

Aragón



If you come to Spain and spend your entire time in Aragón, you'll experience an extraordinary breadth of quintessentially Spanish attractions and you certainly won't leave disappointed.

Aragón's heartbeat is Zaragoza, a city bursting with sound and fury yet still paying homage to high culture with a fine array of historical monuments. It's here in Aragón's largest city that the region's grand themes converge: a commitment to much-loved local cuisine that borders on the passionate; long nights of revelry; and a proliferation of extant glories from the great empires that give depth to Spanish history. The visual and culinary feast continues in Teruel, whose Mudéjar monuments are Spain's finest and where the streets course with life.

Away from the bustle of city life lies an altogether different world, one that's filled with quiet charm and splendid architecture. Stunning stone-walled villages line up across the countryside, from Sos del Rey Católico, Aínsa and Alquézar in the north to Daroca and Albaracín in the south and the small hamlets of Aragón's southeast. This is where Aragón is at its best, a timeless world where Old Spain lives and breathes.

Then there's the terrain that encompasses many of Spain's signature landscapes, beginning in the Pyrenees with some of Spain's most extraordinary mountain scenery and rolling down through the foothills to the arid mesas surrounding Teruel. The great mountains of the north cater for skiers and mountaineers while their valleys are a walkers' paradise of canyons, pretty villages, lonely castles and venerable monasteries with outstanding Romanesque architecture.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Hit buzzing streets and bars of **Zaragoza** (opposite) by night and visit its glorious monuments by day
- Veer off the beaten highway to fabulous old towns such as **Aínsa** (p450), **Sos del Rey Católico** (p460), **Daroca** (p461) and **Albaracín** (p465)
- Savour the Mudéjar architecture and wafer-thin perfection of the best *jamón* (ham) from **Teruel** (p461)
- Go quietly through the beautiful Pyrenean valleys of **Echo** and **Ansó** (p458)
- Walk the wilderness in the **Parque Nacional de Ordesa y Monte Perdido** (p451) in the Pyrenees



■ AREA: 47,720 SQ KM

■ AVE SUMMER TEMP:
HIGH 31°C, LOW 17°C

■ POP: 1.296 MILLION

ZARAGOZA

pop 624,600 / elev 200m

Zaragoza (Saragossa) rocks and rolls. The feisty citizens of this great city on the banks of the mighty Río Ebro make up over half of Aragón's population and they live a fairly hectic lifestyle with great tapas bars and raucous nightlife. But Zaragoza is so much more than a city that loves to live the good life and there's a host of historical sights spanning the great civilisations (Roman, Islamic and Christian) that have left their indelible mark on the Spanish soul.

HISTORY

The Romans founded Caesaraugusta (from which 'Zaragoza' is derived – listen to it phonetically and you'll see what we mean) in 14 BC. As many as 25,000 people migrated to the prosperous Roman city whose river traffic brought the known world to the banks of Río Ebro. In Islamic times Zaragoza was capital of the Upper March, one of Al-Andalus' frontier territories. In 1118 it fell to Alfonso I 'El Batallador' (Battler), ruler of the expanding Christian kingdom of Aragón, and immediately became its capital. In the centuries that followed, Zaragoza grew to become one of inland Spain's most important economic and cultural hubs and a city popular with Catholic pilgrims. Now Spain's fifth-largest city, Zaragoza's growing confidence was reflected in its successful staging of Expo 2008, which thrust the city well and truly into the international spotlight.

ORIENTATION

The core of old Zaragoza, including the bulk of the city's historic monuments and most hotels and restaurants, lies south of Río Ebro, its former walls marked by Avenida de César

Augusto to the west and El Coso to the south. Plaza del Pilar, dominated by Zaragoza's great churches, gives way southwards to a labyrinth of lanes and alleys whose heart is known as El Tubo. The major 'T-junction' of the modern city is south of the old town at Plaza de España. The Estación Intermodal Delicias train and bus stations are about 2km west of the old centre.

INFORMATION

Self-promotion is a Zaragoza speciality if the number of tourist offices is anything to go by. Only the most useful are listed in this section.

Conecta-T (☎ 976 20 59 79; Murallas Romanas 4; per hr €1.60; ☎ 10am-11pm Mon-Fri, 11am-11pm Sat & Sun)

A well-organised facility with cheap international calls, mobile charge point and faxing. There's another branch (Paseo Calanda 27) close to the train and bus stations.

Estación Intermodal Delicias (☎ 976 32 44 68;

☎ 9am-9pm Easter-Oct, 9am-8pm Nov-Easter) Tourist office, in the train station.

Hellespontika (☎ 976 49 55 54; Plaza Ariño 1; wash & dry per 3kg load €12; ☎ 9.30am-1.30pm & 4.45-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) Laundry.

Hospital Clínico Universitario (☎ 976 35 75 01; Calle de San Juan Bosco 15)

Librería General (☎ 976 22 44 83; Paseo de la Independencia 22; ☎ 10am-1.30pm & 5-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1.30pm Sat) Bookshop with walking maps, guide-books, and some English- and French-language novels.

Main post office (Paseo de la Independencia 33; ☎ 8.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2pm Sat)

Oficina de Turismo de Aragón (☎ 976 28 21 81; www.turismodeAragon.com; Avenida de César Augusto 25;

☎ 9am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri, from 10am Sat & Sun) Tourist office.

Plaza del Pilar (☎ 976 39 35 37; www.zaragozaturismo.com; ☎ 9am-9pm Easter-Oct, 10am-8pm Nov-Easter) The city information office, opposite the basilica.

ZARAGOZA – CHEAP AND EASY

If time's tight, there are three options for making the most of Zaragoza without emptying your wallet. Information on all of the following options is available from any of the tourist offices listed above.

- **Zaragoza Card** (☎ 902 14 20 08; www.zaragozacard.com; 24-/48-/72hr €14/19/23) Free entry to all sights, travel on the Tourist Bus and discounts on hotels, restaurants and car rental.
- **Tourist Bus** (Bus Turístico; ☎ 976 20 12 00; adult/under 5yr €6/free) Hop-on, hop-off sightseeing bus that does two 75-minute city circuits daily in summer, less frequently the rest of the year.
- **BiziZaragoza** (☎ 902 31 99 31; www.bizizaragoza.com; subscription €6) Public bicycle rental from numerous pick-up and drop-off points around town.