

Destination Spain

Spain may be a modern European country, but it's never lost its whiff of the exotic. The stereotypes by which it's known – *bailaors* (flamenco dancers) stamping and swirling in flounces of colour; *toreros* (bullfighters) flaunting their courage in the bullrings; and beach-lovers soaking up pitchers of sangria over steaming paella – just happen to be true. But Spain is also so much more.

For a start, few countries can match the diversity of the Spanish landscape. If mountains give you frisson, Spain has them in abundance. In the north, the Pyrenees and the Picos de Europa are as beautiful as any mountain range on the continent, while the snowcapped Sierra Nevada rises up from the sun-baked plains of Andalucía like an unlikely apparition of the Alps. Stunning coastlines, the horizonless gravitas of the *meseta* (high tableland of central Spain) and the captivating semideserts of the south combine to create an extraordinary picture.

Everywhere you go, villages of rare and timeless beauty perch on hilltops and huddle in valleys. Vestiges of Old Spain cling to traditions that the rest of Europe lost long ago and to the stone-and-timber architecture that never goes out of style. Spend as long as you can in places such as these. Better still, use them as bases for hiking, skiing and all manner of stirring outdoor pursuits.

A world away, Spain's dynamic cities are temples to all that's modern and cool. Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia and Seville have become bywords for that peculiarly Spanish talent for living the good life, and for doing so at full volume and all night. Most cities also promise a daytime feast of exceptional sites, from world-class art galleries to graceful Islamic-era monuments, from *barrios* (districts) overflowing with medieval charm to zany Gaudi flights of fancy.

Speaking of feasts, food and wine are what Spaniards really get excited about. Variety is the touchstone of Spanish cooking and every region, nay, every Spanish village seems to have its own speciality. Often the recipes have been intact for centuries; sometimes they've just emerged from the laboratory. You may experience the best meal ever over tapas in an earthy bar where everyone seems to be shouting, or in the refined surrounds of a Michelin-starred restaurant. Either way, the breadth of culinary experience that awaits you is astonishing.

Fascination also resides in the fact that Spain is a work in progress, a country wrestling with its place in the modern world. Spain's rapid rise to become one of Europe's most progressive countries – remember it's only been a democracy for 30 years – finds daily expression as Spaniards confront a host of modern problems.

Ask any Spaniard what they're most concerned about and they're likely to reply: 'the economy, of course'. Spaniards are struggling: how to buy a house, how to pay the mortgage, how to survive on some of Europe's lowest salaries while prices reach parity with the rest of the continent are national obsessions. In this economy, where stellar recent growth has been fuelled by booming construction, the Europewide economic downturn is rocking Spain to its foundations. Immigration, too, is increasingly at the forefront of Spaniards' minds.

And then there are those issues with a more local focus. Since Spain's Socialist government returned to power with a narrow victory in national polls in March 2008, Spaniards have been watching and hoping that the

FAST FACTS

Population: 45 million

Area: 504,782 sq km

GDP: €1348 billion
(world's eighth-largest economy)

GDP per head: €19,226

GDP growth: 1.8%

Inflation: 4.6%

Unemployment rate:
9.63%

Average life expectancy:
79.92 years

Highest point in peninsular Spain: Mulhacén
(3479m)

Biggest paella: made in Valencia in 1992 in a pan 20m in diameter; it was eaten by 100,000 people

next four years won't be as bitter as those that preceded them. Although the government and opposition have promised to end the politics of confrontation, the divisive issues that plagued the last legislature remain open wounds and no one's holding their breath.

The raft of social reforms pursued with such zeal by the Socialist government, and opposed with equal fervour by the opposition, are, it seems, here to stay. But with the government promising to make abortion laws 'more flexible', remove Christian symbols from government ceremonies and open debate on laws allowing a limited form of euthanasia, it's hard to see how the two sides can be reconciled. The election of the Archbishop of Madrid, arch-conservative Antonio María Rouco Varela, to lead the powerful Spanish Bishops' Conference in 2008 suggests that the road ahead will be anything but boring.

Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA; Basque Homeland and Freedom) may be on the decline but, after a nine-month 'permanent' ceasefire, it showed it was still around with the bombing at Madrid's Barajas airport on 30 December 2006. Two people died – the first deaths attributed to ETA in almost four years – and the killing of a former Basque councillor followed during the 2008 election campaign. 'No more negotiations' was the message from both the ruling Socialists and the opposition Partido Popular (People's Party). But negotiate they must on at least one front: the Basque regional government has promised a referendum on plans for far-reaching autonomy.

But for all the issues that confront and divide, Spaniards seem intent on staring down the doomsayers and living life in a way that seems to say 'Crisis? What crisis?' The shops are full, Spaniards are travelling more than ever and it's often said that the current young generation is the first in a very long while to be truly proud of its country. Spain is all the rage around the world, from its cuisine and celebrity chefs to its architecture and design. The national football team finally shook off the mantle of perennial underachiever by winning the 2008 European Championships, its first major trophy since 1964, and Rafael Nadal's epic Wimbledon victory was the first by a Spaniard since 1966. In the aftermath of sporting success, the feel-good factor was palpable in just about every corner of the land and, despite the undoubted problems the country faces, there's a newfound confidence, an overwhelming sense that Spain's time is now.

'Spain's dynamic cities are temples to all that's modern and cool.'

Getting Started

Getting the most out of a visit to Spain is partly a matter of timing. If you hope to enjoy the outdoors (walking, skiing, diving and so on), you need to plan around the weather but avoid the crowded seasonal peaks. You may want to be around to witness some of the country's extraordinary festivals. Some visitors aim for a taste of luxury and gourmet indulgence; in this case it is worth planning which castles to stay in and which avant-garde restaurants to book. Whether it's a lazy beach holiday or a strenuous cycle tour you're craving, whatever your budget, anything is possible.

See Climate Charts (p868) for more information.

WHEN TO GO

Depending on what you're after, Spain is a year-round destination. The ideal months to visit are May, June and September (plus April and October in the south). At these times you can rely on good to excellent weather pretty much throughout the country, yet avoid the main crush of Spanish and foreign tourists and the sometimes extreme heat. During July and August, temperatures can climb to 45°C in inland Andalucía; at this time Madrid is unbearable and almost deserted.

