



Castilla y León

Includes ➔

Ávila	142
Salamanca	147
Segovia	157
Valladolid	164
Zamora	170
Palencia	173
León	177
Burgos	185
Soria	196

Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Restaurante El Fogón Sefardí (p162)
- ➔ Zazu Bistro (p152)
- ➔ Martín Quiroga (p165)
- ➔ Delirios (p181)
- ➔ El Huerto de Roque (p188)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Posada Real La Cartería (p172)
- ➔ La Posada Regia (p180)
- ➔ Don Gregorio (p151)
- ➔ Rimbombin (p187)
- ➔ Hotel Mozart (p164)
- ➔ Hospedería La Gran Casa Mudéjar (p161)

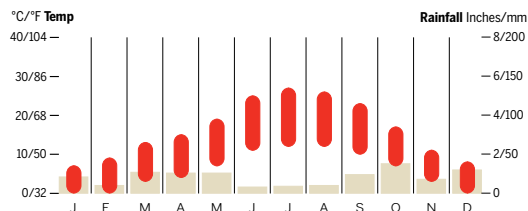
Why Go?

If you're looking for a window on the Spanish soul, head to Castilla y León. This is Spain without the stereotypes, with vast plains, spectacular mountain peaks and evocative medieval towns. Experience fabled cities like Salamanca, with its lively student population, and Segovia, famed for a fairy-tale fortress that inspired Disneyland's Sleeping Beauty castle. The multiturreted walls of Ávila have similar magical appeal, while the lofty cathedrals of León and Burgos are among Europe's most impressive. And, like most of Spain, food here is an agreeable obsession, promising the country's best *jamón* (cured ham), roast lamb and suckling pig.

The region's story is equally told through its quiet back roads, half-timbered hamlets and isolated castles. From the scenic Sierra de Francia in the southwest to Covarrubias, Calatañazor and Medinaceli in the east, this is the hidden Spain most travellers never imagined still existed.

When to Go

León



Mar & Apr Enjoy wild flowers in the countryside and soul-stirring Semana Santa processions.

Jun Get into holiday mode during annual fiesta time in Burgos, Soria and Segovia.

Sep Capture the youthful buzz of Salamanca as universities return to class.

DON'T MISS

The tapas bars in León's Barrio Húmedo are among the best in the province with delectable tapas ranging from traditional morsels to mini artworks on a plate.

Prettiest Villages

- Covarrubias (p190)
- Pedraza de la Sierra (p163)
- San Martín del Castañar (p156)
- Puebla de Sanabria (p172)
- La Alberca (p156)
- Calatañazor (p199)

Top Tiddle

Over the last two decades, Ribera del Duero has seriously challenged Rioja for Spain's top wine region tiara. There are over 200 wineries here and some 9229 hectares of vines. And the jewel in the crown has to be world famous Vega Sicilia, Spain's most celebrated wine.

Top Plazas Mayor

- Salamanca
- Segovia
- Lerma
- El Burgo de Osma
- Medinaceli

Iberia's Finest Roman Villa

Okay, it's not Pompeii, but it is Spain (and Portugal's) most exciting and best-preserved Roman Villa. Located seemingly in the middle of nowhere, the Villa Romana La Olmeda (p177) is surrounded by fertile plains and hidden behind an incongruous futuristic-looking building. Step inside, however, to be transported back, like some zany time traveller, to the 4th century AD and the villa of a wealthy aristocrat and land owner whose property spans some 1000 sq metres and contains some of the finest mosaics to be discovered in a private Roman villa anywhere in Europe.

SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL

Most people associate this province with its magnificent cities, like Salamanca and León. But downsize drastically and you discover villages that look, well, like nowhere else in Spain. Stone-and-timber buildings, sandy main squares, earthy local bars, porticoed walkways held up by ancient wooden columns – and locals who stare. Consider learning enough Spanish to order a *cerveza* (beer) and take a sidestep from the city heavyweights to discover some of Spain's most extraordinary medieval villages (covered in this chapter). Staying overnight can add to this tangible sense of the past. The lack of traffic, the cobbled streets, the ancient buildings and the slow pace of life are a marvellous antidote to stressful living – along with no wi-fi (if you're lucky!).

Top Five Food Experiences

- Stop by León's La Casa de los Quesos (p181) for a wheel of locally produced goat or sheep's cheese (the perfect accompaniment to that bottle of Ribera del Duero wine you bought earlier).
- Indulge in the local speciality, *morcilla de Burgos* (blood sausage from Burgos; p188) at one of this city's fine traditional restaurants.
- Join the *madrileños* on a Sunday and head to picturesque Sepúlveda (p193) for a roast lamb lunch and all the trimmings.
- Pig out on (what else?) but roast suckling pig at one of the longstanding traditional restaurants in Segovia (p161).
- Or take a sidestep from all that meaty fare and enjoy superbly prepared organic and vegetarian cuisine at Salamanca's La Boca Abierta (p152) or El Laurel (p152); restaurants that reflect the diverse culinary tastes of a city with a substantial foreign student population.