

THE CITIES...



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The cities of Spain CITIES FOR ALL



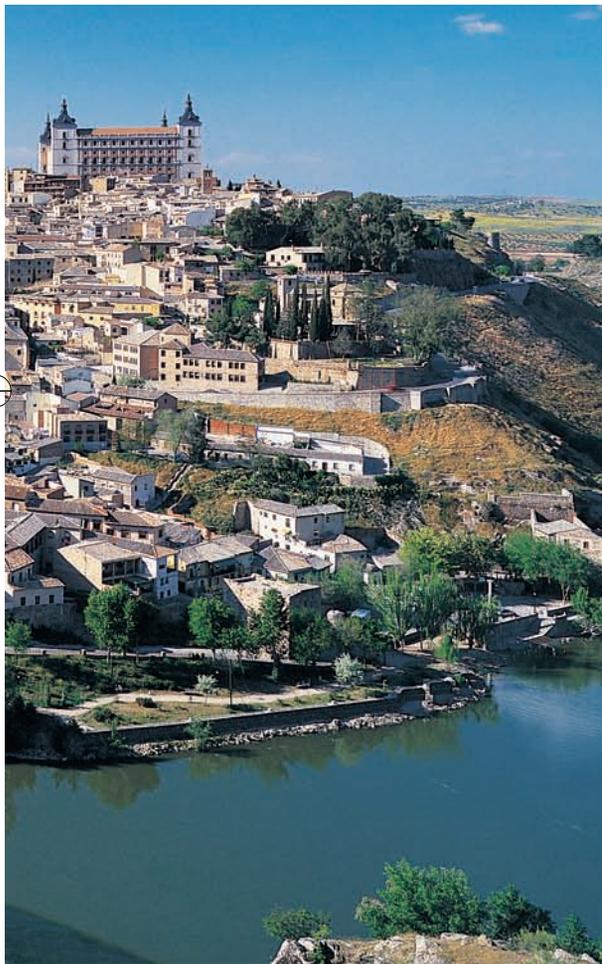
Toledo

◀ Cover: *La Alhambra, Granada*



Granada. View of the Alhambra

S E A S O N S



There is something special about Spanish cities. It could have to do with their age – most can trace their roots back to the Romans, or the Phoenicians, or earlier still. It could have to do with their location, by the sea, on top of spectacular mountains, on the banks of rivers in picturesque valleys. It could have to do with their artistic treasures and architectural gems, their palaces, castles, museums and cathedrals. But none of this is enough to explain why the cities of Spain hold such a fascination. No, it has to do with the manner in which these cities are *alive*. Spanish cities are meant to be touched, breathed, listened to and enjoyed. They are at the same time ancient and young, combining tradition with *joie de vivre* in a way that is not found elsewhere. Monuments that in other countries would be cordoned off to be admired from a distance, here form part of the fabric of life. Monasteries become restaurants, palaces are used as art galleries, castles are converted into hotels, concerts are held in 2000-year-old Roman theatres. For Spaniards, their city – what they call their *patria chica*, the “little homeland” – is an extension of the home. Fair weather allows life to be enjoyed outdoors, and the tradition of the *paseo*, the evening stroll to be seen in every village in Spain, survives in the cities, no matter how large. Perhaps this is why newcomers,



Ibiza

be they worldly-wise travellers or small children, feel immediately at ease in Spain.

Like any proud home-owner, Spaniards are eager to show their *patria chica* to visitors, sharing with them those things that make them proud to call a city their home.

Donostia-San Sebastián



A TALE OF TWO CITIES:

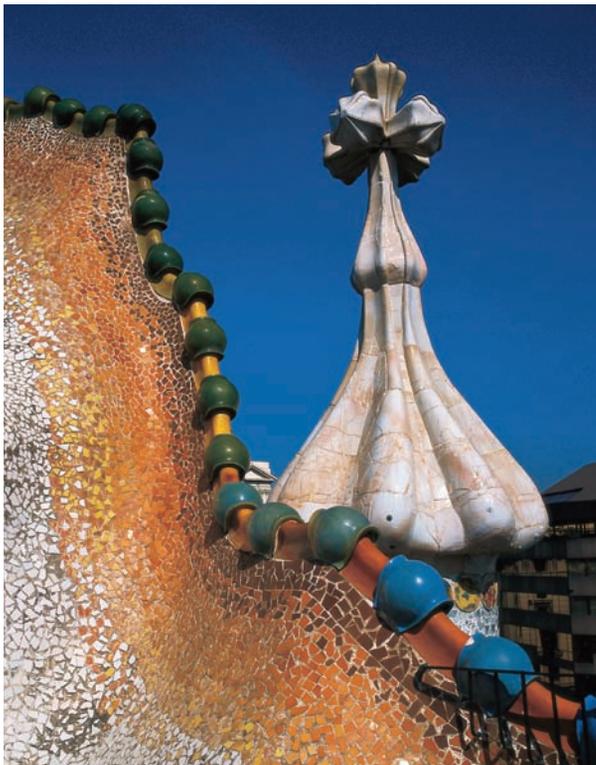
BARCELONA and Madrid are similar in size and importance, but there the similarities end.

The coastal capital of Catalonia and the landlocked capital of Spain reflect two different ways of urban life.



Madrid. Royal Palace

Barcelona. Casa Batlló



MADRID AND BARCELONA



Madrid

The famously hospitable *Madridenses* like to look after their visitors, if only to be reminded that they are living in what is not only Europe's highest capital city (at 2,000 feet above sea level), but also one of its liveliest, friendliest, most generous, and most culturally stimulating.

Art? There are enough masterpieces in the square mile around the Prado to last a lifetime. Nightlife? This is a city where no one ever seems to sleep. Food? Madrid draws on the best produce in Spain, and eating out is a way of life. Parks? El Retiro has to be one of the world's grandest green areas. Ambience? As one Spanish writer pointed out, Madrid is a city where no one is a stranger. Monuments? Take your pick between the Madrid of the Habsburgs, with its spacious Plaza Mayor, or the Madrid of the Bourbons, with its classical palaces and wide boulevards.

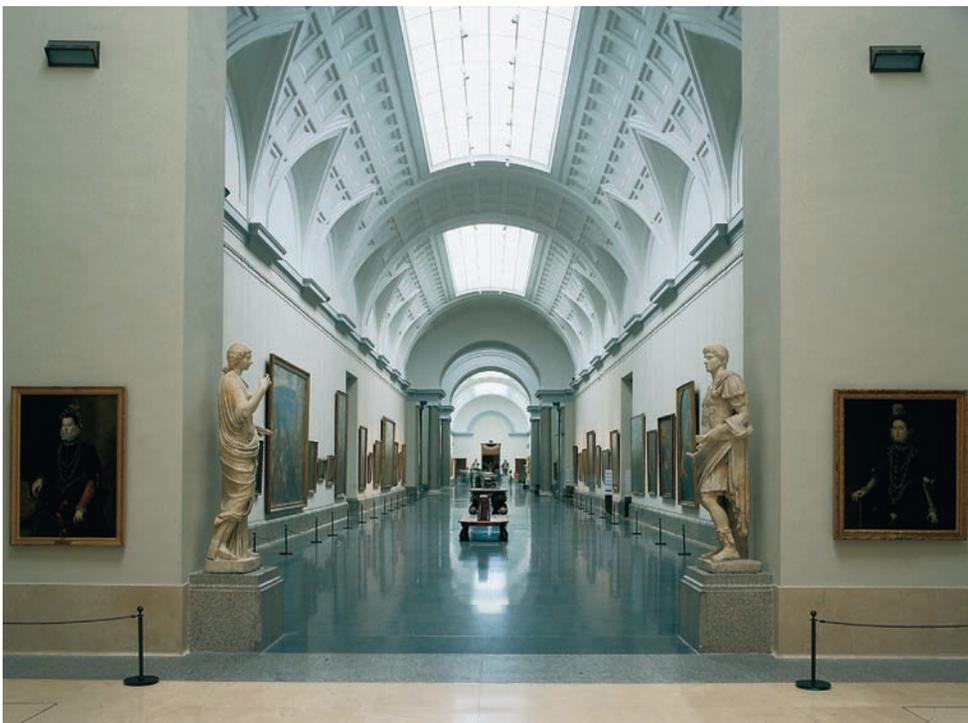
But wait! There's another Madrid. Wander from the imposing buildings, the skyscrapers and the fashionable shopping districts into the back streets of Madrid and you will see that you are not in Spain's largest city, after all, but in its largest village. Men chatter in dusty taverns, as they would in any *pueblo* in Spain. Young parents push baby carriages through shady parks.

Madrid. Palacio de Cristal in El Retiro Park



Instead of big supermarkets, you find specialty corner shops where the owner addresses his customers by their first name.

By Spanish standards, Madrid is a mere adolescent –the Moors established an outpost here, mainly because there was fresh water and a commanding view– and a city by accident only. In 1561, King Philip II decided to establish his capital at a spot chosen principally because it lies, more or less, at the geographical centre of Spain. Spain heeded the call, and soon peoples of every region congregated here to breathe life into the new city. This is “Kilometre Zero”, the point from which all the country’s radial roads are measured. This is where the rest of Spain has sent its best artists, doctors, chefs and actors to pursue their careers. This is where all the cities of Spain meet.



