

CIRCA



TOURS

*A division of Circa Terras, Inc.*



The Guggenheim Museum - Bilbao

Photos by Circa Tours

### *Northern Spain and Rail Cruise*

Madrid - Barcelona - San Sebastian - Bilbao - Cantabria - Asturias - Galicia  
(16 days - 14 nights)

Circa Tours - 30919 Brassie Lane - Temecula - CA - 92591  
Tel: 951-676-6117 - Fax: 951-676-6118 - [www.circatours.com](http://www.circatours.com) - CST 2081474-40  
© Copyright Circa Tours and Circa Terras, Inc. All rights reserved

# 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 <b>Madrid</b> . At leisure   | Madrid                 |
| 3   | Day trip to <b>Avila, Segovia</b> and <b>La Granja</b>                                   | Madrid                 |
| 4   | Private walking tour. Afternoon high-speed train to Barcelona                            | Barcelona              |
| 5   | Day tour of <b>Barcelona</b>   | Barcelona              |
| 6   | Day trip to <b>Sitges</b> and <b>Codorniu</b> wine cellars                               | Barcelona              |
| 7   | Morning train to <b>San Sebastian</b> . At leisure                                       | San Sebastian          |
| 8   | Rail cruise starts at 12:00 noon   | Villasana de Mena      |
| 9   | Rail cruise (details at <a href="http://www.circacruises.com">www.circacruises.com</a> ) | Santander              |
| 10  | Rail cruise  | Cabezón de la Sal      |
| 11  | Rail cruise  | Arriónidas             |
| 12  | Rail cruise  | Gijón                  |
| 13  | Rail cruise  | Luarca                 |
| 14  | Rail cruise  | Viveiro                |
| 15  | Rail cruise ends at 1:00 pm - <b>Santiago de Compostela</b>                              | Santiago de Compostela |
| 16  | 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 18<sup>th</sup> century in Neoclassical style, it emphasizes Spanish art up to the 19<sup>th</sup> 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 18<sup>th</sup>-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 to 20<sup>th</sup>-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:** 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** (Spain's mini-Versailles) to admire its splendid palace and glorious gardens. Next is **Avila** with its massive ramparts. Enjoy a leisurely stroll through the old town where the famous mystic Santa Teresa lived.

**Day 4:** This morning, your local expert guide will take you on a walking tour of the **Royal Palace** and old parts of 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.)

Then, hop on the smooth riding high-speed train this afternoon. Relax and enjoy the scenery as you cross Castilla la Mancha, Aragon and Catalonia on your way to Barcelona.

**Day 5:** Spend the day visiting **Barcelona** with a chauffeur and guide. Choose your visits and/or let your guide advise you on the best places to see.

**La Sagrada Familia** ("Expiatory Church of the Holy Family"), a massive, privately-funded Roman Catholic church still under construction. It is the crowning achievement of renowned Catalan architect Antoni Gaudí (1852–1926). The building's scale and idiosyncratic architecture have made it one of Spain's top tourist attractions. The architecture is unlike anything ever built anywhere. The older section looks like it was carved out of a massive rock. The statuary in the newer section is reminiscent of the characters in a Star Wars movie. The inside shows a clear Gothic influence. The grandiose design and the magnitude of the project are absolutely mind-boggling. It is a masterpiece of creativity and imagination.



**Casa Batlló and Casa Mila,** also known as La Pedrera (Catalan word for "Quarry"): Two fanciful buildings designed by Antoni Gaudí in the Modernista (Art Nouveau) style at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They are both located on one of Barcelona's widest boulevards, the Passeig de Gracia. They are particularly remarkable because of Gaudí's avoidance of straight lines and his use of colorful ceramic tiles and curving wrought iron. The non-traditional architectural features of Casa Batlló's arched roof mimic the back of a dragon. The dozen or so surrealistic chimneys on top of La Pedrera resemble warriors





in a science fiction movie.

**Park Güell**, a public park created by Antoni Gaudi. This complex displays the architect's flamboyant creativity at its best: a mosaic dragon fountain at the main entrance, a long bench in the form of a sea serpent covered with multicolored tiles snaking around the main terrace (with panoramic vistas over the entire city) and a covered area with a forest of columns reminiscent of the ancient temples of upper Egypt.

**Las Ramblas**, a large mile-long pedestrian boulevard in downtown Barcelona that connects Placa de Catalunya and the Christopher Columbus monument by the harbor. Strolling the shaded tree-lined avenue is a favorite for both tourists and locals. Cafes, flower stands, artists, the vibrant Boqueria market nearby and the many whimsical street performers bring a festive atmosphere to this busy and sometimes crowded place.

**Palau de la Música Catalana** (Palace of Catalan Music) a concert hall in the Modernista style created by architect Lluís Domènech i Montaner, which opened in 1908. The design and architecture of this building are incredibly ornate (Baroque in many ways). During the day, it is entirely lit by natural light coming from the outside. This is achieved by walls that are made of stained-glass windows set in magnificent arches and the ceiling, an enormous skylight also made of stained glass (like an oversized Tiffany lamp shade) with hues of gold and blue that suggest the sun and the sky overhead. A "brilliantly" colorful piece of architecture!