Winter (from December to February) along the south and southeast Mediterranean coasts is mild. In the height of summer (from June to August), retreat to the northwest, to beaches or high mountains, anywhere to escape excessive heat. You can be sitting outside enjoying a beer in a T-shirt in Granada in February, or rugged up against the cold while trekking the Picos de Europa in July.

Swimming in the Mediterranean is pleasant from about mid-May to early October, although the Costa Brava can be a touch chillier. The ski season in the Pyrenees generally runs from mid-December to early April, depending on snowfalls, which in recent years have been patchy.

See the Events Calendar (p24) to plan around the countless fiestas that dot the Spanish calendar.

COSTS & MONEY

Spain is, as locals will quickly tell you, not as cheap as it once was. What you spend on accommodation (probably your single greatest expense) will depend on various factors, such as location (Madrid is pricier than Murcia), season (August along the coast is packed and expensive), the degree of comfort you require and a little dumb luck. At the budget end you'll pay €12 to €27 for a bed in a youth hostel (depending on the hostel, season and your age).

The cheapest bearable *pensión* (small private hotel) or *hostal* (budget hotel) is unlikely to cost less than €20 (single) or €35 (double) a night; reckon on more in the cities and resorts. Depending on where you are, you can stumble across good single or double rooms with attached bathroom from as little as €30 or €45 (€60 or €80 in the more popular locations).

Eating out is still more variable. A *menú del día* (daily set menu) can cost as little as €8 to €12. Bank on spending at least €20 on a full dinner (including house wine).

Most sights are fairly cheap. Keep an eye out for free days (especially Sundays and set days for EU citizens).

Public transport is reasonably priced, although high-speed trains can be expensive. See the Transport chapter (p883) for more details.

A backpacker sticking to youth hostels, lunchtime snacks and travelling slowly could scrape by on €40 to €50 a day. A more comfortable midrange

HOW MUCH?

El País newspaper €1.10

Admission to dance clubs
€10-20

Cocktail €6-10

Seat at a Real Madrid
or FC Barcelona match
€15-170

City metro ride up to
€1.30

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Valid travel insurance (p874)
- Your ID card and passport or visa if required (p880)
- Driving licence and car documents if driving, along with appropriate car insurance (p892)
- A concealed money belt or shoulder wallet to help save you from being a petty-theft victim (p871)

budget, including a sandwich for lunch, a modest evening meal, a couple of sights and travel will be anything from €100 to €150 a day. From there, the sky's the limit. It is possible to spend hundreds on five-star lodgings and even in the occasional gourmet paradise.

TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY

Spain's history, location, lack of mineral wealth and dependence on tourism for a sizeable chunk of its national income (more than 10% of GDP) combine to make environmental issues a key to its future.

The presence of millions of tourists in Spain every year is both a boon and a burden on resources. Take care not to waste water; tread carefully in parks, on the coast and other sensitive areas; avoid littering everywhere; and keep an eye open for local products rather than succumbing to mass imports (from food to fashion). Staying in rural accommodation can provide a source of income to otherwise slowly dying country communities. Travelling in the interior away from the standard locations can be rewarding and it helps spread the tourist burden more evenly around the country!

Bear in mind that much of the overly dense, barely controlled construction of holiday housing on the coast is not for Spaniards. Much of the damage is already done, but anyone considering buying coastal apartments might want to consider the implications. The same is true of the nation's golf-course frenzy. Golf tourism is on the rise but is hardly compatible with the semidesert nature of parts of southern Spain, where scarce water would be better directed at irrigation.

Keep in mind that water is at a premium in much of the country. Drought threatened water restrictions along much of the Mediterranean coast in 2008 until, much to everyone's relief, abundant unseasonal downpours in May filled the dams. Despite this, of course, prudent consumption remains the order of the day. Reining in those long showers is good for everyone! For more on environmental issues, see p106.

A motorised vehicle is advantageous for getting to some parts of the country but by making judicious choices you can give your drivers, the vehicles and the atmosphere a rest. Public transport, including the country's growing high-speed rail network, makes it easy to get around between major destinations. In cities, park your car and use public transport instead.

You are what you eat! Seeking out better restaurants that use fresh local products or shopping at produce markets is a way of contributing to both your well-being and the local economy.

Giving your custom to local businesses, especially those with ecofriendly credentials, in and around parks and protected areas helps sustain rural economies without recourse to potentially noxious alternatives.

In parks and other protected areas, stick to established routes, obtain permits for restricted areas and don't damage vegetation or scare wildlife. Take extreme care to avoid starting fires, which every summer ravage large

'Whether it's a lazy beach holiday or a strenuous cycle tour you're craving, anything is possible.'

TOP PICKS


 Portugal

 • Madrid
 SPAIN

SPANISH CINEMA

A handful of silver-screen classics slipped through the general drivel produced during the long Franco era, but since the dictator's demise in 1975 Spaniards have been cheekily adventurous with celluloid. Check out p67 for more on this topic.

- *Todo Sobre Mi Madre* (Pedro Almodóvar; 1999)
- *Amantes* (Vicente Aranda; 1991)
- *¡Bienvenido, Mr Marshall!* (Luis García Berlanga; 1952)
- *Flamenco* (Carlos Saura; 1995)
- *Volver* (Pedro Almodóvar; 2006)
- *Lucía y el Sexo* (Julio Medem; 2001)
- *Un Chien Andalou* (Luis Buñuel; 1929)
- *Jamón, Jamón* (José Juan Bigas Luna; 1992)
- *Mar Adentro* (Alejandro Amenábar; 2004)

THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Spain's scenery is as varied as its history, food and weather, and is often the backdrop for exciting activity. To get your adventurous side into action, see what's on offer in Spain Outdoors (p110). Our pick for top spots include the following:

- Baqueira-Beret (p413) – top-class skiing in the Pyrenees.
- Illes Medes (p385) – pretty diving near the islands off the Costa Brava.
- Tarifa (p758) – powerful windsurfing near the Straits of Gibraltar.
- Vall de la Noguera Pallaresa (p406) – the country's best white-water rafting.
- Aneto (p450) – hiking around the highest peaks of the Spanish Pyrenees.
- Cabo de Gata (p828) – a wild coastal stretch perfect for swimming and diving.
- Parque Nacional Monfragüe (p843) – the place to look out for the *águila imperial* (imperial eagle) and other rare large birds.
- Menorca (p683) – the entire island is a tranquil Unesco Biosphere Reserve.
- Parque Nacional Sierra Nevada (p810) – an area offering skiing, walking and horse riding, not to mention mainland Spain's highest mountain, Mulhacén.
- Camino de Santiago (p118) – the famous spiritual walking trail from the French border to Santiago de Compostela.

areas of Spain. Consider walking as an alternative to disruptive activities such as quad biking.

