



ACADEMY
TRAVEL

TAILORED
SMALL GROUP
JOURNEYS

NORTHERN SPAIN & PORTUGAL

BILBAO TO LISBON

Bodega Ysios winery

OVERVIEW

In many ways, Northern, or “Green” Spain, as it’s known, feels like a country apart. Lush and green, its oceanic climate differs significantly from the inner plateau of Spain.

This region was also relatively less influenced by Moorish rule than the rest of Spain, and so many of its cultural influences are northern European – exemplified by its fine, well-preserved pre-Romanesque, Romanesque and Gothic art and architecture. Portugal shares a similar language, culture, and history; but its strong ties to the sea and the charming culture found in the cities of Porto and Lisbon distinguish it from its bigger neighbour.

Our 20-day tour roughly follows the route of the pilgrims on the Camino Francés, from the forward-thinking port city of Bilbao in the Basque country to Burgos and León, high on the plains of Castile. We’ll cross the mountains outside picturesque Oviedo and travel on to the Atlantic via the green fields of Celtic Galicia to the celebrated city of Santiago de Compostela. From here we leave Spain and journey south via Porto, with its stately bridges and fine port wine, to Portugal’s fascinating and often overlooked capital, Lisbon.



TOUR LEADER

Elena Ortega has a Master of Fine Art (Painting) from the National Art School where she also completed her Bachelor of Fine Art. Elena will be accompanied by a trained tour manager for the duration of the tour.

TOUR DATES

September 13 - October 2, 2024

TOUR PRICE

\$14,870 per person, twin share
\$2,760 single supplement

TOUR DEPOSIT

A **\$1,000** non-refundable deposit is required per person to confirm your booking on tour.

GROUP SIZE

Maximum number of **16** in group

ITINERARY

Bilbao (3 nights), Burgos (2 nights), León (2 nights), Oviedo (3 nights), Santiago de Compostela (3 nights), Porto (2 nights), Lisbon (4 nights)

INCLUSIONS

19 nights’ accommodation in centrally located 4-star hotels. All breakfasts, 5 lunches and 7 dinners. Services of an expert tour leader and an experienced tour manager throughout. All ground transport, entrance fees and tipping.



DETAILED ITINERARY

Start & Finish

The tour starts at 7.30pm on Friday 13 September, in the lobby of the NH Ría de Bilbao Hotel, Bilbao.

The tour ends after breakfast on Wednesday 2 October, at the BessaHotel Liberdade, Lisbon.

Included meals are indicated with B, L, D.

Friday 13 September

Arrival in Bilbao

If you wish to arrive prior to the tour to recover from jetlag, we recommend spending a few nights in Barcelona. After settling into the hotel in Bilbao, we convene for a welcome drink in the hotel reception before dinner at a local restaurant. Overnight Bilbao (B, D)

Saturday 14 September

Guggenheim and Casco Viejo

Today we begin by exploring the striking Guggenheim Museum. Commissioned by the Basque government in 1991 to enliven Bilbao's decrepit port area, the Guggenheim is known as much for its thrilling sculptural architecture as it is for its art exhibits. We also pay a visit to Bilbao's renowned Museum of Fine Arts (Bellas Artes), before a mid-afternoon walking tour along the Nervión river to the Casco Viejo (old heart of the city) via the famous Calatrava bridge. Overnight Bilbao (B)

Sunday 15 September

San Sebastián

This morning we take a leisurely excursion by coach to discover the picturesque resort town of San Sebastián. We sample some of the famed local tapas and Txakoli wine before exploring the centre on foot with a local guide. After some free time to walk along the waterfront of the famed Bahía de la Concha, we join our coach trip back to Bilbao, admiring the sculpture of Eduardo Chillida en route. Overnight Bilbao (B, L)

Monday 16 September

La Rioja - To Castilla-León

Departing the Basque country, we head to the wine growing region of La Rioja. We stop for coffee in Laguardia, a medieval walled city perched on a rocky outcrop before our visit to the extraordinary Bodega Ysios winery. Designed by contemporary architect Santiago Calatrava, its Gaudí-inspired roof and mountain backdrop makes an excellent location for wine tasting. Afterwards we enjoy a typical bodega (winery) lunch at a smaller, more intimate, family-owned vineyard. Overnight Burgos (B, L)

Tuesday 17 September

Explore Burgos

This morning we explore the historic centre of a city at the heart of Spain's history and a principal crossroads of the Camino de Santiago. Amongst other sites, we pause at the Casa del Cordón,

TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao

See the stunning titanium curves of architect Frank Gehry's huge contemporary art gallery, which boasts both permanent and rotating exhibits.

The Pilgrim's Trail

Walk a section of the 800-km Camino Francés, a pilgrimage that ends at Santiago de Compostela, the burial place of the apostle St James, and explore the cities of Burgos and León on its route.

