

Rail holidays of Spain

Expressions



Spanish art and architecture tour



Spanish art and architecture tour

7 NIGHTS / 8 DAYS

Bilbao

Barcelona

Madrid



This tour by air and rail is a delightful introduction to the artistic and architectural heritage of Spain, stopping in three cities which are home to iconic Spanish buildings and a number of outstanding art collections. Witness the contemporary art and architecture of the Basque city of Bilbao; discover the Catalan Art Nouveau style of Barcelona; and then visit the world-class art museums of the country's capital city. Travel between the cities by rail, relaxing in comfort, and watching the Spanish scenery pass by.

Begin your luxury tour of Spain's best artistic spots with your arrival in Madrid. Catch a train as soon as you arrive and travel north to Bilbao in the Basque Country. Spend two nights at the Hotel Carlton, a property that seamlessly blends Bilbao's traditional Spanish heritage with the touches of contemporary design that reflect its glamorous neighbour: the Guggenheim Museum. During the day, explore the collections and exhibitions housed within this striking building, enjoy the other attractions, and seek out Bilbao's most charming architecture. Then, catch a train across northern Spain and into Catalonia, for three nights at the Hotel Claris in Barcelona. Begin by exploring the modernista style, established by Antoni Gaudi and his contemporaries, which informed the design of your hotel. Perhaps start with the iconic Sagrada Familia, before walking down the Passeig de Gràcia and venturing into the Zona Alta to see the Parc Guell. Also take the time to visit the maze-like Gothic quarter, Montjuïc Castle, and the old merchant palaces of La Ribera. To reach your final stop on this tour, catch a high-speed train back to the capital of Spain, Madrid. Stay for three nights at the Hotel Urban, a property that lives up to its name in both its impeccable design and its excellent location, exploring the three world-class art museums that form a triangle around the city's centre. On your final full day in Spain, visit two Royal residences and take in the lively atmosphere of this bustling city. Then, on Day Nine, return to the UK via a flight from Madrid airport.

PRICES

From £1,960 per person

Based on standard class rail travel and two people sharing a double or twin room

First class rail travel and room upgrades can be added for a supplement.

DATES

This holiday can be arranged throughout the year. Timings can vary depending on the month and day of the week.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

Accommodation in Standard rooms on bed and breakfast as below:

- 2 nights in Bilbao
- 3 nights in Barcelona
- 3 nights in Madrid

Standard class rail travel from Madrid to Bilbao, Bilbao to Barcelona and Barcelona to Madrid

Return flights with British Airways from London Heathrow to Madrid

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

Optional extra nights at hotels
Transfers between stations and hotels
Meals other than breakfast unless specified
Early check-in or late check-out at any hotels (though we can arrange this on request at additional cost).

DAY ONE: Arrive into Madrid and journey north to Bilbao, where you will spend your first two nights

Start your touring holiday by flying into Madrid before catching an afternoon train northwards to Bilbao, arriving in the late evening. Travel to your hotel, the five-star Hotel Carlton, which enjoys a privileged position a few steps from the Plaza de Don Federico Moyúa and a short distance from the iconic Guggenheim Museum. Stay for two nights in either a room decorated in chic, contemporary colours, or a room designed with a more traditional Spain in mind. On your first evening, either dine in the elegant dining room, or seek out one of the many excellent restaurants in the city to try some of the hearty local gastronomy.

DAY TWO: Bilbao

You have the whole of Day Two to feast on the artistic and architectural wonders of this vibrant city, perhaps starting off with a visit to the Guggenheim Museum. Designed by Frank Gehry, this futuristic building, with its shimmering curves of titanium and glass, is home to a permanent collection of contemporary art and regularly hosts temporary exhibitions. Only a few minutes' walk away from the hotel is the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, which houses an extensive collection ranging from 12th Century sculptures to 20th Century paintings. Not only will visitors find a number of works by Basque artists, they will see works by renowned artists including El Greco, Goya and Gauguin. To witness some of Bilbao's more traditional architecture, we would recommend entering Bilbao's old quarter through the Plaza Circular, kicking back on the grand Plaza Nueva, with its pavement cafes and weekly market, and finding the beautiful Teatro Arriaga, with its curved façade, statuettes, and ornate stonework. The Church of Saint Anthony the Great and the Basilica of Begoña offer an insight into the religious architecture of the city, and both have radiantly lit interior chambers, and very traditional layouts and towers. Around 20 miles east of Bilbao is the town of Guernica, the namesake of Picasso's famous



