

PAGE
2

PLAN YOUR TRIP

YOUR PLANNING TOOL KIT

Photos, itineraries, lists and suggestions
to help you put together your perfect trip

Welcome to Spain	2
Map	4
25 Top Experiences	6
Need to Know	18
First Time	20
What's New	22
If You Like	23
Month by Month	26
Itineraries	31
Eat & Drink	
Like a Local	36
Outdoor Activities	44
Travel with Children	53
Regions at a Glance	57



PAGE
807

UNDERSTAND SPAIN

GET MORE FROM YOUR TRIP

Learn about the big picture, so you
can make sense of what you see

Spain Today	808
History	810
Architecture	828
Spain's Master	
Painters	837
The Spanish Table	840
Flamenco	844
Bullfighting	847



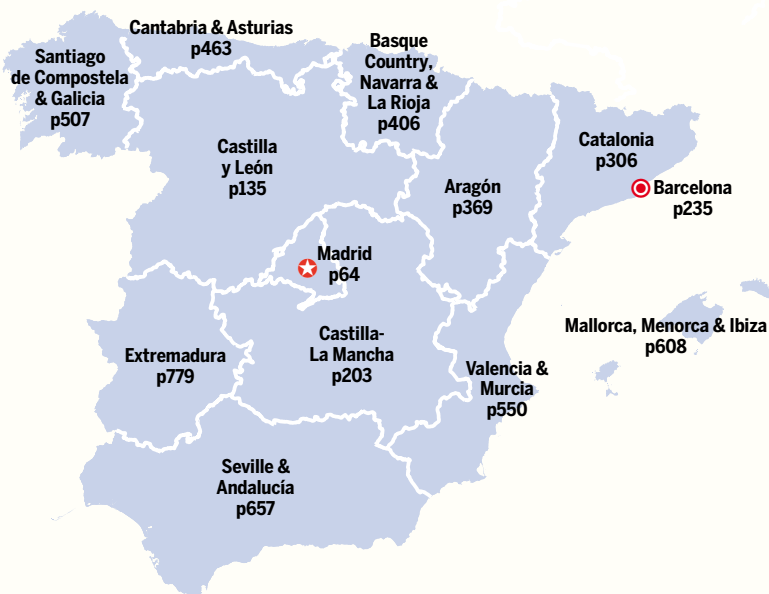
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Directory A-Z	850
Transport	863
Language	872
Index	884
Map Legend	902



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Every listing is recommended by our authors, and their favourite places are listed first

Look out for these icons:



Our author's top recommendation



A green or sustainable option



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MADRID 64

AROUND MADRID	129
San Lorenzo de	
El Escorial	129
Alcalá de Henares	132
Sierra de Guadarrama. . .	133
El Pardo	133
Buitrago & Sierra Pobre. .	134

CASTILLA Y LEÓN . . 135

THE SOUTHWEST	137
Ávila	137
Sierra de Gredos	142
Salamanca	143
Ciudad Rodrigo	151
La Alberca	153
THE CENTRAL PLATEAU. .	155
Segovia	155
Valladolid	164
Zamora	172
Palencia	174
THE NORTHWEST	177
León	177
THE EAST	186
Burgos	186
Soria	198

CASTILLA-LA MANCHA 203

Toledo	205
THE WEST	215
Talavera de la Reina. . .	215
THE SOUTH	216
Ciudad Real	216
Albacete	222

THE NORTHEAST	224
Cuenca	224
Guadalajara	229
Pastrana	230
Sigüenza	231

BARCELONA 235

CATALONIA 306

COSTA BRAVA	308
Tossa de Mar	308
Palafrugell & Around . . .	311
Girona	315
Cadaqués & Around. . .	323
Figueres	326
THE PYRENEES	331
Vall de Núria & Ribes de Freser	335
Parc Nacional d'Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici & Around	343
Val d'Aran	346
CENTRAL CATALONIA . .	349
Vic	349
Montserrat	350
Lleida	353
COSTA DAURADA & AROUND	355
Sitges	356
Penedès Wine Country . .	359
Tortosa	366
Delta de L'Ebre	366

ARAGÓN 369

ZARAGOZA	371
----------------	-----

SOUTH OF ZARAGOZA . .	378
WEST OF ZARAGOZA. . .	378
Tarazona	378
THE NORTH (THE PYRENEES)	379
Sos del Rey Católico . . .	380
Valles de Echo & Ansó. . .	381
Jaca	383
Parque Nacional de Ordesa y Monte Perdido	386
Aínsa	389
Alquézar	394
THE SOUTH	397
Daroca	398
Teruel	399
Albarracín	402

