

SPAIN - THE SILVER ROUTE



Photo courtesy: The Paradores of Spain, Parador de Zafra

20 DAYS

TOUR OVERVIEW

With the tour starting in Seville and finishing in Porto and staying in some of Spain's best historic hotels - the Paradores - this unique tour is designed for all who love Spain and off the beaten track travel.

From ancient times there has been a route through the mountains, valleys and plains uniting the north and south of Spain.

The 'Silver Route' has played a significant role throughout history and was one of the most important on the Iberian Peninsula at the time. It was originally a Roman road and is based on the belief that the Romans used this route to transport silver. From the first to the 19th c, the route was used as a foundation to build new roads therefore representing an extraordinary historical and artistic legacy. The Silver Way offers stunning scenery and outstanding views from rolling fields and lakes through forests, pastures and green hills. The route takes in numerous churches, chapels and bridges and includes some of the major Roman cities like Mérida and UNESCO protected Salamanca and Zamora.

Starting in the 9th c, as Santiago de Compostela was becoming popular as a Christian pilgrimage site and the Silver route began to be used by pilgrims travelling to and from the tomb of St James the Apostle.

SPAIN - THE SILVER ROUTE



TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

Zafra • Rio Tinto Mines • Mérida • Cáceres
Plasencia • Salamanca • Zamora • Douro International
Natural Park • Tordesillas • Verín • Valladolid • Santo
Estevo • Ourense • Pontevedra • Combarro • Sanxenxo
Cambados • Vigo • Baiona • Santiago De Compostela

(B/L/D) Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner included



DAY 1 - ARRIVAL SPAIN - SEVILLE

Extremadura Region - Zafra (3 nights)

Bienvenido! In Seville your tour director and luxury coach will be awaiting you at the airport for transfer to your first Parador (hotel) located in Zafra, a majestic medieval castle with a spectacular facade and elegant spacious rooms located close to the Portuguese border and the perfect base to explore the historical treasures of this region. Zafra's 15th c. castle, our base for the next 3 nights, was built over the former Moorish 'Alcazar' or Fortress. This part of Spain is known for its lamb stewed with vegetables, wine and paprika as well as several varieties of sausage. The friendly restaurant offers traditional local cuisine and wine and a delicious welcome dinner in the evening. (D)

DAY 2 - ZAFRA

Sleep in, have a leisurely breakfast and relax as the morning is yours to do as you wish. The scenic town of Zafra, reputedly one of the oldest towns in the Extremadura region and known for its cattle fairs, was originally a Muslim settlement known as Zafar. Together with a local guide, we will enjoy its beautiful squares, 18th c. arcades and cafes. Narrow streets, framed by arches and decorated with tiles, small balconies adorned with flowers set the scene creating the perfect picture postcard all to be explored in the afternoon.

Also included is a visit to El Caprichio di Cotrina, a fascinating museum inspired by Gaudi style architecture. Enjoy an evening at your leisure. (B)





DAY 3 - RIO TINTO MINES

Settled in and after a typical Spanish breakfast, we are now ready to explore and start our adventure with a guided tour of the Rio Tinto Mines. You would be forgiven for thinking you are still in Australia...the Rio Tinto mines, located in the north of Huelva province are reputed to be the oldest mines in the world; with the exception of mines in Cyprus, they certainly have most longevity of those being worked today - since before 1000BC.

In the late 19th century, they were the world's leading copper producer. Their eight square miles have provided a major source of European copper in both ancient and modern times. The red soil that dominates the landscape is caused by the oxidation of metal-bearing rocks over many millions of years. Today will take in the very best including a visit to the museum and a former colonial house. At night dinner at the hotel. (B/D)

DAY 4 - LOCAL VILLAGES ROUTE

Southern Extremadura Region - Mérida (2 nights)

After hotel check-out, this morning we venture north and discover the land of templars and nobles, local villages with simple, charming folk, rich in culture and learned in gastronomy. We follow the 'Templars Route', places all steeped in history and tradition to explore some of the regions charming local villages including Jerez de los Caballeros, Santa Marta de los Barros and Almendralejo where we will visit a local wine cellar.

