



THE ROUGH GUIDE TO SPAIN



INSIDE THIS BOOK

INTRODUCTION What to see, what not to miss, itineraries and more

BASICS Pre-departure tips and practical information

THE GUIDE Comprehensive, in-depth guide to Spain, with regional highlights and full-colour maps throughout

CONTEXTS History, wildlife and flamenco, plus recommended books and a useful language section

We've flagged up our favourite places – a perfectly sited hotel, an atmospheric café, a special restaurant – throughout the Guide with the ★ symbol



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THE ROUGH GUIDE TO **SPAIN**

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Introduction to Spain

First-time visitors be warned: Spain is addictive. You might book a city break, villa holiday or hiking trip, but soon you'll find yourself distracted by something quite different – swept up in the excitement of a fiesta, hooked on the local cuisine, or stunned by Barcelona's otherworldly architecture. Even in the best-known destinations – from Madrid to the *costas*, from the high Pyrenees to the Moorish cities of the south – there are genuinely surprising attractions at every turn, whether that be cool restaurants in the Basque country, the wild landscapes of the central plains, or cutting-edge galleries in the industrial north. Soon, you'll notice that there is not just one Spain but many – and indeed, Spaniards themselves often speak of *Las Españas* (the Spains).

This diversity is partly down to an almost obsessive regionalism, stemming from the creation in the late 1970s of seventeen *comunidades autónomas* (autonomous regions) with their own governments, budgets and cultural ministries, even police forces. You might think you are on holiday in Spain but your hosts are more likely to be adamant that you're actually visiting Catalunya, and will point to a whole range of differences in language, culture and artistic traditions, not to mention social attitudes and politics. Indeed, the old days of a unified nation, governed with a firm hand from Madrid, seem to have gone forever, as the separate kingdoms that made up the original Spanish state reassert themselves in an essentially federal structure.

Does any of this matter for visitors? As a rule – not really, since few tourists have the time or inclination to immerse themselves in contemporary Spanish political discourse. Far more important is to look beyond the clichés of paella, matadors, sangría and siesta if you're to get the best out of a visit to this amazingly diverse country.

Even in the most over-touristed resorts of the Costa del Sol, you'll be able to find an authentic bar or restaurant where the locals eat, and a village not far away where an age-old bullfighting tradition owes nothing to tourism. The large cities of the north,

from Barcelona to Bilbao, have reinvented themselves as essential cultural destinations (and they don't all close down for hours for a kip every afternoon). And now that the world looks to Spain for culinary inspiration – the country has some of the most acclaimed chefs and innovative restaurants in the world – it's clear that things have changed. Spain, despite some lingering economic uncertainty, sees itself very differently from a generation ago. So should you – prepare to be surprised.

Where to go

Spain's cities are among the most vibrant in Europe. Exuberant **Barcelona**, for many, has the edge, thanks to Gaudí's extraordinary *modernista* architecture, the lively promenade of the Ramblas, five kilometres of sandy beach and one of the world's best football teams. The capital, **Madrid**, may not be as pretty, but nor is it quite so over-run with tourists. Its many devotees have seen the city immortalized in the movies of Pedro Almodóvar, and it is shot through with a contemporary style that informs everything from its major-league art museums to its carefree bars and summer terrazas. Then there's **Seville**, home of flamenco and all the clichés of southern Spain; **Valencia**, the vibrant capital of the Levante, with a thriving arts scene and nightlife; and **Bilbao**, a not-to-miss stop on





FACT FILE

- Spain's land **area** is around half a million square kilometres – about twice the size of the UK or Oregon. The **population** is over 46 million – some eighty percent of whom declare themselves nominally Catholic, though religious observance is patchy.

- Politically, Spain is a **parliamentary monarchy**; democracy was restored in 1977, after the death of General Franco, the dictator who seized power in the Civil War of 1936–39.

- Spaniards read fewer **newspapers** than almost any other Europeans – tellingly, the best-selling daily is *Marca*, devoted purely to football.

- Spanish** (Castilian) is the main official language, but sizeable numbers of Spaniards also speak variants of **Catalan** (in Catalunya, parts of Valencia and Alicante provinces, and on the Balearic Islands), **Galician** and **Basque**, all of which are also officially recognized languages.

- A minority of Spaniards attend **bullfights**; it doesn't rain much on the **plains**; and they only dance **flamenco** in the southern region of Andalucía.

- The highest **mountain** on the Spanish peninsula is Mulhacén (3483m), and the longest **river** is the Rio Tago (716km).

- Spain has 46 sites on **UNESCO's World Heritage** list – more than twice as many as the US.

- Between them, **Real Madrid** and **Barcelona** have won the Spanish league title over fifty times and the European Cup (Champions League) seventeen times and counting.

Spain's cultural circuit, due to Frank Gehry's astonishing Museo Guggenheim.

Not only are Spain's modern cities and towns lively and exciting, they are monumental – literally so. The country's history is evident everywhere, adding an architectural backdrop that varies from one region to another, dependent on their occupation by Romans, Visigoths or Moors, or on their role in the medieval Christian Reconquest or in the later Golden Age of imperial Renaissance Spain. Touring **Castilla y León**, for example, you can't avoid the stereotypical Spanish image of vast cathedrals and hundreds of *reconquista* castles, while the gorgeous medieval university city of Salamanca captivates all who visit. In northerly, mountainous **Asturias** and the **Pyrenees**, tiny, almost organically evolved, Romanesque churches dot the hillsides and villages, while in **Galicia** all roads lead to the ancient, and heartbreakingly beautiful cathedral city of Santiago de Compostela. **Andalucía** has the great mosques and Moorish palaces of Granada, Seville and Córdoba; **Castilla-La Mancha** boasts the superbly preserved medieval capital of Toledo; while the harsh landscape of **Extremadura** cradles ornate *conquistador* towns built with riches from the New World.

The Spanish **landscape**, too, holds just as much fascination and variety as the country's urban centres. The evergreen estuaries of Galicia could hardly be more different from the high, arid plains of Castile, or the gulch-like desert landscapes of Almería. In particular, Spain has some of the finest **mountains** in Europe, with superb walking – from short hikes to week-long treks – in a dozen or more protected ranges or *sierras* – especially the Picos de Europa and the Pyrenees. There are still brown bears and lynx in the wild, not to mention boar, storks and eagles, while a near-five-thousand-kilometre coastline means great opportunities for fishing, whale-watching and dolphin-spotting.

Agriculture, meanwhile, makes its mark in the patterned hillsides of the wine- and olive-growing regions, the baking wheat plantations and cattle



SPANISH TIME

Spanish time is notionally one hour ahead of the UK – but conceptually Spain might as well be on a different planet. Nowhere else in Europe keeps such late hours. Spaniards may not take a traditional midday **siesta** as much as they used to, but their diurnal rhythms remain committedly nocturnal. They'll saunter out around 8pm or 9pm in the evening for a **paseo**, to greet friends and maybe have a drink and tapas, and if they're eating out, they'll normally start at 10pm or 11pm, often later in Madrid, where it's not unusual for someone to phone around midnight to see if you're going out for the evening.

Like everything else, practices differ somewhat by region. Madrid – its inhabitants nicknamed **los gatos** or “the cats” for their nocturnal lifestyle – is famed for staying up the latest, with Andalucía a close second. In the north, particularly in Catalunya, they keep more northern European hours. And, of course, **summer nights** never seem to really end.

ranches of the central plains, the *meseta*, and the rice fields of the eastern provinces of Valencia and Murcia, known as the Levante. These areas, although short on historic monuments and attractions, produce some of Spain's most famous exports, and with the country now at the heart of the contemporary European foodie movement, there's an entire holiday to be constructed out of simply exploring Spain's rich **regional cuisine** – touring the Rioja and other celebrated wine regions, snacking your way around Extremadura and Andalucía in search of the world's best *jamón serrano* (cured mountain ham), or tucking into a paella in its spiritual home of Valencia.

And finally, there are the **beaches** – one of Spain's greatest attractions, and where modern tourism to the country began in the 1960s. Here, too, there's a lot more variety than the stereotypical images might suggest. Long tracts of coastline – along the **Costa del Sol** in Andalucía in particular – have certainly been massively and depressingly over-developed, but



Author picks

Our hard-travelling authors have visited every corner of Spain – from the *rías* of Galicia to the white towns of Andalucía – to bring you some unique travel experiences. These are some of their own, personal favourites.

Fiestas and *ferias* Get boozy at Sanlúcar de Barrameda's sherry festival (p.228), play with fire at Valencia's Las Fallas (p.804), or join the celebrations at Seville's Feria de Abril (p.228).

Seafood heaven Fill up on aromatic Valencian paella (p.797) or feast on L'Escala anchovies (p.727). Adventurous eaters can try *percebes*, prestigious little crustaceans from Galicia (p.549), or *ortiguillas*, deep-fried sea anemones from the Cádiz area (p.292).

Classic journeys The legendary Camino de Santiago route (p.554) is a life must-do. For train thrills the Catalan Cremallera (p.754) is a blast.

Delightful towns Not famous, no fanfares, but thoroughly lovely – Beget in Catalunya (p.747), El Burgo de Osma in Castilla y León (p.403) and Andalucía's Zahara de la Sierra (p.261).

Amazing views The jagged remains of Las Médulas are eerily captivating (p.442), while the views from the walls of Ávila (p.151) and Barcelona from the cross-harbour cable car (p.676) are unforgettable.

Hip and hot nightlife Join the gin craze in Barcelona (p.696), let your hair down at *Ibiza Rocks* in Ibiza (p.863), or hit *Coco's* fashionable dancefloors in Madrid (p.116).

Fine sands In a land of long sandy stretches and limpid, turquoise waters the competition for best beach is tough. Top of the table are: Conil in Andalucía (p.292), Águilas in Murcia (p.845) and Ibiza's Cala D'Hort (p.862).

Stunning architecture Gaudí's Parc Güell (p.679), Chillida in San Sebastián (p.453) and the vertical garden in Madrid's CaixaForum (p.86) are all eye-popping city masterpieces.

Our author recommendations don't end here. We've flagged up our favourite places – a perfectly sited hotel, an atmospheric café, a special restaurant – throughout the guide, highlighted with the ★ symbol.

LEFT JAMÓN, ANDALUCÍA **RIGHT** FROM **TOP** PEINE DEL VIENTO SCULPTURE; CAMINO DE SANTIAGO; EL BURGO DE OSMA, CASTILLA Y LEÓN



delightful pockets remain, even along the biggest, concrete-clad *costas*. Moreover, there are superb windsurfing waters around Tarifa and some decidedly low-key resorts along the **Costa de la Luz**. On the **Costa Brava**, in the northeast in Catalunya, the string of idyllic coves between Palamos and Begur is often overlooked, while the cooler Atlantic coastline boasts the **surfing beaches** of Cantabria and Asturias, and the unspoiled coves of Galicia's estuaries. Offshore, the **Balearic Islands** – Ibiza, Formentera, Mallorca and Menorca – also have some superb sands, with party-fuelled Ibiza in particular offering one of the most hedonistic backdrops to beachlife in the whole Mediterranean.

Hedonism, actually, brings us full circle, back to one of the reasons why Spain is pretty much irresistible and infectious. Wherever you are in the country, you can't help but notice the Spaniards' wild – often overbearing – enthusiasm for **having a good time**. Festivals are a case in point – these aren't staid, annual celebrations, they are raucous reaffirmations of life itself, complete with fireworks, fancy dress, giants, devils, bonfires, parties, processions and sheer Spanish glee. But even outside *fiesta* time there's always something vibrant and noisy happening – from local market to late-night bar, weekend football match to beachside dance club. Meals are convivial affairs – for most Spaniards the rushed sandwich or chain-restaurant takeaway just won't do – and long lunches and late dinners are the norm throughout the country. And with family at the heart of Spanish society, there's a genuine welcome for, and interest in, you and yours, whether at resort hotel or rustic guesthouse. “*A pasarlo bien!*” (Have a good time!), as the Spanish say.



ON THE TAPAS TRAIL

Everyone thinks they know tapas – the little nibbles served up in bars – yet nothing can prepare you for the variety available on their home soil. If all you've ever encountered is deep-fried squid and spicy potatoes, then a treat awaits. That's not even to say that those dishes aren't authentic – but the truth is that your first beachfront plate of Andalusian **calamares** or **patatas bravas** in back-street Barcelona will really make you sit up and take notice. The proper way to eat tapas is to wander from one bar to another to sample a particular speciality, since the best bars tend to be known for just one or two dishes and the locals wouldn't dream of ordering anything else. So you might duck into one place for **jamón serrano** (cured ham), another for **pulpo gallego** (pot-cooked octopus), a third for **pimientos de Padrón** (small green peppers – about one in ten being fiery-hot), and then maybe on to a smoky old bar that serves just **fino** (dry sherry) from the barrel along with slices of **mojama** (dried, pressed roe). And that's not counting the creative, new-wave bars where sculpted **montaditos** (canapés), yucca chips, samosas, sushi-fusion titbits or artisan-produced cheese and meat are all vying for your attention. Once you've nibbled your way around town, it's time to tackle the serious business of dinner.



When to go

If Spain is a country of many regions, it's also a country of many **climates** (see p.51). The high central plains (which include Madrid) suffer from fierce extremes – stiflingly hot in summer, bitterly cold and swept by freezing winds in winter. The Atlantic coast, in contrast, has a tendency to be damp and misty, with a relatively brief, humid summer. The Mediterranean south is warm virtually all year round, and in parts of Andalucía it's positively subtropical – it's often pleasant enough to take lunch outside, even in the winter months. On a general holiday or city break, in most regions spring, the early part of summer and autumn are the best times to visit. Temperatures will be fairly mild, sites and attractions open, and tourist numbers relatively low – worth considering, especially if your destination is one of the beach resorts or main cultural attractions. Spain is one of the most-visited countries on the planet – it plays host to about sixty million tourists a year, rather more than the entire population – and all main tourist destinations are packed in high summer. Even the Pyrenean mountains aren't immune, swapping winter ski crowds for summer hikers and bikers. August is Spain's own holiday month – when the *costas* are at their most crowded, though inland cities (including Madrid) are, by contrast, pretty sleepy, since everyone who can leaves for their annual break.

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things not to miss

It's not possible to see everything that Spain has to offer in one trip – and we don't suggest you try. What follows, in no particular order, is a selection of the country's highlights, including spectacular architecture, outstanding natural wonders, flamboyant local festivals and a few culinary treats. Each entry has a page reference to take you straight into the Guide, where you can find out more. Coloured numbers refer to chapters in the Guide section.





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1 FLAMENCO IN SEVILLE

Page 283

The stamp of heels and heart-rending lament of a *cante jondo* encapsulate the soul of the Spanish south.

2 SHERRY TASTING IN JEREZ

Page 303

There are few greater pleasures than a chilled glass of fino or manzanilla, and there's no better place to sample them than in the sherry heartland of Jerez.

3 BURGOS CATHEDRAL

Page 419

What is perhaps Spain's finest Gothic cathedral dominates the lively small city of Burgos.

4 IBIZA AND FORMENTERA'S HIDDEN COVES

Page 862

The islands' little-developed beaches range from gem-like coves to sweeps of white sand.



3



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5 GOURMET SNACKS IN SAN SEBASTIÁN

Page 459

San Sebastian's *pintxos* (Basque for tapas) are renowned far and wide for being the best in Spain.

6 CLUBBING IN IBIZA

Page 858

Forget sleep, and experience everything else to excess, on Ibiza – the ultimate party island.

7 SEGOVIA

Page 158

At eight hundred metres long the extraordinary Roman aqueduct of Segovia is one of Spain's most breathtaking ancient monuments.

8 TEATRE-MUSEU DALÍ, FIGUERES

Page 743

The Dalí museum in Figueres is as surreal as its creator – who lies in a mausoleum within.

9 TOLEDO

Page 126

The capital of medieval Spain, Toledo has changed little since its depiction in El Greco's paintings.

10 LA MEZQUITA, CÓRDOBA

Page 316

Nothing can prepare you for the breathtaking Grand Mosque of Córdoba – one of the world's most beautiful buildings.



10

11 PARADORES

Page 36

Converted castles, monasteries and special monuments provide many of Spain's most atmospheric hotels.

12 BODEGAS YSIOS

Page 484

Raise a glass to the Rioja region's amazing designer temple of wine.

13 LAS ALPUJARRAS

Page 350

Drive over lemons and walk old mule paths in this picturesque region of mountain villages nestled in the southern folds of the Sierra Nevada.

14 SEMANA SANTA

Page 228

Easter week sees processions of masked penitents, with the biggest events in Seville and Málaga.

15 FUNDACIÓ JOAN MIRÓ

Page 674

Admire the instantly recognizable colours, shapes and forms of Joan Miró's life's work in this Barcelona museum.

16 SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA

Page 548

The pilgrim route to Santiago de Compostela left a swathe of Gothic and Renaissance churches, not least the great Cathedral.

17 PARQUE NACIONAL COTO DE DOÑANA

Page 306

Look for Doñana's myriad birds and other wildlife – including the rare Iberian lynx – on an African-style safari.



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18 UNIVERSIDAD DE SALAMANCA

Page 378

Spain's most famous and historic university sits at the heart of this gorgeous honey-coloured city.

19 PICOS DE EUROPA

Page 516

Take a hike along the stunning Cares Gorge, the most popular walk in glorious Picos de Europa National Park.

20 MUSEO DEL PRADO, MADRID

Page 76

Spain's greatest art museum is an obligatory visit on any trip to the capital.

21 SITGES

Page 773

Sitges is Spain's biggest gay resort and throws simply spectacular parties, especially at Carnival time.

22 ROMAN RUINS OF MÉRIDA

Page 212

Wander at will around the ancient Roman ruins of Mérida, the most extensive such remains in the country.

23 MUSEO GUGGENHEIM, BILBAO

Page 472

Frank Gehry's flagship creation of undulating titanium has become one of the iconic buildings of our age.



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**24 SEVILLE**

Page 263

The quintessential Andalusian city with sun-drenched plazas, winding alleyways, Moorish monuments and more bars than seems remotely feasible.

25 LAS FALLAS

Page 804

In March, Valencia erupts in festivities as giant models are burnt and fireworks crackle across town to celebrate San José.

26 THE ALHAMBRA, GRANADA

Page 334

The legendary Moorish palace complex is a monument to sensuality and contemplative decoration.

27 SAGRADA FAMÍLIA, BARCELONA

Page 667

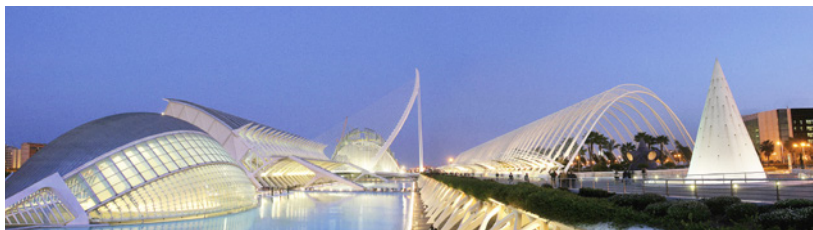
One of Spain's truly essential sights – Antoni Gaudí's unfinished masterpiece, the church of the "Sacred Family".

28 A NIGHT ON THE TILES, MADRID

Page 113

Delight in the capital's most traditional of rituals – a night of bar-hopping and clubbing rounded off by a dawn revival of *chocolate con churros*.





Itineraries

Spain is a vast and varied country, and you can't cover all of it in a single trip. Our Grand Tour concentrates on Spain's major cities and outstanding sights, while our other suggested routes focus on two captivating regions, one in the south, one in the north. Each itinerary will take a packed two weeks to cover; if you only have one week to spare you can cover part of one route and get a flavour of the whole country or a feel for one of its fascinating regions.

GRAND TOUR OF SPAIN

Two weeks in Spain and no idea where to start? Our "Grand Tour" puts you on the right track.

- ➊ **Madrid** The vibrant capital is at the heart of all that makes modern Spain tick, from world-class art collections to a buzzing café society and a wild nightlife. **See p.60**
- ➋ **Toledo** With time for just one side trip from Madrid, head to Toledo. This old rock-bound city is the home of El Greco and is packed with magnificent buildings. **See p.126**
- ➌ **Seville** You could spend weeks exploring Andalucía (see opposite) – but for a taster, Seville combines gorgeous buildings with a vibrant flamenco and tapas scene. **See p.263**
- ➍ **Valencia** The rapidly changing city of Valencia – cultural hub of the east, not to mention the spiritual birthplace of paella – breaks up the long journey up the coast. **See p.797**
- ➎ **Barcelona** Leave Spain – as the locals would have you believe – for the cool Catalan capital, with its Art Nouveau architecture, designer shops, and stylish bars and clubs. **See p.644**
- ➏ **Figueres** The two-hour journey from Barcelona towards the French border is made with only one destination in mind – the extraordinary Teatre-Museu Dalí. **See p.743**

➐ **Logroño** This handsome city sits at the heart of the Rioja region, and while it may be small there's nothing modest about its superb tapas and wine bars. From here, you could detour along the northern coast (see opposite). **See p.410**

➑ **Valladolid** Relive Spain's Golden Age in the capital of Castilla y León, whose majestic Plaza Mayor has no equal. **See p.392**

➒ **Salamanca** The most beautiful city in Spain has buildings fashioned from a honey-coloured stone that glows as the sun sets. **See p.374**

THE BEST OF ANDALUCÍA

- ➓ **Málaga** This transport hub is the obvious place to start, but it's also worth lingering for a day to enjoy this vibrant coastal city. **See p.229**
- ➑ **Ronda** Sited astride a towering gorge is the queen of Andalucía's white towns. **See p.256**
- ➒ **Seville** The essence of all things *andaluz*, with a stunning cathedral, Moorish Alcázar and atmospheric old quarter. **See p.263**
- ➓ **Córdoba** A must-see destination, boasting one of the world's greatest Moorish buildings, the Mezquita, at its heart. **See p.313**
- ➑ **Baeza and Úbeda** These twin Renaissance architectural jewels are filled with a wealth of monuments in golden stone. **See p.325 & 327**

⑥ **Cazorla Natural Park** A stunning array of wildlife inhabits the rugged mountains, gorges and forested valleys of Cazorla. **See p.328**

⑦ **Granada** Overlooked by the seductive Alhambra, the historic city of Granada is one of Spain's most compelling attractions. **See p.331**

⑧ **Almuñécar** The Costa Tropical's main resort has great beaches and plenty of places to eat, drink and dance the night away. **See p.243**

NORTHERN SPAIN, ALONG THE ATLANTIC COAST

① **Bilbao** Revitalized by the success of its Guggenheim Museum, the energetic city of Bilbao is set amid the spectacular green hills of the Basque Country. **See p.469**

② **San Sebastián** This elegant seaside resort boasts one of Europe's best city beaches; its superb cuisine is at its most affordable in the *pintxos* bars of the old quarter. **See p.452**

③ **Pamplona** An intriguing destination, which comes alive during the bull-running of July's San Fermín festival. **See p.485**

④ **Santillana del Mar** Often hailed as Spain's prettiest village, Santillana is an exquisite medieval ensemble with some gorgeous hotels. **See p.511**

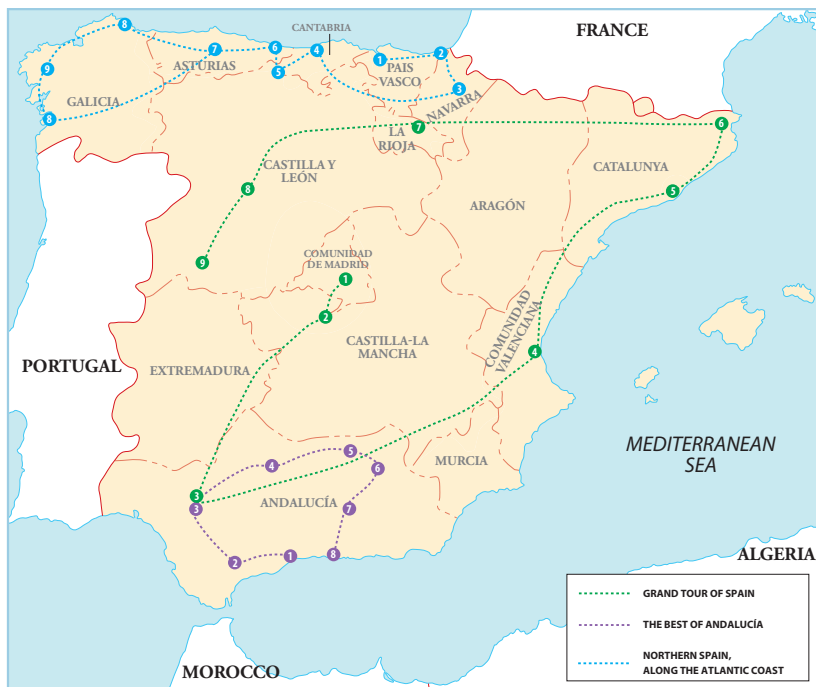
⑤ **Picos de Europa** Just a few kilometres back from the sea, these snowy peaks are interspersed with lush meadows and ancient settlements, and offer superb hiking. **See p.516**

⑥ **Llanes** Delightful seaside towns dot the Asturian coast, but bustling little Llanes, close to superb beaches and soaring mountains, is perhaps the finest of all. **See p.530**

⑦ **Oviedo** Ravishing little Visigothic churches pepper the hills here – though you'll have to tear yourself away from the city's cider-houses to see them. **See p.538**

⑧ **The Rías of Galicia** The fjord-like estuaries that slice into Galicia cradle dramatic scenery and splendid beaches, with the wild Rías Altas in the north and the busier, gentler Rías Baixas to the south. **See p.563 & p.574**

⑨ **Santiago de Compostela** For over a thousand years, this magnificent cathedral city has welcomed footsore pilgrims; its historic core, bursting with bars and restaurants, remains irresistible. **See p.548**





FERIA DE ABRIL, SEVILLE

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Getting there

Madrid and Barcelona are the two main Spanish airports, though the summer holiday trade to the costas and the Balearics, and extensive coverage by European budget airlines, has opened up regional airports right across Spain. Taking the train to Spain is a greener option and has much to recommend it – and now you can do the whole journey from London to Barcelona or Madrid in a day. Driving is more of an adventure, but there are several routes that can save you time, like the direct ferry services from Portsmouth and Plymouth to Santander and Portsmouth to Bilbao.

Flights from the UK and Ireland

Flight time to Spain is two to three hours, depending on the route, and usually the cheapest flights are with the no-frills **budget airlines** such as easyJet (✈️easyjet.com), flybe (✈️flybe.com), Jet2 (✈️jet2.com), Ryanair (✈️ryanair.com) and Vueling (✈️vueling.com), who between them fly from over twenty regional UK airports direct to **destinations all over Spain** – not just Madrid and Barcelona, but also to smaller regional Spanish airports like Málaga, Alicante, Santander, Valencia and those in the Balearics. Note that London flights tend to depart from Stansted or Luton, while it's always worth double-checking the exact Spanish airport used – some "Barcelona" flights, for example, are actually to Girona (1hr to the north) or Reus (1hr 15min to the south). **Fares** for flights on all routes start at around £20 each way excluding baggage. However, book last minute in the summer and you can expect to pay considerably more, up to £100 each way depending on the route.

For flights **to the costas and Balearics**, it's also worth checking holiday and charter companies such as Monarch (✈️monarch.co.uk), First Choice (✈️firstchoice.co.uk), Thomas Cook (✈️thomascokairlines.com) and Thomson (✈️thomsonfly.com). You might not get the rock-bottom deals of the budget

airlines, as schedules and prices are geared towards the summer holiday season, but flights depart from convenient regional airports around the UK.

The widest range of **scheduled flights** is with Iberia (✈️iberia.com) and British Airways (✈️ba.com), with direct services from London Gatwick or Heathrow to half a dozen Spanish cities (most frequently to Madrid and Barcelona, but also Valencia, Bilbao, Málaga and Alicante) and connections on to most other airports in Spain. You'll also be able to arrange add-on sections to London from regional English airports such as Manchester or Newcastle or from Scotland. Special offers start at around £100 return, though a typical late-booking summer rate will be more like £200 return.

From Ireland, you can fly with Iberia from Dublin to Madrid, or with Aer Lingus (✈️aerlingus.com) from Dublin or Cork to several Spanish airports (including Barcelona, Bilbao, Málaga and Alicante). Ryanair also connects Dublin with most of the same destinations. Prices start at around €40 each way, though these rise sharply for last-minute bookings or to popular summer destinations.

Flights from the US and Canada

The widest choice of scheduled flights **from the United States** to Spain is with Iberia (✈️iberia.com), which flies direct, nonstop from New York, Los Angeles, Miami and Chicago to Madrid. Journey time (typically overnight) is between seven and eleven hours, depending on the route. Fares start at around US\$1100 return. The advantage of flying with Iberia is that it offers connecting flights to almost anywhere in Spain, which can be very good value if booked with your transatlantic flight.

Other airlines offering Spain routes (some on a code-share basis with Iberia or other airlines) include American Airlines (✈️aa.com), Delta (✈️delta.com) and United (✈️united.com). In the summer of 2017, Level (✈️flylevel.com), the first "budget" airline to offer trans-Atlantic flights, commenced operations. They offer flights from Los Angeles or San Francisco to Barcelona. Flights can be found for as low as €300 return, though double

A BETTER KIND OF TRAVEL

At Rough Guides we are passionately committed to travel. We believe it helps us understand the world we live in and the people we share it with – and of course tourism is vital to many developing economies. But the scale of modern tourism has also damaged some places irreparably, and climate change is accelerated by most forms of transport, especially flying. All Rough Guides' flights are carbon-offset, and every year we donate money to a variety of environmental charities.

that is more realistic. You can also fly to Spain with airlines such as Air France, KLM, Lufthansa, TAP or British Airways, for example, which tend to fly via their respective European hubs – in which case, you can add three to four hours to your total travel time, depending on the connection.

From Canada, Air Canada (@aircanada.com) flies nonstop from Toronto to Madrid and Barcelona. It also sells connecting and/or code-sharing flights from Toronto and Montréal to Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Malaga and Bilbao. Alternatively, you can fly with one of the major European airlines via their respective hubs – fares in all cases start from around Can\$1050 return.

Flights from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa

There are no direct flights to Spain **from Australia or New Zealand**, but many airlines offer through-tickets with their partners via their European or Asian hubs. Flights via Asia are generally the cheaper option, but fares don't vary as much between airlines as you might think, and in the end you'll be basing your choice on things like flight timings, routes and possible stop-offs on the way. If you're seeing Spain as part of a wider European trip, you might want to aim first for the UK, since there's a wide choice of cheap flights to Spain from there and it's generally cheaper to fly from Australasia to London than it is to Spain. Or consider a Round-the-World fare, with most basic options able to offer Madrid or Barcelona as standard stopovers.

From **South Africa**, Iberia (@iberia.com) offers direct flights between Johannesburg and Madrid. One of the more convenient non-direct routes is offered by Ethiopian Airlines (@www.ethiopianairlines.com) who fly the Johannesburg to Madrid route with a transit in Addis Ababa. Otherwise many other European airlines fly from their respective hubs to Johannesburg and all can offer connections onto Spain.

Package holidays, tours and city breaks

The basic, mass-market **package holidays** to the traditional resorts on the Costa del Sol, Costa Brava, Costa Blanca and others are not to everyone's taste, but bargains can be found online or at any UK high-street travel agent, from as little as £150 for a seven-night flight-and-hotel package. There are often really good deals for families, either in hotels or in self-catering apartments, though, of course, if you

are tied to school holidays you will pay significantly more.

