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Regional Map Contents



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Getting Started

Getting the most out of a visit to Spain is partly a matter of timing. You need to plan around the weather if you hope to enjoy the outdoors (walking, skiing, diving and so on) but avoid the crowded seasonal peaks. You may want to witness some of the country's extraordinary festivals. Some visitors aim for a taste of luxury and gourmet indulgence; in this case it is worth planning which castles to stay in and which avant-garde restaurants to book. Whether it's a lazy beach holiday or a strenuous cycle tour, anything is possible, and on most budgets too.

WHEN TO GO

Depending on what you're after, Spain is a year-round destination. The ideal months to visit are May, June and September (plus April and October in the south). At these times you can rely on good to excellent weather, yet avoid the sometimes extreme heat – and the main crush of Spanish and foreign tourists – of July and August, when temperatures can climb to 45°C in inland Andalucía; at this time, Madrid is unbearable and almost deserted.

There's decent weather in some parts of Spain virtually year-round. Winter (December to February) along the south and southeast Mediterranean coasts is mild, while in the height of summer (June to August) you can retreat to the northwest, to beaches or high mountains anywhere to escape excessive heat. You can be sitting outside enjoying a beer in a T-shirt in Granada in February, or rugged up against the cold while trekking the Picos de Europa mountains in July.

COSTS & MONEY

Spain is, as locals will quickly tell you, not as cheap as it once was. What you spend on accommodation (probably your single greatest expense) will depend on various factors, such as location (Madrid is pricier than Murcia), season (August along the coast is packed and expensive), the degree of comfort you require and a little dumb luck. At the budget end you'll pay €12 to €23 for a bed in a youth hostel (depending on the hostel, season and your age).

The cheapest bearable *pensión* (small private hotel)/*hostal* (budget hotel) is unlikely to cost less than €18/30, but reckon on more in the cities and resorts. Depending on where you are, you can stumble across good rooms with attached bathroom from as little as €30/45 (up to €60/80 in the more popular locations).

Eating out is still more variable. A *menú del día* (daily set menu) can cost as little as €7 to €12. Bank on spending a minimum of €20 on a full dinner (including house wine).

Most sights are fairly cheap. Keep an eye out for free days (especially on Sunday and set days for EU citizens).

See Climate Charts (p843) for more information.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT ...

- Valid travel insurance (p850)
- Your ID card and passport or visa if required (p856)
- Driving licence and car documents if driving, along with appropriate car insurance (p869)
- A concealed money belt or shoulder wallet to help save you from being a petty-theft victim (p845)

TOP TENS

Festivals & Events

Inspired by a deeply religious past and an insatiable love of spectacle, Spaniards have stuck to centuries-old traditions to this day. Just about every town and village has at least one annual fiesta. Here are some of our favourites, but there are many more (see p847).

- Carnaval (Sitges, Catalonia), February (p335)
- Las Fallas (Valencia), March (see the boxed text, p586)
- Semana Santa (Seville), Easter (see the boxed text, p701)
- Moros y Cristianos (Alcoy, Alicante), April (see the boxed text, p624)
- Fiesta de San Isidro (Madrid), May (p143)
- Corpus Christi (Toledo), May to June (p247)
- Fiesta de San Fermín (Pamplona, Navarra), May to June (see the boxed text, p482)
- Romería del Rocío (El Rocío, Andalucía), May to June (p712)
- La Tomatina (Buñol, Valencia), August (see the boxed text, p594)
- Festes de la Mercè (Barcelona), September (p312)

Spanish Cinema

A handful of silver-screen classics slipped through the general drivel produced during the long Franco era, but since the dictator's demise Spaniards have been cheekily adventurous with celluloid. See p61 for reviews.

- *Todo Sobre Mi Madre* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1999)
- *Belle Époque* (Fernando Trueba, 1992)
- *Amantes* (Vicente Aranda, 1991)
- *¡Bienvenido, Mr Marshall!* (Luis García Berlanga, 1952)
- *Flamenco* (Carlos Saura, 1995)
- *Volver* (Pedro Almodóvar, 2006)
- *La Vida Secreta de las Palabras* (Isabel Coixet, 2005)
- *Un Chien Andalou* (Luis Buñuel, 1929)
- *Jamón, Jamón* (José Juan Bigas Luna, 1992)
- *Mar Adentro* (Alejandro Amenábar, 2004)

The Great Outdoors

Spain's scenery is as varied as its history, food and weather, and is often the backdrop for exciting activity. Top spots include the following:

- Baqueira-Beret (p380, Catalonia) – top-class skiing in the Pyrenees
- Illes Medes (p353, Catalonia) – pretty diving near islands off the Costa Brava
- Tarifa (p733, Andalucía) – powerful wind-surfing near the Straits of Gibraltar
- Vall de la Noguera Pallaresa (p373, Catalonia) – the country's best white-water rafting
- Aneto (p431, Aragón) – hiking around the highest of the Spanish Pyrenees peaks
- Cabo de Gata (p803, Andalucía) – a wild coastal stretch for swimming and diving
- Parque Nacional Monfragüe (p818, Extremadura) – the place to watch for the *águila imperial* (imperial eagle)
- Menorca (p661, Balearic Islands) – the entire island is a Unesco Biosphere Reserve
- Parque Nacional Sierra Nevada (p785, Andalucía) – with mainland Spain's highest mountain, Mulhacén, the area offers skiing, walking and horse riding
- Camino de Santiago (p89) – a spiritual walking trail from the French border to Santiago de Compostela

Public transport is reasonably priced, although high-speed trains are pricey. See the Transport chapter (p859) for more information.

A backpacker sticking to youth hostels, lunchtime snacks and travelling slowly could scrape by on €40 to €50 a day. A more comfortable midrange budget, including a sandwich for lunch, a modest evening meal, a couple of sights and travel will be anything from €100 to €150 a day. From there, the sky's the limit. It is possible to spend hundreds on five-star lodgings and even in the occasional gourmet paradise.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

Much ink has been spilled on the subject of Spain by its observers, both foreign and local. For books on Spanish history, art and architecture, see the appropriate chapters.

Between Hopes and Memories: A Spanish Journey by Michael Jacobs is an amusing and personal reflection on contemporary Spain. Jacobs sets out from Madrid and crisscrosses the country, dipping into historical, literary and cultural dimensions such as a man taste-testing a buffet of rich soups.

Jan Morris' *Spain*, a slim but succulent volume, makes for a heady and incisive introduction to the country, painted with economy and style. Although contemporary Spain rushes headlong into modernity, much of what Morris observes holds true today.

Ghosts of Spain by Giles Tremlett is a timely appraisal of contemporary Spain, a country that in many respects is in overdrive to catch up with the rest of the West but with much of its heart still firmly planted in its tumultuous past.

Written in 1845, Richard Ford's classic *A Handbook for Travellers* not only tells us how things once were in places we see now, but also has us chortling as its irascible English author is by turns witty, informative and downright rude.

There is no shortage of expats churning out émigré memoirs in Spain. One of the more amusing is *Mañana, Mañana, Viva Mallorca* by Peter Kerr, his third since he and the family left Scotland to take on an orange farm in Mallorca.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Ciudad Hoy (www.ciudadhoy.com in Spanish) Search for the Spanish city of your choice and you'll reach a comprehensive site with listings, general news, links to phone directories and more.

EuroResidentes (www.euroresidentes.com) A multilingual portal aimed at foreign residents in Spain, with everything from mortgage advice to Spanish travel blogs.

LonelyPlanet.com (www.lonelyplanet.com) Can get you started with summaries on Spain, links and travellers trading information on the Thorn Tree.

Renfe (Red Nacional de los Ferrocarriles Españoles; www.renfe.es) Timetables and tickets on Spain's national rail network.

Spanish Fiestas (www.spanish-fiestas.com) General site with everything from events listings to a joke of the day in Spanish.

Turespaña (www.tourspain.es, www.spain.info) This is the Spanish tourist office's site, with lots of general information and useful links.

HOW MUCH?

El País newspaper €1

Admission to dance clubs €10-20

Cocktail €6-8

Seat at a Real Madrid or FC Barcelona match €30-120

City metro ride up to €1.20

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

HEADING SOUTH

One Month / Barcelona to Algeciras

The sun glitters on the Mediterranean as your flight glides in to **Barcelona** (p266), Spain's second-biggest city. Explore the architecture and sample the food, then embark on a coast crawl with stops in **Tarragona** (p387) for the Roman ruins, **Peñíscola** (p606) for the beach, and **Valencia** (p579) for another dose of nightlife and the 21st-century wonders of the Ciudad de las Artes y las Ciencias. From here, flee deep into Castilla-La Mancha and halt at craggy **Cuenca** (p257). Push on to the capital, mighty **Madrid** (p108), for the hedonism and museums before continuing to **Toledo** (p239), a medieval jewel. The road sweeps through La Mancha's plains and olive groves to **Ciudad Real** (p251). Make a left for the striking village of **Almagro** (p252), in Almodóvar territory, then take the A4 for **Jaén** (p790) and its gorgeous cathedral. Nearby are the Islamic glories of **Granada** (p768) and **Córdoba** (p761). The colourful capital of the south, **Seville** (p686), also beckons. Hear the call of Africa? Drop down to **Cádiz** (p716) and proceed east to **Algeciras** (p737) for the boat to Morocco and a new adventure.

This 1767km route slices right across Spain, from the sparkling northern seaside metropolis of Barcelona, via the pulsating capital of Madrid to the fiery south of Andalucía. En route, make coastal stops in Tarragona and Valencia, and the Castilian strongholds of Cuenca, Toledo and Almagro.



ANDALUCIAN ADVENTURE

Three Weeks / Málaga to Tarifa

Capture the colour, excitement and variety of Spain's vibrant southernmost region by combining visits to its three great World Heritage cities – **Seville** (p686), **Córdoba** (p761) and **Granada** (p768) – with an exploration of some of its most beautiful countryside and a refreshing beach spell to finish your trip. If flying in or out of **Málaga** (p743), don't miss its excellent **Museo Picasso** (p745).

Andalucía is the heartland of medieval Islamic Spain and each of the main World Heritage cities is home to one of Spain's three great Islamic monuments: **Granada's Alhambra** (p771), **Córdoba's Mezquita** (p763) and **Seville's Alcázar** (p695). Modern Andalusian culture and entertainment, too, are at their most effervescent in the university cities of Seville and Granada, both hubs of the flamenco scene and bursting with bars serving some of the most delectable tapas in the region. These cities also boast an array of other treasures, from **Granada's historic Capilla Real** (p775) and old Muslim quarter, the **Albayzín** (p776) to **Seville's massive cathedral** (p690) and baroque churches. For a change of key, venture out from Granada to the otherworldly valleys of **Las Alpujarras** (p786), which also provide easy access to mainland Spain's highest mountains, the **Sierra Nevada** (p783), great for walking in summer and skiing in winter.

Having done your cultural bit, turn south from Seville for **Jerez de la Frontera** (p724), the sherry, equestrian and flamenco hub of Cádiz province, and the historic, vivacious, port city of **Cádiz** (p716), before winding down on the sandy Atlantic beaches of the Costa de la Luz between Cádiz and Spain's internationally hip southernmost town, **Tarifa** (p733).



The route from Málaga to Tarifa is 840km. Add another 170km if you must return to Málaga at the end. Three weeks allows enough time to savour the places you visit; with four weeks you can linger where you like and make your own discoveries.

GREEN SPAIN

One Month / San Sebastián to Santiago de Compostela
Spain's well-drenched northern coast forms a green band from the Basque Country to Galicia, backed by the Cordillera Cantábrica. Either San Sebastián (p465), with its crescent bay and tapas bars, or Bilbao (p453), with its Guggenheim museum, make a fine introduction. Heading westwards, hug the coast of Cantabria and Asturias, making forays to inland valleys and mountains. Following Cantabria's eastern coast, bask in the quaintness of Castro Urdiales (p506), surf at Oriñón (p506) and cruise the bars of Santander (p499). Explore Santillana del Mar (p507) and its medieval core, admire Comillas' (p509) Modernista architecture and catch some waves at sprawling Playa de Merón (p510). The eastern Asturias coast is best travelled by train, stopping off at Llanes (p523) and Ribadesella (p522). Arriondas (p530), the next stop, is one gateway to the majestic Picos de Europa (p527). Straddling Cantabria and Asturias, these peaks offer unlimited hiking. Next, head for Oviedo (p512), Asturias' capital, with its pre-Romanesque architecture, and Gijón (p517), a substantial port where cider flows copiously. West of Gijón, secluded beaches await between the picturesque harbours of Cudillero (p524) and Luarca (p524). One approach to Galicia is to follow its *rias* (estuaries), a route that covers dynamic cities such as A Coruña (p550) and Vigo (p566) and low-key resorts, islands and protected areas. Between the Rías Altas (north) and Rías Baixas (west) are the untamed beaches of Costa da Morte (p558). Santiago de Compostela (p540) makes a suitable endpoint for a Green Spain trek. Those with more time could make the final approach on foot along the Camino de Santiago (p89) pilgrim route. Alternatively, discover the Green North with the Transcantábrico scenic train (see the boxed text, p871).

The sea sets the agenda for the Iberian Peninsula's emerald fringe. This sweep of coastline crosses some 600km, dotted with hundreds of beaches. Cosmopolitan Bilbao and tall peaks present bracing alternatives. All roads lead to Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, Spain's culturally distinct north-west extremity.

**ROADS LESS TRAVELLED****EXTREME WEST**

One Week / Salamanca to Seville
For many travellers, the Plateresque joys of the university town of Salamanca (p183), in western Castilla y León, are well known, but relatively few venture south into what was long one of the poorest regions of Spain. A back highway leads into the hill territory of the Peña de Francia, whose main village is pretty La Alberca (p192). You would never guess that, until recent decades, misery ruled in this quiet rural retreat. The road continues to climb and then suddenly drops through woods into Extremadura, passing into the once equally poor Las Hurdes region to reach Plasencia (p817) to the southeast. Jammed with noble buildings, churches and convents, it was for centuries the region's principle city, and makes a good base for excursions up the northeast valleys and to Monasterio de Yuste (p810). From Plasencia, a circuit takes you first to the charming hill town of Guadalupe (p827), lorded over by the monastery complex dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe. Country roads then lead westwards to the medieval town of Trujillo (p824), a warren of cobbled lanes, churches and the newer Renaissance-era additions that were the fruit of American gold. A short drive further west lies the ochre-coloured medieval jewel of Cáceres (p819), a town with a lively student nightlife scene, too. To the south stand some of Spain's most impressive Roman ruins in Mérida (p829). Further south again across the dry plains lies the white town of Zafra (p836). Rather than continue straight into Andalucía, make a westwards detour to the hilly town of Jerez de los Caballeros (p837) before finally heading southwest for magical Seville (p686).



This 810km route opens up the treasures of Extremadura, wedged between the Castilian university town of Salamanca and the south's sultry mistress, Seville. Along the way, discover the Roman wonders of Mérida, fine medieval cities, and the enchanting towns of La Alberca, Guadalupe and Zafra.

DEEP CASTILLA

Two Weeks / Valladolid to Madrid

Grab a low-cost Ryanair flight to Valladolid (p200) and inject yourself immediately into the Castilian heartland, far from the tourist clichés. Capital of the vast region of Castilla y León, it makes a good starting point for a meandering tour. Take the road east to Peñafiel (p230), dominated by its elongated, hilltop castle, and then on to Aranda de Duero (p229) before veering north towards the village of Quintanilla de las Viñas (p227). Take time for a detour to the monastery of Santo Domingo de Silos (p228), before winding up in Burgos (p221), dominated by its imposing Gothic cathedral. From here head west about 30km before turning south to Frómista (p211), with its Romanesque church, and ultimately Palencia (p209). The pretty town of Sahagún (p218) beckons west of Palencia on the road to one of the region's most charming cities, León (p212), where the Real Basílica de San Isidoro competes with the cathedral for your attention. Further west again lies Astorga (p218), known for its strange Gaudi-designed Palacio Episcopal. It is hard to resist continuing west to Ponferrada (p221) and on into Galicia. The picturesque road climbs out of the Castilian plains into pretty high country. Follow the road to Monforte de Lemos (p574) and on to the provincial capital of Ourense (p572), with its compact old centre. From Ourense take the A52 and swing southeast back into Castilla y León and stop in at Puebla de Sanabria (p209). From there it is a short ride to Zamora (p206), a quiet, fortified Romanesque haven. Due south is the splendid city of Salamanca (p183), from where the road east leads to chilly Ávila (p176) and on to the bright lights of the national capital, Madrid (p108).

This winding 1307km route through the heartland of old Spain strings together a series of medieval cities, from haughty Burgos to bright León, from far-flung Zamora to partly walled highland Ávila. Crossing the Castilian plains, you'll discover the treasures of hidden monasteries and medieval villages.



TAILORED TRIPS

PASSING THROUGH PARADORES

Spain's chain of *paradores* (luxurious, state-owned hotels) offers the chance to reside in grand mansions, former convents and formidable castles. Just south of Madrid in Chinchón, *Parador Nacional* (p173) is set in a 17th-century former monastery. To the south, among the best in Andalucía are *Parador de Granada* (p780) within the Alhambra complex, the castle location of *Parador de Jaén* (p792) on Santa Catalina Hill and the 16th-century Renaissance mansion of *Parador Condestable Dávalos* (p795) in Úbeda. A cluster of fine *paradores* is scattered west of Madrid. In Extremadura, the most tempting include the 15th-century *Parador Zubarán* (p829) in Guadalupe; the 16th-century *Parador de Trujillo* (p827) in a former convent; and *Parador de Cáceres* (p822), a 14th-century townhouse. To the north, León's *Hostal de San Marcos* (p216) is one of the finest *paradores* in the land, housed in the Monasterio de San Marcos. Equally fine is the luxury 15th-century *Parador Hostal dos Reis Católicos* (p546), a former pilgrims' hospice in Santiago de Compostela, northwest Galicia. East in Olite, Navarra, *Príncipe de Viana* (p488) is another gem, occupying a wing of a 15th-century palace. In Catalonia, the hilltop castle-monastery complex of *Parador Ducs de Cardona* (p382), in Cardona, stands out.



KIDS' SPAIN

Spain's generous diet of beaches, fiestas, castles and double-decker city tours keep under-fourteens content much of the time. Unique local attractions provide the icing on the cake. Barcelona has a great aquarium and other amusements at Port Vell (p291). Around Catalonia, kids will enjoy the weird rock pillars and breathtaking cable car of Montserrat (p336), and Spain's biggest amusement/adventure park, Port Aventura (p392).

Down the Mediterranean coast, activate those little brain cells at Valencia's marvellously entertaining and educational Ciudad de las Artes y las Ciencias (p581), which includes Europe's largest aquarium. Then let the adrenaline rip at Benidorm's Terra Mitica, Aqualandia and Mundomar (p615).

Entering Andalucía, stop for a Wild West shoot-out at Mini Hollywood (p803). Estepona's wildlife park Selwo Aventura (p754) stands out among the Costa del Sol's many kid-friendly attractions. In Gibraltar (p739) youngsters love the cable car, the apes, the dolphin-spotting trips and the tunnels in the upper rock. Next stop: Jerez de la Frontera (p724) for its zoo and the prancing horses of the Real Escuela Andaluz del Arte Ecuestre. Isla Mágica (p699), in Seville, thrills the white-knuckle brigade.

Up in Madrid check out Faunia (p142) and the Parque del Buen Retiro (p133), with its boat rides and street performers, then wind up with a splash at Warner Brothers Movie World (p169).



GOTHIC SPAIN

Across Spain, the majesty of Gothic construction can be admired. Start in **Barcelona** (p266), which boasts one of the most extensive Gothic city cores in Europe. Its splendours include the Església de Santa Maria del Mar, the Reials Drassanes (medieval shipyards) and Saló del Tinell. From the Catalan capital you can make a grand sweep west to admire some of the country's landmark Gothic monuments. **Burgos** (p221) is home to a soaring Gothic cathedral much influenced by the French style and, further west still, **León** (p212) hosts another grand Gothic cathedral. Near Madrid, **Segovia** (p194) and **Ávila** (p176) also line up with fine Gothic cathedrals. Ávila's was the earliest raised in the country. There's more in lesser-known centres, such as pretty **Sigüenza** (p263). In Andalucía, there are more such delights in store, such as the grand cathedral in **Seville** (p686) and Capilla Real in **Granada** (p768). They weren't just building cathedrals in those days. The Castilian countryside in particular is littered with castles of all shapes and sizes. Some, like the all-brick castle of **Coca** (p200), are all the more extraordinary for their mix of Gothic and Mudéjar styles. That mix continues in many monuments in medieval **Toledo** (p239), south of Madrid, where stands yet another Gothic pearl, in the form of the cathedral.



WATER WORLDS

One of only two European countries to possess Atlantic and Mediterranean coast (the other being France), Spain's extraordinarily varied coastline offers a little of everything. Swimming is clearly an option all over, but some of the most beautiful beaches and water are to be found in the **Balearic Islands** (p627), especially on **Menorca** (p661) and **Formentera** (p656). One of the best ways to get around the Balearic Islands is by sailing; and speaking of sailing, **Valencia City** (p579) was chosen to stage the 2007 America's Cup. Divers like to explore the depths around the **Illes Medes** (p353), a protected archipelago of islets off Catalonia's Costa Brava. Another popular beach spot that attracts divers is the start of **Cabo de Gata** (p803). Windsurfers, on the other hand, consider **Tarifa** (p733) to be their mecca. Surfers without sails make for the north coast, especially spots like **Zarautz** (p464). Reports suggest that the mysteriously disappeared left in **Mundaka** (p463) is back. Wild and woolly spots abound along the Atlantic coast. Among the most intriguing water-borne excursions in Galicia is a trip to the **Illas Cíes** (p569). There's more than just sea water, however. Those who like white-water adrenalin should head for **Ribadesella** (p522) or **Llavorsí** (p373) to climb aboard for a bumpy ride.



Snapshot

Not since the death of that other queen of flamenco, Lola Flores (1923–95) had Spain been so completely brought to a halt as by the passing away of Rocío Jurado in June 2006. Considered one of the purest voices of all time in Spain, Jurado's death, after a long battle with cancer, caused a national commotion, with hours of nonstop coverage for days before, during and after her funeral. Some 125,000 people from across the country paid their last respects in her home town of Chipiona, in Andalucía.

Tragedy struck almost one month later with the derailment of a rush-hour metro in Valencia, in which 41 commuters died just a day before Pope Benedict XVI's planned visit to the city for the fifth World Meeting of Families. In Galicia, bushfires (many deliberately lit) destroyed more woodland in two weeks in August than in all 2005.

These shocks occurred as Spain's political scene heated up over the 'peace process' promoted by the Socialist government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero to end decades of violence by the Basque separatists organisation, Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA; Basques and Freedom). After an ETA unilateral ceasefire in March 2006, Zapatero announced in June that his government would seek a dialogue. Massive demonstrations against such talks were promoted by the centre-right opposition Partido Popular (PP), whose leader Mariano Rajoy accused the government of 'betraying Spain'. Months later a cloud hung over the process as ETA street violence reignited and some ETA members called for a return to armed struggle.

In spite of PP hysterics, Zapatero has broad support for his peace efforts (including from the EU). The PP have maintained a campaign of total opposition to virtually all government policy since losing national elections to the Socialists in 2004. It (and the Church) led vitriolic campaigns against the 2005 law allowing same-sex marriages (p53) and education reform in 2006 that, among other things, abolished compulsory religion (read: Catholicism) classes. In September 2006, the PP only grudgingly supported the government's decision to contribute 1100 troops to a UN peace-keeping mission in southern Lebanon.

Annoyance for the right has come also with simpler divorce laws (allowing consensual divorce out of court), the opening of debate on easing abortion restrictions (it's legal but the decision ultimately rests with doctors) and measures that will oblige companies to have women in a minimum 40% of top positions in the boardroom in coming years. The government has also proposed a law making it possible for transsexuals to change their name and sex on official registers without court orders and gender operations.

One of the most divisive issues in Spanish politics is the relation between the State and the 17 regions (Autonomous Communities). Under pressure from Catalonia, Zapatero opened the Pandora's box of reform of the regional statutes. Catalonia's new *Estatut*, approved in June 2006, increased that region's powers (including revenue raising) but fell short of what independence-minded Catalans had demanded. References to Catalonia's 'nationhood' in the preamble were watered down, but the PP orchestrated a strident campaign against the *Estatut*, dubbing it the first step towards the 'disintegration' of the Spanish State.

The PP again squealed in opposition to Andalucía's draft statute and what it called 'anti-Spain' references to the constitutional recognition of Andalucía's 'national reality' (whatever that is!). The central government is working on watering down the draft.

FAST FACTS

Population: 44.1 million
Area: 505,000 sq km
GDP: €840 billion
GDP per head: €20,020
GDP growth: 3.4%
Inflation: 3.9%
Unemployment rate: 9.1%
Average life expectancy: 79 years
Highest point in peninsular Spain: Mulhacén at 3479m
Biggest paella: made in Valencia in 1992 in a pan 20m in diameter; it was eaten by 100,000 people

'Europe's first commercial high temperature solar energy plant opened in 2006 in Sanlúcar'

The PP isn't keen on another pending Zapatero measure, his planned Law on Historical Memory. This is a tricky one. Initially conceived to publicly recognise the wrong done to many people jailed or killed under the Franco dictatorship, its realisation has been complicated by the need to treat victims of the left wing, too. One of the aims is to reveal the names and burial locations of up to 90,000 Republicans executed and buried in mass graves during and after the civil war.

The many Spaniards without Republican convictions love their royal family and were happy to hear that one of the few things the government and PP do agree on is the need to reform the constitution to allow Crown Prince Felipe's daughter, Leonor (born 2005), to succeed him on the throne.

Spain struggles to deal with massive illegal immigration (see p58). Waves of *clandestinos* (illegal immigrants) risk their lives on flimsy coastal vessels to reach Spain's Canary Islands from Mauritania and especially Senegal. While this 'deluge' grabs the headlines, most illegals arrive by land and air.

On the economic front, Spain continues to thunder along with high growth rates (an estimated 3.6% in 2006), but warning signs are acute (see p51). National and family debt is growing and much of the growth is fuelled by unreliable long-term sources such as tourism and construction. The latter is especially impressive – for all the wrong reasons. From 1987 to 2005, the amount of urbanised land grew by an astonishing 40%. Regions like Valencia and Murcia continue to turn what little is left of their coastline into one dense, horrible cement ribbon, but the government knows that much of Spain's short-term economic success (and falling unemployment) comes from just this building. Spain is also one of the world's worst offenders in terms of increasing industrial pollution.

Spain is no stranger to swindles and some 300,000 Spaniards lost much of their life savings when two 20-year-old pyramid stamp investment companies collapsed in mid-2006. In a country accustomed to corruption (see the boxed, p752) and savings scandals, the stamp sting could prove to be one of the biggest yet.

While fears abound that southern Spain is turning into a desert, all that sunlight brings a ray of hope. Europe's first commercial high temperature solar energy plant opened in 2006 in Sanlúcar, and local companies hope to make Spain the world leader in this source of energy. The country may need this boost, as coastal tourism could have a limited future. A 2006 report from the Ministry of the Environment claimed Spanish beaches would be eaten back an average of 15m by 2050 because of climate change.

The Authors



DAMIEN SIMONIS

Coordinating Author, Barcelona, Catalonia, Cantabria & Asturias, Balearic Islands

The spark was lit on a trip to Barcelona during a jaunt in southern France. It was Damien's first taste of Spain and he found something irresistible about the place – the way the people moved, talked and enjoyed themselves. All those bars and eateries, the colourful markets... Some years later, he returned, living in Toledo and Madrid before settling in Barcelona. Damien has ranged across the country, from the Picos de Europa to Sierra Nevada, drunk cider in Asturias and gin in the Balearic Islands and still feels he has barely penetrated the first layer. He wrote *Barcelona* for Lonely Planet and has contributed to other guides on Spain.

The Coordinating Author's Favourite Trip

Sometimes the best thing is a trip away from all the mayhem into the backblocks of Spain. Setting off from Madrid (p108), I make for the medieval town I once called home, Toledo (p239). From there I strike west, meeting up with the A5 motorway that leads into Extremadura. After stopping in the delicious town of Guadalupe (p827), I head further west to the equally well-preserved Trujillo (p824), home town of the conquistador Francisco Pizarro. Further west again is Cáceres (p819), the prettiest medieval city in this wild western region. From there, the road leads to Plasencia (p817), a good departure point for the lush Valle del Jerte (p812), before returning to the capital via Sierra de Gredos (p181) and Ávila (p176).



SUSAN FORSYTH

Andalucía

Susan, originally from Melbourne, Australia, has spent the last decade based in southern Spain, and travelling, researching and writing in Spain, Mexico and Central America, mostly sharing assignments with her husband, travel writer and ace editor John Noble. The Hispanicisation of her life continues apace with her two children, now fluent Spanish speakers and totally immersed in the life of a whitewashed Andalucian hill village. Spanish culture, lifestyle and language continue to fascinate and challenge her: she marvels at Spain's architectural and artistic heritage, loves its varied landscapes and finds many similarities with Australia, including the ocean beaches and arid interior.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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ANTHONY HAM

Madrid, Castilla y León

On his first night in Madrid in 2001, Anthony watched spellbound as the Puerta del Sol thronged with energy and people, and Plaza Mayor came alive with street musicians and the languages of the world. In that moment, Anthony fell irretrievably in love with the city. Less than a year later, he arrived in Madrid on a one-way ticket, not speaking a word of Spanish or knowing a single person in the city. Just a few years later, Anthony speaks Spanish, is married to Marina, a *madrileña*, and has just finished renovating an apartment overlooking his favourite plaza in Madrid. When he's not writing for Lonely Planet, Anthony writes on Madrid for newspapers and magazines around the world.



DES HANNIGAN

Aragón, Basque Country, Navarra & La Rioja

Des lives on the Atlantic coast of Cornwall and feels an affinity with the Basque Country, especially the fishing harbours of Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa, where Basque fishermen ask him about the genealogy of Cornish fishermen who work Biscay. (The Cornish reciprocate, oddly enough.) Being an Irish-Scot living in Cornwall, Des also feels a strong affinity with nonviolent Basque politics and Basque culture. He has wandered in and out of Spain for many years and has worked on three guidebooks to Andalucía, so that roaming La Rioja and Navarra and Aragón's southlands felt like familiar heat-seeking, while the foothills and mountains of the Pyrenees are also home-from-home for a devotee of high ground.



JOHN NOBLE

Galicia, Andalucía

In the mid-1990s John, originally from England's Ribbles Valley, and his wife, Susan Forsyth, decided to try life in an Andalucian mountain village and they are still there, along with their children Isabella and Jack. A writer specialising in Spain and Latin America, John has travelled throughout Spain and loves its fascinatingly historic cities; wild, empty back country; isolated villages and castles; rugged coasts; and its music, art, tapas, wine and football. He has written large parts of every edition of this guide, and is coordinating author of Lonely Planet's *Andalucía*.



JOSEPHINE QUINTERO

Castilla-La Mancha

Josephine started travelling with a backpack and guitar in the late 1960s. Further travels took her to Kuwait, where she was held hostage during the Iraq invasion. Josephine moved to the relaxed shores of Andalucía, Spain, shortly thereafter from where she has explored most of the country. She loves Castilla-La Mancha for its dramatic landscape and because it is a beautiful yet largely undiscovered region where you still need to speak Spanish to order a beer.



MILES RODDIS

Andorra, Valencia, Murcia, Extremadura

Over a decade ago Miles and his wife, Ingrid, bought a tatty old flat in the Barrio del Carmen, Valencia's oldest and most vibrant quarter. Now renovated, this shoebox-sized apartment is their principal home, the place to which they retreat to recover, unwind and write up.

Miles has written or contributed to more than 25 Lonely Planet titles, including *Best of Valencia*, *Valencia & the Costa Blanca* and four editions of the book in your hands.

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History

The ancestors of today's Spaniards included Stone Age hunters from Africa; Greeks, Romans, Visigoths and other European peoples; Berber tribes from Morocco; and Phoenicians, Jews and Arabs from the Middle East. The ancestors of a good half of the people living in the Americas today – and others dotted across the rest of the globe – were Spaniards. The key to this great ebb and flow of peoples, cultures and empires is Spain's location: on both the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean; in Europe yet just a stone's throw from Africa. This pivotal position has entangled Spain in the affairs of half the world – and the affairs of half the world in Spain's.

IN THE BEGINNING

Caves throughout the country tell us plenty about Spain's earliest inhabitants. The most impressive, with sophisticated paintings of bison, stag, boar and horses, are at Altamira (p509) near Santander, and date from around 12,000 BC. Altamira was part of the Magdalenian hunting culture of southern France and northern Spain, a Palaeolithic (Old Stone Age) culture that lasted from around 20,000 BC to the end of the last Ice Age in about 8000 BC.

The story goes back even further. The oldest pieces of human bone in Europe have been found in Spain. Human bone fragments 780,000 years old were found in the Sierra de Atapuerca near Burgos in 1994 and probably come from ancestors of the later Neanderthals. Another piece of bone found in 1976 near Orce, in Granada province, is reckoned to be from the skull of an infant ancestor of *Homo sapiens* eaten by a giant hyena over a million years ago.

These finds suggest that the earliest humans in Europe arrived in Spain from Africa.

From the later Neanderthal era, about 30,000 BC, comes 'Gibraltar woman', a skull that was found in 1848. Current thinking is that the Neanderthals were displaced during the last Ice Age by waves of migrants of African origin.

The Cueva de Nerja (p760) in Andalucía is one of many sites of these Cro-Magnons, the first modern humans, who hunted mammoth, bison and reindeer. After the Ice Age new peoples, probably from North Africa, arrived, and their rock-shelter paintings of hunting and dancing survive in eastern Spain.

The Neolithic (New Stone Age) reached eastern Spain from Mesopotamia and Egypt around 6000 BC, bringing many innovations, such as the plough, crops, livestock, pottery, textiles and permanent villages.

Between 3000 and 2000 BC the first metalworking culture began at Los Millares, near Almería (p799), where people began to smelt and shape local copper deposits. The same era saw the building of megalithic tombs (dolmens), constructed of large rocks, around the perimeter of the Iberian Peninsula. The best examples are to be found at Antequera (p758) in Andalucía.

The Bronze Age in Spain began around 1900 BC when people at El Argar in Almería province learned how to alloy copper with tin.

For a colourful survey of the whole saga of Spanish history, read *The Story of Spain* by Mark Williams.

TIMELINE c 12,000 BC

Stone Age hunters at Altamira paint some of Europe's most sophisticated cave art

c 800–600 BC

The fabled Tartessos culture, influenced by Phoenician and Greek traders, flourishes in western Andalucía

PHOENICIANS & GREEKS

By about 1000 BC a flourishing culture had arisen in western Andalucía. The development of this and other societies in the south and east was influenced by Phoenician and, later, Greek traders, who exchanged oils, textiles, jewels and ivory for local metals. The Phoenicians, a Semitic people from present-day Lebanon, set up trading colonies including Cádiz (which they called Gadir), Huelva (Onuba), Málaga (Malaca) and Almuñécar (Ex or Sex). Greek settlements, which began around 600 BC, tended to be further north on the Mediterranean coast. The biggest was Emporion (Empúries; p354) in Catalonia.

These incomers brought the potter's wheel, writing, coinage, the olive tree, the grapevine, the donkey and the hen. Around 700 BC iron replaced bronze as the most important metal in the lower Guadalquivir valley of western Andalucía.

This Phoenician-influenced culture was very likely the fabled Tartessos, which Greek, Roman and biblical writers mythologised as a place of unimaginable wealth. No-one knows whether Tartessos was a city or a state. Some argue it was a trading settlement on the site of modern Huelva; some believe it may lie beneath the marshes near the mouth of the Río Guadalquivir.

IBERIANS & CELTS

Iberians is the general name given to the inhabitants of most of the Iberian Peninsula during the millennium or so before the Romans arrived in 218 BC. From around 1000 to 500 BC, they were joined by Celts (originally from Central Europe) and other tribes who crossed the Pyrenees and settled in northern Spain.

In contrast to the dark-featured Iberians, the Celts were fair, drank beer and ate lard. Celts and Iberians who merged on the *meseta* (the high tableland of central Spain) became the Celtiberians. Celts and Celtiberians typically lived in sizable hill-fort towns called *castros*. The Celts introduced iron technology to the north about the same time as the Phoenicians brought it to the south.

CARTHAGINIANS

From about the 6th century BC the Phoenicians and Greeks were pushed out of the western Mediterranean by Carthage, a former Phoenician colony in modern Tunisia. There was a flourishing Carthaginian colony on Ibiza.

The Carthaginians inevitably came into conflict with the next rising Mediterranean power – Rome. After losing to Rome in the First Punic War (264–241 BC), Carthage responded by invading the Iberian Peninsula under generals Hamilcar Barca, Hasdrubal and Hannibal. The first landing was in 237 BC. The Second Punic War (218–201 BC) saw Hannibal march his elephants over the Alps towards Rome but also brought Roman legions to Spain. Hannibal was eventually forced to retreat, finally being routed in North Africa in 202 BC.

ROMANS

Though the Romans eventually held sway on the Iberian Peninsula for 600 years, it took them 200 years to subdue the fiercest of local tribes.

The Basques in the north, though defeated, were never Romanised in the same way as the rest of Hispania (as the Romans called the peninsula).

Legendary stands against the Romans included the eight-year revolt led by the shepherd-turned-guerrilla Virathius in the west and the centre from around 150 BC, and the siege of Numancia near Soria in 133 BC. Rome had to bring in its most illustrious generals to deal with these insubordinations.

By AD 50 most of the peninsula, particularly the south, had adopted the Roman way of life. This was the Pax Romana, a long and prosperous period of stability. Hispania became urbanised and highly organised. In the 1st century BC the Romans organised the peninsula into three provinces: Baetica (most of Andalucía plus southern Extremadura and southwestern Castilla-La Mancha), with its capital at Corduba (Córdoba); Lusitania (Portugal and northern Extremadura), with its capital at Augusta Emerita (Mérida), the greatest Roman city on the peninsula; and Tarraconensis (the rest), with its capital at Tarraco (Tarragona).

Rome gave the peninsula a road system, aqueducts, temples, theatres, amphitheatres, circuses, baths and the basis of its legal system and languages. The Roman era also brought many Jews, who spread throughout the Mediterranean part of the Roman Empire, and Christianity, which probably came with soldiers from North Africa and merchants in the 3rd century AD. Hispania gave Rome gold, silver, grain, wine, soldiers, emperors (Trajan, Hadrian, Theodosius) and the literature of Seneca, Martial, Quintilian and Lucan. Another notable export was *garum*, a spicy sauce derived from fish and used as a seasoning. The finest of Spain's Roman ruins are at Empúries (p354), Itálica (p708), Mérida (p829), Tarragona (p387) and Segovia (p194).

The Pax Romana started to crack when two Germanic tribes, the Franks and the Alemanni, swept across the Pyrenees towards the end of the 3rd century AD, causing devastation. When the Huns arrived in Eastern Europe from Asia a century later, further Germanic peoples moved westwards. Among these were the Suevi and Vandals, who overran the Iberian Peninsula around 410.

VISIGOTHS

The Visigoths, another Germanic people, sacked Rome itself in 410. Within a few years, however, they had become Roman allies, being granted lands in southern Gaul (France) and fighting on the emperor's behalf against barbarian invaders on the Iberian Peninsula. When the Visigoths were pushed out of Gaul in the 6th century by yet another Germanic people, the Franks, they settled on the Iberian Peninsula, making Toledo their capital.

The rule of the roughly 200,000 long-haired Visigoths, who had a penchant for gaudy jewellery, over the several million more-sophisticated Hispano-Romans was precarious and undermined by strife among their own nobility. The Hispano-Roman nobles still ran the fiscal system and their bishops were the senior figures in urban centres.

The ties between the Visigoth monarchy and the Hispano-Romans were strengthened in 587 when King Reccared converted to Roman Christianity from the Visigoths' Arian version, which denied that Christ was identical to God. Culturally, the Visigoths tended to ape Roman ways. Today a few Visigothic churches can be seen in northern Spain. One, at Baños de Cerrato (p211) near Palencia, dates from 661 and is probably the oldest surviving church in the country.

'Rome gave the peninsula a road system, aqueducts, temples, theatres, amphitheatres, circuses, baths and the basis of its legal system and languages'

Spanish History Index (vlib.iue.it/hist-spain/index.html) provides countless internet leads for those who want to dig deeper.

218–201 BC

Rome defeats Carthage in the Second Punic War and begins a 600-year occupation of the Iberian Peninsula

AD 410

Suevi and Vandals, Germanic peoples from the north, overrun the Iberian Peninsula

466

Visigothic conquest of the Iberian Peninsula begins

711

Muslims invade the peninsula from North Africa, overrunning it within a few years

THE MUSLIM CONQUEST

By 700, with famine and disease in Toledo, strife among the aristocracy and chaos throughout the peninsula, the Visigothic kingdom was falling apart. This paved the way for the Muslim invasion of 711, which set Spain's destiny quite apart from that of the rest of Europe.

Following the death of the prophet Mohammed in 632, Arabs had spread through the Middle East and North Africa, carrying Islam with them. If you believe the myth, they were ushered onto the Iberian Peninsula by the sexual exploits of the last Visigoth king, Roderic. Later chronicles relate how Roderic seduced young Florinda, the daughter of Julian, the Visigothic governor of Ceuta in North Africa, and how Julian sought revenge by approaching the Muslims with a plan to invade Spain.

In 711 Tariq ibn Ziyad, the Muslim governor of Tangier, landed at Gibraltar with around 10,000 men, mostly Berbers (indigenous North Africans). Roderic's army was decimated, probably near the Río Guadalete or Río Barbate in Cádiz province, Andalucía, and he is thought to have drowned while fleeing the scene. Visigothic survivors fled north.

Within a few years the Muslims had conquered the whole Iberian Peninsula, except small areas in the Asturian mountains in the north. The Muslims pushed on over the Pyrenees, but were driven back by the Franks.

MUSLIM SPAIN

The Muslims (sometimes referred to as Moors) were the dominant force on the peninsula for nearly four centuries, a potent force for 170 years after that, and a lesser one for a further 250 years. Between wars and rebellions, Al-Andalus, the name given to Muslim territory on the peninsula, developed the most highly cultured society of medieval Europe.

Al-Andalus' frontiers were constantly shifting as the Christians strove to regain territory in the stuttering 800-year Reconquista (Reconquest). Up to the mid-11th century the frontier lay across the north of the peninsula, roughly from just south of Barcelona to northern Portugal, with a protrusion up to the central Pyrenees. Al-Andalus also suffered internal conflicts and Muslims and Christians even struck up alliances with each other in the course of quarrels with their own co-religionists.

Muslim political power and cultural developments centred initially on Córdoba (756–1031), then Seville (c 1040–1248) and lastly Granada (1248–1492). These cities boasted beautiful palaces, mosques and gardens, universities, public baths and bustling *zocos* (markets). The Muslims developed the Hispano-Roman agricultural base by improving irrigation and introducing new fruits and crops (oranges, lemons, peaches, sugar cane, rice and more).

Though military campaigns against the northern Christians could be very bloodthirsty affairs, Al-Andalus' rulers allowed freedom of worship to Jews and Christians (*mozárabes* or Mozarabs) under their rule. Jews mostly flourished, but Christians had to pay a special tax, so most either converted to Islam (coming to be known as *muladies* or Muwallads) or left for the Christian north.

It was through Al-Andalus that much of the learning of ancient Greece – picked up by the Arabs in the eastern Mediterranean – was transmitted to Christian Europe.

The Muslim settlers themselves were not a homogeneous group. Beneath the Arab ruling class was a larger group of Berbers, and tension between these two groups broke out in Berber rebellion numerous times.

Before long, Muslim and local blood merged. There was even frequent aristocratic intermarriage with the northern Christians.

The Cordoban Emirate & Caliphate

Initially Al-Andalus was part of the Caliphate of Damascus, which ruled the Muslim world. In 750 the Omayyad caliphal dynasty in Damascus was overthrown by a rival clan, the Abbasids, who shifted the caliphate to Baghdad. However an Omayyad survivor, Abd ar-Rahman I, managed to establish himself in Córdoba in 756 as the independent emir of Al-Andalus. He began constructing Córdoba's Mezquita (mosque), one of the world's greatest Muslim monuments. Most of Al-Andalus was more or less unified under Cordoban rule for long periods. In 929 Abd ar-Rahman III bestowed on himself the title caliph, launching the Caliphate of Córdoba (929–1031), during which Al-Andalus reached its peak of power and lustre. Córdoba in this period was the biggest and most dazzling city in Western Europe. Astronomy, medicine, mathematics and botany flourished and one of the great Muslim libraries was established in the city. Abd ar-Rahman III's court was frequented by Jewish, Arab and Christian scholars.

Later in the 10th century the fearsome Cordoban general Al-Mansour (or Almanzor) terrorised the Christian north with 50-odd forays in 20 years. He destroyed the cathedral at Santiago de Compostela in northwestern Spain in 997 and forced Christian slaves to carry its doors and bells to Córdoba, where they were incorporated into the great mosque. But after Al-Mansour's death the caliphate collapsed into a devastating civil war, finally breaking up in 1031 into dozens of *taifas* (small kingdoms), with Seville, Granada, Toledo and Zaragoza among the most powerful.

Almoravids & Almohads

Political unity was restored to Al-Andalus by the Almoravid invasion of 1091. The Almoravids, a strict Muslim sect of Saharan nomads who had conquered North Africa, were initially invited to the Iberian Peninsula to help the Seville *taifa* against the growing Christian threat from the north. Seventy years later a second Berber sect, the Almohads, invaded the peninsula after overthrowing the Almoravids in Morocco. Both sects soundly defeated the Christian armies they encountered.

Under the Almoravids and the Almohads, religious intolerance sent Christian refugees fleeing north. But in time both mellowed in their adopted territory and Almohad rule saw a cultural revival in Seville. The Cordoban philosopher Averroës (1126–98) greatly influenced medieval Christian thought with his commentaries on Aristotle, trying to reconcile science with religion.

The Nasrid Emirate of Granada

Almohad power eventually disintegrated in the face of internal disputes and Christian advances. After Seville fell to the Christians in 1248, Muslim territory on the Iberian Peninsula was reduced to the Emirate of Granada, comprising about half of modern Andalucía and ruled from the lavish

Córdoba's renowned 10th-century caliph Abd ar-Rahman III had red hair and blue eyes; one of his grandmothers was a Basque princess.

Richard Fletcher's *Moorish Spain* is an excellent short history of Al-Andalus (the Muslim-ruled areas of the peninsula).

756–1031

Córdoba dominates Al-Andalus (the Islamic areas of the peninsula) and becomes the finest city in Western Europe

1085

Castilla, a northern Christian kingdom, captures Toledo

1091

The Almoravids invade, helping to unify Muslim Spain

1147

The Almohads defeat the Almoravids in Morocco and invade Muslim Spain

Alhambra palace by the Nasrid dynasty. Granada saw Muslim Spain's final cultural flowering, especially in the 14th century under Yusuf I and Mohammed V, both of whom contributed to the splendours of the Alhambra (p771).

THE RECONQUISTA

The Christian Reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula began in about 722 at Covadonga, Asturias, and ended with the fall of Granada in 1492. It was a stuttering affair, conducted by a tangled sequence of emerging, merging and demerging Christian states that were as often at war with each other as with the Muslims. However the Muslims were gradually pushed south, as the northern kingdoms of Asturias, León, Navarra, Castilla and Aragón developed.

An essential ingredient in the Reconquista was the cult of Santiago (St James), one of the 12 apostles. In 813, the saint's supposed tomb was discovered in Galicia. The town of Santiago de Compostela (p540) grew here, to become the third-most popular medieval Christian pilgrimage goal after Rome and Jerusalem. Christian generals experienced visions of Santiago before forays against the Muslims, and Santiago became the inspiration and special protector of soldiers in the Reconquista, earning the sobriquet Matamoros (Moor-slayer). Today he is the patron saint of Spain.

The Rise of Castilla

Covadonga lies in the Picos de Europa mountains, where Visigothic nobles took refuge after the Muslim conquest. Christian versions of the battle tell of a small band of fighters under their leader, Pelayo, defeating an enormous force of Muslims; Muslim accounts make it a rather less important skirmish. Whatever the facts of Covadonga, by 757 Christians occupied nearly a quarter of the Iberian Peninsula.

The Asturian kingdom eventually moved its capital to León, which spearheaded the Reconquista until the Christians were set on the defensive by Al-Mansour in the 10th century. Castilla, originally a small principality in the east of the kingdom of León, developed into the dominant Reconquista force as hardy adventurers set up towns in the no-man's-land of the Duero basin, spurred on by land grants and other *fueros* (rights and privileges). It was the capture of Toledo in 1085, by Alfonso VI of Castilla, that led the Seville Muslims to call in the Almoravids.

Alfonso I of Aragón, on the southern flank of the Pyrenees, led the counterattack against the Almoravids, taking Zaragoza in 1118. After his death Aragón was united through royal marriage with Catalonia, creating a formidable new Christian power block known as the Kingdom of Aragón. Portugal emerged as an independent Christian kingdom in the 12th century.

Castilla suffered a terrible defeat by the Almohads at Alarcos, south of Toledo, in 1195, but in 1212 the combined Christian armies of Castilla, Aragón and Navarra routed a large Almohad force at Las Navas de Tolosa in Andalucía. This was the beginning of the end for Al-Andalus: León took the key towns of Extremadura in 1229 and 1230; Aragón took Valencia in the 1230s; Fernando III El Santo (Ferdinand the Saint) of Castilla took Córdoba in 1236 and Seville in 1248; and Portugal expelled the Muslims in 1249. The sole surviving Muslim state on the peninsula was now the Emirate of Granada.

Following his 1959 success in *Ben-Hur*, Charlton Heston turned to the Spanish Reconquista for his follow-up Hollywood epic, *El Cid* (1961).

The Lull

Fernando III's son, Alfonso X El Sabio (the Learned; r 1252–84), proclaimed Castilian the official language of his realm. At Toledo he gathered around him scholars regardless of their religion, particularly Jews who knew Arabic and Latin. Alfonso was, however, plagued by uprisings and plots, even from within his own family.

The Castilian nobility repeatedly challenged the crown until the 15th century. This was also an era of growing intolerance towards the Jews and Genoese, who came to dominate Castilian commerce and finance, while the Castilians themselves were preoccupied with their low-effort, high-profit wool production. In the 1390s anti-Jewish feeling culminated in pogroms around the peninsula.

Castilla and Aragón laboured under ineffectual monarchs from the late 14th century until the time of Isabel and Fernando (Isabella and Ferdinand), whose marriage in 1469 would merge the two kingdoms. Isabel succeeded to the Castilian throne in 1474 and Fernando to that of Aragón in 1479. The joint rule of the Catholic Monarchs (Reyes Católicos), as they are known, dates from 1479. The pious Isabel and the Machiavellian Fernando became an unbeatable team.

The Fall of Granada

After Emir Abu al-Hasan of Granada refused, in 1476, to pay any more tribute to Castilla, Isabel and Fernando launched the final crusade of the Reconquista in 1482, with an army largely funded by Jewish loans and the Catholic Church.

By now the rulers of Granada were riven by internal feuds. Matters degenerated into a confused civil war, and the Christians took full advantage of the situation. Isabel and Fernando entered Granada, after a long siege, on 2 January 1492, to kick off what turned out to be the most momentous year in Spanish history.

The surrender terms were fairly generous to Boabdil, the last emir, who got the Alpujarras valleys south of Granada and 30,000 gold coins. The remaining Muslims were promised respect for their religion, culture and property, but this didn't last long.

THE CATHOLIC MONARCHS The Inquisition

The Catholic Monarchs founded the Spanish Inquisition to root out those who didn't practise Christianity as the Catholic Church wished them to. The Inquisition was responsible for perhaps 12,000 deaths over 300 years, 2000 of them in the 1480s. It focused initially on *conversos* (Jews who had converted to Christianity), accusing many of continuing to practise Judaism in secret.

In April 1492, under the influence of Grand Inquisitor Tomás de Torquemada, Isabel and Fernando ordered the expulsion from their territories of all Jews who refused Christian baptism. Up to 100,000 Jews converted, but some 200,000 – the first Sephardic Jews – left for other Mediterranean destinations.

The bankrupt monarchy seized all unsold Jewish property. A talented middle class was decimated.

'The Catholic Monarchs founded the Spanish Inquisition to root out those who didn't practise Christianity as the Catholic Church wished them to'

1248

Seville falls to Fernando III of Castilla; the Nasrid Emirate of Granada becomes the last surviving Muslim state on the peninsula

1469

Isabel, heir to Castilla, marries Fernando, heir to Aragón, uniting the peninsula's two most powerful Christian states

1478

Isabel and Fernando, the Catholic Monarchs (Reyes Católicos), establish the Spanish Inquisition

1492 (January)

Isabel and Fernando capture Granada

Persecution of the Muslims

Cardinal Cisneros, Isabel's confessor and overseer of the Inquisition, tried to eradicate Muslim culture too. In the former Granada emirate he carried out forced mass baptisms, burnt Islamic books and banned the Arabic language. This, combined with seizures of Muslim land, sparked a revolt in Andalusia in 1500. Afterwards, Muslims were ordered to convert to Christianity or leave. Most (around 300,000) underwent baptism and stayed. They came to be known as *moriscos* (converted Muslims), but their conversion was barely skin-deep and they never assimilated. The *moriscos* were finally expelled between 1609 and 1614.

Columbus

In April 1492 the Catholic Monarchs granted Christopher Columbus (Cristóbal Colón to Spaniards) funds for his long-desired voyage across the Atlantic in search of a new trade route to the Orient.

On 3 August 1492 Columbus set off from the port of Palos de la Frontera (p710) in southwestern Andalusia with three small ships and 120 men. They stopped at the Canary Islands, then sailed west for 31 days, sighting no land; the rebellious crew gave Columbus two more days. However, he landed on the island of Guanahani (Bahamas), which he named San Salvador, went on to find Cuba and Hispaniola, and returned to a hero's reception from the Catholic Monarchs in Barcelona, eight months after his departure.

Columbus made three more voyages, founding Santo Domingo on Hispaniola, finding Jamaica, Trinidad and other Caribbean islands, and reaching the mouth of the Orinoco and the coast of Central America. But he died impoverished in Valladolid in 1506, still believing he had reached Asia.

After Isabel

Fernando and Isabel entangled Spain in European affairs by marrying their four children into the royal families of Portugal, Burgundy and England. (The liaison with England went wrong when the youngest child, Catalina, or Catherine of Aragón, was cast aside by Henry VIII.) The early deaths of two children left the third, Princess Juana, heir to the Castilian throne when Isabel died in 1504. Juana's husband, Felipe El Hermoso (Philip the Handsome), was heir to the Low Countries and to the lands of the powerful Habsburg family in Central Europe. However, Juana, dubbed Juana la Loca (the Mad), proved unfit to rule and, when Felipe died soon after Isabel, Fernando took over as regent of Castilla until his death in 1516. His annexation of Navarra in 1512 brought all of Spain under one rule for the first time since Visigothic days.

THE HABSBURGS

Carlos I

In 1517, 17-year-old Carlos I (Charles I), son of Juana la Loca and Felipe El Hermoso, came from Flanders to take up his Spanish inheritance. In 1519 Carlos also succeeded to the Habsburg lands in Austria and was elected Holy Roman Emperor (in which capacity he was Charles V). Carlos now ruled all of Spain, the Low Countries, Austria, several Italian states and parts of France and Germany – more of Europe than anyone since the 9th century – plus the Spanish colonies in the Caribbean and Panama. To these he would add more of Central Europe and further big slices of the Americas.

Carlos spent only 16 years of his 40-year reign in Spain. At first the Spaniards did not care for a king who spoke no Castilian, nor for his appropriating their wealth. Castilian cities revolted in 1520–21 (the Guerra de las Comunidades, or War of the Communities), but were crushed. Eventually the Spanish came round to him, at least for his strong stance against emerging Protestantism and his learning of Castilian.

Carlos I's reign saw ruthless but brilliant Spanish conquistadors seize vast tracts of the American mainland. Between 1519 and 1521 Hernán Cortés conquered the fearsome Aztec empire with a small band of adventurers. Between 1531 and 1533 Francisco Pizarro did the same to the Inca empire. With their odd mix of brutality, bravery, gold lust and piety, these men were the natural successors to the crusading knights of the Reconquista. The new colonies sent huge cargoes of silver, gold and other riches back to Spain, where the crown was entitled to one-fifth of the bullion (the quinto real, or royal fifth). Seville enjoyed a monopoly on this trade and grew into one of Europe's richest cities.

Carlos spent the bulk of the monarchy's new American wealth on an endless series of European conflicts and, war-weary, he abdicated shortly before his death in 1556, dividing his many territories between his son Felipe and his brother Fernando. Felipe got the lion's share, including Spain, the Low Countries and the American possessions.

Felipe II

Felipe II (Philip II; r 1556–98) presided over the zenith of Spanish power. His reign is a study in contradictions. He enlarged the overseas empire – by 1600 Spain controlled Florida, all the biggest Caribbean islands, nearly all of present-day Mexico and Central America, and a large strip of South America – but lost Holland to a long drawn-out rebellion. He received greater flows of silver than ever from the Americas, but went bankrupt. His navy defeated the Ottoman Turks at Lepanto in 1571 but the Spanish Armada of 1588 was routed by England. He was a fanatical Catholic, who spurred the Inquisition to new persecutions, yet readily allied Spain with Protestant England, against Catholic France, when it suited Spain.

When Felipe claimed Portugal on its king's death in 1580, he not only united the Iberian Peninsula but also Europe's two great overseas empires. However the Castilian gentry's disdain for commerce and industry allowed foreign merchants to dominate trade. Money that didn't find its way into foreign pockets, or wasn't owed for European wars, went towards building churches, palaces and monasteries. Spain, it was said, had discovered the magic formula for turning silver into stone.

Decline of the Habsburgs

Seventeenth-century Spain was like a gigantic artisans' workshop, in which architecture, sculpture, painting and metalwork consumed around 5% of the nation's income. The gentry and the Church, which was entitled to one-tenth of all production, led a quite comfortable existence, but for most Spaniards life was decidedly underprivileged. The age was immortalised on canvas by artists such as Velázquez, El Greco, Zurbarán and Murillo, and in words by Miguel de Cervantes, the mystics Santa Teresa of Ávila and San Juan de la Cruz (St John of the Cross) and the prolific playwright Lope de Vega.

The minor country town of Madrid was selected in 1561 by Felipe II as the new capital from which he would mould his kingdom.

'On 3 August 1492 Columbus set off from the port of Palos de la Frontera in southwestern Andalusia with three small ships and 120 men'

1492 (April)

Isabel and Fernando expel Jews who refuse Christian baptism

1492 (October)

Christopher Columbus, funded by Isabel and Fernando, lands in the Bahamas

1517–56

Reign of Carlos I, Spain's first Habsburg monarch

1556–98

Reign of Felipe II, the zenith of Spanish power

Under a trio of ineffectual kings, Spain saw its chickens come home to roost during this period. Felipe III (Philip III; r 1598–1621) left government to the self-seeking Duke of Lerma. Felipe IV (Philip IV; r 1621–65) concentrated on a long line of mistresses and handed over affairs of state to Count-Duke Olivares, who tried bravely but retired a broken man in 1643. Spain lost Portugal and faced revolts in Sicily, Naples and Catalonia. Silver shipments from the Americas shrank disastrously. Carlos II (Charles II; r 1665–1700) failed to produce children, a situation that led to the War of the Spanish Succession.

THE FIRST BOURBONS

Felipe V

Carlos II bequeathed his throne to his young relative Felipe V (Philip V; r 1701–46), who also happened to be second in line to the French throne. The Austrian emperor Leopold, however, wanted to see his son Charles, a nephew of Carlos II, on the Spanish throne. The resulting War of the Spanish Succession (1702–13) was a contest for the balance of power in Europe. Spain lost its last possessions in the Low Countries to Austria, and Gibraltar and Menorca to Britain, while Felipe V renounced his right to the French throne but held on to Spain. He was the first of the Bourbon dynasty, still in place today.

This was Europe's age of Enlightenment, but Spain's powerful Church and Inquisition were at odds with the rationalism that trickled in from France. Two-thirds of the land was in the hands of the nobility and Church and was underproductive, and large numbers of males, from nobles to vagrants, were unwilling to work.

Fernando VI & Carlos III

Under Fernando VI (Ferdinand VI; r 1746–59) the economy took an upturn largely as the result of a revitalised Catalonia and the Basque shipbuilding industry. Agricultural Castilla and Andalucía were left behind, however, as they were unable to increase yields due to a lack of land reforms.

Enlightened despot Carlos III (Charles III; r 1759–88) expelled the backward-looking Jesuits, transformed Madrid, established a new road system out to the provinces and tried to improve agriculture. But food shortages fuelled unrest among the masses.

THE PENINSULAR WAR

Carlos IV (Charles IV; r 1788–1808) was dominated by his Italian wife, Maria Luisa of Parma; she hooked up with a handsome royal guard called Manuel Godoy, who became chief minister. This unholy trinity was ill-suited to coping with the crisis presented by the French Revolution of 1789.

When Louis XVI of France (Carlos IV's cousin) was guillotined in 1793, Spain declared war on France. Two years later, with France's Reign of Terror spent, Godoy made peace, pledging military support for France against Britain. In 1805 a combined Spanish-French navy was beaten by the British fleet, under Nelson, off the Cabo de Trafalgar (south of Cádiz). This put an end to Spanish sea power.

In 1807 Napoleon Bonaparte and Godoy agreed to divide Britain's ally Portugal between them. French forces poured into Spain, supposedly on

the way to Portugal. By 1808 this had become a French occupation of Spain. Carlos was forced to abdicate in favour of Napoleon's brother Joseph Bonaparte (José I).

In Madrid crowds revolted, and across the country Spaniards took up arms guerrilla-style, reinforced by British and Portuguese forces led by the Duke of Wellington. The French, hopelessly stretched by Napoleon's Russian campaign, were finally expelled after their defeat at Vitoria in 1813.

THE 19TH CENTURY

During the Peninsular War, a national Cortes (parliament), meeting at Cádiz in 1812, had drawn up a new liberal constitution, which incorporated many of the principles of the American and French prototypes. This set off a contest lasting most of the 19th century between the Church, monarchy and other conservatives who liked the earlier status quo, and liberals who wanted vaguely democratic reforms.

Fernando VII (Ferdinand VII; r 1814–33) revoked the Cádiz constitution, persecuted liberal opponents and re-established the Inquisition. Corrupt government drastically cut his popularity before his death. Meanwhile the American colonies took advantage of Spain's problems to strike out on their own. By 1824 only Cuba, Guam, the Philippines and Puerto Rico remained Spanish.

First Carlist War

Fernando's dithering over his successor resulted in the First Carlist War (1833–39), between supporters of his brother Don Carlos and those loyal to his infant daughter Isabel. Don Carlos was supported by the Church, other conservatives and regional rebels in the Basque Country, Navarra, Catalonia and Aragón – together known as the Carlists. The Isabel faction had the support of liberals and the army.

During the war violent anticlericalism emerged. Religious orders were closed and, in the Disentailment of 1836, church property and lands were seized and auctioned off by the government. As usual, only the wealthy benefited. The army emerged victorious.

Isabel II

In 1843 Isabel, now all of 13, declared herself Queen Isabel II (Isabella II; r 1843–68). One achievement of sorts during her inept reign was the creation of a rural police force, the Guardia Civil (Civil Guard), which mainly protected the wealthy in the bandit-ridden countryside. There was an upturn in the economy, with progress in business, banking, mining and railways, plus some reforms in education, but the benefits accrued to few. Eventually radical liberals, and discontented soldiers led by General Juan Prim, overthrew Isabel in the Septembrina Revolution of 1868.

First Republic

Spain still wanted a monarch and in 1870 a liberal-minded Italian prince, Amadeo of Savoy, accepted the job. The aristocracy, which opposed Amadeo, split into two camps: one favoured Isabel II's teenage son Alfonso, the other backed Don Carlos' grandson Carlos. Thus began the three-way Second Carlist War (1872–76).

Santa Teresa of Ávila was brought to the silver screen by the rising star of Spanish cinema, Paz Vega, in the 2006 release *Teresa, Vida y Muerte* (Teresa, Life and Death), directed by Ray Loriga.

Felipe IV and his family (sans mistresses) have been preserved for posterity in Velázquez's world-famous family portrait, *Las Meninas*, which can be seen in Madrid's Museo de Prado (p131).

Spain lost the last of its once vast overseas possessions – Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines and Guam – in the humiliating Spanish-American War of 1898.

1609–14

The *moriscos* (converted Muslims) are finally expelled from Spain

1701

Felipe V, first of the Bourbon dynasty, takes the throne

1702–13

War of the Spanish Succession – Spain loses Gibraltar and its last possessions in the Low Countries

1793

Spain declares war on France after Louis XVI is beheaded

Amadeo quickly abandoned Spain and the liberal-dominated Cortes proclaimed Spain a federal republic of 17 states. However, this First Republic, unable to control the regions, lasted only 11 months. In the end the army, no longer liberal, put Alfonso on the throne as Alfonso XII (r 1874–85), in a coalition with the Church and landowners. The 1876 constitution, recognising both monarchy and parliament, produced a sequence of orderly *turnos* (changes of government) between supposed conservatives and liberals. Little actually separated them in policy, and electoral rigging was the norm.

EARLY 20TH CENTURY

Alfonso XIII (r 1902–30) had his friends among the military, wealthy landowners and the rich, powerful Church, and was in the habit of meddling in politics. There were 33 different governments during his reign.

At the other end of the social scale, a powder keg was forming. Industry had brought both prosperity and squalid slums to Barcelona, Madrid and some Basque cities, by attracting much large-scale migration from the country. In the countryside, the old problems of underproduction and oligarchic land ownership persisted. Many Spaniards emigrated to Latin America. The working class gravitated towards Marxism and anarchism.

Social Unrest

The anarchist ideas of the Russian Mikhail Bakunin had reached Spain in the 1860s and rapidly gained support. Bakunin advocated a free society in which people would voluntarily cooperate with each other – a state of affairs to be prepared for by strikes, sabotage and revolts. Anarchism appealed to the peasants of Andalucía, Aragón, Catalonia and the northwest, and to workers living in slums in Barcelona and other cities. In the 1890s and the 1900s anarchists bombed Barcelona's Liceu opera house, assassinated two prime ministers and killed 24 people with a bomb at Alfonso XIII's wedding in 1906. In 1910, the anarchist unions were organised into the powerful Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT; National Confederation of Work).

Socialism grew more slowly than anarchism because of its strategy of steady change through parliamentary processes. The Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT; General Union of Workers), established in 1888, was moderate and disciplined. Its appeal was greatest in Madrid and Bilbao, where people were fearful of Catalan separatism. Spanish socialists rejected Soviet-style communism.

Parallel with the rise of the left was the growth of Basque and Catalan separatism. In Catalonia, this was led by big business interests. Basque nationalism emerged in the 1890s among Basques who considered the many Castilians who had flocked to work in Basque industries as a threat to Basque identity.

In 1909 a contingent of Spanish troops was wiped out by Berbers in Spanish Morocco. The government then called up Catalan reserves to go to Morocco. This sparked off the so-called *Semana Trágica* (Tragic Week) in Barcelona, which began with a general strike and turned into a frenzy of violence. The government responded by executing many workers.

Spain stayed neutral during WWI and enjoyed an economic boom. But anarchist and socialist numbers grew, inspired by the Russian Revolution, and political violence and general mayhem continued, especially in lawless Barcelona.

During the First Republic some Spanish cities declared themselves independent states, and some, such as Seville and nearby Utrera, even declared war on each other.

PRIMO DE RIVERA

In 1921, 10,000 Spanish soldiers were killed by a small force of Berbers at Anual in Morocco. The finger of blame pointed directly at King Alfonso, who had intervened to select the Spanish commander for the Moroccan campaign. Just as a report on the event was to be submitted to parliament in 1923, however, General Miguel Primo de Rivera, an eccentric Andalusian aristocrat, led an army rising in support of the king and then launched his own mild, six-year dictatorship.

Primo was a centralist who censored the press and upset intellectuals but gained the cooperation of the socialist UGT. Anarchists went underground. Primo founded industries, improved roads, made the trains run on time and built dams and power plants. But eventually, with an economic downturn following the Wall St crash and discontent in the army, Alfonso XIII took the chance to return and dismiss him.

SECOND REPUBLIC

Alfonso had brought the monarchy into too much disrepute to last long himself. When a new republican movement scored sweeping victories in municipal elections in 1931, the king went into exile in Italy. The tumultuous Second Republic that followed – called *La Niña Bonita* (Pretty Child) by its supporters – polarised Spain and ended in civil war.

The Left in Charge

Elections in 1931 brought in a government composed of socialists, republicans and so-called radicals (who were actually centrists). The Cortes contained few workers and no-one from the anarchist CNT, which continued with strikes and violence to bring on the revolution.

A new constitution in December 1931 gave women the vote, ended the status of Catholicism as the official religion, disbanded the Jesuits, stopped government payment of priests' salaries, legalised divorce, banned priests from teaching and gave autonomy-minded Catalonia its own parliament. It also promised land redistribution, which pleased the Andalusian landless, but failed to deliver much.

The Right in Charge

Anarchist disruption, an economic slump, the alienation of big business, the votes of women and disunity on the left all helped the right to win the 1933 election. A new Catholic party, Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas (CEDA; Spanish Confederation of Autonomous Rights), won the most seats. Other new forces on the right included the fascist Falange, led by José Antonio Primo de Rivera, son of the 1920s dictator. The Falange practised blatant street violence.

By 1934 violence was spiralling out of control. The socialist UGT called for a general strike, Catalonia's president declared his region independent (within a putative federal Spanish republic) and workers' committees took over the northern mining region of Asturias (eg see Oviedo, p512), after attacking police and army posts. A violent campaign against the Asturian workers by the Spanish Foreign Legion (set up to fight Moroccan tribes in the 1920s), led by generals Francisco Franco and José Millán Astray, firmly split the country into left and right.

Ernest Hemingway's tersely magnificent novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is full of the emotions unleashed in the Spanish Civil War.

1805

Spanish-French fleet defeated by Britain at Trafalgar, ending Spanish sea power

1808–13

French occupation forces driven out in Peninsular War (Spanish War of Independence)

1813–24

Most of Spain's American colonies win independence

1860s

Anarchist ideas reach Spain and soon gain a wide following

Army Uprising

In the February 1936 elections the Popular Front, a left-wing coalition with communists at the fore, narrowly defeated the right-wing National Front. Violence continued on both sides. Extremist groups grew and peasants were on the verge of revolution. But when the revolt came, on 17 July 1936, it was from the other end of the political spectrum. On that day the Spanish army garrison in Melilla, North Africa, rose up against the left-wing government, followed the next day by some garrisons on the mainland. The leaders of the plot were five generals, among them Franco, who on 19 July flew from the Canary Islands to Morocco to take charge of his legionnaires. The civil war had begun.

SPANISH CIVIL WAR

The Spanish Civil War split communities, families and friends. Both sides committed atrocious massacres and reprisals, and employed death squads to eliminate members of opposing organisations. The rebels, who called themselves Nationalists because they thought they were fighting for Spain, shot or hanged tens of thousands of supporters of the republic. Republicans did likewise to Franco sympathisers, including some 7000 priests, monks and nuns. Political affiliation often provided a convenient cover for settling old scores. In the whole war an estimated 350,000 Spaniards died. (Some writers put the numbers as high as 500,000.)

Many of the military and Guardia Civil went over to the Nationalists, whose campaign quickly took on overtones of a crusade against the enemies of God. In Republican areas, anarchists, communists or socialists ended up running many towns and cities. Social revolution followed.

Nationalist Advance

The basic battle lines were drawn within a week of the rebellion in Morocco. Most cities with military garrisons fell immediately into Nationalist hands – this meant everywhere north of Madrid except Catalonia, eastern Aragón, the Basque coast, Cantabria and Asturias, plus western Andalucía and Granada. Franco's force of legionnaires and Moroccan mercenaries was airlifted from Morocco to Seville by German warplanes in August. Essential to the success of the revolt, they moved northwards through Extremadura towards Madrid, wiping out fierce resistance in some cities. At Salamanca in October, Franco pulled all the Nationalists into line behind him.

Madrid, reinforced by the first battalions of the International Brigades (armed foreign idealists and adventurers organised by the communists), repulsed Franco's first assault in November and endured, under communist inspiration, over two years' siege.

Foreign Intervention

The International Brigades never numbered more than 20,000 and couldn't turn the tide against the better armed and organised Nationalist forces.

Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy supported the Nationalists with planes, weapons and men (75,000 from Italy, 17,000 from Germany), turning the war into a rehearsal for WWII. The Republicans had some Soviet support, in the form of planes, tanks, artillery and advisers, but the rest of the international community refused to become involved (although some 25,000 French fought on the Republican side).

Republican Quarrels

With Madrid besieged, the Republican government moved to Valencia in late 1936 to continue trying to preside over the diversity of political persuasions on its side, which encompassed anarchists, communists, moderate democrats and regional secessionists.

Barcelona was run for nearly a year by anarchists and a Trotskyite militia called the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (POUM; Workers' Marxist Unification Party).

In April 1937 German planes bombed the Basque town of Guernica (called Gernika in Basque), causing terrible casualties; this became the subject of Picasso's famous pacifist painting. All the north coast fell in the summer, giving the Nationalists control of Basque industry. Republican counterattacks near Madrid and in Aragón failed.

Meanwhile divisions among the Republicans erupted into fierce street fighting in Barcelona in May 1937, with the Soviet-influenced communists completely crushing the anarchists and Trotskyites. The Republican government moved to Barcelona in autumn 1937.

Nationalist Victory

In early 1938 Franco repulsed a Republican offensive at Teruel in Aragón, then swept eastwards with 100,000 troops, 1000 planes and 150 tanks, isolating Barcelona from Valencia. In July the Republicans launched a last offensive as the Nationalists moved through the Ebro valley. The bloody encounter, won by the Nationalists, resulted in 20,000 dead.

The USSR withdrew from the war in September 1938 and in January 1939 the Nationalists took Barcelona unopposed. The Republican government and hundreds of thousands of supporters fled to France.

The Republicans still held Valencia and Madrid, and had 500,000 people under arms, but in the end the Republican army simply evaporated. The Nationalists entered Madrid on 28 March 1939 and Franco declared the war over on 1 April.

FRANCO'S SPAIN

The Nationalist victors were merciless. Instead of reconciliation, more blood-letting ensued. An estimated 100,000 people were killed or died in prison after the war. The hundreds of thousands imprisoned included many intellectuals and teachers; others fled abroad, depriving Spain of a generation of scientists, artists, writers, educators and more.

Franco ruled absolutely. The Cortes was merely a rubber stamp for such decrees as he chose to submit to it. Regional autonomy aspirations were not tolerated.

Franco kept hold of power by never allowing any single powerful group – the Church, the Movimiento Nacional (the only legal political party), the army, monarchists or bankers – to dominate. The army provided many ministers and enjoyed a most generous budget. Catholic orthodoxy was fully restored, with secondary schools entrusted to the Jesuits, divorce made illegal and church weddings compulsory. Despite endemic corruption among the country's administrators, Franco won some working-class support with carrots such as job security and paid holidays, but there was no right to strike.

Hugh Thomas' *The Spanish Civil War* is the classic account of the war in any language: long and dense, yet readable and humane. Helen Graham's *The Spanish Civil War: A Very Short Introduction* does its different job well, too.

David Trueba's 2003 movie *Soldados de Salamina* (Soldiers of Salamis) and Javier Cercas' identically named 2001 novel tell how a Republican soldier helps a Falangist leader escape execution in the last days of the civil war. Both were big successes.

Homage to Catalonia recounts George Orwell's personal involvement in the civil war, moving from euphoria to despair.

British director Ken Loach's *Tierra y Libertad* (Land and Freedom), made in 1995, is one of the most convincing treatments of the civil war on film.

1873

First Republic, a federal union of 17 states, collapses in chaos; monarchy is restored

1909

La Semana Trágica (Tragic Week) in Barcelona: a general strike turns into a frenzy of violence

1923–30

Mild dictatorship of General Miguel Primo de Rivera

1931–36

Second Republic: King Alfonso XIII goes into exile, Spanish society polarises, political violence spirals

WWII

A few months after the civil war ended, WWII began. Franco promised Hitler an alliance but never committed himself to a date. In 1944 Spanish leftists launched a failed attack on Franco's Spain from France; small leftist guerrilla units continued a hopeless struggle in the north, Extremadura and Andalucía until the 1950s.

After WWII Spain was excluded from the UN and NATO, and suffered a UN-sponsored trade boycott that helped turn the late 1940s into Spain's *años de hambre* (years of hunger). But with the onset of the Cold War, the US sought to establish four bases in Spain. Franco agreed, in return for large sums of aid, and in 1955 Spain was admitted to the UN.

Economic Miracle

The Stabilisation Plan of 1959, with its devaluation of the peseta and other deflationary measures, brought an economic upswing. The plan was engineered by a new breed of technocrats linked to the Catholic group Opus Dei. Spanish industry boomed. Thousands of young Spaniards went abroad to study and returned with a new attitude of teamwork. Modern machinery, techniques and marketing were introduced; transport was modernised; new dams provided irrigation and hydropower.

The recovery was funded in part by US aid, and remittances from more than a million Spaniards working abroad, but above all by tourism, which was developed initially along Andalucía's Costa del Sol and Catalonia's Costa Brava. By 1965, the number of tourists arriving in Spain was 14 million a year.

A huge population shift from impoverished rural regions to the cities and tourist resorts took place. Many Andalucians went to Barcelona. In the cities, elegant suburbs developed, as did shantytowns and, later, high-rise housing for the workers.

The Final Decade

The year 1964 saw Franco celebrating 25 years of peace, order and material progress. However the jails were still full of political prisoners and large garrisons were maintained outside every major city. Over the next decade, labour strife grew and discontent began to rumble in the universities and even the army and Church.

Regional problems resurfaced too. The Basque-nationalist terrorist group Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA; Basques and Freedom), founded in 1959, gave cause for the declaration of six states of emergency between 1962 and 1975; heavy-handed police tactics won ETA support from Basque moderates.

Franco chose as his successor Prince Juan Carlos, the Spanish-educated grandson of Alfonso XIII. In 1969 Juan Carlos swore loyalty to Franco and the Movimiento Nacional.

Cautious reforms by Franco's last prime minister, Carlos Arias Navarro, provoked violent opposition from right-wing extremists. Spain seemed to be sinking into chaos when Franco died on 20 November 1975.

TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

Juan Carlos I, aged 37, took the throne two days later. The new king's links with Franco inspired little confidence in a Spain now clamouring for democracy. However, Juan Carlos earned much of the credit for the successful

transition to democracy that followed. He sacked Navarro in July 1976, replacing him as prime minister with Adolfo Suárez, a 43-year-old former Franco apparatchik with film-star looks. To general surprise, Suárez got the Francoist-filled Cortes to approve a new, two-chamber parliamentary system. Then in early 1977 political parties, trade unions and strikes were all legalised and the Movimiento Nacional was abolished.

New Constitution

Suárez's centrist Unión de Centro Democrático (UCD; Democratic Centre Union) party won nearly half the seats in the new Cortes in 1977. The left-of-centre Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE; Spanish Socialist Worker Party), led by a charismatic young lawyer from Seville, Felipe González, came second. One of the new government's first acts was to grant a general amnesty for acts committed in the civil war and under the Franco dictatorship. There were no truth commissions or trials of the perpetrators of atrocities. An unwritten pact of silence was how Spaniards have generally dealt ever since with their past differences – the civil war and the repression that followed it – in the interests of harmoniously moving forward. Not until the 21st century did people start unearthing the bones of relatives who had been shot for being on the wrong side in the wrong place during the war.

In 1978 the Cortes passed a new constitution that made Spain a parliamentary monarchy with no official religion. The constitution provided for a large measure of devolution from the central government to Spain's regions, in response to the local-autonomy fever that gripped Spain after the stifflingly centralist Franco era. By 1983 the country had been divided into 17 'autonomous communities' with their own regional governments controlling a range of policy areas.

Social Liberation

Personal and social life enjoyed a rapid liberation after Franco. Contraceptives, adultery, homosexuality and divorce were legalised and the Madrid social, party and arts scene known as the *movida* was the epicentre of a newly unleashed hedonism that still looms large in Spanish life today. However, Suárez faced mounting resistance from within his own party to further reforms, and in 1981 he resigned.

PSOE RULE

In 1982 Spain made a final break with the past by voting the PSOE into power with a sizable majority. Felipe González was to be prime minister for 14 years.

The party's young, educated leadership came from the generation that had opened the cracks in the Franco regime in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The PSOE persuaded the unions to accept wage restraint and job losses in order to streamline industry. Unemployment rose from 16% to 22% by 1986. But that same year Spain joined the European Community (now the EU), bringing on an economic boom that lasted until 1991. The middle class grew ever bigger and Spain's women streamed into higher education and jobs.

The PSOE put a national health system in place by the early 1990s and made improvements in state education, raising the university population to well over a million.

25 Años sin Franco (25 Years Without Franco; www.el-mundo.es/nacional/XXV_aniversario) is a special 2000 supplement of *El Mundo* newspaper published online – in Spanish, but the photos and graphics tell their own story.

Franco styled himself Generalísimo (Supreme General) and, later, *caudillo*, which is roughly equivalent to the German *Führer*.

Paul Preston's *Franco* is the big biography of one of history's little dictators – and it has very little to say in the man's favour. Preston has also written *Juan Carlos: Steering Spain from Dictatorship to Democracy*, about the present king.

1936–39

Spanish Civil War: Nationalist rebels led by General Francisco Franco defeat Republican forces; about 350,000 Spaniards are killed

1939–75

Franco dictatorship

1975

Franco dies and is succeeded by King Juan Carlos I

1976–81

Prime Minister Adolfo Suárez engineers a return to democracy

Slump & Scandal

Around halfway through the late 1980s boom, the good life began to turn a little sour. People observed that many of the glamorous new rich were making their money by property or share speculation, or plain corruption. In 1992 – exactly five centuries after the pivotal year of its history – Spain celebrated its return to the modern world in style, staging the Barcelona Olympics and the Expo 92 world fair in Seville. However, the economy was now in a slump (unemployment reached 22.5% the following year) and the PSOE was increasingly mired in scandals.

The slump bottomed out in 1993, but the scandals multiplied. The González-appointed head of the Guardia Civil from 1986 to 1993, Luis Roldán, suddenly vanished in 1994 after being charged with embezzlement and bribery. He was arrested the following year in Bangkok and in 1998 was jailed in Spain for 28 years.

Most damaging was the affair of the Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberación (GAL), death squads that had murdered 28 suspected ETA terrorists (several of whom were innocent) in France in the mid-1980s. A constant stream of GAL allegations contributed to the PSOE's electoral defeat in 1996. In 1998 a dozen senior police and PSOE men were jailed in connection with the affair.

PARTIDO POPULAR RULE

The 1996 general election was won by the centre-right Partido Popular (PP; People's Party), led by José María Aznar, a former tax inspector from Castilla y León. The party had been founded by a former Franco minister, Manuel Fraga, something its opponents never let it forget. Aznar promised to make politics dull, and he did, but he presided over eight years of solid economic progress, winning the 2000 election as well with the first-ever absolute parliamentary majority for a centre-right party in democratic Spain.

The PP cut public investment, sold off state enterprises and liberalised various sectors, such as telecommunications. In 1997 employers and unions signed a deal reforming Spain's employment system: severance pay was reduced but it became easier for companies to hire the young, middle-aged and long-term unemployed. During the Aznar years Spain's economy grew by an average of 3.4% a year, far outstripping the EU average, and unemployment fell from 23% in 1996 to 11% in 2004. The figure was still the highest in the EU, but the statistics concealed the fact that many officially jobless people benefited from a big black economy.

On noneconomic fronts Aznar's rule was less of an unqualified success. The government's slow response to the *Prestige* disaster of 2002, when oil from a broken tanker smothered 600km of northwestern Spanish coast in black sludge, earned it a lot of opprobrium. Aznar took a hard line against ETA, banning its political wing, Batasuna, in 2002, and refusing to talk to ETA unless it renounced violence. Aznar also lined up firmly behind US and British international policy after the 11 September 2001 attacks on the USA. However, his strong support for the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 was unpopular at home, as was his plan to send 1300 Spanish troops to Iraq.

The major social change of the Aznar years was a tripling of the number of foreigners, especially from South America, Morocco, sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Europe, in the population: see p58 for more on this profoundly important development.

The Spanish government can be found on the Web at www.la-moncloa.es, while Juan Carlos I has his site at www.lacasareal.es.

Spain uses more cement than any other country in Europe.

The PSOE, after its resounding defeat in 2000, chose an amiable, sincere young lawyer from Valladolid, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, as its new leader. Zapatero immediately swept most previous PSOE high-ups, including Felipe González, out of the party hierarchy. But as the March 2004 general election approached, Zapatero seemed powerless to prevent a third successive victory for the PP, now led by Mariano Rajoy, successor to Aznar, who had decided to retire after two terms.

THE MADRID BOMBINGS

Early on the morning of Thursday 11 March 2004, three days before the general election, bombs exploded on four crowded commuter trains in and near Madrid, killing 191 people and injuring 1755. An estimated quarter of Spain's population, 11 million people, poured onto the streets in demonstrations of peace and solidarity the following day. Accompanying the overwhelming feelings of national shock and grief was the question, 'Who did it?' The PP government pointed a very firm finger at ETA, which had been foiled in at least two attempts to carry out devastating bombings in the preceding months.

The evidence this time, however, pointed at least equally strongly to Islamic extremists. Police investigating the bombings were certain by the following day that ETA was not the culprit. The government, however, continued to maintain that ETA was the prime suspect until Saturday 13 March, when police in Madrid arrested three Moroccans and two Indians, with suspected links to Al-Qaeda, in connection with an unexploded bomb found on one of the trains.

The following day the PSOE, which had lagged a distant second in the opinion polls before 11 March, won the election. This shock result was widely attributed to the PP's unpopular policy on Iraq, which most Spaniards believed was the reason terrorists had attacked Madrid, and to the PP's apparent attempts to mislead the public by blaming the bombings on ETA.

By March 2005, 75 people, mostly Moroccan, had been arrested for suspected involvement in the bombings. Some were released but in April 2006 29 were ordered to stand trial for involvement in the bombings. A two-year investigation headed by Judge Juan del Olmo had found that Islamic extremists inspired by, but not directed by, Osama bin Laden, were responsible for the attacks. The trial of the 29 was likely to start in 2007 and to last at least a year.

FROM A (AZNAR) TO Z (ZAPATERO): SPAIN UNDER THE NEW PSOE

Within two weeks of taking office in April 2004, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's new PSOE government honoured its campaign pledge to pull Spanish troops out of Iraq. Since then the Zapatero government has forged ahead with reforms that have largely pleased its supporters, including the many young voters who chose the PSOE in the wake of the Madrid bombings, and predictably angered the right. Zapatero – nicknamed Bambi by his detractors for a certain resemblance to the Disney cartoon animal; his amiable, almost innocent air; and supposed political light-weightness – has shown a dogged determination to negotiate solutions to Spain's most intractable problems, in stark contrast to the more autocratic approach of his PP predecessors.

Ghosts of Spain (2006) by Giles Tremlett of the *Guardian* gets right under the skin of contemporary Spain, and its roots in the recent past. If you read only one book on Spain, make it this one.

1982–96

Spain is governed by the centre-left Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) led by Felipe González

1986

Spain joins the European Community (now the EU)

1996–2004

The centre-right Partido Popular (PP), led by José María Aznar, presides over eight years of steady economic progress

2004 (11 March)

One hundred and ninety-one killed in Madrid train bombings by Islamic terrorists

'An amnesty for illegal immigrants in 2005 allowed some 500,000 non-EU citizens to obtain legal residence and work permits in Spain'

In response to persistent agitation from (principally) Catalonia and the Basque Country for more regional autonomy, Zapatero declared his government willing to renegotiate the statutes that define the powers of Spain's 17 autonomous communities. In May 2005 his government passed a motion supporting dialogue with ETA if it abandoned violence. Already weakened by the arrest of many of its top leaders, ETA had not murdered anyone in two years and had started to make vaguely conciliatory noises. In March 2006 it declared a permanent ceasefire, saying it wanted to 'promote a democratic process in the Basque Country'. Zapatero said he would seek peace talks (see p31), but it remains to be seen whether a durable and peaceful political solution for the Basque Country can be achieved. ETA, which has long sought an independent state covering the Spanish and French Basque Country and Navarra, has murdered more than 800 people in its 45 years of existence.

An amnesty for illegal immigrants in 2005 allowed some 500,000 non-EU citizens to obtain legal residence and work permits in Spain, while the government pledged a crackdown on subsequent illegal immigration and black-market labour. This has not, however, stemmed the tide of Africans and South Americans seeking a way into Spain (seen as an easy entry point into Europe) – nor the humanitarian tragedy of the many hundreds who die making dangerous sea crossings from Africa to the Canary Islands or Andalucía.

2004 (14 March)

PSOE, led by José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, wins surprise election victory

2006 (22 March)

ETA declares permanent ceasefire

The Culture

THE NATIONAL PSYCHE

More than five centuries of national unity have done little to erode the regional ticks that distinguish one group of Spaniards from another. Even so, they cannot escape the occasional national generalisation. A visitor to Franco's Spain in the 1960s might have found them uniformly dour and frumpy. Not any more.

Spaniards, from San Sebastián to Seville, share a zest for the fest. The country's calendar creaks beneath the weight of an unending parade of feast days and celebrations that, whether of religious or pagan origin, share the common aim of providing an excuse for much drinking, eating and merrymaking. Not that many Spaniards need an excuse. Urban Spain in particular attaches great importance to what the Irish would call *craic*. From the international rave clubs of Ibiza to the rivers of revellers in the narrow Siete Calles of Bilbao, a live-for-the-moment attitude prevails.

Perhaps simply a precariousness about daily life down the centuries in this long-troubled country has engendered the need for momentary escape. A trip around the country reveals a broad spectrum of regional traits. While the people of deep Spain, the two Castillas, tend to be taciturn and dry, their neighbours to the south in Andalucía are the height of instant affability. Your average Andalusian loves a chat over a sherry in an extrovert and often fickle fashion. In the northeast, the Catalans are famed for their unerring sense of business and a rather Protestant style of work ethic. Further west, the proud Basques can at first seem unapproachable but quickly prove effusively hospitable once the ice is broken.

Madrid comes closest to providing a picture of the amalgam. For centuries a magnet for Spaniards from all corners of the country, its people have that air of the capital, burning candles at both ends by working and partying hard, and keeping a curious eye open for newcomers.

LIFESTYLE

Since Spain passed its new constitution in 1978, the life of its people has changed in leaps and bounds. At the time, 40% of Spanish homes had neither bath nor shower and a quarter of the population above 16 was illiterate. Only a fifth of families could afford to go away on holidays. Now most families have all the standard white goods, a car and take annual holidays at home and abroad. True, household debt has never been so high.

The rapid rise in living standards has been accompanied by deep social change. Spanish women are having fewer children than they were a couple of generations ago (see Population, p55), divorce is on the rise, as is the

According to a study by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Spain is the second-noisiest country in the world after Japan.

MY BEAUTIFUL LITTLE LAUNDRETTE

Spain is for some just one big washing machine – for laundering vast amounts of money. According to Spanish police, at least €2 billion are laundered in Spain annually. The Costa del Sol was long the favoured location, but filthy cash from local, South American, Russian and Ukrainian mafia organisations now gets the cleaning treatment up and down the Mediterranean coast. Luxury cars, boats, houses, even whole suburbs are bought up to make grubby drug and people-traffickers' money squeaky clean. Spain is a special target because of its close financial ties with South America and its position next to North Africa, a gateway for the drug trade. It is estimated that a quarter of all the €500 notes in circulation in Europe are in Spain. Hardly a coincidence!

number of single parent families. De facto couples are gradually acquiring much the same rights as their married counterparts and the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE; Spanish Socialist Worker Party) government shook the conservative elements of society to the core when it legalised same-sex marriage in 2005. The Catholic Church and right-wing opposition Partido Popular (PP; People's Party) vociferously condemned the law but in April 2006, PP's mayor of Ourense (Galicia) surprised all by officiating at the gay marriage of a party colleague. All this was utterly unthinkable in the grey days of Franco, when the Church ruled supreme over Spanish mores.

Children still tend to stay in the parental home for longer than their counterparts in northern Europe. It is not uncommon for them to still be living with their parents into their thirties. The reasons given range from unemployment (almost 20% of university graduates take four years or more to find work) to low salaries combined with the high cost of rent.

10 REASONS WHY SPAIN IS CONTROLLED CHAOS *Skerekes*

- **Semana Santa** (Seville; see the boxed text, p701) Hundreds of men hooded like the Ku Klux Klan processing with candles through narrow alleyways followed by two-tonne virgins carried on the shoulders of 40 barefoot men. Who said Lenten fasting had to be dull?
- **Las Fallas** (Valencia; see the boxed text, p586) Grab your sparklers kids and hit the streets. It's time to burn five-storey tall papier-mâché and wooden sculptures while throwing around incendiary devices with reckless abandon.
- **La Tomatina** (Valencia; see the boxed text, p594) Instructions: drink all night, stumble into the main square at dawn, then get whipped by wet towels and hosed down as you throw truckloads of tomatoes at your fellow *borrachos* (drunkards). But watch out: that tomato juice can leave a nasty eye infection.
- **Carnaval** (Andalucía; see p718) The party doesn't stop for two weeks during this Andalusian fiesta, where full-grown men in Pink Panther costumes can be found passed out luxuriously on park benches at 9am while troops of Smurfs scamper through the streets until dawn.
- **Bullfighting** Rail-thin men in tight-fitting outfits running around provoking a 320kg bull with barbed sticks while another dances around the animal with a piece of red cloth – now that's entertainment.
- **The running of the bulls** (Pamplona; see the boxed text, p482) Grab your running shoes and hit the pavement everyone. It's the latest work-out craze. Beat the herd of charging bulls into the ring or be trampled into the cobblestones. Talk about putting blood, sweat and tears into your workout!
- **'Higher' education** Roll a joint and grab your Amstel light; it's siesta time higher-education style. Don't worry, your professor's not going to bust you for drinking on school grounds. If you're lucky, the next round might be on him.
- **Botellón** Grab your friends and a few litres of Cruzcampo and head towards the plaza. No need to worry about swilling your *cerveza* (beer) in public. If your friend gets a little too drunk and rowdy out in the streets, it's your responsibility, not the police's.
- **Small-town oddities** Head out to the little town of Alberca and go hog wild – with their designated mascot, that is. Yep, that's right, every year this little pueblo (village) designates a pig which it will spare, let loose in the streets, and allow to be the town pet.
- **Los niños de la noche** While American children are snuggled securely in their beds at dusk, Spanish youth are left to run wild producing mayhem in the streets until midnight. Clearly, Spanish parents have never heard of Wee Willy Winkie and his 8pm curfew.

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ECONOMY

Statistics are a funny thing. Figures show the gap in per capita earnings between Spain and the EU closing (to about 80% of the EU average). And yet wages trail well behind those of most Western European countries. The average gross salary does not exceed €18,000 a year. A senior project manager might earn €40,000 before tax. The minimum wage is €490 a month.

Some years ago, former president José María Aznar proclaimed *España va bien* (Spain is doing well) and, by most appearances, one would have to agree. Annual growth, at 3.5%, remains among the most robust of the EU (whose combined average is predicted to be 2.7% for 2006). For the first time ever, Spain ended the 2005 financial year with a budget surplus (and is set to continue running a surplus until at least 2009). Unemployment, while still high, is down to 9.1% (the figures in excess of 20% of the early 1990s seem a distant memory).

At 3.9%, Spanish inflation is almost twice the EU average of 2.1%; public debt remains high; and the trade deficit is widening. Equally, EU funding is set to drop drastically from 2007. There are worries over the higher cost of oil, overdependence on the construction industry, a plateauing of the property boom and the enlargement of the EU in 2004 (which made Spain into a net contributor to EU funds after being a large-scale recipient for many years).

Large Spanish companies, after expanding heavily into Latin America in the 1990s, have started buying up European enterprises as they seek to expand further. In 2004 Spain's Banco Santander (continental Europe's biggest bank) bought the UK bank Abbey for UK£8 billion, and in 2005 Telefónica, the world's third-biggest telecommunications company, bought the British mobile-phone firm O2 for €26 billion. Spain also now has five of Europe's seven biggest construction groups – hardly surprising given the decade-long building boom that has seen Spain become the Florida of Europe in terms of holiday homes. Construction accounts for 16% of the economy. As well as jobs, the building boom has produced some very unsightly and ecologically dubious overdevelopment, not to mention widespread municipal corruption, especially along the coasts.

POPULATION

With 44.1 million people, Spain is one of the least densely populated of Western European countries – about 87 people per square kilometre. According to one survey, Spaniards are among the shortest and slimmest people in Europe too.

In recent years the population would have fallen had it not been for the massive arrival of immigrants. Indeed, the total population grew by nearly one million in 2004 alone. By the end of 2005 it was estimated that 8.4%, or 3.7 million, were foreigners.

Spaniards like to live together in cities, towns or pueblos (villages), a habit that probably goes back to past needs for defence. Only in the Basque Country (and to some extent Galicia) do you see countryside dotted with single farmsteads and small fields. As a result, cities like those of Madrid and Barcelona have among the highest population concentration in the world, while the countryside is bereft of people. Regional differences persist today. The peoples with the strongest identities – the Catalans, Basques and, to a lesser extent, the Galicians – are on the fringes of the Spanish heartland of Castilla and have their own languages and minority independence movements.

Some consider Spain's Roma people to be its only true long-standing ethnic minority. They are thought to have originated in India and reached Spain in the 15th century. As elsewhere, they have suffered discrimination. There are about 600,000 Roma in Spain, more than half of them in Andalucía.

John Hooper's *The New Spaniards* gives a crisp and diverse insight into many aspects of modern Spanish society. It is a breezy, well-documented account of everything from sex bars to the economy.

Mites de Barça is a trilingual coffee-table book covering one of Spain's most glorious sides, FC Barcelona.

SPORT Football

Fútbol (soccer) seems to be many a Spaniard's prime preoccupation. Hundreds of thousands of fans attend the games in the Primera División (First Division) of the Liga (league) every weekend from September to May, with millions more following the games on TV.

Almost any game in the Primera División is worth attending for the Spanish crowd experience. Those involving eternal rivals Real Madrid and Barcelona stir still greater passions. These two have large followings and something approaching a monopoly on the silverware: between them they have carried off the league title 47 times. Since 2004 Barcelona has been having a dream run, taking the league in 2004–05 and again the following year, as well as winning the 2006 European Champion's Cup for only the second time in the club's history.

Real Madrid, which has been having a rocky time of it in the past few years, is at home in the **Estadio Santiago Bernabéu** (☎ 91 398 43 00, 902 324324; www.realmadrid.com; Avenida de Concha Espina 1), near metro Santiago Bernabéu, and FC Barcelona's home is at **Camp Nou** (☎ tickets 902 189900; www.fcbarcelona.com; Avinguda Aristides Maillol s/n), near metro Collblanc.

Other leading clubs include Valencia, Athletic Bilbao, Deportivo La Coruña, Real Betis (of Seville), Málaga and Real Sociedad of San Sebastián.

League games are mostly played on Saturday and Sunday, and you can pay at the gate (from about €15 for lesser games, at least €30 for the cheapest seats at less important Real Madrid or FC Barcelona matches) for all but the biggest matches.

Bullfighting

It is difficult to classify this very Spanish activity. Bullfighting occurs in Portugal, southern France and parts of Latin America, but Spain is its true home. The most important fight season takes place in Madrid for a month from mid-May as part of the city's celebrations of its patron saint, San Isidro.

To aficionados the fight is an art form and to its protagonists a way of life. To its detractors it is little more than ghoulish torture and slaughter. If we call it here a spectator sport, it is more for lack of another obvious 'category'.

La lidia, as the art of bullfighting is known, took off in Spain in the mid-18th century (King Carlos III stopped it late in the century, but his successors dropped the ban). By the mid-19th century breeders were creating the first reliable breeds of *toro bravo* (fighting bull), and a bullfighting school had been launched in Seville.

The bullfighting season begins in the first week of February with the fiestas of Valdemorillo and Ajalvir, near Madrid, to mark the feast day of San Blas. All over the country, but especially in the two Castillas and Andalucía, *corridos* (bullfights) and *encierros* (the running of the bulls through town), as in Pamplona, are part of town festivals. As a rule, *corridos* take place on weekends from about 6pm. On the card are six bulls, and hence fights, faced by three *cuadrillas* (teams) of *toreros* (bullfighters).

The matador is the star of the team. It is above all his fancy footwork, skill and bravery before the bull that has the crowd in raptures or in rage, depending on his (or very occasionally her) performance. A complex series of events takes place in each clash, which can last about 20 to 30 minutes. *Peones* dart about with grand capes in front of the bull, horseback picadors drive lances into the bull's withers and *banderilleros* charge headlong at the bull in an attempt to stab *banderillas* into his neck. Finally, the matador kills the bull, unless the bull has managed to put him out of action, as sometimes happens.

For the latest information on the next bullfight near you, biographies of *toreros* and more, check out www.portaltaurino.com (in Spanish).

A Spanish animal-rights and antibullfighting organisation is the Asociación para la Defensa de los Derechos del Animal (ADDA), at www.addaong.org (in Spanish).

Other antibullfighting organisations are the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA; www.wspa-international.org) and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA; www.peta.org).

La lidia is about many things – death, bravery, performance. No doubt the fight is bloody and cruel, but aficionados say the bull is better off dying at the hands of a matador than in the *matadero* (abattoir). To witness it is not necessarily to approve of it, but might give an insight into the tradition and thinking behind *la lidia*.

Basketball

Baloncesto (basketball) is an increasingly popular sport, and Spain's first ever world championship victory (over Greece) in September 2006 in Japan doubtless won it more aficionados. From late September to late June, 18 clubs contest the Liga Asociación de Clubes de Baloncesto (ACB) national league. Leading teams include Barcelona and Real Madrid (attached to the football clubs), Tau Vitoria, Unicaja of Málaga, Pamesa of Valencia, Caja San Fernando of Seville and Estudiantes of Madrid. For details on upcoming matches around the country, check out the Spanish-language league website www.acb.com.

Motor Racing

Every year around April or May the dashing Formula One knights in shining motorised armour come to Montmeló, about a 30-minute drive north of Barcelona, to burn rubber. For more information, see p328.

Spain is motorcycle mad and even more so now that it has a world-class rider in Dani Pedrosa. It stages a Grand Prix tournament in the world 500cc championship (as well as in the 250cc and 125cc categories) in May each year at the Jerez de la Frontera track **Circuito Permanente de Velocidad** (☎ 956 15 11 00; www.circuitodejerez.com; Carretera de Arcos, Km10) in Andalucía. A second Grand Prix round is usually held at the Montmeló circuit a month later.

Cycling

Spain's version of the Tour de France cycling race is the three-week *Vuelta a España* (www.lavuelta.com), which is usually held in September. The course changes each year.

Tennis

Spanish tennis is attracting a growing following of fans, most of whom concentrate their attention on the young left-handed champion, Rafael Nadal, the wonder boy from Manacor (Mallorca) and champion of the clay court who looks well on the way to one day dethroning Switzerland's Roger Federer as world number one. Other Spanish players worth following include Carlos Moyá, Juan Carlos Ferrero and Arantxa Sánchez Vicario.

Spain's strength in men's tennis won it the Davis Cup for the first time in 2000, with the final played in Barcelona. The team pulled off the same feat in December 2004 when Moyá defeated the USA's Andy Roddick at Seville's Estadio Olímpico. At the time of writing, Spain was number two in the Davis Cup rankings.

A SUCCESSOR FOR SCHUMI?

Asturias-born Fernando Alonso became the youngest ever Formula One driver to take two successive championships (at the age of 26) in a nail-biting competition in 2006. After racing away to an early lead in the season, Alonso hit a bad patch, with arch-rival and seven-times Ferrari champ Michael Schumacher winning seven races in a row and coming within an ace of knocking Alonso aside. The latter finally came out on top in the last Grand Prix race of the season in Brazil in October. Now that Schumacher has bowed out of Formula One racing, the way is open for Alonso to become his successor.

For Ernest Hemingway's exhaustive study of a subject he loved dearly, the bullfight, reach for *Death in the Afternoon*.

Golf

Golf is another sport where Spaniards are increasingly prominent and it's ever more popular in Spain. Miguel-Ángel Jiménez and Sergio García are the stars of the moment, although no-one can forget the triumphs of Severiano (Seve for short) Ballesteros, who dominated Spanish and indeed much of continental Europe's golf scene in 1990s.

MULTICULTURALISM

Long an exporter of its people (the 'Moroccans of the 1950s' in the words of writer Rosa Montero, one of the country's best-known journalists and novelists), Spaniards have, since the mid-1990s, been confronted by a new reality: multiculturalism.

The massive influx of immigrants, who now make up 8.4% of the population (see p55), is rapidly changing the once seemingly homogeneous make-up of the country.

Some 700,000 Muslims (more than 500,000 from Morocco) live in this once ultra-Catholic country. More than one million nationals from Spain's former South American colonies have come to claim their birthright in the *madre patria* (mother country). More than half a million of the foreigners come from EU countries and a similar number from Eastern European countries, especially Romania.

The streets of Spain's big cities have taken on new hues. While the Madrid of the 1980s still had a largely uniform feel, the city today hums to the sounds of many languages, whose speakers have brought new tastes to the dining table. *Shwarma* (kebab) stands and Peruvian restaurants abound. Argentines staff call centres and Filipinos wait in some restaurants. Hordes of retired and wealthy EU citizens are catered for by co-nationals on the holiday *costas* (coasts). Around 15% of the population of the Balearic Islands and just over 12% in Madrid are foreigners.

The image of illegal immigrants crossing the Straits of Gibraltar and the Atlantic (to the Canary Islands) from Morocco in barely seaworthy boats has been a daily reminder of a litany of suffering. As Morocco tightens controls on this route, sub-Saharan Africans are increasingly opting for the more dangerous sea route from Mauritania and even Senegal to the Canary Islands.

While the daily arrivals are a problem for the islands, the alarmed cries over this 'deluge', however, ring hollow. Far more illegal migrants arrive by more mundane means: over the French border and by air. No-one really knows how many come each year, but the figures could be in the hundreds of thousands.

Border controls are minimal and many South Americans do not need a visa to travel to Spain. Pretending to be a tourist is all a prospective *clandestino* (illegal immigrants without papers) from Argentina or Venezuela, for instance, needs to do to get past passport control.

Many businesses connive in this too, as illegal labour comes cheap and with no strings attached. In 2005, an amnesty led to the legalisation of around 700,000 *clandestinos*, a measure that was good for the social security coffers and workers' rights, but which did nothing to staunch the flow of new arrivals.

Spain's multicultural experiment has just begun and urbanite Spaniards, fascinated by the melting pots of New York, London and Paris, rub their hands in glee at this 'coming of age'. Others, fearful of being engulfed, recoil in horror. One study predicts that migrants will make up more than a quarter of the population by 2015. Already 8.4% of all students in Spain were of foreign origin in 2006, up from 7.4% in the previous year.

The word 'internet' was finally accepted as a Spanish word by the Real Academia Española in late 2003.

MEDIA

Media observers in Spain lament the poor quality of much TV news reporting and its frequent partiality. The state-run channels, notably TVE1, tend to toe the line of whichever party is in power.

In print, things are healthier. Much as in the UK, the main newspapers each have their pronounced political leaning. If *El País*, the country's most prestigious newspaper, is centre-left and closely associated with the PSOE, *ABC* is unashamedly right-wing. Some regional titles have their own axes to grind. A good example is a Catalan-language daily published in Barcelona, *Avui*, which pushes an openly Catalan-nationalist line.

Probably the sharpest political punditry comes from the biting satirical puppet show, *Las Noticias del Guñol*, on Canal+ nightly from Monday to Saturday. Not everyone can be bothered with politics, however. The country's most read newspaper (2.5 million readers) is *Marca*, dedicated entirely to sport.

RELIGION

Second to Rome, Spain has long been thought of as the world's greatest bastion of Catholicism. But the Church in Spain, still a powerful institution in spite of the constitutional separation of Church and State since 1978, is anxious. On paper, 80% of the population claims to be Catholic, but only 20% regularly attend Mass. As much as 6% of the population claims to be atheist.

The arrival in power of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and his PSOE government was unwelcome news for the men in purple. The legalisation of gay marriages, the easing of divorce laws and the decision to drop the previous government's secondary-school reforms (which included compulsory religious education) all met with vigorous criticism from the country's bishops.

Indeed the church, whose headquarters is in the small conservative town of Toledo, the 'Rome of Spain', is becoming increasingly tetchy. In a paper published in April 2006, the Episcopal Conference not only reiterated its opposition to abortion and euthanasia, but declared that 'the Church considers masturbation, fornication, pornographic activities and homosexual practices to be serious sins against chastity'. The condom, of course, is considered 'immoral'.

Spain's most significant religious communities after the Catholics are Protestants (around 800,000) and Muslims (around 700,000). Although religious freedom is guaranteed under the constitution of 1978, leaders of the minority faiths frequently claim that they are victims of discrimination. This is particularly evident in the area of finances: the Catholic Church receives state funds and enjoys fiscal benefits denied other faiths.

WOMEN IN SPAIN

Since the demise of Franco in 1975, Spanish society has evolved in leaps and bounds and women have quickly conquered terrain in what was (and in many respects remains) a profoundly male-dominated society. The glass is half empty or half full, depending on your point of view. In the Franco years, the woman's place was in the home. Nowadays, 54% of university students are women.

In the workplace, however, women continue to fight against the odds. On average, men are paid up to 40% than women for equivalent work. Some 80% of those in part-time work are women. Few women make it to the top levels of business.

'On paper, 80% of the population claims to be Catholic, but only 20% regularly attend Mass'

In 2006, the PSOE government approved a draft law aimed at promoting equality of the sexes. Due to come into effect in 2007, it provides for a minimum of 40% of women candidates at all elections.

The law, which met with some employer and PP opposition, would also oblige larger companies to favour the employment and promotion of women.

ARTS Literature

It is difficult to talk of a 'Spanish' literature much earlier than the 13th century, if one means literature in Castilian. Before this, troubadours working in Vulgar Latin, Arabic and other tongues were doing the rounds of southern Europe, and the great writers and thinkers in a Spain largely dominated by Muslims produced their treatises more often than not in Arabic or Hebrew.

Of all the works produced in Spanish in the Middle Ages, the *Poema de Mio Cid*, which has survived in a version penned in 1307 (although first written in 1140), is surely the best known. The epic tale of El Cid Campeador, or Rodrigo Díaz, whose exploits culminated in mastery over Valencia, doesn't let the facts get in way of a good story of derring-do.

Perhaps the greatest of all the Spanish poets was Luis de Góngora (1561–1627). He manipulated words with a majesty that has largely defied attempts at critical 'explanation'; his verses are above all intended as a source of sensuous pleasure. This was the greatest period of Spanish letters – El Siglo de Oro (Golden Century), which stretched roughly from the middle of the 16th century to the middle of the 17th century.

The advent of the *comedia* (comedy) in the early 17th century in Madrid produced some of the country's greatest playwrights. Lope de Vega (1562–1635) was perhaps the most prolific: more than 300 of the 800 plays and poems attributed to him remain. He explored the falseness of court life and roamed political subjects with his imaginary historical plays. Less playful is the work of Tirso de Molina (1581–1648), in whose *El Burlador de Sevilla* we meet the immortal character of Don Juan, a likable seducer who meets an unhappy end.

With a life that was something of a jumbled obstacle course of trials, tribulations and peregrinations, Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (1547–1616) had little success with his forays into theatre and verse. But today he is commonly thought of as the father of the novel. *El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha* started life as a short story, designed to make a quick peseta, but Cervantes found he had turned it into an epic tale by the time it appeared in 1605. The ruined *ancien régime* knight and his equally impoverished companion, Sancho Panza, embark on a trail through the foibles of his era – a journey whose timelessness and universality marked out the work for greatness.

It was some centuries before Cervantes had a worthy successor. Benito Pérez Galdós (1843–1920) is Spain's Balzac. His novels and short stories range from social critique to the simple depiction of society through the lives of its many players. His more mature works, such as *Fortunata y Jacinta*, display a bent towards naturalism.

Miguel de Unamuno (1864–1936) was one of the leading figures of the Generation of '98, a group of writers and artists working around and after 1898 (a bad year for Spain with the loss of its last colonies and an economic crisis at home). Unamuno's work is difficult, but among his most enjoyable prose is the *Tres Novelas Ejemplares*, which is imbued, like most of his novels and theatre, with a disquieting existentialism.

For a gripping account from the losing side of Nelson's famous victory over the Franco-Spanish fleet, it is hard to beat the prose of Benito Pérez Galdós in *Trafalgar*.

Federico García Lorca's dramatic play, *Bodas de Sangre* (Blood Wedding), was brought to the screen in a modern flamenco remake by Carlos Saura with dancers of the calibre of the late Antonio Gades in 1981.

A little later came the brief flourishing of Andalucía's Federico García Lorca (1898–1936), whose verse and theatre leaned towards surrealism, leavened by a unique musicality and visual sensibility. His many offerings include the powerful play *Bodas de Sangre* (Blood Wedding). His career was cut short by Nationalist executioners in the early stages of the civil war.

One of the few writers of quality who managed to work through the years of the Franco dictatorship was the Nobel Prize-winning Galician novelist Camilo José Cela (1916–2002). His most important novel, *La Familia de Pascual Duarte*, appeared in 1942 and marked a rebirth of the Spanish realist novel. It is said to be the most widely read and translated Spanish novel after Don Quijote.

CONTEMPORARY WRITING

The death of Franco in 1975 signalled the end of the constraints placed on Spanish writers. Many of those who became able to work in complete freedom had already been active in exile during the Franco years. Juan Goytisolo (b 1931) started off in the neorealist camp but his more mature works, such as *Señas de Identidad* (Signs of Identity), are decidedly more experimental. Much of his work revolves around sexuality, as he equates sexual freedom (he is bisexual) with political freedom. In *Juan sin Tierra* he sets homosexuality and heterosexuality in conflict with one another. Goytisolo's pal, Jaime Gil de Biedma (1929–90), was one of the 20th century's most influential poets in Catalonia and indeed across Spain.

Manuel Vázquez Montalbán (1939–2003), one of Barcelona's most prolific writers, is best known for his Pepe Carvalho detective novel series and a range of other thrillers.

Andalucian Antonio Muñoz Molina (b 1956) is an author of note. Madrid features regularly as the stage for his stories, such as *Los Misterios de Madrid* (Mysteries of Madrid) and *El Dueño del Secreto* (The Master of the Secret). He shifts the geographical focus in his latest work, *Ventanas de Manhattan* (Windows of Manhattan).

Eduardo Mendoza's (b 1943) *La Ciudad de los Prodigios* (The City of Marvels) is an absorbing and at times bizarre novel set in Barcelona in the period between the Universal Exhibition of 1888 and the World Exhibition in 1929. He was back in 2006 with *Mauricio o Las Elecciones Primarias* (Maurice or the Primaries), delving into pre-1992 Barcelona.

Murcia's Arturo Pérez-Reverte (b 1951), longtime war correspondent and general man's man, has become one of the most internationally read Spanish novelists. His latest novel, *El Pintor de Batallas*, about a war photographer who secludes himself to paint what his photos could never capture, draws on his own experience as a war correspondent.

Madrid's Almudena Grandes (b 1960) has emerged as a writer of some stature. In *Castillos de Cartón* (Cardboard Castles), she follows the life of an art valuer who re-encounters a former lover.

A runaway success story has been *La Sombra del Viento* (The Shadow of the Wind), by Barcelona-born, US-based Carlos Ruiz Zafón (b 1964). This engaging, multilayered mystery story plays out over several periods in Barcelona's 20th-century history.

Cinema & Television

Mention cinema and Spain in the same breath nowadays and just about everyone will say: Pedro Almodóvar (b 1949). The Castilian director with the wild shock of hair, and whose personal, camp cinema was born in the heady days of the Madrid *movida* (the late-night bar and club scene) in the years after Franco's death, is inimitable.

Arturo Pérez-Reverte has built up a following for his series of rollicking tales from 17th-century Spain, featuring Captain Alaric.

Spanish cinema has since evolved in leaps and bounds, but Spanish films still only attract around 15% of audience share in Spain (60% goes to US films). State aid is limited and the average Spanish flick is made on a budget of approximately €3 million, peanuts compared with the average Hollywood production.

Almodóvar's latest, *Volver* (Return; 2006), is a trip back in time and space for the director, who explores aspects of life in his homeland of southern Castilla-La Mancha. In a typically unhinged tale partly set (as usual) in Madrid, Almodóvar lines up a series of his favourite actresses (including Carmen Maura and Penélope Cruz) to rattle the skeletons in a village family's closet. Almodóvar's script took the prize for best script at Cannes and his tribe of female stars were awarded a combined best actress prize at the same film fest – a first.

In terms of strangeness, a line could perhaps be drawn between Almodóvar and one of the earliest great names in Spanish film, Luis Buñuel (1900–83). This disrespectful icon started off with the disturbing surrealist short *Un Chien Andalou* (1929), made with Salvador Dalí ('nuff said). Much of his later film-making was done in exile in Mexico.

A classic to slip through the net of Franco's censorship was Luis García Berlanga's (b 1921) *¡Bienvenido, Mr Marshall!* (1952), a satire of the folkloric genre beloved of the regime, and at the same time a critique of the deal done with the USA to provide Marshall Plan aid to Spain in return for military bases. About the only tangible result for the villagers in the film is a rain of dust as Marshall's VIP cavalcade charges through.

Carlos Saura (b 1932) has been incredibly prolific, with more than 35 films to his name, ranging from the dance spectacular *Flamenco* (1995) to the civil war tragicomedy *¡Ay, Carmela!* (1990).

In 2000, Almodóvar became one of the few Spaniards to take an Oscar, in this case for possibly his best movie, *Todo Sobre Mi Madre* (All About My Mother; 1999). Another quirky director who had foreign audiences a-giggle was José Juan Bigas Luna (b 1946) with the hilarious *Jamón, Jamón* (Ham, Ham), a story of crossed love and murder, in 1992.

Vicente Aranda (b 1926) found acclaim with *Amantes* (Lovers; 1991), set in 1950s Madrid and based on the real story of a doomed love triangle. He was back in 2006 with the epic *Tirant lo Blanc*, a tale of knights, chivalry and damsels loosely based on the eponymous medieval Catalan tale by Joanot Martorell.

Alejandro Amenábar (b 1972) had a landmark hit in 2004 with *Mar Adentro* (Out to Sea), a touching if difficult film based on the true story of a man's 30-year struggle to win the right to end his own paralysed life. The lead, Javier Bardem, took the best actor award at the Venice film festival that same year.

Barcelona's Isabel Coixet (b 1960) went down the English-language route with movies such as *La Vida Secreta de las Palabras* (The Secret Life of Words; 2005), in which a nurse cares for a burns patient (played by Tim Robbins) on a North Sea oil rig. The story has some dramatic and utterly unexpected twists.

Tapas (2005), directed by first-timers Juan Cruz and José Corbacho, is a touching and funny flick of everyday Spanish suburban life set in L'Hospitalet, a district of Barcelona, from where the two actors-turned-directors hail.

Two other key films hit Spanish screens in 2006. The blockbuster *Alatriste* is based on the adventure novels of Arturo Pérez-Reverte. Costing €24 million, exceptional for Spanish cinema, it's a rollicking good adventure film with the Spanish version of D'Artagnan. Perhaps more striking is Manuel Hueriga's *Salvador*, about Salvador Puig Antich, a young protestor who was the last person to be executed under Franco in 1974.

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly, a great spaghetti western by Italian director Sergio Leone, was largely shot in the Tabernas desert in southeastern Andalucía.

The WWII blockbuster movies *The Battle of the Bulge* and *Patton* were both shot on location in Spain in the 1960s with Spanish army material, including 75 tanks and 500 infantrymen.

Spanish TV is dominated by chat shows that often border on gossipy shouting matches, but several series have carved out a big chunk of audience share during the past few years. *Cuéntame Cómo Pasó* (Tell Me How It Happened) is set in a *barrio* (district) of Madrid and recounts tales of the city from 1940 to the 1980s. Starring Imanol Arias, it is one of the most watched shows on the *caja tonta* (silly box).

Another popular sitcom is *Aquí No Hay Quien Viva* (It's Impossible Living Here!), an endless soap following the lives and loves of the folks of an apartment block.

Also popular is *El Comisario*, a cop show starring Tito Valverde as *comisario* (police chief) Gerardo Castilla in charge of a young police team investigating anything from baby kidnappings to street crime.

The late-night American-style chat show, *Buenafuente* (hosted by Andreu Buenafuente) is a mix of interviews with personalities and slightly silly humour.

Music

Spain pulsates with music, and not just flamenco. Music is everywhere and the country's intense musicality will be one of your abiding memories. The rock, pop and electronic scene, while not always wildly original or hugely successful beyond Spanish shores, is nonetheless very busy and energetic – a good deal more so than in many other European countries – and has a big following.

Meanwhile flamenco (see p67), the music most readily associated with Spain, is enjoying a golden age and its influence is felt through almost all Spanish musical genres.

POPULAR MUSIC

Each summer throws up one ultra-danceable catchy hit that takes the country by storm. Some of these spread beyond Iberian shores. Remember *Aserejé* by Las Ketchup (2002)?

Among more lasting artists, the undoubted King Midas of Spanish pop, writer of countless hit ballads for himself and others, is Alejandro Sanz, born in Madrid in 1968. Sanz's songs have a wistful lyricality that touches every heart. Recently he's developed a slightly harder-edged 'urban' image.

Another of the most talented and entertaining songwriter-performers is Kiko Veneno, from Andalucía, who has been around since the 1970s mixing rock, blues, African and flamenco rhythms with witty, simpatico lyrics focusing on snatches of everyday life, and turning out several hit albums. The iconoclastic Joaquín Sabina is another Andalusian evergreen, a prolific producer of rock-folk with a consistent protest theme for more than two decades. 'I'll always be against those in power,' he has proclaimed.

Enrique Bunbury, from Zaragoza, made his name as the vocalist of 1990s rock band Héroes del Silencio, and has since broadened his brush as a talented and versatile solo artist mixing '80s-style glam with Latin American influences. (Yes, he *does* take his name from *The Importance of Being Earnest*.)

A hugely popular young band serving up more mainstream pop-rock is El Canto del Loco. It provides great, high-energy live performances and its album *Zapatillas* (Trainers) was the big success of 2005–06. The indie scene is headed by bands such as psychedelic rockers Sidonie, from Barcelona, which fuses classic pop and rock influences with melodic sitars and a touch of electronica – well worth hearing – and Madrid foursome Dover, powerful live performers ranging over grunge, punk and power pop. Both bands sing predominantly in English.

Indy Rock (www.indyrock.es in Spanish) is a good source for upcoming gigs and festivals, while Clubbing Spain (www.clubbingSpain.com in Spanish) has the knowledge on house and techno events.

In electronic realms, José de Padilla, with his *Café del Mar* compilations and more recent albums such as *Man Ray, vol 4* (2005), is one of the few Spanish DJs to have exploited Ibiza's status as a world dance-music capital. Also listen out for the techno-pop duo OBK, which has been around since the 1980s but won the best electronic track award at Spain's 2006 national music awards with *Yo no soy cool* (I'm not cool).

In the field of *canCIÓN española* (Spanish song), a melodic, romantic genre most popular with an older generation, the undoubted rising star is Pasión Vega, whose beguiling voice may draw you in even if you don't normally go for this kind of thing. Vega incorporates a wide range of influences including flamenco (in which she started out), pop, blues, *fado* (Portuguese folk song), jazz and bossa nova.

Jazz has a good following too. Right now the most loved jazz musician in the country is the twinkle-fingered octogenarian Cuban pianist Bebo Valdés, who has been almost adopted by Spain since his triumphant collaboration with flamenco singer Diego El Cigala on the album *Lágrimas Negras* (Black Tears; 2003).

FOLK

Although the odd group playing traditional folk music can be found in several regions, Spain's real folk hotbed is Galicia. The region's rich heritage is closely related to that of its Celtic cousins in Brittany and Ireland and has nothing in common with other Spanish music such as flamenco. Emblematic of the music is the *gaita*, Galicia's version of the bagpipes. Top bagpipers are popular heroes in Galicia, and some of the younger generation have broadened the music's appeal by blending it with other genres. One highly versatile performer – not just of the *gaita* but of other wind instruments too – is Carlos Núñez. He presents a slick show involving violins, percussion, guitar and lute, and often invites a wide range of guest artists – as on his successful and award-winning 2004 album, *Carlos Núñez y Amigos*. Other exciting Galician pipers are Susana Seivane, Mercedes Peón (who mixes the pipes with many other instruments and her own voice in a spectrum of ethnic styles) and Xosé Manuel Budiño.

Galicia's most successful Celtic group is the highly polished Milladoiro. Other groups to seek out are Berrogüetto, Luar Na Lubre and Fía Na Roca. Uxía is a gutsy female solo vocalist.

CLASSICAL

All Spanish cities have active classical music scenes, and the larger ones are bursting with activity. Most of the music you'll hear in the concert halls, however, won't be written by Spanish composers. Outsiders have made at least as much serious music as Spaniards themselves from the country's vibrant rhythms. Who hasn't heard of *Carmen*, an opera whose leading lady epitomises all the fire and flashing beauty conjured up by the typical image of Andalusian women? Its composer, Frenchman Georges Bizet (1838–75), had been mesmerised by the melodies of southern Spain in much the same way as Claude Debussy (1862–1918), whose penchant for the peninsula found expression in *Iberia*. Another Frenchman, Maurice Ravel (1875–1937), whipped up his *Bolero* almost as an aside in 1927. Russians, too, have been swept away by the Hispanic. Mikhail Glinka (1804–57) arrived in Granada in 1845, fell under the spell of *gitano* song and guitar, and returned home to inspire a new movement in Russian folk music.

Spain itself was more or less bereft of composers until the likes of Cádiz-born Manuel de Falla (1876–1946) and Enrique Granados (1867–1916) in the early 20th century. Granados and Isaac Albéniz (1860–1909) became

great pianists and interpreters of their own compositions, such as the latter's *Iberia* cycle. The blind Joaquín Rodrigo (1901–99) was one of Spain's leading 20th-century composers. His celebrated *Concierto de Aranjuez* for guitar yielded what for some is the greatest jazz rendering of any classical music work – Miles Davis' 1959 version on his *Sketches of Spain* album.

Andrés Segovia (1893–1987), from Linares in Andalucía and steeped in flamenco, probably did more than any other musician to establish the guitar as a serious classical instrument, taking this formerly humble instrument to dizzying heights of virtuosity.

In opera, Spain has given the world both Plácido Domingo (b 1934) and José Carreras (b 1946). With Italian tenor Luciano Pavarotti (b 1935), they form the big three of modern male opera singers. Catalonia's Montserrat Caballé (b 1933) is one of the world's outstanding sopranos.

Painting & Sculpture

Humans have been creating images in Spain for as long as 14,000 years, as the cave paintings in Altamira (p509) attest. Later, the Celtiberian tribes were producing some fine ceramics and statuary, perhaps influenced by the presence of Greeks, Carthaginians and ultimately Romans.

Mostly anonymous, the painters and decorators of Romanesque churches across the north of the country left behind extraordinary testaments to the religious faith of the early Middle Ages. Some remain *in situ* but the single best concentration of 12th-century Romanesque frescoes, possibly in all Europe, can be seen in Barcelona's Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (p299).

Artists began to drop their modesty in the 14th century, and names such as Catalans Ferrer Bassá (c 1290–1348); Bernat Martorell (c 1400–52), a master of *chiaroscuro*; Jaume Huguet (1415–92); and Córdoba's Bartolomé Bermejo (c 1405–95) are thus known to us, and their works identifiable. At this time Gothic painting, more lifelike and complex than the seemingly naive, didactic Romanesque, took hold.

One of the most remarkable artists at work in the latter half of the 16th century was an 'adopted' Spaniard. Domenikos Theotokopoulos (1541–1614), known as El Greco (the Greek), was schooled in his native Crete and Italy, but spent his productive working life in Toledo (see the boxed text, p244). His slender, exalted figures can be seen in various locations in that city, as well as in Madrid's Museo del Prado (p131).

THE GOLDEN CENTURY

As the 16th century gave way to the 17th century, a remarkably fecund era opened. A plethora of masters, in the service of the Church and State, seemed to appear out of nowhere.

In Italy, José (Jusepe) de Ribera (1591–1652) came under the influence of Caravaggio. Many of his works found their way back to Spain and are now scattered about numerous art galleries, including the solid selection in the Museo del Prado.

The star of the period was the genius court painter from Seville, Diego Rodríguez de Silva Velázquez (1599–1660), who stands in a class of his own. With him any trace of the idealised stiffness that characterised a by-now spiritless mannerism fell by the wayside. Realism became the key, and the majesty of his royal subjects springs from his capacity to capture the essence of the person, king or *infanta* (princess), and the detail of their finery. His masterpieces include *Las Meninas* (The Maids of Honour) and *La Rendición de Breda* (The Surrender of Breda), both in the Museo del Prado.

A less-exalted contemporary, and close friend of Velázquez, Francisco de Zurbarán (1598–1664) moved to Seville as an official painter. Probably

Many home-grown bands in Catalonia sing in Catalan rather than Spanish, and since 1998 the annual Senglar Rock festival has celebrated Catalan Rock. Catalonia's Bob Dylan, Lluís Llach (b 1948) made a name as a protest singer in the Franco years and gave his last concerts in 2006.

Velázquez so much wanted to be made a Knight of Santiago that in *Las Meninas* he cheekily portrayed himself with the cross of Santiago on his vest, long before his wish was finally fulfilled.

of Basque origin but born in Extremadura, he is best remembered for the startling clarity and light in his portraits of monks. He travelled a great deal and, in Guadalupe, a series of eight portraits can still be seen hanging where Zurbarán left them, in the Hieronymite monastery (p828). Zurbarán fell on hard times in the 1640s and was compelled by the plague to flee Seville. He died in poverty in Madrid.

Zurbarán has come to be seen as one of the masters of the Spanish canvas, but in his lifetime it was a younger and less-inspired colleague who won all the prizes. Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1618–82) took the safe road and turned out stock religious pieces and images of beggar boys and the like, with technical polish but little verve. Again, you can see many of his works in the Museo del Prado.

GOYA & THE 19TH CENTURY

Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes (1746–1828), a provincial hick from Fuendetodos (p423) in Aragón, went to Madrid to work as a cartoonist in the Real Fábrica de Tapices (p130). Here began the long and varied career of Spain's only truly great artist of the 18th (and for that matter the 19th) century. By 1799 he was Carlos IV's court painter.

Several distinct series and individual paintings mark the progress of his life and work. At the end of the 18th century he painted such enigmatic masterpieces as *La Maja Vestida* and *La Maja Desnuda*, identical portraits but for the lack of clothes in the latter. At about the same time he did *Los Caprichos*, a series of 80 etchings lambasting the follies of court life and ignorant clergy.

The arrival of the French and war in 1808 profoundly affected his work. Unforgiving portrayals of the brutality of war are *El Dos de Mayo* and, more dramatically, *El Tres de Mayo*. The latter depicts the execution of Madrid rebels by French troops and both hang in the Museo del Prado.

An obvious precursor to many subsequent strands of modern art, Goya was an island of grandeur in a sea of artistic mediocrity in Spain. He marked a transition from art in the service of the State or Church to art as a pure expression of its creator's feeling and whim.

Long after Goya's death, the Valencian Joaquín Sorolla (1863–1923) set off on his own path, ignoring the fashionable French impressionists and preferring the blinding light of the Valencian coast to the muted tones favoured in Paris. He is known for his cheerful, large-format images of beach life and much of his work can be admired in Madrid's Museo Sorolla (p137).

THE SHOCK OF THE NEW

Like a thunderclap came the genius of the mischievous *malagueño*, Pablo Ruiz Picasso (1881–1973). A child when he moved with his family to Barcelona, Picasso was formed in an atmosphere laden with the avant-garde freedom of Modernism (see p75).

Picasso must have been one of the most restless artists of all time. His work underwent repeated revolutions as he passed from one creative phase to another. From his gloomy Blue Period, through the brighter Pink Period and on to cubism – in which he was accompanied by Madrid's Juan Gris (1887–1927) – Picasso was nothing if not a surprise package.

By the mid-1920s he was dabbling with surrealism. His best-known work is *Guernica*, a complex canvas portraying the horror of war and inspired by the German aerial bombing of the Basque town, Guernica, in 1937. Picasso cranked out paintings, sculptures, ceramics and etchings until the day he died. A good selection of his early work can be seen in Barcelona's Museo Picasso (p289). Other works are scattered about different galleries, notably Madrid's Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (p131).

Separated from Picasso by barely a generation, two other artists reinforced the Catalan contingent in the vanguard of 20th-century art: Dalí and Miró. Although he started off dabbling in cubism, Salvador Dalí (1904–89) became more readily identified with the surrealists. This complex character's 'handpainted dream photographs', as he called them, are virtuoso executions brimming with fine detail and nightmare images dragged up from a feverish and Freud-fed imagination. Preoccupied with Picasso's fame, Dalí built himself a reputation as an outrageous showman and shameless self-promoter. The single best display of his work can be seen at the Teatre-Museu Dalí (p359) in Figueres.

Slower to find his feet, Barcelona-born Joan Miró (1893–1983) developed a joyous and almost childlike style that earned him the epithet 'the most surrealist of us all' from the French writer André Breton. His later period is his best known, characterised by the simple use of bright colours and forms in combinations of symbols that represented women, birds (the link between earth and the heavens), stars (the unattainable heavenly world, source of imagination) and a sort of net, which entraps all these levels of the cosmos. Galleries of his work adorn Barcelona (p300) and Palma de Mallorca (p635).

THE CONTEMPORARY SCENE

The two main artistic movements of the 1950s, El Paso and the Catalan Dau el Set, launched names such as Antonio Saura (1930–98), Manuel Millares (1926–72) and Barcelona's tireless Antoni Tàpies (b 1923). The art of Madrid's Eduardo Arroyo (b 1937) is steeped in the radical spirit that kept him in exile from Spain for 15 years from 1962. His paintings, brimming with ironic socio-political comment, tend, in part, to pop art.

The death of Franco acted as a catalyst for the Spanish art movement. New talent sprang up, and galleries enthusiastically took on anything revolutionary, contrary or cheeky. The 1970s and 1980s were a time of almost childish self-indulgence. Things have since calmed down but there is still much activity.

The Basques Eduardo Chillida (1924–2002) and Jorge Oteiza (1908–2003) were two of Spain's leading modern sculptors.

Joan Hernández Pijuan (1931–2005) was one of the most important abstract painters to come out of Barcelona in the latter decades of the 20th century. His work is often referred to as informalist and it concentrates on natural shapes and figures, often with neutral colours on different surfaces.

Seville's Luis Gordillo (b 1934) started his artistic career with surrealism, from where he branched out into pop art and photography. His later work in particular features the serialisation of different versions of the same image.

Mallorcan Miquel Barceló (b 1957) is one of the country's big success stories. His work is heavily expressionist, although it touches on classic themes, from self-portraiture to architectural images.

Barcelona's Susana Solano (b 1946) is a painter and above all sculptor, considered to be one of the most important at work in Spain today, while Jaume Plensa (b 1955) is possibly Spain's best contemporary sculptor. His work ranges from sketches, through sculpture to video and other installations that have been shown around the world.

Flamenco

The passionate and uniquely Spanish constellation of singing, dancing and instrumental arts known as flamenco first took recognisable form in the late 18th and early 19th centuries among Roma people in the lower Guadalquivir valley of Andalucía (still flamenco's heartland). The first flamenco was *cante*

'The death of Franco acted as a catalyst for the Spanish art movement'

Reach into the tortured mind of one of Spain's greatest artists with the help of Robert Hughes' riveting work on Goya.

jondo (deep song), an anguished instrument of expression for a group on the margins of society. *Jondura* (depth) is still the essence of pure flamenco. It's not something that's universally appreciated: to the unsympathetic ear, flamenco song can sound like someone suffering from excruciating toothache. But love it or hate it, a flamenco performer who successfully communicates their passion will have you unwittingly on the edge of your seat, oblivious to all else. The gift of sparking this kind of response is known as *duende* (spirit).

A flamenco singer is known as a *cantaor* (male) or *cantaora* (female); a dancer is a *bailaor/a*. Most of the songs and dances are performed to a blood-rush of guitar from the *tocaor/a*. Percussion is provided by tapping feet, clapping hands and sometimes castanets. Flamenco *coplas* (songs) come in many different types, from the anguished *soleá* or the intensely despairing *siguiriyá* to the livelier *alegría* or the upbeat *bulería*. The traditional flamenco costume – shawl, fan and long, frilly *bata de cola* dress, and for men flat Cordoban hats and tight black trousers – dates from Andalusian fashions of the 19th century.

FLAMENCO TODAY

Rarely can flamenco have been as popular as it is today, and never so innovative. While long-established singers such as Enrique Morente, Carmen Linares, Chano Lobato and José Menese remain at the top of the profession, new generations continue to broaden flamenco's audience.

Perhaps most popular and universally acclaimed at present is José Mercé, from Jerez. Estrella Morente from Granada (Enrique's daughter) and La Tana from Seville are young singers steadily carving out niches in the first rank of performers.

Dance, always the readiest of flamenco arts to cross boundaries, has reached its most adventurous horizons in the person of Joaquín Cortés, born in Córdoba in 1969. Cortés fuses flamenco with contemporary dance, ballet and jazz in spectacular shows with music at rock-concert amplification. The most exciting younger dance talent is Farruquito, born into a famous flamenco family in Seville in 1983 (he made his Broadway debut at the age of five). Other top stars to look out for – you may find them dancing solo or with their own companies – include Sara Baras, Antonio Canales, Manuela Carrasco, Cristina Hoyos and Eva La Hiera. Buena.

Among guitarists, listen out for Manolo Sanlúcar from Cádiz; Tomatito from Almería; and Vicente Amigo from Córdoba and Moraíto Chico from Jerez, who both accompany today's top singers.

FLAMENCO FUSION

Given a cue, perhaps, by Paco de Lucía (see opposite), musicians began mixing flamenco with jazz, rock, blues, rap and other genres in the 1970s and they're still doing it today. This 'flamenco fusion' presents perhaps the easiest way into flamenco for newcomers and can be great music in its own right.

The seminal recording was a 1977 flamenco-folk-rock album, *Veneno* (Poison), by the group of the same name centred on Kiko Veneno (see p63) and Raimundo Amador, both from Seville. Amador then formed the group Pata Negra, which produced four fine flamenco-jazz-blues albums, before he went solo.

The group Ketama, originally from Granada, has successfully mixed flamenco with African, Cuban, Brazilian and other rhythms for two decades now. Cádiz's Niña Pastori arrived in the late 1990s with an edgy, urgent voice singing jazz- and Latin-influenced flamenco. Eleven-strong Barcelona-based band Ojos de Brujo mixes flamenco with reggae, Asian and even club dance

10 GREAT FLAMENCO & FUSION ALBUMS

- *Paco de Lucía Antología* – Paco de Lucía (1995)
- *Una Leyenda Flamenca* – El Camarón de la Isla (1993)
- *Cañalla* – Niña Pastori (2000)
- *Del Amanecer* – José Mercé (1999)
- *Buika* – Concha Buika (2005)
- *Noche de Flamenco y Blues* – Raimundo Amador, BB King et al (1998)
- *Blues de la Frontera* – Pata Negra (1986)
- *Cositas Buenas* – Paco de Lucía (2004)
- *Lágrimas Negras* – Bebo Valdés and Diego El Cigala (2003)
- *Sueña La Alhambra* – Enrique Morente (2005)

rhythms. They're great live performers and have gained wide popularity outside as well as inside Spain. Málaga's Chambao successfully combines flamenco with electronic beats on its albums such as *Flamenco Chill* (2002) and *Pokito a Poko* (Little by Little; 2005). But the latest revelation is Concha Buika, a Mallorcan of Equatorial Guinean origin who not only possesses a beautiful, sensual voice but also writes many of her own songs. Her albums *Buika* (2005) and *Mi Niña Lola* (2006) are a captivating melange of African rhythms, soul, jazz, hip-hop, flamenco and more!

FLAMENCO LEGENDS

The great singers of the 19th and early 20th centuries were Silverio Franconetti and La Niña de los Peines, from Seville, and Antonio Chacón and Manuel Torre, from Jerez de la Frontera. Torre's singing, legend has it, could drive people to rip their shirts open and upturn tables.

La Macarrona and Pastora Imperio, the first great *bailaoras*, took flamenco to Paris and South America. Their successors, La Argentina and La Argentinita, formed dance troupes and turned flamenco dance into a theatrical show.

The dynamic dancing and wild lifestyle of Carmen Amaya (1913–63), from Barcelona, made her the *gitana* dance legend of all time. Her longtime partner Sabicas was the father of the modern solo flamenco guitar, inventing a host of now-indispensable techniques.

After a trough in the mid-20th century, when it seemed that the *tablaos* (touristy shows emphasising the sexy and the jolly) were in danger of taking over, *flamenco puro* got a new lease of life in the 1970s through singers such as Terremoto, La Paquera, Enrique Morente and, above all, El Camarón de la Isla from San Fernando near Cádiz. Camarón's incredible vocal and emotional range and his wayward lifestyle made him a legend well before his tragically early death in 1992. As his great guitar accompanist Paco de Lucía observed, 'Camarón's cracked voice could evoke, on its own, the desperation of a people'.

Paco de Lucía himself, born in Algeciras in 1947, is the flamenco artist known most widely outside Spain, and with very good reason. So gifted that by the time he was 14 his teachers had nothing left to teach him, de Lucía has transformed the flamenco guitar into an instrument of solo expression with new techniques, scales, melodies and harmonies that have gone far beyond traditional limits. He can sound like two or three people playing together. He vowed that his 2004 world tour would be his last, but he still performs.

Flamenco World (www.flamenco-world.com), Flama (www.guiaflama.com in Spanish), Centro Andaluz de Flamenco (caf.cica.es in Spanish), esflamenco.com (www.esflamenco.com) and Deflamenco (www.deflamenco.com) are all great resources on flamenco, and include calendars of upcoming events.

In his first book, *Duende*, Jason Webster immersed his body and soul for two years in Spain's passionate and dangerous flamenco world in search of the true flamenco spirit.

SEEING FLAMENCO

Flamenco is easiest to catch in Andalucía, Madrid and Barcelona. In the south, many towns' summer *ferias* (fairs) and fiestas include flamenco performances, and some places stage special night-long flamenco festivals. Bigger events include the two-week Festival de Jerez in Jerez de la Frontera (p726) in late February/early March every year; the Festival de Cante de las Minas, in La Unión, Murcia, over several days in mid-August; and the month-long Bienal de Flamenco (p706), held in Seville in September of even-numbered years. Otherwise, look out for big-name performances in theatres, check seasons of concerts, and visit regular flamenco nights at bars and clubs in some cities – often just for the price of your drinks. Flamenco fans also band together in clubs called *peñas*, which stage live performance nights; most will admit interested visitors and the atmosphere here will be authentic and at times very intimate.

Under the artistic direction of Nacho Duato since 1990, the *Compañía Nacional de Danza* has performed to critical acclaim around the world and won many awards.

Theatre & Dance

Thanks mainly to a big development programme by the PSOE governments of the 1980s and 1990s, most Spanish cities now boast at least one theatre worthy of the name, and drama is now a vibrant field. Larger cities such as Madrid, Barcelona and Seville have plenty of smaller locales staging avant-garde and experimental productions as well as larger venues for straighter productions. Unadulterated drama, though, is unlikely to appeal if your understanding of Spanish – or, in Barcelona, Catalan – is less than fluent.

Dance too thrives and not just in the context of flamenco (p67). Barcelona is Spain's capital of modern dance, with several shows to choose from almost any week. The Madrid-based *Compañía Nacional de Danza*, under the direction of Nacho Duato, is one of Europe's most exciting contemporary ensembles and has performed to great acclaim around the world. The *Ballet Nacional de España*, founded in 1978, mixes classical ballet with Spanish dance. Spain's most gifted classical dancer for aeons, *madrileña* Tamara Rojo, rarely performs in her homeland as she has been a principal dancer with London's Royal Ballet since 2000, garnering ever more superlative reviews as the years pass.

Here and there you'll find the occasional regional folk dance, such as Catalonia's *sardana* round-dance, or the Málaga area's *verdiales*, which are flag dances done to exhilarating fiddle-and-percussion music.

Architecture

As you look up in awe at the arches of the great Roman aqueduct in Segovia you can almost see centurions marching beneath it. Soothed by the gentle bubbling of its cool fountains, the mesmerising beauty of the Alhambra induces a dream sense of a mythical Arab world long past. Wandering along the echoing corridors of the Romanesque cloisters of the Monasterio de Santo Domingo de Silos on a grey winter's day, the Middle Ages seem to have returned with all their mystical fervour. Towering, at times half-ruined, castles dot the countryside from Catalonia to Castilla. To gaze up, eyes turned to God, at the great Gothic cathedrals of Burgos, Palma de Mallorca and Toledo, you can only feel the awe inspired when they were first raised. And who cannot be carried away by the whimsy of Gaudí's Modernista fantasy in Barcelona's La Sagrada Família and Casa Batlló? Spain's architecture presents one of the broadest and richest testimonies in Europe to thousands of years of building ingenuity.

ANCIENT SPAIN

The tribes that first inhabited the Iberian Peninsula, collectively known as Celtiberians, left behind a wealth of evidence of their existence. The most common living arrangement, called the *castro*, was a hamlet surrounded by stone walls and made up of circular stone houses. Several have been partly preserved in locations mostly across northern Spain. Among the better known ones are those at A Guarda (La Guardia; p570), on Galicia's southern coast, and near Coaña (p525) in Asturias.

The Greeks and Carthaginians rarely made it far into the Spanish interior. Greek remains at Empúries (p354) in Catalonia are the most impressive reminder of their Iberian presence.

The Romans left behind more clues. Among the more spectacular sites are the aqueduct in Segovia (p194), the bridge at Alcántara (p823) and the stout walls of Lugo (p575).

Vestiges of some Roman towns can also be seen. Among the more important are the ancient town of Augusta Emerita in Mérida (p829); ancient Tarraco, now known as Tarragona (p387); the amphitheatre and other ruins at Itálica (p708) near Seville; and Sagunto (p593) in Valencia. Modest remains have been imaginatively converted into underground museums in Barcelona (Museu d'Història de la Ciutat; p287) and Zaragoza (Museo del Foro de Caesaraugusta; p418).

EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Filling the vacuum left by the departing Romans, the Visigoths employed a more humble but remarkably attractive style, which survives in a handful of small churches. The 7th-century Ermita de Santa María de Lara, at Quintanilla de las Viñas (p227) in Burgos province, is one of the best. Fragments of this unique style can be seen in several cities across Spain, including Toledo.

Reputedly the oldest church in Spain is the 7th-century Basílica de San Juan in Baños de Cerrato (p211), while the cathedral in nearby Palencia (p209) has Visigothic origins in the crypt. The horseshoe arch, later perfected by the Arabs, is characteristic of the Visigoths' aesthetic.

When Spain was swamped by the Muslim invasion of 711 AD, only the unruly northern strip of the country in what is today Asturias (and probably parts of Cantabria and the Basque Country) held out. During the 9th century a unique building style emerged in this green corner of Spain cut off from

Ciudades Patrimonio de la Humanidad España is a beautiful volume (in Spanish) covering those cities that are or contain World Heritage sites.

the rest of Christian Europe. Of the 30-odd examples of pre-Romanesque architecture scattered about the Asturian countryside, the Palacio de Santa María del Naranco and Iglesia de San Miguel de Lillo, in Oviedo, are the finest (for both, see the boxed text, p513). These buildings offer a foretaste of the Romanesque style.

THE MARK OF ISLAM

Córdoba was the centre of Islamic political power and culture for its first 300 years in Spain, but Muslims remained for almost another 800 years in their longest-lasting enclave, Granada.

The Syrian Omayyad dynasty that set up shop in Spain brought with it architects imbued with ideas and experience won in Damascus. This was soon put to use in the construction of the Mezquita (mosque; p763) in Córdoba, the style of which was echoed across Islamic Spain. Horseshoe-shaped and lobed arches, the use of exquisite tiles in decoration (mostly calligraphy and floral motifs), complex stucco, peaceful inner courtyards and stalactite ceiling adornments are all features reminiscent of Damascus.

Remnants of this Islamic legacy abound across Spain, although many grand examples have been lost. The most striking piece of Islamic architecture in northern Spain is the palace of the Aljafería (p419) in Zaragoza.

In the 12th century the armies of Morocco's Almoravid dynasty stormed across the by now hopelessly divided lands of Islamic Spain. To them we owe some of the marvels of Seville, in particular the square-based minaret known as the Giralda (p690), even more beautiful than the minaret of the Koutoubia mosque in Marrakesh.

Islamic art reached new heights of elegance with the construction of the Alhambra (p771) in Granada. Built from the 13th to the 15th centuries, it is symptomatic of the direction taken by Islamic art at the time. Eschewing innovation, the Alhambra expresses a desire to refine already well-tried forms (geometric patterns, use of calligraphy in decoration, stalactite décor). It is one of the Islamic world's most beautiful creations.

MOZARABIC & MUDÉJAR

Already in the 10th century, Mozarabs – Christians practising in Muslim territory – began to adopt elements of classic Islamic construction and export them to Christian-held territory. Although Mozarabic artisans contributed to many buildings, there are few 'purely' Mozarabic structures. Among the outstanding examples are the Iglesia de San Miguel de Escalada (p218), east of León; the Ermita de San Baudelio (p232), beyond Berlanga de Duero in Soria province; and the Iglesia de Santa María de Lebeña (p535) on the east side of the Picos de Europa mountains.

More important was the influence of the Mudéjars, Muslims who remained behind in the lands of the Reconquista. Their skills were found to be priceless (but cheap) and their influence is evident throughout Spain.

One unmistakable Mudéjar feature is the preponderance of brick: castles, churches and mansions all over the country were built of this material. Another telltale feature is in the ceilings. Extravagantly decorated timber creations, often ornately carved, are a mark of the Mudéjar hand. Several different types get constant mention. The term *armadura* refers to any of these wooden ceilings, especially when they have the appearance of being an inverted boat. *Artesonado* ceilings are characterised by interlaced beams leaving regular spaces (triangular, square or polygonal) for the insertion of decorative *artesas*. The term *techumbre* (which can simply mean 'roof') applies more specifically to the most common of *armaduras*, where the skeleton of the ceiling (looked at from the end) looks like a series of As.

The Alhambra, one of the world's most remarkable Islamic monuments, was used as a barracks by Napoleon's troops during the Peninsular War.

The Alhambra comes alive in the entertaining and learned study, *Alhambra* by Michael Jacobs; it's beautifully illustrated with photographs of one of Andalusia's most emblematic buildings.

A replica of Seville's Giralda minaret once stood in Madison Square in New York, along with another in Kansas City. Neither exists any more.

FROM ROMANESQUE TO GOTHIC

As the Muslim tide was turned back and the Reconquista gathered momentum, the first great medieval European movement in design began to take hold in Spain, spreading from Italy and France. From about the 11th century churches, monasteries, bridges, pilgrims' hospices and other buildings in the Romanesque style mushroomed in the north.

The first wave came in Catalonia, where Lombard artisans influenced by Byzantine building techniques soon covered the countryside with simple churches – the church of Sant Climent de Taüll (p376) and others scattered around nearby are emblematic.

Romanesque is identified by a few basic characteristics. The exteriors of most edifices bear little decoration and tend to be simple, angular structures. In the case of churches in particular, the concession to curves comes with the semicylindrical apse – or, in many cases, triple apse. The single most striking decorative element is the semicircular arch or arches that grace doorways, windows, cloisters and naves. The humble church of the **Monasterio de Sigüenza** (96 974 57 81 58; Villanueva de Sigüenza; 11.30am–1.30pm & 3.30–4.30pm Fri & Sat, 1–2pm & 4.30–5.30pm Sun), 93km east of Zaragoza, has a doorway boasting 14 such arches, one encased in the other.

The Camino de Santiago (Way of St James) is studded with Romanesque beauties. These include (travelling from east to west) the Monasterio de Santo Domingo de Silos (p228), the smaller cloister (Las Claustrillas) in the Monasterio de las Huelgas (p224) in Burgos and the restored Iglesia de San Martín (p211) in Frómista.

During the 12th century modifications in the Romanesque recipe became apparent. The pointed arch and ribbed vault of various kinds are clear precursors of the Gothic revolution to come.

The Monasterio de la Oliva (p488) in Navarra was among the first to incorporate such features, and other buildings followed. Cathedrals in Ávila (p177), Sigüenza (p264), Tarragona (p389) and Tudela (p488) all display at least some transitional elements.

A peculiar side development affected southwest Castilla. The cathedrals in Salamanca (p185 and p185), Zamora (p207) and Toro (p206) all boast Byzantine lines, particularly in the cupola.

Everyone in northern Europe marvelled at the towering new cathedrals built from the 12th century, made possible by the use of flying buttresses and other technical innovations. The idea caught on later in Spain, but three of the most important Gothic cathedrals in the country, in Burgos (p223), León (p214) and Toledo (p241), were built in the 13th century.

The first two owe much to French models, but the Spaniards soon introduced other elements. The huge decorative altarpieces towering over the high altar were one such innovation. And, although not an exclusively Spanish touch, the placing of the choir stalls in the centre of the nave became the rule rather than the exception in Spanish Gothic style.

The main structural novelty in Spanish Gothic was star-vaulting, a method of weight distribution in the roof in which ribbed vaults project outwards from a series of centre points.

In Catalonia, another variant of the style, Catalan Gothic, was largely bereft of the pinnacles and other decorative touches more common in French and northern European styles. Catalan architects favoured breadth over height and stretched the limits of the possible by creating incredibly broad, unsupported vaults. Their use of supports like flying buttresses was minimal.

Monuments often belong to several styles. Many great buildings begun at the height of Romanesque glory were only completed long after Gothic had gained the upper hand. And although, for instance, the cathedral in Burgos

An exhaustive website covering monasteries old and new in Spain, www.catolicos.com/monasteriosespana.htm (in Spanish) has links that will lead you to many sites of great architectural interest around the country.

was one of the first to go up, its spires were a result of German-inspired late-Gothic imagination. In many cases, these Gothic or Romanesque-Gothic buildings later received a Plateresque or baroque overlay.

Mudéjar influences still made themselves felt, particularly in the use of brick rather than stone. Toledo and the region of Aragón, particularly Zaragoza, Teruel, Tarazona and Calatayud, boast many gloriously original and unique buildings of a Gothic-Mudéjar combination.

The so-called Isabelline style was a late ingredient. Taking some cues from the more curvaceous traits of Islamic design, it was in some ways an indirect precursor to Plateresque. Its ultimate expression would be Toledo's San Juan de los Reyes (p245), originally destined to be the final resting place of the Reyes Católicos (Catholic Monarchs). Designed by French-born Juan Gúas (1453–96), it is a medley of earlier Gothic and Mudéjar elements, with a final decorative Isabelline flourish.

The 16th century saw a revival of pure Gothic, perhaps best exemplified in the new cathedral in Salamanca (p185), although the Segovia cathedral (p196) was about the last, and possibly most pure, Gothic house of worship raised in Spain.

Not only religious buildings flourished. Most of the innumerable castles scattered across the country went up in Gothic times. Many never saw action and were not intended to – an extraordinary example of Mudéjar castle-building from this era is the sumptuous castle at Coca (p200). In Barcelona some marvellous civil Gothic architecture can be admired, including the Saló del Tinell (p287) in the one-time royal palace in the Barri Gòtic and the Reials Drassanes (Museu Marítim; p285), the once-mighty shipyards.

THE RENAISSANCE

The Renaissance in Spain can be roughly divided into three distinct styles. First was the Italian-influenced special flavour of Plateresque. To visit Salamanca is to receive a concentrated dose of the most splendid work in the genre. The university façade (p185), especially, is a virtuoso piece, featuring busts, medallions and swathes of complex floral design. Not far behind in intensity comes the façade of the Convento de San Esteban (p186). Little of the work can be convincingly traced to any one hand, and it appears that the principal exponent of Plateresque, Alonso de Covarrubias (1488–1570), was busier in his home city of Toledo (the Alcázar, p241, and the Capilla de los Nuevos Reyes in the cathedral, p241).

Next was the more purist Renaissance style that prevailed in Andalucía, and had its maximum expression in the Palacio de Carlos V (p775) in Granada's Alhambra. Diego de Siloé (1495–1563) and his followers are regarded as masters. Siloé made his mark with Granada's cathedral (p776); others followed him with such masterpieces as the Jaén cathedral (p790).

Juan de Herrera (1530–97) is the last and perhaps greatest figure of the Spanish Renaissance, but his work bears almost no resemblance to anything else of the period. His austere masterpiece is the palace-monastery complex of San Lorenzo de El Escorial (p166).

BAROQUE BAUBLES

The heady frills and spills of baroque can be seen all over Spain, but usually in the form of additions rather than complete buildings. Cádiz's cathedral (p718) is an exception (although some neoclassical work was added). Three loose phases can be identified, starting with a sober baroque still heavily influenced by Herrera, followed by a period of greater (some would say nauseating!) architectural exuberance and finally running into a mixture of baroque with the beginnings of neoclassicism.

Spanish Splendour: Palaces, Castles & Country Homes (Roberto Schezen, photographer) is a sumptuous photographic presentation of some of the most spectacular noble buildings in Spain.

The leading exponents of this often overblown style were the Churriguera brothers. Alberto (1676–1750) designed Salamanca's Plaza Mayor (p185), but he and brother José (1665–1735) are best known for their extraordinary *retablos* – huge, carved wooden altar backdrops. Their memorable works feature twisting gilded columns, burdened with all manner of angels and saints.

Baroque reached new heights of opulence with the Sagrario in Granada's Monasterio de La Cartuja (p776) and the Transparente in Toledo's cathedral (p241). Seville is jammed with gems. But baroque appears elsewhere, too: the façade superimposed over the Romanesque original in the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela (p541) and the cathedral in Murcia (p674) are notable.

MODERNISME MADNESS

Catalonia, at the end of the 19th century, was the powerhouse of the country. And over its capital was unleashed one of the most imaginative periods in Spanish architecture by a group of architects who came to be known as the Modernistas. Leading the way was Antoni Gaudí (1852–1926), who sprinkled Barcelona with jewels of his singular imagination. They range from his immense, and still unfinished, Sagrada Família church (p294) to the simply weird Casa Batlló (p292) and only slightly more sober La Pedrera (p293).

Hot on Gaudí's heels were two other Catalan architects, Lluís Domènech i Montaner (1850–1923) and Josep Puig i Cadafalch (1867–1957). Domènech i Montaner's works include the Palau de la Música Catalana (p289), while Puig i Cadafalch built such townhouses as Casa Amatller (p293).

Elsewhere in Spain, Modernisme (the local version of Art Nouveau) made little impact, although Gaudí and Domènech designed a handful of playful buildings in northern Spain.

BUILDING INTO THE FUTURE

If Barcelona is the seat of Modernisme, Madrid is the capital of Spanish Art Deco. In the 1920s the newly created Gran Vía provided a perfect opportunity for new building, and a number of Art Deco caprices raised in that era still line the boulevard today. Overwhelming (and of questionable taste) is the Palacio de Comunicaciones (or post office to some; p134) on Plaza de la Cibeles.

Ambitious building and urban redevelopment programmes continue to change the main cityscapes. In Barcelona, for instance, the 1992 Olympics provided an enormous impulse for new construction and urban renewal. The Macba art museum (p288) shines white and boldly bright in the once slummy El Raval district. More recently, Jean Nouvel added the spangly gherkin-shaped Torre Agbar (p295), just off Plaça de les Glòries Catalanes; the blue triangular Edifici Fòrum (p291) was deposited on the waterfront by Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron; and Enric Miralles made a colourful splash with the Mercat de Santa Caterina (p289).

Further south, Valencia has chimed in with its futuristic Ciudad de las Artes y las Ciencias (City of Arts and Sciences; p581) complex, by Santiago Calatrava. The single most eye-catching modern addition to the Spanish cityscape (so far) is Frank Gehry's Museo Guggenheim (p455) in Bilbao, where Calatrava has also been busy designing the city's airport. Not to be left out, Sir Norman Foster designed the city's new metro system. In a similar vein, Sir Richard Rogers provided the dreamy, wavy new Terminal 4 at Madrid's Barajas airport (p164).

For a good introduction to the Modernista genius, Antoni Gaudí, have a look at www.gaudiallgaudi.com, with links to photographic sections on a range of his works, as well as that of other Modernista architects, designers and artists.

Gaudí: The Man & His Work, by Joan Masso Bergos, is a beautifully illustrated study of the man and his architecture, based on the writings of one of his confidants.

Environment

THE LAND

The Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal), having previously wobbled around off the western end of Europe for millions of years, settled into its present position about 70 million years ago. Its collision at that time with the European and African landmasses caused the peninsula's main mountain chains to rise up. The resulting rugged topography not only separated Spain's destiny from the rest of Europe's for long periods in historical times, but also encouraged the rise of separate small states in the medieval period.

The Meseta

At the heart of Spain and occupying 40% of the country is the *meseta*, a sparsely populated tableland (apart from a few cities, such as Madrid) that's much given to grain growing. Contrary to what Professor Henry Higgins taught Eliza Dolittle, the *meseta* is not where most of Spain's rain falls. In fact it has a continental climate: scorching in summer, cold in winter, and dry. Nor is it really a plain: much of it is rolling hills and it's split in two by the Cordillera Central mountain chain. Three of Spain's five major rivers, the Duero, Tajo and Guadiana, flow west across the *meseta* into Portugal and, ultimately, into the Atlantic Ocean. Like other Spanish rivers, these three are dammed here and there to provide much of the country's water and electricity.

The Mountains

The *meseta* is bounded by mountain chains on all sides except the west (where it slopes gradually down across Portugal).

Across the north, close to the Bay of Biscay (Mar Cantábrico), is the damp Cordillera Cantábrica, which rises above 2500m in the spectacular Picos de Europa. The Sistema Ibérico runs down from La Rioja in the central north to southern Aragón, peaking at 2316m in the Sierra de Moncayo, and varying from plateaus and high moorland to deep gorges and strangely eroded rock formations, such as the Serranía de Cuenca. The southern boundary of the *meseta* is the low, wooded Sierra Morena, rolling across northern Andalucía.

But it's at or near Spain's extremities that the country's highest mountains rise up. The Pyrenees stretch 400km along the French border, with numerous 3000m peaks in Catalonia and Aragón, the highest being Pico de Aneto (3408m). Across Andalucía stretches the Cordillera Bética, a rumpled mass of ranges that includes mainland Spain's highest peak, Mulhacén (3479m), in the Sierra Nevada southeast of Granada.

The Lowlands

Around and between all the mountains are five main lower-lying areas.

The basin of Río Ebro, Spain's most voluminous river, stretches from the central north to the Mediterranean coast, yielding a variety of crops, though parts of central Aragón are near-desert.

North of the lower Ebro is fertile Catalonia, composed mainly of ranges of low hills. Further south, the coastal areas of Valencia and Murcia are dry plains transformed by irrigation into green market gardens and orchards.

The basin of Spain's fifth major river, the Guadalquivir, stretches across central Andalucía, a zone producing many crops. The summer here sees high temperatures, with a daily average high of 36°C in Seville in July and August.

In northwest Spain is the region of Galicia, which is hilly, rainy and green, with mixed farming.

The highest peak in the whole of Spain is actually Teide (3718m), 1400km southwest of the mainland on the Canary island of Tenerife.



The Coasts

Spain's coast is as varied as its interior. The Mediterranean coast alternates between rocky coves and inlets (as on Catalonia's Costa Brava, the Balearic Islands and Andalucía's Cabo de Gata), and flatter, straighter stretches with some long beaches and some heavy tourism development, as on the Costa Daurada, Costa Blanca and Costa del Sol.

Sea temperatures along the Mediterranean coasts average 19°C or 20°C in June or October, and a reasonably comfortable 22°C to 25°C between July and September – slightly more in the Balearic Islands and around Alicante.

The Atlantic coast has cooler seas and whiter, sandier beaches. The Costa de la Luz, from the Strait of Gibraltar to the Portuguese border, is blessed with many long sandy beaches backed by dunes. In the northwest, Galicia is deeply indented by long estuaries called *rias*, with plenty of sandy beaches. Along the Bay of Biscay, the Cordillera Cantábrica comes almost down to the coast, and the beaches are mostly coves and small bays, though still sandy.

WILDLIFE

Spain's animal life is among Europe's most varied thanks to its wild terrain, which has allowed the survival of several species that have died out elsewhere. It's possible to see plenty of exciting wildlife if you know where to look. But sadly, some species are now in perilously small numbers. The plant life is astonishing in its variety, as the spectacular wildflower displays on roadsides and pastures in spring and early summer testify.

Animals

There are about 170 *osos pardos* (brown bears) in the Cordillera Cantábrica, and about 20 in the Pyrenees (in France and Andorra as well as Spain). Hunting or killing Spain's bears has been banned since 1973, and expensive conservation programmes have started to pay off in the last few years, at least in the western Cordillera Cantábrica, where the population of around 140 is now considered viable for future survival. Bears are being introduced from Slovenia to boost the Pyrenean population. In 1900 Spain had about 1000 brown bears; as with many other species, hunting and poison were the main reasons for their decline.

The *lobo* (wolf) is also on the increase. From a population of about 500 in 1970, Spain now has between 2000 and 2500. Their heartland is the mountains of Galicia and northwestern Castilla y León (Zamora is the province with most wolves). Though heavily protected, wolves are still considered an enemy by many country people.

The outlook is even brighter for the *cabra montés* (ibex), a stocky mountain goat whose males have distinctive, long horns. Almost hunted to extinction by 1900, the ibex was protected by royal decree a few years later (though is still subject to controlled hunting today). There may now be 30,000 in the country, chiefly in the Sierra de Gredos and the mountains of Andalucía.

The beautiful *lince ibérico* (Iberian or pardel lynx), unique to the Iberian Peninsula, is in grave danger of becoming the first extinct feline since the sabre-toothed tiger. Its numbers have dropped to probably fewer than 200 in Spain, and possibly none at all in Portugal, mainly due to a decline in the number of rabbits, its staple food, and loss of habitat to agriculture, plantations and roads. The only significant breeding populations are in the eastern Sierra Morena and Doñana area in western Andalucía. After years of dithering, expensive save-the-lynx programmes are now underway, including an in-captivity breeding centre at Doñana.

Other less uncommon beasts – all widely distributed – include the *jabali* (wild boar); the *ciervo*, *corzo* and *gamo* (red, roe and fallow deer); the *gineta* (genet), a catlike creature with a white and black coat; and the *ardilla* (red squirrel). The chamois (*rebeco*, *sarrio*, *isard* or *gamuza*), a small antelope, lives mainly above the tree line in the Pyrenees and Cordillera Cantábrica. South-western Spain is home to the Egyptian *meloncillo* (mongoose). Gibraltar's 'apes' – actually Barbary macaques – are the only wild monkeys in Europe.

Twenty-seven marine mammal species live off Spain's shores. Dolphin and whale-spotting boat trips are a popular attraction at Gibraltar and nearby Tarifa.

BIRDS

With 390 resident species and subspecies, Spain has easily the biggest and most varied bird population in Europe. Around 25 species of birds of prey, including the *águila real* (golden eagle), *buitre leonado* (griffon vulture) and *alimoche* (Egyptian vulture), breed here. Monfragüe in Extremadura (p818) is the single most spectacular place to observe birds of prey. You'll often see them circling or hovering in mountain areas or on the *meseta*.

Wild Spain by Frederic V Grunfeld (1999) is a useful practical guide to Spain's wilderness and wildlife areas, with illustrations of both animals and plants.

Bird-watchers will need a field guide, such as the *Collins Field Guide: Birds of Britain and Europe* by Roger Tory Peterson, Guy Mountfort and PAD Hollom, or the slimmer *Collins Pocket Guide: Birds of Britain and Europe*.

BACK FROM THE BRINK?

The *quebrantahuesos* (lammergeier or bearded vulture), with its majestic 2m-plus wingspan, is still a threatened species but is recovering slowly in the Pyrenees, where about 80 pairs now breed (the largest population in Europe). It has also been sighted in the Picos de Europa mountains after a 50-year absence, and an attempt is being made to reintroduce it to Andalucía's Parque Natural de Cazorla. The name *quebrantahuesos*, meaning 'bone breaker', describes the bird's habit of dropping animal bones on to rocks from great heights, so that they smash open, allowing the bird to get at the marrow.

Another emblematic and extremely rare bird is the *águila imperial ibérica* (Spanish imperial eagle), unique to Spain. With the help of an active government protection plan, its numbers have increased from about 50 pairs in the 1960s to some 200 pairs today, in such places as Monfragüe and Andalucía's Sierra Morena.

Spain's several hundred pairs of *buitre negro* (black vulture), Europe's biggest bird of prey, probably make up the world's largest population. Its strongholds include Monfragüe, and the Sierra Pelada in western Andalucía.

Another spectacular bird that you're certain to see if you're in western Andalucía, Extremadura or either of the Castillas in spring or summer is the white stork. Actually black and white, this creature makes its large and ungainly nests on electricity pylons, trees, towers – in fact, any vertical protuberance it can find, even right in the middle of towns – and your attention will be drawn by the loud clacking of chicks' beaks from these lofty perches. Thousands of white storks migrate north from Africa across the Strait of Gibraltar in January and February – as do much smaller numbers of Europe's only other stork, the *cigüeña negra* (black stork), which is down to about 200 pairs in Spain.

Spain's extensive wetlands make it a haven for water birds. The most important of the wetlands is the Parque Nacional de Doñana and surrounding areas in the Guadalquivir delta in Andalucía. Hundreds of thousands of birds winter here, and many more call in during the spring and autumn migrations. Other important coastal wetlands include Albufera de Valencia (p593) and the Ebro delta (p394). Inland, thousands of *patos* (ducks) and *grullas* (cranes) winter at Laguna de Gallocanta in Aragón (p442), Spain's biggest natural lake. Laguna de Fuente de Piedra (p759), near Antequera in Andalucía, is one of Europe's two main breeding sites for the *flamenco* (greater flamingo), with as many as 20,000 pairs rearing chicks in spring and summer (the other main breeding ground is France's Camargue).

Plants

Mainland Spain and the Balearic Islands contain around 8000 of Europe's 9000 plant species, and 2000 of them are unique to the Iberian Peninsula (and North Africa). This abundance is largely due to the fact that the last ice age did not cover the entire peninsula, enabling plants killed off further north to survive in Spain.

Mountain areas claim much of the variety. The Pyrenees have about 150 unique species and the much smaller Sierra Nevada in Andalucía about 60. When the snows melt, zones above the tree line bloom with small rock-clinging plants and gentians, orchids, crocuses, narcissi and sundews. The alpine meadows of the Picos de Europa are home to 40 orchid species.

A variety of pines flourishes on Spain's hills and mountains. The lovely umbrella pine, with its large spreading top and edible kernel, grows near coasts. The rare but beautiful Spanish fir is confined to the Sierra de Grazalema and a few other small areas in western Andalucía.

Practical bird-watching guides include John R Butler's *Birdwatching on Spain's Southern Coast*, Ernest Garcia and Andrew Paterson's *Where to Watch Birds in Southern & Western Spain* and Michael Rebane's *Where to Watch Birds in North and East Spain*.

The natural vegetation of many lower slopes in the east and south is Mediterranean woodland, with trees such as the wild olive, carob, holm oak and cork oak that are adapted to a warm, fairly dry climate.

NATIONAL & NATURAL PARKS

Much of Spain's most spectacular and ecologically important country – about 40,000 sq km or 8% of the entire country, if you include national hunting reserves – is under some kind of official protection. Nearly all these areas are at least partly open to visitors, but degrees of conservation and access vary. For example, *parques naturales* (natural parks), the most widespread category of protected area, may include villages with hotels and camping grounds, or may limit access to a few walking trails with the nearest accommodation 10km away. Fortunately, the most interesting parks and reserves usually have helpful visitors centres where you can obtain decent maps and information on local accommodation, walking routes and activities.

The *parques nacionales* (national parks) are areas of exceptional importance for their fauna, flora, geomorphology or landscape, and are the country's most strictly controlled protected areas. They are declared by the national parliament but managed by Spain's regional governments. Spain has 14 national parks – nine on the mainland, four on the Canary Islands and one on the Balearic Islands. The hundreds of other protected areas, declared and administered by Spain's 17 regional governments, fall into at least 16 classifications and range in size from 100-sq-metre rocks off the Balearics to Andalucía's 2140-sq-kilometre Parque Natural de Cazorla.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Human hands have been wreaking radical change in Spain's environment for more than two millennia. It was the Romans who began to cut the country's woodlands – for timber, fuel and weapons – which until then covered half the *meseta*. Deforestation since then, along with overtiling and overgrazing (especially by huge sheep herds), has brought substantial topsoil erosion; most of the fertile Doñana wetlands and the 300-sq-km delta of Río Ebro have been formed by eroded deposits. Urban and industrial growth, intensive tourism development along the coasts, and the construction of hundreds of dams for hydroelectricity and irrigation, have caused further change. And over the centuries many animal species were drastically depleted by hunting and habitat loss.

But there's still lots of wilderness. By European standards Spain is sparsely populated, and most of its people live in towns and cities, which reduces their impact on the countryside.

Conservation

Environmental awareness took a huge leap forward in the post-Franco 1980s. The Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) government spurred a range of actions by regional governments, which now have responsibility for most environmental matters. In 1981 Spain had just 35 environmentally protected areas, covering 2200 sq km. Now there are more than 400, covering some 40,000 sq km. But different regions give varied priority to conservation: Andalucía has more than 80 protected areas, while neighbouring Extremadura has just three. Nor are protected areas always well protected, often because their ecosystems extend beyond their own boundaries. And environmentalists and dedicated officials still have to struggle against illicit building, quarrying and hunting in some protected areas.

Of Spain's animal species, 28 vertebrates (including 16 birds and five mammals) and 16 invertebrates are considered in danger of extinction. In the plant

The English-language Iberianature (www.iberianature.com) is a terrific source of up-to-date information on Spanish fauna and flora.

The best guide to Spain's flowers and shrubs is *Flowers of South-West Europe* by Oleg Polunin and BE Smythies. In the south, Betty Molesworth Allen's *Wildflowers of Southern Spain* is very helpful.

For official information on national parks, visit the website of the Ministerio de Medio Ambiente, Spain's environment ministry (www.mma.es). It's in Spanish, but the diagrams, maps, lists and pictures are informative to everyone.

SPAIN'S HIGHLIGHT PARKS

Park	Features	Activities	Best time to visit	Page
Parc Nacional d'Aiguestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici	beautiful Pyrenees lake region	walking, wildlife-watching	Jun-Sep	p375
Parque Nacional de Doñana	bird & mammal haven in Guadalquivir delta	4WD tours, wildlife-watching, walking horse riding	year-round	p711
Parque Nacional de Ordesa y Monte Perdido	spectacular section of the Pyrenees, with chamois, raptors & varied vegetation	walking, rock climbing	mid-Jun–Jul, mid-Aug–Sep	p433
Parque Nacional de los Picos de Europa	beautiful mountain refuge for chamois & a few wolves & bears	walking, rock climbing, caving	May-Jul, Sep	p527
Parques Nacional & Natural Sierra Nevada	mainland Spain's highest mountain range, with many ibex, 60 endemic plants & the beautiful Alpujarras valleys on southern slopes	walking, rock climbing, mountain biking, horse riding, skiing	depends on activity	p785
Parque Natural de Cazorla	abundant wildlife, 2300 plant species & beautiful mountain scenery	walking, driving, 4WD tours, wildlife-watching, mountain biking	Apr-Oct	p796
Áreas Naturales Serra de Tramuntana	spectacular mountain range on Mallorca	walks, bird-watching	late Feb–early Oct	p638
Parque Nacional Monfragüe	spectacular birds of prey	bird-watching	Mar-Oct	p818
Parque Natural Sierra de Grazalema	lovely, green, mountainous area with rich bird life	walking, rock-climbing, bird-watching, caving, canyoning, paragliding	Sep-Jun	p729
Parc Natural del Cadi-Moixeró	steep pre-Pyrenees range	rock climbing, walking	Jun-Sep	p370
Parc Natural de la Zona Volcánica de la Garrotxa	beautiful wooded region with 30 volcanic cones	walking	Apr-Oct	p363
Parque Natural Sierra de Gredos	beautiful mountain region; home to Spain's biggest ibex population	walking, rock climbing, mountain biking	Mar-May, Sep-Nov	p181
Parque Natural de Somiedo	dramatic section of Cordillera Cantábrica	walking	Jul-Sep	p526
Parque Natural de Cabo de Gata-Níjar	sandy beaches, volcanic cliffs, flamingo colony & semidesert vegetation	swimming, bird-watching, walking, horse riding, diving, snorkelling	year-round	p803

realm, of the 8000 species on the mainland and Balearic Islands, 117 are in danger of extinction. Plants are threatened by such factors as ploughing and grazing, as well as by tourism and collection.

Water

Potentially Spain's worst environmental problem is drought. It struck in the 1950s, 1960s and 1990s, and threatens again in the late 2000s. This is despite a gigantic investment in reservoirs (which number around 1300, covering a higher proportion of Spain than of any other country in the world) and projects such as the Tajo-Segura water-diversion system, which can transfer 600 million cubic metres of water annually from the Tajo basin in central Spain to the heavily irrigated Valencia and Murcia regions on the

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

Spain's parks and other protected areas are mostly well cared for by their managers and by their users. Visitors centres and plentiful signage provide reminders to stick to established routes, to obtain the required permits for restricted areas, and not to damage vegetation, scare wildlife etc.

Giving your custom to local businesses, especially those with ecofriendly credentials, in and around parks and protected areas helps sustain rural economies without recourse to potentially noxious alternatives. But steer clear of noisy, disruptive activities such as quad biking.

Wherever you are, take extreme care to avoid starting fires, which every summer ravage large areas of Spain.

Water is at a premium in much of the country, especially in the dry centre, south and east. Don't waste it.

Mediterranean coast. Although Spain's many dams and reservoirs provide irrigation and hydroelectricity (reducing the need for nuclear or dirtier forms of power) and conserve water, they inevitably destroy habitats. The coastal building and golf-course booms increase demand for water, but inefficient irrigation methods and the very low price of water mean that too much water is simply wasted.

Intensive agriculture and the spread of towns and cities (including tourist resorts) have lowered water tables in some areas. Growing vegetables under huge areas of plastic in the southeast, especially Almeria province, with intense fertiliser and pesticide use and water pumped up from deep underground, is drying up some of the underground aquifers it depends upon.

Other Problems

Coastal development, often slackly controlled, has degraded many of the country's coastal environments and added to the pollution of the seas, although sewage-treatment facilities are being steadily improved. The coastal building boom has accelerated in the past decade, fuelled by second-home buyers from Spain and abroad, and also by the laundering of assorted black money, ranging from unpaid taxes to the proceeds of international drug trafficking and the illegal arms trade. In the southern region of Andalusia 59% of the coastline is already urbanised. The voracious construction and property industry plans ever more developments: *El País* newspaper reported in late 2005 that plans had been approved for at least 1.65 million more homes along the Mediterranean coast between Andalusia and the Valencia area in the east, with some towns and villages planning to multiply their population by 10. Spain's beaches still get creditable numbers of 'blue flags', which indicate that they meet certain minimal standards of hygiene, facilities and environmental management.

Valencia, Granada, and Madrid have the dubious distinction of being the three cities with the dirtiest air in Spain, chiefly because of vehicle emissions, according to the environmental group *Ecologistas en Acción*.

See www.blueflag.org for the latest list of Spain's cleanest, best cared-for beaches.

Spain Outdoors

Few countries in Europe can match Spain's diversity of landscapes, from the rugged coastline of Galicia to the picturesque shores of the Mediterranean, from the towering Pyrenees in the north to Andalucía's Sierra Nevada. You could enjoy these from afar with a glass of Rioja wine in hand, but diving in (sometimes literally) to explore a little further adds a whole new dimension to your Spain visit. Possibilities range from walking or mountain biking in the wilderness to more high-adrenaline pursuits such as downhill skiing and hang-gliding. A variety of water sports are also among Spain's most popular activities.

Depending on your level of experience, you have the option of striking out on your own or joining an organised tour; the latter has the advantage of hooking you up with like-minded people. As a rule, the operators along the Mediterranean coast are more plentiful and have more experience in dealing with English-speaking clients than those in the north, although high standards of professionalism are pretty uniform wherever you go.

WALKING

Spain is one of the premier walking destinations in Europe and a snapshot of the possibilities shows why: Spain's highest mainland peak, Mulhacén (3479m; p783) above Granada; following in the footsteps of Carlos V in Extremadura (p812); walking along Galicia's Costa da Morte (Death Coast; p558); or sauntering through alpine meadows in the Pyrenees (p362).

GRs, PRs & Other Paths

Spain's extensive network of short and long-distance trails are called *senderos de pequeno recorrido* (PRs) and *senderos de gran recorrido* (GRs) respectively. PRs are marked with yellow-and-white slashes, while GRs are signposted red-and-white. While these are a great concept, maintenance of the trails is sporadic. Local or regional groups also create and maintain their own trails using their own trail marking. Tourist offices may have pamphlets describing nearby walks and trailheads sometimes have informative panels.

When to Go

Spain encompasses a number of different climate zones, ensuring that, unlike in much of Europe, it's possible to hike here year-round. If your feet are starting to itch in early spring, head to Andalucía, where conditions are at their best from March to June and in September and October; they're downright unbearable in midsummer but in winter most trails remain open, except in the high mountains. If you prefer to walk in summer, do what Spaniards have traditionally done and escape to the north. The Basque Country, Asturias, Cantabria and Galicia are best from June to September. Starting in mid-June, the Pyrenees (p362) are accessible, while July and August are the ideal months for the high Sierra Nevada (p783). August is the busiest month on the trails and if you plan to head to popular national parks and stay in *refugios* (mountain refuges), book ahead.

Prime Spots

Most famous are the Pyrenees, separating Spain from France and containing two outstanding national parks: Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici (p375) and Ordesa y Monte Perdido (p433). The spectacular GR11 or Senda Pirenaica traverses the Pyrenees by connecting the Atlantic (at Hondarribia in

With an average altitude of 660m, Spain is the second-highest country in Europe after Switzerland.

Spain's long-distance walking trails (GRs) follow old Roman, royal and pilgrimage roads, cart trails and shepherds' migratory paths.

the Basque Country) with the Mediterranean (at Cap de Creus in Catalonia). Walking the whole route to appreciate its beauty is unnecessary, as there are day hikes in the national parks that coincide with the GR11.

Scenic and accessible limestone ranges with their distinctive craggy peaks (usually hot climbing destinations, too) include the Picos de Europa (p527), Spain's first national park and straddling Cantabria, Asturias and León provinces; the Basque mountains; Valencia's Els Ports area (p609); and the Sierra de Cazorla (p796) and Sierra de Grazalema (p729) in Andalucía.

To walk in mountain villages, the classic spot is Las Alpujarras (p786), near the Parque Nacional Sierra Nevada (p783) in Andalucía.

Great coastal walking abounds even along the heavily visited south on Mallorca (p630) and Cabo de Gata (p803) just east of Almería. The easy walking on Galicia's Illas Cies (p569), part of Spain's newest national park, makes it ideal for families.

Spain's most famous long walk is the Camino de Santiago (p89).

For more information on parks and protected areas, see p80.

Information

Region-specific walking (and climbing) guides are published by Cicerone Press (www.cicerone.co.uk) for Mallorca, the Cordillera Cantábrica, the Vía de la Plata pilgrim's route from Sevilla to Santiago, the Costa Blanca, the Sierra Nevada and the GR11 route across the Spanish Pyrenees. In Barcelona, Quera (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 318 07 43; Carrer de Petritxol 2) is a map and guidebook specialist. Madrid's La Tienda Verde (www.tiendaverde.es) and Librería Desnivel (www.libreriadesnivel.com in Spanish) both sell maps (the best Spanish ones are Prames and Adrados) and guides. In Spanish, the website www.andarines.com gives route descriptions and useful links for books, sports shops and Spanish mountaineering associations.

CYCLING

Spain has a rich variety of cycling possibilities, from gentle family rides to challenging two-week expeditions. If you avoid the cities (where cycling can be somewhat nerve-wracking), Spain is also a cycle-friendly country with drivers accustomed to sharing the roads with platoons of Lycra-clad cyclists. The excellent network of secondary roads, usually with a comfortable shoulder, is ideal for road touring.

When to Go

In terms of when to go, the same information holds true for cycling as it does for walking (see p83).

What to Take

Bike hire along the popular Mediterranean coastal areas, the islands and major cities is relatively easy but is hit-and-miss just about anywhere else. Bring your own helmet (helmets are required by law but enforcement is inconsistent) and bicycle if you're planning to do serious touring. Bicycle shops are common everywhere, making it unnecessary to load yourself down with supplies.

Prime Spots

Every Spanish region has both off-road (in Spanish called BTT, from *bici todo terreno*; mountain bike) and touring trails and routes. Mountain bikers can head to just about any *sierra* (mountain range) and use the extensive *pistas forestales* (forestry tracks). A challenging off-road excursion takes you along the Altiplano across the Sierra Nevada. Classic long-haul touring

ON LITTLE WHEELS

Most coastal cities have flat, wide seaside promenades (eg Barcelona, San Sebastián and A Coruña) that are ideal for *patinaje* (rollerblading), except when Spaniards come out in droves for their evening (usually 7.30pm to 9pm) *paseo* (stroll). Skateboard-friendly cities such as Pamplona have skating tracks and skateboard parks.

routes include the Camino de Santiago; the Vía de la Plata; and the 600km Camino del Cid, which follows in the footsteps of Spain's epic hero from Burgos to Valencia. Guides in Spanish exist for all of these.

Information

An indispensable website for readers of Spanish is www.amigosdelciclismo.com, which gives useful information on restrictions, updates on laws, circulation norms, contact information for the hundreds of cycling clubs all over the country, and lists of guidebooks, as well as a lifetime's worth of route descriptions organised region by region. There are more than 200 cycling guidebooks published (the vast majority in Spanish). *España en Bici* by Paco Tortosa and María del Mar Fornés is a good overview guide. *Cycle Touring in Spain: Eight Detailed Routes* by Harry Dowdell is a helpful planning tool, as well as being practical once you're in Spain. Another good resource is *The Trailrider Guide – Spain: Single Track Mountain Biking in Spain*, by Nathan James and Linsey Stroud.

For information on bicycle purchase and transport in Spain, see p867. Bike Spain (www.bikespain.info) in Madrid is one of the better cycling tour operators. The Real Federación Española de Ciclismo (www.rfec.com) provides contact information for bicycle clubs.

SKIING & SNOWBOARDING

For winter powder, Spain's skiers (and the royal family) head to the Pyrenees of Aragón and Catalonia. Outside of the peak periods (which are the beginning of December, 20 December to 6 January, carnival and Semana Santa – Holy Week), Spain's top resorts are relatively quiet, cheap and warm in comparison with their counterparts in the Alps. Resorts now also cater to snowboarders, with shops, schools and the installation of on-slope half-pipes. The season runs from December to April, though January and February are generally the best, most reliable times for snow.

Prime Spots

In Aragón, two popular resorts are Formigal (p439) and Candanchú (p439); just above the town of Jaca, Candanchú has some 42km of runs with 51 pistes (as well as 35km of cross-country track). In Catalonia, Spain's first resort, La Molina (p369), is still going strong and is ideal for families and beginners. Considered by many to have the Pyrenees' best snow (especially in January), the 72-piste resort of Baqueira-Beret (p380) boasts 30 modern lifts with 104km of downhill runs for all levels (and 7km of cross-country track). The après-ski scene also gets high ratings. Andorra, also in the Pyrenees, has popular, well-known resorts. Pas de la Casa-Grau Roig (p407) is Andorra's biggest, with 100km of runs.

Spain's other major resort is Europe's southernmost: the Sierra Nevada (p783), outside Granada. With completely overhauled facilities for the 1996 World Cup ski championships, the 76km of runs are at their prime in March. Despite their World Cup status, the slopes are particularly suited for families and novice to intermediate skiers.

Camping outside designated camping grounds is generally not permitted in Spain. The website www.campingsonline.com helps you locate camp sites anywhere in the country.

An excellent English-language site, with articles on wildlife, outdoor sports and conservation, is www.wild-spain.com.

Of the minor ski stations with poorer snow and a shorter season, Puerto Navacerrada (p173) is just 60km from Madrid and has 16 runs that cater to beginners and intermediates. It can be overwhelmed by crowds on winter weekends. In La Rioja, Valdezcaray, in the Sierra de la Demanda just 45 minutes from Santo Domingo de la Calzada (p496), has 14 runs reaching a maximum altitude of 1530m. Manzaneda, 90km northeast of Ourense (p572) in Galicia, boasts a 230m elevation drop, extensive snow-making machines and 15 runs along treeless trails from 1500m to 1800m.

Information

If you don't want to bring your own gear, Spanish resorts have equipment hire, as well as ski schools. Lift tickets range between €31 and €39 for adults, and €24 and €26 for children; equipment hire costs around €18 a day. If you're planning ahead, Spanish travel agencies frequently advertise affordable single- or multiday packages with lodging included.

WATER SPORTS

Scuba Diving & Snorkelling

With Spain's 4000km of shoreline, abundant marine life, relatively warm Mediterranean water, and varied underwater features including wrecks, sheer walls and long cavern swim-throughs, you'll find great *buceo* (scuba diving) and snorkelling opportunities year-round. The numerous Mediterranean dive centres cater heavily to an English-speaking market and offer single- and multiday trips, equipment rental and certification courses. Their Atlantic counterparts (in San Sebastián, Santander and A Coruña) deal mostly in Spanish, but if that's not an obstacle for you, then the colder waters of the Atlantic will offer a completely different underwater experience.

A good starting point is the coral reefs along the Costa Brava, especially around the Illes Medes marine reserve (p353) off L'Estartit (near Girona). The Costa del Sol (p749) outfits of Málaga, Nerja and Mijas launch to such places as La Herradura Wall, the 1937 cargo vessel the *Motril* wreck and the Cavern of Cerro Gordo. Spain's Balearic Islands (p627) are also popular dive destinations with excellent services.

Paco Nadal's *Buceo en España* provides information province by province, with descriptions of ocean floors, dive centres and equipment rental.

Surfing

Vans of European surfers following the best waves along Spain's windswept Atlantic coast are a sure sign that summer has arrived. At its best from September to April, Spain's north shore has consistent, tubing waves (in winter) and innumerable beaches that offer ideal conditions for all levels of surfer. Cold water is the only drawback; a full wetsuit is required in winter, but a shorty is sufficient in summer. Some people complain of localism (territorial locals) at the best spots on good, and therefore crowded, days. Surf shops abound in the popular surfing areas and usually offer board and wetsuit hire.

Mundaka's legendary left (p463), once considered Europe's best and a magnet for surfers, hit the headlines for all the wrong reasons in 2005 when its waves mysteriously never showed up and a World Championship Tour event had to be cancelled; surfers eagerly await its return. Heading east throughout the Basque Country (and even in downtown San Sebastián at the city beach, Zurriola; p468), Cantabria and Asturias, there are well-charted surf beaches. If you're looking for solitude, along Galicia's Costa da Morte (p558) some isolated beaches remain empty even in summer. In September surfers head to Galicia's Pantín Classic surf competition north of Ferrol

(p555). On the Mediterranean, southwest Spain gets powerful, winter beach breaks, and weekdays off Conil de la Frontera (just northwest of Cabo de Trafalgar) can be sublimely lonely.

José Pellón's *Guía del Surf en España* provides comprehensive recommendations on surf shops, surfing schools, clubs and prime spots. Both www.globalsurfers.com and www.wannasurf.com have Spain pages with A to Z surfing information.

Windsurfing & Kitesurfing

With 10km of white, sandy beaches, easy equipment hire and windsurfing schools, not to mention the strong winds of the Straits of Gibraltar (aka the Wind Machine), Tarifa (p735) is Spain's year-round windsurfing and kitesurfing capital. If you can't make it that far south, the less well known Empuriabrava in Catalonia also has great conditions, especially from March to July, while the family resort of Oliva near Valencia is also worth considering. If you're looking for waves, try Spain's northwest coast, where the northeast trade winds keep the wind constant all year. The Spanish-language website www.windsurfesp.com/sp.asp gives very thorough descriptions of spots, conditions and schools all over Spain.

Kayaking, Canoeing & Rafting

With 1800 rivers and streams, opportunities abound in Spain to take off downstream in search of hot wave trains, curlers and reversals. As most rivers are dammed for electric power at some point along their flow, there are many reservoirs with excellent low-level kayaking and canoeing where you can hire equipment. The downside is that to follow a river's course to the sea means you'll end up carrying your boat.

Top white-water rivers include Catalonia's turbulent Noguera Pallaresa (p373), Aragón's Gállego, Cantabria's Carasa and Galicia's Miño. In general, May and June are best for kayaking, rafting, canoeing and hydrospeed (water tobogganing). For fun and competition, in the first weekend in August the crazy 22km, en-masse Descenso Internacional del Sella canoe race (p530) from Arriondas in Asturias to coastal Ribadesella is a blast.

Patrick Santal's *White Water Pyrenees* thoroughly covers 85 rivers in France and Spain for kayakers, canoers and rafters.

For more-tranquil sea kayaking around cliffs, the Costa Brava's shore by Cala Montgó, Tamariu (p347) and Cadaqués (p356) is tops. Guided excursions, classes and equipment hire from beaches are easy to locate. Exciting surf-kayak spots coincide with the surfing meccas: Mundaka (p463), with its own Surf Kayak Club (www.ur2000.com in Spanish), and Llanes (p523) in Asturias.

Sailing

Spain has some 250 harbours for sport sailing and stages many regatas, and many companies specialise in chartering sailing boats both with and without a skipper and crew. The Real Federación Española de Vela (☎ 91 519 50 08; www.rfev.es in Spanish) maintains a calendar of windsurfing and sailing regatas, as well as regulations governing sailing in Spanish waters.

Canyoning & Puenting

If walking, sliding, diving, jumping and swimming down canyons is your thing, Spain's top *barranquismo* (canyoning) centres are found in Aragón's Parque de la Sierra y Cañones de Guara (p428), which is famous for its deep throats, powerful torrents and narrow gorges, and the Río Verde north of Almuñécar (p789) in southern Spain. May to September are generally the best months.

For a list of hyperbaric chambers and diving-accident facilities in Spain, check www.scuba-doc.com/divsp.htm.

The website www.spainforvisitors.com/sections/activities.htm is a good all-purpose website that provides links to a host of activities in Spain, including ballooning, skiing, walking, sailing and windsurfing.

Valencia's choice as host for the 2007 America's Cup may have delighted Spanish sailors, but landlocked Switzerland looking for a home port was responsible rather than Spanish sailing prowess.

Another popular activity run by adventure outfits all over Spain is swing jumping or *puenting* (which is the Spanglish way of saying 'jumping from a high bridge'). Unlike bungee jumping, where there's rebound, the idea is to jump out far, snug in two harnesses and two cords, and free fall (reaching up to 170km/h) into a pendulum-like swing action.

HANG-GLIDING & PARAGLIDING

If you want to take to the skies either *ala delta* (hang-gliding) or *parapente* (paragliding), there are a number of specialised clubs and adventure tour companies. The **Real Federación Aeronáutica España** (☎ 91 508 29 50; www.rfae.org in Spanish) gives information on recognised schools and lists clubs and events. The best places for paragliding in Spain are Castejón de Sos (p430) in Aragón; Zahara de la Sierra (p730) and Parque Natural Sierra de Grazalema (p729) in Andalucía; Almuñécar (p790); and a number of places along Spain's Mediterranean coast. For hang-gliding try Montsec in Catalonia (p386) as well as the places listed above for paragliding.

For the lowdown on skydiving courses, drop zones (Seville is one of the most popular spots) and equipment hire, look no further than www.skydiveworldwide.com/europe/spain.php.

Camino de Santiago

We sophisticated citizens of the 21st century like our exercise, but a walk of 783km and a month or more of exposure to the extremes of the elements, blisters, cramp, tendonitis and exhaustion requires extra-special motivation. Yet in an unprecedented revival, unlike anything since the 13th century, ever larger numbers of people are following the medieval Camino de Santiago (Way of St James) pilgrimage route across northern Spain. Drive down any road running parallel to the Camino, and you'll see pilgrims of all sizes, ages and nationalities, heading ever westward, loaded down under weighty backpacks or cycling along trails marked with yellow arrows and scallop shells (Santiago's pre-eminent symbol). The motivation of today's pilgrims is in many ways similar to that of their predecessors hundreds of years ago. Medieval pilgrims trod the Camino for faith, penance, salvation, hope for the future, and a dab of adventure. Modern pilgrims do it for the Romanesque and Gothic art, the physical challenge, the gorgeous ever-changing landscapes, or to enjoy a cheap holiday, but also to decide what's next in life, take a spiritual or religious journey, or work out a midlife crisis. Today, too, the pilgrimage to Santiago can be a life-changing experience, and it will certainly be the experience of a lifetime.

Before people could take a plane or drive to Santiago, millions of pilgrims simply walked out of their doors in Germany, the British Isles, Scandinavia, Poland or France and made a beeline for Compostela along a huge network of trade routes, royal roads and trails that eventually came together in Spain. The Camino has even been credited with giving birth to the idea of Europe: 'Europe was born on the pilgrim road to Santiago,' said Goethe. Although in Spain there are many *caminos* (paths) to Santiago, by far the most popular is, and was, the Camino Francés (p93), which originated in France, crossed the Pyrenees at Roncesvalles and then headed west for 750km across the mountains, wheat and wine fields and forests of the regions of Navarra, La Rioja, Castilla and Galicia. Threaded across this vast space are Pamplona, Logroño, Burgos and León, as well as an endless string of villages, each with its own pilgrimage vestige. Whether you go by car or under your own power, the Camino de Santiago is a highlight of travelling in Spain.

HISTORY

What originally set Europe's feet moving? Tradition tells us that Pelayo, a 9th-century religious hermit living in a remote area of northwestern Iberia, followed a mysterious shining star to a Roman mausoleum hidden under briars. Inside were the remains of the apostle James the Greater (in Spanish, Santiago). Confirmed by the local bishop Teodomiro and Asturian king Alfonso the Chaste, the earthshaking discovery spread like wildfire and put the incipient Compostela indelibly on European maps. Today it's hard to imagine the impact of this news, but in that age pilgrimage to holy sites with relics was tantamount to obtaining a ticket to eternal salvation. Relics were sacred commodities: the more important the relic, the more important the shrine that held them. And Santiago's relics were gold: nearly intact and belonging to one of Jesus' apostles, making them Europe's finest. When word got out, the devoted hightailed it to Spain. (See the boxed text, p90, to find out how James the Greater's remains got to Iberia in the first place.)

Bad for early pilgrims, but very good for monarchs, was the lack of roads, bridges, towns, churches and basic services for people trying to get to Compostela. The road had to be built and settled. Taking advantage of the dearth

The Camino is also called the Way of the Stars (*Via Láctea* in Spanish) because the heavenly Milky Way appears to parallel the Camino on the ground. Charlemagne, it is said, dreamt that Santiago told him to follow the Milky Way to his tomb, making him the legendary first pilgrim.

of able-bodied souls, monarchs offered enormous privileges to settlers, who soon populated town after town. Northern Spain was also plagued by Christian versus Muslim skirmishes that made the going hazardous. Monarchs and ecclesiasts were no fools: they quickly put the apostle's image to work and he was reborn as the legendary Santiago Matamoros (Moorslayer), heading up the Christian troops and supposedly helping slaughter Muslim forces mounted on a white charger at key Reconquista battles. Benedictine monks from Cluny in France also recognised the advantage of close ties to the Camino and founded many monasteries and attendant churches along the Camino, helping to spread Romanesque art forms and the order's power. In the 12th century a French cleric compiled the *Liber Sancti Jacobi* (aka the *Book of St James*), a masterwork on the Santiago pilgrimage that includes a guidebook dividing the route from the Pyrenees into 13 stages.

After its 11th-to-13th-century heyday (rivalling even Rome and Jerusalem), the Camino suffered through the Protestant Reformation and nearly died out until its late-20th-century revival. The route's current success has pumped new life into some lost little corners of northern Spain.

INFORMATION

The Camino is not the yellow-brick road to Santiago. While it is way-marked with cheerful yellow arrows on everything including telephone poles, rocks, trees and the ground, the 'trail' itself is a mishmash of forest path, rural lanes, field track running parallel to highways, paved secondary roads and footpaths all strung together. Scallop shells, stuck in cement markers or stylised on metal signs, also show the way.

Tourist offices in northern Spain frequently offer local- and region-specific information on the Camino. 'Friends of the Camino' associations also provide invaluable information, especially the **Confraternity of St James** (% 020 7928 9988; www.csj.org.uk; 27 Blackfriars Rd, London, SE1 8NY, UK). The Confraternity's website lists details of associations in several other countries.

Pilgrim's Credential & Compostela Certificate

Modern pilgrims carry a *Credencial del Peregrino* (Pilgrim's Credential) that they get stamped daily in churches, bars and *refugios* (refuges), to gain access to the network of *refugios* and acquire a certificate of completion, the Compostela. Pilgrims who walk (or ride a horse) the last (not simply any) 100km or cycle the last 200km and claim a religious or spiritual motive for the journey can receive the Compostela from the Santiago cathedral's *Oficina de Acogida de Peregrinos* (% 981 56 24 19; Rúa do Vilar 1; www.archicompostela.org;

PAGAN QUEENS & STONE BOATS

In the year AD 44, pagan Queen Lupa was more than a little suspicious when two Palestinian refugees landed in her territory, near Padrón in western Galicia, with the decomposing and headless body of a Christian martyr, and requested permission to bury him. The apostle James, son of Zebedee and María Salomé, is by tradition thought to have preached in Iberia. Herod Agrippa had him executed on his return to Jerusalem and Santiago's followers whisked the body to Jaffa, from where they let Providence guide their stone boat on a miraculous sea voyage through the Straits of Gibraltar back to Galicia. Promising safe passage and burial, Queen Lupa sent the loyal disciples out to a field to retrieve two oxen to pull the body on a cart. Instead they found two wild bulls eager to gore them. Not to be daunted, the disciples prayed to Santiago, who transformed the bulls' ire into cowed obedience: the two beasts bowed their heads and were peacefully yoked. Impressed by this and other exploits, Queen Lupa converted to Christianity. Santiago then remained forgotten until Pelayo saw the star in the woods.



(9am-9pm). Get the Credential (€0.25) in the *refugios* of major cities, via a Friends of the Camino association, or at the monastery in Roncesvalles (where it costs €1).

Both documents are useful for pilgrims' discounts: ask about applicability at museums along the Camino and discount one-way airfares with Iberia.

Tours

Numerous outfits, both in and outside Spain, organise walking and cycling tours of varying duration. Established companies include **Experience Plus** (www.experienceplus.com), which leads both walking and cycling tours (from O Cebreiro and León respectively); as well as **Bravo Bike** (www.bravobike.com) and **Saddle Skedaddle** (www.skedaddle.co.uk) which specialise in cycling. **On Foot in Spain** (www.onfootinspain.com) and **Iberian Adventures** (www.iberianadventures.com) offer walking trips, including self-guided options with Iberian Adventures, where you walk on your own but are provided with maps, route notes, reserved accommodation and luggage transfers. **Saranjan** (www.saranjan.com) runs upmarket bus tours with some walking involved.

PLANNING

Remember: the Camino changes – sleeping facilities open and close, trails are detoured and prices fluctuate.

Where to Start

No official Camino starting point exists. People usually decide where to start depending on the time available and what they want to see. To walk the 'whole' route (meaning from Roncesvalles) allow at least five weeks; allow two weeks to cycle and give yourself a week by car. Touring cyclists riding on the roads will inevitably go faster than mountain bikers using the mostly off-road walkers' trail. If you use a car, your experience will be more one of looking at the Camino than of doing it, but you will have the flexibility to explore many additional sites that are unfeasible by foot or bicycle.

When to Go

The Camino can be done any time of the year. From October to May there are few people on the road but in winter there will be snow, rain and bitter winds. In May and June the wildflowers are glorious and the endless fields of cereals turn from green to toasty gold, making the landscapes a huge draw. July and August bring crowds of summer vacationers, overcrowded *refugios* and scorching heat, especially in the middle section through Castilla y León. September is less crowded and the weather still stable, making it a pleasant month to travel. Santiago's feast day, 25 July, is another popular time to converge on the city. See Santiago de Compostela (p540) for more details.

The Confraternity of St James website (with great links, online bookshop, and historical and practical information) is the one not to miss:

www.csj.org.uk

Cyclists seeking practical information and advice will want to check out groups.yahoo.com/group/santiago_bicicleta.

CAMINO BOOKS

Outstanding books include David Gittitz and Linda Davidson's *The Pilgrimage Road to Santiago: The Complete Cultural Handbook*; William Melczer's translation of the 12th-century *Pilgrim's Guide to Santiago de Compostela*; Jack Hitt's quirky, modern, personal account *Off the Road*; and Nancy Frey's contemporary analysis of the pilgrimage's popularity, *Pilgrim Stories: On and Off the Road to Santiago*. John Brierley's popular *A Pilgrim's Guide to the Camino de Santiago* attends to both the 'outer and inner pathways', with an updated (and lighter-weight) edition published in 2006.

What to Take

The lighter the load, the easier the walking and cycling. In summer, pilgrims ideally get by with about 8kg to 10kg of clothing (quick-drying trousers, shorts, T-shirts, jumper, socks and footwear), sleeping bag, guidebook and any favourite personal items (camera, sunscreen, toiletries, blister pack). Winter pilgrims will need adequate all-weather gear. For walkers, lightweight, flexible boots with good ankle support are sufficient. Even experienced hikers often get tendonitis (and blisters) from wearing heavy boots on the relatively flat terrain of the *meseta* (the high tableland of central Spain). Cyclists will need panniers and helmet as a minimum. With the yellow arrows and detailed guidebooks, buying maps is unnecessary.

Sleeping

Those carrying the Credential can stay in *refugios*. Charging €3 to €6 (in Galicia, only a donation is required in the public *refugios*), most *refugios* have dorm rooms, bathrooms, space to hang laundry and sometimes kitchen facilities. As a rule it's first come, first served. Cyclists may have to wait until 8pm before being admitted to give preference to walkers. Pilgrims with support vehicles are at the bottom of the preference totem pole. In summer the *refugios* quickly fill and people start getting up earlier and earlier to race to the next *refugio* to ensure a bed space instead of enjoying the Camino.

Numerous alternatives, albeit more expensive, exist all along the Camino: *hostales* (budget hotels), hotels and rural guesthouses. Another option is to carry a tent. Camping grounds intermittently coincide with the Camino (see www.campingsonline.com). For lodging information in this book, see the specific towns in the Basque Country, Navarra & La Rioja (p449), Castilla y León (p175) and Galicia (p538) chapters.

Eating

Restaurants all along the route offer an economical *menú del día* (daily set menu) from €7 to €12, which most often includes three courses, wine or water and bread. Bread, cheese, fruit and cold cuts for picnics are readily available at small markets in the many towns and villages en route.

Getting There & Around

Since the Camino Francés has no fixed starting point, you can join the trail at any point along the way. See city sections in the Basque Country, Navarra & La Rioja (p449), Castilla y León (p175) and Galicia (p538) chapters for transport details.

You can parallel the route by car following the blue-and-yellow high-way signs. Covering the entire route by public transport is difficult unless you're travelling from one major town to the next and skipping the smaller villages. Information boards in the *refugios* usually have updated transport information.

Some 300 *refugios* (refuges) along all of the *caminos* (paths) are listed in easy-to-follow Spanish, along with heaps more good info, at www.caminosantiago.org, the site of the Spanish Friends of the Camino Federation.

CAMINO FRANCÉS

The highlights of the Camino Francés from Roncesvalles to Santiago de Compostela are detailed here. For more specific information on the major towns in Navarra, La Rioja, Castilla y León and Galicia, please see the corresponding chapters.

Roncesvalles to Pamplona

Just north of Roncesvalles, the Camino Francés dramatically enters Spain at the same Pyrenean pass immortalised in the French epic *Song of Roland* and which Napoleon used to launch his 1802 occupation of Spain. Diminutive Roncesvalles, 45km from Pamplona, admirably sets the tone for this extraordinary route. Its 13th-century Gothic church contains the first statue of Santiago dressed as a pilgrim (with scallop shells and staff) and a finely sculpted 13th-century Virgin and child encased in silver. At the daily Mass, the church's canons bless pilgrims using a prayer dating from the 12th century.

Beautiful beech forests surround Roncesvalles and are the Camino's first and last. The trail progressively descends through rural pastures, dense mixed forests and picturesque villages, whose three-storey white houses with brightly coloured shutters and steep peaked roofs (for the winter snows) line the undulating road.

Long before people were running with the bulls down the streets of Pamplona in a frenzy of San Fermín madness, pilgrims overnighed here. In the 11th century Pamplona became an official stop along the Camino, cementing its prosperity. Don't be put off by the cathedral's bland neoclassical façade: just inside are the pure, soaring lines of the 14th-century Gothic interior. The 15th-century alabaster tombs of the Navarran king Carlos III El Noble and his wife, Leonor, are particularly fine.

Pamplona to Estella

Heading west out of Pamplona, the Sierra del Perdón, with its long line of electricity-producing windmills, rises ahead of you. From the pass over the *sierra*, you can see down the long valley that leads to Puente la Reina, where the Camino Aragonés, coming from the east, joins up with the Camino Francés. Also in the valley (a patchwork quilt of wheat, white asparagus,

Romans worshipped Venus on the Galicia coast and when Santiago arrived he took her place on the scallop shell.



grapes and the first olive trees) is one of the Camino's emblematic spots: Eunate, a remarkable 12th-century, octagonal chapel sitting in the middle of a wheat field.

Puente la Reina's (Gares) main draw is its striking 11th-century bridge. Notice its diamond-shaped piers and hollows in the arches that help reduce water resistance when the Río Arga rises during floods.

The Romanesque portals of Puente la Reina's Iglesia de Santiago, Cirauqui's Iglesia de San Román and Estella's Iglesia de San Pedro de la Rúa, all with Mudéjar-influenced lobed Romanesque arches carved with complicated knots, are the only ones of their kind along the Camino. The area's microclimate makes the flowers (especially the roses and geraniums) the envy of any gardener.

The first monumental Romanesque architecture along the route finally makes an appearance in Estella: the outstanding portal of the Iglesia de San Miguel, the cloister of the Iglesia de San Pedro de la Rúa and the Palacio de los Reyes de Navarra. On the Palacio, look for the vices of sloth (a donkey playing a harp while a dog listens), lust (snakes sucking on the breasts of a woman) and avarice (naked people with money bags around their necks) high up on the street-corner capital.

Estella to Viana

Just outside Estella, at the Bodega de Irache, the winery owners tempt virtuous pilgrims with a free wine and water fountain. If you're tempted to take the wine away, it's sold cheap in an adjacent vending machine! Evergreen oaks and wine groves fill the undulating landscapes until a very long open stretch through wheat fields leads through the sleepy towns of Los Arcos, Sansol and Torres del Río. In Torres another stunning eight-sided Romanesque church, the Iglesia del Santo Sepulcro, sits quietly in the middle of the hillside village. To see the inside, complete with a rare 13th-century Christ figure (crucified with four nails), it's necessary to locate the local key lady. Viana is Navarra's last town.

Viana to Santo Domingo de la Calzada

Wine and wheat dominate the landscapes during this stretch and for good reason: La Rioja reds, the grapes for which grow in the iron-rich soils and are fed by the great Río Ebro and its tributaries, are some of Spain's finest. Logroño's Gothic Iglesia de Santiago contains a large Renaissance altarpiece depicting scenes from the life of the saint, including his violent Santiago Matamoros incarnation.

The façade's 17th-century Matamoros image appears to be a musketeer cutting Mt Rushmore-style heads. Be sure not to miss Michelangelo's crucifixion painting behind the main altar in the Catedral de Santa María la Redonda.

Little Nájera was capital of Navarra during Navarra's era of greatest power and splendour in the 11th century. Inside the fascinating Monasterio de Santa María la Real, members of Navarra's early nobility are buried around a miraculous cave where a statue of the Virgin was discovered by the king while out hunting. The 15th-century walnut choir stalls are arguably the finest along the Camino. The monastery has been undergoing restoration work but should be at least partly open by the time you get there.

From Nájera the Camino heads to one of the road's wackiest places, Santo Domingo de la Calzada. Named for its energetic, 11th-century founder Santo Domingo (who cleared forest and built roadways, a bridge, a pilgrim's hospice and a church), the cathedral has long been the major attraction (see p496).

Years when 25 July falls on a Sunday are considered 'Holy Years' (Año Santo/Jacobeo). In these years Catholic pilgrims can earn plenary indulgences (erasing all one's sins), partly explaining the Camino's popularity. The next years not to miss are 2010 and 2021.

Holy Years tend to bring improvements to the Camino's infrastructure. Around the 1993 Jacobeo there was a marked increase in public phones along the route. The 2004 Holy Year saw an explosion of internet facilities, which today are free in a lot of *refugios*.



Santo Domingo de la Calzada to Burgos

After entering Castilla y León province, the Camino passes through the densely forested Montes de Oca, once a thieves' haven, to the isolated monastery at San Juan de Ortega, whose do-gooder founder was Santo Domingo's disciple. On the vernal and autumnal equinoxes, the Miracle of the Light draws thousands to the church to see a shaft of light hit a Romanesque capital depicting the Annunciation.

In the hills after San Juan, the Camino runs by Atapuerca, Europe's most productive palaeontological site, loaded with human fossil remains dating back 1.3 million years.

Burgos overwhelms with its art and architectural riches. Not to be missed is the 13th-century Gothic cathedral, with its three eight-pointed-star vaults magnificently illuminating the main aisle and two chapels.

Burgos to León

The *meseta* begins after Burgos and continues in endless rolls of waving wheat for the next 200km across Burgos, Palencia and (most of) León provinces. People usually either love or hate this section of open, exposed territory where the largely adobe villages are few and far between. Villages are set low in long valleys (intermittently bisected by small, poplar-lined rivers), which rise up to the high, barren plains. Despite its apparent monotony, the stretch is filled with important testaments to the Camino's historical importance.

The crumbling ruins of Castrojeriz' castle rise majestically from the valley floor and the town's four large churches attest to more prosperous times. In Fromista, you'll find one of the jewels of early Spanish Romanesque architecture, the Iglesia de San Martín, with 315 corbels and fine interior capitals. Between Carrión de los Condes and Calzadilla de la Cueva, the Camino coincides with a long stretch of Roman road. Sahagún was a powerful and wealthy Benedictine centre by the 11th century. Most traces of that are gone now, but the Mudéjar-influenced brick Romanesque churches merit a visit (look for the horseshoe arches and the clever way the bricks are placed in geometric patterns). Before reaching León, the Camino runs through a long series of villages that run together along paved, busy roads.

In León the Camino reaches its architectural apex at the Romanesque Iglesia de San Isidoro and the Gothic Catedral de Santa María La Blanca. Considered the Sistine Chapel of Romanesque painting, San Isidoro's Panteón Real contains magnificently preserved frescoes depicting the most important scenes from Christ's life. The sublime cathedral's nearly 2000 sq metres of stained-glass windows, dating from the 13th to the 19th centuries, make them the best collection in Europe after Chartres in France.

León to Villafraanca del Bierzo

Hospital de Órbigo has an impressive medieval bridge and is famed for its association with the outlandish chivalry of a 15th-century knight, Don

To visit Atapuerca check the website www.atapuerca.net.

Suero de Quiñones, who jousted with every knight who passed this way for a whole month in order to free himself of an obligation to wear an iron ring round his neck every Thursday as a token of devotion to his beloved. After Hospital de Órbigo, the Camino finally returns to the mountains. Gateway to the mountain villages (which are collectively known as the Maragatería), Astorga has good Roman ruins and Gaudí's fantastical neo-Gothic Palacio Episcopal (inside you'll find an excellent museum with items relating to the Camino).

From Astorga the Camino progressively ascends through small villages (now back to wood and stone houses) nearly abandoned before the pilgrimage's revitalisation in the early 1990s, including Rabanal del Camino (a favourite stopover that even has a tiny Benedictine monastery founded in 2001). The high point (in more ways than one) is La Cruz de Ferro (1504m); the tiny iron cross is lodged in a long wooden pole set into an ancient pile of rocks. (Pilgrims bring stones to this pile – sometimes from home and sometimes picked up a few yards away – and in the last several years some have also left behind all manner of personal items on and around the pole: photos, bandanas, a braid of hair, cigarette lighter, messages etc.)

The trail makes a long, steep descent to the large, fertile valley, surrounded by mountains, known as the El Bierzo. The Camino cuts straight across the fairly industrialised valley, through the large city of Ponferrada, most famous for its impressive castle (the Templars only occupied it for about 20 years) and then through various towns before reaching El Beirzo's western edge at Villafranca del Bierzo.

At Villafranca's Romanesque Iglesia de Santiago, pilgrims too ill to go further could receive pardon at the Puerta del Perdón (the church's north door), just as if they had reached Santiago.

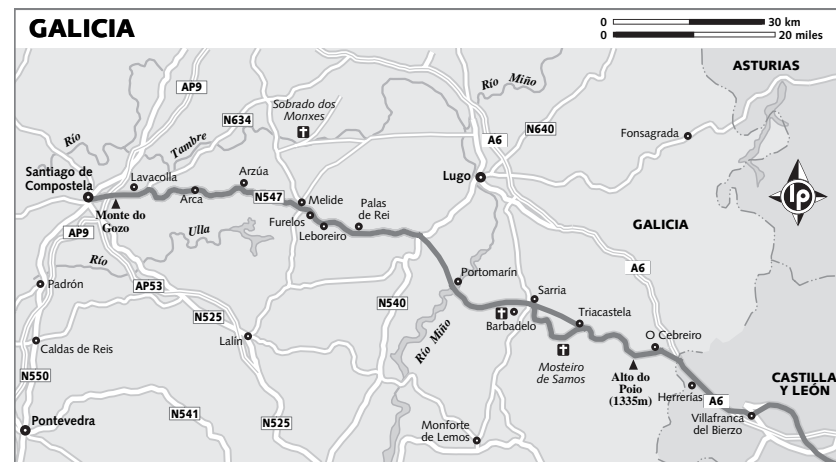
Villafranca del Bierzo to Samos

After gently ascending the long Valcarce river valley to Herrerías, the Camino abruptly rises up the imposing hillside to the pass at O Cebreiro, famous not only for attracting terrible weather, but as one of the earliest pilgrim way stations (a monastery was founded here in 836!) and the legendary locale of the Holy Grail, culminating in a 14th-century miracle in which the host and wine literally turned into the flesh and blood of Christ. Nine *pallozas* (circular, thatched-roof dwellings used since pre-Roman times) and adjacent stone houses (nearly every second one is a bar or hostel) make up this singular village.

Once you reach Galicia everything changes: it's permanently green and hilly, there are countless villages and hamlets, the grand monuments disappear and are replaced by small country churches, the houses are all stone, the roofs are slate and the rural people speak the local language, Galego. The first section through Lugo province is particularly beautiful, with old-growth oak and chestnut stands lining the way. Peeking in barn doors you'll see cobwebbed remnants of the area's strong ties to the land and its late move towards mechanisation, such as wooden ploughs and carts. Don't be surprised to see wizened old men and women (the latter dressed in black) carrying huge scythes to the field or trundling high wheelbarrow loads of hay, greens or potatoes.

In Triacastela the Camino diverges, with both paths reuniting in Sarria. Going by way of Samos allows you to see the grand Benedictine monastery, the Mosteiro de Samos, founded in the 6th century; it has two lovely cloisters (one with odd, busy mermaids and the other filled with roses), an imposing 18th-century church and four walls of murals detailing the life of St Benedict painted in the 1950s after the monastery burnt down.

Yellow arrows, the unofficial Camino blaze, were invented by the indomitable priest from O Cebreiro (Galicia), Elias Valiña Sampredo, back in the 1980s. He and his nephews went out with cans of yellow paint (because yellow is easy to see) and marked the historical ways.



Sarria to Melide

Built on a hill topped by a crumbling castle, Sarria is the usual launching point for people wanting to undertake the last 100km. The Camino winds through village after hamlet after village (such as Barbadelo, with a well-preserved Romanesque church) and steeply descends to Portomarín, set on a hill above the Río Miño. In the 1960s the old town was flooded to make way for a hydroelectric plant further downriver and the most important buildings, such as the fortresslike Romanesque Iglesia de San Juan, were moved stone by stone to the new town centre. The next town, Palas de Rei, has little to attract attention. From Palas to Melide there are lovely rural lanes, and the villages of Leboeiro and Furelos are particularly well preserved.

Melide has not only Galicia's oldest *cruceiro* (standing crucifix) along the main drag but also a good ethnographic museum in the town's small historical quarter. The museum covers the area's prehistory (pre-Roman and Roman) as well as local trades practised for centuries and lost in the last 50 years, such as shoemaking, blacksmithing and carpentry.

Melide to Santiago de Compostela

The Camino rolls through numerous hamlets bridged by eucalyptus forest to finally reach Arzúa (the cow's-milk cheese and honey are great here) and then Arca, a common last-night stopover. Lavacolla, where pilgrims used to cleanse themselves before heading into town, sits at the base of the last great hill, the climax of which is the Monte do Gozo (Mount Joy), crowned by a huge sculpture in honour of the Pope's 1989 visit to Compostela. Pilgrims once used to see the cathedral's towers from here but now the moving view is obscured by eucalyptus trees! The last 6km into town are paved and poorly marked.

From the Rúa de San Pedro it's downhill to the old medieval gateway of Porta do Camiño. Head up the pedestrian street and then down past the cathedral's northern façade and through the tunnel under the Archbishop's Palace to the magnificent cathedral square, the Praza do Obradoiro. The most important pilgrims' rituals revolve around the 12th-century Pórtico da Gloria at the cathedral's western end and the area behind the main altar, where pilgrims climb stairs to hug a Romanesque Santiago statue and then descend to the crypt below to pay respect to the relics. A fitting end to the

A short detour from Melide is the Cistercian monastery of Sobrado dos Monxes, featuring an ornate Galician baroque façade. Though it fell into disrepair in the 19th century, the monastery has since been restored.

SLEEPING ON THE HOME STRETCH

To do the last 100km walking village to village, Sarria is the most convenient starting point. This actually means you'll do 120km and it's five full days' walking to Santiago. The towns listed here go from stage to stage and in each of them at least a dozen sleeping options exist. The lodgings listed are in the middle of the budget price-range and centrally located (except the hotel in Sarria, which is by the train station), and have en-suite facilities. Taxi services, posted in *refugios* (refuges) and hotels, can ferry luggage if you'd rather not carry it yourself. Once you've reached Santiago, accommodation options are plentiful.

Hotel Roma (☎ 982 53 22 11; hotelroma1930@yahoo.es; Calvo Sotelo 2; s/d €35/46) Sarria.

Pensión Arenas (☎ 982 54 53 86; Plaza Condes Fenosa; s/d €26/36) Portomarín.

Hostal Vilariño (☎ 982 38 01 52; Avenida Compostela 16; s/d €24/36) Palas de Rei.

Hostal Teodora (☎ 981 50 00 83; www.casateodora.com; Avenida Lugo 38; s/d €24/40; a i) Arzúa.

Hotel O Pino (☎ 981 51 10 35; www.hotelopino.com; Rúa de Arca 23; s/d €27/40; a i) Arca.

Santiago See Sleeping, p545.

pilgrimage is witnessing the cathedral's big finale staged before Mass ends: the swinging of the mighty Botafumeiro incense burner (see p544). It's truly a spectacle not to be missed.

OTHER CAMINOS DE SANTIAGO

The other Caminos de Santiago also have yellow arrows (more sporadic), *refugios* (fewer) and important pilgrimage monuments, but they lack the marvellous infrastructure and crowds of the Camino Francés.

In the past pilgrims coming via Toulouse in southern France would cross the Pyrenees at the Somport pass (1632m) and take the Camino Aragónés through Jaca and Sangüesa to join the main route at Puente la Reina.

Those who crossed into Iberia at Irún or sailed down to ports such as Santander, San Vicente de la Barquera and Avilés, connected up with the Caminos del Norte, following the Basque, Cantabrian and Asturian coasts, and turned inland at any number of spots to join up with the Camino Francés. The oldest known pilgrimage route to Santiago connected the Asturian city of Oviedo with Compostela.

The Vía de la Plata brought pilgrims north from southern Spain via Seville, Zafra, Mérida, Cáceres, Salamanca and Zamora along a Roman trade route. This trail either heads north to Astorga and the main route or enters Galicia via the Puebla de Sanabria towards Ourense.

The Camino Portugués also had inland and coastal versions and crossed into Galicia at Verín or Tui. Fourteenth-century British pilgrims popularised the Camino Inglés by sailing to the Galician ports of A Coruña and Ferrol then proceeding south on foot via Pontedeume and Betanzos to Sigüeiro and finally Santiago de Compostela.

From Santiago some pilgrims continued trekking to the end of the known world, Fisterra. They still do today, but most take the bus. Off the end of Fisterra's lighthouse, pilgrims burn stinking bits of clothes while watching the sun set into the endless blue horizon.

The Confraternity of St James website www.csj.org.uk publishes excellent guides to all of the alternative *caminos*.

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Food & Drink

Food and wine are among the great pleasures of Spanish life, in part because of the extraordinary variety of dishes that Spain has to offer. Indeed, if you travel from one Spanish *pueblo* (village) to the next, chances are that you'll find a different speciality in each.

Climate has always played a central role in the development of the Spanish diet and it continues to play a defining role in the eating habits of Spaniards. All along the Spanish coasts, you'll discover that no-one treats fish and seafood with such respect, from the astonishingly varied Atlantic offerings of Galicia in the northwest or the Basque Country in the north to the seafood-rich paellas and other rice dishes of the Mediterranean. Even resolutely landlocked Madrid is known as 'the best port in Spain', such is the *madrileño* (Madrid residents') devotion to fresh seafood. As the weather warms, Spaniards from all over the country head for the coast, partly in search of the beach, but just as often in search of a good meal.

If you head inland, a different world awaits where highlights include the hearty stews and exquisitely roasted meats of Castilla, *jamón* (cured ham) and other *embutidos* (cured meats) of the Spanish interior or the olives of Andalucía. Those same Spaniards who travelled to the seashore in summer make the reverse journey in winter when the cold climate calls for the fortification of a warming meal.

Everywhere they go, at any time of the year, Spaniards will most likely accompany their meal with a Spanish wine, especially a red from La Rioja.

For all the variety of Spanish cooking, it's the rare combination of simplicity and innovation that sets Spain's cuisine apart.

The laws of traditional Spanish cooking are deceptively simple: take the freshest ingredients and interfere with them as little as possible. While the rest of the world was developing sophisticated sauces, Spanish chefs were experimenting with subtlety, creating a combination of tastes in which the flavour of the food itself was paramount. Nowhere is this more evident than in the art of humble tapas – bite-sized morsels whose premise is so simple as to have all the hallmarks of genius – where carefully selected meats, seafood or vegetables were given centre stage and allowed to speak for themselves. Such are the foundations on which Spanish cooking is built.

In recent years, however, Spanish chefs have taken the world by storm with their version of *nouvelle cuisine* which could just be Europe's most exciting culinary innovation. Chefs like Ferran Adria and Mari Arzak have developed their own culinary laboratories, experimenting with all that is new while holding fast to the traditions of simplicity that define traditional Spanish cuisine.

This blend of strong tradition and cutting-edge cuisine is illustrated by a simple fact: Spain is home to both the world's oldest restaurant, *Restaurante Sobrino de Botín* (p150) in Madrid, and *El Bulli* (p356) in Catalonia, a temple of gastronomic experimentation that was recently voted the world's best restaurant by *Restaurant* magazine.

Whether eating at home with the family or going out to a restaurant for a meal, eating is a social event that is always taken seriously enough to allocate hours for the purpose. Often, the conviviality of the surroundings and the company are as important as the food itself.

The rest of the world is finally waking up to what Spaniards have known for centuries – that there's so much more to the Spanish table than paella – which is why Spaniards spend more on food per capita than anyone else in Europe. It is, after all, one of the grand passions of Spanish life.

The Food of Spain & Portugal – A Regional Celebration, by Elisabeth Luard (2005), demystifies the food and wine of the various Spanish regions with recipes and the context from which they arise.

Spain is the world's largest producer of olive oil and much of the Italian olive oil sold around the world is made from Spanish olives.

THE ORIGIN OF TAPAS

Medieval Spain was a land of isolated settlements and people on the move – traders, pilgrims, emigrants and journeymen – who had to cross the lonely high plateau of Spain en route elsewhere. All along the route, travellers holed up in isolated inns where innkeepers, concerned about drunken men on horseback setting out from their village, developed a tradition of putting a 'lid' (tapa) atop a glass of wine or beer. Their purpose was partly to keep the bugs out, but primarily to encourage people not to drink on an empty stomach.

In this sense, little has changed and the tapa continues to serve the dual purposes of providing enjoyment and a lid to enable you to develop new levels of stamina during long Spanish nights.

STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

The basics in Spanish cooking are simple enough: bread, olive oil, wine and lots of garlic, a culinary legacy that dates back to Roman times. The eight centuries of Muslim rule in Spain is reflected in the use of spices such as saffron (an essential element of paella) and, in desserts, the predominance of honeyed sweets. Spain was also the centre of an empire and from its South American colonies came potatoes and tomatoes (not to mention coffee and chocolate).

The typical *carta* (menu) begins with starters such as *ensaladas* (salads), *sopas* (soups) and *entremeses* (hors d'oeuvres). The latter can range from a mound of potato salad with olives, asparagus, anchovies and a selection of cold meats – a meal in itself – to simpler cold meats, slices of cheese and olives.

Another essential presence on the Spanish table, and one that is usually eaten as a first course (or as tapas), is cured ham from the high plateau, known as *jamón serrano*. Every *tasca* (tapas bar) has it. *Jamón ibérico* is the best ham in Spain; its made from the hindquarters of wild pigs that have fed exclusively on acorns and the *jamón* from Extremadura or Salamanca is considered to be the finest. Highly seasoned *chorizo* (pork sausage) is also made from acorn-fed pigs. The Spanish will cure almost any kind of meat, including cows and horses; it's then called *cecina*. Spanish cured meats are a bit like Italian prosciutto, but are deep red rather than blushing pink, offer more to the teeth, have a richer aroma and last longer in the mouth.

The basic ingredients of later courses can be summarised under the general headings of *pollo* (chicken), *carne* (meat), *mariscos* (seafood), *pescado* (fish) and *arroz* (rice). Meat may be subdivided into *cerdo* (pork), *ternera* (beef) and *cerdo* (lamb). If you want a *guarnición* (side order), such as *verduras* (vegetables) you may have to order separately.

When it comes to fish, the Spanish favourites are *bonito* (tuna), *sardinas* (sardines) and *anchoas* (anchovies). Shellfish is another favourite. But the fish with which Spaniards have the closest relationship, historically, indeed almost spiritually, is *bacalao* (dried and salted cod). For many centuries roving Spanish fishermen have harvested the codfish from the grand banks of Newfoundland and Norway, salting it and bringing it home looking more like a rock than food. After soaking it several times in water it is rehydrated and relieved of its salt content, enriching the flavour and improving the texture. Originally it was considered food for the poor and some called it 'vigil day beef' for its use during fasts. The best place to enjoy it is in the Basque Country, where they revere it. Try sweet red peppers stuffed with *bacalao* and you'll be inclined to agree.

Inland, you're far more likely to encounter *legumbres* (legumes) such as *garbanzos* (chickpeas), *judias* (beans) and *lentejas* (lentils). Of the hearty stews, the king is *fabada* (pork and bean stew) from Asturias, although *cocido*,

a hotpot or stew with a noodle broth, carrots, cabbage, chickpeas, chicken, *morcilla* (blood sausage) beef and lard is a special favourite in Madrid and León. Other popular staples in Spain's interior include *cerdo asado* (roast lamb), *cochinillo* (roast suckling pig) and *patatas con huevos fritos* (baked potatoes with eggs).

If you opt for tapas, your choice is endless because anything can be a tapa: a handful of olives, a slice of ham and cheese on bread, a bit of *torrillo de patatas* (potato and onion omelette). Other common orders include: *boquerones* (white anchovies in vinegar which are delicious and tangy); *albóndigas* (good old meat balls); *pimientos de Padrón* (little green peppers from Galicia – some are hot and some not); *gambas* (prawns, either done *al ajillo*, with garlic, or *a la plancha*, grilled); *chipirones* (baby squid, served in various ways); *calamares a la Romana* (deep-fried calamari rings)...the list goes on.

DRINKS

Wine

Wine accompanies almost every meal in Spain, where people drink often but rarely to excess. Sometimes Spaniards mix wine with water, especially when giving it to drinkers of a youngish age. Eighteen is the legal age, but generally Spaniards are ready to drink wine when they start to ask for it. They grow up with responsible attitudes towards drink, and generally keep that attitude for life. So don't look for a piss-up or a Bacchanalian revel. Here wine is a food and something to be savoured, not a drug.

Probably the most common premium red table wine you'll encounter will be from La Rioja, in the north. The principal grape of Rioja is the Tempranillo, widely believed to be a mutant form of the Pinot Noir. Its wine is smooth and fruity, seldom as dry as its supposed French counterpart. Look for the 'DO Rioja' classification on the label and you'll find a good wine. Not far behind are the wine-producing regions of Ribera del Duero (p230) and Navarra (p479) while the Valdepeñas area (p254) of southern Castilla-La Mancha has less variety but is generally well-priced and remains popular.

For white wines, the Ribeiro wines of Galicia are well regarded, while one of Spain's most charming white wines is Albariño, also from Galicia. This crisp, dry and refreshing drop is a rare Spanish wine as it's designated by grape rather than region. The Penedès area in Catalonia produces whites and sparkling wine such as *cava*, the traditional champagnelike toasting drink of choice for Spaniards at Christmas.

Sherry, the unique wine of Andalucía (especially around Jerez; see the boxed text, p723), is Spain's national dram and is found in every bar, *tasca* and restaurant in the land. Dry sherry, called *fino*, begins as a fairly ordinary white wine of the Palomino grape, but it's 'fortified' with grape brandy. This stops fermentation and gives the wine taste and smell constituents that enable

To the Heart of Spain, by Ann & Larry Walker (1997), is a cookbook, wine book and travelogue of their food-inspired travels through Spain.

The discovery of *cava* (sparkling wine) is credited, at least in France, to Dom Pérignon – upon tasting it for the first time he called out to his brethren, 'Come quickly! I am drinking stars!'

A MARK OF QUALITY

Spanish wine is subject to a complicated system of wine classification with a range of designations marked on the bottle. These range from the straightforward *vino de mesa* (table wine) to *vino de la tierra*, which is a wine from an officially recognised wine-making area. If they meet certain strict standards for a given period, they receive *Denominación de Origen* (DO; Denomination of Origin) status. An outstanding wine region gets the *Denominación de Origen Calificada* (DOC), while *reserva* and *gran reserva* are other indications of quality. The only DOC wines come from the La Rioja region (p494) in northern Spain, which was demarcated in 1926, and the small Priorat area (see the boxed text, p383) in Catalonia.

The recipe for cured meats such as *jamón* (ham) comes from a noble Roman, Cato the Elder, who changed the course of Spanish culinary history with his tome *De Re Rustica*.

it to age into something sublime. It's taken as an *aperitivo* (apéritif) or as a table wine with seafood. Amontillado and Oloroso are sweeter sherries, good for after dinner. Manzanilla is grown only in Sanlúcar de Barrameda (p722) near the coast in southwestern Andalucía and develops a slightly salty taste that is very appetising. When ordering it be sure to say '*vino de Manzanilla*', since *manzanilla* alone means chamomile tea.

Then there is that famous Spanish wine drink, sangria. Don't expect too much from it and remember that it was developed as a way to make use of bad wine. It's usually a red wine mixed with citrus juice and zest, a bit of cinnamon, sometimes some rum and always diabetes-inducing amounts of sugar.

Other Drinks

Spaniards' love of *cerveza* (beer) makes perfect sense given that the weather is often fiercely hot and the food salty. In bars and *tascas* almost all the beer is on tap, so sidle up to the bar and order *una caña*, for a small beer, or *una jarra* for a greater thirst. Common brands are Cruzcampo, Mahou and San Miguel; the latter is the strongest at 5.4%.

Similar to beer, *sidra* (cider) is the speciality of Galicia, Asturias and the Basque Country; you can enjoy it fresh in a *sidrería* (cider bar), often poured straight from the barrel.

Aguardiente is the term for strong spirits, the most famous being Ponche Caballero. If you've ordered a whisky with coke (*whisky con coca cola*), you'll be expected to watch while the bartender pours your whisky...and continues pouring until you tell them to stop. You pay no extra regardless of the amount and the same applies to other spirits!

Horchata is a sweet, milky drink made from tiger nuts and sugar. Tea and coffee are unremarkable in Spain, but the hot chocolate is thick, rich and delicious.

CELEBRATIONS

In addition to the feasts of the calendar, there are many other reasons and excuses for Spaniards to have a fiesta, most of which are attached to the important rites of passage in a Spaniard's life – birthdays, anniversaries, first communions, graduations and weddings. Spanish fiestas will almost always be accompanied by groaning tables of food and by music, whether a live group or an impromptu performance by groups of women spontaneously breaking into song and clapping out Gypsy rhythms.

A BAR OR RESTAURANT BY ANY OTHER NAME

Plenty of places that serve food and drink go by the name of *bar* or *restaurante*, but there are plenty of variations on the theme.

- Bar de Copas – gets going around midnight and primarily hard drinks are served.
- Cervecería – the focus is on *cerveza* (beer) and there's plenty of the foamy stuff on tap.
- Horno de Asador – a restaurant with a wood-burning roasting oven.
- Marisquería – a bar or restaurant specialising in seafood.
- Tasca – a tapas bar.
- Terraza – an open-air bar, for warm-weather timpling only.
- Taberna – usually a rustic place serving tapas and *raciones* (large tapas): expect to see barrels used as tables and tile décor.
- Vinoteca – a bit more upmarket; wine bars where you can order by the glass.

Despite Spain's reputation as a country of wine-lovers, beer sales surpassed wine sales in Spain in the early 1990s.

The most important week of the year culminates in Easter, and there are special dishes associated with Holy Week. In some communities there is a Good Friday procession in which heavy floats are borne by penitents. In order to keep up their strength, they breakfast on *bacalao a la vizcaina* (dried and salted cod with chillies and capsicum).

As this is the biggest and most important holiday on the Spanish calendar, it's an important time for families and friends to come together to eat. Dishes that are often served during this period include *monas de pascua* (figures made of chocolate), *torta pascualina* (spinach and egg pie) and *torrija* (French toast). A popular Easter dish in Mallorca is *flan de pascuas* (Easter cheese flan), and *cordero pascual* (spring lamb) is common fare everywhere.

At Christmas, *turrón* is a country-wide favourite. It's a uniquely Spanish kind of nougat, whose recipe goes back to the 14th century and incorporates honey, almonds and sugar.

VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

Such is their love for meat, fish and seafood, many Spaniards, especially the older generation, don't really understand vegetarianism. As a result, dedicated vegetarian restaurants are pretty thin on the ground, particularly outside the major cities. Be aware, too, that cooked vegetable dishes often contain ham.

That said, while vegetarians – especially vegans – can have a hard time in Spain, the eating habits of Spaniards are changing and an ever-growing selection of vegetarian restaurants seems to be springing up around the country. Barcelona and, to a lesser extent Madrid, have plenty of vegetarian restaurants. Vegetarian restaurants are easy to find throughout this book – they're marked with a ✓ symbol.

Otherwise, salads are a Spanish staple and, in many restaurants, are a meal in themselves. You'll also come across the odd vegetarian paella, as well as dishes such as *verduras a la plancha* (grilled vegetables); *garbanzos con espinacas* (chickpeas and spinach); and numerous potato dishes, such as *patatas bravas* (potato chunks bathed in a slightly spicy tomato sauce) and *tortilla de patatas*. The prevalence of legumes ensures that *lentejas* and *judías* (beans) are also easy to track down, while *pan* (bread), *quesos* (cheeses), *alcachofas* (artichokes) and *aceitunas* (olives) are always easy to find. *Tascas* usually offer more vegetarian choices than sit-down restaurants.

If vegetarianism is rare among Spaniards, vegans will feel as if they've come from another planet. To make sure that you're not misunderstood, ask if dishes contain *huevos* (eggs) or *productos lácteos* (dairy). You might also want to check out *The New Spain – Vegetarian & Vegan Restaurants*, by Jean Claude Juston, a guide to being a vegetarian in Spain and available from L'Atelier (www.ivu.org/atelier).

EATING WITH KIDS

Food and children are two of the great loves for Spaniards, which means that children are always welcome, whether in a sit-down restaurant or in a chaotically busy bar. If highchairs or risers aren't available staff will improvise and you won't be made to feel uncomfortable as your children run amok. As for the food, children's menus may be rare, but Spanish fare is rarely spicy and kids tend to like it. Toddlers are usually fed straight from their parents' plate. When kids get hungry between meals it's easy to zip into the nearest *tasca* and get them a snack and there are also sweet shops every few blocks. See p842 for further information on travelling with children.

For an authoritative and comprehensive periodical on Spanish gastronomy, check www.spaingourmetour.com, which overflows with recipes and ideas for culinary explorations of Spain.

If you're British, and can't live without Spanish food after you've left Spain, www.delicioso.co.uk is an online Spanish delicatessen that can deliver Spain to your table.

HABITS & CUSTOMS

Spanish waiters are a breed apart. In smarter places, they're often young, attentive and switched on to the needs of patrons. In more traditional places, however, waiting is a career, often a poorly paid one, which is the preserve of old men (sometimes one old man) in white jackets and bow ties and for whom service with a smile is not part of the job description. In such places, they shuffle amid the tables, the weight of the world upon their shoulders, struggling with what seems a Sisyphean task. Getting their attention can be a challenge.

Somewhere in between are Spanish barmen who can be as informal as they are informed and who love to shout their orders to the kitchen and generally create a breezy atmosphere.

In simpler restaurants you may keep the same knife and fork throughout the meal. As each course is finished you set the cutlery aside and they whisk away the plates.

Most visitors complain not about the quality of Spanish food but its timing. *Comida/Almuerzo* (lunch) is the main, leisurely meal of the day and rarely begins before 2pm (kitchens usually stay open until 4pm). For *cena* (dinner), few Spaniards would dream of turning up before 9.30pm.

In the meantime, many bars serve tapas and *raciones* (large tapas) throughout the day. *Bocadillos* (filled rolls) are another option.

Desayuno (breakfast) is generally a no-nonsense affair taken at a bar on the way to work. A *café con leche* (coffee with milk) with a *bollo* (pastry) is the typical breakfast. Some people prefer a savoury start – you could go for a *sandwich mixto* (a toasted ham and cheese).

A Spanish *tostada* is simply buttered toast. Others go for an all-Spanish favourite, *chocolate con churros*, a lightly deep-fried stick of plain pastry immersed in thick hot chocolate.

If you're just eating tapas – which Spaniards generally eat between meals, as an accompaniment to a drink or as a prelude to the main event – you can either take a small plate and help yourself or simply point to the morsel you want. If you do this, keep track of what you eat by holding on to the toothpicks. If you particularly like something you can have a *media ración* (half ration) or even a full *ración*.

In some bars you'll also get a small (free) *tapa* when you buy a drink. Tapas are always taken with a drink, and almost always while standing at the bar. If you don't go out on a *tapeo* (tapas-bar crawl), then you haven't experienced Spain.

For extensive links to articles (in both Spanish and English) and recent books about Spanish food, look no further than www.carnegiejlibrary.org/subject/food/spain.html.

WOULD YOU LIKE SMOKE WITH THAT, SIR?

Those of you who remember with nostalgia the days of smoke-filled Spanish restaurants or the days when you could be served by a smoking Spanish bank-teller are in for a rude shock.

On 1 January 2006, the unthinkable happened: all Spanish bars, restaurants, offices and other enclosed public places became subject to strict antismoking legislation. Smoking is now banned in all workplaces, schools (like they had to ban this?), public transport and sports and cultural centres. The law also extends to bars and restaurants although these have an opt-out clause. Those establishments over 100 sq metres must have designated smoking areas, while smaller bars must make a choice – ban smoking or make the bar off-limits to children.

Little seems to have changed, however, when it comes to bars or smaller restaurants, or at least not so that you'd notice. According to Spain's Hospitality Federation, 85% of restaurants smaller than 100 sq metres have opted to remain smoker-friendly. We've also found only a handful of bars that have elected to become smoke-free and, of the rest, no-one seems to comply with the 'no-children' rule.

The traveller's friend is the *menú del día*, a set-price meal which comprises three courses, with bread and a drink thrown in; they're generally only available at lunchtime Monday to Friday and cost around €7 to €11. You'll be given a menu with five or six starters, the same number of mains and a handful of desserts – choose one from each category and don't even think of mixing and matching. If you can't face a full menu, a simpler option is the *plato combinado*, basically a meat-and-three-veg dish.

When it comes to tipping, most Spaniards leave small change or around €1 per person.

One final thing: don't jump out of your seats if people passing your table address you with a hearty *¡buen provecho!* They're just saying 'Enjoy your meal!'

COOKING COURSES

There are many terrific cooking courses throughout Spain:

Alambique (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 559 78 58; www.alambique.com; Plaza de la Encarnación 2, Madrid) If your interest in cooking is more in passing than something you'd like to spend weeks doing, stop by this friendly store where English-language cooking classes start from €65.

Catacurian (☎ USA 1 800 945 8606, Spain 93 511 07 38; www.catacurian.com; Carrer del Progres 2, El Masroig, Tarragona, Catalonia) Head down to the rural wine region of Priorat for three- to 10-day wine and cooking classes. Catalan chef Alicia Juanpere and her American partner Jonathan Perret lead tours and teach the classes (in English). Three-day courses start from €1350.

Cooking Club (Map p113; ☎ 91 323 29 58; www.club-cooking.com in Spanish; Calle de Veza 33, Madrid) Regular and respected programme of classes encompassing a range of cooking styles from local Spanish to international dishes and from short to longer courses.

L'Atelier (☎ 958 85 75 01; www.ivu.org/atelier; Calle Alberca 21, Mecina, Granada) Award-winning vegetarian chef Jean-Claude Juston (formerly of Neal's Yard Bakery and other celebrated veggie eateries in London) runs vegetarian cookery courses the first week of every month at his welcoming little guesthouse in the magical Alpujarras valleys of Andalucía. One day costs €45.

EAT YOUR WORDS

Want to know *pil pil* from *pimiento*? *Salsa* from *sandía*? Get behind the cuisine scene by getting to know the language. For pronunciation guidelines see p877 and for a complete rundown on useful phrases check out Lonely Planet's *Spanish Phrasebook*.

Useful Phrases

Table for ..., please.

Una mesa para ..., por favor.

oo-na me-sa pa-ra ..., por fa-vor

Can I see the menu, please?

¿Puedo ver el menú, por favor?

pwe-do ver el me-noo, por fa-vor

Can I see the wine list, please?

¿La lista de vinos, por favor?

la lee-sta de vee-nos por fa-vor

Can you recommend a good local wine?

¿Me recomienda un buen vino del país?

me re-ko-myen-da oon bwen vee-no del pa-ees

Can I have (a beer), please?

¿(Una cerveza), por favor?

(oo-na ser-ve-sa) por fa-vor

Good health/Cheers!

¡Salud!

sa-loo

Do you have children's meals?

¿Tienen comidas para niños?

tye-nen ko-mee-das pa-ra nee-nyos

The bill, please.

La cuenta, por favor.

la kwen-ta por fa-vor

I'm vegetarian.

Soy vegetariano/a. (m/f)

soy ve-khe-ta-rya-no/a

The New Spanish Table, by Anya Von Bremzen (2006) is dedicated to the fusion of tradition and *nouvelle cuisine* that is taking the world by storm, not to mention 275 recipes.

Food Glossary

<i>a la parrilla</i>	<i>a la pa-ree-lya</i>	grilled
<i>aceitunas</i>	<i>a-thay-too-nas</i>	olives
<i>adobo</i>	<i>a-do-bo</i>	marinade
<i>aguacate</i>	<i>a-gwa-ka-te</i>	avocado
<i>ajo</i>	<i>a-kho</i>	garlic
<i>albóndiga</i>	<i>al-bon-dee-ga</i>	meatballs
<i>arroz</i>	<i>a-roth</i>	rice
<i>asado</i>	<i>a-sa-do</i>	roasted
<i>bacalao</i>	<i>ba-ka-low</i>	dried and salted cod
<i>berenjena</i>	<i>be-ren-khe-na</i>	aubergine, eggplant
<i>bistec</i>	<i>bees-tek</i>	steak
<i>bocadillo</i>	<i>bo-ka-dee-lyo</i>	bread roll with filling (usually without butter)
<i>boquerones</i>	<i>bo-ke-ro-nes</i>	anchovies marinated in wine vinegar
<i>butifarra</i>	<i>boo-tee-fa-ra</i>	sausage
<i>cabrito</i>	<i>ka-bree-to</i>	kid, baby goat
<i>calamares</i>	<i>ka-la-ma-res</i>	squid rings
<i>caldo</i>	<i>kal-do</i>	broth, stock
<i>callos</i>	<i>ka-lyos</i>	tripe
<i>camarón</i>	<i>ka-ma-ron</i>	small prawn, shrimp
<i>caracol</i>	<i>ka-ra-kol</i>	snail
<i>cebolla</i>	<i>the-bo-lya</i>	onion
<i>cerdo</i>	<i>ther-do</i>	pork
<i>chorizo</i>	<i>cho-ree-tho</i>	cooked spicy red sausage
<i>chuleta</i>	<i>choo-le-ta</i>	chop, cutlet
<i>churro</i>	<i>choo-ro</i>	long, deep-fried doughnut
<i>cochinillo</i>	<i>ko-chee-nee-lyo</i>	suckling pig
<i>codorniz</i>	<i>ko-dor-neeth</i>	quail
<i>coliflor</i>	<i>ko-lee-flor</i>	cauliflower
<i>conejo</i>	<i>ko-ne-kho</i>	rabbit
<i>confitura</i>	<i>kon-fee-too-ra</i>	jam
<i>cordero</i>	<i>kor-de-ro</i>	lamb
<i>empanadillas</i>	<i>em-pa-na-dee-lyas</i>	small pie, either savoury or sweet
<i>ensalada</i>	<i>en-sa-la-da</i>	salad
<i>escabeche</i>	<i>es-ka-be-che</i>	pickle, marinade
<i>estofado</i>	<i>es-to-fa-do</i>	stew
<i>frito</i>	<i>free-to</i>	fried
<i>galleta</i>	<i>ga-lye-ta</i>	biscuit
<i>granada</i>	<i>gra-na-da</i>	pomegranate
<i>helado</i>	<i>e-la-do</i>	ice cream
<i>langosta</i>	<i>lan-gos-ta</i>	lobster
<i>langostino</i>	<i>lan-gos-tee-no</i>	king prawn
<i>leche</i>	<i>le-che</i>	milk
<i>lechuga</i>	<i>le-choo-ga</i>	lettuce
<i>lomo</i>	<i>lo-mo</i>	loin (pork unless specified otherwise)
<i>maíz</i>	<i>ma-eeth</i>	corn
<i>mantequilla</i>	<i>man-te-kee-lya</i>	butter
<i>manzana</i>	<i>man-tha-na</i>	apple
<i>mejillones</i>	<i>me-khee-lyo-nes</i>	mussels
<i>menú del día</i>	<i>me-noo del dee-a</i>	daily set menu
<i>merluza</i>	<i>mer-loo-tha</i>	hake
<i>miel</i>	<i>myel</i>	honey
<i>morcilla</i>	<i>mor-thee-lya</i>	black pudding
<i>naranja</i>	<i>na-ran-kha</i>	orange
<i>ostra</i>	<i>os-tra</i>	oyster

<i>paella</i>	<i>pa-e-lya</i>	rice dish which has many regional variations
<i>pan</i>	<i>pan</i>	bread
<i>pastel</i>	<i>pas-tel</i>	cake
<i>pato</i>	<i>pa-to</i>	duck
<i>pescadito frito</i>	<i>pes-ka-ee-to free-to</i>	fried fish
<i>pil pil</i>	<i>peel peel</i>	garlic sauce spiked with chilli
<i>pimentón</i>	<i>pee-men-ton</i>	paprika
<i>pimiento</i>	<i>pee-myen-to</i>	pepper, capsicum
<i>plátano</i>	<i>pla-ta-no</i>	banana
<i>platija</i>	<i>pla-tee-kha</i>	flounder, plaice
<i>plato combinado</i>	<i>pla-to kom-bee-na-do</i>	combination plate
<i>queso</i>	<i>ke-so</i>	cheese
<i>raciones</i>	<i>ra-syo-nes</i>	large tapas serving
<i>relleno</i>	<i>re-lye-no</i>	stuffing
<i>riñón</i>	<i>ree-nyon</i>	kidney
<i>salsa</i>	<i>saf-sa</i>	sauce
<i>sandia</i>	<i>san-dee-a</i>	watermelon
<i>sesos</i>	<i>se-sos</i>	brains
<i>seta</i>	<i>se-ta</i>	wild mushroom
<i>solomillo</i>	<i>so-lo-mee-lyo</i>	sirloin (usually of pork)
<i>sopa</i>	<i>so-pa</i>	soup
<i>tarta</i>	<i>tar-ta</i>	cake
<i>ternasco</i>	<i>ter-nas-ko</i>	lamb ribs
<i>ternera</i>	<i>ter-ne-ra</i>	veal
<i>tortilla de patatas</i>	<i>tor-tee-lya de pa-ta-tas</i>	potato and onion omelette
<i>trucha</i>	<i>troo-cha</i>	trout

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Madrid



Madrid may lack the effortless glamour of Paris, the gravitas of Rome or the European cool of Barcelona, but it is everything that is good about Spain. Indeed, you'll quickly come to wonder how you can bear to live anywhere else.

Madrid's charm revolves around two extremes. This is a refined city known for its cultural life. Where else in the world could you find three of the world's best art galleries – the Prado, the Reina Sofía and the Thyssen – within a stone's throw of each other? At the same time, Madrid has become synonymous with having a good time and carousing until all hours.

In Madrid's hinterland, attractions range from the sedate royal heritage of San Lorenzo de El Escorial and Aranjuez to the charming villages of Sierra de Guadarrama or enchanted Chinchón, and are all worth seeking out.

Whether you're strolling through the Parque del Buen Retiro on a Sunday afternoon or sipping wine as the street performers that so adorn this city announce its headlong rush into the night, Madrid will, at some point, capture your soul. Once it happens, it never lets go.

HIGHLIGHTS

- See Velázquez's masterpieces and the dark works of Goya at the world-famous **Museo del Prado** (p131)
- Stroll with the *madriñeños* on a Sunday afternoon in the **Parque del Buen Retiro** (p133)
- Search for treasure amid the crowds at **El Rastro flea market** (p129)
- Soak up the buzz with a *caña* (small beer) or glass of fine Spanish wine on **Plaza de Santa Ana** (p130)
- Lose yourself with the flamenco aficionados amid the passion of **Cardamomo** (p160)
- Make a pilgrimage to see the stars of Real Madrid play at the temple of football, **El Estadio Santiago Bernabéu** (p162)
- Enjoy some of the friendliest bars in Spain in the gay barrio of **Chueca** (p156)
- Spend your hard-earned euros in the exclusive barrio of **Salamanca** (p163)
- Feast on roast suckling pig at **Café de la Iberia** (p172) in Chinchón
- Escape the clamour of city life at Aranjuez's sumptuous **Palacio Real** (p169)



■ AREA: XX505 SQ KM (MADRID)
32°C.

■ AVE SUMMER TEMP: HIGH
POP: 3.29 MILLION (MADRID)

HISTORY

When Iberia's Christians began the Reconquista (Reconquest) – the centuries-long campaign by Christian forces to reclaim the peninsula – the Muslims of Al-Andalus constructed a chain of fortified positions through the heart of Iberia. One of these was built by Muhammad I, emir of Córdoba, in 854, on the site of what would become Madrid. The name they gave to the new settlement was Magerit (or Mayrit), which comes from the Arabic word *majira*, meaning water channel.

Magerit's strategic location in the centre of the peninsula saw the city change hands repeatedly, but it was not until 1309 that the travelling Cortes (royal court and parliament) sat in Madrid for the first time. Despite the growing evidence of royal attention, medieval Madrid remained dirt-poor and small-scale: 'in Madrid there is nothing except what you bring with you', observed one 15th-century writer. It simply bore no comparison with other major Spanish, let alone European, cities.

By the time Carlos' son and successor, Felipe II, ascended the Spanish throne in 1556, Madrid was surrounded by walls that boasted 130 towers and six stone gates, but these fortifications were largely built of mud and designed more to impress than provide any meaningful defence of the city. Such modest claims to significance notwithstanding, Madrid was chosen by Felipe II as the capital of Spain in 1561.

Madrid took centuries to grow into its new role and despite a handful of elegant churches, the imposing Alcázar and a smattering of noble residences, Madrid consisted, for the most part, of precarious whitewashed houses that were little more than mud huts. The monumental Paseo del Prado, which now provides Madrid with so much of its grandeur, was nothing more than a small creek.

It was during the 17th century, Spain's golden age, that Madrid began to take on the aspect of a capital and was home to 175,000 people, making it the fifth-largest city in Europe (after London, Paris, Constantinople and Naples).

Carlos III (r 1759–88) gave Madrid and Spain a period of comparatively common-sense government and, after he cleaned up the city, completed the Palacio Real, inaugurated the Real Jardín Botánico and carried out numerous other public works, he became known as the best 'mayor' Madrid had ever had.

Madriñeños (Madrid residents) did not take kindly to Napoleon's invasion and subsequent occupation of Spain in 1805 and, on the morning of 2 May 1808, they attacked French troops around the Palacio Real and what is now Plaza del Dos de Mayo. The ill-fated rebellion was quickly put down by Murat.

Turmoil continued to stalk the Spanish capital after this event. The Carlist Wars of the 19th century were subsequently followed by a two-and-a-half-year siege of Madrid by Franco's Nationalist forces, during which the city was shelled regularly from Casa de Campo and Gran Vía became known as 'Howitzer Alley'.

After Franco's death in 1975 and the country's subsequent transition to democracy, Madrid became an icon for the new Spain as the city's young – under the mayoral rule of Enrique Tierno Galván, a popular Socialist professor – unleashed a flood of pent-up energy. This took its most colourful form in the years of *la movida* (see p159), the endless party that swept up the city in a frenzy of creativity and open-minded freedom that has in some ways yet to abate.

ORIENTATION

In Spain, all roads lead to Madrid's La Plaza de Puerta del Sol (commonly known as Puerta del Sol), kilometre zero, the physical and emotional heart of the city. Radiating out from this busy plaza are roads – Calle Mayor, Calle del Arenal, Calle de Preciados, Calle de la Montera and Calle de Alcalá – that stretch into the city, as well as a host of metro lines and bus routes.

South of the Puerta del Sol is the oldest part of the city, with Plaza Mayor and Los Austrias to the southwest and the busy streets of the Huertas barrio (district or quarter of a town or city) to the southeast. Also to the south lie La Latina and Lavapiés.

North of the plaza is a modern shopping district and, beyond that, the east–west thoroughfare Gran Vía and the bohemian barrio Chueca as well as Malasaña. To the west is the stately Palacio Real, while to the east lies the city's lungs, El Retiro park, and Salamanca.

Madrid is surrounded by a series of ring roads, making maps of the city look something like a bull's-eye. Though often hellishly crowded, these highways are the best (and sometimes only) way to get out of the city.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Altair (Map pp114-15; ☎ 91 543 53 00; www.altair.es in Spanish; Calle de Gaztambide 31) Cosy travel bookshop, with a range of maps, guides and travel literature.

Casa del Libro (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 524 19 00; www.casadellibro.com in Spanish; Gran Vía 29) Spain's answer to Barnes & Noble has a large English- and foreign- language literature section on the ground floor at the back.

Cuesta de Claudio Moyano bookstalls (Map p125; Cuesta de Claudio Moyano) On the southern edge of the botanical gardens, a row of 30-odd bookstalls burst with second-hand books.

De Viaje (Map p120; ☎ 91 577 98 99; www.deviaje.com in Spanish; Calle de Serrano 41) Madrid's largest travel bookshop with a travel agency, a travel gear section and exhibitions of travel photos.

Petra's International Bookshop (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 541 72 91; Calle de Campomanes 13) A lively expat community is drawn to this excellent (mostly second-hand) English-language bookshop.

Cultural Centres

The following foreign cultural centres all have libraries and organise film nights and other activities.

British Council (Map pp114-15; ☎ 91 337 35 00; Paseo del General Martínez Campos 31)

Goethe Institut (Map p120; ☎ 91 391 39 44; Calle de Zurbarán 21)

Institut Français (Map p120; ☎ 91 700 48 00; Calle del Marqués de la Ensenada 12)

Istituto Italiano di Cultura (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 547 86 02; Calle Mayor 86)

Emergency

Ambulance (☎ 061)

Cruz Roja (☎ 91 522 22 22)

Medical & Fire Emergencies (☎ 112)

Police (☎ 091)

Internet Access

You're almost guaranteed to find a high-speed connection if you poke around the streets surrounding the Puerta del Sol, Plaza Mayor and Gran Vía. The ayuntamiento's Centro de Turismo de Madrid (opposite) on Plaza Mayor offers free internet for up to 15 minutes.

Cyber Total (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 532 26 22; Calle de Espoz y Mina 17; per hr €2; 10am-10pm) High-speed internet connections, fax, printing, scanning and CD burning are all possible at this modern, savvy place.

11 MARCH 2004 – A SPECIAL SILENCE *Anthony Ham*

There has never been a day quite like it in Madrid. Throughout Thursday 11 March 2004, an eerie silence reigned over a city long renowned as the most raucous and vibrant in Europe; the quietness of this day was profoundly unsettling, in part because of the devastating bombings which had caused it, but also because this is a city with a joyous disregard for noise.

The silence was broken only by the sirens of emergency vehicles and the sound of circling helicopters. As they laid out the bodies alongside the tracks at Madrid's Atocha train station, many emergency workers stood in anguish, trying to decide whether to answer the ringing mobile phones of the victims. At the makeshift morgue on the outskirts of the city, an emotion-filled voice read out the names of those who had died over a loudspeaker to the waiting families.

And then there was the sound of a million mobile phones, as *madriñeños* overloaded mobile networks trying frantically to track down family and friends. These sounds could not drown out the silence of the empty bars, of normally clamorous streets filled with people standing in silence. After a desperate two hours spent trying to reach my wife's family – we knew that they had been close-by when the bombings took place – I finally got through. Suddenly, I found myself unable to speak.

On Friday night, we joined the massive crowds on the streets of Madrid and marched past the wrought-iron balconies draped with Spanish flags, each tied with a black ribbon, while others stood silently in the rain. Chants rose up, among them the defiant: *'Se nota, se siente, Madrid esta presente'* (You can see it, you can feel it, Madrid is here).

It took almost three hours to travel the 3km from Plaza de Colon to Atocha station. When this angry, grieving crowd, whose march had taken on the quality of a pilgrimage, reached its destination close to where the bombs had exploded, it broke into spontaneous rounds of applause. And before the haunting silence of the *madriñeños* again took hold, there was one last resounding cry: *'Ibamos todos en ese tren'* (We were all on that train).

La Casa de Internet (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 594 42 00; 1st fl, Calle de Luchana 20; per hr €2.10; 10am-12.30am Mon-Fri, 10am-12.30am Sat, 5pm-12.30pm Sun) Terrific place with 60 fast computers and where hourly prices drop as low as €1.25 the more time you use.

Navega Web (Map pp118-19; Gran Vía 30; per hr €2; 10am-2pm & 5-9pm Mon-Sat) The national phone company's phone centre.

Neveda 2000 (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 521 20 94; Calle de los Reyes 7; per hr €1.80; 8am-1am daily) Once you're past the smoky old café with one-armed bandits, there are fast connections out the back.

Left Luggage

Both Chamartin and Atocha train stations have *consignas* (lockers), where you can leave luggage for €2.40 to €4.50 per day, depending on the size of the locker. If you're leaving large boxes or suitcases, the Estación Sur bus station is better; you check your belongings into a large storage room and pay by the day. Three left-luggage offices operate at the airport: in the T1 terminal (near the bus stop and taxi stand), in T2 (near the metro entrance) and on the ground floor of T4. Costs start from €2.75 for the first 24-hour period (or fraction thereof).

Lost Property

You can try looking for lost property (including items left on the metro or buses) at the **Negociado de Objetos Perdidos** (☎ 91 588 43 48, 91 527 95 90; Plaza de Legazpi 7; 9am-2pm). The nearest metro station is Legazpi.

If you leave something in a taxi, call ☎ 91 588 43 44 or the taxi company concerned. If you lose something on a local train, check at the information desk at Atocha train station.

Medical Services

Anglo-American Medical Unit (Map p120; ☎ 91 435 18 23; Calle del Conde de Aranda 1) Private clinic with Spanish- and English-speaking staff.

Farmacia del Globo (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 369 20 00; Plaza de Antón Martín 46; 10am-24hr)

Farmacia Mayor (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 366 46 16; Calle Mayor 13; 10am-24hr)

Hospital General Gregorio Marañón (Map pp114-15; ☎ 91 586 80 00; www.hggm.es in Spanish; Calle del Doctor Esquerdo 46) One of the city's main public hospitals.

Money

Large banks such as Caja de Madrid usually have the best exchange rates, but check their commissions. Using your ATM card will give

you these same bank rates, no matter where or what time of day you use it.

If you're desperate, around Puerta del Sol and Plaza Mayor there are plenty of *bureaux de change*, which have the predictable rip-off rates but are often open until midnight.

Post

Post Office (Map p125; ☎ 91 396 24 43; www.correos.es; Plaza de la Cibeles; 8.30am-9.30pm Mon-Sat) The main post office is in the gigantic Palacio de Comunicaciones. Other branches are dotted throughout the city.

Tourist Information

The city's general-information telephone line (☎ 010, Spanish only) deals with everything from public transport to shows.

You can also try the Comunidad de Madrid's regional information line (☎ 012, Spanish only).

Centro de Turismo de Madrid (Map pp122-3; www.esmadrid.com, www.munimadrid.es; Plaza Mayor 27; 9.30am-8.30pm) The ayuntamiento also runs bright orange information points at Plaza de la Cibeles, Plaza de Callao and at the T4 terminal at Barajas airport.

Regional tourist office (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 429 49 51, 902 100 007; www.madrid.org in Spanish; Calle del Duque de Medinaceli 2; 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun) There are also tourist offices at Barajas airport, Chamartin and Atocha train stations.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

There's no need to be paranoid while in Madrid, but you should be on your guard. Tourists are generally the prey of choice, and thieves operating on the metro and buses will be quick to whisk away that easily accessible wallet, small backpack or briefcase left sitting in the aisle.

You need to be especially careful in the most heavily touristed parts of town, notably Plaza Mayor and surrounding streets, Plaza de Santa Ana, the Puerta del Sol and around the Prado. You should also be sure to take particular care in the crush of bodies in El Rastro flea market.

Don't expect the police to become too agitated over your stories of theft and mishap though. It's part of their daily diet in Madrid. They will, however, be certain to take your statement. You will need this for insurance purposes as well as to have new passports and other documents issued.

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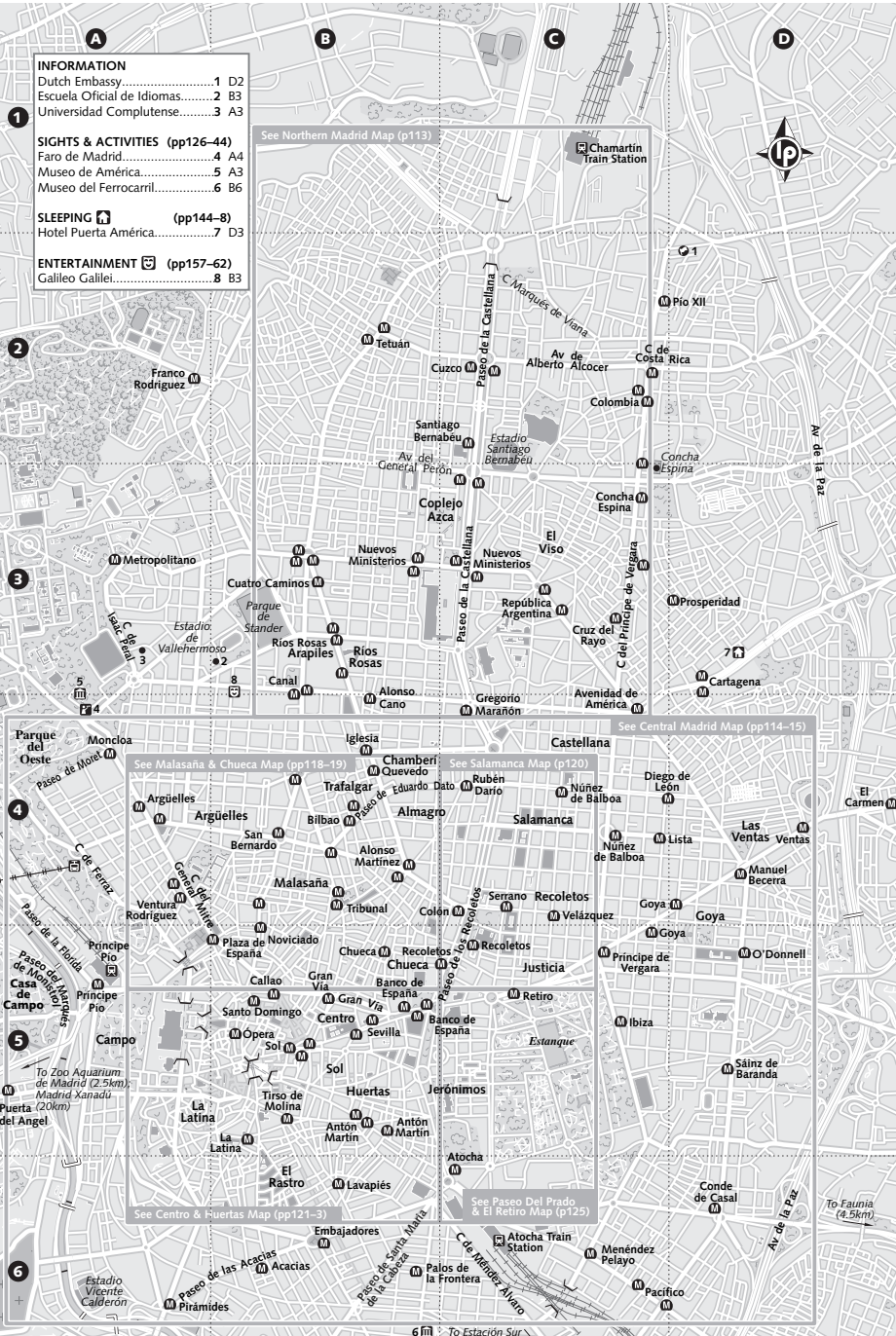
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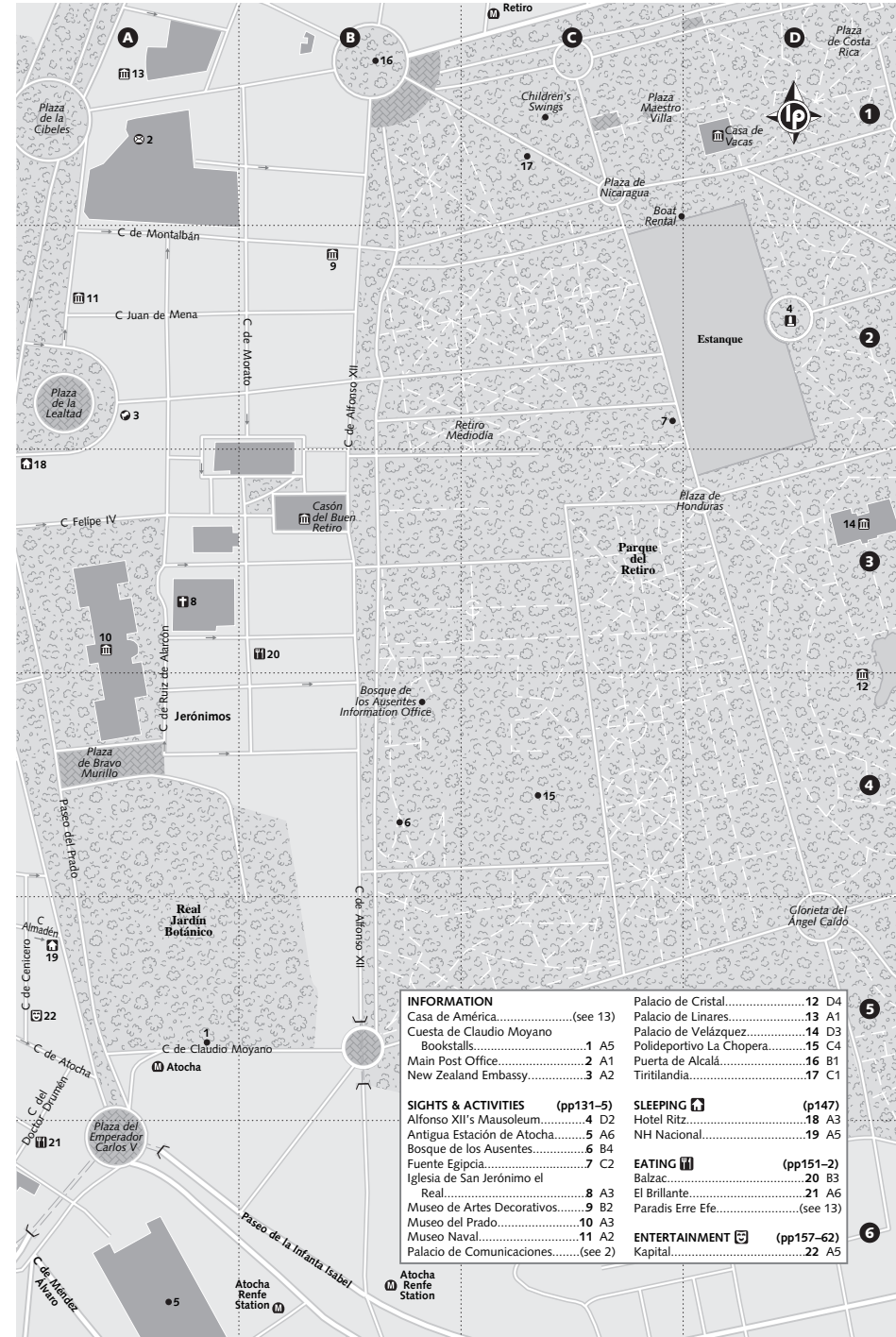
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Scams

Tricks abound and they usually involve a team of two or more (sometimes one of them an attractive woman to distract male victims). While one distracts your attention, the other empties your pockets. If approached by strangers offering flowers or unsolicited help, or simply getting too close to your personal space, move on fast. Be wary of jostling on crowded buses and the metro.

SIGHTS

Madrid has three of the finest art galleries in the world and if ever there was a golden mile of fine art, it has to be the combined charms of the Museo del Prado, the Centro de Arte Reina Sofía and the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza. Beyond the museums' walls, the combination of stunning architecture and feel-good living has never been easier to access than in the beautiful *plazas* (squares), where *terrazas* (cafés with outdoor tables) provide a front-row seat for Madrid's fine cityscape and endlessly energetic streetlife. Throw in some outstanding city parks (Parque del Buen Retiro, in particular) and areas like Chueca, Malasaña, Lavapiés and Salamanca, which each have their own identity, and you'll

quickly end up wondering why you decided to spend so little time here.

Los Austrias, Sol & Centro

From the tangle of streets tumbling down the hillside of Madrid's oldest quarter, **Madrid de los Austrias**, and the busy streets around the Puerta del Sol to the monumental Gran Vía, cutting through the heart of Madrid, this is the city at its most diverse. This is where the splendour of Imperial Spain was at its most ostentatious and Spain's overarching Catholicism was at its most devout – think expansive palaces, elaborate private mansions, ancient churches and imposing convents amid the raucous clamour of modern Madrid.

PLAZA MAYOR

The stunningly beautiful Plaza Mayor (Map pp122–3) is a highlight of any visit to Madrid. The grandeur of its buildings – the uniformly ochre apartments with wrought-iron balconies offset by the exquisite frescoes of the 17th-century Real Casa de la Panadería (Royal Bakery) – is one thing, but this is a living, breathing entity, from the outdoor tables of the *terrazas* to the students strewn across the cobblestones on a sunny day.

Designed in 1619 by Juan Gómez de Mora, its first public ceremony was the beatification

of San Isidro Labrador, Madrid's patron saint. Thereafter, bullfights watched by 50,000 spectators were a recurring spectacle until 1878, while the autos-de-fe (the ritual condemnation of heretics) of the Spanish Inquisition also took place here. Fire largely destroyed the square in 1790, but it was rebuilt and became an important market and hub of city life.

PALACIO REAL

Spain's lavish **Palacio Real** (Royal Palace; Map pp122–3; % 91 454 88 00; www.patrimonionacional.es in Spanish; Calle de Bailén s/n; adult/child incl tour, Farmacia Real & Armería Real €9/3.50; 11 9.30am–5pm Mon–Sat, 9am–2pm Sun Oct–Mar, 9am–6pm Mon–Sat, 9am–3pm Sun Apr–Sep) is a jewel box of a palace, although it's used only occasionally for royal ceremonies; the royal family moved to the modest Palacio de la Zarzuela years ago.

When the Alcázar burned down on Christmas Day 1734, Felipe V, the first of the Bourbon kings, decided to build a palace that would dwarf all its European counterparts. Felipe died before the palace was finished, which is perhaps why the Italianate baroque colossus has a mere 2800 rooms, just one-quarter of the original plan.

The official tour leads through 50 of the palace rooms, which hold a good selection of Goyas, 215 absurdly ornate clocks and five Stradivarius violins still used for concerts and balls. The main stairway is a grand statement of imperial power, leading first to the Halberdiers' rooms and eventually to the sumptuous Salón del Trono (Throne Room), with its crimson-velvet wall coverings and Tiepolo ceiling. Shortly after, you reach the Salón de Gasparini with its exquisite stucco ceiling and walls resplendent with embroidered silks.

Outside the main palace, visit the **Farmacia Real** (Royal Pharmacy) at the southern end of the patio known as the Plaza de Armas (or Plaza de la Armería). Westwards across the plaza is the **Armería Real** (Royal Armoury), a shiny collection of weapons and armour, mostly dating from the 16th and 17th centuries. The Armería is included in the Palacio Real ticket or you can visit it on its own (€3.40/1.70 per adult/child).

PLAZA DE ORIENTE

On a summer's evening, there's no finer place to be than the majestic Plaza de Oriente (Map pp122–3). Overlooked by the Palacio Real (above) and enclosed by a semicircle of ele-

gant apartment buildings and cafés, the square is one of Madrid's most open and agreeable.

Once the site of the old Alcázar (left), the square took on its present form under French occupation in the early 1800s. Littered with statues of mostly ancient monarchs and nobles, local legend has it they get down off their pedestals at night to stretch their legs.

On the eastern side of the square is the ill-fated **Teatro Real** (Map pp122–3; % 91 516 06 60; www.teatro-real.com in Spanish; Plaza de Oriente), the city's opera house. The first theatre was built in 1708 and torn down in 1816. Its successors were burned down during the reign of Isabel II and later blown up in the Civil War for good measure. It took its present neo-Classical form in 1997 after a €100-million refit. **Guided visits** (adult/child €4/2; 11 10.30am–1.30pm) are possible.

CAMPO DEL MORO & JARDINES DE SABATINI

In proper palace style, lush gardens surround the Palacio Real. To the north are the formal French-style **Jardines de Sabatini** (Map pp118–19; 11 9am–9pm May–Sep, 9am–8pm Oct–Apr). Directly behind the palace are the fountains of the **Campo del Moro** (Map pp122–3; 11 10am–8pm Mon–Sat, 9am–8pm Sun & holidays Apr–Sep, 10am–6pm Mon–Sat, 9am–6pm Sun & holidays Oct–Mar), so named because this is where the Muslim army camped before a 12th-century attack on the Alcázar. Now shady paths, a thatch-roofed pagoda and palace views are the main attractions.

CATEDRAL DE NUESTRA SEÑORA DE LA ALMUDENA

Paris has Notre Dame and Rome has St Peter's Basilica. In fact, almost every European city of stature has its signature cathedral, a stand-out monument to the city's glorious Christian past. Not Madrid. The **Catedral de Nuestra Señora de la Almodena** (Map pp122–3; % 91 542 22 00; Calle de Bailén; 11 9am–9pm), south of the Palacio Real, is cavernous and laden with more adornment than charm, its colourful, modern ceilings doing little to make up for the lack of the old-world gravitas that so distinguish the world's great cathedrals.

Carlos I first proposed building a cathedral here back in 1518, but construction didn't get underway until the 1880s. Other priorities got in the way and it wasn't finished until 1992. Not surprisingly, the pristine, bright white neo-Gothic interior holds no pride of place in the affections of *madriños*.

MADRID IN TWO DAYS

Just two days in Madrid? What were you thinking! You've a hectic day ahead of you so plan it around the best places (and plazas) to relax en route. Begin in **Plaza Mayor** (above) with its architectural beauty, fine *terrazas* and endlessly fascinating passing Madrid parade. Wander down Calle Mayor, passing the delightful **Plaza de la Villa** (p128) and head for the **Palacio Real** (opposite). By then you'll be ready for a coffee or something stronger, and there's no finer place to rest than in **Plaza de Oriente** (opposite). Double back up towards the **Puerta del Sol** (p128), and then on to **Plaza de Santa Ana** (p130), the ideal place for a long, liquid lunch. Time for some high culture, so stroll down the hill to the incomparable **Museo del Prado** (p131), the home of a grand collection of predominantly Spanish old masters and one of the best art galleries in Europe. In anticipation of a long night ahead, catch your breath in the **Parque del Buen Retiro** (p133) before heading into **Chueca** for great restaurants (p152) and Madrid's famously noisy and eclectic nightlife (p156).

On day two, choose between either the **Centro de Arte Reina Sofía** (p131) or the **Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza** (p132), then jump on the metro for a quick ride across town to the astonishing Goya frescoes in the **Ermita de San Antonio de la Florida** (p136). While you're in the area, consider a chicken-and-cider meal at **Casa Mingo** (p153) or head for La Latina and the great restaurants and tapas bars along **Calle de la Cava Baja** (Map pp122–3) or some cod-and-tripe tapas at **Casa Revuelta** (p149). If it's a Sunday, better still precede these outings with a wander through **El Rastro** (p129), one of the best flea markets in Europe. Another great place to explore is around Malasaña, where **Calle de Manuela Malasaña** (Map pp118–19) offers rich pickings and the august and old-world **Café Comercial** (p152) is a fine old pit stop at any time of day.

MURALLA ÁRABE

Behind the cathedral apse, and down Cuesta de la Vega, is a short stretch of the so-called *Muralla Árabe* (Arab Wall; Map pp122–3), the fortifications built by Madrid's early medieval Islamic rulers. Some of it dates as far back as the 9th century, when the initial Islamic fort was raised. Other sections date from the 12th and 13th centuries, by which time the city was in Christian hands.

PLAZA DE LA VILLA

There are grander squares elsewhere, but the intimate Plaza de la Villa (Map pp122–3) is one of Madrid's prettiest. Enclosed on three sides by wonderfully preserved examples of 17th-century Madrid-style baroque architecture (*barroco madrileño*: a pleasing amalgam of brick, exposed stone and wrought iron), it has been the permanent seat of Madrid's city government since the Middle Ages.

On the western side of the square is the 17th-century ayuntamiento (town hall), with its Herrerian slate-tile spires and Habsburg-style baroque. On the opposite side of the square is the Gothickesque Casa de los Lujanes, whose brickwork tower is said to have been 'home' to the imprisoned French monarch François I, after his capture in the Battle of Pavia (1525). The Plateresque Casa de Cisneros, built in 1537 with later Renaissance alterations, also catches the eye.

CONVENTO DE LAS DESCALZAS REALES

The grim, prisonlike walls of the *Convento de las Descalzas Reales* (Convent of the Barefoot Royals; Map pp122–3; ☎ 91 554 88 00; www.patrimoniocional.es in Spanish; Plaza de las Descalzas; adult/child €5/2.50, EU citizens free Wed, combined ticket with Convento de la Encarnación €6/3.40; 10.30am–12.30pm & 4–5.30pm Tue–Thu & Sat, 10.30am–12.30pm Fri, 11am–1.30pm Sun) offer no hint that behind the Plateresque façade lies a sumptuous stronghold of the faith.

Founded in 1559 by Juana of Austria, the widowed daughter of the Spanish king Carlos I, the convent quickly became one of Spain's richest religious houses thanks to gifts from Juana's noble friends. On the obligatory guided tour you'll see a gaudily frescoed Renaissance stairway, a number of extraordinary tapestries based on works by Rubens, and a wonderful painting entitled *The Voyage of the 11,000 Virgins*. Some 33 nuns still live here and there are 33 chapels dotted around the convent.

CONVENTO DE LA ENCARNACIÓN

The *Convento de la Encarnación* (Convent of the Incarnation; Map pp122–3; ☎ 91 454 88 00; Plaza de la Encarnación; adult/child €3.60/2, EU citizens free Wed, combined ticket with Convento de las Descalzas Reales €6/3.40; 10.30am–12.45pm & 4–5.45pm Tue–Thu & Sat, 10.30am–12.45pm Fri, 11am–1.30pm Sun) was founded by Empress Margarita of Austria and occupies a 17th-century mansion built in Madrid-style baroque. It's still inhabited by nuns of the Augustine order (Agustinas Recoletas). Inside there is a unique collection of 17th- and 18th-century sculptures and paintings, as well as a handful of silver and gold reliquaries. The most famous contains the blood of San Pantaleón, which purportedly liquefies every year on 28 June, drawing throngs of the curious and the faithful.

IGLESIA DE SAN NICOLÁS DE LOS SERVITAS

Considered Madrid's oldest surviving church, *Iglesia de San Nicolás de los Servitas* (Map pp122–3; ☎ 91 559 40 64; Plaza de San Nicolás; 8am–1.30pm & 5.30–8.30pm Mon, 8–9.30am & 6.30–8.30pm Tue–Sat, 9.30am–2pm & 6.30–9pm Sun & holidays) may have been built on the site of Muslim Magerit's second mosque and offers a rare glimpse of medieval Madrid. Apart from the restored 12th-century Mudéjar (hispano-moorish) bell tower, most of the present church dates back to the 15th century.

IGLESIA DE SAN GINÉS

Between Calle Mayor and Calle del Arenal, north of Plaza Mayor, *Iglesia de San Ginés* (Map pp122–3; Calle del Arenal 13; 1 during services) is another of Madrid's oldest churches and has been here in some form since at least the 14th century. It houses some fine paintings, including an El Greco.

PLAZA DE LA PUERTA DEL SOL

The official centrepiece of Spain is a gracious hemisphere of elegant façades and often very crowded. It is, above all, a crossroads. People here are forever heading somewhere else, on foot, by metro (three lines cross) or bus (many lines terminate and start here). In Madrid's earliest days, the Puerta del Sol (Gate of the Sun; Map pp122–3) was the eastern gate of the city.

It comes into its own on New Year's Eve, when all Madrid packs into the square waiting for the clock that gives Spain its official time

to strike midnight, as the rest of the country watches on TV. Look out for the statue of a bear nuzzling a *madroño* (strawberry tree); this is the symbol of the city.

REAL ACADEMIA DE BELLAS ARTES DE SAN FERNANDO

In any other city, the *Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando* (Map pp122–3; ☎ 91 524 08 64; http://rabasf.insde.es in Spanish; Calle de Alcalá 13; adult/student/senior & under 18yr €2.40/1.20/free, Wed free; 9am–7pm Tue–Fri, 9am–2.30pm Sat–Mon Sep–Jun, longer hours in summer) would be a stand-out attraction, but in Madrid it too often gets forgotten in the rush to the Prado, Thyssen or Reina Sofía. An academic centre of learning for up-and-coming artists since Fernando VI founded it in the 18th century – both Picasso and Dalí studied here – it houses works by some of the best-loved old masters. Highlights include works by Zurbarán, El Greco, Rubens, Tintoretto, Goya, Sorolla and Juan Gris, not to mention a couple of minor portraits by Velázquez and a few drawings by Picasso.

GRAN VÍA

It's difficult to imagine Madrid without Gran Vía, the grand boulevard that climbs through the centre of Madrid from Plaza de España then down to Calle de Alcalá, but it has only existed since 1911 when it was bulldozed through what was then a lively labyrinth of old streets. On a rise about one-third of the way along Gran Vía stands the 1920s-era *Telefónica building* (Edificio Telefónica; Map pp122–3), which was for years the tallest building in the city. During the Civil War, the boulevard became known as 'Howitzer Alley'. At the southern end of Gran Vía, the stunning French-designed *Metrópolis building* (Edificio Metrópolis; Map pp122–3; 1905), has a winged statue of victory sitting atop its dome.

La Latina & Lavapiés

With an identity all its own, eclectic Lavapiés is one of Madrid's oldest, most traditional and, increasingly, most multicultural barrios. There's something medieval about its steeply climbing streets which are home to quirky bars, restaurants and alternative-cool shops. It all spills over into La Latina which comes to life on weekends and on Sunday throngs with the El Rastro crowd, keen to savour one of Europe's most engaging flea markets.

EL RASTRO

A Sunday morning at *El Rastro* (Map pp122–3; 1 Sun morning only), Europe's largest flea market, is a Madrid institution. El Rastro (the Stain) owes its name to the blood that once trickled down these streets from the slaughterhouses, which sat up the hill. It's been an open-air market for half a millennium.

The madness begins at Plaza de Cascorro, near La Latina metro stop, and you could easily spend an entire morning inching your way down Calle de la Ribera de Curtidos and the maze of streets branching off it.

Cheap clothes, luggage, antiques, old photos of Madrid, old flamenco records, faux designer purses, grungy T-shirts, household goods and electronics are the main fare, but for every ten pieces of junk, there's a real gem waiting to be found. The shopping starts at 8am and lasts until lunch (2pm or 3pm) but, for many *madrileños*, the best of El Rastro comes after the stalls have shut down and everyone crowds into nearby bars for an *aperitivo* (appetizer) of vermouth and tapas, turning the barrio into the site of a spontaneous Sunday fiesta.

A word of warning: pickpockets love El Rastro as much as everyone else.

VIADUCTO & JARDINES DE LAS VISTILLAS

For a great view of Campo del Moro, take a stroll down Calle de Segovia, where a viaduct gives a good vantage point.

This was a popular suicide spot until plastic barriers were put up in the late 1990s. Good vantage points, with views out towards Sierra de Guadarrama, are also to be had from the outdoor tables in the adjacent *Jardines de las Vistillas* (Map pp122–3). During the Civil War, Las Vistillas was heavily bombarded by Nationalist troops from the Casa de Campo, and they in turn were shelled from a Republican bunker here.

LA MORERÍA

The area stretching south from Calle de Segovia and southeast to the Iglesia de San Andrés was the heart of the *morería* (Moorish quarter). Strain the imagination a little and the maze of winding and hilly lanes even now retains a whiff of the North African medina. This is where the Muslim population of Magerit was concentrated in the wake of the 11th-century Christian takeover of the town.

BASILICA DE SAN FRANCISCO EL GRANDE

One of the largest churches in the city, the *Basilica de San Francisco el Grande* (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 365 38 00; Plaza de San Francisco 1; admission museum €3; 11am-1pm & 5-7pm Tue-Sat) dominates the skyline at the southern reaches of La Latina, its pretty yellow dome peeking above the rooftops. The baroque basilica has some outstanding features, including frescoed cupolas and chapel ceilings by Francisco Bayeu. Goya's *The Predication of San Bernardino of Siena for the King of Aragon* is here, too. According to legend, the basilica sits atop the site where St Francis of Assisi built a chapel in 1217.

IGLESIA DE SAN ANDRÉS & AROUND

The stately *Iglesia de San Andrés* (Map pp122-3; Plaza de San Andrés 1; 8am-1pm & 5.30-8pm) crowns the plaza of the same name, providing a lovely backdrop for the impromptu parties that fill this square on Sunday afternoons as the El Rastro crowd drifts in. Gutted during Spain's Civil War, it was restored to its former glory and is at its best when illuminated at night.

Around the back is the *Capilla del Obispo*, considered the best Renaissance church in Madrid, though it's not strictly of the period. Look out for the mostly Gothic vaulting in the ceilings, the Plateresque tombs and the fine Renaissance *redos* (screens). It was long the resting place of San Isidro Labrador until his remains were moved to the *Basilica de San Isidro*.

The nearby *Museo de San Isidro* (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 366 74 15; www.munimadrid.es/museosanisidro; Plaza de San Andrés 2; admission free; 9.30am-8pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun) is devoted to the life of the saint. One highlight is a model based on Pedro Teixeira's 1656 map of Madrid.

IGLESIA DE SAN PEDRO EL VIEJO

San Pedro el Viejo (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 365 12 84; Costanilla de San Pedro) is one of the few remaining windows onto the world of medieval Madrid, most notably its clearly Mudéjar bell tower. The church was built atop the site of the old Mezquita de la Morería (Mosque of the Muslim Quarter), in the days when Madrid was still influenced by its Muslim occupation.

Huertas & Atocha

This lively central quarter is where Madrid's writers once made their home, and landmarks to their stay are among the highlights. If you keep going far enough down the hill, you'll end up at the Centro de Arte Reina Sofía.

PLAZA DE SANTA ANA

A delightful confluence of elegant architecture and irresistible energy, *Plaza de Santa Ana* (Map pp122-3) is a gem. What it lacks in a distinguished history, it more than compensates for as a focal point of music (there are smoky flamenco bars nearby and street performers love the square itself), culture (the Teatro Español at the eastern end), daytime café sophistication and nocturnal, full-volume hedonism.

BARRIO DE LAS LETRAS

The area around Plaza de Santa Ana is often referred to as the *Barrio de las Letras* (District of Letters), because of the writers who lived here during Spain's golden age of the 16th and 17th centuries. Miguel de Cervantes was originally buried in the baroque *Convento de las Trinitarias* (Map pp122-3; closed to the public) and a commemorative Mass is held for him every year on the anniversary of his death, 23 April. Cervantes' house, at Calle de Cervantes 2, is long gone, but just down the street is the *Casa de Lope de Vega* (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 429 92 16; Calle de Cervantes 11; admission €2, Sat free; 9.30am-2pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat), which is now a museum about the great writer's life and work.

ANTIGUA ESTACIÓN DE ATOCHA

The *Antigua Estación de Atocha* (Old Atocha Train Station; Map p125; Plaza del Emperador Carlos V) is a towering iron-and-glass relic from the 19th century. Lovingly preserved and artfully converted in 1992 into a surprising tropical garden with more than 500 plant species, it now feels more like a lush greenhouse than a transport hub, although the cavernous ceiling resonates with the grand old European train stations of another age.

REAL FÁBRICA DE TAPICES

Fancy a wall tapestry or a rug based on some of Goya's sketches? The *Real Fábrica de Tapices* (Royal Tapestry Factory; Map pp114-15; ☎ 91 434 05 51; www.realfabricadetapices.com; Calle de Fuenterribera 2; admission €2; 10am-2pm Mon-Fri) can whip one up for you in just a few months for a mere €10,000 or so. Founded in 1720 to provide the royal family and other bigwigs with tapestries befitting their grandeur, it counts the Hotel Ritz as a regular client and the current royal family. Many works are based on cartoons by Goya, who was a long-time employee here, creating 63 different drawings to use as models for elaborate tapestries.

CENTRO DE ARTE REINA SOFÍA

Adapted from the shell of an 18th-century hospital, the *Centro de Arte Reina Sofía* (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 774 10 00; www.reinasofia.es; Calle de Santa Isabel 52; adult/student/child & senior €6/4/free, 2.30-9pm Sat & Sun free; 10am-9pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 10am-2.30pm Sun) houses the best in modern (predominantly) Spanish art, principally spanning the 20th century up to the 1980s.

The main gallery's permanent display ranges over the 2nd (Rooms 1 to 17) and 4th floors (Rooms 18 to 45). The peaceful courtyard offers a respite from the clamour of Madrid, while the views over the city from the external glass lift are outstanding.

The main attraction for most visitors is Picasso's *Guernica*, in Room 6 on the 2nd floor, which is worth the entrance price even if you see nothing else. Measuring an epic 3.5m by 7.8m, this is one of the most famous paintings in the world, a signature work of cubism whose disfiguration of the human form would become an eloquent symbol of a world's outrage at the horrors wrought upon the innocent by modern warfare. (It was inspired by the German bombing of the Basque town of Guernica, on Franco's orders, on 26 April 1937.) Alongside this masterwork is a plethora of the artist's preparatory sketches.

Primary among the other stars on show are the paintings and sculptures of Joan Miró, whose work adorns Room 7, a long gallery adjacent to the Picasso collection. In nearby Room 9 you can see a couple of canvasses by Wassily Kandinsky, one of the few foreigners on show here, while Room 10 boasts 20 or so canvasses by Salvador Dalí, including the surrealist extravaganza *El Gran Masturbador*.

Among the other important Spanish artists you'll find the works of Juan Gris (Rooms 3 and 4) and the Basque painter Ignazio Zuloaga (Room 1), while Room 12 is home to Buñuel's homage to Dalí and sketches by the poet Frederic García Lorca.

On the 4th floor, works by Francis Bacon and Henry Moore (both in Room 24), broaden the context a little, but on no account miss the beautiful works of the Basque sculptor Eduardo Chillida (Rooms 42 and 43).

The state-of-the-art Reina Sofía is itself a work of art, no more so than the stunning extension that spreads along the western tip of Plaza del Emperador Carlos V and hosts temporary exhibitions, auditoriums, the bookshop, a café and the museum's library.

Paseo del Prado & El Retiro

If you've just come down the hill from Huertas, you'll feel like you've left behind a madhouse for an oasis of greenery, fresh air and high culture. The Museo del Prado and the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza are among the richest galleries of fine art in the world and plenty of other museums lurk in the quietly elegant streets just behind the Prado. Rising up the hill to the east are the stately gardens of the supremely enjoyable Parque del Buen Retiro.

MUSEO DEL PRADO

One of the world's top museums, the *Museo del Prado* (Map p125; ☎ 91 330 28 00; http://museodelprado.mcu.es; Paseo del Prado; adult/student/under 18yr & over 65yr €6/4/free, Sun free; 9am-8pm Tue-Sun) has a peerless collection of Spanish and European art. Spend as long as you can here or, better still, plan to make a couple of visits because it can all be a little overwhelming if you try to take it all in at once.

The building in which it is housed is itself a masterpiece. Completed in 1785, the neo-Classical Palacio de Villanueva served as a cavalry barracks for Napoleon's troops during their occupation of Madrid between 1808 and 1813. In 1814, King Fernando VII decided to use the palace as a museum for the royal collections, and five years later the Museo del Prado opened with 311 Spanish paintings on display.

Entering through the northern Puerta de Goya thrusts you immediately into the heart of this priceless collection with the vivid, almost surreal works by the 16th-century master El Greco, whose figures are characteristically slender and tortured. Also close by are works by Titian who was preferred as court painter by Felipe II above El Greco.

About halfway along the main hall, turn left into Room 12 where you'll encounter the life-filled paintings of one of the greatest figures of Spanish art, Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez. Of the many Velázquez paintings that so distinguish the Prado by their presence, *Las Meninas* is considered his masterpiece and nowhere is his mastery of light and colour more apparent. Completed in 1656, the painting is more properly known as *La Familia de Felipe IV* (The Family of Felipe IV), with the Infanta Margarita dominating the picture. In a flourish of personal conceit, Velázquez portrays himself painting

the king and queen. Aside from the extraordinary cheek of depicting himself in royal company, it is the presence of the cross of the Order of Santiago on his vest that reveals his mischievous, yearning streak. He was awarded it shortly before his death.

There are more fine works by Velázquez in Rooms 14 and 15, but don't fail to return to the main hall, where Room 29 is framed by his stunning paintings of various royalty on horseback. By now you'll have become accustomed to the Prado's subtle but strategically placed lighting and high ceilings, which together combine to make this one of the world's premier exhibition spaces.

Room 32 is your introduction to Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes, who is the most extensively represented of the Spanish masters in the Prado. To capture Goya's magic, we suggest a selective approach. Head for Room 22, where you'll find what are probably his best-known and most intriguing oils, *La Maja Vestida* (The Dressed Beauty) and *La Maja Desnuda* (The Nude Beauty). These portraits of the unknown woman commonly believed to be the Duquesa de Alba scandalised Madrid society of the day. You can enjoy the rest of Goya's works later (he fills Rooms 19 to 22, and his early preparatory paintings for tapestries, religious paintings and drawings are on the 2nd floor) but first make your way to Room 39, where pride of place is given to the dramatic *El Dos de Mayo* and *El Tres de Mayo*. Two of Madrid's most emblematic paintings, they bring to life the 1808 anti-French revolt and subsequent execution of insurgents in Madrid.