Madrid. Café

Madrid. Prado Museum ▲

Barcelona. Plaza de Cataluña ►



Barcelona. Moll de la Fusta

Barcelona

Barcelona is a city that is always reinventing itself. The wave of urban renewal leading up to the Olympic Games of 1992, and which virtually changed the face of the city, was but the latest step in a process that started when the Carthaginians and Romans settled here two thousand years ago. That high priest of *moderniste* architecture, Antoni Gaudí, belongs to a distinguished line of creators who over the generations have endowed Barcelona with the world's most curious mixture of styles. History helped shape a character that outsiders often find baffling. Barcelona's people manage to be composed and eccentric, sophisticated and earthy at the same time. If they have a reputation for being shrewd and dedicated businessmen, they are also masters at the fine art of having a good time. They are both innovative –ever experimenting, inventing and setting trends for others to follow– and conservative, nurturing Catalonia's age-old culture and language.

Barcelona. Plaza Real



Barcelona. Las Ramblas



Barcelona. Basilica of the Holy Family

This dual character is reflected in their city. For who can say what best represents Barcelona? Is it Gaudí's unfinished extravaganza, the Basilica of the Holy Family (*Sagrada Família*), or is it the Boquería market, a dazzling cathedral of gastronomy where every stall is an altar celebrating the full, colourful range of Catalonian produce? Is it the city's unparalleled collection of Romanesque art, or the 115,000-seat Camp Nou, Europe's largest football stadium? Is it the kaleidoscopic human comedy of the Rambla, or the concentration of palaces that constitute the oldest part of the city, the *Barri Gòtic*? Is it the demure Catalonian dance, the *Sardana*, or the fiery displays of prancing dragons and dancing devils with which Barcelona marks its fiestas?

Fine food, fashion, opera, nightlife, street theatre, art... Barcelona is all of this and more, a city that holds surprises for every visitor.

CITIES IN THE PATH OF HISTORY

Girona. View of the city and the Onyar River



Girona

Close to the Pyrenees, that formidable barrier that separates Spain from France, Girona rises on a spot overlooking the Onyar river. Such was Girona's strategic location that, over the centuries, it would earn the nickname of "city of the thousand sieges".

Ancient walls that still surround parts of the city attest to the fact that history was made here. Crossing the river from the more modern part of the city, one ascends to the Baroque cathedral and beyond that into a maze of streets where time has been encapsulated. To wander through the oldest parts of Girona is to recapture the aura of a medieval city. In particular, Girona's recovery of its Jewish Quarter, the *Call*, has brought back to life an important part of Girona's heritage, a warren of alleyways and courtyards that until recently lay concealed under a patina of more modern construction. Today it is one of the best-preserved testimonies of the Middle Ages in Spain.

Girona. Rambla de la Libertad





Pamplona



Zaragoza. Basílica del Pilar



S PAIN lies at the crossroads of history, and its cities reflect the comings and goings of great civilisations. Today, the modern city coexists with a strong sense of the past.



Girona. Onyar River, detail of houses



Girona



Zaragoza. Piedra bridge and Basílica del Pilar

Zaragoza

The mighty Ebro river flows past a city that has a special place in the Spanish heart. Zaragoza is the model of a large, modern city, regional capital of the old kingdom of Aragon. Its avenues and building are, by Spanish standards, of fairly recent vintage. In fact, much of the city was rebuilt after being destroyed in a particularly ferocious siege by the French during the Napoleonic Wars. Zaragoza is inextricably linked to the Virgin of the Pillar, the patroness of Spain. Competing for attention with Zaragoza's cathedral, the *Seo*, the sumptuous *Basílica del Pilar* is a place of pilgrimage for the Spanish faithful. It opens out onto the *Plaza del Pilar*, an airy space where a thousand pigeons swirl. The square and its surroundings are a condensed history of the city: a remnant of the old Roman walls here, a tower that was once part of a Moorish palace there, the Gothic-style Lonja where trade was conducted in the 16th century, the city hall over there... The exquisite Aljafería Palace is a reminder that Zaragoza was an important city in Moorish times. The Moorish presence is still felt here, and in the city of **Teruel** to the south, with fine examples of Mudejar architecture (*mudéjar* being the term used to describe the style favoured by the Moorish minorities).

Zaragoza. The Aljafería



Teruel. Cathedral, Mudejar-style tower



Pamplona. City Hall



Pamplona. Plaza del Castillo



Pamplona. Ronda del obispo Barbazán

Pamplona

Midway between the Pyrenees and the Ebro, the capital of Navarre lay in the path of history. But today, historical monuments are not what its name conjures up. For one week in July, Pamplona is the setting for the world's biggest outdoor party, when thousands congregate here for the San Fermín fiestas and the running of the bulls. Such is the intensity and frenzied nature of this wild, round-the-clock festival of food, wine and dance, it is hard to believe that for the remaining fifty-one weeks of the year Pamplona is an alluringly serene city. Pamplona is named after the Roman general, Pompey, which gives an indication of how far back

into history its roots go. But although Pamplona has its fair share of monuments, its distinguishing feature are its parks and open spaces, some in converted locations such as the porticoed *Plaza del Castillo*, where bullfights were held until the middle of the last century, or the *Ciudadela* (citadel), 16th-century fortifications now surrounded by well-tended greenery. Pamplona's parks and streets are an open invitation for strolling or for joining the townsfolk in one of their favourite pastimes, visiting the taverns and restaurants of the city and sampling some of the rich foods and hearty wines for which the region is famous.

CITIES OF SUN AND

THE light in eastern Spain is special. The painter Joaquín Sorolla knew this well, and was able to capture that unique

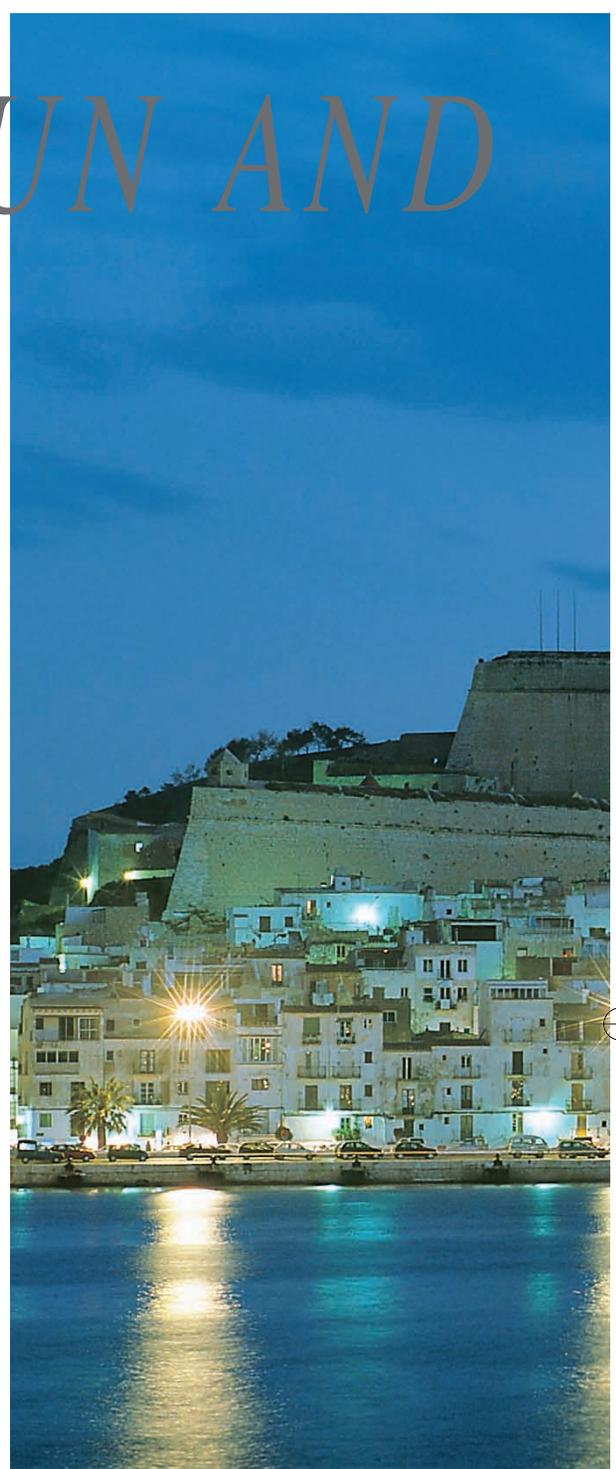
Alicante. Sunset



radiance in brilliantly coloured pictures of his homeland.

Invading Arabs and Berbers fresh from their

arid homelands were drawn to this area and, in particular, to its fertile but untended lands, which they turned into flourishing farms and gardens by adapting and improving the irrigation systems left by the Romans.