The Bodega Ysios Winery

Visit this 'temple dedicated to wine' in the world-renowned Rioja wine region. Santiago Calatrava's aluminium wave is superbly set against the rugged backdrop of the Sierra de Cantabria.

Pre-Romanesque Churches

Outside Oviedo, explore two 9th-century pre-Romanesque churches that tell of over a millennium of worship. Set at the foot of the Naranco mountain, the countryside highlights their simplicity.

Portuguese Azulejos

Admire the distinctive blue tin-glazed ceramic tiles, which adorn buildings in Lisbon, Porto, and Sintra. At the National Tile Museum, marvel at tiles that depicts Lisbon prior to the 1755 earthquake.



Mosaic in La Olmeda



Picos de Europa

where Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castille, the ‘Catholic Monarchs’, met with Columbus to endorse his voyages to the New World. We also see the World Heritage-listed Burgos Cathedral, built on the pilgrim’s route and inspired by the Gothic cathedrals of Paris and Reims. In the afternoon, we visit to the Abbey of Las Huelgas, a beautiful Cistercian monastery just outside the city centre. In the evening, after a talk in the hotel, you might like to sample the hearty local specialty, “Lechazo”, suckling lamb. Overnight Burgos. (B)

Wednesday 18 September
Pilgrim Route and Roman Mosaics

On our way to León, we pass pilgrims with their iconic staffs and scallop shells tied to their packs. We pause to admire the eleventh century Romanesque church at Frómista, with its fine carved capitals, built for the devotion of passing pilgrims. Closer to León, we stop at the Roman Villa of Olmeda to view superb Roman mosaics, buried for centuries. For lunch we sample one of the simple meals that hostleries provide on the Camino for hungry pilgrims. We’ll have time to explore the cloisters, basilica and museum of our hotel, the converted monastery of Real Colegiata, before dinner at Los Delirios, an experimental and highly regarded local restaurant. Overnight León (B, L, D)

Thursday 19 September
Explore León

Today we enjoy a walking tour of the well-preserved medieval centre of León. Our first stop will be the glorious French-style Gothic cathedral known as the ‘House of Light,’ with its fine carvings and huge rose windows. We also admire the well-preserved Romanesque murals of the Pantheon of San Isidoro. After lunch there is time to further explore either the Archaeological Museum or the Museum of Contemporary Art. In the early evening we gather for a talk in the hotel. Overnight León (B)

Friday 20 September
To Asturias

Today we head over the mountains to the enchanting city of Oviedo, our destination for the next three nights. After a break for lunch, we explore the old town on foot, pausing to watch the peacocks roaming the Campo de San Francisco, and to delight in the well-tended parks and squares lined with Baroque palaces. We enjoy an early evening meal in the Bulevar de la Sidra, ‘cider boulevard’ and marvel at the waiters pouring this local specialty, in the traditional way – from a great height. Overnight Oviedo (B, D)

Saturday 21 September
The Picos de Europa

For some of Spain’s finest mountain scenery, we take a day trip to the dramatic Picos de Europa. We make the spectacular drive up to the Lakes of Covadonga and enjoy a rustic lunch in a mountain refuge. There is the option of a short walk around the lakes in the company of a local guide. Overnight Oviedo (B, L)

Sunday 22 September
Pre Romanesque churches

The morning is set aside to survey the beautiful ninth century ‘pre-Romanesque’ architecture of the churches on the outskirts of Oviedo, many of which have been granted UNESCO world heritage. Set at



Santiago de Compostela



Douro River



Lisbon

the foot of the surrounding mountains the countryside sets off their simplicity and austere design. The afternoon is free to relax before we meet for a talk and an aperitif in the hotel. Overnight Oviedo (B)

Monday 23 September

Into Galicia

We drive the last leg of the Camino route to Santiago de Compostela. En route we visit Castro de Viladonga, a 1500-year-old excavated Celtic village that also features an interesting museum. We stop for lunch in Lugo, the only city in the world still surrounded by fully intact Roman walls, and work up an appetite by walking the fortifications. After our arrival in Santiago, we enjoy fine tapas at Abastos 2.0, a cutting-edge extension of the local market that uses excellent regional produce. Overnight Santiago (B, D)

Tuesday 24 September

Santiago de Compostela

Today we explore the beautiful urban area of Santiago de Compostela and witness the emotion of pilgrims arriving at the cathedral after a journey of over 800 kilometres. The Portico de la Gloria, the main facade, has carvings of 200 figures referring to the Apocalypse, and St James welcomes the pilgrims to their final destination. In the afternoon, there is the option of a leisurely walk along a pretty section of the Camino just outside Santiago. Overnight Santiago (B)