By now you should be ready for the dark and disturbing works of Goya's later years, his *Pinturas Negras* (Black Paintings; Rooms 35 to 38), so-called because of the dark browns and black that dominate, and the distorted animal-like appearance of their characters. The Prado's administrators have displayed these wonderfully, with dimmer lights to suit the sombre mood which the paintings evoke.

Having captured the essence of the Prado, you're now free to select from the diverse masterpieces that remain. If Spanish painters have piqued your curiosity, the stark figures of Francisco de Zurbarán dominate Rooms 17A and 18A, while Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (Rooms 29 and 28) and José de Ribera (Room 16) should also be on your itinerary.

Another alternative is the Prado's outstanding collection of Flemish art. The fulsome

figures and bulbous cherubs of Peter Paul Rubens provide a playful antidote to the darkness of many of the other Flemish artists and can be enjoyed in Rooms 8 to 11. Other fine works in the vicinity include those by Anton van Dyck (Rooms 9B, 10A and 10B) and on no account miss Rembrandt in Room 7.

There is no more weird-and-wonderful painting in the Prado than *The Garden of Earthly Delights* by Hieronymus Bosch which can be found in Room 56, downstairs on the ground floor. No-one has yet been able to provide a definitive explanation for this hallucinatory work, painted five centuries before surrealism had a name.

Also on the ground floor is the Prado's nod to the Italians of the Renaissance. Among the plethora of Madonnas with babes and Christ in many poses are *The Story of Nastagio degli Onesti* in three parts by Botticelli and classic chiaroscuro from Caravaggio, while Tintoretto and Titian play with perspective. You'll also find a couple of paintings by the German artist Albrecht Dürer in Room 55B.

The Prado is undergoing a major extension project that could last for years, although it's unlikely to change the major exhibition spaces for some time, if at all. At a later stage some of the thousands of paintings currently in storage (known as the 'Hidden Prado') will also adorn what was until recently the Museo del Ejército.

Guides & Information

With so much to look at, getting a guidebook or joining a guided tour can be a huge help in the Prado. There is little printed information given out for free; the hand-out map will guide you to the main schools and the major artists, but it won't tell you anything about the works themselves. Coin-operated machines sell booklets (€1 each) in several languages and the bookshop sells a more complete guide to the highlights for €9. You can also get an audio guide at the entrance for €3.

MUSEO THYSSEN-BORNEMISZA

The Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza (Map pp122-3; % 91 369 01 51; www.museothyssen.org; Paseo del Prado 8; adult/child €6/4; 10am-7pm Tue-Sun) is the favourite art gallery of many visitors to Madrid. The Thyssen has something for everyone with a breathtaking breadth of artistic styles, from the masters of medieval art down to the zany world of contemporary painting. All the big

names are represented here, sometimes with just a single painting, but the Thyssens' gift to Madrid and the art-loving public is to have them all under one roof. Its easy-to-follow floor plan also makes it one of the most easily navigable galleries in the capital.

The collection is the legacy of Baron Thyssen-Bornemisza, a German-Hungarian magnate. Spain acquired the prestigious collection when the baron married Carmen Tita Cervera, a former Miss España and ex-wife of Lex Barker (of *Tarzan* fame). The deal was sealed when the Spanish government offered to overhaul the neo-Classical Palacio de Villahermosa specifically to house the collection. Almost 800 works have hung here since October 1992. Although the baron died in 2002, his glamorous wife has shown that she has learned much from the collecting nous of her late husband. In early 2000 the museum acquired two adjoining buildings, which have been joined to the museum to house approximately half of Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza's collection.

The 2nd floor, which is home to medieval art, is probably of least interest to the casual visitor, although there are some real gems hidden among the 13th- and 14th-century Italian, German and Flemish religious paintings and triptychs. The instantly recognisable *Henry VIII* by Holbein the Younger (1497-1543) and the evocative 1586 *Massacre of the Innocents* by Lucas van Valckenbrec are highlights, as are works by El Greco, Tintoretto, Titian, Caravaggio and Canaletto. But best of all on this floor is the extension (Rooms A to H) built to house the burgeoning collection of Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza with more Canalettos hanging alongside Monet, Sisley, Renoir, Pissarro, Degas, Constable and van Gogh.

If all that sounds impressive, the first floor is where the Thyssen is truly elevated into the ranks of great art galleries. If you've been skimming the surface until now, Room 32 is the place to linger over each and every painting. The astonishing texture of van Gogh's *Les Vessenis* is a masterpiece, but the same could be said for *Woman in Riding Habit* by Manet, *The Thaw at Vétheuil* by Monet and the quintessentially Parisian *Rue Saint-Honoré in the Afternoon* by Pissarro.

Rooms 33 to 35 play host to Modigliani, Picasso, Cézanne, Matisse and Egon Schiele, while the baroness's eye for quality is nowhere more evident than in the extension (Rooms I to P). Juan Gris, Matisse, Picasso,

Kandinsky, Georges Braque, Toulouse-Lautrec, Degas, Sorolla, Sisley and Edward Hopper are all present, but our favourites include the rich colours of Gauguin's *Mata Mua*, Monet's dreamlike *Charing Cross Bridge* and the rare appearance of Edvard Munch with *Geese in an Orchard*. Quite simply, it's an outrageously rich collection.

The ground floor begins with a fine spread of paintings from cubism through to pop art. In Room 41 you'll see a nice mix of the big three of cubism: Picasso, Georges Braque and Madrid's own Juan Gris. Picasso pops up again in Room 45, another one of the gallery's stand-out rooms. Its treasures include works by Marc Chagall, Kandinsky, Paul Klee and Joan Miró.

Room 46 is similarly rich with the splattered craziness of Jackson Pollock's *Brown and Silver I*, and the pleasing *Green on Maroon* by Mark Rothko taking centre stage. In Rooms 47 and 48, the Thyssen builds to a stirring climax, with Salvador Dalí, Francis Bacon, Roy Lichtenstein, Edward Hopper and Lucian Freud all represented.

PARQUE DEL BUEN RETIRO

A Sunday walk in El Retiro (Map p125; 11 6am-midnight May-Sep, 6am-10pm Oct-Apr) is as much a Madrid tradition as tapas and terrace cafés. Littered with marble monuments, landscaped lawns, the occasional elegant building and abundant greenery, it's quiet and contemplative during the week, but comes alive on weekends.

Once the preserve of kings, queens and their intimates, *madrileños* from all walks of life have long since made the park their own. Apart from strolling, people come here to read the Sunday papers in the shade, take a boat ride (€4 for 45 minutes) or take a cool drink at the numerous outdoor *terrazas*. Puppet shows for the kids are another summertime feature (look for Tirilandia, or Puppet Land).

The *estanque* (lake) is watched over by the massive ornamental structure of Alfonso XII's mausoleum on the eastern side of the lake, complete with marble lions. If you want to catch the essence of Madrid, come here as sunset approaches on a summer Sunday afternoon – as the crowd grows, bongos ring out across the park and people start to dance.

Legend has it that an enormous fortune buried in the park by Felipe IV in the mid-18th century rests beneath the Fuente Egipcia

(Egyptian Fountain) on the western side of the lake. Other highlights include the 1887 **Palacio de Cristal** (☎ 91 574 66 14; 11am-8pm Mon-Sat, 11am-6pm Sun & holidays May-Sep, 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun & holidays Oct-Apr), a charming metal-and-glass structure south of the lake; the 1883 **Palacio de Velázquez** (☎ 91 573 62 45; 11am-8pm Mon-Sat, 11am-6pm Sun & holidays May-Sep, 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun & holidays Oct-Apr); and, at the southern end of the park, a statue of **El Ángel Caído** (the Fallen Angel, aka Lucifer), one of the world's few statues to the devil.

In the southwestern corner of the park is the moving **Bosque de los Ausentes** (Forest of the Absent), an understated memorial to the 191 victims of the 11 March 2004 train bombings. For each victim stands an olive or cypress tree.

REAL JARDÍN BOTÁNICO

With its manicured flowerbeds and neat paths, the **Real Jardín Botánico** (Royal Botanical Garden; Map p125; ☎ 91 420 30 17; Plaza de Bravo Murillo 2; adult/child €2/1; 10am-7pm Oct & Mar, 10am-6pm Nov-Feb, 10am-8pm Apr & Sep, 10am-9pm May-Aug) is more intimate than El Retiro, although not nearly as large. First created in 1755 on the banks of Río Manzanares, the garden was moved here in 1781 by Carlos III. These days you can see thousands of plant species. It's more a place to take a leisurely wander than laze under a tree.

PLAZA DE LA CIBELES

Of all the grand roundabouts that punctuate the elegant boulevard of Paseo del Prado, **Plaza de la Cibeles** (Map p125) most evokes the splendour of Imperial Madrid.

The jewel in the crown is the astonishing **Palacio de Comunicaciones**. Completed in 1917 by Antonio Palacios, Madrid's most prolific architect of the *belle époque*, it combines elements of the North American monumental style of the period with Gothic and Renaissance touches. Newcomers find it hard to accept that this is merely the central post office, although the city council is soon to take part of it over as the *ayuntamiento*. Other landmark buildings around the perimeter include the **Palacio de Linares**, **Casa de América**, **Palacio de Buenavista**, **Casa de las Siete Chimeneas** and the national **Banco de España** (1891). The views east towards the Puerta de Alcalá or west towards the *Metrópolis* building are some of Madrid's finest.

The spectacular fountain of the goddess Cybele at the centre of the plaza is also one of Madrid's most beautiful. Ever since it was erected in 1780 by Ventura Rodríguez, it has been a Madrid favourite. Carlos III tried to move it to the gardens of the Granja de San Ildefonso, near Segovia, but the *madriños* kicked up such a fuss that he abandoned the idea. The Cibeles fountain has also long been the venue for joyous and often destructive celebrations by players and supporters of Real Madrid whenever the side has won anything of note.

MUSEO NAVAL

Boat lovers will get a thrill from the **Museo Naval** (Map p125; ☎ 91 379 52 99; www.museonavalmadrid.com; Paseo del Prado 5; admission free; 10am-2pm Tue-Sun), but it's also of interest to those who've always wondered what the Spanish armada really looked like. Apart from its extraordinary model ships, the museum's highlights are the antique maps, especially Juan de la Cosa's parchment map of the known world, put together in 1500; it's supposedly the first map to show the Americas.

MUSEO DE ARTES DECORATIVAS

Give your inner antique dealer a thrill at the **Museo de Artes Decorativas** (Museum of Decorative Arts; Map p125; ☎ 91 532 64 99; Calle de Montalbán 12; adult/child €2.40/1.20; 9.30am-3pm Tue-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun). A fascinating window onto the life of the upper classes from the 15th to the 19th centuries, the museum is awash with sumptuous period furniture, ceramics, carpets, tapestries and the like. Spread over five floors, it could keep you occupied for hours but probably only deserves an hour.

IGLESIA DE SAN JERÓNIMO EL REAL

Tucked away behind the Museo del Prado, the lavish **Iglesia de San Jerónimo el Real** (Map p125; ☎ 91 420 35 78; Calle de Ruiz de Alarcón 19; 8am-1.30pm & 5-8.30pm) was largely destroyed during the Peninsular War but the 19th-century reconstruction of the interior is exquisite. The chapel was traditionally favoured by the Spanish royal family and it was here, amid the mock-Isabelline splendour, that King Juan Carlos I was crowned in 1975 upon the death of Franco. Being a chapel of royal choice did little to protect it from the Museo del Prado's inexorable expansion – what remained of the cloisters next door was demolished (despite

vociferous local protests) to make way for the Gran Prado extension.

PUERTA DE ALCALÁ

This stunning triumphal gate (Map p125) was built to celebrate the arrival of Carlos III in Madrid in 1769. It was once the main entrance to the city and surrounded by city walls. The gate originally lay in the Puerta del Sol, then Plaza de la Cibeles, but was moved in the late 19th century to its present spot on Plaza de la Independencia as the city grew.

Salamanca

The same theme of grand and rarely restrained elegance continues in the Barrio Salamanca with some excellent museums.

MUSEO ARQUEOLÓGICO NACIONAL

The rather forbidding entrance to the **Museo Arqueológico Nacional** (National Archaeology Museum; Map p120; ☎ 91 577 79 12; www.man.es in Spanish; Calle de Serrano 13; adult/student €3.01/1.50, free from 2.30pm Sat & all day Sun; 9.30am-8.30pm Tue-Sat, 9.30am-2.30pm Sun) bares little resemblance to what lies within. With typical Spanish flair for presentation – the lighting is perfect and the large collection of artefacts is never cluttered – this delightful collection spans everything from prehistory to the Iberian tribes, Imperial Rome, Visigothic Spain, the Muslim conquest and specimens of Romanesque, Gothic and Mudéjar handiwork.

The museum's ground floor is the most interesting. Highlights include the stunning mosaics taken from Roman villas across Spain (those in Rooms 22 and 24 particularly catch the eye); the stunning gilded Mudéjar domed ceiling in Room 35; and the more sombre Christian Romanesque and later Gothic paraphernalia of Room 33. Elsewhere, sculpted figures, such as the *Dama de Ibiza* and *Dama de Elche*, reveal a flourishing artistic tradition among the Iberian tribes – no doubt influenced by contact with Greek and Phoenician civilisations.

The basement contains displays on prehistoric man and spans the Neolithic period to the Iron Age – it's probably more of interest to dedicated archaeological buffs. Modest collections from ancient Egypt, Etruscan civilisation in Italy, classical Greece and southern Italy under Imperial Rome take their place alongside the ancient civilisations in the Balearic and Canary Islands.

The 1st floor contains all sorts of items pertaining to Spanish royalty and court life from the 16th through to the 19th centuries. Outside, stairs lead down to a partial copy of the prehistoric cave paintings of Altamira in Cantabria (see p509).

BIBLIOTECA NACIONAL & MUSEO DEL LIBRO

One of the most outstanding of the many grand edifices erected in the 19th century on the avenues of Madrid, the 1892 **Biblioteca Nacional** (National Library; Map p120; ☎ 91 580 77 59; Paseo de los Recoletos 20; admission free; 10am-9pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) dominates the southern end of Plaza de Colón. The reading rooms are more for serious students, but the sections given over to the Museo del Libro – if it ever reopens after renovations – are a worthwhile stop for any bibliophile yearning to see a variety of Arabic texts, illuminated manuscripts and centuries-old books of the Torah.

MUSEO LÁZARO GALDIANO

The **Museo Lázaro Galdiano** (Map pp114-15; ☎ 91 561 60 84; Calle de Serrano 122; adult/student €4/3; 10am-4.30pm Wed-Mon) is an imposing early-20th-century Italianate stone mansion with some 13,000 works of art and *objets d'art*. Apart from works by van Eyck, Bosch, Zurbarán, Ribera, Goya, Claudio Coello, El Greco, Gainsborough and Constable, this is a rather oddball assembly of all sorts of collectables. In Room 14 some of Goya's more famous works are hung together to make a collage, including *La Maja* and the frescoes of the Ermita de San Antonio de la Florida.

MUSEO DE LA ESCULTURA ABSTRACTA

This fascinating open-air collection of 17 abstracts (Map p120) includes works by the renowned Basque artist Eduardo Chillida, the Catalan master Joan Miró as well as Eusebio Sempere and Alberto Sánchez, one of Spain's foremost sculptors of the 20th century. The sculptures are beneath the overpass where Paseo de Eduardo Dato crosses Paseo de la Castellana.

Malasaña & Chueca

Packed with unique shops and lively bars, trendy Chueca and rough-and-ready Malasaña aren't the most obvious districts to head to for museums. Nevertheless, you'll find a few places worth visiting.

MUSEO MUNICIPAL

The fine **Museo Municipal** (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 588 86 72; www.munimadrid.es/museomunicipal; Calle de Fuencarral 78; admission free; 11 9.30am-8pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun Sep-Jun, 9.30am-2.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun Jul & Aug) has an elaborate and restored baroque entrance, raised in 1721 by Pedro de Ribera. The interior is dominated by paintings and other memorabilia charting the historical evolution of Madrid, of which the highlights are Goya's *Allegory of the City of Madrid*. Also worth lingering over is the expansive model of 1830s Madrid on the ground floor.

SOCIEDAD GENERAL DE AUTORES Y EDITORES

The swirling, melting wedding cake of a building that is the **Sociedad General de Autores y Editores** (General Society of Authors & Editors; Map pp118-19; Calle de Fernando VI 4; 11 1st Mon in Oct) is as close as Madrid comes to the work of Antoni Gaudí. It's a joyously self-indulgent ode to Modernism and one of a kind in Madrid. It's far more impressive from the street, which is just as well because casual visitors are actively discouraged. The only exception is on the first Monday of October, which is International Architecture Day.

ANTIGUO CUARTEL DEL CONDE DUQUE

Dominating the western edge of the Malasaña district this formidable former barracks (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 588 57 71; Calle Conde Duque 9) houses government archives, libraries and the Hemeroteca Municipal (the biggest collection of newspapers and magazines in all Spain). Also contained within its walls is the **Museo Municipal de Arte Contemporáneo de Madrid** (☎ 91 588 29 28; www.munimadrid.es/museoartecontemporaneo; admission free; 11 10am-2pm & 5.30-9pm Tue-Sat, 10.30am-2.30pm Sun), with contemporary Spanish and international paintings, sculpture, photography and graphic art. Now and then in summer the one-time barracks also does a night gig as a music venue.

MUSEO DE CERRALBO

Huddled beneath the modern apartment buildings northwest of Plaza de España, the noble old mansion that houses the **Museo de Cerralbo** (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 547 36 46; Calle de Ventura Rodríguez 17; adult/child €2.40/1.20; 11 9.30am-3pm Tue-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun Oct-May, 10am-1pm Mon, 9.30am-2pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jul-Sep) is like an apparition of how wealthy *madrileños* once lived. The former

home of the 17th Marqués de Cerralbo (1845-1922) – politician, poet and archaeologist – it's a study in 19th-century opulence.

The upper floor of the museum boasts a gala dining hall and a grand ballroom, while the ground floor contains suits of armour, Moroccan kilims and tapestries, a gondola of Murano glass, Bohemian crystal, the porcelain of Sèvres, Wedgwood and Meissen, and local ceramics.

Clearly the marquess was a man of diverse tastes, especially once you factor in artworks by Zurbarán, Ribera, van Dyck and El Greco's *Éxtasis de San Francisco*.

Chamberí & Argüelles

ERMITA DE SAN ANTONIO DE LA FLORIDA The frescoed ceilings of the **Ermita de San Antonio de la Florida** (Map pp114-15; ☎ 91 542 07 22; Glorieta de San Antonio de la Florida 5; admission free; 11 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun) are one of Madrid's most surprising secrets. Recently restored and also known as the Panteón de Goya, the southern of the two small chapels is one of the few places to see Goya's work in its original setting, as painted by the master in 1798 on the request of Carlos IV.

Those on the dome depict the miracle of St Anthony, who is calling on a young man to rise from the grave and absolve his father, unjustly accused of his murder. Around them swarms a typical Madrid crowd. Usually in this kind of scene the angels and cherubs appear in the cupola, above all the terrestrial activity, but Goya, never one to let himself be confined within the mores of the day, places the human above the divine.

The painter is buried in front of the altar. His remains were transferred in 1919 from Bordeaux (France), where he died in self-imposed exile in 1828.

TEMPLO DE DEBOD

Remarkably, this authentic 4th-century-BC Egyptian temple sits in the heart of Madrid. In the Parque de la Montaña, the **Templo de Debod** (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 366 74 15; www.munimadrid.es/templodebod; Paseo del Pintor Rosales; admission free; 11 10am-2pm & 6-8pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep, 9.45am-1.45pm & 4.15-6.15pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar) was saved from the rising waters of Lake Nasser, formed by the Aswan High Dam, and sent block by block to Spain in 1968. The views from the surrounding gardens towards the Palacio Real are quite special.

QUIRKY MADRID

The festivals of Madrid can be paradise for lovers of the offbeat. On 17 January, locals and their furry friends flock to the Iglesia de San Antón (Map pp118-19) for the **Fiesta de San Antón**, an annual blessing of pets. The 13 June **Fiesta de San Antonio** sees young *madrileños* go to the Ermita de San Antonio de la Florida (opposite) to petition for a partner. Whether spiritually inclined or not, the attitude seems to be, why take a chance? And July welcomes the **Fiesta de Vallecas**, where the mischievous Brotherhood of Sailors in the working-class barrio of Vallecas stages a 'naval battle' (a massive water fight) to demand that the government provide Madrid with a seaport.

Even sporting pursuits have their quirky moments, especially the wonderfully festive **San Silvestre Vallecana** (www.sansilvestrevallecana.com) race. Staged on 31 December at 6pm, the 10km-course leads from Plaza de Castilla (Map p113) out to Vallecas, south of the centre. One of the more unusual races in Europe, most athletes are fun-runners in fancy dress; musicians line the route and runners – who pass through streets warming up for New Year's Eve – are pelted with eggs and tomatoes.

Shopping in Madrid is also about more than bullfighting posters and frilly flamenco dresses. Always wanted to be a *torero* but just didn't have a thing to wear? **Justo Algaba** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 523 35 95; Calle de la Paz 4) is where Madrid's *toreros* come to have their *traje de luces* (suit of lights, the traditional glittering bullfighting suit) made in all its intricate excess. A custom-made suit starts at €2500, while the sexy pink tights are a steal at €50. **Santarrufina** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 522 23 83; www.santarrufina.com; Calle de la Paz 9) is an extravagant three-storey shop full of gilded religious items with an astonishing chapel downstairs.

From the sublime to the ridiculous. If you've got problem boobs, **Corsetería La Latina** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 365 46 22; Calle de Toledo 49) is definitely the place to find a home for them; the impressive two-metre bra in the window is no sales gimmick.

PARQUE DEL OESTE

Sloping down the hill behind the Moncloa metro station, **Parque del Oeste** (Map pp114-15) is quite beautiful, with plenty of shady corners to recline under a tree in the heat of the day. It has been a *madrileño* favourite ever since its creation in 1906. Until a few years ago, the Paseo de Camoens, a main thoroughfare running through the park, was lined with prostitutes by night. To deprive them of clients, the city authorities now close the park to wheeled traffic from 11pm on Friday until 6am on Monday.

MUSEO DE AMÉRICA & FARO DE MONCLOA

Travel to, and trade with, the newly discovered Americas was a central part of Spain's culture and economy from 1492 until the early 20th century. The **Museo de América** (Map p112; ☎ 91 549 26 41; Avenida de los Reyes Católicos 6; adult/student/child €3/1.50/free, Sun free; 11 9.30am-3pm Tue-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) has a representative display of ceramics, statuary, jewellery and instruments of hunting, fishing and war, along with some of the paraphernalia brought back by the colonisers. The Colombian gold collection, dating back to

the 2nd century AD, and a couple of shrunken heads are particularly eye-catching.

The odd **Faro de Moncloa** (Lighthouse; Map p112; ☎ 91 544 81 04; Avenida de los Reyes Católicos; admission €1.20; 11 10am-2pm & 5-7pm Tue-Sun), just in front of the Museo de América, promises panoramic views of Madrid; it's only worth it on a clear day. It was built in 1992 to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the discovery of America and to celebrate Madrid's role that year as European Cultural Capital.

MUSEO SOROLLA

The Valencian artist Joaquín Sorolla immortalised the clear Mediterranean light of the Valencian coast and his Madrid mansion, now a museum (Map p120; ☎ 91 310 15 84; Paseo del General Martínez Campos 37; adult/student/child €2.40/1.20/free; 11 9.30am-3pm Tue-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun), is home to the largest collection of his works. Inspired by what he had seen in Andalucía, Sorolla also designed the lush gardens that surround the house.

On the ground floor you enter a cool *patio cordobés*, an Andalusian courtyard off which is a room containing collections of Sorolla's drawings. The 1st floor was mostly decorated

by the artist himself and Sorolla used the three separate rooms as studios. In the second one is a collection of his Valencian beach scenes. Upstairs works spanning Sorolla's career are organised across four adjoining rooms.

Northern Madrid

MUSEO DE LA CIUDAD

This museum (Map p113; ☎ 91 588 65 99; www.muni.madrid.es/museodelaciudad/; Calle del Principe de Vergara 140; admission free; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun Sep-Jun, 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun Jul & Aug) has outstanding scale models of various Madrid landmarks, among them Plaza de Toros. Others cover whole barrios or features such as Plaza de la Villa and Paseo de la Castellana. The theme running throughout the museum is 'Discover your city', and it's a topic well worth exploring as the exhibits take you from Madrid and its beginnings up to the Enlightenment through the 19th century to the present.

Beyond the Centre

CASA DE CAMPO

This 1700-hectare and somewhat unkempt semiwilderness stretches west of Rio Manzanares. There are prettier and more central parks in Madrid, but such is its scope that nearly half a million *madriños* visit every weekend when cyclists, walkers and picnickers overwhelm the byways and trails that criss-cross the park.

To get here take the *teleférico* (cable car; Map pp114-15; ☎ 91 541 74 50; www.teleferico.com in Spanish; adult one way/return €3.10/4.45, child 3-7yr one way/return €2.90/3.40; 1 hours vary); it starts at Paseo del Pintor Rosales, on the corner of Calle del Marqués de Urquijo, and ends at a high point in the middle of the park. Alternatively, take the metro to Batán.

ACTIVITIES

Madrid has plenty of parks, gyms and swimming pools to keep you active.

Cycling

Madrid is not Europe's most bicycle-friendly city but a ride in Casa de Campo or El Parque del Retiro is a fantastic way to spend an afternoon. **Karacol Sports** (Map pp114-15; ☎ 91 539 96 33; www.karacol.es; Calle de Tortosa 8) rents out road bikes and mountain bikes for €15 per day; you'll need to leave an original ID document and a refundable deposit of €50.

Swimming

If you're clamouring for respite during the dry heat of Madrid's endless summer, head to the huge outdoor pool at **Canal de Isabel II** (Map p113; ☎ 91 554 51 53; www.cyil.es in Spanish; Avenida de Filipinas 54; admission €3.50; 11am-8pm Jun-early Sep) in northern Madrid. Also try the large outdoor pools at **Casa de Campo** (Map pp114-15; ☎ 91 463 00 50; Avenida Angel; admission pool €4; 11.30am-9pm May-Sep, 9am-noon & 3-7pm & 9-10pm Oct-Apr), where the indoor and outdoor swimming pools are some of Madrid's best.

Tennis

Polideportivo La Chopera (Map p125; ☎ 91 420 11 54; Parque del Buen Retiro; court rental from €5; 9am-8pm Mon-Fri) is the most atmospheric place to play tennis, surrounded as it is by the trees and open spaces in the southwestern corner of El Retiro.

Skiing

Madrid Xanadú (☎ 902 361 309; www.millsmadridxanadu.com in Spanish; Calle Puerto de Navacerrada, Arroyomolinos; 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun) is the largest covered ski centre in Europe. Open year-round, it's kept at a decidedly cool -2°C, while within the same complex is a mammoth mall, cinemas, a kart track and an amusement park. Madrid Xanadú is approximately 23km east of Madrid, just off the A5. To get here, take bus 529, 531 or 536 from the Estación Sur de Autobuses.

Fitness Clubs

Public gyms with indoor pools (normally for lap swimming only) are scattered throughout Madrid at *polideportivos* (sports centres). They generally charge a modest €3 to €6 per day. For swankier options, head to one of Madrid's privately owned health centres. You'll pay €8 to €12 for a day's admission, but you'll usually find less-crowded workout rooms.

Polideportivo La Chopera (Map p125; ☎ 91 420 11 54; Parque del Buen Retiro; admission €4.50; 9am-8pm Mon-Fri), in the southwestern corner of El Retiro, is one of Madrid's most complete and more central sports centres, boasting a fine new workout centre.

Polideportivo La Latina (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 365 80 31; Plaza de la Cebada; gym per adult €4.50, swimming per adult/child €3.80/2.15; 8.15am-7pm Mon-Thu, 8.15am-6pm Fri, 10am-8.30pm Sat & Sun) is another central and popular municipal gym with decent weight and workout rooms.

Spas & Yoga

Wrap up in a robe and slippers and prepare to be pampered at **Chi Spa** (Map p120; ☎ 91 578 13 40; www.thechispa.com; Calle del Conde de Aranda 6; 10am-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat), one of Europe's best day spas. There are separate areas for men and women, and services include a massage (€65 per hour), facial (€55 to €95), manicure (€25) or pedicure (€35).

Housed in the excavated cellars of old Madrid, **Hammam Medina Mayrit** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 902 333 334; www.medinamayrit.com in Spanish; Calle de Atocha 14; 10am-midnight) is a traditional Arab bath with massages and aromatherapy beneath the elegantly restored arches. Please note that bookings are required. Prices start from around €34.

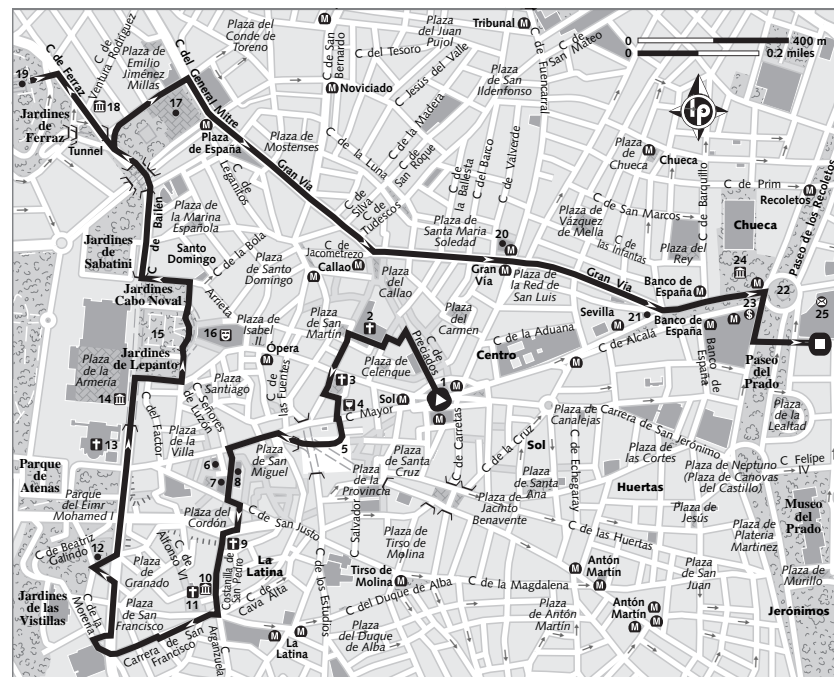
WALK FACTS

Start Plaza de la Puerta del Sol

Finish Palacio de Comunicaciones (Plaza de la Cibeles)

Distance approximately 5km

Duration three hours to full day



City Yoga (Map p113; ☎ 91 553 47 51; www.city-yoga.com in Spanish; Calle de los Artistas 43; 10am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) is one of the most popular yoga centres in Madrid, with a variety of classes to suit all styles and abilities. The first class costs €3, with cheaper per class fees thereafter, plus a €30 joining fee.

WALKING TOURS

Walk 1: Historic Madrid

Start in the pulsating, geographic centre of Spain, **Plaza de la Puerta del Sol** (1; p128), then head northwest along Calle de Preciados. The second street on the left will bring you out onto Plaza de las Descalzas, home to the **Convento de las Descalzas Reales** (2; p128). Moving south, you come to the **Iglesia de San Gines** (3; p128) in Calle de los Bordadores, the site of one of Madrid's oldest places of Christian worship. Behind it is the wonderful **Chocolateria de San Gines** (4; p154), place of worship for lovers of *chocolate con churros*.

Continue up to and across Calle Mayor until you reach **Plaza Mayor** (5; p126), before turning west and heading down the hill to the historic Plaza de la Villa, home of Madrid's 17th-century

ayuntamiento (6; p128). On the same square stand the 16th-century Casa de Cisneros (7; p128) and the Gothic Casa de los Lujanes (8; p128), one of the city's oldest surviving buildings.

Take the street down the left side of the Casa de Cisneros, cross Calle del Sacramento at the end, go down the stairs and follow the cobbled Calle del Cordón out onto Calle de Segovia. Almost directly in front of you is the Mudéjar tower of the 15th-century Iglesia de San Pedro El Viejo (9; p130), whereupon the narrow, almost medieval streets of Old Madrid close in and twist down the hill. Proceeding up Costanilla de San Pedro, you reach the Museo de San Isidro (10; p130). Next door is the Iglesia de San Andrés (11; p130), where the city's patron saint, San Isidro Labrador, was once interred.

From here, twist down through lanes that time forgot to Calle de Bailén and the wonderful, if expensive, *terrazas* (outdoor cafés) on the edge of the Jardines de las Vistillas (12; p129) where you can contemplate the sweeping views out towards Sierra de Guadarrama.

After a soothing *cerveza* (beer), follow the viaduct north to the Catedral de Nuestra Señora de la Almudena (13; p127), the Palacio Real (14; p127) and the supremely elegant Plaza de Oriente (15; p127). The eastern side of the square is closed off by the Teatro Real (16; p127).

Return to the western side of the square and follow the walkway extension of Calle de Bailén which leads into Plaza de España (17) with its statue of Don Quixote and surrounded by monumental towers. Calle de Ferraz leads northwest to the curious mansion of the Museo de Cerralbo (18; p136) and then the ancient Egyptian Templo de Debod (19; p136), from where there are more fine views.

Return to Plaza de España, the eastern flank of which marks the start of Gran Vía (p129), a Haussmannesque boulevard that was slammed through the tumbledown slums to the north of Sol in the 1910s and 1920s. Today it is a busy thoroughfare, chocked with traffic and humming with passers-by darting in and out of side streets, shops and eateries. About halfway along is the mighty Telefónica building (20; p129), still easily visible from its hilltop perch. Head down past the elegant façades to the superb dome of the Metrópolis building (21; p129), where Gran Vía meets Calle de Alcalá. Down the hill you go to Plaza de la Cibeles (22; p134), Madrid's favourite roundabout. Look out especially for the late-19th-century

Banco de España (23; p134) on your right as you approach and, on your left, the Palacio de Buenavista (24). Impossible to miss is the ornate Palacio de Comunicaciones (25; p134) facing you in all its glory from across the square.

Walk 2: Artistic Madrid

Before setting out, pause in the splendid old Café Comercial (1; p152) on Glorieta de Bilbao, a favourite haunt of writers, artists and intellectuals for more than a century. From here, walk northeast along Calle de Luchana, northwest up Calle de Santa Engracia and then down the hill of Paseo del General Martínez Campos to the Museo Sorolla (2; p137), home to the works of Joaquín Sorolla, one of the major Spanish painters of the early 20th century.

Continue down to Paseo de la Castellana and the Museo de la Escultura Abstracta (3; p135), an outdoor exhibition of fine modern sculptures by some of the big names in Spanish contemporary art. As you continue southwest along this grand boulevard – shun the outer footpaths and wander under the shade of the trees which run almost through the centre – pause at either the Café-Restaurante El Espejo (4; p157) or Gran Café de Gijón (5; p153), both of which are steeped in history, atmosphere and the ghosts of writers and artists past.

At Plaza de la Cibeles (6; p134), turn right up the hill to the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando (7; p129), which in any other city would be considered enough reason to come to the city on its own. Cross the elegant Plaza de Canalejas and keep going along Calle del Príncipe to Plaza de Santa Ana (8; p130), where a statue of the poet Federico García Lorca looks towards the Teatro Español (9; p160). From the plaza, take Calle del Prado, turn right on Calle de León, then left down Calle de Cervantes. At No 11 is the Casa de Lope de Vega (10; p130), the playwright's house. You're now in the heart of the Barrio de las Letras, where many famous Spanish writers spent their days and just around the corner (Calle de Quevedo, then Calle de Lope de Vega) is the 17th-century Convento de las Trinitarias (11; p130), where writer Miguel de Cervantes lies buried (it's closed to the public).

Return to Calle de Cervantes and turn left at the grand Plaza de Neptuno (12; Cánovas del Castillo) roundabout – which is watched over by the two grand old dames of the Madrid hotel scene, the Palace (13; p147) and the

Hotel Ritz (14; p147) – for the extraordinary Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza (15; p132). Diagonally across the square is the gracious, low-slung Palacio Villanueva, better known to art-lovers as the peerless Museo del Prado (16; p131) where you could spend hours or days. Behind the Prado is the verdant Real Jardín Botánico (17; p134) and the long-standing Cuesta de Claudio Moyano bookstalls (18; p110), both of which are

pleasant detours as you continue south en route to Madrid's other extraordinary gallery, the Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (19; p131).

COURSES

Spanish-language schools fill the city centre; keep your eye on the 2nd-floor window signs as you stroll along. Some of the more reputable (and cheapest) courses are offered through the Escuela Oficial de Idiomas (Map p112; ☎ 91 553 00 88; www.eoidiomas.com; Calle de Jesús Maestro). It offers courses in Spanish for foreigners (*Español para Extranjeros*) at most levels, though nailing a spot can be tough at this popular place where a semester costs as little as €89. Serious students can also look into taking classes at the Universidad Complutense (Map p112; ☎ 91 394 53 36; www.ucm.es/info

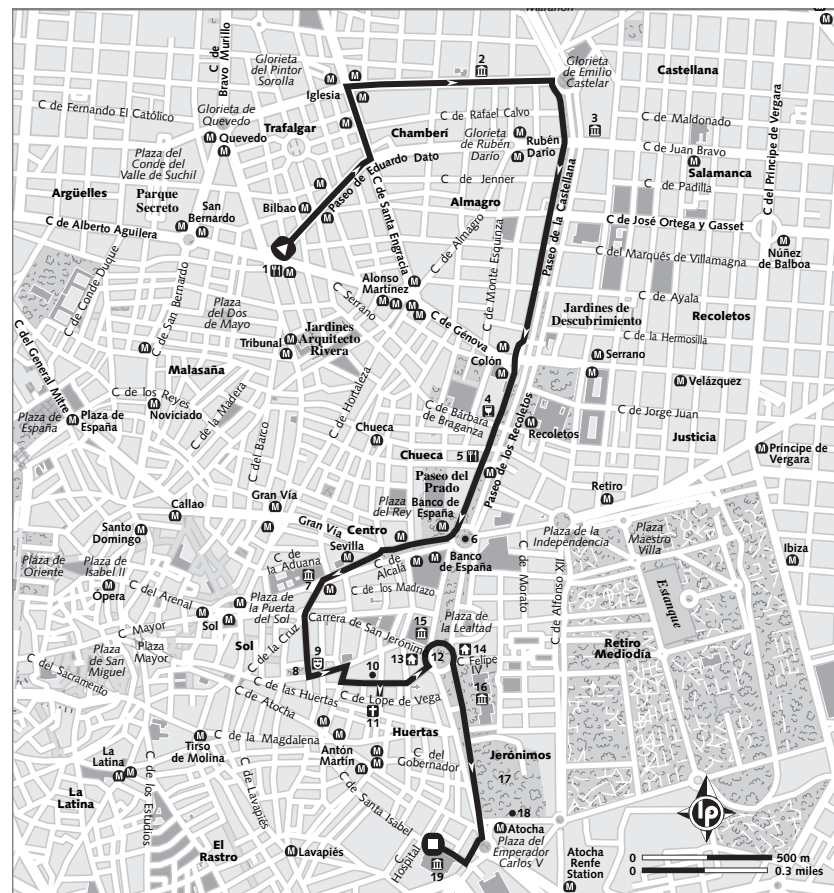
WALK FACTS

Start Café Comercial

Finish Centro de Arte Reina Sofía

Distance approximately 5km

Duration three hours to full day



/cextran/Index.htm; Cuidad Universitaria) where an intensive 150-hour semester course costs €400.

If you'd love to try your hand at Spanish cooking, try **Alambique** (Map pp122-3; % 91 559 78 58; www.alambique.com; Plaza de la Encarnación 2; h 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) where English-speaking courses start from €65.

If you've always wanted to learn how to play guitar like the flamenco greats, stop by **El Flamenco Vive** (Map pp122-3; % 91 547 39 17; www.elflamicovive.com; Calle del Conde de Lemos 7; % 10.30am-2pm & 5-9pm Mon-Sat) and make an appointment for sessions (€20 per hour) with its resident teacher.

MADRID FOR CHILDREN

Madrid has plenty to keep the little ones entertained and a good place to start is **Casa de Campo** (p138) where there are swimming pools as well as the **Zoo Aquarium de Madrid** (Map p112; % 91 512 37 70; www.zoomadrid.com; Casa de Campo; adult/child 3-7yr/infant €14.90/12.20/free; h 10.30am-dusk), home to around 3000 animals, and performing dolphins and sea lions.

Also nearby is the **Parque de Atracciones** (Map pp114-15; % 91 463 29 00; www.parquedeatracciones.es; Casa de Campo; admission €6.20, unlimited all-rides adult/under 8yr €23.50/13.20, single-ride tickets €2; h hours vary), an amusement park with high-adrenaline rides, a haunted house and the 'Zona Infantil' with sedate rides for the really young.

To get to Casa de Campo, take the **teleférico** (cable car; Map pp114-15; % 91 541 74 50; www.teleferico.com in Spanish; adult one way/return €3.10/4.45, child 3-7 years one way/return €2.90/3.40; h hours vary), one of the world's most horizontal cable cars which putters for 2.5km out from the slopes of La Rosaleda.

Another possibility is **Faunia** (Map p112; % 91 301 62 10; www.faunia.es in Spanish; Avenida de las Comunidades 28; adult/under12yr €19/13; h 10am-5pm Wed-Sun, longer hours in summer), a modern animal theme park with an 'Amazon jungle' and 'Polar Ecosystem'. The closest metro station is Valdebernardo.

At the mammoth indoor playground **Parque Secreto** (Map pp118-19; % 91 593 14 80; www.parquesecreto.com in Spanish; Plaza del Conde del Valle de Suchil 3; admission per 30min from €2.50; h 5-6pm Mon, 5-9pm Tue-Fri, 11.30am-2pm Sat & Sun) kids can romp around in tubs of plastic balls, on slides and in a snaking labyrinth. San Bernardo is the closest metro station.

All aboard! **Museo del Ferrocarril** (Railway Museum; Map p112; % 902 228 822; www.museoferrocarril

.org; Paseo de las Delicias 61; adult/child €4/2.50; h 10am-3pm Tue-Sun) is home to old railway cars, train engines and more. It's definitely guaranteed to fascinate budding engineers. (The nearest metro station is Delicias.)

The **Museo de Cera** (Wax Museum; Map p120; % 91 319 26 49; www.museoceramadrid.com; Paseo de los Recoletos 41; adult/under 7yr €12/8; h 10am-2.30pm & 4.30-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-8.30pm Sat & Sun) is Madrid's modest answer to Madame Tussaud's with over 450 wax characters.

Other possibilities that the parents may enjoy as much as the kids include seeing Real Madrid play at the **Estadio Santiago Bernabéu** (p162) or wandering through the soothing greenery of the **Parque del Buen Retiro** (p133), where in summer there are puppet shows and boat rides.

TOURS

If you're pushed for time and want to fit a lot of sightseeing into a short visit, guided tours may be the ideal way to see the city.

Bus Tours

The orange double-decker buses of **Madrid Vision** (% 91 779 18 88; www.madridvision.es; adult 1-/2-day ticket €14.50/19, 7-16yr & senior over 65yr 1-/2-day ticket €8/10, under 7yr free; h 9.30am-midnight 21 Jun-20 Sep, 10am-7pm 21 Dec-20 Mar, 10am-9pm rest of year) provide the usual hop-on-hop-off overview of the city.

There are three routes around town: Rte 1 makes a jaunt around 'Historical Madrid'; Rte 2 is dedicated to 'Modern Madrid'; and Rte 3 takes you around 'Monumental Madrid'.

You can get more information at tourist offices or most travel agencies. Tickets are purchased directly on the bus.

Walking Tours

The Centro de Turismo de Madrid (p111) offers **Descubre Madrid** (% 902 221 622; www.esmadrid.com; Plaza Mayor 27; adult/child, student & senior €3.20/2.60) – dozens of guided itineraries that follow themes such as Madrid of the Bourbons, Velázquez and El Buen Retiro, Legends of Old Madrid, Traditional Shops and Taverns, Madrid of Cervantes and Madrid of the Habsburgs.

The privately-run **Adventurous Appetites** (% 639 331 073; www.adventurousappetites.com; 4-hour tours €40; h 8pm Mon-Sat) organises English-language tapas tours through central Madrid from the bear statue in Puerta del Sol. Prices include the first drink.

Cycling Tours

Londoner **Mike Chandler** organises **Madrid Bike Tours** (% 680 58 17 82; www.madridbiketours.com; tours incl picnic lunch €55), which offer a range of guided four-hour tours. Make reservations by phone or email, and the tour guide will either pick you up or meet you at a central location.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Madrid loves to party, and seemingly any excuse is good for a *fiesta* (festival). For details about national festivals see p847, but here in the city we are to look out for the following events. There's more information online at www.muni.madrid.es or www.esmadrid.com.

February

Arco (Feria Internacional de Arte Contemporánea; www.arco.ifema.es; mid-February) One of Europe's biggest celebrations of contemporary art, Arco draws galleries and exhibitors from all over the world. It's staged in the Parque Ferial Juan Carlos I exhibition centre near Barajas airport.

Festival Flamenco (February) A combination of big names and rising talent comes together for five days of fine flamenco music in one of the city's theatres.

May

Dos de Mayo (2 May) In 1808, Napoleon's troops put down an uprising in Madrid, and commemoration of the day has become an opportunity for much festivity, often called the Fiesta de la Comunidad de Madrid. The day is celebrated with particular energy in the bars of Malasaña. **Fiesta de San Isidro** (15 May) Madrid's patron saint is honoured with a week of nonstop processions, parties and bullfights. Free concerts are held throughout the city, and this week marks the start of the city's bullfighting season.

June

Día del Orgullo de Gays, Lesbianas y Transexuales (June) The colourful Gay Pride Parade sets out from the Puerta de Alcalá in the early evening, and winds its way around the city in an explosion of music and energy, ending up at the Puerta del Sol.

GAY & LESBIAN MADRID

It's a great time to be gay in Madrid. Under laws passed by the Spanish Congress in June 2005, same-sex marriages now enjoy the same legal protection as those between heterosexual partners. At the time there was something of a conservative backlash, but opinion polls showed that the reforms were supported by more than two-thirds of Spaniards.

The inner-city barrio of Chueca is exuberantly and extravagantly gay, although everyone's welcome; it's one of the most lively barrios in Madrid with an abundance of gay-friendly bars, restaurants and shops. **A Different Life** (Map pp118-19; % 91 532 96 52; Calle de Pelayo 30) is a bookshop geared towards gays and lesbians, while **Berkana** (Map pp118-19; % 91 522 55 99; Calle de Hortaleza 64) operates like an unofficial information centre for gay Madrid; here you'll find the bi-weekly *Shanguide* which is jammed with listings and contact ads and the *Mapa Gaya de Madrid*, as well as books, magazines and videos.

Another good place to get the lowdown on gay Madrid is the laid-back **Mamá Inés** (Map pp118-19; % 91 523 23 33; www.mamaines.com in Spanish; Calle de Hortaleza 22; h 10am-2pm Sun-Thu, 10am-3.30am Fri & Sat), a café where you'll hear the gossip on where that night's hot spot will be. **Café Acuarela** (Map pp118-19; % 91 522 21 43; Calle de Gravina 10; h 11am-2am Sun-Thu, 11am-3am Fri & Sat), right on Plaza de Chueca, is a dimly-lit centrepiece of gay Madrid – a huge statue of a nude male angel guards the doorway. Also good for a low-key night out is the sophisticated **Antik Café** (Map pp118-19; % 620 427 168; Calle de Hortaleza 4 & 6; h 10am-3am), where the dark interior is all about intimacy and discretion.

For something a little more upbeat, the cosy **Why Not?** (Map pp118-19; Calle de San Bartolomé 7; h 10.30pm-late) is the sort of place where nothing's left to the imagination (the gay and straight crowd who come here are pretty amorous) and it's full nearly every night of the week. Pop and top-40s music are the standard here.

Other good house clubs popular with a predominantly gay crowd include **Ohm** (Map pp118-19; % 91 541 35 00; Plaza del Callao 4; h midnight-6am Fri & Sat), the Saturday-night party at **Sala Bash: Cool** (Map pp118-19; % 902 499 994; Calle de Isabel la Católica 6); and **Suite** (Map pp118-19; % 91 521 40 31; Calle de la Virgen de los Peligros 4; h 9pm-2am Mon-Thu, 9pm-3am Fri & Sat), one of the trendiest retro bars in Madrid.

For a place to rest your head, look no further than the excellent **Hostal La Zona** (p147) which has a mainly gay clientele.

August–September

Summer Festivals (mid-August to September) Small-time but fun, the neighbourhood summer festivals, such as San Cayetano in Lavapiés, and San Lorenzo and La Paloma in La Latina, are great for cheap entertainment.

September

Fiesta del Partido Comunista Español (PCE; mid-September) The yearly fiesta of Spain's Communist Party lasts a weekend and is a mixed bag of regional food pavilions, rock concerts and political soapboxing in Casa de Campo.

October–November

Fiesta de Otoño (mid-October to mid-November) Music, dance and theatre take over Madrid during the fantastically cultural weeks of the Autumn Festival.

SLEEPING

Madrid's accommodation used to be – how shall we put it? – unexciting, but not any more. A wave of chic minimalism and cutting-edge interpretations of traditional architecture is sweeping the city, with new hotels taking their place alongside the simple *hostales* (budget hotels) and grand old Madrid hotels that were once the city's trademark.

Travellers on a tight budget haven't been left out of the revolution with some fine new *hostales* as well as many old favourites. Mid-range accommodation is similarly diverse with *hotels con encanto* (hotels with charm, often housed in historic buildings) sharing the market with supremely stylish monuments to 21st-century fashions. Madrid's five-star hotels represent the ultimate in luxury, whether in stately palaces or in places that represent the height of innovation.

Accommodation prices in Madrid vary with the not-always-discernible seasons. In general, most midrange and some top-end places have separate price structures for high season (*temporada alta*), midseason (*temporada media*) or low season (*temporada baja*),

all usually displayed on a notice in reception or close by, but there's little agreement among hoteliers about when the seasons actually begin and end.

Los Austrias, Sol & Centro

With a wealth of historical sites, accommodation across a range of budgets, traditional taverns, restaurants and shops, this is probably the area where you'll spend the most time while in Madrid and is, therefore, a good place to be based.

BUDGET

Los Amigos Backpackers' Hostel (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 547 17 07; www.losamigoshostel.com; 4th fl, Calle de Campomanes 6; dm €16-17; j) If you arrive in Madrid keen for company, this could be the place for you – lots of students stay here, the staff are savvy (and speak English) and there are bright dorm-style rooms that sleep from four to 12 people (with free lockers). Los Amigos has recently opened another hostel a couple of blocks away, **Los Amigos Sol Backpackers' Hostel** (☎ 91 559 24 72; 4th fl, Calle de Arenal 26; dm €16-19).

Hostel Metropol (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 521 29 35; www.metropolhostel.com; 1st fl, Calle de la Montera 47; s/d/tr €30/44/54; j) It's not that the rooms here are great. In fact, they're simple and don't have a whole lot of character. But young travellers congregate here for that special something that few hostels have – an attitude, a young vibe, a chilled ambience.

Hostal Orly (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 531 30 12; www.hostalorly.com; 7th fl, Calle de la Montera 47; s/d/tr €32/45/56) The street-facing rooms in this hostel, set in a grand old 19th-century building, have fabulous views; Room 11 is the best with a circular balcony stretching around the corner of the building, high above central Madrid.

Hostal Acapulco (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 531 19 45; www.hostalacapulco.com; 4th fl, Calle de la Salud 13; s/d/tr €42/52/71; a j) This immaculate little *hostal* is a cut above many Madrid hostels, with marble floors, recently renovated bathrooms, double-glazed windows and comfortable beds. Street-facing rooms have balconies overlooking sunny Plaza del Carmen and are flooded with natural light.

Hostal Macarena (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 365 92 21; www.silserranos.com; 1st fl, Cava de San Miguel 8; s/d €53/59; j) On one of the old, cobblestone streets that runs past Plaza Mayor, this *hostal* is at once homely and loaded with impeccable,

old-style charm. The rooms are nicely spacious and decorated in warm colours, with the occasional antique writing desk.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Plaza Mayor (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 360 06 06; www.h-plazamayor.com; Calle de Atocha 2; s/d from €59/79; a) Sitting just across from Plaza Mayor, here you'll find stylish décor, charming original elements of this 150-year-old building and extremely helpful staff. The rooms are attractive, some with a light colour scheme and wrought-iron furniture. The attic rooms boast minimalist dark-wood floors and beams, and designer lamps, and have lovely little terraces with wonderful rooftop views of central Madrid.

Hotel Paris (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 521 64 91; fax 91 531 01 88; Calle de Alcalá 2; s/d €70/90; a) It's impossible to be more central than this classic 140-year-old hotel overlooking the Puerta del Sol. Noise can be a problem, so consider one of the interior rooms (which look onto a pleasant, plant-filled courtyard). Rooms are elegantly kitsch, the owners exude an old-style grace and a reasonable buffet breakfast is included in the room price.

Hotel Senafor (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 531 41 51; www.playasenafor.com; Gran Vía 21; s €75-120, d €85-140; a s) One of central Madrid's prettiest façades conceals some of the most attractive rooms in the city centre. Unusually, only one room on each floor doesn't face onto the street and the views down Gran Vía from the corner rooms are brilliant. Rooms are sophisticated and come with armchairs, wi-fi access, sound systems and reclining beds.

Hotel Anaco (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 522 46 04; www.anacohotel.com; Calle de las Tres Cruces 3; s/d/tr €78/97/131; a) We like a place that spends its renovation dollars on the rooms rather than the lobby – the latter is of a tired, 1970s vintage, but the rooms are decorated in neutral tones with touches of red and modern fixtures like stainless-steel basins.

Mario Room Mate (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 548 85 48; www.room-matehoteles.com; Calle de Campomanes 4; s €77-99, d €114-149; a j) Entering this swanky boutique hotel is like crossing the threshold of Madrid's latest nightclub – staff dressed all in black, black walls and swirls of red lighting in the lobby. Rooms are spacious, with high ceilings and simple furniture, light tones contrasting smoothly with muted colours and dark surfaces.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Petit Palace Posada del Peine (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 523 81 51; www.hthotels.com; Calle de Postas 17; d from €100; a) One of the best hotels to open in central Madrid in recent years, the Petit Palace combines a splendid historic building with a brilliant location – just 50m from Plaza Mayor. The modern hi-tech rooms are supremely comfortable, beautifully appointed and spacious, and the bathrooms sparkle. Friendly, attentive service is another highlight.

Hotel Meninas (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 541 28 05; www.hotelmeninas.com; Calle de Campomanes 7; s €89-110, d €120-180; j) Opened in 2005, this is the sort of place where an interior designer licked his or her lips and created a masterwork of minimalist luxury. The colour scheme is blacks, whites and greys, with dark-wood floors and splashes of fuchsia and lime-green. Flat-screen TVs are in every room, along with the latest bathroom fittings, internet access points and even a laptop in some rooms, all helping to round out the effect of clean lines and latest innovations.

La Latina & Lavapiés

Staying in Lavapiés extracts you from the well-beaten tourist track and while there are few sites to see, it's all about immersion in an area that you could only find in Madrid. La Latina is the heart of Old Madrid, awash with twisting cobblestone lanes, great restaurants and a humming nightlife.

BUDGET

Mad Hostel (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 506 48 40; www.madhostel.com; Calle de Cabeza 24; dm €15-17; a i) From the same people who brought you Cat's Hostel, Mad Hostel is similarly filled with a buzzing vibe. The 1st-floor courtyard – with retractable roof – is a wonderful place to chill, while the four- to eight-bed rooms are smallish but new and clean. There's a small rooftop gym equipped with state-of-the-art equipment.

Huertas & Atocha

Huertas is Madrid's beating heart with the whole area in uproar from Friday afternoon until Sunday morning – if you want to sleep, ask for an interior room.

TOP FIVE SLEEPS

- Cat's Hostel (p146)
- Petit Palace Posada del Peine (opposite)
- Quo (p146)
- Hotel Meninas (opposite)
- Hotel Puerta América (p148)

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Cat's Hostel (Map pp122-3; ☎ 902 889 192, 91 369 28 07; www.catshostel.com; Calle de Cañizares 6; dm €16, d €18-20; a i) Now here's something special. The internal courtyard is Madrid's finest – lavish Andalusian tilework, a fountain, a spectacular glass ceiling and stunning Islamic decoration, surrounded on four sides by an open balcony. There's a softly lit and super-cool basement bar where occasional live flamenco cohorts with free internet connections. The dorms and bathrooms are new and super clean.

BUDGET

Hostal Sardinero (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 429 57 56; fax 91 429 41 12; Calle del Prado 16; s/d from €45/60) More than the cheerful rooms (which have high ceilings, air-conditioning, a safe, hairdryers and renovated bathrooms), it's the friendly old couple who run Hostal Sardinero that gives it its charm. They love it if you take the time to sit down for a chat.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Miau (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 369 71 20; www.hotelmiu.com; Calle del Principe 26; s/d incl breakfast €88/98; a i) If you want to be close to the nightlife of Huer-tas or you can't tear yourself away from the beautiful Plaza de Santa Ana, then this is your place. Light tones, splashes of colour and elegant modern art adorn the rooms, which are large and well-equipped. Bring ear plugs if sleep is something you value.

Hotel El Prado (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 369 02 34; www.pradohotel.com; Calle del Prado 11; s €76-98, d €98-118; a i) This hotel is one of Madrid's most welcoming and offers style and service beyond its modest three-star category. There's a wine theme running throughout the spacious rooms, which have parquet floors, light tones, and places to sit and write. The double-

glazed windows are also important, especially if you're here on a weekend.

Catalonia Moratin (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 369 71 71; www.hoteles-catalonia.es; Calle de Atocha 23; s/d from €90/100; a i) If you like your hotels to be former palaces, this could be for you. The public areas are exquisite – a palm-filled, light-drenched patio and a sweeping staircase guarded by marble lions – and the rooms boast rustic chic, with a simple, warm colour scheme, hardwood floors and balconies off every room.

Alicia Room Mate (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 389 60 95; www.room-matehoteles.com; Calle del Prado 2; s/d from €90/100; i s) The area around Plaza de Santa Ana rarely stands still for long and this new hotel (2006) is evidence that the endless change is for the good. Stylishly classy rooms, some with plaza views, are wedded to cool service and a hip vibe in the public areas.

Hard Rock Hotel (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 531 45 00; www.hardrock.com; Plaza de Santa Ana 14) At the time of research, the western end of Plaza de Santa Ana was being transformed into a stylish new hotel run by the people who brought you the iconic Hard Rock Cafés of the world. At the time of research prices and other information weren't available, but expect it to be one of Madrid's most exciting new hotels.

TOP END

Hotel Urban (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 787 77 70; www.derbyhotels.com; Carrera de San Jerónimo 34; d €160-320; a i s) The towering glass edifice of Hotel Urban is the epitome of art-inspired, super-stylish designer cool. With its clean lines and modern art, it's a wonderful antidote to the more classic charm of Madrid's five-star hotels of longer standing. Dark-wood floors and dark walls are offset by plenty of light, while the bathrooms have wonderful designer fittings – the wash-basins are sublime. The rooftop swimming pool is Madrid's best and the gorgeous terrace is heaven on a candlelit summer's evening.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Quo (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 532 90 49; www.hotelesquo.com; Calle de Sevilla 4; s €110-156, d from €156; a i) Quo is Madrid's home of chic with black-clad staff, minimalist designer furniture, high ceilings and huge windows that let the light flood in. The colour scheme is black and red with light surfaces providing perfect contrast. We're also big fans of the bathrooms – glass doors, glass benches and stainless-steel basins. All rooms have flat-screen TVs, black-and-white photos of Madrid, dark-wood floors, free ADSL internet connection and comfy armchairs, while the rooms on the 7th floor have Jacuzzis and private terraces with terrific views over the rooftops of central Madrid.

Paseo del Prado & El Retiro

Near the 'Big Three' and the shady Parque del Retiro, this sophisticated district is known for its charm but rather low on accommodation options.

MIDRANGE

NH Nacional (Map p125; ☎ 91 429 66 29; www.nh-hotels.com; Paseo del Prado 48; d Fri-Sun €99-128, Mon-Thu €169; a i) The excellent NH chain of hotels doesn't get any better than this place, where the stylish rooms are beautifully decorated in warm colours and combine luxury comfort with all the necessary technology (including satellite TV and internet connections in every room).

TOP END

Palace (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 360 80 00; www.palacemadrid.com; Plaza de las Cortes 7; d €369-470; a i) An old Madrid classic, this former palace of the Duque de Lerma opened as a hotel in 1911 and was Spain's second luxury hotel. Ever since it has looked out across Plaza de Neptuno at its rival, the Ritz, like a lover unjustly scorned. Its name may not have the world-famous cachet of the Ritz, but it's not called the Palace for nothing and is extravagant in all the right places.

Hotel Ritz (Map p125; ☎ 91 701 67 67; www.ritzmadrid.com; Plaza de la Lealtad 5; d €480-580; a i) The grand old lady of Madrid, the Hotel Ritz is the height of exclusivity. One of the most lavish buildings in Madrid, the classic style and impeccable service is second-to-none. Not surprisingly, it's the hotel of choice for presidents, kings and celebrities. The public areas are palatial and awash with antiques while the rooms are extravagantly large, opulent and supremely comfortable.

Salamanca

The barrio Salamanca is Madrid's most exclusive address, home to a wealth of suitably grand sights, not to mention some of the best shopping the city has to offer. It's generally a quieter choice than the rest of the capital.

MIDRANGE

Hesperia Hermosilla (Map p120; ☎ 91 246 88 00; www.hesperia.com; Calle de la Hermosilla; s/d €125/135; a i) If you're here on a mission to shop in Salamanca, or otherwise value quiet, exclusive streets away from the noise of central Madrid, this modern and subtly stylish hotel is a

terrific choice. The furnishings are vaguely minimalist, especially in the public areas, and LCD flat-screen TVs and other creature comforts are rare luxuries in this price range.

TOP END

Bauzá (Map pp114-15; ☎ 91 435 75 45; www.hotelbauza.com; Calle de Goya 79; s €138-174, d €190-275; a i) Minimalist and modern, the new Bauzá would be right at home in Soho. The generous rooms boast dark-wood floors, soothing greys and blues, and occasional flashes of originality like Indian textile prints. Computers, plants, sound systems and designer lamps add to the appeal without crowding the rooms.

Malasaña & Chueca

There's an unmistakable sense that by staying in Malasaña or Chueca you're a discerning traveller keen to live like a *madriño*. You're close to everything, reasonably well served by transport and sure to have a good time once you step out the door of your hotel.

BUDGET

Hostal Don Juan (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 522 31 01; 2nd fl, Plaza de Vázquez de Mella 1; s/d €33/46) Just because you're paying cheap rates for your room, doesn't mean you can't be treated like a king. This elegant two-storey *hostal* is filled with art (each room has original works) and antique furniture that could grace a royal palace. Rooms are simple but luminous and large, and most have a balcony facing out onto the street.

Hostal América (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 522 64 48; www.hostalamerica.net; 5th fl, Calle de Hortaleza 19; s/d/tr €36/48/67) This place is run by a lovely mother-in-law team who preside over super-clean, spacious and IKEA-dominated rooms. As most rooms face onto the usual interior 'patio' of the building, you should get a good night's sleep in this busy area. For the rest of the time, there's an expansive terrace with tables, chairs and a coffee machine.

Hostal La Zona (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 521 99 04; www.hostallazona.com; 1st fl, Calle de Valverde 7; d €50-65; i) Catering primarily to a gay clientele, the stylish Hostal La Zona has exposed brickwork, wooden pillars and a subtle colour scheme. We like a place where a sleep-in is encouraged – breakfast is from 9am to noon, which is exactly the understanding Madrid's nightlife merits. Other highlights include free internet, helpful staff and air-conditioning/heating in every room.

MIDRANGE

Hostal San Lorenzo (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 521 30 57; www.hostal-lorenzo.com; Calle de Clavel 8; s/d from €60/80) Hostal San Lorenzo is a terrific deal: original stone walls and occasional dark-wood beams from the 19th-century in the public areas and modern, bright and comfortable rooms that you'll be more than happy to return to at the end of the day. It's just a pity some of the rooms aren't larger.

Chamberí & Argüelles

Chamberí has bars, shops, cinemas and restaurants in just the right measure and you'll quickly feel less like a tourist and more like a local by staying here. You're a short metro ride from the main sights of interest. Argüelles is more residential, sprinkled with elegant façades, as well as bars, shops and restaurants.

TOP END

Hotel AC Santo Mauro (Map p120; ☎ 91 319 69 00; www.ac-hoteles.com; 5th fl, Calle de Zurbano 36; s €250, d €250-365) Everything about this recently renovated place oozes exclusivity and class, from the address – one of the elite patches of Madrid real estate – to the mansion that is the finest in a barrio of many. This is a place of discreet elegance and warm service, and rooms are suitably lavish; the Arabian-styled indoor pool isn't bad either. David Beckham may be derided for many things, but the fact that he chose to make this his home for six months certainly suggests a high degree of taste.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hotel Puerta América (Map p112; ☎ 91 744 54 00; www.hotelpuertaamerica.com; Avenida de América 41; d €225-300; i a p) When the owners of this hotel looked at their location halfway between the city and the airport, they knew they had to do something special. Their idea? Take some of world architecture's most innovative names and give them a floor each to design. The result? An extravagant pastiche of styles, from curvy minimalism or zany montages of 1980s chic to bright red bathrooms that feel like a movie star's dressing room. Even the bar ('a temple to the liturgy of pleasure'), restaurant, façade, gardens, public lighting and parking garage each had their own architect.

EATING

Madrid has become a magnet for outstanding cooking and eating out in the Spanish capital is a real treat.

There's everything to be found here, not least the rich variety of regional Spanish specialities from across the country, all within a short walk or metro ride from your hotel door. Throw in some outstanding restaurants serving international cuisine and you'll quickly discover that the choice of where to eat is almost endless.

It is nearly impossible to eat badly in Madrid. Restaurants in Malasaña, Chueca, La Latina and Huertas range from stunning old *tabernas* (taverns) to chic, sophisticated and clean-lined boutique restaurants that won't break the bank. For more classically classy surrounds, Paseo del Prado, El Retiro, Salamanca and Northern Madrid are generally pricey but of the highest standard and ideal for celebrating a special occasion or for spotting royalty and the celebrities of the moment.

Almost more than the myriad tastes on offer, however, it is the buzz that accompanies eating in Madrid that elevates the city into the ranks of the great culinary capitals of the world. In Madrid, eating is not a functional pastime to be squeezed in between other more important tasks. Instead, it's one of life's great pleasures, to be enjoyed for hours on end with friends and with a glass or two of wine; an event to be savoured like all good things in life.

Unless otherwise stated, restaurants listed here are open for both lunch (from around 2pm) and dinner (from 9pm).

Los Austrias, Sol & Centro

Old Madrid has a little bit of everything, from the world's oldest restaurant and hearty *madrileño* cooking in places rich in history and character to fine regional tapas. Also there are some wonderful little cafés from which to watch the passing parade.

BUDGET

Cervecería 100 Montaditos (Map pp122-3; ☎ 902 197 494; Calle Mayor 22; small rolls €1) This terrific chain of bars serves up no less than 100 different varieties of mini-*bocadillos* that span the full range of Spanish staples in more combinations than you could imagine. You fill out your order, take it up to the counter and your name is called in no time.

A TAPAS TOUR OF MADRID

Like so many enjoyable experiences in Madrid, your tapas tour starts in Huertas. **La Casa del Abuelo** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 521 23 19; Calle de la Victoria 12; 11.30am-3.30pm & 6.30-11.30pm) is an ageless place where the traditional order is a *chato* (small glass) of the heavy, sweet El Abuelo red wine and the heavenly *gambas* (prawns) *a la plancha* (grilled) or *al ajillo* (sizzling in garlic in little ceramic plates). Directly opposite is **La Oreja del Oro** (Map pp122-3; Calle de la Victoria 9; 1 Wed-Sun) where you can wash down the mere thought of the house speciality, *oreja* (pig's ear), with a glass of refreshing white Ribeiro wine from Galicia. Also in the same area is **Las Bravas** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 532 26 20; Callejón de Álvarez Gato 3), known for its patented version of the classic Spanish *salsa brava*, a spicy sauce slathered over fried potatoes, Spanish tortillas and even seafood, while **La Trucha** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 532 08 82; Calle de Núñez de Arce 6; 1 Tue-Sat) has a counter overloaded with enticing tapas. There is another branch on Calle del Príncipe.

Most famous for *bacalao* (cod) is **Casa Labra** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 531 00 81; Calle de Tetuán 11), which has been around since 1860 and was a favourite of the poet Federico García Lorca. However, many *madrileños* wouldn't eat *bacalao* anywhere except **Casa Revuelta** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 366 33 32; Calle de Latoneros 3; meals €10-15; 1 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun), clinched by the fact that the owner painstakingly extracts every fish bone in the morning. If you continue south, **Taberna Algorta** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 366 48 77; Calle de la Cava Baja 26; 1 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, Sun lunch) proves that the Basques have turned tapas (or *pintxos* as they call them) into an art form. They call their abundant offerings 'high cuisine in miniature' – the first part is true, but these are some of the biggest *pintxos* you'll find.

In Chueca, be sure to try an *empanada* (small savoury meat or tuna pie) at the classic **Antigua Casa Ángel Sierra** (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 531 01 26; Calle de Gravina 11), and don't miss **Bocaito** (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 532 12 19; Calle de la Libertad 4-6; 1 lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat), a favourite haunt of film-maker Pedro Almodóvar who finds the bar, bar staff and the tapas they produce 'the best antidepressant'. In neighbouring Malasaña, the old-world **taberna Casa do Compañeiro** (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 521 57 02; Calle de San Vicente Ferrer 44; 1 1.30pm-2am) is tucked away in the streets just up from Plaza del Dos de Mayo and is renowned for its *pulpo a la gallega* (Galician-style octopus), *pimientos de padrón* (little green peppers grilled) and *lacón* (cured shoulder of pork).

If you're willing to go a little further, don't miss the best tapas in Salamanca at **Biotza** (Map p120; ☎ 91 781 03 13; Calle de Claudio Coello 27; 1 9am-midnight Mon-Thu, 9am-2am Fri & Sat), which is stylish and a purveyor of divine and creative Basque *pintxos*; we suggest one of the *degustación de pintxos* (tasting menus; €11 to €16) where you get a selection. Similarly good, in Chamberí, is **Sagarretxe** (Map pp114-15; ☎ 91 446 25 88; Calle de Eloy Gonzalo 26; meals €15-20; 1 noon-5pm & 7pm-midnight Sun-Wed, noon-5pm & 7pm-12.30am Thu, noon-5pm & 7pm-1am Fri & Sat) where the *surtido de 8/12 pintxos* (your own selection of 8/12 tapas) costs €12/16.

Wherever you happen to be out drinking late at night, consider a detour to **Bar Melo's** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 527 50 54; Calle del Ave María; meals €10-15; 1 9pm-2am Tue-Sat) in Lavapiés – it's famous across the city for its *zapatillas* (*bocadillos* of *lacón*: cured shoulder of pork and cheese). They're big, they're greasy and they're damn good.

La Mallorquina (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 521 12 01; Plaza de la Puerta del Sol 8; pastries around €1.50; 1 8am-9.15pm) Start the day at this classic pastry shop that's packed with *madrileños* who just couldn't pass by without stopping.

Cervecería Compano (Calle de Botaneros; bocadillos €2) Spanish bars don't come any more basic than this, but it is the purveyors of an enduring and wildly popular Madrid tradition – a *bocadillo de calamares* (a large roll stuffed

with deep-fried calamari) – at any hour of the day.

La Gloria de Montera (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 523 44 07; Calle del Caballero de Gracia 10; menú €7.50) There's no beating this popular eatery for cheap sit-down fare. With a sleek, minimalist décor and a combination of local and international flavours, it's oh-so-stylish, oh-so-cheap and oh-so-good. Lunch is especially crowded; be prepared to wait in line if you arrive after 2pm.

MIDRANGE

La Viuda Blanca (Map pp122-3; % 91 548 75 29; Calle de Campomanes 6; meals €25; $\bar{\text{h}}$ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Mon) Calle de Campomanes is quickly becoming one of central Madrid's coolest streets and La Viuda Blanca is an essential part of its charm. The dining room is flooded with sunshine through the glass roof, the crowd is young and trendy, and the cooking ranges from wok dishes and baked salmon to more traditional rice concoctions.

Taberna La Bola (Map pp122-3; % 91 547 69 30; Calle de la Bola 5; meals €20-35; $\bar{\text{h}}$ closed Aug) In any poll of food-loving locals for most traditional Madrid cuisine, Taberna La Bola (going strong since 1880) always features near the top. We're inclined to agree, and if you're going to try *cocido a la madrileña* (stew; €16.80), this is a good place to do so.

Restaurante Sobrino de Botín (Map pp122-3; % 91 366 42 17; www.botin.es; Calle de los Cuchilleros 17; meals €35-45) This place is famous for many reasons. For a start, the Guinness Book of Records has recognised it as the oldest restaurant in the world (1725). And then there's the fact that it has appeared in many novels about Madrid, most notably Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*. The secret of its endurance is fine *cochinillo* (suckling pig) and *cerdero asado* (roast lamb) cooked in the wood-fired ovens. Eating in the vaulted cellar is a treat.

La Latina & Lavapiés

In La Latina you could just about take your pick of any of the restaurants around Calle de la Cava Baja and Plaza de la Paja and not leave disappointed. There's an emphasis on cool, stylish interiors and equally cool and casual clientele, but you'll also find your fair share of throwbacks to another Madrid era, with atmospheric old *tabernas* who've been perfecting traditional *madrileño* cuisine for decades. Lavapiés is more eclectic and multi-cultural and, generally speaking, the further down the hill you go, the better it gets.

BUDGET

Delic (Map pp122-3; % 91 364 54 50; Costanilla de San Andrés 14; sandwiches €3-5, meals from €13; $\bar{\text{h}}$ 11am-2am Wed-Sat, 11am-midnight Sun, 8pm-2am Mon) There's no finer way to spend a summer's afternoon or evening than nursing a *mojito* at Delic's Plaza de la Paja *terrace*, but it also has a delicious range of cakes (€4.50 to €6), and international food in the chilled and cosy indoor dining area.

El Granero de Lavapiés (Map pp122-3; % 91 467 76 11; Calle de Argumosa 10; meals €10-15; $\bar{\text{h}}$ lunch Mon-Thu & Sat, dinner Fri; \checkmark) This cosy vegetarian restaurant feels like eating at home, with just one dining room and friendly, family-style service. The food (all vegetarian) is home-cooked, making it a great choice for lunch and, unusually, it has a *menú del día* on Saturday (€10) as well as weekdays (€8.50).

MIDRANGE

El Estragón (Map pp122-3; % 91 365 89 82; Plaza de la Paja 10; meals €20-25; \checkmark) A delightful spot for crepes and other vegetarian specialities, El Estragón is undoubtedly one of Madrid's best vegetarian restaurants, although attentive vegans won't appreciate the use of butter.

La Buga del Lobo (Map pp122-3; % 91 467 61 51; Calle de Argumosa 11; meals €20-25; $\bar{\text{h}}$ 11am-2am Wed-Mon) One of the 'in' places in cool and gritty Lavapiés, the popularity of La Buga del Lobo shows no sign of abating. The atmosphere is bohemian and chilled, with funky, swirling murals and jazz or lounge music. The food's good – the *chorizo frío de sidra* (cold chorizo in cider) or *pimientos rellenos* (stuffed peppers) are a highlight – but it's best known for its groovy vibe.

Malacatin (Map pp122-3; % 91 365 52 41; Calle de Ruda 5; meals €25-30; $\bar{\text{h}}$ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, lunch Sat) If you want to see discerning *madrileños* enjoying their favourite local food, come here. The clamour of conversation bounces off the compact dining area's tiled walls, and the speciality is as much *cocido* as you can eat (€18). Its *degradación de cocido* (taste of *cocido*; €5) at the bar is a great way to try Madrid's favourite dish without going all the way, although locals would argue that doing that is like smoking without inhaling.

Julián de Tolosa (Map pp122-3; % 91 365 82 10; Calle de la Cava Baja 8; meals €35; $\bar{\text{h}}$ closed dinner Sun) This fine Navarran restaurant has a subtly modern aesthetic to accompany its excellent, meat-dominated menu – the *chuletón* (basically a huge chop of top-quality, juicy meat) for two is outstanding. Fine Navarran wines and *alubias rojas de Tolosa* (red beans from Tolosa) are other highlights.

Posada de la Villa (Map pp122-3; % 91 366 18 60; Calle de la Cava Baja 9; meals €35-40; $\bar{\text{h}}$ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, Sun lunch Sep-Jul) The Posada is a wonderfully restored 17th-century inn (*posada*) and is something of a local landmark. The atmosphere is formal, the decoration sombre

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Ene Restaurante (Map pp122-3; % 91 366 25 91; Calle del Nuncio 19; meals €25-30) Just across from one of Madrid's oldest churches, Ene is anything but old-world. The design is cutting-edge and stylish with the dining area awash with reds and purples, while the young and friendly waiters circulate to the tune of lounge music. The food is Spanish-Asian fusion and there are also plenty of *pintxos* (tapas) to choose from. The week-day *menú del día* costs €11. The downstairs chill-out beds are pure indulgence.

and traditional (heavy timber and brickwork) and the cuisine decidedly local – *cocido*, *callos* (tripe) and *sopa de ajo* (garlic soup).

Casa Lucio (Map pp122-3; % 91 365 32 52; Calle de la Cava Baja 35; meals €35-45; $\bar{\text{h}}$ closed Sat lunch) Lucio has been wowing *madrileños* for ages with his light touch, quality ingredients and home-style cooking – think seafood, roasted meats and, a Lucio speciality, eggs in abundance, which is the main reason the King of Spain is known to frequent this place.

Huertas & Atocha

Late-night (or all-night) drinking is a Huertas forte, but there are plenty of good restaurants as well. The pick of the places is in the lanes between Puerta del Sol and Plaza de Santa Ana, while heading down the hill around Calle del Prado promises equally rich pickings.

BUDGET

El Brillante (Map p125; % 91 528 69 66; Calle del Doctor Drumén 7; bocadillos around €3-5; $\bar{\text{h}}$ 6.30am-12.30am) Just by the Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, this breezy and no-frills bar-eatery is a Madrid institution for its *bocadillos* (the *bocadillo de calamares* is an old favourite) and other snacks (*raciones* cost around €6 to €10). It's also famous for *chocolate con churros* or *porras* (deep-fried doughnut strips).

La Finca de Susana (Map pp122-3; % 91 369 35 57; Calle de Arlabán 4; menú €7.50, meals €15) The classy dining area with soft lighting and plenty of greenery is matched by a mix of innovative and traditional food that draws a hip young crowd. The *fiducia con ali-oli* (small pasta noodles with seafood and garlic mayonnaise) is a fine choice. La Finca doesn't take reservations and there's often a queue at lunchtime.

MIDRANGE

Gula Gula (Map pp122-3; % 91 420 29 19; Calle del Infante 5; meals €15-20; $\bar{\text{h}}$ 9am-3am Tue-Sun) One of the first designer restaurants to hit Madrid back in the mid-1990s, Gula Gula continues to serve fun food. The bare brick walls, parquet floor, stage lighting and sexily dressed waiting staff help to create an ambience that's camp and snappy. The food is a mixed bag but leans towards vegetarian and the salad buffet is excellent in this meat-loving city. There's another branch at Gran Vía 1.

Maceira (Map pp122-3; % 91 429 15 84; Calle de Jesús 7; meals €15-20; $\bar{\text{h}}$ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun, dinner Mon) Arrive here early as the simple wooden benches and tables creak under the weight of so much attention. Get stuck into classic *raciones* of Galician seafood, such as *pulpo a la gallega* (€8.25), downed with a crisp white Ribeiro. There is another branch around the corner on Calle de las Huertas.

Zerain (Map pp122-3; % 91 429 79 09; Calle Quevedo 3; meals €30-35; $\bar{\text{h}}$ Mon-Sat) In the heart of the Barrio de las Letras, this sophisticated Basque restaurant is one of the best places in the area to sample the region's cuisine. The staples include cider, *bacalao* and wonderful steaks, while there are also a few splashes of creativity thrown in (the secret's in the sauce).

Lhardy (Map pp122-3; % 91 522 22 07; www.lhardy.com; Carrera de San Jerónimo 8; meals €35-45; $\bar{\text{h}}$ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) This Madrid landmark (since 1839) is an elegant treasure-trove of delicatessen items that's ideal for those planning a dinner party of gourmet tapas. You can also sit down to full meals (the house specialities are Madrid dishes such as *callos* and *cocido* (stew), as well as *perdiz estofado* (partridge stew).

Paseo del Prado & El Retiro

In the discreet residential enclave between Parque del Buen Retiro and the Museo del Prado, you'll come across a handful of fairly exclusive restaurants. In these establishments, eating is taken very seriously, classic charm is the pervasive atmosphere and limousines wait outside to ferry the well-heeled customers home.

TOP END

Balzac (Map p125; % 91 420 06 13; Calle de Moreto 7; meals €70-80; $\bar{\text{h}}$ Mon-Sat) While Basque and Catalan chefs have been capturing the world's attention for their *nouvelle cuisine*, Madrid's

Andrés Madrigal has been quietly gathering plaudits. His faithfulness to traditional *madrileño* cooking has been fused to what he calls 'innovation, risk-taking and rebellious spirit'. The service is also impeccable.

Salamanca

Eating in Salamanca is traditionally as exclusive as the shops that fill the barrio, the sort of places where the keys to Jags and BMWs are left for valet parking and prices and quality are high. We've listed a few of them, but Salamanca is also home to some of Madrid's best-kept eating secrets, from the best hot dogs and Basque tapas to fusion restaurants and intimate dens of creative home-cooking.

MIDRANGE

Fast Good (Map p120; Calle de Juan Bravo 3; meals €10; 11am-12am) When the star Catalan chef Ferran Adrià became concerned about Spaniards' growing obsession with fast food, he decided to do something about it. Fast Good is a simple concept (food that's fast but healthy), and it's a terrific place to get a freshly prepared hamburger, roast chicken or panini with a creative twist. We enjoyed the panini of *champiñones frescos con gorgonzola* (fresh mushrooms and gorgonzola cheese) almost as much as the curvy white and lime-green décor.

La Galette (Map p120; 91 576 06 41; Calle del Conde de Aranda 11; meals €30; 11am-12am Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) Walk into this lovely little restaurant and you could be in the south of France, with its delightfully intimate dining area. The food is a revelation, with around half the dishes what the owner calls 'baroque vegetarian'. It is creative cooking at its best and it feels like it's emerging from your grandma's kitchen. The *croquetas de manzana* (apple croquettes) are a house speciality, but everything is good.

Teatriz (Map p120; 91 577 53 79; Calle de la Hermosilla 15; meals €30-40) Designed by Philippe Stark, the former Teatro Beatriz has an eerily lit bar right on the stage, and it's the kind of place where you'll need to look like George Clooney to fit in. The food follows the fashion, ranging from 'Made in Spain' to Fusion. While you're there, check out the loos, where you leave luminous footprints!

TOP END

Thai Gardens (Map p120; 91 577 88 84; Calle de Jorge Juan 5; meals €35-40) This sophisticated restaurant is awash with greenery and is a favoured haunt

of Spain's celebrities and well-to-do. The food is exquisite, the service faultless and they say that the ingredients are flown in weekly from Thailand. At lunchtime it has a good set menu for €25. Bookings are essential on weekends.

Paradis Erre Efe (Map p125; 91 575 45 40; Paseo de los Recoletos 2; meals €50-60; 11am-12am Mon-Fri & dinner Sat) Housed in the Casa de América in Palacio Linares, this unique place's minimalist décor exudes modishness and is where Barcelonan chef Ramón Freixa offers 'interactive' cooking. You want a veal fillet? Fine, now you choose what goes with it. The elegant main dining room, dominated by whites and blacks, is surrounded by smaller annexes.

Malasaña & Chueca

Unless you're after the exclusivity of fine and expensive dining, Malasaña and Chueca have some of the best places to eat in Madrid. Old *tabernas* abound, each with its speciality, but there are also plenty of places where *nouvelle* Spanish cuisine is served in lively and stylish surroundings. There are two streets that stand out – Calle de Manuela Malasaña and, in Chueca, Calle de la Libertad.

BUDGET

Café Comercial (Map pp118-19; 91 521 65 55; Glorieta de Bilbao 7; 8am-1am Sun-Thu, 8am-2am Fri-Sat) This glorious, old Madrid café proudly fights a rearguard action against progress with heavy leather seats, abundant marble and old-style waiters. As close as Madrid came to the intellectual cafés of Paris' Left Bank, the cafés of the Glorieta de Bilbao were in the 1950s and 1960s a centre of coffee-house intellectualism. Café Comercial is the last to remain and has changed little since those days.

Fresc Co (Map pp118-19; 91 521 60 52; Calle de Sagasta 30; meals €7.95-9.70; 11am-12am) If you just can't face deciphering another Spanish menu or are in dire need of a do-it-yourself salad, Fresc Co is a fresh, well-priced and all-you-can eat antidote. An extensive buffet of salads, soups, pasta and pizza are on offer, and the price includes a drink. Queues often form out the door at lunchtime.

La Taberna de San Bernardo (Map pp118-19; 91 445 41 70; Calle de San Bernardo 85; meals €15) The *raciones* here (around €6 to €8) include plenty of Spanish favourites with a few surprising twists thrown in – the *berenjenas con miel de caña* (deep-fried eggplant with honey) is brilliant.

MIDRANGE

La Musa (Map pp118-19; 91 448 75 58; Calle de Manuela Malasaña 18; mains €6-12, menú €8-11, tapas €4; 11am-5pm & 7pm-midnight) A local favourite of Malasaña's hip, young crowd, La Musa has designer décor, lounge music and food that will live long in the memory. The fried green tomatoes with strawberry jam and great meat dishes are fun and filled with flavour. It doesn't take reservations so sidle up to the bar, put your name on the waiting list and soak up the ambient buzz of Malasaña at its best.

Bazaar (Map pp118-19; 91 523 39 05; Calle de la Libertad 21; menú €7, meals €20-25) Occupying a privileged corner location, with hardwood floors, grand windows, theatre lighting and comfy leather seats, Bazaar is invariably packed with a casual young crowd who come for the fresh tastes and mixed meat and fish menu. You can't make a reservation so get here early.

Wokafé (Map pp122-3; 91 422 90 69; Calle de las Infantas 44; meals €25; 11am-12am Sun) Step inside here and you could be in Barcelona, Sydney or New York, with its blood-red décor, conical dangling lampshades, bordello mirrors and grand windows. The hip ambience attracts a chirpy, inner-urban crowd who fill the place at lunchtimes.

Restaurante Momo (Map pp118-19; 91 532 73 48; Calle de la Libertad 8; meals €25; 11am-12am Mon-Sat) Momo remains a Chueca beacon of reasonably priced, inventive cuisine. This was one of the first restaurants to take Chueca dining to a new level, and it still has its deservedly loyal following among the gay, straight and arts crowds. The *menú del día* is one of Madrid's best bargains.

Nina (Map pp118-19; 91 591 00 46; Calle de Manuela Malasaña 10; meals €25-30) This is one of our favourite restaurants in Madrid with fantastic food, great service and a stylish dining area. The cooking is similarly cool (English-language menus are available) and the *foie fresco a la plancha* (grilled foie gras) is rich and divine. Popular with a sophisticated local crowd, Nina can be a hard place to get a table and booking on weekends is essential.

Gran Café de Gijón (Map p120; 91 521 54 25; Paseo de los Recoletos 21; meals €30; 11am-2am) This graceful old café has been serving coffee and meals since 1888 and has long been a favourite with Madrid's literati for a drink or a meal. The latter is a bit of a national smorgasbord, ranging from *cabrito asado a la segoviana* (roast kid) to *bacalao al pil pil* (the typically steamed Basque cod in a garlic sauce).

La Isla del Tesoro (Map pp118-19; 91 593 14 40; Calle de Manuela Malasaña 3; meals €30; 11am-12am) This place wins our vote for Madrid's best vegetarian restaurant. The décor is funky, intimate and as inventive as the food. The *ensalada boskimana* (salad of goat's cheese, dates, honey and other assortments) sets the tone for cooking that's fresh and always surprising, and the friendly waiters have some English-language menus. A great choice in a great barrio.

Laydown Rest Club (Map pp118-19; 91 548 79 37; www.laydown.es in Spanish; Plaza de Mostenses 9; meals €30; 11am-2am & 9.30pm-2.30am Tue-Fri, 9.30pm-2.30am Sat & Sun, 2-4pm Mon) This place has to be seen to be believed. Part of a new craze in concept-dining, Laydown Rest Club is whiter-than-white and completely devoid of tables – you eat Roman-style while reclining on beds and are served by toga-clad waiters with huge feather fans. It's all the rage at the moment and is a dining experience unlike any other.

Chamberí & Argüelles

The residential barrios of Chamberí and Argüelles are fast becoming Madrid's coolest, and there's usually not another tourist in sight.

MIDRANGE

Casa Mingo (Map pp114-15; 91 547 79 18; Paseo de la Florida 34; meals €10-15; 11am-12am) Built in 1916 to feed the workers building the Principe Pío train station, Casa Mingo is a rambling Asturian cider house that is known by just about every *madrileño*, most of whom agree that there's no finer place to order *pollo asado* (roast chicken) and a bottle of cider.

The Wok (Map p120; 91 319 18 62; Calle de Génova 27; meals €15-20) If the crowds and queues are anything to go by, *madrileños* have been crying out for reasonably priced Asian food but in a classier setting than most Chinese restaurants in Madrid can muster. Just about everything is wok-cooked and there are a handful of vegetarian options, but don't expect anything too spicy.

TOP END

La Broche (Map p113; 91 399 34 37; www.labroche.com; Calle de Miguel Ángel 29; meals €80) Sergi Arola, a young Catalan acolyte of the world-renowned Ferran Adrià, has made his own splash in this hotel restaurant in the busy uptown area of Madrid. He mixes his ingredients carefully, without necessarily going overboard, and the dining room is minimalist white.

Northern Madrid

If you want to see the state of Spain's economy, visit any eatery in Northern Madrid. The business and well-heeled clientele know their food and are happy to pay for a touch of class.

TOP END

Zalacain (Map p113; ☎ 91 561 48 40; Calle de Álvarez de Baena 4; meals €70-100; 🍴 lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat Sep-Jul) There is a seamless and quiet efficiency about this classy home of the best in traditional cooking. Everyone who's anyone in Madrid, from the king down, has eaten here since the doors opened in 1973. The wine list is purported to be one of the best in the city (an estimated 35,000 bottles) and you should certainly dress to impress.

Santceloni (Map p113; ☎ 91 210 88 40; www.restaurantesantceloni.com; Paseo de la Castellana 57; meals €90-110) The Michelin-starred Santceloni is one of Madrid's best restaurants with luxury Asian-inspired décor and food that wins plaudits from discerning food lovers from across Spain and abroad. Each dish is exquisite – try the chef's showpiece *menú gastronómico* (€110).

Self-Catering

You'll find supermarkets all across central Madrid, but the most romantic places to shop are the old-style fresh produce markets.

Mercado de San Miguel (Map pp122-3; Plaza de San Miguel; 🍴 9am-2.30pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2.30pm Sat) Madrid's most central fresh market, this is the spot to stock up on ingredients for sandwiches and picnics.

Mercado de la Cebada (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 365 91 76; Plaza de la Cebada; 🍴 8am-2pm & 5.15-8.15pm Mon-Fri) Another easy-to-reach fresh market, this is a great place to take the pulse of 'real' Madrid.

Mallorca (Map p120; ☎ 91 577 18 59; Calle de Serano 6; 🍴 9.30am-9pm) For fine takeaway food, head to this Madrid institution. Everything here, from gourmet mains to snacks and desserts, is delicious. There are branches throughout the city.

For a gourmet touch, you could also try the basement food departments of **El Corte Inglés** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 418 88 00; www.elcorteingles.es; Calle de Preciados 3 & elsewhere throughout the city; 🍴 10am-10pm Mon-Sat).

DRINKING

You've seen the great paintings, have eaten an outstanding meal and, if you have any sense, you'll have taken a siesta. Now it's time

for your initiation into Europe's most dynamic nightlife. To get an idea of how much *madrileños* like to go out and have a good time, there is one simple statistic: Madrid has more bars than any city in the world, six, in fact, for every 100 inhabitants.

If you're after the more traditional, with tiled walls and flamenco tunes, head to the barrio of Huertas. For gay-friendly drinking holes, Chueca is the place. Malasaña caters to a grungy, funky crowd, while La Latina has friendly, no-frills bars that guarantee atmosphere every night of the week. In summer, head to the outdoor cafés in the city's squares.

Los Austrias, Sol & Centro

Old taverns and the odd hidden gem populate Madrid's centre and, as a general rule, the further you stray from Plaza Mayor, the more prices drop and the fewer tourists you'll see.

Chocolatería de San Ginés (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 365 65 46; Pasadizo San Ginés 5) You have to end the night at this classic café at least once; the speciality is an eye-opening dose of syrupy hot chocolate and some freshly fried *churros* for dipping. It's open until 7am!

Taberna de Cien Vinos (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 365 47 04; Calle del Nuncio 17; 🍴 closed Mon) This unpretentious wine bar is the perfect place to order by the glass or by the bottle. The classic décor and friendly service have made it one of the best-known wine bars in town.

La Viuda Negra (☎ 91 548 75 29; Calle de Campomanes 6) This all-dressed-in-orange, lounge-like cocktail bar (the Black Widow) is minimalist enough for Manhattan and genuinely cool

LA HORA DEL VERMUT

Sunday. One o'clock in the afternoon. A dark bar off Calle de la Cava Baja. In any civilised city the bar would be shut tight at such an hour, but in Madrid the place is packed because it's *la hora del vermut* (vermouth hour), when friends and families head out for a quick aperitif before Sunday lunch. Sometimes referred to as *ir de Rastro* (going to the Rastro), because so many of the traditional vermouth bars are in and around El Rastro market, this Sunday tradition is deeply engrained in *madrileño* culture. Some of the best bars for vermouth are along Calle de la Cava Baja (between El Rastro and Plaza Mayor).

enough to satisfy the sophisticated crowd of the new Madrid. If you're the sort that likes to settle in for the night, you can first eat at the sister restaurant, La Viuda Blanca, next door (p150), then ease over to the bar for funky house music until late. Sunday afternoons are jazzy and very mellow.

La Latina & Lavapiés

Two barrios, two very different vibes. On summer weekend nights (and many Sunday afternoons), crowds of happy *madrileños* spill from the bars of La Latina and down the slopes, turning otherwise medieval streets into bonhomie central. The pick of the bars are in the area roughly framed by Calle de la Cava Baja, Plaza de la Cebada, Plaza de la Paja and Calle de Segovia. Lavapiés is a different kettle of fish altogether – working-class, quirky and a barrio with a very strong sense of community. If you're after an unmistakably Madrid night but with nary a tourist in sight, Lavapiés could be your thing.

Bonanno (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 366 68 86; Plaza del Humilladero 4) Newcomers to Madrid often wonder what all the fuss surrounding its nightlife is about, but that's because they start too early. If you're suffering from this affliction, head for Bonanno, a stylish cocktail bar that's popular with young professional *madrileños* from early evening onwards. Be prepared to snuggle up close to those around you if you want a spot at the bar.

Café del Nuncio (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 366 09 06; Calle de Segovia 9) A sprawling bar, the Café del Nuncio straggles down a stairway passage to Calle de Segovia. You can drink on one of several cosy levels inside or, better still in summer, enjoy the outdoor *terrace*. On summer weekends, this place hums with the sort of clamour that newcomers to Madrid (and plenty of longstanding residents) find irresistible.

El Viajero (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 366 90 64; Plaza de la Cebada 11; 🍴 closed Mon) This upstairs bar requires the patience of a saint – it's busy and near-on impossible to get a table unless you're prepared to wait. But wait you should because El Viajero is always buzzing and has been for years.

Almendra 13 (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 365 42 52; Calle del Almendra 13) You could easily come here for the tapas but it's standing room only most nights, especially on weekends when locals come here for the fine wines and manzanilla

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

La Inquilina (Map pp122-3; ☎ 627 511 804; Calle del Ave María 39; 🍴 closed Mon) An integral part of the sometimes sophisticated, more often earthy charm of Lavapiés, La Inquilina is a wonderful bar that's ideal for taking the pulse of this increasingly cool barrio. Contemporary artworks by budding local artists adorn the walls and you can either gather around the bar or take a table out the back.

(dry sherry), and the convivial buzz of a happy and discerning Madrid crowd.

Huertas & Atocha

The maze of streets around Huertas and the Puerta del Sol is a treasure-chest of lively bars and nightspots, and you won't be hard-pressed to find a place to revel in the atmosphere with a drink in hand.

Cervecería Alemana (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 429 70 33; Plaza de Santa Ana 6; 🍴 closed Aug) If you've only got time to stop at one bar on Plaza Santa Ana, let it be this classic *cervecería*, renowned for its cold, frothy beers. It's fine inside, but snaffle a table outside in the square on a summer's evening and you won't be giving it up without a fight. This was one of Hemingway's haunts, and neither the wood-lined bar nor the bow-tied waiters have changed since his day.

Casa Alberto (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 429 93 56; www.casaalberto.es; Calle de las Huertas 18; 🍴 closed Mon) Since 1827 *madrileños* have been getting their vermouth from this elegant bar, where the hard stuff is served on tap. The tapas are good but come here on Sunday at 1pm and you're halfway towards being considered an honorary *madrileño*.

La Venencia (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 429 73 13; Calle de Echegaray 7) This is how sherry bars should be – old-world and drinks poured straight from the wooden barrels. La Venencia is a barrio classic, with fine Jerez sherry for just €1.35. There's no music, no flashy decorations; it's all about you, your *fino* (sherry) and your friends.

Ølsen (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 429 36 59; Calle del Prado 15; 🍴 closed Mon) This classy and clean-lined bar is a temple to Nordic minimalism and comes into its own after the Scandinavian restaurant out the back closes. We think the more than 80 varieties of vodka are enough to satisfy most tastes, while the vodka cocktails

(€7 to €9) are also great. You'll hate vodka the next day, but Madrid is all about living for the night.

Viva Madrid (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 429 36 40; www.barvivamadrid.com; Calle de Manuel Fernández y González 7) A beautifully tiled bar, some of the best *mojitos* in town, a friendly atmosphere, a mixed crowd and scattered tables – what more could a *madrileño* want? Not much apparently, and it's famous on the Huertas late-night scene.

Salamanca

Salamanca is the land of the beautiful people, and it's all about gloss and glamour – heels for her and hair gel for him. As you glide through the *pijos* (posh), keep your eyes peeled for Real Madrid players, celebrities and designer clothes. If nothing else, you'll see how the other half lives.

Geographic Club (Map pp114-15; ☎ 91 578 08 62; Calle de Alcalá 141) With its elaborate stained-glass windows, wooden African masks and photos from around the world, the Geographic Club feels like an Irish bar by day (it's the wood panelling that does it), but it gets noisy after midnight with a more mixed crowd than most of Salamanca can muster.

El Lateral (Map p120; ☎ 91 435 06 04; Calle de Velázquez 57) It doesn't get much more *pijo* than this chic wine bar, where wearing hair gel seems to be a prerequisite for entry. Don't bother coming here after work's out unless you're in an Armani suit; at other times, the excellent wines and other drinks loosen up the crowd (if not the ties) more than you'd think.

Malasaña & Chueca

The inner-city barrios of Malasaña and Chueca are two of Madrid's most eclectic and liveliest, although they are worlds apart in personality. Malasaña by night is home to those who would relive the anything-goes, rock-heavy days of *la movida madrileña*, which means a rebellious spirit during clamorous nights that seem to last forever. Chueca, on the other hand, caters to the black-clad, trendy and stylish, the home barrio of the city's considerable gay community.

Café Pepe Botella (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 522 43 09; Calle de San Andrés 12) As good in the wee small hours as it is in the afternoon, this is a classy bar with green velvet benches, marble-topped tables, old photos and mirrors covering the walls. The faded elegance gives the place charm that's made it one of the most popular and enduring drinking holes in the barrio.

Areia (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 310 03 07; www.areiachil.lout.com in Spanish; Calle de Hortaleza 92) The ultimate lounge bar by day (cushions and chill-out music abound and there are dark and secluded corners where you can hear yourself talk or snog quietly), this place is equally enjoyable by night when groovy DJs take over (from 11pm Sunday to Wednesday, and from 9pm the rest of the week) with deep and chill house, nu jazz, bossa and electronica. It's cool, funky and low-key all at once.

La Via Láctea (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 446 75 81; Calle de Velarde 18) A living, breathing and somewhat grungy relic of *la movida*, La Via Láctea remains a Malasaña favourite for a mixed,

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Museo Chicote (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 532 67 37; www.museo-chicote.com; Gran Vía 12; ☒ closed Sun) The founder of this Madrid landmark is said to have invented more than a hundred cocktails, which the likes of Hemingway, Sophia Loren and Frank Sinatra all enjoyed at one time or another. It's still frequented by film stars and socialites, and it's at its best after midnight when a lounge atmosphere takes over, couples cuddle on the curved benches and some of the city's best DJs do their stuff.

informal crowd who seem to live for the 1980s – eye shadow for boys and girls is a recurring theme. There are plenty of drinks to choose from and by early on Sunday morning anything goes. Expect long queues to get in on weekends.

Café Belén (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 308 24 47; Calle de Belén 5) Café Belén is cool in all the right places – lounge and chill-out music, dim lighting, a great range of drinks (the *mojitos* are as good as you'll find in Madrid and that's saying something) and a low-key crowd that's the height of casual sophistication.

Stop Madrid (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 521 88 87; Calle de Hortaleza 11) The name may be incongruous, but this terrific old *taberna* is friendly, invariably packed with people and wins the vote of at least one Lonely Planet author for the best sangria in Madrid.

El Jardín Secreto (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 541 80 23; Calle de Conde Duque 2; ☒ 5.30pm-12.30am Mon-Thu & Sun, 6.30pm-2.30am Fri & Sat) One of our favourite places to drink in Madrid, 'The Secret Garden' has a hip café-style ambience in a barrio that is one of Madrid's best-kept secrets. It's at its best on a summer's evening but the atmosphere never misses a beat – candlelit, cosy and intimate, with a real buzz among the young professional crowd.

Café-Restaurante El Espejo (Map p120; ☎ 91 308 23 47; Paseo de los Recoletos 31; ☒ 8am-midnight) Once a haunt of writers and intellectuals, you could be a little overwhelmed by all the mirrors, chandeliers and discreet charm of another era. What changes all that is that the outdoor tables are some of Madrid's most popular drinking *terrazas* on a warm summer's evening.

ENTERTAINMENT

To find out the current showings at Madrid's theatres, cinemas and concert halls, your best bet is the *Guía del Ocio* (www.guiadelocio.com), a Spanish-only weekly magazine available for €1 from news kiosks. Also helpful is the comprehensive *La Netro* (http://madrid.laetro.com), with info in Spanish. The town hall's website (www.munimadrid.com) has practical details for the city's theatres and stages.

Also keep an eye out for the monthly *Salir Urban* (www.salirsalir.com). It's in Spanish, costs €1.80 and covers both Madrid and Barcelona. The monthly English expat publication *In Madrid* (www.in-madrid.com) is given out free at some hotels, original-version cinemas, Irish pubs and English bookshops and has lots of information about what to see and do in town.

The local press is always a good bet, with daily listings of films, concerts, football matches, bullfights and special events. On Friday pick up *El Mundo's* supplement magazine *Metropoli* for additional information on the week's offerings.

You can buy cinema, theatre, opera or concert tickets (*entradas*) at box offices or at ticket vendors including the following:

Caixa Catalunya's Tel-Entrada (☎ 902 101 212; www.telentrada.com)

El Corte Inglés (☎ 91 379 80 00, 902 400 222; www.elcorteingles.es; throughout city; ☒ 10am-10pm Mon-Sat)

FNAC (☎ 91 595 62 00; www.fnac.es in Spanish) Click on the 'Todos Los Espectáculos' section of the website.

Localidades Galicia (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 531 27 32, 91 531 91 31; www.eol.es/lgalicia/; Plaza del Carmen 1; ☒ 9.30am-1pm & 4.30-7pm Tue-Sat)

Clubs

There's no barrio in Madrid without a decent club or disco, but the most popular dance spots are between Gran Vía and Plaza Mayor. For intimate dancing or quirky décor, head to Chueca or Malasaña. Don't expect dance clubs or *discotecas* to really get going until at least 1am, and some won't even bat an eyelash until 3am when the bars elsewhere have closed.

Club prices vary wildly, depending on the time you enter, the way you're dressed and the number of people inside. The cover charge is €8 to €12, though megaclubs and swanky places charge a few euros more. Discounts are possible if you keep your eyes open for the stamped tickets lying in bars about town.

DRINKING UNDER THE STARS – THE PICK OF THE TERRAZAS

From April to October, when the evening temperatures in Madrid are balmy and rain is rare, summer *terrazas* (terraces, or tables set up outdoors) spill out onto the streets all over town. Joining the chattering, carousing crowds is one of Madrid's great pleasures and some of the best places to start are along **Paseo de la Castellana** and **Paseo de los Recoletos** (Map p120), where tables run up and down the sidewalks. Even more pleasant are the *terrazas* that set up in Argüelles, especially those on **Paseo del Pintor Rosales** (Map pp114-15), or, further south, the *terrazas* of **Las Vistillas** (Map pp114-15), just across Calle de Bailén, with their fine views out towards Sierra de Guadarrama.

Madrid's squares also make perfect locations for outdoor drinking. Most of the bars on Madrid's **Plaza de Santa Ana** (Map pp122-3) operate *terrazas*, while elegant **Plaza Mayor** (Map pp122-3) is as busy as the nearby **Plaza de la Paja** (Map pp122-3) is quiet and inviting. **Plaza de Oriente** (Map pp122-3) is also supremely civilised. Further afield, **Plaza de Chueca** (Map pp118-19) comes into its hedonistic own after dark, while **Plaza de Olavide** (Map pp118-19) in Chamberí, is one of Madrid's best-kept secrets.

LOS AUSTRIAS, SOL & CENTRO

Cool (Map pp118-19; ☎ 902 499 994; Calle de Isabel la Católica 6) Cool by name and cool by nature. One of the hottest clubs in the city, its curvy white lines, discreet lounge chairs in dark corners and pulsating dance floor is peopled by gorgeous people, gorgeous clothes and has a predictably strict entry policy. The sexy, well-heeled crowd includes a lot of sleek-looking gay men and model-like women.

Palacio Gaviria (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 526 60 69; Calle del Arenal 9) An elegant palace converted into one of the most popular dance clubs in Madrid, this is the kind of place where the crowd can be pretty young and boisterous and the queues are long. Thursday is international student and house music night – international relations have never been so much fun.

Teatro Joy Eslava (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 366 37 33; www.joy-eslava.com in Spanish; Calle del Arenal 11) The only things guaranteed at this grand old Madrid dance club (housed in a 19th-century theatre) are a crowd and the fact that it will be open. (The club claims to have opened every single day for the past 25 years.) The music and the crowd are a mixed bag, but queues are long and invariably include locals and tourists and even the occasional *famoso* (celebrity).

El Son (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 532 32 83; Calle de la Victoria 6) If you're after salsa, merengue or some sexy tangos, look no further than El Son. This is the top place in town for Latin music, and it's very popular with Madrid's South and Central American population. Live Cuban music from Monday to Thursday keeps the place packed all week long.

LA LATINA & LAVAPIÉS

La Lupe (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 527 50 19; Calle de la Torrecilla del Leal 12) *Madrileños* in-the-know have been coming to this fun and funky dance spot for years, and there's no sign of its popularity abating. It's mostly the latest dance tunes with cosy and impromptu dance floors so packed that you'll struggle to make your way to the bar. Other places stay open later, but La Lupe will really get your night off on the right foot.

HUERTAS & ATOCHA

Kapital (Map p125; ☎ 91 420 29 06; Calle de Atocha 125; 7-11 Thu-Sun) This massive seven-storey nightclub is one of Madrid's biggies with something for everyone, from cocktail bars and dance music to karaoke, salsa and hip-hop. The crowd is sexy, well-heeled and up for a good time. On

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

EI Juglar (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 528 43 81; Calle de Lavapiés 37) One of the hottest spots in Lavapiés at the moment, this great bar caters for a largely bohemian crowd with down-tempo jazz and soul beats, with some fiery nods to flamenco at 10pm every Sunday and on the first Wednesday of every month. It's busy all night, but the after-midnight Latin tunes are funky and get everyone dancing. There are more frenetic Madrid nightspots, but none more agreeable.

Sunday, 'Sundance' (otherwise known as 'Kapital Love') is definitely for those who have no intention of appearing at work or university on Monday. The afternoon sessions are for a younger crowd, while nights belong more to the Real Madrid set.

Ducados Café (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 360 00 89; Plaza de Canalejas 3) If there's a constant here, it's the promise that the music, whatever the style, will get you groovin'. DJs roll through hip-hop, house, funk and soul but always find a way to keep the crowd happy and the dance-floor filled. The upstairs bar is open all day for tapas or snacks, though at night it becomes a chilled bar. Since there's no cover charge, this is a great place to start the night.

Room at Stella (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 531 63 78; Calle de Arlabán 7; 7-11 Thu-Sat) DJ Ángel García is one of Madrid's best, so don't even think about arriving after 3am – there simply won't be room and those inside have no intention of leaving until dawn. The great visuals will leave you cross-eyed if you weren't already in this vibrant, heady place.

MALASAÑA & CHUECA

There's more information about Chueca's nightclubs in the boxed text on p143.

Café La Palma (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 522 50 31; Calle de la Palma 62) It's amazing how much variety Café La Palma has packed into its labyrinth of rooms. Live shows, featuring hot local bands, are held at the back, while DJs mix up the front. Some rooms have a café style, while others look like an Arab tea room, pillows on the floor and all. Every night is a little different, so expect to be surprised.

El Junco Jazz Club (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 319 20 81; www.eljunco.com in Spanish; Plaza de Santa Bárbara 10)

Night owls who are tired of the house music that pervades so many Madrid clubs will love the nightly live jazz concerts, followed by DJs spinning funk, nu jazz and innovative groove beats. The emphasis is on black music and the crowd is classy and casual.

Penta Bar (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 447 84 60; www.elpenta.com in Spanish; Calle de la Palma 4) A night out here and you could be forgiven for believing that *la movida* never died down. It's an informal place where you can groove to the '80s music you love to hate, but don't even think of turning up before midnight, especially from Thursday to Saturday, when the house DJ keeps the tunes hopping.

Stromboli Café (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 319 46 28; Calle de Hortaleza 96) One of Chueca's best café-clubs, Stromboli manages to stay hip and happening with its lounge, nu jazz and deep house beats from some of the best local DJs who love the cosy, lounge feel almost as much as the punters do. Truly one of *the* places to be seen in Chueca.

Cinemas

Cine Doré (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 369 11 25; Calle de Santa Isabel 3) The National Film Library offers fantastic classic and vanguard films at this cinema.

LA MOVIDA MADRILEÑA

Anyone who went wild when they first moved out of their parents' house can identify with Madrid's *movida*. After the long, dark years of dictatorship and conservative Catholicism, Spaniards, especially *madrileños*, emerged onto the streets with all the zeal of an ex-convent schoolgirl. Nothing was taboo as young *madrileños* discovered the 60s, 70s and early 80s all at once. Drinking, drugs and sex suddenly were OK. All-night partying was the norm, cannabis was virtually legalised and the city howled.

What was remarkable about *la movida* is that it was presided over by Enrique Tierno Galván, an ageing former university professor who had been a leading opposition figure under Franco and was affectionately known throughout Spain as 'the old teacher'. A Socialist, he became mayor in 1979 and, for many, launched *la movida* by telling a public gathering '*A colocarse y ponerse al loro*', which loosely translates as 'get stoned and do what's cool'. Not surprisingly, he was Madrid's most popular mayor ever and when he died in 1986, a million *madrileños* turned out for his funeral.

But *la movida* was not just about rediscovering the Spanish art of *salir de copas* (going out to drink). It was also accompanied by an explosion of creativity among the country's musicians, designers and film-makers.

The most famous of these was film director Pedro Almodóvar. Still one of Europe's most creative directors, his riotously colourful films captured the spirit of *la movida*, featuring larger-than-life characters who pushed the limits of sex and drugs. When he wasn't making films, Almodóvar immersed himself in the spirit of *la movida*, doing drag acts in smoky bars. Among the other names from *la movida* that still resonate, the designer Agatha Ruiz de la Prada (p163) stands out. Start playing anything by Alaska, Los Rebeldes, Radio Futura or Nacha Pop and watch *madrileños* eyes glaze over with nostalgia.

La Enana Marrón (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 308 14 97; Travesía de San Mateo 8) There's no beating this great arty, alternative theatre, showing documentaries, animated films, international flicks and oldies.

Princesa (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 541 41 00; Calle Princesa 3) Screens all kinds of original version films, from Hollywood blockbusters to arty flicks.

Renoir (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 541 41 00; Calle de Martín de los Heros 12) Plenty of latest-release films, as well as some interesting documentaries and Asian flicks.

Yelmo Cineplex Ideal (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 369 25 18, 902 220 922; Calle del Doctor Cortezo 6) Close to Plaza Mayor and offers a wide selection of films.

Theatre & Dance

Madrid's theatre scene is a year-round affair, but it really gets going in autumn. Most shows are in Spanish, but those who don't speak the language may still enjoy musicals or *zarzuela*, Spain's own singing and dancing version of musical theatre. Tickets for all shows start at around €10 and run up to around €50.

Compañía Nacional de Danza (☎ 91 354 50 53; http://cndanza.mcu.es/) Under director Nacho Duato, this dynamic company performs worldwide and has won accolades for its innovation, marvellous technicality and style. The company, made up mostly of international dancers,

performs original, contemporary pieces and is considered a leading player on the international dance scene.

Ballet Nacional de España (☎ 91 517 46 86; <http://balletnacional.mcu.es/>) A classical company that's known for its unique mix of ballet and traditional Spanish styles, such as flamenco and zarzuela.

Teatro Albéniz (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 531 83 11; Calle de la Paz 11) Staging both commercial and vanguard drama, this is one of Madrid's better-known theatres.

Centro Cultural de la Villa (Map p120; ☎ 91 575 60 80; Plaza de Colón) Located under the waterfall at Plaza de Colón, this cultural centre stages everything from classical music concerts to comic theatre, opera and quality flamenco performances.

Teatro Español (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 360 14 80; Calle del Príncipe 25) This theatre has been here since the 16th century and is still one of the best places to catch mainstream Spanish drama.

Live Music

FLAMENCO

Flamenco aficionados from Andalucía may look down their noses at the Madrid flamenco scene, but it was here that this most Spanish of art forms gained a broader following and the city has long been a platform for some of flamenco's top dancers, guitarists and singers. The most accessible flamenco shows are in *tablaos*, small theatres that usually double as restaurants and are geared toward tourists. Although they're pricey (around €25, plus meal prices), you'll see all three elements of the art (dancing, singing and guitar) and you'll probably be sitting close enough to the stage to see the sweat dripping off the dancers.

Casa Patas (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 369 04 96; www.casapatas.com; Calle de Cañizares 10; admission about €30; 11 noon-5pm & 8pm-3am, shows 10.30pm Mon-Thu, 9pm &

LA ZARZUELA

What began in the late 17th century as a way to amuse King Felipe IV and his court has become one of Spain's most unique theatre styles. With a light-hearted combination of music and dance, and a focus on everyday people's problems, *zarzuelas* quickly became popular in Madrid, which remains the genre's undoubted capital. Although you'll likely have trouble following the storyline (*zarzuelas* are notoriously full of local references and jokes), seeing a *zarzuela* gives an entertaining look into local culture. One of the best places to catch a show is at the Teatro de la Zarzuela (below).

midnight Fri & Sat) One of the top flamenco stages in Madrid, this restaurant and *tablao* is a good place for an introduction to the art. Although it's geared toward tourists, locals stop by for a soul-filling session of passionate music and dance. Classes are also held here.

Las Tablas (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 542 05 20; Plaza de España 9; admission €6-20; 11 daily show at 10.30pm) Las Tablas has quickly earned a reputation for quality flamenco. Most nights you'll see a classic flamenco show, with plenty of throaty singing and soul-baring dancing.

CLASSICAL MUSIC & OPERA

Auditorio Nacional de Música (Map p113; ☎ 91 337 01 00; www.auditorionacional.mcu.es; Calle del Príncipe de Vergara 146) Resounding to the sounds of classical music, this modern venue offers a varied calendar of classical music, often by Madrid's Orquesta Sinfonía (www.osm.es) led by conductors from all over the world.

Teatro de la Zarzuela (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 524 54 00; www.teatrodela zarzuela.mcu.es; Calle de Jovellanos 4) This 1856 theatre is the premier place to see *zarzuela*, a very Spanish mix of theatre, music and dance.

Teatro Real (Map pp122-3; ☎ 902 244 848; www.teatro-real.com in Spanish; Plaza de Oriente) The Teatro Real is as technologically advanced as any venue in Europe and is the city's grandest stage for elaborate operas and ballets. You'll pay as little as €15 for a spot so far away you will need a telescope, although the sound quality is consistent throughout. For the best seats, don't expect change from €100.

JAZZ

Madrid has a handful of world-class jazz venues.

Café Central (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 369 41 43; www.cafeCentro&Huertas.com in Spanish; Plaza del Ángel 10; admission €8-12) This Art Deco bar is a great spot for an early evening drink and, if you're clever, you'll stay until 10pm when Café Central morphs into one of Madrid's best jazz venues. Performances include everything from Latin jazz to fusion, tango and classic jazz at the nightly shows.

Café Populart (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 429 84 07; www.populart.es in Spanish; Calle de las Huertas 22; admission free) One of Madrid's classic but informal jazz clubs, this place offers a low-key atmosphere and top-quality music. The shows start at 11pm, but if you want a seat get here early. There's no cover charge, and drinks cost €7 and up.

ROCK

Performances usually start around 10pm or 11pm, though many of the venues open earlier for drinks. Information about the night's concert offerings can be found in publications such as *Guía del Ocio* (p157).

Sala Caracol (Map pp114-15; ☎ 91 527 35 94; www.salacaracol.com; Calle Bernardino de Obregón 18) A temple to variety, this popular club does a different style of group every night, with shows ranging from hip-hop to rock or jazzy flamenco.

Galileo Galilei (Map p112; ☎ 91 534 75 57; www.salagalileogalilei.com; Calle Galileo 100) A Madrid classic, this club in northern Madrid has been known to stage everything from comedy acts to magic shows, though its strength remains up-and-coming bands.

La Riviera (Map pp114-15; ☎ 91 365 24 15; Paseo Bajo de la Virgen del Puerto) A dance club and concert venue

all in one, this sprawling Art Deco monolith down by the Manzanares hosts some of the biggest names in rock and electronica.

Honky Tonk (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 445 68 86; Calle de Covarrubias 24) Despite the name, this is a great place to see local rock'n'roll, though many acts have a little country or some blues thrown in the mix too. It's a fun vibe in a smallish club, so arrive early as the place fills up fast.

La Boca del Lobo (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 523 13 91; Calle de Echegaray 11) Known for offering mostly rock and alternative concerts, 'The Wolf's Mouth' has broadened its horizons recently, adding country and jazz to the line-up. Concerts are held two to three times a week.

Sport

BULLFIGHTING

From the Fiesta de San Isidro (p143) in mid-May until the end of October, Spain's top bullfighters come to swing their capes at Plaza de Toros Monumental de las Ventas (Map pp114-15; ☎ 91 356 22 00; www.las-ventas.com in Spanish; Calle de Alcalá 237), one of the largest rings in the bullfighting world. Las Ventas has a grand Mudejar exterior and a suitably coliseum-like arena surrounding the broad sandy ring. During the six weeks of the fiesta's main bullfighting season, there are *corridos* (bullfights) almost every day. If *toreros* make a name for themselves here, they enter the annals of bullfighting legend as this is the most demanding and prestigious bullfighting arena in the world.

Tickets are divided into *sol* and *sombra* (sun and shade) seating, the former being considerably cheaper than the latter. The cheapest tickets (€3.80) are for standing-room *sol*, though on a broiling hot summer day it's infinitely more enjoyable to pay the extra €3 for *sombra*

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Cardamomo (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 369 07 57; www.cardamomo.net in Spanish; Calle de Echegaray 15; admission free; 11 9pm-4am; live shows 10.30pm Wed) If you believe that flamenco is best enjoyed in a dark, smoky bar where the crowd is predominantly local and where you can clap, shout '¡olé!' and even sing along (the crowd is so thick no-one will mind), Cardamomo is brilliant.

A CULT CLUB FROM A CULT MOVIE

Film director Fernando Trueba, one of the names in Spanish cinema, gained a cult following among jazz aficionados after making the 2000 documentary movie *Calle 54*, a passionate and inspiring chronicle of Latin jazz. The Grammy-nominated film was shown in major film festivals all over the world, was dubbed the *Buena Vista Social Club* of Latin jazz and is still a name of legend for jazz aficionados.

But Trueba wasn't content with simply recording the genre he loves; he went one step further and created **Calle 54** (Map p113; ☎ 902 141 412, 91 561 28 32; Paseo de la Habana 3; 11 7pm-late) in Madrid, a club where the Latin jazz spirit of the movie lives on. It has been a huge success, thanks in part to the support of the legendary artists featured in the film, and has put Madrid firmly on the international Latin jazz circuit. Greats like Bebo Valdés, Chano Domínguez and Roy Hargrove have all taken the stage here, playing for appreciative audiences that often include Trueba's film pals, like Pedro Almodóvar and Penelope Cruz. Live shows start around 11pm.

tickets. The very best seats – in the front row in the shade – are the preserve of celebrities and cost more than €100.

Ticket sales begin a couple of days before the fight at Las Ventas ticket office (H 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm). A few ticket agencies sell before then, tacking on an extra 20% for their trouble; one of the best is **Localidades Galicia** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 531 27 32, 91 531 91 31; www.eol.es/lgalicia/; Plaza del Carmen 1; H 9.30am-1pm & 4.30-7pm Tue-Sat). You can also get tickets at the authorised sales office (La Central Bullfight & Football Ticket Office; Map pp122-3) on Calle de la Victoria. For most bullfights, you'll have no problem getting a ticket at the door, but book ahead during the Fiesta de San Isidro.

For information on who's in the ring, pay attention to the colourful posters tacked around town and check the daily newspapers.

FOOTBALL

El Estadio Santiago Bernabéu is a temple to football and one of the world's great sporting arenas; watching a game here is akin to a pilgrimage for sports fans. Real Madrid has more big-name stars (if not recent trophies) than any team in the world, and when they click it's as close as you'll come to footballing perfection. When they do so with 80,000 passionate *madrileños* in attendance, you'll get chills down your spine. If you're fortunate enough to be in town when Real Madrid win a major trophy, head to Plaza de la Cibeles (p134) and wait for the all-night party to begin.

The **Estadio Santiago Bernabéu** (Map p113; ☎ 91 398 43 00; www.realmadrid.com; Avenida de Concha Espina 1), named after the club's long-time president, is a mecca for *madridistas* (Real Madrid football fans) worldwide. Those who can't come to a game in the legendary stadium can at least stop by for a **tour** (entry at Gate 40; adult/child €9/7; H tours 10.30am-6.30pm except day after game) which takes in the formidable **Exposición de Trofeos**, dressing rooms and players' bench, or to buy Real Madrid memorabilia in the club shop.

Unless you book your ticket (from €30 to €100) through a ticket agency – one of the best is **Localidades Galicia** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 531 27 32, 91 531 91 31; www.eol.es/lgalicia/; Plaza del Carmen 1; H 9.30am-1pm & 4.30-7pm Tue-Sat) – your best bet is to try the ticket counter at Gate 42 on Avenida de Concha Espina (Map p113) early in the week before a scheduled game. The all-important number for booking tickets (which you later pick up at Gate 42) is ☎ 902 324 324 (within Spain only).

The city's other big club, Atlético de Madrid, may have long existed in the shadow of its more illustrious city rival, but it has been one of the most successful teams in Spanish football history in its own right.

Estadio Vicente Calderón (Map pp114-15; ☎ 91 366 47 07; www.at-madrid.com; Paseo de la Virgen del Puerto), the home of first-division team Atlético de Madrid, isn't as large as Real Madrid's (Vicente Calderón seats a mere 60,000), but what it lacks in size it makes up for in raw energy.

To see an Atlético de Madrid game, try calling ☎ 91 366 47 07, but you're more than likely to get a ticket if you turn up at the ground a few days before.

SHOPPING

Madrid's a fantastic place to shop and *madrileños* are some of the finest exponents of the art.

Salamanca is the home of upmarket fashions with lavish and chic boutiques showcasing the best that Spanish and international designers have to offer. They all come with a luxury price tag attached, but prices are reasonable when you consider the quality and originality of what's on offer.

Chueca and, to a lesser extent, Malasaña are Salamanca's alter ego, home to fashion that's as funky as it is offbeat and ideal for that studied underground look or alternative club wear that will fit right in with Madrid's hedonistic after-dark crowd.

Central Madrid – whether it's Sol, Huertas or La Latina – offers plenty of individual surprises, although there's little uniformity in what you'll find. That sense is multiplied a hundred-fold in **El Rastro** (p129) where *madrileños* converge in epic numbers on Sunday to pick through the junk in search of treasure.

The peak shopping season is during *las rebajas*, the annual winter and summer sales when prices are slashed on just about everything. The winter sales begin around January 7, just after Three Kings' Day, and last well into February. Summer sales begin in early July and last into August.

The *madrileños*' shopping day starts at about 10am and is often broken up by a long lunch from 2pm to 5pm. Shops reopen after lunch and stay busy until 8pm or later. Shops selling music and books are the only outlets allowed to open every Sunday, although all shops may (and most usually do) open on the first Sunday of every month and throughout December.

TOP FOUR MADRID SHOPPING STREETS

For...

- Glamour: Calles de Serrano & de José Ortega y Gasset (Map p120)
- Quirky and alternative cool: Calle de Fuencarral (Map pp118-19)
- Discounted designer shoes: Calle de Augusto Figueroa (Map pp118-19)
- Exclusive accessories: Calle de Piamonte (Map pp118-19)

Books

For a list of bookshops in Madrid, see p110.

Fashion & Shoes

Mercado de Fuencarral (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 521 41 52; Calle de Fuencarral 45) Madrid's home of alternative club-cool is still going strong. This place revels in its reverse snobbery, and it's funky, grungy and filled to the rafters with torn T-shirts and more black leather and silver studs than you'll ever need.

Camper (Map p120; ☎ 91 578 25 60; www.camper.es; Calle de Serrano 24) Spanish fashion is not all *haute couture*, and this world-famous cool and quirky shoe brand from Mallorca has shops all over Madrid. The designs are bowling-shoe chic with colourful, fun styles that are all about comfort.

Sara Navarro (Map p120; ☎ 91 576 23 24; www.saranavarro.com; Calle de Jorge Juan 22) Spanish women love their shoes and, perhaps above all, they love Sara Navarro. This designer seems to understand that you'll buy expensive shoes like these only rarely, so why not make each into a perfect work of art. The shop is a temple to good taste, with fine bags, belts and other accessories as well.

Divina Providencia (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 522 02 65; Calle de Fuencarral 45) Divina Providencia has moved seamlessly from the fresh new face on the Madrid fashion scene to almost mainstream stylish, with fun clothes for women and strong retro and Asian influences. The label is such a hit that its clothes are regularly spotted on the characters of major Spanish TV series.

Amaya Arzuaga (Map p120; ☎ 91 426 28 15; Calle de Lagasca 50) Amaya Arzuaga is one of Spain's top fashion designers, with sexy and bold options. She loves mixing black with bright colours (one season it is 1980s fuchsia and turquoise, the following it is orange or red) and has earned a reputation as one of the most creative contemporary designers in Spain.

Agatha Ruiz de la Prada (Map p120; ☎ 91 319 05 01; Calle de Serrano 27) This boutique has to be seen to be believed with pinks, yellows and oranges everywhere you turn. It's fun and exuberant, but it's not just for kids. It's also serious and highly original fashion; Agatha Ruiz de la Prada is one of the enduring icons of Madrid's 1980s outpouring of creativity known as *la movida madrileña*.

Armand Basi (Map p120; ☎ 91 577 79 93; Calle de Claudio Coello 52) With pink, urban designs for men and women, this is the place to go when you want to look fashionable but carelessly casual; the clothing here is ideal for a night out in the city's bars, especially Chueca.

Food & Drink

Convento del Corpus Cristi (Las Carboneras; Map pp122-3; Plaza del Conde de Miranda 3) If you're after heavenly cookies and sweets, there's no substitute for the nuns of the Convento del Corpus Cristi, a closed order, and their rich and moist pastries made with almonds and egg yolks. To the right of the convent's main entrance is a small door with a call button. Ring the nuns, and you'll be let into a small, dark room with a rotating countertop (so that they never see their customers).

Cacao Sampaka (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 521 56 55; Calle de Orellana 4) If you thought chocolate was about fruit 'n' nut, think again. This gourmet chocolate shop is a chocoholic's dream come true. It sells more combinations to go with humble cocoa than you ever imagined possible. The attached café serves breakfasts and great coffee, light lunches and cakes.

Patrimonio Comunal Olivero (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 308 05 05; Calle de Mejía Lequerica 1) Spain is the world's largest producer of olive oils and some of the best in the country are to be found here. Those from Andalucía have the best reputation, but for a wide sampling why not try the box of 10 minibottles for just €8.

Mantequería Bravo (Map p120; ☎ 91 576 76 41; Calle de Ayala 24) Behind the attractive old façade lies a

connoisseur's paradise, filled as it is with local cheeses, sausages and wines. The produce is great for a gift, but everything is so good that you won't want to share.

Bombonería Santa (Map p120; ☎ 91 576 86 46; Calle de Serrano 56) If your sense of style is as refined as your palate, the exquisite chocolates in this tiny shop are guaranteed to satisfy. The packaging is every bit as pretty as the bonbons that fill them, but they don't come cheap – a large box will cost at least €120!

María Cabello (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 429 60 88; Calle de Echegaray 19) You just don't find wine stores like this any more – family-run, with friendly and knowledgeable staff, and still decorated in the original 1913 style with wooden shelves and even a ceiling fresco. There are fine wines in abundance (mostly Spanish with a few foreign bottles), with some 500 labels on show or tucked away out the back.

Handicrafts

Antigua Casa Talavera (Map pp118-19; ☎ 91 547 34 17; Calle de Isabel la Católica 2) The extraordinary tiled façade of this wonderful old shop conceals an Aladdin's Cave of ceramics from all over Spain. This is not the mass-produced stuff aimed at the tourist market, but comes from the small family potters of Andalucía and Toledo, ranging from the decorative (tiles) to the useful (plates, jugs and other kitchen items).

El Arco Artesanía (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 365 26 80; www.elarcoartesaniam.com; Plaza Mayor 9) This super-stylish shop in the southwestern corner of Plaza Mayor sells an outstanding array of home-made designer souvenirs, from stone and glasswork to jewellery and home fittings. The papier-mâché figures are gorgeous, but there's so much here to turn your head.

José Ramírez (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 531 42 29; Calle de la Paz 8) José Ramírez is one of Spain's best guitar makers and his guitars have been strummed by a host of flamenco greats and international musicians (even the Beatles). In the back of this small shop is a little museum with guitars dating back to 1830.

El Flamenco Vive (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 547 39 17; www.elflamencovive.es; Calle del Conde de Lemos 7) This temple to flamenco has it all, from guitars and songbooks to CDs, polka-dotted dancing costumes, shoes, colourful plastic jewellery and literature about flamenco. The knowledgeable staff can also point you in the direction of Madrid's best flamenco *tablaos* as well.

Gil (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 521 25 49; Carrera de San Jerónimo 2) You don't see them much these days, but the exquisite fringed and embroidered *mantones* and *mantoncillos* (traditional Spanish shawls worn by women on grand occasions) and delicate *mantillas* (Spanish veils) make a stunning and uniquely Spanish gift. Inside this 1880s-era shop, the sales clerks still wait behind a long counter to attend to you, like from another age.

Casa de Diego (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 522 66 43; www.casadediego.com; Plaza de la Puerta del Sol 12) This classic shop has been around since 1858, selling and repairing Spanish fans, shawls, umbrellas and canes. Service is old style and the staff occasionally grumpy, but the fans are works of antique art.

México (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 429 94 76; Calle de las Huertas 20) A treasure chest of original old maps, this is a great place to find a unique souvenir of Spain. Some 160 folders hold antique, original maps of Madrid, Spain and the rest of the world. These are all originals or antique copies, not modern reprints, so prices range from a few hundred euros to thousands.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Madrid's **Barajas airport** (Map p167; Aeropuerto de Barajas; ☎ 91 305 8343; flight information 902 353 570; www.aena.es) lies 15km northeast of the city. Although in 2005 it saw 25 million passengers pass through its doors, the February 2006 inauguration of the new and super-stylish terminal 4 (T4) dramatically expanded the airport's capacity to 70 million.

The new T4 deals mainly with flights of Iberia and its partners (eg British Airways, American Airlines and Aer Lingus), while other intercontinental or non-Schengen European flights leave from T1 (eg Air France, Alitalia, Austrian Airlines, British Midlands, Continental Airlines, EasyJet, German Wings, KLM, Lufthansa, Scandinavian SAS, Swiss and US Airways). Both Spanair and Air Europa operate from both T1 and T2, depending on the destination.

Inside the airport you'll find several banks with ATMs, post offices, tourist information and a hotel booking stand, and there are general information offices throughout the terminals. The airport is well connected to the centre, with regular buses and taxis, and a metro line that takes you there in minutes (see opposite).

The major airlines operating at Barajas:

Aer Lingus (☎ 902 502 737; www.aerlingus.com)

Air Berlin (☎ 902 320 737; www.airberlin.com)

Air Europa (☎ 902 401501; www.aireuropa.com)

Air France (☎ 902 207 090; www.airfrance.com)

Alitalia (☎ 902 100 323; www.alitalia.it)

American Airlines (☎ 902 115 570; www.aa.com)

Austrian Airlines (☎ 902 257 000; www.aaa.com)

British Airways (☎ 902 999 262; www.britishairways.com)

British Midlands (☎ 902 111333; www.flybmi.com/bmi)

Continental Airlines (☎ 900 961 266; www.continental.com)

EasyJet (www.easyjet.com)

German Wings (☎ 91 625 9704; www.germanwings.com)

Iberia (☎ 902 400 500; www.iberia.es)

KLM (☎ 902 010 321; www.klm.com)

Lufthansa (☎ 902 220 101; www.lufthansa.com)

Spanair (☎ 902 131 415; www.spanair.com)

Swiss (☎ 901 116 712 in Spain; www.swiss.com)

TAP Air Portugal (☎ 901 116 718 in Spain; www.flytap.com)

Transavia (☎ 902 114 478; www.transavia.com)

Virgin Express (☎ 902 888459; www.virgin-express.com)

Vueling (www.vueling.com)

Bus

Estación Sur de Autobuses (☎ 91 468 42 00; www.estaciondeautobuses.com; Calle de Méndez Álvaro 83), just south of the M30 ring road, is Madrid's main bus station (the nearest metro station is Méndez Álvaro). Most bus companies have a ticket office here, even if their buses depart from elsewhere.

Major bus companies include **ALSA** (Map p113; ☎ 902 422 242; www.alsa.es), **AutoRes** (Map pp114-15; ☎ 902 020 999; www.auto-res.net), and **Continental-Auto** (Map p113; ☎ 902 330 400; www.continental-auto.es).

Car & Motorcycle

If you arrive by car, be prepared to face gridlock traffic. The city is surrounded by three ring roads, the M30, M40 and brand-new M50 (still not 100% completed). You'll probably be herded onto one of these, which in turn give access to the city centre.

RENTAL

The big-name car-rental agencies have offices all over Madrid. Avis, Budget, Hertz, Europcar and Atesa/EuroDollar have booths at the airport. See the Transport chapter (p870) for more information.

Train

Madrid is served by two main train stations. The bigger of the two is Antigua Estación de Atocha (Atocha Train Station; Map p112), at the southern end of the city centre. Chamartín train station (Map p113) lies in the north of the city.

The bulk of trains for the rest of Spain depart from Atocha, especially those going south. International services arrive at and leave from Chamartín, as do several services for northern destinations. Be sure to find out which station your train leaves from.

For bookings, contact **Renfe** (☎ 902 240 202; www.renfe.es) at either train station.

GETTING AROUND

Madrid is well served by an excellent and rapidly expanding underground rail system (metro) and an extensive bus service. In addition, you can get from the north to the south of the city quickly by using *cercanías* (local trains) between Chamartín and Atocha train stations. Taxis are also a viable option.

To/From the Airport

The easiest way into town from T1, T2 or T3 is line 8 of the metro (www.metromadrid.es; entrance in T2) to the Nuevos Ministerios transport interchange, which connects with other metro lines and the local overground *cercanías* train service. The metro operates from 6.05am to 2am; a single-trip ticket costs €1.

Alternatively, take **bus 200** (☎ 902 507 850; €1) to/from the Intercambiador de Avenida de América (transport interchange on Avenida de América; Map p113). The first departure from the city and the airport is at 5.20am. The last scheduled service from the airport is 11.30pm; buses leave every 12 to 15 minutes.

Until the metro line is extended to T4 in 2007, bus 204 runs from platform 17 of the Avenida de América transport interchange. Alternatively, take metro line 8 from Nuevos Ministerios to the final station (Barajas station), from where bus 201 runs to T4.

A **taxi** to the centre will cost you around €18 to €20, depending on traffic and where you're going. There are cab ranks outside all four terminals.

Bus

Buses operated by **Empresa Municipal de Transportes de Madrid** (EMT; ☎ 902 507 850; www.emtma.drid.es) travel along most city routes regularly

between about 6.30am and 11.30pm. Night bus routes (*búhos*) operate from midnight to 6am. They run from Puerta del Sol and Plaza de la Cibeles.

Car & Motorcycle

At first, driving in Madrid can be a little hair-raising. The grand roundabouts of the major thoroughfares sometimes require nerves of steel as people turn left from the right-hand lanes or right from the centre. The morning and evening rush hours frequently involve snarling traffic jams which are even possible in the wee hours of the morning, especially towards the end of the week when the whole city seems to be either behind the wheel or in a bar. The streets are dead between about 2pm and 4pm, when people are either eating or snoozing.

PARKING

Most of Madrid is now divided up into clearly marked blue or green street parking zones. In both areas, parking metres apply from 9am to 8pm Monday to Friday and from 9am to 3pm on Saturday; the Saturday hours also apply for every day in August. In the green areas, you can park for a maximum of one hour (or keep putting money in the metre every hour) for €1.80. In the blue zones, you can park for two hours for €2.55. There are also private parking stations all over central Madrid.

Should your car disappear, call the *Grúa Municipal* (city towing service; % 91 345 06 66). Getting it back costs €120, plus whatever fine you've been given.

Cercanías

The short-range *cercanías*, regional trains operated by Renfe, the national railways, go as far afield as El Escorial, Alcalá de Henares, Aranjuez and other points in the Comunidad de Madrid. In Madrid itself, they're handy for making a quick, north-south hop between Chamartín and Atocha mainline train stations (with stops at Nuevos Ministerios and in front of the Biblioteca Nacional on Paseo de los Recoletos only). Another line links Chamartín, Atocha and Príncipe Pío stations. Single tickets, valid on *cercanías* only, cost €1.15.

Metro

Madrid's modern metro (Map p917; % 902 444 403; www.metromadrid.es) is a fast, efficient and safe way to navigate Madrid, and generally easier

than getting to grips with bus routes. It has 11 colour-coded lines, in addition to the modern southern suburban MetroSur system, and operates from about 6am to 1.30am. Unless you're only passing through en route elsewhere, it's worth your while to buy a Metrobús ticket valid for 10 rides (bus and metro) for €6.15; single-trip tickets cost €1.

Taxi

Madrid's taxis are inexpensive by European standards. They're handy late at night, but during peak hours it's quicker to walk or get the metro. Flag fall is €1.75, after which you pay €0.82 per kilometre (€0.95 between 10pm and 6am). Several supplementary charges, usually posted up inside the taxi apply, such as €4.50 to/from the airport and €2.40 from cab ranks at train and bus stations.

Among the 24-hour taxi services are **Radio-Taxi** (% 91 405 55 00, 91 445 90 08) and **Tele-Taxi** (% 91 371 21 31, 902 501 130). **Radio-Teléfono Taxi** (% 91 547 82 00, 91 547 86 00) runs taxis for the disabled.

AROUND MADRID

The Comunidad de Madrid may be small but it promises many rewarding excursions that allow you to escape the clamour of city life without straying too far. Imposing San Lorenzo de El Escorial and graceful Aranjuez guard the western and southern gateways to Madrid and served as getaways for royalty down through the centuries. Also to the south, the beguiling village of Chinchón is a must-see, while Alcalá de Henares is a stunning university east of the capital. To the north, picturesque villages (and skiing opportunities) abound in Sierra de Guadarrama and Sierra del Pobre.

SAN LORENZO DE EL ESCORIAL

pop 15,364 / elevation 1032m
The imposing palace and monastery complex of San Lorenzo de El Escorial is an impressive place, rising up from the foothills of the mountains that shelter Madrid from the north and west. The one-time royal getaway is now a prim little town overflowing with quaint shops, restaurants and hotels, many of them closed in the low season, catering to throngs of weekend *madrileños*. The fresh, cool air here has been drawing city dwellers since the complex was first ordered to be built by Felipe II in the 16th century.

History

Kings and princes have a habit of promising extravagant offerings to God, the angels, saints and anyone else who'll listen, in return for help in defeating their foes. Felipe II was no exception before the Battle of St Quentin against the French on St Lawrence's Day, 10 August 1557.

Felipe's victory was decisive, and in thanks he ordered the construction of the complex in the saint's name above the hamlet of El Escorial. Several villages were razed to make way for the huge monastery, royal palace and mausoleum for Felipe's parents, Carlos I and Isabel. It all flourished under the watchful eye of the architect Juan de Herrera, who was a towering figure of the Spanish Renaissance.

The austere style reflects both Herrera's stern approach to architecture and Felipe's own severe outlook.

The palace-monastery became an important intellectual centre, with a burgeoning library and art collection, and even a laboratory where scientists could dabble in alchemy. Felipe II died here on 13 September 1598. Various additions were made to the complex in the following centuries.

In 1854 the monks belonging to the Hieronymite order, who had occupied the monastery from the beginning, were obliged to leave during one of the 19th-century waves of confiscation of religious property by the Spanish state, only to be replaced 30 years later by Augustinians.



Orientation

You can't miss the monastic complex that marks the town's southern border. Running parallel to the monastery's main wall is Calle de la Floridablanca, close to which you'll find the tourist office as well as some shops and restaurants. North of here are the narrow streets of the town proper, with Calle del Rey serving as the main thoroughfare and Plaza de la Constitución providing another major landmark.

Information

Internet (☎ 918 90 15 33; Plaza de San Lorenzo, Galería Martin; €2 per hour; 11am-11pm)

Tourist office (☎ 918 90 53 13; Calle de Grimaldi 2; 11am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat & Sun)

Sights

The main entrance to the **Real Monasterio de San Lorenzo** (☎ 918 90 59 02; www.patrimonionacional.es in Spanish; admission €8, free Wed for EU citizens; 11am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Oct-Mar, closed Mon) is on its western façade. Above the gateway a statue of St Lawrence stands guard, holding a symbolic gridiron, the instrument of his martyrdom (he was roasted alive on one). From here you'll first enter the **Patio de los Reyes**, which houses the statues of the six kings of Judah.

Directly ahead lies the **sombre basilica**. As you enter, look up to the unusual flat vaulting below the choir stalls. Once inside the church proper, turn left to view Benvenuto Cellini's white Carrara marble statue of Christ crucified (1576).

Next you'll be led through several rooms containing tapestries and an El Greco, and then downstairs to the northeastern corner of the complex where you'll find the **Museo de Arquitectura** and the **Museo de Pintura**. The former tells the story (in Spanish) of how the complex was built, while the latter contains a range of Italian, Spanish and Flemish art from the 16th and 17th centuries.

At this point you are obliged to head upstairs into a gallery around the eastern extension of the complex known as the **Palacio de Felipe II** or **Palacio de los Austrias**. You'll then descend to the 17th-century **Panteón de los Reyes** (Crypt of Kings), where almost all Spain's monarchs since Carlos I lie interred with their spouses. Backtracking a little, you'll find yourself in the **Panteón de los Infantes** (Crypt of the Princes).

Stairs lead up from the **Patio de los Evangelistas** to the **Salas Capitulares** (chapterhouses)

in the southeastern corner of the monastery. These bright, airy rooms, the ceilings of which are richly frescoed, contain a minor treasure chest of works by El Greco, Titian, Tintoretto, José de Ribera and Hieronymus Bosch (El Bosco to Spaniards).

You can wander around the **Huerta de los Frailes**, the orderly gardens just south of the monastery. In the **Jardín del Príncipe**, which leads down to the town of El Escorial (and the train station), is the **Casita del Príncipe**, a little neoclassical caprice built under Carlos III for his heir. The **Casita de Arriba** (Casa del Infant; ☎ 918 90 59 03; admission €3.40; 11am-6pm daily Jul-Sep, Sat & Sun only Oct-May), another 18th-century neoclassical gem, is along the road to Ávila.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Parrilla Príncipe (☎ 918 90 16 11; www.parillaprincipe.com; Calle de la Floridablanca 6; s €42-44, d €53-59) Rooms here are bare and could do with a style overhaul, but they're clean and some have views of the monastery. The hotel's restaurant – where great grilled meats abound – is one of the best in town. It's open Wednesday to Monday and meals cost around €30.

La Cueva (☎ 918 90 15 16; www.mesonlacueva.com in Spanish; Calle de San Antón 4; mains €10-18; 11am-10pm Tue-Sun) A dimly lit place founded in 1768, this is one of the town's classic eateries. Nibble at the cosy bar downstairs or head up to the more formal dining room, where hearty Castilian dishes await.

Getting There & Away

Every 15 minutes (every 30 minutes on week-ends) **Herranz** (Map pp114-15; ☎ 918 90 90 28) sends a bus to El Escorial from the bus depot outside Moncloa metro station, platform 3. The one-hour trip costs €3.15.

San Lorenzo de El Escorial is 59km northwest of Madrid and it takes 40 minutes to drive there. Take the A6 Hwy to the M600 Hwy, then follow the signs to town.

A few dozen **Renfe** (☎ 902 240 202; www.renfe.es) C8 *cercanías* make the one-hour trip daily from Madrid to El Escorial (€2.25).

VALLE DE LOS CAÍDOS

If you want to understand the fault line that still to some extent runs through the heart of Spanish society, you really must visit Valle de los Caídos, dictator Francisco Franco's memorial of the 'fallen' in Spain's civil war. An extraordinary basilica and stone monument

northwest of Madrid, this place still evokes emotional responses from supporters of both sides of the war. The scale is impressive, although its special poignance derives from the fact that it was constructed by Franco's prisoners of war, many of whom died in the process. Unless you're fascinated by the small reactionary remnant of Franco supporters, avoid visiting on 20 November – the anniversary of Franco's death – when die-hard supporters come here to reminisce about Franco's rule, complete with stiff-armed fascist salutes.

At the **memorial site** (☎ 918 90 13 98; Carretera 600; admission €6; 11am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Mar) you'll find a mammoth stone cross sitting atop a bunkerlike basilica dug into the mountainside in the middle of a pristine pine forest. Walking into the basilica, you basically enter into the heart of the mountain. By the altar lies Franco.

The turn-off and ticket booth is 9km north of El Escorial. It's another 6km drive to the shrine. Near the basilica are walking trails, a picnic area and a small restaurant. You can take a **funicular** (admission €2.50; 11am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, 11am-4.30pm Nov-Mar) up the mountain to the base of the cross, where, if the wind doesn't blow you away, you can enjoy great views of the surrounding sierra.

Getting There & Away

One Herranz (☎ 918 90 90 28) bus heads to the monument at 3.15pm Tuesday to Sunday. It returns at 5.30pm. You can catch the bus at El Escorial's Plaza de la Virgen de Gracia. The combined price of the bus and entry ticket to the site is €8.50.

If you're driving, you'll pass the entry to the Valle de los Caídos a few kilometres before you hit El Escorial coming from the A6 Hwy.

SOUTH OF MADRID Warner Brothers Movie World

Disney World it ain't but this **movie theme park** (☎ 91 821 12 34; www.warnerbros.com; San Martín de la Vega; adult/child & senior €33/25; 11am-8pm, closing hours vary), 25km southeast of central Madrid, has much to catch the attention. Kids will love the chance to hang out with Tom and Jerry, while the young-at-heart film buffs among you will be similarly taken with the Wild West or remakes of the studio sets for such Beverly Hills greats as *Police Academy*. Entrance to the park is via Hollywood Blvd, not unlike

LA's Sunset Blvd, whereafter you can choose between Cartoon World, the Old West, Hollywood Blvd, Super Heroes (featuring Superman, Batman and the finks of Gotham City) and finally Warner Brothers Movie World Studios. It's all about the stars of the silver screen coming to life as life-sized cartoon characters roam the grounds, and rides and high-speed roller coasters (up to 90km/h) distract you if attention starts to wane. There are also restaurants and shops. Opening times are complex and change – always check before heading out here.

To get here by car, take the A4 (the Carretera de Andalucía) south out of Madrid and turn off at Km22 for San Martín de la Vega, about 15km east of the exit. Follow the signs to the car park, where parking is available for €5.

You can also catch one of the C3 *cercanías* that leave Atocha train station regularly headed towards Pinto. In Pinto change trains and get on the C3A line that goes to Parque de Ocio.

Aranjuez

pop 43,926 / elevation 489m

Aranjuez was founded as a royal pleasure retreat, away from the riff-raff of Madrid, and it remains a place to escape the rigours of city life. The palace is opulent, but the fresh air and ample gardens are what really stand out.

Getting around here is easy; when you come into town, you cross Río Tajo and immediately enter into a large traffic circle. The *palacio* and its gardens are to your right, while the rest of town spreads out to your left and in front of you. The bus station is right off the central thoroughway on Calle Infantas.

INFORMATION

The helpful and friendly staff at the **Tourist Office** (☎ 918 91 04 27; www.aranjuez.net in Spanish; Plaza de San Antonio 9; 10am-6.30pm Nov-Apr, 10am-8.30pm May-Oct) will load you down with information about the town and its attractions.

SIGHTS

The **Palacio Real** (☎ 918 91 07 40; admission €4.50, EU citizens Wed free, gardens free; 11am-5.30pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar, 11am-7.30pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep) started as one of Felipe II's modest summer palaces, but took on a life of its own as a succession of royals, inspired by the palace at Versailles in France, lavished money upon it in the 18th century.

With more than 300 rooms, this sprawling box of a palace is filled with a cornucopia of ornamentation. Of all the rulers who spent time here, Carlos III and Isabel II left the greatest mark.

Taking the obligatory guided tour (in Spanish) gives an insight into the palace history and the art that fills it. The *Sala de Porcelana* (Porcelain Room) is extravagant, its walls covered in handcrafted porcelain figures with echoes of a similar chamber in Madrid's Palacio Real (p127). It took two years to complete the decoration. The *Sala Fumadora* (Smoking Room) is almost as extraordinary – a florid imitation of an Alhambra interior, with Arabic inscriptions in stucco and an intricate stalactite ceiling carved in wood.

Afterwards, stroll in the lush gardens (admission free; 9am–6.30pm daily Oct–Mar, 8am–8.30pm daily Apr–Sep). They're a mix of local and exotic species that have rubbed along nicely since Spanish botanists and explorers started bringing back seeds from all over the world in the 19th century (an audio guide is available). Within their shady perimeter, which stretches a few kilometres from the palace base, you'll find two manmade attractions: the *Casa de Marinos*, which contains the *Museo de Falúas* (9am–5.15pm Oct–Mar, 10am–6.15pm Apr–Sep, reservation required), a museum of royal pleasure boats from days gone by.

Further away, towards Chinchón, is the *Casa del Labrador* (9am–5.15pm Oct–Mar, 10am–6.15pm Apr–Sep, reservation required), a tasteless royal jewellery box crammed to the rafters with gold, silver, silk and some second-rate art. It sits in the Jardín del Príncipe, an extension of the massive Palacio Real gardens.

Several walks begin on the historic paths that run through the Jardín del Príncipe or other palace gardens before branching off into forests or fields. One of the most popular leads past the Mar de Ontígola, a swampy area with unusual vegetation, and along the banks of Río Tajo, where you can spot a variety of birds and other animals.

Offering a fun tour around town and a very practical way to get to the Jardín del Príncipe, the *Chiquitren* (9am–5.30pm Oct–Feb, 10am–8pm Tue–Sun Mar–Sep) is a tourist train that loops around Aranjuez. It makes stops at the Casa del Labrador and the Casa de Marinos.

Regardless of your views on bullfighting, the museum (9am–5.30pm Tue–Sun Apr–Sep, 11am–5.30pm Tue–Sun Oct–Mar) housed in Plaza de Toros makes for an interesting stop. You'll find displays on the history of bullfighting, the natural attractions of Aranjuez and the entertainments to which the royal court once treated itself.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hostal Castilla (9am–9.26.27; www.hostalesaranjuez.com; Carretera Andalucía 98; s/d €37/48) A short walk from the *palacio* and the town centre, this friendly, charming *hostal* offers impeccable little rooms with attached bathrooms.

NH Príncipe de la Paz hotel (9am–9.92.22; www.nh-hoteles.com; Calle de San Antonio 22; d €89–121) Sleek, modern design and attentive service make this the best hotel in town.

El Rana Verde (9am–15.71; Plaza Santiago Rusiñol; meals €25–35; 1 breakfast, lunch & dinner) The 'Green Frog' is a classic riverside restaurant whose speciality is frogs' legs; it's near the *palacio*.

Casa José (9am–14.88; Calle de Abastos 32; meals €25–35; 1 lunch & dinner Tue–Sat, lunch only Sun) An elegant spot, Casa José is packed with *madrileños* on weekends who revere it as among the best in town for meats and local dishes.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

If you're driving from Madrid, take the A4 south to the M305, which leads to the city centre. Aranjuez is about 50km away.

The bus company *AISA* (9am–19.87.88; www.aisa-grupo.com in Spanish) has buses to Aranjuez from Madrid's Estación Sur every 15 minutes (€3.15, 30 minutes).

The easiest way to get here is by train. *Renfe* (9am–24.02.02; www.renfe.es) C3 *cercanías* trains leave every 15 or 20 minutes from Atocha train station. The trip to Aranjuez costs €2.17.

Chinchón

pop 4868

Chinchón is just 45km from Madrid but worlds apart. Although it has grown beyond its village confines, visiting its antique heart is like stepping back into another era and into a charming, ramshackle world. Chinchón's main attractions are its plaza (whose *terrazas*, or terraces, make for a heavenly spot for a drink) and the smorgasbord of traditional *mesón*-style (tavern-style) restaurants scattered around town.

THE STRAWBERRY TRAIN

You could take a normal train from Madrid to Aranjuez, but for summer romance it's hard to beat the *Tren de la Fresa* (Strawberry Train; 9am–24.20.202, 902.228.822; adult/child return €24/16). Begun in 1985 to commemorate the Madrid–Aranjuez route – Madrid's first and Spain's third rail line which was inaugurated in the 1850s – the Strawberry Train is a throwback to the time when Spanish royalty would escape the summer heat and head for the royal palace at Aranjuez.

The journey begins at 10.05am on Saturday and Sunday between early April and late June when an antique Mikado 141F-2413 steam engine pulls out from Madrid's Atocha train station, pulling behind it four passenger carriages which date from the early 20th century and have old-style front and back balconies. During the 50-minute journey, rail staff in period dress provide samples of local strawberries – one of the original train's purposes was to allow royalty to sample the summer strawberry crop from the Aranjuez orchards. Upon arrival in Aranjuez, your ticket fare includes a guided tour of the Palacio Real, Museo de Falúas and other Aranjuez sights, not to mention more strawberry sampling. The train leaves Aranjuez for Atocha at 6pm for the return journey.

Tickets can be purchased at any *Renfe* (9am–24.02.02; www.renfe.es) office or any travel agency that sells train tickets.

INFORMATION

Police (9am–6.29.16.70.70; Plaza Mayor)

Tourist office (9am–9.93.53.23; www.ciudad-chinchon.com; Plaza Mayor 6; 1 10am–8pm Mon–Fri, 11.30am–8pm Sat & Sun May–Jun & Sep–Oct, to 9pm Jul–Aug, to 7pm Nov–Feb) Small office but very helpful.

SIGHTS

The heart of town is its unique, almost circular *Plaza Mayor*, which is lined with sagging, tiered balconies – it wins our vote as one of the most evocative *plazas mayor* in Spain. In summer the plaza is converted into a bullring, and it's also the stage for a popular passion play shown at Easter.

Chinchón's historical monuments won't detain you long, but you should take a quick look at the 16th-century *Iglesia de la Asunción* that rises above Plaza Mayor and the late-16th-century Renaissance *Castillo de los Condes* that is out of town to the south. The castle was abandoned in the 1700s and was last used as a liquor factory. Both are usually closed to the public, but the local tourist office has recently begun a program allowing sporadic visits. Ask at the tourist office for details.

To get an idea of the traditional lifestyle in the area, head to the *Museo Etnológico La Posada* (9am–9.91.94.02.07; Calle Morata 5; adult/child €3/2; 1 11am–2pm & 4–8pm Mon–Fri, closed Wed, 11am–8pm Sat & Sun), a well-run museum exhibiting old farm equipment, household items and traditional garb.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The *Fiesta Mayor* is held from 12 to 18 August, when the town's main plaza is turned into a bullring that dominates the centre, and morning bullfights are held daily. Cheer from the surrounding balconies over breakfast and coffee.

SLEEPING

Hostal Chinchón (9am–9.91.893.53.98; www.hostalchinchon.com; Calle de José Antonio 12; s/d/tr €35/42/54; 1 1) The public areas here are nicer than the smallest rooms that are clean but worn around the edges. The highlight is the surprise rooftop pool overlooking Plaza Mayor.

Parador Nacional (9am–9.91.94.08.36; www.parador.es; Avenida Generalísimo 1; r from €113) The former Convento de Agustinos (Augustine Convent), Parador Nacional is one of the town's most important historical buildings and can't be beaten for luxury. It's worth stopping by for a meal or coffee (and a peek around) even if you don't plan to stay here.

EATING

Chinchón is loaded with traditional-style restaurants dishing up *cordero asado* (roast lamb). But if you are after something a little lighter, there is nothing better than savouring a few tapas and drinks on sunny Plaza Mayor.

Mesón Cuevas de la Comendadora (9am–9.91.94.09.47; Calle Teniente Ortiz de Zárate; meals €25–30, menu €12; 1 lunch & dinner Thu–Tue) For something substantial,

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Café de la Iberia (☎ 91 894 08 47; Plaza Mayor 17; meals €30; 🍴 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Our favourite of the *mesons* on Plaza Mayor's perimeter, Café de la Iberia produces wonderful, hearty cooking from its wood-fired ovens and a series of intimate dining areas – either take a seat in the verdant internal patio or snaffle one of the few balcony tables overlooking the Plaza Mayor. If you're coming here on a weekend or holiday, don't even think of arriving without a reservation.

head to this homely place. Its basement is a maze of old cellars dug into the earth. They're worth seeing even if you decide not to eat here.

Mesón Cuevas del Vino (☎ 918 94 02 06; www.cuevasdelvino.com; Calle Benito Hortelano 13; meals €30-35; 🍴 lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) The atmospheric Meson 'Caves of Wine' is guaranteed to be an experience you'll write postcards about. From the huge goatskins (used to keep wine) and the barrels covered in famous signatures to the caves underground, it's sure to be memorable.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

La Veloz (Map pp114-15; ☎ 91 409 76 02) bus company has services (bus 337) approximately every hour to Chinchón. The buses leave from a stop on Plaza Conde de Casal, and the 50-minute ride costs €3.20.

Sitting 45km southeast of Madrid, Chinchón is easy to reach by car. Take the A4 Hwy and exit onto the M404, which makes its way to Chinchón.

ALCALÁ DE HENARES

pop 197,804

So close to Madrid and just off an unappealing highway, Alcalá de Henares is full of surprises. It's like a smaller Salamanca with historical sandstone buildings seemingly at every turn. Throw in some sunny squares and the legendary university, and it's a terrific place to escape the city.

Information

Tourist office (☎ 918 81 06 34; Plaza de los Santos Niños; 🍴 10am-2pm & 5-7.30pm Jun-mid-Sep, 10am-2pm & 4-6.30pm mid-Sep-May)

Sights

The city entered an era of prosperity when Cardinal Cisneros founded a university (☎ 918 83 43 84; 🍴 9am-9pm) here in 1486. Now centred on a much-restored Renaissance building, the university was one of the country's principal seats of learning for a long period. You can wander around various faculty buildings, dating mostly from the 17th century, but more interesting is the **guided tour** (six per day Monday to Friday, 11 per day Saturday and Sunday), which gives a peek into the Mudéjar chapel and the magnificent Parainfo auditorium, where the king and queen of Spain give out the prestigious Premio Cervantes literary award every year.

The town is also dear to Spaniards as the birthplace of the country's literary figurehead, Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. The site believed to be Cervantes' birthplace is recreated in the Museo Casa Natal de Miguel de Cervantes (☎ 918 89 96 54; entrance on Calle de la Imagen 2; admission free; 🍴 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-1.30pm & 4-6.30pm Tue-Sun Oct-May), which lies along the beautiful, colonnaded Calle Mayor. It's filled with period furniture and bits and pieces relating to his life.

Sleeping & Eating

Husa El Bedel (☎ 918 89 37 00; www.husa.es; Plaza San Diego 6; s/d €90/105) A sophisticated hotel that offers spacious accommodation and a perfect location.

El Ruedo (☎ 918 80 69 19; Calle de los Libreros 38; 🍴 9am-11pm Thu-Tue) With a quiet patio for outdoor eating, this is a great place to get informal fare such as salads and mixed plates.

Hostería del Estudiante (☎ 918 88 03 30; Calle de los Colegios 3; menú €27; 🍴 lunch & dinner daily) Run by the national *parador* hotels, this elegant *hostería* is considered the best restaurant in town. With its wooden beams, open fireplace and adjacent courtyard, it's an atmospheric place to eat. In fact, one Lonely Planet author liked it so much he got married here! It's very near the main university building and a nearby building is being converted into a *parador* hotel.

Getting There & Away

Alcalá de Henares is just 35km east of Madrid, heading towards Zaragoza.

Several buses leave Madrid regularly (every five to 15 minutes) from depots at the Avenida de América and Estación Sur (€1.45, one hour).

A constant stream of C1, C2 and C7 Renfe *cercanías* make the trip to Alcalá de Henares (€1.15, 50 minutes) daily.

SIERRA DE GUADARRAMA

To the north of Madrid lies Sierra de Guadarrama, a popular winter ski destination and the home of several charming towns such as Manzanares El Real and Cercedilla, which make great bases for those wanting to explore the mountains.

Manzanares El Real

pop 6140 / elevation 908m

This is a sweet little mountain town, but what makes it stand out from others like it is the 15th-century storybook **Castillo de los Mendoza** (☎ 918 53 00 08; admission incl guided tour €2; 🍴 10am-2pm & 3-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar). The perfectly (almost too perfectly) preserved castle looks like something out of a Disney cartoon with its evenly spaced turrets and strong round towers. There are great views of the sierra from the summit.

Near town, several trails lead into the Parque de la Pedriza, one of which brings you to freshwater pools. Rock climbers have a wealth of options, with 1500 climbing routes in the park. For advice check out the Centro de Educación Ambiental de Manzanares el Real (Environmental Education Centre of Manzanares el Real; ☎ 91 853 99 78; Camino de la Pedriza, Manzanares el Real; 🍴 9am-6pm).

Bus 724 runs regularly to Manzanares from Plaza de Castilla in Madrid (€2.55, 40 minutes).

Cercedilla

pop 6698 / elevation 1188m

This mountain town and its surroundings are popular with walkers and mountain bikers. Several trails are marked out through the hills, the main one known as the *Cuerda Larga* or *Cuerda Castellana*. This is a forest track that takes in 55 peaks between the Puerto de Somosierra in the north and Puerto de la Cruz Verde in the southwest. It would take days to complete, but there are several options for shorter walks, including day excursions up the Valle de la Fuenfria and a climb up Monte de Siete Picos.

Mountain bikers can take their bikes up on the local train to Puerto de los Cotos (a lovely ride in itself), scoot across to the Bola del Mundo (in good winters the top end of

Guadarrama's best ski piste) and pedal downhill to Cercedilla.

You can get information at the Centro de Información Valle de la Fuenfria (☎ 918 52 22 13; Carretera de las Dehesas Km2; 🍴 10am-6pm), which is a couple of kilometres from Cercedilla train station. Accommodation is scarce in this area.

From Madrid's Chamartín train station, the C2 *cercanías* line goes to Cercedilla (€1.28, 80 minutes, 15 daily), or take bus 684 from platform 15 of Madrid's Intercambiador de Autobuses de Moncloa (€3, one hour).

Skiing

If you're here in winter, you may want to head up to the modest ski resorts in the Guadarrama. The slopes aren't anything to write home about, but, hey, it's only 60km from Madrid! Snowless years are common and the available pistes are not extensive, but it's a popular business at the weekend, when the area is best avoided.

The main centre is **Navacerrada** (☎ 918 52 22 02; www.puertonavacerrada.com in Spanish; lift tickets €18-28), with 13km of mostly easy – and frustratingly short – runs. The **Valdesqui Ski Resort** (☎ 915 70 12 24; Puerto de los Cotos; lift tickets €25-34) is another option.

From Madrid's Chamartín train station, you can get to Puerto de Navacerrada on the C8B *cercanías* line (€1.51, two hours with train change in Cercedilla, four daily). Bus 691 from platform 14 of Madrid's Intercambiador de Autobuses de Moncloa also runs here regularly (€2.65, one hour).

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel La Barranca (☎ 918 56 00 00; fax 918 56 05 40; Valle del Pinar de la Barranca, Navacerrada; s with breakfast €75, d with breakfast €100; Ⓢ) Tucked into a picturesque valley, the large La Barranca offers all the comforts, including pool and tennis courts. Its restaurant (mains €9 to €16) also comes recommended as one of the best in the area for excellent Castilian fare, such as roast suckling pig or pigs' trotters.

Parador Nacional (☎ 920 34 80 48; www.parador.es; Carretera Barraco-Béjar Km42; d €110-120) Spain's very first *parador*, this elegant stone hotel overlooks the sierra. The refined restaurant (menú €27) serves tasty local dishes.

Sala de Guadarrama (☎ 918 54 21 21; Carretera de los Molinos Km2, Guadarrama; mains €15-27; 🍴 lunch & dinner daily, closed 20 Sep-20 Oct) A solid bet, known for its

pricey but delicious and (given the location) surprising seafood dishes. This is a popular place, so you'll need to reserve far in advance if you plan to come on a weekend.

NORTH OF MADRID

Palacio Real de El Pardo

Built in the 15th century and remodelled in the 17th, this opulent **palacio** (☎ 913 76 15 00; www.patrimonionacional.es in Spanish; Calle de Manuel Alonso; admission €5; ⌚ 10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-1.30pm Sun Oct-May, 10.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-1.30pm Sun Jun-Sep) was Franco's favourite residence. It's surrounded by lush gardens, and on Sunday fills with *madrileño* families looking for a bit of fresh air and a hearty lunch. Of the art on display inside, the tapestries stand out, particularly those based on cartoons by Goya.

If you're driving from Madrid take the M40 Hwy to the C601, which leads to El Pardo. The 13km trip takes just 15 minutes. You can also take bus 601, which leaves every five to 10 minutes from the Intercambiador de Autobuses de Moncloa (Map pp114-15; €1.15, 25 minutes).

El Molar

pop 5133 / elevation 850m

El Molar itself is a nondescript village 33km north of Madrid along the A1 Hwy to Burgos, but to the south is a small rise peppered with *cuevas* (cellars) old and new. *Madrileños* crowd into them to gorge on grilled meat in the relative cool during the summer months, although they're open year-round.

To find them, follow the yellow signs from the town centre to the *Bodegón de Olivares*. There you will find this *cueva* and all the others huddled together. Plenty of buses zip up from Madrid's Plaza de Castilla (€2.35, 45 minutes).

Buitrago & Sierra Pobre

Buitrago is the entryway into the Sierra Pobre, a quiet stretch of mountain east of the busier Sierra de Guadarrama. Popular with hikers and others looking for nature without quite so many creature comforts, the sleepy Sierra Pobre has yet to develop the tourism industry of its neighbours. And that's just why we like it.

In Buitrago you can stroll along part of the old city walls. You can also take a peek into the 15th-century Mudéjar and Romanesque *Iglesia de Santa María del Castillo* and the small **Picasso Museum** (☎ 918 68 00 56; Plaza Picasso; admission free; ⌚ 11am-1.30pm & 4-6pm Wed-Mon), which contains a few works that the artist gave to his barber, Eugenio Arias.

Tiny hamlets are scattered throughout the rest of the sierra; some, like *Puebla de la Sierra* and *El Atazar*, make for pretty walks from Buitrago and serve as starting points for winding hill trails.

SLEEPING & EATING

Posada de los Vientos (☎ 918 69 91 95; Calle Encerradero 2, La Acebeda; r from €60; ⌚ Sat, Sun & holidays winter only) Housed in a tastefully converted barn, this is a charming small family inn where the rooms have exposed stonework and wooden beams. The owners are a friendly lot as well which adds up to a great Madrid getaway.

El Arco (☎ 918 68 09 11; Calle Arco 6; mains €12-15; ⌚ lunch only Fri-Sun mid-Sep-mid-Jun) The best restaurant in Buitrago, El Arco is known for its fresh, creative cuisine based on local ingredients and traditional Spanish dishes.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The **Continental Auto Company** (☎ 91 745 63 00; www.continental-auto.es) has a dozen daily buses connecting Madrid's Plaza de la Castilla with Buitrago (€4.35, 1½ hours).

Castilla y León



Castilla y León is Spain without the stereotypes. While the package tourists head for the beach, discerning travellers looking for a window on the Spanish soul make for Castilla y León.

Some of Spain's most beautiful cities are here, rising up from the lonely plains of the country's central plateau with dazzling architecture that provides the backdrop to night-time carousing of the highest order. Salamanca is a glorious temple to Plateresque and Renaissance sandstone, but it does anything but live in the past thanks to its vibrant student population who take the nights by storm. Segovia is similarly alive, its buzzing streets watched over by an astonishing Roman aqueduct and a fairy-tale castle that seems to belong (and once did) in Disneyland. Elsewhere, the cathedrals of León and Burgos are among Europe's most impressive, while the multiturreted walls of Ávila are everything you dreamed they would be.

But the story of Castilla y León is just as accurately told through the quiet back roads, isolated villages and captivating castles that appear in the most unlikely places and which the tourist hordes have yet to discover. From the scenic Sierra de Francia in the southwest to Covarrubias, Calatañazor and Medinaceli in the east, this is the hidden Spain that most foreign travellers never dreamed still existed.

Food is another central element of the Castilian charm. Here, cured meats have been perfected to an art form and roasted *cordero* (lamb) or *cochinillo* (suckling pig) provide central Spain's hearty riposte to the dominance of paella.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Spend as long as you can in **Salamanca** (p183), a lively university town that is one of Castilla's most beautiful
- Dream of Disneyland at the Alcázar and marvel at the ingenuity of the ancients at the Roman aqueduct in **Segovia** (p194)
- Savour the sepulchral light in León's **catedral** (cathedral; p214), a kaleidoscopic vision of glass and stone
- Lose yourself in the land time forgot amid the stone-and-timber villages of the **Sierra de Francia** (p192)
- Dine on *cordero asado* (roast lamb) like a Castilian in the pretty hilltop towns of **Lerma** (p229) or **Sepúlveda** (p230)
- Disappear into the quiet Castilian heartland to the enchanting village of **Calatañazor** (p236)



■ AREA: XX94,224 SQ KM

■ AVE SUMMER TEMP: HIGH 31°C,
LOW 14°C

■ POP: 2.51 MILLION



THE SOUTHWEST

Southwestern Castilla y León is one of the region's most engaging corners, home as it is to Salamanca and Ávila, the beautiful mountain scenery of the Sierra de Gredos and the timeworn villages of the Sierra de Francia.

ÁVILA

pop 52,610 / elevation 1130m

Your first glimpse of Ávila is one you'll never forget with mountains in the distance providing an evocative backdrop to the impregnable stone wall and the 88 watchtowers that seem to spring from a fairy tale. Within the walls lies an old town of rare beauty, home to an

extraordinary cathedral and 16th-century monuments that tell the story of Ávila's favourite daughter: Santa Teresa de Ávila. It all adds up to a wonderful day trip from Madrid, or even better, an overnight stay along one of its quiet medieval streets.

History

According to myth, one of Hercules' sons founded Ávila. The more prosaic truth, however, gives the honour to obscure Iberian tribes who were later Romanised and then, for their troubles, Christianised. For almost 300 years, Ávila changed hands regularly between Muslims and Christians, until the fall of Toledo to Alfonso VI in 1085, whereafter Ávila has worn its Christian identity proudly on its sleeve.

'Ávila of the Knights' went on to become an important commercial centre with a well-established noble class, although the 1492 edict expelling all Jews from Spain robbed the city of much of its lifeblood. Meanwhile, Fray Tomás de Torquemada, the infamous 15th-century leader of the Spanish Inquisition (see the boxed text, p202), ended his days in Ávila.

By the end of the 16th century, the city's heyday was over and it has only recently begun to shake off the deep slumber that ensued.

Orientation

The old centre fans out to the west from the *catedral* (cathedral) which abuts the eastern wall. The bus and train stations are a five- and 10-minute walk respectively northeast of the *catedral* in the nondescript new town. The best accommodation and eating options are all close to the *catedral*.

Information

EMERGENCY

Cruz Roja (% 920 22 22 22) For ambulances.

Policia Nacional (% 920 25 10 00, emergencies 091; Paseo San Roque 34)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Hospital Provincial (% 920 35 72 00; Calle de Jesús de Gran Poder 42)

MONEY

Banks that exchange money and have ATMs are everywhere in the eastern end of the old town and close to Plaza de Santa Teresa.

POST

Main post office (% 920 35 31 06; Plaza de la Catedral) Almost opposite the *catedral*.

TELEPHONE

Telephone office (Plaza de la Catedral; h 8am-8pm)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (% 920 21 13 87; www.avilaturismo.com; Plaza de la Catedral 4; h 9am-2pm & 5-8pm) Additional tourist information kiosks open outside Puerta de San Vicente and the train station from June to September.

Sights

CATEDRAL

Ávila's 12th-century *catedral* (% 920 21 16 41; admission €2.50; h 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-7pm Sat, noon-7.30pm Sun) is not just a house of worship, but also an ingenious fortress: its stout granite

apse forms the central bulwark in the heavily fortified eastern wall of the town. This is the earliest Gothic church in Spain, although the grey, sombre façade betrays some unhappy 18th-century meddling in the main portal.

The interior is a different story, with playful red-and-white limestone columns. To fully appreciate its splendour, you'll need to seek out the inner sanctum, cloisters, sacristy and small museum, which are superb. In the museum, highlights include a painting by El Greco and a splendid silver monstrance by Juan de Arfe. Within the church itself are Renaissance-era carved walnut choir stalls and a dazzling altar painting begun by Pedro de Berruguete, showing the life of Jesus in 24 scenes.

You can catch a partial peek of the interior for free, but to see the inner sanctum (and museum) you'll have to produce the €2.50.

BASÍLICA DE SAN VICENTE

Outside the great fortified gate of the same name, the subdued elegance of the Romanesque *basílica* (% 920 25 52 30; admission €1.20; h 10am-1.30pm & 4-6pm) makes it one of the most striking buildings in Ávila. A series of largely Gothic modifications in sober granite contrasts with the warm sandstone of the Romanesque original. Work started in the 11th century, supposedly on the site where three martyrs – San Vicente and his sisters – were slaughtered by the Romans in the early 4th century. Their canopied sepulchre is an outstanding piece of Romanesque work. The Jardín de San Vicente across the road was once a Roman cemetery.

EL MONASTERIO DE SANTO TOMÁS

Commissioned by the Reyes Católicos (Catholic Monarchs), Fernando and Isabel, and completed in 1492, this complex (% 920 22 04 00; admission €1; h 10am-1pm & 4-8pm) is an exquisite example of Isabelline architecture and is amazingly rich in historical resonance. Three interconnected cloisters lead up to the church that contains the alabaster tomb of Don Juan, the monarchs' only son. It's backed by an altarpiece by Pedro de Berruguete depicting scenes from the life of St Thomas Aquinas. The magnificent choir stalls, in Flemish Gothic style, are accessible from the upper level of the third cloister, the Claustro de los Reyes, so called because Fernando and Isabel often attended Mass here. It's thought that the inquisitor Torquemada is buried in the sacristy.



IN SANTA TERESA'S FOOTSTEPS

Santa Teresa – a Catholic mystic and reformer of the Carmelites in the 16th century – casts a long shadow over Ávila.

The **Convento de Santa Teresa** (☎ 920 21 10 30; admission free; h 9am-1.30pm & 3.30-7.30pm), built in 1636 over the saint's birthplace, is the epicentre of the cult surrounding Teresa. The room where she was born in 1515 is now a chapel smothered in gold and lorded over by a baroque altar by Gregorio Fernández and featuring a statue of the saint. An adjoining relics room (admission free; h 9.30am-1.30pm & 3.30-7pm) is crammed with Teresa relics, including her ring finger (complete with ring), which supposedly spent the Franco years by the Generalísimo's bedside. There's also a small museum (admission €1.80; h 10am-1.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm) dedicated to the saint, accessible from Calle Aizpuru. Both the convent and museum are open longer hours in the summer.

Nearby, the 16th-century **Iglesia de San Juan Bautista** (☎ 920 21 11 27) contains the baptismal font in which Teresa was baptised; it's only open during Mass. A five-minute walk east of the *catedral* is the unremarkable **Convento de San José** (☎ 920 22 21 27; admission free; h 10am-1.30pm & 3-6pm), the first convent Teresa founded in 1562; the saint herself is said to have helped build it.

North of the city walls, the unadorned **Monasterio de la Encarnación** (☎ 920 21 12 12; admission €1.20; h 9.30am-1.30pm & 3.30-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1.30pm & 4-6pm Sat & Sun) is where Santa Teresa fully took on the monastic life and lived for 27 years, launching her reform movement. A Renaissance complex modified in the 18th century, it contains further mementos of her life as well as a replica of her spartan cell.

CITY WALL

With its eight monumental gates and 88 towers, Ávila's *muralla* (city wall; adult/concession €3/1.20; h 10am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm Tue-Sat, 10.30am-2pm Sun) stretches for 2.5km and is one of the world's best-preserved medieval defensive perimeters. Raised to a height of 12m between the 11th and 12th centuries, on the remains of earlier efforts by the Muslims and Romans, the wall has been much restored and modified, with various Gothic and Renaissance touches and even some Roman stones re-used in the construction.

The most impressive gates, the **Puerta de San Vicente** and **Puerta del Alcázar**, are

flanked by towers more than 20m high and stand on either side of the *catedral's* apse.

Walking along the walls affords fabulous views out over the countryside and down into the town. Access is from **Puerta del Alcázar**, **Puerta de los Leales** and **Puerta del Carmén** and if you only want to walk one (albeit extensive) section of the wall, the price drops to €1.80.

CHURCHES & MANSIONS

The Romanesque **Iglesia de Santo Tomé El Viejo** (Plaza de Italia; admission €1.20, Sat & Sun free; h 10am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) dates from the 13th century, and it was from this pulpit that Santa Teresa was castigated most vehemently for her reforms of the Carmelite order. It has been impressively restored to house mostly Roman foundation stones and a splendid floor mosaic. It's an annexe of the **Museo Provincial** (☎ 920 21 10 03; adult €1.20, Sat & Sun free; h 10am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm Tue-Sat, 10.30am-2pm Sun) housed in the adjacent and austere granite 16th-century **Mansión de los Deanes**. Both can be entered on the same ticket.

The **Iglesia de San Pedro** (☎ 920 22 19 04; Plaza de Santa Teresa; h 10am-12.30pm) was built a little later and its light, sandstone exterior is a pleasant complement to the granite austerity that reigns inside the city walls. North of the old city, the 12th-century **Iglesia de San Andrés** is Ávila's oldest church and a pure example of the Romanesque. The interior is closed to the public.

The city also has its fair share of noble mansions. **Palacio Los Serrano** (☎ 920 21 22 23; Plaza de Italia; admission free; h 7.30-9.30pm Mon-Fri, noon-2pm & 7.30-9.30pm Sat & Sun) is a typically successful Spanish fusion of the old and the new and is used for contemporary art exhibitions.

LOS CUATRO POSTES

Just northwest of the city on the road to Salamanca, this spot not only affords fine views of Ávila's walls, but also marks the place where Santa Teresa and her brother were caught by their uncle as they tried to run away from home. They were hoping to achieve martyrdom at the hands of the Muslims.

Festivals & Events

Ávila's principal festival, **Fiesta de Santa Teresa** (15 October) honours the city's patron saint with 10 days of processions, concerts and fireworks.

Ávila is one of the best places in Castilla y León to watch the solemn processions of **Semana Santa** (Easter). It all begins on Holy Thursday and the most noteworthy event is the early morning (around 5am) Good Friday procession, which circles the outside of the city wall.

Sleeping

Hostal San Juan (☎ 920 25 14 75; hostalsanjuanavila@hotmail.com; Calle de los Comuneros de Castilla 3; s/d Nov-May from €24/38, Jun-Oct €30/48) Recently renovated and with warm tones throughout, the San Juan is pleasant, friendly and close to everything in Ávila.

Hostal El Rastro (☎ 920 21 12 18; fax 920 25 16 26; Plaza del Rastro 4; s/d from €26/32) With eight quaint rooms overlooking a quiet square, this is one of those Spanish surprises that provides character, location and an outrageously reasonable price tag.

Hostería Las Cancelas (☎ 920 21 22 49; www.las-cancelas.com; Calle de la Cruz Vieja 6; s/d €45/65) Another top choice, the rooms here are spacious and the half-timbered decoration and exposed brickwork are lovely touches that generate plenty of warmth. The rooms are also nice and large.

Hospedería La Sinagoga (☎ 920 35 23 21; www.lasinagoga.net; Calle de los Reyes Católicos 22; s/d €57/80) Centrally located and hidden away down a quiet cobblestone lane, this delightful hotel is carved from the shell of a 15th-century synagogue although the rooms are bright, spacious and modern.

Hotel Las Moradas (☎ 920 22 24 88; www.hotellas-moradas.com; Calle de Don Gerónimo 3; s/d/tr from €69/87/115) There are places around town with more character than Las Moradas, but the rooms are enormous, attractively renovated

and come with kitchenettes. Given the location in the heart of the old town and the helpful service, it's supremely good value.

Parador Raimundo de Borgoña (☎ 920 21 13 40; avila@paradores.es; Marques de Canales y Chozas 2; d €110-120) Occupying a 16th-century palace hard up against the wall in the north of the old town, Parador Raimundo de Borgoña has all of the essential elements of the *parador* chain: elegant public areas, helpful staff and stylish bedrooms.

Eating

RESTAURANTS & CAFÉS

Ávila is famous for its *chuleton avileño* (T-bone steak) and *judías del barco de Ávila* (white beans, often with chorizo, in a thick sauce).

Cafetería Hergós (☎ 920 21 33 70; Calle de Don Gerónimo 1; meals from €3.50) This pastry shop and café is the place to tuck into good-value *platos combinados* (combination plate; €6 to €8), burgers (€3.50) and *bocadillos* (bread rolls with filling, usually without butter; €2.50 to €4.25).

Posada de la Fruta (☎ 920 22 09 84; Plaza de Pedro Dávila 8; mains €8-15) This restaurant has a split personality. There's an informal café-bar in the light-filled courtyard where you'll encounter a fairly standard selection of *raciones* (large tapas servings) and a traditional *comedor* (dining room) that serves *menús* (set meals) and à la carte dishes. The latter is well-suited to those who've learned, like the Spanish, to eat their main meal at lunchtime.

Reyes Católicos (☎ 920 25 56 27; Calle de Reyes Católicos; mains €12-15, menú €18.60) If you are crying out for a break from the sombre ambience of wood-panelled Castilian *comedores* (dining rooms), this slick and super-modern alternative provides a welcome respite. The food blends the creative with Ávila staples, and the service is more stylish and young than bow-tied and grumpy.

Mesón del Rastro (☎ 920 21 12 18; Plaza del Rastro 4; lunch/dinner menú €13/14.50) This atmospheric midrange choice is rare in that it dishes up superb-value *menús* for both lunch and dinner. The dining room, with its dark-wood beams, exudes Castilian charm, and the *cochinillo* is particularly good.

El Almacén (☎ 920 25 44 55; Carretera de Salamanca 6; starters €6-12, mains €12-23) One of Ávila's premier restaurants, you'll pay top dollar here for excellent food (*chuleton avileño* is €16.50), wine and views of the city wall.

PASTELERÍAS

La Flor de Castilla (☎ 920 25 28 66; Calle de San Gerónimo) Ávila's local speciality is the *yema de Ávila*, an ultra-sweet, sticky business made of egg yolk and sugar, allegedly invented by Teresa herself. You'll see it all over town, but this is one of the best places to try it.

Drinking

Ávila nights aren't particularly lively, but there are a few spots worth seeking out. Otherwise, the streets around Plaza del Mercado Chico have bars and tapas.

Café del Adarve (Calle de San Segundo 40; h 3pm-late) This place has a hip, youthful vibe with occasional live music during winter.

El Bar (Calle de San Segundo; h 11am-3am) Almost next door to the Adarve, El Bar is an appealing place with its much-coveted outdoor seats.

La Bodeguita de San Segundo (Calle de San Segundo 19; h 11am-late) A gem of a wine and tapas bar: standing-room only, and the setting in the 16th-century Casa de la Misericordia is superb.

La Bodega de Paquita (Calle de San Segundo) Next door to La Bodeguita de San Segundo, Paquita's similarly good.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Buses leave from Ávila's bus station (☎ 920 22 01 54; Avenida de Madrid) for Madrid (€6.55, 1½ hours, eight departures daily Monday to Friday, four daily on weekends), Salamanca (€4.90, 1½ hours, four daily Monday to Saturday, twice on Sunday) and Segovia (€3.90, one hour, six times daily on weekdays, twice daily on weekends). Destinations in the Sierra de Gredos include Navarredonda de Gredos (€3.80, 1¼ hours, two to three times daily) and Arenas de San Pedro (€4.80, 1¼ hours, twice daily).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

To get to Madrid, head northeast on the N110 and at Villacastín turn onto the NV1 or the parallel A6 *autopista* (tollway). From Ávila, the N501 heads north to Salamanca, the N110 east will take you to Segovia and the N403 north to Valladolid. For the Sierra de Gredos, take the N502.

In Ávila, underground parking stations (€8 to €10.50, 12 hours) abound in the new part of town east of the city walls, but there are very few within the walls where streets are narrow.

TRAIN

From the train station (☎ 920 24 02 02; Paseo de la Estación), more than 30 trains run daily to Madrid (from €6.05, 1½ hours) and a handful to Salamanca (€7.75, 1½ hours).

Getting Around

Local bus 1 runs past the train station to Plaza de la Catedral.

SIERRA DE GREDOS

West of Madrid and south of Ávila, the plains of Castilla yield to the precipitous Sierra de Gredos. It's a secret world of lakes and granite mountains rising up to the Pico de Almanzor (2592m) and while the occasional castle or sanctuary may catch the eye, the overriding appeal is the scenery. The Sierra is also popular with walkers, mountain bikers and rock climbers and is at its best for these activities in spring (March to May) and autumn (September to November); summer (June to August) can be stifling, while in winter (December to February) the trails are covered in snow. The region overflows with Spanish tourists on weekends but sees very few foreign tourists, which is, of course, part of its charm.

Public transport to and throughout the Sierra is intermittent at best (and almost nonexistent on weekends), so renting a car is essential to getting the best from the region. Of the three main routes through the Sierra, the C502 travels north-south, paralleling an old Roman road (still visible in parts) through a steep valley. Cutting across the northern foothills, the C500 affords scenic views of the mountains while the C501 follows the southern flank of the mountain chain and passes through some outstanding scenery en route to Extremadura's La Vera Valle.

Arenas de San Pedro & Around

Arenas de San Pedro (pop 6656, elevation 620m) is a convenient gateway to the southern Sierra and while it does have its pretty corners, it's more the sort of place you'd use as a base than visit for its own sake. It's a popular summer escape for people from the capital.

The tourist office (☎ 920 37 00 05; Plaza de la Nueva España 1; h 10am-1.30pm & 4-8pm) in Arenas has walking suggestions, as does the Ávila tourist office (☎ 920 21 13 87; www.avilaturismo.com; Plaza de la Catedral 4; h 9am-2pm & 5-8pm).

In the town centre, sights worth a quick look include the stout 15th-century Castillo

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hostal Arco San Vicente (☎ 920 22 24 98; www.arcosanvicente.com; Calle de López Núñez 6; s/d €40/60) For its combination of comfort, friendly owners and value for money, this place is outstanding. The rooms are spacious, well appointed and have strong hints of character. The rooms at the back are quieter and have a private terrace. Tucked away in a quiet corner of the old town but a stone's throw from everything, it's terrific value.

de la Triste Condesa, the sober 14th-century Gothic parish church and the Roman bridge. A 10-minute walk north of here is the neoclassical Palacio del Infante Don Luis de Borbón, a gilded cage for Carlos III's imprisoned brother.

Far more attractive than Arenas de San Pedro, but with access to walking trails, are Guisando, El Hornillo and El Arenal, a trio of villages at a distance of 5km, 6km and 9km from Arenas, respectively. All three are served by a bus (weekdays only).

One popular walking trail leads from El Arenal to Puerto de la Cabrilla. Gaining some 1000m over a distance of 4.5km, it's a strenuous five- to seven-hour workout.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hostal El Castillo (☎ 920 37 00 91; Carretera de Candeleda 2, Arenas de San Pedro; s/d €23/35) On the main road through Arenas is Hostal El Castillo, with pleasant, clean rooms with heating and TV.

Hosteria Los Galayos (☎ 920 37 13 79; www.losgalayos.com; Plaza de Condestable Dávalos 2, Arenas de San Pedro; s/d from €32/46) At this comfortable three-star place in the heart of Arenas de San Pedro, the tired décor distracts only momentarily from the fact that rooms are good and spacious and the location is a winner.

Hostal El Fuego de Gredos (☎ 920 37 40 18; Calle Linarejo 6, Guisando; s/d €45/60) This is the most attractive option in Guisando, offering pretty rooms with minibar, heating and satellite TV. It's even better known as a restaurant (meals €20) where hearty meat dishes emerge from the kitchen.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

At least four buses run daily from Arenas de San Pedro to Madrid (€10.60, twice daily except Sunday), and two buses per weekday do the trip to Ávila (€4.80, 1¼ hours).

Northern Flank of the Sierra de Gredos

If you find the crowds drawn to Arenas de San Pedro a little overwhelming, the range's less-frequented northern flank also has some spectacular views, fine walks and excellent hotels. Public transport is even less frequent here than further south.

Running west off the N502, near Puerta de Pico, the scenic C500 leads past Navarredonda de Gredos and on to Hoyos del Espino from where the small AV931, leads into the Sierras, ending after 12km at La Plataforma. This is the jumping-off point for one of the most

picturesque walks, leading to the Laguna Grande, a glassy mountain lake in the shadow of the Pico de Almanzor. The easy-to-moderate walk along a well-defined 8km trail takes about 2½ hours each way. Next to the lake is a *refugio* (mountain shelter), which is often full, and good camping. From here it's possible to climb to the top of the Almanzor (2592m; difficult) in about two hours or to continue for two hours west to the Circo de Cinco Lagunas (easy to moderate). From there you could either backtrack or descend via the Garganta del Pinar towards the town of Navalperral de Tormes, a rigorous endeavour that can take five hours. For maps and further information on these routes, visit the tourist office in Arenas de San Pedro (p181) or Ávila (p177), or visit one of the bookshops in Madrid (p84).

SLEEPING & EATING

Navarredonda de Gredos has the best choice of accommodation.

Albergue Juvenil (☎ 920 34 80 05; albnegredos@dvnet.es; Navarredonda de Gredos; dm under/over 26yr €7/10; 15 Mar-15 Dec; Ⓢ) This place offers spotless rooms, its own Olympic-sized swimming pool and breathtaking mountain views for those who are counting their euros.

Hostal Refugio de Gredos (☎ 920 34 80 47; www.refugiodegredos.com; Navarredonda de Gredos; s/d €45/55) Housed in a lovely old building with sturdy stone walls, this well-run place has good rooms with occasional hints of character and an excellent restaurant.

La Casa de Arriba (☎ 920 34 80 24; www.casadearriba.com; Calle de la Cruz 19, Navarredonda de Gredos; s/d €67/79) Brimful of rustic charm, La Casa de Arriba is a touch of class with wooden beams, wood floors, antique furnishings that are never overdone and thick stone walls. The restaurant is one of the best in the area.

Parador de Gredos (☎ 920 34 80 48; www.parador.es; Carretera Barraco-Béjar Km42, Navarredonda de Gredos; d €90-110) This beautifully colonnaded stone building is typical of the *parador* chain – supremely comfortable, awash with character and with excellent service. The views of the Sierra from here are unrivalled.

Hoyos del Espino is another reasonable base with dozens of *casas rurales* (rooms in private homes).

El Milano Real (☎ 920 34 91 08; www.elmilano real.com; Calle de Toledo s/n, Hoyos de Espina; d from €98) This is a gorgeous place to stay with stylish, spacious rooms hiding behind the old-world façade;

each room is different but the attic rooms have a stylish Japanese feel. Wonderful views, a delightfully peaceful setting and a fine restaurant (starters €9 to €12, mains €16 to €20) are other highlights.

SALAMANCA

pop 160,331

Salamanca is something special and is undoubtedly Castilla's liveliest, most beautiful city. Its secret is an irresistible combination of stunning uniform, old-world architectural elegance and a feel-good Spanish buzz that flows through the streets almost without respite. In few other places will you witness such virtuosity in Plateresque and Renaissance styles, with the exceptional Plaza Mayor the undoubted jewel in the city's considerable crown. Behind and beneath the sandstone façades, with their ochre hints of Latin inscriptions, you'll find an eclectic and vibrant collection of bars, cafés and restaurants invariably filled with Salamanca's enormous student population (Spanish and international) that provide Salamanca with so much life.

History

In 220 BC, Celtiberian Salamanca was besieged by Hannibal. Later, under Roman rule, it was an important staging post on the Via Lata (Ruta de la Plata, or Silver Route) from the mines in Asturias to the south. After the Muslim invasion of Spain, it changed hands repeatedly.

Possibly the greatest turning point in the city's history was the founding of the university (initially the Estudio General) in 1218. It became the equal of Oxford and Bologna, and by the end of the 15th century was the focal point of some of the richest artistic activity in the country. The city followed the rest of Castilla into decline in the 17th century, although

by the time Spanish literary hero Miguel de Unamuno became rector at the university in 1900, Salamanca had essentially recovered.

Orientation

The old centre, north of Río Tormes and with the Plaza Mayor at its heart, is compact and easily walked. The train and bus stations are equidistant from the centre of town, the former to the northeast and the latter to the northwest. Buses connect both to the town centre and taxis are cheap. Most accommodation and eating options, as well as the major monuments, can be found close to Plaza Mayor.

Information

EMERGENCY

Cruz Roja (☎ 923 22 22 22) For ambulances.

Policía Nacional (☎ 091; Ronda de Sancti-Spiritus 8)

INTERNET ACCESS

Cyberspace (Plaza Mayor 10; per hr €2; 11 10.30am-2am)

Cyber Anuario (Calle de La Latina 8; 11 10am-midnight Mon-Sat, 2-11pm Sun) Internet prices start from as low as €0.75 per hour, depending on the time of day.

LAUNDRY

Laundry (Calle de Pasaje Azafranal 18; per wash €3.15; 11 9.30am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-2pm Sat) Coin operated and offers free soap powder and internet access (per hour €2).

MEDICAL SERVICES

Hospital Clínico Universitario (☎ 923 29 11 00;

Paseo de San Vicente 108)

Hospital Santísima Trinidad (☎ 923 26 93 00; Paseo de las Carmelitas 74-94)

MONEY

There is no shortage of banks around the centre, particularly along Rúa Mayor.

FROG SPOTTING

A compulsory task facing all visitors to Salamanca is to search out the frog sculpted into the façade of the Universidad Civil. Once pointed out, it's easily enough seen, but you can spend considerable time in vain searching otherwise.

Why bother? Well, they say that those who detect it without help can be assured of good luck and even marriage within a year. Some hopeful students see a guaranteed examinations victory in it. If you believe all this, stop reading now. If you do want help, look at the busts of Fernando and Isabel. From there, turn your gaze to the largest column on the extreme right of the façade. Slightly above the level of the busts is sculpted a series of skulls, atop the leftmost of which sits our little amphibious friend (or what's left of his eroded self).

SALAMANCA

INFORMATION		SLEEPING		DRINKING	
Cyberspace.....(see 39)	Real Clericia de San Marcos.....24 B5	Albergue Juvenil.....28 D6	Café El Corriollo.....50 B5	Delicatessen Café.....(see 42)	Irish Rover.....51 B5
Cyber Anuario.....1 B5	Torre del Clavero.....25 C5	Hostal Catedral.....29 B5	Litre Bars.....52 B3	O'Hara's.....53 C4	Taberna La Rayuela.....54 C5
Hospital Santísima Trinidad.....2 A3	Tren Turístico.....26 B5	Hostal Concejo.....30 C4	Tío Vivo.....55 C4	Vinodiario.....56 C5	
Laundry.....3 D3	Universidad Civil (University of Salamanca).....27 B5	Hostal Plaza Mayor.....31 C4			
Main Post Office.....4 D4		Hostal Sara.....32 B4	ENTERTAINMENT		
Municipal Tourist Office.....5 C4		Hosteria Casa Vallejo.....33 C4	Castelot.....(see 12)	Cum Laude.....57 B4	
Policia Nacional.....6 D4		Hotel Las Torres.....34 C4	Garamond.....58 B4	Morgana.....59 B3	
Regional Tourist Office.....7 B5		Le Petit Hotel.....35 C4	Posada de las Almas.....60 C3	Potemkin.....61 C4	
		NH Palacio de Castellanos.....37 C6			
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		Pensión Lisboa.....38 C4	SHOPPING		
Catedral Nueva.....8 B6	Colegio de Arzobispo Fonseca.....10 A4	Pensión Los Angeles.....39 C4	El Fotografo.....(see 38)	Municipal Tourist Office Shop.....62 C4	Universitatís Salamantinae.....63 B6
Convento de las Dueñas.....11 C5	Convento de las Ursulas.....12 B4	Rua Hotel.....40 C4	Mercatus.....63 B6		
Convento de San Esteban.....13 C6	Iglesia de San Martín.....15 C4				
Convento de Santa Clara.....14 D5	Museo de Art Nouveau y Art Decó.....16 B6				
Museo de San Martín.....15 C4	Museo de la Universidad.....17 B5				
Museo de Salamanca.....18 B5	Museo Taurino.....19 C4				
Palacio de Monterrey.....20 B4	Patio de las Escuelas Menores.....21 B5				
Plaza Mayor.....22 C4	Plaza de la Torre.....23 B6				

POST

Main post office (☎ 923 28 14 57; Calle Gran Vía 25-29)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Municipal tourist office (☎ 923 21 83 42; Plaza Mayor 14; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4.30-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) Concentrates on the city and is open longer hours in summer.

Regional tourist office (☎ 923 26 85 71; Rúa Mayor s/n; ☎ 9am-2pm & 5-8pm) This office in Casa de las Conchas covers both the city and the surrounding province.

Sights

Although Salamanca is easy to explore on foot (see p186), a good way to get an overview of the old town is aboard the quaint **tren turístico** (tourist train; ☎ 649 62 57 03; Plaza Anaya; adult/child €3.50/1.50; ☎ noon-2pm & 4-8pm). It lasts for 20 minutes and is open longer hours in summer.

PLAZA MAYOR

Built between 1729 and 1755, Salamanca's exceptional grand square is widely considered Spain's most beautiful central plaza, particularly at night when illuminated to magical effect. Designed by Alberto Churriguera, it's a remarkably harmonious and controlled baroque display. The medallions placed around the plaza bear the busts of famous figures (you'll even find a recently freshened-up bust of Franco in the northeastern corner), and bullfights were held here well into the 19th century; the last ceremonial *corrida* (bullfight) took place here in 1992. Its outdoor tables are a place to linger, watch the passing parade and marvel at the beguiling beauty of the architecture. Chances are you'll find yourself drawn here again and again.

Just off the square, the pretty 12th-century Romanesque **Iglesia de San Martín** (Plaza del Corriollo; ☎ 11am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun) lies wedged among a huddle of houses.

CATEDRAL NUEVA

The tower of the late-Gothic **Catedral Nueva** (☎ 923 21 74 76; Plaza de Anaya; ☎ 9am-8pm) lords over the centre of Salamanca, its compelling churrigueresque dome visible from almost every angle. It is, however, the magnificent Renaissance doorways, particularly the **Puerta del Nacimiento** on the western face, that stand out as one of several miracles worked in the city's sandstone façades. Walk around to the **Puerta de Ramos**, facing Plaza Anaya, which

is decorated with similar flourish and contains an encore to the 'frog spotting' challenge on the university façade (see the boxed text, p183): look for the little astronaut and ice-cream cone chiselled into the portal by stonemasons during recent restorations.

Inside, the most notable features include the elaborate choir stalls, main chapel and retro-choir, all courtesy of the prolific José Churriguera. The ceilings are also exceptional.

For a unique perspective on the interior, as well as fine views over old Salamanca, head to the southwestern corner of the cathedral façade and the **Puerta de la Torre** (Ieronimus; Plaza de Juan XXIII; admission €2.50; ☎ 10am-7.15pm), from where stairs lead up through the tower, past labyrinthine but well-presented exhibitions of cathedral memorabilia, then along the interior balconies of the sanctuaries of the **Catedral Nueva** and **Catedral Vieja** and out onto the balconies.

CATEDRAL VIEJA

The **Catedral Nueva's** largely Romanesque predecessor, the **Catedral Vieja** (adult/student €3.50/2; ☎ 10am-7.30pm) was begun in 1120 and remains something of a hybrid: there are Gothic elements while the unusual ribbed cupola, the **Torre del Gallo**, reflects a Byzantine influence. The otherwise simple, towering apse of the *capilla mayor* (chapel containing the high altar) is adorned with an exquisite 15th-century altarpiece whose 53 panels depict scenes from the life of Christ and Mary, topped by a representation of the Final Judgement – it's one of the most beautiful Renaissance altarpieces to be found beyond Italy's shores. The cloister was largely ruined in the 1755 Lisbon earthquake, but in the **Capilla de Anaya** there's an extravagant alabaster sepulchre and one of Europe's oldest organs, a Mudéjar work of art dating from the 16th century. The entrance is inside the **Catedral Nueva**.

UNIVERSIDAD CIVIL

The visual feast of the entrance façade to **Salamanca's university** (☎ 923 29 44 00; Calle de los Libreros; adult/student €4/2, Mon morning free; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1pm & 4-6.30pm Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) is stunning. Founded initially as the **Estudio General** in 1218, the university came into being in 1254 and reached the peak of its renown in the 15th and 16th centuries. The façade, more a tapestry in sandstone, bursts with images of mythical heroes, religious

scenes and coats of arms. It's dominated in the centre by busts of Fernando and Isabel, but it's the elusive frog that draws the crowds (see the boxed text, p183).

Among the small lecture rooms arranged around the courtyard inside the building, the Aula de Fray Luis de León was named after the celebrated 16th-century theologian and writer who taught here and whose statue stands in the Patio de las Escuelas Menoras outside. It conserves the original benches and lectern from Fray Luis' day. Arrested by the Inquisition for having translated the Song of Solomon into Spanish, the sardonic theologian returned to his class after five years in jail and resumed lecturing with the words, 'As I was saying yesterday...'

Upstairs, the university library has fine late-Gothic features and a beautiful *techumbre* (carved wooden ceiling). Some 2800 ancient manuscripts gather dust in what is one of the oldest university libraries in Europe.

CONVENTO DE SAN ESTEBAN

Standing proudly in the southeastern corner of the old city, the Convento de San Esteban's church (☎ 923 21 50 00; admission €2; h 10am-1pm & 4-8pm Wed-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun, 4-8pm Mon & Tue) has an extraordinary altarpiece façade with the stoning of San Esteban (St Stephen) as its central motif. Inside is a well-presented museum dedicated to the Dominicans and their missionary work in the Americas. The splendid Gothic-Renaissance cloister, in particular, has strategically placed mirrors which enable you to fully appreciate the fine ceiling. Climb to the 1st floor from where you can access the church's choir stalls. In the church's main sanctuary, the centrepiece is a *retablo* (altarpiece), an ornate masterpiece by José Churriguera.

Walking Tour

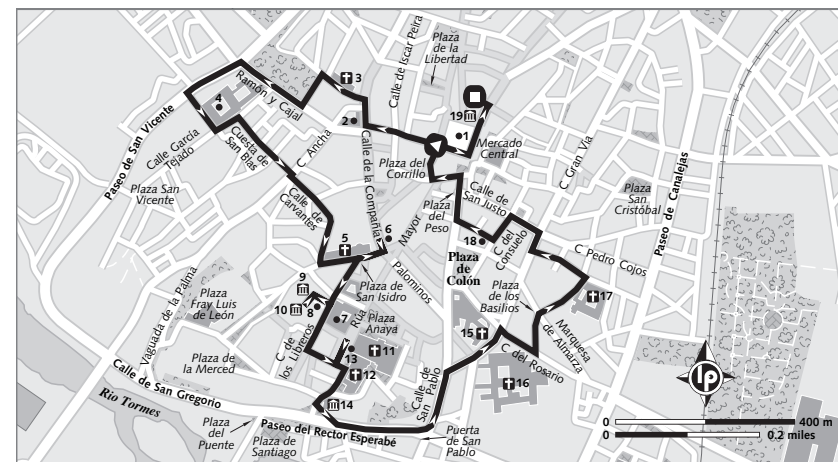
Start your exploration of Salamanca in the incomparable Plaza Mayor (1; p185), the centrepiece of monumental Salamanca and the modern city's beating heart. Heading west off the southwestern corner of the plaza, take Calle del Prior which leads to the Palacio de Monterrey (2), a 16th-century holiday home of the Duques de Alba and a seminal piece of Spanish Renaissance architecture; it's not open to the public but the façade is superb. A short detour north yields the Convento de las Ursulas (3; ☎ 923 21 98 77; Calle de Ursulas 2;

admission €2; h 11am-1pm & 4.30-6pm), a late-Gothic nunnery, which was founded by Archbishop Alonso de Fonseca in 1512 and is now home to his magnificent marble tomb, sculpted by Diego de Siloé. It's closed on the last Sunday of each month. There's also a Spanish twist: the nuns rent out part of the space to a nightclub called Camelot (p190). Crossing the tranquil Campo de San Francisco brings you to the 16th-century Colegio del Arzobispo Fonseca (4; ☎ 923 29 45 70; Paseo de San Vicente; adult/student €0.60/0.30; h 10am-2pm & 4-7pm), a sober Plateresque structure notable for its fine entrance, pleasing courtyard and antique clock collection.

Climb the Cuesta de San Blas and then wind your way southeast to the Real Clericia de San Marcos (5; Universidad Pontificia; ☎ 923 27 71 00; Calle de la Compañía; admission €2; h 10.30am-12.50pm & 5-7.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-1.20pm & 5-8pm Sat, 10am-1.20pm Sun), a colossal baroque church. Directly opposite is the Casa de las Conchas (6; ☎ 923 26 93 17; Calle de la Compañía 2; admission free; h 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Sat & Sun), one of the city's most endearing buildings and named after the scallop shells clinging to its façade. Its owner, Dr Rodrigo Maldonado de Talavera, was a doctor at the court of Isabel and a member of the Order of Santiago, whose symbol is the shell. It now houses the public library, entered via a charming bi-level courtyard.

From Plaza de San Isidro, head southwest along Calle de los Libreros to the Universidad Civil (7; p185), which faces onto the Patio de las Escuelas Menoras (8), a small square where you'll find the Museo de Salamanca (9; ☎ 923 21 22 35; Patio de las Escuelas Menoras 2; adult/concession €1.20/0.60, Sat & Sun free; h 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun). Housed in the former residence of Queen Isabel's doctor, it's more interesting for the picture of tranquil Salamanca residential life offered by the attractive patios than for the paintings and sculptures within. Almost next door, off a small cloister, the main attractions of the Museo de la Universidad (10; Patio de las Escuelas; h 9.30am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1pm & 4-6.30pm Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) are the ceiling fresco of the zodiac and two *techumbres*: one clearly Mudéjar and the other with Italian Renaissance influences. Entry is free if you're visiting the university.

After visiting the Catedral Nueva (11; p185), Catedral Vieja (12; p185) and climbing up through the Puerta de la Torre (13; p185), head southwest down the hill to the Museo de Art



WALK FACTS

Start Plaza Mayor
Finish Museo Taurino
Distance 3.5km
Duration three hours

Nouveau y Art Decó (14): Casa Lis; ☎ 923 12 14 25; Calle de El Expolio 14; adult/student €3/2; h 11am-2pm & 5-9pm Tue-Fri, 11am-9pm Sat & Sun), a gallery devoted to both styles in a Modernista (Catalan Art Nouveau) house.

Walking east along Paseo del Rector Esperarabe, then north along Calle de San Pablo, brings you to the Dominican Convento de las Duenas (15; ☎ 923 21 54 42; Gran Vía; admission €1.50; h 10.30am-12.45pm & 4.30-6.45pm), home to what is easily the city's most beautiful cloister. Directly opposite is the sublime Convento de San Esteban (16; opposite), while quiet streets lead away to the northeast to the Convento de Santa Clara (17; ☎ 923 26 96 23; adult/child €2/0.50; h 9.30am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-3pm Sat & Sun). This much-modified convent started life as a Romanesque structure and you can climb up some stairs to inspect at close quarters the 14th- and 15th-century *artesonado* (Mudéjar ceiling).

As you make your way northwest to the old town, pause at the Torre del Clavero (18; Calle del Consuelo), a 15th-century octagonal fortress with an unusual square base and smaller cylindrical towers. Continue up Calle de San Pablo, skirt the Plaza Mayor and then seek out the Museo Taurino (19; ☎ 923 21 94 25; Calle de Doctor Piñuela 2;

adult/senior €3/2; h 11.30am-1.30pm & 6-8pm Tue-Sat, 11.30am-1.30pm Sun), just north of Plaza Mayor and packed with bullfighting memorabilia.

Courses

Salamanca is one of the most popular places in Spain to study Spanish and the University of Salamanca (Universidad Civil; ☎ 923 29 44 18; www.usal.es; Calle de los Libreros) is the most respected language school. Courses range from a six-hour course spread over two weeks (€310) to a 10-week course of five hours a week (€1425). It can also arrange accommodation with local families. The municipal tourist office (☎ 923 21 83 42; Plaza Mayor 14) also has a list of accredited private colleges.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Albergue Juvenil (☎ 923 26 91 41; www.albergue.salamanca.com; Calle de Escoto 13-15; dm €11.90, s/d €24.40/36) Salamanca's hostel is ideal for those looking for travel buddies as it's a popular, well-run place with large, clean dorms. It's a five-minute walk down the hill from the old town, but the area is quiet and has plenty of character. Breakfast is €1.80 and lunch or dinner €7.

Pensión Los Angeles (☎ 923 21 81 66; Plaza Mayor 10; s/d from €15/26) In a prime location – smack-bang on Plaza Mayor – and with cheap prices to boot, this place is a winner. Those with balconies overlooking the plaza are for three to five people (up to €75).

Pensión Lisboa (☎ 923 21 43 33; 2nd fl, Calle de Meléndez 1; s/d with shared bathroom €16/24, d with private

bathroom €32) Run by friendly young owners, this very good choice has comfortable rooms. Some of the singles are on the small side but some do have a private terrace. What sets this place apart is its rooftop terrace with *catedral* views.

MIDRANGE

All rooms in the following places have private bathroom or shower, TV, phone and air-con.

Hostal Catedral (% 923 27 06 14; Rúa Mayor 46; s/d €30/45) Just across from the *catedrales*, this well-run hostel has a few extremely pretty, clean-as-a-whistle, bright bedrooms with shower. All look out onto the street or *catedral*, which is a real bonus, as is the motherly owner who treats her visitors as honoured guests.

Le Petit Hotel (% 923 60 07 73; www.lepetithotel.net; Ronda de Sancti-Spiritus 39; s/d €33/43) Overlooking a peaceful square in a quiet part of town, this place has individually designed rooms that are good value, especially the renovated ones on the 4th and 5th floors. Some of the rooms are smallish and the floral wallpaper in one or two may not be to everyone's taste, but the welcome is warm and the quality high.

Hostal Plaza Mayor (% 923 26 20 20; hostalplaza-mayor@hotmail.com; Plaza del Corriño 20; s €30-36, d €50-60) A few steps from Plaza Mayor, this hostel has a fabulous location and is one of the best in this price range, with stylish and clean rooms with satellite TV and a touch of character. If you're a light sleeper, ask for a room at the back.

Hosteria Casa Vallejo (% 923 28 04 21; www.hosteria-casavallejo.com; Calle de San Juan de la Cruz 3; s €30-50, d €60-90; i) This pretty little place promises spacious rooms with hints of character in the form of exposed brickwork and wooden beams. The front door is barely 100m from the Plaza Mayor.

Hostal Sara (% 923 28 11 40; www.hostalsara.org; Calle de Meléndez 11; s €35-50, d €38-60, d with kitchen from €50) This friendly new *hostal* (cheap hotel) gets it right in all the right places – friendly staff, large and well-equipped rooms (unusually for this price range, the bathrooms have hairdryers) and a location in the heart of the old town.

Aparthotel El Toboso (% 923 27 14 62; www.hotel-toboso.com; Calle del Clavel 7; s/d €30/45.25, 3-/4-/5-person self-contained apt €76/84/93) Even if the rooms are ageing at this friendly place, they're super value, especially the enormous apartments which come with kitchens and renovated bathroom. It's ideal for families or if you're planning to stay in Salamanca for a while.

Hostal Concejo (% 923 21 47 37; www.hconcejo.com; Plaza de la Libertad 1; s/d Sun-Thu from €40/50, Fri & Sat from €45/56; p) A cut above your average drab and functional Spanish *hostal*, the stylish Concejo has polished wood floors and some rooms have balconies overlooking a pretty square. Plaza Mayor is also just around the corner. Parking costs €7 to €9.

Rua Hotel (% 923 27 22 72; www.hotelrua.com; Calle de Sánchez Barbero 11; s with breakfast €45-65, d with breakfast €65-90; i) This engaging place has largely modern decoration but it does have a family-run feel and all rooms are apartments of around 30 sq metres. All come with kitchen and are filled with light, but the best rooms are those facing north with terrific views. The breakfast room in the basement includes a 13th-century stone arch.

TOP END

Hotel Las Torres (% 923 21 21 00; www.hthotels.com; Calle de Concejo 4-6; d from €60; i) Part of the quality High-Tech chain, this stylish new hotel has lovely dark-wood furniture, designer lamps and bathrooms, and a generally classy feel. Official prices go for well over €200, but more often a normal double goes for considerably less, sometimes including breakfast. The rooms overlooking the Plaza Mayor (Salamanca's best view) start at €120, again depending on the season.

NH Palacio de Castellanos (% 923 26 18 18; www.nh-hotels.com; Calle de San Pablo 58-64; d €99-162; p i) Housed in an old palace just down the hill from the cathedral, this place is all lofty patios and antique staircases. The character doesn't spill over much into the rooms, but they're supremely comfortable and service is good. Parking costs €14.

Eating

El Grillo Azul (% 923 21 92 33; Calle Grillo 1; mains €6-8, menú €8.40; v) If you can tear yourself away from the old town, the vegetarians among you will enjoy this quiet restaurant with high-quality salads, organic rice and pasta. The *croquetas de calabacín, zanahoria y piñones* (zucchini croquettes with carrots and pine nuts) is one of the many highlights.

El Bardo (Calle de la Compañía 8; mains €10-16, menú €10) This high-calibre restaurant is beloved by locals in search of good tapas, while its sit-down menu is very well-priced considering the surrounds. Unusually, there's a separate lunchtime *menú* for vegetarians.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

El Pecado (% 923 26 65 58; Plaza de Poeta Iglesias 12; starters €10-18, mains €16-21, menú €20) One of the trendy places to regularly attract Spanish celebrities in recent times, El Pecado (Sin) has an intimate dining room and quirky, creative menu. *El secreto de la druida* (the secret of the druid), which is lasagne stuffed with the best local cured ham and hazelnuts, is just one of dozens of intriguing choices.

Meson Las Conchas (% 923 21 21 67; Rúa Mayor 16; mains €7-13, menú €11) Similarly atmospheric and with a choice of outdoor tables or an atmospheric bar and dining area, Meson Las Conchas caters less to a tourist crowd than to locals who know their *embutidos* (cured meats).

Mesón Cervantes (% 923 21 72 13; Plaza Mayor 15; raciones €7-12, menú €12) This is another great place where you can eat at the outdoor tables in the plaza itself, but the dark wooden beams and atmospheric buzz of the Spanish crowd on the 1st floor should be experienced at least once.

Mater Asturias (% 923 21 83 86; Calle de Concejo 3; mains €10-12) 'Mother Asturias' is a slick new bar-restaurant all decked out in lime green and with an irresistible buzz that may have something to do with the fact that it serves two glasses of Asturian *sidra* (cider) and a tapa for €1.80. There's also a range of *menús de degustación* (€20 to €24) and plenty of *fabada* (a bean stew), seafood and hearty steaks.

Casa Paca (% 923 21 89 93; Plaza del Peso 10; mains €11-22) Established in 1928 and still going strong, Casa Paca is rumoured to be where the king dines when in town. Both the restaurant and its most famous patron are known for their love of hearty, deceptively simple dishes – expect to pay at least €35 for a full meal.

Grana & Oro (% 923 26 14 05; Plaza del Ángel; starters €9-15, mains €14-20, menú €15) A cool, clean-lined place, Grana & Oro specialises in grills, with some fine combinations of tastes – *mar y tierra* (sea and land) combines inland Spain's best cured ham with the finest fish from Cantabria.

Along Calle de Meléndez, you'll find a number of excellent places serving tapas

and sit-down meals. They include: **Patio Chico** (% 923 26 86 16; Calle de Meléndez 13; menú €11), a lively place with an extensive and creative menu; and the super-chic **Delicatessen Café** (% 923 28 03 09; Calle de Meléndez 25; platos combinados €7-10) which is a very cool place to be seen.

Drinking

Salamanca, with its myriad bars, is the perfect after-dark playground. Nightlife here starts very late – even on weeknights – with many bars not filling until midnight or even later and the partying continuing until the wee hours. Clearly many of Salamanca's students have better things to do than hit the books.

Taberna La Rayuela (Rúa Mayor 19) This low-lit upstairs bar buzzes with a 20-something crowd and is an intimate place, popular early in the evening for 'first drinks'.

Café El Corriño (www.cafecorriño.com; Calle de Meléndez 18) Café El Corriño is great for a beer and tapas at any time, and live jazz on Friday and Saturday nights.

Tío Vivo (Calle de Clavel 3; h 3.30pm-late) Here you can sip drinks by flickering candlelight. It's in the must-visit category, if only to peek at the whimsical décor of carousel horses and oddball antiques.

Delicatessen Café (Calle de Meléndez 25) This super-cool café is all curves, soft lighting and chic décor. It's more *pijo* (beautiful people) than student hang-out.

Vinodiario (Plaza de los Basílios 1) Away from the crowds of the old-city centre, this delightfully chilled wine bar is surrounded by pretty streets, staffed by knowledgeable bar staff and loved by locals who fill the outdoor tables when the weather's warm.

Salamanca's two lively Irish pubs, **O'Hara's** (Calle Zamora 14) and the **Irish Rover** (Calle Rúa Antigua), pull in the thirsty crowds and get started a touch earlier than many Spanish bars; both serve good, cheap food.

The collection of so-called 'litre bars' on Plaza de San Juan de Bautista are fun nighttime hang-outs with a young crowd. Here you can guzzle a 1L *cerveza* (beer) for €2.50 or a *cubalibre* (rum and coke with lemon juice) for €5.10.

Entertainment

Many of Salamanca's café-bars morph into dance clubs after midnight, and there's usually no cover charge.

Posada de las Almas (Plaza de San Boal) Decked out in a curious design mix of looming papier-mâché figures, doll houses and velvet curtains, this place attracts a mixed crowd – gay and straight, Spanish and foreign.

Camelot (Calle de la Compañía) One of our favourites, this lively disco is actually part of the Convento de las Úrsulas. The décor is an incongruous sandstone-industrial fusion that works terrifically well but soon gets forgotten once the DJs get started. To get in, we wouldn't turn up in anything less than smart casual.

Potemkin (Calle del Consuelo) Salamanca's grungy alternative to the sophisticates elsewhere can be found at Potemkin, where you'll catch live rock music most nights. The neighbouring bars are similar, so dress down.

Other *discotecas* (clubs) with a touch more character and buzz than most and where you can shake your hands in the air like you just don't care include the following:

Cum Laude (Calle del Prior 7) Sprawling mock-palace interior and a crowd that knows all the words.

Garamond (Calle del Prior 24) Rather baronial décor and a great selection of music.

Morgana (cnr Cuesta del Carmen & Calle de Iscar Peira) Rave or Latino create one helluva good time, especially around 5am.

Shopping

Salamanca overflows with souvenir shops, running the whole gamut from the tasteful to the tacky.

Universitatis Salamantinae Mercatus (% 923 29 46 92; Calle de Cardenal Plá y Deniel s/n; 10am-2pm & 4.30-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) The official shop of the University of Salamanca has a stunning range of stationery items, leather-bound books and other carefully selected reminders of your Salamanca visit.

El Fotografo (% 923 26 64 92; Calle de Meléndez 5; 10.30am-1.50pm & 5-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm & 6-8.30pm Sat) This small photography shop sells beautiful B&W photos of Salamanca, coffee-table books as well as photographic equipment.

Municipal tourist office shop (Plaza Mayor; 9.30am-1.30pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-2pm Sun) In addition to the small range of posters, pens and other attractive Salamanca souvenirs sold in the tourist office (p185), there is another shop, under the arches on the north side of Plaza Mayor, which has more to choose from and it's all good.

Getting There & Away

BUS

The **bus station** (% 923 23 67 17; Avenida de Filiberto Villalobos) is northwest of the town centre. **Auto Res** (% 902 02 00 52; Avenida de Filiberto Villalobos) has 24 buses daily to Madrid (regular/express €11.20/17.10, three/2½ hours); six buses also serve Valladolid (€6.90, 1½ hours); and four go to Ávila (€4.90, 1½ hours).

There's at least one bus daily, except Sunday, going to La Alberca (€4.20). Regular buses head to Ciudad Rodrigo (€5.15, 1½ hours), Segovia (€9.25, three hours) and Zamora (€3.85, one hour), and there are services to Béjar (€4.15, one hour) and Candelario (€4.95, 1¾ hours).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The N501 leads southeast to Madrid via Ávila, while the N630 heads north to Zamora. Heading for Portugal, take the N620 west via Ciudad Rodrigo. For the Sierra de Francia, take the C512.

There are few underground parking stations (12 hours €9 to €11.50) in the old part of town – your best bet is along or just off Gran Via.

TRAIN

Up to six trains depart daily for Madrid's Chamartin station (€15.30 express, 2½ hours) via Ávila (€7.75, 1¾ hours, eight daily). There are also frequent services to Valladolid (from €6.90, 2½ hours).

Getting Around

Bus 4 runs past the bus station and around the old town perimeter to Gran Via. From the train station, the best bet is bus 1, which heads into the centre along Calle de Azafraan. Going the other way, it can be picked up at the Mercado Central.

AROUND SALAMANCA

The town of Alba de Tormes makes for quite an interesting and very easily accomplished half-day excursion from Salamanca. Apart from the stout and highly visible Torreón – the only surviving section of the former castle of the Duques de Alba – people come from far and wide to pay homage to Santa Teresa who is buried in the Convento de las Carmelitas she founded in 1570. There are plenty of buses from Salamanca to Alba de Tormes.

CIUDAD RODRIGO

bus 14,129

Close to the Portuguese border and away from well-travelled tourist routes, somnambulant Ciudad Rodrigo is one of the prettiest towns of western Castilla y León. It's an easy day trip from Salamanca, 80km away, but sleeping within the sanctuary of its walls enables you to better appreciate its medieval charm and have the sloping Plaza Mayor all to yourself.

Information

Post office (Calle de Dámaso Ledesma 12)

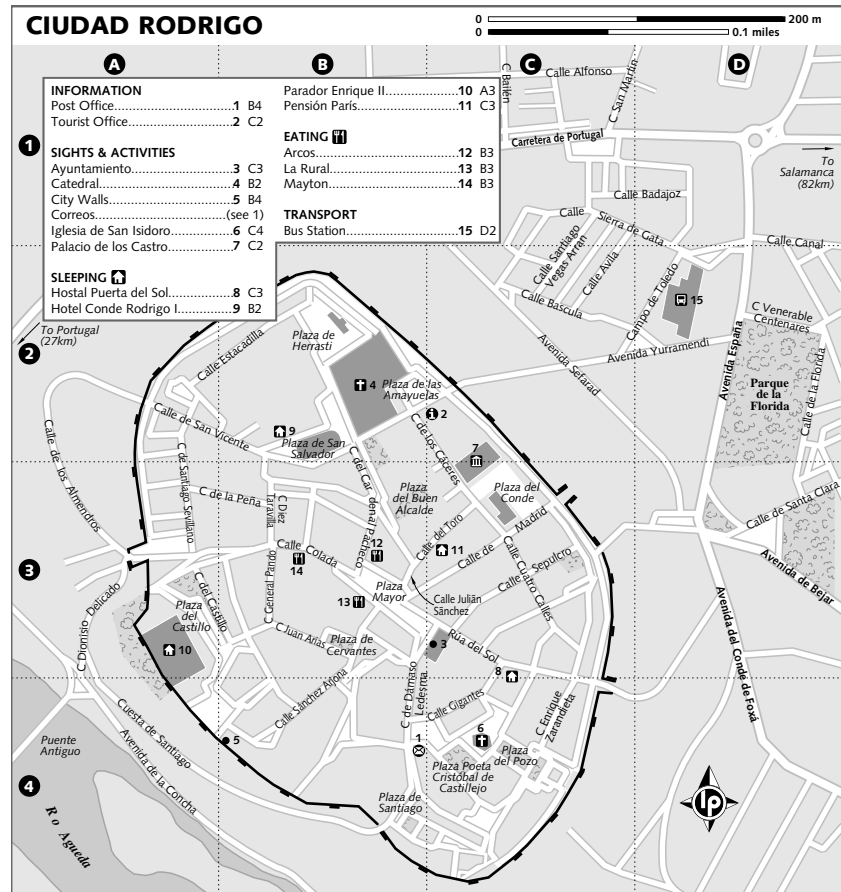
Tourist office (% 923 46 05 61; www.ciudadrodrigo.net; Plaza de las Amayuelas 5; 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm & 4.30-8.30pm Sat & Sun)

Sights

The **catedral** (Plaza San Salvador; admission €1.50, Wed afternoon free; 10am-1pm & 4-9pm), begun in 1165, towers over the old walled town. Of particular interest are the Puerta de las Cadenas, with Gothic reliefs of Old Testament figures; the elegant Pórtico del Perdón; and, inside, the exquisite carved-oak choir stalls.

Even if you've nothing to post, the **correos** (post office; Calle de Dámaso Ledesma 12) is worth passing by to admire the *artesonado*, while the 1st-floor gallery of the **ayuntamiento** (town hall) is a prime vantage point overlooking the Plaza Mayor.

Ciudad Rodrigo is liberally strewn with palaces, mansions and churches. The fusion of 12th-century Romanesque-Mudéjar elements



with later Gothic modifications makes the Iglesia de San Isidoro one of the more interesting stops. The 16th-century Palacio de los Castro (Plaza del Conde 3; admission free; 11 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) boasts one of the town's most engaging Plateresque façades; of the rest only the patio is open to visitors.

You can also climb the city walls and follow their length of about 2.2km around the town for good views over the town and surrounding plains.

Festivals & Events

Carnaval in February is a very unique time to be in Ciudad Rodrigo. Apart from the outlandish fancy dress and festivities, you can witness (or join in) a colourful *encierro* (running of the bulls) and *capeas* (amateur bullfights). It's one of the earliest events in the Spanish bullfighting calendar.

Sleeping

Pensión París (% 923 48 23 49; Calle del Toro 10; s/d with shared bathroom €15/25) There's nothing inspirational about these simple rooms, although they are well-kept and tidy. The location is ideal, down a quiet street within sight of Plaza Mayor.

Hostal Puerta del Sol (% 923 46 06 71; fax 923 46 06 71; Rúa del Sol 33; s €34-40, d €40-58) One of the better *hostales* within the city walls, the Puerta del Sol has comfortable rooms with satellite TV and 24-hour room service.

Hotel Conde Rodrigo I (% 923 46 14 08; Plaza de San Salvador 9; s €50-70, d €55-75) This long-standing Ciudad Rodrigo favourite has good rooms – some are enormous, some could do with a style overhaul and some overlook the pretty Plaza de San Salvador. There is also an excellent restaurant with a wood-fired oven.

Parador Enrique II (% 923 46 01 50; www.parador.es; Plaza del Castillo 1; d €110-120) Ciudad Rodrigo's premier address is a plushly renovated castle that's built into the town's western wall. The views are good, the rooms brimful of character and the restaurant easily the best in town.

Eating

Arcos (Plaza Mayor; 11 9am-late) A good spot for breakfast and snacks or just a coffee, this is a fine front-row seat for watching the town's goings-on.

La Rural (Plaza Mayor; raciones €3-4.50; 11 8am-midnight Mon-Sat) Across the square from Arcos, La Rural is always busy and deservedly so for its cheap tapas (from €0.75).

Mayton (% 923 46 07 20; Calle Colada 9; mains €7-15, menú €9.20) Set in an old stone mansion but without the prohibitive price tag you'd expect, Mayton promises quality home-style cooking, with the region's outstanding *embutidos* featuring alongside *cordero* and an overflowing, atmospheric wine cellar.

Getting There & Away

Up to a dozen buses run daily from Ciudad Rodrigo to Salamanca (€5.15, 1½ hours). For the Sierra de Francia, you need to go via Salamanca.

SIERRA DE FRANCIA

Hidden away in a forgotten corner of southwestern Castilla y León, this mountainous region with wooded hillsides and pretty stone-and-timber villages is among Castilla y León's best-kept secrets. Quiet mountain roads connect villages that you could easily spend days exploring and where the pace of life remains untouched by the modern world. Its architecture is yet to succumb to the ill-conceived developments that have come to blight other once-idyllic corners of Spain.

This was once of Spain's most god-forsaken regions. Malaria-ridden until the early 20th century, the region hadn't improved much in 1932 when Luis Buñuel came to film *Las Hurdes – Terre Sans Pain* (Land Without Bread). When King Alfonso XIII visited in June 1922, the only milk available for his coffee was human! Touched by this abject misery, he was supposedly responsible for the introduction of the area's first cows.

Today the area is popular for walking, biking and trout fishing.

La Alberca

pop 1118 / elevation 1048m

La Alberca is one of the largest and most beautifully preserved of the Sierra de Francia's villages, a historic and harmonious huddle of narrow alleys flanked by gloriously ramshackle houses built of stone, wood beams and plaster. Numerous stores sell local products such as *jamón* (ham) and *turrón* (nougat), galleries of local artists abound, and cosy bars and restaurants cluster on the pretty-as-a-postcard Plaza Mayor and along Calle de Tablado. Spanish tourists threaten to overwhelm the town on summer weekends, so plan to come during the week and make an overnight stop to see La Alberca at its best.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hotel Doña Teresa (% 923 41 53 08; www.hoteldeateresa.com; Carretera Mogarraz; s/d €60/78) La Alberca's classiest hotel, Hotel Doña Teresa is a perfect fit for the village's old-world charm and is just a short stroll from the Plaza Mayor. The large rooms have writing desks and combine character (wooden beams and exposed stonework) with all the necessary mod-cons (minibar and newly renovated bathrooms). Check out the offers on the website for the best deals. It also has a good restaurant.

Housed in one of La Alberca's most evocative half-timbered buildings, **Hostal La Alberca** (% 923 41 51 16; www.hostalalberca.com; Plaza del Padre Arsenio; s/d with bathroom €24/33) is a charming place with comfortable, renovated rooms.

Buses travel between La Alberca and Salamanca (€4.20) twice daily on weekdays and once a day on weekends.

Around La Alberca

Having your own car enables you to immerse yourself in quiet villages such as **Mogarraz**, east of La Alberca, which has some of the most evocative old houses in the region and is famous for its *embutidos*. **Miranda del Castañar**, further east again, is similarly intriguing, strung out along a narrow ridge, but **San Martín del Castañar** is the most enchanting, with half-timbered stone houses, fountains cascading from balconies, a bubbling stream and a small village bullring at the top of the town.

Hotels are rare in these parts, but *casas rurales* abound with a handful in each village. Alternatively, **Hostal Las Madras** (% 923 43 71 15; www.lasmadras.com; Calle de Barrionuevo 27; d €40) in the quiet, pretty little village of **Villanueva del Condé** is a wonderful choice. The rooms are warm and filled with wood and tiles, the owners are friendly and there are views from the balconies over the village square or to the surrounding hills. The restaurant is also top quality. You can even see the village mayor riding through town on a horse and announcing the latest news to the men passing the day by the fountain.

For further information and maps of this area, visit the tourist offices in Salamanca (p185) or Ciudad Rodrigo (p191).

Valle de las Batuecas

The drive south into Extremadura through this dreamy valley is spectacular. Just beyond La Alberca, a sweeping panorama of cascading lower mountain ranges reminiscent of green velvet opens up before you. The road corkscrews down into the valley before passing through a beautiful landscape that has been praised by poets and by the playwright Miguel de Unamuno, and which is especially nice in spring when purple heather blankets the hillsides and wildflowers are in bloom.

Peña de Francia

Head north from La Alberca along the C512 and you'll soon strike the turn-off to the highest peak in the area, Peña de Francia (1732m), topped by a monastery and reached by a road that turns perilous after rain. From here views extend east to the Sierra de Gredos, south into Extremadura and west to Portugal.

SIERRA DE BÉJAR

Between the Sierra de Francia and the Sierra de Gredos, the Sierra de Béjar is home to more pretty villages, rolling mountain scenery and a character all its own. The centre of the region is the eye-catching town of Béjar, whose partly walled old quarters line up at the western end of a high ridge. Among worthwhile sights is the eye-catching 16th-century Palacio Ducal, just west of Plaza Mayor. The most charming place to stay in Béjar is the **Antigua Posada** (% 923 41 03 33; Calle Victor Gorzo 1; d €49), close to the centre of town and in a lovely old building, while **Hotel Colón** (% 923 40 06 50; www.hotelcolonbejar.com; Calle Colón 42; s/d €48/66) has a spa and beauty complex.

Just east of the mountains, the C500 leads to **El Barco de Ávila**, which has a pretty setting on Río Tormes and is larded over by a proud if ruinous castle.

Candelario

The most scenic village in this region, tiny Candelario is a 5km detour from Béjar. Rubbing against a steep mountain face, this charming enclave is a popular summer resort and a great base for outdoor activities. Like the villages of the Sierra de Francia, the village is dominated by mountain architecture of stone and wood houses clustered closely together to protect against the harsh winter climate.

Hotel Cinco Castaños (% 923 41 32 04; www.candelariohotel.com; Carretera de la Sierra s/n; s/d Oct-Jun €39/54, Jul-Sep €54/60) has two stars and is our pick of

the places to stay around town; it's set amid the hills within walking distance of the village. It has simple but pleasant rooms, great views and a fine restaurant.

For something a little cheaper, try **Hostal La Sierra** (☎ 923 41 33 15; Calle Mayor 69; d€40) which is in the heart of the village and represents good *hostal* value.

Meson La Romana (☎ 923 41 32 72; Calle de Núñez Losada; mains from €7.10, menú €10) does reasonably priced meats cooked on an open wood-fire grill.

Getting There & Away

Béjar and Candelario are served by sporadic bus services from Salamanca and various other destinations, including Madrid and Plasencia.

THE CENTRAL PLATEAU

The sweeping rural plains of Castilla y León's central plateau are home to some of the region's most interesting towns – legendary and magical Segovia, energetic Valladolid and the more provincial Zamora and Palencia. The further north you go, the more spectacular the scenery.

SEGOVIA

pop 55,942 / elevation 1002m
Strung out along a ridge overlooking the confluence of Río Eresma and Río Clamores, Segovia is one of those towns that could only exist in Spain – reeking with charm, studded with monuments and with a clamorous nightly soundtrack of noisy bars and great restaurants. In 1985, Unesco recognised the old city and aqueduct of Segovia as World Heritage sites. You could visit Segovia on a day trip from Madrid, but it amply rewards those who linger.

History

The Celtic settlement of Segobriga was occupied by the Romans in 80 BC and rose to become an important town of Roman Hispania. As Christian Spain recovered from the initial shock of the Muslim attack, Segovia became something of a frontline city until the invaders were definitively evicted in 1085. Later a favourite residence of Castilla's roaming royalty, the city backed Isabel and saw her proclaimed queen in the Iglesia de San Miguel

in 1474. After backing the wrong side in the War of the Communities in 1520, Segovia slid into obscurity until the 1960s when tourism helped to regenerate the town.

Orientation

The old town of Segovia rises in the east and peaks in the fanciful towers of the Alcázar (Islamic-era fortress) to the west. If you arrive by train, bus 2 will take you to Plaza Mayor, site of the *catedral*, tourist office and plenty of hotels, restaurants and bars. From the bus station, it's about a 10-minute walk north. The road connecting Plaza Mayor and the aqueduct is a pedestrian thoroughfare that locals know simply as Calle Real.

Information

EMERGENCY
Cruz Roja (☎ 921 44 02 02, 061) For ambulances.
Policia Nacional (☎ 091; cnr Paseo de Ezequiel González & Carretera de Ávila)

INTERNET ACCESS
Mundo 2000 (per hr €2.40; 11am-11pm) Opposite the tourist office near the aqueduct.

MEDICAL SERVICES
Hospital General (☎ 921 41 91 00) About 1.5km southwest of the aqueduct on the Ávila Hwy.

MONEY
Banks abound along Calle de Juan Bravo, near Plaza Mayor, and on Avenida de Fernández Ladreda.

POST
Main post office (Plaza de los Huertos 5)

TOURIST INFORMATION
Municipal tourist office (☎ 921 46 29 06; Plaza del Azoguejo 1; 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat & Sun) By the aqueduct, this office is one of a number around town run by the city council.
Provincial tourist office (☎ 921 46 60 70; www.segoviatourismo.es; Plaza Mayor 6; 9am-2pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Sat & Sun) Information about Segovia and the entire region.

Sights
ACUEDUCTO & AROUND
Segovia's most recognisable symbol is an extraordinary feat of engineering, made even more remarkable by the fact that it was first raised here by the Romans in the 1st century AD

EATING

Casa Duque	32 D3
Cueva de San Esteban	33 C2
La Almazara	34 C2
La Colón	35 D4
Limón y Menta	36 C3
Mesón de Campesino	37 C3
Mesón de Candido	38 E3
Mesón José María	39 D2
Zarzamora	40 C2

DRINKING

Bars (Calle de Carmen)	41 D4
Disney	42 D3
La Tasquina	43 C2
Santana	44 C3
Saxo Bar	45 D3

TRANSPORT

Bus Station

INFORMATION

Main Post Office	1 D2
Mundo 2000	2 E3
Municipal Tourist Office	3 D3
Policia Nacional	4 D4
Provincial Tourist Office	5 C2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Aqueducto (Aqueduct)	6 D3
Alcázar	7 A2
Casa-Museo de Antonio Machado	9 C2
Catedral	10 C2
Convento de los Carmelitas	11 A1
Iglesia de la Vera Cruz	12 A1
Iglesia de San Andrés	13 B2
Iglesia de San Clemente	14 D4
Iglesia de San Esteban	15 C2
Iglesia de San Justo	16 E3
Iglesia de San Martín	17 D3
Iglesia de San Miguel	18 C3
Iglesia de San Millán	19 D4
Monasterio de El Parral	20 C1
Museo Catedralicio	(see 10)
Museo de Arte Contemporáneo	21 D3
Esteban Vicente	22 D3
Plaza de San Martín	23 D3
Torreón de Lozoya	23 D3

SLEEPING

Hostal Foron	24 D3
Hostal Juan Bravo	25 C3
Hostal Plaza	26 D2
Hostería Ayala Berganza	27 D4
Hotel Acueducto	28 E3
Hotel Infanta Isabel	29 C3
Hotel Las Srenas	30 D3
Pensión Ferrí	31 C2

THE DEVIL'S WORK

Although no-one really doubts that the Romans built the aqueduct, a local legend asserts that two millennia ago a young girl, tired of carrying water from the well, voiced a willingness to sell her soul to the devil if an easier solution could be found. No sooner said than done. The devil worked through the night, while the girl recanted and prayed to God for forgiveness. Hearing her prayers, God sent the sun into the sky earlier than usual, catching the devil un-awares with only a single stone lacking to complete the structure. The girl's soul was saved, but it seems like she got her wish anyway. Perhaps God didn't have the heart to tear down the aqueduct.

and not a drop of mortar was used to hold the whole thing together. The 728m granite block bridge you see today is made up of 163 arches. The aqueduct was part of a complex system of aqueducts and underground canals which once brought water from the mountains 15km away, reaching as far as where the Alcázar now stands. At its highest point in Plaza del Azoguejo, it is 28m high.

At this end of town, there are a few churches worth your time. Iglesia de San Millán, off Avenida de Fernández Ladreda, is a time-worn example of the Romanesque style typical of Segovia, with porticoes and a Mudéjar bell-tower. A couple of other late Romanesque churches around here include the Iglesia de San Justo (Plaza de San Justo; 11am-1.30pm & 4.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat) and the Iglesia de San Clemente (Plaza de San Clemente).

TO THE CATEDRAL

From the Plaza del Azoguejo, beside the aqueduct, Calle Real winds up into the delightful heart of Segovia. About a quarter of the way up to Plaza Mayor is the Casa de los Picos (921 46 26 74; admission free; 11am-2pm & 6-8pm Mon-Fri Sep-Feb, noon-2pm & 7-9pm Mon-Fri Mar-Aug), a Renaissance mansion with a diamond-shaped façade that is home to a school of applied arts and hosts free exhibitions.

A little further on you reach Plaza de San Martín, one of the most captivating little squares in Segovia. The square is presided over by a statue of Juan Bravo and the 14th-century Torreón de Lozoya (921 46 24 61; admission free; 11am-5-9pm

Tue-Fri, noon-2pm & 5-9pm Sat & Sun), a tower that was once an armoury; the *pièce de résistance*, however, is the Romanesque Iglesia de San Martín, with the *segoviano* touch of a Mudéjar tower and arched gallery. The interior boasts a Flemish Gothic chapel.

In a perfect marriage of space and function, the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Esteban Vicente (921 46 20 10; www.museoestebanvicente.es; Plazuela de las Bellas Artes s/n; adult/concession €2.40/1.20, Thu free; 11am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Fri, 11am-7pm Sat, 11am-2pm Sun) occupies a 15th-century palace of Enrique IV, complete with Renaissance chapel and Mudéjar ceiling. Some 148 abstract paintings and sculptures by Segovia-born artist Esteban Vicente (1903-2000), a fine painter of the abstract expressionist school, form the core of the exhibit.

The shady Plaza Mayor is the nerve centre of old Segovia, lined by an eclectic assortment of buildings, arcades and cafés and an open pavilion in its centre. The Iglesia de San Miguel, where Isabel was proclaimed Queen of Castilla, recedes humbly into the background before the splendour of the *catedral* across the square.

CATEDRAL

Started in 1525 after its Romanesque predecessor had burned to the ground in the War of the Communities, the *catedral* (921 46 22 05; 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Tue-Fri Sep-Jul, 10am-8pm Sat & Sun year-round, 10am-8pm daily Aug) is a final, powerful expression of Gothic architecture in Spain that took almost 200 years to complete. The austere three-naved interior is anchored by an imposing choir stall and enlivened by 20-odd chapels. One of these, the Capilla del Cristo del Consuelo, houses a magnificent Romanesque doorway preserved from the original church. The Capilla de la Piedad contains an important altarpiece by Juan de Juni, while the Capilla del Cristo Yacente and Capilla del Santísimo Sacramento are also beautiful. The Gothic cloister is lovely, while the Museo Catedralicio (921 46 22 05; admission €2; 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-1.15pm Sun Sep-Feb, 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-1.15pm & 1.30-6.30pm Sun Mar-Aug) will appeal to devotees of religious art.

TO THE ALCÁZAR

The direct route to the Alcázar from Plaza Mayor is via Calle Marqués del Arco. About halfway along you pass yet another Romanesque church, the Iglesia de San Andrés. Away to

the right is the Casa-Museo de Antonio Machado (921 46 03 77; Calle de los Desemparados 5; admission €1.50, Wed free; 11am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm Wed-Sun). Machado, one of Spain's pre-eminent 20th-century poets, lived here from 1919 to 1932 and it still contains his furnishings and personal effects. A few paces further down the road rises the six-level tower of the 13th-century Romanesque Iglesia de San Esteban, which has a baroque interior.

ALCÁZAR

Rapunzel towers, turrets topped with slate witches' hats and a *deep* moat at its base make the Alcázar (921 46 07 59; www.alcazardesegovia.com; adult/concession €3.50/2.50, tower €1.50; 10am-9pm Mar-Aug, 10am-8pm Sep-Feb) a prototype fairy-tale castle, so much so that its design inspired Walt Disney's vision of Sleeping Beauty's castle. Fortified since Roman days, the site takes its name from the Arabic *al-qasr* (castle) and was rebuilt and expanded in the 13th and 14th centuries, but the whole lot burned down in 1862. What you see today is an evocative over-the-top reconstruction of the original. Admission is free for EU citizens on the third Tuesday of every month.

Highlights include the Sala de las Piñas, the ceiling of which drips with a crop of 392 pineapple-shaped 'stalactites', and the Sala de Reyes (Kings' Room), featuring a three-dimensional frieze of 52 sculptures of kings who fought during the Reconquista. The views from the Torre de Juan II are truly exceptional, and put the old town's hilltop location into full context.

CHURCHES & CONVENTS

Another smorgasbord of religious buildings stretches across the luxuriant valley of Río Eresma to the north of the city.

The most interesting of Segovia's churches, and the best preserved of its kind in Europe, is the 12-sided Iglesia de la Vera Cruz (admission €1.50; 10.30am-1.30pm & 3.30-7pm Tue-Sun Mar-Aug, 10.30am-1.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm Tue-Sun Sep-Feb, closed Nov). Built in the 13th century by the Knights Templar and based on the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, it long housed what is said to be a piece of the Vera Cruz (True Cross), now in the nearby village church of Zamarramala (on view only at Easter). The curious two-storey chamber in the circular nave is where the knights stood vigil over the holy relic. For fantastic views of the town and

the Sierra de Guadarrama, walk uphill behind the church for approximately 1km.

Just west of Vera Cruz is the Convento de los Carmelitas Descalzos (921 43 13 49; 10am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun, 4-7pm Mon), where San Juan de la Cruz is buried. It's open longer hours in summer. A bit further east is the Monasterio de El Parral (921 43 12 98; admission by donation; 10am-12.30pm & 4.15-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10-11.30am & 4.15-6.30pm Sun). Ring the bell to see part of the cloister and church, the latter is a proud, flamboyant Gothic structure. The monks chant a Gregorian Mass at noon on Sunday and daily in summer at 1pm, and the monastery is open longer hours in summer.

About 1.3km southeast of the aqueduct, just off Avenida de Padre Claret, the Convento de San Antonio El Real (adult/under 12yr €2/free; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) is also worth a look. Once the summer residence of Enrique IV, its Gothic-Mudéjar church has a splendid ceiling.

Festivals & Events

Segovianos let their hair down for the Fiestas de San Juan y San Pedro, celebrated from 24 to 29 June with parades, concerts and bullfights. Fiesta San Frutos, on 25 October, celebrates the town's patron saint.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Pensión Ferri (921 46 09 57; Calle de Escuderos 10; s/d with shared bathroom €15/22) Occupying an old house in a superb location, this is a good budget choice. The rooms are simple but quaint and incorporate some of the building's original wood and brick work.

Hostal Juan Bravo (921 46 34 13; Calle de Juan Bravo 12; d with washbasin/private bathroom €32/38) Another excellent choice with sparkling rooms, Hostal Juan Bravo has rooms at the back with stunning views of the Sierra de Guadarrama; the friendly owners round out a great package.

Hostal Plaza (921 46 03 03; www.hostal-plaza.com; Calle del Cronista Leceña 11; s with washbasin €22, s/d from €33/42) The real drawcard here is the location, a few steps off Plaza Mayor. Ask to see a few rooms as size and comfort levels vary, but most are worth what is asked. Unusually in this price range, you can also pay with credit card. Our only complaint? The bedspreads sport colour schemes that your grandmother used to love.

Hostal Fornos (96 /fax 921 46 01 98; Calle Infanta Isabel 13; s/d from €32/45) Deservedly popular, this high-quality *hostal* has delightful, spacious rooms with that fresh white-linen-and-wicker-chair look. The owners are welcoming and the location's a winner.

MIDRANGE

Hotel las Sirenas (96 921 46 26 63; hotelsirenas@terra.es; Calle de Juan Bravo 30; s/d from €48/64) This is another popular choice and it's not hard to see why. The rooms are spacious and some come with the barest hint of character. You're also tucked away in a quiet street close to the city walls which you'll appreciate as *segovianos* begin their weekends of revelry.

Hotel Infanta Isabel (96 921 46 13 00; www.hotelinfantaisabel.com; Plaza Mayor 12; s/d from €50/78) A great place in a great location, this historic hotel has period touches (some are a bit overdone) and the rooms with balconies overlooking the plaza are wonderful (if noisy on weekend nights). Utterly charming.

Hotel Acueducto (96 902 25 05 50; www.hotelacueducto.com; Calle de Padre Claret 10; s/d €65/100) If you don't mind being just outside the old town, this place is a very comfortable choice with large, modern rooms. What sets it above the others are the uninterrupted views towards the aqueduct from some of the balconies and the rooftop terrace.

TOP END

Hosteria Ayala Berganza (96 921 46 04 48; www.partner-hotels.com; Calle de Carretas 5; d €110-133) This charming boutique hotel has supremely elegant, individually designed rooms (all have tiled floors, beautiful bathrooms and rustic accents) within a restored 15th-century palace. It's not far from the aqueduct, but it's quiet and oozes style.

Parador de Segovia (96 921 44 37 37; segovia@parador.es; Carretera de Valladolid; d €130-140) On a hilltop perch about five minutes' drive from the centre, this is one of the more modern *paradores* in Spain. It's nonetheless deluxe and you'll leave pampered. Breakfasting in the glass-walled dining room as the sun glitters on the Alcázar and the cathedral is one of Segovia's greatest pleasures.

Eating

Segovianos love their pigs to the point of obsession, which would be worrying if the fruits of their passion were not so delicious. Just about every restaurant proudly boasts its

horno de asar (roasts) and they say that 'pork has 40 flavours – all of them good'. The main speciality is *cochinillo asado* (roast suckling pig), but *judiones de la granja* (lima beans with pork chunks) also looms large on menus. The local dessert is a rich, sweet concoction drenched in *ponche*, a popular Spanish spirit, and hence known as *ponche segoviano*.

RESTAURANTS

Mesón de Campesino (Calle de la Infanta Isabel 12; menú €6) This place dishes up the cheapest *menú* in town – it's as simple as that.

Mesón José María (96 921 46 60 17; Calle del Cronista Lecea 11) Arguably the best tapas bar in town, this respected *segoviano* favourite has a rustic bar, while you can also dine on *cochinillo* (€15) in the formal dining room.

Cueva de San Esteban (96 921 46 09 82; Calle de Valdeláguila 15; menú €12.15) One of the only restaurants in Segovia not forcing suckling pig upon its customers, this popular spot focuses on seasonal dishes, serves varied tapas, and has a lively atmosphere and an excellent wine list.

Zarzamora (96 921 46 12 47; 11 5pm-midnight Tue-Sun) Around the corner from Cueva de San Esteban, this is another gem offering healthy pasta and meat dishes, fruit tarts and other home cooking. It's like eating in your own cosy kitchen.

La Almuzara (96 921 46 06 22; Calle Marqués del Arco 3; dishes under €8; 11 lunch Tue-Sat, dinner Tue-Sun) If you're a vegetarian, you don't need to feel like an outcast in this resolutely carnivorous city. La Almuzara features lots of vegetarian dishes, pastas and salads and the ambience is warm and artsy.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Casa Duque (96 921 46 24 87; www.restaurant-eduque.es; Calle de Cervantes 12; mains €12-17; 11 noon-11.30pm) Segovia's oldest dining establishment (open since 1895) is a local institution and a great place to sample *cochinillo* (suckling pig). It's a classy place with an old-world atmosphere and consistently great food and wine that draws Madrid celebrities for weekend lunches when reservations are essential. For less formality, try its *cueva* (cave) – which can be entered at Calle de Santa Engracia 10 – in the same building where you can get tapas and yummy *cazuelas* (stews).

Mesón de Cándido (96 921 42 81 03; Plaza del Azoguejo 5; mains €10-16, meals €30) At the foot of the aqueduct, this is another one Segovia's most popular places for *cochinillo* although it doesn't quite have the fame of Casa Duque.

CAFÉS

La Colonial (Avenida de Fernández Ladreda 19; 11 8.30am-11pm) Near the aqueduct, La Colonial does a roaring trade in coffees and cakes served at its outdoor tables.

Limón y Menta (96 921 44 21 41; Calle de Isabel la Católica 2; 11 8am-11pm) This is the place to head for a mouthwatering array of biscuits and pastries, including some of the best *ponche segoviano* around.

Drinking & Entertainment

Calle de la Infanta Isabel is one of those Spanish streets that you'd hate to live above and on a warm summer's evening, you'll definitely hear it before you see it; locals call it 'Calle de los Bares' (Street of the Bars) as it's the scene of serious carousing and general merriment, especially from Thursday to Saturday nights.

La Tasquina (96 921 46 19 54; Calle de Valdeláguila 3; 11 9am-late) A wine bar that draws crowds large enough to spill out onto the pavement nursing their good wines, *cavas* (sparkling wines) and cheeses.

Places come and go, but **Disney** (Calle de la Infanta Isabel 5) and **Santana** (Calle de la Infanta Isabel 18) have stood the test of time as popular watering holes.

Bars and discos also cluster at the plaza end of Calle de los Escuderos and along Calle de Carmen near the aqueduct, but they don't launch into action until at least 10pm (Thursday to Saturday only).

In fine weather, Plaza Mayor is the obvious place for hanging out and people-watching, but a quieter alternative is Plaza de San Martín. Near this square is **Saxo Bar** (Seminario 2), which sometimes has live music, usually jazz.

Getting There & Away

BUS

The bus station is just off Paseo de Ezequiel González, near Avenida de Fernández Ladreda. Buses head to Madrid up to 30 times daily (€5.95, 1½ hours). Regular buses go to Coca (€2.90, one hour), Salamanca (€9.25, three hours), Valladolid (€6.80, 2¾ hours) and Ávila (€3.90, one hour).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Of the two main roads down to the NVI, which links Madrid and Galicia, the N603 is the prettier. The alternative N110 cuts south-west across to Ávila and northeast to the main Madrid-Burgos highway. Although there is underground parking at a few points in the old town, the streets can be narrow and difficult to negotiate so it's better to leave the car in one of stations (12 hours €9 to €11) close to Plaza del Azoguejo.

TRAIN

Madrid-bound trains leave at two-hour intervals up to nine times daily (€5.45, 1¾ hours).

AROUND SEGOVIA

La Granja de San Ildefonso

It's not hard to see why the Bourbon King Felipe V chose this site to recreate in miniature (it's all relative) his version of Versailles, the palace of his French grandfather Louis XIV. In 1720 French architects and gardeners, together with some Italian help, began laying out the elaborate and decidedly baroque gardens (admission €3.40; 11 10am-6.30pm Oct-Mar, 10am-7pm Apr, 10am-8pm May-mid-Jun & Sep, 10am-9pm mid-Jun-Aug, 10am-6pm Nov-Feb) in the western foothills of the Sierra de Guadarrama, 12km east of Segovia. La Granja's centrepiece is the garden's 28 extravagant fountains which depict ancient myths such as *Apollo and the Baths of Diana*. Some are switched on at 5.30pm on Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday during Semana Santa.

The 300-room **Palacio Real** (96 921 47 00 19; www.patrimonionacional.es/granja/granja.htm; adult/concession €5/2.50; 11 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-1.30pm & 3-5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-Mar), once a favoured summer residence for Spanish royalty and restored after a fire in 1918, is impressive but perhaps the lesser of La Granja's jewels. You can visit about half of the palace's rooms, although the **Museo de Tapices** (Tapestry Museum) was closed for restoration at the time of research.

Buses to La Granja depart regularly from Segovia's main bus station off Paseo de Ezequiel González (€1.10, 20 minutes).

Pedraza de la Sierra

pop 472

The captivating walled village of Pedraza de la Sierra, about 37km northeast of Segovia, is eerily quiet during the week; its considerable number of restaurants and bars spring to life

with the swarms of weekend visitors. At the far end of town stands the lonely **Castillo de Pedraza** (admission €4; 11am-2pm & 5-8pm Wed-Sun Mar-Aug, 11am-2pm & 4-6pm Wed-Sun Sep-Feb), unusual for its intact outer wall. The excellent **Hospedería de Santo Domingo** (% 921 50 99 71; www.hospederiadesantodomingo.com; Calle Matadero 3; d €90-125) has terrific rooms with balconies, most of which overlook a small garden and the terracotta-tiled floors are a nice touch. Bus services to Pedraza are sporadic at best.

Turégano

pop 1074

Turégano, about 30km north of Segovia, is dominated by a unique 15th-century castle-church complex built by the then-Archbishop of Segovia, Juan Arias Dávila, who decided to make a personal fortress of the town. The castle walls are built around the façade of the Iglesia de San Miguel.

Coca

pop 1960

A typically dusty, inward-looking Castilian village 50km northwest of Segovia, Coca is presided over by a stunning all-brick castle (guided tours €2.50; 11am-11pm Mon-Fri), a virtuoso piece of Gothic-Mudéjar architecture. It was built in 1453 by the powerful Fonseca family and is surrounded by a deep moat. The beautiful multiturreted exterior was once matched by an equally breathtaking Renaissance interior, which was stripped of its ornamentation in the 19th century. Entry is by guided tour only. Up to five buses run daily between Coca and Segovia (€2.90, one hour).

VALLADOLID

pop 321,001

Valladolid doesn't see many tourists and that in itself may be reason enough to visit as it's a lively city with a very Spanish character. By day, it works hard and showcases a sprinkling of first-rate monuments, a fine Plaza Mayor and excellent museums. In the evenings and on weekends, locals put on their Sunday best and stroll through the traffic-free streets of the city centre. And at night, the city comes alive as Valladolid's large student population overflow from the city's boisterous bars. It is an easy city to find your way around with the reasonably compact city centre lying east of Río Pisuerga.

History

Little more than a hamlet in the early Middle Ages, Valladolid had become a major centre of commerce, education and art by the time Fernando of Aragón and Isabel of Castilla discreetly contracted matrimony here in 1469. As Spain's greatest-ever ruling duo, they carried Valladolid to the height of its splendour. Its university was one of the most dynamic on the peninsula and Carlos I made Valladolid the seat of imperial government and a magnet for some of the most famous names of Spanish history, among them the merciless Inquisitor General Fray Tomás de Torquemada (see the boxed text, p202) and Christopher Columbus who ended his days in the city.

Felipe II was born here in 1527, but 33 years later, he chose to make Madrid (which had a population almost half the size of Valladolid) the capital, much to the displeasure of the *vallasoletanos*. It's also the administrative capital of the Autonomía de Castilla y León.

Information

You'll find banks with ATMs along Calle de Santiago.

Algún Lugar (Plaza de la Universidad; per hr €2;

11am-11pm Mon-Sat) Internet café in a buzzing bar.

Hospital de la Cruz Roja Española (% 983 22 22 22; Calle de Felipe II 9)

Main post office (Plaza de la Rinconada)

Policia Nacional (% 091, 983 36 61 00; Calle de Felipe II 11)

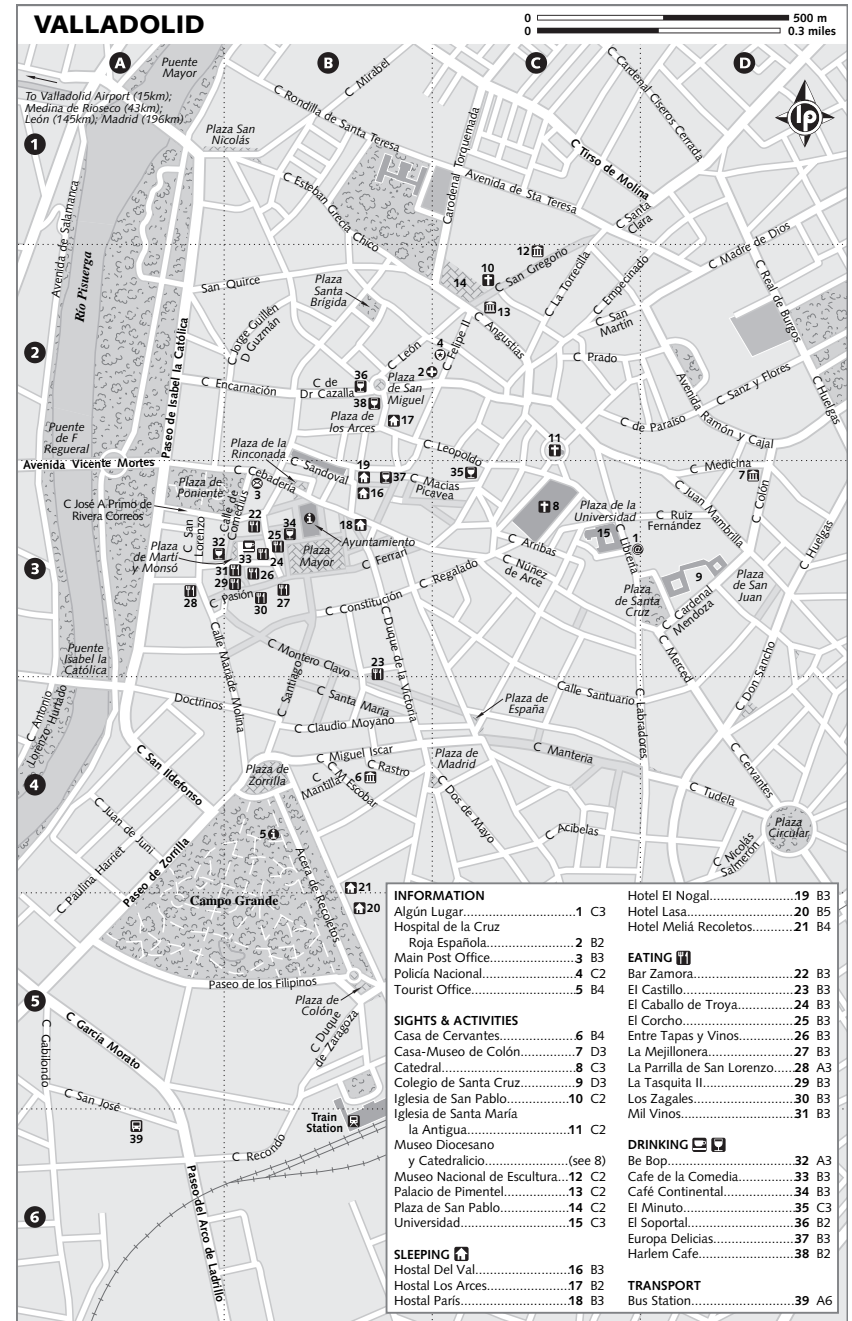
Tourist office (% 983 21 94 38; www.turismocastilla.yleon.com; Acera de Recoletos; 9am-2pm & 5-8pm mid-Sep-mid-Jun, 9am-8pm Sun-Thu & 9am-9pm Fri & Sat mid-Jun-mid-Sep)

Sights

MUSEO NACIONAL DE ESCULTURA

This museum (% 983 25 03 75; http://museoescultura.mcu.es; Calle de San Gregorio 2; adult/child/concession €2.40/free/1.20, Sat afternoon & Sun free; 10am-2pm & 4-9pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun mid-Mar-Sep), Spain's premier showcase of polychrome wood sculpture, is housed in the former Colegio de San Gregorio (1496), a flamboyant example of the Isabelline Gothic style where exhibition rooms line a splendid two-storey galleried courtyard.

Alonso de Berruguete, Juan de Juni and Gregorio Fernández are the star attractions, especially some enormously expressive fragments from Berruguete's main commission,



THE DARK PRINCE OF THE INQUISITION

The Spanish Inquisition casts a long shadow over Spanish history and there were few more notorious advocates of this dark era than the zealot Fray Tomás de Torquemada (1420–98). Immortalised by Dostoevsky as the articulate Grand Inquisitor who puts Jesus himself on trial in *Brothers Karamazov*, and satirised by Monty Python in the *Flying Circus*, Torquemada was born in Valladolid to well-placed Jewish *conversos* (converts to Christianity).

A Dominican, Fray Tomás was appointed Queen Isabel's personal confessor in 1479. Four years later, Pope Sixtus IV appointed this rising star to head the Castilian Inquisition.

Deeply affected by the Spanish cult of *sangre limpia* (pure blood), the racist doctrine that drove the 800-year struggle to rid Spain of non-Christian peoples, Torquemada gleefully rooted out *conversos* (despite his background) and other heretics, including his favourite targets, the *marranos* (Jews who only pretended to convert but continued to practise Judaism in private).

The lucky sinners had their property confiscated which served as a convenient fund-raiser for the war of Reconquista against the Muslims. The condemned were then paraded through town wearing the *sambenito*, a yellow shirt emblazoned with crosses that was short enough to expose their genitals, then marched to the doors of the local church and flogged.

If you were unlucky, you underwent unimaginable tortures before going through an auto-da-fé, a public burning at the stake. Those that recanted and kissed the cross were garroted before the fire was set, while those that recanted only were burnt quickly with dry wood. If you stayed firm and didn't recant, the wood used for the fire was green and slow-burning.

In the 15 years Torquemada was Inquisitor General of the Castilian Inquisition, he ran some 100,000 trials and sent about 2000 people to burn at the stake. Many of the trials were conducted in Valladolid's Plaza Mayor, the executions in Plaza de Zorrilla.

On 31 March 1492, Fernando and Isabel, on Torquemada's insistence, issued their Edict of Expulsion, as a result of which all Jews were forced to leave Spain within two months on pain of death.

The following year, Torquemada retired to the monastery of Santo Tomás in Ávila, from where he continued to administer the affairs of the Inquisition. In his final years he became obsessed with the fear that he might be poisoned, and refused to eat anything without having a unicorn's horn nearby as an antidote. Unlike many of his victims, he died in his sleep in 1498.

the high altar for Valladolid's Iglesia de San Benito. Downstairs is a small wing dedicated to Fernández, whose melodramatic intensity is especially well reflected in his painfully lifelike sculpture of a dead Christ.

The museum opens shorter hours from September to mid-March.

PLAZA DE SAN PABLO

Virtually next to the Museo Nacional de Escultura, this open square is dominated by the Iglesia de San Pablo, the main façade of which is an extravagant masterpiece of Isabelline Gothic, with every square inch finely worked, carved and twisted to produce a unique fabric in stone. Also fronting the square is the Palacio de Pimentel, where, on 12 July 1527, Felipe II was born. A tiled mural in the palace's entrance hall depicts scenes from the life of the king. The palace hosts occasional exhibitions.

CATEDRAL & AROUND

Valladolid's 16th-century *catedral* is not one of Castilla's finest, but it does have a fine altarpiece by Juni and a processional monstrance by Juan de Arfe in the attached Museo Diocesano y Catedralicio (☎ 983 30 43 62; Calle de Arribas 1; admission €2.50; 10am–1.30pm & 4.30–7pm Tue–Fri, 10am–2pm Sat & Sun).

More interesting is the Iglesia de Santa María la Antigua, a 14th-century Gothic church with an elegant Romanesque tower. The grand baroque façade to the east of the *catedral* belongs to the main building of the *universidad* and is the work of Narciso Tomé.

East of the *catedral* and the church is the early Renaissance Colegio de Santa Cruz (1487). The main portal is an early Plateresque example; wander inside to see the three-tiered and colonnaded patio and, in the chapel, Fernández' super-realistic *Cristo de la Luz* sculpture.

CASAS DE CERVANTES & COLON

Cervantes was briefly imprisoned in Valladolid, and his house (☎ 983 30 88 10; Calle del Rastro; adult/under 18 & senior €2.40/free, Sun free; 19.30am–3pm Tue–Sat, 10am–3pm Sun) is happily preserved behind a quiet little garden.

The Casa-Museo de Colón (☎ 983 29 13 53; Calle de Colón; admission free; 10am–2pm & 5–7pm Tue–Sat, 10am–2pm Sun) is a replica of the house in which Christopher Columbus lived and ended his days in 1506. It was closed for major renovations when we visited.

Sleeping

Valladolid's hotels see more businesspeople than tourists during the week – prices at many hotels drop considerably from Friday to Sunday.

Hostal Del Val (☎ 983 37 57 52; benidiopor@terra.es; Plaza del Val 6; s/d with washbasin €15/27, with bathroom €27/36) Run by the same owner as Hostal Los Arces, this *hostal* is good value, especially those with private bathroom that overlook the quiet square. It's a steep three-storey climb to reach reception.

Hostal Los Arces (☎ 983 35 38 53; benidiopor@terra.es; Calle de San Antonio de Padua 2; s/d with washbasin €15/30, with bathroom €27/39) This place is outstanding value with pleasant, renovated rooms with TV, most of which overlook a reasonably quiet square. The owner is also friendly in an understated, Castilian kind of way.

Hostal París (☎ 983 37 06 25; www.hostalparis.com; Calle de la Especiería 2; s/d from €41.20/48.50; P) One of the closest places to stay to the Plaza Mayor, Hostal París has comfortable, modern rooms with all the trimmings (including satellite TV) and good service. There's parking from 8pm to 10am for €9.50.

Hotel El Nogal (☎ 983 34 03 33; www.hotelnogal.com; Calle Conde Ansuérez 10–12; s/d €46/68) Hotel El Nogal has a mixture of old and new, with most of the rooms sporting polished floorboards, ample space (even the singles) and modern bathrooms, some with hydro-massage showers. All face out onto either a plaza or a quietish street.

Hotel Lasca (☎ 983 39 02 55; www.hotellasca.com; Acera de Recoletos 21; s/d Mon–Thu €47/82, Fri–Sun €39/50; P) Handy for the train station and geared towards business travellers, Hotel Lasca's warmly decorated rooms have a nice blend between antique furnishings, shiny parquet floors, modern bathrooms and a sharp attention to detail. Parking costs €11.

Hotel Meliá Recoletos (☎ 983 21 62 00; www.solmelia.com; Acera de Recoletos 13; s/d Mon–Thu €39/50, Fri–Sun €47/82, d with breakfast Fri–Sun €75; P) This excellent four-star hotel has a touch of class that elevates it above other hotels in this category. At once part of a chain but with a boutique-hotel intimacy, it offers large luxurious rooms and impeccable service. Parking is €12.

Eating

BREAKFAST

El Castillo (Calle de Montero Calvo; 19.30am–11.30am Mon–Sat) This buzzing *churrería* (Spanish-style doughnut shop) is ideal for kick-starting your day with good coffee and *tostada* (toasted rolls) or *churros* (doughnuts) for €1.20.

TAPAS

Valladolid is a great town to get into the tapas habit and you need look no further than the bars west of the Plaza Mayor. **Bar Zamora** (Calle de Correos 5) has won prizes for its tapas, while **El Corcho** (Calle de Correos 2), a few doors up, wins the prize of public opinion from many locals.

It is said that Spaniards consume 30 million kilograms of mussels every year and it's our guess that a fair proportion of these are downed in **La Mejillonera** (Calle de la Pasión 13). A good place to try for its range of *tostas* (toasts) is **La Tasquita II** (Calle Caridad). For a slightly more upmarket take on the tapas obsession, try **Entre Tapas y Vinos** (Calle de la Pasión 6).

RESTAURANTS

La Parrilla de San Lorenzo (☎ 983 33 50 88; Calle de Pedro Niño; mains €11–15; 19.30am–late, restaurant lunch & dinner) Both a rustic stand-up bar and a much-lauded restaurant with vaulted ceilings, La Parrilla de San Lorenzo has upmarket Castilian cuisine (hearty stews, legumes and

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

El Caballo de Troya (☎ 983 33 93 55; www.elcaballodetroya.com; Calle de Correos 1; raciones €5.30–10.90, menú €11.80–20.50) The 'Trojan Horse' is a Valladolid treat, ranged around a stunning interior courtyard with a taberna downstairs for brilliant *raciones* – we recommend the *bandeja surtidas* (tasting platters) for a rich and varied combination of tastes – while the restaurant is as sophisticated in flavours as the dining room is classy in design.

steaks play a leading role) with a relaxed ambience. The menu looks like a medieval religious document!

Mil Vinos (☎ 983 34 43 36; www.milvinos.com; cnr Plaza Marti y Monsó & Calle de Comedias; mains €12-16; 1 Tue-Sun) Hardwood floors and lime-green walls go together surprisingly well at this trendy place where the wines and desserts are a feature, but the mains spring their own, creative surprises. The *ensalada de centollo* (spider crab salad) is our favourite.

Los Zagales (☎ 983 38 08 92; Calle de la Pasión 13; mains €15; 1 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) The bar here is awash with hanging local produce and the occasional pig's head mounted on the wall – all are also represented in the tapas varieties lined up along the bar. But Los Zagales is best known for its restaurant where the servings are generous and the food excellent.

Drinking

Central Valladolid brims with welcoming bars and cafés and you'll quickly find a personal favourite.

El Minuto (Calle de Macías Pícarava 15; 1 9am-late) Near the *catedral*, this smooth café-bar is popular with students and is flanked by several other prospects for late-night drinking.

Café Continental (Plaza Mayor 23; 1 8am-3am) This hip spot is the pick of the bars and *terrazas* (terraces) that surround the delightful Plaza Mayor. It features live music upstairs most nights, and you could easily spend the best part of a night here without feeling the need to move.

Calle de Paraíso and its surrounding streets (called 'El Portu' by locals) and Plaza de San Miguel draw bar-hoppers like moths to a flame. At the latter, **El Soportal** (Plaza de San Miguel), with its leopard-skin pillars, is a good place to start your night, while the **Harlem Cafe** (Calle de Padua) around the corner is similarly good. Not far away, **Europa Delicias** (Calle Conde Ansurez 18) is one of those places that comes into its own the longer the night goes on.

The Plaza Marti y Monsó also has a sprinkling of bars. **Café de la Comedia** (Plaza Marti y Monsó) is noisy with people and a convivial atmosphere while **Be Bop** (Plaza Marti y Monsó) is all pink stilettoes and a super-cool crowd.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Ryanair has a four flights a week from Valladolid to London (Stansted) and six weekly

flights to Brussels (Charleroi). Iberia operates up to five daily flights to Barcelona with connections to other cities in Spain.

BUS

Buses travel to Madrid at least hourly between 6.30am and 9.30pm (€11.35, 2¼ hours), while others go hourly to Palencia (€2.85, 45 minutes).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The N620 motorway passes Valladolid en route from Burgos to Tordesillas, where it picks up with the NVI between Madrid and A Coruña in Galicia. The N601 heads northwest to León and south to hit the NVI and A6 west of Segovia.

Parking stations (€8.50 to €12, 12 hours) are plentiful throughout the centre of town, and most hotels and hostels can point you in the right direction.

TRAIN

Valladolid is a major train hub and up to 20 trains daily go to Madrid (from €11.85, about three hours); when the fast train AVE line is completed, you'll be whisked there in under an hour. More than 10 trains run daily to León (from €8.90, about two hours) and Burgos (€7.55, about 1½ hours). There are also frequent services to Palencia (from €2.95, 35 minutes) and Salamanca (from €6.90, 1¾ hours), one train to Zamora (€7.15, 1½ hours) and three to Bilbao (from €19, about 3½ hours).

Getting Around

Valladolid's airport is 15km northwest of the city centre. Many bus services along the N601 stop at the airport, while a dedicated *Linecar* (☎ 983 23 00 33) has up to five daily services from Valladolid to the airport (€3) and three services going the other way. A taxi between the airport and the city centre costs €18 from Monday to Saturday and €19.50 on Sunday and holidays.

Local buses 2 and 10 pass the train and bus stations on their way to Plaza de España.

AROUND VALLADOLID

Medina de Rioseco

pop 5024

Medina de Rioseco, a once-wealth trading centre, is a shadow of its former medieval self, but it retains some worthwhile sights that the

tourist office (☎ 983 72 03 19; turismo@medinaderioseco.com; Calle La Dársena del Canal de Castilla s/n; 1 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), close to Plaza Mayor, can direct you to.

The **Iglesia de Santa Maria de Mediavilla** (☎ 983 70 09 82) is a grandiose Isabelline Gothic work with three star-vaulted naves and the famous **Capilla de los Benavente**. Anchored by an eye-popping altarpiece by Juan de Juni, it's sometimes referred to as 'the Sistine Chapel of Castilla' which is only a slight exaggeration. Down the hill, the portals of the light-flooded **Iglesia de Santiago** blend Gothic, neoclassical and Plateresque architectural styles.

The **Museo de Semana Santa** (☎ 983 70 03 27; adult/under 14yr €3/free; 1 11am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun Sep-May, 11am-2pm & 5-8pm Jun-Aug) is dedicated to *pasos* (Holy Week figures) and an extensive range of other Easter memorabilia within an old church. Medina de Rioseco is famous for its Easter processions.

Hostal Duque de Osuna (☎ 983 70 01 79; Avenida de Castilviejo 16; s/d from €21/33), not far from the bus station, is excellent value, especially as the rooms come with private bathroom. They aren't anything special but they're clean and it's an excellent Medina de Rioseco base.

Hostal La Muralla (☎ 983 70 05 77; Plaza de Santo Domingo 4; d €24-30) offers huge, bright rooms with small bathrooms, balcony and fan.

Two places for a great feed are **Restaurante La Rúa** (☎ 983 70 07 83; Calle de San Juan 25; menú €8) and the more upmarket **Restaurante Pasos** (☎ 983 70 10 02; Calle de Lázaro Alonso 44; menú €12).

Each day up to eight buses run to León (€5.15, 1¼ hours) and up to 10 go to Valladolid (€2.55, 30 minutes).

Tordesillas

pop 8643

Commanding a rise on the northern flank of Río Duero, this charming little town has a historical significance that belies its size. Originally a Roman town, it later became part of the frontline between the Christians and Muslims. It then played a major role in world history, when, in 1494, Isabel and Fernando, the Catholic Monarchs, sat down with Portugal here to hammer out a treaty determining who got what in Latin America. Portugal got Brazil and much of the rest went to Spain.

The **tourist office** (☎ 983 77 10 67; www.tordesillas.net; 1 10.30am-1.30pm & 4-6.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) is in Casas del Tratado, near the Iglesia de San Antolín.

SIGHTS

Real Convento de Santa Clara

The history of Tordesillas has been dominated by this Mudéjar-style convent (☎ 983 77 00 71; adult/student & senior €3.60/2, EU citizens free Wed; 1 10.30am-1.30pm & 4.30-6.30pm Tue-Sat, 10.30am-1.30pm & 3.30-5.30pm Sun Apr-Sep), still home to a few Franciscan nuns living in near-total isolation from the outside world. What started in 1363 as a palace for Alfonso XI later became a residence for the mistress of Pedro I. In his testament, Pedro I charged his daughter Beatriz with turning it into a convent. In 1494, the signing of the Treaty of Tordesillas took place here.

It was also home to the crazy queen Juana la Loca after her husband, Felipe I, died in 1506; she stayed until her own death in 1555 and in fact was buried here for 19 years before her body was transferred to Granada (as she had wished).

The guided tour of the convent takes in some remarkable rooms, including a wonderful Mudéjar patio left over from the palace, and the church – the stunning *techumbre* of which is a masterpiece of woodwork. The Mudéjar door, Gothic arches and Arabic inscriptions are really superb, as are the **Arab baths** (admission €2.25, combined ticket with convent €4.60), which also contain some extremely delicate paintings.

The tour is included in the entry free and the convent is open shorter hours from October to March. The baths are open by appointment only.

Around Town

The **Museo del Tratado del Tordesillas** (☎ 983 77 10 67; Calle de Casas de Tratado) is dedicated to the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas and the informative displays look at the world as it was before and after the treaty. There's a reproduction of the treaty itself and a map that suggests Spain did very well out of the negotiations. It's open by appointment.

The **Museo de San Antolín** (Calle de Tratado de Tordesillas s/n; admission €1.80; 1 10.30am-1.30pm & 4.30-6.30pm Tue-Sun, 10.30am-1.30pm Sun), in a deconsecrated Gothic church, houses a collection of religious art with some ornate altars among the highlights.

The heart of town is formed by the pretty, porticoed **Plaza Mayor**, the mustard-yellow paintwork of which contrasts with dark brown woodwork and black grilles.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hostal San Antolin (☎ 983 79 67 71; sanantolin@telefonica.net; Calle San Antolin 8; s/d €27/45) This is the best place to stay in the old town, although the overall aesthetic and rooms are modern. The attached restaurant, the Mesón San Antolin, is one of the most popular eateries in town with good *raciones* downstairs and a fine fancy restaurant upstairs. It's just off Plaza Mayor.

Parador (☎ 983 77 00 51; www.parador.es; Carretera de Salamanca 5; d €110-140) Tordesillas' most sophisticated hotel is the ochre-toned *parador* where some rooms have four-poster beds (it's that sort of place) and many look out onto the tranquil gardens. This is one of the *parador*'s flagship properties and is worth every euro.

There are a few pleasant cafés and restaurants on Plaza Mayor, including **Don Pancho** (☎ 983 77 01 74; Plaza Mayor 9; menú €8, mains from €9) which is known for its meats cooked in a wood-fire oven, homely atmosphere and home cooking. For tapas, try **Viky** (☎ 983 77 10 61; Plaza Mayor 14; menú €7.50, mains from €11; h Tue-Sun).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The **bus station** (☎ 983 77 00 72; Avenida de Valladolid) is near Calle de Santa María. Regular buses depart for Madrid (€9.20, 2¼ hours), Salamanca (€4.90, 1¼ hours), Valladolid (€1.95, 30 minutes) and Zamora (€4.05, one hour).

Toro

pop 9466

Modern Toro, which lies north of Río Duero, is somewhat overshadowed by the town's historical significance – Fernando and Isabel cemented their primacy in Christian Spain at the Battle of Toro in 1476 – but it has settled comfortably into provinciality at the heart of a much-loved wine region.

The town's **tourist office** (☎ 980 69 18 62; h 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-Jun, 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Tue-Sat Jul-Sep) is in the *ayuntamiento* on Plaza de España.

SIGHTS

Romanesque churches appear on seemingly every street corner in Toro. The **Colegiata Santa María La Mayor** (h 10am-1pm & 4-7pm) rises above the town and boasts the magnificent Romanesque-Gothic Pórtico de la Majestad. Treasures inside include the famous 15th-century painting called *Virgen de la Mosca* (Virgin of the Fly); see if you can spot the fly on the virgin's robe.

From behind the *catedral* you have a superb view south across the fields to the Romanesque bridge over Río Duero. The nearby **Alcázar**, dating from the 10th-century, conserves its walls and seven towers.

Southwest of town, the **Monasterio Sancti Spiritus** (☎ 980 10 81 07; h 10.30am-12.30pm & 4.30-6.30pm Tue-Sun) features a fine Renaissance cloister and the striking alabaster tomb of Beatriz de Portugal, wife of Juan I. Guided tours (€3.60) are offered from Tuesday to Sunday at 10.30am, 11.30am, noon, 5.30pm and 7pm in summer, or 10.30am, 11.15am, noon, 4.30pm and 5.15pm in winter.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hostal Doña Elvira (☎ 980 69 00 62; Calle Antonio Miguelez 47; s/d with washbasin €11.40/16.85, d €27.65) One of the cheapest *hostales* in Tordesillas, Hostal Doña Elvira has a few floors of simple, clean rooms, all with TV.

Hotel Juan II (☎ 980 69 03 00; http://hoteljuanii.com; Paseo del Espolón 1; s/d from €48/66) With fine balcony views, parquet floors and plenty of space, Hotel Juan II is probably Toro's best. It's also in the heart of town and has a lovely rooftop terrace.

Plaza Mayor and surrounds bustle with plenty of places to eat.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Regular buses operate to Valladolid (€2.95, one hour) and Zamora (€1.85, 25 minutes) and there are two direct services to Salamanca (€4.35, 1½ hours) on weekdays.

ZAMORA

pop 66,123

Another strategic fortress town on the northern bank of Río Duero, Zamora is one those Castilian towns that conceals a wealth of medieval monuments behind its otherwise provincial air, so many in fact that it's popularly known as the 'Romanesque Museum'.

History

Roman **Ocelum Durii** was a significant way station along the Ruta de la Plata (Silver Route) from Astorga to southern Spain. The Romans yielded to the Visigoths, who were in turn overwhelmed by the Muslims, who twice laid waste to Zamora. By the 12th and 13th centuries, when a fever of church-building formed the architectural core of what you see today, Zamora had reached its zenith

as a commercial centre and its deeply religious character had begun to take root.

Orientation

The bus and train stations are a good half-hour walk northeast of the town centre. In the opposite direction, the *catedral* and the heart of the old town are a 15-minute walk southwest from the modern centre.

Information

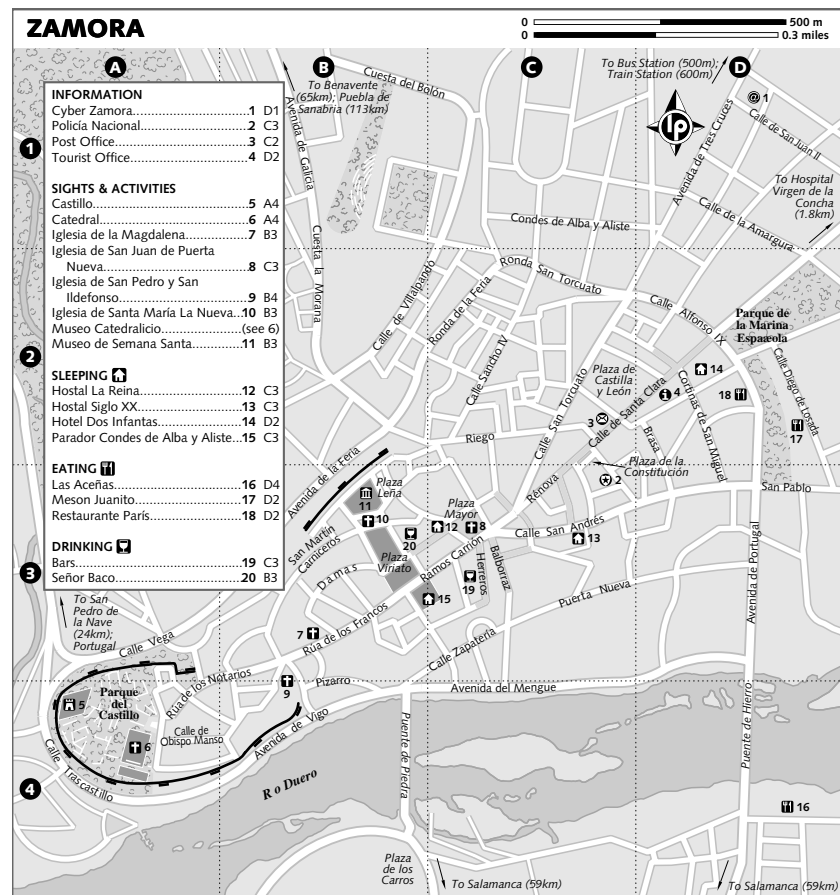
Cyber Zamora (☎ 980 67 24 13; Calle de San Juan II 10; per hr €2; h 10.30am-1am)

Emergency (☎ 091)

Hospital Virgen de la Concha (☎ 980 54 82 00;

Avenida Requejo s/n) One kilometre east of the old town.

Policia Nacional (☎ 980 53 04 62; Calle San Atilano 3)



Post office (Calle de Santa Clara 15)

Tourist office (☎ 980 53 18 45; oficinadeturismodezamora@jcy.es; Calle de Santa Clara 20; h 9am-2pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Sat & Sun)

Sights**CATEDRAL & AROUND**

Crowning medieval Zamora's highest point, the largely Romanesque *catedral* (h 10am-1pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sun Mar-Sep, 10am-2pm & 4.30-6.30pm Oct-Dec) features a square tower, a landmark Byzantine-style dome surrounded by turrets, and notable portals, especially the ornate Puerta del Obispo. Inside this 12th-century structure, the early Renaissance choir stalls are a masterpiece; carvings depict clerics, animals and a naughty encounter between a monk and a nun.

Adjacent to the main entrance is the **Museo Catedralicio** (admission €2; 11am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sun). Its star attraction is a collection of Flemish tapestries, the oldest of which, depicting the Trojan War, dates from the 15th century.

For a look at what's left of the city wall and its *castillo* (castle), head to the little park just west of the *catedral*.

CHURCHES

Zamora's churches (11am-1pm & 5-8pm Mar-Oct, 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Fri-Sun Nov-Apr) are of Romanesque origin, but all have been subjected to other influences. Among those retaining some of their Romanesque charm are the **Iglesia de San Pedro y San Ildefonso** (with Gothic touches) at Rúa de los Francos 3, **Iglesia de la Magdalena** (the southern doorway is considered the city's finest) on Rúa de los Francos and **Iglesia de San Juan de Puerta Nueva** on Plaza Mayor. **Iglesia de Santa María La Nueva** on Calle de San Martín Carniceros is actually a medieval replica of a 7th-century church destroyed by fire in 1158.

MUSEO DE SEMANA SANTA

Zamora is famous for its elaborate celebrations of *Semana Santa*, and this museum (adult/under 12yr €2.70/1.20, camera €3; 11am-2pm & 5-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) showcases the carved and painted *pasos* that are paraded around town during the colourful processions.

Sleeping

Zamora has a decent spread of accommodation. Prices can almost double during *Semana Santa*.

Hostal Siglo XX (980 53 29 08; Plaza del Seminario 3; s/d with washbasin €22/32) Located in a secluded nook, **Hostal Siglo XX** has five bright, simple rooms that are great for those on a tight budget. The *hostal's* location is good, you're close to the main sights in Zamora on a quiet street.

Hostal La Reina (980 53 39 39; Calle de la Reina 1; s/d Oct-Jun €25/28, Jul-Sep €30/35) A slightly better deal, **Hostal La Reina** offers spacious rooms, some with balconies that overlook Plaza Mayor, making it one of the best budget choices in town. Prices rise over Easter.

Hotel Dos Infantas (980 50 98 98; www.hotel-dosinfantas.com; Calle Cortinas de San Miguel 3; s/d €50/75) This place is superb value: a real touch of class at upper midrange prices. The large rooms come with minibar, satellite TV and a warm welcome. The only drawback is that it's in a

largely new part of town, though it it's an easy walk to Zamora's monuments.

Parador Condes de Alba y Aliste (980 51 44 97; www.parador.es; Plaza Viriato 5; d €110-140) Set in a sumptuous 15th-century palace (previous 'guests' included Isabel and Fernando), this is modern luxury with myriad period touches and an impressive attention to detail. Unlike many other *paradores* around the country, it's right in the heart of town. A fantastic choice.

Eating & Drinking

Several café-restaurants line Plaza Mayor, so take your pick.

Mesón Juanito (980 51 19 59; Calle Diego de Losada 10; menú €6.60) If cheap, simple meals are your thing, this is a good choice in a green corner of Zamora. In Zamora terms, it's a long way from the centre; in reality, it's a pleasant 10-minute walk.

Las Aceñas (980 53 02 34; Calle de Aceñas de Píñilla s/n; menú €7.60; 11am-9pm) Just over Puente de Hierro, **Las Aceñas** has riverside views of Zamora, a filling *menú* and a devoted local following – it's more earthy than stylish but that's a big part of its charm.

Restaurante Paris (980 51 43 25; Avenida de Portugal 14; menú €12.40) This is one of Zamora's best restaurants and was once voted one of the best 1000 restaurants in Spain; that may not sound like much, but given the number of restaurants in this food-obsessed country... Local specialities (steaks, salads and roasted meats) rule and the price tag is less painful than you usually pay for this quality.

Plaza Mayor and the streets emanating from it are great places for cafés and bars. One particular street abuzz with evening *marcha* (action) is Calle de los Herreros. Elsewhere, **Señor Baco** (980 53 04 61; Calle Corral Pintado 5; 11am-late) is a café-bar with sophisticated surrounds.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Regular bus services operate to/from Salamanca (€3.85, one hour), León (€6.40, 1½ hours), Valladolid (€5.80, 1½ hours) and Madrid (€18.60, 2¾ hours) via Toro and Tordesillas.

TRAIN

Trains head to Valladolid (€7.15, 1½ hours, one daily), Madrid (€5, 3¾ hours, three daily), Ávila (€18.20, two hours, three daily) and Ourense (€23.40, two hours, two daily).

AROUND ZAMORA San Pedro de la Nave

This lonely 7th-century church, about 23km northwest of Zamora, is a rare and outstanding example of Visigothic church architecture, with blended Celtic, Germanic and Byzantine elements. Of special note are the intricately sculpted capitals. The church was moved to its present site in El Campillo during the construction of the Esla reservoir in 1930. To get there from Zamora, take the N122, then follow the signs to El Campillo.

Puebla de Sanabria

pop 1593

Nestled between the Sierra de la Culebra and Sierra de la Cabrera and close to the Portuguese border, this captivating little village is a tangle of medieval alleyways which unfold around a 15th-century castle and trickle down the hill. You can enter the castle at will and wander around the walls, while the view up towards town from the bridge is very pretty indeed.

The village is worth an overnight stop; the quiet cobblestone lanes feel like you've stepped back centuries. **Posada Real la Cartería** (980 62 03 12; www.lacarteria.com; Calle Rúa 16; d €70-105) is as enjoyable as the village itself, with delightful, large rooms with exposed stone walls and wooden beams, not to mention a gym, good restaurant and professional service.

There are sporadic bus services to Puebla de Sanabria from Zamora (from €5.55, 1¼ hours). If travelling by car, leave Zamora on the N630, then pick up the N631 at the Embalse de Ricobayo, which eventually merges with the N525.

PALENCIA

pop 81,439

Quiet, subdued Palencia boasts an immense Gothic *catedral*, the sober exterior of which belies the extraordinary riches that await within; it's widely known as 'La Bella Desconocida' (Unknown Beauty). Although much of the city is given over to modern apartment blocks, you'll find some pretty squares (particularly the Plaza Mayor and Plaza de la Inmaculada), a colonnaded main street (Calle Mayor) and a slew of other churches and several museums.

History

Known to the Romans as Pallantia and later an important Visigothic centre, Palencia was repeatedly destroyed in the early centuries

AD. King Sancho el Mayor de Navarra re-stored the town in 1035 and Palencia reached its zenith when King Alfonso VIII founded Spain's first university here in 1208. Decline set in rapidly after the 15th century.

Information

EMERGENCY & MEDICAL SERVICES

Emergency (980 112)

Hospital General Río Carrión (980 979 16 70 00;

Avenida Donantes de Sangre s/n) South of the city centre.

INTERNET ACCESS

Sala de Juegos (Plaza Mayor; per hr €0.90; 11am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2.30pm & 5-9pm Sat & Sun)

POST

Post office (980 979 72 20 00; Plaza de León 4)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Municipal tourist office (980 979 74 99 74; Plaza de San Pablo; 11am-10.30am-2pm & 5-8.30pm) This is the best office for information about the city; it's open longer hours in the summer.

Patronato de Turismo (980 979 71 51 30; Calle Mayor 31; 11am-3pm & 5-8pm) Information about Palencia Province.

Regional tourist office (980 979 74 00 68; Calle Mayor 105; 9am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun) Everything you need to know about Castilla y León; it's open longer hours in summer.

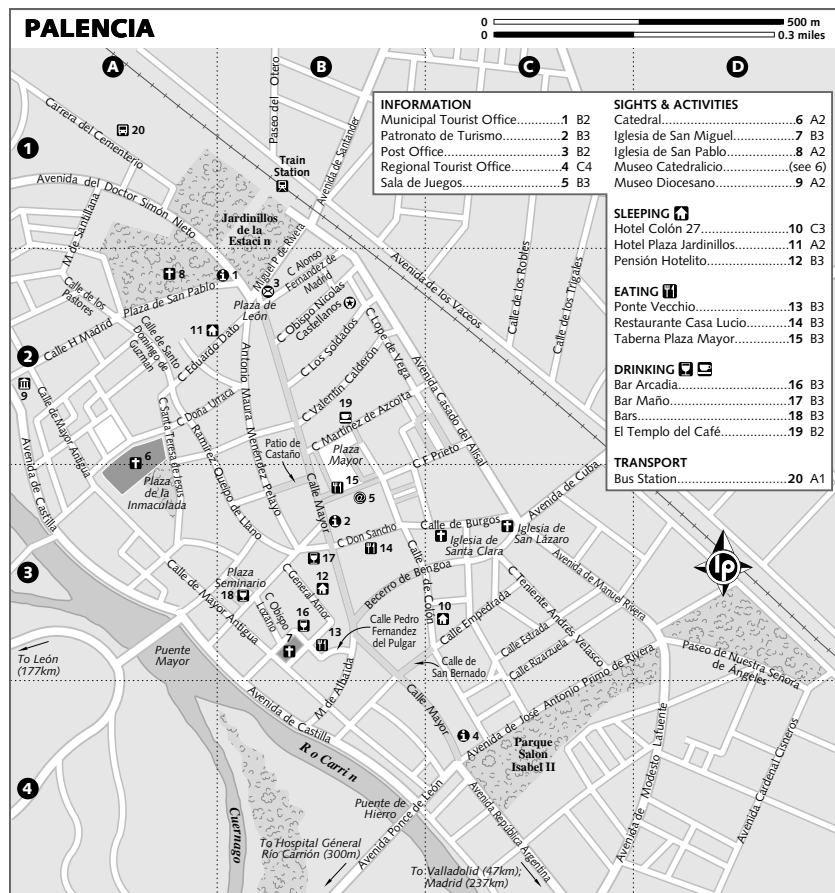
Sights

The **Puerta del Obispo** (Bishop's Door) is the highlight of the façade of the imposing *catedral* (11am-8.45am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun), which, at 130m long, 56m wide and 30m high, is one of the largest of the Castilian cathedrals.

The interior contains a treasure-trove of art. One of the most stunning chapels is the Capilla El Sagrario; the ceiling-high altarpiece tells the story of Christ in dozens of exquisitely carved and painted panels. The stone screen behind the choir stalls, or *trascoro*, is a masterpiece of bas-relief attributed to Gil de Siloé and is considered by many to be the most beautiful retrochoir in Spain.

From the retrochoir, a Plateresque stairwell leads down to the crypt, a remnant of the original, 7th-century Visigothic church and a later Romanesque replacement. Near the stairwell is the oak pulpit, with delicate carvings of the Evangelists by Juan de Ortiz.

In the attached **Museo Catedralicio** (guided tours €1.80; 11am-10.30am-1pm & 4-7pm) you'll see



some fine Flemish tapestries and a painting of San Sebastián by El Greco. A whimsical highlight is a trick painting by 16th-century German artist Lucas Cranach the Elder. Looking straight on, it seems to be a surreal dream-landscape that predates Dalí by some 400 years. Only when viewed from the side is the true image revealed – a portrait of Emperor Carlos V. Tours last 45 minutes and the museum is open longer hours in summer.