Ibiza



Murcia. Holy Week images by sculptor Salzillo

LIGHT



Valencia. Central market



Palma de Mallorca



Orange trees





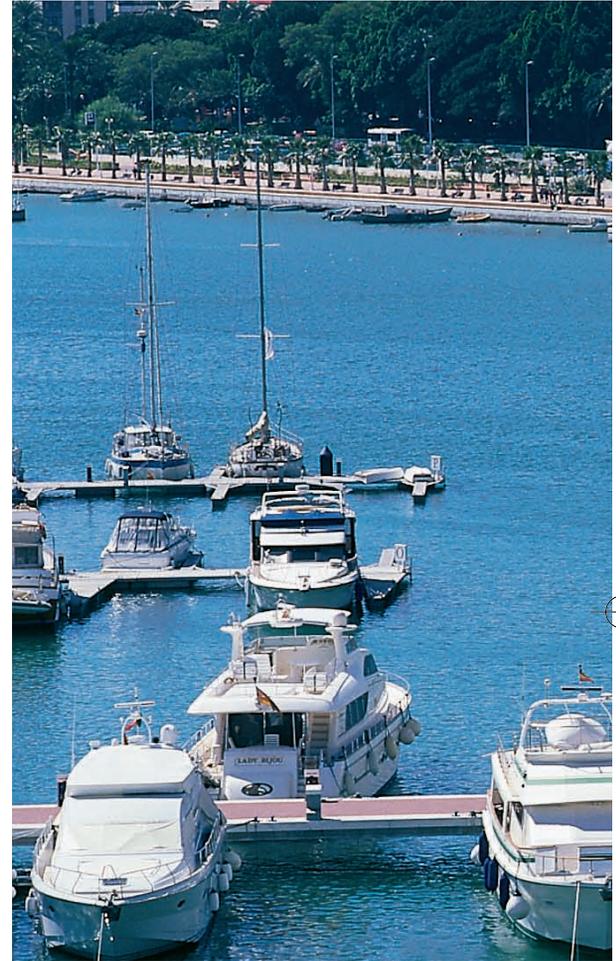
◀◀ Valencia. Botanical Gardens

◀ Valencia. Cathedral and Miguelete Bell Tower

Valencia

Valencia has been a city of industry, commerce and artistic creativity since Greek times. Yet what strikes visitors most is this music-loving city's year-round festive air, which reaches fever pitch during the *Fallas* (from the Latin "facula" or "fax", meaning torch) in spring, a festival revolving around the burning of enormous, elaborate *papier maché* tableaux. It is yet another of those Spanish fiestas that started rather modestly –carpenters would burn wood shavings to mark the end of winter– and evolved over the centuries into an enormous party involving the entire population of Spain's third largest city.

Valencia is a city where, thanks to mild year-round weather, life is lived outdoors, in pavement cafés and luxuriant public gardens. Even Valencia's most venerable monuments have a light, flamboyant feel. And its huge market place, one of the world's largest and most colourful, feels like a festival, as foods from the surrounding area –including the ingredients of that famous Valencia dish, *paella*– are traded in a huge vaulted space, across the street from the old silk exchange, the Lonja.



Valencia. Fallas



Alicante

The Moors found more riches further south along Spain's eastern coast. The town of Elche is a veritable forest of date palms, planted here by the Moors generations ago, though the first trees were introduced centuries earlier by the Carthaginians. Elche is one of many towns that can be visited from Alicante, a dazzling white city on the edge of the Mediterranean. Protected by two hills, one of them crowned by the impressive Santa Barbara Castle looming 500 feet above sea level, Alicante is said to enjoy the best climate in Europe. No wonder the warlike Arabs who came here soon succumbed to the pleasures of the good life. As capital of the popular Costa Blanca, Alicante's name continues to be linked with fun and relaxation.



Alicante

Alicante. Explanada de España



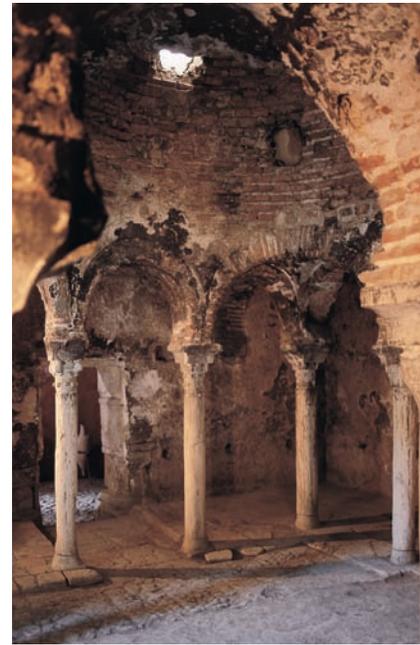
Paella



Palma de Mallorca

Light is the key ingredient in the make-up of Palma de Mallorca, the capital of the Balearic islands. They say that the best way to approach Palma is from the sea. First you notice the cathedral looming into view, then the circular Bellver Castle overlooking the city, a fortress so well preserved it is hard to believe it was built six hundred years ago. Travellers never

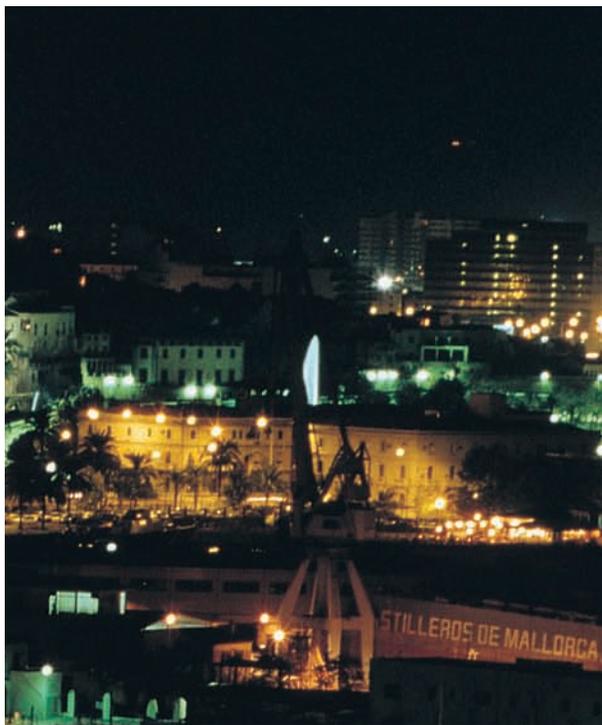
fail to remark on the luminosity of the cathedral's interior, the light flooding down from its stained-glass windows, making it completely different from the solemn churches of mainland Spain. This open, bright atmosphere permeates Palma, until you plunge into the Old Quarter, a labyrinth of cool, narrow streets where one can seek refuge from the heat of a bright Majorcan summer day.



Palma de Mallorca. Ritual Moorish baths



Sailing regatta in Palma Bay



Palma de Mallorca. Cathedral seen from the Bay



Ibiza

Ibiza

The city of Ibiza sums up the character of the island with which it shares its name. Its ancient walled old town, the D'Alt Villa, officially declared a UNESCO World Heritage City, hints at a past stretching back to antiquity –Ibiza was always a major trading post. Today, it vibrates with the freewheeling spirit of an island that has become synonymous with fun and fashion, trendy boutiques and a nightlife that constitutes an after-dark legend.



Mallorca. Toro de Talapí



Murcia. Cathedral

Murcia

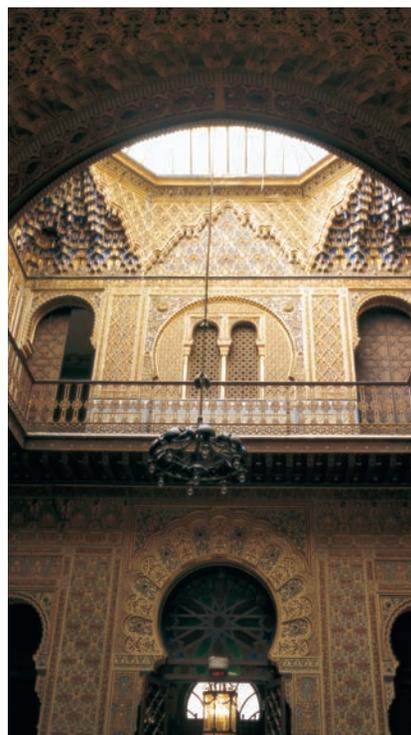
On the banks of the Segura river, the Moors founded Murcia, at the heart of what came to be known as the “*huerta*” (orchard or market garden), from which this engaging, unhurried city still derives its livelihood. Murcia is know among Spaniards for the wealth of its “*huerta*” –enormous shiny peppers

and tomatoes, aubergines and fava beans, the short-grained rice introduced by the Moors and which is the basic ingredient for a myriad local dishes. Indeed, some of the restaurants that serve the specialties of the region are treated as places of pilgrimage by discerning gourmets.

Murcia. Romea Theatre



Local produce

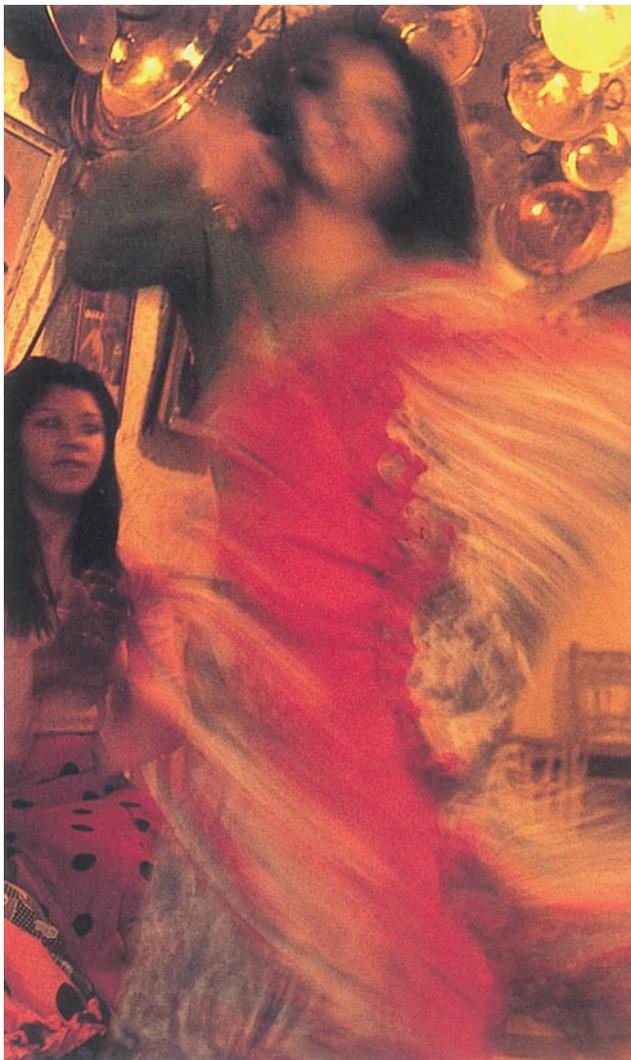


Murcia. View of the Casino



Cordoba. Mosque

CITIES OF FABLED KINGDOMS



Granada. Dancing at Sacromonte

AS you travel to the cities of southern Spain, there is always something to remind you that civilisations have flourished here since antiquity –some so old as to be lost in time and take on near legendary proportions.



