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Spain & Portugal Explorer - 15 Days

Start point: Madrid

End point: Madrid

DAY 1: Arrive in Madrid



Welcome to the start of your 15 day tour of Spain and Portugal! On arrival in Madrid, make your way to the hotel to meet up with your tour leader and the other travellers in the tour group. Depending on your arrival time, you may have time to explore Madrid, or alternatively relax in the comforts of the hotel. This evening, you will get your first taste of Spain with dinner included, giving you a great opportunity to meet the other travellers in the group.

Experiences

Join the tour in Madrid and, if you arrive early, explore the Spanish capital before meeting up with the tour leader in the evening for dinner.

Accommodation

Holiday Inn Madrid - Calle Alcalá

Travelodge Madrid Torrelaguna

Other Foods to try

Enjoy a traditional Spanish meal tonight, where you will sample local food like croquettes, fried shrimp and paella.

DAY 2: Toledo - Granada



This morning, we leave Madrid and head to the UNESCO World Heritage town of Toledo. You are sure to fall in love with this charming medieval town, with its Gothic architecture and its impressive Cathedral. The tour continues south to the Moorish city of Granada. This afternoon, a walking tour is included to give you a great insight into this beautiful region of Spain.

Experiences

Toledo comfort stop to see the Gothic architecture up close

Granada walking tour - witness the Moorish influence in southern Spain

Accommodation

Hotel Juan Miguel

Other Foods to try

The Arabic influence has left its traces in everything in Granada, and the food is no exception. The use of vegetables such as beans, artichokes, and aubergines is very important. Classic dishes include 'La tortilla del Sacromonte' - a type of omelette made with sweetbreads and ham, gazpacho - cold tomato soup and 'las habas con jamón' - broad beans with ham.

DAY 3: Ronda - Seville



Sit back and relax, as we take you on a journey through Andalusia. This area is famous for Flamenco, tapas, matadors and bullfighting. Our first stop is Ronda, which is famous for its 'Puente Nuevo' (New Bridge) that divides the city and offers dramatic views of the surrounding countryside. Once you have explored Ronda, we head to Seville for a two night stay in a comfortable hotel. You will have time to freshen up before heading out to see the old town and many other sights on an included walking tour of the city.

Experiences

Ronda comfort stop - see the 'Puente Nuevo' (New Bridge)

Enjoy a walking tour of Seville and witness its many historical buildings

Optional Excursions

Flamenco Dinner Show €55

* Stated prices and availability are subject to change.

Accommodation

Hotel Sevilla Macarena

Other Foods to try

Seville is famous as the home of tapas - small plates of hot and cold dishes, and the city is known to have 3,000 tapas bars. Pork, fish and seafood figure prominently, with influences from across Europe and Moorish North Africa. Seville is also famous for its Oranges - you can smell the

sweet perfume of bitter oranges through the city. Try them as a compote spread over a freshly toasted piece of bread.

DAY 4: Seville - Free day

Legend has it that Seville was founded by Hercules, and it has certainly had a colourful history it was named Hispalis by the Romans and Isbiliya by the Moors. With a full free day, you will have all the time in the world to explore this beautiful and pleasingly compact city. Seville is famous for its flamenco, tapas bars and orange bars. The cobbled streets of the old town make for a pleasing morning stroll, while in the afternoon you may wish to visit the Metropol Parasol for amazing views, the palaces of Alcázar Casa de Pilatos or the Museum of Flamenco.

Optional Excursions

Flamenco Dinner Show €55

* Stated prices and availability are subject to change.

DAY 5: Algarve - Lisbon



Today we travel to Lisbon, Portugal! Watch the countryside glide past from the comfort of the Expat Explore coach. Upon arrival in Lisbon we take you on an orientation tour of the capital, from the imposing Sao Jorge Castle to the pastel colours of the old town, Lisbon has it all.

Experiences

Lisbon orientation tour

Optional Excursions

Algarve Beach Lunch €15

* Stated prices and availability are subject to change.

Accommodation

Hotel Roma, Lisboa

Other Foods to try

Lisbon is culinary heaven, and its two most famous dishes are salt cod and custard tarts. Saltfish is codfish that has been covered in vast quantities of salt and dried under the hot sun, which means it can be kept for prolonged periods of time. It is then shredded into one of numerous dishes or served as sliced stakes. Pasteis de Nata - soft, sweet, custard tarts, are worth a trip to Portugal in themselves!

