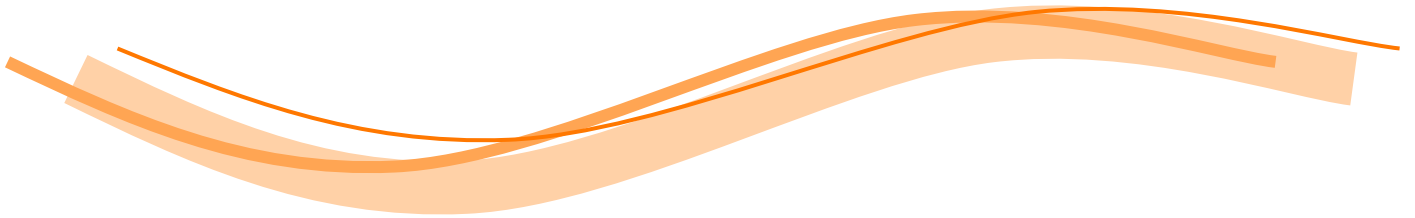




SPAIN





SPAIN

No matter where you go in Spain you will find history, museums, arts and music - coupled with beautiful cities, monuments, gardens, religious buildings and more. There are over 1,400 museums in Spain!

Alongside the incredible depth of arts and culture, Spain is also blessed with **beautiful landscapes**. Snow-capped mountains from the Pyrenees in the north to the Sierra Nevada in the south. Breathtaking coastline from Mediterranean Islands like Majorca and Ibiza to jet-setting beach resort such as Marbella. No wonder it is one of the world's most popular tourist destinations. In fact, Spain is the third most visited country in the world.

Spain has **44 UNESCO World Heritage sites**, which makes it the country with the third largest number of UNESCO sites in the world after Italy and China. These treasures reflect the variety and cultural richness of Spain: monumental buildings, historic quarters and architectural sites as well as landscapes, nature reserves, routes of religious pilgrimage and ethnological traditions.

You will find everything from Pre Roman pottery to the religious architecture of the Sephardic times when synagogues, mosques and churches stood together in peaceful coexistence. And from the explosion of music, art and learning during the Renaissance to today's hub of modern artistic expression in all forms.

Cuisine

One of the great delights on any visit to Spain is the **food and wine**. Did you know :

- The Mediterranean Diet has been awarded a Cultural Heritage Designation by UNESCO
- There are more than 25,000 restaurants in Spain
- There are 171 Michelin-star restaurants, including 8 three-star Michelin restaurants.
- There are no less than 18 individual Wine Routes to follow!
- Spain ranks third globally – only France and Italy produce more wine than Spain.

Spain's famed cuisine is going to be showcased at an event in Montreal this November 2015 called **La Grande Degustation**, where Spain will be the featured country, so there will be a chance for Canadians to get a real taste of Spain here. Visitors will discover the great variety of dishes and the high quality of the Spanish cuisine. The website is www.lagrandedegustation.com . And the dates are November 6 and 7, 2015 at Place Bonaventure in Montreal.

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	<p>San Sebastian is the European Culture Capital in 2016 – The European Capital of Culture 2016 represents an enormous opportunity to turn the focus on culture and dialogue as the roads towards improved coexistence. It will also promote stronger ties with the rest of Europe and foster innovation in the cultural sector. The programme proposes a frame of artistic initiatives and cultural processes that have their origins in local community participation. The projects and initiatives invite new thought on the way we relate to ourselves, to society and to the environment. The San Sebastian 2016 programme has loft objectives. It is designed to leave a specific legacy for the future: a local community with greater freedom, humanism and respect towards human rights, a more participatory society that learns to solve its conflicts through culture and the arts. San Sebastian aims to become a benchmark in the sphere of creative processes and culture. Find out more at these websites: www.sansebastianturismo.com www.dss2016.eu</p>
Location	<p>Spain is located on the Iberian Peninsula, between the Mediterranean Sea to the east and the Atlantic Ocean to the west. The Pyrenees separate the country from France to the north and it shares a long border with Portugal to the west. The Strait of Gibraltar divides the country from Morocco on the African continent in its southern part.</p>
Geography	<p>At 504,782 square km, Spain is the third largest European country after Russia and France. Mount Teide on the island of Tenerife in Spain's Canary Islands is the highest peak of Spain and the third largest volcano in the world from its base. Mainland Spain is dominated by high plateaus and mountain ranges, such as the Sierra Nevada. Running from these heights are several major rivers such as the Tagus, the Ebro, the Duero, the Guadiana and the Guadalquivir. Alluvial plains are found along the coast, the largest of which is that of the Guadalquivir in Andalusia.</p>
Name	<p>There is still much debate on the origin of the name Spain, but most theories centre around Roman, Punic and Basque words for "edge", signifying that Spain was at the western edge of the known world for most early civilizations.</p>
Population	<p>The population of Spain is around 45 million.</p>
Language	<p>Spanish – but English is understood by many. A Spanish phrase book and the confidence to try out some Spanish will be richly rewarded. Also Catalan is spoken by nearly 11 million people in Catalonia in the northeast of Spain, making it the seventh most widely spoken language in Europe, more than both Swedish and Greek.</p>
Currency	<p>The euro (€), the single European currency, became the official</p>

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	<p>currency in Spain and 11 other participating countries on January 1, 1999. After an overlapping period of just over 3 years, the old currency, the Spanish peseta, disappeared into history on March 1, 2002, and the euro became the sole currency in use.</p> <p>1 Euro = 1.48 Canadian Dollars (14 October 2015)</p> <p>The easiest and best way to get cash away from home is from an ATM (automated teller machine), sometimes referred to as a "cash machine," or a "cash-point." In Spain only four-digit numbers are valid so be sure to change any five- or six-digit PINs you may have to a four-digit number before you go.</p>
Tipping	<p>More expensive restaurants add a 7% tax to the bill and cheaper ones incorporate it into their prices. This is not a service charge, and a tip of 5% to 10% is expected in these establishments. For coffees and snacks most people just leave a few coins or round up to the nearest euro. Taxis do not expect tips. Although tipping is not mandatory for hotel staff, you should be aware that wages in the hospitality industry are extremely low so any supplement will be more than welcome. Tip hotel porters and doorman between \$1 and \$1.25, and maids about the same amount per day.</p>
Government	<p>Spain is a constitutional monarchy, with a hereditary monarch and a bicameral parliament, the Cortes Generales. The executive branch consists of a Council of Ministers presided over by the President of Government (comparable to a prime minister), proposed by the monarch and elected by the National Assembly following legislative elections.</p>
Documentation	<p>Canadian passports are required, but no visa is necessary</p>
Time zone	<p>Spain is 6 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time</p>
Health	<p>Spain does not pose any major health hazards. The rich cuisine - garlic, olive oil, and wine - may give some travelers mild stomach upset. The water is safe to drink throughout Spain</p>
Safety tips	<p>Normal traveler precautions apply. The risk of any terrorist activity affecting tourists is minimal. In particular, travellers are advised not to leave passports and tickets in their car.</p>

CLIMATE	
General climate	<p>In summer it's hot, hot, and hotter still, with the cities in Castile (Madrid) and Andalusia (Seville and Córdoba) heating up the most. Madrid has dry heat; the average temperature can hover around 29°C in July and 24°C in September. Seville has the dubious reputation of being about the hottest part of Spain in July and August, often baking under average temperatures of 34°C.</p> <p>Barcelona, cooler in temperature, is often quite humid. Midsummer temperatures in Majorca often reach 33°C. The Costa Brava has temperatures around 27°C in July and August. The Costa del Sol has</p>

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	<p>an average of 25°C in summer. The coolest spot in Spain is the Atlantic coast from San Sebastián to La Coruña, with temperatures around 21°C-26°C in July and August.</p> <p>In winter, the coast from Algeciras to Málaga is the most popular, with temperatures reaching a warm 16°-17°C. Madrid gets cold, as low as 1°C. Majorca is warmer, usually in the low teens, but it often dips into the single digits. Some mountain resorts can experience extreme cold.</p>
Today's weather	<p>Barcelona: 16C and sunny with cloudy periods Madrid: 19C and sunny All as at 14 Oct 2015</p>
Best time to visit	<p>Spring and fall are lovely times throughout Spain: lots of sunshine and moderate temperatures. Summer weather is reliably hot and sunny and this is peak season for fellow Europeans to travel there.</p> <p>Winter is a wonderful time for Canadians to visit Andalucía. Not only is the winter weather more like sunny spring days in Canada, it is also low season for European visitors, so the wonderful sights of the region are un-crowded. It is even sometimes possible to ski in the Sierra Nevada in the morning and sunbathe on a Costa del Sol beach in the afternoon of the same day! Summer brings reliable hot, sunny days and great swimming on the Mediterranean beaches – but also the crowds. The Canary Islands are also a winter haven as they lie so much further south than the rest of Spain.</p>

GETTING THERE	
Flying time	7 to 8 hours with Air Transat and Air Canada direct flights from Canada
Cities	<p>Madrid: Start your Spanish adventure in Madrid. Right in the heart of Spain, Madrid combines tradition with the latest trends. Its history, museums, food and people make it a unique destination. A cosmopolitan European centre with a unique culture, Madrid has distinctive, succulent gastronomy - and great nightlife. The Region blends history with modern innovation, a relaxed pace of life, warm people and several nearby UNESCO World Heritage sites including the University at Cervantes home town and the Gardens of the Summer Royal Palace at Aranjuez.</p> <p>The City of Madrid is the capital of Spain (one of the two most popular vacation countries in the world). Founded in 1202 it was in 1561 that Philip II changed the Imperial Court from Toledo to Madrid, creating it as the capital city of Spain. Phillip II ruled over an empire "where the sun never set" - and in honour of the glory of God and the dynasty of the Habsburgs, Phillip commenced the construction of the monastery of El Escorial. On the 13th of September 1584, Philip II saw his greatest dream fulfilled - a building that, besides being a monastery, was a church, a royal palace, a library, a pantheon for the kings of Spain and a seminary. A world renowned architectural and cultural wonder, the</p>

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Escorial is a must see on your visit to Madrid. Madrid today is a vibrant European centre with fascinating history blended with the most modern amenities. Its great transportation network makes getting around quick and easy. There is also an excellent range of hotel accommodation.