A huge number of **specialist tour operators** offer a wider range of activity holidays or tours, from hiking in the Pyrenees to touring the artistic highlights of Andalucía. We've given a flavour of what's available in the listed reviews at the end of this section, but the options are almost endless. Prices vary wildly depending on the quality of accommodation offered and whether the tours are fully inclusive or not. Many hiking or bicycle tours, for example, can either be guided or done on a more independent (and cheaper) self-guided basis. Spanish-based tour operators offer some of the more interesting, off-the-beaten-track options, but for these you'll usually have to arrange your own flights to Spain, while many foreign-based operators also tend to quote for their holidays exclusive of airfares.

Some operators and websites specialize in **city breaks**, with destinations including Barcelona, Madrid, Seville and Granada. UK prices start at around £150 for three-day (two-night) breaks, including return flights, airport transfer and B&B in a centrally located one-, two- or three-star hotel. Adding extra nights or upgrading your hotel is possible, too, usually at a fairly reasonable cost. The bigger US operators, such as American Express and Delta Vacations, can also easily organize short city breaks to Spain on a flight-and-hotel basis, while from Australia Iberian specialist Ibertours (@ibertours.com.au) can arrange two- or three-night packages in most Spanish cities.

Other deals worth considering are fly-drive offers, where you'll get a **flight, accommodation and car rental** arranged through your tour operator. Some companies specialize in villas and apartments, or off-the-beaten-track farmhouses and the like, while on other holiday packages you can tour the country's historic paradores, with car rental included.

ADVENTURE OPERATORS

Alto-Aragon UK ☎0034 616 452337, @altoaragon.co.uk. An established English-run company offering summer hiking and activity holidays (from around £400, land-only) in the high Pyrenees and the Basque Country.

Exodus Travels UK ☎0203 131 647, @exodus.co.uk. Walking and cycling in Andalucía, Mallorca, the Picos de Europa and the Pyrenees (and most minor mountain ranges), as well as cycling or multi-adventure (climbing, caving, rafting, etc), cultural and sightseeing trips. There's a big range of tours at all prices, but a typical example is a week's walking in the Sierra de Atiana, from £999 including flights.

Naturetrek UK ☎01962 733051, @naturetrek.co.uk. Highly regarded wildlife-watching tours across Spain including wolf-watching in the north, lynx in the south, birdwatching throughout and some offbeat tours such as butterflies and moths of the Spanish Pyrenees.

BACKPACKER TRAVEL

Busabout UK 📞 0845 0267 576, 🌐 busabout.com. The European backpacker bus service offers an eight-day Southern Spain, Portugal and Morocco bus tour staying in Seville, Granada, the Algarve and Tangiers (from €725) plus a four-day Ibiza tour (from €345), all aimed at a young, party crowd.

CYCLING TOURS

Bravobike Spain 📞 917 582 945, 🌐 bravobike.com. Offers a variety of cycle tours from one day in Madrid, Segovia or Toledo, for example, to themed week-long tours in *conquistador* country or along the Camino de Santiago. Prices vary from €35 for a half-day trip round Madrid, up to €2035 for an eight-day guided wine tour of Rioja.

Easy Rider Tours US 📞 1 800 488 8332, 🌐 easyrider.com. Guided cycling and sightseeing tours in Andalucía, the foothills of the Pyrenees, and along the pilgrims' way to Santiago de Compostela. Tours are all-inclusive and fully supported, from around \$3695 for a week, though airfares are extra.

Iberocycle Spain 📞 020 3286 4124, 🌐 iberocycle.com. An English-run, Spain-based company specializing in supported or self-guided cycling tours of northern Spain in particular (Cantabria, Asturias, Basque Country, Catalunya). Short five-night trips start at around €795.

FOOD AND DRINK TOURS

Arblaster & Clarke UK 📞 01730 263111, 🌐 arblasterandclarke.com. The most notable wine-tour specialist, with quality trips to all Spain's wine-producing regions, including agreeable accommodation and tastings at both famous and little-known wineries. From £2225, excluding flights.

A Taste of Spain Spain 📞 856 079 626, 🌐 atasteofspain.com. Organizes gourmet culinary tours of Catalunya, the Basque region/La Rioja, Andalucía and central Spain, with tastings, meals and cookery lessons. From around €415 for a day's excursion to taste Iberico ham, up to €2960 for a week-long gastronomic whizz through the Basque country, Catalunya and Madrid.

HISTORY, ART AND CULTURE TOURS

Abercrombie and Kent UK 📞 01242 547760, 🌐 www.abercrombiekent.co.uk; US 📞 1 800 554 7016, 🌐 abercrombiekent.com. Upmarket independent or fully escorted tailor-made tours, with the ten-day "Classic Spain" trip (Barcelona, Madrid, Cordoba, Seville, from £2995) typically providing high-speed train travel, luxury hotels and a private guide for monument visits.

Madrid and Beyond Spain 📞 917 580 063, 🌐 madridandbeyond.com. Classy customized holidays and special experiences, from private gallery tours to fashion-expert-led shopping trips in Barcelona and Madrid. Variable prices.

Martin Randall Travel UK 📞 020 8742 3355, 🌐 martinrandall.com. The leading cultural-tour specialists, offering small-group, expert-led trips to Catalunya, Madrid, Salamanca, Bilbao and Seville, among others. Trip themes range from a five-day Madrid art tour for around £1810 to a week-long "Romans in the Mediterranean" for £2160.

HORSERIDING TOURS

Fantasia Adventure Holidays Spain 📞 610 943 685, 🌐 fantasiaadventureholidays.com. British-run company offering riding breaks on the Costa de la Luz, from five to fifteen days (from £695, excluding flights).

SURFING HOLIDAYS

Surf Spain UK 🌐 surfspain.co.uk. Surf camps and tailor-made surfing holidays in the north and south of Spain, with six-night breaks from £409 per person (excluding flights).

WALKING TRIPS

ATG-Oxford UK 📞 01865 315678, 🌐 atg-oxford.co.uk.

Sustainable-tourism outfit with off-the-beaten-track walking holidays in Valencia or the volcanic countryside around Girona, plus Mallorca, Catalunya and the Camino de Santiago. Five-day holidays start from £455.

Inntravel UK 📞 01653 617001, 🌐 inntravel.co.uk. Self-guided walking tours in Andalucía, Picos de Europa, the Pyrenees, the Balearics and Catalunya. Each night's destination is a small family-run hotel where your baggage is waiting. A typical seven-day walking holiday starts at around £715.

Ramblers Worldwide Holidays UK 📞 01707 818063, 🌐 ramblersholidays.co.uk. Long-established walking-tour operator, with hiking holidays in most Spanish mountain regions, as well as vineyard rambles and tours of classical Andalucía. From around £850 for a week's walking in Southern Spain (includes hotel, dinner, guide and airfare).

Trains

Travelling **by train from the UK to Spain** is a viable – and fun – option, with total journey times from London of under twelve hours to Barcelona, and fifteen hours to Madrid. You can now do the journey in one (admittedly very long) day, if you take the 9.15am **Eurostar** (🌐 eurostar.com) from London St Pancras International to Paris and change there for the double-decker TGV Duplex, which arrives in Barcelona (via Figueres and Girona) at about 8.40pm. From Barcelona, you can catch a high-speed AVE train, which will get you to Madrid (via Zaragoza) at around midnight. **Fares** start at £79 return for the Eurostar to Paris (through-tickets available from UK towns and cities), plus from €115 one-way for the TGV to Barcelona; one-way fares from Barcelona to Madrid by high-speed AVE start at €91. You'll have to book well in advance on all services to get the lowest prices. If you don't mind the journey to Spain taking a whole lot longer, there are also minor routes that cross the central Pyrenees (via Canfranc or Puigcerdà), though you may have to spend the night at either of the border towns if you want to see the mountains in daylight.

The best first stop for information about train travel to Spain is the excellent 🌐 seat61.com,

which provides full route, ticket, timetable and contact information. You can book the whole journey online with **LoCo2** (🌐loco2.com), or contact a specialist rail agent like Ffestiniog Travel (🌐ffestiniogtravel.com) or the Spanish Rail Service (🌐renfe.com). For the French trains try 🌐voyages-sncf.com, which can book Eurostar and TGV tickets and advise about **rail passes** (principally InterRail and Eurail), which have to be bought before leaving home (see opposite).

Buses

You can reach most major towns and cities in Spain by bus from the UK with **Eurolines** services (🌐eurolines.co.uk). The main routes are from London (though inexpensive add-on fares are available from any British city) to Madrid (27hr), with connections on to other Spanish destinations, but it's a long time to spend cooped up in a bus. Standard return fares are £90 to Madrid, though there are advance deals and special offers – it's always cheapest to book online. Eurolines also has a **Eurolines Pass**, which allows unlimited travel on Eurolines routes between forty-odd cities, but only between Madrid, Barcelona and Alicante within Spain, so it's not much use for a Spanish tour.

Driving to Spain

Driving to Spain from the UK is an interesting way to get there, but with fuel, road toll and overnight costs it doesn't compare in terms of price with flying or taking the train. It's about 1600km from London to Barcelona, for example, which, with stops, takes almost two full days to drive; it's another 600km on to Madrid.

Many people use the conventional **cross-Channel ferry links**, principally Dover–Calais, though services to Brittany or Normandy might be more convenient depending on where you live (and they cut out the trek around Paris). However, the quickest way of crossing the Channel is to use the **Eurotunnel** (🌐eurotunnel.com), which operates drive-on, drive-off shuttle trains between Folkestone and Calais/Coquelles. The 24-hour service runs every twenty minutes throughout the day; though you can just turn up, booking is advised, especially at weekends and in summer holidays, or if you want the best deals (from £50 one-way).

The best way to cut driving time is to use one of the direct **UK–Spain ferry crossings**, especially if you're heading for the Basque region, Galicia,

Castilla y León or even Madrid. Brittany Ferries (🌐brittany-ferries.co.uk) operates car and passenger ferry services from **Portsmouth to Santander** (2 weekly; 24hr) and **Bilbao** (2 weekly; 24–32hr) and **Plymouth to Santander** (1 weekly; 20hr). Fares start at £264 one-way for a car and two passengers, but it costs significantly more in summer, particularly August – it's cheaper for foot-passengers, though everyone has to book some form of seating or cabin accommodation.

Any ferry company or travel agent can supply up-to-date schedules and ticket information, or you can consult the encyclopedic 🌐directferries.com, which has details about, and links to, every European ferry service.

Getting around

Most of Spain is well covered by public transport. The rail network reaches all the provincial capitals and the main towns along the inter-city lines, and there's an expanding high-speed network that has slashed journey times on major cross-country routes from Madrid. Inter-city bus services are often more frequent and cheaper than the regular trains, and will usually take you closer to your destination, as some train stations are a few kilometres from the town or village they serve. Driving a car, meanwhile, will give you the freedom to head away from the major tourist routes and take in some of the spectacular scenery at your own pace.

One important point to remember is that all public transport, and the bus service especially, is drastically reduced on **Sundays and public holidays** – don't even consider travelling to out-of-the-way places on these days. The words to look out for on timetables are *diario* (daily), *laborables* (workdays, including Sat), and *domingos y festivos* (Sun and public hols).

By train

Spanish trains, operated by **RENFE** (🌐renfe.com), tend to be efficient and comfortable, and nearly always run on time. There's a confusing array of services, though the website has a useful English-language version on which you can check timetables and buy tickets with a credit card (printing them out at home before you travel).

ALL ABOARD

As well as the main Spanish rail system, there are also several private and regional train lines offering a different view of some spectacular parts of the country, mainly in the north.

The best is probably the **narrow-gauge railway** (see box, p.502), which runs right across the wild northwest, from Santander in Cantabria, through Asturias to Ferrol in Galicia. Catalunya has its own local commuter line, the **FGC** (see p.705), which operates the mountain rack-railway to **Montserrat**, as well as the **Cremallera**, the “zipper” (see p.754), another rack-and-pinion line that slinks up a Pyrenean valley to the sanctuary and ski station of Núria.

In the Sierra Guadarrama, just north of Madrid, the narrow-gauge line from **Cercedilla** to the ski station at Puerto de Navacerrada and then on to Cotos is a great way to see the mountainous landscape (see p.148).

Cercanías are local commuter trains in and around the major cities, while **media distancia** (regional) and **larga distancia** (long-distance) trains go under a bewildering number of names, including Avant, Alaris, Intercity (IC), Regional and Talgo services. The difference is speed, service and number of stops, and you'll always pay more on the quickest routes (sometimes quite a lot more).

The premier services are the high-speed trains, such as the **Euromed** from Barcelona to Alicante, or the fast-expanding **AVE** (Alta Velocidad Española) network from Madrid to Seville, Málaga, Valencia, Segovia/Valladolid, Zaragoza, Barcelona, Alicante and Huesca; and from Barcelona to Seville and Málaga; and from Valencia to Seville. The AVE trains have cut travelling times dramatically, with Madrid to Seville, for example, taking two and a half hours compared with six to nine hours on the slower trains. The AVE network also runs across the border from Madrid and Barcelona to Marseille, and from Barcelona to Paris, Lyons and Toulouse, and is set to expand right across the peninsula over the next decade, northwest to Castilla y León and Galicia (due to be completed in 2018), the Basque Country and Asturias, and west to Lisbon in Portugal.

Tickets, fares and rail passes

Although you can just turn up at the station for short hops, **advance booking** is essential (and seat reservations obligatory) for long-distance journeys. Advance tickets can be bought at stations between sixty days and five minutes before departure, but don't leave it to the last minute, as there are usually long queues (and often separate windows for the different types of train). Automatic **ticket machines** at main stations take some of the hassle out of queuing.

The best deals are always available **online** on the RENFE website, which has a range of different promotional fares offering discounts of up to sixty percent on the full fares. Otherwise, **return fares**

(*ida y vuelta*) are discounted by ten to twenty percent, depending on the service – you can buy a single, and so long as you show it when you buy the return, you'll still get the discount. There's also a whole range of other **discounted fares** of between 25 and 40 percent for those over 60 or under 26, the disabled, children aged 4 to 11 years, and those travelling in groups.

Actual fares vary wildly, but as an example, you'll pay around €24 on the regional service from Madrid to Salamanca (2hr 50min trip), while on the Madrid to Barcelona route you could pay from as little as €66 on the high-speed AVE service (around 3hr).

The major pan-European **rail passes** (InterRail and Eurail) are only worth considering if you're visiting the country as part of a wider European tour. Both schemes also have single-country Spain rail passes available, which might be better value depending on your Spanish itinerary. The **InterRail Spain Pass** (🌐interrail.eu) is only available to European residents and allows three, four, six or eight days' train travel within one month, with under-26 years, second- and first-class versions available. For anyone else, **Eurail** (🌐raileurope.com) has various Spain passes available, typically offering three days' travel in two months, again in various classes. You can check current prices on the websites, but bear in mind that it often works out cheaper to buy individual tickets in Spain as you need them, and it's certainly more convenient to be free to choose long-distance buses on some routes. All passes have to be bought before you leave home, and you'll still be liable for supplements and seat reservations on long-distance and high-speed trains.

By bus

Buses will probably meet most of your transport needs, especially if you're venturing away from the larger towns and cities. Many smaller villages and rural areas are only accessible by bus, almost always

originating in the capital of their province. Services are pretty reliable, whether it's the two-buses-a-day local run, or the regular services between major cities (the latter often far more conveniently scheduled than the equivalent train services). **Fares** are very reasonable, too: Madrid to León (3hr 30min), for example, costs around €25, Madrid to Santander (6hr) around €31. On inter-city runs, you'll usually be assigned a seat when you buy your ticket. Some destinations are served by more than one **bus company**, but main bus stations have posted timetables for all services (and, sometimes, someone who can speak English). Or you can check timetables on the company websites, which, while not always up to date, do at least give an idea of available services. Major companies like Alsa (Walsa.es/en) and Avanzabus (Wavanzabus.com) have nationwide services, and both have English-language versions of their websites.

There are only a few cities in Spain (Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia, for example) where you'll need to use the **local bus** network, and all the relevant details are given in the Guide. You'll also sometimes need to take a local bus out to a campsite or distant museum or monastery; fares are very cheap, rarely more than a euro or two.

By car

Spain has an extensive system of highways, both free and with tolls. The **autopistas** are the most comfortable and best-kept roads. The second-grade roads, **autovías** (prefixed E), often follow similar routes, but their speed limits are lower. Many

autopistas and some *autovías* are toll roads, relatively expensive but worth paying for the lighter traffic encountered. You can usually pay with a credit card, although it's wise to have enough cash just in case. Toll roads are usually designated by an "AP" or "R" or the words "*peaje/Telpeaje/Via T*".

The Spanish **drive on the right**, and **speed limits** are enforced throughout the country. On most *autopistas* it is 120km/h, on the *autovía* 90km/h, and in towns and villages 50km/h. Police have the power to fine drivers on the spot for speeding or any other transgressions, and if you don't have any cash, they will escort you to the nearest cash machine and issue you with a receipt there and then. You can pay by credit card at most petrol stations for **fuel** (*gasolina*), the main companies being Cepsa and Repsol.

An EU **driver's licence** is sufficient to drive in Spain. US, Canadian, Australian and New Zealand licences should also be enough, though you may want to get an International Driver's Licence as well, just to be on the safe side. If you are bringing your own car, you will need your vehicle registration and insurance papers – and check with your insurers that you are covered to drive the car abroad. It's also compulsory to carry two hazard triangles and reflective jackets in case of accident or breakdown. Rear seat belts are also compulsory, as are child seats for infants. An official first-aid kit and a set of spare bulbs is also recommended.

Parking can be a big pain in the neck, especially in big cities and old-town areas. Metered parking zones usually have stays limited to a couple of hours, though parking between 8pm and 8am, on

THE SPANISH DRIVING EXPERIENCE

If it's your first time out on a Spanish road, especially in one of the bigger cities, you could be forgiven for thinking you've stumbled upon the local chapter of *Mad Max* devotees, out for a burn-up. In fact, those wild-eyed, dangerously speeding, non-signalling, bumper-hogging, mobile-talking, horn-sounding road warriors are normal Spanish citizens on their way to work.

Traffic lights and **pedestrian crossings** in particular present a difficult conceptual challenge – if you are going to stop at either, make sure you give plenty of warning to avoid another vehicle running into the back of you, and keep an eye out for cars crossing your path who have jumped the lights. **Signposting** is universally poor (yes, *that* was the turn you wanted), even on main roads and highways, while joining and exiting **autopistas/autovías** can be particularly dangerous, as it's almost a point of honour not to let anyone in or out, and slip roads are often very short. Many of the worst **accidents** are on the N roads, which have only a single carriageway in each direction, so take particular care on these. Major roads are generally in good **condition**, though some minor and mountain roads can be rather hairy and are little more than dirt tracks in the more remote regions, awash with sheep, goats and cattle. That said, things are getting more orderly and drivers are a bit more careful because of increased use of radar and speed controls. The police are also setting up more **drink-driving** controls than before, though you have to remember that this is a country where it's considered a good idea to have bars in motorway service stations.

SPAIN'S BEST DRIVES

There are some fantastic driving routes in this land of big scenery, big horizons and big surprises – here's our choice of Spain's best drives.

Alt Empordà Track the coastline in northern Costa Brava as you take in Greek and Roman ruins at Empúries and Salvador Dalí's former home outside the picturesque town of Cadaqués. See p.726.

Cañón de Río Sil Gaze upon Galicia's most arresting landscape along this dramatic canyon that is also home to one of the country's foremost wine-producing regions. See p.592.

The Cincó Villas Lose yourself in small-town Aragón on the 80km drive linking the historic "five towns", from Tauste to Sos del Rey Católico. See p.611.

El Escorial to Ávila The most scenic route out of Madrid province, an hour's drive from Felipe II's colossal monastery and over the hills to the historic walled city of Ávila. See p.151.

Gipuzkoa Head inland from San Sebastián and immerse yourself in Basque culture at Tolosa's lively carnival and historic Oñati, with its distinctive *casas torres*. See p.461. Or, for a more coastal Basque view, drive the wiggly and spectacular coastal route (N364 and BI3438) between San Sebastián and Bilbao, stopping for a swim at any one of the hidden coves. See p.463.

Huelva province Take the A416 north from Minas de Río Tinto towards Aracena in Huelva and you'll see some stunning effects of the wealth of minerals in the region. The road leads to a mirador overlooking the El Cerro Colorado mine and travels low

over the point at which two alternately coloured reservoirs – the Embalse de Gossán and the Embalse del Agua – meet.

Inland from Benidorm It's the juxtaposition between hedonistic sun-and-sand and quiet, rural inland Valencia that marks this leisurely 55km excursion, from Calpe to Alcoy. See p.827.

Puerto de las Palomas to Zahara de la Sierra One of the most dramatic descents in Andalucía starts from the "Pass of the Doves" and corkscrews dizzyly downwards to the ancient Moorish village of Zahara, with spectacular views across the sierras. See p.260.

Sierra de la Demanda Mountain monasteries, verdant valleys and bare upland vistas on the two-hour drive (LR113) from La Rioja to the Castilla y León heartland. See p.417.

Through the Valle de Jerte Track the Río Jerte for 70km (N110 out of Plasencia towards Barco de Ávila) on one of the most picturesque drives in Spain – carpeted in cherry blossom every spring. See p.194.

Valldemossa to Lluc The Ma10 tracks the dramatic coastline of northern Mallorca, a roller coaster of a ride through hilltop villages via the island's highest peaks. See p.875.

Vielha to Esterri d'Àneu Snowy peaks, thickly forested slopes and, above all, utter mountain stillness – this 42km drive over the Bonaigua Pass (2072m) is pure Pyrenees. See p.769.

Saturday afternoons and all Sundays tends to be free. Green or blue bays signify pay-parking areas in most cities, but it's always worth double-checking that you're allowed to park where you've just left your car, as any illegally parked vehicle will be promptly towed. Some cities (like Granada) have also introduced old-town **congestion charges**, which you might unwittingly trigger as a casual visitor. It's nearly always best to pay extra for a hotel with parking or use a pay car park, for which you'll need to budget anything from €12 to €20 a day.

Car rental

Car rental is cheapest arranged in advance through one of the large multinational agencies (Avis, Budget, EasyCar, Europcar, Hertz, Holiday Autos, National or Thrifty, for example). There are hundreds of pick-up offices in Spain, including regional airports and major train stations. Rates start from around £140/\$200 a week for a two-door Renault Clio or similar, more for larger vehicles and in peak holiday periods. Local Spanish companies (such as Pepecar; www.pepecar.com) can sometimes offer better value for money and you can also get some very good low-season rates.

You'll need to be 21 or over (and have been driving for at least a year) to rent a car in Spain. You will also need a credit card to cover the initial deposit, and have both your driving license photo card and paper license. It's essential to check that you have adequate **insurance cover** for your rental car, and that all visible damage on a car you're picking up is duly marked on the rental sheet. It's definitely worth considering paying the extra charge to reduce the "excess" payment levied for any damage, but these waiver charges (by the day) soon add up. However, you can avoid all **excess charges** in the event of damage by taking out an annual insurance policy (from £40) with www.insurance4carhire.com, which also covers windscreen and tyre damage.

By bike

Bike rental is not common, save in resort areas or in tourist-oriented cities such as Barcelona and Madrid, where you can expect to pay €15–20 a day, or around €25 for a half-day bike tour. Barcelona, Seville and some other cities also have bike-transit schemes, where you join (by paying a deposit) and then pick up bikes (free or low-cost) to ride around

the city from one depot to another. However, dedicated cycle paths are rare (again, Barcelona is an exception), and cycling around most major Spanish cities can be a hair-raising, if not downright dangerous, business.

Outside towns and cities, cycling is a great way to see parts of the country that might otherwise pass you by, though bear in mind that Spain is one of the most mountainous countries in Europe and there are often searing high-summer temperatures with which to contend. You also need to be extremely careful on the road (single file only, at all times), since Spanish drivers don't generally expect to see cyclists and don't take much care when they do. Off-road biking is a far better idea, and increasing numbers of mountain bikers are taking to the trails in national parks or following long-distance routes like the Camino de Santiago.

Ferries and planes

Anyone heading from the Spanish mainland to the Balearic Islands will probably do so by **ferry** or **catamaran** express ferry (from Alicante, Barcelona, Dénia or Valencia) – all the details are in the relevant city and island chapters. However, there's also an extensive network of internal Spanish **flights**, including to and between the Balearics, with Iberia (viberia.com) and other smaller operators such as

Vueling (vueling.com). These can be worth it if you're in a hurry and need to cross the entire peninsula, or if you can snap up a bargain web fare, but otherwise tourists rarely use flights to get around Spain. The main exception has always been Europe's busiest air route, that between Madrid and Barcelona, though this is now facing stiff competition from the high-speed AVE train, which is comparable in overall centre-to-centre journey time, and often cheaper.

Accommodation

There's a great variety of accommodation in Spain, ranging from humble family-run pensiones to five-star luxury hotels, often in dramatic historic buildings. The mainstay of the coastal resort is the typical beachfront holiday hotel, though renting an apartment or a villa gives you more freedom, while farm stays, village B&Bs, rural guesthouses and mountain inns are all increasingly popular options.

Compared with other European countries, accommodation in Spain is still pretty good value. In almost any town, you'll be able to get a no-frills double room in a *pensión* or small hotel for around €50, sometimes

DISTANCE CHART (KM)

	Alicante	Barcelona	Bilbao	Burgos	Córdoba	Granada	Jaén	León	Madrid
Alicante	–	552	814	645	513	372	417	762	420
Barcelona	552	–	609	629	893	889	840	818	630
Bilbao	814	609	–	160	795	820	730	350	400
Burgos	645	629	160	–	640	664	581	178	245
Córdoba	513	893	795	640	–	238	110	736	404
Granada	372	889	820	664	238	–	98	761	424
Jaén	417	840	730	581	110	98	–	677	342
León	762	818	350	178	736	761	677	–	349
Madrid	420	630	400	245	404	424	342	349	–
Málaga	480	1022	930	776	168	125	211	871	543
Murcia	82	602	785	634	482	297	342	749	408
Pamplona	723	490	152	210	841	869	791	404	456
Salamanca	630	835	398	248	604	634	543	208	219
San Sebastián	769	525	249	300	924	949	854	489	534
Santander	837	715	103	186	820	856	762	280	428
Santiago de Compostela	1033	1165	596	526	1009	1032	949	364	607
Seville	606	1055	861	711	149	261	300	674	537
Toledo	439	710	472	317	391	413	326	412	78
Valencia	183	365	651	590	536	510	454	702	361

even less, especially outside the main resorts. As a rule, you can expect to pay from €90 for something with a bit of boutique styling, and from €150–250 for five-star hotels, historic *paradores* and luxury beach-front resorts. However, the trend is bucked by Madrid and Barcelona, in particular, and some fashionable coastal and resort areas, where rooms are often appreciably more expensive in all categories.

Advance reservations are essential in major cities and resort areas at peak holiday, festival or convention times. Local festivals and annual events also tend to fill all available accommodation weeks in advance. That said, as a general rule, if you haven't booked, all you have to do is head for the cathedral or main square of any town, which is invariably surrounded by an old quarter full of *pensiones* and hotels. You don't always pay more for a central location; indeed, the newer three- and four-star properties tend to be located more on the outskirts. **Families** will find that most places have rooms with three or even four beds at not a great deal more than the double-room price; however, **single travellers** often get a comparatively bad deal, and can end up paying sixty to eighty percent of the price of a double room.

Accommodation prices are **seasonal**, but minimum and maximum rates should be displayed at reception. In high season on the *costas*, many hotels only take bookings for a minimum of a week, while some also require at least a half-board stay.

However, it's worth noting that high season isn't always summer, in ski resorts for example, while inland cities such as Madrid tend to have cheaper prices in August, when everyone heads for the coast. Easter, though, tends to be very busy in many cities.

Where possible, **website** bookings nearly always offer the best deals, especially with the larger **hotel groups** that have made big inroads into Spain – it's always worth checking NH Hoteles (📍nh-hotels.com), Accor (📍accorhotels.com) and Sol Meliá (📍solmelia.com) for current deals.

Unless otherwise stated all our listed accommodation includes free wi-fi.

Private rooms and B&Bs

The cheapest beds are usually in **private rooms**, in someone's house or above a bar or restaurant. The signs to look for are *habitaciones* (rooms) or *camas* (beds), or they might be touted at resort bus and train stations in summer as you arrive. The rooms should be clean, but might well be very simple and timeworn; you'll probably share a communal bathroom.

The number of private **"bed-and-breakfast"** establishments (advertised as such) is on the increase, and while some are simply the traditional room in someone's house, others – especially in the major cities – are very stylish and pricey home from homes.

Málaga	Murcia	Pamplona	Salamanca	San Sebastián	Santander	Santiago de Compostela	Seville	Toledo	Valencia
480	82	723	630	769	837	1033	606	439	183
1022	602	490	835	525	715	1165	1055	710	365
930	785	152	398	249	103	596	861	472	651
776	634	210	248	300	186	526	711	317	590
168	482	841	604	924	820	1009	149	391	536
125	297	869	634	949	856	1032	261	413	510
211	342	791	543	854	762	949	300	326	454
871	749	404	208	489	280	364	674	412	702
543	408	456	219	534	428	607	537	78	361
–	414	993	674	1065	967	1124	231	527	649
414	–	772	604	812	817	1015	531	420	233
993	772	–	453	97	264	742	924	529	524
674	604	453	–	554	370	437	467	273	573
1065	812	97	554	–	350	836	2022	631	612
967	817	264	370	350	–	499	896	508	769
1124	1015	742	437	836	499	–	901	672	970
231	531	924	467	2022	896	901	–	507	684
527	420	529	273	631	508	672	507	–	378
649	233	524	573	612	769	970	684	378	–

Pensiones, hostales and hotels

Guesthouses and hotels in Spain go under various anachronistic names – *pensión, fonda, residencia, hostel*, etc – though only **hotels and pensiones** are recognized as official categories. These are all star-rated (hotels, one- to five-star; *pensiones*, one- or two-star), but the rating is not necessarily a guide to cost or ambience. Some smaller, boutique-style *pensiones* and hotels have services and facilities that belie their star rating; some four- and five-star hotels have disappointingly small rooms and an impersonal feel.

At the budget end of the scale are **pensiones** (marked P), **fondas** (F) – which traditionally had a restaurant or dining room attached – and **casas de huéspedes** (CH), literally an old-fashioned “guesthouse”. In all such places you can expect straightforward rooms, often with shared bathroom facilities (there’s usually a washbasin in the room), while occasionally things like heating, furniture (other than bed, chair and desk) and even external windows might be too much to hope for. On the other hand, some old-fashioned *pensiones* are lovingly cared for and very good value, while others have gone for a contemporary, boutique style.

Next step up, and far more common, are **hostales** (Hs) and **hostal-residencias** (HsR), which are not hostels, in any sense, but budget hotels, generally offering good, if functional, rooms, usually with private bathrooms and – in the better places – probably heating and air conditioning. Many also have cheaper rooms available without private bathrooms. Some *hostales* really are excellent, with good service and up-to-date furnishings and facilities.

