



A Spiritual Journey through Spain and Portugal

Day 1: MADRID ARRIVAL

Arrival. After your transatlantic flight from the United States, you will be met at Madrid Barajas airport by a driver with a private car for transfer to the hotel selected. After checking in, you will have the rest of the morning free. In the afternoon, a local guide will meet you in the lobby of your hotel for a Walking Tour of Old Madrid, the central zone of the city with streets, plazas and palaces dating back over five centuries. After gaining the pulse of Spain's vibrant capital, you will be returned to your hotel. Overnight stay.

Day 2: MADRID –SEGOVIA –AVILA--MADRID.

Breakfast. Today you will take a regular tour with others to two of the most important Castilian cities. Your first stop will be Segovia, a medieval enclave whose number of inhabitants has not varied significantly in recent centuries and which has maintained its ancient monuments and ambience with particular success. Your visit to this quiet provincial city is best undertaken on foot because many of the streets are narrow and steep. Outstanding is the Gothic cathedral, the last of that style constructed in Spain; the Alcazar, a palace/fortress that was the inspiration for many European palaces; and the seemingly indestructible Roman Aqueduct that splits the city in two. After lunch (included), you will continue across Castilian lands, taking a highway that runs parallel to the lovely Sierra de Guadarrama until arrival in Avila in less than one hour. You will visit this medieval enclave by foot, and surely, like hundreds of thousands of other visitors, wonder not only at the city's superb individual monuments and buildings, but also at the 12th century wall that surrounds the urban center and which is in a perfect state. This city, home to the mystic Saint Teresa, also houses the first Gothic style cathedral built in Spain. The cathedral's apse forms part of the defense system of the city and the structure in its totality seems more a fortress than a temple of worship. The Romanesque churches San Vicente and San Pedro are of unequalled beauty and perfect representations of the style. After your visit to this provincial capital with the greatest altitude on the peninsula, you will return to Madrid. Overnight stay.



Day 3: MADRID- GUADALUPE MONASTERY.



Breakfast. After picking up your rental car, you will drive west along a 4-lane highway towards the Region of Extremadura. Near Trujillo, a lovely medieval village that was birthplace to the conquistador Pizarro, you will take a road leading into the rugged Sierra de Guadalupe with final destination the Monastery of the same name. After check in at the Royal Monastery, you will have time to visit this historical site. Here, according to tradition, the Virgin Mary appeared to a shepherd in the year 1300. Since then, the site has engendered a fervor of devotion that has prevailed upon worshipers from the wealthiest noble to the most base bandit. Twenty years after the Virgin's sighting, King Alfonso IX ordered the construction of the Monastery in gratitude for divine intervention in the battle of Salado against the Moors. Since construction, the Monastery has been an extremely popular pilgrimage destination. During the centuries of the reconquest of the Peninsula from the Moors, many of the Christians freed from slavery in Arab lands journeyed there to express gratitude for their liberation. The Monastery has also become one of the symbols of Hispanic association, as it was here that the first Indians brought to

Spain by Columbus received baptism. As night falls, you will experience the magic of this sacred spot and, undoubtedly, bask in the tranquility that reigns supreme within the confines of the Monastery. Overnight stay.

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Day 4: GUADALUPE- LISBON.

Breakfast. Again in your rental car, you will cross the lands of Extremadura, birthplace to the majority of the conquistadors of the Americas. Arrival in Lisbon will take around three hours, but time will pass quickly as you drive by extensive grain fields and cork forests. Spain and Portugal are the world leaders in cork production. Your entry into Portugal's capital will be via one of the two impressive bridges that span the Tagus estuary, one of the largest in Europe. The older bridge, called the 25th of April, was constructed by the same American Company that built San Francisco's Golden Gate, while the recently constructed Vasco de Gama is the largest in Europe. Once you have checked into the hotel selected, we recommend a stroll about the city's colorful streets and a stop at one of the restaurants around the Rossio Plaza to savor some of the local gastronomic delights. After, you may want to try the vibrant nightlife of this port city, undoubtedly, another of its hidden charms. Overnight stay.

Day 5: LISBON.

