

Madrid & Barcelona

14 DAYS/13 NIGHTS - GROUP TRAVEL
SUGGESTED ITINERARY - CAN BE CUSTOMIZED



Spend two weeks visiting two incredible Spanish capitals: Madrid and Barcelona. Both of these cities are oozing with cultural and historical heritage – and they both are surrounded by other fascinating cities to visit like Avila, Toledo, Segovia, El Escorial, Tarragona and Girona – destinations that are home to many UNESCO World Heritage Sites that you'll visit. This itinerary isn't lacking in nature either; and you'll have plenty of opportunities to hit the beach on Spain's famed Coast Brava. You'll see flamenco, eat paella and see the architectural masterpieces of Antoni Gaudi. You'll see the very best of Madrid and Barcelona with expert guides - and also have plenty of down time to relax, shop, swim, wander and explore on your own.



DAY 1 ~ ARRIVE MADRID

Arrival to Madrid, Spain's cultural (and lively) capital city. Upon arrival to Barajas Airport, your group will be met by a local guide in the arrivals hall of the terminal. As hotel rooms will not be ready until 2:00 pm, the guide will take your group on a panoramic sightseeing tour by bus before dropping the group off at the hotel. This is the perfect way to get an orientation of Madrid, which as can be expected – is a large capital city with lots to see!

On the panoramic tour you will see the exterior of the baroque Royal Palace, which was constructed in the 18th century and contains over 3000 rooms (imagine cleaning that) - as well as the nearby Plaza de Oriente, Teatro Real and Almudena Cathedral. You will also see spectacular Plaza Mayor square. (During the days of the Inquisition, many a heretic was burned at the stake here). You'll also see the always bustling Porta del Sol and the lovely Paseo del Prado boulevard, home to the world-renown Museo del Prado. The tour will finish up at the hotel. Check in and

relax before having a group welcome dinner in the hotel's restaurant.



DAY 2 ~ MADRID

After breakfast in the hotel, meet your local guide in the lobby and prepare yourself for a real treat: a visit to the historic city of Toledo. (note: Toledo is one of those incredibly picturesque, medieval cities with cobblestones and hills – so please wear comfy shoes today). Many moons ago, Toledo was actually the capital of Spain. This was from the time of the collapse of the Roman Empire when the Visigoths showed up (4th century AD) to the time when the Moors invaded the Iberian Peninsula (8th century). Because of its historic and cultural value, Toledo's Old Town is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Its historical heritage is unparalleled. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of its history (which goes back to the Romans) is during the Middle Ages when Christians, Jews and Muslims coexisted quite peacefully and lived in flourishing, cultural communities. Toledo has also had some pretty famous citizens including the painter, El Greco. While here your guide will take you inside

INCLUSIONS

- 5 nights in Madrid
- 6 nights in Barcelona
- 2 nights in Girona
- Breakfast daily
- Lunch and dinner per itinerary
- Ground transport via air conditioned luxury coach
- English speaking assistant and guides
- Admission tickets as outlined in itinerary

HIGHLIGHTS

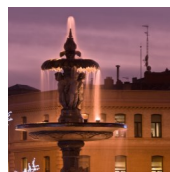
- Sightseeing tours of Madrid, Barcelona, Toledo, Segovia, Girona and Tarragona
- Day trips to Sitges, Cadaques, Besalu, Calella de Palafrugell and San Lorenzo de El Escorial
- Attend a flamenco show in Madrid
- Paella on a Barcelona Beach
- Enjoy the beaches of the Costa Brava
- Cava wine tasting
- Concert in Barcelona's Palau de la Musica Catalana

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Toledo's Cathedral, which is one of the best examples of Gothic architecture in the world; the House & Museum of El Greco, which is located in the old Jewish Quarter; and the 14th-century Synagogue del Tránsito, a remarkable building that once served Toledo's pre-Inquisition Jewish community.

During the tour, there will be a lunch break (on own). In the mid-afternoon, your group will return to the hotel in Madrid. The remainder of the day is at leisure. For those group members that want to relax but not necessarily in the hotel- consider spending the remainder of the afternoon in Madrid's beautiful Retiro Park.



DAY 3 ~ MADRID

After breakfast in the hotel, you have a full day to yourself to explore Madrid.