Wednesday 25 September

The Atlantic Coast

On our last full day in Spain we take an excursion to the beautiful coastline of the Rias Baixas (low estuaries), an area highly renowned for its albariño wine and seafood. We enjoy a tasting at the stately home of Pazo de Rubianes, and a walk through its camellia gardens before lunch at a Michelin-star-rated seafood restaurant. To aid digestion, we take a stroll along the coast to view the mussel farms. Overnight Santiago (B, L)

Thursday 26 September

Into Portugal

Departing Galicia, we head south into Portugal to the World Heritage-listed city of Porto, also known as the 'City of Bridges'. We take a short cruise along the Douro River and stop for a port tasting at the Sandeman Cellars, situated on the river in a granite building dating back to the 1790s, looking toward the historic centre of Porto. Dinner is at a popular local restaurant. Overnight Porto (B, D)

Friday 27 September

Porto

The day begins with a walking tour of the interior of Porto away from the river. We stop at the rail station to admire its vast tile mosaics, then explore the tiles of the spectacular cathedral cloisters and the Stock Exchange building. In the afternoon we have free time to enjoy the city. Overnight Porto (B)

Saturday 28 September

Sintra

Today we depart for Lisbon, stopping to explore the city of Sintra, a unique combination of natural mountain beauty and fairytale palaces. The National Palace is easily distinguished by its two large conical chimneys, while the rest of the building consists of Manueline,

HOTELS

Hotels have been selected principally for their central location, heritage and 4-star rating.

Bilbao, Hespería de Bilbao

(3 nights)

Burgos, Hotel AC Burgos

(2 nights)

León, Hotel Real de Colegiata

(2 nights)

Oviedo, Hotel Campoamor

(3 nights)

Santiago, Hotel San Francisco Monumento

(3 nights)

Porto, Hotel Pestana Vintage

(2 nights)

Lisbon, Bessa Hotel Liberdade

(4 nights)

WEATHER

Temperatures are relatively mild in Northern Spain in September, ranging from evening lows of around 6-11°C to maxima of 20-25°C during the day – very agreeable for travel. You should expect rain for several days of the tour in ‘Green Spain’, but not enough to interrupt the program. Lisbon is further south and will be generally warmer and sunnier with temperatures ranging from 19-27°C.

FITNESS REQUIREMENTS

Grade Three

This tour is among our most physically demanding. You should be able to:

- comfortably participate in up to five to seven hours of physical activity per day
- keep up with the group at all times
- have a reasonable level of physical and respiratory fitness
- negotiate challenging sites, which are often uneven and unstable



Gothic and Moorish architectural styles with magnificent azulejos. Another treasure on our itinerary is the Convent of the Capuchos; appearing to emerge from the surrounding woodland, the Franciscan convent’s philosophy of austerity and poverty is visible in the simplicity of the tiny cells. Overnight Lisbon (B)

Sunday 29 September

Lisbon

This morning we pay homage to the Golden Age of Discovery and explore the borough of Belém. Commencing at Belém Tower, a 16th century fortification at the mouth of the Tagus River which formed a vital part of Lisbon’s defences, we continue to the Discovery Monument, celebrating the location where explorers departed to the Far East to open up important trade routes. After a break for some fine Portuguese tarts, we visit the Jerónimos Monastery, where seafarers came to pray. In the afternoon we enjoy the Berardo Collection Museum which houses an extraordinary collection of art amassed by Portuguese billionaire José Berardo. There is a talk on the history of tiles before we enjoy dinner and a performance of Fado, a Portuguese musical genre dating from the early 19th century. Overnight Lisbon (B, D)

Monday 30 September

LAPA

Our first visit today is to the Museu Calouste Gulbenkian, a fine private art collection featuring works by Rubens, Rembrandt, Monet, Van Dyke and Renoir. Next we make an excursion to view the National Tile Museum’s exquisite collection of azulejos, dating from the 15th century. The museum is housed in the monastic buildings of the Madre de Deus Convent, whose interiors are amongst the most magnificent in the city. Overnight Lisbon (B)

Tuesday 1 October

Alfama

We take an iconic yellow tram up to Alfama to view the Castle of São Jorge and enjoy its outstanding views over the city. We then meander down through the labyrinthine Moorish quarter, a truly emblematic part of the city. Alfama was largely spared in the earthquake of 1755 and is still a maze of narrow streets. We visit the Núcleo Arqueológico, an extraordinary archaeological site with remains dating from the Iron Age, hidden under a modern-day bank. We finish our trip with a farewell dinner in a prestigious local restaurant. Overnight Lisbon (B, D)

Wednesday 2 October

Departure

The tour concludes this morning after breakfast. Airport transfers are provided for anyone who has booked their flights with Academy Travel. (B)



ENQUIRIES & BOOKINGS

For further information or to secure a place, please contact **Jamal Fairbrother** on 9235 0023 (Sydney) or 1800 639 699 (outside Sydney) or email:

jamal@academytravel.com.au