Iglesia de San Miguel (Calle de Mayor Antigua; h 9.30am-1.30pm & 6-7.30pm) stands out for its tall Gothic tower with a castlelike turret. San Miguel's interior is unadorned and austere but beautiful, a welcome antidote to the extravagant interiors of other Castilian churches. According to legend, El Cid (see the boxed

text, p225) was betrothed to his Doña Jimena here.

Of the numerous other churches around town, it's worth seeking out the **Iglesia de San Pablo** (Plaza de San Pablo; h 7.30am-12.30pm & 6.30-8.15pm) with its Renaissance façade and an enormous Plateresque altarpiece in the main chapel.

Of note too is the **Museo Diocesano** (979 70 69 13; Calle de Mayor Antigua; guided tour €3; h 10.30am & 11.30am Mon-Sat), within the 18th-century Palacio Episcopal, although its opening hours are such that you'll have to be quick. It's rooms showcase art from the Middle Ages through to the Renaissance. Pride of place goes to works by Pedro Berrugete and an altarpiece starring the Virgin (attributed to Diego de Siloé).

Sleeping

Pensión Hotelito (979 74 69 13; hotelito@yahoo.com; Calle del General Amor 5; s/d with shared bathroom €18/28, d with private bathroom €32.50) The best of Palencia's budget digs, this *pensión* (small, private hotel) is tidy, friendly and quiet, despite being quite central.

Hotel Plaza Jardiniños (979 75 00 22; Calle de Eduardo Dato 2; s/d €27/30) You don't find value for money like this very often. Some of the rooms come with splashes of colour, most are spacious (including the singles) and the overall sense is of a midrange hotel at budget prices.

Hotel Colón 27 (979 74 07 00; www.hotelcolon27.com; Calle de Colón 27; s/d €29/41) This place is excellent value with bright, spacious and attractive rooms with good bathrooms and TV.

Eating & Drinking

Ponte Vecchio (979 74 52 15; Calle de Doctrinus 1; starters €4-8, pasta & pizza €6-9; h lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) If you're craving a well-cooked pasta in classy surrounds, Ponte Vecchio is Palencia's best Italian restaurant. If you order fish or steak, your bill will double.

Taberna Plaza Mayor (979 74 04 10; Plaza Mayor 8; mains €12) If you can grab an outdoor table in the Plaza Mayor on a summer's evening, you've snaffled one of Palencia's best places to eat and pass the time. Dishes range from sardines stuffed with cured ham to steaks, while the tapas inside at the bar are also good.

Restaurante Casa Lucio (979 74 81 90; Calle de Don Sancho 2; mains €12-16; h 1.30-11.30pm) That great Spanish tradition of a packed bar laden with tapas yielding to a quieter, more elegant restaurant is alive and well at this terrific, central bar-restaurant. Sidle up to the bar for a creative tapa or consider the Castilian speciality of *cordero asado* (€38 for two).

El Templo del Café (979 10 71 21; Calle de Martínez de Azcoitia; h 7.30am-11pm Sun-Thu, 7.30am-1am Fri & Sat) This African-style café is not the sort of place you expect to find in a provincial Castilian town, but it's popular for its world-blend of coffees and African handicrafts for sale on the walls. It also does *chocolate con churros* (€2.70).

Bar Maño (Calle del General Franco 5; h 8am-11pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3am Sat, 10am-11pm Sun) This casual, hip bar is alive with a convivial buzz at all hours of the day and the hip magenta walls with hints of semi-industrial décor give it a classier edge than most Palencia bars.

Drinking is taken seriously by the late-night crowd who frequent the handful of bars that

encircle the tiny Plaza Seminario; drinks are cheap and the décor is the sort that you drink to forget. **Bar Arcadia** (Plaza San Miguel) is similar, but a cooler place to hang out.

Getting There & Away BUS

From the bus station (979 74 32 22; Carrera del Cementerio), there are regular services to Valladolid (€2.85, 45 minutes), Madrid (€13.80, 3¼ hours, seven daily), Aguilar de Campoo (€4.45, 1½ hours, four daily), Frómista (€2.25, 30 minutes, two daily) and Paredes de Nava (€1.35, 25 minutes, five daily).

TRAIN

Trains are usually a good bet, with regular departures from Palencia's busy little train station (979 74 30 19) throughout the day to Madrid (around €17, 3¼ hours), Burgos (from €4.10, one hour), León (from €6.60, 1¼ hours) and Valladolid (€2.95, 45 minutes).

AROUND PALENCIA Baños de Cerrato

Close to the singularly unattractive rail junction of Venta de Baños lies Spain's oldest church, the 7th-century **Basílica de San Juan** (admission €1, Wed free; h 10.30am-1pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sun) in Baños de Cerrato. Built by the Visigoths and modified many times since, its stone-and-terracotta façade exudes a pleasing, austere simplicity and a 14th-century alabaster statue of St John the Baptist. To get there, take a train from Palencia to Venta de Baños, then walk the final 2km.

Paredes de Nava

The eminent 16th-century sculptor Alonso de Berrugete was born in Paredes in 1488. Sadly, most of Paredes' churches are in great disrepair, save for the eclectic, 13th-century **Iglesia de Santa Eulalia** (979 83 04 69; Plaza Mayor; admission €2; h 10.30am-1.30pm & 4.30-7.30pm) with its pretty steeple with many arched windows. Its museum contains some important artworks, including several pieces by Berrugete.

Several trains travel daily to Palencia (€2.05, 15 minutes), and a couple of buses (€1.35) also ply the route.

Frómista

The main (and some would say only) reason for stopping here is the exceptional Romanesque **Iglesia de San Martín** (h 10am-2pm &

4.30-8pm Mar-Nov, 10am-2pm & 3.30-6.30pm Dec-Feb), one of those gems that seem to rise up from the plains of Castilla in the most unlikely villages. Harking back to 1066 and restored in the early 20th century, the squat façade of this harmoniously proportioned church is adorned with a veritable menagerie of human and zoomorphic figures, while the capitals inside are also richly decorated.

If you get stuck here overnight, **Pensión Marisa** (☎ 979 81 00 23; Plaza Obispo Almaraz 2; s/d €15/24) has spotless, bright rooms and great home cooking, while **Hotel San Martín** (☎ /fax 979 81 00 00; Plaza San Martín 7; s/d €32/42) promises a little more comfort.

There are two buses daily from Palencia (€2.20, 30 minutes).

MONTAÑA PALENTINA

These hills in the far north of Castilla y León offer a beautiful preview to the Cordillera Cantábrica, which divides Castilla from Spain's northern Atlantic regions.

Aguilar de Campóo

Aguilar de Campóo is not Castilla y León's loveliest town, but it does boast a medieval castle, and the town is a good base for exploring the region; there are no fewer than 55 Romanesque churches in the cool, hilly countryside.

The **tourist office** (Plaza de España 30; h 10am-1.45pm & 4-5.45pm Tue-Sat, 10am-1.45pm Sun) is on the elongated Plaza de España, capped at its eastern end by the **Colegiata de San Miguel**, a 14th-century Gothic church with a fine Romanesque entrance.

Downhill from the castle is the graceful Romanesque **Ermida de Santa Cecilia**. Just outside town on the highway to Cervera de Pisuerga is the restored **Monasterio de Santa María la Real** of Romanesque origin. Its 13th-century Gothic cloister with delicate capitals is a masterpiece.

There's plenty of accommodation around town and the square is swarming with cafés, bars and a couple of restaurants. The sprawling **Hotel Valentín** (☎ 979 12 21 25; www.hotelvalentin.com; Avenida Ronda 23; s/d Oct-Jun €33/48, Jul-Sep & Easter €42/55) is central and easily the best choice around town with large rooms.

Regular trains link Aguilar de Campóo with Palencia (€4.95, 1¼ hours), but the station is 4km from town. Buses bound for Burgos, Palencia and Santander depart at least once daily.

Romanesque Circuit

The area around Aguilar is studded with little villages and churches. At Olleros de Pisuerga there's a little church carved into rock, while further south, on a quiet back road, the Benedictine **Monasterio de Santa María de Mave** has an interesting 13th-century Romanesque church. The **Monasterio de San Andrés de Arroyo** (guided tours €1.50; h tours hourly 10am-1pm & 4-6pm) is an outstanding Romanesque gem, especially its cloister, which dates from the 13th century.

The C627 highway heading to Cervera de Pisuerga is lined with still more little churches dating from as far back as the 12th century. Cervera de Pisuerga itself is dominated by an imposing late-Gothic church, the **Iglesia de Santa María del Castillo**.

The N621 north from Cervera is a lovely road into Cantabria and to the southern face of the Picos de Europa.

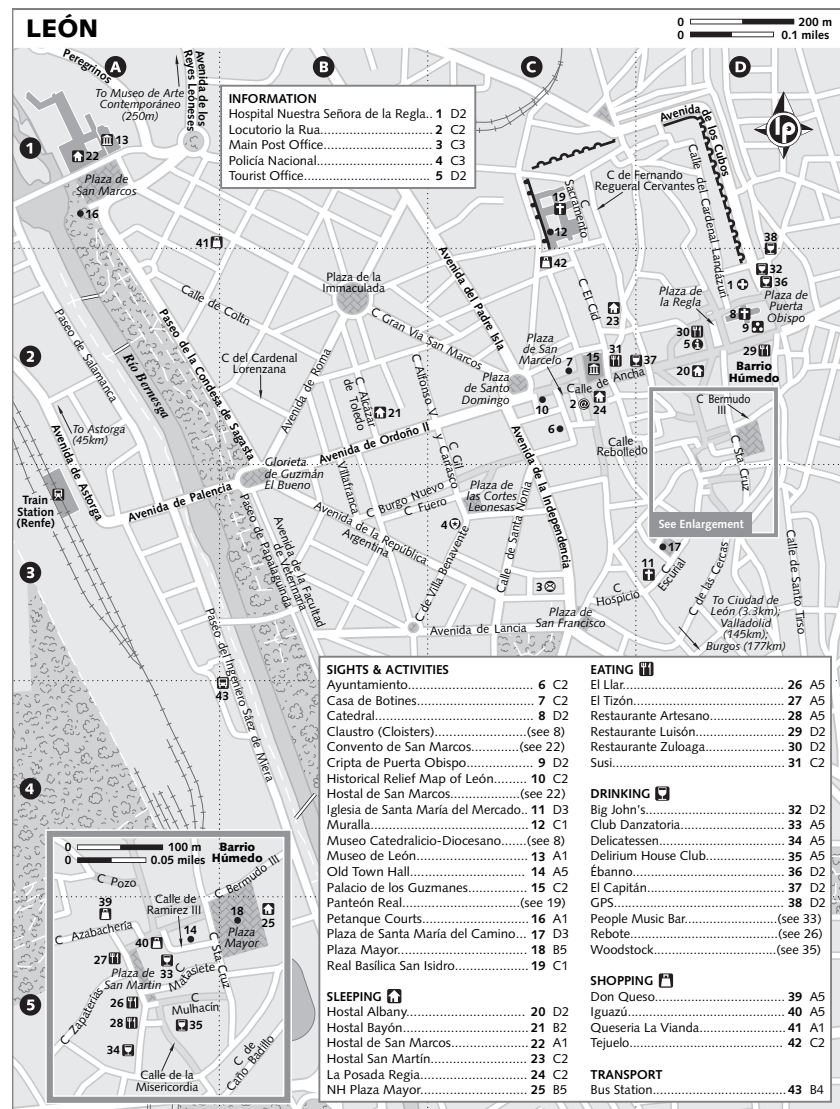
THE NORTHWEST

Once the centre of Christian Spain, León now stands like a sentinel at the rim of the great Castilian heartland. The last major city on the Camino de Santiago before it climbs west into the sierras that separate Castilla from Galicia, León has an extraordinary cathedral and its hinterland is full of interesting diversions and gems such as Astorga.

LEÓN

pop 136,414 / elevation 527m

León's astonishing cathedral is one of the finest in Spain, but, spectacular as it is, the cathedral is merely your entry point to a very charming city. By day you will encounter the León with its roots firmly planted in the soil of northern Castilla: a rich concentration of austere beautiful architecture, a loyal Catholic heritage that has made the city one of the premier attractions along the Camino de Santiago and a conservative and often inward-looking populace that is fiercely proud of its independent past. By night, León is taken over by the city's large student population, who provide it with a deep-into-the-night soundtrack of revelry that floods the narrow streets and enchanting plazas of the city's picturesque old quarter, the **Barrio Húmedo**. It is a fascinating and intoxicating mix.



History

A Roman legion set up camp here in AD 70 as a base controlling the gold mines of Las Médulas (p221). In the 10th century the Asturian king Ordoño II moved his capital here from Oviedo and, although it was later sacked by the Muslim armies of Al-Mansour, León was maintained by Alfonso V as the capital

of his growing kingdom. As the centre of power shifted south, León went into decline until mining brought the city back to life in the 1800s.

To get an idea of how León has grown, look for the historical relief map of the city in Plaza de San Marcelo showing the city in the 1st, 10th and 20th centuries.

Orientation

The train and bus stations lie on the western bank of Río Bernesga, while the heart of the city is on the eastern side. From the river to the *catedral* it's about 1km. The old town, the Barrio Humedo, lies immediately south of the *catedral*.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Iguazú (☎ 987 20 80 66; Calle de Plegarias 7; 10am-2pm & 5-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-2.30pm Sat) This fine little travel bookshop sells a good range of maps and guides to the local area and beyond.

EMERGENCY

Emergency (☎ 112)

Policía Nacional (☎ 091, 987 20 73 12; Calle de Villa de Benavente 6)

INTERNET ACCESS

Locutorio la Rúa (☎ 987 23 01 06; Calle de la Rúa 8; per hr €2; 9.30am-2.30pm & 4-10.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 5-9.30pm Sat)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Hospital Nuestra Señora de la Regla (☎ 987 23 69 00; Calle del Cardenal Landáuzuri 2)

MONEY

Banks with ATMs and exchange services are concentrated along Avenida de Ordoño II.

POST

Main post office (☎ 987 87 60 81; Avenida de la Independencia)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ 987 23 70 82; Plaza de la Regla; 9am-2pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Sat & Sun) Opposite the *catedral* and extremely helpful, it also organises guided city tours (€8; twice daily July to September, and twice each Saturday and Sunday March to June and October). Night tours (€4.50; Friday and Saturday July and September, nightly in August) also run in summer.

Sights

CATEDRAL

León's 13th-century *catedral* (☎ 987 87 57 70; www.catedraldeleon.org; 8.30am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-2.30pm & 5-7pm Sun Oct-Jun, 8.30am-1.30pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-2.30pm & 5-8pm Sun Jul-Sep), with its soaring towers, flying buttresses and truly breathtaking interior, is the city's spiritual heart. Whether spot-lit by night or bathed in

the glorious northern sunshine, the *catedral*, arguably Spain's premier Gothic masterpiece, exudes a glorious, almost luminous quality.

The extraordinary façade has a radiant rose window, three richly sculpted doorways and two muscular towers. After going through the main entrance, lorded over by the scene of the Last Supper, an extraordinary gallery of stained-glass windows awaits. French in inspiration and mostly executed from the 13th to the 16th centuries, the *vidrieras* (stained-glass windows) evoke an atmosphere unlike any other cathedral in Spain; the kaleidoscope of coloured light is offset by the otherwise gloomy interior. There seems to be more glass than brick – 128 windows with a surface of 1800 sq metres in all – but mere numbers cannot convey the ethereal quality of light permeating this *catedral*.

Other treasures include a silver urn on the altar, by Enrique de Arfe, containing the remains of San Froilán, León's patron saint. Also note the magnificent choir stalls and the rich chapels in the ambulatory behind the altar, especially the one containing the tomb of Ordoño II.

The peaceful, light-filled *claustró* (cloister; admission €1), with its 15th-century frescoes, is a perfect complement to the main sanctuary and an essential part of the cathedral experience. The **Museo Catedralicio-Diocesano** (admission incl *claustró* €3.50; 9.30am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1.30pm Sat Oct-Jun, 9.30am-2pm & 4-7.30pm Mon-Fri, to 7pm Sat Jul-Sep), which is entered via the cloisters, has a quality collection encompassing works by Juní and Gaspar Becerra alongside a precious assemblage of early Romanesque carved statues of the Virgin Mary. That said, most visitors without a specialist interest find the cathedral and cloisters more than enough to savour.

To add depth and context to your visit, consider the **guided tours** (€4.50) which leave from the door of the tourist office and take in the sanctuary and cloisters. They set out twice daily (usually midday and 4pm) and guides sometimes speak English.

CRIPTA DE PUERTA OBISPO

Beneath the footpath below the southern wall of the *catedral* is the **Cripta de Puerta Obispo** (admission free), the foundations from the northern gate of the Roman camp where León was founded. The future of the site was unclear at the time of writing – it recently opened to the public but only on a temporary basis.

REAL BASÍLICA DE SAN ISIDORO

Older even than the *catedral*, the Real Basílica de San Isidro provides a seminal Romanesque counterpoint to the former's Gothic strains. Fernando I and Doña Sancha founded the church in 1063 to house the remains not just of the saint, but also of themselves and 21 other early Leónese and Castilian monarchs. Sadly, Napoleon's troops sacked San Isidoro in the early 19th century, leaving behind just a handful of sarcophagi, although there's still plenty to catch the eye.

The main basilica is a hotchpotch of styles, but the two main portals on the southern façade are pure Romanesque. Of particular note is the **Puerta del Perdón** (on the right), which has been attributed to Maestro Mateo, the genius of the *catedral* at Santiago de Compostela. The church remains open night and day by historical royal edict.

The attached **Panteón Real** (☎ 987 87 61 61; admission €3, Thu afternoon free; 10am-1.30pm & 4-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1.30pm Sun Sep-Jun, 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-2pm Sun Jul & Aug) houses the remaining sarcophagi, which rest with quiet dignity beneath a canopy of some of the finest Romanesque frescoes in Spain. Motif after colourful motif drenches the vaults and arches of this extraordinary hall, held aloft by marble columns with intricately carved capitals. Biblical scenes dominate and include the Annunciation, King Herod's slaughter of the innocents, the Last Supper and a striking representation of Christ Pantocrator. The agricultural calendar on one of the arches is equally superb.

The pantheon, which once formed the portico of the original church, is now a small museum where you can admire the shrine of San Isidoro, a mummified finger of the saint and other treasures. A library houses a priceless collection of manuscripts.

Abutting the southwestern corner of the basilica is a fragment of the former *muralla* (old city walls), a polyglot of Roman origins and medieval adjustments.

HOSTAL DE SAN MARCOS

More than 100m long and blessed with a glorious façade, the **Convento de San Marcos** has more the appearance of a palace than the pilgrim's hospital it was from 1173. The Plateresque exterior, sectioned off by slender columns and decorated with delicate medallions and friezes, dates to 1513, by which time the edifice had become a monastery of the Knights of Santiago.

Much of the former convent is now a supremely elegant *parador* (p216). Although you need to stay here to appreciate its full splendour, the former chapterhouse, with its splendid *artesonado*, and the exquisite cloister are both open to the public. The cloister is technically part of the **Museo de León** (☎ 987 24 50 61; adult/student €1.25/free, Thu free; 10am-2pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), accessible through the church at the eastern end of the convent and given over mostly to archaeology.

If you're here on a weekend, head to the riverbank, next to the Puerta de San Marcos, where you may find old men with balls of steel playing *pétanque* as well as some peculiarly Spanish pursuits.

MUSEO DE ARTE CONTEMPORÁNEO

León's showpiece **Museo de Arte Contemporáneo** (Musac; ☎ 987 09 00 00; www.musac.org.es; Avenida de los Reyes Leoneses 24; admission free; 10am-3pm & 4-9pm Tue-Sun) is part of the new wave of innovation sweeping Spanish architecture. The building is a work of art and, for many, may appeal more than the works it contains. A pleasing square-and-rhombus edifice of colourful glass and steel, the museum won the Spanish architecture prize in 2003 and has been acclaimed for the 37 shades of coloured glass which adorn the façade; they were gleaned from the pixelisation of a fragment of one of the stained-glass windows in León's cathedral. Although the museum has a growing permanent collection, it mostly houses temporary displays of cutting-edge Spanish and international photography, video installations and other similar forms. Musac also hosts musical performances and is fast becoming one of northern Spain's most dynamic cultural spaces.

BARRIO HUMEDO

On the fringes of León's old town (also known as the Barrio Gótico), Plaza de Santo Domingo is home to the **ayuntamiento** which occupies a charming Renaissance-era palace; the Renaissance theme continues in the form of the splendid **Palacio de los Guzmanes** (1560), where the façade and patio stand out. Next door is Antoni Gaudí's contribution to León's skyline, the castlelike neo-Gothic **Casa de Botines** (1893); the zany architect of Barcelona fame seems to have been subdued by more sober León.

Down the hill, the Plaza de Santa María del Camino (also known as Plaza del Grano) feels

like a cobblestone Castilian village square and is overlooked by the Romanesque Iglesia de Santa María del Mercado.

At the northeastern end of the old town is the beautiful and time-worn 17th-century Plaza Mayor. Sealed off on three sides by porticoes, this sleepy plaza is home to a bustling fruit and vegetable market on Wednesday and Saturday. On the west side of the square is the superb late-17th-century baroque old town hall.

Festivals & Events

León is famous for its solemn *Semana Santa* processions of hooded devotees, while the city really lets its hair down from 21 to 30 June for the Fiestas de San Juan y San Pedro.

Sleeping

Hostal Bayón (☎ 987 23 14 46; Calle del Alcázar de Toledo 6; s/d with washbasin €15/25, with shower €25/35) At Hostal Bayón, the laid-back and friendly young owner watches over cheerful, brightly painted rooms with pine floors. How good the location is depends on your perspective – you're surrounded by modern León, but just a five-minute walk from the old town (and its noise).

Hostal San Martín (☎ 987 87 51 87; www.sanmartin-hostales.com; 2nd fl, Plaza Torres de Omaña 1; s with shared bathroom €19, s/d/tr with private bathroom €27/39/51) This engaging little place in a splendid, recently overhauled 18th-century building is an outstanding choice with light, airy and modern rooms (most with balcony). The owners are friendly, the location central but quiet and the rooms and bathrooms immaculate. Breakfast is €2.

Hostal Albany (☎ 987 26 46 00; www.albanyleon.com; Calle de la Paloma 13; s/d/tr €35/50/80) The sort of place you'd expect to find in Barcelona or Madrid, Hostal Albany is a high-class *hostal* with a hints of minimalism. Clean lines, plasma TVs, great bathrooms and cheerful colour schemes abound and a few rooms have partial cathedral views; those facing onto the interior patio are quieter.

NH Plaza Mayor (☎ 987 34 43 57; www.nh-hotels.es; Plaza Mayor 15; d Sun–Thu €75, Fri & Sat €90) Part of the stylish NH chain which has a knack of finding a great location in need of tender loving care, the NH Plaza Mayor has the perfect combination of comfort, muted colour schemes, great service and an intimate ambience. Best of all, 19 rooms overlook the plaza.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

La Posada Regia (☎ 987 21 31 73; www.regialeon.com; Calle de Regidores 9-11; s/d from €55/90) You won't find many places better than this anywhere in northern Spain. We know that's a grand claim, but if you found a 14th-century building, magnificently restored (wooden beams, exposed brick and understated antique furniture), with individually styled rooms, character which overflows into the public areas and supremely comfortable beds and bathrooms, how would you describe it?

Hostal de San Marcos (☎ 987 23 73 00; www.parador.es; Plaza de San Marcos 7; r Nov–Feb €120, Mar–Oct €175) León's sumptuous *parador* (see p215) is one of the finest hotels in Spain. With palatial rooms fit for royalty and filled with old-world charm, this is one of the excellent *Parador* chain's flagship properties.

Eating

Restaurante Luisón (☎ 987 25 40 29; Plaza Puerta Obispo 16; mains €5-9, menú €7.80) This place could only happen in Spain – basic surrounds, offhand waiters and terrific, hearty food that keeps the locals fortified during cold winters. You'll often need to book ahead, especially at lunchtime when locals can't get enough of the local *botillo berciano*, a succulent pork dish, or *cocido leónés* (León-style chickpea stew).

Susi (☎ 987 27 39 96; Calle de López Castrillón 1; mains €15, menú €11; r lunch & dinner Tue–Sat, lunch Sun & Mon) Intimate dining and creative cooking make for a fine evening at this stylish new temple to good taste. The service is cool and attentive, the wine list is long, and the menu has some dishes that will live in the memory – *solomillo relleno con foie and datiles* (steak filled with foie gras and dates) is one that stands out.

El Tizón (☎ 987 25 60 49; Plaza de San Martín 1; menú from €11.80; r lunch & dinner Fri–Wed) The tapas are good here, but the small sit-down restaurant, with an abundant set lunch, is even better. House specialities include *embutidos* and the delicious *gambas envueltas a la crema* (prawns wrapped in bacon with a cream sauce). It also has an extensive wine list.

Restaurante Zuloaga (☎ 987 23 78 14; Sierra Pambley 3; meals €25, menú €12) This fabulous place in the vaults of an early-20th-century palace has a

well-stocked cellar and classy menu. The walls feature original mosaics by the artist Ignacio Zuloaga.

Restaurante Artesano (☎ 987 21 53 22; www.palaciojabalquinto.com; Calle de Juan de Arfe, 2; mains from €13.20, menú €17) One of the classier places to eat in León, Restaurante Artesano combines creative food, modern art and the renovated 17th-century Palacio Jabalquinto. It's the ideal spot for a special occasion, and the choices of what to order are many and varied, from *embutidos to brocheta de pato con frutos y frutos secos con manzana glaseada* (duck brochette with fruits, nuts and glazed apple).

El Llar (☎ 987 25 42 87; Plaza de San Martín 9; mains from €12) This old León *taberna* (bar) is a great place to *tapear* (eat tapas) or dine upstairs in the sit-down restaurant. Either way, you'll come across an abundance of local wines, cheeses, cured meats and other specialities of the region. For a typical León taste, order the *tabla de embutido* (plate of cured meats).

Drinking

The Barrio Humedo's night-time epicentre is the Plaza de San Martín, where popular bars abound – the crowds will tell you where the buzz is. For example, a good night could begin at **Rebote** (Plaza de San Martín 9), then move on to funky **Delicatessen** (Calle de Juan de Arfe 10). Just around the corner and down the hill is the **Delirium House Club** (Calle de la Misericordia 9; r 11pm–5am Thu–Sat) where the name says it all, or **Woodstock** (Calle de la Misericordia 9; r 11pm–5am Thu–Sat) where it's all about peace and love. If slick and stylish and moody lighting is your thing, head up to **Club Danzatoria** (Calle de Ramírez III 9) or **People Music Bar** (Calle de Ramírez III 9) where things get started after midnight and don't stop until many hours later.

Tucked away behind the cathedral to the east, there are three bars that together provide the pulse for a whole new centre of activity. **Big John's** (Avenida de los Cubos 4; r 7pm–2am), is a jazz hang-out with live jazz at 10.30pm from November to January; at other times you're just as likely to hear REM. **GPS** (Avenida de los Cubos 8-10; r 10am–3am) has funky lighting, wi-fi for those inclined to lug their laptops to the bar, live comedy acts on Thursday at 10.30pm and a dress code that's more formidable on paper than it is in practice. **Ebano** (Avenida de los Cubos 2; r 4pm–late) has a similar vibe.

A great place day or night for a drink is the hip **El Capitán** (Calle de Ancha 8; r noon–late) with red

velvet curtains, candlelight, mirrors and an ambience somewhere between boudoir and retro. **El Capitán** is perfect for an intimate conversation.

Shopping

Don Queso (Calle Azabachería 20; r 10am–2pm & 5.30–8pm Mon–Fri, 9.30am–2.30pm Sat) Cheese lovers will want to make a stop here; you'll find every imaginable variety.

Queseria La Vianda (☎ 987 24 03 70; Gran Vía de San Marcos 45; r 10am–3pm & 6–9pm Mon–Fri, 10am–3pm Sat) If you've acquired a taste for the local produce, this small shop overflows with *productos artesanales* (homemade products) from chestnuts in cinnamon or trout cake to *nicanores* (a local sweet pastry).

Tejuelo (☎ 987 23 88 22; Calle de Ruiz de Salazar 18; r 10.30am–2pm & 5–8pm Fri & Sat, 11am–2pm Sat) Hand-made paper products, fountain pens, leather-bound books and a small but rich range of homemade, classically upmarket stationery make this place stand out.

Getting There & Away

BUS

ALSA (☎ 902 42 22 42) has buses which leave from the bus station on Paseo del Ingeniero Sáez de Miera to Madrid (€19.90, 3½ hours, 12 daily), Burgos (€12.50, 3¼ hours, four daily), Astorga (€3, 45 minutes, 16 daily), Ponferrada (€7.35, two hours, 12 daily), Oviedo (€7.85, 1½ hours, nine daily) and Valladolid (€8, two hours, eight daily).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The N630 heads north to Oviedo, though the AP66 *autopista* that runs parallel to the west is faster (the two roads merge at Campomanes). The N630 also continues south to Seville via Salamanca. The N120 goes west to Galicia via Astorga, where it merges with the A6. If you avoid the Barrio Humedo, parking stations (€8.50 to €12, 12 hours) abound in the streets surrounding Plaza de Santo Domingo.

TRAIN

Trains travel to Astorga (€2.95, 40 minutes, four daily), Valladolid (€8.90, two hours, 10 daily), Burgos (from €17.20, two hours, four daily), Oviedo (from €6.60, two hours, seven daily), Madrid (from €20.75, 4¼ hours, seven daily) and Barcelona (from €43.80, 10 hours, two daily).

EAST OF LEÓN

Iglesia de San Miguel de Escalada

Rising up from Castilla's northern plains, this beautifully simple treasure was built in the 9th century by refugee monks from Córdoba on the remains of a Visigothic church dedicated to the Archangel Michael. Although little trace of the latter remains, the church (h 10am-2pm & 4.30-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun May-Oct, 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Nov-Feb) is notable for its Islamic-inspired horseshoe arch, the like of which is rarely seen so far north in Spain. The graceful exterior porch with its portico is balanced by the impressive marble columns within; the entrance dates from the 11th century.

To get there, take the N601 southeast of León. After about 14km, take the small LE213 to the east; the church is 16km after the turn-off.

Sahagún

pop 2937 / elevation 807m

An unremarkable place today, Sahagún was once home to one of Spain's more powerful abbeys. Today the abbey is a crumbling ruin, evocative in an abandoned kind of way although its more important remnants are kept in a small museum run by Benedictine nuns. More often than not the place is closed and there's not a nun to be seen.

Next to the former abbey is the early 12th-century **Iglesia de San Tirso** (h 10.30am-1.30pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun), an important stop on the Camino de Santiago and known for its pure Romanesque design and Mudéjar bell-tower laced with rounded arches. The **Iglesia San Lorenzo**, just north of Plaza Mayor, has a similar belltower but is open only for Sunday Mass.

Low on charm but high on comfort, the modern **Hotel Puerta de Sahagún** (% 987 78 18 80; www.hotelpuertadesahagun.com; Calle de Burgos; s €38-45, d €60) seems a bit out of place in provincial Sahagún, but it's spick, span and a haven from dusty Camino trails.

Trains run regularly throughout the day from León (€4.10, 40 minutes) and Palencia (€4.10, 35 minutes).

WEST OF LEÓN

Astorga

pop 12,275 / elevation 870m

Perched on a hilltop on the frontier between the bleak plains of northern Castilla and the mountains that rise up to the east towards Galicia, Astorga is a fascinating little town

with a wealth of attractions far out of proportion to its size. In addition to its fine cathedral, the city boasts a Gaudí-designed palace, a smattering of Roman ruins and a personality dominated by the Camino de Santiago which passes through town.

HISTORY

The Romans built the first settlement, **Astúrica Augusta**, here at the head of the Ruta del Oro. During the Middle Ages, the trade in precious metals began to decline, although by this time Astorga was well-established as a waystation along one of Europe's most important pilgrimage routes. By the 15th century, Astorga had become wealthy and important, which inspired the construction of the **catedral** and the rebuilding of its 3rd-century walls which still encircle the city.

Astorga is the capital of a district known as the Maragateria. Many claim the *maragatos*, who, with their mule trains, dedicated themselves almost exclusively to the carrying trade, were descendants of the first Berbers to enter Spain in the Muslim armies of the 8th century. Other theories argue that Celtic and Phoenician tribes were their long-time ancestors.

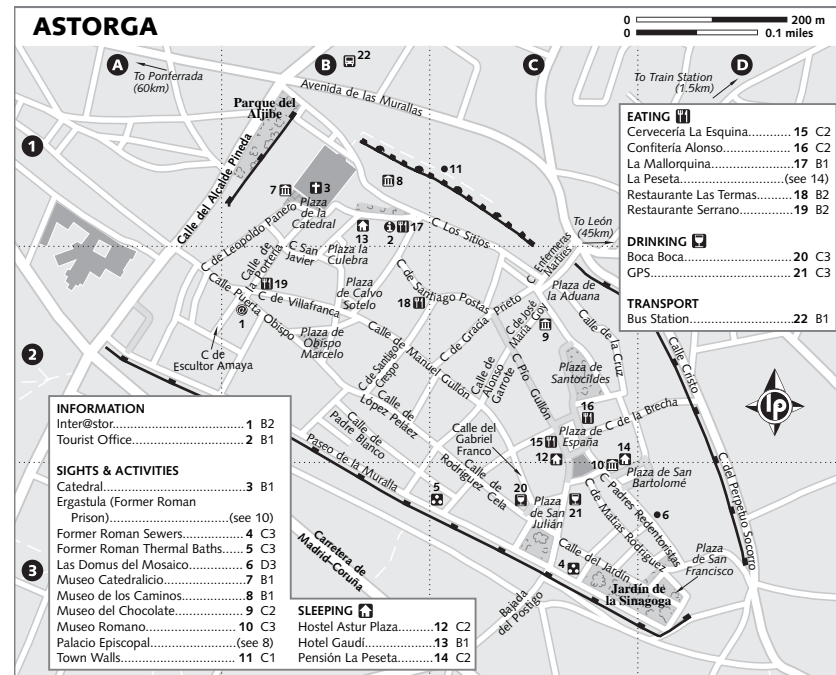
ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

Astorga's old centre is small and easily navigated. The **catedral** and **Palacio Episcopal** huddle together in the northwestern corner of the old town, along with the **tourist office** (% 987 61 82 22; turismo@ayuntamientodeastorga.com; h 10am-2pm & 4-8pm May-Oct, 10.30am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat Nov-Apr). For internet, head to **Inter@stor** (% 987 618 632; cnr Calles de Puerta Obispo & de Escultor Amaya; per hr €2; h 10am-2.30pm & 4-10pm Mon-Sat).

SIGHTS

Catedral

The most striking element of Astorga's **catedral** (% 987 61 58 20; h 9.30am-noon & 4.30-6pm Oct-Mar, 9am-noon & 5-6.30pm Apr-Sep) is its Plateresque southern façade, made from caramel-coloured sandstone and dripping in sculptural detail. Work began in 1471 on the site of its Romanesque predecessor, and proceeded in stop-start fashion over three centuries, resulting in a mix of styles. The interior has soaring ceilings and is mainly Gothic, with the 16th-century altar-piece by Gaspar Becerra monopolising your gaze among the many gilt-edged flourishes. The attached **Museo Catedralicio** (admission €2.50, combined ticket with Museo de los Caminos €4; h 10am-



2pm & 4-8pm Apr-Sep, 11am-2pm & 3.30-6.30pm Oct-Mar) features the usual religious art, documents and artefacts.

Palacio Episcopal (Museo de los Caminos)

The Catalan architect, Antoni Gaudí left his mark on Astorga in the fairy-tale turrets, frilly façade and surprising details of the **Palacio Episcopal**. Built for the local bishop from the end of the 19th century, it now houses the **Museo de los Caminos** (% 987 61 82 22; admission €2.50, combined ticket with Museo Catedralicio €4; h 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Apr-Sep, 11am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun Oct-Mar). It's an eclectic collection with Roman artefacts and coins in the basement; contemporary paintings on the top floor; and medieval sculpture, Gothic tombs and silver crosses dominating the ground and 1st floors. The highlight (apart from the playful Gaudiesque interior) is the chapel with its stunning murals, tilework and stained glass.

Museo del Chocolate

Proof that Astorga does not exist solely for the virtuous souls of the Camino comes in the

form of this small and quirky private museum (% 987 61 62 20; Calle de José María Goy 5; admission €2, combined ticket with Museo Romano €3; h 10.30am-2pm & 4.30-7pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun). Chocolate ruled Astorga's local economy in the 18th and 19th centuries, as evidenced by this eclectic collection of old machinery, colourful advertising and fascinating lithographs. It offers a refreshing, indulgent and, some would say, sinful break from Castilla's religious-art circuit. Best of all, you get a free chocolate sample at the end. There's also a shop where the *chocolate artesano* (homemade chocolate) is divine and the wrappers are works of art.

Ruta Romana

Housed in the Roman *ergastula* (slave prison), the **Museo Romano** (% 987 61 69 37; Plaza de San Bartolomé 2; admission €2.50; h 10am-1.30pm & 4.30-7pm Tue-Sat, 10.30am-1.30pm Sun Jul-Sep, 10.30am-1.30pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sat, 10.30am-1.30pm Sun Oct-Jun) has a modest selection of artefacts and an enjoyable big-screen slide show on Roman Astorga.

Ask at the tourist office about the Ruta Romana Spanish-language guided tours (€3.09, noon and 5pm Easter to October) which seek

out the other Roman ruins dotted around town. Among these are the town walls, thermal baths, sewers and Las Domus del Mosaico; the latter is a Roman floor plan with a few mosaics just 50m southeast of the museum. The tours last for 1½ hours and leave from the tourist office, although the departure times vary.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

During the last week of August, Astorga awakes from its customary slumber to celebrate the **Festividad de Santa Marta** with fireworks and bullfights.

SLEEPING

Pensión La Peseta (☎ 987 61 72 75; www.restaurantelapeseta.com; Plaza de San Bartolomé 3; d Jun-Aug & Easter €48.15, Sep-May €52.45) Although a touch overpriced (the rooms are fine if a little uninspiring), the owners are super-friendly and keen to make your stay comfortable. They readily admit that the attached restaurant (below) is their passion, so spend more time there than in your room.

Hotel Gaudi (☎ 987 61 56 54; www.hotelgaudiastorga.com; Calle de Eduardo de Castro 6; s/d Jun-Aug & Easter €50/66, Sep-May €48/60) There aren't many places in the world where you can see a Gaudi flight of fancy from your bed – ask for a street-facing room. The large carpeted rooms are otherwise pretty good although the décor could do with a fresh look.

Hotel Astur Plaza (☎ 987 61 89 00; www.asturplaza.com; Plaza de España 2; s/d/ste €60/83/94; ☐) This modern hotel is comfortable and while you may lament the lack of character in the rooms, if you have one facing the pretty Plaza de España, you'll leave more than happy. It's worth asking if it has any special offers. Parking costs €6 and buffet breakfast is €5.70

EATING

The local speciality is *cocido maragato*, a stew of chickpeas, various meats, potatoes and cabbage. Unlike elsewhere, *astorgan* tradition dictates that you first eat the meat, then the vegetables before finishing up with the broth. Portions are huge, so one order usually feeds two.

La Peseta (☎ 987 61 72 75; www.restaurantelapeseta.com; Plaza de San Bartolomé 3; mains from €9, menú €10.80; ☐ lunch & dinner) Famous for its *cocido* (€16.05), the excellent La Peseta also has other local specialities, including *morcilla* (blood sausage) and *alúbias* (small white beans). Service is

friendly and obliging and, unusually, their cut-price *menús* also run at night. They sometimes offer cheaper *menús* for pilgrims.

Restaurante Las Termas (☎ 987 60 22 12; Calle de Santiago 1; mains from €9, menú €9) Renowned for the quality of its *cocido* (€16.50), Las Termas also does a great *ensalada maragata* (salad of chickpeas and cod).

Restaurante Serrano (☎ 987 61 78 66; Calle de la Portería 2; menú from €16; ☐ Tue-Sun) The upmarket **Restaurante Serrano** is a little different to the other darkish, wood-panelled restaurants around town. Décor is bright and the menu creative; the *ensalada de mango con carne de centolla* (mango salad with spider-crab) is an example of this.

Cervecería La Esquina (☎ 987 61 57 97; Plaza de España 5) For tapas, this is probably the best place for local *leones* specialities and it has a wonderful house dish called *patatas esquinadas* (lightly seasoned potato slices). You'll also get service with a smile here, not to mention 18 varieties of beer to choose from.

Pastry shops all over town also churn out the local *mantecadas*, a cakelike sweet that's peculiar to Astorga. Places to try include **Confitería Alonso** (Plaza de España) and **La Mallorquina** (cnr Calles de Los Sitos & de Santiago), both of which keep erratic hours. A small/large box costs €2.90/5.80.

DRINKING

GPS (Calle La Bañeza 9) This café-pub is popular with Astorga's younger set; it has a cosy, living-room ambience (assuming your living is adorned with cool modern furniture and framed artwork).

Boca Boca (Calle del Gabriel Franco 10) Around the corner in Calle del Gabriel Franco you'll find Astorga's nightclub strip which cranks up late on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Boca Boca is our pick of the bunch.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Regular bus services connect Astorga with León (€3, 45 minutes, 16 daily) and Ponferrada (€4.40, 1¼ hours, 10 daily). There are also departures for Oviedo (€9.95, 2½ hours, two daily) and Madrid (€19.65, four hours, five daily). There are also trains to/from Ponferrada (€4.50, one hour, nine daily) and León (€2.95, 40 minutes, four daily) which stop at Astorga's train station; the station is inconveniently located a couple of kilometres north of town.

Around Astorga

Castrillo de los Polvazares, 6km west of Astorga, is a 17th-century hamlet built from vivid ferrous stone, its blazing orange colour made all the more striking by the brilliant green paint job on the doors and window frames. If you'd like to stay, look no further than **Hostería Casa Cascolo** (☎ 987 69 19 84; www.casacoscolo.tk in Spanish; d/tr €54/74). It has four brightly painted rooms in a renovated stone building with open rafters. The restaurant downstairs serves up *cocido maragato*. **Hostería Cuca La Vaina** (☎ 987 69 10 34; www.cucalavaina.com; Calle Jardín; d from €55) is another well-run place with warm service and rooms filled with character.

Ponferrada

pop 65,984 / elevation 508m

Ponferrada, about 60km west of Astorga, is not among the region's more enticing towns, but its castle and remnants of the old town centre (the area around the stone clocktower) make it a worthwhile stop en route to or from Galicia. The **tourist office** (☎ 987 42 42 36; ☐ 10am-2pm & 4.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-1.30pm & 4.30-6.30pm Sat, 10.30am-1.30pm Sun) lies in the shadow of the castle walls.

SIGHTS

Built by the Knights Templar in the 13th century, the walls of the fortress-monastery **Castillo Templario** rise high over Río Sil, and the square, crenellated towers ooze romance and history. The **castle** (adult/student €2/1; ☐ 11am-2pm & 5-8.30pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun May-Sep, 11am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun Oct-Apr) has a lonely and impregnable air and is a striking landmark in Ponferrada's otherwise bleak urban landscape.

Among Ponferrada's churches, the Gothic-Renaissance **Basilica de la Virgen de la Encina**, up the hill past the tourist office, is the most impressive, especially its 17th-century painted wood altarpiece from the school of Gregorio Fernández.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hostal Santa Cruz (☎ 987 42 83 51; hsantacruz@wanadoo.es; Calle Marcelo Macías 4; s/d €26/33) A largish place with reasonable rates, **Hostal Santa Cruz** is a good midrange choice, and the rooms all come with TV and the friendly service comes free.

Hotel AC Ponferrada (☎ 987 40 99 73; www.ac-hotels.com; Avenida de Astorga 2; d from €56-71) Part of the quality AC Hotels chain, this modern

four-star place won't win any prizes for personality, but the service is attentive and the rooms supremely comfortable.

For meals, both **Mesón Mosteiro** (☎ 987 42 68 05; Calle del Reloj 10; meals from €5.15) and **Mesón El Quijote** (☎ 987 42 88 90; Calle de Gregoria Campillo 3; menú €5.35), in the new town, offer cheap set meals.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The bus station is at the northern end of town (take local bus 3 to/from the centre). Regular buses connect Ponferrada with Villafranca del Bierzo, León (via Astorga), Madrid (€22.75, five hours, seven daily) and most Galician cities, including Lugo.

Las Médulas

The ancient Roman gold mines at Las Médulas, about 20km southwest of Ponferrada, once served as the main source of gold for the entire Roman Empire – the final tally came to a remarkable three million kilograms. An army of slaves honeycombed the area with canals and tunnels (some over 40km long!) through which they pumped water to break up the rock and free it from the precious metal. The result is a singularly unnatural natural phenomenon and one of the more bizarre landscapes you'll see in Spain.

To get to the heart of the former quarries, drive beyond Las Médulas village (4km south of Carucedo and the N536 highway). Several trails weave among chestnut patches and bizarre sunset-coloured formations left behind by the miners.

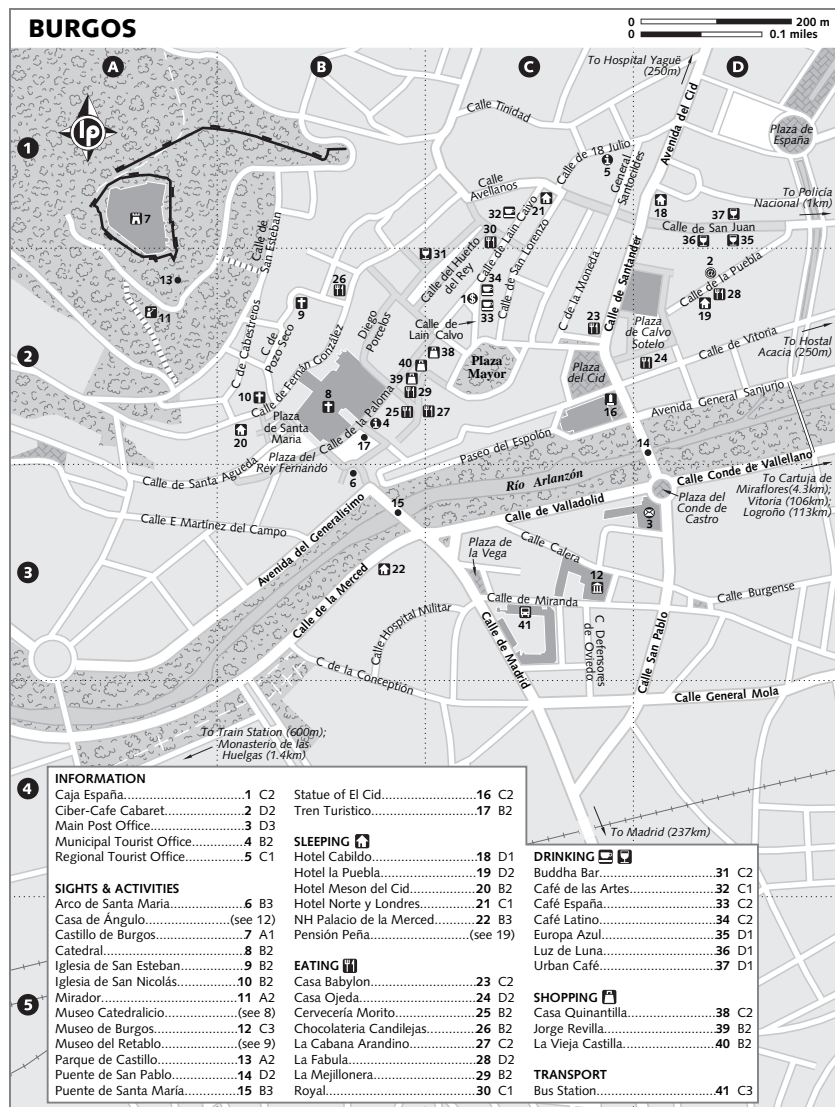
THE EAST

The east of Castilla y León is like a journey through the Castilian heartland, with delightful Burgos and provincial Soria acting as bookends to a region rich in charming villages, isolated monasteries, quiet roads and scenic landscapes.

BURGOS

pop 172,421 / elevation 861m

Burgos is dominated by its Gothic *catedral*, one of Spain's glittering jewels of religious architecture. If you allow your gaze to wander from this extraordinary structure, you'll find a compact, elegant city of pretty promenades, traffic-free plazas, good food and an attractive small-town feel. There's even a whiff of



legend about the place – beneath the majestic spires of the *catedral* lies Burgos' favourite and most roguish son, the almost mythical El Cid (p225).

History

Like so many Castilian towns, Burgos began life as a strategic fortress – in 884 – in the

frontline between the Muslims and the rival kingdom of Navarra. It was surrounded by several *burgos* (villages), which eventually melded together to form the basis of a new city. Centuries later, Burgos thrived as a staging post for pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago and as a trading centre between the interior and the northern ports.

Orientation

The heart of old Burgos, dominated by the *catedral*, is wedged between Río Arlanzón and the hill to the northwest on which stands the town's old castle. South of the river, in the newer half of town, are the bus and train stations.

Information

EMERGENCY

Policía Nacional (☎ 947 22 04 66, 091; Avenida de Castilla y León 3)

INTERNET ACCESS

Ciber-Café Cabaret (Calle de la Puebla 21; per hr from €3; ☒ noon-1am Fri & Sat, 7pm-4am Sat & Sun) A hip place, but the charges are rather steep.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Hospital General Yagüe (☎ 947 28 18 00; Avenida del Cid Campeador 96)

MONEY

There are banks all over central Burgos. One of the most central places to change money is **Caja España** (Calle de la Paloma 4).

POST

Main post office (Plaza del Conde de Castro)

TOURIST OFFICES

Municipal tourist office (☎ 947 28 88 62; turismo@aytoburgos.es; Plaza del Rey Fernando 2; ☒ 10am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1.30pm & 4-7.30pm Sat & Sun Oct-May, 10am-7.30pm daily Jun-Sep)
Regional tourist office (☎ 947 20 31 25; Plaza Alonso Martínez 7; ☒ 9am-2pm & 5-8pm mid-Sep-May, 9am-8pm Jun–mid-Sep)

Sights

OLD QUARTER

Burgos' old quarter is stately rather than grand, austere elegant in the manner of so many cathedral towns of Old Castilla. It can be accessed via two main bridges across Río Arlanzón including the historic **Puente de San Pablo**, beyond which looms a romanticised statue of El Cid with his swirling cloak and sword held aloft. About 300m to the west, the **Puente de Santa María** leads to the splendid **Arco de Santa María** (☎ 947 28 88 68; admission free; ☒ 11am-1.50pm & 5-9pm Tue-Sat, 11am-1.50pm Sun), once part of the 14th-century walls and now home to temporary exhibitions. Running along the southeastern edge of the old town between the two bridges along the riverbank, is the Paseo

del Espolón, a lovely tree-lined pedestrian area with an antique carousel.

CATEDRAL

The *catedral* (☎ 947 20 47 12; Plaza del Rey Fernando; adult/children & pilgrims/student/senior €4/1/2.50/3; ☒ 9.30am-1.15pm & 4-7.15pm) is a masterpiece that is probably worth the trip to Burgos on its own, and it's open longer hours in summer. From humble origins as a modest Romanesque church, work began on a grander scale in 1221. Remarkably, within 40 years most of the French Gothic structure that you see today had been completed. The twin towers, which went up later in the 15th century, each represent 84m of richly decorated Gothic fantasy and they're surrounded by a sea of similarly intricate spires. Probably the most impressive of the portals is the **Puerta del Sarmental**, on the southern flank, although the honour could also go to the **Puerta de la Coronera**, on the northern side, which shows Christ surrounded by the Evangelists.

It's possible to enter the *catedral* from Plaza de Santa María for free, but doing so leaves the most worthwhile sections off-limits. Nonetheless, you'll still have access to the **Capilla del Santísimo Cristo**, which harbours a much-revered 13th-century crucifix (known as the *Cristo de Burgos*) made from buffalo hide, and the **Capilla de Santa Tecla** with its extraordinary ceiling.

Inside the main entrance, the main altar is a typically overwhelming piece of gold-encrusted extravagance, while directly beneath the star-vaulted central dome lies the tomb of El Cid. Another highlight is the **Escalera Dorada** (Gilded Stairway; 1520) on the northern side, the handiwork of Diego de Siloé.

The **Capilla del Condestable**, on the eastern end of the ambulatory behind the main altar, is a remarkable late-15th-century production. Bridging Gothic and Plateresque styles, its highlights include elegant pillars and three altars, all looked upon by unusual star-shaped vaulting in the dome. The sculptures facing the entrance to the *capilla* (chapel) are astonishing 15th- and 16th-century masterpieces of stone carving, portraying the passion, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ.

Also worth a look is the peaceful cloister, with its sculpted medieval tombs. Off the cloister is the **Capilla de Corpus Cristi**, where, high on the northwestern wall, hangs the coffin of El Cid. The adjoining **Museo Catedralicio** (☎ 947 20 47 12) has a wealth of oils, tapestries and ornate chalcices.

BURGOS CARD & TREN TURISTICO

The **Burgos Card** (☎ 902 877 996; www.burgoscard.com; 1/2 days €12/18) covers entrance for all the sights covered in this section, including the *tren turístico* (tourist train), as well as discounts at a range of shops, hotels and other businesses around town.

Also worth considering is the cutesy **tren turístico** (adult/child €3/1.50), which leaves from outside the tourist office and runs past all the major sights in town. Unfortunately, the only stop it makes on the 45-minute journey is at the *mirador* next to the *castillo* (castle), but it's a good way to get an overview of the town. It runs on Friday evenings, Saturday and Sunday, with more frequent departures in summer. Buy your ticket at the tourist office.

CHURCHES

Iglesia de San Esteban, a powerful Gothic structure built in the 14th century, houses the **Museo del Retablo** which was closed for renovation when we visited.

Iglesia de San Nicolás (☎ 947 20 70 95; admission €1, Mon free; 11am-1pm & 5-6pm Mon-Sat) is most noteworthy for its enormous stone-carved altar by Francisco de Colonia, with scenes from the life of St Nicolas. It's open longer hours in summer.

MONASTERIO DE LAS HUELGAS

A 30-minute walk west of the city centre on the southern bank of Río Arlanzón, this **monastery** (☎ 947 20 16 30; guided tours adult/student €5/4, Wed free; 10am-1pm & 3.45-5.30pm Tue-Sat, 10.30am-2pm Sun) was once among the most prominent monasteries in Spain. Founded in 1187 by Eleanor of Aquitaine, daughter of Henry II of England and wife of Alfonso VIII of Castilla, it's still home to 35 Cistercian nuns and is open long hours in summer.

Only a small section of the church is accessible without a guided tour, which you should join if you want to fully appreciate the monastery's treasures. The three main naves of the church are a veritable royal pantheon, containing the tombs of numerous kings and queens, including those of Eleanor and Alfonso. Also here is a spectacular gilded Renaissance altar topped by a larger-than-life Jesus being taken off the cross.

The highlight, though, is the **Museo de Ricas Telas**, reached via a lovely Romanesque cloister known as Las Claustrillas. It contains bejewelled robes and garments once worn by the very royals interred in the aforementioned tombs.

CARTUJA DE MIRAFLORES

The **church** (10.15am-3pm & 4-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-3pm & 4-6pm Sun) of this strict Carthusian monastery, located in peaceful woodlands

4km east of the city centre, contains a trio of 15th-century masterworks by Gil de Siloé. The most dazzling of these is undoubtedly the ornate star-shaped alabaster tomb of Juan II and Isabel of Portugal, the parents of Isabel la Católica. Gil de Siloé also carved the tomb of her brother, the Infante Alfonso, and helped with the giant *retablo* that forms a worthy backdrop to the royal mausoleum.

The walk to the monastery takes about one hour along Río Arlanzón.

MUSEO DE BURGOS

This **museum** (☎ 947 26 58 75; Calle de Calera 25; adult/student & under-18 €1.20/free, Sat & Sun free; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-Jun, 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jul-Sep), housed in the 16th-century Casa de Miranda, contains some fine Gothic tombs and other archaeological artefacts covering a wide period. In the adjoining **Casa de Angulo** is a fine-arts collection.

PARQUE DE CASTILLO

This leafy hilltop park is crowned by the massive fortifications of the rebuilt **Castillo de Burgos** (☎ 947 28 88 74; adult/student, senior & child €3.20/2.20; 11am-2pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar, 11am-2pm & 4-7pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep). Dating from the 9th century, the castle has witnessed a turbulent history, suffering a fire in 1736 before finally being blown up by Napoleon's retreating troops in 1813. Just south of the car park is a *mirador* (lookout) which offers fine views over the town.

Festivals & Events

Burgos' big fiestas take place in the last days of June and the first two weeks of July to celebrate the **Festividad de San Pedro y San Pablo** (Feast of Saints Peter and Paul). There are bullfights, processions and much merry-making, particularly on the first Sunday of

July, the **Día de las Peñas**. A slightly more low-key event is the **Festividad de San Lesmes** (for the city's patron saint) on 30 January. For other festivals and special events, pick up a copy of the *Calendario de Eventos* from the Municipal tourist office (p223).

Sleeping

Pensión Peña (☎ 947 20 63 23; Calle de la Puebla 18; s/d with shared bathroom from €15/23) This impeccable little place has rooms with delightful individual touches, such as hand-painted washbasins, and the central location is also a plus.

Hostal Acacia (☎ 947 20 51 34; www.hostalacacia.com; Calle de Bernabe Perez Ortiz 1; s/d with bathroom from €25/37, d with shower & washbasin from €29.80) Though some of the rooms here are small and ageing, most are pleasant and all are clean and come with TV. Run by a loquacious Trotsky-lookalike proprietor, this place is easy to recommend.

Hotel Norte y Londres (☎ 947 26 41 25; www.hotelnorteylondres.com; Plaza de Alonso Martinez 10; s €45-64, d €50-95; p i) Overflowing with understated period charm, this fine hotel in a converted palace, dating from the 16th century, boasts spacious rooms with antique furnishings, polished wooden floors and pretty balconies. The hotel has been around more than 100 years and it shows in the welcoming, old-world civility. Parking costs €10.40.

Hotel La Puebla (☎ 947 20 00 11; www.hotellapuebla.com; Calle de la Puebla 20; s/d Oct-May €56/71, Jun-Sep €58/88; p a i) Another great choice, this boutique hotel oozes style, fusing chic minimalism with professional service. The rooms aren't huge, but they are supremely comfortable. Highly recommended. Parking is €8.

Hotel Cabildo (☎ 947 25 78 40; www.hotelcabildo.com; Avenida del Cid 2; s/d €80/100; p n i) New to the Burgos hotel scene, Hotel Cabildo has quickly become one of the most comfortable places to stay in town. Combining natural light and suave, dark tones, the rooms are large and stylish and the service obliging. It's a classy place. Parking costs €10.

NH Palacio de la Merced (☎ 947 47 99 00; www.nh-hotels.com; Calle de la Merced 13; d from €104; p n i) Brimful of the quality we've come to expect from the NH chain, the outstanding Palacio de la Merced is one of Burgos' most distinguished addresses. Housed in a 16th-century palace with high domed ceilings, the old-world elegance of the building is wedded to super-modern, supremely comfortable rooms with hardwood floors and muted shades.

Hotel Meson del Cid (☎ 947 20 87 15; www.mesondelcid.es; Plaza de Santa María 8; s/d/st €103.20/129/152; p) The rooms here ooze old-world charm and if you can snaffle a room facing the main

EL CID: THE HEROIC MERCENARY

Few names resonate through Spanish history quite like El Cid, the 11th-century soldier of fortune and adventurer whose story tells in microcosm the tumultuous years when Spain was divided into Muslim and Christian zones. That El Cid has become a romantic, idealised figure of history known for his unswerving loyalty and superhuman strength owes much to the way his exploits captured the popular imagination as expressed in an anonymous 12th-century epic poem and the 1961 film starring Charlton Heston and Sophia Loren. Reality, though, presents a very different picture.

El Cid (from the Arabic *sidi* for 'chief' or 'lord') was born Rodrigo Diaz in Vivar, a hamlet about 10km north of Burgos, in 1043. After the death of Ferdinand I, he entered into the murky world of royal succession which saw the king's five heirs squabbling over the throne and, ultimately, El Cid's banishment from Castilla in 1076. With few scruples as to whom he served, El Cid offered his services to a host of rulers, both Christian and Muslim. With each battle, he became ever more powerful and wealthy.

It is not known whether he suddenly developed a loyalty to the Christian kings or smelled the wind and saw that Spain's future would be Christian. Either way, when he heard that the Muslim armies had taken Valencia and expelled all the Christians, El Cid marched on the city, recaptured it and became its ruler in 1094 after a devastating siege. At the height of his powers and reputation, the man also known as *El Campeador* (the Champion) retired to spend the remainder of his days in Valencia where he died in 1099. His remains were returned to Burgos, where he lies buried along with his wife, Jimena, in the *catedral*.

cathedral façade just 75m away, you'll have one of the most comfortable front-row seats in Burgos. The only drawback? For this price you don't expect indifferent service. Parking is €12 and breakfast €10.

Eating

Burgos is famous for its *queso* (cheese), *morcilla* (blood sausage made with rice and served with red peppers) and *cordero asado*.

TAPAS

La Cabaña Arandino (Calle de la Sombrerería; Ի 1-11pm) Opposite Cervecería Morito, this place doesn't quite match the atmosphere, but it's popular with a young crowd and the tapas are good; locals love the *tigres* (mussels with spicy sauce).

La Mejillonera (Calle de la Paloma 33; Ի 10am-11pm) Another popular stand-up place, La Mejillonera serves great mussels (€2.10 per plate), while the *patatas bravas* (potatoes with spicy tomato sauce) is another popular local order.

RESTAURANTS

Chocolatería Candilejas (Calle de Fernán González 36; desserts from €2; Ի from 6.30pm) A great place for dessert, come here for killer cakes, *churros* (€2) and *batidos* (milkshakes; €2.40), all homemade.

Royal (Calle del Huerto del Rey 23) If you can withstand the glaringly lit dining area, Royal serves a wide range of *raciones* (€2.70 to €6.50) and 18 choices of *bocadillo* (€2.60 to €4.50) that contain everything from old Spanish classics to salmon and other gourmet flourishes.

Casa Ojeda (‰ 947 20 90 52; Calle de Vitoria 5) This Burgos institution, all sheathed in dark wood, is one of the best places in Burgos to try the local Castilian speciality: *cordero asado* (€18.10). The upstairs dining room has outstanding food and faultless service, although we're not sure what we think of the menu which lists the calories and cholesterol for each dish. Prices for a more limited range of *platos combinados* are lower in the downstairs bar.

La Fabula (‰ 947 26 30 92; Calle de la Puebla 18; mains from €12) A good place for nouveau Castilian cuisine. La Fabula offers slimmed-down rice and fish dishes in a light, modern dining room filled with classical music. Dishes include *arroz con gambas* (rice with prawns), *calamares* (calamari) and *merluza y langostinos* (hake and king prawns).

Casa Babylon (‰ 947 25 54 40; www.casababylon.es; Plaza de Santo Domingo 3; mains from €12) Casa Babylon

opened to much fanfare when we were in Burgos and it's certainly an innovative newcomer on the local restaurant scene. There's a nod to local specialities such as *brick de morcilla de Burgos* (Burgos blood sausage) and *cordero asado*, but it's fused to international flavours such as tempura and moussaka. It's cool and flashy and we hope the buzz that surrounded the place continues because it deserves to be full.

Drinking

CAFÉS

Café España (Calle de Lain Calvo 12) A bastion of the Burgos café scene for more than 80 years with its old-world elegance. Other good options include **Café Latino** (Calle de Lain Calvo 16) and **Café de las Artes** (Calle de Lain Calvo 31), which has a magazine rack, occasional live music and an artsy vibe.

BARS

A great place to get your night started is along Calle de San Juan.

Luz de Luna (Calle de San Juan; Ի 5pm-late Tue-Sun) This place is enduringly popular, as much for its exuberant vibe as the décor themed on the enchanted forest.

Europa Azul (Calle de San Juan 34) Europa Azul has an outdoor terrace out the back that's ideal in summer. It doesn't get the crowds until later, but they're pretty cool when they arrive.

Urban Café (Calle de San Juan) This place is seriously funky.

Calle del Huerto del Rey, just northeast of the cathedral and known locally as Las Llanas is another centre of night-time activity. It gets going a bit later than Calle de San Juan. We like **Buddha Bar** (Calle del Huerto del Rey), but it only just shades around 10 others.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Cervecería Morito (Calle de la Sombrerería; Ի 1pm-midnight) Our pick of the Burgos eating scene, this classic Spanish tapas bar (noisy, attractive interior and great food) is always crowded, even on the quietest of Burgos nights; if it's full downstairs, there's more room on the 1st floor. A typical order is *alpargata* (lashings of cured ham with bread, tomato and olive oil; €2.70) and we challenge you to find better *calamares* (calamari) elsewhere.

Shopping

Jorge Revilla (‰ 947 27 40 40; Calle de la Paloma 29; Ի 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) Local Burgos jewellery designer Jorge Revilla is fast making a name for himself beyond Spain's borders and it's not hard to see why – colourful silver pieces that are at once fun and sophisticated and with surprisingly reasonable prices.

Two good shops among the many that offer local produce (as ideal for a picnic as for a gift back home) are **La Vieja Castilla** (Calle de la Paloma 21; Ի 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) with a crowded range of wines, cheeses and a host of other delights and, a few doors north, **Casa Quintanilla** (Calle de la Paloma 22; Ի 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat).

Getting There & Away

BUS

From Burgos' bus station (Calle de Miranda 4), **Continental-Auto** (‰ 947 26 20 17) runs buses to Madrid (€14.75, 2¾ hours), Vitoria (€7, 1½ hours), Bilbao (€11.10, two hours) and San Sebastián (€14.90, 3¼ hours). **ALSA** (‰ 947 26 63 70) also has buses to León (€12.80, 3¼ hours), Pamplona (€13.35, 3½ hours), Logroño (€6.25, two hours) and Valladolid (€8, two hours).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

For Madrid, take the A1 directly south. The N234 branches off southeast to Soria and on to Zaragoza and ultimately Barcelona. The N623 leads north to Santander, while the AP1 *autopista* goes most of the way to Vitoria and hooks up with the Ap68 *autopista* to Bilbao. There are parking stations (€8.50 to €12, 12 hours) all across central Burgos including, conveniently, beneath Plaza Mayor.

TRAIN

Burgos is connected with Madrid (€21.55, four hours), Bilbao (€16.20, three hours), León (from €17.20, two hours), Valladolid (from €7.55, 1¼ hours) and Salamanca (from €19.30, 2½ hours).

AROUND BURGOS

Quintanilla de las Viñas

If you take the N234 out of Burgos, a worthwhile stop some 35km out is the 7th-century **Ermita de Santa María de Lara** close to Quintanilla de las Viñas. This modest Visigothic hermitage has some fine bas-reliefs around its external walls, which are among the best surviving examples of religious art from the 7th century.

Covarrubias

pop 632 / elevation 975m

The picturesque hamlet of Covarrubias is one of Castilla y León's hidden gems. Spread out along the shady banks of Río Arlanza, it's sprinkled with arcaded half-timbered houses overlooking intimate cobblestone squares. There is a small tourist office (‰ 947 40 64 61; Ի 10.30am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 10.30am-2pm Sun Mar-Dec) under the arches of the village's imposing northern gate; pick up the free *Covarrubias: Castile Birthplace*, a handy pocket-sized guide to the sights around town; it also organises guided tours (€3 per person) of the village.

A good time to be here is the second week of July when the village hosts its Medieval Market & Cherry Festival.

SIGHTS

The squat 10th-century **Torreón de Doña Urraca** towers over the remains of the town's medieval walls, while the late-Gothic **Colegiata de San Cosme y Damián** (‰ 947 40 63 11; admission €2; Ի 10.30am-2pm & 4-7pm Wed-Mon) has Castilla's oldest still-functioning church organ and attractive cloisters. It also contains the stone tomb of Fernán González, the 10th-century founder of Castilla. **Casa Doña Sancha** is the best preserved of Covarrubias' 15th-century half-timbered houses.

SLEEPING & EATING

Casa Galín (‰ 947 40 65 52; www.casagalín.com; Plaza de Doña Urraca 4; s/d €20/38) This place has comfortable, brightly painted rooms with recently renovated bathrooms in an old-fashioned timbered building overlooking the main plaza. It's home to a popular restaurant with a well-priced *menú* (€8).

Los Castros (‰ 947 40 63 68; www.casaruralloscastros.com; Calle de los Castros 10; d with breakfast €50) A historic *casa rural*, Los Castros has just five gorgeous doubles filled with all sorts of eclectic furnishings, which somehow reflect this enchanting town.

Hotel Rey Chindasvinto (‰ 947 40 65 60; hotel.chindas@wanadoo.es; Plaza del Rey Chindasvinto 5; s/d €35/55) The classiest hotel in town, the Rey Chindasvinto has lovely, spacious rooms with wooden beams and exposed brickwork, friendly owners and a good restaurant. This is ideal for those who want to enjoy Covarrubias after sunset when the weekend crowds have returned home.

Restaurante de Galo (☎ 947 40 63 93; mains from €12, menu €10) This fine restaurant in the heart of the village is recommended for its robust traditional dishes cooked in a wood-fired oven. This is a good place to sample the regional speciality of *cerdo asado* (€12.60).

SHOPPING

La Alacena (☎ 947 40 65 63; Calle de Monseñor Vargas 8; 10am-2pm & 5-7.30pm Tue-Sun) For homemade chocolate and other local foods, step inside this friendly shop in the heart of the village.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Two buses travel between Burgos and Covarrubias on weekdays, and one runs on Saturday (€2.40, one hour).

Santo Domingo de Silos

pop 311

Nestled away in the rolling hills south of Burgos, this tranquil, pretty village has an unusual claim to fame: monks from this monastery made the pop charts in the mid-1990s in Britain with recordings of Gregorian chants. The monastery is one of the most famous in central Spain, known for its stunning cloister.

SIGHTS

The church (10am-2pm & 4-9.30pm), which is notable for its pleasingly unadorned Romanesque sanctuary dominated by a multidomed ceiling, is where you can hear the monks chant (admission free; 9am Mon-Sat, noon Sun). Hours may vary slightly throughout the year.

The jewel in the attached monastery's crown is the two-storey cloister (☎ 947 39 00 68; 10am-1pm & 4.30-6pm Tue-Sat, 4.30-6pm Sun & Mon), a treasure chest of some of the most imaginative Romanesque art anywhere in the country. Although the overall effect is spectacular, the sculpted capitals are especially exquisite, depicting everything from lions to Harpies, intermingled with floral and geometrical motifs betraying the never-distant influence of Islamic art in Spain; look for the unusually twisted column on the western side. The pieces executed on the corner pillars represent episodes from the life of Christ, while the galleries are covered by Mudéjar ceilings from the 14th century. In the northeastern corner sits a 13th-century image of the Virgin Mary carved in stone, and nearby is the original burial spot of Santo Domingo.

Although much of the monastery is off-limits to visitors, the compulsory guided tour (€3) will show you inside the 17th-century botica (pharmacy) and a small museum containing religious artworks, Flemish tapestries and the odd medieval sarcophagus.

Tucked away in the streets of the village (though well-signposted) is the Museo Nacional de la Tierra (Calle de Las Condesas; admission €1; 10am-2pm & 5-7pm Tue-Sat, 5-7pm Sun Apr-Sep) which has interesting displays on local music traditions.

For sweeping views over the town, pass under the Arco de San Juan and climb the grassy hill to the south to the Ermita del Camino y Via Crucis.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hostal Cruces (☎ 947 39 00 64; Plaza Mayor 2; s/d €21/39) Decent if simple rooms – the cheapest in town – and friendly owners make this a good choice right in the heart of the village.

Hotel Arco de San Juan (☎ 947 39 00 74; fax 947 39 02 00; Pradera de San Juan 1; s/d €35/45) Just down the hill from the monastery, this simple but pleasant hotel has attractive though unexciting rooms, some with good views of the monastery.

Hotel Santo Domingo de Silos (☎ 947 39 00 53; www.hotelsantodomingodesilos.com; Calle de Santo Domingo; s/d €38/50) Although there is greater charm elsewhere, the proportion of price to quality at this hotel is hard to beat with well-appointed rooms.

Hotel Tres Coronas (☎ 947 39 00 47; fax 947 39 00 65; Plaza Mayor 6; s/d €52/76) This place is brimming with character (the suit of armour at the top of the grand staircase sets the scene) with rooms of thick stone walls and old-world charm. The rooms at the front have lovely views over the plaza. Our only complaint is that the service is somewhat cold.

Men can rent a heated room (with meals, €25) in the monastery, but you'll need to book well ahead. Call the Padre Hospedero (☎ 947 39 00 68) between 11am and 1pm. You can stay for a period of three to 10 days.

The village's best (and most expensive) restaurant is at the Hotel Tres Coronas (mains from €14), although the cheaper Hotel Santo Domingo de Silos (mains from €9) is not bad.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Autobuses Arceredillo (☎ 947 268 347, 947 485 266) runs one daily bus from Burgos to Santo Domingo de Silos (€4.80, 1½ hours) from Monday to Saturday.

Desfiladero de Yecla

A mere 1.3km down the back road (BU911) to Caleruega from Santo Domingo, the spectacular Desfiladero de Yecla, a splendid gorge of limestone cliffs, opens up. It's easily visited thanks to the installation of a walkway (the stairs lead down from just past the tunnel exit). There's a small information office (☎ 947 39 01 23; 9am-3pm Mon, Tue & Thu) in the *ayuntamiento* building in Santo Domingo de Silos.

NORTH OF BURGOS

The N623 highway carves a pretty trail from Burgos, particularly between the mountain passes of Portillo de Fresno and Puerto de Carrales. About 15km north of the former, a side road takes you through a series of intriguing villages in the Valle de Sedano. The town of the same name has a fine 17th-century church, but more interesting is the little Romanesque one above Moradillo de Sedano: the sculpted main doorway is outstanding.

Villages flank the highway on the way north, but *Orbaneja del Castillo* is the area's best-kept secret. Take the turn-off for Escalada and follow the bumpy road until you reach the waterfall. Park where you can, then climb up beside the waterfall to the village, which is completely hidden from the road. A dramatic backdrop of strange rock walls lends this charming spot an enchanting air.

SOUTH TO RÍO DUERO

Verma

pop 2744 / elevation 827m

If you're travelling between Burgos and Madrid and finding the passing scenery none-too-eye-catching, Verma rises up from the roadside like a welcome apparition.

An ancient settlement, Verma hit the big time in the early 17th century when Grand Duke Don Francisco de Rojas y Sandoval, a minister under Felipe II from 1598 to 1618, launched an ambitious project to create another El Escorial (see p166). He failed, but the cobbled streets and delightful plazas of the old town retain plenty of charm.

Pass through the Arco de la Cárcel (Prison Gate), off the main road to Burgos, climbing up the long Calle del General Mola to the massive Plaza Mayor which is fronted by the oversized Palacio Ducal, now a *parador* (see right) notable for its courtyards and 210 balconies. To the right of the square is the Dominican nuns' Convento de San Blas which

was closed for renovations at the time of research. A short distance northwest of Plaza Mayor, at the opposite end from the palace, a pretty passageway and viewpoint, *Mirador de los Arcos*, opens up over Río Arlanza. Its arches connect with the 17th-century Convento de Santa Teresa, which is also home to the tourist office (☎ 947 17 70 02; www.citlerma.com in Spanish; Plaza de Santa Clara; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun). Guided tours (€3) of the town and most of its monuments depart from here.

SLEEPING & EATING

Posada La Hacienda de mi Señor (☎ 947 17 70 52; www.lahaciendademisenor.com; Calle de El Barco 6; s/d with breakfast €50/75) Apart from a few *casas rurales* dotted around the old town, this is your best midrange bet, with enormous rooms with free wi-fi in a renovated, historic building; the colour scheme will start to grate if you stay too long.

Parador de Lerma (10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) Undoubtedly the most elegant and imaginative place to stay is this *parador*, which occupies the renovated splendour of the old Palacio Ducal. Like any *parador*, the rooms have luxury and character and the service is impeccable.

You're in the heart of Castilian wood-fired-oven territory and the Plaza Mayor is encircled by high quality restaurants with *cerdo asado* (€32 for two is a good price to pay) on the menu.

Asador Casa Brigante (☎ 947 17 05 94; www.todolerma.com/brigante; Plaza Mayor 5; meals for 2 €55; 10am-10pm Sun-Fri, lunch & dinner Sat Sep-May, lunch & dinner Thu-Tue Jun-Aug) Our favourite is this cosy and friendly place – you won't taste better roast lamb anywhere.

Vegetarians will need to head to the *parador* (menú €35-40).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Regular buses from Burgos (€2.90, 30 minutes) stop here and some buses coming north from Aranda de Duero or Madrid also pass through.

Aranda de Duero

pop 31,247 / elevation 802m

The big attraction in this otherwise unattractive crossroads town is the main portal of the late-Gothic Iglesia de Santa María. Its remarkably rich sculptural flourish was executed in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Other than that, Aranda de Duero is renowned as a bastion of classic Castilian cooking. Most of the better places serving *cordero* are on and around Plaza del Arco Isilla; look for the 'Asador' signs. Probably Aranda's premier *asador* is *Mesón de la Villa* (☎ 947 50 10 25; Calle de la Sal 3; meals €40, ☎ Tue-Sun), which does succulent lamb and complements it with excellent local wines. Reservations are essential on weekends.

Numerous buses and trains connect Aranda with Madrid and most major cities in Castilla y León.

Peñaranda de Duero

pop 568 / elevation 877m

About 20km east of Aranda on the C111, the village of Peñaranda de Duero exudes considerable charm. Originally a Celtic fortress village, most of its surviving riches are grouped around the stately Plaza Mayor. The *Palacio Condes de Miranda* is a grand Renaissance palace with a fine Plateresque entrance, double-arched patio and beautiful ceilings in various styles. Free guided tours operate up to eight times daily Tuesday to Sunday. The 16th-century *Iglesia de Santa Ana* integrates columns and busts found at the Roman settlement of Clunia into an otherwise baroque design. For superb views of the village and surrounding country, take a walk up to the medieval castle ruins.

There are at least four *casas rurales* in the area for you to choose from should you wish to stay. Most buses between Valladolid (€6, 1½ hours) and Soria (€5.85, 1½ hours) pass through town.

Sepúlveda

pop 1322 / elevation 1313m

With its houses staggered along a ridge carved out by the gorge of Río Duratón and famous for its *cordero asado* and *cochinillo*, Sepúlveda is a favourite weekend escape for *madrileños* (Madrid residents). Indeed, the warm ochre tones of Sepúlveda's public buildings, fronting the central Plaza de España are an enviable setting for a hot Sunday roast.

The *ayuntamiento* backs onto what remains of the old castle, while high above it all rises the 11th-century *Iglesia del Salvador*. It's considered the prototype of Castilian Romanesque, marked by the single arched portico.

Most visitors don't stay overnight, but if you'd like to enjoy the town's sleepy post-crowd

aspect, *Mirador del Castilla* (☎ 921 54 03 53; Calle del Conde Sepúlveda 26; s/d €40/50), just off Plaza de España, has very comfortable rooms.

For the *cordero* feast, you could pretty much take your pick (places serving mediocre *cordero* don't last long here) around Plaza de España, but *Restaurante Cristóbal* (☎ 921 54 01 00; Calle Conde de Sepúlveda 9; meals €30) and *Restaurante Figón Zute el Mayor* (☎ 921 54 01 65; Calle de Lope Tablada 6; meals €27) are both long-standing favourites with good wine lists. Reservations are essential on weekends.

At least two buses link Sepúlveda daily with Madrid, while Segovia is served once daily except Sunday.

Parque Natural del Hoz del Duratón

A sizable chunk of land northwest of Sepúlveda has been constituted as a natural park, the centrepiece of which is the *Hoz del Duratón* (Duratón Gorge) where it widens out behind the dam just south of Burgomillado. A dirt track leads 5km west from the hamlet of Villaseca to the *Ermita de San Frutos*. In ruins now, the hermitage was founded in the 7th century by San Frutos and his siblings, San Valentín and Santa Engracia. They lie buried in a tiny chapel nearby. This is a magical place, overlooking one of the many serpentine bends in the gorge, with squadrons of buzzards and eagles soaring above. It's a popular weekend excursion and some people take kayaks up to Burgomillado to launch themselves down the waters of the canyon. There's a small but informative *Centro de Interpretación* (☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri Oct-Jun, 10am-6pm Mon-Fri Jul-Sep) in Sepúlveda.

Castilnovo

Some 12km south of Sepúlveda, this rather cute little castle (☎ 921 53 11 33; admission €3; 9am-1pm & 4-6pm Mon-Fri) has the air of a private conceit by some moneyed eccentric. Originally built in the 14th century and largely Mudéjar, it has undergone a lot of alterations. The castle is only open to groups on the weekend.

WEST ALONG RÍO DUERO Peñafiel

pop 5401 / elevation 758m

At the heart of the Ribera del Duero wine region, Peñafiel is home to the state-of-the-art *Museo Provincial del Vino*, cleverly ensconced within the walls of the mighty *Castillo de Peñafiel* (museum & castle €5, castle only €2; ☎ 11.30am-2.30pm & 4.30-8.30pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep). Telling a comprehensive

story of the region's wines – growing, production and history – this wonderful museum grabs the attention with interactive displays, dioramas, backlit panels and computer terminals. The pleasures of the end product are not neglected: wine tasting costs €7. Not to be missed. It's open shorter hours from October to March.

The castle itself, one of the longest and narrowest castles in Spain, is also worth exploring. Its crenellated walls and towers stretch over 200m, but are little more than 20m across, and were raised and modified over 400 years from the 11th century onwards. The sight of it in the distance alone is worth the effort of getting here.

Just like the wine museum, the cool, classy *Hotel Ribera del Duero* (☎ 983 88 16 16; www.hotelriberadelduero.com; Avenida de Escalona 17; s/d €56.65/67.60) is an unexpected find in little Peñafiel with understated but semiluxurious rooms, some with terrific views. It also organises tours and tastings at local wineries.

Just off the main square is the small, pedestrianised town centre, and on Calle Girón de Velasco you'll find several bars and *Restaurante El Bodegón* (☎ 983 88 07 43; Calle Girón de Velasco 16; menú €10.75), one of the best-value places in town for hearty Castilian dishes.

Four or five buses a day run to Valladolid, 60km west of here.

EAST ALONG RÍO DUERO San Esteban de Gormaz

pop 3158 / elevation 911m

This dusty little town contains a couple of Romanesque gems hidden away in its centre: the 11th-century *Iglesia de San Miguel* and *Iglesia del Rivero*. Both sport the porticoed side-galleries that characterise the Romanesque style of the Segovia and Burgos areas.

El Burgo de Osma

pop 5068 / elevation 943m

Some 12km east of San Esteban de Gormaz, this town is a real surprise packet. Once important enough to host its own university, it's now a somewhat rundown little old town, dominated by a quite remarkable *catedral* and infused with an air of decaying elegance.

SIGHTS

Your initiation into the old town is likely to be along the *Calle Mayor*, its portico borne by an uneven phalanx of stone and wooden

pillars. Not far along, it leads into the *Plaza Mayor* which is fronted by the 18th-century *ayuntamiento* and the more sumptuous *Hospital de San Agustín* (admission free), now a contemporary art gallery.

The ramshackle *Calle Mayor* leads to the *Plaza de San Pedro* and the *catedral* (☎ 975 36 00 48; ☎ 10am-1pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar, 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep). Begun in the 12th century as an essentially Romanesque building, it was continued in a Gothic vein and finally topped with a weighty baroque tower that rivals many of the great cathedrals of Spain. The sanctuary is filled with art treasures, including the 16th-century main altarpiece (a collaboration by Juan de Juni and Juan Pícaro) and the so-called *Beato de Osma*, a precious 11th-century codex (manuscript) that can be seen in the *Capilla Mayor*. Also of note is the light-flooded, circular *Capilla de Palafox*, a rare example of the neoclassical style in this region.

Outside the main approach to the town is the 16th-century Renaissance former university. If you exit *El Burgo* from near *Plaza de San Pedro*, take a left for the village of Osma, high above which stand the ruins of the *Castillo de Osma*.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hostal Mayor 71 (☎ 975 36 80 24; *Calle Mayor* 71; s €30-40, d €36-45) This is a cheap option and recommended as much for its central locale as for its tidy, well-kept rooms.

Posada del Canónigo (☎ 975 36 03 62; www.posadadelcanonigo.es; *Plaza San Pedro de Osma* 19; s €60-70, d €70-80) This is certainly the most imaginative choice with some rooms overlooking the *catedral* from an enchanting 17th-century building. The rooms have been lovingly restored and are overflowing with charm.

Hotel II Virrey (☎ 975 34 13 11; www.virreypalafox.com; *Calle Mayor* 2; s €53-63, d €80-93, ste €110-150; ☎ i) This place oozes old Spanish charm, with its sweeping staircase and heavily gilded furniture. Hardwood floors and wrought-iron furnishings dominate and the bathrooms are newly renovated; some of the suites have four-poster beds. Parking is €10 and room rates soar on weekends in the last half of January, February and March when people flock here for the ritual slaughter of a pig, after which diners indulge in all-you-can-eat feasts. At €40 per head it's not bad for one of the more unusual dining experiences. There's even a pig museum...

There are plenty of cafés and tapas bars in town, especially around the Plaza Mayor, where you can grab a snack.

Asador El Burgo (☎ 975 34 04 89; Calle Mayor 71; mains from €8, menú especial €25; 1 Fri-Sun) This place is popular with locals and does the usual meaty Castilian fare with aplomb, even if only on weekends.

Restaurante Asador El Arco (☎ 617 474 481; Calle Alvarez de Castro) This place is similar to Asador El Burgo.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses link El Burgo with Soria (€3.10, 50 minutes, six daily) and Valladolid (€14, 2¼ hours, three daily).

Parque Natural del Cañón del Río Lobos

Some 15km north of El Burgo de Osma, this park promises forbidding rockscapes and a magnificent, deep river canyon, not to mention abundant vultures and various other birds of prey. Just outside the park is an information centre (☎ 975 36 35 64; 1 mid-Mar–mid-Dec), and about 4km in from the road stands the Romanesque *Ermita de San Bartolomé*. You can walk deeper into the park but free camping is forbidden.

Camping Cañón del Río Lobos (☎ 975 36 35 65; sites per person/tent/car €4.50/4.50/5.75; 1 Easter-15 Sep; ⊆) is near Ucero. If you're heading north along the switchback road that climbs up the canyon, you'll have some fine views back towards Ucero.

Gormaz

pop 18

Some 14km south of El Burgo, on Río Duero, is the virtual ghost town of Gormaz. The sprawling castle has 21 towers and was built by the Muslims in the 10th century and altered in the 13th. Its ruins still convey enormous dignity and the views alone justify the effort of getting here – this must have been a great perch for defending the surrounding country. The castle, which never closes, is reached via a winding road about 2km beyond the modern and largely uninteresting village.

Berlanga de Duero

pop 1085 / elevation 978m

About 15km east of Gormaz, Berlanga de Duero is lorded over by a powerful but ruinous castle. Down below, the squat *Colegiata*

de Santa María del Mercado is a fine late-Gothic church, with the star-shaped vaulting inside perhaps its most pleasing aspect. It's usually closed, but the area around the pretty Plaza Mayor, with the occasional Renaissance house, is equally charming. Outside the old town centre, on a desolate open plot, is the *Picota*, to which petty criminals were tied in the good old days.

Hotel Fray Tomás (☎ 975 34 30 33; fax 975 34 31 69; Calle Real 16; s/d €30/48) has comfortable rooms in a modified 14th-century building, while there are also a couple of *casas rurales* dotted around the old town centre.

Around Berlanga de Duero

About 8km southeast of Berlanga de Duero stands the *Ermita de San Baudelio* (admission €0.75; 1 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Wed-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-Mar, 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Wed-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Apr-Sep) where the simple exterior conceals a remarkable 11th-century Mozarabic interior. A great pillar in the centre of the only nave opens up at the top like a palm tree to create horseshoe arches. Until recently, the hermitage's walls were decorated with Mozarabic and 12th-century Romanesque frescoes, but these have now been moved to the Prado in Madrid.

Another 17km south, the hilltop stone village of Rello retains much of its medieval defensive walls and feels like the place time forgot. The views from the village's southern ledge are superb. There's at least one *casa rural* if you love the peace and quiet.

The Road to Madrid

The N110 winds southwest from San Esteban de Gormaz to join up with the A1 highway between Madrid and Burgos.

The first village of note you'll come to is Ayllón, some 50km southwest of El Burgo de Osma and which bathes in the same orange glow that characterises El Burgo's townscape. You enter by a medieval archway and are immediately confronted on the right by the ornate façade of a late-15th-century noble family's mansion built in Isabelline style. The uneven, porticoed Plaza Mayor is capped at one end by the Romanesque *Iglesia de San Miguel*, and nearby stands the Renaissance-era *Iglesia de Santa María la Mayor*. Turn right behind this and follow the narrow street for about 500m and you'll come to the extensive remains of another Romanesque church, now oddly incorporated into a rambling private

residence. The simple *Hostal Velloso* (☎ 971 55 30 62; Avenida Conde Vellellano s/n; s/d with washbasin €10.80/18.05, d with bathroom €30.65) is the better of the two *hostales* in town.

About 20km south of Ayllón, Riaza has a charmingly ramshackle and circular Plaza Mayor: the sandy arena in the centre is still used for bullfights.

SORIA

pop 37,200 / elevation 1055m

Small-town Soria is one of Spain's smaller and least-visited provincial capitals. With an appealing and compact old centre, a sprinkling of stunning monuments, a setting on Río Duero and in the heart of backwoods Castilian countryside, it's a great place to escape tourist Spain. Calm and laid-back by day, Soria has a surprisingly lively nightlife.

Information

Several banks are near the tourist office.

Cruc Roja (☎ 975 22 22 22; Santo Domingo de Silos 3) For ambulances.

Hospital de Santa Barbara (☎ 975 23 43 00; Paseo de Santa Barbara) Soria's most central hospital.

Main post office (☎ 975 23 36 40; Paseo del Espolón 6)

Metropolis (Calle las Navas de Tolosa 17; per hr €3;

1 10am-11pm Mon-Sat) Internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 975 21 20 52; Calle de Medinaceli 2; 1 9am-2pm & 5-8pm mid-Sep-Jun, 9am-8pm Mon-Thu & Sun, 9am-9pm Fri & Sat Jul-mid-Sep)

Sights

CASCO VIEJO & AROUND

The narrow streets of Soria's *casco viejo* (old town) converge on Plaza Mayor, the heart of the quarter. Its appeal lies in its lack of uniformity and in the attractive Renaissance-era *ayuntamiento* (Plaza Mayor) and the *Iglesia de Santa María la Mayor* (Plaza Mayor), with its unadorned Romanesque façade and gloomy, gilt-edge interior. A block north is the majestic, sandstone, 16th-century *Palacio de los Condes Gomara* (Calle de Aguirre), which changes colour with the angle of the sun.

Further north again is the city's most beautiful church, the Romanesque *Iglesia de Santo Domingo* (Calle de Santo Tomé Hospicio; 1 7am-9pm). Its small but exquisitely sculptured portal is something special, especially at sunset when its reddish stone seems to be aglow.

At the *Iglesia de San Juan de Rabanera* (Calle de San Juan de Rabanera), which was first built in the 12th century, hints of Gothic and even

Byzantine art gleam through the mainly Romanesque hue of this building.

Heading east towards Río Duero you pass the *Concatedral de San Pedro* (Calle de San Agustín), with a 12th-century cloister (admission €1; 1 11am-2pm & 4.30-6.30pm Sat, 11am-2pm Sun) as its most charming feature; it's open longer hours in summer. The delicate arches are divided by slender double pillars topped with beautiful capitals adorned with floral, human and animal motifs. Also of note is the Plateresque main façade.

At the western end of the old town, the *Parque Alameda de Cervantes* is a beautifully shady park that's ideal for taking a stroll or having a picnic.

MUSEO NUMANTINO

Archaeology buffs with a passable knowledge of Spanish should enjoy this well organised museum (Paseo del Espolón 8; admission €1.20; 1 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-Jun, 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jul-Sep), dedicated to finds from ancient sites across the province of Soria (especially Numancia; see p236) – everything from mammoth bones to ceramics and jewellery, all accompanied by detailed explanations of the historical developments in various major Celtiberian and Roman settlements.

BESIDE RÍO DUERO

The most striking of Soria's sights is the 12th-century *Monasterio de San Juan de Duero* (Camino Monte de las Animas; admission €0.60, Sat & Sun free; 1 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-Jun, 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jul-Sep). What most catches the eye are the exposed and gracefully interlaced arches of the monastery's partially ruined cloister, which artfully blend Mudéjar and Romanesque influences. Inside the church the capitals are worth a closer look for their intense iconography.

A lovely riverside walk south for 1.3km will take you past the 13th-century church of the former Knights Templar, the *Monasterio de San Polo*, to the fascinating, baroque *Ermita de San Saturio* (Paseo de San Saturio; 1 10.30am-2pm & 4.30-8.30pm Tue-Sat, 10.30am-2pm Sun Jul & Aug, 10.30am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm Tue-Sat, 10.30am-2pm Sun Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 10.30am-2pm & 4.30-6.30pm Tue-Sat, 10.30am-2pm Sun Nov-Mar). This octagonal structure perches right over the cave where Soria's patron saint spent much of his life.

Festivals & Events

Since the 13th century, the 12 *barrios* (districts) of Soria have celebrated, with some fervour, the *Fiestas de San Juan y de la Madre de Dios* during the second half of June. The festivals' main events take place on Jueves (Thursday) La Saca, when each of the districts presents a bull to be fought the next

day. The day following the bullfight some of the animals' meat is auctioned off, after which dancing and general carousing go on until the small hours of Sunday. Hangovers and all, the *cuadrillas* (teams) representing the 12 districts parade in all their glorious finery and perform folk dances the next morning.

SORIA

0 0.5 miles
0 1 km

INFORMATION

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SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

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Concatedral de San Pedro.....	6	C1
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TRANSPORT

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Sleeping

Hostal Alvi (% 975 22 81 12; hostalalvi@telefonica.net; Calle de Alberca 2; s/d €26/46) Spotless and central, this is one of the best-value places, with good rooms complete with TV and phone. The street itself is not Soria's prettiest, but you're a stone's throw from the centre.

Hostal Centro (% 975 22 21 09; www.soriadormir.com; Plaza Mariano Granados 2; s/d €45/48; a) If you're looking for hotel quality at *hostal* prices, Hostal Centro, part of a chain of *hostales* across Soria, promises stylish rooms with outstanding bathrooms, a downtown location and double-glazed windows to keep out the noise.

Hostería Solar de Tejada (% 975 23 00 54; www.hosteriasolardetejada.com; Calle de Claustro 1; s/d €47/52) This charming boutique hotel right in the middle of the pedestrianised zone is one of the best choices in Soria. Rooms, each individually designed, have whimsical décor, lots of Bohemian touches and beautifully tiled bathrooms.

Hotel Soria Plaza Mayor (% 975 24 08 64; www.hotelsoriaplazamayor.com; Plaza Mayor 10; s €65-85, d €75-95, ste €90-105) An excellent recent addition to the Soria hotel scene, this hotel has terrific rooms, each with their own decoration and all overlooking either the Plaza Mayor or a quiet side street. There are so many balconies in fact that even some bathrooms have them. The suites are *very* comfortable.

Eating

Café Nueva York (Plaza San Blas y el Rosel; h 7am-6pm) This café serves up great breakfasts until noon and is also a good spot to fill up on divine pastries.

Palafox (% 975 22 00 76; Calle Vicente Tutor 2; menú €5-7, mains €8-12) This is a classy and, some would say, more reasonably priced alternative, with an intimate dining area, an extensive wine list and professional service. If you can't decide what to eat, check out the list by the door of the year's most popular orders. For some reason, *la manita inocente* (pigs trotters) is always up there.

Casa Augusto (% 975 21 30 41; Plaza Mayor 5; starters €5-7, mains €8-12) This is a classy and, some would say, more reasonably priced alternative, with an intimate dining area, an extensive wine list and professional service. If you can't decide what to eat, check out the list by the door of the year's most popular orders. For some reason, *la manita inocente* (pigs trotters) is always up there.

Fogon del Salvador (% 975 23 01 94; Plaza El Salvador 1; mains from €13, menú €16) Another Soria culinary stalwart, Fogon del Salvador has a wine list as long as your arm (literally) and a fabulous

wood-fired oven churning out succulent meat-based dishes.

Mesón Castellano (% 975 21 30 45; Plaza Mayor 2; mains €13-22) With beamed ceilings and dangling flanks of ham, this is a local institution, with some of the best tapas in town and delicious full meals in its *comedor*. Remember, however, that eating doesn't come cheap. The *cabrito asado* (roast goat kid; €20) is a good order.

Drinking

Plaza San Clemente is perfect for kicking off the *marcha*. Of the handful or so bars around here, **Iruña** (Plaza San Clemente 2) and **Bar Patata** (Plaza San Clemente 1) have the best range of tapas to go with your drinks.

Another good spot to start the evening is Plaza Ramon Benito Aceña, where you'll find the hugely popular **Apolonia** (Plaza Ramon Benito Aceña) and the very cool **Café Latino** (Plaza Ramon Benito Aceña).

A super-cool alternative is **Café-Bar Soho** (% 975 22 19 11; Calle de Campo 16; h 8am-late Mon-Sat), which is good at any time of the day. Next door, **Kavanagh's** (Calle de Campo 16; h 11am-late) is your typical Irish pub.

For dancing try any of the late-night clubs that line Rota de Calatañazor, just north of the centre.

Getting There & Away

From the bus station (% 975 22 51 60; Avenida de Valladolid), a 15-minute walk west of the centre, there are regular services to Burgos (€9.75, 2½ hours), Logroño (€5.95, 1¾ hours), Madrid (€12.80, 2½ hours) and Valladolid (€12.85, three hours).

Provincial towns such as Medinaceli (€4.25, 45 minutes, two daily), Almazán (€2, 25 minutes, two daily) and Peñafiel (€9.65, 2¼ hours, five daily) are served as well.

If you're driving, take the N111 north for Logroño; for Madrid, the same road connects with the N11 south of Soria. The N122 goes west to El Burgo de Osma. Going east, it merges with the A68 to Zaragoza.

Trains connect Soria with Madrid (€12.85, three hours, four daily), but there are few other direct services. The train station (Carretera a Madrid) is 2.5km southwest of the city centre.

Getting Around

Local buses connect the train station with Plaza Ramón Benito Aceña.

AROUND SORIA

Numancia

The mainly Roman ruins of Numancia (9 975 18 07 12; admission €0.60, Sat & Sun free; 10am-2pm & 5-9pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jun-Aug), 8km north of Soria, have a lonely, windswept aspect and what remains suggests little of the long history of this city which was inhabited as early as the Bronze Age. Numancia proved one of the most resistant cities to Roman rule – several attempts by the Romans to take control of it were frustrated until finally Scipio, who had crushed Carthage, managed to starve the city into submission in 134 BC. Under Roman rule, Numancia was an important stop on the road from Caesaraugustus (Zaragoza) to Asturica (Astorga). Ceramics unearthed here have revealed an advanced artistic tradition among not only the Romanised inhabitants of the city, but also their Celtiberian forebears. Now the city exists in low-slung, stone outline only.

To get to Numancia, take the N111 for around 5km north of Soria and then follow the signs to Garray. It's open shorter hours from September to May.

Sierra de Urbión & Laguna Negra

The Sierra de Urbión, northwest of Soria, is home to the beautiful Laguna Negra (Black Lake), a small glacial lake that resembles a black mirror at the base of brooding rock walls amid partially wooded hills. Located 18km north of the village of Vinuesa, the lake is reached by a winding and scenic road (there's no public transport) that is bumpy in patches but much better than it used to be. The road ends at a car park, where there's a small information office. It's a further 2km uphill to the lake, either on foot or via the bus (return €1, departing every half-hour from 10am to 2pm and 4pm to 6.30pm) that leaves you 300m short of the lake. From the lake, a steep trail leads up to the Laguna de Urbión in La Rioja or to the summit of the Pico de Urbión, above the village of Duruelo de la Sierra, and on to a series of other tiny glacial lakes.

Vinuesa makes a good base for the area. **Hostal Virginia** (9 975 37 85 55; www.hotelvirginia.rh.com; s/d €45/60) offers bright and pleasant rooms with wrought-iron beds; some rooms also have nice views. **Hostal Revinuesa** (9 975 37 81 47; s/d Sep-Jun €28/40, Jul & Aug €31/46), next door, has similarly pleasant rooms, some with nice wooden beams. Both places have restaurants.

Camping El Cobijo (9 975 37 83 31; www.campincobijo.com; sites per person/tent/car €4.10/3.95/4.10, d bungalows with kitchen €64; 1 Easter-Sep; S) is the nearest camping ground to the Laguna Negra (free camping is not permitted). It's a pleasant place set among ample greenery, 2km northwest of Vinuesa.

Calatañazor

pop 64 / elevation 1071m

One of Castilla y León's most romantic tiny hilltop villages of stone, Calatañazor, about 30km west of Soria, is a charming detour off the main road. Hardly visible from the highway just a kilometre away, it has a crumbling medieval air as you climb the crooked, cobbled lanes through the town gate and wander through the maze lined by ochre stone and adobe houses topped with red-tile roofs and conical chimneys. Believe it or not, scenes from the movie *Doctor Zhivago* were shot here. Towering above the village is the one-time Muslim fortress which gave the village its name (which comes from the Arabic Qala'at an-Nassur, literally 'the vulture's citadel'). Now in ruins, the views from the extant walls and watchtowers are exceptional, both down over the rooftops and north over a vast field called Valle de la Sangre (Valley of Blood). This was the setting of an epic 1002 battle that saw the Muslim ruler Almanzor defeated.

There are also two tiny museums, a church, artisan shops selling local products and three *casas rurales* if Calatañazor has captured your imagination and you fancy staying the night.

SOUTH OF SORIA

Almazán

pop 5727 / elevation 940m

Three of this small town's massive gates remain to testify to a past more illustrious than the present in this quiet backwater. It frequently changed hands between the Muslims and Christians, and for three short months was chosen by Fernando and Isabel as their residence.

The Romanesque **Iglesia de San Miguel** (9 975 31 07 02; Plaza Mayor; 10.30am-2pm & 5-7pm Tue-Sun Jul-Oct) sports an unusual octagonal cupolacum-belltower that reveals Mudéjar influences and a lovely circular apse. Inside is a bas-relief depicting the killing of Thomas à Beckett at the hands of the British king Henry II. The work was commissioned by Henry's

daughter, Eleanor of Aquitaine, the wife of Alfonso VII, as a gesture of penance on behalf of her father.

The attractive façade of the Gothic-Renaissance **Palacio de los Hurtado de Mendoza** looks out over Plaza Mayor. Inside is a nice patio and *artesonado*.

Hotel Villa de Almazán (9 975 30 06 11; www.hotelvilladealmazan.com; Avenida de Soria 29; s/d €42/69.50) promises large, well-appointed hotel-style rooms and the best restaurant in town.

There are four daily buses to/from Soria (€2, 30 minutes).

Medinaceli

pop 694 / elevation 1270m

Modern Medinaceli, along a slip road just north of the A2 motorway, is the modern equivalent of a one-horse town, but don't be fooled: old Medinaceli is one of Castilla y León's most rustic and beautiful *pueblos* (villages), draped along a high, windswept ridge 3km to the north. Its most incongruously placed landmark is a 1st-century-AD Roman **Arco Romano** (triumphal arch) overlooking the valleys far below, while there's also the moderately interesting Gothic **Colegiata de Santa María**. But Medinaceli's charm consists of rambling through tranquil cobblestone lanes and being surrounded by delightful stone houses redolent of the noble families that lived here after the town fell to the Reconquista in 1124. The area between Plaza de Santieste and the lovely, partly colonnaded **Plaza Mayor** is where you'll see Medinaceli at its best. The rather forlorn **castillo** stands at the southwestern corner of the village.

You can't miss the **tourist office** (9 975 32 63 47; Calle Campo San Nicolás; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Wed-Sun) which is at the entrance to town, just around the corner from the arch.

Lovely La Ceramica (9 975 32 63 81; www.laceramicacasarural.es; Calle de Santa Isabel 2; d €49, s/d Fri & Sat with breakfast & dinner €77/154) wins our bet for the friendliest staff, best location in the old town and all-round best deal. The rooms are intimate and comfortable with a strong dose of rustic charm. There's a two-night minimum stay.

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The style of the rooms at **Hostal Rural Bavieca** (9 975 32 61 06; www.hostalruralbavieca.com; Calle Campo San Nicolás 6; s/d with breakfast €48.15/69.55, with dinner €60/107) may not be to everyone's taste, but this is unmistakably a boutique hotel that offers high-quality rooms and ambience, although the service is much more personal at La Ceramica.

Both of the above sleeping options have good restaurants – again, La Ceramica is more cosy – but consider also **Asador de la Villa El Granero** (9 975 32 61 89; Calle de Yedra 10; mains €11-19; 1 lunch Wed-Mon Sep-Jun, lunch & dinner Jul & Aug), which is thought by many to be Medinaceli's best restaurant. The *setas de campo* (wild mushrooms) are something of a local speciality. There's also some local produce for sale here to take home.

Two daily buses to Soria (€4.25, 45 minutes) leave from outside the *ayuntamiento* in the new town. There's no transport between the old and new towns; it's quite a hike.

Santa María de la Huerta

pop 407 / elevation 818m

This dusty, largely insignificant village just short of the Aragonese frontier, contains a wonderful Cistercian monastery (9 975 32 70 02; admission €3; 10am-1pm & 4-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10-11.30am & 4-6.30pm Sun), founded in 1162, where monks lived until the monastery was expropriated in 1835. The order was allowed to return in 1930 and 25 Cistercians are now in residence. Before entering the monastery, note the church's impressive 12th-century façade with its magnificent rose window.

Inside the monastery, you pass through two cloisters, the second of which is the more beautiful. Known as the **Claustro de los Caballeros**, it's Spanish Gothic in style, although the medallions on the 2nd floor bearing coats of arms and assorted illustrious busts, such as that of Christopher Columbus, are a successful Plateresque touch. Off this cloister is the *refectorio* (dining hall). Built in the 13th century, it's notable for the absence of columns to support the vault.

A couple of buses per day connect the village with Almazán and Soria.

Castilla-La Mancha



Arguably the least appreciated region of Spain, Castilla-La Mancha acts as a natural buffer between the rich industrialism of northern Spain and Moorish, tourist-driven Andalucía. This is an area as diverse as it is colourful: flat, undulating plains of henna-coloured earth striped with olive groves, wheat fields and grape vines complemented by the drama of hilltop castles and deep canyons sliced into the landscape.

The region's crowning glory is Toledo, Spain's spiritual capital and an open-air museum of medieval buildings and cultural sights. Cuenca is another wondrous place, seemingly about to topple off its eagle's-eyrie perch high above a gorge. Lovely Sigüenza is yet another gem, its buildings and church spires piled high on a hill, topped by a castle like a cherry on the cake. Further south is Almagro, home to one of Spain's more unusual and striking main squares.

There are quiet mountainous stretches here as well, including the Montes de Toledo and the pine-clad valleys around Alcalá del Júcar.

Castilla-La Mancha is, however, most famous as the home of the potty, errant and idealistic Manchego (ie La Manchan) knight, Don Quijote. Cervantes' classic novel celebrated its 400th anniversary in 2005 with the establishment of a new Quijote pilgrim trail, meticulously signposted and covering 250km (see the boxed text, p255). The windmills are everywhere to be seen, most evocatively in Consuegra and Campo de la Criptana.

On a more sensory level, the largest vineyard in the world is here, appropriately complemented by the fact that this is also the capital for Spain's unrivalled and delicious Manchego cheese.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Explore the museums, monuments and tangle of medieval streets in **Toledo** (opposite)
- Enjoy the unspoilt beauty of the **Parque Natural de las Lagunas de Ruidera** (p254) with its crystal-clear turquoise lakes
- Take *the* holiday-brochure Don Quijote shot of the windmills overlooking **Consuegra** (p255)
- Kick back with a beer at a riverside bar beneath the castle and cascade of houses in pretty **Alcalá del Júcar** (p256)
- Visit the modern art museum in **Cuenca's** (p257) extraordinary hanging houses



■ AREA: 79,462 SQ KM

■ AVE SUMMER TEMP: HIGH 34°C,
LOW 16°C

■ POP: 1.75 MILLION



TOLEDO

pop 55,062 / elevation 655m
Toledo is known as La Ciudad Imperial (Imperial City) for a reason; this is Iberia's Rome with a cultural slug of mosques, synagogues, churches and museums, plus the added high of a lofty setting, perched on a rocky ridge above Rio Tajo. Like the Middle East grafted onto Catholic Spain, Toledo's labyrinth of narrow streets, plazas and inner patios is reminiscent of the *medinas* (towns) of Damascus, Cairo or Morocco's Fez. Yet from Toledo's heart rises the Gothic grandeur of the cathedral and the grim composure of the Alcázar. The artistic legacy bequeathed by the city's former

inhabitants of Romans, Jews and Muslims is reflected in this intriguing mosaic of architecture, as well as in its cultural values.

Toledo's charms can be dampened somewhat if the streets are choked up with tour groups. Try and stay until dusk, if you can, when the city returns to the locals and the streets take on a moody, other-worldly air.

HISTORY

The Romans were the first to single out this site as a strategic crossroads near the geographical centre of the Iberian Peninsula; ancient Toletum became an important way-station in Roman Hispania. By the 6th century, Roman influence was already a distant memory and Visigothic King Atanagild moved the site of

his capital from Seville to Toletum, thus creating the Catholic heartland of the Visigothic kingdom. Over time, endless feuds between Visigothic nobles sent the kingdom into decline and its capital became vulnerable. As a result, the Muslims conquered Toledo with little difficulty after crossing the Straits of Gibraltar in 711.

Toledo rapidly grew to be the most important city of central Muslim Spain and, after the collapse of the caliphate in Córdoba in 1031, became the capital of an independent Arab *taifa* (small kingdom). For the following 50 years the city was unrivalled as a centre of learning and arts in Spain and, for a brief period, its power ranged across all modern Castilla-La Mancha extending to Valencia and even to Córdoba.

Alfonso VI marched into Toledo in 1085, marking a significant victory on the long road of the Reconquista. Shortly thereafter, the Vatican recognised Toledo as a seat of the Church in Spain. In the centuries that followed, the city was one of the primary residences of choice for the Castilian monarchy. Its alliance with the archbishop of Toledo, a vocal proponent of the Reconquista and the monarchs' right-hand man at this time, ensured that Toledo became a place of considerable power. Initially, Toledo's Christians, Jews and Muslims coexisted tolerably well. However, soon after Granada fell to the Catholic Monarchs (Reyes Católicos) in 1492, Spain's Muslims and Jews were compelled to convert to Christianity or flee; a grievous tragedy in this city of many faiths.

In the 16th century, Carlos I considered making Toledo his permanent capital, but his successor, Felipe II, dashed such ideas with his definitive move to Madrid, and Toledo went into decline.

In the early months of the 1936–39 civil war, Nationalist troops (and some civilians) were kept under siege in the Alcázar, but were eventually relieved by a force from the south. However, by diverting his units to Toledo, Franco missed an opportunity to reach Madrid before the arrival of the International Brigades, a miscalculation that many believe prolonged the war.

In 1986 Unesco declared the city a monument of world interest. Despite this, people are abandoning the old city for the characterless but comfortable modern suburbs sprawled out beneath it, leaving behind public servants,

tourists, the rent-protected elderly and a medieval city in urgent need of attention.

ORIENTATION

Toledo is built upon a hill around which Río Tajo flows on three sides. The bus station is northeast of the old town, and the train station is further east across the Tajo. Both are connected by local buses to the centre. Plaza de Zocodover is the main square of the old town.

INFORMATION

Emergency

Cruz Roja (☎ 925 22 22 22) For ambulances.

Policía Nacional (☎ 092; Plaza de la Ropería)

Internet Access

Locutorio Miradero Sicra (Calle Venacio Gonzales 9; per hr €2; ☎ 10am–11.30pm)

Post

Main post office (Calle de la Plata 1)

Tourist Information

Main tourist office (☎ 925 25 40 30; www.t-descubre.com; Plaza del Ayuntamiento s/n; ☎ 10.30am–2.30pm Mon, 10.30am–2.30pm & 4.30–7pm Tue–Sun) Across from the cathedral.

Tourist office (☎ 925 22 08 43; fax 925 25 26 48; Carretera de Madrid; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Fri, 9am–7pm Sat, 9am–3pm Sun) This smaller tourist office is just outside Puerta Nueva de Bisagra. Both tourist offices offer a choice of themed guided tours of the city.

SIGHTS

In summer, many of Toledo's attractions open for up to three hours longer than the times cited.

Plaza de Zocodover

This lively square is most people's introduction to Toledo; its cafés are prime places for people-watching.

From 1465 until the 1960s, Zocodover was the scene of the city's Tuesday market and successor to the Arab *souq ad-dawab* (live-stock market), from which the square derives its unusual name. It was also here that *toledanos* for centuries enjoyed their bullfights or morbidly gathered to witness autos-da-fé (public burnings at the stake) carried out by the Inquisition.

Juan de Herrera, who built San Lorenzo de El Escorial, wanted to convert the square into

a grand Castilian *plaza mayor* (main plaza) in the late 16th century, but he was blocked by Church interests. The result is something of a hotchpotch of architectural styles. The elegant eastern façade is all Herrera managed to erect along the line of the former Arab city wall, punctuated by the gate now known as the Arco de la Sangre. The southern flank dates from the 17th century – the McDonald's certainly does not.

Alcázar

Just south off Zocodover, at the highest point in the city, looms Toledo's most recognisable edifice, the Alcázar. Abd ar-Rahman III raised an *al-qasr* (fortress) here in the 10th century, which was altered after the Christians retook the town in the following century. Alonso Covarrubias and Herrera rebuilt it as a royal residence for Carlos I, but the court moved to Madrid and it became a white elephant, eventually winding up as the Academia de la Infantería, one of the most significant army academies in Spain (now located across the Tajo valley to the east).

The Alcázar was largely destroyed during the republican siege of Franco's forces in 1936, but Franco had it rebuilt and turned into a military museum. At the time of research, the museum was closed for major renovations, to enable the relocation here of Madrid's Museo del Ejército (Army Museum). It's not expected to reopen until 2008 (at the earliest). Prior to the renovation, the exhibits eloquently reflected Spain's ambiguous approach to its past and to Franco himself. Historians eagerly await the reopening to see how this sensitive period of Spanish history will be portrayed.

Museo de Santa Cruz

Just outside what were once the Arab city walls, the **Museo de Santa Cruz** (☎ 925 22 10 36; Calle de Cervantes 3; admission free; ☎ 10am–6.30pm Mon–Sat, 10am–2pm Sun) was built in the early 16th century and is a beguiling combination of Gothic and Spanish Renaissance styles. The cloisters and carved wooden ceilings are superb, as are the upstairs displays of ceramics from across Spain. The ground-level gallery contains a number of El Grecos (look for the *Asunción de la Virgen* and the superbly rendered *La Veronica*); a painting attributed to Goya (*Cristo Crucificado*); the wonderful 15th-century *Tapestry of the Astrolabes*; and a mixed bag of religious objects.

Catedral de Toledo

Toledo's **catedral** (adult/child €6/free; ☎ 10.30am–6.30pm Mon–Sat, 2–6pm Sun) dominates the skyline, reflecting the city's historical significance as the heart of Catholic Spain.

From the earliest days of the Visigothic occupation, the modern site of the cathedral has been the city's centre of worship. In 646, Toledo's archbishop was first recognised as the primate of the Catholic Church in Spain. During the three centuries of Muslim rule, the Visigoths' basilica was converted into Toledo's central mosque. In 1085 Alfonso VI promised that the mosque would be preserved as a place of worship for Toledo's considerable Muslim population. The promise was broken, however, and the mosque subsequently destroyed. The construction of the cathedral dates from the 13th century.

Essentially a Gothic structure, the cathedral is nevertheless a melting pot of styles, reflecting the mixed history of the city. Mudéjar elements are plain to see in the interior decoration, and the Spanish Renaissance makes itself felt in the many chapels that line the church naves.

The **Puerta Llana** at the side takes you into the cathedral's main nave. The centre is dominated by the **coro** (choir stalls), a feast of sculpture and carved wooden stalls. The lower tier was carved in the 15th century in Late Gothic style and depicts the conquest of Granada, while the Renaissance upper level features images of saints and apostles, many by Alonso de Berruguete.

Opposite is the **Capilla Mayor**, too small to accommodate the choir stalls as originally planned, but an extravagant work of art dating back to 1498. This altar serves in part as a mausoleum for Cardinal Mendoza (prelate and adviser to Isabel and Fernando) and several kings. The masterpiece is the *retablo* (altarpiece) in Flemish Gothic style, depicting scenes from the life of Christ and culminating with a *Calvario* and an *Asunción de la Virgen*. The oldest of the cathedral's magnificent stained glass is the rose window above the **Puerta del Reloj**, to your left as you're facing the *capilla* (chapel).

Behind the main altar lies a mesmerising piece of churrigueresque baroque, the **Transparente**. A lavish 18th-century embellishment, it also serves to remedy the lack of light in the cathedral.

All the chapels and rooms off the main church body are well worth visiting, but the

EL GRECO IN TOLEDO

After a long apprenticeship in Crete, where he was born in 1541, Domenikos Theotokopoulos moved to Venice in 1567 to be schooled as a Renaissance artist. He learned to extract the maximum effect from few colours, concentrating the observer's interest in the faces of his portraits and leaving the rest in relative obscurity: a characteristic that remained one of his hallmarks.

He came to Spain in 1577 hoping to get a job decorating the 16-century palace-monastery complex of El Escorial outside Madrid (see p166), but was rejected as a court artist by Felipe II and settled in Toledo. Despite being in the grip of evident decline, the city did not suffer from intellectual stagnation and there were several patrons to support him. El Greco favoured the company of the upper echelons, and by all reports did not suffer from a lack of modesty: 'As surely as the rate of payment is inferior to the value of my sublime work, so will my name go down to posterity as one of the greatest geniuses of Spanish painting,' he famously pronounced.

Pompous, rebellious and extravagant, El Greco hired musicians to play while he ate and prided himself on his refusal to comply with his clients' demands. The cathedral administrators withdrew their patronage, while many of his contemporaries despised him as a rebel who fought a solitary philosophical battle against those who demeaned his profession as an artist.

El Greco liked the high life, and took rooms in a mansion on the Paseo del Tránsito. As Toledo's fortunes declined, however, so did El Greco's personal finances and, although the works of his final years are among his best, he often found himself unable to pay the rent. He died in 1614, leaving his works scattered about the city where many have remained to this day.

El Greco's paintings of Toledo are among Europe's first pure landscapes.

highlights are the gilded **Capilla de Reyes Nuevos**, the **Capilla de la Torre** and the **sacristía** (sacristy). The latter contains a small gallery packed to the rafters with magnificent paintings by such masters as El Greco, Zurbarán, Crespí, Titian, Rubens and Velázquez, while the former houses the extraordinary **Custodia de Arfe**, by the celebrated 16th-century goldsmith Enrique de Arfe. With 18kg of pure gold and 183kg of silver, this 16th-century conceit bristles with some 260 statuettes. Its big day out is the feast of Corpus Christi (p247), when it is paraded around Toledo's streets.

The **sala capitular** (chapterhouse) features a remarkable 500-year-old **artesonado** (Mudéjar ceiling) in the so-called Cisneros style and Renaissance murals depicting the life of Christ and the Virgin Mary.

The cathedral's cool and pretty **daustro** (cloister) is entered through the **Puerta del Mollete** facing the square under the Arco del Palacio, which links the cathedral to the Palacio Arzobispal (Archbishop's Palace).

El Greco Trail

The exceptional paintings of El Greco are among the most popular of Toledo's sights and they adorn many of the monuments across town. **Iglesia de Santo Tomé** (% 925 25 60 98; www.santotome.org; Plaza del Conde; admission

€1.90; 10am-6pm) is a must-see, containing El Greco's masterpiece, *El Entierro del Conde de Orgaz* (The Burial of the Count of Orgaz). When the count, a 14th-century benefactor of the church, was buried in 1322, Sts Augustine and Stephen supposedly descended from heaven to attend the funeral. El Greco's work depicts the event, complete with miracle guests, as well as himself, his son and Cervantes among the onlookers.

Similarly bewitching is the **Museo de El Greco** (% 925 22 40 46; Calle de Samuel Levi s/n; admission €2.40; 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), with its exhibition including *Vista y Plano de Toledo*, and a small collection of pieces from the 17th-century Toledo, Madrid and Seville schools.

One of the oldest convents in Toledo, the **Monasterio de Santo Domingo El Antiguo** (% 925 22 29 30; admission €1.50; 11am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 4-7pm Sun) dates from the 11th century and includes some of El Greco's early commissions (most are copies). Visible through an iron grating is the crypt and wooden coffin of the painter himself.

Other spots in Toledo where you can contemplate El Greco's works include Museo de Santa Cruz (p241), the **sacristía** of the Catedral de Toledo (p241) and Museo Duque de Lerma (opposite).

Jewish Quarter

Near the Museo de El Greco is what was once the **judería** (Jewish Quarter). 'Once' because, as a huge plaque in the cathedral proudly proclaims, the bulk of Toledo's Jews, like those elsewhere in Spain, were expelled in 1492. In the centuries prior to this, Toledo's Jews worshipped in 11 synagogues.

Of the two synagogues still standing, the more interesting is **Sinagoga del Tránsito** (% 925 22 36 65; Calle de los Reyes Católicos; adult/child €2.40/1.20; 10am-2pm & 4-9pm Tue-Sat), built in 1355 by special permission of Pedro I (construction of synagogues was by then prohibited in Christian Spain), though its main prayer hall has since been expertly restored. The Mudéjar decoration is particularly striking. From 1492 until 1877 it was variously used as a priory, hermitage and military barracks. It now houses the **Museo Sefardi** (www.museosefardi.net in Spanish), which gives an insight into the history of Jewish culture in Spain. Note that at the time of research the synagogue was temporarily closed due to a fire but was due to reopen shortly, hopefully with little evident damage.

A short way north, **Sinagoga de Santa María La Blanca** (% 925 22 72 57; Calle de los Reyes Católicos 4; admission €1.90; 10am-6pm) is characterised by the horseshoe arches that delineate the five naves – classic Almohad architecture. Originally the upper arches opened onto rooms where women worshipped; the men worshipped down below.

Centro de Interpretación del Toledo Histórico

The city's latest attraction is this excellent **Centro de Interpretación** (% 925 22 16 16; Calle de la Trinidad 7; adult/child €4/2; 10.30am-6pm Wed-Mon) comprising an expansive audio-visual display covering a rambling 800 sq metres. The surrounding exhibits highlight the cultural and religious history of the city with models, photos, soundtrack and film. Currently the explanations are only in Spanish, however there are plans to introduce English audio-guides in the near future.

San Juan de los Reyes

A little further north lies one of the city's most worthwhile sights. The **Franciscan monastery & church** (% 925 22 38 02; admission €1.90; 10am-6pm) is one of the more light-filled churches in Toledo and notable for its delightful cloisters.

Provocatively built in the heart of the Jewish Quarter, San Juan de los Reyes was founded by Isabel and Fernando to demonstrate the power of the crown over the nobles and the supremacy of the Catholic faith in Spain. The rulers had planned to be buried here, but when they took the greater prize of Granada in 1492 they opted for the purpose-built Capilla Real.

Begun by the Breton architect Juan Gúas in 1477, San Juan de los Reyes was finished only in 1606. Throughout the church and two-storey cloister the coat of arms of Isabel and Fernando dominates, and the chains of Christian prisoners liberated in Granada dangle from the walls, most graphically on the northern exterior façade. The prevalent late Flemish Gothic style is enhanced with lavish Isabelline ornament and counterbalanced by unmistakable Mudéjar decoration, especially in the cloister, where typical geometric and vegetal designs stand out.

Islamic Toledo

Though architectural traces of Toledo's medieval Muslim conquerors remain, there's little that is specifically Moorish.

On the northern slopes of town you'll find the **Mezquita de Cristo de la Luz** (adult/child €1.90/1.40; 10am-2pm & 3.30-6.40pm), a modest mosque which is nonetheless quite beautiful. Built at the turn of the 1st millennium, it suffered the usual fate of being converted to a church – as the religious frescoes make clear. The narrow, steep Calle del Cristo de la Luz continues past the mosque and its charming gardens and under a gate the Muslims knew as **Bab al-Mardum** (also the original name of the mosque).

Outside the City Walls

Large portions of the old city walls remain intact and, for many people, the first sight of old Toledo is the imposing turrets of the **Puerta Nueva de Bisagra** (1550), emblazoned with Carlos I's coat of arms.

Just outside the Puerta Nueva de Bisagra is a shady park that hosts the **mercadillo** (market) every Tuesday. Down the hill to the west is another park where you can see the ruins of the former **Circo Romano** (Roman Circus).

Nearby, on the road to Madrid, is the one-time Hospital de Tavera, which now houses the **Museo Duque de Lerma** (% 925 22 04 51; Calle de Cardenal Tavera 2; admission €3; 10.30am-1.30pm &

3.30-6pm). Built in 1541, it contains an interesting array of art, including some of El Greco's last paintings.

For some of the best views of the city, head over the Puente de Alcántara to the other side of Río Tajo. Alternatively, you can get the tiny, free **cable ferry** in summer from near Hotel El Diamantista, and walk up the opposite bank. Scattered about this hinterland are many *cigarrales* (country estates of wealthy *toledanos*).

WALKING TOUR

Stock up on band-aids and explore Toledo on foot, in a fascinating journey through history that could be completed in three hours or last all day. Start off in central **Plaza de Zocodover** (1; p240), then pass through the **Arco de la Sangre** (2) on the eastern side of the square to the rewarding **Museo de Santa Cruz** (3; p241) on the left. Up the hill to the south is Toledo's signature **Alcázar** (4; p241), beyond which there are some fine views over the Río Tajo. Follow the spires down the hill to the west, passing en route the remnants of a mosque, **Mezquita de las Tornerías** (5), before reaching the **Catedral de Toledo** (6; p241), the

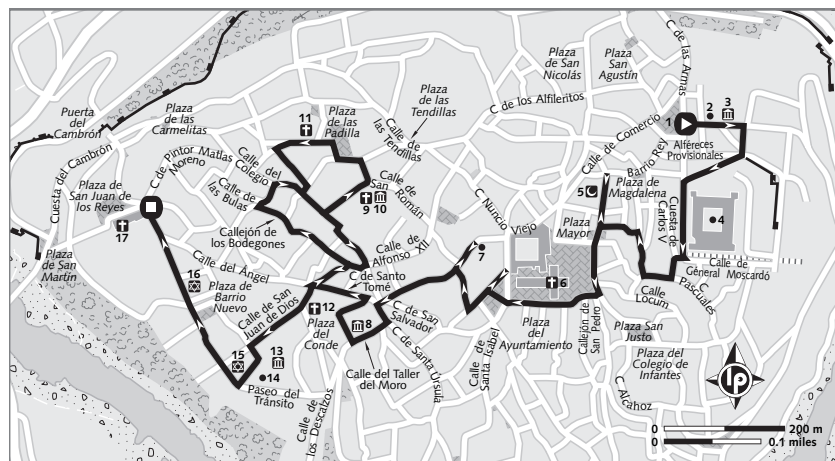
spiritual home of Catholic Spain. From the nearby Plaza del Ayuntamiento, head north up Calle de la Trinidad and check out the entertaining **Centro de Interpretación del Toledo Histórico** (7; p245). Retrace your steps and twist your way west to the 14th-century **Taller del Moro** (8; % 925 22 45 00; Calle del Taller del Moro s/n). Although the museum is closed until late 2007, the building is still interesting for its architecture.

From here, possible detours include heading northeast to the **Iglesia de San Román** (9), an impressive hybrid of Mudéjar and Renaissance styles and home to the **Museo de los Concilios y Cultura Visigoda** (10; % 925 22 78 72; Calle de San Román; adult/child & senior €0.60/free; h 10am-2pm & 4-6.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), with Visigothic artefacts; or to the **Monasterio de Santo Domingo El Antiguo** (11; p244).

Down the hill are a cluster of must-sees for El Greco enthusiasts – the wonderful **Iglesia de Santo Tomás** (12; p244) and the **Museo de El Greco** (13; p244) – encountered before entering the heart of Toledo's old **Jewish Quarter** (14; p245). Here, the **Sinagoga del Tránsito** (15; p245) should on no account be missed, while the **Sinagoga de Santa María La Blanca** (16; p245) is also worth a look. These synagogues take on special poignancy if you continue along Calle de los Reyes Católicos to the splendid **San Juan de los Reyes** (17; p245), which Spain's Catholic rulers hoped would represent the ultimate endpoint of the city's history and, thus, seems a fitting spot to end your walk.

WALK FACTS

Start Plaza de Zocodover
Finish San Juan de los Reyes
Distance 2km
Duration from three hours



COURSES

The University Castilla-La Mancha runs an ESTO (Spanish in Toledo) programme with various language courses; visit www.uclm.es/fundacion/esto for more details.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The **Feast of Corpus Christi** falls on the Thursday of the ninth week after Easter and is the most extraordinary event on Toledo's religious calendar – and one of the finest Corpus Christi celebrations in Spain. Several days of festivities reach a crescendo to a solemn procession featuring the massive Custodia de Arfe (see p244).

Easter in Toledo is also marked by several days of solemn processions by masked members of *cofradías* (brotherhoods). In the key days of Semana Santa (Holy Week) some of these processions occur around midnight.

The **Feast of the Assumption** is on 15 August. On this day of the Sagrario de la Virgen, you can drink of the cathedral's well water, believed to have miraculous qualities – the queues for a swig from an earthenware *botijo* (jug) can be equally astonishing.

SLEEPING

Toledo's good range of accommodation is offset by the number of visitors, especially from Easter to September. To avoid suitcase-trundling over cobbles, book well in advance.

Budget

Camping El Greco (% /fax 925 22 00 90; site per person/tent/car €5.55/5.35/5.35, pool adult/child €4.70/3.20; s) Located 2.5km southwest of town (catch bus 7), on the road to La Puebla de Montalbán, El Greco has superb facilities including five-star views of Toledo from the pool.

HI Albergue Juvenil en San Servando (% 925 22 45 54; ralberguesto@ccm.es; dm under/over 26yr €9.50/12) In a castle just across Río Tajo, this youth hostel has a grand setting with fine views. A membership card is required.

Pensión Arrabal (% 925 25 31 34; Calle Alfonso VI 1; s & d with shared bathroom €30) Clean and acceptable, this central *pensión* is on the main road up to the old town, so can be noisy from the front-facing rooms.

Virgen de la Estrella (% 925 25 31 34; Calle Airosas 1; s & d with shared bathroom €30) The owner also runs the restaurant of the same name nearby as well as the Arrabal. The plus here is a quieter, prettier location opposite the Santiago church.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hostal Casa de Cisneros (% 925 22 88 28; www.hostal-casa-de-cisneros.com; Calle Cardenal Cisneros; s/d €60/80; a) Across from the cathedral, this seductive *hostal* (cheap hotel) is built on the site of an 11th-century Muslim palace, parts of which can be spied via a glass port-hole in the lobby floor. In comparison, this building is a 16th-century youngster with pretty stone-and-wood-beamed rooms and exceptionally voguish en-suite bathrooms.

Midrange & Top End

Hostal Nuevo Labrador (% 925 22 26 20; fax 925 22 93 99; Calle Juan Labrador 10; s/d/tr €30/46/60; a) This friendly hotel offers good value for money with smart, if smallish, rooms in a central location.

Hostal Santo Tomás (% 925 22 17 12; www.hostalsantotome.com; Calle de Santo Tomás 13; s/d €39/52; p a) Full of charm, this family-owned *hostal* (cheap hotel) has benefited from a revamp and sports sparkling pine-clad rooms; go for a balcony with rooftop views.

La Posada de Manolo (% 925 28 22 50; www.laposadademanolos.com; Calle de Sixto Ramón Parro 8; s/d with breakfast from €42/66) This boutique-style hotel has themed each floor with furnishings and décor reflecting one of the three cultures of Toledo. There are stunning views of the old town and cathedral from the terrace.

Hostal Alfonso XII (% 925 25 25 09; www.hostal-alfonso12.com; Calle de Alfonso XII; s/d with breakfast from €44/55; n a) A newbie on the *hostal* scene, this gingerbread cottage of a place has original beams, terracotta tiles and stylish rooms decorated with impeccable taste.

Hostal del Cardenal (% 925 22 49 00; www.hostaldelcardenal.com; Paseo de Recaredo 24; s/d from €49/63; p a) This wonderful 18th-century mansion has soft ochre-coloured walls, arches and columns. The rooms are grand, yet welcoming, with dark furniture, plush fabrics and parquet floors; several overlook the lush garden with its ponds, fountains and a dazzle of brilliantly coloured flowers.

Parador Nacional Conde de Orgaz (% 925 22 18 50; www.parador.es; Cerro del Emperador s/n; s/d €120/150; p a s) High above the southern bank of Río Tajo, Toledo's *parador* (luxurious, state-owned hotel) boasts a classy interior and breathtaking city views.

EATING Restaurants

The cuisine of Toledo is based on simple peasant fare. *Perdiz* (partridge), cooked in a variety of fashions, is typical. *Carcamusa*, a pork dish, is also popular, as is *cuchifritos*, a potpourri of lamb, tomato and egg cooked in white wine with saffron.

Naca Naca (Plaza de Zocodover 7; bocadillos €2.50-3.50; h 8am-1am Mon-Fri, 8am-3am Sat, 8.30am-midnight Sun) What this place lacks in atmosphere it makes up for with good *bocadillos* (filled rolls) and munching potential into the wee hours.

Adolfo (☎ 925 22 42 44; Calle Nuncio Viejo 1; snacks from €4; v) A chic sophisticated setting for enjoying excellent wines along with decadent light eats including salmon with a cream cheese and yogurt dressing, plus vegetarian bites and more carnivorous fare.

Gambrinus (☎ 925 21 44 40; Calle de Santo Tomás; raciones €5-12, mains €7-14) There are outdoor tables on this buzzing street plus beer on tap and international-style fare, including Tex Mex for those suffering from hot-and-spicy withdrawal.

Bacus (☎ 925 25 01 64; Calle de Travesi Descalzos 1; menú €10; h 9am-11pm Mon-Sat, 9am-5pm Sun) The huge *menú del día* (daily set menu) is the order of the day here and its paella is homemade.

La Naviera (☎ 925 25 25 32; Calle de la Campana 8; mains from €10, menú €15; h closed Mon) Diners swoop like seagulls on La Naviera's free tables, ready for the best seafood in Toledo.

Palacio (☎ 925 21 59 72; Calle Alfonso X el Sabio 3; menú from €17) Stained glass, beams and smiling service combine with traditional cuisine for a memorable night out; partridge takes the star turn.

Hierbabuena (☎ 925 22 39 24; Calle de Navalpino 45; mains €17-21, menú €31.70; h closed Sun night) A dress-for-dinner restaurant with a Moorish interior patio dishing up classy cuisine such as sirloin of beef with goose-liver pâté in a wine-based sauce.

Tan Agustito (☎ 925 25 75 53; Calle Alfonso X el Sabio 2; meals from €18; v) The interior here is modern and arty and the menu predictably innovative with vegetarian choices and decadent desserts such as marzipan ice cream with an almond-and-cinnamon sauce.

Rincón del Bohemio (☎ 925 21 37 32; Sierpe 4; meals from €18) Eat al fresco on this pretty cobbled square chowing down on hearty fare such as *patatas revolconas* (grilled potatoes with peppers and onions).

Plaza Mayor (Plaza Mayor 2; meals from €18) Fussy families will appreciate the variety here with crepes and baked potatoes, as well as traditional dishes, such as partridge. Vegetarians may feel queasy about the ceiling of hanging hams.

Aurelio (Plaza del Ayuntamiento 4; meals from €25; h closed Sun night) The three restaurants under this name are among the best of Toledo's expensive restaurants (the other locations are Calle de la Sinagoga 1 and 6). Game, fresh produce and traditional Toledan dishes are prepared with panache.

Cafés

La Venta del Alma (☎ 925 25 42 45; Carretera de Piedrabuena 35; h closed Mon) A charming old homestead where you can enjoy your brew on the patio.

Parador Nacional Conde de Orgaz (☎ 925 22 18 50; www.parador.es; Cerro del Emperador s/n) For sweeping views and even more expensive drinks, head to this fancy *parador*.

The outdoor cafés on Plaza de Zocodover are pleasant for a coffee or drink.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT Bars & Clubs

Toledo doesn't have the most dynamic nightlife in Spain, but there are enough bars and discos to ensure you miss bedtime.

Cervecería 1700 (☎ 925 22 25 60; Plaza de las Tendillas 1; h closed Sun) Kick-start your evening at this relaxed beer bar with its tables spilling out onto the cobblestones.

Pícaro (☎ 925 22 13 01; Calle de las Cadenas 6) A popular *café-teatro* (theatre) serving an eclectic range of *copas* (drinks). From Monday to Thursday it's perfect for a quiet beverage, while the weekend gets rowdy, peaking on Friday and Saturday nights when the disco ball starts spinning at 2.30am.

Camelot (Calle del Cristo de la Luz 10) This disco gets the thumbs-up from young locals and expats.

La Venta del Alma (☎ 925 25 42 45; Carretera de Piedrabuena 35; h closed Mon) For an older crowd, La Venta is mild-mannered during the day, but really gets going on Friday and Saturday when the full-on atmosphere hits a prolonged high. It's just outside the city; cross Puente de San Martín and turn left up the hill and it's about 200m up on your left.

Sithons (Callejón del Lucio; h late-early) Most revellers finish the night at Sithons a *discoteca* (disco) with a throbbing dance floor and pulsating lights.

El Pellejito (☎ 925 25 46 16; Calle de las Tendillas 14; h 8.30am-late Thu-Sat) is near Cervecería 1700, and cosier, along with neighbour **El Ambigü** (Calle de las Tendillas 8), with its half-tiled interior, artwork and arches.

Also tempting in summer are the outdoor tables in the courtyard just off Plaza de Magdalena, including Bar-Restaurante Ludeña and Bar El Corralito.

Serving a variety of Spanish and foreign beers is **Lúpulo** (Calle de Aljibillo 4) and, for a cooler crowd, **La Abadía** (Calle de Nuñez de Arce 3). For the student-oriented bars shimmy down to the streets around La Abadía, particularly Calle de los Alfileritos and Calle de la Sillería.

On Calle de Santa Fe there's **El Trébol** (Calle de Santa Fe 1) and **La Tabernita** (Calle de Santa Fe 10), which specialises in *sidra* (cider). Nearby, on a hidden-away square, is **Enebro** (Plaza de Santiago de los Caballeros), a popular spot for all ages with a second branch on Plaza San Justo.

Theatre & Cinema

Teatro Rojas (☎ 925 22 39 70; Plaza Mayor) This theatre often has a rewarding programme of theatre and dance. Tuesday nights are reserved for a 'film club'. Toledo's only venue for original soundtrack films. Check for weekend kids' matinées.

Live Music

Círcula de Arte Toledo (www.circuloartetoledo.org; Plaza de San Vicente 2) There are several venues for enjoying foot-tapping live sounds, including this classy place with its regular programme of classical, jazz and blues concerts.

Garciaso Club (☎ 925 22 91 60; Calle Rojas 5) An easy-going urbane crowd frequents this funky club with live rock bands and dance space plus an upstairs chill-out zone.

El Último (☎ 925 21 00 02; Plaza del Colegio de Infantes 4) Situated in a 16th-century building, El Último is a hotbed for live jazz, blues and soul.

SHOPPING

For centuries, Toledo was renowned for the excellence of its swords, and you'll see them for sale everywhere. Another big seller in Toledo is anything decorated with *damasquinado* (damascene), a fine encrustation of gold or silver in Arab artistic tradition. A reliable outlet is **Pedro Maldonado** (Calle San Juan de Dios 10).

Toledo is also famed for its ceramics and marzipan, which every shop seems to sell regardless of the quality. The Santo Tomás

brand is reputable and there are several outlets in town, including one on Zocodover. Even the local nuns get in on the marzipan act – visit **Convento Santa Úrsula** (h 11am-1.30pm & 4-7pm) and **Monasterio de Santo Domingo El Antiguo** (h 11am-1.30pm & 4-7pm), behind the church of the same name.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

For most major destinations, you'll need to backtrack to Madrid.

Bus

From Toledo's **bus station** (☎ 925 22 36 41) buses depart for Madrid every half-hour from about 6am to 10pm daily (8.30am to 11.30pm Sunday and holidays). Direct buses (€4.20, one hour) run hourly; other services (1½ hours) go via villages along the way. Regular buses go to Alcázar de San Juan (€4, 1¼ hours, nine daily), Consuegra (€4.05, one hour) and Talavera de la Reina (€5.35, 1¼ hours), while occasional buses go to El Toboso (€7.10, two hours) and Guadalajara (€7.20, 2¼ hours). There are also services on weekdays and Sunday to Albacete (€12, 2¾ hours), Ciudad Real (€6.60, 1½ hours) and Cuenca (€9.30, 2¼ hours).

Car & Motorcycle

The N401 connects Toledo with Madrid. If you want the A4 Autovía de Andalucía, the main motorway running south from Madrid to Córdoba and Seville, take the N400 for Aranjuez. The N403 heads northwest for Ávila and continues as the N501 for Salamanca.

Train

Built in 1920, the **train station** (☎ 925 22 30 99) is a pretty introduction to the city. The high-speed AVE service runs every hour or so to Madrid's Atocha station (€8.10, 30 minutes).

GETTING AROUND

You won't need wheels to explore Toledo's old town, but buses do circulate through it and connect with outlying suburbs. Handy buses run between Plaza de Zocodover and the bus station (bus 5) and train station (buses 5 and 6).

A fun way to see Toledo is on the **Zocotren** (adult/child €3.90/1.70; h 11am-9pm), a 50-minute non-stop train trip. It leaves Zocodover on the hour from October to March, every half-hour April to September. There are also night rides (after 9pm, depending on demand) year-round.

A **remonte peatonal** (escalator; 7am-10pm Mon-Fri, 8am-10pm Sat & Sun), which starts near the Puerta de Alfonso VI and ends near the Monasterio de Santo Domingo El Antiguo, is another way you can minimise the steep uphill climb.

There are taxi ranks just south of Plaza de Zocodover and at the bus station, or you can call a **taxi** (% 925 25 50 50).

AROUND TOLEDO

Carranque

Since 1983, archaeologists at **Carranque** (% 925 59 20 14; adult/child €4/free; 10am-9pm Tue-Sun 15 Apr-15 Sep, 10am-6pm Tue-Sat 16 Sep-14 Apr) have been excavating what they believe to be the foundations of a late-4th-century Roman basilica, which would make it the oldest in Spain. The skeletal remains of Roman villas and temple-fountains are among the site's other highlights, while the remains of a 12th-century monastery with some valuable mosaics are also undergoing excavation and study. The entrance fee includes a small interpretation centre and museum, plus a short audiovisual presentation. Carranque is just off the N401 highway 35km north of Toledo.

Castles

The area around Toledo is littered with castles in varying states of upkeep. You'll be hard-pressed to reach most of them without a car.

Some 20km southeast of Toledo along the CM400 is the dramatic ruined Arab castle of **Almonacid de Toledo**. Some legends suggest El Cid lived here, but the lonely ruins have long been abandoned. A few kilometres further down the road is a smaller castle in the village of **Mascarque**. Continue on to Mora, then take the CM410 for 10km to the village of **Orgaz**, which has a modest 15th-century **castle** (every 2nd Wed Apr-Nov) in good nick.

Around 30km southwest of Toledo, the hulking, isolated ruin of **Castillo de Montalbán** stands majestically over Río Torcón valley. This evocative castle is believed to have been erected by the 12th-century Knights Templar. Officially, it's open from May to January, but there's little to stop you wandering around at any time. To get there from Toledo, take the CM401 to the CM403 junction, turn right towards La Puebla de Montalbán and follow the signs.

The town of **Escalona**, 52km northwest of Toledo on the N403, boasts a castle ruin of Arab origin, in a pretty location on the banks of Río Alberche.

THE WEST

TALAVERA DE LA REINA

pop 77,142

Talavera de la Reina, with old city walls and ceramic façades, is worth a stop if you're in the area. Overrun by the Muslim Almoravid dynasty in the 12th century, Talavera was later the birthplace of Fernando de Rojas, whose *Celestina* (published in 1499) is judged by some as Europe's first great novel. In 1809, the town was the scene of a key battle between the Duke of Wellington's forces and the French.

These days, Talavera has settled into comfortable provinciality and has long been famous for its ceramic work, which adorns many buildings around town. The finest example is the façade of the **Teatro Victoria**, just off Plaza del Padre Juan de Mariana.

Within the old city walls is **Museo Ruiz de Luna** (% 925 80 01 49; Calle de San Agustín el Viejo s/n; admission €0.60; 10am-2pm & 4-6.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), which houses a good collection of local ceramics dating from the 16th and 17th centuries. To buy contemporary ceramics check out the factories and shops along the road leading north to the A5 motorway. The **tourist office** (% 925 82 63 22; Ronda del Cañello s/n; 10.30am-1.30pm & 4-6pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-12.30pm Sun) is east of the old city walls.

There's not a huge range of accommodation, but **Hostal Edán** (% 925 80 69 89; Paseo de Extremadura 24; s/d €17/32) is a popular choice for its simple, clean rooms; reservations are recommended on weekends.

The bus station is in the town centre. Regular buses between Madrid and Badajoz stop in Talavera de la Reina and up to nine leave daily to Toledo (€5.35, 1¼ hours). Buses also head to Cáceres, Mérida, Oropesa, Plasencia and Trujillo.

AROUND TALAVERA DE LA REINA

The delightful village of **Oropesa**, 34km west of Talavera, makes a far better overnight stop than Talavera. Its hilltop 14th-century **castle** (admission €1.50; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun) looks north across the plains to the mighty Sierra de Gredos and also hosts an elegant **parador** (% 925 43 00 00; www.parador.es; s/d €96/120; p a). There's also **La Hostería** (% /fax 925 43 08 75; www.lahosteriadeoropesa.com; Plaza del Palacio 5; s/d with breakfast €45/60; p a) just below the castle, which

has pretty individually decorated rooms with beamed ceilings, and its own *bodega* (cellar).

From Talavera de la Reina, buses do the trip here three or four times daily. If you're driving, follow the signs to the A5 motorway to Extremadura or Badajoz.

By Río Tajo just 14km south of Oropesa sits **El Puente del Arzobispo**, another well-known centre for ceramics with showrooms galore. The multiarched bridge after which the town is named – and over which you're most likely to drive on your way out of town – was built in the 14th century.

MONTES DE TOLEDO

elevation 1400m

The dramatic Montes de Toledo begin at the low foothills south of Toledo rising westwards towards Extremadura. Exploring these hills takes you into the heart of some of the most sparsely populated country of Spain's interior. Long stretches of the region's roads are lined by either patches of terracotta earth dotted with olive trees or green fields that are covered in yellow wildflowers during spring. Most towns are served by the occasional bus – usually once daily on weekdays – from Toledo.

If you're travelling by car, the most straightforward route from Toledo is the CM401, which skirts the northern slopes of the Montes. Eleven kilometres short of Navahermosa, a trail leads south to **Embalse del Torcón**, a popular lakeshore picnic spot.

Beyond Navahermosa you have several options for branching south. Some of the more heavily wooded areas offer gorgeous vistas, and apart from in the odd tiny *pueblo* (village), you'll hardly see a soul. One longish route that gives a taste of the area would see you dropping south off the CM401 at Los Navalmorales. Take the CM4155 towards Los Navalucillos, and keep heading south past seemingly deserted villages until you hit a T-junction after 48km. Turning right (west) you wind 35km to the northern reaches of the huge **Embalse de Cijara**, part of a chain of reservoirs fed by Río Guadiana and actually part of Extremadura. After the tiny village of Cijara, swing north towards **Puerto Rey**, a mountain pass from where you can branch off west along a back road to the EX102 and the last curvy stretch towards Guadalupe (p827).

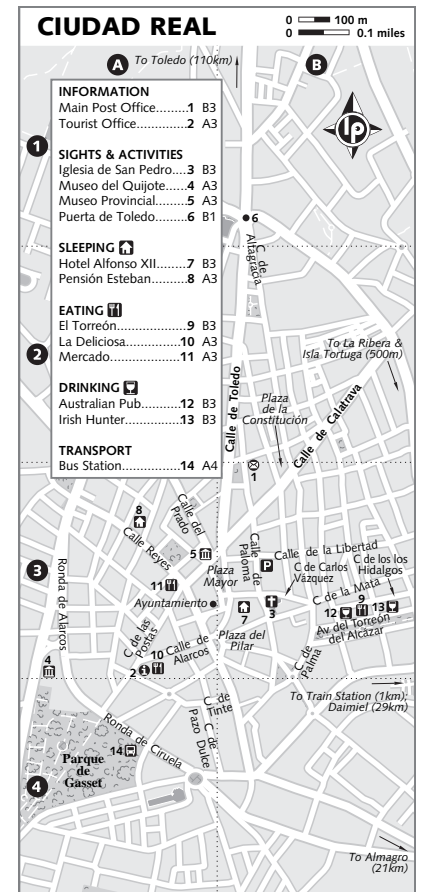
THE SOUTH

CIUDAD REAL

pop 70,000

Despite being the one-time royal counterpart of Toledo, modern Ciudad Real has little cultural wow factor, although there is a pleasant-enough shopping centre and Plaza Mayor crowned by its Gaudilike Congress Centre has a certain appeal.

Founded by Castilian King Alfonso X El Sabio (the Wise) in 1255 to check the power of the Knights of Calatrava, based in nearby Almagro, Ciudad Real quickly became an important provincial capital, finally eclipsing Almagro in the 18th century.



Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 926 20 00 37; www.castillalamancha.es; Calle de Alarcos 21; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) has a reasonable stock of information on the province; it shares the same building as the city's second post office. The main post office is on Plaza de la Constitución.

Sights & Activities

Coming from the north, you'll enter Ciudad Real by the **Puerta de Toledo** (1328), the last remaining gate of the original eight, built in Mudéjar style by Alfonso XI.

The **Museo Provincial** (Calle del Prado 4; admission free; 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun; ♾) has exhibits of archaeological finds and an art collection covering the past four centuries. For Quijote fans, the one-of-a-kind **Museo del Quijote** (Ronda de Alarcos 1; admission free; 10am-2pm & 6-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) has a Cervantes library stocked with hundreds of Don Quijote books, including some in Esperanto and Braille, and others dating back to 1724. You'll have to understand Spanish to get the most out of the inventive audiovisual displays.

Of the swag of churches to be seen, the most striking is the 14th-century Gothic **Iglesia de San Pedro**, the work of Gil de Siloé.

Sleeping & Eating

Pensión Esteban (☎ 926 22 45 78; Calle Reyes 15; s/d €20/30) Within confessional distance of the cathedral, this no-nonsense *pensión* has a friendly owner, soppy cat and adequate rooms with pine furniture and sparkling bathrooms.

Hotel Alfonso XII (☎ 926 22 42 81; Calle de Carlos Vázquez 8; s/d €60/120; p a w) Not far from Plaza Mayor, this is an upmarket place where old façade meets renovated interior with success. The modern carpeted rooms come with all the swish trimmings, plus wi-fi coverage on the 2nd floor.

La Deliciosa (☎ 926 21 38 01; Calle de Alarcos 11; 8.30am-11pm) Located near the tourist office, this is a handy spot for breakfast, *bocadillos* and coffee.

Self-caterers should head for the vast covered **mercado** (market; Calle de las Postas). The handful of café-bars along Calle de Palma serve some of the best-sized tapas in town. But for most of your dining and drinking pleasures, head for Avenida del Torreón del Alcázar and the parallel Calle de los Hidalgos. The former is lined with eateries such as **El Torreón** (Avenida del Torreón del Alcázar 7), which specialises in game.

Drinking

You'll find bars such as **Australian Pub** (Avenida del Torreón del Alcázar s/n) and, on the same street, the Irish Hunter near El Torreón. On Calle de los Hidalgos you can nibble tapas and sip *cervezas* (beers) in a string of bars. Move on to the city's best-known moving-and-shaking discos: La Ribera and Isla Tortuga, in Playa Park, east of town beyond the train tracks.

Getting There & Away

BUS

The **bus station** (☎ 926 21 13 42) is southwest of the town centre. Up to three daily buses head to Albacete (€12.75, 2¾ hours) and Toledo (€6.85, 1½ hours), and five per day head off to Madrid (€10.10, 2½ hours). Most surrounding towns, including Almagro (€1.85, 30 minutes, up to five daily), can be reached by bus.

TRAIN

You'll find the **train station** (☎ 926 22 02 02) east of the town centre. The bulk of trains linking Madrid and Andalucía stop at Ciudad Real. There are regular departures to Madrid (from €17.80, one hour) and Córdoba (from €22.90, one hour), while there are daily departures for Valencia (from €26, five hours, two daily) and southeast to Almagro (€2.10, 30 minutes).

Getting Around

Local bus 5 swings past both the train and bus stations bound for the town centre; catch it from Plaza del Pilar when you're leaving town.

CIUDAD REAL PROVINCE

Almagro

pop 9092

An architecturally gem-studded town, the jewel in the crown of Almagro is the extraordinary Plaza Mayor with its wavy tiled roof, stumpy columns and dark-green porticoes. Although it looks quasi-oriental, the 16th-century plaza has Germanic roots, dating back to the reign of Carlos I when several well-heeled bankers and traders moved here. The town is a delight to wander around, its relatively traffic-free cobbled streets flanked by Renaissance palaces, churches and museums.

INFORMATION

The **tourist office** (☎ 926 86 07 17; www.ciudad-almagro.com in Spanish; Plaza Mayor 1; 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm & 5-7pm Sat, 11am-2pm Sun), in the

ayuntamiento (town hall), has information about a number of distinguished buildings around town.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Opening onto the plaza is the oldest theatre in Spain: the 17th-century **Corral de Comedias** (Plaza Mayor 18; adult/concession €1.50/1; 10am-2pm & 5-7pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm & 5-7pm Sun Sep-Jun, 10am-2pm & 6-9pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm & 6-8pm Sat, 11am-2pm & 6-8pm Sun Jul & Aug), an evocative tribute to the Golden Age of Spanish theatre with rows of wooden balconies. It's still used for performances, especially during July's **Festival Internacional de Teatro Clásico** (www.festivaldealmagro.com in Spanish). This is nicely complemented by the **Museo de Teatro** (Calle de Gran Maestre 2; adult/concession €2.40/1; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Fri, 11am-2pm & 4-6pm Sat, 11am-2pm Sun Jun & Aug, 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Fri, 11am-2pm & 4-6pm Sat, 11am-2pm Sun Jul), just across the square, with exhibits on Spanish theatre from the 18th century in rooms around a restored courtyard.

SLEEPING

Almagro has some real show-stopping accommodation for such a small town.

Hospedería Almagro (☎ 926 88 20 87; Calle de Ejido de Calatrava s/n; s/d €27/46; a) Located in a 15th-century convent, the beamed rooms are small and simple with original terracotta tiles. Inspiring utter devotion is the lovely leafy courtyard with its adjacent restaurant and bar; Plaza Mayor is a short stroll away.

Posada Almagro (☎ /fax 926 26 12 01; www.laposa.dadealmagro.com; Calle de Gran Maestre 5; s/d from €30/48; a) This place has rustic character with just 11 rooms set around a couple of inner courtyards. Rooms have an air of gentility with original tiled bathrooms, but the downstairs bar-restaurant means you may need earplugs on a Saturday night.

Retiro del Maestre (☎ 926 26 11 85; www.retirodelmaestre.com in Spanish; Calle San Bartolomé 5; s/d €60/75; p a i w) Enjoy five-star treatment and style without the hurly burly of a big hotel at this exquisite new place with its spacious rooms washed in ochre and blue, inner courtyard and wi-fi in the lobby.

Parador (☎ 926 86 01 00; www.parador.es; Ronda de San Francisco 31; s/d €108/135; p a w) In a spruced-up convent in a quiet corner of Almagro, this *parador* has a luxurious, old-world charm complete with lace-makers in the lobby.

Also recommended is the **Hostal Rural San Bartolomé** (☎ 926 26 10 73; Calle San Bartolomé 12; s/d €55/64; a).

EATING

There are several cafés and bars spilling out onto Plaza Mayor, most serve the usual suspects (*raciones*, *platos etc*) at the standard Plaza Mayor prices.

Queso de Oveja (☎ 926 86 05 02; Calle Feria 2) Pick up your wheel of well-aged local Manchego cheese from the experts here.

Bar Las Nieves (☎ 926 86 12 90; Plaza Mayor 52; snacks from €4) This is one of the better Plaza Mayor bars with chairs on the square and inexpensive light eats.

Meson Cepa Veja (☎ 926 26 12 61; Ronda de Santo Domingo 45; meals from €15) Better for a hot dinner than a hot date, this brightly lit place has a no-fuss traditional menu. Try the excellent *pisto* (peppers, tomatoes, garlic and egg).

El Corregidor (☎ 926 86 06 48; Calle de Jerónimo Ceballos 2; meals from €40; 1 closed Mon except Jul) The town's best restaurant with a menu of high-quality Manchegan cooking, a wall full of culinary awards and a hotchpotch décor that somehow works.

Both the **Posada Almagro** (☎ /fax 926 26 12 01; Calle de Gran Maestre 5) and the **parador** (☎ 926 86 01 00; Ronda de San Francisco 31) restaurants are worth checking out, too.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Two trains go daily to Madrid (€12.85, 2¾ hours), with up to six to Ciudad Real (€2.10, 15 minutes) and two to Valencia (€24.95, 4¼ hours); for destinations to the south, change in Ciudad Real. Buses also run reasonably often to Ciudad Real (€1.75, 30 minutes), but there are none on Sunday.

Castillo de Calatrava

About 30km south of Almagro, the fortress-like castle-and-monastery complex of **Castillo de Calatrava** (Calatrava La Nueva; admission free; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun) commands magnificent views across the *sierra* (mountain range) of the same name. The complex was once a forward base of the medieval order of knights that long controlled this frontier area of La Mancha during the Reconquista. Even if it's closed, it merits a visit for the site and view alone. From Calzada de Calatrava, it's 7km southwest along the CR504 and is accessible only with your own vehicle.

Parque Nacional de Las Tablas de Daimiel

The reedy marshes of Las Tablas, 11km north of Daimiel, are no great inspiration – unless you're a bird-watcher. This is a favourite stop-over for migratory birds, such as the purple heron. The park's **tourist centre** (h 8am-dusk) has information, but there's no public transport to the park.

Parque Natural de las Lagunas de Ruidera

Make a detour here and you won't be disappointed; the scenery is just stunning. A ribbon of 14 small lakes is surrounded by lush parkland, camp sites, picnic areas and discreetly situated restaurants and hotels. Foreign tourists are rare; it's most popular as a chill-out zone for hot and bothered *madrileños* (Madrid residents).

The **tourist office** (☎ 926 52 81 16; Avenida Castilla La Mancha s/n, Ruidera; h 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Wed-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) has lots of glossy information on accommodation and activities, such as hiring rowing boats, kayaks or mountain bikes.

Camping Los Batanes (☎ 926 69 90 76; www.losbatanes.com; site per person/tent/car €5/5/5.40, d bungalow €42; p) is a leafy camping ground on Laguna Redondilla.

Push the boat out and stay in the windmill suite at **Hotel Albamanjon** (☎ 926 69 90 48; www.albamanjon.net; Laguna de San Pedro 16; d from €89, ste €150; a) with a view of the turquoise lake. All the rooms have private terraces and there's an

excellent restaurant where you can sample owner Raúl's superb cooking.

La Vega (☎ 967 37 80 39; Calle San Pedro 7, Lagunas de Ruidera; meals from €12) is wonderfully situated on the lake with a large terrace and small beach. Expect a good grilling; barbecued meats are the speciality.

Villanueva de los Infantes

pop 6050

The fruit of a repopulation campaign in La Mancha as the Muslims fell back into Andalucía after the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212, Villanueva de los Infantes is an attractive and busy provincial town. A highlight here is the **Plaza Mayor**, with its deep ochre-coloured buildings, wooden-and-stone balconies and lively bars and restaurants.

On the square stands the 15th-century **Iglesia de San Andrés**, where the 16th-century poet Francisco de Quevedo is buried. Like Almagro, Villanueva is studded with the houses of old nobles and deserves a wander. The **tourist office** (☎ 926 36 13 21; Plaza Mayor s/n; h 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) organises guided walks of the town.

Hospedería El Buscón Queveda (☎ /fax 926 36 17 88; www.hosteriasreales.com; Calle Frailes 1; s/d Sun-Thu from €45/58; a), a lovely former convent four streets south of Plaza Mayor, has handsome regency-style rooms and magnificent public areas with original tapestries and oil paintings.

Buses run to Ciudad Real three times daily from Monday to Friday (€5, 1½ hours).

THE WINES OF VALDEPEÑAS

Standing at the exact midpoint between Madrid and Córdoba, the large and otherwise uninviting town of Valdepeñas offers weary travellers one (and only one) very good reason to break the journey. Surrounding the town is what some experts believe to be the largest expanse of vineyards in the world, although true aficionados of the humble grape argue that quantity does not easily translate into quality. There's an element of truth to this view – Valdepeñas has historically been to the mass market what La Rioja is to the quality end of the market (see the boxed text, p494).

That said, things are changing. You're still more likely to come across Valdepeñas wines in the cheap, cask variety than served in Spain's finest restaurants, but some of the Valdepeñas bodegas (cellars) have begun to make inroads into the quality end of the market. Doubtless you'll want to form your own opinion, but don't expect Napa Valley-style tasting here; most of the bodegas only offer tours and tastings with previous appointments and charge to boot. Check the websites for details to avoid going thirsty. One bodega to visit in town is **Bodegas Arúspide** (☎ 926 34 70 75; www.aruspide.com; Calle Franci Morales 102; per person €8) which includes a bottle to take home in the tasting price, while **Bodegas Real** (☎ 926 33 80 01; Carretera Cozar, km12.8; €3.50) includes a tour of the vineyards, bodega and a tasting of two or more wines for a fairly modest price.

IN SEARCH OF DON QUIJOTE

Part of the charm of a visit to Castilla-La Mancha is the chance to track down the real-life locations into which Miguel de Cervantes placed his picaresque hero. These days it requires less map-reading skills as, to celebrate the fourth centenary of this epic tale, the 250km Route of Don Quijote has been created and painstakingly signposted leading you along paths, cattle routes and historic routes throughout the region. Out of all the places and sights you can ponder along the way the *molinos de vientos* (windmills) are the most obvious, for it was these 'monstrous giants' that so haunted El Quijote and with which he tried to battle. Although Consuegra's are the most attractive, those that are specifically mentioned in Cervantes' novel are the windmills of **Campo de la Criptana** (below) and **Mota del Cuervo** (p256). Other highlights on the trail include the castle of **Belmonte** (p256) and **El Toboso** (p256), where the knight discovered the lovely Dulcinea.

The anniversary also kicked off a yearlong party and saw bookshops overflowing with new editions, some with CD-ROMs, and complimentary texts while institutes, universities and local authorities organised an exhausting list of seminars, conferences, theatre works and concerts not just in Spain, but across the globe. At the time of writing there were at least two films being produced looking to introduce the whimsical errant knight to a new generation of film-goers. One is the Ines Paris comedy *Miguel and William* about an improbable, but not impossible, meeting between Cervantes and William Shakespeare. Hopefully these will hit the screen despite the superstition that Don Quijote's tales of disaster seem to rub off on those who would seek him. Legendary director Orson Welles spent 20 years trying, but never succeeded. And Monty Python creator Terry Gilliam's effort, starring Johnny Depp, suffered logistical problems that included filming being constantly disrupted by US aircraft taking off and the set being washed away.

SOUTHEAST TO ALBACETE

The sweeping, windswept plains of south-eastern Castilla-La Mancha can seem dull but once you get off the highway, this is a land of ancient windmills, quiet villages and, of course, our favourite nutty knight – Don Quijote (see the boxed text, above).

Consuegra

This is *the* place for the novice windmill-spotter where you can get that classic shot of a dozen *molinos de vientos* (windmills) flanking the 13th-century **castle** (admission €2; h 9.30am-1.30pm & 3.30-5.30pm). Consuegra once belonged to the Knights of Malta; a few rooms in the castle have been done up to give a good indication of how the knights would have lived.

The **tourist office** (☎ 925 47 57 31; h 9am-2pm & 4.30-7pm Mon-Fri, from 10.30am Sat & Sun) is in the Bolero mill (they all have names), which is the first you come to as the road winds up from the town. They can advise on *casas rurales* (country homes) if you want to stay overnight.

Bar Castillo (☎ 925 48 14 79; meals from €25) stays firmly in classical mould with a rustic-style dining room and robust local dishes. The *sopa de almendra* (almond soup) is excellent.

There are regular weekday buses (three on weekends) running between Consuegra and

Toledo (€4, one hour), and up to seven buses daily to Madrid.

Alcázar de San Juan

Apart from the 18th-century **Iglesia de Santa María** (it's thought Cervantes was baptised here), there's nothing much to draw you to Alcázar but its transport options.

Hostal Aldonza (☎ 926 54 15 54; Calle de Alvarez Guerra 28; s/d €20/35), opposite the pretty train station, has clean, if poky, blue-and-white rooms with TV. The La Bollega restaurant and bar downstairs heaves with locals. For bopping nightlife strut over to the Vanyty disco across the street.

Trains leave from here for destinations throughout the country, including Albacete, Alicante, Barcelona, Ciudad Real, Jaén, Madrid, Málaga, Seville and Valencia. There are occasional buses that serve Belmonte, Cuenca and Toledo.

Campo de la Criptana & Around

The windmills of Don Quijote fame are the main feature of this pleasant town all dressed in white. They sit atop the town's summit and their proximity to the surrounding houses marks an interesting contrast with Consuegra. The **tourist office** (☎ 926 56 22 31; h 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) is in the Poyatos mill.

There are a few small *hostales* in town, including the simple, but adequate, **Hostal Egos** (☎ 926 56 43 04; Calle de García León 51; s/d €25/44), around a 300m walk from Plaza Mayor. Go for a room with a balcony. The downstairs restaurant has a €10 *menú*.

Campo de la Criptana is served by the odd train and regional bus, but options are greater 8km away in Alcázar de San Juan. About four buses run daily between the two towns, but none on Sunday.

El Toboso

Another stop on the Quijote trail is El Toboso, a 12km detour off the N420. This pretty town is the literary home of Dulcinea, and Don Quijote pilgrims can check out the mildly entertaining **Casa-Museo de Dulcinea** (☎ 925 19 72 88; Calle Don Quijote 1; adult €0.60; h 9.45am–2pm & 4–6.45pm Tue–Sat, 10am–2pm Sun). There's a small **tourist office** (☎ 925 56 82 26; h 10am–2pm & 4–7pm Tue–Sat, 10am–2pm Sun) in the centre. There are three direct buses every day to Madrid (€6.50, two hours).

There are more pretty windmills at **Mota del Cuervo**, 29km northeast of Campo de la Criptana, at the junction of the N301.

Belmonte

About 25km northeast of Mota del Cuervo, Belmonte has one of the better-preserved Castilian castles. Set on a knoll above the pretty village, the 15th-century **castle** (adult/child €2/1; h 10.30am–1pm & 4–6pm Tue–Sun Sep–Mar, 5–7pm Tue–Sun Apr–Aug) was for a while home to France's Empress Eugénie after her husband Napoleon III lost the French throne in 1871. Also well worth a visit is **Iglesia Colegial de San Bartolomé** (Colegiata), which has an impressive altarpiece.

La Muralla (☎ 967 17 10 45; s/d €15/30) has plain comfortable rooms with a cavernous downstairs bar where old men in flat caps play dominoes. **Palacio Buenavista Hospedería** (☎ 967 18 75 80; fax 967 18 75 88; Calle José Antonio González 2; s/d/ste with breakfast from €45/70/90; p a) is a classy boutique hotel with stylish rooms set around a central patio with skylight. Go for a castle view.

By bus from Belmonte, you can get to Alcázar de San Juan and Cuenca.

ALBACETE

pop 160,000

This mildly down-at-heel provincial city is no star, but is useful as a transport hub and a place to pause between Spain's central plains and the Mediterranean *costa* (coast).

If you're passing through, the town's **cathedral** is appealing enough with its four Ionic columns. On a hot summer's afternoon, the leafy **Parque de Abelardo Sánchez** (Calle de Tesifonte Gallego), home of the **Museo Provincial** (admission €1.20; h 10am–2pm & 4.30–7pm Mon–Sat, 10am–2pm Sun), offers some respite. The **tourist office** (☎ 967 58 05 22; Calle del Tinte 2; h 10am–2pm & 4.30–6.30pm Mon–Fri, to 6pm Sat, to 3pm Sun) should be able to muster more enthusiasm for the town than we can. Check your emails at **Mailboxes etc** (☎ 967 61 61 00; Calle Cura 5; per hr €3; h closed Sun).

Hotel Altozano (☎ 967 21 04 62; Plaza del Altozano 7; s/d €35/58; p a) has an ace location on a pretty main square, the rooms are hotelly modern with satellite TV. For more memorable charm, the **parador** (☎ 967 24 53 21; s/d €88/110; p a i) is possibly the highlight of the town.

The bus and train stations are next to each other at the northeastern end of town. Buses serve many major cities around the country. There are five daily buses to Cuenca (€9.10, two hours), three daily to Ciudad Real (€12.50, 2¾ hours), up to three to Toledo (€12.50, 2¾ hours, none on Saturday) and at least daily Monday-to-Friday services to Almansa, Chinchilla de Monte Aragón and Ruidera. Trains head to Alicante (€21.40, 1½ hours, up to 11 daily), Ciudad Real (€14.75, 2¾ hours, five daily), Madrid (€11, three hours, hourly), Murcia (€21.90, two hours, seven daily) and Valencia (€21.40, 1½ hours, up to 15 daily).

AROUND ALBACETE

Just off the N430 motorway to Valencia, a restored fortress overlooks **Chinchilla de Monte Aragón**, a whitewashed village with a beautiful Plaza Mayor. About 60km further on, a square-turreted castle built by the Muslims stands high above the town of **Almansa**. Both towns are served by bus from Albacete.

Río Júcar

Northeast of Albacete, the deep, tree-filled gorge of Río Júcar makes a stunning detour. About halfway along the CM3218, the breathtaking town of **Alcalá del Júcar** comes into view as you descend via hairpin turns. Its restored 15th-century **castle**, an unmistakable landmark, towers over the houses that spill down the steep bank of the Júcar gorge. At the foot of the town there's a leafy meeting-and-greeting plaza, home of a small tourist office with sporadic opening hours, and several plaques which detail local hikes. **Naragua** (☎ 969 23 16

A BATTY CAVE

Forget stalagmites, cave drawings and coach tours – Alcalá's **Cuevas y Mirador del Diablo** (☎ 637 418 297; San Lorenzo 7; admission €3) is not your conventional cave. The first inkling comes when owner Juan José Martínez appears to collect your entrance fee sporting a sweeping Dalí-clone mustache. It transpires he grew up in the maestro's home town of Cadix. OK, so that makes sense – sort of. The real adventure starts with a 70m-long tunnel, which apparently dates back to Moorish times when it was used for stabling animals. With the next exhibit the large no-smoking sign at the entrance suddenly makes sense. Don't take *any* drugs on this excursion. Spy through the porthole on your left and you are met with the astonishing sight of strobe lights in a quasi-disco setting. Next you emerge into a bar (Juan has 10 children so there's no shortage of staff). After your free drink you can enjoy an extraordinary museum; a collectables heaven with old cameras, lottery tickets, farming implements, cash registers, radios, sewing machines, news clippings and Juan's poems.

Next, climb several flights of stairs and you emerge into a fabulous *mirador* (lookout) set into the side of the cave, complete with chairs for contemplating the vista. Then there is another passage and another bar (different children) where taxidermy seems to be the main theme. Nothing as ordinary as squirrels and rabbits, you understand – think along stuffed gorilla terms.

There's something particularly apt about finding such an eccentric in the depths of La Mancha country – Cervantes would have definitely approved.

56; www.naragua.com in Spanish; Carretera Ciudad Encantada, Km7, Cuenca; €25) organises canoe trips on Río Júcar.

There are a few very well-priced hotels, including **Hostal El Júcar** (☎ 967 47 30 55; Calle Batán 1; s/d with breakfast €25/40) with pine-clad rooms and **Hostal Rambla** (☎ 967 47 40 64; Paseo Los Robles 2; s/d with breakfast €25/45). Both have restaurants; the one at Hostal Rambla does great char-grilled meats served at outdoor tables.

For an alternative route back to Albacete, a small back road takes you through the gorge with houses cut into the cliff face. The more picturesque hamlets are at the western end where the gorge narrows. Tiny **Cubas** has an intriguing ceramic-tiled and domed church hollowed out of the cliff, while **Alcozarejos** is famed for its trout fishing.

Sierra de Alcaraz

Stretching across the southern strip of Albacete province, the cool, green peaks of the Sierra de Alcaraz, laced with small, intensively farmed plots and dotted with villages, offer a great escape from the dusty plains around Albacete.

The most scenic countryside is to be found along the CM412, particularly between **Puerto de las Crucetas** (1300m) and **Elche de la Sierra**, although a detour to **Vianos** is also worthwhile. Apart from in the wooded hills and on some craggy rock formations, donkey-mounted shepherds still watch their small

flocks of sheep in the more remote corners of the *sierra*.

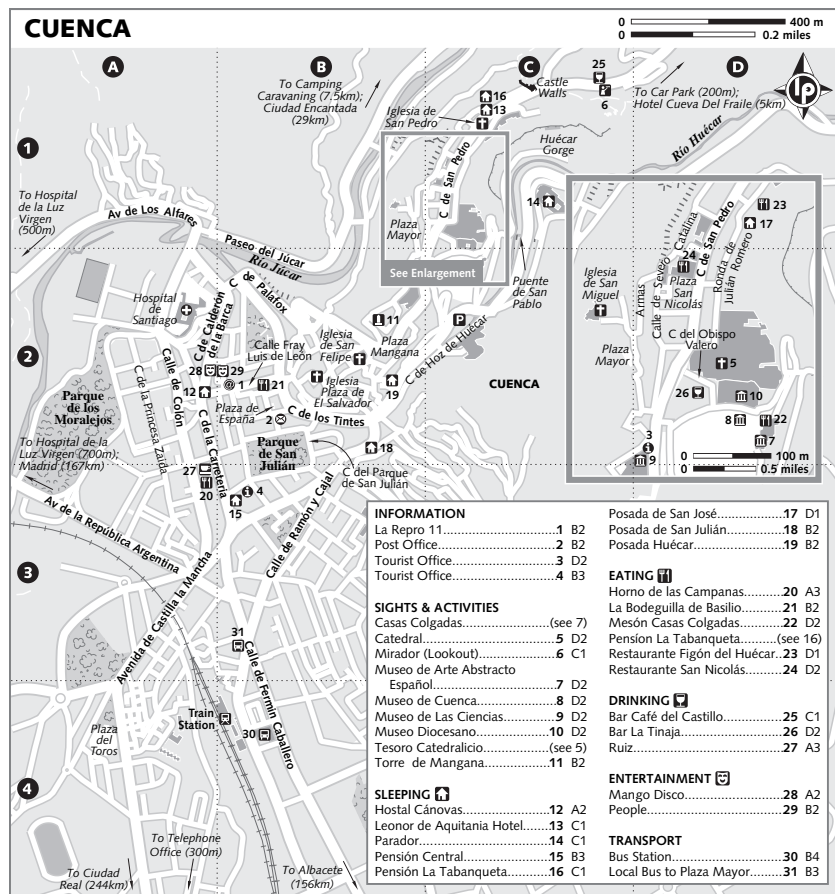
The largest choice of accommodation is in leafy **Riópar**, including the excellent **Camping Río Mundo** (site per person/tent/car €4.45/4.70/5.20) 6km east of town. You can also go horse trekking here with **La Ponderosa** (☎ 666 72 98 22; www.laponderosa.org; Fuente del Espino 23; per hr €32). The prettiest place to stay in these parts, however, is in sleepy hilltop **Alcaraz** with its medieval Plaza Mayor and lattice of narrow cobbled streets. At the top of the village, sporting magnificent views, is newish **Los Rosales** (☎ 967 38 01 28; Calle Granada s/n; s/d €43/48) with spruce and comfortably furnished rooms. Just down the hill, a handsome 16th-century building houses the **Mirador Sierra de Alcaraz** (☎ 967 38 00 17; Calle Padre Pareja s/n; d €75; a). Though the rooms may be too girly for some, with their flowery décor and drapes, the downstairs vaulted restaurant is definitely worth checking out.

THE NORTHEAST

CUENCA

pop 50,000

A World Heritage site, Cuenca is one of Spain's most enchanting cities, its old centre bristling with evocative medieval buildings. Its most emblematic sights are the *casas colgadas*, the hanging houses of Cuenca, which perch above the deep gorges that surround the town.



Like so many Spanish cities, the surrounding new town is modern and forgettable; keep the blinkers on during the approach – up the hill lies another world.

History

Probably inhabited in Roman times, Cuenca remained obscure until Muslim occupation. Fortified by one Ismail bin Dilnun early in the 11th century, the city became a flourishing textile centre. The Christians took their time conquering the place, and it fell only in 1177 to Alfonso VIII. Like much of Spain's interior, 16th-century Cuenca slipped once again into decline and hardship, something from which it only began to recover during the 20th century.

Orientation

Cuenca is compact and easily negotiable. The old town is home to all the sights and occupies the narrow hill at the northeastern end of town, between the gorges of Ríos Júcar and Huécar. At the foot of the hill down which the old town tumbles, the new town spreads out to the south. Near Cuenca's southern outskirts (a 10-minute walk from the foot of the hill), the train and bus stations are almost opposite each other, southwest of Calle de Fermin Caballero.

Information

EMERGENCY

Cruz Roja (% 969 22 22 00) For ambulances.

Police (% 091)

INTERNET ACCESS

La Repro 11 (% 969 23 14 40; Fray Luis de León 16; per hr €1.20; closed Sun)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Hospital de la Luz Virgen (% 969 17 99 00) Off Avenida de la Cruz Roja.

POST

Post office (cnr Calles del Parque de San Julián & del Dr Fleming)

TELEPHONE

Telephone office (Paseo de San Antonio 42)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (% 969 32 31 19; www.aytocuenca.org in Spanish; Plaza Mayor s/n; 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 9am-2.30pm Sun May-Sep, 9am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-2pm Sun Oct-Apr) In the historic centre.

Tourist office (% 969 23 58 15; Plaza Hispanidad; 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Thu, 10am-8pm Fri-Sun) In the new town.

Catedral

The main façade of Cuenca's **cathedral** (adult/child €2.50/free) is hardly Spain's finest – a pastiche of unfortunate 16th-century Gothic experimentation and 20th-century restoration. Built on the site of a mosque, the relatively unadorned nave dates back to the early 13th century although other elements, such as the apse, were constructed in the mid-15th century. The cathedral's aesthetics are redeemed somewhat by the cheery, modern stained-glass windows and a small museum, the **Tesoro Catedralicio** (% 969 21 20 11; adult/child €2.50/free; 11am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun), which is worth the entry fee.

Casas Colgadas

The most striking element of medieval Cuenca, the **casas colgadas** jut out precariously over the steep defile of Río Huécar. Dating from the 16th century, the houses with their characteristic layers of wooden balconies seem to emerge from the rock as if an extension of the cliffs. The finest restored examples now house an upmarket restaurant (see p261) and an art museum (right), which make excellent use of what was once an economical adaptation of limited living space. For the best views of the **casas colgadas**, cross the **Puente de San Pablo** footbridge, or walk to the northernmost tip of the old town where a **mirador** offers unparalleled views.

Museums

Old Cuenca can feel like a medieval museum and it's easy to get lost in its narrow steep streets of brick and stone.

Cuenca is not just a place to enjoy ancient history. The **Museo de Arte Abstracto Español** (% 969 21 29 83; adult/child €3/1.50; 11am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Fri, 11am-2pm & 4-8pm Sat, 11am-2.30pm Sun) is a superb exhibition space, occupying one of the **casas colgadas** and with a fine **artesonado** ceiling. Begun as an attempt by Fernando Zobel to unite the works of his fellow artists from the 1950s Generación Abstracta, the museum's constantly evolving displays include works by Chillida, Millares and Sempere. A range of art appreciation courses is also run.

Another innovative museum is the **Museo de Las Ciencias** (Science Museum; % 969 24 03 20; Plaza de la Merced; adult/child €1.20/free, weekends free; 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), where displays range from a time machine to the development of the human species and a study of the resources of Castilla-La Mancha. There are plenty of interactive gadgets to keep kids of all ages happy, as well as a **planetarium** (admission €1.20).

The **Museo de Cuenca** (% 969 21 30 69; Calle del Obispo Valero 6; adult/child €1.20/free; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun) houses a modest archaeological collection, plus Roman artefacts, found in the Cuenca area.

Almost opposite, highlights at the **Museo Diocesano** (% 969 22 42 10; Calle del Obispo Valero 3; adult/child €1.80/free; 11am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun) include two El Greco paintings and a 14th-century Byzantine diptych, the jewel in the crown. How such a piece ended up in Cuenca, no-one seems to know.

Torre de Mangana

The Torre de Mangana, near Plaza Mangana, is the last remnant of a fortress that was built by Cuenca's Muslim rulers. It is all that remains of Cuenca's days as a Muslim town.

Festivals & Events

Cuenca's **Semana Santa** celebrations are renowned throughout Spain, particularly for the eerie, silent processions through the streets of the old town. Also gaining international acclaim is the **Semana de Música Religiosa de Cuenca**, the city's celebration of sacred music. Usually held in March or April, it attracts international performers and spectators and, if it's your thing, is a great time to be in town. Contact the tourist office for more information.

Sleeping

Aside from the possible disadvantage of lugging bags up the hill, the atmospheric old town is *the* place to stay. That said, there are some reasonable options down the hill. Most places increase their rates during *Semana Santa* and the summer.

If you decide to camp, **Camping Caravaning** (☎ 969 23 16 56; site per person/tent/car €4.40/4.40/4; 📅 1 Mar-31 Oct) has superb facilities. It's 8km out of town on the road towards the *Ciudad Encantada*.

OLD TOWN

Many of the hotel rooms in the old town have amazing views, so it's worthwhile seeing if you can get a room with *una vista* (a view).

Pensión La Tabanqueta (☎ 969 21 12 90; Calle de Trabuco 13; s/d with shared bathroom €15/30) A listed building, the prices are the best you'll find in the historic centre and some rooms have five-star views of Río Júcar. This place is plain but charming, and there's a popular eatery attached.

Posada Huécar (☎ 969 21 42 01; www.huecar.com; Paseo del Huécar 3; s/d €21/45; p a i) Feel luxurious on a tight budget; located squarely between the old and new towns, this upbeat place has large rooms with terracotta tiles, rustic furnishings and river views. There's free internet use for guests.

Leonor de Aquitania Hotel (☎ 969 23 10 00; www.hotelleonordeaquitania.com; Calle de San Pedro 60; s/d with breakfast from €73/109; a) In an 18th-century house, this is a well-aged classic although the rooms may be a touch fussy for some. The restaurant is excellent.

Parador (☎ 969 23 23 20; www.parador.es; Calle de Hoz de Huécar; d €125; p a) This majestic former

convent commands stunning view of the *casas colgadas*. The recently revamped rooms have a luxury corporate feel while the public areas are headily historic with giant tapestries and antiques. There's wi-fi in the lobby.

NEW TOWN

Pensión Central (☎ 969 21 15 11; Calle de Alonso Chirino 7; s/d/tr with shared bathroom €13/22/29.75; 📅) This is a cheap sleep in a clean and tidy *penión* (small, private hotel) in the new town. Rooms are large with TV and washbasin.

Hostal Cánovas (☎ 969 21 39 73; Calle Fray Luis de León 38; s/d €30/45) This upbeat and welcoming *hostal* has spacious rooms with polished floorboards, a warm colour scheme and bright modern bathrooms.

Posada de San Julián (☎ 969 21 17 04; Calle de las Torres 1; d €46) Just down the hill from the historic centre, revel in the 16th-century surroundings with lofty ceilings, creaking staircases and cavernous rooms. Family run, grandpa peels potatoes all day for the bustling restaurant downstairs.

Hotel Cueva Del Fraile (☎ 969 21 15 71; www.hotelcuevadelfraile.com; Hoz del Huécar s/n; s/d €80/106; p a s) This 16th-century former convent is 5km from Cuenca and has been resurrected as a chic welcoming hotel with rooms washed in earth colours and excellent facilities, including tennis courts and mountain bikes for hire.

Eating

There's plenty of choice in Cuenca, although the places in the historic quarter tend to hike the price.

La Bodeguilla de Basilio (☎ 969 23 52 74; Calle Fray Luis de León 3; raciones €5-10) Tummy rumpers can fill up with delicious *tapas* and *raciones* (large *tapas*) at this atmospheric places; try the *patatas pobres* (fried potatoes with peppers, tomatoes and garlic).

Restaurante San Nicolás (☎ 969 24 05 19; Calle de San Pedro 15; mains €15-18, menú €18) Another fine establishment for solid Castilian-Manchegan food although the service can be sniffy. The braised wild boar in a fennel and thyme sauce (€21.75) is particularly good.

Horno de las Campanas (☎ 969 23 10 00; Calle de San Pedro 58-60; meals from €16) This hotel restaurant lacks the views, but has an atmospheric dining room among the stone arches. Consider *energising* your morning with the generous €9 *desayuno* (breakfast).

Restaurante Figón del Huécar (☎ 969 24 00 62; Ronda de Julián Romero 6; mains €16-21, menú €27) Run by the same owners as *Mesón Casas Colgadas*, this dress-for-dinner place specialises in seafood and such Castilian specialities as suckling pig.

Mesón Casas Colgadas (☎ 969 22 35 52; Calle de los Canonigos 3; mains €10-22, menú €27) Housed in one of the *casas colgadas*, Cuenca's gourmet pride and joy fuses an amazing location with delicious traditional food, such as venison stew.

Also recommended are the restaurants at **Pensión La Tabanqueta** (menú €10) and **Posada de San José** (mains from €7).

Drinking

The bars and cafés on Plaza Mayor are well placed for kicking back with a *cerveza*.

Bar La Tinaja (Calle del Obispo Valero 4) Enjoying an ace position, right off Plaza Mayor, this place is typically heaving with crusty locals here for the delicious (and free) *tapas* provided with every drink.

Bar Café del Castillo (☎ 969 24 34 47; Calle de Larga 13; 📅 closed Sun) Well sited for views with a large terrace, this spirited place is perfect for that late-night coffee, with a dozen of the spiked variety on offer.

Ruiz (Calle de Carretería 12; 📅 closed Sun) Popular with powdered ladies here for the delicious cakes, pastries and light snacks to accompany their *café con leche* (coffee with milk).

Entertainment

You can join the under-twenty-sixes who gather together along Calle de San Miguel (old town) or Plaza de España (new town) for loads of noisy evening *copas*. There's a gaggle of bars in both areas.

If you're looking to improve your dance moves, head for the disco-pubs on Calle del Doctor Galíndez, near Plaza de España.

People (www.peoplecuenca.com in Spanish; Calle del Doctor Galíndez 10) We recommend this spot with its slick interior and nonstop party atmosphere.

Mango Disco (Calle del Doctor Galíndez 3) Also a hit with the young trendies firing up to a steamy dance pit post midnight.

Getting There & Away

BUS
Up to nine buses daily serve Madrid (€9.80, two hours). Other services include Valencia (€11.40, 2½ hours, up to three a day), Albacete (€9.20, two hours, up to three daily) and

Alcázar de San Juan (€10.80, three hours, 3pm weekdays) via Belmonte. There are also two buses to Toledo (€10, 2¼ hours) on weekdays and one on Sunday.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

From Cuenca, the quickest route to Madrid is west along the N400, turning northwest onto the A3 at Tarancón.

TRAIN

Cuenca lies on the train line connecting Madrid and Valencia. Trains to Madrid's Atocha station depart six times on weekdays and four times on weekends (€9.90, three hours). Trains to Valencia leave four times daily (€10.90, 3¼ hours).

Getting Around

Local buses 1 and 2 for Plaza Mayor leave from just north of the train station. There's free street parking at the top of the old town (follow the signs to *estacionamiento*).

SERRANÍA DE CUENCA

Spreading north and east of Cuenca, the Serranía de Cuenca is a heavily wooded and fertile zone of craggy mountains and green fields. Ríos Júcar and Huécar flow through Cuenca from the high hinterland through landscapes that are well worth exploring if you have your own transport.

From Cuenca, take the CM2105 about 30km to the extraordinary *Ciudad Encantada* (Enchanted City; adult/child €3/free; 📅 10am-sunset). Surrounded by pine woods, limestone rocks have been eroded into fantastical shapes by nature. If you let your imagination carry you away, it's possible to see a boat on its keel, a dog and a Roman bridge. The shaded 40-minute circuit around the open-air rock museum is great for breaking up a car journey. It's crowded with *madrileños* at weekends, and there are several overpriced places to eat and drink.

You could then head back to the CM2105 and turn right in the direction of Uña and Tragacete. This part of the province is very pretty, dotted with sleepy villages and the clear blue lake of the *Embalse de la Toba*. About 5km on from the eye-catching *Huelamo*, a turn-off to the right (the sign says Teruel) leads 60km across the Montes Universales to the mesmerising medieval town of *Albarracín* (p445) – a perfect place to stroll at the end of a day's drive.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Posada de San José (☎ 969 21 13 00; www.posadasanjose.com; Ronda de Julián Romero 4; s/d with views from €55/83, with shared bathroom from €25/38) Owned by Antonio and his Canadian wife, Jennifer, this 17th-century former choir school retains an extraordinary monastic charm with its crumbling portal, uneven floors and original tiles. Enjoy spectacular views and fresh flowers in the room en lieu of satellite TV and be sure to sample the *tapas* in the downstairs bar; it's excellent.

An alternative route to the road east to Teruel, the CM2105 continues north to the **Nacimiento del Río Cuervo** (17km), a couple of small waterfalls where Río Cuervo rises. From here you could loop around towards **Beteta** (29km) and the gorge of the same name, or cross the provincial frontier into Guadalajara to make for the pleasant, if unspectacular, **Parque Natural del Alto Tajo**. To the west lies La Alcarria (right).

AROUND CUENCA

Alarcón

One hundred kilometres or so south of Cuenca is the seductive village of Alarcón. Stop at the **tourist office** (☎ 969 33 03 01; Calle Posadas 6; ⌚ closed Mon & Tue) for a map of walks around the village and beyond. Most famous here, however, is the triangle-based Islamic **castle** which has been converted into a sumptuous **parador** (☎ 969 33 03 15; www.parador.es; d €190; p a) offering old-world charm and supremely comfortable rooms.

Segóbriga

These **ruins** (☎ 629-752257; adult/child €4/2; ⌚ 9am-9pm Tue-Sun 15 Apr-15 Sep, 10am-6pm Tue-Sat 16 Sep-14 Apr) may date as far back as the 5th century BC. The best-preserved structures are a **Roman theatre** and **amphitheatre** on the fringes of the ancient city, looking out towards a wooded hillside. Other remains include the outlines of a Visigothic basilica and a section of the aqueduct, which helped keep the city green in what is otherwise a desert.

The site is near Saelices, 2km south of the A3 motorway between Madrid and Albacete. From Cuenca, drive west 55km on the N400, then turn south on the CM202.

GUADALAJARA

pop 69,521
A modern somewhat scruffy city, Guadalajara is more of historical than aesthetic interest.

Guadalajara (from the Arabic *wad al-hijaara*, or 'stony river') was, in its medieval Muslim heyday, the principal city of a large swathe of northern Spain under the green banner of Islam at a time when Madrid was no more than a military observation point. In 1085 Alfonso VI finally took Guadalajara as the Reconquista moved ponderously south. The city was repeatedly sacked during the War of the Spanish Succession, the Napoleonic occupation and the Spanish Civil War.

While little remains of Guadalajara's glory days, the much-restored **Palacio de los Duques del Infantado** (admission €2; ⌚ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), where the Mendoza family held court, is worth a visit if you're passing by. Its striking façade is a fine example of Gothic-Mudéjar work, and the heavily ornamental patio is equally entrancing. The town's **tourist office** (☎ 949 21 16 26; Plaza de los Caidos 6; ⌚ 10am-2pm & 4-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) is opposite the *palacio* (palace).

Guadalajara is a simple day trip from Madrid, but if you're stuck, **Pensión Venecia** (☎ 949 21 13 52; Calle de Dr Benito; s/d €15/30) is a clean and tidy place. For more creature comforts, check into **Hotel Pax** (☎ 949 24 80 60; www.hotelpaxchi.com in Spanish; s/d €55/60; a) with its air of all-round poshness and genteel pastel-coloured rooms. There's wi-fi in the lobby.

The **bus station** (☎ 949 88 70 94; Calle del Dos de Mayo) is a short walk from the *palacio*. Regular buses depart for Madrid (€3.75, 50 minutes) throughout the day between 6.15am and 10pm. Sigüenza (€5.20, 1½ hours) and Pastrana (€3.10, 25 minutes) get two connections daily on weekdays, one on Saturday, but none on Sunday.

From the **train station** (☎ 949 21 28 50), 2km north of town, there are regular AVE fast trains to Madrid (€12.50, 30 minutes) from about 5am to 11.30pm and far fewer slower trains (€4.10, 50 minutes). Regional trains go to Sigüenza (€5.40, one hour), but there's a bit of a lull in the middle of the day.

LA ALCARRIA & AROUND Mar de Castilla

Southeast of Guadalajara along the N320 (it soon becomes the CM200) is the Mar de Castilla, a collection of lakes formed by dams built in the late 1950s, in an area known as **La Alcarria**. Hardly spectacular, La Alcarria was nonetheless immortalised in an enchantingly simple account of a walking trip made there in 1946 by the Nobel Prize-winning writer Camilo José Cela, *Viaje a La Alcarria*.

Pastrana

pop 1081
Of the many pueblos Cela called in at during his walking trip, Pastrana is the most enchanting. This unspoilt place has a Tuscan feel with its cobbled streets and honey-coloured stone buildings. Forty-two kilometres south of Guadalajara along the CM200, the heart and

soul of the place is the **Plaza de la Hora**, a large square dotted with acacias and fronted by the sturdy **Palacio Ducal**. It is here that the one-eyed princess of Éboli, Ana Mendoza de la Cerda, was confined in 1581 for a love affair with the Spanish King Felipe II's secretary. You can see the caged window of her 'cell', where she died 10 years later, and arrange a tour (Spanish only; €2) via the **tourist office** (☎ 949 37 06 72; www.pastrana.org in Spanish; Plaza de la Hora 5; ⌚ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun).

Walk from the square along Calle Mayor and you'll soon reach the massive **Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Asunción** (Colegiata). Inside, the interesting little **museum** (adult/child €2.50/free; ⌚ 10.30am-1.30pm & 4.30-6.30pm) contains the jewels of the princess, some exquisite 15th-century tapestries and even an El Greco.

Hostal Moratin (☎ 949 37 01 16; Calle de Moratin 7; s/d from €25/40; a s) is a family-owned *hostal* just in from the main highway, with colourful stylish rooms and a large terrace and pool. There's a restaurant and bar downstairs. **Hostelería Real de Pastrana** (☎ /fax 949 37 10 60; s/d from €63/98; p a) should be a *parador*; it's gorgeous, with original oil paintings and antiques throughout and classic rooms with period touches and marshmallow-soft pillows. There's an adjacent museum of religious artefacts. If this fails to excite you'll need wheels – Pastrana is 2km away.

This town has plenty of restaurants and bars. Don't miss the locals' local **Casa Seco** (Calle Mayor 36) papered with faded bullfighting posters and run by a wonderfully matriarchal lady who keeps the flat-cap clientele under control. Round the corner, **Meson Castilla** (☎ 949 37 02 02; Calle Casino 2; meals from €18) is the pick of the restaurant bunch, its half-tiled dining room heaving with local families at weekends. Grilled meat is the speciality.

Two buses travel to Madrid (€4, 1½ hours) via Guadalajara every weekday morning.

Around Pastrana

Some 20km northeast of Pastrana is the area's main reservoir, the white-rimmed **Embalse de Entrepeñas**, where swimming is more an attraction than the views. From there you can push north on the CM204 to **Cifuentes**, with its 14th-century castle.

An alternative route to the lake goes via Guadalajara, from where you could follow the A2 northeast and turn off at **Torija**, which has a rather impressive castle out of proportion

to the size of the town. The **museum** (admission free; ⌚ 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) within the castle is dedicated to Cela's *Viaje a La Alcarria*. From here, take the CM201 for La Alcarria's second town after Pastrana, **Brihuega**, a leafy village with stretches of its medieval walls intact. The drive east along Río Tajuña is one of the more pleasant in this part of Castilla-La Mancha. The road forms a T-junction with the CM204, from where you can head north for Sigüenza or south to the Embalse de Entrepeñas.

SIGÜENZA

pop 5000
Sleepy, historic and filled with the ghosts of a turbulent past, Sigüenza is well worth a detour. The town is built on a low hill cradled by Río Henares, and boasts a castle, a cathedral and several excellent restaurants set among twisting lanes of honey-coloured medieval buildings.

History

Originally a Celtiberian settlement, Segontia (as the town was previously named) became an important Roman and, later, Visigothic military outpost. The 8th-century arrival of the Muslims put the town in the frontline provinces facing the Christians. Sigüenza stayed in Muslim hands for considerably longer than towns further southwest, such as Guadalajara and Toledo, resisting until the 1120s. After a period of Aragonese occupation, the town was later ceded to the Castilians, who turned Sigüenza and its hinterland into a vast Church property. The bishops remained complete masters – material and spiritual – of the town and land until the end of the 18th century. Sigüenza's decline was long and painful as the town found itself repeatedly in the way of advancing armies: again a frontline during the War of the Spanish Succession and the civil war, when fighting here was heavy.

Information

The main **tourist office** (☎ 949 34 70 07; www.sigüenza.com in Spanish; ⌚ 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Mon-Thu, 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Fri, 9.30am-2.30pm & 4-7pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) is in the delightful Ermita del Humilladero; there's a smaller **tourist office** (☎ 949 34 7 0 09; Calle de Medina 9) just down the hill from the cathedral. Both can organise guided two-hour **town tours** (per person €6) for a minimum of six people.

You can check your emails cheaply at **Locuterio Sigüenza** (☎ 949 39 15 83; Calle Humilladero 21; per hr €2). The **post office** (Calle de la Villa Viciosa) is very central.

Catedral

Rising up from the heart of the old town is the city's centrepiece, the **catedral** (⌚ 9.30am-2pm & 4-8pm Tue-Sat, noon-5.30pm Sun). Begun as a Romanesque structure in 1130, work continued for four centuries as the church was expanded and adorned. The largely Gothic result is laced with elements of other styles, from Plateresque through Renaissance to Mudéjar. The church was heavily damaged during the civil war.

The dark (and very cold) **nave** (admission free) has some fine stained-glass windows and

an impressive 15th-century altarpiece along the south wall. To enter the chapels, sacristy and Gothic cloister, you'll need to join a Spanish-language only **guided tour** (€3; ⌚ 11am, noon, 4.30pm & 5.30pm Tue-Sat). The highlights of the tour include the **Capilla Mayor**, home of the reclining marble statue of Don Martín Vázquez de Arce (the statue is named *El Doncel*) who died fighting the Muslims in the final stages of the Reconquista. Particularly beautiful is the **Sacristía de las Cabezas**, with a ceiling adorned with hundreds of heads sculpted by Covarrubias. The **Capilla del Espíritu Santo** boasts a doorway combining Plateresque, Mudéjar and Gothic styles, and inside is a remarkable dome and an Anunciación by El Greco.

Museo Diocesano de Arte

Across the square from the cathedral, this **museum** (admission €3; ⌚ 11am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun) has an impressive selection of religious art from Sigüenza and the surrounding area, including a series of mainly 15th-century altarpieces.

Castillo

Calle Mayor heads south up the hill from the cathedral to a magnificent-looking castle which was originally built by the Muslims. Lived in by most of the kings and queens of Castilla, it was virtually destroyed during the Spanish Civil War only to be subsequently rebuilt under Franco as a **parador** (below).

Sleeping

As Sigüenza is a popular weekend jaunt for *madrileños*, accommodation gets quickly booked up.

Hostal El Doncel (☎ 949 39 00 01; www.eldoncel.com in Spanish; Paseo de la Alameda 3; s/d €35/48) Pastel-washed walls, spot lighting and shiny tiles—this family-owned place has class. Rooms on the 3rd floor have heady rooftop views. The adjacent restaurant is recommended.

Hospedería Porta Coeli (☎ 949 39 18 75; Calle Mayor 50; s/d €60/69) Housed in a handsome historic building, the light tiles and pale paintwork provide a bright fresh look to the good-sized bedrooms.

Parador (☎ 949 39 01 00; www.parador.es; Plaza del Castillo s/n; s/d from €108/120) Sigüenza's *parador* has the usual combination of luxury, attentive service and period furnishings. Set in the former archbishop's palace overlooking the town, its courtyard is a wonderful place to pass the time.

Eating & Drinking

Los Soportales (☎ 949 39 17 42; Plaza Mayor 3; snacks €2-4) Great location under the arches with tables on the square and free tapas with every drink.

Cafe-Bar Alameda (☎ 949 39 05 53; Paseo de la Alameda 2; snacks €5-10; ⌚ 10am-midnight) Join the locals at

this down-home bar, its counter heaving with tempting tapas including *caracoles* (snails) for the intrepid.

Taberna Seguntina (Calle Mayor 43; mains €8-15; ⌚ lunch only Tue, closed Wed; √) A swallow's swoop from the castle, the innovative menu here includes vegetarian choices such as thistles with Asturian goat's cheese and vegetable and almond soup.

Restaurante La Casa (☎ 949 39 03 10; Plaza de San Vicente s/n; mains €15-20) The town's newest restaurant is housed in a magnificent 12th-century house. Enjoy classic dishes such as *cabrito asado* (roast kid) in the stone-clad dining room.

Getting There & Away

Bus routes are infrequent and mostly serve towns around Sigüenza, including Guadalajara. They stop on Avenida de Alfonso VI. There are up to 10 regional trains to Madrid (Chamartín station; €8.10, 1½ hours). Some continue on to Soria.

Sigüenza lies north of the A2 motorway. The main exits are the C204, coming from the west, and the C114, from the east. The C114 then heads north towards Almazán or Soria in Castilla y León.

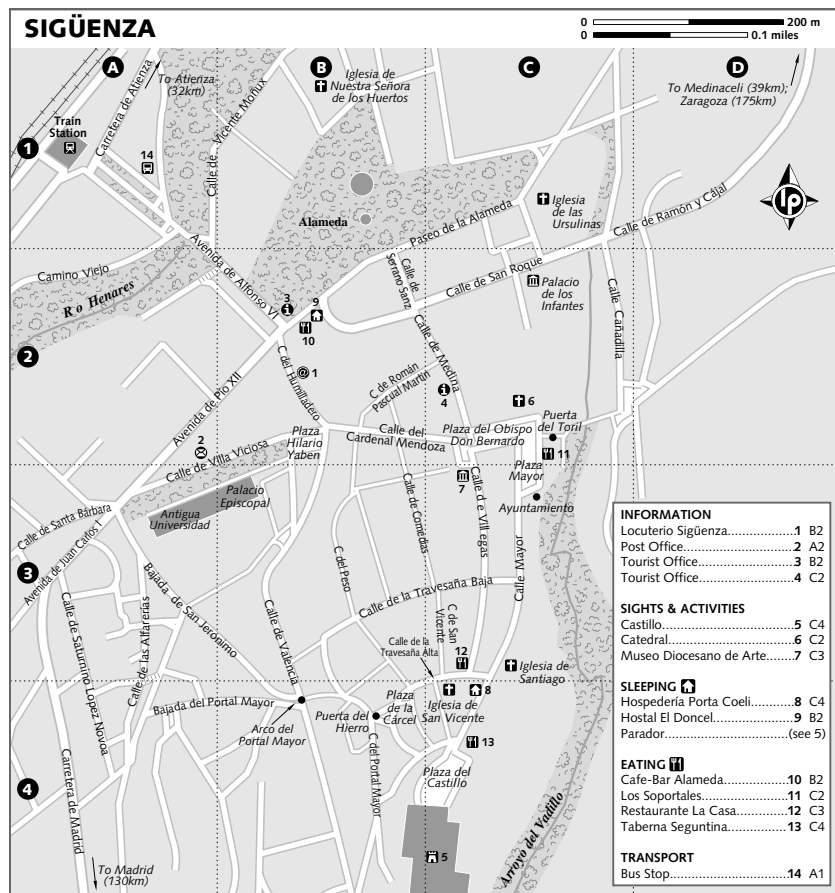
AROUND SIGÜENZA

Atienza

pop 420
Some 31km northwest of Sigüenza, Atienza is a charming walled medieval village crowned by a castle ruin. This place is crammed with half a dozen mostly Romanesque churches and has two small **museums** (admission per museum €1.50, for both €2; ⌚ 10.30am-1.30pm & 4.30-6.30pm) in the Iglesia de San Gil and Iglesia de San Bartolomé.

If you come by bus, you'll have to stay. Fortunately, **El Mirador** (☎ 949 39 90 38; Calle Baruelo s/n; d with/without bathroom €43/30) offers good, if slightly overpriced, rooms and a cosy restaurant.

A couple of buses leave early in the morning, bound for Guadalajara, Madrid and Sigüenza.



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Barcelona



Dazzling pearl of the Mediterranean, Barcelona is Spain's most cosmopolitan city. Restaurants, bars and clubs are always packed, as is the seaside in summer. You might get the impression that Barcelona is dedicated exclusively to hedonism, but it is a hard-working, dynamic place.

Set on a plain rising gently from the sea to a range of wooded hills, Barcelona is one of the Mediterranean's busiest ports and hopes to place itself in the vanguard of 21st-century Europe with a heavy concentration of hi-tech and biomedical business.

It regards its long past with pride. From Roman town it passed to medieval trade juggernaut, and its old centre constitutes one of the greatest concentrations of Gothic architecture in Europe. Beyond this core are some of the world's more bizarre buildings: surreal spectacles capped by Antoni Gaudí's La Sagrada Família church.

Barcelona has been breaking ground in art, architecture and style since the late 19th century. From the marvels of Modernisme to the modern wonders of today, from Picasso to the likes of Susana Solano, the racing heart of Barcelona has barely skipped a beat. The city's avant-garde chefs whip up a storm that has even the French reaching for superlatives.

Barcelona is the capital of Catalonia, a region with its own language, character and history – many Catalans think of their home as a separate country. The city itself could keep you occupied for weeks but just outside it are sandy beaches, Sitges and the Montserrat mountain range.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Marvel at **La Sagrada Família** (p294), Antoni Gaudí's still-unfolding Modernista masterpiece
- Drink in the views from Gaudí's **Park Güell** (p295)
- Lose yourself in the hippest part of town, **El Born** (p318, p323), for tipping and snacking
- Study the earliest of Pablo's portraits in the **Museu Picasso** (p289)
- Grab your towel and tastebuds and head for **La Barceloneta** (p291)
- Get a spiritual lift in the strange soaring mountains of **Montserrat** (p336)
- Swan around inside the curvy **Casa Batlló** (p292), Gaudí's kookiest building
- Explore **Montjuïc** (p298), home to Romanesque art, a brooding fort and Miró
- Head down the coast for **Sitges** (p334), an outrageous party resort with yet more beaches

■ AREA: 477 SQ KM

■ AVE SUMMER TEMP: HIGH 28°C, LOW 20°C

■ POP: 1.58 MILLION



HISTORY

It is thought that Barcelona may have been founded by the Carthaginians in about 230 BC, taking the surname of Hamilcar Barca, Hannibal's father. Roman Barcelona (known as *Barcino*) covered an area within today's *Barri Gòtic* and was overshadowed by Tarraco (Tarragona), 90km to the southwest.

In the wake of Muslim occupation, and then Frankish domination, *Guifré el Pilós* (Wilfrid the Hairy) founded the house of the Counts of Barcelona (Comtes de Barcelona) in AD 878. Barcelona grew rich on pickings from the collapse of the Muslim caliphate of Córdoba in the 11th century. Under Ramon Berenguer III (1082–1131), Catalonia launched its own fleet and sea trade developed.

In 1137 Ramon Berenguer IV married Petronilla, heiress of Aragón, creating a joint state and setting the scene for Catalonia's golden age. Jaume I (1213–76) wrenched the Balearic Islands and Valencia from the Muslims in the 1230s to 40s. Jaume I's son Pere II followed with Sicily in 1282. Then came a spectacular expansion of Catalonia's Mediterranean trade-based empire, albeit hampered at home by divisions in the ruling family, the odd clash with Castilla and trouble with the aristocracy in Aragón. Malta (1283), Athens (1310), Corsica (1323), Sardinia (1324) and Naples (1423) fell, for varying periods, under Catalan dominance.

The accession of the Aragonese noble Fernando to the throne in 1479 augured ill for Barcelona, and his marriage to Queen Isabel of Castilla more still. Catalonia effectively became a subordinate part of the Castilian state. In the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–13), Barcelona backed the wrong horse, was abandoned by its European allies and fell to Felipe V in September 1714. Felipe abolished the Generalitat (Parliament), built a huge fort, the Ciutadella, to watch over Barcelona, and banned the writing and teaching of Catalan.

Modernisme, Anarchy & Civil War

The 19th century brought economic resurgence. Wine, cotton, cork and iron industries developed, as did urban working-class poverty and unrest. To ease the crush, Barcelona's medieval walls were demolished in 1854, and in 1869 work began on L'Eixample, an extension of the city beyond Plaça de Catalunya. The flourishing bourgeoisie paid for lavish buildings, many of them in the unique Modernista style, whose leading exponent was Antoni

Gaudí (seven of his buildings in Barcelona together form a World Heritage site).

Modernisme was the most visible aspect of the Catalan *Renaixença*, a movement for the revival of Catalan language and culture in the late 19th century. By the turn of the 20th century, Barcelona was also Spain's hotbed of avant-garde art, with close ties to Paris.

In the decades around the turn of the century Barcelona became a vortex of anarchists, Republicans, bourgeois regionalists, gangsters, police terrorists, political *pistoleros* (gunmen), and meddling by Madrid.

Within days of the formation of Spain's Second Republic in 1931, Catalan nationalists, led by Francesc Macià and Lluís Companys, proclaimed Catalonia a republic within an imaginary 'Iberian Federation'. Madrid pressured them into accepting a unitary Spanish state, but Catalonia got a new regional government, with the old title of Generalitat.

For nearly a year after Franco's rise in 1936, Barcelona was run by revolutionary anarchists and the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (POUM; Workers' Marxist Unification Party) Trotskyist militia, with Companys as president only in name. In 1937 the Catalan communist party (PSUC; Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya) took control and disarmed the anarchists and POUM. One of those to watch on in distress at this fratricidal conflict was George Orwell, who recorded his war efforts in his classic *Homage to Catalonia*. The city fell to Franco in 1939, and there followed a long period of repression.

From Franco to the Present

The big social change under Franco was the flood of immigrants, chiefly Andalucía, attracted by economic growth in Catalonia. Some 750,000 people came to Barcelona in the '50s and '60s, and almost as many to the rest of Catalonia. Many lived in appalling conditions.

Three years after Franco's death in 1975, a new Spanish constitution created the autonomous community of Catalonia (Catalunya in Catalan, Cataluña in Castilian), with Barcelona as its capital, in the context of a new quasi-federation. The Generalitat has wide powers over agriculture, education, health, industry, tourism, local police and trade. The autonomy statutes were renegotiated in 2006, increasing Catalonia's fiscal independence.

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Jordi Pujol's moderate nationalist *Convergència i Unió* (CiU) coalition won regional elections in 1980 and remained in control until late 2003, when a left-wing coalition under Pasqual Maragall's *Partit Socialista de Catalunya* (PSC, aligned with the national PSOE) took power. It collapsed in 2006 and fresh elections were called late that year. Barcelona itself has, since the return of democracy, always been run by a PSC council.

The 1992 Olympics spurred a burst of public works, bringing new life to areas such as Montjuïc, where the major events were held, and the once-shabby waterfront. The impetus has barely let up. The *Fòrum* area on the northeast waterfront has been transformed from wasteland into a high-rise residential and congress district with a new marina. Other spectacular buildings, such as Jean Nouvel's *Torre Agbar*, are just part of a continuing programme of urban transformation.

ORIENTATION

Barcelona's coastline runs roughly northeast to southwest, and many streets are parallel or perpendicular to it.

The focal axis is *La Rambla*, a 1.25km boulevard running northwest, and slightly uphill, from *Port Vell* (Old Harbour) to *Plaça de Catalunya*. The latter marks the boundary between *Ciutat Vella* (Old City) and *L'Eixample*, the grid of straight streets into which Barcelona grew from the late 19th century.

Ciutat Vella, a warren of streets, centuries-old buildings, hotels, restaurants and bars, spreads either side of *La Rambla*. Its heart is the lower half of the section east of *La Rambla*, called the *Barri Gòtic* (Gothic Quarter). West of *La Rambla* is somewhat edgier *El Raval*. *Ciutat Vella* continues northeast of *Barri Gòtic* across *Via Laietana* to *La Ribera*, east of which lies the pretty *Parc de la Ciutadella*.

Port Vell (Old Port) has a great aquarium and two marinas. At its northeast end is *La Barceloneta*, the old sailors' and former industrial workers' quarter, from where beaches

and a pedestrian promenade stretch 1km northeast to *Port Olímpic*, built for the Olympics and now surrounded by lively bars and restaurants.

You will find most of Barcelona's singular *Modernista* architecture, including *La Sagrada Família*, in *L'Eixample*.

Gràcia, beyond the wide *Avinguda Diagonal* on the northern edge of central *L'Eixample*, is a net of narrow streets and squares with a varied population, and can be a lively place to spend a Friday or Saturday night. Just north of *Gràcia* is *Gaudi's Park Güell*.

Two good landmarks are the hills of *Montjuïc* and *Tibidabo*. *Montjuïc*, the lower of the two, begins about 700m southwest of the bottom (southeast end) of *La Rambla*. *Tibidabo*, with its TV tower and statue of Christ, is 6km northwest of *Plaça de Catalunya*. It's the high point of the *Collserola* range of wooded hills that forms the backdrop to the city.

El Prat airport is 12km to the southwest of central Barcelona, although judging by the transport options and interminable roadworks you'd think it was light years away (see p331).

Maps

Tourist offices hand out free city and transport maps but *Lonely Planet's Barcelona City Map* (1:24,000 with a complete index of streets and sights) is better. Also handy is *Michelin's ring-bound Barcelona*, scaled at 1:12,000.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Altair (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 342 71 71; www.altair.es; Gran Via de les Corts Catalanes 616) Excellent travel bookshop with maps, guides and travel literature.

Antinous (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 301 90 70; Carrer de Josep Anselm Clavé 6) Good gay bookshop and café.

Casa del Llibre (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 272 34 80; www.casadellibro.com; Passeig de Gràcia 62) Enormous general bookshop.

Elephant (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 443 05 94; Carrer de la Creu dels Molers 12) A bright English-language bookshop where you can trade.

Laie (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 518 17 39; www.laie.es; Carrer de Pau Claris 85) Novels and books on architecture, art and film, in English and French, and a fine café.

Libreria & Informació Cultural de la Generalitat de Catalunya (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 302 64 62; La Rambla dels Estudis 118) First stop for books on all things Catalan.

Quera (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 318 07 43; Carrer de Petritxol 2) Map and guidebook specialists.

Cultural Centres

British Council (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 241 99 72; www.britishcouncil.org/es/spain.htm; Carrer d'Amigó 74) Language school, library and occasional cultural events.

Institut Français de Barcelona (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 567 77 77; www.institutfrances.org; Carrer de Moia 8) French-language school that puts on films, concerts and exhibitions.

Institut for North American Studies (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 240 51 10; www.ien.es; Via Augusta 123) The main centre for learning North American English; also has library services.

Emergency

Tourists who want to report thefts need to go to the **Policia Nacional** (Map pp274-5; ☎ 091; Carrer Nou de la Rambla 80) or the **Guàrdia Urbana** (Local Police; Map pp278-9; ☎ 092; La Rambla 43). See also p845 for a handy national number and website.

Ambulance (☎ 061)

EU standard emergency number (☎ 112)

Fire Brigade (Bombers; ☎ 080, 085)

Institut Català de la Dona (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 495 16 00; www.gencat.net/icdona; Carrer de Viladomat 319) For rape counselling.

Mossos d'Esquadra (Catalan State Police; ☎ 088)

Internet Access

Bornet (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 268 15 07; www.bornet-bcn.com; Carrer de Barra de Ferro 3; per hr €2.60, per 5 hrs €10; 10am-10pm Mon-Fri, 3-10pm Sat & Sun) A cool little internet centre—cum—art gallery.

easyInternetcafé (www.easyeverything.com) *Plaça de Catalunya* (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 412 13 97; Ronda de l'Universitat 35; 10am-2am); *El Raval* (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 318 24 35; La Rambla 31; 10am-2.30am) With 300 terminals and a café, this is an internet temple. For €1 you get about 30 minutes (depending on demand). Unlimited access costs €5/7/12 per day/week/month.

Internet Resources

www.bcn.es The City of Barcelona's municipal website, with many links.

www.barcelonareporter.com A portal that gathers news articles from and about Barcelona and Catalonia.

www.lecool.com Subscribe for free to this site for weekly events listings.

www.rutadelmodernisme.com Web page of route, monuments and events related to Modernisme.

Laundry

Lavaxpress (Map pp274-5; www.lavaxpres.com; Carrer de Ferlandina 34; 10am-10pm) An 8kg wash costs €3.50, drying is €3.50 for 30 minutes.

BARCELONA IN...

Two Days

Start with the **Barri Gòtic** (p285). After a stroll along **La Rambla** (p283), wade into the labyrinth to admire **La Catedral** (p286) and surrounding monuments, including the fascinating *Plaça del Rei*, now part of the **Museu d'Història de la Ciutat** (p287). Cross *Via Laietana* into **La Ribera** (p289) to square up to the city's favourite and most beautiful church, the **Església de Santa Maria del Mar** (p290), and the nearby **Museu Picasso** (p289). To round off, plunge into the warren of bars and restaurants in the funky **El Born** (p290) area for a meal and cocktails.

The following day, start off at *Gaudi's Park Güell* (p295), conceived as a residential hideaway for the well-off and now a joyous public park laced with the architect's singular creations. After a picnic lunch in the park, head for *Gaudi's* extraordinary work in progress, **La Sagrada Família** (p294). Such grandeur may have you reaching for a drink in nearby **Michael Collins Pub** (p325), before heading off for dinner elsewhere in *L'Eixample*, say at **Cerveseria Catalana** (p321).

Four Days

You could start the third day with another round of *Gaudi*, visiting **Casa Batlló** (p292) and **La Pedrera** (p293). So much culture may have you crying out for relaxation, so head for the beach and follow with a seafood feast at one of the many eateries in **La Barceloneta** (p291). Day four should be dedicated to **Montjuïc** (p298), with its museums, galleries, fortress, gardens and Olympic stadium. Some good eateries can be discovered downhill at nearby **Poble Sec** (p322).

One Week

With three extra days you can explore further, taking in the **El Raval** district (p288), the **Tibidabo** (p296) amusement park and some walking in the **Collserola** (p297) parklands. A tempting one-day excursion is **Montserrat** (p336), Catalonia's 'sacred mountain', or spend a day at the beach at **Sitges** (p334), followed by a meal and a wild night at its bars.

Lavomatic Barri Gòtic (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 342 51 19; Plaça de Joaquim Xirau 1; ̣ 9am-9pm); La Ribera (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 268 47 68; Carrer del Consolat de Mar 43-45) A 7kg wash costs €5.50, drying is €0.85 for five minutes.

Wash'N Dry (Map pp272-3; ☎ 902 100703; www.washndry.net; Carrer de Torrençes de l'Olla 105; ̣ 7am-10pm) There are six other branches around town. An 8kg wash costs €4.50, drying is €1 per 10 minutes; there's a wash, dry and fold service for an extra fee.

Left Luggage

At the airport, **left luggage** (consigna; ̣ 24 hr) is on the ground floor of Terminal B, at the end closest to Terminal C. It costs €4.10 per piece per day.

Estació Sants, the train station, has lockers (̣ 5.30am-11pm) charging €3/4.50 per small/big item for 24 hours, as does the main bus station, Estació del Nord.

Lost Property

Oficina de Trovalles (Lost Property; Map pp278-9; ☎ 010; Carrer de la Ciutat 9; ̣ 9am-2pm Mon-Fri)

Taxis Lost Property (☎ 902 101564)

TMB Bus & Metro Lost Property – Centre d'Atenció al Client (☎ 93 318 70 74)

Media

El País includes a daily supplement devoted to Catalonia, but the region has a lively home-grown press too. *La Vanguardia* and *El Periódico* are the main local Castilian-language dailies. The latter also publishes a Catalan version. *Avui* is the more conservative and Catalan-nationalist daily. *El Punt* concentrates on news in and around Barcelona.

Medical Services

Call ☎ 010 to find out where the nearest late-opening duty pharmacy is. There are also several 24-hour pharmacies scattered across town.

Farmàcia Álvarez (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 302 11 24; Passeig de Gràcia 26)

Farmàcia Clapés (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 301 28 43; La Rambla de Sant Joseph 98)

Farmàcia Torres (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 453 92 20; Carrer d'Aribau 62)

Hospital Clínic i Provincial (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 227 54 00; Carrer de Villarroel 170)

Hospital de la Creu Roja (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 507 27 00; Carrer del Dos de Maig 301)

Hospital de la Santa Creu i de Sant Pau (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 291 90 00; Carrer de Sant Antoni Maria Claret 167)

Money

Banks abounds in Barcelona, many with ATMs, including several around Plaça de Catalunya, on La Rambla and on Plaça de Sant Jaume in Barri Gòtic.

The foreign-exchange offices that you see along La Rambla and elsewhere are open for longer hours than banks but generally offer poorer rates.

Interchange (Amex; Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 342 73 11; La Rambla dels Caputxins 74; ̣ 9am-midnight daily Apr-Sep, 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat Oct-Mar)

Representatives for American Express. It will cash Amex travellers cheques in euros commission free and replace lost cheques (but not cards).

Post

The main post office (Map pp278-9; Plaça d'Antoni López; ̣ 8.30am-10pm Mon-Sat, noon-10pm Sun) is opposite the northeast end of Port Vell. There's a handy branch (Map pp272-3; Carrer d'Aragó 282; ̣ 8.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1pm Sat) just off Passeig de Gràcia.

Tourist Information

A couple of general information lines worth bearing in mind are ☎ 010 and ☎ 012. The first is for Barcelona and the latter is for all of Catalonia (run by the Generalitat). You may sometimes strike English-speakers but most operators are Catalan-Castilian bilingual.

In addition to the following listed tourist offices, information booths operate at Estació Nord bus station, Portal de la Pau and at the foot of the Monument a Colom (Map pp274-5). At least three others set up at various points in the city centre in summer.

Oficina d'Informació de Turisme de Barcelona

Main Branch (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 285 38 34; www.barcelonaturisme.com; Plaça de Catalunya 17-S underground; ̣ 9am-9pm); Aeroport del Prat (̣ 9am-9pm); Estació Sants (Map pp268-9; ̣ 8am-8pm Jun-Sep, 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat, Sun & holidays Oct-May); Town Hall (Map pp278-9; Carrer de la Ciutat 2; ̣ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun & holidays) The main Barcelona tourist information office concentrates on city information and can help book accommodation. The branch in the airport's EU arrivals hall has information on all of Catalonia. A smaller office at the international arrivals hall opens the same hours. The train-station branch has limited city information. There's also a branch in the *ajuntament* (town hall).

Palau de la Virreina Arts Information Office (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 301 77 75; La Rambla de Sant Josep 99; ̣ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, 11am-3pm Sun) A useful office for events information (and tickets).

WARNING! AN EYE ON YOUR VALUABLES

Every year aggrieved readers write in with tales of woe from Barcelona. Petty crime and theft, with tourists as the prey of choice, is a problem, so you need to take a few common-sense precautions to avoid joining this regrettable list. Nine times out of 10 it is easy enough to avoid.

Thieves and pickpockets operate on airport trains and the metro, especially around stops popular with tourists (such as La Sagrada Família). The Old City (Ciutat Vella) is the pickpockets' and bag-snatchers' prime hunting ground. Take special care on and around La Rambla. Prostitutes working the lower (waterfront) end often do a double trade in wallet snatching. Also, stay well clear of the ball-and-three-cups (*trileros*) brigades on La Rambla. This is always a set-up and you will lose your money (and maybe have your pockets emptied as you watch the game).

Regional tourist office

(Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 238 40 00; www.gencat.net/probert; Passeig de Gràcia 107; ̣ 10am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) Housed in the Palau Robert, it has a host of material on Catalonia.

Travel Agencies

Halcón Viatges (Map pp272-3; ☎ 807 722 7222; www.halconviatges.com in Spanish; Carrer de Pau Claris 108) Reliable chain of travel agents that sometimes has good deals. This is one of many branches around town.

Viajes Zeppelin (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 412 00 13; www.viajeszeppelin.com in Spanish; Carrer de Villarroel 49) Small chain that often finds good-value fares.

SIGHTS

Barcelona could be divided up into thematic chunks. In Ciutat Vella (especially the Barri Gòtic and La Ribera) are clustered the bulk of the city's ancient and medieval splendours. Along with El Raval, on the other side of La Rambla, and Port Vell, where old Barcelona meets the sea, this is the core of the city's life, by day and by night.

L'Eixample is where the Modernistas went to town. Here the attractions are more spread out. Passeig de Gràcia is a concentrated showcase for some of the most outstanding of their work, but La Sagrada Família, Gaudí's masterpiece, and other outstanding buildings are scattered about.

The beaches and working-class district of La Barceloneta (which is riddled with seafood restaurants) form a separate summery side of the city, just as Montjuïc, with its gardens, museums, art galleries and Olympic Games sites, forms a microcosm on its own.

Gaudí's Park Güell is just beyond the area of Gràcia, whose narrow lanes and interlocking squares set the scene for much lively nightlife.

Further sights, ranging from FC Barcelona's Camp Nou football stadium to the

peaceful haven of the Museu-Monestir de Pedralbes, glitter like distant stars away from the centre.

La Rambla

Head to Spain's most famous street for a first taste of Barcelona's vibrant atmosphere. Flanked by narrow traffic lanes, La Rambla is a broad pedestrian boulevard, lined with cafés and restaurants, and crowded deep into the night with a cross-section of Barcelona's permanent and transient populace.

La Rambla gets its name from a seasonal stream (*raml* in Arabic) that once ran here. It was outside the city walls until the 14th century, and was built up with monastic buildings and palaces in the 16th to 18th centuries. Unofficially it's divided into five sections with their own names.

From Plaça de Catalunya, La Rambla de Canaletes is named after an inconspicuous fount, whose drinking water (despite claims that anyone who drinks it will return to Barcelona) nowadays leaves much to be desired. Delirious football fans gather here to celebrate whenever the main home side, FC Barcelona, win a cup or the league premiership. A block east along Carrer de la Canuda is Plaça de la Vila de Madrid, with a sunken garden where Roman tombs (Map pp278-9) lie exposed.

The second stretch, La Rambla dels Estudis, from below Carrer de la Canuda to Carrer de la Portaferriça, is popularly known as La Rambla dels Ocells (Birds) because of its twittering bird market. From Carrer de la Portaferriça to Plaça de la Boqueria, what is officially called La Rambla de Sant Josep (named after a now nonexistent monastery) is lined with flower stalls, which give it the alternative name Rambla de les Flors.

The Palau de la Virreina (Map pp278-9; La Rambla de Sant Josep 99) is a grand 18th-century rococo

mansion housing a municipal arts-entertainment information and ticket office. Next is the **Mercat de la Boqueria** (Map pp278–9), one of the best stocked and most colourful produce markets in Europe. Plaça de la Boqueria, where four side streets meet just north of Liceu metro station, is your chance to walk all over a **Miró** – the colourful **Mosaic de Miró** (Map pp278–9) in the pavement, with one tile signed by the artist.

Barcelona takes pride in being a pleasure centre and in the **Museu de l'Eròtica** (Map pp278–9; ☎ 93 318 98 65; www.erotica-museum.com; La Rambla de Sant Josep 96; adult/senior & student €7.50/6.50; ⌚ 10am-midnight Jun-Sep, 11am-9pm Oct-May; ♾) you can observe just how people have been enjoying themselves since ancient times – lots of Kamasutra and 1920s porn flicks.

La Rambla dels Caputxins (named after yet another defunct monastery and also known as Rambla del Centre) runs from Plaça de la Boqueria to Carrer dels Escudellers. The west side is flanked by the Gran Teatre del Liceu (Map pp278–9, see right).

Further south, on the east side of Rambla dels Caputxins, is the entrance to the palm-shaded Plaça Reial. Below this point La Rambla gets seedier, with a few strip clubs

and peep shows. The final stretch, La Rambla de Santa Mònica, widens out to approach the **Monument a Colom** (Map pp274–5) overlooking Port Vell. La Rambla here is named after the Convento de Santa Mònica that once stood on the western flank of the street and has since been converted into an art gallery and cultural centre, the **Centre d'Art Santa Mònica** (Map pp278–9; ☎ 93 316 28 10; La Rambla de Santa Mònica 7; admission free; ⌚ 11am-8pm Tue-Sat, 11am-3pm Sun & holidays).

On the east side lurks the **Museu de Cera** (Map pp278–9; ☎ 93 317 26 49; www.museocerabcn.com; Passatge de la Banca 7; adult/under 12yr €6.65/3.75; ⌚ 10am-1.30pm & 4-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm & 4.30-8.30pm Sat, Sun & holidays; ♾), a wax museum with a hall of horror and everyone from Lady Di to General Franco.

GRAN TEATRE DEL LICEU

Barcelona's grand opera house (Map pp278–9; ☎ 93 485 99 00; www.liceubarcelona.com; La Rambla dels Caputxins 51-59; admission €4; ♾) was built in 1847, largely destroyed by fire in 1994, and reopened better than ever in 1999.

The Liceu launched such Catalan stars as Josep (aka José) Carreras and Montserrat Caballé, and can seat up to 2300. Guided tours (adult/student/under 10 years/€9/7/free) are at

10am and there are standard visits at 11.30am, noon and 1pm. On the standard visit you are taken to the grand foyer, and then up the marble staircase to the glittering, neo-baroque **Saló dels Miralls** (Hall of Mirrors). You are then led up to the 4th floor to admire the theatre in all its splendour from the high stalls. The longer tour takes in the above and a collection of Modernista art, El Cercle del Liceu.

MONUMENT A COLOM

The bottom end of La Rambla, and the harbour beyond, lie under the supervision of this late-19th-century monument (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 302 52 24; Plaça del Portal de la Pau; lift adult/senior & child/under 4yr €2.30/1.50/free; ⌚ 9am-8.30pm May-Oct, 10am-6.30pm Nov-Apr) to the glory of Christopher Columbus (who some Catalan historians insist came from Barcelona rather than Genoa in Italy). Take the lift to the top for spectacular views over the city.

MUSEU MARÍTIM

West of the Monument a Colom stand the Reials Drassanes (Royal Shipyards), now home to the fascinating **Maritime Museum** (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 342 99 20; www.museumaritimbarcelona.org; Avinguda de les Drassanes; adult/senior & child €6/3; ⌚ 10am-8pm), a rare work of civil Gothic architecture that was once the launch pad for a mighty medieval fleet. The museum, together with its setting, forms a fascinating tribute to the seafaring that shaped much of Barcelona's history. And you can take a load off afterwards in the pleasant restaurant-café.

The shipyards, first built in the 13th century, gained their present form (a series of long bays divided by stone arches) a century later. Extensions in the 17th century made them big enough to accommodate the building of 30 galleys. In their shipbuilding days (up to the 18th century) the sea came right up to them.

Inside is an impressive array of boats, models, maps, paintings and more, with areas devoted to ships' figureheads, Columbus and Magellan, and 16th-century galleys (the full-scale replica of Don Juan of Austria's royal galley from the Battle of Lepanto is the highlight).

The museum is free from 3pm to 8pm on the first Saturday of each month.

Barri Gòtic

Barcelona's 'Gothic Quarter', east of La Rambla, is a classic medieval warren of narrow, winding streets, quaint *plaças* (plazas), and

TOP FIVE WHAT'S FREE?

- Park Güell (p295) Gaudi's weird and wonderful landscaped park.
- CaixaForum (p299) A grand gallery of modern art with constantly changing exhibitions.
- Església de Santa Maria del Mar (p290) Barcelona's best example of Catalan Gothic.
- Estadi Olímpic (p300) The site of the 1992 Olympics.
- Temple Romà d'Augustí (p287) The soaring columns left over from a great Roman temple.

grand mansions and monuments from the city's golden age. Many of its great buildings date from the 15th century or earlier. The district is liberally seasoned with restaurants, cafés and bars, so sightseeing relief is always close to hand!

The Barri Gòtic stretches from La Rambla in the west, to Via Laietana in the east, and roughly from Carrer de la Portaferrissa in the north, to Carrer de la Mercè in the south. Carrer de Ferran and Carrer de Jaume I, cutting across the middle, form a kind of halfway line: these streets and those to their north tend to be peppered with chic little shops, while those to their south become marginally seedier (but no less lively).

PLAÇA DE SANT JAUME

It's hard to imagine that on this very spot, a couple of thousand years ago, folk in togas would discuss the day's events and Roman politics. For hereabout lay the Roman-era Forum and the square as you see it today has again been Barcelona's political hub since at least the 15th century. Facing each other across it are the Palau de la Generalitat (the seat of Catalonia's government) on the north side, and the *ajuntament* (town hall) on the south side. Both have fine Gothic interiors.

The **Palau de la Generalitat** (Map pp278–9), founded in the early 15th century, is open only on limited occasions (10am to 1pm on the second and fourth Sundays of the month, when there's a free guided visit, as well as 23 April, 11 September and 24 September). The most impressive of the ceremonial halls is the

DISCOUNTS & OPENING TIMES

Students generally pay a little over half adult admission prices, as do children aged under 12 and senior citizens (aged 65 and over) with appropriate ID. Several sights have free-entry days, often just once a month. For example, the Museu Picasso (p289) is free on the first Sunday of the month and the Museu Marítim (opposite) on the first Saturday.

Possession of a Bus Turistic ticket (see p312) entitles you to discounts to some museums.

Articket (www.articketbcn.org) gives you admission to seven important art galleries for €20 and is valid for six months. The galleries are the Museu Picasso, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (MNAC), the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (Macba), the Fundació Antoni Tàpies, the Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona (CCCB), the Fundació Joan Miró and La Pedrera. You can pick up the ticket through **Tel-Entrada** (☎ 902 101212; www.telentrada.com), at the tourist offices on Plaça de Catalunya, Plaça de Sant Jaume and Sants train station, or at selected branches of the Caixa de Catalunya bank.

If you want to get around Barcelona fast and visit multiple museums in the blink of an eye, the **Barcelona Card** might come in handy. It costs €23/28/31/34 for two/three/four/five days (a little less for children aged four to 12). You get free transport (and 20% off the A1 Aerobús, p331) and discounted admission prices (up to 30% off) or free entry to many museums and other sights, as well as minor discounts on purchases at a small number of shops, restaurants and bars. The card is available at the tourist offices; you should have a look at the pamphlet first to see whether the discounted sights are what you are hoping to see.

The Ruta del Modernisme pack (see p292) is well worth looking into.

Museum and art-gallery opening hours vary considerably, but as a rule of thumb you should be OK between 10am and 6pm, Tuesday to Friday, in most places (some shut for lunch from around 2pm to 4pm). Many museums and galleries close all day Monday, and from 2pm Sunday.

Saló de Sant Jordi, named after the region's patron saint, St George. At any time, however, you can admire the original Gothic main entrance on Carrer del Bisbe Iruirita.

Outside, the only feature of the **ajuntament** (Map pp278-9; ☎ 010; 10am-1pm Sun) that's now worthy of note is the disused Gothic entrance on Carrer de la Ciutat. Inside you can visit, above all, the **Saló de Cent**, a fine arched hall created in the 14th century (but since remodelled) for the medieval city council, the **Consell de Cent**. Guided visits start every 30 minutes, and English and French speakers are catered for.

CATEDRAL & AROUND

You can reach Barcelona's **catedral** (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 342 82 60; Plaça de la Seu; admission free, special visit €4; 10am-12.15pm & 5.15-7.30pm, special visit 1-5pm), one of its most magnificent Gothic structures, by following Carrer del Bisbe Iruirita northwest from Plaça de Sant Jaume. The narrow old streets around the cathedral are traffic-free and dotted with occasionally very talented buskers.

The best view of the cathedral is from Plaça de la Seu beneath its main **northwest façade**. Unlike most of the building, which dates from between 1298 and 1460, this façade was not created until the 1870s! They say it is based on a 1408 design and it is odd in that it reflects northern-European Gothic styles rather than the sparer, Catalan version.

The interior of the cathedral is a broad, soaring space. It is divided into a central nave and two aisles by lines of elegant, thin pillars.

In the first chapel, on the right from the northwest entrance, the main Crucifixion figure above the altar is **Sant Crist de Lepant**, carried on the prow of the Spanish flagship at the battle of Lepanto. It is said the figure acquired its odd stance by dodging an incoming cannonball. Further along this same wall, past the southwest transept, are the wooden coffins of Count Ramon Berenguer I and his wife Almodis, cofounders of the 11th-century Romanesque predecessor to the present cathedral.

Smack bang in the middle of the central nave is the late-14th-century, exquisitely sculpted timber **coro** (choir stall; admission €1.50). The coats of arms belong to members of the Barcelona chapter of the Order of the Golden Fleece.

The **crypt** beneath the main altar contains the remarkable alabaster tomb of Santa Eulàlia, one of Barcelona's patron saints and a good Christian lass of the 4th century, who suffered terrible tortures and death at the hands of the pagan Romans. Some of these are depicted on the tomb.

For a bird's-eye (mind the poop) view of medieval Barcelona, visit the cathedral's **roof and tower** (admission €2) by a lift from the **Capella de les Animes del Purgatori**, near the north-east transept.

From the southwest transept, exit to the lovely **claustr** (cloister), with its trees, fountains and geese (there have been geese here for centuries). One of the cloister chapels commemorates 930 priests, monks and nuns, martyred in the civil war.

Along the northern flank of the cloister you can enter the **Sala Capitular** (chapterhouse; admission €1.50; 10am-12.15pm & 5.15-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-12.45pm & 5.15-7pm Sun). Although bathed in the rich reds of the carpet, and cosseted by fine-timber seating, the few artworks gathered here are of minor interest. Among them is a *Pietat* by Bartolomeo Bermejo.

You can visit the cathedral in one of two ways. In the morning or the afternoon, entrance is free and you can visit any combination of the choir stalls, chapterhouse and roof you choose. If you want to visit all three, it costs less (and is less crowded) to enter for the so-called 'special visit'.

At the northern end of Carrer del Bisbe Iruirita, poke your head into the courtyards of the 16th-century **Casa de l'Ardiaca** (Archdeacon's House, Map pp278-9) and the 13th-century **Palau del Bispat** (Bishop's Palace, Map pp278-9). On the outside of both buildings, at the very end of Carrer del Bisbe Iruirita, the foundations of the rounded towers that flanked a Roman gate are visible. The lower part of the **Casa de l'Ardiaca's** northwest wall was part of the **Roman walls** (10am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat). Inside the building itself you can see parts of the wall.

The walls ran along present-day Plaça de la Seu into what subsequently became the **Casa de la Pia Almoina** (Map pp278-9), a medieval alms house that now contains the **Museu Diocesà** (Diocesan Museum; Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 315 22 13; www.arqbcn.org; Avinguda de la Catedral 4; adult/senior & student/under 7yr €3/1.50/free; 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun), where you can see a sparse collection of medieval religious art, usually supplemented by a temporary exposition.

Just beyond the southeast end of the cathedral stand four mighty columns of the **Temple Romà d'Augustí** (Roman Temple of Augustus; Map pp278-9; Carrer de Paradís 10; admission free; 10am-2pm Mon-Sat), built in the first century AD.

PLAÇA DEL REI

A stone's throw east of the cathedral, Plaça del Rei is the courtyard of the former **Palau Reial Major**, the palace of the Counts of Barcelona and monarchs of Aragón.

Most of the tall, centuries-old buildings surrounding Plaça del Rei are now open to visitors as the **Museu d'Història de la Ciutat** (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 315 11 11; www.museuhistoria.bcn.es; Carrer del Veguer; adult/student €4/2.50, incl Museu-Monestir de Pedralbes & Park Güell Centre de Acollida; 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun Oct-May, 10am-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun Jun-Sep). The City History Museum is one of Barcelona's most fascinating sights, combining large sections of the palace with a subterranean walk through Roman and Visigothic Barcelona. Set aside at least an hour for the visit, and note that admission is free from 4pm to 8pm on the first Saturday of the month.

The entrance to the museum is through 16th-century **Casa Padellàs** (Map pp278-9), just south of Plaça del Rei. Casa Padellàs, with its courtyard typical of Barcelona's late-Gothic and baroque mansions, was moved here in the 1930s because of roadworks. The external courtyard staircase leads to a restored Roman tower. Below ground awaits a remarkable walk through excavated Roman and Visigothic ruins – complete with sections of a Roman street, baths, shops, along with remains of a Visigothic basilica. You emerge inside the former palace on the north side of the Plaça del Rei. To your right is the **Saló del Tinell** and to the left ahead of you is the **Capella Reial de Santa Agata**.

The **Saló del Tinell** (Map pp278-9) was the royal palace's throne hall, a masterpiece of strong, unfussy Catalan Gothic, built in the mid-14th century with wide, rounded arches holding up a wooden roof. The **Capella Reial de Santa Agata**, whose spindly bell tower rises from the northeast side of Plaça del Rei, was the palace's chapel and dates from the same period.

Head into Plaça del Rei down the fan-shaped stairs and bear right to the entrance to the multi-tiered **Mirador del Rei Martí** (Lookout Tower of King Martin, Map pp278-9), built

in 1555, from where you can enjoy eagle-eye views over the city.

The southwest side of Plaça del Rei is taken up by the **Palau del Lloctinent** (Viceroy's Palace, Map pp278-9), built in the 1550s as the residence of the Spanish viceroy of Catalonia.

MUSEU FREDERIC MARÈS

A short distance north is the **Museu Frederic Marès** (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 310 58 00; www.museumares.bcn.es; Plaça de Sant Lu 5-6; adult/senior & student €3/1.50; 10am-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun & holidays; √), in another part of the **Palau Reial Major**. Marès was a rich 20th-century Catalan sculptor and collector. He specialised in medieval Spanish sculpture, huge quantities of which are displayed on the ground and 1st floors. The top two floors, known as the **Museu Sentimental**, hold a mind-boggling array of other Marès knock-knacks, from toy soldiers and cribs to scissors and tarot cards, along with some of his own sculptures. The museum is free on Wednesday afternoons and on the first Sunday of the month, and you can take a load off in the pleasant courtyard café.

ROMAN WALLS

From Plaça del Rei it's worth a detour to see the two best surviving stretches of Barcelona's Roman walls. One section (Map pp278-9) is on the southwest side of Plaça de Ramon Berenguer el Gran, with the **Capella Reial de Santa Agata** on top. The other (Map pp278-9) is further south, by the north end of Carrer del Sotstinent Navarro. They date from the 3rd and 4th centuries, when the Romans rebuilt their walls after the first attacks by Germanic tribes from the north.

PLAÇA DE SANT JOSEP ORIOL & AROUND

This small plaza is the prettiest in the Barri Gòtic. Its bars and cafés attract buskers and artists, and make it a lively place to hang out for a while. It's surrounded by quaint streets, many of them dotted with appealing cafés, timeless restaurants and cavernous old shops. The plaza is dominated by the Gothic **Església de Santa Maria del Pi** (Map pp278-9; 8.30am-1pm & 4.30-9pm Mon-Sat, 9am-2pm & 5-9pm Sun & holidays), completed in the 16th century. The beautiful rose window above its entrance on Plaça del Pi is claimed to be the world's biggest. The inside of the church was gutted by anarchists' fire in 1936, and most of the stained glass is modern.

SINAGOGA MAJOR

The area between Carrer dels Banys Nous, to the east of the church, and Plaça de Sant Jaume is known as the Call, and was Barcelona's Jewish quarter – and centre of learning – from at least the 11th century until anti-Semitism saw the Jews expelled from it in 1424. Here the sparse remains of the medieval **Sinagoga Major** (Main Synagogue; Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 317 07 90; www.calldebarcelona.org; Carrer de Marlet 5; admission free; ⌚ 11am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun) have been revealed and returned to occasional use as a functioning temple. Remnants of medieval and Roman-era walls remain, suggesting (given their orientation towards Jerusalem) that there may have been a Jewish place of worship here in Roman times.

PLAÇA REIAL & AROUND

Just south of Carrer de Ferran, **Plaça Reial** (Map pp278-9) is an elegant shady square surrounded by eateries, nightspots and budget accommodation. Its 19th-century neoclassical architecture looks as if it would be at home in some Parisian quarter (but the palm trees wouldn't). The lampposts next to the central fountain are Gaudí's first known works.

Until the 1980s, the square and surrounding streets had long been a den of poverty, drug abuse and prostitution. A whiff of its dodgy past remains, in the form of a few down-and-outs and the occasional pickpocket. Today locals and tourists mostly fill the square's bars and restaurants with chatter and laughter.

El Raval

West of La Rambla, Ciutat Vella spreads to Ronda de Sant Antoni, Ronda de Sant Pau and Avinguda del Paral·lel, which together trace the line of Barcelona's 14th-century walls. Known as El Raval, the area contains what remains of one of the city's slums, the seedy red-light zone and drug-abusers' haunt of the Barri Xìnes, at its south end. It's not nearly as tricky as it once was, but watch your pockets nonetheless.

MUSEU D'ART CONTEMPORANI & AROUND

The vast, white **Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona** (Macba; Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 412 08 10; www.macba.es; Plaça dels Àngels 1; admission €7, Wed €3; ⌚ 11am-7.30pm Mon & Wed-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun &

holidays; √) is a temple to contemporary art. Artists frequently on show include Antoni Tàpies, Miquel Barceló and a host of very new installation artists.

Behind the museum is the **Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona** (CCCB; Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 306 41 00; www.cccb.org; Carrer de Montalegre 5; adult/student €6/4.40; ⌚ 11am-8pm Tue-Sat, 11am-3pm Sun & holidays 21 Jun-21 Sep; 11am-2pm & 4-8pm Tue & Thu-Fri, 11am-8pm Wed & Sat, 11am-7pm Sun & holidays 22 Sep-20 Jun; √), a complex of auditoriums and exhibition and conference halls created in the early 1990s from an 18th-century hospice. The big courtyard, with a vast glass wall on one side, is spectacular. Exhibitions are held here regularly.

On the south side of the square is the Gothic shell of the 16th-century **Convent dels Àngels** (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 301 77 75; Plaça dels Àngels), where part of the Macba's permanent exhibition is shown.

Two blocks southeast of Plaça dels Àngels is an architectural masterpiece from another age. Founded in the early 15th century as the city's main hospital, the **Antic Hospital de la Santa Creu** (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 270 23 00; Carrer de l'Hospital 56; admission free; ⌚ library 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) today houses the **Biblioteca de Catalunya** (Catalonia's national library). Take a look inside to admire some fine Catalan-Gothic construction.

The chapel (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 442 71 71; www.bcn.es/virreinaexposicions; Carrer de l'Hospital 56; ⌚ noon-2pm & 4-8pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun & holidays) of the former hospital is used for temporary exhibitions.

PALAU GÜELL

Gaudí's **Palau Güell** (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 317 39 74; Carrer Nou de la Rambla 3-5) is the only major Modernist building in Ciutat Vella, although it's closed for restoration until 2007. Gaudí built it in the late 1880s for his most constant patron, the industrialist Eusebi Güell. It lacks some of Gaudí's later playfulness but is still a characteristic riot of styles – Art Nouveau, Gothic, Islamic – and materials. After the civil war it was in police hands and political prisoners were tortured in its basement.

Features to look out for include the carved wooden ceilings and fireplace, the stonework, the use of mirrors, stained glass and wrought iron, and the main hall with its dome reaching right up to the roof. The roof is a weird world of fantastically shaped and polychrome-tiled chimneypots.

La Ribera

La Ribera is cut off from the Barri Gòtic by noisy Via Laietana, which was driven through the city in 1907. La Ribera, whose name refers to the waterfront that once lay much further inland, was the pumping commercial heart of medieval Barcelona. Its intriguing, narrow streets house major sights and a warren of good bars and restaurants, mainly in the too-cool-for-school El Born area.

PALAU DE LA MÚSICA CATALANA

The **Palace of Catalan Music** (Map pp274-5; ☎ 902 442882; www.palaumusica.org; Carrer de Sant Francesc de Paula 2; adult/student/under 12yr €8/7/free) is a Modernist high point and World Heritage Site. It's not exactly a symphony, more a series of crescendos in tile, brick, sculptured stone and stained glass. Built between 1905 and 1908 by Lluís Domènech i Montaner for the Orfeo Català musical society, it was conceived as a temple for the Catalan Renaixença. Tours (included in the admission price) run for 50 minutes every half hour from 10am to 7pm in July and August and from 10am to 3.30pm during the rest of the year.

You can see some of its splendours – such as the main façade with its mosaics, floral capitals and sculpture cluster representing Catalan popular music – from the outside and wander into the foyer to admire the lovely tiled pillars and décor of the café and ticket office area.

Best of all, however, is the richly colourful auditorium upstairs, with its ceiling of blue-and-gold stained glass and, above a bust of Beethoven, a towering sculpture of Wagner's valkyries (Wagner was No 1 on the Renaixença charts). To see this, you need to attend a concert or join a guided tour.

MERCAT DE SANTA CATERINA

A 19th-century market, built on the site of a 15th-century monastery, was replaced in 2005 with this original, colourful market (Map pp278-9; www.mercatsantacaterina.net; Avinguda de Francesc Cambó 16; ⌚ 8am-2pm Mon, to 3.30pm Tue & Wed, to 8.30pm Thu & Fri, to 3.30pm Sat; √) designed by the adventurous Catalan architect Enric Miralles. The outstanding element is the bright, ceramic-covered, wavy roof – a splash of pastel loopyness.

MUSEU PICASSO

Barcelona's most visited museum (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 319 63 10; www.museupicasso.bcn.es; Carrer de Montcada 15-23; adult/student/under 12yr €6/3/free;

⌚ 10am-8pm Tue-Sun & holidays; √) occupies five of the many fine medieval stone mansions (worth wandering into for their courtyards and galleries) on narrow Carrer de Montcada. The collection concentrates on Picasso's formative years and several specific moments in his later life. Allow two hours, and note that admission is free on the first Sunday of the month. There are additional charges for special exhibitions.

The museum's permanent collection is housed in the first three houses, the **Palau Aguilar**, **Palau del Baró de Castellet** and the **Palau Meca**, all dating back to the 14th century. The 18th-century **Casa Mauri**, built over some medieval remains (even some Roman leftovers have been identified), and the adjacent 14th-century **Palau Finestres** accommodate temporary exhibitions.

A visit starts, naturally enough, at the beginning, with sketches, oils and doodling from Picasso's earliest years in Málaga and La Coruña – most of it done between 1893 and 1895. Some of his self-portraits, and the portraits of his father, which date from 1896, are evidence enough of his precocious talent. The enormous *Ciència i Caritat* (Science and Charity) is proof to anyone that, had he wanted, Picasso would have made a fine mainstream artist. His first consciously thematic adventure, the Blue Period, is well covered. His nocturnal blue-tinted views of *Terrats de Barcelona* (The Rooftops of Barcelona) and *El Foll* (The Madman) are cold and cheerless, and yet somehow spectrally alive.

Among the later works, done in Cannes in 1957, there's a complex technical series (*Las Meninas*), which are studies on Diego Velázquez's masterpiece of the same name (which hangs in the Prado in Madrid).

MUSEU TÈXIL I D'INDUMENTÀRIA

This museum (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 319 76 03; www.museutextil.bcn.es; Carrer de Montcada 12-14; admission incl Palau Reial de Pedralbes museums €3.50; ⌚ 10am-6pm Tue-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun & holidays; √) is in the 14th-century **Palau dels Marquesos de Llió**, across the road from the Museu Picasso. Its 4000 items range from 4th-century Coptic textiles to 20th-century local embroidery. The museum's highlight is the big collection of clothing from the 16th century to the 1930s. The courtyard has a highly agreeable café and admission is free on the first Sunday of the month.

MUSEU BARBIER-MUELLER D'ART PRECOLOMBI

Occupying Palau Nadal, this museum (Map pp278-9; % 93 310 45 16; www.barbier-mueller.ch; Carrer de Montcada 12-14; adult/student/under 16 €3/1.50/free; h 11am-7pm Tue-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun & holidays; √) holds part of one of the world's most prestigious collections of pre-Columbian art, including gold jewellery, ceramics, statues and textiles. The artefacts from South American 'primitive' cultures come from the collections of the Swiss businessman Josef Mueller (1887-1977) and his son-in-law Jean-Paul Barbier, who directs the Musée Barbier-Mueller in Geneva. Admission is free on the first Sunday of the month.

CARRER DE MONTCADA

Several other mansions on this once-wealthy street of Barcelona merchant barons are now commercial art galleries where you're welcome to browse. The 16th-century Palau dels Cervelló, for instance, houses the Galeria Maeght (Map pp278-9; Carrer de Montcada 25), a branch of the renowned Paris gallery. The baroque courtyard of the originally medieval Palau de Dalmases (Map pp278-9; Carrer de Montcada 20) is one of the finest on the strip and home to a rather baroque bar.

ESGLÉSIA DE SANTA MARIA DEL MAR

Carrer de Montcada opens at its southeast end into the cheers and jeers of medieval jousting tournaments, today replaced at night by animated carousing. At its southwest tip rises Barcelona's finest Gothic church, the Església de Santa Maria del Mar (Map pp278-9; % 93 319 05 16; Plaça de Santa Maria del Mar; h 9am-1.30pm & 4.30-8pm). Built in the 14th century, Santa Maria was lacking in superfluous decoration even before anarchists gutted it in 1909 and 1936. This only serves to highlight its fine proportions, purity of line and sense of space. You may occasionally catch an evening recital of baroque music here.

MUSEU DE LA XOCOLATA

In the Museum of Chocolate (Map pp274-5; % 93 268 78 78; http://pastisseria.com; Plaça de Pons i Clerch s/n; admission €3.80; h 10am-7pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun & holidays; √) you can trace the origins of this fundamental foodstuff and admire (but not chomp into!) chocolate models of things like La Sagrada Família. Admission is free on the first Monday of the month.

Parc de la Ciutadella

East of La Ribera and north of La Barceloneta, the gentle Parc de la Ciutadella (Map pp274-5; h 8am-6pm Nov-Feb, 8am-8pm Oct & Mar, 8am-9pm Apr-Sep) makes a fine antidote to the noise and bustle of the city.

After the War of the Spanish Succession, Felipe V built a huge fort (La Ciutadella) to keep watch over Barcelona. Only in 1869 did the government allow its demolition, after which the site was turned into a park and used to host the Universal Exhibition of 1888.

The monumental Cascada (Map pp274-5) near the Passeig de les Pujades entrance was created between 1875 and 1881 by Josep Fontserè, with the help of a young Antoni Gaudí. It's a dramatic combination of classical statuary, rugged rocks, greenery and thundering water.

Southeast, in the fort's former arsenal, is the regional Parlament de Catalunya (Map pp274-5; % 93 304 65 45; www.parlament-cat.net; h 4-6pm), which has free guided visits in Catalan. It also opens on the first Friday of the month and on 11 and 12 September.

The south end of the park is occupied by the Zoo de Barcelona (Map pp274-5; % 93 225 67 80; www.zoobarcelona.com; adult/senior/4-12yr/under 4yr €14.50/7.50/8.75/free; h 10am-7pm Jun-Sep, 10am-6pm Mar-May & Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Feb), which holds about 7500 living things, from gorillas to insects.

Along the Passeig de Picasso side of the park are several buildings created for the Universal Exhibition. These include two arboretums, the Museu de Geologia (Map pp274-5; % 93 319 69 12; www.bcn.es/museu-ciencies; Passeig de Picasso; admission with Museu de Zoologia €3; h 10am-2.30pm Tue, Wed & Fri-Sun, 10am-6.30pm Thu) for rock- and fossil-lovers, and the Museu de Zoologia (Map pp274-5; % 93 319 69 12; Passeig de Picasso; admission with Museu de Geologia €3; h 10am-2.30pm Tue, Wed & Fri-Sun, 10am-6.30pm Thu). The contents of this museum (stuffed animals and the kind of displays on the animal kingdom that once formed a part of the young child's school-outings programmes) are less interesting than the building itself. The Castell dels Tres Dragons (Three Dragons Castle) is a whimsical effort by Lluís Domènech i Montaner, who added medieval-castle trimmings on a pioneering steel frame for the Universal Exhibition.

Northwest of the park is the imposing Modernista Arc de Triomf (Map pp268-9; Passeig de Lluís Companys), with unusual, Islamic-style brickwork.

Port Vell

Barcelona's old port at the bottom of La Rambla, once such an eyesore that it caused public protests, has been transformed since the 1980s into a people-friendly leisure zone.

For a view of the harbour from the water, you can take a golondrina (excursion boat; Map pp274-5; % 93 442 31 06; www.lasgolondrinas.com; Moll de les Drassanes; trips adult/4-10yr/under 4yr €7.50/2/free) from in front of the Monument a Colom. The one-hour round trip takes you to Port Olímpic, the Fórum and back again. The number of departures depends largely on season and demand. As a rule the trips are only done between March and November. Otherwise you can opt for a 35-minute excursion (adult/child aged four to 10/child under four €4/2/free) to the breakwater and back. Neither trip is particularly exciting, but pleasant enough.

Northeast from the quay stretches the promenade Moll de la Fusta. Usually the Pailebot de Santa Eulàlia (Map pp274-5; Moll de la Fusta; adult/child €2.40/1.20; h noon-5pm Tue-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun), a fully functioning 1918 schooner restored by the Museu Marítim, is moored here for visits, although sometimes it's off on the high seas. Admission is free with a Museu Marítim ticket.

At the centre of the redeveloped harbour is the Moll d'Espanya, a former wharf linked to Moll de la Fusta by a wave-shaped footbridge, Rambla de Mar (Map pp274-5), which rotates to let boats enter the marina behind it. At the end of Moll d'Espanya is the glossy Maremàgnum shopping and eating complex, but the major attraction is L'Aquàrium (Map pp274-5; % 93 221 74 74; www.aquariumbcn.com; Maremàgnum; adult/over 60yr/4-12yr/under 4yr €15/12/10/free; h 9.30am-11pm Jul-Aug, 9.30am-9.30pm Jun & Sep, 9.30am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-9.30pm Sat & Sun Oct-May; √), with its 80m-long shark tunnel. Short of diving among them (which can actually be arranged here too) this is as close as you can get to a set of shark teeth without being bitten. Beyond L'Aquàrium is the big-screen Imax cinema.

La Barceloneta & the Coast

It used to be said that Barcelona had 'turned its back on the sea', but the ambitious 1992 Olympics-inspired redevelopment programme returned a long stretch of coast northeast of Port Vell to life. A similar programme is turning the city's long abandoned extreme northeast coastline around too.

La Barceloneta, laid out in the 18th century and subsequently heavily overdeveloped, was

long a factory-workers' and fishermen's quarter. It still retains a gritty flavour although the factories are a distant memory and there are unmistakable signs of gentrification. Some of the fishing families remain and the area is laced with seafood restaurants.

In the Palau de Mar building (former warehouses) facing the harbour is the Museu d'Història de Catalunya (Map pp274-5; % 93 225 47 00; www.mhcat.net; Plaça de Pau Vila 3; admission €3; h 10am-7pm Tue & Thu-Sat, 10am-8pm Wed, 10am-2.30pm Sun & holidays; √). The place incorporates lots of audiovisuals and interactive information points in a series of colourful displays, recounting Catalonia's tumultuous past from pre-history to the 1980s. All sorts of scenes are recreated, from a prehistoric Pyrenean cave dwelling, through to a Roman house and a Spanish-civil-war air-raid shelter. It's free on the first Sunday of the month.

Barcelona's fishing fleet ties up along the Moll del Relotge, south of the museum. On La Barceloneta's seaward side are the first of Barcelona's beaches, which are popular on summer weekends. The pleasant Passeig Marítim (Map pp268-9), a 1.25km promenade from La Barceloneta to Port Olímpic, is a haunt for strollers and rollers, so bring your Rollerblades.

The Transbordador Aeri (Cable Car; Map pp268-9; Passeig Escullera; one way/return €7.50/9; h 11am-8pm mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 10.45am-7pm Mar-mid-Jun & mid-Sep-late-Oct, 10am-6pm late-Oct-Feb), strung across the harbour to Montjuïc, provides a seagull's view of the city. Get tickets at Miramar (Map pp268-9) in Montjuïc and the Torre de Sant Sebastià (Map pp274-5) in La Barceloneta. Buses 17, 39, 55 and 64 run to the Torre de San Sebastià.

Port Olímpic (Map pp268-9), a busy marina built for the Olympic sailing events, is surrounded by bars and restaurants. An eye-catcher, on the approach from La Barceloneta, is Frank Gehry's giant copper Peix (Fish, Map pp268-9) sculpture.

The area behind Port Olímpic, dominated by twin-tower blocks (the luxury Hotel Arts Barcelona and Torre Mapfre office block), is the former Vila Olímpica living quarters for the Olympic competitors, which has since been sold off as apartments.

More and better beaches stretch northeast along the coast from Port Olímpic. They reach the largely completed development project known variously as Diagonal Mar and Fórum.

MODERNISME UNPACKED

Aficionados of Barcelona's Modernista heritage should consider the Ruta del Modernisme pack. For €12 you receive a guide to 115 Modernista buildings great and small, a map and discounts of up to 50% on the main Modernista sights in Barcelona, as well as some in other municipalities around Catalonia. The discounts are valid for a year. For €18, you get another guide and map, *Sortim*, which leads you to bars and restaurants located in Modernista buildings around the city. The *Ruta del Modernisme* guide (in various languages) is available in bookstores. You can take it to one of three Centres del Modernisme to obtain the discount cards, or buy the lot at those centres. They are located at the **Oficina d'Informació de Turisme de Barcelona** (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 285 38 34; www.barcelonaturisme.com; Plaça de Catalunya 17-S underground; ⌚ 9am-9pm), the **Hospital de la Santa Creu i de Sant Pau** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 902 076621; www.santpau.es; Carrer de Cartagena; ✓✓) and the **Pavellons Güell** (Map pp268-9; p297; ☎ 902 076621; Pedralbes).

Aside from high-rise hotels and apartment blocks looking out to sea, highlights include the protected swimming area, a new marina, kids' playgrounds, good spots for rollerblading and skating, and the weird, triangular Edifici Fòrum building. The building is home to a permanent display on urban plans for Barcelona (Barcelona Propera) and occasional temporary exhibitions. Eventually the city zoo will be relocated to a waterfront position here too.

L'Eixample

Stretching north, east and west of Plaça de Catalunya, L'Eixample (the Extension) was Barcelona's 19th-century answer to overcrowding in the medieval city.

Work on it began in 1869, following a design by architect Ildefons Cerdà, who specified a grid of wide streets with plazas that were formed by their cut-off corners. Cerdà also planned numerous public green spaces but few survived the ensuing scramble for real estate. Only now are some being recreated in the interior of some blocks.

L'Eixample has been inhabited from the start by the city's middle classes, many of whom still think it's the best thing about Barcelona. Along its grid of straight streets are the majority of the city's most expensive shops and hotels, plus a range of eateries and several concentrations of bars and clubs. The development of L'Eixample coincided with the city's Modernisme period and so it's home to many Modernista creations. These constitute the area's main sightseeing attractions and, apart from La Sagrada Família, the principal ones are clustered on or near L'Eixample's main avenue, Passeig de Gràcia.

CASA BATLLÓ & THE MANZANA DE LA DISCORDIA

If La Sagrada Família is his master symphony, the **Casa Batlló** (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 216 03 06; www.casabatllo.es; Passeig de Gràcia 43; adult/student & senior €16.50/13; ⌚ 9am-8pm) is Gaudí's whimsical waltz. The façade, sprinkled with bits of blue, mauve and green tile, and studded with wave-shaped window frames and balconies, rises to an uneven blue-tiled roof with a solitary tower. The roof represents Sant Jordi (St George) and the dragon, and if you stare long enough at the building, it almost seems a living being. Inside the main salon overlooking Passeig de Gràcia everything swirls. The ceiling is twisted into a vortex around a sun-like lamp. The doors, windows and skylights are dreamy waves of wood and coloured glass. The same themes continue in the other rooms and covered terrace. The roof, with its twisting chimneypots, is equally astonishing, and provides a chance for a close-up look at the St George-and-the-dragon motif that dominates the view from the street.

Casa Batlló is the centrepiece of the so-called **Manzana de la Discòrdia** (Apple of Discord – in a play on words, *manzana* means both city block and apple), on the western side of Passeig de Gràcia, between Carrer del Consell de Cent and Carrer d'Aragó. According to Greek myth, the original Apple of Discord was tossed onto Mt Olympus by Eris (Discord) with orders that it be given to the most beautiful goddess, sparking jealousies that helped start the Trojan War.

On the same block are two utterly different houses (hence the discord) by the other two senior figures of Modernista architecture: Lluís Domènech i Montaner's **Casa Lleó Morera**

(Map pp272-3; Passeig de Gràcia 35), which is closed to the public; and **Casa Amatller** (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 487 72 17; www.amatller.org; Passeig de Gràcia 41; admission free; ⌚ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) by Josep Puig i Cadafalch. The former is swathed in Art Nouveau carving on the outside and has a bright, tiled lobby, in which floral motifs predominate. The latter is altogether different, with Gothic-style window frames, a stepped gable borrowed (deliberately) from the urban architecture of the Netherlands and all sorts of unlikely sculptures and busts jutting out. The pillared foyer (which you can enter) and the staircase lit by stained glass are like the inside of some romantic castle. Exhibitions are held out the back and parts of the building might be opened to the public in the near future. All three buildings were completed between 1898 and 1906.

The **Museu del Perfum** (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 216 01 21; www.museodelperfume.com; Passeig de Gràcia 39; adult/student & senior €5/3; ⌚ 10.30am-2pm & 4.30-8pm Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm Sat), in the Regia store, contains everything from ancient scent receptacles to classic eau de Cologne bottles.

FUNDACIÓ ANTONI TÀPIES

Around the corner from the **Manzana de la Discòrdia**, the **Fundació** (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 487 03 15; www.fundaciotapies.org; Carrer d'Aragó 255; adult/student €4.20/2.10; ⌚ 10am-8pm Tue-Sun; ✓✓) is a pioneering Modernista building of the early 1880s, and a homage to, and by, a leading 20th-century Catalan artist. The collection spans

the arc of Tàpies' creations (with more than 800 works) but only a small portion is ever on show, always in conjunction with several other temporary exhibitions. In the main exhibition area (Level 1, upstairs) you can see an ever-changing selection of about a dozen of Tàpies' later and grander works, often mystifying creations. For a historical perspective, head for the basement Level 3, where you'll find drawings and colourful canvases from the 1940s and 1950s.

LA PEDRERA

Back on Passeig de Gràcia is another Gaudí masterpiece, built between 1905 and 1910 as a combined apartment and office block. Formally called the **Casa Milà**, after the businessman who commissioned it, it's better known as **La Pedrera** (The Quarry; Map pp272-3; ☎ 902 400973; www.fundacioaixacatalunya.es; Carrer de Provença 261-265; adult/student & EU senior €8/4.50; ⌚ 10am-8pm) because of its uneven grey-stone façade, which ripples around the corner of Carrer de Provença. The wave effect is emphasised by elaborate wrought-iron balconies.

Visit the lavish top-floor flat, attic and roof, together known as the **Espai Gaudí** (Gaudí Space). The roof is the most extraordinary element, with its giant chimneypots looking like multicoloured medieval knights. One floor below, where you can appreciate Gaudí's gracious parabolic arches, is a modest museum dedicated to his work. You can see models and videos dealing with each of his buildings.

THE MODERNISTAS' MISSION

Antoni Gaudí (1852–1926), known above all for La Sagrada Família, was just one, albeit the most spectacular, of a generation of inventive architects who left an indelible mark on Barcelona between 1880 and the 1920s. They were called the Modernistas.

The local offshoot of the Europe-wide phenomenon of Art Nouveau, Modernisme was characterised by its taste for sinuous, flowing lines and (for the time) adventurous combinations of materials like tile, glass, brick, iron and steel. But Barcelona's Modernistas were also inspired by an astonishing variety of other styles too: Gothic and Islamic, Renaissance and Romanesque, Byzantine and baroque.

Gaudí and Co were trying to create a specifically Catalan architecture, often looking back to Catalonia's medieval golden age for inspiration. It is no coincidence that Gaudí and the two other leading Modernista architects, Lluís Domènech i Montaner (1850–1923) and Josep Puig i Cadafalch (1867–1957), were prominent Catalan nationalists.

L'Eixample, where most of Barcelona's new building was happening at the time, is home to the bulk of the Modernista creations. Others in the city include Gaudí's **Palau Güell** (p288) and **Park Güell** (p295); Domènech i Montaner's **Palau de la Música Catalana** (p289); **Castell dels Tres Dragons** (p290) and the **Hotel España** restaurant (p314); and Puig i Cadafalch's **Els Quatre Gats** (see boxed text, p318).

Downstairs on the next floor the apartment (El Pis de la Pedrera) spreads out. It is fascinating to wander around this elegantly furnished home, done up in the style a well-to-do family might have enjoyed in the early 20th century.

From mid-June to late July, La Pedrera opens on Friday and Saturday evenings (9.30pm to midnight). The roof is lit in an eerie fashion and, while you are taking in the night views you can also sip a flute of *cava* (the Catalan version of champagne) and listen to live music (€10). Book in advance.

PALAU DEL BARÓ QUADRAS & CASA DE LES PUNXES

A few blocks north and east of La Pedrera are two of Puig i Cadafalch's major buildings. **Palau del Baró Quadras** (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 238 73 37; www.casaasia.es; Avinguda Diagonal 373; 10am-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) was built between 1902 and 1904 with fantastical neo-Gothic carvings on the façade and a fine stained-glass gallery. It houses Casa Asia, an Asia-Pacific cultural centre. Visiting the varied temporary exhibitions allows you to get a peek at the inside of this intriguing building, which is full of surprising Oriental themes.

Nearby Casa Terrades is better known as **Casa de les Punxes** (House of Spikes; Map pp272-3; Avinguda Diagonal 420) because of its pointed, witch's hat turrets. This apartment block (1903-05) looks more like a fairy-tale castle.

FUNDACIÓ FRANCISCO GODIA

Francisco Godia (1921-90) put together the intriguing mix of medieval art, ceramics and modern paintings at the **Fundació** (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 272 31 80; www.fundacionfgodia.org; Carrer de València 284; adult/student & senior/under 5yr €4.50/2.10 /free; 10am-8pm Wed-Mon; √) in a lifetime of collecting. Godia's interests ranged from the Neapolitan baroque painter Luca Giordano through to Catalan Modernism and València's Joaquim Sorolla, not to mention fast cars.

LA SAGRADA FAMÍLIA

If you only have time for one sightseeing outing, this should be it. The **Temple Expiatori de la Sagrada Família** (Expiatory Temple of the Holy Family; Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 207 30 31; www.sagradafamilia.org; Carrer de Mallorca 401; adult/student €8/5, with Casa Museu Gaudí in Park Güell €9; 9am-8pm Apr-Sep, 9am-6pm Oct-Mar) inspires awe with its sheer verticality and, in the true manner of the great medieval

cathedrals it emulates, it's still not finished after more than 100 years. Work is proceeding apace, however, and it might be done by the 2020s. The first Mass may be celebrated as soon as 2008, if the roof is completed on time. It is Spain's most visited monument and you could easily spend a couple of hours here.

The church was the project to which Antoni Gaudí dedicated the latter part of his life. He stuck to a basic Gothic cross-shaped ground plan, but devised a temple 95m long and 60m wide, which was able to seat 13,000 people. The completed sections and the museum can be explored at leisure. Guided tours (€3.50, 50 minutes, up to four daily) are offered. You can enter from Carrer de Sardanya and Carrer de la Marina. Audio-guides (€3.50) are available and it costs a further €2 per ride on the lifts that take you up inside one of the towers on each side of the church.

The northeast, or **Nativity Façade**, is the Sagrada Família's artistic pinnacle, and was mostly done under Gaudí's personal supervision. You can climb high up inside some of the four towers by a combination of lifts and narrow spiral staircases – a vertiginous experience. The towers are destined to hold tubular bells capable of playing complicated music at great volume. Beneath the towers is a tall, three-part portal on the theme of Christ's birth and childhood. It seems to lean outwards as you stand beneath, looking up. Gaudí used real people and animals as models for many of the sculptures, along with the occasional corpse from the local morgue! The three sections of the portal represent, from left to right, Hope, Charity and Faith. Among the forest of sculpture on the Charity portal, you can make out, low down, the manger surrounded by an ox, an ass, the shepherds and kings, with angel musicians above.

The southwest **Passion Façade**, which has the theme of Christ's last days and death, has been constructed since the 1950s with, like the Nativity Façade, four needling towers and a large, sculpture-bedecked portal. The sculptor, Josep Subirachs, has not attempted to imitate Gaudí's work but has produced controversial (people like 'em or loath 'em), angular images of his own. The sculptures, on three levels, are in an S-shaped sequence, starting with the Last Supper at bottom left and ending with Christ's burial at top right. Subirachs continues to add elements to the façade today.

The semicircular **apse** was the first part to be finished (in 1894). The interior of the church remains a building site but the nave has been roofed over, and a forest of extraordinary angled pillars is in place. The image of the tree is in no way fortuitous, for Gaudí's plan envisaged such an effect.

Work has begun on the **Glory Façade**. It will, like the others, be crowned by four towers – the total of 12 representing the 12 apostles. Further decoration will make the whole building a microcosmic symbol of the Christian church, with Christ represented by a massive 170m central tower above the transept, and the five remaining planned towers symbolising the Virgin Mary and the four Evangelists.

Open the same times as the church, the **Museu Gaudí** (Map pp272-3), below ground level, includes interesting material on Gaudí's life and other work, as well as models and photos of La Sagrada Família. You can see a good example of his plumb-line models, which showed him the stresses and strains he could get away with in construction. Gaudí is buried in the simple crypt at the far end.

HOSPITAL DE LA SANTA CREU I DE SANT PAU

Domènec i Montaner excelled himself as architect and philanthropist with the Modernista masterpiece **Hospital de la Santa Creu i de Sant Pau** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 902 076621; www.santpau.es; Carrer de Cartagena; √), long one of the city's most important hospitals. The whole complex (a World Heritage site), including 16 pavilions, is lavishly decorated and each pavilion is unique. Among the many artists who contributed statuary, ceramics and artwork was the prolific Eusebi Arnau. You can wander around the grounds at any time, and it's well worth the stroll up Avinguda de Gaudí from La Sagrada Família.

The hospital facilities are gradually being transferred to new grounds nearby. Part of the historic site will become a museum dedicated to Montaner, medicine and the 600-year history of the hospital (which was first established in El Raval in the early 15th century; see p288), but not before 2009. You can join a guided tour for €5 (10.15am and 12.15pm in English, 11.15am in Catalan and 1.15pm in Spanish).

TORRE AGBAR

Jean Nouvel's glimmering cucumber-shaped **tower** (Map pp268-9; Avinguda Diagonal 225; √) has come to share the skyline limelight with La

Sagrada Família, and it is now the most visible landmark in the city. By the end of 2006 you should be able to head to a panoramic viewing floor and restaurant high up in the building.

Gràcia

Gràcia lies north of L'Eixample. Once a separate village and in the 19th century an industrial district famous for its republican and liberal ideas, it became fashionable among radical and bohemian types in the 1960s and '70s. Now more sedate and gentrified, it retains much of its style of 20 years ago, with a mixed-class population and very Catalan air. Gràcia's interest lies in the atmosphere of its narrow streets, small plazas and the multitude of bars and restaurants.

The liveliest plazas are **Plaça del Sol**, **Plaça de Rius i Taulet** with its **clock tower** (a favourite meeting place) and **Plaça de la Virreina** with the 17th-century **Església de Sant Joan** (Map pp272-3). Three blocks northeast of **Plaça de Rius i Taulet** there's a big covered market, the **Mercat del Abaceria** (Map pp272-3). West of Gràcia's main street, **Carrer Gran de Gràcia**, seek out an early Gaudí house, the turreted, vaguely Mudéjar **Casa Vicenç** (Map pp272-3; Carrer de les Carolines 22). It's not open to the public.

Park Güell

North of Gràcia, **Park Güell** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 413 24 00; Carrer d'Olot 7; admission free; 10am-9pm Jun-Sep, 10am-8pm Apr, May & Oct, 10am-7pm Mar & Nov, 10am-6pm Dec-Feb) is where Gaudí turned his hand to landscape gardening, and the artificial almost seems more natural than the natural.

Park Güell originated in 1900 when Count Eusebi Güell bought a hillside property (then outside Barcelona) and hired Gaudí to create a miniature garden city of houses for the wealthy. The project was abandoned in 1914, but not before Gaudí had created 3km of roads and walks, steps and a plaza in his inimitable manner, plus the two Hansel-and-Gretel-style gatehouses on Carrer d'Olot.

Just inside the entrance, visit the park's visitor centre, **Centre d'Acollida** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 285 68 99; adult/student/under 16yr €2/1.50/free; 11am-3pm), in the **Pavelló de Consergeria**, the one-time porter's home that now hosts a display on Gaudí's building methods. For €4 you get entry here and to the **Museu d'Història de la Ciutat** (p287) and the **Museu-Monestir de Pedralbes** (p297).

The steps up from the entrance, guarded by a mosaic dragon-lizard, lead to the **Sala Hipòstila**, a forest of 84 stone columns (some of them leaning), intended as a market. On top of the Sala Hipòstila is a broad open space; its highlight is the **Banc de Trencadís**, a tiled bench curving sinuously around its perimeter, which was designed by Gaudí's right-hand man, Josep Maria Jujol (1879–1949).

The spired house to the right is the **Casa-Museu Gaudí** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 219 38 11; admission €4; 10am-8pm Apr-Sep, 10am-6pm Oct-Mar), where Gaudí lived for most of his last 20 years (1906–26). It contains furniture by him and other memorabilia. Bus 24 drops you at an entrance near the top of the park.

Tibidabo

Tibidabo (512m) is the highest hill in the wooded range that forms the backdrop to Barcelona. It's a good place for some fresh air and fine views. Tibidabo gets its name from the devil, who, trying to tempt Christ, took him to a high place and said, in the Latin version: *'Haec omnia tibi dabo si cadens adoraberis me.'* ('All this I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.')

TEMPLE DEL SAGRAT COR

The **Church of the Sacred Heart** (☎ 93 417 56 86; Plaça de Tibidabo; 10am-7pm), looming above the top funicular station, is meant to be Barcelona's answer to Paris' Sacré Coeur. It's certainly equally as visible, and even more vilified by aesthetes (perhaps with good reason). It's actually two churches, one on top of the other. The top one is surmounted by a giant Christ and has a lift to the roof (tickets €2; 10am-2pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm & 3-7pm Sun).

PARC D'ATRACCIONS

Barcelonins (residents of Barcelona) come to Tibidabo for a bit of fresh air at this **funfair** (☎ 93 211 79 42; www.tibidabo.es; Plaça de Tibidabo 3-4; admission for 6 attractions & Museu d'Automats €11, admission all rides adult/child shorter than 1.2m €22/9). Give yourself a bit of a scare in the Hotel Krueger, a *hospedaje* (guesthouse) of horrors inhabited by actors playing out their Dracula, Hannibal Lecter and other fantasies. A curious sideline is the Museu d'Automats, with 35 automated puppets that go back as far as 1880 and are part of the original amusement park. You can still see some of these gizmos go. The park is open from noon to 10pm or 11pm Wednesday to

Sunday from July to early September. At other times, closing times vary enormously (from 5pm to 9pm) Saturday, Sunday, holidays and some other days in warmer months.

COSMOCAIXA – MUSEU DE LA CIÈNCIA

Located in a transformed Modernista building, this **science museum** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 212 60 50; www.fundacio.lacaixa.es; Carrer de Teodor Roviralta 47-51, Zona Alta; adult/student €3/2; 10am-8pm Tue-Sun; √) is a giant interactive paradise with knobs (and buttons and levers and lots more besides). Among the star attractions are the planetarium and the re-creation over 1 sq km of a chunk of flooded Amazon rainforest (*Bosc Inundat*), with more than 100 species of Amazon flora and fauna (including anacondas and poisonous frogs). The museum was voted Europe's best in 2006.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Take a Ferrocarrils de la Generalitat de Catalunya (FGC) train to Avinguda de Tibidabo from Catalunya station on Plaça de Catalunya (€1.20, 10 minutes). Outside Avinguda de Tibidabo station, hop on the *tramvia blau*, Barcelona's last surviving old-style tram. It runs between fancy Modernista mansions – note particularly **Casa Roviralta** (Map pp268-9; Avinguda de Tibidabo 31), now home to a well-known grill restaurant – and Plaça del Doctor Andreu (one way/return €2.30/3.50; operating 10am to 8pm late June to early September, 10am to 6pm Saturday, Sunday and holidays mid-September to late-June) – it has been doing so since 1901. The tram runs every 15 or 30 minutes. On days and at times when the tram does not operate, a bus serves the route (€1.20).

From Plaça del Doctor Andreu, the Tibidabo funicular railway climbs through the woods to Plaça de Tibidabo at the top of the hill (one way/return €2/3). Departures start at 10.45am and continue until shortly after the park's closing time.

An alternative is bus T2, the 'Tibibús', from Plaça de Catalunya to Plaça de Tibidabo (€2.20). It runs every 30 to 50 minutes on Saturday, Sunday and holidays year-round, and hourly from 10.30am Monday to Friday late June to early September; you purchase tickets on the bus. The last bus down leaves Tibidabo 30 minutes after the Parc d'Atraccions closes. You can also buy a combined ticket that includes the bus and entry to the Parc d'Atraccions (€22).

Collserola

PARC DE COLLSETEROLA

Stretching over 8000ha, this **park** (☎ 93 280 35 52; www.parccollserola.net; Carretera de l'Església 92; Centre d'Interpretació 10 9.30am-3pm) makes an ideal escape hatch from the city, with ample walking and mountain biking possibilities. Aside from the nature, the principal point of interest is the sprawling **Museu-Casa Verdaguier** (☎ 93 204 78 05; www.museuhistoria.bcn.es; Vil.la Joana, Carretera de l'Església 104; admission free; 10am-2pm Sat & Sun & holidays), 100m from the information centre and a short walk from the train station. In this late-18th-century country house, Catalonia's revered and reverend writer, Jacint Verdaguier, spent his last days before dying on 10 July 1902.

To get to the park, take the FGC train from Plaça de Catalunya to Peu de Funicular and then the Funicular to Baixador de Vallvidrera.

TORRE DE COLLSETEROLA

The 288m **Torre de Collserola** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 406 93 54; www.torredecollserola.com; Carretera de Vallvidrera al Tibidabo; adult/senior/child €5.20/4.20/3.60; 11am-2.30pm & 3.30-7pm Wed-Sun) telecommunications tower was completed by Norman Foster in 1992. An external glass lift whisks you up 115m to the visitors' observation area, from where you can see for 70km on a clear day. Take bus 111 from Funicular de Vallvidrera or from Plaça de Tibidabo.

Jardins del Laberint d'Horta

Laid out in the twilight years of the 18th century by Antoni Desvalls, Marquès d'Alfarras i de Lluçà, this carefully manicured **park** (☎ 93 428 39 34; Carrer dels Germans Desvalls; adult/student €2/1.25, free Wed & Sun; 10am-sunset) remained a private family idyll until the 1970s, when it was opened to the public. Many a fine party and theatrical performance was held here over the years, but now it serves as a kind of museum-park. The gardens take their name from a maze (which is very easy to get lost in!) in their centre, but other paths take you past a pleasant artificial lake or *estany*, waterfalls, a neoclassical pavilion and a false cemetery. The latter was inspired by 19th-century romanticism, often characterised by an obsession with a swooning, anaemic (some might say plain silly) vision of death. To get to the park, take the metro to Mundet.

Pedralbes

This is a wealthy residential area north of the Zona Universitària.

PALAU REIAL DE PEDRALBES

Across Avinguda Diagonal from the main campus of the Universitat de Barcelona, set in a lush, green park is the 20th-century **Palau Reial de Pedralbes** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 280 50 24; Avinguda Diagonal 686; both museums & the Museu Tèxtil i d'Indumentària adult/student €3.50/2; 10am-6pm Tue-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun & holidays, park 10am-6pm), which belonged to the family of Eusebi Güell (Gaudí's patron) until they handed it over to the city in 1926. Then it served as a royal residence – King Alfonso XIII, the president of Catalonia and General Franco, among others, have been its guests. It's free on the first Sunday of the month and the ticket also gets you into the Museu Tèxtil i d'Indumentària (p289).

Today the palace houses two museums. The **Museu de Ceràmica** (www.museuceramica.bcn.es) has a good collection of Spanish ceramics from the 13th to 19th centuries, including work by Picasso and Miró. Across the corridor, the **Museu de les Arts Decoratives** (www.museuartsdecoratives.bcn.es) brings together an eclectic assortment of furnishings, ornaments, and knick-knacks dating as far back as the Romanesque period.

Over by Avinguda de Pedralbes are the Gaudí-designed stables and porter's lodge for the Finca Güell, as the Güell estate here was called. They were built in the mid-1880s, when Gaudí was strongly impressed by Islamic architecture, and are also known as the **Pavellons Güell** (☎ 902 076621; guided tour adult/child & senior €5/2.50). There are tours Monday to Friday in English at 10.15am and 12.15pm, and there are also tours in Catalan (11.15am) and Spanish (1.15pm). Outside visiting hours, there is nothing to stop you admiring Gaudí's wrought-iron dragon gate from the outside.

MUSEU-MONESTIR DE PEDRALBES

This peaceful old **convent** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 203 92 82; www.museuhistoria.bcn.es; Baixada del Monestir 9; admission €4 incl Museu d'Història de la Ciutat & Park Güell Centre d'Interpretació; 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-2pm Tue-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun Oct-May), founded in 1326 and now a museum of monastic life, stands at the top of Avinguda de Pedralbes in a divinely quiet corner of

Barcelona. Displays are distributed in cells and dependencies around the elegant, three-storey cloister, a jewel of early-14th-century Catalan Gothic.

Upstairs is a grand hall that was once the **Dormidor**, or sleeping quarters. It was lined by tiny night cells but they were long ago removed. Today, a modest collection of the monastery's art, especially Gothic devotional works, and furniture grace this space.

Take the FGC train to Reina Elisenda or bus 22 (from Plaça de Catalunya), 64 (from Plaça de l'Universitat) or 75 (from Plaça de Kennedy).

Camp Nou

One of Barcelona's most visited museums is the **Museu del Futbol Club Barcelona** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 496 36 08; www.fcbarcelona.es; Carrer d'Aristides Maillol; adult/child €6/4.50; ⌚ 10am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2.30pm Sun & holidays), next to the club's giant Camp Nou stadium. Barça is one of Europe's top football clubs and its museum is a hit with fans the world over, more so since the side won the Spanish premiership and the European Champion's League in 2006.

Camp Nou, built in 1957, is one of the world's biggest stadiums, holding 100,000 people, and the club has a world-record membership of 130,000. Soccer fans who can't get to a game (see p328) should find the museum worthwhile. The best bits are the photo section, goal videos and views over the stadium. Among the quirkiest paraphernalia are old sports board games, the life-size diorama of old-time dressing rooms, magazines from way back, and the *futbolín* (table-soccer) collection. You can join a guided tour (adult/child €10.50/8; ⌚ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1.30pm Sun & holidays) of the stadium, starting in the team's dressing rooms (pong!) then heading out through the tunnel, on to the pitch and winding up in the presidential box.

Montjuïc

Montjuïc, the hill overlooking the city centre from the southwest, is dotted with museums, soothing gardens and the main group of 1992 Olympic sites, along with a handful of theatres and clubs. It's worth at least a day of your time.

The name Montjuïc (Jewish Mountain) indicates there was once a Jewish cemetery, and possibly settlement, here. Montjuïc also has a darker history: its castle was used as a

political prison and execution site by various governments, including the Republicans during the civil war and Franco thereafter.

The first main burst of building on Montjuïc came in the 1920s, when it was chosen as the stage for Barcelona's 1929 World Exhibition. The Estadi Olímpic, the Poble Espanyol and some museums all date from this time. Montjuïc got a face-lift and more new buildings for the 1992 Olympics, and cosmetic surgery on the gardens continues today.

Abundant roads and paths, with occasional escalators, plus buses and a chairlift, allow you to visit Montjuïc's sights in any order you choose. The main attractions – the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, CaixaForum, the Poble Espanyol, the Pavelló Mies van der Rohe, the Fundació Joan Miró, the Estadi Olímpic and the views from the castle – make for a full couple of days' sightseeing.

For information on the park, head for the **Centre Gestor del Parc de Montjuïc** (Passeig de Santa Madrona 28; ⌚ 10am-8pm Apr-Oct, 10am-6pm Nov-Mar) in the Font del Gat building, a short walk off Passeig de Santa Madrona, east of the Museu Etnològic. It also has a pleasant bar-restaurant. Another information office, open the same hours, operates at the castle (see p309).

AROUND PLAÇA D'ESPANYA

The approach to Montjuïc from Plaça d'Espanya gives you the full benefit of the landscaping on the hill's northern side and allows Montjuïc to unfold for you from the bottom up. On Plaça d'Espanya's northern side is the former **Plaça de Braus Les Arenes bullring**, built in 1900 and being converted into a shopping and leisure centre by Sir Richard Rogers.

Behind the bullring is **Parc Joan Miró**, created in the 1980s, and worth a quick detour for Miró's giant, highly phallic sculpture *Donna i Ocell* (Woman and Bird, Map pp268-9) in the northwest corner.

LA FONT MÀGICA & AROUND

Avinguda de la Reina Maria Cristina, lined with exhibition and congress halls, leads from Plaça d'Espanya towards Montjuïc. On the hill ahead of you is the Palau Nacional de Montjuïc, and stretching up a series of terraces below it are Montjuïc's fountains, starting with the biggest, **La Font Màgica** (Map pp268-9; Avinguda de la Reina Maria Cristina; admission free; ⌚ every 30min 7-8.30pm Fri & Sat Oct-late Jun, 9.30-11.30pm Thu-Sun late Jun-Sep), which comes alive with a

15-minute lights-water-and-music show repeated several times an evening.

Just to the west of La Font Màgica is the strange **Pavelló Mies van der Rohe** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 423 40 16; www.miesbcn.com; Avinguda del Marquès de Comillas; adult/student/under 18yr €3.50/2/free; ⌚ 10am-8pm; √). Architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe erected the Pavelló Alemany (German Pavilion) for the 1929 World Exhibition. It was a startling modern experiment. What you see now is a replica erected by an association of his fans in the 1980s.

CaixaForum (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 476 86 00; www.fundacio.lacaixa.es in Spanish; Avinguda del Marquès de Comillas 6-8; admission free; ⌚ 10am-8pm Tue-Sun; √) hosts part of the Caixa bank's extensive collection of modern art from around the globe. It is housed in a remarkable former Modernista factory designed by Puig i Cadafalch. Constantly changing exhibitions are generally top quality.

MUSEU NACIONAL D'ART DE CATALUNYA

The **Palau Nacional**, built in the 1920s for World Exhibition displays, houses what is probably the city's most important museum (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 622 03 76; www.mnac.es; Mirador del Palau Nacional; adult/student/senior & under 12yr €8.50/6/free; ⌚ 10am-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2.30pm Sun & holidays; √). Its Romanesque art section consists mainly of 11th- and 12th-century murals, woodcarvings and altar frontals – painted, low-relief wooden panels that were forerunners of the elaborate *retablos* (altarpieces) that adorned later churches. Gathered from decaying rural churches in northern Catalonia early last century, they form one of Europe's greatest collections of Romanesque art. The two outstanding items are an image of Christ in majesty done around 1123 and taken from the apse of the Església de Sant Climent de Taüll in northwest Catalonia, and an apse image of the Virgin Mary and Christ child from the nearby Església de Santa Maria de Taüll.

The extensive Gothic-art section contains works by Catalan painters such as Bernat Martorell and Jaume Huguet. From here you pass through two eclectic private collections, the Cambò bequest and works from the Thyssen-Bornemisza collections. Works by the Venetian Renaissance masters Veronese (1528-88), Titian (1490-1557) and Canaletto (1697-1768), along with Rubens (1577-1640) and even England's Gainsborough (1727-88), feature.

Upstairs, after a series of minor works by a variety of classic 17th-century Spanish Old Masters, the collection turns to modern

Catalan art. It is an uneven affair, but it is worth looking out for Modernista painters Ramon Casas and Santiago Rusiñol.

The photography section encompasses work from mostly Catalan snappers from the mid-19th century on. The Gabinet Numismàtic de Catalunya contains coins ranging from Roman Spain and medieval Catalonia to some engaging notes from civil war days.

POBLE ESPANYOL

This so-called **Spanish Village** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 508 63 30; www.poble-espanyol.com; Avinguda del Marquès de Comillas; adult/senior & student/under 12yr €7.50/5.50/4; ⌚ 9am-8pm Mon, 9am-2am Tue-Thu, 9am-4am Fri & Sat, 9am-midnight Sun) is both a cheesy souvenir-hunters' haunt and an intriguing scrapbook of Spanish architecture. Built for the Spanish crafts section of the 1929 exhibition, it's composed of plazas and streets lined with surprisingly good copies of characteristic buildings from across the country's regions.

You enter from Avinguda del Marquès de Comillas, beneath a towered medieval gate from Àvila. Inside, to the right, is an information office with free maps. Straight ahead from the gate is a Plaza Mayor, or town square, surrounded by mainly Castilian and Aragonese buildings. Elsewhere you'll find an Andalusian *barrio* (district), a Basque street, Galician and Catalan quarters, and even – at the eastern end – a small Dominican monastery. The buildings house dozens of moderate-to-expensive restaurants, cafés, bars, craft shops and workshops, and a few souvenir stores.

The **Fundació Fran Daurel** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 423 41 72; admission free; ⌚ 10am-7pm) is an eclectic collection of 200 works of art including sculptures, prints, ceramics and tapestries by artists ranging from Picasso to Miquel Barceló.

MUSEU ETNOLÒGIC & MUSEU D'ARQUEOLOGIA

Down the hill east of the Museu Nacional d'Art, these museums are worth a visit if their subjects interest you, although neither is excitingly presented and most explanatory material is in Catalan.

The **Museu Etnològic** (Ethnology Museum; Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 424 64 02; www.museuetnologic.bcn.es; Passeig de Santa Madrona; adult/senior & student/under 12yr €3/1.50/free; ⌚ noon-8pm Tue-Sat, 11am-3pm Sun late Jun-late Sep, 10am-7pm Tue & Thu, 10am-2pm Wed, Fri & Sun late-Sep-late-Jun) presents a wide-ranging, three-part exhibition with all sorts of traditional

objects collected across Spain and around the world: anything from Australian boomerangs to ceramics from Andalucía. It's free on the first Sunday of the month.

The **Museu d'Arqueologia de Catalunya** (Archaeology Museum; Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 424 65 77; www.mac.es; Passeig de Santa Madrona 39-41; adult/child €2.40/1.70; 11 9.30am-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2.30pm Sun) covers Catalonia and neighbouring areas in Spain. Items range from copies of pre-Neanderthal skulls to Carthaginian necklaces and Visigothic crosses. There's good material on the Balearic Islands and Empúries and Roman finds dug up in Barcelona.

ANELLA OLÍMPICA

The 'Olympic Ring' is the group of sports installations where the main events of the 1992 Olympics were held. Westernmost is the Institut Nacional d'Educació Física de Catalunya (INEFC; Map pp268-9), a kind of sports university, designed by one of Catalonia's best-known contemporary architects, Ricardo Bofill. Past a circular arena, Plaça d'Europa, with the Torre Calatrava telephone tower behind it, is the Piscines Bernat Picornell (Map pp268-9), where the swimming and diving events were held. For details on swimming here, see p310.

Next comes a pleasant park, the Jardí d'Acclimatació, followed by the Estadi Olímpic (Map pp268-9; Avinguda de l'Estadi; admission free; 11 10am-6pm Oct-Apr, 10am-8pm May-Sep), the main stadium of the games (enter at the north end). If you saw the Olympics on TV, the 65,000-capacity stadium may seem surprisingly small. So may the Olympic flame-holder into which an archer spectacularly fired a flaming arrow during the opening ceremony. The stadium was opened in 1929, and restored for 1992.

At the southern end of the stadium (enter from the outside) is the Galeria Olímpica (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 426 06 60; www.fundaciobarcelonaolimpica.es; Passeig Olímpic s/n; adult/student/senior & under 12yr €3/1.50; 11 10am-1pm & 4-6pm Mon-Fri), which has an exhibition on the 1992 games.

West of the stadium is the Palau Sant Jordi (Map pp268-9), a 17,000-capacity indoor sports, concert and exhibition hall, designed by the Japanese architect Arata Isozaki.

JARDÍ BOTÀNIC

South across the road from the Estadi, this **botanical garden** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 426 49 35; www.jardibotanic.bcn.es; Carrer del Doctor Font i Quer; adult/student €3/1.50; 11 10am-8pm Jul-Aug, 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat & Sun & holidays Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-5pm Oct-Mar) was

created atop an old municipal dump. The theme is 'Mediterranean' flora and the collection includes some 2000 species thriving in areas with a climate similar to that of the Mediterranean, including the Eastern Med, Spain (including the Balearic and Canary Islands), North Africa, Australia, California, Chile and South Africa. It's free on the last Sunday of the month.

CEMENTIRI DEL SUD-OEST

On the hill south of the Anella Olímpica you can see the top of a huge cemetery, the Cementiri del Sud-Oest (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 484 17 00; 11 8am-5.30pm), which extends right down the south side of the hill. It was opened in 1883, and is an odd combination of elaborate architect-designed tombs for rich families and small niches for the rest. It contains the graves of numerous Catalan artists and politicians, including Joan Miró, Carmen Amaya (the flamenco star from La Barceloneta) and Lluís Companys (a nationalist president of Catalonia, who was executed by Franco's henchmen in the nearby Montjuïc castle in 1940).

FUNDACIÓ JOAN MIRÓ

The **Fundació Joan Miró** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 443 94 70; www.bcn.fjmiro.es; Plaça de Neptú; adult/senior & child €7.50/5, plus €4/3 for temporary exhibitions; 11 10am-7pm Tue, Wed, Fri & Sat, 10am-9.30pm Thu, 10am-2.30pm Sun & holidays; ✓✓) is a must-see gallery dedicated to one of the greatest artists to emerge in Barcelona in the 20th century, Joan Miró.

The collections include some 450 paintings, sculptures and textile works, and almost 7000 drawings, but only a selection is shown at any one time. The displays tend to concentrate on Miró's more settled last 20 years, but there are some important exceptions. The Sala Joan Prats and Sala Pilar Juncosa show work by the younger Miró that traces him moving away slowly from a *relative* realism towards his own later signature style. Transitional works from the 1930s and '40s are especially intriguing. Another interesting section is devoted to the 'Miró Papers', which include many preparatory drawings and sketches, some on bits of newspaper or cigarette packets. A *Joan Miró* is a collection of work by other contemporary artists, donated in tribute to Miró and displayed in a basement room.

Reckon on a couple of hours to take in the permanent and temporary exhibitions.

(Continued on page 309)

(Continued from page 300)

CASTELL DE MONTJUÏC & AROUND

The southeast of Montjuïc is dominated by the castell (castle, Map pp268-9). For most of its existence it has been used to watch over the city and as a political prison and killing ground. The army opened it to the public as a museum in 1960, but the central government has yet to make good on a 2004 promise to cede the location to Barcelona city, which wants to create a European Peace Museum in it.

The castle is surrounded by a network of ditches and walls, and houses the **Museu Militar** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 329 86 13; admission €2.50; 11 9.30am-5pm Tue-Sun Nov-mid-Mar, 9.30am-8pm daily mid-Mar-Oct), which has a section on Catalan military history, a discreetly half-hidden statue of Franco, plus old weapons, castle models and so on. Best of all are the views from the castle area of the port and city below. Make the charming walk along the base of the seaward walls, drinking in views of the city and the sea.