Cadiz. City Hall

Cadiz. View of the Cathedral

Cadiz

It is said that Cadiz was once part of the fabled kingdom of Tharsis, a land rich in gold and silver, mentioned in the scriptures and the writings of Greek historians. What we do know is that Cadiz is the oldest continuously inhabited city in Western Europe. Three thousand years ago, Phoenician merchants established a trading colony on what was then an island (since joined to the mainland by a sandy isthmus). There is a textured, crusty quality to Cadiz. It has to do with the fact that the city is almost entirely surrounded by water, limiting its expansion, so that much of its layout has an unchanging character. Wherever you are in Cadiz, the sea is never far away. There is a special clarity to the air, and an ever-present scent of sea-salt to remind you that the city's fate and fortunes have always been linked to the sea. It also has the effect of whetting one's appetite in anticipation of some of the seafood dishes that Cadiz chefs are so proficient at preparing, and that are to be eaten accompanied by a good sherry from neighbouring Jerez.



Cadiz. Carnival

Seville. Torre de Oro and Guadalquivir river



Seville

This is Andalusia, and to many, Andalusia means just one thing, i.e., Seville. Who can fail to fall for the charm of this city on the banks of the Guadalquivir river, especially during the season when its hundreds of orange trees are in flower and the nights are full of magic? Once Spain's largest city, the gateway through which the riches of the New World poured, today the capital of Andalusia is a prosperous hub of commercial and industrial activity, the centre of a rich agricultural region, yet such is Sevillians' easy-going attitude to life, such is their capacity for fun and fiestas, that visitors are left wondering how they ever get any work done. The city puts an enormous effort into the lavish Holy Week processions in spring, a celebration that manages to combine religious solemnity with Andalusian flair. No sooner is that finished than it is time for the April Feria, a round-the-clock party that lasts a week. Seville will pull out the stops for any occasion, be it an international sports event, a world fair, or a royal wedding. It could be that Seville learned to enjoy the finer things in life in the days of the Moors, when it was the capital of King Al-Mutamid, known for his love of poetry and music. The Moors left behind marvellous examples of their architecture, such as the Giralda, at one time a minaret and today part of Seville's cathedral, Christendom's third largest.



Seville. The Giralda





Cordoba. Mosque



Cordoba. Patio in the old Jewish Quarter

Cordoba

To fully grasp the glory of Moorish Spain, the land they called *Al-Andalus*, one has to travel up the Guadalquivir river to what was once the capital of the most powerful kingdom of Islam. In its heyday, Cordoba was a city of more than half a million people, with hundreds of mosques, a *medina* that pulsed with the activity of the finest craftsmen, a centre of science and learning, the most civilised capital in Europe. Its crowning jewel was the Great Mosque. Part of it was destroyed to make way for a cathedral, built over its centre, but you can still recapture the spirit of *Al-Andalus* as you wander through its forest of hundreds of delicate marble columns and double-tiered arches. Leaving the Mosque, today's Cordoba greets the traveller with all the charm of a tolerant and congenial Andalusian city. Taverns beckon with offerings of tasty *tapas* (delicious snack-like servings) and fine wines, *plazas* (squares) and *patios* (courtyards) are alive with flowering roses, geraniums and carnations, the strains of flamenco waft from balconies and windows, beautiful examples of fine filigree jewellery, intricate leatherwork and other handcrafted goods tempt the traveller. Cordoba is a UNESCO World Heritage site.



Cordoba. Mosque

Granada

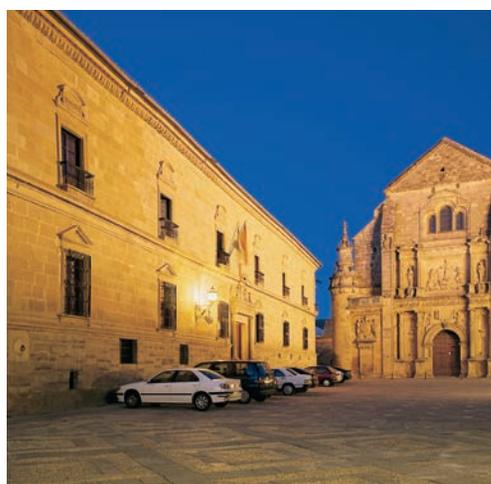
The search for Moorish treasure leads to Granada, capital of Spain's last Moorish kingdom. Few experiences can surpass the view from the Albaicín quarter across to the Alhambra –both World Heritage sites– at sunset, the towers of its palace-fortress glowing red against the backdrop of a snow-capped Sierra Nevada. Everything you have heard about the Alhambra and the adjoining Generalife gardens is true, and those with the luck and foresight to have reserved a room at the Parador (state-run luxury hotel) within its grounds will enjoy the experience all the more. Sitting on the Parador terrace, reading a good book, listening to birdsong, it is easy to forget that, down below, the university town of Granada hums with life.

For a taste of Andalusian history after the Moors' departure, a visit to the twin World Heritage Cities of **Úbeda** and **Baeza**, across the mountains north of Granada, will submerge you in two towns of Renaissance splendour.

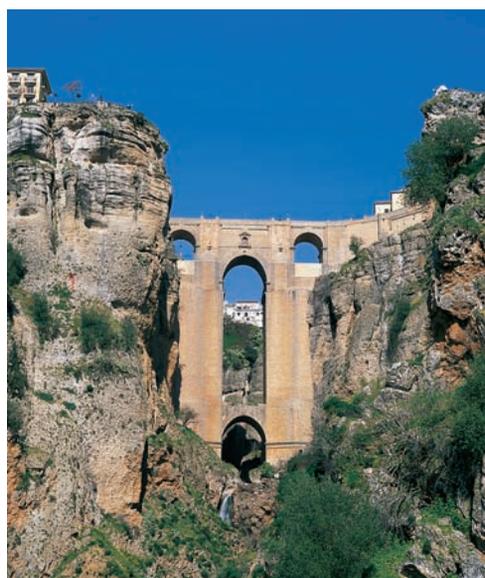


Granada. Alhambra

Úbeda (Jaén). El Salvador Church and Parador



Granada. Albaicín Quarter



Ronda (Malaga)

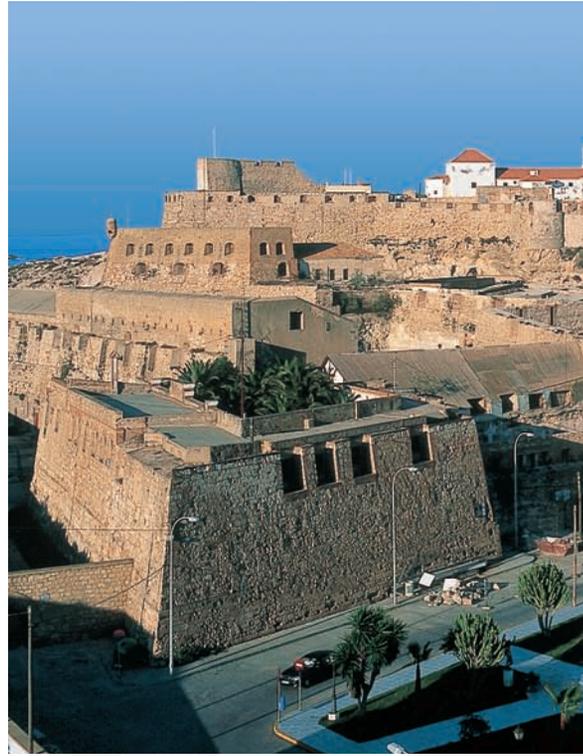
Malaga

For a dramatic setting, few towns can rival Ronda, one of Spain's most spectacularly located cities. Built at the edge of a dizzying gorge, Ronda, the quintessential mountain city, is one face of Malaga province. The other, of course, is Malaga's Costa del Sol, one of Europe's most cosmopolitan leisure areas.

Somehow its capital, the city of Malaga, seems to remain untouched by the internationalism of its neighbouring resorts, and is as Spanish a city as you are likely to find. Malaga has always had an unlimited capacity to absorb those who arrived from other shores to settle here, be they Phoenician traders or 19th-century English merchants.



Malaga. View of the harbour



Melilla

Melilla

As elsewhere in Andalusia, Malaga rings with echoes of its Moorish past, but there are two Spanish cities where the sound of the *muezzin's* call can still be clearly heard. A third of the citizens of Melilla are Muslims, for this is a city on the north coast of Africa, built by the Spaniards in the fifteenth century and part of Spain ever since. In a sense, however, Melilla is curiously less Moorish than many cities on the mainland, in that it lacks their ancient Islamic monuments. Instead, one finds a modern European town transplanted to Africa, vibrating with the atmosphere of a frontier city, a subtropical meeting place of two continents, with its duty-free bazaars, outdoor cafés and mingling of languages.

