



ACADEMY
TRAVEL

TAILORED
SMALL GROUP
JOURNEYS

NORTHERN SPAIN & PORTUGAL

Bilbao to Lisbon

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 19-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

Dr. Jeni Ryde is a former Senior Lecturer at the University of Western Sydney, where she completed her PhD focusing on the Renaissance, heritage tourism, and museology. She has extensive knowledge of European history, art and architecture, and has travelled extensively through Spain and Portugal.

Essential information

Tour dates: April 21- May 9, 2023

Price per person: \$11,450

Supplement for sole use of double room: \$2,580

Maximum number in group: 16

Start: 7.30pm, April 21, lobby of the NH Ría de Bilbao Hotel, Bilbao

Finish: After breakfast, May 9, BessaHotel Liberdade, Lisbon

Fitness level

★★★ Physically demanding; excellent overall fitness required

Itinerary

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

Further information and bookings

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Highlights

Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao

See the stunning titanium curves of architect Frank Gehry's huge contemporary art gallery.

The Bodega Ysios Winery

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

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. Meet pilgrims who are completing the trail, and explore the cities of Burgos and León on its route.

Pre-Romanesque Churches

Outside Oviedo, explore three 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 and austere design.

Portuguese Azulejos

Admire the distinctive blue tinglazed ceramic tiles or *azulejos*, which adorn buildings in Lisbon, Porto, and Sintra. At the National Tile Museum, marvel at a work of some 1300 tiles that depicts Lisbon prior to the 1755 earthquake.

Detailed itinerary

Included meals are shown with the symbols B, L and D.

Friday 21 April – Arrival in Bilbao

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

Saturday 22 April – 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 23 April – 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 24 April – 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 25 April – 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, 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 26 April – 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 11th-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 hostels 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 27 April – 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 28 April – To Asturias

This morning we cross the mountains to the enchanting city of Oviedo, where peacocks roam the well-tended parks and the squares are lined with Baroque palaces. After a walking tour of the centre, we venture to the edge of town to survey two beautiful 9th-century 'pre-Romanesque' churches. We enjoy an early evening meal in the *Bulevar de la Sidra*, 'cider boulevard' -and marvel at the waiters pouring this local speciality from a great height. Overnight Oviedo (B, D)

Saturday 29 April – 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 30 April – 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)

Monday 1 May – 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)

Tuesday 2 May – 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)

Wednesday 3 May – 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 prestigious Ferreira cellars before dinner at a popular local restaurant. Overnight Porto (B, D)

Thursday 4 May – 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)

Friday 5 May – 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

Hotels

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

Hespería de Bilbao, Bilbao (3 nights)

Hotel AC Burgos, Burgos (2 nights)

Hotel Real de Colegiata, León (2 nights)

Hotel Campoamor, Oviedo (2 nights)

Hotel San Francisco Monumento, Santiago (3 nights)

Hotel Pestana Vintage, Porto (2 nights)

Bessa Hotel Liberdade, Lisbon (4 nights)

Weather

Temperatures are relatively mild in Northern Spain in April, ranging from evening lows of around 6 in Burgos to maxima of 20 degrees 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 15-24 degrees.

Fitness requirements for this tour

GRADE THREE ★★★

This Grade Three tour is among our most physically demanding. To participate on this tour, you should be able to:

- keep up with the group
- walk for 5-7 kms at a moderate pace with only short breaks
- stand for a reasonable length of time in galleries and museums
- tolerate varying climatic conditions such as humidity and heat
- have a reasonable level of physical and respiratory fitness
- tolerate a diet that can be significantly different from a typical Australian diet and where some dietary requirements cannot be met

building consists of Manueline, 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)

Saturday 6 May – 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)

Sunday 7 May – 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)

Monday 8 May – 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)

Tuesday 9 May - Departure

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

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