Fully fledged **hotels** (H), meanwhile, have a star-rating dependent on things like room size and staffing levels rather than any intrinsic attraction. There’s often not much difference in price between a one-star hotel and a decent *hostal*, for example,

and the *hostal* might be nicer. At three and four stars, hotel prices start to increase and you can expect soundproofing, an elevator, an English-language channel on the TV and a buffet breakfast spread. At five stars, you’re in the luxury class, with pools, gyms, Jacuzzis, and prices to match, and some hotels differentiate themselves again as five-star “deluxe” or “gran classe” (GL).

You can pick up lists of local accommodation from any Spanish tourist office, and there are countless websites to look at, too, including the excellent **Rusticae** (www.rusticae.es), which highlights scores of stylish rural and urban hotels across the country.

Paradores

Spain has over ninety superior hotels in a class of their own, called **paradores** (www.parador.es), which are often spectacular lodgings converted from castles, monasteries and other Spanish monuments (although some are purpose-built). They can be really special places to stay, sited in the most beautiful parts of the country, or in some of the most historic cities, and prices are very good when compared with the five-star hotels with which they compete. Overnight rates depend on location and popularity, and start at around €100 a night, though €150–180 is more typical. That said, a whole host of special offers and web deals (through the official website) offer discounted rates for the over-55s, the under-30s, or for multi-night stays.

A popular approach is to take a fly-drive holiday based around the paradores. There is no end of routes you could choose, but good options include the area around Madrid and through the Sierra de Gredos; along the Cantabrian coast, past the Picos de Europa; or along the French–Spanish border and through the foothills of the Pyrenees. Another popular route takes you through Galicia, and on to *Hostal dos Reis Católicos*, one of the most

ACCOMMODATION PRICES

We give a room price for all establishments reviewed in this book. Unless otherwise stated, this represents the price for the **cheapest available double or twin room in high season** (ie usually Christmas/New Year, Easter, and June–September, though local variations apply – summer prices might be high-season on the Costa del Sol but will be low-season in scorching inland Andalucía, for example). Consequently, at many times of the year, or during special promotions, you’ll often find a room for a lower price than that suggested. For **youth hostels** and anywhere else with **dorm beds**, we also give the per-person overnight rate. Note that **eight percent tax (IVA)** is added to all accommodation bills, which might not be specifically stated until it is time to pay, so always ask if you’re uncertain.

Hotel prices don’t usually include breakfast, which is almost always an optional extra; often it’s much cheaper to find a nearby bar to eat in.

PICK OF THE PARADORES

Nearly all of Spain's **paradores** (🌐 www.paradores.es) have a quirky history, a story to tell or a magnificent location – here's our choice of the best, from former palaces to pilgrims' hospitals.

Hostal dos Reis Católicos, Santiago de Compostela

Apparently the oldest hotel in the world, the *Hostal dos Reis Católicos* is impressively set in a fifteenth-century hospital at the end of the Camino de Santiago. See p.561.

Parador Carlos V, Jarandilla Majestic former imperial palace, set in the verdant Vera valley. See p.193.

Parador Castillo de Santa Catalina, Jaén Occupying a stunning, crag-bound thirteenth-century Moorish fortress, this is one of the most spectacular locations in Spain. See p.325.

Parador Condes de Alba y Aliste, Zamora Occupying a grand palace in the middle of a quiet town, Zamora's parador is gentility defined. See p.391.

Parador Cristobal Colón, Andalucía An impeccable four-star hotel set high above the Costa de la Luz's Mazagón beach – a pristine stretch with sandstone cliffs and lapping Atlantic waters. See p.290

Parador de Lerma, Lerma A remarkable ducal palace facing a broad plaza of elegant beauty. See p.426.

Parador Marqués de Villena, Alarcón There are just fourteen rooms in this atmospheric Arabic castle perched on the rocky promontory above the Río Júcar. See p.184.

Parador Nacional Castell de la Suda, Tortosa Tortosa's highest point, the splendid Castillo de la Suda, looms majestically over the lush Ebre valley. See p.786.

sumptuous paradores of all in Santiago de Compostela. Three-night **packages**, where you stay in a different parador every night yet only pay for two nights, start at around €159 per person (based on two sharing, car rental not included). All the details are on the website, or contact the official parador **agents**, Keytel in the UK (🌐 keytel.co.uk) or Petrabax in the US (🌐 petrabax.com).

Villas, apartments and rural tourism

Most UK and European tour operators can find you a self-catering **villa** or **apartment**, usually on one of the *costas* or in the Balearics. They are rented by the week, and range from simple town-centre apartments to luxury coastal villas with private pools. Prices, of course, vary wildly, but the best deals are often packages, including flights and car rental, with endless **villa agencies** including Thomson Villa Collection (🌐 thomson.co.uk/holidays/villas).

Casas rurales (rural houses), or *casas de pagès* in Catalunya, are where many Spanish holiday-makers stay. It's a wide-ranging concept, from boutique cave dwellings to restored manor houses, many with pools and gardens. You can rent by the room, or by the property, either on a B&B basis or self-catering, depending on the accommodation. Many places also offer outdoor activities such as horse-riding, walking, fishing and cycling. They are generally excellent value for money, starting at around €40 per person, even cheaper if you're in a group or staying for longer than a night or two. While some are fairly basic and clearly just a sideline to the owners' real work, others are run more along

the lines of intimate boutique hotels. In many cases they are the choice place to stay.

ASETUR (🌐 ecoturismorural.com), the association for rural tourism in Spain, has an excellent website where you can search thousands of properties by region, while many Spanish tourist-office websites also carry information on *casas rurales*. Holiday companies in your own country may also have Spanish rural properties available, or contact Spain-based **agencies** like Rurality (Cantabria and Asturias; 🌐 rurality.com), Rustic Blue (Andalucía; 🌐 rusticblue.com), Agroturisme (Catalunya; 🌐 agroturisme.org), or Casas de Gredos (Ávila and Gredos area; 🌐 casa.gredos.com). Top Rural (🌐 toprural.com) is a country-wide option.

Youth hostels

There are around 250 youth hostels (*albergues juveniles*) in Spain under the umbrella of the **Red Española de Albergues Juveniles** (REAJ; 🌐 reaj.com), the Spanish youth hostel association that is affiliated to the parent organization, Hostelling International (HI; 🌐 hihostels.com). There are full details of each hostel on the REAJ website (English-language version available), and we've included some of the best in the Guide.

However, many HI hostels are only open in the spring and summer, or tend to be inconveniently located in some cities; they may also be block-booked by school/youth groups. You'll need an HI membership card, though you can buy one at most hostels on your first night. And at €16–25 a night in high season (less for under-26s, and out of season) for a bunk bed with shared facilities, they're no cheaper than a basic double room in a *hostal* or

TEN UNUSUAL PLACES TO STAY

Take ancient buildings, magnificent locations, historic charm, designer flair and sheer Spanish style – and the result is enough **unusual places to rest** your head for a whole lifetime's worth of holidays.

Hosteria del Monasterio, Castilla y León Classy hotel rooms within a sprawling monastery that is hidden high in the Riojan hills. See p.417.

La Casona de Calderón, Andalucía. Immerse yourself in Osuna's history in this seventeenth-century *posada*, complete with museum which has, among other rare findings, a display of the towns cow bells. See p.313

Hotel Castell d'Empordà, Catalunya Eight-hundred-year-old hilltop castle that Salvador Dalí once tried to buy. See p.725.

Hotel España, Barcelona Boutique hotel, yes, but also a peerless *modernista* artwork. See p.688.

Hotel El Mudayyan, Aragón Venture into the medieval tunnels (as far as you dare) under this lovely Moroccan-style boutique hotel. See p.618.

Hotel Real Colegiata de San Isidoro, León Stay in an old

royal college and church, part of which dates back to 1063 and doubles up as a museum.

Hotel Toruño, Andalucía Spot flamingos, herons, avocets and more without leaving your bed. See p.307.

Jallambau Rural, Galicia Enjoy expansive views over Ría de Muros from this spectacularly perched, stone B&B. See p.574.

Hostal Posada de San José, Castilla-La Mancha Precariously situated in a mansion perched on the edge of the gorge next to Cuenca's famous "hanging houses". See p.182.

Refugio Marnes, Valencia Sleep like a sultan in this sumptuous Bedouin tent in the middle of the Valencian countryside. See p.826.

Santuari de Lluc, Mallorca Enjoy complete peace and quiet, by spending the night at this monastery that has been a tranquil retreat since the thirteenth century. See p.879.

posión. That said, hostels are good places to meet other travellers, and there are some really gorgeously located ones, especially in Andalucía and in the hiking regions of northern Spain.

Some cities and resort areas also have a wide range of **independent backpacker hostels**. Prices are similar, they tend to be far less institutional, and open all year round, and you won't need a membership card. Also, many are brand-new, often with private rooms as well as dorms, and with excellent facilities (en-suite rooms, cafés, bike rental, tours, etc).

Mountain refuges, monasteries and pilgrim accommodation

In mountain areas and some of the national parks, climbers and trekkers can stay in **refugios**, simple dormitory huts, generally equipped only with bunks and a very basic kitchen. They are run by local mountaineering organizations, mostly on a first-come-first-served basis, which means they fill up quickly in high summer, though you can book in advance at some (or bring a tent and camp outside). Overnight prices start around €15 per person (or €30–40 with a meal included).

It is sometimes possible to stay at Spanish **monasterios** or **conventos**, which may let empty cells for a small charge. There are some particularly wonderful monastic locations in Galicia, Castilla y

León, Catalunya and Mallorca. If you're following the Camino de Santiago, you can take full advantage of monastic accommodation specifically reserved for **pilgrims** along the route (see p.557).

Camping

There are literally hundreds of authorized campsites in Spain, mostly on the coast and in holiday areas. They work out at about €5 or €6 per person plus the same again for a tent, and a similar amount for each car or caravan. The best-located sites, or the ones with top-range facilities (restaurant, swimming pool, bar, supermarket), are significantly more expensive. If you plan to camp extensively, buy the annual *Guía de Campings*, which you can find in large bookshops, or visit vayacamping.net. The price quoted in our campsite reviews in this book refers to the cost for two people, a pitch and a car.

In most cases, **camping outside campsites** is legal – but there are certain restrictions. You're not allowed to camp "in urban areas, areas prohibited for military or touristic reasons, or within 1km of an official campsite". What this means in practice is that you can't camp on the beach, while in national parks camping is only allowed in officially designated areas. Aside from these restrictions, however, and with a little sensitivity, you can set up a tent for a short period almost anywhere in the countryside. Whenever possible, ask locally first.

Food and drink

Spanish cuisine has come a long way in recent years, and Spanish chefs are currently at the forefront of contemporary European cooking. You know a power shift has taken place when *Restaurant* magazine's annual "World 50 Best Restaurants" list regularly cites three or four Spanish eateries in the top ten, and when there are more gourmet places in the Basque Country worth making a special trip for than in Paris. There's some fantastic food to be had in every region, and not just the fancy new-wave stuff either – the tapas, gazpacho, *tortilla* and paella that you may know from home are simply in a different league when made with the correct ingredients in their natural surroundings.

Of course, not every restaurant is a gourmet experience and not every dish is a classic of its kind. Tourist resorts – after all, where many people go – can be disappointing, especially those aimed at a foreign clientele, and a week on one of the *costas* can just as easily convince you that the Spanish national diet is egg and chips, *sangría*, pizza and Guinness. However, you'll always find a good restaurant where the locals eat, and few places in Europe are still as good value, especially if you have the *menú del día*, the bargain fixed-price lunch that's a fixture across the country.

Breakfast, snacks and sandwiches

The traditional Spanish breakfast (*desayuno*) is *chocolate con churros* – long, extruded tubular doughnuts served with thick drinking chocolate or coffee. Some places specialize in these but most bars and cafés also serve cakes and pastries (*bollos* or *pasteles*), croissants and toast (*tostadas*), or crusty sandwiches (*bocadillos*) with a choice of fillings (try one with omelette, *tortilla*). A "sandwich", incidentally, is usually a less appetizing ham or cheese sandwich in white processed bread. Other good places for snacks are **cake shops** (*pastelerías* or *confiterías*) or the local bakery (*panadería*), where they might also have savoury pasties and turnovers.

Bars, tapas and raciones

One of Spain's glories is the phenomenon of **tapas** – the little portions of food that traditionally used to be served up free with a drink in a bar. (The origins are disputed but the word is from *tapar*, "to cover", suggesting a cover for drinks' glasses, perhaps to keep the flies off in the baking sun.) A *menú de tapeo* (tapas menu) is found in many restaurants or bars and can include just about anything – a handful of olives, a slice or two of cured ham, a little dish of meatballs or chorizo, spicy fried potatoes or battered squid. They will often be laid out on the counter, so you can see what's available, or there might be a blackboard menu. Most bars have a speciality; indeed, Spaniards will commonly move from bar to bar, having just the

IT'S FOOD, JIM, BUT NOT AS WE KNOW IT

King of molecular gastronomy, and godfather of Spanish contemporary cuisine, **Ferran Adrià**, started it all, with his liquid-nitrogen-frozen herbs, seafood-reduction Rice Krispies and exploding olive-oil droplets. Although his multi-Michelin-starred *El Bulli* restaurant on the Costa Brava has now closed and turned into a cookery foundation and "centre for creativity" (see p.731), the influences of Spain's best-known chef have shaken the restaurant scene, as his former employees, acolytes and disciples have gone on to make the country one of the most exciting places to eat in the world.

The style city of Barcelona, not surprisingly, is at the forefront of this innovative form of cooking, with **Carles Abellán's** *Tapas24* (see p.693) typical of the breed, while the **Roca brothers'** celebrated *Celler de Can Roca* in Girona (see p.741) keeps Catalunya firmly in the vanguard of new-wave cuisine. However, it's in the Basque Country that many of the hottest chefs are currently in action: **Andoni Aduriz** at *Mugaritz*, Errearteria, San Sebastián (see p.460), father-and-daughter team **Juan Mari and Elena Arzak** at *Arzak*, San Sebastián (see p.459), and **Martín Berasategui** at *Restaurante Martín Berasategui*, Lasarte-Oria, San Sebastián (see p.460), are all cooking sensational food in restaurants that regularly feature in lists of the world's best. Maybe it's a northern thing, but there's less fuss in the south of the country about the so-called *cocina de autor*; in Madrid, perhaps only **Sergi Arola** cuts the new-wave mustard with his surprisingly affordable venture *Vi-Cool* (see p.106).

one dish that they consider each bar does well. Conversely, if you're in a bar with just some pre-fried potatoes and day-old Russian salad on display, and a prominent microwave, go somewhere else to eat.

Aside from a few olives or crisps sometimes handed out with a drink, you often pay for tapas these days (the provinces of Granada and Jaén, León and parts of Galicia are honourable exceptions), usually around €2–4 a portion. **Raciones** or a **media ración** (around €6–12) are simply bigger plates of tapas: a *ración*, or two or three half *raciones* are enough for a meal – you're sometimes asked if you want a *tapa* or a *ración* of whatever it is you've chosen.

There are big regional variations in tapas. They are often called **pinchos** (or *pintxos*) in the Basque provinces, where typically tapas come served on a slice of baguette, held together with a cocktail stick. When you've finished eating, the sticks are counted up to work out your bill. This kind of tapas can be as simple as a cheese cube on bread or a far more elaborately sculpted concoction; they are also known as **montaditos** (basically, *canapés*). Famously good places across Spain for tapas-tasting include Madrid, León, Logroño, San Sebastián, Granada, Seville and Cádiz.

Most cafés and bars have some kind of tapas available, while you'll also find a decent display in

SPANISH CUISINE

There really is no such thing as traditional "Spanish" cuisine, since every region claims a quite separate culinary heritage. That said, you'll find similar dishes cropping up right across the country, whatever their origin, while typical Mediterranean staples are ubiquitous – olive oil, tomatoes, peppers, garlic, onions, lemons and oranges.

It's usual to start your meal with a **salad** or a plate of cold cuts, while **soups** might be fish or seafood or, in the north especially, hearty broths such as the Galician cabbage-and-potato *caldo gallego*. Boiled potatoes with greens, or a thick minestrone of vegetables, are also fairly standard starters, while depending on the season you might be offered grilled asparagus or artichokes, or stewed beans with chunks of sausage.

Anywhere near the coast, you really should make the most of what's on offer, whether it's the fried fish of Málaga, Basque shellfish or the seafood specialties in Galicia, notably octopus (*pulpo*). Fish stews (*zarzuelas*) can be memorable, while seafood rice dishes range from *arroz negro* ("black rice", cooked with squid ink) to the better-known **paella**. This comes originally from Valencia (still the best place for an authentic one), though a proper paella from there doesn't include fish or seafood at all but things like chicken, rabbit, beans and snails.

Meat is most often grilled and served with a few fried potatoes. Regional specialties include *cordero* (lamb) from Segovia, Navarra and the Basque Country, as well as *cochinillo* (suckling pig) or *lechal* (suckling lamb) in central Spain. **Cured ham**, or *jamón serrano*, is superb, produced at its best from acorn-fed Iberian pigs in Extremadura and Andalucía, though it can be extremely expensive. Every region has a local **sausage** in its locker – the best known is the spicy chorizo, made from pork, though others include *morcilla* (blood sausage; best in Burgos, León and Asturias), and *butifarra*, a white Catalan sausage made from pork and tripe. **Stews** are typified by the mighty *fabada*, a fill-your-boots Asturian bean-and-meat concoction.

Cheeses to look out for include Cabrales, a tangy blue cheese made in the Picos de Europa; Manchego, a sharp, nutty cheese made from sheep's milk in La Mancha; Mahon, a cow's-milk cheese from Menorca, often with paprika rubbed into its rind; Idiazábal, a smoked cheese from the Basque Country; and Zamorano, made from sheep's milk in Castilla y León.

In most restaurants, **dessert** is nearly always fresh fruit or *flan*, the Spanish crème caramel, with the regions often having their own versions such as *crema catalana* in Catalunya and the Andalusian *tocino de cielo*. There are also many varieties of *postre* – rice pudding or assorted blancmange mixtures – and a range of commercial ice-cream dishes.

If you want to know more about the food in the region where you're travelling, turn to the special **features**:

Andalucía See p.229

Aragón See p.608

Around Madrid See p.139

Asturias See p.530

Balearics See p.853

Basque Country See p.459

Castilla-La Mancha See p.178

Castilla y León and La Rioja See p.375

Catalunya See p.717

Extremadura See p.194

Galicia See p.549

Madrid See p.106

Valencia and Murcia See p.797

tascas, **bodegas** and **tabernas** (kinds of taverns) and **cervecerías** (beer-houses). It's always cheapest to stand at the bar to eat; you'll pay more to sit at tables and more again to sit outside on a terrace.

Restaurants

The simplest kind of restaurant is the **comedor** (dining room), often a room at the back of a bar or the dining room of a *hostal* or *pensión*. Traditionally, they are family-run places aimed at lunching workers, usually offering a straightforward set meal at budget prices. The highway equivalent are known as **ventas** or **mesones** (inns), and are dotted along the main roads between towns and cities. These have been serving Spanish wayfarers for centuries – some of them quite literally – and the best places are immediately picked out by the line of cars and trucks outside. Proper restaurants, **restaurantes**, come in a myriad of guises, from rustic village restaurants to stylish Michelin-starred eateries; **asadores** specialize in grilled meats, **marisquerías** in fish and seafood.

Almost every restaurant serves a weekday, fixed-price lunchtime meal, the **menú del día**, generally three courses including wine for €12–15, occasionally even cheaper, depending on where you are in Spain. This is obviously a terrific deal; the *menú del día* is only sporadically available at night, and sometimes prices are slightly higher (and the menu slightly fancier) at weekends. The very cheapest places are unlikely to have a written menu, and the waiter will tell you what the day's dishes are. In smarter restaurants in bigger cities and resorts, there will still be a *menú del día*, though it might be a shadow of the usual à la carte menu, and drinks may be excluded. Even so, it's a way of eating at a restaurant that might normally cost you three or four times as much. Top city restaurants often also feature an upmarket *menú* called a **menú de degustación** (tasting menu), which again can be excellent value, allowing you to try out some of the country's finest cooking for anything from €50 to €100 a head.

Otherwise, in bars and so-called *cafeterías*, meals often come in the form of a **plato combinado** – literally a combined dish – which will be a one-plate meal of something like steak, egg and chips, or *calamares* and salad, often with bread and a drink included. This will generally cost in the region of €5–10.

If you want a menu in a restaurant, ask for **la carta**; *menú* refers only to the fixed-price meal. In all but the most rock-bottom establishments it is customary to leave a small **tip**, though five percent of the bill is considered sufficient and service is

normally included in a *menú del día*. IVA, the eight percent **tax**, is also charged, but it should say on the menu if this is included in the price or not.

Spaniards generally eat very late, with **lunch** served from around 1pm (you'll be the first person there at this time) until 4pm, and **dinner** from 8.30pm or 9pm to midnight. Obviously, rural areas are slightly earlier to dine, but making a dinner reservation for 10.30pm or even later is considered perfectly normal in many cities in Spain. Most restaurants **close one day a week**, usually Sunday or Monday. The opening hours given in this book provide a rough idea, but bear in mind that many restaurants in Spain will close early or not open at all during quiet periods.

Increasingly, more upmarket restaurants are using **WhatsApp** as a means of making and confirming bookings.

Vegetarians

Vegetarians generally have a fairly hard time of it in Spain, though there's an increasing number of veggie restaurants in the bigger cities, including some really good ones in Madrid (see box, p.105) and Barcelona (see box, p.694). In more rural areas, there's usually something to eat, but you may get weary of fried eggs and omelettes. However, many tapas favourites, especially in the south, are veggie (like fried aubergine, or spinach and chickpeas in Seville), while superb fresh fruit and veg, and excellent cheese, is always available in the markets and shops.

In restaurants, you're faced with the extra problem that pieces of meat – especially ham, which the Spanish don't regard as real meat – and tuna are often added to vegetable dishes and salads. You'll also find chunks of chorizo and sausage turning up in otherwise veg-friendly soups or bean stews. The phrases to get to know are *Soy vegetariano/a. Como sólo verduras. Hay algo sin carne?* ("I'm a vegetarian. I only eat vegetables. Is there anything without meat?"); you may have to add *y sin marisco* ("and without seafood") and *y sin jamón* ("and without ham") to be really safe.

Some salads and vegetable dishes are strictly **vegan**, but they're few and far between. Fruit and nuts are widely available, nuts being sold by street vendors everywhere.

Coffee, tea and soft drinks

Café (coffee) is invariably an espresso (*café solo*); for a large cup of weaker, black coffee, ask for an *americano*. A *café cortado* is a *café solo* with a drop of milk; a *café con leche* is made with lots of hot

milk. Spaniards almost only drink this kind of coffee at breakfast time and you'll get strange looks if you order it at any other time of the day unless you're in a tourist hotspot. Coffee is also frequently mixed with brandy, cognac or whisky, all such concoctions being called *carajillo*. Iced coffee is *café con hielo*.

Chocolate (hot chocolate) is a popular breakfast drink, or for after a long night on the town. It's usually thick and rich. For a thinner, cocoa-style drink, ask for a brand name, like Cola Cao.

Spaniards usually drink **té** (tea) black, so if you want milk it's safest to ask for it afterwards, since ordering *té con leche* might well get you a glass of warm milk with a tea bag floating on top. Herbal teas (*infusiones*) are widely available, like *manzanilla* (camomile), *poleo* (mint tea) and *hierba luisa* (lemon verbena).

Local soft drinks include **granizado** (crushed ice) or **horchata** (a milky drink made from tiger nuts or almonds), available from summer street stalls, and from milk bars (*horchaterías*, also known as *granjas* in Catalunya) and ice-cream parlours (*heladerías*). Although you can drink the **water** almost everywhere, it tastes revolting in some cities and coastal areas – inexpensive *agua mineral* comes either sparkling (*con gas*) or still (*sin gas*).

Wine

One of the great pleasures of eating out in Spain is the chance to sample some of the country's excellent **wines**. Over fifty percent of the European Union's vineyards lie in Spain and *vino* is the invariable accompaniment to every meal. At lunchtime, a glass or small pitcher of the house wine – often served straight from the barrel – is usually included in the *menú del día*; otherwise, restaurant wine starts at around €5–10 a bottle, although the sky's

the limit for the really good stuff. And there's plenty of that, since in recent years Spanish wine has enjoyed an amazing renaissance, led largely by the international success of famous wine-producing regions like La Rioja and Ribera del Duero. Other regions – not perhaps so well-known abroad – are also well worth investigating, like Galicia or the Priorat in Catalunya, and every wine-producing area is set up for *bodega* (winery) visits, tastings and tours. In Andalucía, meanwhile, the classic wine is **sherry** – *vino de jerez* – while champagne in Spain means the Catalan sparkling wine, **cava**.

The festival and tourist drink is, famously, **sangría**, a wine and fruit punch that's often deceptively strong; a variation in Catalunya is *sangría de cava*. *Tinto de verano* is a similar red-wine-and-soda or -lemonade combination; variations on this include *tinto de verano con naranja* (red wine with orangeade) or *con limón* (lemonade).

Beer

Beer (*cerveza*) is nearly always lager, though some Spanish breweries also now make stout-style brews, wheat beers and other types. It comes in 300ml bottles (*botellines*) or, for about the same price, on tap – a *caña* of draught beer is a small glass, a *caña doble* larger, and asking for *un tubo* (a tubular glass) gets you about half a pint. Mahou, Cruz Campo, San Miguel, Damm, Estrella de Galicia and Alhambra are all decent beers. A **shandy** is a *clara*, either with fizzy lemon (*con limón*) or lemonade (*con casera* or *con blanca*).

Spirits and shots

In mid-afternoon – or, let's face it, sometimes even at breakfast – Spaniards take a *copa* of liqueur with their coffee, such as *anis* (similar to Pernod) or *coñac*, the local **brandy**, which has a distinct vanilla flavour. Most brandies are produced by the great sherry houses in Jerez (like Lepanto, Carlos I and Cardinal Mendoza), but two good ones that aren't are the Armagnac-like Mascaró and Torres, both from Catalunya. Instead of brandy, at the end of a meal many places serve **chupitos** – little shot glasses of flavoured schnapps or local firewater, such as Patxarán in Navarra and the Basque Country, Ratafia in Catalunya or Orujo in Galicia. One much-loved Galego custom is the *queimada*, when a large bowl of *aguardiente* (a herb-flavoured fiery liqueur) with fruit, sugar and coffee grains is set alight and then drunk hot.

You should order **spirits** by brand name, since there are generally less expensive Spanish equiva-

SPAIN'S TOP 6 BODEGA VISITS

Bodegas Codorníu, Penedès Spain's first producers of *cava*, located in outstanding Catalan Art Nouveau premises. See p.773.

Bodegas Marqués de Riscal, La Rioja Alavesa Terrific wine, and an extraordinary Frank Gehry-designed building to boot. See p.484.

Bodegas Ysios, La Rioja Alavesa Located in a stunning building by Santiago Calatrava. See p.484.

Condes de Albaréi, Galicia Cooperative *bodega* turning out excellent Albariño wines. See p.577.

González Byass, Jerez One of the biggest sherry producers, makers of the Tío Pepe brand. See p.303.

Costers del Siurana, Priorat Investigate the Priorat region wines in deepest Catalunya. See p.784.

lents for standard imports, or simply specify *nacional*. Larios gin from Málaga, for instance, is about half the price of Gordon's. Measures are staggeringly generous – bar staff generally pour from the bottle until you suggest they stop. Long drinks include the universal Gin-Tónico and the Cuba Libre (rum and Coke), and there are often Spanish Caribbean rums (*ron*) such as Cacique from Venezuela or Havana Club from Cuba.

The media

The ubiquitous Spanish newspaper kiosk is your first stop for regional and national newspapers and magazines, though hotels and bars nearly always have a few kicking around for customers. The bigger cities, tourist towns and resorts will also have foreign newspapers available (some of which are actually published in Spain), generally on the day of issue or perhaps a day late. Television is all-pervasive in bars, cafés and restaurants, and you're going to find yourself watching more bullfighting, basketball and Venezuelan soap operas than perhaps you'd bargained for. Most hotel rooms have a TV, too, though only in the fancier places will you get any English-language programming, and then probably only the BBC News, CNN or Eurosport satellite channels.

Newspapers

Of the Spanish **national newspapers** the best are the Madrid-based centre-left *El País* (🇵🇸elpais.es) and the centre-right *El Mundo* (🇵🇸elmundo.es), both of which have good arts and foreign news coverage, including comprehensive regional "what's on" listings and supplements every weekend. The **regional press** is generally run by local magnates and is predominantly right of centre, though often supporting local autonomy movements. Nationalist press includes *Avui* in Catalunya, printed in Catalan, and the Basque papers *El Correo*, *Deia* and *Gara*, the last of which is very strongly nationalist. All that said, the paper with the highest circulation is *Marca* (🇵🇸marca.com), the country's top **sports daily**, which is mainly football-dominated; there's also *As* (🇵🇸as.com), *El Mundo Deportivo* (🇵🇸elmundodeportivo.es) and *Sport* (🇵🇸sport.es). The main cities are also awash with **free newspapers**, which are dished out at bus and metro stops.

Magazines

There's a bewildering variety of **magazines** specialising in celebrity gossip (known collectively as *la prensa rosa*), ranging from the more traditional *Hola* to the sensationalist *QMD!* (*Qué Me Dices*). *El Jueves* ("The Thursday" – strapline: "The magazine that comes out on Wednesdays") is a weekly comic-strip-style satirical magazine, while the online daily *El Confidencial* (🇵🇸elconfidencial.com) gives the inside track on serious economic and political stories. There are also various **English-language magazines** and papers produced by and for the expatriate communities in the main cities and on the *costas*, such as *InMadrid* (🇵🇸in-madrid.com), *Barcelona Metropolitan* (🇵🇸barcelona-metropolitan.com), and – for southern Spain – *Sur in English* (🇵🇸surinenglish.com) and *The Olive Press* (🇵🇸theolivepress.es).

Radio

There are hundreds of local radio channels, broadcasting in Spanish and regional languages, alongside a handful of national ones. The state-run Radio Nacional de España, or **RNE** (🇵🇸rtve.es/radio), covers five stations: Radio Nacional, a general news and information channel; Radio Clásica, broadcasting mainly classical music and related programmes; the popular music channel Radio 3; Radio 4, in Catalan; and the rolling news and sports channel Radio 5. Radio Exterior is RNE's international shortwave service. Other **popular channels** include Cadena Ser and Onda Cero (news, talk, sports and culture); the Catholic Church-run COPE; Los 40 Principales (for the latest hits, Spanish and otherwise); and Cadena 100 (music and cultural programming). Radio Marca (dedicated sports radio) is also very popular.

Television

RTV (🇵🇸rtve.es/television) provides the main, state-run channels, namely La 1 (ie, "Uno"), a general entertainment and news channel, and its sister La 2 ("Dos"). Private national stations are Antena 3, Cuatro (Four), Telecinco (Five) and La Sexta (Sixth). There are also plenty of **regional channels**, the most important being Catalunya's TV3 and Canal 33, both broadcast in Catalan, and the Basque Country's ETB channels (in Basque), though there are also stations in Galicia (TVG) and Andalucía (Canal Sur) with local programming. The main satellite channel is Canal+.

