

CIRCA



TOURS

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The Monasterio de San Lorenzo - El Escorial

Photos by Circa Tours

Madrid and Andalusia

Madrid - Cordoba - Malaga - Granada - Seville
(16 days - 14 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 (16 days - 14 nights)

DAY	ACTIVITIES	NIGHT
1	Leave U.S.	
2	Arrive in Madrid . Airport transfer	Madrid
3	Morning Private walking tour. Explore Madrid at leisure	Madrid
4	Day trip to Toledo	Madrid
5	Day trip to Avila, Segovia and La Granja	Madrid
6	High-speed train to Cordoba . Private walking tour	Cordoba
7	High-speed train to Malaga . Private walking tour	Malaga
8	Day trip to Granada . Private tour of the Alhambra	Malaga
9	Day trip to Ronda	Malaga
10	Morning train to Seville . Private walking tour. Afternoon at leisure	Seville
11	Day trip to Jerez de la Frontera (Royal Equestrian Show) and Arcos de la Frontera (a "white village")	Seville
12	Morning: guided tour of Lebrija and Fine Arts Museums Afternoon: guided tour of Plaza de Espana and Macarena Museum	Seville
13	Morning: guided tour of Casa de Pilatos, Flamenco Museum and Salvador church. Afternoon: Tour to Roman Italica	Seville
14	High-speed train to Madrid . At leisure	Madrid
15	Half-day trip to El Escorial	Madrid
16	Airport transfer. Depart for the U.S.	

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

Day 1: Leave U.S.

Day 2: Arrive in **Madrid**. Relax during your private airport transfer to your hotel. Enjoy the rest of the day on your own. You may want to start exploring the Plaza Mayor, Plaza del Sol, Gran Via, Cibeles Fountain, etc.

Day 3: Your local guide will welcome you to Spain and introduce you to the capital city. A walking tour will include the Royal Palace and old parts of Madrid. Later you can visit the Prado, Thyssen, Sorolla or Reina Sofia Museums at your own pace. Please note: the Prado, Thyssen Bornemisza and Sorolla museums are closed on Mondays. The Reina Sophia museum is closed on Tuesdays.



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.)

The Prado Museum is one of Europe's top museums, and it is also one of Madrid's best attractions. Built in the late 18th 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



collection.

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 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 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, even 20th-century American paintings. The Thyssen's more "human-size" display is a fine complement to the Prado's massive

Day 4: This morning, you're off to **Toledo**. On your walking tour through the old quarter, you'll see ancient palaces, convents and churches. Visit the Visigoth Museum, the Transito Synagogue, the church of St Tome with El Greco's famous painting *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz* and the impressive Gothic Cathedral, among many other architectural and cultural jewels.

Day 5: Today's excursion takes you to Segovia, La Granja and Avila. Enjoy a walking tour of **Segovia** with its 8 mile-long Roman aqueduct, Jewish quarter and its many Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque monuments. The handsome Alcazar, a perfectly restored medieval castle, rounds out this tour. Then on to **La Granja** to admire its splendid palace and glorious gardens. Next is **Avila** with its massive ramparts. You can take a leisurely stroll through the old town where the famous mystic Santa Teresa lived.

Day 6: Board the high-speed AVE train for a 2 1/2-hour trip to **Cordoba**. Enjoy the scenery of Castilla la Mancha and Andalusia on the way down. When you arrive, your local guide will meet you for an afternoon tour of La Mezquita, the Alcazar and the Synagogue.



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*.

The **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 7: Continue on your journey with a morning AVE train ride to **Malaga** on the Costa del Sol. This afternoon, your walking tour will take you to the old quarter with its cathedral, castle, Roman amphitheater and the “piece de resistance” - the Picasso Museum.

The **Costa del Sol** is best known for its sandy beaches, lush golf courses and flashy resort towns lining the Mediterranean coast all the way to Gibraltar. But Malaga, in the middle of it, offers several sites of significant cultural interest: a beautiful, ornate cathedral, an ancient castle (the Alcazaba) and a Roman amphitheater. You can also visit the house of Pablo Picasso, who was born there in 1881. A tour of the Picasso Museum reveals a fine collection of works by the prolific artist.

Day 8: Today’s destination is the medieval city of **Granada** to visit the Alhambra (one of the most visited monuments in Europe) and its historic quarter with an expert guide.

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.



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 mighty Alhambra fortress on the hill facing it.



Granada’s **Cathedral** is the second largest in Spain after Seville. It was started in the 16th 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 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 them. The high altar is one of the finest Renaissance works in all of Spain.

Day 9: This morning, on to scenic **Ronda** for a walking tour with a local expert guide.



