

CIRCA



TOURS

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Courtyard in Andalusia

Photos by Circa Tours

Iberian Experience

Lisbon - Andalusia - Madrid - Bilbao - Barcelona - Valencia
(20 days - 18 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 (20 days - 18 nights)

DAY	ACTIVITIES	NIGHT
1	Leave U.S.	
2	Arrive in Lisbon . Private airport transfer. At leisure	Lisbon
3	Half-day city tour*. Afternoon self-guided tour	Lisbon
4	Day at leisure	Lisbon
5	Private airport transfer. Fly to Seville . Private airport transfer. At leisure	Seville
6	Day trip to Granada * (train + escorted tour of Alhambra + train)	Seville
7	Morning city tour*. Afternoon self-guided tour	Seville
8	High-speed train to Cordoba . Private walking tour. At leisure	Cordoba
9	High-speed train to Madrid . At leisure	Madrid
10	Morning city tour*. Afternoon self-guided tour	Madrid
11	Day trip to Toledo *	Madrid
12	Day at leisure	Madrid
13	Day at leisure	Madrid
14	Private airport transfer. Fly to Bilbao . Private airport transfer Self guided visit of Guggenheim Museum and the city	Bilbao
15	Half-day car with private driver/guide. Self-guided visit of Chillida-Leku Museum Evening flight to Barcelona . Private airport transfer	Barcelona
16	Full-day city tour*	Barcelona
17	Day trip to Valencia (train + private walking tour + train)	Barcelona
18	Day at leisure	Barcelona
19	Day at leisure	Barcelona
20	Private airport transfer. Return to U.S.	

* Guided excursions by motor coach, with different groups of travelers each trip

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

Day 1: Leave the U.S.

Day 2: Arrive in **Lisbon**. Your private driver will pick you up at the airport. Settle into your hotel and relax after your international flight or start exploring the city on your own.

Day 3: The best way to start visiting a city for the first time is to get a quick overview of the place - a panoramic tour, in other words. This half-day classic tour starts with a scenic view of Lisbon and its hills in the distance. Next is a visit to the Belém quarter, with beautiful historical monuments dating back to the 15th century. Brief stop at the famous **Belém Tower**, a World Heritage site and the point of departure for many Portuguese maritime explorations. View the Monument to the Discoveries (Padrão dos Descobrimentos), built to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the death of Prince Henry the Navigator.





On to visit the church at the **St. Jerome Monastery** (Mosteiro dos Jerónimos), another World Heritage site and a masterpiece of the amazingly ornate “Manueline” style. Then, visit the Coach Museum (Museu dos Coches) displaying one of the biggest collections of carriages in the world. (On Mondays, the monastery and the museum are closed, so these two visits are replaced by a tour of the Ajuda Palace or the “Fundação Medeiros e Almeida”). Following the river you’ll arrive at the historic **Alfama District** where you can enjoy a leisurely walk along the ancient narrow streets and a tasting of Port wine. Next, head towards the downtown area (Baixa) to admire the famous squares of Lisbon: Trade Square (Praça do Comércio), the Rossio Square - the heart of the city - and the Restauradores Square. Then, on down the Liberdade Avenue, the “Champs Elysees” of Lisbon, to finish the tour at Pombal Square.

Day 4: Today, explore the city on your own and discover its treasures at your own pace.

Day 5: Alluring Andalusia is next on the itinerary. Fly to **Seville**. Spend the rest of the day exploring the city on your own.

Day 6: Today, after a panoramic ride through the Andalusian countryside, the massive Alhambra fortress will not fail to amaze you. 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 7: Today is your “formal” introduction to Seville with a classic half-day tour of the city. First, take in a panoramic view of **Plaza de España**, a jewel of 20th-century Sevillian architecture, the signature building of the 1929 Iberoamerican Exposition. Then on to the famous “Door to the Americas” - the Golden Tower (**Torre de Oro**). As you travel along, admire the many splendid monuments: the University of Seville (the cigar factory in Bizet’s opera Carmen), the Triana Bridge and the Monastery of the Cartuja, followed by the Roman city wall built at the time of Julius Cesar. Visit the **Macarena Basilica** with the beautifully adorned Virgin Mary of Sevilla. Next, the medieval Santa Cruz quarter with its narrow streets, secluded patios and beautiful flower arrangements will enchant you. You will then tour the **Cathedral**, the largest Gothic building in the world, and the spectacular **Giralda Tower** - a combination minaret and bell tower.



Day 8: Hop on the smooth high-speed train to **Cordoba** this morning for a short 1-hour ride. Upon arrival, meet your personal private guide for a leisurely walking tour of La Mezquita and the surrounding historic quarter. This evening, enjoy the tranquil atmosphere of this small city after the day visitors have gone back to Seville or Madrid.

Cordoba is a medium-sized city on the Guadalquivir River. 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.