Festivals

It's hard to beat the experience of arriving in some small Spanish village, expecting no more than a bed for the night, to discover the streets decked with flags and streamers, a band playing in the plaza and the entire population out celebrating the local fiesta. Everywhere in Spain, from the tiniest hamlet to the great cities, devotes at least a couple of days a year to partying, and participating in such an event propels you right into the heart of Spanish culture.

Local saints' days aside, Spain has some really major events worth planning your whole trip around, from the great Easter processions of *Semana Santa* (Holy Week) to the famous bull-running during July's *Fiesta de San Fermín* in Pamplona. There are also fiestas celebrating deliverance from the Moors, safe return from the sea, or the bringing in of the grapes – any excuse will do. One thing they all tend to have in common is a curious blend of religious ceremony and pagan ritual – sombre processions of statuary followed by exuberant merrymaking – in which fire plays a prominent part.

The **annual festival calendar in this section** concentrates on the country's most notable fiestas. For more regional and local fiestas turn to the **feature boxes** found in the Guide.

Outsiders are always welcome at fiestas, the only problem being that it can be hard to find a hotel, unless you book well in advance. The other thing to note is that while not every fiesta is a national **public holiday** (see p.56), or vice versa, you may well get stuck if you arrive in town in the middle of an annual event, since pretty much everything will be closed.

JANUARY

5: Cabalgata de Reyes When the "Three Kings" (*reyes*) arrive to bring the children their presents for Epiphany. Most cities stage a spectacular cavalcade as the Three Kings are driven through the streets throwing sweets to the crowds.

16–17: Sant Antoni Bonfires and saint's day processions, especially on the Balearic Islands.

TOP 5 FIESTAS

Semana Santa Andalucía. See p.228

Feria de Abril Seville. See p.228

Fiesta de San Fermín Pamplona.

See p.486

Las Fallas Valencia. See p.804

La Tomatina Buñol. See p.815

FEBRUARY

Week preceding Ash Wednesday and Lent: Carnaval An excuse for wild partying and masques, most riotous in Cádiz (Andalucía), Sitges, Catalunya and Águilas (Valencia).

MARCH

12–19: Las Fallas Valencia has the biggest of the bonfire festivals held for San José, climaxing on the Nit de Foc (Night of Fire) when enormous caricatures are burnt, and firecrackers let off in the streets. See p.804.

EASTER

March/April: Semana Santa Holy Week is celebrated across Spain, most theatrically in Seville, Málaga, Murcia and Valladolid, where *pasos* – huge floats of religious scenes – are carried down the streets, accompanied by hooded penitents atoning for the year's misdeeds. Maundy Thursday and Good Friday see the biggest, most solemn processions.

APRIL

22–24: Fiestas de Moros y Cristianos Mock battle between Moors and Christians in Alcoy, Valencia. See p.828.

23: Sant Jordi A day of celebration across Catalunya, especially Barcelona (see p.648) for the region's patron saint – Sant Jordi, St George. Being the birth date of Cervantes, it's also celebrated as National Book Day throughout Spain.

Last week: Feria de Abril Spectacular week-long fair in Seville, with a major bullfighting festival.

MAY

Early May: Horse Fair Jerez (Andalucía). Horsey high jinks – show-jumping, parades and the famous "dancing Andalusian horses" – turn Jerez into equine heaven.

15: San Isidro Madrid's patron saint's day sees a two-week fiesta either side of the actual date.

Seventh Sunday after Easter: Pentecostés Pentecost is celebrated by the *Romería del Rocío* – the great pilgrimage-fair – at El Rocío, near Huelva (Andalucía). See p.306.

Thursday after Trinity Sunday: Corpus Christi Religious processions accompanied by floats and penitents, notably in Toledo, Granada and Valencia, plus the spectacular costumed events of Berga's *Festa de la Patum*, Catalunya (see p.752).

Last week: Feria de la Manzanilla The big annual sherry festival celebrates the famous tipple of Sanlúcar de Barrameda (Andalucía).

JUNE

Second or third week: Sónar Europe's biggest electronic music and multimedia bleep-fest, held over three days in Barcelona. See p.648.

23–24: San Juan Midsummer's eve is celebrated with bonfires and fireworks all over Spain, marking a hedonistic welcome to the summer – particularly in San Juan de Alicante and in Barcelona.

JULY

7–14: San Fermín The famed "Running of the Bulls" at Pamplona. See p.486.

25: Santiago Spain's patron saint, St James, is honoured at Santiago de Compostela, with fireworks and bonfires.

Last three weeks: Pirineos Sur World music festival on a floating stage at Lanuza, near Sallent de Gállego, in the Pyrenees.

AUGUST

10–11: Misteri d'Elx Elche, Valencia (see p.835), hosts mock battles between Christians and Moors, ending with a centuries-old mystery play.

Last week: Los Santos Niños *Gigantones* (giant puppets) are paraded in Alcalá de Henares, near Madrid.

Last Wednesday: La Tomatina Buñol, near Valencia, hosts the country's craziest fiesta, a one-hour tomato fight. See p.815.

SEPTEMBER

First week: Vendimia The grape harvest is celebrated wildly in Valdepeñas (Castilla-La Mancha), Jerez (Andalucía) and many other wine towns.

21: San Mateo The annual Rioja wine harvest bash coincides with the local saint's day in Logroño (La Rioja).

Third Week: Festa de Santa Tecla Human castles (*castells*) and processions of *gegants* (giant puppets) in Tarragona.

24: La Mercè Barcelona's biggest annual party (either side of the saint's day, 24th) sees a week's worth of giants' parades, fireworks and human-castle-building.

OCTOBER

1: San Miguel Villages across the country celebrate their patron saint's day.

12: La Virgen del Pilar Honouring the patron saint of Aragón is an excuse for bullfights, dancing and celebrations in Zaragoza and elsewhere.

DECEMBER

24: Nochebuena Christmas Eve is particularly exuberant, with parties and carousing early in the evening before it all suddenly stops in time for family dinner or Mass.

31: Nochevieja New Year is celebrated by eating a grape for every stroke of the clock in Plaza del Sol in Madrid, Pza. de Catalunya in Barcelona, and main squares and bars throughout the country.

Culture and etiquette

Spain is a fantastically welcoming, vibrant country, characterized by its love of life. With a population of over 46 million it's a diverse place, too, with regional identities as characteristic as their local landscapes, and the Basques, Galicians and Catalans all add their own languages and cultures to the mix. No matter where you decide to visit though,

many of the clichés of Spanish life, such as the siesta, busy bars and restaurants open late into the night, and towns celebrating lively festivals, still pretty much ring true.

Social life and etiquette

One of the most important aspects of Spanish life is the **family**; no celebration would be complete without an extended gathering, although this is more common away from the busy cities where modern life takes its toll. Even so, the elderly are respected, and it's not uncommon to have older relatives being cared for in the family home. Likewise, children are absolutely adored, and included in everything. There is no better country in Europe in which to holiday as a family.

Food plays an important part in Spanish family life, with lunch (*la comida*) the biggest meal of the day, often lasting from 2 to 4pm. It's common for shops and whole villages to come to a standstill for the "siesta" (which today really means just lunch rather than actually sleeping) especially in more out-of-the-way places. Evening meals, which often start as late as 10pm, are usually preceded by a leisurely stroll, or **paseo**, when you may take in an aperitif in a bar or two.

Friends are more likely to meet in restaurants for meals, but if you are **invited to someone's house** for dinner, you should take a small gift for any children, along with chocolates, a bottle of wine, or some flowers (though avoid dahlias, chrysanthemums and flowers in odd numbers as these would only be given at funerals). Also bear in mind that **drinking** too much isn't common; although there seems to be a bar on every corner, this is more for coffee and socializing than heavy boozing.

The Spanish are among the biggest **smokers** in Europe, with an estimated thirty percent of the population smoking regularly. Attitudes are changing, however, and the law now bans smoking in all public places, including shops, public transport, bars and restaurants.

Tipping is common in Spain, although not always expected, but locals are small tipplers and twenty cents on a bar table or five percent in a restaurant is usually enough. It is also common practice to tip taxi drivers, hotel porters and the like in small change.

If you are planning to indulge in any toplevel **sunbathing**, consider local feelings first, and try to stick to beaches where people are already doing it. You also need to make sure you are properly

covered if you enter a **church**; shorts and sleeveless tops should be avoided.

Greetings

If you're **meeting someone** for the first time, you should shake their hand. If you become friends, you may well move on to hugging (men) or kisses on each cheek (women), starting with the left. Men are also more likely to kiss women hello and goodbye, than to shake their hand. To say **hello**, use *Buenos días* before lunch and *Buenos tardes* after that. Bear in mind that in Spain the sense of time is somewhat elastic, so unless you're meeting for business (when being late is very bad form) don't be offended if you are left waiting for a good ten or twenty minutes.

Sports and outdoor activities

Spain is nothing if not enthusiastic about sport, with football and basketball all but national obsessions, and bullfighting – whether or not you agree that it's a "sport" – one of its cultural highlights. There are also plenty of opportunities to get out and enjoy the country's stunning outdoors, whether it's ambling around a golf course, skiing in the southern slopes, chasing surf off the Basque Country coast or canyoning in the Pyrenees.

Basketball

In Spain, **basketball** (*baloncesto*) comes second only to football in national interest, and the 2014 World Championships were held here, the second time the country has hosted the world's biggest basketball tournament. Domestically, there are eighteen professional teams competing in the national league, **ACB** (🌐acb.com), whose season runs from September to June; while other big competitions include the Copa del Rey and the Europe-wide Euroleague. The two biggest teams are, not entirely coincidentally, owned by the two most successful football teams, Barcelona and Real Madrid, and have won the ACB (until 1983 known as the Liga Nacional) dozens of times between them. There's more basketball information on the Federación Española de Baloncesto website (🌐feb.es). Games are broadcast on TV, and match tickets cost from around €20.

Bullfighting

The **bullfight** is a classic image of Spain, and an integral part of many fiestas. In the south, especially, any village that can afford it will put on a *corrida* for an afternoon, while in big cities such as Madrid or Seville, the main festival times are accompanied by a season of prestige fights. However, with the exception of Pamplona, bullfighting is far more popular in Madrid and all points south than it is in the north or on the islands. Indeed, many northern cities don't have bullrings, while the regional governments of both Catalunya and the Balearics have gone so far as to **ban bullfighting** (although Catalunya's ban was overturned by the Constitutional Court in 2016). Spain's main opposition to bullfighting is organized by **ADDA** (Asociación Defensa Derechos Animal; 🌐addaong.org), whose website has information (in English) about international campaigns and current actions.

Los Toros, as Spaniards refer to bullfighting, is certainly big business, with the top performers, the matadors, on a par with the country's biggest pop and sports stars. To *aficionados* (a word that implies more knowledge and appreciation than mere "fan"), the bulls are a ritual part of Spanish culture – with the emphasis on the way man and bull "perform" together – in which the *arte* is at issue rather than the cruelty. If pressed on the issue of the slaughter of an animal, supporters generally fail to understand. Fighting bulls are, they will tell you, bred for the industry; they live a reasonable life before they are killed, and, if the bullfight went, so, too, would the bulls.

If you decide to attend a *corrida*, try to see a big, prestigious event, where star performers are likely to despatch the bulls with "art" and a successful, "clean" kill. There are few sights worse than a matador making a prolonged and messy kill, while the audience whistles and chucks cushions. The most skilful events are those featuring mounted matadors, or *rejoneadores*; this is the oldest form of *corrida*, developed in Andalucía in the seventeenth century.

The **bullfight season** runs from March to October, and **tickets** for *corridas* start from around €6 – though you can pay much more (up to €150) for the prime seats and more prominent fights. The cheapest seats are *gradas*, the highest rows at the back, from where you can see everything that happens without too much of the detail; the front rows are known as the *barreras*. Seats are also divided into *sol* (sun), *sombra* (shade) and *sol y sombra* (shaded after a while), though these distinctions have become less crucial as more and more bullfights start later in the day, at

6pm or 7pm, rather than the traditional 5pm. The *sombra* seats are more expensive, not so much for the spectators' personal comfort as the fact that most of the action takes place in the shade.

The corrida

The **corrida** begins with a procession, to the accompaniment of a *pasodoble* by the band. Leading the procession are two *alguaciles*, or "constables", on horseback and in traditional costume, followed by the three matadors, who will each fight two bulls, and their *cuadrillas*, their personal "team", each comprising two mounted *picadores* and three *banderilleros*.

Once the ring is empty, the first bull appears, to be "tested" by the matador or his *banderilleros* using pink and gold capes. These preliminaries conducted (and they can be short, if the bull is ferocious), the **suerte de picar** ensues, in which the *picadores* ride out and take up position at opposite sides of the ring, while the bull is distracted by other *toreros*. Once they are in place, the bull is made to charge one of the horses; the *picador* drives his short-pointed lance into the bull's neck, while it tries to toss his padded, blindfolded horse, thus tiring the bull's powerful neck and back muscles. This is repeated up to three times, until the horn sounds for the *picadores* to leave. For many, this is the least acceptable stage of the *corrida*, and it is clearly not a pleasant experience for the horses, who have their ears stuffed with oil-soaked rags to shut out the noise, and their vocal cords cut out to render them mute.

The next stage, the **suerte de banderillas**, involves the placing of three sets of *banderillas* (coloured sticks with barbed ends) into the bull's shoulders. Each of the three *banderilleros* delivers these in turn, attracting the bull's attention with the movement of his own body rather than a cape, and placing the *banderillas* while both he and the bull are running towards each other.

Once the *banderillas* have been placed, the **suerte de matar** begins, and the matador enters the ring alone, having exchanged his pink-and-gold cape for the red one. He (or she) salutes the president and then dedicates the bull either to an individual, to whom he gives his hat, or to the audience by placing his hat in the centre of the ring. It is in this part of the *corrida* that judgements are made and the performance is focused, as the matador displays his skills on the (by now exhausted) bull. He uses the movements of the cape to attract the bull, while his body remains still. If he does well, the band will start to play, while the crowd *olé* each pass. This stage lasts around ten

minutes and ends with the kill. The matador attempts to get the bull into a position where he can drive a sword between its shoulders and through to the heart for a *coup de grâce*. In practice, they rarely succeed in this, instead taking a second sword, crossed at the end, to cut the bull's spinal cord; this causes instant death.

If the audience is impressed by the matador's performance, they will wave their handkerchiefs and shout for an award to be made by the president. He can award one or both ears, and a tail – the better the display, the more pieces he gets – while if the matador has excelled himself, he will be carried out of the ring by the crowd, through the *puerta grande*, the main door, which is normally kept locked.

Popular **matadors** include the veteran Enrique Ponce, Julián "El Juli" López, Granada's David "El Fandi" Fandila, César Jiménez and Manuel Jesús Cid Sala "El Cid". But the *torero* who sets most male aficionados' hearts aflutter (and many female ones, too) is the moody, quixotic and media-shy José Tomás Román Martín; fighting under the name José Tomás, his fans claim that his courageous, high-risk style – he has been seriously gored on numerous occasions – has taken the art back to its roots.

Football

Until its poor performance in the 2014 World Cup, Spain had one of the greatest national teams of all

BASQUE GAMES AND SPORTS

It's a whole different ball game in the Basque Country, where sporting obsessions are of a very distinct kind.

Pelota (a version of which is known as **jai alai**, Basque for "happy party") is played all over Spain, but in Euskal Herria even the smallest village has a *pelota* court or *fronton*, and betting on the sport is rife.

Rowing is also hugely popular, and regattas are held every weekend in summer. During local fiestas, you'll also see other unique Basque sports including **aizkolaritza** (log-chopping), **harri-jasotzea** (stone-lifting), **soka-tira** (tug-of-war) and **segalaritza** (grass-cutting). The finest exponents of the first two in particular are popular local heroes (the world champion stone-lifter Iñaki Perurena's visit to Japan resulted in the sport being introduced there – he remains the only lifter to surpass the legendary 315kg barrier).

time. Spain became World Cup winners in 2010 and won back-to-back European championships in 2008 and 2012. Meanwhile, Barcelona – mercurial *tiki-taka* (pass-and-move) masters – and big spenders Real Madrid are regular finalists of the European Champions League. Certainly, if you want the excitement of a genuinely Spanish sporting event, watching a Sunday-evening game in **La Liga** (W lfp.es) is unsurpassed.

For many years, in fact, the country's two dominant teams have been **Real Madrid** and **FC Barcelona**, each boasting one of the world's two best footballers in, respectively, Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi. Their monopoly was broken by **Atlético Madrid**, who surprised everyone by winning the league title in 2014, but other challengers struggle to keep up. These usually include **Valencia**, the Andalusian powerhouse of **Sevilla** and the emerging forces of **Villarreal**, who have experienced a rags-to-riches success story under president and ceramics tycoon Fernando Roig, and **Real Sociedad** from San Sebastián. Also powerful are **Athletic Bilbao**, who only draw on players from Euskal Herria (the Basque Country in Spain and France, and in Navarra) and those who come through the club's youth ranks.

The league **season** runs from late August until May, and most games kick off at 5pm or 7pm on Sundays, though live TV usually demands that one key game kicks off at 10pm on Saturday and 9pm

on Sunday. With the exception of local derbies, major European games, and the so-called *clásicos* between Real Madrid and Barcelona, **tickets** are not too hard to get. They start at around €30 for La Liga games, with the cheapest in the *fondo* (behind the goals); *tribuna* (pitchside stand) seats are much pricier, while to see an average Real Madrid (see p.94) or Barcelona (see p.680) game could easily cost you up to €100.

Golf

When Cantabria boy Severiano "Seve" Ballesteros died in 2011, aged just 54, the whole nation mourned. He and his fellow golfers, like José María Olazábal, Sergio García and Miguel Ángel Jiménez, have raised the country's golf profile immeasurably in recent years, and with around three hundred **golf courses** Spain is one of the best European destinations for the amateur golfer too. Temperatures, especially favourable in the south, mean that you can play more or less year-round on the Costa del Sol, while a number of courses have been built away from the traditional centres, for example along the Costa de la Luz and the Atlantic coast, which, while not as nice in winter, tend to be a little cheaper. There are increasing concerns, however, about the amount of water used by courses in a country that is experiencing a severe water crisis.

SPAIN'S CLASSIC HIKES

The country's **major footpaths** are known as GR (Grande Recorrido) or PR (Pequeño Recorrido), some of which make up part of the trans-European walking routes that extend across the entire continent. GR paths are the longest, and are marked by red-and-white stripes, while the smaller PR routes (yellow-and-white) can usually be done in a day. The best-known routes are the GR11, which crosses the Pyrenees from coast to coast and takes at least forty days, via Andorra; the GR65 and its variants, the Camino de Santiago; and the GR7, which starts from Tarifa in Andalucía, heads through the Sierra Nevada and up the Catalan coast before reaching the Pyrenees.

Baixa Garrotxa A 28-kilometre loop through the spectacular Garrotxa volcanic region of northeastern Catalunya. See p.748.

Camino de Santiago The legendary, month-long pilgrimage route runs from the Pyrenees to Santiago de Compostela, by way of Romanesque architecture in Navarra (see p.492), mighty Gothic cathedrals in Castilla y León (see p.427), fine wines in La Rioja and beautiful green Galicia scenery (see p.560).

Cañón de Añisoc Much less visited and wilder than its neighbour Ordesa, this spectacular river gorge is overlooked by wedding-cake palisades. See p.638.

Carros de Foc The trans-park circuit takes in the most scenic corners of the Parc Nacional d'Aiguestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici, a challenging route linking nine overnight refuges. See p.763.

Circo de las Cinco Lagunas A scintillating one-day walk in the Sierra de Gredos, with sparkling mountain lakes and the possibility of seeing half-tame Gredos ibex. See p.158.

Circo de Soaso The best sampling of Aragón's Parque Nacional de Ordesa – upstream along the valley to a superb waterfall, and back via a spectacular cornice route called the Faja de Pelay. See p.637.

Desfiladero de Cares The classic Picos de Europa hike – through the Cares Gorge – is a dramatic 12km route along a path hewn out of the cliff face. See p.523.

Pedraforca One of the most revered peaks in Catalunya is a relatively easy one to bag, with a variety of routes up. See p.755.

Plenty of tour operators can arrange golf-holiday packages, while for more information visit the very useful **Golf Spain** website ([@golfspain.com](http://www.golfspain.com)), which details all the country's golf courses and golf schools, plus green fees and golf-and-resort packages.

Hiking and mountain sports

Spain is one of the most mountainous countries in Europe, and as such is hugely popular with walkers. Aside from the classic long-distance routes, there are fantastic day-hikes, climbs and circuits possible almost everywhere, though you'll need to be properly equipped with a map, compass or GPS, hiking boots and mountain gear.

In Andalucía, the **Sierra Nevada** mountain range and national park offers spectacular walking among the highest peaks in Europe after the Alps. It can be pretty hard going, but there are less challenging hikes in the foothills, particularly the lush valleys of Las Alpujarras. For the best trekking in central Spain, head for the **Sierra de Gredos**, two hours' drive from Madrid, where there are lots of excellent one- and two-day hikes in the shadow of the highest peak, Almanzor (2592m). To the north, in the Pyrenees, the largest concentration of peaks lies in the eastern half of the range, particularly in Catalunya's **Parc Nacional d'Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici**, where there are walks of all levels, from afternoon rambles to multi-day expeditions. Further challenges abound to the west, where the **Aragonese Pyrenees** are home to the two highest peaks in the range, Aneto (3404m) and Posets (3375m), while in Aragón's **Parque Nacional de Ordesa** there are both rewarding day-hikes and more intensive climbs. If asked to choose just one corner of Spain, though, many would plump for the rugged **Picos de Europa** in Cantabria and Asturias, which, although only 40km or so across, offers a surprising diversity, from easy day-treks to full-blown expeditions.

Rafting and canyoning

There's **rafting** (see p.760) in various rivers across Spain, though the fast-flowing Noguera Pallaresa in the eastern Pyrenees is the most popular choice for expeditions. The season runs roughly from March to October, during which time you can fling yourself down the rapids in an inflatable raft from around €50 for a two-hour trip, and more like €180 for an all-day trip with lunch.

The Parque Natural Sierra de Guara ([@guara.org](http://www.guara.org)) and the Parque Nacional de Ordesa ([@ordesa.net](http://www.ordesa.net))

provide some of the best locations in Europe for **canyoning** (*barranquismo*) – hiking, climbing, scrambling and abseiling in caves, gorges and rivers. Operators in most of the local villages (including Alquézar and Torla) offer equipment and guides, with prices starting from around €70 for a full day's expedition. The park websites have more information on routes and local organizations.

Skiing and snowboarding

Spain offers a decent range of slopes, and often at lower prices than its more mountainous European neighbours. It is also home to the southernmost skiing in Europe, in the form of the Sol y Nieve resort in the **Sierra Nevada** (Andalucía), which has the longest season in Spain, running from November to April and sometimes even May, allowing you to ski in the morning and head to the beach in the afternoon – really, the only thing the resort's got going for it. Much more challenging skiing is to be had in the north of the country in the Pyrenees. The **Aragonese Pyrenees** are home to a range of resorts catering for beginners to advanced skiers, while the resorts in the **Catalan Pyrenees**, to the east, encompass Andorra; the biggest resort here is Soldeu/El Tarter. Other options include the more intimate **Alto Campoo**, near Santander, and, for a day's excursion, easy-to-intermediate skiing just outside Madrid at **Valdesqui** and **Navacerrada**.

There are ski deals to Spain from tour operators in your home country, though it often works out cheaper if you go through a local Spanish travel agent or even arrange your trip directly with local providers. Many local hotels offer ski deals, and we've covered some options in the Guide. Equipment rental will set you back around €20–30 a day as a general rule, and weekly lift-passes from around €120, although the longer you rent or ski for, the cheaper it will be.

Watersports

Spain offers a vast range of watersports, especially along the Mediterranean coast where most resorts offer **pedalo, kayak, paddleboard and canoe rental** (from €10/hour), sailing/kitesurfing tuition, and **boat rental** (€40/hour) and **waterskiing** (from €30/15min).

Surfing is best on the Atlantic coast, backed up by the fact that the area plays regular host to a number of prestigious competitions such as the Ferrolterra Pantín Classic and the Goanna Pro. Breaks such as the legendary Mundaka (Costa Vasca),

considered by many as the best left-hander in Europe (but one that's notoriously fickle), along with a superb run of beaches with waves for all abilities, make the region's reputation. The surfing season runs roughly from September to April, meaning that a full wetsuit is a basic requirement in the cold Atlantic waters. If you prefer to surf in warmer waters, note that the Atlantic Andalusian coastline has a few decent spots. For more information, get hold of the superb *Stormrider Surf Guide: Europe* (📞lowpressure.co.uk), which gives full details of all the best spots in Spain (and elsewhere in Europe).

Tarifa on the Costa de la Luz is *the* spot in Spain – indeed, in the whole of Europe – for **windsurfing and kitesurfing**, with strong winds almost guaranteed, and huge stretches of sandy beach to enjoy. You'll also find schools dotted around the rest of the coast, with another good spot being the rather colder option of the Atlantic coast in Galicia. Prices are around €27 for an hour's board and sail rental, while lessons start at €50 for two hours including board rental.

Travelling with children

Spain is a fabulous country to travel with children of any age; they will be well received everywhere, and babies and toddlers, in particular, will be the centre of attention. You will probably have to change your usual routine, since young children stay up late in Spain, especially in the summer. It's very common for them to be running around pavement cafés and public squares after 10pm or 11pm, and yours will no doubt enjoy joining in. It's expected that families dine out with their children, too, so it's not unusual to see up to four generations of the same family eating tapas in a bar, for example.

Holidays

Many holiday hotels and self-contained club-style resorts offer things like kids' clubs, babysitting, sports and entertainment. The only caveat is that, of course, you're unlikely to see much of Spain on these family-oriented holidays. The two best cities to take children, hands down, are Madrid and Barcelona, which have loads of child-friendly attractions. Otherwise, Spain has various theme parks and

leisure activities specifically aimed at kids, while the long Spanish coastline has a bunch of popular **water parks**.

Museums, galleries and sights throughout Spain either offer **discounts** or **free entry** for children (it's often free for under-4s or even under-7s), and it's the same on trains, sightseeing tours, boat trips and most other usual tourist attractions.

Accommodation

If you're travelling independently, finding **accommodation** shouldn't be a problem, as *hostales* and *pensiones* generally offer rooms with three or four beds. Bear in mind that much budget accommodation in towns and cities is located on the upper storeys of buildings, often without lifts. It's also worth noting that some older-style *pensiones* don't have heating systems – and it can get very cold in winter. If you want a cot provided or **babysitting** services, you'll usually have to stay in a more expensive hotel – and even then, never assume that babysitting services can be provided, so always check in advance. **Self-catering accommodation** offers the most flexibility; even in major cities, it's easy to rent an apartment by the night or week and enjoy living like a local with your family.

Products, clothes and services

Baby food, disposable nappies, formula milk and other standard items are widely available in pharmacies and supermarkets, though not necessarily with the same brands that you will be used to at home. Organic baby food, for example, is hard to come by away from the big-city supermarkets, and most Spanish non-organic baby foods contain small amounts of sugar or salt. Fresh milk, too, is not always available; UHT is more commonly drunk by small children. If you require anything specific for your baby or child, it's best to bring it with you or check with the manufacturer about equivalent brands. Remember, too, the airline restrictions on carrying liquids in hand luggage if you're planning to bring industrial quantities of Calpol to see you through the holiday.

For **babies' and children's clothing**, Prénatal (📞prenatal.es) and Chicco (📞chicco.es) are Spain's market leaders, with shops in most towns and cities. Or you can always try the local El Corte Inglés department store.

Families might eat out a lot, but things like **highchairs and special children's menus** are rare, except in the resorts on the *costas* and islands. Most

bars and cafés, though, will be happy to heat milk bottles for you. **Baby-changing areas** are also relatively rare, except in department stores and shopping centres, and even where they do exist they are not always up to scratch.

Attitudes

Most establishments are **baby-friendly** in the sense that you'll be made very welcome if you turn up with a child in tow – a refreshing change from parts of northern Europe. Many museum cloakrooms, for example, will be happy to look after your pushchair as you carry your child around the building, while restaurants will make a fuss of your little one. Discreet **breast-feeding** in public is acceptable. **Noise** is the other factor that often stuns visiting parents. Spain is a loud country, with fiesta fireworks, jackhammers, buzzing mopeds and clamouring evening crowds all adding to the mix. Babies sleep through most things, but you might want to pick and choose accommodation with the location of bars, clubs, markets, and the like, firmly in mind.

Travel essentials

Addresses

Addresses are written as: C/Picasso 2, 4º izda. – which means Picasso Street (*calle*) no. 2, fourth floor,

left- (*izquierda*) hand flat or office; dcha. (*derecha*) is right; cto. (*centro*) centre. Where no house number is known *s/n* (*sin número*) is commonly used in Spain. Avenida is often abbreviated to Avda. (Avenida in Barcelona, Catalunya and the Balearics) in addresses.

Other confusions in Spanish addresses result from the different spellings, and sometimes words, used in Catalan, Basque and Galician – all of which are replacing their Castilian counterparts; for example, *carrer* (not *calle*) and *plaça* (not plaza) in Catalan.

Climate

Overall, spring, early summer and autumn are ideal times for a Spanish trip – though the weather varies enormously from region to region. Note that the chart below shows **average temperatures** – and while Seville, the hottest city in Spain, can soar high into the 90s at midday in summer, it is a fairly comfortable 23–27°C (75–80°F) through much of the morning and late afternoon. Equally, bear in mind that temperatures in the north or west, in Extremadura or León for example, can approach freezing at night in winter, while mountainous regions can get extremely cold much of the year.

Complaints

By law, all establishments (including hotels) must keep a *libro de reclamaciones* (**complaints book**). If you have any problems, you can usually produce an

AVERAGE TEMPERATURES

	Jan	Mar	May	Jul	Sept	Nov
ALICANTE, COSTA BLANCA °C/°F	16/61	20/68	26/78	32/90	30/86	21/70
BARCELONA, CATALUNYA °C/°F	13/56	16/61	21/70	28/83	25/77	16/61
MADRID, CASTILE °C/°F	9/49	15/59	21/70	31/88	25/77	13/56
MÁLAGA, COSTA DEL SOL °C/°F	17/63	19/67	23/74	29/84	29/84	20/68
MALLORCA, BALEARICS °C/°F	14/58	17/63	22/72	29/84	27/80	18/65
PONTEVEDRA, GALICIA °C/°F	14/58	16/61	20/68	25/77	24/75	16/61
SANTANDER, CANTABRIA °C/°F	12/54	15/59	17/63	22/72	21/70	15/59
SEVILLE, ANDALUCÍA °C/°F	15/59	21/70	26/78	35/95	32/90	20/68

immediate resolution by asking for the book, since most establishments prefer to keep them empty, thus attracting no unwelcome attention from officialdom. If you do make an entry, English is acceptable but write clearly and simply; add your home address, too, as you are entitled to be informed of any action, including – but don't count on it – compensation. Or take your complaint to any local *turismo*, which should attempt to resolve the matter while you wait.

Costs

There are few places in Europe where you'll get a better deal on the cost of simple meals and drinks. Public transport remains very good value, as does car rental, certainly out of season.