The Parador in Mérida, an 18th c. convent, comes with its 'Garden of Antiquities', an archeological ensemble made up of Roman, Mudejar and Visigothic elegents. Located on a square and just 5 minutes from the Roman Theater, the jewel of Mérida's monuments, our hotel, has housed a hospital, jail and mental asylum. At night, dinner is planned at our charming Parador with the local cuisine known for its white truffles, 'Gazpacho' soup and almond and egg yolk cake. (B/D)





DAY 5 - MÉRIDA

The town of Mérida stands on the site of the Roman Augusta Emerita, founded in 25 BC and with more than 40,000 inhabitants was the largest Roman city on the Iberian Peninsula and its political and cultural hub.

Today Mérida has more Roman ruins than anywhere else in Spain and we will take in its history with a local guide during a morning walking tour and visit the amphitheater, where gladiatorial games, wild beast hunts and battles between wild animals were held on the large wooden platforms that formed the arena, the Roman circus, one of the grandest and best preserved in the Empire. The Los Milagros Aqueduct, Roman bridge and Temple of Diana are other must-sees. The afternoon is free to explore at your leisure. At night, our residence will host a magnificent 'Roman Dinner'. (B/D)



DAY 6 - CÁCERES

Central Extremadura Region - Plasencia (2 nights)

After breakfast and hotel check-out, we head for Cáceres, the region's second biggest city with a lively student population. At the heart of the old town so little changed since the 15th and 16th centuries that it is often used as a film set with the 150 m long Plaza Mayor, a memorable part of the walled old city all to be discovered with a local guide. This particular part of Spain is known for its beautiful pasture land dotted with evergreen oaks. The bark of the cork oak can be stripped every nine years for cork.

In the afternoon we head for Plasencia for our 2 night stay. Its Parador is ideally located in the old quarter, a strategic location along the ancient commercial and pilgrimage route known as the 'Ruta de la Plata'. The hotel occupies the Santo Domingo Monastery, built in the 15th century. Thick stone walls, vaulted ceilings and beautiful décor await you in the Gothic style interior. The Parador offers quaint rooms and is the perfect spot from which to explore the city and the surrounding natural landscape. Dinner at the hotel. (B/D)

DAY 7 - PLASENCIA

After breakfast, together with a local guide, we will discover the old quarter and remains of Plasencia's medieval walls, fortified towers and gates, including Puerta del Sol (Sun Gate) and the smaller Postigo de Santa María (Santa María Gate).

As we walk through the town center, you will come to the Plaza Mayor (Main Square), a must-see during the Martes Mayor (Great Tuesday) celebrations, which have been named a national tourist attraction. The town also boasts one of the most representative groups of historic buildings in the area, made up of the Romanesque Old Cathedral and the New Cathedral, which has Gothic and Renaissance elements.

This part of hidden Spain offers many local delicacies such as partridge stew, lamb, Extremadura-style fried breadcrumbs, the famous Ibérico ham and exquisite torta del Casar cheese. Since the afternoon and evening are at your leisure, this presents a perfect opportunity to sample the local delicacies. (B)



DAY 8 - SALAMANCA

Castilla y Leon region - Zamora (4 nights)

After breakfast and hotel check-out we head for Salamanca. Under Roman rule, it was an important post on the 'Silver Route' from the mines in Northern Spain to the south. The city is best known for its churches but in particular its university, founded in 1218 and it soon became the equal of Oxford and Bologna. After lunch, accompanied by a local guide, we will navigate most of its local treasures on foot.

The day continues as we head for Zamora for our 4 night stay. In the historic town center of the capital of Zamora, a beautiful palace awaits. Built on the site of an old Muslim citadel, today it houses a Parador. The hotel provides the opportunity to discover all the beauty of the natural, historical and artistic riches of this region. The medieval feel of the interior, which you will note in the armor, fine tapestries and canopy beds, blends with the Renaissance style of the courtyard, glass enclosed wooden gallery and coats of arms. Dinner at the Parador. (B/D)

DAY 9 - ZAMORA

Breakfast following a mid morning start with a guided visit to Zamora, another fortress town on the northern bank of the Rio Duero along the Ruta de la Plata (Silver Route). Roman, Visigoth, Moorish and Christian influences set the scene and today we will take in the best of its fascinating history. Zamora is dotted with 12th c churches, some of them still retaining their Romanesque charm. The afternoon and evening are at your leisure, make the most of your free time in this special part of Spain. (B)

DAY 10 - DOURO PARK - PORTUGAL

Today we briefly cross the border and explore the spectacular Douro International Natural Park including a relaxing boat trip. Located In the north east of Portugal's Trás-os-Montes region, the River Douro marks the border with Spain. This river can be seen flowing through the almost 122km long Natural Park.