Just as walkers should tread softly and leave no refuse behind them, so divers should be careful not to disturb the seabed, coral and marine life. Boaters should not drop anchor in areas where Poseidon grass grows on the seabed, as they will tear up this sea flora when weighing anchor. Look for a sandy bottom.

Littering remains a problem and a big issue on crowded beaches. It is incredible but true that awareness campaigns are still needed to remind

people not to leave cigarette butts, cans and other refuse on the beach. The lesson, it appears, is yet to be learned by all. Bin your rubbish!

Look out for discount cards that support environmental and sustainability projects, for instance the Targeta Verda in the Balearic Islands (see the boxed text, p673).

TRAVEL LITERATURE

Much ink has been spilled on the subject of Spain by its observers, both foreign and local. For books on Spanish history, art and architecture, see the recommendations in the History, Culture and Architecture chapters.

Ghosts of Spain, by Giles Tremlett, looks at contemporary Spain, a country in overdrive to catch up with the rest of the West but with its heart still planted in its tumultuous past.

Between Hopes and Memories: A Spanish Journey, by Michael Jacobs, is an amusing and personal reflection on contemporary Spain. Jacobs sets out from Madrid and criss-crosses the country, dipping into its historical, literary and cultural dimensions.

Tuning Up at Dawn, by Robert Graves' son Tomás, looks at Mallorca (and Spain) since the civil war, with an emphasis on the music world in which he was caught up.

Spanish Steps sees author Tim Moore and his donkey, Shinto, undertaking the walk from France to Santiago de Compostela, offering no shortage of laughs along the way. A more serious and superbly written account of the Camino can be found in Cees Nooteboom's *Roads to Santiago*.

Written in 1845, Richard Ford's classic *A Handbook for Travellers* not only tells us how things once were in places we see now, but also has us chortling as its irascible English author is by turns witty, informative and downright rude.

There is no shortage of expats churning out émigré memoirs in Spain. One of the more amusing is *Mañana, Mañana, Viva Mallorca*, by Peter Kerr, one of four books he wrote during his family's three-year stint running an orange orchard on the island.

INTERNET RESOURCES

EuroResidentes (www.euroresidentes.com) A multilingual portal aimed at foreign residents in Spain, detailing everything from mortgage advice to Spanish travel blogs.

Fiestas.net (www.fiestas.net) Good site on fiestas worth checking out.

LonelyPlanet.com (www.lonelyplanet.com) Can get you started with info on Spain, links and a forum of travellers trading information on the Thorn Tree.

Renfe (Red Nacional de los Ferrocarriles Españoles; www.renfe.es) Timetables and tickets for Spain's national rail network.

Spanish Fiestas (www.spanish-fiestas.com) Has little on fiestas but does have everything from events listings to links for active holidays.

Turespaña (www.spain.info) This is the Spanish tourist office's site, which offers lots of general information and useful links.

Vayafiestas.com (www.vayafiestas.com) Spanish-only site with month-by-month info on fiestas around the country.

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Events Calendar

From San Sebastián to Seville, Spaniards share a zest for the fest. The country's calendar creaks beneath the weight of an unending parade of feast days and celebrations that, whether of religious or pagan origin, share the common aim of providing an excuse for much drinking, eating and merrymaking.

JANUARY

FESTIVIDAD DE SAN SEBASTIÁN 20 Jan
During this festival (p488) everyone in San Sebastián dresses up and goes somewhat berserk.

FEBRUARY

ARCO mid-Feb
Madrid hosts Arco (Feria Internacional de Arte Contemporánea; www.arco.ifema.es in Spanish), one of Europe's biggest contemporary art fairs (p173), at the tail end of winter.

FEBRUARY–MARCH

CARNAVAL
This event involves several days of fancy-dress parades and festivities. It is at its wildest in Cádiz (p741) and Sitges (p365), but is also good in Ciudad Rodrigo (p223). It usually ends just before Lent, on the Tuesday 47 days before Easter Sunday. An especially odd celebration takes place in Solsona, Catalonia (p415). Townsfolk celebrate Carnival by hoisting a donkey (nowadays made of plastic) up the central clock tower and dropping it onto the crowded square below! Another little-publicised version is the Batalla de Caramels (Battle of the Sweets), the high point of very rowdy Carnival celebrations in Vilanova i la Geltrú (p420) in which locals hurl countless sweets at one another.

MARCH

LAS FALLAS 12-19 Mar
This festival consists of several days of all-night dancing and drinking, first-class fireworks and processions. Its principal stage is Valencia city (p611), but it is also celebrated in Gandia (p629)

and elsewhere in the Valencia region. The festivities culminate in the ritual burning of (sometimes enormous) effigies in the streets. See www.fallas.es (in Spanish) for more.

MARCH–APRIL

SEMANA SANTA (HOLY WEEK)

The week leading up to Easter Sunday (which changes each year) entails parades of *pasos* (holy figures) and huge crowds. It is most extravagantly celebrated in Seville (p723), but it is also big in Málaga (p772), Córdoba (p791), Toledo (p280), Ávila (p211), Cuenca (p295), Lorca (p704) and Zamora (p240).