Day 9: The sleek, comfortable, high-speed train will once again “transport” you today. Enjoy the scenery of Castilla la Mancha before reaching the capital city of **Madrid**. After checking in at your hotel, you can relax or start exploring the city on your own: the museums, the Royal Palace, Plaza Mayor, etc.



Day 10: As in Lisbon and Seville, first getting acquainted with the city is a good idea. So, get an overall feel for the city this morning on a 3-hour 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.

Afternoon on your own to explore museums, among other possibilities. Discover the Prado, Thyssen or Reina Sofia Museums at your own pace. Please note: the Prado and Thyssen Bornemisza museums are closed on Mondays. The Reina Sophia museum is closed on Tuesdays.

Day 11: 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 16th-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.



This day trip includes the following visits: The Cathedral, featuring countless magnificent decorations and examples of the various stages of the Spanish Gothic style; the Church of St. Tomé with El Greco’s masterpiece, *the Burial of the Count of Orgaz*; the Synagogue of Santa María la Blanca; the Museum of Victorio Macho; the Monastery of San Juan de los Reyes; the famous technique of Damasquinado (encrusting of precious metals in steel) and panoramic sightseeing of the city.

Day 12 and 13: Explore Madrid on your own and discover its treasures at your own pace (see details in our “Spain Highlights”).

Day 14: On to Euskadi (the Basque Country) today. Fly to **Bilbao**. Self guided visit of the city and the **Guggenheim Museum**.

The interest of this museum lies in its contents, of course, but even more so in the architectural style of the building itself. Designed by Pritzker-Prize laureate Frank Gehry, it opened in 1997. (Gehry also designed the Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles and the Marques de Riscal winery, south of Bilbao, in the same style.) This architectural style is difficult to describe. A good analogy might be something like the layers of an onion or the petals of a rose (or wood shavings, perhaps) spread apart and then twisted in various directions. Except that the surface of the building is not onion skin or silky flower petals, but titanium sheets combined with limestone and glass. The overall look is also reminiscent of the hull of a ship floating on the waters of the Nervion River next to it. Richard Serra’s mammoth wavy steel installation inside the museum is in perfect harmony with the structure of the building housing it. On the outside, “Maman” - the giant spider





by Louise Bourgeois - and “Puppy” - the 40-foot tall terrier by Jeff Koons - are not to be missed (they’re actually hard to miss - they’re so enormous!)

Day 15: More exciting modern art today in the company of **Eduardo Chillida** (1924 - 2002), a Basque sculptor of abstract monumental works. Head out to his 30-acre sculpture garden at the Chillida-Leku Museum outside scenic San Sebastian and experience the symbolism and the overwhelming feeling of strength, power and grace conveyed by his massive steel and marble pieces. OR, as an alternative, go to San Sebastian and at Mount Igeldo Park, admire Chillida’s favorite sculpture: “Peine del Viento” (the Comb of the Wind) - a set of three gargantuan welded steel

pieces assembled in the shapes of menacing “hooks or claws”, anchored at the top of craggy rocks above the stormy waters of the Atlantic Ocean - a truly stunning and inspiring work of art! (only fully appreciated in the middle of a storm). To this breathtaking experience add a visit to the Kursaal Congress Center and enjoy one of Rafael Moneo’s most amazing avant-garde architectural works. Car with private driver/guide + self-guided visit of the museum. This 4-hour excursion ends with the return to the airport for your evening flight to Barcelona.

Day 16: Today is the beginning of an exciting three days in worldly and alluring **Barcelona**. There is so much to see there, so starting with a full-day overview is a very good way to go. First, start with the “Classic Tour”: Barcelona is a vibrant world-class city. 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 its faithful reproductions of typical architectural styles around Spain.

After lunch, continue your exploration of the city on the “Artistic Tour”: Barcelona is the capital of the Modernista style of architecture and the place where the famous Catalan architect, Antonio Gaudi, 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 Gaudi’s creative genius. Next, admire the cathedral of la **Sagrada Família**, Gaudi’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 Mondays).



Day 17: Back on the train today, for an interesting combination of the ancient and the modern for a fun day-trip to thriving **Valencia**, Spain’s third largest city. This attractive and busy Mediterranean city is the home of the famous Lladro porcelain factory and the birthplace of paella, horchata, Impressionist painter Joaquin Sorolla and world-famous architect Santiago Calatrava. Valencia’s crowning tourist attraction is the 90-acre futuristic City of Arts and Sciences Park. This ultra-modern complex includes a museum, a planetarium, a covered promenade, a performing arts center and a recently finished sports arena plus a new bridge (all of them designed by Calatrava). To this amazingly avant-garde complex, add the Oceanographic, a futuristic marine park created by another famous Spanish architect, Felix Candela - all within easy walking distance of one another. Time permitting, you can also explore the historic center escorted by your own private guide.



Day 18 and 19: Explore Barcelona on your own and discover its treasures at your own pace (see details in our “Spain Highlights”).

Day 20: Private 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