BASQUE COUNTRY, NAVARRA & LA RIOJA 406

BASQUE COUNTRY	407
Bilbao	408
San Sebastián	425
Vitoria	437
NAVARRA	441
Pamplona	442
The Pyrenees	448
LA RIOJA	454
Logroño	454
Wine Region	459

CANTABRIA & ASTURIAS 463

CANTABRIA	465
-----------------	-----

On the Road

Santander	465
ASTURIAS	477
Oviedo	478
Gijón	484
PICOS DE EUROPA	495

SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA & GALICIA..... 507

Santiago de Compostela	509
COSTA DA MORTE	520
Fisterra & Around	520
A CORUÑA & THE RÍAS ALTAS	522
A Coruña	523
Rías Altas	527
RÍAS BAIXAS	531
Pontevedra	534
Illas Cíes	540
THE SOUTHWEST	541
A Guarda	541
Tui	542
THE EAST	542
Ribeira Sacra & Cañón do Sil	545
Lugo	548

VALENCIA & MURCIA..... 550

VALENCIA & THE COSTA BLANCA	552
Valencia City	552
Costa del Azahar	571
El Maestrazgo	573
Costa Blanca	578

MURCIA	595
Murcia City	595
Costa Cálida	603
Lorca	604
Parque Natural de Sierra Espuña	606

MALLORCA, MENORCA & IBIZA.. 608

MALLORCA	610
Palma de Mallorca	610
Northwest Coast & Serra de Tramuntana	617
Badia d'Alcúdia	623
MENORCA	625
Maó	625
Ciutadella	631
IBIZA	640
Ibiza City	640
FORMENTERA	651

SEVILLE & ANDALUCÍA..... 657

Seville	659
HUELVA PROVINCE	681
Parque Nacional de Doñana	683
Aracena & Around	686
CÁDIZ PROVINCE	687
Cádiz	687
Jerez de la Frontera	697
Parque Natural Sierra de Grazalema & Around	703
Tarifa	707
Gibraltar	711
MÁLAGA PROVINCE	715

Málaga	715
Costa del Sol	723
Ronda	726
CÓRDOBA PROVINCE	732
Córdoba	733
GRANADA PROVINCE	740
Granada	741
Las Alpujarras	758
JAÉN PROVINCE	763
Úbeda	767
Parque Natural de Cazorla	770
ALMERÍA PROVINCE	772
Almería	772
Cabo de Gata	775

EXTREMADURA ... 779

CENTRAL EXTREMADURA	780
Cáceres	780
Alcántara	785
Trujillo	785
Guadalupe	789
NORTHERN EXTREMADURA	790
La Vera	791
Valle del Jerte	794
Valle del Ambroz	795
Parque Nacional de Monfragüe	797
SOUTHERN EXTREMADURA	798
Mérida	798
Badajoz	803
Zafra	804

Spain



Top Experiences >



itineraries

Whether you've got six days or 60, these itineraries provide a starting point for the trip of a lifetime. Want more inspiration? Head online to lonelyplanet.com/thorntree to chat with other travellers.



Two Weeks

The Grand Tour

So many Spanish trails begin in **Barcelona**, Spain's second-biggest city and one of the coolest places on earth. Explore the architecture and sample the food, before catching the train down the coast to **Valencia** for another dose of nightlife and the 21st-century wonders of the Ciudad de las Artes y las Ciencias. A fast train whisks you inland to the capital, mighty **Madrid**, for the irresistible street energy and one of the richest concentrations of art museums on the planet. Allow time for a day trip to **Toledo**, a medieval jewel, and/or **Segovia** with its fairytale castle, Roman aqueduct and gorgeous setting. Yet another fast train takes you deep into Andalucía, with **Córdoba**, especially its 7th-century Mezquita, the essence of the country's formerly Islamic south. The charms of **Seville**, too, span the centuries with fabulous tapas, fine flamenco and a smattering of Islamic-era monuments. But we've saved the best until last: **Granada**, the one-time capital of Muslim Al-Andalus, boasts the extraordinary Alhambra, its soulful alter ego, the Albayzín, and an eating and drinking scene that embraces Spanish culinary culture in all its variety.



