

Spanish Capitals

Barcelona & Madrid

with excursions to Montserrat, Zaragoza, Toledo, El Escorial & Segovia

Day 1: Fly out from USA

Begin your Spanish adventure today, traveling to the airport for your overnight flight from the USA to Europe.

Day 2: Bienvenidos a España

After a morning arrival in Spain you'll be met by your Global Explorers Tour Leader, who will accompany you throughout your tour.

Your tour begins as you travel into the heart of Barcelona, the capital of Catalonia, a distinct & proud region with its own history & traditions. Our expert local guide will take you on a tour of this vibrant & exciting city, this afternoon, visiting many of the city's most noted landmarks - the idiosyncratic Park Guell, the Montjuic district that is home to the 1992 Olympic park, & the *Barri Gothic* or Gothic Quarter, the heart of this historic city.

Later today, after checking into your centrally-located hotel for three nights, this evening's first group dinner will be taken close to the city's famous *Las Ramblas*. Afterwards your tour leader will take you for an evening stroll to experience the atmosphere, a great way to end your first day in Spain.

Day 3: "Barcelona!"

Today is dedicated to discovering the vibrant & exciting city of Barcelona in more depth with your Global Explorers tour leader.

After riding the city's efficient metro, take a walk through the *Barri Gothic* to the 14th century Cathedral, home to the tomb of Barcelona's patron saint, Eulalia, & thirteen guard geese that still honk when disturbed!

After a stroll up the nearby *Las Ramblas* & a stop for lunch, continue through the elegant 'Eixample' district, home to the city's best *Modernista* buildings including several by Barcelona's favorite son, Antoni Gaudi.

Your final visit today will be to Gaudi's crowning achievement, the stunning & still-incomplete Sagrada Familia, perhaps the most unique & spectacular church anywhere. Dinner tonight will be in the heart of the city's Gothic Quarter.

Day 4: Montserrat & Barcelona at Leisure

This morning you'll leave the city behind as you travel to the monastery at Montserrat, one of the most important pilgrimage centers in Spain & an important center of Catalan nationalism. Sitting atop a 4,000 ft jagged mountain (Montserrat means 'serrated

mountain'), this remote site has been home to monks for over 1100 years! After ascending the mountain by cable car you'll have time to see the famed 'Black Madonna' statue, witness the daily performance of the monastery's renowned boys choir, visit the world class art collection, & even take a hike on the surrounding peaks.

An afternoon arrival back in Barcelona will allow you time to explore at leisure, whether taking in one of the city's renowned museums, touring the home of F.C.Barcelona, visiting the amazing *Modernista* Catalan Concert Hall, or strolling & shopping along *Las Ramblas*. At the end of the day, meet your fellow travelers once more for your group dinner.

Day 5: From Catalunya to Castilla

Leaving Barcelona & the coast behind this morning, journey south-west towards the Spanish capital Madrid, located in the heart of the Iberian peninsula.

En-route you'll visit the city of Zaragoza, a major city that is home to northern Spain's greatest Moorish palace & two cathedrals. There'll be plenty of time for lunch & to see the central sights before you continue your journey.

Later you'll arrive in Madrid & check-in to your hotel for five nights, then enjoy a group dinner in the heart of this fun capital.

Day 6: Madrid in Depth

Discover the heart of the Spanish capital this morning, as our local Madrid guide leads you on a walking tour of central Madrid, followed by a visit to the vast Royal Palace, still the official home of the Spanish monarchy.

After lunch the renowned Prado Museum awaits, housing many of Spain's greatest art, including works by El Greco, Velazquez & Goya. Smaller & more manageable than many of Europe's other great art galleries, the Prado is a great introduction to Spanish art for visitors of all interest levels, with the highlight being Velazquez's masterpiece *Las Meninas*. Tonight's dinner is a fun experience, dining at the San Miguel market, where you can try all kinds of tasty Spanish treats from tapas to paella, ordering whatever takes you fancy from the colorful stalls.

Day 7: The Capital Region - Toledo

Venture outside Madrid today, to explore the medieval city of Toledo.

Just an hour south of the capital, Toledo is one of Spain's highlights, a wonderful atmospheric medieval city that was home to the artist El Greco. Indeed many of his works are still located here. The city also once enjoyed a reputation as Europe's leading center for sword-making. On your walking tour you'll find evidence of all this & more, with spectacular views & fabulous art along the way.

We return to Madrid this afternoon in time for dinner.

Day 8: The Capital Region - El Escorial & Segovia

Today you venture outside Madrid once more, to explore more highlights of Castilla.

The first stop will be El Escorial, the huge palace-monastery complex that was once home to the twin Spanish powers of royalty & religion.

Before lunch continue to the nearby city of Segovia, a UNESCO World Heritage city, where you'll spend your afternoon. Segovia is home to an amazing array of buildings from different eras, including a fantastically-well preserved Roman aqueduct & a fairytale castle. The day ends back in Madrid in time for dinner.

Day 9: Madrid at Leisure

Now that you know Madrid, today has been left totally free for you to enjoy Madrid at your leisure. There is plenty to occupy your time, from visit more of its great museums to shopping in the boutiques & department stores. Or enjoy a taste of the Madrilenos' relaxed pace of life with a leisurely day in a park or strolling through the city's squares. As always your tour leader will be at hand to help you plan your day & even to accompany you as you explore.

This evening the group will rendezvous at the hotel for a farewell dinner on your final night in this fun capital city & in Spain. And afterwards your tour leader will treat you to the city's best hot chocolate & *churros*, the perfect way to end your time in Spain!

Day 10: Adiós Espana!

Sadly it's time to depart this morning for your flight from Madrid to the USA, arriving home later the same day.