Ceuta

Ceuta, the gateway to Africa, lies on the shores of the Strait of Gibraltar, only twenty-two kilometres (just under 14 miles) from the coast of Andalusia. Its beaches are bathed by the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea. This autonomous Spanish city, perched on a peninsula crowned by Mt. Hacho, is joined to the African continent by an isthmus. Christians, Moslems, Jews and Indians have made Ceuta a city of the four cultures. Their peaceful co-existence and mutual respect have made an immeasurable contribution to the stature of a city that plainly feels very much part of Europe. Ceuta's cultural heritage is centred on the *Plaza de África*, the site, among others, of the Cathedral, the shrine of the city's patron saint, and the Assembly Building. Close by stand the Royal Walls, erected over the course of the 16th and 18th centuries as an impressive defensive bulwark. Ceuta is home to seven museums, including those housing the "Legion" and the "Regulars" collections, both of an evident military bent. In addition, the city possesses a large leisure area, the Mediterranean Park (*Parque del Mediterráneo*), located near the marina and fishermen's quarter. Situated on the outskirts of Ceuta are spots of great scenic beauty and ecological value, along with picturesque communities, such as Benzú, where visitors are strongly recommended to try the traditional local cuisine, on which North African customs have left their distinct mark. Similarly, Ceuta is the ideal place both to enjoy water sports and scuba-diving, and to shop for presents, which tend to be cheaper than on the Spanish mainland.



Ceuta

CITIES IN THE LAND OF CASTLES



Segovia

IN the central plains of Spain, the very stones tell stories. At times they speak of battles and warfare, at others of cultural brilliance, of prosperity, of spiritual quest. This is the land of castles and cathedrals, monasteries and palaces.



Segovia

Segovia

Close your eyes, and picture a castle in Spain: chances are you have imagined Segovia's *Alcázar*. If it is castles you are looking for, you are going to find plenty of them in the old kingdom of Castile, along with palaces and monasteries and cathedrals.

Segovia's *Alcázar* is everybody's idea of what a castle should look like, but in fact it acquired its fairy-tale appearance fairly recently, after a fire destroyed part of the original medieval fortress in the 19th century. You will not find anything to equal Segovia's other, somewhat older, major landmark, the 2000-year-old Roman aqueduct which cuts through the very heart of the city. Even more awe-inspiring than its size—close to 100 feet high, and 2,700 feet long—is the feat of engineering it represents, for the enormous granite blocks used in its construction were cut so perfectly that no mortar or lime was needed to cement them. Not far from the aqueduct, in any number of establishments, the traveller comes across another thing for which Segovia and Castile are famous: succulent roast lamb and sucking pig which alone justify a pilgrimage to this World Heritage city.

Segovia by night



Segovia. Church of San Esteban



Segovia. Cathedral and Plaza Mayor





Ávila. Walls

Ávila

If Segovia is a place to satisfy physical hunger, Ávila, another of Spain's World Heritage sites, is more given to things of the spirit. It is no surprise that Spain's feisty mystic, Saint Theresa, came from this walled city, perched on a hill at an altitude of 3,700 feet above sea level in the midst of a stark landscape of climatic extremes. Within the 36-foot walls that encircle the old city—they can be viewed in their full dimension from the Cuatro Postes look-out outside the city—is a complex of sober palaces, churches, convents and monasteries that are a representation in stone of the tough, austere Castilian spirit. A stay in Ávila's Parador, in a restored 15th-century palace, reinforces the impression of being immersed in the Middle Ages.

Ávila. Shrine to Nuestra Señora de Sonsoles



Ávila. View from the Cuatro Postes look-out





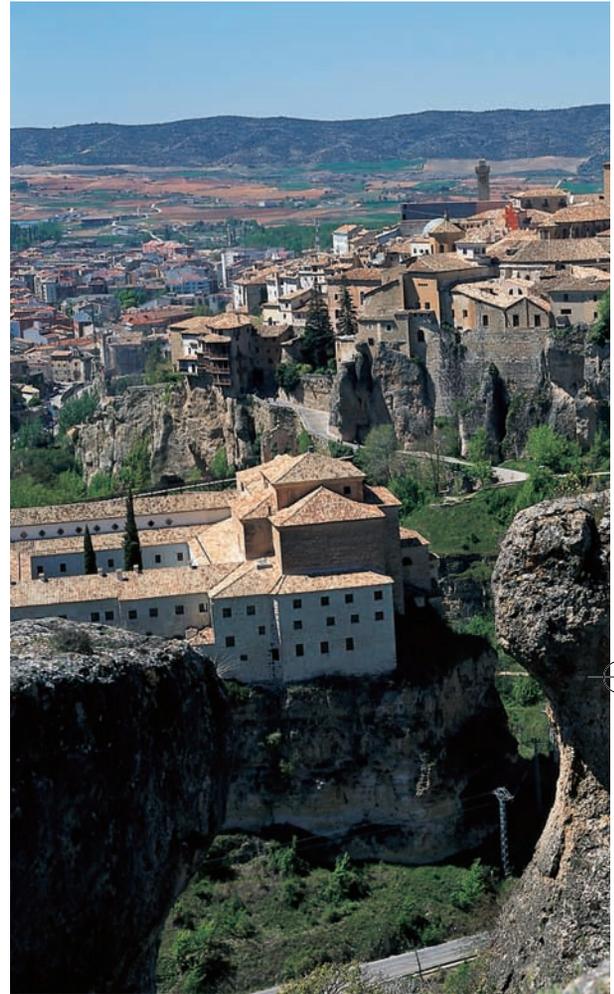
Salamanca. Plaza Mayor, the main square

Salamanca

While Ávila is all red-tinged granite, “golden” is the adjective invariably used to describe the world Heritage City of Salamanca and its sandstone buildings. Salamanca’s claim to fame is as a university town, one of Europe’s first –the university was founded nearly eight centuries ago– and still one of its liveliest. Since the Middle Ages, Spanish university students have had a reputation for being a mischievous, rambunctious lot, and some of this freewheeling spirit has rubbed off on their town. Salamanca’s literary heroes are not knights or kings, but the procuress and the confidence trickster portrayed in *La Celestina* and *Lazarillo de Tormes*, two 16th-century classics set in Salamanca.

Life here revolves around what is generally considered to be Spain’s finest *Plaza Mayor* (main square), a gathering place for residents and students alike, where the human landscape is even more interesting than the surrounding architectural gems, and where you are likely to hear Spanish spoken with more accents than you ever imagined existed, for this is a city to which foreign students come in their thousands to polish their “*castellano*” (as Castilian Spanish is often referred to).

Cuenca. View of the city

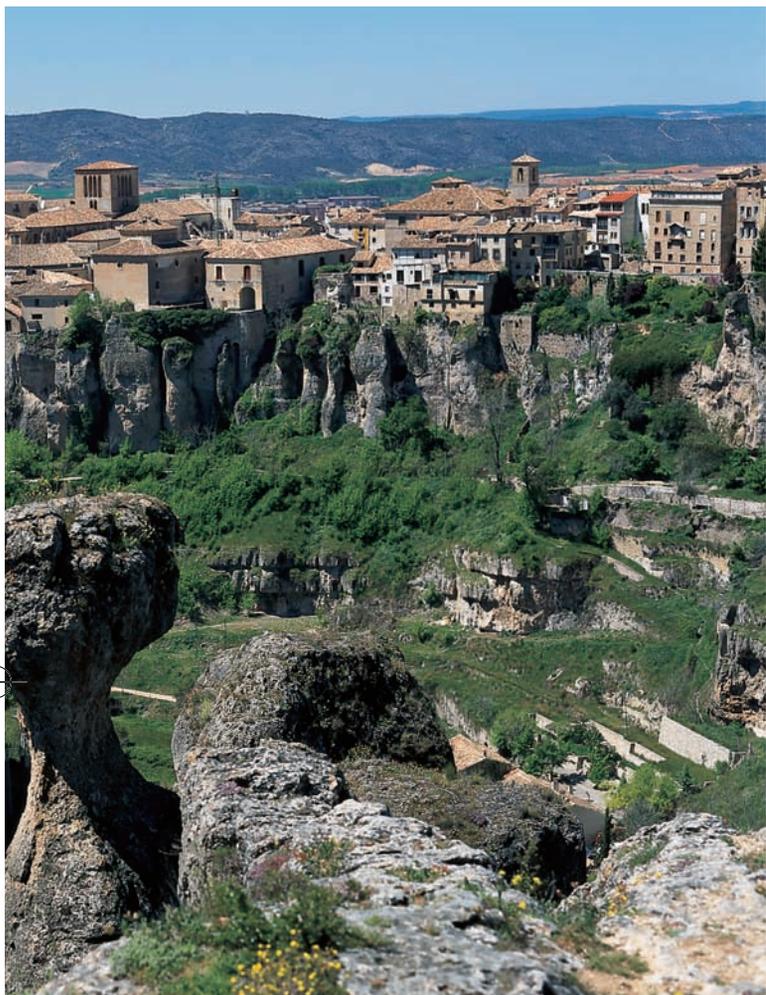


Salamanca. The “New” Cathedral



Salamanca. Renaissance medallion



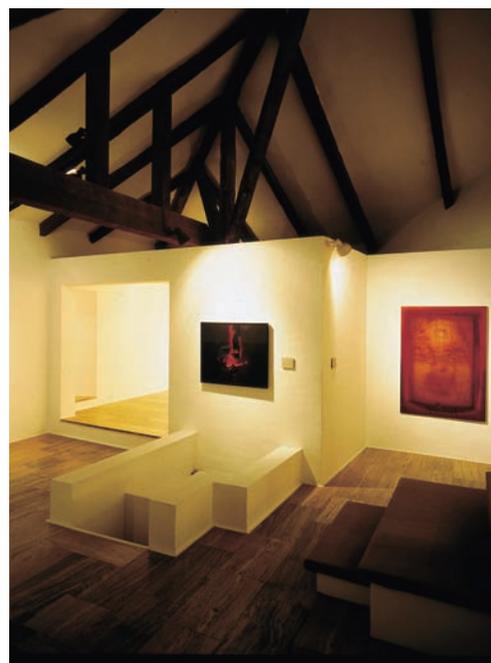


Cuenca. The “Hanging Houses”