DAY 6: Lisbon - Free day

Today is your free day to explore Lisbon on your own. See Lisbon's landmarks, including the Monument to the Discoveries and the Belém Tower or discover the hill top district of Bairro Alto, with dozens of restaurants and bars lining the narrow streets and lots to see and do. Fado music is unique to Portugal, and is arguably the oldest urban folk music in the world - you are sure to discover bars in this area playing this type of music.

Optional Excursions

Sintra Half-Day Trip €50

* Stated prices and availability are subject to change.

DAY 7: Lisbon - Porto



We continue our tour of Portugal and enter into Porto - the second largest city and one of the oldest European centres. Your tour leader will take you on a driving tour of Porto, where you will see Ponte de Luis - a stunning bridge which crosses the River Douro, the Clerigos Tower and many other famous landmarks. One of Portugal's famous exports is port wine, which is named after Porto, and you will have the opportunity to taste it this afternoon at the included Port tasting.

Experiences

Porto driving tour - experience Porto and its World Heritage Site historical centre.

Port tasting experience - sample the famous Portuguese fortified wine. It is typically a sweet, red wine, often served as a dessert wine. It is available in dry, semi-dry, and white varieties.

Optional Excursions

Douro River Cruise €12

* Stated prices and availability are subject to change.

Accommodation

HF Ipanema Porto

HF Ipanema PARK

Other Foods to try

Petiscos is the Portuguese version of Spanish tapas - classic dishes include thin pork sandwiches and snails in a herbal broth. From its colonial past spices are used abundantly in Portuguese cooking, especially piri-piri, made from African bird's eye chili peppers.

DAY 8: Porto - Salamanca



It is time to depart Portugal and travel back to Spain, as our journey today takes us through the countryside. Once we arrive into Salamanca, you will have time to freshen up at the hotel and enjoy some free time. We recommend you visit the old town and go up the Cathedral Bell Tower, which offers amazing panoramic views of the town and its surroundings. To cap off the evening, we have dinner included, and this is your chance to taste the famous Spanish tapas!

Experiences

Have free time to explore Salamanca, before enjoying a traditional tapas dinner.

Accommodation

Gran Hotel Corona Sol

Other Foods to try

Enjoy authentic Spanish tapas tonight, like home made croquettes, Spanish omelette, cold meats, olives, patatas bravas, albóndigas (meatballs) and chorizo.

DAY 9: Avila - Madrid



This morning we depart Salamanca and travel to Avila, where we take a comfort stop. Avila is notable for its many Romanesque and Gothic churches, and the famous and incredibly well preserved medieval walls. We then continue onto the capital Madrid, where you'll have some free time before we meet up again for dinner this evening.

Experiences

On our way back to Madrid, we take a comfort stop in the beautiful Medieval walled town of Avila.

Accommodation

Holiday Inn Madrid - Calle Alcalá
Travelodge Madrid Torrelaguna

Other Foods to try

Enjoy a traditional Spanish meal tonight, where you will sample local food like croquettes, fried shrimp and chorizo.

DAY 10: Segovia - San Sebastian



This morning we'll depart Madrid and make our way to San Sebastian on Spain's northern coast. Along the way we'll enjoy a comfort stop in Segovia, a picturesque UNESCO World Heritage Site city which offers the highest concentration of Romanesque churches in Europe, as well as an incredibly well-preserved Roman aqueduct that runs into the heart of the city. Later this afternoon we'll arrive in San Sebastian, a charming city with a beautiful beach and vibrant nightlife. A foodie's paradise, San Sebastian is known for its Basque gastronomy, so this evening is best spent exploring the beachfront bars and indulging in pintxo, northern Spain's version of tapas!

Experiences

Explore the historic old town of Segovia, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Highlights in the old town include the ancient Roman aqueduct, the Alcazar (royal palace) and Segovia Cathedral.

Enjoy a night in San Sebastian - relax on the beach and then get to know the locals as you hit the bars for traditional pintxo!