It's difficult to come up with a **daily budget** for the country, as your €1 glass of wine and €40 *pensión* room in rural Andalucía might be €3 and €60, respectively, in Madrid or Barcelona. However, as a very rough guide, if you always stay in youth hostels or the cheapest hotels, use public transport and stick to local restaurants, you could get by on between €50 and €80 a day. Stay somewhere a bit more stylish or comfortable, eat in fancier restaurants, and go out on the town, and you'll need more like €100–150 a day, though, of course, if you're holidaying in Spain's *paradores* or five-star hotels, this figure won't even cover your room.

Visiting museums, galleries, churches and monasteries soon adds up. Check to see if there are tourist cards available that give discounts on entry. Accordingly, it pays to take along any **student/youth or senior citizen cards** you may be entitled to, as most attractions offer discounts (and make sure you carry your passport or ID card). Some museums and attractions are **free** on a certain day of the week or month (though note that this is sometimes limited to EU citizens only; you'll need to show your passport). Any **entrance fees** noted in the Guide are for the full adult price; children (as well as seniors) usually get a discount, and the under-4s are often free.

Crime and personal safety

The police in Spain come in various guises. The **Guardia Civil**, in green uniforms, is a national police force, formerly a military organization, and has responsibility for national crime, as well as roads, borders and guarding public buildings. There's also the blue-uniformed **Policía Nacional**, mainly seen in cities, who deal with crime, drugs, crowd control, identity and immigrant matters, and the like. Locally, most policing is carried out by the

Policía Municipal, who wear blue-and-white uniforms, and these tend to be the most approachable if you're reporting a crime, for example. In certain of the autonomous regions, there are also regional police forces, which are gradually taking over duties from the Guardia Civil and Policía Nacional. The **Mossos d'Esquadra** in Catalunya (blue uniforms with red-and-white trim) and the Basque **Ertzaintza** (blue and red, with red berets) have the highest profile, though you're most likely to encounter them on traffic and highways duty.

If you do get robbed, go straight to the police, where you'll need to make an official statement known as a **denuncia**, not least because your insurance company will require a police report. Expect it to be a time-consuming and laborious business – you can do it online (details on policia.es), but you'll still have to go into the station to sign it. If you have your passport stolen, you need to contact your embassy or consulate.

Avoiding trouble

Pickpocketing and **bag-snatching** is, unfortunately, a fact of life in major Spanish cities and tourist resorts, though no more so than anywhere else in Europe. You need to be on guard in crowded places and on public transport, but there's no need to be paranoid. Drivers shouldn't leave anything in view in a **parked car**. **On the road**, be cautious about accepting help from anyone other than a uniformed police officer – some roadside thieves pose as "good Samaritans" to persons experiencing car and tyre problems, some of which, such as slashed tyres, may have been inflicted at rest stops or service stations in advance. The thieves typically attempt to divert your attention by pointing out a problem and then steal items from the vehicle while you are looking elsewhere.

Incidentally, if you are stopped by a proper police officer for a **driving offence**, being foreign just won't wash as an excuse. They'll fine you on the spot, cash or card.

Sexual harassment

Spain's macho image has faded dramatically, and these days there are relatively few parts of the

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- 📞 112 All emergency services
- 📞 061 Ambulance
- 📞 080 Fire service
- 📞 062 Guardia Civil
- 📞 091 Policía Nacional

STAYING SAFE IN SPANISH CITIES

Certain Spanish cities – Madrid, Barcelona and Seville particularly – have a bad reputation as far as petty crime is concerned. While it's easy to get spooked by lurid tales of local thievery (hoteliers often go to great pains to warn guests of the dangers), taking the usual sensible **precautions** should help make your stay safe.

Know where your belongings are at all times (eg, don't leave **bags** unattended, even if you're looking at rooms upstairs in a *hostal*). Carry handbags slung across your neck, not over your shoulder; don't put wallets in your back pocket; leave passport and tickets in the hotel safe; and keep a photocopy of your passport, plus notes of your credit card helplines and so on.

On the street, beware of people standing unusually close at street kiosks or attractions, or of those trying to distract you for any reason (pointing out "bird shit" – in reality, planted shaving cream – on your jacket, shoving a card or paper to read right under your nose). Next thing you know, your wallet has gone.

country where **women travelling alone** are likely to feel intimidated or attract unwanted attention. There is little of the pestering that you used to have to contend with, and the outdoor culture of terrazas (terrace bars) and the tendency of Spaniards to move around in large, mixed crowds, help to make you feel less exposed. *Déjame en paz* ("leave me in peace") is a fairly standard rebuff, and if you are in any doubt, take a taxi, always the safest way to travel late at night.

The major **resorts** of the *costas* have their own artificial holiday culture, where problems are more likely to be caused by other alcohol-fuelled holiday-makers. You are actually more vulnerable in isolated, **rural regions**, where you can walk for hours without coming across an inhabited farm or house, though it's rare that this poses a threat – help and hospitality are much more the norm. Many single women happily tramp the long-distance pilgrim footpath, for example, though you are always best advised to stay in rooms and *pensiones* rather than camping wild.

Electricity

Plugs in Spain are of the two-prong, standard European type. The current in Spain is 220v – bring an adaptor (and transformer) to use UK and US laptops, mobile phone chargers, and other electronic devices.

Entry requirements

EU citizens (and those of Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland) need only a valid national identity card or passport to enter Spain. Other Europeans, and citizens of the **United States, Canada, Australia** and **New Zealand**, require a passport but no visa, and can stay as a tourist for up

to ninety days. Other nationalities (including South Africans) will need to get a visa from a Spanish embassy or consulate before departure. Visa requirements do change, and it's always advisable to check the current situation before leaving home.

Most non-EU citizens who want to stay in Spain for longer than three months, rather than just visit as a tourist, need to register at a provincial **Oficina de Extranjeros** (Foreigners' Office), where they'll be issued with a residence certificate; you'll find a list of offices (eventually) on the Ministry of Interior website (www.mir.es). You don't need the certificate if you're an EU citizen living and working legally in Spain, or if you're legally self-employed or a student (on an exchange programme or otherwise). US citizens can apply for one ninety-day extension, showing proof of funds, but this must be done from outside Spain. Other nationalities wishing to extend their stay will need to get a special visa from a Spanish embassy or consulate before departure.

When the UK leaves the EU in March 2019 the rules regarding British entry to Spain are likely to change.

Health

The **European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)** gives EU citizens access to Spanish state public-health services under reciprocal agreements. While this will provide free or reduced-cost medical care in the event of minor injuries and emergencies, it won't cover every eventuality – and it only applies to EU citizens in possession of the card – so travel insurance is essential.

No **inoculations** are required for Spain, and the worst that's likely to happen to you is that you might fall victim to an upset stomach. To be safe, wash fruit and avoid tapas dishes that look as if they were prepared last week. Water at public fountains

is fine, unless there's a sign saying "*agua no potable*", in which case don't drink it.

For minor complaints, go to a **farmacia** – pharmacists are highly trained, willing to give advice (often in English) and able to dispense many drugs that would be available only on prescription in other countries. They keep usual shop hours (Mon–Fri 9am–1.30pm & 5–8pm), but some open late and at weekends, while a rota system (displayed in the window of every pharmacy) keeps at least one open 24 hours in every town.

If you have special medical or dietary requirements, it is advisable to carry a letter from your doctor, translated into Spanish, indicating the nature of your condition and necessary treatments. With luck, you'll get the address of an English-speaking **doctor** from the nearest *farmacia*, police station or tourist office – it's obviously more likely in resorts and big cities. Treatment at **hospitals** for EU citizens in possession of the EHIC card is free; otherwise, you'll be charged at private-hospital rates, which can be very expensive.

In **emergencies**, dial 📞 112 for an ambulance.

Insurance

You should take out a comprehensive **insurance policy** before travelling to Spain, to cover against loss, theft, illness or injury. A typical policy will provide cover for loss of baggage and tickets, as well as cancellation or curtailment of your journey. When securing baggage cover, make sure that the per-article limit will cover your most valuable possession. Most policies exclude so-called **dangerous sports** unless an extra premium is paid: in Spain, this can mean that most watersports are excluded (plus rafting, canyoning, etc), though not things like bike tours or hiking.

If you need to make a claim, you should keep receipts for medicines and medical treatment, and in the event you have anything stolen, you must obtain an official statement from the police.

Internet

Wi-fi (pronounced "wee-fee" in Spain) is widespread in cafés, bars, hotels and other public "hotspots" – Barcelona city council, for example, operates Spain's largest free public network. Otherwise, you can get online at computer shops and phone offices (*locutorios*), where you'll pay as little as €1 an hour, though it can cost two or three times as much. Since most accommodation in Spain has free wi-fi too, reviews in the Guide only highlight places where there is no wi-fi or you have to pay for it.

Laundry

You'll find a few coin-operated self-service laundries (*lavanderías automáticas*) in the major cities, but you normally have to leave your clothes for a service wash and dry at a *lavandería*. A dry cleaner is a *tintorería*. Note that by law you're not allowed to leave laundry hanging out of windows over a street, and many *pensiones* and *hostales* expressly forbid washing clothes in the sink.

Mail

Post offices (*Correos*; 📧 correos.es) are normally open weekdays from 8am to 2pm and again from 5pm to 7.30pm, though branches in bigger places may have longer hours, may not close at midday and may open on Saturday mornings. There's an office-finder on the website, which also gives exact opening hours and contact details for each post office in Spain. As you can also pay bills and buy phonecards in post offices, queues can be long – it's often easier to buy **stamps** at tobacconists (look for the brown-and-yellow *estanco* sign).

Outbound mail is reasonably reliable, with letters or cards taking around three days to a week to the UK and the rest of Europe, a week to ten days to North America, New Zealand and Australia, although it can be more erratic in the summer.

ROUGH GUIDES TRAVEL INSURANCE

Rough Guides has teamed up with WorldNomads.com to offer great travel insurance deals. Policies are available to residents of over 150 countries, with cover for a wide range of adventure sports, 24hr emergency assistance, high levels of medical and evacuation cover and a stream of travel safety information. Roughguides.com users can take advantage of their policies online 24/7, from anywhere in the world – even if you're already travelling. And since plans often change when you're on the road, you can extend your policy and even claim online. Roughguides.com users who buy travel insurance with WorldNomads.com can also leave a positive footprint and donate to a community development project. For more information, go to 🌐 roughguides.com/travel-insurance.

There's also a whole host of express-mail services (ask for *urgente* or *exprés*).

Maps

You'll find a good selection of **road maps** in most Spanish bookshops, street kiosks and service stations. Most widely available are the regional Michelin maps (1:400,000), covering the country (including the Balearics) in a series of nine maps, though there are also whole-country maps and atlas-format versions available. Other good country and regional maps are those published by *Distribuidoras Telstar* (📍distribuidoras-telstar.es), which also produces reliable indexed **street plans** of the main cities. Any good book or travel shop in your own country should be able to provide a decent range of Spain maps, or buy online from specialist stores such as 📍stanfords.co.uk or 📍randmcnally.com.

You can buy **hiking/trekking maps** from specialist map/travel shops in Spain, including *La Tienda Verde* in Madrid (📍tiendaverde.es), and *Librería Quera* (📍facebook.com/LlibreriaQuera) or *Altair* (📍altair.es) in Barcelona. These and other bookshops stock the full range of **topographical maps** issued by two government agencies – the Instituto Geográfico Nacional and the Servicio Geográfico del Ejército – available at scales of 1:200,000, 1:100,000, 1:50,000 and occasionally 1:25,000. The various SGE series are considered to be more up to date, although neither agency is hugely reliable. A Catalunya-based company, *Editorial Alpina* (📍editorialalpina.com), produces useful 1:40,000 or 1:25,000 map/booklet sets for most of the Spanish **mountain and foothill areas** of interest, and these are also on sale in many bookshops.

Money

Spain's currency is the **euro** (€), with notes issued in denominations of 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200 and 500 euros, and coins in denominations of 1, 2, 5, 10, 20 and 50 cents, and 1 and 2 euros. Up-to-the-minute currency **exchange rates** are posted on 📍oanda.com.

By far the easiest way to get money is to use your bank **debit card** to withdraw cash from an **ATM**, found in villages, towns and cities all over Spain, as well as on arrival at the airports and major train stations. You can usually withdraw up to €300 a day, and instructions are offered in English once you insert your card. Make sure you have a personal identification number (PIN) that's designed to work overseas, and take a note of your bank's emergency

contact number in case the machine swallows your card. Some European debit cards can also be used directly in shops to pay for purchases; you'll need to check first with your bank.

All major **credit cards** are accepted in hotels, restaurants and shops, and for tours, tickets and transport, though don't count on being able to use them in every small *peñsión* or village café. If you use a foreign credit card in some shops, you may also be asked for photo ID, so be prepared to show a driving licence or passport. Make sure you make a note of the number for reporting lost or stolen cards to your credit card company.

Spanish **bancos** (banks) and **cajas de ahorros** (savings banks) have branches in all but the smallest villages. **Banking hours** are usually Monday to Friday 8.30am to 2pm, with some city branches open Saturday 8.30am to 1pm (except June–Sept when all banks close on Sat), although times can vary from bank to bank. Outside these times, it's usually possible to change cash at larger hotels (generally with bad rates and high commission) or with travel agents – useful for small amounts in a hurry.

In tourist areas, you'll also find specialist **casas de cambio**, with more convenient hours (though rates vary), while some major tourist offices, larger train stations and most branches of *El Corte Inglés* department store have exchange facilities open throughout business hours.

Opening hours

Almost everything in Spain – shops, museums, churches, tourist offices – closes for at least two hours in the middle part of the day (commonly called a *siesta* but today few Spaniards actually sleep at this time). There's a lot of variation (and the *siesta* tends to be longer in the south), but you'll get far less aggravated if you accept that the early afternoon is best spent having lunch or at the beach.

Basic **working hours** are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 2pm and 5pm to 8pm. Many **shops** open slightly later on a Saturday (at 10am) and close for the day at 2pm, though you'll still find plenty of places open in cities, and there are regional variations. Moreover, department and chain stores and shopping malls tend to open a straight Monday to Saturday 10am to 9pm or 10pm.

Museums and galleries, with very few exceptions, also have a break between 1pm or 2pm and 4pm. On Sundays, most open mornings only, and on Mondays many close all day (museums are also usually closed Jan 1 & 6, May 1, Dec 24, 25 & 31). Opening hours vary from year to year, though often not by more than half

an hour or so. Some are also seasonal, and usually in Spain, “summer” means from Easter until September, and “winter” from October until Easter.

The most important **cathedrals, churches and monasteries** operate in the same way as museums, with regular visiting hours and admission charges. Other churches, though, are kept locked, generally opening only for worship in the early morning and/or the evening (between around 6pm and 9pm).

Public holidays

Alongside the Spanish **national public holidays** (see box below) there are scores of regional holidays and local fiestas (often marking the local saint’s day), any of which will mean that everything except hotels, bars and restaurants locks its doors.

In addition, **August** is traditionally Spain’s own holiday month, when the big cities are semi-deserted, with many shops and restaurants closed for the duration. In contrast, it can prove nearly impossible to find a room in the more popular coastal and mountain resorts at these times; similarly, seats on planes, trains and buses in August should if possible be booked in advance.

Shopping

The great city **markets** of Spain are attractions in their own right – bustling, colourful and hugely photogenic – but even so they are emphatically not “just for tourists”. Local people still do their daily shop in places like La Boquería in Barcelona, Valencia’s Mercado Central or Madrid’s Mercado de San Miguel, while a visit to any town’s local market is a sure way to get a handle on regional produce and specialities. Independent **food shops** thrive too, from traditional bakeries to classy delis serving the finest cured meats, while the bigger cities support whole enclaves of

foodie shops – in Barcelona’s La Ribera neighbourhood, for example, you can flit from alley to alley to buy hand-crafted chocolates, artisan-made cheeses, home-roast coffee, organic olive oil and the like.

Leatherwork, such as belts, bags, purses and even saddles, are best sourced in Andalucía. The town of Ubrique (Cádiz) has been a centre of leather production since medieval times, and you can browse and buy from the workshops that line the main street.

Ceramics are widely available, but are especially good in Andalucía (Córdoba region, and around Seville) and in Catalunya (at La Bisbal, northwest of Palafrugell).

In Andalucía you’ll also be able to pick up the most authentic **flamenco** accessories such as dresses, fans, shawls and lace.

Smoking laws

Since 2006, smoking in public places in Spain has been regulated by law, and tougher restrictions introduced in 2011 mean that it’s now forbidden to smoke in all public buildings and transport facilities, plus bars, restaurants, clubs and cafés. Compared to other countries with smoking restrictions in force, you’ll find there’s still an awful lot of puffing going on, though the ban is generally observed.

Taxes

Local sales tax, **IVA** (pronounced “eeba”), is ten percent in hotels and restaurants, and twenty-one percent in shops. It’s usually included in the price though not always, so some hotel or restaurant bills can come as a bit of a surprise – though quoted prices should always make it clear whether or not tax is included. **Non-EU residents** are able to claim back the sales tax on purchases that come to over €90. To do this, make sure that the shop you’re buying from fills out the correct paperwork, and present this to customs before you check in at the airport for your return flight.

Telephones

Spanish **telephone numbers** have nine digits; mobile numbers begin with a 6 or 7, freephone numbers begin 900, while other 90-plus- and 80-plus-digit numbers are nationwide standard-rate or special-rate services. To **call Spain from abroad**, dial your country’s international access code + 34 (Spain’s country code) + the nine-digit Spanish number.

Public telephones have instructions in English, and accept coins, credit cards and phonecards.

SPANISH NATIONAL PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Jan 1 *Año Nuevo*, New Year’s Day

Jan 6 *Epifanía*, Epiphany

March/April *Viernes Santo*, Good Friday

May 1 *Fiesta del Trabajo*, May Day

Aug 15 *La Asunción*, Assumption of the Virgin

Oct 12 *Día de la Hispanidad*, National Day

Nov 1 *Todos los Santos*, All Saints

Dec 6 *Día de la Constitución*, Constitution Day

Dec 8 *Inmaculada Concepción*

Dec 25 *Navidad*, Christmas Day

Phonecards (*tarjetas*) with discounted rates for calls are available in tobacconists, newsagents and post offices, issued in various denominations either by Telefónica (the dominant operator) or one of its rivals. Credit cards are not recommended for local and national calls, since most have a minimum charge that is far more than a normal call is likely to cost. It's also best to avoid making calls from the phone in your hotel room, as even local calls will be slapped with a heavy surcharge.

You can make international calls from any public payphone, but it's cheaper to go to one of the ubiquitous phone centres, or **locutorios**, which specialize in discounted overseas connections. **Calling home from Spain**, you dial 00 (Spain's international access code) + your country code (44 for the UK) + city/area code minus initial zero + number. For **reverse-charge calls**, dial the international operator (0 1008 Europe, 0 1005 rest of the world).

Most European **mobile phones** will work in Spain, though it's worth checking with your provider whether you need to get international access switched on. Since June 2017, EU mobile phone companies are no longer allowed to charge extra roaming fees for using a mobile (including text and data services) in another EU nation.

Time

Spain is one hour ahead of the UK, six hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time, nine hours ahead of Pacific Standard Time, eight hours behind Australia, ten hours behind New Zealand, and the same time as South Africa. In Spain, the clocks go forward in the last week in March and back again in the last week in October. It's worth noting, if you're planning to cross the border, that Portugal is an hour behind Spain throughout the year.

Toilets

Public toilets are generally reasonably clean but don't always have any paper. They can very occasionally still be squat-style. They are most commonly referred to and labelled *Los Servicios*, though signs may point you to *baños*, *aseos* or *lavabos*. *Damas* (Ladies) and *Caballeros* (Gentlemen) are the usual distinguishing signs for sex, though you may also see the potentially confusing *Señoras* (Women) and *Señores* (Men).

Tourist information

The Spanish national tourist office, **Turespaña** (0 spain.info), is an excellent source of information

when planning your trip. The website is full of ideas, information and searchable databases, and there are links to similar websites of Turespaña offices in your own country.

There are **oficinas de turismo** (tourist offices) in virtually every Spanish town, usually open Monday to Friday 9am to 2pm and 4pm to 7pm, Saturday and Sunday 9am to 2pm, but hours vary considerably from place to place. In major cities and coastal resorts the offices tend to remain open all day Saturday and on Sunday morning between April and September.

The information and help available in *oficinas de turismo* also varies: some are very good, and some do little more than hand out a map and ask where you're from. Not all staff speak English, especially in the more rural and out-of-the-way destinations. There's also often more than one information office, especially in bigger towns and cities, where responsibility for local tourism is split between municipal and provincial offices. As a rough rule, the municipal offices are better for specific city information, the provincial offices best for advice about where to go in the region.

Travellers with disabilities

The classic tourist images of Spain – the medieval old towns, winding lanes, the castles and monasteries – don't exactly fill you with confidence if you're in a wheelchair. However, Spain is changing and facilities are improving rapidly, especially in the more go-ahead, contemporary cities. There are accessible rooms and hotels in all major Spanish cities and resorts and, by law, all new public buildings (including revamped museums and galleries) are required to be fully accessible. Public transport is the main problem, since most local buses and trains are virtually impossible for wheelchairs, though again there are pockets of excellence in Spain. The AVE high-speed train service, for example, is fully accessible, as is every city and sightseeing bus in Barcelona (and large parts of its metro and tram network, too). In many towns and cities, acoustic traffic-light signals and dropped kerbs are common.

Some organizations at home may be able to advise you further about travel to Spain, like the very useful UK-based **Tourism For All** (0 tourismforall.org.uk). **Access Travel** (0 access-travel.co.uk) offers Barcelona city breaks and holidays to five other Spanish resorts, and, at the very least, local tourist offices in Spain should also be able to recommend a suitable hotel or taxi company.



METROPOLIS

GRASSY

GRASSY

GRASSY

Madrid

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Madrid

Madrid became Spain's capital simply by virtue of its geographical position at the heart of Iberia. When Felipe II moved the seat of government here in 1561, his aim was to create a symbol of the unification and centralization of the country, and a capital from which he could receive the fastest post and communication from every corner of the nation. The site itself had few natural advantages – it is 300km from the sea on a 650-metre-high plateau, freezing in winter, boiling in summer – and it was only the determination of successive rulers to promote a strong central capital that ensured Madrid's survival and development.

Today, Madrid is a vast, predominantly modern city, with a population of some three million and growing. The journey in – through a stream of soulless suburbs and high-rise apartment blocks – isn't pretty, but the streets at the heart of the city are a pleasant surprise, with pockets of medieval buildings and narrow, atmospheric alleys, dotted with the oddest of shops and bars, and interspersed with eighteenth-century Bourbon squares. Compared with the historic cities of Spain – Toledo, Salamanca, Seville, Granada – there may be few sights of great architectural interest, but the monarchs did acquire outstanding picture collections, which formed the basis of the **Prado** museum. This, together with the **Reina Sofía** and the **Thyssen-Bornemisza** museums, state-of-the-art homes to fabulous arrays of modern Spanish painting (including Picasso's *Guernica*) and European and American masters, has made Madrid a top port of call on the European art tour.

Aside from these heavyweight cultural attractions, there is a host of smaller museums and palaces which can be almost as rewarding. Sports fans will inevitably be drawn to the Santiago Bernabéu, home to Real Madrid, the most glamorous and successful club in world football, while a scattering of parks and gardens provide a welcome respite from the hustle and bustle of the city centre.

However, monuments and sights are not really what Madrid is about and as you get to grips with the place, you soon realize that it's the lifestyle of the inhabitants – the **madrileños** – that is the capital's key attraction: hanging out in traditional cafés or summer terrazas, packing the lanes of the Sunday Rastro flea market or playing hard and very late in a thousand **bars**, clubs, discos and *tascas*. Whatever Barcelona, Valencia or San Sebastián might claim, the Madrid scene, immortalized in the movies of Pedro Almodóvar, remains the most vibrant and fun in the country.

Since the arrival of the new millennium, Madrid has undergone a series of urban rehabilitation programmes focused on the city's older *barrios* (districts). Improvements

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LA CHATA TAPAS BAR, LA LATINA

Highlights

- 1 **Palacio Real** Marvel at the over-the-top opulence in this grandiose former residence of the Spanish monarchs. **See p.71**
- 2 **El Rastro** Take a Sunday stroll from Plaza Mayor through Madrid's shambolic flea market. **See p.72**
- 3 **The Prado** The Goya, Velázquez and Bosch collections alone make the trip to one of the world's greatest art museums a must. **See p.76**
- 4 **Guernica** Behold this icon of twentieth-century art set in context at the Reina Sofia. **See p.83**
- 5 **Museo Arqueológico Nacional** The archeological museum houses a stunning array

of ancient treasures, including the iconic Iberian bust known as the Dama de Elche. **See p.93**

- 6 **Real Madrid** Watch the twelve-times European champions' dazzling roster of big-name players parade their footballing skills at the Santiago Bernabéu stadium. **See p.94**
- 7 **Tapas** Sample the mouthwatering range of tasty specialties as you hop from bar to bar in the Huertas, La Latina, Chueca or Malasaña districts. **See p.104**
- 8 **A night on the tiles** Start late at a bar, then go on to a club and try to make it into the early hours before collapsing over *chocolate con churros*. **See p.113**

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Hotel Emperador	11
Hotel Indigo	14
Hotel Orfila	2
Hotel Santo Domingo	13
Hotel T3 Tirol	1
Hotel Urso	6
NH Nacional	17
Only You Hotel	9
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Petit Palace Embassy Serrano	5
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Bogui Jazz	24	La Lupe	36
Café Acuarela	23	Morocco	28
Café Barbieri	39	Oldenburg	5
Café de Chinitas	29	Opium	8
Candela	35	The Passenger	18
Casa Camacho	13	Pepe Botella	12
Circo Price	40	La Riviera	32
Clamores	4	La Tape	1
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Estación Sur de Autobuses, Museo del Ferrocarril & Atocha

MADRID'S FIESTAS

There are dozens of **fiestas** in Madrid, some of which involve the whole city, others just an individual *barrio*. The more important dates celebrated in the capital are listed below.

Also well worth checking out are cultural festivals organized by the city council, in particular the **Veranos de la Villa** (July–Aug) and **Festival de Otoño a Primavera** (Nov–June). Many events are free and, in the summer, often open-air, taking place in the city's parks and squares. Annual festivals for gastronomy (Jan–Feb), flamenco (June), books (end May), photography (mid-July to August), jazz (November) and dance (November–December) are also firmly established on the cultural agenda. Full programmes are published in the monthly what's-on magazine *esMadrid*, free from any of the tourist offices (see p.99) and from the city's tourist website (www.esmadrid.com).

JANUARY

5: Cabalgata de Reyes To celebrate the arrival of the gift-bearing Three Kings there is a hugely popular, gigantic evening procession through the city centre in which children are showered with sweets. It's held on the evening before presents are traditionally exchanged in Spain.

FEBRUARY

Week before Lent: Carnaval An excuse for a lot of partying and fancy-dress parades, especially in the gay zone around Chueca. The end of *Carnaval* is marked by the bizarre and entertaining parade, *El Entierro de la Sardina* (The Burial of the Sardine), on the Paseo de la Florida.

MARCH/APRIL

Semana Santa (Holy Week) Celebrated with a series of solemn processions around Madrid, although for a more impressive backdrop head for Toledo (routes and times of processions are available from tourist offices).

MAY

2: Fiesta del Dos de Mayo Held throughout Madrid, with music, theatre productions and flamenco shows, though a bit low-key in recent years.

15: Fiestas de San Isidro Festivities to honour Madrid's patron saint are spread a week either side of this date, and are among the country's biggest festivals. The fiestas also herald the start of the bullfighting season.

JUNE/JULY

End June/beginning July: World Pride Madrid (LGBT Pride Week) Week-long party throughout Chueca, culminating in a massive carnival-style parade that brings the city centre to a standstill.

AUGUST

6–15: Castizo (Traditional fiestas of San Cayetano, San Lorenzo and La Virgen de la Paloma) in La Latina and Lavapiés *barrios*. Much of the activity – processions, dancing and live music – takes place around C/Toledo, the Pza. de la Paja and the Jardines de las Vestillas.

DECEMBER

25: Navidad During Christmas, Pza. Mayor is filled with stalls selling festive decorations and displaying a large model of a Nativity scene. *El Corte Inglés*, at the bottom of C/Preciados, has an all-singing, all-dancing clockwork Christmas scene (*Cortylandia*), which plays at certain times of the day to the delight of assembled children.

31: Nochevieja (New Year's Eve) is celebrated at bars, restaurants and parties all over the city. Puerta del Sol is the customary place to gather, waiting for the strokes of the clock – it is traditional to swallow a grape on each stroke to bring good luck in the coming year.

have been made to the transport network, with extensions to the metro, the construction of new ring roads, and the excavation of a honeycomb of new road tunnels designed to bring relief to Madrid's congested streets. A number of the city centre shopping streets have been pedestrianized, new cycle lanes have been built, while an ambitious regeneration scheme along the Manzanares has turned the river into a focal point for leisure and recreation. However, the impact of the economic crisis, combined

with chronic overspending and the failure of three consecutive bids for the Olympics, stalled the momentum. High levels of unemployment, a battery of austerity measures, endemic political corruption and local government ineptitude have certainly taken the gloss off the Spanish capital, but the *madrileños* themselves are incredibly resilient folk and the city remains one of the most vibrant and welcoming destinations for any visitor.

A brief history

Madrid's history dates back to the ninth century when **Muslims** established a defensive outpost on the escarpment above the River Manzanares which later became known as "Mayrit" – the place of many springs.

It remained a relatively insignificant backwater until 1561 when Felipe II designated the city his **imperial capital** by virtue of its position at the heart of the recently unified Spain. The cramped street plan in the city centre provides a clue as to what the city would have been like at this time and the narrow alleys around the Pza. Mayor are still among Madrid's liveliest and most atmospheric. With the **Bourbons** replacing the Habsburgs at the start of the eighteenth century, a touch of French style, including the sumptuous Palacio Real, was introduced into the capital by Felipe V.

It was the "King-Mayor" **Carlos III**, however, who tried to convert the city into a home worthy of the monarchy after he ascended to the throne in 1759, ordering the streets to be cleaned, sewers and lighting to be installed and work to begin on the Prado museum complex.

Upheaval and political polarization

The early **nineteenth century** brought invasion and turmoil to Spain as Napoleon established his brother Joseph (or José to Spaniards) on the throne. Madrid, however, continued to flourish, gaining some very attractive buildings and squares, including the Pza. de Oriente and Pza. de Santa Ana. With the onset of the **twentieth century**, the capital became the hotbed of the political and intellectual discussions that divided the country; *tertulias* (political/philosophical discussion circles) sprang up in cafés across the city (some of them are still going) as the country entered the turbulent years of the end of the monarchy and the foundation of the Second Republic.

The Civil War

Madrid was a Republican stronghold during the **Civil War**, with fierce battles raging around the capital as Franco's troops laid siege to the city, eventually taking control in 1939. The Civil War, of course, caused untold damage, and led to forty years of isolation. The city's great spread to **suburbia** began during the Franco era and it has continued unabated ever since, with unbridled property speculation taking its toll on the green spaces that surround the capital. Franco also extended the city northwards along the spinal route of the Paseo de la Castellana, to accommodate his ministers and minions during development extravaganzas of the 1950s and 1960s.