Towards the foot of this part of Montjuïc, above the main road to Tarragona, the **Jardins de Mossèn Costa i Llobera** (Map pp268-9; admission free; 11 10am-sunset) have a good collection of tropical and desert plants – including a veritable forest of cacti. Near the Estació Parc Montjuïc (funicular station) are the ornamental **Jardins de Mossèn Cinto Verdaguer**. From the **Jardins del Mirador**, opposite the Estació Mirador, you have fine views over the port of Barcelona.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

You *could* walk from Ciutat Vella (the foot of La Rambla is 700m from the eastern end of Montjuïc). Escalators run up to the Palau Nacional from Avinguda de Rius i Taulet and Passeig de les Cascades. They continue as far as Avinguda de l'Estadi.

Bus

Several buses make their way up here, including buses 50, 55 and 61. A local bus, the PM (Parc de Montjuïc) line, does a circle trip from Plaça d'Espanya to the castell.

Bus Montjuïc Turistic

This open-top, olive coloured bus (adult/child €3/2; 11 late Jun-mid-Sep) runs two hop-on, hop-off circuits (red and blue) around the park. Blue starts at Plaça d'Espanya and red at Plaça del Portal de la Pau (the Monument a Colom). There are 22 stops, five interconnecting the two routes.

Metro & Funicular

Take the metro (lines 2 and 3) to Paral.lel station and get on the funicular railway (11 9am-10pm Apr-Oct, 9am-8pm Nov-Mar) from there to Estació Parc Montjuïc.

Transbordador Aeri

To get to the mountain from the beach, take the Transbordador Aeri (Telefèric). It runs between Torre de Sant Sebastià in La Barceloneta (p291) and the Miramar stop on Montjuïc.

Telefèric de Montjuïc

From Estació Parc Montjuïc (see Metro & Funicular, above), this cable car goes to the castell via the Mirador (a lookout point). At the time of writing it was out of action for repairs.

ACTIVITIES

Cycling

For information on bicycle hire, see p332. Cycle lanes have been laid out along many main arteries across the city. Montjuïc and the Parc de Collserola are both hilly but less stressful than the rest of the city in terms of traffic.

Marathon

Runners converge on Barcelona annually to participate in the city's **marathon** (www.maratobarcelona.es); in 2006 it was held in March on a new course. It starts and finishes at Plaça d'Espanya, passing Camp Nou, La Pedrera, La Sagrada Família, Torre Agbar, Fórum, Parc de la Ciutadella, Plaça de Catalunya and La Rambla.

Rollerblading

The most popular parts of town for a gentle rollerblade are the esplanade along La Barceloneta beach and around Port Olímpic.

Sailing & Windsurfing

Head to **Base Nautica Municipal** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 221 04 32; www.basenautica.org; Avinguda Litoral s/n), just back from Platja de la Mar Bella, for courses in pleasure-boat handling, kayaking or windsurfing (€163 for 10 hours' tuition).

Swimming

Down by La Barceloneta, **Club Natació Atlètic-Barcelona** (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 221 00 10; www.cnab.org; Plaça de Mar s/n; adult/under 11yr €9.50/5.70; 11 6.30am-11pm Mon-Fri, 7am-11pm Sat year-round, 8am-5pm Sun & holidays Oct-mid-May, 8am-8pm Sun & holidays mid-May-Sep) has one indoor and two outdoor pools, a gym and private beach access.

Included in the standard price to Barcelona's Olympic pool, **Piscines Bernat Picornell** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 423 40 41; www.picornell.com in Catalan; Avinguda de l'Estadi 30-40, Montjuïc; adult/15-25yr/senior & child €8.50/5.60/4.50, outdoor pool only Jun-Sep adult/senior & 6-14yr €4.50/3.20; ⌚ 7am-midnight Mon-Fri, 7am-9pm Sat, 7.30am-4pm Sun, outdoor pool 10am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Oct-May, 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 9am-8pm Sun Jun-Sep), is use of the gym, saunas and spa bath.

Water babies will adore the thalassotherapy sports centre, **Poliesportiu Marítim** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 224 04 40; www.claror.org/maritim.htm in Catalan; Passeig Marítim 33-35; admission Mon-Fri €13.50, Sat, Sun & holidays €16; ⌚ 7am-midnight Mon-Fri, 8am-9pm Sat, 8am-4pm Sun & holidays). Apart from the smallish training pool, the centre is a minor labyrinth of spa pools that are hot, warm and freezing cold,

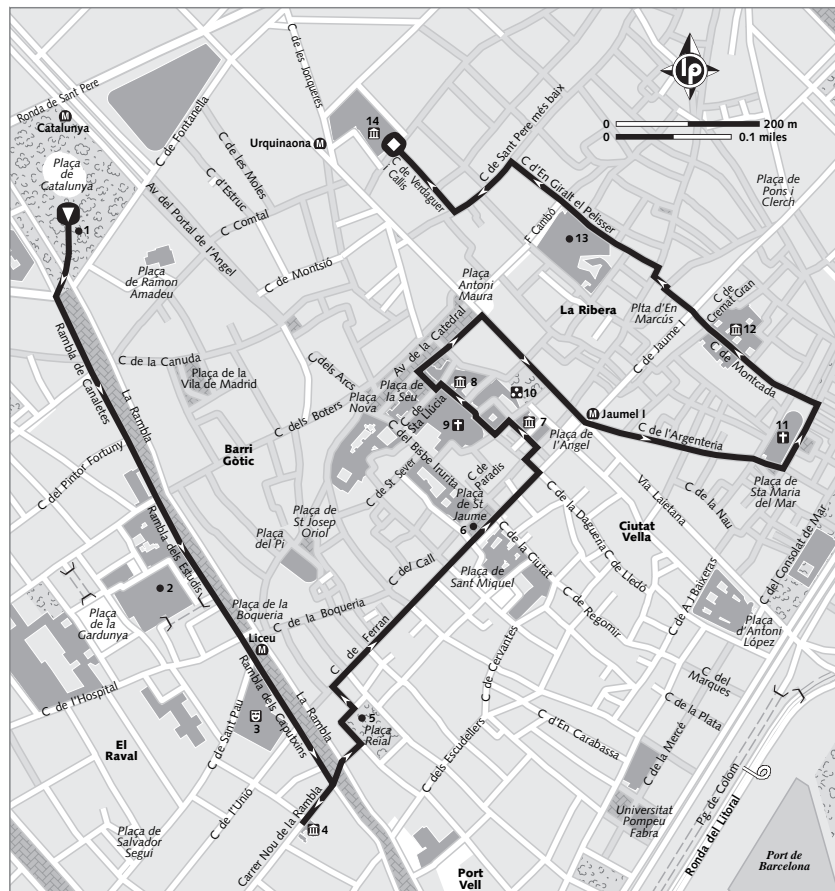
along with waterfalls for massage relief. When you're sufficiently relaxed, you can stumble outside and flop on to the beach.

WALKING TOUR

A great deal of what makes Barcelona fascinating is crowded into a relatively compact space, making an introductory strolling tour a great way to make the city's acquaintance.

WALK FACTS

Start Plaça de Catalunya
Finish Palau de la Música Catalana
Distance 3.5km
Duration 1½ hours



There's nothing wrong with following the crowds to start off with, so wander down La Rambla from Plaça de Catalunya (1). Along the way, sniff around the Mercat de la Boqueria (2; p323), pop into the Gran Teatre del Liceu (3; p284) and visit one of Gaudí's earlier efforts, the Palau Güell (4; p288). From here, cross La Rambla and busy Plaça Reial (5) and make for Plaça de Sant Jaume (6; p285), at the core of the Barri Gòtic and the political heart of the city for 2000 years. You can examine the city's Roman origins in the nearby Museu d'Història de la Ciutat (7; p287). From the complex of buildings huddled around the museum and Plaça del Rei, you pass the Museu Frederic Mares (8; p287) en route for the main façade of the Catedral (9; p286). From there, make the loop down Via Laietana to admire what remains of the Roman walls (10; p287), and then branch off down Carrer de l'Argenteria to reach the splendid Gothic Església de Santa Maria del Mar (11; p290). Circle around it and up noble Carrer de Montcada, home to several museums including the Museu Picasso (12; p289). Proceed north past the Mercat de Santa Caterina (13; p289), a daring 21st-century reincarnation of a grand 19th-century produce market on the site of a medieval monastery, and then dogleg on to the stunning Modernista Palau de la Música Catalana (14; p289).

COURSES

Barcelona is bristling with schools offering Spanish- and Catalan-language courses: **Escola Oficial d'Idiomes de Barcelona** (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 324 93 30; www.eoibd.es in Spanish; Avinguda de les Drassanes s/n) Part-time courses (around 10 hours a week) in Spanish and Catalan (around €165 for a semester). Because of the demand for Spanish, there is no guarantee of a place.

International House (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 268 45 11; www.ihes.com/bcn; Carrer de Trafalgar 14) Intensive courses from around €370 for two weeks. Staff can also organise accommodation.

Universitat de Barcelona (Map pp274-5; Gran Via de les Corts Catalanes 585) Spanish (☎ 93 403 55 19; www.eh.ub.es); Catalan (☎ 93 403 54 77; www.ub.edu/slc) Intensive courses (40 hours' tuition over periods ranging from two weeks to a month; €390) in Spanish year-round. Longer Spanish and Catalan courses are also available.

And you can learn lots more in Barcelona, like salsa and saucers:

Antilla BCN Escuela de Baile (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 451 45 64; www.antillasalsa.com; Carrer d'Aragó 141) The

place to learn salsa and other Caribbean dance. Weekly courses cost €100 per term.

Cook and Taste (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 302 13 20; www.cookandtaste.net; La Rambla 58; half-day workshop €50) Learn to whip up a paella or stir a gazpacho in this Spanish cookery school.

BARCELONA FOR CHILDREN

There's plenty to interest kids, from street theatre on La Rambla to the beaches. Transport is good, many attractions are huddled fairly close together and children are generally welcome in restaurants and cafés.

An initial stroll along La Rambla is full of potential distractions and wonders, from the bird stands to the living statues and buskers, and the Wax Museum (Museu de Cera, p284) further down the boulevard is bound to keep them engaged.

At the bottom end of La Rambla, more options present themselves: a ride up to the top of the Monument a Colom (p285) or seeing sharks at L'Aquarium (p291). You might also score points with a visit to the nearby 3-D Imax cinema (p326).

The Transbordador Aeri (p291), strung across the harbour between La Barceloneta and Montjuïc, is an irresistible ride. Or scare the willies out of them with a ride in the Hotel Kruger horror house at Tibidabo's Parc d'Ataccions (p296) amusement park!

Of the city's many museums, those most likely to capture children's imagination are the Museu Marítim (p285), the Museu de la Xocolata (p290) and the interactive CosmoCaixa (p296).

In the summer months you will doubtless be rewarded by squeals of delight if you take the bairns to one of the city's swimming pools (p309) and/or the beach (p291). In cooler weather, parks can be a good choice. Montjuïc, including some exploration of its Castell (p309), should appeal to young kids. A wander around

BABYSITTING AGENCIES

Most of the midrange and top-end hotels in Barcelona can organise a babysitting service. A company that many hotels use, and which you can also contact directly, is **5 Serveis** (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 412 56 76, 639 361111; Carrer de Pelai 50). Multilingual babysitters (*canguros*) are available. Reckon on paying about €7.50 an hour plus the cost of the babysitter's taxi ride home.

the maze of the **Jardins del Laberint d'Horta** (p297) will keep kiddies guessing as they try to work their way through the central maze. Animals usually work wonders with truculent toddlers, so why not drop by the **Zoo de Barcelona** (p290)?

QUIRKY BARCELONA

Probably the weirdest museum in town is the **Museu de Carrasses Fúnebres** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 902 076902; Carrer de Sancho d'Àvila 2; admission free; 10am-1pm & 4-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat, Sun & holidays). This basement hearse museum is the place to come if you want to see how the great and good have been transported to their final resting places in Barcelona since the 18th century.

TOURS

Several tour options present themselves if you want a hand getting around the sights:

Barcelona Walking Tours (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 285 38 34; Plaça de Catalunya 17-S) The Oficina d'Informació de Turisme de Barcelona organises guided walking tours. One explores the Barri Gòtic (adult/child €9/3; English 10am daily, Spanish and Catalan noon Saturday); another follows in Picasso's footsteps and winds up at the Museu Picasso, entry to which is included in the price (€11/5; English 10.30am Tuesday to Sunday, Spanish and Catalan 11.30am Saturday); and a third takes in the main jewels of Modernisme (adult/child €9/3; English 4pm Friday and Saturday, Spanish 4pm Saturday, all tours at 6pm June-September). Finally, there's also a 'gourmet' tour (€11/5), which leads to traditional purveyors of fine foodstuffs, from chocolate to sausages, across the old city (English 11am Friday and Saturday, Spanish and Catalan 11am Saturday). It includes a couple of chances to taste some of the products. All tours last 1½ to two hours and start at the tourist office.

BCN Skytour (☎ 93 224 07 10; www.cathelicopters.com; Heliport, Passeig de l'Escullera; €80; 10am-7pm daily) A 10-minute thrill at 800m above the city in a helicopter will give a real bird's eye view of the city. You can take the golondrina tour boats (p291) to the Heliport.

Bus Turistic (Map pp274-5; ☎ 010; www.tmb.net; 1 day adult/child €18/11, 2 consecutive days €22/14; 10am-7.45pm) This hop-on hop-off service covers three circuits (44 stops) linking virtually all the major tourist sights. Tourist offices, TMB transport authority offices and many hotels have leaflets explaining the system. Each of the two main circuits takes about two hours. The third circuit, from Port Olímpic to the Forum, runs from April to September and is less interesting. The service doesn't run on Christmas or New Year's days.

Catalunya Bus Turistic (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 285 38 34; www.tmb.net) Two day-tour routes leaving from Plaça de Catalunya (Tuesday to Sunday, April to October) for: Montserrat, Sitges and a visit to the Torres wine cellars

near Pacs del Penedès (€60, 9am to 8.30pm); Girona and Figueres (€60, 8.30am to 8.30pm).

My Favourite Things (☎ 637 265405, 678 542753; www.myft.net; tours €26-32) These people offer tours (with no more than 10 participants) based on numerous themes: anything from design to food, from roller-blading to sailing. Some of the more unusual activities cost more and times vary.

Saboroso.com (☎ 667 770492, 647 390134; www.saboroso.com; Carrer del Comte d'Urgell 45) Gastronomes can wander around the old town on a guided eating tour. You will visit various intriguing food stores, munch on tapas and so on. The cost depends on the content of the walking tour, which can last up to four hours (not all walking!). Expect to pay €80 to €150 a head including food.

Un Cotxe Menys (☎ 93 268 21 05; www.bicicletabarcelona.com; Carrer de l'Esparteria 3; tours €22; 10am-2pm Mon-Fri) This group organises three-hour bike tours around the old city, La Barceloneta, La Sagrada Família and Port Olímpic. There is no need to book unless you have a group of 15 or more. Tours take place at 11am daily throughout the year and at 4.30pm Friday to Monday from April to mid-September. The price includes a drink stop. Turn up to the meeting spot outside the tourist office on Plaça de Sant Jaume.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

April

Dia de Sant Jordi (23 April) This is the day of Catalonia's patron saint (George) and also the Day of the Book: men give women a rose, women give men a book, publishers launch new titles; La Rambla and Plaça de Sant Jaume are filled with book and flower stalls.

June

Dia de Sant Joan (24 June) This is a colourful midsummer celebration with bonfires, even in the squares of L'Eixample, and fireworks marking the evening preceding this holiday.

Dia per l'Alliberament Lesbià i Gai (Saturday nearest 28 June) The city's big gay and lesbian festival and parade.

June–August

Grec Arts Festival (late June to August) The Grec Arts Festival involves music, dance and theatre at many locations across the city.

August

Festa Major de Gràcia (around 15 August) A madcap local festival held in Gràcia, with decorated streets, dancing and concerts.

September

La Diada (11 September) Catalonia's national day, marking the fall of Barcelona in 1714, is a fairly solemn holiday in Barcelona.

GAY & LESBIAN BARCELONA

The city's tourist board publishes *Barcelona – The Official Gay and Lesbian Tourist Guide* bi-annually. A couple of informative free magazines are in circulation in gay bookshops and bars. One is the biweekly *Shan-guide*. It is jammed with listings and contact ads and aimed principally at readers in Barcelona and Madrid. The monthly *Mensual* (€2) is available at newsstands. There is an online version at www.mensual.com (in Spanish). For a listing of gay and lesbian websites, see p849.

Barcelona has a fairly busy gay scene, much of it concentrated in the 'Gaixample', between Carrer de Muntaner and Carrer de Balmes, around Carrer del Consell de Cent.

Arena (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 487 83 42; Carrer de Balmes 32; admission €5-10; 10am-11pm Tue-Sun) Popular with a young, cruisy gay crowd, Arena is one of the top clubs in town for boys seeking boys. Find 'em in the dark room, and keep an eye on Wednesday's drag shows.

Bacon Bear (Map pp274-5; Carrer de Casanova 64; 10am-2.30am) Every bear needs a cave, and this is a friendly one. It's really just a big bar for burly gay folk. Thursday night from 7pm to 10pm is happy hour(s).

Dietrich Gay Teatros Café (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 451 77 07; Carrer del Consell de Cent 255) It's show time at 1am, with at least one drag-queen gala a night at this cabaret-style locale dedicated to Marlene.

Metro (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 323 52 27; www.metrodiscobcn.com; Carrer de Sepúlveda 185; 10pm-midnight-5am) Metro attracts a casual gay crowd with its two dance floors, three bars and very dark room.

New Chaps (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 215 53 65; Avinguda Diagonal 395; 10pm-3am) Leather lovers get in some close-quarters inspection on the dance floor and more especially in the dark room.

Salvation (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 318 06 86; Ronda de Sant Pere 19-21; 10pm-midnight-5am Fri-Sun) Beautiful boys and fluttering fag hags crowd into this club, where the sexy-boy barmen will warm the hearts of some and the occasional naughty shows will do the rest.

Festes de la Mercè (around 24 September) The city's biggest party involves around four days of concerts, dancing, *castellers* (human castle-builders), a fireworks display synchronised with the Montjuïc fountains, dances of giants on the Saturday, and *correfocs* – a parade of firework-spitting dragons and devils from all over Catalonia, on the Sunday.

SLEEPING

There is no shortage of hotels (with new ones opening seemingly every five minutes) in Barcelona, but its continuing status as one of Europe's city-break getaway flavours-of-the-month and its busy trade fair calendar means that it is often a good idea to book in advance.

Those looking for cheaper accommodation close to the action should check out the Barri Gòtic and El Raval. Some good lower-end *pensiones* (small private hotels) are also scattered about L'Eixample. A growing range of boutique-style hotels with real charm in all categories has enriched the offerings in the past few years. A broad range of midrange and top-end places are spread across L'Eixample, most of them in easy striking distance of the old town, and there are some stunning waterfront options, although these are surprisingly rare.

Camping

The nearest camping grounds to Barcelona lie some way out of town. A couple are on the main coast road heading for Sitges.

Camping Masnou (☎ 93 555 15 03; Camí Fabra 33, El Masnou; 2-person sites with car €28.65; 1 year-round; p s) This is 11km northeast of the city, and only 200m from El Masnou train station (reached by *rodalies* trains from Catalunya station on Plaça de Catalunya). It offers some shade, is near the beach and is reasonable value.

Camping Tres Estrelles (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 633 06 37; Carretera C31, Km186.2, Viladecans; 2-person sites with car €33.70; 10am-mid-Mar-mid-Oct; p s i) This beachside camping ground is one of several located on a stretch starting about 12km southwest of Barcelona. It has shops, restaurants, bars, several pools and laundry facilities. There's a play area for kids and a basketball court. It's a comparatively green spot under shady pines. Bus L95 runs from the corner of Ronda de la Universitat and Rambla de Catalunya.

La Rambla MIDRANGE

Hotel Continental (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 301 25 70; www.hotelcontinental.com; La Rambla 138; s/d €75/95; a i) Rooms in this classic old Barcelona hotel

(where George Orwell stayed during the civil war) are spare but have romantic touches such as ceiling fans. Try for a double with balcony over La Rambla (for which you pay €10 extra). You can have breakfast in your room.

Hotel Oriente (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 302 25 58; www.husa.es; La Rambla 45; d €179.75; a) One of Barcelona's oldest hotels is built into the shell of a former convent, among whose most spectacular leftovers is the cloister that is now a skylit restaurant. Rooms are simple but pleasant with parquet floors.

Barri Gòtic

BUDGET

Alberg Hostel Itaca (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 301 97 51; www.itacahostel.com; Carrer de Ripoll 21; dm €17, d €48-60; i) This bright, quiet hostel option near the cathedral has spacious dorms (for six, eight and 12 people). If you want more privacy, a couple of doubles are also available. Breakfast costs €2, and you can make use of the upstairs kitchen.

Hostal Campi (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 301 35 45; hcampi@terra.es; Carrer de la Canuda 4; s/d without bathroom €25/46, d with bathroom €56) An excellent bottom-end deal. The best rooms are the doubles with their own loo and shower. Although basic, they are extremely roomy and bright.

Hostal Levante (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 317 95 65; www.hostallevante.com; Baixada de Sant Miquel 2; s/d without bathroom €33/56, d with bathroom €65; √) Rooms here come in all shapes and sizes. Most have old-style tile floors and many look on to the surrounding streets. Try for a double with a balcony.

MIDRANGE

Hotel California (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 317 77 66; www.hotelcaliforniabcn.com; Carrer d'En Rauric 14; s/d €65/95; a) A classic, central, gay-friendly establishment, the California offers simple but spotlessly kept rooms in light, neutral colours, with good-sized beds and a bustling breakfast room. Room service operates 24 hours.

Hotel Jordi (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 301 59 00; www.hoteljordi-barcelona.com; Plaça de Sant Josep Oriol 1; s/d €70/96; a) The best rooms in this attractively located spot are the doubles with a balcony over one of the prettiest squares in the city. The rest are fairly average.

TOP END

Hotel Neri (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 304 06 55; www.hotelneri.com; Carrer de Sant Sever 5; d from €248.25; a i √) Occupying a beautifully adapted, centuries-old building, this stunningly renovated medieval

mansion combines historic stone walls with sexy plasma TVs. Downstairs is a fine restaurant and you can take a drink and catch some rays on the roof deck.

El Raval

BUDGET

Alberg Center Rambles (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 412 40 69; www.tujuca.com; Carrer de l'Hospital 63; dm with breakfast up to €22.25; h 24hr; a i) This HI hostel is right in the thick of things, just off La Rambla. Beds are in single-sex dorms of four to 10 people. Safes and laundry facilities are available, and there are discounts for people under 26 and ISIC cardholders.

Hostal Gat Raval (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 481 66 70; www.gataccommodation.com; Carrer de Joaquim Costa 44; s/d without bathroom €38/54, d with bathroom €60; a i) They've opted for a pea-green and lemon-lime colour scheme in this hip young 2nd-floor *hostal*, deep in El Raval. Rooms are pleasant, secure and each behind a green door, but only some have private bathroom. Across the road you have a choice of busy bars to while away the evenings.

Hotel Peninsular (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 302 31 38; www.hpeninsular.com; Carrer de Sant Pau 34; s/d without bathroom €30/50, with bathroom €50/70; a) The star attraction of this one-time convent is the plant-draped atrium extending the full height of the hotel, at the bottom of which you take breakfast in the morning. Rooms are simple, clean and (mostly) spacious.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Aneto (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 301 99 89; www.hotelaneto.com; Carrer del Carme 38; s/d €50/70; a) This good midrange hotel, at the lower end of the scale, is nestled in a lively street, in one of the nicer parts of El Raval. The best rooms are the doubles with the shuttered street-side balconies.

Hostal Gat Xino (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 324 88 33; www.gataccommodation.com; Carrer de l'Hospital 149-155; s/d €60/80; a i) Better still than Gat Raval (above) is this newer version. The lime-green decor theme continues but rooms are more spacious and all have bathroom. There is even a suite with its own terrace (€120), with views to Montjuïc.

Hotel España (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 318 17 58; www.hotelespanya.com; Carrer de Sant Pau 9-11; s/d €80.25/112.35; a) The hotel is famous for its two marvellous dining rooms, designed by the Modernista architect Lluís Domènech i Montaner. One

has big sea-life murals by Ramon Casas; the other has floral tiling and a wood-beamed roof. The rooms are a little on the dingy side but have high ceilings and certainly exude the flavour of a past era.

Abba Rambla Hotel (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 505 54 00; www.abbaramblahotel.com; Rambla del Raval 4; s/d €96.30/112.35; a i p) Overlooking the human theatre of El Raval's grand pedestrian strip, the modern Abba Rambla Hotel offers sunny rooms with functional furniture and dark parquet floors.

Hotel Mesón de Castilla (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 318 21 82; www.husa.es; Carrer de Valldonzella 5; d €139.10; p a) Some characterful Modernista touches remain on the 1st floor of this elegant hotel. Heavy wooden furniture, across several timeless sitting rooms, contrasts with playful stained glass and murals, and Gaudiesque window mouldings. Rooms have a classic charm and lone travellers may get a modest cut off the price of a double. The best doubles are those with terraces out the back.

Hotel San Agustín (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 318 16 58; www.hotelsa.com; Plaça de Sant Agustí 3; s/d €112.35/149.80; a i √) This one-time 18th-century monastery opened as a hotel in 1840, making it the city's oldest (it's undergone various refits since then!). The location is perfect: a quick stroll off La Rambla, on a curious square. Consider an attic double, with a sloping ceiling and bird's-eye views.

TOP END

Casa Camper (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 342 62 80; www.camper.es; Carrer d'Elisabets 11; s/d €230.05/251.45; a i n) These designer digs, run by the Mallorcan shoe people in the better end of El Raval, offer rooms with a few surprises, like the Vinçon furniture. Across the corridor from each room itself is a separate, private sitting room, with balcony, TV and hammock.

La Ribera

BUDGET

Pensió 2000 (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 310 74 66; www.pensio2000.com; Carrer de Sant Pere més Alt 6; s/d without bathroom €40.70/51.40, with bathroom €51.40/72.80; i) Sitting in front of the Modernista chocolate box that is the Palau de la Música Catalana (p289), this cheerful *pensió* (small, private hotel), with its seven canary-yellow rooms, is a conveniently placed option. The best rooms have their own bathroom. You can also take time out on the little terrace.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hotel Banys Orientals (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 268 84 60; www.hotelbanysorientals.com; Carrer de l'Argenteria 37; s/d €85.60/101.65; a i) Cool blues and aquamarines combine with dark-hued parquet floors to lend this boutique beauty an understated charm. All rooms – admittedly on the small side, but impeccably presented – look onto the street or back lanes. Next door they have some bigger (duplex) and somewhat more expensive suites (€133.75). It remains one of the best deals in town.

MIDRANGE

Park Hotel (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 319 60 00; www.parkhotelbarcelona.com; Avinguda del Marqués de l'Argentera 11; s/d €128.40/165.85; p a √) This 1950s hotel, which oozes details of that period such as the angular spiral stairway, is a minor Barcelona landmark. Dark wood and fabrics dominate the rooms, some of which have terraces. The chic Abac restaurant downstairs (see p320) is also the hotel breakfast room.

Port Vell & the Coast

BUDGET

Hostel Sea Point (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 224 70 75; www.seapointhostel.com; Plaça del Mar 4; dm €23; i) What this youth hostel lacks in charm it makes up for in position. Set in an ugly high-rise and with rather tight dorms, it is right on the beach. The only other options in Barcelona that can make such a boast are five-star.

MIDRANGE

Hotel del Mar (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 319 33 02; www.gar.gallohotels.es; Plaça de Palau 19; s/d €120/152; a i) Recently converted into a comfortable mid-level spot, the 'Sea Hotel' is neatly placed between Port Vell and El Born. Some of the rooms in this classified building have balconies with waterfront views. It's no more than 10 minutes' walk from the beaches and seafood of La Barceloneta and the bars of El Born.

TOP END

Hotel Arts Barcelona (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 221 10 00; www.ritzcarlton.com; Carrer de la Marina 19-21; r €380-460; p a i s √) In one of the two sky-high towers that dominate Port Olímpic, these are Barcelona's most fashionable digs, frequented by VIPs from all over the planet. The rooms

have unbeatable views. Prices vary greatly according to the size and position of the rooms. You can indulge in all sorts of extras, from massages to your own private bath butler.

L'Eixample

BUDGET

Centric Point (Map pp272-3; % 93 231 20 45; www.centricpointhostel.com; Passeig de Gràcia 33; dm €19, d €45; j) This is your chance to stay on Barcelona's snootiest boulevard without paying commensurate rent! One of four hostels run by the same people, this one offers 400 beds in a Modernista building close to Plaça de Catalunya. Linen is supplied and there is a bar on the premises.

Hostal Neutral (Map pp272-3; % 93 487 63 90; hostalneutral@arrakis.es; La Rambla de Catalunya 42; s/d without bathroom €30/50) A reliable old-style option in a privileged and leafy location, this is a no-frills pit stop in a chichi part of town. It has a couple of microscopic singles without bathrooms but they are generally occupied. The doubles without a loo do have a shower.

Hostal Central (Map pp274-5; % 93 302 24 20; info@hostalcentral.com; Ronda de l'Universitat 11; s/d with bathroom €33/45, with bathroom €52/65) Spread out over several renovated flats, some of the larger rooms have charming terraces looking onto the admittedly noisy street. Lovingly restored mosaic or prim new parquet floors are a nice touch.

MIDRANGE

Hostal Windsor (Map pp272-3; % 93 215 11 98; Rambla de Catalunya 84; s/d €48.15/72.75) An immaculately maintained, elegant old *hostal*, the Windsor offers a good deal. The rooms facing the street are the brightest. Cheaper rooms without a bathroom are also available.

Hostal Goya (Map pp272-3; % 93 302 25 65; www.hostalgoya.com; Carrer de Pau Claris 74; s/d without bathroom €37.45/67, d with bathroom €75.45-88.30; a) Near Plaça de Catalunya, this place offers the option of tastefully renovated rooms (with stylish parquet floors and a pleasing, light colour scheme) or the somewhat tattier ones that may one day also be overhauled.

Hotel d'Uxelles (Map pp272-3; % 93 265 25 60; www.hotelduxelles.com; Gran Via de les Corts Catalanes 688; s/d €80.25/99.50; a j) Wrought-iron bedsteads are overshadowed by flowing drapes in rooms that each have their own personal décor (from blues and whites to beige-and-cream combos). Some have little terraces. Get a back room as Gran Via is incredibly noisy.

Hostal Palacios (Map pp272-3; % 93 301 37 92; www.hostalpalacios.com; Rambla de Catalunya 27; s €55-65, d €100, ste €150; a i) This classy *hostal* offers fine, sunny rooms with high ceilings and old-style furnishings. The 'suites', which can be taken as triples, are roomy and worth the extra outlay.

Hotel Constanza (Map pp272-3; % 93 270 19 10; www.hotelconstanza.com; Carrer de Bruc 33; s/d €107/128.40; j a) This boutique belle has stolen the heart of many a visitor to Barcelona. Even smaller singles are made to feel special with broad mirrors and strong colours (reds and yellows, with black furniture). Design touches abound, and little details like flowers in the bathroom add charm.

Hotel Cram (Map pp274-5; % 93 216 77 00; www.hotelcram.com; Carrer d'Aribau 54; s/d €145.50/163; s a i p) A magnificent 1892 façade hides a designer's dream, with beguiling, if somewhat smallish, rooms. A light, white and timber toned décor dominates. You'll love the high-pressure showers. Hang out on the roof terrace or dine downstairs in one the city's most exclusive restaurants, Gaig.

Hotel Catalonia Berna (Map pp272-3; % 93 272 00 50; www.hoteles-catalonia.com; Carrer de Roger de Llúria 60; d €184; s a i p) It is difficult to miss the intriguing, restored frescoes that grace the entire frontage of this historic corner building, which was one of the first to go up in L'Eixample in the 1860s. The rooms are less surprising but perfectly comfortable and with marble bathrooms.

Hotel Diagonal (Map pp268-9; % 93 489 53 00; www.hoteldiagonalbarcelona.com; Avinguda Diagonal 205; s/d €123.05/192.60; s i a p) Designed by local architect Juli Capella as an angular reply to its tubular neighbour, the Torre Agbar, the striking black-and-white exterior presages the designer interior, with purple lighted corridors leading to bright, light rooms, some with stunning views of the tower next door. **Hotel Axel** (Map pp274-5; % 93 323 93 93; www.hotelaxel.com; Carrer d'Aribau 33; s/d €133.75/197.95; a i s) Fashion-and gay-friendly, the sleek-lined, corner-block Axel offers modern touches in its designer rooms. Plasma-screen TVs and (in the double rooms) king-size beds are just some of the pluses. Take a break in the rooftop pool, the Finnish sauna or the Jacuzzi. Or sip a cocktail at the summer skybar.

Hotel Àmister (Map pp268-9; % 93 363 34 68; www.hotelamister.com; Avinguda de Roma 93-95; d €101.50-225; a i) On a corner block of a busy boulevard, this artsy (check the art out in the common

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hotel Omm (Map pp272-3; % 93 445 40 00; www.hotelomm.es; Carrer del Rosselló 265; d €224.70-449.40; a s w) The balconies look like strips of metallic skin peeled back from the shiny surface of the hotel – the sort of idea a latter-day Modernista might have had! Light, clear tones dominate in the ultra-modern rooms, and the sprawling foyer bar has become a popular evening meeting point for guests and outsiders alike. Behind the beautiful-people bar is a one-Michelin-star restaurant (meals €100-150). Hell, this place even has its own club downstairs.

areas and some rooms) digs offers light-filled rooms and frills including (depending on the offer you get) free daily paper. Prices vary wildly depending on season and other factors. A handful of more costly rooms are more like compact apartments.

Hotel Prestige (Map pp272-3; % 93 272 41 80, 902 200414; www.prestigepaseodegracia.com; Passeig de Gràcia 62; d €173.35-229; a i p w) You're in a 21st-century designer hotel (encased in a well-preserved 1930s edifice), with Bang & Olufsen TVs and soft back-lighting above the beds. Inside the block is a pretty garden and among the hotel's amenities is Zeroom, a library and music room to chill in.

Hotel Hispanos Siete Suiza (Map pp272-3; % 93 208 20 51; www.barcelona19apartments.com; Carrer de Sicília 255; apt €192.60-256.80; p a i) Near La Sagrada Família, this hotel's apartments have two double rooms and separate bathrooms, a lounge, a fully equipped kitchen and a terrace. The only drawback is that it's a minor hike from the heart of the action.

TOP END

Hotel Claris (Map pp272-3; % 93 487 62 62; www.derbyhotels.es; Carrer de Pau Claris 150; d from €310; p a s w) Inside the fine 19th-century Palacio Verdura lurks one of the city's best-known designer digs (with a permanent art collection on show). Décor varies greatly: some rooms are strikingly modern, while others cede to more classic tastes in luxury.

Gràcia

Hotel Casa Fuster (Map pp272-3; % 93 255 30 00; www.hotelescenter.es; Passeig de Gràcia 132; d from €412;

a s i p w) It is hard to believe the wrecking ball once threatened this Modernista mansion turned luxury hotel. Standard rooms are plush if smallish. Period features have been lovingly restored and complemented with hydro-massage tubs, plasma TVs and king-sized beds.

Tibidabo & Around

BUDGET

Alberg Mare de Déu de Montserrat (Map pp268-9; % 93 210 51 51; www.tujuca.com; Passeig de la Mare de Déu del Coll 41-51; dm up to €22.25) Four kilometres north of the city, this hostel's main building is a magnificent former mansion with a Mudéjar-style lobby. Most rooms sleep six. Sitting outside on balmy summer nights makes a pleasant alternative to a trip into town. There are discounts for people under 26 and ISIC cardholders. Take the metro to Vallcarca station and then bus 28 or 92.

Apartments

An alternative accommodation option can be short-term apartment rental. Typical prices are around €80 to €100 for two people per night. If you're looking to do a short-term house swap, check out the ads on www.loquo.com. There are scores of rental services:

Apartment Barcelona (Map pp272-3; % 93 215 79 34; www.apartmentbarcelona.com; Carrer de València 286)
Barcelona Apartments (Map pp268-9; % 93 414 55 28; www.barcelonaapartments.com; Via Augusta 173)
Barcelona On Line (Map pp272-3; % 93 343 79 93/94; www.barcelona-on-line.es; Gran Via de les Corts Catalanes 662)

Long-Term Rentals

The **Universitat de Barcelona** (Map pp274-5; % 93 402 11 00; Gran Via de les Corts Catalanes 585), the **British Council** (Map pp268-9; % 93 241 99 77; Carrer d'Amigo 83) and **International House** (Map pp274-5; % 93 268 45 11; Carrer de Trafalgar 14) have noticeboards with ads for flat shares.

Another option for students coming to Barcelona to study is **Rent a Bedroom** (Map pp272-3; % 93 217 88 12; www.rentabedroom.com; Avinguda del Príncep d'Astúries 52). Staff can organise rooms in share houses for between €300 and €700, inclusive of bills.

The free English-language monthly *Barcelona Metropolitan*, found in bars, some hotels, and occasionally at tourist offices, carries rental classifieds in English, as does another monthly freebie, *Catalunya Classified*.

Check out the ads at www.loquo.com too. Otherwise, get hold of *Anuntis*, the weekly classifieds paper. The last few pages of the *Suplement Immobiliària* (Real-Estate Supplement) carry ads for shared accommodation under the heading *lloguer/hostes i vivendes a compartir*. Count on rent of €300 a month or more. To this, you need to add your share of bills (gas, electricity, water, phone and *comunidad* – building maintenance).

EATING

Barcelona was always a good place to eat but in recent years it has evolved into something of a foodies' paradise on earth, combining rich Catalan cooking traditions with a new wave of cutting-edge chefs at the vanguard of what has been dubbed *nueva cocina española*. The city has taken on quite a cosmopolitan hue too. Whereas Thai, Japanese and other exotic cuisines were barely represented in the mid-1990s, they are now springing up all over the city.

The main concentration of new and experimental cuisine is in El Born, the trendy, BoHo lower side of La Ribera in the old city. More traditional restaurants, often not too demanding fiscally speaking, are scattered across the Barri Gòtic, and there are some gems in El Raval too.

Gràcia is also full of tempting little eateries, among them a legion of Middle Eastern and Greek joints.

Across the broad expanse of L'Eixample and the Zona Alta, and further outlying

districts, you'll find all sorts. The majority of the seriously top-level joints are to be found secreted away in such areas. You need to know where you are going, however, as wandering about aimlessly and picking whatever takes your fancy is not as feasible as in the old city.

Cartas (menus) may be in Catalan, Spanish or both; some establishments also have foreign-language menus.

Barri Gòtic

BUDGET

Can Conesa (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 310 57 95; Carrer de la Llibreteria 1; bocadillos & toasted sandwiches €2.50-4.50; 1 Mon-Sat) They have been doling out delicious *bocadillos* (bread rolls with filling), frankfurters and toasted sandwiches here for more than 50 years – *barcelonins* swear by it and queue for it.

Maoz (Map pp278-9; Carrer de Ferran 13; falafels €2.90-4; 1 noon-2am; ✓) There's a lot of goodness packed into a tiny space here. The extent to which you stuff yourself depends on just how much of the fillings you can cram into your pita.

Bagel Shop (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 302 41 61; Carrer de la Canuda 25; meals €8-10; 1 9.30am-9.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun; 1) Searching for a smoked salmon and cream cheese bagel? You've found the spot for this and a whole array of savoury and sweet bagels using different types of bread.

Bodega La Palma (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 315 06 56; Carrer de la Palma de Sant Just 7; meals €10-15; 1 lunch &

dinner Mon-Fri, lunch Sat) Time stopped still in this ageless tavern where platters of cheese and cured ham rule the roost, washed down with throaty house red tapped directly from the enormous barrels that line the wall.

MIDRANGE

Bar Celta (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 315 00 06; Carrer de la Mercè 16; meals €20; 1 noon-midnight) Specialists in *pulpo* (octopus) and other seaside delights from Galicia in the country's northwest, the waiters waste no time in serving up bottles of crisp white Ribeiro wine to wash down the *raciones* (large tapas serving).

Agut (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 315 17 09; Carrer d'en Gignàs 16; meals €25-30; 1 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun; 1) Contemporary paintings set a contrast with the fine traditional Catalan dishes offered in this timeless restaurant. Start with a platter of cured ham, and proceed with a menu of meat or fish – *suquet de rap* (monkfish stew, €18.30) is succulent.

Restaurant Pitarra (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 301 16 47; Carrer d'Avinyó 56; meals €30; 1 Mon-Sat Sep-Jul; 1) So many local politicians can't be wrong. Judging by the photos on the wall, the entire Catalan parliament has passed through here for hearty Catalan fare, whether seafood or pigs' trotters.

Pla (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 412 65 52; Carrer de Bellafila 5; meals €35; 1 dinner; 1) In this modern den of inventive cooking, and music worthy of a club, the chefs present deliciously strange combinations such as *bacallà amb salsa de pomes verdes* (cod in a green apple sauce). Exotic meats like kangaroo turn up on the menu too, and it's a good idea to let yourself be guided by the waiters.

Els Quatre Gats (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 302 41 40; Carrer de Montsió 3 bis; meals €30-40; 1 1pm-1am; 1) Once a turn-of-the-20th-century hangout for the city's avant-garde artists (see opposite), Els Quatre Gats is full of charming tile and timberwork. It also displays reproductions of some of its former customers' portraits, painted by other former customers. Head out past the bar to the rear dining area, gathered around a courtyard.

El Raval

BUDGET

Buenas Migas (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 412 16 86; Plaça del Bonsuccés 6; meals €10-15) This charming hole-in-the-wall (part of a growing chain), in a busy little square just off La Rambla, offers decent

focaccia, pizza slices and other snacks that quickly constitute a full meal.

Organic (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 301 09 02; Carrer de la Junta de Comerç 11; lunch €8-12, dinner €20-25; 1 1pm-midnight; 1 ✓) A long sprawl of a vegetarian diner, Organic is always full. Choose from a limited range of options that change from day to day, and tuck into the all-you-can-eat salad bar in the middle of the restaurant. At night prices go up a tad and a full waiting service operates.

Mesón David (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 441 59 34; Carrer de les Carretes 63; meals €15; 1 Thu-Tue) With its timber ceiling and chaotic feel, this is a great slice of old Spain. Plonk yourself down on a bench for gregarious dining. It's no-nonsense cooking here, and house specialities include *Jec-hazo asado*, a great clump of roast suckling lamb (€6).

Bar Pinotxo (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 317 17 31; Mercat de la Boqueria; meals €15; 1 6am-5pm Mon-Sat Sep-Jul) Of the half-dozen or so tapas bars and informal eateries scattered about the market, this one near the Rambla entrance is the best known and most popular.

MIDRANGE

Restaurant El Cafetí (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 329 24 19; Pas-satge de Bernardí; meals €25-30; 1 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun; 1) This diminutive eatery is filled with antique furniture and offers traditional local cooking, with one or two unorthodox variations. Paella and other rice dishes dominate. It is down an arcade just off Carrer de Sant Rafael.

Biblioteca (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 412 62 21; Carrer de la Junta de Comerç 28, meals €35; 1 Tue-Sat) Exposed-brick and creamy-white décor dominate in the 'Library', where the food represents a broad sweep across Spain, with careful creative touches and a good wine list. A good sample is *bacallà confitat amb suc d'escarrelans i llegums de temporada* (pickled salted cod with crayfish juice and seasonal vegetables).

Ca l'Isidre (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 441 11 39; Carrer de les Flors 12; meals €45; 1 Mon-Sat) Ca l'Isidre is one of those old-world restaurants where immaculately kept dining areas are dominated by warm timber and tiles. Chefs use only the best of ingredients gathered in the morning at La Boqueria market to produce quality local cuisine, and white-jacketed waiters deliver the goods with silken alacrity to your table.

AN ARTISTS' LAIR

When up and coming Modernista architect Josep Puig i Cadafalch finished his first building in the heart of the Barri Gòtic in the 1890s, a rather self-possessed group of local artists thought it would make the perfect spot for a permanent meeting place.

Barcelona dandy Ramon Casas and his pal Santiago Rusiñol, the city's two leading artists of the day and joint heads of the Modernisme movement in painting, teamed up with good friends Miquel Utrillo and Pere Romeu to open a new tavern here in 1897. They called it Els Quatre Gats (The Four Cats) in allusion to its four founders and to Le Chat Noir, an artistic café in Montmartre, Paris. Idiomatically, it means 'a handful of people, a minority', which is no doubt how they and their trendy clientele saw themselves.

Romeu, the manager, was a colourful character equally devoted to cabaret and cycling, and under his stewardship the place quickly became a meeting, drinking and cavorting place of young artists, writers, actors, musicians and their circles.

The group published its own magazine and staged exhibitions, recitals and even shadow-puppet shows. Picasso's first exhibition was held here in 1900, and included drawings of many of the customers. The fun came to an end all too soon. Els Quatre Gats closed in 1903. Later it was used as an art gallery, before its present incarnation as a restaurant (see review, opposite).

TOP END

Casa Leopoldo (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 441 30 14; Carrer de Sant Rafael 24; meals €50; lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun; ☎) Several rambling dining areas with magnificent tiled walls and exposed timber-beam ceilings, make this a fine option. The seafood menu is extensive and the local wine list strong. This is an old-town classic beloved of writers and artists down the decades.

La Ribera

BUDGET

Casa Delfin (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 319 50 88; Passeig del Born 36; menú €8.50; ☎ 6am-7pm Mon-Sat) Under siege from triremes of ultra avant-garde cookeries, the 'Dolphin House' continues to do what it has always done best – a bountiful lunch from an extensive menu of Spanish favourites. No frills, just good tucker amid all the fancy folk.

El Xampanyet (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 319 70 03; Carrer de Montcada 22; meals €15; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) Nothing much has changed in this, one of the city's best-known *cava* bars. Plant yourself at the bar or seek out a table jammed up against the old-style tiled walls for a glass or three of *cava* and an assortment of tapas, such as the tangy *boquerons en vinagre* (white anchovies in vinegar).

MIDRANGE

Habana Vieja (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 268 25 04; Carrer dels Banys Vells 2; meals €20; ☎ Mon-Sat) This Cuban hideaway offers island faves like stringy meat – *ropa vieja* ('old clothes', €13) and rice dishes. With its antique light fittings and predilection for rickety timber furnishings, this old Ribera house could easily be an Old Habana eatery.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hofmann (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 319 58 89; Carrer de l'Argenteria 74; meals €50-60; ☎ Mon-Fri; ☎) Discreetly tucked away, upstairs in the plant-filled annexe to one of the city's renowned cuisine schools, is this refined restaurant. Some of the nation's great chefs learned the trade here, and you will not be disappointed with the present students' efforts. An imaginative and constantly changing menu keeps chefs and diners on their toes. Special care is put into the desserts, and there's a lunch *menú del dia* for around €30.

La Flauta Mágica (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 268 46 94; Carrer dels Banys Vells 18; meals €20-25; ☎ dinner; ☎ ✓) You feel instantly cheerful on entering this salon, which caters to vegetarians and carnivores alike. How about *rice 'n' curry del país de la eternal sonrisa* (from the land of the eternal smile)? The 'magic flute' itself is an ingenious cheese and carrot roll.

Pla de la Garsa (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 315 23 13; Carrer dels Assaonadors 13; meals €25; ☎ dinner; ☎) This 17th-century house is ideal for a romantic dinner. Timber beams, a peppering of tables around the dining area and soft ambient music combine to make an enchanting setting for traditional Catalan cooking. The *tast selecte* (€23.90), a tasting menu, is a good way to get a broad idea of what they cook up here.

Santa Maria (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 315 12 27; Carrer de Comerç 17; meals €30-40; ☎ Tue-Sat) It comes as no surprise that this irreverent little gastrodome should be located snugly amid other avant-garde El Born kitchens. Here your bar snack is as likely to be a serving of Sichuan pepper yucca chips or spicy mussels with fried plantain.

Centre Cultural Euskal Etxea (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 310 21 85; Plaça de Montcada 1; tapas €15-20, meals €30; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) Barcelona has plenty of Basque and pseudo-Basque eateries, but this is the real deal. It captures the feel of San Sebastián better than many of its newer competitors. Choose your *pintxos* (snacks), sip *txacoli* wine, and keep the toothpicks so the staff can count them up and work out your bill.

Comerc 24 (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 319 21 02; Carrer del Comerç 24; meals €35-45; ☎ Tue-Sat; ☎) The edgy black-red-grey décor in the rear dining area lends this culinary cauldron a New York feel. Chef Carles Abellán whips up some eccentric dishes, inspired by everything from sushi to *crostini*. Plump for the tasting menu (€48) and leave it all up to Abellán.

Cal Pep (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 310 79 61; Plaça de les Olles 8; meals €45; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, dinner Mon Sep-Jul; ☎) This gourmet tapas bar is one of the most popular in town and difficult to snaffle a spot in. Pep recommends *cloïsses amb pernil* (clams and ham – seriously! – at €11.70) or the *trifàsic*, a combo of calamari, whitebait and prawns (€11.10).

TOP END

Àbac (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 319 66 00; Carrer del Rec 79-89; meals €90-100; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, dinner Mon,

closed Easter & Aug) Minimalist designer décor is matched by some of the best designer eating in the city. You never quite know what might emerge from the kitchen, but it does so with a rare aplomb.

La Barceloneta & the Coast

BUDGET

Can Maño (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 319 30 82; Carrer del Baluard 12; meals €15; ☎ Mon-Sat) You'll need to be prepared to wait, before being squeezed in at a packed table for a raucous night of *racions* (posted on a board at the back) over a bottle of *turbio* – a cloudy white plonk. You can breakfast on *gambes* (prawns) too if you want!

El Chiringuito de Moncho's (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 221 14 01; Avinguda Litoral 36; meals €15; ☎ noon-1am; ☎) The Moncho's seafood chain is cheap and cheerful. There are no designer frills in this good-natured, noisy barnyard of a place, where you can feast on fish and seafood by the sea without blowing your budget. The kitchen is fired up all day.

MIDRANGE

Can Ros (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 221 45 79; Carrer de l'Almirall Aixada 7; meals €25-30; ☎ Thu-Tue; ☎) Little has changed over the decades in this seafood fave. In a restaurant where the décor is a reminder of simpler times, a simple rule guides – serve up succulent fresh fish cooked with a light touch.

Agua (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 225 12 72; Passeig Marítim 30; meals €30; ☎) Head for this beachside dining area, gaily decorated with marine motifs, for bright Mediterranean dishes like *arroz con alcachofas, gambas y setas* (rice with artichokes, prawns and mushrooms).

Suquet de l'Almirall (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 221 62 33; Passeig de Joan de Borbó 65; meals €45-50; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun; ☎) A family business run by one of the acolytes of Ferran Adrià's El Bulli restaurant (see p356), the order of the day is top-class seafood. A starter of *ventresca de tonyina* (the prized and tastiest tuna meat), followed perhaps by a house speciality such as *arros a la barca* (rice laden with various types of fish, squid and tomato). The restaurant is closed for two weeks in August.

TOP END

Torre d'Alta Mar (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 221 00 07; Torre de Sant Sebastià, Passeig de Joan Borbó 88; meals €70-80;

☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Mon; ☎) Head up to the top of the Torre de Sant Sebastià and take a ringside seat for the best views of the city, and seafood. The setting alone makes this ideal for impressing a date.

L'Exemple

BUDGET

Can Maño (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 454 59 25; Carrer de Muntaner 109; meals €10-12; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat; ☎ ✓) A limited and varying *menú del dia* (€9.10) is offered in this proper little place, and while servings are hardly gargantuan, the grub is tasty. The menu changes regularly but you might encounter a scrumptious *paella d'arros integral amb verdure*s (whole rice vegetable paella).

Amaltea (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 454 86 13; Carrer de la Diputació 164; meals €10-15; ☎ Mon-Sat; ☎ ✓) The weekday set lunch (€9) offers a series of dishes that change frequently with the seasons. Savour an *escalopa de seitan* (seitan escalope) and *empanadillas* (pastry pockets stuffed with spinach or hiziki algae and tofu).

MIDRANGE

La Rita (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 487 23 76; Carrer d'Aragó 279; meals €20; ☎) Locals love to line up to dine here, if only because the price-quality rapport is excellent. So join the queue to get inside this boisterous restaurant. You have a choice between classic local cooking and some more inventive dishes, and there's a great *menú del dia* (€7.90).

El Rincón Maya (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 451 39 46; Carrer de València 183; meals €20; ☎ Tue-Sun) The setting in this Mexican restaurant is warm and crowded. The nachos, guacamole and fajitas burst with flavour, and you may have to queue for a table.

Cerveceria Catalana (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 216 03 68; Carrer de Mallorca 236; meals €20-25; ☎) This 'Catalan brewery' is great for its cornucopia of tapas (€3 to €4.50) and *montaditos* (canapés, €1.50-2.50). You can sit at the bar, outside, or in the restaurant at the back. The variety of hot tapas, mouth-watering salads and other snacks draws a well-dressed crowd.

Relais de Venise (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 467 21 62; Carrer de Pau Claris 142; meals €20; ☎ Sep-Jul; ☎) There's just one dish, a succulent beef entrecôte with a secret 'sauce Porte-Maillot' (named after the location of the original restaurant in Paris), chips and salad. It is served in slices and in two waves so that it doesn't go cold.

Koyuki (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 237 84 90; Carrer de Còrsega 242; meals €20-30; 𠄎 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, dinner Sun) Take a seat at one of the long tables in this basement Japanese eatery that is as popular with Japanese visitors as it is with Catalans in the know. The *tempura udon* (€7.80) is a hearty thick noodle option.

Inopia (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 424 52 31; Carrer de Tamarit 104; meals €25-30; 𠄎 dinner Tue-Fri, lunch & dinner Sat) Albert Adrià, brother of star chef Ferran, has his hands full with this constantly busy, corner, gourmet-tapas temple. Try the lightly fried, tempura-style vegetables, olive selections and *pincho moruno de pollo* (chicken on a skewer).

Chicoa (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 453 11 23; Carrer d'Aribau 73; meals €35; 𠄎 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun; 𠄎) For good traditional Catalan cooking, locals keep coming back to Chicoa. A speciality of the house is anything to do with *bacallà* (salted cod).

El Peixerot (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 424 69 69; Av de Tarragona 177; meals €40-50; 𠄎) With its sea-blue décor and long-standing fame for fresh seafood (sold by weight) and rice dishes, this is a quality stop in the rather unlikely train-station area.

Cata 1.81 (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 323 68 18; Carrer de València 181; meals €45-50; 𠄎 dinner Mon-Sat Sep-Jul) Call ahead and see if you can get the back room behind the kitchen. Surrounded by shelves of fine wines (which are a serious element of a meal here) packed to the rafters, you will be treated to a series of dainty gourmet dishes, such as *truita amb tòfona* (a thick potato tortilla with a delicate trace of truffle).

Cinc Sentits (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 323 94 90; Carrer d'Aribau 58; meals €40-50; 𠄎 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun, closed Easter & Aug) Indulge in one of three adventurous tasting menus (from €26 to €50) of small, experimental dishes at 'Five Senses'.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Restaurant de l'Escola de Restauració i Hostalatge (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 453 29 03; Carrer de Muntaner 70-72; meals €30-35; 𠄎 Mon-Fri Sep-Jul; 𠄎) Greenery hangs from the ceiling and contemporary art from the walls. The cooks-in-training bend over backwards to produce a combination of local classics, such as *fricandó de vedella amb moixerons* (veal fricandeau with St George mushrooms), fish of the day and more modern creative dishes.

TOP END

Sauç (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 321 01 89; Passatge de Lluís Pellicer 12; meals €60-70; 𠄎 Tue-Sat; 𠄎) Pop down into this back lane basement place and enter an upcoming gourmet landmark. The décor is sober but the dishes are sins for the senses. The €56 tasting menu comprises an appetiser and five courses, followed by a cheese selection and two desserts, which is a great way to get a broad impression of what happens here!

Gràcia

BUDGET

Sol Soler (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 217 44 40; Plaça del Sol 21-22; meals €15; 𠄎 dinner) This is a pleasant corner of a busy, bar-lined square. Gather around the convivial marble-top tables for a drink and enticing, inventive snacks, which you choose at the bar.

MIDRANGE

Goliard (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 207 31 75; Carrer de Progrés 6; meals €30; 𠄎 lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat & Sun; 𠄎) This quiet diner is a haven of exquisite designer cooking at modest prices. Try the *lassanya de pops i patates* (a lasagne in which sliced potatoes take the place of pasta, and slightly spicy, tender octopus is the meat). Book ahead.

Envalira (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 218 58 13; Plaça del Sol 13; meals €25; 𠄎 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) An inconspicuous, old-time eatery, Envalira specialises in fish and rice dishes, from *arròs a la milanesa* (a savoury rice dish with chicken, pork and a light cheese gratin, €10) to *bullit de lluç*, a slice of white hake boiled with herb-laced rice and a handful of clams (€11).

Montjuïc & Poble Sec

MIDRANGE

Quimet i Quimet (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 442 31 42; Carrer del Poeta Cabanyes 25; tapas €2-3; 𠄎 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun; 𠄎) Quimet i Quimet is proof that good things come in small packages. Cram into this bottle-lined quad for gourmet tapas, fine wine and even a specially made dark Belgian beer.

Restaurant Elche (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 441 30 89; Carrer de Vila i Vila 71; meals €25) With tables spreading over two floors, and old-world style in service and settings, this spot has been doing some of Barcelona's best paella (of various types) and *fideuà* (vaguely similar to paella, but made with vermicelli noodles) since the 1960s.

Self-Catering

Shop in the Mercat de la Boqueria (Map pp278-9; La Rambla de Sant Josep; 𠄎 8am-8pm Mon-Sat), one of the world's great produce markets, and complement with any other necessities from a local supermarket. Handy ones include **Champion** (Map pp278-9; La Rambla dels Estudis 113; 𠄎 9am-10pm Mon-Sat), near the northern end of La Rambla, and **Superservis** (Map pp278-9; Carrer d'Avinyó 13; 𠄎 8am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat), in the heart of Barri Gòtic.

For freshly baked bread, head for a *for* or *panaderia*. For a gourmet touch, the food sections of El Corte Inglés department stores (p329) have some tempting local and imported goodies.

DRINKING

Barcelona's bars run the gamut from wood-panelled wine cellars to bright waterfront places and trendy designer bars. Most are at their liveliest from about 10pm to 2am or 3am, especially from Thursday to Saturday, as people get into their night-time stride.

The old town is jammed with places. The hippest area since the late 1990s has been El Born, in the lower end of La Ribera, but there is an impressive scattering of bars across the lower half of the Barri Gòtic and in El Raval too. The latter especially is home to some fine old drinking institutions as well as a new wave of funky, inner city locales. The rapid rise in tourism since the late 1990s has, however, had the effect of turning the old-time nightlife scene into one dominated largely by foreigners.

A word of warning on La Rambla: While it can be pleasant enough to tinkle here, few locals would even think about it and bar prices tend to be exorbitant – €25 for a carafe of sangria is not unheard of.

Elsewhere, the series of squares and some streets of Gràcia are loaded up with bars. In the broad expanse of L'Eixample you need to know where to go. The upper end of Carrer d'Aribau is the busiest area (late in the week), along with the area around its continuation northwest of Avinguda Diagonal. The main concentration of gay bars is on and around Carrer del Consell de Cent, between Carrer de Balmes and Carrer de Muntaner.

La Rambla

Café Zurich (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 317 91 53; Carrer de Pelai 39; coffee & pastry €3-4; 𠄎 8pm-midnight) This is a prime spot, virtually on Plaça de Catalunya, for coffee, a paper and the passing

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Barcelona Pipa Club (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 302 47 32; Plaça Reial 3; 𠄎 Mon-Sat) This pipe-smokers' club is like someone's flat, with all sorts of interconnecting rooms and knick-knacks – notably the pipes after which the place is named. You buzz at the door and head two floors up. It is for members only until 11pm. Prop up one of the cosy bars or plunge into a lounge, but make sure you explore the whole labyrinth.

street theatre at this crucial city crossroads. It's a visible place to meet and start a night out downtown.

Café de l'Òpera (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 317 75 85; La Rambla 74) Opposite the Gran Teatre del Liceu opera house is La Rambla's most interesting café. Founded in 1876, it is pleasant for an early evening tippie or coffee and croissants. Head upstairs for a seat overlooking the boulevard.

Barri Gòtic

Café Royale (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 412 14 33; Carrer Nou de Zurbarano 3; 𠄎 6pm-2.30am) A high blue-fabric bench covers the wall opposite the bar, so grab a lounge in the spacious hardwood back area. Later on everyone gets in the mood for dancing.

Dot Light Club (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 302 70 26; Carrer Nou de Sant Francesc 7; 𠄎 8pm-3am) Dot remains one of the hippest club-style hangouts in this part of town. Each night the DJs change the musical theme, ranging from deep funk to deeper house.

La Clandestina (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 319 05 33; Baixada de Viladecols 2bis; 𠄎 10am-10pm Sun-Thu, 9am-midnight Fri & Sat) Opt for tea, a beer or a Middle Eastern *narghile* (the most elaborate way to smoke). You can even get a head massage or eat cake in this chilled tea shop.

La Macarena (Map pp278-9; Carrer Nou de Sant Francesc 5; admission up to €5; 𠄎 11.30pm-4.30am) A dark dance space where you can sit at the bar and quietly observe the goings on, which are almost in your face in this space-challenged locale that hovers between bar and club with DJs' electro and house offerings.

Sinatra (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 412 52 79; Carrer de les Heures 4-10; 𠄎 9pm-2.30am) A block from Plaça Reial is this busy corner locale. The fauna is largely comprised of foreigners who flop into splotchy cowhide-pattern lounges, perch on

BEER FOR BARCELONA

Moritz is back! This crisp lager, once Barcelona's most popular beer is available again after a hiatus of nearly 30 years. Brewed since 1856 by a company founded by Louis Moritz, an Alsatian brewer. The Barcelona brewery went belly-up in 1978 but now the descendants of Moritz (who kept the brand) are back in action. The **old brewery buildings** (Map pp274-5; Ronda Sant Antoni 39-43) are being turned into a cultural centre (under the direction of French architect Jean Nouvel), with restaurant, small-scale public demonstration brewery and museum, in addition to the company headquarters. The reborn beer first started appearing in bars in mid-2004. Curiously, although sold as a wholly Catalan product (the company claims the beer is brewed with Font d'Or mineral water from Montseny, north of Barcelona), it is actually made at La Zaragozaana brewery in Zaragoza (Aragón), a point that has irritated some local purists. Why they should be so upset is something of a mystery as the beer itself is really quite a tasty drop.

long stools beneath the mirror ball and sip Desperados beer.

El Raval

Bar Marsella (Map pp278-9; Carrer de Sant Pau 65; 10pm-2am Mon-Thu, 10pm-3am Fri & Sat) In business since 1820, the Marsella specialises in *absenta* (absinthe), a beverage known for its supposed narcotic qualities. Nothing much has changed here since the 19th century, and the local tittle certainly has a kick.

Boadas (Map pp278-9; 93 318 88 26; Carrer dels Tallers 1; 11 Mon-Sat) Inside the unprepossessing entrance is one of the city's oldest cocktail bars (famed for its daiquiris). The bow-tied waiters have been serving up their poison since 1933, and both Joan Miró and Hemingway tipped here.

Casa Almira (Map pp274-5; 93 318 99 17; Carrer de Joaquim Costa 33) In business since the 1860s, this unchanged corner drinkery is dark and intriguing, with Modernista décor and a mixed clientele.

Corto Club (Map pp274-5; 93 302 27 95; Carrer dels Tallers 68; admission sometimes €5; 10pm-5am) Here's a late-night bar you can stumble into without the trouble of lining up to enter a club. Music, sometimes live, ranges from funk to bossa nova.

Kentucky (Map pp278-9; 93 318 28 78; Carrer de l'Arc del Teatre 11; 11 Tue-Sat) All sorts of odd bods from the *barri* (district) and beyond squeeze in to this long, narrow bar late at night. Opening times (which can mean until 5am) depend in part on the presence (or rather absence) of the law in the street.

London Bar (Map pp278-9; 93 318 52 61; Carrer Nou de la Rambla 34-36; 11 7.30pm-5am Tue-Sun) If you still need a drink after 3am this is your best bet. Open since 1909, it started as a hangout for circus

hands and has some Modernista touches and the occasional music act way out back.

Zentraus (Map pp278-9; 93 443 80 78; www.zentraus.com; Rambla del Raval 41; 11 Tue-Sat) Mellow drum 'n' bass earlier in the week rises to a deep-house crescendo on Saturdays in this deep, dark early-evening dance-and-drink den. You can get a bite to eat at lunchtime too.

La Ribera

Gimlet (Map pp278-9; 93 310 10 27; Carrer del Rec 24) White-jacketed bar staff, with all the appropriate aplomb, will whip you up a gimlet, or any other classic cocktail your heart desires (around €6) as you crowd in around the curving bar.

La Vinya Del Senyor (Map pp278-9; 93 310 33 79; Plaça de Santa Maria del Mar 5; 11 noon-1am Tue-Sun) The wine list is as long as *War & Peace*, and the terrace lies in the shadow of Santa Maria del Mar. You can crowd inside the tiny wine bar itself or take a bottle upstairs to the one available table.

Va de Vi (Map pp278-9; 93 319 29 00; Carrer dels Banys Vells 16; 11 6pm-2am) The wonderful Gothic setting, all heavy stone arches, is perfect for tasting a broad selection of Spanish wines. You can also order nibbles.

Port Vell & the Coast

The Barcelona beach scene, apart from the roasting of countless bodies, warms up to dance sounds in the summer months. In addition to waterfront restaurants and bars (especially around Port Olímpic), a string of *chiringuitos* (little provisional bars) sets up along the beaches. Most serve food and some turn into mini-clubs on the sand from the afternoon and on to about 1am. Most are strung along from Platja de Bogatell to Platja de Nova Mar Bella.

CDLC (Map pp268-9; 93 224 04 70; Passeig Marítim 32; 11 noon-3am) Seize the night by the scruff at the Carpe Diem Lounge Club, the perfect place for your first drink lounging back in semi-Oriental surrounds. You could choose to eat here too, but tables are shuffled away about midnight. Ideal for a warm-up before heading to the nearby clubs.

Daguiri (Map pp268-9; 93 221 51 09; Carrer de Grau i Torras 59; 11 11am-1am Thu-Mon) Foreigners who have found seaside nirvana in Barcelona, hang out in this chilled bar back from the beach. A curious crowd of crusties and switched-on dudes chats over light meals and a beer.

L'Eixample & Around

Berlin (Map pp272-3; 93 200 65 42; Carrer de Muntaner 240; 11 10am-1.30am Mon-Wed, 10am-3am Thu-Sat) This elegant corner chill-out space offers views over the Diagonal, a cluster of tables outside, and designer lounges downstairs.

Dry Martini (Map pp272-3; 93 217 50 72; Carrer d'Aribau 162-166) Waiters will serve up the best dry martini in town, or whatever else your heart desires, in this classic cocktail lounge. The G&T is enormous.

Les Gens Que J'aime (Map pp272-3; 93 215 68 79; Carrer de València 286) This intimate relic of the 1960s offers chilled jazz music in the background, and a cosy scattering of velvet-backed lounges around tiny dark tables.

Michael Collins Pub (Map pp272-3; 93 459 19 64; Plaça de la Sagrada Família 4; 11 noon-3am) To be sure of a little Catalan-Irish craic, this barn-sized and storming pub is just the ticket.

Premier (Map pp272-3; 93 532 16 50; Carrer de Provença 236; 11 9am-2.30am) Relax at the bar or in a lounge in this funky little French-run cocktail bar. The wine list is almost exclusively French, but you can opt for that resurrected Barcelona brew, Moritz (see opposite) or a *mojito* (Cuban rum cocktail).

Gràcia

Maria (Map pp272-3; Carrer de Maria 5) Even the music hasn't changed since this place got going in the late 1970s. Lovers of rock 'n' roll will enjoy sinking beers here, perhaps over a game of pool.

Sabor Cubano (Map pp272-3; 93 600 262003; Carrer de Francisco Giner 32; 11 10pm-2.30am Mon-Sat) A mixed crowd of Cubans and fans of the Caribbean island come to drink *mojitos* and shake their stuff in this home of *ron y son* (rum and sound).

Tibidabo & Around

Mirablau (Map pp268-9; 93 418 58 79; Plaça del Doctor Andreu; 11 11am-5am) Wander downstairs after 11pm to join the beautiful people in the squeeze-me small dance space. The views over sparkling Barcelona below are magic.

Montjuïc & Poble Sec

Maumau Underground (Map pp274-5; 93 441 80 15; www.maumauunderground.com; Carrer de la Fontrodona 33; 11 11pm-2.30am Thu & Sun, 11pm-3am Fri & Sat) Funk, soul, hip-hop and more is on the programme in this Poble Sec music and dance haunt. Above the backlit bar a huge screen pours forth psychedelic images.

Tinta Roja (Map pp274-5; 93 443 32 43; Carrer de la Creu dels Molers 17; 11 8pm-1am Wed & Thu, 8pm-3am Fri & Sat, 7pm-midnight Sun) Sprinkled with an eclectic collection of furnishings, dimly lit in violets, reds and yellows, the 'Red Ink' is an intimate spot for a drink, and the occasional show in the back.

ENTERTAINMENT

To keep up with what's on, pick up a copy of the weekly listings magazine, *Guia del Ocio* (€1) from newsstands. The daily papers also have listings sections and the **Palau de la Virreina** (Map pp278-9; 93 301 77 75; La Rambla de Sant Josep 99; 11 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, 11am-3pm Sun) information office can clue you in to present and forthcoming events.

The easiest way to get hold of *entradas* (tickets) for most venues throughout the city is through the **Caixa de Catalunya's Tel-Entrada** (93 902 101212; www.telentrada.com) service or **Servi-Caixa** (93 902 332211; www.servicaixa.com in Catalan & Spanish). Another one to try for concerts is **Tick Tack Ticket** (93 902 105025; www.ticktackticket.com). There's a *venta de localidades* (ticket office) on the ground floor of the **El Corte Inglés** (Map pp274-5; 93 402 40222; www.elcorteingles.es/entradas in Spanish; Plaça de Catalunya) and at some of its other branches around town (you can also buy tickets through El Corte Inglés by phone and online), and at the **FNAC store** (Map pp278-9; 93 902 100632; Plaça de Catalunya) in the El Triangle shopping centre on the same square.

You can purchase some half-price tickets at the Caixa de Catalunya desk in the **Oficina d'Informació de Turisme de Barcelona** (Map pp274-5; 93 285 38 34; www.barcelonaturisme.com; Plaça de Catalunya 17-S underground; 11 9am-9pm). To qualify, you must purchase the tickets in person no more than three hours before the start of the show you wish to see. The system is known as Tiquet-3.

Clubs

Barcelona clubs are spread a little more thinly than bars across the city. They tend to open from around midnight until 5am or 6am.

Distrito Diagonal (Map pp272-3; Avinguda Diagonal 442; 10pm-4am Wed & Thu, 10pm-8am Fri & Sat) It's hard to categorise this narrow, red-lit bar with the dance space up the back, but it's hard to resist a place that stays up so late on weekends, and for free if you're in before 4am! After 4am on Friday and Saturday it's €15.

Elephant (Map pp268-9; 93 334 02 58; www.elephantbcn.com; Passeig dels Til·lers 1; admission Wed-Thu & Sun free, Fri & Sat €15; 11pm-3am Wed, 11pm-5am Thu-Sun) Getting in here is like being invited to some Beverly Hills private party. Models and wannabes mix freely, as do the drinks. A big tent-like dance space is the main game here.

Karma (Map pp278-9; 93 302 56 80; Plaça Reial 10; admission €8; 1 Tue-Sun) This basement place heaves to the sounds of indie, rock, punk and even '80s disco.

La Paloma (Map pp274-5; 93 301 68 97; Carrer del Tigre 27; admission €8; 1 Thu-Sat) Draped in voluptuous red, this former theatre and still-functioning ballroom metamorphoses into a club later in the night. On Friday and Saturday the ballroom theme continues until 2am, after which acid sounds take over with So Rebel Club.

Luz De Gas (Map pp272-3; 93 209 77 11; www.luzdegas.com; Carrer de Muntaner 246; admission up to €15) Set in a grand theatre that is frequently the scene of live acts, this club attracts a crowd of well-dressed beautiful people, whose tastes in music vary according to the night, from Sixties Saturday to soul on Thursday.

Moog (Map pp278-9; 93 301 72 82; www.masimas.com/moog; Carrer de l'Arc del Teatre 3; admission €9) This fun, minuscule club is a downtown hit. In the main downstairs dance area, DJs dish out house, techno and electro, while upstairs you can groove to indie and occasional classic pop.

Otto Zutz (Map pp272-3; 93 238 07 22; Carrer de Lincoln 15; admission €15; 1 Tue-Sat) Beautiful people only need apply for entry into this three-floor dance den. Head upstairs for house or upstairs for funk and soul. Friday is hip-hop night.

Razzmatazz (Map pp268-9; 93 272 09 10; Carrers dels Almogàvers 122 & de Pamplona 88; 1 Fri & Sat) A half-dozen blocks back from Port Olímpic is this stalwart of Barcelona's club and concert scene, with five clubs in one huge space.

Sala Apolo (Map pp274-5; 93 441 40 01; www.sala-apollo.com; Carrer Nou de la Rambla 113; admission €6-12; 12.30am-5am Wed-Sat, 10.30pm-3.30am Sun) In this old theatre the Nitsclub team provides house, techno and break-beat sounds on weekends. On Thursday night it's The Powder Room, with funk and rare grooves.

Sutton Club (Map pp272-3; 93 414 42 17; www.thesuttonclub.com; Carrer de Tuset 13; admission €12; 1 Tue-Sat) A classic club with mainstream sounds, this place inevitably attracts just about everyone pouring in and out of the nearby bars, at some stage in the evening.

Cinemas

Foreign films, shown with subtitles and their original soundtrack, rather than dubbed, are marked *VO* (*versión original*) in movie listings. A ticket usually costs between €5.80 and €6.40 but most cinemas have a weekly *día del espectador* (viewer's day), often Monday or Wednesday, when they charge around €4. The cinemas listed here show *VO* films.

Filmoteca (Map pp272-3; 93 410 75 90; Avinguda de Sarrià 31-33; admission €2.70) Specialises in film seasons that concentrate on particular directors, styles and eras of film.

Icària Yelmo Cineplex (Map pp268-9; 93 221 75 85; www.yelmocineplex.es in Spanish; Carrer de Salvador Espriu 61) A massive complex where all the cinemas offer undubbed movies.

Imax (Map pp278-9; 93 225 11 11; Moll d'Espanya; www.imaxintegral.com) This is the city's 3D big screen experience, great for kids and not bad for adults either! **Méliès Cinemes** (Map pp268-9; 93 451 00 51; Carrer de Villarroel 102) Old classics in the original.

Renoir Floridablanca (Map pp274-5; 93 93 426 33 37; www.cinesrenoir.com in Spanish; bookings www.cinentradas.com in Spanish; Carrer de Floridablanca 135) Art-house cinema on the edge of El Raval.

Verdi (Map pp272-3; 93 238 79 90; Carrer de Verdi 32) One of the most popular art-house cinemas in town, in the heart of Gràcia, and surrounded by bars and eateries.

Verdi Park (Map pp272-3; Carrer de Torrijos 49) Also operated by Verdi.

Theatre

Theatre is almost always performed in Catalan or Spanish. For more information on all that's happening in the theatre, head for the information office at Palau de la Virreina (p282), where you'll find leaflets and *Teatre BCN*, the monthly listings guide.

Teatre Lliure (Map pp268-9; 93 289 27 70; www.teatrelliure.com; Plaça de Margarida Xirgu s/n, Montjuïc; 1 box office 5-8pm) Consisting of two separate theatre spaces, the 'Free Theatre' puts on a variety of serious, quality drama, pretty much exclusively in Catalan.

Teatre Mercat de les Flors (Map pp268-9; 93 426 18 75; Carrer de Lleida 59) At the foot of Montjuïc, this is an important venue for music, dance and drama. The box office opens one hour before the show.

Teatre Nacional de Catalunya (Map pp268-9; 93 306 57 00; www.tnc.es in Catalan & Spanish; Plaça de les Arts 1) Ricard Bofill's ultra-neoclassical theatre hosts a wide range of performances, principally drama but occasionally also dance and other performances.

Teatre Romea (Map pp278-9; 93 301 55 04; www.focus.es in Catalan & Spanish; Carrer de l'Hospital 51; 1 box office 4.30-8pm Tue-Sun) This theatre is a reference point for quality drama in Barcelona. It puts on a range of interesting plays – usually classics with a contemporary flavour.

Live Music

There's a good choice most nights of the week. Many venues double as bars and/or clubs. Starting time is rarely before 10pm. Admission charges range from nothing to €20 – the higher prices often include a drink. Note that some of the clubs previously mentioned, including Razzmatazz (opposite), Sala Apolo (opposite) and La Paloma (opposite), occasionally stage concerts too. Keep an eye on listings.

Big-name acts, either Spanish or from abroad, often perform at venues such as the 17,000-capacity Palau Sant Jordi (p300) on Montjuïc or the Teatre Mercat de les Flors (above), at the foot of Montjuïc.

Bikini (Map pp268-9; 93 322 08 00; www.bikiniibcn.com; Carrer de Deu i Mata 105; admission €10-20; 1 mid-night-5am Wed-Sun) This multi-hall dance space frequently stages quality acts ranging from funk guitar to rock. Performances generally start around 10pm and the club then swings into gear around midnight.

Harlem Jazz Club (Map pp278-9; 93 310 07 55; Carrer de la Comtessa de Sobradiel 8; admission up to €10; 1 8pm-4am

Tue-Thu & Sun, 8pm-5am Fri & Sat) This narrow, smoky, old-town dive is one of the best spots in town for jazz. Every now and then they mix it up with a little rock, Latin or blues.

Jamboree (Map pp278-9; 93 319 17 89; www.masimas.com/jamboree; Plaça Reial 17; admission up to €10; 1 10.30pm-5am) Concerts start at 11pm and proceed until about 2am at the latest, at which point punters convert themselves into clubbers. Some of the great names of jazz and blues have filled the air with their sonorous contributions.

La Cova del Drac – Jazzroom (Map pp268-9; 93 319 17 89; www.masimas.com/jazzroom; Carrer de Vallmajor 33; admission €10-20; 1 9pm-3am) This is a good, if awkwardly located, spot for jazz sessions most nights of the week. On weekends it can stay open as late as 5am.

Sidecar Factory Club (Map pp278-9; 93 302 15 86; www.sidecarfactoryclub.com; Plaça Reial 7; admission €8-15; 1 10pm-5am Tue-Sat) Downstairs from the bar and eatery are the red-tinged bowels of the club that opens for live music most nights. Just about anything goes, from UK indie pop through to country punk. Most shows start at 10pm (Thursday to Saturday).

FLAMENCO

Although quite a few important flamenco artists grew up in the *barris* of Barcelona, opportunities for seeing good performances of this essentially Andalusian dance and music are limited. A few *tablaos* (tourist-oriented locales that stage flamenco performances) are scattered about. For more on flamenco, see p67.

Sala Tarantos (Map pp278-9; 93 318 30 67; http://masimas.com/tarantos; Plaça Reial 17; admission from €5; 1 10pm-5am Mon-Sat) This basement locale is the stage for some of the best flamenco to pass through Barcelona. You have to keep an eye out for quality acts. For lower-grade stuff, a *tablaó* is put on most nights between around 8.30pm and 11pm. The place converts into a club later.

Tablaó Cordobés (Map pp278-9; 93 317 66 53; www.tablaocordobes.com; La Rambla 35; show €30, with dinner €60; 1 shows 8.15pm, 10pm & 11.30pm) This long-standing *tablaó* is typical of the genre. Generally people book for the dinner and show.

Tablaó de Carmen (Map pp268-9; 93 325 68 95; www.tablaodecarmen.com; Carrer dels Arcs 9, Poble Espanyol; show €31, dinner & show €59; 1 shows 9.30pm & 11.30pm Tue-Sun) Named after the great Barcelona *bailaora* (flamenco dancer) Carmen Amaya, the set-up at this establishment is similar to that at the Tablaó Cordobés.

TOP FIVE CLUBS

- Otto Zutz (right)
- Razzmatazz (right)
- La Paloma (above)
- Elephant (above)
- Sutton Club (right)

CLASSICAL MUSIC & OPERA

Guia del Ocio has ample listings, but the monthly *Informatiu Musical* leaflet has the best coverage of classical music (as well as other genres). You can pick it up at tourist offices and the Palau de la Virreina (p282).

Gran Teatre del Liceu (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 485 99 00; www.liceubarcelona.com; La Rambla dels Caputxins 51-59; 11am-8pm Mon-Fri) Barcelona's grand opera house, rebuilt after fire in 1999, has world-class opera, dance and classical-music recitals. Tickets can cost from €7.50 for a cheap seat behind a pillar, to €150 for a well-positioned night at the opera. The box office opens an hour before the show on the weekend.

L'Auditori (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 247 93 00; www.auditori.org; Carrer de Lepant 150; admission €10-45; 11am-9pm Mon-Sat) Barcelona's impressive modern home for serious music lovers. L'Auditori puts on plenty of orchestral, chamber, religious and other music throughout the year.

Palau de la Música Catalana (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 295 72 00; www.palaumusica.org; Carrer de Sant Francesc de Paula 2; admission €12-165; 11am-9pm Mon-Sat) This Modernista delight is the traditional centre for classical and choral music. It has a busy and wide-ranging programme.

Dance**SARDANA**

The best chance you have of seeing people dancing the *sardana* (the Catalan folk dance) is at 7pm on Wednesday, 6.30pm on Saturday or noon on Sunday in front of the Catedral (p286). You can also see the dancers during some of the city's festivals. They join hands to form ever-widening circles, placing their bags or coats in the centre. The dance is intricate but hardly flamboyant. The steps and the accompanying brass-and-reed music are at times jolly, at times melancholy, rising to occasional crescendos, then quietening down again.

Sport**BULLFIGHTING**

Barcelona city council has declared itself against bullfighting but some citizens continue to be strongly attached to this controversial activity. Fights are staged on Sunday afternoon in spring and summer at the **Plaça de Braus Monumental** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 245 58 02; cnr Gran Via de les Corts Catalanes & Carrer de la Marina; admission €19-120; tickets 11am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun). The 'fun' starts at around 6pm. Tickets are available at the arena or through ServiCaixa.

FOOTBALL

FC Barcelona (Barça for aficionados) has one of the best stadiums in Europe – the 100,000-capacity **Camp Nou** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 902 189900; www.fcbarcelona.com; 11 tickets 9am-1.30pm & 3.30-6pm Mon-Fri) in the west of the city. Tickets for national-league games are available at the stadium and theoretically through the **ServiCaixa** (☎ 902 332211; www.servicaixa.com in Catalan & Spanish) ticketing service (although this does not always seem to work if you are not a member). They cost around €30 to €120, depending on the seat and match.

FORMULA ONE

Alonso and Co come to Barcelona every April/May to rip around the track at Montmeló, about a 30-minute drive north of the city. A seat for the Grand Prix race at the **Circuit de Catalunya** (☎ 93 571 97 71; www.circuitcat.com) can cost anything from €110 to €428, depending largely on how far in advance you book. Purchase by phone, at the track, or online with **ServiCaixa** (☎ 902 332211; www.servicaixa.com in Catalan & Spanish). You can get a regular *rodalies* train to Montmeló (€1.30, 30 minutes) but will need to walk about 3km, or find a local taxi (about €8 to €10) to reach the track.

SHOPPING

All of Barcelona seems to be lined with unending ranks of fashion and design stores. Maxing out credit cards is a definite risk in this town. Alongside the latest modes, all sorts of curious traditional shops offer everything from coffee and nuts to candles, from sweets made in convents to amusing condoms.

Most of the mainstream fashion and design stores can be found on a shopping 'axis' that looks like the hands of a clock set at about twenty to five. From **Plaça de Catalunya** it heads along **Passeig de Gràcia**, turning left into **Avinguda Diagonal**. From here as far as **Plaça de la Reina Maria Cristina** (especially the final stretch from **Plaça de Francesc Macià**), the **Diagonal** is jammed with shopping options. The T1 **Tombús** service (see p332) has been laid on for the ardent shopper.

Fashion does not end in the chic streets of **L'Eixample** and **Avinguda Diagonal**. Since the mid-1990s, the **El Born** area in **La Ribera** has been humming and in the wake of bars and restaurants have come hip little boutiques, especially those purveying young, fun fashion. **Custo Barcelona** has a branch here. Another

POKING ABOUT THE MARKETS

Large **Els Encants Vells** ('The Old Charms'; Map pp268-9; 11am-6.45pm Mon, Wed, Fri & Sat), also known as the **Fira de Bellcaire**, is the city's principal flea market. There is an awful lot of junk here, but you can turn up interesting items if you are prepared to hunt around.

The **Barri Gòtic** is livened up by an **arts and crafts market** (Map pp278-9; **Plaça de Sant Josep Oriol**; 11am-8pm) on Saturday and Sunday, the antiques **Mercat Gòtic** (Map pp278-9; **Plaça Nova**; 11am-10pm) on Thursday, and a **coin- and stamp-collectors' market** (Map pp278-9; **Plaça Reial**; 11am-2pm) on Sunday morning. Just beyond the western edge of **El Raval**, the punters at the **Mercat de Sant Antoni** (Map pp274-5; 11am-8.30pm) dedicate Sunday morning to old maps, stamps, books and cards.

Once every fortnight, from Friday to Sunday, gourmards can poke about the homemade honey, sweets, cheese and other edible delights at the **Fira Alimentació** (Map pp278-9; **Plaça del Pi**).

bubbling fashion strip is the **Barri Gòtic's Carrer d'Avinyó**. For second-hand stuff, head for **El Raval**, especially **Carrer de la Riera Baixa**.

A squadron of antiques stores is scattered about **Carrer dels Banys Nous** in the **Barri Gòtic**, in whose labyrinthine lanes you can find all sorts of curious stores. For food, from cheese to nuts, some gems glitter in **El Born**.

The single best-known department store is **El Corte Inglés** **Plaça de Catalunya** (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 306 38 00; **Plaça de Catalunya 14**; 11am-10pm Mon-Sat); **Plaça de la Reina Maria Cristina** (Map pp268-9; **Avinguda Diagonal 617**), with branches around town. **FNAC** (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 344 18 00; **Plaça de Catalunya 4**; 11am-10pm Mon-Sat), the French book, CD and electronics emporium, has a couple of branches around town. **Bulevard Rosa** (☎ 93 215 44 99; **Passeig de Gràcia 55-57**; 11am-8pm Mon-Sat) is one of the most interesting arcades, while the **Maremàgnum** (☎ 93 225 81 00; www.maremagnum.es; **Moll d'Espanya**) shopping centre can be a diversion when wandering around the **Port Vell** waterfront.

Winter sales officially start on or around 10 January and their summer equivalents on or around 5 July.

Art Galleries

Want some contemporary art? You'll find small galleries and designer stores on **Carrer del Doctor Dou**, **Carrer d'Elisabets** and **Carrer dels Àngels** (Map pp278-9). The classiest concentration of galleries is on and around the short stretch of **Carrer del Consell de Cent** between **Rambla de Catalunya** and **Carrer de Balmes** (Map pp272-3).

Fashion

Antonio Miró (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 487 06 70; www.antoniomiro.es; **Carrer del Consell de Cent 349**) **Mr Miró** is one of Barcelona's *haute couture* kings.

He concentrates on light, natural fibres to produce smart, unpretentious men's and women's fashion.

Custo Barcelona (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 268 78 93; www.custo-barcelona.com; **Plaça de les Olles 7**) **Custo** bewitches people the world over with a youthful, psychedelic panoply of women's and men's fashion.

Mango (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 215 75 30; www.mango.com; **Passeig de Gràcia 65**; 11am-8pm Mon-Sat) **At home** in a modest Modernista townhouse (and in endless other locations), this busy hall of a store shines bright with the local fashion-chain's flagship items – a host of light, fun women's clothing and leather accessories.

Zara (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 318 76 75; www.zara.es; **Passeig de Gràcia 16**) **Started** in Galicia, **Zara** is one of the great success stories of modern *prêt-à-porter*. Women's fashion is the name of the game and this megastore on Barcelona's top shopping street is the most obvious of its outlets.

Food & Drink

Casa Gispert (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 319 75 35; **Carrer dels Sombrierers 23**) **Prize-winning Casa Gispert** has been toasting almonds and selling all manner of dried fruit since 1851. Pots and jars piled high on the shelves contain an unending variety of crunchy titbits.

J Murrià (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 215 57 89; **Carrer de Roger de Llúria 85**) **Ramon Casas** designed the Modernista shop-front ads for this delicious delicatessen, where the shelves groan under the weight of speciality food from around Catalonia and beyond.

Homewares

Vinçon (Map pp272-3; ☎ 93 215 60 50; www.vincon.com; **Passeig de Gràcia 96**; 11am-8.30pm Mon-Sat) **Vinçon** has the slickest designs in furniture

and household goods, local and imported. The building once belonged to the Modernista artist Ramon Casas.

Shoes

Camper (Map pp272-3; % 93 215 63 90; www.camper.com; Carrer de València 249) This Mallorcan success story is the Clarks of Spain. Its shoes range from the eminently sensible to the stylishly fashionable.

Farrutx (Map pp272-3; % 93 215 06 85; www.farrutx.es; Carrer del Rosselló 218; 10am-8.30pm) Farrutx specialises in exclusive footwear for uptown gals.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Aeroport del Prat (% 902 404704; www.aena.es for all Spanish airports) is 12km southwest of the centre at El Prat de Llobregat. Barcelona is a big international and domestic destination, with direct flights from North America as well as many European cities.

Several budget airlines, including Ryanair, use Girona-Costa Brava airport, 11km south of Girona and about 80km north of Barcelona. Buses connect with Barcelona's Estació del Nord bus station (right).

For general information on flights, see the Transport chapter (p859). See Travel Agencies on p283 for some suggestions on where to pick up air tickets.

Boat

BALEARIC ISLANDS

Regular passenger and vehicular ferries to/from the Balearic Islands, operated by Acciona Trasmediterrànea (% 902 454645; www.trasmediterranea.es), dock along both sides of the Moll de Barcelona wharf in Port Vell (Map pp274-5).

For information on schedules and fares, see p629.

ITALY

The Grimaldi group's **Grandi Navi Veloci** (% 899 199 069 in Italy; % 902 410200, 93 443 98 98 in Spain; www1.gnv.it; Moll de San Beltran) runs a high-speed, roll-on roll-off luxury ferry service from Genoa to Barcelona three times a week (18 hours). **Grimaldi Ferries** (% 93 502 81 63 in Spain, 081 496444 in Italy; www.grimaldi-ferries.com) has a similar service between Barcelona and Civitavecchia (for Rome) up to six days a week, with a sailing time of 20 hours.

Bus

Long distance buses for destinations throughout Spain leave from the **Estació del Nord** (Map pp268-9; % 902 260606; www.barcelonanord.com; Carrer d'Alii Bei 80). A plethora of companies operates services to different parts of the country, although many come under the umbrella of **Alsa-Enatcar** (% 902 422242; www.alsa.es). There are frequent services to Madrid, Valencia and Zaragoza (up to 20 a day) and several daily departures to such distant destinations as Burgos, Santiago de Compostela and Seville (see trip details, opposite).

Eurolines (% 93 490 40 00; www.eurolines.com), in conjunction with local carriers all over Europe, is the main international carrier. It runs services across Europe and to Morocco from Estació del Nord (above) and **Estació d'Autobusos de Sants** (Map pp268-9; Carrer de Viriat), which is next to Estació Sants Barcelona. For information and tickets in Barcelona, contact Alsa-Enatcar (above). Another carrier is **Linebús** (% 902 335533; www.linebus.com).

Within Catalonia, much of the Pyrenees and the entire Costa Brava are served only by buses, as train services are limited to important railheads such as Girona, Figueres, Lleida, Ripoll and Puigcerdà. If there is a train, take it – they're usually more comfortable and convenient. Various bus companies operate across the region, mostly from Estació del Nord (above):

Alsina Graells (% 902 33 04 00; www.continental-auto.es) Part of the Continental-Auto group, it serves destinations west and northwest, such as Vielha, La Seu d'Urgell and Lleida.

Barcelona Bus (% 902 130014; www.sagales.com in Catalan/Spanish) Runs buses to Girona (and Girona-Costa Brava airport), Figueres and parts of the Costa Brava.

Hispano-Igualadina (% 93 804 44 51) Serves much of central Catalonia from Estació d'Autobusos de Sants.

SARFA (% 902 302025; www.sarfa.com) The main operator on and around the Costa Brava.

TEISA (Map pp272-3; % 972 20 48 68; www.teisa-bus.com; Carrer de Pau Claris 117) Covers a large part of the eastern Catalan Pyrenees from Girona and Figueres. Buses from Barcelona head for Camprodon via Ripoll and Olot via Besalú. To get here, take the metro to Passeig de Gràcia.

Departures from Estació del Nord include the following (where frequencies vary, the lowest figure is usually for Sunday; fares quoted are the lowest available):

Destination	Frequency (per day)	Duration	Cost
Almeria	5	11¼-13¼ hr	€56.30
Burgos	5-6	7¾-9 hr	€31
Granada	8	12-14¼ hr	€61.95
Madrid	up to 20	7½ hr	€25.05
Seville	1-2	15½ hr	€81.10
Valencia	up to 16	4¼-5¼ hr	€22.85
Zaragoza	up to 22	3½ hr	€12.20

Car & Motorcycle

Autopistas (tollways) head out of Barcelona in most directions, including the C31/C32 to the southern Costa Brava; the C32 to Sitges; the C16 to Manresa (with a turn-off for Montserrat); and the AP7 north to Girona, Figueres and France, and south to Tarragona and Valencia (turn off along the AP2 for Lleida, Zaragoza and Madrid). The toll-free alternatives, such as the A2 north to Girona, Figueres and France, and west to Lleida and beyond, or the A7 to Tarragona, tend to be busy and slow.

RENTAL

Avis, Europcar, Hertz and several other big companies have desks at the airport, Estació Sants train station and Estació del Nord bus terminus:

Avis (Map pp272-3; % 902 135531, 93 237 56 80; www.avis.es; Carrer de Còrsega 293-295)

Europcar (Map pp272-3; % 91 343 45 12, 93 302 05 43; www.europcar.es; Gran Via de les Corts Catalanes 680)

Hertz (Map pp272-3; % 91 749 90 69, 93 217 80 76; www.hertz.es; Carrer de Tuset 10)

National/Atesa (Map pp274-5; % 902 100101, 93 323 07 01; www.atesa.es; Carrer de Muntaner 45)

Pepecar (www.pepecar.com) La Rambla (Map pp278-9; % 807 414243; Plaça de Catalunya); Estació Sants Barcelona (Map pp268-9; Carrer de Béjar 68) This company specialises in cheap rentals (especially the two-person Smart). If you book far enough ahead, it can cost around €10.50 a day. There's also an outlet at Aeroport del Prat.

Vanguard (Map pp272-3; % 93 439 38 80; www.vanguardrent.com; Carrer de Viladomat 297) For motorbikes.

Train

The main international and domestic station is **Estació Sants** (Map pp268-9; Plaça dels Països Catalans), 2.5km west of La Rambla. Other stops on long-distance lines are **Catalunya** (Map pp274-5; Plaça de Catalunya) and **Passeig de Gràcia** (Map pp272-3; cnr Passeig de Gràcia & Carrer d'Arago). Information windows operate at Estació Sants and Passeig

de Gràcia station. Sants station has a **consigna** (left-luggage lockers: small/big locker per 24hr €3/4.50; 11.50am-11pm), a tourist office, a telephone and fax office, currency-exchange booths and ATMs.

INTERNATIONAL

For information on getting to Barcelona by rail from European cities, see the Transport chapter (p864).

Two daily direct Talgo services connect Montpellier in France with Estació Sants (€49 each way in *turista* class, 4¼ hours). A couple of other slower services (with a change of train at Portbou) also make this run. All stop in Perpignan.

From Estació Sants, up to 10 trains daily run to Cerbère (€26, 2½ hours), on the French side of the border, and five to Latour-de-Carol (€7.90, 3¼ hours). From these stations you have several onward connections to Montpellier and Toulouse, respectively.

DOMESTIC

There are trains to most large Spanish cities, with the usual huge range of train types and fares. All services depart from or pass through Estació Sants.

GETTING AROUND

The metro is the easiest way of getting around and reaches most places you're likely to visit (although not the airport). For some trips you need buses or FGC suburban trains. The tourist office gives out the comprehensive *Guia d'Autobusos Urbans de Barcelona*, which has a metro map and all bus routes.

For public-transport information, make a call to % 010.

To/From the Airport

The **A1 Aerobús** (Map pp274-5, Map pp268-9; % 93 415 60 20; one way €3.60; 30-40min) runs from the airport to Plaça de Catalunya via Plaça d'Espanya, Gran Via de les Corts Catalanes (on the corner of Carrer del Comte d'Urgell) and Plaça de la Universitat every 8-10 minutes from 6am to midnight Monday to Friday (from 6.30am to midnight on weekends and holidays). Departures from Plaça de Catalunya are from 5.30am to 11.15pm Monday to Friday (6am to 11.30pm on weekends and holidays) and go via Estació Sants and Plaça d'Espanya. Buy tickets on the bus. The travel time to/from the airport depends on traffic conditions.

Renfe's *rodalies* line 10 runs between the airport and Estació de França in Barcelona (about 35 minutes), stopping also at Estació Sants (the main train station) and central Passeig de Gràcia. Tickets cost €2.40, unless you have a T-10 multirip public transport ticket. The service from the airport starts at 6am and ends at 11.44pm daily.

A taxi to/from the centre, about a half-hour ride depending on traffic, costs between €18 and €24.

Sagalés (☎ 902 361550; www.sagales.com) runs hourly services from Girona-Costa Brava airport to Girona's main bus/train station (€1.75, 25 minutes) in connection with flights. The same company runs direct Barcelona Bus services to/from Estació del Nord bus station (p330) in Barcelona (one way/return €11/19, 70 minutes), connecting with flights.

Bicycle

Bike lanes have been laid out along quite a few main roads (such as Gran Via de les Corts Catalanes, Avinguda Diagonal, Carrer d'Aragó, Avinguda de la Meridiana and Carrer de la Marina) and a growing web of secondary streets, so it is quite possible to get around on two ecological wheels.

Biciclot (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 221 97 78; www.biciclot.net; Passeig Marítim; per hr/day €5/19; 19 9am-3pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm & 4-8pm Sat & Sun May-Oct; 10am-3pm Sat & Sun Nov-Apr) A handy seaside location.

Un Cotxe Menys (Map pp278-9; ☎ 93 268 21 05; www.bicicletabarcelona.com; Carrer de la Espartería 3; per hr/half-day/full day/week €6/12/16.50/65; 19 10am-2pm Mon-Fri) Can also organise bike tours around the old city and port.

Bus

The city transport authority, TMB (☎ 010; www.tmb.net), runs buses along most city routes every few minutes from 5am or 6am to 10pm or 11pm. Many routes pass through Plaça de Catalunya and/or Plaça de la Universitat (both on Map pp274-5). After 11pm, a reduced network of yellow *nitbusos* (night buses) runs until 3am or 5am. All *nitbus* routes pass through Plaça de Catalunya and most run about every 30 to 45 minutes.

BUS TURÍSTIC

This TMB-run bus service covers three circuits (44 stops) linking very nearly all the major tourist sights. See p312 for more information.

TOMBBUS

The T1 Tombbús (Map pp274-5) route operated by TMB is designed for shoppers and runs regularly (€1.40) from Plaça de Catalunya to Avinguda Diagonal and then west to Plaça de Pius XII, where it turns around. It passes landmarks such as El Corte Inglés (p329) – several of them – Bulevard Rosa and FNAC en route.

Car & Motorcycle

An effective one-way system makes traffic flow fairly smoothly, but you'll often find yourself flowing the way you don't want to go, unless you happen to have an adept navigator and a map that shows one-way streets.

PARKING

Limited parking in the Ciutat Vella is virtually all for residents only, with some metered parking. The narrow streets of Gràcia are not much better. The broad boulevards of L'Eixample are divided into blue and green zones. For non-residents they mean the same thing: limited meter parking. Fees vary but tend to hover around €2.25 an hour. Parking stations are also scattered all over L'Eixample, with a few in the old centre too. Prices vary.

Metro & FGC

The Transports Metropolitans de Barcelona (TMB) metro (☎ 010; www.tmb.net) has six numbered and colour-coded lines (see the map, p918). The metro runs from 5am to midnight Sunday to Thursday, and 5am to 2am on Friday, Saturday and days immediately preceding holidays. Line 2 has access for the disabled and a handful of stations on other lines also have lifts (it is hoped all metro stations will have disabled access by 2007).

Suburban trains run by the Ferrocarrils de la Generalitat de Catalunya (FGC; ☎ 93 205 15 15; www.fgc.net) include a couple of useful city lines. One heads north from Plaça de Catalunya. A branch of it will get you to Tibidabo, and another within spitting distance of the Monestir de Pedralbes. Some trains along this line run beyond Barcelona to Sant Cugat, Sabadell and Terrassa.

The other FGC line heads to Manresa from Plaça d'Espanya, and is handy for the trip to Montserrat (p336).

These trains run from about 5am (only one or two services before 6am) to 11pm or midnight (depending on the line) Sunday to Thursday, and 5am to 2am on Friday and Saturday.

Three tram (☎ 902 193275; www.trambcn.com) lines run into the suburbs of greater Barcelona from Plaça de Francesc Macià and are of limited interest to visitors. Another line runs from behind the zoo near the Ciutadella-Vila Olímpica metro stop to Sant Adrià via Fórum. All standard transport passes are valid.

Taxi

Taxis charge €1.45 flag fall (€1.55 from 9pm to 7am weekdays and all day Saturday, Sunday and holidays) plus meter charges of €0.78 per kilometre (€1 at night and on weekends). A further €3 is added for all trips to/from the airport, and €0.90 for luggage bigger than 55cm x 35cm x 35cm. The trip from Estació Sants to Plaça de Catalunya, about 3km, costs about €8. You can call a taxi (☎ 93 225 00 00, 93 300 11 00, 93 303 30 33, 93 322 22 22) or flag them down. There's a taxi rank at the Monument a Colom (Map pp274-5) and one on Plaça de Catalunya (Map pp274-5), at the corner of La Rambla, too. General information is available on ☎ 010. The call-out charge is €2.93 (€3.66 at night and on weekends).

Fono Taxi (☎ 93 300 11 00) is one of several taxi companies with taxis adapted for the disabled. **Taxi Amic** (☎ 93 420 80 88; www.terra.es/personal/taxiamic) is a special taxi service for the disabled or difficult situations (transport of big objects). Book at least 24 hours in advance if possible.

Tickets & Targetas

The metro, FGC trains, *rodalies/cercanías* (Renfe-run local trains) and buses come under one zoned fare regime. Single-ride tickets on all standard transport within Zone 1 (which extends beyond the airport), except on Renfe trains, cost €1.20.

Targetas are multirip transport tickets. They are sold at most city-centre metro stations. The prices given here are for travel in Zone 1. Children under four travel free.

Targeta T-10 (€6.65) 10 rides (each valid for 1¼ hours) on the metro, buses and FGC trains. You can change between metro, FGC, *rodalies* and buses.

Targeta T-DIA (€5) Unlimited travel on all transport for one day.

Targeta T-50/30 (€27.55) For 50 trips within 30 days. Two-/three-/four-/five-day tickets for unlimited travel on all transport except the A1 Aerobús cost €9.20/13.20/16.80/20. Buy them at metro stations and tourist offices.

Monthly transport pass For unlimited use of all public transport (€42.75)

Train

Renfe runs local trains (*rodalies* or *cercanías*) to towns around Barcelona, as well as the airport. For ticket information see left.

Trixis

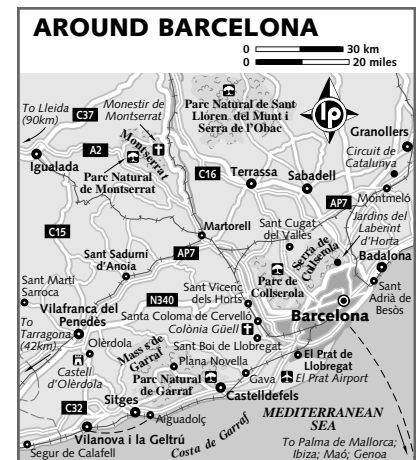
These three-wheeled cycle taxis (Map pp274-5; www.trixi.info; per half-hour/hour €10/18; 19 noon-8pm daily Jun-Oct) operate on the waterfront. They can take two passengers, and children aged three to 12 are half-price. You can find them near the Monument a Colom and in front of the Catedral.

AROUND BARCELONA

Need a break from the hubbub? Several options within easy reach present themselves. Sitges is a pretty seaside town southwest of Barcelona with thumping nightlife. Wine-lovers may want to explore the Penedès wine-making region, famous for its *cava*. From the hedonistic to the heavenly, head north for Catalonia's sacred mountain range, Montserrat. Closer to home, admire the genius of Gaudí at Colònia Güell.

THE OUTSKIRTS Colònia Güell

Apart from La Sagrada Família, the last grand project Gaudí turned his hand to was the creation of a Utopian textile-workers' complex, known as the Colònia Güell (☎ 93 630 58 07;



www.coloniaguellbarcelona.com; Santa Coloma de Cervelló; admission to crypt €4; 1 crypt 9am-2pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-3pm Nov-Mar, info centre 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) outside Barcelona at Santa Coloma de Cervelló.

His main role was to erect the colony's church – workers' housing and the local co-operative were in the hands of other architects. Work on the church's crypt started in 1908 and proceeded for eight years, at which point interest in the whole idea fizzled. The crypt still serves as a working church.

This structure makes up an important part of Gaudí's oeuvre. The mostly brick-clad columns that support the ribbed vaults in the church's ceiling are inclined in much the way you might expect trees in a forest to lean at all angles (reminiscent also of Park Güell, which Gaudí was working on at much the same time). Gaudí had worked out the angles in such a way that their load would be transmitted from the ceiling to the earth, without the help of extra buttressing. Down to the wavy design of the pews, Gaudí's distinctive hand is visible.

Near the church spread the cute brick houses designed for the factory workers and still inhabited today. A short stroll away, the 23 factory buildings of a Modernista industrial complex, idle since the 1970s, have been brought back to life in a €60 million project under the direction of local building star Óscar Tusquets. Shops and businesses have moved in (or are being encouraged to do so) to the renovated complex. You can pick up a map at the information centre and wander around or join guided visits of the crypt alone (€5) or the crypt and former factory complex (€8) at noon on weekends. Several languages are theoretically catered for.

To get here, take FGC train S4, S7, S8 or S33 from Plaça d'Espanya.

SITGES

pop 24,470

Sitges attracts everyone from jet-setters to young travellers, honeymooners to weekend-ing families, and from Barcelona's night owls to an international gay crowd. The beach is long and sandy, the nightlife thumps until breakfast and there are lots of groovy boutiques if you need to spruce up your wardrobe. In winter Sitges can be dead, but it wakes up with a vengeance for Carnival, when the gay crowd puts on an outrageous show.

Information

Hospital Sant Joan (☎ 93 894 00 03; Carrer del Hospital) In the upper part of town.

Main tourist office (☎ 93 894 50 04; www.sitgestur.com; Carrer de Sinia Morera 1; 1 9am-8pm Jul–mid-Sep, 9am-2pm & 4-6.30pm Mon-Fri mid-Sep–Jun)

Policia Local (☎ 93 704 101092; Plaça d'Ajuntament) Behind the parish church.

Tourist office (☎ 93 811 06 11; Carrer de Fonollar s/n; 1 10am-1.30pm & 5-9pm Thu-Tue Jul–mid-Sep; 10.30am-2pm Wed-Fri, 11am-2pm & 4-7pm Sat, 11am-2.30pm Sun mid-Sep–Jun) Next door to Palau Maricel.

Sights & Activities

MUSEUMS

Three museums (☎ 93 894 03 64; adult/child €3.50/1.75, combined ticket to all museums €6.40/3.50; 1 10am-1.30pm & 3-6.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun Oct-Jun; 10am-2pm & 5-9pm Tue-Sun Jul-Sep) serve as a timid counterweight to the general hedonism.

The **Museu Cau Ferrat** (Carrer de Fonollar) was built in the 1890s as a house-cum-studio by Santiago Rusiñol, Modernista artist and the man who attracted the art world to Sitges. In 1894, Rusiñol reawakened the public to the then unfashionable work of El Greco by parading two of the Cretan's canvases in from Sitges train station to Cau Ferrat. These are on show, along with the remainder of Rusiñol's rambling art-and-craft collection, which includes paintings by the likes of Picasso, Ramon Casas and Rusiñol himself.

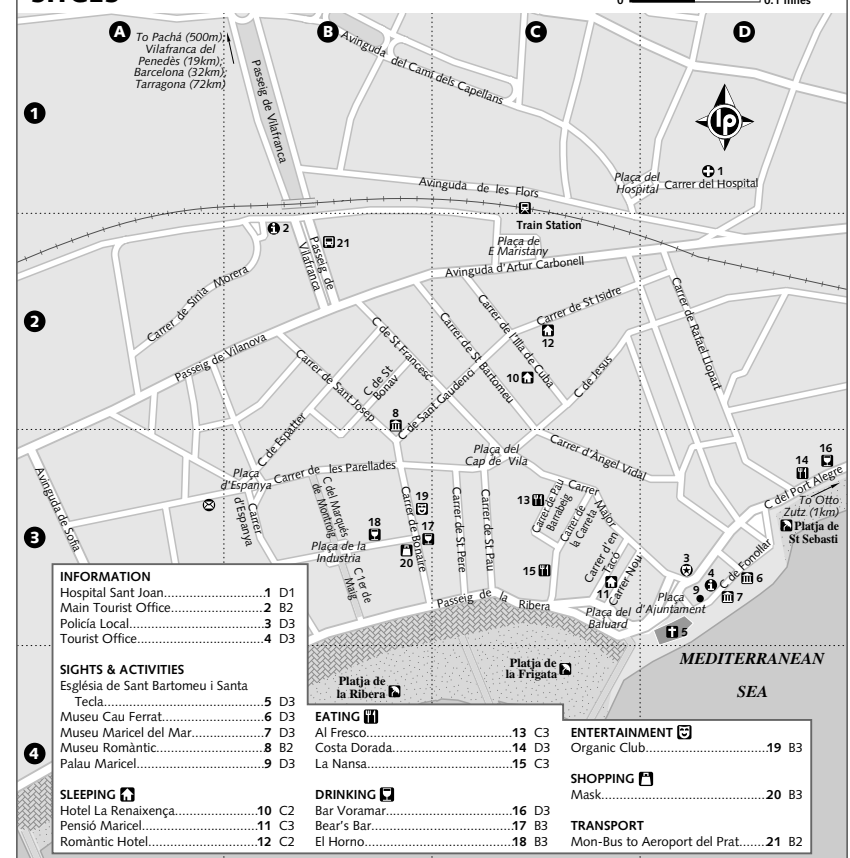
Next door, the **Museu Maricel del Mar** (Carrer de Fonollar) houses art and handicrafts from the Middle Ages to the 20th century. The museum is part of the **Palau Maricel**, a stylistic fantasy built around 1910 by Miquel Utrillo (along with Rusiñol and Casas, one of the 'Quatre Gats', see p318).

The **Museu Romàntic** (Carrer de Sant Gaudenci 1) re-creates the lifestyle of a 19th-century Catalan landowning family, and contains a collection of several hundred antique dolls.

BEACHES

The main beach is divided by a series of breakwaters into sections with different names. A pedestrian promenade runs its whole length. In the height of summer, especially on Saturday and Sunday, the end nearest the **Església de Sant Bartomeu i Santa Tecla** gets jam-packed. Crowds thin out slightly towards the southwest end.

SITGES



Festivals & Events

Carnaval (dates change from year to year) in Sitges is a week-long riot just made for the extrovert, ambiguous and exhibitionist, capped by an extravagant gay parade that's held on the last night. June sees the **Sitges International Theatre Festival**, with a strong experimental leaning. The town's **Festa Major** (Major Festival) in late August features a huge firework display on the 23rd. And early October is the time for Sitges' **International Fantasy Film Festival**.

The town has planned a year-long programme of cultural events and exhibitions related to Santiago Rusiñol from June 2006 to mark the 75th anniversary of the artist's death.

Sleeping

Sitges has 47 hotels and *hostales*, but many close from around October to April, then are full in July and August, when prices are at their highest and booking is advisable. Many, including the following, are gay-friendly without being exclusively so. Gay folk looking for accommodation in Sitges can try Throb (www.throb.co.uk).

Pensió Maricel (☎ 93 894 36 27; www.milsa.com; Carrer d'En Tacó 13; d €65) This spot is one of the cheaper deals in town, just back from the beach in a tight lane. The 10 simple rooms are clean and spartan. Those looking on to the interior, without noteworthy views, are €10 cheaper. From the exterior ones you can get sea glimpses if you lean out.

Romàntic Hotel (☎ 93 894 83 75; www.hotelromantic.com; Carrer de Sant Isidre 33; s/d €74.50/110.75; a) These three adjoining 19th-century villas are presented in sensuous period style, with a leafy dining courtyard. If they have no rooms, ask about their other charming boutique hotel, **Hotel La Renaixença** (Carrer d'illa de Cuba 45), round the corner (the reception is at Romàntic Hotel). Indeed, it shares the street with several beautifully restored houses converted into enticing hotels.

Eating

Al Fresco (☎ 93 894 06 00; Carrer de Pau Barrabeig 4; meals €25-30; h dinner Wed-Sun) Hidden along a narrow stairway, masquerading as a street, is a charming hideaway with some interesting gastronomic twists. You could indulge in light curries or a *solomillo de canguro* (a prime cut of Australia's bouncing beast).

Costa Dorada (☎ 93 894 35 43; Carrer del Port Alegre; meals €30; h lunch & dinner Fri-Tue, lunch Wed) Old-world service with 1970s atmosphere (lots of tiles and bottles of wine on display) and reliable standards make the 'Gold Coast' a safe bet, especially for seafood, paella and *fideuà*.

La Nansa (☎ 93 894 94 19 27; Carrer de la Carreta 24; meals €30-35; h lunch & dinner Thu-Mon Feb-Dec) Cast just back from the waterfront up a little lane in a fine old house is this seafood specialist that does a good line in paella and other rice dishes.

Drinking & Entertainment

Much of Sitges' nightlife happens on one short pedestrian strip packed with humanity right through the night in summer: Carrer del 1er de Maig, Plaça de la Indústria and Carrer del Marqués de Montroig, all in a short line off the seafont. Carrer del 1er de Maig – also known as Calle del Pecado (Sin Street) – vibrates to the volume of 10 or so disco-bars, all trying to outdo each other in decibels.

You'll find more of the same, if slightly less intense, around the corner on Carrer de les Parel·lades, Carrer de Bonaire and Carrer de Sant Pere. Afterwards, there's clubbing at the nearby **Otto Zutz** (Port d'Aiguadolç) on the waterfront and **Pachà** (www.pachasitges.com; Carrer San Didac, Vallpineda), north of the town centre.

Bar Voramar (Carrer del Port Alegre 55) On Platja de Sant Sebastià, this is a 1960s throwback with nautical decoration and good music. Check it out for live jazz sessions.

Gay and gay-friendly bars abound. **El Horno** (Carrer de Juan Tarrida Ferratges 6) has a dark room to fumble about in and you can make hirsute pursuits at **Bear's Bar** (Carrer de Bonaire 17). For dancing late into the night, the **Organic Club** (Carrer de Bonaire 15; h 2.30-6am) is a popular gay club, one of two in town. If you need any toys, head for the **Mask** (Carrer de Bonaire 22) erotic shop.

Getting There & Away

From about 6am to 10pm, four *rodalies* per hour run from Estació Sants Barcelona to Sitges (€2.40, 30 minutes). The best road from Barcelona to Sitges is the C32 tollway. A direct bus run by Mon-Bus goes to Barcelona airport from near the tourist office.

MONTSERRAT

Montserrat (Serrated Mountain), 50km northwest of Barcelona, is a 1236m-high mountain of truly weird rock pillars, shaped by wind, rain and frost from a conglomeration of limestone, pebbles and sand that once lay under the sea. With the historic Benedictine Monestir de Montserrat, one of Catalonia's most important shrines, cradled at 725m on its side, it makes a great outing from Barcelona. From the mountain, on a clear day, you can see as far as the Pyrenees and even, if you're lucky, Mallorca.

Orientation & Information

The *cremallera* (rack-and-pinion train) and cable car both arrive on the mountainside, just below the monastery. From either of these, the main road curves (past a snack bar, cafeteria, information office and the Espai Audiovisual) round and up to the right, passing the blocks of Cel.les Abat Marcel, to enter Plaça de Santa Maria, at the centre of the monastery complex.

The information office (☎ 93 877 77 01; www.abadiamontserrat.net; h 9am-6pm) has information on the complex and walking trails.

Sights & Activities

MONESTIR DE MONTSERRAT

The monastery was founded in 1025 to commemorate a 'vision' of the Virgin on the mountain. Wrecked by Napoleon's troops in 1811, then abandoned as a result of anticlerical legislation in the 1830s, it was rebuilt from 1858. Today a community of about 80 monks lives here. Pilgrims come from far and wide to venerate *La Moreneta* (The Black Virgin), a

12th-century Romanesque wooden sculpture of Mary with the infant Jesus, which has been Catalonia's patron since 1881.

The two-part **Museu de Montserrat** (☎ 93 877 77 77; Plaça de Santa Maria; admission €5.50; h 10am-6pm) has an excellent collection, ranging from an Egyptian mummy and Gothic altarpieces to art by El Greco, Monet, Degas and Picasso. The **Espai Audiovisual** (admission €2, or free with Museu de Montserrat ticket; h 10am-6pm) is a walk-through multimedia space (with images and sounds) that illustrates the daily life and activities of the monks and the history and spirituality of the monastery.

From Plaça de Santa Maria you enter the courtyard of the 16th-century **basilica** (admission €5 incl La Moreneta; h 8am-8.15pm Jul-Sep), the monastery's church. The basilica's façade, with its carvings of Christ and the 12 Apostles, dates from 1900, despite its 16th-century Plateresque style. Opening times, when you can file past the image of the Black Virgin high above the basilica's main altar, vary according to season and the church closes from early October to June. Follow the signs to the **Cambri de la Mare de Déu** (h 8-10.30am & 12.15-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 8-10.30am, 12.15-6.30pm & 7.30-8.15pm Sun & holidays) to the right of the main basilica entrance to see the Black Virgin.

If you're around the basilica at the right time, you'll catch a performance by the **Montserrat Boys' Choir** (Escolania; www.escolania.net; admission free; h performances 1pm Mon-Fri, noon & 6.45pm Sun Sep-Jun), reckoned to be Europe's oldest music school.

On your way out, have a look in the room, across the courtyard from the basilica entrance, filled with gifts and thank-you messages to the Montserrat Virgin, from people who give her the credit for all manner of happy events. The souvenirs range from plaster casts to wedding dresses.

If you want to see where the holy image of the Virgin was discovered, take the **Santa Cova funicular** (one way/return €1.60/2.50; h every 20min 10am-5.35pm Apr-Oct, 11am-4.25pm Nov-Mar) down from the main area.

THE MOUNTAIN

You can explore the mountain above the monastery on a web of paths leading to some of the peaks and to 13 empty and rather dilapidated hermitages. The **Funicular de Sant Joan** (one way/return €3.90/6.30; h every 20min 10am-5.40pm Apr-Oct, to 7pm mid-Jul-Aug, 11am-4.30pm Nov-Mar) will carry you

up the first 250m from the monastery. If you prefer to walk, the road past the funicular's bottom station leads to its top station in about one hour (3km).

From the Sant Joan top station, it's a 20-minute stroll (signposted) to the **Sant Joan hermitage**, with fine westward views. More exciting is the one-hour walk northwest, along a path marked with occasional blobs of yellow paint, to Montserrat's highest peak, **Sant Jeroni**, from where there's an awesome sheer drop on the northern side. The walk takes you across the upper part of the mountain, with a close-up experience of some of the weird rock pillars. Many have names: on your way to Sant Jeroni look over to the right for **La Prenyada** (The Pregnant Woman), **La Mòmia** (The Mummy), **L'Elefant** (The Elephant) and **El Cap de Mort** (The Death's Head).

Sleeping & Eating

Cel.les Abat Marcel (☎ 93 877 77 01; 2-/4-person apt €46.60/83.20; p) Here you will find comfortable apartments equipped with full bathroom and kitchenette. Smaller studios go for €31.50/38.40 for one/two people.

Hotel Abat Cisereros (☎ 93 877 77 01; s/d €51.10/88.90; a p) The only hotel in the monastery complex has modern, comfortable rooms, some looking on to Plaça de Santa Maria. It has a restaurant (meals €25-30), a cafeteria (meals €10-15) for lunch and a couple of cafés for breakfast.

Getting There & Away

BUS

A daily bus from Barcelona with **Julia Tours** (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 317 64 54; Ronda de l'Universitat 5) to the monastery (€43) leaves at 9.30am (returning at 3pm). The price includes travel, all entry prices, use of funiculars at Montserrat and a meal at the cafeteria.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The most straightforward route from Barcelona is by **Avinguda Diagonal**, **Via Augusta**, the **Túnel de Vallvidrera** and the **C16**. Shortly after Terrassa, follow the exit signs to Montserrat, which will put you on the C58 road. Follow it northwest to the C55. Then head 2km south on this road to **Monistrol de Montserrat**, from where a road snakes 7km up the mountain. You could leave the car at the parking station in **Monistrol Vila** and take the *cremallera* up to the top.

TRAIN, CREMALLERA & CABLE CAR

The R5 line trains operated by FGC (☎ 93 205 15 15) run from Plaça d'Espanya station in Barcelona to Monistrol de Montserrat up to 18 times daily starting at 8.36am. They connect with the rack-and-pinion train, or cremallera (☎ 902 31 20 20; www.cremallerademontserrat.com; one way/return €3.80/6), which takes 17 minutes to make the upward journey. One-way/return from Barcelona to Montserrat with the FGC train and cremallera costs €8/14.40. Alternatively, you could get off the train a stop earlier at Montserrat Aeri and take the Aeri de Montserrat cable car (same price as the cremallera).

TransMontserrat tickets (€18.40) include the train, cremallera, two metro rides, the Espai Audiovisual and unlimited use of the funiculars. For €31 you can have all this with the TotMontserrat card, which also includes museum entrance and a modest dinner at the self-service restaurant. Two further ticketing options are available for those who get to the cremallera under their own steam. The Combi 1 ticket (€12) includes unlimited use of the funiculars and entrance to the Espai Audiovisual, while the Combi 2 ticket (€24.75) also includes admission to the museum and a meal at the self-service restaurant.

There are discounts for children, students and senior citizens on all the above fares.

PENEDÈS WINE COUNTRY

Some of the country's best wines come from this area. Sant Sadurní d'Anoia, a half-hour train ride west of Barcelona, is the capital of cava. Vilafranca del Penedès, 12km down the track, is the heart of the Penedès *Denominación de Origen* (DO; Denomination of Origin) region, which produces noteworthy light whites. Some reasonable reds also come out of the area. Visitors are welcomed on tours of numerous wineries; there'll often be a free glass along the way and plenty more for sale. Several companies offer package trips to Barcelona that include winery tours of the Penedès, although it is much cheaper to do it on your own. One such option for luxury lovers is the four-day all-inclusive tour run by Cellar Tours (www.cellartours.com), which costs up to €2995 per person. More accessible are 1½-day tours organised from Barcelona by Spanish Fiestas (www.spanish-fiestas.com), charging from €100 per person.

Sant Sadurní d'Anoia

pop 11,360

One hundred or so wineries around Sant Sadurní produce 140 million bottles of cava a year – something like 85% of the entire national output. Cava is made by the same method as French champagne. If you happen to be in town in October, you may catch the *Mostra de Caves i Gastronomia*, a cava- and food-tasting fest.

Freixenet (☎ 93 891 70 00; www.freixenet.com; Carrer de Joan Sala 2, Sant Sadurní d'Anoia; admission free; 1 1½hr tours 11am, noon, 1pm, 4pm & 5pm Mon–Thu, 10am, 11am, noon & 1pm Fri, 10am & 1pm weekends), the best-known cava company, is based right next to the train station.

Codorniu (☎ 93 891 33 42; www.codorniu.es; admission free; 1 9am–5pm Mon–Fri, 9am–1pm Sat & Sun) is at Can Codorniu in a Modernista building at the entry to the town by road from Barcelona. Manuel Raventós, head of this firm back in 1872, was the first Spaniard to be successful in producing sparkling wine by the champagne method.

You can simply turn up for tours at either of these establishments.

Vilafranca del Penedès

pop 35,860

Vilafranca is larger than Sant Sadurní and more interesting. The **tourist office** (☎ 93 818 12 54; www.turismevilafranca.com; Carrer de la Cort 14; 1 9am–1pm & 4–7pm Tue–Fri, 10am–1pm Sat & 4–7pm Mon) can provide tips on visiting some of the smaller wineries in the area.

SIGHTS

The mainly Gothic **Basilica de Santa Maria** (Plaça de Jaume I) faces the combined **Museu de Vilafranca** and **Museu del Vi** (Wine Museum; ☎ 93 890 05 82; Plaça de Jaume I; adult/7–17yr/under 6yr €3/0.90/free; 1 10am–2pm & 4–7pm Tue–Sat, 10am–2pm Sun & holidays) in the old centre of this straggling town. The museum, a fine Gothic building, covers local archaeology, art, geology and bird life, and also has an excellent section on wine. A statue on Plaça de Jaume I pays tribute to Vilafranca's famous *castellers* (Catalan human-castle builders), who do their thing during Vilafranca's lively **Festa Major** (main annual festival) at the end of August. For more on castellers, see p390.

Vilafranca's premier winery is **Torres** (☎ 93 817 74 87; www.torres.es; 1 9am–5pm Mon–Sat, 9am–1pm Sun & holidays), 3km northwest of the town

centre on the BP2121 near Pacs del Penedès. The Torres family revolutionised Spanish wine-making in the 1960s by introducing new temperature-controlled, stainless-steel technology and French grape varieties.

EATING

While there is no need to stay in Vilafranca and little attraction in doing so, eating is another story altogether. **Cal Ton** (☎ 93 890 37 41; Carrer Casal 8; meals €35–40; 1 lunch & dinner Wed–Sat, lunch Sun & Tue) is one of several enticing options

in town. Hidden away down a narrow side street, Cal Ton has a crisp, modern décor and offers inventive Mediterranean cuisine – all to be washed down with local wines of course!

Getting There & Away

Up to three *rodalies* trains an hour run from Estació Sants Barcelona to Sant Sadurní (€2.40, 40 minutes) and Vilafranca (€3, 50 minutes). By car, take the AP7 and follow the exit signs.

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Catalonia



From metropolitan Barcelona spreads a land of such diversity that, although its furthest-flung corner is no more than 200km away, you could spend weeks dissecting it and still feel you'd barely begun. The Costa Brava, blighted by dreary pockets of mass tourism, still boasts much of the wild beauty that first drew visitors here. Just inland are the medieval city of Girona and Figueres, home of the 'theatre-museum' of that city's zany son, Salvador Dalí.

Running across the north, the Pyrenees rise to mighty 3000m peaks from a series of green and often remote valleys, dotted with villages that retain a palpable rural and even medieval air. These mountains provide some excellent walking and skiing. Enchanting Romanesque churches are scattered across the valleys of the north.

Excitement runs thinner in the far west and south, but there's enough to keep you exploring for days, from the wetlands of the Ebro delta to the historic cities of Tarragona and Lleida. Strike out and you'll discover grand medieval monasteries, lush vineyards and hilltop villages.

Throughout Catalonia (Catalunya in Catalan, Cataluña in Castilian Spanish) the sense of difference from the rest of Spain is intense, not only in the use of Catalan (although everyone speaks Castilian too) but in the festivals, cuisine and reminders of the region's unique history.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Chill out on the Costa Brava coves and beaches near **Palafrugell** (p346) or **Begur** (p347)
- Discover the magical village of **Cadaqués** (p356) and nearby **Port Lligat**, haunted by the memory of Salvador Dalí
- Contemplate the absurd with a visit to the **Teatre-Museu Dalí** (p359) in Figueres
- Conquer the trails of the **Parc Nacional d'Aiguestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici** (p375)
- Take the *cremallera* (rack-and-pinion railway) up to **Vall de Núria** (p366)
- Ski the region's premier slopes at **Baqueira-Beret** (p380)
- Explore the compact medieval city centre of **Girona** (p349)
- Contemplate Spain and France from atop the region's highest mountain, **Pica d'Estats** (p365)
- Seek out the Romanesque churches around **Boi** and **Tauill** (p376)
- Wander the monastery complex of the **Reial Monestir de Santa Maria de Poblet** (p383)



■ AREA: 32,113 SQ KM

■ AVE SUMMER TEMP: HIGH 30°C,
LOW 22°C

■ POP: 6.99 MILLION



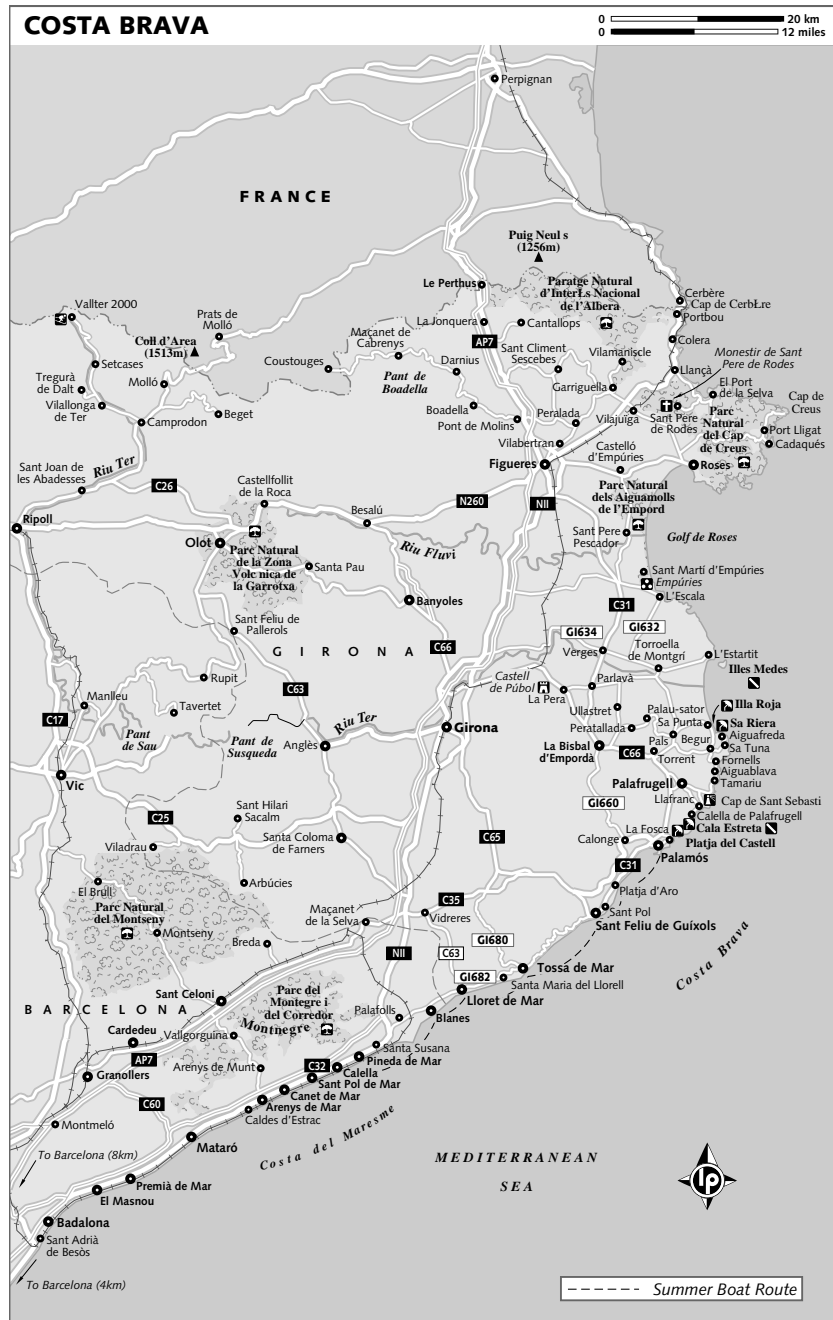
COSTA BRAVA

The Costa Brava (stretching from Blanes to the French border) ranks with the Costa Blanca and Costa del Sol as one of Spain's three great holiday coasts. But alongside some occasionally awful concrete development, English breakfasts and *Konditoreien* (pastry shops), the 'Rugged Coast' has some spectacular stretches.

Nestling in the hilly back country – green and covered in umbrella pine in the south, barer and browner in the north – are scattered charming stone villages, the towering monastery of St Pere de Rodes and Salvador Dalí's fantasy castle home at Púbol. A little further inland are the bigger towns of Girona (Castilian: Gerona),

with a sizable and strikingly well preserved medieval centre, and Figueres (Castilian: Figueras), famous for its bizarre Teatre-Museu Dalí, the eccentric surrealist artist Salvador Dalí.

The ruggedness of the Costa Brava continues under the sea and has some of the best diving in Spain. Diving centres with certified instructors operate at a dozen or more places. The Illes Medes, off L'Estartit, are protected islets with probably the most diverse sealife along the Spanish coast. Other top diving spots include the Illes Formigues (rocky islets off the coast between Palamós and Calella de Palafrugell with waters down to 45m) and Els Ullastres, which has three underwater hills off Llafranc, with some sheer walls and depths to 54m.



Getting There & Away

Direct buses from Barcelona go to most towns on or near the Costa Brava. The railway between Barcelona and the coastal border town of Portbou runs inland, through Girona and Figueres, most of the way. From Girona and Figueres there are fairly good bus services to the coast.

In summer, you could take an alternative approach to the southern Costa Brava from Barcelona by a combination of *rodalies* (local trains) and boat.

The AP7 *autopista* (tollway) and the toll-free NII Hwy both run from Barcelona via Girona and Figueres to the French border, a few kilometres north of La Jonquera. The C32 *autopista* follows the NII up the coast as far as Blanes.

TOSSA DE MAR

pop 5260

Curving around a boat-speckled bay and guarded by a headland crowned with defensive medieval walls and towers, Tossa de Mar is a village of crooked, narrow streets onto which tourism has tacked a larger, modern extension. In July and August it's hard to reach the water's edge without tripping over oily limbs, but it is heaven compared with Lloret de Mar 12km southeast – a real concrete and neon jungle of Piccadilly pubs, *Bierkeller* and soccer chants.

Tossa was one of the first places on the Costa Brava to attract foreign visitors – a small colony of artists and writers gravitated towards what painter Marc Chagall dubbed 'Blue Paradise' in the 1930s.

Orientation & Information

The bus station is beside the GI682, where it leaves for Lloret de Mar. The main beach, Platja Gran, and the older part of town are a 10-minute walk southeast.

The tourist information office (☎ 972 34 01 08; www.infotossa.com; Avinguda del Pelegrí 25; h 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Sun Jun-Sep, 9am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat Apr-May & Oct, 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) is next to the bus station.

Old Tossa

The walls and towers on the pine-dotted headland, Mont Guardi, at the end of the main beach, were built between the 12th and 14th centuries. The area they girdle is known as the Vila Vella (Old Town). When wandering around Mont Guardi you will come across vestiges of a castle, and the *Far de Tossa* (lighthouse;

☎ 972 34 12 97; adult/child €3/1.50; h 10am-10pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Oct-Apr). Inside there is an imaginative 20-minute walk-through display on the history of lighthouses and life inside them. Next door is a great bar (see p345).

In the lower part of Vila Vella, the **Museu Municipal** (☎ 972 34 07 09; Plaça de Roig i Soler 1; adult/student & senior €3/1.80; h 10am-8pm Tue-Sat, to 2pm Sun-Mon Jun-mid-Oct, to 2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sat, to 3pm Sun mid-Sep-mid-Jun), set in the 14th- and 15th-century *Palau del Batlle*, has mosaics and other finds from a Tossa-roman villa, off Avinguda del Pelegrí, and Tossa-related art including Chagall's *El Violinista*.

A tangle of 18th-century lanes, Vila Nova (New Town) stretches away from the old nucleus. Further north, northwest and northeast spreads the sprawl of the really new town.

Beaches & Coves

The main town beach, *Platja Gran*, tends to be busy. Further north along the same bay are the quieter and smaller *Platja del Reig* and *Platja Mar Menuda* at the end of Avinguda de Sant Ramon Penyafor. The coast to the northeast and southwest of Tossa is dotted by rocky coves, some with small beaches. You can walk cross-country from Tossa to *Cala Levado* and *Cala d'En Carles* beaches, 3km southwest, or the longer *Platja de Llorell* (3.5km away), or drive down to *Platja de Llorell* from the GI682. To the northeast, you can walk down from the GI682 to sandy coves such as *Cala Pola* (4km), *Cala Giverola* (5km), *Cala Salions* (8km) and *Platja Vallpregona* (11km).

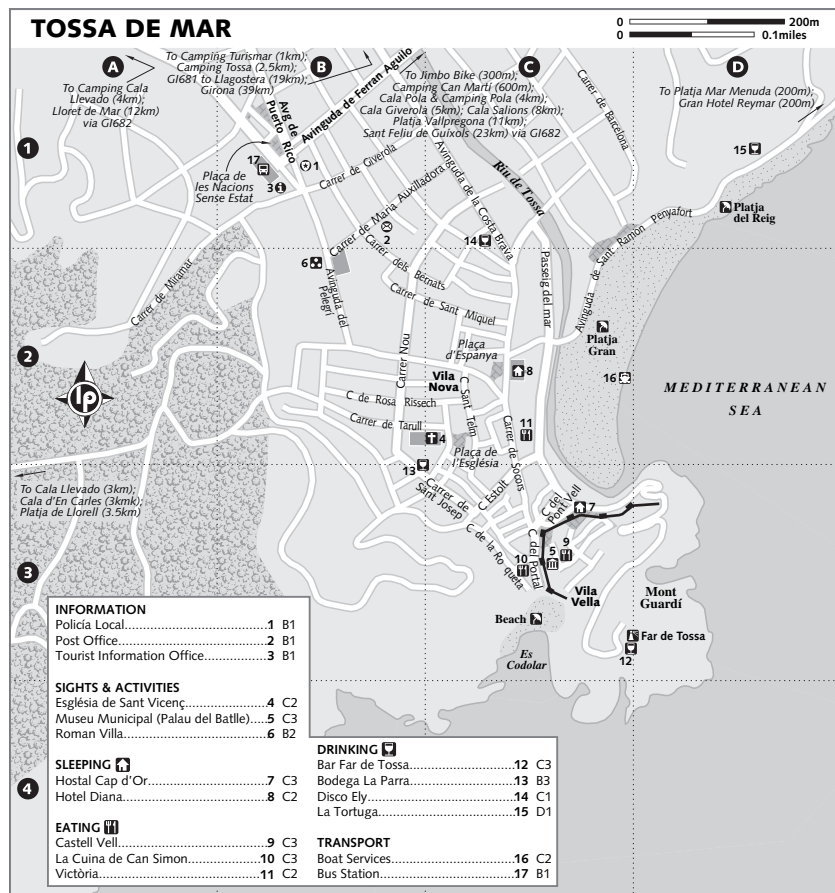
In summer (Easter to September), glass-bottomed boats (☎ 972 34 22 29; return adult/3-12yr/under 3yr €10/6/free) run about hourly to some of these northeastern beaches from *Platja Gran*, calling in at a few sea caves along the way. You have the option of spending the day at *Cala Giverola* (a pleasant sandy cove with a couple of restaurants and bars) and returning on a later boat.

Sleeping

Tossa has around 70 hotels, *hostales* (budget hostels) and *pensiones* (small private hotels). You'll find all of them open from *Semana Santa* (Easter) to October, but only a handful outside those months.

CAMPING

Five camping grounds are spread out around the town. The nearest is **Camping Can Marti** (☎ 972 34 08 51; www.canmarti.org; Rambla Pau Casals; sites per 2-person tent & car €28; h late May-mid-Sep; ♀), 1km back from the beach and well equipped.



Of the others, **Camping Cala Llevadó** (972 34 03 14; www.calallevado.com; Cala Llevadó; sites per 2-person tent & car €31.60; h May-Sep; p s) is probably the best. It stretches back from a cove 4km southwest of Tossa in the settlement of Santa Maria de Llorell. This high-quality facility, apart from its shady camping spots and prime location near a pretty beach, offers tennis courts, a pool, a restaurant, shops and bars.

The remaining ones, should you get stuck, are **Camping Tossa**, **Camping Turismar** and **Camping Pola**. The latter is 4km out of town on a cove below the winding road northeast of Tossa.

HOSTALES & HOTELS

Hostal Cap d'Or (972 34 00 81; Passeig de la Vila Vella 1; s/d incl breakfast €38/72) Rub up against the town's

history in this spot right in front of the walls. Rooms are comfortable and the best look straight onto the beach.

Hotel Diana (972 34 18 86; www.hotelesdante.com; Plaça d'Espanya 6; s/d €76/121, d with sea views €146; h Apr-Nov; a) You'll relax simply on entering this small-scale, older hotel fronting **Platja Gran**. It has a Gaudí-built fireplace in the lounge and oozes Modernista décor and stained glass in the central covered courtyard. Prices include a buffet breakfast.

Gran Hotel Reyomar (972 34 03 12; www.bestwesternreyomar.com; Platja de Mar Menuda; r up to €248; h May-Oct; p a s) This is the top place in town and it's a typical large-scale, multi-star job. The rooms are comfortable and many have terraces offering stunning views out to

sea. You can pamper yourself in the pools and massage facilities of the rather misnamed **Dynamic Center**.

Eating

Victoria (972 34 01 66; Passeig del Mar 23; mains €20-25) This eternal waterfront favourite is popular for its no-nonsense seafood cuisine. Try for a table with windows looking out to sea. Several other cheerful restaurants line this esplanade.

Castell Vell (972 34 10 30; Carrer del Abat Oliva 1; mains €30; h Tue-Sun May-Oct) This rustic stone house lurks within the walls of the old town. Take your meal, which ranges from local cuisine to more-international fare, on the terrace. Seafood predominates.

La Cuina de Can Simon (972 34 12 69; Carrer del Portal 24; mains €50-60; h Wed-Mon) Tossa's culinary star (Michelin says so!) nestles by the old walls in a former fisherman's stone house. It serves an imaginative array of Mediterranean cuisine mixed in with traditional Catalan seaside cooking. Expect an enticing parade of *amuse-gueules* followed by exquisitely prepared mains (such as *suquet de salmonetes de roca con ajo tostado*, a mullet stew with toasted garlic) and good wines from around Spain.

Drinking & Entertainment

Many of the old town's lively bars, some with music, are along and near **Carrer de Sant Josep**. **Bodega La Parra** (Carrer de Sant Josep 26; h 9pm-3am Apr-Oct) manages to maintain an old-fashioned wine-cellar atmosphere. Next to the lighthouse, **Bar Far de Tossa** (972 34 12 97; h 10am-10pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 10am-6pm Oct-Apr) is a groovy little bar with outdoor terrace and the best place for a morning coffee or sunrise wine. Light meals are also provided and the place is wi-fi wired.

For some sensual salsa and rumba sounds, head for the waterfront **La Tortuga** (Avinguda de Sant Ramon de Penyafort 11; h 8pm-3am Fri-Sun Apr-Jun, nightly Jul-Aug). **Disco Ely** (972 34 00 09; Carrer de Pola; h 10pm-5am Apr-Oct), one of a handful of clubs in town, puts on a wide range of mainstream dance music and plays some house in the mix.

Getting There & Away

BOAT

From April to October **Dolfi-Jet** (972 37 19 39) runs boats several times a day between Calella, Blanes, Lloret de Mar and Tossa de Mar (one to 1½ hours), with stops at a few points en route. You could catch one of the *rodalies*

from Barcelona's Catalunya station to Calella or Blanes, then transfer to the boat. The return trip to Tossa from Calella costs €21. In many places the boats simply pull up at the beach (in Tossa, at **Platja Gran**) and tickets are sold at a booth there. From June to September a couple of other companies also kick in, some extending the route as far northeast of Tossa as Sant Feliu de Guixòls.

BUS

Sarfa (972 34 20 25; www.sarfa.com) runs to and from Barcelona's Estació del Nord up to 11 times daily via Lloret de Mar (€8.95, 1¼ hours). Otherwise there is only a handful of summer connections to Girona and Sant Feliu de Guixòls.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

From Barcelona, the **C32 autopista**, which takes you almost to Blanes, saves a weary trudge on the toll-free A2. To the north, the 23km stretch of the G1682 to Sant Feliu de Guixòls is a great drive, winding its way up, down and around picturesque bays.

Getting Around

Jimbo Bike (972 34 30 44; Avinguda de Pau Casals 12; h 9am-9pm mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 10am-1pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat mid-Sep-Nov & Easter-mid-Jun) rents out mountain bikes for up to €21 for 24 hours.

SANT FELIU DE GUIXÒLS

pop 20,320

A snaking road hugs the spectacular ups and downs of the Costa Brava for the 23km from Tossa de Mar to Sant Feliu de Guixòls. On this road *Rose Macaulay*, author of *Fabled Shore* (1950), 'met only one mule cart, laden with pine boughs, and two very polite *guardias civiles*'. Along the way are several enticing little inlets and largely hidden beaches.

Sant Feliu itself has an attractive waterside promenade and a handful of curious leftovers from its long past, the most important being the so-called **Porta Ferrada** (Iron Gate): a wall and entrance, which is all that remains of a 10th-century monastery, the **Monestir de Sant Benet**. A couple of nice-enough beaches can be found on either side of the town.

Sarfa buses call in here frequently (up to 16 from Easter to September) from Barcelona (€11.45, 1½ hours), on the way to **Platja d'Aro** or **Palafregell** or both. They do *not* follow the coast road.

PLATJA D'ARO & PALAMÓS

These spots mark the two ends of one of the Costa Brava's party spots. The beaches are OK, the high-rises are standard issue and the nightlife is busy. The area tends to attract more Spanish tourism than foreign. Around the main broad beaches and their resorts are some magnificent stretches of coast with enticing coves. Both are stops on the frequent Barcelona–Palafrugell Sarfa bus route (€11.80 and €12.65 respectively, 1½ hours to Platja d'Aro and 15 minutes more to Palamós).

The 2km-long Platja d'Aro beach is big and sandy, but for something more secluded you could head north along the GRS92 coastal walking path, which winds along the high leafy coastline for about 4km to Sant Antoni de Calonge. The first beach you hit is Platja Rovira, and soon after, the smaller and more enchanting Sa Cova. A little further on again are two small nudist coves, Platja d'en Ros and Platja d'es Canyars.

If you should end up in Palamós and wonder how it happened, all is not lost. Again you can pick up the GR92 trail and head north for Platja del Castell, a virtually untouched strand. If you don't fancy the walk, drive out of Palamós heading for Palafrugell and look for the signs that lead right to the beach. Two kilometres of partly unsealed road get you there. The northern end of the beach is capped by a high wooded promontory that hides the 'castle' (the remains of a 6th- to 1st-century-BC Iberian settlement) after which the beach is named.

PALAFRUGELL & AROUND

North of Palamós begins one of the most beautiful stretches of the Costa Brava. The town of Palafrugell, 5km inland, is the main access point for a cluster of enticing beach spots. Calella de Palafrugell, Llafranc and Tamariu, one-time fishing villages squeezed into small bays, now constitute three of the Costa Brava's most charming, low-key resorts.

Begur (opposite), 7km northeast of Palafrugell, is an interesting village with a cluster of less developed beaches nearby. Inland, seek out the charming villages of Pals and Peratallada.

Palafrugell

pop 17,420

Palafrugell is the main transport, shopping and service hub for the area but is of little interest in itself. The C66 Palamós–Girona road passes through the western side of Palafrugell,

a 10-minute walk from the main square, Plaça Nova. The **tourist office** (☎ 972 30 02 28; www.palafrugell.net/turisme; Carrer del Carrilet 2; 11 9am–9pm Mon–Sat, 10am–1pm Sun Jul–Aug, 9am–1pm & 5–8pm Mon–Sat, 10am–1pm Sun May–Jun & Sep, 9am–1pm & 4–7pm Mon–Sat, 10am–1pm Sun Oct–Apr) is beside the C66 Hwy. The **bus station** (Carrer de Torres Jonama 67–9) is a short walk from the tourist office.

Sarfa runs to Palafrugell from Barcelona up to 16 times daily (€13.70, two hours). Many buses also run between Girona and Palafrugell (€4.55, one hour if you get the most direct service).

Calella de Palafrugell

pop 420

The southernmost of the Palafrugell resorts, Calella is also the most spread out. Its low buildings are strung Aegean-style around a bay of rocky points and small beaches, with a few fishing boats still hauled up on the sand. The **tourist office** (☎ 972 61 44 75; Carrer de les Voltes 4; 11 10am–1pm & 5–9pm Mon–Sat, 10am–1pm Sun Jul–Aug; 10am–1pm & 5–8pm Mon–Sat, 10am–1pm Sun Apr–Jun & Sep–mid-Oct) is near the seafront.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Apart from plonking on one of the beaches, you can stroll along pretty coastal footpaths northeast to Llafranc (20 or 30 minutes), or south to Platja del Golfet beach, close to Cap Roig (about 40 minutes). Atop Cap Roig, the **Jardi Botànic de Cap Roig** (☎ 972 61 45 82; admission €4; 11 9am–8pm Jun–Sep, to 6pm Oct–May) is a beautiful garden of 1200 Mediterranean species, set around the early-20th-century castle-palace of Nikolai Voevodsky. He was a tsarist colonel with expensive tastes, who fell out of grace in his homeland after the Russian Revolution.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Calella stages the Costa Brava's biggest summer *cantada* de havaneres. *Havaneres* are melancholy Caribbean sea shanties that became popular among Costa Brava sailors in the 19th century, when Catalonia maintained busy links with Cuba. These folksy concerts are traditionally accompanied by the drinking of *cremat* – a rum, coffee, sugar, lemon and cinnamon concoction that you set alight briefly before quaffing. Traditionally, Calella's *cantada* is held in August.

SLEEPING & EATING

Camping Moby Dick (☎ 972 61 43 07; www.campingmobydick.com; Carrer de la Costa Verde 16–28; sites per

2-person tent & car €21; 11 Apr–Sep; p s) Set in a pine-and-oak stand about 100m from the seaside, this camping ground is in an ideal location. It has tennis courts and offers the chance of diving in the area.

Hotel La Torre (☎ 972 61 46 03; www.hotel-latorre.com; Passeig de la Torre 28; s/d €59/115; 11 Apr–Sep; p) Dominating a high point on the road leading north out of Calella, and in a leafy spot near an old watchtower, this hotel offers 28 rooms, most with extensive sea views and cheery balconies.

Restaurant Tragamar (☎ 972 61 51 89; mains €25; 11 lunch only Mon, Wed & Thu, lunch & dinner Fri–Sun) A little north of the arcaded seaside Plaça de Port Bo, on a separate beach, Platja Canadell, the Tragamar serves up *tapas* and seafood. The *escamarlans gratinats amb pasta fresca* (crayfish with a light cheese crust and fresh pasta) is typical of their original approach to dishes.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses from Palafrugell run to Calella, then Llafranc, then back to Palafrugell (€1.20, 30 minutes). They leave every half-hour or so between 7.40am and 8.30pm in July and August; the service is steadily reduced to three or four buses a day from November to February.

Llafranc

pop 170

Barely 2km northeast of Calella de Palafrugell, and now merging with it along the roads back from the rocky coast between them, Llafranc has a smaller bay but a longer stretch of sand and gets more crowded. The **tourist office** (☎ 972 30 50 08; Carrer de Roger de Llúria; 11 10am–1pm & 5–9pm Mon–Sat, 10am–1pm Sun Jul–Aug, 10am–1pm & 5–8pm Mon–Sat, 10am–1pm Sun Apr–Jun & Sep–mid-Oct) is a kiosk just back from the western end of the beach.

From the **Far de Sant Sebastià** (a lighthouse) and **Ermita de Sant Sebastià** (a chapel now incorporated into a luxury hotel), up on Cap de Sant Sebastià (east of the town), there are tremendous views in both directions along the coast. It's a 40-minute walk up: follow the steps from the harbour and the road up to the right. You can walk on to Tamariu.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hostal Celimar (☎ 972 30 13 74; www.hostalcelimar.com; Carrer de Carudo 12–14; s/d €38/60) The sunset yellow *hostal* is barely a stumble from the beach and offers bright rooms, with differing colour schemes from room to room, and spotless

bathrooms. One of the cheapest deals in town, it also happens to be one of the best.

Hotel Far de Sant Sebastià (☎ 972 30 16 39; www.elfar.net; d €267–321; p a) A fine old 18th-century *hostelry*, with a chapel and a defence tower, has been converted into an elegant hotel with magnificent clifftop sea views. The best rooms come with a spacious terrace. Grand stone arches and sunny courtyards add a romantic touch and the fine dining in the hotel restaurant is another draw.

Chez Tomás (☎ 972 30 62 15; Carrer de Lluís Marqués Carbo 2; mains €25–30; 11 dinner only daily Jun–Sep, lunch & dinner Fri–Sun Oct–May) As the name hints, the game here has a French flavour. Its strength is the use of fresh market produce to come up with such dishes as *magret d'ànec amb figues* (duck slices with figs).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

See Calella de Palafrugell for information on bus services (left). The Llafranc bus stop is on Carrer de la Sirena, up the hill on the Calella side of town.

Tamariu

pop 90

About 3.5km north up the coast from Llafranc, as the crow flies, Tamariu is a small crescent cove surrounded by pine stands and other greenery. Its beach has some of the most translucent waters on Spain's Mediterranean coast. The **tourist office** (☎ 972 62 01 93; Carrer de la Riera; 11 10am–1pm & 5–8pm Mon–Sat, 10am–1pm Sun Jun–Sep) is in the middle of the village.

Hotel Es Furió (☎ 972 62 00 36; www.esfurio.com; Carrer del Foraió 5–7; s/d incl breakfast €74/128), set just back from the beach, has spacious, cheerfully decorated rooms. Pale oranges and aquas and other seaside colours predominate. It has its own restaurant and the beachfront is lined with seafood eateries.

Sarfa buses from Palafrugell run to Tamariu (€1.20, 15 minutes) three or four times daily, from mid-June to mid-September only. A rough road leads to the beach of Aiguablava (p348).

Begur

pop 3990

The *castell* (castle), dating to the 10th century and towering above the village, is in much the same state in which it was left by the Spanish troops who wrecked it to impede the advance of Napoleon's army in 1810. Dotted around the village are six or so towers built for defence

against 16th- and 17th-century pirates. The **tourist office** (☎ 972 62 45 20; Avinguda del Onze de Setembre 5; ⌚ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) has loads of information.

A few steps towards the castle from the **central church is Hotel Rosa** (☎ 972 62 30 15; www.hotel-rosa.com; Carrer de Pi i Ralló 19; s/d €75/87; a i), a little surprise package which has well-kept, spacious rooms. You can get some sun upstairs on the terrace and relax in the hydro-massage baths. Eat at their Fonda Caner at No 10.

Sarfa buses run up to four times a day from Barcelona (€14.35, 1¼ to 2¼ hours) via Palafrugell. On weekdays one Sarfa bus runs to Girona (€5.80, 1¼ hours).

Around Begur

You can reach a series of smallish beaches, on an enticing stretch of coast, by turning east off the Palafrugell road 2km south of the centre of Begur. About 2km down is a turn-off to the black-sand **Platja Fonda** (1km). Half a kilometre further on is the turn-off to Fornells (1km), a hamlet on one of the most picturesque bays of the Costa Brava, with a marina, beach and incredibly blue water.

One kilometre on from the Fornells turn-off is **Aiguablava**, with a slightly bigger and busier beach, and the **Parador Nacional de la Costa Brava** (☎ 972 62 21 62; www.parador.es; s/d €134/178), a modern luxury hotel enjoying lovely views back across the Fornells bay (half board obligatory in July and August).

Another road from Begur leads 2km east to **Aiguafreda**, a beach on a lovely cove backed by pine-covered hills, and, a bit further south, the slightly more built-up **Sa Tuna**, on a quiet pebbly beach. You could stay in **Hostal Sa Tuna** (☎ 972 62 21 98; d €120) and gobble down a paella (around €17) in its convivial seaside eatery. A couple of kilometres north of Begur, there's another nice beach at **Sa Riera**. A walk along the coastal track brings you to the reddish sand of **Illa Roja** (Red Island), a nudist strip beyond which stretches the broad **Platja de Pals** to the north.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

A **bus platges** (beach bus) service runs from Plaça de Forgas in Begur between late June and mid-September.

Pals

pop 2300

About 6km inland from Begur is the pretty walled town of Pals. The main monument

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Mas de Torrent (☎ 972 30 32 92; www.mastorrent.com; Torrent; ste €390-625; p a i s) Set in green fields by the tiny settlement of Torrent, about 2.5km southwest of Pals, this luxury rural hideaway is the antidote to worldly stress and worry. The 18th-century farmhouse has been lovingly restored and modified, and its rooms furnished with timber period items. The top-end suites each have their *own* pool (in addition to the communal one). There are tennis courts on the grounds and the hotel provides mountain bikes. In the evening, settle in for dinner in the gardens.

is the 15m **Torre de les Hores** (clock tower) but what makes the trip worthwhile is simply wandering around the uneven lanes and poking your nose into one medieval corner or another. From the **Mirador del Pedró** you can see northeast across the coastal plains to the sea, with the Illes Medes in the background. Up to four Sarfa buses come here from Barcelona (€14.80, two hours) on weekdays.

Peratallada

The warm stone houses of Peratallada have made this village a favourite day trip for Catalans. Its narrow streets and 11th-century castle-mansion (now a luxury hotel and restaurant) are supplemented by several other places to stay, enticing restaurants and a sprinkling of low-key boutiques.

Ca l'Àliu (☎ 972 63 40 61; www.calaliu.com; Carrer de la Roca 6; d €60-83) is an 18th-century village home, where the old stone-and-timber frame has been teamed with modern comforts to create an atmospheric place with seven rooms for an overnight stop. There are several other such rural houses and a hotel.

Peratallada is on the Begur-Girona bus line (once daily Monday to Friday).

CASTELL DE PÚBOL

The **Castell de Púbol** (☎ 972 48 86 55; www.salvador-dali.org; La Pera; adult/student & senior €6/4; ⌚ 10.30am-7.15pm mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 10.30am-5.15pm Tue-Sun mid-Mar-mid-Jun & mid-Sep-late Oct, 10.30am-4.15pm Tue-Sat Nov-Dec) is at La Pera, just south of the C66 and 22km northwest of Palafrugell. It forms the southernmost point of northeastern Catalonia's 'Salvador Dalí triangle', whose other elements

include the **Teatre-Museu Dalí** in Figueres and the Cadaqués area.

In 1968 Dalí bought this Gothic and Renaissance mansion, which includes a 14th-century church, and gave it to his wife, Gala, who lived here until her death. Local lore has it that the notoriously promiscuous Gala was still sending for young village men almost right up to the time she died in 1982, aged 88.

The castle was renovated by Dalí in his inimitable style, with lions' heads staring from the tops of cupboards, statues of elephants with giraffes' legs in the garden, and a stuffed giraffe staring at Gala's tomb in the crypt. In the garage is the blue Cadillac in which Dalí took Gala for a last drive round the estate – after she died.

Sarfa buses between Palafrugell and Girona run along the C66.

GIRONA

pop 86,670

Northern Catalonia's largest city, Girona (Catalian: Gerona) sits in a valley 36km inland from Palafrugell. Its impressive medieval centre is a powerful reason for making a visit.

The Roman town of Gerunda lay on Via Augusta, the highway from Rome to Cádiz (Carrer de la Força in Girona's old town follows part of Via Augusta). Taken from the Muslims by the Franks in AD 797, Girona became capital of one of Catalonia's most important counties, falling under the sway of Barcelona in the late 9th century. Its wealth in medieval times produced many fine Romanesque and Gothic buildings that have survived repeated attacks and sieges through the centuries.

Orientation

The narrow streets of the old town climb above the east bank of the Riu Onyar and are easy to explore on foot. Several road bridges and footbridges link it to the new town across the river. The train station is 1km southwest, on Plaça d'Espanya, off Carrer de Barcelona, with the bus station behind it on Carrer de Rafael Masó i Valentí.

Information

Parc Hospitalari (Hospital) Martí i Julià (Hospital: ☎ 972 18 25 00; Carrer del Doctor Castany s/n)

Policia Nacional (National Police: Carrer de Sant Pau 2)

Tourist office (☎ 972 22 65 75; www.ajuntament.gi/turisme; Rambla de la Libertat 1; ⌚ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm & 4-8pm Sat, 9am-2pm Sun)

Sights CATEDRAL

The billowing baroque façade of the **cathedral** stands at the head of a majestic flight of steps rising from Plaça de la Catedral. Most of the building, however, is much older than its exterior. Repeatedly rebuilt and altered down the centuries, it has Europe's widest Gothic nave (23m). The **cathedral's museum** (☎ 972 21 44 26; www.lacatedraldegirona.com; admission €4, free on Sun; ⌚ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat Mar-Jun, 10am-8pm Tue-Sat Jul-Sep, 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sat Oct-Feb, 10am-2pm Sun & holidays), through the door marked 'Claustre Tresor', contains the masterly Romanesque *Tapis de la Creació* (Tapestry of the Creation) and a Mozarabic illuminated *Beatus* manuscript, dating from AD 975. The Creation tapestry shows God at the epicentre and in the circle around Him the creation of Adam, Eve, the animals, the sky, light and darkness.

The fee for the museum also admits you to the beautiful 12th-century Romanesque cloister, whose 112 stone columns display some fine, if weathered, carving. From the cloister you can see the 13th-century Torre de Carlemany bell tower.

MUSEU D'ART

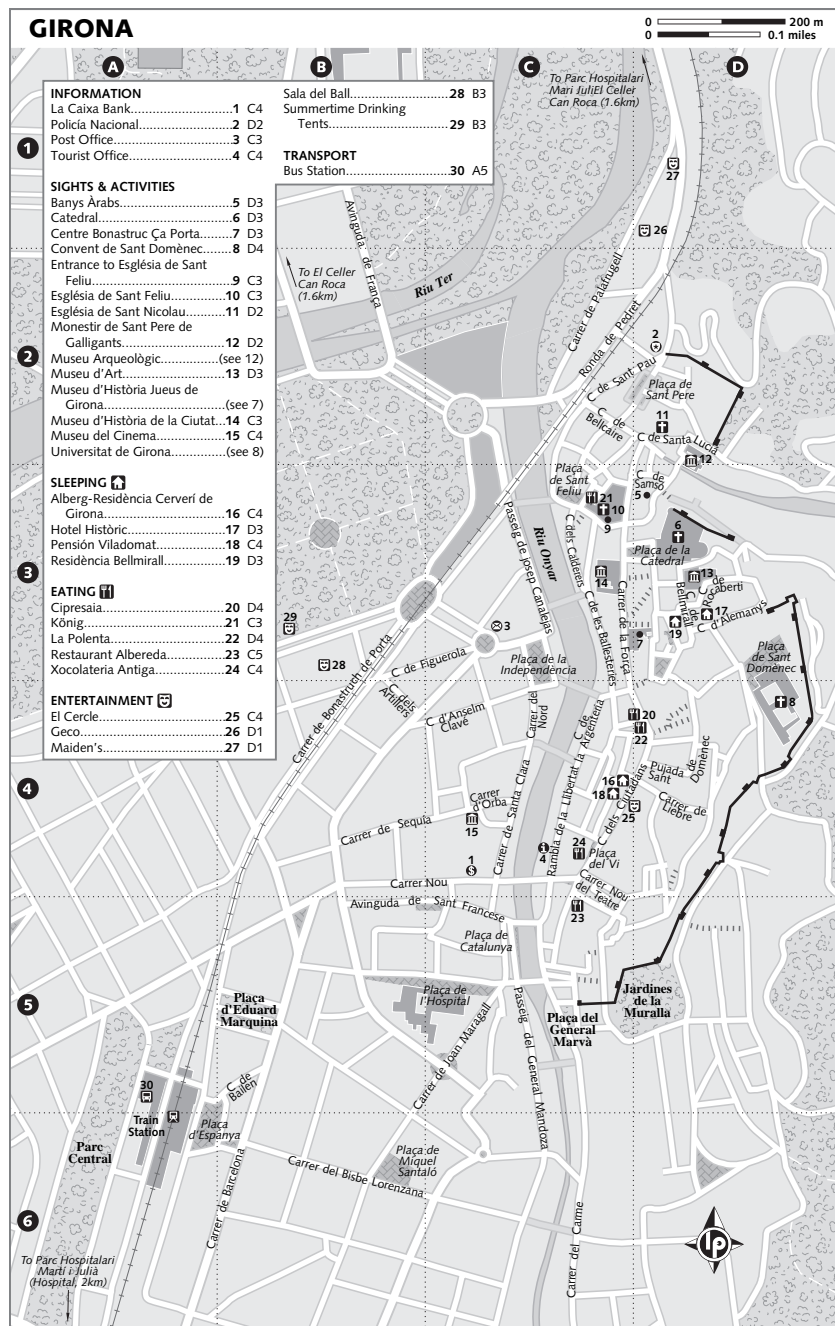
Next door to the cathedral, in the 12th- to 16th-century **Palau Episcopal**, the **art museum** (☎ 972 20 38 34; www.museuart.com; Plaça de la Catedral 12; admission €2; ⌚ 10am-7pm Tue-Sat Mar-Sep, 10am-6pm Tue-Sat Oct-Feb, 10am-2pm Sun & holidays) collection ranges from Romanesque woodcarvings to early 20th-century paintings.

ESGLÉSIA DE SANT FELIU

Girona's second great church (Plaça de Sant Feliu; ⌚ 9.30am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon & 4-7pm Sun) is downhill from the cathedral. The 17th-century main façade, with its landmark single tower, is on Plaça de Sant Feliu, but the entrance is around the side. The nave has 13th-century Romanesque arches but 14th- to 16th-century Gothic upper levels. The northernmost of the chapels, at the far western end of the church, is graced by a masterly Catalan Gothic sculpture, *Aloi de Montbrai's* alabaster *Crist Jacent* (Recumbent Christ).

BANYS ÀRABS

Although modelled on earlier Muslim and Roman bathhouses, the **Arab baths** (☎ 972 21 32 62; Carrer de Ferran Catió; admission €1.50; ⌚ 10am-8pm Tue-Sat Jul-Aug, 10am-7pm Tue-Sat Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-2pm



Tue-Sat Oct-Mar, 10am-2pm Sun & holidays year-round) are a 12th-century Christian affair in Romanesque style. This is the only public bathhouse discovered from medieval Christian Spain, where, in reaction to the Muslim obsession with water and cleanliness, washing almost came to be regarded as ungodly. The baths contain an *apodyterium* (changing room), followed by a *frigidarium* and *tepidarium* (with respectively cold and warm water), and a *caldarium* (a kind of sauna).

PASSEIG ARQUEOLÒGIC

Across the street from the Bany's Àrabs, steps lead up into lovely gardens, which follow the city walls up to the 18th-century Portal de Sant Cristòfol gate, from where you can walk back down to the cathedral.

MONESTIR DE SANT PERE DE GALLIGANTS

Down across thin Riu Galligants, this 11th- and 12th-century Romanesque monastery has another lovely cloister with some marvellous animal and monster carvings on the capitals of its pillars. The monastery houses Girona's **Museu Arqueològic** (€ 972 20 26 32; admission €1.80; 10.30am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat Jun-Sep, 10.30am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sat Oct-May, 10.30am-2pm Sun & holidays), whose exhibits date from prehistoric to medieval times, and include Roman mosaics and some medieval Jewish tombstones.

THE CALL

Until 1492 Girona was home to Catalonia's second-most important medieval Jewish community (after Barcelona), and its Jewish quarter, the Call, was centred on Carrer de la Força. For an idea of medieval Jewish life and culture, visit the **Museu d'Història dels Jueus de Girona** (Centre Bonastruc Ça Porta; € 972 21 67 61; Carrer de la Força 8; admission €2; 10am-8pm Mon-Sat Jun-Oct, 10am-6pm Mon-Sat Nov-May, 10am-3pm Sun & holidays). Named after Jewish Girona's most illustrious figure, a 13th-century cabbalist philosopher and mystic, the centre – a warren of rooms and stairways around a courtyard – hosts limited exhibitions and is a focal point for studies of Jewish Spain.

MUSEU D'HISTÒRIA DE LA CIUTAT

The **City History Museum** (€ 972 22 22 29; Carrer de la Força 27; admission €2; 10am-2pm & 5-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) has displays covering everything from the city's Roman origins to the *sardana* (Catalonia's national round-dance) tradition.

MUSEU DEL CINEMA

The Casa de les Aigües houses Spain's only **cinema museum** (€ 972 41 27 77; www.museudelcinema.org; Carrer de Sequia 1; admission €3; 10am-8pm Tue-Sun May-Sep; 10am-6pm Tue-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat, 11am-3pm Sun Oct-Apr). The *Collecció* Tomàs Mallol includes not only displays tracing the history of cinema, but also a parade of hands-on items for indulging in shadow games, optical illusions and the like – it's great for kids.

Sleeping

Alberg-Residència Cerveri de Girona (€ 972 21 80 03; Carrer dels Ciutadans 9; dm student & under 26yr/26yr & over €18/21; j) A modern youth hostel in the old town, it doubles for most of the year as a student residence.

Pensió Viladomat (€ 972 20 31 76; Carrer dels Ciutadans 5; s/d without bathroom €20/38, d with bathroom €60) This is one of the nicest of the cheaper *pensions* scattered about the southern end of the old town. It has eight simple but sparsely maintained rooms.

Residència Bellmirall (€ 972 20 40 09; Carrer de Bellmirall 3; s/d €35/60; 1 closed Jan-Mar; a) This attractive spot has been carved out of a medieval building in the heart of the city. The guy who runs it is an artist and his taste is reflected in the place's overhaul. Rooms with shared bathroom are marginally cheaper.

Hotel Històric (€ 972 22 35 83; www.hotelhistoric.com; Carrer de Bellmirall 4/a; s/d €109/122; a i p) A bijou hotel in an historic building in the heart of old Girona, it has eight spacious rooms that are individually decorated. For a greater sense of home, you could opt for one of the seven self-contained apartments (going for up to €300).

Eating

Xocolateria Antiga (€ 972 21 66 81; Plaça del Vi 8; coffee & pastry €5-8; 1 Mon-Sat) Modernista décor, frilly lace in the windows and hot sticky cups of chocolate: time has stood still here. It's a great spot for breakfast.

König (€ 972 22 57 82; Carrer dels Calderers 16; meals €8-15; 1 daily) For a quick sandwich, *entrepà* (filled roll) or simple hot dishes, 'King' boasts a broad outdoor terrace shaded by thick foliage. Or just stop by for a drink.

La Polenta (€ 972 20 93 74; Carrer de la Cort Reial 6; meals €15-20; 1 Fri-Wed; v) For vegetarian goodies, consider this cheerful option. The *seitan amb formatge blau i couscous* (seitan with blue cheese and couscous; €9.15) is a hit. Opening days tend to vary.

Cipresaia (☎ 972 22 24 49; Carrer de Blas Fournàs 2; meals €25-30; 𠄎 dinner only Fri-Sat, lunch only Mon-Wed & Sun) This tranquil, romantic option offers a range of Catalan dishes, from a succulent *arròs a llàmantol* (lobster rice; €17) to *magret d'ànec al Cabernet Sauvignon* (duck slices in Cab Sav; €13.90). Candlelit dinners for two in the heart of the old town are on the menu too.

Restaurant Albereda (☎ 972 22 60 02; Carrer de l'Albereda 9; meals €40; 𠄎 Tue-Sat & lunch only Mon) Elegant Albereda, the town's senior restaurant, dishes up classic Catalan cuisine. It frequently has gourmet themes, such as mushrooms (when they are in season), in which a special tasting menu includes a different kind of mushroom in every course, even dessert.

El Cellar de Can Roca (☎ 972 22 21 57; www.cellarcanroca.com; Carretera de Taialà 40; mains €60-80; 𠄎 Mon-Fri & dinner Sat) About 2km west of the city centre (and not the easiest place to find), this two-star Michelin choice is one of Catalonia's top-ranking restaurants. You might start with *cloïsses amb sorbet de naranja i Campari* (clams in orange sorbet and Campari) and proceed to *vieires amb carbassa, fruita de la passió, te verd i ceba tendra* (scallops with pumpkin, passionfruit, green tea and sweet onion).

Drinking & Entertainment

Students make the nightlife here, so in summer things calm down. Thursday is the big night of the week, as most people head for the coast on weekends.

El Cercle (☎ 972 22 45 29; Carrer del Ciutadans 8; 𠄎 8am-3am) Carved out of a medieval warren of stone arches and timber beams, this cavernous, centuries-old house is perfect for a quiet, evening tittle.

You can keep going until the wee hours near the river north of the old town, where you will find several bars (and restaurants) along Carrer de Palafrugell and Ronda de Pedret. **Geco** (Carrer de Palafrugell 20), which hosts a mix of rock and club sounds depending on the night, and **Maiden's** (for heavy metal maniacs) at No 38 offer boisterous beer and beats nights.

In summer (May to September), a series of *drinking tents (las carpas)* is erected in the park, west of the railway line. Across the road, the cyber techno **Sala del Ball** (☎ 972 20 14 39; Carrer del Riu Güell 2; 𠄎 midnight-5am Thu-Sat) is Girona's Thursday-night clubbing destination.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Located 11km south of the centre is **Girona-Costa Brava airport**, and just off the AP7 and A2, is Ryanair's Spanish hub. **Sagalés** (☎ 902 36 15 50; www.sagales.com) operates hourly services from Girona-Costa Brava airport to Girona's main bus/train station (€1.75, 25 minutes) in connection with flights. The same company runs direct Barcelona Bus services to/from Estació Nord bus station (Map pp274-5) in Barcelona (one way/return €11/19, 70 minutes), connecting with flights. Sarfa runs a couple of buses a day in summer, from the airport to coastal destinations, including Tossa de Mar (€8, one hour) and Roses (€13, one hour 20 minutes), as well as Figueres (€13, 55 minutes). A **taxi** (☎ 972 20 33 73, 972 22 23 33) to/from the airport to central Girona costs around €15.

BUS

Teisa (☎ 972 20 02 75; www.teisa-bus.com in Spanish) runs up to eight services daily (four on Sunday) to Besalú (€3.10, 50 minutes) and Olot (€5.55, 1¼ hours).

TRAIN

Girona is on the railway line between Barcelona, Figueres and Portbou on the French border. There are more than 20 trains per day to Figueres (€2.40 to €2.70, 30 to 40 minutes) and Barcelona (€5.45 to €6.25, 1½ hours), and about 15 to Portbou or Cerbère or both (€3.60 to €4.10, 50 minutes to one hour).

VERGES

pop 1170

About 15km east of Girona, this town has little to offer, but if in the area on Holy Thursday (Easter), make an effort to see the macabre evening procession of the *Dansa de la Mort*. People dressed as skeletons perform the Dance of Death through the streets as part of a much bigger procession enacting Christ's way to Calvary. The fun starts around 10pm. Girona-Torroella buses pass through here.

TORROELLA DE MONTGRÍ

pop 10,230

On the Riu Ter, about 30km northeast of Girona and 15km north of Palafrugell, the agreeable old town of Torroella de Montgrí is the funnel through which travellers to L'Estartit must pass.

Sights & Activities

Overlooking the town from the top of the 300m limestone Montgrí hills to the north, the impressive-but-empty **Castell de Montgrí** was built between 1294 and 1301 for King Jaume II, during his efforts to bring to heel the disobedient counts of Empúries, to the north. There's no road, and by foot it's a 40-minute climb from Torroella. Head north from Plaça del Lledoner along Carrer de Fàtima, at the end of which is a sign pointing the way.

In town itself, the **Can Quintana – Centre Cultural de la Mediterrània** (☎ 972 75 51 80; Carrer d'Ulla 31; admission free; 𠄎 11am-2pm & 6-9pm Wed-Sat & Mon, to 2pm Sun Jul-Aug, 11am-2pm & 5-8pm Wed-Sat & Mon, 11am-2pm Sun Sep-Jun) is a local museum and cultural centre housed in the Can Quintana mansion. The permanent exhibition on the 1st floor concentrates on local history, culture and music.

Getting There & Away

Ampsa (☎ 972 75 82 33; www.ampsa.org; Plaça d'Espanya 19) runs buses about hourly (€1.20) to L'Estartit from June to September (half as often during the rest of the year). Sarfa has three or four daily buses to/from Barcelona (€16, 1¼ hours).

L'ESTARTIT & THE ILLES MEDES

pop 920

L'Estartit, 6km east of Torroella de Montgrí, has a long, wide beach of fine sand but nothing over any other Costa Brava package resort –

except for the Illes Medes (Islas Medes). The group of rocky islets barely 1km offshore are home to some of the most abundant marine life on Spain's Mediterranean coast.

The main road in from Torroella de Montgrí is called *Avinguda de Grècia* as it approaches the beach; the beachfront road is *Passeig Marítim*, at the northern end of which is the **tourist office** (☎ 972 75 19 10; www.estartit.org; Passeig Marítim; 𠄎 9.30am-2pm & 4-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jul-Aug, 9.30am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun May-Jun & Sep, 9am-1pm & 3-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat Oct-Apr).

Illes Medes

The shores and waters around these seven islets, an offshore continuation of the limestone Montgrí hills, have been protected since 1985 as a *reserva natural submarina* (underwater nature reserve), which has brought a proliferation in their marine life and made them Spain's most popular destination for snorkellers and divers. Some 1345 plant and animal species have been identified here. There's a big bird population too; one of the Mediterranean's largest colonies of yellow-legged gulls (8000 pairs) breeds here between March and May.

Kiosks by the harbour, at the northern end of L'Estartit beach, offer snorkelling and glass-bottomed boat trips to the islands. Other glass-bottomed boat trips go to a series of caves along the coast to the north, or combine these with the Medes.

DIVING OFF THE COSTA BRAVA

The range of depths (down to 50m) and underwater cavities and tunnels around the Illes Medes contribute much to their attraction. On and around rocks near the surface are colourful algae and sponges, as well as octopuses, crabs and various fish. Below 10m or 15m, cavities and caves harbour lobsters, scorpion fish and large conger eels and groupers. Some groupers and perch may feed from the hand. If you get down to the sea floor, you may see angler fish, thornback rays or marbled electric rays.

Several outfits in L'Estartit can take you out scuba diving, at the Medes or off the mainland coast; the tourist office has lists of them. It's worth shopping around before taking the plunge. Apart from price difference, try to assess the quality. Is the equipment in good shape or old? (There's nothing worse than a broken regulator.) Do they bother with safety checks? Do they provide guides? What is their attitude to touching coral and sealife? When doing courses, it is important to feel that safety aspects are properly taken into account. Sloppy dive shops often provide sloppy instruction.

If you're a qualified diver, a two-hour trip usually costs between €26 and €30 per person. Full gear rental can cost €16 a day. Night dives are possible (usually about €30 to €34). You generally pay extra to go with a guide and for insurance if you don't have any. If you're a novice, do an introductory dive for around €45 or a full, five-day PADI Open Water Diver course for around €375.

Sleeping & Eating

Les Medes (☎ 972 75 18 05; www.campinglesmedes.com; Paratge Camp de l'Arbre; sites per 2-person tent & car €29; h Dec-Oct; p s) Of the eight camping grounds in and around town, this is in a leafy location about 800m from the seaside and has a sauna. Bike rental and even massages are available.

Hotel Les Illes (☎ 972 75 12 39; www.hotellesilles.com; Carrer de Les Illes 55; s/d with half-board €44/80) A decent, functional place with comfortable, if unspectacular, rooms, all with sparkling bathroom and balcony. This is basically a divers' hangout that's in a good spot back from the port. A buffet breakfast is included.

The northern end of Passeig Marítim, by the roundabout, is swarming with eateries. These places are all pretty similar, presenting a mix of basic Spanish fare and chicken-and-chips-style meals.

Getting There & Around

Sarfa runs to and from Barcelona once daily (€16, 2¼ hours), rising to four times in peak season (July to August).

L'ESCALA

pop 5180

L'Escala, 11km north of Torroella de Montgrí, is a pleasant medium-sized resort on the southern shore of the Golf de Roses. It's close to ancient Empúries (Castilian: Ampurias) and, about 10km further north, the wetlands of the Parc Natural dels Aiguamolls de l'Empordà.

Orientation & Information

If you arrive by Sarfa bus, you'll alight on L'Escala's Plaça de les Escoles, where you'll find the **tourist office** (☎ 972 77 06 03; Plaça de les Escoles 1; h 9am-7pm daily May-Sep, 9am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Oct-Apr). Empúries is 1km around the coast to the northwest of the town centre.

Empúries

Empúries was probably the first, and certainly one of the most important, Greek colonies on the Iberian Peninsula. Early Greek traders, pushing on from a trading post at Masilia (Marseille in France), set up a new post around 600 BC at what is now the charming village of Sant Martí d'Empúries, then an island. Soon afterwards they founded a mainland colony nearby, which came to be called Emporion

(Market) and remained an important trading centre, and conduit of Greek culture to the Iberians, for centuries.

In 218 BC Roman legions landed here to cut off Hannibal's supply lines in the Second Punic War. About 195 BC they set up a military camp and by 100 BC had added a town. A century later it had merged with the Greek one. Emporiae, as the place was then known, was abandoned in the late 3rd century AD, after raids by Germanic tribes. Later, an early Christian basilica and a cemetery stood on the site of the Greek town, before the whole place, after over a millennium of use, disappeared altogether.

Many of the ancient stones now laid bare don't rise more than knee-high. You need a little imagination – and perhaps the aid of a taped commentary (€1.50 from the ticket office) – to make the most of it.

THE SITE

During spring and summer there's a pedestrian entrance to the site (☎ 972 77 02 08; adult/student/under 7yr & senior €2.40/1.80/free; h 10am-8pm Jun-Sep, 10am-6pm Oct-May) from the seafront promenade in front of the ruins; just follow the coast from L'Escala to reach it. At other times the only way in is the vehicle approach from the Figueres road, about 1km from central L'Escala.

The Greek town lies in the lower part of the site, closer to the shore. Main points of interest include the thick southern defensive walls, the site of the Asklepleion (a shrine to the god of medicine) with a copy of his statue found here, and the Agora (town square), with remnants of the early Christian basilica and the Greek *stoa* (market complex), beside it.

A small museum (Barcelona's Museu d'Arqueologia de Catalunya, p299), has a bigger and better Empúries collection, separates the Greek town from the larger Roman town on the upper part of the site. Highlights of the Roman town include the mosaic floors of a 1st-century-BC house, the Forum and ancient walls. Outside the walls are the remains of an oval amphitheatre. To the great surprise of archaeologists, a 2nd-century-AD bust in Carrara marble of the Roman god Bacchus was unearthed on the site in 2005.

A string of brown-sand beaches stretch along in front of the site. On one of them, 1.2km from L'Escala, stands a Greek stone jetty. Nearby is where the 1992 Olympic flame

was landed in a remake of an ancient Greek vessel amid great theatrical circumstance.

Another few hundred metres north along the beaches from Empúries brings you to a gem, the 15th-century seaside hamlet of **Sant Martí d'Empúries**, all bright stone houses and cobbled lanes. On Plaça Major, four restaurant-bars compete for your attention under the watchful gaze of the strange, squat façade of the local church.

Sleeping

Hostal El Roser (☎ 972 77 02 19; Carrer de l'Església 7; s/d €35/54; p a w) This is one of the best bets at the lower midrange level in the heart of town. A cheerful corner block with restaurant and rooms upstairs, it has clean and welcoming rooms. You can sun yourself on the terrace.

Some more expensive options line up on the waterfront.

Eating

L'Escala is famous for its *anchoas* (anchovies) and fresh fish, both of which are likely to crop up on menus. Plenty of eateries are scattered along the waterfront parade of Port d'En Perris.

Restaurant El Roser II (☎ 972 77 11 02; Passeig Lluís Albert 1; mains €35; h Tue-Sat, lunch only Sun) This is an excellent waterfront seafood eatery, ideal for a hearty lunch of grilled catch of the day and *suquet* (a fish-and-potato hotpot). It also comes with less common (and frequently more expensive) concoctions, such as lobster with mushroom risotto (€42).

Getting There & Away

Sarfa has one bus from Barcelona (via Palafrugell) on weekdays (€16, up to 2¼ hours), and three on Sunday (four daily July to August). Buses also run to and from Girona.

PARC NATURAL DELS AIGUAMOLLS DE L'EMPORDÀ

This nature park preserves the remnants of marshes that once covered the whole coastal plain of the Golf de Roses, an important site for migrating birds. Bird-watchers have spotted over 100 species a day in the March to May and August to October migration periods, which bring big increases in the numbers of wading birds and even the occasional flamingo, glossy ibis, spoonbill or rare black stork. There are usually enough birds around to make a visit worthwhile at any time of year.

Head for the **El Cortalet information centre** (☎ 972 45 42 22; h 9.30am-2pm & 4.30-7pm mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 9.30am-2pm & 3.30-6pm mid-Sep-mid-Jun), 1km east off the Sant Pere Pescador-Castelló d'Empúries road. Marked paths lead to a 2km stretch of beach and several *aguaites* (hides) with saltwater-marsh views. From the top of the Observatori Senillosa, a former silo, you can observe the whole park. The paths are always open, but morning and evening are the best times for birds (and mosquitoes!).

The nearest places to El Cortalet that can be reached by bus are Sant Pere Pescador, 6km south (served by four or five Sarfa buses daily from L'Escala and Figueres), and Castelló d'Empúries, 4km north.

CASTELLÓ D'EMPÚRIES

pop 3640

This old town was the capital of Empúries, a medieval Catalan county that maintained a large degree of independence up to the 14th century. The finest monument here is the **Església de Santa Maria** on Plaça de Jacint Verdaguer. It's a large 13th- and 14th-century Gothic church with a sturdy Romanesque bell tower.

Hotel Canet (☎ 972 25 03 40; www.hotelcanet.com; Plaça del Joc de la Pilota 2; s/d €49/70; p a s) is a modernised 17th-century mansion in the centre, with elegant rooms, low-slung stone arches and a sundeck. A soothing swimming pool glistens within the stone walls of the interior courtyard. It also has a decent restaurant offering mostly Catalan fare.

Sarfa runs from about 12 (fewer on Sundays and up to 28 in July and August) buses a day from Figueres (€1.20, 15 minutes), three or four (more in July and August) from Cadaqués (€3.05, 50 minutes) and up to two from Barcelona's Estació del Nord (€15.30, 1¼ to 2¼ hours).

ROSES & AROUND

pop 15,540

Some believe Roses is the site of an ancient Greek settlement. Rodes, although nothing remains to confirm the hypothesis. The town does boast the impressive seaward wall of its 16th-century citadel. Although this middling holiday town's beaches are OK (the tourist office has lists of accommodation), Roses is, above all, a handy base for going elsewhere.

With a vehicle, you can get well beyond the crowds of Roses into the southern end of Parc Natural del Cap de Creus. About 6km east of

Roses, a road runs up into the hills and along the rugged coast to Cala Montjoi and Spain's most renowned restaurant, El Bulli (below).

Le Rachdingue (☎ 972 53 00 23; www.rachdingue.com; admission €10-15), about 8km northwest of Roses on the road to Vilajuïga, is one of the Costa Brava's club meccas. Big name DJs from around Europe are wheeled in to this *masia* (country house) to spin their sets of house, deep house and even deeper house (among other grooves and beats). Clubbers from all over the continent make an effort to get here. It is especially active in summer (the pool comes in handy!), but opens on Saturday nights in winter too. Call to find out what's happening.

Sarfa buses from Barcelona run one to four times a day to Roses, depending on the day and season (€16.45, 1¼ hours). Plenty run between Roses and Figueres (€2.30, 30 minutes).

CADAQUÉS & AROUND

pop 2620

If you have time for only one stop on the Costa Brava, you can hardly do better than Cadaqués. A whitewashed village around a rocky bay, it and the surrounding area have a really special magic – a fusion of wind, sea, light and rock – that isn't dissipated even by the throngs of mildly fashionable summer visitors.

A portion of that magic owes itself to Salvador Dalí, who spent family holidays in Cadaqués during his youth, and lived much of his later life at nearby Port Lligat. The empty moonscapes, odd-shaped rocks and barren shorelines that litter Dalí's paintings weren't just a product of his fertile imagination. They're strewn all round the Cadaqués area in what Dalí termed a 'grandiose geological delirium'.

The country here is drier than further south. The sparseness continues to dramatic Cap de Creus, 8km northeast of Cadaqués, lending itself to coastscapes of almost (ahem) surreal beauty.

Thanks to Dalí and other luminaries, Cadaqués pulled in a celebrity crowd for decades. One visit by the poet Paul Éluard and his Russian wife, Gala, in 1929 caused an earthquake in Dalí's life: he ran off to Paris with Gala (who was to become his lifelong obsession and, later, wife) and joined the surrealist movement. In the 1950s the crowd he attracted was more jet-setting – Walt Disney, the Duke of Windsor and Greek shipowner Stavros Niarchos. In the 1970s Mick Jagger and Gabriel García Márquez popped by. Today the crowd is not quite as famous, and leans heavily to day-tripping French from across the border, but the enchantment of Cadaqués' atmosphere remains.

Information

Clinic (☎ 972 25 88 07; Carrer de Guillem Bruguera)
Polícia Local (☎ 972 15 93 43; Carrer de Barcelona) Out of town, off the road to Port Lligat.
Tourist office (☎ 972 25 83 15; www.cadaques.org; Carrer del Cotxe 2; h 9am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat)

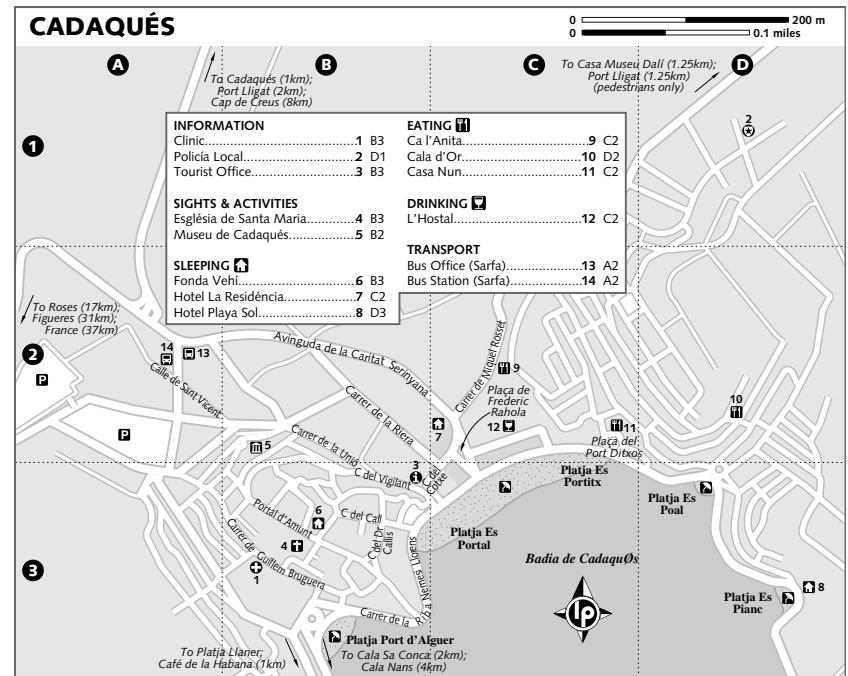
The Town

Cadaqués is perfect for wandering, either around the town or along the coast. The 16th- and 17th-century *Església de Santa Maria*, with a gilded baroque *retablo* (altarpiece), is the focus of the older part of town, with its narrow hilly streets.

The **Museu de Cadaqués** (☎ 972 25 88 77; Carrer de Narcís Monturiol 15; h 10am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat) includes Dalí among other local artists. The admission fee depends on the temporary exhibition being held.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

El Bulli (☎ 972 15 04 57; bulli@elbulli.com; Cala Montjoi; mains €150-200; h dinner daily Jul-Sep, Wed-Sun Apr-Jun) Chef Ferran Adrià, acclaimed by many to be the world's greatest chef, runs this sensorial, cliff-top restaurant (considered by some the best restaurant on the face of the earth). Each season sees Adrià indulging himself with new experiments in international and Mediterranean cooking. The setting alone is worth the effort of getting here. The restaurant has almost as many staff as tables, making service exquisite. Adrià and Co like to play with essences, so don't be surprised if many of the myriad platters that come your way seem little more than puffs of air. This place is not an eatery, it is a theatrical spectacle for the palate. Adrià and his restaurant (which can only be reached by car from Roses) have become such international icons that booking a place is nearly impossible. Well before the 2006 season began, it was completely booked out for that year.



Beaches

Cadaqués' main beach, and several others along the nearby coast, are small, with more pebbles than sand, but their picturesqueness and beautiful blue waters make up for that. Overlooking Platja Llaner, to the south of the town centre, is Dalí's parents' holiday home. Out the front is a statue by Josep Subirachs dedicated to Federico García Lorca and in memory of his 1920s stay.

Port Lligat

Port Lligat, a 1.25km walk from Cadaqués, is a tiny settlement around another lovely cove, with fishing boats pulled up on its beach. **Casa Museu Dalí** (☎ 972 25 10 15; www.salvador-dali.org; Port Lligat; adult/student & senior €8/5; h 10.30am-9pm mid-Jun–mid-Sep, 10.30am-6pm Tue-Sun mid-Sep–mid-Jan & mid-Mar–mid-Jun) began as a fisherman's hut and was steadily altered and enlarged by Dalí, who lived here from 1930 to 1982, apart from a dozen or so years abroad during and around the Spanish Civil War. It's the house with a lot of little white chimneypots and two egg-shaped towers, overlooking the western end of the beach. You must book ahead.

Cap de Creus

Cap de Creus is the most easterly point of the Spanish mainland and a place of sublime, rugged beauty. With a steep, rocky coastline indented by dozens of turquoise-watered coves, it's an especially wonderful place to be at dawn or sunset. On top of the cape stand a lighthouse and a curious restaurant (☎ 972 19 90 05) where you get curry and cheesecake, and sleep over in one of a handful of rooms.

Walking

There are infinite possibilities for walking: out along the promontory between Cadaqués and Port Lligat; to Port Lligat and beyond; along the southern side of the Cadaqués Bay to the Far de Cala Nans (lighthouse); or over the hills south of Cadaqués to the coast east of Roses.

Sleeping

Fonda Vehí (☎ 972 25 84 70; Carrer de l'Església 5; s/d without bathroom €25/40, d with bathroom €50) Near the church in the heart of the old town, this simple but engaging *pensión* tends to be booked up for July and August. Easily the cheapest deal in town, it got some sprucing up in 2006

and remains a popular deal because of its position and decent restaurant.

Hotel La Residència (☎ 972 25 83 12; www.laresidencia.net; Avinguda de la Caritat Serinyana 1; s/d €70/91; p a) In the heart of town, with just a dozen good-sized rooms, this hotel oozes history. It opened in 1904 and Picasso stayed here six years later. Nowadays the place has a studied, classy air. A beautiful stained-glass ceiling creates a light well in the main staircase, and decorative details range from Dalí to rococo. The best rooms look out to sea.

Hotel Playa Sol (☎ 972 25 81 00; www.playasol.com; Platja Es Planc 3; s/d €107/171; p a s) On the east side of the bay, this sprawling affair offers spacious rooms with cable TV, a tree-lined pool, tennis court and gardens. Prices vary according to position (those with sea views are the dearest) and, predictably, season.

Eating

Cala d'Or (☎ 972 25 81 49; Carrer de Sa Fitora 1; meals €20; h daily) Tucked away back from the waterfront, this knockabout place attracts swarms of local workers after a good solid lunch at tables dressed in classic gingham. Tuck into some *llobarro a la planxa* (grilled sea perch).

Ca l'Anita (☎ 972 25 84 71; Carrer de Miquel Roset 16; meals €20-25; h Tue-Sun) This busy, ebullient place, where customers often find themselves elbow to elbow with perfect strangers, has a name for tasty grilled fish and other seafood delights.

Casa Nun (☎ 972 25 88 56; Plaça del Port Ditxos 6; meals €25-30; h Thu-Mon) Head for the cute upstairs dining area or take one of the few tables outside overlooking the port. Try the *raviolis rellenos de foie gras con salsa de albahaca* (foie gras stuffed dumplings with basil sauce; €15.50).

Entertainment

L'Hostal (Passeig; h 10pm-5am Apr-Oct) Facing the beachfront boulevard, this classic has live music on many nights (from midnight). One evening in the 1970s, an effusive Dalí called L'Hostal the *lugar más bonito del mundo* (the most beautiful place on earth). Inside hang photos of the artist and hordes of other stars and starlets of times gone by.

Café de la Habana (☎ 972 25 86 89; Carrer de Dr Bartomeu, Punta d'En Pampa; h 9pm-2.30am Easter-Oct, 9pm-2.30am Fri-Sun Nov-Easter) One kilometre south of town, this icon of Cadaqués' nightlife can get lively with Latin-music nights, art exhibitions and cool cocktails (not to mention the extensive range of Caribbean rums). Come along for

Nanu's session at 11pm on Saturday nights. He does covers of anyone, such as Jacques Brel, and his own material.

Getting There & Away

Sarfa buses to/from Barcelona (€18.05, 2¼ hours) leave two times daily (up to five daily in July and August). Buses also run to/from Figueres (€4.05, one hour) up to seven times daily (three in winter) via Castelló d'Empúries.

CADAQUÉS TO THE FRENCH BORDER

If you want to prolong the journey to France, El Port de la Selva and Llançà are pleasant enough minor beach resorts—cum—fishing towns, and both have a range of accommodation. Portbou, on the French frontier, is less enticing. From El Port de la Selva you can undertake a wild and woolly walk along the rugged coast. The trail, which is awkward at some points, leads east to Cap de Creus.

A more spectacular stop is the **Monestir de Sant Pere de Rodes** (☎ 972 38 75 59; adult/student/senior €3.60/2.40/free, admission free Tue; h 10am-7.30pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Oct-May), a classic piece of Romanesque architecture looming 500m up in the hills southwest of El Port de la Selva, with great views. Founded in the 8th century, it later became the most powerful monastery between Figueres and Perpignan in France. The great triple-naved, barrel-vaulted basilica is flanked by the square Torre de Sant Miquel bell tower and a two-level cloister.

Getting There & Away

The monastery is on a back road over the hills between Vilajuïga, 8km to its west, and El Port de la Selva, 5km northeast. Each town is served by at least one Sarfa bus from Figueres daily, but there are no buses to the monastery. Vilajuïga is also on the railway between Figueres and Portbou.

FIGUERES

pop 38,880

Twelve kilometres inland from the Golf de Roses, Figueres (Castilian: Figueras) is a humdrum town (some might say a dive) with a single, big attraction: Salvador Dalí. In the 1960s and '70s Dalí created here, in the town of his birth, the extraordinary Teatre-Museu Dalí. Whatever your feelings about old Salvador, this is worth every cent and minute you can spare.

Information

Tourist office (☎ 972 50 31 55; www.figueresciutat.com/vis-info.html; Plaça del Sol; h 8.30am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-9pm Sat, 9am-3pm Sun Jul & Aug, 8.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-8pm Sat Sep, 8.30am-3pm & 4.30-8pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm Easter-Jun & Oct, 8.30am-3pm Mon-Fri Nov-Easter)

Policia Nacional (Carrer de Pep Ventura 8)

Cro Roja (☎ 972 50 17 99; Carrer de Santa Llogàia 67)

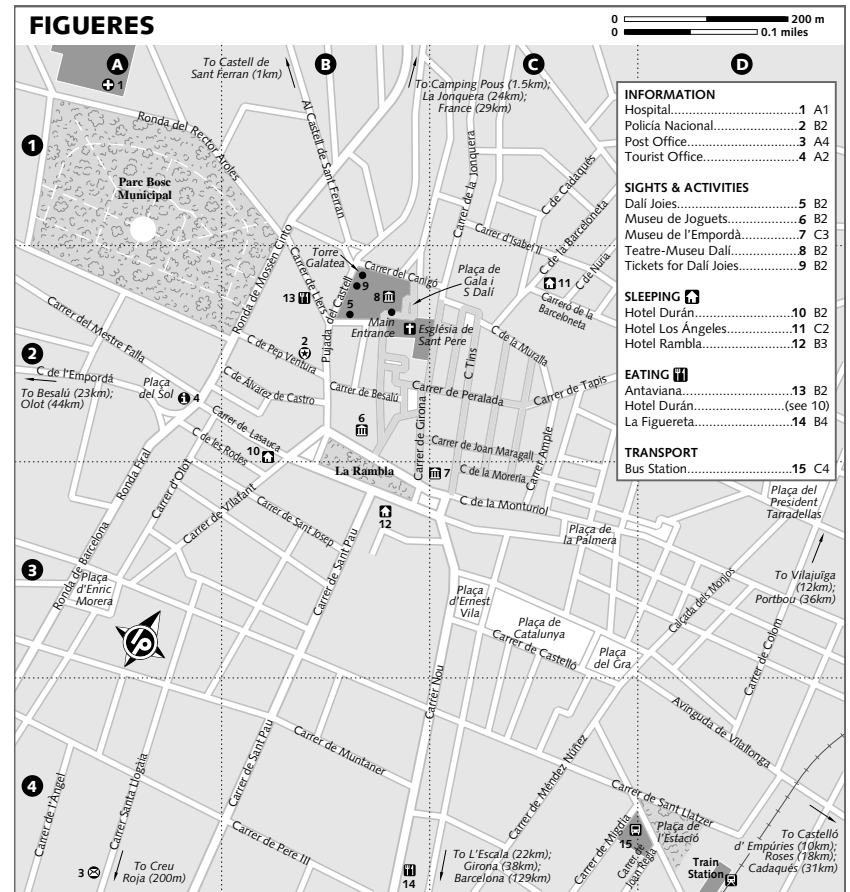
Hospital (☎ 972 67 50 89; Ronda del Rector Aroles)

Sights

TEATRE-MUSEU DALÍ

Salvador Dalí was born in Figueres in 1904. Although his career took him to Madrid, Barcelona, Paris and the USA, he remained true to his roots and lived well over half his

adult life at Port Lligat, east of Figueres on the coast. Between 1961 and 1974 Dalí converted Figueres' former municipal theatre, ruined by a fire at the end of the civil war in 1939, into the **Teatre-Museu Dalí** (☎ 972 67 75 00; www.salvador-dali.org; adult/student €10/7, summer nights €11, entry includes Dalí Joies; h 9am-7.45pm Jul-Sep, 10.30am-5.45pm Tue-Sun Oct-Jun, summer nights 10pm-1am Aug; night entry includes glass of cava & is limited, tickets must be booked ahead). 'Theatre-museum' is an apt label for this multidimensional trip through one of the most fertile (or disturbed) imaginations of the 20th century. It's full of surprises, tricks and illusions, and contains a substantial portion of his life's work. Readers have reported that queues are getting so long that opening hours have been extended on an ad hoc basis.



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Even outside, the building aims to surprise, from the collection of bizarre sculptures outside the entrance, on Plaça de Gala i Salvador Dalí, to the pink wall along Pujada del Castell, topped by a row of Dalí's trademark egg shapes and what appear to be sculptures of female gymnasts, and studded with what look like loaves of bread.

Inside, the ground floor (1st level) includes a semicircular garden area on the site of the original theatre stalls. In its centre is a classic piece of weirdness called *Taxi Plujós* (Rainy Taxi), composed of an early Cadillac, which was said to have belonged to Al Capone, and a pile of tractor tyres; both are surmounted by statues, with a fishing boat balanced precariously above the tyres. Put a coin in the slot and water washes all over the inside of the car. The *Sala de Peixateries* (Fish Shop Room) off here holds a collection of Dalí oils, including the famous *Autoretrat Tou amb Tall de Bacon Fregit* (Soft Self-Portrait with Fried Bacon) and *Retrat de Picasso* (Portrait of Picasso). Beneath the former stage of the theatre is the crypt, with Dalí's plain tomb.

If proof were needed of Dalí's acute sense of the absurd, *Gala Mirando el Mar Mediterráneo* (Gala Looking at the Mediterranean Sea) on the 2nd level would be it. With the help of coin-operated viewfinders, the work appears, from the other end of the room, to be a portrait of Abraham Lincoln.

A separate section is given over to the Owen Cheatham collection of 37 jewels, designed by Dalí, and called *Dalí Joies* (Dalí Jewels; adult/student €6/4 or combined entry; h same as Teatre-Museu Dalí). Also on display are the designs themselves. Dalí did these on paper (his first commission was in 1941) and the jewellery was made by specialists in New York. Each piece, ranging from the disconcerting *Ull del Temps* (Eye of Time) through to the *Cor Reial* (Royal Heart), is unique.

MUSEU DE L'EMPORDÀ

This local museum (96 972 50 23 05; La Rambla 2; adult/student €2/1, admission free with a Teatre-Museu Dalí ticket; h 11am-7pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun & holidays) combines Greek, Roman and medieval archaeological finds with a sizable collection of art, mainly by Catalan artists, but there are also some works on loan from the Prado in Madrid.

MUSEU DE JOGUETS

Spain's only toy museum (96 972 50 45 85; www.mjc-figueres.net; La Rambla 10; adult/student €4.70/3.80; h 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 11am-1.30pm & 5-7.30pm

Jun-Sep, 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 11am-1.30pm Sun & holidays Oct-May) has more than 3500 Catalonia- and Valencia-made toys from the pre-Barbie 19th and early 20th centuries. The Groucho Marx doll is an odd one!

CASTELL DE SANT FERRAN

The sprawling 18th-century fortress (96 972 50 60 94; www.lesfortalesescatalanes.info/santferran.html; admission €2; h 10.30am-8pm Easter & Jul-mid-Sep, 10.30am-2pm Nov-Feb, 10.30am-2pm & 4-6pm rest of the year) stands on a low hill 1km northwest of the centre. Built in 1750, it saw no action in the following centuries. After abandoning Barcelona, Spain's Republican government held its final meeting of the civil war (1 February 1939) in the dungeons.

Sleeping

Camping Pous (96 972 67 54 96; www.androl.internet-park.net; sites per 2-person tent & car €21; h year-round) A small and leafy camping ground, it lies 1.5km north of the centre on the A2 towards La Jonquera. There is a little hotel (with doubles for up to €52) and restaurant on the same site.

Hotel Los Ángeles (96 972 51 06 61; www.hotelangeles.com; Carrer de la Barceloneta 10; s/d €45/62; p a i) Rooms are all much the same in this spick-and-span digs. White walls, brown floor tiles and sparkling attached bathroom are standard throughout. Wi-fi works throughout the hotel (€3 a day).

Hotel Rambla (96 972 67 60 20; www.hotelrambla.net; La Rambla 33; s/d up to €75/85; p a i) Hiding behind an 1860 façade on the town's central boulevard, this hotel has pleasant rooms with crisp décor in blues and beiges. The superior rooms are spacious and light, but you can drop the price by taking a standard one.

Hotel Durán (96 972 50 12 50; www.hotelduuran.com; Carrer de Lasauca 5; s/d €62/88; p i a) Tradition marks out this key central option. With one of the best restaurants in town on the premises, it has an advantage over much of the competition. It has been going since the late 19th century (on the site, it is said, of a wayside inn as far back as the 17th century) and offers comfortable, renovated rooms with modern decorative touches, satellite TV and hairdryers in the bathroom.

Eating

La Figuereta (96 972 67 38 45; Carrer Nou 101; meals €25; h Tue-Sat, lunch only Mon) Amid the hurly burly of a busy, somewhat down-at-heel shopping

street shines this elegant eatery, with bare brick walls and white table linen. On offer is a pleasing menu of Catalan and Mediterranean fare, such as *magret d'ànec amb salsa de fruits vermells i graten de patata* (duck with red fruit sauce and potato gratin).

Antaviana (96 972 51 03 77; Carrer de Llers 5; meals €30; h Wed-Sun) For a good mix of Mediterranean cooking, with some enticing seafood options and light meals, this is a tasty bet.

Hotel Durán (96 972 50 12 50; Carrer de Lasauca 5; meals €30-40) More than a century of tradition has not tired the Durán clan of serving up fine traditional food. Frequently the stage of gastronomic events, this place offers such Catalan affairs as *canill rostint amb cargols* (roast rabbit with snails) and seafood classics like *suquet* (stew). Salvador Dalí was a big fan of the restaurant here, and no doubt visited the wine cellar, which one can do every once and a while.

Getting There & Away

Sarfa serves Castelló d'Empúries (€1.20) 10 to 20 times daily and Cadaqués (€4.05, one hour) up to eight times daily.

Figueres is on the railway line between Barcelona, Girona and Portbou on the French border, and there are regular connections to Girona (€2.40 to €2.70, 30 to 40 minutes) and Barcelona (€7.90 to €9.10, 2¼ hours) and to Portbou and the French border (€1.85 to €2.10, 25 minutes).

AROUND FIGUERES

It is hard to imagine that, just a few kilometres outside Figueres, such pleasant countryside should soothe the eyes. Take the C252 road northeast of town for a refreshing excursion.

In **Vilabertran**, 2.5km from central Figueres, there is what started life as an Augustinian convent (96 972 50 87 87; admission €2.40, free Tue; h 10am-1.30pm & 3-6.30pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-1.30pm & 3-5.30pm Oct-May). The 11th-century Romanesque church, with its three naves and Lombard bell tower, is outstanding. Also of great charm is the cloister.

Five kilometres up the road, coquettish Peralada is known for the 16th-century *Castell-Palau dels Rocaberti*. The castle, with its round towers, has a rather French air and is given over to a casino and restaurant. The only way in, if you're not eating or gambling, is to turn up for a classical-music performance during

the annual **Festival del Castell de Peralada** (96 93 503 86 46; www.festivalperalada.com; Carrer de Sant Joan s/n; h Jul-Aug) in summer.

BESALÚ

pop 2210

In the 10th and 11th centuries, pretty Besalú was the capital of an independent county that stretched as far west as Cerdanya before it came under Barcelona's control in 1111.

Most picturesque of all is the view of the village across the tall, crooked 11th-century **Pont Fortificat** (Fortified Bridge), with its two tower gates, from the southern side of the Fluvià.

The **tourist office** (96 972 59 12 40; Plaça de la Llibertat; h 10am-2pm & 4-7pm) is on the arcaded central square. It has a decent map-brochure and offers guided visits to the *Miqvé* (a 12th-century Jewish ritual bath by the river, €1.25), the bridge and the Romanesque *Església de Sant Vicenç*. The church and *Miqvé* are otherwise normally closed. Have a look at the 11th-century Romanesque church of the *Monestir de Sant Pere*, with an unusual ambulatory (walkway) behind the altar, and the 12th-century Romanesque *Casa Cornella*.

Sleeping & Eating

There are a couple of cheap *pensiones* in Besalú. Otherwise, try *Els Jardins de la Martana* (96 972 59 00 09; www.lamartana.com; s/d €83/111; p a i), a charming mansion set on the out-of-town end of the grand old bridge. It has well-appointed rooms, with tiled floors, high ceilings and elegant curtains. Most offer views from balconies across the bridge to the town, and you'll find comfortable sitting rooms and peaceful garden terraces. Breakfast is included in the room price.

Pont Vell (96 972 59 10 27; Pont Vell 26; meals €25-30; h Wed-Sun & lunch only Mon, closed late Dec-late Jan) The views to the old bridge (after which the restaurant is named) are enough to tempt you to take a seat here, even without considering the wide-ranging menu. Starting from a base of standard local cuisine, the menu also offers more intriguing options, like *canill agri-dolç* (sweet-and-sour rabbit).

Getting There & Away

The N260 road from Figueres to Olot meets the C66 from Girona at Besalú. See the Girona (p352) and Olot (p363) sections for information on Teisa bus services to Besalú.

THE PYRENEES

The Pyrenees in Catalonia aren't as high as those in neighbouring Aragón, but they still encompass some awesomely beautiful mountains and valleys. Above all, the Parc Nacional d'Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici, in the northwest, is a jewel-like area of lakes and dramatic peaks. The area's highest mountain, the Pica d'Estats, is reached by a spectacular hike past glittering glacial lakes. On arrival at the top, you enjoy a privileged point with 360-degree views over France and Spain.

Aside from the natural beauty of the mountains, and the obvious attractions of walking, skiing and other sports, the Catalan Pyrenees and their foothills have a rich cultural heritage, notably many lovely Romanesque churches and monasteries, often tucked away in remote valleys. They are mainly the product of a time of prosperity and optimism in this region in the 11th and 12th centuries, after Catalonia had broken ties with France in AD 988 and as the Muslim threat from the south receded.

When looking for a place to kip, keep an eye out for *casas rurals* or *casas de pagès* (country houses converted into accommodation), usually set in old village houses and peppered across the Pyrenees. The annual *Establiments de Turisme Rural* guide, published by the Generalitat (regional Catalan government), covers most of them.

OLOT

pop 31,270

The hills around Olot are little more than pimples, but those pimples are the volcanoes of the Parc Natural de la Zona Volcànica de la Garrotxa. Admittedly they're either extinct or dormant, but one erupted as recently as 11,500 years ago.

Information

Casal dels Volcans (☎ 972 26 60 12; Avinguda de Santa Coloma de Farners; 11am-2pm & 4-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) For information about the Parc Natural de la Zona Volcànica de la Garrotxa. It's in the Jardí Botànic, 1km southwest of Plaça de Clarà.
Patronat Municipal de Turisme (☎ 972 26 01 41; www.turismegarrotxa.com; Carrer del Hospici 8; 10am-

2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun late Jun-late Sep; 9am-2pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 5-7pm Sat, 11am-2pm Sun late Sep-late Jun). Near the bus station, it has some maps.

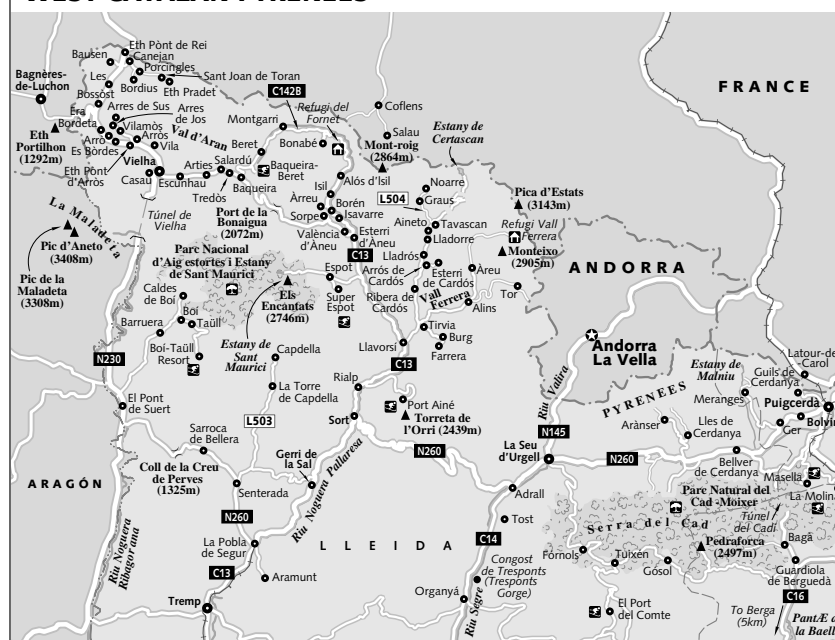
Sights

The Museu Comarcal de la Garrotxa (☎ 972 27 91 30; Carrer de l'Hospici 8; adult/senior/student & child combined with Museu dels Volcans €3/1.50/free; 11am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun & holidays), in the same building as the tourist office, covers Olot's growth and development as an early textile centre and includes a collection of local 19th-century art.

The **Jardí Botànic**, a botanical garden of Olot-area flora, contains the interesting **Museu dels Volcans** (☎ 972 26 67 62; adult/senior/student & child combined with Museu Comarcal de la Garrotxa €3/1.50/free; 11am-2pm & 4-6pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun & holidays), which covers local flora and fauna as well as volcanoes and earthquakes.

Four volcanoes stand sentry on the fringes of Olot. Head for Volcà Montscapça, 500m north of the centre, or Volcà La Garrinada, 1km northeast of the centre. In both cases paths climb to their craters.

WEST CATALAN PYRENEES



Sleeping & Eating

Several simple eateries are clustered around Plaça Major but the best restaurants are out of the town centre.

Torre Malagrida (☎ 972 26 42 00; Passeig de Barcelona 15; dm student & under 26yr/26yr & over €16/19) This youth hostel is set in an unusual early-20th-century Modernista building surrounded by gardens. The accommodation is unadorned dorm-style and you can purchase meals and rent bicycles.

Pensió La Vila (☎ 972 26 98 07; www.pensiolavila.com; Carrer de Sant Roc 1; s/d €37/51; a i √) Smack in the middle of town and overlooking Plaça Major, this straightforward pension has perfectly comfortable rooms over three floors with satellite TV. Cheaper rooms with shared showers are also available.

Les Cols (☎ 972 26 92 09; www.lescolds.com; Carretera de la Canya s/n; meals €35-45; lunch & dinner Wed-Sat, lunch only Mon-Tue) Set in a converted *masia*, more than 100 years old, Les Cols is about 4km north of central Olot. Inside the décor has 21st-century edge, with iron and glass walls, and gourmet ambitions. Dishes with local products are prepared with a silken touch, from chicken and duck to wild boar.

Getting There & Away

Teisa (☎ 972 26 01 96; www.teisa-bus.com) runs buses to/from Barcelona (via Banyoles) up to seven times a day (€13.60, two to 2½ hours) and Girona via Banyoles and Besalú up to 15 times a day (€5.55, 1¼ hours). The easiest approach by car from Barcelona is by the AP7 and C63.

PARC NATURAL DE LA ZONA VOLCÀNICA DE LA GARROTXA

The park completely surrounds Olot but the most interesting area is between Olot and the village of Santa Pau, 10km southeast.

Volcanic eruptions began here about 350,000 years ago and the most recent one, at Volcà del Croscaç, happened 11,500 years ago. In the park there are about 30 volcanic cones, up to 160m high and 1.5km wide. Together with the lush vegetation, a result of fertile soils and a damp climate, these create a landscape of unusual beauty. Between the woods are crop fields, a few hamlets and scattered old stone farmhouses.

The main park information office is the **Casal dels Volcans** in Olot. Another is the **Centre d'Informació Can Serra** (☎ 972 19 50 74), beside the G1524 Olot-Banyoles road 4.5km from the centre of Olot.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Mas Pau (☎ 972 54 61 54; www.maspau.com; s/d €88/105; h closed 6 Jan–mid-Mar; p a i s) Five kilometres southwest of Figueres on the road to Olot, and near the village of Avinyonet de Puigventós, is this breathtaking country hotel and restaurant. With its stone and ochre plaster walls, shady timber verandah and peaceful gardens, it makes a perfect rural getaway. The spacious rooms are immaculate, with antique furnishings and art on the walls. There are some more luxurious suites too. Breakfast is extra (€11). The restaurant (meals €60 to €80; lunch and dinner Wednesday to Saturday, lunch Sunday, dinner Monday to Tuesday) is a paradise of delicate flavours, with local products lovingly arranged into *haute cuisine* masterpieces.

The old part of Santa Pau village, perched on a rocky outcrop, contains a porticoed plaza, the Romanesque Església de Santa Maria, and a locked-up baronial castle.

Castellfollit de la Roca, on the N260 about 8km northeast of Olot, stands atop a crag composed of several layers of petrified lava – it's most easily viewed from the road north of the village.

Several good marked walks, which you can complete in less than a day, allow you to explore the park with ease. Inquire at the park information offices about routes.

Just off the GI524, and close to the most interesting parts of the park, are some pleasant, small country camping grounds. Wild camping is banned in the Garrotxa district, which stretches from east of Besalú to west of Olot, and from the French border to south of Sant Feliu de Pallerols. **Camping La Fageda** (☎ 972 27 12 39; www.campinglafageda.com; Batet de la Serra; sites per 2-person tent & car €16.95; p s w), 4km east of the centre of Olot, has a pool, bar-restaurant, picnic areas and a children's playground.

RIPOLL

pop 10,760

Ripoll, 30km west of Olot and in the next valley, is a shabby industrial town. However, it can claim, with some justice, to be the birthplace of Catalonia. At its heart, in the Monestir de Santa Maria, is one of the finest pieces of Romanesque art in Spain.

In the 9th century, Ripoll was the power base from which the local strongman, Guifré el Pilós (Wilfred the Hairy), succeeded in uniting several counties of the Frankish March along the southern side of the Pyrenees. Guifré went on to become the first Count (Comte) of Barcelona. To encourage repopulation of the Pyrenees valleys, he founded the Monestir de Santa Maria, the most powerful monastery of medieval Catalonia.

Orientation & Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 972 70 23 51; www.elripolles.com & www.ajripoll.org; Plaça del Abat Oliba; h 9.30am–1.30pm & 4–7pm Mon–Sat, 10am–2pm Sun) is by the Ribes de Freser–Sant Joan de les Abadesses road, which runs through the north of town. The Monestir de Santa Maria is virtually next door.

Monestir de Santa Maria

Following its founding in AD 879, the monastery grew rapidly rich, big and influential. From the mid-10th to mid-11th centuries it was Catalonia's spiritual and cultural heart. A five-apsed basilica was built, and adorned in about 1100 with a stone portal that ranks among the high points of Romanesque art. Two fires had left the basilica in ruins by 1885, after which it was restored in a rather gloomy imitation of its former glory. The most interesting feature inside is the restored tomb of Guifré el Pilós.

You can visit the basilica and its great **portal** (admission free; h 10am–1pm & 3–7pm), now protected by a wall of glass. A chart near the portal (in Catalan) helps to decipher the feast of sculpture: a medieval vision of the universe, from God the Creator, in the centre at the top, to the month-by-month scenes of daily rural life on the innermost pillars.

Down a few steps, to the right of the doorway, is the monastery's beautiful **claustr** (cloister; admission €2). It's a two-storey affair, created in the 12th to 15th centuries.

Sleeping & Eating

Ca la Paula (☎ 972 70 00 11; www.elripolles.com/cala paula; Carrer dels Pirineus 6; s/d €24/41; p) This friendly family establishment is barely a stone's throw from the Monestir de Santa Maria. It has modern rooms with sparkling bathrooms.

Can Nerol (☎ 972 70 18 94; Carrer del Pla d'Ordina 11; meals €30; h lunch only Sun–Fri, lunch & dinner Sat) In a lovely house surrounded by gardens, this

restaurant serves a mix of Catalan and French cooking. You'll need to ask for directions: from Carretera de Ribes follow the winding lane of Carrer dels Hortolans down to the Riu Freser and cross the bridge. Turn right and head upstream to the highway overpass – the restaurant is just beyond it.

Getting There & Away

The bus and train stations are almost side by side on Carrer del Progrés, 600m southeast of the centre. Connections with Barcelona, Ribes de Freser and Puigcerdà are better by train. About 12 trains a day run to/from Barcelona (€5.50, about two hours), up to seven to Ribes de Freser (€1.90, 20 minutes) and six to Puigcerdà (€2.90, 1¼ hours).

AROUND RIPOLL

A short way north of Ripoll, the GI401 branches west from Campdevànol, passes through Gombrèn and then proceeds in twisting and turning fashion on to La Pobla de Lillet, set a short way below the source of one of Catalonia's more important rivers, the Llobregat.

The grey stone village started life as a Roman outpost and grew to some importance

as a local agricultural centre. People still cross its beautiful 12th-century Romanesque bridge and the town is also known for its delightful Jardins Artigas, a Modernista landscaped garden spread out along the river. You can sleep in one of three simple pensions.

Follow the road up into the mountains from La Pobla de Lillet to the source of the Llobregat. Just half a kilometre on and you reach the mountain hamlet of **Castellar de n'Hug**, over the shoulder from the La Molina ski resort (see p369). The hamlet was founded in the 13th century under the lords of Mataplana (based in Gombrèn). A tight web of alleys is bundled around the Romanesque Església de Santa Maria (much remodelled over the centuries), and from the square by the church you look north across a valley to the bare mountains beyond.

Six *pensions* are gathered about the hamlet, three of them on Plaça Major. Most have a bar attached, where you can get something to eat.

One **Transports Mir** (☎ 972 70 30 12; www.auto carsmir.com) bus a day (except Sunday) runs between Ripoll and Bagà via Campdevànol, Gombrèn, Castellar de n'Hug and La Pobla de Lillet. The journey (€4) takes 1½ hours.

OUT & ABOUT IN THE PYRENEES

The Catalan Pyrenees provide magnificent walking and trekking. You can undertake strolls of a few hours, or day walks that can be strung together into treks of several days. Nearly all can be done without camping gear, with nights spent in villages or *refugis* (mountain shelters).

Most of the *refugis* mentioned in this chapter are run by two Barcelona mountain clubs, the **Federació d'Entitats Excursionistes de Catalunya** (FEEC; ☎ 93 412 07 77; www.feec.org) and the **Centre Excursionista de Catalunya** (CEC; ☎ 93 315 23 11; www.ccc-centre.org in Spanish). A night in a *refugi* costs around €11.50 to €12.50. Normally FEEC *refugis* allow you to cook; CEC ones don't. Moderately priced meals are often available.

The coast-to-coast GR11 long-distance path traverses the entire Pyrenees from Cap de Creus on the Costa Brava to Hondarribia on the Bay of Biscay. Its route across Catalonia goes by way of La Jonquera, Albanyà, Beget, Setcases, the Vall de Núria, Planoles, Puigcerdà, Andorra, south of Pica d'Estats (3143m), over to the Parc Nacional d'Aiguestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici, then on to the southern flank of the Val d'Aran and into Aragón.

The best season for walking in the high Pyrenees is from late June to early September. Earlier than that, snow can make things difficult, and avalanches are possible. Later, the weather can turn poor. It can get very hot in midsummer even at high altitudes, but nowhere in the Pyrenees is the weather reliable; even in July and August you can get rainy days, fog and cloud – and cold temperatures at high altitude.

Local advice from tourist offices, park rangers, mountain *refugis* and other walkers is invaluable and you should look out for hiking maps of the kind mentioned in the Directory (p851).

There's boundless scope for **climbing** – Pedraforca in the Serra del Cadí offers some of the most exciting ascents. For more information on walking and trekking in Spain, see the Spain Outdoors chapter (p83).

VALL ALTO DEL TER

This upper part of the Riu Ter valley reaches northeast from Ripoll to the pleasant towns of Sant Joan de les Abadesses and Camprodon, then north west to the modest **Vallter 2000 ski centre** (☎ 972 13 60 75; www.vallter2000.com; day lift pass €26), just below the French border and at 2150m. It has 12 pistes of all grades, nine lifts and a ski school, but snow can be unreliable (most is usually artificial). The area makes a more pleasant overnight stop than Ripoll, and from the upper reaches there are some excellent walks to the Vall de Núria. Get the Editorial Alpina *Puigmal* map guide.

The C38 road leaves the Ter valley at Camprodon to head over the 1513m Collado d'Ares into France.

Sant Joan de les Abadesses

pop 3620

In Sant Joan de les Abadesses the restored 12th-century bridge over the Ter and the **Museu del Monestir** (☎ 972 72 00 13; Plaça de l'Abadessa; admission €1; 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Oct-Apr, 10am-2pm & 4-7pm May-Jun & Sep, 10am-7pm Jul & Aug) are worth a look. This monastery, another founded by Guifré el Pilós, began life as a nunnery but the nuns were expelled in 1017 for alleged licentious conduct. Its elegant 12th-century church contains the marvellous *Santíssim Misteri*, a 13th-century polychrome woodcarving of the descent from the cross, composed of seven life-size figures. Also remarkable is the Gothic *retablo* of Santa Maria La Blanca, carved in alabaster. The elegant 15th-century late-Gothic cloister is charming.

Hostal Janpere (☎ 972 72 00 77; Carrer del Mestre Andreu 3; s/d per person €20) is one of two simple *hostales* here. It has good if somewhat clinical rooms. Prices haven't budged in years! You can opt for half (€25) or full board (€35).

Teisa (☎ 972 70 20 95) operates up to seven buses daily from Ripoll to Sant Joan de les Abadesses (€1.15, 15 minutes). One daily bus runs from Barcelona (Carrer de Pau Claris 117) at 7.15pm to Camprodon via Ripoll (€8.85, two hours).

Beget

Capping the end of a winding mountain lane that trails off here into a heavily wooded valley, this hamlet is a joy. The 12th-century Romanesque church is accompanied by an implausible array of roughly hewn houses, all

scattered about stone-paved lanes. Through it gushes a mountain stream. Beget is on the GR11 walking route.

El Forn (☎ 972 74 12 31; Carrer de Josep Duñach 9; full board per person €64), a well-kept cosy stone-and-timber house in the heart of the hamlet, is the best of the handful of accommodation and eating options.

There is no public transport to Beget.

VALL DE NÚRIA & RIBES DE FRESER

Around AD 700, the story goes, Sant Gil (St Giles) came from Nîmes in France to live in a cave in an isolated mountain valley 26km north of Ripoll, preaching the Gospel to shepherds. Before he left, four years later, apparently fleeing Visigothic persecution, Sant Gil hurriedly hid away a wooden Virgin-and-child image he had carved, a cross, his cooking pot and the bell he had used to summon the shepherds. They stayed hidden until 1079, when an ox led some shepherds to the spot. The statuette, the *Mare de Déu de Núria*, became the patron of Pyrenean shepherds and Núria's future was assured. The first historical mention of a shrine was made in 1162.

Sant Gil would recoil in shock if he came back today. The large, grey sanctuary complex squatting at the heart of the valley is an eyesore and the crowds would make anyone with hermitic leanings run a mile. But otherwise Núria remains almost pristine, a wide, green, mountain-ringed bowl that is the starting point for numerous walks. Getting there is fun too, either on foot up the Gorges de Núria – the green, rocky valley of the thundering Riu Núria – or from Ribes de Freser town, by the little *cremallera*, which rises over 1000m on its 12km journey up the same valley.

Orientation

Unless you're walking across the mountains to Núria, you must approach from the small town of Ribes de Freser, on the N152 14km north of Ripoll. The *cremallera* (rack-and-pinion railway) to Núria starts at Ribes-Enllaç station, just off the N152 at the southern end of Ribes. There's a road from Ribes to Queralbs, but from there on it's the *cremallera* or your feet.

Information

Núria's **tourist office** (☎ 972 73 20 20; www.valldenuria.com; 10 8.30am-5.45pm mid-Sep–mid-Jul, 8.30am-6.45pm mid-Jul–mid-Sep) is in the sanctuary.

Santuari de Núria

The large 19th- and 20th-century building that dominates the valley contains a hotel, restaurants and exhibition halls as well as the *santuari* (sanctuary) itself and its sacred *símbols de Núria*. The *santuari* has the same opening hours as the information office. The Mare de Déu de Núria sits behind a glass screen above the altar and is in the Romanesque style of the 12th century, so either Sant Gil was centuries ahead of his time or this isn't his work! Steps lead up to the bell, cross and cooking pot (which all date from at least the 15th century). To have your prayer answered, put your head in the pot and ring the bell while you say it.

Skiing & Walking

In winter, Núria is a small-scale ski resort with 10 short runs. A day lift pass costs €24.75 (€20.30 on weekdays).

Walkers should get Editorial Alpina's *Puigmal* map guide before coming to Núria. You can walk up the gorge to Núria but skip the first unexciting 6km from Ribes de Freser by taking the *cremallera* (or road) to Queralbs, thus saving your energies for the steepest and the most spectacular part of the approach, which is about three hours' walk up. Or take the *cremallera* up and walk down!

From the Vall de Núria, you can cap several 2700m-to-2900m peaks on the main Pyrenees ridge in about 2½ to four hours' walking for each (one way). The most popular is *Puigmal* (2913m).

Sleeping & Eating

Wild camping is banned in the whole Ribes de Freser-Núria area.

NÚRIA

Behind the sanctuary there's a basic **zona d'campada** (bookings ☎ 972 73 20 20; sites per adult/tent €2/2), a camping area with limited facilities.

Alberg Pic de l'Aliga (☎ 972 73 20 48; dm student & under 26yr/26yr & over €19/23) The youth hostel is at the top of the cable car (*telecabina*) on the eastern side of the valley. Dorm rooms sleep from four to 14, and the price includes breakfast. The cable car runs 9am to 6pm daily (to 7pm mid-July to mid-September). On Friday evenings it also runs to meet the *cremallera* train at around 7pm and 9pm.

Hotel Vall de Núria (☎ 972 73 20 20; half-board per person up to €107) Housed in the sanctuary

building, the hotel has comfortable rooms with bathroom and satellite TV. Apartments are also available most of the year.

In the sanctuary building, **Autoservei** self-service cafeteria and Bar Finestrelles both have starters in the €6 region and main courses for around €10 to €12. La Cabana dels Pastors specialises in fondue and braised meats (€20 to €25 for a meal). A shop in the sanctuary building sells food. The bar and restaurant are closed during slow periods, but the Autoservei is generally open daily.

RIBES DE FRESER

Hotel Els Caçadors (☎ 972 72 70 77; www.hotelsderibes.com; Carrer de Balandrau 24; s/d €22/44, half-board per person €38) A family-run business, this small hotel offers simple rooms with bathroom and TV. The buffet breakfast is grand – loads of cold meats, cheeses, juice, cereal and sweet pastries. Or try their three-star place across the road (half-board €55), where the best rooms are spacious, with parquet and timber, and, in some cases, have a hydromassage bathtub.

QUERALBS

This delightful hamlet of stone houses with slate roofs makes a prettier base. Try for a room at **Pensió L'Avet** (☎ 972 72 73 77; Carrer Major 7; half-board per person €39; 10 daily mid-Jun–mid-Sep, Sat, Sun & holidays rest of year). It's a pleasant old house that is the only option in the village itself (often open only at weekends and hard to get a hold of). A couple of restaurants open up on weekends and during holiday periods.

Getting There & Away

Transports Mir runs services between Ripoll and Ribes de Freser, with two or three buses a day Monday to Friday, and one on Saturday.

Up to seven trains a day run to Ribes-Enllaç from Ripoll (€1.90, 20 minutes) and Barcelona (€6.05, 2¼ hours).

The *cremallera* (☎ 972 73 20 20) is a narrow-gauge electric-powered rack-and-pinion railway that has been operating since 1931. It runs from Ribes-Enllaç to Núria and back six to 12 times a day; depending on the season (one way/return €9.55/15.25, 45 minutes one way). All trains stop at Ribes-Vila and Queralbs (1200m). It's a spectacular trip, particularly after Queralbs, as the train winds up the Gorges de Núria. Some services connect with Renfe trains at Ribes-Enllaç.

CERDANYA

Cerdanya, along with French Cerdagne across the border, occupies a low-lying basin between the higher reaches of the Pyrenees to the east and west. Although Cerdanya and Cerdagne, once a single Catalan county, were divided by the Treaty of the Pyrenees in 1659, they still have a lot in common. Walkers should get a hold of Editorial Alpina's *Cerdanya* map and guide booklet (scaled at 1:50,000).

Puigcerdà

pop 8850

Just 2km from the French border, Puigcerdà (puh-cher-da) is not much more than a way station, but it's a jolly one, particularly in summer and during the ski season. A dozen

Spanish, Andorran and French ski resorts lie within 45km. At a height of just over 1200m, Puigcerdà is the capital of Cerdanya.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

Puigcerdà stands on a small hill, with the train station at the foot of its southwest side. A few minutes' climb up some flights of steps takes you to Plaça de l'Ajuntament, off which is the **tourist office** (☎ 972 88 05 42; Carrer de Querol 1; h 9am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 4.30-7pm Sat, 10am-1pm Sun).

The **Hospital de Puigcerdà** (☎ 972 88 01 50; Plaça de Santa Maria 1) is up the road from the tourist office.

SIGHTS

The town was heavily damaged during the civil war and only the tower remains of the 17th-century **Església de Santa Maria** (Plaça de Santa Maria). The 13th-century Gothic **Església de Sant Domènec** (Passeig del 10 d'Abril) was also wrecked but later rebuilt. It contains 14th-century Gothic murals that somehow survived (opening times are erratic). The *estany* in the north of town, created back in 1380 for irrigation, is surrounded by turn-of-the-20th-century summer houses, built by wealthy Barcelona families.

SLEEPING

The town is home to 13 varied hotels and *pensiones*.

Camping Stel (☎ 972 88 23 61; www.stel.es; sites per 2-person tent & car €31.50; h Jun-Sep; s p) Out along the road to Llívia, this is the only nearby camping option and a pleasant one, with a pool, basketball and a football pitch. You can also rent bungalows by the month between October and May.

Hotel del Lago (☎ 972 88 10 00; www.hotellago.com; Avinguda del Dr Piguillem 7; s/d €81/118; p i s) Near the *estany* (lake), this hotel has old-fashioned style and a nice leafy garden. The rooms vary greatly; some have heavy timber beams, while corner ones have windows opening in several directions out to the leafy exterior. The best doubles have hydromassage bathtubs.

EATING

Braseria St Jordi (☎ 972 94 03 66; Plaça de Cabrinetty 15; meals €20-25; h Mon-Sat) A cheerful spot for all sorts of meat goodies, this makes an inviting, modestly priced option. Try for a seat by the window for the valley views and tuck into a *filet de bou* (fillet of beef; €15.50).

La Vila (☎ 972 14 08 04; Carrer d'Alfons I 34; meals €35; h lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch only Sun) Wander into this rustic, welcoming den in the heart of the town for a serving of lovingly prepared Catalan dishes with an original touch. A sweet and savoury combination is the *colomi amb tofona negra i salsa d'albercoc sec* (pigeon with black truffles and dry apricot sauce).

El Pati de la Tieta (☎ 972 88 01 56; Carrer dels Ferrers 20; pizza €9, meals €35-45; h daily in high season, Thu-Sun Jul-May) One of the best choices, this understated restaurant offers a creative range of dishes, from *broquetes de cangur i verdures* (kangaroo on a skewer with vegetables) to *vieires a la crema de coliflor i pisto de coriandre* (coquille with coriander stew). Shame about the gaudy plastic seats in this rustic stone setting.

ENTERTAINMENT

Discoteca Gatzara (☎ 972 88 07 57; Rambla de Josep Martí 1; h 10pm-5am Tue-Sun) This club has been keeping Puigcerdà's après-ski set dancing into the wee hours for years now. It remains a classic and is easy to roll home from. A couple of others are located outside town and require transport to reach.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus

Alsina Graells runs two daily buses (one at weekends) from Barcelona (€15, three hours) via the 5km Túnel del Cadí and two or three to **La Seu d'Urgell** (€5.10, one hour). They stop at the train station.

Car & Motorcycle

From Barcelona, the C16 approaches Puigcerdà through the Túnel del Cadí. Bicycles are not allowed in the tunnel, which is a tollway.

The N152 from Ribes de Freser climbs west along the northern flank of the Rigard valley, with the pine-covered Serra de Mogrony rising to the south, to the 1800m Collado de Toses (pass), then winds down to Puigcerdà.

The main crossing into France is at Bourg-Madame, immediately east of Puigcerdà, from where roads head to Perpignan and Toulouse.

Train

Six trains a day run from Barcelona to Puigcerdà (€7.90, 3¼ hours) via Ripoll and Ribes de Freser. Five in each direction make the seven-minute hop over the border to

Latour-de-Carol in France, where they connect with trains from Toulouse or Paris, and with the narrow-gauge Train Jaune (yellow train) down the Têt Valley to Perpignan.

Llívia

Six kilometres northeast of Puigcerdà, across flat farmland, Llívia is a piece of Spain within France. Under the 1659 Treaty of the Pyrenees, Spain ceded 33 villages to France, but Llívia was a 'town' and so, together with the 13 sq km of its municipality, remained a Spanish possession.

The interest of Llívia's tiny medieval nucleus, near the top of the town, centres on the **Museu Municipal** (☎ 972 89 63 13; Carrer dels Forns 4; admission €1; h 10am-7pm Mon-Sat Jul-Aug, 10am-7pm Tue-Sat Jun & Sep, 10am-6pm Tue-Sat Apr-May, 10am-4.30pm Tue-Sat Oct-Mar, 10am-2pm Sun & holidays year-round) and the 15th-century Gothic **Església de Nostra Senyora dels Àngels**, just above the museum. The museum is in what's claimed to be Europe's oldest pharmacy, the *Farmacia Esteva*, founded in 1415. From the church you can walk up to the ruined **Castell de Llívia** where, during the short-lived period of Islamic dominion in the Pyrenees, the Muslim governor Manussa enjoyed a secret dalliance with Lampègia, daughter of the Duke of Aquitaine (or so legend has it).

Dine on the balconies of **Restaurant Can Ventura** (☎ 972 89 61 78; Plaça Major 1; meals €30-35; h Wed-Sun), a ramshackle building dating from 1791. The food is delightful – traditional Catalan fare that comes from a discreetly hidden modern kitchen.

Two or three buses a day run from Puigcerdà train station to Llívia. Otherwise, it's not a long walk, and the road is flat and quiet. You only cross about 2km of France before entering the Llívia enclave.

La Molina & Masella

These ski resorts lie either side of Tosa d'Alp (2537m), 15km south of Puigcerdà, and are linked by the Alp 2500 lift. The two resorts have a combined total of 96 runs (day lift pass for the whole area €33) of all grades at altitudes of 1600m to 2537m. Information, rental equipment and ski schools are available at both resorts (☎ 972 89 20 31, www.lamolina.com; ☎ 972 14 40 00, www.masella.com).

SLEEPING

Many skiers choose to stay in Puigcerdà or further afield.



Alberg Mare de Déu de les Neus (☎ 972 89 20 12; dm student & under 26yr/26yr & over €19/23; p) At the bottom part of La Molina, near the train station, this is a handy youth hostel. Rooms range from doubles to eight-bed dorms. Many of the rooms have a bathroom.

Hotel Adserà (☎ 972 89 20 01; www.hoteladsera.com; half-board per person from €69; p s) From the rooms of this mountain hotel, surrounded by greenery, the eye takes in the sweep of the valleys below. The rooms and public areas have warm parquet floors. The hotel has a pool (for the summer) and activities ranging from table tennis to archery.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

In the ski season there's a bus service from Puigcerdà. Most people come by car; the easiest route from Barcelona is by the C58 toll road and the C16 through the Túnel del Cadí. Roads also wind down to La Molina and Masella from the N152 west of the Collado de Toses.

Northern Cerdanya

The N260 Hwy runs southwest from Puigcerdà along the Riu Segre valley towards La Seu d'Urgell. It cuts its path between the main Pyrenees chain to the north and the range made up mainly of the Serra del Cadí and Serra de Moixeró to the south. Up to three buses a day run along this valley between Puigcerdà and La Seu d'Urgell.

About 6km from Puigcerdà, Bolvir has a little Romanesque church and, more importantly, a luxurious and characterful place to stay, Torre del Remei (right).

Another kilometre on from Bolvir, take the Ger turn-off for an excursion into the mountains. A minor asphalted road winds its way west and north through the broad, arid Valltova Valley to Meranges, a dishevelled, stone farming village that makes few concessions to the passing tourist trade. You can stay in the charming **Can Borrell** (☎ 972 88 00 33; www.canborrell.com; Carrer de Retorn 3; s/d from €78/91), a rustic hideaway tastefully decorated for a modestly discerning clientele. The rooms are all different, loaded with timber beams and high ceilings, and there is also a fine restaurant (meals €35), where the meals are prepared with mostly local products. You can opt for family rooms.

Those with cars can proceed along a sliver of road to the **Refugi de Malniu** (↪ daily Jun-Sep,

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Torre del Remei (☎ 972 14 01 82; www.torredelremei.com; Camí Reial s/n, Bolvir; d €257-385; p a s) This tastefully decorated Modernista mansion (which during the civil war was requisitioned as a school and later as a hospital by the Republican government) sits majestically amid tranquil gardens, and is a romantic and stylish getaway. The rooms, exquisitely furnished and each one different, are superb and the dining is equally tempting. You can go to gastronomic heaven for €70 to €80 a head. Big spenders could try the main tower suite (€664).

Sat & Sun rest of year), at 2130m. Right behind the *refugi* is the reed-covered **Estany Sec** (the misnamed Dry Lake). The *refugi* is on the path of the long-distance GR11 walk, which approaches from Guils de Cerdanya (also reachable by car) in the east, and continues west to Andorra.

SERRA DEL CADÍ

The N260 runs west along the wide Riu Segre valley from Puigcerdà to La Seu d'Urgell, with the Pyrenees climbing northwards towards Andorra, and the craggy pre-Pyrenees range of the Serra del Cadí rising steep and high along the southern flank. Although this face of the Cadí – rocky and fissured by ravines known as *canals* – looks daunting enough, the range's most spectacular peak is **Pedraforca** (2497m), a southern offshoot with the most challenging rock-climbing in Catalonia. Pedraforca and the main Cadí range also offer some excellent mountain walking for those suitably equipped and experienced.

Orientation

The Pedraforca area is most easily reached from the C16, then along the B400, which heads west 1.5km south of Guardiola de Berguedà. Pedraforca looms mightily into view about halfway to the village of Saldes, which sits 1215m high at its foot, 15km from the C16. The main Cadí range runs east–west, about 5km north of Saldes. The **Refugi Lluís Estasen** (see opposite) nestles below the northern face of Pedraforca, 2.5km northwest of Saldes. You can reach it by footpath from Saldes or by a partly paved road that turns north off

the B400 about 1km west of Saldes. Park at the Mirador de Gresolet (nice views), from where it's a 10-minute walk up to the refuge.

Information

The Parc Natural del Cadí-Moixeró's main **Centre d'Informació** (☎ 938 24 41 51; Carrer de la Vinya 1; ↪ 9am–1.30pm & 3.30–7pm Mon–Fri, 9am–1pm & 4–6.30pm Sat, 9am–1pm Sun & holidays) is in **Bagà**, a quiet village (walk down to the stone bridge that crosses the stream) 4km north of Guardiola de Berguedà on the C16.

In Saldes, the **Centre d'Informació Massís del Pedraforca** (☎ 938 25 80 46; ↪ 10am–2pm & 5–7.30pm Mon–Tue & Thu–Sat, 10am–2pm Sun Jul–Aug, 11am–1pm Mon–Tue & Thu–Fri, 11am–2pm & 5–7pm Sat, 11am–2pm Sun Sep–Jun) has information on the Saldes and Pedraforca area only.

Walking

PEDRAFORCA

The name means 'stone fork' and the approach from the east makes it clear why. The two separate rocky peaks, the northern **Pollegó Superior** (2497m) and the southern **Pollegó Inferior** (2400m), are divided by a saddle called L'Enforcadura. The northern face, rising near vertically for 600m, has some classic rock climbs; the southern has a wall that sends alpinists into raptures.

Pedraforca is also possible for walkers. From **Refugi Lluís Estasen** you can reach the **Pollegó Superior** summit in about three strenuous hours – either southwards from the refuge, then up the middle of the fork from the southeastern side (a path from Saldes joins this route); or westwards up to the Collada del Verdet, then south and east to the summit. The latter route has some hairy precipices

and requires a good head for heights. It's not suitable for coming down: you must use the first route.

GÓSOL, TUIXÉN & BEYOND

The B400 is paved from Saldes to the pretty stone village of Gósol, 6km further west. The original Gósol (the Vila Vella), which dated back to at least the 9th century, is now abandoned on the hill south of the present village.

A road west from Gósol climbs the 1625m Coll de Josa pass, then descends past the picturesque hamlet of Josa del Cadí to Tuixén (1206m), another attractive village on a small hill and sometimes written Tuixent. From Tuixén, scenic paved roads lead northwest to La Seu d'Urgell (36km) and south to Sant Llorenç de Morunys (28km), which is on a beautiful cross-country road from Berga to Organyà.

Sleeping & Eating

SALDES & AROUND

There are at least four camping grounds along the B400 between the C16 and Saldes, some open year-round. In Saldes you'll find a handful of *pensiones* and a larger hotel.

Refugi Lluís Estasen (☎ 608 31 53 12; ↪ daily Jun–Sep; Sat, Sun & holidays rest of year) Run by the FEEC and near the Mirador de Gresolet, this *refugi* has 87 places, meals and a warden in summer. In winter it has about 30 places. When it's full you can sleep outside, but not in a tent.

GÓSOL & TUIXÉN

You'll find a handful of *casas rurals* in both villages, although some are rented out only on weekends or for a week at a time in summer.

INTREPID TREMENTINAIRES

As late as the 1960s, the village of Tuixén was known for its natural herbs and remedies and for the extraordinary women who would head off (often on foot) to sell them, the so-called *Trementinaires* (named after *trementina*, or turpentine, which was one of their more popular items). Since the late 19th century, these wandering saleswomen would head off for as long as four months and walk as far afield as Barcelona, leaving their menfolk behind to tend the fields and farm animals, and only returned home when they had sold all their wares. Among the latter were *te de roca* ('rock tea' for upset tummies) and *orella d'ós* ('bear's ear' for coughs and colds). The women generally travelled in pairs, but even so, unaccompanied women travellers were otherwise virtually unheard of in Spain, much less from deep inland villages! The last *Trementinaire*, **Sofia d'Ossera**, undertook her last trip in 1982! You can learn more about these women in Tuixén's **Museu de les Trementinaires** (☎ 973 37 00 30; admission free; ↪ 11am–2pm & 5–8pm daily Easter & Jul–Sep, 11am–2pm & 5–8pm Sat & Sun rest of the year), on the village square.

Cal Fusté (☎ 973 37 00 83; Plaça Major 9, Gósol; d €35) Right in the middle of town, this stone house with its own courtyard contains smallish spick-and-span rooms that are as good as any in the *casas rurals*.

Forn Cal Moixó (☎ 973 37 02 74; Carrer del Canal 2, Gósol; meals €15-18; 𠂆 lunch daily, dinner only Fri & Sat) This bakery doubles as a homy restaurant. Tuck into filling and tasty local food, such as a tender *filet de vedella* (fillet of beef). The *menú del dia* is good lunch value at €11.

Can Farragetes (☎ 973 37 00 34; www.calfarragetes.com; Carrer del Coll 7, Tuixén; d €23 per person; 𠂆) A big, friendly stone place set over two floors around a sprawling courtyard, this country village house has smallish but immaculate rooms featuring iron bedsteads and wood panelling.

Getting There & Around

You need your own vehicle to reach Saldes, Gósol or Tuixén.

LA SEU D'URGELL

pop 12,320

The lively valley town of La Seu d'Urgell (la *seu* - *dur-zhey*) is Spain's gateway to Andorra, 10km to the north. It's a pleasant place to spend a night, with an admirable medieval cathedral.

When the Franks evicted the Muslims from this part of the Pyrenees, in the early 9th century, they made La Seu a bishopric and capital of the counts of Urgell. It has been an important market and cathedral town since the 11th century.

Information

Hospital (☎ 973 35 00 50; Passeig de Joan Brudieu 8).

Policia Municipal (☎ 973 35 04 26; Plaça dels Oms 1) In the Casa de la Ciutat (Town Hall).

Tourist office (☎ 973 35 15 11; www.laseu.org/turisme; Avinguda de les Valls d'Andorra 33; 𠂆 9am-9pm Jul-Aug, 10am-2pm & 4-6.30pm Mon-Sat Sep-Jun) At the northern entrance to town.

Catedral de Santa Maria & Museu Diocesà

On the southern side of Plaça dels Oms, the 12th-century *seu* (cathedral; admission free; 𠂆 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-1pm & 4-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Oct-May) is one of Catalonia's outstanding Romanesque buildings despite various remodellings. It's one of more than a hundred Romanesque churches lining what has come to be known as the Ruta Romànica, from Perpignan (France) to the Urgell district.

The fine western façade, through which you enter, is decorated in typical Lombard style. The inside is dark and plain but still impressive, with five apses, some murals in the southern transept, and a 13th-century Virgin-and-child sculpture in the central apse.

From inside the cathedral you can enter the **Museu Diocesà** (☎ 973 35 32 42; www.museudiocesaurgell.org; admission €2.50; 𠂆 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Jun-Sep, noon-1pm Mon-Sat, 11am-1pm Sun Oct-May). This good museum encompasses the fine cloister and the 12th-century Romanesque **Església de Sant Miquel** (€1.50 without Museum; 𠂆 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-1pm & 4-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Oct-May) as well as some good medieval Pyrenean church murals, sculptures and altarpieces, and a rare 10th-century Mozarabic Beatus (illustrated manuscript of the Apocalypse).

Sleeping

Pensió Jové (☎ 973 35 02 60; Carrer dels Canonges 42; r per person €15) One of two basic digs on the same street in the old town, this place has clean, simple rooms with basin and shared bathroom.

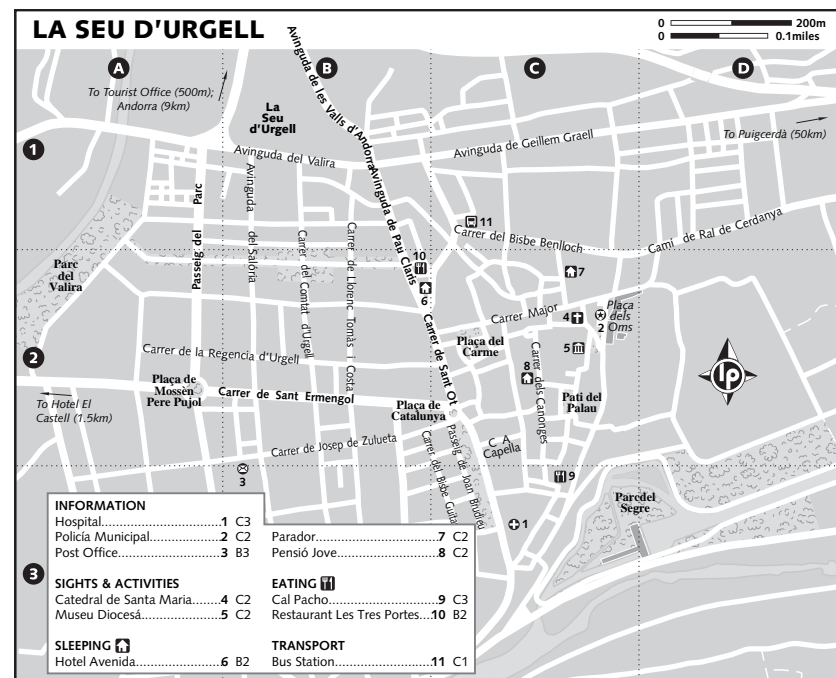
Hotel Avenida (☎ 973 35 01 04; www.avenhotel.com; Avinguda de Pau Claris 24; s/d €33/56) This hotel has a range of mostly sunny rooms. Although not overly characterful, the rooms are big enough and kept spick-and-span. Its Italian restaurant, Miscela, is not bad.

Parador (☎ 973 35 20 00; www.parador.es; Carrer de Sant Domènec s/n; s/d €103/129; 𠂆 a s) Built around the restored cloister of the 14th-century Sant Domènec convent, this is a modern establishment. Rooms are comfortable without being luxurious. What makes it is the setting, and extra touches such as the pool and sauna.

Hotel El Castell (☎ 973 35 00 00; www.hotelescastell.com; Castellciutat; s/d up to €343/396; 𠂆 a i s) Set in a castle in a hilltop jumble of lanes about 1.5km west of central La Seu, this spa hotel is a world of its own. Run by the Relais & Châteaux team, it is the classiest hotel for miles around, with soothing gardens, a gym, sauna and gourmet restaurant.

Eating

Cal Pacho (☎ 973 35 27 19; Carrer de la Font 11; meals €15-20; 𠂆 Mon-Sat) Hidden away in the old town, this is a marvellous den serving old-fashioned local grub. Try a dish of *cargols a la llaua* (baked snails; €10) or *cabrit at forn* (roast kid). The *menú del dia* offers a broad variety of options for €8.50.



Restaurant Les Tres Portes (☎ 973 35 29 07; Carrer de Garriga i Massou 7; meals €30-35; 𠂆 Thu-Sun) This is a homy spot, where you can chow down on mixed Spanish cuisine in the peaceful garden. It presents an array of options taking in fish, seafood and meat mains. The *mitjana de cavall amb alls* (horsemeat prepared in garlic) is hearty at €16.

Getting There & Away

The bus station is on the northern edge of the old town. **Alsina Graells** (☎ 973 35 00 20) runs four or five buses daily to Barcelona (€20.80, 3½ hours): two each via Solsona and Ponts, and one, which does not run on Sunday, via the Túnel del Cadí. There are also three to Puigcerdà (€5.10, one hour) and two to Lleida (€14.15, 2½ hours).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The N260 HWY heads 6km southwest to Adrall, then turns off west over the hills to Sort. The C14 carries on south to Lleida, threading the towering Trespons gorge about 13km beyond Adrall.

VALL DE LA NOGUERA PALLARESA

The Riu Noguera Pallaresa, running south through a dramatic valley about 50km west of La Seu d'Urgell, is Spain's best-known white-water river. The main centres for white-water sports are the town of Sort and the villages of Rialp and Llavorsí. You'll find companies to take you rafting, hydrospeeding, canoeing and kayaking or canyoning, climbing, mountain biking, horse riding and ponting (basically bungee jumping from bridges).

The main **tourist office** (☎ 973 62 10 02; Avinguda dels Comtes del Pallars 21; 𠂆 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 3pm Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Jul-Aug, 9am-3pm & 4-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2.30pm Sat Sep-Jun) for the area is in Sort.

White-Water Rafting

The Riu Noguera Pallaresa has no drops of more than grade 4 (on a scale of 1 to 6), but it's exciting enough to attract a constant stream of white-water fans between April and August. It's usually at its best in May and June.

The best stretch is the 14km or so from Llavorsí to Rialp, on which the standard raft outing lasts one to 1½ hours and costs €30 to €35 per person depending on the company and season.

A trip down the same stretch on a hydrospeed costs from €34 (5km) up to €60 (14km). Longer rides to Sort and beyond will cost more.

At least one company, **YetiEmotions** (☎ 973 62 22 01; www.yetiemoitions.com; Carrer de Borda Era d'Alfons s/n, Llavorsí), organises high-grade trips, for experienced rafters only, further upstream. Several other rafting companies operate from Llavorsí and other points like Sort. Canoeing trips on the same river start at €34 per hour.

You need to bring your own swimming costume, towel and a change of clothes. All other gear is usually provided.

Sleeping

Llavorsí is the most pleasant base, much more of a mountain village than Rialp or Sort, with a couple of camping grounds and four hotels.

Camping Aigües Braves (☎ 973 62 21 53; sites per 2-person tent & car €18; h mid-Mar–Aug; p s) About 1km north of Llavorsí proper, this pleasant riverside camping ground has a pool, restaurant and mini-market.

Hotel Riberies (☎ 973 62 20 51; www.riberies.com; Camí de Riberies s/n; s/d €83/133; p s) This is by far the most pleasant choice. Timber ceilings and wooden floors give the spacious rooms a warm feel, and the price includes breakfast. Throw in comfort factors like the verdant site, good restaurant and a heated swimming pool.

Getting There & Away

Alsina Graells runs one daily bus (at 7.30am) from Barcelona to Sort, Rialp, Llavorsí (€26.50, 5½ hours) and Esterrí d'Aneu (€28.30). From June to October it continues to Vielha (€32.90) and the Val d'Aran. The return bus leaves Llavorsí at 1.56pm. The Barcelona–Vielha trip is shorter and cheaper via Lleida (€27.60, 5½ hours)

NORTHWESTERN VALLEYS

North of the highway that leads northwest from Llavorsí towards the Port de Bonaigua pass, stretches a series of verdant valleys leading up to some of the most beautiful sights in the Catalan Pyrenees.

The Vall de Cardós and Vall Ferrera, heading back into the hills northeast of Llavorsí, lead to some remote and, in parts, tough mountain walking country along and across the Andorran and French borders, including Pica d'Estats, the highest peak in Catalonia. Editorial Alpina's *Pica d'Estats* and *Montgarrí* maps will help.

Vall de Cardós

Heading north into the hills along the L504 road from Llavorsí, this pretty valley leads to challenging mountain-walking possibilities. Editorial Alpina's *Pica d'Estats* map-guide is useful here. There is no public transport up the valley.

Lladrés and **Lladorre**, the latter graced with a charming Romanesque church, are pretty stone hamlets oozing bucolic charm. **Tavascan** marks the end of the asphalt road. It's a huddle of well-kept houses and a launch pad for numerous excursions. The most stunning piece of scenery is a crystal-blue glacial lake (the largest in the Pyrenees), **Estany de Certascan**, about 13km away along a tough road best negotiated by 4WD. Just out of view of the lake is the **Refugi de Certascan** (☎ 973 62 13 89; €13; h daily early mid-Jun–mid-Sep, some weekends & holidays rest of year), which has room for 40 people, showers and offers meals. More trails and lakes await in this frontier mountain territory. The valley's towns are littered with charming *cases de pagès* (country guesthouses), along with three hotels in Tavascan.

Vall Ferrera

Greener than the Vall de Cardós and at the heart of the Parc Natural de l'Alt Pirineu (Catalonia's biggest nature reserve), this valley is another pleasant surprise, hiding several pretty villages and bringing even more good walking country within reach. The ascent of the Pica d'Estats (3143m), the region's highest peak, is generally undertaken from here. There is no public transport.

The prettiest hamlet, **Àreu**, is a popular base for walkers. It is divided into two separate settlements, each with a Romanesque church: **Sant Climent** is in the lower part and **Sant Feliu de la Força** up the road. The ascent of and return from the Pica d'Estats is an all-day affair and only for the fit. You need to be at the **Refugi de Vall Ferrera** (☎ 973 62 43 78; h Easter & mid-Jun–mid-Oct), 10km to the north of Àreu, at dawn. On the way up you will pass glacial lakes, high pastures and ever-changing scenery, before ascending the bare rocky summit.

There are several *cases de pagès* and one hotel in Àreu, and more options in **Alins**. **Casa Besolí** (☎ 973 62 44 15; La Plaça s/n; d €40), in the lower part of the village, is one of the few that rents out rooms by the night. Rooms are small but immaculately kept affairs.

Valls d'Aneu

To proceed to the next valleys west, you return to Llavorsí and the C13 Hwy, along which you proceed north. After 12km you pass the turn-off on the left for Espot – this is the most popular way into the Parc Nacional d'Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici.

Six kilometres further on from the turn-off, after passing an artificial lake on the right where you can hire rowing boats and canoes to potter about in, you'll arrive at **Esterrí d'Aneu**, a popular, if distant, base for the ski fields of Baqueira–Beret (p380) in the Val d'Aran. Of the various valleys that make up the Valls d'Aneu, the Vall d'Isil is the most intriguing. Follow the C13 directly north through Esterrí d'Aneu and it will lead you over a bridge across the Riu Noguera Pallaresa. You then follow this back road (the C147) up into a mountain valley, passing through the villages of **Borén**, **Isil** and the half-abandoned **Alós d'Isil**.

PARC NACIONAL D'AIGÜESTORTES I ESTANY DE SANT MAURICI & AROUND

Catalonia's only national park extends 20km east to west, and only 9km from north to south, but packs in more beauty than most areas 100 times its size. The product of glacial action over two million years, it's essentially two east–west valleys at 1600m to 2000m altitude lined by jagged 2600m to 2900m peaks of granite and slate. Against this backdrop, pine and fir forests, and open bush and grassland, bedecked with wildflowers in spring, combine with some 200 small *estanyis* (lakes) and countless streams and waterfalls to create a wilderness of rare splendour.

The national park, whose boundaries cover 141.2 sq km, lies at the core of a wider wilderness area, whose outer limit is known as the *zona perifèrica* and includes some magnificent high country to the north and south. The total area covered by the wilderness area is 408.5 sq km and is monitored by park rangers.

Orientation

APPROACHES

The main approaches are via the village of Espot (1320m), 4km east of the park's eastern boundary, and Boí, 5.5km from the western side.

THE PARK

The two main valleys are those of the Riu Escrita in the east and the Riu de Sant Nicolau in the west. The Escrita flows out of the

park's largest lake, the 1km-long **Estany de Sant Maurici**. The Sant Nicolau's main source is **Estany Llong**, 4km west of Estany de Sant Maurici across the 2423m Portarró d'Espot pass. Three kilometres downstream from Estany Llong, the Sant Nicolau runs through a particularly beautiful stretch known as **Aigüestortes** (Twisted Waters).

Apart from the valley openings at the eastern and western ends, virtually the whole perimeter of the park is mountain crests, with numerous spurs of almost equal height reaching in towards the centre. One of these, from the south, ends in the twin peaks **Els Encantats** (2746m and 2733m), towering over Estany de Sant Maurici.

MAPS & GUIDES

Editorial Alpina's map guides are adequate, although they don't show every single trail. *Sant Maurici – Els Encantats* covers the eastern half of the park and its approaches; *Vall de Boi* covers the western half and its approaches; *Montserrat de Pallars* covers the northern Vall Fosca; and *Val d'Aran*, naturally, covers the Val d'Aran. A better map of the whole area is the Institut Cartogràfic de Catalunya's *Parc Nacional d'Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici*, scaled at 1:25,000 – but even it is not perfect. The help of guides can be enlisted at the Espot and Boi information offices.

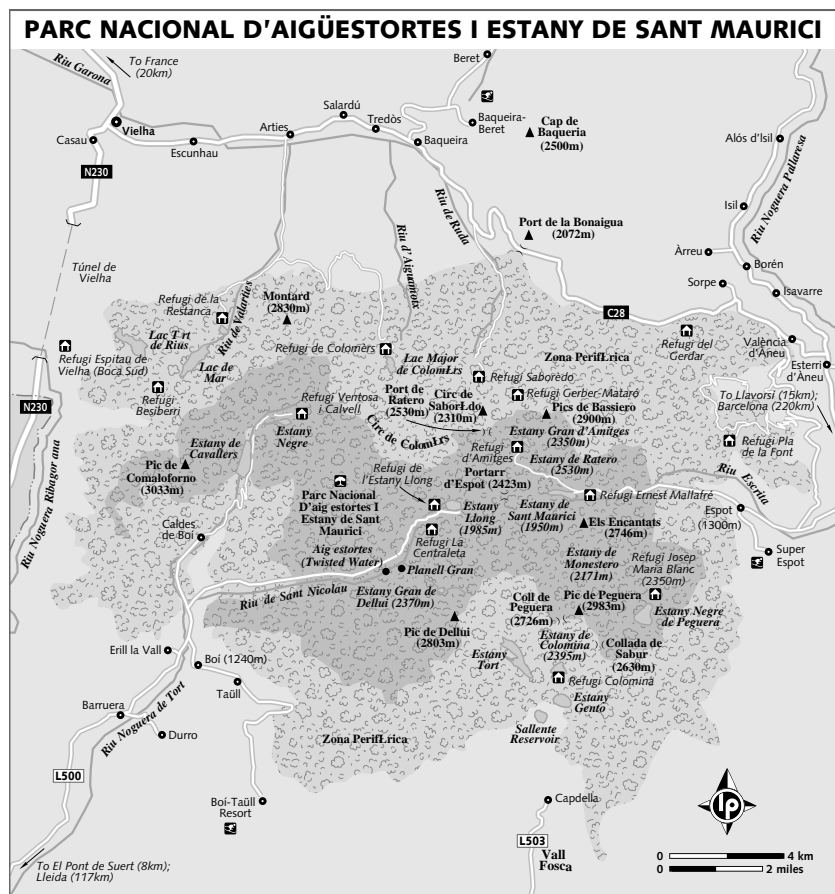
Information

TOURIST INFORMATION

In Espot, there are **national park information offices** (☎ 973 62 40 36; h 9am–1pm & 3.30–6.45pm daily Jun–Sep, 9am–2pm & 3.30–5.45pm Mon–Sat, 9am–2pm Sun Oct–May) and **Boí** (☎ 973 69 61 89; h same as Espot office). The **tourist office** (☎ 973 69 40 00; h 9am–2pm & 5–7pm Mon–Sat, 10am–2pm Sun) in Barruera, on the L500, 10km north from the N230, is a good source of information on the area around the west side of the park. A sub-branch is open at Taüll in Easter and June to September (same opening times). Offices south of the park are located in **El Pont de Suert** (☎ 973 69 06 40) and **La Poblada de Segur** (☎ 973 68 02 57).

PARK RULES

Private vehicles cannot enter the park. Wild camping is not allowed, nor are swimming or other 'aquatic activities' in the lakes and rivers. Hunting, fishing, mushroom-picking and just about every other kind of potentially harmful activity are banned.



Romanesque Churches

The Vall de Boí (www.vallboi.com), southwest of the park, is dotted with some of Catalonia's loveliest little Romanesque churches, which together were declared a Unesco World Heritage site in 2000. Two of the finest are at Taüll, 3km east of Boí. **Sant Climent de Taüll**, at the entrance to the village, with its slender six-storey bell tower, is a gem, not only for its elegant, simple lines but also for the art that once graced its interior until the works were transferred to museums in the 20th century. The central apse contains a copy of a famous 1123 mural that now resides in Barcelona's Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (see p299). At the church's centre is a *Pantocrator* (Christ figure), whose rich Mozarabic-influenced col-

ours, and expressive but superhuman features, have become a virtual emblem of Catalan Romanesque art. Other art from this church has found its way to museums as far away as Boston in the USA!

Santa Maria de Taüll (admission free; h 10am-7pm), up in the old village centre and possessing a five-storey tower, is also well represented in the Barcelona museum but lacks the *in situ* copies that add to the interest of Sant Climent.

Other worthwhile Romanesque churches in the area are at Boí (Sant Joan), Barruera (Sant Feliu), Durro (Nativitat) and Erill la Vall (Santa Eulàlia). The latter has a slender six-storey tower to rival Sant Climent's and slopes upwards to the altar. Next door is the Centre

d'Interpretació del Romànic (☎ 973 69 67 15; Carrer del Bataló 5; h 9am-2pm & 5-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), which has a small Romanesque art collection, and it's also where you can organise guided tours of the churches.

You can visit all the churches (with the exception of Santa Maria de Taüll) from 10am to 2pm and 4pm to 7pm daily (admission €1.20 each or €5 for all six churches).

Walking

The park is crisscrossed by plenty of paths, ranging from well marked to unmarked, enabling you to pick suitable routes.

EAST-WEST TRAVERSE

You can walk right across the park in one day. The full Espot-to-Boí (or vice versa) walk is about 25km and takes nine hours, but you can shorten this by using Jeep-taxis to/from Estany de Sant Maurici or Aigüestortes (3km downstream from Estany Llong) or both. Espot (1300m) to Estany de Sant Maurici (1950m) is 8km (two hours). A path then climbs to the Portarró d'Espot pass (2423m), where there are fine views over both of the park's main valleys. From the pass you descend to Estany Llong and Aigüestortes (1820m; about 3½ hours from Estany de Sant Maurici). Then you have around 3.5km to the park entrance, 4km to the L500 and 2.5km south to Boí (1260m) – a total of about three hours.

SHORTER WALKS

Numerous good walks of three to five hours' return will take you up into spectacular side valleys from Estany de Sant Maurici or Aigüestortes.

From the eastern end of Estany de Sant Maurici, one path heads south 2.5km up the Monastero valley to Estany de Monastero (2171m), passing Els Encantats on the left. Another goes 3km northwest up by Estany de Ratero to Estany Gran d'Amitges (2350m). From Planell Gran (1850m), 1km up the Sant Nicolau valley from Aigüestortes, a path climbs 2.5km southeast to Estany Gran de Dellui (2370m). You can descend to Estany Llong (3km); it takes about four hours from Aigüestortes to Estany Llong.

Skiing

The Boí-Taüll ski resort (☎ 902 40 66 40; www.boitaullresort.com; day lift pass €30) is one of Catalonia's more promising areas, with 46 pistes (most fairly easy) covering 42km. You can also ski

around Espot (☎ 973 62 40 58; www.esportesqui.net; day lift pass €28), which gives you a further 31 pistes over 32km.

Sleeping CAMPING

There are four similarly priced camping grounds in and around Espot. **Camping Vorapark** (☎ 973 62 41 08; www.voraparc.com; Prat del Vedat; sites per 2-person tent & car €19; h Apr-Sep; p s) is about the best in Espot, about 1.5km out of town towards the park entrance. It has a pleasant swimming pool, as well as a pool hall, bar and mini-market.

MOUNTAIN REFUGIS

Six *refugis* in the park and nine more inside the *zona perifèrica* provide accommodation for walkers. They tend to be staffed from early or mid-June to September, and for some weeks in the first half of the year for skiers. At other times several of them leave a section open where you can stay overnight; if you are unsure, call ahead or ask at the park information offices. Most charge €12.50 per person to stay overnight. The refuges in the park are listed here. Those outside are marked on the map.

Refugi d'Amitges (☎ 973 25 01 09; www.amitges.com) At Estany Gran d'Amitges (2380m), in the north of the park, it's run by the Centre Excursionista de Catalunya (CEC). Meals and showers are available.

Refugi La Centraleta Basic digs with bunks, mattresses and blankets, 15 minutes south of Refugi de l'Estany Llong.

Refugi Ernest Mallafré (☎ 973 25 01 18) It's near the eastern end of Estany de Sant Maurici (1950m) and run by the FEEC. It has meals but no showers.

Refugi de l'Estany Llong (reservations ☎ 629-374652, 973 29 95 45) It's near Estany Llong (1985m) and run by the national park; there's a kitchen and showers.

Refugi Josep Maria Blanc (☎ 973 25 01 08; www.jmblanc.com) It's near Estany Tort (2350m) and run by the CEC; meals available when staffed.

Refugi Ventosa i Calvell (☎ 973 29 70 90; www.refugiventosa.com) The CEC runs this *refugi* in the northwest of the park (2220m); it has a kitchen and showers.

HOSTALES & HOTELS

The villages of Espot, Boí and Taüll have a range of accommodation options (including several mid-range hotels in Espot). There are

hostales and *casas de pagès* in Barruera, El Pont de Suert, Capdella and La Torre de Capdella.

Esport

Residència Felip (☎ 973 62 40 93; s/d €15/30, Jul-Aug €25/40) A friendly, family-run place in the heart of the village, this spot has clean rooms, and rates include breakfast. It is one of three country homestays here.

Taüll

Three kilometres uphill from Boí, Taüll is by far the most picturesque place to stay on the west side of the park. It has nine *casas de pagès* and over a dozen hotels and *pensiones*, either in the village itself or in the surrounding area.

Pensión Santa Maria (☎ 973 69 61 70; www.taull.com; Plaça Cap del Riu 3; d up to €105) Through a shady entrance a grand stone archway leads into the quiet courtyard of this rambling country haven, with rose-draped balcony. The rooms are tastefully furnished and the building, all stonework, timber and slate roof, oozes timeless character. For €7 the staff will pack you a picnic lunch.

Eating

Note that throughout the area many places close mid-week and in the off-season. Most of the towns have one or two fairly basic restaurants.

Restaurant Juquim (☎ 973 62 40 09; meals €20) This restaurant on the main square has a varied menu concentrating largely on hearty country fare, with generous winter servings of *olla pallaresa* (steaming hotpot) or *civet de senglar* (wild boar stew).

Hotel Roya (☎ 973 62 40 40; meals €25-30) Also in Esport, the century-old Hotel Roya offers a similar range of food in a slightly more up-market setting, with a dining room inside and sunny separate dining area opposite the hotel entrance. Try the *truita de riu del país* (local river trout).

In Taüll, where there are a handful of eateries, you could try **Sant Climent** (☎ 973 69 60 52; meals €15-20; ̣ daily Dec-Easter & Jul-Sep) for a piping-hot onion soup and other simply home-cooked fare.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Daily buses from Barcelona, Lleida and La Pobla de Segur to Esterrí d'Aneu (and in summer to the Val d'Aran) will stop at the Esport

turning on the C13. From there you have an 8km uphill walk (or hitch) to Esport.

Alsina Graells buses from Barcelona to La Pobla de Segur (€22.15, three to 4½ hours) run up to three times a day all year. From July to mid-September, a connecting bus runs daily from La Pobla de Segur to El Pont de Suert and from there to Barruera and the Boí turn-off (el Cruce de Boí) on the L500 (1km short of Boí).

Getting Around

Once you're close to the park, the easiest way of getting inside it is by Jeep-taxi from Esport or Boí. There's a more or less continuous shuttle service between Esport and Estany de Sant Maurici, and between Boí and Aigüestortes, saving you, respectively, 8km and 10km. The one-way fare for either trip is €4.40 per person and the services run from outside the park information offices in Esport and Boí (from July to September 8am to 7pm, other months 9am to 6pm).

VAL D'ARAN

pop 9200

This lush green valley, Catalonia's northernmost outpost, is surrounded by spectacular 2000m-plus mountains. Its only natural opening is northwards to France, to which it gives its river, the Riu Garona (Garonne), flowing down to Bordeaux. Thanks in part to its geography, Aran's native language is not Catalan but Aranese (*aranés*), which is a dialect of Occitan or the *langue d'oc*, the old Romance language of southern France.

Despite this northward orientation, Aran has been tied politically to Catalonia since 1175, when Alfonso II took it under his protection to forestall the designs of rival counts on both sides of the Pyrenees. A major hiccup came with the Napoleonic occupation from 1810 to 1815.

For all its intriguing past, the Val d'Aran is in danger of being overrun by tourism, which, since the 1964 opening of the Baqueira-Beret ski resort, has replaced farming and herding as the economic mainstay. That said, many villages retain an old-fashioned core and, from Aran's pretty side valleys, walkers can go over the mountains in any direction, notably southwards to the Parc Nacional d'Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici.

The Val d'Aran is some 35km long and is considered to have three parts: Naut Aran

(Upper Aran), the eastern part, aligned east-west; Mijaran (Middle Aran) around Vielha; and Baish Aran (Lower Aran), where the Garona flows northeast to France.

Vielha

pop 5020

Vielha is Aran's junction town, and the Aranes spelling of its name is more common than the Catalan and Castilian version, Viella.

INFORMATION

Hospital (☎ 973 64 00 04; Carrer deth Espitau)

Mossos d'Esquadra (Catalan regional police; ☎ 973 25 72 85) Just north of the centre along the N230 to France.

Tourist office (☎ 973 64 01 10; www.aran.org; Carrer de Sarriulera 10; ̣ 9am-9pm)

SIGHTS

The small old quarter is around Plaça dera Gleisa and across the little Riu Nere, just west of the square. The **Gleisa de Sant Miquèu** (Plaça dera Gleisa) is a church that displays a mix of 12th- to 18th-century styles, with a 13th-century main portal. It contains some notable medieval artwork, especially the 12th-century *Crist de Mijaran*, an almost life-sized wooden bust that is thought to have been part of a *Descent from the Cross* group. The **Musèu dera Val d'Aran** (☎ 973 64 18 15; Carrer Major 11; admission €2; ̣ 10am-1pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) tells the tale of Aran's history up to the present.

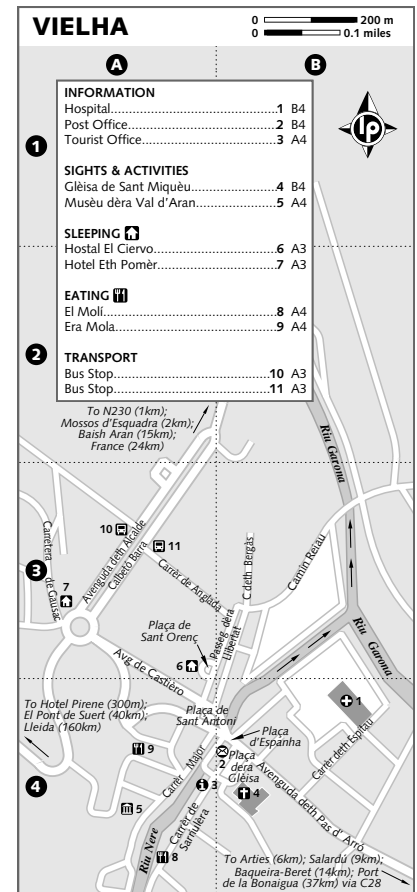
SLEEPING

About a third of the Val d'Aran's hotels are in the capital. For some of the cheaper places, head down Passeig dera Llibertat, north off Avenguda de Castièro. High season for most is Christmas to New Year, Easter and a handful of other peak holiday periods: high summer (July to August) and much of the ski season (January to February). At other times, prices can be as much as halve.

Hostal El Ciervo (☎ 973 64 01 65; Plaça de Sant Orenç 3; s/d €50/78) Some of the better rooms in this perfectly adequate, 18-room, old-style hotel overlooking a central square have the singular benefit of power showers.

Hotel Pirene (☎ 973 64 00 75 or 902 16 02 42; www.hotelpirene.com; Carretera del Túnel s/n; s/d €58/96; ̣) Perched on a rise just above the centre of Vielha, this modern hotel offers fairly straightforward rooms with valley views.

Hotel Eth Pomèr (☎ 973 64 28 88; www.hotelpomer.com; Carretera de Gausac 4; s/d €73/96; ̣ a i) In



central Vielha, this hotel is ideal for skiers. Rooms are bright with parquet floors, high ceilings, attractive wood furnishings and modern marble bathrooms.

EATING

Quality dining is quite hard to come by in Vielha, but you will find no shortage of places serving average meals – many will dish up the local speciality, *olla aranesa* (a hearty hotpot).

El Molí (☎ 973 64 17 18; Carrer de Sarriulera 26; meals €30) On the banks of Riu Nere, this eatery specialises in grilled meaty dishes and *llesques*, toasty bread with toppings like *ceps*, *jabugo i formatge fós* (mushrooms, top quality ham and melted cheese; €15).

Era Mòla (☎ 973 64 24 19; Carrer de Marrèc 8; meals €30-35; 1 Thu-Tue mid-Jul-Sep & Dec-Apr) Easily the best restaurant in town, located in a low-slung house in the heart of the old town. Expect carefully prepared local and more international cuisine. The desserts, with a French leaning, rate a special mention.

Arties

pop 370

Six kilometres east of Vielha, this village on the southern side of the highway sits astride the confluence of the Garona and Valarties rivers. Among its cheerful stone houses is the Romanesque **Gleisa de Santa Maria**, with its three-storey belfry and triple apse.

Just nearby in a charming house atop the Valarties stream is **Hotel Residencia Besiberri** (☎ 973 64 08 29; Carrer de la Font 3; s/d €75/96; 1 Dec-Apr & Jul-Sep). This rustic place could almost be at home somewhere in Austria, with stone and timber trims. The staff can arrange for a babysitter when you're out wandering or skiing.

Another reason for coming to Arties is to eat at **Casa Irene** (☎ 973 64 43 64; Carrer Major 20; meals €40-55; 1 Wed-Sun, dinner only Tue, closed Oct & May). The food at Casa Irene is sublime, featuring a tempting mix of sturdy local dishes and international flair.

Salardú

pop 1200

Three kilometres east of Arties, Salardú's nucleus of old houses and narrow streets has largely resisted the temptation to sprawl. In May, June, October or November, however, you will find only a few hotels open. In the apse of the village's 12th- and 13th-century **Sant Andreu** church, you can admire the 13th-century *Crist de Salardú* crucifixion carving.

The town is a handy base for the Baqueira-Beret ski resort, located 4km from here.

Alberg Era Garona (☎ 973 64 52 71; Carretera de Vielha s/n; dm student & under 26yr/26yr & over €19/23) is a large youth hostel built in local stone and slate. It has rooms of up to four beds, each with a bathroom.

Hotel deth Pais (☎ 973 64 58 36; Carrer de Santa Paula s/n; s/d €72/89; 1) is in the middle of the original village; it's a pleasant slate-roofed hotel with straightforward rooms.

Baqueira-Beret

Baqueira (Vaquèira in Aranes), 3km east of Salardú, and Beret, 8km north of Baqueira,

form Catalonia's premier ski resort (☎ 973 63 90 10; www.baquiera.es; day lift pass €39), favoured by the Spanish royal family, no less! Its good lift system gives access to 72 varied pistes totalling 104km (larger than any other Spanish resort), amid fine scenery at between 1500m and 2510m.

There's nowhere cheap to stay in Baqueira, and nowhere at all at Beret. Many skiers stay down the valley in Salardú, Arties or Vielha. If you want to rent an apartment, call the central booking number ☎ 973 63 90 27.

North of Vielha

The hills on either side of the highway up to the French frontier hide some exquisite countryside with fine walking trails and an assortment of curious villages.

ARRÒS, VILA & OTHER VILLAGES

Turn off the highway at Eth Pònt d'Arròs and climb a few kilometres into Arròs via Vila. This sleepy village makes a better choice of place to stay than the valley towns. Try **Casa Mariu** (☎ 973 64 03 41; Cap dera Vila 13; d €32). This charming village house, all stone and dark wood shutters, is typical of the Val d'Aran. Other villages dot the area too.

PLAN DERA ARTIGA DE LIN

Branch west, off the main highway at Es Bòrdes, a typical Aranes village, and keep following the road as it twists its way up into heavily wooded countryside. The drive alone is a real delight: follow the course of the Joèu stream, as you gain altitude, to reach the high mountain pastures of the Plan dera Artiga de Lin plain. Walking trails lead off into the tall forbidding mountains of the Aragonese Pyrenees, capped by the Pic d'Aneto (see p430).

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

El Raconet (☎ 973 64 17 30; Carrer de Cre-stalhera 3, Arròs; meals €20-25; 1 Mon-Fri mid-Jul-Sep, plus Sat & Sun ski season; otherwise weekends only) Regulars keep coming back to this cosy stonewalled house converted into a charming country restaurant. The setting alone makes it worthwhile. Solid country cooking is on offer and the cooks have a special penchant for *bacalao* (dried and salted cod).

Getting There & Around

BUS

Two Alsina Graells buses run daily between Barcelona and Vielha (€27.60, 5½ hours) via Lleida and El Pont de Suert. Lleida to Vielha (€10.89) takes three hours. From June to October, a daily Alsina Graells bus connects Barcelona and Vielha (€32.90, 7½ hours) via La Pobra de Segur, Llavorsi, the Espot turning on the C13, Port de la Bonaigua and Salardú.

A local bus service runs from four (at weekends) to nine times daily along the valley from Baqueira to Les or Pontaut (for Eth Pont de Rei) via Vielha and the intervening villages. Several others run from Vielha either to Baqueira or to Les/Pontaut. The trip from one end of the valley to the other takes up to an hour. A single ticket for any destination is €0.80 (or €7.20 for a book of 10 tickets).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The N230 Hwy from Lleida and El Pont de Suert reaches Aran through the 5.25km Túnel de Vielha, then heads north from Vielha to the French border at Eth Pont de Rei.

From the Vall de la Noguera Pallaresa, the C28 crosses the Port de la Bonaigua pass (2072m) – which is sometimes closed in winter – into Naut Aran, meeting the N230 Hwy at Vielha.

CENTRAL CATALONIA

Away from the beaches and mountains that captivate the bulk of roamers in Catalonia is a host of little-visited gems splashed across the Catalan hinterland. About halfway between Barcelona and the Pyrenees lies the graceful town of Vic, with its grand Plaça Major. Northwest of the capital, you can strike out for Manresa (just beyond Montserrat), Cardona (with its windy castle complex) and Solsona, en route to Lleida. An alternative route to Lleida takes you further south through the Conca de Barberà, littered with majestic medieval monasteries.

VIC

pop 37,825

Vic, with its attractive historic centre and some fine restaurants, dominates the flatlands of La Plana de Vic to the south of the Pyrenees, and was one of Catalonia's leading religious centres. The power of the bishops of Vic stretched far

and wide and explains the surprising number of churches crammed into the old town.

Information

Tourist office (☎ 93 886 20 91; www.victurisme.com; Carrer de la Ciutat 4; 1 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2pm & 4-7pm Sat, 10am-1.30pm Sun)

Sights

Plaça Major, the largest of Catalonia's central squares, is lined with medieval, baroque and Modernista mansions. It's still the site of regular markets, hence its other name, *Plaça del Mercadal*.

The **Catedral de Sant Pere** (admission €2; 1 10am-1pm & 4-7pm) is a neoclassical Goliath of gloomy taste, and flanked by a Romanesque bell tower. Inside, the dark, square-based pillars are lightened somewhat by murals by Josep Maria Sert (he had to do them twice because the first set was destroyed by fire in 1936). It is worth the admission fee to enter the Romanesque crypt, see the treasury rooms and wander into the stone lace-work splendour of the Gothic cloister. Entry is from the left side of the altar.

Across Carrer de Cloquer, the **Museu Episcopal** (☎ 93 886 93 60; Plaça del Bisbe Oliba 3; adult/child, student & senior €4/2; 1 10am-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Tue-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-Mar) holds a marvellous collection of Romanesque and Gothic art, among other things. In Catalonia it is second only to the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya collection (p299) in Barcelona. The Romanesque collection includes the vivid *Davallament*, a scene depicting the taking down of Christ from the cross. The Gothic collection contains works by such key figures as Lluís Borrassà and Jaume Huguet.

Sleeping & Eating

Vic is an easy day trip from Barcelona. The city is known for its disproportionate density of high-quality restaurants, and it's close enough to Barcelona for people from the big city to have an agreeable gourmet getaway.

Hostal Osona (☎ 93 883 28 45; Carrer de Remei 3; d €28) If you do need digs, this basic *hostal* has rooms with basin and shared showers in the hall. Otherwise there are three mid-level hotels.

La Taula (☎ 93 886 32 29; Plaça de Don Miquel de Clariana 4; meals €20-25; 1 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat all year, lunch only Sun Oct-May) In a town that bristles with eateries, this is a bright star of traditional cooking, with fair prices and no pretensions. The *entrecot a la tòfona* (with truffles) is delicious.

Getting There & Away

Regular *rodalies* (line C3) run from Barcelona (€3.80, up to 1½ hours).

AROUND VIC

Rupit

pop 240

An enchanting excursion northeast of Vic takes you 31km along the C153 to Rupit, a splendid old village set amid rugged grazing country – the flat-top mountains around here come as quite a surprise. You cross a suspension footbridge made in the 1940s to reach the village, which is full of quaint 17th-century houses, a baroque church and tucked-away squares. Especially enticing is Carrer del Fossar, which climbs the spine of the hill, along which part of the village is spread-eagled. Rupit is a good base for rambles in the area.

Getting here without your own vehicle is problematic. *Sagalés* (☎ 93 889 25 77) buses leave Carrer de Casp 30 in Barcelona at 6pm Monday to Friday and at 11.20am on Saturday. Change buses in Vic. The trip (€9.50) takes about two hours from Barcelona.

MANRESA

pop 64,000

A big commercial centre in the Catalan heartland, Manresa was the scene of the first assembly of the nationalist *Unió Catalanista* (1897), which published the *Bases de Manresa*, a political manifesto for an autonomous Catalan state.

Not a great deal of the old town remains but you can't miss the great hulk that is the *Basilica de Santa Maria*, atop the Puig Cardener hill in the town centre. Its Gothic nave is second in size only to that of the cathedral in Girona. The unique Romanesque *Pont Vell*, whose eight arcs span the rather less-impressive Riu Cardener, was rebuilt after destruction in the civil war.

Rodalies from Barcelona (€3.80, 1¼ hours) via Terrassa run here regularly.

CARDONA

pop 5230

Long before arrival, you espy in the distance the outline of the impregnable 18th-century fortress high above Cardona, which itself lies next to the Muntanya de Sal (Salt Mountain). Until 1990 the salt mines were an important source of income.

The castle (follow the signs uphill to the *parador*) was built over an older predecessor. The single most remarkable element of the buildings is the lofty and spare Romanesque *Església de Sant Vicenç* (☎ 93 868 41 69; adult/child €2.40/1.80; ↷ 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-1pm & 3-5pm Tue-Sun Oct-May). To get in, stop at the guardian's office on the right as you enter the castle (and now hotel) courtyard. The bare stone walls were once covered in bright frescoes, some of which can be contemplated in the *Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya* (p299) in Barcelona.

A couple of modest *pensiones* offer relatively cheap digs for an overnight stay. Otherwise, the place to be is the magnificent *Parador Ducs de Cardona* (☎ 93 869 12 75; cardona@parador.es; s/d €129/170), where you can feel like the king of the castle for a night or two.

Cardona is served by the Alsina Graells Barcelona–Manresa–Solsona bus route. Up to four run daily from Barcelona (€10.90, 1¾ hours) and nine from Manresa (€3.70, 40 minutes). Up to four buses proceed to Solsona (€1.85, 25 minutes).

SOLSONA

pop 8570

They call the people of Solsona *matarucs* (donkey killers), which seems an odd tag until you hear what the townsfolk's favourite festive activity used to be.

Every February the high point of Solsona's carnival fun was the hoisting of a donkey, by the neck, up the town bell tower (Torre de les Hores). The donkey, literally scared to death, not unreasonably, would shit and piss on its way up, much to the delight of the drink-addled crowd below. To be hit by a glob of either substance was, they say, a sign of good fortune for the coming year. Animal rights people put an end to this bizarre form of entertainment and the donkey nowadays is a water-spraying fake.

The *Catedral de Santa Maria* on Plaça de la Catedral (admission free; ↷ 10am-1pm & 4-8pm) boasts Romanesque apses, a Gothic nave and a pretty cloister. Behind the cathedral is the *Palau Episcopal* (☎ 973 48 21 01; Plaça del Palau; adult/senior & child €3/2; ↷ 10am-1pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-Apr, 10am-1pm & 4.30-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun May-Sep). Built in the 18th century, this neoclassical building houses a considerable collection of medieval art gathered from churches in the surrounding district.

Hotel Solsona Centre (☎ 973 48 43 40 www.hotel-solsonacentre.com; Carrer de Àngel Guimerà 3; s/d €36/45; p a i w) This is a plain Jane of a place, but clean, secure and central, and rather modestly priced.

Two to four Alsina Graells buses run daily from Barcelona (€12.80, two hours) via Manresa (€5.60, 65 minutes) and Cardona to Solsona.

CONCA DE BARBERÀ

This hilly, green, wine-making district comes as a refreshing surprise in the otherwise drab flatlands of southwest Catalonia and makes an alternative route from Barcelona (or Tarragona) to Lleida and beyond. Vineyards and woods succeed one another across rolling green hills, studded by occasional medieval villages and monasteries.

Reial Monestir de Santa Maria de Poblet

The jewel in the crown is doubtless this imposing fortified monastery (☎ 977 87 12 47; adult/student €4.20/2.40; ↷ 10am-12.45pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-12.30pm & 3-5.30pm Sun & holidays mid-Mar–mid-Oct, 10am-

12.45pm & 3-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-12.30pm & 3-5.30pm Sun & holidays mid-Oct–mid-Mar), founded by Cistercian monks from southern France in 1151.

The walls of this abbey devoted to Santa Maria (a Unesco World Heritage site), were a defensive measure and also symbolised the monks' isolation from the vanities of the outside world. A grand portal gives access to a long uneven square, the Plaça Major, flanked by several dependencies including the small Romanesque *Capella de Santa Caterina*. The nearby *Porta Daurada* is so called because its bronze panels were overlaid with gold to suitably impress the visiting emperor Felipe II in 1564.

Once inside the *Porta Reial* (Royal Gate), flanked by hefty octagonal towers, you will be led through a worn Romanesque entrance to the grand cloister, of Romanesque origins but largely Gothic in style. With its peaceful fountain and pavilion, the two-level cloister is a marvellous haven. You will be led from the cloister to the head of the church, itself a typically tall and austere Cistercian Gothic creation, to witness the sculptural glory in alabaster that is the *retablo* and Panteón de los

CATALAN TIPPLES

Avid tippers will have come across a playful, relatively inexpensive bubbly called Freixenet. One of Spain's flagship exporters of *cava*, Freixenet is based at the heart of Catalonia's Penedès wine region, which alone produces the bulk of all Spain's sparkling white wines (see the Barcelona chapter, p338).

But Freixenet and bubbly are only the tip of the Catalan wineberg. Catalonia hosts 11 DO (*denominación de origen*) wine-producing zones and a remarkable variety of tipples. Although perhaps less well-known than wines from the Rioja area, Catalan wines are full of pleasant surprises. The heavy, tannin-loaded, deep-coloured reds of El Priorat have gained the much-desired DOC (*denominación de origen calificada*) status long held by Rioja wines alone. To further investigate El Priorat's wines, and wines from the adjacent Montsant DO region, head for the tourist office in **Falset** (☎ 977 83 10 23; www.priorat.org; Carrer de Sant Marcel 2; ↷ 9am-3pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat, 11am-2pm Sun) for information on local wine cellars. Falset, the capital of the Priorat area, offers some fine restaurant options too.

Catalonia's other DO wines come from points all over the region, spread as far apart as the Empordà area around Figueres in the north, and the Terra Alta zone around Gandesa in the southwest. The Penedès region pumps out almost two million hectolitres a year and thus doubles the combined output of the remaining DO regions.

Most of the grapes grown in Catalonia are native to Spain and include the White Macabeo, Garnacha and Xarel·lo (for white wines), and the Black Garnacha, Monastrell and Ull de Llebre (Hare's Eye) red varieties. Foreign varieties (such as Chardonnay, Riesling, Chenin Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Pinot Noir) are also widespread.

Freixenet, Codorniu and Torres are the big names in the Penedès region, but there is plenty to discover beyond that region. Raimat, in the Costers del Segre DO area in Lleida province, produces some fine reds and a couple of notable whites. Good fortified wines come from around Tarragona; some pleasing fresh wines are also produced in the Empordà area in the north by, for example, Cellers Santamaria and Cooperativa de Mollet de Perelada.

Reyes (Kings' Pantheon). The raised alabaster coffins, restored by Frederic Mares (see p287), contain such greats as Jaume I (the conqueror of Mallorca and Valencia) and Pere III.

Of six **Vibasa buses** (☎ 902 101363; www.vibasa.es) from Tarragona to Montblanc, L'Espuga de Francolí (50 minutes) and on to Lleida on weekdays, three stop at the monastery (55 minutes, two make all stops on weekends). Regular trains from Barcelona (Ca4 regional line) stop at Montblanc and L'Espuga de Francolí (€7.55) – the monastery is a 40-minute walk from the latter.

Around Reial Monestir de Santa Maria de Poblet

It is worth spending time exploring the vicinity. L'Espuga de Francolí, 2.5km away from the monastery along a pleasant tree-lined country road that makes walking tempting, is a bright town with several small hotels.

More interesting still is Montblanc, 8km away. Surrounded by medieval battlements, this one-time royal residence is jammed with highlights, including a Gothic royal mansion and churches, as well as some vestiges of its Romanesque origins. The winding cross-country drive to Prades leads through lovely country.

If monasteries are of interest, **Monestir de Santes Creus** (☎ 977 63 83 29; Plaça de Jaume el Just s/n; adult/child €3.60/2.40, plus Poblet & Vallbona monasteries €7, free Tue; 10am–1.30pm & 3–7pm Tue–Sun mid-Mar–mid-Sep, 10am–1.30pm & 3–5.30pm Tue–Sun mid-Sep–mid-Jan, 10am–1.30pm & 3–6pm Tue–Sun mid-Jan–mid-Mar), about 28km east of Montblanc, and **Vallbona de les Monges** (☎ 973 33 02 66; adult/child €2.50/2, plus Santes Creus & Poblet monasteries €7; 10.30am–1.30pm & 4.30–6.45pm Tue–Sat, noon–1.30pm & 4.30–6.45pm Sun & holidays Mar–Oct, 10.30am–1.30pm & 4.30–6pm Tue–Sat, noon–1.30pm & 4.30–6pm Sun & holidays Nov–Feb), to the north, are well worth searching out.

LLEIDA

pop 124,710

Much of western Catalonia is flat and drab, but if you're not in a hurry Lleida (Castilian: Lérida) is a likable place with a long and varied history. It's also the starting point of several routes towards the Pyrenees.

Information

Centre d'Informació i Reserves (☎ 902 25 00 50; http://turisme.paeria.es; Carrer Major 31bis; 10am–2pm & 4–7pm Mon–Sat, 10am–1.30pm Sun) Turisme de Lleida provides information about the city.

Oficina Turisme de la Generalitat (☎ 973 24 88 40; Plaça de Ramon Berenguer IV; 10am–2pm & 3.30–7.30pm Mon–Fri, 10am–2pm Sat) For tips on the rest of Lleida province.

Policia Nacional (Carrer de Sant Martí 62)

Post office (Rambla de Ferran 16; 8.30am–8.30pm Mon–Fri, 9.30am–2pm Sat)

La Seu Vella

Lleida's 'old cathedral', **La Seu Vella** (☎ 973 23 06 53; admission €2.40; 10am–1.30pm & 3–5.30pm Tue–Sat, 10am–1.30pm Sun Oct–May, 10am–1.30pm & 4–7.30pm Tue–Sat, 10am–1.30pm Sun Jun–Sep) towers above everything else in position and grandeur. It stands within a *recinte* (compound) of defensive walls erected between the 12th and 19th centuries.

