

CIRCA



TOURS

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City of Arts and Sciences - Valencia

Photos by Circa Tours

Magic Spain and the Levant

Madrid - Cordoba - Granada - Valencia - Barcelona
(12 days - 10 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 (12 days - 10 nights)

DAY	ACTIVITIES	NIGHT
1	Leave U.S.	
2	Arrive in Madrid . Airport transfer. At leisure	Madrid
3	Private walking tour. Explore Madrid at leisure	Madrid
4	Day trip to Toledo	Madrid
5	High-speed train to Cordoba . Private walking tour	Cordoba
6	Train to Granada . Private walking tour	Granada
7	Private morning tour of the Alhambra . At leisure. Overnight train to Valencia	Granada
8	Early morning discovery on your own and private walking tour. At leisure	Valencia
9	Train to Barcelona . At leisure	Barcelona
10	Full-day guided tour	Barcelona
11	Special interest tours (Roman Catalonia, Jewish heritage, art, architecture, wine, gastronomy...)	Barcelona
12	Airport transfer. Return to 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 might want to start with a museum or two. Please note: the Prado and Thyssen Bornemisza museums are closed on Mondays. The Reina Sophia museum is closed on Tuesdays.

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 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, and even 20th-century American paintings. The Thyssen’s more “human-size” display is a fine complement to the Prado’s massive collection.

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 up above.
- **Alcalá de Henares,** birthplace of famous author Miguel de Cervantes, only a short train ride from Madrid.

Day 3: This morning, your local guide will welcome you to Spain and take you on a walking tour of the **Royal Palace** and old parts of Madrid. You'll have time after lunch to visit more of the capital city on your own. 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 afternoon is your own to discover more of Madrid.

Day 4: Today's excursion will take you to **Toledo**. 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.



Day 5: Enjoy the countryside of Castilla la Mancha and Andalusia as you travel by high-speed train to **Cordoba** this morning. Upon arrival meet up with your private guide and take in the amazing sites of the former Moorish metropolis (Cordoba was the largest and most sophisticated city in Europe in the year 1,000). Your guide will take you on a tour of La Mezquita - a stunning piece of architecture that combines a massive mosque with a Baroque cathedral, all under one roof - the Alcazar next door and the quaint old quarter nearby. Spend the rest of the day on your own savoring the delightful combination of the old Arab world and the Andalusian atmosphere of the city.



Day 6: The train to **Granada** this morning is a "regular" train, so you will have more time to enjoy the rolling hills of the Andalusian countryside. After checking into your hotel, enjoy a guided walking tour of the old city: Albaicin, Alcaiceria, the Cathedral and the Royal Chapel.

The **Albaicin** 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 on the hill facing it.

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.

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.

The lavish **Royal Chapel** the a 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 7: This morning's visit is arguably the high point of any Spain tour: the amazing **Alhambra**, 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. Enjoy some free time this afternoon before your overnight train to Valencia.



Day 8: Your early arrival in **Valencia** gives you plenty of time to discover the futuristic **City of Arts and Sciences** under the best lighting possible - the morning sun. Take lots of pictures! Spend the rest of the day exploring 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 avant-garde complex of the 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.

You can also explore the historic center escorted by your own private guide: A 13th-century cathedral with a massive octagonal bell tower and what some believe to be the Holy Grail on the inside; the Torres de Serranos, two 14th-century towers that protected the entrance to the city; la Lonja de la Seda (Silk Exchange), a hall from the 15th century with Flamboyant Gothic architecture displaying grotesque sculptures and gargoyles on its façade. Other churches and museums can be seen in the old quarter, some of the most unusual being the Museo de Ceramica; the Museo Fallero showing "ninots" (figures made of papier-mache) from past Fallas Festivals; and the Museo San Pio V, a fine arts museum considered one of the best in Spain, with works by Velazquez, El Greco, Goya and Sorolla. South of the city is the Albufera Nature Park, with one of the largest fresh-water lakes in Spain.



Make sure you go back to the City of Arts and Sciences tonight (and take more pictures). The lighting of all those "out-of-this-world" buildings will make you feel like an extra terrestrial on a science fiction station on your way to a distant galaxy.

Day 9: Back on the train this morning on your way to worldly and alluring **Barcelona**.



This afternoon, start exploring the city at your own pace: the Gothic Quarter, Las Ramblas, Plaza de Catalunya, the Picasso Museum and tonight, enjoy the restaurants and the night life of Barceloneta.

Day 10: Start your sightseeing today with the “Classic Tour” of Barcelona. This tour will give you a quick overview of this vibrant city: Plaza de Catalunya, Via Laietana, the Cathedral and its cloister, the Gothic Quarter, Plaza Sant Jaume (Generalitat and Town Hall). Then on to Villa Olímpica (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 famous the 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 example of Gaudí’s creative genius. Next, admire the Cathedral of La Sagrada Família, his masterpiece, which is still under construction. On to Santa Maria del Mar, a magnificent Gothic church. The last stop on the tour is the Picasso Museum, which houses some of the artist’s early works. You can visit the museum on your own (closed on Mondays).

Day 11: Depending on your interests, a wide array of “special” guided tours is at your disposal today:

Gourmet walking tour - Enjoy a flavor-filled 2-hour journey on a professionally guided tour through the old town. During this walk you will find out about the history of Barcelona’s cuisine, as well as some of its flagship restaurants and food outlets. Types of places on the itinerary: Café Granja Viader, La Boqueria Market, Pastisseria Escriba, Petritxol Street (chocolate shops and cafeterias), Fargas chocolate shop, La Pineda tapas restaurant, Oro Liquido (olive oil shop), Caelum (jams and preserved fruit, marzipan and liquors, quality cakes and cookies), La Colmena (candies and pastries), Viniteques de la Bibera (wine shop), Pastisseria Brunells...

Art Tour - Barcelona is an important destination for art lovers. It boasts a fine selection of world-class museums:

- Picasso Museum
- Miró Foundation
- Museo Nacional de Arte de Catalunya (MNAC), which offers Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque and modern paintings, as well as coins, drawings, prints, posters and photography.
- Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art (MACBA)
- Dalí museum in Figueres (a day trip outside Barcelona)



Jewish Heritage - Jewish communities are thriving again in Spain, five centuries after their expulsion by the “Catholic Kings”. More people are searching their past today in an attempt to discover their Jewish ancestry. Jewish sites are being restored and preserved across the country. Catalonia is a good place to start exploring the Jewish culture and its importance in the Iberian Peninsula. In Girona, north of Barcelona, stroll around the Jewish quarter and museum. In nearby Besalú, visit another Jewish quarter and mikva. And in Barcelona, see the center of interpretation in the Jewish quarter and the old synagogue.



Modern architecture and landscape - Barcelona offers a long list of major world-renowned names in architecture: Mies van der Rohe, Sert and Torres (GATCPAC), Jean Nouvel (Agbar Tower), Dominique Perrault, Norman Foster, Albert Viaplana, Enric Miralles, Enric Massip, Clotet, Santiago Calatrava, Zaha Hadid, Arata Isozaki, Toyo Ito...

Roman Catalonia - Tarragona, just south of Barcelona, was an important city of the Roman Empire. Much of the splendor of the period can still be seen today: a Roman aqueduct outside of town and the impressive architecture you can visit during the

archeological walk: city wall, forum, Roman circus and amphitheater (Tarragona was declared a World Heritage site in 2000). Barcelona also has remnants of that distant past: a city wall, ruins of the temple of Augustus and a necropolis with an underground museum.

Day 12: Your tour concludes with a private transfer to the airport.

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