TOUR CODE

QVX

ADVENTURESABROAD

SPAIN & PORTUGAL

with Victor Romagnoli

15 days

Updated 5/31/2011

Day 1 *Arrive in Bilbao*

Welcome to Spain. Our tour begins in Bilbao, tucked into the deep lush folds and clefts of Euskadi's coastal range. The name is "Bilbo" in Basque, but its inhabitants prefer to call it the "botxo," Basque for hole, or orifice. The orifice was originally a scattering of fish hamlets, huddled on the left bank where the hills offered some protection from the Normans and other pirates.

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

Day 2 *Bilbao: The Guggenheim*

This morning we visit the newest and biggest attraction in Bilbao, the Guggenheim Museum. The 31 329 sq m (349,000 sq foot) colossus is one of the focal points of a $1.5 billion redevelopment plan for the city. The Frank Gehry design features a 50 m- (165 foot-) high atrium, more than one-and-a-half times the height of the rotunda of Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum in New York. The museum is devoted to American and European art of the 20th century, featuring the works of such renowned artists as Kandinsky, Mondrian, Picasso, Ernst, Pollock, Lichtenstein, Oldenburg, Serra, and others.

We also explore the Old Town of Bilbao on a walking tour. We travel back in time to Medieval Bilbao with its cobbled streets, charming corners and squares, and trace its development through the centuries.

Overnight in Bilbao. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Bilbao - San Sebastian - Pamplona*

Today we travel to Pamplona, located within the region of Navarre. The city is be best known for the tradition of the running of the bulls which occurs in July every year as made famous by Ernest Hemingway's "The Sun Also Rises."

En route we stop at San Sebastian, the undisputed queen of the Basque resorts. Set around the deep, still bay of La Concha and enclosed by rolling low hills, it's beautifully situated; the old town sits on the eastern promontory, its back to the wooden slopes of Monte Urgull, while newer development has spread along the banks of the Urumea, around the edge of the bay to the foot of Monte Igueldo and on the hills overlooking the bay. We have time for lunch and some exploration before continuing to Pamplona.

We have a walking tour of the old fortress city of Pamplona (Iruna), said to have been founded by the Roman general, Pompey. In the ninth century it became the capital of Navarra. This otherwise quiet city explodes into life in July during the fiesta of Los Sanfermines, with its dare-devil bull running. From the old city walls (murallas) we can get a good overview of Pamplona. The nearby cathedral, which is built in ochre-coloured stone, looks down on a loop in the Rio Arga.

Overnight in Pamplona. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Pamplona - Lumbier Gorge - Laguardia*

This morning we leave Pamplona and make a stop at the spectacular Lumbier Gorge. You will be struck by the power of the water and the erosion which, over millions of years, has managed to carve these ravines in the mountain. They are inaccessible spots with vertical walls, deep rivers, rocky places furrowed with cracks and caves, the refuge of many animals and birds, including an important colony of Griffon vultures. We'll walk along the rim for about 3 km (flat surface).

Our next stop it the Marques de Riscal winery, founded in 1858 and the first winery in the Rioja to produce wines following the Bordeaux method. In 1972, it was the first winery to promote the Rueda Designation of Origin, where it produced its famous Marques de Riscal white wines. We'll have a tour and a tasting at this stunning place, made even more famous by the recent addition of a luxury hotel designed by Frank Gehry of Guggenheim fame. The hotel roof is constructed from curved plates of titanium suspended at different angles and tinted rose, silver and gold -- symbolizing a grapevine just before the fruit is harvested.

We finish our day in Laguardia, a gateway for experiencing the Rioja wine region and a good example of a walled village that has not change much since the 13th century.

Overnight in Laguardia. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Laguardia - Burgos*

Today we travel to Burgos, set along the Arlanzon River. The promenade along the river is one of Spain's prettiest, and we have the afternoon to enjoy this setting and (possibly) visit Burgos's diaphanous Gothic cathedral and castle ruins above town.

Burgos preserves one of the greatest collections of Gothic art and monuments in southern Europe, yet it has also had a long role as a military camp, from the days of El Cid in the 15th century to General Franco, who during Spain's Civil War made burgos his capital. It was here that Franco held his infamous trials of 16 Basque separatists. The Kingdom of Castile was born in the town of Burgos, and its castle stands on what was the Moorish frontier in 884. Old Castile and Leon, which we visit in a few days, encompass two ancient kingdoms on Spain's meseta, a semi-arid expanse of dun-coloured plains spotted with patches of mountains.

Overnight Burgos. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Burgos - Leon: Town Tour*

Today we travel to the engaging city of Leon. The Roman and medieval walls in between help to highlight the beautiful contrast between the old quarter and the squares, known as the Plaza Mayor and the Plaza del Mercado, and the avenues, modern buildings, parks and gardens that lie to the west. The three most characteristic monuments that stand out for their great artistic value in Leon are the Cathedral, the Collegiate Church of San Isidoro and the Convent of San Marcos.