The main entrance to the *recinte* (admission free; 8am–9pm) is from Carrer de Monterey on its western side, but during the cathedral's opening hours you can use the extraordinarily ugly ascensor (lift; admission €0.40; 10am–1.30pm & 4–8pm Tue–Sat, 10am–1.30pm Sun Jun–Sep, 10am–1.30pm & 3–5.30pm Tue–Sat, 10am–1.30pm Sun Oct–May) from above Plaça de Sant Joan.

The cathedral was built in sandy-coloured stone in the 13th to 15th centuries on the site of a former mosque (Lleida was under Muslim control from AD 719 to 1149). It's a masterpiece of the Transitional style, although it only recently recovered from 241 years' use as a barracks, which began as Felipe V's punishment for the city's opposition in the War of the Spanish Succession.

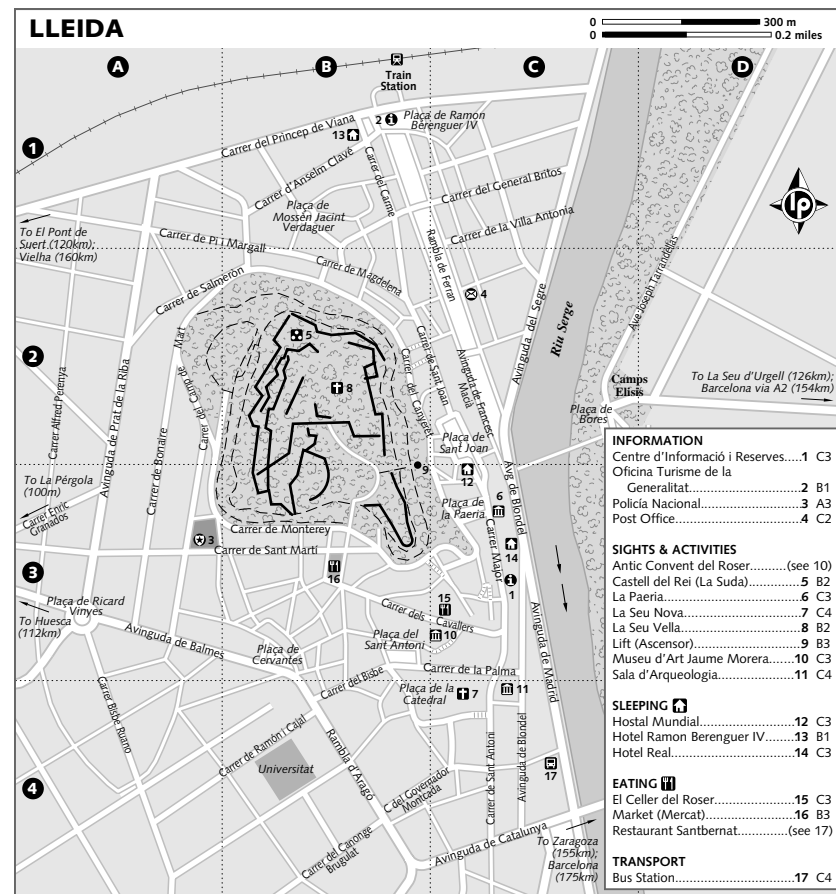
A 70m octagonal bell tower rises at the southwest end of the cloister, whose windows are laced with exceptional Gothic tracery. The spacious if austere interior, used as stables and dormitories during the military occupation, has a veritable forest of slender columns with carved capitals.

Above the cathedral are remains of the Islamic fortress and residence of the Muslim governors, known as the Castell del Rei or La Suda.

Carrer Major & Around

A 13th-century Gothic mansion La Paeria has housed the city government almost since its inception. The 18th-century neoclassical La Seu Nova on Plaça de la Catedral was built when La Seu Vella was turned into a barracks.

Opposite is the Hospital de Santa Maria, with a Gothic courtyard. It now houses the



Sala d'Arqueologia (☎ 973 27 15 00; Plaça de la Catedral; admission free; 10am–2pm & 6–9pm Tue–Fri, 11am–2pm & 7–9pm Sat, 11am–2pm Sun Jun–Sep, 10am–2pm & 5.30–8.30pm Tue–Fri, noon–2pm & 5.30–8.30pm Sat, noon–2pm Sun Oct–May), which includes Iberian and Roman finds from the Lleida region.

Carrer dels Cavallers and Carrer de la Palma climb from Carrer Major up through the old part of town. The Antic Convent del Roser, featuring an unusual three-storey cloister, houses the **Museu d'Art Jaume Morera** (☎ 973 70 04 19; Carrer dels Cavallers 15; admission free; 11am–2pm & 5–8pm Tue–Sat, 11am–2pm Sun) and its collection of work by Lleida-associated artists. The museum is due to be moved to another location, but so far funding has yet to be stumped up.

Sleeping

Hostal Mundial (☎ 973 24 27 00; Plaça de Sant Joan 4; s/d €20/40; p) Singles are smallish but have full bathrooms, which is not bad for a central little *hostal*/like this one. Doubles are roomier and all are clean and neat.

Hotel Ramon Berenguer IV (☎ 973 23 73 45; Plaça de Ramon Berenguer IV 2; s/d €35/44; p a) These somewhat dog-eared digs are quite all right and handy for the train station. Rooms are all decent if unexciting. Those on the higher floors enjoy a bit of a view.

Hotel Real (☎ 973 23 94 05; www.hotelrealleida.com; Avinguda de Blondel 22; s/d €67/86; p a i w) A modern midrise place with a pleasant garden, Hotel Real is aimed at business visitors and offers various classes of room. All are bright and clean,

and the better ones have generous balconies. A couple of rooms have wheelchair access.

Eating

Lleida is Catalonia's snail-eating capital. So many *cargols* are swallowed during the annual **Aplec del Cargol** (Snail Festival), held on a Sunday in early May, that some have to be imported.

Restaurant Santbernart (☎ 973 27 10 31; Carrer de Saracibar; meals €20-30; 11 lunch & dinner Thu-Sun, lunch Mon) You would hardly expect to find a hearty eatery like this up on the 1st floor of the rather dour bus station. The star attractions are char-grilled meat dishes.

La Pergola (☎ 973 23 82 37; Passeig de Ronda 123; meals €40-50; 11 Mon-Sat Jun-Sep, Thu-Tue Oct-May) The chefs in this shady house (one of several on this strip – a surprise given the surrounding horrible highrises) take the business of cooking seriously. This is one of the few spots in Lleida for fine seafood, along with such classics as entrecot in Cabrales cheese.

Getting There & Away

BUS

For general bus-timetable information, call ☎ 973 26 85 00. Daily services by **Alsina Graells** (☎ 973 27 14 70) include up to 13 buses (three on Sunday) to Barcelona (€16.70, 2¼ to 2¾ hours); two to El Pont de Suert and Vielha (€10.89, 2¾ hours); one (except Sunday) to La Pobla de Segur, Sort, Llavorsí and Esterri d'Aneu (€16.50, three hours); and two to La Seu d'Urgell (€14.50, 2½ hours).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The quickest routes to Barcelona, Tarragona and Zaragoza are by the AP2, but you can avoid tolls by taking the A2 to Zaragoza or Barcelona or the N240 Hwy to Tarragona. The main northward roads are the C14 to La Seu d'Urgell, the N230 to Vielha and the N240 to Barbastro and Huesca (in Aragón).

TRAIN

Lleida is on the Barcelona–Zaragoza–Madrid line. Up to 23 trains daily run to/from Barcelona, taking two to three hours (you may find faster times still if the high-speed AVE stretch from Lleida to Tarragona opens as planned by the end of 2006). Second-class fares range from €8.90 to €20.30. A similar number of trains head to Zaragoza (€9.90 to €19.80, up to two hours), including high-speed

ones, taking just under one hour. About 10 high-speed trains head to Madrid (€55, 2¾ hours).

MONTSEC

This hilly range 65km north of Lleida is the main stage for hang-gliders and ultra-lights in Catalonia. It is also a popular area for walking, caving and climbing.

The focal point is **Ager**, a village in the valley of the same name. If coming via Balaguer, you'll see it to the northeast as you reach the top of Coll d'Ager (912m). The village is draped like a mantle over a hill, protruding from the top of which is the intriguing ruin of the **Església de Sant Pere**.

Montsec has a half-dozen take-off points, including one at the Sant Alís peak (1678m), the highest in the range. **Volager** (☎ 973 32 02 30; www.volager.com; Camí de Castellnou s/n), based in Bellpuig, offers hang-gliding courses here and provides all the equipment. You can go hang-gliding with the school for a day (€80), while a full six-day course comes to €400.

A choice location for walkers and climbers is the stunning **Congost de Mont-Rebei**, a narrow gorge of 80m-high rock walls at the western end of the Montsec range. The Riu Noguera Ribagorçana flows into the gorge from the north, along the border with Aragón. Caves along the foot of the gorge, and around the dam to the south, attract speleologists.

You can stay at one of a handful of *casas de pagès* or a *hostal*. About the only way to get into and around the area is with your own wheels.

COSTA DAURADA

South of Sitges (p334) stretches the Costa Daurada (Golden Coast), a series of mostly quiet resorts with unending broad beaches along a mainly flat coast, capped by the delta of the mighty Riu Ebre (Ebro), which protrudes 20km out into the Mediterranean. Along the way is the old Roman capital of Tarragona, and the modern extravaganza of Port Aventura – Catalonia's answer to EuroDisney.

VILANOVA I LA GELTRÚ

pop 61,430

Six minutes west of Sitges by train, Vilanova is home to the culinary delicacy of *xató* (an almond-and-hazelnut sauce used on

various dishes, particularly seafood), the much sought-after actor Sergi López, and a trio of broad beaches. Much of the sprawling town itself is, however, of little interest.

Information

Tourist office (☎ 93 815 45 17; www.vilanovaturisme.net; Passeig del Carme s/n; 11 10am-2pm & 4-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jul-Aug, 10am-1pm & 4.30-7.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Apr-Jun & Sep-Oct, 10am-1pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Nov-Mar).

Sights

A few blocks inland from the beaches is Vilanova's main attraction, the **Museu del Ferrocarril** (Railway Museum; ☎ 93 815 84 91; Plaça d'Eduard Maristany; adult/student & child €4.50/3.50; 11 10.30am-2.30pm Tue-Fri & Sun, 10.30am-2.30pm & 4-6.30pm Sat Sep-Jul, 11am-2pm & 5-8pm daily Aug), located in the 19th-century installations for the maintenance of steam trains, next to the train station. The collection of steam locomotives attracts kids of all ages.

Festivals

Vilanova i la Geltrú stages a riotous *carnaval* (carnival) in February that lasts for 13 days. One of the highpoints is the **Batalla dels Caramels** (Battle of the Sweeties), when townsfolk in costume launch more than 100,000 kilograms of sweets at one another!

Sleeping & Eating

It's easy enough to pop down to Vilanova for the day from Barcelona or Sitges but there is one serious reason for hanging out a little longer...

Hotel Cesar (☎ 93 815 11 25; www.hotelcesar.net; Carrer d'Isaac Peral 4-8; r €90-160; a i s) The town's top hotel is set in a leafy, tranquil part of town just back from the waterfront. It offers a series of double rooms and suites in a variety of categories. The best rooms have their own computers with broadband Internet access. Saunter to the sauna, or opt for a massage. Or you can just chill in the garden after a day at the nearby beach. The hotel is also home to La Fitorra (meals €30; Tuesday to Saturday, lunch only on Sunday), one of the senior denizens of local cooking.

Getting There & Away

The town is just down the *rodalies* (line C2) from Sitges. From Barcelona the fare will set you back €2.40.

ALTAFULLA

pop 1675

Once a Roman holiday resort for the affluent citizens of Tarragona, this town about 10km east of Tarragona was converted into a fortified settlement in the wake of the Muslim invasion. The original medieval core of Altafulla is small but charming, all cream and whitewashed walls with rose-coloured stone portals and windows. Capping it is a 13th-century castle.

Altafulla's broad beach (about 2km away on the other side of the freeway) is backed by a row of cheerful single-storey houses known as the **Botigues de Mar** (Sea Shops). Until well into the 19th century they served as warehouses but have since been converted into houses – many available for holiday let.

Sleeping & Eating

Alberg Casa Gran (☎ 977 65 07 79; Plaça 12; dm student & under 26yr/26yr & over €18/21) In the old part of town, this is one of the region's more enchantingly placed youth hostels. Occupying a fine old mansion with a terrace, it even incorporates a tower belonging to the old town walls.

Faristol (☎ 977 65 00 77; Carrer de Sant Martí 5, Altafulla; meals €30; 11 lunch & dinner Jun-Sep, dinner Fri, lunch & dinner Sat & Sun Oct-May) Housed in an 18th-century mansion built by *indians* (locals who had made their fortune in the Americas) in the old town, the restaurant offers traditional Catalan cooking with an emphasis on seafood. There are also some surprises thrown in, such as tandoori. Upstairs are five pretty rooms (singles/doubles €50/70).

Getting There & Away

A host of local trains run to Altafulla from Tarragona (€1.30 to €1.50, 10 minutes).

TARRAGONA

pop 128,150

Tarragona was first occupied by the Romans, who called it Tarraco, in 218 BC. In 27 BC Augustus made it the capital of his new Tarraconensis province (roughly all modern Spain) and stayed until 25 BC, directing campaigns in Cantabria and Asturias. Tarragona was abandoned when the Muslims arrived in AD 714, but reborn as the seat of a Christian archbishopric in 1089. Today its rich Roman remains and fine medieval cathedral make it an absorbing place.



Orientation

The main street is Rambla Nova, which runs roughly northwest from a cliff-top overlooking the Mediterranean. A couple of blocks to the east, and parallel, is Rambla Vella, which marks the beginning of the old town and, incidentally, follows the line of the Via Augusta, the Roman road from Rome to Cádiz.

The train station is about 500m southwest of Rambla Nova, near the seafront, and the bus station is about 2km inland, just to the northwest, off Plaça Imperial de Tàrraco.

Information

Ciberespai (% 977 24 57 64; Carrer d'Estanislau Figueres 58; per hr €1.80; 11am-11pm Sat & Sun)

Guàrdia Urbana (% 977 24 03 45; Carrer de Prat de Riba 37)

Hospital Joan XXIII (% 977 23 27 14; Passeig de Torroja 58)

Information kiosks (11am-2pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep) These are scattered about town.

Post office (Plaça de Corsini; 11am-8.30am Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2pm Sat)

Regional tourist office (% 977 23 34 15; Carrer de Fortuny 4; 11am-2pm & 4-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat)

Tourist office (% 977 25 25 07 95; www.tarragonaturisme.es; Carrer Major 39; 11am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun Jul-Sep, 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun & holidays Oct-Jun)

Sights & Activities

Pick up the handy *Ruta Arqueològica Urbana* brochure from the main tourist office. It details more than 30 locations throughout the old town where Roman remains can be viewed, some of them in shops and restaurants. If they are not too busy with customers, shop owners are generally happy for individuals to drop by and take a look.

CATEDRAL

Sitting grandly at the top of the old town, Tarragona's cathedral (% 977 23 86 85; Pla de la Seu; admission €2.40; 11am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat mid-Mar-May, 10am-7pm Mon-Sat Jun-mid-Oct, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat mid-Oct-mid-Nov, 10am-2pm Mon-Sat mid-Nov-mid-Mar) is a treasure house deserving 1½ hours or more of your time, if you're to do it justice. Built between 1171 and 1331 on the site of a Roman temple, it combines Romanesque and Gothic features, as typified by the main façade on Pla de la Seu. The entrance is by the cloister on the northwest flank of the building.

The cloister has Gothic vaulting and Romanesque carved capitals, one of which shows rats conducting what they imagine to be a cat's funeral...until the cat comes back to life! The rooms off the cloister house the Museu Diocesà, with an extensive collection extending from Roman hairpins to some lovely 12th- to 14th-century polychrome woodcarvings of a breastfeeding Virgin.

The interior of the cathedral, over 100m long, is Romanesque at the northeast end and Gothic at the southwest. The aisles are lined with 14th- to 19th-century chapels and hung with 16th- and 17th-century tapestries from Brussels. The arm of St Thecla, Tarragona's patron saint, is normally kept in the Capella de Santa Tecla on the southeastern side. The choir in the centre of the nave has 15th-century carved walnut stalls. The marble main altar was carved in the 13th century with scenes from the life of St Thecla.

MUSEU D'HISTÒRIA DE TARRAGONA

This museum (www.museutgn.com; adult/student & senior per site €2/1, all sites €8/4; sites 11-13 9am-9pm Tue-Sat, 9am-3pm Sun & holidays Easter-Sep, 9am-5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun & holidays Oct-Easter) comprises four separate Roman sites (which since 2000 together have constituted a Unesco World Heritage site) and a 14th-century noble mansion, which now serves as the Museu Casa Castellarnau (% 977 24 22 20; Carrer dels Cavallers 14).

Start with the Pretori i Circ Romans (% 977 24 19 52; Plaça del Rei), which includes part of the vaults of the Roman circus, where chariot races were held. The circus, 300m long, stretched from here to beyond Plaça de la Font to the west. Nearby Plaça del Fòrum was the location of the provincial forum and political heart of Tarraconensis province. Near the beach is the well-preserved Amfiteatre Romà (% 977 24 25 79), where gladiators battled each other, or wild animals, to the death. In its arena are the remains of 6th- and 12th-century churches built to commemorate the martyrdom of the Christian bishop Fructuosus and two deacons, who, they say, were burnt alive here in AD 259.

Southeast of Carrer de Lleida are remains of the Fòrum Romà, dominated by several imposing columns. The northwest half of this site was occupied by a judicial basilica (where legal disputes were settled), from which the rest of the forum stretched downhill to the southwest. Linked to the site by a footbridge is another excavated area with a stretch of

FIRE-BREATHERS, GIANTS & HUMAN CASTLES

Catalans get up to unusual tricks at *fiesta* time. Fire and fireworks play a big part in many Spanish festivals, but Catalonia adds a special twist with the *correfoc* (fire-running), in which devil and dragon figures run through the streets spitting fireworks at the crowds. (Wear protective clothes if you intend to get close!)

Correfocs are often part of the *fiesta major*, a town or village's main annual festival, which usually take place in July or August. Part of the *fiesta major* fun are the *sardana* (Catalonia's national round-dance) and *gegants*, splendidly attired 5m-high giants that parade through the streets or dance in the squares. Giants tend to come in male-and-female pairs, such as a medieval king and queen. Almost every town and village has its own pair, or up to six pairs, of giants. They're accompanied by grotesque 'dwarfs' (known as *capgrossos*, or 'big heads').

On La Nit de Sant Joan (23 June), big bonfires burn at crossroads and town squares in a combined midsummer and St John's Eve celebration, and fireworks explode all night. The supreme fire festival is the Patum in Berga. An evening of dancing and firework-spitting angels, devils, mulelike monsters, dwarfs, giants and men covered in grass culminates in a mass frenzy of fire and smoke. The 'real' Patum happens on Corpus Christi (the Thursday following the eighth Sunday after Easter Sunday) although there are simplified versions over the next two or three days. Unesco declared the Patum a World Heritage item in 2005.

A more orderly celebration is the building of *castells* – human castles. Valls, Vilafranca del Penedès and Terrassa have three of the most famous teams of *castellers*. The golden age was the 1880s, when castells such as *tres de nou* ('three of nine', ie nine storeys of three people) were achieved.

There are various ways of constructing a *castell*: those built without a *pinya*, *folre* or *manilles* (extra rings of support for the first, second and third storeys) are tricky and termed *net* (clean). A completed *castell* is signalled by the child at the top (the *anxaneta*) raising their arm, a cue for tumultuous applause and cheering. A *castell* that manages to dismantle itself without collapsing is *descairegat*. Especially difficult is a *pilar*, a tower of one person per storey, which has a record of eight storeys.

Every two years a championship competition is held in Tarragona's bullring. The most successful club, the Castellers de Vilafranca, took their third successive title in 2006. The next one will be in October 2008. Otherwise, these and many other teams turn up at *festes* all over Catalonia.

Roman street. This forum was the hub of public and religious life for the Roman town. The discovery in 2006 of remains of the foundations of a temple to Jupiter, Juno and Minerva (the major triumvirate of gods at the time of the Roman republic) suggests the forum was much bigger and more important than previously assumed.

The Passeig Arqueològic is a peaceful walk around part of the perimeter of the old town between two lines of city walls; the inner ones are mainly Roman, while the outer ones were put up by the British during the War of the Spanish Succession.

MUSEU NACIONAL ARQUEOLÒGIC DE TARRAGONA

This carefully presented museum (☎ 977 23 62 09; www.mnat.es; Plaça del Rei 5; adult/senior & under 18yr €2.40/free; 10am-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun & holidays Jun-Sep, 10am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun & holidays

Oct-May) gives further insight into Roman Tarraco, although most explanatory material is in Catalan or Castilian. Exhibits include part of the Roman city walls, frescoes, sculpture and pottery. A highlight is the large, almost complete *Mosaic de Peixos de la Pineda*, showing fish and sea creatures. In the section on everyday arts you can admire ancient fertility aids including an outsized stone penis, symbol of the god Priapus.

Admission entitles you to enter the museum at the Necropolis Paleocristians (☎ 977 21 11 75; Avinguda de Ramón i Cajal 80; adult/senior & under 18yr €2.40/free with Museu Nacional Arqueològic de Tarragona; 10am-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jul-Sep, 10am-5.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-Jun). This large Christian cemetery of late-Roman and Visigothic times is on Passeig de la Independència on the western edge of town and boasts some surprisingly elaborate tombs. Unfortunately only its small museum is open at present.

MUSEU D'ART MODERN

This modest art gallery (☎ 977 23 50 32; Carrer de Santa Anna 8; admission free; 10am-8pm Tue-Fri, 10am-3pm & 5-8pm Sat, 11am-2pm Sun & holidays) is at its most interesting when temporary exhibitions take place.

MUSEU D'HISTÒRIA DE LES ARMES ANTIGUES

If you're into old swords, lances and pistols, this museum (Carrer de la Nau 12; admission €3; 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) is an interesting stop.

MUSEU DEL PORT

Down by the waterfront, this curious museum (☎ 977 25 94 42; Refugi 2 Moll de la Cost; adult/student €1.80/1.20; 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun & holidays Jun-Sep; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun & holidays Oct-May) is housed in a dockside shed. There's not a lot to it; there are some displays tracing the history of the port from Roman times (in Catalan and Castilian only), a few model boats and one or two other seafaring items.

PONT DEL DIABLE

The so-called Devil's Bridge is actually the *Aqueducte Romà* (admission free; 9am-dusk), yet another of the marvels the Romans left behind. It sits, somewhat incongruously, in the leafy rough just off the AP7 freeway, which leads into Tarragona (near where it intersects with the N240). It is a fine stretch of two-tiered aqueduct (217m long and 27m high), along which you can totter to the other side. Bus 5 to Sant Salvador from Plaça Imperial de Tarraco, running every 10 to 20 minutes, will take you to the vicinity, or park in one of the lay-bys marked on either side of the AP7, just outside the freeway toll gates.

BEACHES

The town beach, *Platja del Miracle*, is reasonably clean but can get terribly crowded. *Platja Arrebassada*, 1km northeast across the headland, is longer, and *Platja Llarga*, beginning 2km further out, stretches for about 3km. Buses 1 and 9 from the Balcó stop on Via Augusta go to both (€1.05). You can get the same buses from along Rambla Vella and Rambla Nova.

Sleeping

Camping Las Palmeras (☎ 977 20 80 81; www.laspalm.eras.com; sites per 2-person tent & car €37; p s) This cheerful camping ground lies at the far end of *Platja Llarga* (3km northeast of Tarragona

and is one of the better of eight camping grounds scattered behind the beaches north-east of the city. A big pool stretches out amid leafy parkland just back from the beach. The camping ground enjoys a 1.5km stretch of seaside frontage and untouched coastal woodland nearby.

Hostal La Noria (☎ 977 23 87 17; Plaça de la Font 53; s/d €21/34) For a bargain basement position right on the old town's main square, you can't do much better than these corner digs. Rooms are simple enough but have their own attached clean bathroom, and those with a balcony assure you a window on old Tarragona's street life.

Hotel Plaça de la Font (☎ 977 24 61 34; www.hotel.pdelafont.com; Plaça de la Font 26; s/d €40/58; a) A notch up and also on the town square is this crisp *pensión* with its own restaurant. Rooms, although a trifle cramped, have a pleasing modern look, with soft colours, sturdy beds and, in the case of half the rooms, little balconies with views over the square.

Hotel Lauria (☎ 977 23 67 12; www.hlauria.es; Rambla Nova 20; s/d €40/58; a s) With its dignified façade along the city's grandest boulevard, the hotel has a whiff of another era. The rooms are a little on the functional side, but the best have parquet floors, leather-backed furniture and the occasional nice touch such as fresh flowers.

Eating

Bar Toful (☎ 977 21 42 16; Arc de Sant Bernat 4; meals €15-20; 8am-6pm Mon-Thu, 8am-midnight Fri & Sat) Since the 1940s this knockabout bar has been a mecca for locals in search of good ol' tapas over a beer or two. During the day people drop by for a tippie, and on weekend evenings others crowd in for a steak in mushroom sauce, or fish – a cheap, cheerful and good-value dinner. The midday *menú del dia* (€8.75) is also good value, with a generous gazpacho and choice of meat and fish mains.

Quim Quima (☎ 977 25 21 21; Carrer de les Coques 1bis; meals €35, *menú del dia* €14.90; 10am-11pm Tue-Sat) This renovated medieval mansion makes a marvellous setting for a meal. Huddle up to bare stone wall or opt for the shady little courtyard. The playful menu is wide-ranging, including sausage and cheese crepes, lasagna, various types of meat fondue, including one in which you cook the meat in boiling white wine.

The quintessential Tarragona seafood experience can best be had in Serrallo, the town's fishing port. About a dozen bars and restaurants

here sell the day's catch, and on summer weekends in particular the place is packed. Most of the restaurants close their kitchens fairly early, by 10.30pm.

L'Ancora (Carrer de Trafalgar 25; meals €25-30; 1pm-1am) and its sister establishment **El Varadero** (Carrer de Trafalgar 13) brim with mouthwatering seafood. Go for a selection of dishes, which might include *tigres* (stuffed, breaded and fried mussels), *ostrón* (fat oyster) and *cigalas a la plancha* (grilled crayfish). Whatever you choose, it'll be good. You can sit inside (head upstairs) or, in the summer, take up a seat at one of the outdoor tables. Hour-long queues at midnight on summer weekends are not unheard-of.

Drinking & Entertainment

The main concentration of nightlife is the bars and clubs along the waterfront near the Port Esportiu (marina), and in some of the streets in front of the train station, such as along Carrer de la Pau del Protectorat.

Pub Sis (☎ 977 23 80 14; Carrer de Barcelona 6; 7-8pm-3am) For a dose of '80s music, this is a good-natured place to stop by for a drink and loud conversation. At nearby **Cova del Jazz** (Carrer de Pau del Protectorat 5) you can encounter live music from 11pm.

El Cau (☎ 977 23 12 12; www.elcau.net; Carrer de Trinquet Vell; 7 daily) Set in one of the vaults of the Roman circus, this is the best place for dancing in central Tarragona. Various DJs and acts perform on most nights, ensuring that no two nights are the same. Check the website for which maestro is on that particular night.

Getting There & Away

Lying on main routes south from Barcelona, Tarragona is well connected. The train is generally the much easier option.

BUS

Bus services run to Barcelona, Valencia, Zaragoza, Madrid, Alicante, Pamplona, the main Andalusian cities, Andorra and the north coast. As a rule though, you are better off with the train.

TRAIN

Up to 50 regional and long-distance trains per day run to/from Barcelona's Passeig de Gràcia station via Sants. Fares in *turista* class range from €5.40 to €17.20, and the journey takes 52 minutes to 1½ hours.

Up to 15 trains a day run south to Valencia (€14.75 to €31.30, two to 3½ hours) and several proceed down the coast and into Andalucía. Up to 11 head northwest to Lleida (€5.40 to €15.10, up to one hour 40 minutes).

PORT AVENTURA

One of Spain's most popular funfair-adventure parks (☎ 902 20 20 41 or ☎ 902 20 22 20; www.portaventura.es; mid-Sep–mid-Jun adult/senior & child 5-12yr €37/30, Jul & Aug €35/28, 2-day tickets €53.50/43; 7-10am-midnight Jul-Aug, 10am-8pm Easter-Jun & Sep, 10am-7pm Oct) lies 7km west of Tarragona. It makes an amusing day out, especially if you have children in tow. The park has plenty of spine-tingling rides and other attractions, such as the Temple del Foc (Temple of Fire) and Hurakan Condor (at 100m one of the highest amusement park rides in Europe), spread across themed areas ranging from the Wild West to Polynesia.

Opening days and hours from November to March vary greatly. The park usually opens on weekends and holidays but it is wise to check.

In addition to the main area, Port Aventura Park, the complex includes two hotels and **Caribe Aquatic Park** (adult/child & senior €19/15.50 mid-May–Sep, €9.50/8 remaining days when only the heated areas are open; 7-10am-7pm Jul-Aug, 10am-6pm mid-May–Jun & Sep, 10am-5pm late Mar–mid-May), a waterworld with all sorts of wet rides.

Trains run to Port Aventura's own station, about a 1km walk from the site, several times a day from Tarragona (€1.20 to €1.50, 10 to 15 minutes) and Barcelona (from €5.20 to €5.95, around 1½ hours). By road, take exit 35 from the AP7, or the N340 from Tarragona.

REUS & AROUND

pop 99,500

Reus was, for much of the second half of the 19th century, the second most important city in Catalonia and a major export centre of textiles and brandy. Birthplace of Gaudí, it boasts a series of Modernista mansions. The **tourist office** (☎ 902 36 02 00; turismo.reus.net; Carrer de Sant Joan s/n; 7-9.30am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat) can provide a map guiding you to 30-odd Modernista mansions around the town centre. The tourist office organises guided visits (sometimes in English and French) to some of the most interesting of these houses, for which you need to book in advance. Regular trains connect Reus with Tarragona (€1.30 to €1.50, 15 to 20 minutes).

About 35km northwest of Reus, above the pretty mountain village of Siurana, stand the

remains of one of the last Muslim castles to fall to the reconquering Christians. To its west rise the rocky walls of the Serra de Montsant range, and the area attracts rock-climbers and walkers. In Siurana you could stay in **Can Roig** (☎ 977 82 14 50; Carrer Major 6; d €36), a charming, refurbished stone house in the middle of the village.

From Cornudella de Montsant, 9km from Siurana, a narrow and picturesque road (the TV7021) hugs the rugged southern face of the Montsant westwards to Escaladei, located in a valley below the mountain range, which produces some fine El Priorat reds. The evocative ruins of the **Cartoixa d'Escaladei** (☎ 977 82 70 06; adult/student & senior €2.40/1.80; 7-10am-1.30pm & 4-7.30pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-1.30pm & 3-5.30pm Tue-Sun Oct-May), a 12th-century monastery complex, are a 1km walk out of the village. Guided visits (usually in Catalan) are available on weekends (€4.50/3.90).

To the southeast, 4km west of the village of Riudecanyes, stands the **Castell-Monestir de Sant Miquel d'Escornalbou** (☎ 977 83 40 07; adult/student & senior €2.40/1.80; 7-10am-1.30pm & 4-7.30pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-1.30pm & 3-5.30pm Tue-Sun Oct-May). Dating from 1153, much of the castle-monastery complex is in ruins; parts have been rebuilt but hardly to exacting historical criteria. The most interesting elements are the church (from the 12th and 13th centuries), cloister and chapterhouse. You will be taken on a compulsory guided tour, probably in Catalan, of about half an hour.

There is no public transport to Siurana, Escaladei or Castell-Monestir de Sant Miquel d'Escornalbou.

CAMBRILS

pop 26,210

A sprawling tourist town (more or less an extension of the high-density tourist ghetto of Salou), inspired by the place's long beaches,

has developed around the original old village and fishing port, 18km southwest of Tarragona. Although sun and sand are uppermost in many people's minds, the place rewards a bit of exploration, with several medieval towers, some Roman remains, the busy fishing port and, above all, something of a reputation as a culinary magnet.

For good seafood, try bustling **La Roca d'en Manel** (☎ 977 36 30 24; Passeig de Miramar 38; meals €25-30; 7 Tue-Sun), a few steps away from where the fishing boats tie up. Service can be abrupt, but the portions are tasty and generous. A step up in class is the nearby **Casa Gatell** (☎ 977 36 00 57; Passeig de Miramar 26; meals €45-55; 7 Tue-Sat, lunch only Sun), where you might succumb to the succulent *caldereta de bogavante* (lobster stew; €37).

Cambril is about 25 minutes from Tarragona by local train (€1.50 to €2.10).

TORTOSA

pop 33,700

Home to Iberian tribes some 2000 years ago, Tortosa has seen them all come and go: Greeks, Romans, Visigoths and Muslims. The town was on the northern front line between Christian and Muslim Spain for four centuries.

As well as the **tourist office** (☎ 977 44 96 48; www.turismetortosa.com; Plaça del Carrilet 1; 7-10am-1.30pm & 4.30-7.30pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 10am-1.30pm Sun Easter-Oct, 10am-1.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 10am-1.30pm Sun), there is an information office with similar hours in the Jardins del Princep gardens.

The old town, concentrated at the western end of the city, north of the Ebro, is watched over by the imposing **Castell de la Suda**, where a small medieval Arab cemetery has been unearthed and in whose grounds there now stands a **fine parador** (☎ 977 44 44 50; s/d €116/154; pas). The **Gothic cathedral** (Seu; 7 9am-1pm & 4-8pm) dates back to 1347 and contains a pleasant cloister and some baroque additions. Other

TAKING THE BULLS BY THE HORNS

Many Catalans advertise their loathing of bullfighting (an attitude that clashes with Barcelona's long history in the spectacle) but some may not be aware that in the southern corner of their region, locals have indulged in their own summer torment of the animals. In Amposta and other towns, people celebrate *bous capllacats* and *bous embolats*, the former a kind of tug-of-war between a bull with ropes tied to its horns and townsfolk, the latter involving bulls running around with flaming torches attached to their horns. Denounced by animal rights groups, they are allowed by the Catalan government, which recognises the right to hold these *festas* because of their long history and the fact that the bulls are not killed. The heated debate shows no signs of abating in the immediate future.

attractions include the **Palau Episcopal** and the lovely **Jardins del Princep**, perfect for a stroll.

Hostal Virginia (☎ 977 44 41 86; www.hotelvirginia.net; Avinguda de la Generalitat 139; s/d €32/54; a i w) is a cheerful, central stop whose modern if somewhat antiseptic rooms boast good-sized beds and cool tile floors. There's a bar downstairs.

The train and bus stations are opposite each other on Ronda dels Docs. Trains to/from Barcelona, Lleida and Tarragona (€5.40, one hour 10 minutes) are more frequent than the buses. Two to four buses run into the Delta de l'Ebre area.

EBRO DELTA

The delta of the Río Ebro (Catalan: Delta de l'Ebre), formed by silt brought down by the river, sticks out 20km into the Mediterranean near Catalonia's southern border. Dotted with reedy lagoons and fringed by dune-backed beaches, this flat and exposed wetland is northern Spain's most important water-bird habitat. The migration season (October and November) sees the bird population peak, with an average of 53,000 ducks and 15,000 coots, but they are also numerous in winter and spring; 10% of all water birds wintering on the Iberian Peninsula choose to park themselves here.

Nearly half the delta's 320 sq km are given over to rice-growing. Some 77 sq km, mostly along the coasts and around the lagoons, form the **Parc Natural Delta de l'Ebre**.

Orientation

The delta is a seaward-pointing arrowhead of land with the Ebro flowing eastwards across it's middle. The town of Deltebre straggles about 5km along the northern bank of the river at the centre of the delta. Deltebre's western half is called Jesús i Maria and the eastern half La Cava. Facing Deltebre on the southern bank is Sant Jaume d'Enveja. Roads crisscross the delta to Deltebre and beyond from the towns of L'Ampolla, Amposta and Sant Carles de la Ràpita, all on the N340. Three ferries (*transbordadors*), running from early morning until nightfall, link Deltebre to Sant Jaume d'Enveja (two people and a car €2.50).

Information

The **Centre d'Informació** (☎ 977 48 96 79; Carrer de Martí Buera 22, Deltebre; h 10am-2pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun May-Sep, 10am-2pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-Apr) is combined with an **Ecomuseu** (admission €1.20; h same as Centre d'Informació), with

displays describing the delta environment and an aquarium-terrarium of delta species.

There's another **information office** (admission €1.50; h 10am-2pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun May-Sep, 10am-2pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-Apr) with a permanent exposition on the delta's lagoons at La Casa de Fusta, beside L'Encanyissada lagoon, 10km southwest of Deltebre. Other offices are in Sant Carles de la Ràpita, Amposta and L'Ampolla.

Sights & Activities

A good way to explore the delta is by bicycle and you can rent one from several places in Deltebre. **Lloguer de Bicicletes Torné** (☎ 977 48 00 17; Avinguda Goles de l'Ebre 184; per day €10), in the heart of town, rents out bicycles year-round.

Early morning and evening are the best times for **bird-watching**, and good areas include L'Encanyissada and La Tancada lagoons and Punta de la Banya, all in the south of the delta. L'Encanyissada has two observation towers and La Tancada one (others are marked on a map you can pick up at the **Centred'Informació**). La Tancada and Punta de la Banya are generally the best places to see the **greater flamingos**, the delta's most spectacular birds. Almost 2000 of the birds nest here, and since 1992 the delta has been one of only five places in Europe where they reproduce. Punta de la Banya is joined to the delta by a 5km sand spit with the long, wide and sandy **Platja de l'Eucaliptus** at its northern end.

Olmos (☎ 977 48 05 48) is just one of a couple of companies that run daily tourist **boat trips** (1½ hours, €10 per person) from Deltebre to the mouths of the Ebro and Illa de Buda at the delta's tip. Boats go daily, but the frequency depends on the season (and whether or not there are enough takers).

Sleeping

Camping Eucaliptus (☎ 977 47 90 46; sites per 2-person tent & car €19.75; h Apr-mid-Oct) This camping ground is in a small eucalyptus grove just back from Platja de l'Eucaliptus. It has its own restaurant, bar and minimarket. There are two more camping grounds at Riumar, 10km east of Deltebre.

Delta Hotel (☎ 977 48 00 46; www.dsi.es/delta-hotel; Avinguda del Canal, Camí de l'Illeta s/n; s/d €56/94; p a) On the northern edge of Deltebre, by the road to Riumar, this delightful hotel has modern rooms, as well as a good restaurant. Lounge around in the leafy courtyard and gardens in

which some of what you eat in the restaurant is grown.

There are a few places to stay in Sant Carles de la Ràpita, a pleasant fishing town with a marina.

You'll find several eateries by Riumar and the mouth of the river. In La Cava, try **Nuri** (☎ 977 48 01 28; Carretera de les Goles; meals €25-30; h lunch daily), located by the mighty Ebro in a grand old ivy-covered house. Much of what you eat, ranging from frog's legs and eel to seafood-and-rice dishes, comes from the river or around about it. Ask about their boat res-

taurant, the **Santa Susana** (☎ 629-204117), tied up on the river a little further along.

Getting There & Away

The delta is easiest to get to and around with your own wheels, but it is possible to reach Tortosa by bus or a train-bus combination.

Autocars Hife (☎ 902 11 98 14; www.hife.net) runs buses to Jesús i Maria and La Cava from Tortosa (€2.35, 50 minutes) up to four times daily (twice on Saturday, Sunday and holidays), and from Amposta (€1.20, 30 minutes) once daily.

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Andorra



Slip Andorra into the conversation and people may tell you, with horror or joy, that it's all skiing and shopping. They might add that it's a one-road, one-town minestate.

They're right to some degree, but also very wrong. Shake yourself free of the capital Andorra la Vella's tawdry embrace to purr along one of the state's only three secondary roads and you'll discover villages as unspoilt as any in the Pyrenees.

A warning though: it may not be the same a few years from now. Greed and uncontrolled development risk spoiling the side valleys. In the last five years, its resorts have invested over 50 million euros in mountain cafés and restaurants, chair lifts and gondolas, car parks and snowmaking machines.

Although Andorra, with a resident population of less than 80,000, absorbs well over 10 million visitors annually (most of whom just pop in to shop), there are still areas where you can be completely alone. Tucked into the Pyrenees and wedged between Spain and France, Andorra has the distinction of being the only country in the world where Catalan is the official language. Though short on historical interest and monuments of consequence, this tiny, political anomaly, rucked and buckled with scarcely a flat square metre to its name, has some of the most dramatic scenery and by far the best skiing in all the Pyrenees. And, once the snows have melted, there's great walking in abundance, ranging from family strolls to demanding day hikes in the higher, more remote reaches of the principality.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Cross the spectacular **Port d'Envalira** (p410), the highest road pass in the Pyrenees
- Cross-country ski or walk the quiet countryside above **La Rabassa** (p403)
- Steep yourself in the warm mineral waters of the space-age **Caldea** (p400)
- Tramp a few of the walking trails that thread through the principality, especially around **Ordino** (p405) and **Soldeu** (p408)



■ AREA: 468 SQ KM

■ AVE SUMMER TEMP: HIGH 22°C,
LOW 12°C

■ POP: 76,900



History

By tradition, Andorra's independence is credited to Emperor Charlemagne, who captured the region from the Muslims in AD 803. In 843 his grandson, Charles II, granted the Valls d'Andorra (Valleys of Andorra) to Sunifred, Count of Urgell, whose base was La Seu d'Urgell, in adjacent Catalonia. From the counts, Andorra later passed to the bishops of Urgell, also based in La Seu.

In the 13th century, after a succession dispute between the bishops and the French counts of Foix to the north, Andorra's first constitutional documents, the Pareatges, established a system of shared sovereignty between the two rivals. This originally feudal setup created a peculiar political equilibrium that, over the centuries, saved Andorra from being gobbled up by its powerful neighbours despite recurrent tension between the coprinces down the centuries and French control passing from the counts of Foix to France's head of state.

In March 1993, after seven centuries of being a 'coprincedom', 75% of the 9123 native Andorrans who were eligible to vote (less than one-sixth of the actual population at the time)

opted in a referendum to establish Andorra as an independent, democratic 'parliamentary coprincedom'. The new constitution placed full sovereignty in the hands of the Andorran people, although the coprinces continue to function as joint heads with much reduced powers. The country retains its full name of Principat (Principality) d'Andorra.

Since the 1950s Andorra has developed as a centre for skiing and duty-free shopping, the latter a legitimate progression from the more dubious smuggling of French goods to Spain during the Spanish Civil War and Spanish goods to France in WWII (Andorra remained conveniently and profitably neutral in both). With its almost tax-free, no-questions-asked banking, Andorra increasingly attracts savers from all over the world, especially Eastern Europe.

Environment

Andorra, in the heart of the Pyrenees, is essentially a pair of major valleys and the steep mountains that hug them. It measures a mere 25km from north to south at its maximum, and 29km from east to west. Most of its 40 or so villages and hamlets – some with just a few

dozen people – are in the valleys. The main river, the Riu Gran Valira, is formed near the capital, Andorra la Vella, at the confluence of the Valira d'Orient and the Valira del Nord.

Pic de Coma Pedrosa (2942m) in western Andorra is the highest mountain, while the lowest point, on the Spanish frontier at La Farga de Moles, is still a healthy 838m above sea level.

Population & People

A mere 36% of Andorra's 76,900 inhabitants (well over half of whom live in Andorra la Vella and the contiguous parish of Escaldes-Engordany) are Andorran nationals. The rest are Spanish (37%), Portuguese (13%), French (6.5%) and others. While 76,900 souls may fit comfortably into a suburb of your home town, bear in mind that, scarcely 50 years ago, Andorra's population was only around 6000.

The state language, enforced by a 1999 law of the Andorran parliament, is Catalan. But nearly everyone can speak Spanish fluently. Local lore has it that everyone speaks Catalan, Spanish and French, but plenty of Andorrans know only a smattering of French and many Spanish residents have little Catalan. Young people and those working in tourism speak basic to good English.

Government & Politics

In 1993 the country's elected parliament, the Consell General (General Council), took over from the Consell de la Terra (Land Council), which had run the show ever since 1419. The Consell General has 28 members – four from each of the seven *parròquie* (parishes) – who meet three or four times a year. It appoints a *cap de govern* (prime minister) who chooses ministers, whose programmes in turn have to be approved by the Consell. Albert Pintat Santolaria, the current head of state, was elected *cap de govern* in 2005.

Women gained suffrage as late as 1970, and all Andorran citizens over 18 can now vote. Andorra is a member of the UN and of the Council of Europe, but not a full member of the EU.

Of Andorra's seven parishes, six have existed since at least the 9th century. The seventh, Escaldes-Engordany, was created in 1978 by dividing the fast-growing parish of Andorra la Vella.

Economy

Andorra's economy is based on cheap tax-free shopping, banking and tourism, which together

A TAXING SITUATION

It had to come. With neighbouring countries slapping on value-added taxes in excess of 15%, Andorra, an anomaly in so many ways, was way out of kilter. In January 2006, a relatively modest 4% service tax was applied to prices for hotels and restaurants, ski passes and the like. And oh, the fuss and palaver from the locals! Some places absorb this modest imposition within their charges; others include it as an extra element. If the pennies count, check before you eat, sleep, shop or ski.

account for some 80% of the country's GDP. Of the 11 million annual visitors (very many drive in, shop hard and drive out the same day), the vast majority are Spanish and French.

The residual agricultural sector (in the main, tobacco growing and cattle raising), these days represents only around 1% of total economic activity.

Getting There & Away

The only way into Andorra – unless you trek across the mountains – is by road. One route climbs in from La Seu d'Urgell in Spain, 21km south of Andorra la Vella. The other enters Andorra at Pas de la Casa, on the eastern border with France.

Top up your tank; petrol in Andorra is about 20% cheaper than in Spain and a good 30% cheaper than in France.

AIR

The nearest major airports are those of Barcelona (225km south) and Toulouse (180km north). Both cities and their airports are linked to Andorra by bus (see details below).

Discussions have long been underway about upgrading a small airport near La Seu d'Urgell, enabling it to take commercial flights. The talking continues...

BUS

Some of the bus services listed here may vary seasonally, so do check with the company or any Andorran tourist office.

Spain

Alsina Graells (☎ 826 567; www.alsinagraells.com) Four buses daily (€20, 3½ hours) to/from Barcelona's Estació del Nord.

Autocars Nadal (☎ 805 151; www.autocarsnadal.com in French & Spanish) Six buses daily to/from Barcelona's airport (€26, 3¾ hours), calling by the city's Sants train station (€21, 3¾ hours).

Autocars Novatel (☎ 803 789; www.andorraybus.com) Five minibuses daily (€26, 3½ hours) to/from Barcelona's airport.

La Hispano Andorrana (☎ 821 372; www.hispanoandorrana.com) Hourly buses between Andorra la Vella and La Seu d'Urgell (€2.50, 40 minutes).

Viatges Montmantell (☎ 807 444) Four buses daily to/from Lleida (€17, 2½ hours) to connect with the Madrid-bound high speed AVE train. Services stop outside Caldea (p400).

France

Autocars Nadal Twice each Friday and Sunday to/from Toulouse's bus station (€21, 3½ hours).

Autocars Novatel Two minibuses daily (€29, 3½ hours) to/from Toulouse's airport and train station.

Getting Around

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The largely ignored speed limit is 40km/h in populated areas and 90km/h elsewhere. Two problems are the recklessness of local drivers and Andorra la Vella's traffic jams. It's possible to bypass the worst of the latter by taking Avinguda de Salou, which becomes Avinguda de Tarragona, around the southern side of town.

MIND HOW YOU GO

Legally, Catalan is obligatory for all signage, publicity, restaurant menus, announcements and the like. However, since tourism is Andorra's lifeblood, most notices are also in Spanish, English and sometimes French.

But not always; even though Catalan is opaque to the vast majority of visitors, we came across the following monolingual signs, to which, for your safety, we append the English translation!

- Perill: Zona Voladures = Beware: Falling stones
- Caiguda de Neu = Watch out for snow sliding from roofs
- Risc Allaus = Risk of avalanche

Alternatively, just jump when the locals jump.

WHEN TO VISIT

The ski season (December to April) is the high season for visitors. For walking and temperate mountain warmth, choose July, August or September.

If you're driving between the parishes of Ordino or La Massana and those of Encamp or Canillo, avoid this motorist's nightmare by taking the scenically striking route over the Coll d'Ordino. This alternative is often impassable during winter due to drifts of snow blocking the road.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Six routes, run by **Cooperativa Interurbana** (☎ 806 555), radiate out from Andorra La Vella along the principality's three main roads. Tourist offices carry a free leaflet giving current timetables.

ANDORRA LA VELLA

pop 22,900 / elevation 1030m

Andorra la Vella (*vey-yah*, means 'old'), surrounded by mountains of up to 2400m, is the capital and only real town of the principality. Its main preoccupation is retailing duty-free electronics and luxury goods.

ORIENTATION

Andorra's capital is strung out along one main street, the name of which changes from Avinguda del Príncep Benlloch to Avinguda de Meritxell to Avinguda de Carlemany. The little Barri Antic (Historic Quarter) around Antic Carrer Major (Old High Street) is split by this heavily trafficked artery. The town now merges with the once-separate villages of Escaldes and Engordany to the east, and Santa Coloma to the southwest.

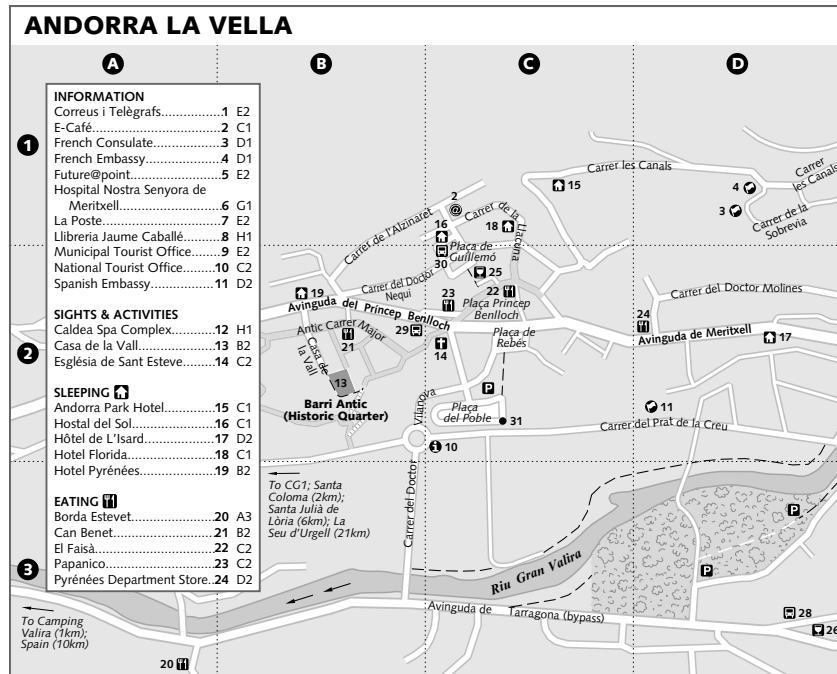
INFORMATION

Bookshops

Llibreria Jaume Caballé (☎ /fax 829 454; Avinguda Fiter i Rossell 31) A splendid collection of antiquarian and new travel books in Spanish, French and Catalan, plus a comprehensive range of walking and travel maps.

Emergency

Main police station (☎ 872 000; Carretera de l'Obac s/n)



Internet Access

E-Café (Carrer de l'Alzinairet 5; per hr €2.40; ☎ 7.30am-11pm Mon-Sat, 10am-11pm Sun)

Future@point (Carrer de la Sardana 6; per hr €2.80; ☎ 10am-11pm Mon-Sat, 10am-10pm Sun)

Medical Services

Hospital Nostra Senyora de Meritxell (☎ 871 000; Avinguda Fiter i Rossell)

Post

Correus (Correos) i Telègrafs (Carrer de Joan Maragall 10; ☎ 8.30am-2.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1pm Sat) The Spanish post office.

La Poste (Carrer de Pere d'Urg 1; ☎ 8.30am-2.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) The French post office.

Tourist Information

Municipal tourist office (☎ 827 117; turisme@comuandorra.ad; Plaça de la Rotonda; ☎ 9am-9pm daily Jul & Aug, 9am-1pm & 3.30-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun Sep-Jun) Also has pan-Andorra information.

National tourist office (☎ 820 214; sindicatdinicio-tiva@andorra.ad; Edifici Davi, Local C, Carrer del Doctor Vilanova 13; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Jul-Sep, 10am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat Oct-Jun)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

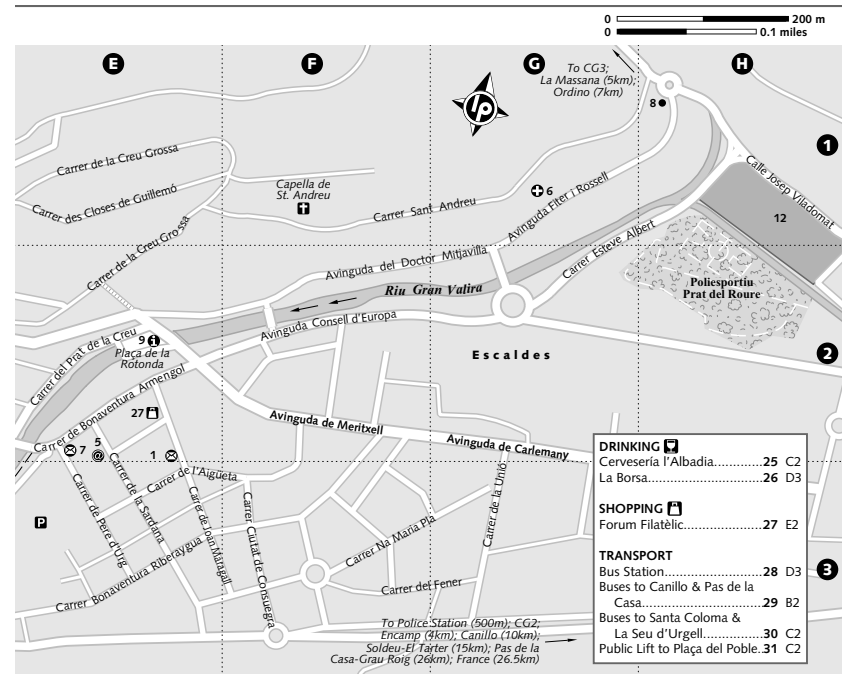
Caldea Spa Complex

In Escaldes, the **Caldea spa complex** (☎ 800 999; www.caldea.ad; Parc de la Mola 10; adult/child €29.50/22; ☎ 10am-11pm, last entry 9pm) is Europe's largest. Looking like some futuristic cathedral, it's a wonderful place for some soothing relaxation after exertions in the mountains. Fed by hot springs, its heart is a 600-sq-metre lagoon kept at a constant 32°C. A series of other pools, plus Turkish baths, saunas, spas and hydromassage, are all included in the three-hour entrance ticket.

You can sign on for a whole range of extras, including 'Turkish exfoliation', 'body scrub' and the enticing 'full hand care'. Caldea is a 10-minute walk upstream from Plaça de la Rotonda.

Barri Antic

The Barri Antic, intrusively and artificially bisected by Avinguda Príncep Benlloch, was the heart of Andorra la Vella when the principality's capital was little more than a village. The narrow cobbled streets around Casa de la Vall are flanked by attractive stone houses.



Andorra la Vella's parish church, **Església de Sant Esteve** (Avinguda del Príncep Benlloch), these days aligned north-south, dates back to the 11th century. Apart from the Romanesque apse on its eastern side, the church is mainly modern and has little of interest apart from some wonderfully warm, glowing stained-glass windows.

Casa de la Vall

The **Casa de la Vall** (House of the Valley; Carrer de la Vall), constructed in 1580 as a home for a wealthy family, has served as Andorra's parliament building since 1702. Downstairs is **El Tribunal de**

Corts, the country's one and only courtroom. The **Sala del Consell**, upstairs, has to be one of the cosiest parliament chambers in the world. **L'Armari de les Set Claus** (Cupboard of the Seven Keys) once held Andorra's most important official documents. Security was guaranteed because it could only be opened if a key-bearing representative from each of the seven parishes was present. There are free **guided tours** (☎ reservations 829 129; ☎ 9.30am-1.30pm & 3-6.30pm Tue-Sat, 3-6.30pm Mon May-Oct, 9.30am-1.30pm & 3-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1.30pm Sat Nov-Apr) in several languages, including English. Book at least a week ahead in summer to ensure a place – though individuals can often be squeezed in at the last minute.

Plaça del Poble

'People's Square', just south of Plaça de Rebès, occupies the roof of a modern government office building. Giving splendid views of the valley and mountains, it's a popular local gathering place, especially in the evening. The lift in the southeastern corner whisks you down to the car park below on Carrer del Prat de la Creu.

USEFUL PHONE NUMBERS

Weather & Winter Snow Conditions

☎ 848 852 (Spanish)
☎ 848 853 (French)
☎ 848 851 (Catalan)

Road Conditions

☎ 848 884 (Spanish, French & Catalan)

SLEEPING

Most hotels, except those in the budget category, hike their prices by 20% or more in the capital's high season (essentially August and major Spanish and French public holidays), when advance reservations are essential.

Camping Valira (☎ 722 384; campingvalira@andorra.ad; Avinguda de Salou; sites per person/tent/car €5.35/5.35/5.35; ☹ year round; 🚻) Just west of town, it has a small indoor swimming pool. You'll have to hunt to find a space between the resident caravans.

Hostal del Sol (☎ 823 701; fax 822 363; Plaça de Guillemó 3; s/d €14/28) This friendly, family-run place has 12 spruce, excellent-value rooms. It's set back on the northern side of a semipedestrian square, so noise is no problem, and there are several cheap eateries just below. Sadly, at the time of writing, it was being threatened with closure due to lease expiry.

Hotel Florida (☎ 820 105; www.hotelflorida.ad; Carrer de la Llacuna 15; s/d incl breakfast from €37/45) This welcoming modern hotel sits on a quiet side street. If you stagger in after a hard day's skiing or hiking, relax in the sauna (free to guests), or steep yourself in the bathtub that's a feature of all rooms, then tone yourself up for the morrow in the minigym. Rooms vary considerably in size; ask for one of the larger ones.

Hotel Pyrénées (☎ 860 006; www.hotelpyrenees.com; Avinguda del Príncep Benlloch 20; s/d from €35/56; 📞) After the Casa de la Vall and a Romanesque church or two, Hotel Pyrénées ranks among the most antique buildings in the principality. Constructed in 1940 and oozing style, its 70 rooms have plenty of appealing dark woodwork and are attractively furnished. Ask for one at the rear, well away from the traffic-clogged Avinguda del Príncep Benlloch. In high season, you have to take half-board (€69 per person). Its restaurant (menú €15, mains €9 to €14) serves Catalan, French and Spanish dishes amid sparkling chandeliers and two-tone tablecloths. Parking is €12.

Hôtel de l'Isard (☎ 876 800; www.hotelisard.com in French & Spanish; Avinguda de Meritxell 36; s €56-80, d €71-110; 📞) Behind the attractive stone façade is a comfortable, family-run hotel. All 61 rooms are double-glazed and have a bathtub. Ask for one at the rear, overlooking the valley and mountain beyond. The higher you go, the more impressive the views. It too runs a good restaurant (menú €15, mains €10 to

€14.50). Parking costs €15 and breakfast is included in the room price.

Andorra Park Hotel (☎ 877 777; Carrer les Canals 24; s €76-101, d €130-180; 📞 ☹ 🚻 🚿) This five-star hotel, opened in 2006, rises above its parent, the lovely slate roofed, stone walled original Park Hotel, these days the restaurant. The vast public space is bedecked with orchids and a venerable olive tree, retained from the original garden. Rooms are correspondingly large, equipped with a hydromassage bath and separate shower cubicle, and have a window and balcony with panoramic views. Reception, however, falls short of what you'd expect from such a prestigious venue. Parking is €18 and wi-fi is available.

EATING

In the heart of Barri Antic you'll find one or two good restaurants specialising in local cuisine.

Pyrénées department store (Avinguda de Meritxell 21) The top-floor cafeteria and restaurant of this megastore offer great fare at very reasonable prices. Pile your salad plate (€4.95) high at the self-service buffet and follow it with the dish of the day (€4.65), or select from one of the seven varieties of *plato combinado* (mixed plate; €7.25). One floor down, self-caterers will enjoy choosing from the shelves of its well-stocked supermarket.

Papanico (☎ 867 333; Avinguda Príncep Benlloch 4; mains €9.50-13) This cheery place does tasty tapas from €2.95 and a range of sandwiches and mains. Fun at midday and vibrant at night, it's also a place to see and be seen.

El Faisà (☎ 823 283; Cap del Carrer 4; mains €9-18; ☹ Tue-Sat & lunch Sun) 'The Pheasant' is a delightful place, committed to serving fine food, where the cuisine gives more than a nod towards both France and Spain. Trim, with crisp white tablecloths and gleaming glasses, its mains offer something for all pockets and preferences.

Can Benet (☎ 828 922; Antic Carrer Major 9; mains €13-20; ☹ Tue-Sun, closed 1-15 Jul) It's international cuisine and everything à la carte at this long-established restaurant. Eat in the intimate ground-floor bar or upstairs in the dining room with its attractive stone-clad walls.

Borda Estevet (☎ 864 026; Carretera de la Comella 2; menú €35.50, mains €15-18.50) Here's a place for meaty mountain fare with a strong Catalan twist to the menu. Try its *graellada de muntanya*, a selection of meats and sausages

sizzled on hot slates. Conclude a great eating experience with a *digestif* from its table full of liqueurs and spirits. Among the chef's many accolades and commendations is the intriguing Golden Cock Award.

DRINKING

La Borsa (The Stock Exchange; ☎ 827 657; Avinguda de Tarragona 36; ☹ 11pm-3am Tue-Sun) Like a drink now and again and the chance to dance? Enjoy a little flutter? Here you can indulge in all three. Keep a weather eye on the electronic, computer-controlled screen; the price of each drink fluctuates according to the night's consumption. Some you win, some you lose. It's like life, really, only rather more fun as the evening wears on...

Cerveceria l'Albadia (☎ 820 825; Cap del Carrer 2) The place for serious beer drinkers, with over eight classics on draught and more in the bottle than you could possibly manage in a weekend of heavy tipping.

ENTERTAINMENT

Contact the town tourist office (p400) for information about festivals, dance performances etc. These intermittent events apart, once the shops have closed, Andorra la Vella is fairly moribund.

SHOPPING

Andorra has over 2000 shops – more than one for every 40 inhabitants. Most of Andorra la Vella's duty-free shops border the eastern part of Avinguda del Príncep Benlloch, the length of Avinguda de Meritxell and into its continuation, Avinguda de Carlemany in Escaldes. Opening hours are normally 9am to 1pm and 4pm to 8pm daily, though the big stores work through the break lest they miss a buck or two. On Saturday and in July and August, when the eager hordes pour in, shops remain open until 9pm daily (until 7pm on Sunday).

At **Forum Filatèlic** (☎ 822 894; Altell 4D), up the steps beside Carrer de Joan Maragall 2, stamp-, coin- and phonocard-collectors will find themselves in heaven.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Buses to La Seu d'Urgell via Santa Coloma and Sant Julià call by the stop on Plaça de Guillemó. Those for all other destinations within Andorra pass by the bus stop on Avinguda del Príncep Benlloch.

Long-distance buses use the main bus station on Avinguda de Tarragona.

Call ☎ 863 000 to order a taxi.

Andorra la Vella is compact, and is a traffic nightmare; you're much better off walking. Drop your car in the multistorey car park beneath Plaça del Poble or, at less cost, in the huge open-air park just north of the bus station.

AROUND ANDORRA LA VELLA

La Rabassa

elevation 2050m

At the end of a 20km zigzagging drive from Sant Julià de Lòria (there's no public transport or accommodation), **La Rabassa** (☎ 759 798; www.larabassa.ad in French & Spanish), hunched up against the frontier with France, is a wonderful mountain playground, particularly for families. In winter, it has 15km of groomed cross-country ski routes, toboggan runs, dog sleds, snow-shoe trails and a snow playground for younger children. In summer, there's mountain biking, walking, horse riding and more. A taxi from Andorra la Vella costs around €20, one way.

Sant Julià de Lòria

Six kilometres south of Andorra la Vella is the splendid **Museu del Tabac** (☎ 741 545; Carrer Doctor Palau 17; admission €5; ☹ 10am-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2.30pm Sun). Occupying a one-time tobacco factory, it recalls the pleasurable sins of tobacco and smuggling. Three rooms are furnished with the trappings of tobacco cultivation, and cigarette and cigar making. There's an optional English audio accompaniment and a 15-minute film ('Who hasn't been a smuggler for a day?', it rhetorically asks). Allow at least an hour.

Església de Santa Coloma

The pre-Romanesque form of the Church of Santa Coloma, mentioned in documents from the 9th century, and the principality's oldest church, has been much modified over the centuries. The four-storey, freestanding circular bell tower was raised in the 12th century. All the church's 12th-century Romanesque murals, except one entitled *Agnus Dei* (Lamb of God), were taken to Berlin for conservation in the 1930s and still languish there. The church is 2.5km southwest of Plaça de Guillemó along the main road to Spain.

NORTHWESTERN ANDORRA

La Massana, 6km north of Andorra la Vella and gateway to the ski centres of Arinsal and Pal, has little to detain you. From it, the CG3 continues north into the mountainous Parròquia d'Ordino, for us the country's most beautiful parish, with its slate and stone farmhouses, gushing streams and picturesque old bridges. Up there is the ski area of Ordino-Arcalis and, in summer, soul-stirring walking.

The four small ski resorts and La Massana have recently fused (administratively, at least; there's no lift link between the two centres) to form the ski domain of Vallnord (www.vallnord.com) with a common lift pass (€27/69.50 per day/three days – €32/82.50 in high season). The slopes can be considerably colder than those of eastern Andorra but, on the plus side, skiing usually starts earlier here and the snows are the last to melt from the pistes.

LA MASSANA

pop 3000 / elevation 1250m

La Massana's **tourist office** (☎ 835 693; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun), at the base of a brand new cabin lift, covers both Arinsal and Pal.

In Sispony, 1km off the CG3 at the entry to La Massana, is **Casa Rull** (☎ 836 919; Carrer Major, Sispony; admission €2.40; ☎ 9.30am-1.30pm & 3-6.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), a predominantly 17th-century restored farmhouse and rural museum.

Just outside La Massana on the road to Arinsal are two restaurants offering quality Andorran cuisine and a good selection of wine. **Borda de l'Aví** (☎ 835 154; Carretera de Arinsal Km0.5; mains €16-23), low-beamed and popular, is a stylish upmarket choice specialising in grills and roasts, but offers an ample selection of more subtle fare. **Borda Raubert** (☎ 835 420; Carretera de Arinsal Km1.5) is smaller, less expensive and more informal. It also specialises in mountain cuisine and grills and is equally tempting.

Buses between Andorra la Vella and Ordino pass through La Massana about every half-hour from 7am to 9pm Monday to Saturday.

ARINSAL & PAL SKI AREAS

Arinsal (☎ 737 020), 5km northwest of La Massana, has good skiing and snowboarding for beginners and intermediates, and a lively après-ski scene. The smaller ski station of **Pal** (☎ 737 000), 7km from La Massana, has gentler slopes, making it ideal for families.

Skiing

A fast cabin lift can rush you from La Massana to the Pal sector. The combined stations are linked by a cabin lift and have 63km of pistes with a vertical drop of 1010m.

Walking

For an excellent walking guide in English, pick up a copy of *Thirty-six Interesting Itineraries on the Paths of the Vall d'Ordino & the Parish of La Massana* (€2) from either parish's tourist office. Walk descriptions are altogether tauter than the title.

From Aparthotel Crest at Arinsal's northern extremity, a trail leads northwest, then west to **Estany de les Truites** (2260m). **Refugi de Coma Pedrosa** (☎ 327 955; per person €8; ☎ Jun-Oct), Andorra's only staffed mountain refuge, is just above this natural lake and does snacks and simple meals for all comers.

The steepish walk up to the lake takes around 1½ hours from Arinsal. From here, it's a further 1½ to two hours of vigorous walking to **Pic de Coma Pedrosa** (2942m), Andorra's highest point.

Other Activities

Pal, in particular, offers a wealth of summer-time activities, including mountain biking, horse riding, go-karting and archery. In July and August, you can ride the long La Serra chairlift (adult/child €6.80/4.75 return), with the option of a pleasant walk down.

Sleeping

Camping Xixerella (☎ 836 613; www.campingxixerella.com; sites per person/tent/car €4.95/4.95/4.95; ☎ Nov-Sep; ☎) Between Pal and Arinsal, this large, well-equipped site has an outdoor pool and plenty of shade and greenness.

All accommodation is in Arinsal (Pal has none); each of the places we recommend here is on the main drag.

Hotel Coma Pedrosa (☎ 737 950; [@hotmail.com](http://hotelcoma.pedrosa); d €40, half-board per person €30; ☎ Apr-Nov; ☎) The new owners of this welcoming place have brightened rooms up considerably. Most

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hostal Poblado (☎ 835 122; sti@andorra.ad; B&B per person with shower €22.50, with bathroom €30; ☎ Dec-Oct; ☎) Hostal Poblado sits right beside the cabin lift, handy for skiing in winter and for taking off on summer day walks. It's friendliness itself and a great place to make contact with other skiers or walkers. There's a lively bar and an internet point (€3 per hour), and you couldn't be more at the heart of the action.

rooms have a bathtub, there's free public parking just behind and you can relax in the cosy bar. In winter, it's fully occupied by ski tour operators.

Hotel Solana (☎ 737 999; www.hotelsolana.com; s/d €46/66, half-board per person €55; ☎) This is a very comfortable choice with a covered, heated pool and sauna, free to guests. All 95 rooms have a balcony; those facing the front have attractive views, while from the rear ones all you see is a wall of hillside. Reservation well in advance is essential in the ski season. In high season, the Solana insists on half-board.

Eating

Restaurant el Molí de la Plaça (☎ 835 281) This popular place, open year-round, bills itself as Italian – and indeed offers the usual staple pastas and pizzas (both €7.50 to €9.75). But its chefs are Argentinean and it also has more exotic fare such as Chinese chicken (€11.50).

Refugi de la Fondue (☎ 839 599; ☎ noon-11pm Tue-Sun, 4.30-11.30pm Mon Sep-Jun, lunch Sat & Sun, dinner daily Jul-Aug) As a change from the plentiful snack and sandwich joints in Arinsal, try this restaurant, on its own up the hill towards the main chairlift. Its speciality is cheese and meat fondue dishes (€14) and in summer it does outdoor barbecues on the small terrace.

Entertainment

In winter, Arinsal fairly throbs after sunset; in summer, it can be almost mournful. When the snow's around, call by **Surf** (meals €8.50-13), near the base of the cabin lift. A pub and restaurant until 11pm, then *discoteca* upstairs, it specialises in Argentinean dishes of juicy grilled meat.

Bar Cisco (☎ 4pm-2.30am Dec-Apr), up the lane beside Restaurant el Molí de la Plaça, occupies

a wonderful old barn. There's a lively après-ski scene in the downstairs bar, low-beamed, stone walled and fuggy, with a nightly DJ and regular live music. The upstairs restaurant (mains €10.50 to €12.50) specialises in Tex-Mex fare.

Getting There & Away

Nine daily buses (€1.50) leave Andorra la Vella for Arinsal via La Massana. There are also at least nine local buses (€0.90) daily between La Massana and Arinsal, and four (€0.90) between La Massana and Pal.

In winter a special ski bus runs eight times daily between La Massana and Arinsal.

ORDINO

pop 1600 / elevation 1300m

Despite all its ongoing development, Ordino is a charming little village. All new buildings are constructed in local stone, its main square is pedestrian only and a chuckling stream sluices through it.

The **tourist office** (☎ 737 080; www.ordino.ad; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-5pm Sun Jul-Sep, 8.30am-1.30pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun Oct-Jun) is within the Centre Esportiu d'Ordino sports complex beside the CG3.

Museums

The ancestral home of one of Andorra's great families, the Areny Plandolits, was built in 1633. Modified in the mid-19th century, it's now the **Museu d'Areny i Plandolit** (☎ 836 908; adult/student €2.40/1.20; ☎ 9am-9pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9.30am-1.30pm & 3pm-6.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Sep-Jun), which offers half-hour guided visits, in Spanish or Catalan, of its richly furnished interior.

In the same grounds as the Museu d'Areny i Plandolit, the **Museu Postal de Andorra** (Postal Museum; adult/student €2.40/1.20; ☎ 9am-9pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9.30am-1.30pm & 3-6.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Sep-Jun) is fun and interesting even for nonphilatelists. There is a 15-minute audiovisual presentation (available in English), and set upon set of stamps issued by France and Spain specifically for Andorra.

Walking

From the hamlet of Segudet, 1km east of Ordino, a path goes up through fir woods to the **Coll d'Ordino** (1980m), reached in about 1½ hours. **Pic de Casamanya** (2740m), where you can enjoy expansive panoramas, is some two hours north from the coll.

Sleeping & Eating

Camping Borda d'Ansalonga (☎ 850 374; www.campingansalonga.com; sites per person/tent/car €5/4/4; 🏠 mid-Jun–mid-Sep; 📶) This large, grassy option enjoys an attractive valley site just outside the village.

Hotel Santa Bàrbara de la Vall d'Ordino (☎ 738 100; www.santabarbara-hotel.com; Plaça d'Ordino; s/d €45/60; 🏠) Above the main square and facing the church, this 21-room family-run hotel with its attractive bar is good value for money. Staff speak English, all rooms have a bathtub and its two large split-level rooms (€96) are ideal for a family or two couples. Parking costs €5.

Hotel Coma (☎ 736 100; www.hotelcoma.com; per person incl breakfast €37-65, with half-board €48-75; 🏠 Dec-Oct; 🏠) Curling around the hillside like a boomerang, this spacious 48-room hotel has attractive rooms, all with parquet flooring and Jacuzzi. All except the top-floor eyries have a balcony giving fine views. Not least of the Coma's pleasures is its superb restaurant, much favoured by wealthy Andorrans for weddings and other rites of passage.

Casa León (☎ 835 977; menú €12.50-18.50; 🏠 Tue-Sun) offers a wide range of tapas and à la carte meat and fish dishes (€9.50 to €15). **Bar Restaurant Quim**, next door, friendly and more snacky, also has plenty of tapas and does a filling midday *menú* (€10).

Getting There & Away

Buses to/from Andorra la Vella (€1) run every half-hour from 7.15am to 9.15pm Monday to Saturday.

VALL D'ORDINO

The **Centre d'Interpretació de la Natura** (Nature Interpretation Centre; ☎ 837 939; adult/student/child €2.45/1.75/free; 🏠 10am-1pm & 3-5pm or 4-8pm Tue-Sat) in **La Cortinada** is a good multimedia introduction to Andorra's flora and fauna. A guided visit follows a 10-minute slide-video presentation (both with English option).

In the same village, the tiny, partly Romanesque **Església de Sant Martí** (🏠 Jul-Aug) has some well-preserved 12th-century frescoes and four finely wrought gilded altarpieces. Opposite is a small working water-powered **flour and sawmill** (adult/child €2/1; 🏠 approx 10am-1.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm Tue-Sun Jun-Aug).

Walking

Exhilarating trails lead from the small settlements that nestle beside the CG3, north of

Ordino. Arm yourself with *Thirty-six Interesting Itineraries on the Paths of the Vall d'Ordino & the Parish of La Massana* (see p404).

A track leads west from **Llorts** (1413m) up the Riu de l'Angonella valley to a group of lakes, the **Estanys de l'Angonella**, at about 2300m. Count on three hours to get there.

From slightly north of the even smaller settlement of **El Serrat** (1600m), a secondary road leads 4km east to the Borda de Sorteny mountain hut (1969m). From there a trail goes southeast to **Estany de l'Estanyó** (2339m). Another heads east up to the **Collada dels Meners pass** (2713m, about 1½ hours), from where you can go north to **Pic de la Serrera** (2913m, 30 minutes) or a couple of hours south and west via **Pic de la Cabaneta** (2863m) to **Pic de l'Estanyó** (2915m), Andorra's second-highest summit. In about eight hours of tough trekking from Borda de Sorteny you could bag all three peaks and continue via the Coll d'Arenes (2539m) and Pic de Casamanya to the **Coll d'Ordino**, enjoying great views along the way.

From **Arans** (1385m), a trail leads north-eastwards to **Bordes de l'Ensegur** (2180m), where there's an old shepherd's hut.

Sleeping

Camping Mitxeu (☎ 850 022; mitxeu@hotmail.com; sites per person/tent/car €3/3/3; 🏠 Jul–mid-Sep) Some 200m north of Llorts, it's small, basic – and one of Andorra's most beautiful camping grounds with its own spring.

Pensió Vilaró (☎ 850 225; s/d with washbasin €20/35, half-board per person €33; 🏠 Dec-Oct; 🏠) This simple, friendly place, 300m south of the village, is a favourite with both walkers and skiers and does copious meals for guests.

Getting There & Away

Hourly buses linking Ordino and Arcalís also serve El Serrat and the small communities of the valley.

ORDINO-ARCALÍS SKI AREA

Several of the rugged peaks in this beautiful area reach 2700m and provide challenging and spectacular summer walking. There's no accommodation in Arcalís.

Restaurant La Coma (2200m) at the end of the paved road (closed in winter) is a useful landmark. From there, the **Creussans chairlift** (adult/child one way €5/4.10, return €7.60/4.50; 🏠 Dec-Apr & Jul-Sep) whisks you up to 2625m.

Skiing

The slopes of the **Ordino-Arcalís ski area** (☎ 739 600), in Andorra's far northwestern corner, are better for beginner and intermediate skiers. There's a decent selection of runs but gosh, it can be cold and windy. There are 14 lifts covering 26km of pistes at elevations between 1940m and 2625m.

Walking

The trail behind Restaurant La Coma leads eastwards across the hill, then north and over the ridge to a group of beautiful mountain lakes, **Estanys de Tristaina**. The walk to the first lake takes about 30 minutes.

Eating

Restaurant La Coma (🏠 10am-6pm) is open from December to early May and late June to early September, offering both snacks and a full menu.

Getting There & Away

In the ski season there are up to 12 buses daily (€1) between Ordino and the ski station, and six in summer.

EASTERN ANDORRA

Eastern Andorra has the principality's best skiing (see the boxed text, right), while in summer walks around Soldeu and Canillo rival those of northwest Andorra for beauty and grandeur.

ENCAMP

elevation 1300m

Encamp is really little more than a sprawl on either side of the CG2. The **tourist office** (☎ 731 000; 🏠 9am-1pm & 3.30-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Sat, 9am-5pm Sun) is beside the CG2, 100m south of Encamp's town hall, a striking smoked-glass cube.

Sights & Activities

The **Museu Nacional de l'Automòbil** (National Automobile Museum; ☎ 832 266; adult/student €2.40/1.20; 🏠 9am-9pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-1.30pm & 3-6.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Sep-Jun), beside the CG2, displays about 80 vintage cars and motorcycles, plus over 100 bicycles from old bone-rattlers to sleek racers.

Most of the **Església Sant Romà de les Bons**, about 1km north of Encamp, dates from the

12th century. The Romanesque frescoes in the apse are reproductions of the originals, now in Barcelona's Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (see p299).

To the right of the CG2, 3km north of Encamp, the austere **Santuari de Nostra Senyora de Meritxell** (🏠 9am-9pm daily Jul & Aug, 9am-1pm & 3-6pm Wed-Mon Sep-Jun) looms over the highway. Designed by the internationally renowned Catalan architect Ricardo Bofill, it replaces the original shrine to the Virgin of Meritxell, Andorra's patron, which was destroyed by fire in 1972.

Funicamp (adult/child return €10.50/7.50; 🏠 operates Dec-Mar & Jul-Aug), the long bubble lift at the northern end of Encamp, hauls you from 1300m to 2500m, giving access to the Grau Roig and Pas de la Casa ski fields.

Getting There & Away

Buses (€1.25) run from Andorra la Vella to Encamp every 15 minutes between 7am and 9.30pm daily.

GRANDVALIRA SKI AREA

Each of the five ski resorts within Grandvalira has a different character. Canillo, the smallest, is family-oriented and remains our favourite. El Tarter and, 2km to its east, Soldeu (which has the bulk of the accommodation and facilities), are both very popular with British skiers. At Andorra's eastern extremity, the linked ski stations of Pas de la Casa, a favourite of French skiers and young Brits out for nocturnal fun, and Grau Roig lie on either side of the Port d'Envalira pass.

The skiing differs too. Canillo is essentially a way of linking into the system. The exposed ski areas of Pas de la Casa and Grau Roig are great when the sun shines but oh, how the wind

SNOW MATES

In the winter of 2003, the ski resorts of Soldeu-El Tarter and Pas de la Casa-Grau Roig, after decades of jealously eyeing each other's slopes and fortunes, agreed to install a short umbilical lift and join forces. The result is the combined snowfields of **Grandvalira** (☎ 801 060), far and away the most extensive in all the Pyrenees, with 193km of runs and a combined lift system that can shift 96,000 skiers per hour. Lift passes, valid for the combined area for one/three days, cost €37/97.50.

can lash. The lower reaches of the Soldeu–El Tarter segment are pleasantly wooded and black runs into the villages are steeper and more picturesque.

The website www.grandvalira.com gives a rundown on the resorts and, in winter, the latest snow conditions, including a see-for-yourself webcam if you don't trust the official weather forecast.

CANILLO

elevation 1500m

Canillo is a pleasant, expanding ski village, small by comparison with Soldeu–El Tarter 7km to its east, yet ideal if you're looking for a quiet family winter holiday spot. A cabin lift links into the Grandvalira slopes so that you can zigzag all the way to Pas de la Casa and the French frontier.

Once the snows melt, Canillo adopts an even gentler pace and is a delightful base for a summer activity holiday. It offers canyon climbing, guided walks, four *via ferrata* climbing routes and a climbing wall. The **Palau de Gel** sports complex, with its ice rink and swimming pool, is open year-round, and there are endless possibilities for walking (including La Ruta del Gallo, an easy 6.5km signed nature walk that follows the valley downstream from Soldeu).

The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 751 090; www.vdc.ad; ☹ 9am–1pm & 3–7pm Mon–Sat, 8am–4pm Sun), on the main road at the east end of the village, also covers Soldeu and El Tarter. A little beyond is the splendid 11th-century Romanesque **Església de Sant Joan de Caselles** (☹ Jul & Aug). Year-round, you can collect the key from Hostal Aina (below). Inside is a rare stucco *Christ in Majesty* and a fine 16th-century altarpiece.

Sleeping & Eating

Camping Santa Creu (☎ 851 462; camping_santacreu@yahoo.com; sites per person/tent/car €3.50/3.50/3.50; ☹ mid-Jun–Sep) It's the greenest of Canillo's five camping grounds and, since it's the furthest from the highway, the quietest.

Hostal Aina (☎ 851 434; colonias.aina.andorra.ad; dm €13, half-board €19; ☹ Sep–mid-Jun) This place functions as a children's holiday camp in summer and as a hostel for all-comers for the rest of the year. Ring ahead during the ski season as it's often full. Dorms sleep six and you need your own sleeping bag.

Hotel Bonavida (☎ 851 300; hotel.bonavida.andorra.ad; Plaça Major; per person incl breakfast Dec–Apr €40–59,

Jun–Oct €34–40; ☎ ☹) Only a well cast snowball from Canillo's telecabin, the Bonavida couldn't be better placed for skiers, and there's a minigym with sauna and Jacuzzi to relax the muscles at day's end. Most of its cosy rooms have balconies overlooking the river and mountain beyond. The copious buffet breakfast has real espresso coffee and dinners are ample too.

Cal Lulu (☎ 851 427; menú €14, mains €16–18, pizzas €7.50–10; ☹ closed Mon & Tue except high season) Intimate (it's divided into small booths), full of character and often packed to the gills, Cal Lulu serves up tasty Catalan and French dishes in generous quantities.

Palau de Gel Restaurant (☎ 800 840; menú €12.50, mains €7–14) Part of the Palau de Gel sports complex, it isn't the kind of place you'd automatically associate with good cuisine. The bar is a good spot for a snack and has free wi-fi – for entertainment you can watch the swimming and skating below.

SOLDEU & EL TARTER

elevation 1700m

Soldeu, the larger of the two villages, is especially popular with British skiers. The major hotels are here and there's an active après-ski scene. El Tarter, just down the valley and set back from the main highway, is altogether quieter and more relaxed.

The telecabins in Canillo and Soldeu (adult/child €8.50/7 return) also operate in July and August, whisking you up to the higher reaches, from where you can walk or hire a mountain bike and whiz down.

Centre d'Equitació Calbo (☎ 852 101), at the western end of Soldeu, does horse rides.

Sleeping

Most hotels are in thrall to the tour operators throughout winter. There are, however, two splendid exceptions at each end of the price spectrum.

Hotel Roc de Sant Miquel (☎ 851 079; www.hotel-roc.com; Soldeu; half-board per person winter €30–68, summer €27–45; ☹ closed May & Oct) The pleasant young Anglo-Andorran owners, both ski instructors and experienced walkers, can arrange nature walks and hikes. It's a relaxed, laid-back option (one of the owners plays lead guitar in a local band) and guests can also hire mountain bikes for a nominal fee.

Hôtel del Clos (☎ 851 500; www.grupnordic.ad; Carretera General s/n, El Tarter; half-board per person €46–83;

☹ closed Nov; ☎ ☹) Above the main road in El Tarter, this attractive 54-room hotel, built into the mountainside, has wood everywhere and a distinctly Scandinavian feel. All rooms are equipped with a bathtub and most have a balcony. Those overlooking the ski slopes are an extra €9. Guests have access to the pool of Hotel Nordic, opposite. Parking costs €6.

Sport Hotel (☎ 870 600; www.sporthehotels.ad; Soldeu; half-board per person Dec–Apr €58–100, May–Nov €37–60) and **Sport Hotel Village** (☎ 870 500; Soldeu; half-board per person Dec–Apr €68–122, May–Nov €42–69) Imagine a pair of Alpine chalets on the scale of a department store, where woodwork predominates and the vast open spaces are broken down into more intimate lounges and bars. Guests get a 30% discount at their **Sport Wellness** spa with its range of aquatic and fitness activities. At Sport Hotel Village, with its internal atrium soaring upwards for four storeys, most rooms have balconies overlooking the ski slopes.

If you're prepared to push just 2.5km eastward to Les Bordes d'Envalira, equidistant between the Soldeu–El Tarter and Grau Roig–Pas de la Casa ski fields, prices drop significantly (though this may change in 2008 if the projected gondola lift connecting the fields takes off). Both hotels have restaurants, so you aren't obliged to drop down to Soldeu to eat.

Hotel Austria (☎ 735 555; recepcioaustria@andorra.ad; d €50–90, tr €69–124; ☹ Dec–Apr; ☎ ☹) This family-friendly, English-speaking place has 62 rooms, including four for the handicapped. Parking costs €9.

Hotel Confort (☎ 852 288; hotelconfort-b.env@andorra.ad; s/d/tr/q €58/70/95/119) Next door to Hotel Austria, the Confort is a family-run hotel, with 30 rooms, all with bathtub. It requires half-board (€80/92 for singles/doubles) during the ski season. Don't be deterred by the gloomy reception area.

Eating

Hotel Bruxelles restaurant (☎ 851 010; Soldeu; menú €11–20) A cheerful place with a small open-air terrace overlooking the pistes. It does full meals, well-filled sandwiches and whopping burgers (around €9).

Restaurant Fontanella (☎ 851 750; Soldeu; mains €7–13) This restaurant does a range of very reasonably priced Italian specialities, plus the usual pizzas and pastas (€7.50 to €9). Arrive early to grab a table on its terrace overlooking the ski slopes.

Borda de l'Horto (☎ 851 622; mains €12–16; ☹ Tue–Sun) This upmarket restaurant, 1km west of

El Tarter, is one of few places in the valley where you can be sure to find Andorrans dining. With its low beams and whitewashed walls, it's a congenial, attractively restored farmhouse offering good cuisine.

El Mosquit (☎ 851 030) Off the main highway and in the village of El Tarter, 'The Mosquito' is at once intimate bar, restaurant and, below, heaving pub. The restaurant, run by a young Belgian pair, has robust wood furnishings, its chairs and benches as heavy as church pews. It does fondues (€13 to €16), large and lavishly topped pizzas and Tex-Mex.

Entertainment

The night scene at Soldeu–El Tarter gets hopping once the first snows fall. Pussy Cat and its neighbour, Fat Albert, both one block from the main drag, rock until far too late to allow impressive skiing next day. **Avalanche** (☎ 852 282) and, three doors away, **Aspen** (☎ 851 974), both feature music every day and live bands regularly. Also on the main drag, the Stone Bar has broadband internet access, table football and occasional live music.

Getting There & Around

Buses run at least hourly from Andorra la Vella to Canillo (€2.50) and on to El Tarter and Soldeu between 8am and 8pm. In winter, there are free shuttle buses (just flash your ski pass) between Andorra la Vella and Pas de la Casa, passing by Canillo, El Tarter, Soldeu and Les Bordes d'Envalira. They run hourly (with a break from noon to 3pm) until 8.30pm.

All four villages are also on the route of buses travelling between Andorra la Vella, Pas de la Casa and the French railhead of L'Hospitalet.

PAS DE LA CASA

elevation 2050m

Pas de la Casa, on the French border and the largest of Andorra's ski resorts, is a fairly tawdry and architecturally bleak place, catering principally to French visitors and day trippers on a duty-free shopping orgy. In high season, especially the French winter school holiday from mid-February to early March, it's near impossible to get a bed and lift queues can be frustratingly long.

Pas de la Casa's **tourist office** (☎ 855 292; fax 856 275; ☹ 9am–1pm & 3–7pm Mon–Sat, 9am–4pm Sun) is in a kiosk opposite the Andorran customs station.

Activities

The **Centre Esportiu** (☎ 856 830) is an architecturally striking leisure complex with swimming pools, solarium, hydromassage, sauna, squash, a climbing wall and more.

Activitats d'Aventura (Adventure Activities; ☎ 355 053) in Grau Roig runs a variety of fun snowy activities, including snowshoe treks, igloo building, dog sledding and short, 10-minute helicopter flights.

Sleeping

During the ski season and, to a lesser extent, July and August, it's almost impossible to find reasonably priced accommodation in Pas de la Casa since so many hotels are occupied partially or fully by tour companies.

Hotel Central (☎ 855 375; www.hotelcentral.ad; Carrer Abelleses 5; s/d/tr/q Apr–Nov €30/50/66/80, compulsory half-board per person Dec–mid-Apr €43–59) Open year-round, the vast concrete Hotel Central has bland, unexceptional rooms, and the same could go for the cuisine. That said, it does represent, in Pas de la Casa currency, good value for your euro.

Hotel la Muntanya (☎ 855 318; fax 855 898; Carrer Catalunya 12; r per person incl breakfast €27–51, half-board €39–63) This welcoming place is also open year-round. In the ski season, half-board is compulsory at weekends and during French school holidays.

Eating

In Pas de la Casa, you can eat sandwiches and burgers until they ooze out of your ears. For more substantial fare, try the battery of restaurants around the base of the ski slopes but don't expect gourmet cuisine.

La Belle Époque (☎ 855 173; Carrer de Catalunya 12; mains €12–15, menú €9–12.50) The new owners of La Belle Époque, which also styles itself Si-Ski-Klan, offer a range of fondues (€13 to €16) and grilled meats. It does a pair of bargain lunch *menús* and offers an imaginative range of dishes based on French cuisine.

Tristaina (☎ 739 739; Carrer Beam 20–24) More up-market, the restaurant of Hôtel Font d'Argent does an excellent value lunchtime *menú* (€8.50) and a richly varied buffet dinner.

Entertainment

What Pas de la Casa lacks in places to sleep or eat, it compensates for in its ski season nightlife. Centred around Plaça del Vaquers and adjacent Plaça Sant Josep, it pounds from

sunset onwards. Dance away your bruises at West End and Billboard, both on Carrer Maià. **Milwaukee** (Carrer Beam; ☎ 5pm–1am), a favourite of the British snow crowd, also packs in the après-skiers, as do **Kyu** (Plaça dels Vaquers; ☎ 5pm–3am) and nearby **Underground** (☎ 8pm–3am).

Vertigo, next door to Underground and on a smaller scale, is more versatile. There's the hip pub with its resident DJ, a less noisy bar and also a pleasant restaurant (mains €13 to €19). **Habana Club Latino** (Plaça del Vaquers), where Cuban rhythms play and rum is king, is a pleasant Latin alternative to too much Anglo-Saxon heartiness.

Getting There & Away

There are eight buses daily (€4.50) between Andorra la Vella and Pas de la Casa.

Drivers can avoid Port d'Envalira by taking the 2.8km toll tunnel (€5.70) between Pas de la Casa and Grau Roig. But unless you're pushed for time or the weather's poor, you'll be missing out on the spectacular drive up and over Port d'Envalira with dramatic views in all directions, at 2408m the highest road pass in the Pyrenees.

ANDORRA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Andorra, which survives on 'touroeuros', is low on budget accommodation. Most visitors come as members of an organised group. Indeed, if you're happy to stay in one place, the cheapest option, especially during the ski season, is to sign up for a package. All major tour operators in Britain, for example, offer Andorra as a destination.

Hotels are fullest from December to March and in July and August. During these months, some places put prices up substantially, sometimes wildly, or insist on half-board, while others simply don't take in independent travellers. They also sometimes fail to post their prices.

There are no youth hostels in Andorra. In compensation there are several great camping grounds, many beautifully situated.

You don't need to make reservations at any of Andorra's 26 *refugis* (mountain huts). All are some distance from the road and all but one are unstaffed and free. Most have bunks, fireplaces and drinkable water, but no cooking facilities.

Tourist offices stock a free booklet, *Guia d'Allojaments Turístics*, but it's far from a comprehensive listing and, while the rest of the information is reliable, the prices it quotes are merely indicative.

ACTIVITIES

Skiing

DOWNHILL

Andorra boasts the best skiing and snowboarding in the Pyrenees, and its ski passes work out cheaper than those of many other European resorts. Tourist offices and **Ski Andorra** (☎ 864 389; www.skiandorra.ad) offer up-to-the-minute information.

The longest and best runs are in the Grandvalira ski area (p407). Skiing in the four resorts of the Vallnord complex, Arinsal, Pal (p404) and Ordino-Arcalis (p406), is more limited and often windier yet less expensive.

Skiing is good for all levels – especially so for beginners and intermediates. The season normally runs from December to mid-April.

Ski school costs around €35 per hour for one-on-one tuition (much cheaper per head if you're in a small group) and €71 to €101 for 15 hours of group classes, prices varying according to resort and season.

Downhill ski-gear hire costs around €10 per day, while snowboards go for €17.50 to €20 per day.

CROSS-COUNTRY

There's a great little cross-country skiing centre with 15km of marked forest trails at La Rabassa (p403), near Andorra la Vella.

Walking

The best walking map is *Andorra & Cadí* (1:50,000), produced by Rando Éditions. Close on its heels comes *Andorra* (1:40,000), by the Spanish map company Alpina. Another option is the *Mapa de Refugis i Grans Recorreguts d'Andorra* (1:50,000), which pinpoints all of Andorra's 26 mountain refuges and network of marked trails.

Andorra's unspoiled back country, where more than 50 *estanyes* (lakes) lie hidden among the soaring mountains, begins only a few hundred metres from the bazaar-like bustle of the capital.

The best season for walking is June to September, when temperatures climb well above 20°C, dropping to around 10°C at night. June can be wet. Ordino in the northwest and

Canillo or Soldeu in eastern Andorra make excellent bases for day walks.

The GR11 trail, which traverses the Spanish Pyrenees from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, enters Andorra by the Port de Vall Civera pass (2518m) in the southeast and crosses to the challenging Port de Baiua pass (2756m) in the northwest.

Walkers and cross-country skiers can sleep for free in any of Andorra's 26 mountain refuges dotted around the high country.

CUSTOMS

Tourist offices carry a leaflet outlining duty-free allowances for goods entering Spain, France or any EU country from Andorra. These include 5L of still wine, either 1.5L of spirits or 3L of lighter spirits or sparkling wine, and 300 cigarettes. Spot checks for smugglers are fairly rigorous on both Spanish and French borders.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Roads follow the floor of Andorra's tight valleys and traffic jams can clog Andorra la Vella's main arteries. Andorran drivers must rank among Europe's most reckless, hurtling around the tight mountain bends as if propelled by some collective death wish.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Andorran Embassies & Consulates

Andorra has embassies in France and Spain: **France** (☎ 01 40 06 03 30; www.amb-andorre.ad in French and Catalan; Place d'Andorre 1, 75016 Paris) **Spain** (Map pp114–15; ☎ 91 431 74 53; Calle de Alcalá 73, 28009 Madrid)

Embassies & Consulates in Andorra

France and Spain maintain reciprocal missions in Andorra:

France (Map pp400–1; ☎ 736 730; www.ambafrance-ad.org in French) Consulate (Carrer de la Sobrevia 7, Andorra la Vella); Embassy (Carrer de les Canals 38, Andorra la Vella) **Spain** (Map pp400–1; ☎ 820 013; Carrer del Prat de la Creu 34, Andorra la Vella)

HOLIDAYS

Public holidays fall on 1 January (Año Nuevo), 14 March (Día de la Constitución; Constitution Day), Good Friday (Viernes Santo), 8 September (Día de Meritxell, patron saint of Andorra) and 25 December (Navidad; Christmas Day).

INTERNET RESOURCES

www.andorra.ad Site of the Ministry of Tourism and Environment.

www.skiandorra.ad For skiing and practical wintertime info.

www.turismeandorra.com Maintained by the local hotel association.

MEDIA

The principality's two daily papers, both in Catalan, are *Diari d'Andorra* and *Periòdic d'Andorra*. You can watch Spanish and French TV, along with the local Andorra Televisión (ATV).

Local radio stations include Ràdio Nacional Andorra (RNA; 91.4MHz and 94.2MHz); Andorra 7 (101.5MHz); Ràdio Valira (93.3MHz and 98.9MHz); and Andorra Uno (96.0MHz).

MONEY

Though not a full member of the EU, Andorra uses the euro. For exchange rates, see the inside front cover. Banks and ATMs abound in this commercially minded country.

POST

Andorra has no postal service of its own. France and Spain each operate a separate postal system with their own Andorran stamps. They're valid only for items posted within Andorra – and needed only for international mail, since letters for destinations within the country go free. You can't use regular French or Spanish stamps.

International mail (except letters to Spain) is better routed through the swifter and more reliable French postal system. There are two kinds of post boxes, but if you use the wrong one your letter will be transferred.

The best way to get a letter to Andorra (except from Spain) is to address it to 'Principauté d'Andorre via FRANCE'.

SHOPPING

With low customs duties and sales tax, Andorra is an Aladdin's cave of cheap electronic goods, sports gear, shoes, clothing, perfume, petrol and, above all, alcohol, cigarettes and French dairy products. Shops selling these goods cluster in Andorra la Vella, Pas de la Casa and near the Spanish border.

Some warranties are valid only in the country of purchase, so read the fine print.

TELEPHONE

Andorra's country code is ☎ 376. To call Spain from Andorra, dial ☎ 00-34 followed by the local number. To call France, dial ☎ 00-33 then the local number.

Directory assistance (☎ 111 for numbers within Andorra, ☎ 119 for international information) has multilingual operators.

To phone, use euros or an Andorran *tel-estarja* (phonecard), sold at tourist offices and tobacconists for €3 and €6.

TOURIST INFORMATION

There's a municipal and a national tourist office in Andorra la Vella (p400) and several smaller ones around the country. Most carry information about the whole of the principality and sell both stamps and phonecards.

Andorra's tourist offices or tourism representatives abroad include:

France (☎ 01 42 61 50 55; 26 Ave de l'Opéra, 75001 Paris)

Spain Madrid (☎ 91 431 74 53; Calle de Alcalá 73, 28001); Barcelona (☎ 93 508 84 48; World Trade Center, Moll de Barcelona, Edificio Nord, Planta Baja 27, 08039)

UK (☎ 020-8874 4806; 63 Westover Rd, London SW18 2RF)

VISAS

Visas are not necessary; the authorities reckon that if Spain or France lets you in, that's good enough for them. But bring your passport or national ID card.

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Aragón



North to south, the land of Aragón rings the changes, from the awesome snow-plastered mountains of the Pyrenees to the arid mesas of Teruel. Between these two Spanish extremes is a more modest, even at times, dull landscape; but pinned at the very heart of the region is the great bustling city of Zaragoza, while a host of smaller towns, stone-walled villages, historic monasteries and castles pepper the landscape. Each one has written its chapter or footnote in the dramatic history of Aragón, a region whose neighbours are France, Navarra, Catalonia, Valencia and the Castilian heartland; all, at one time or another, enemies at the gate.

Today, you take your pick of Aragón's many gifts. The great mountains of the north cater for skiers and mountaineers while their foothills are a walkers' paradise of canyons, pretty villages, lonely castles and venerable monasteries with some outstanding Romanesque architecture.

For an urban fix, the region's main city, Zaragoza, bursts at the seams with sound and fury and may leave even the most streetwise reeling; but the city is big-hearted and hides an astonishing array of Roman ruins beneath its sombre monumental buildings and churches.

Central Aragón consists mainly of treeless depressions and forlorn plateaus. Further south, you reach other, thinly populated mountain regions, sprinkled with picturesque, mysterious villages. The towers of Teruel, the south's biggest town, are among the masterpieces of Spanish Mudéjar architecture.

HIGHLIGHTS

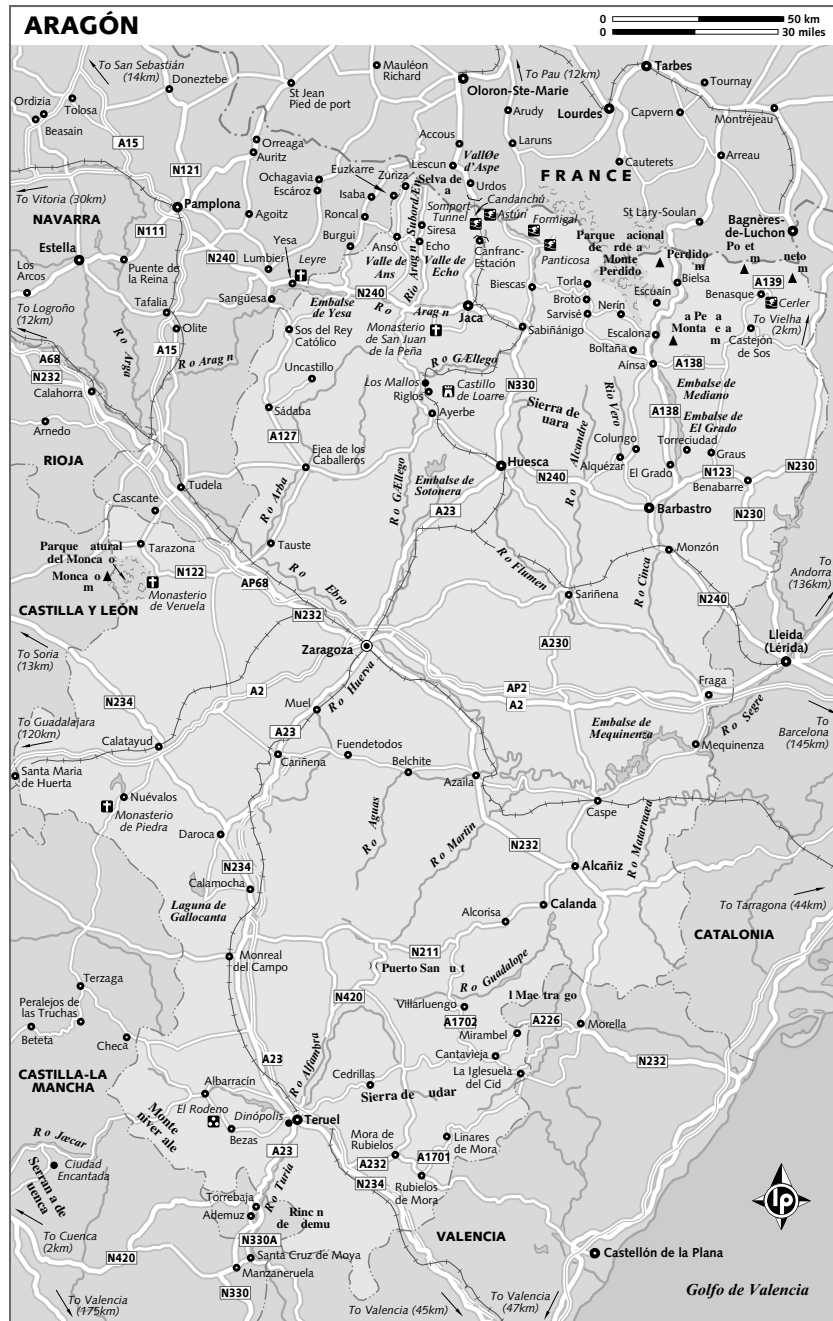
- Hit **Zaragoza's** (p415) buzzing streets and bars, with energy
- Veer off the beaten highway to fabulous old towns such as **Alquézar** (p428), **Daroca** (p442) and **Albarracín** (p445)
- Savour the wafer-thin perfection of the best **Teruel** (p443) *jamón* (ham)
- Go quietly through the beautiful Pyrenean valleys of **Echo** and **Ansó** (p440)
- Meditate on the glories of the Romanesque monastery of **San Juan de la Peña** (p439)
- Walk on the wild side in the **Parque Nacional de Ordesa y Monte Perdido** (p433) in the Pyrenees



■ AREA: 47, 720 SQ KM

■ AVE SUMMER TEMP: HIGH 31°C,
LOW 17°C

■ POP: 1.23 MILLION



ZARAGOZA

pop 597,472 / elevation 200m

Zaragoza (Saragossa) rocks and rolls – and that’s just the traffic. The feisty citizens of this great city on the banks of the mighty Río Ebro can rock with the best of them as well. They make up over half of Aragón’s population, the result of the most intense rural-urban drift of Spain’s past 200 years of often agonising modernisation. The result is a city bursting at the seams. Yet enshrined at the heart of the city’s encircling mass of functional modern buildings and traffic-bound streets is a more people-friendly Spanish *casco* (old town) crammed with historic buildings and with a colourful traditional identity. Intriguing archaeology, fine art and architecture, and dozens of lively bars, clubs and stylish restaurants rub shoulders happily here and with Expo 2008 looming, and ambitious building programmes planned, Zaragoza seems set for even more partying.

HISTORY

The Romans founded the colony of Caesaraugusta (from which ‘Zaragoza’ is derived) in 14 BC. As many as 25,000 people migrated to the prosperous Roman city whose river traffic brought the known world to the inland banks of Río Ebro. In Muslim times Zaragoza was capital of the Upper March, one of Al-Andalus’ frontier territories. In 1118 it fell to Alfonso I ‘El Batallador’ (Battler), ruler of the expanding Christian kingdom of Aragón, and immediately became its capital.

Centuries later Zaragoza put up unusually stiff resistance to the Napoleonic siege, although it capitulated in 1809. Industrial growth late in the 19th century made it a centre of militant trade unionism, but in 1936, when the civil war began, the Republicans had no time to organise and Zaragoza quickly fell under Nationalist control. The country’s main military academy was established here under General Franco in 1928 (still in use, it’s north of town). Zaragoza’s more recent story has been one of sometimes uncontrolled development and modernisation.

ORIENTATION

The core of old Zaragoza, with the bulk of the city’s historic monuments and many of its hotels and restaurants, lies south of Río Ebro, its former walls marked by Avenida de César

Augusto to the west and El Coso to the south. From the riverbanks, the vast Plaza del Pilar, dominated by Zaragoza’s great churches, gives way southwards to a labyrinth of lanes and alleys whose heart is known as El Tubo. The great ‘T-junction’ of the modern city is south of the old town where El Coso and the wide Paseo de la Independencia meet at Plaza de España. Busy lanes and streets with plenty of bars and eateries lie to either side of the Paseo.

The Estación Intermodal Delicias train station is about 2km west of the old centre.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Librería General (☎ 976 22 44 83; Paseo de la Independencia 22) This well-stocked shop has an excellent selection of walking maps and guidebooks, as well as some English- and French-language novels.

Internet Access

Conecta-T (☎ 976 20 59 79; Murallas Romanas 4; per hr €1.60; ☎ 10am–11pm Mon–Fri, 11am–11pm Sat & Sun) A very well-organised facility with cheap international calls, mobile charge point and faxing.

Laundry

Hellespontika (☎ 976 49 55 54; Plaza Ariño 1; wash & dry per 3kg load €10; ☎ 9.30am–1.30pm & 4.30–8.30pm Mon–Fri, 10am–2pm Sat)

Medical Services

Hospital Clínico Universitario (☎ 976 35 75 01; Calle de San Juan Bosco 15)

Post

Main post office (Paseo de la Independencia 33; ☎ 8.30am–8.30pm Mon–Fri, 9.30am–2pm Sat)

Tourist Information

Zaragoza has two helpful central tourist offices, plus a branch in the Estación Intermodal Delicias.

Oficina de Turismo de Aragón (☎ 902 47 70 00; www.turismodeAragon.com; Avenida de César Augusto 25; ☎ 9am–2pm & 5–8pm Mon–Fri, from 10am Sat & Sun) Excellent information on the Aragón region.

Plaza del Pilar (☎ 976 39 35 37; www.turismozaragoza.com; ☎ 10am–8pm) Opposite the basilica in a futuristic black glass cube. This is the city information office.

Torreón de la Zuda (☎ 976 20 12 00; Glorieta de Pío XII; ☎ 10am–2pm & 4.30–8pm 7 Jan–Easter, 10am–8pm Easter–Dec) A subsidiary city information office in a 15th-century Mudéjar tower by the Roman walls. Climb the tower for panoramic views (free).

SIGHTS

Plaza del Pilar & Plaza de la Seo

In Zaragoza's old town, just south of Río Ebro, is Plaza del Pilar and its eastward continuation, Plaza de la Seo. Together, these two squares form a 500m open space and are flanked by important buildings and historic monuments.

BASÍLICA DE NUESTRA SEÑORA DEL PILAR

Brace yourself for the saintly and the sombre in this great baroque cavern of Catholicism. It was here on 2 January AD 40, that Santiago (St James the Apostle) is believed by the faithful to have seen the Virgin Mary descend atop a marble *pilar* (pillar). A chapel was built

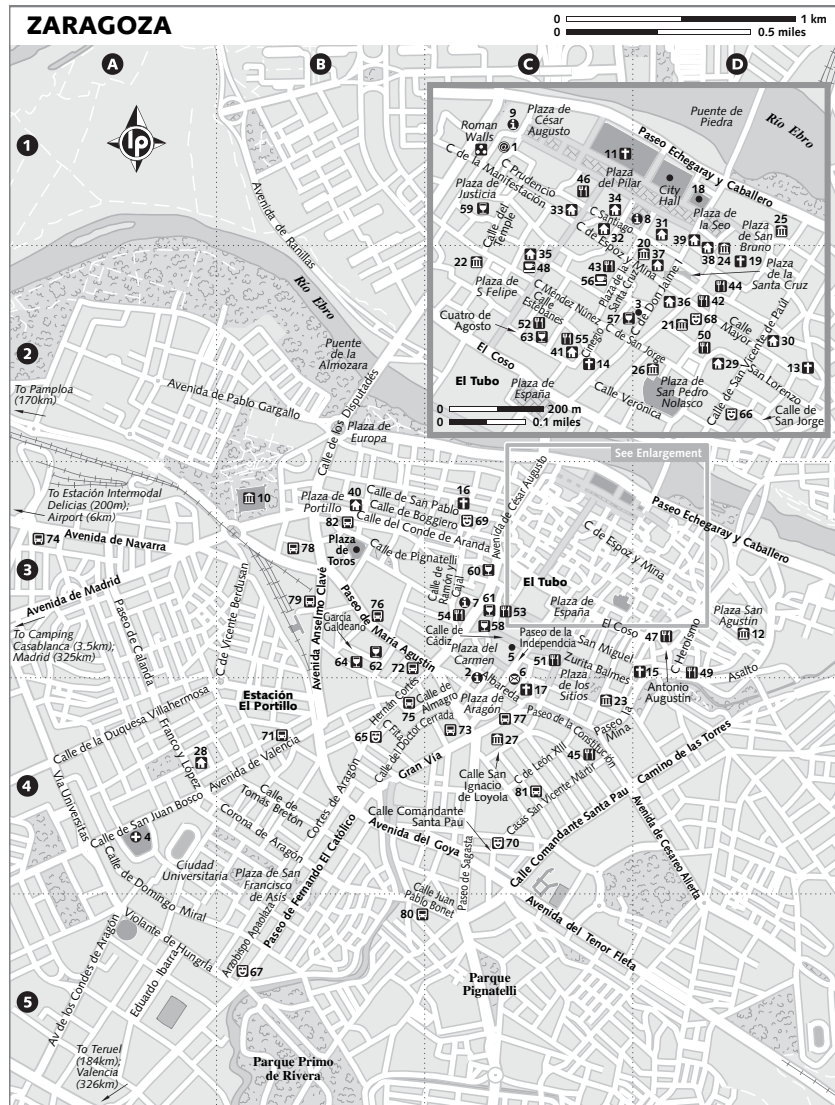
around the remaining pillar, followed by a series of ever-more-grandiose churches. This is the story behind Zaragoza's enormous **basilica** (☎ 976397497; ☎ 6.45am-9pm), designed in 1681 by Felipe Sánchez y Herrera and greatly modified in the 18th century by the heavier hand of Ventura Rodríguez. The towers were not finished until the early 20th century and are often still under scaffolding; but the roofscape transcends the gloomy interior. A splendid main dome lords it over a flock of 10 minidomes, each one encased in chunky blue, green, yellow and white tiles, creating a kind of rugged Byzantine effect. Get yourselves up to the top of the north tower (right) for the best view.

The legendary **pilar** is hidden in the Capilla Santa, inside the east end of the basilica. A tiny oval-shaped portion of the *pilar* is exposed on the chapel's outer west side. A steady stream of people (with busloads of the faithful arriving at times) line up to brush lips with its polished and seamed cheek, which even popes have air-kissed.

Hung from the northeast column of the Capilla Santa are two wickedly slim shells that were lobbed at El Pilar during the civil war. They failed to explode. A miracle said the faithful: typical Czech munitions said the more cynical.

The basilica's finest artwork is a 16th-century alabaster altarpiece by Damián Forment. It stands at the outer west wall of the choir. Goya painted *La Reina de los Mártires* (Mary, Queen of Martyrs) in a cupola above the north aisle, outside the Sacristía de la Virgen. Dulled by age and poor light it is currently being refurbished and should bring some welcome illumination when completed.

A **lift** (admission €1.50; ☎ 9.30am-2pm & 4-6pm Sat-Thu), operated by a genial attendant, whisks you most of the way up the north tower from where you climb some steps and a final steep spiral staircase to a superb viewpoint over the city. Follow the main stairs down for changing views at every turn to reach a second lift door, where you ring for service.



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BURNING FAITH

In 1484 Fernando and Isabel, the Catholic Monarchs (Los Reyes Católicos), began to extend the nascent Spanish Inquisition into Aragón. Their chief honcho Fray Tomás de Torquemada (see also the boxed text, p202) appointed two Dominicans as his local inquisitors, Gaspar Jugler and the young Canon of Zaragoza's cathedral, Pedro Arbués. Both men could smell the smoke and on 10 May of that year Jugler officiated at the first auto-da-fé (trial by fire) in Aragón. It took place in the cathedral, but resulted in the bloodless reconciliation to the faith of a handful of alleged heretics. Not to be outdone, Arbués staged a second auto-da-fé a few weeks later and managed to preach enough brimstone to condemn two men to a grisly death by fire. A few days later Gaspar Jugler died under suspicious circumstances; some believe that he was poisoned. Public repugnance at the autos-da-fé was so fierce that the Inquisition was stalled in Aragón for nearly two years, until in September 1485 Arbués was assassinated in front of the cathedral's altar. Ironically, this increased the public's taste for burning flesh. The flames rose, the Inquisition prospered, and Arbués is now a much-revered saint.

LA LONJA

Now an **exhibition hall** (☎ 976 39 72 39; admission free; ☹ 10am-2pm & 5-9pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), this plain but finely proportioned Renaissance-style building, the second building east of the basilica, was constructed in the 16th century as a trading exchange. The coloured medallions on its exterior depict kings of Aragón and other historical personages.

MUSEO DEL FORO DE CAESARAUGUSTA

The rather out of place trapezoid building on Plaza de la Seo is the entrance to an excellent reconstruction of part of Roman Caesaraugusta's **forum** (☎ 976 39 97 52; Plaza de la Seo 2; admission €2; ☹ 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), now well below ground level.

The remains of porticoes, shops, a great *cloaca* (sewer) system, and a limited collection of artefacts dating from between 14 BC and about AD 15 are on display. Sections of lead pipes used to channel water to the city demonstrate the Romans' genius for engineering. An interesting audiovisual show, presented on the hour in Spanish, breathes life into things and audioguides are available.

LA SEO

Dominating the eastern end of Plaza del Pilar is the Catedral de San Salvador, also known as **La Seo** (☎ 976 29 12 38; Plaza de la Seo; admission €2; ☹ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Fri, 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Fri, 10am-1pm & 4-6pm Sat, 10am-noon Sun Oct-Mar). Entry is at the eastern end.

La Seo, built between the 12th and 17th centuries, displays a fabulous spread of architectural styles from Romanesque to baroque.

It stands on the site of Islamic Zaragoza's main mosque (which in turn stood upon the temple of the Roman forum). The northwest façade is a Mudéjar masterpiece, deploying classic dark brickwork and colourful ceramic decoration in eye-pleasing geometric patterns. All the chapels are framed by beautiful stonework and ring the changes from the foggy gloom of St Mark's to the glorious Renaissance façade of the central Christ Chapel and the 15th-century high altarpiece in polychrome alabaster.

La Seo's **Museo de Tapices** (admission €2; ☹ 10am-2pm & 4-6pm or 7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) has a large collection of 14th- to 17th-century Flemish and French tapestries.

Museo del Teatro de Caesaraugusta

Discovered during the excavation of a building site in 1972, the ruins of Zaragoza's Roman theatre are the focus of this interesting **museum** (☎ 976 20 50 88; Calle de San Jorge 12; admission €3; ☹ 10am-9pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), opened in 2003. Although the ruins aren't particularly impressive, great efforts have been made to help visitors reconstruct the edifice's former splendour, including evening projections of a virtual performance on the stage (Friday and Saturday only; consult the museum for times). The exhibit culminates with a boardwalk tour through the theatre itself.

Other Roman Remains

Just across Plaza de San Bruno from La Seo is the absorbing **Museo del Puerto Fluvial** (☎ 976 39 31 57; Plaza de San Bruno 8; admission €2; ☹ 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) which displays the Roman city's river-port installations. There's a

quaint but enjoyable audiovisual programme every half-hour. The **Museo de las Termas Públicas** (☎ 976 29 72 79; Calle San Juan y San Pedro 3-7; admission €2; ☹ 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) houses the old Roman baths.

Aljafería

Islamic Spain makes its mark at the **Aljafería** (☎ 976 28 96 84; Calle de los Diputados; adult/student & pensioner/under 12yr €3/11/free, Sun free; ☹ 10am-2pm Sat-Wed, 4-6.30pm Mon-Wed & Fri & Sat Nov-Mar, 10am-2pm Sat-Wed, 4.30-8pm Fri-Wed Apr-Jun & Sep-Oct, daily Jul & Aug), the country's finest Islamic-era edifice outside Andalucía, though it's not in the league of Granada's Alhambra or Córdoba's Mezquita. It's a half-hour's noisy walk west from Plaza del Pilar or a 10-minute ride on bus 32 or 36 from Plaza de España.

The Aljafería was built as a pleasure palace for Zaragoza's Muslim rulers, chiefly in the 11th century. From the 12th century Zaragoza's Christian rulers made alterations, and in the 1490s the Catholic Monarchs, Fernando and Isabel, tacked on their own palace. Later the Aljafería served as a hospital and barracks, when it was allowed to decay. From the 1940s to 1990s restoration was carried out, and in 1987 Aragón's regional parliament, the Cortes de Aragón, was established here.

Inside the main gate, cross the rather dull introductory courtyard into a second, the **Patio de Santa Isabel**, once the central courtyard of the Islamic palace. Here you are confronted to north and south by the exquisite interwoven arches typical of the opulence and geometric mastery of Islamic architecture. The innermost hall at the northern end was the throne room, now with reproductions of its delicate plaster and alabaster wall carvings. Also opening off the northern porch is a small, octagonal **oratorio** (prayer room), with a magnificent horseshoe-arched doorway leading into its *mihrab* (prayer niche indicating the direction of Mecca). The finely chiselled floral motifs, Arabic inscriptions from the Quran and pleasingly simple cupola are impressive examples of Islamic art.

Moving upstairs, you pass through rooms of the **Palacio Mudéjar**, added by Christian rulers in the 12th to 14th centuries, then to the Catholic Monarchs' **palace**, which, as though by way of riposte to the Muslim finery below, contains some exquisite Mudéjar coffered ceilings, especially that of the **Salón del Trono** (Throne Room).

Churches

Several other Zaragoza churches are well worth a look. The **Iglesia de San Pablo** (cnr Calles de San Pablo & Miguel de Ara; ☹ 9am-1pm) has a delicate 14th-century Mudéjar tower and an early-16th-century *retablo* (altarpiece) by Damián Forment. The **Iglesia de La Magdalena**, **Iglesia de San Miguel** and **Iglesia de San Gil** also boast fine 14th- and 15th-century Mudéjar towers – at their best when floodlit at night. The **Iglesia de Santa Engracia**, built in the 16th-century, has an underground crypt containing the bones of the eponymous saint and other Zaragozaan early Christian martyrs.

Museums

MUSEO DE ZARAGOZA

Devoted to archaeology and fine arts, the **city museum** (☎ 976 22 21 81; Plaza de los Sitios 6; admission free; ☹ 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) displays artefacts from prehistoric to Muslim times, and an important collection of Gothic art, as well as a dozen Goya paintings.

MUSEO CAMÓN AZNAR

This eclectic **collection** (☎ 976 39 73 28; Calle de Espoz y Mina 23; admission €1, ID required; ☹ 9am-2pm & 6-9pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun) of Spanish art through the ages features a room of Goya etchings (on the top floor) and half a dozen paintings attributed to El Greco. It spreads over the three storeys of the Palacio de los Pardo, a Renaissance mansion.

PATIO DE LA INFANTA

This **exhibition** (☎ 976 76 76 76; Calle San Ignacio de Loyola 16; admission free; ☹ 8.30am-2.30pm & 6-9pm Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm & 6-9pm Sat) is the Ibercaja bank's collection of Goya paintings, displayed in a lovely Plateresque courtyard.

MUSEO DE PABLO GARGALLO

Within the 17th-century Palacio Argillo is a representative **display** (☎ 976 72 49 23; Plaza de San Felipe 3; admission free; ☹ 10am-2pm & 5-9pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) of sculptures by Pablo Gargallo (1881-1934), probably Aragón's most gifted artistic son after Goya.

CENTRO DE HISTORIA DE ZARAGOZA

The old convent of San Agustín (only the neoclassical façade remains) is the site of this **museum** (Zaragoza History Centre; ☎ 976 20 56 40; Plaza San Agustín 2; adult/child €3.25/free; ☹ 10am-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun). Each of the eight exhibit rooms

focuses on a different aspect of the city's heritage, from trade and transport to popular celebrations. Of particular interest is a series of models depicting Zaragoza's physical transformation through four key phases of its development. Take bus 22 going east along El Coso or bus 30 at Plaza de España.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Zaragoza's biggest event is the **Fiestas del Pilar**, a week of full-on celebrations (religious and otherwise) peaking on 12 October, the **Día de Nuestra Señora del Pilar**. On 5 March, Zaragozans celebrate **Cincomarzada**, commemorating the 1838 ousting of Carlist troops by a feisty populace. Thousands head for Parque Tío Jorge, north of the Ebro, for concerts, games, grilled sausage and wine.

SLEEPING

At the time of writing, there was no camping ground operating in the area, a situation that seems likely to continue in spite of talk of a site being planned. In the run-up to Expo 2008, Zaragoza stages quite a number of trade fairs, during which central hotels are often block-booked.

Budget

Albergue Juvenil Baltasar Gracián (☎ 976 30 66 92; Franco y López 4; HI ID under 26yr/other incl breakfast €8.60/11.55) Doubling as a student residence during the school term, this HI hostel has room for 50 in quads. It's a 2km hike from El Tubo, or a quick ride on bus 22 or 38.

Hostal El Descanso (☎ 976 29 17 41; San Lorenzo 2; s/d without bathroom €14/24) This decent budget choice faces a pretty plaza near the Roman theatre. It's family-run and has 20 clean, bright rooms but fills up quickly.

Pensión Holgado (☎ 976 43 20 74; Calle del Conde de Aranda 126; s/d €27.90/39.15, without bathroom €17.70/29.90) An excellent budget option about 1km from Plaza de España and near the Aljafería. There are plenty of simple, well-tended rooms on three floors and it usually has vacancies. Bus 22 (€1, eight minutes) runs frequently from the junction of El Coso and Plaza de España to Plaza del Portillo, opposite Holgado.

Hostal San Jorge (☎ 976 39 74 62; Calle Mayor 4; s/d €31/39) Prices go up and down a bit but are mainly good-value for the simple but decent-sized rooms at this friendly place that also has a small café.

Other decent, reasonably priced places with fairly basic facilities in or near the old city:

Pensión La Peña (☎ 976 29 90 89; Cinegio 3; s/d without bathroom €12/24)

Hostal Navarra (☎ 976 29 16 84; Calle de San Vicente de Paúl 30; s/d €27/35)

Midrange & Top End

Most of these places offer parking for approximately €10 per day.

Hostal Plaza (☎ 976 29 48 30; www.hostalplaza-santiago.com; Plaza del Pilar 14; s/d €35/50; 📍) Some of the bright and neatly trimmed rooms look directly out onto Plaza del Pilar. Singles are small but adequate.

Hotel Rio Arga (☎ 976 39 90 65; www.hotelriorga.es; Contamina 20; s/d €37/54; 📍 🚰 🚿) In a quiet location, yet ideal for all central needs, there are comfy rooms here.

Hotel Las Torres (☎ 976 39 42 50; Plaza del Pilar 11; s/d €44/59) A great location on the plaza makes up slightly for fairly ordinary rooms here.

Hotel Sauce (☎ 976 20 50 50; www.hotelsauce.com; Calle de Espoz y Mina 33; s/d €48/91; 📍) This good-value, small hotel has modern but cosy rooms; bookings are advisable for weeknights.

Hotel Tibur (☎ 976 20 20 00; www.hoteltibur.com in Spanish; Plaza de la Seo 2; s/d €61/70; 📍 🚰 🚿) Business-standard rooms at this pleasant hotel, right on Plaza de la Seo, have minibars and plenty of space.

Hotel El Príncipe (☎ 976 29 41 01; www.hotel-el-principe.com; Calle Santiago 12; s/d €110/128; 📍 🚰 🚿) Just south of Plaza del Pilar, this Best Western hotel has fairly sleek modern comforts to go with the swish in-house restaurant and bar. Rates drop by half outside the high season.

Other well-equipped lodgings in the city centre:

Hotel Via Romana (☎ 976 39 82 15; Calle de Don Jaime I 54-56; s/d €57.80/82.40)

Hotel Inca (☎ 976 39 00 91; Calle de la Manifestación 33; s/d €141.25/160.50; 📍 🚰 🚿)

EATING Tapas

The narrow streets and small plazas south of La Seo harbour some great tapas bars – ideal for lunchtime snacking or cooling off with a beer on a warm evening. On the cosy Plaza de Santa Marta, Carvercería Marpy and Casa Vitorinos II have bar-top treats in plenty, while Casa Domino offers hams and *montados* (toasted baguette slices topped with Cabrales cheese, among other tantalising spreads).

La Calzorras (Plaza de San Pedro Nolasco) With accompanying trees and fountain in the plaza, has tempting larger-than-tapas specialities for around €4.

There's another string of tapas bars towards the southern end of Calle Heroísmo (most open until midnight), including the atmospheric **Gran Taberna Pantagruel** (Calle Heroísmo 35), with some delicious pâté. Around El Tubo, **Taberna Doña Casta** (☎ 976 20 58 52; Calle Estébanes 6; 📍 Tue-Sun) does filling, simple tapas. Still more snacking options cram Calle Moneva, off Calle de Zurita east of Paseo de la Independencia, where El Calamar Bravo churns out the fried squid sandwiches (€2.30) and La Mejillonería goes through buckets of mussels (€2.30) nightly.

Cafés & Restaurants

There are well-placed cafés along Plaza del Pilar facing the basilica that offer ordinary fare, with *menús del día* (daily set menus) for around €7/8.50 indoors/outdoors.

Churrería La Fama (☎ 976 39 37 54; Calle Prudencio 25; 3 churros €1.50) La Fama is tucked away off Calle de Alfonso 1 and is a good spot for fresh *churros* (long, deep-fried doughnuts) and chocolate to go with morning coffee.

Gran Café de Zaragoza (Calle de Alfonso I 25; breakfast from €2.50) This long-established and still elegant salon is a good place for morning coffee or breakfast.

La Miguería (☎ 976 20 07 36; Calle Estébanes 4; migas €3.80, salads €7) There's filling Aragonese quick-fix food such as *migas* (breadcrumbs drenched in olive oil, and topped with sausage, egg and pineapple) at this popular place; ideal for an evening snack.

El Rincón Criollo (☎ 976 39 92 86; Antonio Agustín 1; mains €6; 📍 8pm-midnight Tue-Sun) South American specialities are the thing in this funky little place. Treats, such as fajitas and *hallacas* (a meaty stew wrapped in banana leaves) come from Venezuela, Colombia, Peru and Mexico.

Mariscos y Chacinas Azoque (☎ 976 22 03 20; Azoque 37; dishes €7-18) There's a pleasant Andalusian flavour to this fine restaurant where a cluster of dangling *jamóns* and a bar-top spread of seafood greet you. Relish the selection of *gamba blanca* (white shrimps), *ostras* (oysters) and *pulpo Gallego* (Galician octopus) at the heart of landlocked Zaragoza.

Casa Juanico (☎ 976 39 72 52; Plaza de la Santa Cruz 21; meals €9.50-19; 📍) Tapas also tempt at this

excellent place where you can enjoy everything from best *jamón* (ham), *chipirones* (small squid) or a hefty *chuletón* (T-bone steak). It does a nice Montesierra Crianza for €9.80, among a good wine list.

Churrasco (☎ 976 22 91 60; Calle de Francisco Vitoria 19; menú €14, mains €19; 📍) It's meat eaters' heaven at this long-established place with *jamón Ibérico* (Iberian ham) a speciality, although there's decent fish and seafood as well. A good bet is the day's *centros* (shared platters of ham, squid and other treats).

Perrexita (☎ 976 43 83 16; Calle de Ramón y Cajal 43; mains €12.50-20) Dream of cooler climes in the smart landscape of this stylish Basque restaurant that sprinkles a few *pintxos modernos* (tapas) along the bar while you consider classic dishes such as *bacalao y pil pil* (cod in natural sauce).

DRINKING

Calle de Espoz y Mina and Calle Mayor, a stone's throw from Plaza del Pilar, have plenty of varied bars from which to choose. There's a satisfying buzz round the Plaza del Carmen area in the newer part of town where a string of café-bars and restaurants keeps things lively day and night.

Exo (☎ 609 63 98 11; Plaza del Carmen 11) You don't need to be as sleek and cool as the bar staff or as shiny as the modernist décor at this smart, but easy-going, bar. There's a great friendly mood to go with the background Spanish rock.

Novo (☎ 616 48 74 24; Calle Azoque 64) This is another smooth, easy-listening bar with lots of subtle lighting and comfy seating.

Café Praga (☎ 976 20 02 51; Plaza de la Santa Cruz 13) One of Zaragoza's favourites. Praga has several landscapes; you can cool nicely on the plaza terrace, relax quietly in the upper bar or enjoy the occasional live music in the main bar.

Rock & Blues Café (Cuatro de Agosto 5-7; 📍 from 5pm) Rock 'n' roll paraphernalia and homage to the likes of the mighty Jimi Hendrix set the tone for the music and style of this long-standing favourite, that stages live gigs midweek.

Bar Corto Maltés (Calle del Temple 23) and **La Cucaracha** (Calle del Temple 25) are among a string of nicely grubby and rowdy disco-pubs favoured by Zaragoza's lively student crowd for postmidnight action. **Chastón** (Plaza Ariño 1) is a relaxed little bar playing recorded jazz.

There are a couple of friendly gay clubs just south of Paseo de María Augustin. **Paradys** (García Galdeano 6) is a friendly, stylish place, where red satin curtains separate the bar from the crowded dance floor. Across the street is the friendly, and lesbian-friendly, **Y Que** (García Galdeano 13). Closer to the old city, **Mick Havanna** (Calle de Ramón Pignatelli 7; ☎ from 5pm) is a quiet, chatty place, frequented by a mature crowd.

ENTERTAINMENT

The tourist office puts out the bimonthly *Agenda Cultural*, covering theatre, art, music and film events.

Filmoteca de Zaragoza (☎ 976 72 18 53; Plaza San Carlos 4; screenings €2; ☎ Wed-Sat night) One of the few cinemas showing films in their original language (subtitled in Spanish).

La Casa del Loco (☎ 976 39 67 71; Calle Mayor 10; cover for live music €6-8; ☎ from 9.30pm Thu-Sat) Hugely popular, especially on Thursday nights when there's a regular live concert with mainly Spanish pop and rock bands. Friday and Saturday night, it's still a lively late-night venue.

Oasis (☎ 976 43 95 34; Calle de Boggiero 28; cover €10; ☎ from midnight Fri & Sat) A few streets west of the old centre, Oasis began life long ago as a variety theatre. It's currently going strong as a disco with good techno house, but with a bit of anything goes, including drag queen extravaganzas.

El Cantor de Jazz (☎ 976 23 89 24; Calle Dato 18) This popular place pays heavy tribute, by its name alone, to the first film talkie. A nice selection of jazzy instruments is part of the décor and the sounds are a mix of blues, R&B and even a bit of jazz, with occasional live turns.

For house sessions at weekends, check out **Roxy Club Zgz** (Calle Comandante Santa Pau 4; ☎ 2am-8am Fri & Sat), then around dawn head for **Kitsch Experimental Club** (☎ 976 46 74 40; Paseo de Fernando El Católico 70; cover incl drink €8; ☎ 6am-10am Sat & Sun), where they're still shakin' well past breakfast time.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

The **Zaragoza airport** (☎ 976 71 23 00) has a daily direct **Ryanair** (www.ryanair.com) flight to/from Stansted airport. Ryanair also flies direct to Zaragoza from Milan and there are Iberia flights to/from Madrid daily, to Barcelona daily except Sunday and to Paris and Frankfurt most days. Air Europa flies to/from Palma de Mallorca.

Bus

At the time of writing, Zaragoza's several bus lines were still scattered all over the city. The ongoing promise that they will all be based adjacent to the Estación Intermodal Delicias train station may well be realised by Expo 2008, but nobody's holding their breath on this one, so entrenched is the system. Currently, the most useful bus station is **Agreda Automóvil** (☎ 976 22 93 43; www.agredasa.com in Spanish; Paseo de María Agustín 7), where **ALSA** (☎ 902 42 22 42; www.alsa.es) operates at least 15 buses a day to/from Madrid (€11.75, 3¼ hours) and Barcelona (€11.10, 3¼ hours), and **Alosa** (☎ 976 22 93 43; www.alosa.es in Spanish) runs at least eight buses to/from Huesca (€5, one hour), half of which continue to Jaca (€10.40, 2¼ hours). Other services operating from here include Linecar (Soria, León), Hife (Valencia, Tarragona) and Suroeste (Badajoz, Mérida).

Other bus stations and the destinations they serve include the following:

Abasa & Agreda Automóvil (☎ 976 55 45 88; www.agredasa.com in Spanish; Avenida de Valencia 20) Destinations: Alcañiz, Belchite, Cariñena, Daroca, Fraga, Lleida (Lérida) and Muel.

Autobuses Conda (☎ 976 33 33 72; Avenida de Navarra 1) Destinations: Pamplona, San Sebastián and Tudela.

Automóviles Zaragoza (☎ 976 21 93 20; www.automovileszaragoza.com in Spanish; Calle de Almagro 18) Destinations: Calatayud and Monasterio de Piedra.

Fuendetodos Buses depart from in front of the Museo Pablo Serrano, Paseo de María Agustín 20. Destination: Andorra.

Samar Buil (☎ 976 43 43 04; Calle de Borao 13)

Sanguesa In the car park below Estación El Portillo, Avenida Anselmo Clavé. Destination: Sos del Rey Católico.

Tezasa (☎ 976 27 61 79; Calle Juan Pablo Bonet 13)

Destinations: Burgos, Logroño, Teruel and Valencia.

Therpara (☎ 976 22 57 23; Calle del General Suevo 22) Destinations: Soria and Tarazona.

Viaci Viajes (☎ 976 28 31 00; Calle de Pignatelli 120) Destinations: Bilbao, León, Oviedo, Santander, Santiago de Compostela and Vitoria.

Train

Zaragoza's futuristic and rather impersonal **Estación Intermodal Delicias** (Calle Ríoja 33) was opened in 2003. There is a very helpful tourist office at the station. As with other major stations in Spain, luggage is scanned at platform entries.

Services include Madrid (€39.60, 1¼ hours, approximately 10 daily), Barcelona (€36.50, one to 4½ hours, approximately 12 daily), Valencia (€20.40, 5½ hours, two daily), Huesca

(€4.75, one hour, approximately four daily), Jaca (€9.90, 3½ hours, three daily) and Teruel (€11.35, three hours, three daily).

GETTING AROUND

Agreda Automóvil (☎ 976 55 45 88) runs airport buses (€1.80) to/from Paseo Pamplona via Plaza San Francisco and Gran Via 4 (the stop for municipal bus 30) that link with flights.

Most city bus routes (€0.80) go through Plaza de España on the southern edge of El Tubo. Bus 51 to/from Estación Intermodal Delicias begins/ends at Paseo de la Constitución, one block from Plaza de Aragón. A taxi to/from the station is about €17 to €20.

SOUTH OF ZARAGOZA

The following places can all be reached by bus, but having your own transport is advantageous.

Muel & Cariñena

The N330 south towards Teruel passes through Campo de Cariñena, Aragón's premier wine-producing region. The **Ermita de la Fuente** in Muel, 19km before Cariñena, has some fine paintings of saints by the young Goya.

Bodegas (cellars) dot the main road into Cariñena, and in town there's a **Museo del Vino** (☎ 902 19 07 13; Calle de la Platera 7; admission €2; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Fri, 11am-2pm & 5-8pm Sat, 11am-2pm Sun) housed in an early-20th-century warehouse.

Hostal Iiturgis (☎ 976 62 04 92; Plaza de Ramón y Cajal 1; s/d €30/35) is a refurbished 17th-century home that is a comfy option for an overnight stay.

Fuendetodos

Some of the greatest start small. One such was Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes,

born in this insignificant hamlet, 24km east of Cariñena, in 1746. The **Casa Natal de Goya** (☎ 976 14 38 30; Zuloaga 3; admission incl Museo del Grabado de Goya €1.80; ☎ both 11am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun) stayed in his family until the early 20th century, when the artist Ignacio Zuloaga found and bought it. Partly destroyed during the civil war, the three-storey abode, which is less humble than legends make out, has since been restored. Down the road, the **Museo del Grabado de Goya** contains a seminal collection of the artist's engravings.

Samar Buil buses leave Zaragoza for Fuendetodos (€5, one hour) at 10am and 6pm Monday to Saturday.

Belchite

The twin towns of Belchite are perhaps the most eloquent reminders of the destruction wrought in the Spanish Civil War. The ruins of the old town, which have been replaced by an adjacent new village, stand as a silent memorial to a brutal tug-of-war for possession between Republican and Nationalist forces during the war. Abasa buses (€3.70, 45 minutes) arrive from Zaragoza three times daily.

A few kilometres west of Belchite stands the 18th-century baroque **Santuario de Nuestra Señora del Pueyo**.

WEST OF ZARAGOZA

Tarazona

pop 10,500 / elevation 480m

The quiet, serpentine streets of Tarazona's old town are an evocative reminder of the layout of a medieval Spanish town. The town lies on the N122. It has more than enough monuments to repay a stop, while just wandering the streets is a pleasure.

DANCING IN THE DESERT

You don't really want to linger in the relentless flatlands between Zaragoza and Valencia, but the rural town of Fraga might stop you in your tracks at **Florida 135** (☎ 974 47 02 50; www.florida135.com in Spanish; Calle Sotet 2; admission around €12; ☎ from 11.30am Sat), the temple of Spanish techno. The windowless 3000-sq-metre, graffiti-strewn space is just the most recent incarnation of a dance hall that's been going since 1942. Busloads of clubbers arrive for the club's main Saturday-night sessions, although there are sometimes sessions on Wednesday and Friday. Check the website for the monthly programme. One night back in 1994 the action boiled over to the desert, giving birth to the **Monegros Desert Festival** (www.monegrosfestival.com), formerly called the Groove Parade. Dozens of Spanish and internationally renowned DJs and bands demonstrate their skills on various stages at the event, which takes place in mid-July at Finca Les Peñetes, about 18km west of Fraga. Recent festivals have seen up to 30,000 people, three times the population of Fraga. Headliners in 2006 were The Prodigy.

The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 976 64 00 74; www.tarazona.org; Plaza San Francisco 1; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 4.30-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1.30pm & 4-6pm or 7pm Sat & Sun) has lots of material on the town and area. Most leaflets have English versions.

SIGHTS

There are useful multilingual (including English) interpretive panels all over town, although a few have been defaced, sadly.

Tarazona's **cathedral** is a fetching concoction of Romanesque, Gothic, Mudéjar and Renaissance styles. It has been closed for restoration since 1997. At the time of writing there was no certain date of reopening. Considering that its foundations are on fairly desiccated soil it's hardly surprising that major stabilisation has been required.

Nearby, the octagonal **Plaza de Toros Vieja** (Old Bullring) is made up of 32 houses built in the 1790s as a private housing initiative complete with ringside window seats.

A signposted walking route takes you around the twisting cobbled ways of the medieval 'high part' of the town, north of Río Queiles. Most of the main monuments cannot be entered but there's enough interest in the streets and buildings themselves. From all around you can see the slender Mudéjar tower of the **Iglesia de Santa María Magdalena**. The **Palacio Episcopal** (Bishop's Palace), next door, was a Islamic fortified palace. Tarazona's medieval **judería** (Jewish area) is exceptionally well preserved. The high balconied projections of the 'hanging houses' are remarkable.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hostal Palacete de los Arcedianos (☎ 976 64 23 03; www.palacetearedianos.com in Spanish; Plaza de los Arcedianos 1; s/d €25/35) Up in the *judería* this good budget choice has unfussy, comfy rooms in a pleasant family-run place.

Hostal Santa Agueda (☎ 976 64 00 54; www.santaagueda.com; Calle Visconti 26; s/d from €59/69.50; ☎ ☎) Just off Plaza San Francisco, this 200-year-old home has lovely rooms and a charming proprietor. The little breakfast room is a glorious shrine to Raquel Meller, Aragón's queen of popular song during the early 20th century.

Hotel Condes de Visconti (☎ 976 64 49 08; www.condesdesvisconti.com in Spanish; Calle Visconti 15; r incl breakfast from €72; 📍) Beautiful rooms, mostly with colourful individual décor, plus a preserved Renaissance patio, make this one-time 16th-century palace a choice stopover.

Cafetería Casino (☎ 976 64 22 17; Plaza La Seo 1) Located a short way along the riverbank from the tourist office is this friendly bar that does tasty tapas and other snacks.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Up to six **Therpasa** (☎ 976 64 11 00; Avenida de Navarra 17) buses run daily to/from Zaragoza (1 ¼ hours) and Soria (one hour). **Autobuses Conda** (☎ 948 82 03 42; Parque de la Estación) goes to Tudela. Both stops are a minute's walk from Plaza de San Francisco.

Around Tarazona

Backed by the often snowcapped Sierra del Moncayo the fortified **Monasterio de Veruela** (☎ 976 64 90 25; admission €2; ☎ 10.30am-6.30pm Wed-Mon), founded in the 12th century, looks more like a Castilian castle than a monastery. The rather stern Gothic church is flanked by a charming cloister, which has a lower, Gothic level surmounted by a Renaissance upper gallery. There is a small wine museum within the complex. The monastery is 13km southeast of Tarazona and 1km from Vera de Moncayo. Just two of Therpasa's daily Zaragoza-Tarazona buses stop in Vera itself; the others stop at the Vera turn-off on the N122, 4km from the monastery. Having your own transport is advantageous.

In Vera, accommodation includes **Camping Vera de Moncayo** (☎ 976 64 91 54; sites per person/tent/car €3/3/3; ☎ mid-Jun-mid-Oct) and **La Casa del Carpintero** (☎ 976 64 65 65; Calle Moncayo 6; r €34), a charming country home.

Those with a vehicle can visit the **Parque Natural del Moncayo**, with several walking trails on the flank of the 2300m-plus Sierra del Moncayo.

Calatayud

pop 17,300 / elevation 530m

At the dusty core of Calatayud, just off the Zaragoza-Madrid A2 highway, is an atmospheric centre of narrow streets and enough points of interest to merit a stop. Head for the labyrinthine old town and search out the Mudéjar towers of the **Colegiata de Santa María**, **Iglesia de San Andrés** and the 14th-century **Iglesia de San Pedro** (Rúa de Eduardo Dato), which looks as though it's about to topple into the street. The baroque **Parroquia de San Juan El Real** (Calle Valentin Gómez 3) features four Goya paintings of the fathers of the church, housed in the angles below its dome.

Places to stay include the good budget option **Pensión La Perla** (☎ 976 88 13 40; Calle de San Antón 17; s/d with shared bathroom €14/24), with big sparkling rooms, and the charming **Hospedería El Pilar** (☎ 976 89 70 20; www.hospederiaelpilar.com in Spanish; Calle Baltasar Gracián 15; s/d €25/45), in a restored 17th-century inn near the Colegiata de Santa María. Both have restaurants serving all meals.

Calatayud's bus station is in a building off the central Plaza del Fuerte. Automóviles Zaragoza runs four or more buses daily to/from Zaragoza (€5.90, one hour), while ALSA runs at least three buses to/from Madrid. Three trains run to/from Zaragoza, one of which continues to/from Madrid.

Monasterio de Piedra

This one-time Cistercian **monastery** (both park & monastery adult/child €11/7.50; ☎ park 9am-dusk, monastery 10.15am-1.15pm & 3.15-7.15pm), 28km southwest of Calatayud, dates from the 13th century but was abandoned in the 1830s and then sold into private hands in 1840. Subsequent owners laid out the ground as a formal wooded park full of caves and waterfalls, the latter fed by Río Piedra. There's even a fish farm that was set up in the 1860s, the first in Spain. Incorporated into the complex is the **Hotel Monasterio de Piedra** (☎ 976 84 90 11; www.monasterio.piedra.com in Spanish; s/d €73/135).

In the lakeside village of **Nuévalos**, 3km north, a good sleeping option is **Hostal Las Rumbas** (☎ 976 84 91 12; www.lasrumbas.com in Spanish; s/d €30/46) with pleasant balconies, some overlooking the lake. The hotel has a restaurant.

On Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday (or daily in summer), Automóviles Zaragoza runs a 9am bus from Calle de Almagro 18 in Zaragoza to the monastery (€10.60, 2½ hours) via Calatayud, returning at 5pm.

THE NORTH (THE PYRENEES)

As you head north from Zaragoza's parched flatlands, a hint of green tinges the landscape and there is a growing anticipation of very big mountains somewhere ahead. And they are big. The Aragonese Pyrenees boast several peaks well over the 3000m mark and they are the most dramatic and most rewarding on the Spanish side of the range. Viewed from the south their crenellated ridges fill the northern

horizon wherever you turn and their valleys offer magnificent scenery, several decent ski resorts and great walking. There are many ways to approach the area, with several routes clawing up through the valleys and some crossing into France.

Activities

SKIING

Aragón has plenty of ski slopes in the Pyrenees, with resorts at Cerler, Formigal, Panticosa, Astún and Candanchú. Most accommodation in and near the resorts offers packages that include ski passes and some meals.

WALKING

Aragón's mountains are more popular in summer than in winter. Some 6000km of long-distance trails (Grandes Recorridos; GRs) and short-distance trails (Pequeños Recorridos; PRs) are now marked in all parts of Aragón. The coast-to-coast GR11 traverses the most spectacular Aragón Pyrenees, but there are plenty of other routes.

The best time for walking is mid-June to early September, though the more popular parks and paths can become crowded in mid-summer. The weather can be unpredictable at any time of the year, so walkers should be prepared for extreme conditions at all times. Before setting out check the latest weather reports. Carry as much water as you can and know where there are water sources along the route. Check before setting out, especially early in the season, that paths and tracks are in safe condition after winter storms and spring thaws. Know exactly where there is shelter and consider carrying a light bivvy sack.

This chapter mentions several mountain *refugios* (refuges). Some are staffed and serve meals, while others are empty shacks providing shelter only. At holiday times staffed *refugios* are often full, so unless you have booked ahead, be prepared to camp. The **Federación Aragonesa de Montañismo** (FAM; ☎ 976 22 79 71; www.fam.es in Spanish; Calle Albareda 7, Zaragoza) can provide some information, and a FAM card will get you substantial discounts on *refugio* stays.

The Aragonese publisher Prames produces some of the best maps for walkers in the Aragón Pyrenees. Editorial Alpina maps are an acceptable substitute, although not comprehensive in some instances.

HUESCA

pop 54,634 / elevation 488m

Huesca has a rough-edged charm and its old centre retains some appeal. Without any visible backdrop of great peaks, however, the town is more of a busy commercial centre than a launch pad for the big hills, although it's worth a stopover and has plenty facilities.

Orientation & Information

The old part of Huesca sits on a slight rise, with the bus and train stations sharing the modern Estación Intermodal, 500m south. There's a small bank with an ATM at the station and several banks with ATMs in and around Plaza de Navarra. Street parking is metered. There is underground parking in front of the station.

Hospital General San Jorge (☎ 974 21 11 21; Avenida Martínez de Velasco)

Osc@.com (☎ 974 21 21 58; San José de Calasanz 13; per hr €2; ☎ 4pm-midnight)

Post office (Calle del Coso Alto 14)

Tourist office (☎ 974 29 21 70; www.huescatourismo.com; Plaza López Allué 1; ☎ 9am-8pm Jun-Sep, 9am-2pm & 4-8pm Oct-May) Inside the old market building. Huesca Turismo also operates an information kiosk (June to September) on Plaza de Navarra.

Sights

PLAZA DE LA CATEDRAL & AROUND

Tranquil Plaza de la Catedral, at the heart of the old town, is presided over by the venerable Gothic **cathedral** (☎ 646 79 05 16; ☎ 10.30am-1.30pm & 4-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 10.30am-1.30pm & 4-6pm Oct-Mar),

built between the 13th and 16th centuries. The richly carved main portal dates from 1300. The stately interior features a large, 16th-century alabaster *retablo* by Damián Forment. The adjoining **Museo Diocesano** (admission €2; ☎ 10.30am-1.30pm & 4-6pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-1.30pm Sat Apr-Sep, 10.30am-1.30pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar) exhibits religious art and artisanship from the Huesca diocese. The 16th-century **ayuntamiento** (town hall) across the square is another Aragonese gem of renaissance detail. A little way north, the octagonal **Museo de Huesca** (☎ 974 22 05 86; Plaza Universidad 1; admission free; ☎ 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) has a well-displayed collection covering the archaeology and art of Huesca province, including works by Goya.

IGLESIA DE SAN PEDRO EL VIEJO

Another of the city's historical and architectural gems stands 250m southeast of Plaza de la Catedral. The church of **San Pedro** (adult/child €2/1; ☎ 10am-1.30pm & 4-7.30pm Jun-Sep, 10am-1.30pm Oct-May) is a 12th-century Romanesque masterpiece. Worth a close look is its cloister, with beautiful Romanesque capitals that have been attributed to the same maestro who carved those at the Monasterio de San Juan de la Peña (p439). The fourth and fifth monarchs of Aragón, Alfonso I El Batallador (1104-34) and Ramiro II (1134-37), lie here in the Panteón Real, a chamber off San Pedro's cloister.

Tours

The **tourist office** (☎ 974 29 21 70; www.huescatourismo.com; Plaza López Allué) gives guided tours of the historic centre (adult/child €2/1) in Spanish, English and French at 11am and 5pm daily July to September, and 11am daily from Semana Santa (Easter) to June and in October.

Entertaining tours by vintage bus (adult/child €5/2.50, under 12 years free) are offered daily mid-June to September to the Castillo de Loarre (p428), Los Mallos (p428), the Sierra de la Guara, and other destinations of historical interest or natural beauty. Buses depart at 9am daily from the Estación Intermodal and return at 2.30pm. Tickets can be bought at the tourist office.

Sleeping

Camping San Jorge (☎ 974 22 74 16; www.campingsan Jorge.com in Spanish; Calle de Ricardo del Arco s/n; sites per person/tent/car €4/4/4; ☎ Apr-mid-Oct) A well-run, woodland site 1km west of the old town centre and with very good facilities. There's a

restaurant offering everything from filled baguettes to sit-down meals.

Hostal El Centro (☎ 974 22 68 23; hcentro@auna.com; Calle de Sancho Ramírez 3; s/d €28/40) This homely, welcoming place is on a narrow lane just outside the old town.

Hostal San Marcos (☎ 974 22 29 32; www.hostal sanmarcos.es in Spanish; Calle de San Orenco 10; s/d €28/49; ☎ ☎) In the heart of town, the San Marcos has 29 modern units above a popular bar.

Hostal Lizana/Hostal Lizana 2 (☎ 974 22 07 76; www.hostal-lizana.com; Plaza de Lizana 6; s/d Hostal Lizana €40/50, Hostal Lizana 2 €42/60; ☎) Facing each other across the street at the corner of a pleasant little plaza near the cathedral are these two worthwhile places with decent rooms in each.

Hotel Pedro I de Aragón (☎ 974 22 03 00; Calle del Parque 34; s/d €122/136) Overlooking leafy Parque Municipal Miguel Servet, this is the place for top-end comfort.

Eating & Drinking

Pizzeria La Giara (☎ 974 23 20 18; Calle de Argensolas; pizza €6-8.30; ☎ 8pm-midnight Thu-Tue) An unassuming, excellent place where delicious pizzas are baked in a wood-fired oven and topped with fresh ingredients. It also does lasagne and pasta and a selection of salads, with good Italian wines to go with it all.

Hervi (☎ 974 24 03 33; Calle Santa Paciencia 2; mains €12-20; ☎ closed Thu) A popular lunchtime scene, Hervi offers superb salads and other veggie options as well as meaty stews. There's a tasty seafood platter for two (€25).

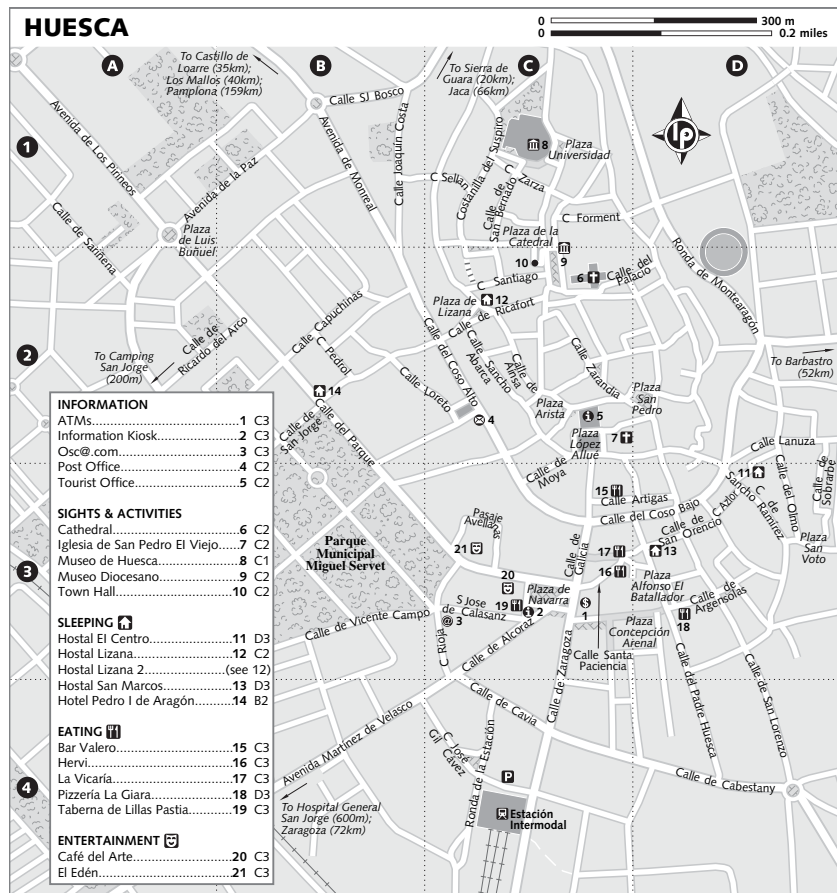
Taberna de Lillas Pastia (☎ 974 21 16 91; Plaza de Navarra 4; menú del día €30) Dress up just a little for this slightly above-itself eatery in the town's old casino. The food is excellent, however. Mains of fish and meat range from €16 to €22.

There are several rewarding tapas bars around town. A good bet is **La Vicaría** (☎ 974 22 51 95; Calle de San Orenco 9) with great fish tapas for €1 to €1.25 and *raciones* (large tapas) for €4 to €8.50. **Bar Valero** (☎ 974 22 00 29; Calle Artigas 9) is another popular place with a great selection of tapas.

Entertainment

Ask the tourist office for a copy of *Radar*, which has a rundown of the month's music, theatre and arts events, or see its website at www.huescacultura.com (in Spanish).

El Edén (☎ 974 22 76 25; Pasaje Avellanas 5; ☎ 4pm-3am) Huesca's hotspot pub hosts live rock and electronica at weekends in a big generous



space with raised seating and a happy, noisy crowd that spans the age range.

Café del Arte (☎ 974 21 16 91; Plaza de Navarra 4; ☎ closed Tue) Downstairs from the senior centre, this local alternative space hosts live music from around 10.30pm on Thursday night.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Bus company **Alosa** (☎ 974 21 07 00; www.alosa.es in Spanish) runs at least six daily buses to/from Zaragoza (€5.50, one hour), and around nine each to/from Jaca (€6, 1¼ hours), Barbastro (€3.65, 50 minutes) and Lleida (Lérida; €8.80, two hours); and five to/from Barcelona (€19.60, 4¼ hours). There's also a daily service to Benasque (€10.40) and Pamplona (€12.30).

TRAIN

Eight trains a day run to/from Zaragoza (€6.10, one hour), with one each to/from Madrid, Teruel and Valencia. Three trains daily head north to Jaca (€7.05, 2½ hours), with two continuing to Canfranc-Estación (€7.15, three hours).

AROUND HUESCA

Castillo de Loarre

The monolithic **Castillo de Loarre** (☎ 974 38 26 27; guided tour €2; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Tue-Sun Jan-mid-Mar, 10am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun mid-Mar-Jun & Sep-mid-Oct, 10am-8pm Jul & Aug) stands brooding above the southern plains across which Muslim raiders once rode. Raised in the 11th century by Sancho III of Navarra and Sancho Ramírez of Aragón, its resemblance to a crusader castle has some resonance with those times.

A labyrinth of dungeons, tunnels and towers, in and around the living rock, has been left in a state of partial restoration, giving it a suitably realistic atmosphere. Some parts are so dark that a torch (flashlight) would be useful. You can climb two towers for magnificent views.

If it all looks familiar, you may have seen it in the 2005 Ridley Scott film, *Kingdom of Heaven*. The medieval fortress served as a backdrop for much of the action (though the film is set in 12th-century France), and the banquet scenes were shot in the Iglesia de San Pedro.

The castle is a 5km drive, or a 2km, one-hour, uphill walk by the PR-HU105 footpath, from the village of Loarre, 35km from Huesca.

Camping Castillo de Loarre (☎ 974 38 27 22; www.campingloarre.com in Spanish; sites per person/tent/car

€2.90/2.90/2.60) is a good site located halfway from the village to the castle, accessible by road or footpath. **Hospedería de Loarre** (☎ 974 38 27 06; www.hospederiadeloarre.com; Plaza Miguel Moya; s/d incl breakfast €67/84; ☎) is a charming, small hotel occupying a converted 16th-century mansion on Loarre village square. Its restaurant offers medium-priced to expensive meals.

Two buses run to Loarre village from Huesca (€2.35, 40 minutes) Monday to Friday; there's just one bus on Saturday.

Los Mallos

After a rather unexciting patch along the Huesca-Pamplona road, you come to a dramatic area along Río Gállego north of Ayerbe. On the eastern bank, huge rock towers known as Los Mallos (Mallets) rise up – they wouldn't look out of place in the Grand Canyon and are popular with very serious rock climbers. For a closer look, head for Riglos.

ALQUÉZAR

pop 307 / elevation 670m

Heading downriver in the Alquézar region east of Huesca means **canyoning** (*descenso de barrancos* in Spanish), which involves following canyons downstream by whatever means available – walking, abseiling, jumping, swimming, even diving. The Sierra de Guara, north of the Huesca-Barbastro road is sliced through by more than 200 dramatic canyons of the Río Vero and other river systems and is Europe's prime location for the sport.

The main base is the picturesque village of Alquézar, 20km northwest of Barbastro. Alquézar is a delightful place, well worth a detour even if you don't want to get wet and wild in a canyon, although why not, while you're there? The village has winding streets that lead eventually to the pleasant Calle Nueva with a long *mirador* (viewpoint) from where there are fine views. The rocky hill on which the village stands is topped by the **Colegiata de Santa María** (☎ 974 23 10 99; admission €3; ☎ 11am-1.30pm & 4.30-7.30pm Wed-Mon Apr-Sep, 11am-1.30pm & 4-6pm Wed-Mon Oct-Mar), a large castle-monastery. Originally built as an **Alcázar** (fortress) by the Arabs in the 9th century, it was conquered around 1060 by Sancho Ramírez. Remnants of the Augustinian monastery he established here in 1099 are still visible. The columns within its delicate cloister are crowned by perfectly preserved carved capitals depicting biblical scenes, and the walls are covered with

spellbinding murals. On the upper level is a museum of sacred art. Visits are by guided tour only. The door is locked while tours are in progress; they last for about half an hour, so simply wait patiently for the next tour.

The charming **Casa Fabián** (☎ 974 31 89 13; Calle Baja 16; admission €1.50; ☎ 11am-2pm & 4-8pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 11am-2pm Tue-Sun Nov-May), a folk museum in a 17th-century house, is full of intriguing artefacts of farming and domestic life and includes an old olive-oil works, dug out of the rocky foundations.

A **tourist office** (☎ 974 31 89 40; Calle Arrabal; ☎ 10.30am-1.30pm & 4.30-8.30pm Jun-Oct, Sat, Sun & festivals only Nov-May) has useful information about the town in various languages.

Several agencies, such as the well-organised **Avalancha** (☎ 974 31 82 99; www.avalancha.org; Calle Arrabal) offer guided canyoning trips costing €39 to €45 a day per person, depending on the graded difficulty of the trip. Gear is provided and it also organises rafting, trekking and mountain climbing. The main season is mid-June to mid-September. Another good local agency is **Vertientes** (☎ 974 31 83 54; www.vertientesaventura.com; Calle San Gregorio 5) at Casa Tintorero (below).

Sleeping & Eating

Camping Alquézar (☎ 974 31 84 34; www.alquezar.com; sites per person/tent/car €3.80/3.80/3.50) Just outside the village, this camping ground also has two-to-six-person bungalows from €35 to €94. It organises canyoning guiding and equipment rental.

Casa Tintorero (☎ 974 31 83 54; www.vertientesaventura.com; Calle San Gregorio 5; bunks incl breakfast €15) This is a cheerfully run *albergue* (refuge), one of several in the village, with two-to-six-person rooms and great views from the upper floors.

Casa Jabonero (☎ 974 31 89 08; Calle Mayor; r with/without bathroom €30/25) The welcome is every bit as charming as the rooms in this *casa rural* (country house) in a Mudéjar building in the heart of the village.

Fonda Narbona (☎ 974 31 80 78; Calle Baja 19; d with/with shared bathroom €40/30; ☎ Sat & Sun only in winter) Rooms here are simple but very pleasant and the attached restaurant offers a *menú* for €13 and a heftier one for €21; enjoy them on its great terrace.

Hotel Villa de Alquézar (☎/fax 974 31 84 16; www.villadealquezar.com in Spanish; Calle Pedro Arenal Caverro 12; s/d incl breakfast €50/58; ☎) One of the best places in town with a lot of style in its large airy rooms; several rooms have great balcony views.

Getting There & Away

Autocares Cortés (☎ 974 31 15 52) runs a bus to Alquézar from Barbastro (€1.55) daily, except Sunday.

North of Alquézar, the road through Colungo to Ainsa is a delightful drive through pre-Pyrenean canyon country.

BARBASTRO & AROUND

pop 15,400 / elevation 341m

Barbastro's 350-year spell as one of Muslim Spain's most northerly outposts has left little traces today. It's a bit run-down, although the area around Plaza del Mercado has some character and the 16th-century **cathedral** boasts a main altarpiece – an incomplete, yet still stunning, work by the Renaissance master Damián Forment. Barbastro was also the birthplace of Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of the Catholic movement Opus Dei.

The **tourist office** (☎ 974 30 83 50; www.barbastro.org; Avenida de la Merced 64; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4.30-8pm Tue-Sat Sep-Jun, daily Jul & Aug), next to the bullring, is combined with a **wine museum** devoted to the local Somontano vintages. The central **Hostal Pirineos** (☎ 974 31 00 00; hspirineos@eresmas.net; Calle General Ricardos 13; s/d €40/50; ☎) has bright décor and also runs the town's best café.

Enemies riding against **Monzón** (population 14,650), 19km southeast of Barbastro, must have been hugely intimidated at sight of the formidable **castle** (☎ 974 34 90 07; admission €2; ☎ 10am-1pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sun except Sun afternoon Jul-Sep, 11.30am-1pm & 3-5pm Tue-Fri, 11.30am-1pm & 4-6pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-Jun), rising proudly above the town's jumbled streets. The Muslims built Monzón's first great fortress, later taken for Aragón by Sancho Ramírez. The Knights Templar took it over in 1143, but after the order of knights fell, the fortress decayed under several sieges in the 16th to 19th centuries. It has now been partly restored, as has the 12th-century church, the **Colegiata de Santa María del Romeral**.

Getting There & Away

Departures from Barbastro's **bus station** (☎ 974 31 12 93) most days include four buses to Barcelona; 11 to Huesca and Monzón, half of which continue to Lleida (Lérida); two to Benasque (€6.30, two hours); and one or two to Ainsa (€3.40, one hour). Several trains stop in Monzón on their way from Zaragoza to/from Lleida or Barcelona.

BENASQUE

pop 1388 / elevation 1140m

Aragón's northeastern corner is crammed with the highest and shapeliest peaks in the Pyrenees. Even in midsummer these great mountains can be capped with snow and ice. The area, much of which is protected as the Parque Natural Posets-Maladeta, offers walkers almost limitless options and climbers a wide choice of peaks. The Alpine-style nerve centre of the district is the village of Benasque (Benás in the local dialect), set in a broad, green valley with rocky mountains rising on three sides. Walkers, climbers and skiers flock here not only as a jumping-off point for mountain activities but also for a spot of after-dark bar-hopping. The narrow back streets of the village have some atmosphere, but there's a slightly hard-edged, touristy feel to the town generally.

The approach from the south suddenly jumps out at you as the A139/N260 plunges through the Congosto de Ventamillo, a narrow defile carved by the crystalline Río Ésera. There's not much quarter given by traffic in either direction. North of the defile, the village of Castejón de Sos is a paragliding centre with accommodation. For information on where to stay visit www.castejondesos.es and for paragliding outfits www.parapentepirineos.com (in Spanish) and www.volarencastejon.com.

Information

Lavandería Ecológica (☎ 974 55 15 04; Carretera de Francia; ☎ 10am–2pm & 5–8pm Mon–Fri, 10am–1pm Sat)

Telecomunicaciones S&Z (☎ 974 55 14 59; Los Huertos 5; per hr €2; ☎ 3–10pm) Benasque's internet connection also offers cheap international calls.

Tourist office (☎ 974 55 12 89; www.turismobenasque.com in Spanish; Calle San Sebastián 5; ☎ 9.30am–1.30pm & 4.30–8pm) Offers copious information on shorter walking routes.

Plenty of outfitters offer guides and instruction for climbing, skiing and other activities; most sell or rent clothing and equipment for the hills:

Barrabés (☎ 974 55 16 81; Avenida de Francia) Stocks a vast array, including maps and guidebooks.

Casa de la Montaña (☎ 974 55 20 94; Avenida de los Tilos)

Compañía de Guías Valle de Benasque (☎ 974 55 13 36; www.guiasbenasque.com in Spanish; Avenida Luchón 19)

Gradodiez (☎ 629 18 24 82; www.grado-diez.com; Avenida Luchón) Local branch of Cerler ski shop.

Sleeping

There are several camping grounds along the A139 north of Benasque. In town you'll find a dozen hotels and *hostales* (budget hotels). During the ski season most offer packages with *media pensión* (half-board).

Camping Aneto (☎ 974 55 11 41; www.anetocamping.com; sites per person/tent/car €4.95/4.95/4.95) This is the closest camping ground to town (3.5km away). It is very well equipped and has a shop and laundry.

La Fonda de Vescelia (☎ 974 55 16 54; vescelia@terra.es; Calle Mayor 5; bunks €9, s/d with shared bathroom €27/42; ☎) Cheap, cheerful and central, accommodation here is basic, with up to 30 bunks sharing the same toilets and showers. You'll need a sleeping bag for the dorms. There's a café-bar selling snacks, including veggie burgers.

Hotel Avenida (☎ 974 55 11 26; www.h-avenida.com in Spanish; Avenida de los Tilos 14; s/d €53.50/67) Benasque accommodation at its best. Rooms are handsomely furnished and the service is friendly. There's a restaurant attached.

Hotel San Marsial (☎ 974 55 16 16; www.hotelsanmarsial.com in Spanish; Avenida de Francia 75; s/d incl buffet breakfast €65/105) The usual lodgelike touches are pleasantly done here in this comfortable, well-run hotel at the north end of town.

Eating & Drinking

The best places are along Avenida de los Tilos and its continuation, Calle Mayor.

Taberna del Ixarsó (☎ 974 55 28 32; Calle Mayor 12) Meaty tapas such as *chorizo* and *salchichón* (sausage) help the drink go down at this lively little bar, where local aficionados happily mix with tourists.

Pastelería Flor de Nieve (☎ 974 55 10 27; Calle Mayor 17) Energy-fuelling treats could be the excuse for delving into the cream and chocolate cornucopia in this traditional bakery and coffee shop.

La Buhardilla (☎ 974 55 13 20; Calle Mayor s/n; dishes €4–15.50) A plush creperie at the heart of the old town, the 'attic's' sleek modern décor is softened by a big, open fire for chilly Pyrenean evenings. Sweet and savoury crepes cost €4 to €6, fondues start at €10.50.

Restaurante El Fogaril (☎ 974 55 16 12; Calle Mayor 5; mains €18–28) Treat yourself at this elegant country dining room which serves outstanding Aragonese fare. Its specialities include young venison and stuffed partridge, *cozal* (small deer) and freshwater fish, all superbly prepared and presented.

Bar La Compañía (☎ 974 55 29 00; Avenida Luchón 19; ☎ 2–11pm, closed Wed) Nicely worn décor and an upbeat atmosphere make this a popular drinking spot where rock and ice fanciers can thumb through copies of climbing mags while listening to background rock of the other sort.

Getting There & Away

Two buses operate Monday to Saturday, and one runs on Sunday, from Barbastro to Benasque (€6.30, two hours) and back. Buses to/from Huesca, Lleida (Lérida) and Barcelona connect with these buses at Barbastro.

AROUND BENASQUE

Skiing

Aragón's easternmost **ski resort** (☎ 974 55 10 12; www.cerler.com in Spanish) has two centres: one at Cerler itself, at 1500m altitude, 6km southeast of Benasque, and another at **Ampríu**, 8km beyond Cerler, at 1900m. On offer are 45 varied runs, totalling 52km at altitudes up to 2630m, plus ski and snowboard schools and equipment rentals. With limited accommodation available, many people prefer to stay in Benasque. A bus service connects Benasque and the ski stations during ski season.

Walking & Climbing

From mid-June to mid-September, bus services link Benasque with La Besurta (one-way/return €6/8.80), 16km north in the upper Ésera valley, and with the Refugio Pescadores (one-way/return €10/13.10), which is in the Valle de Vallibierna, 11km northeast of Benasque. The buses stop at camping grounds on the A139 north of Benasque – you can use them to reach many of the walks mentioned in this section. Check current timetables at Benasque's **tourist office** (☎ 974 55 12 89; www.turismobenasque.com in Spanish; Calle San Sebastián 5; ☎ 9.30am–1.30pm & 4.30–8pm).

Good maps for northeast Aragón are *Aneto-Maladetas* and *Llardana-Posets* in Prames' 1:40,000 Mapa Excursionista series.

NEAR BENASQUE

Plenty of marked trails, ranging from an hour's to a day's walking, start from Benasque itself or from nearby villages, such as Eriste and Sahún.

VALLE DE VALLIBIERNIA

This valley runs southeastward up from the A139 about 5.5km north of Benasque. On foot, take the track towards Camping Ixeia,

which leaves the A139 just before the Puente de San Jaime (or Chaime) bridge, 3km out of Benasque. You're now on the GR11 coast-to-coast trail, which after a couple more kilometres diverges into Valle de Vallibierna. It's then about a 6km (2½-hour) walk, ascending nearly 600m, to the Refugio Pescadores or the Refugio Coronas, anglers' shelters that are small with no facilities. Three groups of mountain lakes, the Lagos (or Ibons) de Coronas, Llosás and Vallibierna, can each be reached in under two hours from the refuge.

GR11 TO BIELSA

Westbound, the GR11 leaves the A139 just after the Puente de San Jaime. It's an easy three-hour walk (600m ascent) up the Valle de Estós to **Refugio de Estós** (☎ 974 55 14 83; bunks adult/under 14yr €12.50/5.50). This good 115-bunk refuge is attended year-round, but it's essential to ring ahead (dinner is €12.80). A further five or so hours bring you, via the 2592m Puerto de Gistain (or Chistau) pass and some superb views of the Posets massif, to the excellent **Refugio de Viadós** (☎ 974 50 61 63; bunks €7.50, half-board €22; ☎ staffed Jun–Sep, Sat & Sun Easter–May). Viadós is a base for climbs on **Posets** (3369m), a serious undertaking that requires mountaineering skills, often requires crampons and long-shaft ice axes and is a hard six hours-plus to the summit, with potential altitude effect. Route finding is not that easy. Not a casual stroll, then... The GR11 continues some six hours west to the hamlet of Parzán in the Bielsa valley, before heading into the Parque Nacional de Ordesa y Monte Perdido (p433). Bielsa, 4km south of Parzán, has several *hostales* and hotels.

Autocares Bergua (☎ 974 50 00 18) runs a bus from Bielsa to Ainsa at 6am Monday, Wednesday and Friday (daily, except Sunday, in July and August).

UPPER ÉSERA VALLEY & MALADETA MASSIF

North of Benasque, the A139 continues paved for about 12km. About 10km from Benasque, a side road leads 6km east along the pretty upper Ésera valley, ending at a spot called La Besurta, with a hut selling drinks and some food.

Hospital de Benasque (☎ 974 55 20 12; www.llanosdelhospital.com; bunks €18–28, s/d incl breakfast from €73/90; ☎), a little under halfway from the A139 to La Besurta, is a large mountain lodge in a beautiful location, surrounded by handsome peaks. From early spring onwards it gets very busy

with day-trippers as well as skiers and mountain walkers. If driving you may be stopped at a lower car park about 1km from the lodge. There's a bar, restaurant, and a variety of accommodation ranging from bunks to comfy rooms. From Benasque, a summer bus makes six trips a day here (€6 return, 30 minutes); another shuttles back and forth between here and La Besurta.

An exacting trail from Llanos del Hospital heads northeast and upwards to Peña Blanca, and from there winds steeply up to the 2445m Portillón de Benasque pass on the French frontier. This should take fit walkers about 2½ hours. You could return via a visit to the Puerto de la Picada, another pass to the east – or another 3½ hours north would take you down past the Boums del Port lakes to the French town of Bagnères-de-Luchon.

South of La Besurta is the great Maladeta massif, a superb challenge for experienced climbers. This forbidding line of icy peaks, with glaciers suspended from the higher crests, culminates in Aneto (3404m), the highest peak in the Pyrenees.

Refugio de la Rencusa (☎ 974 55 21 06; bunks €12, half-board €29), staffed and serving meals from about June to mid-October and weekends from March to June, is a 40-minute walk from La Besurta. Experienced and properly equipped climbers can reach the top of Aneto from here in a minimum of five hours.

The massif offers other peaks, including Maladeta (3308m). From La Besurta or La Rencusa, walkers can follow paths southeast beneath the Maladeta massif, leading ultimately into Catalonia.

AÍNSA

pop 1650 / elevation 589m

The busy crossroads that is modern Aínsa hardly prepares you for the beautiful hilltop village of medieval Aínsa (L'Aínsa in the local dialect) that stands above, commanding panoramic views of the mountains and of the great rock bastion of La Peña Montañesa particularly. Aínsa is one of Aragón's gems, worth visiting, if possible, in the low season or late evening; during festivals and the main summer season the place is crammed with fellow visitors. You can drive up by road to a large car park, but the best way up is by age-old steps from the lower village. This takes you along cobbled streets between beautiful stone façades and eventually to the huge, arcaded Plaza Mayor and the

castle. Around the village there are excellent interpretive panels, in French and English as well as Spanish and Aragonese.

The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 974 50 07 67; ainsa@pirineo.com; Avenida Pirenaica 1; ☎ 9am-9pm Jul & Aug, 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Sep-Apr, closed Sun & Mon Nov-Mar) is by the crossroads in the newer part of the village. In addition, there's an excellent **regional tourist office** (☎ 974 50 512; info@turismosobarbe.com; Plaza del Castillo 1, Torre Nordeste; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun, closed Sun afternoon) within the castle walls.

There is an internet facility at the **library** (☎ 974 10 03 88; Calle Bajo los Muros s/n; per hr €1.10; ☎ 10am-1.30pm & 4-8pm Mon-Thu).

The restored Romanesque **Iglesia de Santa María**, just outside the southeastern corner of Plaza Mayor, lights up when you pop a €1 coin into a box, with sacred music thrown in. The crypt and Gothic cloister are charming. You can also climb the **belfry** (admission €1; ☎ approximately 11am-1.30pm & 4-7pm) for great views of the mountains to the north. The **castle** and fortifications off the far end of the plaza mostly date from the 1600s, though the main tower is 11th century. It contains an **eco-museum** (☎ 974 50 05 97; admission €2.50; ☎ 10.30am-2pm & 5-8.30pm Wed-Sun Easter-Oct) on Pyrenean fauna.

Sleeping

Accommodation in the old part of town is limited and booking ahead is advisable.

Casa El Hospital (☎ /fax 974 50 07 50; www.caselhospital.com; Calle del Arco del Hospital; s/d €29/45) There's a charming mood of old Aínsa in this traditional building opposite the south door of the church. There are six comfortable rooms with brass beds.

Hotel Villa Romanica (☎ 974 50 07 50; www.hotelvil-laromanica.com in Spanish; Calle Santa Cruz 21; s/d €39/65; ☎) Run by the owners of El Hospital, this is a beautiful place; modernised, yet retaining lovely detail, with exposed stone and lots of beautiful woodwork and comfy rooms.

Hotel Los Arcos (☎ 974 50 00 16; www.hotellosarcosainsa.com in Spanish; Plaza Mayor 23; s €96.30, d €107-150; ☎) In a fine position on Plaza Mayor, this stylish hotel has luxurious rooms with canopied beds and good-sized bathrooms. The service is friendly and stylish also.

In the lower village are the jointly run **Hostal Dos Rios** (☎ 974 50 01 06; www.hostaldosrios.com; Avenida Central 2; s/d/tr €36/55.64/73.60) and **Hotel Dos Rios** (☎ 974 50 09 61; www.hoteldosrios.com; s/d €55/71.70), both smart, modern places that offer web booking discounts.

Eating

In summer, half the houses around Plaza Mayor seem to metamorphose into eating places and there are plenty of outside tables – the plaza is a grand place to eat in the cool of a summer evening, although prices may be a bit upmarket to go with it.

L'Alfil (☎ 974 50 02 99; Calle Traversa; dishes €3.50-9) A pretty little place, with floral accompaniment to its outside tables, in a side street along from the church, this café-bar does salads, *jamón*, cheese and shellfish dishes.

Bodegas del Sobrarbe (☎ 974 50 09 37; Plaza Mayor 2; mains from €12.50, menú €22) Just off the plaza, this fine restaurant offers meaty Aragonese fare with a few fish dishes. The stuffed pork with foie and mushrooms is delicious and the hake and mussels are pretty good, also.

There are a couple of supermarkets in the lower village that are well stocked.

Getting There & Away

From Barbastro bus station, **Autocares Cortés** (☎ 974 31 15 52) runs buses to Aínsa (€3.40, one hour) at 11am Monday to Saturday during July and August, and at 7.45pm Monday to Saturday year-round. Buses return from Aínsa at 7am and 3.10pm.

PARQUE NACIONAL DE ORDESA Y MONTE PERDIDO

This is where the Spanish Pyrenees really take your breath away. At the heart of it all is a dragon's back of limestone peaks skirting the French border, with a southeastward spur that includes Monte Perdido (3348m), the third-highest peak in the Pyrenees. Deep valleys slice down from the high ground. Most were carved by glaciers and at their heads lie bowl-like glacial *circos* (cirques) backed by spectacular curtain walls of rock. Chief among the valleys are Pineta (east), Escuaín (southeast), Bellos (south), Ordesa (southwest), Bujaruelo (west) and Gavarnie (north, in France).

The vegetation range in these valleys is fascinating. Lush mixed forest gives way higher up to scattered stands of pines that cling to sheer cliffs in places. Above the tree line is the high mountain zone where edelweiss, gentians and other wildflowers sparkle with colour across the otherwise arid ground.

Chamois (*rebeco* in Spanish but often called *sarrio* in Aragón) wander the park's upper reaches in herds of up to 50. In the skies fly the rare and formidable lammergeier or

quebrantahuesos (bearded vulture) and the always spectacular golden eagle. But in some seasons, the most numerous beast in the 156-sq-km park is *Homo sapiens*, a mix of serious skiers, mountaineers and walkers, but with the biggest input by carbound sightseers. So popular are the more accessible zones that severe restrictions have been placed on vehicle access in summer.

Orientation

The main jumping-off point is the village of Torla, 3km south of the southwest corner of the national park. From Torla a paved road leads to the Pradera de Ordesa, in the Valle de Ordesa, with a big car park, 5.5km inside the national park (for seasonal vehicle restrictions, see p436). If you don't have a vehicle and the shuttle bus isn't running, it's a walk of about 7km from Torla to Pradera de Ordesa starting by Hostal Bella Vista.

The Valle de Bujaruelo, outside the park's western boundary, is accessed by an unpaved road veering north at the Puente de los Navarros on the road north of Torla.

From Escalona, 11km north of Aínsa on the A138, a minor paved road heads northwest across to Sarvisé, a few kilometres south of Torla. This road crosses the park's southern tip, with a narrow, sinuous section winding up the dramatic Bellos valley and giving access to walks in the spectacular Cañón de Añiscol (the upper reaches of the Bellos valley).

From Bielsa, a 12km paved road runs up the Valle de Pineta.

MAPS

Ordesa y Monte Perdido Parque Nacional (1:25,000), published by the Ministerio de Fomento in 2000, costs around €7 and comes with a booklet detailing 20 walks. It's available in Torla shops.

Information

The **Centro de Visitantes El Parador** (☎ 974 48 64 21; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Easter-Oct), with worthwhile displays and helpful staff, is 2km inside the park along the Torla-Pradera de Ordesa road. A second visitors centre operates the same hours at Tella in the Escuaín sector. There's also a **park information office** (☎ 974 48 64 72; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri) in Torla, towards the north end of the village, opposite the Guardia Civil, and **park information centres** (☎ 9am-1.30pm & 3-6pm Easter-Oct, 8am-3pm Mon-Fri Nov-Easter) in Escalona and Bielsa.



In Torla, there is a useful **tourist office** (☎ 974 48 64 72; Plaza de Aragón; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Easter-Oct, 8am-3pm Nov-Easter), a **post office** (Plaza de la Constitución), and there are banks and ATMs on Avenida de Ordesa. In addition, tourist offices operate from July to September in Broto, Fanlo and Bielsa.

Camping is allowed only above certain altitudes (1800m to 2500m), in small tents pitched at sunset and taken down at sunrise. Swimming in rivers or lakes, mountain biking, fishing and fires are banned.

Walking & Climbing CIRCO DE SOASO

A classic day walk follows the Valle de Ordesa to the Circo de Soaso, a rocky balcony whose centrepiece is the **Cola del Caballo** (Horsetail

waterfall. From the eastern end of the Pradera de Ordesa, take the path that crosses Río Arazas and climbs steeply up through woods on the valley's south side. This hardest part, called the Senda de los Cazadores (Hunters' Path), in which you ascend 600m, takes an hour. Then it's level or downhill all the way along the high Faja de Pelay path to the circo. Return by the path along the bottom of the valley, passing several waterfalls. The whole circuit takes about seven hours.

REFUGIO DE GÓRIZ & MONTE PERDIDO

Fit walkers can climb a series of steep switchbacks (part of the GR11) to the top of the Circo de Soaso and up to the **Refugio de Góriz** (☎ 974 34 12 01; bunks €12), at 2200m. This 72-place ref-

uge, attended and serving meals year-round, makes an obvious base for ascents of Monte Perdido. For July and August, book a month ahead. A lot of people end up simply camping nearby. As with Posets (p431), Monte Perdido is a serious undertaking that requires mountaineering skills and often requires crampons and ice axes. Be fit and capable.

FAJA RACÓN, CIRCO DE COTATUERO & FAJA CANARELLOS

This walk takes you along spectacular high-level paths on the north flank of the Valle de Ordesa. It takes about five or six hours, or an hour less if you omit Faja Canalleros. It should not be attempted in winter and spring, when there is a high risk of ice, falling rocks or even an avalanche.

From Pradera de Ordesa head 600m west back along the paved road to a stone building, Casa Oliván, and take the path signed 'Tozal del Mallo, Circo de Carriata'. About 1½ hours up this fairly steep, zigzag path, diverge eastward along the path signed 'Faja Racón': this high-level route of about 3km brings you out below the Circo de Cotatuero's impressive 200m **waterfall**. From here head a few minutes' downhill to a wooden shelter. Here you can either continue down the Cotatuero circo to a path junction 600m east of Pradera de Ordesa or, if you're still energetic, cross a bridge opposite the shelter to follow another high-level path of 3km to 4km, Faja Canarellos. This brings you down to the Valle de Ordesa at Bosque de las Hayas, from where it's 4km westward, gently downhill, back to Pradera de Ordesa.

BRECHA DE ROLANDO

The cool-headed may climb part of the wall of the Circo de Cotatuero by the **Clavijas de Cotatuero**, a set of 32 iron pegs hammered into the rock in 1881 by a local blacksmith. Don't worry, they've been renewed since and follow more of a rising traverse than a vertical ladder. No special equipment is needed, but you need to be fit and able. From here you are about 2½ hours' march from the **Brecha de Rolando** (Roldán; 2807m), a dramatic, breezy gap in the mountain wall on the French frontier. You can also reach the Brecha by a 3½-hour path from Refugio de Góriz. From the Brecha it's a steep 500m descent to the French **Refuge des Sarradets** (☎ France 33-06 83 38 13 24). Check ahead about conditions between the Brecha and the refuge, especially outside the summer high season.

PUERTO DE BUJARUELO

The GR11 describes a 6km arc up the very pretty Valle de Bujaruelo to San Nicolás de Bujaruelo. From there an east-northeastward path leads in about three hours (with a 950m ascent) up to the Puerto de Bujaruelo pass on the border with France. You are now in the French Parc National des Pyrénées, and in about two hours can descend to **Gavarnie** village. Alternatively you can head southeast and upwards for about 2½ hours to the **Refuge des Sarradets** (☎ France 33-06 83 38 13 24) and from there back into Spain via the **Brecha de Rolando** (left).

SOUTHERN GORGES

The **Cañón de Añiso** is a gaping wound in the earth's fabric, carved out, unlike the glacial valleys further north, by the eroding action of water on limestone. Energetic walkers can start from the Refugio de Góriz and descend the gorge from the north, but if you have a vehicle you can take a day walk from the southern end. Some 12km from Escalona on the road to Sarvisé, a broad path leads down to the dramatic **Puente de San Urbez**, then up the canyon. You can walk as far north as La Ripareta and back in about five hours, or to Fuen Blanca and back in about eight hours.

The **Gargantas de Escuaín** is a smaller-scale but still dramatic gorge on Río Yaga, further east. You can descend into the gorge in about an hour from the semi-abandoned hamlet of Escuaín, reached by a minor road off the Escalona-Sarvisé road.

Sleeping & Eating

Although Torla is the obvious base, there are many other villages near the park that offer accommodation. Broto, Escalona and Biescas each have a dozen or so hotels, *hostales* or *casas rurales*, and even tiny Nerín has a *hostal* and *albergue*.

TORLA

Torla is an Alpine-style village that has a slightly hard edge to it during the busiest times. (When a car park is almost as big as the village it serves, you know what to expect.) Yet, Torla's tall grey stone houses are an attractive sight. They cluster above Río Ara with a backdrop of the national park's mountains. Finding a bed is tricky only in the monster July-August season, when reservations are essential. There are three camping grounds within 2km north of Torla (all closed from mid- or late October till Easter).

Hostal Alto Aragón (☎ /fax 974 48 61 72; Calle de Capuvita; s/d €32/40), run in harness with Hotel Ballarín, is about the cheapest choice apart from the two refugios. It has well-kept, charming rooms. **Hotel Ballarín** (☎ /fax 974 48 61 55; Calle de Capuvita 11; s/d/tr €35/48/58) is every bit as smart and well kept, and has superb views from the top rooms. **Refugio L'Atalaya** (☎ /fax 974 48 60 22; Calle de Francia; bunks €9; ☞ Apr–mid-Oct) and **Refugio Lucien Briet** (☎ 974 48 62 21; www.refugiolucienbriet.com in Spanish; Calle de Francia; bunks €9, d€37) are French-managed refuge-style places in the village.

All these places have restaurants with *menús* from €12 to €17. You can also stock up on supplies in small supermarkets, open seven days a week.

VALLE DE BUJARUELO

Camping Valle de Bujaruelo (☎ 974 48 63 48; www.campingvalledebjaruelo.com in Spanish; sites per person/tent/car €4.10/4.10/4.10, r€36-50; ☞ Easter-Oct) Located 3.5km up the Valle de Bujaruelo, this camping ground features a refuge with bunks, a restaurant and a supermarket.

Mesón de Bujaruelo (☎ 974 48 64 12; www.mesondebjaruelo.com in Spanish; dm €10, half-board €27) At San Nicolás, 3km further up the valley, this old hostelry provides bunks and meals in a particularly pretty location by the Puerto de Bujaruelo.

SOUTH OF TORLA

The nicest place in Broto, nestled in the Río Ara valley 3km south of Torla, is the stone **Casa O'Puente** (☎ 974 48 60 72; Calle Porches 7; r incl breakfast €45), beside a piece of the old bridge.

Among a handful of lodgings in Sarvisé, the next village south, is the handsome **Casa Frauca** (☎ 974 48 63 53; www.casafrauca.com; s/d/tr €35/43/52; ☞ Mar-Dec), with a dozen delightfully decorated rooms, a dining room and fireplace.

Nerin, a tiny huddle of houses 3km from the Cañón de Aníscolo, and high in the mountains, has one of the most beautiful outlooks in the area with a sweeping view to the great buttelike mass of Peña Montañesa. Check the wonderful spoonmakers' workshop in the little square. **Albergue Aníscolo** (☎ 974 48 90 10; www.nerinrural.com in Spanish; dm €8) is open all year and has fabulous terrace views. It offers meals as well as excellent cheap lodging. Downhill is the more business-like, custom-built **Hotel Palazio** (☎ 974 48 90 02; www.hotelpalazio.com in Spanish; s/d €40/66) with smart, spacious rooms with terraces.

EAST OF THE PARK

Escalona, a roadside village at the park's southeastern corner, boasts several attractive lodgings, including the friendly **Casa Carpintera** (☎ 974 50 51 69; www.casa-carpintera.com; Avenida Pineta; half-board €37), with seven comfortably crafted rooms and lavish breakfasts.

From Escalona you can head up the steep-sided Valle de Pineta, which is crowned by an impressive cirque. Along the way you'll find the shady **Camping Pineta** (☎ 974 50 10 89; www.campingpineta.com; sites per person/tent/car €4.30/4.30/4.30; ☞ Apr–mid-Oct), a *zona de acampada* (camping zone); the always-attended **Refugio de Pineta** (☎ 974 50 12 03), with meals; and the luxurious **Parador de Bielsa** (☎ 974 50 10 11; s/d €120/150).

Continuing north on the A138 takes you to the Túnel de Bielsa and into France. Heading south from Escalona towards Aínsa, at the tiny village of Labuerda is **Hotel Turmo** (☎ 974 50 08 32; www.hotelurmo.com in Spanish; s/d €40/60), a modern roadside stopover with excellent, spacious rooms and back balcony views of the mighty Peña Montañesa.

Getting There & Away BUS

A daily **Hudebús** (☎ 974213277) bus runs at 11am from Sabiñánigo, on the N330 between Huesca and Jaca, to Torla (noon), Broto, Sarvisé and Aínsa (1pm). It heads back from Aínsa at 2.30pm. In addition, in July and August a 6.30pm bus makes the Sabiñánigo–Sarvisé (but not Aínsa) run daily, returning at 8pm.

A daily Alosa bus leaves Zaragoza (Paseo de María Agustín 7) at 8.30am, and arrives in Sabiñánigo at 10.20am, in time to connect with the Torla bus. From Jaca, there's a 10.15am bus to Sabiñánigo daily, except Sunday (€1.25, 20 minutes).

PARK ACCESS

See Orientation (p433) for details of road approaches to the park. The following scenario has remained unchanged for several years. Private vehicles may not drive from Torla to Pradera de Ordesa during Easter week and July to mid-October. During these periods a shuttle bus (€2.40/3.40 one-way/return) runs between Torla car park and Pradera de Ordesa. On the upward run, the bus's only stop is at the Centro de Visitantes El Parador; on the way back, it will stop if requested at the Puente de los Navarros and three hotels or camping grounds between there and Torla. The last

run back is at 10pm in July and August, 9pm in September. A maximum of 1800 people are allowed in the park at any one time.

During the same periods, a one-way system is enforced on part of the Escalona–Sarvisé road. From the Puyarruego turn-off, 2km out of Escalona, to a point about 1km after the road diverges from the Bellos valley, only northward traffic is allowed. Southeastward traffic uses an alternative, more southerly road.

JACA

pop 14,700 / elevation 820m

You can feel a mountain nip in the air at Jaca, where the 2007 European Youth Olympic Winter Sports Festival was to have its scheduled base in February 2007, an expected boost to the town's reputation as a winter sports capital. At all times of the year, this busy and amiable town is a good starting point for reaching the valleys of the western section of the Aragonese Pyrenees. It also has enough remnants of its past as the capital of the nascent 11th-century Aragón kingdom to repay a short stay and the old town has

a sprinkling of good restaurants and bars. On winter weekends it rocks a fair bit with après-ski funsters.

Information

There are several banks with ATMs, including a couple on Calle Mayor.

Ciberciva (Avenida del Regimiento de Galicia 2; per hr €2; ☞ 11am–1.30pm & 5pm–midnight Mon–Sat, 5.30–10pm Sun) Internet access next door to the tourist office.

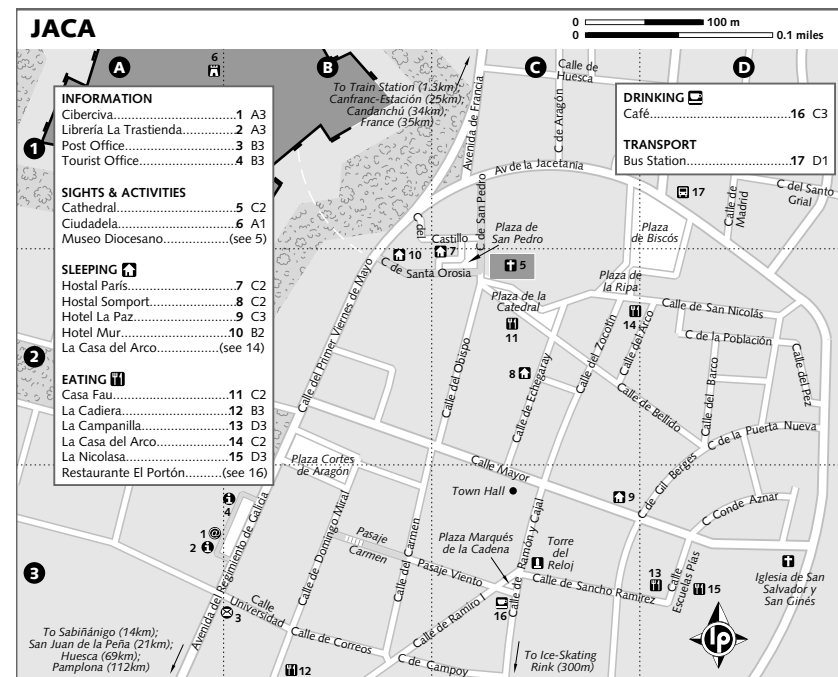
Llibrería La Trastienda (☎ 974 36 34 38; Avenida del Regimiento de Galicia 2a) A useful source of maps and guidebooks for the region, next door to the tourist office.

Post office (Calle Universidad)

Tourist office (☎ 974 36 00 98; Avenida del Regimiento de Galicia 2; ☞ 9am–1.30pm or 2pm & 4.30–7.30pm or 8pm Mon–Sat)

Sights & Activities

Jaca's 11th-century **cathedral** is a powerful building. It was once more gracefully French Romanesque in style and retains some fine features still. Worth a look is the side chapel dedicated to Santa Orosia, the city's patron saint, whose martyrdom is depicted in a series of mysterious murals. Overhead the



vaulted ceiling is studded with gold stars. In the cloister, the **Museo Diocesano** has a remarkable collection of frescoes and sculpture from churches throughout the region.

The star-shaped, 16th-century **Ciudadela** (Citadel; adult/child €4/2; ☎ 11am-noon year-round, 4-5pm Nov-Mar, 5-6pm Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 6-8pm Jul & Aug) now houses an army academy, but visits are permitted, with 40-minute guided tours (in English, Spanish or French). Deer graze in the surrounding moat.

At the time of writing the town's long-established **ice-skating rink** was due to be supplanted by a brand-new rink for hosting the ice skating and ice hockey events of the 2007 European Youth festival. Check with the tourist office for current details.

Festivals & Events

Jaca puts on its party gear for the week-long **Fiesta de Santa Orosia**, which revolves round the saint's day of 25 June. To see displays of medieval archery, visit on the first Friday of May, when Jaca celebrates a **Christian victory** over Muslims in 760. The **Festival Folklorico de los Pirineos**, held in late July and early August, provides 1½ weeks of international music, dance, crafts and theatre. It's held on odd-numbered years in Jaca and even-numbered years in Oloron-Ste-Marie, France.

Sleeping

It's worth booking ahead at weekends throughout the year and during the skiing season, July and August.

Hostal Paris (☎ 974 36 10 20; www.jaca.com/hostal-paris in Spanish; Plaza San Pedro 5; s/d with shared bathroom €25/30) Close to the cathedral this friendly, central option has spotless, ample-sized rooms and smart shared bathrooms. It has pleasantly old-style décor and everything is spotless.

Hostal Somport (☎/fax 974 36 34 10; Calle de Echegaray 11; s/d with shared bathroom €23/46) Family-run and with clean decent rooms, the Somport lacks sparkle but is still a good option.

Hotel Mur (☎ 974 36 01 00; www.hotelmur.com in Spanish; Calle de Santa Orosia 1; s/d incl breakfast €47.20/63.80) A pleasantly large and rambling place, this long-established hotel provides above-average comfort and style.

Several standard hotels cater for the ski trade but are worthwhile for a summer stop-over. A decent place is **Hotel La Paz** (☎ 974 36 07 00; Calle Mayor 41; s/d €37/54).

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

La Casa del Arco (☎ 974 36 44 48; www.laca.sadelarco.net; Calle de San Nicolás 4; 2-/3-course menú €15; ☎ ☑ ☑) Among the meat-eating mountains of Jaca, La Casa del Arco is a haven of excellent vegetarian food that is prepared with imagination and flair. All ingredients are carefully sourced. There's a lovely alternative ambience in this friendly place. Downstairs is a nice little bar, the **Tetaría el Arco**, which stages occasional music sessions and other events and is a good late-night venue. Rooms are cheerfully otherworldly, also (singles, doubles and triples €50, singles/doubles with shared bathrooms €18/36).

Eating

La Campanilla (☎ 974 36 14 48; Calle Escuelas Pías 8; menú €10) Fill up with a hearty, good-value lunch at this popular place.

La Cadiera (☎ 974 35 55 59; Calle de Domingo Miral 19; menú €11; ☎ closed Wed afternoon & Mon) The emphasis at this popular eatery is on meaty northern fare. Sure-fire bets include the garlic soup, *ternasco* (lamb), *migas* and *trucha de la Val* (trout).

Restaurante El Portón (☎ 974 35 58 54; Plaza Marqués de la Cadena 1; menú €32) Located in a little tree-shaded plaza this classy venue serves *haute-cuisine* versions of Aragonese fare. Reservations are a must. It also does a decent *menú del día* for €12.

For good tapas, head to **Casa Fau** (☎ 974 36 15 94; Plaza de la Catedral) or **La Nicolasa** (☎ 974 35 54 12; Calle Escuelas Pías 3; ☎ closed Tue).

Entertainment

Lively late-night bars line Calle de Gil Berges and trickle off into the neighbouring lanes. **Café** (Plaza Marqués de la Cadena 2), a small place with big sounds, is a popular local place that stays open into the small hours. Another late night venue with a more laid back style is **Tetaría el Arco** (see the boxed text, above).

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (☎ 974 35 50 60; Plaza de Biscós) is at the centre of town. Five buses go to Huesca (€5.95, 1¼ hours) and Zaragoza (€11.40, 2¼ hours) most days, and two go to Pamplona (€6.40, 1¼ hours).

The **train station** (☎ 974 36 13 32) is a half-hour walk northeast of the town centre, with three

trains daily south to Huesca and Zaragoza, and two north to Canfranc-Estación.

AROUND JACA

The N330 leads north from Jaca, via the pretty Río Aragón valley, to the Somport road tunnel into France passing **Canfranc-Estación** after 25km. Opened in 1928, this enormous station's distinctive architecture reflected the Modernista style. At the time it was Europe's second-largest station. For years it was Spain's principal connection with France until the French unilaterally halted the service after an accident in 1970. There is ongoing talk of reopening the line; it's more out of nostalgia than necessity, however. Two trains a day from Zaragoza via Huesca and Jaca stop here and three daily buses continue to the Vallée d'Aspe and Oloron-Ste-Marie, connecting with trains or buses for Pau, France.

Ski Resorts

To help with booking accommodation in any of these resorts, you can contact the resort information numbers and websites. All the resorts have ski and snowboard schools, as well as equipment for hire. You can also rent gear in Jaca.

CANDANCHÚ & ASTÚN

A major winter sports stadium is scheduled to open at **Candanchú** (☎ 974 37 31 94; www.candanchu.com) for the 2007 European Youth Olympic Winter Sports Festival. It seems likely to boost the reputation of the resort, which is 28km north of Jaca. Some 42km of widely varied pistes make it appealing to most grades of skiers. Accommodation in Candanchú includes three hotels, one *pensión* (small, private hotel), several apartments, and four cheap *albergues*. The small town is reasonably well equipped with general stores and ski-hire shops.

One advantage of visiting Candanchú is that another good resort, **Astún** (☎ 974 37 30 88; www.astun.com in Spanish), is just 3km east. Astún's 42km of pistes are largely for capable skiers; accommodation is more limited and generally more expensive than in Candanchú.

Five daily buses head from Jaca to Candanchú and Astún (€2.25, 45 minutes), via Canfranc-Estación.

PANTICOSA & FORMIGAL

The comparatively small resort of **Panticosa** (☎ 974 48 72 48; www.panticosa-loslagos.com in Spanish),

northeast of Biescas in the Gállego valley, has a bigger counterpart, **Formigal**, which is about 10km further north. The runs at Panticosa aren't too difficult and the nearly 2km Mazaranuala ski run is a must for adept skiers.

A livelier place with far more infrastructure than Panticosa, **Formigal** (☎ 974 49 00 00; www.formigal.com) is a regular host for ski competitions. Here you have the full range of facilities, including restaurants, bars, discos and saunas, as well as 57km of ski runs and 22 lifts.

From Jaca, one or two daily buses wind over to Panticosa and Formigal (€4.70, two hours).

Monasterio de San Juan de la Peña

High in a mountain eyrie 21km southwest of Jaca, this is Aragón's most fascinating monastery – but, like any eagle's nest, it's not reachable by public transport. Gateway to the monastery is **Santa Cruz de la Serós**, a pretty village 4km south of the N240. The monastery is another 7km uphill from here. You can buy a joint ticket for the monastery and the Iglesia de Santa María in the village for €6, which also covers bus transport from the village.

From Santa Cruz, a seemingly endless, winding road climbs the Sierra de la Peña to the **Monasterio Viejo** (Old Monastery; ☎ 974 35 51 19; www.monasteriosanjuan.com; admission incl Iglesia de Santa María €4.50; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm 16 Mar-31 May & 1 Sep-15 Oct, 10am-2.30pm & 4-8pm Jun & Aug, 11am-2pm & 4-5.30pm Tue-Sun 16 Oct-15 Mar), tucked under an overhanging lip of rock at a bend in the road. For walkers, a stiff 4km marked path (the GR65.3.2) leads up from Santa Cruz to the monastery in about 1½ hours, with an ascent of 350m. At very quiet times of year drivers may be able to park on the roadside near the Monasterio Viejo; but during *Semana Santa*, June, July and August don't even think of parking; there's a hard team organising the whole banana, amiably but firmly. You have to continue uphill from the Monasterio Viejo for another 1.3km to the car park near the Monasterio Nuevo (New Monastery). At busy times a shuttle bus (€2), first boarded at Monasterio Nuevo, takes people down to Monasterio Nuevo and Monasterio Viejo.

The rock shelter where the Monasterio Viejo is built, perhaps used by Christian hermits as early as the 8th century, became a monastery in the 10th century, when the Mozarabic lower church was constructed.

The monastery emerged as the early spiritual and organisational centre of the medieval kingdom of Aragón. A Romanesque church was built above it in the late 11th century.

The first three kings of Aragón – Ramiro I (1036–64), Sancho Ramírez (1064–94) and Pedro I (1094–1104) – are among those buried at the Monasterio Viejo. The greatest highlight is the Romanesque **cloister**, with marvellous carved 12th- and 13th-century capitals depicting Genesis and the life of Christ.

A fire in 1675 led the monks to abandon the old monastery and build a new one in brick further up the hill. **Monasterio Nuevo** (☎ 10am–2pm & 4–7pm 16 Mar–31 May & 1 Sep–15 Oct, ☎ 10am–2.30pm & 4–8pm Jun & Aug, 11am–2pm & 4–5.30pm Tue–Sun 16 Oct–15 Mar) has been undergoing extensive restoration for some time. By 2007 its three buildings may have *parador*-style accommodation, a large visitors centre devoted to the Aragonese kings and an archaeology museum.

In Santa Cruz de la Serós, the 11th-century Romanesque **Iglesia de Santa María** (☎ 10am–2pm & 4–7pm; admission €2) dominates the village. It has a stark beauty and you can climb the tower. **Hostelería Santa Cruz** (☎ 974 36 1975; www.santacruzdelaseros.com; Calle Ordana; r incl breakfast €51), near the church, is a beautiful place with friendly service and lovely rooms. Its restaurant serves mainly meat dishes (€7.50 to €15) and there's a good *menú del día* (€12).

VALLES DE ECHO & ANSÓ

The verdant Echo and Ansó valleys are mountain magic at its best. Old stone villages punctuate slopes of dense mixed woods of beech, pine, rowan, elm and hazel and, as the valleys narrow to the north, 2000m-plus peaks rise triumphantly at their heads. Go quietly through these beautiful valleys; they encourage a gentle touch and deserve a less conspicuous tourism than the more spectacular territory further east.

Most places to stay have good information on walking and exploring the area. Take a reasonable map/guide, such as Prames' *Ansó-Echo Aragüés-Jasa* or Alpina's *Ansó-Echo*.

A bus to Jaca leaves Ansó at 6.30am, Siresa at 6.53am and Echo at 7am, Monday to Saturday, returning from Jaca at 6.50pm. There are no buses further up either of the valleys. A road, improved and resurfaced in 2006, links the two villages, a distance of about 9.5km.

Echo (Hecho)

pop 650 / elevation 833m

Lovely Echo is a place to linger in, although you'll have company in the high season. It's the biggest village in the valley, an attractive warren of solid stone houses with steep roofs and flower-bedecked balconies. There's a charming artistic riff, in the form of street sculptures and a hillside sculpture park.

The very helpful **tourist office** (☎ 974 37 55 05; www.valledehecho.net in Spanish; Carretera Oza s/n; ☎ 10am–1.30pm & 5.30–8pm Mon–Sat, ☎ 10am–2pm Sun Jul–Oct) is in a wonderful building that also contains the **Museo de Arte Contemporáneo**, a basement art gallery of changing exhibitions. The front of the building sports a cheerful mural and alongside is the **Museo de Escultura al Aire Libre**, a hillside sculpture park. At the heart of the village is the endearing **Museo Etnológico Casa Mazo** (Calle Aire; admission €1; ☎ 10.30am–1.30pm & 5–8pm), with displays on rural life including a terrific swathe of photographs of villagers from the 1920s and 1930s.

Echo has only a few sleeping options. **Casa Blasquico** (☎ 974 37 50 07; Plaza de la Fuente 1; r €45; ☎ usually closed 1st half Sep) has a half-dozen charming rooms, although they're right above the much-lauded and usually very busy **Restaurante Gaby**. **Hotel de la Val** (☎ 974 37 50 28; Cruz Alta 1; s/d €30/47), a big chalet-type lodging, also has a decent restaurant with a *menú del día* for €9. South of town, **Camping Valle de Hecho** (☎ 974 37 53 61; sites per adult/tent/car €4/4/4; 🚰) is a pleasant, well-kept camping ground.

Siresa & Around

pop 133 / elevation 850m

A couple of kilometres north of Echo, Siresa is another charming village. It boasts the formidable, 11th-century **Iglesia de San Pedro** (admission €1.50; ☎ 11am–1pm & 5–7pm, closed Wed afternoon),

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hotel Usón (☎ 974 37 53 58; www.hoteluson.com in Spanish; s/d incl breakfast €45/60; ☎ Easter–Oct; 🚰 ☎) There's perfect peace in fabulous surroundings at this outstanding place, high in the Echo valley, 5km north of Siresa on the road to the Selva de Oza. Peace extends to the total absence of TVs; but there are great books in plenty. The restaurant offers excellent home-cooked meals.

which originally comprised part of one of Aragón's earliest monasteries.

Albergue Siresa (☎/fax 974 37 53 85; www.albergue-siresa.com in Spanish & French; Calle Reclusa s/n; bunks incl breakfast €12.50, sheets €1.50; ☎) is a cheerful hostel providing bunk-and-breakfast accommodation in clean conditions, with other meals available. It also rents mountain bikes (€12 per day) and has a library. **Hotel Castillo d'Acher** (☎ 974 37 53 13; www.castillodacher.com; Plaza Mayor; s/d €38/50) has a pleasant mix of rooms, some rather old-fashioned, others pine-clad and modern, but all spotless. It also has *casas rurales* (doubles €27) in the village. The big in-house restaurant does a good *menú del día* (€13.50).

Selva de Oza

This top end of the Valle de Echo is particularly beautiful, with the road running parallel to Río Aragón Subordán as it bubbles its way through thick woodlands. About 6km from Siresa is the **Centro de Interpretación del Megalitismo** (☎ 11am–2pm & 4.30–8.30pm mid-Jun–mid-Sep, 11am–2pm & 4–6.30pm mid-Sep–mid-Jun), with displays, in Spanish, about the prehistoric stone burial chambers that are located throughout the area. About 14km from Siresa the paved road ends, shortly after it connects with the GR11 path en route between Candanchú and Zuriza. At least half a dozen mountain peaks sit in an arc to the north for strenuous day ascents.

Ansó

pop 540 / elevation 860m

Ansó takes you even further into a world of high places and harmony. The rough-hewn stone houses here are in grey stone, their roofs are of red tiles. Some walls are whitewashed making a pleasing checker-board pattern. Forested slopes climb ever upwards from where Ansó straggles along a low escarpment above a partly covered streambed.

There's a car park before you turn up into the village. A grid of narrow streets surrounds the main square, Plaza Mayor, where there is a bank and ATM. The **tourist office** (☎ 974 37 02 25; Plaza Mayor; ☎ 9am–1.30pm & 5–8pm Easter & Jul–Sep) is in the town hall and has lots of information, but mainly in Spanish.

Adjoining the rough-walled church and seeming to grow out of it, the delightful **Posada Magoria** (☎ 974 37 00 49; Calle Milagros 32; s/d €35/48–53; 🚰) is crammed with character and lovingly kept

by a charming family with lots of local knowledge. In the kitchen *comedor* (dining room) you can enjoy an excellent €12 *menú* of organically sourced vegetarian dishes, while vegans are catered for too. At **Casa Baretón** (☎ 974 37 01 38; www.casabareton.com; Calle Pascual Altamir 16; s/d €27/41), the craftsman owner of this lovingly restored stone house has retained a number of old features to add to the general comfort and charm of the rooms.

Bar Zuriza (☎ 639 28 45 90; Mayor 71) is near the top end of the village in the main street and is popular place serving decent tapas.

SOS DEL REY CATÓLICO

pop 610 / elevation 625m

Born in this handsome hilltop village in 1452 was the other half of one of the most formidable double acts in history, Fernando II of Aragón. He and his wife, Isabel I of Castilla, became known as the Catholic Monarchs (Los Reyes Católicos). They conquered the last Muslim kingdom of Granada and united Spain and were patrons of Christopher Columbus – and of the dreaded Inquisition.

Sos, as the village is universally and unsurprisingly known, is 80km west of Jaca. The old medieval town is a glorious maze of twisting, cobbled lanes that wriggle between dark stone houses with deeply overhung eaves. On summer weekends and holidays Sos can be overrun with visitors.

There's a bank in Plaza del Mesón and a post office in Calle E Alfaro.

The keep of the **Castillo de la Peña Feliciano** crowns the hilltop, and the Gothic **Iglesia de San Esteban** (admission €1.50; ☎ 10am–1pm & 3.30–5.30pm) below it, with a weathered Romanesque portal, has a deliciously gloomy crypt with terrific frescoes and huge wooden birds as light holders.

Fernando is said to have been born in the **Casa Palacio de Sada**, now containing the **tourist office** (☎ 948 88 85 24; www.sosdelreycatolico.com in Spanish; Plaza Hispanidad; ☎ 10am–2pm & 4–8pm Jun–Aug, 10am–1pm & 4–7pm Wed–Fri, 10am–2pm & 4–7pm Sat & Sun Sep–May) and an **interpretive centre** (adult/child €2.40/1.20), with fine exhibits on the history of Sos and the life of the king. The admission price includes a tour of the adjoining San Martín de Tours chapel.

Sleeping & Eating

Albergue Juvenil Sos del Rey Católico (☎ 948 88 84 80; Calle Meca; per person under/over 26yr €13.50/17) Enjoy

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

As Bruixas (☎ 948 88 84 15; www.asbruixas.com in Spanish; Calle Mayor 25; s/d €40/50; ♿) Ironically named 'The Witches' by its charming management this terrific place has three rooms offering a refreshing blend of vivid style and comfort, with plump mattresses, gleaming bathtubs and boho objects fished out of thrift shops.

Its similarly postmodern dining room, with a view to swoon over, offers cuisine that gives traditional ingredients a fresh twist, whipping up dishes such as pigeon with prawns (€12.60) and mushroom-stuffed pigs' trotters (€10.60).

life in a restored medieval tower in superb modern conditions at this excellent hostel that has bright, stylish décor. Free bicycle rental is available, and all meals are served.

Fonda Fernandina (☎ 948 88 81 20; Plaza del Mesón s/n; s/d €18/35, half-board €28/54) At the south end of the village is this down-to-earth place with simple, but decent rooms and a popular restaurant that has a good *menú del día* of hearty country fare.

Parador de Sos del Rey Católico (☎ 948 88 80 11; Calle Arquitecto Sainz de Vicuña 1; s/d €103/129) A place that might just have pleased Los Reyes themselves, this grand building is modern, but its style fits with the rest of Sos.

Getting There & Away

A **Gomez** (☎ 976 67 55 29) bus from Zaragoza to Sos del Rey Católico (€8.50) departs from below the old El Portillo train station at 7pm Monday to Friday. It returns from Sos at 7am.

THE SOUTH

Flat by nature and flat by appeal, the vast sweeps of countryside immediately south of Zaragoza are either dreary plains or bald, uninviting ridges; however, head further south or southeast and you'll encounter a more dramatic landscape, along with some intriguing towns and villages. Among these are Teruel, a storehouse of some of the best Mudéjar architecture you'll find anywhere in the country, and tucked away in deep hill country above Rio Guadalaviar, is Albarracín, a medieval delight.

DAROCA

pop 2250

Daroca is something of a well-kept secret, hidden away as it is in central Aragón's often anonymous countryside. This one-time Muslim stronghold later became Christian Aragón's fortress town in the early medieval wars against Castilla. Its well-preserved old quarter is laden with historic references.

Daroca lies in a valley, neatly side-stepping the traffic torrent of the N234 Calatayud-Teruel highway that skirts it. Rocky hills stand above and on their crests are the crumbling remnants of once-extensive walls, which originally boasted 114 military towers. Coming from north or south, you slip quietly away from the highway and enter Calle Mayor, the cobbled main street, through monumental gates. About midway along and up to the west is the attractive main square, Plaza de España, dominated by the large Romanesque-cum-Mudéjar-cum-Renaissance **Iglesia Colegiata de Santa María**.

There's lots of enthusiasm at the **tourist office** (☎ 976 80 01 29; www.daroca.info; Plaza de España 4; ☎ 10.30am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm), where you can get excellent information, in several languages, including English, about walks round the town and along the old walls. There's free internet access too.

La Posada del Almudí (☎ 976 80 06 06; www.staragon.com/posadadelalmudi in Spanish; Grajera 5; s/d incl breakfast €42/60) was a one-time 16th-century palace and today is an attractive place to stay. Its comfy rooms retain some old features including big wooden beams. An attached restaurant offers good traditional cuisine.

Big meat dishes are the favourite at **Restaurante Legido** (☎ 976 80 01 90; Carretera 234, Km220; menú €10), a roadside eatery at the northern entrance to Daroca. It also has basic rooms (singles/doubles €20/35).

Buses stop outside the Mesón Félix bar, at Calle Mayor 104. Four buses a day, run to Zaragoza and Teruel, Monday to Saturday.

LAGUNA DE GALLOCANTA

Some 20km south of Daroca and a similar distance west of Calamocha on the N234, this is Spain's largest natural lake, with an area of about 15 sq km (though it can almost dry up in summer). It's a winter home for some 70,000 cranes and many other water fowl. A **Centro de Interpretación** (☎ 978 72 50 04; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Nov & Feb, Sat & Sun only rest of year), with information and exhibitions, is on the Tornos-Bello road

near the southeast corner of the lake where the cranes gather. Take binoculars.

TERUEL

pop 31,000 / elevation 917m

Too long dismissed as being outside Spain's mainstream renaissance, Teruel is fast re-asserting itself as a city with cultural attitude and economic potential. The culture and the history are palpable; this ancient capital on its hilltop site, above the flatlands of southern Aragón, boasts some of the most ornate and striking Mudéjar monuments in Spain. The city has several absorbing museums and the *casco viejo* (old town) supports a lively social and commercial life that complements all that antiquity.

History

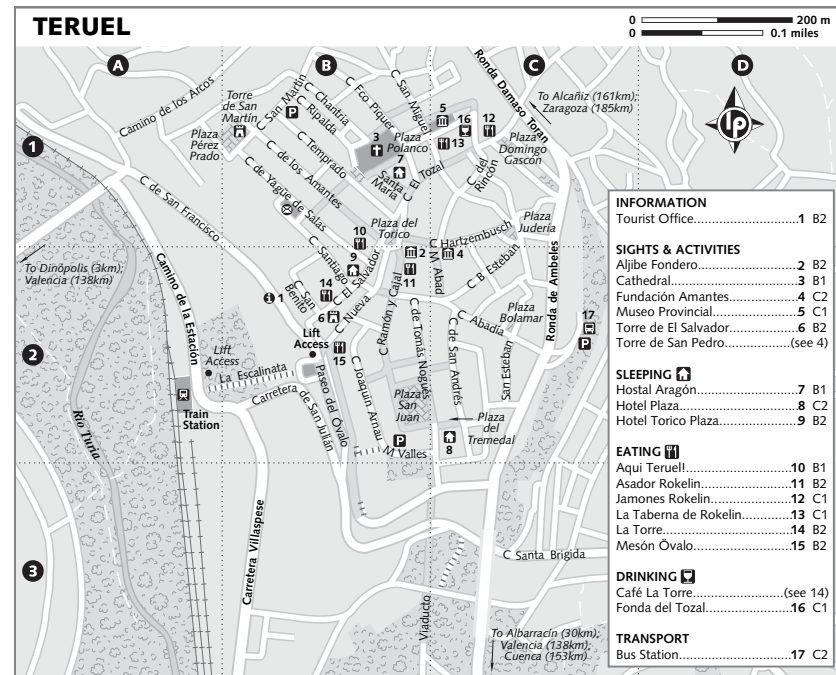
During the 11th century Teruel was briefly part of a Muslim *taifa* (small kingdom) based in nearby Albarracín. Taken for Christendom by Alfonso II of Aragón in 1171, it became an operational base for Jaime I of Aragón in his 1230s campaign to wrest Valencia from Muslim hands. When the Christians got round to

building monumental churches in the 13th and 14th centuries, they adorned several with the beautiful Mudéjar towers for which Teruel is now famous.

Orientation & Information

The train station is downhill on the western edge of the old town, and is reached by the grand staircase of the 1920 neo-Mudéjar La Escalinata, which descends from Paseo del Óvalo, or by a free lift alongside. The bus station is on higher ground on the eastern edge of town. From either it's a short walk into the town centre. Teruel's main square is Plaza del Torico, a lively focus of city life. From here the main street, Calle de Ramon y Cajal, leads to the big Plaza San Juan. Driving in town is quite complex. It's best to make for one of several signposted underground car parks.

Teruel's modern **tourist office** (☎ 978 64 14 61; Calle de San Francisco 1; ☎ 9am-2pm & 5-7.30pm) is rather anonymous and not overwhelmingly helpful. It's about 100m to the north of the top of the Escalinata staircase and lift. There is an **internet facility** (per hr €1.50) at the bus station.



Sights

CATHEDRAL

Teruel's **cathedral** (☎ 978 61 80 16; Plaza de la Catedral; adult/child €3/2; 🕒 11am-2pm & 4-8pm Easter-Oct, 4-7pm Nov-Easter) is a rich example of the Mudéjar imagination at work with its kaleidoscopic brickwork and colourful ceramic tiles. The superb 13th-century bell tower has hints of the Romanesque in its detail. Inside, the coffered roof of the nave is covered with paintings that add up to a medieval cosmography – from musical instruments and hunting scenes to coats of arms and Christ's crucifixion.

FUNDACIÓN AMANTES

Teruel's flagship attraction is the redesigned **Mausoleo de los Amantes** and **Torre de San Pedro**, which under the umbrella of the **Fundación Amantes** (☎ 978 61 83 98; Calle Matías Abad 3; admission €5; 🕒 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Sep-Jul, 10am-8pm Aug; 🚰) pulls out the stops on the city's famous legend of Isabel and Diego, tragic 13th-century lovers who died of grief at seeing their love frustrated. The Mausoleum of the Lovers contains the mummified remains of the pair. They lie in modern alabaster tombs, sculpted by Juan de Ávalos with their heads tilted endearingly towards each other. Round this centrepiece has been shaped a remarkable audiovisual exhibition, featuring music, theatre and the world league of star-crossed duos, from Romeo and Juliet to Tristan and Isolde. It all skates very close to glorious kitsch, but is entirely persuasive. Part of the ambivalent charm is the complex menu of admission prices for various combinations of tower, church and exhibition.

TORRE DE EL SALVADOR

The most impressive of Teruel's other Mudéjar monuments is the **Torre de El Salvador** (☎ 978 60 20 61; Calle El Salvador; adult/child €2.50/1.80; 🕒 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Easter-Oct, 11am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm Nov-Easter), an early-14th-century extravaganza of brick and ceramics built around an older Islamic minaret. You climb the narrow stairways and passageways occupying the gap between the inner and outer towers. Along the way, you'll find exhibits on Mudéjar art and architecture.

MUSEO PROVINCIAL

Teruel's **Provincial Museum** (☎ 978 60 01 50; Plaza Polanco; admission free; 🕒 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun) is housed in the 16th-century Casa de la Comunidad, a fine work of Renaissance

architecture. The archaeological sections are a highlight, and there are changing exhibitions of contemporary art.

ALJIBE FONDERO

At the entrance to Plaza del Torico is the metrolike entrance to the **Aljibe** (☎ 978 61 99 03; Calle Ramón y Cajal; adult/child €1/0.60; 🕒 10am-2pm & 4.30-7pm), a fascinating 14th-century underground water-storage facility.

DINÓPOLIS

It's fun for all at this large, modern **dinosaur theme park** (☎ 902 44 80 00; www.dinopolis.com; adult/child €18/14; 🕒 10am-8pm Jul–mid-Sep, Wed-Sun only May & Jun, Fri-Sun Mar-Apr & Sep–mid-Oct). It's 3km from the town centre, well signposted just off the Valencia road. A highlight is 'El Ride', a motorised trip through time spiced up with animated dinosaur robots.

Festivals & Events

On the weekend closest to 14 February, thousands of Teruel's inhabitants don medieval dress for a gala event and a **re-enactment of the Diego and Isabel legend** (see left). The **Día de San Cristóbal** (St Christopher's Day, held on 10 July) is the hub of the week-long **Feria del Ángel**, which commemorates the founding of Teruel.

Sleeping

Hostal Aragón (☎ 978 61 18 77; Calle Santa María 4; s/d €24/42) An unassuming place with well-kept wood-panelled rooms and on a narrow side street. Booking at weekends and on holidays is advised.

Hotel Plaza (☎ 978 60 86 55; www.bacohoteles.com; Plaza del Tremedal 3; s/d €57/86; 🚰 🚿 🚰) Standard business comfort, but with a friendly vibe, makes this place, in a quiet location off Plaza San Juan, a good choice. There's a useful café-bar attached.

Hotel Torico Plaza (☎ 978 60 86 55; Calle de Yagüe de Salas 5; s/d incl breakfast €82/101; 🚰 🚿 🚰) Part of the same chain as the Hotel Plaza, this pricier place has similar facilities and is in the heart of town.

Eating

Landlocked Teruel is fairly devoted to meat eating and promotes its local *jamón* with enthusiasm.

Jamones Rokelin (Calle del Rincón 2) Up the street from La Taberna de Rokelin, here you can

load up with smoked meats, sausages and cheeses for a week's worth of picnics.

La Taberna de Rokelin (☎ 978 78 60 60; Calle El Tozal 33; tapa/ración of ham €3.50/12) A great rack of smoked pig hocks sets the pace at one of Teruel's best and most popular tapas bars. It's part of the Rokelin chain.

Aquí Teruel! (Calle de Yagüe de Salas 4; tapa/ración €3.50/12) Lots of choices at this quietly atmospheric place that runs the gamut of *jamón*, *chorizo* and *morcilla* (black pudding).

Asador Rokelin (☎ 978 60 93 63; Calle Ramón y Cajal 7; dishes €7-15) Yet more Rokelin at this useful sit-down restaurant that offers the whole range of meat dishes, but also does enormous salad plates with plentiful curls of *jamón*.

La Torre (☎ 978 61 73 76; Calle El Salvador; dishes €12-18) Right opposite the Torre de El Salvador, this smart restaurant with attached café (below) raises the stakes on style with its *nouveau cuisine Aragonesa*, with subtle dishes such as quail in a fruity sauce and cod with mushrooms.

Mesón Óvalo (☎ 978 61 82 35; Paseo del Óvalo 8; menú €11, main dishes €14-20; 🕒 closed Mon) There's a strong emphasis on regional Aragonesa cuisine at this pleasant place with meat and game dishes to the fore.

Drinking

Fonda del Tozal (Calle del Rincón 5) The cavernous ground-floor bar is a rough-and-ready old place in which to unwind. It was formerly the stables of a very old inn. There are exuberant rock bands at weekends.

Café La Torre (☎ 978 61 73 76; Calle El Salvador) Part of the restaurant complex of the same name, this stylish place has a lively morning scene and is also good for late-night drinks, especially in the upstairs bar with its views of the Torre de El Salvador opposite.

Getting There & Away

From Teruel's **bus station** (☎ 978 61 07 89), Tezasa runs up to five buses daily to/from Zaragoza (€9, 2½ hours). Samar runs five buses to/from Valencia (€8.40, 2¼ hours) most days, and four buses to/from Madrid (€17.50, 4½ hours). La Rápida offers service to/from Barcelona (€23.70, six hours) and Cuenca (€8.70) daily, except Sunday. For more local services see destination sections.

Teruel is on the railway between Zaragoza (€11.35, three hours) and Valencia (€10.20, 2½ hours), with three trains each way daily.

RINCÓN DE ADEMUZ

Heading south from Teruel, the N330 crosses Sierra de la Matanza and enters the 'Ademuz Corner', a mountainous detached piece of Valencia province between the provinces of Teruel and Cuenca (Castilla-La Mancha). It makes a picturesque alternative route between Teruel town and Valencia or Cuenca provinces. The most spectacular stretch is the rough and winding 17km of the old N330A, south of the town of Ademuz to Santa Cruz de Moya. Starting along the deepening gorge of the upper Río Turia, the road crosses into Castilla-La Mancha in quite spectacular fashion. This section (and Ademuz town itself) is bypassed by the main N330, so you need to head into Ademuz via Torrebaja at the junction of the N330 and the N420, or, if coming from the south through Manzanerueta to Santa Cruz de Moya.

The N420 west from the Rincón de Ademuz skirts the southern hills of the Serranía de Cuenca en route to Cuenca.

Hostal Casa Domingo (☎ 978 78 20 30; Avenida Valencia 1; s/d €32/55), in Ademuz, has well-kept, comfy rooms and there's a restaurant attached. Buses to/from Teruel (one a day, except Sunday and holidays) and Valencia (twice daily) stop outside.

ALBARRACÍN

pop 1060 / elevation 1180m

It takes time to get to Albarracín, 38km west of Teruel, but it's worth it, not least for the marvellous sense of timelessness that is still patent in this lovely hill town, in spite of the modern onslaught of summer coach tours and fellow travellers. Built on a steep, rocky height carved out by a meander of Río Guadalaviar, Albarracín was, from 1012 to 1104, the seat of a tiny Islamic state ruled by the Berber Banu Razin dynasty. From 1170 to 1285 it was an independent Christian kingdom sandwiched between Castilla and Aragón. Ragged, fortress walls still rise up the surrounding slopes and the town's streets retain their mazelike charm, with centuries-old buildings leaning over them.

Information

There are a couple of banks, one with an ATM behind an iron grill, just off Plaza Mayor.

Post office (Calle de la Catedral)

Tourist office (☎ 978 71 02 51; www.albarracin.org; Calle Diputación 4; 🕒 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun except Sun afternoon) In the Casa de la Sierra, at the top of the approach steps that lead up from the car park.

Sights

The **cathedral** (☎ 10.30am-2pm & 4-6pm except Sun afternoon, until 8pm Jul-Sep), with its cupola typical of the Spanish Levant, has an elaborate gilded altarpiece. The **Palacio Episcopal** (Bishop's Palace), to which it's connected, houses the **Museo Diocesano** (admission €2; ☎ 10.30am-2pm & 4-6pm except Sun afternoon, until 8pm Jul-Sep), with 16th-century paintings, tapestries, and religious *objets d'art*.

The **Museo de Albarracín** (Calle San Juan; admission €2; ☎ 10.30am-1pm & 4-5.30pm except Sun afternoon), in the old city hospital, is devoted to the town's Islamic heritage.

The castle, near the southern end of town, and the **Torre del Andador** (Walkway Tower), at the top of the walls at the north, both date from the 9th century, when Albarracín was already an important Muslim military post. Walk up to the Torre del Andador for fine panoramas, then just enjoy exploring the streets. Nearly every brick, stone, slab of concrete and slap of mortar in the place is in some earthy shade of red or pink, making for wonderful plays of colour, particularly in the evening.

Tours

El Andador (☎ 667 26 06 01) conducts 1½-hour walks through Albarracín's medieval core for €3.50, departing from outside the tourist office at 11am, 12.45pm and 4.30pm.

Sleeping & Eating

For weekends in summer and all holiday times it's worth booking ahead.

Camping Ciudad de Albarracín (☎ 978 71 01 97; www.campingalbarracin.com; sites per person/tent/car €3/3/3; ☎ Apr-Oct) Pleasant, small and shaded, the camping ground is 2km from the heart of Albarracín, off the Bezas road. It also has timbered four-person chalets for €55.

Habitaciones Los Palacios (☎ 978 70 03 27; www.montepalacios.com in Spanish; Calle Los Palacios 21; s/d €25/40) This charming place has spotless rooms, some with balconies and gorgeous views. It's about 250m from Plaza Mayor, starting along Calle de Santiago and exiting through Portal de Molina. If driving from the Teruel direction, pass through the tunnel under the town and take the first road up to the right.

Hotel Mesón del Gallo (☎ 978 71 00 32; Calle de los Puentes 8; s/d €30/40) Below the main town, and just below the tunnel entrance, these adequate rooms do not enjoy the full Albarracín charm, and are above a restaurant.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Casa de Santiago (☎ 978 70 03 16; www.casa-desantiago.net; Subida a las Torres 11; s/d €48/64) A beautiful place, with lots of exposed wood, tiled floors and with charming service to go with it, the Casa lies at the heart of the old town a few steps up from Plaza Mayor. You step off the street into an immediate comfort zone. The restaurant has a *menú* for €18.

Posada del Adarve (☎ 978 70 03 04; www.posada-adarve.com; Calle Portal de Molina 23; s €33, d €45-70) A typical Albarracín townhouse, this place has been lovingly restored and is by the Portal de Molina (Molina Gateway). Its five rooms are stylish and comfy.

La Taberna (☎ 978 70 03 17; Plaza Mayor 6; platos combinados €6-9) Standard mountain fare, including wild boar and other game, is on offer at this central eatery.

All the accommodation options have restaurants offering *menús* from €10 to €14.

Getting There & Away

Autotransportes Teruel buses leave daily, except Sunday, from Teruel for Albarracín (30 minutes) at 3.30pm, and from Albarracín for Teruel at 8.45am.

EL RODENO

The back road leading southeast from Albarracín towards Bezas passes near a series of Neolithic rock paintings of bulls, horses and deer, known as the **Conjunto de Arte Rupestre del Rodeno**, among boulder-strewn countryside. There are 12 lots of paintings in total, in five groups. Five key trails, varying in distance from 2.2km to 15km, traverse the zone; the Albarracín **tourist office** (☎ 978 71 02 51; www.albarracin.org; Calle Diputación 4; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun except Sun afternoon) gives out maps and information.

THE SOUTHEAST

The sparsely populated ranges stretching east of Teruel into the Valencia region present a bleached maze of rocky peaks and dramatic gorges, among which the quiet and ancient stone *pueblos* (villages) seem to be left to their own devices. This is wonderful country for exploring, well off the beaten track, but unless you have a lot of time, you need a vehicle.

Buses serve most places, but rarely more than once daily and often not at all on weekends.

A worthwhile route from Teruel for those with their own transport leads 43km southeast to **Mora de Rubielos** in the foothills of the Sierra de Gudar. A massive 14th-century **castle** (admission €1.30; ☎ 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sun) towers over the village amid a sea of red and pink stone. Across the way is the 15th-century Gothic **Ex-Colegiata de Santa María**, notable for its single very broad nave.

Another 14km southeast along the A232 is pretty **Rubielos de Mora**, a quiet web of narrow streets whose houses have typically small Aragonese balconies. The friendly **Hotel Los Leones** (☎ 978 80 44 77; www.losleones.info in Spanish; Plaza Igual y Gil 3; s/d €72/105) has attractive period décor and comfortable rooms, and has a fine restaurant with a €27 *menú*.

In the north of the region is **La Iglesia del Gid**. Here you have entered El Maestrazgo, a medieval knightly domain centred on Sant Mateu (p607) in Castellón province. La Iglesia is worth a quick visit to see its church and old town hall, sharing a tight little medieval plaza with the classy **Hospedería de la Iglesia del Gid** (☎ 964 44 34 76; Ondevilla 4; s/d €83/118; P) (☎) in an 18th-century mansion. At **Casa Amada** (☎ 964 44 33 73; Fuentesueva 10; s/d €25/39) you'll find simple accommodation and a good restaurant.

Cantavieja, 13km northwest of La Iglesia, was reputedly founded by Hannibal. It later became a seat of the Knights Templar. The best-preserved (and partly restored) part of town is the porticoed Plaza Cristo Rey. A decent stopover is **Pensión Julián** (☎ 964 18 50

05; Calle García Valiño 6; d with/without bathroom €27/18) where you enter through a cavernous old carriage yard. There are decent home-cooked meals available.

If you're heading for Morella in the Valencian Maestrazgo, the A226 northeast of Cantavieja will take you, snaking down past ragged cliffs and then via **Mirambel**, a fine example of a gently decaying, walled medieval town without the usual modern-day additions. For an overnight stay **Hostal Guimerá** (☎ 964 17 82 69; Calle Pastor 28; s/d €24/30, without bathroom €15/20) has simple rooms and simple, but filling, meals.

Getting There & Away

One of the more useful bus services is the 3pm Monday-to-Friday bus from Teruel to La Iglesia del Gid (€7.65, two hours) via Cantavieja (€6.75, 1½ hours). In the opposite direction, the bus departs from La Iglesia at 6.15am. Another Monday-to-Friday bus leaves Cantavieja at 5.45am bound for Morella via Mirambel. Yet another early morning weekday bus journeys from Cantavieja to Villarluengo and Alcorisa, where you can connect for Alcañiz (see p448).

CALANDA

From Teruel, the N420 heads north through mountainous terrain, reaching the foggy heights of pass Puerto San Just (1400m) before descending to meet the east-west N211 which leads to Calanda, at the confluence of Rios Guadalupe and Guadalopillo. The chief reason to visit Calanda is the **Centro Buñuel Calanda** (☎ 978 84 65 24; Calle Mayor 48; admission €5; ☎ 10.30am-1.30pm & 4-8pm

LUIS BUÑUEL & THE DRUMS OF CALANDA

Luis Buñuel's earliest memories were of the drums of Calanda. In the centuries-old ritual of the lower Aragón town, the film director's birthplace, Good Friday noon marks the *rompida de la hora* (breaking of the hour). At that moment thousands commence banging on *tambores* (snare drums) and *bombos* (bass drums), together producing a thunderous din. The ceremony goes on for the next 24 hours, only ceasing for the passage of the standard Easter processions. The drumming rages all over the region with drum parades at Alcañiz also.

'The drums, that amazing, resounding, cosmic phenomenon that brushes the collective subconscious, causes the earth to tremble beneath our feet', Buñuel recalls in his memoir, *Mi Último Suspiro* (My Last Sigh). 'One has only to place his hand on the wall of a house to feel the vibrations. Nature follows the rhythm...which goes on all night. Anyone who manages to fall asleep, lulled by the banging, awakes with a start when the sound trails off. At dawn, the drum skins are stained with blood: hands bleed after so much banging. And these are the rough hands of peasants.'

This clamour worked its way into Buñuel's dreams and nightmares, and eventually into his surreal films; the drums left their imprint, along with a taste for ritual, costumes and disguises.

Tue-Sun), a museum devoted to the life and films of Luis Buñuel. The museum tries to remain faithful to the surrealist spirit of the Calanda native (see the boxed text, p447), cleverly weaving images from his oeuvre into the tour. For true aficionados, a filmography room has computers with details of all 32 of Buñuel's films, accompanied by screenings of key scenes and commentary by the director. The décor throughout is bright and colourful.

The museum is 500m from the bus stop on the edge of town. Look for Plaza de España and follow Calle Mayor three or four blocks east.

Calanda is served by buses (€7.10, two hours) from Teruel and Alcañiz.

ALCAÑIZ

Alcañiz is the administrative centre for lower Aragón and is fairly overwhelmed by commerce, although it's an engagingly busy town and useful for an overnight stop if you're head-

ing north or south. The huge castle is now a *parador*. A series of vivid, intricately detailed murals dating from the 14th century cover the walls of the **keep** (admission €4.50; ☎ 10am-1.30pm & 4-6pm, later in summer), which can be ascended for views.

The monumental **Iglesia de Santa María La Mayor** dwarfs the central Plaza de España and has a huge baroque portal. A **tourist office** (☎ 10am-2pm & 4-6pm except Sun afternoon) gives access to 'hidden Alcañiz', a series of **underground passages** (admission €2) that was used as store-rooms and ice store.

Of a dozen lodgings, **Hostal Aragón** (☎ 978 87 07 17; Calle Espejo 3; s/d €30/50) is an excellent, central choice – a tall, old house with sturdy balconies.

Up to four buses travel daily to/from Zaragoza, and two stop here (€8.90, 2½ hours) en route between Teruel and Barcelona. Look immediately for signposted underground car parks if you're driving.

Basque Country, Navarra & La Rioja



The Basque Country and its associated regions of Navarra and La Rioja seem worlds apart from Spain, from Europe and, sometimes, from the rest of the world itself.

The Basques claim their country as a nation and it is easy to see why. Even the most casual visitor cannot help feeling a powerful sense of uniqueness amid the forested hills and timeless villages of the northern Basque provinces. You feel that same uniqueness on the corrugated coastline with its string of tough fishing ports, where Euskara, the Basque language, holds sway above all others. You feel it too in the crowning glories of the Basque Country, the cities of Bilbao and Vitoria, paradigms of cultured, sociable urban life and San Sebastián, a sublime beach resort and boasting some of the finest food in Spain and, some say, in Europe too. Add to all of this the ancient Basque heartland of Navarra, less self-consciously Basque today, but with a colourful identity that also sets it apart.

It is a land of breathtaking contrasts that take you from the seductive heat of the low country south of Pamplona, through that ambivalent city of sedate tradition and bull-running excess, to the snowy coxcombs of the Pyrenees and their green, forested valleys – paradise for walkers, skiers and climbers. And then there's La Rioja, awash with glorious wine, linked by geography to the more temperate north, yet persuasively Mediterranean in its sunburst colours and its dreamy landscape of vineyards, grassy hills and bone-white limestone escarpments, its medieval monasteries and enticing wine towns.

HIGHLIGHTS

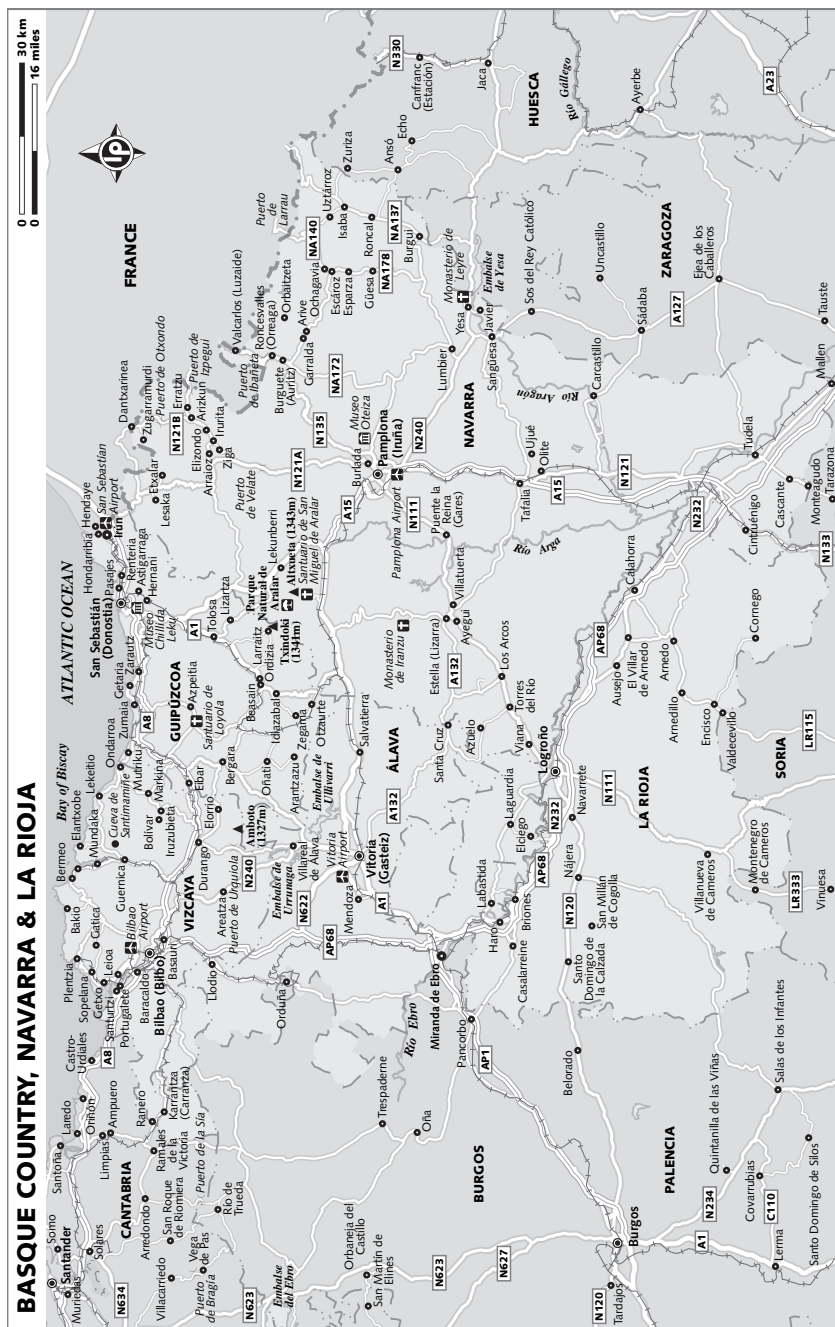
- Wine and dine in fabulous **San Sebastián** (p465), city of beautiful beaches and *belle-époque* buildings
- Don't miss **Bilbao's** (p453) stunning Museo Guggenheim and its Museo de Bellas Artes; big windows on great art
- Relax in civilised **Vitoria** (p476), where the pedestrian triumphs over the car
- Wander the velvety **La Rioja** (p491) wine country
- Escape from the mainstream and explore the medieval towns of **Olite** (p487) and **Tudela** (p488)
- Get high on the pure air of the Navarran **Pyrenees** (p488)



■ AREA: 22,670 SQ KM

■ AVE SUMMER TEMP: HIGH 28°C,
LOW 12°C

■ POP: 3.02 MILLION



BASQUE COUNTRY

The Basque Country proper, known to Basques as Euskadi or Euskal Herria, the 'land of the Basque Speakers' and known in Spanish as El País Vasco, somehow manages to cope triumphantly with its multifaceted identity. Hopefully emerging from the shadow of political violence, although only time will tell, this is a land that demands exploration beyond its delightful main cities of Bilbao, Vitoria and San Sebastián. It's a land of tumbling hills and rocky ridges, often swathed in forest, and subject always to the quixotic weather of the great sea that washes on to its equally fascinating and varied coastline. At every turn are towns and villages that are emphatically Basque, yet have unique and intriguing identities.

Even the names of the region's three provinces of Guipúzcoa (Basque: Gipuzkoa), Álava (Basque: Araba) and Vizcaya (Basque: Bizkaia) seem to resonate with intriguing possibilities. You travel through the Basque Country always curious, and always rewarded.

History

No-one quite knows where the Basque people came from (they have no migration myth in their oral history); but their presence here is believed to predate even the earliest known migrations. Even the Romans left the hilly Basque Country more or less to itself, but the expansionist Castilian crown gained sovereignty over Basque territories during the Middle Ages (1000–1450), although with considerable difficulty; Navarra constituted a separate kingdom until 1512. Even when they came within the Castilian orbit, Navarra and the three Basque provinces extracted broad autonomy arrangements, known as the *fueros* (the ancient laws of the Basques).

After the Second Carlist War in 1876 all provinces except Navarra were stripped of their coveted *fueros*, thereby fuelling nascent Basque nationalism. Yet, although the Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV; Basque Nationalist Party) was established in 1894, support was never uniform, as all Basque provinces included a considerable Castilian contingent.

When the Republican government in Madrid proposed the possibility of home rule (self-government) to the Basques in 1936, both Guipúzcoa and Vizcaya took up the offer. When the Spanish Civil War erupted,

conservative rural Navarra and Álava supported Franco, while Vizcaya and Guipúzcoa sided with the Republicans, a decision they paid a high price for in the four decades that followed.

Today, with the Basque terrorist organisation Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA; Basques and Freedom) declaring what is, hopefully, a final ceasefire in 2006, and with Madrid proving positive about strengthened autonomy to the regions, the Basque Country seems ever more likely to progress its nationalist ambitions.

Language

'The Basque language is a country', said Victor Hugo, and language certainly encapsulates all things Basque. Known as Euskara, the Basque language is acknowledged as being one of Europe's oldest and most quixotic languages, with no known relationship to the Indo-European family of languages. Its earliest written elements were thought to be 11th-century manuscripts found at the Monasterio de Suso (p496) at San Millán de la Cogolla in La Rioja province, but discoveries in 2006 at the archaeological site of Iruña-Veleia near Vitoria included inscriptions in Basque dating from the 3rd century AD.

Suppressed by Franco, Basque was subsequently recognised as one of Spain's official

SIGNS IN BASQUE

Basque words that commonly appear on signs include the following:

Basque	English	Spanish
<i>aireportua</i>	airport	<i>aeropuerto</i>
<i>erdia</i>	centre	<i>centro</i>
<i>erdialdea</i>	city centre	<i>centro de la ciudad</i>
<i>jatetxea</i>	restaurant	<i>restaurante</i>
<i>kalea</i>	street	<i>calle</i>
<i>kale nagusia</i>	main street	<i>calle mayor</i>
<i>komuna/kontzu!</i>	toilet/s caution/ beware!	<i>servicios</i> <i>¡atención!</i>
<i>nekazal</i>	agrotourism homes	<i>casas rurales</i>
<i>ongi etorri</i>	welcome	<i>bienvenido</i>
<i>turismoa/turismo</i>	tourism	<i>turismo</i>
<i>turismo bulego</i>	tourist office	<i>oficina de turismo</i>

BASQUE NATIONALISM

Basque nationalism is many faceted, yet at its heart, its motivation lies in the Basque peoples' compelling sense of identity and of cultural uniqueness, a passion that becomes evident to even the most casual traveller through the northern Basque provinces.

In 1961 a small group of Basque separatists known as Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA; the name stands for Basque Homeland and Freedom) carried out its first terrorist attack. Its goal was to carve out an independent Basque state from the Basque territories of northern Spain and southern France. Thus began a cycle of violence that became increasingly self-defeating in the face of the granting of wide-ranging autonomy in the early 1980s and 1990s. The antithesis of ETA was the emergence of a powerful, though peaceful, nationalism, especially among the young, that saw the Basque language as the most potent symbol of nationhood and independence.

In the last 40 years ETA's grisly war killed more than 800 people. Sporadic 'ceasefires' and initiatives foundered on the unwillingness of both sides to make major concessions. Relations reached their nadir in March 2004 when the government of José María Aznar, made a desperate, and ultimately failed, election play by trying to blame ETA for the terrorist bombings in Madrid.

In March 2006, ETA declared a 'final' ceasefire, the most hopeful yet. The response of Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero was to state that the Madrid government 'has the best opportunity for a peace process for more than 30 years'. Zapatero's pragmatism and his party's stated intent of holding talks with ETA and with Herri Batasuna, the perceived political wing of ETA, may yet progress the situation in spite of continuing opposition from Spain's conservative Popular Party and ingrained suspicion of Madrid by many Basques.

No-one would claim that all Basques are passionate nationalists, but with expanded autonomy on the cards for Catalonia, the realisation of the peaceful aspirations of a large majority of Basques seems more promising than ever. Complex and conflicting issues remain, however, not least the vexed question of the Madrid government's policy of imprisoning outside the Basque Country those whom many Basques see as political prisoners. Resolving this would be a major step forward.

languages. Although Franco's repression meant that many older Basques are unable to speak their native tongue, it has now become the language of choice, and of identity, among a growing number of young Basques, fuelling a dynamic cultural renaissance and a nonviolent political awareness. There are now Basque-language radio and TV stations and newspapers.

For more information on the Basque language, see p877.

Sport

The Basques indulge in a wonderful and, to outsiders, eccentric assortment of sports, that range from grass-cutting and log-chopping to caber-tossing and tug-of-war. The most famous is *pelota vasca* a form of handball played on a walled court known as a *frontón*. There's also a version involving the use of a *txistera*, a kind of hand-held basket that allows the ball to be slung with disconcerting velocity at the wall. You can often see local teams whacking away at the town or village *frontón*. The traditional game, with teams of

two players each, is played with the bare hand, but there are up to 20 variants of the sport, now played all over the world.

Coastal Basques are superb rowers in the tradition of their historic use of pilot vessels and whaling boats. Today at ports such as Ondarroa (p464), rowing is a passion and there are famous races, such as the Regatta de Traineras in San Sebastián (see p469).

Football (soccer) is well-served by the much-loved Athletic de Bilbao team, known for its admirable, though often difficult, policy of only signing Basque players.

Food & Drink

Food to the Basques is both a necessity and an art form and Basque cuisine is generally regarded as among Spain's finest, both for its classical food and for its tapas, which are known more commonly as *pintxos* in the Basque Country (see the boxed text, p470).

Fish is probably the favourite natural ingredient in Basque cuisine and famous dishes include *bacalao al pil pil* (salt cod cooked with garlic) and *merluza a la vasca* (hake in green

sauc). Meat usually turns up as delicious stews throughout the Basque Country and as *chuletas de buey* (enormous beef chops). Other distinctive ingredients include mushrooms, *pimientos* (red peppers) and *alubias* (black beans).

The great Basque drinks are *sídra* (cider) and a refreshing young white wine, *txacoli*, light in alcohol content and a classic accompaniment to *pintxos*. A good part of the La Rioja wine-producing region extends into the Northern Basque Country and the choicest Riojas are a rich complement to Basque cuisine.

Led by such master-chefs as Juan Mari Arzak and his daughter Elena, and Pedro Subijana, the Basque Country's contribution to *nouvelle cuisine* has become internationally famous with what is commonly called the *nieuva cocina vasca*, a world-class 'school' of innovation. Signature dishes, using classic Basque produce, include treats such as mushroom terrine, partridge stuffed with grapes and sea bass with green peppers.

BILBAO

pop 372,000

Bilbao (Basque: Bilbo) is a city to dream about – vital, vibrant and culturally dynamic, yet somehow stress-free and, above all, civilised in the true sense of that overused word.

The Basque Country's biggest and busiest city, Bilbao lies on Ría Nervión and is neatly wedged into the green hills of Vizcaya province. At its heart it is sliced in two by the murky waters of Ría de Bilbao, the Nervión's channel to the sea.

Bilbainos (residents of Bilbao) have long called their city the *botxo*, the 'orifice', an ironic and affectionate multimetaphor for the city's topography and its once-ugly industrial sprawl. Post-industrial decline into an even deeper black hole seemed to be Bilbao's fate during the late 20th century. Yet by the 1990s visionary planning, and Bilbao's tradition of hard work, saw the city well on the way to reinventing itself as a 21st-century metropolis, even before Frank Gehry's iconic Museo Guggenheim gave it international cultural status. *Bilbainos* appreciate 'El Goog', but they know also that their city was going places anyway.

Today, Bilbao throngs with sophisticated yet earthy locals, its cuisine is positively lip-smacking, there's nonstop partying if you want to burn out in style, and a rich Basque culture more than matches the internationalism of the Guggenheim.

History

Bilbao was granted the title of villa (a city state) in 1300, and medieval *bilbainos* went about their business in the bustle of Las Siete Calles, the original seven streets of the old town, and on the wharves of San Antón and Abando. The conquest of the Americas stimulated trade, and Basque fishers, merchants and settlers soon built strong links to such cities as Boston. By the late 19th century the smokestacks of steelworks, shipbuilding yards and chemical plants dominated the area's skyline.

From the Carlist Wars through to the Spanish Civil War, Bilbao was always considered the greatest prize in the north, largely for its industrial value. Franco took the city in the spring of 1937 and reprisals against Basque nationalists were massive and long lasting. Yet, during the Franco era the city prospered as it fed Spanish industrial needs. This was followed by the seemingly terminal economic decline that has been so dynamically reversed in recent years.

Orientation

Bilbao's old quarter, the Casco Viejo, lies bundled up on the east bank of Ría de Bilbao, Río Nervión's channel to the sea. *Pensiones* (small hotels), cafés, restaurants and bars cluster in the pedestrianised streets, Las Siete Calles. Between the Casco and the river is Plaza de Arenal, a broad open area in front of the handsome façade of the Teatro Arriaga. From here the Puente de Arenal spans the river and leads into the Abando area and Plaza Circular (Plaza de España). The plaza is the eastern hub of El Ensanche, the 19th-century 'extension' of Bilbao with its swathe of tall, handsome buildings. The main train stations are between Plaza Circular and the river. The main bus station, Termibus, is just over 1.5km west of Plaza Circular.

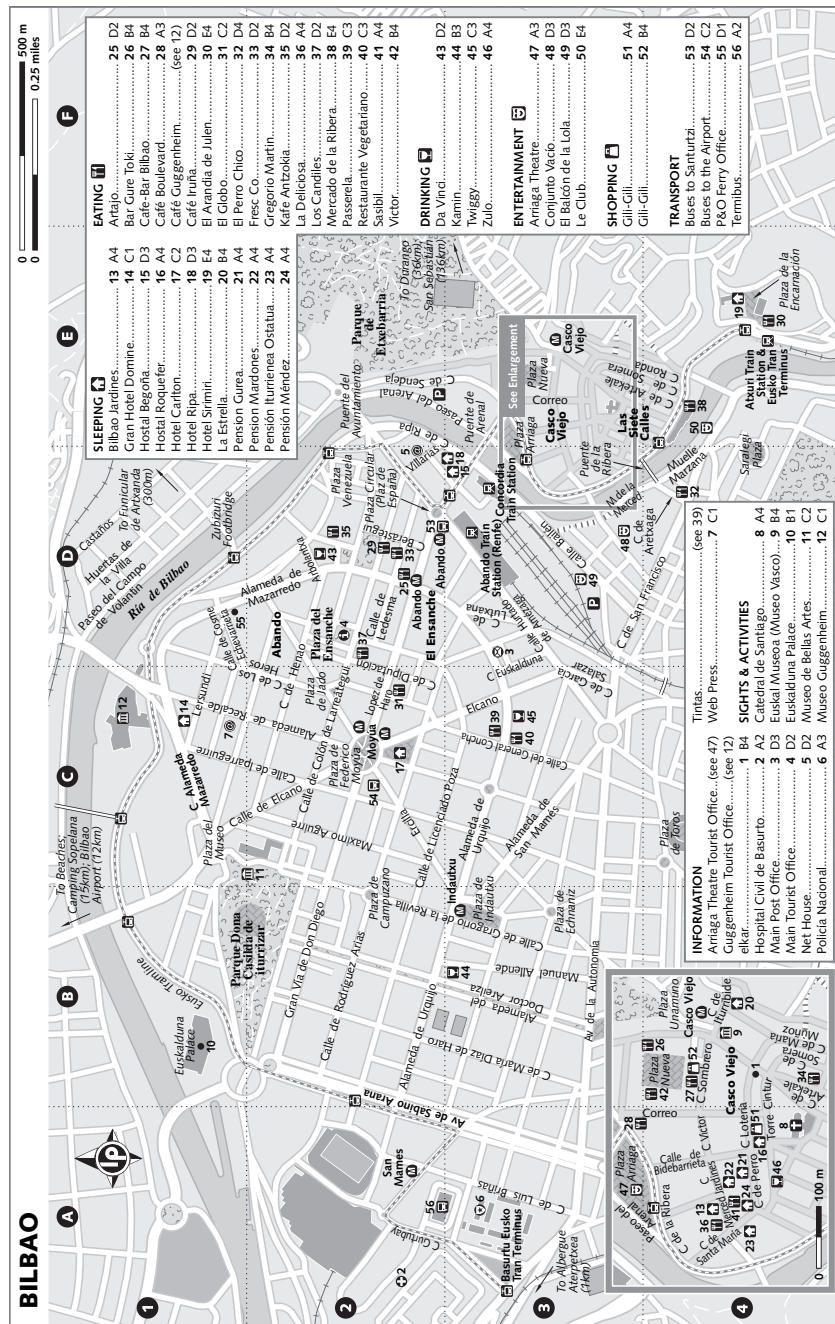
Information

BOOKSHOPS

Newsstands around Plaza Moyúa usually have a fair selection of foreign newspapers. There are well-stocked bookshops at the Guggenheim and at the Museo de Bellas Artes.

elkar (☎ 944 16 14 50; Calle de la Cruz) Basque publications are strongly represented here. Also stocks books in Spanish and a few in English, and there's an excellent map and travel section.

Tintas (☎ 944 44 95 41; Calle del General Concha 10) Travel bookshop with a broad selection of travel books, road maps and topographical maps for trekkers.



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EMERGENCY

Cruz Roja (% 944 22 22 22) Ambulance service.
Emergency (% 112)
Policía Nacional (% 091; Calle de Luis Briñas 14)

INTERNET ACCESS

Net House (% 944 23 71 53; Calle Villarias 6; per hr €3; h 10.30am-10.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-11.30pm Sat, 11.30am-10.30pm Sun)
Web Press (% 944 23 39 37; Calle Esquina Barraincúa 9; per hr €2.60; h 10am-10pm Mon-Fri, 4-10pm Sun) A well-run place with a photocopying service.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Hospital Civil de Basurto (% 944 41 87 00; Calle de Gurtubay)

MONEY

There are numerous banks, most with ATMs, in Bilbao, particularly around Plaza Circular (Plaza de España).

POST

Main post office (% 944 22 05 48; Alameda de Urquijo 19)

TELEPHONE

Web Press (% 944 23 39 37; Calle Esquina Barraincúa 9; h 10am-10pm Mon-Fri, 4-10pm Sun) Cheap international calls.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (% 944 79 57 60; www.bilbao.net/bilbaoturismo); **Main Office** (Plaza del Ensanche, 11; h 9am-2pm & 4-7.30pm Mon-Fri); **Arriaga Theatre** (Plaza Arriaga; h 9.30am-2pm & 4-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-2pm Sun Jun-Sep, 11am-2pm & 5-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2pm & 5-7.30pm Sat, 9.30am-2pm Sun Oct-May); **Guggenheim** (Avenida Abandoibarra 2; h 10am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun Jul-Sep, 11am-6pm Tue-Fri, 11am-7pm Sat, 11am-2pm Sun Oct-May); **Airport** (% 944 71 03 01; h 7.30am-11pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-11pm Sat & Sun) Bilbao's friendly tourist staffers are extremely helpful, well informed and above all enthusiastic about their city. At all offices ask for the free bimonthly *Bilbao Guia*, with its entertainment listings plus tips on restaurants, bars and nightlife.

Sights

MUSEO GUGGENHEIM

Opened in September 1997, Bilbao's Museo Guggenheim (% 944 35 90 80; www.guggenheim-bilbao.es; Ave Abandoibarra 2; adult/student/under 12 €10.50/6.50/free; h 10am-8pm Tue-Sun Sep-Jun, daily Jul & Aug; ✓✓) lifted modern architecture and Bilbao into

the 21st century – with sensation. It boosted the city's already inspired regeneration and stimulated further development.

Some might say that structure overwhelms function here and that the Guggenheim is probably more famous for its architecture than its content; but Canadian architect Frank Gehry's inspired use of flowing canopies, cliffs, promontories, ship shapes, towers and flying fins is irresistible.

Like all great architects, Gehry designed the Guggenheim with historical and geographical contexts in mind. The site was an industrial wasteland, part of Bilbao's wrenched and decaying warehouse district on the banks of Ría de Bilbao. The city's historic industries of ship building and fishing reflected Gehry's own interests, not least his engagement with industrial materials in previous works, while the gleaming titanium tiles that sheathe most of the building like giant herring scales are said to have been inspired by the architect's childhood fascination with fish.

The interior of the Guggenheim is purposefully vast. The cathedral-like atrium is more than 45m high. Light pours in through the glass cliffs. Leading off from the atrium is Gallery 104, the fish gallery, a vast arena 128m by 30m wide that houses Richard Serra's *Snake*, and his *The Matter of Time*. These installations comprise massive iron sheets arranged maze-like and mysterious and between which you wander in a rust-red world of muffled, sibilant or clanging sound.

Galleries 103 and 105 house selections from the Guggenheim permanent collection, and can include works by Picasso, Braque, Mondrian, Miró, Rothko, Klee and Kandinsky; but these works are not always on display (check the Guggenheim's website for a full programme of upcoming exhibitions).

Admission prices may vary depending on special exhibitions and the last ticket sales are half an hour before closing. Free guided tours in English take place at 11am, 12.30pm, 4.30pm and 6.30pm; you sign up half an hour before at the information desk. Groups are limited to 20, so get there early. Excellent self-guided audio tours in various languages are free with your general admission.

FUNICULAR DE ARTXANDA

For a breathtaking vista of Bilbao take the three-minute ride up Artxanda hill on the funicular (% 944 45 49 66; Plaza Funicular; one-way adult/under

OPEN-AIR GALLERY

Part of the Guggenheim experience is a quiet wander around the outside of the building, appreciating the extraordinary imagination behind its design and catching the different colours reflected by the titanium tiles, limestone and glass. Lying between the glass buttresses of the central atrium and Ria de Bilbao is a simple pool of water that emits at intervals a mist 'sculpture' by Fuyiko Nakaya. Nearby on the riverbank is a sculpture by Louise Bourgeois, a skeletal canopy representing a spider entitled *Maman*, said to represent a protective embrace.

In the open area to the west of the museum a fountain sculpture fires off jets of water into the air randomly and youngsters have the time of their lives taking their chances as they leap to and fro. Beyond is a kids' playground. On the Alameda Mazarredo, the city side of the museum, is Jeff Koon's kitsch-whimsy *Puppy*, a 12m tall highland terrier made up of thousands of begonias. Bilbao has hung on to 'El Poop', who was supposed to be a passing attraction as part of a world tour. With the fond, deprecating humour of citizens of all tough cities, *bilbainos* will tell you that El Poop came first – and then they had to build a kennel behind it...

12 €0.80/0.35; 11 7.15am–10pm Mon–Sat, 8.15am–10pm Sun Oct–May, to 11pm Sat & Sun Jun–Sep). The base station in Plaza Funicular can be reached from the pleasant northside river walk that links the Paseo del Arenal to the Guggenheim. It can also be reached from the Uribitarte Eusko Tran stop by crossing the exuberant Zubizuri Footbridge, creation of architect Santiago Calatrava.

MUSEO DE BELLAS ARTES

A mere five minutes from the Museo Guggenheim is Bilbao's Fine Arts Museum (944 39 60 60; www.museobilbao.com; Plaza del Museo 2; adult/student €5/3.50, Wed free; 11 10am–8pm Tue–Sat, 10am–2pm Sun; √), a more than satisfactory complement to the Guggenheim.

The museum houses a compelling collection that includes everything from Gothic sculptures to 20th-century pop art. There are three main subcollections; Classical Art, with work by Murillo, Zurbarán, El Greco, Goya and van Dyck; Contemporary Art, featuring work by Gauguin, Francis Bacon, Anthony Caro; and Basque Art with the work of the great sculptors Jorge de Oteiza and Eduardo Chillida, but also with strong paintings by the likes of Ignacio Zuloaga and Juan de Echevarria. A useful audio-guide costs €2.

CASCO VIEJO

It's a worthwhile stroll through Bilbao's atmospheric old town, with its worn, grungy façades, bars, restaurants and shops. At the heart of the Casco are Bilbao's original 'seven streets', Las Siete Calles. Midmorning there's a bit of a rout as delivery vans compete for space. It's all part of the quarter's happy vibe. At the heart of the Casco is the 19th-century

arcaded Plaza Nueva, a rewarding *pintxo* haunt. There's a lively Sunday market here that offers coins, stamps and other bric-a-brac. The quarter's Gothic Catedral de Santiago, has a splendid Renaissance portico, itself once the scene of medieval markets and civic meetings.

EUSKAL MUSEOA (MUSEO VASCO)

The Museum of Basque Archaeology, Ethnography & History (944 15 54 23; www.euskal-museoa.org; Plaza Miguel Unamuno 4; adult/student/under 10 €3/1.50/free, Thu free; 11 11am–5pm Tue–Sat, 11am–2pm Sun; √), to give it its full title, is a well-executed display of archaeological findings from the Basque region, enhanced by exhibits about traditional working practices and domestic life. The museum is housed in a fine old building, at whose centre is the peaceful cloister that was part of an original 17th-century Jesuit College. In the cloister is the Mikeldi Idol a powerful pre-Christian, possibly Iron Age, symbolic figure.

Tours

An enjoyable way of catching a close quarters' flavour of Bilbao is on a walking tour (944 79 57 60; per person €3; 11 Sat & Sun) of the Casco Viejo and of the Ensanche–Abandoibarra district on the west side of Riá de Bilbao. They are led by local guides who have excellent language skills, great knowledge of the city and infectious enthusiasm. The tours last 90 minutes. Ask at tourist offices for times.

Festivals & Events

Held in February, *carnaval* is celebrated with vigour, but Bilbao's grandest fiesta begins on the first Saturday after 15 August and is

known as the Aste Nagusia (Big Week). Traditional parades and music mix with a full programme of cultural events over 10 days.

About 25km north of Bilbao, Getxo hosts a week-long international jazz festival in July, as well as a smaller blues music festival (June) and a folk music festival (September).

Sleeping

The Bilbao tourism authority has a very useful reservations department (902 87 72 98; www.bilbaoreservas.com).

Places to stay in the Casco Viejo are usually spread across the upper floors of tall, old buildings with street level intercoms. Many places are pleasantly creaky and late-night noise at weekends can be irritating; but double-glazing often helps. Ask for a room facing away from the street, pack the earplugs, or join the party.

BUDGET

Camping Sopelana (946 76 19 81; www.camping-sopelana.com; sites per person/ten/car €5/5/5; ∞) This pleasant site has a swimming pool as well as nearby Sopelana Beach to play on. Facilities are very good. It's on the metro line, 15km from Bilbao.

Albergue Bilbao Aterpetxea (944 27 00 54; aterpe@albergue.bilbao.net; Carretera Basurto-Kastrexana Erep 70; dm/s €14.50/18.50; i) A modern, well-run facility, spread over eight floors, this hostel is a 10-minute ride on bus 58 from Plaza Arriaga, Plaza Zabáburu and from Basurto. Prices shown are for under-twenty-fives; over twenty-five's pay about €1.30 more. Meals, internet access, bike hire, money exchange and laundry facilities are some of the extras on offer. Student groups often book it.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hostal Begoña (944 23 01 34; www.hostalbegona.com; Calle de la Amistad 2; s/d from €51.35/61; i) The owners of this outstanding place, in a quiet side street near Plaza Circular, don't need voguish labels for their very stylish and individual creation. Begoña speaks for itself with colourful rooms decorated with modern artworks, and all with funky tiled bathrooms, minibar, cable TV and wrought-iron beds. Bonuses include free internet access, books, magazines and drinks. Prices drop in the low season.

Pensión Méndez (944 16 03 64; www.pensionmendez.com; Calle de Santa María 13; s/d without bathroom €27/38, s/d/tr with bathroom from €39/52/68) There's a dual choice on the 1st and 4th floors of this centrally located, lofty building. Rooms are fresh and clean and have tiled or wooden floors. The 1st floor has en-suite rooms with pleasant décor. The 4th floor has shared bathrooms, but the general standard is still good.

La Estrella (944 16 40 66; fax 944 16 70 66; Calle de María Muñoz 6; s/d €27/45, with bathroom €39/57). Estrella has been around for a while and offers decent rooms that have no great character but that are clean and comfy. There's a dining room and bar.

Hostal Roquefer (944 15 07 55; Calle de la Lotería 2; s/d with washbasin €25/40, with bathroom €38/50) Buried inside a classic old-town building and with high ceilings and narrow hallways, Roquefer is a touch fusty and dusty to match the old-fashioned style; but the very kindly owners are a pleasure.

Pension Gurea (944 16 32 99; Calle de Bidebarrieta 14; s/d €40/45, without bathroom €30/35) There's a sparky air around this busy, well-run place where you get a friendly, up-beat welcome. Rooms are adequate and clean.

Pension Mardones (944 15 31 05; www.pensionmardones.com; Calle Jardines 4; s/d with washbasin €35/40, with bathroom €40/45) Deep in the heart of the Casco this long-established favourite is very well kept by the cheerful owners. The rooms are high-ceilinged and spacious and there's lots of polished wood on the floors.

MIDRANGE

Pensión Iturrienea Ostataua (944 16 15 00; fax 944 15 89 29; Calle de Santa María 14; s/d €50/60) Reflecting a marvellous Basque individuality at the heart of Bilbao's Casco Viejo – say hello to the lifelike sheep at the door – this place oozes character and charm. There's been a recent refurbishment of the spacious rooms and the whole place is filled with natural wood, stone and antiques. It also serves a good breakfast (€8).

Hotel Ripa (944 23 96 77; www.hotel-ripa.com; Calle de Ripa 3; s/d €50/65; p i) Across the bridge from the Casco Viejo, the comfy rooms here are fresh and bright and the ones at the front have great river views.

Bilbao Jardines (944 794 210; www.hotelbilbaojardines.com; Calle Jardines 9; s/d €4.20/85.60; p a i) A sparkling newcomer to the Casco Viejo's dusty façades, the Jardine's fresh, modern

décor and comfy, but unfancy furnishings offer a reasonably priced alternative to the sometimes worn charm of the quarter's long-serving *pensiones*.

Hotel Sirimiri (☎ 944 33 07 59; www.hotelsirimiri.com; Plaza la Encarnación 3; s/d/tr €74.90/96.30/117.70; P i) An excellent choice with very friendly and helpful management, Sirimiri is just under 1km downriver from Plaza Arriaga, but has the overwhelming advantage of being only seconds away from the Atxuri Train Station and Eusko Tran Terminal. Rooms are spacious and very comfy. There's even a free gym in the basement and a sauna which costs €5.

TOP END

Hotel Carlton (☎ 944 16 22 00; www.aranzazu-hotels.com; Plaza de Federico Moyúa 2; s/d Mon-Thu €188.30/236, Fri-Sun €101.65/117.70) Grand dame of Bilbao hotels and still lording it over the buzzing Plaza Moyúa, the delightful Carlton draws you in past an army of staff and slightly flouncy regulars, into soothing marble interiors, vaulted ceilings and graceful rooms. 'El Goog' is even within walking distance.

Gran Hotel Domine (☎ 944 25 33 00; www.granhoteldominebilbao.com; Alameda Mazarredo 61; d from €216) With designer chic all the way from the Javier Mariscal main interiors to the Phillipe Starck and Arne Jacobsen fittings – and that's just in the loos – this stellar showpiece of the Silken chain has views of the Guggenheim from some of its pricier rooms and from the roof terrace.

Eating

Bilbao may not have snared the same starry reputation for food that San Sebastián enjoys, but it can more than match its rival's *pintxo* bars for quality if not quantity, while its top restaurants offer terrific Basque cuisine.

PINTXOS

Bar Gure Toki (☎ 944 15 80 37; Plaza Nueva 12; pintxos €1.20) Tucked away in the northwest corner of Plaza Nueva is this cosy little *pintxo* bar that has a cosy attitude to match. There's a subtle but simple line in creative *pintxos* (€1.20) such as *hongos con foie* (mushrooms in sauce).

Victor (☎ 944 15 16 78; Plaza Nueva 2) A long-established Bilbao favourite with a popular restaurant where you can sample the great Basque signature dish of *bacalao al pil pil*, but it's in the main bar where you'll find classic *pintxos*.

Café-Bar Bilbao (☎ 944 15 16 71; Plaza Nueva 6) This place prides itself on very creative *pintxos*, so plunge straight in, if you dare, for a taste of *mousse de pata sobre crema de melocotón y almendras*. Don't ask; just eat...

Sasibil (☎ 944 79 05 71; Calle Jardines Victor 8) Sasibil gets a mixed business crowd at lunchtime and early evening for such treats as *brocheta de pulpo y langostinos* (octopus and prawns). The squawking as you enter? Ignore it...

Don't restrict your search for the perfect *pintxo* to the Casco Viejo. The El Ensanche area also has some good options.

El Globo (☎ 944 15 42 21; Calle de Diputación 8) One of the best, this popular bar at a pedestrianised crossroads near Plaza Moyúa, has a terrific range of *pintxos modernos*, including favourites such as *txangurro gratinado* (spider crab) and *morcilla rebozada* (blood sausage in light batter).

Los Candiles (☎ 944 24 14 79; Calle de Diputación 1) A narrow little bar, low key, but with some subtle seafood *pintxos*. Exotics include *erizo*, a small spiny sea urchin chopped in half and filled with an unquestionable taste of the sea.

Artajo (☎ 944 24 85 96; Calle de Ledesma 7) Very Bilbao in its ambience; you won't feel like a tourist if you're after its famous *tigres* (mussels dressed in a spicy tomato and anchovy sauce).

RESTAURANTS

Fresc Co (☎ 944 23 30 01; Calle de Ledesma 12; meals lunch €7.95, dinner Sat & Sun €9.70; ✓) You can cram your plate with salad and then scoop up soup, pasta, and pizza as well as tasty desserts at this seductive budget venue. It's usually packed. Pitch in roundabout 4pm for some space.

Passerela (☎ 944 10 05 04; Alameda de Urquijo 30; menú €9) World nosh is the style at this bright, cheerful place that dishes up pasta, burgers and pizza (€5.30 to €12) as well as fresh salads for €5.

La Deliciosa (☎ 944 15 09 44; Calle Jardines 1; menú €9) This quietly understated restaurant at the heart of the Casco Viejo has clean, modern lines and reasonable prices that still deliver a fairly classy eating experience.

Restaurante Vegetariano (☎ 944 44 55 98; Alameda de Urquijo 33; menú €9.50; ✓) There is an excellent lunch at this cheerful, brightly decorated place, with crisp fresh salads and some tasty specialities such as *torta de alcachofes*, a delicious artichoke quiche. Check the noticeboard for just about every alternative scene in Bilbao.

Kafe Antzokia (☎ 944 24 46 25; Calle San Vicente 2; menú €11) A terrific lunch spot in a spacious old theatre, which is at the heart of this vibrant Basque cultural centre. There's a daily changing *menú del día* (daily set lunch) that delivers classic Basque dishes. The great atmosphere comes free.

Café Guggenheim (☎ 944 23 93 33; lunch menú €17, restaurant mains €25-35) Modernist chic and Frank Gehry designer furniture go with the landscape at El Goog's classy restaurant and café which are under the direction of top chef Martin Berasategui. Fine *nueva cocina vasca* is served, but reservations are advised. It serves up a fabulous lunch menú from 1pm to 3.30pm, enabling you to enjoy creative Basque cooking without the usual price tag.

El Arandia de Julen (☎ 944 33 10 86; Plaza Encarnación 2; menú €25) An exemplar of modern Basque cuisine, Arandia has retained the best traditions in its creative dishes. There's a special Wednesday *menú* of traditional red beans with a lip-smacking mix of pork *chorizo* (red sausage), *morcilla* (black pudding) and more, plus a delicious hake course. Excellent Rioja's add lustre.

El Perro Chico (☎ 944 15 05 19; Calle de Aretxaga 2; meals €33) Long established and still with its feet firmly in the kitchen in spite of visits from Frank Gehry, and a supporting cast of hungry celebs, this popular restaurant dishes up the very best in Basque cuisine, treating signature dishes, such as hake in béchamel sauce, with due awe and emotion. Reservations are essential.

CAFES

The porticoed Plaza Nueva is a good spot for coffee and people-watching, especially in summer.

Café Boulevard (☎ 944 15 31 28; Calle del Arenal 3) A Bilbao institution since 1871. The slightly dusty Art Deco surroundings still outclass much modern décor and even the colours of the fruit machine match the stained-glass windows. It serves breakfast specials (from €2.50).

Café Iruña (cnr Calles de Colón de Larreategui & Berástegui) With its Andalusian Mudéjar-style décor still intact, this very popular place has been going strong since 1903 and is still one of the best places for coffee or lunchtime *pintxos*.

SELF-CATERING

Mercado de la Ribera (Casco Viejo) For self-catering, try this market. Drifting round the fish section is a marvellous experience in itself.

Gregorio Martin (☎ 944 15 37 07; Calle de Arteale 22) For more delicate delicatessen-ware don't miss this terrific food shop with mountains of salt cod, *chorizos*, hams, preserves and discerning wines, all at reasonable prices.

Drinking

In the Casco Viejo around Calles Barrenkale, Ronda and Somera there are plenty of terrific hole-in-the-wall, no-nonsense bars, often political, definitely alternative, and with a generally youngish crowd. Passive smoking in some places may well go to your head. Across the river in the Ensanche area, there's a more sophisticated slant on things in the numerous wayside bars and cafés.

Zulo (Calle Barrenkale 22) This is Ikurriña (Basque flag) country. Full-on rock, terrific atmosphere, nonstop yelling in ears. You'll be out in the street anyway, where things still rock.

Twiggy (☎ 944 10 38 14; Alameda de Urquijo 35) Retro psychedelio! Happy posthippy place with a cheerful mix of '60s kitsch for lovely people.

Kamin (☎ 944 44 41 21; Manuel Allende 8) Laid-back listening in rosy light among the Bilbao cognoscenti. The music trails sweetly through everything from rock and pop to alternative and fresh new sounds on the Basque scene.

Da Vinci (☎ 944 23 23 00; Arbolantxa 6) Tricked out with Leonardo trimmings, this popular bar is comfortable and has plenty of room, although it gets busy. There's a relaxing background of pop and R & B.

Entertainment CLUBS

There are plenty of clubs and live venues in Bilbao and the vibe is friendly and generally easygoing. Websites usually have details of upcoming gigs.

Kafe Antzokia (☎ 944 24 46 25; www.kafeantzokia.com; Calle San Vicente 2) The vibrant heart of contemporary Basque Bilbao, featuring international rock bands, blues and reggae, but also the cream of Basque rock-pop. Weekend concerts run from 10pm to 1am, followed by DJs until 5am. Cover charge for concerts can range from about €4 upwards. DJ sessions are free.

Conjunto Vacio (Muelle de la Merced 4) House is the spin here and there's a very style-conscious and confident, young, mixed-gay-and-straight crowd. There's a door fee on Saturday nights of about €10.

Le Club (☎ 944 16 71 11; www.leclub.es; Muelle Marzana 4) Three floors of wildly differing décor to shake down on, from floor bashing, to relaxed, to very chilled. Entrance is about €8 with one drink included.

El Balcón de la Lola (☎ 946 08 67 20; Calle Bailén 10) One of Bilbao's most popular mixed/gay clubs, this is the place to come if you're looking for hip industrial décor and a packed Saturday-night disco.

THEATRE

Bilbao offers regular performances of dance, opera and drama at the city's two principal theatres.

Arriaga Theatre (☎ 944 79 20 36; www.teatroarriaga.com; Plaza Arriaga) The baroque façade of this venue commands the open spaces of El Arenal between the Casco Viejo and the river.

Euskalduna Palace (☎ 944 31 03 10; www.euskalduna.net; Avenida Bandoibarra) About 400m downriver from the Guggenheim is another modernist gem, built on the riverbank in a style that echoes the great shipbuilding works of last century. The Euskalduna houses the Bilbao Symphony Orchestra and the Basque Symphony Orchestra. Check the theatre websites for current information.

Shopping

Gili-Gili Calle Sombrero (☎ 944 16 77 94; Calle Sombrero 5); Calle Loteria (☎ 944 79 07 06; Calle Loteria 4) If you want to know what fashionable young Basques are wearing head for the Casco Viejo outlets of this store for labels such as Lois, Fornarina, Beste Bat and Nolita.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Bilbao's airport (☎ 944 86 96 36; www.aena.es) is near Sondika, 12km northeast of the city. Services are excellent. There's a first class **tourist information office** (☎ 944 710 301; 7.30am-11pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-11pm Sat & Sun), a medical centre, ATMs, shops, cafés, a restaurant, and car-hire offices. Easyjet (www.easyjet.com) have cheap flights between London and Bilbao although booking well ahead is advised.

BOAT

At the time of writing a new ferry service between Santurtzi, about 14km northwest of Bilbao's city centre, and Portsmouth had just been set up by the Spanish company Acciona Trasméditerránea (www.accionaferryes.org) running

three ferries a week in July and August, and two ferries a week the rest of the year. Prices are about 10% less than P&O Ferries.

P&O ferries (☎ 944 23 44 77; www.poportsmouth.com; Calle de Cosme Echevarrieta 1) leave twice weekly, except November to March, for Portsmouth, from Santurtzi. Tickets prices vary due to special offers, but a guide is €61 per passenger and €488 per car and passenger. Departures from Portsmouth/Bilbao take 33/30 hours.

BUS

Bilbao's main bus station, **Termibus** (San Mamés), is southwest of the centre. You can get to virtually anywhere in the city by metro. Renfe train and the Eusko Tran (opposite) from right outside the Termibus. From Termibus there are regular services operating to/from Madrid (€24.70, 4¼ hours), Barcelona (€38.10, seven hours), Burgos (€10.90, two hours), Vitoria (€4.95, 50 minutes), Pamplona (€11.60, 1¼ hours), Logroño (€10.90, two hours), Irún and the French border (€7.40, two hours), Santander (€5.85, 1½ hours) and Oviedo (€17.60, five hours). Pesa (☎ 902 10 12 10) operates services every 30 minutes to one hour to San Sebastián (€8.65, one hour) and also serves Durango-Elorrio and Oñati.

Bizkaibus (☎ 902 22 22 65) travels to destinations throughout the rural Basque Country, including coastal communities such as Lekeitio and Bermeo.

TRAIN

The **Renfe** (☎ 902 24 02 02; www.renfe.es) Abando train station is just across the river from Plaza Arriaga and the Casco Viejo. There are two trains daily to Madrid (€32.80, 6¼ hours) and Barcelona (€38, nine hours). Other cities served include Valladolid (€21.90, four hours) and Burgos (€16.70, three hours).

Next door is the Concordia train station with its handsome Art Nouveau façade of wrought iron and tiles. It is used by the FEVE (☎ 944 23 22 66; www.feve.es) private rail company for running trains west into Cantabria and Asturias.

The Atxuri Station is about 1km upriver from Casco Viejo. From here, **Eusko Tren** (☎ 902 54 32 10; www.euskotren.es) operates services every half-hour to Bermeo (€2.25, 1¼ hours) via Guernica (€2.25, one hour) and Mundaka (€2.25, 70 minutes) and hourly to San Sebastián (€6, 2¾ hours) via Durango, Zumaia and Zarautz.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT & PORT

The airport bus Bizkaibus A3247 (€1.15, 30 minutes) leaves from a stand on the extreme right as you leave Arrivals. It runs through the northwestern section of the city passing the Museo Guggenheim stopping at Plaza Moyúa and terminating at the Termibus (bus station) where there are connections to the metro, Renfe and Eusko Tran. It runs every half-hour from 5.25am to 9.55pm. You're expected to have the exact cash ready.

Taxis from the airport to the Casco Viejo cost about €20 and to the Termibus about €24. Each piece of baggage is charged €0.80.

Buses for the port of Santurtzi leave from near the junction of Calle Hurtado de Amézaga and Plaza Circular.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Bilbao is a difficult town for driving in, if you are a stranger. Metered street parking is strictly enforced. There are several underground car parks, including one beneath Plaza Nueva, and overground ones, including a new riverside facility at Muelle del Arenal north of Plaza Arriaga, that was scheduled for opening in 2007.

METRO

There are metro stations at all the main focal points of the Ensanche and at Casco Viejo. Tickets start at €1.20. The metro was designed by architect Sir Norman Foster and opened in 1995. Locals instantly dubbed the concertina-style glass and chrome entrances 'Fosteritos'. The metro runs to the north coast from a number of stations on both sides of the river and makes it easy to get to the beaches closest to Bilbao.

TRAM

Bilbao's Eusko Tran tramline is a boon to locals and visitors alike. It runs to and fro between Basurtu in the southwest of the city to the Atxuri train station. Stops include the Termibus station, the Guggenheim and Teatro Arriaga by the Casco Viejo. Tickets cost €1 and need to be verified in the machine next to the ticket dispenser before boarding.

AROUND BILBAO Beaches

Two reasonable beaches for swimming are **Azkorri** and **Sopelana**. The latter's Playa Salvaje section is set aside for naturists. Better beaches can be found east of Plentzia (the Bilbao metro

services Plentzia and costs €1.45). Also good is the sheltered beach at **Gorliz**, which has a pretty lighthouse and some fine views from the Astondo end of the beach. There are well-signposted tracks for walkers.

A worthwhile stop en route to the beaches is the newly restored **Puente Colgante**, the world's first transporter bridge which opened in 1893 – it links Getxo and Portugalete. A platform, suspended from the actual bridge high above, is loaded with up to six cars plus foot passengers; it then glides silently over Río Nervión to the other bank. Rides are €0.30 one-way per person. You can also take a lift up to the superstructure at 46m, and walk across the river and back (not for those prone to vertigo) for some great views (€4). Another choice is to cross the river by small ferryboat (€0.25). The nearest metro stop from Bilbao is Areta (€1.20) and the nearest Renfe stop is in Portugalete (€1.25).

Castillo de Butrón

This marvellous piece of medieval fantasy with its dark stone walls and crenellated towers, surrounded by a moat and set in a dreamy park, makes the term 'fairytale' seem inadequate. The castle (☎ 946 15 11 10; www.castillodebutron.com; adult/child €6/3.50, with guided tour €8/5; 7-10.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-6pm Sat & Sun Oct-Feb, 10.30am-8pm daily Mar-Sep) is located a few kilometres west of the village of Gatica (Basque: Gatika), about 20km north of Bilbao. It was built in the 14th century as the bastion of the Basque Butrón clan but owes much of its present splendour to a 19th-century renovation. It makes for an excellent outing for youngsters, but school groups often add to the decibel level around the various displays and audiovisuals.

To get there, take the metro to Larrabastera, then the bus in the direction of Mungía, which leaves from Calle de Akilino Arriola 71, about 500m from the metro station, every 90 minutes.

Nearby Elorrio has many impressive mansions. Calle de San Balentin Berrio-Otxoa in particular is loaded with noble façades and spills out onto the delightful Plaza Gernikako Arbola, which is dominated by the austere 15th-century Basílica de la Purísima Concepción. Opposite the church is the local *frontón*.

Regular buses and the ET/FV train, coming from Bilbao or San Sebastián, stop in Durango, from where buses run every hour or so to Elorrio.

Guernica

pop 15,454

Guernica (Basque: Gernika) is a state of mind as well as a place. At a glance it seems no more than a very ordinary modern country town, surrounded by gentle wooded hills. Yet such is Guernica's iconic significance that you cannot fail to be impressed, and moved, by a visit. There is a dual significance here. The essence of Basque democracy and independent lawmaking is enshrined in the Tree of Guernica, today a young oak tree. Beneath the branches of the original oak, a Basque parliament met from medieval times until 1876. Yet Guernica is even more significant worldwide as the victim of one of the most barbarous acts of the 20th century, the saturation bombing of civilians on 26 April 1937 by Nazi and Italian Fascist planes, at the behest of Franco. An estimated 1645 civilians died in the attack which was seen by Franco as 'teaching a lesson' to the ever-recalcitrant Basques and by Hitler as a test run for future carpet bombing of major cities. The victims of Guernica have been remembered with transforming hope while the perpetrators have been reviled. The tragedy is given even greater international resonance by Picasso's iconic painting *Guernica*.

Guernica's architectural ordinariness is understandable. It was rebuilt functionally after the bombing.

INFORMATION

The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 946 25 58 92; www.gemika-lumo.net; Artekalea 8; 10am-7pm Mon-Sat Jul & Aug, 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, Oct-Jun, 10-2pm Sun) has friendly multilingual staff. They can organise guided tours of the city sights at 11am (€2, 1½ hours). They also sell a Global Ticket, a combined entry ticket for the town's sights (€3).

SIGHTS

Guernica's seminal experience for visitors is a visit to the **Museo de la Paz de Gernika** (Guernica Peace Museum; ☎ 946 27 02 13; www.peacemuseumguernica.org; Plaza Foru 1; adult/under 13yr €4/free; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) where audiovisual displays transcend the predictable with a calm humanity that is the antithesis of the 1937 bombing. Display panels are in Castilian and Basque, but the ticket office hands out good English and French translations of almost all the captions. There are guided tours, in four languages, each day at 12pm and 5pm.

A couple of blocks north, on Calle Allende Salazar, is a ceramic-tile version of Picasso's *Guernica*.

Further west along Calle Allende Salazar is the **Euskal Herriko Museoa** (☎ 946 25 54 51; Calle Allende Salazar; admission free; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 11am-3pm Sun), housed in the 18th-century Palacio de Montefuerte. The comprehensive exhibitions on Basque history and culture are well worth a look, with fine old maps, engravings, and a range of other documents and portraits.

The open area in front of the museum used to be the town market and it was here that the bombs of 1937 took their most devastating toll.

The pleasant **Parque de los Pueblos de Europa** (10am-7pm, to 9pm summer) behind the museum contains a couple of typically curvaceous sculptures by Henry Moore and other works by Eduardo Chillida, and leads to the attractive **Casa de Juntas**, where the provincial government has met since 1979. Inside the chamber is a superb modern stained-glass window on a huge scale (235 sq m). Outside is the famous Oak Tree, now a mere stump, sheltered by a neoclassical gazebo. Another tree was recently planted in the rear courtyard.

SLEEPING & EATING

Albergue Gernika (☎ 685 75 22 86; www.alberguegernika.com; Kortezubi Bidea 9; dm €13) On the outskirts of town is this spick and span hostel run by the same management as Pensión Akelarre. Reception is staffed from April to November. Phone ahead otherwise.

Hotel Boliña (☎ 946 25 03 00; www.hotelbolina.net; Calle de Barrencale 3; s/d €35.30/51.30) In the centre of town is this comfortable hotel, which has a recommended restaurant (*menú del día* cost €9.50).

Pensión Akelarre (☎ 946 27 01 97; www.hotelakelarre.com; Calle de Barrencale 5; s/d from €45/60; 1) Near Boliña is this well run place with clean, comfy rooms and a top-floor sitting room and outdoor area. Prices drop considerably out of season.

Restaurante Gernika (☎ 946 25 07 78; Industria 12; menú del día €9) Gernika has numerous cafés and restaurants. This is a popular place that serves up filling traditional dishes.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Guernica is an easy day trip from Bilbao by ET/FV train from Atxuri train station, where trains run every half-hour (€2.25, one hour).

Cueva de Santimamiñe

The grotto of Santimamiñe is a crowd pleaser for its impressive stalactites, stalagmites and well-preserved prehistoric cave paintings. Free guided tours (with a maximum of 15 people) start at 10am, 11.15am, 12.30pm, 4.30pm and 6pm Monday to Friday.

There's no public transport, although the Guernica-Lekeitio bus can drop you off at Kortezubi (€1.10), from where it's a 3km walk. If you're driving, take the BI638 to Kortezubi, then turn off to the BI4244 just before town.

El Bosque Pintado de Oma

Near the grottoes is one of the region's most unusual attractions, the 'Painted Forest' of Basque artist Agustín Ibarrola who has adorned dozens of trees in the Oma Valley with rainbows, outlines of people and colourful abstract shapes. While at first they seem rather disjointed, several trees together form a complete picture.

The Bosque is accessible, part of the way on foot, from the BI4244. Follow the directions to the Cueva de Santimamiñe, and from a turn-off near the caves a marked forest track leads in 3km to the Bosque. Cars should not use this track.

Mundaka

pop 1686

The legend of one of surfing's longest sand-bottom, left-hand breaks (a wave that breaks across clean ground from right to left) took a slight whack at Mundaka in 2005 when the famous sandbar diminished. The good news is that the bank reformed in 2006 and the break with it. Spain's biggest surf event, the Billabong Pro Mundaka took place again in October 2006. There's a small tourist office (☎ 946 17 72 01; www.mundaka.org; Calle Kepa Deuna).

Camping Portuondo (☎ 946 87 77 01; www.campingportuondo.com; sites per person/tent/car €5.20/5.30/5.30, bungalows from €78.60; 5) has lovely terraced grounds, a pool and restaurant.

Buses and ET/FV trains between Bilbao and Bermeo stop here.

Bermeo

pop 16,092

Located just a few minutes to the north of Mundaka and on the open coast proper, this tough, fishing port is refreshingly down-to-earth.

The **tourist office** (☎ 946 17 91 54; Askatasun Bidea 2; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 4-7pm

Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) is on the waterfront and has several excellent leaflets in French and English about the town. The absorbing **Museo del Pescador** (☎ 946 88 11 71; Plaza Torrontero 1; admission free; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2.30pm Sun), in the handsome 15th-century **Ercilla Tower**, is steeply uphill from the tourist office and just past a sculpture of a family of fisherfolk gazing out to sea.

A few kilometres beyond Bermeo, the **Ermita de San Juan de Gaztelugatxe** stands on an islet that is connected to the mainland by bridge. It also has two natural arches on its seaward side.

Half-hourly buses and ET/FV trains run from Bermeo to Bilbao (€2.25, 1¼ hours).

Durango

Industrial Durango makes few concessions to the picturesque although the **Iglesia de Santa Ana** has an interesting blend of Renaissance, Gothic and Herrerian styles. The real attraction is the **Duranguésado**, the mountainous area around the city. The drive south to the **Puerto de Urquiola** pass is festooned with spectacular lookouts. For more information on mountain walking, contact the Durango tourist office (☎ 946 03 00 30; Calle de Bruno Maurício Zabala 2).

Regular buses and the ET/FV train, coming from Bilbao or San Sebastián, stop in Durango.

THE CENTRAL BASQUE COAST

The coast road from Bilbao to San Sebastián snakes its way past some spectacular seascapes, with cove after cove stretching east and verdant fields suddenly ending where cliffs plunge into the sea. Agrotourism homes and camping grounds are plentiful and well signposted.

Elantxobe

pop 460

The tiny hamlet of Elantxobe spills down to its small harbour beneath high cliffs and fends off over-commercialisation with its still authentic atmosphere of a Basque fishing community. See the Lekeitio section for bus connections.

Lekeitio

pop 7354

Of the two beaches in this attractive fishing town, the one just east of the river is nicer. The harbourside is dominated by the late-Gothic **Iglesia de Santa María de la Asunción**.

Accommodation is scarce and pricey but **Camping Endai** (☎ 946 84 24 69; sites per person/tent €3.50/3.50; 𠄎 mid-Jun–mid-Sep) is a smallish camping ground with a bar and a shop on Playa Mendexa, a few kilometres before you reach the town.

The waterfront and back streets of the old town teem with bars and snack joints.

Bizkaibus A3513 leaves from Calle Hurtado Amezaga, by Bilbao's Abando train station, about eight times a day, except Sunday, and goes by Guernica and Elantxobe.

Fairly regular buses from Lekeitio run to San Sebastián (€5.45).

Ondarroa

Slotted into the coastal hills of Vizcaya province just inside the border with Guipúzcoa, Ondarroa is the Basque Country's biggest fishing port, a fascinating and gutsy place in every sense. It is also implacably Basque, especially when it comes to language. Locals do not tolerate central government officials who don't speak Euskara and yet they are the kindest and friendliest of people when it comes to visitors. The harbour is the vibrant focus and Río Artibai winds inland beneath several bridges; one an ancient, iconic symbol of Basque resistance, the other a signature example of the modernist work of Santiago Calatrava, who was responsible for Bilbao's Zubizuri Footbridge (p456). Ondarroa is also a terrific centre of *estropadak* (rowing).