Three to Four Weeks Andalucian Adventure

If you're arriving by air, the natural starting point for any Andalucía trip is **Málaga**, whose airport receives flights from almost every conceivable corner of Europe. While in town, don't miss the exceptional Museo Picasso. Head north to the stunning Mudéjar architecture of **Antequera**, then east to **Granada**, the first in Andalucía's triumvirate of Unesco World Heritage-listed cities (the other two are Seville and Córdoba). In Granada, marvel at the peerless Alhambra, be overwhelmed by the gilded Capilla Real and linger in the medieval Muslim quarter of Albayzín. A detour south and then east takes you to the otherworldly valleys of **Las Alpujarras** with their fine mountain scenery and North African-style villages; explore these on foot if you've the time and the energy. Away to the southeast, **Almería** is one of Spain's most agreeable provincial towns, while **Cabo de Gata** is one of the most dramatic sections of the country's Mediterranean coast and an antidote to its otherwise overdeveloped shoreline.

Returning into the Andalucian heartland, via Granada, make for **Córdoba**, home to the magnificent Mezquita and an enchanted *judería* (Jewish quarter). Next stop, **Seville**, the heartbeat of Andalucía with its glorious architecture (especially the Alcázar and cathedral), fine food and soul-stirring live flamenco. There's more flamenco, as well as fine Andalucian horsemanship, at **Jerez de la Frontera**, while **Cádiz** is at once fun-loving and Europe's oldest settlement; if you're in Cádiz during Carnival in particular you'll understand what we mean. The region's hill villages don't come any more beautiful than cliff-top **Arcos de la Frontera**, which conforms wonderfully to the stereotype of Andalucía's *pueblos blancos* (white villages). After breaking up your journey here, meander along quiet country roads east through the pretty whitewashed villages and mountain trails of **Parque Natural Sierra de Grazalema** and on to spectacularly sited **Ronda**, where a night in its palatial and precipitous *parador* is one of Spain's great sleeping experiences. **Vejer de la Frontera** is another hill town par excellence, while the sandy Atlantic beaches of the **Costa de la Luz** are some of Spain's best. End your journey in hip **Tarifa**, the southernmost tip of mainland Spain, and a centre for summer whale-watching, windsurfing and, of course, much lazing on the fine beach.



Three Weeks Spain's Northwest

Spain's well-drenched northern coast, at times rugged and wildly beautiful, forms a green band from the Basque Country to Galicia, backed by the Cordillera Cantábrica. This route takes you through what is arguably Spain's most spectacular (and certainly least developed) stretch of coastline, with gorgeous villages and fine food thrown in for good measure.

There is no finer introduction to the country than **San Sebastián**, its two dramatic headlands giving way to a perfect crescent bay. Its old town is arguably Spain's spiritual home of tapas (or *pintxos* as they call them here) and spending an evening wandering from bar to bar with their counters groaning under the weight of bite-sized morsels is close to gastronomic paradise. West of San Sebastián, **Bilbao** is best known as the home of the showpiece Guggenheim Museum. Heading west, hug the coast of Cantabria and Asturias and drop by the old centre of **Castro Urdiales**, to surf at **Oriñón** and to promenade along the waterfront at **Santander**. Following Cantabria's eastern coast, explore the cobblestone medieval marvel that is **Santillana del Mar** and admire the Modernista architecture in **Comillas**. The eastern Asturias coast is best travelled by train, stopping off at **Llanes** and **Ribadesella**, two of many achingly picturesque villages along Asturias' coast. **Arriondas**, the next stop, is one gateway to the majestic **Picos de Europa** with their vertiginous rock walls, outstanding scenery and fine hiking opportunities. Next make your way to **Oviedo**, Asturias' capital, for its pre-Romanesque architecture, and **Gijón**, a substantial port where cider, one of the great Asturian passions, flows freely. West of Gijón, secluded beaches await between the picturesque fishing harbours of **Cudillero** and **Lueca**. Galicia's coastline is one of Spain's great natural wonders, punctuated with secluded fishing villages and stunning cliffs. As you make your way around the coast, don't miss **Cabo Ortegal**, dynamic **A Coruña** and the **Costa da Morte**. On the cusp of Portugal, **Pontevedra** and **Vigo** are worth continuing down the coastline for, before doubling back to **Santiago de Compostela**, a thoroughly Galician city, a place of pilgrim footfalls, fine regional cuisine and a cathedral of rare power.

