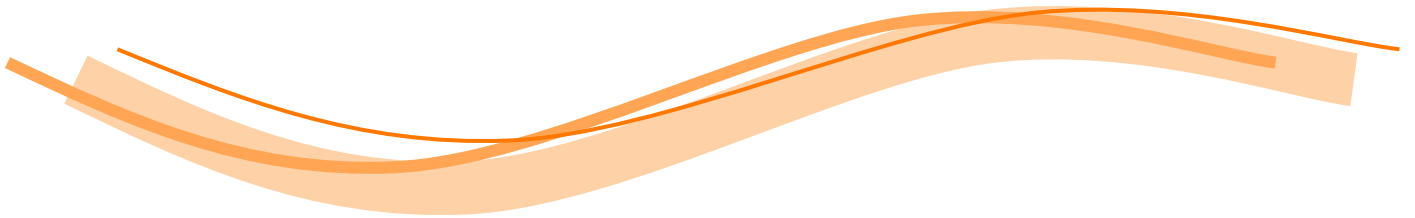




SPAIN & INSIGHT VACATIONS





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. In fact there is so much heritage, it is fair to say - **Spain is Culture!**

Alongside this 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.

Spain has **55 UNESCO World Heritage sites**, which makes it the country with the second largest number of UNESCO sites in the world. 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.

Next year is the 400th anniversary of the death of painter **El Greco**. El Greco combined Greek tradition, Venetian colour and Roman design – but it was in the Spanish city of Toledo where he was to flourish until his death. There are special exhibitions in Toledo and at the Prado Museum in Madrid to mark his achievements. But Spain's artistic treasures span the centuries. In Madrid there are upcoming major exhibitions of Salvador Dali and Surrealist art, as well as works by Cezanne at the Museum Thyssen-Bornemisza.

Madrid is one of the world's great cities. Founded in 1202, it was in 1561 that Philip II moved 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 commenced the construction of the awe inspiring monastery-palace of El Escorial.

Interestingly, in 1580 the king commissioned El Greco to paint an altarpiece of The Martyrdom of St Maurice for the church of El Escorial. But when Philip saw it, he relegated the painting to an obscure place in his collection and commissioned Romulo Cincinnato to paint a

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	<p>replacement for the altar. El Greco never worked for the king again. You can still see the two paintings today at the Escorial and judge for yourself which you prefer.</p> <p>A cosmopolitan European centre with exciting nightlife - there is so much to explore in Madrid! One travel tip is that there are walking and biking tours every day of the year. Madrid also has distinctive and succulent cuisine – including the famous Tapas. Tapas are snacks, canapés or finger food served in restaurants, bars and cafés. Tapas can be anything from a chunk of tuna, cocktail onion and an olive skewered on a long toothpick, to piping hot meat with sauce served in a miniature clay dish - or anything in between.</p> <p>To complement the food there is, of course, Spanish wine! Major Spanish wine regions include the Rioja and Ribera del Duero - known for Valdepeñas (the wine drunk by Hemingway). Jerez is the home of the fortified wine Sherry.</p> <p>And the folklore and festivals of Spain are virtually limitless! From the famous Sanfermines bull-running festival in Pamplona, to the Fallas bonfire festival in Valencia and the religious processions of Easter week. Spain even celebrates “World Tapas Day”!</p> <p>Catalonia is simply magnificent, with the beaches of the Costa Brava, the mountains of the Pyrenees and a culture and a cuisine all its own. Barcelona, Catalonia's vibrant capital, is the classic European city and a perfect mix of fascinating history and contemporary ambience.</p> <p>Andalucia includes the stunning cities of Cordoba, Seville and Granada. Malaga is the gateway to the region and to the beautiful beaches and excellent golf courses of the Costa del Sol.</p>
<p>Location</p>	<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>
<p>Geography</p>	<p>At 504,782 square km, Spain is the third largest European country after Russia and France. Teide (Tenerife, 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>

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Name	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.
Population	The population of Spain is around 45 million (2013).
Language	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.
Currency	The euro (€), the single European currency, became the official 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. 1 Euro = 1.43 Canadian Dollars (22 Nov, 2013) 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.
Tipping	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.
Government	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.
Documentation	Canadian passports are required, but no visa is necessary
Time zone	Spain is 6 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time
Health	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
Safety tips	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.

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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 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: 13C and sunny Madrid: 10C and sunny Malaga: 18 and sun/clouds All as at 22 Nov 2013.</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 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</p>

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Royal Palace at Aranjuez.

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 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

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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 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.

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.

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.

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

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	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.
Distances	<p>Madrid to Granada: 434 km Madrid to Barcelona is 621 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 the west is 173 km, to Vielha in the northwest is 280 km and to Figueres in the northeast is 138 km Granada to Seville: 256 km Granada to Cordoba: 166 km Granada to Malaga: 129 km Barcelona to Seville: 1046 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.</p> <p>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 Nov 2013) 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</p>

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	<p>of the Madrid public transport system, with unlimited use of the underground, bus and the Cercanias lines (the suburban train network).</p> <p>The Barcelona Card http://www.barcelona-card.com</p> <p>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 (Nov 2013) 33.3 euros for 2 days. The 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>
Buses	<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 Turístic (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>Bus service in southern Spain is extensive, low priced, and comfortable enough for short distances. You'll rarely encounter a bus terminal. The station might be a cafe, a bar, the street in front of a hotel, or simply an intersection. A bus may be the cheapest mode of transportation, but it may not be best option for distances of more than 150km as the buses can be uncomfortable and may lack toilet facilities, although rest stops are frequent. It's best for 1-day excursions outside a major tourist center such as Seville. In the rural areas of the country, bus networks are more extensive than the railway system; they go virtually everywhere, connecting every village. In general, a bus ride</p>

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	between two major cities in Spain, such as from Córdoba to Seville, is about two-thirds the price of a train ride and a few hours faster. For bus information, contact ALSA at www.alsa.es .
Trains	<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 (2013); 4 journeys within one month period: 163 € http://www.renfe.com/EN/viajeros/viajes_internacionales/spainpass/index.html</p>
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</p>
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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".

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.

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.

The Paradores are famous for their exceptional food. They offer a traditional menu prepared with fresh local products from the region in 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	
Families	<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</p>

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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."

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.

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.

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 Zoológico, 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, 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.

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.

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	<p>Andalucía is called the playground of Spain, so there are many amusements here for the entire family to enjoy, including some of Europe's best beaches. Perhaps your main concern with having children along is pacing yourself to see monuments, including cathedrals. One suggestion is to spend one day at Córdoba but allow two days for Seville, which has many more attractions. That is followed by a visit south to Jerez de la Frontera, fabled for its horses. The most scenic journey here will be from Jerez to Arcos de la Frontera all the way to the dramatic mountain town of Ronda, perched over a ravine high in the mountains. Kids will enjoy the east most of all because it will take them to the beach resorts of Torremolinos and Málaga, the capital of the Costa del Sol.</p> <p>In Cordoba head first for the Mezquita-Catedral de Córdoba, whose 856 still-standing pillars remind kids of giant peppermint stick candy. Follow up with a tour through the Alcázar de los Reyes Cristianos, which looks like the setting for a medieval adventure film for most kids. In Seville, see the once-mighty Alcázar, which will take about 2 hours of your family time. With its lavish decorations and ornate rooms, along with its 18th-century gardens, the castle fortress has enough elements to appeal to all ages. After lunch, visit Catedral de Seville, the largest Gothic structure on earth. Kids are usually awed by the place. If not, they will be when they get to climb the ancient Moorish tower, La Giralda. Also take the kids to the landmark Plaza de España where they can rent pedal boats, feed the ducks, and be amused by the donkey carts. As the afternoon wanes, head for Isla Mágica, built on the site of the 1992 Expo grounds. The park has been turned into a Disney-like playground including themed festivals and a Pirates' Cove.</p> <p>In Jerez, perfect for family viewing are the Dancing Horses of Jerez. After seeing a performance of these stallions in the morning, you can fill out the afternoon with visits to the Alcázar and an intriguing trip to the Museo de los Relojes, the town's clock museum.</p> <p>Lastly, Torremolinos and the Costa del Sol. The two major beaches are at La Carihuela and El Bajondillo. After beach time you can take the kids to Aquapark with a lot of nautical attractions, including "water mountains." At Benalmádena, the satellite of Torremolinos, the family can visit the best aquarium in Andalusia, Sea Life Benalmádena, and have fun at Tivoli World, a large amusement park. Cap the day by boarding the teléferico, taking you to the top of Monte Calamorro for a panoramic vista of the Costa del Sol. For dinner that night, head to one of the fish restaurants at the old fishing village of La Carihuela.</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</p>

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	<p>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>Andalucia: Romantic highlights of this region of Spain are the famous White Towns that lie behind the Costa del Sol and the magical gardens of the Generalife in Grenada. Stay in one of the ancient Parador hotels in a castle, palace or monastery for a special experience.</p>
Seniors	<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>
UNIQUES	<p>Sagrada Família in Barcelona</p> <p>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>
Surprising	<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>

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History

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).

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).

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	<p>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>
Books	<p>Completely updated every year (unlike most of the competition), 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>Also: <i>Spain: a Phaidon Cultural Guide</i> and James A. Michener's <i>Iberia</i></p>
1000 Places to see before you die	<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 trove of Romanesque and Gothic art housed in the National Palace La Sagrada Familia: the incomplete masterpiece of Antoni Gaudi in Barcelona Museo Picasso, Barcelona: many of Picasso's great works are housed in two adjoining Palaces 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> <p>In Andalucia: Arcos de la Frontera – base for Andalucia's Pueblos Blancas La Mezquita, Cordoba – Iberia's greatest mosque The Alhambra, Granada – Palace beyond compare Seville – the City of Carmen</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</p>

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	<p>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>
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<p>SPORTS ACTIVITIES</p>	<p>Spain reign supreme in the soccer world! They are the current World Champions after the World Cup in South Africa in 2010 and they were already European Champions.</p> <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>
<p>Golf</p>	<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 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> <p>Andalucia Club Marina Golf Mojacar (Mojácar) Golf Novo Sancti Petri (Chiclana de la Frontera) Club de Golf Isla Canela (Ayamonte)</p>

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	Estepona Golf (Estepona) Marbella Golf & Country Club (Marbella)
Tennis	Tennis is available at most of the larger resort hotels on the Mediterranean coast.
Fishing	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.
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.realescuola.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>The entire Mediterranean coast is also a wonderful choice for hiking. You can choose from Andalusia (with interior routes like the Sierra Nevada route or routes near the beach), Murcia (with its typical vegetable garden landscapes) and the Autonomous Region of Valencia (with its multiple wetlands and large seaside lagoons). Along the coast there is also the option of choosing your favourite stage along the Augusta Way, ideal for those interested in the traces of the Roman Empire in Spain.</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</p>

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	<p>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> <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! And especially now that the Spanish national team are World Champions after the 2010 World Cup in South Africa. 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 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 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 Catalonia has 17 ski resorts, 11 downhill and 6 cross-country, thanks to</p>

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	<p>the Pyrenees Mountains. There are 160km of pistes which are mostly covered by snow making equipment to guarantee snow cover.</p>
Bullfighting	<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 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>
CULTURE	<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>
El Greco 400th Anniversary	<p>There are a number of special events and exhibitions planned to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the death of the great Spanish painter El Greco. A special website has been created for all the details: http://elgreco2014.com/en/index.html</p>
Arts	<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>
Music	<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</p>

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	<p>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 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</p> <p>Madrid has four of Europe's most important museums: the Prado, Reina Sofia, Thyssen-Bornemisza and Caixa Forum.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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</p>

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	<p>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.</p> <p>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 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>Andalucia If you see just one museum in the region, make it this one: Málaga honoured one of its native sons in 1983 with the inauguration of the Casa Museo Pablo Ruiz Picasso. The painter's native home, located in the bustling Plaza de la Merced, is listed as a national historic and artistic monument, and includes a museum dedicated to Picasso's artwork. The museum features both a permanent collection, which includes illustrated books, engravings and ceramics by the artist, as well as a series of seasonal temporary exhibits. Visitors will also discover over 3,500 works by such renowned artists as Miró, Bacon, Ernst, Tàpies and Chillida, to name but a few, as well as various local artists.</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</p>

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	<p>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 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>
<p>Festivals: Fiestas Andalusia</p>	<p>Granada Reconquest Festival, Granada. The whole city celebrates the Christians' victory over the Moors in 1492 and the highest tower at the Alhambra opens to the public. For information, contact the Tourist Office of Granada (tel. 95-822-59-90). January 2.</p> <p>Día de los Reyes (Three Kings Day), throughout Andalusia. Parades are held all over the province on the eve of the Festival of the Epiphany. Various "kings" dispense candy to kids. January 6.</p>

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	<p>Carnavales de Cádiz, Cádiz. The oldest and best-attended carnival in Spain is a freewheeling event full of costumes, parades, strolling troubadours, and drum beating. Call tel. 95-621-12-56 or go to www.carnavaldecadiz.com for more information. Mid-February.</p> <p>Semana Santa (Holy Week), Seville. Although many of the country's smaller towns stage similar celebrations (especially notable in Málaga), the festivities in Seville are by far the most elaborate. From Palm Sunday until Easter Sunday, a series of processions with hooded penitents moves to the piercing wail of the saeta, a love song to the Virgin or Christ. Pasos (heavy floats) bear images of the Virgin or Christ. Again, make hotel reservations way in advance. Call the Seville Office of Tourism for details (tel. 95-422-14-04). Usually the last week of March.</p> <p>Feria de Sevilla (Seville Fair). This is the most celebrated week of revelry in the country, with all-night flamenco dancing, merrymaking in casetas (entertainment booths), bullfights, horseback riding, flower-decked coaches, and dancing in the streets. Reserve a hotel early. For general information and exact festival dates, contact the Office of Tourism in Seville (tel. 95-422-14-04). Second week after Easter.</p> <p>Feria de Málaga (Málaga Fair). One of the longest summer fairs in southern Europe (generally lasting 10 days), this celebration kicks off with fireworks and is highlighted by a parade of Arabian horses pulling brightly decorated carriages. Participants are dressed in colorful Andalusian garb. Plazas rattle with castanets, and wine is dispensed by the gallon. For information, call tel. 95-221-34-45. Always the weekend before August 19.</p> <p>Feria de Agosto, Málaga. Málaga celebrates its major fiesta of the summer honoring the reconquest of their city on August 19, 1487, from the Moors. The Old Town turns into one big street party with lots of entertainment. Locals dress up in the traditional costumes, and food and wine flow freely. At night the celebration moves to the city's fairgrounds in the suburbs. Visit www.feria-de-malaga.es for more information. August 19.</p>
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ATTRACTIONS	<p>Spain has the second highest number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the world, with a total of 55, second only to Italy. There are six UNESCO World Heritage Sites within easy reach of Madrid:</p>
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- **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 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.

- **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.

- **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.

- **Avila:** Founded in the 11th century to protect the Spanish territories from the Moors, this 'City of Saints and Stones', the birthplace of St

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	<p>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:</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>In Andalucía there are another 5 sites:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cordoba - Granada - Seville - Donana Park - Renaissance Monumental Ensembles of Úbeda and Baeza.
<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 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>
<p>Beaches</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> <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>

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	<p>The South: Out of the many beaches lining both the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts, here are a couple that are easily accessible from Malaga:</p> <p>Playa de la Carihuela, Torremolinos: Even if the beach here is not among the world's greatest, you'll have a roaring good time on the sands of La Carihuela bordering the old fishing village of this wildly popular resort along the Costa del Sol. An expat population of Germans, Scandinavians, and Brits can be found playing volleyball or sunning themselves on the beige sands in skimpy suits. When you tire of the sands, a bevy of excellent seafood restaurants lines the waterfront. The beach has facilities for paragliding, windsurfing, water-skiing, and plain old sailing.</p> <p>El Fuerte and La Fontanilla, Marbella: On either side of the Costa del Sol's glossiest resort stretches the sands of these two good beaches, both famous and fashionable since the 1960s. The beaches are protected from the northerly winds by the Sierra Blanca, which allows the bathing season to extend from May to October. If you find the sands too crowded, you can also sample two of Marbella's other beaches, the Playa de la Bajadilla in the east and the amusingly named Playa de Venus, both of which lie between the resort's twin harbors. Many water-sports, including sailing and water-skiing, are possible from these beaches.</p>
<p>Wildlife</p>	<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. Cost: \$19</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. For further details on some of Catalonia's wonderful natural parks, see</p>

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	<p>www.parcscatalunya.net</p> <p>The National Park of Aigues Tortes and Estany Sant Maurici is in the Catalanian Pyrenees: 10,000 hectares of winding streams, lakes and fir-trimmed crags.</p> <p>Andalucia: There are a number of parks and wildlife refuges that enable visitors to see the natural side of Andalucía: Parque Natural de las Sierras de Cazorla, Segura y las Villas Parque Natural de la Sierra de Hornachuelos Parque Nacional de Sierra Nevada Parque Nacional de Doñana (a UNESCO World Heritage site)</p>
<p>Parks</p>	<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 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>Andalucia: Covering some 76,080 hectares, Cota de Doñana National Park is Spain's largest wildlife reserve and one of the continent's last great wildernesses. At an estuary of the River Guadalquivir, it is also one of the world's greatest wetland sites for migrating birds. Bird-watchers by the thousands flock here in spring when hundreds of flocks of breeding birds fly in to nest in the wetlands. In all, there are 300 different species of rare birds, along with colonies of storks, buzzards, kites, kestrels, and egrets, plus 33 species of mammals, 12 species of fish, and 18 species of reptiles. There have even been sightings of the almost-extinct Spanish imperial eagle. Mammals on the verge of extinction, including a rare lynx, also live here. Wild boar can be seen in the marismas (swamps). The park is also the home of more than 10 separate kinds of orange, tangerine, and citrus trees, an estimated 300,000 trees in total, many of them cultivated within the park hotel's sprawling, 1,000-hectare</p>

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	<p>farmlands.</p> <p>The best bird-watching base is the village of El Rocío on the northwestern edge of the marshes. The enveloping marshes and pinewoods here teem with honking wild geese and white storks. The Doñana Visitor Centre lies at La Rocina, less than 2km west of El Rocío. A footpath has been cut through the wetlands here, and you can walk its 3.5km daily from 9am to 2pm and 3 to 9pm. Free maps are provided. Along the way you might encounter such creatures as the red-crested pochard or the magnificent hoopoe, even flamingos and hundreds of singing nightingales.</p> <p>The Sierras Subbéticas Geopark is one of the new European UNESCO Geopark network and provides an exceptional access to the geology of the heart of the Bética Mountain Ranges in Andalucía: the lower-Guadalquivir lands of the External Zones domain. The landscape and geology of the Geopark are closely related; ridges are formed of hard limestone; valleys are created in areas underlain by softer argillaceous carbonates and other detrital sediments. The rocks, which range in age from the Jurassic to the Tertiary, were deposited approximately between 200 million years and 25 million years ago. The rocks of the Geopark are rich in fossils and are noted for their Mesozoic ammonites which are an extinct group of marine molluscs. The Geopark is internationally recognised as one of the most significant areas for the study of the evolution of this group of fossils</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>El Generalife, Granada: Exit from the Alhambra in Granada via the Puerta de la Justicia and then circumnavigate the Alhambra's southern foundations until you reach the gardens of the summer palace, where Paseo de los Cipreses quickly leads you to the main building of the</p>

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	<p>Generalife, built in the 13th century to overlook the Alhambra and set on 30 lush hectares.</p> <p>The sultans used to spend their summers in this palace (pronounced "heh-neh-rah-lee-feh"), safely locked away with their harems. Don't expect an Alhambra in miniature: The Generalife was always meant to be a retreat, even from the splendours of the Alhambra. Lying north of the Alhambra, this country estate of the Nasrid emirs was begun in the 13th century, but the palace and gardens have been much altered over the years. The palace is mainly noted for its beautiful courtyards, including Patio de Polo, where the visitors of yore would arrive on horseback. The highlight of the Generalife is its gardens, begun in the 13th century but much modified over the years. Originally, they contained orchards and pastures for domestic animals. Highlights include Escalera del Agua (The Water Staircase) with water flowing gently down. An enclosed Oriental garden, Patio de la Acequía, was constructed around a long pool, with rows of water jets making graceful arches above it. The Patio de la Sultana (also called the Patio de los Cipreses) was the secret rendezvous point for Zoraxda, wife of Sultan Abu Hasan, and her lover.</p>
<p>Caves</p>	<p>The Caves of Nerja are a series of caverns close to the town of Nerja in Andalusia. Stretching for almost 5 km the caverns are one of Spain's major tourist attractions. Concerts are regularly held in one of the chambers which form a natural amphitheatre. The caves were discovered on 12 January 1959 by a group of cavers, who entered through a narrow sink hole, known as "La Mina". This forms one of the two natural entrances to the cave system. A third entrance was created in 1960 to allow easy access for tourists. The cave is divided into two main parts known as Nerja I and Nerja II. Nerja I include the Show Galleries which are open to the public, with relatively easy access via a flight of stairs and concreted pathways to allow tourists to move about in the cavern without difficulty. Nerja II, which is not open to the public, comprises the Upper Gallery discovered in 1960 and the New Gallery discovered in 1969.</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</p>

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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 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 Mediterrani (Balcony of the Mediterranean), where the vistas are especially beautiful at sunset.

La Alhambra, Granada: One of Europe's greatest attractions, the stunningly beautiful and celebrated Calat Alhambra (Red Castle) is perhaps the most remarkable fortress ever constructed. Muslim architecture in Spain reached its apogee at this pleasure palace once occupied by Nasrid princes and their harems. Although later Moorish occupants turned the Alhambra into a lavish palace, it was originally constructed for defensive purposes on a rocky hilltop outcropping above the Darro River. The modern city of Granada was built across the river from the Alhambra, about 800 metres from its western foundations. When you first see the Alhambra, its somewhat somber exterior may surprise you. The true delights of this Moorish palace lie within. Tickets are sold in the office at the Entrada del Generalife y de la Alhambra. Enter through the incongruous 14th-century Puerta de la Justicia (Gateway of Justice). Most visitors don't need an expensive guide but will be content to stroll through the richly ornamented open-air rooms, with their lacelike walls and courtyards with fountains.

Mezquita de Córdoba: In the 8th century, this Mezquita (Great Mosque) became the crowning glory of Muslim architecture in the West. With its fantastic labyrinth of red-and-white candy-striped Moorish horseshoe arches, it remains one of the grandest attractions in Europe. Not even the Catholic cathedral placed in its center can destroy the impact of this "forest" of architectural pillars. Visit the phantasmagoric rows of columns and arches first, saving the florid cathedral for last. The caliph of Córdoba, Abd el-Rahman I, built this place of worship in 785. To do so, he razed an earlier Visigothic basilica, which itself had replaced a Roman temple. Initially, the Great Mosque covered 23,400 sq. m. The Mezquita was built in various stages, following an overall

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plan of a crenellated square perimeter enclosing El Patio de los Naranjos (Court of Orange Trees), which is one of the principal entrances to the mosque. This courtyard was redesigned following the Reconquista. Still visible are the irrigation channels dug by the Muslims. Puerta del Perdón (Gate of Forgiveness), on the north wall, is the former entrance into the mosque.

Before the Catholic takeover, the mosque had a total of 900 pillars. Remarkably, **856 pillars are still standing**. Their red and white peppermint stripes are formed in large part by white stone and redbrick voussoirs. The pillars are also built of onyx, granite, marble, and jasper, filling a total of 19 aisles. A second row of arches set above the first almost doubles the height of the ceiling. Some of the most interesting pillars came from the ancient Visigothic basilica. You can pick these out by the impressive carvings on their capitals. Since some of the pillars brought in were taller than others, they had to be sunk into the floor of the mosque. The oldest known pillar came from Egypt and dates from the reign of Amenophis IV.

In the very heart of the Mezquita lies the **Mihrab**, where the faithful gathered for ritual prayers. Bordered by Koranic sculptures and with carved stucco adorning its upper walls, the Mihrab was the holy sanctuary where the Koran was kept. It was also said to have another precious treasure: a bone from the arm of the prophet Muhammad. The bejeweled Koran was copied by the caliph's own hand and anointed with his blood. This sanctum is covered by a scallop-shaped dome, which is richly decorated with beautiful colored mosaics and gilded tiles. In this area you can see the Maksura, the enclosure reserved for the caliph and his entourage. This most sacred part of the architectural ensemble is roofed by a trio of ribbed domes resting on interweaving multifoil arches. One might call such florid and flamboyant architecture "Islamic baroque"; it features golden mosaics, arabesque, carvings, cupolas, palm-leaf motifs framed by Sufic script, and marble panels. The Byzantine mosaics, which have hundreds of pieces of tiny gold, glass, and ceramic tiles, were a gift of the 10th-century emperor of Constantinople. The frieze in gold and blue that runs all the way around the Mihrab lists the 99 names of Allah. Located in the Sacristy, next to the Mihrab, is the Treasury, displaying beautiful examples of Cordovan silver and gold artistry

In later years the addition of **Christian chapels** destroyed the architectural harmony of the Mezquita. At the far end of the mosque stands the Capilla Villaviciosa which was completed in 1371. The chapel features a stalactite ceiling and stunning plaster lacework. Also added was the Chapel Royal decorated in the 1200s with mudéjar stucco. Although the people of Córdoba rallied against the idea, Emperor Carlos V ordered that part of the mosque be torn down to

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	<p>make way for the Catedral, which disfigured the mosque. Later he regretted his decision, saying to his architects, "What you are building here can be found anywhere, but what you have destroyed exists nowhere."</p> <p>Catedral de Sevilla: The largest Gothic building in the world and the third-largest church in Europe (after St. Peter's in Rome and St. Paul's in London), the Catedral de Sevilla was designed by builders whose stated goal was that: "those who come after us will take us for madmen." Construction began in the late 1400s on the site of an ancient mosque and took centuries to complete. The cathedral claims to contain the remains of Columbus; his tomb is mounted on four statues. Works of art abound, many of them architectural, such as the 15th-century stained-glass windows, the iron screens (rejas) closing off the chapels, the elaborate 15th-century choir stalls, and the Gothic reredos above the main altar. During Corpus Christi and Immaculate Conception observances, altar boys with castanets dance in front of the high altar. In the Treasury are works by Goya, Murillo, and Zurbarán, and on the macabre side, a display of skulls. Note: Shorts and T-shirts are not allowed in the cathedral. After touring the dark interior, you'll emerge into the sunlight of the Patio of Orange Trees, with its fresh citrus scents and chirping birds.</p> <p>La Giralda, a Moorish tower next to the cathedral in Seville, is the city's most recognizable monument. Erected as a minaret in the 12th century, later additions include 16th-century bells. To climb it is to take the walk of a lifetime. There are no steps, but if you make it to the top of the seemingly endless ramp, you'll have a dazzling view of Seville. Entrance is through the cathedral.</p> <p>Malaga: The Moorish fortress of Alcazaba was built on the former site of Roman fortifications during the ninth century under King Badis of Granada. Towering over the Mediterranean, it has preserved the fine details of its Moorish architecture, as well as its typically Andalusian gardens and ponds. The Alcazaba is home to a small archaeological museum which features an interesting collection of prehistoric artifacts found in the caves of Nerja, as well as Phoenician mosaics and Roman sculptures. The Teatro Romano was discovered in 1951 at the foot of the Alcazaba, where it had remained buried underground for several centuries. The 16m-high theatre has a diameter of 31m and was built during the first century under the reign of Augustus.</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

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	<p>Menorca - The Canaries in the Atlantic off the north African coast, comprising Tenerife, Gran Canaria, Lanzarote, Fuerteventura, Gomera, La Palma and Hierro</p> <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	
Shopping	<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</p>

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	<p>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>Andalucia: Ceramics and Tiles: Throughout Andalucia, stores sell highly distinctive ceramics (each town or region has its own style) as well as azulejos (hand-painted tiles). For example, to suit the preferences of the many English expats who settled in and around Cadiz, florals and busy scenic designs became popular in this area. Many of these floral motifs, however, were rooted in Spanish cultural traditions from the 18th century. Other pieces have ancient geometric patterns inherited from the Arabs. Some wall plates are enameled and trimmed in 24-karat gold.</p> <p>Antiques: Many avid shoppers land in Andalusia and go on shopping binges for antiques and accessories. Seville in particular offers antique hunters some rare possibilities. There is a wide range of dealers throughout the province; you'll often find them in some of the smaller villages, with the stores marked just by a little sign. Many items purchased in these shops are small decorative pieces that can be shipped home easily. Some of the most popular "antiques" purchased in Andalusia are old posters, many from the 1800s. Posters advertising the famous Andalusian fairs or else the well-attended corridas (bullfights) sell the most copies.</p> <p>Guitars: In the land of flamenco, guitars are highly prized by visitors. Artisans in Granada turn out top-quality, custom-made guitars. Of course, you can purchase ready-made guitars a lot more cheaply. You may like to stroll Calle Cuesta de Gomez, a narrow and sloping street uphill from the Alhambra in Granada. Artisans along this street turn out some of the world's finest instruments. Many of their guitars end up in the possession of famed musicians.</p> <p>Marquetry: Marquetry has been a famous product of Granada since the Muslim empire. Artisans still make furniture and other items inlaid with ivory and colored woods in the Moorish design. Inlaid boxes are a particularly good item to take home as gifts, and they become lasting souvenirs. Throughout Granada, especially in the Albaicin, which is a virtual North African souk (marketplace), you will see shop after shop hawking this extremely delicate work.</p>
Markets	Madrid: El Rastro is Madrid's largest flea market, only open on Sunday mornings, featuring rows upon rows of private vendors selling a variety

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	<p>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>Seville: "Los Hippies" sounds like something from the 1960s, but it actually is what Seville bargain hunters call their flea-market locations. On Wednesday and Thursday, the market takes place at Plaza Magdalena and Calle Rioja, on Friday at Calle Feria and Calle Alameda, and on Saturday at La Plaza del Duque. Almost anything is for sale, from antiques (or faux antiques), lots and lots of junk, even some Cordovan leather goods, and clothes that John Lennon might have worn way back when. There are no set hours, but it's best to go before noon.</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 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</p>

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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.

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.

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.

The fun of nightlife in **Málaga** is just wandering, although there are a few standout destinations. More than just about any other city in the region, Málaga offers night owls the chance to stroll a labyrinth of inner-city streets, drinking wine at any convenient *tasca* and talking with friends and new acquaintances.

Start out along the town's main thoroughfare, **Calle Larios**, adjacent to the city's port. Off Calle Larios, you can gravitate to any of the *tascas*, discos, and pubs lining the edges of the Calle Granada. Particularly fun and atmospheric is **La Posada**, Calle Granada 33 (tel. 95-221-70-69). If you want to eat well and cheaply, do as the locals do and head for the taverns. Don't expect a refined experience, but the food is some of the most enjoyable and least expensive in Málaga. You can easily fill up on two or three orders of *tapas* because portions are extremely generous. The entrance to **Bar Logüeno**, Marín García 9 (tel. 95-222-30-48), is behind a wrought-iron-and-glass door. It leads into a stucco-lined room decorated in a local tavern style -- enough hams, bouquets of garlic, beer kegs, and sausages to feed a village for a week.

Nearby, an all-pedestrian street, **Calle Compagnía**, and a square, the Plaza Uncibaj, are home to simpler *tascas*. Completely unpretentious (and in some cases without any discernable name), they serve glasses of wine and *tapas* similar to those available from their neighbors.

A popular **dance bar is Carma**, Calle Luis de Velázquez 5 (no phone), and Cosa Nuestra, Calle Las Lazcano 5. Don't even think of heading there before 11pm, but the music will probably continue till at least 4am. The main theatre in the province is **Teatro Cervantes**, Ramos Marin s/n (www.teatrocervantes.es), which opened its doors in the second half of

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	<p>the 19th century. This is an elegant yet austere building. Its programs include plays in Spanish, but also a number of concerts and flamenco entertainment of interest to all. The major performances of the Málaga Symphony Orchestra are staged here in winter.</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>

<p>CUISINE</p>	<p>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</p> <p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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. <p>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,</p>
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	<p>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.</p> <p>Andalucia: The Romans taught the Andalusians how to cultivate wheat and vines and used the fish from the seas to produce the best "garum" in the empire. The Arabs taught the Andalusians how to grow fruit and vegetables. They used irrigation systems and improved the cultivation of olive trees and the production of oil. Furthermore, the Greeks, Phoenicians, Carthaginians and Visigoths left their mark on the art, science, culture and gastronomy of Andalusia.</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! 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>Here are some of the many Andalusian special dishes: Potato soup; Cordoban-style swordfish; Small kebabs; Oxtail; Andalusian stew; Stuffed tuna; Sevillian-style duck; Crispy shrimp pancakes; 'Huevos a la flamenca'; Andalusian fried fish; 'Tocinillo de cielo' (pudding made with egg yolks and syrup); Gazpacho</p>
<p>Drinks</p>	<p>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</p>

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Seville.

Wine - Rioja from the province of La Rioja adjoining Navarra is by far the best and most popular quality vino tinto, followed by Ribera del Duero from nearby Valladolid. Rueda (Valladolid again), Penedès (Cataluña), and the expensive Albariño (Galicia) are the favorite whites. Though the capital has its own regional Vinos de Madrid - modest wines but admirable for quaffing - these are still sadly undervalued and struggling to find a niche. You may find them in the cave bars behind the Plaza Mayor.

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!

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.

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.

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.

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

Catalonia Vineyard Tour

The beauty of its wine cellar and the surroundings make the **Abadal**

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	<p>Vineyards a place you can't miss. It will captivate you with its history, the identity of its wines and the beauty of its dense forests and lush vineyards, spotted with peculiar vineyard huts built in the dry stone technique. The modern technology of its winery combines harmoniously with the 12th century country house and the museum, which exhibits a collection of tools formerly used in the winemaking process, as well as vehicles and medieval carriages. Tasting of Abadal wines, with the Picapoll grape variety predominating as the autochthonous variety from the Bages region. Wine tasting courses and specialised workshops.</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 Bocaíto (tel. 91-532-12-19). Cited as a favorite snack 'n' wine locale by Oscar-winning cineaste Pedro Almodóvar, the stylish little Bocaíto, 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 salmonetes (red mullet) to pescaítos (small fried fish).</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Barcelona</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Try Can Costa, Passeig de Joan de Borbón (tel. 93-221-59-03). It's</p>

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	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>For the best traditional Catalan Cuisine try Via Veneto which exudes old-fashioned class and serves up some of the finest Catalan cooking in the land. Some of the serving methods, such as the sterling silver duck press, seem to belong to another century.</p> <p>Andalucia: here are some recommendations in the South: El Faro del Puerto - El Puerto de Santa María (Cadiz) La Alquería (H. Hacienda Benazuza) - Sanlúcar la Mayor (Seville) La Meridiana - Marbella (Malaga) Juanito - Baeza (Jaén) La Finca (H. La Bobadilla) - Loja (Granada)</p>
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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	<p>Spanish Tourism Board website: www.spain.info</p> <p>Online Brochures: http://srv.tourspain.es/ExpendedorFolletosWeb/Catalogo.aspx?idioma=en-GB&mercado=INTERNACIONAL_EN</p> <p>Connect with Spain on facebook: https://www.facebook.com/SeeSpain</p> <p>Follow Spain on Twitter: https://twitter.com/spain</p>

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Personal Experience	<p>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:</p> <p>http://www.chrisrobinsontravelshow.ca/images/upload/ChrisFavouriteHotels.pdf and http://www.chrisrobinsontravelshow.ca/images/upload/ChrisFavouriteHotels.pdf</p> <p>I have stayed in ten Paradors and recommend every one of them:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- 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 Siguenza, 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)- 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)
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<p>INSIGHT VACATIONS</p>	<p>Insight Vacations offer carefully curated itineraries with the ideal balance of included sightseeing and leisure time. Travel in comfort in a smaller group of maximum 40 in a luxury coach. You can relax in the care of your knowledgeable tour director, who is the expert in the region and your “traveling concierge”. There are plenty of opportunities to engage with the local people and artisan producers so you truly experience the destination, its history and culture. Plus you will enjoy memorable dining highlights and local restaurants.</p> <p>The 10 day “Highlights of Spain” escorted journey is true to its name with all the high points of this fascinating country; the Alhambra in Granada, the Modernist architecture of Barcelona, Madrid’s Prado Museum, the Andalusian capital of Seville and Cordoba’s Mezquita to name but a few.</p> <p>Insight Vacations is the expert for Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean, visiting all but one of the independent states in these regions and covering more of Europe than any other tour operator. Insight Vacations also offers the same legendary high standards and carefully curated itineraries in North America, India and Nepal.</p> <p>Insight’s escorted journeys are designed with care and an unwavering commitment to exceeding guests’ expectations. They know that today’s traveller seeks to connect with their vacation destination in an intensely personal and interactive way. They’ve transformed their tours to address this desire by adding a unique collection of exceptional local experiences and magnificent new itineraries that their guests will never forget.</p>
<p>What makes Insight Different?</p>	<p>The Insight Vacations difference:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carefully curated itineraries: ideal balance of included sightseeing and leisure time • Knowledgeable tour directors: Experts in their regions and act as ‘travelling concierge’ • Smaller group sizes: Luxury coaches have been reconfigured to seat a maximum of 40 passengers • Authentic experiences: They create opportunities for guests to engage with local people and artisan producers to truly experience the destination, its history and culture • Signature Dining and Dine-Around Evenings: They create a variety of memorable highlight evenings. Dine-Around evenings allow guests to choose from a selection of local restaurants
<p>Insight Touring Styles 2014</p>	<p>Insight Vacations premium tours offer you the chance to experience Europe’s finest cities, sights, hotels and culinary delights. Whether you</p>

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	<p>want to explore Europe at a leisurely pace, experience as much as possible or get off the beaten track, Insight Vacations offers a complete range of five touring itineraries to suit all holiday dreams.</p> <p>Discovery Journeys are designed to provide a balanced 'snapshot' of several countries in one itinerary.</p> <p>Regional Experiences are for those seeking to focus on a specific region or country.</p> <p>Easy Pace contain predominately three or four nights in each city centre for exploring at leisure.</p> <p>Country Roads visit all the main sights but also take you off the beaten track;</p> <p>Gold Luxury is an exceptional range of uniquely tailored deluxe tours. You'll appreciate luxury hotels, dine in authentic restaurants and enjoy leisurely days with premium included sightseeing. These 7 itineraries are an entirely new perspective on classical journeys..</p>
<p>History of Insight Vacations</p>	<p>In 1978, its first year, the company had a handful of staff in London and carried just 5700 passengers. Today, Insight has a team of professionals throughout the world, plays host to over 100,000 guests per year and has offices in the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa , Singapore and the UK. The company has also appointed specialist agents in Argentina, Brazil, Mauritius, India, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia, Korea, Taiwan and China.</p> <p>Insight has achieved many important Tour Operator 'Firsts' over the years including, in 1983, being the first scheduled tour operator to win 'the Queen's Award for Export Achievement' from Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II.</p> <p>Rediscovering a Golden Age - Insight invites you to rediscover the Golden Age of European Travel</p> <p>Group touring in Europe was started in 1841 by an Englishman, Thomas Cook, when he took a party from Leicester to Loughborough, a grand journey of 18kms and back! In the golden age of touring that followed, those early travellers expected and received personal service, well planned itineraries, good quality, well located hotels and enjoyed the benefit of travelling in small select friendly groups - with no attention to detail spared. Since then, much has changed, not all for the better!</p>

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	In this fast paced world of the 21st century, most of these desirable touring principles have been forgotten - but not by Insight. They are justifiably proud of their commitment to give you that something 'extra' when you travel with them, and for 2014 they are featuring the very best.
Who goes on an Insight Vacation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Average age is 47 - Core over 55 - Baby boomers - free time and central hotels are important - 65% are past Cruise vacationers – Insight is like Land Cruising - Discerning clients - 5% are single - no supplement - Average of two Honeymooners per Europe Tour - More Families - discounts and Super Savers are popular - Guests are often “time poor, not money poor”
New Tours for 2014	There are 13 new tours for 2014 including WW1 Battlefields, Malta, Greek Islands, Spanish Heritage, Eastern Europe, Croatia and even Ukraine, Moldova and Crimea!
2014 Insight Brochures	Insight has five different brochure available in 2014: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Europe - USA and Canada - Eastern Med - India and Nepal - Gold Luxury
2014 Travel Show Prize – Highlights of Spain	<p>Highlights of Spain - 10 day tour from \$2125</p> <p>True to its name, you'll find only the highlights here; the Alhambra, the Modernist architecture of Barcelona, Madrid's Prado Museum, the Andalusian capital of Seville and Cordoba's Mezquita to name but a few.</p> <p>Itinerary</p> <p>Day 1 - Depart Canada</p> <p>Day 2 - Welcome to Barcelona Airport transfers depart from Barcelona Airport for the tour hotel at 09:30 & 12:30. Later, join your Tour Director for a Welcome Reception and the chance to mingle over a pleasant evening of dinner and wine. Hotel: Meliá Barcelona Sarrià Meals: Welcome Dinner</p> <p>Day 3 - Barcelona - The City of Gaudi After a restful night's sleep, join a local expert in the Plaça Nova in the heart of Barcelona's Gothic quarter. Walk through the Roman gate to explore the narrow lanes and old squares behind the cathedral. Now</p>

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drive by the lively Rambla and along the Passeig de Gràcia, adorned with elegant wroughtiron street lamps and some of the most flamboyant Modernist buildings. Continue through the Eixample district to stand beneath the soaring facade of Gaudi's extraordinary, unfinished Sagrada Familia church. A mix of Gothic spires, fruity mosaics and sinuous sculpture - it defies belief! The afternoon is at leisure.

Hotel: Meliá Barcelona Sarrià

Meals: Buffet Breakfast

Day 4 - Valencia & the Orange Blossom Coast

Follow the sunny Costa Dorada, past the rice fields of the Ebro Delta to stop in Peñíscola. Explore the lanes and white-walled cottages clustered around the sea-lapped castle, used in the film El Cid. Now through the famous orange groves to Valencia where you see the ultra modern Centre of Arts and Sciences. Circumnavigate the old town, past the City Gates of Serranos and Quart to reach your central hotel. Maybe take a stroll to the castellated Lonja (Silk Exchange) or the Cathedral with its octagonal bell tower. Valencia is home to one of the world's greatest dishes. Nowhere, but nowhere, will you eat better paella! Tonight, learn the authentic recipe in a fun cookery demonstration and savour the flavours of this classic dish for dinner!

Hotel: Husa Reina Victoria, Valencia

Meals: Buffet Breakfast / Dinner

Day 5 - Granada & the Alhambra, a Paradise on Earth

Heading along the Costa Blanca, Benidorm suddenly rises like Manhattan on the Mediterranean. Continue past the castle at Lorca and troglodyte dwellings hollowed out of the soft rock at Purullena. Drive along the Sierra Nevada, with magnificent mountain views and over the Mora Pass to reach glorious Granada. Overlooking the town, stands one of the most remarkable fortresses ever built, the Alhambra. Explore this exquisite palace; a fantasy of stone cut lace, arabesque gardens and fountains, built as a citadel by the Moors in the 13th century. Also stroll through the exotic water gardens of the Generalife, the Royal summer residence.

Hotel: Vincci Albayzin, Granada

Meals: Buffet Breakfast / Dinner

Day 6 - Seville & the Flavours of Andalucía

This morning there is time, if you wish, to explore the labyrinthine Albaicin quarter - from the church of St Nicholas, there is one of the most exquisite views of the Alhambra. Then drive past gleaming white villages and olive groves that stretch as far as the eye can see to Seville. This exquisite capital of Andalucía is simply one of Spain's most

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charming jewels. Tonight enjoy the flavours of Andalucía and share in the passion of Spain's most fiery region at a Flamenco show and dinner.
Hotel: Ayre, Seville
Meals: Buffet Breakfast / Highlight Dinner

Day 7 - Seville, the City of Carmen

Seville has a distinctive character and presence best revealed by a local expert. During your stay, visit the Plaza de España in Maria Louisa Park. Then stroll through the fashionable Santa Cruz Quarter with its flower decked wrought-iron balconies. Emerge by the Alcazar - a Moorish fantasy in stone set in richly scented gardens. Visit the massive cathedral, burial place of Christopher Columbus and enriched with the spoils of the New World. The energetic can climb the Giralda Tower, former minaret of the Great Mosque and enjoy views over the city. This afternoon is at leisure.
Hotel: Ayre, Seville
Meals: Buffet Breakfast

Day 8 - Cordoba, the Mezquita and Across the Plains of La Mancha to Madrid

Set off early along the Guadalquivir valley, past villages and towns studded with Moorish towers and fortresses. Stop in the perfectly preserved Moorish city of Cordoba. Cross the famous 2000-year-old bridge and meet a local historian for a visit to the magnificent Mezquita, an 8th century mosque with a Christian church built inside it. Afterwards, there is free time to stroll through the narrow streets of the Old Jewish Quarter. Follow in the footsteps of Don Quixote now as you travel through the Mancha vineyards to the famous wine-centre of Valdepeñas, its roads lined with bodegas (wine-cellars). Learn about the wines that make this region so famous and taste their robust flavours. Move on to the capital of Madrid.
Hotel: Hesperia Madrid
Meals: Buffet Breakfast

Day 9 - Madrid of the Bourbons

The next morning, join a local expert for a sightseeing tour along the noble avenues. Drive by the statue of Cervantes' fictional hero, Don Quixote in the Plaza de España. Continue past the Cibeles Fountain and the Parliament and cross the Puerta del Sol. Visit the Prado Museum, a rose coloured palace housing works by Botticelli, Velázquez, Goya, Titian, Rubens and others. Take time out to relax at a café or shop in the trendy boutiques. In the evening, join a farewell Celebration Dinner in the heart of town, complete with wine and music.
Hotel: Hesperia Madrid

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	<p>Meals: Buffet Breakfast / Celebration Dinner</p> <p>Day 10 - Return to Canada Board your onward flights taking home memories and friendships that will last a lifetime.</p> <p>Signature Experiences and Dining</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Granada: The Alhambra Palace is an arabesque fantasy in stone, the ultimate in Muslim architecture, complemented by the rich scented Gardens of the Generalife. - Seville: From the Moorish Pati de los Naranjos, step inside the Cathedral, past the altarpiece, dripping with gold to the Tomb of Columbus, held aloft by four kings. - Cordoba: Cross the Roman Bridge and explore the Mezquita's forest of horseshoe arches with a local expert. - Valdepeñas: The light-red wines upon which the reputation of Valdepenas was founded are slowly giving way to more-serious reds. Enjoy a delicious exploration of these wines, their robust flavours and absorbing history. - Madrid: Witness the world's finest collection of Spanish painting plus an impressive foreign collection as you tour the Prado Museum with an expert art historian. - Valencia: Paella is a classic rice course which hails from Valencia and is much loved the world over. Join a qualified chef for a delicious culinary introduction to Valencian culture and their signature dish. - Seville: Over a lavish meal with wine, beyond your dimly lit table, the stage suddenly erupts with the unmistakable singing, clapping and throbbing guitars of Flamenco. - Madrid: Honest culinary traditions and a fiesta of fresh ingredients are the hallmarks of your end-of-tour Spanish Celebration Dinner. The perfect accompaniment to good conversation and a chilled glass of beer or wine.
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<p>Singles</p>	<p>If you wish to share with another tour member you can advise Insight Vacations at the time of booking. Insight believes that traveling solo doesn't have to cost you more. They will try to match you with someone of the same sex in order to avoid having to pay the single supplement. If they are not able to provide a suitable roommate, they will provide a single room at no extra cost.</p>
<p>Tour Director</p>	<p>This is Insight's appointed tour escort who manages your entire trip, and is responsible to see that your vacation runs smoothly. He or she travels with you, coordinating your day-to-day itinerary, hotel check-in and language translation; as well as giving practical advice on everything from 'do's and don'ts' to the best restaurants and sights.</p>

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Hotels	<p>All Insight hotels are carefully selected to be appropriate for your tour and for the destination. They are mainly First Class, Superior First Class and Deluxe standard, but some will be selected because they particularly reflect the region or country. Even in the more remote areas such as the Scottish Highlands and islands or countryside areas around Europe, Insight chooses from the best touring hotels available. It's worth remembering that room sizes in Europe, UK & Ireland tend to be smaller than in many areas of the world, and can vary within the same hotel, particularly in older, character hotels.</p>
Meals	<p>Insight tours feature an abundance of dining experiences. You'll enjoy included three course Table d'hôte dinners where we arrange the ideal complement of local foods such as soups and salads, pasta, paella, fish, chicken or various meats, plus appetizing desserts and coffee or tea.</p> <p>On some tours Insight features a 'Dine-Around Evening' with a choice of two or three restaurants. Your Tour Director will advise you of each menu so you can pre-select and make your reservation. Even if your first choice is unavailable you will enjoy any of the other delicious options also with wine, beer or soft-drinks.</p> <p>Other tours may offer a 'Highlight Dinner' at a restaurant, which usually features a menu typical of the region, similarly with wine, beer or soft-drinks.</p> <p>Hearty breakfasts are always included, from delicious traditional full-cooked breakfasts in Britain and Ireland to substantial buffets or continental style breakfasts as is the usual custom throughout Europe. In North America breakfast will consist of a full American breakfast. Should you require special dietary menus your tour director can arrange these for you when informed in advance.</p>
Luggage	<p>Handling is included for one suitcase per person.</p>
Tipping	<p>On an Insight Vacation, some gratuities are included in the price of your trip: baggage handling, meal service for all meals listed in the tour itinerary, and hotel service charge. Room service, however, is not included in the tour price.</p> <p>Tipping is a widespread practice in Europe and is a customary way of acknowledging service. Here are some guidelines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taxi fare, on meter 10-15% Restaurant, total bill 10-15% Tour Director €4.00 per person per day Motor-coach Driver €2.50 per person per day Local Sightseeing Guide €1.00
Coaches	<p>Insight's coaches are safe and comfortable and the drivers are highly experienced professionals. To give each passenger an equal</p>

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	<p>opportunity, they rotate seats daily. A non-smoking policy is in place. Regular rest stops are provided so that you can stretch your legs, and allow passengers a smoke.</p>
Passports	<p>The Chris Robinson Travel Show always advises listeners to carry their passport with them at all times. This ensures against loss or theft in hotels. For added protection, keep a photocopy of your passport in your suitcase. Hotels are sometimes required to hold your passport in order to comply with local regulations.</p>
Phone Cards	<p>Almost all hotels will add a service charge to the cost of any phone calls you make from your room. This charge can be high, especially for international calls. It is always cheaper to use public telephones (pay phones) or an international calling service such as EKit, allowing you to save up to 70% on international calls. Information on Ekit global phone cards will be sent with your tour documentation from Insight. Your tour director will also advise you how to use the telephone if you are unsure.</p>
Videos	<p>There are many informative and visually stunning videos covering the whole range of Insight Vacations tours available to view on their website: http://www.insightvacations.com/ca/video.php</p>
Sustainable Travel	<p>Protecting the environment and the people and places Insight visit is a top priority for the company. They want to help ensure these remain for future generations to enjoy and are committed to ensuring they minimize the environmental impact of their own operations around the world.</p> <p>Insight's Responsibility</p> <p>Every time we travel, whether by car, train, plane or coach, we are burning fossil fuels and contributing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. And while there are many ways to travel while on holiday, by choosing an Insight escorted tour, you are opting for one of the most environmentally friendly ways to go. Their website has a grid that shows you the amount of carbon dioxide emitted per km for a passenger traveling on various forms of transport which clearly shows coach transport as emitting significantly less carbon dioxide than other forms of transport. It's over five times more efficient than car travel for instance. With carbon dioxide being one of the main causes of global warming, it's good to know that buying an escorted tour holiday is a better way to travel.</p> <p>They are reducing the carbon footprints and environmental impact of their offices by introducing recycling, energy reduction and waste minimisation projects as well as supporting local community projects where they live and work. Insight staff are involved in making a difference and starting in 2008 they are encouraging staff to spend two working days a year volunteering for charitable projects.</p>

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	<p>Conservation Foundation: To demonstrate commitment and ongoing investment, Insight are supporting and contributing to The Leading Travel Companies of the World Conservation Foundation www.tlwc.com , a not-for-profit organisation that will invest in supporting long term sustainable tourism.</p> <p>The Insight group of companies is donating US\$1 million per year to fund much-needed conservation, community and sustainable tourism projects that will create a better world for future generations to enjoy. To ensure every dollar goes to people and places in need, each project is carefully vetted by the Foundation's Members of the Board.</p>
<p>2014 Deals</p>	<p>Pay in full before January 15, 2014 and save 10% Pay in full before March 31, 2014 and save 7.5% Past travellers receive a 5% discount</p>
<p>Contacts</p>	<p>Address: Insight Vacations, 33 Kern Rd, Toronto, Ontario M3B 1S9 Website: www.insightvacations.com There is a very useful travellers' forum on the website which gives you an excellent feel for what these vacations are all about.</p> <p>Reservations: see your local travel agent; there is also a list of travel agents on the Insight website</p> <p>Brochures: available through your local travel agent or order them on the website at https://www.insightvacations.com/ca/brochures.php ; the brochures are also available on the website as downloadable e-brochures.</p> <p>Telephone: 1-866-747-8120 Email: info@insightvacations.ca Website: www.insightvacations.com www.Facebook.com/insightvacations www.twitter.com/insightvacation www.pinterest.com/insightvacation www.insightvacations.com/travelforum</p>

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