Breakfast. First thing in the morning, a local guide will drive you around the city in a private car to reveal the enchantment and secrets of this city which as the local poet, Fernando Pessoa, has written, "dreams of the sea". And thus it is in reality, because the city has given its heart and soul to the deep surge of the Atlantic since the beginnings of its history. According to the majority of historians, the city was founded by the Phoenicians over three thousand years ago. Probably because of the initial influences of these ancient maritime founders, Lisbon seems to have always had its sights set on the sea rather than on the interior regions of Portugal. The establishment of colonies and commercial establishments around the world, from India and China to Angola and Brazil, brought in a prosperity that its hard working people displayed in churches, palaces and fortresses. After your guided tour, you will have the rest of the day to further get to know this fascinating city. You might want to visit some of its top quality museums, such as the Antique National Art Museum, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the National Museum of Decorative Tiles. You might also want to visit the birthplace of San Antonio de Padua, who, despite the association of his name and deeds with the Italian city, was from Lisbon. If you wish to see how a two thousand year city can adapt to modern times without losing a bit of its personality, be sure to visit the Park of the Nations, constructed specifically for the Universal Exposition of 1998. Overnight stay.



Day 6: LISBON- SANTAREM- FATIMA.

Breakfast. This morning, you will drive approximately a half-hour on the 4-lane highway towards Porto, until arrival at Santarem. This small city jealously guards the treasures of its splendid past as a royal residence. The kings chose it as such for its proximity to the capital and for its enviable strategic position, that dominates the Tajo lowlands. Here, Santa Irene, the namesake of the city, was born. Among its numerous churches, which generally follow the Gothic style, Santissimo Milagro is noteworthy as being the site of the transformation of the Holy Host into Christ's Blood. Since this miracle of the 13th century, thousands of faithful worshipers from around the world have come to pay homage. The Host is displayed in a niche behind the altar. After admiring this testimony of faith, you will continue on the same 4-lane highway until entry into the famed site of Fatima. Once checked into the hotel selected, you can, if it coincides with your visit, join a nocturnal candle procession along the Cathedral's esplanade. Overnight stay.

Day 7: FATIMA.

Breakfast. You will have the full day free to explore this important Christian enclave. At the site of the Sanctuary, one hundred years ago, there were only oak trees and grazing sheep, the latter tended by children from the neighboring villages. Three such young shepherds, Francisco, Jacinta and Lucia were witnesses to the appearance of the Virgin Mary on May 13th, 1917, an experience that brought about the transformation of the site called Cova da Iria, into one of the Christian world's most visited shrines. The visitation of the Virgin occurred with monthly regularity until October 13th of the same year. The last of these appearances was witnessed by over 70,000 people, not a few of whom were quickly dissuaded of their initial skepticism. The Basilica was built at the end of a great esplanade, in the middle of which is the Chapel of the Appearances, open 24 hours, 365 days of the year. Masses celebrated in innumerable languages and pilgrims from the far corners of the world are the palpable proof of the strength of faith that this sacred site engenders. From the beginning of spring until the onset of winter, an emotional candle procession is celebrated, a marvelous, muted demonstration of Christian brotherhood. Overnight stay.



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Day 8: FATIMA- BRAGA- PONTEVEDRA- SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA.

Breakfast. A little more than two hours of driving will bring you to Braga, the religious capital of the country. What was an important Roman city, Bracara Augusta, has been transformed over the centuries into the religious center of the Portuguese Catholic Church. In its solid Romanesque Cathedral are to be found the tombs of the parents of the first Portuguese king, the Castilian Teresa and the Frenchman Henry of Burgundy. This village has much to enchant visitors but perhaps before visiting specific monuments it would be best to just stroll about its narrow, cobblestone streets and breathe in its unique historical/religious ambience. Once again on route, you will shortly cross the Miño River, the natural frontier that separates northern border of Spain and Portugal, before arriving at Pontevedra. This Galician city, whose inhabitants speak both Castilian Spanish and Gallego, a language very similar to Portuguese, is, in its surrounding countryside and architecture very similar to its neighbor. Pontevedra is a quiet provincial capital and it is worth taking the time to stroll its cobblestone streets. The church, Santa Maria la Mayor, constructed between the 15th and 16th century by the Maritime Union, is a jewel that harmoniously blends Gothic and Renaissance styles. In a little monastery nearby Sor Lucia had several apparitions of the Holy Mother. Afterwards, you will continue on route to Santiago de Compostela, following a lovely highway that meanders through chestnut and eucalyptus forests. We recommend that, like many pilgrims following this thousand year old route, you stop briefly at Monte de Gozo (Joy Mountain) to contemplate at a distance the silhouette of the Santiago's Cathedral. Once in Santiago and checked into the hotel selected, we recommend a stroll about the surrounding active streets to take the pulse of this lovely city. Overnight stay.

