



SPAIN

TOP SIGHTS, AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES



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Welcome to Spain

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

Poignantly windswept Roman ruins, cathedrals of rare power and incomparable jewels of Islamic architecture speak of a country where the great civilisations of history have risen, fallen and left behind their indelible mark. And what other country could produce such rebellious and relentlessly creative spirits as Salvador Dalí, Pablo Picasso and Antoni Gaudí? Here, grand monuments to the past coexist alongside architectural creations of such daring that it becomes clear Spain's future will be every bit as original as its past.

But for all the talk of Spain's history, this is a country that lives very much in the present and there's a reason 'fiesta' is one of the best-known words in the Spanish language – life itself is a fiesta here and everyone seems to be invited. Perhaps you'll sense it along a crowded street after midnight 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.

Food and wine are national obsessions in Spain, and with good reason. The touchstones of Spanish cooking are deceptively simple: incalculable variety, traditional recipes handed down through the generations and an innate willingness to experiment and see what comes out of the kitchen laboratory.

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Metropol Parasol (p175), Seville
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Plan Your Trip

Spain's Top 12

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Madrid

Fine arts and irresistible street life

Madrid (p35) is one of the fine-arts capitals of the world, with an extraordinary collection of art galleries. The showpiece is the Museo del Prado (pictured above), but nearby are the Centro de Arte Reina Sofía and the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza. Few European cities can match the intensity and street clamour of Madrid's nightlife. As Ernest Hemingway said, 'Nobody goes to bed in Madrid until they have killed the night'. There are wall-to-wall bars, small clubs and live venues. Above right: Palacio de Cristal, Parque del Buen Retiro (p47)

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Barcelona

One of Europe's coolest cities

Home to cutting-edge architecture, world-class dining and pulsating nightlife, Barcelona (p69) has long been one of Europe's most alluring destinations. Days are spent wandering the cobblestone lanes of the Gothic quarter, basking on Mediterranean beaches or marvelling at Gaudí masterpieces across the city. By night, Barcelona is a whirl of vintage cocktail bars, gilded music halls, innovative eateries and dance-loving clubs. There are also colourful markets, hallowed arenas and a calendar packed with traditional Catalan festivals. Top: Plaça Reial (p77); Bottom: Festival float, Barcelona

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Costa Brava

Beautiful beaches with echoes of Salvador Dalí

Easily accessible from the rest of Europe, and filled with villages and beaches of the kind that spawned northern Europe's obsession with the Spanish coast, the Costa Brava (p109) in Catalonia is one of our favourite corners of the Mediterranean. Beyond this, the spirit of Salvador Dalí lends so much personality and studied eccentricity to the Costa Brava experience, from his one-time home in Port Lligat near Cadaqués to Dalí-centric sites in Figueres and Castell de Púbol. Above: View of beach through cliff-top fortifications, Tossa de Mar (p114)