



John McGrath's ESPAÑA POR FAVOR Tour

April 12th to 20th 2024

\$3079 per person sharing land only
\$899 Single supplement - limit 4 per tour

ITINERARY

SPAIN IS DIFFERENT - Napoleon stated this after his first battlefield defeat at **BAILEN** in 1808 and it became a slogan, used by the Spanish in the 1960s, to promote tourism. They wanted to lure tourists to a country that promised more than just sun and oranges, flamenco shows and glorious beaches. In my days as a student of Spanish I had to write an essay defending my opinion on the statement. That was in the mid 1970s, just after Franco's death, when Spain certainly was different. However, even today Spain differs significantly from the rest of Europe and not just because they have a 3 hour lunch, they don't eat dinner until after 9 pm and some Spaniards still enjoy their daily siesta! Many French say that Africa begins south of the Pyrenees and indeed the influence of the Moors is widespread. Spain is at the crossroads of Africa, Europe and the Americas and is made up of several diverse regions, each with its often very distinct dialect, architecture, cuisine and culture.

On this trip, by visiting **Madrid and Barcelona** we will be exposed to many of those differences because the two cities are often considered rivals and opposites. However, if I can generalise, in many ways, I consider the Spanish to be quite like the Irish. Being positive, lively, and outgoing are common characteristics. They are mostly warm and receptive to strangers and appreciate interaction and relationships. They especially enjoy a party! We will spend 3 nights in Madrid, 4 in Barcelona and the focus will be on things Spanish - but I will also be entertaining on a few evenings at our hotels. There are several tours and meals organised and we are sure the group can generate the same camaraderie and craic we enjoyed on our recent trip to Ireland.

Friday, April 12th - Depart the US for Madrid

Saturday, April 13th - WELCOME TO MADRID



On arrival at Madrid airport, you will be transferred, by coach, to **HOTEL CATALONIA GRAN VIA**. Set in a restored historic building, this beautiful hotel has a rooftop pool and terrace with a stylish bar offering spectacular views over Madrid. The hotel is on the **Gran Via de San Antonio** and has lots of attractions on its doorstep. Some people will want to rest after the overnight flight but, for anyone who prefers to venture out, three of the world's most prestigious art galleries can be found within walking distance of the hotel.

One such museum is the **Reina Sofia**, its main attraction being one of Picasso's masterpieces, **Guernica**.

Very close by are the **Botanical Gardens and the Retiro Park**, where you can stretch out after your flight with a leisurely stroll. Just across from the Retiro you can enter old Madrid by making your way up **Calle de las Huertas**, which cuts through the **Barrio de las Letras (Literary Quarter)**. This area is brimming with antique shops, tapas bars and charming cafés. Tomorrow we will be having a guided tour of the **Prado Museum** so, although it's very nearby, best to leave it until then. Join your Travel Director at 18:00 for a Welcome Dinner at a local restaurant, as you get to know your fellow travellers over delicious food and wine.

DINNER & OVERNIGHT - HOTEL CATALONIA GRAN VIA

Sunday April 14th - THE ELEGANT SPANISH CAPITAL OF MADRID

After breakfast at our hotel a local tour guide will accompany us, by private coach, around the many highlights in central Madrid. The city is bursting with life and there is so much to see: **Plaza Mayor, Royal Palace, Plaza de España, Cibeles Fountain, Cortes/Parliament, Puerta del Sol** and more. Afterwards, with an art historian, we will visit the world famous, **Prado Museum**, an exceptional destination, especially for art lovers. The Prado showcases a complete collection of Spanish paintings from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century with works by **El Greco, Velázquez, Goya**, as well as Italian and Dutch masters. Don't miss **Velázquez's Las Meninas, Goya's The Third of May 1808, Hieronymus Bosch's The Garden of Earthly Delights**, and **Titian's Bacchanal**. The museum closes at 8pm so everyone can finish at their leisure and make their own way back to the hotel and make plans for dinner. Tomorrow will be an early start!

OVERNIGHT - HOTEL CATALONIA GRAN VIA (B)



Monday April 15th - BUS TRIP TO TOLEDO AND SEGOVIA

After breakfast we venture south (one hour) to the fascinating city of Toledo, situated high above the River Tajo, in La Mancha. **(Remember DON QUIJOTE DE LA MANCHA)** Toledo was Spain's capital until 1561. Arab, Jewish and Christian cultures had flourished, side by side, through the Middle Ages and the city is well known for its mixture of monuments, located within the walled, historic centre. Walk within these city walls, through the narrow cobbled streets, on a guided tour. Toledo was the home of the Spanish painter **El Greco (The Greek)** and there is a museum dedicated to his works. **The Cathedral, the Puente de San Martín, La Puerta de Bisagra, Monasterio de San Juan de los Reyes** and the **Alcázar** are all in walking distance.

After lunch at **Hacienda del Cardenal**, a typical Toledo restaurant, we continue on to spend late afternoon in **Segovia**. Some of the highlights are:

The **Roman Aqueduct** which is all of two thousand years old and is still in immaculate condition

The fairy tale castle **Alcázar**, which is said to have been the inspiration for the castle in Disney's *Sleeping Beauty*

The **Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Esteban Vicente**

The **Jewish Quarter** - starting at **Iglesia del Corpus Christi**

If you're feeling peckish before returning to Madrid, try **cochinillo** (roasted suckling pig). This is Segovia's local dish and one of Spain's best.

OVERNIGHT - HOTEL CATALONIA GRAN VIA (B)

Tuesday, April 16th - MADRID TO BARCELONA

There is huge competition between Madrid and Barcelona and, since I spent a year there, I am biased towards Madrid but even the madrilenos concede that Barcelona is a very beautiful city. I also have to agree. It has a wealth of architectural and cultural influences and is situated on the Mediterranean Sea. Barcelona is the capitol of Catalonia, a region that retains its own distinctive language and traditions and indeed many Catalonians do not consider themselves Spanish and crave independence from the rest of Spain. Everyone there understands Spanish (Castillano) but they prefer to speak Catalan - (so, don't be alarmed if you struggle when eavesdropping!)