Barcelona was built around its port on the Mediterranean Sea. The long-standing capital of the autonomous community of Catalonia, this city of 2.5 million inhabitants has always had its sights turned north towards Europe, making for a very unique identity, compared to the nation's other cities. The emblem of Barcelona lies in the northern part of the city, in the Eixample district: the Sagrada Familia basilica. Its construction was undertaken in 1884 and it remains unfinished. This stunning testament to the genius of its architect, Gaudí, is topped with spindle-shaped towers and bears witness to its creator's outlandish taste for symbolism and the exuberant shapes of nature.

Bilbao is the largest of the Basque cities, and is most famous for its Guggenheim Art Museum building. The unique, titanium-covered building was designed by Frank Gehry, and inspired a modern makeover of Bilbao's waterfront.

Cordoba is home to important heritage architecture. To take a stroll through the historic quarter of Cordoba is to discover a beautiful network of small streets, alleys, squares and whitewashed courtyards arranged around the Mosque-Cathedral, which reflects the importance of the city during medieval times. Yet despite its splendid past, Cordoba is definitely a modern city, offering infrastructure and services, as well as a large network of hotels. Cordoba also has high speed train connections and an extensive railway network linking it to all the big cities, like Madrid and Seville. Once inside the city, buses and taxis make it very easy to get around. Cordoba is synonymous with art, culture and leisure, thanks to a myriad of cultural events throughout the year: Flamenco festivals, concerts, ballet, a number of museums and an exciting nightlife.

Seville: On the banks of the Guadalquivir River, **Seville** (population 700,000) has a rich Arab legacy and was a prosperous trading port with the Americas. Every street and square that making up the historic quarter of the Andalucian capital bursts with life. Museums, arts centres, theme parks, cinemas, theatres, and banquet halls are only a few of the endless activities. And numerous terraces, pubs and bars are home to the most deeply-rooted of all traditions of the city: delicious tapas cuisine. Another good excuse to come to the Seville is the festivals. The

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	<p>celebrations of Easter Week and Feria de Abril (the April Fair), reflect the devotion and folklore of the people of Seville. Seville is also your jumping off point for natural treasures such as the Doñana Nature Reserve, declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserve, and the Sierra Norte Nature Reserve. They are the ideal setting for outdoor sports including hiking, horse riding, and cycling. And Seville has four excellent golf courses in its vicinity.</p> <p>Grenada: At the foot of Sierra Nevada, between the Darro and Genil rivers, lies Granada – a city with architectural gems from the Renaissance period. Because it was the last city to be re-conquered from the Moors by the Catholic Monarchs in 1492, Granada has an unmistakable Arab flavour. Its cuisine, crafts and urban layout are testament to the city's glorious history. Fountains, viewpoints and Cármenes (the villas surrounded by gardens, typical of the city) add to Granada's unforgettable charm.</p> <p>The Alhambra's reddish hills house the old Alcazaba and the Nazarite Royal Palaces. This artistic gem of Arab Granada, built between the 13th and the 15th centuries, is composed of many rooms linked by courtyards, gardens and fountains. The Generalife, the summer residence of the Nazarite Monarchs, is also located on this hill, along with the Palace of Carlos V. It is a Renaissance-style building, housing the Provincial Fine Arts Museum and the Alhambra Museum.</p> <p>Malaga is the gateway to the region of Andalucía and the Costa del Sol - the number one destination for Europeans in winter, with a mild climate, beautiful beaches and excellent golf courses. Visitors will enjoy exploring Málaga's recently refurbished historic city centre. Here, they'll discover the Pasaje de Chinitas, a lively little thoroughfare that's perfect for a stroll; the Calle Granada, home to the city's fine arts museum; and the Calle Larios, one of the old town's main gathering places. Slightly removed from Calle Larios, the neighbourhoods of El Perchel, El Egido and La Trinidad are also worth a visit. Avid sunbathers can head to the gold-sand beaches of the coastal towns that surround Málaga. Torreblanca, near Fuengirola, is perfect for swimming and enjoying water sports. In Nerja, Torrecilla Beach features a walkway where joggers and cyclists can take in the sun while they enjoy their favourite activities.</p>
<p>Distances</p>	<p>Madrid to Barcelona is 621 km Madrid to Granada: 434 km Madrid to Valencia 349km Madrid to Cádiz 625km Barcelona to Cadiz is 1284 km Barcelona to Tarragona in the south of Catalonia is 95 km, to Lleida in</p>

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	<p>the west is 173 km, to Vielha in the northwest is 280 km and to Figueres in the northeast is 138 km Barcelona to Seville: 1046 km Granada to Seville: 256 km Granada to Cordoba: 166 km Granada to Malaga: 129 km</p>
Metro	<p>Serving a population of some four million, the Madrid Metro is one of the most extensive and fastest-growing metro networks in the world. With the addition of a loop serving suburbs to Madrid's south-west "MetroSur", it is now the second largest metro system in Western Europe, second only to London's Underground, running over 322 kilometers of line. Barcelona also has a Metro system that is efficient and cheap.</p>
Passes	<p>The Madrid Card: Get a Madrid Card for free entry to over forty museums. For more information on the benefits of the Madrid Card check out www.madridcard.com . The cost is 65 Euros for 72 hours. (as at Oct 2015) It will help you discover the city and enjoy your stay and save money. You will be able to benefit from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to the entire cultural offer in and around Madrid. Free entry to more than 40 of the major museums. • As many journeys as you wish on the Madrid Visión tour bus. • All visits which are part of the Discover Madrid programme. • Madrid Fun Fair, Madrid Zoo and Aquarium, Cable Railway, Faunia, Imax. • Take a casual stroll wherever you want in the Santiago Bernabéu stadium, thanks to the new Bernabéu Tour. <p>You will also be able to enjoy considerable discounts in shops, restaurants, shows and leisure centres for adults and children. With the Madrid Card you will also obtain a guide with information on the museums and establishments associated with the programme, as well as a city map.</p> <p>The ideal complement to the Madrid Card is the Tourist Travel Pass (not included in the price of the card). This allows you to make the most of the Madrid public transport system, with unlimited use of the underground, bus and the Cercanías lines (the suburban train network).</p> <p>The Barcelona Card http://www.barcelona-card.com An ideal way to appreciate Barcelona better and save money at the same time is with the Barcelona Card, which is available through Transat Holidays here in Canada. It is also sold in Spain at tourist offices, El Prat airport, Sants railway station, the Estació Nord bus station, and various branches of the Corte Inglés. It's definitely a bargain if you stay in the city for more than an afternoon and do any sightseeing. For adults, it costs (Oct 2015) 33.3 euros for 2 days. The</p>

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	<p>24-hour card covers unlimited travel on all public transport, and is valid for a free walking tour. Culture vultures holding the card can get discounts of 20% to 100% in all museums. Discounts on a host of theatres, shows, and attractions such as the aquarium and the Golondrinas pleasure boats are also on the menu, as are discounts in bars, restaurants, and some shops. The cards specify where they can be used.</p>
<p>Buses</p>	<p>The public coach service in Spain as a whole is comfortable and efficient with a number of coach lines covering long distance routes across the country.</p> <p>Hop on Hop off Barcelona transit pass: The most convenient way to see all of Barcelona, especially if your time is limited, is to hop on (and off) the Bus Turístico (tel. 93-318-70-74); this double-decker, open-top tourist bus travels to all the major areas and sights; you can either choose to disembark or to stay on and continue your journey.</p> <p>Buses from Madrid run from several bus stations to towns of interest in Madrid province such as Chinchón and Torrelaguna. Outside of the Community of Madrid, two main bus stations, Méndez Alvaro and Avenida de America, operate economical but rapid coach services to most Spanish cities.</p>
<p>Trains</p>	<p>Spain's railway system, the Red Nacional de Ferrocarriles Españoles (Renfe) operates the vast majority of Spain's railways. The crown jewel of Spain's next decade of infrastructure construction is the Spanish high speed rail network, Alta Velocidad Española AVE. The overall goal is to have all important provincial cities be no more than 4 hours away from Madrid. AVE high-speed trains link Atocha station to Seville, Málaga and Toledo in the south and to Zaragoza, Lleida, Tarragona and Barcelona in the east. These are currently the fastest trains operating in Europe and even President Obama has told Congress that he would like to see a system similar to AVE in operation in the US. The journey from Barcelona to Madrid has been shortened from 5.5 to 3.5 hours.</p> <p>Renfe Spain Pass is a pass that allows non-residents in Spain to travel around the country. This pass is active for 6 months as from the date of issue and is valid for 1 month as from the date on which it is first validated for a journey. Customers can choose between two types: Business or Tourist, for adult or child (ages 4 to 13; children under the age of 4 travel free if they do not occupy a seat). Customers can choose passes of 4, 6, 8, 10 or 12 journeys, to be used within 1 month. It is valid for all AVE Long Distance and Medium Distance trains. Sample price (2015); 4 journeys within one month period: 163 €</p>

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	http://www.renfe.com/EN/viajeros/viajes_internacionales/spainpass/index.html
Car Rental	All major international car rental companies operate in Spain including the international airports. Driving is on the right in Spain.
Ferries	You can catch a ferry from Algeciras, 132 km west of Malaga, to Tangier in Morocco; it's a 3 hour trip each way to this tip of Africa. Also, you can take the ferry to the Balearic Islands of Majorca, Minorca and Ibiza in the Mediterranean.