Casa Batlló, Barcelona

painting which was inspired by the town's bombing during the Spanish Civil War, which makes for an excellent excursion by bus or train. As the sun sets, wander down the Gran Via de Don Diego López de Haro to soak up the lively street entertainment, dip in and out of the shops, and enjoy the cosmopolitan side to Spain.

DAY THREE: Catch a train from Bilbao to Barcelona, and stay for three nights

Spend the morning exploring anything you might have missed in Bilbao, before you take a mid-afternoon train to Barcelona, arriving in the Catalan capital just after 10pm. Here you will stay for three nights at Hotel Casa Fuster, itself a remarkable building which has been designed in the eclectic and vibrant 'Modernista' style that is typical of Barcelona. Spend two days in Barcelona. The Hotel Claris is a stylish hotel located in central Barcelona, just a short walk from Passeig de Gracia and two of Antoni Gaudí's more famous buildings, La Pedrera and Casa Batlló.

DAYS FOUR AND FIVE: Barcelona

Use the next two days in Barcelona to explore the many sights. The most famous landmark of this beautiful city is the Sagrada Família, an unconventional church building which is filled with symbolism and fulfilled Gaudí's dream of combining religious reverence with a dramatically sculpted skyline. The

other famous works of art that feature Gaudí's trademark curved lines, decorated chimneys, elaborate wrought iron, and mosaic decorations include Parc Guell in the Zona Alta, the more Gothic Palau Guell, and Casa Batlló and La Pedrera on the Passeig de Gràcia. There are also a number of outstanding art museums within the city, including the Picasso Museum in the La Ribera quarter, housed in a converted merchant's palace, which traces the life and works of Pablo Picasso, the Joan Miró Foundation dedicated to works by the eponymous Catalan painter, and the National Art Museum of Catalonia, which holds a vast collection of Catalan art from throughout the ages. The Gothic quarter, or Barri Gotic, is also home to outstanding architecture dating back to mediaeval times, including the cathedral, and Barcelona's best shops. An easy day trip by train from Barcelona is to Figueres, a small city around 90 miles to the north, which is known for being the birthplace of Salvador Dalí. Figueres is home to the renowned Dalí Theatre-Museum, with its pink exterior walls, egg-shaped battlements, vast glass globe, and extensive collection of the artist's works, as well as pieces by other artists such as El Greco. Also essential to any visit to Barcelona is a walk down La Rambla, stopping off at La Boqueria Market to sample the famous oysters, a few hours spent on one of the 6 Blue Flag beaches, known also for the restaurants that serve the best seafood in the city, and a visit to Montjuïc Castle, the tallest monument in the city. In the evenings,



Barcelona Port



Retiro Park, Madrid



Madrid Town Hall



Madrid Plaza Cibeles

dine at the hotel or choose from one of the many excellent restaurants and tapas bars Barcelona has to offer.

DAY SIX: Travel into Central Spain and spend your final three nights in Madrid

From Barcelona, catch one of the hourly high-speed trains to Madrid, arriving around three hours later. Stay at the Hotel Urban, a five-star hotel in the cultural centre of the city.

DAYS SEVEN AND EIGHT: Madrid

Your two days in Madrid will be packed with prestigious art and architecture from throughout the centuries. The hotel is within walking distance of all three of the world-class art museums which make up Madrid's Golden Triangle of Art. The Prado Museum is one of the largest art galleries in the world and contains an impressive selection of Spanish paintings, including works by Goya and El Greco; the Reina Sofia Museum is Spain's premier collection of modern 20th and 21st century art including Picasso's 'Guernica,' films by Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, and an abundance of striking sculpture; and the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, one of the best private collections of 13th to 20th century art, illustrates the history of western art and includes pieces by Goya, Degas, Kandinsky and Renoir, but must be booked in advance. After visiting all three of these prestigious

museums, enjoy the atmosphere of the capital. Take in the ambience of the Plaza Mayor, the grand arcaded square at the centre of the city. Then, visit the Palacio Real de Madrid, the official residence of the Royal family, which is often open for the public to explore. Inside, the highlights include the Spanish marble, stucco carvings, frescoes painted by Giaquinto, Tiepolo, and Bayeu, and the fully-equipped Royal Armoury. If you are not able to go inside, you can still enjoy the Plaza de Oriente beside the palace, which has statues of the Gothic Kings lining its central walkway, or the Campo del Moro Palace Gardens. The Basilica de San Francisco el Grande has atmospherically lit golden walls, and a blue and green painted dome that is recognised to be one of the best in Spain. Situated just outside the city, the historical residence of the King of Spain, El Escorial, is a vast palace complex with magnificent gardens that is also open to the public. However, you may need to arrange private transportation to reach it. Other, longer day trips include Toledo, the City of Three Cultures, and Segovia, home to the Alcázar that inspired Disney's Cinderella Castle, and an long and well-preserved Roman aqueduct.

DAY NINE: Enjoy your final day, and then return to the UK

Perhaps spend a few hours at leisure in Madrid before you catch your return flight to the UK.

OPTIONAL

It is possible to add extra nights in Madrid, Granada, Cordoba and Seville. Speak to one of our Personal Travel Specialists for ideas on other additional locations.

HOTELS

Below is some information regarding each of the hotels featured in this touring itinerary.

Expressions

BILBAO

Hotel Carlton 5 star

The five star Hotel Carlton in Bilbao oozes French Second Empire Style, and it perfect for luxury holidays spent exploring cultural Northern Spain. Completed in 1926, its grandiose, ornate architectural style is characterised by flourished archways, staircases, balustrades, cornices, and symmetry, all of which add to the all-encompassing sense of luxury at this Spanish hotel. The iconic glass roof that crowns the building comes into its own when you enter the central hall, which is flooded with down-pouring light. The style of the hotel lends itself easily to both contemporary, chic design, and more traditional decoration, something which becomes clear in the eclectic, but highly comfortable, individual rooms. The building's history as the seat of the Basque Government during the Spanish Civil War is evident throughout, in the interior staircases, elegant atmosphere, and its singular stained-glass window that remains from before the war. The feeling of regal importance and elegance that this history brings with it pervades each of the corridors and rooms. Restaurant Carlton, decorated in pleasing pastel colours reminiscent of its 1920s origin, serves a varied menu of hearty Basque and Biscay cuisine, including rice dishes, locally sourced lobster, and bean stew. The excellent positioning of this hotel puts you in the very heart of the city. Each day, you are at your leisure to explore the delights of Bilbao, from the world-famous Guggenheim Art Museum, the many charming plazas, the towering ornate palaces and basilicas, to the green parks and river. We would highly recommend stopping at this luxury five star hotel as part of a larger tour of Northern Spain, sampling the diverse and intriguing culture and history before moving on to coastal cities or further inland.



Hotel Claris

BARCELONA

Hotel Claris 5 star

Hotel Claris is a contemporary and chic five-star hotel situated in the Eixample district in central Barcelona, just a short walk away from many of the main sights of the city. Once a 20th century palace the interiors are now sophisticated and modern with the interesting addition of cultural pieces and old artefacts. The modern extension of glass that completes the building centres around an indoor patio area which adds to the contemporary feeling of luxury, something that continues into the 124 rooms and suites. All decorated in this unique style, with dark furnishings combined with neutral and warm tones they provide a sense of modern luxury, making it a perfect place to relax after a day exploring the city. An intriguing feature of the design style at Hotel Claris is the addition of ancient artefacts and cultural artwork in each of the rooms, as well as the 400 items in the Egyptian Museum on the first floor. The hotel also boasts a roof top terrace with impressive views over the rooftops of the city and an outdoor pool with surrounding sun loungers. During the days