DANSA DE LA MORT

In the fairly nondescript Catalan village of Verges (p384), the Dansa de la Mort (Dance of Death) on Holy Thursday is a chilling experience. This nocturnal dance is the centrepiece of Easter celebrations and is much bigger in numbers than the town that hosts it!

LOS EMPALAO

The village of Villanueva de la Vera, in northeast Extremadura, plays out one of the most extraordinary acts of Easter abnegation you are ever likely to witness. Taking place on Holy Thursday, the devotion and self-inflicted suffering of the barefoot penitents who walk the Way of the Cross leaves most onlookers breathless (see p836 for details).

APRIL

MOROS Y CRISTIANOS 22-24 Apr
Colourful parades and mock battles between Christian and Muslim 'armies' in Alcoy (p644), near Alicante, make this one of the most spectacular of several similar events staged in Valencia and Alicante provinces (see www.portalbfester.com in Catalan).

FERIA DE ABRIL

late Apr
This is a week-long party (p723) held in Seville, kicking off after the religious fervour of Semana Santa. *Sevillanos* ride around on horseback and in elaborate horse-drawn carriages by day and, dressed up in their best traditional finery, dance late into the

night. For more details, see <http://feriadesevilla.andalunet.com> (in Spanish). The city also stages its biggest bullfight series this week.

ROMERÍA DE LA VIRGEN DE LA CABEZA

last Sun in Apr

Hundreds of thousands of people make a mass pilgrimage to the Santuario de la Virgen de la Cabeza (www.santuariovirgencabeza.org in Spanish) near Andújar, in Jaén province (p816). As a small statue of the Virgin Mother is paraded about, people pass clothes and even small children over the crowd to have a priest touch them to the statue's mantle.

FERIA DEL QUESO

last weekend in Apr

The streets of Trujillo, in Extremadura, are filled with an overwhelming aroma as multitudes of cheeses from all over Spain are displayed at this gourmet fest (p851). The fair is sometimes held at the beginning of May. See www.feriadelqueso.com for details.

MAY

FERIA DEL CABALLO

early May

A colourful equestrian fair in Andalucía's horse capital, Jerez de la Frontera (p749), the Feria del Caballo features parades, bullfights and plenty of music and dance.

WOMAD

early May

For three days Cáceres is taken by musical storm for the World of Music, Arts and Dance festival (p845). You could hardly hope for a greater concentration of performers from all over the planet, nor for a more beautiful setting than the medieval squares of this city.

CONCURSO DE PATIOS CORDOBESES

early to mid-May

Scores of beautiful private courtyards are opened to the public for two weeks in Córdoba (p790). For more information, check out www.patiosdecordoba.net (in Spanish).

ES FIRÓ

around 11 May

Sóller, in northern Mallorca, is invaded by Muslim pirates in early May. This gives rise to a 'battle' between townsfolk and invaders known as Es Firó (p662). It recreates an infamous assault on the town that was repulsed on 11 May 1561, in which Ses Valentes Dones (Valient Women) played a key part in victory.

FIESTA DE SAN ISIDRO

15 May

Madrid's major fiesta (p173) features bullfights, parades, concerts and more. Some of the events, such as the bullfighting season, last for a month. Indeed, this is the major bull fiesta – *toreros* (bullfighters) the world over dream of being able to fight here at the Las Ventas ring.

MAY-JUNE

ROMERÍA DEL ROCÍO

7th weekend after Easter

Focused on Pentecost weekend, the seventh after Easter, this is a festive pilgrimage made by up to one million people to the shrine of the Virgin at the Andalusian village of El Rocío (p734); see www.portalrociero.com (in Spanish).

CORPUS CRISTI

9th week after Easter

On the Thursday in the ninth week after Easter, religious processions and celebrations take place in Toledo (p280) and other cities. Those in Toledo (www.corpuschristitoleado.es) are most impressive.

JUNE

HOGUERAS DE SAN JUAN

23 Jun

Midsummer bonfires and fireworks feature on the eve of the Fiesta de San Juan (24 June; Día de San Joan), notably along the Mediterranean coast – especially southeast and south – but also as far north as Barcelona (p344). It's celebrated with particular gusto in Ciutadella, Menorca (p691), where you can see splendid horsemanship in multitudinous parades. See www.santjoanweb.com.

ROCK IN RIO

late Jun

Launched in 2008 over two weekends in Arganda del Rey (30km from Madrid), this enormous rock festival attracted 200,000 spectators to see national and international acts. A repeat is planned for 2010.

SÓNAR

Performers and spectators come from all over the world for Sónar (www.sonar.es), Barcelona's two-day celebration of electronic music (see p344). Dates vary each year.

JULY

FIESTA DE SAN FERMÍN (SANFERMINES)

6-14 Jul

For many, the highlight of this week-long non-stop festival and party in Pamplona (p502) is the

FINDING YOUR FIESTA

As well as the fiestas listed here (and others in the course of the guide), there are numerous sources listing the events, both traditional and modern, that go on throughout the year in Spain. You could start with the national tourist office website (www.spain.info): click on What to Do? and then Events and Fiestas. Some upcoming events are listed immediately and you can search by type of event, region, town, dates and so on. Regional and local tourist offices also tend to have copious information on the events in their regions – check the relevant websites to get started. Another more ‘homemade’ website is www.portalfiestas.com (in Spanish). Again, you can search by place and date. Punters provide many of the listings. If you can deal with the Spanish, you may well uncover some weird and wonderful events in the remotest towns and villages. Spainforyou.es (www.spainforyou.es in Spanish) is a similar tool. Less exhaustive but a good starting point is Spanish Fiestas (www.spanish-fiestas.com). A good book resource is the illustrated *Popular Fiestas, Spain Day by Day* by María Ángeles Sánchez. It covers, to a greater or lesser extent, thousands of Spanish fiestas.

encierro (running of the bulls), an activity also pursued in dozens of other cities and towns through the summer.

FESTIVAL DE ORTIGUEIRA 2nd weekend in Jul
Groups from as far off as Nova Scotia come to celebrate their Celtic roots with the *gallegos* in this bagpipe- and fiddler-filled music fest in Galicia’s Ortigueira (p579). See www.festivaldeortigueira.com for info.