ACCOMMODATION TYPES	<p>Experience Spain in a very special way by staying at the Paradores. These luxury, state-run hotels are in old castles, palaces and historic buildings ...but with all modern comforts. For over 80 years the Paradores have provided a high quality product while preserving the historic heritage of Spain. There are currently over 90 Paradores throughout Spain. They are often located in undiscovered parts of Spain and encourage sustainable tourism development through providing local fare in their dining rooms and promoting the discovery of both cultural destinations and beautiful natural areas.</p> <p>Currently a project is underway so that most of the Paradores located in historical buildings will become "Paradores Museums", allowing guests to become immersed in the history, architecture, art and legends of these beautiful old buildings. Most recently the Parador of Úbeda became the sixth "Paradores Museum", after those of Santo Estevo, Santiago, Granada, Oropesa and Cardona. The medium term target is to convert about 50 hotels into "Paradores Museums".</p> <p>Every year, hundreds of thousands of tourists travel Spain from Parador to Parador. Staying at the Paradores hotels they can follow routes such as Don Quixote, the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route or the white villages of Andalusia, among many others. There are also Paradores in World Heritage Cities such as Toledo, Segovia, Ávila, Santiago de Compostela, and Salamanca, as well as the most important nature reserves in the country. With the new Paradores Routes programs you can take different trips around Spain with comprehensive packages of three and seven nights at very attractive prices.</p> <p>Paradores "Unique Rooms" are a selection of the best of each Parador - best for their size and class: suites, junior suites, superior rooms; and because of their views, décor and history. The 60 most spectacular have been chosen because these are authentic rooms in which kings and nobles have lodged - high atop the tower of a medieval castle or in the cell of the abbot of a Cistercian monastery. These all offer many extras, such as a dinner, very special décor, and above all, the sensation of savoring a bit of Spain's ancient history.</p> <p>The Paradores are famous for their exceptional food. They offer a traditional menu prepared with fresh local products from the region in</p>
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which the Parador is located, and the menu will change according to the seasons. In this way, guests will enjoy the best cuisine from each Spanish region. There are special menus for babies and toddlers as well as senior citizens, vegetarians, diabetics and gluten sensitive guests. And a new wine list has been designed primarily to make it easier for guests to choose the most suitable wine for each occasion. Selected "Gastronomic Paradores" will offer the highest level of gastronomy, with a wide selection on the menu and a very full wine list. And Paradores located closest to the main roads – such as Benavente, Puebla or Manzanares - are ideal lunch stops for travellers offering a light and very digestive meal, with fast and efficient service. Visit www.parador.es to find out more about the Paradores.

TARGET GROUPS	
<p>Families</p>	<p>Madrid: The little ones can learn with fun ideas that combine education and entertainment. There are experts in charge of children's activities at museums, cultural centres, parks like El Capricho and El Retiro, and leisure attractions from the Faunia wildlife park to the Madrid Planetarium and Zoo/Aquarium.</p> <p>Try the Parque de Atracciones at Casa de Campo: The park was created in 1969 to amuse the young at heart with an array of rides and concessions. The former include a toboggan slide, a carousel, pony rides, an adventure into outer space, a walk through a transparent maze, a visit to a jungle, a motor-propelled series of cars disguised as a tail-wagging dachshund puppy, and a gyrating whirligig clutched in the tentacles of an octopus named El Pulpo. The most popular rides are a pair of roller coasters named "7 Picos" and "Jet Star."</p> <p>Warner Brothers Movie World: Newest addition to Madrid's great child attractions, this long-awaited movie theme park - Spain's answer to Disneyworld - opened in 2002. It's not cheap, but it's proved a smash for the family and is worth stretching the budget for a day. Its five themed areas cover Old West Territory, Hollywood, DC Super Heroes, Cartoon Village, and Warner Bros. Studios.</p> <p>Aquasur in Aranjuez: this superb open-air pool with its five giant slides is an ideal fun location for the kids if you're visiting Madrid in the full heat of summer. Catch the regular cercanías train from Atocha for the 40-minute trip.</p> <p>Barcelona is a lively and very crowded city that also happens to be a very good destination for families with children. From the peaceful Parc Güell to the Parque Zoologico, as well as fun spots like Happy Park Port Aventura and Cataluña en Miniatura, there's plenty to choose from. Happy Park is the perfect solution for kids who need to let off a little steam. It's a huge covered labyrinth-type setup full of bouncy,</p>

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	<p>touchy, feely, jumpy, rubbery contraptions for the little ones to romp around on. Monitors are on hand and there is a special enclosed area for tiny tots. There are two in Barcelona: one at Comtes de Bell-lloc 74-78 (Metro: Sants) and the other at Pau Claris 97 (Metro: Urquinaona). Both are open Monday to Friday 5 to 9pm and weekends 11am to 9pm.</p> <p>Barcelona Aquarium: One of the most impressive testimonials to sea life anywhere opened in 1996, in Barcelona's Port Vell, a 10-minute walk from the bottom of La Rambla. The largest aquarium in Europe, it contains 21 glass tanks positioned along either side of a wide, curving corridor. Each tank depicts a different marine habitat, with emphasis on everything from multicolored fish and corals to seagoing worms to sharks. The highlight is a huge "oceanarium" representative of the Mediterranean as a self-sustaining ecosystem. You view it from the inside of a glass-roofed, glass-sided tunnel that runs along its entire length, making fish, eels, and sharks appear to swim around you. Kids can let off some steam in the Explora section, a collection of touchy-feely educational exhibits on Catalonia's Costa Brava and Ebro Delta.</p>
<p>Romance</p>	<p>Madrid: For romance in the city, consider a stroll in the parks: Madrid's best central parques are particularly rewarding to explore, especially the Retiro, with its rose garden, fountains, statues (including the Angel Caído, or Fallen Angel), central lake, Casa de Vacas, and 19th-century Palacios de Cristal and Velazquez cultural showrooms. Below the Palacio Real, the Campo del Moro has a verdant neatness more associated with northern Europe, while on the edge of Argüelles the Parque del Oeste's marked nature trails wend their way down past an international selection of trees and plants to the River Manzanares (where you can view the Ermita de San Antonio de la Florida's Goyan frescoes).</p> <p>Catalonia: There is much for the romantics amongst us to enjoy in this part of the world. The long, golden sands of the Costa Daurada in the south are ideal for those sunset walks. The high mountain valleys and alpine meadows of the Pyrenees are ideal for getting away from it all. And the hedonistic delights of one of Europe's great cities are a great match for young party-goers!</p>
<p>Zoomers</p>	<p>Spain is an excellent destination for the older traveler, combining high standards of accommodation and cuisine with easy transport and a wealth of cultural and scenic highlights.</p> <p>Mention the fact that you're a senior when you make your travel reservations. Many hotels offer discounts for seniors. In most cities, people over the age of 60 qualify for reduced admission to theatres, museums, and other attractions, as well as discounted fares on public transportation. For the Paradors, discounts start at 55.</p>

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<p>UNIQUES</p>	<p>Sagrada Família in Barcelona Abandoned for decades, the still-unfinished cathedral finally saw restoration and expansion work carried out when its hermit-like architect, Antoni Gaudí (who was killed by a tram in 1926 and whose tomb can be viewed in the crypt), came back into fashion in the 1990s. The four original spires - designed by the master himself - are generally acknowledged to be far superior to the additional quartet. You can now take an elevator up to the top of one of the towers and enjoy the fine view. Loved and reviled in equal measure, the building remains unique. Current construction progresses slowly, however, and even the most optimistic forecaster doesn't believe the whole project will reach completion for at least another decade. It is an icon of Spain.</p>
<p>Surprising</p>	<p>The Christian forces in Spain finally defeated the last Arab kingdom in Spain at Grenada in the same year as Columbus discovered America for Spain: 1492.</p>
<p>History</p>	<p>What a history! This is but a fleeting summary... 550 B.C. Greeks settled at Empúries in northern Catalonia. 218 B.C. The Romans, using Empúries as an entry point, subjugated Spain. Barcino, principally a trading port, is founded. A.D. 415 Barcelona occupied by the Visigoths. 719 The Muslim invasion of the Peninsula reached Barcelona. 801 Barcelona taken by the Franks. 878 Guifré el Pilós (Wilfred the Hairy) defeated the Moors and became Count of Barcelona, the first in the line of a 5-century-long autonomous rule. 1064 The Usatges, the first Catalan Bill of Rights, was drafted. 1137 A royal marriage united Catalonia and neighboring region of Aragon. 1213-35 Jaume I conquered Majorca, Ibiza, and Valencia. 1265 Barcelona formed the Consell de Cent, its own municipal government. 1282-1325 Catalonia conquered Corsica and Sicily. 1347-59 The Black Plague halved the city's population. The Generalitat (autonomous government) was founded. 1479 Fernando II, monarch of the crown of Catalonia-Aragon, married Isabel, queen of Castile, uniting all of Spain. Catalonia fell under Castilian rule. 1492 Columbus discovered America. The "Catholic Kings" expelled all remaining Jews and Muslims. 1522 Under the rule of Charles V, Catalans were refused permission to trade in the New World. 1640-50 Catalan revolt known as the Guerra dels Segadors (Harvesters' War).</p>

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	<p>1702 The War of Succession began. 1759 Barcelona fell to Franco-Spanish army. Catalan language banned. 1808-14 French occupied Catalonia. 1832 The Industrial Revolution began in Barcelona with the first steam-driven factory. 1873 First Spanish Republic established. 1909 Setmana Tràgica; anarchists went on anticlerical rampage in Barcelona. 1923 Dictatorship led by General Primo de Rivera started in Spain. 1931 Francesc Macià negotiates autonomy for Catalonia during the Second Republic and declared himself president. 1939 Anarchist-occupied Barcelona taken by Franco's army. 1960s The package tourism boom took off on Catalonia's Costa Brava. 1975 Franco died. Barcelonense drank the city dry in celebration! 1978 King Juan Carlos granted Catalonia autonomous rule. 1986 Spain joined the European Community (now the European Union). 1992 Barcelona hosted the Summer Olympics. 1998 The Generalitat introduced controversial "linguistic normalization" laws in an effort to strengthen Catalan as the region's primary language. 2006 A new Estatut (Statute) granting Catalonia more autonomous powers passed by the Spanish government.</p>
<p>Books</p>	<p>Frommer's Spain and Seville, Granada & the Best of Andalusia will help you navigate and explore the wonders of the whole of Spain or southern Spain, from Moorish palaces and historic villages to the best resorts on the Costa del Sol.</p> <p>Read Nicholas Luard's Andalucía and you will start planning your trip to this unique region. I have reviewed this lovely book in Chris' Book Picks: http://www.chrisrobinsontravelshow.ca/content.asp?page=ChrisBookPicks#4</p> <p>See if you can pick up a delightful book by T. A. Layton called "Wines and Castles of Spain". Although it was written decades ago, it's a delightful read about the author's travels all around Spain to experience not only the history of the land...but also its many types of wine</p> <p>Also: <i>Spain: a Phaidon Cultural Guide</i> and James A. Michener's <i>Iberia</i></p>
<p>1000 Places to see before you die</p>	<p>Around Madrid: Salamanca's Plaza Mayor Meson de Candido, Segovia Madrid: museum and sights</p> <p>In Catalonia: Catalan National Art Museum, Barcelona: the world's finest treasure</p>