Consider visiting the Reina Sofia Museum or the Prado Museum. While they are both superb and definitely merit a visit, their collections are different. The Reina Sofia Museum contains artwork by modern painters (Salvador Dalí, Joan Miró and Pablo Picasso – including his masterpiece Guernica) while the Prado Museum contains masterpieces by traditional, Spanish painters like Diego Velázquez (yes, inside is his famous Las Meninas), Goya, Murillo and El Greco (who was actually Greek).



DAY 4 ~ MADRID

After breakfast in the hotel, meet your local guide for a full-day excursion to visit the towns of San Lorenzo de El Escorial and Avila. In San Lorenzo de El Escorial, you will visit its famous monastery, which was commissioned by King Phillip II in the 16th century. This massive structure stands as an outstanding example of Renaissance architecture and is a UNESCO World

Heritage Site. While in San Lorenzo de El Escorial, you will also see the controversial monument, called "The Valley of the Fallen" which was commissioned under Franco and remains a stark reminder of the Spanish Civil War. After the guided tour of El Escorial, enjoy some free time for lunch before continuing your daytrip to Avila.

Avila is a walled city whose medieval walls were constructed in the 11th century. The walls are some of the finest in all of Europe and surround the Old Town's remarkably well-preserved Romanesque churches, Gothic palaces and the city's 11th-century Cathedral. It's no surprise that Avila's Old Town is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It's also a place of religious importance as it was the birthplace of Saint Teresa, who was born in Avila in 1515. Your group will have a 2-hour walking tour of Avila before returning to Madrid. Upon arrival back to the hotel, the rest of the day is at leisure.



DAY 5 ~ MADRID

After breakfast in the hotel, today is your final daytrip from Madrid. Meet your

guide in the lobby for an excursion to Segovia, an ancient city that lies north of Madrid, in the region of Castile and León. It was inhabited by indigenous Iberians long before the Romans arrived to settle there. During the Middle Ages, Segovia was an interesting, multicultural city with a strong trade industry, and Queen Isabella I herself was crowned here in the 15th century. Today you will visit its Old Town and its incredible aqueduct, both of which form a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Romans finished building the Aqueduct of Segovia during the 2nd century. Today it is still remarkably intact. While in Segovia, your group will also visit the dramatically stunning Alcazar (Royal Palace), which is almost 1000 years old - and the Cathedral



of Segovia, a superb example of 16th-century, Gothic architecture. (There will be free time for lunch during today's excursion). Your group will return to Madrid in the late afternoon and will have the remainder of the day at leisure.



DAY 6 ~ BARCELONA

After breakfast in the hotel, all group members will check out and transfer by private bus to the train station, where they will board the very convenient, high-speed train to Barcelona. Your next week will be spent in a very distinct region of Spain: Catalonia. Virtually everyone that lives in this autonomous region is bilingual, speaking both Spanish and Catalan. Like Spanish, Catalan is also a Romance Language – and while a good deal of its words resemble Spanish words, many others resemble French, Italian or Portuguese words. The difference between Catalans and other Spaniards is more than just linguistic however. In many ways they are culturally different too – with different music, cuisine and traditions (that being that, they seem to equally love soccer as much as the rest of the country).

While in Barcelona, you won't see elegant baroque architecture like in Madrid or stunning mudéjar (medieval Moorish) structures like in Andalusia – but you will see beautifully-preserved Romanesque architect as well as Barcelona's signature style: modernisme. This style - which for simplicity's sake can be grouped into the wider Art Nouveau movement that was taking place in the late 19th century/ early 20th century - has been made manifest throughout Barcelona by the city's architectural godfather: Antoni Gaudí. Catalonia (or Catalunya as the Catalans write it) also has a very interesting ancient heritage; both Greek and Roman

settlements existed on this stretch of the Mediterranean Coast. Finally, Catalunya is home to Spain's famous Costa Brava, which is pretty much one gigantic postcard. While here, you will experience all of this!

As you will arrive to Barcelona in late morning - when your hotel rooms will not yet be ready for check-in – your group will store its bags and have a break to buy some lunch – before meeting a local guide for an afternoon tour of the Eixample District. By the 19th century, the Old Town was getting pretty crowded. Disease. Folks living on top of each other. No space. The city needed to expand, and that's exactly what happened. The word "Eixample" actually means "extension." Well-to-do families of the day moved up town into this newly developed district based on a perpendicular grid. And the really wealthy ones hired architects like Antoni Gaudí to design their homes. On your guided tour of this beautiful neighborhood, which really is unlike any other area in Spain – you will see some of the fruit of Gaudí's labors like the Basilica of the Sagrada Família (inside visit), the Casa Milà (inside visit) and the Casa Batlló. (All three buildings are UNESCO World Heritage Sites).

