Tour Code
**ES4**

ADVENTURESABROAD

# SPAIN & MOROCCO

## 'Andalucia & the Imperial Cities'

**18 days**

Created on: 19 Apr, 2024

### 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.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

### Day 2 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 3 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 4 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 5 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 6 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.

The balance of the day is at leisure for independent exploration, or you can join your Tour Leader on an informal stroll in the city's old Moorish quarter of the Albaicin.

Overnight in Granada.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 7 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 8 Ronda - Pileta Caves - Olive Oil Tour - 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 the route known as "the Route of the White Villages" for the singularity of the scenery. The villages -- Pueblos Blancos -- are a series of whitewashed towns and villages in the northern part of the provinces of Cádiz and Málaga, mostly within the Sierra de Grazalema Natural Park. These charming settlements feature whitewashed houses festooned with pots of colourful flowers, mountain vistas, and traces of the Islamic and Christian past.

For a bit of a break we stop briefly in the White Town of Grazalema, a white hill down nestled in Grazalema National Park, before continuing to a visit to one of the region's olive oil producers for a tour and lunch (included instead of dinner today). The region is renown for extra virgin olive oil, which transmits all the aroma, the flavour, and the essence of the olive groves of Zahara de la Sierra. The process is difficult and extreme, with steep slopes which require manual caretaking and harvesting; the reward is a very fruity, sweet, and gentle flavour partly due to high rainfall in the area. We will learn all about this process and have a chance to taste both the oil and the wine also made locally. Our visit will culminate with a lunch typical of the region with an assortment of tapas, local cheeses, fruits and other sweets (vegatarians are well-catered for).

After a relaxing lunch, we proceed to Sevilla arriving late afternoon. Though we don't include dinner this evening, our hotel is well-placed and your Tour Leader will provide suggestions for your free time.

Overnight in Sevilla.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

## 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.

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 10 Sevilla - Tarifa, Spain - Tangier, Morocco

Today we travel by road to the Spanish port of Tarifa from where we ferry across the Strait of Gibraltar to Africa and the Moroccan city of Tangier.*

Tangier is a fascinating Moroccan city to visit. It has many of the things that travellers love -- a sense of exotic mystery, interesting history, beautiful vistas, unspoiled beaches, and friendly people. Tangier is an interesting mix of north Africa, Spain, Portugal and France. Upon arrival we'll have a tour of this quickly growing and very colourful city.

* In the event that the tour runs with a small group, it may be more expedient for us to fly from Seville to Morocco instead. This potential situation will become clearer closer to departure.

Overnight in Tangier.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 11 Tangier - Casablanca

Today we travel by road to Casablanca with a stop for lunch en route.

Casablanca is believed to have been a Phoenician settlement and later a Berber town. It was conquered by the Almohads in 1188, and developed by Sutlan Abd el-Moumen as a port. In the 14th century the Portuguese established a settlement here on the site of the village of Anfa, but when it became a pirates' base in 1468, they destroyed it, repeating this act in 1515. The Portuguese reestablished themselves in the late 16th century, renaming the town Casa Blanca, staying until 1755, when an earthquake destroyed the settlement.

Overnight in Casablanca.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 12 Casablanca - Rabat - Fes

This morning we visit the Hassan II Mosque, a glorious structure believed to be only second in size to Islam's most important site, Mecca in Saudi Arabia. The mosque was inaugurated in August 1993, the culmination of five years of intensive labour by over 30,000 workers and craftsmen. Non-Muslims may enter as part of a guided tour.

From Casablanca we travel to Rabat, Morocco's third oldest Imperial City and modern capital. Among the sites in Rabat that we will visit are the the Hassan Tower and the Mohammed V Mausoleum. Leaving Rabat we travel to Fes arriving in time for dinner.

The historic city of Fes lies in the Oued Sebou basin, astride the traditional trade route from the Sahara to the Mediterranean and the path from Algeria and the Islamic heartland beyond. For centuries the dominant axis within Morocco was of Fes and Marrakech, two cities linked by their immense power and rivalry. Fes is still seen as the spiritual and cultural capital and holds an enduring fascination for visitors with one of the largest historic medinas full of monuments reflecting the different periods of Morocco's imperial past.