The **tourist office** (☎ 946 83 19 51; www.learjai.com; Kalea Kantiope 3; 𠄎 10am–2pm & 4–7pm Mon–Sat, 10am–2pm Sun mid-Jun–mid-Sep, 10.30am–1.30pm & 4–7pm Fri & Sat, 10.30am–2.30pm Sun mid-Sep–mid-Jun) has plenty of information about the area.

Just across the river on a high cliff is the cheerful **Arrigorri Itsas Ostatua** (☎ 946 13 40 45; www.arrigorri.net; Calle de Arrigorri 3; s/d €28/48, with bathroom €40/50). Breakfast is included at this one-time *balneario* (spa) with a stairway to the beach. It's run by a friendly crew and also serves good meals (June to September) for €10 on weekdays, €15 on weekends.

In Ondarroa there's a branch of Bilbao's **Kafe Antzokia** (☎ 946 83 41 41; www.kafeantzokia.com; Iparragirre 10) located in an old cinema and serving up drinks and the same hot music and cultural events as its city counterpart.

Inland to Markina & Bolívar

The BI633 turns south just after Ondarroa to reach, after about 10km, the pretty town of

Markina, whose great claim to fame is the home of *pelota* (handball; see p452) – the local *frontón* is even known as the Universidad de la Pelota.

Another 5km south is Bolívar, the birthplace of Simón Bolívar, the great early-19th-century South American independence fighter. It's a tiny place with great charm; the little square is graced by a handsome statue of the great man and nearby is the 'trial yard', where oxen haul massive stones during festivals. The **Museo Simón Bolívar** (☎ 946 16 41 14; Calle Boko 4; admission free; 𠄎 10am–1pm Tue–Fri, noon–2pm Sat & Sun, also 5–7pm Tue–Sun Jul–Aug) is dedicated to his exploits. Hourly buses between Ondarroa and Bilbao stop at Iruzubieta, from where it's a 2km walk.

Mutriku

pop 4188

Back on the coast, the picturesque fishing village of Mutriku is clamped by a steep rocky vice cut into the coast, its streets winding tortuously down to a small harbour. Four camping grounds surround the town, largely because of the fine beach of **Saturrarán**, a few kilometres west, which has a fine rocky headland.

Zumaia

pop 8320

For beach lovers Zumaia has the **Playa de Izurun** wedged in among cliffs, while the **Playa de Santiago** is a more open strand a couple of kilometres east of the town centre. Next to the latter stands the surprising and richly rewarding **Museo de Zuloaga** (admission €4; 𠄎 4–8pm Wed–Sun), housed in the one-time studio of Basque artist Ignacio Zuloaga (1870–1945). It contains some of his important works, as well as a handful by other headliners, including El Greco and Zurbarán.

Getaria

pop 2494

Getaria is a small medieval fishing settlement huddled in the shadow of El Ratón (Mouse), the distinctive islet watched over by the sober mass of the 14th-century Gothic **Iglesia de San Salvador**.

In 1522 this port saw the return of its most illustrious son, the sailor Juan Sebastián Elcano, who sailed with Magellan and completed a round-the-world trip after Magellan's death.

A couple of local homes offer cheap beds, and there's **Pensión Guetariano** (☎ 943 14 05 67; Calle Herrieta 3; s/d €38/54). Several harbour-front

restaurants grill up the fresh catch of the day, which washes down well with a glass of crisp, locally produced *txakoli*.

If surfing's your thing, you may want to stop in the resort town of Zarautz, a few kilometres beyond Getaria, which hosts a round of the **World Surfing Championship** every September.

SAN SEBASTIÁN

pop 182,930

San Sebastián (Basque: Donostia) has been holding court on the shores of the beautiful, crescent-shaped Bahía de La Concha for a very long time and shows no sign of losing any of its poise or its subtle flavour of high camp. This is no Grande Dame either; more a cool, svelte, diva who has seen them all, from *belle époque* blue bloods, to 21st-century international rock stars. It's here too that the gourmet subculture of the *pintxo* underpins Michelin-starred cuisine. Thirteen Michelin stars fret the San Sebastián firmament of classy eateries, a galaxy matched only by central Paris.

There are no great cultural icons in San Sebastián, but the city entertains you at every turn not least because of its cheerful, upbeat atmosphere. La Concha beach is one of the world's most beautiful city beaches and across the river is Playa de la Zurriola (Zurriola Beach), also known as Playa de Gros, less glamorous and with a strong surfing appeal. Add to this the atmospheric Parte Vieja (Old Town), said to have more bars than any other *quartier* (neighbourhood) in the known world, and the Centro Romántico, with its pedestrianised shopping streets, lined with the handsome façades of Art Nouveau buildings.

The city is also exuberantly Basque by nature and is the event capital of Europe's Atlantic Arc, with cultural and corporate happenings around every corner. These include the annual San Sebastián Jazz Festival and International Film Festival.

History

San Sebastián was for centuries little more than a fishing village, but by 1174 it was granted self-governing status by the kingdom of Navarra for whom the bay was the principal outlet to the sea. Whale and cod fishing were the main occupations along with the export of Castilian products to European ports and then to the Americas. After

years of knockabout trans-European conflicts that included the razing of the city by Anglo-Portuguese forces during the Peninsular War, San Sebastián was hoisted into 19th-century stardom as a fashionable watering hole by Spanish royalty dodging the searing heat of the southern *mesas* (tableland). By the close of the century, the city had been given a superb *belle époque* makeover that has left a legacy of elegant Art Nouveau buildings and beachfront swagger.

Modern day San Sebastián maintains its style and excitement with a growing reputation as a major venue for international cultural and commercial events.

Orientation

San Sebastián has three main centres of action. The lively Parte Vieja, San Sebastián's 'old town', lies across the neck of Monte Urgull, the bay's eastern headland. It is neatly underlined to the south by the Alameda del Boulevard whose broad promenade leads into the pedestrianised Parque de Alderdi Eder, which in turn merges with the famous Paseo de la Concha with its elegant balustrades and background of well-manicured buildings.

South of the Alameda del Boulevard is the sleeker commercial and shopping district, the Centro Romántico, whose handsome grid of late-19th-century buildings extends from behind La Concha Beach to the banks of Río Urumea. On the east side of the river is the district of Gros, a pleasant enclave that, with its relaxed ambience and the surfing beach of Zurriola, makes a cheerful alternative to the honeypots on the west side of the river.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

The newsstand outside the Mercado de la Bretxa stocks the previous day's issue of many foreign newspapers.

elkar (☎ 943 42 00 80; Calle de Fermin Calbetón 21–30)

A great selection of books, maps and music including an excellent Basque section.

Librería Graphos (☎ 943 42 63 77; cnr Alameda del

Blvd & Calle Mayor; 𠄎 10am–1.30pm & 4–7.30pm Mon–Fri, 10am–2pm Sat) Excellent for travel books and maps, with a good stock of Lonely Planet guidebooks.

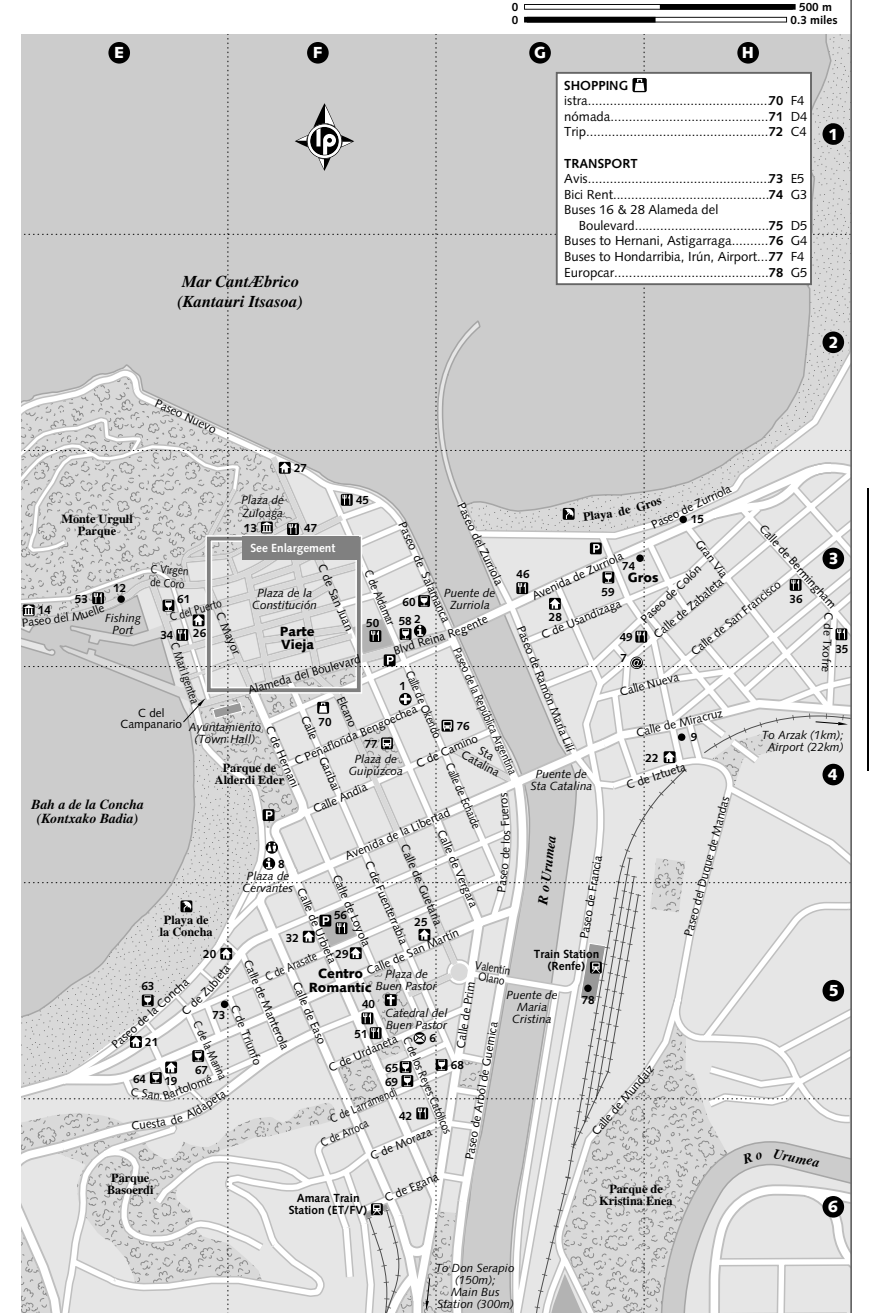
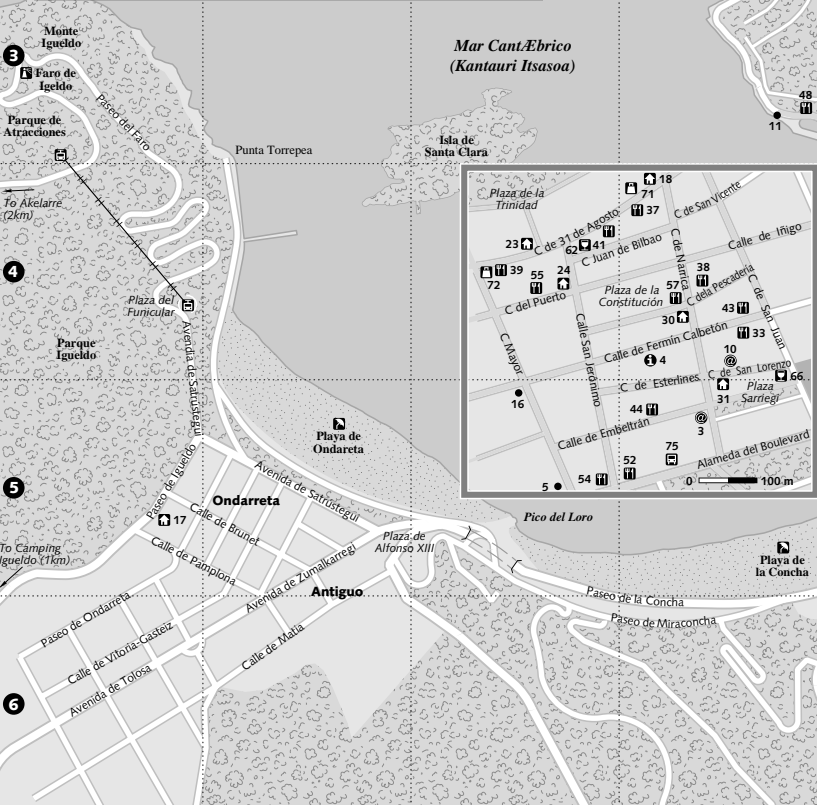
EMERGENCY

Medical Emergency (☎ 112)

Policía Nacional (☎ 091)

SAN SEBASTIÁN

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BASQUE COUNTRY, NAVARRA & LA RIOJA

BASQUE COUNTRY, NAVARRA & LA RIOJA

INTERNET ACCESS

Donosti-Net (☎ 943 42 94 97; Calle de Narrica 3; per 10min/1hr €0.90/3.30; 𠄎 9am-11pm) The best place for internet access. Also doubles as a super-savvy travellers' information centre, offering everything from a left-luggage service to money transfers and car hire.

Throw (☎ 943 29 18 09; Calle de Zabaleta 10; morning €1.50, after 2pm €2.30; 𠄎 10am-10pm)

Zarranet (Calle de San Lorenzo 6; per hr €3; 𠄎 10am-10pm Mon-Sat, 4-10pm Sun)

LAUNDRY

Wash'n Dry (☎ 943 29 31 50; Calle de Iparragirre 6; 𠄎 8am-10pm) Just across the river in the Gros district, this is an excellent self-service laundry that has the bonus of an Australian owner who runs the place like a de facto tourist office. The full wash-and-dry treatment for an 8kg load costs €6 (€20 if done for you); the left-luggage service costs €3 per day; and the book exchange, useful notice board and local knowledge and advice come free.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Casa de Socorro (Calle Peñaflores Bengochea 4) Free medical care.

MONEY

There are plenty of banks with ATMs throughout the city centre.

POST

Main post office (Calle de Urdaneta)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Centro de Atracción y Turismo (CAT; ☎ 943 48 11 66; www.sansebastianturismo.com; Blvd Reina Regente 3; 𠄎 8am-8pm Mon-Sat Jun-Sep, 9am-2pm & 3.30-7pm Mon-Sat Oct-May, 10am-2pm Sun year-round) This friendly office offers comprehensive information on the city and the Basque Country in general. At the time of writing there was talk of a new location for the office, but no specific details were available.

Tourist kiosk (Paseo de la Concha; 𠄎 11am-9pm Jul & Aug) Operates at the city end of the Paseo de la Concha.

Sights & Activities**AQUARIUM**

The city's **aquarium** (☎ 943 44 00 99; www.aquariumss.com; Paseo del Muelle 34; adult/student €10/7; 𠄎 10am-9pm Jul & Aug, 10am-8pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-7pm Mon-Fri & 11am-8pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar) is fairly pricey for what you get; but there is a chance to come face to face with some of the finny species that might be appearing on your plate later in the evening. There are also displays and exhibits about the Bay of Biscay.

MUSEO NAVAL

This **museum** (☎ 943 43 00 51; www.gipuzkoa.net/kultura/untzimuseoa; Paseo del Muelle 24; admission €1.20, Thu free; 𠄎 10am-1.30pm & 4-7.30pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun) offers an in-depth look into the Basque sea-faring tradition, but will be best appreciated by those with at least basic Spanish-language skills.

MUSEO DE SAN TELMO

Housed in a former 16th-century monastery with an attractive cloister, this **museum** (☎ 943 42 49 70; Plaza de Zuloaga 1; admission free; 𠄎 10.30am-1.30pm & 4-7.30pm Tue-Sat Sep-Jun, 10.30am-8.30pm Mon-Sat Jul & Aug, 10.30am-2pm Sun year-round) features paintings ranging from the Renaissance and the baroque through to the 19th century, with a heavy emphasis on Basque painters. A highlight is the chapel, whose walls are decorated with frescoes by José María Sert chronicling Basque artisanship.

MONTE URGULL

You can walk to the top of Monte Urgull, topped by low castle walls and a grand statue of Christ, by taking a path from Plaza de Zuloaga or from behind the aquarium. The views are breathtaking.

MONTE IGUELDO

The views from the summit of Monte Igueldo, just west of town, are better still – a vast panorama of the Bahía de la Concha and the surrounding coastline and mountains of Guipúzcoa. The best way to get there is via the old-world funicular railway (return €1.80; 𠄎 10am-8pm Sep-Jun, 10am-10pm Jul & Aug) to the **Parque de Atracciones** (amusement park; ☎ 943 21 02 11; 𠄎 11am-6pm Mon-Tue & Thu-Fri, 11am-8pm Sat & Sun).

BEACHES & ISLA DE SANTA CLARA

The placid Playa de la Concha and its westerly extension, the Playa de Ondarreta, are among the best city beaches in Europe. For this reason, both get rather crowded in summer. The Isla de Santa Clara, about 700m from the beach, is accessible by boats that run to the island every half-hour from June to September (€2).

The Playa de la Zurriola (Playa de Gros), east of Rio Urumea, is popular (though less crowded) with both swimmers and surfers.

SURFING

Surf bums should drop by **Pukas** (☎ 943 542 72 28; shop@pukassurf.com; Calle Mayor 5; 𠄎 10am-1.30pm

& 4-8pm Mon-Sat), which rents surfboards (€20 per day), as well as wetsuits, boogie boards and fins. In summer it also offers a week-long beginners' surfing course (€60) from its shop and seasonal surf club, also known as **Pukas** (☎ 943 32 00 68; Paseo de Zurriola; 𠄎 10am-7.30pm Mon-Sat Jun-Oct).

Tours

Donosti Tour (adults/students & seniors/6-12yr/under 6 €10/9/5/free) is a one-day bus tour that allows you to hop on and off as often as you wish. Tickets, which include headphones for commentary in your choice of language, are sold on the bus. The main route stays close to the beaches and climbs Monte Igueldo. A second route operates from July to September, heading further inland along the river and visits the Museo Chillida Leku (p475). A combined ticket for the two routes costs €12/11/6/free. Check with the tourist office for times.

The **Centro de Atracción y Turismo** (☎ 943 48 11 66; Blvd Reina Regente 3) tourist office also provides an excellent audio-guide (€10) with a map that allows you to explore the city at your own pace.

Festivals & Events

Among San Sebastián's top draws is the International Jazz Festival, held in July. The 2006 headliner was Bob Dylan, giving a free concert on Playa de la Zurriola. The world-renowned, two-week **Film Festival** (www.sansebastianfestival.com) has been an annual fixture in the second half of September since 1957. Other major fiestas are the **Festividad de San Sebastián** on 20 January and **carnaval** in mid-February. The **Regatta de Traineras**, a boat race in which local teams of rowers race out to sea, takes place on the first two Sundays in September.

Sleeping

Accommodation in San Sebastián is generally good, but prices rise considerably in July and August (at some places from May to September). Booking ahead for June to September and at weekends is strongly recommended. High-season prices are listed below.

BUDGET**Camping & Hostels**

Camping Igueldo (☎ 943 21 45 02; www.campingigueldo.com; Paseo del Padra Orkolaga 69; sites per 2 people, car & tent or caravan €27) This well-organised, tree-shaded camping ground is 5km west of the city and

is served by bus 16 from Alameda del Boulevard (€1, 30 minutes).

Albergue La Sirena Ondarreta (☎ 943 31 02 68; udala_youthhostel@donostia.org; Paseo de Igueldo 25; dm under/over 25 with breakfast €15.35/17; 𠄎 i) San Sebastián's HI hostel is near Playa de Ondarreta and Monte Igueldo. It's immaculate and very secure. The midnight curfew extends to 4am on weekends, June to September. Buses 5, 25, 33 and 16 from Alameda del Boulevard (€1) stop nearby.

Hostales & Pensiones

The Parte Vieja has plenty of excellent *pensiones*, most of which are combating the inevitable partying street noise with hefty double-glazing. Unless otherwise noted, rooms in this category come with shared facilities.

Pensión Larrea (☎ 943 42 26 94; Calle de Narrica 21; s/d €24/50; j) An immaculate place, with an immaculate and kindly owner. Larrea has worked hard with its soundproofing and the shared bathrooms serve two rooms each.

Pensión Aussie (☎ 943 42 28 74; Calle San Jerónimo 18; dm €15, s/d €25/45) Run by an Australian expat, this budget place is popular with young travellers. At the time of writing, the owner was about to open another more modern place south of Centro.

Pensión La Perla (☎ 943 42 81 23; www.pensionla.perla.com; Calle de Loyola 10; s/d €30/50) Brisk, old-fashioned service and clean, fairly plain rooms, keep this well-located Centro *pensión* busy. It's right by Plaza del Buen Pastor and the cathedral and alongside the San Martín Centre, yet is very quiet at night.

Pensión Urkia (☎ 943 42 44 36; www.pensionurkia.com; Calle de Urbieta 12; s/d €25/50) Just around the

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Pensión Amaiur Ostata (☎ 943 42 96 54; www.pensionamaiur.com; Calle de 31 de Agosto 44, San Sebastián; s/d €35/56; j) A great atmosphere backed by friendly and kindly owners makes this happy place, in one of the city's oldest buildings, an unbeatable option. You won't get sleek décor here, but there's plenty of character and quirky touches everywhere. The bathrooms are shared, but plentiful and are as well cared for as the rooms. You can also use the kitchens, where the friendly vibe makes for good connections for lone travellers – who are welcomed.

corner from La Perla and run by the sister of La Perla's proprietor. Pensión Urkia is similarly good value.

Hospidaje Ibai (☎ 943 42 62 53; Calle de 31 de Agosto 16; s/d €30/59) Just up and running at the time of writing, this cheerful place is on the quieter edge of the Parte Vieja and has bright and pleasant rooms.

Pensión Loinaz (☎ 943 42 67 14; pensionloinaz@telefonica.net; Calle de San Lorenzo 17; s/d €50/55; j) Modern, small and immaculate, Pensión Loinaz is a very pleasant place, with friendly English-speaking proprietors, spotless bathrooms and bright rooms. A laundry service is available.

MIDRANGE

Pensión Edorta (☎ 943 42 37 73; www.pensionedorta.com; Calle del Puerto 15; s/d €50/80; j) A fine *pensión* with lovely rooms that are full of character and charmingly decorated. Edorta is on the western edge of the Parte Vieja.

Pensión Donostiarra (☎ 943 42 61 67; www.pensiondonostiarra.com; Calle de San Martín 6; s/d €55/78) Close to the cathedral, Pens has pleasant rooms with polished dark-wood floorboards.

Pensión Kursaal (☎ 943 29 26 66; www.pensionesconencanto.com; Calle de Peña y Goñi, 2; s/d €58/76) This excellent place, full of light and colour, works in harness with Pensiones Aida and Itxasoa, and maintains a very high standard of service. It's located across the river in Gros, but is a mere stroll from the central areas.

Pensión Aida (☎ 943 32 78 00; www.pensionesconencanto.com; Calle de Iztueta 9; s/d €58/76) Near the train station in Gros and just a few minutes' walk from the Parte Vieja and Centro, the lovely rooms here have lots of exposed stone and bright woodwork.

Pensión Itxasoa (☎ 943 42 01 32; www.pensionesconencanto.com; Calle de San Juan 14; s/d €58/76) Just on the seaward edge of Parte Vieja, many of the attractive rooms here come with great sea views. In keeping with its partner *pensiones* the welcome is friendly and service is good.

Hostal Alemana (☎ 943 46 25 44; www.hostalalemana.com; Calle de San Martín 53; s/d from €55/93; j) Smart, comfortable rooms are the style at this efficiently managed option that is effectively hotel standard. It's one of the few places with a lift, beyond a first flight of steps.

TOP END

Hotel Niza (☎ 943 42 66 63; www.hotelniza.com; Calle de Zubieta 56; s/d €102/128; p i) A long established hotel right across from La Concha beach. The rooms are stylish and modern with a gentle nod to *belle époque* ambience in the public areas.

Hotel de Londres e Inglaterra (☎ 943 44 07 70; www.hlondres.com; Calle de Zubieta 2; s/d €167/205.50, with sea view €199/237; p a i) An enduring favourite with well-heeled French and Spanish visitors this classic hotel oozes old-world charm to go with its great beachfront location.

Eating

San Sebastián has a growing reputation as a world leader in gastronomic innovation of the highest order – it also has the highest number of Michelin stars of any city in Spain.

PINTXOS

San Sebastián is *pintxo* heaven (see the boxed text, below). *Pintxos* generally cost €1.10 to €4, depending on their size and quality. Heated *pintxos* usually cost more than the cold, ready-to-eat variety.

PINTXO PARADISE

Just rolling the word *pintxo* (the Basque version of a tapa) ound your tongue defines the essence of this cheerful, cheeky little slice of Basque cuisine. The perfect *pintxo* should have exquisite taste, texture and appearance and should be savoured in two elegant bites. Tapas by any other name, the *pintxo* transcends the commonplace by the sheer panache of its culinary campness. In San Sebastián especially, Basque chefs have refined the *pintxo* to an art form.

Many *pintxos* are bedded on small pieces of bread or on tiny half-baguettes upon which towering creations are constructed, often melded with flavoursome mayonnaise and then pinned in place by large toothpicks. Some bars specialise in a seafood genre, with much use of marinated anchovies, prawns and strips of squid, all topped with anything from chopped crab to pâté. Others deal in mushroom delicacies, or simply offer a mix of everything.

Expect to pay just €3.10 to €3.50 for one *pintxo* and a glass of delicious *txakoli*, the young white wine of the Basque Country. The true art is sticking to just one or two *pintxos* per bar.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

La Cuchara de San Telmo (☎ 943 42 08 40; Calle de 31 de Agosto) This is the 'Spoon' of San Telmo, an unfussy, stand-up bar, with a lively local clientele. It offers miniature *nueva cocina vasca* (Basque *nouvelle cuisine*) from a supremely creative kitchen, where chefs Alex Montiel and Iñaki Gulin conjure up such delights as *tempura de bacalao* (€3), a fine chunk of cod in exquisite light batter, or *pato 'Hembra'*; (€2.80, just ask for 'duck'). Feel them melt on the tongue. Treat yourself to a La Cuchara T-shirt too. Profits go to the worthy Fundación Vicente Ferrer charity.

Bar Txepetxa (Calle de la Pescadería 5) Txepetxa's fame is worldwide and its walls are covered in press cuttings to prove it. Anchovy *pintxos* are a speciality but there are other treats such as *champiñón al horno* (tiny towers of grilled mushrooms).

Tamboril (Calle dela Pescadería; r) In a great position at the entrance to the arcaded Plaza de la Constitución this popular bar is noted for its *banderillas* (*pintxos* neatly skewered with a toothpick).

Bikain (Calle de 31 de Agosto 31) There's a great range of *pintxos* in this unassuming bar as well as filling *bocadillos* (filled rolls) and *cazuelitas* (minicasseroles).

Bar La Cepa (Calle de 31 de Agosto 7) The best *jamón jabugo* does not disappoint here and you eat beneath the blank eyes of a very large bull's head.

Casa Valles (Calle de los Reyes Católicos 10) Another meaty *pintxo* place beneath a forest of hung hams, this fine bar also does *raciones* (meal-sized tapas) and full meals (€13 to €30).

Across the river in Gros are several outstanding *pintxo* places.

Bar Bergara (Calle de Bermingham) A popular, award-winning bar where things get hectic after noon. The bar groans with splendid creations and even the barmen orchestrate in style.

Bar Aloña Berri (Calle de Bermingham 24) This is another award-winner with some seriously exquisite fish and seafood *pintxos*.

RESTAURANTS

La Zurri (☎ 943 29 38 86; Calle de Zabaleta 10; menú €8.30) Consistent good value, over in Gros, can be had at this friendly focus of Basque home

cooking where plenty of local regulars prove the point.

Restaurante Portaletas (☎ 943 42 42 72; Calle del Puerto 8; mains €12) Thickets of hanging hams set the tone at this popular local diner with its black wood-and-stonework décor. The *pintxos* and heftier dishes in the back restaurant are consistently good.

Kaskazuri (☎ 943 42 08 94; Paseo de Salamanca 14) Fairly new on the block this classy yet unpretentious restaurant has views to the sea and even better views on the plate. Bright, modern décor and good service accompanies a remarkable *menú* with a gorgeous choice for €13/16 lunchtime/evenings on weekdays and €20/30 lunchtime/evenings at weekends. Offerings across the board include starters of *jamón Ibérico* (ham from acorn-feed pigs) or *terrina de foie* (liver terrine) and mains of cod, hake and monkfish. Meat dishes are equally subtle and desserts are mellifluous. Booking well in advance is essential.

Kursaal Restaurant (☎ 943 00 31 62; Avenida de Zurriola 1) Another of top chef Martin Berasategui's outstations where you can enjoy a superb lunch *menú* of modern Basque cuisine for €15.70 on weekdays and €18.60 at weekends. The chic surroundings of the Kursaal Centre go with it.

Arraitxiki (Calle del Campanario 3; mains €13-17; ✓) It's not all writhing prawns and pierced *pintxos* in San Sebastián. This excellent vegetarian restaurant does a fine line in creative meals and everything is organically sourced. There's a *menú del día* for €13.

Casa Urbano (☎ 943 42 04 34; Calle de 31 de Agosto 17; menú €28) A comfy, old-fashioned dining room is the frame for excellent *jamón* (ham) and fish dishes here. The *lomo de merluza con almejas* (hake and clams) is delicious and traditional dishes such as *bacalao con tomate y pimientos* (smoked cod with tomato and peppers) are subtly done.

Restaurante Pollitena (Calle de San Jerónimo 3) Pollitena is notable for its *menú de degustación* (tasting menú; €41.50 for two), which is a great way to sample local specialities at a reasonable price.

Arzak (☎ 943 27 84 65; Alto de Miracruz 21; meals €100-160) With three Michelin stars, the acclaimed Chef Juan Mari Arzak takes some beating. Arzak is now assisted by his daughter Elena and they never cease to innovate. Signature dishes include the positively sculptural 'squid circle', a clever confection of delicious squid

pieces dressed with a classic Arzak sauce incorporating hints of bergamot tea, sarsaparilla, tartar, and with a final flourish of cocoa and ginger drapery. The restaurant is about 1.5km east of San Sebastián. Reservations, well in advance, are obligatory. The restaurant is closed for the last two weeks in July and last three weeks in November. Prices are high. This man cooked for the Queen of England.

In the Parte Vieja, **Izkiña** (☎ 943 42 25 62; Calle de Fermín Calbetón 4) and **Alotza Jatetxea** (☎ 943 42 07 82; Calle de Fermín Calbetón 7), across the street, both have a consistently good *menú* (around €12), as well as respectable *pintxos* selections.

For seafood by the sea, a handful of places have set up by the fishing harbour. Open from March until September, they include the following.

Restaurante Mariñela (☎ 943 42 73 83; Paseo del Muelle; mains €9-15)

Restaurante Sebastián (☎ 943 42 58 62; Paseo del Muelle; mains €9-15)

La Rampa (☎ 943 42 16 52; Paseo del Muelle; mains €12-22; 🍷 lunch & dinner Thu-Mon, lunch Tue, closed Tue night & Wed)

QUICK EATS

Reloj Berrí (☎ 943 42 97 09; Alameda del Blvd 20) This is a great breakfast spot for a piping selection of coffees and croissants that are always fresh. Breakfasts cost from €2.20 to €3.70 at the bar, but prices rise at the terrace tables.

Juantxo Taberna (Calle de Embeltrán 6; bocadillos from €2.20) You won't find starchy cuisine here, but if you want rocket fuel then this much-loved bar offers rocket-sized *bocadillos* stuffed with tortillas and other great fillings.

Caravanserai (☎ 943 47 54 18; cnr Calle San Bartolomé 1 & Plaza del Buen Pastor; bocadillos from €3, meals from €7.50) does tasty burgers, sandwiches and pasta. It rubs shoulders in the cathedral plaza with the pleasant **Plaza Café** (☎ 943 44 57 12; Plaza del Buen Pastor 14; breakfast €2.50-6) popular with locals for a midmorning breakfast.

SELF-CATERING

Mercado de la Bretxa On the east side of the Parte Vieja, this market has an underground Lidl supermarket.

San Martín Centre (Calle de Urbietta 9) At the heart of Centro is this smart centre with a very big supermarket.

Don Serapio (☎ 943 46 96 77; Calle Sancho el Sabio 22) For Basque food there's none better than

this place. A couple of hundred metres up from the bus station is this long-established food emporium stocked with delicious Basque delicacies, *jamóns*, salt cod, fruit and vegetable preserves, cheeses, wines and much more.

Entertainment

The night is young at dawn in San Sebastián and the Parte Vieja is the place to start, as the sun goes down the night before the morning after. There's also a handful of attractive bars in Centro and across the river in Gros.

Etkekalte (Calle Mari Igentea 11) This great little bar near the harbour has a very together local crowd quietly chatting over drinks in the early evening. Things tighten up later and there's a downstairs dance space where visiting or local DJs ring the changes from funk to R & B.

Bar Ondarra (Avenida de la Zurriola 16) Head over to Gros to this terrific bar that's just across the road from the beach. There's a great mixed crowd – even the surfers drop in, trailing sand. In the rockin' downstairs bar, every kind of sound gets aired.

Altzerri Jazz Bar (Blvd Reina Regente 2; www.altzerri.com) This jazz and blues temple has regular live gigs by local and international stars. Jamming session's take over on nonquest nights. There's usually a cover charge from €5 to €10 for top guests.

Herria Bar (Calle Juan de Bilbao) Basque Donostia flies the flag with enthusiastic style in many of the bars in Juan de Bilbao. Drinks are fairly cheap here. Herria's name (the Nation) says it all, as do the sloganeering T-shirts for sale behind the bar.

Be Bop (Paseo de Salamanca 3) Top and tail the night in this cheerful place that's tricked out in bright red, green and cream and burnished by the evening sun. Enjoy some creative cocktails as pop anthems kick off the night. Later on there's a strong salsa kick.

Sibbibo (Plaza Sarriegi 8) Low, neony lighting and colourful décor suit the very cool sounds for a fairly energetic crowd at this popular bar.

La Rotonda (Paseo de la Concha 6) Be bright, beautiful and be ready to swerve well into the morning at this ultra-smooth dance venue, right at beach level below the Paseo. Nothing much happens until after midnight when things start strolling with soul followed by Spanish rock. By 4am harder techno House takes over.

Molly Malone's (Calle de San Martín 55) An Irish bar with a lively student crowd.

Soho (Calle de San Martín 49) Funky music and funkier décor attract a crowd right through to sunrise here.

The area round the junction of Calles de Los Reyes Católicos and de Laramendi has a great streetwise vibe and the action spills outside on summer evenings.

Pokhara (Sánchez Toca 1) A popular corner bar, Pokhara draws an under-30 crowd and is one of several mixed venues in the area with a gay clientele.

Uda.berri (Calle de Laramendi) In the same locale as Pokhara, this is a cool ground-floor bar, with a more boisterous scene downstairs.

Soma 107 (Calle de Laramendi 4) Amsterdam in San Sebastián. Very laid-back venue where just hovering round the streetside hatch can get your mind drifting and where the creative interior is in keeping with the vibe.

Shopping

Trip (☎ 943 42 94 43; Calle de 31 de Agosto 33) For souvenirs that balance happily between kitsch and authentic, try this place.

nomada (☎ 943 42 61 52; www.nomada.biz; Calle de 31 de Agosto 24) For something really special check out the exquisite carpets and bags and other artefacts here, all ethically sourced by the proprietors. There are also superb art works on fabric by Basque painters and prices range from €20 for a colourful bag to €2000 for an antique carpet.

istra (☎ 943 42 83 79; Alameda del Blvd 15) For outstanding contemporary jewellery of great subtlety try this jeweller, where prices range from €30 to €1000.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The city's airport (☎ 943 64 12 67) is 22km out of town, near Hondarribia. There are regular flights to Madrid and occasional charters to major European cities. At the time of writing there was much talk of either extending the airport or establishing a new airport.

BICYCLE

You can rent bicycles and mountain bikes at **Bici Rent** (☎ 655 72 44 58; Avenida de Zurriola 22; per hr/day €4/16).

BUS

The main bus station, a 20-minute walk south of the Parte Vieja, is between Plaza de Pio XII and the river. Local bus 28 connects the

bus station with Alameda del Boulevard (€1, 10 minutes).

Continental Auto (☎ 943 46 90 74) operates services for Madrid up to 12 times daily (€25.85, 5¼ hours), with 10 going via Vitoria (€6.35, 1½ hours) and seven via Burgos (€12.60, 3½ hours).

La Roncalesa (☎ 943 46 10 64) has up to 10 buses daily to Pamplona (€5.98, one hour).

PESA (☎ 902 10 12 10) runs half-hourly services to Bilbao along the A8 *autopista* (tollway) from 6.30am to 10pm (€8.65, one hour). It also sends a few buses to Durango (€6.90), Elorrio (€6.20) and Oñati (€4.50), plus twice-daily buses to Hendaye (€2.65), St Jean de Luz (€4), Biarritz (€5.90) and Bayonne (€6.85) in France.

Interbus services to Hondarribia (€1.50), Irún and the airport (€1.50) depart from Plaza de Guipúzcoa; buses A1 and G1 travel to Hernani and Astigarraga (€1) from the stop on Calle de Echaide.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The A8 *autopista* heads to Bilbao in the west and into France (where it becomes the A63) to the east. You can avoid the toll on the virtually parallel N634. The main route south is the A1, which runs to Madrid via Vitoria.

Driving in San Sebastián can be nerve-racking for visitors, especially midmorning. There are a number of underground car parks. Parking fees are €1.40 per hour, €18.30 per 24 hours.

Car Hire

Several major car-hire companies are represented by agencies in San Sebastián, including **Avis** (☎ 943 46 30 13; Calle del Triunfo 2) and **Europcar** (☎ 943 32 23 04) in the Renfe train station. A good place to ask for the best deal is the internet facility **Donosti-Net** (☎ 943 42 94 97; Calle de Narrica 3; 🍷 9am-11pm).

TRAIN

The main Renfe train station (Paseo de Francia) is just across Río Urumea, on a line linking Paris to Madrid. There are seven services daily to Madrid (€34.50, six hours) and two to Barcelona (from €35.50, eight hours).

There's only one direct train to Paris, but there are plenty more from the French border town of Hendaye (€1.35, 35 minutes), which is served by the private company **Eusko Tren/Ferrocarril Vasco** (ET/FV; ☎ 902 54 32 10) on a railway line

nicknamed 'El Topo' (Mole). Trains depart every half-hour from Amara train station, about 1km south of the city centre, and also stop in Pasajes (€1.15, 12 minutes) and Irún (€1.35, 25 minutes). Another ET/FV railway line heads west to Bilbao (€5.70, 2¾ hours, hourly) via Zarautz, Zumaia and Durango.

EAST OF SAN SEBASTIÁN

Pasajes

pop 16,145

Pasajes (Basque: Pasaia), where Río Oiartzun empties into the Atlantic, is the largest port in the province of Guipúzcoa. The single street and the area immediately around the central square are lined with pretty houses and colourful balconies; it's accessible by road via the town of Lezo and Pasajes is on the El Topo railway line from San Sebastián (€1.15, 12 minutes, every half-hour) and is also served by regular buses from San Sebastián.

Irún

pop 57,133

For travellers coming in or out of the Basque Country from France, Irún may not be the finest introduction, or farewell. But spare a thought; Irún was carpet bombed by the Nazis after Guernica and suffered for years as a bleak Francoist border post.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The half-hourly El Topo train runs to Hendaye (€1) in France, from where up to 10 trains daily leave the SNCF station for Paris. Trains leave from the ET/FV station (Paseo de Colón) for San Sebastián (€1.35).

Frequent buses connect Irún with San Sebastián (Plaza de Guipúzcoa) and Hondarribia. Long-distance trains from the Renfe train station run to Madrid and Barcelona. Long-distance buses also depart from here.

Hondarribia

pop 15,493

Cheerful, relaxing Hondarribia (Castilian: Fuenterrabía) has managed to preserve its charming Casco Antiguo (Old City) and has an appealing flavour of France, its near neighbour across the bay.

The tourist office (☎ 943 64 54 58; Calle de Javier Ugarte 6; 11 9.30am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) is between the Casco and La Marina, the central harbour area. It has excellent information in several languages. You enter the

Casco through an archway at the top of Calle San Compostela, just uphill from the tourist office, to reach the pretty Plaza de Gipuzkoa. Head straight on to Calle San Nicolás and go left to reach the bigger Plaza de Armas and the Gothic Iglesia de Santa María de la Asunción. The plaza is dominated by the sumptuous Parador El Emperador (below).

For La Marina, head the other way from the tourist office. This is Hondarribia's most picturesque quarter. Its main street, Calle San Pedro, is flanked by typical fisherfolk houses, with façades painted bright green or blue and wooden balconies gaily decorated with flower boxes.

SLEEPING & EATING

Camping Faro de Higuera (☎ 943 64 10 08; Paseo del Faro 58; sites per person/small tent €3.83/3.83; p s) This pleasant camping ground is located about 6km west of the town centre.

Albergue Juan de Elkano (☎ 943 64 15 50; juv.hondarribia@gazteria.gipuzkoa.net; Foroko lgoera; dm under/over 30 with breakfast €9/14) About 500m west of the centre, this place offers discounts for HI cardholders.

Hostal Txoko Goxoa (☎ 943 64 46 58; www.txokogoxoa.com; Calle Murrua 22; s/d €43/60) A charming, family-run establishment on the quiet side of the Casco, this cosy place offers smallish but very pleasant and immaculate rooms. The entrance is round the back of the building in Calle Etxenagusia.

Hotel San Nicolás (☎ 943 64 42 78; Plaza de Armas 6; s/d €55/75) Overlooking Plaza de Armas, there's a charming period feel here, underpinned by modernised facilities and comfy rooms. The hotel also has a pleasant bar on the ground floor.

Parador El Emperador (☎ 943 64 55 00; www.parador.es; Plaza de Armas 16; s/d €166/217.60) Behind the imposing 12th-century façade of this one-time palace is a flower-bedecked inner courtyard and a swathe of luxurious rooms.

Sebastián (☎ 943 64 01 67; Calle Mayor 9; meals €39; 11 Tue-Sun) This one-time grocery store has retained much of its original landscape as a nice backdrop to classy food. Great fish dishes, especially *merluza* (hake), are complemented by equally fine meat and game dishes.

There is a swathe of popular restaurants serving up decent snacks and meals along Calle de San Pedro and the quieter Calle de Santiago, one block west.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses leave every 20 minutes from near the post office for Irún (€1, 10 minutes), San Sebastián (€1.55, 45 minutes) and occasionally across the border to Hendaye in France. In summer you can catch a boat to Hendaye (€1.50, 10 minutes).

SOUTH OF SAN SEBASTIÁN

Museo Chillida Leku

This open-air museum (☎ 943 33 60 06; www.edu.ardo-chillida.com; admission €8; 11 10.30am-3pm Wed-Mon Sep-Jun, 10.30am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-3pm Sun Jul & Aug) is the most engaging museum in rural Basque Country. Amid the beech, oak and magnolia trees, you'll find 40 sculptures of granite and iron created by the renowned Basque sculptor Eduardo Chillida. Many more of Chillida's works appear inside the renovated 16th-century farmhouse. Guided tours (€5) should be booked ahead. A useful audio-guide in several languages, including English, is €3.50.

To get here, take the G2 bus for Hernani from Calle de Okendo in San Sebastián and get off at Zabalaga. If you're driving, take the A1 south from San Sebastián. After 7km, take the turn-off southwest for Hernani (GI3132). The museum is 600m along on your left.

Walking in the Hills

Thirty kilometres south of San Sebastián and served by frequent buses, Ordizia is the best base from which to visit the hills to the east. A popular 1½-hour walk leads up to the top of Monte Txindoki, one of the highest peaks (1341m) in the Sierra de Aralar, and begins from the village of Larraitz, about 8km to the east (follow the signs for Zaldibia). A few buses make the run from Ordizia to Larraitz on weekends only.

More ambitious walkers can make for the Santuario de San Miguel de Aralar (p487), a good day's strong walking to the southeast in Navarra. You can also go south from Ordizia to Zegama and the hamlet of Otzaurte, picking up a stretch of the GR12 trail, a medieval pilgrim route, to the attractive Refugio de San Adrián (☎ 943 58 20 76). The *refugio* (mountain shelter) is supposedly open on Saturday and Sunday and in summer, but it's a little unreliable.

A daily train serves Otzaurte from Vitoria (€3.20, 40 minutes) and San Sebastián (€5.05, one hour).

The Interior

The hills rising to the south between San Sebastián and Bilbao offer a number of appealing towns. There's plenty of *nekazal turismoas* (agrotourism homes – family homes in rural areas with rooms to rent).

SANTUARIO DE LOYOLA

Just outside Azpeitia (12km south of the A8 motorway along the GI631) lies the portentous Santuario de Loyola (admission free; 11 10am-noon & 4-7pm), dedicated to St Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuit order. The sumptuous baroque façade gives way to a circular basilica laden with dark grey marble and plenty of carved ornamentation. The house where the saint was born in 1490 is preserved in one of the two wings of the *santuario* (shrine).

OÑATI

Continue southwest from Azpeitia, along Río Urola and a delightful back road (GI3750), which winds through the hills to the rather scraggly town of Bergara. Push on down the GI627 to reach Oñati, one of the most delightful towns in rural Basque Country. Oñati contains a Renaissance gem in the Universidad de Sancti Spiritus, where for 350 years, alumni were schooled in philosophy, law and medicine until its closure in 1902. Highlights are the Plateresque façade and Mudéjar courtyard. There are guided tours during July and August. Ask for details at the tourist office. Nearby is the Iglesia de San Miguel, a late-Gothic confection whose cloister was built over the river. The church faces onto the main square, Foruen Enparantza, dominated by the eye-catching baroque ayuntamiento (town hall).

The tourist office (☎ 943 78 34 53; Calle San Juan 14; 11 10am-2pm & 3.30-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 4.30-6.30pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar) is opposite the Universidad.

Ongi Ostataua (☎ 943 71 82 85; ongiostataua@latinmail.com; Calle Zaharra 19; s/d €42.80/57.80) is an excellent stopover, with big, bright rooms and business standard touches. Breakfast is €6 and prices drop by 25% at weekends. For rural luxury you won't beat Arregi (☎ 943 78 08 24; www.nekatur.net/arregi; Garagaltza 19; d €39.50), the splendid agrotourism home 2km south of town. There are also several good restaurants in town.

There are daily buses to/from San Sebastián, Vitoria and Bilbao.

ARANTZAZU

About 10km south of Oñati, is the compelling **Santuario de Arantzazu**, a fabulous conflation of piety with avant-garde art. The sanctuary was built in the 1950s and free rein was given to such luminaries as Eduardo Chillida, Jorge Oteiza and Lucio Muñoz. The results were inevitably controversial, from the religious standpoint, but time has sanctified what are outstanding features. The complex is run by Franciscans.

The road up and the setting are worth the trip themselves, and the whole area lends itself to excellent walking – the Oñati tourist office has information on routes.

VITORIA

pop 229,080 / elevation 512m

Be calm, be relaxed in Vitoria (Basque: Gasteiz); the city encourages it with its friendly, sophisticated ambience and its pedestrianised triumph over the motor car. Vitoria is the provincial capital of the southern Basque province of Álava (Basque: Araba) but also of the entire Basque Country. Mix in the medieval flavour of the city's old quarter – itself given a very Basque energy by the city's students – plus exciting art galleries and museums, countless great *pinxto* bars and restaurants and you have one of the happiest, most rewarding destinations in the Basque Country.

History

Vitoria's name may well derive from the Basque word *beturia*, meaning height, a reference to the hill on which the old town stands. It was so named by the Visigoths. Sancho VI of Navarra settled things by founding a 'New Vitoria' in the 12th century. Thereafter, Vitoria bounced to and fro between the Castilian and Navarran crowns. The economic advances of the late 19th century triggered Vitoria's expansion, which carried over into the 20th century. The city's historic and well-preserved nature made it a good choice for becoming the capital of the Basque autonomous government in 1981. The University of the Basque Country also has its base here.

Orientation

From the central adjoining squares of Plaza de la Virgen Blanca and the late-18th-century Plaza de España (Plaza Nueva to the Basques), the Casco Viejo (the medieval town), rises in a series of concentric ellipses, a spider's web

of narrow streets rising to the crowning glory of the 14th-century Catedral de Santa María (opposite). South of the plazas is Vitoria's 19th-century extension, which counts some wonderful parks and leafy promenades as complements to its grid of pleasant streets. The central Calle de Eduardo Dato, main artery of the evening *paseo* (promenade), leads arrow-straight to the Renfe train station. The bus station is right on the eastern edge of the Casco.

Information

There are plenty of banks with ATMs in the newer part of town.

elkar (☎ 945 14 45 01; Calle de San Prudencio 7) For books, maps and music.

Emergency (☎ 112)

Hospital de Santiago (☎ 945 25 36 00; cnr Calles de la Paz & de Olaguibel)

Main post office (Calle de las Postas)

Policia Nacional Near the Hospital de Santiago.

Tourist office (☎ 945 16 15 98; www.vitoria-gasteiz.org/turismo; Plaza General Loma s/n; 11 9.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat Jul-Sep, 10am-7pm Mon-Sat Oct-Jun, 11am-2pm Sun year-round) Opposite the Basque Parliament Building.

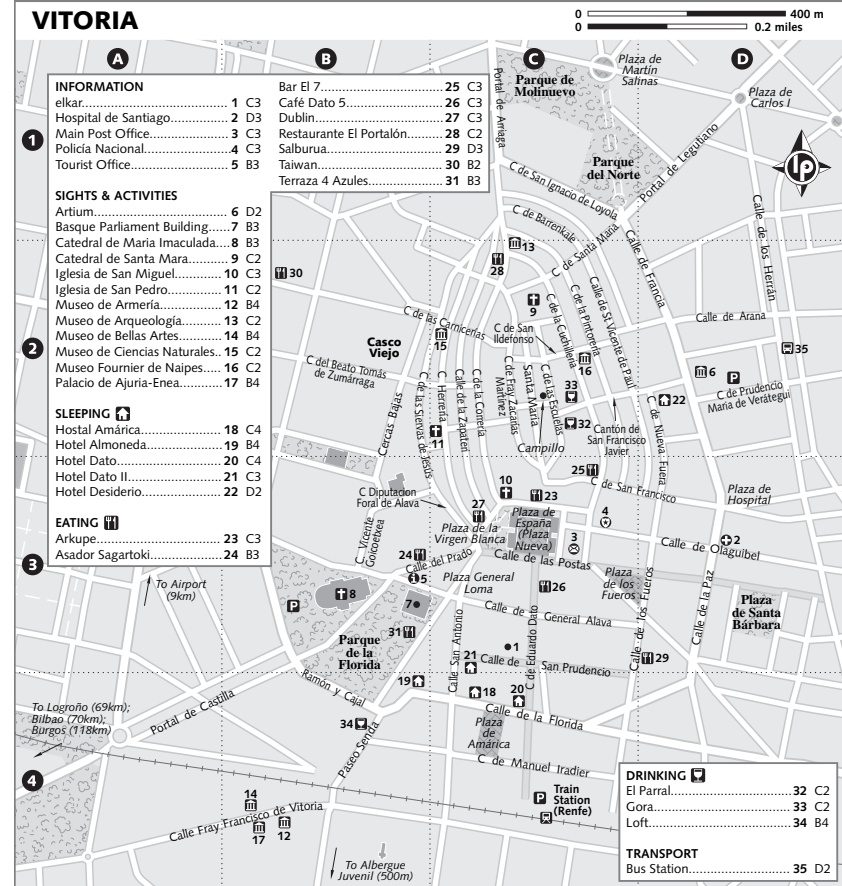
Sights

As befits the Basque capital, Vitoria boasts some important buildings, essential administrative centres, but of great symbolic significance. They include the **Basque Parliament Building** (Calle de General Alava), built in 1853 in the Parque de la Florida, and the **Palacio de Ajuria-Enea** (1920) on Paseo Fray Francisco de Vitoria, residence of the *lehendakari* (president of the regional government).

ART GALLERIES

The city's gallery of modern art, the **Artium** (☎ 945 20 90 20; Calle de Francia 24; adult/student €4.50/2.20, Wed free; 11 11am-8pm Tue-Fri, 10.30am-8pm Sat & Sun) is a powerful building; unsensational, but with great presence amid generally dull surroundings. Its collections have a robust, frontline ethos and surpass the Guggenheim for content. Big subterranean galleries are filled with engrossing works by Basque, Spanish and international artists. Major names include Picasso, Dalí and Miró. Temporary exhibitions of some fairly intense modernist work are staged throughout the year.

The absorbing **Museo de Bellas Artes** (☎ 945 18 19 18; Paseo Fray Francisco de Vitoria; admission free; 11 10am-2pm & 4-6.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat, 11am-2pm Sun) has Basque paintings and sculpture



from the 18th and 19th centuries. The works of local son Fernando de Amarica are given good space and reflect an engaging romanticism that manages to mix drama with great warmth of colour and composition.

CHURCHES

At the base of Vitoria's medieval Casco Viejo is the delightful **Plaza de la Virgen Blanca**, which is lorded over by the 14th-century **Iglesia de San Miguel** whose statue of the Virgen Blanca lends her name to the Plaza below and is the city's patron saint.

The 14th-century **Iglesia de San Pedro** (Calle Herrería) is the city's oldest church and has a fabulous Gothic frontispiece on its eastern façade.

On the summit of the old town and dominating its skyline is the medieval **Catedral de Santa María** (☎ 945 25 51 35; www.catedralvitoria.com; 11 11am-2pm & 5-8pm). The cathedral is undergoing a lengthy, but much praised, restoration project unlikely to be completed for some years yet. There are excellent three-hour guided tours (€3.50) that give an insight into the excitement of restoration and discovery as well as giving some contact with the cathedral's interior.

The **Catedral de María Inmaculada** (☎ 945 15 06 31; Cadena y Eleta s/n; admission free; 11 10am-2pm & 4-6.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat, 11am-2pm Sun) in the new town is an impressive adventure in the Gothic style that began in the early 20th century. It houses a collection of sacred art.

MUSEUMS

Vitoria has a sprinkling of interesting museums (admission free; 10am-2pm & 4-6.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat, 11am-2pm Sun), notably the brick-and-timber **Museo de Arqueología** (☎ 945 18 19 22; Calle de la Correría 116), which is housed in a former armoury. Also worth a quick visit are the **Museo de Ciencias Naturales** (Natural Science Museum; ☎ 945 18 19 24; Calle de las Siervas de Jesús 24), in the Torre de Doña Oxtanda, and the **Museo de Armería** (☎ 945 18 19 25; Calle Fray Francisco de Vitoria) for jousting fans. The **Museo Fournier de Naipes** (Card Museum; ☎ 945 18 19 20; Calle de la Cuchillería 54) is in the 16th-century Palacio de Bendaña, with an impressive collection of historic presses and playing cards, including some of the oldest European decks.

Festivals & Events

The calm sophistication of Vitoria takes a back seat during the boisterous **Fiestas de la Virgen Blanca**, held from 4 to 9 August, with a range of fireworks, bullfights, concerts and street dancing. All of this is preceded by the symbolic descent of Celedón, a Basque effigy that flies down on strings from the Iglesia de San Miguel into the plaza below.

A jazz festival is held in July and a fairly new gig is the **Azkena Rock Festival** (☎ 944 15 45 51; www.azkenarockfestival.com) held at the end of August to early September. It features a fairly lively mix of Basque and Spanish bands plus headliners who have included Iggy Pop and Deep Purple in the past.

Sleeping

Albergue Juvenil (☎ /fax 945 14 81 00; cnr Calles de Escultor Isaac Díez & Salvatierrabide; junior/senior dm €9/14) About 600m southwest of the train station, this well-kept, well-secured, red-brick building is the cheapest deal in town.

Hotel Desiderio (☎ 945 25 17 00; fax 945 25 17 22; Colegio San Prudencio 2; s/d €35/60) Dull décor, dull outlook, and overpriced, but you're only 50m from modern art at the Artium, 100m from the bus station and a mere stagger away from the streets of the Casco.

Hotel América (☎ 945 13 05 06; fax 945 13 05 48; Calle de la Florida 11; s/d with breakfast €35.40/52) Comfy rooms and a friendly welcome make this a good option. One or two rooms may feel slightly enclosed to some, but the overall charm makes up for it.

Hotel Almoneda (☎ 945 15 40 84; www.hotelalmoneda.com; Calle de la Florida 7; s/d Mon-Thu €62/99,

Fri-Sun €51/74) Confident atmosphere and business-level comfort and style draw you in at this fine hotel where rooms have a nice muted feel. Breakfast is included and prices drop at weekends.

There's great value at the comfortable **Hotel Dato** (☎ 945 14 72 30; www.hoteldato.com; Calle de Eduardo Dato 28; s/d/tr €33/46/61; 100m) and at its supplementary hotel, **Dato II** (Calle San Antonio). Both put the art into Deco with extravagant trimmings that include full-sized statues of nubile water nymphs and stags.

Eating

Head for the west sides of Plaza de España and the adjacent Plaza de la Virgen Blanca for breakfast and morning coffee in the bright light of day. Switch to the east sides for afternoon sun.

Terraza 4 Azules (☎ 945 14 88 48; Parque de la Florida) A sweet little corner for alfresco coffee among the trees in Parque de Florida.

Dublin (☎ 945 28 67 62; Plaza de la Virgen Blanca) One of those wonderful places that seems to be at the crossroads of city life. It rings the changes from relaxed morning café through lunchtime *pintxo* place to a late-night drinking spot with great conversation.

Taiwan (☎ 945 22 91 47; Calle Badaia 24; dishes €12-15) For a change from Basque food, this friendly place does excellent dishes and is developing its Taiwanese cuisine also. There's a *menú del día* for €9.

Arkupe (☎ 945 23 00 80; Mateo Benigno de Moraza 13; mains €15-21) A great local restaurant, family-run and with a strong grip on traditional Basque dishes, Arkupe has comfy, intimate seating in which to enjoy classic dishes such as baked hake in a squid sauce or pork with a red wine sauce.

Restaurante El Portalón (☎ 945 14 27 55; Calle de la Correría 151; meals €55) El Portalón offers quality Basque cuisine in splendid timbered and vaulted surroundings, but you'll pay for the privilege and reservations are essential.

You can get *pintxos* and *mentés del día* at many of the bars in the Casco Viejo. A popular place to start is **Bar El 7** (☎ 945 27 22 98; Calle de la Cuchillería 3; menú €9.80), where they do no-fuss *pintxos*, *bocadillos* and a tasty *menú del día*. The *menú* racks up to €13.80 on Saturdays. **Café Dato 5** (☎ 945 14 94 20; Calle de Eduardo Dato 5) runs a *pintxo* for €1 deal. The top spot is **Salburua** (☎ 945 28 64 60; Calle de los Fueros 19), which has picked up several awards for its *pintxos*.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Asador Sagartoki (☎ 945 28 86 76; Calle del Prado 18; mains €17.60-19) A marvellous *sidrería* (cider bar) restaurant that has one of the most creative menus around and an atmosphere to go with it. The dining room stretches way beyond the busy front bar and the *pintxos* are sublime award-winners. Try the exquisite *pirulis de revueltos de champiñons*, wild mushroom 'lollipops' by any other name, or the *degustación de pintxos* (€16) for a selection of the best. There's a *menú sidrería* for €34 per person and mains of fish and meat as well as superb salads. Marvel as the bar staff, arms akimbo, orchestrate jets of cider from the big barrels to the glass in their outstretched hands; then try it yourself in the restaurant.

Drinking

There's a strong politico-arty vibe in the Casco Viejo where a lively student cadre keeps things swerving with creative street posters and action. The *campillo* (a covered, but open-sided, court used for games and other events) in Calle las Escuelas is often turned over to raucous band fests, rallies and political fairs. In Calle de la Cuchillería and Calle Herrería there's a swathe of hole-in-the-wall bars with no name.

El Parral (☎ 945 27 68 33; Cantón de San Francisco Javier) This is the 'grape arbor', though all the grapes are in the flowing wine that fuels lively discussion and late-night rock, reggae and Spanish pop.

Gora (☎ 945 12 14 52; Cantón de San Francisco Javier) This café-bar has smooth modern surroundings, but there's still a great Casco vibe. There's rockin' DJs and late sessions, especially at the weekend.

Loft (Paseo Senda s/n; admission €9; 11pm-late Thu-Sat) For later in the night, this is where House-music DJs ensure a packed dance floor on weekends.

Getting There & Away

Vitoria's **airport** (☎ 945 16 35 00) is at Foronda, about 9km northwest of the city. Ryanair has daily flights from Stansted and there are internal connections to Madrid and Barcelona. There's an ATM and car-hire offices at the airport. Buses (€3) to town meet flights. Taxis cost €20.

There are car parks by the railway station, by the Artium and just east of the cathedral.

Vitoria's bus station (☎ 945 25 84 00; Calle de los Herrán) has regular services to Madrid (€21.50, five hours, up to 13 daily), Barcelona (€34.25, seven hours), Pamplona (€7, 1½ hours), San Sebastián (€6.75, 1½ hours) and Bilbao (€5.10, 50 minutes). Booking tickets, for Bilbao especially, is recommended at weekends.

Trains go to Madrid (€31.30, 5½ hours, eight daily), Barcelona (€34.50 seven hours,

one daily), San Sebastián (€8.10, 1¾ hours, up to 10 daily) and to Pamplona (€4.10, one hour, four daily). There's an ATM and an internet facility at the station.

NAVARRA

Several Spains intersect in Navarra (Basque: Nafarroa). The soft greens and bracing climate of the Navarran Pyrenees lie like a cool compress across the sunstruck brow of the south, which is all stark plains, cereal crops and vineyards, sliced by high sierras with coxcombs of raw limestone. Navarra is pilgrim territory: for centuries the faithful have used the pass at Roncesvalles to cross from France on their way to Santiago de Compostela (see Camino de Santiago, p89).

Navarra was historically the heartland of the Basques, but dynastic struggles and trimming, due to reactionary politics, including Francoism, has left it as a semi-autonomous province with the north being Basque by nature while the south leans towards Castilian Spain. The centre hangs between and Navarra seems intrinsically uncommitted to the vision of a Basque future. The Navarran capital, Pamplona, tends to grab the headlines with its world-famous running of the bulls, but the region's real charm is in its peppering of small towns and villages, each one with a unique history and an iconography that covers every kind of architecture.

PAMPLONA

pop 190,937 / elevation 456m Pamplona (Basque: Iruña), capital of the fiercely independent Navarra, can seem a touch austere at times, partly because of the dark stonework of its older buildings and partly because of a lingering reputation for Navarran reactionary politics. Yet Pamplona

is the home of Los Sanfermines (Fiesta de San Fermín) one of the most riotous and extreme festivals in Europe. At the heart of the festival is El Encierro, the Running of the Bulls (see the boxed text, p482), an activity that many other countries would have banned years ago because of the perceived cruelty to animals and danger to people.

All this apart, Pamplona is fascinating at any time. A fine cathedral is the jewel in the crown and there's much to be enjoyed by simply meandering along narrow streets or relaxing in the vast green belt on the western edge of the inner city. Pamplona's bars and restaurants have a growing reputation for superb *pintxos*, and a healthy Basque culture among young people enlivens things.

History

The Romans called the city Pompaelo, after its founder Pompey the Great. They were succeeded by the Visigoths and then, briefly, by the Muslims. Navarra has been a melting pot of dynastic, political and cultural aspirations and tensions, ever since Charlemagne rampaged across the Pyrenees from France in 778. The city achieved great things under Sancho III in the 11th century and its position on the Camino de Santiago ensured its prosperity. Twentieth-century prosperity saw an expansion of the city.

Orientation

The compact old-city centre is marked off to the north and east by Río Arga and what remains of the old defensive wall. To the west it's bordered by parks and Ciudadela, the former citadel. The main square is the enormous Plaza del Castillo, with its central bandstand. Its south side extends southwest through the wide Paseo de Sarasate roughly marking the division between the old town and the 19th-century *Ensanche*, the 'extension'. The train station is a kilometre northwest of the city centre. The main bus station is a few minutes walk south of Paseo de Sarasate.

Information

There are several banks with exchange services and ATMs along Paseo de Sarasate and numerous ATMs throughout the newer part of town.

elkar (☎ 948 22 41 67; Comedias 14) Excellent branch of this chain bookshop with music and maps also.

Emergency (☎ 112)

Hospital de Navarra (☎ 848 42 22 22; Calle de Irunlarrea)

Kuria.Net (☎ 948 22 30 77; Calle Curia 15; per hr €3; 11 10am-10pm Mon-Sat, noon-10pm Sun) A well-run place with good kit.

Main post office (cnr Paseo de Sarasate & Calle de Vínculo)

Policía Nacional (Calle del General Chinchilla)

Telephone Locutorio (Plaza de Castillo; 11 9am-11pm)

Tourist office (☎ 848 20 65 40; www.navarra.es; Calle de Esclava 1; 11 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) This extremely well-organised office has English-speaking staff and plenty of information about the city and Navarra.

Sights

CATEDRAL

Pamplona's main **catedral** (☎ 848 42 04 20; Calle Dormitallería; guided tours adult/student €4.15/2.45; 11 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) stands on a rise just inside the city ramparts amid a dark thicket of narrow streets. The cathedral is a late-medieval Gothic gem spoiled only by its rather dull neo-classical façade, an 18th-century appendage. The vast interior reveals some fine artefacts, including a silver-plated Virgin and the splendid 15th-century tomb of Carlos III of Navarra and his wife Doña Leonor. The real joy is the Gothic cloister where there is marvellous delicacy in the stonework. The **Museo Diocesano** occupies the former refectory and kitchen, and houses an assortment of religious art, including some fine Gothic woodcarvings.

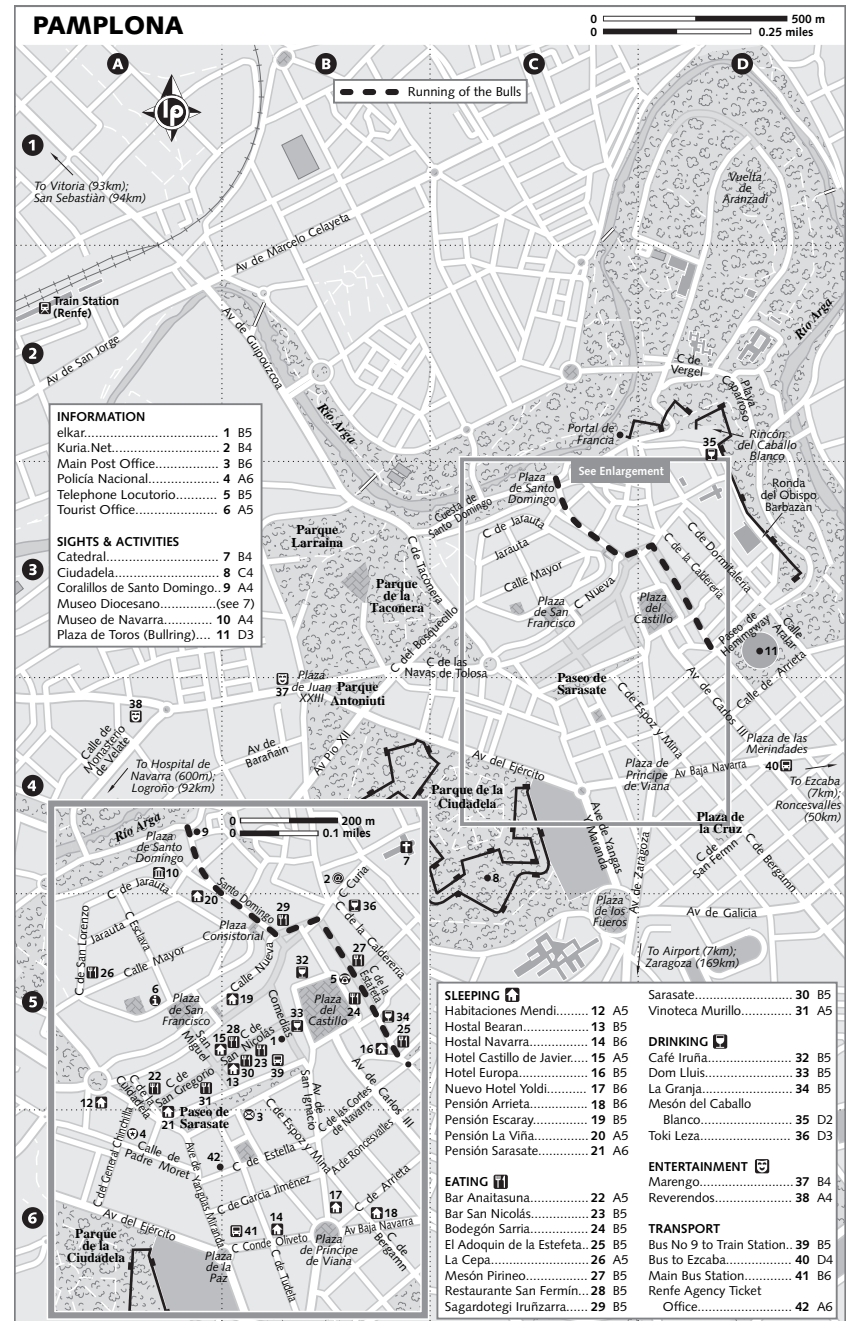
The cathedral, cloister and museum can be visited on three-hour guided tours at 10am and 4pm daily, except Saturday afternoon and Sunday.

MUSEO DE NAVARRA

Housed in a former medieval hospital, this **museum** (☎ 848 42 64 92; www.cfnavarra.es; Calle Santo Domingo 47; adults/students €2/1, Sat afternoon & Sun free; 11 9.30am-2pm & 5-7pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun) has an eclectic collection of archaeological finds (including a Roman mosaic), as well as a selection of art including Goya's *Marqués de San Adrián*.

CIUDADELA & PARKS

The walls and bulwarks of the grand fortified citadel, the star-shaped **Ciudadela** (Avenida del Ejército; admission free; 11 7.30am-9.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-9.30pm Sun), lurk amid the verdant grass and trees in what is now a charming park, the portal to three more parks that unfold to the north and lend the city a beautiful green escape.



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THE RUNNING OF THE BULLS

Liberated, obsessive, or plain mad is how you might describe aficionados (and there are many) who regularly take part in Pamplona's **Sanfermines** (Fiesta de San Fermín), a nonstop cacophony of music, dance, fireworks, processions – and the small matter of running alongside a handful of agitated, horn-tossing *toros* (bulls) – that takes place from 6 to 14 July each year.

El *Encierro*, the running of the bulls from their corrals to the bullring for the afternoon bullfight, takes place in Pamplona, every morning during Sanfermines. Six bulls are let loose from the Coraillos de Santo Domingo to charge across the square of the same name (a good vantage point). They continue up the street, veering onto Calle de los Mercaderes from Plaza Consistorial and then sweep right onto Calle de la Estafeta for the final charge to the ring. Devotees, known as *mazos* (the brave or foolish, depending on your point of view) race madly with the bulls, aiming to keep close – but not too close. The total course is some 825m long and lasts little more than three minutes.

Since records began in 1924, 13 people have been killed during Pamplona's bull run. Many of those who run are full of bravado (and/or drink), and have little idea of what they're doing. This is not an activity to be recommended, but if you're tempted, try to run with someone experienced. Above all don't get trapped near a bull that has been separated from the herd – a lone, frightened 500kg bull surrounded by charging humans can be lethal. Keeping ahead of the herd is the general rule. As part of your preparation, familiarise yourself with the course.

To participate you must enter the course before 7.30am from Plaza de Santo Domingo. About 8am two rockets are fired: the first announces that the bulls have been released from the corrals; the second lets you know they're all out and running. The first danger point is where Calle de los Mercaderes leads into Calle de la Estafeta. Here many of the bulls skid into the barriers because of their headlong speed on the turn. They can become isolated from the herd and are then always dangerous. A very treacherous stretch comes towards the end, where Calle de la Estafeta slopes down into the final turn to Plaza de Toros.

A third rocket goes off when all the bulls have made it to the ring, and a final one when they have been rounded up in the stalls.

The week winds up at midnight on 14 July with a candlelit procession, known as the *Pobre de Mi* (Poor Me), which starts from Plaza Consistorial. Another entertaining sideshow is the procession by protestors from the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, wearing as few clothes as possible, but without bulls behind them.

Concern has grown about the high numbers of people taking part in recent *Encierros*. The 2004 fiesta was considered to be one of the most dangerous in recent years with dozens of injuries, but no deaths. For the 2005 fiesta the authorities used a special antislip paint on the streets to cut down on bull-skid. There seemed to be just as many falls and there were several injuries, including four gorings. The 2006 event passed without serious injury to any of the runners, but with even greater demands on the authorities, including 145 fire alarm call outs and four stray cats collected; no stray bulls reported. For dedicated *Encierro* news check out www.sanfermin.com.

MUSEO OTEIZA

Around 9km northeast of Pamplona in the town of Alzuza, this impressive museum (948 33 20 74; www.museoteiza.org; Calle de la Cuesta 7; adult/student/child €4/2/free, Fri free; 11am–7pm Tue–Sun Jun–Sep, 10am–3pm Tue–Fri, 11am–7pm Sat & Sun Oct–May) contains almost 3000 pieces by the renowned Navarran sculptor, Jorge Oteiza. As well as his workshop, this beautifully designed gallery incorporates the artist's former home in a lovely rural setting.

Rio Irati (948 22 14 70) has at least one bus a day to Alzuza from Pamplona's bus station.

If you're driving, Alzuza is signposted north off the NA150, just east of Huarte.

Sleeping

During Los Sanfermines all hotels raise their rates mercilessly – some triple their normal rack rates, a few increase them by even more – and it can be near impossible to get a room without reserving several months in advance. Touts hang around the bus and train stations at this time of year, offering rooms in private houses. You take your chances on the quality.

BUDGET

Ezcaba (948 33 03 15; www.campingezcaba.com; sites per person/tent/car €4.30/4.55/4.05) On the banks of Rio Ulzama, about 7km north on the N121, this is the nearest camping ground. Bus 4 runs four times daily (the earliest at 10.48am) from Plaza de las Merindades by the BBVA bank. Extra buses run during Los Sanfermines.

Pensión La Viña (948 21 32 50; Calle de Jarauta 8; s/d with shared bathroom €15/25) A decent budget option that's a mere skip, jump and heartbeat from the bull run. The outer door is plain metal and the *penión* is an unnumbered door on the second landing.

Pensión Escaray (948 22 78 25; Calle Nueva 24; s/d with shared bathroom €20/40) Tucked away behind a vast doorway this is a marvellous period-piece *penión* with polished floorboards and high ceilings. The welcome's charming also.

Habitaciones Mendi (948 22 52 97; Calle de las Navas de Tolosa 9; s/d €30/36) Mendi is a longstanding institution full of old Pamplonese style – creaky floorboards, Navarran chintz and crockery.

Pensión Sarasate (948 22 30 84; Paseo de Sarasate 30; s/d €35/40) Old-fashioned care and comfort is the mark of this excellent choice at the end of the *paseo* and right on the threshold of the old town. Plenty of traditional décor and polished wood add to the cosy atmosphere.

Hostal Bearan (948 22 34 28; fax 948 22 43 02; Calle de San Nicolás 25; s/d from €36/42) A well-organised and fairly formal management makes this a reliable place, although the rooms – and the welcome – are a bit dull.

Pensión Arrieta (948 22 84 59; Calle de Arrieta 27; s/d €32/38, d with bathroom €45) This is a more-than-adequate option, but with décor wearing a touch thin. Arrieta has decent-sized rooms in its main *penión*. Across the way on the floor of another building is an annexe of much the same standard.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Castillo de Javier (948 20 30 40; www.hotel-castillodejavier.com; Calle San Nicolás 50; s/d €42/58; j) This relatively new hotel is smack bang in the middle of the old town. Rooms are standard business style, comfy and smart, and there are excellent facilities for those with mobility difficulties.

Hostal Navarra (948 22 51 64; www.hostalnavarra.com; Calle de Tudela 9; s/d €48.15/64.20) An immaculate place, with delightful personal touches,

Navarra has stylish, comfy rooms and is only a few minutes from the Casco. The delicious breakfast is €6.

Nuevo Hotel Yoldi (948 22 48 00; www.hotelyoldi.com; Avenida de San Ignacio 11; s/d €57/82; j) Sleep with the macho memories of Hemingway and Anthony Quinn in this longstanding and excellent hotel. The very comfortable rooms have CD players and minibars to keep the ghost of Hemingway happy at least.

Hotel Europa (948 22 18 00; www.hreuropa.com; Calle de Espoz y Mina 11; s/d €65/84; j) There's business-standard comfort at this enjoyable central hotel, but with the usual stinting on room size for singles. Weekend rates plummet by 20%.

Eating

Bar Anaitasuna (948 22 79 56; Calle de San Gregorio 58; menú €9.75) This is an ideal scrub-down for everything from breakfast to late drinking and with *bocadillos* and sandwiches starting at €3.50.

Bar San Nicolás (Calle de San Nicolás 13) Prices are a bit kinder here than in some nearby places, so try the Spanish standards, such as *paella* and *bacalao* (salted cod), as well as a Basque *menú* (€9).

Sarasate (948 22 57 27; Calle de San Nicolás 21; menú Mon–Fri/Sat & Sun €10/15; ✓) This bright, uncluttered vegetarian restaurant on the 1st floor offers excellent veggie dishes and also has a gluten-free *menú*.

Bodegón Sarria (Calle de la Estafeta 50; mains from €9, menú €12.50) There's plenty of Pamplona tradition in this largely meat-based eatery. Meaty pics of Hemingway and assorted *toros* (bulls) hang on the walls to aid digestion.

Mesón Pirineo (948 22 20 45; Calle de la Estafeta 41; menú €15) One of Calle de la Estafeta's great *pintxo* bars, the selection here is really superb. It also does a good three-course *menú* for about €15.

El Adoquín de la Estafeta (948 22 68 41; Calle de la Estafeta 80; menú €12) This unassuming corner bar has delicious chunky *pintxos* such as *roquefort con salmon* and *setas con jamón* (mushrooms and ham).

For more options, wander west to Calle de San Lorenzo.

La Cepa (948 21 31 45; Calle de San Lorenzo 2; menú €10) There's a stylish pull to this high-ceilinged eatery with its red walls and wooden tables. There are filling meals and it's a good place for just drinks and snacks.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Baserri (☎ 948 22 20 21; Calle San Nicolás 32; menú €12.50) It's *pintxo* paradise at Baserri, where the bar groans with bright butterflies of food. A *menú degustación*, a sampler of *pintxos*, costs €18.50; or just pick away at such treats as venison with wild mushrooms or ostrich with Idiábal cheese. There are also gluten-free options.

Sagardotegi Iruñazarra (☎ 948 22 51 67; Calle de los Mercaderes 15) Beef up on solid Navarran meat dishes and trimmings for about €22 at this popular cider house. Included in the price is all the cider you can drink.

Restaurante San Fermín (☎ 948 22 21 91; Calle de San Nicolás 46) A fairly top-end place that produces classics such as *cogote de merluza* (tender neck of hake) or *centollo el horno* (baked spider crab).

Vinoteca Murillo (☎ 948 22 10 15; cnr Calle de San Gregorio & Plaza de San Nicolás; 11am-1.45pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat) A wine shop that fills 5L containers of good Navarran wine for under €6.

Drinking

Pamplona's resident student population ensures a lively after-dark scene year-round. There's a strong Basque vibe in the bars around Calle Carmen and Calle Calderería and up towards the cathedral.

Toki Leza (☎ 948 22 95 84; Calle de la Calderería 5) This place has plenty of life and soul.

The cafés on Plaza del Castillo, with their French-style awnings, are good places to start or end the day.

Café Iruña (Plaza del Castillo 44) With frilly *belle époque* décor in need of re-gilding – although the faded look sits well – this is a perennial favourite for coffees or aperitifs.

Mesón del Caballo Blanco (Ronda del Obispo Barbazán) Country comes to town at this enduring favourite. It's in a converted church just inside the city wall to the north of the cathedral. Inside and out you have a charming sense of escaping claustrophobic city streets and the across-country views are refreshing. It also does decent food with dishes under €10 and has fairly good wine.

Other good bars include the intimate **Dom Lluís** (cnr Calles de San Nicolás & de Pozo Blanco) or the more modern **La Granja** (Calle de la Estafeta 71).

Entertainment

Most of Pamplona's dance venues are a walk or short taxi ride south and west of the old city centre in the direction of the university. Doors at these places are usually open after 11pm Thursday to Saturday, and the cover charge tends to be around €6 to €10, depending on the night.

Reverendos (Calle de Monasterio de Velate 5; 11.30pm-6.30am) This is the big number for the 20 to 30 year-old dance and techno fiends.

Marengo (Avenida de Bayona 2) This venue gets the crowds going with Latin rhythms.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Pamplona's airport (☎ 948 16 87 00), about 7km south of the city, has regular flights to Madrid and Barcelona. There's an ATM as well as car-rental desks. Bus 16 from the main bus station (€1, 25 minutes) drops you 300m downhill from the airport, so heavy cases are a genuine drag. A taxi costs about €13.

BUS

From the main bus station (☎ 948 22 38 54; Calle Conde Oliveto 8) buses leave for most towns throughout Navarra, although service is restricted on Sunday.

Regular bus services travel to Bilbao (€11.60, 1¾ hours), Vitoria (€6.80, 1½ hours), Logroño (€7, 1½ hours), San Sebastián (€6.50, one hour), Soria (€11.10, two hours), Madrid (€24.29, five hours) and Barcelona (€33.50, five hours). Regional destinations include Olite (€2.85, 40 minutes, 16 daily), Javier (€3.75, one hour, two daily), Estella (€3.25, one hour, 10 daily), Tudela (€6.20, 1¼ hours, eight daily) and Puento La Reina (€1.70, 30 minutes, 10 daily).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The A15 *autopista* connects Pamplona with San Sebastián, although the N121 is a more scenic – and free – alternative. The N135 leads east into the Pyrenees, while the N240 heads west to Vitoria and Burgos and east to Aragón. For Logroño take the N111.

TRAIN

Pamplona's train station is linked to the city centre by bus 9 from Paseo de Sarasate every 15 minutes. Tickets are also sold at the **Renfe agency** (☎ 902 24 02 02; Calle de Estella 8; 11.30am-1.30pm & 4.30-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1pm Sat).

Trains run to/from Madrid (€48.50, 4½ hours, three daily), Barcelona (€31, six hours, three daily), San Sebastián (from €18.30, two hours, three daily), Vitoria (€4.10, one hour, four daily) and Tudela (€12.50, 1½ hours, five daily).

EAST OF PAMPLONA

Southeast of Pamplona along the road to Aragón (N240), there are a handful of interesting towns, and the grand Monasterio de Leyre in the foothills of the Pyrenees, which offer worthwhile stopovers.

Sangüesa

pop 4750 / elevation 430m

The whiff of history hangs happily around Sangüesa (Basque: Zangoza), although the more palpable whiff from a nearby paper mill represents the present. Sangüesa was once an important stop on the pilgrim route to Santiago de Compostela. Top billing goes to the Iglesia de Santa María Real (adult/child €2/1), one of the finest examples of Romanesque religious art in Navarra. The fabulous portal has a busy crowd of saints, sinners and supporting acts depicting everything from the Last Supper to the Norse Sagas. Look for the opportunistic bird's nest while you're there.

All round Sangüesa you'll come across excellent information boards in several different languages.

Immediately opposite the Iglesia de Santa María Real is the tourist office (☎ 948 87 14 11; www.navarra.es; Calle Mayor 2; 11am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Easter-Oct, 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun Nov-Easter).

Cantolagua (☎ 948 43 03 52; Camino de Cantolagua s/n; sites per person/tent/car €3.50/3.50/4; 11 mid-Feb–Oct) is a well-equipped camping ground, while the most comfortable place in town is **Hostal JP** (☎ 948 87 16 93; www.ciberwebs.com/jp; Paseo Raimundo Lumbier 3; s/d €35/52), opposite the Iglesia de Santa María. **Pensión Las Navas** (☎ 948 87 00 77; Calle de Alfonso el Batallador 7; s/d €20/40) has cheap rooms and also does good, honest food, including a special *asado* (grilled meat) *menú* for €15 or a *menú del día* for €10.

Regular buses run daily to/from Pamplona (€3.15, 45 minutes). A minibus service runs to Sos del Rey Católico (€1, 15 minutes) in Aragón (see p441) at 8.30pm on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and at 1.45pm on Tuesday and Thursday.

Javier

pop 77 / elevation 448m

Javier (Xavier), 11km northeast of Sangüesa, is where the patron saint of Navarra, San Francisco Xavier, was born in 1506. The fairly dull town lies downhill from the quaint, Jesuit-owned **Castillo de Javier** (☎ 948 88 40 00; admission free; 11.30am-12.40pm & 4-6.40pm Apr-Sep, 9am-12.40pm & 4-5.40pm Oct-Mar), an evocative piece of medieval architecture that houses a small museum dedicated to the life of the patron saint, who was a missionary in the Far East.

A daily bus passes through from Pamplona and Sangüesa en route to Huesca; another heads up the Valle de Roncal.

Monasterio de Leyre

pop 219 / elevation 559m

Totally swamped with visitors on public holidays is the **Monasterio de Leyre** (☎ 948 88 41 50; adult/child €2/0.50; 11.30am-2pm & 3.30-7pm Mon-Fri, 10.15am-2pm & 4-7pm Sat & Sun), in an attractive setting in the shadow of the Sierra de Leyre about 4km from Yesa on the N240.

The early-Romanesque crypt has a three-nave structure with a low roof and the 12th-century main portal of the church is a fine example of Romanesque artistry.

Accommodation is available at the **Hospedería de Leyre** (☎ 948 88 41 00; www.monasteriodeleyre.com; s/d €36/70), which is housed in part of the monastery complex and also has a reasonable restaurant with a weekday *menú del día* for €16.50 (€17.50 at weekends).

There's an early-morning bus from Yesa to Pamplona, as well as one to Huesca. Virtually no buses run on Sunday, and there are none at all from Yesa to the monastery.

WEST OF PAMPLONA

The N111 is the main route west out of Pamplona, winding gently to Logroño along the Camino de Santiago (p89). Dotted with a handful of charming villages and especially bursting with colour after the spring rains, it's one of the more enticing stretches for those walking the Camino. Buses travel between Pamplona and Logroño along this route.

Puente la Reina

pop 2520 / elevation 421m

The six-arched medieval bridge at Puente la Reina (Basque: Gares) throngs with the ghosts of a multitude of pilgrims. Over the centuries they approached from Roncesvalles to the

NAVARRA'S CASAS RURALES

Navarra has an excellent selection of *casas rurales* (village houses or farmsteads with rooms to let) which are often well kept, beautiful houses in mountain villages. Reservations are recommended at peak periods. You can recognise the *casas rurales* by one of two small plaques: one has 'CR' in white on a dark-green background; the more modern one, in brown, olive green and white, displays the letter 'C' and the outline of a house.

A copy of the *Guía de Alojamientos* is available free from most tourist offices in Navarra, and it lists all the private homes and farmsteads that rent out rooms.

north and Aragón to the east, and then united to take the one main route west to Santiago de Compostela. Their first stop here was at the late-Romanesque Iglesia del Crucifijo, erected by the Knights Templar and still containing one of the finest Gothic crucifixes in existence. From here the narrow Calle Mayor leads to the Iglesia de Santiago, sporting an eroded Romanesque portal with Mudéjar touches; inside is an especially beautiful sculpture of the saint.

Estella

pop 13,449 / elevation 483m

Never mind the traffic-packed approaches to Estella (Basque: Lizarra), this town was known as 'La Bella' in medieval times because of the splendour of its monuments and buildings and it's still a charming place today. During the 11th century, Estella became a main reception point for the growing flood of pilgrims along the Camino de Santiago. Today, the atmospheric older part of town is huddled on the west bank of tree-shaded Río Ega and the newer part of town is centred on the big, cheerful Plaza de los Fueros. Parking can be difficult, but an extension to the car park near the bus station at Plaza Coronación for the south side of town is planned for 2007.

The very helpful **tourist office** (☎ 948 55 63 01; www.navarra.es; Calle de San Nicolás 1; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat Sep & Easter-Jun, 10am-8pm Mon-Sat Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Easter, 10am-2pm Sun year-round) is on the western bank of the river below the 12th-century Iglesia de San Pedro de la Rúa, the most important monument in Estella. Guided

visits leave from the tourist office seven times a day (€2.50, 30 minutes). Guided tours of the entire town, along with an English commentary, cost €4 and last for 1½ hours. You should check with the tourist office in advance.

Adjacent to the tourist office is the **Palacio de los Reyes** (☎ 948 54 60 37; Calle de San Nicolás 2; admission free; 11am-1pm & 5-7pm Tue-Sat, 11am-1pm Sun), a rare example of Romanesque civil construction. It houses an intriguing collection of paintings by Gustavo de Maeztu y Whitney (1887-1947), who was of Cuban-English parentage, but emphatically Basque in upbringing and identity. Landscapes, portraits and full-bodied nudes reflect Maeztu's engaging sensual romanticism. Across the river and overlooking the town is the **Iglesia de San Miguel** with a fine Romanesque north door.

Every year from 31 July to 8 August, Estella hosts a *feria* (fair) with its own encierro, the running of the bulls, although the 'bulls' are less potentially lethal heifers that have their horns padded. They're big enough, however, and the fun can be happily scary.

Decent hotels include **Pensión San Andrés** (☎ 948 55 41 58; Plaza Santiago 58; s/d with washbasin from €15/27, s/d/tr/q with private bathroom €23/35/40/50), with very simple, clean rooms; **Hostal Residencia Cristina** (☎ 948 55 04 50; fax 948 55 07 72; Calle Baja Navarra 1; s/d/tr €37/45/55), which overlooks the main square and has good rooms; and the central **Hotel Yerri** (1 948 54 60 34; fax 948 55 50 81; Avenida de Yerri 35; s/d/tr €31/60/66), which is very comfortable.

Hotel Restaurante Yerri, attached to Hotel Yerri has a *menú del día* for €10 and a heftier *menú* on Saturday for €22. **Restaurante La Cepa** (☎ 948 55 00 32; Plaza de los Fueros 15; mains €15-18.50) is noted for its excellent traditional kitchen and does a good *menú del día* for €12 on weekdays and €22.50 at weekends.

About 10 buses leave from the bus station (Plaza Coronación) for Pamplona (€3.25, one hour) Monday to Friday, and four on Saturday and Sunday.

Around Estella

There are some fascinating monasteries in the vicinity of Estella. About 3km southwest of Estella, near Ayegui, the **Monasterio de Irache** (☎ 948 55 44 64; admission free; 1 9am-1.30pm Tue, 9am-1.30pm & 5-7pm Wed-Fri, 9am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Sat & Sun Mar-Oct, 10am-1.30pm & 4.30-6pm Tue-Sun Nov-Feb, closed 15 Dec-31 Jan) is an ancient Benedictine monastery with a lovely 16th-century Plateresque

cloister and the **Puerta Especiosa**, decorated with delicate sculptures.

Set in quieter country, the **Monasterio de Iranzo** (☎ 948 52 00 47; www.monasterio-iranzo.com; adult/child €2.40/1.20; 10am-2pm & 4-8pm May-Sep, 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Oct-Apr) is backed by a wooded hillside about 10km north of Estella, near Abárzuza.

The Road to Logroño

The road to Logroño continues past Los Arcos, with the **Iglesia de Santa María** and its impressive Gothic cloister, before winding through rolling country to **Torres del Río**, whose octagonal 12th-century Romanesque **Iglesia del Santo Sepulcro** is a little gem.

NORTH OF PAMPLONA

Sierra de Aralar

One of Navarra's many natural parks the scenic Sierra de Aralar offers pleasant walking. From **Lekunberri**, the area's main town, which also has a **tourist office** (☎ 948 50 72 04; oit.lekunberri@cfnavarra.es; Calle de Plazaola 21), the NA1510 leads southwest through the most scenic countryside, culminating (after 21km) in the austere 9th-century **Santuario de San Miguel de Aralar** (☎ 948 39 60 28; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm), which lies in the shadow of Monte Altxueta (1343m) and has attractive circular naves and a 12th-century *retablo* (altarpiece).

Lekunberri has a number of hotels and restaurants. The best choice is **Hostal Ayestarán** (☎ 948 50 41 27; hotelayestaran@terra.es; Calle de Aralar 27; r €56) whose restaurant does a *menú del día* for €12.

Most buses between Pamplona and San Sebastián stop in Lekunberri, but you'll need your own vehicle to explore the sierra.

Valle del Baztán

This is rural Basque Country at its most typical, a landscape of reds and greens where the houses too are built of red stone. Minor roads take you in and out of charming little villages, such as **Arriaz** (known for the fortified **Casa Jaureguizar**) and **Ziga**, with its 16th-century church.

Just beyond Irurita on the N121B is the valley's biggest town, **Elizondo**, given a distinctly urban air by its tall functional buildings. It's a good base for exploring the area. There's accommodation at the comfortable **Hotel Bastán** (☎ 948 58 00 50; www.hotelbazan.com; s/d €67/82; p s), which has well equipped rooms. If you prefer a more rural setting, **Casa Jaén**

(☎ 948 58 04 87; d €27; p s) is a tranquil *casa rural* with two delightful doubles in a chalet-style building not far out of town.

Buses go to Pamplona up to four times daily (€3.90), stopping in many of the smaller villages up and down the valley.

Beyond Elizondo, a particularly lovely road climbs eastwards through the pleasant villages of **Arizkun** and **Erratzu** to the French border-pass of **Puerto de Izpegui**. You'll find a good number of *casas rurales* (r €27-45) in Arizkun. There are more choices in Erratzu, as well as **Camping Baztan** (☎ 948 45 31 33; sites per person/tent €5.15/9.35).

The N121B continues northwards to the **Puerto de Otxondo** and the border crossing into France at **Dantxarinea**. Just before the border a minor road veers west to **Zugarramurdi**, home to the **Cuevas de Las Brujas** (Witches' Caves; admission €3; 1 9am-dusk); once the scene of magnificent debauchery, according to the Inquisition, whose perverse masters promptly tortured and burned scores of alleged witches.

Zugarramurdi has plenty of *casas rurales* (d from €27). One bus daily (except Sunday) goes to Elizondo.

SOUTH OF PAMPLONA

The roads south of Pamplona lead through indifferent country to the absorbing towns of Olite and Tudela.

Olite

pop 3265 / elevation 365m

Olite feels a touch too polished, yet is still a delightful place to linger. The exceptional medieval castle complex known as the **Palacio Real** (☎ 948 74 00 35; Castillo de Olite; adult/child €2.80/1.40; 10am-7pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Jul & Aug; 10am-6pm Oct-Mar), dominates the town. It was the residence of the Navarran kings until the union with the kingdom of Castilla in 1512. The centre-piece of the rambling crenellated structure is the **Gran Torre**, one of a straggle of round towers and annexes that offer fine views. Integrated into the castle is the **Iglesia de Santa María la Real**, which has a superbly detailed Gothic portal. There are guided tours of the church. Check with the tourist office for times.

Whether or not you're a wine fan the **Museo del Vino** (☎ 948 74 12 73; museodelvino@congresosnavarra.com; Plaza de los Teobaldos 10; adult/child €3.50/1.50; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Wed-Sun, 4.30-8pm Mon & Tue) is a fascinating trip with its display of the major wine labels of Navarra, the processes of grape

growing (1st floor), wine making (2nd floor) and wine appreciation (basement). There are interactive displays, and all descriptions are in English, French and Spanish. The entrance ticket to the Palacio Real entitles you to a €1 discount.

Olite has a friendly and helpful tourist office (☎ 948 74 17 03; oit.olite@cfnavarra.es; Calle Mayor 1; 11am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Easter-12 Oct, 10am-5pm Mon-Fri & 10am-2pm Sat & Sun 13 Oct-Easter), in the same building as the wine museum.

Excellent stopovers include **Hotel Merindad de Olite** (☎ 948 74 07 35; www.hotel-merindaddeolite.com; Rúa de la Judería 11; s/d/tr from €51/66/100; 2) a charming place with masses of period style in a splendid old building and with its own restaurant. **Hotel Casa Zanito** (☎ 948 74 00 02; Rúa Revillas s/n; s/d from €59/72) is another charming option, that's family-run with elegant, cosy rooms. It too has a restaurant serving traditional cuisine. As with all paradores, the **Príncipe de Viana** (☎ 948 74 00 00; olite@parador.es; Plaza de los Teobaldos 2; d €128) is in a sumptuous, atmospheric class of its own.

Hourly buses run between Olite and Pamplona (€3, 40 minutes) and less regular buses run to Tudela (€3.10).

Ujué

Some 18km east of Olite, the tiny medieval village of Ujué balances atop a hill overlooking the plains of southern Navarra. The village itself is quiet and pretty with steep, narrow streets tumbling down the hillside, but what gives it something special is the hybrid **Iglesia de Santa María**, a fortified church of mixed Romanesque-Gothic style. The heart of Carlos II is preserved here.

Monasterio de la Oliva

The 12th century Monasterio de la Oliva was founded by Cistercian monks and is still functioning as a community. It lies 2km beyond the quiet backwater of Carcastillo, another side road to the east of the main Pamplona-Zaragoza highway. Its austere church gives onto a peaceful and pleasing Gothic cloister. There are two or three buses daily between Pamplona and Carcastillo.

Tudela

pop 31,228 / elevation 243m

Tudela was in Muslim hands for some 400 years and the Islamic genius for serpentine street creation makes this ancient city a pleasure to wander through. There's an excellent

tourist office (☎ 948 84 80 58; oit.tudela@navarra.es; Calle de Juicio 4; 11 9.30am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Easter-mid-Oct, 9.30am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Sat, 10am-1pm Sun mid-Oct-Easter) opposite the cathedral.

The brightly decorated, 17th-century **Plaza de los Fueros** has coloured panels high on its walls, depicting coats-of-arms and bullfight scenes from the days when the square was used as a bullring. Today plenty of cheerful cafés encircle the plaza. Storks nest happily on the high roofs and on the tower of the 16th-century **Iglesia de Santa María**. A short distance away is the **catedral**, a sombre 12th-century Gothic pile built of stone and brick. The western **Puerta del Juicio** is particularly striking, with its many sculpted figures looking decidedly uneasy about their participation in the Last Judgment and positively agonised on the right-hand side where little devils are boiling them in oil. The cathedral has undergone a long restoration but is due to reopen in 2007. There are some marvels inside, including the choir with its exuberant carvings, a handsome main altar *retablo* and a lovely cloister.

Of the other churches in Tudela, the **Iglesia de San Nicolás** still sports a fine Romanesque tympanum featuring lions above one of its doors; it's at the end of Calle Rúa. Take time to wander the streets as there are some fine old mansions, many with Aragonesé-style *aleros* (awnings) jutting out from the roof – the **Palacio del Marqués de San Adrián** (☎ 948 82 15 35; Calle de Magallón 10) is an impressive example.

Hostal Remigio (☎ 948 82 08 50; www.hostalremigio.com; Calle de Gaztambide 4; s/d €28/48) just off Plaza de los Fueros has sturdy, good-value rooms. Its old dining room does a filling *menú del día* for €14 and mains for €9 to €17.

At least five trains run daily to/from Pamplona (€12.50, 1½ hours). Buses to Pamplona (€6.20, 1¼ hours, eight daily) operate from next to the train station, southeast of the town centre.

THE PYRENEES

Rolling hills, ribboned cliffs, forests and snow-plastered mountains make up the Navarran Pyrenees, a playground for outdoor enthusiasts and pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago. Trekkers and skiers should be thoroughly equipped at any time of the year and should note emergency numbers in case of difficulties: ☎ 112 in Navarra or ☎ 17 in Aquitaine (France).

Walking

There are numerous walking trails of mixed lengths and difficulties while the GR12 long-distance trail from Burguete can be followed eastward for five days (80km) through some of the best scenery Navarra has to offer. A two-season sleeping bag and all-weather gear are needed even in summer. Further information can be obtained from the **Federación Navarra de Deportes de Montaña y Escalada** (☎ 948 22 46 83; www.fedme.es) in Pamplona.

Starting in Burguete, head north to Roncesvalles, cross the Puerto de Ibañeta and steer eastward to Fábrica de Orbaizeta. You may need to head south to the town of Orbaizeta where there are several *casas rurales* (r from €27).

The next day will take you through the Bosque de Irati to Las Casas de Irati; you may be able to stay in the *casa del guarda* (a kind of warden's house) but be prepared to camp (free). The following stage sees you climbing to the bare heights of the Puerto de Larrau (ask at the restaurant-bar, 4km south of the French border, about bunk beds). The trail then cuts across the Sierra de Abodi; you can reach the *Belagua refugio* (shelter) in about five hours.

The final trek takes you to the highest mountain in Navarra, La Mesa de los Tres Reyes (2438m), from where the easiest thing to do is descend to the town of Zuriza at the top end of the Valle de Ansó in Aragón.

To France via Roncesvalles

As you bear northeast out of Pamplona on the N135 and ascend into the Pyrenees, the yellows, browns and olive greens of lower Navarra begin to give way to more luxuriant vegetation.

BURGUETE

The main road runs tightly between neat, whitewashed houses with bare stone cornerstones at Burguete (Basque: Auritz) lending a more sober French air to things.

There's a supermarket, bank, ATM and some decent accommodation.

Camping Urrobi (☎ 948 76 02 00; www.campingurrobi.com; sites per person/tent €4.20/4.20; 11 Apr-Oct) is a few kilometres south. In the town itself, as well as a sprinkling of *casas rurales*, **Hostal Juandeaburre** (☎ 948 76 00 78; Calle de San Nicolás 38; s/d with washbasin €15/26) offers good old-fashioned value with a somewhat old-fashioned welcome, while just across the road is the more sophisticated **Hotel Loizu** (☎ 948 76 00 08; www.hotelloizu.com; s/d

from €46/61) whose upper rooms have attractive beams and exposed stone walls. The hotel restaurant offers a *menú del día* for €15.

Restaurante Txikiopoli (☎ 948 76 00 19; Calle de San Nicolás 52; menú €15), on the main road, has tasty mains and specialises in foie gras.

RONCESVALLES

Mobbed by often desultory, bad-tempered visitors during busy holiday periods, Roncesvalles (Basque: Orreaga) is simply a **monastery complex** (admission to cloister, chapterhouse & museum €2.30, guided tours adult/child €4.50/2.30; 11 10am-1.30pm & 3.30-7pm) set within an atmospheric mountain pass, which for centuries has been a major Pyrenees crossing point for pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago. It's open shorter hours from October to March. The 13th-century Gothic church **Real Colegiata de Santa María** (11 10am-8.30pm) contains a much-revered, silver-covered statue of the Virgin beneath a modernist-looking canopy worthy of Frank Gehry. Also of interest is the cloister (rebuilt in the 17th century), and more particularly the chapterhouse, with its beautiful star-ribbed vaulting. This contains the tomb of King Sancho VII (El Fuerte) of Navarra, the apparently 2.25m-tall victor in the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, fought against the Muslims in 1212. Also nearby is the 12th-century **Capilla de Sancti Spiritus**.

A few steps away in an old millhouse is the **tourist office** (☎ 948 76 03 01; 11 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun).

Albergue de la Juventud (☎ 948 76 03 02; dm under/over 29yr €8/10) is a possibility for HI members. It's housed in an 18th-century hospital where pilgrims used to take respite and is fronted by an enormous square.

Hostal La Posada (☎ 948 76 02 25; s/d/tr with bathroom €42/52/57) has charming rooms. The bar and restaurant get fairly lively at busy times. Breakfast is €6.50 and dinner is €16.

The morning bus, which travels from Pamplona via Burguete daily, except Sunday, stops in Roncesvalles (€4.10) and returns in the late afternoon.

PUERTO DE IBAÑETA & VALCARLOS

From Roncesvalles the road climbs to the Puerto de Ibañeta, from where you have magnificent views across into France. The last town before the frontier is Valcarlos (Basque: Luzaide), a sleepy but quite pretty spot. Of the numerous *casas rurales* in town, the tree-framed **Casa Etxezuria** (☎ 948 79 00 11; www.etxezurria.com; d €30),

on the main road heading towards France, has pleasant rural décor and furnishings.

THE ROADS TO OCHAGAVÍA

Happy wanderers on wheels can drift around a network of quiet country roads, with pretty villages along the way, in the area east of the main Roncesvalles road. A couple of kilometres south of Burguete, the NA140 branches off east to Garralda. Push on to Arive, a charming hamlet, from where you could continue east to the Valle del Salazar, go south along Río Irati past the fine Romanesque church near Nagore, or perhaps take a loop northeast through the Bosque de Irati forest, which again would eventually bring you to the Valle del Salazar, at Ochagavía. The forest, full of elms, beeches and lime trees, is one of Europe's most extensive, inviting you to ditch your vehicle and head off for a hike. If you stick to the NA140 between Arive and Ochagavía, Abaurregaina and Jaurieta are particularly picturesque. Most villages along the route have *casas rurales*.

Ochagavía

This charming Pyrenean town lying astride narrow Río Zatoya sets itself quite apart from the villages further south. Grey stone, slate and cobblestones dominate the old centre, which straddles a bubbling stream (crossed by a pleasant medieval bridge). The town's sober dignity is reinforced by the looming presence of the Iglesia de San Juan Evangelista.

This is a popular base for walkers and even skiers, so there are plenty of *casas rurales*. For a list of options and hiking opportunities in the region, visit the Centro de Interpretación de la Naturaleza (☎ 948 89 06 80; oit.ochagavia@cfnavarra.es; 10am-2pm Mon-Thu & Sun, 10am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm Fri & Sat). **Camping Osate** (☎ 948 89 01 84; www.osate.net; sites per person/tent €4/4) also has two-person cabins from €55.

HEADING NORTH

To reach France, take the NA140 northeast from Ochagavía into the Sierra de Abodi and cross at the Puerto de Larrau (1585m), a majestically bleak pass. Four kilometres short of the border there's a seasonal restaurant and bar for skiers.

Valle del Salazar

If you've made your way to Ochagavía, a good choice for heading south is the Valle del Salazar, many of whose hamlets contain gems of medieval handiwork with quiet cobbled streets

and little plazas. Esparza, with its mansions, medieval bridge and restored Iglesia de San Andrés, is particularly rewarding, while Ezcároz, Sarriés, Güesa and nearby Igal (off the main road) are also worth an amble. A daily bus runs the length of the Valle del Salazar between Pamplona and Ochagavía.

Valle del Roncal

Navarra's most spectacular mountain area is around Roncal and an alternative route for leaving or entering the Navarran Pyrenees is this easternmost valley. One bus leaves Pamplona at 5pm Monday to Friday (1pm on Saturday), passing through all the Valle del Roncal towns on its way to Uztárroz. It returns early in the morning. For details of *casas rurales* in the valley, visit the Roncal-Salazar (www.roncal-salazar.com) website.

BURGUI

The gateway to this part of the Pyrenees is Burgui. Its Roman bridge over Río Esca, combined with its huddle of stone houses straddling the river, is an evocative introduction to the rural Pyrenean towns further upstream. **Hostal El Almadiero** (☎ 948 47 70 86; almadiero@jet.es; Plaza Mayor; d with breakfast €60) has bright, pleasant rooms in the heart of the village.

RONCAL

A gurgling river flows alongside the main road at Roncal and the village's cobblestone alleyways twist and turn between dark stone houses. Roncal is renowned for its Queso de Roncal, a sheep's cheese that's sold in the village.

The **tourist office** (☎ 948 47 52 56; www.vallederoncal.es; 10am-2pm & 4.30-8.30pm Mon-Sat mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 10am-2pm Mon-Thu, 10am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm Fri & Sat mid-Sep-mid-Jun, 10am-2pm Sun year-round), on the main road towards the Isaba exit from town, has an excellent interpretation centre (€1.20) and although information is in Euskara and Castilian, it is still visually satisfying for non-speakers of the languages. There's a bank with an ATM in the village.

Across the river on the southern exit from Roncal is the reasonable and large **Hostal Zaltua** (☎ 948 47 50 08; Calle de Castillo 23; s/d €30/45), some of whose rooms have good views over the valley.

ISABA

The village of Isaba is another popular base for walkers and skiers, lying above the confluence of Ríos Belagua and Uztárroz, which together

flow into Río Esca. There are a few banks with ATMs and a **tourist office** (☎ 948 89 32 51; 10am-2pm & 4.30-8.30pm Mon-Sat mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 10am-2pm Mon-Thu, 10am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm Fri & Sat mid-Sep-mid-Jun, 10am-2pm Sun year-round).

There are plenty of sleeping places, but many are block-booked during the skiing season. For standard modern service there's **Hotel Isaba** (☎ 948 89 30 00; hotel_isaba@ctv.es; s/d from €45/70), part of the Husa chain. For much more character, the tall, stone-built **Casa Catalingarde** (☎ 948 89 31 54; d €40) is possibly the pick of the *casas rurales* in the village. **Camping Asolaze** (☎ 948 50 40 11; www.campingasolaze.com; sites per person/tent/car €4/4/4) is at Km6 on the road to France.

LA RIOJA

Get out the *copas* (glasses) for La Rioja and for some of the best red wines produced in the country. Wine goes well with the region's ochre earth and vast blue skies that seem far more Mediterranean Spanish than the green Basque Country to the north. The bulk of the vineyards line Río Ebro around the town of Haro, but extend also into neighbouring Navarra and the Basque province of Álava. Long before the vine, prehistoric La Rioja was a major stomping ground of dinosaurs, with much fossilised evidence still in existence (see the boxed text, p496).

LOGROÑO

pop 137,614

There's an air of brisk contentment about Logroño and although the town is surrounded by urban sprawl, at its heart lies a typical Spanish town of tree-studded squares with a Casco Viejo, an old quarter, of narrow streets and hidden corners. There are few monuments, but there are some fine restaurants and *tapas/pintxos* bars in plenty, while the citizens are unfailingly friendly. You leave with that feeling of contentment – and it's not just the wine.

Orientation

If you arrive at the train or bus station, first head up Avenida de España and then Calle del General Vara de Rey until you reach the Espolón, a large, parklike square lavish with plane trees. The Casco Viejo starts just to the north and the main area here is the pedestrianised Calle de Portales with the cathedral as its focus.

Information

There are two tourist offices in Logroño, a regional office and a relatively new office run by the town council. Both have enthusiastic, friendly, well-informed staff and both issue a huge amount of excellent information about the town and the region.

Main post office (Plaza de San Agustín 1) In the old town.

Oficina de Información Logroño (☎ 941 27 33 53; www.logroturismo.org; Calle de Portales 39; 10am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun Easter-Oct, 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat, 11.30am-2pm Sun Nov-Easter) The town office.

Tourist Office of La Rioja (☎ 941 29 12 60; www.lariojatourismo.com; Paseo del Espolón; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Sat, 10am-2pm & 5-7pm Sun) The regional office.

Sights

The **Catedral de Santa María Redonda** (Calle de Portales; 10am-1pm & 6.30-7.30pm Mon-Sat) started life as a Gothic church, a fact easily overlooked when your gaze is caught by the extravagant churrigueresque towers, late-baroque features added in the 18th century. Storks like them too. The impressive main entrance to the 13th-century **Iglesia de San Bartolomé** (Calle de Rodríguez Paterna) has a splendid portico of deeply receding orders and a lively collection of statuary.

A stroll around the old town and down to the river is a pleasant diversion. The **Museo de la Rioja** (☎ 941 29 12 59; Plaza de San Agustín; admission free; 10am-2pm & 4-9pm Tue-Sat, 11.30am-2pm Sun) is housed in a grand, 18th-century building. Amid the engaging Gothic gloom is a lovely 12th-century wooden statue of Christ.

Festivals & Events

Logroño's week-long **Fiesta de San Mateo** starts on 21 September and doubles as a harvest festival, during which all of La Rioja comes to town to watch the grape-crushing ceremonies in the Espolón and to drink ample quantities of wine. The **Feast of San Bernabé** is held on 11 June and commemorates the French siege of Logroño in 1521.

Sleeping

Hostal La Numantina (☎ 941 25 14 11; fax 941 25 16 45; Calle de Sagasta 4; s/d €32/51) This is a very comfortable option with an attractive reception area and pleasant, comfy rooms. The location is handy for everything.

Hostal Niza (941 20 60 44; www.hostalniza.com; Calle de Capitán Gallarza 13; s/d €42.80/64) A real charmer of a place, with a different, bright colour scheme



on each floor, tea- and coffee-making facilities in the rooms and a lift. It's right at the heart of things.

Hotel Marqués de Vallejo (☎ 941 24 83 33; www.hotelmarquesdevallejo.com; Calle del Marqués de Vallejo 8; s/d €69.50/107) A classy choice in the old town, this well-managed hotel has high-standard, comfortable rooms and a sleek ambience.

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Eating

Logroño's great tapas/pintxos streets are Calle Laurel and Calle San Juan, with Laurel and its tributary Travesía de Laurel the best of all.

Bar Soriano (Travesía de Laurel 2) Don't miss this bar, which has been serving up the same delicious mushroom tapa, topped with a shrimp, for more than 30 years. With wine it costs about €1.50.

Lorenzo (Travesía de Laurel 4-6) This place serves the delicious *tío agus* (roasted pork in a secret sauce), as well as great *pinchos morunos* (the Spanish version of kebabs), for about €0.75 a stick, and cheap Crianza (€1.10 a glass) and young Rioja wines (€0.75).

La Taberna de Baco (☎ 941 21 35 44; Calle de San Agustín 10) This place has a crackling list of tapas including *bombitas* (potatoes stuffed with mushrooms) and *rabas de pollo* (fried chicken slices marinated in spices and lemon juice). It has tables where you can order delicious casseroles, and salads, and has a great Rioja wine list.

La Sacristía (☎ 941 10 26 01; Calle de Portales 3; menú €9) This restaurant, which also doubles as an

excellent wine shop has an Andalusian touch to its many fish and shellfish dishes.

Bar El Ángel (Calle Laurel 12) offers tasty garlic mushrooms, while **La Taberna del Laurel** (Calle Laurel 7) serves tasty *patatas bravas* (potatoes in a spicy sauce). In Calle San Juan **Bar A Tu Gusto** (Calle San Juan 21) specialises in shellfish and **Bar La Travesía** (Calle de San Juan 10) is the place for tortillas.

SELF-CATERING

Mercado de Abastos (Calle Peso) For self-catering there's this market, with a fish-and-meat section and superb fruit-and-veg shops.

There are countless wine outlets in town but two excellent wine shops, ideal for picking up wines that can be difficult to find outside La Rioja, are **Vinos san Agustín** (Plaza San Agustín 4; 11am-2pm & 6-9pm Tue-Sat), unassuming but definitely with the 'knowledge', and **Vinos El Peso** (☎ 941 22 82 54; cnr Calles Laurel & de Capitán Gallarza; 11am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat, 9am-2pm Sun), which also has a knowledgeable owner.

BEST TAPAS, LOGROÑO HPETS312

- **Paté de olivas at Vinissimo, Calle San Juan** A generous pile of salty, black olive tapenade on a thick slice of bread. Wonderful with a glass of Riojan Crianza.
- **The best tortilla in Spain, hands down: Tortilla 'Mere'** I've eaten this dish everywhere in Spain, and the best I've ever had is at the *tortillería* on Travesía San Juan. It has the perfect ratio of egg to potatoes, isn't overcooked, and literally melts in your mouth. Order with *picante* for a kick.
- **Zapatillas at Bar Médula, Calle San Agustín** 'Zapatillas' means sandals or slippers, and the tapa gets its name because it's a long, thin piece of bread, rubbed with tomato, topped with *jamón serrano* (cured ham) and then grilled. Fold it in half for a crispy on the outside, gooey on the inside treat.
- **Setas at Bar Soriano (opposite), Travesía de Laurel** This bar is so popular that customers spill onto the street and order its garlicky mushrooms from the window outside. A stack of three perfectly tender mushrooms is topped with a tiny shrimp and pinch of crunchy sea salt.
- **Pimientos rellenos at Bar Charly, Calle San Agustín** Roasted red peppers stuffed with meat, battered and fried. Spicy, creamy and crispy, this tapa has it all.
- **Morunos at Paganos, Calle Laurel** Tender chunks of spicy pork skewered and roasted over coals. So good I always end up getting two.
- **Patatas bravas at La Taberna del Laurel (above), Calle Laurel** Like the tortilla, the best I've ever had in Spain: a perfectly spicy hot sauce and a creamy, secret-recipe white sauce over fried potatoes. You think you don't need bread until the potatoes are gone and you're using it to get every last bit of sauce.
- **Also recommended** Tender chunks of spicy octopus at Pulpería La Universidad on Calle San Agustín and *berenjena* (eggplant) at Casa Pali on Calle Laurel. Make sure you get a glass of Rioja wine (just order a *tinto*) at every stop!

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BLUELIST.

By train, Logroño is regularly connected to Zaragoza (€10.20, two hours), Madrid (€48.50, 3½ hours), Bilbao (€15, three hours) and Burgos (€14.50, 2½ hours).

WINE REGION

La Rioja wine rolls on and off the tongue with ease, by name as well by taste. All wine fanciers know the famous wines of La Rioja (where the vine has been cultivated since Roman times). The region is classic vine country where vineyards cover the hinterland of Río Ebro. On the river's north bank, the region is part of the Basque Country and known as La Rioja Alavesa.

Haro

pop 9813 / elevation 426m

There's not much of a heady bouquet to Haro, the capital of La Rioja's wine-producing region; but the town has a cheerful pace, and the compact old quarter, leading off Plaza de la Paz, has some intriguing alleyways with bars and wine shops in plenty.

The **tourist office** (☎ 941 30 33 66; Plaza de Florentino Rodríguez; 10am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jul-Sep, 10am-2pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Sat Oct-Jun) is a couple of hundred metres along the road from Plaza de la Paz and has plenty of excellent information, including a list of wineries open to the public.

IN SEARCH OF THE FINEST DROP

La Rioja is all about serious wine drinking as much as holidaymaking. Someone's got to do it. The best place to start your research is at the exceptional **Museo del Vino** (p487) in Olite. Also excellent are the **Museo del Vino** (above) in Haro and **Quaderna Via** (☎ 948 55 40 83; fax 948 55 65 40; admission free; 10am-2pm & 3-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun), around 4km west of Estella, near Igúzquiza.

Wine categories in La Rioja are termed Young, Crianza, Reserva and Gran Reserva. Young wines are in their first or second year and are inevitably a touch 'fresh'. Crianzas must have matured into their third year and have spent at least one year in the cask, followed by a few months rested in the bottle. Reservas pay homage to best vintages and must mature for at least three full years in cask and bottle, with at least one year in the cask. Gran Reservas depend on the very best vintages, are matured for at least two years in the cask followed by three years in the bottle. These are the 'velvet' wines.

Experts have developed a classification system for the years in which the wine was particularly good. Five stars (the maximum) were awarded in 1982, 1994, 1995, 2001 and 2004. Four-star years include 1981, 1987, 1991, 1996 and 1998.

The tourist offices in Haro, Laguardia and Logroño are among those that have lists of bodegas that can be visited throughout the region, although it usually requires ringing in advance to arrange a time. One exception is **Bodega Muga** (above), which has set times for guided tours and tastings.

There are good wine shops in Logroño and Haro (above and p491).

The **Museo del Vino** (☎ 941 31 05 47; Bréton; admission €3, Wed free; 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), near the bus station, houses a detailed display on how wine is made and has helpful information in Spanish, French and English.

The winery **Bodega Muga** (☎ 941 31 04 98), just after the railway bridge on the way out of town, gives guided tours and tastings at 11am (English) and 4.30pm Monday to Thursday. The tour costs €5.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

On 29 June, the otherwise mild-mannered citizens of Haro go temporarily berserk during the **Batalla del Vino** (Wine Battle), squirting and chucking wine all over each other in the name of San Juan, San Felices and San Pedro. Plenty of it goes the right way down also.

SLEEPING & EATING

Pensión La Peña (☎ 941 31 00 22; Calle La Vega; s/d €30/36) Just off Plaza de la Paz is this family-run, slightly old-fashioned place, but the maze of rooms are clean and bright.

Hostal Higüña (☎ 941 30 43 68; losagustinos@aranzazu-hotels.com; Calle de Virgen de la Vega; s/d €46.65/58.30; 1 Apr-mid-Dec; 10am-2pm) An attractive seasonal place with spacious, carpeted rooms that are bright and comfortable, Higüña is under the management of the classy Los Agustinos Hotel across the road.

Los Agustinos (☎ 941 31 13 08; losagustinos@aranzazu-hotels.com; Calle San Agustín 2; s/d €78/97; 10am-2pm) As its name implies, this was once a monastery and the attractive cloister survives as part of the surroundings. The quality and service is gratifyingly high.

Restaurante Beethoven I & II (☎ 941 31 11 81; Calle de Santo Tomás 5 & 10; menú €16) These two restaurants face each other across the narrow street. Number II charges a few euros more, but both offer excellent La Rioja cuisine, all of it complemented by the very best local wines.

There are plenty of cafés and bars around Plaza de la Paz and the surrounding streets.

Terete (☎ 941 31 00 23; Calle Lucrecia Arana 17; meals €30) This is a real treat for meat fanciers and is straight out of rural La Rioja. It has a front-of-house oven for baking *cordero* (lamb) that's served upstairs on scrubbed wooden tables along with other meaty treats such as black pudding and liver.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Regular trains connect Haro with Logroño (€3.65, 45 minutes), and buses additionally serve Vitoria, Bilbao, Santo Domingo de la Calzada and Laguardia.

Laguardia

pop 1500 / elevation 557m

Medieval Laguardia is a joy and is the loveliest of the Rioja wine-producing towns. It's strategic position, walled and on a rocky hilltop, against the stunning backdrop of the fortress-like cliffs of the Sierra Cantabrica, explains its origins as the 'Guard of Navarra'. The town is virtually traffic-free because of the maze of 300 or so wine bodegas only a few metres below ground. You don't go heavy-wheeled over sleeping wine. Handsome old mansions are scattered throughout the town. The **Iglesia de Santa María de los Reyes** has a breathtaking late-14th-century Gothic doorway, thronging with beautiful sculptures of the disciples and other motifs. The beautiful polychrome colouring is intact. The statue of Santa María de los Reyes has the looks of a heartbreaker. Just alongside the entrance to the church is a little plaza with a metal sculpture by the Vitoria artist Koko Rico, a delightful collection of casually displayed bags and boots.

Virtually every house in Laguardia has a basement wine cellar, and bars and bodegas serve local drinks for as little as €0.40 a glass.

There are several ATMs around the town. The **tourist office** (☎ 945 60 08 45; Plaza de San Juan; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 5-7pm Sat, 10.45am-5pm Sun) is housed in a beautiful old building. Staff are very helpful and they have a list of bodegas that can be visited in the local area.

SLEEPING & EATING

Laguardia has only a few places to stay, and if you are determined to stay here it may be wise to book ahead, especially at weekends and during holidays.

Camas (☎ 945 60 01 14; Calle Mayor 17; s/d €18/35) Quiet and pleasantly old fashioned, this is as cheap as it gets in Laguardia. Rooms are very clean and simple and have shared facilities.

Hotel Pachico (☎ 945 60 00 09; www.pachico.com; Calle Sancho Abarca 20; s/d €39/51) In a historic building, this *hostal* has comfortable doubles with TV and bathroom. The rooms at the back have sweeping views of the Riojan mountains.

Posada Mayor de Migueloa (☎ 945 62 11 75; www.mayordemigueloa.com; Mayor de Migueloa 20; s/d €77/99.50; 10am-2pm) For the ultimate in gracious La Rioja living, this old mansion-hotel is irresistible. The in-house restaurant offers fine local cuisine with meals starting at about €37.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Six slow daily buses connecting Vitoria and Logroño pass through Laguardia.

Around Laguardia

Your own transport is essential for exploring here. There are several wine cellars that can be visited, contact the tourist office in Laguardia for details. **Bodegas Palacio** (☎ 945 60 00 57; www.cosmepalacio.com; Carretera de Elciego) is only 1km from Laguardia on the Elciego road. Tours are at 12.30pm and 1.30pm Tuesday to Sunday and cost €4. In Elciego itself, 6km southwest of Laguardia is **Bodegas Marqués de Riscal** (☎ 945 60 60 00; www.marquesderiscal.com) which has grabbed the future with both hands and commissioned Frank Gehry, of Bilbao Guggenheim fame, to design a new complex containing a visitors' centre, hotel and restaurant. At the time of writing the signature Gehry canopies, in viniculture colours of silver, light bronze and pinkish-rose, hung in the air above a dusty building site. An opening in 2007 is promised. Phone for information regarding tours.

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF BIG FEET

Before wine, dinosaurs seem to have had a taste for La Rioja. Walkers on the GR93 (long-distance walking route), between the villages of Enciso (about 10km south of Arnedillo) and Cornego (about 22km southeast of Enciso) will find eight hefty fossil prints of dinosaurs signposted along the way, with explanations posted in Spanish. In Valdecevillo (2km southeast of Enciso), you can see footprints left by some enormous carnivorous biped. Other fossils are scattered about the area along different tracks, at a number of sites such as those at Virgen del Campo, Poyales, Navalsaz and Cornego itself. At sites such as Virgen del Campo walkways make it easier to view the dinosaur footprints. Griffon vultures wheel in the air above.

Before setting out stop off in the **Centro Paleontológico de Enciso** (% 941 39 60 93), or get the excellent *Footprints and Dinosaurs in La Rioja* (free) from any tourist office. Buses are rare in these parts, so it's best to explore the area with your own vehicle, or on foot.

MONASTERIES WEST OF LOGROÑO**Nájera**

pop 7287 / elevation 506m

The main attraction of this town is the Gothic **Monasterio de Santa María la Real** (% 941 36 36 50; admission €2; 10am-1pm & 4-5.30pm Tue-Sun), in particular its fragile-looking early-16th-century cloisters. Inside the church you can see splendid choir stalls with imaginative carvings, and a pantheon of tombs containing the remains of various kings of Castilla, León and Navarra. It closes a little earlier in winter. Buses between Logroño and Santo Domingo de la Calzada stop in Nájera.

San Millán de Cogolla

pop 266 / elevation 733m

About 16km southwest of Nájera are the two remarkable monasteries in the hamlet of San Millán de Cogolla, framed by a beautiful valley. The **Monasterio de Yuso** (% 941 37 30 49; adult/child €3.50/1.50; 10.30am-1.30pm & 4-6.30pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 10.30am-1pm & 4-6pm Oct-May), sometimes presumptuously called El Escorial de La Rioja, contains numerous treasures in its museum. Highlights are the lavishly decorated, barrel-vaulted sacristy; the library, with its rare manuscripts; and the church with paintings by Juan Rizzi.

A short distance away is the **Monasterio de Suso** (% 941 37 30 82; admission €3; 10am-1.30pm & 4-6.30pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-1.30pm & 4-5.30pm Tue-Sun Oct-May). Built above the caves where San Millán once lived, it was consecrated in the 10th century. Much of the original Mozarabic architecture survives. It's believed that in the 13th century, a monk named Gonzalo de Berceo wrote the first Castilian words here, although recent discoveries suggest otherwise (see p451). Buses go to Suso from Yuso every half-hour from 9.55am to 6.25pm (5.25pm October to May).

Santo Domingo de la Calzada

pop 5904 / elevation 630m

There's a general air of piety about Santo Domingo, but it's a fascinating place all the same; not least because of its pedestrianised old town and several fine old buildings. There are several excellent information boards in Spanish, French and English scattered around the town's rugged old mansions and churches.

The morose, monumental **cathedral** (admission €3, Sun free; 10am-6.30pm) is a mix of Romanesque and Gothic. Its eastern end has eight pilasters with splendid carved figures and the main altarpiece features some wicked grotesques. The cathedral's most eccentric feature is the Disneyesque white rooster and hen that forage in a glass-fronted cage opposite the entrance to the crypt. These two celebrate a longstanding legend, the Miracle of the Rooster which tells of a young man who was unfairly executed only to recover miraculously, while the broiled cock and hen on the plate of his judge suddenly leapt up and chickened off, fully fledged. Today, several cocks and hens do a monthly rota.

Beyond the cathedral is the huge Plaza Mayor, cobbled and surrounded by low buildings in honey-coloured stone.

Brace yourself for an early night at the excellent **Hospedería Sta Teresita** (% 941 34 07 00; Calle Pinar 2; s/d €29.50/50), a religious-run, modernised hostel, with clean, comfortable rooms. For the antithesis of piety there's always the palatial **Parador** (% 941 34 03 00; sto.domingo@parador.es; Plaza del Santo 3; d €149), which occupies the former pilgrim's hospice built by Santo Domingo himself.

There are a few lacklustre cafés and bars in the modern centre of town by the bus stop, but **Casa Madariaga** (% 941 34 01 30; Plaza de España 7;

menú €21.40) is a relaxed place for coffee or more substantial meals, including a tasty shellfish salad for €12.

Buses run to Burgos (€3.65, 1¼ hours, five daily) and Logroño (€2.50, 45 minutes, up to 13 daily on weekdays, fewer on weekends). The Logroño buses travel via Nájera (€1.15, 30 minutes). There are also two daily buses to Haro (€1, 25 minutes).

SOUTH OF LOGROÑO

For those with their own transport, heading south for Soria leads through some picturesque country. One route is along the N111 which, after a boring start, picks up as it follows deep canyon walls along Río Iregua into the sierras marking Soria province off from the flatlands of central La Rioja. Several pretty villages, including Villanueva de Cameros, line the lower half of the route. About halfway to Soria you could turn west for Montenegro de Cameros, and then drop south for Vinuesa and the Laguna Negra near Soria.

Another good route to Soria is to head south-east of Logroño to Calahorra, on the N232. Of

Roman origin, Calahorra overlooks Río Ebro and its tributary Río Cidacos, upon which dwells a moderately interesting Gothic cathedral. The sacristy, chapterhouse and museum are all worth a look. Free guided tours operate daily from 9am to 1pm and 5pm to 8pm. **Hostal Teresa** (% /fax 941 13 03 32; Calle de Santo Domingo 7; s/d/tr €20/30/45) has simple but adequate rooms. For a luxury option, there's a handsome, red-brick **Parador** (% 941 13 03 58; calahorra@parador.es; s/d €92/120).

From Calahorra, head southwest towards Arnedo, and then follow Río Cidacos through dramatic country. The small, traditional spa town of Arnedillo, gathered up in a fold of the valley, is a pretty location and the ideal place for spending a night or two if you plan to do a spot of walking in the area. The pleasant **Hospedería Las Pedrolas** (% 941 39 44 01; fax 941 39 44 01; Plaza Felix Merino 16; s/d €45/75; a) has very pleasant rooms in a renovated 18th-century building.

The road starts to climb after entering Soria province and can be blocked by snow in winter.

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Cantabria & Asturias

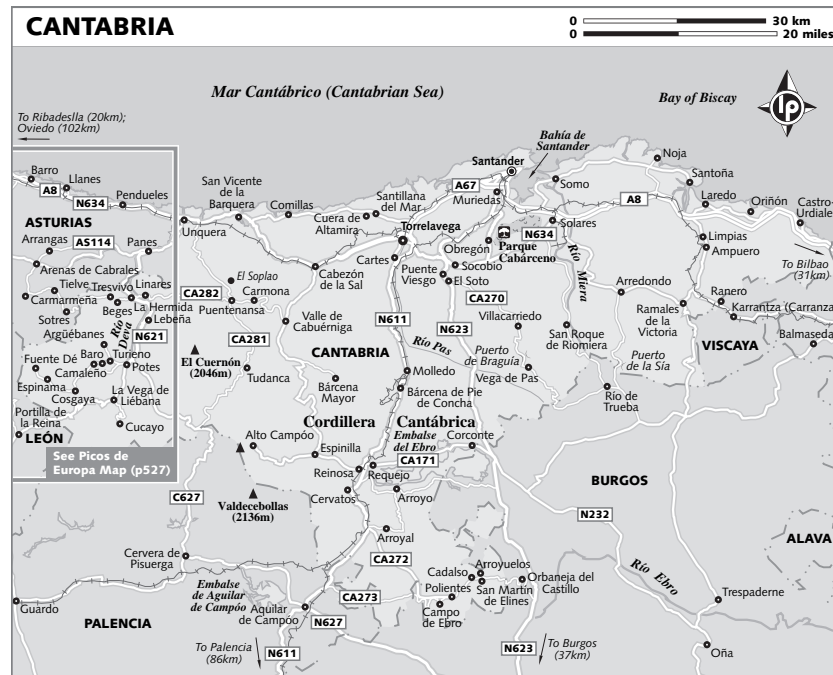


Rolling meadows and cattle pasture, craggy hills, cider-drinking and bagpipes. It might be an advertisement for a composite of Ireland and Wales, but no, it is the flip side of the typical image of Spain. The verdant emerald strip (between Galicia to the west and the Basque Country to the east) formed by Cantabria and Asturias is as beautiful as it is surprising.

The two regions share a spectacular coastline along the Bay of Biscay, alternating between sheer cliffs, tiny coves, small fishing and resort towns, and scores of sandy beaches. Stone villages dot the roads leading inland towards the chainmail wall of mountains that forms the regions' southern boundary, the Cordillera Cantábrica – beyond which the landscape changes with amazing abruptness to the parched plains of the *meseta* (tableland). The mountains reach their greatest heights and grandeur in the Picos de Europa, a northern spur of the cordillera straddling southeast Asturias, southwest Cantabria and the north of Castilla y León.

It's not just bucolic beauty that attracts people here. From the prehistoric art of Altamira to the medieval splendours of Santillana del Mar, the area is dotted with manmade gems. The big three cities of Santander, Oviedo and Gijón, all offer plenty of sightseeing and nocturnal diversions in their restaurants and bars.

The only drawback to 'green Spain' is what makes it green: the rain. Even in August you might endure a week of grey skies and showers, especially inland.



CANTABRIA

It is no wonder the Romans had a hard time subduing the Cantabrian tribes. The lushness of the vegetation belies the difficulty of much of Cantabria's terrain. Sliced up by deep mountain valleys dotted with the occasional settlement, the region remains largely untouched by the modern legions of visitors that flock to Spain each year.

It offers a little of everything for the traveller looking for an escape. Some pretty beaches make summer seaside days quite possible (unreliable weather permitting), while the inland valleys, dotted with quiet towns and villages and *casas rurales* (country homes) to stay in (check out www.turismocantabria.net or www.cantabriarural.com), offer a feast of natural beauty for the eyes, whether you choose to drive the country roads or walk the trails. The rugged ranges culminate in the west in the abrupt mountainous walls of the Picos de Europa.

The capital, Santander, offers a slice of urban life with its bustling bodegas (wine

cellars) and handful of sights. The towns of Santillana del Mar and Comillas entice with their medieval and Modernista trappings. The remarkable cave paintings of the Cueva de Altamira, off limits to the public, can be admired in impressive replica form near the site.

The Romans, as reported, finally carried the day against the proud Cantabrians and pacified the area by around 19 BC. In more recent centuries Cantabria was long regarded simply as a coastal extension of Castilla and as its direct gateway to what was confidently known as the Mar de Castilla (Castilian Sea). Cantabria became a separate region under Spain's 1978 constitution.

SANTANDER

pop 183,950
Most of modern Santander, with its bustling centre, clanking port and shapeless suburbs, stands in drab contrast to its pretty beaches, particularly the old-world elegance of El Sardinero. A huge fire raged through the city in 1941, but what's left of the 'old' centre is a lively source of entertainment for the palate and liver, and has an atmosphere well

HIGHLIGHTS

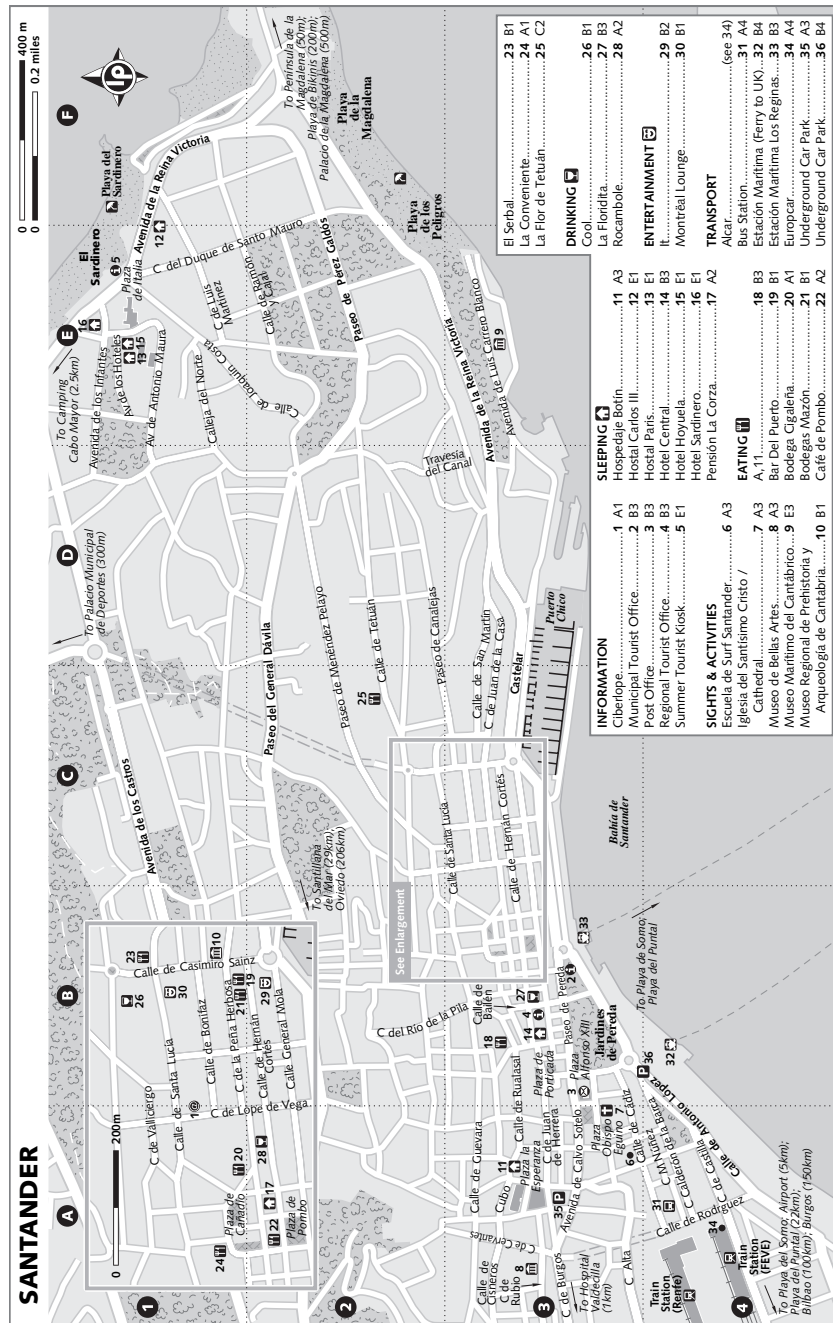
- Sidle up for cider poured in the convivial *sidrerías* (cider houses) of Asturias (p516)
- Ignore the pong and savour the tangy **Cabrales cheese** (see the boxed text, p534)
- Travel by train along the Santander–Oviedo coastal corridor
- Walk the **Garganta del Cares** (Cares Gorge; p533) in the Picos de Europa
- Let the medieval town of **Santillana del Mar** (p507) bewitch you with its charms
- Bathe at secluded **Playa del Silencio** (p524)
- Admire the ancient rock paintings at **Cueva de Altamira** (Altamira Cave; p509) and **Puente Viesgo** (p505)
- Take the plunge and canoe down the rapids of **Rio Sella** (p530) near Ribadesella
- Marvel at the pre-Romanesque churches of **Oviedo** (p512)
- Admire a little Modernista madness in the buildings of Gaudí and Co at **Comillas** (p509)



■ AREA: 15,925 SQ KM

■ AVE SUMMER TEMP: HIGH 22°C,
LOW 14°C

■ POP: 1.64 MILLION



worth stopping to savour. All up, however, Santander is a good deal more staid than its resort cousin, San Sebastián (p465).

History

When the Romans landed here in 21 BC, they named the place Portus Victoriae (Victory Harbour) and, indeed, within two years they had vanquished the Cantabrian tribes that had given them such strife.

From that time Santander, as the city became known, led a modestly successful existence. Its heyday came rather late, when King Alfonso XIII made a habit of spending summer here in the 1900s. The locals were so pleased they gave him the Península de la Magdalena and built him a little palace there. Everyone who wanted to see and be seen converged on Santander, giving rise to a *belle époque* building boom – most evident around El Sardinero.

Orientation

The city stretches along the northern side of the handsome Bahía de Santander out to the Península de la Magdalena. North of the peninsula, Playa del Sardinero, the main beach, faces the open sea.

The ferry, train and bus stations are all within 100m of each other in the southwest part of the central district. A 10-minute walk northeast brings you to the heart of older Santander, then it's a half-hour stroll to the beaches. Most of the cheaper places to stay and many good restaurants and bars are in a compact area taking in the bus and train stations and the old quarter.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Ciberlope (Calle de Lope de Vega 14; per hr €2.20; 10.30am-midnight Mon-Fri, 11.30am-midnight Sat, 5pm-midnight Sun)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Hospital Valdecilla (% 942 20 25 20; Avenida de Valdecilla)

MONEY

Banks cluster in the newer part of central Santander around Avenida de Calvo Sotelo.

POST

Post office (Plaza Alfonso XIII; 8.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2pm Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Municipal tourist office (% 942 20 30 00; www.ayto-santander.es in Spanish; Jardines de Pereda; 9am-9pm daily Jul & Aug, 8.30am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat Sep-Jun) A branch office in El Sardinero, opposite Plaza Italia, operates in summer.

Regional tourist office (% 901 11 11 12, 942 31 07 08; www.turismodecantabria.com in Spanish; Calle de Hernán Cortés 4; 9am-9pm Jul-Sep, 9.30am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Oct-Jun) Located inside the Mercado del Este.

Sights

The **cathedral** (Plaza del Obispo Equino; % 10am-1pm & 4.30-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm & 4.30-8pm Sat & Sun) is composed of two 13th-century Gothic churches, one above the other. The upper church, off which is a 14th-century cloister, was extensively rebuilt after the 1941 fire. In the lower **Iglesia del Santísimo Cristo** (Calle Somorrostro; 8am-1pm & 5-8pm) glass panels reveal excavated bits of Roman Santander under the floor. Displayed nearby are silver vessels containing the skulls of the early Christian martyrs San Emeterio and San Celedonio, Santander's patron saints. The care of these holy relics, found on this site, prompted the construction of the monastery that previously stood here.

Under one roof, the **Museo Regional de Prehistoria y Arqueología de Cantabria** (% 942 20 71 09; Calle de Casimiro Sainz 4; admission free; 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun) brings together collections of prehistoric finds across the region, including some elements from the Cueva de Altamira. Among the highlights are copies of cave paintings and some Roman stellas, accompanied by interpretations of their texts.

Make a giant leap closer to our times with a visit to the **Museo de Bellas Artes** (% 942 20 31 20; Calle de Rubio 3; admission free; 10.15am-1pm & 5.30-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat), a sometimes fusty but eclectic art collection spanning the 16th to 20th centuries. Much of what's on show is secondary Spanish art (from about 1920 on the 1st floor, 1860-1920 on the 2nd floor and earlier stuff, mixed in with a few Flemish, Italian and French works, on the 3rd floor). You'll find the odd curio, such as Goya's portrait of King Fernando VII.

If seafaring is your thing, visit the **Museo Marítimo del Cantábrico** (% 942 27 49 62; www.museosdecantabria.com; Calle San Martín de Bajamar s/n; adult/senior, student & child 4-12yr €6/4; 10am-9.30pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Oct-Apr), near the bay beaches. The four-floor museum covers all facets of navigation in Cantabria, and includes an aquarium. The displays range from marine

biology to maritime history, which is perhaps the most interesting, dealing for example with Portus Victoriae (Victory Port), the Roman port town from which Santander later grew. The stuffed swordfish and starfish in bottles are perhaps less captivating, but the 60-tonne whale skeleton is a star attraction.

Architecture buffs will want to swing by the city's **Palacio Municipal de Deportes** (Calle del Alcalde Vega Lamera s/n), a sports pavilion with room for 6000 spectators that looks like something out of *Lost in Space*. The stainless-steel and glass coating has almost the air of something NASA might have cooked up. Designed by José Manuel Palau and Julián Franco and opened in 2003, locals think of it as a shiny beached whale.

The **Península de la Magdalena** (H 8am-8.30pm Oct-May, 8am-10pm Jun-Sep) parklands, crowned by the Palacio de la Magdalena, the former royal palace, are perfect for a stroll and popular with picnickers. Kids will enjoy the sea lions and the little train that choo-choos around the headland.

Activities

BEACHES & BOAT TRIPS

The beaches on the **Bahía de Santander** are more protected than Playa del Sardinero. The latter is a hike from the city centre, so catch bus 1, 2 or 3 from outside the post office. Playa del Puntal, a finger of sand jutting out from the eastern side of the bay roughly opposite Playa de la Magdalena, is idyllic on calm days (but beware the currents). Boats sail there every 30 minutes

between 10am and 8pm June to late September, from the Estación Marítima Los Reginas (€3.10 return). From the same boat station there are one-hour bay tours (€7) daily in summer (on weekends April to June) and a year-round passenger ferry to Somo (with another sandy beach), just beyond Playa del Puntal.

SURFING

Surfers emerge in force along El Sardinero when the waves are right. Playa de Somo, across the bay, can also be good. Three or four shops on Calle de Cádiz and Calle Méndez Núñez sell boards, wetsuits and other surfing gear. The **Escuela de Surf Santander** (☎ 669 48 80 15; www.escueladesurfsantander.com in Spanish; Calle de Cádiz 19) is a surf school (€50 for two hours' private tuition) with boards for rent (€6).

Walking Tour

The tour begins within the stately Plaza Porticada (1), which is surrounded by 64 porticoes. Proceed down past the post office to the cathedral (2; p501). Below it, amid a traffic circle, a poignant sculpture (3) recalls the devastation of the 1941 fire. To the east spread the lovely Jardines de Pereda (4), named after the Cantabrian

WALK FACTS

Start Plaza Porticada
Finish Palacio del Embarcadero
Distance 1.9km
Duration 45 minutes



writer José María de Pereda, whose seminal work, *Escenas Montañesas*, is illustrated in bronze and stone here. Opposite the park you'll see the 1950s Banco de Santander (5) building, one of the country's major financial institutions. Going through its grand archway you enter the old quarter. Proceed through the delightful Plaza de Pombo (6), turning north (left) at the far end to reach the lively Plaza de Cañadio (7), brimming with bars. Follow Calle de Daoiz y Velarde east, grabbing a few tapas along the way. At the end, you'll find the Museo Regional de Prehistoria y Arqueología de Cantabria (8; p501). Afterwards, head down to the Puerto Chico (Little Port), the marina. Beside it, standing on stilts in the bay, is the Real Club Marítimo (9), the surprisingly austere yacht club. Those boys you see diving into the bay after coins are actually another bit of public sculpture, Los Raqueros (10). Stroll the bay-front promenade west, noting on your right the row of opulent buildings with their glassed-in galleries, fruits of early-20th-century boom times. Finally, catch the ferry at the Palacio del Embarcadero (11), itself a gem, over to Somo for a seafood lunch.

Festivals & Events

Santander's big summer fiesta is the **Semana Grande**, a week of fun around 25 July. Right through summer, the Palacio de la Magdalena hosts the **Universidad Internacional Menéndez Pelayo** (www.uimp.es in Spanish), a global get-together for specialists in all sorts of disciplines. The **Festival Internacional de Santander** is a sweeping musical review in August that covers everything from jazz to chamber music.

Sleeping

Loads of budget spots can be found around the train and bus stations. Down by fashionable Playa del Sardinero, the cheaper places tend to close during the low season. The pick of the middle and top-range digs are also down that way.

BUDGET

Camping Cabo Mayor (☎ 942 39 15 42; www.cabomayor.com; Avenida del Faro s/n; sites per 2 adults with tent & car €18.75; p s) This place is out towards the Cabo Mayor lighthouse, beyond Playa del Sardinero. Take bus 9 from Jardines de Pereda. Within easy reach of the beach, this 500-site camping ground provides a supermarket and laundry facilities. It's about a 300m walk to the beach.

Hospedaje Botín (☎ 942 21 00 94; www.hospedajebotin.com in Spanish; Calle de Isabel II No 1; s/d €40/52) The homy Botín has some spacious rooms with showers and galerías (glassed-in balconies).

Pensión La Corza (☎ 942 21 29 50; Calle de Hernán Cortés 25; r with washbasin/bathroom €42/55) The best deal around, La Corza is on pleasant Plaza de Pombo, with high-ceilinged, handsomely furnished rooms up on the 3rd floor, some with balconies overlooking the square.

MIDRANGE

Hostal Carlos III (☎ /fax 942 27 16 16; Avenida de la Reina Victoria 135; s/d €53/71; H Easter-Oct) Frosted-glass fixtures and painted mouldings adorn this vintage (and somewhat worn), turreted structure. Some rooms are in the ugly front building but you will be rewarded with sea views.

Hotel Central (☎ 942 22 24 00; www.elcentral.com; Calle General Mola 5; s/d €82.40/127.35; a) A century-old hotel, the Central is what its name suggests, smack in the heart of the city. Rooms are spacious and originally decorated (eg steel blues in the colour scheme in some). Singles are smallish. Top-floor terrace rooms (€135) with unbeatable bay views are worth the extra.

Hostal Paris (☎ 942 27 23 50; www.hparis.net; Avenida de los Hoteles 6; s/d €86/112; p) This charmer in white (in bad need of a lick of paint!) boasts rooms dominated by the same colour theme. Otherwise they are quite different one from the other, but the overall effect is a lingering sensation of the late 19th century. Parquet floors, spare but elegant furnishings and, in some cases, nice architectural touches, such as the setting of the sleeping area in an alcove, make this an attractive choice.

Hotel Sardinero (☎ 942 27 11 00; www.gruposardiner.com; Plaza de Italia, El Sardinero 1; d €133.75-149.80) This grand old seaside hotel evokes the area's golden age. Rooms are a trifle small but pleasingly furnished, with high ceilings. Try for those with sea views. Single rates (€69.55) are available outside of August.

TOP END

Hotel Hoyuela (☎ 942 282628; www.gruposardiner.com; Avenida del Faro s/n; sites per 2 adults with tent & car €18.75; p s) Although new, the Hoyuela emanates the classic sense of Santander's golden seaside age and elegance. The cream décor and soft carpet make for soothing rooms. Downstairs is an equally elegant restaurant, and you're not far from the beach. Prices drop to as little €75 in the low season.

Eating

You can sit down for a few snacks in a tapas bar, quaff hearty local food in no-nonsense bodegas or opt for slightly upper-market dining in any number of restaurants. Santander's waterfront promenades brim with cafés.

BUDGET

Bodega Cigaleña (‰ 942 21 30 62; Calle de Daoiz y Velarde 19; pinchos from €2; h Mon-Sat) A lovely and classic bar for tapas, wine and laughter, this is one of the best and most popular of its ilk in the old town.

Café de Pombo (‰ 942 22 32 24; Calle de Hernán Cortés 21) On the square of the same name, this is one of the city's most pleasant and elegant lingering breakfast stops.

Bodegas Mazón (‰ 942 21 57 52; Calle de Hernán Cortés 57; raciones €4-12; h Thu-Tue) This cavernous wine cellar serves up varied *raciones* (large tapas) at a long timber bar. The selections are chalked on great lumbering vats and behind you are piled huge barrels of wine and sherry. Proceed out the back for a sit-down meal.

A,11 (‰ 942 07 43 62; Calle del Arrabal 11; tapas & raciones €4-12; h Mon-Sat) Gourmet sophistication and big city-style bright lights have landed here, a respectful distance from the classic bodegas but packed to screaming point with locals after something a little different.

MIDRANGE

La Flor de Tetuán (‰ 942 21 83 53; Calle de Tetuán 25; meal €30-40; h Mon-Sat) Anything from a salad filled with crayfish to a slab of catch of the day lightly grilled, this is a simple seafood delight.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

La Conveniente (‰ 942 21 28 87; Calle Gómez Oreaña 9; raciones €5-12; h dinner only Mon-Sat) This cavernous bodega (wine cellar) has high stone walls, wooden pillars and beams, and more wine bottles than you may ever have seen in one place. Squeeze into the tram-like enclosure at the front or line up (locals queue with unlimited patience) for a seat out back (or just snack at the bar). A piano man tinkles on a raised gallery but the noisy bonhomie tends to leave him little hope of being heard. You might go for a cheese *tabla* (platter) or other classic *raciones* (large tapas). For something lighter, order *bocadillos*, little hot rolls with tasty fillings.

Most items are sold by weight and this is the best of a series of four seafood eateries on this strip.

Bar Del Puerto (‰ 942 21 30 01; Calle de Hernán Cortés 63; meal €35-45; h daily Jun-Sep, Tue-Sat, lunch only Sun Oct-Apr) With its grand windows looking out over the waterfront of the Puerto Chico, this is the perfect spot for damn near perfect seafood. Your choice of critter will have a huge influence on the fiscal outlay.

TOP END

El Serbal (‰ 942 22 25 15; Calle de Andrés del Río 7; meal €40-50; h Tue-Sat, lunch only Sun, closed Feb) Probably the best restaurant in town, this elegantly understated place (beneath a brick high-rise apartment block) offers the experience of modern, imaginative twists on essential typical northern Spanish food. Exquisitely prepared fish dishes star.

Drinking & Entertainment

Plaza de Cañadio is home to several *bares de copas*, where you can enjoy an outdoor beer in the evening. Calle de Santa Lucía, along with Calle del Río de la Pila and its immediate neighbourhood also team with bars of all descriptions. Most stay open until between 3am and 4am.

La Floridita (‰ 942 22 33 09; Calle de Bailén 4) A tropically themed nightclub attracting a broad age group, Floridita has a green luminous bar, big cocktails and wi-fi if you happen to have brought your laptop along.

Cool (Calle de San Emeterio 3) Despite the beyond-capacity crowds, this small hash-infused club stays pretty relaxed, with everyone getting their dose of funky music and sweet fumes.

Rocambole (‰ 942 36 49 61; Calle de Hernán Cortés 37; h 10pm-5am) The action often goes on till dawn at this dimly lit, basement rock-music bar. It closes at 6am on Saturday and Sunday morning.

If you're after clubs, a couple of inner-city options that are similar to one another and attract a fairly young crowd are **It** (Calle del General Mola s/n; h 1am-6.30am Thu-Sat) and the **grungier Montréal Lounge** (Calle de Santa Lucía; h 1am-6.30am Thu-Sat).

Getting There & Away

AIR

The airport is about 5km south of town at Parayas. A handful of daily flights serve Madrid and Barcelona. Ryanair has flights here from London Stansted, Liverpool, Frankfurt (Hahn) and Rome (Ciampino).

BOAT

From Plymouth in the UK, **BrittanyFerries** (‰ UK 08703 665333, Spain 942 36 06 11; www.brittanyferries.co.uk) runs a twice-weekly car ferry to Santander (20½ hours) from mid-March to mid-November. Two people with a car pay return fares of up to UK€966, depending on the season, for a standard interior cabin.

BUS

From the **bus station** (‰ 942 21 19 95; www.santanadereabus.com), **Continental-Auto** runs at least six buses daily to/from Madrid (€24 to €32, five to 5½ hours), plus five or six to/from Burgos (€9.45 to €10, 2½ to 3½ hours). ALSA runs frequent buses to Bilbao (€6.05, 1½ hours) and at least six to San Sebastián (€11.70, three hours), Irún and the French border. ALSA also runs to Oviedo (€11.80 to €20.40, three hours), with most buses stopping in Llanes, but has only two daily to Arriondas and Ribadesella.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Heading west, take the A67 for Torrelavega for a quick getaway. The N623 to Burgos – a pretty route – is the main road south. All traffic heads out of the city along the south side of the train station.

Europcar (‰ 942 21 78 17) is inside the FEVE train station. Next door, local crowd **Alcar** (‰ 942 21 47 06) rents Fiat Pandas for €43 a day.

TRAIN

There are two train stations. Renfe has three trains daily to/from Madrid (€35.90 to €47.90, 5½ to 8¼ hours) via Palencia and Avila. Six trains also run daily to/from Reinosa, two of which continue on to Valladolid.

FEVE (‰ 942 20 95 22; www.feve.es in Spanish), next door, operates two trains daily to/from San Vicente de la Barquera, Llanes and Oviedo (€12.25, 4¾ hours) and three to/from Bilbao (€6.75, 2½ to three hours).

Getting Around

Santander buses cost €1 per ride. Purchase a 10-ride ticket for €5.30 at tobacco stands throughout the city.

AROUND SANTANDER

Puerto Viesgo & Around

pop 2350

The valley town of Puerto Viesgo, 25km south of Santander on the N623 towards Burgos, lies at the foot of the conical Monte Castillo.

About 1.5km up this mountain stretch the impressive **Cuevas del Castillo** (‰ 942 59 84 25; adult/child each cave €3/1.50; h 10am-7.30pm May-Sep, 9.30am-5pm Wed-Sun Oct-Apr). The two caves on view here, El Castillo and La Moneda, contain a series of prehistoric wall paintings of various animals that are just as breathtaking as those at Cueva de Altamira (p509), but these are the genuine article rather than copies. In between the art, there's a labyrinth of stalactites and stalagmites in an astounding array of shapes. El Castillo has more paintings.

Visits to the caves are by guided tour only (in Spanish), departing every half-hour; the last tour is given an hour before closing. In summer it's mandatory to book a day ahead.

The town also has some local fame for the medicinal qualities of its baths and its salmon and trout farms. To pamper yourself, visit or stay at the **Gran Hotel Balneario** (‰ 942 59 80 61; www.balneariodepuenteviesgo.com; Calle de Manuel Pérez Mazo s/n; s/d €136.50/166; h baths 8am-9pm; p a i), where you can indulge in all sorts of treatments, from a simple paddle in baths for an hour or two (€10 to €12) to mixed sessions of anything from shiatsu to specific treatments for backache or physiotherapy. Rooms are furnished in classic style, and many have balconies from which you can enjoy the verdant country views.

Seven buses run to Puente Viesgo from Santander Monday to Friday (€1.90, 35 to 45 minutes), with fewer on weekends.

Those with a vehicle should head northeast of Puente Viesgo about 3km to admire one of the region's finest Romanesque churches, the 12th-century **Colegiata de Santa Cruz de Castañeda** in the village of Socobio. It is one of the finest in Cantabria, and displays elements of later periods too. About a 1km walk away is the **Palacio de Alvear**, a 16th-century tower with surrounding buildings in a pleasant park.

Parque de la Naturaleza Cabárceno

This open-air zoo (‰ 902 210112; www.parquedecabarceno.com in Spanish; adult/child Mar-Oct €12/8.50, Nov-Feb €9/6; h 9.30am-7pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-6pm Oct-Mar) is a curious experiment. On the site of former open-cut mines, a zoological park has been created to give a free-range home to everything from buffaloes to watussis (a big-horned African quadruped). In 2005 an elephant was born in captivity here. To get here, drive south from Santander about 20km to Obregón, from where you can enter the park.

EASTERN CANTABRIA

The 95km stretch of coast between Santander and Bilbao offers jaded citizens of both cities several seaside bolt holes. Some, such as Noja, are little more than beaches fronted by rows of holiday flats. The pick of the bunch is undoubtedly Castro Urdiales, 35km short of Bilbao.

Santoña

The fishing port of Santoña is dominated by two forts, Fuerte de San Martín and, further north, the abandoned Fuerte de San Carlos. You can take a pleasant walk around both, or plonk yourself on sandy Playa de San Martín. Otherwise, head north along the C141 to Playa Berria, a magnificent sweep of sand on the open Mar Cantábrico. Down here, one of the best sleeping options is **Hotel Juan de la Cosa** (☎ 942 66 12 38; www.hoteljuandelacosa.com in Spanish; Playa de Berria 14; s/d €83.50/106). It's a bit of a brutish-looking building, but inside the blue-hued rooms are generally spacious. From the 2nd floor up you have nice views of the beach.

Seven or more buses a day run to/from Santander (€3.40, 50 to 65 minutes), and a regular passenger ferry (9am to 8pm May to September) crosses the estuary to the western end of Laredo beach (€1.50). Hourly buses link Santoña with Playa Berria.

Playa de Oriñón

One of the nicer beaches along this coast is at Oriñón, 14km east of Laredo. Popular on summer weekends, the broad sandy strip is set deep behind protective headlands, making the water calm and *comparatively* warm. In contrast, you'll find a chilly sea and some surfable waves on the windward side of the western headland. The settlement itself is made up of drab holiday flats. Up to 10 buses a day head from Castro Urdiales to Oriñón (30 minutes).

Castro Urdiales

pop 13,380

The haughty Gothic jumble that is the **Iglesia de Santa María de la Asunción** (↷ 10am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Jul & Aug, 4-6pm Sep-Jun) stands out above the harbour and the tangle of narrow lanes that make up the medieval centre of Castro Urdiales. It could be a seaside set for *The Name of the Rose*. The church shares its little headland with the ruins of what was for centuries the town's defensive bastion, now supporting a lighthouse. Of the two beaches, the westerly **Playa de Ostende** is the more attractive.

Find out about other beaches in the area at the **tourist office** (☎ 942 87 15 12; Avenida de la Constitución 1; ↷ 9am-9pm Jul-mid-Sep, 9am-2pm & 5-7pm mid-Sep-Jun), by the fishing port in the heart of the town.

Several places to stay are scattered about the old centre, of which **Hostal La Mar** (☎ 942 87 05 24; Calle de la Mar 27; s/d €32/50) is one of the better ones (and prices haven't budged in years!). It is one block from the waterfront and has crisp, functional if unexciting rooms, some of which look onto the narrow pedestrian street.

Traditional fare, such as *sopa de pescado* (fish soup) and *pudin de cabracho* (seafood pâté), abounds in *mesones* (old-style eateries) and *tabernas* (taverns) along Calle de la Mar, Calle Ardigales and in front of the fishing boats at Plaza del Ayuntamiento.

ALSA (☎ 902 422242; Calle Leonardo Rucabado 2) runs up to 10 buses daily to/from Santander (€5, one hour). Bizkaibus has buses to/from Bilbao (€2.20, one hour) every half-hour, making various stops in town, including at Bar La Ronda, on the corner of Calle La Ronda and Calle de Benito Pérez Galdós.

Eastern Valleys

Short on specific sights but rich in unspoiled rural splendour, the little-visited valleys of eastern Cantabria are ripe for exploration. Plenty of routes suggest themselves: what follows is an example only.

From El Soto, on the N623 just south of Puente Viego, take the CA270 southeast towards Vega de Pas. The town is of minimal interest, but the drive is something. The views from the **Puerto de la Braguía** pass in particular are stunning. From Vega de Pas continue southeast, briefly crossing into Castilla y León, before turning north again at Río de Trueba, then following Río Miera down through San Roque de Riomiera towards Santander.

Another option from Río de Trueba is to take the BU571 road up over the Puerto de la Sia pass towards Arredondo. This road is full of switchbacks, a couple of mountain passes and isolated farmhouses.

SOUTHERN CANTABRIA

Wonderful views of high peaks and deep river valleys flanked by patchwork quilts of green await the traveller penetrating the Cantabrian interior. Every imaginable shade of green seems to have been employed to set this stage, strewn with warm stone villages and held together by a network of narrow country roads.

Reinosa (pop 10,520), the main town in southern Cantabria, is dreary, with little to stop for, except perhaps to look at the mansions around the central Plaza de España. But the **Colegiata de San Pedro** in Cervatos, 5km south, is one of Cantabria's finest Romanesque churches.

Inquire at Reinosa's **tourist office** (☎ 942 75 52 15; Avenida del Puente de Carlos III 23) for information on *senderos* (walking routes) if a little rambling in the area appeals to you.

If you get stuck in Reinosa, you'll find a half-dozen sleeping options. **Hostal Sema** (☎ 942 75 00 47; Calle de Julióbriga 14; d €30, s/d without bathroom €15/25) is conveniently close to the train and bus stations, with basic rooms. For a little more comfort, try **Hotel San Roque** (☎ 942 75 47 88; www.hotelsanroque.net in Spanish; Avenida de Cantabria 3; s/d €50/62), whose 18 rooms have parquet floors and, in some, timber ceiling beams. The attic rooms have skylights.

Three regional trains a day (€4.75, 1½ hours) and two or three more expensive long-distance trains head to/from Santander. Up to 11 buses (€5.15, up to 1½ hours) head to/from Santander.

Along Río Ebro

Río Ebro (from whence 'Iberia' stems) rises about 6km west of Reinosa, fills the Embalse del Ebro reservoir and then meanders south and east into Castilla y León. You can follow the river's course along minor roads out of Reinosa.

Head first along the CA171 towards Corconte, then turn right at Requejo to cross over to the reservoir. Follow the southern shore towards Arroyo (you'll pass the ruins of Roman Julióbriga). Just before Arroyo, turn right (south). Along this exceedingly narrow route, you encounter the **Monasterio de Montes Claros**, dating from the 9th century. Next, descend to Arroyal and finally hit a T-junction where the CA272 meets the CA273. About 13km east is Polientes, where you'll find banks, a petrol station and four places to stay. Along or just off the road, several medieval chapels hewn from the rock can be visited. The best example, the **Iglesia de Santa María de Valverde**, is actually about 10km west of the T-junction. Eastwards, there are chapels at **Campo de Ebro** and, beyond Polientes, **Cadalso** and **Arroyuelos**.

Across the Ebro from Arroyuelos, **San Martín de Elines** has a fine Romanesque church and marks the end of the line for a daily bus

from Reinosa via Polientes. With your own transport you can push on for Orbaneja del Castillo (p229) in Castilla y León.

WESTERN CANTABRIA

Santillana del Mar

pop 3820

They say this is the city of the three lies, since it is neither holy (santi), flat (llana), nor on the sea (del mar)! Some good-looking liar! This medieval jewel is in such a perfect state of preservation, with its brick cobbled streets and tanned stone and brick buildings huddling in a muddle of centuries of history, that it seems too good to be true. Surely it's just a film set! Well, no. People still live here, passing their precious houses down from generation to generation.

You could easily pass by on the motorway and never be the wiser to its existence. Strict town planning rules were first introduced back in 1575, and today they include the stipulation that only residents or guests in hotels with garages may bring in their vehicles. Other hotel guests may drive to unload luggage and must then return to the car park at the town entrance.

Santillana is a bijou in its own right, but makes the obvious overnight base for visiting the nearby Cueva de Altamira too.

Banks, a post office, telephones and a bookshop all cluster on or near the handsome Plaza Mayor. You'll find an informative **tourist office** (☎ 942 81 88 12; Calle Jesús Otero 20; ↷ 9am-9pm Jul-Sep, 9.30am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Oct-Jun) at the main car park. You can also get information on the town at www.santillana-del-mar.com.

SIGHTS

A stroll along the cobbled main street past solemn nobles' houses from the 15th to 18th centuries leads you to the lovely 12th-century Romanesque **Colegiata de Santa Juliana** (admission €3; ↷ 10am-1.30pm & 4-7.30pm daily Jun-Sep, 10am-1.30pm & 4-6.30pm Tue-Sun Oct-May). The drawcard in this former monastery is the cloister, a formidable storehouse of Romanesque handiwork, with the capitals of its columns carved into a huge variety of figures. The sepulchre of Santa Juliana, a 3rd-century Christian martyr from Turkey (and the real source of the name Santillana), stands in the centre of the church. The monastery and town grew up around the saint's relics, which arrived here after her death.

ART PREHISTORY

When archaeologists stumbled across them in 1879, they dismissed the vivid rock paintings in the Cueva de Altamira (opposite) as a hoax. They were just too good, too fresh, too sophisticated to be the handiwork of primitive people tens of thousands of years ago. Wrong. It has been proved beyond doubt that these works are the real McCoy, and so precious that the Unesco World Heritage site has been closed to the public (a replica has been created nearby).

Around 50 similar sites have been found around Cantabria, and others in neighbouring Asturias, but few can be visited. The region's mild climate and limestone caves provided a convenient habitat for Palaeolithic settlers, when ice still covered much of the earth's surface. Enscorced in this environment, some of these early inhabitants felt the need to express themselves using the materials at hand.

The most spectacular images, covering the ceiling of the Cueva de Altamira, are thought to be the work of a single artist, done 14,500 years ago. Most of the thousands of paintings found at Altamira and elsewhere (some dating as far back as 20,000 years ago) are stylised depictions of animals, usually deer, bison, boars and bulls, rendered in red, black and ochre tones. Other motifs also appear. At the Cuevas del Castillo (p505) there are 53 negative handprints (produced by what was surely the world's first air-brush), and a series of crimson discs that one theory (among many) suggests could have been used as a lunar calendar. The **Museo de Altamira** (http://museodealtamira.mcu.es/otros_destinos.html) website details other caves that can be visited in Cantabria.

Admission to the Colegiata includes entry to the **Museo Diocesano** (% 942 84 03 17; Calle Cruce; h 10am-1.30pm & 4-7.30pm daily Jun-Sep, 10am-1.30pm & 4-6.30pm Tue-Sun Oct-May) at the other end of town. The former Dominican monastery contains a fascinating collection of 'popular' polychrome wooden statuary, some of it quite bizarre.

Santillana also hosts an eclectic bunch of museums, cultural foundations and exhibitions. The **Museo El Solar** (% 942 84 02 73; Calle Jesús Otero 1; adult/senior & student/under 13yr €3.60/2.40/free; h 10am-9pm Apr-Sep, 10.30am-8pm Oct-Mar) houses an exhibition on the Inquisition, displaying more than 70 charming instruments of torture used in its unremitting battle against heresy, while the **Fundación Santillana** (% 942 81 82 03; Plaza Mayor; admission free) and the **Palacio Caja Cantabria** (% 942 81 81 71; Calle Santo Domingo 8; adult/child €2.50/free; h 11am-2pm & 4-8pm Tue-Sun) stage temporary exhibitions from around the world. The 14th-century **Torre del Merino** (% 942 81 82 89; Plaza de Ramón Pelayo; adult/senior & student/under 13yr €3.50/3/free; h 10am-9pm Apr-Sep, 10am-1.30pm & 4-7.30pm Mon-Fri Oct-Mar) is a medieval tower also used for temporary exhibitions.

SLEEPING

There are dozens of places to stay, an inordinate number of them in atmospheric historic buildings converted for your comfort and pleasure. They are scattered about the old part of town and along the roads towards the Cueva de Altamira and Santander. A half-dozen lodg-

ings around Campo Revolgo park, across the main road from the old town, are mostly in remodelled stone farmhouses or stables. Some close from about November to February.

Budget

Camping Santillana (% 942 81 82 50; sites per 2 people, car & tent €22; p s) Just west of Santillana del Mar on the Comillas road, this camping ground has good facilities, including bungalows, supermarket, kids' playground, tennis court and restaurant.

Posada Santa Juliana (% 942 84 01 06; Calle Carrera 19; d €55) A short walk in from the main road, this charming *casona* (medieval house) has smallish but tastefully restored rooms. Inquire at Los Nobles restaurant opposite.

Midrange

Hotel Siglo XVIII (% 942 84 02 10; Calle de Revolgo 38; s/d €42/70; h closed mid-Dec-Feb; p s) This has to be one of the better deals in Santillana. Surrounded by a garden, this stone mansion, although quite new (so with no history value), is nevertheless faithful to the town's style. Rooms are inviting, with antique furniture, and access to a pool at these prices is a bonus.

La Casa del Organista (% 942 84 03 52; www.casadelorganista.com in Spanish; Camino de Los Hornos 4; s/d €58/85; p) Rooms at this elegant 18th-century house, long home to the Colegiata church's organist, are particularly attractive, with wood-rail balconies, plush rugs, antique

furniture and plenty of exposed heavy beams and stonework. Some rooms look across fields towards the Colegiata.

Los Infantes (% 942 81 81 00; www.gruposofininfantes.com in Spanish; Avenida L'Dorat 1; s/d €86.70/114.50; h closed Dec-Mar; p) Another fine 18th-century pile, this place on the main road offers sober but comfortable rooms, some with iron bed heads. It has its own restaurant and bar too.

Top End

Casa del Marqués (% 942 81 88 88; www.turismosantillanadelmar.com in Spanish; Calle del Cantón 26; s/d €175.50/195.80; h closed mid-Dec-Feb; p a i) Feel like the lord or lady of the manor in this 15th-century Gothic mansion, once home to the Marquis of Santillana. Exposed timber beams, thick stone walls and cool terracotta floors contribute to the atmosphere of the rooms, all of which are quite different from one another. It has a beautiful garden restaurant over the road.

EATING

Santillana has a lot of humdrum eateries catering to the passing tourist trade, and you should be able to get a full meal at most for around €20 to €25. There are some better options, however.

La Villa (% 942 81 83 64; Plaza de la Gándara s/n; meal €25; h Thu-Tue) Wander through the great timber doors into the courtyard. To your left is a bar with benches, to the right and upstairs proceed to the dining area, brought together as though under a big top of heavy, dark timber beams. The meat dishes, such as the *solomillo con salsa de queso* (sirloin in cheese sauce; €13.50) are its strong suit.

Casa Uzquiza (% 942 84 03 56; Calle del Escultor Jesús Otero 5; meal €25-35; h Tue-Sun, closed Feb) This upstairs restaurant with the red and blue walls and somewhat harsh lighting offers many of the usual local suspects, such as *cocido montañés* (bean, cabbage, meat and sausage stew), and then some surprises with an elegant touch, such as *lomo de bacalao en pil-pil de erizo* (soft steamed cod drenched in a thick yellow sea urchin sauce). The lemon tart is to die for.

Restaurante Gran Duque (% 942 84 03 86; www.grandduque.com in Spanish; Calle del Escultor Jesús Otero 5; meal €30-35; h Tue-Sun) The food is high-quality local fare and what sets it apart is the setting, a grand stone house with noble trappings and nice decorative touches such as the exposed brick and beams. There is a reasonable balance of surf or turf options, but the latter are better.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Autobuses La Cantábrica (% 942 72 08 22) has buses four times a day Monday to Friday, with three on Saturday and Sunday, from Santander to Santillana (€2.05 & 35 minutes), and on to Comillas and San Vicente de la Barquera. They stop on Avenida de Santonio Sandí, opposite the medical centre.

Museo & Cueva de Altamira

The country's finest prehistoric art, in the Cueva de Altamira, 2km southwest of Santillana del Mar, is now off-limits to all but the scientific community.

Since 2001, however, the **Museo Altamira** (% 942 81 80 05; <http://museodealtamira.mcu.es>; adult/student/senior & under 18yr €2.40/1.20/free, Sun & from 2.30pm Sat free; h 9.30am-7.30pm Tue-Sat, 9.30am-3pm Sun & holidays Jun-Sep, 9.30am-5pm Tue-Sat, 9.30am-3pm Sun & holidays Oct-May; p w) has allowed all comers to view the inspired, 14,500-year-old depictions of bison, horses and other beasts (or rather, their replicas) in this full-size, dazzling re-creation of the cave's most interesting chamber, the Sala de Policromos (Polychrome Hall). The viewing is enhanced by the museum's excellent interactive exhibits on prehistoric humanity and cave art around the world, from Altamira to Australia.

Visits to the replica cave, called the Neocueva, are guided; you are assigned a tour time with your ticket. Tours are in Spanish only. During Easter and from July to September it's worth purchasing tickets in advance at branches of **Banco Santander** (% 902 242424; www.bancosantander.es in Spanish), or by phoning or visiting its website (click on Venta de Entradas). Those without vehicles must walk or take a taxi the 2km from Santillana del Mar.

Comillas

pop 2500

Take the CA131 16km from Santillana through verdant countryside to reach Comillas. You first sight the town's fine, golden beach, but there is much more: a pleasant, cobbled old village centre and, separated from it by verdant valleys, hilltops crowned by some of the most original buildings in Cantabria.

The **tourist office** (% 942 72 07 68; Calle de Aldea 6; h 10.30am-1.30pm & 5-8pm daily Jul & Aug, 10.30am-1.30pm & 5-8pm Wed-Mon Sep-Jun) has local information, and a **branch** (Plaza de Joaquín del Piélagos; h 9am-2pm & 4-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) behind the town hall.

SIGHTS

Antoni Gaudí left few reminders of his genius beyond Catalonia, but of those that he did, the 1885 **Capricho de Gaudí** (Gaudí's Caprice) in Comillas is easily the most flamboyant, if modest in stature. The brick building, originally a summer house for the Marqués de Comillas and now an expensive restaurant, is liberally striped with ceramic bands of alternating sunflowers and green leaves.

The Capricho was one of several buildings commissioned for Comillas from leading Catalan Modernista architects by the first Marqués de Comillas, who was born here as plain Antonio López, made a fortune in Cuba and returned to beautify his home town. In the same hillside parklands stand the wonderful neo-Gothic **Palacio de Sobrellano** (admission €3; 10am-9pm May-Sep, 10.30am-2pm & 4-7.30pm Oct-Apr) and **Capilla Panteón de los Marqueses de Comillas** (admission €3; 10am-9pm May-Sep, 10.30am-2pm & 4-7.30pm Oct-Apr), both designed by Joan Martorell. With the *palacio* (palace), Martorell truly managed to out-Gothic real Gothic. Visits to both buildings are by guided tour.

Martorell also had a hand in the **Universidad Pontificia** (no longer, however, a pontifical university) on the hill opposite, but it was Lluís Domènech i Montaner, another Catalan Modernista, who contributed the medieval flavour to this elaborate building, a former seminary, whose grounds you can stroll.

Comillas's compact medieval centre is full of its own little pleasures. **Plaza de la Constitución** is its focal point, a sloping, cobbled square flanked by the town hall, the Iglesia de San Cristóbal and old sandstone houses with flower-bedecked balconies.

Comillas boasts a teeny fishing port and fine beach, just a 10-minute walk from Plaza de la Constitución.

SLEEPING

Camping Comillas (942 72 00 74; www.campingcomillas.com in Spanish; sites per 2 people, car & tent €18; Jun-Sep) A simple grassy spot run by a friendly fellow on the eastern edge of town, the camping ground spreads to a clifftop area overlooking part of the beach in July and August (minimum stay in that part five days).

Pensión La Aldea (942 72 10 46; La Aldea 5; d without bathroom €35) This homy guesthouse offers simple rooms with hardwood floors, and there's a little *comedor* (eatery) downstairs. It

runs a second, slightly fancier place over on Calle de Díaz de la Campa.

Hostal Esmeralda (942 72 00 97; www.hostalesmeralda.com in Spanish; Calle de Antonio López 7; s/d €60/80) A short distance east of the town centre, this handsomely restored *hostal* (budget hotel) in a fine, stone building partly covered in ivy contains large, old-fashioned rooms.

Casal del Castro (942 72 00 36; hccastro@infonegocio.com; Calle San Jerónimo s/n; s/d €64/91) A quick stroll round the corner from the Esmeralda, this period-furnished 17th-century mansion is one of the best choices. Some rooms are in a less-inspiring modern extension, but some of them benefit from views clear across town to the Universidad Pontificia.

EATING & DRINKING

The obvious place for morning coffee is the Plaza de la Rabia, behind the cathedral. A couple of simple seafood restaurants line the waterfront.

Restaurante Gurea (942 72 24 46; Calle Ignacio Fernández de Castro 11; meal €30-40; Tue-Sat, lunch only Sun) In a back street behind Hostel Esmeralda, this elegant restaurant dishes up a mix of Basque and *montañés* (Cantabrian-style mountain) fare. Try the delicate *carpaccio de buey al aroma de trufa* (beef carpaccio seasoned with truffle; €14.90), or the tasting menu at €27.

El Capricho de Gaudí (942 72 03 65; meal €35-40; Mon-Sat, lunch only Sun) You can't visit Gaudí's Capricho, but you can eat there! Of course, the dining area is curved (no straight lines for Gaudí) and has a modestly elegant air. It serves up such substantial dishes as *lomo de venado a la pimienta negra con setas y pure de manzana* (deer loin in black pepper with mushrooms and apple puree; €18). It also has a *menú del día* (daily set menu) for €20.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Comillas is served by the same buses as Santillana del Mar (€3.15, 55 minutes from Santander). The main stop is on Calle del Marqués de Comillas, near the driveway to the Capricho de Gaudí.

Around Comillas

Out of several beaches around Comillas, the long, sandy **Playa de Oyambre**, 5km west, is decidedly superior. There are two year-round camping grounds behind the beach.

A little further west, the wilder, less crowded and clothing-optional **Playa de Merón** and its

continuation **Playa del Rosal** stretch 3km to the estuary at San Vicente de la Barquera. Heed the warning signs about currents here.

San Vicente de la Barquera

pop 4520

Just 10km further west from Comillas, follow the CA131 through the green and humid estuary land of the Parque Natural de Oyambre. As you approach from a height, you see how a broad swathe of sea water has cut a gash through the coast at San Vicente de la Barquera. The main estuary is spanned by the long, low-slung 15th-century Puente de la Maza bridge. On its east side, out of view of the main road, runs a long, golden strand. The town huddles between the bridge and another narrow inlet on the west side.

San Vicente was an important fishing port throughout the Middle Ages and later became one of the so-called Cuatro Villas de la Costa – converted by Carlos III into the province of Cantabria in 1779.

The tourist office (942 71 07 97; www.sanvicentedelabarquera.org; Avenida del Generalísimo 20; 10am-1.30pm & 4.30-7pm Mon-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun) doubles as an agent for *casas rurales* in the area.

The old part of town is topped by a castle (adult/child €1.20/0.60; 11am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sun) and some remnants of the old city walls, but its outstanding monument is the largely 13th-century **Iglesia de Santa María de los Ángeles**, further inland. Although Gothic, it sports a pair of impressive Romanesque doorways. In one of the chapels, the lifelike statue of 16th-century Inquisitor Antonio del Corro (reclining on one elbow, reading) is deemed to be the best piece of Renaissance funerary art in the country.

The friendly **Pensión Liébana** (942 71 02 11; Calle Ronda 2; s/d €39/42), up some steps from Plaza de José Antonio, features cosy stone-walled rooms, some with skylights.

Just after crossing the bridge and before you hit the central Plaza de José Antonio, **Hotel Luzón** (942 71 00 50; www.hotel luzon.net; Calle de Miramar 1; s/d €41/77) is a stately looking stone-fronted home possessing an air of older times with its high ceilings and quiet drawing rooms. Rooms are a little fusty but most have a sense of space and many have broad views over town and water.

El Pescador (942 71 00 05; Calle Antonio Gurrely s/n; meals €20; Wed-Mon) is the liveliest of seafood restaurants with tables overlooking

the estuary. Stand around in the good-natured bar area knocking back tapas with the manager, José Ignacio, or make your way out the back to the dining area overlooking the main estuary.

San Vicente bus station, by the Puente de la Maza, is served by up to seven daily ALSA services on the Gijón-San Sebastián route (€4.15, 1¼ hours from Santander; €8.30, two hours from Oviedo). Buses Palomera also stops here en route between Santander and Potes (€2, 1½ hours to/from Potes). Two FEVE trains stop in San Vicente daily en route between Santander (€3.90, 1½ hours) and Oviedo.

Western Valleys

Generally ignored by holiday-makers, who concentrate their attention on the Picos de Europa further west, the valleys of Río Saja and, next west, Río Nansa, make a soft contrast to the craggy majesty of the Picos.

A beautiful drive if you are starting from the Picos de Europa is the CA282, which snakes up high and eastwards from La Hermita on Río Deva. The village of Puentenansa forms a crossroads. Fifteen kilometres north (turn east at Rábago and climb 7km) is El Soplao (902 820282; www.elsoplao.com; adult/senior, student & child €9/6; 10am-2pm & 3-5pm), a 12km stretch of caves full of stalactites and stalagmites and until 1979 a lead and zinc mine. The Cantabrian government and speleological club are slowly opening the caves up to the public – the first chamber was opened in 2005 and visits take one hour.

The CA281 south from Puentenansa follows Río Nansa upstream: along the way, a short detour east leads to the attractive hamlet of Tudana, dominated by the white, 18th-century *casona* (mansion). The CA281 eventually meets the CL627, on which you can head south to Cervera de Pisuerga (see Montaña Palentina, p212) or turn northwest back to the Picos.

Proceeding east from Puentenansa takes you through Carmona, with many fine stone mansions. When you reach the village of Valle de Cabuerniga and Río Saja, head south towards Reinoso. The views are magnificent. The hamlet of Bárcena Mayor, about 9km east of the main road, is a popular spot with a couple of *casas rurales* to stay in and great *mesones*, where you should try the *cocido montañés*.

ASTURIAS

'*Ser español es un orgullo*'; the saying goes, '*ser asturiano es un título*'. If being Spanish is a matter of pride, to be Asturian is a title, or so some of the locals would have you think.

Asturias' beauty lies in its stunning countryside. Much of the Picos de Europa are on Asturian territory, and fishing villages such as Llanes and Cudillero make great bases for exploring the lovely coast, otherwise dotted with picture-postcard coves (it is said there are more than 600 beaches on the Asturian coast) and inlets. For the architecture buff, Asturias is the land of the pre-Romanesque – modest but unique survivors of early medieval building and decoration. The region's pretty capital, Oviedo, is an interesting enough town, with its old centre and elegant squares.

Bucolically green though much of it is, Asturias also has its gritty industrial side. The Oviedo-Gijón-Avilés triangle is the heart of industrial Asturias.

Like neighbouring Galicia, Asturias was exclusively Celtic territory before the arrival of the Romans. It's also the sole patch of Spain never conquered by the Muslims. Ever since King Pelayo warded them off in the Battle of Covadonga in AD 722 and laid the foundations of Christian Spain's 800-year comeback, Asturians have thought of themselves – or have been perceived to think of themselves – as a cut above the rest of the peninsula's inhabit-

ants. Asturias, they say, is the real Spain; the rest is simply *tierra de la reconquista* (reconquered land).

The Reconquista's southwards progress left Asturias increasingly a backwater. As a concession, Juan I of Castilla y León made Asturias a *principado* (principality) in 1388, and to this day the heir to the Spanish throne holds the title Príncipe de Asturias (just as Prince Charlie is the Prince of Wales). Annual awards handed out by the prince to personalities of distinction are Spain's equivalent of the Nobel prizes.

Traditional Asturian food is simple peasant fare. Best known is the *fabada asturiana*, a hearty bean dish jazzed up with meat and sausage. The region is also renowned for its earthy cheeses, many of which are produced in the Picos de Europa (see the boxed text, p534).

Asturias' regional tourism office maintains an excellent website, www.infoasturias.com, which is well worth exploring before or during your visit. Another useful site is www.vivirasturias.com (in Spanish).

OVIEDO

pop 212,170 / elevation 232m

The elegant parks and modern shopping streets of Asturias' capital are agreeably offset by what remains of the *casco antiguo* (old town). Out on the periphery, the hum and heave of factories is a strong reminder that Oviedo is a key producer of textiles, metal goods, sugar and chocolate.

IN A PRE-ROMANESQUE WORLD OF THEIR OWN

More or less cut off from the rest of Christian Europe by the Muslim invasion, the tough and tiny kingdom that emerged in 8th-century Asturias gave rise to a unique style of art and architecture in Europe.

The 14 buildings, mostly churches (and collectively a World Heritage site), that survive from the two centuries of the Asturian kingdom take some inspiration from other sources, but have no real siblings. Typical of all are the straight lines of their profiles and floor plans – no apses or cylinders here – although their semicircular arches are obvious forerunners of the style that would later triumph in northern Spain and across much of Europe – Romanesque. Another precursor to the Romanesque style is the complete vaulting of the nave.

Roman and Visigothic elements are visible. In many cases the bases and capitals of columns, with their Corinthian or floral motifs, were simply cannibalised from earlier structures. Another adaptation, which owes something to developments in Muslim Spain, was the use of lattice windows. They appear purely as a design effect, since their Eastern progenitors were inspired by the desire to maintain privacy from the outside world – hardly an issue in a church.

Some of the best representatives of the pre-Romanesque style are found in or near Oviedo. The **Iglesia de San Julián de los Prados** (adult/child €1.20/0.60, Mon free; 10am–12.30pm Mon, 10am–12.30pm & 4–5.30pm Tue–Fri, 9.30am–noon & 3.30–5pm Sat May–Sep, shorter hr Oct–Apr) in Oviedo, just above the road to Gijón, is the largest remaining pre-Romanesque church, and one of the oldest, built under Alfonso II. It is flanked by two porches – another Asturian touch – and the inside is covered with frescoes. The **Iglesia de Santa María de Bendones** (closed), southeast of Oviedo, is unique for its extra-wide nave, a result of Roman influence. On the slopes of Monte Naranco, 3km northwest of central Oviedo, the tall, narrow **Palacio de Santa María del Naranco** (closed for renovation) and the **Iglesia de San Miguel de Lillo** (adult/child to both €2/1, Mon free; 9.30am–1pm Sun & Mon, 9.30am–1pm & 3.30–7pm Tue–Sat Apr–Sep, shorter hr Oct–Mar) were built by Ramiro I (842–50), Alfonso II's successor, and mark an advance in Asturian art. An outstanding feature of the decoration in the former is the *sogueado*, the sculptural motif imitating rope used in its columns.

History

When Asturian king Alfonso II El Casto (the Chaste; AD 791–842) defeated a Muslim detachment that practically razed Oviedo, he was sufficiently impressed by the site to rebuild and expand it, and move his court there from Pravia. It stayed until 910 when it was moved to León. The university opened around 1600, and industry took off in the 19th century. A miners' revolt (1934) and a nasty siege in the first months of the Spanish Civil War led to the destruction of much of the old town.

Orientation

From the train station, Oviedo's main drag, Calle de Uría, leads southeast to the Campo de San Francisco, a park, and the old town. The ALSA bus station is east of the train station on Calle de Pepe Cosmen. A collection of restaurants, cafés and bars awaits in the old town.

Information

EMERGENCY

Policía Nacional (Calle de General Yagüe)

INTERNET ACCESS

Le@ser (Calle de San Francisco 9; per hr €3; 10.30am–12.30am Mon–Fri, 10.30am–12.30am Sat & Sun) Check email here.

MEDICAL SERVICES

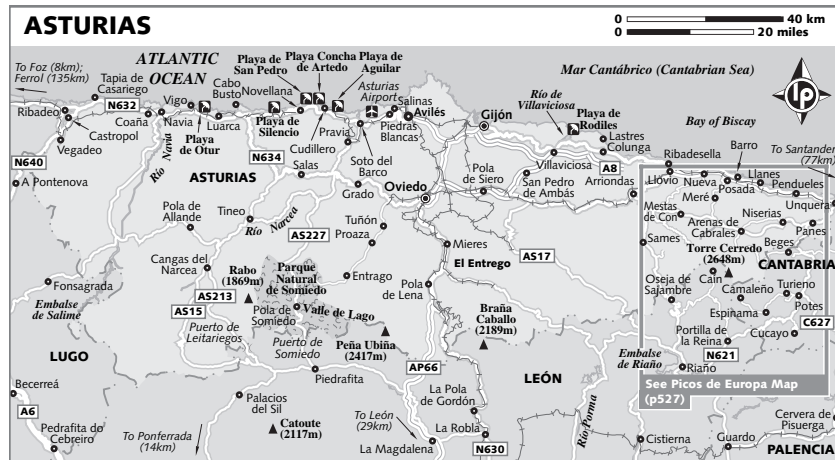
Farmacia Nestares (☎ 985 22 39 25; Calle de Uría 36; 9am–midnight)
Hospital Central de Asturias (☎ 985 10 61 00; Avenida de Julián Clavería)

POST

Main post office (Calle de Alonso Quintanilla 1; 10.30am–8.30pm Mon–Fri, 9.30am–2pm Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Oficina Municipal de Turismo (☎ 985 22 75 86; www.oviedo.es; Calle Marqués de Santa Cruz; 10.30am–2pm & 4.30–7.30pm) In a kiosk off Campo de San Francisco.
Regional tourist office (☎ 985 21 33 85; www.infoasturias.com; Calle de Cimadevilla 4; 10am–8pm late Jun–late Sep, 10am–7pm early Oct–early Jun)





Sights

CATEDRAL DE SAN SALVADOR

In a sense, the mainly Gothic edifice you see today forms the outer casing of a many-layered history in stone of Spanish Christianity. Its origins lie in the Cámara Santa, a chapel built by Alfonso II to house holy relics. The chapel is now the inner sanctuary of the cathedral (9% 985 20 31 17; admission incl Cámara Santa, Museo Diocesano & cloister adult/child 10-15yr/under 10yr €3/1/free; h 10am-1pm & 4-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 4-6pm Sat mid-May-Sep, 10am-1pm & 4-6pm or 7pm Mon-Sat Oct-mid-May), which was chiefly built between the 14th and 16th centuries.

The Cámara Santa contains some key symbols of medieval Spanish Christianity. Alfonso II presented the Cruz de los Ángeles (Cross of the Angels) to Oviedo in 808, and it's still the city's emblem. A century later Alfonso III donated the Cruz de la Victoria (Cross of Victory), which in turn became the sign of Asturias.

These and other items can be viewed from the Sala Apostolar, whose remarkable sculptures of the apostles are the work of Maestro Mateo, creator of the Pórtico de la Gloria in the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. Turning to leave, you'll see three heads sculpted out of a single block of stone above the doorway. This strikingly simple work depicts, from left to right, the Virgin Mary, Christ and St John on Calvary.

The cloister is pure 14th-century Gothic, rare enough in Asturias, and just off it the *sala capitular* (chapter house) contains some well-restored Flemish-Gothic choir stalls. The Museo Diocesano houses some interesting ecclesiastical artefacts.

One vestige of the original 9th-century structure is a Romanesque tower on the south side, best approached via the Tránsito de Santa Barbara.

AROUND THE CATHEDRAL

Plaza de Alfonso II El Casto and neighbouring Plaza de Porlier are fronted by elegant palaces dating from the 17th and 18th centuries. The nearby Museo de Bellas Artes de Asturias (9% 985 21 30 61; www.museobbaa.com in Spanish; Calle de Santa Ana 1; admission free; h 11am-2.30pm & 5-9pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2.30pm Sun Jul & Aug, 10.30am-2pm & 4.30-8.30pm Tue-Fri, 11.30am-2pm & 5-8pm Sat, 11.30am-2.30pm Sun Sep-Jun), itself housed in two buildings dating each to the 17th and 18th centuries, rewards a visit: its collection includes paintings by Goya, Murillo and other Spanish greats, and plenty by

Asturians, such as Evaristo Valle, plus a roomful of El Grecos. Behind the cathedral, the 16th-century Benedictine Monasterio de San Vicente houses the Museo Arqueológico (closed indefinitely for restorations).

PLAZAS

Indulge in a little exploration of the old town's nooks and crannies. Plaza de la Constitución occupies a barely perceptible rise close to the heart of old Oviedo, capped at one end by the Iglesia de San Isidoro, and fronted by an eclectic collection of old shops, cafés and the 17th-century *ayuntamiento* (city hall). To the south, past the Mercado El Fontán food market, arcaded Plaza Fontán is equipped with a couple of *sidrerías* (cider houses) and the passages leading under the houses to surrounding streets.

Other little squares include Plaza de Trascorales, Plaza de Riego and Plaza del Paraguas. The last got its name from its inverted-umbrella design, which once accommodated an open-air market. Today it sports a big umbrella to protect visitors from the elements.

Festivals & Events

Oviedo's biggest fiesta is that of San Mateo, celebrated in the third week of September and climaxed around 21 September.

Sleeping

BUDGET

The busy shopping boulevard, Calle de Uria, from the train station to the old town is a gallery of inexpensive, and in some cases very pleasant, lodgings.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hotel Libretto (9% 985 20 20 04; www.librettohotel.com; Calle Marqués de Santa Cruz 12; s/d €105.90/117.70; p i) Music lovers will appreciate this opera-inspired hotel in a modernist-style building facing the Campo de San Francisco. The 15 sleekly furnished double rooms, dominated by creams and off whites, include DVD/CD players, wi-fi, and a nice touch for the wet north – an umbrella. You can choose from a menu of pillows, use an in-house laptop in the room and take breakfast there too. You might only want to emerge for a quick session in its fitness centre.

Hostal Arcos (☎ 985 21 47 73; Calle de Magdalena 3; d €45) The only lodging in the old town is a modern brick building with nine simple, clean rooms (that have TV and heating) and is ideally located within stumbling distance of some of Oviedo's best watering holes. Outside August lone travellers usually get a discount.

Hotel Belmonte (☎ 985 24 10 20; calogon@teleline.es; Calle de Uria 31; s/d €35/46) A quick stroll from the train station, this charming 3rd-floor (there's a lift) lodging offers cosy rooms with timber floors and an at-home feel. Cheaper rooms with shared bathroom are also available.

MIDRANGE

Casa Camila (☎ 985 11 48 22; www.casacamila.com; Calle de Fitoria 29; s/d €74.90/96.30; p) This family-run hotel has just seven rooms (one single and one great double with private terrace and hydro-massage bath for €128.40) and is a charmer. It is a few kilometres outside of town and offers wonderful views over the city. Rooms are spacious, with an old-world rustic flavour.

Hotel Ciudad de Oviedo (☎ 985 22 22 24; www.hotelclarin.es in Spanish; Calle de Gascona 21; s/d €77/99.50; p) A typical, midrange business-folk hotel, this spot is well placed for the *sidrerías* of the same street, from which you can roll downhill to bed. Speaking of beds, they're big and firm, in rooms that are neutrally decorated.

TOP END

Hotel de la Reconquista (☎ 985 24 11 00; www.hoteldelareconquista.com; Calle de Gil de Jaz 16; s/d €187.25/230, ste €749; p a i) The city's top lodgings started life as an 18th-century hospice. Rooms come in different shapes and sizes, with timber furniture, floor-to-ceiling windows and gentle ochre and white colour schemes. You can opt for one of the suites, too.

Eating

BUDGET

Oviedo's *sidrería* rules include getting good grub at reasonable prices. Most of those on Calle de la Gascona serve *raciones* from €6 to €15.

Tierra Astur (☎ 985 21 56 79; Calle de la Gascona 1; meal €15-20) A particularly atmospheric *sidrería*/restaurant, Tierra Astur is famed for its grilled meats and prize-winning cider. Folks queue for tables, or give up and settle for tapas at the bar. Some just buy typical local products in the shop area to the right and go home. Platters of Asturian sausage, cheese or ham are a good starter option.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Los Tres Caracoles (☎ 985 20 77 89; Calle de Jovellanos 25; meal €35; h Mon-Sat, closed Jan) A bright, original addition to the already healthy local eating scene, the Three Snails offers pleasingly presented permutations of Asturian cuisine under 1950s lighting. Sit at the bar, perch on a high stool at high tables for two or three or head out back. Choose from a curious mix of dishes (which you can take in 'mini' versions), which might range from *berenjena rellena de boletus confitados* (aubergine stuffed with crystallised mushrooms) to *tempura de verduras y langostino con salsa de soja y miel* (vegetable and king prawn tempura in a soya and honey sauce).

MIDRANGE

Restaurante El Raitán (☎ 985 21 42 18; Plaza Trascorrales 6; meal €30-35; h Tue-Sun) Dark timber dominates several labyrinthine dining areas. The menu is extensive, with tonnes of starters and a good range of fish and meat options. The *solomillo* (sirloin medallions) are melt-in-the-mouth tender and the salads enormous.

Casa Conrado (☎ 985 22 39 19; Calle de Argüelles 1; meal €35-40; h Mon-Sat, closed Aug) A classic, where black-jacketed waiters will deliver carefully assembled Asturian dishes to your table. Try the *crema de mariscos* (cream of seafood; €8.80) and for a switch from fish, the *solomillo de carne roja con foie fresco de pato y salsa de oporto* (sirloin with fresh duck foie and port sauce; €21).

TOP END

La Puerta Nueva (☎ 985 22 52 27; Calle de Leopoldo Alas 2; meal €40-50; h Mon-Sat) A gourmet experience, mixing northern with Mediterranean cooking in a homy, welcoming atmosphere. The best option is to tackle the tasting menu. Market supplies determine to a large extent what appears on the menu.

Drinking & Entertainment

The narrow pedestrian streets of the old town are thronged with people having a great time inside and outside dozens of bars on weekends. The main axis is Calle de Mon (and its extension Calle Oscura, the aptly named 'Dark Street'). Not much happens during the week, but from Thursday to Saturday night

bars swing into action, some staying open as late as 5.30am.

You could start the night drinking no-frills Asturian-style, indulging in some frothy cider-slurping in the *sidrerías*. Calle de la Gascona is the classic street lined with lively, no-nonsense cider houses, among them **La Pumarada** (Calle de la Gascona 8) and **Villaviciosa** (Calle de la Gascona 7). But you will soon start finding them all over town.

El Quinto de la Tarde (Plaza de Riego) With its red-dominated bull-theme décor, this is a good place to start the evening over a glass or two of wine. It shuts by 1.30am.

Bar Campa (Plaza del Sol 3) Another good place to start the night, this is a straightforward beer bar that fills with boisterous locals.

Divino Bhar (Calle Oscura 27) This is the place for Latin themes and a broad dance space, busy from midnight to 5.30am on weekends.

La Factoria (Calle del Postigo Alto) Has similar hours to Divino Bhar, but this square, bare stone basement bar is jammed so tight that the DJ's efforts seem pointless (if he's hoping to encourage dancing).

Morgana Le Fay (Calle de Cimadevilla 15) A long bar with multicoloured lighting and mainstream dance tunes (it even has a doorman, although this ain't a club).

Ca Beleño (Calle de Martínez Vigil 4) This is a well-established venue for Celtic music, whether of Asturian, Galician or Irish extraction. It hosts occasional jam sessions.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The Aeropuerto de Asturias is at Santiago del Monte, 47km northwest of Oviedo and 40km west of Gijón. There are flights to Madrid, Barcelona and several other Spanish destinations, along with services to London Stansted with EasyJet, and Paris and Brussels with Iberia.

BUS

From the **ALSA bus station** (☎ 902 499949; Calle de Pepe Cosmen), direct services head up the motorway to Gijón (€1.85, 25 to 30 minutes) every 10 or 15 minutes from 6.45am to 10.45pm.

Other daily buses head to/from Galicia, Cantabria and elsewhere. At least nine go to León (€7.56, 1½ to two hours), 11 to Madrid (€28.10 to €44, five to 5½ hours), up to 11 to Santander (€11.80 to €20.40, 2¼ to three hours) and five to Santiago de Compostela

(€22.90 to €40.15, 4¼ to 7½ hours). Buses to Cangas de Onís (p530) and Covadonga (p531) also run from Oviedo.

TRAIN

One train station serves both rail companies, Renfe and FEVE, the latter located on the upper level. For Gijón, it's best to use the Renfe *cercanías* (local trains that serve large cities; €2.15, 35 minutes), which run until after 10pm.

FEVE (☎ 985 29 76 56) runs four daily trains to/from Arriondas (€3.90, 1½ hours), Ribadesella (€5.05, two hours) and Llanes (€6.45, 2½ hours), with two continuing to Santander (€12.25, 4¼ hours) and one to Bilbao. West-bound, FEVE trains link up with trains from Gijón at Pravia, with three daily runs to Cudillero (€2.40, 1¼ hours) and Lluarca (€5.60, 2¼ hours). Two of these continue to Tapia de Casariego, Ribadeo and Ferrol (€17.95, 6½ hours).

Getting Around

Buses run regularly between the ALSA bus station and the Aeropuerto de Asturias (€5.60, 45 minutes).

AROUND OVIEDO

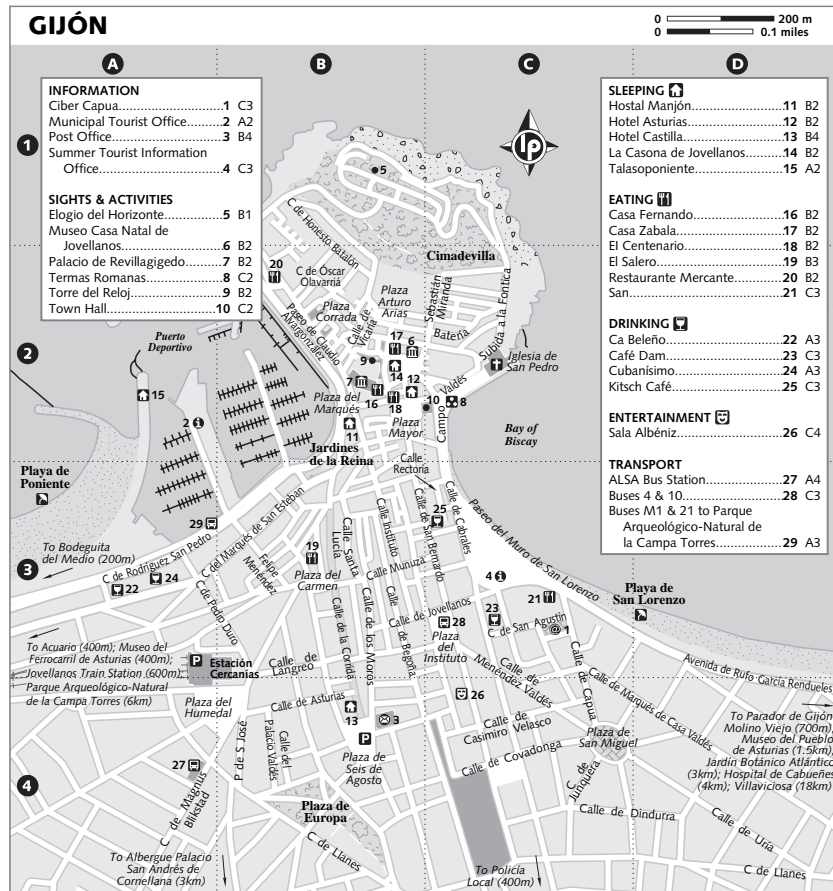
El Entrego

Asturias has a proud mining history, an industry that promoted the arrival of the railways and opened the region up to the rest of the country. You can plunge into that history at the Museo de la Minería y de la Industria (☎ 985 66 31 33; www.mumi.es in Spanish; San Vicente; adult/child €4/2; h 10am-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jul-Sep, 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-Jun). The displays, life-sized models of machinery and replica of a mine shaft bring to life the tough story of mining in Asturias. Renfe and FEVE trains from Oviedo call in at El Entrego.

GIJÓN

pop 273,930

Bigger, busier and gutsier than Oviedo, Gijón (*khi-hon*) produces iron, steel and chemicals, and is the main loading terminal for Asturian coal. But Gijón is emerging like a phoenix from its industrial setting, having given itself a face-lift with pedestrianised city-centre streets, parks and seafront walks. The place is something of a minor party town too, and in summer puts on a vast entertainment programme.



Information

In addition to the tourist office mentioned here, information booths open at Playa de San Lorenzo and elsewhere in town over the summer months.

Ciber Capua (Calle de Capua 4; per hr €1.80; h 11am-1am) Check email here.

Hospital de Cabueñes (☎ 985 18 50 00) Four kilometres east of the city centre.

Municipal tourist office (☎ 985 34 17 71, 902 93 19 93; www.infogijon.com; Espigón Central de Fomento; h 9am-8pm) On a pier of the Puerto Deportivo (marina).

Policía Local (☎ 985 18 11 00; Calle San José 2) South of the centre of town.

Post office (Plaza de Seis de Agosto; h 8.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2pm Sat)

www.gijonasturias.com This website is worth a look.

Sights & Activities

The ancient core of Gijón is concentrated on the headland known as Cimadevilla. At the top of this, what was once a fortified military zone has been converted into an attractive park. At the edge of the promontory stands the **Elogio del Horizonte**, a monumental concrete sculpture by Basque artist Eduardo Chillida that has become a symbol of the city. Wrapped around the landward side is an enticing web of narrow lanes and small squares.

Plaza de Jovellanos is dominated by the home of 18th-century Enlightenment politician Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos, now housing the **Museo Casa Natal de Jovellanos** (☎ 985 18 51 52; www.jovellanos.net in Spanish), devoted mainly to Asturian art and Jovellanos himself.

To the east, underneath Campo Valdés, are the town's **Termas Romanas** (Roman Baths; ☎ 985 18 51 51; adult/senior & student €2.35/1.35), built in the 1st to 4th centuries AD.

West of the baths spreads the harmonious **Plaza Mayor**, with porticoes on three sides and the *casa consistorial* (town hall) on the fourth. Further west, the impressive 18th-century **Palacio de Revillagigedo** (☎ 985 34 69 21; Plaza de Marqués 2) is now a lively cultural centre, hosting modern art exhibitions and the occasional play or concert. The **Torre del Reloj** (Clock Tower; ☎ 985 18 13 29; Calle de Recoletas 5), just behind it, houses a six-floor exhibition on Gijón's history, with a viewing platform at the top.

The **Museo del Ferrocarril de Asturias** (☎ 985 30 85 75; Calle de Dionisio Fernández Nespral Aza s/n; adult/senior & student €2.35/1.35), housed in Gijón's old Renfe train station, just a few minutes' walk west of the city centre, explores the role of railways in Asturian history, with 50 locomotives and carriages, and plenty of choo-choo paraphernalia.

On Playa de Poniente, a little further on from the Museo del Ferrocarril, is the city's new **Acuario** (☎ 958 18 52 20; www.acuariodegijon.com; adult/child €10/5; h 10am-10pm Sep-Jun, 10am-midnight Jul & Aug). This singular aquarium incorporates an Asturian freshwater river environment with trout and salmon and a total of 4000 specimens in 12 separate underwater environments, from the Bay of Biscay to the tropics. Large plastic bubbles have been inserted into the seabed so that you can get a sea-snail's-eye view of proceedings.

The **Museo del Pueblo de Asturias** (☎ 985 18 29 60; Paseo del Dr Fleming 877, La Huelga; adult/senior & student €2.35/1.35), on a large woodland site 2km east of

ALL-IN-ONE CARD

The Gijón Card (€15, valid for three days) gives you entry to all museums and attractions in the city and discounts on others throughout Asturias, free use of town buses and discounts on a whole range of restaurants and *sidrerías* (cider houses). If you make use of the latter, it could work as a money-saver.

the city centre, is a regional ethnographic museum with several traditional buildings, one containing the **Museo de la Gaita**, with bagpipes from Asturias and elsewhere. Take bus 10 from Plaza del Instituto to the Grupo Cultural Covadonga stop, about 400m from the museum.

Parque Arqueológico-Natural de la Campa Torres (☎ 985 30 16 82; adult/senior & student €2.35/1.35), on the Cabo Torres headland 6km northwest of the city centre, is Gijón's birthplace – a Roman and pre-Roman site where you can examine remains of dwellings and cisterns. Take bus M1 or 21 from in front of the marina.

The **Jardín Botánico Atlántico** (Atlantic Botanical Garden; ☎ 985 13 07 13; www.botanicoatlantico.com; adult/senior & student €5.30/2.50; h 10am-9pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Oct-May), 3km east of the city centre, provides an excellent introduction to Cantabrian flora. The grand finale is the Jardín de la Isla, a landscaped park laced with pools and streams, based on the plans of 19th-century industrialist Florencio Valdés. Take bus 4 from Plaza del Instituto.

For swimming, **Playa de San Lorenzo** is a surprisingly good, clean city beach, but rather thin when the tide comes in. Playa de Poniente, west of the Puerto Deportivo, has imported sand and is much broader.

Festivals & Events

Throughout the summer, Gijón finds some excuse for a fiesta almost every week, from the **Semana Negra** (Black Week) arts festival in early July, focusing on detective novels, to the **Fiesta de la Sidra Natural** (Natural Cider Festival) in late August. Varied musical programmes and plenty of partying accompany all these events. The biggest week of all is **Semana Grande** (early to mid-August).

Since 2003 the city has hosted the **Crossroad Festival** rock fest that lasts several days in late August.

GIJÓN MUSEUMS

All Gijón museums are closed on Monday. Opening hours on other days vary by place and season, but the typical timetable is 10am to 1pm (or 11am to 2pm) and 5pm to 7pm or 9pm (depending on the season) Tuesday to Saturday, 11am to 2pm and 5pm to 7pm Sunday. Tourist offices have lists of current hours. Most museums are free, except where otherwise stated. There's no charge for any on Sunday. A single ticket to the three paying museums costs adult/senior & student €3.90/1.90.

Sleeping BUDGET

Albergue Palacio San Andrés de Cornellana (☎ 985 16 06 73; www.alberguegijon.com in Spanish; dm under 26yr/26yr & over €10.85/13; j) This large youth hostel in a late-17th-century palace is quite a way out, in the Contruceas neighbourhood, but it's a quick ride on bus 12.

Hostal Manjón (☎ 985 35 23 78; Plaza del Marqués 1; s/d €35/47) Though basic and in a rather ugly high-rise (1st floor), it is in a good spot, with some rooms overlooking the marina and others facing Palacio de Revillagigedo.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Castilla (☎ 985 34 62 00; http://welcome.to/hcastil lagijon; Calle de la Corrida 50; s/d €54/80; j) Standing beside the lively Plaza Seis de Agosto, the Castilla is a little dated but cosy, with friendly service and good-sized rooms on seven floors with carpet, TV and heating.

Hotel Asturias (☎ 985 35 06 00; www.unionhotelera.com; Plaza Mayor 11; s/d €58.85/82.40) Touched with elegance, Asturias' spacious rooms, with parquet floors, overlook Cimadevilla's main square.

La Casona de Jovellanos (☎ 985 34 20 24; www.lacasonadejovellanos.com in Spanish; Plaza de Jovellanos 1; s/d €62/81.30; p) This antique-furnished 16th-century house (with a lively *chigre*, or Asturian eatery, downstairs) is one of only two hotels in the old heart of town and on one of Cimadevilla's nicest squares.

TOP END

Parador de Gijón Molino Viejo (☎ 985 37 05 11; www.parador.es; Parque de Isabel la Católica s/n; s/d €115.60/144.50; p a) In a building that spreads out discreetly at one end of the city's most pleasing parks, this is, for the moment, about the nicest top-end digs. Rooms are modern and comfortable but those with park views cost another €20.

In 2007, a new hotel and spa centre, Talasoponiente, is due for completion on the waterfront and will likely become *the* place to stay and play in Gijón.

Eating

The newer part of the city centre offers many options, but the most atmospheric area is Cimadevilla.

BUDGET

Casa Fernando (☎ 985 34 59 13; Plaza del Marqués 5) and **El Centenario** (☎ 985 34 35 61; Plaza Mayor 7) are two typical seafood joints in Cimadevilla.

Among more exotic local specialities are *oricios* (sea urchins) and *centollos* (spider crabs). *Raciones* go for around €5 to €15, cider for €2.50 per bottle. More *sidrerías* are found a bit further up in Cimadevilla and indeed all over town.

MIDRANGE

El Salero (☎ 985 17 04 43; Calle del Horno 3; meal €20-25) A trendy little eatery, the 'Saltshaker' offers ethnic décor and a series of tempting, modest dishes, ranging from bulging salads to rice dishes and varied *raciones*.

Restaurante Mercante (☎ 985 35 02 44; Cuesta del Cholo 2; meal €25-35) For views of the port while you munch on your fish and seafood, this is a great spot. On warm days, grab a table on the cobbled terrace, otherwise head upstairs. It's a bit of a knockabout place, full of atmosphere and always packed. It does a huge *parrillada de pescado* (mixed fish grill; €38 for two).

San (☎ 984 19 00 16; Paseo del Muro 6; meal €30) Sick of hearty Asturian fare? This is a rare chance to make an Asian getaway with a pretty reasonable Japanese menu. The sushi, maki and sashimi are nicely presented. Tempura and other options (some decidedly un-Japanese) complete the picture in this blue-tinted restaurant.

Casa Zabala (☎ 985 34 17 31; Calle del Vizconde de Campo Grande 2; meal €30-40; T Tue-Sat, lunch only Sun) A fine eatery, nestled in among the many estimable *sidrerías* around Cimadevilla, Casa Zabala is good for seafood and fish of a more sophisticated ilk than you generally encounter hereabouts. The old-time looks have been maintained, and it's not everywhere you'll be served mullet in a *txacoli* (Basque white wine) sauce.

Drinking

Gijón can be a lively place after dark. New closing regulations mean that normal bars must shut by 1.30am Sunday to Thursday and 3.30am on weekends. Those licensed to have bands and DJs (and many fall into this category) can remain open until 3.30am during the week and 5.30am on weekends. Clubs disgorge their punters at 7.30am. The folks here really are deprived!

The *sidrerías* in Cimadevilla and around town are a fun way to start the night (and inject some food), and further up in Cimadevilla, a youthful music-bar scene flourishes in spots around Plaza Corrada and down Calle Vicaría.

Kitsch Café (Calle Rectoría 8; T 11am-1.30am Sun-Thu, 5pm-3.30am Fri & Sat) provides a suitably low-lit ambience before clubbing, while **Café Dam** (www.cafedam.net in Spanish; Calle de San Agustín 14; T 7pm-2.30am Sun-Thu, 7pm-5.30am Fri & Sat) is a great den for live music and DJs.

A more mature crowd descends upon the string of back-to-back bars and clubs along Calle de Rodríguez San Pedro – ranging from salsa dens **Cubanísimo** (☎ 985 17 25 17; 35 Calle de Rodríguez San Pedro) and **La Bodeguita del Medio** (☎ 985 35 21 46; 43 Calle de Rodríguez San Pedro) to **Ca Beleño** (☎ 984 29 22 53; 39 Calle de Rodríguez San Pedro), with jazz and Celtic sounds.

Entertainment

The tourist office will print off a list of bars and clubs if you ask nicely.

Sala Albéniz (☎ 985 35 65 13; www.sala-albeniz.com in Spanish; Calle de San Bernardo 62; cover €6-10; T 1am-7.30am Fri & Sat, 6.30pm-2am Sun) This large nightclub is a venue for touring bands. Otherwise, Friday night is house night, as is Saturday from 4am on, after the live music is over.

Getting There & Away BUS

Buses fan out across Asturias and beyond from the ALSA bus station (☎ 985 34 27 11; Calle de Magnus Blikstad). Hourly buses run to Villaviciosa (€2.30, 45 minutes) and up to eight daily to Ribadesella (€5.25 to €6.15, 1½ to 1¾ hours). A similar number go to Llanes (€7.45, 1¾ to two hours) en route to Santander and San Sebastián. Westwards, up to eight go to Cudillero (€4.30, one hour and 10 minutes) and Luarca (€8.25, 1½ hours).

TRAIN

The main train station is Estación Cercanías (Plaza del Humedal), though it isn't only used by suburban trains. The other station, Jovellanos, is 600m west. See p517 for trains between Oviedo and Gijón.

FEVE (☎ 985 34 24 15), using Estación Cercanías only, runs *cercanías* to/from Cudillero (€2.20, 1½ hours) hourly on weekdays, half as often on weekends. Others run as far as Ferrol (€18.80, 6½ hours).

EAST COAST

Mostly Spanish holiday-makers seek out a summer spot on the beaches and coves along the coast east of Gijón, backed by the Picos de Europa, which rise as little as 15km inland.

Villaviciosa & Around

pop 15,390

Apart from the Iglesia de Santa María, a late-Romanesque structure, Villaviciosa's pretty centre is mostly a child of the 18th century. Calle García Caveda, the main street in the old town, is lined with noble houses.

The surrounding area is sprinkled with often diminutive and ancient churches. One that shouldn't be missed is the pre-Romanesque Iglesia de San Salvador de Valdediós (☎ 985 89 23 24; admission €1; T 11am-1pm & 4.30-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, 11.15am-1pm Tue-Fri, 4-5.30pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar), about 9km southwest, off the road to Pola de Siero. It was built in AD 893 as part of a palace complex for Alfonso III El Magno in what Asturias dubbed 'God's Valley', but archaeologists have failed to find any remnant beyond this simple church. Next door is the Romanesque Iglesia y Monasterio de Santa María de la Cistercian persuasion, open for guided tours. Oviedo-bound buses from Villaviciosa can drop you at San Pedro de Ambás, from where it's a 2km walk to the site.

Another fine Romanesque church is the Iglesia de San Juan de Amandi, 1.5km south of Villaviciosa in Amandi.

In Villaviciosa itself, which you could easily leave off your itinerary, there are 13 hotels and *pensiones*. One of the more attractive is the Hotel Casa España (☎ 985 89 20 30; www.hcasaeapana.com in Spanish; Plaza de Carlos I 3; s/d €56.70/70.60), with old-style rooms in the prettiest point of the town.

La Casona de Amandi (☎ 985 89 01 30; d €119.85-139; T), a 19th-century farmhouse in Amandi, is a treat. Rooms, all of which ooze their own character and vary in size, contain Isabelline furnishings.

Facing the sea on the western side of the Ria de Villaviciosa is the minute port village of Tazones, 11km north of Villaviciosa along the AS256 and then the VV5. Carlos I supposedly first landed in Spain here in 1517. It's a popular spot with a cluster of seafood restaurants and three places to stay, including the twin portside hotel-restaurants Hotel Imperial (☎ 985 89 71 16) and Hotel El Pescador (☎ 985 89 70 77). In either a simple double will cost up to €55 in August. The best restaurant is the portside Restaurante Rompeolas (☎ 985 89 70 13; Calle de San Miguel 21; meal €30-40). Opening times in all spots outside the high summer period can be dodgy.

The eastern side of the estuary is covered by the broad golden sands of the Playa de Rodiles. Surfers might catch a wave here in late

summer. **Camping La Ensenada** (☎ 985 99 61 56; sites per 2 people, car & tent €12), open year-round at Playa de Rodiles, is a beachfront camping ground that has laundry facilities and a restaurant.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

ALSA provides up to 11 buses daily to/from Oviedo (€3.30, 35 minutes to one hour) and Ribadesella (€3, 35 to 55 minutes), as well as an hourly service to/from Gijón (€2.30, 30 to 45 minutes). From early July to early September a 12.45pm bus runs to Playa de Rodiles, returning six hours later.

Lastres

Apart from a few sandy beaches, the only worthwhile stop along the 40km stretch between Villaviciosa and Ribadesella is the precarious cliffside fishing village of Lastres, a scruffier version of Cudillero (see p524), with a couple of 16th-century churches thrown in.

Ribadesella

pop 6360

Unless you've booked in advance, stay away from here on the first weekend after 2 August, when the place goes mad for the **Río Sella canoe festival** (see p530). Otherwise, Ribadesella is a low-key resort. Its two halves, split by the Sella's estuary, are joined by a long, low bridge. The western half has a good, expansive beach, Playa de Santa Marina, while the older part of town and fishing harbour are on the eastern side.

The **tourist office** (☎ 985 86 00 38; www.ribadesella.com in Spanish; h 10am-10pm Jul & Aug, 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun Sep-Jun) is at the eastern end of the Sella bridge.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

To see some real cave paintings (as opposed to the copies at Altamira in Cantabria), plan on visiting the **Cueva de Tito Bustillo** (☎ 985 86 11 20; adult/senior, student & child €4/2; h 10am-5.15pm Wed-Sun Apr-late Sep). The cave drawings here, mostly of horses, are roughly 14,000 years old.

The site is a short distance south of the western end of the Sella bridge. Groups enter the cave every 25 minutes. The hour-long 1.5km tour includes some slippery stretches, and is not recommended for children under 11. There's a limit of 360 visitors daily, so turn up early in August, or book ahead by phone or at <http://tematico.princast.es/cultura/yacimientos/entradas.php>.

Several companies can set you up with canoe trips on Río Sella (p530), hire bikes, take you canyoning and so on. **Turaventura** (☎ 985 86 02 67; www.turaventura.com in Spanish; Calle Manuel Caso de la Villa 50) is one company that has been around for a few years.

SLEEPING

Albergue Roberto Frassinelli (☎ 985 86 11 05; www.albergueribadesella.com; Calle de Ricardo Canga; per person under/over 29yr with hostelling card €13.50/15.50; j) Housed in a grand *palacio de indiano* (mansion built by a returnee from the Americas), this REAJ hostel backs onto Playa de Santa Marina. It has two-, four- and six-bed rooms.

Hotel Covadonga (☎ 985 86 01 10; Calle Manuel Caso de la Villa 9; r with shared/private bathroom €55/68) About 100m back from the port in the older part of town, the Covadonga is like a step back in time, a little dusty but full of character and generally booked in August. Downstairs is a boisterous *sidrería*.

Hotel Villa Rosario (☎ 985 86 00 90; www.hotelvillosario.com; Calle Dionisio Ruizsánchez 6; s/d €144.45/169; p a i) This magnificently restored waterfront *palacio de indiano*, an early-20th-century nouveau-riche caprice, is an ideal honeymoon hideaway. All rooms are doubles, with some especially spacious ones (€202), decorated with great taste.

EATING

For food, the busy waterfront *sidrerías* on the eastern side of the river are a good bet.

Casa Gaspar (☎ 985 86 06 76; Calle de López Muñiz 6; meal €15-20) If waves of fish leave you nauseous, you could opt for tapas and cider in copious quantities at Casa Gaspar, in the heart of the old town. On summer nights especially it gets rollicking busy.

Casa Tista (☎ 985 86 09 54; meal €30-35; h Wed-Mon) Want a local tip? For the best in straightforward, fresh fish (grilled or lightly baked) or seafood (sold by weight) head for Casa Tista, 5km east of Ribadesella along the AS263, just after the hamlet of Toriello. Sit inside or under the leafy pergola.

Casa Abelardo (☎ 985 86 08 39; Calle de Manuel Caso de la Villa 20; meal €35) A cut above the rest is this relatively new kid on the block serving up a scrumptious *sopa de marisco* (seafood soup; €8) followed by delicately prepared *pixin al horno* (a local white fish baked to perfection; €21).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The **bus station** (☎ 985 86 13 03; Avenida Palacio Valdés) is about 300m south of the bridge. There are regular services to/from Arriondas (€1.40, 25 minutes), Oviedo (€6.25, 65 minutes to 2½ hours) and Gijón, and eastwards to/from Llanes (€2.10, 30 to 40 minutes), San Vicente de la Barquera and Santander. In July and August a couple of daily buses run to/from Cangas de Onís.

FEVE trains run at least thrice daily to/from Llanes and Oviedo, and two to/from Santander.

Ribadesella to Llanes

Several little beaches and coves await discovery between Ribadesella and Llanes by those with transport and time. About 10km short of Llanes, Playa de San Antolin is a vast, unprotected beach where you might pick up the odd wave.

Three kilometres further on is the village-cum-understated holiday resort of Barro. Its main beach is a bit bigger than the average cove and not too crowded. A little exploration here will turn up all sorts of pretty white-sand inlets. Stay at **Hostal La Playa** (☎ 985 40 07 66; d €70; p), just behind the beach.

Llanes

pop 13,350

Inhabited since ancient times, Llanes was for a long period an independent-minded town and whaling port with its own charter awarded by Alfonso IX of León in 1206. Today, with a small medieval core and bustling harbour, it's one of northern Spain's more popular holiday destinations – a handy base for some very pretty beaches and with the Picos de Europa close at hand.

The **tourist office** (☎ 985 40 01 64; www.llanes.com; Calle Alfonso IX s/n; h 10am-2pm & 5-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 10am-2pm & 4-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun mid-Sep-mid-Jun) is in La Torre, a tower left over from Llanes' 13th-century defences.

Of the three town beaches, Playa de Toró to the east is easily the best. Westwards along a 2.5km cliff-top path, the Paseo de San Pedro leads to the village of Poo.

The **Basílica** (Plaza de Cristo Rey), the town's main and mostly Gothic church, was begun in 1240 and is worth a quick inspection if you find it open.

Strewn alongside the far end of the pier like a set of children's blocks are the Cubes of

Memory, painter Agustín Ibarrola's playful public artwork using the port's breakwater as his canvas.

SLEEPING

In the June to mid-September period, booking, especially at weekends, is virtually essential, as Llanes fills to the brim.

Pensión La Guía (☎ 985 40 25 77; www.pensionlaguia.com; Plaza de Parres Sobrón 1; d €60) Just west of the river, this 300-year-old house has plenty of charm, with glassed-in balconies overlooking the plaza. The structure is a web of dark timber beams and terracotta floors, although the rooms themselves are plainer.

Hotel Sablon's (☎ 985 40 07 87; www.hotelsablon.com in Spanish; Playa del Sablón 1; s/d with beach views & breakfast €102.70/119.85) This is a modest, low-level modern hotel overlooking the smaller of the town beaches. Rooms are clean-cut with terracotta floors and the best have views straight over the inlet. The hotel's seafood restaurant has a terrace also overlooking the beach.

EATING

Plenty of lively *marisquerías* (seafood eateries) and *sidrerías* line Calles Mayor and de Manuel Cué, so stoking up on sea critters and washing them down with cascades of cider is an easy task.

El Bodegón (☎ 985 40 01 85; Calle Mayor 14; tapas each €3.60-7; h Fri-Wed) A rollicking good-fun place for cider and chips (and more), El Bodegón is very social if you crowd onto one of the outdoor benches on the terrace out the back.

Restaurante Siete Puertas (☎ 985 40 27 51; Calle de Manuel Cué 7; mains €35-45; h daily Jun-Sep, Sat & Sun Oct-May) For more of a gourmet approach to your grub, try the 'Seven Doors', where a cornucopia of *parrillada de pescado* for two will cost you €56. If pigging out is not your deal, the restaurant's *merluza rellena de mariscos* (hake stuffed with seafood) is marginally less filling.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The **bus station** (Calle La Bolera) is east of the river. Five to seven ALSA buses stop in Llanes between Gijón (€7.45, 1¾ hours) and Santander (€5.55, two hours). Regular services also run to/from Oviedo (€8.25, 1¼ to 2¼ hours).

Three or four FEVE trains come here daily from Oviedo and Ribadesella, two of them continuing to Santander.

East of Llanes

The 350m-long **Playa La Ballota** is a particularly attractive beach a few kilometres east of Llanes, hemmed in by green cliffs and accessible by dirt track; part of it is for nudists. **Playa de la Franca**, further towards Cantabria, is also nice and has a summer camping ground.

WEST COAST Cudillero

pop 1850
Cudillero is the most picturesque fishing village on the Asturian coast, and it knows it. The houses, painted varying pastel shades, cascade down to a tiny port on a narrow inlet. Despite its touristy feel, Cudillero is cute and remains reasonably relaxed, even in mid-August when almost every room in town is occupied. For a good map of area beaches, stop by the **tourist information office** (☎ 985 59 13 77; www.cudillero.org; 10am-9pm daily Jul & Aug, 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun Sep-Jun) by the port, which is also the only place to park.

The main activity is watching the fishing boats come in (between 5pm and 8pm) and unload their catch, then sampling fish, molluscs and urchins at the *sidrerías*.

BEACHES

The coast around here is a particularly appealing sequence of cliffs and beaches. The nearest beach is the fine, sandy **Playa de Aguilar**, a 3km drive or walk east. Those to the west include **Playa Concha de Arredo** (4km) and the pretty **Playa de San Pedro** (10km).

Playa del Silencio (also called El Gavieiru), 15km west of Cudillero, could certainly qualify as one of Spain's most beautiful beaches: a long sandy cove backed against a natural rock amphitheatre. Take the exit for Novellana and follow signs to Castañeras.

SLEEPING

Accommodation in the village of Cudillero is limited, especially during the low season when some places shut down.

Camping L'Amuravela (☎ 985 59 09 95; www.lamu.ravela.com in Spanish; sites per 2 people, car & tent €18.10; 1 Mar-Nov; ☼) At the village of El Pito, about 1.5km southeast (uphill) from the town centre, this is the closest camping ground to town. Facilities include a big playground and bungalows for up to five people.

Hotel Casa Prendes (☎ 985 59 15 00; Calle San José 4; d €78) This blue-fronted stop is a nicely main-

tained port hotel. Single rates (€45 to €55) are available outside August. The same people also rent apartments.

La Casona de Pío (☎ 985 59 15 12; www.arrakis.es /-casonadepio in Spanish; Calle Riofrio 3; s/d €66.35/83.50) Just back from the port area is this charming stone house, featuring 11 very comfortable rooms with a rustic touch, and a good restaurant.

Plenty of hotels, *casas de aldea* (village houses), *pensiones* and apartments are scattered around the countryside within a few kilometres. Ask at the tourist office.

EATING

There's no shortage of eateries down towards the port: a meal with drinks is likely to cost you around €25 in most places.

Sidrería El Patrón (Calle de Suárez Inclán 2; meal €20) Back up the road a bit from the port, this is where many locals hang out for *raciones* of seafood or cheese and sausage or ham platters (€5 to €15).

El Faro (☎ 985 59 15 32; Calle del Riofrio 3; meal €20-30; 1 Thu-Tue) is an attractive eatery hidden one street back from the port. A combination of stone, timber and blue décor creates a welcoming atmosphere in which to dig into an *arroz caldoso* (a seafood and rice stew).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The bus station is at the top of the hill, 800m from the port, and the FEVE train station is 1km further inland. See p517 and p521 for more information.

Luarca

pop 5180
More dishevelled than Cudillero, Luarca has a similar setting in a deep valley running down to a larger harbour full of small fishing boats. It's a base for some good nearby beaches.

The **tourist office** (☎ 985 64 00 83; www.luarca-turismo.com in Spanish; Calle Caleros 11; 10am-2pm & 4.30-6.30pm Tue-Fri, 10.30am-2pm & 5-7pm Sat, noon-2pm Sun) is behind the town hall.

Kids will not want to miss the **Aula del Mar** (☎ 985 47 03 70; admission €3; 11am-1pm & 4-9pm), 1.5km uphill in the Villar district. It features a collection of giant squid, along with some 700 other marine species.

BEACHES

Sandy, 600m-long **Playa de Cueva**, 7km east of Luarca, is one of the best beaches in the district, with cliffs, caves and occasional

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hotel Villa La Argentina (☎ 985 64 01 02; www.villalaargentina.com; s/d/ste €84.50/90/112.35; 10-12) This 1899 *casa de indios* (named for those Spaniards who made their fortune in Latin America) is now a comfy 12-room hotel amid lovely gardens that drips with *belle époque* elegance. Antique furniture brings warmth to the rooms, with their high ceilings, chandeliers and understated decoration. Between meals, play tennis or billiards, or dip in the pool. It's in the Villar district about 1.5km southeast (uphill) from Luarca.

decent surf. Five kilometres further on, **Cabo Busto** will give you some sense of the Asturian coast's wildness as waves crash onto the jagged, rocky cliffs. **Playa de Otur**, 8km west of Luarca, and **Playa de Barayo**, 1km further, are good sandy beaches in pretty bays. Barayo is a protected natural reserve at the mouth of a river winding through wetlands and dunes. To reach it, turn off the N634 at Puerto de Vega and head for the village of Vigo, then follow signs (which are painted on the road) for the beach. From the car park, the beach is accessible by a well-marked 30-minute nature hike.

SLEEPING & EATING

At least seven hotels and *hostales* are on or just off the central Plaza de Alfonso X, including three cheapies in Calle Crucero. Several seafood eateries dot the waterfront.

Hotel La Colmena (☎ 985 64 02 78; Calle de Uria 2; s/d €40/55; j) On the corner of the street and Plaza de Alfonso X, this comfortable hotel has some nice touches, such as the dark parquet floors, high ceilings and tall windows.

Restaurante Sport (☎ 985 64 10 78; Calle de Rivero 8; meal €30-35; 1 Thu-Tue) This seafood restaurant is hidden a few steps away from the waterfront. It's an elegant dining option, where you might slurp a half-dozen oysters (€7.20) as a starter. Catch of the day is sold at €6 per 100g, as are such north-coast delicacies as *percebes* (goose barnacles; €10).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Seven daily ALSA buses run to/from Oviedo (€7.65, 1½ hours) and along the coast as far as Ribadeo (Galicia). A couple come from Gijón,

too. The FEVE train station is 800m south of the town centre: three trains run daily to/from Cudillero and Oviedo, and two along the coast to/from Ferrol (Galicia).

Coaña & Río Navia

The small town of Coaña lies about 4km inland of the port of Navia, west of Luarca. A couple of kilometres beyond is the **Castro de Coaña** (☎ 985 97 84 01; adult/child €3/1.50, Wed free; 11am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, 11am-3pm Mon-Fri, 11am-1pm & 4-5pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar), one of the best-preserved Celtic settlements in northern Spain and well worth visiting.

From the *castro* (Celtic-fortified village), a road snakes its way high above the cobalt-blue Río Navia, through classic Asturian countryside – meadows alternating with rocky precipices – to Lugo in Galicia, crossing some of Galicia's least-visited and wildest territory, around the town of Fonsagrada.

Tapia de Casariego

pop 4480
This welcoming fishing haven makes a pleasant lunch stop if you're driving, but little more. If you get stuck here, you'll find a half-dozen options for stopping overnight. Beaches along the next few kilometres west, such as **Playa Anquileiro**, **Playa La Paloma**, **Playa de Serantes** and **Playa de Santa Gadea**, all boast surfable waves, and there are several surf shops in Tapia.

Castropol & Around

pop 4380
Ría de Ribadeo marks the frontier between Asturias and Galicia. Spanning the broad mouth of this, the first of the many grand estuaries that slice into Galicia's coast, is the Puente de los Santos.

Whitewashed Castropol village, on a rise a few kilometres up the eastern side of the *ría* (estuary), is a tranquil alternative to Ribadeo, Galicia, the town on the other side. From Castropol, the N640 southwest to Lugo forms a little-travelled back route into Galicia.

Camping Playa Penarronda (☎ 985 62 30 22; sites per 2 people, car & tent €32.30; 1 Easter-Sep) is set on the fringe of the broad, open Playa de Penarronda beach, 7km northeast of Castropol, and offers a café and shop as well as bicycle hire.

One of two hotels at the northern entrance into Castropol, **Hotel Casa Vicente** (☎ 985 63 50 51; Carretera General; s/d €37.45/51.40) has 14 rooms, half of which give matchless views of the *ría*.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Palacete Peñalba (☎ 985 63 61 25; www.telpalacetepenalba.com in Spanish; Calle Granda s/n; d €99-130) Like a haughty countess, this lovely early-20th-century mansion complex stands amid almost 2 sq km of sculpted gardens studded with palms, magnolias and statues in Figueras del Mar, 4km north of Castropol and a mere 200m from the beach. A total of 19 rooms are spread out over two buildings, one of them a Modernista gem. The best rooms are akin to royal apartments, furnished with the careful taste of a bygone era.

INLAND WESTERN ASTURIAS

Although it's mostly difficult to reach unless you're driving, there's some gorgeous country in southwest Asturias. Even just passing through on alternative routes into Castilla y León, such as the AS227 via the 1486m Puerto de Somiedo, or the spectacular 1525m Puerto de Letiriegos on the AS213, can be rewarding.

Salas

pop 1600

Drivers between Oviedo and Luarca could take, instead of the standard highways, the pretty N634, which snakes up and down lush valleys northwest of Oviedo. At Salas, 48km from Oviedo, it soon becomes clear that the town's most famous son was Grand Inquisitor Fernando de Valdés Salas, who also founded Oviedo's university in the 16th century. His castle has been converted into the Hotel Castillo de Valdés Salas, and his elaborate alabaster tomb is inside the nearby Colegiata de Santa María.

Charming Hotel Castillo de Valdés Salas (☎ 985 83 01 73; www.castillovaldesalas.com in Spanish; Plaza Campa; s/d €64/80), gathered around a quiet courtyard lined by a polished timber gallery, is in a beautiful 16th-century building. Rooms are simple enough but attractive with parquet and iron bed heads. The enchantment is in the rest of the building.

Regular ALSA buses run to/from Oviedo (€3.65, 1¼ hours).

Senda del Oso

Between the villages of Tuñón and Entrago, southwest of Oviedo, the Senda del Oso is a 20km concrete walking and cycling path that follows the course of a former mine railway

through fields, riverbank woodlands and canyons. About 5km south of Tuñón, the path passes the Monte del Oso (Bear Mountain), where Paca and Tola, two Asturian brown bears orphaned by a hunter in 1989, live in semi-liberty in a 40,000-sq-metre compound. Each day around noon, except during their hibernation from about December to February, the bears are fed at a spot where their compound borders the path and you stand an excellent chance of seeing them. One kilometre southwest of this spot, in Proaza, is the Casa del Oso (☎ 985 76 10 53; admission free; h 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat & Sun), with a restaurant, shop and interesting exhibits on Spanish brown bears, which, apart from a handful (about 20) in the Pyrenees, survive only in the Cordillera Cantábrica, where they number around 170.

In Proaza, Hotel Peñas Juntas (☎ 985 76 14 63; Plaza de la Abadía; d with bathroom €50) has cosy rooms.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

The bear feeding spot is a 15-minute walk from the AS228 Trubia-Tuñón-Entrago road, 2km north of Proaza: watch for the 'Cercado Osero' sign and car park. Three daily buses run from Oviedo bus station to Entrago via Tuñón and Proaza. During the main visitor periods, you can hire bicycles at various points along the Senda del Oso.

Parque Natural de Somiedo

If you fancy exploring some dramatic mountain country that few foreigners know of, consider this 300-sq-km protected area on the northern flank of the Cordillera Cantábrica. Composed of five valleys descending from the cordillera's 2000m-plus main ridge, the park is characterised by lush woodlands and high pastures dotted with thatched shepherds' shelters. It's also the main bastion of Spain's remaining brown bear population.

Each of the valleys has a number of marked walking trails, which you can find out about at the park's Centro de Recepción (☎ 985 76 37 58; h 10am-2.30pm & 4-9pm mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri & Sun, 10am-2.30pm & 4-9pm Sat mid-Sep-mid-Jun) in the small village of Pola de Somiedo. Pola also has a bank, supermarket and half-a-dozen budget and midrange places to stay. One of the best walking areas is the Valle de Lago, whose upper reaches contain a number of glacial lakes and high summer pastures. There is a camping ground, *hostal*

and hotel in Valle de Lago hamlet, a good starting point for walks, 8km southeast of Pola de Somiedo.

Two daily buses (one on weekends) run to/from Oviedo to Pola de Somiedo (€6.55, 1¼ to two hours).

PICOS DE EUROPA

These jagged, deeply fissured mountains straddling Asturias, Cantabria and the north-east of Castilla y León province amount to some of the finest walking country in Spain, offering plentiful short and long outings for striders of all levels, plus lots of scope for climbers and cavers, too.

Beginning only 15km from the coast, and stretching little more than 40km from east to west and 25km north to south, the Picos still encompass enough spectacular mountain and gorge scenery to ensure a continual flow of Spanish and international visitors. They comprise three limestone massifs, whose geological structure is unique in Spain and similar to that of the Alps: the eastern Macizo Ándara, with a summit of 2444m; the western Macizo El Cornión, rising to 2596m; and the particularly rocky Macizo Central or Macizo Los Urrieles, reaching 2648m. The 647-sq-km Parque Nacional de los Picos de Europa covers all three massifs and is Spain's second-biggest national park. Some websites worth checking out include www.turismopicosdeeuropa.com



WARNING

The Picos de Europa are not the highest mountains in Spain, but walkers and climbers should come armed with a dose of respect. The weather is notoriously changeable, and mist, rain, cold and snow are common problems. Higher up, few trails are marked and water sources are rare. Paying insufficient attention to these details has cost several lives over the years. National park information offices and tourist offices will readily give you a list of mountain-safety tips.

(in Spanish), www.liebanaypicosdeeuropa.com and also www.picosdeeuropa.com (in Spanish).

Virtually deserted in winter, the area is full to bursting in August and you should always try to book ahead, whether you are heading for a hotel or a mountain *refugio* (refuge).

Orientation

The main access towns for the Picos are Cangas de Onís in the northwest, Arenas de Cabrales in the central north and Potes in the southeast. Paved roads lead from Cangas southeast up to Covadonga, Lago de Enol and Lago de la Ercina; from Arenas south up to Poncebos then east up to Sotres and Tresviso; and from Potes west to Fuente Dé. The mountains are roughly bounded on the western side by Río Sella and the N625 Cangas de Onís–Riaño road; on the north by the AS114 Cangas de Onís–Arenas de Cabrales–Panés road; and on the east by Río Deva and the N621 Panés–Potes road.

MAPS & GUIDEBOOKS

The best maps of the Picos, sold in shops in Cangas de Onís, Potes and elsewhere for €4 to €5 each, are Adrados Ediciones' *Picos de Europa* (1:80,000), *Picos de Europa Macizos Central y Oriental* and *Picos de Europa Macizo Occidental* (1:25,000).

Information

The national park's main information office, in Cangas de Onís, is **Casa Dago** (☎ 985 84 86 14; Avenida de Covadonga 43; 17 9am–2pm & 5–6.30pm Mon–Sat, 9am–3pm Sun Easter–mid-Oct, 9am–2pm & 4–6.30pm Mon–Sat mid-Oct–Easter). Other park information offices are in **Posada de Valdeón** (☎ 987 74 05 49;

Travesía de los Llanos, 17 9am–2pm & 5–6.30pm Mon–Sat, 9am–3pm Sun Easter–mid-Oct, 9am–2pm & 4–6.30pm Mon–Sat mid-Oct–Easter) and in **Cillorigo de Liebana** (☎ 942 73 81 09; Avenida Luis Cuevas 2A; 17 9am–8pm Jul–Sep, 9am–6pm Oct–Jun) in Cantabria. Basic information on walks and accommodation is available at these offices. Local tourist offices can usually provide information on nearby sections of the park, as well as on their own towns.

Cangas de Onís, Arenas de Cabrales and Potes all have banks, ATMs and good supermarkets. Cangas and Potes are the best places to buy walking boots, waterproof clothing and other outdoor equipment.

Camping within the national park is permitted only above 1600m and only overnight: tents can only be erected in the evening and must be taken down in the morning.

WHEN TO GO

The weather across northern Spain is similar to what you'd find in the UK, Ireland or Brittany, and in the Picos it's notoriously changeable, although the southeast parts of the Picos are drier than further north and west.

In August most of Spain is taking its holidays and finding rooms anywhere near the Picos is hard. July is not far behind. May, June and September are the best times to visit – more tranquil and just as likely to be sunny as August. Most serious walkers and climbers choose September, as it tends to be the driest month. Drivers should note that chains are often needed in winter.

WHAT TO BRING

For the walks mentioned here, you don't need special equipment. But sun protection (hats, sunscreen, sunglasses, adequate covering of clothes) is essential, as is a water bottle – sources of drinkable water are irregular. Walking boots are advisable, if not absolutely necessary on every route, and even on a sunny day you should take some items of warmer and waterproof clothing. For any treks or climbs off established tracks, you'll need the appropriate gear and experience.

GUIDED WALKS

The national park offers free guided walks of between three and six hours daily in July, August and September. Routes vary according to the day of the week; pick up a programme at an information office. Most guides speak Spanish only.

FAUNA

Although some wolves and the odd brown bear still survive in the Picos, you're highly unlikely to see either. Far more common is the *rebeco* (chamois), a kind of cross between antelope and mountain goat. Around 6500 of them skip around the rocks and steep slopes. Deer, foxes, badgers, wild boar, hedgehogs, squirrels and martens, in various quantities, inhabit the more wooded areas.

A variety of eagles, hawks and other raptors fill the Picos' skies, but you'd be lucky to catch sight of the majestic *águila real* (golden eagle) or the huge scavenging *buitre leonado* (griffon vulture) or Egyptian vulture. Choughs, with their unmistakable caws, accompany walkers at the highest altitudes.

Getting There & Around

Trying to taste the main delights of the Picos by public transport can be a frustrating matter, if you're not hanging around long enough to crisscross them on foot. Just a few bus and train services – mostly summer only – will get you into the hills or to the edge of them.

An alternative to the buses for getting around the Picos area is taxis. Apart from regular taxis that stick to the better roads, such as **Taxitur** (☎ 985 84 87 97, 689 14 38 81) in Cangas, there are also 4WD taxi services that can manage some of the mountain tracks. One of the latter is operated by **Casa Cipriano** (☎ 985 94 50 24; www.casacipriano.com in Spanish; s/d €30/50) in Sotres (p534). A regular taxi costs around €28 from Cangas de Onís to the Lagos de Covadonga, and about €20 from Arenas de Cabrales to Sotres or Potes to Fuente Dé.

BUS & TRAIN

Details of the following bus and train services change from time to time but the broad outlines described below are likely to be maintained.

Oviedo–Panés

From Oviedo, ALSA has up to 12 buses daily to Arriondas (€4.80, 50 minutes to 1¼ hours) and 10 to Cangas de Onís (€5.35, 1½ hours). About half of the Cangas buses continue to Arenas de Cabrales (€7.60, two hours 10 minutes), and one or two go on to Niserias and Panés. At Panés you can switch to/from buses running between Santander and Potes (but make sure you get the timetables right!). Depending on the day, the last bus from Panés towards Oviedo leaves at 4pm.

Arriondas is also on the FEVE railway line between Oviedo, Ribadesella, Llanes and Santander.

Cangas–Covadonga

Up to four ALSA buses daily run to Covadonga from Cangas de Onís (€1.10, 20 minutes). In July, August and early September services are more frequent. On weekends and holidays year-round, three buses run from Oviedo to Covadonga (€6.15); in summer there are two on weekdays as well; otherwise, change in Arriondas or Cangas. The last bus down from Covadonga is at 8pm in summer, and as early as 5.15pm at other times.

Covadonga–Lago de Enol

In July, August and early September four or five buses a day travel from Covadonga up to Lago de Enol (30 minutes) and return.

Cangas–Ribadesella/Llanes

To travel just between Cangas and Ribadesella or Llanes you normally need to change buses at Arriondas, which is linked with the pair of coastal towns by up to 12 buses daily and four FEVE trains. In July, August and early September, however, up to three daily buses run from Cangas to Ribadesella and return.

Cangas–Oseja de Sajambre

A weekday (twice daily from late June to early September) bus links these two spots (€2.30, one hour).

Poncebos & Garganta del Cares

From July to early September up to three buses go between Arenas de Cabrales and Poncebos Monday to Friday (but only one on weekends). In the same period a daily ALSA bus runs in the morning from Oviedo to Cangas de Onís and Posada de Valdeón, then in the afternoon/evening from Poncebos back to Cangas and Oviedo. The idea is that you walk the 8km road along the Cares valley from Posada to Caín, then along the Garganta del Cares gorge to Poncebos, and be picked up at the end. Buses to/from Llanes, Ribadesella and Gijón connect with this service at Cangas de Onís.

Arenas de Cabrales–Llanes

ALSA buses link Arenas de Cabrales with Llanes daily in the morning and afternoon (€2.60 to €4.95, one to two hours depending on the route).

Santander–Picos

From Santander, **Autobuses Palomera** (☎ 942 88 06 11) travels via San Vicente de la Barquera to Panes, Urdón, La Hermida, Lebeña and Potes (€6.25, 2½ hours), and returns, two or three times daily. In July and August, the line is sometimes extended to Fuente Dé (about 50 minutes) and adds one or two return services between Potes and Fuente Dé.

WESTERN PICOS

Arriondas

pop 2210

Arriondas is the starting point for easy and popular canoe trips down pretty Rio Sella to various end points between Fries and Llovio (13km to 16km). That is about the limit of the interest in this otherwise dreary provincial town.

At least a dozen agencies in town will rent you a canoe, paddle, life jacket and waterproof container, show you how to paddle and bring you back to Arriondas at the end. Try these agencies:

Astur Aventura (☎ 985 84 10 02; www.asturaventura.net in Spanish; Calle Río Piloña)

Jaire (☎ 985 84 14 64; www.canoasdelasella.com in Spanish; Calle Juan Carlos I No 7)

The standard charge, including a picnic lunch, is €23 per person. Excursions set off around 11am. Bring a change of clothes. Agencies in Cangas de Onís and nearby coastal towns offer much the same deal, including transport to Arriondas and return.

This stretch of the Sella has a few entertaining minor rapids, but it's not a serious white-water affair, and anyone from about eight years old can enjoy this outing, which for most people lasts four or five hours. In summer you can stop off at a couple of temporary riverside cafés.

The river is easily at its busiest on the first Saturday after 2 August when 1500 canoes head downriver from Arriondas to Ribadesella, in the **Descenso Internacional del Sella**, a major international canoeing event.

Arriondas has a range of accommodation, including the basic **Camping Sella** (☎ 985 84 09 68; sites per 2 people, car & tent €15; ½ mid-Jun–mid-Sep), about 100m from Río Sella, and **Hotel La Estrada** (☎ 985 84 07 67; www.laestradahotel.com in Spanish; Calle Inocencio del Valle 1; s/d €45/70; p). Breakfast is included in the room price at La Estrada.

Cangas de Onís

pop 3990

Good King Pelayo, after his victory at Covadonga, moved about 12km down the hill to settle the base of his nascent Asturian kingdom at Cangas in AD 722. Cangas' big moment in history lasted 70 years or so, until the capital was moved elsewhere. Its second boom time arrived in the late 20th century with the invasion of Picos de Europa tourists. In August, especially, the largely modern and rather drab town is full to bursting with trekkers, campers and holiday-makers, many desperately searching for a room – a common story throughout eastern Asturias in high summer.

INFORMATION

The **tourist office** (☎ 985 84 80 05; www.cangasdeonis.com in Spanish; Jardines del Ayuntamiento 2; ½ 10am–9pm Jul & Aug, 10am–2pm & 4–7pm Mon–Sat, 10am–2pm Sun Sep–Jun) is just off the main street, Avenida de Covadonga. **Casa Dago** (☎ 985 84 86 14; Avenida de Covadonga 43; ½ 9am–2pm & 5–6.30pm Mon–Sat, 9am–3pm Sun Easter–mid-Oct, 9am–2pm & 4–6.30pm Mon–Sat mid-Oct–Easter) provides national park information. Cangas has a fair smattering of banks with ATMs.

SIGHTS

The so-called **Puente Romano** spanning Río Sella, which arches like a cat in fright, is almost certainly medieval rather than Roman, but no less impressive for the mistaken identity. From it hangs a copy of the Cruz de la Victoria, the symbol of Asturias, which resides in Oviedo's cathedral.

The tiny **Capilla de Santa Cruz** (Avenida Contranquil; ½ 10am–1pm & 3–6.30pm Tue–Sun Jul–mid-Sep, Sat & Sun mid-Sep–Jun) marks the site of a millennia-old shrine, though the chapel itself was placed there in the 1940s. Within the crypt is a megalithic tomb.

Parque de la Naturaleza La Grandera (☎ 985 94 00 17; ½ 11am–8.30pm daily Easter–Sep, Tue–Sun Oct–Easter) at Soto de Cangas, 3km east on the Covadonga road, offers the chance to observe captive bears, wolves, birds of prey and other Spanish wildlife that you would be pretty lucky to see on the trail.

ACTIVITIES

Many agencies offer a range of activities, including canoeing on Río Sella, horse riding (€15 per hour), canyoning (€36 for two to three hours) and caving (€22 to €25 for two to three hours). There are several agencies:

Cangas Aventura (☎ 985 84 92 61; http://cangasaventura.galeon.com in Spanish; Avenida de Covadonga 17)

Frontera Verde (☎ 985 84 14 57; www.fronteraverde.com; El Portazgo)

Los Cauces (☎ 985 94 73 18; www.loscauces.com in Spanish; Avenida de Covadonga 23)

SLEEPING

Cangas has loads of hotels and a few *pensiones*, and there are plenty more of both, plus numerous *casas rurales*, in villages within 10km to 15km of town. Along the road towards Arenas de Cabrales, Soto de Cangas, Mestas de Con and Benia de Onís all have several options. Most places in town can also inform you of apartments available for rent.

Hostal de Casa Fermín (☎ 985 84 84 91; Paseo de Contranquil 3; d €42) Located 500m past the Capilla de Santa Cruz, in a vaguely bucolic setting, this brick structure has bright, simple rooms and a popular summer *sidrería*.

Hotel Santa Cruz (☎ 985 84 94 17; www.hotelsantacruz.net; Avenida Constantino González 11; s/d €64/83) Between the Capilla de Santa Cruz and a big riverside playground, this modern hotel goes for the rustic look. You can increase the comfort factor by opting for a double with its own Jacuzzi (€118).

Hotel Los Lagos (☎ 985 84 92 77; www.loslagos.es in Spanish; Jardines del Ayuntamiento 3; s/d €77/96; a) A standard, middle-ranking hotel, this spot offers a range of rooms. The better doubles are quite spacious and spotless; others are a little cramped. Lodgings are above what is probably the best restaurant in town, Los Arcos (right).

Parador (☎ 985 84 94 02; www.parador.es; Calle de Villanueva s/n; d €144.45; p a) Housed in a one-time monastery amid greenery near Río Sella, this *parador* is the star accommodation option in Cangas. The best rooms are sprawling affairs and the common areas ooze centuries of history.

EATING & DRINKING

Meson Puente Romano (☎ 985 84 81 10; menú del día €10) The terrace is just below the bridge, or you could opt for the lugubrious cellarlike dining room. The set lunch is *fabada* (a hefty Asturian bean stew) followed by *arroz con leche* (rice pudding). The management warns that both dishes are 'abundant'.

Sidrería Restaurante Casa Mario (☎ 985 84 81 05; Avenida de Covadonga 19; meal €20) On the main street just off Jardines del Ayuntamiento, this

sidrería has good *raciones* – try the fish in sea-urchin sauce.

Los Arcos (☎ 985 84 92 77; Jardines del Ayuntamiento 3; meal €30–35; ½ daily) This prize-winning eatery will win you over with such cunning contemporary interpretations of traditional cooking as *ventresca de atún con crema de espárragos*, *polvo de jamón y cubitos de melón* (a tasty cut of tuna stomach with cream of asparagus, ham powder and cubes of melon).

La Sifonería (☎ 985 84 90 55; Calle de San Pelayo 28; ½ Wed–Mon) In business since 1896, this minuscule *sidrería* is well worth dropping by for the fluid stuff and some nicely prepared gourmet snacks.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

You will find the bus stop and local ALSA bus company office opposite the Jardines del Ayuntamiento on Avenida de Covadonga.

Covadonga

The importance of Covadonga, 11km southeast of Cangas de Onís, lies in what it represents rather than what it is. Somewhere hereabouts, in approximately AD 722, the Muslims received their first defeat in Spain at the hands of King Pelayo, who set up the Asturian kingdom considered to be the beginning of the Reconquista – a mere 800-year project.

The place is an object of pilgrimage, for in a cave here, the **Santa Cueva**, the Virgin supposedly appeared to Pelayo's warriors before the battle. On weekends and in summer the queues at the cave, now with a chapel installed, are matched only by the line of cars crawling past towards the Lagos de Covadonga. The **Fuente de Siete Caños** spring, by the pool below the cave, is supposed to ensure marriage within one year to women who drink from it.

Landslides destroyed much of Covadonga in the 19th century and the main church here now, the **Basilica de Covadonga**, is a neo-Romanesque affair built between 1877 and 1901. About 100m from the basilica is the **Museo de Covadonga** (☎ 985 84 60 96; adult/child €3/2; ½ 10.30am–2pm & 3.30–6.30pm Tue–Sun), filled with all sorts of items, mostly donations by the illustrious faithful.

Lagos de Covadonga

Don't let summer traffic queues deter you from continuing the 10km uphill from Covadonga to these two beautiful little lakes. Most of the day-trippers don't get past patting a few cows'

noses near the lakes, so walking here is as nice as anywhere else in the Picos. In August the road can close for an hour or two when the car parks near the lakes can't accept anymore vehicles.

Lago de Enol is the first lake you reach. It's linked to Lago de la Ercina, 1km away, not only by the paved road but also by a footpath via the Centro de Visitantes Pedro Pidal (h 10am-6pm Easter-early Dec), which has information and displays on the Picos and a bookshop. There are rustic restaurants near both lakes, closed in winter. Bathing in the lakes is banned.

When mist descends, the lakes, surrounded by the green pasture and bald rock that characterise this part of the Picos, take on an eerie appearance.

WALKS FROM THE LAKES

Two relatively easy trails begin and end at the lakes. The first leads about 5km south-east, with an ascent of 600m, from Lago de la Ercina to the Vega de Ario, where the Refugio Marqués de Villavicosa (Refugio Vega de Ario: % 650 90 07 60; bunks €8.30), attended and with meal service daily from Easter to early December, has sleeping space for 40 people. The reward for about 2½ hours' effort is magnificent views across the Garganta del Cares (Cares Gorge) to the Macizo Central of the Picos.

The alternative walk takes you roughly south from Lago de Enol to the Refugio de Vegarredonda (% 985 92 29 52; www.vegarredonda.com; bunks €8.30, meal €12.50) and on to the Mirador de Ordiales, a lookout point over a 1km sheer drop into the Valle de Angón. It's about a 3½-hour walk (one way) – relatively easy along a mule track as far as the Refugio de Vegarredonda, then a little more challenging on up to the *mirador*. The 68-place *refugio* is attended year-round.

Desfiladero de los Beyos

The N625 south from Cangas de Onís follows Río Sella upstream through one of the most extraordinary defiles in Europe. The road through the Desfiladero de los Beyos gorge is a remarkable feat of engineering. Towards the southern end of the defile, you cross from Asturias into Castilla y León.

Hotel Puente Vidosa (% 985 94 47 35; www.puentevidosa.com in Spanish; s/d €55.30/64.50; p √), gloriously perched on a bend in the Sella by a waterfall, is 20km south of Cangas. The converted stone house contains 19 lovely rustic rooms with gorge(ous) views, and wood panelling. A pool, sauna and Jacuzzi are being added.

Oseja de Sajambre

pop 380 / elevation 650m

Once inside the province of Castilla y León you'll soon strike Oseja de Sajambre, an average place with magnificent views across the gorge.

The *Hostal Pontón* (% 987 74 03 48; Carretera General; s/d €33/37) is on the main road. You'll probably also be able to find someone who rents rooms privately. There are a couple of restaurants and grocery shops.

Soto de Sajambre

pop 100 / elevation 930m

Pressing on 4km north from Oseja de Sajambre, you reach this much prettier village by a freshwater stream, a great base for hikers. Walks from Soto de Sajambre include La Senda del Arcediano, a very scenic trip of five or six hours north to Amieva, manageable by most walkers, and a more difficult trail eastwards to Posada de Valdeón.

Offering meals and comfortable beds is *Hostal Peñasanta* (% 987 74 03 95; Calle Principal s/n; d €36.50, s/d without bathroom €24.50/30.50), housed in an attractive old stone structure. The owners run the *Albergue Peñasanta* (bunk €9) next door (a sleeping bag is required).

CENTRAL PICOS

A star attraction of the Picos' central massif is the gorge that divides it from the western Macizo El Cornión. The popular Garganta del Cares trail can be busy in summer, but the walk is worthwhile. This part of the Picos also has plenty of less heavily tramped paths and climbing challenges once you've 'done' the Cares. Arenas de Cabrales (or just plain Arenas) and Poncebos are obvious bases.

Arenas de Cabrales

pop 830

Arenas de Cabrales lies at the confluence of Ríos Cares and Casaño, 30km east of Cangas de Onís. The busy main road is lined with hotels, restaurants and bars, and just off it lies a little tangle of quiet squares and back lanes.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

Buses stop next to the tourist office (% 985 84 64 84; h 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Easter & Jul-Sep), which is a kiosk in the middle of town at the junction of the Poncebos road.

SNP Viajes (% 985 84 64 55; www.snptravel.com; Plaza del Castañedo) is an English- and Dutch-speaking

agency that can set you up with guides for walking and cycling treks.

FESTIVALS

On the last Sunday in August a cheese festival is held in this home of fine smelly cheese. Thousands come to enjoy the exhibitions, processions, cheese-making demonstrations and tastings.

SLEEPING

Arenas has a camping ground, about 10 other accommodation options, as well as holiday apartments.

Camping Naranjo de Bulnes (% 985 84 65 78; sites per 2 people, car & tent €22) This large and efficiently run camping ground sits within a chestnut grove, 1.5km east of the town centre on the Panes road.

Hostal Naturaleza (% 985 84 64 87; d €36) About 800m from the centre of Arenas along the road to Poncebos is this quiet little house with a series of smallish but well-scrubbed rooms. The owner, Finá, also has a couple of houses for rent in Arenas.

Hotel Rural El Torrejón (% 985 84 64 28; www.eltorrejon.com in Spanish; r incl breakfast €53) A bright red country house welcomes the weary traveller with tastefully decorated rooms in a rural style with lots of fragrant wood. The setting is idyllic, beside Río Casaño, a couple of minutes' walk from the village centre.

EATING

Restaurante Cares (% 985 84 66 28; meal €25-30) On the western approach into town, this is one of the best restaurants for miles around. Dig into a hearty *cachopo* (breaded veal stuffed

with ham, cheese and vegetables) and finish with *delicias de limón* (between lemon mousse and yogurt).

Garganta del Cares

Nine kilometres of well-maintained path high above Río Cares between Poncebos and Cain constitute, perhaps unfortunately, the most popular mountain walk in Spain; in August the experience is akin to London's Oxford St on a Saturday morning. If you do arrive with the holiday rush, try not to be put off – the walk is a spectacular excursion between two of the Picos' three massifs. If you're feeling fit (or need to get back to your car), it's quite possible to walk the whole 9km and return as a (somewhat tiring) day's outing; it takes about seven hours plus stops.

PONCEBOS & FUNICULAR DE BULNES

Poncebos, a straggle of buildings at the northern end of the gorge, set amid already spectacular scenery, is exclusively dedicated to Picos tourism. A road turning uphill just above the *Penisión Garganta del Cares* leads 1.5km up to the hamlet of Camarmeña, where there's a lookout with views to El Naranjo de Bulnes in the Macizo Central.

A few metres up the Sotres road, just below Poncebos, is the lower end of the *Funicular de Bulnes* (% 985 84 68 00; adult/child return €16.95/5.10; h 10am-8pm Easter & Jul-Sep, 10am-12.30pm & 2-6pm rest of year), a tunnel railway that climbs 2km inside the mountain to the hamlet of Bulnes, which is inaccessible by road. The funicular functions year-round, making the seven-minute trip every half-hour in either direction.

Hotel Garganta del Cares (% /fax 985 84 64 63; Calle de Poncebos; s/d €38/62; h closed 10 Dec-15 Jan; p) offers beds and meals (*menú del día* €8) that are the closest to the Garganta del Cares trail. A classier hotel lies next door.

GARGANTA DEL CARES WALK

By doing the walk from north to south, you save the best till last. Follow the 'Ruta de Cares' sign pointing uphill about 700m along the road from the top end of Poncebos. The beginning involves a steady climb upwards in the wide and mostly bare early stages of the gorge. After about 3km you'll reach some abandoned houses. A little further and you're over the highest point of the walk. You should encounter a couple of drink stands along the way (the stuff is transported by horse).

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hotel Torrecerredo (% 985 84 67 05; www.fade.es/torretours/home.htm; s/d €45/60; p) Taking its name from the Picos' tallest peak (which can sometimes be glimpsed from the dining room), the Torrecerredo is a relaxed place set on a hillside just outside Arenas. Hosted by a friendly Anglo-Spanish couple that also leads excursions, it has 19 solar-powered rooms and a delightful terrace looking over the countryside, plus all-you-can-eat breakfasts (€5 extra). Follow the signs to the left as you enter Arenas from Cangas – it's about 300m uphill.

SAY CHEESE

Northern Spain, with its damp climate supporting healthy herds of dairy cattle (rare elsewhere in the country), makes a greater quantity and variety of cheese than other regions. In Asturias alone some 30 varieties are produced. The Picos de Europa region produces a particularly high number of traditional cheeses, and the Cabrales area, running up into the mountains from the central northern rim of the Picos, is home to one of the most celebrated of all, a powerful bluey-green creation much appreciated by connoisseurs.

The basic raw material of *queso de Cabrales* is untreated cow milk, particularly when obtained in May, June and July. Traditionally, this is mixed with lesser quantities of goat and/or sheep milk, though these are included in less than 20% of cheeses today. The cheese is matured for up to six months in mountain caves.

It's the penicillium fungus that gives the cheese its characteristic hue and creamy consistency – not to mention a rather strong odour. In this case, the bite is every bit as powerful as the olfactory bark, as a good Cabrales cheese tends to have considerable kick.

You can learn more about Cabrales cheese-making at the **Cueva El Cares** (☎ 985 84 67 02; adult/child €2.50/1.50; 🗨 10am–2pm & 4–8pm Apr–Sep, Sat & Sun only Oct–Mar), an exhibition cave south of Arenas along the Poncebos road.

Cabrales goes to town over its cheese on the last Sunday of August, with Arenas hosting cheese-making demonstrations, a cheese judging (with the winning cheese being auctioned for as much as €1200), a folklore festival and thousands of free Cabrales *bocadillos* (filled rolls).

You can distinguish a genuine Cabrales cheese from imitators by its label, which will show a five-pointed green leaf along with the crucial wording 'Denominación de Origen Protegida Cabrales'.

Less well known but equally loved by cheese-lovers is *queso picón* made in eastern Cantabria, especially in the villages of Tresviso and Beges (or Bejes). This is a mix of cow's, sheep's and goat's milk, although there are no set rules on the proportions. It is a high-quality, high-odour cheese.

As you approach the regional boundary with Castilla y León, the gorge becomes narrower and its walls thick with vegetation, creating greater contrast with the alpine heights above. The last stages of the walk are possibly the prettiest, and as you descend nearer the valley floor, you pass through a series of low, wet tunnels to emerge at the end of the gorge among the meadows of Caín. Along the way, there are several paths – most of them on the slippery side – leading down to the river.

CAÍN

If you're coming from the south, the trailhead of the walk is at Caín, where the rickety (and picturesque) road from Posada de Valdeón comes to an end.

Casa Cuevas (☎ 987 74 27 20; r with/without bathroom €36/26) has basic rooms. There are at least two fancier places to stay, plus a couple of bars and restaurants. You'll find further lodgings in the string of villages south of Caín, including Corderianos and the rather drab Posada de Valdeón.

Sotres

A side road heads up 11km from Poncebos to Sotres, the highest village in the Picos at 1045m and starting point for a number of good walks. There are five places to stay, most with their own restaurant.

Casa Cipriano (☎ 985 94 50 24; www.casacipriano.com in Spanish; s/d €30/50) is a favourite haunt of mountain aficionados. Aside from the simple but cheerful rooms, the staff offers a professional mountain-and-caving guide service. The cosy restaurant area downstairs offers set meals for €8.

Hotel Peña Castil (☎ 985 94 50 80; www.hotel.penacastil.com in Spanish; s/d €40/60) offers 10 impeccable if smallish rooms in a renovated stone house. The rooms have graciously tiled floors, some wood panelling and fine showers, and some have perky balconies.

WALKS AROUND SOTRES

A popular route goes east to the village of Tresviso and on to Urdón, on the Potes–Panés road. As far as Tresviso (10km) it's a paved road, but the final 6km is a dramatic walking trail,

the **Ruta de Tresviso**, snaking 850m down to the Desfiladero de la Hermida (see right). Doing this in the upward direction, starting from Urdón, is at least as popular. An alternative track winds off the Sotres–Tresviso road and down via the hamlet of Beges to La Hermida, also in the Desfiladero de la Hermida.

Many walkers head west from Sotres to the **Collado de Pandébano**, about 90 minutes' walk away up on the far side of the Duje valley. From Pandébano it's possible to see the 2519m rock finger called **El Naranjo de Bulnes** (Pico Urriello), an emblem of the Picos de Europa and a classic challenge for climbers.

Few walkers can resist the temptation to get even closer to El Naranjo. It's possible to walk in around three hours from Pandébano to the **Vega de Urriello**, at the foot of the northwestern face of the mountain, where the **Refugio de La Vega de Urriellu** (☎ 985 92 52 00; www.picourriellu.com in Spanish; bunks €8.30) is attended, with meal service, year-round.

Otherwise, you can descend for about an hour west to **Bulnes** (see p533). Bulnes is divided into two parts, the upper Barrio del Castillo and the lower La Villa. All amenities are in La Villa, including the six-room **La Casa del Chiflón** (☎ 985 84 59 43; www.casadelchiflon.com; d/tr/q €59/70/80; 🗨 Mar–Nov, Sat & Sun by reservation Dec–Feb) **casa rural** and **Bar Bulnes** (☎ 985 84 59 34), with good home cooking. You can also get to Bulnes by walking southeast up from Poncebos (about 1¼ hours).

Niserias

East of Arenas de Cabrales, the AS114 follows the attractive Río Cares valley downstream towards Panes. About 15km from Arenas is the peaceful hamlet of Niserias, at a particularly pretty bend in the Cares.

You can't miss the cheerful, deep yellow country house **Casa Julián** (☎ 985 41 57 97; www.casajulian.com; s/d €51/64.20). In business since 1949 and long part shop part digs for fishermen coming to try their luck in Río Cares, it is today a welcoming stop for modern travellers. The place is divided into hotel and *hostal* (double €44.90), the latter across the road. In August it has doubles only. The restaurant does great fish dishes.

La Tahona de Besnes (☎ 985 41 57 49; www.latahona.debesnes.com; d €64–115) comprises a beautifully renovated set of old stone bakery buildings in a leafy river valley 1.75km north of Niserias (take the Alles road and follow the signs). It

has attractive double rooms, a few apartments and a good restaurant. You can go horse riding here, too.

EASTERN PICOS Panes

Panes is where the AS114 from Cangas and Arenas meets the N621 running from the coast south to Potes. It has a range of accommodation. Hotel Trespalacios on the main street is the main bus stop.

Desfiladero de la Hermida

The N621 south from Panes follows Río Deva and enters the impressive Desfiladero de la Hermida gorge. You cross into Cantabria here at Urdón, the bottom end of the Ruta de Tresviso path, 2km before the hamlet of La Hermida. There's not much at La Hermida, but the bubbling Deva, the Picos looming to the west and a couple of *pensiones*.

Lebeña

About 8.5km south of La Hermida, is a spot that warrants visiting. A kilometre east of the N621 stands the fascinating little **Iglesia de Santa María de Lebeña** (admission €1; 🗨 10am–1.30pm & 4.30–7.30pm Tue–Sun), built in the 9th century. The horseshoe arches in the church are a telltale sign of its Mozarabic style – rarely seen this far north in Spain. The floral motifs on the columns are Visigothic, while below the main *retablo* (altarpiece) stands a Celtic stone engraving. They say the big yew tree outside was planted 1000 years ago.

Potes

pop 1580 / elevation 291m
Overrun in peak periods, but with some charm in the old centre (restored in attractive traditional stone and slate after considerable damage during the civil war), Potes is a popular staging post on the southeast edge of the Picos. Spanned by the medieval San Cayetano bridge, Río Quiviesa joins Río Deva at the heart of the village, with the Macizo Oriental (also called Macizo Andara) rising close at hand.

The **tourist office** (☎ 942 73 07 87; Plaza de la Serna; 🗨 10am–2pm & 4–7pm Mon & Thu–Sat, 10am–2pm Sun) shares a building with the bus station on the west side of town. Inquire there about the various adventure outfits operating from Potes and offering everything from horse riding and quads to canoeing and canyoning. It

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Casa Cayo (☎ 942 73 01 50; www.casacayo.com; Calle Cántabra 6; s/d €25/45) This is the pick of the bunch in Potes, with helpful service and attractive, comfy, wood-beamed rooms. Open the timber window shutters early in the morning to listen to the nearby burbling river. You can eat well in its excellent restaurant for about €20. Try the *cocido lebaniego completo* (€13), a feast that starts with unlimited noodle soup followed by a plate loaded with meat, sausage, chickpeas, potato, cabbage and spinach.

Right in the centre of town, the squat **Torre del Infantado** was built as a defensive tower in the 15th century and is now the town hall, having long served as a prison. A bit further down the river, the 14th-century **Iglesia de San Vicente**, deconsecrated in the 19th century, is a nice example of rustic Gothic architecture.

SLEEPING & EATING

With 14 hotels and *pensiones* , there is no shortage of accommodation here. They are by and large simple, straightforward places.

Pensión La Antigua (☎ 942 73 10 31; Calle Cántabra 9; s/d €40/50) This is one of the most attractive *pensiones* here, with crisp rooms (lots of timber beams, parquet floors and some rooms with skylights) in the heart of the old town.

Tasca Cántabra (☎ 942 73 07 14; Calla Cántabra; meal €15-20; 1-3 Thu-Tue) For a cheerful meal try this old town eatery, where you can try local faves such as *cocido lebaniego* (noodle soup followed by a plate loaded with meat, sausage, chickpeas, potato, cabbage and spinach) or *lengua con tomate* (tongue with tomato; €7.20).

Around Potes**MONASTERIO DE SANTO TORIBIO DE LIÉBANA & PIASCA**

Liébana valley, of which Potes is in a sense the 'capital', lies between the southeast side of the Picos de Europa and the main spine of the Cordillera Cantábrica. Christian refugees from Muslim-occupied Spain to the south fled to this front-line valley in the 8th century. The Muslim army defeated at Covadonga is said to have been wiped out while retreating through this valley by a massive landslide near Cosgaya (an event immediately attributed to the Almighy by the Christians).

The settlers brought with them the Lignum Crucis, purportedly the single biggest chunk of Christ's cross, which had supposedly been transported from Jerusalem by Bishop Toribio of Astorga in the 4th century. The holy relic has been housed ever since in this monastery (1-3 10am-2pm & 4-7pm), 3km west of Potes (signed off the Fuente Dé road). About 500m further on is the tiny **Ermita de San Miguel**, a chapel with great valley views.

The relic, which according to tradition features the hole made by the nail that passed through Christ's left hand, is an extraordinary magnet for the faithful. It's kept inside a crucifix of gold-plated silver, which is housed in a lavish 18th-century baroque chapel off the monastery's austere Gothic church (dating from 1256).

Head of the monastery in the latter half of the 8th century was Beato de Liébana, who won fame in medieval Europe for his lavishly illustrated *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. Copies of this illustrated tome were distributed throughout Europe and came to be known as Beatos. Around 30 survive scattered across Europe today, but the original was lost.

The Romanesque **Iglesia de Santa María de Piasca**, 2.5km off the CA184 road about 8km southeast of Potes, was at the heart of the other main medieval monastery established here, but now gone. The sculpture is among some of the most exquisite in the region.

Potes to Fuente Dé

The 23km CA185 from Potes to Fuente Dé is a beautiful trip, with several places to stay (including three camping grounds) along the way. At **Camaleño** is the **Hostal El Caserío** (☎ 942 73 30 48; s/d €30/45), housed in a cluster of beautifully restored old structures, including what used to be the town's cantina. **Cosgaya**, 13km southwest of Potes, is home to the majestic twin stone townhouses of the **Hotel del Oso** (☎ 942 73 30 18; www.hoteldeloso.com in Spanish; s/d €57.80/73.80; S), which face each other across Río Deva and road.

ESPINAMA

This is the last stop of any significance before Fuente Dé, and probably makes a more appealing base if you have your own transport. A 4WD track from here leads about 7km north and uphill to the **Hotel Refugio de Áliva** and on to Sotres.

There's a surprising choice of decent places to stay in Espinama, all with restaurants. The family-run **Hostal Remoña** (☎ 942 73 66 05; s/d €25/45) has large rooms, some with balconies over rushing Río Nevandi.

Fuente Dé & the Teleférico

At 1078m, Fuente Dé lies at the foot of the stark southern wall of the Macizo Central. In four minutes the **Teleférico de Fuente Dé** (cable car; ☎ 942 73 66 10; adult/child return Easter & Jul-Sep €12.50/3, rest of the year €10/3; 1-3 9am-8pm Easter & Jul-Sep, 10am-6pm rest of year, closed 7 Jan-Feb) here whisks people 762m to the top of that wall, from where walkers and climbers can make their way deeper into the central massif.

Be warned that during the high season (especially August) you can wait for hours at the bottom to get a seat. Coming down, you simply join the queue and wait – OK on a sunny day, but a little unpleasant if the queue is long.

ACTIVITIES**Walking & Climbing**

It's a walk of 3.5km from the top of the *teleférico* to the Hotel Áliva, or you might catch one of the private 4WD shuttles that do the trip for €4 per person. From the hotel, two trails descend into the valley that separates the central massif from its eastern cousin. The first winds its way some 7km south down to Espinama, while the other will get you north to Sotres via Vegas de Sotres. If there is a demand, 4WDs cover the Sotres and Espinama routes.

Other possibilities for the suitably prepared include climbing Peña Vieja (2613m) and making your way across the massif to El Naranjo de Bulnes. This requires proper equipment and experience – Peña Vieja has claimed more climbers' lives than any other mountain in the Picos. Less exacting is the route of about two hours leading northwest

from the *teleférico*, passing below Peña Vieja by marked trails to the tiny (three-place) **Refugio Cabaña Verónica** at 2325m near Horcados Rojos.

SLEEPING & EATING

Fuente Dé has one camping ground and two hotels (including an *ugly parador* – a luxury, state-owned hotel), both of which offer 4WD trips into the mountains.

Hotel Rebeco (☎ 942 73 66 01; d €60; P) This handsome stone lodge is the better-value option. Eleven of the 30 rooms include loft levels that are suitable for kids.

Hotel Refugio de Áliva (☎ 942 73 09 99; d €70; 1-3 Jun–mid-Oct) Set 1700m high, this 27-room hotel features a restaurant and café as well as a sundeck.

Potes to Posada de Valdeón

Drivers will be rewarded by a drive from Potes around to the southern approaches to the Picos. Take the N621 (direction Riaño) south of Potes and you are soon on a narrow road winding through the verdant Valle de Liébana. After about 8km, you reach the cute crossroads hamlet of La Vega de Liébana (ALSA buses call in here), with a handful of places to stay. Branch east the 12km for Cucayo via Dobres (11km), a lovely trip that rises to about 900m. Cucayo is the end of the road. Around you are scarred mountain peaks and green fields below. Stay at the marvellous **Posada de Cucayo** (☎ 942 73 62 46; www.laposadadecucayo.com; d up to €55), nine of whose 10 spacious and tasteful doubles enjoy sweeping views.

Back in La Vega, the road southwest quickly penetrates a gorge before rising to the often fog-bound Puerto de San Glorio pass (1609m). It then drops down quickly on the Castilian side of the frontier. At **Portilla de la Reina**, take the narrow and still pretty country lane northwest to **Posada de Valdeón**, where you are at the southern gateway to the Picos.

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Galicia



If the regions of Spain were identified by colour, Galicia's might well be green tinged with grey. Just as Andalucía wears its dazzling whitewash and Castilla-La Mancha bathes in the burnt red and dusty olive green of its sun-scorched plains, so granite walls and slate rooftops against a verdant rural background seem symbolic of Galicia. Without doubt, the often inclement weather contributes to the impression. You *always* have to be ready for rain here.

Galicia's wild coastline is frayed up and down its length by a series of majestic *rias* (inlets or estuaries). In the south, Río Miño divides Galicia from Portugal, and in the east, Galicia is separated from Spain's *meseta* (central tableland) by the western end of the Cordillera Cantábrica and associated ranges. Frenetic deforestation has unfortunately stripped much of Galicia of its indigenous trees, mostly replaced by eucalyptus plantations.

Many travellers make a beeline for Santiago de Compostela and no one can blame them. It is one of Spain's most engaging urban centres. Beyond it, however, lies plenty more: Pontevedra, Lugo, A Coruña and Vigo to name a few. Along the coasts, the popular Rías Baixas and less well-known Costa da Morte and Rías Altas are dotted with beaches, bays and fishing villages, and you'll see some of Spain's wildest coast towards Cabo Ortegal in the northwest. Inland, refreshingly green countryside and old stone villages, castles and churches await exploration. And except in Santiago, other tourists you meet on your travels will mostly be Spanish.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Marvel at the cathedral and wander the medieval streets of **Santiago de Compostela** (p540)
- Explore the coves, beaches, fishing villages and cliffs of the **Costa da Morte** (p558), **Rías Baixas** (p560) and **Rías Altas** (p554)
- Feast on Spain's best **seafood** (see the boxed text, p547)
- Get out into the Galician countryside along the **Camino de Santiago** (p96 and p97)
- Groove to *gaiteros* (bagpipers) at Galicia's summer **music festivals** (see the boxed text, p557)
- Savour the atmosphere of historic **Pontevedra** (p562) and **Lugo** (p575)
- Soak up the urban excitement of **A Coruña** (p550) and **Vigo** (p566)



■ AREA: 29,574 SQ KM

■ AVE SUMMER TEMP: HIGH 24°C,
LOW 13°C

■ POP: 2.85 MILLION



History

By the Iron Age Galicia was populated by people living in *castros*, villages of circular stone huts surrounded by defensive perimeters. Most Galicians believe these ancestors were Celts, though sceptics claim that Galicia's Celtic origins are an invention of romantic 19th-century Galician nationalists. The Romans gave the area its name, initially Gallaecia. Galicia was then ruled by the Germanic Suevi for most of the 5th and 6th centuries AD, before the Visigoths asserted themselves. Little touched by the 8th-century Muslim invasion, Galicia was under the control of the Christian kingdom of Asturias by 866.

The big event in the area's medieval history was the 'rediscovery' of the grave of Santiago

Apóstol (St James the Apostle) in 813, at what would become Santiago de Compostela. The site grew into a rallying symbol for the Christian Reconquista of Spain, and pilgrims from all over Europe began trekking to Santiago to redeem their sins. In the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries the city rivalled Rome and even Jerusalem in importance as a Christian pilgrimage site. For more on the pilgrimage, past and present, see the Camino de Santiago chapter (p89).

By the time the Reconquista was completed in 1492, Galicia had become an impoverished backwater in which Spain's centralist-minded Catholic Monarchs (Reyes Católicos), Isabel and Fernando, had already begun to supplant the local tongue and traditions with Castilian

methods and language. The Rexurdimento, an awakening of Galician national consciousness, did not surface until late in the 19th century, and then suffered a 40-year interruption during the Franco era.

Rural, with its own language, and much ignored by the rest of Spain, Galicia is still today in many aspects another country. Galicians have traditionally looked outward for solutions, with fishing and emigration (to Latin America and, more recently, other European countries) long their mainstays, as well as agriculture. Galicia is home to half Spain's fishing fleet, but with world fish stocks falling, its fishing communities face an uncertain future. Shipbuilding, auto assembly, textiles (Galicia is home to the world's second-biggest clothing company, Inditex, owner of Zara and Bershka) and, increasingly, tourism provide many alternative jobs. Developing their Latin American connections, some Galicians have raked in fortunes through drug smuggling. Only in the USA, Colombia and, some years, Mexico, is more cocaine seized than in Spain – and most of that is in Galicia.

One relatively recent event that drew attention to Galicia was the sinking of the oil tanker *Prestige* off the coast in 2002. Oil slicks inflicted serious damage on hundreds of kilometres of coastal habitat and the key seafood and fishing industries, and 300,000 seabirds of over 70 species were among the casualties of the worst ecological disaster in Spain's history. The government's lackadaisical response spawned a grassroots political movement, Nunca Máis (Never Again), which spontaneously mobilised to clean up the coast, boosted Galician national consciousness and probably contributed to the final unseating in 2005 of Galicia's long-standing regional president, a former minister in the Franco dictatorship named Manuel Fraga. Today the *Prestige's* effects on Galicia's coastline seem to have been erased and fish and seafood hauls have recovered, even if concerns linger over remaining seabed deposits.

Language

Long suppressed during the Franco years (strange, since Franco was born in Galicia), the Galician language (*galego* or, in Castilian, *gallego*) sounds and looks like a cross between Portuguese and Castilian. Like both those tongues, it's another Romance language (latter-day version of Latin).

Galician is widely spoken, especially in rural areas, and in recent years has been strongly pushed as the main regional language. The Galician versions of city, town and village names are now pretty well universal on signposts in Galicia (and starting to appear beyond its borders, too).

In this chapter we use the names you're likely to encounter during your travels. By and large, this means Galician spellings for towns, villages and geographical features. Beaches tend to be *praia* rather than *playa*, islands *illa*, not *isla*, and mountain ranges *serra* instead of *sierra*. We give streets (Galician: *rúa*/Castilian: *calle*), squares (*praza/plaza*), churches (*igreja/iglesia*), monasteries (*mosteiro/monasterio*) and the like whichever name is most prominently used.

SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA

pop 88,000 / elevation 260m

There can be few cities in the world as beautiful as Santiago that are founded on the basis of so preposterous a story. The corpse of Santiago Apóstol (St James), the myth relates, was transported in a stone boat from the Holy Land to the far side of Spain by two disciples after his execution in Jerusalem in AD 44. They landed at Padrón and buried Santiago in a spot 17km inland.

In 813 the grave was supposedly rediscovered by a religious hermit following a guiding star (hence 'Compostela', a corruption of the Latin *campus stellae*, field of the star). The saint's purported grave became a welcome rallying symbol for Christian Spain, the Asturian king Alfonso II turned up to have a church erected above the holy remains, pilgrims began flocking to it and the rest is history.

Aesthetically the city has only improved with age and various architectural additions down the centuries. Apart from the undisputed splendour of its gold-tinged monuments and the charm of its medieval streets, Santiago de Compostela is today a very lively city with a huge summer contingent of international pilgrims and tourists, and during college term a student population of up to 40,000. There's a great entertainment and nightlife scene to tap into at the end of a day investigating the city's history and culture.

HISTORY

By 1075 when the Romanesque basilica was begun and the pilgrimage was becoming a major European phenomenon, Santiago de Compostela had already been raided on various occasions by the Normans and Muslims. Bishop Diego Gelmírez obtained archbishopric status for Santiago in 1100 and added numerous churches in the 12th century, when homage paid to its saint brought in a flood of funds. Enthusiasm for the pilgrimage to Santiago peaked around then, and the following centuries were marked by internecine squabbling between rival nobles, damped down by Isabel and Fernando after the Reconquista. After misguidedly siding with the Carlists in the 1830s, Santiago de Compostela slipped into the background. Only since the 1980s, as capital of the autonomous region of Galicia and a rediscovered tourist and pilgrimage target, has the city been revitalised.

ORIENTATION

Santiago's compact old town, focused on the cathedral and its surrounding squares and almost completely pedestrianised, contains most of the monuments and places to stay and eat. Praza de Galicia marks the boundary between the old town and the modern shopping area to its south.

The train station is about a 15-minute walk downhill (south) from the city centre, and the bus station is marginally further to the northeast of the centre.

INFORMATION

Emergency

Policía Nacional (☎ 981 55 11 00; Avenida de Rodrigo de Padrón 101)

Internet Access

Bbigg Internet (Rúa da Senra 19; per hr €1.75;

h 10am-12.30am)

Cyber Nova 50 (Rúa Nova 50; per hr €1.20; h 9am-midnight Mon-Sat, 10am-midnight Sun)

Medical Services

Farmacia Valdés (☎ 981 58 58 95; Cantón do Toural 1; h 24hr)

Hospital Clínico Universitario (☎ 981 95 00 00; Travesa da Choupana)

Money

Banks and ATMs are dotted about the centre.

Banco BBVA (Rúa do Vilar 33) A handy bank.

Oficina de Acogida de Peregrinos

People who have covered at least the last 100km of the Camino de Santiago on foot, or the last 200km by bicycle, with spiritual or religious motives can obtain their 'Compostela' certificate to prove it at the **Pilgrims' Reception Office** (☎ 981 56 24 19; www.archicompstela.org in Spanish; Rúa do Vilar 1; h 9am-9pm).

Post

Main post office (Rúa das Orfas 17; h 8.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2pm Sat)

Tourist Information

City tourist office (☎ 981 55 51 29; www.santiago.turismo.com; Rúa do Vilar 63; h 9am-9pm Jun-Sep, 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Oct-May)

Regional tourist office (☎ 981 58 40 81; www.tur.galicia.es; Rúa do Vilar 30-32; h 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri) Shares the Xacobeo office at Rúa do Vilar 30-32; the website is a terrific multilingual resource on all Galicia.

Xacobeo office (☎ 981 57 20 04; www.xacobeo.es; Rúa do Vilar 30-32; h 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm & 5-7pm Sat, 11am-2pm Sun) Offers information on the Camino de Santiago.

SIGHTS

Catedral del Apóstol

Anyone who has journeyed along the Camino de Santiago will hardly be disappointed on entering Praza do Obradoiro to behold the lavish baroque façade of the **Catedral del Apóstol** (h 8am-9pm). Before this elaborately festive façade was built in the 18th century, the less overwhelming but artistically unparalleled **Pórtico de la Gloria** (Galician: Porta da Gloria) – now behind the baroque façade – was the first scene to greet weary pilgrims. The bulk of the cathedral was built between 1075 and 1211, in Romanesque style, and the Pórtico de la Gloria was its original façade. Much of the 'bunting' (the domes, statues and endless flourishes) came later.

The baroque icing on the Romanesque cake undoubtedly mutes the impact of the Pórtico de la Gloria, but it has also served to protect from the elements the sculptures of Maestro Mateo, the master architect and sculptor placed in charge of the cathedral-building programme in the late 12th century by Fernando II of León. The main figure in the portico's central archway is Christ risen. At his feet and hands are the four Evangelists, and beside them are angels with the crown of thorns and other instruments connected with Jesus' passion. In an arc above are the



24 musicians said in the Apocalypse to sit around the heavenly throne. Below Christ's feet is represented Santiago and popular belief is that the figure below him is Maestro Mateo. Bump your head on it three times and you're supposed to acquire some of Mateo's genius; the problem is that Mateo's statue is the one on the other side, kneeling facing the altar,

while the popular but mistaken head probably belongs to Hercules (holding open the mouths of two lions). Some people bump both heads to cover all options. Another tradition calls for a brief prayer as you place your fingers in the five holes created above Hercules' head by the repetition of this very act by millions of faithful over the centuries.

INFORMATION		SLEEPING		RESTAURANTS	
Banco BBVA.....	1 C3	Hostal Alameda.....	23 B3	Restaurante Casa Camilo.....	49 B2
Bbigg Internet.....	2 B3	Hostal Alfonso.....	24 A2	Restaurante Don Gaiferos.....	50 C3
City Tourist Office.....	3 B3	Hostal Barbantes.....	25 B2	Restaurante Ó 42.....	51 B3
Cyber Nova 50.....	4 C3	Hostal Libredón.....	26 B2		
Farmacia Valdés.....	5 C3	Hostal Pazo de Agra.....	27 C3		
Main Post Office.....	6 B3	Hostal Seminario Mayor.....	28 C2	DRINKING	
Oficina de Acogida de Peregrinos.....	7 C2	Hostal Suso.....	29 B3	A Reixa.....	52 C3
Policia Nacional.....	8 B3	Hotel Airas Nunes.....	30 C2	Bar-Tolo.....	53 C2
Regional Tourist Office.....	(see 9)	Hotel Costa Vella.....	31 C1	Borriqueta de Belém.....	54 C2
Xacobeo Office.....	9 B2	Hotel Entrecercas.....	32 B3	Café Atlántico.....	(see 39)
		Hotel Real.....	33 C3	hs.....	55 C2
		Hotel Rua Villar.....	34 B2	Modus Vivendi.....	56 C2
		Hotel Tránsito dos Gramáticos.....	35 C3	Momo.....	57 C2
		Hotel Virxe da Cerca.....	36 C2	Pub Desván.....	58 C2
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		Parador Hostal dos Reis		ENTERTAINMENT	
Casa do Cabildo.....	10 B2	Católicos.....	37 B2	A Casa das Crechas.....	59 C2
Catedral del Apóstol.....	11 B2	Pensión Campanas de Sar.....	13 D5	Conga 8.....	60 C2
Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea.....	12 D1	Pensión Forest.....	39 C1	Dado Dadá.....	61 B4
Colexiata de Santa María do		San Francisco Hotel		Discoteca Liberty.....	62 B4
Fonte de los Caballos.....	14 C2	Monumento.....	40 B1	El Buho.....	63 B4
Hostal dos Reis Católicos.....	(see 37)			Sala Capitol.....	64 C3
Mosteiro de San Martiño Pinario.....	(see 28)	EATING		SHOPPING	
Mosteiro de San Paio de Antealtares.....	15 C2	A Despensa de Troia.....	41 C2	Sargadelos.....	65 C2
Museo da Catedral.....	16 B2	A Taberna do Bispo.....	42 B3		
Museo das Peregrinacións.....	17 C1	Casa Manolo.....	43 C2	TRANSPORT	
Museo do Pobo Galego.....	18 D1	Casa Marcelo.....	44 B2	Airport Bus Stop.....	66 B4
Museo Granell.....	19 B3	Hotel Costa Vella.....	(see 31)	Bus No 5 To Bus Station.....	67 B3
Pazo de Raxoi.....	20 B2	La Bodega de San Roque.....	45 C1	Bus No 5 To Bus Station.....	68 D2
Pazo de Xelmírez.....	21 B2	O Gato Negro.....	46 B3	Bus No 6 from Centre.....	69 B5
Puerta Santa.....	22 B2	O Triángulo Das Verduras.....	47 C1	Bus No 6 to Centre.....	70 B4
				Bus No 6 To Train Station.....	71 C2

The remarkably lifelike figures on the right side of the portico are apostles, while those to the left represent Old Testament prophets.

Approaching the Churrigueresque Altar Mayor (Main Altar), you'll notice an opening and stairs on the right side. Follow the crowds to embrace the 13th-century statue of Santiago. You emerge on the left side then proceed down some steps to contemplate what you are assured is the tomb of Santiago.

The cathedral's many artistic and architectural riches fill guidebooks of their own. Try to make more than one visit to do it justice.

You may catch one of the special Masses where the world's greatest dispenser of incense, the *botafumeiro*, is swung heftily across the transept by an expert team using an ingenious pulley system – an unforgettable sight (see the boxed text, p544).

A special pilgrims' Mass is celebrated at noon daily. Others Masses are at 9.30am and 7.30pm daily, 6pm Saturday and Sunday and 1.30pm Sunday.

MUSEO DA CATEDRAL

To the right of the cathedral's façade is the main entrance to the Cathedral Museum (9% 981

56 05 27; admission €5; 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Jun-Sep, 10am-1.30pm & 4-6.30pm Oct-May, closed Sun afternoon).

The museum includes the cathedral's *claustr* (cloister; inside this entrance), treasury and crypt, and the Pazo de Xelmírez on the north side of the cathedral.

The cloister is a successful mix of Late Gothic and Plateresque styles. Rooms on several floors around it contain displays on the cathedral's development from early shrine to today's complex structure, an impressive collection of religious art and the lavishly decorated 18th-century *sala capitular* (chapter house). Maestro Mateo's original stone choir (*coro*) has been reconstituted and is on view beside the main entrance.

The crypt, entered from the foot of the cathedral's Praza do Obradoiro steps, is notable for its 12th-century architecture and rich decoration.

The Gothic Pazo de Xelmírez was built for Bishop Diego Gelmírez in 1120. In its Sala de Ceremonias, the main banquet hall, exquisite little wall busts depict feasters and musicians, plus the odd king and juggler. Bishop Gelmírez's biggest contribution to Santiago de Compostela was to resuscitate the myth

SANTIAGO FROM ABOVE

Fascinating hour-long cathedral **roof tours** (€ 981 55 29 85; €10; 11 hourly 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Tue-Sun) start in the Pazo de Xelmírez (tickets are sold inside the *pazo* entrance). Taking this tour you'll be following the steps of medieval pilgrims who completed their trek by climbing to the roof and burning their clothes beneath the Cruz dos Farrapos (Cross of the Rags) up there – symbolically casting aside the old and starting a new life. You'll also see the cathedral's interior from above and get a fascinatingly different angle on the town around it. Some tours are given in English.

of the Battle of Clavijo. Supposedly Santiago had joined Ramiro I of Asturias in this *fiesta* of Moor-slaying in 844, for which the grateful king promised to dedicate the first fruits of every harvest to the saint. Gelmírez turned the probably mythical battle into one of his city's biggest sources of revenue.

Around the Cathedral

However much the cathedral dominates the heart of Santiago, the area around it is rich in other architectural jewels. The Renaissance *Hostal dos Reis Católicos* stretches across the northern end of Praza do Obradoiro. Built to shelter the poor and infirm by Isabel and Fernando, it now shelters well-off travellers instead, as a *parador* (luxury, state-owned hotel; see p546). Along the western side of the square is the elegant 18th-century Pazo de Raxoi, now the city hall.

A stroll around the cathedral takes you through some of Santiago's most inviting squares. To the south is Praza das Praterías (Silversmiths' Square), with the *Fuente de los Caballos* (1829) at its centre. The cathedral's south façade, up the steps, is an original, if

weathered, Romanesque masterpiece. Facing it from the lower side of the square is the ornamental 18th-century *Casa do Cabildo*, a residence for cathedral clergy.

Following the cathedral walls you enter Praza da Quintana. Here is the cathedral's *Puerta Santa* (Holy Door), opened only in holy years when the Feast of Santiago (25 July) falls on a Sunday. Across the plaza is the long, stark wall of the *Mosteiro de San Paio de Antealtares*, founded by Alfonso II for Benedictine monks to look after St James' relics, and converted to a nunnery in 1499. Climbing the steps at the top of the plaza you'll find the entrance to the convent, above which stands the beatific figure of the 10th-century Galician child saint San Paio, his throat being slashed in reference to his martyrdom in Córdoba. Inside the convent is a **sacred art museum** (Via Sacra 5; admission €1.50; 11 10.30am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat Apr-Dec), containing the original altar raised over the Santiago relics.