Ronda is one of the many pretty “white villages” of Andalusia. Perched on top of a rocky promontory, its beauty is enhanced by the dramatic location on either side of a 350-ft deep gorge spanned by a massive stone bridge built in the 18th century. The old section offers many beautifully decorated mansions with shaded patios, as well as baths and minarets from the Moorish past. The new town has the oldest bullring in Spain, built in the 1700s, complete with a small but informative bullfight museum. Located roughly half-way between Malaga and Seville, it is a very popular destination for visitors.

Day 10: Board your morning train to **Seville**. This is not a high-speed train, so you will have more time to enjoy the Andalusian countryside. Your walking tour of Seville this afternoon will include visits of the Cathedral, the Giralda minaret/bell tower, the Alcazar and the Jewish quarter.

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 15th-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 grand 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, is characterized by narrow, winding streets and whitewashed houses.

Other places of interest:

- **Plaza de España** and **Maria 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 from the “Semana Santa” (Holy Week) religious processions that are performed every spring in Seville.
- The **Torre de Oro** (golden tower)
 - **Casa de Pilatos**, a magnificent Mudejar-style palace dating back to the 16th century.
 - **La Isla Magica** (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 (see “Opera Carmen” below)
 - **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 **Flamenco Museum**, which explains the history, technique and art of Andalusia’s signature dance.





The Opera Carmen in Seville. The Maestranza bullring is the place where Carmen is stabbed to death by Don José in Georges Bizet's famous opera. This unique Baroque construction is decorated in the striking white and ochre colors typical of Andalusia. Along with Las Ventas in Madrid, it is regarded as one of the top bullfighting venues in Spain, with space for up to 12,000 spectators. The museum recounts the history of bullfighting with an outstanding collection of costumes, famous bullfighters' portraits, bullfighting paraphernalia and a purple cape painted by Pablo Picasso. The bullfight season starts during the April "feria" through the spring and again in the fall until October. Most "corridos de toros" are held on Sunday evenings.

A short walking distance away is the Tobacco Factory where Carmen fell in love with Don Jose. It is a magnificent 18th-century building with a chapel, grand staircases, patios, fountains and beautiful Andalusian gardens. The building is now occupied by the University of Seville.

Day 11: The quaint towns of **Jerez de la Frontera** and **Arcos de la Frontera** are yours to discover on today's excursion. In Jerez, your tour includes a sherry wine tasting at a local bodega (winery).

The name of Jerez de la Frontera comes from the Arabic name *Xerez* or *Xeres*, and *Frontera* refers to its location on the frontier between the Moorish and Christian regions of Spain during the *Reconquista*, during which the Christians took Spain back from the Moors. "Sherry" - the name of the famous fortified wine that originated here - is an adaptation of the city's Arabic name, which is pronounced *Sherish*.

In addition to being known as the capital of sherry, Jerez is famous as the home of the **Royal Andalusian School of Equestrian Art**, a riding school comparable to the world-famous Spanish Riding School in Vienna. In May, the whole city celebrates the Feria del Caballo (Horse Fair).

Arcos de la Frontera is one of the famous "white villages" in southern Spain. At the top of the hill is the old town center with the Church of Santa Maria and the old fort across from a palace that has been turned into a Parador hotel. You'll see rows of white-washed homes descending the narrow streets. The town commands a magnificent view of the peak of San Cristobal and the Guadalete Valley.



Day 12: Continue exploring Seville with a morning walking tour to the Fine Arts Museum and the Condesa de Lebrija Museum. After lunch, your private driver/guide will take you to Plaza de Espana and the Macarena Museum, where floats from the Holy Week procession are displayed. (See day 10 for details.)

Day 13: This morning's walking tour includes Casa de Pilatos, the Flamenco Museum and Salvador Church. All visits are within walking distance, but short taxi cab rides are available if preferred. (See day 10 for details.)

After lunch, your driver will take you to **Italica**, the site of some of Spain's most impressive Roman ruins. This ancient place, a few miles outside Seville, used to be a thriving city of great military importance. Emperors Hadrian and Trajan were born there. Today you can still see a 20,000-spectator amphitheater, mosaic floors, thermal baths and a theater.



Day 14: Back on the AVE train for your return to **Madrid** this morning. Spend the rest of the day visiting a museum or other places of interest.

Plaza Mayor. 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 15: A half-day trip to **El Escorial** will round out this wonderful vacation. The Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, 30 miles from Madrid, is a grandiose complex of imposing but austere buildings and palaces. It is a strong statement for Spain as a major world power in the 16th century, the time of the Conquistadors. Architecturally, it exudes power rather than elegance, but it is well worth a visit. When you return, you have time left over for shopping or other last minute visits.

Day 16: Your trip ends with a private airport transfer to catch your flight home.

Hello, my name is **Pierre Mainguéné**. 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