The post-Franco era

The Spanish capital has changed immeasurably, however, in the four decades since Franco's death, initially guided by a poet-mayor, the late **Tierno Galván**. His efforts – the creation of parks and renovation of public spaces and public life – left an enduring legacy, and were a vital ingredient of the *movida madrileña* "the happening Madrid" with which the city broke through in the 1980s. From the early 1990s until 2015, the centre-right Partido Popular (PP) was in control, bringing with it a more restrictive attitude towards bar and club licensing. Mayor Alberto Ruiz Gallardón was the catalyst for a succession of gigantic pharaoh-style urban renewal schemes. These undoubtedly improved the city environment, but at the same time he and regional president Esperanza Aguirre presided over rampant property speculation and a subsequent collapse that bequeathed the city a number of white elephant civic projects and a

ORIENTATION

Madrid's layout is fairly straightforward. At the city's heart is the large oval-shaped plaza **Puerta del Sol** (often referred to as just "Sol"). Around it lie the oldest parts of Madrid, neatly bordered to the west by the **River Manzanares**, to the east by the park of **El Retiro** and to the north by the city's great thoroughfare, the **Gran Vía**.

Madrid's main sights occupy a compact area between the **Palacio Real** and the gardens of **El Retiro**. The great trio of museums – the **Prado**, **Thyssen-Bornemisza** and **Reina Sofía** – lie in a "golden triangle" just west of El Retiro and close to Paseo del Prado. Over towards the river are the oldest parts of the city, centred on the splendid, arcaded **Pza. Mayor**, an area known as **Madrid de los Austrias** after the Habsburg monarchs who built it.

To get a feel for the city you should experience the contrasting character and life of the various neighbourhoods (*barrios*). The most central and rewarding of these are the areas around **Pza. de Santa Ana and C/Huertas**, east of Sol; **La Latina and Lavapiés**, south of Pza. Mayor, where the Sunday market, El Rastro, takes place; and **Malasaña and Chueca**, north of Gran Vía. By happy circumstance, these *barrios* have some of Madrid's finest concentrations of tapas bars and restaurants.

massive debt crisis. Support for the PP plummeted in the 2015 elections and the left-of-centre citizen-based Ahora Madrid group, led by mayor Manuela Carmena, began to pick up the pieces and deal with the debt problem.

In recent years there has been a tendency in Madrid towards homogenization with the rest of Europe, as franchised fast-food joints and coffee bars have sprung up all over the city centre. Nevertheless, in making the transition from provincial backwater to major European capital, Madrid has still managed to preserve its own stylish and quirky identity.

Madrid de los Austrias

Madrid de los Austrias (Habsburg Madrid) was a mix of formal planning – at its most impressive in the expansive and theatrical Pza. Mayor – and areas of shanty-town development, thrown up as the new capital gained an urban population. The central area of old Madrid still reflects both characteristics, with its twisting grid of streets, alleyways and steps, and its Flemish-inspired architecture of red brick and grey stone, slate-tiled towers and Renaissance doorways.

Puerta del Sol

☉ Sol

The obvious starting point for exploring Madrid de los Austrias (and most other areas of the centre) is the **Puerta del Sol**. This square marks the epicentre of the city – and, indeed, of Spain. It is from this point that all distances are measured, and here that six of Spain's *Rutas Nacionales* officially begin. On the pavement outside the clock-tower building on the south side of the square, an inconspicuous stone slab shows **Kilometre Zero**.

The square, which conceals a subterranean transport hub, is a popular meeting place, especially by the statue of a bear pawing a *madroño* (strawberry tree) – the city's emblem – at the start of C/Alcalá and the equestrian bronze of King Carlos III. Statues apart, there's little of note in the square apart from the **Casa de Correos**, built in 1766, originally the city's post office and now home to the main offices of the Madrid regional government. At New Year, the square is packed with people waiting for the clock that crowns the Neoclassical facade to chime midnight. Sol's main business, however, is shopping, with giant branches of the **department stores** El Corte Inglés and the French chain FNAC in C/Preciados, at the top end of the square.

Plaza Mayor

☞ Sol

Follow C/Mayor (the “Main Street” of the medieval city) west from the Puerta del Sol and you could easily walk right past Madrid’s most important landmark: **Pza. Mayor**. Set back from the street and entered by stepped passageways, it appears all the more grand in its continuous sweep of arcaded buildings. It was planned by Felipe II – the monarch who made Madrid the capital – as the public meeting place of the city, and was finished thirty years later in 1619 during the reign of Felipe III, who sits astride the stallion in the central statue. The architect was Juan Gómez de Mora, responsible for many of the civic and royal buildings in this quarter.

The square, with its hundreds of balconies, was designed as a theatre for public events, and it has served this function throughout its history. It was the scene of the Inquisition’s *autos-de-fé* (trials of faith) and the executions that followed; kings were crowned here; festivals and demonstrations passed through; plays by Lope de Vega and others received their first performances; bulls were fought; and gossip was spread.

Nowadays, Pza. Mayor is primarily a tourist haunt, full of expensive outdoor cafés and restaurants (best stick to a drink), buskers and caricaturists. However, an air of grandeur clings to the plaza, which still performs public functions. In the summer months and during the major *madrileño* fiestas, it becomes an outdoor **theatre** and **music stage**; and in the winter, just before Christmas, it becomes a **bazaar** for festive decorations and religious regalia. Every Sunday, too, stamp and coin sellers set up their stalls.

Casa Panadería

Tourist office daily 9:30am–8.30pm

Royalty would watch the more important of the historic public events from their apartments in the central **Casa Panadería**, a palace named after the bakery that it replaced. It was rebuilt after a fire in 1692 and subsequently decorated with frescoes. However, the present delightful, and highly kitsch, array of allegorical figures that adorn the facade was only added in 1992. Today, the palace houses municipal offices and a tourist office.

MADRID’S FREEBIES

Free entrance can be gained to many of Madrid’s premier attractions. Sites classed as Patrimonio Nacional, such as the Palacio Real, the Convento de la Encarnación, El Pardo and the Monasterio de las Descalzas, are free to EU citizens at various times during the week (bring your passport). Museums run by Madrid City Council, including the Museo de San Isidro, La Ermita de San Antonio, the Templo de Debod and the Museo de Historia de Madrid, do not charge admission. Most museums are free for children, and give substantial discounts to retirees and students (bring ID in all cases). In addition, many museums and sights that normally charge entry set aside certain times when entrance is free, and nearly all are free on World Heritage Day (April 18), International Museum Day (May 18), the Día de Hispanidad (Oct 12) and Día de la Constitución (Dec 6). The following are free at these times:

Museo de América Sun 10am–3pm.

Museo Reina Sofía Mon, Wed–Sat 7–9pm, Sun 1.30pm–7pm.

Museo Arqueológico Nacional Sat 2–8pm, Sun 9.30am–3pm.

Museo de Artes Decorativas Thurs 5–8pm (Sept–June), Sat 2–3pm, Sun 10am–3pm.

Museo Cerralbo Thurs 5–8pm, Sat 2–3pm, Sun 10am–3pm.

Museo Lázaro Galdiano Mon, Wed–Sat 3.30–4.30pm, Sun 2–3pm.

Museo del Prado Mon–Sat 6–8pm, Sun 5–7pm.

Museo del Romanticismo Sat 2–6.30pm (May–Oct till 8.30pm), Sun 10am–3pm.

Museo Sorolla Sat 2–8pm, Sun 10am–3pm.

Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza Mon noon–4pm.

Museo del Traje Sat 2.30–7pm, Sun 10am–3pm.

Palacio Real Oct–March: Mon–Thurs 4–6pm, April–Sept: 6–8pm.

Real Academia de Bellas Artes Wed 10am–3pm.

Mercado de San Miguel

Set back from the road, near the entrance to the Pza. Mayor, is the splendid decorative ironwork of the **Mercado de San Miguel**. Built in 1916, it was formerly one of the old-style food markets scattered throughout the city, but it has been refurbished and converted into a stylish, though pricey, tourist-oriented emporium complete with oyster bar, a sherry corner and smoked cod stall.

The alley taverns

In the alleys just below the square, such as C/Cuchilleros and C/Cava de San Miguel, are some of the city's oldest *mesones*, or **taverns**. Have a drink in these in the early evening and you may be serenaded by passing *tunas* – musicians and singers dressed in traditional costume of knickerbockers and waistcoats who wander around town playing and passing the hat. These men-only troupes are attached to various faculties of the university and are usually students earning a bit of extra cash to make ends meet.

Plaza de la Villa and around

West along C/Mayor, towards the Palacio Real, is **Pza. de la Villa**, an example of three centuries of Spanish architectural development. Its oldest surviving building is the eye-catching fifteenth-century **Torre de los Lujanes**, a fine Mudéjar (Moors working under Christian rule) tower, where Francis I of France is said to have been imprisoned in 1525 after his capture at the Battle of Pavia in Italy. Opposite is the former town hall, the **ayuntamiento (Casa de la Villa)**, begun in the seventeenth century, but remodelled in Baroque style. Finally, fronting the square is the **Casa de Cisneros**, which was built by a nephew of Cardinal Cisneros in the sixteenth-century Plateresque (“Silversmith”) style.

Basilica de San Miguel

C/San Justo 4 • July–Sept 14 Mon–Sat 10am–1.15pm & 6–9.15pm, Sun 9.45am–1.30pm & 6.30–9.15pm; Sept 15–June 30 Mon–Sat 9.45am–1.30pm & 5.30–9pm, Sun 9.45am–2.15pm & 6–9.15pm • Free • © La Latina

Just around the corner from Pza. de la Villa is the flamboyant **Basilica de San Miguel**. Designed by Italian architects at the end of the seventeenth century, the Basilica, with

A WALKING TOUR OF MADRID DE LOS AUSTRIAS

To get a feel for what the old city might have been like when it was first designated the Spanish capital in the sixteenth century take a stroll around the area known as **Madrid de los Austrias**.

Start off at **Pza. de la Villa**, probably the oldest square in the city and home to some of its most ancient buildings, including the fifteenth-century Torre de los Lujanes. Then take the narrow, elbow-shaped C/Codo out of the northeastern corner of the plaza, passing the Convento de los Carboneras where the nuns still sell traditional cakes and biscuits, continuing downhill to the tranquil backstreet C/San Justo. If you bear left past the splendid **Baroque Basilica de San Miguel** you will emerge on to bustling C/Segovia, one of the ancient entrances into the old city. From here wander down Cava Baja with its succession of traditional *tascas*, former coaching inns and stylish tapas bars. You will end up in **Pza. Humilladeros**, which buzzes with people sitting at the terrace bar in the middle of the square and is flanked by the graceful lines of the Iglesia de San Andrés and the mansion that is now home to the Museo de San Isidro. Walk past the splendid domed church and turn right into **Pza. de la Paja**, one of the old market squares that once littered the medieval city. Wealthy families would have lived in the mansions that line the square, each with a small garden similar to the peaceful Jardín de Anglona situated at the bottom of the plaza.

Take a right along C/Príncipe de Anglona and shady C/Nuncio to rejoin C/Segovia and bear left up **C/Cuchilleros**, named after the knife-makers who once plied their trade on the street. Here you will pass the renowned restaurant **Botín**, a *madriileño* institution that lays claim to be the oldest eating establishment in the world, followed by a string of cellar bars offering flamenco and traditional tapas. Don't miss the beautiful wrought-ironwork of the **Mercado de San Miguel** before finishing up with a circuit of the arcaded splendour of the **Pza. Mayor**.

its convex facade, is one of the few examples of a full-blown Baroque church in Madrid and has been entrusted to the Opus Dei organization since 1959.

Ópera and the Palacio Real

Dominated by the imposing **Palacio Real** and the elegant Pza. de Oriente, **Ópera** is one of the most pleasant and relaxed *barrios* in the city. The area contains the lavishly decorated **Teatro Real**, the tranquil gardens of the **Campo del Moro** and the **city cathedral**, while the two unobtrusive monastery complexes of **La Encarnación** and **Las Descalzas Reales** conceal an astounding array of treasures.

San Ginés

C/Arenal 13 • Mon–Sat 8.45am–1pm & 6–9pm, Sun 9.45am–2pm & 6–9pm • Free • ☞ Sol/Ópera

Situated midway between Sol and Ópera along C/Arenal is the ancient church of **San Ginés**. Of Mozarabic origin (built by Christians under Moorish rule), it was completely reconstructed in the seventeenth century. There is a splendid El Greco canvas of the moneychangers being chased from the temple in the **Capilla del Cristo** (on show Mon 12.30pm). Alongside, in somewhat uneasy juxtaposition, stands a cult place of modern times, the *Joy Madrid* nightclub, and, behind it, the **Chocolatería San Ginés**, a Madrid institution, which at one time catered for the early-rising worker but now churns out *chocolate con churros* for the late nightclub crowd (see box, p.116).

Descalzas Reales

Pza. de las Descalzas Reales 3 • Guided tours (some in English) Tues–Sat 10am–2pm & 4–6.30pm, Sun & some public hols 10am–3pm • €6, joint ticket with Convento de la Encarnación €8, valid for 48hrs, free for EU citizens on Wed & Thurs 4–6.30pm • ☞ patrimonio nacional.es • ☞ Sol/Callao

A couple of blocks north of San Ginés is one of the hidden treasures of Madrid, the **Monasterio de las Descalzas Reales**. It was founded in 1557 by Juana de Austria, daughter of the Emperor Carlos V, sister of Felipe II, and, at the age of 19, already the widow of Prince Don Juan of Portugal. In her wake came a succession of titled ladies (*Descalzas Reales* means “Barefoot Royals”), who brought fame and, above all, fortune to the convent, which is unbelievably rich, though beautiful and tranquil, too. It is still in use, with shoeless nuns tending patches of vegetable garden.

Whistle-stop **guided tours** conduct visitors through the cloisters and up an incredibly elaborate stairway to a series of chambers packed with art and treasures of every kind. The **former dormitories** are perhaps the most outstanding feature, decorated with a series of Flemish tapestries based on designs by Rubens and a striking portrait of St Francis by Zurbarán. These were the sleeping quarters for all the nuns, including St Teresa of Ávila for a time, although the empress María of Germany preferred a little more privacy and endowed the convent with her own luxurious private chambers. The other highlight of the tour is the **Joyería** (Treasury), piled high with jewels and relics of uncertain provenance. The nuns kept no records of their gifts, so no one is quite sure what many of the things are – there is a bizarre cross-sectional model of Christ – nor which bones came from which saint. Whatever the case, it’s an exceptional hoard.

Convento de la Encarnación

Pza. de la Encarnación • Guided tours (usually in Spanish only) Tues–Sat 10am–2pm & 4–6.30pm, Sun & some public hols 10am–3pm • €6, joint ticket with the Monasterio de las Descalzas €8, valid for 48hrs, free for EU citizens on Wed & Thurs 4–6.30pm; guided tours only • ☞ patrimonio nacional.es • ☞ Ópera

Just to the north of Pza. de Oriente is the **Convento de la Encarnación**. This was founded a few years after Juana’s convent, by Margarita, wife of Felipe III, though

1

it was substantially rebuilt towards the end of the eighteenth century. It houses an extensive but somewhat disappointing collection of seventeenth-century Spanish art, and a wonderfully bizarre library-like reliquary, reputed to be one of the most important in the Catholic world. The most famous relic housed here is a small glass bulb said to contain the blood of the fourth-century doctor martyr, St Pantaleon, whose blood supposedly liquefies on his feast day, July 27. The tour ends with a visit to the Baroque-style church, which features a beautifully frescoed ceiling.

Teatro Real

Pza. de Isabel II • General tour daily 10am–1pm; closed mid-July to mid-Sept; • €8 (under-26s and over-65s €6, under-7s free); tickets on sale from the box office from 9.15am • Info and reservations ☎ 915 160 696, 🌐 teatro-real.com • 📍 Ópera

West of Sol, C/Arenal leads to the **Teatro Real**, or **Ópera**, which gives this area its name. Built in the mid-nineteenth century, it almost sank a few decades later as a result of subsidence caused by underground canals and was forced to close in 1925; it finally reopened in 1997 after an epic ten-year refurbishment that ended up costing a mind-boggling €150 million. The interior is suitably lavish and merits a visit in its own right, and it makes a truly magnificent setting for opera, ballet and classical concerts (see p.119). You can take a general tour or tours focusing on the artistic or technical elements of productions (€12 and €14 respectively).

Plaza de Oriente

📍 Ópera

The opera house is separated from the Palacio Real by the **Pza. de Oriente**, one of the most graceful and agreeable open spaces in Madrid and used in the bad old days by Franco as the venue for his public addresses; small groups of neo-Fascists still gather here on the anniversary of his death on November 20. One of the square's main attractions – and the focus of its life – is the Parisian-style *Café de Oriente*, whose summer terraza is one of the stations of Madrid nightlife. The café (which is also a prestigious restaurant) looks as traditional as any in the city but was in fact opened in the 1980s by a priest, Padre Lezama, who ploughs his profits into various charitable schemes.

The café apart, the dominant features of Pza. de Oriente are **statues**: 44 of them, depicting Spanish kings and queens, which were originally designed to go on the palace facade but found to be too heavy (some say too ugly) for the roof to support. The **statue of Felipe IV** on horseback, in the centre of the square, clearly belongs on a different plane; it was based on designs by Velázquez, and Galileo is said to have helped with the calculations to make it balance.

Catedral Nuestra Señora de la Almudena

C/Bailén 8–10 • Daily: 9am–8.30pm (July & Aug 10am–9pm); not open for visits during Mass: Mon–Sat noon, 6pm & 7pm, Sun & hols 10.30am, noon, 1.30pm, 6pm & 7pm (July & Aug daily noon & 8pm) • Free (€1 donation requested) • ☎ 915 422 200, 🌐 catedraldealmudena.es • **Museum** Mon–Sat 10am–2.30pm • €6, €4 for Madrid residents and students • **Crypt** daily 10am–8pm (guided visits Mon–Sat noon • €3) • 📍 Ópera


Facing the Palacio Real to the south, across the shadeless Pza. de la Armería, is Madrid's cathedral, **Nuestra Señora de la Almudena**. Planned centuries ago, bombed out in the Civil War, worked upon at intervals since, and plagued by lack of funds, it was eventually opened for business in 1993 by Pope John Paul II. The building's bulky Neoclassical facade was designed to match the Palacio Real opposite, while its cold neo-Gothic interior is largely uninspiring.

To one side of the main facade is a small **museum** containing some of the Catedral's treasures, though the main reason to visit is to gain access to the dome from where you can enjoy some fantastic views over the city and out towards the Sierra. The entrance to the **crypt**, with its forest of columns and dimly lit chapels, is to be found down the hill on C/Mayor.

The Moorish wall and Jardines de las Vistillas

C/Bailén crosses C/Segovia on a high **viaduct** (now lined with panes of reinforced glass to prevent once-common suicide attempts); this was constructed as a royal route from the palace to the church of San Francisco el Grande, avoiding the rabble and river that flowed below. Close by is a patch of **Moorish wall** (*muralla árabe*) from the medieval fortress here, which the original royal palace replaced. Across the aqueduct, the **Jardines de las Vistillas** (“Gardens of the Views”) beckon, with their summer terrazas looking out across the river and towards the distant Sierra.

Palacio Real

C/Bailén • Daily: April–Sept 10am–8pm; Oct–March 10am–6pm; closed occasionally for state visits • €11; free for EU citizens Oct–March Mon–Thurs 4–6pm, April–Sept Mon–Thurs 6–8pm • patrimonionacional.es •  Ópera

The **Palacio Real**, or Royal Palace, scores high on statistics. It claims more rooms than any other European palace; a library with one of the biggest collections of books, manuscripts, maps and musical scores in the world; and an armoury with an unrivalled assortment of weapons dating back to the fifteenth century. If you're around on the first Wednesday of the month (except July–Sept) between noon and 2pm, look out for the **changing of the guard** outside the palace, a tradition that has recently been revived.

Guided tours in various languages are available (€4), but a more relaxing option is to hire an audio-guide (€3) and make your own way through the luxurious royal apartments, the Royal Armoury Museum and the Royal Pharmacy. This will give you more time to appreciate the extraordinary opulence: acres of Flemish and Spanish tapestries, endless Rococo decoration, bejewelled clocks and pompous portraits of the monarchs.

The palace also houses an impressive exhibition space, the **Galería de Pinturas**, which displays work by Velázquez, Caravaggio and Goya, among others, and also hosts temporary **exhibitions**.

The palace

The Habsburgs' original palace burnt down on Christmas Eve, 1734. Its replacement, the current building, was based on drawings made by Bernini for the Louvre. It was constructed in the mid-eighteenth century and was the principal royal residence from then until Alfonso XIII went into exile in 1931; both Joseph Bonaparte and the Duke of Wellington also lived here briefly. The present royal family inhabits a considerably more modest residence on the western outskirts of the city, using the Palacio Real on state occasions only.

The **Salón del Trono** (Throne Room) is the highlight for most visitors, containing as it does the thrones installed for former monarchs Juan Carlos and Sofia as well as the splendid ceiling by Tiepolo, a giant fresco representing the glory of Spain – an remarkable achievement for an artist by then in his seventies. Look out, too, for the marvellous **Sala de Porcelana** (Porcelain Room) and the incredible oriental-style **Salón de Gasparini**.

The outbuildings and annexes

The palace outbuildings and annexes include the **Armería Real**, a huge room full of guns, swords and armour, with such curiosities as the suit of armour worn by Carlos V in his equestrian portrait by Titian in the Prado. Especially fascinating are the complete sets of armour, with all the original spare parts and gadgets for making adjustments. There is also an eighteenth-century **Farmacia**, a curious mixture of alchemist's den and laboratory, whose walls are lined with jars labelled for various remedies. The **Biblioteca Real** (Royal Library) can now only be visited by prior arrangement for research purposes.

The gardens

Jardines de Sabatini Daily: May–Sept 9am–10pm; Oct–April 9am–9pm **Campo del Moro** Daily: April–Sept 10am–8pm; Oct–March 10am–6pm; occasionally closed for state visits

Immediately north of the palace are the **Jardines de Sabatini**, which provide a shady retreat and venue for summer concerts, while to the rear is the larger, and far more beautiful, **Campo del Moro** (access only from the far west side, off the Paseo de la Virgen del Puerto), a leafy English-style garden with shady paths, monumental fountains and a splendid view of the western facade of the palace.

South of Plaza Mayor

The areas south of Pza. Mayor have traditionally been tough, working-class districts, with tenement buildings thrown up to accommodate the expansion of the population in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In many places, these old houses survive, huddled together in narrow streets, but the character of **La Latina** and **Lavapiés** has changed as their inhabitants, and the districts themselves, have become younger, more fashionable and more cosmopolitan. The streets in and around Cava Baja and Cava Alta in La Latina, for example, include some of the city's most popular bars and restaurants. These are attractive *barrios* to explore, particularly for bar-hopping or during the Sunday-morning flea market, **El Rastro** (see below), which takes place along and around the Ribera de Curtidores (📍 La Latina/Tirso de Molina).

Around La Latina

La Latina is a short walk south from Pza. de la Villa and, if you're exploring Madrid de los Austrias, it's a natural continuation, as some of the squares, streets and churches here date back to the early Habsburg period. One of the most attractive pockets is around **Pza. de la Paja**, a delightful square behind the large church of **San Andrés**, and once home to one of the city's medieval markets. In summer, there are a couple of terrazas here, tucked well away from the traffic.

Iglesia de San Andrés, Capilla del Obispo and Capilla de San Isidro

Pza. de San Andrés & Pza. de la Paja • **Iglesia de San Andrés** Mon–Thurs & Sat 9am–1pm & 6–8pm, Fri 6–8pm, Sun 10am–1pm • Free • **Capilla del Obispo** Guided visits only, Tues 10am, 10.45am & 11.30am, Thurs 4pm & 4.45pm; closed July & Aug • €3 • 📞 915 592 874 (reservation only through the cathedral museum), 🌐 museocatedral.archimadrid.es/capilla-del-obispo • 📍 La Latina
The **Iglesia de San Andrés** and the **Capilla de San Isidro** can be reached from Pza. de

EL RASTRO

Madrid's flea market, **El Rastro**, is as much a part of the city's weekend ritual as a Mass or a *paseo*. This gargantuan, thriving shambles of a street market sprawls south from Metro La Latina to the Ronda de Toledo, especially along Ribera de Curtidores. Through it, crowds flood between 10am and 3pm every Sunday and on public holidays, too. On offer is just about anything you might – or more likely might not – need, from secondhand clothes and military-surplus items to flamenco fans and antiques.

Some of the goods are so far gone that you can't imagine any of them ever selling. Others may be quite valuable, but on the whole it's the stuff of markets around the world you'll find here: pseudo-designer clothes, bags and T-shirts. Don't expect to find fabulous bargains, or the hidden Old Masters of popular myth: the serious antique trade has mostly moved off the streets and into the surrounding shops, while the real junk is now found only on the fringes. Nonetheless, the atmosphere of El Rastro is always enjoyable, and the bars around these streets are as good as any in the city. One warning, though: keep a close eye on your bags, pockets, cameras (best left at the hotel) and jewellery. The Rastro rings up a fair percentage of Madrid's tourist thefts.

San Andrés. Inside is a beautifully sculpted dome depicting angels laden with fruit and a red-marble backdrop fronted by black columns and sculptures of saints. The chapel of San Isidro was built in the mid-seventeenth century to hold the remains of Madrid's patron saint (since moved to the Iglesia de San Isidro). The adjoining Gothic **Capilla del Obispo** (entrance on Pza. de la Paja), with its impressive polychromed altarpiece and alabaster tombs, reopened in 2010 following a forty-year restoration saga.

Museo de San Isidro: Los Orígenes de Madrid

Pza. San Andrés 2 • Aug: Tues–Fri 9.30am–2pm, Sat & Sun 9.30am–8pm; rest of year Tues–Sun 9.30am–8pm • Free • 📞 913 667 415, 🌐 www.madrid.es/museosanisidro • 📍 La Latina

Alongside the church of San Andrés is one of the city's newer museums, the **Museo de San Isidro**, housed in a sixteenth-century mansion owned by the counts of Paredes and supposedly once the home of Madrid's patron saint. The museum traces the city's origins through to its establishment as the Spanish capital. The **archeological collection**, which consists of relics from the earliest settlements along the River Manzanares and nearby Roman villas, is in the basement. The rest of the museum is given over to exhibits on the later history of the city and also to **San Isidro** and his miraculous activities, including the well from which he is said to have rescued his own son.

San Francisco el Grande

Pza. de San Francisco 11 • July & Aug Tues–Sun 10.30am–12.30pm & 5–7pm; rest of year Tues–Fri 10.30am–12.30pm & 4–6pm, Sat 10.30am–1.30pm & 4–6pm • €3 with guided tour • 📞 913 653 800 • 📍 La Latina

A couple of minutes' walk southwest of the Museo de San Isidro down the hill is one of Madrid's grandest, richest and most elaborate churches, **San Francisco el Grande**. Built towards the end of the eighteenth century as part of Carlos III's renovations of the city, it has a dome even larger than that of St Paul's in London. The interior, which you can only visit with a guided tour, contains splendid paintings by, among others, Goya and Zurbarán, and some magnificent frescoes by Bayeu.

Iglesia Colegiata de San Isidro

C/Toledo 37 • Daily 7.30am–1pm & 6–9pm; guided tours Sat 11.30am • 📍 La Latina

The vast **Iglesia Colegiata de San Isidro** was originally the centre of the Jesuit Order in Spain. After Carlos III fell out with the Order in 1767, he redesigned the interior and dedicated it to the city's patron, whose remains are entombed within. The church acted as the city's cathedral prior to the completion of the Almudena by the Palacio Real, but relics and altarpiece aside, its chief attribute is its size.

Next door is the **Instituto Real**, a school that has been in existence considerably longer than the church and counts among its former pupils such literary notables as Calderón de la Barca, Lope de Vega, Quevedo and Pío Baroja.

Puerta de Toledo

📍 Puerta de Toledo

If you proceed south to the end of Ribera de Curtidores, whose antique shops (some, these days, extremely upmarket) stay open all week, you'll see a large arch, the **Puerta de Toledo**, at one end of the Ronda de Toledo. The only surviving relation to the Puerta de Alcalá in the Pza. de la Independencia, this gate was originally designed to be built as a triumphal arch to honour the conquering Napoleon. However it was not constructed until after his defeat in the Peninsular War, so instead became a symbol of the city's freedom. Adjacent to the arch is the Mercado Puerta de Toledo, once the site of the city's fish market, and now a teaching centre for one of the local universities.

Lavapiés

A good point at which to start exploring the multicultural *barrio* of **Lavapiés** is the Pza. Tirso de Molina (☉ Tirso de Molina). From here, you can follow C/Mesón de Paredes, stopping for a drink at one of the city's most traditional bars, the *Taberna Antonio Sánchez* at no. 13, past rows of wholesale clothes shops to **La Corrala**, on the corner of C/Sombrerete. This is one of many traditional *corrales* – tenement blocks – in the quarter, built with balconied apartments opening onto a central patio. Plays, especially farces and *zarzuelas* (a kind of operetta), used to be performed regularly in Spanish *corrales*, and the open space here usually hosts a few performances in the summer. It has been sympathetically renovated and declared a national monument.

From Metro Lavapiés, you can take **C/Argumosa** towards the Museo Reina Sofía. Don't miss out on the opportunity to sample some of the excellent local bars on this pleasant tree-lined street while you're here.

Cine Doré

C/Santa Isabel 3 • Closed Mon • Films €2.50 • ☎ 913 691 125 • 📍 Antón Martín

To the north of the quarter is the **Cine Doré**, the oldest cinema in Madrid, dating from 1922, which has a late modernist/Art Nouveau facade. It has been converted to house the Filmoteca Nacional, an art-film centre (see p.119) with bargain prices which often shows English-language films and has a pleasant and inexpensive *café/restaurant* (4–11pm).

East of Sol: Plaza de Santa Ana to Plaza de Cibeles

The **Pza. de Santa Ana/Huertas** area lies at the heart of a triangle, bordered to the east by the Paseo del Prado, to the north by C/Alcalá and along the south by C/Atocha, with the Puerta del Sol at the western tip. The city reached this district after expanding beyond the Palacio Real and the Pza. Mayor, so the buildings date predominantly from the nineteenth century. Many of them have literary associations: there are streets named after Cervantes and Lope de Vega (where one lived and the other died), and the *barrio* is host to the Atheneum club, Círculo de Bellas Artes (Fine Arts Institute), Teatro Español and the Congreso de los Diputados (parliament). Just to the north, there is also an important museum, the **Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando**.

For most visitors, though, the major attraction is that this district holds some of the best and most beautiful **bars** and **tascas** in the city. They are concentrated particularly around Pza. de Santa Ana and the streets that run into Huertas.

Plaza de Santa Ana and around

☉ Sol/Sevilla

The bars around **Pza. de Santa Ana** really are sights in themselves. On the square itself, the dark wood-panelled *Cervecería Alemana* was a firm favourite of Hemingway's and has hardly changed since the turn of the twentieth century. Opposite, *La Suiza* café is a great place for a coffee and a cake while watching the world go by. Flanking one side of the plaza is the elegant facade of the emblematic *ME Madrid Reina Victoria* hotel, once a favourite of bullfighters and now the designer showpiece for the Sol-Meliá chain, while at the other end are the polished lines of the nineteenth-century Neoclassical pile, the Teatro Español.

Viva Madrid, on the northeast corner at C/Manuel Fernández y González 7, should be another port of call, if only to admire the fabulous tile work, original zinc bar and a ceiling supported by wooden caryatids.