Those with more time could make the final approach on foot along the Camino Portugues route of the **Camino de Santiago** pilgrim route. Alternatively, discover the area with the Transcantábrico scenic train.



Three to Four Weeks Balearics to the Pyrenees

You could spend weeks exploring the Balearic Islands, depending, of course, on how long you need passing long, lazy days on its wonderful beaches. Begin, like so many holidaymakers, in pretty **Palma de Mallorca**, lingering in particular over its astonishing cathedral. Before leaving the island, set aside time to leave the crowds behind by trekking into the **Serra de Tramuntana** and exploring the villages of Mallorca's north-western coast, such as **Fornalutx**, and the fine coastal scenery at Cap de Formentor. Take a ferry to **Ibiza** and dive into its world-famous nightlife, before island-hopping again, this time to **Menorca** and its wonderful south-coast beaches.

Catch one last ferry from Menorca to **Valencia** and dine on paella by the sea, admire the breathtaking Ciudad de las Artes y las Ciencias and stay out late in the Barrio del Carmen. Follow the Mediterranean northeast to **Tarragona**, one of the most significant Roman sites in the country. Follow the Costa Brava, acquaint yourself with **Barcelona**, then head inland to **Girona** and Salvador Dalí's fantasy castle **Castell de Púbol**. Returning to the coast, dip into pretty villages such as **Tossa de Mar**, **Calella de Palafrugell** and **Tamariu** en route to **Cadaqués**, Dalí's beautiful one-time home.

Leave the Mediterranean behind and climb up into the Pyrenees, passing through the increasingly spectacular northwestern valleys to the **Parc Nacional d'Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici**, before crossing the provincial frontier into Aragón. Medieval, stone-built **Aínsa** is the prettiest among many Aragonese villages in the Pyrenean foothills; linger here for a couple of days before drawing near to the **Parque Nacional de Ordesa y Monte Perdido**, perhaps the most shapely mountains of all on the Spanish side of the frontier. Apart from being staggeringly beautiful, this is one of Europe's premier hiking destinations and its restrictions on the number of visitors make this a top-notch wilderness destination. As you head west in the shadow of the snow-capped peaks, detour up the **Valle de Anso** and then end your journey in the idyllic hill village of **Sos del Rey Católico**.



Three to Four Weeks Castilla & Aragón

From **Madrid**, head west to some of the loveliest towns of the Spanish heartland: walled **Ávila**, sleepy **Ciudad Rodrigo** and vibrant **Salamanca**. In the latter, wander with wonder at night through the pulsating streets, amid its splendid plateresque public buildings, luminous and floodlit. Salamanca is also a gateway to some of Spain's least-visited back-country villages, especially in the timeworn **Sierra de Francia**. The pick of a very fine bunch is probably **La Alberca**. Meander north to provincial **Zamora**, a little-visited Romanesque gem, and on to the medieval village of **Puebla de Sanabria**. The cathedral towns of **León** and **Burgos** take you into the Castilian heartland, while eastern Castilian villages such as **Covarrubias** and **Medinaceli** are beautiful places to rest. Cross the border into Aragón and make for **Zaragoza**, one of Spain's most vibrant cities with a wealth of monuments and great tapas. Heading south, **Daroca** is a picturesque place to break up the journey, while **Teruel** has a compact old quarter studded with Mudéjar gems. Finish your journey in nearby **Albarracín**, one of Spain's most spectacular villages.

Two Weeks Extreme West

Extremadura is one of Spain's least-known corners, which is all the more reason to visit. Begin in Extremadura's north, in **Plasencia**, which is jammed with notable buildings, churches and convents; for centuries it was the region's principal city, and makes a good base for excursions up the northeast valleys. From Plasencia, a circuit takes you first to the birders' paradise that is the **Parque Nacional de Monfragüe** and then on to the charming hill town and pilgrims' destination of **Guadalupe**, lorded over by the monastery complex dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe. Country roads then lead westwards to the medieval town of **Trujillo**, a warren of cobbled lanes, churches and the newer Renaissance-era additions that were the fruit of conquistador gold. A short drive further west lies the medieval splendour of **Cáceres**. To the south stand some of Spain's most impressive Roman ruins in **Mérida**. Further south again across the dry plains lies the white town of **Zafra**, a precursor to Andalucía in both spirit and geography. Rather than continue straight into Andalucía, make a westwards detour to the hilly town of **Jerez de los Caballeros** before finally heading south for magical **Seville**.