The Douro International Natural Park covers the border areas of Miranda do Douro, Mogadouro, Freixo de Espada à Cinta and Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo, in the district of Guarda. You will be moved by the breath-taking views in the park. Water has carved the banks of the River Douro for centuries, forming monumental canyons covered with the local flora and populated by the various species of birds that inhabit the park. The combination of geography and Mediterranean climate provide the settings for a rich biodiversity in the entire park.

Junipers, cork-oaks, chestnut trees and holm oaks can be found in the park's forests, home to the Red Kite, Common Buzzard, also known as Buteo, and a wide variety of birds, such as the Blue Rock Thrush and the Golden Oriole. Dinner at the Parador. (B/D)





DAY 11 - TORDESILLAS - VALLADOLID

This morning we head for Tordesillas, this originally Roman town is known for the 'Treaty of Tordesillas'. Two years after Columbus had sailed the ocean, Spain's Catholic Monarchs sat down with Portugal at the negotiating table to hammer out a treaty regulating who got what in the New World.

Today we will enjoy a guided visit of the Mudejar-style convent, still home to 14 Franciscan nuns living in almost total isolation from the outside world. In the afternoon, together with a local guide, we will visit Valladolid where Columbus spent his final years. Little more than a hamlet in the early Middle Ages, Valladolid became a flourishing centre of the Spanish Renaissance to be explored in the old centre today. At night, dinner again at our Parador. (B/D)



DAY 12 - PUEBLA DE SANABRIA - VERÍN Galicia Region - Santo Estevo (2 nights)

After hotel check-out, we are heading for Santo Estevo, in the heart of the Ribeira Sacra region, a uniquely beautiful natural area in inland Galicia that is home to the Miño and Sil rivers, concealed within a great cloak of green woods, stands the Santo Estevo Monastery, which has been converted into a beautiful Parador.

The monastery's origins are believed to date back to the 6th and 7th centuries. It is easy to distinguish elements of the baroque and romanesque styles and the building has three incredible cloisters: one Romanesque, one Gothic and the third Renaissance, where you can spend a peaceful evening in a subdued atmosphere with the soft sounds of religious music as an accompaniment. Its beauty and historical features led the building to be declared a historic-artistic site in 1923. At night dinner at the Parador. (B/D)



DAY 13 - TAKING IN THE LOCAL SURROUNDS

After breakfast we will continue our journey with a relaxing panoramic day. Starting from the Parador, we will take in some unique and beautiful scenery in an area that is never overcrowded by tourism. We will visit the beautiful Sil River Canyon, which offers a spectacular explosion of color in spring and autumn and enjoy breathtaking picture postcard views of the riverbanks.

This is an area known for its churches and monasteries dating from the late 12th and 13th centuries, surrounded by magical forests of oaks and chestnuts. Sit back, relax and enjoy a scenic drive today. A typical Spanish dinner is again awaiting us at the hotel. (B/D)



DAY 14 - OURENSE - PONTEVEDRA Galicia Region - Pontevedra (3 nights)

After breakfast and hotel check-out, we head for Ourense, the city of water. Here eight bridges cross the Miño river, which in Roman times was a gold mine. Today there is no gold, but very valuable waters: thermal spring waters. In the afternoon, we will explore Pontevedra, Galicia's smallest provincial capital and perhaps its most striking port reaching the height of its glory in the 16th c.

The Parador, once the residence of the counts of Maceda, is located in the old quarter of the magnificent city of Pontevedra. You will be welcomed by a stately carved stone staircase leading to comfortable guest rooms.

You won't want to leave without taking a walk through the well-preserved old quarter of Pontevedra, most of which has been pedestrianized. Visit Santa María la Mayor Basilica, a jewel of Gothic architecture and La Virgen Peregrina Church, a chapel with a scallop-shaped floor plan and beautiful night lighting. Dinner at the Parador. (B/D)

DAY 15 - COMBARRO - SANXENXO - CAMBADOS

Today is planned for a visit to Combarro, where the old quarter is a representative example of three traditional architectural elements in Galicia: raised granaries, sea houses and crosses. A few kilometers from the city, the Rías Baixas region opens onto the Atlantic, it comprises of a series of four estuarine inlets located on the southwestern coast of Galicia.