Cuenca

Standing on a rocky promontory hewed by the rivers Huécar and Júcar at the northern edge of La Mancha is this World Heritage City of the hanging houses. Cuenca’s streets lead ever upwards –the difference in altitude between the lowest part of the city and its crowning castle is around 300 feet– and space was at such a premium that some 14th-century houses cling to the cliff side on the edge of the city, in a gravity-defying effort to make the most of every inch: these are the *Casas Colgadas* that are a symbol of Cuenca. The city’s impossible topography might have condemned it to an existence as a provincial backwater, had not artistically-enlightened Spaniards realised what a treasure they had in Cuenca and injected new life into this breath-taking city.



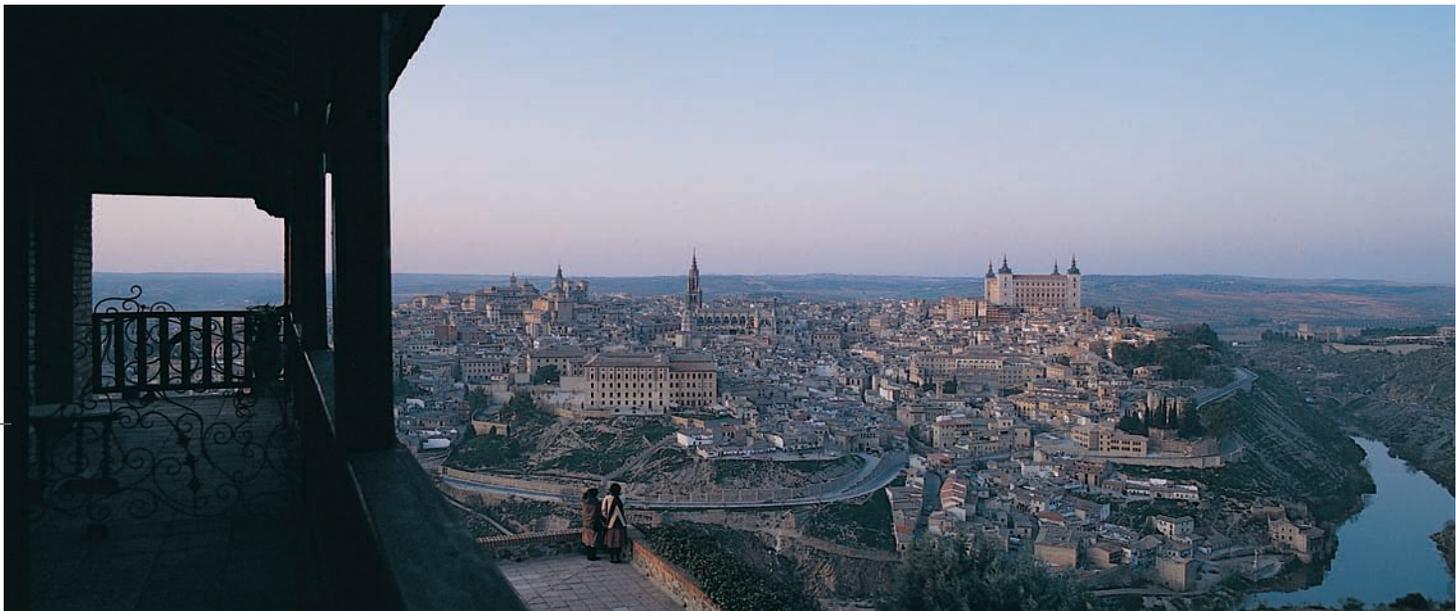
Cuenca. Museum of Abstract Art

Toledo

In the days of battles and sieges, there was every reason to choose an inaccessible site for a city. The World Heritage City of Toledo towers on top of a hill protected by a bend in the Tagus river to form a natural fortress, complete with moat. No wonder El Greco, that painter of the elongated, was attracted to this vertical city.

Once fought over by armies, Toledo was to become a symbol of tolerance as the 13th-century capital of King Alfonso the Wise (*el Sabio*), a centre of scholarship that attracted Moorish, Jewish and Christian men of learning. Its two surviving synagogues –El Tránsito and Santa María la Blanca– remind visitors that this was

once home to one of Spain’s largest Jewish communities. Toledo’s name is also associated with the steel swords once made here and still offered as tourist souvenirs, though travellers might be more attracted to a meal of Toledo-style partridge –this is hunting territory– or a taste of the local marzipan.



Toledo. View from the Parador



Toledo. "The Burial of Count Orgaz", by El Greco



Alcalá de Henares. University



Alcalá de Henares. Plaza de Cervantes ▲
Toledo. Jewish Quarter ►



Alcalá de Henares

Situated just a stone's throw from the country's capital, Alcalá de Henares, which is considered to be the world's first planned university city and has received a boost through its designation as a World Heritage City, is currently experiencing a renaissance on both the cultural and tourist fronts.

Its gradual rise to a pinnacle of splendour dates back to the late 15th century, with the foundation of the University by Cardinal Cisneros. The ensuing urban renewal gave birth to a genuine university city, dotted with student residences, convents, monasteries and churches. Outstanding among the buildings making up the University ensemble are the San Ildefonso University Hall of Residence (*Colegio Mayor*), the Santo Tomás de Villanueva Quadrangle (*patio*) and the *Patio Trilingüe* (Three Languages Quadrangle where Latin, Greek and Hebrew were taught), as well as the Great Hall and Chapel. Eminent personages, such as Antonio de Nebrija, father of the first Castilian Spanish Grammar and the Polyglot Bible (parallel texts in Hebrew, Latin, Greek and Chaldean), and other illustrious figures from Spain's Golden Age, such as Quevedo, Calderón de la Barca, Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molina, San Juan de la Cruz, etc., passed through here as students or teachers, but it is Miguel de Cervantes, the author of "Don Quixote", who has become the leading embodiment of the city where he was born and spent the first years of his life.

Alcalá's arcaded *Calle Mayor* (Main Street), one of the longest and best preserved in Spain, the Cathedral (known in Spanish as a *Catedral Magistral*, a title conferred upon collegiate churches whose canons were also professors –*magister*– at the University. It is one of only two still remaining in the world), the Archbishop's Palace, the San Bernardo Convent and the San Felipe Neri Oratorio are some of the city's best-known landmarks.



Cáceres. Golfinos Palace



Cáceres. Moctezuma Palace



Cáceres. Plaza Mayor (main square)

Cáceres

The Tagus river flows westward through scenic countryside and, before reaching Portugal, crosses the province of Cáceres. Its capital is yet another of those Spanish cities which has been declared a World Heritage site and cities whose historic centre seems to be entirely made up of palaces. Many are still used as family residences, a few are open to visitors, and one –the 14th-century palace of the Comendador de Alcuéscar– is part of the Parador chain, providing the

chance, if only for a short time, to live like nobility. In late winter, hundreds of storks migrate here from Africa to build their large nests on the towers and belfries of medieval Cáceres, filling the air with their characteristic clacking sound. You can watch their comings and goings while enjoying refreshment at one of the sidewalk cafés in the animated Plaza Mayor, the main square where the modern part of Cáceres and the Old Quarter join.

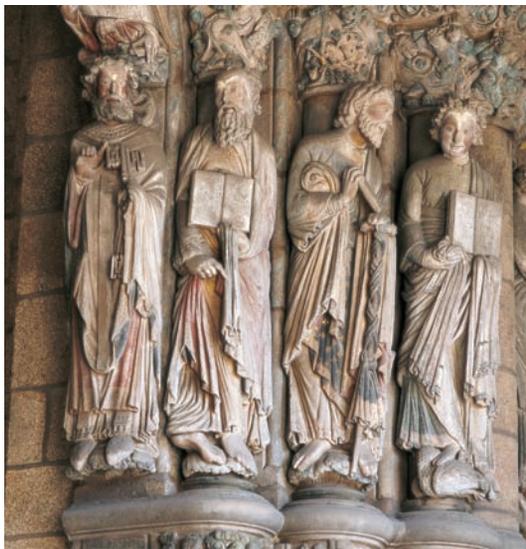
MORE than a thousand years ago, a spot called the Field of Stars (*Campus Stellae*)

was identified as the last resting place of the Apostle Saint James. It soon became a place of worship, destination for millions of Medieval pilgrims. Three different routes,

CITIES



*Santiago de Compostela Cathedral.
Portico of Glory*



two through the interior and one hugging the coast, converged on the capital of Medieval

Christendom, Santiago de Compostela.

OF THE PILGRIM'S WAY



Santiago de Compostela.
"Hostal Reyes Católicos" Parador

Santiago de Compostela

Just imagine how the medieval pilgrims felt when they topped the crest of what came to be known as the Mountain of Joy and caught their first glimpse of Santiago de Compostela and its cathedral, the shrine of Saint James (*Santiago*). It was the reward for a pilgrimage that entailed months of hardship.