Huertas

The area around pedestrianized **C/Huertas** itself is workaday enough – sleepy by day but buzzing by night – and, again, packed with bars. North of here, and parallel, are two streets named in honour of the greatest figures of Spain's seventeenth-century literary golden age, Cervantes and Lope de Vega. Bitter rivals in life, both are probably spinning in their graves now, since Cervantes is interred in the **Convento de las Trinitarias** on the street named after Lope de Vega, while the latter's house, the **Casa de Lope de Vega**, finds itself on C/Cervantes. In 2015, forensic scientists found a casket in the convent crypt containing human remains and labelled with Cervantes' initials. The remains were reburied in the Iglesia de San Ildefonso which lies within the convent.

Casa de Lope de Vega

C/Cervantes 11 • Tues–Sun 10am–6pm; closed mid-July to mid-Aug • Free • Guided tours every 30min; ring ☎ 914 299 216 to reserve a tour in English • 🌐 casamuseolopepedevega.org • 🗺️ Antón Martín

The charming little **Casa de Lope de Vega** provides a fascinating reconstruction of life in seventeenth-century Madrid; behind the innocuous wooden door you will be taken on a tour of the Spanish Golden Age dramatist's former home, which includes a chapel containing some of his relics and a delightful little patio garden.

El Congreso

C/San Jerónimo s/n • Tours Sat every 30min, 10.30am–12.30pm; closed Aug; passport essential • 🌐 congreso.es • 🗺️ Sevilla

El Congreso de Los Diputados is an unprepossessing nineteenth-century building where the Congress (the lower house) meets. Sessions can be visited by appointment only, though anyone can turn up for the tour on Saturday mornings. You're shown, among other things, the bullet holes left by Colonel Tejero and his Guardia Civil associates in the abortive coup attempt of 1981.

Círculo de Bellas Artes

C/Alcalá 42 • Exhibitions usually Tues–Sun 11am–2pm & 5–9pm • 🌐 circulobellasartes.com • 🗺️ Sevilla

Cut across to C/Alcalá from Pza. de las Cortes and you'll emerge close to the **Círculo de Bellas Artes**, a strange-looking 1920s building crowned by a statue of Pallas Athene. This is one of Madrid's foremost arts centres, and includes a theatre, music hall, cinema, exhibition galleries and a very pleasant bar (daily 8am–1am; Fri & Sat til 3am) – all marble and leather decor, with a nude statue reclining in the middle of the floor. It attracts the capital's arts and media crowd but is not in the slightest exclusive, and there's an adjoining terrace and a great rooftop bar, too. The Círculo is theoretically a members-only club, but it issues €5 day-membership on the door, for which you get access to the roof terrace and exhibitions.

Plaza de la Cibeles and Real Academia de Bellas Artes

Close to the Círculo and past an imposing array of grandiose buildings on C/Alcalá lies one of Spain's leading art galleries, the **Real Academia de Bellas Artes**, one for art buffs who have some appetite left after the Prado, Thyssen-Bornemisza and Reina Sofía. Half a kilometre to the east is **Pza. de la Cibeles**. Awash in a sea of traffic in the centre of the square are a **fountain** and statue of the goddess Cibeles, which survived the bombardments of the Civil War by being swaddled from helmet to hoof in sandbags. It was designed, as were the two other fountains gushing magnificently along the Paseo del Prado, by Ventura Rodríguez. The fountain is the scene of celebrations for victorious Real Madrid fans (Atlético supporters bathe in the fountain of Neptune just down the road).

Palacio de Cibeles, CentroCentro and Casa de América

Casa de América Tours Sat & Sun 11am, noon & 1pm • €8 • 🌐 casamerica.es/visitas • 🗺️ Banco de España

The monumental wedding-cake building on the eastern side of Pza. de Cibeles was until quite recently Madrid's main post office. Constructed from 1904 to 1917, **Palacio**

de Cibeles is vastly more imposing than the parliament and runs the Palacio Real pretty close. The city council took a shine to it and it now provides a home for the burgeoning **municipal offices**. It is also home to a smart exhibition space **CentroCentro** (Tues–Sun 10am–8pm), with a viewing gallery (Tues–Sun 10.30am–1.30pm & 4–7pm; €2, under-12s €0.50), a café (daily 10am–midnight), an expensive restaurant and an overpriced terrace bar (daily 1pm–2am). Adjacent, a palatial eighteenth-century mansion built by the Marqués de Linares is home to the **Casa de América**, a cultural organization promoting Latin American art and hosting temporary exhibitions which runs guided tours at weekends.

Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando

C/Alcalá 13 • Tues–Sun 10am–3pm • €8, free Wed • ☎ 915 240 864 • 🌐 realacademiabellasartessanfernando.com • 📍 Sevilla

The **Real Academia** has traditionally been viewed as one of the most important art galleries in Spain. Admittedly, you have to plough through a fair number of dull academic canvases, but there are some hidden gems. These include a group of small panels by **Goya**, in particular *The Burial of the Sardine* and two revealing self-portraits, and a curious *Family of El Greco*, which may be by the great man or his son. Two other rooms are devoted to foreign artists, in particular Rubens. Upstairs, there is a series of sketches by Picasso, and a brutally graphic set of sculptures depicting the *Massacre of the Innocents* by José Ginés. It is also home to the national chalcography (copper or brass engraving) collection (usually Mon–Thurs 9am–5pm, Fri 9am–3pm; July & Sept Mon–Fri 9am–3pm; closed Aug), which includes a number of Goya etchings used for his *Capricho* series on show at the Prado.

The Paseo del Arte

Madrid's three world-class art museums, the Prado, Thyssen-Bornemisza and Reina Sofía, are all along or close to the Paseo del Prado within a kilometre of each other in what is commonly known as the **Paseo del Arte**. The most famous of the three galleries is the **Prado**, which houses an unequalled display of Spanish art, an outstanding Flemish collection and an impressive assemblage of Italian work. The **Thyssen-Bornemisza** provides an unprecedented excursion through Western art from the fourteenth to the late twentieth centuries. The final member of the trio, the **Reina Sofía**, is home to the Spanish collection of contemporary art, including the Miró and Picasso legacies and the jewel in the crown – *Guernica*.

Museo del Prado

C/Ruiz de Alarcón 23 • Mon–Sat 10am–8pm, Sun 10am–7pm; Jan 6, Dec 24 & Dec 31 10am–2pm; closed Jan 1, May 1 & Dec 25 • €15, €7.50 for over-65s, free for under-18s, students under 25 and disabled people; free Mon–Sat 6–8pm, Sun & hols 5–7pm; or Paseo del Arte ticket (see box above) • ☎ 902 107 077, 🌐 museodelprado.es • 📍 Banco de España/Atocha

The **Museo del Prado** is Madrid's premier attraction – well over two million visitors enter its doors each year – and one of the oldest and greatest collections of art in the world. Built as a natural science museum in 1775, the Prado opened to the public in 1819, and houses the finest works collected by Spanish royalty – for the most part, avid, discerning

PASEO DEL ARTE COMBINED ENTRY TICKET

If you plan to visit all three art museums on the Paseo del Prado during your stay, it's worth buying the under-advertised **Paseo del Arte ticket** (€28), which is valid for a year and allows one visit to each museum at a substantial saving, although it does not include the temporary exhibitions. It's available at any of the three museums and will save you just under €7 on full-price tickets.

and wealthy buyers – as well as Spanish paintings gathered from other sources over the past two centuries. The €152 million Rafael Moneo-designed **extension**, which includes a stylish glass-fronted building incorporating the eighteenth-century cloisters of the San Jerónimo church, houses the restaurant and café areas, a shop, an auditorium, temporary exhibition spaces, restoration and conservation workshops and a sculpture gallery.

The museum's highlights are its early Flemish collection – including almost all of **Bosch's** best work – and, of course, its incomparable display of Spanish art, in particular that of **Velázquez** (including *Las Meninas*), **Goya** (including the *Majas* and the *Black Paintings*) and **El Greco**. There's also a huge section of Italian painters (**Titian**, notably) collected by Carlos V and Felipe II, both great patrons of the Renaissance, and an excellent collection of seventeenth-century Flemish and Dutch pictures gathered by Felipe IV, including **Rubens' Three Graces**. The museum also hosts an increasing number of critically acclaimed temporary displays. Even in a full day you couldn't hope to do justice to everything here, and it's perhaps best to make a couple of more focused visits, returning when entry is free at the end of the day.

INFORMATION AND TOURS

Tickets are purchased at the Puerta de Goya opposite the *Hotel Ritz* on C/Felipe IV, and the **entrances** are round the back at the Puerta de los Jerónimos, which leads into the new extension, or at the side at the Puerta de Goya Alta. If you want to avoid the lengthy queues for tickets, a better option is to buy them in advance via the museum website (©museodelprado.es). The Puerta de Murillo entrance, opposite the botanical gardens, is for school and university groups only.

MUSEO DEL PRADO

Tours What follows is, by necessity, only a brief guide to the museum contents. If you want more background on the key paintings pick up an audio-guide (€4; children's version also available), a visitor's guide covering 50 key masterpieces (€4.75) or the comprehensive 480-page Prado guide (€18.53) in the bookshop. A lunchtime or early-evening visit is often a good plan if you want to avoid the worst of the crowds and tour groups.

Exploring the museum

To follow the **route** proposed by the museum, bear right after the Puerta de los Jerónimos entrance and head into the central hallway – the Sala de las Musas. From here you are guided through the early Flemish, Italian and Spanish collections on the ground floor before being directed upstairs. A tour of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italian and French collections in the northern wing gives way to the Flemish and Dutch galleries on the second floor where work from Rubens and Rembrandt is to the fore. Back on the first floor, visitors are ushered through the Spanish Golden Age collections with their heavyweight contributions from El Greco, Velázquez and Murillo before enjoying the delights of Goya which stretch up to the second floor once again. From there you return to the ground floor for Goya's *Black Paintings* before concluding the visit with a tour of the grandiose historical epics that make up the remainder of the nineteenth-century Spanish collection.

Spanish painting

The Prado's collections of Spanish painting begin on the ground floor (rooms 50–52C) with the striking cycles of twelfth-century **Romanesque frescoes** reconstructed from a pair of churches from the Mozarabic (Muslim rule) era in Soria and Segovia. **Early panel paintings** – exclusively religious fourteenth- and fifteenth-century works – include a huge *retablo* (altarpiece) by Nicolás Francés; the anonymous *Virgin of the Catholic Monarchs*; Bermejo's *Santo Domingo de Silos*; and Pedro Berruguete's *Auto-da-Fé*.

The Golden Age: Velázquez and El Greco

Upstairs, the collections from Spain's Golden Age – the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries under Habsburg rule – are prefigured by a fabulous array of paintings by **El Greco** (1540–1614), the Cretan-born artist who worked in Toledo from the 1570s. You really need to have taken in the works in Toledo to appreciate fully his

PRADO HIGHLIGHTS

The Prado is much too big for a single visit to do the collection justice; however, if you are pressed for time here is a list of some of the **works you should not miss**.

The Garden of Earthly Delights by Bosch. A surrealistic masterpiece years ahead of its time.
The Triumph of Death by Pieter Brueghel. A disturbing and macabre depiction of hell by the Flemish master.

The Annunciation by Fra Angelico. A groundbreaking early Renaissance work.

Self-portrait by Dürer. Insightful self-portrait by the German genius.

The Descent from the Cross by Van der Weyden. An emotive and colourful depiction of the Deposition.

The Romanesque frescoes. Stunning frescoes from the Romanesque churches in Segovia and Soria.

David and Goliath by Caravaggio. The Italian's theatrical use of chiaroscuro at its best.

The Adoration of the Shepherds by El Greco. One of a series of revolutionary Mannerist works by the Greek-born painter.

Las Meninas by Velázquez. One of the most technically adroit and fascinating paintings in Western art.

Artemisa by Rembrandt. The Dutchman used his wife Saskia as a model for this portrayal of the heroic queen.

Sir Endymion Porter by Van Dyck. A superlative work by the Dutch court painter famous for his portraits of Charles I.

The Three Graces by Rubens. One of the great classically inspired works by the Flemish genius.

Charles V at Mühlberg by Titian. A magnificent equestrian portrait of the Holy Roman Emperor.

The Lavatorio by Tintoretto. Epic masterpiece depicting Christ washing the feet of the disciples, that once belonged to Charles I.

La Maja Desnuda and **La Maja Vestida** by Goya. A pair of supremely seductive portraits of a woman reclining on a bed of pillows, one clothed, one naked.

Dos and Tres de Mayo by Goya. Timeless and iconic images on the horror of war.

Goya's Black Paintings. A series of penetrating and haunting images from the latter part of Goya's career.

extraordinary genius, but the portraits and religious works here (rooms 8B–10B), ranging from the Italianate *Trinity* to the visionary late *Adoration of the Shepherds*, are a good introduction.

In rooms 9A and 10–15A, you confront the greatest painter of Habsburg Spain, **Diego Velázquez** (1599–1660). Born in Portugal, Velázquez became court painter to Felipe IV, whose family is represented in many of the works: “I have found my Titian,” Felipe is said to have remarked on his appointment. Velázquez's masterpiece, *Las Meninas*, is displayed in the octagonal central gallery (room 12) alongside studies for the painting. Manet remarked of it, “After this, I don't know why the rest of us paint,” and the French poet Théophile Gautier asked “But where is the picture?” when he saw it, because it seemed to him a continuation of the room. *Vulcan's Forge*, *Las Hilanderas*, showing the royal tapestry factory at work, *Christ Crucified* and *Los Borrachos* (*The Drunkards*) are further magnificent paintings. In fact, almost all of the fifty or so works on display (around half of the artist's surviving output) warrant close attention. Don't overlook the two small panels of the *Villa Medici*, painted in Rome in 1650, in virtually Impressionist style. There are several Velázquez canvases, including *The Surrender at Breda*, in the stunning collection of royal portraits and works depicting Spanish military victories.

In the adjacent rooms are examples of just about every significant Spanish painter of the seventeenth century, including many of the best works of **Francisco Zurbarán** (1598–1664), **Bartolomé Esteban Murillo** (1618–82), **Alonso Cano** (1601–67), **Juan de Valdés Leal** (1622–60) and **Juan Carreño** (1614–85). Note, in particular, Carreño's portrait of the last Habsburg monarch, the drastically inbred and mentally challenged Carlos II, rendered with terrible realism. There's also a fine selection of paintings by **José Ribera** (1591–1625), who worked mainly in Naples, and was influenced there by

Caravaggio. His masterpieces are considered to be *The Martyrdom of St Philip* and the dark, realist portrait of *St Andrew*; look out, too, for the bizarre *Bearded Lady*.

Goya

The final suite of Spanish rooms (32 and 34–38), which continue up onto the second floor (85–94) and then down on to the ground floor (64–67), provides an awesome and fabulously complete overview of the output of **Francisco de Goya** (1746–1828), the largest and most valuable collection of his works in the world, with some 140 paintings and 500 drawings and engravings. Goya was the greatest painter of Bourbon Spain, a chronicler of Spain in his time, and an artist whom many see as the inspiration and forerunner of Impressionism and modern art. He was an enormously versatile artist: contrast the voluptuous *Maja Vestida* and *Maja Desnuda* (*The Clothed Belle* and *The Naked Belle*) with the horrors depicted in the *Dos de Mayo* and *Tres de Mayo* (moving, on-the-spot portrayals of the rebellion against Napoleon in the streets of Madrid and the subsequent reprisals). Then there is the series of pastoral cartoons – designs for tapestries – and the extraordinary Black Paintings (room 67), a series of disconcerting murals painted on the walls of his home by the deaf and embittered painter in his old age. The many portraits of his patron, Carlos IV, are remarkable for their lack of any attempt at flattery, while those of Queen María Luisa, whom he despised, are downright ugly.

The nineteenth century

The Prado's collection of melodramatic nineteenth-century Spanish art can be found in the ground-floor rooms 60–66 and 75. Theatrical works by Eduardo Rosales and Antonio Gisbert are combined with some fine luminous canvases by Spanish Impressionist Joaquín Sorolla.

Italian painting

The Prado's Italian galleries begin on the ground floor (49 and 56B) and are distinguished principally by **Fra Angelico's** *Annunciation* (c.1445) and by a trio of panels by **Botticelli** (1445–1510). The latter illustrate a deeply unpleasant story from the *Decameron* about a woman hunted by hounds; the fourth panel (in a private collection in the US) gives a happier conclusion. Here too are major works by **Raphael** (1483–1520), including the fabulous *Portrait of a Cardinal*.

With the sixteenth-century Renaissance, the collection really comes into its own. The Prado is said to have the most complete collection of Titians and painters from the Venetian School of any single museum. On the first floor there are epic masterpieces from the Venetians **Tintoretto** (1518–94), such as the beautifully composed *Lavatorio*, bought by Felipe IV when Charles I of England was beheaded and his art collection was auctioned off, and **Veronese** (1528–88), as well as **Caravaggio** (1573–1610), whose brutal *David with the Head of Goliath* is another highlight. The most important works, however, are by **Titian** (1487–1576) in rooms 24–27 and 41–44. These include portraits of the Spanish emperors *Carlos V* and *Felipe II* (Carlos' suit of armour is preserved in the Palacio Real), and a famous, much-reproduced piece of erotica, *Venus, Cupid and the Organist* (two versions are displayed here), a painting originally owned by a bishop.

Flemish, Dutch and German painting

The biggest name in the **early Flemish collection** (room 56A) is **Hieronymus Bosch** (1450–1516), known in Spain as “El Bosco”. The Prado has several of his greatest triptychs: the early-period *Hay Wain*, the middle-period *Garden of Earthly Delights* and the late *Adoration of the Magi* – all familiar from countless reproductions but infinitely more chilling in the original. Bosch's hallucinatory genius for the macabre is at its most extreme in these triptychs, but is reflected here in many more of his works, including three versions of *The Temptations of St Anthony* (though only the smallest of these is definitely an original). Don't miss, either, the amazing table-top of *The Seven Deadly Sins*.

Bosch's visions find an echo in the works of **Pieter Brueghel the Elder** (1525–69), whose *Triumph of Death* must be one of the most frightening canvases ever painted. Another elusive painter, **Joachim Patinir**, is represented by four of his finest works. From an earlier generation, **Rogier van der Weyden's** *Descent from the Cross* is outstanding; its monumental forms make a fascinating contrast with his miniature-like *Pietà*. There are also important works by Memling, Bouts, Gerard David and Massys.

The collection of **later Flemish and Dutch art** is on the first floor (rooms 16B and 28–29), and there are enough works here to make an excellent comparison between the flamboyant Counter-Reformation propaganda of Flanders and the more austere bourgeois tastes of Holland. **Rubens** (1577–1640) is extensively represented, with the beautifully restored *Three Graces*, *The Judgement of Paris* and a series of eighteen mythological subjects designed for Felipe IV's hunting lodge in El Pardo (though Rubens supervised rather than executed these). There is, too, a fine collection of canvases by his contemporaries, including **Van Dyck's** dramatic and deeply moving *Piedad*, and his magnificent portrait of himself and Sir Endymion Porter. **Jan Brueghel's** representations of the five senses and **David Teniers'** scenes of peasant lowlife also merit a closer look. For political reasons, Spanish monarchs collected few works painted from seventeenth-century Protestant Holland; an early **Rembrandt**, *Judith at the Banquet of Holofernes*, in which the artist's pregnant wife served as the model, is, however, an important exception.

The **German room** (55B) on the ground floor is dominated by **Dürer** (1471–1528) and **Lucas Cranach the Elder** (1472–1553). Dürer's magnificent *Adam and Eve* was saved from destruction at the hands of the prudish Carlos III only by the intervention of his court painter, Mengs, whose own paintings are on the first and second floors in rooms 20 and 89. The most interesting of Cranach's works is a pair of paintings depicting Carlos V hunting with Ferdinand I of Austria.

French and British painting

Most of the **French** work held by the Prado is from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (rooms 2, 3, 19, 21 and 39 on the first floor). Among the outstanding painters represented is **Nicolas Poussin** (1594–1665), with his Baroque work shown to best effect in *Triumph of David*, *Landscape with St Jerome* and *Mount Parnassus*. The romantic landscapes and sunsets of **Claude Lorraine** (1600–82) are well represented, and look out for **Hyacinthe Rigaud's** (1659–1743) portrayal of the imperious *Louis XIV*.

British painting is thin on the ground – a product of the hostile relations between the Spanish and English from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. There is, however, a small sample of eighteenth-century portraiture from **Joshua Reynolds** (1723–92) and **Thomas Gainsborough** (1727–88) in room 20 on the first floor.

The Tesoro del Dauphin

The museum's basement houses the **Tesoro del Dauphin** (Treasure of the Dauphin), a display of part of the collection of jewels that belonged to the Grand Dauphin Louis, son of Louis XIV and father of Felipe V, Spain's first Bourbon king. The collection includes goblets, cups, trays, glasses and other pieces richly decorated with rubies, emeralds, diamonds, lapis lazuli and other precious stones.

Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza

Paseo del Prado 8 • Mon noon–4pm; Tues–Sun 10am–7pm (extended opening in summer months, check website for details); closed Jan 1, May 1 & Dec 25 • €12 for permanent collection and temporary exhibitions; combined admission with Paseo del Arte ticket (see box, p.76); free for under-12s and on Mon for all • ☎ 902 760 511, 🌐 museothyssen.org • 🇪🇸 Banco de España

The **Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza** occupies the old Palacio de Villahermosa, diagonally opposite the Prado, at the end of Pza. de las Cortes. This prestigious site played a large part in Spain's acquisition – for a knock-down \$350 million in June 1993 – of what many argue was the world's greatest private art trove after that of the British royals: some

seven hundred paintings accumulated by father-and-son German-Hungarian industrial magnates. The son, Baron Hans Heinrich Thyssen, died in April 2002 aged 81. Another trump card was the late baron's fifth wife, Carmen Cervera (aka "Tita" Cervera), a former Miss Spain, who steered the works to Spain against the efforts of Britain's Prince Charles, the Swiss and German governments, the Getty foundation and other suitors.

The museum had no expense spared on its design – again in the hands of the ubiquitous Rafael Moneo, responsible for the remodelling of Estación de Atocha and the extension at the Prado – with stucco walls (Carmen insisted on salmon pink) and marble floors. A terribly kitsch portrait of Carmen with a lapdog hangs in the great hall of the museum, alongside those of her husband and King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofía. Pass beyond, however, and you are into seriously premier-league art: **medieval to eighteenth-century** on the second floor, **seventeenth-century Dutch** and **Rococo and Neoclassicism to Fauves and Expressionists** on the first floor, and **Surrealists, Pop Art** and the **avant-garde** on ground level. Highlights are legion in a collection that displays an almost stamp-collecting mentality in its examples of nearly every major artist and movement: how the Thyssens got hold of classic works by everyone from Duccio and Holbein, through El Greco and Caravaggio, to Schiele and Rothko, takes your breath away.

Carmen has a substantial collection of her own (over 600 works), which has been housed in the **extension**, built on the site of an adjoining mansion and cleverly integrated into the original format of the museum. It is particularly strong on nineteenth-century landscape, North American, Impressionist and Post-Impressionist work. The ground floor is home to a large temporary exhibition space, which has staged a number of interesting and highly successful shows.

There's a handy cafeteria and restaurant in the extension; there's also a shop, where you can buy a wide variety of art books, guides to the museum, postcards and other souvenirs. In July and August the museum opens a restaurant on the top-floor terrace: *El Mirador*. Advance tickets for the museum, a good idea in high season, are available via the website.

The second floor: European old masters and Carmen's collection

Take a lift to the second floor and you will find yourself at the chronological start of the museum's collections: European painting (and some sculpture) from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century. The core of these collections was accumulated in the 1920s and 1930s by the late baron's father, Heinrich, who was a friend of the art critics Bernard Berenson and Max Friedländer. He was clearly well advised. The early paintings include incredibly good (and rare) devotional panels by the Siennese painter **Duccio di Buoninsegna**, and the Flemish artists **Jan van Eyck** and **Rogier van der Weyden**. You then move into a fabulous array of Renaissance portraits (room 5), which include three of the very greatest of the period: **Ghirlandaio's** *Portrait of Giovanna Tornabuoni*, **Hans Holbein's** *Portrait of Henry VIII* (the only one of many variants in existence that is definitely genuine) and **Raphael's** *Portrait of a Young Man. A Spanish Infanta* by **Juan de Flandes** may represent the first of Henry VIII's wives, Catherine of Aragón, while the *Young Knight* by **Carpaccio** is one of the earliest-known full-length portraits of the king. Beyond these is a collection of **Dürers** and **Cranachs** to rival that in the Prado, and as you progress through this extraordinary panoply, display cases along the corridor contain scarcely less spectacular works of sculpture, ceramics and gold- and silverwork.

Next in line, in room 11, are **Titian** and **Tintoretto**, and three paintings by **El Greco**, one early, two late, which make an interesting comparison with each other and with those in the Prado. **Caravaggio's** monumental *St Catherine of Alexandria* (room 12) is the centrepiece of an important display of works by followers of this innovator of chiaroscuro. As you reach the eighteenth century, there is a room containing three flawless **Canaletto** views of Venice (room 17). Tagged onto this floor are the first galleries (lettered A–H) that make up the initial section of Carmen's collection. **Luca Giordano's** monumental *Judgement of Solomon* and a

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Van Dyck *Crucifixion* (room A) are two of the early highlights. Gallery C traces the development of landscapes from early Flemish works through to the nineteenth century. Beyond are some interesting works by North American and European artists that complement the baron's collection and some soothing Impressionist offerings by **Degas**, **Renoir**, **Pissarro**, **Monet** and **Sisley**. Constable's *Lock*, however, is no longer in the collection, Carmen having, controversially, sold it for £22.4 million in 2012 because she had "no liquidity", a decision that prompted the resignation of museum trustee Sir Norman Rosenthal.

The first floor: Americans, Impressionists and Expressionists

The route now takes you downstairs through the remainder of Carmen's collection (rooms I–P), beginning with further Impressionist work, taking in some delightful canvases by **Gauguin** and the Post-Impressionists and ending with some striking Expressionist pieces by **Kandinsky** and **Robert Delaunay**.

From room P, walk along the corridor to rejoin the baron's collection. After a comprehensive round of seventeenth-century Dutch painting of various genres, Rococo and Neoclassicism, you reach some **English portraiture** by Gainsborough, Reynolds and Zoffany (room 28) and **American painting** in rooms 29 and 30. The collection, one of the best outside the US, concentrates on landscapes and includes James Goodwyn Clonney's wonderful *Fishing Party on Long Island Sound*, and works by James Whistler, Winslow Homer and John Singer Sargent.

As with Carmen's collection, **Impressionism** and **Post-Impressionism** are another strong point, with a choice selection of paintings by Vincent van Gogh, including one of his last and most gorgeous works, *Les Vessenots* (room 32). **Expressionism**, meanwhile, is represented by some stunning works by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Franz Marc, Wassily Kandinsky and Max Beckmann.

The ground floor: avant-garde

Works on the ground floor run from the beginning of the twentieth century through to around 1970. The good baron didn't, apparently, like contemporary art: "If they can throw colours, I can be free to duck," he explained, following the gallery's opening.

The most interesting work in his "experimental avant-garde" sections is from the **Cubists**. There is an inspired, side-by-side hanging of parallel studies by Picasso (*Man with a Clarinet*) and Braque (*Woman with a Mandolin*). Later choices include a scattering of Joan Miró, Jackson Pollock, Dalí, Rauschenberg and Lichtenstein. In the **Synthesis of Modernity** section, there are some superbly vivid canvases by Max Ernst and Marc Chagall, a brilliant portrait of George Dyer by Francis Bacon, and a fascinating **Lucian Freud**, *Portrait of Baron Thyssen*, posed in front of the Watteau *Pierrot* hanging upstairs (both in room 47).

Museo Reina Sofía

C/Santa Isabel 52 • Mon & Wed–Sat 10am–9pm, Sun 10am–7pm; closed Jan 1 & 6, May 1 & 15, Sept 9, Nov 10, Dec 24, 25 & 31 • €8, free Mon & Wed–Sat 7–9pm, Sun 1.30–7pm; free for under-18s and over-65s; or Paseo del Arte ticket (see box, p.76) • ☎ 917 741 000, 🌐 museoreinasofia.es • 📍 Atocha

It is fortunate that the **Museo Reina Sofía**, facing Estación de Atocha at the end of Paseo del Prado, keeps slightly different opening hours and days to its neighbours. For this leading exhibition space and permanent gallery of modern Spanish art – its centrepiece is Picasso's greatest picture, *Guernica* – is another essential stop on the Madrid art circuit, and one that really shouldn't be seen after a Prado-Thyssen overdose.

The museum, a vast former hospital, is a kind of Madrid response to the Pompidou Centre in Paris, with transparent lifts shuttling visitors up the outside of

the Sabatini building to the permanent collection. Like the other two great art museums, it also underwent a major **extension** programme – the French architect Jean Nouvel added a massive state-of-the-art metal-and-glass wing behind the main block in 2005. If the queues at the main entrance are too long, try the alternative one in the new extension on the Ronda de Atocha. You can also buy tickets in advance via the website.

The Santini building

It is for **Picasso's Guernica** that most visitors come to the Reina Sofía, and rightly so. Superbly displayed, this icon of twentieth-century Spanish art and politics carries a shock that defies all familiarity. Picasso painted it in response to the bombing of the Basque town of Gernika by the German Luftwaffe, acting in concert with Franco, in the Spanish Civil War. In the fascinating preliminary studies, displayed around the room, you can see how he developed its symbols – the dying horse, the woman mourning her dead, the bull, the sun, the flower, the light bulb – and then return to the painting to marvel at how he made it all work.

The painting was first exhibited in Paris in 1937, as part of a Spanish Republican Pavilion in the Expo there, and was then loaned to the Museum of Modern Art in New York, until, as Picasso put it, Spain had rid itself of Fascist rule. The artist never lived to see that time, but in 1981, following the restoration of democracy, the painting was, amid much controversy, moved to Madrid to hang (as Picasso had stipulated) in the Prado. Its transfer to the Reina Sofía in 1992 again prompted much soul-searching and protest, though for anyone who saw it in the old Prado annexe, it looks truly liberated in its present setting. Many Basques believe the painting's rightful home is with them, but studies have revealed cracks and fissures that make the painting too fragile to move once again.

Guernica hangs midway around Collection 1 on the second floor. It is displayed adjacent to rooms dedicated to the Spanish Pavilion in the 1937 Expo. There are strong sections on **Cubism** and the **Paris School**, in the first of which Picasso is again well represented, alongside work by French artist Georges Braque and Spaniard Juan Gris.

Dalí and **Miró** make heavyweight contributions to the nearby halls. Miró, who once claimed that he wanted “to assassinate painting”, is represented with a series of characteristically striking and enigmatic canvases. The development of Dalí's work and his variety of techniques are clearly displayed here, with works ranging from the classic *Muchacha en la Ventana* to famous surrealist works such as *El Gran Masturbador* and *El Enigma de Hitler*. There is an impressive collection of Spanish sculpture to be found in the final rooms.