The tour will finish at the hotel where group members can check in, relax and freshen up before a group dinner in the hotel.



DAY 7 ~ BARCELONA

After breakfast in the hotel, your group will venture to Barcelona's Old Town. This area is much more historic than what you saw yesterday. This is Roman and Medieval Barcelona! Unlike the Eixample's broad avenues, today you will walk through windy, narrow streets - and through many layers of the city's history. This morning's tour will take place in the Barri Gòtic



neighborhood and the Born neighborhood. You will see the Passeig del Born, the Picasso Museum (outside only), the Santa Maria del Mar Gothic Basilica (inside visit), the Cathedral de la Seu, the Plaça Sant Jaume – and Barcelona’s most famous avenue, La Rambla, an action-filled street graced with flower vendors, painters and street performers! On the Rambla your guide will also take your group inside the ever-lively Boqueria food market (warning: you might see sheep brains). After the walking tour has finished, your group will head out to Barcelona’s seaside for a paella lunch. Afterwards – the remainder of the day is free, so feel free to relax and sunbathe on one of Barcelona’s city beaches.



DAY 8 ~ BARCELONA

After breakfast in the hotel, meet your local guide and board the bus for an exciting excursion west to the mountain of Montserrat, which houses a medieval abbey set high up amongst some truly unusual rock formations. To reach the top, you and your fellow group members will have to take a funicular. Montserrat is one of Europe’s most famous pilgrimage sites, and pilgrims have been traveling here since the Middle Ages to see its Black Virgin statue. Its boys choir is also one of Europe’s oldest (over 500 years old). Even if you’re not particularly religious – if you’re interested in medieval history, hiking, or geology – a trip to this spiritual spot is not to be missed.

After the visit atop the mountain (free time will be given for lunch), your group will take the funicular back down, re-board the bus and head to Sant Sadurn d’Anoia – also known as Catalan Cava County. Enjoy a guided tour and tasting of this sparkling wine in a local winery before returning to Barcelona late afternoon. Upon arrival to

the hotel, group members will have time free time to eat, relax or explore before meeting back up for tonight’s classical music concert (pending availability) in the most beautiful concert hall we can think of: Barcelona’s iconic Palau de la Musica Catalana, which was designed in the beginning of the 20th century by Catalan, modernist architect - Lluís Domènech i Montaner.



DAY 9 ~ BARCELONA

After breakfast in the hotel, enjoy a morning sightseeing tour of other great neighborhoods of Barcelona beginning with Pedralbes, one of the wealthiest spots in town. Your guide will take you inside the neighborhood’s Monestir de Pedralbes, which was built in 1326. This spectacular building houses lots of interesting, historical artifacts. Enjoy looking around – and make sure you see the monastery’s beautiful cloister.

From Pedralbes, your group will continue its sightseeing tour with a visit to Gaudí’s iconic park – Parc Guell! This is a favorite attraction of travelers and locals alike. Gaudi actually liked it so much – that he moved in. (Yep, he moved into a house located inside the park). Spend some time wandering this truly gorgeous green space. Afterwards, everyone will re-board the bus and head to Barcelona’s Gràcia neighborhood. Gràcia is charming, charming and charming – and it’s not an area that too many tourists visit. This hilly neighborhood used to be a small village, separate from the city of Barcelona. They only united at the end of the 19th century. As a result, visiting Gràcia feels like you’re still in a pretty village. Your guide will walk you through Gràcia, showing you some of its lovely squares. This is the end of today’s tour. We suggest you stay up here to have lunch and to wander a bit. However, the



bus and guide will accompany anyone who likes back to the hotel.