Accommodation

Ibis Irun

Other Foods to try

Pincho, or pintxo as it is known in the Basque region, is a Spanish snack eaten in bars throughout northern Spain. Pintxo is similar to tapas, but is usually served with bread on a skewer or toothpick. The most common ingredients include fish, cold meats, stuffed peppers, tortilla de patatas (Spanish omelette) and croquettes.

DAY 11: Pamplona - Zaragoza



Our first stop today is Pamplona, the historic city made famous by “the running of the bulls” during the San Fermin festival. Packed with history, you’ll have some free time to explore the beautiful medieval city centre and see the city walls and citadel. We’ll then head to Zaragoza, enjoying a wine tasting along the way, before taking a walking tour of the city. The city has experienced a long and varied history, with Roman, Moorish, Jewish and Christian communities leaving their marks over the centuries, as seen in the Basílica del Pilar cathedral, Aljafería Islamic palace and the Roman theatre.

Experiences

Explore the history of Pamplona, including the Baroque facade of the town hall in Plaza Consistorial, the Gothic church of San Saturnino and Cámara de Comptos (the oldest building in the city, dating from the 13th century).

As we make our way from San Sebastian to Zaragoza, we’ll drive through popular wine growing regions of northern Spain, and enjoy a tasting of local Spanish wines. Typical Spanish grape varieties include Tempranillo, Garnacha, Albariño and Macabeo.

Enjoy a walking tour of Zaragoza and experience the legacy of the many different cultures that have influenced the city’s history. The city centre is compact and easy to walk around; perfect for an evening stroll.

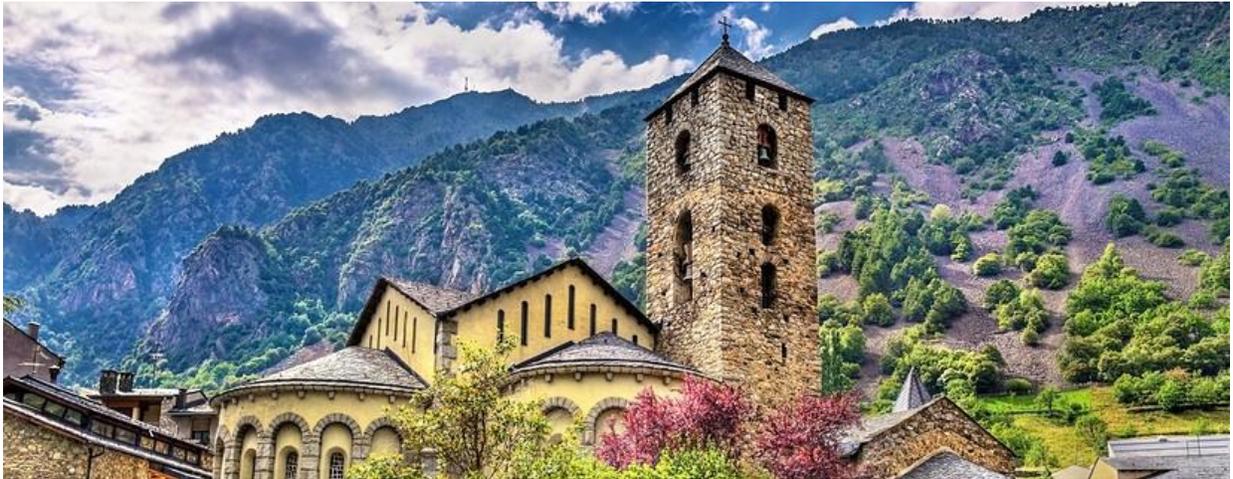
Accommodation

Ibis Zaragoza Centro

Other Foods to try

The Ebro River passes through Zaragoza, and trout caught from the river and its tributaries is a common dish in the city and the surrounding Aragón region. It's typically pan fried or stuffed with peppers and bacon and grilled.

DAY 12: Andorra - Barcelona



On our way to Barcelona we'll take a comfort stop in Andorra, a tiny independent principality with a population of just 85,000, located between France and Spain in the Pyrenees mountains. We'll enjoy some free time to explore Andorra la Vella, the highest capital city in Europe and a popular ski resort. Later this afternoon we'll arrive in the cosmopolitan capital of the Catalonia region, Barcelona. Your tour leader will acquaint you with the city's vibrant energy with a driving tour, so keep your eyes open for the famous Sagrada Familia cathedral, and some of the spectacular examples of Antoni Gaudi's eclectic art and architecture.