The fourth floor, which houses Collection 2, covers themes from the postwar years up to the late 1960s and includes Spanish and international examples of **abstract** and **avant-garde** movements. Outstanding pieces from **Francis Bacon** (*Reclining Figure*), **Henry Moore** and **Graham Sutherland** give a British context, while challenging work from **Antoni Tapiès**, **Antonio Saura** and **Eduardo Chillida** provide the Spanish perspective. If the avant-garde work all gets too much, you'll find some more accessible offerings from the Spanish realists here too.

The Area Nouvel

The extension, or the **Nouvel wing** as it is known, consists of three buildings built around an open courtyard topped by a striking delta-shaped, metallic, crimson-coloured roof. It is home to Collection 3 which deals with themes from the final years of the Francoist dictatorship through to the present day. The new wing also houses an auditorium, a library, a café-restaurant and a bookshop (Mon & Tues–Sat 10am–8.45pm, Sun 10am–3pm) that sells a wide range of glossy coffee-table volumes, as well as more academic tomes and the informative museum guidebook (€13), which examines eight key works in detail.

1 Parque del Retiro and around

When you get tired of sightseeing, Madrid's many parks are great places to escape for a few hours. The most central and most popular of them is **El Retiro**, a delightful mix of formal gardens and wider open spaces. Nearby, in addition to the Prado, Thyssen-Bornemisza and Reina Sofía galleries, are a number of the city's **smaller museums**, plus the startlingly peaceful **Jardines Botánicos**.

Parque del Retiro

Winter daily 6am–10pm; summer 6am–midnight • 🚶 Retiro

Originally the grounds of a royal retreat (*retiro*) and designed in the French style, the **Parque del Retiro** has been public property for more than a hundred years. In its 330 acres you can jog, row in the lake (you can rent boats by the Monumento a Alfonso XII), picnic (though officially not on the grass), have your fortune told and – above all – promenade. The busiest day is Sunday, when half of Madrid, replete with spouses, in-laws and kids, turns out for the *paseo*. Dressed for show, the families stroll around, nodding at neighbours and building up an appetite for a long Sunday lunch.

Strolling aside, there's almost always something going on in the park, including a good programme of **concerts** and **fairs** organized by the city council. Concerts tend to be held in the Quiosco de Música in the north of the park. The most popular of the fairs is the Feria del Libro (Book Fair), held in early June, when every publisher and half the country's bookshops set up stalls and offer a 25 percent discount on their wares. At weekends, there are **puppet shows** by the Puerta de Alcalá entrance, and on Sundays you can often watch groups of South American musicians performing by the lake.

A number of **stalls** and **cafés** along the Paseo del Estanque sell drinks, *bocadillos* and *pipas* (sunflower seeds), and there are terraces, too, for *horchata* and *granizados*. The park has a safe reputation, at least by day; in the late evening, it's best not to wander alone.

Palacio de Velázquez, Palacio de Cristal, Casa de Vacas and the Bosque del Recuerdo

Palacio de Velázquez & Palacio de Cristal April–Sept daily 10am–10pm; Oct–March 10am–6pm • Free • 📞 915 746 614 for information • **Casa de Vacas** Opening hours vary depending on exhibitions but usually daily 10am–9pm; closed Aug • Free

Temporary art exhibitions are frequently housed in the beautifully tiled **Palacio de Velázquez**, the splendid glass and wrought-iron **Palacio de Cristal** and the more modest **Casa de Vacas**, all of which are inside the park. Look out, too, for **El Ángel Caído** (Fallen Angel), the world's only public statue to Lucifer, in the south of the park. There is also the **Bosque del Recuerdo**, 192 olive trees and cypresses planted in the Paseo de la Chopera in memory of those who died in the train bombings at the nearby Atocha station on March 11, 2004.

Puerta de Alcalá

🚶 Retiro/Banco de España

The Parque del Retiro's northwest corner gives access to the Pza. de la Independencia, in the centre of which is one of the two remaining gates from the old city walls. Built in the late eighteenth century, the **Puerta de Alcalá** was the biggest in Europe at that time and, like the bear and *madroño* tree, has become one of the city's monumental emblems.

Museo de Artes Decorativas

C/Montalbán 12 • Tues–Sat 9.30am–3pm, Sun 10am–3pm; also open Thurs & Fri 5–8pm in winter and spring • €3, free Thurs 5–8pm, Sat 2–3pm and Sun • 📞 915 326 499, 🌐 mecd.gob.es/mnartedecorativas • 🚶 Banco de España/Retiro

Just south of Puerta de Alcalá is the **Museo de Artes Decorativas**, housed in a

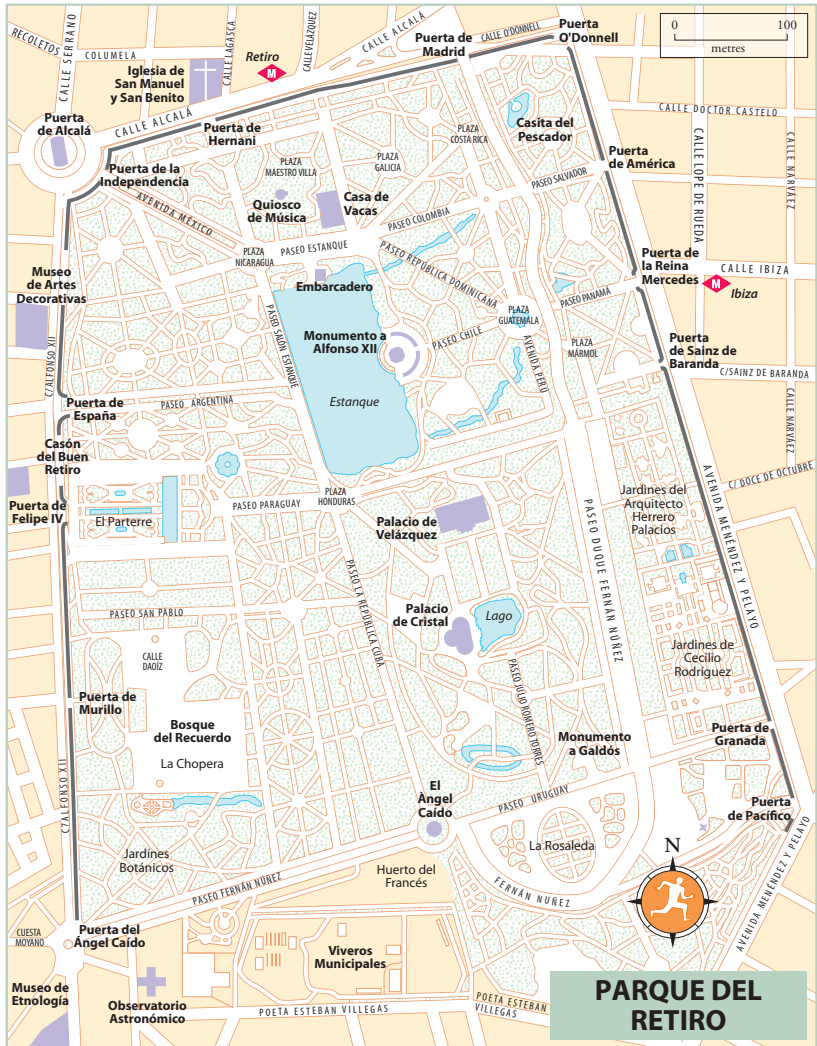
graceful-looking mansion close to the Retiro. The eclectic collection of furniture, glass, carpets, toys, clocks, jewellery and fans is interesting enough but the highlight is undoubtedly the beautifully tiled Valencian kitchen on the fourth floor with its superb painted *azulejos*.

Museo Naval

Paseo del Prado 5 • Tues–Sun 10am–7pm; Aug Tues–Sun 10am–3pm • Free (bring ID), though a voluntary €3 donation is requested •

📞 915 238 516, 🌐 armada.mde.es/museonaval • 🏠 Banco de España

A couple of blocks west of the Museo de Artes Decorativas in a corner of the Naval Ministry is the **Museo Naval**, strong, as you might expect, on maritime paintings, models,



Estación de Atocha

PARQUE DEL
RETIRO

charts and navigational aids from or relating to the Spanish voyages of discovery. Exhibits include the first map to show the New World, drawn in 1500, a cannon from the Spanish Armada and part of Cortés' flag used in the conquest of Mexico.

San Jerónimo el Real

C/Ruiz de Alarcón 19 • Mon–Sat 10am–1pm & 5–8pm, Sun 9.30am–2.30pm & 5.30–8pm; July to mid-Sept daily 10am–1.30pm & 6–8.30pm • ④ Banco de España/Atocha

Just behind the Prado is **San Jerónimo el Real**, Madrid's society church, where in 1975 Juan Carlos (like his predecessors) was crowned. Despite significant remodelling and the addition of two Gothic towers, the old form of the church is still clearly visible; but the seventeenth-century cloisters have fallen victim to the Prado extension.

Real Academia Española de la Lengua

C/Felipe IV 4 • ④ Banco de España/Atocha

Opposite the church is the **Real Academia Española de la Lengua** (Royal Language Academy), whose job it is to make sure that the Spanish language is not corrupted by foreign or otherwise unsuitable words. The results are entrusted to their official dictionary – a work that bears virtually no relation to the Spanish you'll hear spoken on the streets.

Real Jardín Botánico

Pza. de Murillo 2 • Daily 10am–dusk • €4, under-10s free • ④ www.rjb.csic.es • ④ Atocha

Immediately south of the Prado is the delightful, shaded **Real Jardín Botánico**. Opened in 1781 by Carlos III (known as *El Alcalde* – “The Mayor” – for his urban-improvement programmes), the garden once contained over 30,000 plants. The numbers are down these days, though the worldwide collection of flora is fascinating for any amateur botanist; don't miss the hothouse with its tropical plants and amazing cacti or the bonsai collection of former prime minister Felipe González. Temporary exhibitions take place in the Palacio Villanueva within the grounds.

La CaixaForum

Paseo del Prado 36 • Daily 10am–8pm • €4 • ④ obrasocialacaixa.org • ④ Atocha

Opposite the botanical gardens is **La CaixaForum**, an innovative and stylish exhibition space opened in 2008 by the powerful Catalan bank, which complements the existing attractions on the Paseo del Arte. The centre, which hosts a variety of high-quality temporary art shows, concerts and workshops, is flanked by an eye-catching vertical garden designed by French botanist Patrick Blanc in which some 15,000 plants form an organic carpet extending across the wall. Inside, there's a decent art bookshop and a neat top-floor restaurant that serves a fine €12 lunchtime set menu.

Estación de Atocha

④ Atocha

On the far side of the botanical gardens from La CaixaForum is the sloping Cuesta de Moyano, lined with **bookstalls**; although it's at its busiest on Sundays, many of the stalls are open every day. Across the way, the **Estación de Atocha** is worth a look even if you're not travelling out of Madrid. It's actually two stations, old and new, the latter now sadly infamous as the scene of the horrific train bombings that killed 191 people and injured close to 2000 in March 2004. The original station, a glorious 1880s glasshouse, was revamped in the early 1990s with a spectacular tropical-garden

centrepiece. It's a wonderful sight from the walkways above, and train buffs and architects will want to take a look at the high-speed AVE trains and the station beyond.

Museo Nacional de Antropología/Etnología

C/Alfonso XII 68 • Tues–Sat 9.30am–8pm, Sun 10am–3pm • €3, under-18s & over-65s free, free Sat after 2pm & Sun • ☎ 915 306 418, mnantropologia.mcu.es • 📍 Atocha

Also in this area is the **Museo Nacional de Antropología/Etnología**, designed to give an overview of different cultures of the world, in particular those intertwined with Spanish history. The most unusual exhibits are to be found in a side room on the ground floor – a macabre collection of deformed skulls, a Guanche (the original inhabitants of the Canary Islands) mummy and the skeleton of a circus giant (2.35m tall).

Real Fábrica de Tapices

C/Fuentarrabia 2 • Mon–Fri 10am–2pm; closed Aug & Dec 24–Jan 2 • €5 • Tours on the hour (midday in English) • ☎ 914 340 550, realfabricadetapices.com • 📍 Atoche Renfe/Menéndez Pelayo

The **Real Fábrica de Tapices** still turns out handmade tapestries, many of them based on the Goya cartoons in the Prado. They are fabulously expensive, but the entrance fee is a bargain, with the tour tracing the fascinating manufacturing process, barely changed in the three hundred years of the factory's existence.

The Gran Vía, Chueca and Malasaña

The **Gran Vía**, Madrid's great thoroughfare, runs from Pza. de Cibeles to Pza. de España, effectively dividing the old city to the south from the newer parts northwards. Permanently jammed with traffic and crowded with shoppers and sightseers, it's the commercial heart of the city, and – if you spare the time to look up – quite a monument in its own right, with its early twentieth-century, palace-like banks, offices and cinemas. Look out for the **Edificio Metrópolis** (1905–11) on the corner of C/Alcalá, complete with cylindrical facade, white stone sculptures, zinc-tiled roof and gold garlands, and the towering **Telefónica** building, which was the chief observation post for the Republican artillery during the Civil War, when the Nationalist front line stretched across the Casa de Campo to the west.

North of the Telefónica building, C/Fuencarral heads north to the Glorieta de Bilbao. To either side of this street are two of Madrid's most characterful *barrios*: **Chueca**, to the east, and **Malasaña**, to the west. Their chief appeal lies in an amazing concentration of bars, restaurants and, especially, nightlife. However, there are a few reasons – cafés included – to wander around here by day.

Chueca

Once rather down at heel, Chueca is now one of the city's most vibrant *barrios* and the focal point of Madrid's **gay scene**. At the centre is the lively **Pza. de Chueca** (📍 Chueca), which is fronted by one of the best old-style *vermút* bars in the city, *Bodega Ángel Sierra*. The whole area has become gentrified in recent years with the rise of a host of stylish bars, cafés and restaurants and the opening of the newly refurbished Mercado de San Antón.

Paseo de Recoletos

From Pza. de Chueca east to **Paseo de Recoletos** (the beginning of the long Paseo de la Castellana) are some of the city's most enticing streets. Offbeat restaurants, small private art galleries and odd corner shops are in abundance, and the **C/Almirante** has

some of the city's most fashionable clothes shops, too. To the north, on Paseo de Recoletos, are a couple of the city's most lavish **traditional cafés**, the *Café Gijón* at no. 21 and *Café del Espejo* at no. 31 (see p.112).

Sociedad General de Autores

C/Fernando VI 4 • Alonso Martínez

On the edge of the Santa Bárbara *barrio*, is the **Sociedad de Autores** (Society of Authors), housed in the only significant *modernista* building in Madrid designed by José Grases Riera, who was part of the Gaudí school, and featuring an eye-catching facade that resembles a melted candle.

Museo Nacional del Romanticismo

C/San Mateo 13 • May–Oct Tues–Sat 9.30am–8.30pm (closes 6.30pm Nov–April), Sun 10am–3pm • €3, free on Sat after 2pm, Sun • 914 481 045, museoromanticismo.mcu.es • Tribunal

Reopened in 2009 after a nine-year, seven-million-euro restoration, the **Museo Nacional del Romanticismo** shows the lifestyle and outlook of the late Romantic era through an evocative re-creation of a typical bourgeois residence in the turbulent reign of Isabel II (1833–68), and this it does brilliantly. Overflowing with a marvellously eclectic and often kitsch hoard of memorabilia, the mansion is decorated with some beautiful period furniture and ceiling frescoes. There's also a relaxing garden café serving a selection of teas, coffees and cakes.

Museo de Historia de Madrid

C/Fuencarral 78 • Tues–Sun 10am–8pm • Free • 917 011 863, munimadrid.es/museomunicipal • Tribunal

Just around the corner from the Museo del Romanticismo, the **Museo de Historia de Madrid** reopened in late 2014 after a lengthy restoration programme. The building itself features a flamboyant Churrigueresque (Spanish Baroque) facade by Pedro de Ribera. Inside, the holdings include a large chronological collection of paintings, photos, cartoons, maps, sculptures and porcelain, all relating to the history of the city since it was designated capital in 1561. One of the highlights is a fascinating 1830s scale model of the city.

Malasaña

The heart, in all senses, of **Malasaña** is the **Pza. Dos de Mayo**, named after the insurrection against Napoleonic forces on May 2, 1808; the rebellion and its aftermath are depicted in Goya's famous paintings at the Prado. The surrounding district bears the name of one of the martyrs of the uprising, 15-year-old Manuela Malasaña, who is also commemorated with a street (as are several other heroes of the time). On the night of May 1, Madrid honours its heroes, though the plaza is no longer the site of the traditional festivities.

More recently, the quarter was the focus of the *movida madrileña*, the “happening scene” of the late 1970s and early 1980s. As the country relaxed after the death of Franco and the city developed into a thoroughly modern capital under the leadership of the late mayor, Tierno Galván, Malasaña became a focal point for the young. Bars appeared behind every doorway, drugs were sold openly in the streets and there was an extraordinary atmosphere of new-found freedom. Times have changed and a good deal of renovation has been going on in recent years, but the *barrio* retains a somewhat alternative – nowadays rather grungy – feel, with bar customers spilling onto the streets and an ever-lively scene in the Pza. Dos de Mayo terrazas.

The streets have an interest of their own and are home to some fine traditional bars, while on C/Manuela Malasaña you can take your pick from some of the trendiest cafés in town. There are also some wonderful old shop signs and architectural details, best of all the **Antigua Farmacia Juanse** on the corner of C/San Andrés and C/San Vicente Ferrer, with its irresistible 1920s *azulejo* scenes depicting cures for diarrhoea, headaches and suchlike.



San Antonio de los Alemanes

Corredera de San Pablo 16 • Mon–Sat 10.30am–2pm; closed Aug • €2 • 📍 Callao

One of the few specific sights in this quarter, and a real gem it is too, is **San Antonio de los Alemanes**, a delightful, elliptical church with dizzying floor-to-ceiling frescoes by Neapolitan artist Luca Giordano depicting the life of St Anthony.

Plaza de España, Moncloa and beyond

Pza. de España provides a breathing space from the densely packed streets to the east. Beyond the square lies a mixture of leafy suburbia, university campus and parkland, including the green swathes of Parque del Oeste and Casa de Campo. Sights include some fascinating minor museums and, further out, the royal palace of *El Pardo*. The airy terrazas along Paseo del Pintor Rosales provide ample opportunity for refreshment.

Plaza de España

📍 Pza. de España

The **Pza. de España** at the west end of Gran Vía was home, until the flurry of corporate building in the north of Madrid, to two of the city's tallest buildings: the **Torre de Madrid** and the **Edificio de España**; the latter is scheduled to become a 600-room luxury hotel run by the Riu chain. These rather stylish 1950s buildings preside over an elaborate monument to Cervantes in the middle of the square, which in turn overlooks the bewildered-looking bronze figures of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.

The plaza itself is a little on the seedy side, especially at night, but there are plans to turn the area into a more open and pleasant green space. To the north **C/Martin de los Heros** is a lively place, day and night, with a couple of the city's best cinemas, and behind them the **Centro Princesa**, with shops, clubs, bars and a 24-hour branch of the ubiquitous VIPS – just the place to buy a box of chocolates or a bite to eat before heading on to a small-hours club.

Conde Duque

📍 Pza. de España

Up the steps opposite the Centro Princesa is **C/Conde Duque**, an atmospheric street that contains an intriguing selection of cafés, restaurants and shops, and one that is dominated by the massive former barracks of the royal guard, constructed in the early eighteenth century by Pedro de Ribera. The barracks have been turned into a dynamic cultural centre, **El Centro Cultural de Conde Duque**, housing the city's contemporary art collection (C/Conde Duque 11; Tues–Sat 10am–2pm & 5.30–9pm, Sun 10.30am–2pm; free; ☎ 914 004 401, 🌐 condeduquemadrid.es). Just to the east of this is the **Pza. de las Comendadoras** – named after the convent that occupies one side of the square – which is a tranquil space bordered by a variety of interesting craft shops, bars and cafés.

Museo Cerralbo

C/Ventura Rodríguez 17 • Tues, Wed, Fri & Sat 9.30am–3pm, Thurs 9.30am–3pm & 5–8pm, Sun & hols 10am–3pm • €3, free Thurs 5–8pm, Sat after 2pm, Sun • ☎ 915 473 646, 🌐 museocerralbo.mcu.es • 📍 Pza. de España

A block to the west of Pza. de España, a beautiful mansion houses the refurbished **Museo Cerralbo**, endowed with the collections of the reactionary politician, poet, traveller and archeologist, the seventeenth Marqués de Cerralbo. The rooms, stuffed with paintings, furniture, armour and artefacts, provide a fascinating insight into the lifestyle of the nineteenth-century aristocracy. The highlight is the exquisite mirrored ballroom complete with frescoes and marble decor.

Parque del Oeste

Pza. de España • ㉔ Argüelles/Ventura Rodríguez

The **Parque del Oeste** stretches northwest from the Pza. de España, following the rail tracks of Príncipe Pío up to the suburbs of Moncloa and Ciudad Universitaria. In summer, there are numerous terrazas in the park, while, year-round, a **teleférico** shuttles its passengers high over the river from Paseo del Pintor Rosales to the middle of the Casa de Campo, where there's a bar-restaurant with pleasant views back towards the city. Just below the starting point of the *teleférico* (April–Sept daily noon–8pm or 9pm; Oct–March Sat, Sun & public hols noon–dusk; €4.20 single, €5.90 return; ㉔ 902 345 002, ㉔ teleferico.com) is the beautiful **Rosaleda** (10am–9pm), a vast rose garden at its best in May and June.

Templo de Debod

C/Ferraz 1 • April–Sept Tues–Fri 10am–2pm & 6–8pm, Sat & Sun 9.30am–8.30pm; Oct–March Tues–Fri 9.45am–1.45pm & 4.15–6.15pm, Sat & Sun 9.30am–8pm • Free • ㉔ madrid.es/templodebod • ㉔ Pza. de España

On the south side of the park, five minutes' walk from Pza. de España, is the **Templo de Debod**, a fourth-century BC Egyptian temple given to Spain in recognition of the work done by Spanish engineers on the Aswan High Dam (which inundated its original site). Reconstructed here stone by stone, it seems comically incongruous, and even more so with the multimedia exhibition on the culture of Ancient Egypt housed inside.

La Ermita de San Antonio de la Florida

Glorieta de la Florida 5 • Tues–Sun 9.30am–8pm; guided tours on Sat at noon in English, 1pm in Spanish • Free • ㉔ madrid.es/ermita • ㉔ Príncipe Pío

Almost alongside the famous roast chicken and cider restaurant *Casa Mingo* is **La Ermita de San Antonio de la Florida**. This little church on a Greek-cross plan was built by an Italian, Felipe Fontana, between 1792 and 1798, and decorated by **Goya**, whose frescoes are the reason to visit. In the dome is a depiction of a miracle performed by St Anthony of Padua. Around it, heavenly bodies of angels and cherubs hold back curtains to reveal the main scene: the saint resurrecting a dead man to give evidence in favour of a prisoner (the saint's father) falsely accused of murder. Beyond this central group, Goya created a gallery of highly realist characters – their models were court and society figures – while for a lesser fresco of the angels adoring the Trinity in the apse, he took prostitutes as his models. The *ermita* also houses the artist's mausoleum, although his head was stolen by phrenologists for examination in the nineteenth century.

Moncloa

The wealthy suburb of **Moncloa** contains the Spanish prime ministerial residence and merits a visit even if you are not using the bus terminal for El Pardo and El Escorial. The metro will bring you out next to the mammoth building housing the Air Ministry and the giant Arco de la Victoria, built by Franco in 1956 to commemorate the Nationalist victory in the Civil War. Beyond this lie the leafy expanses of the Parque del Oeste and the campuses of the **Ciudad Universitaria**. During termtime, the area becomes one giant student party on weekend evenings, with huddles of picnickers and singing groups under the trees.

Museo de América

Avda. de los Reyes Católicos 6 • Tues, Wed, Fri & Sat 9.30am–3pm, Thurs 9.30am–7pm, Sun 10am–3pm • €3, free on Sun • ㉔ 915 492 641, ㉔ mecd.gob.es/museodeamerica • ㉔ Moncloa

Near the Arco de la Victoria is the **Museo de América**, which contains a fine collection of artefacts, ceramics and silverware from Spain's former colonies in Latin America, displayed thematically. The highlight is the fabulous Quimbayas treasure – a breathtaking collection of gold objects and figures from the Quimbaya culture of Colombia.

Faro de Moncloa

Avenida de los Reyes Católicos 6 • Tues–Sun 10am–8pm • 📍 Moncloa; take the Pza. de Moncloa exit

Next to the Museo de América is the **Faro de Moncloa**, a futuristic 110m-high viewing tower which has finally been reopened after an 11-year closure and offers fantastic views over the city, Casa de Campo and out towards the mountains.

Museo del Traje

Avda. de Juan de Herrera 2 • Tues–Sat 9.30am–7pm, Sun & hols 10am–3pm (July & Aug open late from 9.30am–10.30pm on Thurs) • €3; free for under-18s, Sat after 2.30pm and all day Sun • 📞 915 504 708, 🌐 museodeltraje.mcu.es • 📍 Moncloa

Across the busy road from the Museo de América down towards the university is the **Museo del Traje**, a fascinating excursion through the history of clothes and costume. Exhibits include clothes from a royal tomb dating back to the thirteenth century, some stunning eighteenth-century ball gowns and a selection of Spanish regional costumes, as well as shoes, jewellery and underwear. Modern Spanish and international designers are also featured, with a Paco Rabanne miniskirt and stylish dresses from Pedro del Hierro. The upmarket restaurant in the grounds has a cool garden terrace for summer use.

Casa de Campo

📍 Batán/Lago, bus (#33) from Príncipe Pío or teleférico (see p.91)

If you want to jog, play tennis, swim (pool open daily June–Sept 11am–8.30pm; €4.50), picnic, go to the fairground or see pandas, then the **Casa de Campo** is the place. This enormous expanse of heath and scrub is in parts surprisingly wild for a spot so easily accessible from the city; other sections have been tamed for more conventional pastimes.

Picnic tables and café-bars are dotted throughout the park and there's a **jogging track** with exercise posts, a municipal open-air **swimming pool** close to 📍 Lago, tennis courts and rowing boats for rent on the **lake** (again near 📍 Lago). Sightseeing attractions include a large and well-organized **zoo** and a popular amusement park, the **Parque de Atracciones** (see p.120), complete with the obligatory selection of heart-stopping, stomach-churning gravity rides. Be aware that some of the **access roads** through the park are frequented by prostitutes, though there are few problems during daylight hours.

El Pardo

Nine kilometres northwest of Madrid in the former royal hunting ground of **El Pardo** is where Franco had his principal residence. A garrison still remains in the town – where most of the Generalísimo's staff were based – but the stigma of the place has lessened over the years, and it is now a popular weekend excursion for *madriños*, who come here for long lunches in the terraza restaurants, or to play tennis or swim at one of the nearby sports clubs.

Palacio del Pardo

C/Manuel Alonso • April–Sept daily 10am–8pm; Oct–March daily 10am–6pm; closed occasionally for official visits • Guided tours €9, 5–16-year-olds, over-65s €4, free Wed & Thurs 5–8pm (April–Sept), 3–6pm (Oct–March) for EU citizens • 🌐 patrimonio.nacional.es • Buses (#601) from Moncloa (daily 6.30am–midnight, every 10–15min; 25min)

Rebuilt by the Bourbons on the site of a hunting lodge of Carlos V, the **Palacio del Pardo** is the tourist focus of the area. The interior is pleasant enough, with its chapel and theatre, a portrait of Isabel la Católica by her court painter Juan de Flandes and an excellent collection of tapestries, many after the Goya cartoons in the Prado. Guides detail the uses Franco made of the *palacio*, but pass over some of his stranger habits – he kept by his bed, for instance, the mummified hand of St Teresa of Ávila. The country-house retreat in the grounds known as the **Casa del Príncipe** was, like the *casitas* (pavilions) at El Escorial, designed by Prado architect Juan de Villanueva, and is highly ornate (visit by appointment only; €3; 📞 913 761 500).

Salamanca and the Paseo de la Castellana

Salamanca, the area north of the Parque del Retiro, is a smart address for apartments and, even more so, for shops. The *barrio* is the haunt of *pijos* – universally denigrated rich kids and their well-heeled parents – and the grid of streets between C/Goya and C/José Ortega y Gasset contains most of the city's designer emporiums. Most of the buildings are modern and undistinguished, though there are some elegant nineteenth-century mansions and apartment blocks. A scattering of museums, galleries and exhibition spaces might tempt you up here, too – in particular the **Sorolla** and the **Lázaro Galdiano** museums, two little gems that are often ignored by visitors.

Plaza de Colón and around

If you tackle the area from south to north, the first point of interest is **Pza. de Colón** (ⓂColón), endowed at street level with a statue of Columbus (Cristóbal Colón) and some huge stone blocks arranged as a megalithic monument to the discovery of the Americas. Below the plaza and underneath the cascading waterfall facing the city's longest, widest and busiest avenue, the Paseo de la Castellana, is the **Teatro Fernán Gómez** arts centre.

Museo Arqueológico Nacional

C/Serrano 13 • Tues–Sat 9.30am–8pm, Sun 9.30am–3pm, free Sat after 2pm and Sun • €3 • 📞 915 777 912, 🌐 man.es • 📍 Colón/Serrano

Adjacent to Pza. de Colón is the **Museo Arqueológico Nacional**, revitalized after a lengthy refurbishment. The collections have been given a new lease of life with their arrangement around a naturally lit central atrium, while the labelling and video explanations (in English and Spanish) put the exhibits into context. As befitting a national collection, the museum holds some very impressive pieces, among them the celebrated Celtiberian busts known as *La Dama de Elche* and *La Dama de Baza*, and a wonderfully rich hoard of Visigothic treasures found at Toledo. The museum also contains outstanding Roman, Egyptian, Greek and Islamic finds.

Museo de Arte Público

Paseo de la Castellana 41 • Free • 📍 Rubén Darío

North from the Museo de la Biblioteca Nacional, up the Paseo de la Castellana, the **Museo de Arte Público** is an innovative attempt at using the space underneath the Juan Bravo flyover. However, its haphazard and rather stark collection of sculptures, including the six-tonne suspended block titled *The Meeting* by Eduardo Chillida and Joan Miró's primitive bird-woman figure *Mère Ubu*, appears to be more appreciated by the city's skateboard community.

Museo Sorolla

C/Martínez Campos 37 • Tues, Thurs–Sat 9.30am–8pm, Sun 10am–3pm • €3, free under-18s, Sat 2–8pm, Sun • 📞 915 101 584, 🌐 mecd.gob.es/msorolla • 📍 Gregorio Marañón/Iglesia

Not far north of here, across the Paseo de la Castellana, is a little gem of a gallery, the **Museo Sorolla**, which has a large collection of work by the painter **Joaquín Sorolla** (1863–1923), tastefully displayed in his beautifully preserved old home. The most striking of his paintings, which include beach scenes, portraits and landscapes, are impressionistic plays on light and texture. His old studio is much as he left it, and the house itself, with its cool and shady Andalusian-style courtyard and gardens, is worth the visit alone and makes a wonderful escape from the traffic-choked streets.

Museo Lázaro Galdiano

C/Serrano 122 • Tues–Sat 10am–4.30pm, Sun 10am–3pm • €6; free under-12s, 3.30–4.30pm & Sun 2–3pm • 📞 915 616 084, 🌐 flg.es • 📍 Gregorio Marañón/Rubén Darío

The **Museo Lázaro Galdiano** is just northeast of the Museo Sorolla at the intersection of