DÍA DE LA VIRGEN DEL CARMEN

16 Jul

Around this date in most coastal towns the image of the patron of fisherfolk is carried into the sea or paraded on a flotilla of small boats.

DÍA DE SANTIAGO

25 Jul

The Feast of St James marks the national saint’s day and is spectacularly celebrated in Galicia at Santiago de Compostela (p569), the site of St James’ tomb.

FESTIVAL INTERNACIONAL DE

JAZZ E BLUES DE PONTEVEDRA

late Jul

Top jazz and blues musicians converge on the pretty Galician town of Pontevedra for four days of good listening (p586) near the end of July. The international get-together is preceded by several days of local acts.

FESTIVAL INTERNACIONAL DE BENICÀSSIM

late Jul

Spain is awash with outdoor concert festivals attracting big-name acts from around the country and abroad. This one, in the Valencian town of Benicàssim (p623), remains one of the original and best.

JULY–AUGUST

FESTIVAL DE TEATRO CLÁSICO

The Roman theatre and amphitheatre in Mérida, Extremadura (p856), become the stage for the classics of ancient Greece and Rome, and the occasional newbie such as Will Shakespeare. What better setting for the works of Sophocles and Euripides? Performances are held most nights during July and August.

AUGUST

FESTES DE LA PATRONA

1–2 Aug

In northwest Mallorca, Pollença is the scene of fierce mock combat between invading Muslim pirates and townsfolk armed mostly with poles (p663). The afternoon of processions and combat in the streets of the town is preceded by a night of revelry in which music and drink fire up souls until dawn.

SEMANA GRANDE OR ASTE NAGUSIA

1st Sat after 15 Aug

Bilbao is touched by a little summer madness for about 10 days with processions, cultural events, music and much partying, especially in the streets of the old town (see p475). Similar events take place in various towns along the Bay of Biscay coast. Gijón (p543) is particularly frenetic.

LA TOMATINA

2nd-last or last Wed in Aug

This massive tomato-throwing festival in Buñol, Valencia (p619) must be one of the messiest get-togethers in the country. Thousands of people launch about 100 tonnes of tomatoes at one another in just an hour or so!

CERTAMEN DEL QUESO

2nd-last or last Sun in Aug

In Arenas de Cabrales (p557) at the foot of the Picos de Europa, cheese-lovers are treated to cheese tasting, making, judging and more.

SEXENNI

2nd half Aug

In the high-country inland town of Morella, the good folk come together every six years (next in 2012) for nine days of exuberant baroque festivities in honour of the Virgin (p627). The town is decorated in preparation for the grand processions of a *paso* of the Virgin Mary from a chapel 24km away, to give thanks for her saving Morella from the plague in 1672.

Highlights include a flamenco festival and a program of bullfighting, all liberally washed down with plenty of all-night eating and drinking.

FIESTA DE SAN MATEO

21 Sep

For one week, Logroño celebrates the feast day of St Matthew and the year's grape harvest (p512). There are grape-crushing ceremonies and endless opportunities to sample the fruit of the vine in liquid form.

FESTES DE LA MERCÈ

around 24 Sep

Barcelona's gigantic party (p344) marks the end of summer with four days of parades, concerts, theatre, fire running and more.

SEPTEMBER**FIESTA DE LA VIRGEN DE GUADALUPE**

6-8 Sep

The pretty town of Guadalupe in Extremadura celebrates its very own Virgin Mary (p853). A statue is paraded about on the evening of the 6th and then again in the monastery on the 8th, which also happens to be Extremadura's regional feast day.

FERIA DE PEDRO ROMERO

1st half Sep

The honouring of Pedro Romero, one of the legends of bullfighting, is a good excuse for the people of Ronda to host weeks of partying (p782).

OCTOBER**DÍA DE NUESTRA SEÑORA DEL PILAR**

12 Oct

In Zaragoza the faithful mix with the hedonists to celebrate this festival dedicated to Our Lady of the Pillar (p437). The pillar in question, upon which the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared, is in the cathedral, but much of the fun happens in the bars nearby.

FIESTA DE SANTA TERESA

15 Oct

The patron saint of Ávila (p211) is honoured with 10 days of processions, concerts and fireworks around her feast day.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

HEADING SOUTH

One Month/Barcelona to Algeciras

The sun glitters on the Mediterranean as your flight glides in to **Barcelona** (p302), Spain's second-biggest city. Explore the architecture and sample the food, then embark on a coast crawl with stops in **Tarragona** (p421) for the Roman ruins, **Peñíscola** (p624) for the beach, and **Valencia** (p604) for another dose of nightlife and the 21st-century wonders of the Ciudad de las Artes y las Ciencias. From here, flee deep into Castilla-La Mancha and halt at craggy **Cuenca** (p292). Push on to the capital, mighty **Madrid** (p129), for the hedonism and museums before continuing to **Toledo** (p273), a medieval jewel. The road sweeps through La Mancha's plains and olive groves to **Ciudad Real** (p285). Make a left for the striking village of **Almagro** (p287), in Almodóvar territory, then take the A4 for **Jaén** (p816) and its gorgeous cathedral. Nearby are the Islamic glories of **Granada** (p795) and **Córdoba** (p787). The colourful capital of the south, **Seville** (p710), also beckons. Hear the call of Africa? Drop down to **Cádiz** (p738) and proceed east to **Algeciras** (p761) for the boat to Morocco and a whole new adventure.

This 1767km route slices right across Spain, from the sparkling northern seaside metropolis of Barcelona, via the pulsating capital of Madrid to the fiery south of Andalucía. En route, make coastal stops in Tarragona and Valencia, and the Castilian strongholds of Cuenca, Toledo and Almagro.



ANDALUCIAN ADVENTURE

Three Weeks / Málaga to Tarifa

Capture the colour, excitement and variety of Spain's vibrant southernmost region by combining visits to its three great World Heritage cities – **Seville** (p710), **Córdoba** (p787) and **Granada** (p795) – with an exploration of some of its most beautiful countryside and a refreshing beach spell to finish your trip. If flying in or out of **Málaga** (p768), don't miss its excellent **Museo Picasso** (p768).