Overnight in Fes.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 13 Fes - Volubilis - Meknes - Fes

This morning we visit the impressive site of Volubilis, the best-preserved Roman site in Morocco. Situated on the ledge of a long plateau, the dramatic site was once one of the Roman Empire's most remote outposts. Our local guide here will take you on tour of the site; we also allow free time for photographs.

We also see the sacred town of Moulay Idriss (photo stop only). Moulay Idriss is a dramatic sight, houses and mosques piled up around two rock outcrops, with the 'zaouia,' or sanctuary, in between.

We continue to Meknes, Morocco's youngest Imperial City. We feature the Bab El Mansour gate dating from 1752, complete with its Corinthian columns. The city was built by a massive army of slaves, both Moroccan and Christian, and the Sultan was in particular famed for his barbaric treatment of these people, supposedly interring them in the walls. The city contained within it all that was necessary for such a large population and military machine, with store houses, stables, armouries, exercise areas, gardens and ponds.

We return to Fes.

Overnight in Fes.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 14 Fes: City Tour

Today we will have a walking tour of Fes El Bali, the extraordinary medieval walled city. Once inside the gates of this great spectacle, you will see an entirely different view of life in Morocco. In contrast to the well-planned Ville Nouvelle, the old city is a labyrinth of alleys and lanes lined with shops, mosques, homes and schools. In 1980 UNESCO designated the medina a World Heritage Site.

Our guide will take us to the medina to view the market shops, or suqs. Everything from food to clothing can be purchased. We will see the famous dying works with the brightly coloured cloth hanging to dry. A visit to the Royal Palace, several mosques, theological schools, and shops where we can see craftsmen tailoring their work will round out the day's tour. Today's walk is an amazing look into the life of the Moroccan city dweller where little has changed over the centuries.

Overnight in Fes.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 15 Fes - Erfoud

We have a morning departure for the Middle Atlas, a region of folded mountains and high, windswept plateaux, vast forests of cork oak and cedar, and lakes and streams full of trout. This is Berber country and sheep and goat-rearing is the main occupation of these resilient, friendly people. We drive via the Berber villages of Imouzzer du Kandar; Ifrane, a fairy-tale town unlike any other in Morocco with white-walled French-style villas with steep red roofs and gables. As the altitude increases, we come to a bare, arid, sandy plateau with another range of mountains in the distance.

We continue to Erfoud, an attractive town -- red and sandy, exuding desert ambiance.

Overnight in Erfoud.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 16 Rissani & Merzouga Dunes

This morning we journey to the historic 8th century caravan town of Rissani to visit the Tafilalt Oasis. The first capital of the Tafilalt and the last stop on the caravan routes south, Rissani has a special place in Moroccan lore. The ruling Alaouite dynasty (from whom Morocco's current ruler, Mohammed VI, is a descendant) launched its bid for power here before triumphing finally in Fes and Marrakech. Today, a quarter of Rissani's population still inhabits a large 17th-century ksar in the center of town.

Later this afternoon we drive by 4WD vehicle to Merzouga to witness sunset over the dunes. We have time to explore the dunes on foot, or by camel! This is a magical Saharan landscape, with huge drifting expanses of sand dunes reaching heights of more than 45 metres (148 ft). Their colour shifts from pink to gold to red to white depending on the time of day.

Overnight at Merzouga.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 17 Merzouga - Todra Gorge - Ouarzazate

This morning we depart for the Todra Gorge, one of Morocco's most spectacular sights. It is a vast fault in the plateau separating the High Atlas from the Jbel Sarhro, two sheer cliffs over 300 metres (958 ft) high separated by a narrow corridor only 20 metres (66 ft) wide.

Later we cross the southern slopes of the High Atlas before arriving at the captivating city of Ouarzazate. We stop en route in the heart of the Dades Valley at the oasis of Kelaa Mgouna.

Overnight in Ouarzazate.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 18 Ouarzazate - Casablanca - Depart

Today we fly back to Casablanca and connect with flights that generally leave in the evening.

NOTE: The flight to Casa is included in your trip cost; if booking your own flights from Casablanca, land only passengers need to take into account the timing of the flight from Ouarzazate before booking their air from Casa.

BON VOYAGE!!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast