Tour Code
ES3

ADVENTURESABROAD

SPAIN: NORTH & SOUTH

'World Heritage Mosaic'

18 days

Created on: 28 Mar, 2024

Day 1 Arrival in Spain

Welcome to Spain! Arrival 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 de Compostela.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Santiago de Compostela: City Tour

This morning we have a walking city tour of Santiago, a UNESCO World Heritage city. Our tour begins at Obradoiro Square where some of its more prominent monuments can be seen: the Archbishop's residence which preserves some 12th century lounges; the Town Hall, former Raxoy Palace, with its classical facade; the San Jeronimo College, whose facade shows Roman influences.

We also include the city's famous cathedral, a truly grand building adorned with many statues of St James in his familiar pilgrim guise with staff, broad-brimmed hat, and scallop-shell badge.

We also visit the Cathedral Museum, the Cloister and finally, the Platerias Gate, the only Romanesque one that is still preserved; and we take a guided tour of the Cathedral roofs,* which allows us to climb to the very top of the building and look out over the historic centre from the heights. To do so we make for the Gelmirez Palace, located to the side of the Cathedral in the Plaza del Obradoiro square. We pass through the interior of the Gelmirez Palace, past the Cathedral gallery (above the Gloria doorway) and up to the roof of the cathedral.

* Impending maintenance on the roof has been announced starting from late winter 2018, and it is unclear as to how long a closure may last. Please be advised that this element may not be possible if the roof tour is unavailable for your chosen departure.

Overnight in Santiago de Compostela.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Santiago de Compostela - Leon

This morning we take the train (2nd class) to Leon.*

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. Our Leon sightseeing continues with the old quarter of the city, which conserves a large part of the medieval wall and some remains of the original Roman wall. One can also find the Casa de Botines, a neo-gothic building and an excellent example of the architecture of Antoni Gaudi.

* NOTE: We use the rail system quite extensively on this tour (except tours ES1 qnd PS2, which feature only ONE rail journey). YOU MUST BE ABLE TO MANAGE YOUR OWN BAGS ONTO / OFF TRAINS AND IN TRAIN STATIONS. Packing lightly is essential.

Overnight in Leon.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Leon - Cave of Altamira - Bilbao

Today we travel by road to Bilbao, via a stop at the museum connected with the Cave of Altamira. Dating from 12000 BC, the caves are full of prehistoric paintings of wild animals and impressions of human hands. When discovered in the 1870s the vivid and evocative paintings were nearly perfectly-preserved. Even Picasso commented on the paintings here: "After Altamira, everything is decadence." (We will be visting a museum and a replica of the cave paintings; the actual cave has been closed to visitors in the interest of conservation).

We continue deeper into Basque country and toward 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Bilbao: The Guggenheim

Today we 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.

The major highlight today is our visit to 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 (on rotation) the works of such renowned artists as Kandinsky, Mondrian, Picasso, Ernst, Pollock, Lichtenstein, Oldenburg, Serra, and others.

Options for your free afternoon include: remain at the Guggenheim on your own, the Basque Museum, Fine Arts Museum, a guided boat tour of the estuary, or local bus trip to San Sebastian (+/- 1:20) etc. Your Tour Leader can help you plan your afternoon.

Overnight in Bilbao.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Bilbao - Barcelona: City Tour

Today we fly to Barcelona.

Barcelona, located on the Mediterranean Sea in the very north of the Spanish coast, is certainly the most cosmopolitan and economically active city in this country. Of course, Barcelona has an long history, and there are monuments of Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance periods and before, but most characteristic is what has been built during the last 100 years.

We are aiming for the morning flight so that we might embark on the guided portion of our Barcelona sightseeing upon arrival (mostly on foot - leisurely pace). Our first stop is Parc Guell, a beautiful place in the morning. We have time to visit the Casa Gaudi with its collection of Gaudi-designed furniture. We'll walk through the Parc, ending up at the main entrance to visit the terrace and pavilion unit and Doric columns.

Overnight in Barcelona.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Barcelona: City Tour

This morning we travel by bus to Barcelona's most famous and most photographed attraction -- La Sagrada Familia Cathedral (Cathedral of the Holy Family), an amalgam of fantasy and Gothic impulses, and Gaudi's most unique piece of architecture. Our bus stops on the side of the Nativity facade (north) from where we walk around to the Passion facade. We explore the interior and also visit the cathedral museum during our stop. At some point during our time in Barcelona, we will also visit the Picasso Museum.

We also stroll down the avenue of Las Ramblas, the exotic "spine of Barcelona," with a stop to look at Palau Guell, another Gaudi creation. We continue to Placa Catalunya and Placa Reial via the central market, Bequiria; a very lively place, crowded with stalls selling caged birds and lush plants and the constant clamor of people haggling and selling.

We then walk into Barri Gotic, a densely-packed area of narrow lanes with a fascinating mixture of medieval and stately Renaissance buildings.

Overnight in Barcelona.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Barcelona: Montserrat & Leisure Time

This morning we include a half-day guided tour of one of Spain's most sacred sites, set in beautiful mountains about one hour's drive from Barcelona. Long before we reach Montserrat, we will see the jagged silhouette of the great peak and understand how it got its name ('serrat' means 'serrated). This massive rock fortress is dotted with paths, stairs, caves, chapels, and hermitages. We drive through the Montserrat Natural Park and up to the Sanctuary, located at 725m (2,380 feet) above sea level. On a clear day you will see breathtaking panorama of the Pyrenees.

Arriving at the Sanctuary, we visit the Royal Basilica and the Chapel of Our Lady of Montserrat. Inside the chapel is the famous 12th century Romanesque carved wood statue of La Moreneta (the Black Virgin). La Moreneta is the patron saint of Catalonia and is a presence strongly felt and revered; indeed this celebrated statue has made the Royal Basilica one of the most important pilgrimage sites in Spain. The tour also includes entrance to an interesting audiovisual exhibition ("Montserrat Portes Endins"), and the chance to taste four locally-produced liquors.

We return to Barcelona with time at leisure.

Overnight in Barcelona.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Barcelona - Madrid: Royal Palace

Today we travel to Madrid by fast train (+/- 3 hours).

This afternoon we include a tour of the Royal Palace* where we see, among other things, its principal staircase, throne, gala dining room, museum of silver, and principal courtyard. This is the official residence of the royal family, but today it is used only state ceremonies. Otherwise known in Spanish as the Palacio Real, the Royal Palace was built during the 18th and 19th centuries, and is a monumental building. It replaced the former medieval Alcazar, which was burnt to the ground in 1794. The present day Royal Palace of Madrid was decorated to the tastes of Charles III, and is extremely lavish inside.

* Please note that the palace is periodically closed without notice due to official functions. We apologize if this activity is not possible.

Overnight in Madrid.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Madrid & The Prado

This morning we have a panoramic tour of broader Madrid, terminating at the Prado Museum for a guided tour. 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. You may want to visit the nearby Reina Sofia for the important modern art collection, including Picasso's masterpiece, "Guernica." Or visit the Museo Naval, one of the world's most important Navy Museums, to learn about the history of the Spanish Armada.

Overnight in Madrid.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Madrid: Toledo Day Trip

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.

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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Madrid - Cordoba: City Tour

Today we travel by fast 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. Next we arrive at the Mezquita-Catedral, or Great Mosque of Cordoba, one of the oldest structures still standing from the time Muslims ruled Al-Andalus. The buildings on this site are as complex as the extraordinarily rich history they illustrate. Historians believe that there had first been a temple to the Roman god, Janus, on this site. The temple was converted into a church by invading Visigoths who seized Cordoba in 572. Next, the church was converted into a mosque and then completely rebuilt by the descendants of the exiled Umayyads -- the first Islamic dynasty who had originally ruled from their capital Damascus (in present-day Syria) from 661 until 750.

We visit 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.

Please note: Our official meal plan for today is "breakfast & dinner"; however, due to other variables, however (such as hotel location), your Tour Leader may choose to include lunch instead of dinner today. You will, of course, be advised in advance.

Overnight in Cordoba.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Cordoba - Granada

Our tour continues to 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.

On arrival we visit the Royal Chapel, featuring tombs carved out of marble by the Tuscan sculptor Domenico Fancelli. As both Queen Isabel and King Fernando died before the Royal Chapel was finished, they were first buried in the Friary of San Francisco in the Alhambra. They were then later moved to the chapel once it had been completed, and buried alongside King Felipe and Queen Juana. Although their original idea was for all future Spanish Kings and Queens to be buried here, this did not happen as the monastery in El Escorial was used instead.

Overnight in Granada.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Granada: The Alhambra

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; in your free time, you may choose to explore the old Moorish quarter of the Albaicin.

Overnight in Granada.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Granada - Reserva Tauro - 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. En route we visit Reserva Tauro, a 500 acre bull and horse breeding farm. Here we have the opportunity to get close to bulls and gain an understanding of the culture without attending a bull fight. Of course this cultural/historical practice is controversial, but the farm does a good job in presenting bull fighting in an even, objective way without in any way promoting or excusing it.

In Ronda, 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. 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 16 Ronda - Pileta Caves - Sevilla

Today we travel to Seville via a stop at the well-preserved rock paintings at the Pileta Caves (walking required on wet stone with no hand rails - speak to your leader for further guidance). The 25,000 year old Neolithic and Paleolithic drawings of black, ochre, and red are mostly just lines or patterns, but there are also horses, goats, cattle, and a rare giant fish, made from a mixture of clay and fat. This is not a well-developed tourist attraction; you must be steady on your feet and prepared for some slow walking.

We then follow (by road) the route known as "the route of the white villages" for the singularity of the scenery. Lunch and time to explore Grazalema, a white hill down nestled in Grazalema National Park. Prior to arrival in Sevilla (Seville), we stop at a viewpoint for a panoramic photo opportunity.

Overnight in Sevilla.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 17 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.

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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 18 Depart

Departure from Sevilla.

BUEN VIAJE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast