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The Alhambra - Granada

Photos by Circa Tours

## *Alluring Spain*

Barcelona - Madrid - Andalusia  
(15 days - 13 nights)

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# SAMPLE ITINERARY

This is an example of a possible itinerary. It can be resized, reorganized and customized to fit your interests, budget and schedule. It can also be combined with other tours.

## HIGHLIGHTS (15 days - 13 nights)

DAY	ACTIVITIES	NIGHT
1	Leave U.S.	
2	Arrive in <b>Barcelona</b> . Airport transfer. At leisure	Barcelona
3	Full-day city guided tour	Barcelona
4	Hop on/off bus. Self-guided visits	Barcelona
5	Guided day tour to <b>Girona</b> and Dali museum in <b>Figueres</b>	Barcelona
6	High-speed train to <b>Madrid</b> . Private walking tour	Madrid
7	Morning panoramic guided city tour. Afternoon self-guided visit of museums	Madrid
8	Guided day tour to <b>Toledo</b>	Madrid
9	Self-guided visits of Madrid	Madrid
10	High-speed train to <b>Cordoba</b> . Private walking tour	Cordoba
11	Train to <b>Granada</b> . Afternoon self-guided visits	Granada
12	Morning guided tour of the <b>Alhambra</b> . Afternoon self-guided visits	Granada
13	Train to <b>Seville</b> . Private walking tour	Seville
14	Hop on/off bus. Self-guided visits of the city. Evening <b>Flamenco</b> show	Seville
15	Private airport transfer. Return to U.S.	

## ITINERARY (for more options, see our "Spain Highlights")

**Day 1:** Leave the U.S.

**Day 2:** After your private chauffeur picks you up at the airport, settle into your hotel and relax after your flight or start exploring the city on your own.

**Day 3:** This morning, start discovering the vibrant, world-class city of **Barcelona** with the "Classic Tour". This tour gives you a quick overview of the highlights: Plaza de Catalunya, Via Laietana, the Cathedral and its cloister, the Gothic Quarter, Plaza Sant Jaume (Generalitat and Town Hall). Then on to Villa Olimpica (residential complex for the 1992 Olympic games) and Port Olympic. Next, ascend Montjuïc Mountain, with panoramic views over the city and the harbor. Tour the Olympic Stadium, Palau Sant Jordi and the Calatrava-designed radio and television tower. Visit Poble Espanyol (Spanish Village) with the faithful reproductions of typical architectural styles around Spain.



The "Artistic Tour" is on the schedule for the afternoon: Barcelona is the capital of the Modernista style of architecture and the place where the famous Catalan architect, Antonio Gaudí, lived and worked. On this panoramic tour along Passeig de Gràcia, you will see some of his most famous achievements: Casa Batlló and Casa Milà, also known as "La Pedrera". Then take a stroll around Parc Güell, a large public park and another flashy manifestation of Gaudí's creative genius. Next, admire the cathedral of la Sagrada Família, Gaudí's masterpiece, still under construction. On to Santa Maria del Mar, a magnificent Gothic church. The tour ends at the Picasso Museum which you can visit on your own (closed on Mondays).



**Day 4:** With your handy hop on/off bus tickets, continue your exploration of Barcelona on your own today. The bus lines going around the city will take you to the major sites, so you can explore the city and its monuments in more depth at your own pace.

**Day 5:** Today you're off on a full-day trip to **Girona** and the Dali Museum in **Figueres**. Guided walking tour of Girona, a city rich in heritage with one of Europe's best-preserved Jewish quarters. Then, visit Figueres with its surrealist Teatre-Museu Dalí and "Dalí Joies" a wonderful collection of extravagant jewelry created by the famous artist.

**Day 6:** Hop on the smooth riding high-speed train to **Madrid** this morning. Relax and enjoy the scenery. Upon arrival, meet your personal private guide for a leisurely walking tour of the Royal Palace and some of the surrounding Old Madrid. The **Royal Palace** is one of the most popular attractions in Madrid. This elegant building is one of Europe's greatest palaces, in close competition with the likes of Versailles in Paris, Schonbrunn in Vienna and the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg. It was built in the 1700s by King Philip V, the grandson of Louis XIV. With over 2,000 rooms - only a handful of which can be visited, of course - it is full of sumptuous interiors: luxurious tapestries, priceless porcelain, elegant furniture and more. (The palace is still used for official state receptions, so it is sometimes closed to the public.)

**Day 7:** Get an overall feel for the city this morning on a half-day panoramic tour. Ride through the old Hapsburg district with its Renaissance and Baroque buildings at Puerta del Sol, Plaza Mayor and Plaza de la Villa. Panoramic tour of the Madrid of the Bourbon kings, the Royal Palace, the Cibeles and Neptune Fountains and the Puerta de Alcalá. Then on to admire the Madrid of José Bonaparte in the 19th century, with the elegant Plaza de Oriente and the Prado Museum. Next is contemporary Madrid with La Gran Vía, the district of Salamanca, Plaza de Castilla, Parque del Oeste, the University Campus, and commercial areas of modern Madrid. Finally, two signature pieces: the Las Ventas Bullring and the Santiago Bernabéu Football Stadium.

The afternoon is on your own to explore museums, among other possibilities. The **Prado Museum** is one of Europe's top museums, and it is also one of Madrid's best attractions. Built in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century in Neoclassical style, it emphasizes Spanish art up to the 19th century. Goya's *El Tres de Mayo*, Velazquez's *Las Meninas*, and El Greco's *Adoracion de los Pastores* (*the Adoration of the Shepherds*) are some of the most famous pieces on display, but there are many more artists represented: Ribera, Murillo, and Zurbaran, to name a few. There is a substantial collection of Dutch and Italian masters as well. The museum is closed on Mondays.



The **Reina Sofia Museum** occupies an 18th-century building that has been renovated in a modern, avant-garde style by architect Jean Nouvel. As a modern art museum, it houses treasures of contemporary Spanish art such as works by Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dali, Juan Miro and many more. Since 1992, it has been the home of Guernica, Picasso's famed work depicting the 1937 Civil War bombing of a small Basque village by the German air force. This is a very dramatic painting and, as such, a major draw for history and modern art enthusiasts. The museum is closed on Tuesdays.

The **Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum** displays over 600 works of art ranging from medieval to modern pieces, giving the viewer a chance to enjoy an overall understanding of the history of Western art. The collection includes world-class examples of Italian, Flemish, Renaissance, Baroque, Impressionist, and even 20th-century American paintings. The Thyssen's more "human-size" display is a fine complement to the Prado's massive collection. The museum is closed on Mondays.



**Day 8: Toledo** is on the schedule today. This charming "city-museum," located 50 miles south of Madrid, is one of the oldest cities in Europe. It was founded by the Romans in 200 BC. In the 6th century AD the Visigoths chose it as the capital of Spain. Today, it is the flourishing economic center of the Castilla La Mancha region. Toledo is known as "the city of the three cultures" and "the capital of universal tolerance" because for centuries, the religious tolerance of the Moors allowed Christians, Muslims and Jews to co-exist in peace and mutual respect. Its buildings include almost all the architectural styles Spanish history has produced (Gothic, Arabic, Mudejar, Renaissance and Baroque).

The great 16<sup>th</sup>-century painter El Greco lived there. It is an easy day trip from Madrid, and with such rich cultural heritage, it attracts lots of visitors every day.

**Day 9:** Discover more of Madrid on your own today. Here are a few highlights:

One would not conceive of going to Madrid without a stroll around the cobble-stoned **Plaza Mayor** and down the narrow streets of the nearby old section of the city. Built in 1619 and once the site of public executions and bullfights, the plaza is the heart of the city. It is a quiet, pedestrian-only enclosed square with ancient arcades surrounded on all four sides by restaurants, bars and shops. Stop for refreshment at one of the outdoor cafes and watch the world go by while listening to the melodic tunes of the street musicians.



Other places of interest:

- **Retiro Park.** A few blocks east of the Prado Museum, a 300-acre park good for strolling, picnicking or boating on the lake.
- **Botanical Gardens** with rare plants and trees, next to the Prado Museum.
- **Sorolla Museum.** The house of famous painter Joaquin Sorolla (1863-1923) with some of his luminous paintings and portraits.
- **Chapel of San Antonio de la Florida.** Francisco Goya's tomb with some of his beautiful frescoes painted on the ceiling of the cupola.
- **Alcalá de Henares,** birthplace of famous author Miguel de Cervantes, only a short train ride from Madrid.

**Day 10:** Back on the high-speed train this morning for a short 2-hour ride to **Cordoba.** Then, meet your private guide for a walking tour of La Mezquita, the Alcazar and the old quarter.



**Cordoba** is a medium-sized city on the Guadalquivir River in Andalusia (southern Spain). It was founded in Roman times and later became the capital of the Caliphate of Córdoba, which governed almost all of the Iberian peninsula. It has been estimated that in the latter half of the 10th century Cordoba, with up to 500,000 inhabitants, was the most populated city in Europe and possibly in the world. It was known as an advanced cultural and economic center. In 1236 it was captured from the Moors by King Ferdinand III during the Spanish *Reconquista*.

**La Mezquita** is a Roman Catholic cathedral originally built as a mosque on the site of what previously had been a Visigothic Christian church. In 784, Emir Abd ar-Rahman I started rebuilding the earlier Visigothic church as a mosque, a process which continued for two centuries. After the capture of Cordoba in 1236, the mosque was turned into a church, with a Gothic cathedral inserted into the center of the large Moorish building. Under Charles V, a Renaissance nave was added in the middle of the structure. Artisans and architects continued to add to the existing structure until the late 18th century.

Today, you can really feel the centuries of history as you walk beneath the giant arches of various styles, formed by hundreds of columns of jasper, onyx, marble and granite.

Near the Mezquita on the banks of the Guadalquivir River, is the **Alcázar de los Reyes Cristianos** ("Palace of the Christian Monarchs"). The fortress served as one of the primary residences of Queen Isabella of Castile and her husband King Ferdinand II of Aragon in the 15th century. The two monarchs also used the Alcázar for one of the first permanent tribunals of the Spanish Inquisition and as a headquarters for their campaign against the Nasrid dynasty in Granada, the last remaining Moorish kingdom in the Iberian Peninsula. In 1492, the monarchs met Christopher Columbus in the Alcázar before his first voyage to the Americas. Napoleon Bonaparte used the Alcázar as a garrison in 1810, after which it was turned into a prison.



**The Synagogue,** located in the Jewish Quarter of Córdoba, was built in the Mudejar style in 1315. After the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, the building was



devoted to various functions including a hospital, a chapel for shoemakers and a nursery school, but it retains its original character. It was declared a National Monument in 1885.

Other places of interest:

- **Old City Patios.** Private Andalusian courtyards decorated with flowers.
- **Calahorra Tower** with its Museum of Three Cultures (Jewish, Christian and Muslim)

**Day 11:** The train to **Granada** this morning is a “regular” train, giving you more time to enjoy the rolling Andalusian countryside. Spend the afternoon doing self-guided visits at your own pace. Suggestions:

The **Albaicín** is Granada’s ancient Moorish quarter reminiscent of a long-gone, mysterious world. Of particular interest is the Plaza de San Nicolas with breathtaking views of the Alhambra fortress on the hill facing it.

Granada’s **Cathedral** is the second largest in Spain after Seville. It was started in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and the massive structure displays a combination of Renaissance and Baroque styles. The main chapel contains two kneeling effigies of the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella who finished the reconquest of Spain from the Moors in 1492.

Originally a Moorish silk market, the **Alcaiceria** is a network of narrow lanes laid out like an Arab bazaar. The atmosphere takes you back centuries. Today, it is still a market of sorts, although the shoppers are mainly tourists.

The lavish **Royal Chapel** is the mausoleum of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, the Catholic Monarchs who ruled at the time of the voyages of Christopher Columbus. It also holds the remains of their daughter Queen Juana (Joan the Mad), her husband Philip the Handsome and the Infante Miguel, their oldest grandson. The Chapel’s lacy Plateresque Gothic style is richly ornate and one of the best examples of this style in Spain. The carved marble faces of the two monarchs are considered to be a good likeness of Ferdinand and Isabella. The high altar is one of the finest Renaissance works in all of Spain.



**Day 12:** This morning you will have a guided tour of the amazing Alhambra followed by an afternoon of self-guided visits. The **Alhambra** is an expansive Moorish palace and fortress with unique architecture and beautiful gardens. This complex is a cluster of four different sites perched side by side on top of a hill: the **Nasrid Palace**, an exquisite combination of rooms and courtyards - the famous Courtyard of the Lions is one of them - where the Muslim rulers lived; the beautifully manicured **Generalife Gardens**, planted in the 1930s; the **Palace of Charles V**, Spain’s most impressive Renaissance building; and the **Alcazaba**, an empty fortress with panoramic views over Granada. The Alhambra is one of the most visited tourist destinations in Europe. The culture and historical events reflected by this place make for an incredible touring experience.



**Day 13:** Enjoy more Andalusian scenery on the train ride to **Seville** today. Meet your private guide for a walking tour of the Cathedral, the Alcazar and the old quarter of Santa Cruz and a quick introduction to this classy city.

**Seville**, located on the banks of the Guadalquivir River, is the artistic, cultural, and financial capital of southern Spain. Its known history goes back to Roman times, and since it was controlled by the Moors from 712 to 1248 AD, it was heavily influenced by Arabic culture. It was taken by the Catholic King Ferdinand III during the *Reconquista*.

The 15<sup>th</sup>-century **Cathedral of Seville** was built on the former site of the city's mosque. It is the largest Gothic cathedral in the world and is lavishly decorated with gold and silver from the New World. The famous *Giralda*, originally a minaret, was converted into a bell tower. The Cathedral is also known for housing the remains of Christopher Columbus on a large raised platform, although there is some evidence that his remains may be in the Dominican Republic. In any event, the Cathedral and the memorial to Columbus are quite impressive.