Day 9: SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA.

Breakfast. First thing in the morning, a local guide will meet you in the lobby of your hotel to take you on a tour of the city. You will be taken around the most emblematic sites before visiting the most impressive and important of all, the Cathedral, a masterpiece of Romanesque art, constructed around the sepulchre of the Apostle Santiago (James). No matter what time of the year you visit the city, you will encounter a multitude of pilgrims who have come, many on foot, to pay homage at his tomb. And so it has been for over a thousand years. Of all the pilgrimages of the Middle Ages, that of Santiago is the only one that continues to be largely undertaken on foot. And, while there are some who undertake the Way to Santiago for non-religious reasons, the majority do so as an expression of their deep devotion. They walk the same paths, contemplate the same countryside, and mouth the same orations in the same places, as did the first pilgrims over ten centuries ago. Today, the imposing granite presence of the Cathedral dominates the city, physically, socially and economically. In the evening, you can sit in a café terrace or stroll about the city's streets, animated by a large student presence as Santiago is also home to one of Spain's oldest universities. Overnight stay.



Day 10: SANTIAGO- ASTORGA- LEON.

Breakfast. There are numerous routes to arrive at Santiago, and just as many for the return. You will be following one that leads down to the Castilian plains after taking you through forested mountains that were, for centuries, home to numerous bandits who plundered the devoted in their passing. Of course, today, the bandits are long gone. The first stop on route recommended is at the lovely city of Astorga, ancient capital of the Iberians, and over whose original foundation the Romans constructed their strategic city, Asturica Augusta, from which they controlled the gold mines of the northern peninsula, the richest in all the Roman Empire. An hour's drive will bring you to Leon, provincial capital and one of the cities most steeped in history on the Iberian Peninsula. After you have checked into the hotel selected, we recommend you take a stroll about its medieval quarter full of taverns and bars, known as the Humedo – Spanish for Wet-. You will want to try some of the local gastronomic dishes, many elaborated over the centuries so as to provide sustenance against the vigorous winters that castigate the zone. Overnight stay.

Day 11: LEON- BURGOS.

Breakfast. First thing in the morning, you will meet a local guide in the lobby of your hotel for a tour of the city. The most representative monument of the city and one of the jewels of the Spanish Gothic style is, undoubtedly, the Cathedral. This splendid structure is, according to experts, the most "French" of all cathedrals on the Iberian Peninsula, and competes with the cathedral of Chartres, for the spectacularity of its stained windows, which provide an ethereal lightness to the walls and transform the air celestial before visitor's eyes. Afterwards, you will continue on to another of the great Castilian cities, Burgos. Upon arrival, you will check into the hotel selected before a local guide will take you on a tour of what was the first capital of Castile and birth and burial place of the celebrated hero, El Cid. All in this solemn city seems to revolve around the Cathedral, one of the most beautiful and monumental on the European continent, and considered since its construction one of the highlights of Gothic architecture. Once the tour is finished, you will want to venture out on your own into the city's lively streets and plazas to savor the local dishes and steep yourself in the medieval atmosphere. Overnight stay.



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Day 12: BURGOS- LOYOLA- SAN SEBASTIAN.

Breakfast. Today, you will leave behind the Castilian plains and begin entry into the green, mountainous countryside of Northern Spain. Once over the heights of Pancorbo, you will enter the Basque Country. The origins of the Basque culture and language have been much investigated and debated by experts without resolution, but it is certain that the ancestors of the present inhabitants lived there before the arrival of the Romans in the 3rd century AD. You will drive by the city of Vitoria, capital of the Basque Autonomous Community, in direction of Azepeitia and the nearby Sanctuary of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, who was born there. His house is conserved, having been surrounded by a Baroque Sanctuary built around 1689 by the Italian Carlo Fontana. Following the Jesuit premise of "to the greater glory of God", the Sanctuary evokes a grand solemnity and has been said to be like a prayer wrought in stone. Not far from this tiny enclave, but still in the Basque province of Guipuzcoa, is San Sebastian, considered by the majority of visitors as one of the most beautiful Spanish cities. After you have checked into the hotel selected, we recommend you stroll along the stately Paseo de la Concha, a splendid, gardened walkway bordering one of the most impressive beaches in the world. You will also want to visit the city's old quarter to savor some of the famed Basque dishes, among the most exquisitely elaborated to be found on the European continent. Overnight stay.