Other places of interest:

- **Picasso Museum**, with some of his early works
- **Catalan Art Museum**. A world-class collection of works by Catalan artists
- **Church of Santa Maria del Mar**. A Gothic church in the Ribera district
- **Joan Miro Foundation**. Abstract art and sculpture
- **Plaza de Espana** with its ornate fountain
- **Montjuic Park** with panoramic views over the city
- **Barrio Gotico** (Gothic Quarter) with the cathedral
- **Poble Espanyol** (Spanish Village), recreating architectural styles around Spain
- **Tibidabo**. An amusement park on top of a hill
- **Barceloneta's** beaches, restaurants and night life



**Day 6:** Explore the Modernista style of architecture in more depth, with a full-day excursion to Sitges and the Codorniu wine cellars. **Sitges** is one of the most picturesque villages on the Catalan coast. With the Garraf massif as a backdrop, Sitges is one of the favorite destinations for beach tourists visiting Catalonia. Its microclimate, with almost 300 days of sun per year, seventeen beaches, an attractive range of cultural opportunities and its exceptional cuisine and shopping options make it the perfect choice for enjoying a Mediterranean vacation. Some of its architecture still displays the influence of the fanciful Modernista style dating back the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The **Codorniu wine cellars**, located in Sant Sadurn d'Anoia - in the Penedes region just south of Barcelona - was founded in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is one of the world's largest producers of sparkling wine (called "cava" in Spain) made by the traditional "méthode champenoise" originally developed in the Champagne region of France. In addition to tasting the wine, a visit to Codorniu offers the added bonus of seeing its stunning Modernista-style building designed by Catalan architect Josep Puig i Cadafalch.



**Day 7:** Back on the train this morning across northeastern Spain leaving the Mediterranean behind, on your way to the Atlantic Ocean. Destination: the Basque Country. Explore scenic **San Sebastian** on your own this afternoon. San Sebastian is an elegant resort, with some of the most beautiful beaches in Spain. This city became famous when royalty and the rich and famous started vacationing there to escape the summer heat of Madrid. As the culinary capital of the Basque Country, it is famous for its fine cuisine. Some of the nation's leading chefs are from San Sebastian or practice their craft there. It boasts several Michelin-starred restaurants.

**Day 8:** Noon is the start of your train expedition across "**Green Spain**" - a week-long



journey across the breathtaking mountainous and coastal scenery of the Basque Country, Cantabria, Asturias and Galicia (more details at [www.circacruises.com](http://www.circacruises.com). Click on "Galicia - Vasco"). Enjoy a city tour and lunch in San Sebastian followed by a bus ride to Bilbao to meet up with the train. Welcome aboard and settle down in your compartment. Dinner in **Villasana de Mena**.

**Day 9:** Morning train ride to busy **Bilbao** and visit of the **Guggenheim Modern Arts Museum** (Frank Gehry, architect, and works by Louise Bourgeois and Jeff Koons on the outside and Richard Serra on the inside). Lunch on board the train. Dinner and night in **Santander** with a possible visit to the casino.

**Day 10:** Train ride to Unquera this morning, followed by a motor coach excursion along the La Hermita gorge to the small town of Potes and its lovely mountain views. Stop there for lunch. In the afternoon, visit the St. Poribio de Liebana sanctuary dating back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Then, on by train to rustic Cabezon de la Sal with a visit of Comillas, with its cobbled streets, ancestral houses and Modernista style buildings (one of them, "El Capricho", designed by none other than Antoni Gaudí). Dinner and night in **Cabezon de la Sal**.

**Day 11:** Morning visit by motor coach to medieval Santillana del Mar and the **Altamira** prehistoric Museum and its cave paintings. Lunch in Santillana. This afternoon the train takes you to the beautiful province of Asturias and the picture postcard fishing village of Llanes. Dinner and night in **Arriondas** nearby.

**Day 12:** Morning bus tour to the high mountains of the picturesque National Park of **Picos de Europa**. Visit Covadonga (site of the first military victory of a Christian king over the Moors, marking the starting point of the Reconquista in the early 700s). Stroll around the sanctuary and reach quaint Cangas de Onís with its hump-backed Roman bridge over the Sella River. Lunch and return to the train for the next overnight destination, **Gijon**, boasting one of Eduardo Chillida's massive concrete sculptures, *Eulogy to the Horizon*, facing the Atlantic Ocean.



**Day 13:** Today, on to **Oviedo**, the capital of Asturias, by train. This small city is famous for its traditional gastronomy and some remarkable Pre-Romanesque monuments. Next is Lluarca, a picturesque fishing village known as the "white village" of Green Spain. Dinner and overnight in **Lluarca**.

**Day 14:** Today, you cross the border into Galicia to reach **Ribadeo**. Enjoy the rugged coast at Cathedral Beach where the ocean has sculpted arches that look like the buttresses of a cathedral. More scenic ocean views in the afternoon on the way to the walled city of **Viveiro**, where you spend the night.

**Day 15:** Train to **Ferrol**, the ultimate rail destination on this journey, followed by a motor coach excursion to **Santiago de Compostela** for a visit of the Obradoiro's Square, the Platerias and the fabulous Cathedral.

#### Rail Cruise Highlights

- San Sebastian
- Bilbao and the Guggenheim Museum
- Santander and its casino
- The prehistoric caves of Altamira
- The rugged coast of "Green Spain" with its pretty fishing villages
- The high "Picos de Europa" mountains
- The sanctuary and basilica of Covadonga
- Oviedo: pre-Romanesque monuments
- Ribadeo: Cathedral Beach
- Walled city of Viveiro
- Santiago de Compostela, end point of "The Way of St. James" pilgrimage route



## Day 15: Return to the U.S.

---

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