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	<p>trove of Romanesque and Gothic art housed in the National Palace</p> <p>La Sagrada Familia: the incomplete masterpiece of Antoni Gaudi in Barcelona</p> <p>Museo Picasso, Barcelona: many of Picasso's great works are housed in two adjoining Palaces</p> <p>Cadaques and Figueres: white-washed fishing village on the Costa Brava and the home of Teatre-Museu Dali built in and around the nineteenth century theatre where Dali had his first exhibition</p>
Must Sees	<p>All of the above! My personal favourite is the old Arab town of Arcos de la Frontera. It's so special it's been declared a National Historic Monument, and you'll need about 2 hours to wander its narrow streets where Moors of old trod. You'll want to spend most of your time exploring the Medina or Old Town and taking in the panoramic lookout point, Mirador de Abades. There are some good restaurants here, so consider a luncheon stopover. There's also my favourite Parador hotel in all of Spain.</p> <p>If you are in the north, don't miss Montserrat, 56km NW of Barcelona. The monastery at Montserrat, which sits atop a 1,200m-high (4,000-ft.) mountain, 11km long and 5.5km wide, is one of the most important pilgrimage spots in Spain. It ranks alongside Zaragoza and Santiago de Compostela. Thousands travel here every year to see and touch the medieval statue of La Moreneta (The Black Virgin), the patron saint of Catalonia.</p>

SPORTS ACTIVITIES	<p>Sport in Spain has been dominated by football since the early 20th century. Basketball, tennis, cycling, handball, motorcycling and, lately, Formula 1 are also important due to presence of Spanish champions in all these disciplines. Today, Spain is a major world sports power, especially since the 1992 Summer Olympics that were hosted in Barcelona and promoted a great variety of sports in the country. The tourism industry has led to an improvement in sports infrastructure, especially for water sports, golf and skiing.</p>
Golf	<p>Around Madrid, the best golf is the Club de Campo Villa de Madrid (Madrid Country Club; http://clubdemadrid.com), which has a challenging par-71 course. This is a full-fledged sports center with tennis, squash, horseback-riding, pigeon shooting, and a swimming pool among its other facilities.</p> <p>Another topnotch venue, located on the eastern outskirts of Madrid between the Juan Carlos Exhibition Halls and Barajas airport, is the Club de Golf Olivar de la Hinojosa (http://golfolivar.com), which has one 9-hole course and one 18-hole course.</p> <p>Catalonia has a long golfing tradition and sports 36 golf courses in the region, most located along the scenic coast. One of the Barcelona's</p>

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	<p>best courses, Club de Golf Vallromanes, Afueras s/n, Vallromanes, Barcelona, is 20 minutes north of the centre by car. Non-members who reserve tee times in advance are welcome to play. The greens fees are 75€ (\$94) on weekdays, 125€ (\$156) on weekends. The club is open Wednesday through Monday from 9am to 9pm. Established in 1972, it is the site of Spain's most important golf tournament.</p>
Tennis	<p>Tennis is available at most of the larger resort hotels on the Mediterranean coast.</p>
Fishing	<p>Sea fishing in the Mediterranean as well as fresh water fishing in the lakes and rivers of the mountainous north of Catalonia will delight all fishing enthusiasts.</p>
Horse riding	<p>Madrid: The closest place for taking to the saddle is the Club de Campo Villa de Madrid sports complex on the edge of the leafy Casa del Campo park. At the nearby up-market suburb of Pozuelo, you can also hire horses by the hour or day at the Escuela de Equitación Pozuelo. Further countryside riding facilities are available at outlying towns such as Cercedilla and Manzanares el Real.</p> <p>The Dancing Horses of Jerez are a rival to Vienna's famous Spanish Riding School. It is the Escuela Andaluza del Arte Ecuestre (Andalusian School of Equestrian Art), Ave Duque de Abrantes www.realescuela.org In fact, the long, hard schooling that brings horse and rider into perfect harmony originated in this province. The Viennese school was started with Hispano-Arab horses sent from this region, the same breeds you can see today. Every Thursday at noon, crowds come to admire the Dancing Horses of Jerez as they perform in a show that includes local folklore. When performances aren't scheduled, you can visit the stables and tack room, observing as the elegant horses are being trained</p> <p>Jerez May Horse Fair. Jerez de la Frontera stages this spectacular equestrian event at Gonzalez Hontoria Park. Many of the greatest riders, certainly some of the world's finest horses, take part in various endurance trials, coach driving, and dressage competitions. First week of May.</p>
Hiking	<p>There are hiking opportunities everywhere in Spain, from the mountains to the coasts. One of the most famous walks in the world is in northern Spain: The Pilgrims' Way to Santiago. This route of pilgrimage has been hiked for more than eight centuries.</p> <p>Madrid: The Guadarrama mountains are nearer than you think. Just 1 hour and 20 minutes by suburban train from Chamartín takes you to the town of Cercedilla, which has an information centre and six graded trails in the hills. Another fine walking spot - reached by bus from Plaza de Castilla - is Manzanares el Real, with its beautiful and dramatic La Pedriza park, where many scenes from the Charlton Heston '60s epic El Cid were filmed.</p>

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	<p>Barcelona: There is a network of footpaths in the region extending over 5,000 km! The mountain of Montjuïc is the first sight that greets visitors arriving at the port of Barcelona. Behind its rocky seaside face are acres of pine-dotted parkland beloved by cyclists, joggers, and strollers on the weekend. Topped by a castle museum with stunning city views, it provides a tranquil alternative to the hustle of the city below and offers some welcome breathing space.</p>
<p>Soccer</p>	<p>Spain is soccer mad! See www.soccer-spain.com for an English language site all about soccer in Spain.</p> <p>Madrid is home to Real Madrid, the world's most successful football club in the 20th Century (according to FIFA), which plays in the Estadio Santiago Bernabéu. Its supporters are referred to as vikings, or, more commonly, meringues. Its hometown rival, Atlético Madrid, is also well supported in the city, and its supporters are called, 'the sufferers'. Madrid hosted the 1982 FIFA World Cup final. Along with Barcelona, Glasgow, Lisbon and Istanbul, Madrid is one of five cities in Europe to contain two UEFA 5-star stadia: Real Madrid's Santiago Bernabéu and Atlético Madrid's Vicente Calderón both meet the criteria. Tours of the Bernabeu Stadium are available for 15 Euros (Kids 10 Euros): go to http://www.realmadrid.com/cs/Satellite/en/Prehome_ES2.htm</p> <p>Visitors can purchase tickets for games on the Club's website from 48 to 180 Euros http://www.realmadrid.com</p>
<p>Windsurfing</p>	<p>When the wind blows, Barcelona's beaches offer good conditions for wind and kite surfing and regular surfing, and the latter has really taken off. Wind 220°, on the corner of Passeig Marítim and Pontevedra (tel. 93-221-47-02; Metro: Barceloneta), right on the beach at Barceloneta, has all the equipment you need for rent, plus storage facilities, a cafe, information, and courses.</p>
<p>Skiing</p>	<p>Andalucia</p> <p>The Sierra Nevada area is Europe's southernmost ski resort, situated in southern Andalusia, at more than 3,000 m above sea level. It is the resort's geographical characteristics that give it ideal weather conditions for skiing: during much of the season there are wonderful sunny days. If you are a good skier, you should definitely go up to the Laguna and Veleta pistes. They are so high that, on a clear day, you can see the coast and the sea on both sides of the Mediterranean.</p> <p>Pyrenees</p> <p>Catalonia has 17 ski resorts, 11 downhill and 6 cross-country, thanks to the Pyrenees Mountains. There are 160km of pistes which are mostly covered by snow making equipment to guarantee snow cover.</p>
<p>Bullfighting</p>	<p>With origins as old as pagan Andalusia, bullfighting is a pure expression of Spanish temperament and passion. Detractors call the sport cruel, bloody, and savage. Aficionados, however, view bullfighting</p>

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	<p>as a microcosm of death, catharsis, and rebirth. If you strive to understand the bullfight, it can be a powerful and memorable experience. Head for the Plaza de Toros (bullring) in any major Andalusian city; the best corridas (bullfights) are in Seville.</p> <p>Madrid hosts the largest Plaza de Toros (bullring) in Spain, Las Ventas, established in 1929. Las Ventas is considered by many to be the world centre of bullfighting and has a seating capacity of almost 25,000. Madrid's bullfighting season begins in March and ends in October. Bullfights are held every day during the festivities of San Isidro (Madrid's patron saint) from the middle of March to the middle of June, and every Sunday, and public holiday, the rest of the season.</p> <p>Caution: the bullfighting spectacle is not for the faint of heart and may be seen as cruel to the bulls by many Canadians.</p>
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<p>CULTURE</p>	<p>Due to historical, geographical and generational diversity, Spanish art has known a great number of influences. The Moorish heritage in Spain, especially in Andalucía, is still evident today in cities like Córdoba, Seville, and Granada.</p> <p>From the cave paintings discovered at Llerida to several true giants of the 20th century - Picasso, Dalí, and Miró - Catalonia has also had a long and significant artistic tradition.</p>
<p>Arts</p>	<p>Madrid: Known as the "Paseo del Arte" or Art Walk, this is unique in the world, and takes visitors on a path through paintings and sculptures, architecture and nature, in one of Madrid's most emblematic areas: the Paseo del Prado. The route can easily be done on foot, and leads to three major art galleries in succession: the Prado Museum, the Thyssen Bornemisza Museum and the Reina Sofía Museum and Art Centre. This first-rate location makes it possible to enjoy, within a few square metres, Velazquez's Meninas, Goya's Majas, Giovanna Tornabuoni by Ghirlandaio, as well as Les Vessenots en Auvers by Van Gogh and Picasso's Guernica, together with other masterpieces of world art.</p>
<p>Music</p>	<p>Spanish music is often considered abroad to be synonymous with flamenco, an Andalusian musical genre, which, contrary to popular belief, is not widespread outside that region. Various regional styles of folk music abound in Aragon, Catalonia, Valencia, Castile, the Basque Country, Galicia and Asturias. Pop, rock, hip hop and heavy metal are also popular.</p> <p>In the field of classical music, Spain has produced a number of noted composers such as Isaac Albéniz, Manuel de Falla and Enrique Granados and singers and performers such as José Carreras, Montserrat Caballé, Plácido Domingo, Alicia de Larrocha, Alfredo Kraus, Pau Casals, Ricardo Viñes, José Iturbi, Pablo de Sarasate, Jordi Savall and Teresa Berganza. In Spain there are over forty professional</p>