Day 13: SAN SEBASTIÁN- LOURDES.

Breakfast. A drive of half an hour from San Sebastian will bring you to the French border. Afterwards, you will take the AutoRoute towards Toulouse, running parallel to the imposing Pyrenees Mountains. During the first hours of the afternoon, you should be in the city of Lourdes. As opposed to the Fatima Sanctuary that was constructed in a deserted enclave, Lourdes is a city replete with history, to the point that figures as important as Charlemagne are associated with its illustrious past. After you have checked into the hotel selected, we recommend, if such is being celebrated, your taking part in the evening procession of the candles. Overnight stay.



Day 14: LOURDES.

Breakfast. You will have the entire day to explore this pleasant French city, that has so touched the hearts of Christians from around the world. All began on February 11th, 1858, when a young Bernadette Soubirous, who was with friends collecting firewood, was visited by the Virgin Mary. This first apparition was followed by 17 more. On July 4th, 1866, Bernadette left Lourdes for Nevers, to join the convent of San Gildard. She died on April 16th, 1879 and her uncorrupted body has been conserved there ever since. The loveliness of the city, set in the heart of the Pyrenees, and the beauty of its streets and monuments, over which reigns the city castle, lend to Lourdes a special mystical aura that are to be found in few places in the world. There are many sites related to the young Bernadette: the mill, her family home, an abandoned prison where they lived in abject poverty, but above all else is the grotto of the apparitions where one can still feel the emotions of these sacred encounters. Overnight stay.

Day 15: LOURDES- JAVIER- ZARAGOZA.

Breakfast. Today, you will drive along a lovely, serpentine highway that cuts through the Pyrenees Massif at the same pass that provided pilgrims from the rest of Europe access to the Way to Santiago de Compostela for over a thousand years. In the province of Navarre, a few miles from its capital, Pamplona, you will come upon the castle of Javier. Although the castle has sufficient merit in itself to warrant a visit, its being the birthplace of San Francisco Javier adds deep spiritual significance. Although of a wealthy family, and destined to a career in arms, his meeting compatriot, San Ignacio de Loyola in Paris, changed the course of his life and that of Western religious life. Together these two expatriate Spaniards formed the Company of Jesus or as it is better known, the Jesuits. Without their profound intervention in the events of the following centuries, it is difficult to imagine how the Catholic Church would be today. They formed the intellectual branch of the Counter-reformation and supported the Popes and the pontificate unconditionally during some of the Church's most difficult moments. From the castle of Javier, you will drive towards Zaragoza, capital of the region of Aragon. Once checked in to the hotel selected, you will have time to stroll about this lovely city. Here, the Virgin Mary (although still alive in Palestine) appeared for the first time to the apostle James (Santiago) who was relentless in his efforts to convert Spain and its people to Christianity. By direct desire of the Virgin, a basilica was built that has come to be one of the most important cult sites of Catholicism. According to tradition, the Virgin brought a marble pillar and instructed James to construct a temple in her honor around it. Thus was constructed the first Christian temple of worship. The Virgin of the Pillar (Virgin del Pilar) has had a profound influence on the subsequent religious life of Spain, not the least of which has been the derivation of one of the country's most popular women's names, Pilar. Overnight stay.



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Day 16: ZARAGOZA- MONTSERRAT- BARCELONA.

Breakfast. From Zaragoza, you will drive northeast in the direction of Barcelona along a 4-lane highway. After crossing the plains of the Ebro River valley and extensive irrigated fields, you will drive through a range of low mountains that mark the entry into the region of Catalonia. Before arrival in Barcelona, capital of this Autonomous Community, you will want to take the time to stop at the Sierra de Montserrat to visit one of the most important sacred sites on the Iberian Peninsula. Perched on this razor backed mountain is situated a Monastic Sanctuary that guards the most venerated religious image of Catalonia: the Moreneta, an black Virgin dating back to the 12th century. The Sisters of this enclave, numbering around 80, are renowned for their gift in teaching music, and the Escolania de Montserrat is considered one of the best children's choirs in the world. It is possible to hear the gifted voices of the young choir members at 11 in the morning and at 6:30 in the afternoon. A short drive will take you to Barcelona. After checking into the hotel selected and returning your rental car, you will have time to wander this fabulous city's lively streets and have dinner in one of its famed restaurants. Overnight stay.



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