Andalucía was the heartland of medieval Islamic Spain and each of the main World Heritage cities is home to one of Spain's three great Islamic monuments: Granada's **Alhambra** (p797), Córdoba's **Mezquita** (p788) and Seville's **Alcázar** (p718). Modern Andalucian culture and entertainment, too, are at their most effervescent in the university cities of Seville and Granada, both centres of the flamenco scene and bursting with bars serving some of the most delectable tapas in the region. These cities also boast an array of other treasures, from Granada's historic **Capilla Real** (p802) and old Muslim quarter, the **Albayzín** (p802), to Seville's massive **cathedral** (p717) and baroque churches. For a change of key, venture out from Granada to the otherworldly valleys of **Las Alpujarras** (p812), which also provide easy access to mainland Spain's highest mountains, the **Sierra Nevada** (p810), great for walking in summer and skiing in winter.

Having done your cultural bit, turn south from Seville for **Jerez de la Frontera** (p746), the sherry, equestrian and flamenco hub of Cádiz province, and the historic, vivacious port city of **Cádiz** (p738), before winding down on the sandy Atlantic beaches of the Costa de la Luz between Cádiz and Spain's internationally hip southernmost town, **Tarifa** (p757).



The route from Málaga to Tarifa is 840km. Add another 170km if you must return to Málaga at the end. Three weeks allows enough time to savour the places you visit; with four weeks you can linger as you like and make your own discoveries.

GREEN SPAIN**One Month / San Sebastián to Santiago de Compostela**

Spain's well-drenched northern coast forms a green band from the Basque Country to Galicia, backed by the Cordillera Cantábrica. Either **San Sebastián** (p484), with its crescent bay and tapas bars, or **Bilbao** (p469), with its Guggenheim museum, will make a fine introduction. Heading westwards, hug the coast of Cantabria and Asturias, making forays to inland valleys and mountains. Following Cantabria's eastern coast, drop by the old centre of **Castro Urdiales** (p528), surf at **Orión** (p528) and cruise the bars of **Santander** (p521). Explore the cobblestone medieval marvel of **Santillana del Mar** (p529), admire the Modernista architecture in **Comillas** (p532) and catch some waves at sprawling **Playa de Merón** (p533). The eastern Asturias coast is best travelled by train, stopping off at **Llanes** (p547) and **Ribadesella** (p546). **Arriondas** (p555), the next stop, is one gateway to the majestic **Picos de Europa** (p552). Straddling Cantabria and Asturias, these peaks offer fabulous hiking. Next head for **Oviedo** (p535), Asturias' capital, for its pre-Romanesque architecture, and **Gijón** (p541), a substantial port where cider flows copiously. West of Gijón, secluded beaches await between the picturesque fishing harbours of **Cudillero** (p548) and **Luarca** (p549). One approach to Galicia is to follow its *rias* (estuaries), a route that covers dynamic cities such as **A Coruña** (p572) and **Vigo** (p590), as well as low-key resorts, islands and protected areas. Between the Rías Altas (north) and Rías Baixas (west) are the untamed beaches of the **Costa da Morte** (p581). **Santiago de Compostela** (p564) makes a suitable end point for a Green Spain trek. Those with more time could make the final approach on foot along the **Camino de Santiago** (p118) pilgrim route. Alternatively, discover the area with the Transcantábrico scenic train (see the boxed text, p895).

The sea sets the agenda for the Iberian Peninsula's emerald fringe.

This sweep of coastline crosses some 600km, dotted with hundreds of beaches. Cosmopolitan Bilbao and tall peaks present bracing alternatives. All roads lead to Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, Spain's culturally distinct northwest extremity.



ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

EXTREME WEST

One Week / Salamanca to Seville

For many travellers, the plateresque joys of the university town of **Salamanca** (p214), in western Castilla y León, are well known, but relatively few venture south into what was long one of the poorest regions of Spain. A back high-way leads into the hill territory of the Peña de Francia, whose main village is pretty **La Alberca** (p225). You would never guess that until recent decades misery ruled in this quiet rural retreat. The road continues to climb and then suddenly drops through woods into Extremadura, passing into the once equally poor Las Hurdes region to reach **Plasencia** (p841) to the southeast. Jammed with noble buildings, churches and convents, it was for centuries the region's principal city, and makes a good base for excursions up the northeast valleys and to **Monasterio de Yuste** (p835). From Plasencia, a circuit takes you first to the charming hill town of **Guadalupe** (p852), lorded over by the monastery complex dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe. Country roads then lead westwards to the medieval town of **Trujillo** (p849), a warren of cobbled lanes, churches and the newer Renaissance-era additions that were the fruit of American gold. A short drive further west lies the ochre-coloured medieval jewel of **Cáceres** (p844), a town with a lively student nightlife scene, too. To the south stand some of Spain's most impressive Roman ruins in **Mérida** (p854). Further south again across the dry plains lies the white town of **Zafra** (p861). Rather than continue straight into Andalucía, make a westwards detour to the hilly town of **Jerez de los Caballeros** (p862) before finally heading south for magical **Seville** (p710).

This 810km route opens up the treasures of Extremadura, wedged between the Castilian university town of Salamanca and the south's sultry mistress, Seville. Along the way, discover the Roman wonders of Mérida, fine medieval cities, and the enchanting towns of La Alberca, Guadalupe and Zafra.