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	<p>orchestras, including the Orquestra Simfònica de Barcelona, Orquesta Nacional de España and the Orquesta Sinfonica de Madrid. Major opera houses include the Teatro Real, the Gran Teatre del Liceu, Teatro Arriaga and the El Palau de les Arts Reina Sofia.</p>
<p>Museums</p>	<p>Madrid Madrid has four of Europe's most important museums: the Prado, Reina Sofia, Thyssen-Bornemisza and Caixa Forum. The Prado — boasting masterpieces by Fra Angelico, Diego de Velazquez, El Greco, Francisco de Goya — charges no admission Tuesday through Saturday from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., and from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. on Sunday. In 2014 there will be a celebration of El Greco 400th anniversary. The Reina Sofia — home to Pablo Picasso's "Guernica" — has free admission Monday to Friday from 7 p.m.-9 p.m., Saturdays from 2:30 p.m.-9 p.m. and Sundays from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Located within the central Retiro park are three smaller, more intimate museums. Palacio de Cristal and Palacio de Velazquez are linked to the Reina Sofia and often have free exhibitions, while Casa de Vacas at the northern end also holds free exhibitions.</p> <p>Barcelona Museu Picasso: By far the most popular art museum in town, the Picasso is tastefully spread throughout a quintet of fine old mansions in the heart of La Ribera. Be prepared for long lines but if you do manage to squeeze it into your time-challenged schedule, don't miss the Malagueño artist's version of Velázquez's La Meninas. The museum concentrates mainly on more conventional works and etchings by the adolescent Picasso, who arrived in town with his family in 1895 and wasted no time in opening his very first (and very modest) studio in Carrer de la Plata. Museu Maritim: The Gothic arches inside the Royal Shipyards building loom impressively over what's probably the best nautical museum in the Mediterranean: a superb testament to Barcelona's great naval past. Check out the marvelous "Great Adventure of the Sea" collection with its full-scale replica of Don Juan of Austria's Royal Galley from the decisive 16th-century Battle of Lepanto when Spain defeated the Ottomans. There are smaller models of Magellan's world-navigating Santa María, and one of the earliest submarines, the Ictíneo; and just outside you can go on board the old Santa Eulalia sailing ship moored in Moll de la Fusta. Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (MNAC): This museum, which recently underwent massive renovations and expansion, is the major depository of Catalan art. Although its mammoth collection also covers the Gothic period and 19th and 20th centuries, MNAC is perhaps the</p>

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	<p>most important center for Romanesque art in the world. The majority of the sculptures, icons, and frescoes were taken from dilapidated churches in the Pyrénées, restored, and mounted as they would have appeared in the churches in expertly reproduced domes and apses.</p>
<p>Festivals: Fiesta Madrid</p>	<p>The Madrileño calendar is a colorful kaleidoscope of saint's days, fiestas, and bullfights. Art exhibitions are perennial features and during the hot summers you can enjoy concerts in the Retiro Park as well as other open areas.</p> <p>The Big Three Fiestas</p> <p>Fiesta de San Isidro: Madrileños run wild during this 10-day celebration honoring their city's patron saint. Food fairs, Castilian folkloric events, street parades, parties, music, dances, bullfights, and other festivities mark the occasion. Local couples known as chulos and chulapas parade in castizo (traditional 19th-century) dress and enjoy feasts, romerías (festivals), and music acts in key spots like the Plaza Mayor. The largest number of consecutive daily bullfights are held during this fiesta. Make hotel reservations early. Second week in May.</p> <p>Virgen de la Paloma: This lively festival belies the midsummer image of Madrid as a temporarily lethargic ghost city with practically everyone out of town basking on the Levante and Cantabrian coasts. On August 15, the Latina quarter becomes a crowded riot of street bunting, drinking stalls, live music, and kids' events. The highlight is the procession. Early to mid-August.</p> <p>The Autumn Festival: The Festival de Otoño is the best music festival in Spain, with a lineup that attracts the cream of the European and South American musical communities. The usual roster of chamber music, symphonic pieces, and orchestral works is supplemented by a program of zarzuelas (operettas or musical reviews), as well as Arabic and Sephardic pieces composed during the Middle Ages. For tickets write to Festival de Otoño, Plaza de España 8, 28008 Madrid. October and November (dates vary year to year).</p>
<p>Festivals: Catalonia</p>	<p>Catalonia's festive calendar is packed with events year-round. The most famous is the Feast of Sant Jordi held on April 23 when streets fill up with flower and book stalls</p> <p>Semana Santa (Holy Week). 1 week before Easter. Catalonia has some Easter traditions not found in the rest of the country. The Mona is a whimsical chocolate and pastry creation given in the same way others give Easter eggs. On Palm Sunday, palm leaves are blessed in Gaudí's Sagrada Família and the city's main cathedral has the curious L'ou com balla - a hollowed-out egg shell that is placed</p>

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	<p>on top of a fountain in the city's cathedral's cloister to bob around and "dance." Out of town, the ominously named Dansa de la Mort (Dance of Death) sees men dressed as skeletons performing a "death" dance in the village of Verges, near Girona, and various Passion Plays are also performed, the most famous in the village of Esparraguera, 40km outside of Barcelona.</p> <p>Fira de Santa Llucia Nov/Dec Dating from 1786, this Christmas fair outside Barcelona Cathedral has 300 stalls selling all manner of seasonal goodies. A nativity scene contest, musical parades and exhibitions and the popular life-size nativity scene in Plaça Sant Jaume add to the fun. Kids line up for a go on the giant caga tió, a huge, smiley-faced "log" that drops out presents when beaten with a stick (smaller versions are on sale in the market).</p>
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<p>ATTRACTIONS</p>	<p>Spain has the second highest number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the world, with a total of 44, second only to Italy. There are six UNESCO World Heritage Sites within easy reach of Madrid:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Toledo: Successively a Roman municipium, the capital of the Visigothic Kingdom, a fortress of the Emirate of Cordoba, an outpost of the Christian kingdoms fighting the Moors and, in the 16th century, the temporary seat of supreme power under Charles V, Toledo is the repository of more than 2,000 years of history. Its masterpieces are the product of heterogeneous civilizations in an environment where the existence of three major religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – was a major factor. - Aranjuez: The Aranjuez cultural landscape is an entity of complex relationships: between nature and human activity, between sinuous watercourses and geometric landscape design, between the rural and the urban, between forest landscape and the delicately modulated architecture of its palatial buildings. Three hundred years of royal attention to the development and care of this landscape have seen it express an evolution of concepts from humanism and political centralization, to characteristics such as those found in its 18th century French-style Baroque garden, to the urban lifestyle which developed alongside the sciences of plant acclimatization and stock-breeding during the Age of Enlightenment. - Alcala de Henares: Founded by Cardinal Jiménez de Cisneros in the early 16th century, Alcalá de Henares was the world's first planned
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	<p>university city. It was the original model for the Civitas Dei (City of God), the ideal urban community which Spanish missionaries brought to the Americas. It also served as a model for universities in Europe and elsewhere.</p> <p>- El Escorial: Built at the end of the 16th century on a plan in the form of a grill, the instrument of the martyrdom of St Lawrence, the Escorial Monastery stands in an exceptionally beautiful site in Castile. Its austere architecture, a break with previous styles, had a considerable influence on Spanish architecture for more than half a century. It was the retreat of a mystic king and became, in the last years of Philip II's reign, the centre of the greatest political power of the time.</p> <p>- Segovia: The Roman aqueduct of Segovia, probably built c. A.D. 50, is remarkably well preserved. This impressive construction, with its two tiers of arches, forms part of the setting of the magnificent historic city of Segovia. Other important monuments include the Alcázar, begun around the 11th century, and the 16th-century Gothic cathedral.</p> <p>- Avila: Founded in the 11th century to protect the Spanish territories from the Moors, this 'City of Saints and Stones', the birthplace of St Teresa and the burial place of the Grand Inquisitor Torquemada, has kept its medieval austerity. This purity of form can still be seen in the Gothic cathedral and the fortifications which, with their 82 semicircular towers and nine gates, are the most complete in Spain.</p> <p>There are five UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Catalonia either in Barcelona or accessible from the city:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Archaeological Ensemble of Tarraco, Tarragona - Catalan Romanesque Churches at Vall de Boí - Poblet Monastery, Poblet, Tarragona province - Palau de la Música Catalana and Hospital de Sant Pau, Barcelona - Works of Antoni Gaudi: Sagrada Família, Barcelona; Parc Güell, Barcelona; Palau Güell, Barcelona; Casa Milà, Barcelona
<p>Madrid's Royal Palace</p>	<p>The Palacio Real (Royal Palace) is an enormous palace, with scorching plains of concrete around it and the Real Armorial (Royal Armory), a two-story collection of medieval weapons and armour. In spite of its name, it is not the residence of the current royal family. The Royal Palace is considered to be one of the most emblematic and beautiful buildings in Madrid, not only for its location but also for its architecture and the artistic treasures to be found in its rooms. The façades of the palace measure 130 meters long and 33 meters high with 870 windows and 240 balconies opening on to the facades and courtyard. It has a surface area of 100,000 square meters with 44</p>