guests may choose to relax and enjoy the views or explore the city, with many of the main sights within easy reach by walking or by metro. In the evenings guests can dine at the hotel, either at La Terraza del Claris which provides excellent Mediterranean cuisine all year around with striking scenery and views or East 47 Tapas and Cocktail Bar which offers guests light dishes and delicious cocktails in colourful and vibrant surroundings, inspired by the art of Andy Warhol. The area around the hotel also offers many excellent restaurants and tapas bars offering an exquisite variety of local cuisine. A stylish and contemporary hotel, Hotel Claris is ideally located for a short stay to explore all that Barcelona has to offer.



Hotel Carlton



Hotel Claris



Hotel Carlton



Hotel Urban

MADRID

Hotel Urban 5 star

The grand luxury five-star Hotel Urban promises a type of style and sophistication that befits its name, located in Madrid's financial, political, commercial and cultural centre. In the thick of the city centre bustle surrounded by bars and restaurants, the building's 21st century façade is a vision of glass and industrial grey tones. Inside, you will experience absolute luxury on a boutique scale, making it easy to feel very at home. The design theme is ultra-contemporary, with materials such as glass, steel and leather giving a sleek and business-like quality. Ambient lighting ensures that public areas remain welcoming, while an atrium at the centre of the building is illuminated from sunlight through the glass ceiling high above. Taking inspiration from the cultural artwork that can be spotted in the guestrooms, throughout the public areas and in the museum which is located in the basement, an earthy colour scheme can be seen to pervade throughout the hotel. Choose from rooms and suites which range up to the exquisite offering of

the Suite Lofts, which offer living and sleeping spaces spread across two floors. Some guestrooms look out onto the atrium, whilst others enjoy views of the surrounding suites. You might be surprised to find that there is an outdoor swimming pool hidden within this metropolitan base, located on the hotel's rooftop terrace where you will also find a number of sunbeds. The terrace is also open in the summer months to those looking to dine in the open air La Terraza del Urban, with its outstanding views and exotic menu. Come nightfall, enjoy a cocktail under the stars here or in the Glass Bar, which is the only oyster bar in Spain and fosters an underground, club-like atmosphere. Meanwhile, Europa Deco Restaurant is the place to be for more substantial dinners of creative Mediterranean cuisine. A number of metro stations can be found within a few minutes' walk of the hotel, whilst Atocha train station is under ten minutes away by taxi, making Hotel Urban an excellent choice for a luxury short break in Madrid.



Hotel Urban



Hotel Claris



Hotel Urban

MAP OF SPANISH ART AND ARCHITECTURE TOUR

The map below illustrates the route outlined in this touring itinerary, with overnight stops and places of interest highlighted.



GENERAL INFORMATION

This tailor-made touring holiday is one of several suggested touring holidays we can offer you exactly as it is but also with any alterations you might want including extra nights in one or more places or adding in extra places. All our tours can be extended so that you can include a longer stay at the included destinations or add additional stops. Do call to discuss the options with our travel consultants.

OUR TOURS

Our rail tours are for individuals travelling on their own or in their own family group. You do not join a group and you are not escorted.

FLEXIBLE ARRANGEMENTS

Our arrangements are very flexible in that you choose to travel on any day you want, subject to availability of trains and hotels. As mentioned above, additional nights can be added at any point.

EUROSTAR

Rail holidays from the UK start with a journey by Eurostar from London St Pancras, Ebbsfleet or Ashford stations to either Paris Gare du Nord, Brussels or Lille Europe. In summer months there are direct trains on Saturdays from London St Pancras to Avignon with no change required.

Eurostar offers almost hourly departures every day, allowing you to travel from the centre of London to the centre of Paris on the same train in three hours. Not all trains stop at the Ebbsfleet and Ashford stations in Kent, but parking is plentiful at both stations and it allows you to avoid London.

Check-in is 30 minutes prior to departure, customs formalities are completed before boarding and there is no limit to the amount of baggage that can be taken on board. The Eurostar trains themselves have 8 coaches which are split into Standard Class, Standard Premier and Business Premier as well as 2 cafeterias. Standard Premier customers are served a light cold meal and enjoy a more spacious environment than Standard Class, while Business Premier customers receive a hot meal and unlimited beverages as well as lounge access.

TRAIN TIMES

We have planned our itineraries based on train times that work day by day at the time of planning which can be up to a year before you travel. Usually train times stay more or less the same every day, season by season. The times we have planned will be discussed with you at the time you enquire about the holiday and they are detailed to you in your written holiday quotation. It may be that the timetable changes between the planning of the itinerary and when you come to book but we can always adjust the itinerary to suit the actual train times and any requirements you have for particular times of travel.

FIRST OR SECOND CLASS

We will automatically include travel in second class but lots of our clients do upgrade to first class service. On Eurostar this is called Standard Premier for leisure travellers as it gives you an upgraded on-board service and more spacious seating but without paying for the fully-flexible business tickets. On the Inter-city trains, upgrading to first class gives you more spacious seating with increased legroom. The price of upgrading varies from route to route but is something that is not always proportionately a lot more on the price of the overall holiday, so well-worth considering.

TRANSFERS

Transfers in Paris between stations and from the station to each hotel are not automatically included in the price of the holiday. In Paris most clients choose to take a taxi between the stations rather than go on the Metro but we can arrange a private car with driver to take you in between. This is quite useful if you are a family group that can't fit into one Paris taxi.

PRICE INFORMATION

This tailor-made touring holiday is one of several suggested touring holidays we can offer you exactly as it is but also with any alterations you might want including extra nights in one or more places or adding in extra places. All our tours can be extended so that you can include a longer stay at the included destinations or add additional stops. Do call to discuss the options with our travel consultants.

OUR PRICES

The sample prices mentioned in this leaflet are generally a 'from' price based on the cheapest season of travel. However, train fares and hotel rates can change (up and down depending on offers), so we give you an accurate price for your holiday when we provide you with a quotation. Our sample prices should be used as an indication of how much a particular combination will cost and to show the differences on average between the hotel categories on offer.

PRICE INFORMATION IN MORE DETAIL

Prices from **£1,960 per person** based on two people sharing a double or twin room.

What's included?

Accommodation with bed and breakfast at the following locations:

Two nights at the Hotel Carlton in Bilbao

Three nights at the Hotel Claris in Barcelona

Three nights at the Hotel Urban in Madrid

Standard class rail travel from Madrid to Bilbao, Bilbao to Barcelona and Barcelona to Madrid

Return flights with British Airways from London Heathrow to Madrid

What's not included?

Optional extra nights at hotels

Transfers between stations and hotels

Meals other than breakfast unless specified

Early check-in or late check-out at any hotels (though we can arrange this on request at additional cost).

Expressions

BOOKING CONDITIONS

Our booking conditions apply to all holidays. A copy can be found on our website and a copy is also sent to you with a written quotation and when you make a booking.

FINANCIAL PROTECTION

Expressions Holidays offers full financial protection for all holidays you book with us. If your holiday includes a flight, the ATOL (3076) covers the costs of the holiday. If the holiday does not include a flight, it is the ABTOT bond that protects the cost of the holiday. We are also members of AITO (the Association of Independent Tour Operators) and ABTA.



Expressions Holidays
Lynx House, Pynes Hill, Exeter EX2 5JL

HOW TO BOOK

To make a booking, just phone us on

01392 441276

and we can take you through the details we need and start the booking process. A deposit is required to confirm the arrangements and this can be paid by debit or credit card over the phone. The level of the deposit will be confirmed at the point of booking and will depend on the ticketing deadlines of the rail tickets involved in your booking.