LA MANCHA TO EL MAESTRAZGO

One to Two Weeks / Toledo to Peñíscola

Start this adventure in nonconformist fashion with a couple of nights in **Toledo** (p273), rather than the typical day trip from Madrid. Wander further from convention by taking the road south to **Orgaz** (p283) and then a detour southeast to **Consuegra** (p289), one of many villages associated with Don Quijote. From there you plunge south past olive groves to **Ciudad Real** (p285) and east to **Almagro** (p287), an enchanting stop for a night or two. While here, make the excursion for the hilltop castle ruins outside **Calzada de Calatrava** (p288). From Almagro, the trail takes you east towards **Ruidera** (p288) and its lagoon park. From Ruidera, swing back northwest to Quijote territory, checking out **Campo de Criptana** (p289), **El Toboso** (p290) and **Mota del Cuervo** (p290). The road continues east to **Belmonte** (p290) and its castle. For a castle you can sleep in, press on to **Alarcón** (p297). Make the loop southeast to reach **Alcalá del Júcar** (p291), on the stunning Río Júcar, which you can then follow west before heading back north for **Cuenca** (p292) and its hanging houses. A pretty riverside route takes you north along the CM2105 road into the hilly territory of the Serranía de Cuenca and the **Ciudad Encantada** (p297) and then east across the Montes Universales to the ochre town of Muslim origin, **Albarracín** (p465). Next stop is **Teruel** (p461), remarkable for its old town's architecture. To the east lies a route past hamlets of the high country of El Maestrazgo, including **La Iglesuela del Cid**, **Cantavieja** and **Mirambel** (see p466). Crossing into Valencia (but still in El Maestrazgo), our route takes you to the breathtaking **Balmá monastery** (p629), on to the pretty, castle-dominated town of **Morella** (p627) and finally to the coast at **Peñíscola** (p624).

Think you've been there and done that in Iberia? This 1185km meander across the back-blocks of central Spain will delight with Quijotic villages, castles, broad plains and the remote high country of El Maestrazgo – all far from tourist trails – before emerging at pretty, coastal Peñíscola.



TAILORED TRIPS

PASSING THROUGH PARADORES

Spain's chain of *paradores* (luxurious, state-owned hotels) offers the chance to reside in grand mansions, former convents and formidable castles. Just south of Madrid in Chinchón, the **Parador Nacional** (p203) is set in a 17th-century former monastery. To the south, among the best in Andalucía are the **Parador de Granada** (p806) within the Alhambra complex, the castle location of the **Parador de Jaén** (p818) on Santa Catalina Hill and the 16th-century Renaissance mansion of **Parador Condestable Dávalos** (p821) in Úbeda. A cluster of fine *paradores* is scattered west of Madrid. In Extremadura, the most tempting include 15th-century **Parador de Guadalupe** (p854) in Guadalupe; the 16th-century **Parador de Trujillo** (p851) in a former convent; and the **Parador de Cáceres** (p847), a 14th-century town house. To the north, León's **Hostal de San Marcos** (p249) is one of the finest *paradores* in the land, housed in the Monasterio de San Marcos. Equally fine is the luxury 15th-century **Parador Hostal dos Reis Católicos** (p570), a former pilgrims' hospice in Santiago de Compostela, northwest Galicia. East in Olite, Navarra, the **Príncipe de Viana** (p509) is another gem, occupying a wing of a 15th-century palace. In Catalonia, the hilltop castle-monastery complex of the **Parador Ducs de Cardona** (p415), in Cardona, stands out.



KIDS' SPAIN

Spain's generous diet of beaches, fiestas, castles and double-decker city tours keep under-14s content much of the time. Unique local attractions provide the icing on the cake. Barcelona has a great aquarium and other amusements at **Port Vell** (p328), along with the CosmoCaixa interactive science museum (p334). Around Catalonia, kids will enjoy the *cremallera* (rack and pinion) train ride to **Montserrat** (p367) and its weird rock pillars, and Spain's biggest amusement/adventure park, **Port Aventura** (p426).

Down the Mediterranean coast, activate those little brain cells at Valencia's marvellously entertaining *and* educational **Ciudad de las Artes y las Ciencias** (p607), which includes Europe's largest aquarium. Gijón, in Asturias, is home to another fine **Acuario** (p543), among whose stars are the sharks and a lively pair of otters.

Estepona's wildlife park **Selwo Aventura** (p779) stands out among the Costa del Sol's many kid-friendly attractions. In **Gibraltar** (p763) youngsters love the cable car, the apes, the dolphin-spotting trips and the tunnels in the upper rock. Next stop: **Jerez de la Frontera** (p746) for its zoo and the prancing horses of the Real Escuela Andaluza del Arte Ecuestre. **Isla Mágica** (p721), in Seville, thrills the white-knuckle brigade.

Up in Madrid, check out **Faunia** (p164) and the **Parque del Buen Retiro** (p156), with its boat rides and street performers. Many kids will go loco for the locos at the **Museo del Ferrocarril** (p164).



GOthic SPAIN

Wherever you find yourself in Spain, the majesty of Gothic construction can be admired. Start your tour in **Barcelona** (p302), which boasts one of the most extensive Gothic city cores in Europe. Its splendours include the Església de Santa Maria del Mar, the Reials Drassanes medieval shipyards and Saló del Tinell. From the Catalan capital you can make a grand sweep west to admire some of the country's landmark Gothic monuments. **Burgos** (p255) is home to a soaring Gothic cathedral much influenced by the French style and, further west still, **León** (p246) hosts another grand Gothic cathedral. Near Madrid, **Segovia** (p226) and **Ávila** (p207) also make the grade with their fine Gothic cathedrals; Ávila's was the earliest raised in the country. There's more Gothic to be found in lesser-known centres, such as pretty

Sigüenza (p299). In Andalucía there are delights in store, such as the grand cathedral in **Seville** (p710) and Capilla Real in **Granada** (p795). They weren't just building cathedrals in those days. The Castilian countryside in particular is littered with castles of all shapes and sizes. Some, like the all-brick construction in **Coca** (p233), are all the more extraordinary for their mix of Gothic and Mudéjar styles. That mix continues in many monuments in medieval **Toledo** (p273), south of Madrid, where stands yet another Gothic pearl, in the form of the cathedral. Finally, the Balearic Islands also sport a Gothic cathedral in **Palma de Mallorca** (p653).



WATER WORLDS

One of only two European countries to possess both Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts (the other, of course, being France), Spain's extraordinarily varied coastline offers the visitor a little bit of everything. Swimming is clearly an option all over the place, but some of the most beautiful beaches and water are to be discovered in the **Balearic Islands** (p648), especially on **Menorca** (p683) and **Formentera** (p678). You'll find one of the best ways to get around the Balearic Islands is by sailing. It is possible to hire charter yachts (with or without skipper) from places such as **Barcelona**, where you can take sailing and windsurfing classes (p340) before you set off. Divers will be eager to explore the depths around the **Illes Medes** (p385), an incredible protected archipelago of islets off Catalonia's Costa Brava. Another popular beach spot that is certain to attract divers is the start of **Cabo de Gata** (p828).