Keep following the cathedral walls northwards to reach Praza da Inmaculada. Rising up on the far side is the huge Benedictine *Mosteiro de San Martiño Pinario*. The classical façade hides two 17th-century cloisters which are normally closed, except in the summer when the monastery opens as lodgings for tourists and pilgrims (see p546). The monastery's elaborate baroque church (€ 981 58 30 08; admission €2; 11 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sun) can be visited through its entrance on Praza de San Martiño Pinario. The visit incorporates a museum with the beautifully carved Renaissance choir stalls from the cathedral.

Other Attractions

Museums worth seeking out include the *Museo das Peregrinacións* (€ 981 58 15 58; Rúa de San Miguel 4; admission free; 11 10am-8pm Tue-Fri, 10.30am-1.30pm & 5-8pm Sat, 10.30am-1.30pm Sun), devoted to the Camino de Santiago phenomenon over the centuries; and the *Museo Granell* (€ 981 57

21 24; www.fundacion-granell.org; Praza del Tournal; admission €2; 11 11am-2pm & 4-9pm Wed-Sat & Mon, 11am-2pm Sun Oct-May, 11am-9pm Wed-Mon Jun-Sep) with an impressive collection of surrealist art based on the work of Galicia's Eugenio Granell.

Northeast of the old town, the former Convento de San Domingos de Bonaval houses the **Museo do Pobo Galego** (Museum of the Galician People; € 981 58 36 20; Rúa San Domingos de Bonaval; admission free; 11 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun), with exhibits on Galician life and arts, from the fishing industry to music and traditional costumes. The monastery's Gothic church is part of the visit, but the most singular feature of all is the triple spiral staircase. Facing the museum, the **Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea** (€ 981 54 66 19; admission free; 11 11am-8pm Tue-Sun) hosts exhibitions of modern art.

About 1km south of the old town along Rúa do Patio de Madres stands, precariously (it suffers a pronounced tilt), the Romanesque *Colexiata de Santa Maria do Sar* (€ 981 56 28 91; admission €1; 11 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat). Part of the beautiful cloister can still be admired and there's a small museum, mainly of Romanesque sculpture.

WALKING TOUR

Any tour of Santiago must begin with the *Catedral del Apóstolo* (1; p541), and many hours can be devoted to this alone. Exit onto Praza do Obradoiro (2; opposite) and proceed south to Praza de Fonseca to look into the *Colexio de Fonseca* (3; € 981 56 31 00; admission free; 11 11am-2pm & 5-8.30pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun), the original seat of Santiago's university (founded in 1495), with a beautiful courtyard, university library and exhibition gallery. Loop back northwards to Praza das Praterías (4; opposite) and Praza da Quintana (5; opposite) at the rear of the cathedral, and turn right onto Rúa de San Paio, along which you'll find a few inviting cafés and bars. At the end of the street, go right, down Rúa de Conga, then left along Rúa Nova with its quaint stone-pillared arcades, stopping to admire the *Igrexa de Santa María Salomé* (6). At the end of Rúa Nova turn right into Praza do Tournal, where there may be a concert going on. If not, pop into the surreal *Museo Granell* (7; opposite). A short distance down Rúa dos Bautizados, exit the old town into the greenery of the *Carballeira de Santa Susana* (8) where you can enjoy great views back across town to the cathedral.

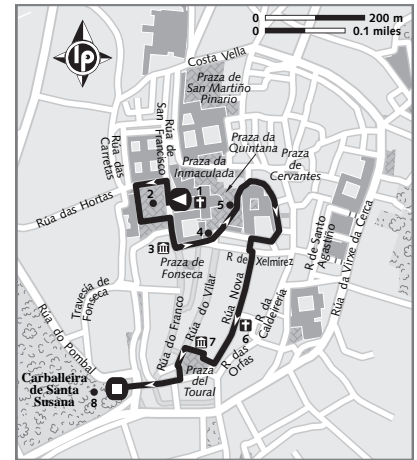
WALK FACTS

Start Cathedral

Finish Carballeira de Santa Susana

Distance 2km

Duration one to two hours



FESTIVALS & EVENTS

July is a fine month to be in Santiago. The Feast of Saint James (*Día de Santiago*) is on 25 July and is simultaneously Galicia's 'national' day. The night before, Praza do Obradoiro comes alight with the *fogo do Apóstolo*, a spectacular fireworks display that culminates in the incineration of a mock façade erected in front of the cathedral.

SLEEPING

Santiago is bursting with accommodation. In the old town, the number of *hospedaje* (hostelries), *casa de huéspedes* (guesthouses), *habitaciones* (rooms) and *camas* (beds) signs is reassuring for budget travellers, and a growing number of tastefully modernised old buildings provide attractive midrange accommodation. But even so, your first choices may fill up in July or August, so it's wise to book ahead.

Budget

Pensión Forest (€ 981 57 08 11; Rúa de Abril Ares 7; s/d €17/27) A good option, especially if you get a top-floor double (though outer rooms are best avoided on rowdy weekends), the Forest is run

THE BOTAFUMEIRO

Santiago's singular censer, the *botafumeiro* (meaning loosely 'smoke spitter'), dates from the 13th century, weighs 53kg, reaches a speed of 68km/h, misses hitting the north and south transept vaults by only 51cm while reaching an angle of 82°, swings a minimum of 25 days per year, fell in 1499 and 1622 (to the horror of those below) and is a perfect, gigantic pendulum conceived three centuries before pendulum physics was worked out. To see it best, be sure to stand in the north or south transept. When not in action, the Botafumeiro is kept in the cathedral library, part of the Museo da Catedral (p543).

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hotel Costa Vella (☎ 981 56 95 30; www.costa.vella.com; Rúa da Porta da Pena 17; s €51, d €71-86; a) A particularly pleasing small hotel conversion on the northern edge of the old town; many of the good-sized, thoughtfully designed rooms have *galerías* (glassed-in balconies), and excellent breakfasts are served in the café and lovely garden.

by a friendly family who have lived in London. The exterior rooms have *galerías* (glassed-in balconies) but share bathrooms.

Hostal Suso (☎ 981 58 66 11; Rúa do Vilar 65; s/d €20/39) In the heart of the old town, this newly renovated guesthouse has extremely attractive, good-sized rooms with new wooden furnishings and great firm beds.

Hostal Pazo de Agra (☎ 981 58 35 17; pazodeagra@yahoo.es; Rúa da Caldeirera 37; s/d €26/36) This family-run lodging is in a stately old house near the university. Rooms are large, with balconies. Inquire at nearby *Restaurante Zingara*.

Hostal Seminario Mayor (☎ 981 58 30 09; www.viaje.satlantico.com in Spanish; Praza da Inmaculada 5; s/d €30/47; h Jul-Sep) Rooms are basic, but this *hostal* offers the rare experience of staying inside a Benedictine monastery. With 126 rooms, it's a good bet when everywhere else is full.

Hostal Alameda (☎ 981 58 81 00; www.alameda32.com in Spanish; Rúa de San Clemente 32; s/d €31/49, with shared bathroom €19/34) This relaxed lodging has a great position on the edge of the old town, just below the Carballeira de Santa Susana park. Rooms are plain but comfortable enough, and there's a car park right outside.

Midrange

Hostal Libredón (☎ 981 57 65 20; www.libredonbarbantes.com; Praza de Fonseca 5; s €43-54, d €65) The Libredón has small but bright, up-to-date rooms, and a great location on a lively little square just south of the cathedral. Most rooms come with balconies.

Hostal Barbantes (www.libredonbarbantes.com; Rúa do Franco 3; s €43-54, d €65) Across the square from the Libredón and under the same management with very similar rooms. Reception is in the Libredón.

Pensión Campanas de San Juan (☎ 981 55 27 37; www.campanasdesanjuan.com; Rúa Campanas de San Juan 6; s/d €50/66) A charming and friendly new little place just off Praza da Inmaculada, with stone

walls, wrought-iron bedsteads and tasteful modern art and décor.

Hotel Tránsito dos Gramáticos (☎ 981 57 26 40; www.transitodosgramaticos.com in Spanish; Rúa Tránsito dos Gramáticos 1; s/d €54/65) This attractive hotel graces pleasant Praza Mazarelos, with good-sized, very comfortable rooms featuring exposed stonework and (except one) exterior windows. There's a good innovative restaurant here too.

Hotel Airas Nunes (☎ 902 40 58 58; www.pousadas.decompostela.com; Rúa do Vilar 17; s/d €80/91; j) The 10 rooms sport ancient stone walls and cosy modern comforts, on one of Santiago's most atmospheric streets.

Hotel Virxe da Cerca (☎ 902 40 58 58; www.pousadas.decompostela.com; Rúa da Virxe da Cerca 27; s/d €112/123; a i) Backed by tranquil gardens, this large, elegant hotel, with ample, stylish rooms, began life in the 18th century as a Jesuit residence.

Also recommended:

Hostal Alfonso (☎ 981 58 56 85; www.hostalalfonso.com; Rúa do Pombal 40; s/d incl breakfast €43/60; j) Some of the seven cosy, comfortable rooms have great views across town to the cathedral.

Hotel Entrecercas (☎ 981 57 11 51; Rúa Entrecercas 11; s/d incl breakfast €45/65; p i) A charming small hotel occupying a renovated 600-year-old mansion.

Hotel Real (☎ 981 56 92 90; www.hotelreal.com; Rúa da Caldeirera 49; s/d €70/75) Discounts for two-night stays.

Top End

Hotel Rua Villar (☎ 981 51 98 58; www.hotelruavillar.com in Spanish; Rúa do Vilar 8-10; s/d incl breakfast €96/161; a i) A luxuriously kitted-out adaptation of an 18th-century mansion in the heart of town – great skylight in the lobby, too!

San Francisco Hotel Monumento (☎ 981 58 16 34; www.sanfranciscohm.com; Campiello San Francisco 3; s/d €105/134; p a i s) Superb conversion of a 16th-century cathedral/monastery, with all modern comforts including indoor pool and private museum.

Parador Hostal dos Reis Católicos (☎ 981 58 22 00; www.parador.es; Praza do Obradoiro 1; s/d €171/214; p a i) This building is one of Santiago's prime monuments. In keeping with its exalted past, guests pay exalted prices – but it's a magnificent place to stay, crimson-draped four-posters and all!

EATING

There are countless places to eat to suit all pockets. Don't leave without trying a *tarta de Santiago*, an almond-based cake with a

sword-cum-cross emblem etched from the top layer of powdered sugar.

Rúa do Franco and parallel Rúa da Raíña, south of the cathedral, are packed with restaurants displaying boatloads of live seafood. Prime time is around 9pm.

A Taberna do Bispo (☎ 981 58 60 45; Rúa do Franco 37B; tapas €1-6; h closed Mon) Tantalising tapas are arrayed along the bar's length, and you can order all sorts of goodies like *montaditos* (small open sandwiches) of *solomillo* (pork sirloin) with bacon, cheese and dates.

A Despensa de Troia (☎ 981 58 19 09; Rúa da Troia 9; tabla for 1/2 €3/6) This little wine bar is a delightful spot to enjoy a *tabla* (board) of sausage/meats or cheese accompanied by a Ribeiro wine.

Hotel Costa Vella (☎ 981 56 95 30; Rúa da Porta da Pena 17; breakfast €4-5; h 8am-11pm) The lovely leafy walled garden here, with fountain, is a divine spot for a tranquil breakfast, with *tetilla* cheese and honey if you like.

O Gato Negro (☎ 981 58 31 05; Rúa da Raíña; raciones €3-9) Order plates of seafood, ham, cheese or peppers and down them with a bottle of local

wine at one of the five tables (if you can get one) in this tiny, stone-floored, old-town haunt.

O Triángulo Das Verduras (☎ 981 57 51 81; Praciña das Peñas 2; menú €11.50; h 1.30-3.30pm & 9-11.30pm, closed Mon evening & Sun; v) These folks prepare some good vegetarian dishes using organic ingredients.

Restaurante Sobrinos del Padre (☎ 981 58 35 66; Rúa da Fonte de San Miguel 7) Octopus rules at this no-frills bar-cum-eatery: a *ración of pulpo a la gallega* goes for €8.60.

Restaurante Ó 42 (☎ 981 57 06 65; Rúa do Franco 42; mains €7-16) Of the many eateries along Franco, *Restaurante Ó 42* is one of the best choices for traditional Galician seafood and meat in an agreeable setting – either in the stone-walled front bar or the bright *comedor* (dining room).

La Bodegailla de San Roque (☎ 981 56 43 79; Rúa de San Roque 13; mains €8-13) Northeast of the old town, this busy two-storey eatery serves an eclectic range of excellent dishes including cheeses, meats, salads, pâtés and desserts. We recommend, among other things, the *boliños*

GALICIAN FOOD FARE

When stomachs grumble in Galicia, thoughts turn to seafood. Galician seafood is plentiful, fresh, and may well be the best you have ever tasted. The region's signature dish is *pulpo a la gallega*, tender pieces of octopus sprinkled with olive oil and paprika (*pulpo á feira* has chunks of potato added). Mollusc mavens will enjoy the variety of *ameixas* (clams) and *mexillóns* (mussels). Special shellfish of the region include *vieiras* and *zamburiñas* (types of scallop), *berberechos* (cockles), *navajas* (razor clams) and the tiny, much-prized goose barnacles known as *percebes*, which bear a curious resemblance to fingernails. Other delicacies include various crabs, from little *necoras* to the great big *buey del mar* – the 'ox of the sea'. Also keep an eye open for the *bogavante* or *lubrigante*, a large, lobster-like creature with two enormous claws.

If you prefer seafood that swims, sample *xoubiñas* – sardines, tastiest when grilled – or *caldeirada*, a hotpot of potato and fish. *Marraxo*, a sort of shark generally served *a la plancha* (hotplate-grilled), is surprisingly tasty. On many menus you can choose between three ways of having your fish prepared: *a la plancha*, *a la gallega* (cooked in chunks with paprika-laced olive oil) or *a la romana* (fried in batter). Always a good bet are *robaliza/lubina/robalo* (sea bass) and *peixe sapo/rape* (monkfish/anglerfish).

If you just want to cleanse your palate before the next sea feast, order a hearty bowl of *caldo gallego* (broth with cabbage or turnip, potato and usually a bit of meat) or a plate of *lacón con grelos* (boiled pork shoulder, potatoes and greens). To spice things up a bit, bite into some *pimientos de Padrón* (small green peppers fried with lots of garlic).

Since the 13th century pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago have looked forward to the *empanadas* of Galicia. Something like pasties, they're usually filled with seafood.

Add to all this some of the best tortillas and meat in Spain and flavourful local cheeses including the creamy *queso de tetilla* ('nipple cheese', named for its breastlike shape) and you will definitely enjoy eating here. Galicia produces some fine wines, too. The Ribeiro wines, mostly from around Ribadavia, include a clean, crisp white and a decent red. For a robust white, the Condado label from the lower Rio Miño is recommended, while the fruity white Albariño from around Cambados is considered the prince of Galician tipples.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Casa Marcelo (☎ 981 55 85 80; Rúa das Hor-tas 1; set menu €38; 1 Wed-Sat) Eating is an occasion at this mod-rustic gourmet dining den just down the hill from Praza do Obradoiro. A different five-course creative feast is prepared daily, with specialties like cockles with mango and pepper, and with the kitchen in full view.

de tenreira en prebe de espinacas (meatballs in spinach sauce; €6.60).

Other recommendations:

Casa Manolo (☎ 981 58 29 50; Praza de Cervantes; set menu €6.80; 1 closed Sun night) The cheap, filling, three-course *menu* offers wide choice and pulls the crowds. **Restaurante Casa Camilo** (☎ 981 58 45 93; Rúa da Raíña 24; mains €9-14) Reliable purveyor of Uncomplicated Galician seafood, fish and meat, with a popular *terrace* (terrace).

Restaurante Don Gaiferos (☎ 981 58 38 94; Rúa Nova 23; mains €15-25; 1 closed Sun & Mon evenings) Great seafood and steaks amid stone arches and subtle lighting.

DRINKING

The cafés on Praza da Quintana and Rúa do Vilar have the prime people-watching locations in town.

Santiago's liveliest central bars lie in a sort of arc east of Praza da Quintana. From A Casa das Crechas (right), Rúa de San Paio de Antealtares runs southeast to Praza de San Paio, where half a dozen bars form a single boisterous entity, with varied good music playing from around 10pm till the early hours.

Borriquita de Belém (Rúa de San Paio 22) Just south of Praza de San Paio, this is a particularly inviting little jazz club serving *mojitos*.

Modus Vivendi (Praza de Feixoo 1; 1 7pm-4am) At the bottom of the street is an atmospheric, wood-paneled pub in the stables of an 18th-century mansion, attracting all types with wide-ranging music and occasional live bands.

North of the cathedral, the multi-level **Café Atlántico** (☎ 981 57 73 96; Rúa da Fonte de San Miguel 9; 1 from 9pm) pulls in a hip, attractive 20s set, with music from Cajun blues to Spanish indie rock, while dimly lit **Bar-Tolo** (Rúa da Fonte de San Miguel 8; 1 from 7.30pm) cultivates a punk attitude with a teens/early 20s crowd. Just down the street is **hs** (☎ 629 87 60 17; Rúa da Troia; 1 from 10.30pm Mon-Sat), a highly spirited gay club.

There are several other good bars in and around the old city:

Momo (☎ 981 56 55 80; Rúa da Virxe da Cerca 23; 1 7pm-4am) Has a wonderful big garden area open in warmer weather with views over parks and monasteries, plus two bars, pool and football tables and rock music. **A Reixa** (☎ 981 56 07 80; Rúa Tras de Salomé 3) A popular, dark, stone-walled, rock den, with a heavy '60s influence and live music some Wednesdays. **Pub Desván** (☎ 981 57 00 97; Rúa da Conga 7) Another popular classic-rock bar.

ENTERTAINMENT

An energetic programme of cultural events and festivals goes on year-round at a variety of venues. Several listings publications are distributed at tourist offices and around town: you can also check the agenda on www.santiagoturismo.com.

Clubs

The large student population ensures that Santiago rages all through the night from Thursday to Saturday.

Conga 8 (☎ 981 58 34 07; Rúa da Conga 8) Upstairs there's a casual café, downstairs a mirror-ball-enhanced dance floor for salsa enthusiasts.

A lot more late drinking and dancing goes on in the new town. People generally frequent the disco-pubs along Rúa da República Arxentina or rowdy Rúa Nova de Abaixo before hitting one of the evergreen discos such as the cavernous **Discoteca Liberty** (☎ 981 59 91 81; Rúa de Alfredo Brañas 4; minimum €4; 1 from 1am), which gets going around 4am on weekends. From Liberty, people head across the street to the after-hours *rockero* haven **El Buho** (Rúa de Alfredo Brañas 11): you enter through the garage door.

Live Music

Some of the best music can be heard free on Santiago's streets and plazas; groups often perform on Praza da Quintana or Praza do Toural, and you're bound to run into a few busking *gaiteros* (bagpipers) and street combos in your wanderings.

A Casa das Crechas (www.casadascrechas.com in Galician; Via Sacra 3) *The place* in Santiago for Celtic music, with jam sessions (*foliadas*) held Wednesday night in the cellar. Tuesday and Thursday usually see guest musicians of other folk and world-music genres. Music usually starts at 10.30pm. On Friday and Saturday nights DJs work the cellar.

Sala Capitol (☎ 981 57 43 99; www.salacapitol.com in Spanish; Rúa Concepción Arenal 5; admission varies) The Capitol is a major venue for touring bands; check its website for upcoming events.

Dado Dadá (☎ 981 59 15 74; www.dado-dada.com; Rúa de Alfredo Brañas 19; 1 10pm-3.30am Mon-Sat) Jazz fans should head for this Santiago mainstay, featuring jam sessions starting at 11pm Tuesday.

SHOPPING

Santiago's old town is littered with shops selling handicrafts, including the characteristic local jet or jet-and-silver jewellery, which is beautiful and ornate. You'll find plenty of traditional Galician lace here, too. **Sargadelos** (☎ 981 58 19 05; Rúa Nova 16) sells the attractive ceramics made in the Galician village of Sargadelos (near Lugo).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Santiago de Compostela's Lavacolla airport (☎ 981 54 75 00) is 11km east of the city. Ryanair flies daily to/from London Stansted, and Air Berlin flies to/from several German airports. Iberia flies up to six times daily to Madrid, three times to Barcelona and Bilbao, and once each to Amsterdam and Brussels. Air Europa and Spanair also serve Madrid, and Spanair and Vueling offer further direct flights to/from Barcelona.

Bus

From Santiago's bus station, **Castromil** (☎ 902 29 29 00) runs hourly services north to A Coruña (€6.15, one hour) and west to Noia (€2.95, 45 minutes) and Muros (€5.70, two hours), and up to nine times daily south to Pontevedra (€4.95, one hour) and Vigo (€7.25, 1½ hours). Castromil also goes up to 10 times daily to Ourense (€9.20, two hours), and up to five times to Cambados and O Grove (€6, two hours).

ALSA (☎ 902 42 22 42) operates up to six buses daily to Madrid (€38 to €53, seven to nine hours), two or three each to Oviedo (€23 to €35, 5½ to 6½ hours), Salamanca (€22 to €27, 6¼ to 7½ hours), Cáceres and Seville, and one each to Barcelona (€62, 16½ hours) and Porto (€29, 3¼ hours) and Lisbon (€41, 8½ hours) in Portugal. ALSA also travels to Paris, London, Brussels, Amsterdam and Zürich.

Further daily services head for places along the Costa da Morte and Rías Baixas, and destinations to the east such as Lugo, Santander, San Sebastián and Burgos.

Car & Motorcycle

Tolls on the AP9 *autopista* (tollway) are €4.50 to A Coruña (64km) and €3.80 to Pontevedra (57km). Parallel to the AP9, slower and free of cost is the N550. Street parking anywhere near the centre of the city is difficult, but several pay car parks are dotted around the periphery of the old town.

Train

You can travel to/from Madrid (Chamartín station; €42.20) on a daytime Talgo (eight hours) or an overnight *trenhotel* (nine hours).

Trains run almost hourly to A Coruña (from €3.60, one hour), and to Pontevedra and Vigo (€5.45 to €7.40, 1¼ to 1¾ hours). There are six or more trains daily to Ourense (from €6.60, 1½ to two hours) and one to Irún, on the French border, via León, Burgos and San Sebastián.

Santiago is the usual finishing point of rail holidays on El Transcantábrico (see the boxed text, p871).

GETTING AROUND

Santiago de Compostela is walkable, although it's a bit of a hike from the train and bus stations to the centre.

Up to 23 **Empresa Freire** (☎ 981 58 81 11) buses run daily between Lavacolla airport and the bus station (€1.70). About half of them continue to/depart from Rúa do Doutor Teixeira, southwest of Praza de Galicia. Taxis charge around €15.

Bus 6 runs every 20 to 30 minutes from Rúa do Hórreo near the train station to Rúa da Virxe da Cerca on the eastern edge of the old town. Coming from the centre to the train station, it stops on Rúa de Santiago Leon de Caracas. Bus 5 runs every 15 to 30 minutes between Praza de Galicia and the bus station, via Rúa da Virxe da Cerca. Tickets cost €0.85.

A CORUÑA & THE RÍAS ALTAS

Often more intemperate and certainly much less visited than the west-facing coast of Galicia, the northern coast is peppered with pleasant surprises. A Coruña is a lively and attractive port city with decent beaches, and there are many smaller towns and fishing villages to explore – plus some of the most impressive coast in all Spain.

A CORUÑA

pop 252,000

A Coruña (Castilian: La Coruña) is Galicia's wealthiest city and was only recently overtaken in size by Vigo. They say 'No one is a stranger in A Coruña' and this is definitely the region's most outward-looking and urbane city, as you might expect from a port of 2000 years' standing that's also home to the world's second-biggest textile company, Inditex, and Galicia's biggest banks and building companies. Today's A Coruña is largely a creation of the 19th and 20th centuries, but it makes up for the paucity of historic monuments with a thriving and sophisticated cultural and nightlife scene and a superb maritime location. This is a city that repays more time and attention than most travellers give it.

Britain looms large on A Coruña's horizon. In 1588 the ill-fated Spanish Armada weighed anchor here, and the following year Sir Francis Drake tried to occupy the town, but was seen off by María Pita, a heroine whose name lives on in the town's main square. Napoleon's troops occupied A Coruña for the first six months of 1809. Their British opponents were able to 'do a Dunkirk' and evacuate, but their commander, General Sir John Moore, died in the battle of Elviña and was buried here. In the 19th and 20th centuries, A Coruña's port was the gateway through which hundreds of thousands of Galician emigrants left for new lives in the Americas.

Orientation

The train and bus stations are 2km southwest of the city centre. A Coruña gets interesting along a fairly narrow isthmus and the large headland to its east and north. The *ciudad vieja* (old city) huddles in the southeast of the headland, while the Torre de Hércules caps its northern extreme. Most hotels, restaurants and bars are in the newer, predominantly 19th-century part of town on the isthmus, whose northwestern side is lined with sandy beaches, while on its southeast lies the port.

Information

Farmacia Velasco (☎ 981 22 21 34; Calle Real 92;

h 9am-3am) Late-opening pharmacy.

Main post office (Calle Alcalde Manuel Casas)

Municipal tourist office (☎ 981 18 43 44; www.turismocoruna.com; Plaza de María Pita; h 9am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun)

Regional tourist office (☎ 981 22 18 22; Dársena de la Marina; h 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm & 5-7pm Sat, 11am-2pm Sun)

Zalae@.Net (Calle de Zalaeta 7; per hr €1.30; h 10am-2am) Internet access.

Sights & Activities

TORRE DE HÉRCULES

One myth says Hercules built the original lighthouse here after slaying the cruel giant Gerion who kept the local populace in terror. All we *know* is that the Romans built a lighthouse in the 2nd century. It was later used as a fort and restored as a lighthouse in 1791. As you enter the **tower** (☎ 981 22 37 30; admission €2; h 10am-5.45pm Oct-Mar, 10am-6.45pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-8.45pm Jul & Aug), you'll see the excavated remains of the original Roman base. Climb the 234 steps to the top for views of the city and coast. The headland around the tower is dotted with the quirky Galician sculptures of the outdoor **Parque Escultórico**.

To get to the tower take the Paseo Marítimo tram (see p554), or bus 3 from Paseo de la Dársena.

GALERÍAS

A Coruña has been dubbed the 'city of glass'; to find out why, head to the east end of Avenida de la Marina. Multistorey houses sport what could pass as a uniform protective layer of classic late-19th-century Galician *galerías*.

CIUDAD VIEJA

This is a compact zone constituting almost all of A Coruña built before the 19th century. Elegant Plaza de María Pita forms its western boundary, with porticoes on three sides and the flamboyant early-20th-century *ayuntamiento* (town hall) on the fourth.

The Iglesia de Santiago (Calle Parrote; h noon-8pm Mon-Sat), with three Romanesque apses backing onto pretty little Plaza de la Constitución, is the city's oldest church. Dazzling examples of gold and silverwork from the Romanesque-Gothic Iglesia de Santa María del Campo are displayed in the adjacent Museo de Arte Sacro (☎ 981 20 31 86; Puerta de Aires 23; admission free; h 10am-1pm & 5-7pm Tue-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat Sep-Jun, 9am-2pm Tue-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat Jul & Aug). A short walk through the labyrinth brings you to the Jardín de San Carlos, where General Sir John Moore lies buried. Across the street, lovers of death and destruction will enjoy the Museo

A CORUÑA

0 200 m
0 0.1 miles

0 100 m
0 0.05 miles

EATING 🍴

Café Momos.....	20	C2
Cervecería La Bombilla.....	21	B2
El Champi.....	22	C2
Mesón do Pulpo.....	23	C2
Pablo Gallego Restaurante.....	24	C2
Restaurante Bania.....	25	B2
Taberna Da Panela.....	26	C2

DRINKING 🍷

Bodega Priorato.....	27	C2
Cervecería L'Abadia.....	28	B2
Jazz Filloa.....	29	B2

ENTERTAINMENT 🎭

Dublin.....	30	B2
Jazz Vides.....	31	A3
Sala Mardigras.....	32	C2
Telefunken.....	33	C2

TRANSPORT 🚏

Bus 1, 1A to Bus Station.....	34	C2
Bus Station.....	35	B5
Local Bus Stop No 3.....	36	C2
Local Bus Stop No 5.....	37	A5
Local Bus Stop Nos 1 & 1A.....	38	B5
Local Bus Stop Nos 1 & 1A.....	39	B3
Tram Stop.....	40	C3
Tram Stop.....	41	D3

INFORMATION 📄

Farmacia Velasco.....	1	B2
Main Post Office.....	2	B2
Municipal Tourist Office.....	3	C2
Regional Tourist Office.....	4	C2
Zalae@.Net.....	5	B2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES 🏛️

Ayuntamiento.....	6	C2
Castillo de San Antón.....	7	D3
Domos.....	8	A1
Galerías.....	9	C2
Iglesia de Santa María del Campo.....	10	C2
Iglesia de Santiago.....	11	C2
Museo Arqueológico e Histórico.....(see 7)	12	B2
Museo de Arte Sacro.....(see 10)	13	D2
Museo de Bellas Artes.....	12	B2
Museo Militar.....	13	D2

SLEEPING 🛏️

Hospedaje Los Potes.....	14	C2
Hostal Alborán.....	15	C2
Hostal La Provincialiana.....	16	B2
Hostal Sol.....	17	B2
Hotel Riazor.....	18	A3
Hotel Zenit Coruña.....	19	A3

Militar (☎ 981 20 53 00; Plaza de Carlos I; admission free; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm), with weapons from the 18th to the 20th centuries.

MUSEUMS

Outside the old town walls and keeping a watch over the port, the 16th-century **Castillo de San Antón** now houses a **Museo Arqueológico e Histórico** (☎ 981 18 98 50; admission €2; 10am-7.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2.30pm Sun), with an eclectic collection from Bronze Age helmets to material on the battle of Elviña.

The innovative design of the **Museo de Bellas Artes** (Fine Arts Museum; ☎ 981 22 37 23; Calle de Zalaeta; admission €2.40, Sat afternoon & Sun free; 10am-8pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm & 4.30-8pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) manages to salvage something of the atmosphere of the convent that once stood on the site. In addition to works by Rubens and Goya, it holds a representative collection of 16th- to 20th-century Spanish and European paintings.

Highlights of the **Aquarium Finisterrae** (☎ 981 18 98 42; admission €10; Paseo Marítimo; 10am-9pm Jul & Aug, 10am-7pm or 8pm Sep-Jun), on the seashore not far from the Torre de Hércules, are its seal colony and the underwater Nautilus room surrounded by sharks, rays and 50 other fish species. Along the same seafloor, in an avant-garde Japanese-designed building, is **Domus** (☎ 981 18 98 40; Calle de Santa Teresa 1; admission €2; 10am-7pm Sep-Jun, 11am-9pm Jul & Aug), an interactive museum of the human body – entertaining even for non-Spanish speakers.

BEACHES

A Coruña's city beach is a glorious protected sweep of sand 1.4km long, named Playa del Orzán at its east end and Playa de Riazor at the west – and pretty busy in summer. More beaches are strung along the 30km of coast stretching west to Malpica de Bergantiños.

Sleeping

Hospedaje Los Potes (☎ 981 20 52 19; Calle Zapatería 15; s/d €25/40) One of the few options in the old town, this has large rooms with wood floors and *galerías*. Inquire at Bar Los Potes, three blocks west.

Hostal Alborán (☎ 981 22 65 79; www.hostalalboran.com in Spanish; Calle de Riego de Agua 14; s €24-26, d €37-46) The best-located budget bet, slightly faded Alborán is steps from Plaza de María Pita.

Hostal La Provinciana (☎ 981 22 04 00; www.la-provinciana.net in Spanish; Rúa Nueva 9; s/d €35/47; 10am-7pm) La Provinciana is a homely, well-kept place

with good-sized rooms sporting old-fashioned polished furniture.

Hostal Sol (☎ 981 21 03 62; www.hotelosolcoruna.com; Calle del Sol 10; s €47-80, d €51-91; 10am-7pm) Though officially a *hostal* (budget hotel), the 39-room Sol has the comfort and efficient management of a good midrange hotel. Standard rooms are well sized, with classical furnishings; 'superior' rooms are more stylish. Get an off-street room if you want to sleep through the end-of-week revels outside the bars in the street below.

Hotel Riazor (☎ 981 14 57 10; www.riazorhotel.com; Avenida Barrié de la Maza 29; s/d €63/118; 10am-7pm) Overlooking Riazor beach, this 12-storey hotel has 71 well-equipped rooms. It's popular with business and conference travellers: check for special weekend rates.

Hotel Zenit Coruña (☎ 981 21 84 84; www.zenit-hotels.com; Calle Comandante Fontanes 19; r €58-150; 10am-7pm) Stylishly minimalist in design, the Zenit reserves five of its seven floors for nonsmokers. All rooms have big exterior windows, glass washbasins and elegant anti-humidity wallpaper. The hotel's La Marola restaurant serves up creative Galician fare, and it's all just a block from Orzán beach. Rates depend on dates and demand: call or check the website.

Eating

Plaza de María Pita is surrounded by restaurants and tapas bars all sporting uniform designer kiosks. The narrow lanes west of Plaza de María Pita, especially Calle de la Franja, have many further options.

Cervecería La Bombilla (Calle de Galera 7; tapas €0.80, raciones €4-6) The 'Light Bulb', an unpretentious corner locale popular with students, concentrates on doing the basics – ham, cheese, tortilla – well, and at retro prices: a slab of fresh tortilla and a cold beer will get you change from €2.

El Champi (☎ 981 22 70 03; Calle de la Franja 50; tapas €1-1.50) Don't miss its signature chomp – a little shrimp on a big sautéed mushroom. You can also try *ortiguillas* (sea anemones) here.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Café Momos (☎ 981 21 44 53; Calle Santo Domingo 16; raciones €5.50-12.50; 10am-midnight Mon-Fri) In the old city, quirky, witch-themed Café Momos attracts all types to its dozen tables for its fabulous tortillas and other tasty creations.

Restaurante Bania (☎ 981 22 13 01; Calle de Cordelería 7; mains €5.50-8.50; 10am-7pm closed Mon night & Sun; 10am-7pm) Tofu escalopes, natural juices and all kinds of salads are a few of the tasty items offered by this neat, artistic vegetarian eatery.

Mesón do Pulpo (☎ 981 20 24 44; Calle de la Franja 9; half-ración/ración €6/9.50; 10am-7pm closed Sun) Go for the octopus; as the name suggests, classically prepared with paprika, rock salt and olive oil.

Taberna Da Penela (☎ 981 20 92 00; Plaza de María Pita 12; mains €9-16; 10am-7pm closed Mon) Highly popular bistrolike spot on the main plaza. The short but good menu focuses on fish, seafood and meat.

Pablo Gallego Restaurante (☎ 981 20 88 88; Plaza de María Pita 11; mains €11-34; 10am-7pm closed Sun) Classy, stone-walled joint in a corner of the plaza, preparing 21st-century updates on traditional Galician ingredients – you might start with the scallops, crabs and asparagus, and follow them with steamed sea bass with seaweed and sea urchins.

Drinking

The cafés on Plaza de María Pita are unbeatable for people-watching. The streets to the southwest known as the Zona de los Vinos, including Calle de la Franja, Calle Barrera and Calle de Galera, have many popular bars for evening drinks and tapas, drawing every type of customer.

Dozens of pubs on Calle del Sol, Calle Canalejo, Calle del Orzán and other streets behind Playa del Orzán party on from around midnight till 3am or 4am at the weekend.

Cervecería L'Abadía (☎ 981 22 97 02; Calle de Franja 49; 10am-7pm closed Mon) This wood-trimmed beer hall has Estrella de Galicia on tap.

Bodega Priorato (Calle de la Franja 16) Sawdust and peanut shells litter the floor of A Coruña's oldest bodega (wine cellar), where wine is poured by the *porrón* (jug with a long, thin spout through which you pour wine into your mouth).

Jazz Filloa (Calle del Orzán 31; 10pm-3am) Jazz connoisseurs will appreciate the great musical selection at this cavernous hang-out. There's live music about once a week.

Entertainment

Sala Mardigras (☎ 981 20 38 77; www.salamardigras.com in Spanish; Travesía de la Torre 8; admission varies; 10pm-10pm Thu-Sat) This dark little club can get pretty crowded, especially when touring bands play.

Dublin (☎ 981 20 32 74; Calle Panaderas 50) Irish pub staging Galician folk nights most Tuesdays. Music starts around 10pm.

Jazz Vides (☎ 981 27 96 10; www.jazzvides.com in Spanish; Calle José Luis Pérez Cepeda 23; admission varies; 10pm-10pm Thu-Sat) Varied live music, from jazz and folk to acid-jazz and funky, happens at this wine bar-cum-nightclub.

Telefunken (www.housecafe music.com in Spanish; Calle Alcalde Folla Yordi 8; 10pm-4am Thu-Sat) Cool club for house lovers.

Discoteca Playa Club (☎ 981 25 00 63; www.playaclub.net in Spanish; Playa de Riazor; admission €6.50; 10pm-midnight Fri & Sat) As the pubs close, the discos start to fill. Ever-popular Playa Club, with views over the bay, plays plenty of alternative pop, soul-jazz, funk and electronica. There are live bands at least once a week.

Deportivo La Coruña (☎ 981 22 94 10; www.canal-deportivo.com in Spanish; Estadio de Riazor, Calle de Manuel Murguía) A Coruña is justly proud of its football team, which mixes it with Europe's best. Check the website for ticket details.

Getting There & Away

AIR

From A Coruña's **Alvedro airport** (☎ 981 18 72 00), Iberia has at least three flights daily to/from Madrid and Barcelona, plus daily direct services to/from London. There are further Madrid and Barcelona flights on Spanair, and daily flights to Lisbon by Portugalía.

BUS

From the bus station (☎ 981 18 43 35; Calle Caballeros 21), **Castromil** (☎ 902 29 29 00) operates services to Santiago de Compostela (€6.15, one hour) at least 16 times daily, and to Pontevedra (€11, two hours) and Vigo (€12.85, 2½ hours) six or more times daily. **Arriva** (☎ 902 27 74 82) heads several times daily to Betanzos (€2, 45 minutes, 22 or more daily), Ferrol (€5.95, one hour), Viveiro (€12.30, three hours), Lugo (€7.65 to €8.40, 1¼ hours) and Ourense (€13.45, 2¼ hours), and also serves the Costa da Morte.

ALSA (☎ 902 42 22 42) runs east to Asturias, Cantabria, the Basque Country and Barcelona, south to Portugal, Extremadura and Andalucía, and to Madrid (€36 to €51, 6½ to 8½ hours, three or more daily).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The AP9 tollway heading for Santiago de Compostela is the quickest way out of town to the south. Before Betanzos another tollway heads north to Ferrol. The N550 to Santiago is prettier and there's no charge.

TRAIN

Trains head south about hourly to Santiago de Compostela (from €3.60, one hour), Pontevedra (€7.90 to €10.70, two to 2½ hours) and Vigo (€8.90 to €12.05, 2½ to three hours). There are three or more daily trains to Lugo (from €6.05, two hours), Ourense (€17.70 to €20.80, 1¾ to 2¾ hours) and Betanzos (€2.40 to €3, 40 minutes), two to Madrid (Chamartin station; €45, nine or 10 hours), and one or two to Barcelona via Zaragoza.

Getting Around

Twelve buses a day (seven on Saturday, four on Sunday) travel between the bus station and airport (€1.15), 8km south of the centre. A taxi costs around €10.

Local buses 5, 5A and 11 link the train station with central A Coruña; they stop diagonally opposite the station. Buses 1, 1A, 12 and 14 stop outside the bus station en route to the city centre. Rides cost €1.15.

Daily from mid-June to sometime in October, and on weekends the rest of the year, trams (€1) run along Paseo Marítimo from the port area right round the large headland north of the city centre to the beach Playa de Riazor. This service is convenient for reaching the Torre de Hércules and the Aquarium Finisterrae.

RÍAS ALTAS

In many ways the Rías Altas and surrounding countryside east of A Coruña have an edge over the more popular Rías Baixas. They are far less populated and less touristed, retaining a greater natural attraction, and many beaches on this stretch are every bit as good as those to the south. A handful of enticing towns, such as medieval Betanzos and Pontedeume, are accompanied by some of the most dramatic coast in Spain.

Betanzos

pop 13,000 / elevation 38m

Just 24km east of A Coruña, the old part of Betanzos occupies a low hill between Ríos Mendo and Mandeo, which meet here to flow north into Ría de Betanzos. Medieval Betanzos was long a busy port until it was eclipsed by A Coruña. Today its well-preserved old town has a lively eating and drinking scene.

There's a **tourist information office** (☎ 981 77 36 93; Rúa de Emilio Romay 1; 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-1pm Sat) inside the Museo das Mar-

íñas. Banks are on or near the sprawling main square, Praza dos Irmáns García Naveira, with its multistorey houses glassed in by classic *galerías*. Around 50,000 people cram into the square at midnight on 16 August to witness the releasing of an enormous, decorated, paper hot-air balloon from the tower of Santo Domingo church, in the Fiesta de San Roque.

SIGHTS

The original settlement that predated the town stood on what is now Praza da Constitución, which is flanked by the neoclassical Casa do Concello and Romanesque/Gothic Igrexa de Santiago. More interesting is the small Praza de Fernán Pérez de Andrade, with the Gothic churches of Santa María do Azougue and San Francisco (11.9.30am-1pm & 4.30-7.30pm). The latter is filled with elaborate noble tombs, above all the fabulously carved stone tomb of Fernán Pérez de Andrade 'O Boo' (The Good), the 14th-century local potentate who had all three of these Gothic churches built. His sepulchre is supported by the family emblems in stone – a bear and a wild boar.

The Museo das Mariñas (admission €1.20; 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-1pm Sat), located in the old Santo Domingo monastery, showcases an intriguing assortment of curios, including traditional Galician costumes and some of the district's rich medieval funerary sculpture.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel Garelos (☎ 981 77 59 30; www.hotelgarelos.com; Calle Alfonso IX 8; s/d incl breakfast €64/86; p a i), The best hotel for miles around is the sparkling-new Hotel Garelos close to Praza dos Irmáns García Naveira. The spick-and-span rooms are endowed with parquet floors, marble bathrooms and the lovely local watercolours of artist Manuel Gandullo. Second choice is the unremarkable Hotel Los Angeles (☎ 981 77 15 11; Rúa dos Anxeles 11; s/d €47/56).

Culinary life focuses on Travesía do Progreso, a lane off the main square: O Pote and O Rabel are popular watering holes serving tapas (€2 to €2.50) and *bocadillos* (bread rolls with fillings). The parallel lane, Venela do Campo, has more tapas bars, while the cafés under the old stone arches on the main square are popular for breakfast. You can quench your thirst with an Irish or Belgian beer at nearby Cervezeria Zoki (Praza Domingo Etcheverría).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Up to 33 daily Arriva buses to/from A Coruña (€2, 45 minutes) operate from Praza dos Irmáns García Naveira. Four Arriva buses head daily to Viveiro, and six each to Lugo and Ferrol.

Betanzos Cidade train station is northwest of the old town, across Río Mendo. Three trains go daily to Ferrol and A Coruña (both €2.40 to €3, 40 minutes).

Pontedeume

pop 4500

Founded in 1270, this hillside feudal bastion is another appealing stop with a sweep of sandy beach, Praia de Cabanas, just across the bridge that carries the main road over the Eume estuary. Rúa Real, the narrow, porticoed street leading up from the roundabout at the south end of the bridge, climbs past a cheerful little square to the 18th-century Iglesia de Santiago. Down near the waterfront, opposite the market, rises the Torreón dos Andrade, the keep of what was once the palace-castle of the local feudal lords, the Andrades. It houses a **tourist office** (☎ 981 43 02 70; 10am-2pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2.30pm Sat, 11am-2pm Sun), where you can obtain information on walks in the lovely 91-sq-km Parque Natural Fragas do Eume, which begins a few kilometres up the Eume valley. The park preserves Galicia's last great Atlantic coastal forest and the romantic ruins of the 10th-century Mosteiro de Caaveiro.

Hostal Allegue (☎ 981 43 00 35; Rúa Chafaris 1; r €39) is the most comfortable of three similar restaurant/guesthouses around Plaza del Convento.

Rúa Real is lined with taverns and eateries. At **Taberna Tostaky** (☎ 981 43 44 45; Rúa Real 34; raciones €7-10; 11am-10pm Mon-Fri, closed Sun night & Mon) a Frenchman prepares dishes such as vegetarian lasagne and salads of local Eume cheese and *jamón serrano* (Serrano ham).

Cedeira

pop 7000

The biggest town on the Rías Altas is the naval port of Ferrol, 17km north of Pontedeume. Ferrol is the western terminus of the FEVE railway from the Basque Country and was the birthplace of General Franco, but it has little to detain the visitor and you might as well carry on 38km north to Cedeira, on the pretty Ría de Cedeira. En route, after about 16km, is Valdoviño, with the beautiful Praia Frouxeira. Just beyond Valdoviño, Praia de Pantín hosts an international surfing competition in early September.

Cedeira's older nucleus fronts the west bank of Río Condomiñas with traditional *galerías*, while across two parallel bridges on the modern side of town is the pleasant Praia da Magdalena. Around the headland to the south is the more appealing Praia de Vilarrube, a protected dunes/wetlands area.

Cedeira's **tourist office** (☎ 981 48 21 87; Calle Ezequiel López 17; 10.30am-1.30pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-2pm Sat) is in the old town.

For a nice hour or two's stroll, walk seaward along the waterfront to the fishing port, climb up beside the old fort above it and then walk out onto the headland overlooking the mouth of Ría de Cedeira. The rocky coast around here produces rich harvests of *percebes* (goose barnacles), which is a much-coveted (and expensive) seafood delicacy.

SLEEPING & EATING

You should phone ahead in August for bookings. The town is full of bars and cafés, especially around the river mouth.

Pensión Brisa (☎ 981 48 10 54; Arriba da Ponte 19; s/d €26/36) On the west bank of the river, this affably managed place offers basic rooms of variable size and ventilation, but all are in decent shape.

Pensión Chelsea (☎ 981 48 23 40; Praza Sagrado Corazón 9; d €43) This central apartment-block *pensión* (small private hotel) isn't in the first flush of youth but provides cheerful rooms and a friendly welcome.

Apartamentos A Revolta (☎ 650 606500; apartamentosaarevolta@yahoo.es; Paseo Marítimo; apt for 2/4 €60/85) About 500m along the beach from the centre, these good, modern apartments, open year-round, all enjoy *ría* views.

Taberna do Puntal (☎ 981 48 05 32; tortillas €4-5; 11am-10pm Mon-Fri, closed Tue) Along the road towards Vilarrube beach, this lively tavern serves exquisitely gooey tortillas and a superior selection of Ribeiro wines.

Mesón Muíño Kilowatio (☎ 981 48 26 90; Rúa Marín 12; raciones €7-15) Stop by this popular locale a few doors from Café A Marina for a large portion of *marraxo* (a type of shark) and a cold beer.

Restaurante A Revolta (☎ 981 48 07 64; Paseo Marítimo; raciones €8-15) Down by the beach, Restaurante A Revolta is a good place to sample *percebes* (ración €14) or whatever else was netted earlier in the day. You can sit in the stone-walled, check-cloth bar or the more formal restaurant area.

Restaurante Brisa (☎ 981 48 20 85; Rúa Mariñeiro 8; mains €8-18; 🍴 lunch daily, dinner Thu-Sun) One of the few restaurants (as opposed to bars with food) in the riverfront/central area. The speciality octopus and clams and *merluza a la cazuela* (hake casserole) are both good bets.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

By bus from the south, you'll need to change in Ferrol, from where Rialsa runs five or more buses daily (€2.65, 45 minutes). Arriva has three or four daily buses to Cariño (€2.75, 50 minutes).

Serra da Capelada

North of Cedeira it only gets better. On the road to San Andrés de Teixido you exchange the ever-changing horizons of the *rias* for thick woodlands, and after San Andrés the winding road is dotted with spectacular *miradores* (lookouts) over some of the sheerest coast in Europe. Anyone with a vehicle should come this way just for the views. Wild horses still mingle here with long-horned cattle and long-armed windmills. The nearest Sunday to 1 July is the annual date for the *rapa das bestas*, the festive round-up and breaking in of the free-spirited horses.

SAN ANDRÉS DE TEIXIDO & GARITA HERBEIRA

Tiny San Andrés, 12km northeast of Cedeira, is renowned as a sanctuary of relics of St Andrew. Spaniards flock here by the busload and fill bottles with spring water from the *Fonte do Santo*. Six kilometres beyond San Andrés is the spectacular Garita Herbeira *mirador*, 600m above sea level.

CABO ORTEGAL

Another 20km northeast is Cabo Ortegal, the mother of Spanish capes. Great stone shafts drop sheer into the ocean from such a height that the waves crashing onto the rocks below seem pitifully – and deceptively – benign. The cape, which marks the meeting of the Atlantic Ocean and Bay of Biscay, is 4km beyond the workaday town of Cariño. Buses run to Cariño from Ferrol, Cedeira and Ortigueira, and there are three *hostales*.

Cariño to Viveiro

From Cariño the road roughly follows Ría de Ortigueira southwards to Río Mera. The only town of any consequence is Ortigueira,

a fishing town and the site of a major Celtic music festival held in July (see the boxed text, opposite). Continue northeast to O Barqueiro, a Galician fishing village as you might imagine one, on the Ferrol–Viveiro railway and bus route. White houses with slate-tile roofs cascade down to a small protected port. There's little to do but watch the day's catch come in, but that's the point – this is the real thing. There are three places to stay and eat on the waterfront: **Hostal O Forno** (☎ /fax 981 41 41 24; s/d €35/50) has rooms in excellent, comfy condition, most enjoying harbour views.

For an even quieter base, push north to the hamlet of Porto de Bares, 2km past Vila de Bares, boasting a lovely crescent beach. **Hostal Porto Mar** (☎ 981 41 86 76; Rúa Feliciano Armada 15; s/d €30/40) has good-sized, bright, clean rooms, and **Restaurante La Marina** (☎ 981 41 40 01), above the beach, does superb seafood paellas (€16 to €24 per person, minimum two). Between Vila de Bares and Porto de Bares, a 1.5km side road leads off to the *Punta da Estaca de Bares*, Spain's most northerly point. From the lighthouse, a trail follows the spine of the serpentine outcrop almost to its end.

Viveiro

pop 6000

Behind the grand *Puerta de Carlos V* (the most impressive of Viveiro's three remaining old gates, facing the *Puente de Misericordia* bridge over the Ría de Viveiro) lies a straggle of cobbled lanes and plazas where not too much has changed since the town was rebuilt after a fire in 1540. Directly up the street past *Praza Maior* is the *Iglesia de Santa María do Campo*, displaying Romanesque and Gothic features. Nearby is a bad-taste reproduction of the shrine of Lourdes, while to the north the 14th-century *Iglesia de San Francisco* (🕒 11.30am-1.30pm & 7-8.30pm) features an extraordinary apse with tall, slender stained-glass windows.

A well-stocked **tourist office** (☎ 982 56 08 79; www.viveiro.es; Avenida Ramón Canosa; 🕒 10.45am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat) is opposite the small bus station (north along the waterfront from the *Puerta de Carlos V*).

Hotel Vila (☎ 982 56 13 31; www.hotel-vila.net; Avenida Nicolás Cora Montenegro 57; s/d €38/45; 🍴), about 300m up from the waterfront, is a welcoming place to stay, with comfy rooms, breakfasts available, and helpful, English-speaking hosts. There are *hostales* and a couple of camping

grounds on the beaches outside town, particularly at *Praia de Covas*.

For a good seafood meal, head to **O Muro** (☎ 982 56 08 23; Rúa Margarita Pardo de Cela 28; fish mains €13.50-15; 🍴 closed Mon), with a bar downstairs and dining room upstairs. **Mesón Xoquín** (☎ 982 56 27 56; Rúa Irmáns Vilar Ponte 19; raciones €3.50-12.50) is a great little place for tapas, from mussels or meatballs to eggs and chips with slivers of eel.

Four daily FEVE trains travelling between Ferrol (€5.05, two hours) and Oviedo (€12.85, 4½ hours) stop at Viveiro. Four or five daily buses operate to A Coruña (€12.30, three hours), Ferrol (€7.50, 1½ hours), Lugo (€9, two hours) and (except Sundays) Ribadeo (€4.70, one hour).

Mondoñedo

pop 6000 / elevation 139m

Compared with the natural spectacles of Galicia's northwestern coast, the offerings east of Viveiro cut a poor figure. The main road lies mostly well inland, and most of the beaches pale before their cousins further west and east.

PIPERS & FIDDLERS

Although the sounds and rhythms of Galician music differ noticeably from those of the Celts in Brittany, Ireland and Scotland, there's also much in common between the different traditions. The most readily recognisable Galician instrument is the *gaita* (bagpipe). Summer in Santiago de Compostela is a good time to catch buskers playing traditional Galician tunes, on quite an inventory of instruments. In addition to the standard *gaita*, *bombo* (big drum) and *violin*, look out for the *zanfona*, a string and key instrument vaguely similar to an accordion.

Bagpipe ensembles feature in many Galician festivals and the leading *gaiteros* (bagpipers) are popular heroes. If you get the chance to hear stars such as Carlos Núñez, Xosé Manuel Budiño, Susana Seivane or Mercedes Peón, don't pass it up. Top traditional folk groups, also well worth watching out for, include Milladoiro, Luar Na Lubre and Berrogüetto. Uxia is a powerful female vocalist and interpreter of traditional popular song.

Perhaps the best setting in which to enjoy Galicia's musical heritage is at its myriad summer folk festivals. These summits bring together folk musicians from within the region and far beyond, with groups from Asturias, Brittany, Ireland and even Nova Scotia sharing their roots.

- **Ortigueira International Celtic Music Festival** (☎ 981 40 00 00; www.festivaldeortigueira.com) Rías Altas; second weekend in July.
- **Festival Intercéltico do Morrazo** (☎ 986 31 01 04; www.interceltico.com in Spanish) In Moaña, Ría de Vigo; last weekend in July.
- **Festa da Carballeira** (☎ 981 77 00 11; www.festadacarballeira.com) Zas, Costa de Morte region, 40km northwest of Santiago de Compostela; first weekend in August.
- **Festival Celta de Pardiñas** (☎ 982 37 01 09) Guitiriz, midway between A Coruña and Lugo; first weekend in August.
- **Festival Celta dos Irmandiños** (☎ 981 40 40 06) Moeche, 20km northeast of Ferrol; second-last weekend in August.

By contrast, a detour inland to Mondoñedo is rewarding. Once the seat of a bishopric and, until 1833, a provincial capital within Galicia, the town is surrounded by green hills and its slightly down-at-heel appearance in no way diminishes its interest.

The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 982 50 71 77; www.emondonedo.com in Spanish; Praza da Catedral 34; 🕒 10.30am-2pm & 4.30-7pm) is just up from the large and impressive **cathedral** (🕒 9am-1pm & 4-8pm), a stylistic mongrel ranging from 13th-century Romanesque to 18th-century baroque. Check out the 15th-century murals in the main nave, displaying St Peter's martyrdom and the slaughter of the innocents. Also fronting the old square is the 18th-century **Palacio Episcopal**. The *Fonte Vella* (Old Fountain), a short walk south, was built in 1548.

Mondoñedo's most unusual place to stay is the **Hospedaxe Seminario** (☎ 982 52 10 00; Praza do Seminario; s/d €21.40/38.52), in the 18th-century Santa Catalina seminary behind the cathedral, where rooms are spacious and comfortable, but this is probably not the place to come if you're in a party mood.

Meson Os Arcos (☎ 982 50 70 12; Rúa de Alfonso VII 6; mains €6-10) specialises in tasty *carnes a la brasa* (barbecued meats).

A few daily buses operate to Lugo, Ribadeo, Viveiro and A Coruña.

Ribadeo

pop 9000

The best thing about this busy little frontier town is its broad *rúa*. The impressive **Ponte dos Santos** crosses the waterway that, becoming Río Eo further inland, marks the regional border with Asturias for 30km south. Ribadeo's tranquil, palm-studded central square, Praza de España, is highlighted by the modernist Torre de los Moreno with a glazed ceramic dome. If you have a little time to spare, head 10km west to Praia As Catedrais, a 1.5km sandy beach with spectacular rock arches.

The centre of Ribadeo is awash with places to stay: **Hotel Mediante** (☎ 982 13 04 53; www.hotelmediante.com; Praza de España 16; s/d €47/60; j) is recommended both for its cosy rooms and its fish and meat grills.

Two daily FEVE trains run along the Asturian coast to/from Oviedo (€9.25, 3½ hours); four run to/from Ferrol (€8.65, three hours). Half a dozen daily buses head to/from Oviedo, Luarca and (except Sunday) Viveiro, and a few to/from Lugo.

COSTA DA MORTE

Legend is that on stormy nights, villagers along the 'Coast of Death' used to put out lamps to lure passing ships to their doom on deadly rocks, and would then reap a harvest of whatever washed ashore. This treacherous coast has certainly seen more than its share of shipwrecks. On sunny days you could be forgiven for thinking the tales of danger are exaggerated, but the idyllic landscape can undergo a rapid transformation when ocean mists blow in. The area remains one of the most intriguing in Galicia, relatively isolated and fairly thinly populated. Every fishing village has its own character and the coast between them rarely fails to be either dramatic or beautiful.

West of A Coruña, the Costa da Morte begins at unassuming Caión.

Arriva (☎ 902 27 74 82; www.arriva.es in Spanish) runs buses from Santiago de Compostela and A Coruña to many places on the Costa da Morte.

MALPICA DE BERGANTIÑOS

pop 3000

Malpica calls itself 'the town of life on the coast of death', and its bustling centre, with a sweeping, sandy beach on one side and a busy port on the other, is certainly one of the saltier places along this coast. Offshore are the *Illas Sisargas*, where gulls nest.

Hostal JB (☎ 981 72 19 06; Ruedo da Praia 3; s €26-35, d €39-45) has lovely, well-cared-for rooms, some overhanging the beach.

Hostal Panchito (☎ 981 72 03 07; Praza Villar Amigo 5; r €37-46) is upstairs from a busy fishermen's café on the main street. Its good bright rooms all have outside windows.

For seafood, head to the shiny **Casa Antonio** (☎ 981 72 00 04; Plaza Santa Lucia; mains €11-21), in the alley next to Café Panchito, or **O'Burato** (☎ 981 72 00 57; mains €12-15), across the way and overlooking the port. Most people start their meals with a crack of their favourite shellfish.

Four or more daily buses come here from A Coruña (€5.50, one hour), but just one from Santiago de Compostela on Saturday and Sunday.

LAXE, CAMELLE & AROUND

Laxe (population 3000) has a sweeping blue-flag beach, though unfortunately its diminutive historic core is overshadowed by modern buildings. The 15th-century Gothic church of Santa María da Atalaia stands guard over the harbour.

The **Hostal Bahía** (☎ 981 72 82 07; www.bahialaxe.com; Avenida Besugueira 24; s/d €30/40, r with terrace €55), uphill past Santa María da Atalaia, has 22 well-maintained rooms; the more expensive ones have stupendous terraces overlooking the port. Owner Manuel is a mine of information about the best walks and places to go on the Costa da Morte. For fresh fish and seafood, head to the **Casa do Arco** (☎ 981 70 69 04; Rúa Real 1; mains €12-18; h closed Tue) overlooking the bay.

Up to five buses run daily to/from A Coruña (€7.20, 1¼ hours); there's also a bus Monday to Friday from Santiago de Compostela with Aucasa (€6.20).

One lovely two-day, 39km walk, takes you southwest along the coast to Camariñas. Along the way are **Praia de Traba**, a 2km sweep of sand that remains virtually deserted even in mid-August, and the laid-back fishing village of **Camelle**, where **A Molinera** (☎ 981 71 03 28; Rúa Principal 79; r €30) has plain but well-kept rooms. **Café Bar Rotterdam** (mains from €7) by Camelle's port serves delicious fish dishes.

Towards the end of Camelle's pier you'll find the **Museo do Alemán**, a garden of quirky sculpture created by an eccentric, long-time German resident. Locals say the sculptor, known simply as Man, was so devastated by the *Prestige* spill, which splashed his fanciful figures black, that he died shortly afterwards, apparently sapped of the will to live. The museum has been left to fend for itself.

Just west of Camelle is **Arou**, a little-visited fishing village with a couple of pleasant swimming areas. A passable dirt track leads from near Arou towards **Ensenada de Trece**, a quiet beach, and eventually to the Camariñas-Cabo Vilán road. After 10km the track passes the **Cemiterio dos Ingleses** (English Cemetery), the burial ground from an 1890 shipwreck in which 170 British cadets drowned.

CAMARIÑAS

pop 6000

The small fishing port of Camariñas is a place of simple charms: cobblestone lanes wind past cubist houses, and women make the town's traditional *encaixe* (lacework – some of it very pretty) in the streets and at their windows. Several shops specialise in lace, and there's a **Museo do Encaixe** (☎ 981 73 63 40; Praza Insuela; admission €1.20; h 11am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun) by the town hall.

While you're here, take a look at **Cabo Vilán**, an impressive cape with a 25m lighthouse, 5km northwest of the town.

Overall the best bet of half a dozen places to stay is the new **Hotel O Parranda** (☎ 981 70 54 68; www.oparranda.com; Calle Casadillo 1; s/d incl breakfast €25/40; √√), behind the town hall and half a block from the harbour. It has 18 sparkling, all-exterior rooms. Neat, spacious **Restaurant Villa de Oro** (☎ 981 73 63 54; Rúa do Areal 5; mains €6-15), 150m back from the harbour, does good roast lamb as well as seafood.

Up to four buses run daily to/from Santiago de Compostela (€9.30, two hours), some with a change in Baio, and to/from A Coruña (€9.70, two hours), some with a change at Vimianzo.

MUXÍA & AROUND

Getting to/from Camariñas you'll pass through Ponte do Porto, on Río Grande. The coastal road south for Os Muíños (Molinos) passes the pretty hamlet of **Cereixo**, then turns sharp right along a narrow, shaded road. Along this enchanting route, near Leis – which has almost as many *hórreos* (grain stores) as houses –

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Casa de Trillo (☎ 981 72 77 78; www.casade.trillo.com; r incl breakfast €64-80; p i √) For something different, make for the hamlet of Santa Mariña, 1km west of Villarmide (which is 10km south of Muxía). Here the Casa de Trillo provides characterful rooms in a 16th-century noble mansion with a heap of history and lovely gardens.

you'll find one of the most inviting beaches along the Costa da Morte, **Praia do Lago**, looking across the 3km-wide *ría* to Camariñas, with a quiet little river at its south end. **Hostal Playa de Lago** (☎ 981 75 07 93; www.hostalplayadelago.com in Spanish; s/d €33/40; h Easter-Oct), opposite the south end of the beach, is a friendly place with cosy rooms and a seafood restaurant. There are also a couple of camping grounds here.

Muxía itself (population 5000) is nothing special, but you can head out to **Punta da Barca**, which affords good views of the coast. In the baroque **Santuário da Virxe da Barca** are kept the stone hull and sail of the stone boat in which Santiago (St James) supposedly started back for Palestine after preaching in Galicia (this was, of course, before he died in Palestine and his body was returned to Galicia in another stone boat). The rocks around the church are the scene of a popular *romería* (festive pilgrimage) in mid-September. Muxía's **Hostal La Cruz** (☎ 981 74 20 84; Avenida López Abente 44; s/d €41/55) has bright rooms, great views and a restaurant.

Two or three buses travel daily to/from A Coruña to Muxía (€11.20, 2¼ hours), with a change at either Vimianzo or Laxe, and there are two daily from Santiago de Compostela.

FISTERRA & AROUND

Those wandering about the Costa da Morte will want to make it to Galicia's version of Land's End, **Cabo Fisterra** (Castilian: Cabo Finisterre), where Spain stops and the Atlantic begins. Although this is not quite mainland Spain's westernmost point (Cabo de la Nave, 5km north, has that distinction), it's certainly a spectacular spot. It's also the end of the popular 86km Camino de Fisterra variant of the Camino de Santiago (see p98).

From the town of Fisterra (population 3000) it's 3.5km to the cape. On the way out is the 12th-century **Igrexa de Santa María das Areas**, a mix of Romanesque, Gothic and baroque. The

best views of the coast are to be had by climbing up the track, beginning 600m past the church, to Monte Facho and Monte de San Guillermo. The area is laced with myth and superstition, and they say childless couples used to come up here to improve their chances of conception.

Fisterra town has a dozen places to stay. **Hostal Mariquito** (☎ 981 74 00 84; Calle Santa Catalina 24; r €36), just up from the main harbour, has reasonably modern rooms, and the four front ones on the 4th floor enjoy harbour views. Much more charming and comfy is **Hotel Rústico Insula Finisterrae** (☎ 981 71 22 11; www.insulafinisterrae.com in Spanish; A Insua 76; r incl breakfast €72; p i s), a century-old converted farmhouse at the top of the village, with stone walls, crisp white bedding, solid wood furnishings, fantastic views and great breakfasts.

O Centolo (☎ 981 74 04 52; Calle del Puerto; dishes & raciones €10-30; h closed late Dec & Jan) serves up good fresh seafood and fish in a stylish café overlooking the harbour.

Up to six buses daily come from A Coruña (€11.40, two hours) and up to seven from Santiago de Compostela (€10, 2½ hours). Some require a change in Baio or Cée.

TOWARDS THE RÍAS BAIXAS

The southernmost stretch of the Costa da Morte has its moments. From Ézaro, 25km east of Fisterra, a 2.5km side road leads up to a *mirador* with awesome views over the Atlantic.

O Pindo is a cute fishing village set back on a shallow, tranquil bay. Here you'll find the adequate **Hospedaje La Morada** (☎ 981 76 48 70; s/d €20/30), with shiny white quilted bedspreads and a reasonably priced restaurant.

Another 10km south is long, sandy Playa de Carnota – usually not too crowded and fine if the wind isn't up. Carnota town is renowned as home to Galicia's longest *hórreo* – 34.5m long, it was built late in the 18th century.

RÍAS BAIXAS

The four great estuaries of Galicia's south, the Rías Baixas (Castilian: Rías Bajas), are the grandest of all the *rías* that indent the length of the Galician coast and are justifiably well known. There are plenty of beaches and several relatively low-key resorts, and in summer good weather is a better bet here than further north. You may be a little disappointed with the dull, built-up stretches to be found along

every *ría*, and by the traffic and 'House Full' signs in summer, but there are enough pretty villages and expanses of beautiful shore to keep most people happy. Throw in the Illas Cíes, lovely old Pontevedra and bustling Vigo, and you have a tempting travel cocktail.

The following sections start at the inland end of each *ría* and work outwards, but if you have a vehicle an appealing option is simply to follow the coast around from one *ría* to the next: the coastal road runs some 360km from Cée on the Costa da Morte to Tui on the Portuguese border – a straight-line distance of just 110km!

RÍA DE MUROS Y NOIA

pop 14,000

Noia's old centre preserves a few reminders of past glories, in particular the Gothic **Igrexa de San Martiño** (Praza do Tapal). The **Igrexa de Santa María A Nova** (☎ 981 82 41 69; Carreiriña do Escultor Ferreiro; admission free; h 10.30am-1.30pm & 4-6pm Mon-Sat), together with its cemetery, forms a unique museum of headstones and funerary art.

Hotel Elisardo (☎ 981 82 01 30; Costa do Ferrador 15; r €42) is a small, comfortable lodging in a central street just 50m back from the waterfront.

For food and drinks, you can't beat **Tasca Tipica** (☎ 981 82 18 42; Rúa Cantón 15) in the 14th-century Pazo de Costa, along the street from the Igrexa de San Martiño.

Buses run here hourly from Santiago de Compostela (€2.95, 45 minutes), continuing to Muros.

Muros

pop 10,000

Founded in the 10th century towards the western end of the *ría*, en route to the Costa da Morte, Muros was long an important port for Santiago de Compostela. It has no great surviving monuments and apart from enjoying a beer or meal on the waterfront, there's not much to detain you, though there are a couple of nice beaches west of town.

South Shore

The main attraction here is the long series of beaches – such as **Praia de Agueira**, 2km past Portosín. The village of **Porto do Son**, 2km beyond, makes a relaxed stop. On a picturesque headland, 4km southwest, are the remains of a prehistoric settlement, the **Castro de Baroña**. The **Centro de Interpretación do Castro de Baroña** (Calle

de Fernando Fariña; admission €0.60; h 11am-2pm & 7-9pm Jul-Sep), in Porto do Son, provides background. Stretching south from the *castro*, **Praia Area Longa** is the first of a small string of surfing beaches down this side of the *ría*.

Hotel Villa del Son (☎ 981 85 30 49; www.hotel.villadelson.com; Rúa Trincherpe 11; s/d €32/51; p w), just back from the harbour and only a few years old, has simple but comfortable rooms and its own convenient café.

Drivers could detour to the **Dolmen de Axeitos**, a well-preserved megalithic monument, signposted between Xuño and Ribeira; and on to **Corrubedo** at the tip of the peninsula, with beaches either side of town, a lighthouse at the end of the road and a few relaxed bars around its small harbour.

RÍA DE AROUSA

Padrón

pop 10,000

The hottest thing to come out of Padrón is peppers. That's right, *pimientos de Padrón* – shrivelled little green things that taste very good, but beware the odd *very* hot one. Franciscan friars imported them from Mexico in the 16th century and the whole area now grows them to meet the demand.

This town, where Santiago's corpse supposedly arrived in Galicia, also prides itself as the former home of poet Rosalía de Castro, inspiration of Galicia's 19th-century *Rexurdimento* (cultural reawakening). The **Casa Museo Rosalía de Castro** (☎ 981 81 12 04; A Matanza; admission €1.40; h 10am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-1.30pm Sun), just behind the train station, is the prime stop on the so-called *Ruta Rosaliana* around this region.

Hostal del Jardín (☎ 981 81 09 50; Rúa de Salgado Araujo 3; r €43), a pretty stone building with a small garden and spacious rooms, is opposite the park on the road to the train station.

Buses run up to eight times daily to/from Santiago de Compostela (€1.60, 30 minutes) and Pontevedra (€3.20, one hour), and a few travel daily to/from Noia, Cambados and O Grove.

Catoira

About 15km from Padrón down the southern side of Río Ulla, which shortly afterwards widens into the Ría de Arousa, stand the **Torres do Oeste** at Catoira. These towers are what remains of *Castellum Honesti*, the medieval castle that was the key in protecting (not always successfully) Santiago de Compostela

against Norman raids. On the first Sunday of August, a Viking landing is staged here as part of a boisterous fiesta, the *Romería Viquinga*.

Illa de Arousa

Southwest of Catoira, Illa de Arousa is an island connected to the mainland by a 2km-long bridge. The small town here survives mainly from fishing and the whole place has a low profile. Some of the beaches facing the mainland are very pleasant and protected, with comparatively warm water, and a walking trail runs around the 29km coastline. The southern part of the island forms the **Parque Natural Carreirón**, with dunes, marshlands and abundant bird life.

Camping Salinas (☎ 986 52 74 44; sites per person/tent/car €4/3.80/3.80; h Jun-Sep) and **Camping El Edén** (☎ 986 55 15 20; sites per person/tent/car €4.55/4.15/4.65; h mid-Jun–mid-Sep) are on Playa de Salinas, facing the mainland.

Monbus (☎ 902 29 29 00) has a few daily buses linking the island with Vilanova de Arousa and Vilagarcía de Arousa, both of which have connections for Santiago de Compostela, Cambados and O Grove. **Autocares Núñez Barros** (☎ 986 54 31 00) operates to/from Pontevedra (€3, 1¼ hours) up to five times daily.

Cambados

pop 13,000

Founded by the Visigoths and a victim of constant harrying by Vikings in the 9th and 10th centuries, Cambados is today a peaceful *ría*-side town and the hub of the Albariño wine region, famed for its fruity whites. The **Centro Comarcal Expo-Salnés** (☎ 986 52 60 13; Paseo da Calzada; h 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri, from 11am Sat & Sun) has displays on local architecture, archaeology and wine and will give you a map of **Albariño wineries** (h usually 11am-1pm & 4-8pm, some closed Sat & Sun), many of which are open for visits. At the north end of the town centre is the magnificent **Praza de Fefiñans**, bordered on two sides by a grand 16th-century mansion, the **Pazo de Fefiñans**, with a winery (h 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat mid-Mar–Dec) and on another by the 15th-century **Igrexa de San Bieito**.

Cambados has five museums (joint admission €3; h 10am-2.30pm & 4.30-7.30pm Tue-Sun), mainly devoted to wine and fishing but there's also one preserving an old tide-operated cereal mill.

SLEEPING & EATING

Cambados has over 20 places to stay suiting all budgets. For food, take a walk beside the

parador up cobbled Rúa Príncipe and Rúa Real towards Praza de Fefiñáns.

Pazo A Capitana (☎ 986 52 05 13; www.pazoacapitana.com in Spanish; Rúa Sabugueiro 42; s/d incl breakfast €75/96; p a w) This lovely country house dating from the 15th century sits off the Pontevedra road on the edge of town. It has beautiful gardens and an on-site winery so you don't need to move far for your wine tasting. The rooms are recently renovated but in classically antique style.

Parador de Cambados (☎ 986 54 22 50; www.parador.es; Paseo Calzada; s/d €120/150; p a i s w v) Recently modernised, in a 17th-century mansion in the heart of town. The restaurant here has special menus for vegetarians and celiacs.

A Casa da Leña (☎ 986 52 10 71; Praza das Rodas 1; raciones €3-15; h closed Tue) An attractive little stone-walled eatery serving some very tasty concoctions including *revuelto de grelos con jamón* (scrambled eggs with ham and greens) and Galician *tetilla* cheese with anchovies and red peppers. Plenty of wine too, of course.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Up to five buses a day run to/from Santiago de Compostela (€4.60, one hour), up to nine to/from Pontevedra (€2.15, one hour) and up to seven to/from O Grove (some via Sanxenxo).

O Grove

pop 11,000
How you react to O Grove may depend on the weather. It's a strange mix of England's Blackpool and some of Italy's Adriatic 'family' resorts, and in winter much of it is closed. Arguably the best thing about the area is **Praia A Lanzada** (p566), on the isthmus linking O Grove to the mainland.

The **tourist office** (☎ 986 73 14 15; www.turismo.grove.com; Praza do Corgo 1; h 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun) is near the fishing harbour. Fish auctions are staged in the nearby Lonxa (Fish Market) at 7am and 5pm Monday to Friday.

Acquariumgalicia (☎ 986 73 15 15; admission €9; h 10am-9pm Jun-mid-Oct, 10am-8pm Fri-Sun mid-Oct-May), at Punta Moreiras on the northwest side of the O Grove peninsula, houses sea creatures mainly from the Galician coasts.

In steady weather from April to November, numerous companies run *ría* cruises, chiefly to look at the bateas – platforms where mussels, oysters and scallops are cultivated. Tours, including mussel tastings, cost €13 per person and run for 1¼ hours.

SLEEPING & EATING

There are half a dozen camping grounds on the west side of the O Grove peninsula. In town, accommodation is mostly spread along Rúa Castelao, running between the centre and the bridge to Illa A Toxa (a verdant island of luxury hotels, villas, apartments and a golf course).

Hostal Montesol (☎ 986 73 09 16; www.hostalmontesol.net; Rúa Castelao 160; r €40) On the waterfront near the bridge, this friendly, well-kept *hostal* offers comfy beds and panoramic *ría* views.

Hotel Maruxia (☎ 986 73 27 95; Rúa Luis Casais 14; s/d €63/85; w) No sea views except from the roof terrace, but the Maruxia is a solidly comfortable central hotel offering carpeted rooms with good, big bathrooms.

Of the slew of large seafood houses facing the harbour, **El Crisol** (☎ 986 73 00 99; Rúa do Hospital 10; fish dishes €13-16; h closed lunch Mon) is up there with the best.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses run to/from Cambados, Pontevedra, Santiago de Compostela and elsewhere. The bus station is on Beiramar, by the port.

PONTEVEDRA

pop 78,000 / elevation 290m
Galicia's smallest provincial capital has managed to preserve intact a classic old centre dotted with attractive plazas linked by winding streets. This is also the living centre of a vibrant little city – great for leisurely exploring interspersed with visits to the many appealing bars and restaurants.

History

In the 16th century Pontevedra was the biggest city in Galicia and an important port. Columbus' flagship, the *Santa María*, was built here. In the 17th century the city began to decline in the face of growing competition in the *ría* and the silting up of its port. Nevertheless, Pontevedra was made provincial capital in 1835 and today tourism is a healthy boon.

Orientation & Information

The historic centre is clearly confined within a rough circle drawn by the former city walls. Inside this area you'll find several sleeping, eating and drinking options and most of what you'll want to see.

Banks and other offices lie on or near Rúa de Michelena, the main drag of the newer town.

Ciber Las Ruinas (Rúa do Marqués de Riestra 21; per hr €1.80; h 10am-1am Mon-Fri, 11am-1am Sat, 5pm-1am Sun)

Municipal tourist information kiosks (Praza de España & Praza de Ourense; h 10am-1.30pm & 5-7.30pm Jun-Nov)

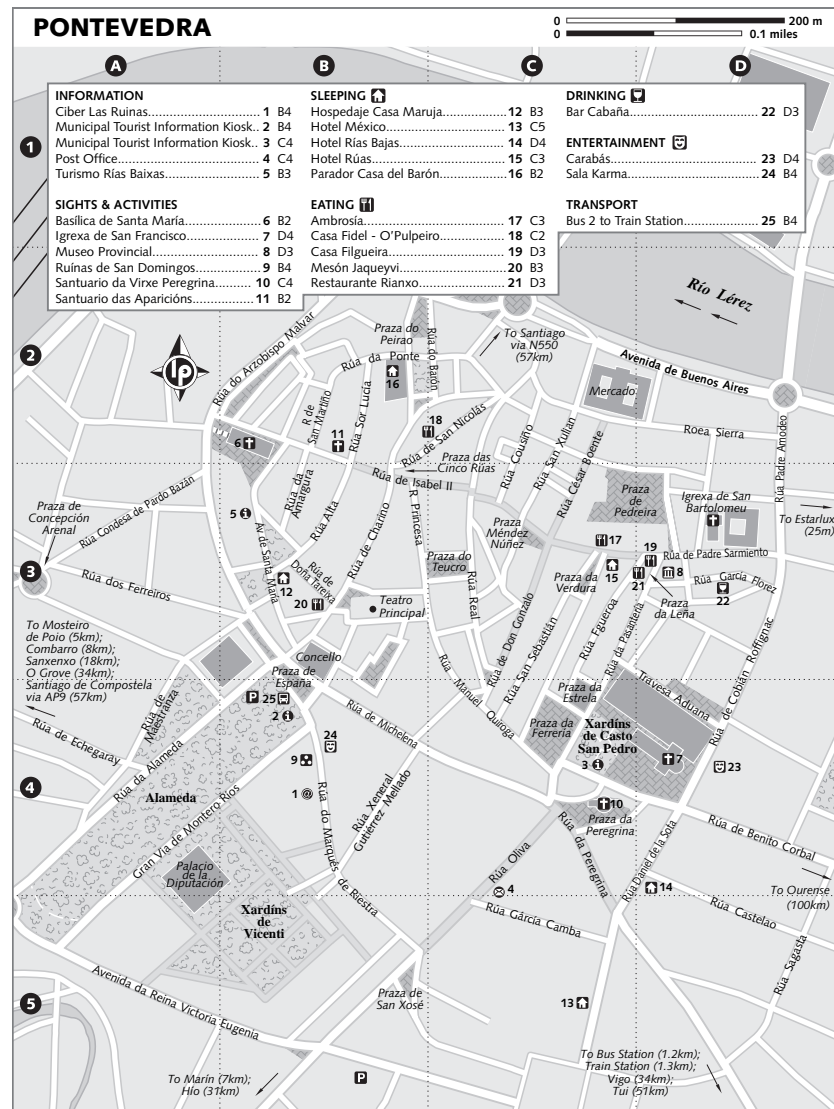
Post office (Rúa Oliva)

Turismo Rías Baixas (☎ 986 84 26 90; www.riasbaixas.org; Praza de Santa María; h 9am-9pm Mon-Fri,

10am-2.30pm & 4.30-8pm Sat & Sun mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm Sat & Sun mid-Sep-mid-Jun) Heaps of information on all Pontevedra province.

Sights

Starting at the southeastern edge of the old town, you can't miss the distinctive curved façade of the **Santuario da Virxe Peregrina**, an 18th-century



caprice with a distinctly Portuguese flavour. The broad, part-colonnaded **Praza da Ferrería**, nearby, displays an eclectic collection of buildings dating as far back as the 15th century. Set back from Praza da Ferrería in its own gardens is the 14th-century **Igrexa de San Francisco** (h 7.30am-12.45pm & 5.30-9pm), believed to have been founded personally by St Francis of Assisi when on pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. What was the adjacent convent is now the local tax office.

Head down **Rúa da Pasantería** and you emerge in **Praza da Leña**, one of Pontevedra's most enchanting niches, partly colonnaded and with a *cruceiro* (wayside crucifix) in the middle. Just off it stands the eclectic **Museo Provincial** (986 85 14 55; Rúa da Pasantería 10; admission free; h at least 10am-1.30pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat year-round, 11am-2pm Sun Oct-May), centred on two 18th-century palaces joined by an arch. The collection ranges from Bronze Age archaeological finds to Galician crafts and Renaissance and modern painting. Part of the archaeological collection is housed in the **Ruínas de San Domingos**, a ruined 14th-century church beside the elegant **Alameda gardens**.

West of the museum, the area known as **As Cinco Rúas** is a hub of Pontevedra nightlife. The tiny **Praza das Cinco Rúas**, where five lanes converge, is marked by a *cruceiro*.

West of **Praza das Cinco Rúas**, up **Rúa de Isabel II**, stands the **Basílica de Santa María** (h 10am-1pm & 5-9pm), a mainly Gothic church with a whiff of Plateresque and Portuguese Manueline influences. Signposted on the way up is the **Santuario das Aparicións** (h 9am-1.30pm & 4-6pm), a chapel and lodgings where the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared to the 20th-century child visionary **Lucía de Fátima**.

Festivals & Events

The **Festas da Peregrina**, held for a week in mid-August, feature a big funfair on the **Alameda** and concerts in **Praza da Ferrería**. In late July, the **Festival Internacional de Jazz e Blues de Pontevedra** (www.jazzpontevedra.com) attracts topnotch musicians from around the world.

Sleeping

Hospedaje Casa Maruja (986 85 49 01; Avenida de Santa María 12; s/d €25/37) The best budget bet in the old town has 10 spotless, good-sized rooms, and balconies over a tranquil plaza.

Hotel México (986 85 90 06; Rúa de Andrés Muruais 10; s/d €36/56; p) Just outside the old town, this hotel is nothing spectacular but has colourful, well-equipped rooms with gleaming bathrooms.

Hotel Rúas (986 84 64 16; hotelruas@terra.es; Rúa de Padre Sarmiento 37; s/d €40/60; p a i v) Flanked by two plazas in the heart of the old city, **Hotel Rúas** is a sleek, comfortable place to spend the night, with original colour combos like yellow and green.

Hotel Rías Bajas (986 85 51 00; hotelriabajas.com; Rúa Daniel de la Sota 7; s €55-64, d €86-105; p) Not quite in the old city, this is a good option for above-average comfort. The good big rooms, nearly all external, are adorned with pleasing art and 19th-century-style furnishings.

Parador Casa del Barón (986 85 58 00; www.parador.es; Rúa do Barón 19; s/d €120/150; p a i) Housed in a large Renaissance/neoclassical mansion, it's one of Spain's most appealing *paradores*, full of historical atmosphere and smooth service.

Eating

Tapas in many Pontevedra watering holes are not the mere titbits you get elsewhere, but a wholesome *media-ración* size.

Casa Figueira (986 85 88 15; Praza da Leña 2; tapas €3.50-10; h closed Sun) Among other items from its delectable tapas list, you'll want to try the *filloas* (€3.50) – crepes stuffed with oyster mushrooms, salt cod and so on.

Casa Fidel – O Pulpeiro (986 85 12 34; Rúa de San Nicolás 7; pulpo á feira €8) The **Cinco Rúas** area is an eating and drinking hub and **Casa Fidel** is the zone's octopus specialist: look for the boiling tubs of chopped-up cephalopod.

Mesón Jaqueyvi (986 86 18 20; Rúa de Doña Tareixa 1; tapas €2-10, tablas €6-14) Terrific tapas and wine bar on the small plaza in front of the theatre, specialising in cheeses, hams, pâtés, *empanadas* and marvellous tortillas.

Ambrosia (986 84 24 80; Rúa de Padre Sarmiento 31; mains & set menu €10; h 1.30-3.45pm Mon-Sat, 9-11.30pm Fri & Sat; v) Stylish 'new vegetarian' place appropriately situated on **Praza da Verdura** (Vegetable Square). The creative taste combinations run from tofu and mango brochettes to spicy rice-and-egg kofta.

Restaurante Rianxo (986 85 52 11; Praza da Leña 6; set menu €10; h closed Sun) If you'd like to sit down and tuck into a proper meal, head upstairs to the *comedor* here for good home-style cooking.

Drinking

The best places for coffee and people-watching are the cafés on the many squares. **Praza da Ferrería** probably wins on this score.

For evening drinks, head for old-town squares like **Praza da Verdura** or **Praza da Leña**. From there you can head to the pocket of bars on **Rúa do Barón** and then, for some heftier *marcha* (action), up the road to the thumping music bars of **Rúa de Charino** – you'll soon get a feel for what's right for you. Outside the bars, the stately porticoes of **Praza de Pedreira** become the scene of major partying long after dark.

For a more bohemian atmosphere, head for **Bar Cabaña** (986 85 28 24; Rúa García Flórez 22; h from 10.30pm), a subterranean jazz den.

Entertainment

If it's nightclubs you're after, try **Estarlux** (Rúa Cruz Vermella 6; h from midnight Thu-Sat), with eclectic DJ programming over a 6000-watt system, or Pontevedra's biggest discotheque **Carabás** (986 86 26 95; Rúa de Cobián Roffignac 4; h from 1am Thu-Fri, 3am Sat), southeast of the town centre.

Spanish touring bands play at **Estarlux**; **Sala Karma** (Rúa do Marqués de Riestra 34; admission varies) often hosts local bands from Thursday to Saturday.

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (986 85 24 08; Rúa da Estación) is about 1.5km southeast of the town centre. Frequent services link Pontevedra with **Vigo** (€2.30, 30 minutes), and at least nine buses travel the AP9 motorway to **Santiago de Compostela** (€4.95, one hour); at least six continue to **A Coruña** (€11, two hours). Other **Santiago-bound** buses stop in **Padrón**. **Monbus** (986 902 29 29 00) runs roughly hourly to/from **Combarro**, **Sanxenxo** and **O Grove** (€3.40, one hour). Buses also go to/from **Cambados**, **Tui**, **Ourense**, **Lugo** and **Madrid**.

Pontevedra's train station (986 85 13 13), across the street from the bus station, is on the **Vigo-Santiago de Compostela** line, with almost hourly train services to those cities and **A Coruña**.

Getting Around

Local circular-route buses (€0.90) run from the bus and train stations to **Praza de España**, in front of the **Concello** (City Hall) building.

RÍA DE PONTEVEDRA Mosteiro de Poio

Just northwest of Pontevedra (in fact barely separated from it now), the town of **San Xoán de Poio** is dominated by its grand monastery

(admission €1.50; h 10am-1.30pm Mon-Sat & 4.30-8pm daily May-mid-Oct, 10am-1pm Mon-Sat & 4-6pm daily mid-Oct-Apr). The first church here may have been built in the 7th century, and the gardens of the monastery's 16th-century **Claustro de las Procesiones** are gathered around a baroque fountain.

The nun-run **Hospedería Monasterio de Poio** (986 77 00 00; hospederiamonasterio@terra.es; s/d €34.24/41.73, with shared bathroom €18.19/27.82; h Easter-Oct) offers good-sized, adequately comfortable rooms in the monastery.

Combarro

pop 1300

The fishing village of **Combarro**, though hardly indifferent to the tourist dollar, has managed to retain some measure of its original character. It possesses a very quaint area of old stone houses and a picturesque string of *hórreos* down near the waterfront.

Taberna O Peirao (986 77 13 97; Rúa do Mar 6; seafood raciones €6.50-11) is the best of several spots among the waterfront *hórreos* where you can enjoy a leisurely meal. The women here bake some amazing *empanadas de berberecho* (cockles), and in summer they stoke up the sardine grill.

The road west towards **Sanxenxo** is liberally laced with *hostales*.

Monbus buses between Pontevedra and **Sanxenxo** stop at **Combarro**.

Sanxenxo

pop 15,000

Sanxenxo (Castilian: **Sangenjo**), 10km west of **Combarro**, is about as close as Galicia comes to emulating Spain's Mediterranean holiday coast. The main town beach, **Praia de Silgar**, is fine and sandy, if crowded in summer. There's a **tourist office** (986 72 02 85; www.sanxenxo.org; Porto Juan Carlos I; h 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sun), plus a large car park, in the shiny new marina development immediately east of the beach.

Rúa de Carlos Casas, running uphill just east of **Praia de Silgar**, has a few places offering decent rooms at decent prices, the best being **Hotel Casa Román** (986 72 00 31; Rúa de Carlos Casas 2; r €48).

For a seafront location, the stylish and comfortable **Hotel Rotilio** (986 72 02 00; www.hotelrotilio.com in Spanish; Avenida do Porto 7; s/d €58/103; p a) overlooks both **Praia de Silgar** and the marina. All 40 rooms are exterior and the majority have balconies. Its restaurant, **La Taberna de Rotilio** (mains €15-25; h closed Sun & Mon)

serves up terrific Galician seafood and meat with a creative touch in a fairly formal setting. Portonovo, 2km west, has many tapas bars and seafood eateries.

Buses between Pontevedra and O Grove (over 20 a day in summer) stop in Sanxenxo.

Praia A Lanzada

The coastal road beyond Portonovo is dotted with small beaches, hotels, *hostales* and camping grounds all the way around to the longest beach in the Ría de Pontevedra – the 2.3km-long, dune-backed Praia A Lanzada, along the west side of the isthmus leading to the O Grove promontory. The beach is free of the resort feel, but it's *not* deserted and remote! O Grove-bound buses will drop you here.

Illa de Ons

One diversion from Sanxenxo in summer is to take a boat out to Ons island, with its sandy beaches, cliffs, ruins, walking trails, rich bird life, no motor vehicles and a camping area (€ 986 68 76 96; camping free; 1 Jun-Sep). Campers must obtain a *tarjeta de acampada* (camping card) with their boat ticket.

Weather permitting, *Cruceros Rías Baixas* (€ 986 73 13 43; www.crucerosriasbaixas.com in Spanish) sails to/from Illa de Ons several times daily (return €12) from Sanxenxo from late June to mid-September, and on weekends in the earlier part of June.

South Shore

Don't be put off by the road from Pontevedra to Marín. It's an ugly business that bears little resemblance to what lies beyond.

HÍO & AROUND

Just west of the C550 towards the end of the *ría*, the peaceful village of Hío has its focal point in Galicia's most remarkable *cruceiro*, sculpted during the 19th century from a single block of stone. Key passages of Christian teaching, from Adam and Eve's sinful errors through to the taking down of Christ from the cross, are narrated up its length.

About 2.5km north of Hío by paved road is a fairly tranquil sandy beach, *Praia Areabrava*. Another paved road heads 5km roughly southwest from Hío to *Cabo de Home*, where you can ramble over rocky crags and enjoy great views of the Illas Cies and the Atlantic. Along the way are turn-offs for several beaches on the Ría de Vigo.

Hostal Stop (€ 986 32 94 75; Rúa Igrexario 71, Hío; r €30-40; 1 Jun-Sep), near the famous *cruceiro*, has pleasant rooms and a nice little garden.

Autobuses Cerqueiro (€ 986 32 02 54) runs a few daily buses from Cangas to Hío. Monbus' Pontevedra–Cangas service (at least 10 times daily) stops at Vilariño, 1.5km east of Hío.

RÍA DE VIGO

It's enjoyable to drive along the northern bank of the *ría*. You can see serried ranks of *bateas* and observe Vigo in the distance. But except for the far western area around Hío (left), there's not much to stop for. If you have your own transport, head a few kilometres inland from Moaña to the *Mirador de Cotorredondo*, a lookout commanding magical views over both the Ría de Vigo, with its imposing Puente de Rande suspension bridge, and the Ría de Pontevedra.

VIGO

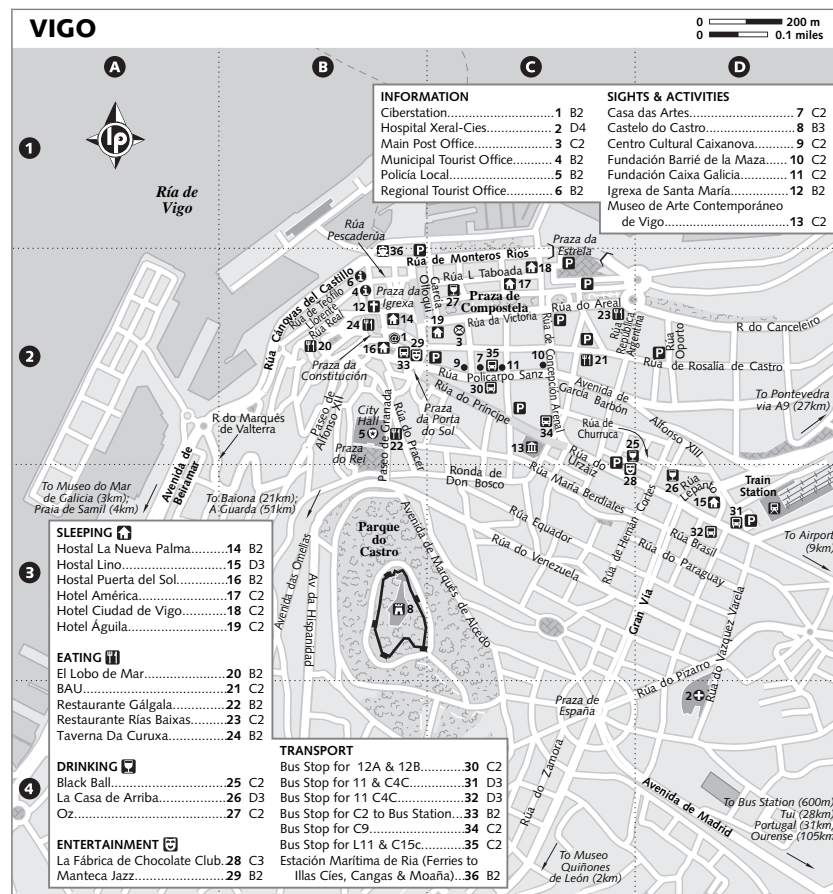
pop 276,000

Like Galicia's other large port and industrial centre, A Coruña, Vigo is short on monuments but makes up for that with a fabulous coastal setting, a busy cultural scene and a vibrant nightlife. The city has reclaimed its waterfront from unsightly docks and can claim to be Galicia's artistic capital. Vigo's long port – home to, among other things, Europe's biggest fishing fleet – once boasted a busy passenger terminal. These days, the furthest you'll get by sea is the Illas Cies, unless you're on one of the cruise ships that drop in here.

People started to notice Vigo in the Middle Ages when it began to overtake Baiona as a major port. Although the first industries started up here in the 18th century, Vigo's major development was in the 20th century, during which its population grew fifteenfold.

Orientation

The train station is 800m southeast of the old centre. The bus station is on Avenida de Madrid, about 1.4km beyond. From near the train station, Rúa do Urzáiz and its pedestrianised continuation, Rúa do Príncipe, lead down to Praza da Porta do Sol, the gateway to the old centre and port area. The heart of the modern town is immediately east of the old centre, between Rúa do Príncipe and the waterfront.



Information

The two tourist offices are within a block of each other, just up from the passenger port. There's no shortage of banks and ATMs, particularly along Avenida de García Barbón.

CiberStation (€ 986 22 36 35; Praza da Princesa 3; per hr €1.80; 1 10am-2am Mon-Sat, 11am-2am Sun)

Hospital Xeral-Cies (€ 986 81 60 00; Rúa do Pizarro 22)

Municipal tourist office (€ 986 22 47 57; www.turismodevigo.org; Rúa de Teófilo Llorente 5; 1 10am-2pm & 4-7.30pm)

Policia Local (€ 986 81 01 01; Praza do Rei)

Post office (Rúa da Victoria)

Regional tourist office (€ 986 43 05 77; Rúa Cánovas del Castillo 22; 1 9.30am or 10am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm Mon-Sat Jul-Sep, 9.30am-2pm & 4.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1.30pm Sat Oct-Jun)

Sights & Activities

The entrance to the Casco Vello (Old Town) from the bustling thoroughfares of central Vigo is marked by Praza da Princesa. Elegant Praza da Constitución is a pleasant spot for a morning coffee. Head north down Rúa dos Cesteiros, lined by wicker shops, and you'll come upon the Igrexa de Santa María, built in 1816 – long after its Romanesque predecessor had been burnt down by Sir Francis Drake. Nearby Praza da Almeida is home to a few art galleries, while narrow Rúa Pescadería, with its seafood eateries, is the old town's liveliest street.

The Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Vigo (Marco; € 986 11 39 00; www.marcovigo.com; Rúa de Príncipe 54; admission €3; 1 11am-9pm Tue-Sat, 11am-3pm Sun; √) is one of the city's top venues for exhibitions

in a variety of artistic forms, from painting and sculpture to cinema, fashion and design.

The recently opened **Fundación Barrié de la Maza** (☎ 986 11 02 20; www.fbarrie.org; Rúa Policarpo Sanz 31; admission free; 10am-1pm & 5.30-8.30pm Tue-Fri, noon-2pm & 5.30-8.30pm Sat & Sun) is an avant-garde, hi-tech exhibition and performance venue where walls, floors and seats can retract, ascend and descend to accommodate events of all kinds – worth a look for the building alone.

For exhibitions, also check out the **Casa das Artes, Centro Cultural Caixanova** and **Fundación Caixa Galicia**. All are on Rúa Policarpo Sanz and generally open from 6pm to 9pm Monday to Friday, 11am to 2pm and 6pm to 9pm Saturday, and 11am to 2pm Sunday.

Directly south (and uphill) of the old town you can wander in the verdant **Parque do Castro**, and inspect the **Castelo do Castro** that formed part of the city's defences built under Felipe IV.

English and French gardens surround the **Museo Quiñones de León** (☎ 986 29 50 70; Parque de Castrelos; admission free; 10am-8pm Tue-Fri, 5-8pm Sat, 10am-1.30pm Sun; ♪), in a 17th-century palace 3km south of the city centre. The museum contains archaeological and historical material and two major painting collections. Bus 20 from Porto do Sol heads there via Paseo Alfonso XII.

The best beach within reach is southwest of the city centre at **Praia de Samil** – 1.8km long and sandy, with great views of the Illas Cies. Catch bus 15C westbound on Policarpo Sanz or southbound on Paseo Alfonso XII to get there. On the way out to Samil, the **Museo do Mar de Galicia** (☎ 986 24 76 91; Avenida Atlántica 160; admission €3; 11am-8pm Tue-Thu, 11am-11.30pm Fri & Sat, 10am-9pm Sun) features innovatively arranged exhibits on Galicia's intimate relationship with the sea.

Sleeping

Hostal La Nueva Palma (☎ 986 43 06 78; Rúa Palma 7; s/d €22/28) This humble old-town option offers decent-sized rooms, some with balcony, facing the Igrexa de Santa María.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hotel Águila (☎ 986 43 13 98; www.hotelaguila.com; Rúa da Victoria 6; s/d incl breakfast €32/47; p i) East of the old town, the Águila has been imaginatively renovated with paint washes and prints to make the most of its big, old-fashioned rooms – exceptionally good value.

Hotel Puerta del Sol (☎ 986 22 23 64; www.alojami.entosvigo.com; Porta do Sol 14; s/d €59/72; p i) The charming rooms at this renovated hotel have CD players and terrific views over Praza da Princesa or Praza da Constitución. It's very popular, so call ahead.

Hotel Lino (☎ 986 44 70 04; www.hotel-lino.com in Spanish; Rúa Lepanto 26; s/d €60/84) One of many places outside the train station, the Lino has a good deal more character than the rest, with wraparound balconies and 45 warmly decorated rooms.

Hotel América (☎ 986 43 89 22; www.hotelamerica-vigo.com; Rúa de Pablo Morello 6; s/d incl breakfast €61/91; a ♪) The revamped América exudes a modishly minimalist elegance, and with just 44 rooms, service is more personal than in larger establishments.

Hotel Ciudad de Vigo (☎ 986 22 87 20; www.ciudaddevigo.com; Rúa de Concepción Arenal 5; s/d €111/139; a i) For more luxury, this is a centrally located, top-end hotel with big, elegant, well-equipped rooms.

Eating

Rúa Pescadería is a short old-town block jammed with people tucking into fresh seafood. You can buy oysters for €6 to €10 per dozen from the shuckers at the west end of the street and sit down to eat them with a drink at one of the neighbouring restaurants. Oysters and Albariño wine here are Vigo's traditional Sunday-morning hangover cure.

Restaurante Rías Baixas (☎ 986 22 30 41; Rúa República de Argentina 2; menu €7, fish dishes €8-11; 1 closed Sun afternoon & Wed) Rarely visited by tourists, this lively dining hall is the place to head for fresh fish, traditionally prepared.

Restaurante Gálgala (☎ 986 22 14 17; Rúa do Pracer 4; meals around €15; 1-4pm Tue-Sat, 8.30-11.30pm Fri & Sat) A few minutes' walk uphill from the old town, this small vegetarian restaurant serves a variety of well-prepared, reasonably priced dishes.

Taverna Da Curuxa (☎ 986 43 88 57; Rúa dos Cesteiros 7; 1 closed Tue) The winding lanes and blind alleys of old Vigo are laced with tapas bars and eateries of all descriptions. This bar off Praza da Constitución serves very tasty *cazolas* (casseroles) and good wine. It's popular with a 20s to 30s crowd.

El Lobo de Mar (Rúa Anguía; raciones €4-6; 1 closed Sun) This little old-town eatery simply serves up great home-style fresh fish and seafood prepared in an open kitchen at one end of the premises.

BAU (☎ 986 22 22 14; Rúa de Rosalía de Castro 6; mains €10-18; 1 closed Sun) Come here for a creative twist on Galician favourites, eg warm quail salad or pork sirloin with dates in white wine.

Drinking & Entertainment

On weekend evenings, in particular, some of the taverns along Rúas Real and Teófilo Llorente in the old town can get quite lively. Many good bars are also dotted along Rúa de Montero Ríos (with *terrazas* opposite the waterfront) and Rúa do Areal and the streets behind them.

Manteca Jazz (Rúa Carral 3; admission varies; 1 from 11pm Mon-Thu, from midnight Fri & Sat) This sizable city-centre jazz den hosts Wednesday jam sessions and bands most Fridays and Saturdays.

Australians homesick for the sight of a wombat road sign should make for **Oz** (Praza de Compostela). The real *zona de marcha* is southeast around Rúas de Churrúa, Rogelio Abalde and Irmadiños. You might start at **La Casa de Arriba** (Rúa de Iglesias Esponda), a rock pub open from early evening, or the retro lounge-style **Black Ball** (Rúa de Churrúa 8), then stop into **La Fábrica de Chocolate Club** (☎ 986 13 58 84; Rúa de Rogelio Abalde 22; 1 from 9pm) which hosts three or four varied bands or guest DJs each week. For clubs and pubs where you can dance after the other bars have closed, head to Gran Vía.

Getting There & Away

AIR
Vigo's **Peinador airport** (☎ 986 26 82 00) is about 10km east of the centre. Iberia flies to/from Bilbao, Barcelona and Madrid daily. Spanair also serves Barcelona and Madrid. Air France and Air Europa have flights to/from Paris.

BOAT

Ferries to Cangas sail about every half-hour from 6.30am to 10.30pm year-round (€1.75). For details on ferries to the Illas Cies, see right.

BUS

From the **bus station** (☎ 986 37 34 11; Avenida de Madrid 57) there are frequent services to Pontevedra (€2.30, 30 minutes), Santiago de Compostela (€7.25, 1½ hours), A Coruña (€12.85, 2½ hours), Ourense, Lugo, Baiona, Tui and A Guarda. Monbus runs to Sanxenxo and O Grove. AutoRes goes six times daily to Madrid (€31 to €39, 6½ to 8½ hours), and other buses head for Oviedo, Santander, Bilbao, Pamplona, Barcelona, Salamanca, Seville and elsewhere.

Autna runs twice daily Monday to Friday (once daily on weekends) to/from Porto, Portugal (€10, 2½ hours), with connections there for Lisbon. ALSA runs to Porto (€16, two hours) and Lisbon (€33, 7½ hours) daily.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The AP9 tollway runs to A Coruña via Pontevedra (€2.65) and Santiago de Compostela.

TRAIN

Trains run approximately hourly to Pontevedra (€1.85 to €2.50, 30 minutes), Santiago de Compostela (€5.45 to €7.40, 1¼ to 1¾ hours) and A Coruña, and seven times daily to Ourense. There are daily trains to Madrid and Barcelona.

Getting Around

Vigo has a good local bus system (€1 per ride). Bus C9 runs between the city centre and the airport; buses C2 and C4C link the centre and the bus station; and bus 11 joins the centre with Rúa do Urzáiz close to the train station. See the Vigo map (p567) for locations of stops.

ILLAS CIES

The best beaches in the Rías Baixas aren't really in the *rias* at all. Rather, you need to go to the Illas Cies. This little archipelago, reaching 197m above sea level, forms a 6km breakwater that protects Vigo and its *ría* from the Atlantic's fury. Two of the three main islands, Illa do Faro and Illa de Monteagudo, are linked by a sand crescent that forms a lagoon known as Lago dos Nenos. Together with Ons, Sálvora and Cortegada islands further north, the Illas Cies constitute the **Parque Nacional de las Islas Atlánticas de Galicia**, a nesting sanctuary for seabirds.

You can only visit the Illas Cies during Semana Santa, on weekends from May to early June and daily from early June to early September. To stay overnight you must book for **Camping Illas Cies** (sites per person/tent €6.60/6.85; ♪) through the camping ground's office (☎ 986 43 83 58) at the Illas Cies boat terminal in Vigo. The camping ground has a restaurant and shop, and a capacity of 800 people – often filled in August.

Boats to the islands are operated by **Naviera Mar de Ons** (☎ 986 22 52 72; www.mardeons.com in Spanish). During the season, weather permitting, up to eight daily trips are made from Vigo (45 minutes one-way), and beginning in July, up to four each from Baiona and Cangas. Wherever you start, return tickets cost €16.50.

THE SOUTHWEST

Though skipped by many travellers, this corner of Galicia is home to several interesting and handsome old towns and spectacular scenery.

THE COAST

Baiona

pop 10,000

On 1 March 1493, the caravel *Pinta* came into view off Baiona (Castilian: Bayona), bearing the remarkable news that Christopher Columbus had made it to the Indies. (In fact, he had bumped into the Americas.) Then an important trading port, Baiona was later eclipsed by Vigo. Today it's one of Galicia's premier summer resorts, but understated compared with its Mediterranean counterparts, and has a small *casco antigo* (old city) that's worth a wander.

There is a **tourist information booth** (☎ 986 68 70 67; www.baiona.org in Spanish; Paseo da Ribeira; 10am–11am–2pm & 4–7pm Apr–Dec) on the approach to the Monte Boi promontory. The pine-covered promontory supports the **Fortaleza de Monterreal** (pedestrian/car €1/4; 10.30am–9.30pm), erected between the 11th and 17th centuries, and protected by a mighty 3km circle of walls. Also within the precinct today is a luxurious **parador** (www.parador.es).

For beaches, head along the coastal road towards Vigo. About 1.5km from the centre of Baiona is **Praia Ladeira**, but better (if still with an urban background) is the magnificent sweep of **Praia América** at Nigrán, about 4km north. Most buses between Baiona and Vigo stop at these beaches.

SLEEPING & EATING

Baiona's harbour-front drive, and, one block inland, Rúa de Ventura Misa, offer at least half-a-dozen places to stay. **Hospedaje Kin** (☎ 986 35 56 95; Rúa de Ventura Misa 27; r with/without bathroom €50/35; 1 Jun–Sep) is among the least expensive places in town, and fills up early in August. For more comfort, you won't find a cosier place than the sturdy old **Hotel Tres Carabelas** (☎ 986 35 54 41; www.hoteltrescarabelas.com; Rúa de Ventura Misa 61; s/d €50/64).

The cobbled lanes in the centre of town, including Rúa do Conde and Rúa de Ventura Misa, are full of restaurants, tapas bars and watering holes.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

ATSA (☎ 986 35 53 30) buses run north to Vigo (€2) every 30 minutes till 9pm most days, and a couple a day go south to A Guarda, from in front of the *lonja* (fish market) by the harbour. In summer boats sail to the Illas Cíes (see p569).

A Guarda

pop 10,000

The fishing port of A Guarda (Castilian: La Guardia) sits just north of where Galicia's longest river, Río Miño, enters the Atlantic. The treat here is to head 4km up from the town to **Monte de Santa Trega** (admission in vehicle per person Tue–Sun Easter–early Dec €0.90, other times free). On the way up you can inspect a *castro*, where a couple of the primitive circular dwellings have been restored, and at the top is a small museum with a few archaeological finds. But best of all are the magnificent views up the Miño, across to Portugal and out over the Atlantic.

A Guarda's top sleeping choice, **Hotel Convento de San Benito** (☎ 986 61 11 66; www.hotelsanbenito.com; Praza de San Bieito; s/d €52/75; a i), is housed in a lovely former convent down by the harbour. Its elegant rooms are sound-proofed and the room rates are pretty reasonable.

A dozen bars and restaurants by the harbour serve tapas and meals; most fish and seafood will have been caught the same day you eat it. Lobster is a big speciality here.

One of the best choices is the first in line, **Porto Guardés** (☎ 986 61 34 88; Rúa do Porto 1; fish dishes €5–10), where reasonably priced swordfish, tuna, cod and other seafood are served upon checked tablecloths.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Most ATSA (☎ 986 61 02 55) buses to/from Vigo (€4.80, one to 1½ hours) run via Tui, but a few go via Baiona. Monday-to-Friday services are frequent, but on Sunday there are only six buses.

A **transbordador** (ferry) runs from Camposancos, just inside the heads of the Miño, to Caminha in Portugal, from where you can get to the first of a string of sandy ocean beaches on the way south to Viana do Castelo. Departures are at least hourly from 9.30am to 7.30pm (to 9.30pm March to June, to 10.30pm July and August). Fares are €0.65/2.60 per person/car.

RÍO MIÑO

Tui

pop 16,000 / elevation 58m

Tui (Castilian: Tuy) is a gem: a pretty old town sitting on Río Miño. Especially popular in summer when its little bars come alive, it's ideally situated by a bridge across to Portugal's equally interesting Valença. A fair crowd of Portuguese day-trippers fill Tui on weekends and Spaniards reciprocate in Valença.

Tui briefly hosted the court of the Visigothic king Witiza (r AD 702–10). It was subsequently attacked several times by Spain's Muslim invaders and Norman raiders. Later still it found itself on the front line during various wars between Spain and Portugal.

There's a **regional tourist office** (☎ 986 60 17 89; Rúa Colón 2; 1 9.30am–2pm & 4.30–6.30pm Mon–Fri, 10.30am–12.30pm Sat) almost opposite the Hotel Colón.

SIGHTS

The brooding, fortress-like **cathedral** (☎ 986 60 05 11; admission €2, Jul–mid-Sep €3; 1 9.30am–1.30pm & 4–7pm, to 9pm Jul–mid-Sep) dominates Tui's small old town. Completed in 1225, the cathedral was much altered in the 15th century and the extra stone bracing was added after the Lisbon earthquake in 1755. Entry to the main body of the cathedral through its lovely Gothic portico costs nothing, but it's well worth getting the ticket to the Gothic cloister, Romanesque chapter house, the tower and gardens with views over the river, the cathedral museum and the **Museo Diocesano** (1 Easter–mid-Oct), across the street, with its archaeology and art collection.

The surrounding narrow lanes hold a pair of *cruceiros* and various chapels including the **Iglesia de San Telmo**, containing relics of the patron saint of sailors.

Beyond the old town centre, a riverside walk from the **Iglesia de Santo Domingo** is enticing. This church's baroque façade hides a largely 14th-century interior (admission is included with the cathedral ticket).

SLEEPING

Hostal San Telmo (☎ 986 60 30 11; Avenida de la Concordia 88; s/d €30/40) A comfortable if unremarkable option, the San Telmo is a 15-minute walk from the old town.

Hotel Colón (☎ 986 60 02 23; www.hotelcolontuy.com; Rúa Colón 11; s €38–43, d €72–88, apt for 2 €86–99; p a i s) This modern hotel with 45 rooms and 21 apartments (some duplex) has stylishly

clean-cut lines and is well equipped with two pools, tennis court and restaurant. It's 500m along the main drag from the old town.

EATING & DRINKING

There are several inviting places near the cathedral. On Friday to Sunday nights, **Entre-fornos** and other quaint cobblestone streets behind the cathedral are the scene of some major partying.

O Vello Cabalo Furado (☎ 986 60 19 88; Rúa Seijas 2; mains €8–15; 1 closed Tue Oct–Jun, Sun Jul–Sep) Not to be confused with the inferior O Cabalo Furado around the corner, this large inviting dining hall puts together a very hearty lunch. Check out the *cocido gallego* (Galician stew; €10).

Mesón Jaqueyvi (Praza do Concello 4; tapas & tablas €2–14; 1 closed Tue) This tavern serves some unusual snacks (sea urchin caviar, fried asparagus), though most patrons just order a helping of Serrano ham.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Up to 30 daily ATSA buses to Vigo (€2.85, 30 minutes) and A Guarda (€2.70, 30 minutes) stop on Paseo de Calvo Sotelo, opposite Librería Byblos. Service is reduced at weekends. Autna buses between Vigo and Portugal stop at the Puente Internacional.

Ribadavia

pop 5000 / elevation 100m

About 80km up the Miño from Tui towards Ourense, Ribadavia is in the heart of Ribeiro wine country, producing some of the best whites in the country. It was once Galicia's most important Jewish settlement and has managed to preserve a lovely stone-built medieval town centre, with a patchwork of uneven little cobbled squares, lined with heavy stone arcades and *galerías*, which is a pleasure to explore. Even after Isabel and Fernando decided to expel Jews in 1492, most here managed to hang on by converting to Christianity or fleeing temporarily to Portugal.

The enthusiastic **tourist office** (☎ 988 47 12 75; www.ribadavia.com; Praza Maior 7; 1 10am–3pm & 5–8.30pm Jun–Sep, 9.30am–2.30pm & 4–7pm Mon–Sat, 10.30am–3pm Sun Oct–May) is in a 17th-century palace on the main square. Upstairs is the **Centro de Información Xudía** (admission €1), with an exhibition on the Jews of Galicia.

The **Barrio Xudío** (Jewish Quarter) occupies the zone between the south wall and Praza Magdalena, where a house once served as the

community synagogue. The Casa da Inquisición fronts nearby Praza de García Boente. The coats of arms on its façade belonged to the Ribadavia families who served as local officials for the Inquisition.

Of several churches, the Romanesque Igrexa de Santiago and Igrexa de San Xoán stand out. The Museo Etnolóxico (admission €2.40; h 9.30am-2.30pm & 4-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), just down the street from the Igrexa de Santiago, with its Galician folk history collection, is worth a look, too. The remains of the Castelo dos Condes de Ribadavia date from the 15th century.

Ribadavia stages Galicia's biggest wine festival, the Ferial del Vino del Ribeiro, in late April and early May.

Hostal Plaza (☎ 988 47 05 76; Praza Maior; s/d €20/30; mains €5-10) has well-kept rooms with tub, TV and balcony, and one of the old town's better restaurants. There are many inviting stone-walled tapas bars on and around Praza Maior.

La Tafona de Herminia (Travesía Porta Nova de Arriba 2) is one of several little bakeries selling poppy-seed cookies and other traditional Jewish pastries.

Up to 10 buses and five trains run daily to Ourense and Vigo from stations in the east of town, just over Río Avia.

THE EAST

With the notable exception of the well-trodden Camino de Santiago, Galicia's deep interior is little visited, but full of intriguing small towns and villages and beautiful green countryside, and so perfect for travellers who like digging out their own hidden gems. Lugo's superbly preserved Roman walls encircle a stunningly beautiful old city, but nothing human-made can match the natural splendour of the Cañón do Sil (Sil Canyon; p574).

OURENSE

pop 107,000

Ourense (Castilian: Orense) may well be the first Galician city encountered by travellers arriving from neighbouring Castilla y León. First impressions are of an unexciting sprawl of apartment blocks, but at Ourense's core is a wonderful old town bursting with life.

History

Ourense was a Roman settlement of some importance. The Visigoths raised a cathedral here,

but the Muslims destroyed it during several raids. Repopulated by Sancho II of Castilla in 1071, the town eventually took off as a trade centre. Ourense's considerable Jewish population, having contributed generously to the campaign against Granada, was promptly rewarded in 1492 with expulsion. Essentially an ecclesiastical town, Ourense declined for centuries until the arrival of the railway in 1882.

Orientation

The train station is 500m north of Río Miño and the bus station a further 1km northwest. On foot you can approach the city centre across Ponte Romano, which is actually a medieval bridge constructed in place of an older Roman one. Head for Catedral do San Martiño, around which the old town unfolds.

Information

For banks, look along Rúa do Paseo and Rúa Curros Enríquez.

Ciber Eclipse (Rúa Monte Cabeza de Manzaneda 2; per hr €2; h 9am-midnight) Coin-operated Internet access.

Municipal tourist office (☎ 988 36 60 64; www.our.ense.es in Spanish; Rúa As Burgas 12; h 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm Sat & Sun)

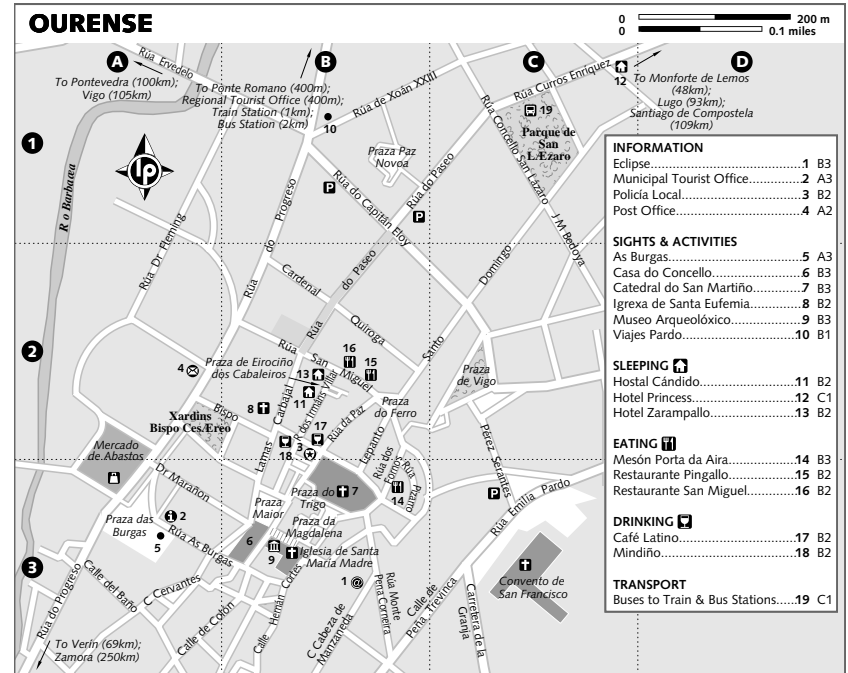
Policia Local (☎ 988 39 17 00; Praza de San Martiño 1) Post office (Rúa do Progreso)

Regional tourist office (☎ 988 37 20 20; h 9am or 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm & 5-7pm Sun mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 9am-2pm & 4.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri mid-Sep-mid-Jun) On the Ponte Romano.

Sights

The most singular feature of the rather gloomy 13th-century Catedral do San Martiño is the Pórtico do Paraíso at the west end, a Gothic copy of Santiago de Compostela's Pórtico de la Gloria. Around the cathedral spreads a web of charming little squares and alleyways, inviting exploration by day or night. The sloping Praza Maior is the grandest plaza, hemmed in by arched walkways. At one end of the plaza are the dignified Casa do Concello (Town Hall) and, next door, Ourense's Museo Arqueolóxico (Archaeological Museum), which has been closed for renovations for years. About 100m northwest of the cathedral stands the Igrexa de Santa Eufemia, with a magnificent concave façade that is an archetypal example of Gallego baroque.

As Burgas, Ourense's steaming mineral waters, have been a blessing for the sick, tired and sore-footed since at least Roman times. They still gush out in fountains in Praza das Burgas.



Sleeping

Hostal Cándido (☎ 988 22 96 07; Rúa dos Irmáns Villar 15; s/d €22/33) On a small plaza 100m north of Praza Maior, this budget choice above a *chocolateria* (chocolate shop) offers worn-at-the-edges accommodation.

Hotel Zarampallo (☎ 988 22 00 53; www.zarampallo.com in Spanish; Rúa dos Irmáns Villar 19; s €30, d €45-50) A small and stylish city-centre hotel, run by the same family since the 1940s, the Zarampallo features elegant, pink-toned rooms (all exterior) and its own good restaurant.

Hotel Princess (☎ 988 26 95 38; hprincess@wanadoo.es; Avenida de la Habana 45; s/d €72/95; a i w) A bit chintzy but with professional and amiable service, this is a good option if you're after more comfort.

Eating

The streets and squares around Catedral do San Martiño are bursting with restaurants and watering holes.

Mesón Porta da Aira (☎ 988 25 07 49; Rúa dos Fornos 2; dishes €7-14; h closed Mon & 2nd half Sep) Just one of several enticing bars along this street, the Mesón Porta da Aira has locals flocking

in for the generous platters of *huevos rotos*, lightly fried eggs over a bed of thinly sliced potatoes, served alongside various sausages, steaks and chops.

Restaurante Pingallo (☎ 988 22 00 57; Rúa San Miguel 6; mains €6-12) *Lacón con grelos* (boiled pork shoulder with greens) is one of the traditional favourites available daily at this longstanding establishment with a small open-air patio.

Restaurante San Miguel (☎ 988 22 07 95; Rúa San Miguel 12; mains €15-23) The spiffiest place in the centre, the San Miguel offers a big range of vegetable, fish and meat dishes and hundreds of wines. Cooking is trad Galician with a few innovative touches.

Drinking & Entertainment

Rúa Pizarro and neighbouring lanes are awash with late-opening bars and pubs purveying a multitude of musical styles. The Igrexa Santa Eufemia vicinity has a few more refined locales, including **Mindiño** (☎ 988 24 55 36; Rúa Arce-diagos 13) playing Celtic music, and **Café Latino** (☎ 988 22 67 21; Rúa Coronel Ceano Vivas 7), which hosts a spring jazz festival.

Getting There & Away

Ourense's bus station (☎ 988 21 60 27; Carretera de Vigo 1) has service to Galicia's main cities, with at least four daily departures to Santiago de Compostela (€9.20, two hours). Daily buses also go to most other regions of Spain, including six to Madrid (€26 to €33, 5½ to 6½ hours). Empresa Villalón heads to Verín, where you can get connections towards Chaves in Portugal, a hub for many Portuguese destinations.

Six trains a day run to Santiago de Compostela (€6.60 to €16.20, 1½ to two hours), three continuing to A Coruña. Up to eight trains daily serve Vigo (€7.15 to €16.70, two hours), and a few go to Pontevedra, León, Madrid and Barcelona.

Getting Around

Local buses 1, 3, 6, 8 and 12 run between the train station and Parque de San Lázaro in the city centre. Buses 6 and 12 also serve the bus station.

CASTELO DE MONTERREI

The A52 southeast of Ourense crosses several low ranges on the way to Castilla y León. Outside Verín the N532 diverges south to Feces on the Portuguese border. If you have transport, it's well worth detouring to the large **Castelo de Monterrei** (admission free; ⌚ 10.30am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Wed-Sun), dating from the 14th to 17th centuries, in a commanding position just west of Verín.

CAÑÓN DO SIL

The N120 northeast of Ourense follows Río Miño, a pretty stretch but nothing compared to what's in store if you turn off east at Os Peares, where Río Sil joins the Miño. The ensuing 45km make a spectacular drive along the south bank of the Cañón do Sil (Sil Canyon) – known as the Ribeira Sacra (Sacred Riverbank) for the many monasteries set up here from the 6th century onwards by monks wanting to get right away from everything.

Twelve kilometres from Os Peares you reach a boat landing, where passenger boats of **Viajes Pardo** (☎ 988 21 51 00; www.riosil.com in Spanish; Rúa de Xoán XXIII 1, Ourense) speed up the gorge for a 1½-hour round trip (€13). At least two trips go every Saturday and Sunday from early March to early December; further trips go on weekdays from June to mid-September if there are 15 takers.

The road heads uphill here, reaching Loureiro after 4km. If you turn right (west) here, after 4km you'll reach **Santo Estevo de Ribas de Sil**. This huge monastery with three cloisters (one Romanesque, one Gothic, one Renaissance) was recently converted to a luxurious *parador*, the **Parador de Santo Estevo** (☎ 988 010 110; www.parador.es; s/d €120/150; p a i w), but is open to visitors. From here you can backtrack east and continue along the upper slopes of the gorge – a picturesque route through chestnut woods and across high, windswept heath, with many of the steep hillsides covered in vineyards.

Fourteen kilometres east of Loureiro is the village of Parada do Sil, where a 4km road leads down to the pretty little **Mosteiro de Santa Cristina** with its Romanesque church. Just 1km outside the village is the **Balcóns de Madrid**, a spectacular lookout over the canyon.

A further 16km east from Parada do Sil you reach the handsome village of **Castro Caldelas**, with great panoramas from its hilltop castle and at least three good upper-budget-range sleeping options nearby. From here you can head north to Monforte de Lemos or on eastwards towards Ponferrada in Castilla y León.

MONFORTE DE LEMOS

pop 19,000 / elevation 363m

Inhabited before the Romans appeared and later converted into the medieval **Mons Forti**, this somewhat dishevelled but interesting place, northeast of Ourense, has been Galicia's principal rail junction since 1883.

Long before you reach the centre of town you'll see the **Torre da Homenaxe** (☎ 982 40 47 15; admission €1.20; ⌚ noon-1.30pm & 4-6.30pm Fri, 11am-2pm & 4-8pm Sat & Sun, by appointment Tue-Thu), the 30m-tall keep of the 13th-century castle on top of the hill the town is built around. The adjacent **Mosteiro de San Vicente do Pino** is now the sumptuous **Parador de Monforte de Lemos** (☎ 982 41 84 84; www.parador.es; s/d €120/150; p a i s w). If you're not staying here, have a drink in the lovely three-storey cloister.

The area south of Monforte de Lemos' town centre is dominated by the proud **Colexio de Nosa Señora da Antiga** (Colexio dos Escolapios), erected by Cardinal Rodrigo de Castro in 1593. A pair of El Greco paintings highlights its art gallery (admission by guided tour free; ⌚ consult tourist office for schedules). Nearby is the **municipal tourist office** (☎ 982 40 47 15; ⌚ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm).

For budget accommodation, head for the 16th-century bridge over Río Cabe. **Hotel Puente Romano** (☎ 982 41 11 67; www.hpuenteromano.com in Spanish; Paseo do Malecón; s/d €27/42) and its adjacent **Hostal Puente Romano** (s/d €16.50/26), as well as **Hotel El Castillo** (☎ 982 40 21 50; Rúa das Hortas 36; s/d €25/35; p) along the street, all have many rooms with river views. Their prices reflect their relative comfort levels. A good bet for meals nearby is **La Polar** (☎ 982 40 00 01; Rúa do Cardenal 13; mains €6-11), a nice, informal joint with dozens of dinner options and tables on a pedestrian street.

Many trains crossing Galicia call in here. Buses head north to Lugo and southwest to Ourense about once an hour on weekdays, and a few travel east to Ponferrada and León. Both stations are north of the castle.

SAMOS

pop 2300 / elevation 532m

Drivers between Monforte and Lugo should detour – as do many pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago – to the **Mosteiro de Samos** (☎ 982 54 60 46), a grand Benedictine monastery built in Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance and baroque styles over many centuries, then built

again after a disastrous fire in the 1950s. It has two lovely three-storey cloisters, an imposing 18th-century baroque church and four walls of murals detailing the life of St Benedict painted after the fire.

LUGO

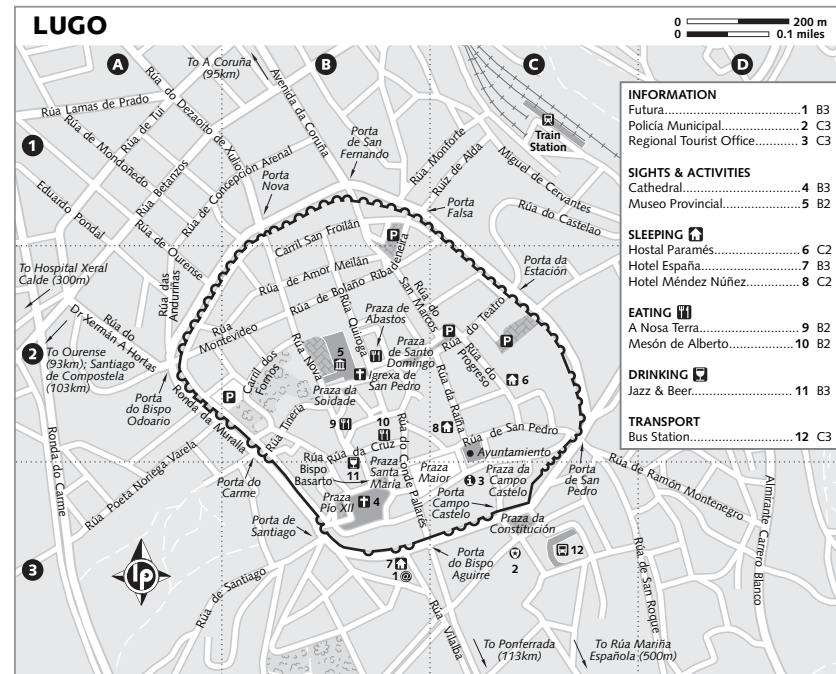
pop 80,000 / elevation 475m

Lugo's impressive Roman walls are reason enough for a visit, but within them is a beautifully preserved, lively and mainly traffic-free historic centre, built in many styles over many centuries and well worthy of exploration.

The Romans established **Lucus Augusti** over a *castro* in the 1st century BC. The walls went up three centuries later, but the failed to keep out the Suevi in 460, or indeed the Muslims 300 years later. Until well into the 19th century the city gates were closed at night and tolls were charged to bring in goods from outside.

Orientation & Information

Whether you arrive in Lugo by train or bus, you'll end up not too far outside the circuit of Roman walls.



Several banks and ATMs are on Rúa da Raiña and Praza de Santo Domingo.

Futura (Rúa Vilalba 6; per 15 min €0.60) Internet access.

Hospital Xeral Calde (☎ 982 29 60 00; Rúa Doutor Ochoa) About 500m west of the old town.

Policia Municipal (☎ 982 29 71 10; Praza da Constitución)

Regional tourist office (☎ 982 23 13 61; Praza Maior 27; 𠄎 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat Sep-Jun, 10am-2pm & 4-8pm daily Jul & Aug) In a shopping corridor opposite the *ayuntamiento*.

Sights

ROMAN WALLS

More than 2km round, up to 15m high and studded by 82 stout turrets, the Roman walls enclosing Lugo are the best preserved of their kind in all Spain, if not the world. You can climb on top of the walls – one convenient access point is the **Porta de Santiago** (Gate of Santiago) near the cathedral – and walk all the way round the town.

CATHEDRAL

Inside the Porta de Santiago, the cathedral, with its symmetrical façade, might not at first glance seem that ancient, but it was in fact begun in 1129, inspired by the cathedral in Santiago de Compostela. Work continued until the 14th century and the neoclassical front was added later still. The northern doorway, which is protected by a formidable portico, remains obviously Romanesque. In an oval frame amid the archway is a majestically seated figure of Christ; beneath his feet, a Last Supper scene has been carved into an unsupported capital. Inside, the walnut choir stalls are a baroque masterpiece.

MUSEO PROVINCIAL

Lugo's museum (☎ 982 24 21 12; Praza da Soidade; admission free; 𠄎 11am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat Jul & Aug, 10.30am-2pm & 4.30-8pm Mon-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun Sep-Jun; ♾) includes what remains of the Convento de San Francisco – a Gothic cloister and the convent kitchen and refectory. The collections range from pre-Roman gold jewellery and Roman mosaics to Galician art from the 15th to 20th centuries.

Sleeping

Just two lodgings are within Lugo's walls.

Hostal Paramés (☎ 982 22 62 51; Rúa do Progreso 28; s/d €18/28) This humble choice is on a quiet street. The front rooms, with *galerías*, have been modernised with good firm beds.

Hotel España (☎ 982 23 15 40; Rúa Vilalba 2; s €22-30, d €40) Outside the Porta do Bispo Aguirre, this easy-going hotel offers comfortable beds, and you might be able to bargain down the rate.

Hotel Méndez Núñez (☎ 982 23 07 11; Rúa da Raiña 1; s/d €54/70; 𠄎) Run by the same family since the 19th century, this large if not terribly exciting hotel was recently completely redone, with sturdy beds and brand-new bathrooms.

Eating

Rúa de Cruz and Rúa Nova, north of the cathedral, are packed with tempting tapas bars and restaurants.

A Nosa Terra (☎ 982 22 92 35; Rúa Nova 8; mains & raciones €5-13) The most popular of many popular spots on this street doles out good tapas (free with a drink). The downstairs bodega offers a great choice of meat, fish, seafood and *revueltos* – this is a good place to try *pulpo á feira* or *lacón con grelos*.

Mesón de Alberto (☎ 982 22 83 10; Rúa da Cruz 4; tapas €2.50-8, mains €16-25; 𠄎 closed Tue evening & Sun) The place for fab trad Galician tucker. The *menú de la tapería* (€13) lets you sample two of its original tapas, plus wine and dessert: try the chocolate or cream-filled crêpes. There's a more formal restaurant upstairs.

Drinking & Entertainment

Lugo has a relatively subdued nightlife area around the cathedral, with half a dozen pubs offering a varied musical menu, including the self-explanatory **Jazz & Beer** (☎ 982 25 09 51; Rúa Bispo Basurto 2). **Chundas** (electronica dance clubs) are strung along Rúa Mariña Española, south of the walls.

Getting There & Away

From the bus station (☎ 982 22 39 85), Empresa Freire runs at least five buses daily to/from Santiago de Compostela (€6.40, 1½ to two hours), and Arriva offers direct service up to 12 times daily to A Coruña (€7.65 to €8.40, 1¼ hours).

Around six buses a day head to Monforte de Lemos, Ourense, Pontevedra, Vigo, Mondoñedo, Viveiro and Ribadeo. ALSA serves León and Madrid (€30 to €47, 5½ to seven hours), as well as Asturias, Cantabria and the Basque Country.

Three or more daily trains run northwest to A Coruña (€6.05 to €14.10, two hours) and south to Monforte de Lemos (€3.60 to €10.90, one hour). One or two continue across Castilla y León to Madrid or Barcelona.

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Valencia



In 2005 more than five million overseas visitors chose the Comunidad Valenciana (Valencia region) as their holiday destination. Most descend upon the resorts of the thin coastal strip, where they stay put – except, perhaps, for a day trip to Valencia City. The more enterprising rent a bike or car, leave behind the coastal hedonism and explore the region's rich interior.

Valencia is both of Spain, and distinct from Spain. In Muslim hands for five centuries, its Christian European history has been shaped as much by Catalonia, its neighbour to the north, as by Castilla. The region's flag bears the red and yellow stripes of Catalonia and the mother tongue of many is Valenciano, a dialect of Catalan.

Valencia City, the region's capital, is famed for its nightlife, the wild Las Fallas spring festival and the stunning architecture of its Ciudad de las Artes y las Ciencias. At the time of writing, it's scheduled to be in the spotlight again when it hosts the America's Cup yacht race in 2007.

To the north, along the Costa del Azahar (Orange Blossom Coast), is a string of low-key resorts, plus the historic site of Sagunto. Southwards along the Costa Blanca (White Coast) stretch some of Spain's finest beaches. You can bar-hop and party in international resorts such as Benidorm, Torrevieja and the lively provincial capital of Alicante. Others, such as Denia and Gandia, still retain a much more Spanish flavour. Inland lies another world where mountains buckle and castles crown the hilltops: there's Morella, girt by its intact medieval walls; Xàtiva, with its own splendid castle; and Elche, with Europe's most extensive palm groves.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Fling fireworks and suffer serious sleep deprivation at **Las Fallas** (p586), Europe's wildest spring festival
- Take a sunset boat trip on **La Albufera** (p593) freshwater lake
- Bring your tent and shake your booty at **Festival Internacional de Benicàssim** (p605), Benicàssim's outdoor international music festival
- Gasp at the daring architecture of **Valencia City** (p581) in the Ciudad de las Artes y las Ciencias, and immerse yourself in the Oceanogràfic, Europe's largest aquarium
- Savour your first glimpse of the medieval fortress town of **Morella** (p608) from afar



■ AREA: 23,255 SQ KM

■ AVE SUMMER TEMP: HIGH 32°C,
LOW 19°C

■ POP: 2.2 MILLION



VALENCIA CITY

pop 738,400

In the first quarter of 2006, Valencia, Spain's third-largest city, registered a massive 30% increase in visitors compared to the previous year. But these were a mere trickle compared to the million and a half faithful who greeted the Pope in July, when he called by for a long weekend. Early in 2007 the city's set to receive tens of thousands of yachting when it's scheduled to host the America's Cup, while in 2008 it stages the World Indoor Athletics Championships.

This increasingly popular year-round short-break venue is where paella first simmered over a wood fire. It's a vibrant, friendly, mildly chaotic place with two outstanding fine-arts museums, an accessible old quarter, Europe's newest cultural and scientific complex – and one of Spain's most exciting nightlife scenes.

HISTORY

Pensioned-off Roman legionaries founded 'Valentia' on the banks of Río Turia in 138 BC. The Arabs made Valencia an agricultural and industrial centre, establishing ceramics, paper, silk and leather industries and extending the network of irrigation canals in the rich agricultural hinterland.

Muslim rule was briefly interrupted in 1094 by the triumphant rampage of the legendary Castilian knight El Cid (see p225), but almost a century and a half were to elapse before the Christians definitively retook the city in 1238, when Jaime I incorporated the area into his burgeoning Catalan kingdom.

Valencia's golden age was in the 15th and 16th centuries, when it was one of the Mediterranean's strongest trading centres. Like Catalonia, Valencia backed the wrong horse in the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–13) and in retribution the victorious Bourbon king Felipe V abolished Valencia's *fueros*, the autonomous privileges the city had enjoyed. The Spanish Civil War proved similarly unlucky; Valencia, having sided with the Republicans (and acted as seat of the Republican government from November 1936 until October 1937) was slighted for years by successive nationalist governments.

The *fueros* may not have been restored but, benefiting from the decentralisation that followed Franco's death, Valencia today enjoys a high degree of autonomy.

CREEPING CATALAN

More and more town halls are replacing street signs in Spanish with the Valenciano/Catalan equivalent (though more broad-minded local authorities still sign in both). While the difference between the two versions is often minimal, this can sometimes be a source of confusion for visitors. Occasionally we use the Valenciano version where it's clearly the dominant one. But since Spanish is the version every local understands and the majority uses, we've elected to stick with it in most cases.

ORIENTATION

The 'action' part of the city is an oval area bounded by the old course of Río Turia, long ago diverted, and the sickle-shaped inner ring road of Calles de Colón, Xàtiva and de Guillem de Castro. This traces the walls of the old city, demolished in 1865 as a job-creation project.

Within the oval are three major squares: Plazas del Ayuntamiento, de la Reina (also known as Plaza de Zaragoza) and de la Virgen. The oldest quarter of the city, the Barrio del Carmen (or El Carmé), is delimited by Plaza de la Virgen, the Torres de Quart and Seranos, and the Turia riverbed.

Best and easiest to handle of several competing commercial maps of town is the *Gran Plano de Valencia* at 1:9000, produced by Bayarri.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Casa del Llibre (Map p582; ☎ 96 353 00 80; www.casadelllibre.com; Passeig Russafa 11) Offspring of the giant Madrid mother store, with a reasonable stock of books in English.

Llibreria Patagonia (Map p582; ☎ 96 393 60 52; Calle Santa Amalia 2) An excellent travel bookshop with some guides in English, including Lonely Planet titles.

Emergency

EU standard emergency number (☎ 112)

Medical emergency (☎ 085)

Policia Nacional (Map p582; ☎ 091; Gran Via de Ramón y Cajal 40) For serious stuff.

Internet Access

Oro (Map p582; Calle San Vicente Màrtir 22; per hr €3; 10am–1am)

Work Center (Map p582; Calle Xàtiva 19; per hr €4; 10am–24hrs)

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Internet Resources

Region of Valencia (www.comunitatvalenciana.com)

The Valencia tourism authority's excellent official site. The main site is multilingual and includes some English information, or try the English site.

Money

Viajes Duna (Map p580; % 96 374 15 62; Calle Cirilo Amorós 88) Represents American Express.

Post

Main post office (Map p582; Plaza del Ayuntamiento)

Tourist Information

Call % 902 12 32 12 throughout the region for tourist information (at premium rates).

Diputación (Provincial) tourist office (Map p582; % 96 351 49 07; www.valenciaterramar.org; Calle Poeta Querol s/n; h 9.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-2pm Sat, 11.30am-2pm Sun) At the Teatro Principal.

Regional tourist office (Map p582; % 96 398 64 22; Calle Paz 48; h 9am-2.30pm & 4.30-8pm Mon-Fri) The best informed office.

Valencia Convention Bureau tourist office (% 96 315 39 31; www.turisvalencia.es) Plaza de la Reina (Map p582; Plaza de la Reina 19; h 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun); Train Station (Map p582) Also has a branch at the airport arrivals area.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Ciudad de las Artes y las Ciencias

The aesthetically stunning **Ciudad de las Artes y las Ciencias** (City of Arts & Sciences; Map p580; % reservations 902 10 00 31; www.cac.es; Autovía a El Saler; combined ticket for all 3 attractions adult/child €29.90/22.40) occupies a massive 350,000-sq-metre swath of the old Turia riverbed. It's mostly the work of local architect Santiago Calatrava, designer of, among many other exciting creations around the world, the transportation terminal for the new World Trade Center site in New York.

The **Hemisféric** (Map p580; adult/child €7.50/5.80) is a planetarium, IMAX cinema and laser show in one, all with optional English commentary.

The **Museo de las Ciencias Príncipe Felipe** (Map p580; adult/child €7.50/5.80; h 10am-6pm or 8pm) is an interactive science museum where each section has a pamphlet in English summarising its contents.

The highlight of the complex, especially if you have young children, will probably be the **Oceanográfico** (Map p580; adult/child €22/16.60; h 10am-6pm or 8pm Sep-Jul, 10am-midnight Aug). The aquariums of this watery world have sufficient water sloshing around to fill 15 Olympic-size

swimming pools. There are also polar zones, a dolphinarium, a Red Sea aquarium, a Mediterranean seascape – and a couple of underwater tunnels, one 70m long, where the fish have the chance to gawp at visitors.

The **Palau de les Arts Reina Sofía** (Map p580; % 902 10 00 32; www.lesarts.com; Autovía a El Saler) broods over the riverbed like a giant beetle, its shell shimmering with translucent mosaic tiles. With four auditoriums and seating for 4400, it's exceeded in capacity only by the Sydney Opera House.

Take bus 14, 15 or 35 from Calle Játiva and bus 95 from Torres de Serranos or Plaza de América.

Museo de Historia de Valencia

The **Museo de Historia de Valencia** (% 96 370 11 05; Calle Valencia 42; adult/child €2/1; h 10am-2pm & 4.30-8.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun), above the riverbed Parque de Cabecera, plots more than 2000 years of the city's history. Hands-on and with lots of film and video, it's great fun – even if your Spanish isn't too hot. Ask to borrow the museum's informative folder in English. Take bus 3, 81 or 95 or get off at the Nou d'Octubre metro stop.

Museo de Bellas Artes

The **Museo de Bellas Artes** (Fine Arts Museum; Map p582; % 96 378 03 00; Calle San Pio V 9; admission free; h 10am-8pm Tue-Sun) ranks among Spain's best, with works by El Greco, Goya, Velázquez, Murillo, Ribalta and artists such as Sorolla and Pinazo of the Valencian impressionist school.

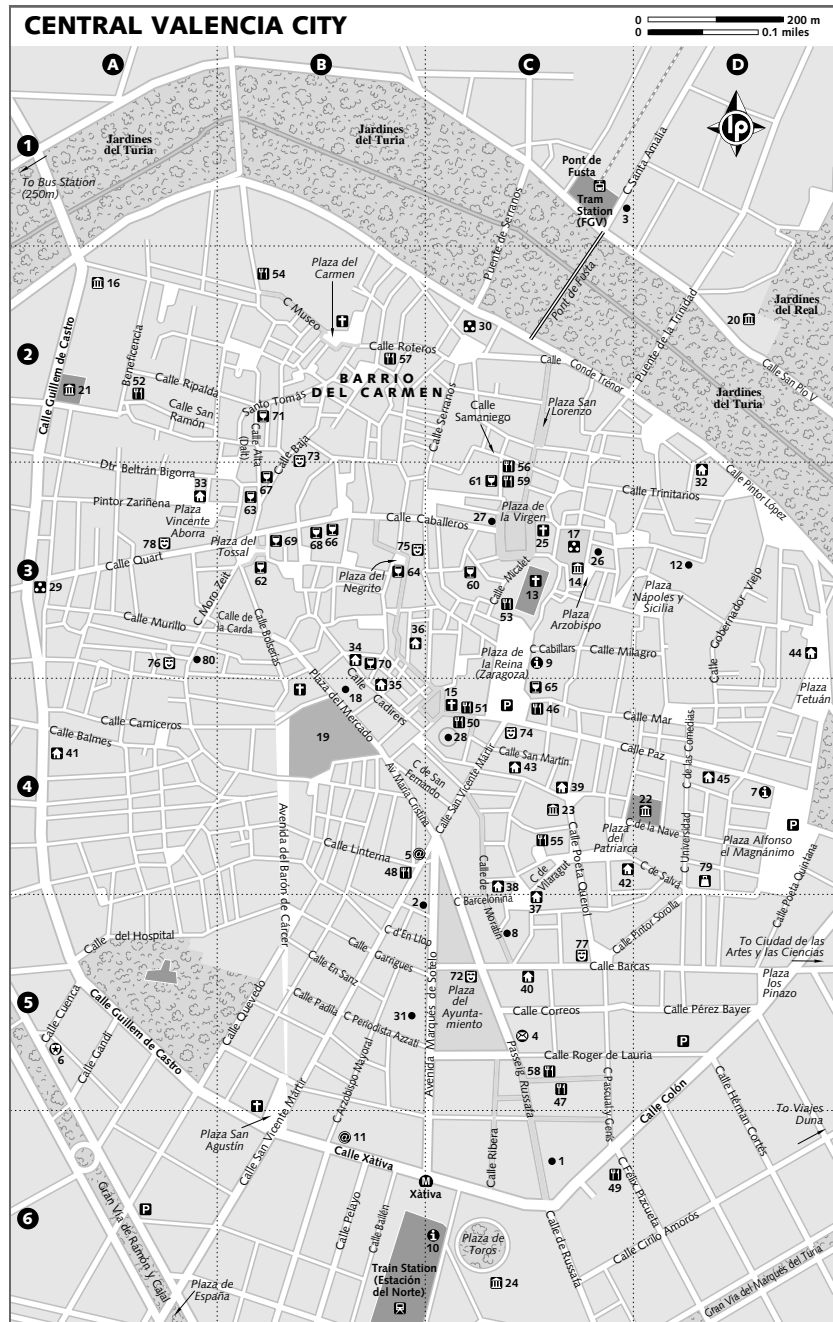
Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno (IVAM)

IVAM (Map p582; % 96 386 30 00; Calle Guillem de Castro 118; adult/student €2/1, Sun free; h 10am-10pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-8pm Oct-May), pronounced 'ee-bam', is currently in the throes of a major expansion. It houses an impressive permanent collection of 20th-century Spanish art and hosts excellent temporary exhibitions.

Cathedral

The **cathedral** (Map p582; adult/child with audioguide €3/2.10; h 8am-8.30pm) is a microcosm of the city's architectural history; the Puerta del Palau on Plaza de la Virgen is Romanesque; the dome, tower and Puerta de los Apóstoles are Gothic; the presbytery and main entrance on Plaza de la Reina are baroque; and there are a couple of Renaissance chapels inside.

In the flamboyant Gothic Capilla del Santo Cáliz, right of the main entrance, is what's



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claimed to be the Holy Grail, the chalice from which Christ sipped during the Last Supper. A door leads to the cathedral museum, with its rich collection of vestments and statuary. The next chapel north, La Capilla de San Francisco de Borja, has a pair of particularly sensitive Goyas.

Left of the main portal is the entrance to the Miguelete bell tower (adult/child €1.20/0.60; 10am-1pm & 4.30-6pm). Climb the 207 steps of its spiral staircase for great city-and-skyline views.

As for over a thousand years, the Tribunal de las Aguas (Water Court) meets every Thursday at noon outside the cathedral's Plaza del Palau. Here, local farmers' irrigation disputes are settled in Valenciano.

Plaza de la Virgen & Around

The plaza occupies the site that was once the forum of Roman Valencia, on the spot where its main north-south and east-west highways met. Beside the cathedral is the church of Nuestra Señora de los Desamparados (Map p582; 7am-2pm & 4-9pm). Above the altar is a highly venerated statue

of the Virgin, patron of the city. Opposite is the handsome 15th-century Gothic – and much amended – Palau de la Generalitat (Map p582), seat of government for the Valencia region. The reclining figure in the central fountain represents the Río Turia, while the eight maidens with their gushing pots symbolise the main irrigation canals flowing from it.

Through the transparent viewing area of the archaeological site of La Almoína (Map p582), just east of the square and Valencia's newest urban space, you can look down on the remains, Roman, Arab and Christian.

Beside it, the Cripta de la Cárcel de San Vicente Mártir (Map p582; 96 934 14 17; Plaza del Arzobispo; adult/child €2/1, Sat & Sun free; 9.30am-2pm & 5.30-8pm Tue-Sat, 9.30am-2pm Sun) was reputedly used as a prison for the 4th-century martyr San Vicente. Although the crypt of this Visigoth chapel isn't particularly memorable in itself, it's worth taking in the multimedia show that presents Valencia's history and the saint's life and death. Reserve by phone or at the Palacio del Marqués de Campo (Map p582), just opposite, and ask for a showing in English.

LAS FALLAS

The exuberant, anarchic swirl of **Las Fallas de San José** – fireworks, music, festive bonfires and all-night partying – is a must if you're in Spain between 12 and 19 March.

The *fallas* themselves are huge sculptures of papier-mâché on wood (with, increasingly, environmentally damaging polystyrene), built by teams of local artists. Each neighbourhood sponsors its own *falla*, and when the town wakes after the *plantà* (overnight construction of the *fallas*) on the morning of 16 March, more than 350 have been erected. Reaching up to 15m in height, with the most expensive costing more than €120,000 (oh yes, we've got those eurozeros right!), these grotesque, colourful effigies satirise celebrities, current affairs and local customs.

Around-the-clock festivities include street parties, paella-cooking competitions, parades, open-air concerts, bullfights and nightly free firework displays. Valencia considers itself the pyrotechnic capital of the world and each day at 2pm from 1 to 19 March a *masclètà* (over five minutes of deafening thumps and explosions) shakes the window panes of Plaza del Ayuntamiento.

After midnight on the final day each *falla* goes up in flames – backed by yet more fireworks.

(admiring the fine mansions as you go) or continue down Calle Bolserías. Turn left into Plaza del Mercado and allow yourself time to browse around the Mercado Central (6; p589) and Lonja (7; p584).

Bear right at the junction with Calle San Vicente Mártir to detour briefly and take in Plaza del Ayuntamiento (8), where the neoclassical town hall (9) looks across to the neobaroque splendour of Valencia's main post office (10). Pop inside to savour its freshly renovated interior – more like a theatre foyer than a place to post a letter – and raise your eyes to the magnificent leaded-glass dome. Returning, head north up Calle San Vicente Mártir to Plaza de la Reina (11), wide and a bit soulless – something that can't be said for the bar Finnegan's (12; p590). With the walk's end almost in sight, you might want to reward yourself with a Guinness here. Otherwise, slip up the lane that runs to the left (west) of the cathedral to rejoin your starting point.

COURSES

Cooking

Escuela de Cocina Eneldo (☎ 96 395 54 57; www.cocinaeneldo.com in Spanish; Calle Joaquín Costa 45) Cooking's a very demonstrable discipline so even if your Spanish isn't up to scratch, pitch in and get your hands floury.

Dance

Academia de Baile Maria Cruz Alcalá (☎ 96 334 42 31; Calle Salamanca 20) Runs three dance schools around Valencia City.

Centre Professional de Dansa Valencià (☎ 96 385 80 54; centredansavalencia@hotmail.com; Calle Calixto III 11-13) Offers everything from traditional Spanish to belly dancing.

Estudio de Danza Maria Carbonell (☎ 96 380 58 43; www.mariacarbonell.com in Spanish; Calle Cádiz 54) Forming dancers for over 20 years.

Spanish Language

Babylon Idiomas (☎ 96 315 33 32; www.babylon-idiomas.com; Calle San Vicente Mártir 2)

Intereuropa (Map p582; ☎ 96 394 49 95; www.intereuropa.es; Plaza del Ayuntamiento 5)

Route 66 Idiomas (Map p582; ☎ 96 342 73 68; www.route66idiomas.com; Calle Moratin 15) Hey, it even thrives in free bike hire for the duration of your course.

VALENCIA FOR CHILDREN

Beaches (p584), of course: nearest is the combined beach of Malvarrosa and Las Arenas (the latter meaning 'sand'), a shortish bus or tram ride from the centre. The high-speed tram is fun: feel the G-force as it surges along. The other great playground, year-round, is the diverted Río Turia's former 9km riverbed. Of its formal playgrounds, Gulliver (p584) just asks to be clambered all over.

Within the Jardines del Real (Los Viveros gardens, p584), there's a miniature road system, complete with traffic signs and bridges. You have to take your own bike, trike or pedal car, but it's great fun – and a learning experience too. The Jardín Botánico (p584) is altogether more peaceful; mind the cactuses and feral cats, play hide-and-seek in amongst the trees and keep an eye out for frogs in the fountain.

Of the Ciudad de las Artes y las Ciencias' diversions (p581), the Oceanogràfic, with more than 45,000 aquatic beasts and plants, has something for all ages. The science museum, reasonably documented in English, is more

for over-twelves (we have seen primary-school kids innocently and casually wrecking the hands-on exhibits), while the IMAX cinema offers thrills for all. The fun is far from free, however, so do research the range of family and combined tickets.

TOURS

Bicycle Tours

Valencia Guías (Map p580; ☎ 96 385 17 40; www.valencia.guias.com; Paseo de la Pechina 32) conducts 3½-hour guided tours (in Spanish and English) of Valencia by bike (€22 including rental), leaving from their premises at 10am. They'll turn out daily and require a minimum of only two cyclists.

Orange Bikes (Map p582; ☎ 96 391 75 51; www.orange.bikes.net; Calle Santa Teresa 8) runs similar guided visits for a maximum of eight participants (see p592).

Bus Tours

Valencia Bus Turístico (☎ 96 341 44 00) runs 90-minute city tours (adult/child €12/6) with a recorded commentary in eight languages. Buses leave from Plaza de la Reina, tickets are valid for 24 hours and you can hop off and on at five sites en route.

It also does a similar multilingual tour of La Albufera (p593; adult/child €12/6, two hours), including a half-hour boat trip on the lagoon and trips to Sagunto (p593; €15, 2½ hours).

Walking Tours

Valencia Guías (Map p580; ☎ 96 385 17 40; www.valencia.guias.com; Paseo de la Pechina 32) does two-hour walking tours in Spanish and English (adult/child €12/6), leaving Plaza de la Reina tourist office at 10am each Saturday (Thursdays too, mid-June to mid-September).

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

March/April

Las Fallas See the boxed text, opposite.

Semana Santa (Easter) Elaborate Holy Week processions in the seaside district of La Malvarrosa.

Fiesta de San Vicente Ferrer (Sunday after Easter) Colourful parades and miracle plays performed around town.

May

Fiesta de la Virgen (second Sunday of May) The effigy of the Virgen de los Desamparados, hemmed in by fervent believers struggling to touch her, makes the short journey across Plaza de la Virgen to the cathedral.

June

Corpus Christi (ninth Sunday after Easter) Celebrated with an elaborate procession and mystery plays.

Día de San Juan (Midsummer's Day, 23-24 June) Thousands mark the longest day with bonfires on the beach.

July

Feria de Julio (second half of July) Performing arts, brass band competitions, bullfights, fireworks and a 'battle of the flowers', when decorated horse-drawn floats parade down Paseo de la Alameda while their occupants and spectators pelt each other with tens of thousands of marigolds.

October

Valencia Bienial (October-November, odd years) A festival of modern visual arts with exhibitions all over town.

Festival of Mediterranean Cinema A week of films from around the Mediterranean.

Día de la Comunidad (9 October) Commemorates the city's 1238 liberation from the Arabs.

SLEEPING

Budget

Hôme Backpackers (Map p582; ☎ 96 391 37 97; www.likeathome.net; Calle Santa Cristina s/n; dm €14.50, tr/q €51/68; i) This, the simplest of the Hôme team's three excellent budget options, each with self-catering facilities, has 170 beds and a large roof terrace for chilling out or soaking in the sun.

Red Nest Hostel (Map p582; ☎ 96 342 71 68; www.nestyh.com; dm €14-17, d €41-47, q €70-78) This cheerful hostel has brightly decorated rooms ranging from doubles to dorms accommodating 12.

Purple Nest Hostel (Map p582; ☎ 96 353 25 61; Plaza Tetuan 5; dm €14-17, d €41-47, q €70-78; a) Red Nest's big brother, just round the corner, observes the same rates and some rooms have aircon and en suite bathroom.

Pensión París (Map p582; ☎ 96 352 67 66; www.pensionparis.com; 1st & 3rd fl, Calle de Salvá 12; basic s/d/tr €20/30/45, d/tr with shower €35/48, d with bathroom €38)

Welcoming, with spotless rooms and corridor bathrooms, this family-run option on a quiet street is the antithesis of the crowded, pack 'em in hostel.

Hostal Antigua Morellana (Map p582; ☎ 96 391 57 73; www.hostalam.com; Calle En Bou 2; s €33-58, d €48-58; a) The friendly, family-run 18-room Hostal Antigua Morellana is tucked away near the central market. Occupying a renovated 18th-century building on a quiet street, the hotel has cosy, good-sized rooms, most with balconies.

Other recommended budget choices:

Hôme Deluxe Hostel (Map p582; % 96 391 46 91; www.likeathome.net; Calle Cadirers 11)

Hôme Youth Hostel (Map p582; % 96 391 62 29; www.likeathome.net; Calle Lonja 4)

Indigo Youth Hostel (Map p582; % 96 315 39 88; www.indigohostel.com; Calle Guillem de Castro 64)

Midrange

Since Valencia is a business centre, big hotels struggle to fill rooms at weekends and most offer fat weekend and high summer discounts.

Hotel Excelsior (Map p582; % 96 351 46 12; www.hoteles-catalonia.com; Calle Barcelonina 5; s/d with breakfast €85/97; a) The spacious rooms at this recently renovated hotel have gleaming parquet flooring and lavish marble bathrooms. Central and welcoming, it also has a small, pleasant downstairs bar area.

Petit Palace Bristol (Map p582; % 96 394 51 00; www.hoteles.com; Calle Abadía San Martín 3; s €80-120, d €90-140; n a i) Hip, minimalist and friendly, this lovely boutique hotel, a comprehensively made-over, 19th-century mansion, retains the best of its past and does a particularly scrumptious buffet breakfast. It's well worthwhile paying €10 extra for one of the superior doubles on the top, fifth floor.

Hotel Inglés (Map p582; % 96 351 64 26; www.meliaingles.solmelia.com; Calle Marqués de Dos Aguas 6; r €82-138; n a i) In a stylishly renovated, much modified 18th-century palace, the Hotel Inglés has rooms with parquet floors, dark, stained-wood bedheads and a large glass-topped working table. The café and some bedrooms overlook the glorious rococo main entrance to the Palacio del Marqués de Dos Aguas.

Hotel Reina Victoria (Map p582; % 96 352 04 87; www.husa.es; Calle Barcas 4; s €82-115, d €93-191; n a) If you go for faded charm and favour a central position, this grand old place, comprehensively renovated, will please. Bedrooms are large (singles are particularly roomy) and attractively furnished.

Jardín Botánico (Map p580; % 96 315 40 12; www.hoteljardinbotanico.com; Calle Doctor Peset Cervera 6; s €94-112, d €94-124; n a) Welcoming and megacool ('Chill Out' is their slogan), this intimate – only 16 rooms – hotel is furnished with great flair. Understandably, the Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno (IVAM), an easy walk away, regularly selects it as a venue for its guests.

Ad Hoc (Map p582; % 96 315 91 40; www.adhoc.hoteles.com; Calle Boix 4; s/d €99/119; a) Friendly, welcoming Ad Hoc offers comfort and charm deep

within the old quarter and also runs a splendid small restaurant. The late-19th-century building has been restored to its former splendour with great sensitivity, revealing original ceilings, mellow brickwork and solid wooden beams.

Top End

Hotel Astoria Palace (Map p582; % 96 398 10 00; www.hotel-astoria-palace.com; Plaza Rodrigo Botet 5; s/d €110/142, d with breakfast Fri-Sun €94; p n a) Although facing increasingly keen competition from younger luxury upstarts, Hotel Astoria, almost 50 years in business, can still hold its own for top-end comfort and attentive service.

Palau del Mar (Map p580; % 96 316 28 84; www.hospes.es; Calle Navarro Reverter 14; r from €110; n a s) Created by the merging of two elegant 19th-century mansions (with 18 very similar rooms, newly constructed, surrounding a tranquil internal garden), this boutique hotel, all black, white, soft fuscous and beige, is cool, confident and ultra-modern. There's a sauna and a Jacuzzi – and a pool scarcely bigger than your bathtub.

Neptuno (% 96 356 77 77; www.hotelneptunovalencia.com; Paseo de Neptuno 2; s €110-180, d €110-225; p n a) The Neptuno, overlooking the beach, is a very stylish, ultramodern newcomer. It's also an ideal choice if you want to mix cultural tourism with a little beach frolicking. It runs a superb on-site gourmet restaurant, Tridente.

EATING

Valencia is the capital of *la huerta*, a fertile coastal agricultural plain that supplies the city with delightfully fresh fruit and vegetables.

Rice is the staple of much Valencian cuisine – and the basis of the dish Valencia exported to the world: paella. Other local favourites include *arroz a banda* (rice simmered in a fish stock), *arroz negro* (rice with squid, including its ink) and *arroz al horno* (rice baked in the oven). Then there's *fideuá*, a paella made with noodles instead of rice. Valencians usually eat rice only at lunchtime, when locals in their hundreds head for Las Arenas, just north of the port.

Around Plaza del Ayuntamiento

En Bandeja (Map p582; % 96 394 06 95; Calle San Vicente Mártir 24; h 8.30am-9pm Mon-Sat Sep-May, 8.30am-9pm Mon-Fri Jun-Aug) This relaxed self-service place does excellent-value continental breakfasts (€3.50) and lunches (€8.90 including a drink and coffee).

Fresc Co (Map p582; % 96 310 63 88; Calle Felix Pizcueta 6; h dinner daily, lunch Sat & Sun) Fresc Co's all-you-can eat buffet offers a veritable kitchen garden of salad items and a choice of pasta or pizza. With its bare, mellow brickwork, it's an agreeable place to dine in (dinner from €9.70), though you're not encouraged to linger once dessert's over.

La Utielana (Map p582; % 96 352 94 14; Plaza Picadero dos Aguas 3; meals €12; h lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, lunch Sat) Tucked away off Calle Prócida and not easy to track down, La Utielana well merits a minute or two's sleuthing. Very Valencian, it packs in the crowds, drawn by the wholesome fare and exceptional value for money. Arrive early as it doesn't take reservations.

There's a cluster of superb upmarket seafood restaurants along pedestrianised Calle Mosén Femades, including **Palacio de la Belota** (Map p582; % 96 351 53 61; Calle Mosén Femades 7; h lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) and **Civera Centro** (Map p582; % 96 352 97 64; Calle Mosén Femades 10; a). For both, count on at least €50 per head, including wine.

A visit to the magnificent covered market, the **Mercado Central** (Map p582; Plaza del Mercado; h 7.30am-2.30pm Mon-Sat), is a must, even if you only browse.

Around Plaza de la Virgen

Las Cuevas (Map p582; % 96 391 71 96; Calle Samaniego 9; tapas €2.50-7) 'The Caves', a low-ceilinged, semi-basement and aptly named, carries a huge range of tapas.

Seu-Xerea (Map p582; % 96 392 40 00; Calle Conde Almodóvar 4; meals €25; h lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) This smart, welcoming restaurant is favourably quoted in almost every English-language press article about Valencia City. Its creative, regularly changing à la carte menu features dishes both international and rooted in Spain. It does a warmly recommended lunchtime *menú del día* (daily set menu; €15).

La Lola (Map p582; % 96 391 80 45; Subida del Tolelano 8; meals €25; h lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Up an alley beside the cathedral, here's a very suave number where cool jazz trills. Desserts such as creamed white chocolate, raspberry delight, gooey Greek yoghurt, pistachio and crunchy biscuit (oh yes, that's all one dish) are wickedly tempting.

Burdeos in Love (Map p582; % 96 391 43 50; Calle Mar 4; meals €25; h lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, lunch Sat) At this smart restaurant with its modern, clean-lined décor, both the midday *menú* (€16) and the

menú degustación (€36) are excellent value and there's an impressive wine list, especially of Spanish reds.

Elsewhere in El Barrio del Carmen

La Tastaolletes (Map p582; % 96 392 18 62; Calle Salvador Giner 6; menú €10; h lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, dinner Mon; v) This tiny place does a creative range of vegetable tapas. Pleasantly informal, it's worth visiting for the friendly atmosphere and good, wholesome food created from quality prime ingredients. Salads are frondy and the cheese-cake with stewed fruits, a dream.

La Lluna (Map p582; % 96 392 21 46; Calle San Ramon 23; meals €15; h lunch & dinner Mon-Sat; v) La Lluna has been serving quality, reasonably priced vegetarian fare for over 25 years. On two floors, its walls elaborately tiled, it offers lots of choices plus daily specials (go for the seaweed salad if it's on).

Ana Eva (Map p580; % 96 391 53 69; Calle Turia 49; meals €20; h lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun; v) The smartest of Valencia's vegetarian options, just beyond the Barrio, has tasteful décor and a delightful rear patio. Staff prepare some very imaginative dishes and do great juices. With starters including rice, pasta, potatoes and couscous, you won't walk out bloating.

Mattilda (Map p582; % 96 382 31 68; Calle Rotereros 21; menus €12, mains €14.60-19; h lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) The décor is stylish and modern at this relative newcomer, run by a cheery young team. There's an imaginative à la carte selection and a particularly good-value lunch *menú*.

Las Arenas

In Las Arenas, a long line of restaurants overlooking the beach all serve up authentic paella in a three-course meal costing under €15.

La Lonja del Pescado Frito (% 96 355 35 35; Calle Eugenia Vines 243; meals €15; h dinner Tue-Fri, lunch & dinner Sat & Sun Mar-Oct, Sat & Sun Nov-Feb) One block back from the beach at Malvarrosa and right beside the tram stop, this busy, informal place in what's little more than an adorned tin shack offers unbeatable value for fresh fish. Grab an order form as you enter and fill it in at your table.

La Pepica (% 96 371 03 66; Paseo Neptuno 6) Larger and more expensive than its competitors and renowned for its rice dishes and seafood, this is where Ernest Hemingway, among many other luminaries, once strutted. Between courses, browse through the photos and tributes that plaster the walls.

DRINKING

Fuelled by a large student population and an overdeveloped sense of competitiveness with Madrid and Barcelona, Valencia has a justified reputation for having one of Spain's best nightlife scenes.

The Barrio del Carmen has both the grungiest and grooviest collection of bars. The other major area is around the university; Avenidas de Aragón and Blasco Ibáñez and surrounding streets have enough bars and *discotecas* to keep you busy beyond sunrise.

Two other zones worth checking out are around the Mercado de Abastos and Plaza de Cánovas; while in summer, Malvarrosa, north of the port, comes alive.

Barrio del Carmen

'El Carmé' has everything from designer bars and yuppie pubs to grungy thrash-metal haunts and punk bars. On weekends, Calle Caballeros, the main street, seethes with revelers seeking *la marcha* (the action).

Plaza del Tossal is rimmed by sophisticated bars. The interior of **Café Infanta** (Map p582; Plaza del Tossal) is a clutter of cinema memorabilia. The 1st floor of **San Jaime** (Map p582; Plaza del Tossal), a converted pharmacy that's all quiet crannies and poky passageways, is altogether more intimate. Both have great people-watching terraces.

On Calle Caballeros are a couple of bars for beautiful people: **Johnny Maracas** (Map p582; Calle Caballeros 39) is a suave salsa place with fish tanks on the bar, and **Fox Congo** (Map p582; Calle Caballeros 35) has a cool back-lit alabaster bar and walls clad in leather and sheet-metal.

Cafe-Bar Negrito (Map p582; Plaza del Negrito) At this bar, which traditionally attracts a more left-wing, intellectual clientele, the crowd spills out onto the square.

John Silver (Map p582; Calle Alta 8) Low, dark and named after the monoped old pirate

HORCHATA

Horchata is a sweet, opaque local drink made from pressed *chufas* (tiger nuts), into which you dip large finger-shaped buns called *fartons*; both name and taste are to savour. Two traditional places to sample it in the heart of town are **Horchatería de Santa Catalina** (Map p582; Plaza Santa Catalina) and **Horchatería el Siglo** (Map p582; Plaza Santa Catalina).

himself (his wooden leg hangs behind the bar), this place is typical of the cheaper bars north of Plaza del Tossal.

Xino Xano (Map p582; Calle Alta 28) The genial owner, a well-known DJ in his own right, picks from his collection of dub, reggae and funk.

Other Areas

Café de las Horas (Map p582; Calle Conde de Almodóvar 1) This place offers high baroque, tapestries, music of all genres, candelabras and a long list of exotic cocktails.

Finnegan's (Map p582; Plaza de la Reina) Longest established of Valencia's several Irish bars, it's a popular meeting place for English speakers.

Lounge (Map p582; % 96 391 80 94; Calle Estameñaría Vieja 2) A true Irish bar without a false fiddle or unread copy of James Joyce in sight, this friendly place with an Internet terminal is where locals and visitors interact (ask about their weekly conversational interchanges).

Near the Mercado de Abastos, just west of the town centre, Calle Juan Lloréns and surrounding streets are in another hip area. Drop into modish **Akuarela** (Map p580; Calle Juan Lloréns 49); the smaller **Maruja Limón** (Map p580; Calle Juan 54), strong on Spanish pop; or, for a little Pharaonic frenzy, **Anubis** (Map p580; Calle Juan 34) with its ancient Egyptian theme.

Just east of the centre, Plaza de Cánovas, rather tamer, attracts a younger crowd. **Plaza** (Map p580; Plaza de Cánovas) is a stylish corner bar on the square itself. Around the corner, a pair of congenial neighbours, **Abbey Road** (Map p580; Calle Serrano Morales) and **Década Loca** (Map p580; Calle Serrano Morales), wait to pull you in.

ENTERTAINMENT

La Turia and *Que y Donde* are weekly guides in Spanish on sale at kiosks and newsagents. *Hello Valencia* (Spanish and English) and *24-7 Valencia* (in English) are free monthlies. *Cool Carmen* has tip-offs about places within the Barrio del Carmen and *Thisisvalencia Mapazine* (www.thisisvalencia.com) is in the same genre (its website has much greater detail). All four are available in tourist offices and selected bars and clubs.

Clubs

Radio City (Map p582; Santa Teresa 19; 11pm-late) At weekends, Radio City has a free disco that's good for post-bar dancing to salsa, house and sometimes cheesy pop. There's live flamenco at 11pm on Tuesday.

GAY VALENCIA

There's a small gay rectangle in the Barrio del Carmen where most of the enticing venues beckon.

Café de la Seu (Map p582; % 96 391 57 15; Calle Santo Cáliz 7; 11 Mon-Sat) and **Café Sant Miguel** (Map p582; % 96 392 31 29; Plaza Sant Miguel 13; 11 Tue-Sun winter, daily summer) are a couple of relaxing, gay-friendly places, the latter with a large, popular terrace.

Venial (Map p582; % 96 391 73 56; www.venialvalencia.com; Calle Quart 26; 11 1-7.30am), with its house and techno music and a quieter chill-out zone, is far and away the city's most popular gay dance venue. It's also big on cabarets and theme nights.

Deseo 54 (Map p580; www.deseo54.com; Calle Pepita 15; 11 1.30am Sat) is a gay disco for the stay-through-till-dawn crowd where the music's mainly pop remixes.

For more life after 3am, head to the university area along and around Avenida Blasco Ibáñez and Avenida de Aragón. Most *discotecas* have cover charges of up to €10, although discounted passes are often available from local bars.

Caribbean's (Map p580; Calle Bélgica 5; 11 Tue-Sat) Drinks are decently priced at this club, which plays a mixture of house, hip-hop and R&B.

Rumbo 144 (Map p580; Avenida Blasco Ibáñez 146; 11 Thu-Sat Sep-Jul) This is a funky, large-floored place with a light show. Thursday is student night.

Warhol (Map p580; Avenida Blasco Ibáñez 111; 11 Wed-Sat) Across the road from Rumbo 144, Warhol is a smallish venue playing eclectic music that attracts a predominantly student crowd.

Bananas (% 96 178 17 06; Carretera Valencia-Alicante, El Romani; 11 midnight Fri & Sat) Just about the maxiest maxidisco you'll ever party at, Bananas packs in dancers by the thousand, playing techno with a leavening of house. Forget taxi lines: take the special train that leaves Estación del Norte at 1.15am, go Bananas and return on the early bird at 6.15am.

Dub Club (Map p580; www.dubclubvalencia.com; Calle Jesús 91; 11 Thu-Sun) With the slogan 'We play music not noise', this is a bar that has great music: reggae (Thursday), dub, drum 'n' bass, funk and more. Tuesday is live jazz jamming night.

La Claca (Map p582; % 669 325079; www.laclaca.com; Calle San Vicente Mártir 3; 11 7pm-3.30am) La Claca has nightly DJs playing funk, hip hop and indie. Earmark 11.30pm Sunday for some of the best live flamenco in town. It also gives flamenco classes if you fancy expanding your dance-floor repertoire.

La Marxa (Map p582; % 96 391 70 65; Calle Cocinas 5; 11 11pm-3am) This is a popular late-late choice. Raucous, thumping and pumping, it pulls in all sorts from hardened local partyers to international students fresh in town and out for something a little raw.

Cinemas

Filmoteca (Map p582; % 96 399 55 77; Plaza del Ayuntamiento; admission €1.50) This cinema, on the 4th floor of the Teatro Rialto building, screens undubbed classic, arthouse and experimental films – and hasn't raised its admission price in 20 years!

Valencia has two multiscreen cinemas that show exclusively undubbed films and share a website (www.cinesalbatrosbabel.com): **Albatros** (Map p580; % 96 393 26 77; Plaza Fray Luis Colomer) and **Babel** (Map p580; % 96 362 67 95; Calle Vicente Sancho Tello 10). Admission prices are lower on Monday.

Theatre & Opera

Teatro Principal (Map p582; % 96 353 92 00; Calle Barcas 15) This is Valencia's main venue for opera and the performing arts.

Palau de la Música (Map p582; % 96 337 50 20; www.palauvalencia.com in Spanish; Paseo de la Alameda 30) A huge, glass-domed concert hall, this venue hosts mainly classical music recitals.

Palau de les Arts Reina Sofía (Map p580; % 902 10 00 31; Autovía a El Saler) The Palau de la Música is overshadowed in size alone by this brand new venue with its four auditoriums.

Live Music

Black Note (Map p580; % 96 393 36 63; Calle de Polo y Peyrolón 15) Valencia City's most active jazz venue has live music Monday to Thursday and good canned jazz, blues and soul on Friday and Saturday.

Jimmy Glass (Map p582; Calle Baja 28) Come here to listen to cool jazz from the owner's vast CD collection, and live performers at 9.30pm on alternate Tuesdays.

El Loco (Map p580; % 96 326 05 26; Calle Erudito Orellana 12) This place puts on live concerts from Wednesday to Saturday and runs house and techno sessions on other nights.

Cormorán (Map p580; ☎ 607 659705; Calle San Vicente Mártir 200) Cormorán has the pulling power to bring in the big names of pop and rock. With a couple of auditoriums on two floors, it's open only when there's a gig.

Football

The city, as football crazy as any other corner of the Mediterranean, has a highly successful soccer team, Valencia Club de Fútbol, Spanish League Champions 2003 and 2004 and UEFA cup holders in 2004. You can pick up a scarf, woolly hat, shirt or other memento from the club's shop (Calle Pintor Sorolla 24).

Valencia's other professional club, Levante, a minnow by comparison, has lately bounced in and out of the Spanish first division. Should they still be up there by the time you hit town, do take in a game; they'll be needing all the support they can get.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Valencia's **Aeropuerto de Manises** (☎ 96 159 85 00) is 10km west of the city centre along the A3, in the direction of Madrid.

Less than five years ago, not one budget airline buzzed in to Valencia. Today seven low-cost flights daily fly to/from UK airports, in addition to national carriers BA and Iberia. Other economy flights serve major European destinations such as Milan, Rome, Berlin, Amsterdam and Zurich.

Boat

Acciona Trasmediterránea (☎ 902 45 46 45; www.acciona-trasmediterranea.es in Spanish) operates car and passenger ferries to Mallorca and Ibiza. Buy your ticket online, at the passenger terminal of the **Muelle de Poniente** (☎ 96 316 48 59) or at any travel agency.

Bus

Valencia's **bus station** (Map p580; ☎ 96 346 62 66) is located beside the riverbed on Avenida Menéndez Pidal. Bus 8 connects it to Plaza del Ayuntamiento.

AutoRes (☎ 902 02 09 99; www.auto-res.net) operates hourly bus services to/from Madrid (€21.10 to €27, four hours). **ALSA** (☎ 902 42 22 42; www.alsa.es) has more than 10 daily buses to/from Barcelona (€22.87 to €27.76, four to 5½ hours) and Alicante (€16.30 to €18.55, 2¾ hours), most passing by Benidorm (€12.70 to €14.35, 1¾ hours).

Train

From Valencia's Estación del Norte (Map p582), seven to 10 Alaris express trains travel daily to/from Madrid (€40.60, 3½ to 4¼ hours) and at least 11 to Barcelona (€31.80 to €37, 3¼ to four hours). Up to nine trains head daily to Alicante, (€21.40 to €24.50, 1¾ hours).

Trains run every half hour to Castellón (€3.65, up to one hour) via Sagunto (€2.40, 30 minutes).

GETTING AROUND

Valencia has an integrated bus, tram and metro network. EMT buses ply town routes, while MetroBus serves outlying towns and villages. Tourist offices stock maps for both services.

The three tourist offices of the **Valencia Convention Bureau** (☎ 96 315 39 31; www.turisvalencia.es) Plaza de la Reina (Map p582; Plaza de la Reina 19; 11 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun); Train Station (Map p582); Airport (arrivals area) sell the **Valencia Card** (€6/10/12 per 1/2/3 days), entitling you to free urban travel and discounts at participating sights, shops and restaurants.

To/From the Airport

The number 5 metro line is currently being extended and will connect the airport, downtown and port. **Aero-Bus** (€2.50, 20 minutes, every 20 minutes) leaves from a stop outside the departures area on the airport's upper level and terminates beside metro Bailén, just south of the main train station. A taxi into the centre costs around €15 (there's a supplement of €2.50 above the metered fee for journeys originating at the airport).

Bicycle

Orange Bikes (Map p582; ☎ 96 391 75 51; www.orangebikes.net; Calle Santa Teresa 8), opposite Radio City, rents out mountain bikes and town bikes (€9 to €12 per day, €24 per weekend, €45 to €55 per week) and electric bikes (€15 per day). The initiative of a young Anglo-Valenciano couple, this is also a good place to buy a second-hand cycle. **Valencia Guías** (p587) also rents out reliable town bikes.

Car & Motorcycle

Street parking is a real pain. There are large subterranean car parks beneath Plazas de la Reina and Alfonso el Magnánimo and, biggest of all, near the train station, covering the area between Calle Xàtiva and the Gran Via.

Major car-hire companies include **Europcar** airport (☎ 96 152 18 72); train station/town (☎ 96 351 90 55) and **Avis** airport (☎ 96 152 21 62); train station/town (☎ 96 352 24 78). Reliable local companies operating from Valencia airport include **Javea Cars** (☎ 96 579 3312; www.javeacars.com), **Solmar** (☎ 96 153 90 42; www.solmar.es) and **Victoria Cars** (☎ 96 583 02 54; www.victoriacars.com). They are usually substantially less expensive than the major companies.

Public Transport

Most EMT (☎ 96 352 83 99) buses run until about 10pm, with night services continuing on seven routes until around 1am. A single journey costs €1.10. Tobacconists and kiosks sell T1 (one-day pass; €3.10) or a 10-trip Bonobus (€5.20) pass.

The smart high-speed tram is a pleasant way to get to the beach, paella restaurants of Las Arenas and the port. Pick it up at Pont de Fusta or where it intersects with the Metro at Benimaclet.

Metro lines serve the outer suburbs. The closest stations to the centre are Ángel Guimerá, Xàtiva (for the train station), Colón and Pont de Fusta.

Taxi

Call **Radio-Taxi** (☎ 96 370 33 33) or **Valencia Taxi** (☎ 96 357 13 13).

AROUND VALENCIA CITY

La Albufera

About 15km south of Valencia, La Albufera is a huge freshwater lagoon separated from the sea by La Devesa, a narrow strip of sand dunes and pine forests. The lake and its shores are a breeding ground and sanctuary for migrating and indigenous birds. Keen bird-watchers flock to the **Parque Natural de la Albufera**, where around 90 species regularly nest while more than 250 others use it as a staging post on their migrations.

The sunsets can be spectacular. You can take a boat trip on the lagoon, joining the local fisherfolk, who use flat-bottomed boats and nets to harvest fish and eels from the shallow waters.

Surrounded by rice fields, La Albufera was the birthplace of paella. Every second house in the villages of El Palmar and El Perellonet is a restaurant, serving paella and other rice and seafood dishes.

Autocares Herca buses for Playa El Saler (p584) are also good for La Albufera and continue to either El Palmar (five to seven daily) or El Perellonet (hourly), further down the coast.

Sagunto

pop 61,800

You come to Sagunto (Valenciano: Sagunt), 25km north of Valencia, primarily to enjoy the spectacular panorama of the town, coast and green sea of orange groves from its hilltop castle complex. It's usually visited as a day or half-day excursion from Valencia.

Nowadays a sleepy spot, Sagunto was once a thriving Iberian community (called – infelicitously, with hindsight – Arse) that traded with Greeks and Phoenicians. In 219 BC Hannibal besieged the town for eight months. The inhabitants were eventually wiped out and their town destroyed, sparking the Second Punic War between Carthage and Rome. Rome won, named the town Saguntum and set about rebuilding it.

From the train station it's a 15-minute walk to the **tourist office** (☎ 96 266 22 13; www.sagunto.com; Plaza Cronista Chabret; 11 8am-3pm & 4.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1.30pm Sat, 9am-2pm Sun). A further 10-minute uphill walk – detour into the small Judería, the former Jewish quarter – brings you to the **Roman theatre**. Its modern 'restoration' is controversial but the acoustics remain outstanding and it's the main venue for Sagunto's three-week, open-air **August arts festival**.

Higher up, the stone walls of the **castle complex** (admission free; 11 10am-dusk Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) girdle the hilltop for almost a kilometre. Mostly in ruins, the rambling complex's seven sections each speak of a different period in Sagunto's long history.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are frequent trains between Valencia and Sagunto (€2.40/3.90 one way/return) and

NAVAJAS

About 2km north of the Segorbe turn-off on the main N234, take a signed right to drive beside orchards, almond and olive groves to the attractive village of Navajas, shaded by cypress, pine and palm trees and spouting with fountains and springs. Savour the charming tiled and pastel-painted **summer villas**, built during the 19th century by rich Valencians, then stretch your legs by following one of the four signed **walking trails**, each about 12km long, that radiate from central Plaza del Olmo, over which towers a venerable *olmo* (elm), planted in 1635.

LA TOMATINA

Buñol? It'll make you see red.

The last or penultimate Wednesday in August (the date varies) marks one of Spain's messiest and most bizarre festivals. Held in the town of Buñol, an otherwise drab industrial town about 40km west of Valencia City, La Tomatina is a tomato-throwing orgy that attracts around 30,000 visitors to a town of just 9000 inhabitants.

Just before noon on this very red-letter day, truckloads of ripe, squishy tomatoes (125,000kg is one estimate) are tipped out to the waiting crowd, and for the next hour or so everyone joins in a frenzied, cheerful, anarchic tomato battle.

After being pounded with pulp, expect to be sluiced down with hoses by the local fire brigade. The mayhem takes place on the town's main square and Calle del Cid.

At 1pm an explosion signals the end and the drenched participants don their stash of fresh clothes. Most people come for the day, arriving on the morning train from Valencia and heading back in the afternoon.

You can watch the spectacle in dry comfort on Canal 9, Valencia's local TV channel.

AVSA (96 267 1416) runs a service (€2, at least hourly) from Valencia's bus station.

Segorbe

pop 8500 / elevation 395m

Segorbe, 33km northwest of Sagunto, has a substantial baroque cathedral. Within its more delicate Gothic cloister is a fine ecclesiastical museum (adult/child €3/2; h 11am-1.30pm & 5-7pm Tue-Sun) with a sculpture of the Virgin and Child by Donatello and several colourful altarpieces.

At the western corner of the old town is a pair of cylindrical towers. The Torre de la Carcel for a time served as the town's lock-up while the town executioner, for those whose fate was even worse, lived nearby in the Torre del Botxí. The medieval aqueduct, of which a healthy hunk remains, brought water from the fountain of La Esperanza (Hope), from where it still springs eternal.

Segorbe is renowned for its *Entrada de Toros y Caballos* (Entry of Bulls and Horses). Prompt at 2pm for seven days in the first half of September, skilled horsemen guide and prod the bulls down Calle Colón between two human walls of spectators.

The **tourist office** (96 964 71 32 54; www.segorbe.org; Calle Marcelino Blasco 3; h 9am-2pm & 4-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat, 10.30am-1.30pm Sun) is beside the municipal car park.

Requena

pop 20,100 / elevation 690m

From the heart of Requena, 71km west of Valencia, rears La Villa, its medieval nucleus, jumbled and irregular with twisting streets and

blind alleys. Requena's former wealth came from silk; at one time it had 800 active looms, making this tiny town Spain's 4th-biggest producer. Nowadays it's primarily wine and livestock country, producing robust reds, sparkling *cavas* (Spain's rival to champagne), and rich hunks of sausage and spicy meats.

The second weekend in February marks the *Muestra del Embutido*, the Sausage Show; in 2005, visitors gobbled up around 10,000kg of sausage and 25,000 servings of roast pork. In late August/early September, Requena's *Fiesta de la Vendimia* is another hearty bacchanal, celebrating the end of the grape harvest.

The **tourist office** (96 962 30 38 51; www.requena.es; Calle Garcia Montés s/n; h 9.30am-2pm Tue-Thu & Sun, 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Fri & Sat) is below the main entrance to the old town. Ask for the English version of its *Sensaciones para Descubrir*, a useful guide to La Villa.

SIGHTS

Enter the old quarter from its northern side, passing by the 10th-century Muslim *Torre del Homenaje*. Within the town walls are the Gothic *Santa María* and *San Salvador* churches, each with a magnificent if much weathered main portal, and sturdy noblemen's mansions such as the *Casa del Arte Mayor de la Seda* (Silk Guild House) and *Palacio del Cid*, soon to house the town's new wine museum.

Requena's recently inaugurated *Museo de Arte Contemporáneo* (96 230 30 32; Cuesta del Ángel 2; adult/child €3/2; h 11am-2pm & 5.30-9pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun) has canvases mainly by Spanish artists, including Picasso, Miró, Sempere, Tàpies and Dalí.

The *Museo Municipal* (adult/child €3/2; Plaza Consistorial; h 11am-2pm Tue-Sun) has a rich collection of traditional costumes, re-creations of a bourgeois town house and country dwelling and a few Roman funerary remains. In the old town, *Plaza Albornoz*, also called *Plaza de la Villa*, hides in its intestines a network of interlinked cellars, once used as storerooms and, during strife, hideouts. **Guided visits** (adult/child €3/2; h 11am, noon & 1pm Tue-Sun plus 4.15pm, 5pm & 6pm Fri-Sun) descend from the entrance on the eastern side of the square.

SLEEPING & EATING

Mesón La Villa (96 restaurant 96 230 12 75, rooms 96 230 03 74; www.hotelmesonlavilla.com; Plaza Albornoz 13; s/d €32/52) If you can't visit the cellars, dine here (mains €8.50 to €15.50, menú €9.50) and ask your hosts to let you see theirs (admission €1), briefly used by the local branch of the Inquisition (see the Papal coat of arms on the façade) to turn the screws on heretics. *Mesón La Villa* also keeps nine decent rooms, some with views of the square.

Also on the square are two other attractive options, each with a good restaurant. Recently inaugurated *Hôtel La Villa* (96 restaurant 96 230 12 75, rooms 96 230 03 74; www.hotelavillarestaurante.com; Plaza Albornoz 8; s/d €36/55; a), run by the same family, and *Hôtel Doña Anita*; (96 96 230 53 47; www.tubal.net; Plaza Albornoz 15; s/d €45/70), a new building despite its antique air.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

More than 12 buses (€3.90, one hour) and eight trains (€3.65, 1½ hours) run daily to/from Valencia.

COSTA DEL AZAHAR

Inland from the Costa del Azahar – the orange blossom coast – spread orange groves, from whose headily scented flowers the region takes its name. The busy, developed – not always harmoniously – seaside resorts are enticing if you're after sun and sand. They're expanding rapidly in anticipation of the inauguration of Castellón's airport. Scheduled for 2008, it's vehemently opposed by environmentalists (not least because Valencia's international airport is only 80km south). The high hinterland, especially the wild, sparsely populated lands of the Maestrazgo, offer great walking, solitude and hearty mountain cooking.

Getting There & Away

The Valencia to Barcelona railway follows the coast and regional trains stop at all main towns. From Valencia, trains run every half hour to Castellón de la Plana. Up to seven trains daily call at Benicàssim, three at Oropesa and six at Benicarló/Peñíscola and Vinaròs.

CASTELLÓN DE LA PLANA

pop 167,500

The outskirts of Castellón de la Plana (Valenciano: Castelló de la Plana) are grim, industrial and rambling, so the centre comes as a pleasant surprise if you penetrate to the heart of this prosperous commercial town.

Orientation & Information

Plaza Mayor and, just to its south, Plaza Santa Clara, form the nucleus of what matters to the visitor in Castellón. Bus and train stations – one above the other – are about 1km northwest, beyond leafy Parque Ribalta. El Grau de Castellón, the port area, is 4km east of downtown.

Main tourist office (96 964 35 86 88; Plaza María Agustina 5; h 9am-7pm Mon-Fri Jul-Aug, 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri Sep-Jun, 10am-2pm Sat year-round)

Sights

The *Museo de Bellas Artes* (96 964 72 75 00; Avenida Hermanos Bou 28; admission free; h 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) occupies award-winning premises. Its displays include a large and impressive ceramics section, reflecting the region's major industry, but the real stars are 10 magnificent canvases by Zurbarán.

From Plaza Mayor, bordered by the early 18th-century town hall and the bustling covered market, thrusts the long finger of El Fadri (1604), an octagonal bell tower and symbol of the city. Beside the tower is the reconstructed *Concatedral de Santa María*, shattered in the civil war and now restored to its original state.

Four kilometres east of the centre is El Grau de Castellón, a harbour that handles this industrial region's exports as well as the local fishing fleet. Castellón's beaches start north of here.

Sleeping & Eating

Hostal La Esperanza (96 964 22 20 31; Calle Trinidad 37; basic s/d/tr €18/30/45) This welcoming *hostal* has spotless rooms above a cosy, family-run bar-restaurant (menú €7.50; closed Sunday). The bar carries a great range of tapas.

Hotel Intur Castellón (☎ 964 22 50 00; www.intur.com; Calle Herrero 20; r Mon–Thu from €73.50, Fri–Sun & Aug €55; p n a i) Stark from the outside, it's cheerful from the moment you enter. There's a bright, spacious central atrium, onto which give both restaurant and bar. There's also wi-fi access, parking for €9, and weekend rates, which are a particular bargain.

Julivert (☎ 964 22 37 26; Calle Caballeros 41; h 9am–4.30pm Mon–Fri; v) This tiny place does a good three-course *menú* with vegetarian option for €8.70.

Mesón Navarro (mains €8.50–12.60) Calle Amadeo (☎ 964 25 09 66; Calle Amadeo 18); Calle Sanchis Abella (☎ 964 26 11 33; Calle Sanchis Abella 4); Plaza Tetuán (☎ 964 21 31 15; Plaza Tetuán 26) Navarro has three restaurants around town, all busy and all excellent value, especially for meat dishes. The one at Calle Amadeo 18 also specialises in fresh fish.

Arropes (☎ 964 23 76 58; Calle Benárbé 5; menú €25, mains €11–17; h lunch & dinner Tue–Sat & lunch Sun) Arropes (from Arroz – rice – and Pes – abbreviated *pescado*, fish) specialises in just that, plus the freshest of seafood. It's popular with discerning locals, and you'd be wise to reserve. A nice touch: the fresh mint sprigs and flowers in the toilets.

Getting There & Around

Long-distance services use the bus station (☎ 964 24 07 78). Buses for El Grau and the beaches to its north leave from Plaza Borrull, 300m south of Plaza Mayor. Frequent buses for Benicàssim set out from Plaza Fadrell. For both Valencia and resorts to the north, except for Benicàssim, trains tend to be both swifter and more frequent.

Local bus 9 connects bus and train stations with the town centre.

AROUND CASTELLÓN DE LA PLANA

Vilafamés

pop 1700

What draws visitors to Vilafamés, a tiny hillside town 26km north of Castellón de la Plana, is its excellent Museo de Arte Contemporáneo (☎ 964 32 91 52; Calle Diputació 20; adult/child €2/free; h 10am–1.30pm & 4–7pm Tue–Sun). Within the 15th-century Palacio de la Bailía, worth a visit in its own right, is a highly eclectic collection of contemporary paintings and sculpture. The tourist office (☎ 964 32 99 70; www.vilafames.com) is at Plaza del Ayuntamiento 2.

The small old town is an agreeable clutter of whitewashed houses and civic buildings in

rust-red stone. From Plaza de la Sangre, steep steps take you up to the ruined castle and a sensational panorama.

The modest **Hotel El Rullo** (☎ 964 32 93 84; www.elrullo.com; Calle de la Fuente 2; s/d €22/42), 200m below the museum, is a friendly family hotel that does a good *menú*.

The small yet spacious **Jardín Vertical** (☎ 964 32 99 38; www.eljardinvertical.com; Carrer Nou 15; r from €110; n a i) is a gem; there are only seven rooms, so reservations are essential. A mainly 17th-century mansion with five floors, Jardín Vertical has been renovated with great taste by the proprietress herself. There's a lovely terrace, all rooms have a balcony and those overlooking the valley – which cost no more – have sweeping views.

Montanejos

pop 490 / elevation 460m

It's a spectacular drive along the CV20 from Castellón up the Río Mijares gorges to this resort and spa village at the heart of the Sierra de Espadán. Surrounded by craggy and pine-clad mountains, its cool, fresh mountain air attracts hordes of visitors over the summer months and there's bathing for free in the 25°C waters of Fuente de Los Baños, 1km north. Montanejos is also a popular base for rock climbing.

The tourist office (☎ 964 13 11 53; Carretera Tales; www.montanejos.com in Spanish) is within the *balneario* (spa).

Most hotels open only in summer and at weekends. **Hotel Rosaleda del Mijares** (☎ 964 13 10 79; www.hotelesrosaleda.com; Carretera Tales 28; s/d €57.50/77, Sat, Sun & Aug €62/84; a s), barely 100m from the *balneario*, lays on a filling *menú* (€12) in its vast dining room. Its 81 rooms are attractive and comfortable and have large beds, and breakfast is included. The hotel has its own pool and gym and also offers a variety of spa packages.

BENICÀSSIM

pop 16,200

Benicàssim (Castilian: Benicasim) has been a popular resort since the 19th century, when wealthy Valencian families built summer residences here. To this day, around 80% of summer visitors are Spanish and many people from Madrid, Valencia and Castellón own summer apartments.

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Orientation & Information

Benicàssim's beaches and accompanying development, scarcely a couple of blocks wide, stretch for 6km along the coast.

Main tourist office (☎ 964 30 09 62; www.benicassim.org; Calle Santo Tomás 74; h 9am–9pm daily mid-Jun–mid-Sep, 10am–2pm & 5–8pm Mon–Sat, 10am–1.30pm & 5–8pm Sun mid-Sep–mid-Jun) One kilometre inland in the old town.

Sights & Activities

Those 6km of broad beach are the main attraction. Bordering the promenade at the northeastern end are Las Villas, exuberant, sometimes frivolous holiday homes built by wealthy Valencians at the end of the 19th century and into the 20th.

Aquarama water park (☎ 964 30 33 21; www.aquarama.net; h 11am–7pm mid-Jun–Aug) is just south of town, off the N340.

About 6km inland is the Desierto de las Palmas, a mountain range – cooler than the coast, on occasion misty – with a Carmelite monastery (1697) at its heart. Nowadays a nature reserve and far from desert (for the monks it meant a place for mystic withdrawal), it's a green, popular outdoor activities area. From Monte Bartolo (728m), its highest point, there are staggering views. Ask at the tourist office for its handout *The Desert de les Palmes Nature Reserve*, which illustrates three splendid walking trails.

Festivals & Events

In early August music aficionados by the tens of thousands gather for the annual Festival Internacional de Benicàssim (FIB; www.fiberfib.com), one of Europe's top outdoor music festivals that also embraces short films, dance and alternative theatre. Major performers in 2006 included The Strokes, Franz Ferdinand, Madness, Morrissey and the Scissor Sisters.

Sleeping & Eating

Benicàssim's six camp sites are all within walking distance of the beaches.

Hotel Avenida (☎ 964 30 00 47; www.hotelescoavenida.com; Avenida Castellón 2; d mid-Feb–Jun & Oct €34–41, Jul & Sep with compulsory breakfast €53–62, Aug €68; h mid-Feb–Oct; p a i s) This appealing family-owned hotel, on the old town's main street, has a pool and shady courtyard. Rooms are large, parking's free and it's excellent value. The entrance is on Calle Quatro Caminos.

Hotel Tramontana (☎ 964 30 03 00; www.hoteltramontana.com; Paseo Marítimo Ferrandis Salvador 6; s/d/tr with breakfast from €30/48/67; h Mar–Oct; p) More in the heart of things and only half a block from the beach, the Tramontana is also family-owned and welcoming. All triples overlook the shore.

Hotel Voramar (☎ 964 30 01 50; www.voramar.net; Paseo Marítimo Pilar Coloma 1; s/d from €44/58, high season from €67/79; p n a i) Venerable (run by the same family for four generations) and blooded in battle (it functioned as a hospital in the Spanish Civil War), the Voramar has more character than most of Benicàssim's modern upstarts and is the only hotel that faces directly onto the sands. The dining room, where the cuisine is first class, has large windows overlooking the sea. There's free wi-fi and parking is €8 to €12.

Plenty of economical restaurants line Calle de Santo Tomás and Calle Castellón, the old town's main street.

Drinking

In summer and at weekends, Benicàssim rocks. The eastern end of Calle de los Dolores in the old town has a great collection of lively bars including El Único, Pink Noise, Scratch Sessions, Campus and Resaca (the perhaps appropriately named 'Hangover'). The town's *discotecas* are clustered around Aquarama (left).

Getting There & Away

Buses run every half-hour (every 15 minutes in summer) to Castellón, from where train connections are more plentiful.

OROPESA DEL MAR

It's a fine scenic drive from Benicàssim to Oropesa (Valenciano: Orpesa) along a narrow road winding around the rocky coastline. The resort is expanding rapidly and none too prettily northwards, embracing the massive spa and resort of Marina d'Oró.

The main tourist office (☎ 964 31 33 20; Plaza París; h 9.30am–2pm & 3–8pm or 4.30–6.30pm) is beside Playa de la Concha.

Naturhiscope (☎ 964 31 30 26; Plaza de la Iglesia; adult/child €3/1.50; h 9.30am–2pm & 4.30–7.30pm or 6–9pm) is a collection of photos and everyday objects, interpreting the town and its relationship with the sea in a high-tech context. Inspirational for some, pretentious flummery for others.

More interesting are two museums, also in the old town and each run by passionate, eccentric amateurs. The official opening hours of Museo del Naípe (Playing Card Museum; ☎ 964 31 20 20;

Calle Hospital 1; adult/child €3/1.50; 7-6-10pm Jun-Sep) are short, but at other times, just knock; the owner lives above. This place has over 5000 different packs and other memorabilia from around the world, explained with beguiling enthusiasm.

Luis Elvira, another collecting squirrel, has assembled a unique collection of cogs and grills, shields and other items in metal at the **Museo del Hierro** (Metalwork Museum; % 964 31 61 04; Calle Ramón y Cajal 12; admission €3; 7-10am-2pm & 7-10pm Tue-Sun mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 10am-2pm Tue-Sun mid-Sep-mid-Jun).

PEÑÍSCOLA

pop 6150

Peñíscola's old town, all cobbled streets and whitewashed houses, huddles within stone walls that protect the rocky promontory jutting into the sea. It's pretty as a postcard – and just as commercial, with lots of souvenir and ceramics shops (one favourite: a pot with an – oh dear – stiff penis for a spout, a pun that doesn't even work in Spanish). In stark contrast, the high-rises sprouting northwards along the coast are mostly leaden and charmless. But the **Paseo Marítimo promenade** makes pleasant walking, and the beach, which extends towards neighbouring Benicarló, is sandy and over 5km long.

The main tourist office (% 964 48 02 08; www.peniscola.org; 7-9am-8pm Mon-Fri mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 9.30am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) is at the south end of Paseo Marítimo. Pick up its descriptive booklet, *The Old City*.

Sights & Activities

The rambling 14th-century castle (adult/child €2.50/free; 7-9.30am-9.30pm Easter-mid-Oct; 10.30am-5.30pm mid-Oct-Easter) was built by the Knights Templar on Arab foundations and later became home to Pedro de Luna ('Papa Luna', the deposed Pope Benedict XIII).

The **Museo de la Mar** (Maritime Museum; Calle Príncipe s/n; admission free; 7-10am-2pm & 4pm-dusk daily Apr-Sep, Tue-Sun Oct-Mar) illustrates the town's fishing and seafaring heritage from Phoenician times to the present. Highpoint for children will be the three small aquariums.

The Sierra de Irta, running south from Peñíscola, is both nature park and protected marine reserve. It's one of the last unspoilt stretches of coastline in the Comunidad Valenciana, best explored on foot or by mountain bike. You can attack the full 26km of the circular PR V-194 trail or slip in one or more shorter loops. Ask at the tourist office for the English version of its *Senderos de Irta* brochure.

Sleeping & Eating

There are two great alternatives to the beachside concrete towers. Since they're small, make sure you reserve.

Chiki Bar (% 964 48 02 84; Calle Mayor 3; r €37-45) In addition to its engaging name Chiki Bar has seven spotless, modern rooms with views. It's high in the old town, and you might want your earplugs, since the nearby parish church chimes tinnily, on the hour, every hour. It runs a small restaurant (mains from €8.50), which is closed on Tuesday from March to October but open every day July to September. The three-course *menú* (€10), offered for both lunch and dinner, is excellent value.

Hotel-Restaurante Simó (% 964 48 06 20; www.hotel-simo.com; Calle Porteta 5; s €40-56, d 50-70; 7-Mar-Dec) At the base of the castle pile and right beside the sea, the Simó has a restaurant (mains €11 to €18) with magnificent views across the bay. Of its nine rooms, all have balconies and seven enjoy equally impressive vistas. Rooms are simple, unfussy and relatively spacious.

Hosteria del Mar (% 964 48 06 00; www.hosteria delmar.net; Avenida Papa Luna 18; s €47-94, d €64-125; p n a i s) This family-owned hotel has more character than most of its undistinguished multistorey neighbours on the north side of town. Nearly all rooms have balconies overlooking the beach. There's wi-fi and free parking.

Hogar del Pescador (% 964 48 95 88; Calle Jardín 2; fish from €10) This popular fisherfolk's café by day is also great value for everything fishy. For the maximum taste sensation for two, share a *mariscada* (seafood special; €33) followed by the *combinado degustación*, a magnificent platter of mixed fish and shellfish.

Casa Jaime (% 964 48 00 30; Avenida Papa Luna 5; mains €17.50-20.50; 7-lunch & dinner daily mid-Jun-mid-Sep, closed Wed & dinner Sun mid-Sep-mid-Jun) Dine on the ample outside terrace or in the cosy dining room, where you can see mum and dad (once a fisherman who learnt his trade cooking for the crew) at work in the kitchen. They're renowned for their *suquet de peix* (fish stew; €20.50; minimum two people), and other rice and simmered fish dishes.

Getting There & Around

Year round, local buses run at least every half-hour between Peñíscola, Benicarló and Vinaròs. From July to mid-September, there's a run at least hourly to Peñíscola/Benicarló Renfe station with trains to Barcelona and, southwards, to Castellón and Valencia.

To patrol the long beach front, hire a bike or scooter from **Diver Sport** (% 609 622225; Avenida Estación 17), beside Hotel Herasu.

VINARÒS

pop 25,250

Unlike its luxury-loving neighbours, Vinaròs is a working town, and a fairly grim one. Redeeming features are its active fishing port, famous for *langostinos* (king prawns), and a pair of small, sandy beaches.

The **Iglesia Arciprestal** (Plaza del Ayuntamiento) is a stocky baroque fortified church with a tall bell tower and elaborate main doorway decorated with candy-twist columns. Opposite is the **Modernista Casa Giner** (1914), garnished with floral motifs and fine *miradores* (enclosed balconies). These days a Benetton shop, its original stained glass proclaims its earlier quaint function as *paquetería* and *mercería* (haberdasher and draper).

From here, pedestrianised Calle Mayor leads past the covered market to the tourist office (% 964 45 33 34; www.vinaros.org; Paseo Colón s/n; 7-10am-2pm & 5-8pm daily Jun-Sep; 10am-2pm & 5-7.30pm Tue-Fri, 11am-2pm Sat-Mon Oct-May) and the **Playa del Fortí**.

You've plenty of eating choices on the waterfront, most specialising in seafood.

El Faro de Vinaròs (% 964 45 63 62; Zona Portuaria s/n, menús €25-65, mains €12-18; 7-lunch & dinner Tue-Sat & lunch Sun), located in the base of a former lighthouse, serves up both traditional Mediterranean dishes and more innovative fare. There is a strong emphasis on what's pulled from the sea.

Just across the road, and also a well-lopped *langostino* from the quayside fish market, **Bar Puerto** (% 964 45 56 72; Calle Costa Borrás 60; mains €7-10), small, friendly and informal, does a great range of tapas and fishy mains, displayed on its chalkboard.

EL MAESTRAZGO

Straddling northwestern Valencia and south-east Aragón, El Maestrazgo (Valenciano: El Maestrat) is a mountainous land, a world away from the coastal fleshpots, where ancient *pueblos* (villages) huddle on rocky outcrops and ridges.

One such place, Sant Mateu, was chosen in the 14th century by the maestro (hence the name El Maestrazgo) of the Montesa order of knights as his seat of power.

Activities CYCLING & WALKING

This is fertile territory for cyclists and walkers. The long-distance GR-7 walking trail crosses the Els Ports area. The Morella tourist office has a free brochure (in Spanish) describing a 15km, four-hour signed route between the town and Forcall. It also sells *Guía de Senderos Homologados de Els Ports-Maestrat*, a pack of loose-leaf folders describing (in Spanish but with explicit maps) 16 routes lasting between one and six hours.

SALTAPINS

Saltapins (% 964 17 32 56; www.saltapins.com; adult/child €17/15; 7-daily mid-Jun-mid-Sep, Sat & Sun Apr-mid-Jun & mid-Sep-Oct) is an adventure centre within the **Fábrica Giner** complex (p609). There's a gentle circuit for kids aged five to 10 and, open to all, a more challenging one with creepers to swing from, suspended gangplanks to teeter over and barrels to wriggle through.

SANT MATEU

pop 2000 / elevation 325m

A drive 5km south from the N232 along the CV132 brings you to Sant Mateu, once capital of the Maestrazgo. Its solid mansions and elaborate façades recall the town's more illustrious past and former wealth, based upon the wool trade. From attractive colonnaded Plaza Mayor, ringed with café terraces, signs point to four small municipal museums: the **Museo Paleontológico**, **Museo Arciprestal** of religious art (in Casa Abadía, beside the parish church tower), **Museo les Presons** in the former jail and **Museo Histórico Municipal**, entered via the tourist office in the **Palacio Borrull**, a stalwart 15th-century building.

The tourist office (% 964 41 66 58; www.santmateu.com in Spanish; Calle Historiador Betí 10; % 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) is just off Plaza Mayor.

Hotel-Restaurante La Perdi (% 964 41 60 82; fax 964 41 64 78; Calle Historiador Betí 9; s/d mid-Sep-mid-Jul €18/30, mid-Jul-mid-Sep €24/36) has modern, comfortable rooms and its restaurant does a decent *menú* for only €9.

Follow signs from Plaza Mayor to the **Ermита de la Mare de Déu**, perched on a rocky hillside, a 2.5km drive or considerably shorter walk. A monastery until the Spanish Civil War (take a peep at its over-the-top baroque chapel) and freshly renovated, it was about to open again as a restaurant offering incomparable views of the surrounding plain.

Getting There & Away

Weekday Autos Mediterráneo (% 964 22 05 36) buses link San Mateu with Vinaròs (€2.20, 35 minutes, four daily), Castellón (€4.45, up to two hours, three daily) and Morella (€2.90, one hour, two daily). On Saturday, one bus runs from Castellón to Morella via Sant Mateu. The bus stop is 100m east of Hotel Restaurante Montesa.

MORELLA

pop 2800 / elevation 1000m

Bitingly cold in winter and cool in summer, Morella is the principal town of El Maestrazgo. This outstanding example of a medieval fortress, perched on a hilltop and crowned by a castle, is girdled by an intact wall over 2km long.

Orientation & Information

Morella's walls are broken only by their seven entrance gates. The town is a confusing, compact jumble of narrow streets, alleys and steep steps. The main street, running east-west between Puerta San Miguel and Puerta de los Estudios, compounds the confusion by assuming five different names in less than a kilometre.

The **tourist office** (% 964 17 30 32; www.morella.net; Plaza San Miguel 3; h 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) is just behind the Torres de San Miguel, twin 14th-century towers flanking the main entrance gate.

Sights

Morella's **castle** (adult/child €1.50/free; h 9am-8pm Easter-Oct, 10am-6.30pm Oct-Easter), though badly knocked about, well merits the strenuous ascent to savour the breathtaking views of the town and surrounding countryside. At its base is the bare church and cloister of the **Convento de San Francisco** (admission free), being converted into a *parador* hotel.

Museo del Sexenni (adult/child €1.80/1.20; h 11am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sun Jul, daily Aug, Sat & Sun Sep-Jun), in the ex-Church of Sant Nicolau, displays models, photos and items associated with this major fiesta (see right).

In **Museo Tiempo de Dinosaurios** (adult/child €1.80/1.20; h 11am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sun Jul, daily Aug, Sat & Sun Sep-Jun), opposite the tourist office, are dinosaur bones and fossils – the Maestrazgo's remote hills have been a treasure-trove for palaeontologists – together with an informative video (in Spanish).

A combined ticket to both the Sexenni and Tiempo de Dinosaurios costs €3.

The imposing Gothic **Basilica de Santa Maria la Mayor** (Plaza Arciprestal; h noon-2pm & 4-6pm) has two elaborately sculpted doorways on its south façade. A richly carved polychrome stone staircase leads to the elaborately sculpted overhead choir, while cherubs clamber and peek all over the gilded altarpiece. Its ecclesiastical treasure is kept within the **Museo Arciprestal** (admission €1.20).

Among several imposing civil buildings are the 14th-century **Casa del Consell** (town hall; Calle Segura Barreda 28) and manorial houses such as the **Casa de la Cofradia de Labradores** (House of the Farmers' Guild; Calle de la Confraria).

On the outskirts of town stretch the arches of a 13th-century **aqueduct**.

Festivals & Events

Morella's major festival is the **Sexenni**, held every six years during August (the next is in 2012) in honour of the Virgen de Vallivana. Visit the Museo del Sexenni to get the flavour of this major celebration with its tonnes of confetti and elaborate compositions in crêpe paper.

Annually in August, there's a **baroque music festival**, starring the Basilica de Santa Maria la Mayor's huge organ.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel El Cid (% 964 16 01 25; www.hotelescidmorella.com; Puerta San Mateu 3; s/d €25/42) Nestling beside the ramparts, Hotel el Cid has spruce, modern rooms above a busy bar and restaurant. Head high; top-floor rooms have magnificent views of the surrounding countryside.

Hostal La Muralla (% 964 16 02 43; www.hostal.muralla.com; Calle la Muralla 12; s/d €28/48) You may find 19-room Hostal La Muralla a little quieter. Just around the corner and also abutting

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Mesón del Pastor (% 964 16 02 49; Cuesta Jovani 5-7; mains €4.65-14; h lunch Thu-Tue, dinner Sat) The stuffed boar and wild goat heads balefully eyeing your plate hint at the glories within the kitchen. It's all about strong mountain cuisine, thick gruels in winter, rabbit, juicy sausages, partridge and, yes, wild boar and goat. In February, you can eat truffle-flavoured dishes from starter to dessert. Ditto for wild mushrooms during peak autumn collecting time.

the walls, it's equally trim, though the rough towels might induce razor burn.

Hotel Cardenal Ram (% 964 17 30 85; www.cardenalram.com; Cuesta Suñer 1; s/d €45/70; a) This venerable hotel has ancient stone floors, high ceilings and antique furniture, all in a wonderfully transformed 16th-century cardinal's palace. Attractively decorated rooms have sensual power showers. Its restaurant (mains €8 to €13) is open daily July to September but closed Monday October to June. It does a first-class *menú degustación* (€30, minimum two people) and a tempting *menú del día* (€14).

Restaurante Casa Roque (% 964 16 03 36; Cuesta San Juan 1; h lunch & dinner Tue-Sat & lunch Sun) Occupying an attractive 17th-century mansion, Casa Roque does a good-value weekday *menú* (€12). For a selection of typical Els Ports dishes, go for the *menú gastronómico* (€22).

Getting There & Around

On weekdays, **Autos Mediterráneo** (% 964 22 05 36) runs two daily buses to/from both Castellón (€7.30) and Vinaròs (€4.35). There's also one Saturday bus to/from Castellón.

ELS PORTS

Morella is the ancient capital of Els Ports, the 'mountain passes', a rugged region offering some outstanding scenic drives and strenuous cycling excursions, plus excellent possibilities for walkers.

Fábrica de Giner

On the Forcall road, 4.5km west of Morella, is the **Fábrica de Giner** complex, a former textile factory with a pair of choices at each end of the sleeping spectrum:

Hotel Fábrica Giner (% 964 17 31 42; www.ghihoteles.com; s/d €50/58, Sat & Aug €70/80; p a) has 24 well appointed rooms within the former factory owners' sumptuous dwelling, while the **HI-affiliated Youth Hostel** (% 902 22 55 52; fax 963 98 59 13; dm under/over 26yr €7.45/10.60; h daily Apr-mid-Sep, Fri-Sun mid-Sep-Mar) has been converted from workers' housing.

Saltapins (p607) occupies the woods across the valley while over the road is a large public swimming pool.

Forcall

Nine kilometres further west, this quiet village is at the confluence of the Ríos Caldés and Cantavieja. On the weekend closest to 17 January, the **Santantonà** (also known as the Fiesta

SANTUARIO DE LA BALMA

Push northwards beyond Forcall for 15km along the CV14 to experience the extraordinary Santuario de la Balma, set inside a rocky crag. Behind the main altar is a forest of offerings and ex-votos – wax limbs, baby clothes, bridal dresses, military berets and much more – accompanied by notes of thanks to the Virgin for her protection or intercession.

de San Antonio), a winter festival celebrating fire, briefly dispels the prevailing calm as local youths sprint through a blazing tunnel.

One of two fine, renovated, 16th-century Aragonese palaces on opposite sides of Plaza Mayor, the **Hotel-Restaurante Palau dels Osset** (% 964 17 75 24; www.ghihoteles.com; s/d €58/65, Sat & Aug €80/95; a) has been converted into an elegant 20-room hotel with a more than respectable restaurant (mains €10 to €13.50).

From Forcall, an attractive 20km drive along the CV120, ascending the rugged Rio Cantavieja valley, brings you to the charming medieval town of Mirambel.

COSTA BLANCA

The long stripe of the Costa Blanca (White Coast) is one of Europe's most heavily visited areas. If you're after a secluded midsummer beach, stay away. But if you're looking for a lively social scene, good beaches and a suntan...

It isn't all concrete and package deals. Although the original fishing villages have long been engulfed by the sprawl of resorts, a few old town kernels, such as those of Xàbia (Jávea) and Altea, still survive.

In July and August it can be tough finding accommodation if you haven't booked. Out of season, those places remaining open usually charge far less than in high summer.

Most buses linking Valencia and Alicante head down the motorway, making a stop in Benidorm. A few, however, call by other intervening towns. Renfe trains connect Valencia with Gandia, while the FGV narrow-gauge trains and trams ply the scenic route between Denia and Alicante, stopping at all *pueblos* en route.

Inland Trips from the Costa Blanca by Derek Workman describes in detail and with flair 20

one-day car excursions into the interior. Pack too his *Small Hotels and Inns of Eastern Spain* if you'd like to linger and spend the night away from the crowds.

GANDIA

pop 71,500

Gandia, 65km south of Valencia, is a tale of two cities. The main town, once home to a branch of the Borja dynasty (more familiar to most as the infamous Borgias), is a prosperous commercial centre.

Four kilometres away on the coast, Playa de Gandia has a long, broad beach of fine sand, groomed daily by a fleet of tractors and backed by medium-rise hotels and apartments.

It's a popular and predominantly Spanish resort with a good summer and weekend nightlife.

Information

Playa de Gandia tourist office (☎ 96 284 24 07; www.gandiaturismo.com; Paseo de Neptuna s/n; h 9.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1.30pm Sat & Sun mid-Jun-mid-Sep; 9.30am-2pm & 4-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1.30pm Sat & Sun mid-Sep-mid-Oct & mid-Mar-mid-Jun; 9.30am-1.30pm daily mid-Oct-mid-Mar)

Town tourist office (☎ 96 287 77 88; h 9.30am-1.30pm & 3-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1.30pm Sat) Opposite the bus/train station.

Sights & Activities

Gandia's magnificent **Palacio Ducal de los Borja** (☎ 96 287 14 65; Calle Duc Alfons el Vell 1; guided tour adult/child €5/3; h 10am-1pm & 4-6.30pm or 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) was the 15th-century home of Duque Francisco de Borja. Highlights include its finely carved *artesonado* ceilings and rich ceramic work – look out for the vivid *mapa universal* floor composition. One-hour guided tours in Spanish, with an accompanying leaflet in English, take place every half hour.

There are two extremely good *Rutas Ecoturísticas* (Ecotourism Routes). The 12km **Racó del Duc** walking and cycling trail follows an old railway line through unspoiled countryside between the villages of Vilallonga (8km south of Gandia) and L'Orxa. **Entre Senill i Borró** is a 13km walking trail through coastal marshland and dunes from Gandia town to the coast. You can pick up brochures in English describing the routes from both tourist offices.

Sleeping

Camping L'Alqueria (☎ 96 284 04 70; www.lalqueria.com; Carretera del Grau de Gandia s/n; sites per person/tent/car €4.30/6.20/4.90; h year-round; s) About 1km inland, this place has a heated indoor pool.

Albergue Mari Vent (☎ 96 283 17 48; albergopiles_ivaj@gva.es; dm under/over 26 €7.45/10.60; h year-round) This excellent beachfront youth hostel is 5km south of Gandia beside Playa de Piles. Take La Amistad bus from the bus station.

Hostal El Nido (☎ 96 284 46 40; fax 96 284 65 71; Calle Alcoy 22; s/d Sep-Jun €35/45, Jul-Aug €45/60) Rooms are as cheerful as the owners at this warmly recommended place, a block back from the beach. Between June and September it also runs a small bar for guests.

Hostal Riviera (☎ 96 284 50 42; www.hotelesrh.com; Paseo de Neptuno 28; half-board per person Jun-Sep €57-87, Oct-May €34-45.50; p a i s) It's well worth going for half-board – compulsory anyway in July and August – at this large beachside hotel, one of Denia's earliest, that's been comprehensively renovated. Invest an extra €5 per person for one of the eight sea-view rooms.

Hostal Bayren 1 (☎ 96 284 03 00; www.hotelesrh.com; Paseo de Neptuno 62; half-board per person Jun-Sep €58-91.50, Oct-May €38.25-48.25; p a i s) Rooms are comfortable and there's wi-fi, a gym, spa and a pool at this good, if a little monolithic, hotel, that also faces the beach. Parking is €9 to €12.

Eating

Eateries abound in Paseo Marítimo Neptuno. You'll also find a few longer-established places at the western end of the port and along Calle Verge.

Kayuko (☎ 96 284 01 37; Calle Asturias 23; menú €25-54; rice dishes €13 mains, €9-22; h lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) The Kayuko, at the northern end of the resort, is one of a trio of excellent seafood restaurants in Gandia. Service is attentive, staff speak excellent English and the rice is simmered to perfection.

Restaurante Emilio (☎ 96 284 07 61; Bloque F-5, Avenida Vicente Calderón; mains €14-18; h lunch & dinner Thu-Tue, daily Jul-mid-Sep) Despite a cupboardful of gastronomic accolades, Emilio, his wife and three children manage to preserve a family atmosphere in this traditionally furnished restaurant, where you'll eat very well indeed.

Drinking

There's great summer and weekend nightlife at Playa de Gandia, with bars, including **Paco Paco**, **Mama Ya Lo Sabe** and **Ouka-le-le**,

clustered around Plaza del Castell, barely 300m inland from the beach. After they close, head for one of the discos that bop till dawn, such as **Bacarra** (Calle Legazpi 7), two blocks from the beach, or **Falkata** (Cami Vell de Valencia), further inland.

Getting There & Around

Trains run between Gandia and Valencia (€3.65, one hour) every half-hour (hourly on weekends). The combined bus and train station is opposite the town tourist office. Stopping beside the office, La Marina Gandiense buses for Playa de Gandia run every 20 minutes.

DENIA

pop 40,600

Denia town is rather dull but the beaches of La Marina, to the north, are good and sandy, while southwards the fretted coastline of Las Rotas and beyond offers less frequented rocky coves. From the port are the shortest sea crossings to the Balearic Islands.

Orientation & Information

The tourist office (☎ 96 642 23 67; www.denia.net; Glorieta del Oculista Buiques 9; h 9.30am-2pm & 5-8pm daily Jul-mid-Sep, 9.30am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-1.30pm Sun mid-Sep-Jun) is near the waterfront. Both train station and ferry terminal are close by.

Activities

To catch the sea breezes, sign on with **Mundo Marino** (☎ 96 642 30 66), which does return catamaran trips to/from Xàbia (adult/child €14/7), some of which continue to Calpe (€25/12.50) and Altea (€30/15).

Sleeping

Hostal l'Anfora (☎ 96 643 01 01; www.hostallanfora.com; Esplanada Cervantes 8; s €26-32, d €43-55; n a) This place facing the fishing port has 20 trim rooms with pinewood furniture and tiled bathrooms. All have balconies.

Costa Blanca (☎ 96 578 03 36; www.hotelcostablanca.com; Calle Pintor Llorens 3; s/d from €35/55; p n a) Beside the train station, this is an excellent-value option except in high summer, when prices soar to €45/87 for singles/doubles. Rooms are comfortable and cosily furnished and the port is but a few steps away. Parking is €10.

Posada del Mar (☎ 96 643 29 66; www.laposada.delmar.com; Plaza Drassanes 2; r with breakfast €115-165;

p n a i) This sensitively renovated hotel occupies a 13th-century building that last functioned as Denia's customs house. Each of its 25 rooms is individually decorated with a nautical theme and light streams through the large windows that overlook the harbour. Parking costs €15.

Eating

There's a clutch of tempting restaurants catering for all pockets along harbour-facing Bel-lavista, Calle Port and their continuation, Plaza del Raset.

Restaurante Drassanes (☎ 96 578 11 18; Calle Port 15; mains €7.50-12, menus €15-23; h lunch & dinner Tue-Sun Dec-Oct) Bustling and seething on two levels, the Drassanes is pleasantly informal compared to some of its more expensive and stuffier neighbours.

Asador del Puerto (☎ 96 642 34 82; Plaza del Raset 10-11; mains €16.50-22) This is an excellent choice for either meat, roasted in a clay oven, or fish dishes. Try the *cochinillo* (suckling pig), crispy on the outside, juicy within and roasted to a turn.

Getting There & Away

From the station, seven trains daily follow the scenic route southwards to Alicante (€7.75, 2½ hours; change to the tram in El Campello) via Altea (€3.50) and Benidorm (€4.30).

For the Balearic Islands, **Balearia Lines** (☎ 902 16 01 80; www.balearia.net) runs daily ferries to/from Mallorca and Ibiza. Both **Acciona Trasmediterránea** (☎ 902 45 46 45; www.acciona-trasmediterranea.es) and **Iscomar** (☎ 902 11 91 28; www.iscomar.com) run a high-speed service to/from Ibiza.

XÀBIA

pop 28,250

With a third of its resident population and over two-thirds of its annual visitors non-Spanish (every second shop seems to be an estate agent/realtor), Xàbia (Castilian: Jávea) isn't the best place to meet the locals. That said, it's gentle, laid-back and well worth a visit early in the season, when the sun shines but the masses haven't yet arrived.

Xàbia comes in three parts: the attractive old town 2km inland; El Puerto (the port), directly east of the old quarter; and the beach zone of El Arenal, a couple of kilometres to the south of the harbour. Further south, the promontory of Cabo de La Nao offers spectacular views.

Information

Bookworld (☎ 96 646 22 53; Avenida Amanecer de España 13) In the old town.

Lavandería Los Delfines (Avenida del Pla s/n, El Arenal; 9am-1pm & 4-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat)
Link (Calle San Rafael, El Arenal; per hr €2.50; 10am-2pm & 2.30-9pm Mon-Sat) Internet access.

Tourist offices (www.xabia.org); El Arenal (☎ 96 646 06 05; Carretera Cabo de la Nao; 9am-1.30pm & 4.30-7.30pm or 5-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1.30pm Sat); Old Town (☎ 96 579 43 56; Plaza de la Iglesia; 9am-1.30pm & 4.30-7.30pm or 5-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1.30pm Sat); Port (☎ 96 579 07 36; Plaza Almirante Bastarache 11; 4.30-7.30pm Sat & 10am-1.30pm Sun)

Activities

To explore the old town, pick up the free tourist office brochure, *Historical Centre of Jávea*. Its *Nature Parks & Trekking Routes* describes six waymarked routes in the area, including an ascent of Montgó, the craggy mountain that looms over the town. Year-round, the tourist office leads free guided walks almost daily.

Sleeping

The harbour area has a couple of options.

Camping Naranjal (☎ 96 579 29 89; www.campinge.naranjal.com; Camino dels Morers 15; sites per person/tent €5/11.25; 11 year-round) A 10-minute walk from the beach.

Pensión la Favorita (☎ 96 579 04 77; fax 96 579 64 68; Calle Magellanes 4; r €26-35, with shower €32-41, with bathroom €41-46; 11 Mar-Nov) Run by a friendly young couple, this popular place is clean as a new pin, fresh with flowers and warmly recommended.

Hotel Miramar (☎ /fax 96 579 01 02; Plaza Almirante Bastarache 12; s/d €29/52, Jul-Sep €40/64; a) This imposing building, right beside the port, couldn't be nearer the sea. Rooms are cosy (those overlooking the bay carry a €10 to €15 supplement) and there's a bar and restaurant.

Parador de Jávea (☎ 96 579 02 00; www.paradores.es; Avenida del Mediterráneo 7; s/d €120/150) Architecturally, Xàbia's boxy, once-modern *parador* ranks among the least exciting of this excellent state-owned chain. But it enjoys a magnificent site, on a headland overlooking the bay of El Arenal.

Eating & Drinking

The old town has several enticing tapas bars, while bars and restaurants flank Avenida de la Marina Española, the pedestrianised promenade south of the port. In El Arenal, cafés and restaurants hug the rim of the beachside Paseo Marítimo.

La Bombonería (☎ 96 579 16 47; Avenida Lepanto 20; mains €14.50-18.50; 11 Mon-Sat) Near the port and set back from the road, this restaurant offers good traditional cuisine with a creative twist. You can dine inside or on its ivy-clad terrace.

Amarre 152 (☎ 96 579 06 29; Port de la Fontana; meals €30) At the end of a backwater in El Arenal, this is a delightful retreat (just count your way along the moorings to number 152), with a designer interior and small quayside terrace. Great for rice dishes, its fish is the freshest: nothing from the freezer and not even a minnow from a fish farm.

In the old town, **Temptacions** (☎ 96 579 29 20; Plaza de la Iglesia 10) is adapted from two old houses (only their doorway arches, curving over the interior, still survive). Nearby (go down the steps beside the tourist office), neighbours **Bar Imperial** (☎ 96 646 11 81; Plaza de Baix 2) and **Tertulia** (☎ 96 646 07 61; Plaza de Baix 3) have pleasant terraces and offer both tapas and full meals.

Getting There & Around

Six buses run daily to both Valencia (€8.90) and Alicante (€7.55). They stop on Avenida Óndara, near the unnamed square with a large olive tree at its heart.

You can rent a cycle at **Xàbia's Bike Centre** (☎ 96 646 11 50; xabiabike@hotmail.com; Avenida Lepanto 21; per day/week from €7/42) in the port area.

CALPE

pop 25,200

The Gibraltaresque Peñon de Ifach, a giant molar protruding from the sea, dominates the seaside resort of Calpe (Valenciano: Calp).

Two large bays sprawl either side of the Peñon: Playa Arenal on the southern side is backed by the old town, while Playa Levante to the north has most of the more recent development.

Information

DIP Digital Center (Calle Benidorm 15; per hr €3; 10am-midnight Mon-Sat, 4-11pm Sun) Internet access.

Librería Europa (☎ 96 583 58 24; Calle Oscar Espá 2) Good stock of titles in English and other European languages.

Main tourist office (☎ 96 583 85 32; www.calpe.es; Plaza del Mosquit; 10am-1.30pm & 4-7pm or 5-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1.30pm Sat) In the old town.

Sights

A fairly strenuous trail – allow 2½ hours for the round trip – climbs from the Peñon's **Aula de Naturaleza** (Nature Centre) towards the 332m summit, offering great seascapes from its end point at the end of a dark tunnel. In July and August numbers on the cliff are limited to 150 at a time, so you may have a short wait.

Sleeping

Camping Levante (☎ 96 583 22 72; campinglevante@telefonos.es; Avenida de la Marina s/n; tent & 2 campers €24) A brief walk from Playa Levante.

Pensión Centrica (☎ 96 583 55 28; mjpiffet@telefonos.net; Plaza de Ifach 5; per person €12) This welcoming, recommended place just off Avenida Gabriel Miró has 13 neat, well maintained basic rooms and there's a fridge and microwave for guests' use. Look out for the pet tortoise and iguana...

Hotel Bahía (☎ 96 583 97 02; www.bahiacalpe-hotel.com; Avenida de Valencia 24; s/d from €59/74, mid-Jul–Aug from €115/148; p a s) The Bahía, overlooking Playa Arenal, is a very stylish option that's handy for both beach and town. Sea-facing rooms (aim high, towards the top of its seven floors) offer good views of the beach and Peñon. Parking costs €9 and there's wi-fi access.

Hotel Esmeralda (☎ 96 583 61 01; www.rocaesmeralda.com; Calle Ponent 1; s €64.75-85.25, d €84.50-127.50; p a s) At the northern limit of Playa Levante, the huge Esmeralda, as much leisure complex as hotel, is particularly suited to families with children. If the sea fails to call, there are three outside pools and a heated indoor one too, plus a gym, a couple of restaurants and a café. Parking costs €5.35.

Eating

There are plenty of restaurants and bars around Plaza de la Constitución and along the main Avenida de Gabriel Miró, plus a cluster of good fish places down by the port.

La Cambra (☎ 96 583 06 05; Calle Delfin 2; mains €15-21; 11 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat Jul-Aug, lunch Mon-Thu, dinner Fri & Sat Oct-Jun) All agreeably antique wood and tiles, La Cambra specialises in rice dishes (€10 to €12) and also has a rich à la carte selection.

Los Zapatos (☎ 96 583 15 07; Calle Santa María 7; mains €13-20; 11 lunch & dinner Thu-Mon Dec-Oct) Highly recommended, this German-run restaurant has a short, specialised à la carte menu. In season it does a tempting *menú caza y pescado* (hunting and fish menu) with boar and fish of the day. Or go for their 'Menu for Fish Freaks'.

Getting There & Away

Seven FGV trains travel daily northwards to Denia (€2.65, 40 minutes) and south to Alicante (€5.35, 1¼ hours) via Benidorm (€1.75).

Buses connect Calpe with both Alicante and Valencia (€9.85, 3½ hours, six daily). The bus station (Avenida de la Generalitat Valenciana) is on the ring road.

ALTEA

pop 21,200

Altea, separated from Benidorm only by the thick wedge of the Sierra Helada, could be a couple of moons away. Its beaches are mostly pebbles and rock – and that's what has saved it so far from mass tourism. The whitewashed old town, perched on a hilltop overlooking the sea, is just about the prettiest *pueblo* in all the Comunidad Valenciana.

Altea's tourist office (☎ 96 584 41 14; Calle San Pedro 9) is on the beachfront.

Off Plaza de la Iglesia in the old town, and especially down Calle Major, there's a profusion of cute little restaurants, many open for dinner only except in high summer.

BENIDORM

pop 67,500

It's easy to be snobbish about Benidorm, which long ago sold its birthright to cheap package tourism. But the old girl, though violated most summer nights by louts from northern Europe, still manages to retain a certain dignity. The foreshore is magnificent as the twin sweeps of Playa del Levante and the longer Playa del Ponent – 5km of white sandy beaches – meet beneath Plaza del Castillo, where the land juts into the bay like a ship's prow.

In winter half of all visitors are over 60, mostly from northern Europe. During summer Benidorm is for all ages.

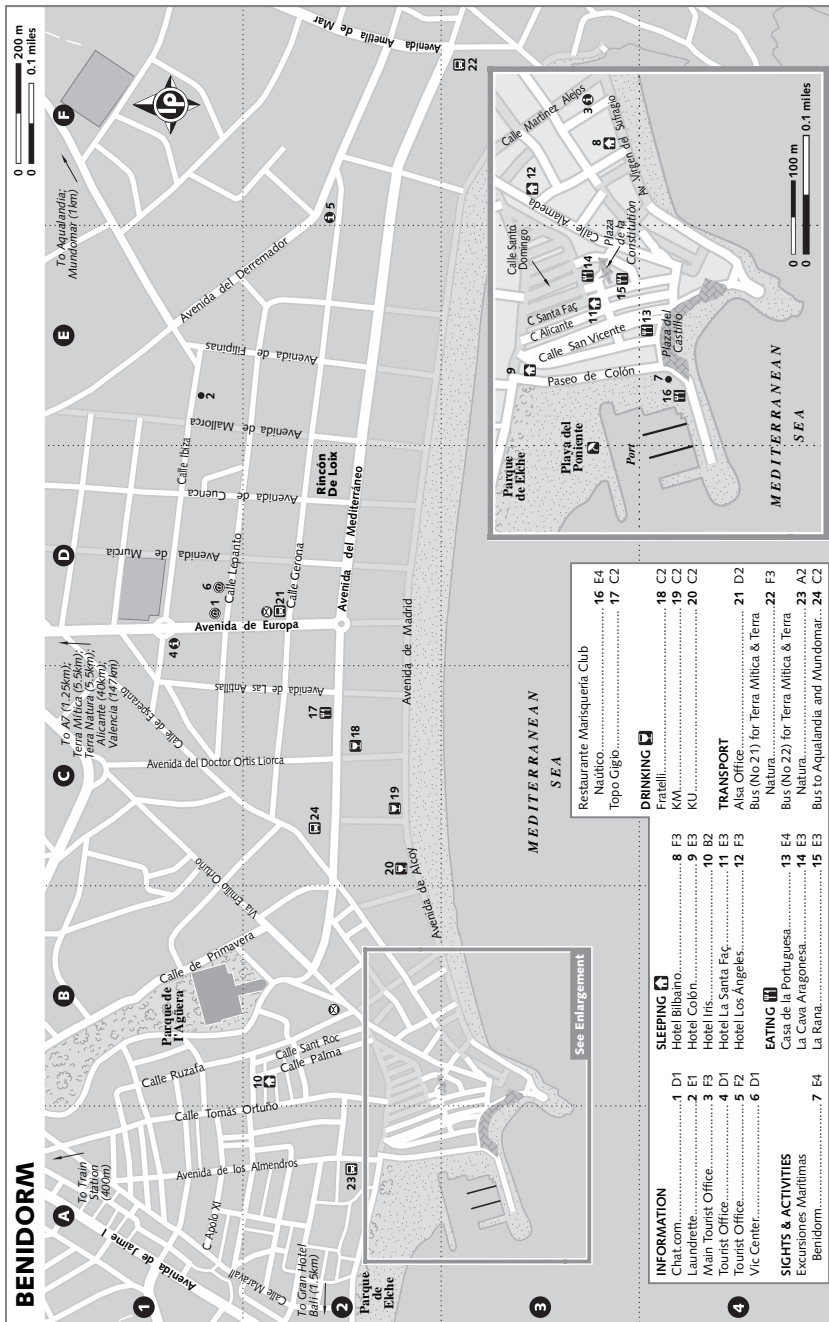
Information

Chat.com (Avenida de Europa s/n; per hr €1.80; 11 10am-midnight) Internet access.

Laudrette (Calle Ibiza 14; 11 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat)

Main tourist office (☎ 96 585 13 11; www.benidorm.org; Avenida Martínez Alejos 6; 11 9.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1.30pm & 4.30-7.30pm Sat, 10am-1.30pm Sun) There are also tourist office kiosks on Avenida de Europa and in Rincon de Loix.

Vic Center (Calle Lepanto 6; per hr €1.80; 11 9.30am-midnight) Internet access.



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Bus (No 21) for Terra Mítica & Terra Natura	23 A2
Bus (No 22) for Terra Mítica & Terra Natura	24 C2
Bus to Aquilandia and Mundomar	

EATING	13 E4
Casa de la Portuguesa	14 E3
La Cava Aragonesa	15 E3
La Rana	16 E4

Sights & Activities

Terra Mítica (Mythical Land; % 902 02 02 20; adult/child €33/25; h 10am-10pm mid-Jul-Aug, 10am-8pm Apr-mid-Jul & Sep, Sat & Sun only Oct) is the Costa Blanca's answer to Disneyland. A fun day out, especially if you're with children, it's Mediterranean in theme, with plenty of rides and areas devoted to ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, Iberia and the islands. Take bus 21 or 22.

Terra Natura (% 902 50 04 14; adult/child €20/15; h 10am-dusk) is a rival theme park, also on the grand scale. Over 1000 animals live in man-made habitats, there's a water park (€5 supplement) and, for the brave, the chance to swim with sharks (fairly small and benign, no visitors yet lost).

Aqualandia (% 96 586 01 00; adult/child €23/16; h 10am-7pm mid-May-mid-Oct) is Europe's largest water park. Beside it is **Mundomar** (% 96 586 91 01; adult/child €20/14; h 10am-7pm), a marine and animal park with parrots, dolphins, sea lions, even bats – and no, they're not mermaids but a bevy of girls doing synchronised swimming with dolphins. Each is worth a full day. It's economical to buy a combined ticket (€31/21 adult/child), which can be used on different days. Take bus 11.

Should Benidorm's frenetic pace get you down, pick up a free copy of *Routes Across Sierra Helada* from the tourist office and stride out into the hills north of town for superb bay views.

Excursiones Marítimas Benidorm (% 96 85 00 52; Paseo de Colón) runs hourly boats (€10/8 adult/child return) to the Isla de Benidorm, a full-day outing to the island of Tabarca (€25/16) and a cruise up the coast to Calpe (€19/12).

Sleeping

Almost everyone's on a package deal, so accommodation can be expensive for the independent traveller. Book on line through **Benidorm Spotlight** (www.benidorm-spotlight.com) for significant discounts.

Hotel Iris (% /fax 96 586 52 51; Calle Palma 47; s €25-45, d €25-50; i) Here's a friendly budget choice on a fairly quiet street. All rooms come with fans and bathtubs and most have a small balcony too. There's a cosy ground floor bar for guests only, equipped with three Internet terminals.

Hotel Los Angeles (% 96 680 74 33; Calle Los Angeles 3; s/d Nov-Jun from €27/50, Jul-Sep €43/72) This pleasant, informal, family-owned hotel is also in the old town. Fifth- and sixth-floor rooms have

large balconies at no extra cost. The family also runs **Penión** and **Restaurant del Mar**, just down the road, where guests staying at the **Los Angeles** dine.

Hotel La Santa Faç (% 96 585 40 63; www.santafazhotel.com; Calle Santa Faç 18; s/d/tr €48/75/90; h Apr-Oct; a) This long-established hotel, up a narrow street in the old quarter, is friendly and full of character. All rooms have a balcony.

Larger hotels can be reasonable value out of season.

Hotel Colón (% 96 585 04 12; www.hotelcolon.net; Paseo de Colón 3; s/d €30/42, Jul-Aug €56/84; h mid-Mar-Oct; a) Conveniently positioned where the neck of the promontory and old town meet Playa del Poniente, the Colón is great value outside high season. Half-board is only €3 more than the B&B, though don't expect fine cuisine. East-facing rooms have great views of Playa Poniente.

Hotel Bilbao (% 96 585 08 04; www.hotelbilbaino.com; Avenida Virgen del Sufragio 1; s/d winter €31.60/51, summer €54/96; h Mar-Nov; a) This, Benidorm's very first hotel, still belongs to the same family. Now completely remodelled, it overlooks the beach and is a particularly good deal outside high summer.

GranHotel Bali (% 96 681 52 00; www.granhotelbali.com; Calle Luis Prendes s/n; half-board per person €46-89; p a s) At 186m high, this mammoth complex, as much space-age village as hotel, is Europe's tallest. Its vastness isn't to everyone's taste but, with 23 lifts/elevators (have fun riding one of the two external ones), 776 rooms and a pair of restaurants that can accommodate up to 1000 diners, it's superlative in many senses.

Eating

For Benidorm's biggest concentration of local and Spanish regional restaurants and tapas bars, take your pick from those lining Calle Santo Domingo at the Plaza de la Constitución end.

Topo Gigio (% 96 585 71 68; Edificio Marianne 9, Avenida del Mediterráneo) On the main east-west drag and hemmed in by high rises, this authentically Italian place prepares superior pizzas and pastas (around €8) and also offers a selection of mains from across the Med.

Restaurante Marisquería Club Náutico (% 96 585 54 25; Paseo de Colón s/n; mains €12-18, menus €21) At this elegant restaurant, designed with flair, you can pick at tapas by the bar or enjoy a full meal on the large terrace – where you can also simply enjoy a drink and the view over Benidorm's small port.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

La Cava Aragonesa (Plaza de la Constitución) We have been dropping into this place for well over a decade now. What keeps drawing us back is its magnificent selection of tapas, fat canapés, 20 different plates of cold cuts and good wine by the glass (a decent measure of Catalan bubbly is still under a euro).

Casa de la Portuguesa (% 96 585 89 58; Calle San Vicente 39; mains €9.50-14) With its tables spilling onto the narrow street in summer, this restaurant, a favourite of Benidorm's movers and shakers, is nevertheless very reasonably priced. Family-run, it owes its reputation to its great rice dishes and fresh fish.

La Rana (% 96 586 81 20; Costero del Barco 6; meals €20) One of Benidorm's oldest restaurants (that aged cash register must have rung up the very first bills), The Frog serves authentic Spanish cuisine. Tucked away up a cobbled alley, it's well worth tracking down.

Drinking & Entertainment

Fratelli (% 96 585 39 79; Calle Doctor Orts Llorca s/n; h 6pm) For a sophisticated drink in a town not noted for subtlety, park yourself on a stool at this recently opened, cool designer cocktail place that styles itself 'Bar Fashion'.

KU (Avenida de Alcoy s/n; h 10am-5am), with its reproduction Hindu and Buddhist statues, plays the oriental card. At its near neighbour **KM** (Avenida de Alcoy; h 11am-5am), the music's eclectic until 6pm, when it's strictly house. Both are laid-back cafés during the day, changing tempo once the sun sets.

Both have mega *discotecas* on Avenida de la Comunidad Valenciana on the outskirts of town. They and other similar giants open daily in July and August, and at weekends year-round.

Getting There & Away

ALSA (% 96 680 39 55; www.alsa.es) buses run north and south along the Costa Blanca to/from Valencia (€12.70 to €14.35, 1½ hours) and Alicante (€3.40, one hour, at least hourly). The ticket office (set back in La Nuria shopping mall) is at the bus stop (Avenida de Europa 8).

Alternatively, you can take the FGV train to Alicante (€3.45, 1¼ hours, hourly), Denia (€4.30, 1¼ hours, seven daily) and all stations in between.

ALICANTE

pop 319,400

Alicante (Valenciano: Alacant), the Valencia region's second-largest town, lives for much more than tourism alone. Dynamic, it's transformed itself from a somewhat seedy port to an attractive place that improves with every visit. Try to fit in at least one overnight stay to experience its frenetic – and unmistakably Spanish – nightlife.

Orientation

Palm trees shade the pedestrianised Paseo Explanada de España, lined with cafés and running parallel to the harbour. Around Catedral de San Nicolás are the narrow streets of El Barrio (the old quarter), which has most of the cheaper accommodation options and a vibrant nightlife. El Barrio is bordered by the Rambla de Méndez Núñez, the principal north-south artery.

Information

Main post office (Calle de Alemania)

Municipal tourist office (www.alicanteturismo.com; Bus Station)

Regional tourist office (% 96 520 00 00; Rambla de Méndez Núñez 23; h 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 3-8pm Sat)

UP Internet (Calle Angel Lozano 10; per hr €1.65;

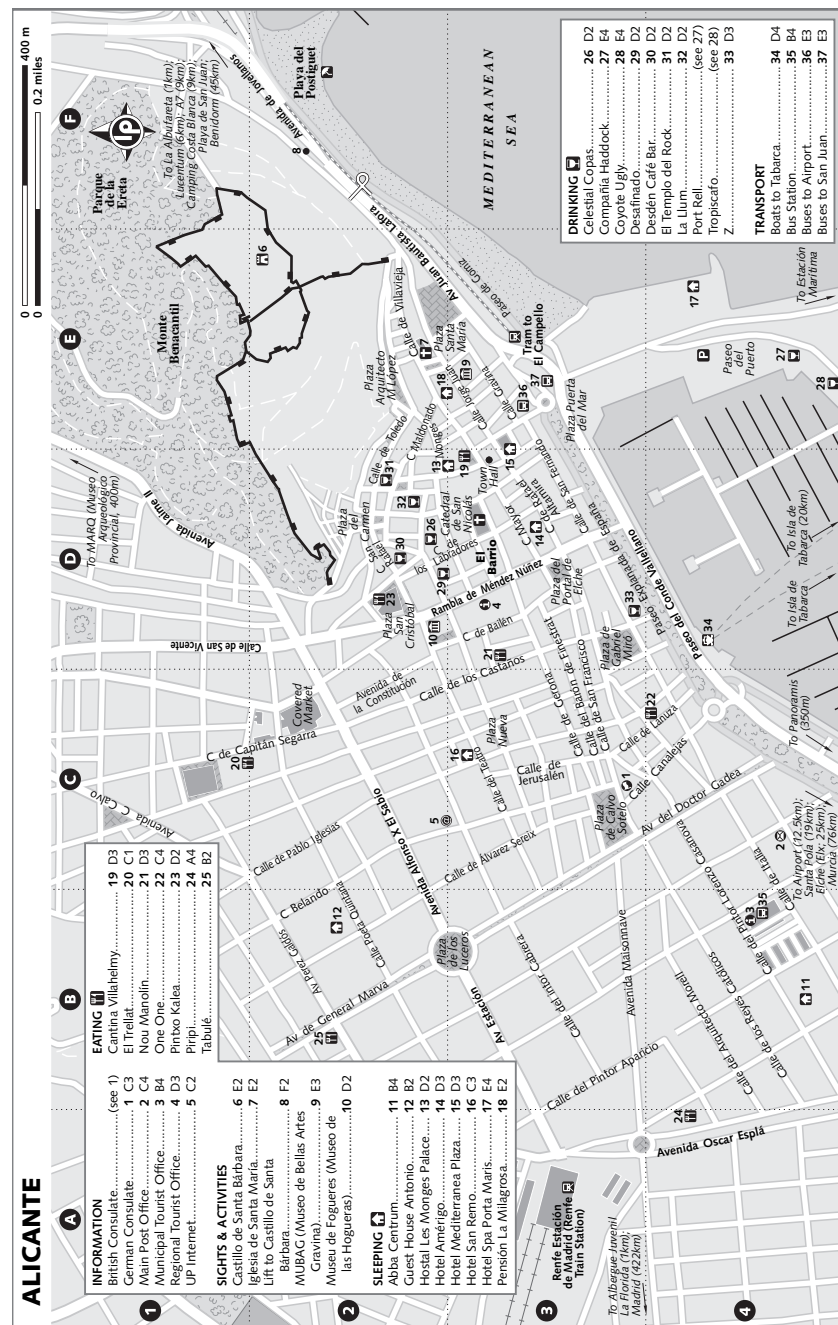
h 8am-1am Mon-Thu, 9am-3am Fri & Sat, 9am-1am Sun)

Sights & Activities

MARO (Museo Arqueológico Provincial; % 96 514 90 06; Plaza Doctor Gómez Ulla s/n; adult/child €3/1.50; h 10am-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), very visual and high-tech, well merits a visit even though there's little information in English. Buses 2, 6, 9, 20 and 23 pass by.

The **Museo de Fogueres** (Museo de las Hogueras; % 96 514 68 28; Rambla de Méndez Núñez 29; admission free; h 10am-2pm & 5-8pm or 6-9pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) has a great audiovisual presentation of what the Fiesta de Sant Joan (p618), all fire and partying, means to *alicantinos*.

From the 16th-century **Castillo de Santa Bárbara** (admission free; h 10am-7.30pm Apr-Oct, 9am-6.30pm Nov-Mar) there are sweeping views over the city. Inside is a permanent display of contemporary Spanish sculpture. A lift/elevator (€2.40 return), reached by a footbridge opposite Playa del Postiguet, rises through the bowels of the mountain. It's a pleasant walk down through Parque de la Ereta via Calle San Rafael to Plaza del Carmen.



MUBAG (Museo de Bellas Artes Gravina; % 96 514 67 80; Calle Gravina 13-15; admission free; h 10am-2pm & 4-8pm or 5-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), Alicante's stimulating fine arts museum, is within an 18th-century mansion.

Nearby, the **Iglesia de Santa María** (admission €1; h 10am-12.30pm & 6-8.30pm) has a flamboyant, 18th-century façade and ornate, gilded altarpiece, both contrasting with the nave's Gothic simplicity.

From the harbour, boats (€16 return) make the 45-minute run to the popular island of Tabarca (p620), 20km south.

A pleasant harbourside promenade and tiled walkway (separated only by a hideously busy road) follow the curve of the port. On the western mole is **Panoramis**, a vast shopping and leisure complex.

Immediately north of the port is the sandy beach of **Playa del Postiguet**. Larger and less crowded beaches are at **Playa de San Juan**, easily reached by buses 21 and 22.

Festivals & Events

Alicante's major festival is the **Fiesta de Sant Joan**, spread either side of 24 June, when the city stages its own version of Las Fallas (see the boxed text, p586), with fireworks and satirical effigies (Valenciano: *fogueres*, Spanish: *hogueras*) going up in smoke all over town.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Camping Costa Blanca (% 965 63 06 70; www.campingcostablanca.com; Calle Convento, Campello; sites per person/tent/car €4.75/7.05/4.75; s) This large camp site is about 10km north of Alicante. The train passes right by.

Albergue Juvenil La Florida (% 96 511 30 44; Avenida Orihuela 59; under/over 26yr €7.45/10.60) **Around 2km** west of the centre and normally a student residence, La Florida functions as a youth hostel between July and mid-September. Facilities are excellent, with most beds in single rooms. Take bus 2 or 3, both of which pass by the bus and Renfe train stations.

Pensión La Milagrosa (% 96 521 69 18; www.hostalamilagrosa.com; Calle de Villavieja 8; s/d €20/35, with bath-room €30/45; a) From its freshly painted façade to the refurbished roof terrace, The Miracle has been given a thorough going over recently. It also has three apartments (€50) that can sleep up to six (per extra person €20). There's also a small guest kitchen and washing machine.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hostal Les Monges Palace (% 96 521 50 46; www.lesmonges.net; Calle San Agustín 4; s/d with shower €27/41, with bathroom €39/54; p a i) This agreeably quirky place, with its winding corridors, tiles, mosaics and antique furniture, is a treasure. Each room is individually and tastefully decorated, there's parking for €10 and the reception couldn't be more welcoming. To really pamper yourself, choose one of the two rooms with sauna and Jacuzzi (€92). Look out for the small Dalí original beside the reception desk...

Guest House Antonio (% 650 718353; www.guesthousealicante.com; Calle Segura 20; s €25-32, d €33-45; a) Here's a magnificent budget choice. Each of the eight large, tastefully decorated rooms has a safe, full-size fridge and free beverage-making facilities. The five apartments (€60 to €70), two with their own patio, have a mini-kitchen and washing machine and are exceptional value. There's also free wi-fi and Antonio has two other apartments, one nearby, the other handy for the bus station.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Hotel San Remo (% 96 520 95 00; www.hotelsanremo.net; Calle Navas 30; s €31-37, d €45-57, tr €61-75; p n a) This friendly, family-run hotel has 27 spruce, well-maintained, if smallish, rooms. Although it doesn't offer breakfast, there's a coffee machine near reception that dispenses the real brew. There's also wi-fi access.

Hotel Mediterranea Plaza (% 96 521 01 88; www.hotelmediterraneaplaza.com; Plaza del Ayuntamiento 6; s €75-127, d €99-140; n a) Occupying a converted 18th-century mansion in a pedestrian square, the Mediterranea Plaza couldn't be more central. It has spacious, stylishly furnished rooms with wood floors, plus a sauna, gym and sun terrace.

Hotel Spa Porta Maris (% 96 514 70 21; www.hotelspportamaris.com; Plaza Puerta del Mar 3; s €77.50-108, d from €87.50-123; a s) Each of the 138 rooms has a balcony overlooking either beach or marina. Among the many facilities at this hyperhealthy choice are pools, gym and a Wellness Center. Then again, no one will care if you simply slob around...

Abba Centrum (% 96 513 04 40; www.abbahoteles.com; Calle Pintor Lorenzo Casanova 33; r €85-125; p n a i)

With a new name and a radical overhaul in 2005, the **Abba Centrum** is a hugely attractive option in the heart of town. Weekend rates drop to a bargain €60 per room. Parking costs €11.

Hotel Aragón (% 96 514 65 70; www.hospes.es; Calle Rafael Altamira 7; r from €140; p n a i s) Within an old Dominican convent, this glorious five-star hotel harmoniously blends the traditional and ultra-modern. Enjoy the views from the rooftop pool, itself a work of art, build up a sweat in the fitness area or just flop in the solarium – if you can tear yourself away from the comfort of your stunningly designed room. Parking costs €15 and there's wi-fi access.

Eating

El Trelat (% 965 20 62 75; Calle Capitán Segarra 19; menú lunch €8.50, dinner €11.50; h lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Fri & Sat) Beside the covered market, this small, friendly place does creative three-course *menús*: first course a serve-yourself buffet, then an ample choice of inventive mains. For dessert it has to be *brazo de gitano con crema de turrón* (gypsy's arm; a swiss roll wrapped around soft creamy nougat). Trust the chef; he previously worked in Alicante's premier cake shop.

Cantina Villahelmy (% 965 21 25 29; Calle Mayor 37; mains €4-8; h lunch & dinner Tue-Sat & lunch Sun) Intimate, funky and popular, the Villahelmy has lots of snacks, excellent salads and a menu that features dishes from couscous to octopus.

Pintxo Kalea (% 96 514 58 41; Plaza San Cristóbal 11; menú €12) Basque music wails and jigs in the background at this modern, stylish bar and restaurant, which does a wonderful selection of juicy *pinchos* (small open sandwiches), salads, steaks and cod prepared in four different ways.

Tabulé (% 965 13 34 45; Avenida Pérez Galdós 52; menú €18; h lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Wed-Sat; v) At this friendly vegetarian restaurant, run by an all-girl team, you take what's on offer on the day's *menú*. You won't repeat yourself; it's original, inventive and changes weekly.

One One (% 965 20 63 99; Calle Valdés 9; meals €25; h Tue-Sat) It's easier if you speak a little Spanish at this wonderfully eccentric place (pronounced 'on-eh, on-eh') with its faithful following of regulars, but a touch of bravado will get you by (just ask your ebullient host about his travels to Peru). It's a true bistro, the walls scarcely visible for photos and posters, and there's no menu. Just listen carefully as Bartólome intones...

Nou Manolín (% 96 520 03 68; Calle Villegas 3; menú €15, mains €10-19) This mellow bare-brick place does magnificent bar tapas and delightful rice dishes. Book in advance, since it's another favourite among discerning *alicantinos*.

Piripi (% 96 522 79 40; Avenida Oscar Esplá 30; mains €13-23) This highly regarded restaurant is strong on stylish tapas (head for the shoulder-to-shoulder downstairs bar) and fine rice or seafood dishes.

Self-caterers can browse around Alicante's huge, Art Nouveau twin-storey covered market (Avenida Alfonso X El Sabio).

Drinking

The old quarter around Catedral de San Nicolás is wall-to-wall bars. Down by the harbour, the Paseo del Puerto, tranquil by day, is a double-decker line of bars, cafés and night-time discos.

Early opener **Desdén Café Bar** (Calle de los Labradores 22) is a friendly place to kick off the evening, while **La Llum** (cnr Calles Montegon & Padre Maltés) is a tiny sweatbox dance-bar that goes wild late into the night. No prizes for guessing what music prevails at nearby **El Templo del Rock** (Plazo Quijano 1).

Celestial Copas (Calle San Pascual 1) is heavenly and decidedly weird, with a kitsch collection of religious art/junk and great music. Nearby, **Desafinado** (Santo Tomas 6) is another heaving dance bar with DJs that also offers good jazz.

An easy walk away, **Z** (Calle Coloma; h Tue-Sun) is a slick *discoteca* with a dress code. Don't turn up before 3am unless you want to dance alone.

In the port area, if you don't recognise **Compañía Haddock** by the din, you will from the image of Tintin's pipe-smoking companion. Sitting above it – and risking bringing the roof down on a good night – is **Port Rell**.

A couple of doors along, **Tropiscafo** beams out good recorded jazz, while beside it **Coyote Ugly** sometimes has live music.

If you're still on your feet, take the night ferry over to the Panoramis complex, where the opportunities for nocturnal action are almost as rich.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Alicante's El Altet airport (% 96 691 91 00), gateway to the Costa Blanca, is served by budget airlines, charters and scheduled flights from all over Europe.

Two cut-price operators, both with offices at Alicante airport, are **Servitour** (☎ 96 568 26 42; www.servitour.es) and **V. Travel 2000** (☎ 96 691 94 60), which also calls itself Goflightline.

BOAT

Acciona Trasmediterránea (www.acciona-trasmediterranea.es) and **Romeu** (☎ 96 520 04 01), an Algerian company, run regular ferries to/from Oran in Algeria.

BUS

From the bus station (☎ 96 513 07 00) over 10 motorway buses run daily to Valencia (€16.30 to €18.55, 2½ hours). Others, much slower, pass through Costa Blanca coastal towns such as Benidorm (€3.40, one hour, at least hourly). At least four serve Madrid (€33, 4¼ hours).

TRAIN

Destinations from the main Renfe Estación de Madrid (Avenida de Salamanca) include Murcia (€5.10, 1½ hours, hourly) via Orihuela and Elche, Valencia (€24.50, two hours, up to 10 daily) via Villena and Xàtiva, Madrid (€38.60, 3¼ hours, five daily) and Barcelona (€47.25, five hours, eight daily).

Ferrocarril de la Generalitat Valenciana (FGV; ☎ 900 72 04 72) has a tram and narrow-gauge train service, the *trenet* (little train), which follows a coastal route that's scenically stunning at times. A tram (every half hour) runs northwards as far as El Campello, where the *trenet* takes over. It runs to Denia (€7.75) via Playa de San Juan (€0.95), Benidorm (€3.45) and Calpe (€5.35). Trains run hourly as far as Altea and every two hours to Denia (€8.20).

Getting Around

El Altet airport is around 12km southwest of the centre. Bus C-6 runs every 40 minutes between Plaza Puerta del Mar and the airport, passing by the north side of the bus station.

Reliable and very economical local car-hire companies operating from the airport include **Javea Cars** (☎ 96 579 33 12; www.javeacars.com), **Solmar** (☎ 96 646 10 00; www.solmar.es) and **Victoria Cars** (☎ 96 583 02 54; www.victoriacars.com).

There are also taxis (☎ 96 510 16 11).

AROUND ALICANTE

Isla de Tabarca

A trip to Tabarca, around 15km to 20km south of Alicante as the seagull flies, makes for a pleasant day trip – as much for the boat ride

itself as for the island, which can heave with tourists in summer. Pack your towel and face-mask. Much of the waters that lap this small island, 1800m long and 400m wide at its widest point, are protected and no-go areas. But fish don't understand such boundaries and you'll enjoy some great underwater viewing in permitted areas.

In summer, daily boats visit the island from both Alicante and Torrevieja and there are less regular sailings year-round.

Lucentum

On and around the Tossal de Manises spread the remains of the Roman town of **Lucentum** (☎ 96 526 24 34; adult/child €2/1.20; 9am-noon & 7-10pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-May), forerunner of Alicante. You can make out its clearly defined streets and town plan, and more waits to be revealed as excavation continues. Take bus 9 or 21.

TORREVIEJA

pop 83,350

With a high proportion of northern European visitors, Torrevieja has good beaches. Sea salt production remains an important element of its economy.

Ciber Paredes (Calle Pedro Lorca 13; per hr €2; 10.30am-2pm & 4.30-10pm Tue-Sun) has Internet access.

The **tourist office** (☎ 96 570 34 33; www.webtorrevieja.com; Plaza de Capdepon; 8.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) is near the waterfront.

Sights & Activities

To appreciate why salt still means so much to *torrevejenses*, visit the **Museo del Mar y de la Sal** (Sea & Salt Museum; ☎ 96 670 68 38; Calle Patricio Pérez 10; admission free; 10am-2pm & 5-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1.30pm Sun), an appealing clutter of mementoes and bric-a-brac, and the more recent **Centro de Interpretación de la Industria Salinera** (☎ 96 570 58 88; Avenida de la Estación; admission free; 10am-1pm & 4-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat), more didactic yet with a lightness of touch.

Aquópolis (☎ 96 571 58 90; Finca la Hoya Grande s/n; adult/child €18.50/12.80; 11am-7pm mid-Jun–Aug) – say it aloud and the pun will make you wince – is a fun water park on the outskirts of town. It offers free transport from the bus station.

El Delfin (☎ 96 670 68 38; admission free; 10-5pm Wed-Sun) is a decommissioned navy submarine that you can prowl around.

The **Via Verde** is a 6km long walking and cycling track that follows an old railway line,

down which the last train steamed over 50 years ago. Running beside the lagoon and through the salt pans, it makes for a great half-day outing. Rent a bike from **Da Bike Profi** (☎ 96 692 83 67; Calle Pedro Lorca 49; per day €7) or **Family Bike Hire** (☎ 655 338066; www.costablancabikehire.com; per day/three days/week €12/24/39), who will deliver to your hotel.

Just to the south of the tourist office is a large parking area and the jetty from which boats leave in summer for day trips (€20/14 adult/child return) to the island of **Tabarca** (opposite).

Sleeping

Camping La Campana (☎ /fax 96 571 21 52; sites per person/tent €4.25/11; 11 Apr-Sep) The nearest camp site, La Campana is 4.5km south of town on the Cartagena road.

Hotel Cano (☎ 96 670 09 58; www.hotelcano.com; Calle Zoa 53; s/d mid-Sep–Jun €30/40, Jul–mid-Sep €40/60; p a) Five blocks west of the bus station, the Cano has 57 trim, modern rooms, many with balcony. Those in the new wing have fresh furniture and plenty of pleasing woodwork. Parking is €8.

Hotel Madrid (☎ 96 571 00 38; www.ansahotel.com; Calle Villa Madrid 15; s/d with breakfast €45/63, Jul–mid-Sep €60/85; p a i) With 40 rooms and one star up, the Madrid is a friendly option with comfortable, fairly spacious rooms, one equipped for travellers with disabilities. There's also a top-floor Jacuzzi. Parking costs €7.

Hotel Masa Internacional (☎ 96 692 15 37; hotel-masa@arrakis.com; Avenida Alfredo Nobel 150; s €55-90, d €77-120; p a s) This smart cliff-top hotel, extensively renovated in 2003, is a lovely top-end choice, east of town and remote from all the downtown frenzy. Rooms overlooking the sea come at no extra cost.

Eating

Plenty of restaurants around the waterfront offer cheap meals and international menus. On Plaza Isabel II, park yourself on a patio and enjoy great grilled fresh fish.

Restaurante Vegetariano (☎ 96 670 66 83; Calle Pedro Lorca 13; mains €9, salads €5.25-8; 11am-10pm Tue-Sun; v) One block back from the beachfront, this little vegetarian haven is run by a Spanish-Australian couple. It offers salads, sandwiches, pizzas and tasty mains.

El Muelle (☎ 96 670 41 72; Paseo Marítimo Juan Aparicio; mains €10-14, pizzas €8-12; a) East of and set apart from the run-of-the-mill promenade restaurants, the highly regarded 'Jetty' does great

house pastas and mains, all served on crisp linen tablecloths. Eat on the terrace overlooking the sea or inside in the chill of the air-con.

Mercado de Abastos (Plaza Isabel II) Torrevieja's covered market is a great basket-filler for self-caterers.

Getting There & Away

From the bus station (☎ 96 571 01 46; Calle Antonio Machado), there are up to six buses daily to Madrid (€33.50, 5½ hours). Autocares Costa Azul runs eight buses daily to Cartagena (€3.77, 1¼ hours) and Alicante (€3.28, one hour).

INLAND FROM THE COSTA BLANCA

The borderline between the holiday *costa* and the interior is, perhaps appropriately, a motorway. Venture away from the Med, west of the A7, to find yourself in a different, truly Spanish world. By far the easiest way to explore this hinterland is with your own transport.

XÀTIVA

pop 28,200

Xàtiva (Castilian: Játiva) makes an easy and rewarding 50km day trip from Valencia. It has a small historic quarter, town museum and a mighty castle strung along the crest of the Serra Vernissa, at whose base the town snuggles.

After the Reconquista, Xàtiva became Valencia's second-largest city. Birthplace of the Borgia Popes Calixtus III and Alexander VI and of the painter José Ribera (1591–1652), who sought fortune in Italy, its glory days ended in 1707 when Felipe V's troops torched most of the town.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 96 227 33 46; Alameda Jaime I 50; 10am-2.30pm Tue-Sun mid-Jun–mid-Sep, 10am-1.30pm & 4-6pm Tue-Fri, 10am-1.30pm Sat & Sun mid-Sep–mid-Jun) is on the Alameda, Xàtiva's shady main avenue.

Sights & Activities

Attractions of interest lie south and uphill from the Alameda. Ask at the tourist office for its English brochure, *Xàtiva: Monumental Town*.

In the **Museo del Almudín** (☎ 96 227 65 97; Calle Corretgeria 46; adult/child €2.10/1.10; 11am-9.30am-2.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2.30pm Sat & Sun mid-Jun–mid-Sep, 10am-2pm & 4-6pm

Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun mid-Sep–mid-Jun) items of most interest, including a couple of fine portraits by Ribera, are up on the penultimate floor. You can't miss the portrait of Felipe V, hung upside down in retribution for his sacking the town.

The 16th-century *Colegiata Basílica* (Colegiate Church) impresses by its sheer size but little else. The paintings and statues, carefully illuminated, tend towards the kitsch. A contemporary curiosity: in a couple of side chapels are 20th-century portraits of clerics assassinated by the Republican side during the Spanish civil war.

It's a long climb to the castle (adult/child €2.10/1.10; 10am-6pm or 7pm), from where the views are sensational. On the way up, on your left is the 18th-century *Ermita de San José* and, to the right, the lovely Romanesque *Iglesia de Sant Feliu* (1269), Xàtiva's oldest church. Alternatively, hop aboard the little tourist train (€3.80 return) that heads up from the tourist office at 12.30pm and 4.30pm (5.30pm June to September) or call a taxi (€96 227 16 81).

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Huerto Virgen de las Nieves (€96 228 70 58; Avenida Ribera 6; r €82; a i s) This intimate hotel (it has only eight rooms) has been restored with very considerable flair. It's a wonderfully spacious place, all mellow brick and woodwork, with a secluded garden and wi-fi. Its restaurant (*menús* €15-40), open to all comers, is equally rich in character.

Hostería Mont Sant (€96 227 50 81; www.mont-sant.com; s €93.50-131, d €103-149.50; p a s) On the road to the castle, this place is charmingly set amid palm trees and orange groves. Stay in the main building, once a farm, or in one of the spacious wooden cabins. There's a splendid restaurant, agreeably divided into intimate crannies. Sip your sundowner beside the *mirador* (viewing platform) with its plunging view of the plains.

Casa la Abuela (€96 228 10 85; Calle de la Reina 17; mains €11-16.50, menus €13; 11am-8pm) Renowned for its à la carte cuisine and rice dishes, 'Grandmother's House' does a good *menú* for €12 and is strong on regional dishes.

Canela y Clavo (€96 228 24 26; Alameda Jaume I 64; mains €12-19) This place is spacious, well lit and staffed by black-clad waiters. It does inventive mains and an excellent value four-course lunch *menú* for €15. We savoured their *bacalao con fusión de erizos de mar y crema de almendras* (salt cod with sea urchins and cream of almonds).

Getting There & Away

The train is by far your best bet. Frequent services connect Xàtiva with Valencia (€2.85, 45 minutes, half-hourly) and most Valencia-Madrid trains stop here too. You can also reach Alicante (€8.15-19.50, 1½ hours, six daily).

VILLENA

pop 34,200

Villena, on the N330 between Alicante and Albacete, is the most attractive of the towns that dot the corridor of the Val de Vinalopó.

Plaza de Santiago is at the heart of the old quarter. The **tourist office** (€96 580 38 04; 11am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun) is at No 5. Within the fine 16th-century **Palacio Municipal** (Plaza de Santiago 2) is the **Museo Arqueológico** (admission free; 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Fri, 11am-2pm Sat & Sun). The pride of its collection are 60 gold artefacts weighing over 10kg, dating from around 1000 BC and found by chance in an old riverbed. Perched high above the town, the 12th-century **Castillo de la Atalaya** (admission free) is splendidly lit at night. Guided visits are offered every morning except Monday until 1pm.

Villena celebrates its **Moros y Cristianos** fiesta from 5 to 9 September (see the boxed text, p624).

ELDA

pop 55,600

Elda vies with Elche for the title of shoemaking capital of Spain. Foot fetishists shouldn't miss the **Museo del Calzado** (Shoe Museum; €96 538 30 21; Avenida Chapí 32; adult/child €2.50/1.25; 10am-1pm & 4-8pm Tue-Sun). Above the mezzanine floor with its rows of Heath Robinson drills, stamps and sewing machines, it's wall-to-wall footwear: boots through the ages; shoes from around the world; fanciful designs that must have been agony to wear; and donated cast-offs from matadors, flamenco dancers, King Juan Carlos, Queen Sofia and other well-shod greats.

NOVELDA

pop 26,250

If you're a fan of Art Nouveau (more often known as *Modernismo* in Spanish), make the 25km pilgrimage from Alicante to Novelda's wonderful **Casa-Museo Modernista** (€96 560 02 37; Calle Mayor 22; admission free; 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm Sat). A bourgeois mansion completed in 1903, its stained glass, soft shapes in wood, period furniture and magnificent spiralling wrought-iron staircase take the breath away.

Novelda's tourist office (€96 560 92 28; Calle Mayor 6; 11am-2pm & 4.30-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) is within the town's Centro Cultural, itself a lovely *Modernista* building. Admire too the exterior of the headquarters of the local Cruz Roja (Spanish Red Cross; Plaza del Ayuntamiento).

JIJONA

If you love all things sweet, you really ought to make a pilgrimage to Jijona (Valenciano: Xixona), on the N340 more or less midway between Alicante and Alcoy. This small town has two claims to fame. Nowadays, it's Spain's principal producer of *turrón*, a kind of nougat with both soft and crunchy variants. In the past, the place was also a stopover for porters bearing ice from the high hinterland to assuage the heat of a coastal summer. And so it lent its name to Jijona, a popular brand of ice cream that sells by the hectolitre throughout the land.

ALCOY

pop 60,950 / elevation 565m

For 51¾ weeks a year, there's really not a lot to entice you to the lugubrious industrial town of Alcoy (Valenciano: Alcoi), 54km north of Alicante. But there's everything to draw you here between 22 and 24 April, when Alcoy holds its resplendent **Moros y Cristianos** festival (see the boxed text, p624).

To get some idea of the splendour of the costumes and a feel for the fiesta, visit the **Casal de Sant Jordi** (€96 554 05 80; Calle San Miguel 62; admission €1.50; 11am-1pm & 5.30-7.30pm Tue-Fri, 10.30am-1.30pm Sat & Sun). Occupying an 18th-century mansion, it houses the festival's museum.

Alcoy's **tourist office** (€96 553 71 55; alcoi@touristinfo.net; Calle San Lorenzo 2) is just off the main Plaza de España.

Hostal Savoy (€96 554 72 72; www.hostalsavoy.com; Calle Casablanca 9; s/d/tr with bathroom €35/50/65; p) is a friendly place, one block south of Plaza de España and one of only three accommodation options in town. Rooms are trim and well kept and most have a bathtub. There's locked parking (€6) a short walk away.

Immediately west of Plaza de España, **Plaxa de Dins**, arcaded and more intimate, is packed with drinkers and diners on warm summer evenings.

There are four trains daily to/from Valencia (€6.75, two hours) via Xàtiva. From the nearby bus station, three to six daily services run to Valencia (€11.25), at least 10 to Alicante (€5.75) and a couple to Gandia (€3.75).

GUADALEST

You'll be far from the first to discover the village of Guadalest; nowadays coaches, heading up from the Costa Blanca resorts, disgorge more than two million visitors annually. But get there early, or stay put after the last bus has pulled out and the place will be almost your own.

Crowds come because Guadalest, reached by a natural tunnel and overlooked by the **Castillo de San José** (adult/child €3.50/1.50; 10.30am-6pm or 7pm), is indeed very pretty, and it's a joy to stroll through a traffic-free village.

One little jewel amid so much day-tripper-orientated tackiness is the diminutive **Museo Etnológico** (€96 588 52 38; admission free, donations welcome; 10am-6pm daily Jun-Oct, Sun-Fri Nov-May), a sensitive presentation of what life in Guadalest was like before the coach parties came along.

ELCHE

pop 215,150

A mere 23km southwest of Alicante, Elche (Valenciano: Elx) is a Unesco World Heritage site twice over: for the *Misteri d'Elx*, its annual mystery play (see the boxed text, p625) and for its extensive palm groves, Europe's largest and most northerly, originally planted by the Arabs. Muslim irrigation systems converted the region into a rich agricultural district that still produces citrus fruit, figs, almonds, dates – and 85% of Spain's pomegranates.

Its sights are comprehensively and accurately signed in English.

Orientation

The town is split north-south by Río Vinalopó. The older quarter and most of the parks and monuments lie on its eastern side.

Train and bus stations are beside each other on Avenida de la Libertad (also called Avenida del Ferrocarril), north of the centre. From either, go left along Avenida de la Libertad, then left again down Paseo de la Estación to reach the tourist office and town centre.

Information

Entre Acto Cybercafé (Calle Santa Barbara 15; per hr €3; 11am-midnight Mon-Fri, 3pm-2am Sat & Sun) Internet access.

Tourist office (€96 545 27 47; www.turismedelx.com; 10am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) At the southeast corner of Parque Municipal (Town Park).

Sights & Activities

Around 200,000 palm trees, some shaggy and in need of a haircut, most trim and clipped, each with a lifespan of some 250 years, make the heart of this busy industrial town a veritable oasis. A signed 3km walking trail (ask at the tourist office for its leaflet, *Historic Palm Groves Route*) leads you through the groves.

Opposite the hotel of the same name, the **Huerto del Cura** (Porta de la Morera 49; adult/child with audioguide €5/3; 9am-sunset Mar-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Feb) is a lovely private garden with tended lawns and colourful flowerbeds. More instructive is the **Museo del Palmeral** (96 542 22 40; Porta de la Morera 12; adult/child €3/1; 10am-8pm daily mid-May-Oct, 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1.30pm Sun Nov-mid-May). In a former farmhouse, it's all about the date palm and the intricate blanching, woven fronds used throughout Spain in Palm Sunday rites. Wander through the delightful adjacent palm grove and orchard with its gurgling irrigation channels and typical fruit trees of the *huerta*.

The **Museo Arqueológico y de Historia de Elche** (MAHE; 96 661 53 82; Diagonal del Palau s/n; admission free; 10am-10pm daily Apr-Oct, shorter hours and closed Mon Nov-Mar) is a great new museum, well signed in Spanish and English, that recounts the Elche's history through selected artefacts, touchscreens and giant computer animations.

For an alternative overview of the town, make your way to the **Centro de Visitantes**

(admission free; 10am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun). This Arab-style building, located in the park behind the tourist office, runs a 10-minute audiovisual presentation with multilingual commentary.

The 12th-century **Baños Árabes** (Arab Baths; 96 545 28 87; Plaza Santa Lucia 14; adult/child €1/0.50; 10am-1.30pm & 4.30-8pm Tue-Sat, 10.30am-1.30pm Sun) runs an enjoyable audiovisual presentation with optional English soundtrack.

The vast baroque **Basilica de Santa Maria** (7am-1.30pm & 5.30-9pm) is used for performances of the *Misteri d'Elx*. Climb up its tower (adult/child €2/1; 11am-6pm or 7pm) for a pigeon's-eye view over the palms.

The well-signed **Alcúdia archaeological site** is 3.5km south of the town centre. Here was unearthed the *Dama de Elche*, a master-piece of Iberian art that now forms part of Madrid's **Museo Arqueológico Nacional** collection (see p135). Visit the site's excellent **Museo Arqueológico** (96 661 15 06; adult/child €2.50/1.80; 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar, 10am-2pm Sun year-round). The museum displays the rich findings from a settlement that was occupied continuously from Neolithic to late Visigoth times.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Faro (96 546 62 63; Camí dels Magros 24; basic s/d €15/30) This friendly nine-room family place is a little gem. It's rooms are simple and spotless rooms.

FIESTAS DE MOROS Y CRISTIANOS

More than 80 towns and villages in the south of Valencia hold their own Fiesta de Moros y Cristianos (Moors and Christians festival) to celebrate the Reconquista, the region's liberation from Muslim rule.

Biggest and best known is Alcoy's (22 to 24 April), when hundreds of locals dress up in elaborate traditional costumes representing different 'factions' – Muslim and Christian soldiers, slaves, guild groups, town criers, heralds, bands – and march through the streets in spectacular and colourful processions with mock battles.

The various processions converge upon Alcoy's main plaza and its huge, temporary wooden fortress. It's an exhilarating spectacle of sights and sounds: soldiers in shining armour, white-cloaked Muslim warriors bearing scimitars and shields, turban-topped Arabs, scantily clad wenches, brass bands, exploding blunderbusses, firework displays and confetti showering down on the crowds.

Each town has its own variation on the format, steeped in traditions that allude to the events of the Reconquista. For example, Villena's festival (5 to 9 September) features midnight parades, while La Vila Joiosa (24 to 31 July), near Benidorm, re-enacts the landing of Muslim ships on the beaches. Other major festivals include those of Bocairent (1 to 5 February) and Ontinyent (end August), both inland in Valencia province; Biar (10 to 13 May), inland in Alicante province; and Guardamar (late July), on the coast near the border with Murcia.

MISTERI D'ELX

The *Misteri d'Elx*, a two-act lyric drama dating from the Middle Ages, is performed annually in Elche's **Basilica de Santa Maria**.

One distant day, according to legend, a casket was washed up on Elche's Mediterranean shore. Inside were a statue of the Virgin and the *Consueta*, the music and libretto of a mystery play describing Our Lady's death, assumption into heaven and coronation.

The story tells how the Virgin, realising that death is near, asks God to allow her to see the apostles one last time. They arrive one by one from distant lands and, in their company, she dies at peace. Once received into paradise, she is crowned Queen of Heaven and Earth to swelling music, the ringing of bells, cheers all round and – hey, we're in the Valencia region – spectacular fireworks.

The mystery's two acts, *La Vespra* (the eve of her death) and *La Festa* (the celebration of her assumption and coronation), are performed in Valenciano by the people of Elche themselves on 14 and 15 August respectively (with public rehearsals on the three previous days).

You can see a multimedia presentation – complete with virtual apostle – in the **Museo de la Festa** (96 545 34 64; Carrer Major de la Vila 25; adult/child €3/1.80; 10am-1pm & 4.30-8.30pm or 5-9pm Tue-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun), about a block west of the basilica. The show lasts 35 minutes and is repeated several times daily, with optional English commentary.

Hotel Huerto del Cura (96 661 00 11; www.huerto delcura.com; Porta de la Morera 14; r Mon-Thu €90-110, Fri-Sun €88; p n a i s) Accommodation here is in trim bungalows within lush, palm-shaded gardens. Parking is free and there's wi-fi access. Complete the cossetting at Elche's longest standing luxury hotel by dining in **Els Capellans**, its renowned restaurant.

Restaurante Dátil de Oro (96 65 45 34 15; mains €8-12, menus €14-20) Within the municipal park, this vast emporium to eating can accommodate almost 2000 diners (last time we passed they had three simultaneous wedding receptions). Even so, the cuisine is far from institutional and it's one of the best places in town to sample local cuisine at reasonable prices.

Carrer Mare de Déu del Carmé (Calle Nuestra Señora del Carmen) has a cluster of good, cheap and cheerful eateries including **Bar Los Extremeños** (Calle Nuestra Señora del Carmen 14), which serves great tapas. On summer evenings almost the whole length of this short street is set with tables.

Getting There & Around

SuBús operates buses every half-hour to/from Alicante (€1.70). **ALSA** (www.alsa.es) runs six buses daily to Valencia (€10.30) via Elda and Villena and six to/from Murcia (€3.50).

Elche is located on the Alicante to Murcia railway. Around 20 trains daily rattle through, bound for Alicante (€1.75) or Murcia (€2.45) via Orihuela.

ORIHUELA

pop 75,000

Beside Río Segura and flush with the base of a barren mountain of rock, the historical heart of Orihuela with its Gothic, Renaissance and (especially) baroque buildings well merits a detour.

The **tourist office** (96 530 27 47; Calle Francisco Die 25; 8am-2.30pm & 5-7.30pm Mon-Fri mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 8am-3pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri mid-Sep-mid-Jun) is opposite the **Iglesia de Santiago Apóstol**.

Sights

The 16th-century **Convento de Santo Domingo** (Calle Adolfo Claravana s/n; 10am-1.30pm & 4-7pm or 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) has two fine Renaissance cloisters and a refectory rich in 18th-century tilework.

Other splendid ecclesiastical buildings include the 14th-century **Catalan-Gothic Cathedral of San Salvador** (Calle Doctor Sarget; admission €1.20; 10am-1.30pm & 4-6.30pm or 5-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1.30pm Sat) with three finely carved portals, a lovely little cloister and the **Museo Diocesano**, whose collection includes Velázquez' *Temptation of St Thomas*.

The **Iglesia de las Santas Justa y Rufina** (Plaza Salesas 1; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm or 5-8pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) has a Renaissance façade and a Gothic tower graced with gargoyles. Also noteworthy are the sober baroque façade of the **Palacio Episcopal** (Calle Ramón y Cajal), the 14th-century **Iglesia de Santiago Apóstol** (Plaza de Santiago 2) and, crowning the mountain, the ruins of a castle originally constructed by the Muslims.

Access to Orihuela's **Museo de la Muralla** (☎ 96 530 46 98; Calle del Río s/n; admission free; h 10am-2pm & 4-7pm or 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) is through the main door to the Universidad Miguel Hernández. A 20-minute guided tour in Spanish (ask for the English leaflet) leads you through the vast underground remains of the city walls, Arab baths, domestic buildings and a Gothic palace.

Sleeping & Eating

Hostal-Residencia Rey Teodomiro (☎ /fax 96 674 33 48; 1st fl, Avenida de Teodomiro 10; s/d €30/50; n a) This hotel is a tidy option in the more modern part of town. All of its 23 rooms have bathtub and tiled floors and those facing the square have small balconies.

Hotel Melia Palacio de Tudemir (☎ 96 673 80 10; www.solmelia.com; Calle Alfonso XIII 1; r €88-99; n a i) Palace is indeed the word for this tastefully renovated 18th-century building, recently gobbled up by the Melia chain. There's wi-

fi access, a pleasant café and its restaurant (*menús* €15 and €35) is the best of Orihuela's limited dining options.

Café Bar Casablanca (☎ 96 530 10 29; Calle Meca 1; tapas from €3.50, mains €6-12) This unpretentious place dishes up a good choice of tapas and a wide selection of meat and fish mains.

Ateneo (☎ 96 530 40 18; Calle Cardenal Loaces 1; mains €12-17, *menús* €12) The restaurant of Orihuela's lavish 19th-century Casino (stride through to the far end), Ateneo serves good food in its eccentrically tiled restaurant and gloomy bar, which is a little cheaper.

Getting There & Away

Bus and train stations are combined at the Intermodal, an airy structure at the end of Avenida de Teodomiro. Orihuela is on the Alicante–Murcia train line and has frequent services to both places. Tickets cost €2.90 to Alicante and €1.75 to Murcia.

Balearic Islands



Each of these four islands (Islas Baleares, Illes Balears in Catalan), floating serenely in the glittering Mediterranean, could be said to have a theme. Mallorca is the senior island, combining a little of everything, from spectacular mountain scenery and hiking through to the standard sea 'n' sun seaside tourism. Ibiza is synonymous with clubbing, the island that gave Europe the rave. Menorca is a haven of tranquillity – splendid isolated beaches and coves, and prehistoric monuments standing as taciturn reminders of how small we are in the grand scheme of things. And tiny Formentera, a chill-out island, where some people lose themselves for the entire summer, needing little more to keep them happy than white beaches and sunset parties.

Each year a massive multinational force invades the islands in search of a piece of this multifaceted paradise. The total population of the isles does not amount to a million, but many times that number are involved in a round-the-clock airlift and disembarkation of sun- and fun-seekers from Easter to October.

Surprisingly, the islands have managed to maintain much of their intrinsic beauty. Beyond the high-rise resort hotels, bars and more popular beaches are Gothic cathedrals, Stone Age ruins, fishing villages, spectacular walks, secluded coves, endless olive and almond groves and citrus orchards. And a growing range of elegant, rural retreats and A-list eateries are attracting a range of visitors beyond the party package crowd.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Admire the building genius at Palma de Mallorca's enormous Gothic **cathedral** (p632)
- Take a hike in Mallorca's **Serra de Tramuntana** (p638)
- Join the party that sets the Mediterranean on fire in **Ibiza's amazing clubs** (p651)
- Chill out at Formentera's sunset parties at the Blue Bar on **Platja de Migjorn** (p660)
- Enjoy scented strolls in villages like **Fornalutx** (p641) in Mallorca's northwest
- Gasp at the turquoise hues of the sea around the **Cap de Formentor** promontory (p642)
- Peer into prehistory at **Naveta des Tudons** (p669) and Menorca's other ancient monuments
- Slip into Menorca's limpid waters at **Cala Macarelleta** and **Cala en Turqueta** (p671)
- Prance with the prancing horses at the **Festa de Sant Joan** (p668) in pretty Ciutadella
- Say three Hail Marys before winding along the spectacular 12km route to **Sa Calobra** (p641)



■ AREA: 4992 SQ KM

■ AVE SUMMER TEMP: HIGH 28°C,
LOW 20°C

■ POP: 983,130



History

Archaeologists believe the first human settlements in the Balearic Islands date from around 5000 BC and the islands were later regular ports of call for Phoenician traders. The Carthaginians followed and founded Ibiza City in 654 BC, making it one of the Mediterranean's major trading ports. Next came the Romans, who, in turn, were overwhelmed by the Visigoths.

Three centuries of Muslim domination ended with the Christian Reconquista, led by Jaume I of Catalonia and Aragón, who took Palma de Mallorca in 1229 and sponsored the invasion of Ibiza in 1235. Menorca was the last to fall: Alfonso III took it in 1287 in a nasty Vietnam-style campaign, completing the islands' incorporation into the Catalan world.

After their initial boom as trading centres and Catalan colonies, the islands had fallen on hard times by the 15th century. Isolation from the mainland, famines and frequent raids by pirates contributed to their decline. During the 16th century Menorca's two major towns were virtually destroyed by Turkish forces and Ibiza City's fortified walls were built. After a succession of bloody raids, Formentera was abandoned.

After backing the Habsburgs in the Spanish War of Succession, Mallorca and Ibiza were occupied by the victorious Bourbon monarchy in 1715. Menorca was granted to the British along with Gibraltar in 1713 under the Treaty of Utrecht. British rule lasted until 1802, with the exception of the Seven Years War (1756–

63), during which the French moved in, and a brief Spanish reconquest after that. In the Spanish Civil War, Menorca was the last of the islands to succumb to Franco's forces.

Tourism since the 1950s has brought considerable wealth. The islanders now enjoy – by some estimates – the highest standard of living in Spain, but 80% of their economy is based on tourism. This has led to thoughtless (and continuing) construction on the islands (the term *balearización* has been coined to illustrate this short-termism and wanton destruction of the area's prime resource – its beautiful coastlines) and leads to Balearics-wide anxiety attacks whenever a season doesn't meet expectations.

The islands' foreign admirers seem to have their preferences. If the Germans have set their sights on Mallorca, Formentera becomes Little Italy in July and August. The Brits are numerous in Mallorca, but have a special affection for Menorca. Ibiza's clubs, on the other hand, attract an international brigade of hedonists.

Place names and addresses in this chapter are in Catalan, the main language spoken (with regional variations). The major exceptions are Ibiza and Ibiza City – both are called Eivissa in Catalan but we use the better-known Spanish rendition.

Getting There & Around

AIR

If your main goal in Spain is to visit the Balearic Islands, it makes *no* sense to fly via the mainland. If already in Spain, scheduled flights from major cities on the mainland are

operated by Iberia, Air Europa, Spanair and Vueling (see the Transport chapter, p859).

Inter-island flights are expensive (given a flying time of less than 30 minutes), with a trip from Palma de Mallorca to Maó or Ibiza easily costing up to €100. There are no direct flights from Ibiza to Maó.

In summer, masses of charter and regular flights converge on Palma de Mallorca and Ibiza. From the UK, EasyJet can get you there for as little as UK£30 one way (plus taxes), depending on how far in advance you book, while German budget airlines, such as Air-Berlin and LTU, shuttle in thousands of passengers from cities all over Germany daily. Typical return fares hover around €150, but can easily hit €300 in July and August.

BOAT

The main ferry company, **Acciona Trasmediterránea** (☎ 902 45 46 45; www.trasmediterranea.es), has offices in and runs services between Barcelona and Valencia on the mainland, and Ibiza City, Maó and Palma de Mallorca. Tickets can be purchased from any travel agency or online. Timetables and fares vary constantly.

Up to three kinds of service are available: standard ferries (few left in service), super ferries (larger, faster boats) and high-speed (*alta velocidad*) services. The latter will either be a catamaran (which can do up to 47 knots) or the Fast Ferry (38 knots). All services transport vehicles.

In the peak summer period scheduled services include: Barcelona–Palma (up to two catamarans and one super ferry per day, 3¼ hours, seven or eight hours respectively); Barcelona–Maó (catamaran or super ferry, one daily, 4½ hours and nine hours respectively); Barcelona–Ibiza City (a catamaran or super ferry daily, four hours 50 minutes and nine hours respectively); Valencia–Palma (fast ferry, one daily; standard ferry, six days a week, four hours and 7¼ hours respectively); Valencia–Ibiza City (fast ferry, one daily, three hours); Palma–Ibiza City (fast ferry, one daily, 2½ hours); and Palma–Maó (standard ferry, one weekly, 5½ hours). Frequency drops throughout the rest of the year. In 2006 there was talk of a summer-only Ibiza–Alicante run (3½ hours) too.

Standard summer fares from the mainland (Barcelona, Valencia or Alicante) to any of the islands cost around €46.50 one way for a

'Butaca Turista' (seat) on standard and super ferries. On the fast ferries and catamarans the standard fare is €75.

Inter-island services (Palma–Ibiza City and Palma–Maó) both cost from €35.50 one way.

Baleària (☎ 902 160180; www.balearia.com) runs services to the Balearics from Barcelona and Denia. It operates a daily fast ferry (four hours) and conventional overnight ferry (seven hours) from Barcelona to Palma in summer. Another fast service runs to Alcudia (5¼ hours), in northeast Mallorca, via Ciutadella (3¼ hours) in Menorca. It also operates a daily slow service from Barcelona to Maó (nine hours) and a similar service to Sant Antoni in Ibiza (8½ hours). All these services operate from mid-May to September. In the off-season frequency tails off.

From Denia (connecting bus from Valencia), two daily ferries (one a fast ferry) head to Palma de Mallorca (five to 8¼ hours) via Ibiza City (two to four hours from Denia). In the peak July–August period it puts on an extra fast ferry, as well as an extra run to Sant Antoni and another to Ibiza City via Formentera. One fast ferry (two hours) and one conventional boat (four hours) link Palma to Ibiza.

From the mainland you pay €65/92 one way on the standard/fast ferry. The fares between Palma de Mallorca and Ibiza are €46/62.80 respectively.

Iscomar (☎ 902 119128; www.iscomarferrys.com) has services from Barcelona to Palma (€32, €93.90 per small car; 7½ hours, daily in summer). There are sometimes services to Ibiza and Maó too. From Valencia there is a run to Palma (€27.50, €93.90 per small car; nine hours, six days a week in summer) and once a week to Maó. From Denia up to two ferries a day run to Ibiza (€32.20, €93.90 per small

YOUR PLACE IN THE SUN

Renting apartments, studios and bungalows has long been a popular way to stay on the islands. Rural accommodation, often in stylishly transformed tranquil country retreats (almost always with pool), has become especially popular in the past few years. A few sites to get you started include: www.topfincas.com, www.balearics.com/fincas, www.rusticrent.com, www.toprural.com, www.secretplaces.com, www.homedays.com and www.guiascasasrurales.com.

BUSIER THAN BEN HUR

The Balearics in high summer (from late June to about halfway into September) can be incredibly busy. Palma de Mallorca alone turns around some 40 inbound and outbound flights a day. It is no coincidence that local bus and taxi drivers occasionally choose to strike around this time. Most of the millions of visitors have pre-booked package accommodation and the strain on local infrastructure can make it tricky for the independent traveller wanting the freedom to choose at the last minute. It is wise to book at least the first couple of nights around this time to avoid getting off to an uncomfortable start. In July and August, some hotels push the boat out on prices. This chapter reflects such high-season maxima, which means that in some places you can expect to pay considerably less in quieter times.

car; 4½ hours). One to two daily ferries shuttle between Ciutadella on Menorca and Port d'Alcúdia on Mallorca (€39 per person and €60 per small car one way).

Cape Balear (☎ 902 10 04 44; www.capebalear.es) operates two fast ferries daily to Ciutadella (Menorca) from Cala Ratjada (Mallorca) in summer for €64 one way (bizarrely, €50 return if you do a day return trip!). The crossing takes 55 minutes.

For details of ferries between Ibiza and Formentera, see p660.

MALLORCA

In 1950 the first charter flight landed on a small airstrip on Mallorca, the largest of the Balearic Islands (3640 sq km). The number of annual visitors today hovers around 10 million – most in search of the three S's: Sun, Sand and Sea, and swamping the local island populace of some 781,600 people (nearly half of whom live in the capital, Palma de Mallorca).

However, there's much more to Mallorca than the beach. Palma de Mallorca (or simply Palma) is the main centre and a charming stop. The northwest coast, dominated by the Serra de Tramuntana mountain range, is a beautiful region of olive groves, pine forests and ochre villages, with a spectacularly rugged coastline.

Most of Mallorca's best beaches are on the north and east coasts and, although many have been swallowed up by tourist developments, you can still find the occasional exception. There is also a scattering of fine beaches along parts of the south coast.

Check out websites like www.illesbalears.es, www.balears.com, www.abcmallorca.com and www.newsmallorca.com. For hotels, check www.mallorcahotelguide.com. See also p645.

Orientation

The capital, Palma de Mallorca, is on the south side of the island, on a bay famous for its brilliant sunsets.

Locals refer to what lies beyond the capital as the *part forana*, the 'part outside'. A series of rocky coves and harbours punctuate the short southwest coastline. Offshore from the island's westernmost point is the large, uninhabited Illa de Sa Dragonera.

The spectacular Serra de Tramuntana mountain range runs parallel with the northwest coast and Puig Major (1445m) is its highest point. The northeast coast is largely made up of two bays, the Badia de Pollença and the larger Badia d'Alcúdia.

The east coast is an almost continuous string of sandy bays and open beaches, which explains the densely packed tourist developments. Most of the south coast is lined with rocky cliffs interrupted by beaches and coves, and the interior is largely made up of the fertile plain known as Es Pla.

Getting Around

BUS

Most of the island is accessible by bus from Palma. All buses depart from (or near) the **bus station** (Carrer d'Eusebi Estada). For information contact **Transport de les Illes Balears** (TIB; ☎ 971 17 77 77; http://tib.caib.es).

One-way fares from Palma include Cala Ratjada (€9.05), Ca'n Picafort (€4.40), Port de Pollença (€5.10) and Port d'Andratx (€3.55).

BOAT

Palma and the major resorts and beaches around the island are connected by boat tours and water-taxi services. Some of these are detailed in the *Excursions En Barca* brochure, available at tourist offices. **Cruceros Iberia** (☎ 971 71 71 90; ☹ Tue, Thu & Fri mid-May–mid-Oct) organises

day trips to Sant Elm, leaving at 9.30am and returning at 5pm, for €52.50 per person including lunch and hotel transfers.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

About 30 vehicle-hire agencies operate in Palma. The big league has representatives at the airport and along Passeig Marítim, along with several cheaper companies.

One of the best deals is **Hasso** (☎ 902 20 30 12; www.hasso-rentacar.com). **Pepacar** (☎ 807 414243; www.pepacar.com) has several rental outlets, including the airport (look for the Centauro counter).