Over the last thousand years, this path has been trodden by millions. And they still come, motivated by faith, adventure or curiosity. Most make straight for the *Plaza del Obradoiro*, a space built on a larger-than-life scale, as if to imbue the new arrival with a proper sense of humility. Before him rises the Baroque façade of the cathedral, while to one side stands the *Hostal de los Reyes Católicos*, a hospice built in the 16th century to give shelter to the pilgrims. Today, as a luxurious hotel, it continues to provide comfortable lodgings to weary travellers. The dominant theme in this World Heritage City is granite, broken by splashes of ochre-coloured lichen, and the place would appear rather funereal – it is, after all, a city built around a grave – were it not for that other, human ingredient in the mix, accounted for not only by its numerous visitors but by the fact that Santiago is a university town, whose students ensure that evenings in this city are lively affairs, in which music, conversation and great food – especially shellfish from the Galician coast – figure prominently.

Santiago de Compostela.
Cathedral and Plaza del Obradoiro

Lugo

Lugo was the last major city the pilgrims came to as they crossed over into Galicia and neared their final destination. Lugo is famed for the Roman walls, officially declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which still encircle the city centre, and one of the most romantic experiences in Spain is to walk along the top, following the same path imperial sentries patrolled so long ago. A visit to Lugo is best enjoyed if it coincides with the colourful weekly market, when farmers bring in produce from the surrounding country, a land of rolling hills, grazing cattle and herds of free-roaming horses, a land of witchcraft, magic and mystery.



Lugo. City Hall

Lugo. Roman walls



Lugo. Old Quarter





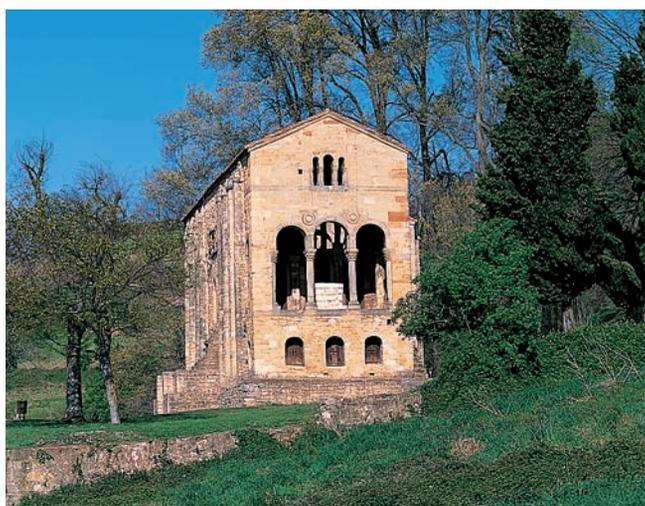
Oviedo. Cathedral

Oviedo

An alternative, more northerly route to Santiago ran along the Cantabrian coast, crossing the verdant Principality of Asturias. It was here the Christians first rallied against the Muslim invasion of Spain, and locals like to point out that “Spain is Asturias, and rest is what we took back from the Moors”. Its capital, Oviedo, is appropriately steeped in history and all the more enjoyable thanks to an intensive programme that has rendered much of the city’s historic

centre a traffic-free pedestrian precinct. But Oviedo is no mere museum piece. Asturians continue to go about their business, and part of the daily routine is a visit to one of the city’s many busy taverns to drink their favourite tittle, fresh apple cider, perfect for washing down meals of *fabada* (the famous indigenous bean stew), Asturian beef, seafood from the nearby coast and sharp Cabrales cheese from the Asturian mountains.

Oviedo. Santa María del Naranco



Oviedo. Plaza Trascorrales





León. Parador "Hotel San Marcos"

León

The spirituality of the pilgrimage era found its expression in light and colour in the fantastic stained glass windows of León Cathedral, one of the mighty churches that rose along the Pilgrims' Way. One can spend hours watching the play of light, as filtered sunbeams pour down from above, but other attractions beckon in this city founded by, and named after, the Roman legionnaires who came here seeking the rich minerals of the surrounding lands.

For a visit in style, you can stay at one of the city's most outstanding monuments, the *Hostal de San Marcos*. Once a monastery and hospice for pilgrims, it was rebuilt splendidly in the 16th century, and is today one of Spain's most sumptuous hotels.



León. Cathedral

León. Botines House, designed by Gaudí





Burgos

Burgos

Midway along the Spanish leg of the Pilgrims' Way, the soaring spires of Burgos Cathedral rise above a landscape of wheat fields. Founded in the ninth century at what was, and still is, an important crossroads, Burgos and its cathedral (begun in the thirteenth century and added onto over the following three hundred years) are identified with that legendary Spanish figure, El Cid, who was born near here and lies buried within. His tomb is easy to miss among the cathedral's eclectic

collection of works of art, relics, artefacts and religious curios. As a contrast to the grandeur of Burgos' most prominent landmark, a stroll along the promenades that border the river Arlanzón is the perfect way to work up an appetite for the local Castilian dishes.

Enormous flocks of merino sheep once reigned supreme in this part of Castile, and sheep—both in the form of roast lamb and as ewes' milk cheeses—are an important part of the gastronomic heritage.

Logroño

Crossing the Pyrenees from France, the various pilgrimage routes ran through Navarre into a region renowned for its vegetables, and for the local ways of cooking them. Yet there is one crop for which La Rioja has become a household name throughout the world: wine. It is little wonder that visitors to the regional capital, Logroño, are tempted to skip the sights—which include a leafy main square and some impressive medieval churches—and head straight for the various wineries to learn how Rioja wine is grown and produced and, of course, to sample the results. La Rioja is a relatively small region and can be explored in comfort from the capital. One particularly worthwhile visit is to Santo Domingo de la Calzada, the last stop in La Rioja for the medieval pilgrims. Many of them would have whispered a prayer of thanks to the man who gave his name to the town, one of those down-to-earth, practical-minded saints who occasionally crop up in Spanish history. To help 11th-century pilgrims ford the river Oja, Saint Domingo single-handedly built a bridge. Next, he supplied them with a proper paved road—the “*calzada*”—and converted an abandoned palace into a hospice for weary travellers. His spirit survives, for today's travellers can still find solace and comfortable lodging in the hospice which the good saint established and which is now a Spanish Parador.

Logroño. Cathedral



CITIES OF THE GREEN COAST

ALTERNATELY battered by fierce seas and shrouded in fine mists, Spain's northern coast is a land of lush vegetation and soft summers, of fine food and ancient traditions.



A Coruña (Corunna)

Santander. La Magdalena Palace



Santander

Midway along Spain's "Green Coast", between the Basque Country and Asturias, is Santander, a city where one is enveloped in graceful turn-of-the-century elegance. Santander's sandy beaches, stately buildings and tasty seafood have long been an attraction for those seeking a carefree summer sojourn.

At one time Santander, the capital of Cantabria—a region referred to simply as "The Mountain"—was virtually cut off from the rest of Spain. Then, in the 1700s, a road was hacked through the Cantabrian mountain range and the city's fortunes came to be linked with those of Castile, as the port through which Castile's wool, wine and wheat were shipped to Flanders, England and beyond.



A Coruña. Méndez Núñez Gardens

A Coruña (Corunna)

At the western extreme of Spain’s northern coast, near to what was once “the end of the world”, stands a 300-foot Roman lighthouse, the Tower of Hercules, to warn sailors that this is one of the Atlantic’s most treacherous shorelines. It is on the tip of a small peninsula occupied by the Galician city of A Coruña. The city folk pride themselves with being the most sophisticated and forward-looking in all Galicia, and as proof of their claim can point to Spain’s most modern interactive museum or the city’s exciting nightlife. But for many visitors the classic image of Coruña is its port front, light glinting off the characteristic glassed-in balconies of its buildings. The hustle and bustle of the harbour, not to mention the incredible variety of seafood served up in Coruña’s restaurants, tell of a city that is wed to the sea.



A Coruña (Corunna)