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	<p>stairways and more than 30 principal rooms. Also located within the palace is the Pharmacia, which contains hundreds of bottles of early medicines and a reconstructed laboratory. Metro: Opera. Open: 9:00 - 17:00, Sundays and holidays: 9:00 - 13:00.</p>
Beaches	<p>Barcelona's 6.4km stretch of new city beaches, whose promenade, jetties, and marinas are lapped by inviting Mediterranean waters, have been transformed from a once-neglected area into a round-the-clock international playground. Their atmospheric chiringuitos (waterside bars and eating spots specializing in seafood dishes) are perfect spots either for lunch or a relaxing end-of-day drink, often accompanied by the music of an in-house DJ.</p> <p>The Costa Brava (Wild/Rugged Coast), in the northeast of Catalonia, has rocky cliffs and a mix of pebble and sandy beaches.</p> <p>The Costa Daurada (Golden Coast), in the southeast of Catalonia, has sandy beaches which are beloved by families.</p>
Wildlife	<p>Madrid: Zoo Aquarium de la Casa de Campo: This modern, well-organized facility allows you to see about 3,000 animals from five continents. Most are in simulated natural habitats, with moats separating them from the public. There's a petting zoo for the kids and a show presented by the Chu-Lin band. The zoo/aquarium complex includes a 520,000-gallon tropical marine aquarium, a dolphinarium, and a parrot club. You can also take a camel, pony, or mini-train ride, and live your own Jaws experience in the walk-through shark tank.</p> <p>Catalonia: Because of its geographical location and terrific range of habitats, including dry-land steppes, rocky coastlines, mountains and some of the most important wetland sites in Europe, Catalonia has a greater variety of bird life than anywhere else on the peninsula, with 95% of Iberia's and 50% of the whole Palearctic's recorded bird species. Some of the most sought-after are Lammergeier, Black Woodpecker, Wallcreeper, Bonelli's Eagle, Lesser Grey Shrike, Dupont's Lark, Little Bustard, Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, Audouin's Gull and Lesser Crested tern. The most important sites are Cap de Creus, Aiguamolls de L'Empordà, Barcelona's Llobregat Delta, the Parc de Garraf, Ebro Delta, Steppes of Lleida and, of course, The Pyrenees.</p> <p>For further details on some of Catalonia's wonderful natural parks, see www.parcscatalunya.net</p> <p>The National Park of Aigues Tortes and Estany Sant Maurici is in the Catalonian Pyrenees: 10,000 hectares of winding streams, lakes and fir-trimmed crags.</p>
Parks	<p>Madrid: Madrid is full of green spaces and parkland, in central Madrid the largest park is Parque del Retiro, formerly the grounds of the palace built for Felipe IV, and Madrid's most popular park. Its large lake</p>

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	<p>in the middle once staged mini naval battles to amuse royalty, these days the more tranquil pastime of pleasure boating is popular. Inspired by London's Crystal Palace, the palacio de cristal can be found at the south-eastern end of the park.</p> <p>Barcelona: Parc Güell - You can imagine gremlins living in this unique fairy-tale park located high up in the city and loved by children and adults alike. Look out for its mosaic serpent and Hansel and Gretel houses at the entrance (one of which is a tiny museum, the Centre d'Interpretació i Acol·lida, devoted to depicting creator Gaudí's building methods). At its center, up some steps, the Banc de Trencadís - a multicolored ceramic bench - curves around a spacious esplanade, while behind it footpaths climb into the pine woods of Vallcarca and Monte Carmel, offering scenic views through the trees of the city below.</p>
<p>Gardens</p>	<p>Madrid Botanical Gardens: This garden is a short walk west of the Retiro, and adjacent to the Museo del Prado. Founded in the 18th century by Fernando VI at the Huerto de Migas Calientes and subsequently moved to its present location by Carlos III, the garden celebrated its 250th anniversary in 2005. Today it contains more than 104 species of trees and 30,000 types of plants. Also on the premises are an exhibition hall and a library specializing in botany.</p> <p>Barcelona Botanical Gardens Just behind the Castell de Montjuïc, the city's Botanical Garden opened in 1999 and has steadily gathered international praise for its cutting-edge landscaping. The foliage focuses on species of plants, flowers, and trees that flourish in a Mediterranean-type climate (all are clearly labeled in Latin, Catalan, Spanish, and English). The park is divided into sections representing each of these regions.</p>
<p>Historic Buildings</p>	<p>El Escorial, near Madrid: Explore the Real Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial (49 km from Madrid): Philip II, who commissioned this monastery in the 1530s, envisioned it as a spiritual fortress against the distractions of the secular world. Today it remains the best living example of religious devotion in Renaissance Spain. Within its huge granite walls - more awesome than beautiful - are the tombs of Spanish kings and a priceless repository of ancient books, tapestries, and masterpieces by Goya, Velázquez, and other artistic giants.</p> <p>Tarragona 97km S of Barcelona, 554km E of Madrid The ancient Roman port city of Tarragona, on a rocky bluff above the Mediterranean, is one of the grandest but most neglected sightseeing centres in Spain. Despite its Roman and medieval remains, it's merely the second oldest city of Catalonia. The Romans captured Tarragona in</p>

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	<p>218 B.C., and during their rule the city sheltered one million people behind 64km-long city walls. One of the four capitals of Catalonia when it was an ancient principality and once the home of Julius Caesar, Tarragona today consists of an old quarter filled with interesting buildings, particularly the houses with connecting balconies. The upper walled town is mainly medieval, the town below newer. The city has a bullring, good hotels, and even beaches. The Romans were the first to designate Tarragona a resort town. After seeing some of the many attractions, cap off your day with a stroll along the Balcó del Mediterráni (Balcony of the Mediterranean), where the vistas are especially beautiful at sunset.</p>
<p>Spanish Islands</p>	<p>There are two sets of islands that are immensely popular with Vacationers to Spain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Balearics in the Mediterranean, comprising Mallorca, Ibiza and Menorca - The Canaries in the Atlantic off the north African coast, comprising Tenerife, Gran Canaria, Lanzarote, Fuerteventura, Gomera, La Palma and Hierro <p>Ibiza: Ibiza’s explosive world-famous club and nightlife scene often stretches into the very early hours of the morning and continues throughout the day, making it easy to overlook the traditional charms of the island. Ibiza’s beautiful Balearic scenery is also host to an enchanting historic town, excellent restaurants with breezy terraces, and balmy beaches ideal for sunbathing, water sports and extreme relaxation under the radiant island sun.</p> <p>Mallorca: One of Europe’s most popular tourist destinations, with the highest rate of hotels per capita almost anywhere in the world, Mallorca is bustling with activity and offers undiscovered landscapes and mysterious island nooks. Roam the verdant mountain regions or enjoy local nightlife until the rising hours of the morning. The golden beaches and mild Mediterranean climate only add to this island’s incredible natural beauty and geographical diversity.</p> <p>Menorca: The wind that earned Menorca the title of the ‘windy’ island among the Balearic islands is responsible for maintaining the comfortable temperatures on Menorca, particularly on the coastline. Rain is a rare occurrence, providing ideal conditions for wandering about and exploring the interior, bays and shores of this most tranquil and historically untouched of the Balearic islands. The beautiful seascapes and grassy elevations will provide you with a breathtaking backdrop for your Menorcan memories.</p>

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OTHER ACTIVITIES	
<p>Shopping</p>	<p>Madrid's teeming flea market represents a tradition that's 500 years old. The place really gets going from around 9 am on, with shoulder-to-shoulder stalls stretching down Calle Ribera de Curtidores. Real or fake antiques, secondhand clothing, porn films, Franco-era furniture, paintings (endless copies of Velázquez), old books, religious relics, and plenty of just plain junk are for sale. These streets also contain some of the finest permanent antiques shops in Madrid.</p> <p>Barcelona: Stylish clothing and shoes and leatherwear are the items to go for in Barcelona. Leather shoes, belts, jackets, and coats are particularly good buys; whether you want a high-end brand such as Loewe or succumb to the leather hawkers on La Rambla, the quality and value of leather goods is superb. Barcelona has always been renowned for its expertise in design and has a vibrant design culture supported by the local government. Decorative objects and housewares here are original and well-made and can be found in the shops around the MACBA and Picasso Museums. Artisan pieces, such as ceramic tiles and earthenware bowls and plates are cheap and plentiful. Cookware, crockery, wineglasses, and utensils in general are a great buy; a poke around a humble hardware store can unearth some great finds, too.</p>
<p>Markets</p>	<p>Madrid: El Rastro is Madrid's largest flea market, only open on Sunday mornings, featuring rows upon rows of private vendors selling a variety of homemade goods, and a wealth of live entertainment. The closest Metro station is La Latina.</p> <p>Barcelona - La Rambla: this 2 km-long avenue is divided into five distinct sections named successively Canaletes, Estudis, Sant Josep, Caputxins, and Santa Monica. It's a stage set of human statues, jugglers, singers, eccentrics, misfits, transvestites, caged animals, kiosks, cafes, and radiant flower stalls. Originally called rambla (riverbed) by the Arabs, it's the favorite strolling place for Barcelonese and visitors alike. For year-round atmosphere there's nowhere else like it in Spain.</p> <p>The Boquería market, La Rambla 91-101 (Mon-Sat 8am-8pm; Metro: Liceu), is the largest market in Europe (and probably the greatest in the world) and a must-see in the Catalan capital. It's located right in the middle of La Rambla. While many markets have little to offer a visitor in terms of practical shopping, the Boquería boasts some of the best bars and cafes in the city, and a chance to rub shoulders with the people who are helping put the city at the forefront of Mediterranean cuisine.</p>
<p>Nightlife</p>	<p>Madrid abounds in dance halls, tascas, cafes, theatres, movie houses, music halls, and nightclubs. Because dinner is served late in Spain, nightlife doesn't really get under way until after 11pm, and it generally lasts until around 3am - Madrileños are so fond of prowling about at</p>