This part of Spain is also renowned for its white wines made from the Albariño grape variety and we will enjoy a tasting in Cambados today. Dinner at the Parador. (B/D)

DAY 16 - BAIONA - VIGO

Today we head for the Santa Tegra Mountain region to enjoy great views of the mouth of the Minho River between Portugal and Spain. We continue on the Northern Spanish coast to visit Baiona where we walk on the ancient walls and enjoy free time in the center. The town was an important trading port in the middle ages with a medieval historical center situated by the outlet of Vigo Bay.

The length of Galicia's Atlantic coast is dotted with pastures favoured by wild horses, particularly in the hills south and east of Baiona. Locals occasionally head out to round the horses up in what becomes a day-long fiesta or 'Curro', In Vigo, we enjoy a boat trip on the Rías Bajas to see the mussel beds and have a tasting on board. Whilst on the coast, lets enjoy a typical seafood lunch. Dinner at the Parador. (B/D)



DAY 17 - SANTIAGO DI COMPOSTELA

Galicia Region - Santiago de Compostela (3 nights)

After a leisurely breakfast and hotel check-out we start the final part of our journey and head for Santiago di Compostela for our 3 night stay. Upon arrival we will enjoy a guided walking tour to take in the best of this magnificent town. Today will include a visit to local market, the cathedral and the tomb of St James the Apostle. The tomb was discovered in the year 813 and from that moment the pilgrimages started.

Our Parador, one of the most luxurious and beautiful hotels in the Paradores chain is located in Santiago de Compostela. In this city, the destination of millions of pilgrims, rays of sunlight illuminate the building façades in summer and the rain creates a magical ambiance that overtakes the cobbled streets in winter.

The Parador de Santiago, known as the Hostal dos Reis Católicos, is a blend of history, art and tradition, the dream of pilgrims and emblem of Santiago. It is located on Obradoiro Square near the cathedral, creating an area of spectacular beauty in one of the most visited provincial capitals in the world. A stay at this Parador means a visit to a truly unique and exclusive location. After hotel check in, the afternoon and evening are at your leisure. (B)

DAY 18 - WALKING THE CAMINO

Whilst we are in town, a part of our day is devoted to walking a small section of 'The Camino'. Also known in English as 'The Way of St. James', it covers a network of pilgrimages leading to the shrine of the apostle Saint James the Great in the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia in northwestern Spain, where tradition has it that the remains of the saints are buried. In the evening, a well deserved dinner awaits us at the Parador. (B/D)

DAY 19 - TAKING IN THE LOCAL SURROUNDS

After breakfast we enjoy a relaxing panoramic tour and explore the nearby local villages and conclude our adventure with a visit to some local artisans to learn about their art of cheese and wine making. The remainder of the afternoon is at your leisure.

At night a farewell dinner is planned at the tables of our ancient hotel, considered the oldest hotel in the world and built as a royal hospital in 1499 to accommodate pilgrims traveling to Santiago. (B/D)

DAY 20 - PORTO AIRPORT

After hotel check-out, we head for Porto's international airport where your tour director will wave goodbye. If you are not quite ready to fly home yet, consider a 3 night package in Porto. (B)



TOUR PRICE INCLUSIONS

Meet and greet Seville San Pablo Airport. Return airport transfers in Europe. 19 nights in charming heritage accommodation (Paradores) including daily buffet breakfast, 3 course dinner (or lunch) with beverages based on typical traditional regional cuisine where indicated.

Private coach travel in Europe, entry fees covering sightseeing and entertainment, hotel service charges, city taxes, most tipping, baggage handling (1 bag pp), services of a full-time professional tour director and local city guides.



DEPARTURE SCHEDULE LAND ONLY - 20 DAYS

Start date Seville - Thursday, 3 October 2024

Finish date Porto - Tuesday, 22 October 2024

Tour Price pp/twin share - AUD \$13,695

Single Supplement - AUD \$2,495

Due to the heritage nature of the Paradores, hotels included on this tour may undergo renovations throughout the year. In this instance a hotel may be replaced with a property of the same standard in the same region. The content of the tour itinerary/inclusions will not change (or as little as possible).