TOUR CODE

ES2

ADVENTURESABROAD

SOUTHERN SPAIN

'Eternal Andalucia'

10 days

Updated 06/01/2013

Day 1 ***Arrive in Madrid***

Today we arrive in Madrid and transfer to our hotel.

The capital of Spain, located in the heart of the peninsula and right in the center of the Castillian plain, is a cosmopolitan city, a business center, headquarters for the Public Administration, Government, Spanish Parliament and the home of the Spanish Royal Family.

Overnight in Madrid. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 ***Madrid: The Prado***

This morning we have a guided tour of the Prado Museum. Our route to the museum likely takes us past Plaza Espana point and the Cervantes Monument.

Originally opened to the public in 1819, the Prado houses all of the finest works collected by Spanish Royalty as well as Spanish paintings gathered from other sources over the past two centuries. The Prado is one of the most important repositories of art in the world, including a vast collection of Italian paintings. For the purposes of our visit, however, we will concentrate on works by Spanish masters -- Velasquez, Goya, Ribera, El Greco, Zurbaran, to name a few.

After our tour, we'll head off on foot for an informal stroll up Gran Via and into the old quarter of Madrid. You'll then have free time for lunch and an afternoon of independent exploration. Your Tour Leader can help you plan your free time, with recommended shopping, other historical sites and galleries.

Overnight in Madrid. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 ***Madrid - Toledo - Madrid***

This morning we travel to Toledo, a city with a unique blend of Arab, Jewish, Christian, Roman, and Visigothic elements. Toledo sits on a rocky promontory isolated on three sides by a looping gorge of the Tagus River. The history of several different cultures is contained within this region, represented by the houses, synagogues, churches, and mosques.

Our excursion includes a visit to the Cathedral, as well as the Santa Maria la Blanca Synagogue, which shows the influence of the Granada Moors. It has an ornate ceiling and carved arabesques, not in Arabic, but in Hebrew. The most elaborate Mudejar interior in the city is hidden behind the deceptively humble facade of this former synagogue, built in the 14th century by Samuel Ha-Levi, the Jewish treasurer to Pedro the Cruel. The interlaced frieze of the lofty prayer hall harmoniously fuses Islamic, Gothic and Hebrew geometric motifs below a wonderful coffered ceiling. Adjoining the synagogue is an interesting museum dedicated to Jewish Sephardi culture.

We also see one of Toledo's most outstanding attractions, El Greco's masterpiece "The Burial of the Count of Orgaz" located inside the Church of Santo Tome.

After lunch and some free time in Toledo, we return to Madrid.

Overnight in Madrid. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Madrid - Cordoba*

Today we travel by fast train to travel by train to Cordoba (+/- 2 hours), crossing the Despenaperros Mountains and the border pass between Castile and Andalucia.

During our time in Cordoba (a World Heritage City), we will gain a sense of the city's long and varied past and multicultural nature. Our tour* starts at the Roman Bridge and the Calahorra Tower, an Arab defensive tower. We continue to the Cathedral-Mosque, the only Catholic cathedral built in the heart of a mosque. Next we arrive at the Alcazar fortress, built by King Alfonso XI, and containing mosaics and sarcophagi. Finally we will have a stroll in the Jewish Quarter where the synagogue is located. We will also have time shopping and independent exploration.

* Our sightseeing will likely be divided between today and tomorrow morning.

Overnight in Cordoba. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Cordoba - Granada*

This morning we continue with our Cordoba sightseeing program before departing for Granada by fast train (2.5 hours).

Overnight in Granada. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Granada: The Alhambra*

Today we tour Granada, set in the heart of Andalucia with the majestic Sierra Nevada mountains as a backdrop. Conquered by the Moors in AD 711, Granada blossomed into one of Europe's wealthiest and most refined cities. The legacy of Granada's rich history and heritage remain visible throughout the city centre with its cobblestone streets and lovely plazas. In 1992 Granada celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Christian re-conquest by the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella.

The focus of our sightseeing today is Granada's main attraction, the Alhambra, a mighty fortress that houses an extraordinarily delicate and beautiful Moorish palace begun in the 13th century. This was the palace of the Nasrid Sultans, rulers of the last Spanish Moorish Kingdom. A fantasy of "lace in stone" surrounded by arabesque gardens and fountains, it affords superb views of the Old Quarter and Sacromonte, a mountain occupied by gypsy cave dwellers. In many ways, the Alhambra represents the Moorish concept of life itself -- something glorious to be ennobled by learning and enlivened by every kind of pleasure.

We also visit the nearby Generalife Gardens as well as the old Moorish quarter of the Albaicin.

Overnight in Granada. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Granada - Ronda: Town Tour*

We continue our tour (by road) to Ronda, a historic town located on a towering plateau in the mountains of Malaga Province. We will walk around the old town where you will learn the origins of this ancient town where Romans, Arabs, and Christians left their traces. We visit the Mondragon Palace, built in a Mudejar style and finally to the Bullring, the oldest in the country.

Time at leisure to enjoy this charming town. Ronda is famous for its dramatic escarpments and views, and for the deep El Tajo gorge that carries the rio Guadalevin through its centre. We suggest a walk to the 18th century Puente Nuevo 'new' bridge, which straddles the 100m / 328 ft chasm below, for its unparalleled views out over the Serrania de Ronda mountains.

Overnight in Ronda. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Ronda - Sevilla*

Today we follow (by road) the route known as "the route of the white villages" for the singularity of the scenery through the Grazalema National Park. Our destination is Sevilla (Seville), the capital of Andalusia and a World Heritage city. We enter the city through one of the most beautiful avenues: the Palm Trees Road, which leads us to the Plaza de Espana, and the Parque de Maria Luisa, bequeathed to the city after the 1929 world exhibition. Later we will walk along the Guadalquivir riverbank and view historic monuments like the Maestranza Bullring, the Torre del Oro, and the Monument to the Tolerance by Eduardo Chillida.

Overnight in Sevilla. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Sevilla: City Tour*

Sevilla, the fourth largest city in Spain, is the picture-perfect image of Andalucia, complete with restored Andalusian architecture, orange groves, flower-filled patios, and castanet-rattling Gypsies.

While in Sevilla we visit the largest cathedral in Spain, built in a Gothic style with lovely stained glass windows, choir, and chapels. We visit the Giralda Tower, with its spectacular views of the city. We will also see the Moorish Alcazar Palace, a 14th century palace, the oldest royal residence in Europe and still in use. King Juan Carlos resides here while in Sevilla, as King Ferdinand II and Queen Isabella once did. We finish our tour with a walk through the Old Quarter.

Balance of the day at leisure.

Overnight in Sevilla. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Depart*

Departure from Sevilla.

NOTE: As Seville is a smaller centre with fewer flight options and maybe higher fares, you may consider taking the fast train to Madrid (2.5 hours, 85 Euros), and flying from there.

BUEN VIAJE! Meal plan: Breakfast.

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