**DAY 10 ~
BARCELONA**

After breakfast in the hotel, meet your local guide for a full-day sightseeing excursion. You'll be traveling south along the Mediterranean Coast to the ancient Roman city of Tarragona, whose impressive ruins (another UNESCO World Heritage Site) you will visit this morning! You will see Tarragona's ancient walls, the Roman forum and the 2000-year-old amphitheater, whose backdrop is a dramatic blue blast of Mediterranean Sea. Just outside of Tarragona's center, you will also see the out-of-this world Roman aqueduct, colloquially known at the "Pont del Diable." The aqueduct is in remarkably good condition (those Romans sure knew how to build!). Its spans a wide valley - and you can even walk across the top of aqueduct. After your guided tour of Tarragona and a lunch break - your group will board the bus and return back towards Barcelona. En route you will stop in the seaside resort town of Sitges.

Sitges is home to one of Europe's best Carnival celebrations. It is also an incredibly picturesque place. Your group will stop here on the way back to Barcelona with a couple hours of free time to stroll the beach promenade, have a drink, go for a swim or shop. Once your group returns to the hotel in Barcelona in the late afternoon, the rest of the day is at leisure.



DAY 11 ~ GIRONA

After breakfast in the hotel, all group members should check out and board the bus. You'll be traveling north to the city of Girona, which is the capital of the province of Girona. (Many consider this area the

most beautiful in all of Catalonia). When you arrive to Girona, your hotel rooms will most likely not be prepared for check in, so group members will store their baggage with the hotel's reception staff and meet a local guide for a walking tour of Girona.

Girona is – in our opinion – one of Spain's most interesting cities. It's scenically set along a river and like many Spanish cities, it has a Roman foundation and throughout its 2000 years has played host to Christians, Moorish and Jewish communities. In addition to a remarkably well-preserved Jewish quarter (called a "call"), Girona still has part of its original Roman fortifications as well as beautiful Romanesque and Gothic buildings. During your tour you will go inside small-yet-worthwhile Museu Arqueològic, Girona's Cathedral – which has the widest nave of all Gothic cathedrals in the world – and the Museum of Jewish History, a fantastic museum which sheds light on Spain's Jewish population in the Middle Ages from the times of peaceful coexistence to the Inquisition. The tour will finish at the hotel. Group members can check in and enjoy the remainder of the day at leisure in Girona's Old Town.



DAY 12 ~ GIRONA

After breakfast in the hotel, prepare yourself for a full-day sightseeing excursion to the towns of Figueres and Cadaques. This is your Salvador Dali day. Even if you don't know much about this eccentric, Spanish surrealist painter – we're sure you will enjoy this day all the same. You will travel north by bus to Figueres. Dali was born here, and for this reason his foundation has opened a massive museum dedicated to him here: the Teatre Museu Dalí. You're going to enjoy a guided tour of it this morning. In addition to a fantastic collection of Dali's works, the building in and of itself is an experience. Going



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through it feels a bit like walking through a very, very strange dream.

After touring this unusual museum, your group will re-board the bus and head east to the seaside city of Cadaques where Dali eventually constructed his very odd house. Even if Dali had never set foot in Cadaques, we would still recommend you visit it because it's simply one of the most beautiful villages on the Mediterranean. Prepare yourself to take out the camera. You'll have free time here to have lunch, walk around, shop or swim before returning in the afternoon to Girona. The evening is at leisure in Girona.



DAY 13 ~ BARCELONA

After breakfast in the hotel, get ready to enjoy the heck out of your last day in Spain! Your day will begin with a visit to the historic town of Besalú. Besalú is a beautiful village that was quite an important place in the early Middle Ages – when Wilfred the Hairy (yes, seriously) was the Count of Besalú. The town is known for its beautiful, 12th-century Romanesque bridge at its entryway. You'll have a couple of hours this morning to wander around and explore charming Besalú on your own before re-boarding the bus and traveling to picture-perfect Calella de Palafrugell on the oh-so-turquoise Costa Brava. You'll have free time here for lunch – and we hope you brought your swimsuit. If you didn't, no worry – it's a great place to walk around or have a drink while looking out at the sea. In the late afternoon, your group will re-board the bus to return to Barcelona. Upon arrival to the hotel, you're free to enjoy your last evening in Spain as you please!



DAY 14 ~ BARCELONA

After breakfast in the hotel, all group members should check out and transfer to Barcelona Airport by private bus for their return flight to the USA.

WHY TRAVEL WITH US ?

Whether it is taking a family trip to Paris, an educational group to Barcelona, or a church group to Rome we can build an affordable, European trip tailored to your interests. From single city itineraries to multiple cities and countries, your travel agent will work with us to create custom tours for groups of 10 to 500 people.

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