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	<p>night that they're known around Spain as gatos (cats). In fact, if you arrive at 9:30pm at a club, you'll have the place all to yourself, if it's even open. In most clubs a one-drink minimum is the rule: feel free to nurse one drink through the entire evening's entertainment.</p> <p>In summer, Madrid sponsors a series of plays, concerts, and films, making the city a virtual free festival. Pick up a copy of the Guía del Ocio (available at most news-stands) for listings of these events. This guide also provides information about occasional discounts for commercial events, such as the concerts that are given in Madrid's parks.</p> <p>Barcelona is a great nighttime city, and the array of after-dark diversions is staggering. There is something to interest almost everyone and to fit most pocketbooks. Fashionable bars and clubs operate in nearly every major district of the city, and where one closes, another will open within weeks.</p> <p>Locals sometimes opt for an evening in the tascas (taverns), or they settle in for a bottle of wine at a cafe, an easy and inexpensive way to spend an evening people-watching.</p> <p>Nightlife will begin for many Barcelonese with a promenade (paseo) from about 8 to 9pm. Then things quiet down a bit until a second surge of energy brings out the post-dinner crowds from 11pm to midnight. Serious drinking in the city's pubs and bars usually begins by midnight. For the most fashionable places, Barcelonese will delay their entrances until at least 1am - meeting friends for the first drink of the evening after midnight certainly takes some getting used to. If you want to go on to a club, you should be prepared to delay things even longer - most clubs don't open until around 2am, and then they're mostly empty for the first half-hour or so, until the bars close at 3am. Many clubs stay open to as late as 6am.</p>
<p>Casinos</p>	<p>Casino Gran Madrid is at Km 29 along the Carretera La Coruña (the A-6 highway running between Madrid and La Coruña), Apartado 62. The largest place for gambling in Madrid, it appeals to non-gamblers to boot with a well-choreographed roster of dining and entertainment facilities, including two restaurants, four bars, and a nightclub. And if you happen to enjoy gambling, there are facilities for French and American roulette, blackjack, punto y banco, baccarat, and chemin de fer. Presentation of a passport at the door is required.</p> <p>A casino by the sea...The Casino Barcelona is set in one of the finest spots in the city, the Port Olímpic in Barcelona, beneath the luxury of the Hotel Arts and the golden lights of the Fish, designed by architect Frank Owen Gehry.</p>

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CUISINE

The Spanish don't eat lunch until 1:00 or 2:00 pm, and dinner doesn't start until 9:00 pm; many restaurants don't open until these times. As a rule of thumb, restaurants serve lunch from 1:00 (earlier in touristic zones) until 3:30, then close and re-open for dinner at 8:30 pm, serving until 11:00 pm

Madrid is located in the central region of Spain known as Castille, which has a particular culinary tradition within Spain, largely meat based. Within this region, Madrid has a number of "typical" dishes, some of the most well-known are the following:

- **Callos a la Madrileña** - A hot pot of spicy beef tripe similar to those found in Turkey and the Balkans.

- **Cocido Madrileño** - Chickpea stew with meat and vegetable products. The particularity of this stew is the way it is served. The soup, chickpeas and meats are served and eaten separately.

- **Oreja de Cerdo** - Pigs ear, fried in Garlic. This popular dish is widely eaten throughout central Spain.

- **Sopa de Ajo** - The Garlic soup is a rich and oily soup which generally includes paprika, grated Spanish ham, fried bread and a poached egg. A variation of this soup is known as Sopa Castellana.

Catalan cuisine relies heavily on ingredients found along the Mediterranean coast, including fresh vegetables (especially tomato, garlic, aubergine, red pepper, and artichoke), wheat products (bread, pasta), olive oils from Arbequina, wines, legumes (beans, chick peas), mushrooms, all sorts of pork preparations (sausages from Vic, ham), all sorts of cheese, poultry, lamb, and many types of fish like sardine, anchovy, tuna, and cod.

Traditional Catalan cuisine uses a lot of pasta (second only to the Italian cuisine) and cod (salted, dried, fresh, etc.). The cuisine includes many preparations that mix sweet and salty and stews with sauces based on botifarra (raw pork sausage) and the characteristic picada (ground almonds, hazelnuts, pine nuts, etc. sometimes with garlic, herbs, biscuits). Torró is a nougat-like traditional Christmas confectionery. Nowadays many variants and flavours exist, but the traditional ones are these kinds based on almonds and honey.

"Green Spain", in Spain's northwest, has very different cuisine and wines...

- **Galicia**

Its cuisine is one of the main tourist attractions of Galicia: the exquisite delicacies of this region are based on the high quality and variety of the local products used in the preparation of dishes. Country, farm and sea

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products are unique in their characteristics and quality. Galician chefs are found world-wide. There are more than 300 gastronomic fiestas which are held in Galicia throughout the year. The origins of these exaltations to local produce, lie in the many local and regional traditional fiestas held during harvest time or religious holidays, such as the "romerías", where promises are made to the patron saint and then completed with a traditional meal.

- **Asturias**

Asturias is a magnificent natural sea, mountain and country paradise with a very diverse environment. Protected on one side by the Bay of Biscay and on the other by the Picos de Europa mountain range, this region has always been isolated and protected from possible invasions and therefore has many deep-rooted traditions and rituals. The typical Asturian is friendly and open, always willing to receive outsiders who wish to get to know their land. Its cuisine is based on cider, fabada (bean stew) and cheese, together with shellfish and fish. Asturian cuisine could be defined as slow cooking over low heat. The Asturians do not use many spices or other condiments in their dishes which could distort the natural taste of the ingredients. The kitchens use old-style stoves which conjure up an atmosphere from another era, contrasting strongly with the stress of modern day life. Asturians delight in their stews, the "fabada" being the queen of them all.

- **Cantabria**

The Region of Cantabria is very rich in history, art and natural areas: the sea, valleys with mild and warm micro-climates, fertile pastures... the varied cuisine cleverly combines the products from the sea with those from the pastures and market gardens. Cantabrian milk is very high quality so dairy products are plentiful throughout the region. It's known that people here were making butter 2,000 years ago, when the Romans used it as protection from the sun. For the Cantabrians, cheese is almost a religion. Strong-tasting cheeses which are cured with great care. Queso de nata (cream cheese) which can be found throughout the region, picón from Treviso Bejes, smoked cheeses, such as those from Áliva or Pido, and the small quesucos, which are made from a mixture of cow's and sheep's milk.

- **Basque Country**

The Basque Country is probably the most important gastronomic destination in Spain. A coastal and border region, whose very varied culinary delights are due to the mixture of sea and mountain cultures with modern top-quality cooking. This trend emerged over the last decades with the appearance of the so-called Basque Nouvelle Cuisine.

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	<p>But most importantly, the good food is a reflection of the character of the Basque people, a people devoted to tradition and good food, the centre of any social occasion. Due to its geographical position in the Bay of Biscay, the Basques have been avid sailors for many centuries. Its constant fishing on the shore of Terranova has resulted in a whole cuisine based around cod. It's a fish which in the past was consumed on the mainland to fight off the famine and which today has been converted into a delicacy, forming part of numerous recipes. The sauces which have emerged due to this fish - "pil pil" (garlic), Biscay sauce, green sauce, "ajovarriero" (eggs and garlic) - have become world famous.</p>
<p>Food</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tapas, those delicious bite-size portions washed down with wine, beer, or sherry, are reason enough to go to Madrid and Barcelona. Original favorites were cured ham or chorizo (spicy sausage). Today you might sample gambas (deep-fried shrimp), boquerones (anchovies marinated in vinegar), albóndigas (meatballs), tortillas (tiny omelets), or calamares (squid). Among the best areas for a tapeo (tapa "crawl") are bustling Plaza de Santa Ana and the labyrinthine Cava Baja. - Visiting Madrid or Spain in general without trying Jamon Iberico (ham) would be considered a crime by most Spaniards. Spaniards treat their ham very seriously and types and qualities of ham vary in a similar way to wine. - Seafood: It is ironic that Madrid, located right in the center of Spain is known in the country as the "Best port in Spain" having higher quality seafood than most coastal regions. This can be explained by Spaniard's obsession with seafood and the historical need to supply the capital's wealthy with a constant stream of fresh produce. You will be hard pressed to find better quality seafood in any city in Europe than in Madrid.
<p>Drinks</p>	<p>There is no better way to discover Spanish wine than by actually visiting their places of origin.</p> <p>Many of Spain's leading vineyards are open to visitors: many are hundreds of years old, some boast an extraordinary architectural richness, and others even include interesting collections of art relating to the wine culture.</p> <p>It is a real privilege to enter this world accompanied by those who have a such a deep understanding of it. They will show you how to fully appreciate it: they will take around the facilities, the vineyards, the production process; they will reveal the secrets of wine tasting and you will, of course, be able to sample the wines accompanied by typical local dishes. At tourist information centres you can get details of the vineyards and wine cellars, as well as times and conditions for visits. It seems to me to be the perfect way to explore the sheer cultural diversity of Spain while sampling some of the finest wines in the world.</p>

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There are so many to choose from:

- La Rioja Alavesa, in the southern part of Álava;
- the wines of the central part of Navarra;
- the wines and cavas of El Penedés, between Barcelona and Tarragona;
- the many varieties of the wine-producing districts of Somontano, in Huesca and the fruity whites of the Rías Baixas, in Pontevedra.
- in central and southern Spain are the Manchego wines of Ciudad Real; the specialities of Montilla-Moriles in Córdoba, and the Jumilla wines of Murcia.

Spain has no fewer than **18 Wine Routes** – here are some examples:

- **La Rioja Alavesa wine route**

One part of the famous Rioja wines are produced in this region of northern Spain, called Rioja Alavesa. Its geographical location, between the Ebro River and the Cantabria Mountains, give this region a privileged microclimate for vine cultivation. The care and dedication of local people also play an important role in the quality of these prestigious wines. They have combined traditional production processes with new technologies. This means that on the Rioja Alavesa Wine Route you can sample everything from vintages aged in medieval caves through to wines produced in the most avant-garde installations.

- **Penedès wine and cava route**

Wines of exceptional quality, prestigious around the world, are produced in this region of Catalonia, located between the plains of the Mediterranean coast and the nearby mountains. This is also where another universally renowned drink is produced: Cava (sparkling wine). Follow the Penedès Wine and Cava Routes and discover this region, with its wealth of art, culture and countryside. Unique experiences await you in landscapes dominated by vineyards and wineries.

- **Navarre wine route**

Come to the central area of Navarre and discover its wine route. Here, besides sampling some exquisite wines, you will also discover a land with a rich history, which lies on the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route. Visit its villages, surrounded by a landscape dominated by vineyards, clear testimony to the importance that wine has had in the region since Roman times.