After breakfast we are transferred to the impressive **Atocha Station** to take the **AVE (high-speed train)** to Barcelona - a **2.5 hour journey**. We will then be transferred to **Hotel Catalonia Passeig de Gracia** where we will stay for the next 4 days. The hotel is in a great, central location and the Ramblas are only a short walk away.

After settling in at our hotel we will meet to enjoy a buffet dinner of Spanish and Catalan dishes and drinks. This will be followed by the throbbing guitars and passion of Spain's dancing and musical extravaganza, the **Flamenco**.

DINNER & OVERNIGHT - H10 MADISON BARCELONA (B)



Wednesday April 17th - EXPLORING THE CITY

Barcelona is buzzing! It oozes vitality. After breakfast we explore its highlights with a local guide. Sightseeing begins in the medieval maze of the **Gothic Quarter**, a tangle of streets and squares just behind the old cathedral. We will pass through the impressive Old Town and see stunning examples of its daring Art Nouveau. The tour proceeds down the **Passeig de Gràcia**, and arrives at **Gaudí's** (still to be completed) masterpiece, the **Sagrada Família**. Work began on the church in 1882 and, since some of the original plans were destroyed in the Spanish Civil War, its design has been modified and influenced by numerous architects. It's hard to categorise what we see today but nonetheless, it is spectacular. Spend as much time as you like here and make your own way back to our nearby Hotel.



Tonight we will get a hands-on lesson in Spanish cuisine with an interactive cooking class. We will learn the secrets of **Paella** - Spain's most famous and delicious dish. It consists of rice, vegetables, seafood and meat - served up in a large pan. We will then dine on our efforts - complemented by excellent local wines.

DINNER & OVERNIGHT - H10 MADISON BARCELONA (B)

Thursday April 18th - Day trip to MONTSERRAT AND THE BLACK MADONNA

Today we will be taken by private coach to ascend the sacred mountain of **Montserrat** and view Catalonia's historic monastery. This is one of the most important pilgrimage sites in all of Spain and dates back to the 11th century. Enjoy the spectacular panoramic views before entering the dark, ornate **Basílica Real** and reaching the mystical **Black Madonna**, surrounded by an altar of gold. Return to Barcelona with a stop off at **Cavas Cordorniu Winery** where we will lunch on Tapas and sample Cava (sparkling white or Rose wine) and other local produce.



This evening you are free to explore Barcelona and dine in a restaurant of your choice.

OVERNIGHT - H10 MADISON BARCELONA (B)

Friday April 19th - BARCELONA AT LEISURE



Enjoy a relaxing day exploring the parts of the city that most interest you. Consider a stroll along the famous **Las Ramblas** or perhaps the short excursion to Gaudí's fascinating **Güell Park**. Art lovers won't want to miss two excellent museums, the **Picasso Museum** or the **National Art Museum of Catalonia**, while history buffs will appreciate the collections at the **Museum of Catalan History** and **Maritime Museum of Barcelona**. Sports fans can opt for a tour of **FC Barcelona's Camp Nou stadium**. A visit to the famous **La Boqueria market** is a real treat for food enthusiasts while others might enjoy a spell at the beach - it should be warm enough in April.

On our final night we join our fellow travelers at the nearby **El Cangrejo Loco** for a farewell dinner. The restaurant name translates as **The Crazy Crab** and, not surprisingly, specialises in seafood. We will again be served a dish, typical of the catalan region and of course accompanied by Spanish wine.

DINNER & OVERNIGHT - H10 MADISON BARCELONA (B)

Saturday April 2th - SAFE TRAVELS HOME

Sadly our adventures have come to an end and we're sorry to see you go. After breakfast, our coach driver will transfer everyone to Barcelona Airport, in good time for their flights. There is ample duty-free shopping at the airport for any last-minute gifts or souvenirs. Thank you for trusting us with your vacation and we sincerely hope you had a great time.

HOTELS

HOTEL CATALONIA GRAN VIA

Located in an ideal part of Madrid City Center this charming hotel was built in 1917 and features beautiful stained-glass windows. All rooms are decorated in neutral tones, have satellite TV, Wi-Fi and en suite bathrooms.

The hotel has a rooftop terrace with a pool and views over Gran Via, one of Madrid's main arteries. There is also a spa and gym. Situated between Puerta del Sol and Plaza de Cibeles, everything is on your doorstep. The Reina Sofía, Thyssen-Bornemisza and Prado Art Galleries are less than a 10 minutes away, on foot.

The restaurant serves Mediterranean and international cuisine. A buffet breakfast is available and the hotel's bar offers a wide range of cocktails. There is also a private lounge and an internet corner.

H10 MADISON BARCELONA

The hotel is conveniently nestled between the labyrinthine charm of the Gothic quarter and the urban flavor of the eternally hip El Born district, tucked away on a tiny street just five minutes from the busy thoroughfare via Laietana and the city's emblematic neo-gothic Cathedral. Shops, cafés and restaurants abound in the area, not to mention the famed Picasso Museum, which is a brisk 600 meters away. The smartly adorned lobby consists of a mini library and two intimate seating areas, one of which leads to the modish restaurant, The Avenue. Plush velvet sofas, marble flooring, abstract artwork, crystal chandeliers and carefully crafted furnishings are more on par with a ritzy townhouse than a rest stop. Though equally stylish, rooms feature a contrasting array of woods combined with leather and marble that emanate a decidedly more understated vibe.