



Spain

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Why Go?

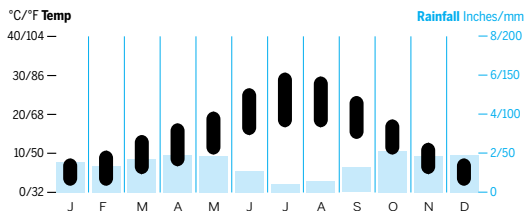
Passionate, sophisticated and devoted to living the good life, Spain is at once a stereotype come to life and a country more diverse than you ever imagined.

Spanish landscapes stir the soul, from the jagged Pyrenees and wildly beautiful cliffs of the Atlantic northwest to charming Mediterranean coves, while astonishing architecture spans the ages at seemingly every turn. Spain's cities march to a beguiling beat with cutting-edge architecture and unrivalled nightlife, even as time-capsule villages serve as beautiful signposts to Old Spain. And then there's one of Europe's most celebrated (and varied) gastronomic scenes.

But, above all, Spain lives very much in the present. Perhaps you'll sense it along a crowded after-midnight street when all the world has come out to play. Or maybe that moment will come when a flamenco performer touches something deep in your soul. Whenever it happens, you'll find yourself nodding in recognition: *this* is Spain.

When to Go

Madrid



Mar–Apr Spring wildflowers, Semana Santa processions and mild southern temps.

May, Jun & Sep Balmy weather but without the crowds of high summer.

Jul–Aug Spaniards hit the coast in the summer heat, but quiet corners still abound.

MADRID

POP 3.3 MILLION

No city on earth is more alive than Madrid, a beguiling place whose sheer energy carries a simple message: this city really knows how to live. Explore the old streets of the centre, relax in the plazas, soak up the culture in Madrid's excellent art museums, and spend at least one night in the city's legendary nightlife scene.

Sights

★ **Museo del Prado** MUSEUM
(Map p570; www.museodelprado.es; Paseo del Prado; adult/child €15/free, 6-8pm Mon-Sat & 5-7pm Sun free, audio guides €3.50, admission plus official guidebook €24; ☉ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-7pm Sun; 🚶 🚶 Banco de España) Welcome to one of the world's premier art galleries. The more than 7000 paintings held in the Museo del Prado's collection (although only around 1500 are currently on display) are like a window onto the historical vagaries of the Spanish soul, at once grand and imperious in the royal paintings of Velázquez, darkly tumultuous in *Las pinturas negras* (The Black Paintings) of Goya, and outward looking with sophisticated works of art from all across Europe.

★ **Centro de Arte Reina Sofía** MUSEUM
(Map p574; ☎ 91 774 10 00; www.museoreinasofia.es; Calle de Santa Isabel 52; adult/concession €8/free, 1.30-7pm Sun, 7-9pm Mon & Wed-Sat free; ☉ 10am-9pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 10am-7pm Sun; 🚶 A-tocha) Home to Picasso's *Guernica*, arguably Spain's most famous artwork, the Centro de Arte Reina Sofía is Madrid's premier collection of contemporary art. In addition to plen-

ty of paintings by Picasso, other major drawings are works by Salvador Dalí (1904-89) and Joan Miró (1893-1983). The collection principally spans the 20th century up to the 1980s. The occasional non-Spaniard artist makes an appearance (including Francis Bacon's *Lying Figure*; 1966), but most of the collection is strictly peninsular.

★ **Plaza Mayor** SQUARE
(Map p574; 🚶 Sol) Madrid's grand central square, a rare but expansive opening in the tightly packed streets of central Madrid, is one of the prettiest open spaces in Spain, a winning combination of imposing architecture, picaresque historical tales and vibrant street life coursing across its cobblestones. At once beautiful in its own right and a reference point for so many Madrid days, it also hosts the city's main tourist office, a Christmas market in December and arches leading to laneways leading out into the labyrinth.

★ **Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza** MUSEUM
(Map p574; ☎ 902 760511; www.museothyssen.org; Paseo del Prado 8; adult/child €12/free, Mon free; ☉ 10am-7pm Tue-Sun, noon-4pm Mon; 🚶 Banco de España) The Thyssen is one of the most extraordinary private collections of predominantly European art in the world. Where the Prado or Reina Sofía enable you to study the body of work of a particular artist in depth, the Thyssen is the place to immerse yourself in a breathtaking breadth of artistic styles. Most of the big names are here, sometimes with just a single painting, but the Thyssen's gift to Madrid and the art-loving public is to have them all under one roof.

ITINERARIES

One Week

Marvel at the art nouveau-influenced Modernista architecture and seaside style of **Barcelona** before taking the train to **San Sebastián**. Head on to **Bilbao** for the Guggenheim Museum and end the trip living it up in the legendary night-life scene of Madrid.

One Month

Fly into **Seville** and embark on a route exploring this and Andalucía's other magical cities, **Granada** and **Córdoba**. Take the train to **Madrid**, from where you can check out **Toledo**, **Salamanca** and **Segovia**. Make east for the coast and **Valencia**. Head up to the Basque Country to see the epoch-making Guggenheim Museum in **Bilbao** and feast on some of the world's best food in **San Sebastián**, then head east via the medieval villages of **Aragón** and the dramatic **Pyrenees** to Catalonia, spending time in **Tarragona** before reaching **Barcelona**. Take a plane or boat for some R and R on the beautiful **Balearic Islands** before catching a flight home.