On arrival in Leon we visit the San Isidoro Collegiate Church, an important piece of western Romanesque, where 23 kings and queens are buried. The Cathedral was built in the middle of the 13th century in a gothic style similar to the French cathedrals and is famous for the beauty of more than 100 glazed windows. We also see the facade of the Old Covent of San Marcos, a Spanish Plateresque masterpiece.

Overnight in Leon. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Leon - Way of St James - Santiago de Compostela*

Today your Tour Leader will choose a section of the nearby famed Way of St James route of pilgrimage in order to give particpants a well-deserved leg stretch, and a chance to experience at least a small piece of this famous venerable footpath linking France and Santiago de Compostela. Today's route and activities maybe left somewhat free-form in order to take into such variables as weather, Tour Leader suggestions and group interest.

We finish our day in Santiago de Compostela, one of Spain's most beautiful cities, built of golden granite and declared a national monument in its entirety. It's a wonderful place to walk with its arcades and flagstone streets.

Overnight in Santiago. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Santiago de Compostela*

Today our tour continues to the Cathedral. Although it was built between the 11th and 12th centuries, its appearance is of a baroque building. The Obradoiro facade, built in 1750, is a Spanish Baroque masterpiece. Behind it we find the Portico de la Gloria, built by Mateo in 12th century and whose two hundred Romanesque sculptures represent a unique spectacle. The statue of Santiago's apostle is located on the altar.

We also visit the museum, the Cloister and finally, the Platerias Gate, the only Romanesque one that is still preserved. This afternoon is free for independent exploration.

Overnight in Santiago de Compostela. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Santiago, Spain - Porto, Portugal*

Today we travel by road into Portugal and the city of Porto. Today upon arrival (time permitting), we will take a pleasant walk through parts of the old city located on the banks of the Douro River.

Overnight in Porto. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Porto: City Tour*

This morning we enjoy a tour of Porto, a World Heritage city. We will see the Church of Sao Francisco which dates to the 13th century. This was originally a Gothic church and has a fine rose window at its entrance. Walls, vaulting, and pillars are generously covered with carved and gilded wood vines, grapes, birds, angels, cherubs; a forest of carved, gilded wood covers the high altar. We will also see the Old Quarter, the modern section of the city, and the low section, fronting the River Douro.

During our time in Porto we'll also enjoy a port wine tasting.

Overnight in Porto. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Porto - Coimbra - Leiria*

This morning we travel to the university town of Coimbra, known for its twisting streets and terraced houses. We visit the 12th century Se Velho Cathedral, and 13th-century university with its magnificent library, Manueline doors and chapel. We also visit the charming and elegant 16th century Museu Nacional Machado de Castro, formerly the Bishop's palace and now the depository of some of Portugal's finest sculpture. On display is a mixture of other items including ancient art up to the 20th century.

We continue to Leiria, a charming town with small homes over archways and behind graceful arcades.

Overnight in Leiria. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Leiria - Fatima - Obidos*

Today we travel to nearby Fatima, the well-known Roman Catholic Marian shrine. We visit the Basilica and the Chapel of Apparitions that marks the spot where the three shepherd children had visions in 1917.

We continue south to Obidos, a medieval symbol of narrow streets surrounded by walls. Obidos is known for its typical white houses with blue trim, flowered windows, narrow streets and steps paved with beautiful stone. On arrival in Obidos we embark on a walking tour, passing through the 18th century entry arch covered in glazed tiles (azulejos). Small bright white houses lining narrow cobblestone streets, flower pots on window-sills, Gothic and Renaissance churches -- especially the beautiful Church of Santa Maria -- reminds of the importance of Obidos's past.

Overnight in Obidos. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Obidos - Lisbon*

Today we finish our journey in Lisbon, the capital of Portugal since its conquest from the Moors in 1147. Lisbon is a legendary city with over 20 centuries of history; indeed this was the centre of Europe's first and largest overseas empire and, as a result, the city retains an air of colonial elegance.

Overnight in Lisbon. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Lisbon: City Tour*

Lisbon is an enticing tangle of past and present -- funky and old-fashioned, unpretentious and quirky, restored and revitalised, booming with new confidence. With cultural diversity combined with a laid-back ambience and an architectural time-warp, this is one of Europe's most enjoyable cities.

Today's half-day city tour takes us along the banks of the River Tagus and the Belem Tower guarding the mouth of the river. We visit Jeronimo's Monastery with the tomb of Vasco da Gamma. We continue on to see Alcantara, Praca do Comercio, and the House of Pointed Stones.

We also drive along the Avenida da Liberdade, a fashionable tree-lined street through the centre of town. We continue on a walking tour through the oldest quarter Alfama, Baixa, Rossio, Restauradores, and Avenida da Liberdade.

Afternoon at leisure.

Overnight in Lisbon. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 15 *Departure*

Departure from Lisbon.

VIAGEM BOA!! Meal plan: Breakfast.