The wines of Spain are inextricably mixed with the culture of Spain too in my experience...

If you visit the many museums specialising in this field, you will see for

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yourself that wine is a primordial element of Spanish culture. From the Catalonia Wine Culture Museum (VINSEUM), to the “La Baranda” House of Wine in Tacoronte and the “Villa Lucía” Centre in Álava, you will love the pleasant surprises that await you. They will show you the ritual of wine production, the machinery used, and you can buy presents to take away with you.

If you would like to know more about the culture of each region, there are guided routes to the historic centres of towns and to the many vineyards and wineries. Can you imagine following in the footsteps of Don Quixote? You can do so exploring the windmills and vineyards of the La Mancha route. Plan a trip to the historic sites and Modernist buildings of the Alt Penedès region (Penedès route), a visit to the country houses of the Rías Baixas route or a tour of where wine barrels are kept on the Montilla-Moriles route.

Spain’s Wine Fiestas

A very special time to sample Spanish wines is during the wine harvest fiesta, normally held between the months of July and October. If you come at this time, you can see flamenco shows, horse races, and witness the traditional treading of grapes. You can also ride in a horse and cart, in the Sierra de Montilla region, for example.

For the more enterprising, on itineraries like the Jumilla route you can do interesting activities at any time of year, such as making homemade soap, olive collecting or pottery. While you take part in such activities, you can choose your accommodation from stately houses, traditional farmsteads, 16th-century farmhouses, country hotels and Modernist buildings with jacuzzi and sauna. Comfort and tradition close at hand. And let’s not forget the ancient sherry bodegas of Jerez in Andalusia... It is served cold, but is dry on the palate, as well as intense, smooth and light, and has a delicate bouquet with almond notes. Its unmistakable flavour and personality have made it one of the most highly-regarded and distinctive wines in the world; so much so that in the rest of the planet it is identified by the name of one of its designations of origin: this is the famous Jerez, also known as Xérès or sherry.

Come to southern Spain and discover the world surrounding this delicious wine, which is so deeply rooted in the social and festive life of Andalusia, and is not just a drink, but a door which opens onto a whole culture.

Beer - Madrid's favorite cerveza is Mahou, which comes in light and dark versions and is served draught or by the bottle. Also popular and widely available locally are Aguila from Valencia and Cruzcampo from Seville.

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	<p>Cider - Still or fizzy sidra is the favorite drink in Asturian eating spots such as Casa Mingo and Casa Lastra. Warning: the still version is stronger than you'd think!</p> <p>Spirits - Adventurous imbibers can try orujo, a fiery liquor or aguardiente (made from the stalks and skins of grapes) that tastes like a rough grappa and is sometimes offered free after a meal. Magno and Carlos 1, mellow coñacs from Cádiz, or Pacharán, a rose-purple anise-flavored sloe gin spirit from Navarra, are more conventional after-dinner tipples.</p> <p>Cava - Spain's answer to champagne is best from Cataluña (though recent political differences between the capital and Barcelona led to a not-too-successful boycott of the stuff). Look for Codorniu and Freixenet. Up-and-coming rivals from Extremadura and Toledo aren't bad either.</p> <p>Sherry – Spain's most distinctive fortified wine - "sherry" in English, jerez in Spanish - uses the charming little Andalusian town of Jerez de la Frontera as its main production center. Touring the sherry wineries, or bodegas, is one of the province's most evocative undertakings. You can see mixing tanks, fermentation rooms, and warehouses for aging, but nothing is more memorable than an actual tasting. You'll quickly determine your favorite, ranging from fino (extra dry) to dulce (sweet). It's best to arrive in early September for the annual wine harvest.</p> <p>Grape Harvest Festival, Jerez de la Frontera. Andalusia's major wine festival honours the famous sherry of Jerez, with 5 days of processions, flamenco dancing, bullfights, livestock on parade, and, of course, sherry drinking. Mid-October</p>
<p>Restaurants</p>	<p>Madrid</p> <p>The Sobrino de Botín (tel. 91-366-30-26) may be touristy, but the setting and atmosphere of the city's oldest restaurant (some say the oldest eatery in the world) more than compensate. Rafters, beams, and nooks abound, and the effective service is accompanied by some first-rate Castilian specialties, such as lechón (suckling pig).</p> <p>Best Tapas: El Bokaíto (tel. 91-532-12-19). Cited as a favorite snack 'n' wine locale by Oscar-winning cineaste Pedro Almodóvar, the stylish little Bokaíto, set in the heart of bohemian Chueca, will usually serve a free miniportion of cecina (smoked beef) or something similar with your vino before offering a wealth of marine delights that ranges from</p>

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salmonetes (red mullet) to pescaitos (small fried fish).

Best for Kids: Foster's Hollywood (tel. 91-564-63-08) wins almost hands-down. Since 1971 it has lured kids with Tex-Mex selections, one of the juiciest hamburgers in town, and what a New York Times reporter found to be "probably the best onion rings in the world." The atmosphere is fun too, evoking a movie studio with props.

Personally recommended: Restaurante Dassa Bassa. Villalar, 7 28001 Madrid (tel. 91-576-73-97) www.dassabassa.com One of Spain's great Chefs, with his own television cookery show, Darrio Barrio brings his own, unique take on 'nouvelle cuisine meets tapas' with amazing results. You will need to book in advance.

Barcelona

For an atmospheric lunch you can't do better than Barcelona's oldest restaurant (est. 1786), **Can Culleretes**, Quintana 5 (tel. 93-317-64-85). It's tucked away in a secretive lane in the heart of the Barri Gòtic. You won't be the only non-Catalan visitor - the place is in too many guidebooks - but the restaurant is a monument, the service and decor from another age, and the traditional food and wine pretty good.

Try **Can Costa**, Passeig de Joan de Borbón (tel. 93-221-59-03). It's located a block back from the waterfront, as all the genuine locales are. This is the real McCoy, with excellent fideuà de paella (made with noodles not rice) and baby calamares that are worth leaving home for. Can gets busy for lunch, so arrive early - and that's any time before 2pm in Spain.

Halfway down La Rambla, **Café de l'Opera**, La Rambla 74 (tel. 93-317-75-85), is a 19th-century Parisian-style cafe. Its murals, iron columns, and wall mirrors with etchings evoke a more elegant age, when waiters with bow ties served you with delightful indifference. It's the ideal spot to sit back, enjoy a quality coffee, and watch the nonstop activity outside.

You can make as much noise as you like at **Mesón David**, an old-school eatery with an interminable menu of dishes from all regions of Spain. Chances are you will be sitting next to a raucous group celebrating a birthday or engagement with waiters often joining in the revelry themselves.

For the best traditional Catalan Cuisine try **Via Veneto** which exudes old-fashioned class and serves up some of the finest Catalan cooking in

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	the land. Some of the serving methods, such as the sterling silver duck press, seem to belong to another century.
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MORE INFO	
Brochures	Contact the Tourist Office of Spain , 102 Bloor St. W., Suite 3402, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1M9 for brochures on Spain (tel. 416-961-3131)
Websites	Spanish Tourism Board website: www.spain.info Online Brochures: http://srv.tourspain.es/ExpendedorFolletosWeb/Catalogo.aspx?idioma=en-GB&mercado=INTERNACIONAL_EN Connect with Spain on facebook: https://www.facebook.com/SeeSpain Follow Spain on Twitter: https://twitter.com/spain
Personal Experience	I have travelled extensively throughout Spain to Madrid, Toledo, Catalonia, Barcelona, Granada, Cordoba, Seville, Andalucia, Pyrenees, Costa Brava, Costa Dorada, Costa Blanca, Costa Del Sol; Majorca, Ibiza, Menorca, Tenerife, Gran Canaria, Fuerteventura, Lanzarote. The Paradors are among my favourite places to stay anywhere in the world and have two entries on my Top Ten lists: http://www.chrisrobinsontravelshow.ca/images/upload/ChrisFavouriteHotelsGroups.pdf and http://www.chrisrobinsontravelshow.ca/images/upload/ChrisFavouriteHotels.pdf I have stayed in ten Paradors and recommend every one of them: - Parador Casa del Corregidor at Arcos de la Frontera (a former Palace with panoramic views) - Parador Alcazar del Rey Don Pedro at Carmona near Seville (in a fourteenth century Arabic fortress) - Parador Nacional Sierra Nevada at Monachil near Grenada - Parador Castillo de Santa Catalina at Jaen in Andalucia (four star hotel in a thirteenth century Arab fortress) - Parador San Francisco at Granada (Spain's most popular Parador is a small four star hotel in a fifteenth century convent which is part of the famous Palace of Alhambra) - Parador at Chinchon near Madrid (luxury four star hotel using the renovated buildings of a seventeenth century Augustinian convent) - Parador Castillo de Sigüenza, northeast of Madrid (in a castle that was built in the fifth century and strengthened by the Moors in 712; in 1123 it was retaken by Fernando I and El Cid)

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- Parador Duques de Cardona at Cardona (four star luxury hotel in a ninth century castle with the tower dating from the second century)
- Parador Raimundo de Borgona at Avila (in a sixteenth century palace site within the walls of Avila)
- Parador Conde de Orgaz at Toledo (in an old Manor House sitting on the top of The Emperor's Hill with an excellent view over the city of Toledo)

Here is a **Magic Moment** from one of my trips to this destination:

"A few years ago I was touring Southern Spain with my wife Dara and enjoying the sights and splendors of the famous Pueblos Blancos – the White Villages of Andalusia. After a full day's sightseeing, which included a visit to Ecija which lived up to its name as the "Frying Pan of Andalusia", we were staying the night in Arcos de la Frontera. This picturesque settlement is perched high on top of a massive sandstone ridge above the Guadelete River. Our hotel was one of the renowned Paradors of Spain – this one was a converted manor house built into the cliff face and our balcony looked out over the lush green plain of the valley far below. As the ancient church bells rang, a cooling breeze played across the balcony and the sun began to set, our reverie was broken by the arrival of a plate of tapas, including fresh and juicy local olives...together with a dry sherry from neighbouring Jerez that simply took my breath away. This, I thought contentedly, is the essential Spain!"

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