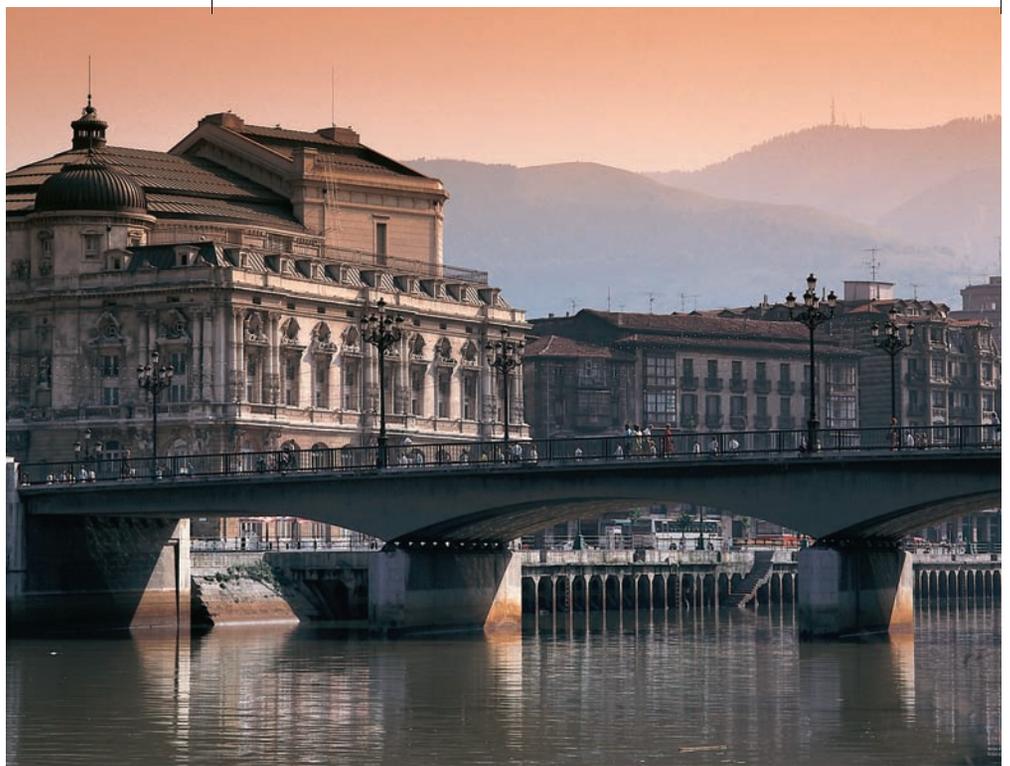
Santander



Bilbao

In complete contrast to its elegant neighbour, San Sebastián, the city of Bilbao has always been associated with the Basque Country's rise as an industrial power. Yet beneath its crusty exterior is a heart of gold, albeit one that beats with the pulse of a major banking centre and commercial city with strong international ties. Even now, the city is changing, with ambitious urban projects that, along with the Guggenheim Museum, will truly transform Bilbao into a city for the 21st century.

Some things never change, though. Being a Basque city, it boasts fabulous food, and its *tapa* bars, both in the Old Quarter and the wide avenues of the new section across the Nervión river, are among Spain's best and busiest.



Bilbao. Arriaga Theatre ▲

Bilbao. City Hall ►

Bilbao. Guggenheim Museum ▼



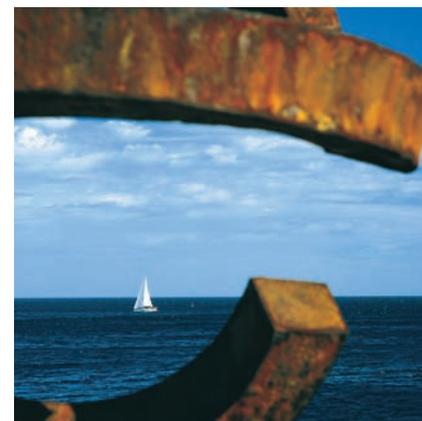
Donostia-San Sebastián

Thanks to a royal physician, Donostia can claim to be Spain's most elegant city. In the middle of the 19th century the Spanish Queen came here on doctor's orders to bathe in the waters of Spain's northern shores. Soon the Basque city, better known by its Spanish name –San Sebastián– became the summer resort for royalty and aristocrats, and its Belle Époque building and manicured gardens still speak of more genteel times. San Sebastián has changed often, though not always out of choice. Between the 13th century and the Napoleonic Wars, thirteen fires have

devastated the town or large parts of it. Even what the locals call "the Old Part" is not all that old, though it is old enough to contain traditional restaurants where one can confirm the city's renown as Spain's culinary capital. Before it drew royal patronage, San Sebastián was basically a fishing port. Basque fishermen are adept, not only at catching fish (whose language, legend has it, they understand), but at cooking and eating it too. Their love of good food and their recipes have together inspired a generation of innovative chef-restaurateurs who are at the forefront of Spanish cuisine today.



Donostia-San Sebastián. Fiesta



Donostia-San Sebastián.
"El Peine de los Vientos" by Chillida

Donostia-San Sebastián. Rowing regatta

CITIES OF THE ISLANDS

AT that point where Spain reaches out to touch the New World, the Canary Islands rise like a dream in the midst of the Atlantic. These are islands of exotic vegetation and dramatic volcanic

Canaries. Island architecture



landscapes, harbouring a gentle people with a character all their own. It is here where Spain and America meet.

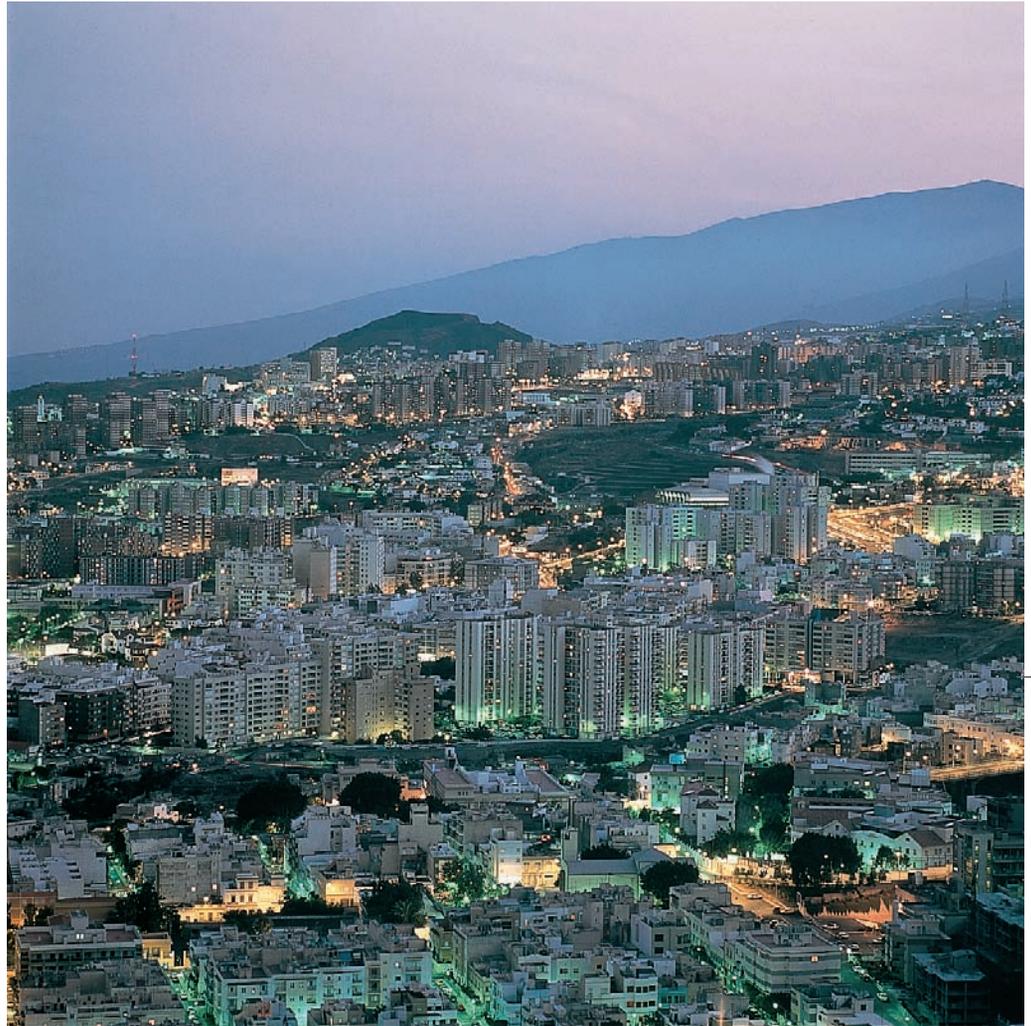


Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. Casa de Colón

FORTUNATE



*Las Palmas de Gran Canaria.
Centro Atlántico Modern Art centre*



Santa Cruz de Tenerife



Canary island flora

*Santa Cruz de Tenerife.
García Sanabria Park*



Las Palmas de Gran Canaria

“Cosmopolitan” is a frequent description of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, one of Spain’s fastest-growing cities, a bustling centre of busy shopping streets packed with duty-free bargains, a busy port where ships of a hundred nations call. But a relaxed atmosphere prevails in the oldest part of town, La Vegueta, where one can see why so many observers have compared the capital of Gran Canaria to Havana or Buenos Aires. Visitors should make a stop at the *Museo Canario*, where an outstanding collection of ancient artefacts inspires you to ponder on the lost race of the Guanches, the primitive people who ruled these islands before Europeans arrived in the 15th century.

Santa Cruz de Tenerife

Following the course set by Columbus, many Spanish ships made their last stop in the Canary Islands before heading for the Americas. It was a two-way traffic, for the islanders owe much of their easy-going nature, their cuisine and their melodious accent to the lands across the ocean.

The connection is evident in Santa Cruz de Tenerife’s carnival, an explosion of colour, music, fireworks and fun. Swept up in the unbridled exuberance of the carnival, you might think the party was never going to end, but there is in fact another, more tranquil face to Santa Cruz. This is a quiet-paced tropical city with lazy days made for people-watching, for sipping cool drinks on outdoor terraces, for strolling through parks and along avenues bursting with exotic vegetation.

Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. La Vegueta Quarter





View of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria

Santa Cruz de Tenerife



San Sebastián de la Gomera

Santa Cruz de Tenerife. Carnival

San Sebastián de la Gomera



San Sebastián de la Gomera

There is only one way to reach San Sebastián de la Gomera, capital of one of the seven major islands in the Canaries archipelago, and that is by boat. Columbus visited San Sebastián de la Gomera several times on his way to the New World, though it is rumoured he was not so much attracted to the city itself as to the charms of a certain lady, Beatriz de Bobadilla. Today, travellers use this relaxing city as a base from which to explore the natural beauty of an unspoilt volcanic paradise, and it does not take long for them to realise just why the Canaries are called “the Fortunate Islands”, where every season is springtime.

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