The **Alcázar of Seville** (Spanish "Alcázares Reales de Sevilla") is a royal palace across from the Cathedral. Construction started in 1181 under the Moors and continued for over 500 years. Its peaceful gardens are a blend of Moorish, Andalusian, and Christian traditions. The palace is one of the best remaining examples of mudéjar architecture, and the upper levels are still used by the royal family as their official Seville residence.

The **Barrio de Santa Cruz**, the former Jewish quarter of the medieval city, which is characterized by narrow, winding streets and whitewashed houses.

Other places of interest:

- **Plaza de España** and **María Luisa Park**, both built for the 1929 Exposición Ibero-Americana international fair. The ceramic tile decorations illustrating provinces of Spain are exquisite.
- **Basilica de la Macarena** with its Weeping Virgin and floats used during the "Semana Santa" (Holy Week). If you can't attend the religious processions performed every spring in Seville, this at least gives a feel for the pageantry of those grandiose celebrations.
- The **Torre de Oro** (golden tower)
- **Casa de Pilatos**, a magnificent Mudejar-style palace dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century.
- **La Isla Mágica** (Magic Island) theme park
- **Museo Palacio de la Condesa de Lebrija**, a stunningly beautiful 18th-century aristocratic mansion furnished with Phoenician, Greek, and Roman artifacts
- **La Maestranza** bull ring, one of the most famous in Spain
- **Salvador church** is the second largest church of Seville after the Cathedral
- **Museum of Fine Arts** where lesser-known but still top-notch art by Zurbarán, Murillo and others is on display
- Various other museums including a very informative **Flamenco Museum**



**Day 14:** Discover more of Seville on your own today with your hop on/off bus tickets. And for a grand finale to this great excursion across the Iberian Peninsula, enjoy an evening Flamenco show, the signature art form of Andalusia.

**Day 15:** Airport transfer. Return to U.S.

Hello, my name is **Pierre Mainguené**. I personally handcrafted this itinerary.



I am the co-founder and president of Circa Tours. I was born and raised in Brittany, France so, as a native European, I love everything about the "old country" especially France, Spain and Portugal, the three countries we specialize in. I love their history (and there is lots of it), their art (same thing), their cuisine (especially in France, Catalonia and the Basque Country), their wine (everywhere), their lifestyle and the endless diversity of the local cultures.

In dozens of trips I have taken to Europe, I have traveled to nearly every corner of those countries, and I continue my journey of discovery every year. I am a Travel-Institute certified France and Spain Specialist, and I am also recognized by the Tourist Office of Portugal as a certified Portugal Specialist.

My goal is to create the best possible trip for you. I am always ready to listen to your wishes (however creative) and feedback, and I will always enjoy sharing my experiences with you.

That's me, by the way, in front of a Joaquin Sorolla painting in Madrid. And, the following are some comments made by a few of our clients:

- “Our trip was fantastic! We had such a wonderful time! All went well including getting our train tickets to Seville changed the day of the strike. Our guides were nothing less than phenomenal! We can't thank you and your staff enough for putting together a trip that was worthy of our 30th anniversary celebration!” M.B., Massachusetts
- “Pierre. Thank you for your services. I really enjoyed dealing with you. You are so knowledgeable, pleasant and professional. I certainly will recommend you to friends.” J.L., Colorado
- “It was not a good trip - it was a GREAT trip! Truly everything was fabulous, ran smoothly, and worked well. The guides were excellent, the itinerary perfect. We enjoyed Spain very much and will ask you for assistance on our next journey to southern Europe!” J.K., California
- “Circa Tours did a good job. They worked very closely with us in putting the program together. We were very pleased with how efficient everything ran. The information we received from Circa Tours was done up very well, which allowed us to just pull the appropriate paperwork and be on our way. The tours were very well done. The guides we had with the local travel providers did a very good job of explaining the areas we toured. Pierre at Circa Tours made sure we saw a bit of everything.” D.T., Florida
- “We are all home, safe and sound - very tired, but in a hazy daze of love for France. Thank you and Carolyn SO much for arranging such an amazing trip for all of us. Throughout the trip, my sisters, mom and myself could be heard saying such things as, “THANK YOU, PIERRE”...or, “thank goodness for Pierre!!!” Martine was an excellent guide, by the way...very good, nice, thorough and professional. We wouldn't have been able to do HALF of what we did (and certainly not with nearly as much carefree enjoyment) with out her. Thank you and Carolyn for all of you expertise and care in helping us and doing all of the hard work for us! Thank you! Thank you!!!” K.B., Iowa