Miles Roddis

Valencia & Murcia; Mallorca, Menorca & Ibiza Miles and his wife, Ingrid, have lived for over 20 years in a shoebox-sized apartment in the Barrio del Carmen, Valencia's oldest and most vital quarter. He's the author or coauthor of more than 50 Lonely Planet guidebooks, including *Valencia & the Costa Blanca*, *Valencia Encounter*, *Walking in Spain*, *Canary Islands* and seven editions of the book you're holding. He loves Fallas about twice a decade, and gets the hell out of town in intervening years.



Brendan Sainsbury

Andalucía An expat Brit, now living near Vancouver, Canada, Brendan once worked in Andalucía as a guide leading cultural and hiking trips in the hills of Grazalema. He fell unashamedly for the region's romantic charms when he met his future wife in a small white village near Ronda in 2003. He's been back numerous times since, and has developed a special passion for flamenco guitar and the city of Granada. Brendan also writes for Lonely Planet on Cuba, Italy and Mexico.



Regis St Louis

Barcelona Regis first fell in love with Catalunya on a grand journey across Iberia in the late 1990s. Subsequent trips cemented his relationship with Barcelona, one of his favourite cities on the planet. Memorable outings from his most recent trip include morning runs in Barceloneta, evening concerts in the Ciutat Vella and feasting on perhaps the last *calçots* of the season. Regis is also the author of *Barcelona*, and he has contributed to dozens of other Lonely Planet titles. He

lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Read more about Regis at:
lonelyplanet.com/members/regisstlouis



Andy Symington

Castilla-La Mancha; Extremadura Andy hails from Australia but has been living in Spain for over a decade, where, to shatter a couple of stereotypes of the country, he can frequently be found huddled in sub-zero temperatures watching the tragically poor local football team. He has authored and coauthored many Lonely Planet guidebooks and other publications on Spain and elsewhere; in his spare time he walks in the mountains, embarks on epic tapas trails, and co-

bosses a rock bar.



OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Melbourne, London and Oakland, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

OUR WRITERS



Anthony Ham

Coordinating Author; Madrid; Castilla y León; Aragón In 2001 Anthony fell in love with Madrid on his first visit to the city. Less than a year later, he arrived on a one-way ticket, with not a word of Spanish and not knowing a single person. Having recently passed the 10-year mark in Madrid, he still adores his adopted city as much as the first day he arrived. When he's not writing for Lonely Planet, Anthony writes about and photographs Spain, Africa and the Middle East for

newspapers and magazines around the world.



Stuart Butler

Basque Country, Navarra & La Rioja; Valencia & Murcia; Mallorca, Menorca & Ibiza Stuart's first childhood encounters with Spain, in Parque Nacional de Doñana and on family holidays along the north coast, left lasting impressions. When he was older he spent every summer on the Basque beaches, until one day he found himself unable to tear himself away – he has been there ever since. His travels for Lonely Planet, and various surf magazines, have taken him beyond

Spain to the shores of the Arctic, the deserts of Asia and the forests of Africa. His website is stuartbutlerjournalist.com.

Read more about Stuart at:
lonelyplanet.com/members/stuartbutler



Anna Kaminski

Catalonia Anna's love affair with Spain began in 2001 during a summer Spanish course in Santander and continued, unabated, in spite of a nasty bout of salmonella. Over the last decade she has found herself returning every year, both for research and pleasure – be it to hike in the Pyrenees, kitesurf in Tarifa, or go tapas bar-hopping in San Sebastián, Granada and Madrid. Memorable moments from her most recent trip include almost running out of petrol on a lonely mountain road and visiting the former home of the late, great Dalí. Anna currently calls Barcelona home.



John Noble

Cantabria & Asturias; Santiago de Compostela & Galicia John, originally from England's Ribble Valley, has lived in an Andalusian mountain village since 1995. In that time he has travelled lengthily all over Spain and helped write every edition of Lonely Planet's *Spain* and *Andalucía* guides. He loves returning to far-away parts of the country like Galicia and the north coast, with their completely different landscapes, climate, people and culture, and being reminded just how

diverse Spain is.

Read more about John at:
lonelyplanet.com/members/ewoodrover

OVER MORE
PAGE WRITERS

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