Experiences

Comfort stop in Andorra - enjoy some free time to explore the sixth-smallest nation in Europe.

Barcelona - enjoy a driving tour of this vibrant and diverse city that you can then explore further during your free day tomorrow. You may see La Monumental Bullring, Sagrada Familia, Casa Batllo, Joan Miro Park, Fountain of 3 Rivers, The Venetian towers, Magic Fountain, Poble Espanyol (Spanish Village), Olympic stadium, Port of Barcelona, Christopher Columbus Column, Las Ramblas, and a photo stop with views over the city.

Accommodation

Ibis Meridiana

Other Foods to try

Escalivada is a typical Catalan dish - a salad of roasted aubergine, peppers, tomatoes and onions. Crema Catalana is the region's version of the crème brûlée, flavoured with lemon zest and cinnamon.

DAY 13: Barcelona - Free day

Today is all yours to do with as you please! The best views of the city can be had from Park Guell, and you can take in the panoramic splendour and skyline of Barcelona. The park itself offers a very interesting design which is a product of Anton Gaudi's challenging architectural visualisations. Barcelona is home to many of Gaudi's building designs and you could spend the whole day simply locating each one. One of his most famous works is that of the unfinished Sagrada Familia - an interpretation of a Gothic cathedral which is unlike any building you will have ever seen. You can't miss it from Park Guell, or most other vantage points in the city. Harbour tours, La Ramblas, the 'Old Town', museums, art galleries and some of Europe's best shopping - there is much to do in this incredible city. If you wish to participate in our optional excursion, we can organise tickets for you to see a traditional Flamenco show! The dance of passion is performed with style, flair and energy, and is a real experience not to be missed.

Optional Excursions

Flamenco Show	€42
Barcelona Tapas Dinner	€25

* Stated prices and availability are subject to change.

DAY 14: Peniscola - Valencia



Leaving Barcelona behind we'll make our way south down the coast towards Valencia, stopping off along the way in Peniscola. With a historic old town, beautiful promenade and sandy beach overlooked by an imposing castle built by the Knights Templar, there are few more picturesque places in Europe to enjoy a lunch stop. Once we've arrived in Valencia we'll enjoy an orientation tour of this thriving port city, which retains plenty of historic charm despite the decades of development that have given it a distinct space-age feel. As our last night on tour, we'll round off the day with a farewell paella dinner this evening.

Experiences

Enjoy a lunch stop in picturesque Peniscola, a fortified seaport on a rocky headland with only a narrow strip of land connecting it to the mainland. The castle was built in the early 14th century and served as the home of the Avignon pope Benedict XIII from 1415 to 1423.

Orientation tour of Valencia - experience the bold architecture (both contemporary and art nouveau) - see the City of Arts and Sciences complex, Colón Market, Turia Gardens and the Cathedral.

Enjoy a fabulous farewell dinner on our last night on tour, featuring paella in the city where this classic dish is so revered.

Accommodation

Eurostars Rey Don Jaime

Other Foods to try

Valencia is known as the birthplace of paella, a rice dish with ancient roots that originated in its current form in the 1800s. Although paella is often served around the world as ‘mixed’ with both meat and seafood, Valencians insist that only the original recipe, consisting of just seafood, is authentic.

DAY 15: Valencia - Madrid



Enjoy some free time this morning to explore Valencia - why not visit the cathedral or stroll through the Turia River Bed Gardens? Our journey then continues through the historic La Mancha region, made famous by the legend of Don Quixote. Later, we'll explore Castillo de Belmonte, with entrance to this medieval castle included in your tour package. The interiors are dominated by spectacular stucco works in the Gothic and Moorish styles, and a beautiful Neo-Gothic courtyard. Later this afternoon we'll arrive back in Madrid for the end of the tour.

Experiences

Enjoy some free time this morning to explore Valencia. Explore the Old Town (where all the sights are conveniently within walking distance), or visit the biggest fresh-produce market in Europe, Mercado Central.

Visit Belmonte castle, with entrance included in your tour package. This beautifully restored medieval castle was built in the 15th century on the hill of San Cristobal.