Windsurfers, on the other hand, consider **Tarifa** (p757) to be their mecca. Surfers without sails make for the north coast, especially spots such as **Zarautz** (p484) and **Mundaka** (p482), which is known for its mythical left wave. Wild and woolly spots abound along the Atlantic coast. Among the most intriguing water-borne excursions in Galicia is a trip to the **Illas Cies** (p593). There's more to enjoy than just sea water, however; those who like white-water adrenalin should make for **Ribadesella** (p546) or **Llavorsí** (p406) and climb aboard for a bumpy ride.



The Authors



DAMIEN SIMONIS

Coordinating Author

Barcelona, Catalonia, Cantabria & Asturias, Balearic Islands

The spark was lit on a short trip over the Pyrenees to Barcelona during a summer jaunt in southern France. It was Damien's first taste of Spain and he found something irresistible about the place – the way the people moved, talked and enjoyed themselves. Damien came back years later, living in medieval Toledo, frenetic Madrid and, finally, settling in Barcelona. He has ranged across the country, from the Picos de Europa to the Sierra Nevada, from Córdoba to Cáceres, and slurped cider in Asturias and gin in the Balearic Islands. For this edition of *Spain* he also wrote the Getting Started, Events Calendar, Itineraries, Culture, Architecture, Directory and Transport chapters. Damien has authored *Barcelona, Madrid, Mallorca, Canary Islands* and the now-defunct *Catalunya & the Costa Brava* for Lonely Planet.



SARAH ANDREWS

Galicia

Sarah Andrews has been living in and writing about Spain since 2000, when she moved to Barcelona from North Carolina. Since then, she's worked on many Spain-related titles for Lonely Planet and other publishers, but authoring the Galicia chapter was her first immersion in *gallego* culture. After weeks of soaking in stunning scenery, visiting incredible cities such as Santiago de Compostela, and getting her fill of specialities like *caldo gallego* (Galician soup), she's hooked. Read her recent work online at www.sarahandrews.com.

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STUART BUTLER

Basque Country, Navarra & La Rioja, Andalucía, Environment, Spain Outdoors

Stuart's first visit to the Basque Country, as a nipper, led to his first taste of surfing. He quickly became addicted to both. When he was older he spent every summer on the beaches in and around both the French and Spanish Basque Country until one day he found himself so hooked on the waves, climate, landscapes and beach 'attractions' that he was unable to leave – he has been there ever since. When not writing for Lonely Planet he drags himself away from home to search for uncharted surf on remote coastlines. The results of these trips appear frequently in the world's surf media. His website is www.oceansurfpublications.co.uk.



ANTHONY HAM

Madrid, Castilla y León, Aragón, Food & Drink

In 2001 Anthony fell irretrievably in love with Madrid on his first visit to the city. Less than a year later, he arrived there on a one-way ticket, with not a word of Spanish and not knowing a single person in the city. Now Anthony speaks Spanish with a Madrid accent and is married to Marina, a *madriña*; together with their daughter Carlota, they live overlooking their favourite plaza in the city. When he's not writing for Lonely Planet, Anthony is the Madrid stringer for Melbourne's *Age* newspaper and writes about and photographs Madrid, Africa and the Middle East for newspapers and magazines around the world. Anthony also wrote *Destination Spain* and the *Local Flavours* and *Green Getaways* colour chapters.



JOHN NOBLE

Andalucía, History

In the mid-1990s John, originally from England's Ribble Valley, and his wife Susan Forsyth decided to try life in an Andalusian mountain village. A writer specialising in Spain and Latin America, John has travelled throughout Spain and loves its fascinatingly historic cities, wild, empty back country, isolated villages and castles, rugged coasts, and its music, art, tapas, wine and football.



JOSEPHINE QUINTERO

**Castilla-La Mancha,
Murcia, Extremadura**

Josephine started travelling with a backpack and guitar in the late '60s. Further travels took her to Kuwait, where she was held hostage during the Iraq invasion. Josephine moved to the relaxed shores of Andalucía shortly thereafter, from where she has explored most of the country. She loves Castilla-La Mancha for its dramatic landscape and because it is a beautiful, yet largely undiscovered, region where you still need to speak Spanish to order a beer.



MILES RODDIS

Valencia

Miles and his wife Ingrid have lived for more than 15 years in a shoebox-sized apartment in the Barrio del Carmen, Valencia's oldest and most vibrant quarter. Having cut his Lonely Planet teeth on tough African stuff such as Chad, the Central African Republic and Sudan, he nowadays writes about softer Mediterranean lands – Spain, France and Italy. He's the author or coauthor of more than 30 Lonely Planet guidebooks, including *Valencia & the Costa Blanca*, *Best of Valencia*, *Walking in Spain*, *Canary Islands* and five editions of the book you're holding. He loves Fallas about twice a decade and gets the hell out of town in intervening years.



ARPI ARMENAKIAN SHIVELY

Andalucía

Arpi, her partner Fred Shively and their bearded collie Macduff arrived in the Andalusian spa town of Lanjarón more or less by accident in 2003, via previous writing lives in London and Washington DC. They quickly fell in love with the dramatic Alpujarran landscape, the simplicity of life and the warmth of the community, plus free supplies of Lanjarón's coveted mineral water. As half of a freelance writer and photographer team, Arpi has written many articles about Andalucía's people, places and lifestyles for magazines in Spain and the UK, and plans to write many more as she continues to explore her adopted region in this beautiful country.

CONTRIBUTING AUTHOR

Nancy Frey wrote the Camino de Santiago chapter. She earned her PhD in cultural anthropology from UC Berkeley and wrote *Pilgrim Stories: On and Off the Road to Santiago*. For nine years Nancy and her partner Jose Placer have led hundreds down the Camino with their walking tours company On Foot in Spain. They have three kids and live on the Galician coast.