TAXI

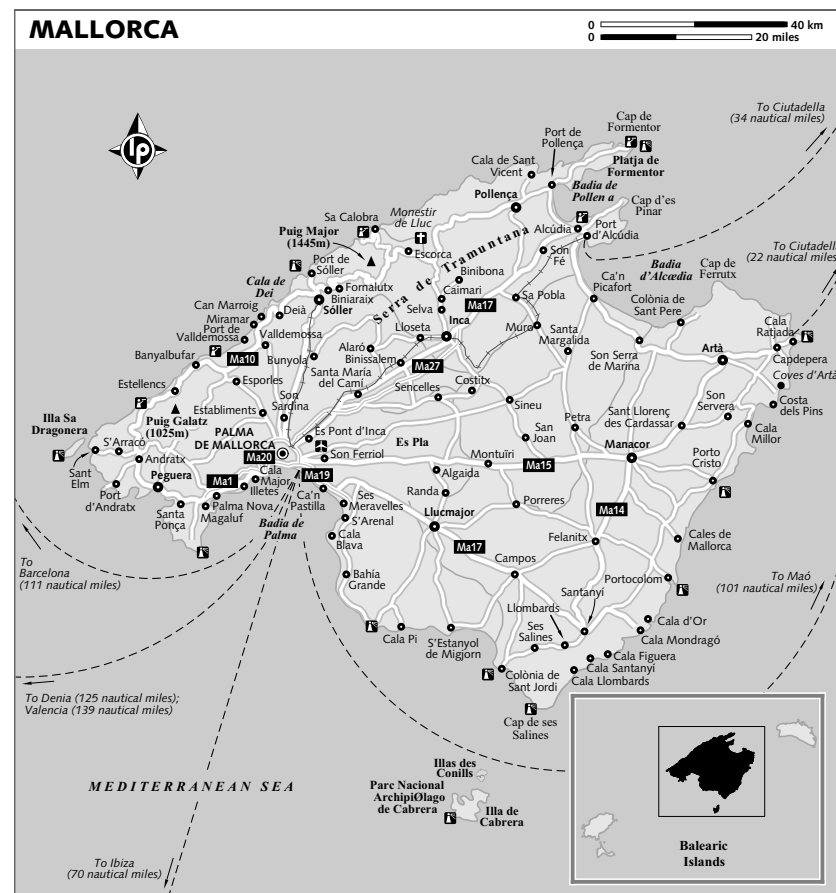
You can get around the island by taxi, but it's costly. Prices are posted at central points in

many towns. You're looking at €70 from the airport to Cala Ratjada.

TRAIN

Two train lines run from Plaça d'Espanya in Palma de Mallorca. The **Palma–Sóller railway** (☎ 971 75 20 51, 902 36 47 11; www.trendesoller.com; one way/return €9/14) was built in 1912 to replace the local stagecoach, and its trip to the north coast is now one of the island's most popular excursions. Trains leave five or six times daily.

The other **train line** (☎ 971 17 77 77) runs inland to Sa Pobla (€2.65; 55 minutes) via the town of Inca (€1.80; 35 minutes). A secondary line links Inca with Manacor (€1.90; 40 minutes).



PALMA DE MALLORCA

pop 375,770

Palma de Mallorca is the islands' only true city. Central Palma's old quarter is an attractive blend of tree-lined boulevards and cobbled laneways, Gothic churches and baroque palaces, designer bars and slick boutiques. It's a stylish city that buzzes by day and sizzles by night.

The bad news is that you'll have to take a bus to get to the beaches, where you'll discover the sprawl of high-rise tourist development.

Orientation

Central Palma stretches from the harbour to Plaça d'Espanya, home to the train stations and 200m from the bus station. The airport bus stops here, too. It has a tourist office, and frequent buses run to the central Plaça de la Reina (a 20-minute walk).

Information

Numerous countries maintain consular agencies here, a few of which have been marked on the Central Palma de Mallorca map (see also p847).

INTERNET ACCESS

Xspace (☎ 971 72 92 10; Carrer de Sant Gaietà 4d; per hr €2; ☎ 11am-11pm Mon-Sat, noon-11pm Sun & holidays)

INTERNET RESOURCES

www.conselldemallorca.net Official general website for Mallorca.

www.illesbalears.es Main general tourism website for the Balearic Islands.

www.visit-palma.com Asociación de Hoteles de Palma de Mallorca website, with hotel and general information for Palma de Mallorca.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Hospital Son Dureta (☎ 971 17 50 00; Carrer de Andrea Doria 55)

POST

Post office (Carrer de la Constitució 6; ☎ 8.30am-10pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-10pm Sat, noon-10pm Sun & holidays).

TOURIST INFORMATION

Consell de Mallorca tourist office (☎ 971 71 22 16; www.infomallorca.net; Plaça de la Reina 2; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) covers the whole island.

Municipal tourist office (☎ 902 102365; www.palma demallorca.es) main office (Casal Soleric, Passeig des Born 27); ☎ 9am-8pm); branch office (Parc de les Estacions; ☎ 9am-8pm)

Sights

Central Palma is especially known for the elegant courtyards, or *patis*, of its many noble houses and mansions. Most are in private hands or used as offices, but a peek into a *patis* is often possible. Ask for a booklet pinpointing the most interesting at the tourist office.

CATEDRAL

Palma's enormous **catedral** (La Seu; ☎ 971 72 31 30; www.bisbatdemallorca.com; Carrer del Palau Reial 9; adult/student/under 10yr €4/3/free; ☎ 10am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2.30pm Sat Jun-Sep, 10am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2.30pm Sat May & Oct, 10am-2.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2.30pm Sat Nov-Mar) is often likened to a huge ship moored at the city's edge. Construction work on what had been the site of the main mosque started in 1230 but wasn't completed until 1600. This awesome structure is predominantly Gothic, apart from the main façade (replaced after an earthquake in 1851) and parts of the interior (renovated in Modernista style by Antoni Gaudí at the beginning of the 20th century).

Entry is via a small, three-room **museum**, which holds a rich collection of religious artwork and precious gold and silver effects, including two amazing candelabra.

The *catedral's* interior is stunning in its sense of spaciousness, with a series of narrow columns supporting the soaring ceiling and framing three levels of elaborate stained-glass windows. The front altar's centrepiece, a rather odd twisting wrought-iron sculpture suspended from the ceiling and periodically lit with fairy lights, has been widely acclaimed, mainly because it was Gaudí's handiwork. The island's top contemporary artist, Miquel Barceló, is working on ceramic decoration of the Capella del Santíssim i Sant Pere.

PALAU DE L'ALMUDAINA

In front of the catedral stands the **Palau de l'Almudaina** (☎ 971 21 41 34; Carrer del Palau Reial s/n; adult/student €3.20/2.30; ☎ 10am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat Apr-Sep, 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat Oct-Mar), a Muslim castle converted into a residence for the Mallorcan monarchs at the end of the 13th century. It is still occasionally used for official functions when King Juan Carlos is in town, but at other times you can join the hordes and wander through an endless series of cavernous and austere stone-walled rooms and inspect a collection of portraits of Spanish monarchs, Flemish tapestries and period furniture.

CENTRAL PALMA DE MALLORCA



ES BALUARD

The spectacular **Es Baluard** (Museu d'Art Modern i Contemporani; ☎ 971 90 82 00; www.esbaluard.org; Porta de Santa Catalina 10; adult/student & senior €6/4.50, temporary exhibitions €4/3; ☎ 10am-10pm Tue-Sun mid-Jun-Sep, 10am-8pm Tue-Sun Oct-mid-Jun) takes the grand Renaissance-era seaward fortifications as its setting. A 21st-century concrete complex has been built into the walls, and is a playful game of light, surfaces and perspective – the perfect framework for this major exhibition of contemporary artists from Spain and beyond. On show are items from many of the great names, from local boy Miquel Barceló through to Kandinsky. Ceramics by Picasso, notes and sketches by Miró and sculptures by the late Basque master Jorge Oteiza await discovery. The views from the ramparts are splendid, and the restaurant is one of the city's best.

MUSEU D'ART ESPANYOL CONTEMPORANI (PALAU MARCH)

For more modern art try this **mansion** (☎ 971 71 35 15; www.march.es/arte/palma; Carrer de Sant Miquel 11; admission free; ☎ 10am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-2pm Sat) near the *catedral*. Once one of several residences of the phenomenally wealthy March family, this private palace boasts an outdoor terrace display of modern sculpture and, inside, a selection of some 70 works by a who's who of mostly Spanish 20th-century and contemporary artists, from Eduardo Arroyo to Fernando Zóbel. Also on show is an 18th-century Neapolitan *belén* (nativity scene) of overwhelming richness and detail; upstairs you can admire the ceiling and wall murals by Josep Maria Sert (better known for his murals in the Catedral de Sant Pere in Vic, Catalonia, p381).

MUSEU DE MALLORCA

Housed in a converted 15th-century palace, this **museum** (☎ 971 71 75 40; Carrer de la Portella 5; ☎ 10am-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) holds an impressive collection of archaeological artefacts, religious art, antiques and ceramics. Upstairs is a great portrait gallery of local identities and painters. Much of the museum is temporarily off-limits due to ongoing renovation, but admission is free during the work.

CAN MARQUÈS

This typical Palma **mansion** (☎ 971 71 11 75; www.casasconhistoria.net; Carrer de Zanglada 2a; adult/student & senior €6/5; ☎ 10am-3pm Mon-Fri) is one of few such

places in Palma open to visitors. Dating to the 14th century, it gives a fascinating insight into how the well-to-do of bygone centuries lived (and in some cases still do) in old Palma.

CASA-MUSEU JOAQUIM TORRENTS LLADÓ

This fine old **house** (☎ 971 72 98 35; Carrer de la Portella 9; adult/student & senior €3/1.80; ☎ 11am-7pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 10am-6pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat mid-Sep-mid-Jun), with a timber gallery overlooking a courtyard, is yet another mansion on show. It once belonged to the Catalan artist of the same name (1946-93) and has been largely preserved as it was, giving a unique glimpse into this kind of old-town mansion and a look at the painter's works. Temporary exhibits complete the picture.

BANYS ÀRABS

The **Arab baths** (☎ 971 72 15 49; Carrer de Serra 7; adult/child €1.50/free; ☎ 9am-7.30pm Apr-Nov, 9am-6pm Dec-Mar) are the only extant monument to the Muslim domination of the island. All that remains are two small underground chambers, one of which has a domed ceiling supported by a dozen columns. Interestingly, each of the columns is topped by a different capital: the Muslims were great recyclers and the capitals came from demolished Roman buildings.

MUSEU DE MUÑECAS

While around the cathedral you might want to pop into this shop-cum-museum dedicated to old dolls, known in Catalan as the **Museu de Nines Antiques** (☎ 971 72 98 50; Carrer del Palau Reial 27; adult/child/under 6yr €3.50/2.50/free; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun). If you like them enough, you can even buy one.

LA LLOTJA

The gorgeous Gothic **La Llotja** (☎ 971 71 17 05; Plaça de la Llotja s/n), opposite the waterfront, was built as a merchants' stock exchange and is used for temporary exhibitions.

CHURCHES

Two of Palma's oldest churches are the soaring Gothic **Església de Santa Eulàlia** (☎ 971 71 46 25; Plaça de Santa Eulàlia 2; ☎ 8am-1pm & 5-8pm) and the nearby **Basilica de Sant Francesc** (☎ 971 71 26 95; Plaça de Sant Francesc 7; admission €1; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-6pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm Sun & holidays). The latter was begun in 1281 in Gothic style and its baroque façade was completed in 1700. You enter by the cloister. Inside is the tomb of, and monument

to, the 13th-century scholar Ramon Llull, while at the front of the church is a statue of Junipero Serra, the Franciscan missionary who founded many missions in California.

FUNDACIÓ PILAR I JOAN MIRÓ

Joan Miró's **art foundation** (☎ 971 70 14 20; http://miro.palmademallorca.es; Carrer de Joan de Saridakis 29; adult/student & senior/under 17yr €5/2.80/free; ☎ 10am-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun & holidays mid-May-mid-Sep, 10am-6pm Tue-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun & holidays mid-Sep-mid-May) in Cala Major (about 4km southwest of the city centre) is housed in the artist's Palma studios and contains a permanent collection of the works stored here at the time of his death. In all, more than 100 paintings, a small collection of sculpture and hundreds of drawings make up the collection. Take bus 3 or 6 from the city centre.

OTHER ATTRACTIONS

In the west of the city, **Poble Espanyol** (☎ 971 73 70 75; Carrer del Poble Espanyol 39; adult/student & senior €5/3; ☎ 9am-7pm Apr-Sep, 9am-6pm Oct-Mar) is a copy of the village of the same name in Barcelona. It contains replicas of famous monuments and other buildings representative of a variety of Spanish architectural styles, not to mention souvenir shops galore, although these are closed on Saturday afternoon, Sunday and on holidays. Further south, the circular **Castell de Bellver** (☎ 971 73 06 57; adult/senior & student €2/1; ☎ 8am-8.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-Sep, 8am-7.15pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar, 10am-5pm Sun & holidays year-round) is an unusual 14th-century castle (with a unique round tower) set atop a pleasant park. Parts of the castle are shut on Sunday. It is the stage for a summer **classical music festival** in July.

Sleeping

Central Palma is by far the best area to stay. Avoid the string of glossy (and not-so-glossy) tourist hotels around the waterfront east and west of the city centre – they're a long way from anything (except each other). Check out www.mallorcahotelguide.com for hotels in Palma and around the island.

BUDGET

Hostal Pons (☎ 971 72 26 58; Carrer del Vi 8; s/d €20/40) This *hostal* seems unchanged since the 1880s. The downstairs chambers are cluttered with antiques and artworks, and the quaint bedrooms all have timber bedsteads and rickety tiled floors.

Hostal Brondo (☎ 971 71 90 43; www.hostalbrondo.net; Carrer de Can Brondo 1; s/d €35/60) Climb the courtyard stairs to arrive in a homy little sitting room overlooking the narrow lane. High-ceilinged rooms (No 3 with a glassed-in gallery) furnished in varying styles (from Mallorcan to vaguely Moroccan) are atmospheric.

Hostal Terminus (☎ 971 75 00 14; www.terminushostal.com; Plaça d'Espanya 5; s/d to €43.95/54.95) This place has been hosting guests since it opened as Hotel Terminus in 1913. Fan-cooled rooms are spacious and retain a fusty feel, but are very clean. Some with shared toilet cost a little less.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Born (☎ 971 71 29 42; www.hotelborn.com; Carrer de Sant Jaume 3; s €53.50, d €78-99.50) A superb place in the heart of the city, this hotel is in an 18th-century palace. The rooms combine elegance and history, with all the mod-cons. The best rooms have an engaging view on to the courtyard.

Hotel Palau Sa Font (☎ 971 71 22 77; www.palausafont.com; Carrer dels Apuntadors 38; s/d from €103.80/157.30; ☎ ☎) Behind the mighty timber doors lies a series of 19 elegant rooms and suites, all varying in size and layout but sharing a simple, light décor. Art plays a big decorative role, with original modern works on room doors and scattered about this boutique charmer.

Hotel San Lorenzo (☎ 971 72 82 00; www.hotelsanlorenzo.com; Carrer de Sant Llorenç 14; s/d from €117.70/139; ☎ ☎) Tucked away inside the old quarter, this hotel is in a beautifully restored 17th-century building, and has a marvellous Mallorcan courtyard, its own bar, dining room and rooftop terrace with swimming pool. There are just six rooms.

Hotel Dalt Murada (☎ 971 42 53 00; www.daltmurada.com; Carrer de la Almudaina 6; d from €149.80, ste €252.50) Gathered around a medieval courtyard, this carefully restored old townhouse is a gorgeous

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hotel Portixol (☎ 971 27 18 00; www.portixol.com; Carrer de la Sirena 27; s/d from €123/208.65; ☎ ☎) Boasting one of the trendiest seafood restaurants around, Portixol is also one of the hippest hotels in town. It's a fine exercise in cool, streamlined minimalism. The best rooms have sea views, and a drink on the terrace bar is a pleasant way to begin the evening.

if tiny option, with just a handful of doubles and suites. The penthouse suite has a Jacuzzi and views of the cathedral.

Hotel Ca Sa Padrina (☎ 971 42 53 00; www.hotelcasapadrina.com; Carrer de les Tereses 2; d €107-128.40) The owners of Hotel Dalt Murada have six more modest rooms (with Jacuzzi and some with terrace) here.

TOP END

Hotel Palacio Ca Sa Galesa (☎ 971 71 54 00; www.palaciocasagalesa.com; Carrer de Miramar 8; s/d to €253.60/322.10; ♿ ♿ ♿ ♿) Welcome to the classiest act in town. This enchanting 16th-century mansion has five doubles and two singles arranged around a cool patio garden. A genteel air wafts through the elegant rooms, with antiques, artwork and silk bed throws. Head up to the roof and take some sun with cocktail in hand.

Eating

A mess of eateries and bars cater to Palma's visitors in the maze of streets between Plaça de la Reina and the port. Take a look around the *barrio* (district) of Santa Catalina, west of Passeig de Mallorca, especially around the east end of Carrer de la Fàbrica. Also pleasant is the seaside Es Molinar area around Es Portixol, where you'll find cheerful seafood eateries and laid-back bars.

Forn des Teatre (☎ 971 71 52 54; Plaça de Weyler 9; ☞ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat) This pastry shop has the best *ensaimada* (a light, spiral pastry emblematic of the island) in town.

Ca'n Joan de S'Aigo (☎ 971 71 07 59; Carrer de Can Sa'nç 10; hot chocolate €1.40; ☞ 8am-9pm Wed-Mon) For a hot chocolate in what can only be described as an antique-filled milk bar dating from 1700, you must pop by here and observe the ladies with their fans and the children with their ice cream.

Bon Lloc (☎ 971 71 86 17; Carrer de Sant Felii 7; menú €12; ☞ lunch Mon-Sat) With its mighty timber ceiling, fans and discreet lighting, this is a soothing setting for a good, healthy four-course *menú del día* that might include a *crema fría de zanahoria* (cold carrot cream soup) and follow with *pastel de patata* (potato pie).

Restaurant Celler Sa Premsa (☎ 971 72 35 29; Plaça del Bisbe Berenguer de Palou 8; meals €20-25; ☞ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat Sep-Jun, Mon-Fri Jul-Aug) A visit to this local institution is almost obligatory. It's a cavernous tavern filled with huge old wine barrels, and has walls plastered with faded

bullfighting posters. The food is hearty and the atmosphere jolly.

Ca'n Carlos (☎ 971 71 38 69; Carrer de l'Aigua 5; meals €35-40; ☞ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Step down into this basement restaurant for finely prepared fish, meat and rice dishes (the latter abundant and creamily delicious at €12 a head). You might opt for a fat calamari stuffed with monkfish and mushrooms. Ochre-washed walls lend warmth to this split-level charmer.

La Bodeguilla (☎ 971 71 82 74; Carrer de Sant Jaume 1-3; meals €35-45; ☞ 1-11.30pm Mon-Sat) This gourmet eatery does lightly creative interpretations of dishes from across Spain (such as *cochinillo*, suckling pig, from Segovia, and *lechazo*, young lamb, baked Córdoba-style in rosemary) and a tasting menu of tapas for €21 a head. Wash down with fine wines from its extensive list.

Aramis Bellini (☎ 971 72 52 32; Carrer de Sant Felii 7; meals €35-45; ☞ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat Sep-Jul) Tucked away off the street, this is a carefully orchestrated gourmet hideaway, with dark-timber floors and art on the walls. They do such juicy meat classics as *entrecot Café de Paris* (in a thick gravy). The midday *menú del día* is good value at €13.

Koldo Royo (☎ 971 73 24 35; Avinguda de Gabriel Roca 3; meals €60-70; ☞ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Considered one of the great eating experiences of the island, this Basque gastrodome offers a limited menu in its downstairs bistro, KR (meals around €25), and the full linen treatment upstairs. Why not try *alcachofas al aroma de jamón de Jabugo con huevitos de codorniz* (artichokes prepared in aroma of Jabugo ham with partridge eggs)? If it seems too pricey, there's always Burger King next door.

Mercat de l'Olivar (Plaça del Olivar; ☞ 7am-2pm Mon-Sat) For doing-it-yourself, this is a good, central produce market.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Abaco (☎ 971 71 59 47; Carrer de Sant Joan 1; cocktails €15; ☞ 8pm-12.30am Tue-Thu, 8pm-3am Fri & Sat) Behind a set of ancient timber doors is the bar of your wildest dreams. Inside, a Mallorcan patio and candlelit courtyard are crammed with elaborate floral arrangements, cascading towers of fresh fruit and bizarre artworks. Take a look upstairs at the mix of rooms too. Bow-tied waiters will fulfil your wishes, while classical music soothes your ears.

Drinking & Entertainment

The old quarter is the city's most vibrant nightlife zone. Particularly along the narrow streets that lie between Plaça de la Reina and Plaça de la Drassana, you'll find an enormous selection of bars and pubs, ranging from rather flashy tourist haunts to much more stylish *bodegas* (wine cellars). Look around the Santa Catalina and Es Molinar districts too. In the latter, several chilled bars line Carrer del Vicari Joaquim Fuster. There is one big caveat on all this. Most bars shut by 1am Sunday to Thursday (3am Friday and Saturday).

Jazz Voyeur Club (www.jazzvoyeur.com; Carrer dels Apuntadors 5; admission €4) Enter into the liveliest local music scene in the heart of the old quarter. The smallish, black, upstairs bar fills quickly for live jazz and soul most nights.

Bodeguita del Medio (Carrer de Vallseca 18) For a taste of Cuba, head in here for a *mojito* (rum, lemon, mint and ice, one of Hemingway's faves) or three.

About 2km west of the old quarter along and behind Passeig Marítim (aka Avinguda de Gabriel Roca) is a concentration of taverns, girlie bars and clubs. A classic among the latter is **Garito Club** (☎ 971 73 69 12; Dàrsena de Can Barberà; admission generally free; ☞ 7pm-4.30am). DJs and live performers doing anything from jazz rock to disco classics and electro beats heat up the scene from around 10pm. Another classic club is **Tito's** (Passeig Marítim; ☞ midnight-6am Fri & Sat). **Tunnel** (Avinguda de Joan Miró 38; ☞ 10.30pm-4am Fri & Sat) has an emphasis on rock and appeals to an early 20s set.

S'Arenal and Magaluf (Map p631), the amorphous seaside tourist haunts to the east and west of Palma respectively, are full of bars and discos filled to bursting with the lobster-hued package-tourist crowd.

One marvellous exception is the über-laid-back, sunset chill lounge, **Puro Beach** (☎ 971 74 47 44; www.purobeach.com; ☞ 11am-2am), an all white bar with a tapering outdoor promontory area that is perfect for sunset cocktails, DJ sessions and fusion food escapes. Blend in with the monochrome décor and wear white, thus emphasising your designer tan. It is just a two-minute walk east of Cala Estancia (itself just east of Ca'n Pastilla).

Getting There & Away

Sant Joan airport is about 10km east of Palma. For trains and buses to other parts of the island, see Getting Around (p630).

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Bus 1 runs every 15 minutes between Sant Joan airport and Plaça d'Espanya in central Palma (€1.85, 15 minutes) and on to the ferry terminal. Alternatively, a taxi will charge you around €15 for the trip.

BUS

There are some 23 local bus services around Palma and its bay suburbs with EMT (☎ 971 21 4444). Single-trip tickets cost €1.10, or you can buy a 10-trip card for €8. For the beaches at S'Arenal, take bus 15 from Plaça de la Reina or Plaça d'Espanya.

TAXI

There are a few numbers to call for a taxi (☎ 971 72 80 81, 971 75 54 40, 971 40 14 14).

SOUTHWEST COAST

A freeway skirts around the Badia de Palma towards Mallorca's southwest coast. Along the way you'll pass the resorts of Cala Major, Illetes and Palma Nova, basically a continuation of Palma's urban sprawl. From the inland town of Andratx, two turn-offs lead down to the coast: one goes to Port d'Andratx and the other to Sant Elm.

Port d'Andratx

pop 1060

Port d'Andratx is a glamorous town set on low hills surrounding a narrow bay. The main road around the waterfront is lined with upmarket seafood restaurants. Several dive schools are based here.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hostal-Residencia Catalina Vera (☎ 971 67 19 18; Carrer de Isaac Peral 63; s/d €42/68) A couple of hundred metres back from the harbour, this is a lovely guesthouse retreat with rooms set around a tranquil garden courtyard. The best doubles have balconies.

MALLORCA'S TOP FIVE BEACHES

- Platja de Formentor (p642)
- Cala Llombards (p644)
- Cala de Sant Vicent (p642)
- Cala de Deià (p640)
- Es Trenc (p644)

Restaurante La Gallega (☎ 971 67 13 38; Carrer de Isaac Peral 52; meals €25-30) A couple of blocks inland from the waterfront, this is a popular local seafood restaurant overlooked by most foreigners, who prefer the pricier waterfront alternatives.

Sant Elm

pop 80

The seaside township of Sant Elm is popular for day trips from Palma. The last part of the drive (7km) across from Andratx is a spectacular climb through attractive hills. If you'd rather walk this section, take a regular bus to Andratx (20 a day, 30 minutes).

Sant Elm's sandy beach is pleasant, but can get crowded. Just offshore is a small rocky islet – within swimming distance for the fit. Further north is a small dock from where you can join a **glass-bottomed boat tour** or take the hourly boat (€10) to the imposing and uninhabited **Illa Sa Dragonera**, which is criss-crossed with good walking trails. You can also take the boat between Sant Elm and Port d'Andratx (€8). For details, call ☎ 971 75 70 65 or 639-617545.

NORTHWEST COAST & SERRA DE TRAMUNTANA

Dominated by the rugged Serra de Tramuntana range, Mallorca's northwest coast and its hinterland make up 'the other Mallorca'. No sandy beach resorts here. The coastline is rocky and largely inaccessible, the villages are mostly built of local stone (as opposed to concrete), and the mountainous interior is much loved by walkers for its beautiful landscapes of pine forests, olive groves and spring wildflowers.

The main road through the mountains (the Ma10) starts at Andratx and runs roughly parallel to the coast to Pollença. It's a stunning scenic drive and a popular cycling route, especially during spring, when the muted mountain backdrop of browns, greys and greens is splashed with the bright colours of yellow wattles and blood-red poppies. Plenty of *miradores* (lookout points) recommend themselves as stops to punctuate the trip. The journey can be a slow-going traffic nightmare in summer.

Estellencs

pop 340

Estellencs is a pretty village of stone buildings scattered around the rolling hills below the **Puig Galatzó** (1025m) peak. It's a popular base

for walkers and cyclists. A rugged walk of about 1km leads down to the local 'beach', a rocky cove with crystal-clear water.

At the western entrance to the town, the higgledy-piggledy, stone **Petit Hotel Sa Plana** (☎ 971 61 86 66; www.saplana.com; Carrer de Eusebi Pascual; d €98; ☎ ♿ ♿ ♿) dominates a rise that catches the evening sun. Rooms are all quite different and tastefully decorated with period furnishings. It has just five rooms. Other options and a few eateries present themselves in the village.

Banyalbufar

pop 460

Eight kilometres northeast, Banyalbufar is similarly positioned high above the coast. Surrounded by steep, stone-walled farming terraces carved into the hillside, the town is home to a cluster of bars and cafés, and three upmarket hotels.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel Baronia (☎ 971 61 81 46; www.hbaronia.com; Carrer de Baronia 16; s/d €50/63; ♿ ♿ ♿) Here is a maze of a building with an olde-worlde feel, it's built in the ruins of a Muslim-era fort (part of the central tower remains). Baronia has modern rooms, some with excellent sea views, and a great cliffside swimming pool. For a little more you get half-board and a guaranteed room with a view.

Pegasón y el Pajarito Enmascarado (☎ 971 14 87 13; Carrer del Pont 2; meals €20-25; ♿) lunch & dinner Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat, dinner Sun) Hidden from the main street (and its series of eateries), this cosy cavernous spot offers simple pizzas, pasta and mains like *magret de pato agridulce y espárragos* (sweet-and-sour duck slices with asparagus) at little candlelit tables, some of them outside.

Valldemossa

pop 1910

Valldemossa is an attractive blend of tree-lined streets, old stone houses and impressive new villas. It owes most of its fame to the fact that the ailing composer Frédéric Chopin and his lover George Sand spent their 'winter of discontent' here in 1838-39.

They stayed in the **Cartuja de Valldemossa** (☎ 971 61 21 06; admission €7.50; ♿) 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun), a grand monastery that was turned into rental accommodation after its monks were expelled in 1835. Their stay wasn't an entirely happy experience and Sand later wrote *Un Hiver à Mallorca* (Winter

in Mallorca), which, if nothing else, made her perennially unpopular with Mallorcans (although you will still find copies of it at souvenir stands).

Four buses arrive in droves to visit the monastery, a beautiful building with lovely gardens and fine views. In the couple's former quarters are Chopin's piano (which, due to shipping delays, arrived only three weeks before their departure), his death mask and several original manuscripts. Entry includes piano recitals (eight times daily in summer) and entry to the adjacent 14th-century **Palau del Rei Sanxo** (King Sancho's Palace) and local museum.

Costa Nord (☎ 971 61 24 25; www.costanord.com; Avinguda de Palma 6; adult/child €7.75/4.75; ♿) 9am-5pm Oct-Apr, 10am-6pm May-Sep) was dreamed up by part-time Mallorca resident and Hollywood celebrity Michael Douglas. His (what should we call it?) show is made up of two parts. The first is a three-screen 'documentary' on the history of this part of the island. Next you are ushered into a mock-up of the master's quarters of the good ship *Nixe*. The vessel belonged to Archduke Luis Salvador (or Ludwig to his family), son of the 19th-century Habsburg ruler of Tuscany, Leopoldo II. Luis spent much of his life bobbing around on the Mediterranean in *Nixe* and writing treatises on an astounding range of subjects, including Mallorca, which he came to live on and love. Indeed, he liked it so much that he proceeded to buy as much of it as he could.

From here a tortuous 7km drive leads down to **Port de Valldemossa**, where a dozen or so buildings (including two bar-restaurants) huddle around a rocky cove.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hostal Ca'n Mاريو (☎ 971 61 21 22; Carrer de Uetam 8; s/d €32/50) These simple but spotless little digs are nice, central and cheap. It overlooks a leafy street, and rooms with balconies at the front have splendid views across a valley.

A sprinkling of cheerful restaurants decorates the streets. None are of any culinary significance.

Miramar & Can Marroig

Five kilometres north of Valldemossa on the road to Deià is **Miramar** (☎ 971 61 60 73; admission €; ♿) 9.30am-7pm Tue-Sun May-Oct, 10.30am-6pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar), one of Habsburg Archduke Luis Salvador's former residences. The Archduke built this home on the site of a 13th-century

SLEEPING IN STYLE

In recent years Mallorcans have switched their attention from mass tourism to attracting a more discerning traveller. Nowhere is this more evident than in the mushrooming of midrange and high-end boutique hotels, often lovingly created out of restored mansions and country farmhouses. Several are listed in this chapter but there were around 100 at last count, some of them magnets for the rich and famous. Among those you might like to try:

- Finca Ets Abellons, Binibona (p641)
- Hotel Dalt Murada, Palma de Mallorca (p635)
- Hotel Palacio Ca Sa Galesa, Palma de Mallorca (p636)
- La Residencia, Deià (p640)
- Son Brull, Pollença (p642)
- Es Passarell, Felanitx (p645)

monastery, of which only a small part of the cloister remains. Walk out the back and enjoy the cliff-top views.

Two kilometres further on is one of the archduke's other main residences (Douglas bought yet another!), **Can Marroig** (☎ 971 63 91 58; admission €3; ♿) 9.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-Sep, 9.30am-2pm & 3-5.30pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar). It is a delightful, rambling mansion, jammed with furniture and period items, including many of the archduke's books. The views are the stuff of dreams. Wander down to the **Foradada**, the strange hole-in-the-rock formation by the water. It's about a 3km walk. You can swim, but beware the men o' war jellyfish.

Deià

pop 708

Deià is perhaps the most famous village on Mallorca. Its setting is idyllic, with a cluster of stone buildings cowering beneath steep hillsides terraced with vegetable gardens, vines and fruit orchards.

Such beauty has always been a drawcard, and Deià was once a second home to an international colony of writers, actors, musicians and the like. The most famous member was the English poet Robert Graves, who died here in 1985 and is buried in the town's hillside cemetery. Check out **Deià Mallorca** (www.deia.info).

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The Ma10 passes through the town centre, where it becomes the main street and is lined with bars and shops, expensive restaurants and ritzy boutiques. Several pricey **artists' workshops** and **galleries** flog locally produced work. The steep cobbled lanes lead to the parish church and attached **museum**.

On the coast, **Cala de Deià** has some popular swimming spots and a couple of bar-restaurants. The steep walking track from town takes about half an hour; you can drive down, but in the high season this might take almost as long. Some fine walks criss-cross the area, such as the gentle **Deià Coastal Path** to the pleasant hamlet of Lluç Alcari (three hours return).

SLEEPING

Fonda Villa Verde (☎ 971 63 90 37; Carrer de Ramon Llull 19; s/d €46/62) This charming little *pensión* in the heart of the hilly village offers homely rooms and splendid views from the sunny terrace. A handful of doubles with their own terrace and superlative views cost €80.

La Residencia (☎ 971 63 90 11; www.hotellaresidencia.com; Son Moragues; s/d from €310.30/497.55; ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖ ☗ ☘ ☙ ☚ ☛ ☜ ☝ ☞ ☟ ☠ ☡ ☢ ☣ ☤ ☥ ☦ ☧ ☨ ☩ ☪ ☫ ☬ ☭ ☮ ☯ ☰ ☱ ☲ ☳ ☴ ☵ ☶ ☷ ☸ ☹ ☺ ☻ ☼ ☽ ☾ ☿ ☽ ☿ ☽ ☿) 'The Res' to its habitués, this is the place to stay if you want to rub shoulders with the rich and famous. A short stroll from the village centre, this former 16th-century manor house is a luxurious resort hotel set in 12 hectares of manicured lawns and gardens.

EATING

The diverse collection of eateries along the main street includes a couple of affordable pizzerias and several expensive restaurants that claim to specialise in local cuisine.

Ca'n Quet (☎ 971 63 91 96; Carretera Valldemossa-Deià; meals €40-45; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) In this

hushed, ivy-draped locale 1km out of Deià on the road to Valldemossa, you have a choice of good seafood and meat dishes. There is a set menu for €38.

Sóller

pop 9160

Sóller's train station is the terminus for the Palma-Sóller railway, one of Mallorca's most popular and spectacular excursions (see Getting Around, p631).

The town sprawls across a flat valley beneath soaring and jagged outcrops of the Serra de Tramuntana. It's a pleasant place, with attractive old buildings, lush gardens and open plazas, and is a preferred base for walkers.

The main square, Plaça de la Constitució, is 100m downhill from the train station. It's surrounded by bars and restaurants, and is home to the *ajuntament* (town hall). Also here is the large 16th-century **Església Parroquial de San Bartolomé**, with a beautiful Gothic interior and a Modernista façade.

Most visitors take a ride on one of Sóller's open-sided old trams, which shuttle 2km down to **Port de Sóller** on the coast (€3). They depart from the train station every 30 minutes between 7am and 9pm.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel El Guà (☎ 971 63 02 27; Carrer del Castañer 2; s/d €51/78) Handily located beside the train station, this is a good place to meet fellow walkers. Its bright rooms feature timber trims and modern bathrooms.

Espléndido Hotel (☎ 971 63 18 50; www.esplendidohotel.com; Es Traves 5; s/d €70/120; ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖ ☗ ☘ ☙ ☚ ☛ ☜ ☝ ☞ ☟ ☠ ☡ ☢ ☣ ☤ ☥ ☦ ☧ ☨ ☩ ☪ ☫ ☬ ☭ ☮ ☯ ☰ ☱ ☲ ☳ ☴ ☵ ☶ ☷ ☸ ☹ ☺ ☻ ☼ ☽ ☾ ☿ ☽ ☿ ☽ ☿) Run by the snappy Hotel Portixol (p635) folks in Mallorca, this marvellous old 1954 carcass has been transformed into cutting-edge waterfront luxury digs in Port de Sóller. The hotel's best rooms have terraces that open up straight to the sea. Others overlook a leafy garden.

Ca's Carreter (☎ 971 63 51 33; Carrer del Cetre 9; meals €20-25; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) Set in a leafy, corner cart workshop (founded in 1914), downhill and west of the tram line, this is a cool and welcoming spot for modest local cooking, with fresh local fish, a couple of meat options and such specials as *calabacines rellenos de espinacas y pescado* (spinach and fish stuffed courgettes).

You'll find that the Port de Sóller waterfront is lined with eateries.

Biniaraix & Fornalutx

From Sóller it's a pleasant 2km drive, pedal or stroll through narrow laneways up to the hamlet of Biniaraix. From there, another narrow and scenic route continues north to Fornalutx, through terraced groves crowded with orange and lemon trees.

Fornalutx is a pretty village of distinctive stone houses with green shutters, colourful flower boxes and well-kept gardens. Many are owned by expats but it's a far cry from the (comparative) bustle of Sóller. These are the kind of places people dream about and lured the ilk of Peter Kerr to live on the island – his trials and tribulations settling in to Mallorca have proven a nice little earner in the form of his travel humour tomes *Snowball Oranges*, *Mañana Mañana* and *Viva Mallorca!*

A delightfully converted former convent just off the main street, **Fornalutx Petit Hotel** (☎ 971 63 19 97; Carrer de l'Alba 22; s/d €75.75/135.95; ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖ ☗ ☘ ☙ ☚ ☛ ☜ ☝ ☞ ☟ ☠ ☡ ☢ ☣ ☤ ☥ ☦ ☧ ☨ ☩ ☪ ☫ ☬ ☭ ☮ ☯ ☰ ☱ ☲ ☳ ☴ ☵ ☶ ☷ ☸ ☹ ☺ ☻ ☼ ☽ ☾ ☿ ☽ ☿ ☽ ☿) is a friendly, tranquil place to stay. Rooms glow with the warmth of terracotta floors and stonework. Room décor is mostly sober white but soothing. Have a snooze in the garden hammock.

Sa Calobra

The 12km road from route Ma10 across and down to the small port of Sa Calobra is a spectacular scenic drive. The serpentine road has been carved through the weird mountainous rock formations, skirting narrow ridges before twisting down to the coast in an eternal series of hairpin bends.

If you come in summer you won't be alone. NATO would be proud to organise such an operation. Divisions of buses and fleets of pleasure boats disgorge battalion after battalion of tireless tourists. It makes D-Day look like play lunch, and all that's missing are the choppers playing *Ride of the Valkyrie*. Sa Calobra must be wonderful on a quiet, bright midwinter morning... sigh.

From the northern end of the road a short trail leads around the coast to a river gorge, the **Torrent de Pareis**, and a small cove with some fabulous (but usually crowded) swimming spots.

One bus a day (Monday to Saturday) comes from Ca'n Picafort (9am) via Pollença and the Monestir de Lluç. It returns at 3pm. The whole trip takes 2½ hours, with a one-hour stop at the Monestir de Lluç. From Pollença you pay €4.55.

Monestir de Lluç

Back in the 7th century, a local shepherd claimed to have seen an image of the Virgin Mary in the sky. Later, a similar image appeared on a rock. 'It's a miracle', everyone cried and a chapel was built near the site to commemorate it.

A monastery was established here after Jaume I conquered Mallorca in 1229. Since then thousands of pilgrims have come every year to pay homage to the 14th-century **statue of the Virgin of Lluç**, known as *La Moreneta* because of her dark complexion.

The present **monastery** (☎ 971 87 15 25; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-8pm), a huge austere complex, dates from the 18th century. Off the central courtyard is the entrance to the **Basílica de la Mare de Déu**, which contains the statue. There is also a **museum** (admission €2; ☎ 10am-1.30pm & 2.30-5.30pm) with archaeological bits and bobs and a modest art collection.

SLEEPING & EATING

Santuari de Lluç (☎ 971 87 15 25; s/d from €13.50/23.50) The monastery's accommodation section has 97 rooms (of all sizes and some with kitchen access), and is popular with school groups, walkers and pilgrims. The downstairs rooms are dark and best avoided. Several restaurants and cafeterias cater to your tummy's demands.

Finca Ets Abellons (☎ 971 87 50 69; www.abellons.com; Binibona; s/d €82.40/117.70; ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖ ☗ ☘ ☙ ☚ ☛ ☜ ☝ ☞ ☟ ☠ ☡ ☢ ☣ ☤ ☥ ☦ ☧ ☨ ☩ ☪ ☫ ☬ ☭ ☮ ☯ ☰ ☱ ☲ ☳ ☴ ☵ ☶ ☷ ☸ ☹ ☺ ☻ ☼ ☽ ☾ ☿ ☽ ☿ ☽ ☿) Just 1km outside the tiny hamlet of Binibona, south of the monastery, is this charming, restored stone farmhouse in the foothills of the Serra de Tramuntana. Rooms have classic brown ceramic floors, timber ceilings and graceful furnishings.

The once near-abandoned Binibona village has been singled out for attention, with several other classy rural retreats located in and around it.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Up to three buses a day run from Ca'n Picafort to Monestir de Lluç via Pollença (€5.10, 1¼ hours).

Pollença

pop 11,330

Next stop on the Mallorcan pilgrimage is this attractive inland town. The devout and hardy come here to climb up **Calvari** (Calvary), 365 stone steps leading from the town up to a hilltop chapel and small shrine; the rest of us

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hotel Costa d'Or (☎ 971 63 90 25; s/d €96/148; ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖ ☗ ☘ ☙ ☚ ☛ ☜ ☝ ☞ ☟ ☠ ☡ ☢ ☣ ☤ ☥ ☦ ☧ ☨ ☩ ☪ ☫ ☬ ☭ ☮ ☯ ☰ ☱ ☲ ☳ ☴ ☵ ☶ ☷ ☸ ☹ ☺ ☻ ☼ ☽ ☾ ☿ ☽ ☿ ☽ ☿) This secluded spot is on the coast 3km north of Deià, in the captivating hamlet of Lluç Alcari. Beautiful rooms have high ceilings, tiled floors and windows opening onto gardens. It has a restaurant and sun terrace with fine views over the water. If you want sea views, book early (€121 to €220). A 15-minute walk through a pine forest takes you down to a little pebbly beach with crystal-clear water.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Son Brull (☎ 971 53 53 53; www.sonbrull.com; s/d from €265.40/312.45; ☹ ☹ ☹ ☹) Housed in a former convent a couple of kilometres south of Pollença on the road to Sa Pobla and disposed around a beautiful old cloister, this is one of the most tastefully presented country hotels on the island. Spacious, light rooms combine the rustic beauty with ultramodern touches, including a Bang & Olufsen TV and sound system in every room.

drive up the back road. Either way, the views from the top are worth it. Otherwise, the central Plaça Major is a good place to relax, with several cafés and restaurants.

SLEEPING & EATING

Santuari del Puig de Maria (☎ 971 18 41 32; d €20) Built during the 14th and 15th centuries, this former monastery is now a somewhat chaotic retreat. Neither the food nor the accommodation are anything to write home about, but the setting and views are spectacular. Call ahead for bookings. It's a couple of kilometres south of Pollença on the road to Palma.

Restaurant Clivia (☎ 971 53 36 35; Avinguda Pollentia; meals €45-50; ☹ lunch & dinner Tue & Thu-Sun, dinner Mon & Wed) Set in what was once a private house, this spot offers fine food (especially the fish) prepared and presented with panache. The service is attentive and the ambience tranquil. Try the house speciality, *llobarro de palangre al vi blanc* (wild sea bass steamed in white wine).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Pollença is on the Ca'n Picafort-Sóller bus route.

Cala de Sant Vicent

pop 270

A series of four jewel-like *cales* (coves), this is a tranquil resort in a magnificent setting. Yes, the inevitable English breakfast and German bratwurst problem is in evidence, but it's minimal compared with the big beaches further southeast. And the water is so limpid you feel you could see to the centre of the world.

Hostal los Pinos (☎ 971 53 12 10; www.hostal-lospinos.com; s/d €45/79; ☹ ☹) is set on a leafy hillside back off the road between Cala Molins and Cala Carbo. The best of the simple rooms have

partial sea views and are technically suites, with separate sleeping and lounge areas and balconies to hang up your beach towel.

Up to four buses run to Cala de Sant Vicent (€1.10, 15 minutes) from Pollença and likewise from Port de Pollença.

Port de Pollença

pop 5930

On the north shore of the Badia de Pollença, this resort is popular with British families soothed by fish 'n' chips and pints of ale. Sailboards and yachts can be hired on the beaches. South of town, the bay's shoreline becomes quite rocky and the beaches are less attractive.

Cap de Formentor

A splendid drive (cyclists be warned: it's steep, narrow and often busy) leads from Port de Pollença out along this rocky promontory.

Midway along the promontory is **Hotel Formentor** (☎ 971 89 91 01; www.hotelformentor.net; s/d from €288.90/460; ☹ ☹ ☹), a jewel of pre-WWII days when hotels of any type were in a strict minority on the island. These ritzy digs have played host to the likes of Grace Kelly and Winston Churchill since 1926.

Near the hotel and backed by shady pine stands, the slim sandy beaches of **Platja de Formentor** (parking €4) are pretty. At your disposal are a couple of exclusive beach bars, a golf course and a nearby horse-riding ranch.

From here it's another spectacular 11km out to the lighthouse on the cape that marks Mallorca's northernmost tip.

BADIA D'ALCÚDIA

The long beaches of this huge bay dominate Mallorca's northeast coast, its broad sweeps of sand stretching from Port d'Alcúdia to Ca'n Picafort.

Alcúdia

pop 15,900

Wedged between the Badia de Pollença and Badia d'Alcúdia, busy Alcúdia was once a Roman settlement. Remnants of the Roman theatre can be seen and the old town is still partly protected by medieval walls. Head for the ruins of the Roman town of **Pollèntia** and its **museum** (☎ 971 54 70 04; www.pollentia.net; Carrer de Sant Jaume 30; admission €2; ☹ 10am-3pm Tue-Fri, 10.30am-1pm Sat & Sun Jul-Oct, 10am-4pm Tue-Fri, 10.30am-1pm Sat & Sun Nov-Jun), just outside one of the town's squat medieval gates.

Port d'Alcúdia

pop 1820

A large harbour dominates the town centre and imparts a slightly chic maritime flavour, with boat trips leaving daily to various points, especially Platja de Formentor (anything up to €26 depending on time spent out, the route, and whether or not you take the lunch option). Boats also leave here for Ciutadella on the island of Menorca (see Getting There & Around, p629).

Friendly managers run the tidy little **Hostal Vista Alegre** (☎ 971 54 73 47; Passeig Marítim 22; s/d €20/35; ☹). The singles are pokey and have no air-con, while the doubles have either sea views (and breeze) or air-con. The doubles have their own bathroom. There are zillions of other places to stay in and around Port d'Alcúdia.

Ca'n Picafort

A smaller version of Port d'Alcúdia, Ca'n Picafort is a package-tour frontier town, and somewhat raw and soulless, but the beaches are pretty good.

EAST COAST

Most of the fine beaches along Mallorca's east coast have succumbed to the ravages of mass tourism. The northern half of this stretch of coastline is home to a series of concrete jungles that rivals the worst excesses of the Costa del Sol on the mainland. Further south the coastline is corrugated with a series of smaller coves and ports, saving it from the same fate.

Artà

pop 6650

The quiet, ochre inland town of Artà is dominated by a 14th-century hilltop fortress and **Església de San Salvador**, from where you have wonderful views across the town, countryside and even out to sea. A simple restaurant-bar opens for lunch up here.

On the coast 10km southeast are the **Coves d'Artà** (☎ 971 84 12 93; www.cuevasdearta.com; adult/under 13yr €9/4.50; ☹ 10am-6pm May-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Apr), rivalling Porto Cristo's Coves del Drac (right). Tours of the caves leave every 30 minutes.

A wonderful old mansion in the centre of town away from the seaside fish 'n' chips scene, **Hotel Casal d'Artà** (☎ 971 82 91 63; www.casaldarta.com; Carrer de Rafael Blanes 19; s/d €42/78; ☹) is a place with real character. It doesn't serve breakfast, though.

Cala Ratjada

pop 6000

Germans seem particularly enamoured with Cala Ratjada, a heavily developed and busy resort. The main streets are wall-to-wall souvenir shops, and the pretty beaches are carpeted with sizzling flesh. A few kilometres inland, **Capdepera** is marked by the walls of the 13th-century **castle** (☎ 971 81 87 46; admission €2; ☹ 9am-8pm Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Mar) above the town.

This is package-tourist territory and it can be hard to find a place to sleep in July and August. For details of daily fast ferries to Ciutadella (Menorca), see Getting There & Around (p629).

There are up to four buses a day from Palma de Mallorca via Artà to Cala Ratjada. Other buses connect Cala Ratjada with Manacor and Porto Cristo.

Porto Cristo

pop 6020

During the day, this place teems with day-trippers visiting the nearby underground caves. Porto Cristo won't help your claustrophobia, but by late afternoon when the hordes have disappeared it can be quite nice. The town cradles a small sandy beach and boat harbour.

The **Coves del Drac** (Dragon's Caves; ☎ 971 82 07 53; adult/under 8yr €9.50/free; ☹ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10.45am-3.30pm Nov-Mar) are on the southern outskirts of town. One-hour tours are held hourly, the 'highlight' being the classical music played by boat-bound musicians floating across a large subterranean lake. Barely 200m away, you can also visit the **Acuario** (☎ 971 82 09 71; adult/under 9yr €5/2.50; ☹ 10.30am-6pm Apr-Oct, 11am-3pm Nov-Mar), with a reasonably interesting collection of fishes in tanks over two floors.

In between the aquarium and the caves is the cheerful, roadside **Hotel Sol i Vida** (☎ 971 82 10 74; Avinguda de Joan Servera 11; s/d from €26/43; ☹), with a pool, bar-restaurant and tennis court.

Portocolom

pop 1080

A tranquil village set on a generous harbour, Portocolom has managed to resist the tourist onslaught with a degree of dignity. Various restaurants dot the long bay, and within a couple of kilometres are some fine beaches, such as the immaculate little cove of **Cala Marçal**.

Right on the waterfront, **Hostal Porto Colom** (☎ 971 82 53 23; www.hostalportocolom.com; Carrer de

Cristofol Colom 5; per person €35; ☺) offers breezy rooms with parquet floors, big beds and sunny décor. Downstairs opens out a too-cool-for-school restaurant (sandwiches €5, mains €15-20) and lounge bar. The food on offer ranges from local fish to a fine vegetable tempura.

Up to six buses run here daily from Palma via Felanitx (€4.85, 1¼ hours).

Cala d'Or to Cala Mondragó

Once a quaint fishing village, **Cala d'Or** is now an overblown big-dollar resort. Its sleek new marina is lined with glisteningly expensive boats and the surrounding hills are crowded with blindingly whitewashed villas. Plenty of lifestyle, little substance.

Immediately south of Cala d'Or (and virtually joined to it by urban sprawl) is the smaller and more tranquil **Portopetro**. Centred on a boat-lined inlet and surrounded by residential estates, it has a cluster of harbourside bars and restaurants, and a couple of small beaches nearby.

Two kilometres south of Portopetro, **Cala Mondragó** is one of the most attractive coves on the east coast. Sheltered by large rocky outcrops and fringed by pine trees, a string of three protected sandy beaches (two with a bar each and one with a restaurant) connected by coast footpaths await you.

The five-storey **Hostal Playa Mondragó** (☎ 971 65 77 52; Cala Mondragó; per person with sea views €36; ☺ ☺ ☺ P) is barely 50m back from one of the beaches. It's a tranquil option, and the better rooms have balconies and fine sea views. It also operates its own restaurant downstairs.

Regular local buses travel Monday to Saturday between Cala d'Or and Cala Mondragó via Portopetro.

Cala Figuera

The fishermen here really still fish, threading their way down the winding inlet before dawn while the predominantly German tourists sleep off the previous night's food and drink. What has probably kept the place in one piece is the fact that the nearest beach, pretty **Cala Santanyi**, is a few kilometres drive southwest. Nicer still is **Cala Llombards**, which you can walk to (scaling endless stairs) from Cala Santanyi or drive to via the town of Santanyi (follow the signs to Llombards and then Cala Llombards).

Excellent, spacious rooms with bathrooms and balconies at **Hostal-Restaurant Ca'n Jordi**

(☎ 971 64 50 35; Carrer de la Virgen del Carmen 58; s/d €29/40) offer splendid views over the inlet. The owners also rent out a few apartments and villas.

On Monday to Saturday, four to six buses a day travel from Palma de Mallorca to Cala Figuera via Es Llombards (town), Cala Santanyi and Santanyi.

Colònia de Sant Jordi

On the southeast coast, the large resort town of Colònia de Sant Jordi is unexciting. Some good beaches lurk nearby, however, particularly **Ses Arenes** and **Es Trenc** (with a nudist strip), both a few kilometres up the coast towards Palma. The water at the latter, 6km away by road, is an impossible shade of blue and it's so popular that you pay to **park** (car/motorcycle €6/2; ☺ 9am-9pm May-Oct). Indeed, the drawback can be the crowds and, if you're unlucky, great swamps of algae that sometimes wash ashore.

From Colònia de Sant Jordi itself you can take full-day **boat trips** (☎ 971 64 90 34; adult/under 10yr €31/15; ☺ May-Oct) to the former prison island of **Cabrera**, where more than 5000 French soldiers died after being abandoned in 1809 towards the end of the Peninsular War. Illa Cabrera and its surrounding islets now form the **Parc Nacional Archipiélago de Cabrera**. Take your own lunch or pay the boat people €7 a head for a simple repast. The boats leave the port at 9am and return at 3.30pm – the trip takes an hour each way.

THE INTERIOR

East of the Serra de Tramuntana, Mallorca's interior is a flat and fertile plain. Dominated by farmland and often fairly unremarkable agricultural townships, it holds little of interest to the average beach-obsessed traveller. But for those with time, transport and an interest in discovering the traditional Mallorcan way of life, an exploration of the island's interior is highly rewarding. If you like Mallorcan windmills, you'll feast on them on the initial stretch of the Palma-Manacor road!

Several of the island's major inland towns are well known for their specialised products. **Binissalem** is the centre of the island's wine industry (which produces some more than palatable whites and reds). A good cellar to look for is José L Ferrer (at the east entrance to this bigish and, in parts, pretty town). Ugly

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Es Passarell (☎ 971 18 30 91; www.espassarell.com; Segunda Vuelta s/n, Felanitx; d €107-144.45; ☺ ☺ ☺ P) The sun-bleached stone walls and tiled roofs of this one-time farmstead are immediately enticing. Modern, spacious rooms decorated with modern art and the occasional antique occupy what were once such areas as the wash house and rooms for drying out sausages. The gardens are alive with fruit trees, and other vivid plants and flowers. Rooms and apartments vary considerably. Some have only a shower, while others have a full bathroom.

Inca holds a popular market each Thursday and is, more importantly, the seat of much of Spain's leather and shoe production. Big names like Camper and Farrutx started out here and you can browse countless factory outlets and shops for quality footwear and leather goods. Check out Gran Via de Colom and Avinguda del General Luque. **Felanitx** has a name for ceramics.

Industrial and melancholy **Manacor** is known for its manufactured pearl industry (including the Majorica factory) and is home to many of the island's furniture manufacturers. Majorica has a huge shop just inside town on the road in from Palma.

Sleeping

If you're interested in experiencing 'the other Mallorca', numerous rural properties, mountain houses and traditional villas around the island operate as upmarket B&Bs. **Agroturisme Balear** (☎ 971 72 15 08; www.topfincas.com) has around 100 places on the books.

Many of the properties are historic and often stylish country estates offering outstanding facilities, including swimming pools, tennis courts, and organised activities and excursions. The prices for double rooms (often sleeping three) cost about €60 to €200 per day.

Son Mercadal (☎ 971 18 13 07; Camí de Son Pou; s/d to €76/100; ☺ ☺ ☺ P) Five kilometres out of Porreres on the road to Campos and then signposted 2km down a side road, the tastefully restored Son Mercadal is a 19th-century country estate that makes a perfect rural halt. Surrounded by 7 hectares of land, Mercadal offers a truly homely atmosphere and plenty of tranquility.

IBIZA (EIVISSA)

Ibiza is the most extreme of the islands, in landscape and visitors.

The Greeks called Ibiza and Formentera the *Islas Pitiusas* (Islands of Pine Trees). The landscape is harsh and rocky, and the island receives little rainfall. Alongside the hardy pines, the most common crops are olives, figs and almonds. Perhaps surprisingly, about half the island (especially the fairly unspoilt northeast) remains covered by thick woods. Indeed, driving around the back roads of the north is to plunge into a rural idyll – not what one associates with Ibiza at all!

A rugged coastline is interspersed with dozens of sandy beaches, most consumed by intensive tourist developments. A few out-of-the-way beaches remain, but in summer you won't be doing much solitary swimming.

Ibiza's beaches and laid-back attitude first became a major drawcard in the flower-power heyday of the 1960s – while North America's hippies were 'California dreaming', their European counterparts were heading here to tune in, turn on and drop out. It's hard to believe that in 1956 the island boasted only 12 cars!

Initially for the hip and fashionable, Ibiza (a mixed World-Heritage site because of Ibiza city's architecture and the island's rich sealife) soon latched on to the money-spinner of bulk tourism and started shipping in summer sun-seekers by the thousand. Today the island populace of 111,100 watches on as millions (more than four million passengers are registered annually through the airport alone) of hippies, fashion victims, nudists, clubbers and package tourists pour through S'Illa Blanca (the White Island) each year.

Birthplace of the rave, Ibiza is home to some of Spain's most (in)famous clubs. The outrageous summer scene is complemented by a diverse collection of bars.

IBIZA'S TOP FIVE BEACHES

- Cala Benirràs (p654)
- Cala Mastella (p653)
- Cala de Boix (p653)
- Cala Xarraca (p654)
- Cala Codolar (p656)

Away from the bars are the woods, coastal walking trails and quiet (if not deserted) beaches that allow you to elude Ministry of Sound-style madness. Places such as Santa Eulària d'es Riu and the small resorts and coves of the northeast are ideal for family holidays.

Interesting websites include www.ibiza.holidays.com, www.ibiza-spotlight.com and www.ecoibiza.com.

Around about 20 beautiful and comfortable *hoteles rurales* (rural hotels) in renovated country houses are scattered about the island's north.

Getting Around

BUS

Four bus companies operate to different parts of the island and fares don't exceed €2.70 for the longest journey. You can get hold of a copy of *Horario y Líneas de Autobuses* (the bus timetable) from tourist offices or check out the website, www.ibizabus.com.

Autobuses Empresas HF Vilas (☎ 971 30 19 16) operates from Ibiza City to Santa Eulària d'es Riu, Es Canar, Cala Sant Vicent, Portinatx,

and other eastern and northern beaches. It also does the Santa Eulària d'es Riu-Sant Antoni de Portmany run.

Autobuses San Antonio (☎ 971 34 05 10) runs bus services from Ibiza City to Sant Antoni de Portmany.

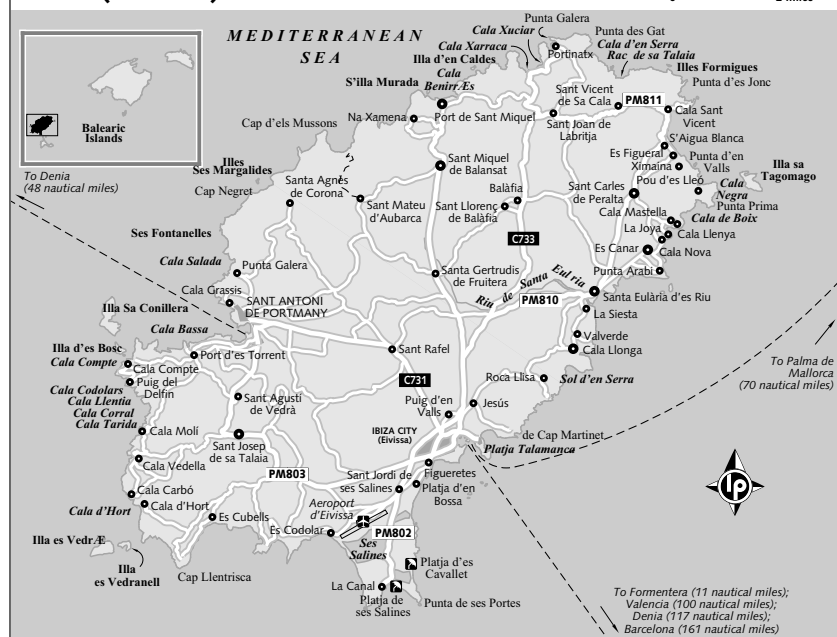
Autobuses Voramar El Gaucho (☎ 971 34 03 82) operates from Ibiza City to the airport, Sant Jordi de ses Salines, Platja d'en Bossa, Cala Llonga and Santa Eulària d'es Riu.

Autocares Lucas Costa (☎ 971 31 27 55) runs from Ibiza City to Santa Gertrudis de Fruitera, Sant Mateu, Sant Miquel de Balansat and Port de Sant Miquel.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The big boys have car-hire desks at the airport and in Ibiza City, but local (and often cheaper) outfits are scattered around the island. Those in Ibiza City include **Valentin** (☎ 971 31 08 22; Avinguda de Bartomeu Vicent Ramón 19) and **BK** (☎ 971 19 28 74; Carrer de Felipe II). The latter will hire a Fiat Panda for €95 or a Seat Ibiza for €110 for three days all-inclusive. **Pepecar** (www.pepecar.com) has a branch near the airport (Aeroport d'Eivissa).

IBIZA (EIVISSA)



HIGHWAYS & GREEN CARDS

The right-wing Partido Popular, in power in the Balearic Islands since 2003, has long had a reputation as *desarrollista* (fomenting development) and is playing true to form with massive construction around the islands and a road-building programme that includes 20km of four-lane motorways between Ibiza's airport, the capital and Sant Antoni. This latter project went ahead in 2006 despite protests from ecologists and islanders. To be fair, the old road had long been a summer traffic hazard and often fatal. The PP government put on its ecology hat when it introduced the Targeta Verda (Green Card) in 2005. Anyone can buy the card (€10) from places like hotels. It entitles holders to various discounts and proceeds go to environmental protection and sustainable projects. So far, however, few punters have taken up the offer.

IBIZA CITY (EIVISSA)

pop 42,800

Set on a protected harbour on the southeast coast, Ibiza's capital is a vivacious, enchanting town with a captivating old quarter and numerous attractions. It's also a focal point for some of the island's best nightlife and the most diverse range of cafés and restaurants.

Orientation

The old walled town, D'Alt Vila, crowns a hilltop overlooking all. Between D'Alt Vila and the harbour lies Sa Penya, a jumble of narrow streets and lanes lined with whitewashed shops, bars and restaurants.

The broad Passeig de Vara de Rey is a favourite spot for the traditional sunset promenade. It runs westward from Sa Penya to Avinguda d'Espanya, which in turn takes you out of the city towards the airport, 7km southwest. The new town spreads west of the old centre.

Information

EMERGENCY

Polícia Nacional (Avinguda de la Pau s/n)

INTERNET ACCESS

Chill Internet Café (☎ 971 39 97 36; Via Púnica 49; per hr €3; ☎ 8.30am-10pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5.30pm Sat & Sun) Check your email with relaxing chill-out sounds over a coffee. Wi-fi costs €2 an hour.

Surf@Net (☎ 971 19 49 20; Carrer de Riambau 8; per hr €3.60; ☎ 10am-11pm)

INTERNET RESOURCES

www.eivissa.org Ibiza city's town hall website.

www.eivissaweb.com Multilingual Ibiza search engine.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Farmacia Juan Turviñas (Carrer d'Antoni Palau 1; ☎ 24hr)

Hospital Can Misses (☎ 971 39 70 00; Barri Can Misses)

POST

Post office (Avinguda d'Isidor Macabich 67; ☎ 8.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2pm Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Airport tourist office (☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 9am-2.30pm Sun)

Tourist office (☎ 971 19 19 51; www.cief.es; Passeig des Moll; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-7.30pm Sat Jun-mid-Oct; 9.30am-1.30pm & 5-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-1pm Sat Apr-May & mid-late Oct; 8.30am-3pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-1pm Sat Nov-Mar)

Sights & Activities

SA PENYA

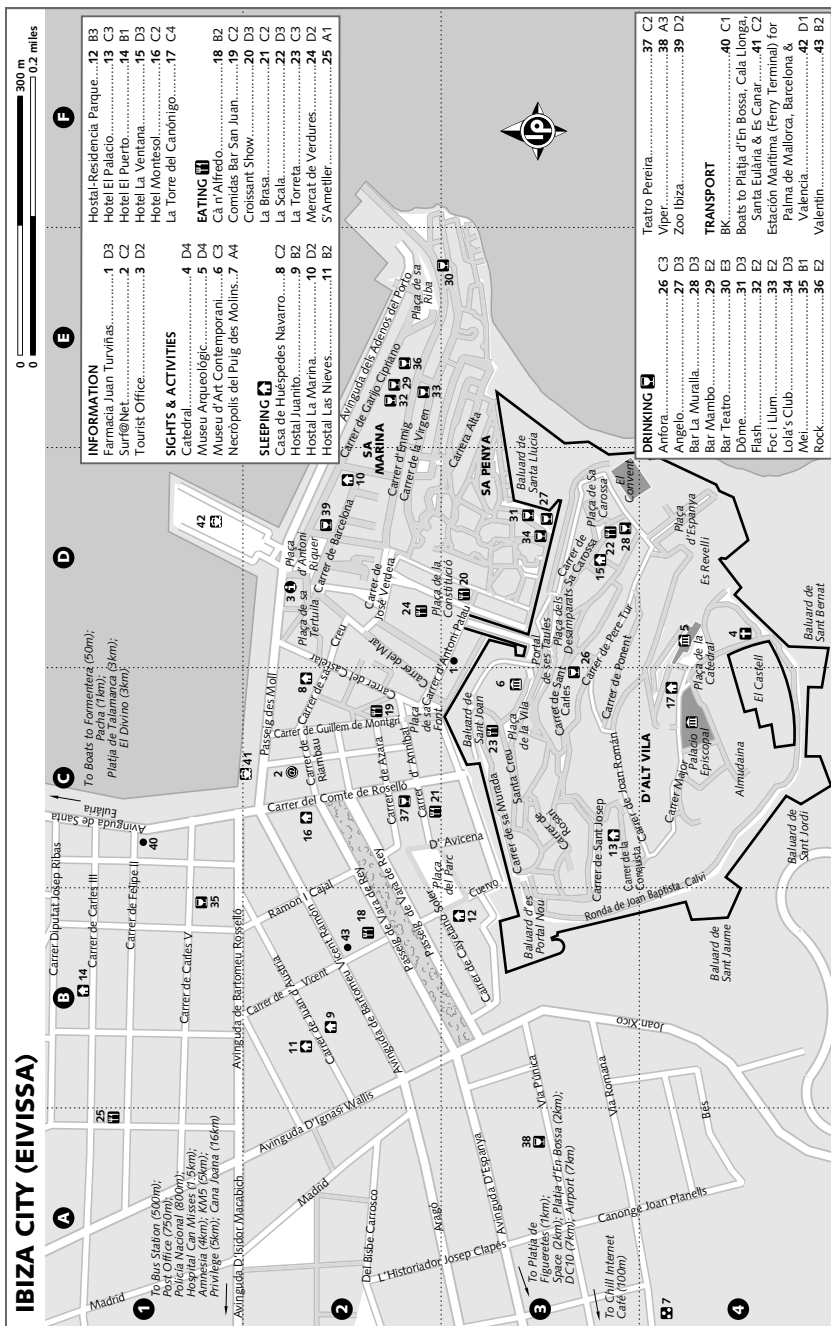
There's always something going on portside. People-watchers will be right at home – this pocket must have one of the highest concentrations of exhibitionists and weirdos in Spain.

Sa Penya is crammed with funky and trashy **clothing boutiques**, and the intense competition between the locally made gear and the imports keeps a lid on prices. The so-called **hippy markets**, street stalls along Carrer d'Enmig and the adjoining streets, sell everything under the sun.

D'ALT VILA & AROUND

From Sa Penya wander up into D'Alt Vila, the old walled town (and Unesco World Heritage site since 1999). The Romans were the first to fortify this hilltop, but the existing walls were raised by Felipe II in the 16th century to protect against invasion by French and Turkish forces.

A ramp leads from Plaça de sa Font in Sa Penya up to the **Portal de ses Taules** gateway, the main entrance. Above it hangs a commemorative plaque bearing Felipe II's coat of arms and an inscription recording the 1585 completion date of the fortification – seven artillery bastions joined by thick protective walls up to 22m in height.



Inside spreads **Plaça de la Vila**, with its up-market restaurants, galleries and shops. Up behind the plaza you can walk along the top of the walls and enjoy exhilarating views.

Nearby, the **Museu d'Art Contemporani** (☎ 971 30 27 23; Ronda de Narcís Puget s/n; adult/student & senior €1.20/free; ☎ 10am-1.30pm & 5-8pm Tue-Fri, 10am-1.30pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-1.30pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar) is in an 18th-century powder store and armoury that hosts contemporary art exhibitions.

A steep and well-worn route leads from **Plaça de la Vila** along narrow streets to the **catedral**, which overlooks all. It elegantly combines several styles: the original 14th-century structure is Catalan Gothic but the sacristy was added in 1592 and a major baroque renovation took place in the 18th century.

Adjoining the cathedral, the **Museu Arqueològic** (☎ 971 30 17 71; Plaça de la Catedral 3; adult/student/child & senior €2.40/1.30/free; ☎ 9am-3pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-Mar, 10am-2pm & 6-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Apr-Sep) has a collection of ancient relics, mainly from the Phoenician, Carthaginian and Roman periods.

The **Necropolis del Puig des Molins** (Via Romana 31; admission free; ☎ 10am-2pm & 6-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun mid-Mar-mid-Oct; 9am-3pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun mid-Oct-mid-Mar) is an ancient burial ground dating from Phoenician times (as long ago as the 7th century BC), on an olive-tree dotted *puig* (hill). Follow the path around and peer into the north-south oriented burial caverns cut deep into the hill. You can descend into one interlocking series of these *hypogea* (burial caverns).

BEACHES

The closest beach to Ibiza City is **Platja de Figueretes**, about 20 minutes' walk southwest of Sa Penya. In the next bay around to the northeast of Sa Penya is **Platja de Talamanca**. These beaches are all right for a quick dip, although if you have the time, head for **Ses Salines** (p656).

Sleeping

Start your hotel search in Ibiza online at www.ibzahotelsguide.com. The high season is generally mid-June to mid-September, although some places make August ultrahigh. Prices outside this period can fall by a third or more, but even so lodgings here come at a steep price.

BUDGET

Casa de Huéspedes Navarro (☎ 971 31 07 71; Carrer de sa Creu 20; s/d €28/55) Right in the thick of things, this simple place has 10 rooms at the top of

a long flight of stairs. The front rooms have harbour views, the interior rooms are quite dark (but cool in summer) and there's a sunny rooftop terrace.

Hostal Las Nieves (☎ 971 19 03 19; Carrer de Juan de Austria 18; s/d €30/40) One of several simple *hostales* in the El Pratet area, this place offers fairly Spartan rooms but with the advantage, in some cases, of balconies overlooking the animated street. It also runs Hostal Juanito, across the road at No 19 and sans balconies.

MIDRANGE

Hostal La Marina (☎ 971 31 01 72; www.hostal-lamarina.com; Carrer de Barcelona 7; s €62, d €77-150; ☎) Looking onto the waterfront and Carrer de Barcelona, this mid-19th-century building has all sorts of brightly coloured rooms. A handful of singles look onto the street, but you can choose from simple doubles to great attics with terraces and panoramic port and/or town views. It has a couple of other simpler lodging options in the same street.

Hostal-Residencia Parque (☎ 971 30 13 58; Carrer de Vicent Cuervo 3; s with shared bathroom €50, d with private bathroom €100) The best doubles here overlook pleasant Plaça del Parc from above the eponymous café. Doubles are comfortable but singles are predictably pokey.

Hotel Montesol (☎ 971 31 01 61; www.hotelmontesol.com; Passeig de Vara de Rey 2; s/d to €60/106; ☎) The doubles in this amiable, well-placed and grand-looking hotel are also comfortable, if uninspiring, and come with views of the harbour or the old town. The singles are small and nothing special. Most rooms are subject to street noise.

Hotel El Puerto (☎ 971 31 38 12; www.ibizaelpuerto.com; Carrer de Carles III 24; s/d €99.95/173.35; ☎) This place offers more than 90 rooms and a series of apartments (up to €230.25 for four people) just outside the old town and handy for the Formentera ferry. The pool is a big plus.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hotel La Ventana (☎ 971 39 08 57; www.laventanaibiza.com; Carrer de Sa Carossa 13; d from €176; ☎) Just wander into this charming 15th-century mansion in the old town, set on a little tree-shaded square. Some rooms come with stylish four-poster beds and mosquito nets, and the rooftop terrace, gardens and restaurant are added reasons to choose this spot.

TOP END

La Torre del Canónigo (☎ 971 30 38 84; www.elcanonigo.com; Carrer Major 8; apt €210-480; ☞ Apr-Dec; ☞ ☞) This 14th-century tower houses 10 gorgeous 'apartments' (doubles and suites), all of different size and character. Four-poster beds, lots of timber and classic comfort are the hallmarks of this unique location. Prices almost halve in the low season.

Hotel El Palacio (☎ 971 30 14 78; www.elpalacio.com; Carrer de la Conquesta 2; r from €310-428; ☞ Easter-Oct; ☞ ☞) The 'Hotel of the Movie Stars' is something of a private movie museum, with a collection of signed photos, original posters and film awards. Seven rooms each pay homage to a different Hollywood star (from Bogart to Monroe).

Eating

Croissant Show (☎ 971 31 76 65; Plaça de la Constitució s/n; ☞ 6am-11pm) Opposite the food market, this is where *everyone* goes for an impressive range of pastries and other breakfast, post-partying goodies. It is quite a scene all on its own.

Comidas Bar San Juan (☎ 971 31 16 03; Carrer de Guillem de Montgri 8; meals €15-20; ☞ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) A family-run operation with two small dining rooms, this simple eatery offers outstanding value, with fish dishes for around €10 and many small mains for €6 or less.

S'Ametller (☎ 971 31 17 80; Carrer de Pere Francès 12; meals €20-30; ☞ lunch Mon-Thu, lunch & dinner Fri & Sat) 'The Almond Tree', resting uneasily next door to a cheap Chinese eatery, offers local cooking with fresh market produce. On offer are a couple of tasting menus, at €32 and €39.50.

La Brasa (☎ 971 30 12 02; Carrer de Pere Sala 3; meals €35-40) Clouds of bougainvillea tumble about the entrance and courtyard of La Brasa. Sit down to well-prepared food in the leafy garden.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Ca' n'Alfredo (☎ 971 31 12 74; Passeig de Vara de Rey 16; meals €30; ☞ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) Locals have been flocking to Alfredo's place since 1934 for a good square meal. And they still do. Don't let appearances deceive. This is no new-wave Thai-fusion experience, but a great place for the freshest of seafood and other local cuisine that's so good it's essential to book to get a seat here in the evening.

La Scala (☎ 971 30 03 83; Plaça de sa Carrossa 6; meals €35-40; dinner Wed-Mon) This candlelit place serves international cuisine with a central European bent, and a highlight is the meat dishes. There's a pretty open-air terrace and the clientele is predominantly, but not exclusively, gay.

La Torreta (☎ 971 30 04 11; Plaça de la Vila 10; meals €35; dinner Easter-Oct) Opt for al fresco dining on local fish and other Mediterranean dishes or head inside – groups should try for the big table set on a separate lower level and surrounded by the inside of the massive city walls. The seafood *canelones de marisco* are melt-in-the-mouth.

Canà Joana (☎ 971 80 01 58; Km10; meals €50; ☞ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun Feb-May, dinner Mon-Sat Jun-Oct) Two kilometres shy of Sant Josep on the road north out of Ibiza City, a sign points you 500m to the right into a country garden restaurant with elegant local and Med cooking.

Mercat de Verdurs (Plaça de la Constitució; ☞ 7am-7pm Mon-Sat) Buy fresh fruit and vegies from this open-air market, opposite the entrance to D'Alt Vila.

Drinking & Entertainment

Sa Penya is the nightlife centre. Dozens of bars keep the port area jumping from around sunset until the early hours. After they wind down, you can continue at one of the island's world-famous discos.

BARS

Dôme (Via de Alfonso XII 5) Deep inside Sa Penya, this is a largely, but not exclusively, gay haven. Above all, it is glam.

Lola's Club (Via de Alfonso XII 10) Anyone who remembers Ibiza in the '80s will have fond memories of Lola's Club, one of the first on the island. It's a hip miniclub (with a gay leaning).

Teatro Pereira (☎ 971 19 14 68; Carrer del Comte de Rosselló 3) Away from the waterfront hub-bub, this is a lively bar, packed most nights with a more eclectic crowd than the standard preclubbing bunch. It often has live music sessions. Out back is the much abandoned 1893 theatre. For years there has been talk of restoring it. As island heritage it can't be torn down, but owners and council have yet to find a formula for renovation.

KM5 (☎ 971 39 63 49; www.km5-lounge.com; Carretera de San Jos 5-6; ☞ 8pm-4am May-Sep) The bar named after its highway location is where you go to

glam it up. Head out of town towards Sant Josep and dance in the gardens as you gear up for the clubs.

Viper (☎ 971 30 45 69; Via Púnica 12; ☞ 8pm-4am Mon-Sat) This is a classy cocktail bar where you can opt for French cuisine too.

Carrer de Barcelona, a pedestrian-only street that runs parallel with the harbour, is lined with high-energy bars. Most have tall tables and stools out on the street, and all pump out loud music. Most places employ slick and persuasive touts to 'invite' passers-by to join them for a drink, sometimes with the lure of discounted passes to the clubs. A popular one is **Zoo Ibiza** (www.zooibiza.com; Plaça d'Antoni Riquer).

These bars open nightly from early evening until 3am to 4am, roughly May to September. Outside that it's hit-and-miss and depends largely on how much (if any) business there is.

Less in your face are the bars further east along Carrer de Garijo Cipriano, including **Bar Mambo** (☎ 971 31 21 60; Carrer de Garijo Cipriano 10), **Flash** (Carrer de Garijo Cipriano 9) and **Rock** (Carrer de Garijo Cipriano 13).

Two other, somewhat quieter, areas to look for are Plaça des Parc and the El Pratet set of parallel streets around Carrer de Felip II. **Mei** (☎ 699 007067; Carrer de Carles V 11; ☞ Thu-Sat) is one of the coolest.

CLUBS

In summer (late May to the end of September) the island is a continuous party from sunset to sunrise and back again. The island's entrepreneurs have built an amazing collection of clubs – huge, throbbing temples to which thousands of disciples flock nightly to pay homage to the gods of hedonism.

The major clubs operate nightly from around 1am to 7am (June to September). Each has something different to offer. Theme nights, fancy-dress parties and foam parties (where you are half-drowned in the stuff while you dance) are regular features. Some places go a step or two further, with go-go girls (and boys), striptease acts and even live sex as a climax (ahem) to the evening (or morning).

Entertainment Ibiza style doesn't come cheaply: most places charge around €50 to €60 admission (and then sting you for drinks). If you hang out around the right bars in Sa Penya, you might score a flier that entitles you to discounted admission handed out by sometimes scantily clad club promoters and touts – if they think you've got the look.

The big names are listed below.

Pacha (www.pacha.com; ☞ nightly Jun-Sep, Fri & Sat Oct-May) In business on the northern side of Ibiza City's port since 1973 (nowadays with branches from New York to Moscow) and containing 15 bars (!).

Privilege (☎ 971 19 81 60) Five kilometres out of Ibiza City on the road to Sant Rafel, this club claims to be the world's largest (with a mere 20 bars and a pool inside, and capacity for up to 10,000 gyrating clubbers).

Amnesia (☎ 971 19 80 41; www.amnesia.es) Four kilometres out on the road to Sant Rafel with a sound system that seems to give your body a sound massage.

Es Paradis (☎ 971 34 66 00; www.esparadis.com; Carrer de Salvador Espriu 2, Sant Antoni) This club boasts an equally amazing sound system, fountains and outdoor feel (there's no roof, but then in summer it doesn't rain anyway).

Eden (☎ 971 80 32 40; www.edenibiza.com) Es Paradis' direct competition across the road has room for about 5000.

El Divino (☎ 971 31 83 38; www.eldivino-ibiza.com) This club is across the water from the Ibiza town centre (it organises boats and will refund taxis for groups of three or more).

DC10 (☎ 971 19 80 86; www.circolocoibiza.com; Carretera de las Salinas, Km7) Out towards the airport and beaches.

Space (☎ 971 39 67 93; www.space-ibiza.es) One of the biggest of them all, south of Ibiza City in Platja d'en Bossa and a specialist in all-day dancing (22 hours a day, with as many as 40 DJs and up to 12,000 clubbers throughout the day and night!). Regular daytime boats make the trip between Platja d'En Bossa and Ibiza City (€6 return) from May to mid-October.

Different DJ teams make the rounds of the big clubs. One of the best known in Ibiza, **Manumission** (www.manumission.com), is known for its sexy acts and has a popular morning slot at least one day a week at Space.

A good website that keeps track of all the party dates is **Ibiza Spotlight** (www.ibiza-spotlight.com). Another website with info is www.disco.tecasdeibiza.com.

During summer (June to September), Ibiza's **Discobus** (☎ 971 31 34 47) operates nightly from midnight until 6am, doing circuits between the major discos, bars and hotels in Ibiza City, Platja d'en Bossa, Sant Rafel, Santa Eulària d'es Riu (and an extension to Es Canar) and Sant Antoni.

GAY BARS & CLUBS

The gay scene is based towards the eastern end of Sa Penya, particularly along the far end of Carrer de la Virgen. Many of the big clubs have special gay nights. Keep a look out for what's going on, as the scene changes a lot from year to year. For more on the latest in gay Ibiza check out www.ibigay.net.

Bar Teatro (www.barteatro.com; Carrer de la Virgen 83) This place has sea views from inside.

Angelo (Carrer de Santa Lucía 21) In the shadow of the old city walls, this is a busy gay bar with several levels.

Bar La Muralla (☎ 971 30 18 82; Carrer de Sa Carossa 3; ☎ 11pm-4am) A gay sex club with dark room, labyrinth and sling cage.

Labry i Llum (☎ 971 19 33 16; Carrer de la Virgen 55) This venue has a terrace, videos and a steamy darkroom.

Anfora (Carrer de Sant Carles 7; ☎ 10pm-4am) Seemingly dug out of walls of rock, this is a favourite gay dance haunt high up D'Alt Vila. Heteros are welcome to hang about too. From 1.30am you pay €12 admission (includes first drink).

Getting There & Away

Ibiza's airport (Aeroport d'Eivissa) is 7km southwest of the capital and receives direct flights from various mainland Spanish cities as well as London and a host of European centres.

Boats for Formentera leave from a separate terminal 300m north of the centre. For information on other inter-island ferries, see Getting There & Around (p629).

Cruceros Santa Eulalia (☎ 971 33 22 52) runs boats to Cala Llonga, Santa Eulària d'es Riu and Es Canar up to four times daily (€13 return) from May to mid-October.

Buses to other parts of the island depart from a series of stops along Avinguda d'Isidoro Macabich (the western continuation of Avinguda de Bartomeu Rosselló). Tickets can be bought from the bus station booths on the same street or on the buses.

For information on car hire, see p646.

Getting Around

Buses between the airport and the central port area operate hourly between 7.30am and 11.35pm (€1.30, 15 minutes). From April to October they are half-hourly (6.50am to 11.50pm). A taxi from the airport costs around €12 to €14. You can call a **taxi** (☎ 971 39 83 40, 971 30 66 02).

EAST COAST

A busy highway (C733) speeds you north out of Ibiza City towards Santa Eulària d'es Riu on the east coast. Alternatively, you could take the slower but more scenic coastal road via Cala Llonga – take the turn-off to Jesús a couple of kilometres northwest of Ibiza City. This route winds through low hills and olive groves, with detours along the way to several beaches, including the pleasant **Sol d'en Serra**.

Cala Llonga is set on an attractive bay with high rocky cliffs sheltering a lovely sandy beach, but the town itself has many high-rise hotels.

Santa Eulària d'es Riu

pop 6400

Ibiza's third-largest town, Santa Eulària d'es Riu is a bustling and agreeable place with reasonable beaches, a large harbour and plenty of 20th-century tourist-resort architecture.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

The main highway, known as Carrer de Sant Jaume as it passes through town, is a hectic traffic artery lined with souvenir shops.

The **tourist office** (☎ 971 33 07 28; Carrer de Marià Riquer Wallis 4; ☎ 9.30am-1.30pm & 5-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1pm Sat) is just off the highway.

SLEEPING

Modern hotels and apartments crowd the Santa Eulària beachfront, but you will find a cluster of affordable *hostales* a couple of blocks inland.

Hostal-Residencia Sa Rota (☎ 971 33 00 22; Carrer de Sant Vicent 59; s/d €40/60) A good-value *hostal*, this place features bright generous rooms (the doubles in particular) with modern bath or shower. The downstairs café has a nice outdoor extension with a pergola

Ca's Català (☎ 971 33 10 06; www.cascatala.com; Carrer del Sol s/n; s €48.15, d €74.90-112.35; ☎) A British-run place with 12 rooms (with ceiling fans and all nonsmoking), this place is a find. It has the feel of a private villa, with colourful flowerpots, rooms overlooking a garden courtyard and a swimming pool (with bar).

EATING

Most of the restaurants and cafés along the beachfront are tacky and overpriced. Four blocks back, there are plenty of decent eateries along Carrer de Sant Vicent.

Restaurante es Rickshaw (☎ 971 33 01 23; Carrer de Sant Vicent 49; meals €35-40) If the series of generally cheap and cheerful Spanish restaurants on this strip doesn't grab you, pop into this groovy, self-styled 'fusion lounge', where you can start with a Tom Ka soup (€5) and follow with Thai curry and fresh squid.

El Naranja (☎ 971 33 03 24; Carrer de Sant Josep 31; meals €35; ☎ dinner Tue-Sun) Enjoy well-prepared seafood meals in a shady garden at 'The Orange', a tranquil gourmet escape. Carpaccios of various kinds of meat are a house specialty.

ENTERTAINMENT

Guaraná (www.guaranaibiza.com; Passeig Marítim; ☎ 1am-6am Jun-Sep) Right by the town's marina, this is a cool club away from the Ibiza-Sant Rafel-Sant Antoni circuit, with occasionally mellow tones, as well as live jazz and blues on some nights. Sunday in particular is a good live music night.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Regular buses (every 30 to 60 minutes) connect Santa Eulària's **bus stop** (Carrer de sa Església) with Ibiza City, Sant Antoni and the northern beaches.

Santa Eulària d'es Riu to S'Aigua Blanca

Northwest of Santa Eulària d'es Riu is the resort town of **Es Canar**, which is heavily developed and probably best avoided, although a couple of camping grounds are located nearby.

Further north on the main road is the sleepy village of **Sant Carles de Peralta**. Just outside the village, at Km12 on the road to Santa Eulària, is the **Las Dalias** (☎ 8pm-1.30am Mon Jun-Sep) night market.

Side roads lead off to the pleasant **Cala Llenya** and the serene **Cala Mastella** beaches. Boats run to the former from Santa Eulària five times daily (€8 return) from June to September. At the latter you could walk around the rocks from the left (northern) end of the pretty beach to reach **Es Bigote** (meals €20; ☎ 2pm lunch May-Sep). Offering fish caught that morning cooked up with herbs and vegetables in a huge vat, this eatery is known far and wide. You need to turn up here in person the day before to book a spot. If you miss out, **Sa Seni** (paella €40), 100m behind Cala Mastella, will serve up a fresh paella for two. Hours are arbitrary and service can be slow, but the product is worth waiting for.

The road to Cala Mastella continues on a couple of kilometres up to **Cala de Boix**, the only true black-sand beach in the Balearic Islands. Alternatively, there is another turn-off to Cala de Boix about 1km after Sant Carles.

Back on the main road, the next turn-off leads to the resort area of **Es Figueras**. A little further on a handwritten sign marks the turn-off to the lovely beaches of **S'Aigua Blanca**. Being a bit out of the way and little developed, these beaches are popular with Ibiza's 'young and restless' crowd, most of whom tend to forget to put on their swimsuits. A couple of shacks act as seaside daytime bars.

SLEEPING & EATING

Camping Cala Nova (☎ 971 33 17 74; www.campingcalanova.com; sites per 2 people, tent & car €24.20) Just back from the Cala Nova beach and about 1km north of Es Canar, this is the best of the camping grounds here. There is a play area for the kids and tennis courts for the grown-ups.

Hostal Cala Boix (☎ 971 33 52 24; www.hostalcalaboix.com; r per person with breakfast €30; ☎) Set uphill and back from the beach, this solitary place could not be further from Ibiza madness. All rooms have bathrooms and some have sea views. It has a restaurant, and there is another one across the road. By the beach you'll find a little daytime bar. Half board is a good deal at €41 each.

Can Curreu (☎ 971 33 52 80; www.cancurreu.com; Carretera de Sant Carles Km12; d from €256.80; ☎) This Ibizan farmstead lies 1.5km south of Sant Carles, just off the main road from Santa Eulària. Rooms are tastefully decorated and furnished, and the suites are a luxury home in the country, with such extras as CD player, Jacuzzi and fireplace (for the winter). The restaurant is excellent, and you can use a modest gym and go horse riding.

Bar Anita (☎ 971 33 50 90; Sant Carles de Peralta; meals €25) A timeless tavern opposite the village church, this restaurant and bar has been attracting all sorts from around the island for decades. They come for pizza, pasta or slabs of *entrecote con salsa de pimienta* (entrecote in a pepper sauce; €14.50), or simply to drink and chat.

Cala Sant Vicent

The package-tour resort of Cala Sant Vicent is built around the shores of a protected bay on the northeast coast, a long stretch of sandy beach backed by a string of modern midrise

hotels. Sitting out to sea is Illa sa Tagomago, an uninhabited island. Cala Sant Vicent is a pleasant place for a swim.

NORTH COAST & INTERIOR

This northern part of Ibiza contains some of the island's most attractive landscapes. If you need a break from the beaches, the area's coastal hills and inland mountains are popular with bushwalkers and cyclists.

Cala Sant Vicent to Portinatx

The main road (PM811) heads west from Cala Sant Vicent, passing by the unremarkable village of **Sant Vicent de Sa Cala** before hitting the main north-south highway. From here you can head south to Ibiza City or north to Portinatx.

Portinatx

Portinatx is the north coast's major tourist resort, with phalanxes of hotels around its three adjoining beaches – S'Arenal Petit, S'Arenal Gran and Platja Es Port. The beaches themselves are beautiful but can get crowded.

Cala Xarraca

This beach, just west of Portinatx, is set in a picturesque, partly protected bay with a rocky shoreline and a dark-sand beach. Development is limited to a solitary bar-restaurant and a couple of private houses.

Sant Miquel de Balansat & Port de Sant Miquel

One of the largest inland towns, Sant Miquel is overlooked by a boxlike 14th-century church that is worth the climb. Inside, the restored early 17th-century frescoes in the Capella de Benirràs are worth a look if you get lucky and the church is open. In the pretty patio, demonstrations of traditional island dances are held at 6pm on Thursdays. Several kilometres north, the fine beaches of Port de Sant Miquel are dominated by the huge **Hotel Club San Miguel**.

A turn-off to the right just before you enter town, coming from the south, takes you around a headland to the entrance to the **Cova de Can Marçà** (☎ 971 33 47 76; adult/child €6/4; ☎ 10.30am-7.30pm), a collection of underground caverns spectacularly lit by coloured lights. Tours in various languages take around 30 to 40 minutes.

Beyond the caves, an unsealed road continues 4km around the coast to the unspoiled

bay of **Cala Benirràs**. A sealed road to Cala Benirràs leads off the Sant Joan-Sant Miquel road, midway between the towns. High, forested cliffs and a couple of bar-restaurants back the beach. On Sunday at sunset you may well encounter groups of hippies with bongos banging out a greeting to the sunset, something they have been doing for decades.

The splendid country mansion of **Can Planells** (☎ 971 33 49 24; www.canplanells.com; Carrer de Venda Rubió 2; d €173.35-288.90; ☎ ☎ P), just 1.5km outside Sant Miquel on the road to Sant Mateu d'Aubarca, oozes a relaxed rural luxury in its handful of tastefully arranged doubles and suites. The best suites have private terraces, and the place is set amid delightful gardens and fruit-tree groves.

The UK-based **Ibiza Yoga** (☎ UK 020-7419 0999; Ibiza 971 33 33 18; www.ibizayoga.com; ☎ ☎) occupies three villas and a series of apartments a few hundred metres back from the beach at Cala Benirràs and offers week-long, all-inclusive yoga retreats. Villa Palmas is the nicer of the villas, with a range of rooms in cool country fashion. Prices in that villa range from UK£600 to UK£800 a week per person, which includes six yoga classes for beginners and above.

About 3km west of Port de Sant Miquel is Ibiza's famous cliff-top hotel **Hacienda Na Xamena** (☎ 971 33 45 00; www.hotelhacienda-ibiza.com; d from €406; ☎ ☎ P). If you want to rub shoulders with the rich and famous, this is the place to stay. Approaching it, the place seems a discreetly low slung country estate, but it actually has six levels built into the steep cliff facing out to sea. Rooms are furnished in old-fashioned style and the views are... words fail us.

Sant Llorenç de Balàfia

This quiet hamlet is dominated by a white Ibizan fortress church dating to the 18th century, when attacks by Moorish pirates were the scourge of the island. If it's open, climb to the roof for wonderful views. One kilometre northeast on a dirt track is the tiny, onetime fortified, hamlet of Balàfia, with two towers, a feast of flowers and lots of *privado* signs around the half-dozen houses.

Head 500m on to the C733 road and you reach the shady open-air restaurant of **Cana Pepeta** (☎ 971 32 50 23; Km15.4; meals €20-25; ☎ Wed-Mon), where the *frito de pulpo* (a baked dish of octopus, potatoes, paprika and herbs) is unique and delicious.

Santa Gertrudis de Fruitera

If you blinked at the wrong time you could easily miss tiny Santa Gertrudis, south of Sant Miquel. Clustered around the central Plaça de l'Església you'll find an unusual collection of **art-and-craft galleries** and antique and bric-a-brac shops, plus several good bars, among which the perennial favourite is **Bar Costa** (11 Plaça de l'Església), with art on the walls and somewhat erratic opening times. A cut above for foodies is **La Plaza** (☎ 971 19 70 75; Plaça de l'Església; meals €40; ☎ dinner), which serves elegant French and Mediterranean dishes. About 3km south-east of Santa Gertrudis, on the C733, is one of the island's cool, Asian-style restaurant-cum-bar-cum-lounge scenes, **Bambuddha Grove** (☎ 971 19 75 10; www.bambuddha.com; Km8.5; meals €35; ☎ 8pm-4am). The ambience is great, but the food average and service slow.

Sant Rafel

pop 1780

Midway between Ibiza City and Sant Antoni de Portmany, Sant Rafel is internationally known as the nearest geographical point to two of Ibiza's biggest and best discos, Privilege (p651) and Amnesia (p651). By day, the town is known as a craft centre and has a pretty good collection of ceramics workshops, sculpture galleries, shops and markets.

WEST COAST

Sant Antoni de Portmany

pop 18,370

Sant Antoni (San Antonio in Spanish), widely known as 'San An', is big and about as Spanish as bangers and mash. The locals joke that even football hooligans need holidays, and somehow they seem to end up in San An. It's the

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

EI Ayoun (☎ 971 19 83 35; Carrer d'Isidor Macabich s/n, Sant Rafel; meals €30-40; ☎ 8pm-4am) When clubbers are ready to take a breather, some like to chill and feed at this relaxed Moroccan restaurant. The Middle Eastern food is just the beginning (kitchen closes around midnight). The huge garden terrace is another big attraction, and a (relatively) subdued party atmosphere builds in the restaurant's Bar Privado towards the end of the evening.

perfect destination if you've come in search of booze-ups, brawls and hangovers.

Most of the town is on the tacky side, but if you head for the small rock-and-sand strip on the north shore, you can join hundreds of others for sunset drinks at a string of a half-dozen cool bars, the best known of which is **Café del Mar** (☎ 971 34 25 16; Carrer de Vara del Rey s/n; ☎ 5pm-4am). Others include **Café Mambo** (☎ 971 34 66 38; Carrer de Vara del Rey 56; ☎ 2pm-4am), which is a kick-off point for a lot of Pacha's (p651) pre-club night shenanigans; and **Savannah Café** (☎ 971 34 80 31; Carrer del General Balanzat 38; ☎ 2pm-4am). The latter plays chill-out music as you munch on Tex Mex and sip sangria. After the sun goes down all of them turn up the rhythmic heat and pound on until 4am, from about June to October. If nothing else, it can be said with confidence that the nightlife here is wild.

The town is also home to the club **Es Paradis** (☎ 971 34 66 00; www.esparadis.com), just out of the town centre on the coast road heading west (also see p651).

Not far north of Sant Antoni are several pleasant and undeveloped beaches, such as **Cala Salada**, a wide bay with sandy shores backed by a pine forest. From here, a rough track continues further north to the beach at **Ses Fontanelles**. Closer to Sant Antoni are the cosy little beaches of **Cala Gració** and **Cala Gracioneta**, separated by a small rocky promontory.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel Pikes (☎ 971 34 22 22; www.pikeshotel.com; Camí de sa Vorerera Km12; d from €246; ☎ ☎ P) This is an extraordinary little hotel south of Sant Antoni. It offers a range of doubles and suites (all with varying themes, names like Honeysuckle and Sunset, and some with prices reaching for the stars). The stone country mansion has a gym, leafy garden with bar and a translucent pool. The hotel's bar sessions (finishing as late as 2am) are also renowned.

Es Rebot de Ca'n Prats (☎ 971 34 62 52; Carrer de Cervantes 4; meals €15-20; ☎ Wed-Mon) A little worn, but a good spot for decently prepared fish and other local dishes (try the *cazuela de pescado*, fish casserole; €18), this is one of the few authentic Ibiza eateries in Sant Antoni. It's a hike from the waterfront bar action.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Sant Antoni is connected with Ibiza City and the rest of the island by regular bus services.

Local buses run every 15 to 30 minutes to Ibiza City and take about 30 to 40 minutes. There are seven or eight buses a day to Cala Bassa and Cala Compte from June to October. They take about 20 minutes, depending on stops and traffic.

Boats run to local beaches, such as Cala Bassa and Cala Compte.

Cala Bassa to Cala d'Hort

Heading west and south from Sant Antoni, you'll come to the rocky and popular bay of **Cala Bassa**. The next few coves around the coast hide some extremely pretty beaches – **Cala Compte**, with its translucent water, and the popular **Cala Codolers** are among the best. All are accessible by local bus and/or boat from Sant Antoni.

Further south, **Cala Vedella** is a modest resort with a fine beach in the centre of town, backed by a couple of restaurants. A little further south, **Cala d'Hort** has a spectacular setting overlooking two rugged rocky islets, **Es Vedrá** and **Es Vedranell**. The water here is an inviting shade of blue, and the beach a long arc of sand sprinkled with pebbles and rocks. The developers still haven't ruined this place, and there's nothing here apart from two relaxed bar-restaurants.

SOUTH COAST

Ses Salines

pop 4290

Platja de ses Salines and the adjacent Platja d'es Cavallet, at the southernmost tip of the island, are the best and most popular beaches within easy striking distance of Ibiza City. The area takes its name from the saltpans exploited here since Carthaginian times and which were big business until tourism came along.

The local bus from Ibiza City drops you at the western end of Ses Salines beside a small bar. Across the road, on the other side of the sand dunes, a long crescent-shaped bay stretches into the distance, with a broad sandy beach broken by patches of rocks. These beaches are popular with Ibiza's party-hard crowd and four or five open-air beach bars are spread around the bay. Swimsuits become less common the further east you go. Stroll on if the *au naturel* look appeals to you: **Platja d'es Cavallet**, the next bay around to the east, is Ibiza's official nudist beach.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hostal Mar y Sal (☎ 971 39 65 84; d to €50; ☹ May-Sep) Handy for the beach, this spot has its own bar

and restaurant. It's frequently booked months in advance for July and August.

Sa Trincha, at the eastern end of the beach, has long been considered the coolest bar on this stretch of sand. It serves burgers, *bocadillos* (filled rolls), salads and fruit smoothies. It also does somewhat stronger drinks, and when the DJ gets into gear (from 2pm) things can get kind of wild and crazy.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Autobuses Voramar El Gaucho runs eight to 10 buses daily to Ses Salines from Ibiza City (€1.30).

FORMENTERA

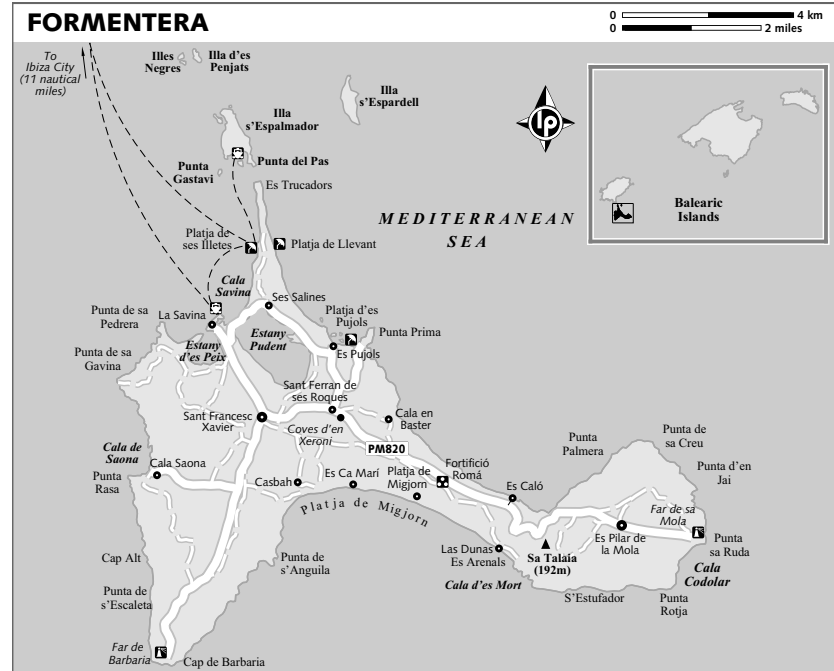
A short boat ride south of Ibiza, Formentera is the smallest and least-developed of the four main Balearic Islands, with a population of 7506. This idyll is laced with sandy beaches and some relaxing short walking and cycling trails. It's a popular day trip from Ibiza and gets crowded in midsummer (especially with the Italian contingent, for whom Formentera is what Bali is to the Australians), but most of the time it is still possible to find yourself a strip of sand out of sight and earshot of other tourists.

Formentera's predominantly flat landscape is rugged and at times bleak. The coast is alternately fringed with jagged cliffs and beaches backed by low dunes. A handful of farmers scrape a living from the land in the centre and east, but elsewhere the island is a patchwork of pine plantations, sun-bleached salt beds, low stonewalls and mostly vacant fields.

Orientation & Information

Formentera is less than 20km across from east to west. Ferries arrive at La Savina, a harbour town wedged between two large salt lakes, the Estany d'es Peix and Estany Pudent (the aptly named Smelly Lake). Three kilometres south of La Savina is the island's administrative capital, Sant Francesc Xavier, and another 5km southwest is Cap de Barbaria, the southernmost point. Es Pujols, the main tourist resort, is 3km east of La Savina.

The main road (PM820) runs down the middle of the island, passing by the fine beaches of Platja de Migjorn along the south coast and through the fishing village of Es Caló (13km southeast of La Savina) before



climbing to Sa Talaia (192m), the island's highest point. The eastern end of the island is marked by the Far de sa Mola lighthouse.

Formentera's **tourist office** (☎ 971 32 20 57; www.ajuntamentdeformentera.com; ☹ 10am-2pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat May-Sep) is in La Savina, hidden behind the row of vehicle-hire agencies that line the port. Opening hours vary seasonally. Another office opens in **Es Pujols** (☹ 4-10pm Mon-Fri, 6-10pm Sat Jun-Sep) in summer. Most of the banks are in Sant Francesc Xavier. There is a clinic, **Centro Médico** (☎ 902 07 90 79), 3km south of La Savina.

Sights & Activities

Apart from walking, cycling and lying on beaches, activities are limited. Points of interest include a series of crumbling stone **watchtowers** along the coastline, a ruined **Roman fortress** (Fortifició Romá), on the south coast, and 40 minor **archaeological sites** (most signposted off the main roads). Divers could approach **Diving Center Formentera** (☎ 971 32 11 68; www.blue-adventure.com; Carrer d'Almadraba 67-71 La Savina; dive with rental gear €42), one of a handful of island dive centres.

BEACHES

Among the island's best beaches are **Platja de Llevant** and **Platja de ses Illetes** – beautiful strips of white sand that line the eastern and western sides, respectively, of the narrow promontory stretching north towards Ibiza. A 4km **walking trail** leads from the La Savina–Es Pujols road to the far end of the promontory, from where you could wade across a narrow strait to **Illa s'Espalmador**, a tiny uninhabited islet with beautiful, quiet beaches and mud baths. The promontory itself is largely undeveloped. Be careful when wading out – you can easily be caught by incoming tides. Or better, take the **Barca Bahía boat** (€12 return) that runs three times daily from La Savina ferry port (via Platja de ses Illetes) to the island and returns.

East of Sant Ferran de ses Roques, towards Es Caló, a series of bumpy roads leads to the south coast beaches, known collectively as **Platja de Migjorn**. They are secluded and popular, despite their sometimes rocky and seaweed-strewn shorelines (especially towards the western end). The best are at the eastern end around **Es Arenals**. Most of these beach settlements consist of a handful of houses and

apartments, a couple of bar-restaurants and the odd *hostal*.

Nudism is fairly common on many of the island's beaches. It's not mandatory but no-one bats an eyelid if you shed all your layers.

SANT FRANCESC XAVIER

pop 1500

Formentera's capital and biggest population centre, Sant Francesc Xavier is an attractive whitewashed village with some good cafés overlooking small, sunny plazas. The town's older buildings include a 14th-century **chapel**, an 18th-century **fortress**, and the **Museu Etnològic** (☎ 971 32 26 70; Carrer de Jaume I 17; admission free; ☎ 10am-2pm & 7-9pm Mon-Sat Jun-Sep, 9am-3pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr), a modest ethnological museum devoted to the traditional aspects of predominantly rural island life.

CALA SAONA

On the road south of Sant Francesc Xavier, one-third of the way to Cap de Barbaria, turn west to the delectable cove of Cala Saona. The beach is one of the island's best, with just one big hotel (see opposite), a couple of bar-restaurants overlooking the clear, pale aqua-and-blue-black waters, and a discreet smattering of a half-dozen houses.

CAP DE BARBARIA

A narrow sealed road heads south out of the capital through stone-walled farmlands to Cap de Barbaria, the island's southernmost point. It's a pleasant ride to the lonely white lighthouse at the road's end, although there ain't much to do once you get there, except gaze out to sea. From the *far* (lighthouse) a track leads east (a 10-minute walk) to the **Torre d'es Cap de Barbaria**, an 18th-century watchtower.

ES PUJOLS

Once a sleepy fishing village, Es Pujols has been transformed by tourism. Rows of sun-bleached timber boat shelters still line the beachfront, but today modern hotels, apartments and restaurants overshadow them. If the beaches are too crowded for your liking, more secluded options lie within easy striking distance (keep walking northwest towards Platja de Llevant).

COVES D'EN XERONI

Beside the main road just east of Sant Ferran are the **Coves d'en Xeroni** (☎ 971 32 82 14; adult/under 12yr €4/2.50; ☎ 10am-1.30pm & 2.30-7pm Mon-Sat May-

Oct), an unexceptional series of underground caves with stalactites and all. Treat opening times with a large grain of salt.

EASTERN END

The fishing settlement of Es Caló is set on a tiny rocky cove ringed by faded timber boat shelters. The coastline is jagged, but immediately west of Es Caló you'll find some good swimming holes and rock pools with small patches of sand.

From Es Caló, the road twists up to the island's highest point. Close to the top, **Restaurante El Mirador** (p660) offers spectacular views along the length of the island, whose eastern extremity is an elevated limestone plateau. Most of the coastline is only accessible by boat, and pine stands and farms mainly take up the interior. A road runs arrow-straight to the island's eastern tip, passing through **Es Pilar de la Mola**, which comes alive for hippy markets on Wednesday and Sunday. At the end of the road stand the **Far de sa Mola** lighthouse, a **monument** to Jules Verne (who used this setting in one of his novels), a bar and spectacular cliffside views.

Sleeping

Camping is prohibited. Most accommodation caters to package-tour agencies, so is overpriced and/or booked out in midsummer. Single rooms are as rare as hens' teeth in summer, and rental apartments (a better deal for stays of a week or more) are more common than *hostales* and hotels (of which there are just over 50). Check out www.formenteraho.telsguide.com and www.formentera.es.

Astbury Formentera (☎ UK 01642-210163; www.formentera.co.uk; 31 Baker St, Middlesbrough TS1 2LF) is a UK-based specialist in house and apartment rentals in Formentera.

SANT FRANCESC XAVIER

Several *hostales* are scattered about this pleasant town and prices are more realistic than at some of the beach locations.

Casa Rafal (☎ 971 32 22 05; Carrer d'Isidoro Macabich; d€65; ☎) Just off sleepy Plaça de sa Constitució, this modest two-storey spot is friendly and offers good, clean rooms with bathroom. They have a restaurant downstairs.

ES PUJOLS

Hostal Voramar (☎ 971 32 81 19; voramar@interbook.net; Carrer de Miramar; s/d €107/130.75; ☎ May-Oct; ☎) About 100m inland from the beach,

this ochre-fronted hotel has comfortable rooms (renovated in 2003), most with balcony. Have a workout in the small gym.

Fonda Pinatar (d€94) Owned by the same people and virtually next door to Voramar, this simple place rents out rooms.

SANT FERRAN DE SES ROQUES

Hostal Pepe (☎ 971 32 80 33; Carrer Major 68; s/d with breakfast €32/52) Located on the pleasant (and on summer nights quite lively) main street near the village's old sandstone church, this place has 45 simple and breezy rooms with bathroom. It's been a classic for decades. Some folks hang out for weeks, others move on fast.

CALA SAONA

Hotel Cala Saona (☎ 971 32 30 30; s/d €115/160; ☎ May-Oct; ☎) A white behemoth, this hotel is set back from the beach and offers 116 rooms, pool, tennis courts and restaurant. From the best rooms the view is straight across the beach and out to sea. Prices halve in low season. The beach bar-restaurants are perfect for a sunset sangria.

PLATJA DE MIGJORN

A spattering of *hostales* and apartments is spread along Formentera's south beach.

Hostal Ca Mari (☎ 971 32 81 80; Es Ca Mari; s/d €59/100; ☎) This is actually three comfortable *hostales* in one: its rooms and apartments all share a central bar, restaurant, pool and grocery shop in the little settlement of the same name.

Hostal Santi (☎ 971 32 83 75; Km10.7; s/d €90; ☎) Smaller but a similar deal, this place offers simple, cool rooms, many with balcony overlooking the sea. Poolside there is a little bar and there is a restaurant on the premises.

ES CALÓ

Fonda Rafalet (☎ 971 32 70 16; s/d €61/85) Overlooking a small rocky harbour, this guesthouse has good rooms (some with sea views), and also incorporates a bar and popular seafood restaurant with portside terrace. A couple of other *hostales* and apartments are also available in this attractive village.

Eating

Mostly waterfront eateries offer a standard range of seafood and paella-style options. Reckon on an average of €30 to €40 a head or

more for a full meal in the bulk of restaurants, most of which open from May to October only. Gotta make euros while the sun shines!

SANT FRANCESC XAVIER

Bar Platé (☎ 971 32 23 13; Plaça de sa Constitució; meals €20-25; ☎ Mon-Sat) Set beneath a leafy pergola, this is a charming spot for a lazy breakfast or a simple meal. Salads, *bocadillos* and tapas go for €4 to €7.

ES PUJOLS

Luzius (☎ 971 32 84 17; Fonoll Marí 2-6; meals €30-35) The second-to-last of a string of beach-bar restaurants as you head west from the town centre, this is a relaxed and shady option for seafood and largely local cooking with an occasional light French touch, tapas and a range of refreshing fruit juices. Fish dishes come in for €14 to €20, and there's a kids' menu too.

El Caminito (☎ 971 32 81 06; Carretera La Savina-Es Pujols; meals €40-50; ☎ dinner Apr-Nov) This Argentine meat grill is one of the best restaurants on the island, serving succulent slabs of meat in all its known forms. A touch of the Pampa in the Med, it is barely 1km outside Es Pujols on the road to La Savina.

SANT FERRAN DE SES ROQUES

Can Forn (☎ 971 32 84 35; Carrer Major 39; meals €30-35; ☎ May-Oct) The best dishes are the *calamar a la bruta* ('dirty calamari', with potato, Mallorcan sausage and squid ink) and *calamar a la payesa* (similar, but with an onion sauce and tomato instead of the ink).

CALA SAONA

Two restaurants operate in addition to the hotel restaurant. All offer much the same sort of food and prices (expect to pay €15 to €18 a head for paella).

PLATJA DE SES ILLETES

A 3km, partly dirt road winds north of the La Savina-Es Pujols road, just behind the string of beaches leading to Platja de ses Illetes and providing access to four beachside restaurants and a trio of bars along the way.

Es Molí de Sal (☎ 971 18 74 91; meals €35-50; ☎ May-Oct) In a tastefully renovated mill boasting a lovely terrace and magnificent sea views you will discover some of the finest seafood on the island. Try one of the rice dishes or the house speciality, *caldereta de llagosta* (lobster stew).

SOUTH COAST

Restaurante Es Cupinà (☎ 971 32 72 21; Plaça de Migjorn; meals €30-40; ☹ May-Oct) At the eastern extremity of the beach, this is a big name on the island, noted especially for the lobster (unfortunately not always available) and freshly cooked fish of the day.

Vogamari (☎ 971 32 90 53; Km9.5; meals €30; ☹ 1-8pm May-Oct) A simple island eatery with a broad veranda set amid a greenery-filled dune, this is great for fresh fish, paella or solid meat dishes at lunch and later.

ES PILAR DE LA MOLA

Formentera's easternmost town has a handful of bars and restaurants.

Restaurante El Mirador (☎ 971 32 70 37; Carretera de la Mola Km14.3; meals €25-30; ☹ May-Oct) The best feature of this fairly average seafood restaurant is the staggering views west across the length of the island, with the Med glittering along its north and south shores.

Pequeña Isla (☎ 971 32 70 68; Avinguda del Pilar 111; meals €30; ☹ Tue-Sun) Easily the best restaurant in town, with a shady roadside terrace, the 'Little Island' dishes up hearty meat dishes, fresh grilled fish and paella.

Entertainment

ES PUJOLS

In summer Es Pujols gets lively (above all with a relaxed Italian crowd), offering an intense tangle of intertwined bars along or just off Carrer d'Espardell (just back from the waterfront) that stay open until 3am or 4am. An old favourite is the red and rocking Indiana, one of the first to get going in the 1990s. They each have their quirks but the end effect is like being in one huge semi-open-air saloon with themed spaces. On Carrer de sa Roca Plana, a couple of bars worth looking out for are **Bananas&co** (Carrer de sa Roca Plana) and **Bar Coyote** (Carrer de sa Roca Plana), both with terraces. Just after them is **Pachanka** (Carrer de sa Roca Plana), where everyone ends up for the clubbing atmosphere until 6am.

SANT FERRAN DE SES ROQUES

Fonda Pepe (☎ 971 32 80 33; Carrer Major 55; ☹ May-Oct) Welcome to the island classic, a knock-about bar connected with the *hostal* (across the street) of the same name. They have been serving *pomades* (gin and lemon) for decades. It attracts a lively crowd of locals and foreigners of all ages and persuasions, who fill the bar and street with their animated banter.

PLATJA DE SES ILLETES

One of the island beachside rituals is sipping on sangria while observing the sunset.

Bigsurllife (☹ 10.30am-sunset May-Oct) This bar attracts a good-natured beautiful Italian crowd, and serves nachos all day and Italian dishes at lunchtime. It's such a hit with the *dolce vita* mob that they have brought out their own chill-out CD. The daily event is drinks on the beach for sunset. About 20m before the turn-off for Platja de ses Illetes from the La Savina-Es Pujols road, a parking area is signposted to the left. Another 30m brings you to the beach and bar.

Tiburón (☎ 659 638945; ☹ 10am-sunset May-Oct) About 200m further up the beach, this is an equally fun beach tavern that tends to attract more locals for fish, salads, sangria and, of course, sunsets.

PLATJA DE MIGJORN

Blue Bar (☎ 971 18 70 11; www.bluebarformentera.com; Km8; ☹ noon-4am Apr-Oct) This is a Formentera classic, which offers good seafood, paella and spadefuls of *buen rollito* (good vibes). It is the south's chill-out bar par excellence, and everything is blue – the seats, the sunshades, the tables, lounges, loos, walls. So head down for sunset, grab a cocktail and relax. The restaurant closes at midnight.

Blanco (www.blancoformentera.com; ☹ Apr-Oct) Barely 100m before Blue Bar, this place is for a more active lot, who dance the evening away to camp hits from the Village People.

10.7 Vista y Sol (☎ 971 32 84 85; www.vistaysol.com; ☹ Apr-Oct) This could be an urban trend den from Milan, only sitting by the sea. The food (separate menus for lunch and dinner) is resolutely Italian, with an international wine list. DJ sounds, black and white décor and a relaxed vibe make it perfect for a meal (€40 to €50) or simply sipping.

Getting There & Away

Baleària (☎ 902 160180; www.balearia.com) runs up to 11 daily fast ferries (€18.50/34 one way/return, 25 minutes) and a couple of conventional boats (€12/20 one way/return, one hour) between Ibiza City and Formentera. Fares for vehicles cost €65 for a small car one way, €29 for motorcycles under 250cc and €9.20 for a bicycle. On the fast ferries in particular, there are sometimes special offers. The first ferry leaves Ibiza City at 7am and the last one returns from Formentera at 10pm (Sunday 7.30pm).

Mediterranea-Pitiusa SL (☎ 971 32 24 43; www.medpitiusa.net) runs up to nine fast ferries daily between Ibiza and Formentera (€16 to €18.50 each way, 25 to 35 minutes).

Getting Around

Autocares Paya (☎ 971 32 31 81) runs a regular bus service connecting the main towns, but scooter and bicycle are the preferred options.

Vehicle-hire agencies are all over the island, including a string of places opposite the harbour in La Savina. Local agencies include **Moto Rent Mitjorn** (☎ 971 32 32 01), **Moto Rent La Savina** (☎ 971 32 22 75) and **Formotor** (☎ 971 32 70 48). Daily rates are around €6 to €7 for a bike, €8 to €10 for a mountain bike, €20 to €25 for a motor scooter and up to €55 for a motorcycle. A car is superfluous on this tiny island, but they are available for rent, as are quads (at around €100 a day).

You can also call a **taxi** (☎ 971 32 20 16, 971 32 80 16, 971 32 20 02).

MENORCA

Menorca (population 82,900) is the least overrun and most tranquil of the Balearics. In 1993 Unesco declared it a Biosphere Reserve, aiming to preserve environmental areas, such as the Parc Natural S'Albufera d'es Grau wetlands and the island's unique archaeological sites.

The untouched beaches, coves and ravines around its 216km coastline allow the more adventurous the occasional sense of discovery! This must be one of the few places in the Mediterranean where it is possible to have a beautiful beach largely to yourself in summer. Some say the island owes much to Franco for not being overrun with tourist development. While neighbouring Mallorca went over to the Nationalists almost at the outset of the civil war, Menorca resisted. Franco later 'rewarded' Mallorca with a construction free-for-all and penalised Menorca by blocking development!

MENORCA'S TOP FIVE BEACHES

- Cala Macarelleta (p671)
- Cala en Turqueta (p671)
- Cala Pregonda (p670)
- Cala Presilli (p670)
- Cala Morell (p671)

The second-largest and northernmost of the Balearics, Menorca also has a wetter climate and is usually a few degrees cooler than the other islands. Particularly in the low season, the 'windy island' is relentlessly buffeted by *tramuntana* winds from the north.

Check out the tourist information website www.e-menorca.org and the island's official accommodation website, www.visitmenorca.com.

Orientation

The capital, Maó (Castilian: Mahón), is at the eastern end of the island. Ferries from the mainland and Palma de Mallorca arrive at Maó's busy port, and Menorca's airport is 7km southwest of the city. The main road (ME1) runs along the middle of the island to Ciutadella, Menorca's second town, with secondary roads leading north and south to the resorts and beaches.

The northern half of Menorca is an undulating area of green rolling hills, with a rugged and rocky coastline. The southern half of the island is flatter and drier, with a smoother coastline and sandy beaches between high cliffs.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

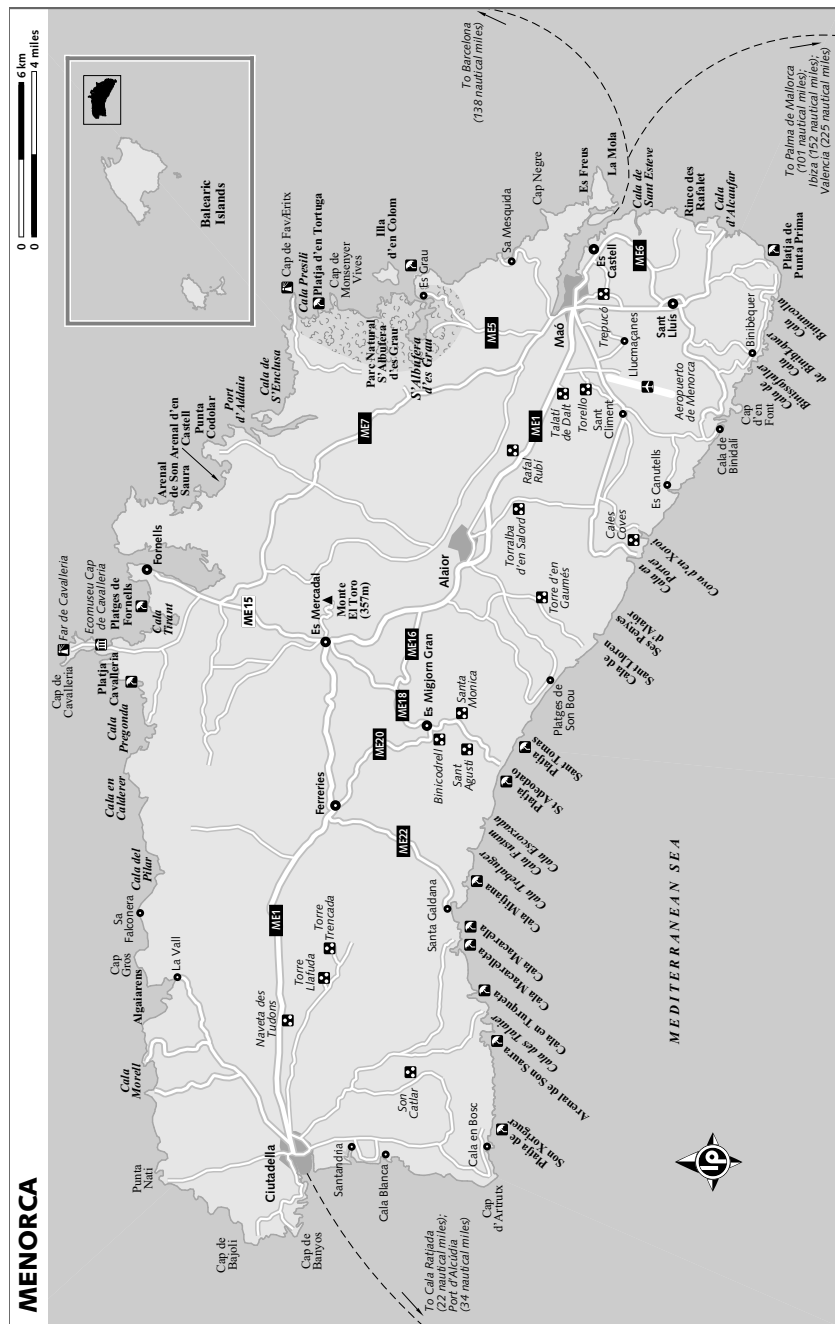
Menorca's airport is served by buses to Maó (€1.50, 15 minutes) every half-hour from around 6am to 10pm and then hourly to midnight. The bus stops at the bus station, the Estació Marítima and a couple of other intermediate points.

BUS

Do not expect to move around the island fast on the buses. You can get to quite a few destinations from Maó, but, with a few exceptions, services are infrequent and sluggish. You can get a reloadable card with 10 or 40 trips on it. There are various zones, but to cover the whole island you pay €23.40 for a 10-trip card.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

In Maó, try **Autos Valls** (☎ 971 35 42 44; Plaça d'Espanya 13) or **Autosmenorsur** (☎ 971 36 56 66; Moll de llevant 35). All the biggies have representatives at the airport. Daily hire can cost €35 to €45 for something like a Seat Marbella, Opel Corsa or VW Polo.



MAÓ

pop 27,670

The British have invaded Menorca four times (if you count the modest campaign that began with the first charter flight from London in 1953). As a result Maó, the capital, is an unusual blend of Anglo and Spanish characteristics.

The British made it the capital in 1713, and the influence of their almost 100-year presence (the island reverted to Spanish rule in 1802) is still evident in the town's architecture, traditions and culture. Even today the majority of Maó's visitors come from Britain.

Maó's harbour is its most impressive feature and was the drawcard for the Brits. The deep, well-protected waters handle everything from small fishing boats to tankers. The town is built atop the cliffs that line the harbour's southern shore. Although some older buildings still remain, the majority of the architecture is in the restrained 18th-century Georgian style (note the sash windows!).

Information

Hospital Verge del Toro (☎ 971 15 77 00; Carrer de Barcelona s/n)

Policia Nacional (Carrer de la Concepció 1)

Post office (Carrer del Bon Aire 11-13; ☎ 8.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2pm Sat)

Tourist office airport (☎ 971 157115; ☎ 8am-10pm); bus station (☎ 971 36 37 90; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Fri); Moll de Llevant (Moll de Llevant 2; ☎ 8am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) The office at the airport is the main office.

Sights & Activities

OLD QUARTER

Maó's main plaza is the large Plaça de s'Espianada. A **craft and clothing market** is held here every Saturday.

The narrow streets to the east comprise the oldest part of Maó. The **Arc de Sant Roc**, a 16th-century archway at the top end of Carrer de Sant Roc, is the only remaining relic of the medieval walls that once surrounded the old city.

The **Església de Santa Maria la Major** (Plaça de la Constitució), further east, was completed in 1287, but rebuilt during the 18th century. It houses a massive organ built in Barcelona and shipped across in 1810. At the northern end of this plaza is the **ajuntament** (town hall).

PLAÇA D'ESpanya

Just off Plaça d'Espanya is the **Mercat Claustre del Carme**, where former church cloisters have been imaginatively converted into a market and

shopping centre. Upstairs enjoy temporary art exhibitions and the modest **Museu Hernández Sanz Hernández Mora** (☎ 971 35 05 97; admission free; ☎ 10am-1pm Mon-Sat), devoted to Menorcan themes and dominated by artworks, maps and decorative items going as far back as the 18th century.

MUSEU DE MENORCA

This former 15th-century Franciscan **monastery** (☎ 971 35 09 55; Plaça de Sant Francesc; adult/child & senior €2.40/free, Sat afternoon & Sun free; ☎ 10am-2pm & 6-8.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun & holidays) has had a chequered history. From the time the Franciscans were obliged to abandon the premises in 1835 after Mendizábal's expropriations, the buildings embarked on a colourful career path – ranging from nautical school and public library to high school and children's home.

The permanent museum collection covers the earliest history of the island, the Roman and Byzantine eras and Muslim Menorca, and includes paintings and other material from more recent times, too.

XORIGUER GIN DISTILLERY

On the waterfront, head to the **distillery** (☎ 971 36 21 97; Moll de Ponent 93; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat), where you can try the local gin, another British legacy. At the front is a liquor outlet and souvenir shop where visitors can help themselves to free samples. Menorcan gin is distinctively aromatic and very tasty. You can also try various strange liqueurs and tonics.

BEACHES

The closest decent beaches to the capital are **Es Grau** to the north and **Platja de Punta Prima** to the south. Both are connected to Maó by local bus. There are around eight buses a day to Punta Prima.

HARBOUR CRUISES

Numerous operators offer glass-bottomed boat cruises around the harbour next to the ferry terminal. These can be a pleasant way to kill an hour or two and generally cost around €8.50/4.50 per adult/child for an hour. Or make a day of it on a catamaran with **Excursions Blue Mediterranean** (☎ 971 36 44 82; adult/under 12yr with lunch €90/45).

Sleeping

Posada Orsi (☎ 971 36 47 51; Carrer de la Infanta 19; s/d with washbasin €25/45, d with shower €55; ☎) Pastel colours are all the go here, and you may pick up

MAÓ

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TO GOLDEN FARM (6km); ES GRAU (10km); FORTALESA DE LA MOLA (12km); FORNELLS (30km)

TO CIUTADELLA (66km)

TO AIRPORT (7km); SOUTH COAST

TO PLATJA DE PUNTA PRIMA (8km)

TO COLLINGWOOD HOUSE (HOTEL DEL ALMIRANTE, 1.5km); SA SÍNIA (3km); ES CASTELL (5km); FORT MARLBOROUGH (5km)

TO BARCELONA; PALMA DE MALLORCA; IBIZA; VALÈNCIA

the scent of incense. Rooms are equally bright (with lots of pink, hot orange and sky blue), mosquito nets (handy) and a no-smoking policy (and no hot water after midnight).

Hostal-Residencia La Isla (☎ 971 36 64 92; Carrer de Santa Catalina 4; s/d €30/52) This large, family-run *hostal* is excellent value, with spacious rooms (all with their own bathroom). Décor is uninspiring but the folks are friendly and run a bustling café-bar downstairs.

Hotel Mirador des Port (☎ 971 36 00 16; www.hoteles-catalonia.es; Carrer de Dalt Vilanova 1; s/d €121/164.80; 🚗 🚗) The disadvantage of this modern and slightly ageing hotel is that it's out of the town centre, but it makes up for it with comfortable rooms and terrific vistas of the port and back across to the old town. The pool and

garden are complemented by a fitness area with Jacuzzis.

Hotel Port Mahón (☎ 971 36 26 00; www.sethotels.com; Avinguda del Port de Maó; s/d from €100/170, d with port views €196; 🚗 🚗) This fine hotel has 72 marble-clad rooms, a pool and pleasant gardens. It also has luxurious suites. Try to get a room fronted by a balcony with a grand view over the port. Décor varies between the rooms.

Eating

Maó's harbour is lined with restaurants and bars; most offer alfresco dining. Also worth investigating are the many waterfront eateries in Cales Fonts, just 3km away in Es Castell.

American Bar (☎ 971 36 18 22; Plaça Reial 8; mains €8-10) Pull up a seat outside on the terrace

in front of this rambling café to linger over breakfast (€9 for toasted ham and cheese, OJ and coffee) and a newspaper.

El Muelle (Moll de Llevant 33; meals €15; 🍷 lunch Mon-Fri, lunch & dinner Sat) The place may not look like anything special, but you get well-prepared fish dishes and tapas with none of the pointless frills and spills of more upmarket spots further around the waterfront. It's generally patronised by locals, who also like the *bocadillos*.

Ses Forquilles (☎ 971 35 27 11; Carrer de Rovellada de Dalt 20; meals €30-35; 🍷 lunch & dinner Thu-Sat, lunch Mon-Wed) This self-proclaimed 'gastronomic space' offers tasty dishes ranging from *magret de pato y peras al vino* (duck and pears in white wine) to a steaming chunk of *chuletón de buey* (1kg of 'big beef chop' for two at €40).

Restaurant La Minerva (☎ 971 35 19 95; Moll de Llevant 87; meals €40-45) Dine out on seafood on this boat moored to the waterfront. It may all look a bit cheesy (it is), but this doesn't stop the kitchen from pouring out good fish and seafood – cooked lightly, just as it should be. You might be up for a *suprema de merluza con almejas en salsa verde* (supreme of hake with mussels in a green sauce). Kids, and their parents, will love the set specials for them (€6 to €8.50).

Restaurant Jàgaro (☎ 971 36 23 90; Moll de Llevant 334; meals €40-45; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) The last in the long line of eateries on the harbour is a timeless place (and service has seen better days) but the goodies still leave mouths watering. Start with *cigalas a la plancha* (grilled crayfish, €19) and follow with a *zarzuela de pescado y marisco* (fish and seafood hotpot, €26). If that's all too much, they have some fine paella and similar rice dishes for around €11 to €13.

Drinking & Entertainment

Nightlife in Maó is low key in comparison to Mallorca or Ibiza. Most of the action is on the waterfront.

Mirador Café (☎ 971 35 21 07; Plaça d'Espanya 9; 🍷 10am-2am Mon-Sat) In a laneway between the top of Costa de ses Voltes and the Mercat Claustre del Carme, this is a popular music bar with a cave-like interior carved out of the old walls above the harbour.

Vinateria Parra (☎ 971 36 36 36; Carrer de San Fernando 3; 🍷 Tue-Sun 8pm-2am) Head downstairs to the cellar for a little self-indulgent wine-sipping and chat over soft music at a random mix of timber and marble tables. Order salad, cheese and meat platters if you wish to adulterate your wine. Or just perch at the marble bar over a beer.

Akellarre (☎ 971 36 85 20; Moll de Ponent 41-43; 🍷 8am-5am) Ambient and jazz dance music dominate the wee hours in this place, made welcoming by the warm stone interior. Live music frequently enlivens proceedings earlier in the evening (starting around 11pm, and costing €5 to €10) and there are four or five other bars lined up next door.

Sa Sínia (Carrer de Sant Jordi s/n, Es Castell; 🍷 8pm-3am Tue-Sun) At the entrance to Es Castell in an old white house with a pleasant terrace, this is not a bad spot for a drink and a little music. A range of (mostly local) DJs spin anything from '80s hits to hip hop.

Getting There & Away

You can catch TMSA (☎ 971 36 04 75) buses from the bus station just off the southwest end of Plaça de s'Esplanada. Six go to Ciutadella (€4.15, one hour) via Alaior (€1.30), Es Mercadal (€2.10) and Ferreries (€2.75). The company also operates regular services to the south-coast beaches, including Platja de Punta Prima (€1.20). A handful of bus services run to Santa Galdana (€3.40, one hour). Two to five **Autos Fornells** (www.autosfornells.com) services run each day to/from Fornells (€2.55, one hour).

ON THE WATER, OR IN IT

There are several ways to enjoy the island more by getting off dry land. Diving outfits operate in various locations around the coast, including Ciutadella (p668), Fornells (p670) and on beaches in the southeast of the island near Sant Lluís. Windsurfing off Fornells is another option for a good dunking. Don't want to get wet? You could try one of various sailing possibilities. **Antigua Meloussa** (☎ 679 654441; www.menorcaenvelero.com) offers cruises of up to a week (€3900 for up to six people in August, down to €330 per person in the cooler months). It is also possible to charter yachts without a skipper. To get you started, check out the **Menorca Activa** (www.menorcaactiva.com) website, which can also point you in the right direction for land-lubbers' activities like horse-riding.

THE INTERIOR – MAÓ TO CIUTADELLA

Menorca's main road, from Maó to Ciutadella, divides the island into north and south. It passes through the towns of Alaior, Es Mercadal and Ferreries, and along the way smaller roads branch off towards the beaches and resorts of the north and south coasts.

Many of the island's most significant archaeological relics are signposted off the main road.

Alaior is home to the local cheese and shoe industries. The main manufacturer of cheese here is **Coinga** (☎ 971 37 12 27; www.coinga.com; Carrer des Mercadal 8; ☹ 9am-2pm Mon-Fri).

Es Mercadal is one of the oldest villages on the island (a market has been held here since at least 1300) and is at the turn-off north for Fornells. You also turn here to get to **Monte El Toro** (all of a towering 357m), Menorca's highest point. A twisting road leads to the summit, which is shared by a 16th-century **church** and **Augustine monastery**, a cluster of satellite dishes and radio towers, and a statue of Christ (built to honour the dead of the civil war). On a

clear day you can see Mallorca. In town are several good places to eat, including **Es Moli des Racó** (☎ 971 37 53 92; Carrer Major 53), for traditional island cooking in an 18th-century flour mill, and **Jeni** (☎ 971 37 50 59; www.hostaljeni.com; Carrer de la Mirada del Toro 81) for more elaborate dishes (and the only place in town with rooms).

Ferreries is Menorca's highest town. Each Saturday morning the **Mercat de Ferreries** takes place, with stallholders selling fresh produce, along with traditional Menorcan crafts and artworks. This is also a centre of cheese, shoes and leather goods production. The turn-off to the resort of Santa Galdana is just west of here.

CIUTADELLA

pop 26,970

Founded by Carthaginians and known to the Muslims as Medina Minorqa, Ciutadella was almost destroyed following the 1558 Turkish invasion and much of the city was subsequently rebuilt in the 17th century. It was Menorca's capital until the British arrived.

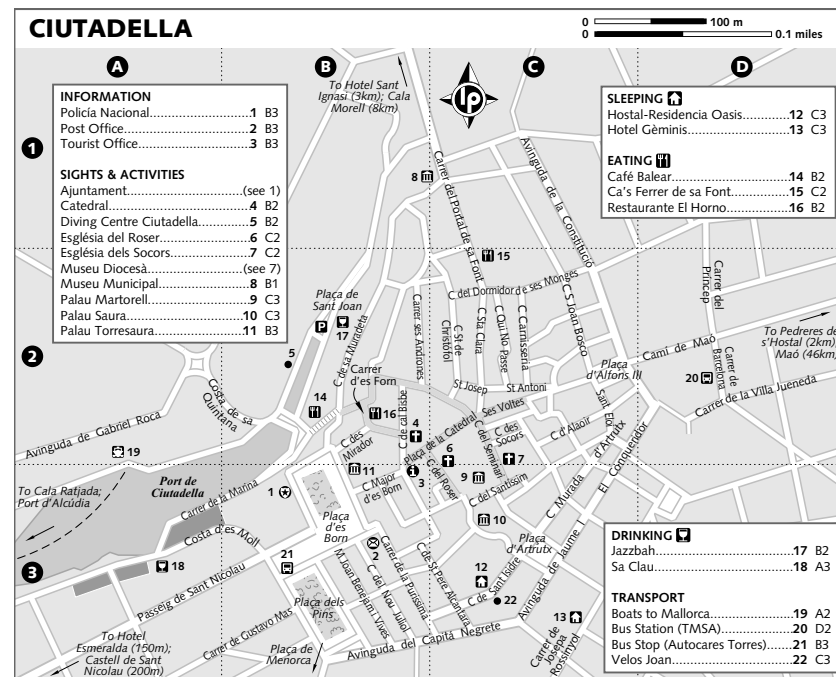
FORTS & MANSIONS

From the time Great Britain took control of Menorca, Maó's value as a port was clear. And so they built **Fort Marlborough** (☎ 971 36 04 62; adult/senior & student/under 7yr €3/1.80/free; ☹ 10am-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-2.30pm Tue-Sun Oct-Apr) above the charming emerald-green inlet, Cala de Sant Esteve (2.5km beyond Es Castell, which to the Brits was Georgetown), southeast of Maó. Most of the fortress was excavated into the rock below surface level. It is well worth wandering around the fort, and the cheesy video provides a modicum of information.

To more fully immerse yourself in the area's British colonial past, stop at **Collingwood House** (Hotel del Almirante; ☎ 971 36 27 00; www.hoteldelalmirante.com; Fonduco, Es Castell; s/d to €72/96; ☹ P), once the residence of Nelson's fellow commander-at-sea and now a charming hotel, replete with maritime reminiscences, pool, terrace, bar, restaurant and wonderful views over the port of Maó. With its heavy carpets, dark-timber doors and furniture, and countless paintings and sketches of great vessels and their commanders, you could almost be in a minor museum. It's on the road about halfway between Maó and Es Castell, and the two are connected by regular local buses (€1.15, 15 minutes).

In the 19th century Queen Isabel II ordered the construction of a new fortress, the **Fortalesa de la Mola** (☎ 971 36 21 00; admission €5; ☹ 10am-8pm Jun-Sep, 10am-6pm May & Oct, 10am-2pm Tue-Sun Nov-Apr), out on the promontory of the same name on the northern shore of the bay. About a 12km drive from Maó, you'll want to set aside a couple of hours for the visit and use one of the audio-guides. Wear comfortable shoes and bring a torch (flashlight) for the tunnels. You will go rambling through galleries, gun emplacements and barracks. The only way here is by car, although **Yellow Catamarans** (☎ 639 676351), one of the companies in Maó offering trips around the harbour, runs a boat here on Sundays. It costs €10 per person, departs at 10.45am and returns at 2.05pm.

On the way back towards Maó you'll notice a rose-coloured stately home surrounded by gardens on a high point near Sant Antoni. **Golden Farm** (Granja Dorada) is private property and can't be visited, but they say Nelson and his lover Lady Hamilton enjoyed a tryst here in 1799. You can also see it across the bay from Collingwood House.



Known as Vella i Bella (The Old and the Beautiful), Ciutadella is an attractive and distinctly Spanish city with a picturesque port and an engaging old quarter. Its character is quite distinct from that of Maó, and its historic centre is far more appealing.

Information

Polícia Nacional (Ajuntament, Plaça d'es Born)

Post office (Plaça d'es Born; ☹ 8.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2pm Sat)

Tourist office (☎ 971 38 26 93; Plaça de la Catedral 5; ☹ 9am-9pm Jun-Sep; 9am-1pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat May & Oct; 9am-1pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri Nov-Apr); Port (☹ 9am-8pm Tue-Sat, 8am-1pm Sun) The port office is located where boats from Mallorca land.

Sights & Activities

The main square, Plaça d'es Born, is surrounded by palm trees and gracious 19th-century buildings, including the post office, the **ajuntament** (town hall) and the **Palau Torresaura**. In the centre of the square is an **obelisk**, raised to commemorate those townsfolk who died trying to ward off the Turks on 9 July 1558.

Costa d'es Moll takes you down to the port from Plaça d'es Born. Heading in the other direction, the narrow cobbled laneways and streets between Plaça d'es Born and Plaça d'Alfons III hold plenty of interest, with simple whitewashed buildings alongside ornate churches and elegant palaces. The pedestrian walkway of **Ses Voltes** (The Arches) has a vaguely North African flavour, and is lined with glamorous shops and boutiques, restaurants and smoky bars.

Architectural landmarks worth looking out for include the 14th-century **catedral** (☎ 971 38 07 39; Plaça de la Catedral; ☹ 9am-1pm & 6-9pm), built in Catalan Gothic style (although with a baroque façade) on the site of Medina Minorqa's central mosque. There are also the baroque 17th-century churches **Església dels Socors** (Carrer del Seminari), which houses the **Museu Diocesà** (☎ 971 48 12 97; adult/student/senior €2.40/1.80/1.20; ☹ 10.30am-1.30pm Tue-Sat); and **Església del Roser** (Carrer del Roser), now used as an occasional exhibition gallery. Impressive noble families' mansions, such as **Palau Martorell** (Carrer del Santíssim 7) and **Palau Saura** (Carrer del Santíssim 2; admission free; ☹ 10am-1pm & 6-9pm Mon-Sat) are used for temporary exhibitions.

FANCY FOOTWORK

Neighbouring Mallorca is better known for its shoe-making tradition (especially with the growing international success of the Camper company) but Menorca too has long had its share of cobblers. Today the best loved local product is *avarques*, loose, comfortable slip-on type sandals that cover the front of the foot and strap around the heel. They make great summer shoes and you'll find several makers of them in Ciutadella, although shops sell them all over the island (and indeed all over the Balearics).

The **Museu Municipal** (☎ 971 38 02 97; Bastió de sa Font; adult/senior/under 12yr €1.20/0.60/free; ☎ 10am-2pm Tue-Sat) contains displays recounting the island's story from prehistory to medieval times.

West of the town centre, the southern head of the port entrance is dominated by the stout little **Castell de Sant Nicolau** (☎ 971 38 10 50; Plaça del Almirante Ferragut; admission free; ☎ 11am-1pm & 6-8pm Tue-Sat). The views west to Mallorca and south down the coast are lovely.

About 2km east of the town centre is an original 'monument'. The **Pedrer de s'Hostal** (☎ 971 48 15 78; www.lithica.es; Camí Vell; adult/senior/under 11yr €3/1.50/free; ☎ 9.30am-sunset Mon-Sat, 9.30am-2.30pm Sun & holidays) is an extensive series of stone quarries. The bleached *marés* stone, extracted here and in other quarries around the island, has historically been Menorca's main building material. This quarry was in action until 1994. The bizarre shapes cut into the rock were first hewn by strong men with picks (as long as 200 years ago) and later with machinery. In the latter – which are a series of giant, deep pits – concerts are organised (the acoustics are great). In the older quarry a **botanical garden**, with endemic Menorcan species, grows amid the weird 'sculpture'.

Three dive centres operate in and around Ciutadella. **Diving Centre Ciutadella** (☎ 971 38 60 30; Plaça de Sant Joan 10; per dive €45) is handily located in the town port.

Festivals & Events

The **Festa de Sant Joan** is held in Ciutadella in the third to last week of June. The high point is 23 June, the eve of the saint's feast day, although the atmosphere in the streets builds over preceding evenings. It is one of Spain's best-known and most traditional festivals,

featuring busy processions, prancing horses (Menorcans pride themselves on their riding skills), performances of traditional music and dancing, and lots of partying.

Sleeping

Hostal-Residencia Oasis (☎ 971 38 21 97; Carrer de Sant Isidre 33; s/d €25/36) Set around a spacious garden courtyard, this quiet place close to the heart of the old quarter has pleasant rooms, some of them done up in the past two years and most with private bathroom.

Hotel Gèminis (☎ 971 38 46 44; www.hotelgeminis menorca.com; Carrer de Josepa Rossinyol 4; s/d €55/85; 📶) A friendly, stylish two-star place located on a back street, this graceful, three-storey, rose-white lodging offers comfortable if somewhat neutral rooms just a short walk away from the city centre. The best rooms have a nice balcony to boot.

Hotel Esmeralda (☎ 971 38 02 50; www.mac-hotels .com; Passeig de Sant Nicolau 171; r per person €53.80; 📶) Esmeralda is a somewhat rambunctious tourist three-star. The main advantage of this big, curving corner block is that you will be hard pressed to miss out on a room with views over to the Sant Nicolau fort and west out to the sunset and sea.

Hotel Sant Ignasi (☎ 971 38 55 75; www.santignasi .com; Carretera de Cala Morell s/n; r per person €117; 📶 📶 📶) This tranquil rural hotel is a fine retreat 3km outside Ciutadella. It boasts a good restaurant and pleasant garden, bar and pool. Prices more than halve over the winter months.

Eating

Ciutadella's small port is teeming with restaurants and cafés, many of which are set in the old city walls or carved out of the cliffs that line the waterfront.

Café Balear (☎ 971 38 00 05; Plaça de Sant Joan 15; meals €25-30; ☎ Sat-Thu Dec-Oct) Sometimes the old timers are the best. Set apart from the town's more frenetic restaurant activity, this remains one of Ciutadella's classic seafood stops. You can eat outside and admire the old quarter towering before you while tucking into local prawns or *navalles* (a strange tubular seafood delicacy).

Restaurante El Horno (☎ 971 38 07 67; Carrer de s'For 12; meals €25-30; ☎ May-Oct) Descend into the old quarter basement for wholesome Spanish fare, with an even range of fish and meat dishes, including the seasonal *civet de jabalí* (wild boar stew; €15). Fish dishes come in at around €12.

Ca's Ferrer de sa Font (☎ 971 48 07 84; Carrer del Portal de sa Font 16; meals €35; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) Located in an 18th-century building, this is a romantic place offering a mix of inventive Mediterranean cooking.

Drinking & Entertainment

The bulk of the town's nightlife is concentrated along the waterfront and in particular around Plaça de San Joan, on either side of which you will encounter phalanxes of bars and clubs.

Sa Clau (Carrer de la Marina 199; ☎ 7pm-4am) For a post-prandial cocktail, drop by here on the waterfront at the bottom of Costa d'es Moll.

Set in the old quarter walls, this hip piano bar sometimes features live jazz and blues.

Jazzbah (Plaça de San Joan 3; admission €10; ☎ 11pm-5am) This venue is worth watching for its live concerts, happening house nights and chill-out sessions. The latter take place on the terrace.

Getting There & Away

Boats for Mallorca (Port d'Alcúdia and Cala Ratjada) leave from the northern side of the Port de Ciutadella. For details, see p629.

TMSA (Carrer de Barcelona 8) runs buses between Ciutadella and Maó. **Autocares Torres** (☎ 971 38 64 61; Plaça dels Pins) buses serve the coast south of Ciutadella as far as Son Xoriguer.

MENORCA'S PREHISTORIC MYSTERIES

As long ago as 2000 BC, people were enjoying Menorca's pristine beaches in between stints of hunting and gathering. The interior of the island remains sprinkled with reminders of these remote times. Many of the most significant of these fascinating sites are open to the public (and free).

The monuments are linked to three main periods: the Pre-Talayotic Period (or cave era) from 2000 BC to 1300 BC; the Talayotic Period (or Bronze Age) from 1300 BC to 800 BC; and the Post-Talayotic Period (or Iron Age) from 800 BC to around 100 BC. Similarly, there are three types of structures: *navetas*, *talayots* and *taulas*.

Navetas, built from large rocks in the shape of upturned boat hulls, are thought to have been used as either tombs or meeting places – perhaps both.

Talayots, large stone mounds found all over the island, were perhaps used as watchtowers for each settlement.

Unique to Menorca, *taulas* are huge stone tablets precisely balanced in the shape of a 'T'. It has been suggested that they could have been used as sacrificial altars but, as with Stonehenge, nobody is sure how these enormous slabs of stone were moved into position or what they signify.

Off the main road 3km west of Maó, the Talayotic settlement of **Talati de Dalt** (adult/student & senior/under 8yr €3/1.50/free; ☎ 10am-sunset) is one of the most interesting sites. It's about five minutes' walk from the car park to the main feature, a well-preserved *taula*.

About 4km further along on the northern side of the road is **Rafal Rubí**, a pair of well-preserved burial *navetas*.

The nearby **Torralba d'en Salord** (☎ 971 37 83 85; adult/student & senior/under 16yr €3/1.50/free; ☎ 10am-8pm Jun-Sep, 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat Oct-May) is another Talayotic settlement whose outstanding feature is an impressive *taula*.

South of Alaior is the large **Torre d'en Gaumès** (adult/student & senior/under 16yr €2.40/1.20/free; ☎ 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sun) settlement, which includes three *talayots* on a hilltop and a collection of circular dwellings. It's free to visit every day from October to April, and on Sundays from May to September.

Further south on the coast at **Cales Coves**, some 90 caves dug into the coastal cliffs were apparently used for ritual burials. More recently some of the caves have been homes to hippy colonies, and nearby the large **Cova d'en Xoroi** (☎ 971 37 72 36; www.covadenxoroi.com; admission with drink adult/child €5.80/3.50; ☎ 11.30am-9pm) can be visited as a sight by day or as a club by night. The sunset chill-out scene starts around 8pm and the disco gets into action around midnight to 5am. Foreign DJs make regular summer appearances.

South of Ciutadella (from the *ronda*, or ring road, follow the road for Macarella and after 2.8km veer right), **Son Catlar** (admission free; ☎ 10am-sunset) is the largest Talayotic settlement in the Balearic Islands. Its five *talayots* and the remains of its dwellings cover around 6 hectares. East of Ciutadella (near the Km40 road marker), the **Naveta des Tudons** is a stone burial chamber.

Getting Around

You can hire mountain bikes from **Velos Joan** (☎ 971 38 15 76; Carrer de Sant Isidre 28) for €7 per day, as well as Vespas and scooters (€57 to €72 for two days, depending on the model).

NORTH COAST

Menorca's north coast is rugged and rocky, dotted with small and scenic coves. It's less developed than the south and, with your own transport and a bit of footwork, you'll discover some of the Balearics' best off-the-beaten-track beaches.

Maó to Fornells

North of Maó, head first for **Es Grau**, a plain hamlet on an open bay. The beach is OK and you can kick back at a couple of bar-restaurants.

Inland from Es Grau and separated from the coast by a barrier of high sand dunes is the **Parc Natural S'Albufera d'es Grau**, the largest freshwater lagoon in the Balearic Islands. Home to many species of wetland birds and an important stopover for migrating species, S'Albufera and the surrounding countryside have been designated the 'nucleus zone' of Menorca's Biosphere Reserve, a natural park protected from the threat of development. **Illa d'en Colom**, a couple of hundred metres offshore, is considered part of the park.

The drive up to **Cap de Favàritx**, a narrow rocky cape at the top of the Parc Natural S'Albufera d'es Grau zone, is a treat. The last leg is across a lunar-like landscape of black rock. At the end of the road a **lighthouse** stands watch as the sea pounds relentlessly against the impassive cliffs.

South of the cape stretch some fine sandy bays and beaches, including **Cala Presili** and **Platja d'en Tortuga**, reachable on foot.

Cap de Cavalleria & Around

Three kilometres shy of Fornells, turn west and follow the signs for 7km to reach a parking area for the stunning little double crescent, golden beach of **Platja Cavalleria** (a five-minute walk from the car park). One kilometre further north is the **Ecomuseu Cap de Cavalleria** (☎ 971 35 99 99; www.ecomuseudecavalleria.com; adult/senior/child €32/free; ☎ 10am-8.30pm Jul-Sep, 10am-7pm Apr-Jun & Oct), with displays and videos on the north coast, its fauna, the lighthouse, ancient inhabitants and Romans. The remains of the latter's settlement, **Sanisena** (today Sanitja), have been

excavated nearby. At the museum you'll receive a detailed area map showing you how to wander to the ruins and round about.

Another 2km drive north brings you to the abrupt cliffs, **far** (lighthouse) and a series of crumbling civil war Republican gun emplacements. A side road from the Cap de Cavalleria road leads about 3km to **Cala Binimella**, an OK beach with a nearby bar-restaurant. You can walk from there to the much prettier **Cala Pregonda**.

Fornells

pop 450

This picturesque whitewashed village is on a large, shallow bay popular with windsurfers. Fornells has come to be known for its waterfront seafood restaurants, most of which serve up the local (and rather pricey) speciality, **caldereta de llagosta** (lobster stew).

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

If the sight of those fishing boats bobbing in the bay stirs the seawolf in your soul, embark on a three- to four-hour catamaran trip with **Catamaran Charter** (☎ 626 486426; www.catamarancharter.net; Passeig Marítim; adult/child €60/35). You will also find a windsurfing school and a couple of diving outfits as you head south out of the village. Check out **Diving Center Fornells** (☎ 971 37 64 31; www.divingfornells.com; Passeig Marítim 44b).

At the edge of town stands the squat, round defensive tower, the **Torre de Fornells** (admission €2.40; ☎ 11am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep).

A couple of kilometres west at **Platges de Fornells**, the development frenzy has been unleashed on the coastal hills surrounding a small beach. The exclusive villas of the Menorca Country Club resort dominate this ritzy *urbanització* (urban development).

SLEEPING

Hostal La Palma (☎ 971 37 66 34; Plaça S'Algaret 3; s/d to €40/75; ☎ ☎) Out the back of this bar-restaurant are cheerful rooms with bathrooms, balconies and views of the surrounding countryside. Singles aren't available in summer.

Hostal Fornells (☎ 971 37 66 76; www.hostalfornells.com; Carrer Major 17; s/d €85.60/117.70; ☎ ☎ ☎) Behind a whitewashed façade on a pedestrian lane just behind the port, this is a slick option, with a bar and restaurant. A variety of spacious rooms have views of the sea, the courtyard pool or the back country. Rooms without views in October cost less than a third of the above prices!

EATING

The restaurants along the foreshore are all pretty expensive, and if you're here to try **caldereta de llagosta**, you are looking at €60 to €65.

Es Cranc (☎ 971 37 64 42; Carrer de Tramuntana 31; meals €35-65; ☎ ☎ Thu-Tue) If you're happy to pay, head for this congenial spot on a street a couple of blocks inland. It has a simple dining room and a strong reputation. You can splash out on **caldereta de llagosta** (€65) or even **paella de llagosta** (€130 for two). Fresh delivery of lobster from a half-dozen local fishing vessels is guaranteed.

Es Plá (☎ 971 37 66 55; Passeig Es Pla s/n; meals €30; ☎ ☎ closed mid-Jan-mid-Feb) You can live without lobster but want melt-in-the-mouth seafood? Try this spot, with tables literally at the water's edge. The **lenguado** (sole) is prepared in a rich seafood sauce and vegetables. The **menú del día** (€18) is good value for this town.

Around Ciutadella

North of Ciutadella, **Cala Morell** is a low-key development of whitewashed villas. Steep steps lead to the small port and beach, backed by a couple of bar-restaurants. More intriguing is the **Cala Morell Necropolis**, prehistoric burial caves hacked into the coastal cliffs along a track leading away from the beach.

Before reaching Cala Morell, a right turn to **Algaiares** leads you to a privately owned **park** (per car €5; ☎ 10am-7pm), with a parking area, a small lake and pristine beaches.

SOUTH COAST

Menorca's southern flank tends to have the better beaches – and thus the greater concentration of development. The recurring image is of a jagged coastline, occasionally interrupted by a small inlet with a sandy beach and backed by a growing cluster of gleaming white villas. Menorca has largely opted for small-scale developments in the 'Moorish-Mediterranean' style, modelled on the resort of Binibèquer (or Binibeca), near the south-east corner, designed by the architect Antonio Sintes in 1972.

The rugged coastline south of Ciutadella gives way to a couple of smallish beaches at the resorts of **Santandria** and **Cala Blanca**. On the island's southwestern corner looms the large resort of **Cala en Bosc**, a busy boating and diving centre. Not far east are the popular beaches of **Platja de Son Xoriguer**, connected to Ciutadella by frequent buses.

Between Son Xoriguer and Santa Galdana lies some of the least accessible coast in the south. A narrow country road leads south of Ciutadella and then forks twice to (almost) reach the beautiful, unspoiled beaches (from west to east) of **Arenal de Son Saura**, **Cala en Turqueta**, **Es Talaier**, **Cala Macarelleta** and **Cala Macarella**.

For Cala Macarella, for instance, you arrive at a car park and must then walk 15 minutes to the beach (which has a restaurant). You can easily walk or swim around to the still prettier Cala Macarelleta. The walk between Cala Macarella and Cala en Turqueta takes about an hour.

Day cruises (☎ 971 38 52 59) to these beaches run from Ciutadella harbour in summer for €18 per person.

Southwest of Ferreries is the resort of **Santa Galdana**, which is just the place if karaoke, English pubs and minigolf are your idea of a good holiday. In fairness, the beach is beautiful and the tack mild. A walking track leads west along the coast to Cala Macarella (30 minutes). To the east of Santa Galdana, **Cala Mitjana** is another enticing strand.

The pleasant **Camping S'Atalaia** (☎ 971 37 42 32; www.campingsatalaia.com; sites per 2 people, tent & car €21.60; ☎ ☎), shaded by pine trees, is two-thirds of the way down the Ferreries-Santa Galdana road.

The resort of **Platges de Son Bou**, south of Alaior, boasts the island's longest beach and most depressing development. Just back from the beach are the remains of an ancient **Christian basilica** that dates, by some reckonings, to the 5th century AD.

Most of the coast south of Maó is more intensively developed. Regular buses sidle down to **Platja de Punta Prima**, which has a nice beach (you can even catch the occasional wave here!). If you pass through **Sant Lluís** (a bright, white town built by the French during their brief occupation of the island in 1756-63), you may want to stop to savour one of several fine eateries. West around the coast is **Binibèquer**, touted as a charming old fishing town. It has been given several coats of whitewash and turned into a tourist beehive, but the curious houses and narrow lanes, not to mention the little boat harbour with its transparent water, are attractive. A few kilometres further west lies **Cala de Binidali**. The village is no big deal and the beach small, but the water is so azure it makes you want to swim out of the inlet and into the open sea.

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Murcia



Pinched between the more-trodden beaches of Almería to the south and the heaving resorts of Valencia's Costa Blanca to the north, Murcia is one of Spain's least visited and, the peninsula of La Manga apart, least touristy corners.

Its name derives from the Latin *murtae* (mulberry). For centuries mulberry leaves fed silkworms for a flourishing industry that lasted until well after WWII, when local silk could no longer compete against man-made fibres.

Murcia's 250km of coast is aptly called La Costa Cálida (Hot One). With over 3000 hours of sunshine each year, it almost guarantees an all-over tan, whether you spread your towel in the tourist pulls of the Mar Menor or in the quieter, much more Spanish resorts southwards.

So much sunshine means a dry, semidesert interior. Humankind has toiled over the centuries to put the little rain that falls over the region to best use. Muslims from North Africa introduced their irrigation systems: waterwheels, aqueducts and *acequias* (canals). This network, still largely extant, helps to distribute the stingy 300mm of annual rainfall, allowing intensive cultivation, especially of the citrus crops and grapes in the El Guadalentín valley and tomatoes by the tonne, grown in vast plastic greenhouses south of Cartagena.

The busy capital, also called Murcia, is a university town with a splendid cathedral. Cartagena, Spain's premier naval port, is excavating, digging deep to reveal its rich classical heritage. Inland, Lorca, once a frontier town between Christian and Muslim Spain, is famous for its Semana Santa (Easter week) processions, and the unspoilt Parque Natural de Sierra Espuña draws climbers and walkers.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Steep yourself in the warm, shallow waters of the **Mar Menor** (p680)
- Sip a drink in Murcia's Plaza del Cardenal Belluga, the **cathedral's** (p674) resplendent baroque façade before you
- Tag onto one of Lorca's spectacular **Semana Santa processions** (see p681)
- Visit a selection of Cartagena's well-documented, freshly revealed **Roman and Carthaginian sites** (p677)
- Walk the trails of the **Parque Natural de Sierra Espuña** (p682)



■ AREA: 11,314 SQ KM

■ AVE SUMMER TEMP: HIGH 40°C, LOW 19°C

■ POP: 1.36 MILLION



MURCIA CITY

pop 410,000

Murcia, bypassed by most tourists and unjustifiably sneered at by too many Spaniards, well merits a visit. Pass through the industrial outskirts and head straight for the river, cathedral and laid-back, partly pedestrianised heart of this attractive university city.

The Muslims founded 'Mursiya' in AD 825 on the site of a former Roman colony. The town was reconquered in 1243 by Alfonso X of Castilla y León, honoured nowadays in the name of one of Murcia's two main thoroughfares (his shrivelled heart, tradition has it, is preserved within the cathedral's altar).

Enriched by the silk industry and by agricultural prosperity, the city was at its grandest in the 18th century, when the cathedral's magnificent baroque façade was built, along with the urban palaces of the nobility and rising bourgeoisie.

Looted by Napoleonic troops in 1810, then victim of plague and cholera, the city fell into understandable decline during the 19th cen-

tury. In 1936, during the Spanish Civil War, it was the scene of bitter fighting and many of its churches were razed.

ORIENTATION

The city centre spreads north of Río Segura. The main commercial thoroughfare, Gran Vía del Escultor Francisco Salzillo (usually – and thankfully – abbreviated to 'Gran Vía') runs north from the Puente Viejo (Old Bridge).

From the cathedral, pedestrianised Calle de la Trapería, the main street of medieval and Renaissance Murcia, cuts north through the old town.

INFORMATION

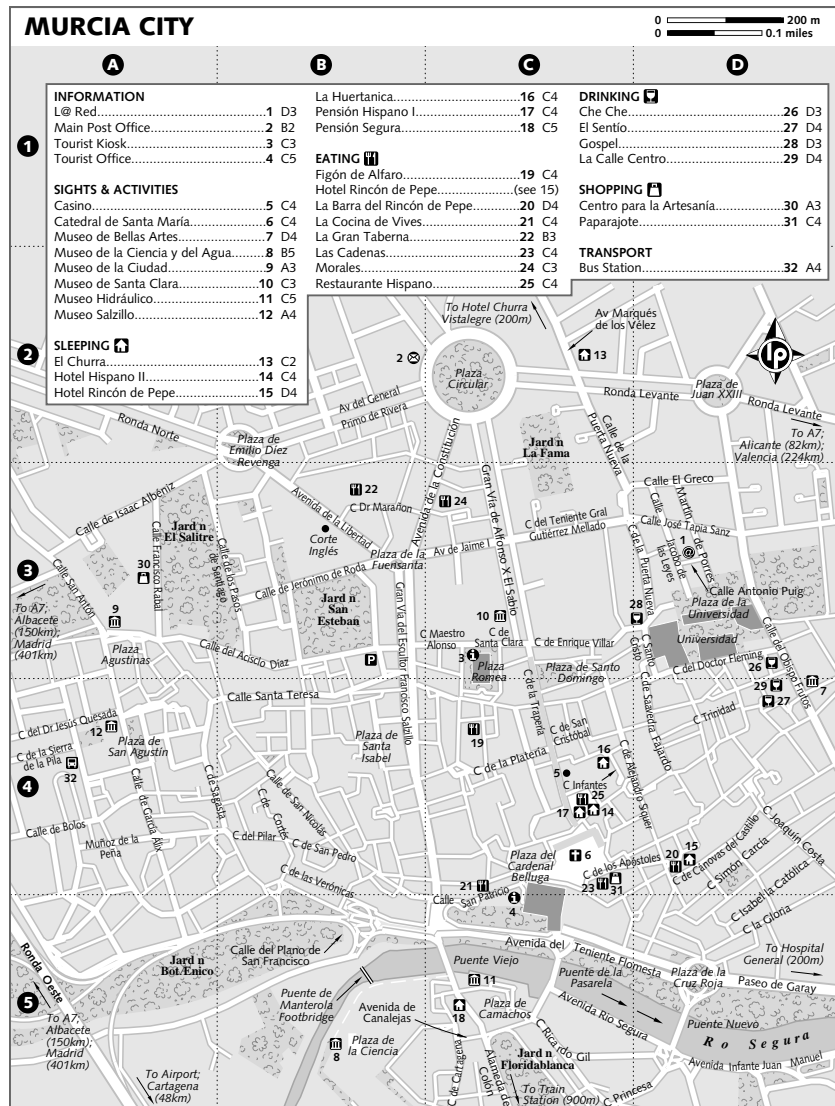
L@Red (Calle Antonio Puig 1; per hr €2: 11 10am-2pm & 4-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) Internet access.

Main post office (Plaza Circular)

Tourist kiosk (Calle de Santa Clara; 11 10am-2pm & 4.30-8.30pm or 5-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun)

Tourist office (☎ 968 35 87 49; www.murciaciudad.com; Plaza del Cardenal Belluga; 11 10am-2pm & 4.30-8.30pm or 5-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun)

www.murciaturistica.es This is the website of the regional tourist authority.



SIGHTS

Catedral de Santa María

Murcia's sumptuous cathedral (h 7am-1pm & 5-8pm) was raised in 1394 on the site of a mosque. Initially Gothic in style, it was dramatically altered in 1748, when the exuberant baroque façade with its tumbling cherubs was added. A highlight of the interior is the 15th-century

Flamboyant Gothic Capilla de los Vélez, its flutes and curls like piped icing sugar. The fat 92m tower, begun in 1519, took 270 years to be completed.

Casino

Murcia's resplendent casino (968 21 22 55; Calle de la Trapería 18) first opened as a gentlemen's

club in 1847. Beyond the decorative façade, completed in 1901, are an Arab-style vestibule and a patio. Penetrate as far as the magnificent ballroom and pop €1 in the slot to see the 320 lamps of its candelabra shimmer with light as Strauss' *Radetsky March* wafts from all corners. Closed for improvements when we last visited, it should again be open.

Museums

Museo de la Ciudad (968 27 43 90; Plaza Agustinas 5-7; admission free; h 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri Jul-Aug, 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun Sep-Jun), cheerful and well displayed, follows the city's 2000-year history. The ground floor recounts Murcia's Muslim heritage, the 1st floor its early Christian times and the 2nd floor its 18th-century glory days until present times.

Museo Salzillo (968 29 18 93; Plaza de San Agustín 1-3; admission €3; h 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat Jul & Aug, 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat Sep-Jun), devoted to the Murcian sculptor Francisco Salzillo (1707-83), is in the baroque chapel of Ermita de Jesús. It displays his impressive *pasos* (figures carried in Semana Santa processions) and his superb miniature Nativity figures carved in wood.

Museo de Bellas Artes (968 23 93 46; Calle del Obispo Frutos 12; h 10am-8.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), is a bright, well-documented gallery. Devoted to Spanish artists, its 1st-floor Siglo de Oro gallery, with canvases by Murillo and Ribera, is the highlight.

Museo de Santa Clara (969 39 65 44; Gran Vía de Alfonso X El Sabio; admission free; h guided visits 10am-1pm & 4-6.30pm or 5-7.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) is a recently restored Islamic palace. It has an exquisite courtyard and an important collection of Islamic art within a closed-order convent with its own rich treasures, assembled over the centuries. Phone to reserve a 45-minute guided tour in English.

Giant grindstones and delicate working models are the permanent features of **Museo Hidráulico** (968 35 86 00; Calle los Molinos; admission free; h 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat), a restored water mill that's also used for temporary exhibitions.

Museo de la Ciencia y del Agua (968 21 19 98; Plaza de la Ciencia 1; adult/child €1.20/0.60; h 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun), also beside the river (and best approached on foot along the riverside walk from Puente Viejo), is one for the children. Although everything's in Spanish, this small hands-on science museum has plenty of buttons to press and knobs to twirl and a small planetarium, too.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Murcia's *Semana Santa* processions rival Cartagena's in their fervency. Two days after Easter Sunday, the mood changes as the city celebrates the *Bando de la Huerta*, recalling its agricultural heritage with parades, food stalls, folklore and fun aplenty.

SLEEPING

Pensión Segura (968 21 12 81; Plaza de Camachos 14; s/d €30/38; a) We scarcely recognised this long-standing budget favourite of ours when we last passed by. Everything – new beds, and furniture, refurbished bathrooms for its 14 rooms – has changed except the excellent value it offers.

La Huertanica (968 21 76 68; www.hotelhuertanica.com; Calle Infantes 3-5; s/d €44/57.50; p a) The Huertanica with its 31 rooms, some with balcony, makes a reliable midrange choice. Tucked away down a quiet side street, it also runs a more-than-decent restaurant that specialises in local fare. Parking costs €10 to €13.

Pensión Hispano I (968 21 61 52; www.hotelhispano.net in Spanish; Calle de la Trapería 8; s with shower/bathroom €24/27, d/tr €38/50; p) Just around the corner from her fancier sister (below) and something of a Cinderella, Hispano I would benefit from some investment to smarten her up a bit.

Hotel Hispano II (968 21 61 52; www.hotelhispano.net in Spanish; Calle Radio Murcia 3; s/d Mon-Thu €52/68, Fri-Sun €45/50; p n a i) Hotel Hispano II and Pensión Hispano I, umbilically joined but far from identical twins, are under the same ownership (smile – you're on Hispano II's closed-circuit TV when you approach the reception desk). They share telephone, garage (parking €12) and website. The trim, comfortable, modern Hispano II, famous for its excellent restaurant (p676), is reliable and popular with business travellers. Ask for a room on floors two to four; all have been recently refurbished, and wi-fi is available.

El Churra (968 23 84 00; www.elchurra.net; Avenida Marqués del los Vélez 12; s €45, d Mon-Thu €65, d Fri-Sun €50; p n a i) El Churra started life more than 50 years ago as a *merendero* (snack bar), when the area was all fields and orchards. Now it's a reliable hotel with rather small but well-maintained rooms, with wi-fi. Continuing tradition, it runs a superb restaurant that merits a visit in its own right. Parking costs €7.

Churra Vistalegre (968 20 17 50; www.elchurra.net; Avenida Arquitecto Juan José Belmonte 4; s €45, d Mon-Thu €65, Fri-Sun €50; p n a i) El Churra's younger

sister, just up the road, has the same rates and is equally reliable.

Hotel Rincón de Pepe (☎ 968 21 22 39; www.nh-hotels.com; Calle los Apóstoles 34; r Mon-Thu €119, Fri-Sun €85; p n a i) Renowned throughout Spain, 'Pepe's Corner' has spacious, well-equipped rooms and offers every luxury. Its weekend rate, once the commercial trade has headed home, is a particular bargain. Wi-fi is available, and parking costs €12.

EATING

Figón de Alfaro (☎ 968 21 68 62; Calle Alfaro 7; mains €5-12; h Mon-Sat, lunch only Sun) Popular with young folk and families, it offers full meals and a range of juicy *montaditos* (minirolls). Eat in the bar area, where prices are a little lower, or in the more sedate interconnecting dining room.

La Cocina de Vives (☎ 968 21 22 66; Calle San Patricio 7; menú €7.50, mains €6-11) For economical eating, you can't beat this bustling place with its huge range of dishes, all on display, to eat in or take away.

Restaurante Hispano (Calle Arquitecto Cerdán; mains €13-16; h Mon-Sat, lunch only Sun) Snug between hotels Hispano I and II, this is really two places – the less expensive bar area and the smart restaurant extending deep into the recesses of the building. They share a fabulous display of fresh fish and a common, creative kitchen. The three-course lunch *menú* (set meal) is, at €10 if you eat at the bar, a great deal.

Las Cadenas (☎ 968 22 09 24; Calle de los Apóstoles 10; menú €20, mains €10-15; h Mon-Sat) Las Cadenas is all low beams and leaded windows. Cosy and friendly, it offers traditional tasty fare based on fresh local produce. Save a cranny for the homemade ice cream.

Morales (☎ 968 23 10 26; Avenida de la Constitución s/n; mains €15-18; h Mon-Fri, lunch only Sat) Your dish won't come smothered in subtle sauces, jus or coulis here. What you'll get at this traditional family-run restaurant is the freshest of fish and first-class quality meat, cooked with care.

La Gran Taberna (☎ 968 24 45 22; Avenida de la Libertad 6; mains around €17; h closed Sun & dinner Tue) The walls are an attractive clutter of old menus, posters, programmes and calendars at this highly regarded restaurant. Work your way through its magnificent *menú tradicional* (traditional set menu; €32), chalked up on the blackboard and constant for over a decade, where the dishes just keep coming and

coming. Go down Calle Doctor Marañón, opposite the Corte Inglés department store, and La Gran Taberna is before you.

Hotel Rincón de Pepe (☎ 968 21 22 39; mains €18-23; h Mon-Sat & lunch Sun) At the restaurant here, renowned throughout Spain, you are guaranteed a true gourmet experience. Just around the corner, La Barra del Rincón de Pepe, with food from the same kitchen, does an excellent-value *menú del día* (daily set menu; €12).

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

Pedestrianised Plazas Romea and Santo Domingo plus Calle de la Trapería pack in the crowds at *paseo* (strolling) time and well into the night. Most through-the-night life buzzes around the university, particularly south of Calle del Doctor Fleming, which pulsates with small elbow-to-elbow bars.

Our favourites include **Gospel** (cnr Calles de Enrique Villar & Santo Cristo), **Che Che** (Calle Doctor Fleming 16) and **La Calle Centro** (Calle Trinidad 12B).

To wind down later on, award yourself a nightcap at **El Sentio** (Calle Luisa Aledo 14), smaller and quieter than most of the alternatives.

SHOPPING

Two good places for local handicrafts are the **Centro Para la Artesanía** (Calle Francisco Rabal 6), both exhibition and sales outlet, and **Paparajote** (Calle de los Apóstoles 14), beside the Catedral de Santa María.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Murcia's **San Javier airport** (☎ 968 17 20 00), beside the Mar Menor, is, in fact, much closer to Cartagena. A taxi between the airport and Murcia city costs around €40. Connections to the UK include the following:

Easyjet (www.easyjet.com) London (Gatwick) and Bristol.
Flybe (www.flybe.com) Birmingham, Exeter, Norwich and Southampton.

Jet2.com (www.jet2.com) Blackpool, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds/Bradford, Manchester and Newcastle.

Ryanair (www.ryanair.com) London (Luton and Stansted), Dublin, Glasgow and Liverpool.

Bus

For information about buses call ☎ 968 29 22 11. Local services include Cartagena (€3.20, one hour, at least 10 daily via the motorway). For Alicante and Lorca, let the train take the strain.

ALSA has daily buses to Granada (€18, 3½ hours, seven daily), Valencia (€13.95, 3¾ hours, four to seven) and Madrid (€23.45, five hours, up to 10).

Train

Up to five trains travel daily to/from Madrid (€38.60, 4¼ hours). Hourly trains operate to/from Lorca (€3.95) and Alicante (€5.10, 1½ hours), from where options are greater for Valencia and Barcelona.

GETTING AROUND

From the bus station, take bus 3 into town; from the train station hop aboard bus 9 or 39.

MURCIA REGION

CARTAGENA

pop 203,950

After falling on hard times in the later part of the 20th century, Cartagena is now rejuvenating and redefining itself, with a particular emphasis on bringing to life its Roman and Carthaginian past. In recent years, lead and pyrite mining, a staple of the economy since Roman times, had all but ceased. The naval presence – particularly the American Sixth Fleet that periodically disgorged dollar-laden sailors on R&R – was less evident, and the dingy approach to the city centre, closed shops and dilapidated buildings all spoke recession.

But the town is picking itself up. More seadate cruise passengers outnumber roustabout sailors and the redundant military hospital has been recycled as the campus of the Universidad Politécnica. As for tourism, the city is making huge efforts to pull itself up by its sea-boot straps, digging deep into its past and stripping back more and more of its old quarter to reveal its long-buried Roman and Carthaginian heritage.

MUD, GLORIOUS MUD

In **Lo Pagán**, beside an old windmill, a walkway, more than 2km long, sticks out into the lagoon. It borders the Salinas (salt pans) de San Pedro, where flocks of flamingos trawl for small fry. From it stick out a number of short wooden jetties. Go to the end of one, dunk yourself in the water and coat yourself in mud (be careful; *el lodo*, the squelchy, inky goo, retains the heat and can be almost scalding). Wallow a little, let it dry, wash it off, then, to really tone yourself up, take a dip in the lagoon on the other side of the walkway. Great fun and therapeutic too, swear many, given the mud's high salt and iodine content.

History

In 223 BC Hasdrubal marched into the Iberian settlement of Mastia at the head of his invading army from Carthage, North Africa, and renamed it Carthago Nova. The town flourished during Roman occupation, and under Muslim rule became the independent emirate of Cartajana. The Arabs improved agriculture and established the town's reputation for building warships before they were expelled in 1242. The extensive defensive walls were raised in the 18th century.

Information

Exit (Plaza del Rey 5; per hr €2; h noon-midnight Mon-Sat, 4pm-midnight Sun)

Post office (Plaza del Rey)

Tourist office (☎ 968 50 64 83; www.cartajena.es; Plaza del Almirante Bastarache; h 10am-2pm & 4-6pm or 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat)

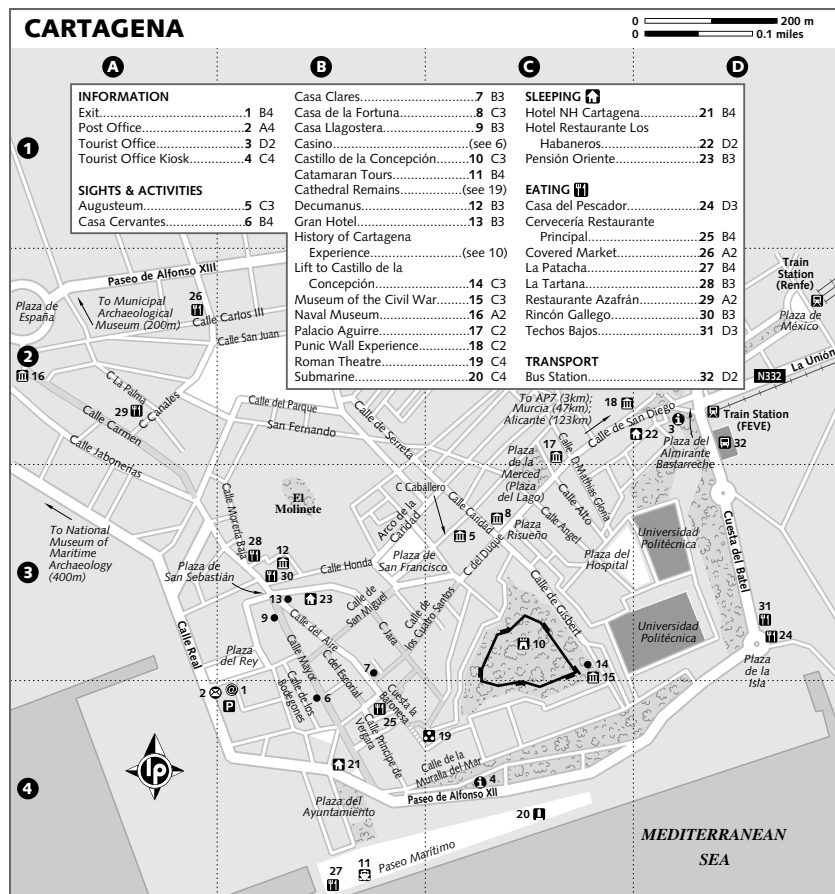
Tourist office kiosk (Paseo de Alfonso XII; h 10am-2pm & 4-6pm or 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun)

Sights & Activities

Several rich sites from Cartagena's past have been restored under the blanket title **Puerto de Culturas** (Port of Cultures; ☎ 968 50 00 93; www.puerto.culturas.com). There are four different combined tickets (€12.50), available at each venue, offering various permutations of sights.

For a start, and for a great panorama of the town and the hills that embrace the harbour, make your way up to **Castillo de la Concepción**, and within its remains, the **History of Cartagena Experience** (adult/child €3.50/2.50; h 10am-2.30pm & 4-8.30pm daily Jul-Sep, 10am-2.30pm & 4-6.30pm Tue-Sun Oct-Jun), offering a hi-tech overview of the city through the centuries. Enjoy the uphill walk or take the lift (€1).

A similar visitors centre, the **Punic Wall Experience** (Calle de San Diego; adult/child €3.50/2.50; h 10am-2.30pm & 4-8.30pm daily Jul-Sep, 10am-2.30pm & 4-6.30pm Tue-Sun Oct-Jun), built around a section of the



old Punic wall, concentrates on the town's Carthaginian and Roman legacy.

Other Roman sites in Cartagena include the **Augusteum** (Calle Caballero; adult/child €2.50/2; 10am-2.30pm Tue-Sun Jul-Sep, 4-6.30pm Tue-Sun Oct-Jun), with an exhibition on the Roman forum; the **Decumanus** (adult/child €2/1; 4-6pm Tue-Sun Jul-Sep, 12.30-2.30pm Tue-Sun Oct-Jun), off Calle Honda, with the shop-lined remains of one of the town's main Roman streets; and the **Casa de la Fortuna** (Plaza Risuëño; adult/child €2.50/2; 10am-2.30pm & 4-8.30pm Tue-Sun Jul-Sep, 10am-2.30pm Tue-Sun Oct-Jun), a Roman villa demonstrating daily life of the time.

The **Museum of the Civil War** (Calle de Gisbert; adult/child €3.50/2.50; 10am-2.30pm & 4-8.30pm daily Jul-Sep, 10am-2.30pm & 4-6.30pm Tue-Sun Oct-Jun), in a

former air-raid shelter, presents Cartagena's more recent and more violent history.

The huge grey cigar on Paseo Marítimo is a prototype submarine built in 1888 by local inventor Isaac Peral, who, alas, failed to convince the Spanish navy that such a means of propulsion could have a future.

To the northeast are the remains of the 13th-century cathedral, devastated by aerial bombardment during the Spanish Civil War and originally built from recycled slabs and pillars from the adjacent Roman theatre, which is currently undergoing a fundamental reconstruction so that it can again be a venue for events.

The **Municipal Archaeological Museum** (Calle Ramón y Cajal 45; admission free; 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Fri, 11am-2pm Sat & Sun), built above a late-Roman

cemetery, has a rich display of Carthaginian, Roman, Visigoth and Muslim artefacts.

The **National Museum of Maritime Archaeology** (adult/student/child €2.40/1.20/free; 9.30am-3pm Tue-Sun), by the lighthouse on the jetty Dique de la Navidad, has a reconstructed Roman galley and a collection of relics recovered from the sea.

The **Naval Museum** (Calle Menéndez Pelayo 8; admission free; 10am-1.30pm Tue-Sun) has a great collection of maps and charts, plus replicas of boats big and small.

Cartagena is also rich in Modernista buildings: **Casa Cervantes** (Calle Mayor 11), the **Casino** (Calle Mayor 13), **Casa Llagostera** (Calle Mayor 25), **Gran Hotel** (Calle del Aire) and **Casa Clares** (Calle del Aire 4) – looking more neglected every time we visit – and the resplendent **Palacio Aguirre** (Plaza de la Merced).

Tours

A sleek **catamaran** (adult/child €5.50/4.50) does one-hour tours of the harbour and its military defences, offering a wonderful alternative perspective of the city.

Festivals & Events

Cartagena's haunting **Semana Santa** processions are as elaborate as anything Andalucía can offer.

For 10 days in the second half of September, the townsfolk play war games, re-enacting the battles between rival Carthaginian and Roman occupiers in the spectacular **Carthagenes y Romanos** fiesta.

La Mar de Músicas brings the best of world music to Cartagena throughout July.

Sleeping

Pensión Oriente (% /fax 968 50 24 69; 2nd fl, Calle Jara 27; d €35, s/d without bathroom €25/33) The Oriente's 12 simple rooms (there's only one in suite double) occupy two floors. The welcome is warm, there are fans in all rooms and mattresses are springy.

Hotel Restaurante Los Habaneros (% 968 50 52 50; www.hotelhabaneros.com in Spanish; Calle de San Diego 60; s €52-57, d €63-73; p n a i) This hotel is well furnished and welcoming. Ask for a room in its recently completed new wing (there's wi-fi). The ground-floor restaurant, with excellent-value lunch and dinner *menús* (€12), spills onto its ample terrace in summer. Parking costs €6.

Hotel NH Cartagena (% 968 12 09 08; www.nh-hotels.com; Calle Real 2; d Mon-Thu €116-140, Fri-Sun & Aug €64; p n a i) Occupying what were once port

offices, this sensitively renovated building is Cartagena's prime choice. Facing the neoclassical town hall, it's a very stylish number that offers ever better views of the bay the higher your floor. Parking costs €9 and wi-fi is available.

Eating

There are plenty of bars and restaurants around Plaza del Ayuntamiento and the side streets off Calle Mayor.

Rincón Gallego (Calle Honda 3; 1 Mon-Sat) The owner of this tiny, unpretentious place isn't known as the Rey del Pulpo (Octopus King) for nothing; his arm-long menu of fish dishes includes 25 different ways of preparing the suckers.

La Tartana (Calle Morería Baja) Whether you nibble at the bar or rest your feet in its large restaurant (bypass the terrace tables alongside the hideously noisy street) you'll enjoy its famed tasty tapas and *montaditos*. It also does a four-course *menú* for €11.

Cerveceria Restaurante Principal (% 968 12 30 31; Calle Principe de Vergara 2; mains €10-15.60; 1 Mon-Sat) Fresh green plants, frosted glass, gleaming chrome and soft back lighting; the décor is as stylish as the cuisine at this restaurant-cum-beerhouse.

Restaurante Azafrán (% 968 52 31 72; Calle La Palma 3; mains €11-15; 1 closed Sun year-round, plus dinner Mon May-Sep) 'To ensure that the act of eating is transformed into a feast for all the senses' is the Saffron's mission statement. Its cuisine is based on first-class ingredients, either allowed to speak for themselves or creatively blended. Eat in the stylish dining room or on its newly created terrace.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

La Patacha (% 968 10 39 71; Muelle Alfonso XII; mains €10-18) Originally a fishing platform, though you'd never know it, this boat, reconstructed from dead hulks and permanently moored against the keystone, has varnished wood everywhere. Pillars are masked with coiled rope and the ceiling is papered with old naval charts. Why, as the level drops in your bottle of wine you can almost hear the hawsers creaking. In such a setting, the choice has to be fish, firm and so delightfully fresh it might still be swimming. Even if you don't dine here, do pop in for a drink and a tapa or two.

On Plaza de la Isla, set back from the fishing port from where they buy the freshest of produce, are two large, reasonably priced fish restaurants: **Casa del Pescador** (☎ 968 50 63 75; mains €9-14; ⌚ closed dinner Sun & Mon year-round, plus Tue Aug) and its neighbour, **Techos Bajos** (☎ 968 50 50 20; mains €4-10; ⌚ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Fri & Sat).

Cartagena has a big covered market (Calle Carlos III; ⌚ 7am-2pm Mon-Sat), a rich resource for self-caterers.

Getting There & Away

BUS

You'll recognise the smart new bus station (☎ 968 50 56 56) by the bizarre lighthouse tower on its roof. There are eight runs daily to/from Alicante (€7.05, two hours) via Los Alcázares (€1.50, 30 minutes), Torrevieja (€3.80, 1¼ hours) and Santa Pola (€5.80, 1¾ hours). At least 10 motorway buses go to/from Murcia (€3.20, one hour) daily and ALSA runs services to/from La Manga (€2.20 to €2.70, one hour, at least 10 daily).

TAXI

A taxi to/from Murcia airport costs approximately €30.

TRAIN

For Renfe train destinations, change in Murcia (local train €3.60, 50 minutes, four to seven daily). Beware: the Talgo express alternative costs €14!

Local FEVE trains make the short run to Los Nietos (€1.10, 30 minutes, every 40 minutes) on the Mar Menor.

THE PRICE OF GOLF

The year 2005 was Spain's driest for well over a century. Compounding the problem, demand for water has been doubling every seven years. The two principal guzzlers are intensive agriculture and tourism, particularly golf courses.

Large areas of Murcia are already semi-desert and much of the remainder is only productive because of intensive irrigation. And yet there are plans for laying out up to 40 new golf courses in the region. Each one sucks in as much water as 10,000 households consume.

You might want to pack your racquet or fins in place of your clubs.

COSTA CÁLIDA

With more than 300 days of sunshine annually and an average temperature of 18°C, the Hot Coast is aptly named.

Mar Menor

The Mar Menor is a 170-sq-km saltwater lagoon. Averaging 7m deep, its waters are a good 5°C warmer than the open sea, from which it's separated by La Manga (Sleeve). This 22km sliver of land, great for water sports, is punctuated by lots of little beaches (the quietest ones are at its northern tip), ideal for families. But this favourite package-tour destination has been hideously overdeveloped with high-rise accommodation; the world would lose little if the whole isthmus one day cut loose and drifted away.

Cabo de Palos, at the peninsula's southern limit, is still a small fishing port. The waters around the tiny offshore Islas Hormigas (Ant Islands), a protected marine area, are great for scuba diving. **Atura-Sub** (☎ 968 56 48 23; www.atura.com in Spanish) and **BuceaYa** (☎ 968 34 70 33; www.buceaya.com in Spanish), both beside the marina, offer courses and dives year-round.

On the Mar Menor's west bank, Los Alcázares is hard to squeeze into during the tourist season (when the population swells from a resident 8500 to over 150,000), but is pleasantly quiet the rest of the year. **Restaurante La Encarnación** (☎ 968 57 50 48; Calle Condesa 2; rice dishes around €10, mains €14-18) is a wonderful place for lovers of faded glory. Overlooking the lagoon, it occupies part of the old spa hotel, whose taps were recently turned off for the last time. Enjoy a drink or snack in the leafy interior courtyard or loll back in the ample wicker chairs of the dining room, hung with old photos, paintings and programmes.

Golfo de Mazarrón

To explore the lands west of Cartagena, you really need your own wheels. The coast, fretted with little coves and unspoilt beaches, has a rugged, barren charm. Inland, where agribusiness prevails, is a disappointment. What appear from a distance as shimmering silver lakes turn out to be entire valleys sheathed in plastic, forcing tomatoes and other cheap vegetables for local and export markets.

Driving from Cartagena, if speed matters, take the new stretch of A7 motorway. Otherwise, opt for the more spectacular E22, then E16, which swoop and snake through the

coastal hills. Both bring you to Puerto de Mazarrón, a pleasant, modern resort with beaches of shale. Further west and all but nudging the border with Almería, Águilas has better beaches. A town with roots, it exists for more than tourism, and fishing remains an important contributor to its economy.

LORCA

pop 87,150 / elevation 330m

For the Romans Lorca was merely a modest stopover on the road between the Pyrenees and Cádiz. For the Visigoths it became a key bastion in the vain attempts to hold off Muslim armies probing northwards. Finally captured by the Arabs around AD 780, it was from then on known as 'Lurka'. On 23 November 1243, the very day his father, Fernando III, captured Seville, the future Alfonso X El Sabio reclaimed Lorca from the Muslims.

Nowadays, the town is an urban centre for the arid southwestern corner of the Murcia region.

Orientation & Information

The town's old quarter clings to the slopes between Calle Lope Gisbert and the 13th-century castle that overlooks Lorca from the northwest.

Train and bus stations are beside each other, about 200m southwest of the tourist office (☎ 968 46 61 57; ofiturismo@ayuntalorca.es; Calle Lope Gisbert 10; ⌚ 9.30am-2pm & 5.30-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun), which occupies part of the Casa de Guevara (right). You'll probably find the town's **Centro de Visitantes** (☎ 902 40 00 47; www.lorcatallerdel tiempo.com; ⌚ 9.30am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun) more informative about the town's sights. It's in the former Convento de la Merced, beside Puente de la Alberca to the northern end of the old town. Its multimedia

exhibition (adult/child €3/2.30) graphically illustrates Lorca's long history.

Sights

The Centro de Visitantes sells various combined tickets (€12 to €26), offering different packages of visits to Lorca's sights – including a ride on the tourist train (adult/child €3/2.30), a painless way of being hauled up to the castle.

The town's castle has been transformed into a veritable theme park, **La Fortaleza del Sol** (adult/child €10/6.80; ⌚ 10.30am-6.30pm Tue-Sun Jul-Sep, 10.30am-5.30pm or 6.30pm Sat & Sun Oct-Dec & Apr-Jun, closed Jan-Mar) with dioramas, actors in costume and plenty of gadgetry.

Behind the baroque façade of the 17th-century **Casa de Guevara** (adult/child €3/2.30) is a harmonious patio and, within it, a restored early-20th-century pharmacy.

There are more splendid baroque buildings around Plaza de España, also called Plaza Mayor, in the centre of the old town. These include the Pósito, a 16th-century public granary that nowadays houses the town archives, the 18th-century **Casa del Corregidor** and the town hall. Most impressive of all is the **Colegiata de San Patricio** (⌚ 11am-1pm & 4.30-6pm), a collegiate church with a confident baroque façade and predominantly Renaissance interior.

Peculiar to Lorca are four small museums featuring the magnificent embroidered costumes used in the Semana Santa processions. Largest are those of the Azules and the Blancos (see the boxed text, below). The **Museo de Bordados del Paso Azul** (Calle Nogalte 7; adult/child €2/1.50; ⌚ 10am-2pm & 5-7.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) competes in splendour, as in everything else, with the **Museo de Bordados del Paso Blanco** (Plaza Santo Domingo; adult/child €2/1.50; ⌚ 10am-2pm & 5-7.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), annexed to the church of Santo Domingo.

ADDING COLOUR TO SEMANA SANTA

In Lorca, issues are black and white, or rather blue and white, the colours of the two major brotherhoods that have competed every year since 1855 to see who can put on the most lavish Semana Santa display.

Lorca's Easter parades beat to a different rhythm, distinct from the slow, sombre processions of Andalucía and elsewhere in Murcia. While still deeply reverential, they're full of colour and vitality, mixing Old and New Testament legend with the Passion story.

If you hail from Lorca, you're passionately Blanco (White) or Azul (Blue). Each of the brotherhoods has a statue of the Virgin (one draped in a blue mantle, the other in white, naturally), a banner and a spectacular museum. The result of this intense and mostly genial year-round rivalry is just about the most dramatic Semana Santa you'll see anywhere in Spain.

Lorca's **Museo Arqueológico** (adult/child €2/1.50; h 10am-2pm & 5-7.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) is in the grand 16th-century Casa de los Salazar, set back from Calle Santo Domingo.

The cavernous **Centro de Artesanía** (Calle Lope Gisbert), beside the tourist office, displays and sells local traditional crafts.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Alameda (☎ 968 40 66 00; www.hotel-alameda.com; 1st fl, Calle Musso Valiente 8; s/d/tr €30/50/65; p a) Although a bit on the bland side, this pleasant family hotel with simply furnished rooms, right in the heart of town, compensates by the warmth of its welcome.

Jardines de Lorca (☎ 968 47 05 99; www.serco.telhoteles.com; Alameda de Rafael Méndez; r €75-109; p a i s) Approximately 200m south of the bullring, this well-equipped four-star hotel, popular with business travellers, is in a tranquil residential suburb.

Restaurante Juan de Toledo (☎ 968 47 02 15; Calle Juan de Toledo 14; mains €11-15; h Tue-Sat, lunch only Sun) You can pick at tapas in the bar, heavy with hung hams, or dine in the more tranquil rear restaurant. Try the restaurant's signature *trigo* stew, with snails, artichokes and rabbit.

Getting There & Around

Hourly buses (€4.50) and trains (€3.95) run between Lorca and Murcia.

There's a large **underground car park** (Plaza Colón) 200m west of the tourist office.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Pensión del Carmen (☎ 968 46 64 59; Rincón de los Valientes 3, Lorca; r per person €18; a) This is a great little budget choice. Cheerful and family-run, it has seven doubles and seven singles, all spotless. You'll find it in a tiny square just off Calle Nogalte, about 50m south of the Museo de Bordados del Paso Azul. Its popular, no-frills restaurant, Rincón de los Valientes (*menú* €9, mains €6 to €9; open for lunch daily and dinner Wednesday to Saturday), serves hearty local fare.

PARQUE NATURAL DE SIERRA ESPUÑA

The park is a 40-minute drive southwest of Murcia towards Lorca. Just north of the N340, it has more than 250 sq km of unspoilt highlands and blazed trails and beckons to walkers and climbers alike.

Limestone formations tower above its sprawling forests. In the northwest of the park are 26 Pozos de la Nieve (Ice Houses), where snow was compressed into ice then taken to nearby towns in summer, a practice that lasted until the arrival of industrial refrigeration.

Access to the park is best via Alhama de Murcia. Visit the excellent **Centro de Interpretación** in the heart of the park.

The nearby village of El Berro has a couple of restaurants and the friendly **Camping Sierra Espuña** (☎ 968 66 80 38; www.campingsierraespuna.com; sites per person/tent/car €3.50/3.50/3.50; s).

Andalucía



Spain's most southerly region is the true home of typically Spanish experiences. Bullfighting, tapas, flamenco, the guitar itself, all began in Andalucía and remain deeply embedded here. Other aspects of Spanish life take on their most extreme forms here: Andalusian fiestas are the noisiest and most colourful, Easter processions have more pageantry, the summer heat is more broiling, the people are at their most vivacious, fun-loving and family-oriented. And the coastal tourist resorts are the most densely crowded in the whole country.

But beyond the cliché images, Andalucía is a land of surprises and contradictions. Away from the mass-tourism resorts you'll find some of the most pristine beaches in the country, on the Cabo de Gata promontory and the Atlantic Costa de la Luz. Inland are green hills, white villages, huge nature reserves (one-fifth of Andalusian territory is under environmental protection), and the snowcapped highest mountain range on the Spanish mainland, the Sierra Nevada.

Andalucía is the proud home of Spain's most famous building, that bejewelled diadem of Islamic architecture, Granada's Alhambra, as well as other marvellous relics of medieval Islamic Spain. The region also has a lesser-known but as fabulous heritage of cathedrals, palaces and castles from later eras. Contemporary Andalucía is ever more cosmopolitan and fashionable, with towns and cities full of glitzy boutiques, hip bars, stylish restaurants and pumping nightlife.

Deeply traditional yet ready to seize the modern world, Andalusians always live life to the full. Few visitors to their land fail to get caught up in the fun.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Revel in **Granada** (p768) – the magical Alhambra, thumping nightlife and free tapas!
- Live the passion of **Semana Santa in Seville** ('Holy Week': p701)
- Play on the golden-sand beaches of Cádiz's **Costa de la Luz** (p731)
- Stalk ibex, wild boar and deer amid the stunning mountain scenery of the **Parque Natural de Cazorla** (p796)
- Marvel at Córdoba's mesmerizing **Mezquita** (p763)
- Tour the mouthwatering tapas bars of **Seville** (p703)
- Climb mainland Spain's highest mountain range, the **Sierra Nevada** (p783), and wend your way along the age-old paths of the beautiful **Alpujarras valleys** (p786)
- Get close to genius at Málaga's **Museo Picasso** (p745)



■ AREA: 87,000 SQ KM

■ AVE SUMMER TEMP: HIGH 37°C,
LOW 20°C (Seville)

■ POP: 7.9 MILLION

History

Around 1000 or 900 BC, Andalucía's agricultural and mining wealth attracted Phoenician trading colonies to coastal sites such as Cádiz, Huelva and Málaga. In the 8th and 7th centuries BC Phoenician influence gave rise to the mysterious, legendarily wealthy Tartessos civilization, somewhere in western Andalucía.

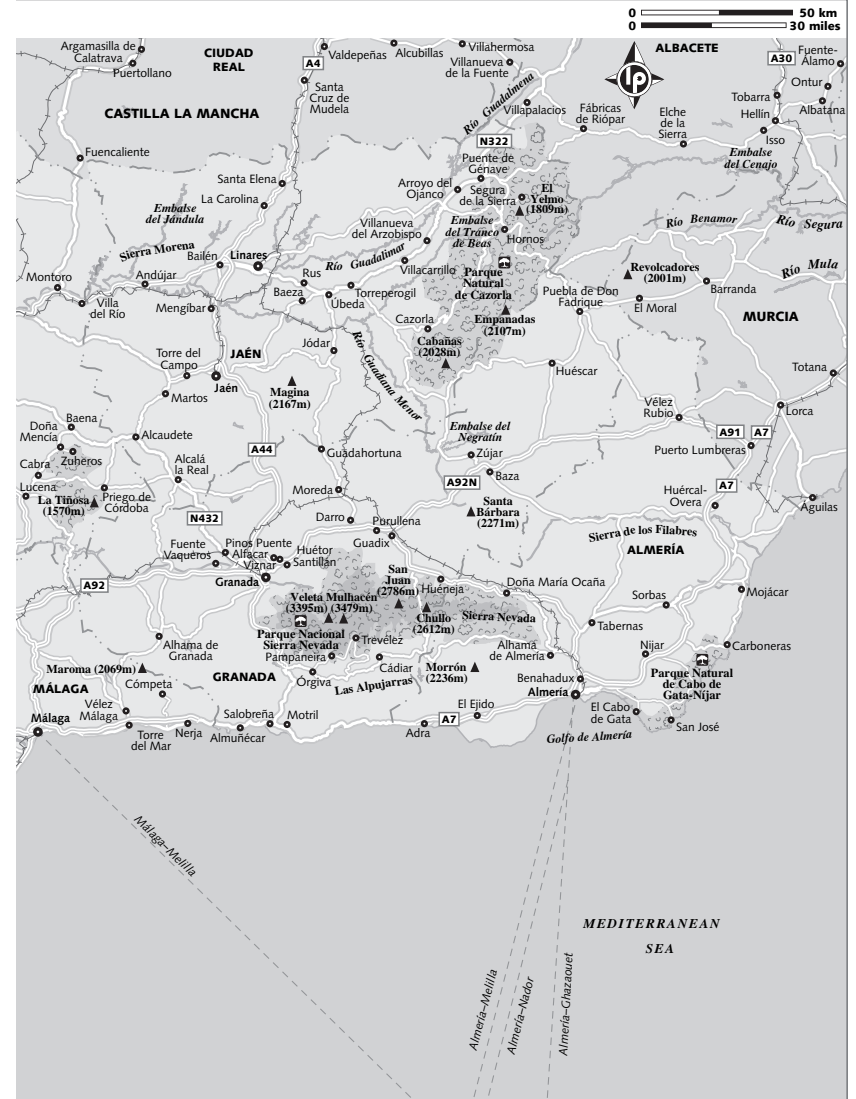
In Roman times (the 3rd century BC to 5th century AD) Andalucía, governed from Córdoba, was one of the most civilized and wealthiest areas of the Roman Empire. Rome imported Andalusian products such as olives, copper, silver, fish and garum (a spicy seasoning derived from fish), and Andalucía gave Rome two emperors, Trajan and Hadrian.

ANDALUCÍA



Andalucía was the obvious base for the Muslim invaders who surged onto the Iberian Peninsula from Africa in 711 under Arab general Tariq ibn Ziyad, who landed at Gibraltar with around 10,000 men, mostly Berbers (indigenous North Africans). Córdoba, until the 11th century, then Seville until the 13th and finally Granada until the

15th century, took turns as the leading city of Islamic Spain. At its peak, in the 10th century, Córdoba was the biggest and most dazzling and cultured city in Western Europe, famed for its 'three cultures' coexistence between Muslims, Jews and Christians. Islamic civilization lasted longer in Andalucía than anywhere else on the Iberian Peninsula



and it's from the medieval name for the Muslim areas of the peninsula, Al-Andalus, that the name Andalucía comes.

The Emirate of Granada, the last bastion of Al-Andalus, finally fell to the Catholic Monarchs, Fernando and Isabel, in 1492. Columbus' landing in the Americas the same year brought great wealth to Seville, and later Cádiz, the Andalusian ports through which Spain's trade with the Americas was conducted. But the Castilian conquerors killed off Andalucía's deeper prosperity by handing out great swaths of territory to their nobles, who set sheep to run on former food-growing lands.

By the late 19th century, rural Andalucía was a hotbed of anarchist unrest. During the civil war Andalucía split along class lines and savage atrocities were committed by both sides. Spain's subsequent 'hungry years' were particularly hungry here in the south, and between 1950 and 1970 some 1.5 million Andalusians left to find work in the industrial cities of northern Spain and other European countries.

But tourism and the almost everlasting building boom that has come with it, plus industrial growth and massive EU subsidies for agriculture (which still provides one Andalusian job in eight), have made a big difference since the 1960s. The left-of-centre PSOE (Partido Socialista Obrero Español) party has controlled Andalucía's regional government in Seville since 1982. The worst of Andalusian poverty has been eradicated with the help of grants, community works schemes, a generous dole system and the overall improvement in the Spanish economy. Registered unemployment in Andalucía remains the highest in Spain (14% in 2006), but it's also a fact that many registered unemployed in Andalucía have jobs. Education and health provision have steadily improved and the PSOE has given Andalucía Spain's biggest network of environmentally protected areas (though only in the last couple of years has it begun to tackle the rampant overdevelopment of many coastal areas).

The early 21st century has seen an important shift in Andalucía's ethnic balance with the arrival not just of ever more northern European sun-seekers but also economic migrants, legal and illegal, from Latin America, Morocco, sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Europe.

SEVILLE

pop 714,000

If any one place comes close to rolling together everything that's quintessentially Andalusian, it's Seville. Here in the region's capital and biggest city, that special Andalusian way of life is distilled into its purest and most intense form. Seville has the most passionate and portentous Semana Santa (Holy Week), the most festive and romantic annual *feria* (fair), the best tapas bars, the best nightlife and the most stylish people in Andalucía. It has more narrow, winding, medieval lanes and romantic, hidden plazas soaked in the scent of orange blossom than half of Andalucía's other cities put together. It's the home of those two bulwarks of Andalusian tradition, flamenco and bullfighting, and its heritage of art and architecture (Roman, Islamic, Gothic, Renaissance, baroque) is without rival in southern Spain.

But Seville's most developed art form is that of enjoying oneself. To be out at night among the city's relaxed, fun-loving crowds – in the tapas bars, on the streets, in the clubs and discos – is an experience you won't forget.

There are a couple of catches, of course: Seville is expensive. You might pay €80 here for a room that would cost €50 elsewhere, and prices go even higher during Semana Santa and the Feria de Abril (April Fair). Also bear in mind that Seville gets *very* hot in July and August: locals, sensibly, leave the city then.

HISTORY

Roman Seville, named Hispalis, was a significant port on Río Guadalquivir, which is navigable to the Atlantic Ocean 100km away. Muslim Seville, called Ishbiliya, became the most powerful of the *taifas* (small kingdoms) into which Islamic Spain split after the Córdoba caliphate collapsed in 1031. Poet-king Al-Mutamid (1069–91) presided over a languid, hedonistic court in the Alcázar palace. In the 12th century a strict Islamic sect from Morocco, the Almohads, took over Muslim Spain and made Seville capital of their whole realm, building a great mosque where the cathedral now stands. Almohad power eventually crumbled and Seville fell to Fernando III (El Santo, the Saint) of Castilla in 1248.

By the 14th century Seville was the most important Castilian city. Its biggest break

came in 1503, when it was awarded a monopoly on Spanish trade with the American continent. Seville – *puerto y puerta de Indias* (port and gateway of the Indies) – rapidly became one of the biggest, richest and most cosmopolitan cities on earth, and a magnet for everyone from priests and bankers to beggars and commoners. Lavish Renaissance and baroque buildings sprouted, and many geniuses of Spain's artistic golden age (the late 16th to late 17th centuries) were based here: painters such as Zurbarán, Murillo and Valdés Leal (though Seville-born Velázquez left for Madrid), and sculptors such as Juan Martínez Montañés and Pedro Roldán.

However a plague in 1649 killed half the city and the Guadalquivir became more silted-up and less navigable for the increasingly big ships of the day. In 1717 the Casa de la Contratación, the government office controlling commerce with the Americas, was transferred to Cádiz. Another Seville plague in 1800 killed 13,000 people. The beginnings of industry in the mid-19th century brought a measure of prosperity for some, but the majority remained impoverished. Seville fell very quickly to the Nationalists at the start of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, despite resistance in working-class areas (which brought savage reprisals).

Things looked up in the 1980s when Seville was named capital of the new autonomous

Andalucía within democratic Spain, and *sevillano* Felipe González became Spain's prime minister. The Expo '92 international exhibition (1992) brought the city millions of visitors, eight new bridges across the Guadalquivir and the super-fast AVE rail link to Madrid. Seville's economy is now steadily improving with a mix of tourism, commerce, technology and industry.

ORIENTATION

Seville straddles Río Guadalquivir, with most places of interest found on the river's east bank. The central area is a tangle of narrow, twisting old streets and small squares, with the exception of Plaza Nueva and the broad, straight Avenida de la Constitución. Just east of Constitución are the city's major monuments: the cathedral, La Giralda and the Alcázar fortress-palace. The quaint Barrio de Santa Cruz, east of the cathedral and the Alcázar, is a popular place to stay and eat. The true centre of Seville, El Centro, is a little further north, around Plaza de San Francisco and Plaza Salvador. The area between Avenida de la Constitución and the river is called El Arenal.

The train station and the two bus stations are on the periphery of the central area, all served by city buses that circle the centre (p707): Prado de San Sebastián bus station is 650m southeast of the cathedral and within

SEVILLE IN...

Two Days

On your first morning visit the **cathedral** (p690) and **Giralda** (p694) then wander through the **Barrio de Santa Cruz** (p697) and enjoy lunch at the **Corral del Agua** (p704) or **Restaurante La Albahaca** (p704). In the afternoon head over to Río Guadalquivir and visit the **Plaza de Toros** (p698) or the **Museo de Bellas Artes** (p698). Devote the evening to a relaxed tour of a few tapas bars!

Give your second morning to the **Alcázar** (p695) before heading up to El Centro to visit the **Palacio de la Condesa de Lebrija** (p697) and some of the city-centre shops. In the evening take in a flamenco performance and check out some of the bars in **El Centro** (p705) or around the **Alameda de Hércules** (p705).

Four Days

On day three relax with a visit to the leafy **Parque de María Luisa** (p698) and its museums, followed by whichever of the sights you missed on day one. Treat yourself to dinner at a classy restaurant such as the **Egaña Oriza** (p704) or **Enrique Becerra** (p704). On day four venture out to Santiponce to explore the Roman **Itálica** (p708) and **Monasterio de San Isidoro del Campo** (p708). Wind up with a night out enjoying some live music and, if it's the weekend, a **nightclub** (p705).



walking distance of the Barrio de Santa Cruz; Plaza de Armas bus station is 900m northwest of the cathedral, within walking distance of El Arenal; and Santa Justa train station is 1.5km northeast of the cathedral.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Casa del Libro (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 50 29 50; Calle Velázquez 8; 11 9.30am-9.30pm Mon-Sat) Guidebooks and novels published in several languages. Also, there are maps and dictionaries.

LTC (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 42 59 64; Avenida Menéndez Pelayo 42-44; 11 closed Sat) Andalucía's top map shop.

Emergency

Ambulance (☎ 061)

Policía Local (☎ 092)

Policía Nacional (☎ 091)

Internet Access

First Center (Map pp692-3; Avenida de la Constitución 34; per hr €2; 11 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-9.30pm Sat, noon-9pm Sun)

Interneta (Map pp692-3; Avenida Menéndez Pelayo 46; per hr €2; 11 10.30-1.30am Mon-Fri, noon-1.30am Sat & Sun)

Sevilla Internet Center (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 50 02 75; Calle Almirantazgo 2; per min €0.05; 11 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-10pm Sat & Sun)

Internet Resources

Discover Sevilla (www.discoversevilla.com)

Explore Sevilla (www.exploresevilla.com)

Seville Tourism (www.turismo.sevilla.org) The city's informative official tourism site; it includes a great guide to Seville for gays and lesbians, and an 'Accessible Guide' listing establishments with disabled access.

Laundry

Laundries here do the job for you (usually in half a day), with washing, drying and folding included in their prices.

Auto-Servicio de Lavandería Sevilla (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 21 05 35; Calle Castelar 2C; per load €6; 11 9.30am-1.30pm & 5-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat)

La Segunda Vera (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 54 11 48; Calle Alejo Fernández 3; per load €8; 11 9.30am-1.30pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1.30pm Sat)

Media

El Giralillo Andalucía-wide what's-on mag, free at tourist offices and some hotels, with a strong Seville emphasis.

Tourist Free mag for tourists with worthwhile information.

Welcome & Olé Ditto.

Medical Services

Centro de Salud El Porvenir (Map pp692-3; ☎ 955 03 78 17; cnr Avenidas Menéndez y Pelayo & de Cádiz) Public clinic with emergency service.

Hospital Virgen del Rocío (☎ 955 01 20 00; Avenida de Manuel Siurot s/n) The main general hospital, 1km south of Parque de María Luisa.

Money

There's no shortage of banks and ATMs in the central area. Santa Justa train station, the airport and both bus stations have ATMs.

Post

Post office (Map pp692-3; Avenida de la Constitución 32)

Telephone

There are plenty of pay phones around the centre. The following call centres offer inexpensive international calls:

Ciber Alcázar (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 21 04 01; Calle San Fernando 35; 11 10.15am-10.30pm Mon-Fri, noon-10.30pm Sat & Sun)

First Center (Map pp692-3; Avenida de la Constitución 34; 11 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-9.30pm Sat, noon-9pm Sun)

Tourist Information

Municipal tourist office (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 22 17 14; barranco.turismo@sevilla.org; Calle de Arjona 28; 11 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat & Sun, reduced hr during Semana Santa & Feria de Abril)

Regional tourist offices Avenida de la Constitución 21 (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 22 14 04; otsevilla@andalucia.org; 11 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 3-7pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun, closed holidays); Estación Santa Justa (Map pp688-9; ☎ 954 53 76 26; 11 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun, closed holidays). The Constitución office is well informed but often very busy.

Turismo Sevilla (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 21 00 05; www.turismosevilla.org; Plaza del Triunfo 1; 11 10.30am-7pm Mon-Fri) Information on all Sevilla province.

SIGHTS

Seville's major monuments, the cathedral, the Giralda and the Alcázar complex, are all just east of Avenida de la Constitución and south of the city's true centre (El Centro). But there's plenty more to see and do in El Centro and neighbouring El Arenal, as well as in areas to the south, north and west.

Cathedral & Giralda

After Seville fell to the Christians in 1248 its main mosque was used as a church until 1401

when, in view of its decaying state, the church authorities decided to knock it down and start again. 'Let us create such a building that future generations will take us for lunatics', they reputedly agreed. They certainly got themselves a big and magnificent church. Seville's **cathedral** (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 21 49 71; adult/student, senior, disabled/under 12yr €7.50/1.50/free, admission free Sun; 11 11am-6pm Mon-Sat, 2.30-7pm Sun Sep-Jun, 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 2.30-7pm Sun Jul & Aug; ✓✓) is one of the largest in the world: the main building is 126m long and 83m wide. It was completed by 1507 and was originally all Gothic, though work done after its central dome collapsed in 1511 was mostly in the Renaissance style. The original mosque's beautiful minaret, La Giralda, still stands on its eastern side (see p694), but the cathedral's bulky exterior gives few other hints of the treasures within.

SALA DEL PABELLÓN

Selected treasures from the cathedral's art collection (many of them the work of masters from Seville's 17th-century artistic golden age) are exhibited in this first room after the ticket office.

CATHEDRAL CHAPELS & STAINED GLASS

The sheer size of the broad, five-naved cathedral is obscured by a welter of interior decoration typical of Spanish cathedrals. The chapels along the northern and southern sides are as rich in sculpture, stained glass and painting as any church chapels in Spain. Near the western end of the northern side is the **Capilla de San Antonio**, with Murillo's large 1666 canvas depicting the vision of St Anthony of Padua; thieves excised the kneeling saint in 1874 but he was found in New York and put back.

Don't forget to look up to admire the Gothic vaulting and rich-hued stained glass. The oldest stained glass, with markedly different colours, in the four westernmost bays on either side of the uppermost storey of the nave, and above the five westernmost chapels on both sides of the nave, was done between 1478 and 1483 by a German, Enrique Alemán.

COLUMBUS' TOMB

Inside the cathedral's southern door stands the tomb of Christopher Columbus, an elaborate monument dating from 1902 with four sepulchre-bearers representing the four kingdoms of Spain at the time of Columbus' 1492 voyage: Castilla, León, Aragón and

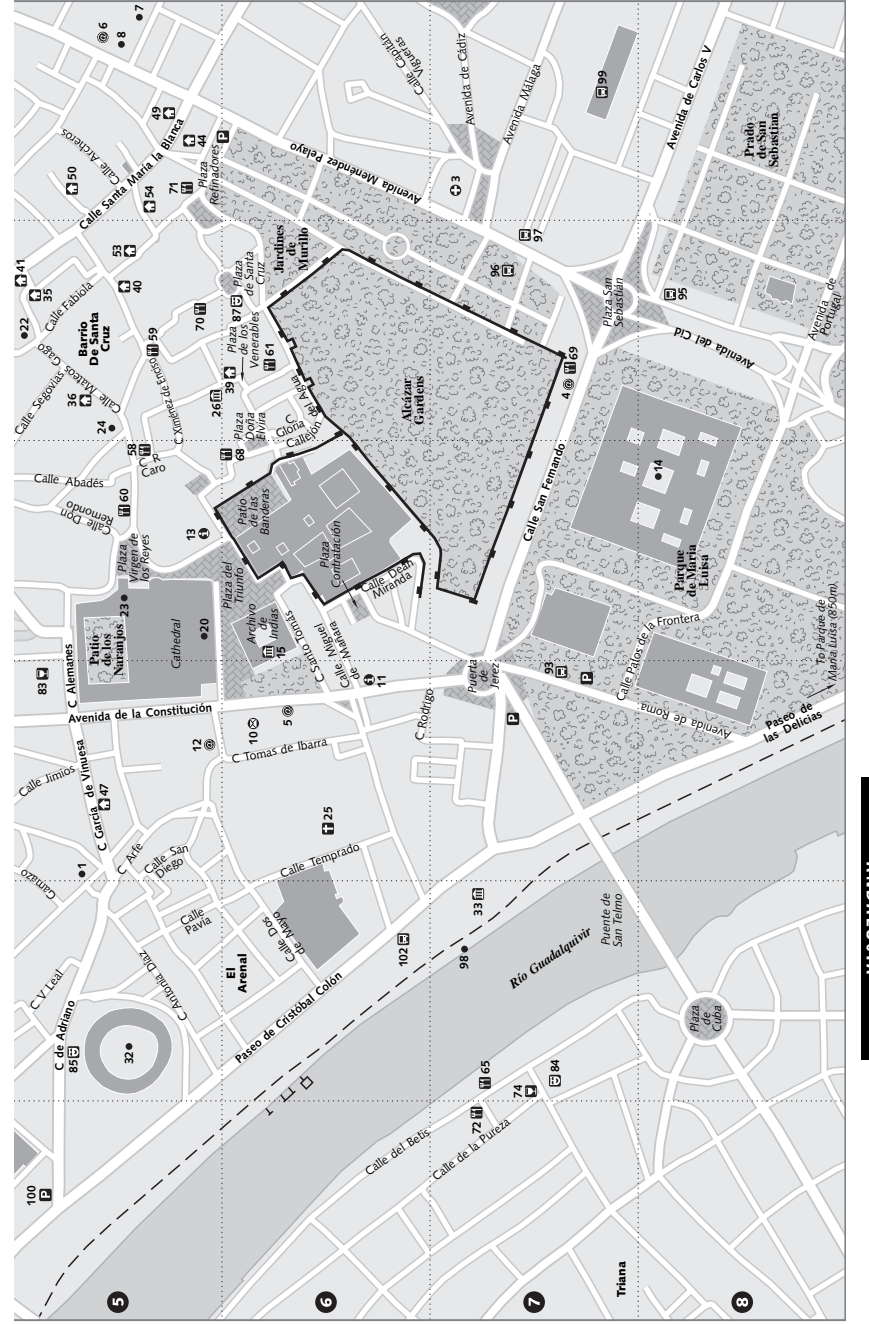
Navarra. But are the bones within *really* those of the great explorer? The tomb holds bones brought back from the Caribbean in 1899 and long thought to be Columbus'. However, the Dominican Republic in the Caribbean claims that Columbus' bones lie beneath a monument in its capital, Santo Domingo. Since 2003 researchers have been conducting tests on various bones from the Seville cathedral tomb and elsewhere to try to resolve the puzzle. In 2006 it was announced that the DNA of the cathedral bones matches that of Columbus' brother Diego (who was also buried in Seville), indicating that the cathedral bones are indeed the great explorer's. But Columbus' bones were moved several times after his death and it's quite possible that at one stage they went different ways. It would be strangely apt if his mortal remains, as his life was, were divided between Spain and the Caribbean.

CAPILLA MAYOR

Towards the east end of the main nave is the Capilla Mayor, whose Gothic altarpiece is the jewel of the cathedral and reckoned to be the biggest altarpiece in the world. Begun by Flemish sculptor Pieter Dancart in 1482 and completed by others by 1564, this sea of gilded and polychromed wood holds more than 1000 carved biblical figures. At the centre of the lowest level is the 13th-century image of the Virgen de la Sede, patron of the cathedral.

SACRISTIES & CHAPTERHOUSE

South of the Capilla Mayor are rooms containing many of the cathedral's art treasures. The westernmost of these is the **Sacristía de los Cálices** (Sacristy of the Chalice), where Goya's 1817 painting of the Seville martyrs *Santas Justa y Rufina* (potter sisters who died at the hands of the Romans in AD 287) hangs above the altar. A lion licks Rufina's feet, as reputedly happened when she was thrown to the said beasts during her travails. The large domed **Sacristía Mayor** (Main Sacristy) is a Plateresque creation of 1528-47: the arch over its portal has carvings of 16th-century foods. The room's centrepiece is the **Custodia de Juan de Arfe**, a huge 475kg silver monstrance made in the 1580s by Renaissance metal smith Juan de Arfe. In a glass case are the city keys handed to the conquering Fernando III in 1248.



INFORMATION	SLEEPING	DRINKING
Auto-Servicio de Lavandería	Casa Sol y Luna.....34 D3	Alambique.....74 B7
Sevilla.....1 C5	Hostal Córdoba.....35 E5	Antigüedades.....75 D4
Casa del Libro.....2 C2	Hostal Goya.....36 E5	Bare Nostrum.....76 D3
Centro de Salud El	Hostal Museo.....37 B1	Big Ben.....(see 74)
Porvenir.....3 F7	Hostal Residencia	Cabo Loco.....(see 76)
Ciber Alcázar.....4 E7	Naranjo.....38 B3	Café Isbilliya.....77 A4
First Center.....5 C6	Hostería del Laurel.....39 E6	El Capote.....78 A4
Internetia.....6 F5	Hotel Alcántara.....40 E5	El Garlochi.....79 E3
La Segunda Vera.....7 F5	Hotel Amadeus.....41 E5	La Antigua Bodeguita.....80 D3
LTC.....8 F5	Hotel Madrid.....42 A3	La Rebótica.....81 D3
Municipal Tourist	Hotel Maestranza.....43 C4	La Sapotales.....82 D3
Office.....9 A4	Hotel Puerta de Sevilla.....44 F5	Mú d'Aquí.....(see 74)
Post Office.....10 C6	Hotel Puerta de Triana.....45 A4	Nao.....(see 76)
Regional Tourist Office.....11 D6	Hotel San Francisco.....46 D4	P Flaherty Irish Pub.....83 C5
Seville Internet Center.....12 C5	Hotel Simón.....47 C5	Sirocca.....(see 74)
Turismo Sevilla.....13 D5	Hotel Vincci La Rábida.....48 B4	
	Huéspedes Dulces	
	Sueños.....49 F5	
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	Las Casas de la Judería.....50 F5	ENTERTAINMENT
Antigua Fábrica de Tabacos	Las Casas del Rey de	Boss.....84 B7
(Universidad de Sevilla).....14 D8	Baeza.....51 F3	Casa de la Memoria de
Archivo de Indias.....15 D6	Oasis Backpackers Hostel.....52 D3	Al-Andalus.....(see 40)
Ayuntamiento.....16 C4	Península San Pancracio.....53 E5	Empresa Pagés.....85 B5
Capilla de San José.....17 C3	Un Patio en Santa Cruz.....54 F5	La Carbonería.....86 F4
Carpe Diem.....18 D3		Los Gallos.....87 E6
Casa de Pilatos.....19 F3		Sol Café Cantante.....88 E1
Cathedral Entrance.....20 D5	EATING	
CLIC.....21 C3	Bar Alfalfa.....55 E3	SHOPPING
Fundación Cristina Heeren de	Bar Laredo.....56 C4	El Corte Inglés.....89 B2
Arte Flamenco.....22 E5	Bar Levies.....57 E4	El Corte Inglés.....90 B3
Giralda.....23 D5	Bodega Santa Cruz.....58 D5	El Corte Inglés.....91 B3
Giralda Center.....24 E5	Café Bar Las Teresas.....59 E5	El Corte Inglés.....92 C2
Hospital de la	Cervecería Giralda.....60 D5	
Caridad.....25 C6	Corral del Agua.....61 E6	TRANSPORT
Hospital de los Venerables	El Patio San Eloy.....62 C2	Airport Bus Stop.....93 C7
Sacerdotes.....26 E5	Enrique Becerra.....63 C4	Bus No 32 Stop.....94 D2
Iglesia de la Magdalena.....27 B3	Habanita.....64 D3	Bus No C2 Stop.....95 E8
LINC.....28 C3	Kiosco de las Flores.....65 B7	Bus No C3 Stop.....96 E7
Maritime Museum.....(see 33)	La Bodega.....66 E3	Bus No C4 Stop.....97 E7
Museo de Bellas Artes.....29 A2	La Trastienda.....67 E3	Cruceros Turísticos Torre de
Palacio de la Condesa de	Restaurante La Cueva.....68 D6	Oro.....98 B7
Lebrija.....30 C2	Restaurante Egaña Oriza.....69 E7	Estación de Autobuses Prado
Parroquia del Salvador.....31 D3	Restaurante La Albahaca.....70 E5	de San Sebastián.....99 F7
Plaza de Toros de la Real	Restaurante Modesto.....71 F5	Parking Paseo de Colón.....100 A5
Maestranza.....32 B5	Ristorante Cosa Nostra.....72 A7	Renfe Ticket Office.....101 B4
Torre del Oro.....33 B7	Robles Placentines.....73 D4	Sevilla Tour & Tour Por Sevilla
		Bus Stop.....102 B6

The beautifully domed **Cabildo** (Chapterhouse), in the southeastern corner of the cathedral, was built between 1558 and 1592 to the designs of Hernán Ruiz, architect of the Giralda belfry. High above the archbishop's throne at the southern end is a Murillo masterpiece, *La Inmaculada*. Eight Murillo saints adorn the dome.

GIRALDA

In the northeastern corner of the cathedral interior you'll find the passage for the climb up to the belfry of the Giralda. The ascent is quite easy, as a series of ramps – built so that the guards could ride up on horseback – goes all the way up. The climb affords great views.

Over 90m high, La Giralda was the minaret of the mosque that stood on the site before the

cathedral, constructed in brick by Almohad caliph Yusuf Yacub al-Mansur between 1184 and 1198. Its proportions, decoration and colour, which changes with the light, make it perhaps Spain's most perfect Islamic building. The topmost parts (from the bell level up) were added in the 16th century, when Christians were busy 'improving on' surviving Islamic buildings. At the very top is **El Giraldillo**, a 16th-century bronze weathervane, which represents Faith and is a symbol of Seville.

PATIO DE LOS NARANJOS

Planted with over 60 orange trees, this was originally the courtyard where Muslims performed ablutions before entering the mosque. On its north side is the beautiful Islamic Puerta del Perdón.

Alcázar

Residence of many generations of kings and caliphs, the not-to-be-missed **Alcázar** (Map pp692-3; % 954 50 23 23; adult/under 16yr, senior, student, disabled €7/free; 9.30am-8pm Tue-Sat, to 6pm Sun & holidays Apr-Sep, to 6pm Tue-Sat, to 2.30pm Sun & holidays Oct-Mar; √√) stands south of the cathedral across Plaza del Triunfo. This intriguing, beautiful complex is intimately associated with the lives and loves of many Muslim and Christian rulers, above all the extraordinary Pedro I of Castilla (1350-69), who was known as either Pedro El Cruel or Pedro El Justiciero (the Justice-Dispenser), depending which side of him you were on.

Originally founded as a fort for the Cordoban governors of Seville in 913, the Alcázar has been expanded and rebuilt many times in its 11 centuries of existence. This makes it a complicated building to understand, but makes it more fascinating. Seville's prosperous 11th-century Muslim *taifa* rulers built themselves a palace called Al-Muwarak (the Blessed) in what's now the western part of the Alcázar. The 12th-century Almohad rulers added another palace east of this, around what's now the Patio del Crucero. Christian Fernando III moved into the Alcázar in 1248 and several later Christian monarchs used it as their main residence. Alfonso X replaced much of the Almohad palace with a Gothic one. Between 1364 and 1366 Pedro I created the sumptuous Mudéjar Palacio de Don Pedro, partly on the site of the old Al-Muwarak palace. The Catholic Monarchs, Fernando and Isabel, set up court here in the 1480s as they prepared for the conquest of Granada. Later rulers created the Alcázar's lovely gardens.

PATIO DEL LEÓN

The Lion Patio was the garrison yard of the Al-Muwarak palace. Off here, the **Sala de la Justicia** (Hall of Justice), with beautiful Mudéjar plasterwork, was built in the 1340s by Alfonso XI, who disported here with his mistress Leonor de Guzmán. Alfonso's dalliances left his heir Pedro I (El Cruel/Justiciero) with five half-brothers and a severe case of sibling rivalry. Pedro had a dozen friends and relatives murdered in his efforts to stay on the throne. One of the half-brothers, Don Fadrique, met his maker right here in the Sala de la Justicia. The room gives on to the pretty **Patio del Yeso**, a 19th-century reconstruction of part of the 12th-century Almohad palace.

PATIO DE LA MONTERÍA

The rooms on the western side of this patio were part of the Casa de la Contratación, founded by the Catholic Monarchs in 1503 to control American trade. The **Sala de Audiencias** (Audience Hall) contains the earliest known painting on the discovery of the Americas (by Alejo Fernández, 1530s), in which Columbus, Fernando El Católico, Carlos I, Amerigo Vespucci and Native Americans can be seen sheltered beneath the Virgin in her role as protector of sailors.

PALACIO DE DON PEDRO

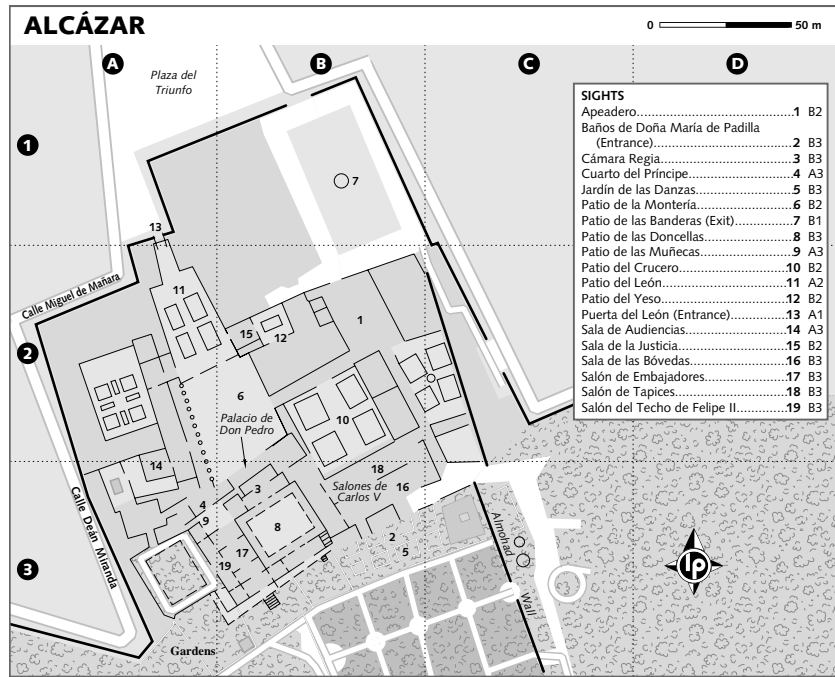
Whatever else Pedro I may have done, posterity owes him a big thank you for building this wonderful palace inside the Alcázar in the 1360s. His Muslim ally Mohammed V of Granada, the man responsible for the Alhambra's fabulous Palacio de los Leones, sent along many of his best artisans to help. These were joined by others from Toledo and Seville, and their work, drawing on the traditions of the Almohads and caliphal Córdoba, is a unique synthesis of Iberian Islamic art.

Inscriptions on the palace's façade on the Patio de la Montería encapsulate the collaborative nature of the enterprise. While one announces in Spanish that the building's creator was 'the very high, noble and conquering Don Pedro', another intones repeatedly in Arabic 'There is no conqueror but Allah'.

At the heart of the palace is the wonderful **Patio de las Doncellas** (Patio of the Maidens), surrounded by beautiful arches and exquisite plasterwork and tiling. In 2004 archaeologists uncovered its original sunken garden from beneath a 16th-century marble covering.

The **Cámara Regia** (King's Quarters) on the northern side of the patio has two rooms with stunning ceilings and more wonderful plasterwork and tiles. Just west is the small **Patio de las Muñecas** (Patio of the Dolls), the heart of the palace's private quarters, with delicate Granada-style decoration; indeed, plasterwork was actually brought here from the Alhambra in the 19th century when the mezzanine and top gallery were added for Queen Isabel II. The **Cuarto del Príncipe** (Prince's Quarters), to its north, has a superb wooden cupola ceiling trying to recreate a starlit night sky and was probably the queen's bedroom.

The spectacular **Salón de Embajadores** (Hall of Ambassadors), off the western end of the



Patio de las Doncellas, was Pedro I's throne room and incorporates aliphah-style door arches from the earlier Al-Muwarak palace. Its fabulous wooden dome of multiple star patterns, symbolising the universe, was added in 1427. On its western side, the beautiful **Arco de Pavones**, with peacock motifs, leads into the **Salón del Techo de Felipe II**, with a handsome Renaissance ceiling (1589–91).

SALONES DE CARLOS V

Reached by a staircase from the Patio de las Doncellas, these are the rooms of Alfonso X's 13th-century Gothic palace, much remodelled since his time. It was here that Alfonso's intellectual court gathered and, a century later, Pedro I installed the mistress he loved, María de Padilla. The **Sala de las Bóvedas** (Hall of the Vault) is adorned with beautiful 1570s tiling, while the **Salón de Tapices** (Tapestry Room) has huge 18th-century tapestries showing Carlos I's 1535 conquest of Tunis.

GARDENS & EXIT

From the Salones de Carlos V you can head out into the Alcázar's large gardens, a nice

place to relax. The gardens in front of the Salones de Carlos V and Palacio de Don Pedro were mostly brought to their present form in the 16th and 17th centuries, while those to the east are 20th-century creations. From the little **Jardín de las Danzas** (Garden of the Dances) a passage runs beneath the Salones de Carlos V to the grotto known as the **Baños de Doña María de Padilla**.

From the new gardens you can leave the Alcázar via the **Apeadero**, a 17th-century entrance hall, and the **Patio de las Banderas** (Patio of the Banners).

Archivo de Indias

On the western side of Plaza del Triunfo, the **Archive of the Indies** (Map pp692–3; % 954 21 12 34; Calle Santo Tomás) is the main archive on Spain's American empire, with 80 million pages of documents dating from 1492 through to the end of the empire in the 19th century. The 16th-century building, designed by Juan de Herrera, was originally built as a merchants' exchange for commerce with the Americas. It was closed for restoration work at the time of writing.

Barrio de Santa Cruz

Seville's medieval *judería* (Map pp692–3; Jewish quarter), east of the cathedral and Alcázar, is today a tangle of quaint, winding streets and lovely plant-decked plazas perfumed with orange blossom. It's tourist central, but still a vital part of the city and one that's remarkably easy and pleasant to wander. Its most characteristic plaza today is **Plaza de Santa Cruz**, which gives the barrio its name. Its central cross, made in 1692, is one of the finest examples of Seville wrought-iron work. **Plaza Doña Élvira** is another beautiful spot.

The 17th-century **Hospital de los Venerables Sacerdotes** (% 954 56 26 96; Plaza de los Venerables; adult/student & senior/under 12yr €5/2.50/free, admission free Sun afternoon; h 10am–2pm & 4–8pm) was a residence for aged priests. You can visit the lovely central courtyard, several exhibition rooms, and the church with murals by Valdés Leal and fine sculptures by Pedro Roldán.

El Centro

The real centre of Seville is the densely packed zone of narrow streets north of the cathedral (Map pp692–3), broken up by squares around which the city's life has revolved for aeons.

PLAZA DE SAN FRANCISCO & CALLE SIERPES

With a lively history as a market square in Muslim times and then the prime spot for Inquisition burnings, Plaza de San Francisco has been Seville's main public square since the 16th century. The southern end of the **ayuntamiento** (City Hall) here is encrusted with lovely Renaissance carving from the 1520s and '30s.

Pedestrianised Calle Sierpes, heading north from the plaza, and the parallel Calle Tétuan/Velázquez, are the hub of Seville's fanciest shopping zone. Between the two streets is the 18th-century **Capilla de San José** (Calle Jovellanos; h 8am–12.30pm & 6.30–8.30pm), with breathtakingly intense baroque ornamentation.

The **Palacio de la Condesa de Lebrija** (% 954 22 78 02; Calle de la Cuna 8; whole bldg/ground fl only admission €7/4; h 10.30am–1.30pm & 5–7pm Mon–Fri, 10am–1pm Sat), a block east of Calle Sierpes, is a 16th-century noble mansion remodelled in 1914 by Doña Regla Manjón, Countess of Lebrija – one of those lucky aristocratic travelling archaeologists. The countess filled the house with her rich collection of art and artisanry and treasures from her travels. There are plenty of remains from Roman Itálica (p708), includ-

ing a marvellous mosaic in the lovely central courtyard. Upstairs are Arabic, baroque and Spanish rooms.

PLAZA SALVADOR

This plaza, which has a few popular bars, was once the forum of Roman Hispalis. It's dominated by the **Parroquia del Salvador**, a big baroque church built between 1674 and 1712 on the site of Muslim Ishbiliya's main mosque. Before the mosque, early Christian churches stood here, and before them, a Roman temple. At the time of writing the church was closed for restoration work and archaeological investigation, but on its northern side, the mosque's small **patio** (admission free; h 10am–2pm & 5–7pm) remains open, with a few half-buried Roman columns.

CASA DE PILATOS

Another of the city's finest noble mansions (% 954 22 52 98; Calle Águilas; whole house/lower fl only admission €8/5, EU citizen 1–5pm Tue free; h 9am–7pm Mar–Sep, 9am–6pm Oct–Feb), 500m northeast of the cathedral, is still occupied by the ducal Medinaçeli family. This extensive and splendid 16th-century building is a mixture of diverse architectural styles, with some beautiful tilework, *artesonado* (Mudéjar wooden ceiling with interlaced beams leaving a pattern of spaces for decoration) and gardens. The Patio Principal features lots of wonderful 16th-century tiles, intricate Mudéjar plasterwork, classical statues and busts of Roman historical and mythical figures. The staircase from here to the upper floor has magnificent tiling, with a great golden *artesonado* dome above. If time or money is limited, you could skip the top floor.

El Arenal

A short walk west from Avenida de la Constitución brings you to the bank of Río Guadalquivir, lined by a pleasant footpath. The nearby district of El Arenal (Map pp692–3) is home to some of Seville's most interesting sights.

TORRE DEL ORO

This 13th-century river-bank Islamic watchtower, which once crowned a corner of the city walls, supposedly had a dome covered in golden tiles, hence its name, 'Tower of Gold'. Inside is a small **maritime museum** (% 954 22 24 19; admission €1; h 10am–2pm Tue–Fri, 11am–2pm Sat & Sun, closed Aug).

HOSPITAL DE LA CARIDAD

A marvellous sample of Sevillian golden-age art adorns the church in this **charity hospice** (☎ 954 22 32 32; Calle Temprado 3; admission €4, free Sun & holidays; ⌚ 9am-1.30pm & 3.30-7.30pm Mon-Sat, to 1pm Sun & holidays) a block from the river. The hospital was founded in the 17th century by Miguel de Mañara, by legend a notorious libertine who changed his ways after experiencing a vision of his own funeral procession. For the church, Mañara commissioned a collection of top-class 17th-century Sevillian art on the theme of death and redemption. Valdés Leal's frightening masterpieces *In Ictu Oculi* (In the Blink of an Eye) and *Finis Gloriarum Mundi* (the End of Earthly Glory) face each other across the western end of the church, chillingly illustrating the futility of worldly success. Four Murillo paintings along the walls illustrate the theme of redemption through mercy. They show Moses drawing water from the rock, the miracle of the 'loaves and fishes', St John of God (San Juan de Dios) caring for an invalid, and Isabel of Hungary curing the sick. Mañara is buried in the crypt beneath the main altar, on which a masterly sculpture by Pedro Roldán illustrates the final act of mercy, the burial of the dead – in this case, of Christ himself.

PLAZA DE TOROS DE LA REAL MAESTRANZA

Seville's **bullring** (☎ 954 22 45 77; Paseo de Cristóbal Colón 12; tours adult/over-65 €4/3.20; ⌚ half-hourly 9.30am-6.30pm, 9.30am-3pm bullfighting days) is one of the most handsome in Spain and probably the oldest (building began in 1758). It was here, and in the ring at Ronda, that bullfighting on foot (instead of horseback) began in the 18th century. Interesting guided visits, in English and Spanish, take you into the ring and its museum, with a peep into the minihospital for bullfighters who have come off second best.

MUSEO DE BELLAS ARTES

Set in a beautiful former convent, Seville's **fine-arts museum** (☎ 954 22 07 90; Plaza del Museo 9; adult/EU citizen €1.50/free; ⌚ 2.30-8.30pm Tue, 9am-8.30pm Wed-Sat, to 2.30pm Sun; √) does full justice to Seville's leading role in Spain's artistic golden age. The 17th-century Seville masters Murillo, Zurbarán and Valdés Leal are particularly well represented here.

Highlights include Pedro Millán's 15th-century terracotta sculptures (Room I); Pietro

Torrighiano's influential Renaissance sculpture *San Jerónimo Penitente* (Room II); paintings by Velázquez and Alonso Cano (Room III); paintings by Murillo including *Inmaculada Concepción Grande* in Room V, formerly the convent church; Ribera's very Spanish-looking *Santiago Apóstol* and Zurbarán's deeply sombre *Cristo Crucificado* (Room VI); and further major works by Zurbarán (Room X).

South of the Centre

ANTIGUA FÁBRICA DE TABACOS

Seville's massive former **tobacco factory** (Map pp692-3; Calle San Fernando; admission free; ⌚ 8am-9.30pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat; √) – workplace of Bizet's passionate operatic heroine, Carmen – was built in the 18th century. It had its own jail, stables for 400 mules, 24 patios and even a nursery. Now part of the Universidad de Sevilla, it's an impressive if somewhat gloomy neoclassical building.

PARQUE DE MARÍA LUISA & PLAZA DE ESPAÑA

A large area south of the tobacco factory was transformed for Seville's 1929 international fair, the Exposición Iberoamericana, when architects spattered it with all sorts of fine, fancy and funny buildings, many of them harking back to Seville's eras of past glory or imitating the native styles of Spain's former colonies. In its midst, the large **Parque de María Luisa** (Map pp688-9; ⌚ 8am-10pm, to midnight Jul & Aug), with 3500 magnificent trees, is a beautiful respite from the traffic and noise of the city.

Plaza de España, one of the city's favourite relaxation spots with its fountains and minicanals, faces the park across Avenida de Isabel la Católica. Around it is the most grandiose of the 1929 buildings, a semicircular brick-and-tile confection featuring Seville tilework at its gaudiest.

On Plaza de América, at the southern end of the park, is Seville's **Museo Arqueológico** (Map pp688-9; ☎ 954 23 24 01; adult/EU citizen €1.50/free; ⌚ 3-8pm Tue, 9am-8pm Wed-Sat, to 2pm Sun & holidays), whose big collection includes a room of gold jewellery from the mysterious Tartessos culture, and fine collections of Iberian animal sculptures and beautiful Roman mosaics. Facing it is the **Museo de Artes y Costumbres Populares** (Map pp688-9; ☎ 954 23 25 76; adult/EU citizen €1.50/free; ⌚ 3-8pm Tue, 9am-8pm Wed-Sat, to 2pm Sun & holidays), with mock-up workshops of local crafts and some really beautiful old festival costumes.

Isla Mágica

This large **amusement park** (Map pp688-9; ☎ 902 161716; www.islamagica.es; adult/under 16yr & senior late Jun–mid-Sep all day €23.50/16.50, evening €16.50/12, late-Sep–late Oct all day €21/15, evening €15/11; ⌚ 11am-7pm Tue-Fri, to 10pm Sat & Sun Apr-late Jun, to 11pm Mon-Fri & Sun, to midnight Sat late Jun–early Sep, to 9pm or 11pm Fri & Sat early Sep–Oct, closed Nov-Mar) provides a sure-fire great day's fun for kids and all lovers of white-knuckle rides. It stands on the Isla de La Cartuja, a tongue of land lying between two branches of Río Guadalquivir, 2km northwest of the cathedral. The theme is 16th-century Spanish colonial adventure, and highlight rides include El Jaguar, a roller coaster with high-speed 360° turns, and the Anaconda water roller coaster, which features vertiginous drops. Opening hours vary from year to year, so you should confirm times before going.

Isla Mágica uses part of the site of Expo '92. Other parts of the futuristic site have been turned into a technology park called Cartuja 93.

Both buses C1 and C2 (p707) run to Isla Mágica.

WALKING TOUR

This route will acquaint you with the main central neighbourhoods of Seville as a preliminary to more in-depth investigations.

Start on Plaza del Triunfo, flanked by Seville's two great monuments, the **cathedral** (1; p690) and the **Alcázar** (2; p695). From here take a wander through the narrow lanes and pretty plazas of the Barrio de Santa Cruz (p697) – **Plaza Doña Elvira** (3), **Plaza de los Venерables** (4), **Plaza de Santa Cruz** (5), Calle Santa Teresa and Calle Mateos Gago. You'll very likely want to return to some of the bars, restaurants and shops here later. Calle Mateos Gago brings you out in front of **La Giralda** (6; p694). Now head up pedestrian Calle Álvarez Quintero to El Centro, the age-old true centre of Seville, for a look at **Plaza de San Francisco**

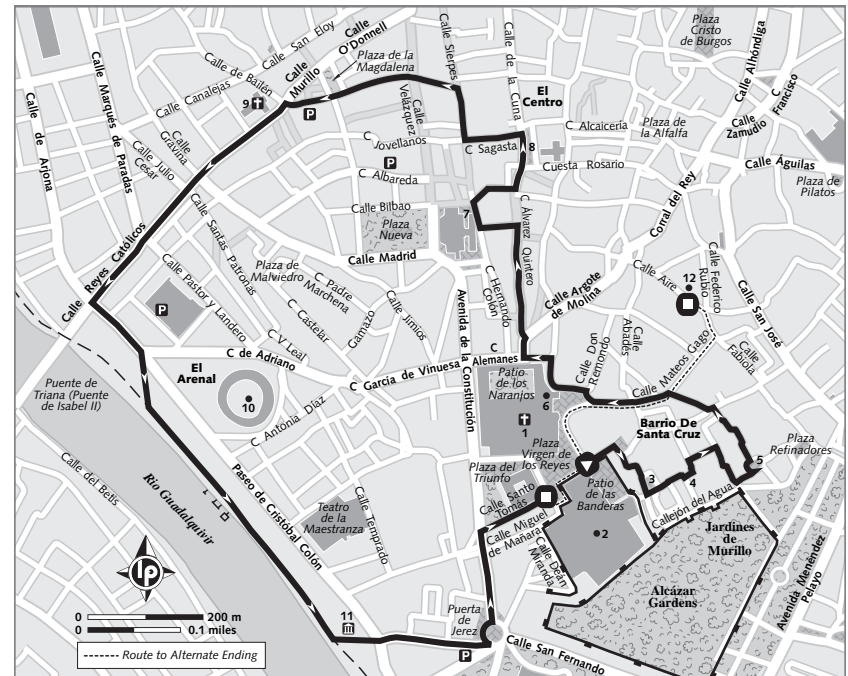
WALK FACTS

Start Plaza del Triunfo

Finish Cathedral

Duration 4km

Duration two hours plus stops



(7; p697) and **Plaza Salvador** (8; p697). Stroll north along Calle Sierpes, a key downtown shopping street. Turn west along Calle Rioja to the **Iglesia de la Magdalena** (9; opposite), then head southwest to Río Guadalquivir. Follow the river southeast along the walking path, passing the **Plaza de Toros de la Real Maestranza** (10; p698), as far as the **Torre del Oro** (11; p697), from where it's a short walk east back to the cathedral. Time to give those weary sightseeing muscles a soothing soak? Head a couple of blocks north the Arab baths **Aire de Sevilla** (12; % 955 01 00 25; www.airedesevilla.com; Calle Aire 15; bath/bath & massage €18/26; 7 every 2hr, 10am-2am), with two warm pools and one cold, plus a steam room.

COURSES

Flamenco & Dance

The city has many dance and flamenco schools. Check these out:

Espacio Meteora (Map pp688-9; % 954 90 14 83; espaciometeora.com; Calle Duque Cornejo 16A) Innovative arts centre.

Fundación Cristina Heeren de Arte Flamenco (Map pp692-3; % 954 21 70 58; www.flamencoheeren.com; Calle Fabiola 1) Long-term courses in all flamenco arts, also one-month intensive summer courses.

Sevilla Dance Centre (Map pp688-9; % 954 38 39 02; Calle Conde de Torrejón 19) Flamenco, classical, hip-hop, contemporary.

Tourist offices and *El Giraldirlo* (p690) have further information.

Language

Seville is one of the most popular cities in Spain to study Spanish. The best schools offer both short- and long-term courses at a variety of levels:

Carpe Diem (Map pp692-3; % 954 21 85 15; www.carpediemsevilla.com; Calle de la Cuna 13)

CLIC (Map pp692-3; % 954 50 21 31; www.dic.es; Calle Alameda 19)

Giralda Center (Map pp692-3; % 954 21 31 65; www.giraldacenter.com; Calle Mateos Gago 17)

Lenguaviva (Map pp688-9; % 954 90 51 31; www.lenguaviva.es; Calle Viriato 24)

LINC (Map pp692-3; % 954 50 04 59; www.linc.tv; Calle General Polavieja 13)

SEVILLE FOR CHILDREN

Open spaces such as the banks of the Guadalquivir, **Parque María Luisa** (p698) and the **Alcázar gardens** (p696) are great places for

young children to let off some steam. They'll enjoy feeding the doves at Plaza de América in Parque María Luisa. **Isla Mágica** (p699) is a huge day of fun: those aged over 10 will get the most out of the rides. Another sure hit is a **city tour** (below) in an open-top double-decker or horse-drawn carriage. On Sunday morning visit the pet market in Plaza de la Alfalfa.

TOURS

Cruceros Turísticos Torre del Oro (Map pp692-3; % 954 56 16 92; adult/under 14yr €12/free) One-hour sightseeing river cruises from the Torre del Oro, every half-hour from 11am; last departure can range from 6pm in winter to 10pm in summer.

Horse-drawn carriages These wait near the cathedral and Plaza de España and Puerta de Jerez, charging €30 for up to four people for a one-hour trot around the Barrio de Santa Cruz and Parque de María Luisa areas.

Sevilla Tour (% 902 101081; www.citysightseeing-spain.com) Open-topped double-decker buses and converted trams make one-hour city tours, with earphone commentary in a choice of languages. The €13 ticket (children €5) is valid for 24 hours and you can hop on or off near the Torre del Oro (Map pp692-3), Avenida de Portugal behind Plaza de España (Map pp688-9) or the Isla de La Cartuja (Map pp688-9). Buses typically leave every 30 minutes between 7am and 8pm.

Sevilla Walking Tours (% 902 15 82 26; www.sevilawalkingtours.com) English-language tours of the main monumental area, at 10.30am Monday to Saturday lasting about 1½ hours for €10. The same group also offers tours of the cathedral and Alcázar.

Tour por Sevilla/Sevirama (% 954 56 06 93; www.busturistico.com) Similar deal to Sevilla Tour but doesn't start till 10am.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Seville's Semana Santa processions (see the boxed text, opposite) and its Feria de Abril, a week or two later, are worth travelling a long way for.

Feria de Abril

The **April Fair**, in the second half of the month, is a kind of release after the solemnity of Semana Santa. The biggest and most colourful of all Andalucía's *ferias*, it takes place on a special site, El Real de la Feria, in the Los Remedios area southwest of the city centre. The ceremonial lighting of the *feria* grounds on the Monday night is the starting gun for six nights of *sevillanos'* favourite activities: eating, drinking, talking, dressing up and dancing

SEMANA SANTA IN SEVILLE

Nowhere in Spain is Holy Week marked with quite such intense spectacle, solemnity and joy, and quite such weight of tradition, pride and overriding adoration of the Virgin, as in Seville.

Every day from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday, large, richly bedecked images and life-size tableaux from the Easter story are carried from Seville's churches through the streets to the cathedral, accompanied by processions that may take more than an hour to pass, and watched by vast crowds. These rites have been going on in their present form since the 17th century, when many of the images – some of which are supreme works of art – were created.

The processions are organised by over 50 different *hermandades* or *cofradías* (brotherhoods, some of which include women), each normally with two *pasos* (sculptural representations of events from Christ's Passion).

The first *paso* focuses on Christ; the second is an image of the Virgin. They are carried by teams of about 40 bearers called *costaleros*, who work in relays as each supports a weight of about 50kg. The *pasos* move with a hypnotic swaying motion to the rhythm of their accompanying bands and the commands of their bell-striking *capataz* (leader).

Each pair of *pasos* has up to 2500 costumed followers, called *nazarenos*. Many of these wear tall Ku Klux Klanlike capes, which cover their heads (except for eye slits), implying that the identity of the penitent is known only to God. The most contrite go barefoot and carry crosses.

From Palm Sunday to Good Friday, about eight brotherhoods leave their churches in the afternoon or early evening, arriving between 5pm and 11pm at Calle Campana, at the northern end of Calle Sierpes. This is the start of the *carrera oficial* (official route), which all then follow along Calle Sierpes, Plaza San Francisco and Avenida de la Constitución to the cathedral. They enter the cathedral at its western end and leave at the east, emerging on Plaza Virgen de los Reyes. They get back to their churches some time between 10pm and 3am.

The climax of the week is the *madrugada* (early hours) of Good Friday, when some of the most respected or popular brotherhoods file through the city. The first to reach the *carrera oficial*, at about 1.30am, is the oldest brotherhood, El Silencio, which goes in complete silence. At about 2am comes Jesús del Gran Poder, whose 17th-century Christ is a masterpiece of Sevillian sculpture. Around 3am comes La Macarena, whose much adored Virgin is Seville's supreme representation of the grieving-yet-hoping mother of Christ. Then come El Calvario, from the Iglesia de la Magdalena, then Esperanza de Triana and finally, at about 6am, Los Gitanos, the *gitano* (Roma) brotherhood.

On the Saturday evening, just four brotherhoods make their way to the cathedral, and finally, on Easter Sunday morning, only one, the Hermandad de la Resurrección.

Procession schedules are widely available during Semana Santa, and the website www.semana-santa.org (in Spanish) is devoted to Holy Week in Seville. It's interesting to see a brotherhood passing through its own neighbourhood or as it leaves or re-enters its church – always an emotional moment. Crowds along most of the official route make it hard to get much of a view there, but if you arrive near the cathedral early enough in the evening, you can usually get quite a good view.

If you're not in Seville for Semana Santa, you can see what it's about from some of the churches housing the famous images. The **Basilica de La Macarena** (Map pp688-9; % 954 90 18 00; Calle Bécquer 1; museum €3; 7 9am-2pm & 5-9pm) and the **Basilica de Jesús del Gran Poder** (Map pp688-9; % 954 91 56 72; Plaza de San Lorenzo 13; 7 8am-1.30pm & 6-9pm Sat-Thu, 7.30am-10pm Fri) are both north of the centre. The **Iglesia de la Magdalena** (Map pp692-3; Calle San Pablo 12; 7 usually 8am-11.30am & 6.30-9pm) is a few streets south of the Museo de Bellas Artes.

till dawn. Much of the site is occupied by private *casetas* (enclosures), but there are also public ones, where much the same fun goes on. There's also a huge fairground.

In the afternoon, from about 1pm, those with horses and carriages parade about the *feria* grounds in their finery (horses are dressed up too). It's also during the *feria* that Seville's major bullfighting season takes place.

SLEEPING

There's a good range of places to stay in all three of the most attractive areas – Barrio de Santa Cruz (close to the Alcázar and within walking distance of Prado de San Sebastián bus station), El Arenal (convenient for Plaza de Armas bus station) and El Centro.

Room rates in this section are for each establishment's high season – typically from March

to June and again from September to October. Just about every room in Seville costs even more during Semana Santa and the Feria de Abril, and sometimes between the two as well. The typical increase is between 30% and 60% over normal high-season rates. Book ahead at this time.

Renting a tourist apartment here can be good value: a clean, comfortable, well-equipped apartment typically costs under €100 a night for four people, or between €30 and €70 for two. Try **Apartamentos Embrujo de Sevilla** (% 625 060937; www.embrujodesevilla.com) or **Sevilla5.com** (% 637 011091; www.sevilla5.com).

Barrio de Santa Cruz

BUDGET

Pensión San Pancraccio (Map pp692-3; % /fax 954 41 31 04; Plaza de las Cruces 9; s/d without bathroom €20/30, d with bathroom €45) The furnishings are almost as old as the rambling family house, but it's all sweet and clean. There's a curfew at 1.30am, when the house closes down for the night (not during Semana Santa or the *feria*).

Huéspedes Dulces Sueños (Map pp692-3; % 954 41 93 93; Calle Santa María La Blanca 21; s/d without bathroom €20/40, s/d with bathroom €40/50; a) 'Sweet Dreams' is a friendly little *hostal* (budget hotel) with spotless rooms. Those overlooking the street are good and bright. Only the doubles have air-con.

Another recommendation:

Hostal Córdoba (Map pp692-3; % 954 22 74 98; Calle Farnesio 12; s/d without bathroom €40/60, s/d with bathroom €50/70; a) Run by a friendly older couple, on a quiet pedestrian street.

MIDRANGE

Un Patio en Santa Cruz (Map pp692-3; % 954 53 94 13; www.patiosantacruz.com; Calle Doncellas 15; s/d €58/68; a i) An understated hotel defying the elaborate traditions of Andalusian décor. The rooms are kept stylish and simple, and the roof terrace has views of the Giralda.

Hotel Alcántara (Map pp692-3; % 954 50 05 95; www.hotelalcantara.net; Calle Jiménez de Enciso 28; s/d €66/84; a ✓) This small, friendly hotel on a pedestrian street has bright rooms with bathtub, marble washbasins, windows on to the hotel's patio and pretty floral curtains.

Hotel Puerta de Sevilla (Map pp692-3; % 954 98 72 70; www.hotelpuertadesevilla.com; Calle Santa María la Blanca 36; s/d €65/85; p a i) A small shiny hotel in a great location, the Puerta de Sevilla is all flower-pattern textiles, wrought-iron beds and pastel wallpaper. Rooms have plasma-screen TVs and writing tables.

Hotel Amadeus (Map pp692-3; % 954 50 14 43; www.hotelamadeussevilla.com; Calle Farnesio 6; s/d €70/85; p a i) An entrepreneurial musician family converted their 18th-century mansion into this marvellously stylish hotel with 14 elegant, fabulously designed rooms. If you'd like to practice piano or violin, there are a couple of soundproof practice rooms. A glass elevator lifts you to your floor or onto the roof terrace, where you can have your breakfast with views of the Giralda.

Hostería del Laurel (Map pp692-3; % 954 22 02 95; www.hosteriadellaurel.com; Plaza de los Venerables 5; s/d incl breakfast €72/104; a) Above a characterful old bar on a small Santa Cruz plaza, the Laurel has simple, spacious and bright rooms with marble floors and good-sized bathrooms.

Another recommendation:

Hostal Goya (Map pp692-3; % 954 21 11 70; hgoya@hostalgoya.e.telefonica.net; Calle Mateos Gago 31; s/d €50/80; a) Since the gleaming Goya had a facelift in 2005, it's more popular than ever. Book ahead.

TOP END

Las Casas de la Judería (Map pp692-3; % 954 41 51 50; www.casasypalacios.com; Callejón Dos Hermanas 7; s/d from €108/167; p a) This charming hotel is in fact a series of restored houses and mansions based around several lovely patios and fountains. Most of the rooms and suites sport four-poster beds, bath *and* shower and writing table. An amazing range of art decks the walls.

El Arenal

BUDGET

Hostal Residencia Naranjo (Map pp692-3; % 954 22 58 40; Calle San Roque 11; s/d €35/50; a) Colourful bedspreads and pine furniture add a touch of warmth; the rooms are all equipped with TV and phone.

Hotel Madrid (Map pp692-3; % 954 21 43 07; www.hotelmadridsevilla.com; Calle San Pedro Mártir 22; s/d €40/55; p a) This friendly hotel is pretty good value. All rooms have firm beds, and balconies overlooking quiet, orange-tree lined streets.

Hostal Museo (Map pp692-3; % 954 91 55 26; www.hostalmuseo.com; Calle Abad Gordillo 17; s/d €45/62; a i) The immaculate rooms are endowed with solid wooden furniture, comfortable beds, phone, wi-fi and reading lamps. There's a lift too.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Maestranza (Map pp692-3; % 954 56 10 70; www.hotel-maestranza.com; Calle Gamazo 12; s/d €49/87; a i) A small, friendly hotel on a quietish street,

the Maestranza has spotless, plain rooms, all equipped with phone, safe and little chandeliers. The singles are small.

Hotel Simón (Map pp692-3; % 954 22 66 60; www.hotelsimonsevilla.com; Calle García de Vinuesa 19; s €45-60, d €70-95; a) A charming small hotel in a fine 18th-century house, with spotless and comfortable rooms, the Simón is extremely popular so book well ahead. It's built around a lovely patio with a fountain, and adorned with antiques and beautiful Sevillian tilework.

Hotel Puerta de Triana (Map pp692-3; % 954 21 54 04; www.hotelpuertadetriana.com; Calle Reyes Católicos 5; s/d incl breakfast €70/96; a) The cosy rooms here have traditional fittings but modern comforts, and all with windows onto the street or interior patios. Downstairs are spacious lounge areas.

TOP END

Hotel Vincin La Rábida (Map pp692-3; % 954 50 12 80; www.vincinhotels.com; Calle Castelar 24; s/d €154/182; p a i) A beautiful four-storey columned atrium-lounge greets you in this converted 18th-century palace, now a classy four-star hotel with extremely comfortable rooms. The seasonal rooftop bar-café has magnificent views of the cathedral.

El Centro

BUDGET

Oasis Backpackers' Hostel (Map pp692-3; % 954 29 37 77; www.oasissevilla.com; Calle Don Alonso el Sabio 1A; dm/d €18/40, all incl breakfast; a i) Seville's stylish, buzzing backpacker central, sister hostel of the massively popular Oasis in Granada, offers 24 hour free internet access and breakfasts on a glass-floored roof terrace. Each dorm bed has a personal safe, the atmosphere is good and the hosts keep you entertained with tapas tours and Spanish classes.

Casa Sol y Luna (Map pp692-3; % 954 21 06 82; www.casasolyluna1.com; Calle Pérez Galdós 1A; s/d/tr without bathroom €22/38/60, d with bathroom €45) This is a first-rate *hostal* in a large, beautifully decorated old house, with embroidered white linen that makes you feel as if you're staying at your grandma's. The bathrooms are the biggest and most beautiful you'll find in any *hostal* in Andalucía. Pay special attention to the 24 hour-booking confirmation policy.

MIDRANGE

Hotel San Francisco (Map pp692-3; % /fax 954 50 15 41; Calle Álvarez Quintero 38; s/d €55/68; a ✓) This good-value hotel on a pedestrianised street

occupies an 18th-century home. Nearly all the good-sized rooms look onto the street or an interior patio; all have marble floors and air-con/heating.

TOP END

Las Casas del Rey de Baeza (Map pp692-3; % 954 56 14 96; www.hospes.es; Plaza Jesús de la Redención 2; s/d €171/198; p a i s) This expertly run and marvellously designed hotel occupies former communal housing patios dating from the 18th century. The large rooms, in tasteful hues, boast attractive modern art, CD player, DVD and wi-fi. Public areas include a super-comfortable lounge and reading room and a gorgeous pool.

North of the Centre

TOP END

Hotel San Gil (Map pp688-9; % 954 90 68 11; www.fp-ho teles.com; Calle Parras 28; s/d €126/158; p a s) Around the corner from the Basílica de la Macarena, San Gil is one of the city's hidden gems. The renovated early-20th-century building focuses on a pretty garden-courtyard and combines acclaimed modern design with beautiful antique tiling and other traditional touches.

EATING

Seville is one of Spain's tapas capitals, with scores of bars serving all sorts of delectable bites. To catch the city's atmosphere, plunge straight in and follow the winding tapas trail. Most tapas bars open at lunchtime as well as in the evening.

For a sit-down meal, modern restaurants preparing Spanish food with enlivening international touches abound. Don't bother looking for dinner until at least 8pm.

Barrio de Santa Cruz & Around

TAPAS

Bodega Santa Cruz (Map pp692-3; % 954 21 32 46; Calle Mateos Gago; tapas €1.50-2) A focal point for tapas pilgrims, this bar has a wonderful choice of flavoursome bites. Santa Cruz' popularity speaks volumes.

Cervecería Giralda (Map pp692-3; % 954 22 74 35; Calle Mateos Gago 1; tapas €1.50-2.50) Exotic variations are merged with traditional dishes at this bar in what was once a Muslim bathhouse.

Café Bar Las Teresas (Map pp692-3; % 954 21 30 69; Calle Santa Teresa 2; tapas €2-4) Hams dangle proudly from the ceiling and punters are kept happy with plates of traditional tapas.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Corral del Agua (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 22 07 14; Callejón del Agua 6; mains €12-18, menú €23; 17 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) If you're hankering for inventive food on a hot day, book a table at Corral del Agua. Its cool, green courtyard is a lovely spot to sample traditional stews and Arabic-inspired desserts.

RESTAURANTS & CAFÉS

Restaurante La Albahaca (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 22 07 14; Plaza de Santa Cruz 12; mains €18-22, menú €27) Gastronomic invention is the mainstay of this swish restaurant. Try the pork trotter with mushroom, young garlic and pea mousse!

Restaurant La Cueva (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 21 31 43; Calle Rodrigo Caro 18; mains €11-24) This popular eatery cooks up a storming fish casserole (€24 for two people) and a hearty *caldereta* (lamb stew; €11).

Restaurante Egaña Oriza (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 22 72 11; Calle San Fernando 41; mains €15-40; 17 closed Sat lunch & Sun) One of the city's best restaurants, Egaña Oriza cooks up superb Andalusian-Basque cuisine.

Restaurante Modesto (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 41 68 11; Calle Cano y Cueto 5; mains €7.50-43) This classy place presents a full range of fish dishes, including lobster.

El Arenal**TAPAS**

Mesón Cinco Jotas (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 21 05 21; Calle Castelar 1; tapas/media-rationes €3/7) Dine on succulent ham from pigs that have snuffled out the finest acorns in the oak forests near the village of Jabugo (p715). The *solomillo ibérico* (Iberian pork sirloin) in sweet Pedro Ximénez wine is divine.

RESTAURANTS

Enrique Becerra (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 21 30 49; Calle Gamazo 2; mains €15-21; 17 closed Sun) Adding a smart touch to El Arenal, Enrique Becerra cooks up hearty Andalusian dishes to rave about. The lamb drenched in honey sauce and stuffed with spinach and pine nuts is just one of the delectable offerings.

El Centro**TAPAS**

Plaza de la Alfalfa is the hub of the tapas scene, with a flush of first-rate bars serving tapas

from around €1.80 to €3. On Calle Alfalfa just off the plaza, hop from sea-themed La Trastienda to the intimate Bar Alfalfa and on to La Bodega where you can mix head-spinning quantities of ham and sherry.

El Patio San Eloy (Map pp692-3; Calle San Eloy 9; tapas €1.50-2) Hams hang like stalactites at the always-busy Patio San Eloy, where you can sit on the steps at the back and feast on a fine array of *burguillos* (small filled rolls).

Bar Levies (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 21 53 08; Calle San José 15; tapas €1.50-4) The ultimate student tapas bar, crowded Levies serves a tapa of *solomillo al whisky* as big as a ración – and beer in big glasses.

Robles Placentines (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 21 31 62; Calle Placentines 2; tapas €2) Modelled on a Jerez wine cellar, this popular haunt serves up tempting dishes such as white asparagus from the Sierra de Córdoba.

RESTAURANTS & CAFÉS

Bar Laredo (Map pp692-3; cnr Calle Sierpes & Plaza de San Francisco) Watch them slap together a variety of *bocadillos* (bread roll with filling; €3) for rapid consumption at this popular breakfast stop.

Habanita (Map pp692-3; ☎ 606 716456; Calle Golfo 3; raciones €6-9; 17 closed Sun evening; ✓) This top restaurant serves a winning variety of Cuban, Andalusian and vegetarian food.

Triana**RESTAURANTS & CAFÉS**

Ristorante Cosa Nostra (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 27 07 52; Calle del Betis 52; pizzas €5.50-7.50; 17 closed Mon) Cosa Nostra has an intimate feel that neighbouring pizza-and-pasta joints lack.

Casa Cuesta (Map pp688-9; ☎ 954 33 33 37; Calle de Castilla 3-5; mains €9-10) Something about the carefully buffed wooden bar and gleaming beer pumps suggests the owners are proud of Casa Cuesta. They should be; it's a real find for food and wine lovers alike.

Kiosco de las Flores (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 27 45 76; Calle del Betis; mains €15-40, raciones €9; 17 closed Sun evening & Mon) Still revelling in the transformation from 70-year-old shack to a glam conservatory (just check the photos), this eatery doles out great *pescado frito* (fried fish).

DRINKING

Bars usually open 6pm to 2am weekdays, 8pm till 4am at the weekend. Drinking and partying really get going around midnight on Friday and Saturday (daily when it's hot). In

summer, dozens of open-air late-night bars (*terrazas de verano*) spring up along both banks of the river.

Barrio de Santa Cruz

PFlaherty Irish Pub (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 21 04 15; Calle Alemanes 7) The location right next to the cathedral makes this one of the busiest bars around. Guinness and footy are on offer, and if there's a game on, the atmosphere is fun.

Antigüedades (Map pp692-3; Calle Argote de Molina 40) Blending mellow beats with weird mannequin parts and skewered bread rolls suspended from the ceiling, this is a strange but cool place. Wander past and it'll suck you in.

El Arenal

El Capote (Map pp692-3; Calle de Arjona) A fabulous place for *al fresco* drinking right next to Puente de Triana, by day or night. The music is good, and a young, groovy crowd comes here for cocktails, beer or cappuccino.

Café Isbiliyya (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 21 04 60; Paseo de Cristóbal Colón 2) Cupid welcomes you to this gay music bar, which puts on extravagant drag-queen shows on Thursday and Sunday nights.

El Centro

Plaza del Salvador throbs with drinkers from mid-evening to 1am and is a great place to down a couple of beers alfresco. Grab a drink from **La Antigua Bodeguita** (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 56 18 33) or **La Sapotales** next door and sit on the steps of the Parroquia del Salvador.

Calle Pérez Galdós, off Plaza de la Alfalfa, has a handful of pulsating bars: **Bare Nostrum** (Map pp692-3; Calle Pérez Galdós 26), **Cabo Loco** (Map pp692-3; Calle Pérez Galdós 26), **Nao** (Map pp692-3; Calle Pérez Galdós 28) and **La Rebótica** (Map pp692-3; Calle Pérez Galdós 11). If you're in a party mood, you should find at least one with a scene that takes your fancy.

El Garlochi (Map pp692-3; Calle Boteros 4) Dedicated entirely to the sensations of Semana Santa, El Garlochi hits you with clouds of incense, sombre processional music, Jesus and Virgin images and potent cocktails with names like *Sangre de Cristo* (Blood of Christ).

Alameda de Hércules

In terms of hipness and trendy places to go out, the Alameda is where it's at. The area's slightly run-down feeling allows the boho lot to have the place more or less to themselves. It's also the heartbeat of gay Seville.

Bulebar Café (Map pp688-9; ☎ 954 90 19 54; Alameda de Hércules 83; 17 4pm-late) This place fills up with young sweaty bodies at night, but is pleasantly chilled in the early evening.

Café Central (Map pp688-9; ☎ 954 38 73 12; Alameda de Hércules 64) One of the oldest and most popular along the street, Central has yellow bar lights, wooden flea-market chairs and a massive crowd that gathers on weekends and sits outside.

Habanilla (Map pp688-9; ☎ 954 90 27 18; Alameda de Hércules 63) Opposite Café Central and just as busy, Habanilla's *pièce de résistance* is the lovely handmade bottle-chandelier that dominates the room.

Triana

The wall overlooking the river along Calle del Betis forms a fantastic makeshift bar. Carry your drink out from one of the following places: Alambique, Big Ben, Sirocca and Mui d'Aquí. They're all clustered at Calle del Betis 54 (Map pp692-3) and open from 9pm.

La Otra Orilla (Map pp688-89; Paseo de Nuestra Señora de la O) Duck through a passage to the river bank to find this buzzing music bar blessed with a great outdoor terrace.

ENTERTAINMENT

Seville presents a feast of night-time delights, from beer-fuelled celebrations and thumping live beats to experimental theatre and steamy flamenco. See www.discoversevilla.com or www.exploresevilla.com for the latest action.

Clubs

Clubs in Seville come and go fast but a few stand the test of time. The partying starts between 2am and 4am at the weekend. Dress smarter (so no sportswear) at the weekend as clubs become pickier about their punters.

Boss (Map pp692-3; Calle del Betis 67; admission free with flyer; 17 8pm-7am Tue-Sun) Make it past the two gruff bouncers and you'll find Boss a top dance spot. The music is a total mix.

Weekend (Map pp688-9; ☎ 954 37 88 73; Calle del Torneo 43; admission €7; 17 11pm-8am Thu-Sat) This is one of Seville's top live-music and DJ spots.

Lisboa Music Club (Map pp688-9; Calle Faustino Álvarez 27; admission €6; 17 midnight-6am Wed-Sat) A very hip house and techno club.

Aduana (Map pp688-9; ☎ 954 23 85 82; www.aduana.net; Avenida de la Raza s/n; admission varies; 17 midnight-late Thu-Sat) This huge dance venue, 1km south of Parque de María Luisa, plays nonstop grooves for manic party people.

Live Music

Fun Club (Map pp688-9; ☎ 958 25 02 49; Alameda de Hércules 86; admission live-band nights €3-6, other nights free; 11.30pm-late Thu-Sun, from 9.30pm live-band nights) With funk, Latino, hip-hop and jazz bands taking the stage it's not surprising that this little dance warehouse is a music-lovers' favourite.

La Imperdible (Map pp688-9; ☎ 954 38 82 19; Plaza San Antonio de Padua 9; admission €5-6) This epicentre of experimental arts stages lots of contemporary dance and a bit of drama and music, usually at 9pm. Its bar, the **El Almacén** (☎ 954 90 04 34; admission free), hosts varied music events from around 11pm Thursday to Saturday.

FLAMENCO

Hotels and tourist offices tend to steer you towards *tablaos* (expensive, tourist-oriented flamenco venues), which can be inauthentic and lacking in atmosphere, though **Los Gallos** (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 21 69 81; www.tablaolosalgallos.com; Plaza de Santa Cruz 11; admission incl 1 drink €27; 11.30pm) is a cut above the average.

You'll catch more atmosphere – though unpredictable quality – at one of the venues and bars that stage regular flamenco nights: **Casa de la Memoria de Al-Andalus** (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 56 06 70; Calle Ximénez de Enciso 28; adult/child €11/5; 11.30pm) Authentic nightly shows in a great patio setting.

La Carbonería (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 21 44 60; Calle Levies 18; admission free; 11.30pm-4am) A converted coal yard in the Barrio de Santa Cruz with two large bars, thronged nearly every night with locals and visitors who come to enjoy the social scene, and live flamenco from about 8pm to 4am.

Sol Café Cantante (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 22 51 65; Calle del Sol 5; adult/concession €18/11; 11.30pm Wed-Sat) Up-and-coming flamenco artists take the stage here.

Well-known flamenco artists appear fairly frequently at theatres and concert halls. Seville also stages the biggest of all Spain's flamenco festivals, the month-long Bienal de Flamenco, in September of even-numbered years.

Bullfights

Fights at Seville's ancient, elegant, 14,000-seat **Plaza de Toros de la Real Maestranza** (Map pp692-3; Paseo de Cristóbal Colón 12; www.realmaestranza.com) are among the biggest in Spain. Seville's crowds are some of the most knowledgeable in the bullfighting world and, many say, the most demanding and difficult to please. The season

runs from Easter Sunday to early October, with fights every Sunday, usually at 7pm, and every day during the Feria de Abril and the week before it.

From the start of the season until late June/early July, nearly all the fights are by fully fledged matadors. Seats cost €25 to €110 but only cheap *sol* seats (in the sun at the start of proceedings) may be available to those who don't hold season tickets. Most of the rest of the season, novice bullfights (*novilleras*) are held, with tickets costing €9 to €42. Tickets are sold in advance at **Empresa Pagés** (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 50 13 82; Calle de Adriano 37), and from 4.30pm on fight days at the bullring itself.

SHOPPING

The craft shops in the Barrio de Santa Cruz are inevitably tourist-oriented, but many sell attractive ceramics and tiles.

El Centro has a pretty cluster of pedestrianised shopping streets. Calles Sierpes, Cuna, Velázquez and Tetuán have a host of small shops selling everything from polka-dot flamenco dresses to diamond rings. **El Corte Inglés** department store (Map pp692-3) occupies four separate buildings a little west, on Plaza de la Magdalena and Plaza del Duque de la Victoria. Further north, Calle Amor de Dios and Calle Doctor Letamendi (Map pp688-9) have more alternative shops.

The large Thursday **mercadillo** (flea market; Map pp688-9; Calle de la Feria) near the Alameda de Hércules is a colourful event that's well worth a visit.

In the traditional **tile-making area** of Triana, a dozen shops and workshops still offer charming, artful ceramics around the junction of Calle Alfarería and Calle Antillano Campos (Map pp688-9).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Seville's **Aeropuerto San Pablo** (☎ 954 44 90 00) has a fair range of international and domestic flights. **Iberia** (☎ 902 40 05 00; www.iberia.com) flies direct to Barcelona, Madrid, half a dozen other Spanish cities, and Paris. **Spanair** (☎ 902 13 14 15; www.spanair.com) also flies to Madrid and, along with **Air Europa** (☎ 902 40 15 01; www.air-europa.com) and **Vueling** (☎ 902 33 39 33; www.vueling.com), to Barcelona.

From the British Isles there are flights with **British Airways** (☎ 902 11 13 33; www.ba.com) from London Gatwick, **Ryanair** (☎ 807 22 00 32;

www.ryanair.com) from Liverpool and London Stansted, and **Aer Lingus** (☎ 902 50 27 37; www.aerlingus.com) from Dublin. Spanair, **Lufthansa** (☎ 902 22 01 01; www.lufthansa.com), **Air-Berlin** (☎ 901 11 64 02; www.airberlin.com), **Hapagfly** (☎ 902 39 04 00; www.hapagfly.com) and **Iberia** all offer flights from German airports; **Transavia** (☎ 902 11 44 78; www.transavia.com) comes from Amsterdam, and **SN Brussels Airlines** (☎ 902 90 14 92; www.flysn.com) from Brussels.

Bus

From the **Estación de Autobuses Prado de San Sebastián** (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 41 71 11; Plaza San Sebastián), there are 10 or more buses daily to/from Cádiz (€10.50, 1¼ hours), Córdoba (€9.50, 1¼ hours), Granada (€18, three hours), Jerez de la Frontera (€6.50, 1¼ hours), Ronda (€9, 2½ hours, five or more daily) and Málaga (€15, 2½ hours). This is also the station for other towns in Cádiz province, the east of Sevilla province, and destinations along the Mediterranean coast from the Costa del Sol to Barcelona.

From the **Estación de Autobuses Plaza de Armas** (Map pp688-9; ☎ 954 90 77 37; Avenida del Cristo de la Expiración), destinations include Madrid (€16, six hours, 14 daily), El Rocio (€5, 1½ hours, three to five daily), Arcena (€6, 1¼ hours, two daily) and other places in Huelva province, Mérida (€11, three hours, 12 daily), Cáceres (€15, four hours, six daily) and northwestern Spain. This is also the station for buses to Portugal. **ALSA** (www.alsa.es) runs two daily buses to Lisbon (€36, seven hours daily), one via Badajoz and Évora, the other (overnight) via Faro. **Casal** (www.autocarescasal.com) has a daily service between Seville and the border at Rosal de la Frontera (west of Arcena), where you can connect with Portuguese buses to/from Lisbon for a total journey time of 10 hours, costing €22. **Damas** (www.damas-sa.es) runs twice daily (except Saturday, Sunday and holidays from October to May) to/from Lagos (€18, 5½ hours) via Faro and Albufeira.

Train

The **Estación de Santa Justa** (Map pp688-9; ☎ 954 41 41 11; Avenida Kansas City) is 1.5km northeast of the city centre. There's also a city-centre **Renfe ticket office** (Map pp692-3; Calle Zaragoza 29).

Fourteen or more super-fast AVE trains, reaching speeds of 280km/h, whiz daily to/from Madrid (€64 to €70, 2½ hours). There are cheaper 'Altaria' services (€55, 3½ hours).

Other destinations include Barcelona (€53 to €88, 10½ to 13 hours, three daily), Cádiz (€9 to €29, 1¼ hours, nine daily), Córdoba (€7 to €24, 40 minutes to 1½ hours, 21 or more daily), Granada (€20, three hours, four daily), Huelva (€7 to €16, 1½ hours, four daily), Jerez de la Frontera (€6 to €16, one to 1¼ hours, nine daily), Málaga (€16, 2½ hours, five daily) as well as Mérida (€12, five hours, one daily).

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

The airport is 7km east of the city centre on the A4 Córdoba road. **Amarillos Tour** (☎ 902 21 03 17) runs buses between the airport and the Puerta de Jerez (€2.50, 30 to 40 minutes, at least 15 daily). A taxi costs about €15.

Bus

Buses C1, C2, C3 and C4 do useful circular routes linking the main transport terminals and the city centre. The C1, from in front of Estación de Santa Justa, follows a clockwise route via Avenida de Carlos V (close to Prado de San Sebastián bus station and the Barrio de Santa Cruz), Avenida de María Luisa, Triana, Isla Mágica and Calle de Resolana. The C2, heading west from in front of Estación de Santa Justa, follows the same route in reverse. Bus 32, also from outside Santa Justa, runs to/from Plaza de la Encarnación in El Centro.

The clockwise number C3 will take you from Avenida Menéndez Pelayo (near Prado de San Sebastián bus station and the Barrio de Santa Cruz) to the Puerta de Jerez, Triana, Plaza de Armas bus station, Calle del Torneo, Calle de Resolana and Calle de Recaredo. The C4 does the same circuit anticlockwise except that from Estación de Autobuses Plaza de Armas it heads south along Calle de Arjona and Paseo de Cristóbal Colón to the Puerta de Jerez, instead of crossing the river to Triana.

Bus rides cost €1.

Car & Motorcycle

Hotels with parking usually charge you €10 to €15 a day for the privilege – no cheaper than some public car parks but at least your vehicle will be close at hand. **Parking Paseo de Colón** (Map pp692-3; cnr Paseo de Cristóbal Colón & Calle Adriano; per hr up to 10 hr €1.20, 10-24 hr €12) is a relatively inexpensive underground car park.

AROUND SEVILLE

You'll find Andalucía's best Roman ruins at Itálica and, on the rolling agricultural plains east of Seville, fascinating old towns such as Carmona and Osuna that bespeak many epochs of history.

Santiponce

pop 7000

The small town of Santiponce, 8km northwest of Seville, is the location of Itálica and of the historic Monasterio de San Isidoro del Campo.

Itálica (☎ 955 99 65 83; adult/EU citizen €1.50/free; 𠄎 8.30am-8.30pm Tue-Sat, 9am-3pm Sun Apr-Sep; 9am-5.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Oct-Mar), on the northern edge of Santiponce, was the first Roman town in Spain. Founded in 206 BC for veterans of Rome's victory over Carthage at nearby Ilipa, Itálica was also the hometown of the 2nd-century-AD Roman emperors Trajan and Hadrian. The partly reconstructed ruins include one of the biggest of all the Roman amphitheatres, broad paved streets, ruins of several houses with beautiful mosaics, and a theatre.

The **Monasterio de San Isidoro del Campo** (☎ 955 99 69 20; admission €2; 𠄎 10am-2pm Wed & Thu, to 2pm & 5.30-8.30pm Fri & Sat, to 3pm Sun & holidays, also 4-7pm Fri & Sat Oct-Mar) is at the southern end of Santiponce (the end nearest Seville), 1.5km from the Itálica entrance. Founded in 1301, it contains a rare set of 15th-century murals, showing saints and Mudéjar geometric and floral designs; and some fine and historically interesting sculpture in its two churches, notably a masterly *retablo* by the great 17th-century Sevillian sculptor Juan Martínez Montañés. It was here that the Bible was first translated into Spanish, by the monk Casiodoro de Reina, in the 1550s.

Casa Venancio (☎ 955 99 67 06; Avenida Extremadura 9; mains €6-13), opposite the Itálica entrance, does good rabbit or partridge with rice (€17 for two).

Buses run to Santiponce (€0.80, 30 minutes) from Seville's Plaza de Armas bus station, at least twice an hour from 6.30am to 11pm Monday to Friday, and a little less often at weekends. They stop near the monastery and outside the Itálica entrance.

CARMONA

pop 25,000 / elevation 250m

Charming old Carmona, fortified since the 8th century BC, perches on a low hill dotted with old palaces and impressive monuments, 38km east of Seville off the A4 to Córdoba.

The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 954 19 09 55; www.turismo.carmona.org; 𠄎 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, to 3pm Sun & holidays) is in the Puerta de Sevilla at the main entrance to the old part of town. Buses from Seville's Prado de San Sebastián bus station (€2, 45 minutes, 20 a day Monday to Friday, 10 on Saturday, seven on Sunday) stop 300m west of here, on Paseo del Estatuto.

Sights

Just over 1km southwest of the Puerta de Sevilla is Carmona's impressive **Roman necropolis** (☎ 954 14 08 11; Avenida de Jorge Bonsor; admission free; 𠄎 9am-2pm Tue-Sat 15 Jun-14 Sep; to 5pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun rest of year, closed holidays) You can climb down into a dozen family tombs, hewn from the rock.

The tourist office in the **Puerta de Sevilla**, the impressive fortified main gate of the old town, sells tickets (€2) for the gate's interesting upper levels, called the Alcázar de la Puerta de Sevilla, which include an Almohad patio and traces of a Roman temple.

Up into the old town from here, the 17th-century **ayuntamiento** (Town Hall; Calle El Salvador; admission free; 𠄎 8am-3pm Mon-Fri), contains a large, very fine Roman mosaic of the Gorgon Medusa. The splendid **Iglesia Prioral de Santa María** (Calle Martín López de Córdoba; admission €3; 𠄎 9am-2pm & 5.30-7pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat, closed 21 Aug-21 Sep) was built mainly in the 15th and 16th centuries in a typical Carmona combination of brick and stone. But its Patio de los Naranjos was originally a mosque's courtyard, and has a Visigothic calendar carved into one of its pillars. Behind Santa María, the **Museo de la Ciudad** (City History Museum; ☎ 954 14 01 28; Calle San Ildefonso 1; admission €2, free Tue; 𠄎 10am-2pm & 4.30-9.30pm Wed-Mon to 2pm Tue 16 Jun-31 Aug, 11am-7pm Wed-Mon to 2pm Tue Sep-mid-Jun) provides extensive background for explorations of the town.

The **Puerta de Córdoba** (Calle Dolores Quintanilla), at the end of the street passing the Iglesia de Santa María, is an original Roman gate, through which there are fine panoramas. South of here is the ruined **Alcázar**, an Almohad fort that Pedro I turned into a country palace. Ruined by earthquakes in 1504 and 1755, it's now the site of the luxurious *parador* hotel, a good place to stop for a drink!

Sleeping & Eating

Pensión Comercio (☎ 954 14 00 18; Calle Torre del Oro 56; s/d €32/45; ☪) This lovely old tiled building near the Puerta de Sevilla provides 14 cosy, clean rooms.

Hospedería Marques de las Torres (☎ 954 19 62 48; www.hospederiamarquesdelastorres.com; Calle Fermin Molpeceres 2; dm €23, r €60; ☪) An almost unreal combination of dorm cabins resembling train compartments and comfortable hotel rooms with plush beds in a converted *palacio*, with a fabulous turquoise pool in the sunny garden.

Parador Alcázar del Rey Don Pedro (☎ 954 14 10 10; www.parador.es; s/d €129/161; ☪ a i s) Carmona's luxuriously equipped *parador* exudes a historic atmosphere, and few Andalusian swimming pools are more spectacularly sited! The refectory-style dining room (*menú del día* €28) is one of the best in town.

Casa de Carmona (☎ 954 19 10 00; www.casade-carmona.com; Plaza de Lasso 1; r incl breakfast €150-180; ☪ a s) A super-luxurious hotel in a beautiful 16th-century palace, the Casa de Carmona has the genuine feel of the aristocratic home that it used to be. Its elegant restaurant (mains €16 to €22, *menú* €24 to €48) serves *haute cuisine* with an *andaluz* (Andalusian) touch.

There are several places to eat around Plaza San Fernando, near the ayuntamiento. **Café Bar El Tapeo** (☎ 954 14 43 21; Calle Prim 9; tapas/raciones €1.50/5) is friendly, down-to-earth and popular.

OSUNA

pop 18,000 / elevation 330m

Osuna, 91km from Seville, just off the A92 towards Granada, is the loveliest of Sevilla province's country towns, with beautifully preserved baroque mansions and an amazing Spanish Renaissance monastery. Several of the most impressive buildings were created by the ducal family of Osuna, one of Spain's richest since the 16th century. On the central Plaza Mayor, the **Oficina Municipal de Turismo** (☎ 954 81 57 32; 𠄎 9am-2pm Mon-Sat) and the **Asociación Turístico Cultural Osuna** (☎ 954 81 28 52; 𠄎 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat & Sun) both provide tourist information and hand out useful guides.

Sights

Most impressive are the big buildings on the hill overlooking the centre. On the way up from Plaza Mayor, the **Museo Arqueológico** (☎ 954 81 12 07; Plaza de la Duquesa; admission €1.50; 𠄎 11.30am-1.30pm & 5-6.30pm Tue-Sun, closed Sun afternoon Jul & Aug) has a good collection of mainly Iberian and Roman artefacts. Further up the same hill, the 16th-century **Colegiata de Santa María de la Asunción** (☎ 954 81 04 44; Plaza de la Encarnación; admission by guided tour only €2; 𠄎 10am-1.30pm

& 4-6.30pm Tue-Sun, closed Sun afternoon Jul & Aug), contains a wealth of sacred art, including several paintings by José de Ribera. The visit includes the lugubrious Sepulcro Ducal, the Osuna family vault. Opposite the Colegiata is the **Monasterio de la Encarnación** (☎ 954 81 11 21; admission €2; 𠄎 same as Colegiata), now Osuna's museum of religious art, with beautiful tile work and a rich collection of baroque art.

Sleeping

Hostal Caballo Blanco (☎ 954 81 01 84; Calle Granada 1; s/d €30/50; ☪ a) The friendly 'White Horse Inn' is an old coaching inn with courtyard parking and comfy rooms.

Hotel Palacio Marqués de la Gomera (☎ 954 81 22 23; www.hotelpalaciodelmarques.com; Calle San Pedro 20; s/d €92/115; ☪ a i) This luxury hotel occupies one of Osuna's finest baroque mansions.

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (☎ 954 81 01 46; Avenida de la Constitución) is 500m southeast of Plaza Mayor. Up to 11 daily buses run to Seville (Prado de San Sebastián, €6.50, 1¼ hours). The **train station** (Avenida de la Estación) is 1km southwest of the centre, with six trains a day to Seville (€6 to €6.50, one hour).

HUELVA PROVINCE

Andalucía's westernmost province – an afterthought to most travellers who are not on the way to or from Portugal – is in fact a land of many and surprising rewards. Around half the excellent, sandy, Atlantic beaches of the Costa de la Luz lie along Huelva's coast. Also here is most of that beautiful and hugely important wildlife sanctuary, the Parque Nacional de Doñana. Anyone with a historical leaning will be fascinated by the Columbus sites outside Huelva city. And northern Huelva, focused on the town of Aracena, is a beautiful rolling hill-country district just waiting to be discovered on foot.

HUELVA

pop 145,000

The province's unspectacular but amiable capital, a port and industrial city, was probably founded by the Phoenicians as a trading settlement about 3000 years ago. What's here today, however, has almost all been built since the devastating Lisbon earthquake of 1755.

Orientation & Information

Huelva stands between the Odiel and Tinto estuaries. The central area is about 1km square, with the bus station at its western edge, on Calle Doctor Rubio, and the train station at its southern edge on Avenida de Italia. The main street is Avenida Martín Alonso Pinzón (also called Gran Vía). The nearby **Regional tourist office** (☎ 959 65 02 00; Plaza Alcalde Coto Mora 2; 11 9am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun) is well informed and helpful.

Sights

The **Museo Provincial** (☎ 959 25 93 00; Alameda Sundheim 13; admission free; 11 2.30-8.30pm Tue, 9am-8.30pm Wed-Sat, 9am-2.30pm Sun) focuses on Huelva province's archaeological pedigree, especially its millennia of mining history (see p714). Pride of place goes to a huge restored Roman water wheel and a reconstructed gold-and-wood Phoenician funeral cart.

Sleeping & Eating

Instalación Juvenil de Huelva (☎ 959 65 00 10; www.inturjuven.com; Avenida Marchena Colombo 14; per person incl breakfast under 26yr €13-15, over 26yr €17-19; √√) This is a good modern youth hostel where all rooms have a bathroom. It's 2km north of the bus station: city bus 6 (€0.80) from there stops just around the corner from the hostel, on Calle JS Elcano.

Hotel Los Condes (☎ 959 28 24 00; Alameda Sundheim 14; s/d incl breakfast €40/59; p a i) Large, bright, modern rooms, with big gleaming bathrooms, plus friendly reception, free internet and a reasonable restaurant, add up to the best value in town.

NH Luz Huelva (☎ 959 25 00 11; www.nh-hotels.com; Alameda Sundheim 26; s/d €100/105; p a i) This is the best hotel Huelva has to offer, with attractive, comfy rooms in an ugly building with concrete, scallop-shaped balconies. Check the website for discount offers, and ring ahead for a parking spot.

Taberna El Condado (☎ 959 26 11 23; Calle Sor Ángela de la Cruz 3; tapas €1.50, raciones €10-15; 11 closed Sun) An atmospheric tapas bar of just two small rooms dominated by a ham-heavy bar, specialising in tasty local meats.

Trattoria Fuentevieja (Avenida Martín Alonso Pinzón; mains €6-11; 11 closed Sun evening) This ultra-popular Italian spot serves a good range of salads as well as pizza, pasta and meat dishes, with touches of vaguely classical art amid tasteful sky-blue-and-lemon décor.

Getting There & Away

From the **bus station** (☎ 959 25 69 00) at least 18 daily buses head to Seville (€7, 1¼ hours), and four to Madrid (€21, seven hours). Two (except Saturday, Sunday and holidays from October to May) head for Lagos (€13, four hours) in Portugal via Faro and Albufeira. From the **train station** (☎ 959 24 56 14) four daily trains head to Seville (€7 to €17, 1½ hours).

LUGARES COLOMBINOS

The Lugares Colombinos (Columbus Sites) are the three townships of La Rábida, Palos de la Frontera and Moguer, along the eastern bank of the Tinto estuary, east of Huelva. All three played key roles in the discovery of the Americas and can be combined in a single day trip from Huelva, the Doñana area or the nearby coast.

La Rábida

pop 400

The most important of the sites is the 14th-century **Monasterio de La Rábida** (☎ 959 35 04 11; admission incl multilingual audio-guide €3; 11 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat Apr-Jul & Sep, 10am-1pm to 6.15pm Tue-Sat Oct-Mar, 10am-1pm & 4.45-8pm Tue-Sat Aug, 10.45am-1pm Sun year-round), visited several times by Columbus before his great voyage of discovery and today full of Columbus memorabilia. Abbot Juan Pérez, a former confessor of Queen Isabel La Católica, helped Columbus find support for his far-fetched plans not only from the Spanish royal court but also from the sailors of Palos and Moguer.

On the waterfront below the monastery is the **Muelle de las Carabelas** (Wharf of the Caravels; ☎ 959 53 05 97; admission €3.20; 11 10am-2pm & 5-9pm Tue-Fri, 11am-9pm Sat, Sun & holidays Jun-Sep, 10am-7pm Tue-Sun Oct-May), where you can board replicas of Columbus' tiny three-ship fleet, crewed by ludicrous mannequins.

Palos de la Frontera

pop 7000

Columbus set sail from Palos on 3 August 1492; the town provided two of his three ships, the *Niña* and *Pinta*, and more than half his crew. Palos' access to the Tinto is now silted up but it's still proud of its role in the European discovery of the Americas.

A short walk uphill from the central plaza, the **Casa Museo Martín Alonso Pinzón** (☎ 618 57 09 83; Calle Colón 24; admission free; 11 10am-2pm & 5-7pm Tue-Sun) was the home of the *Pinta's* captain. Further

along Calle Colón is the 15th-century **Iglesia de San Jorge** (11 10am-noon & 7-8pm Tue-Sun), where Columbus and his men took communion before embarking for their great voyage. In a park down the street is **La Fontanilla**, a brick well from which they drew water. A plaque above marks the site of the *embarcadero* (jetty) from which they sailed.

El Bodegón (☎ 959 53 11 05; Calle Rábida 46; mains €8-20; 11 closed Tue), a noisy, atmospheric cavern of a restaurant, cooks up fish and meat on wood-fired grills and doles out plates of good cheese and *jamón serrano* (cured hill-country ham).

Moguer

pop 13,000

This attractive small town provided many of Columbus' crew. There's a helpful **tourist office** (☎ 959 37 18 98; Calle Castillo s/n; 11 9am-2pm & 4.30-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun & holidays) a couple of blocks south of the central Plaza del Cabildo, in Moguer's **Castillo** (Castle; admission free; 11 same as tourist office), a bare walled enclosure of Almohad origin, expanded in the 14th century.

The 14th-century **Monasterio de Santa Clara** (☎ 959 37 01 07; Plaza de las Monjas; guided tour €2; 11 11am-1pm & 5-7pm Tue-Sat) is where Columbus kept a prayerful vigil the night after returning from his first voyage in March 1493. You'll see a lovely Mudéjar cloister and an impressive collection of religious art.

The 1956 Nobel literature laureate Juan Ramón Jiménez came from Moguer and wrote of childhood wanderings here with his donkey in *Platero y Yo* (Platero and I). His home, the **Casa Museo Zenobia y Juan Ramón** (☎ 959 37 21 48; www.fundacion-jrj.es in Spanish; Calle Juan Ramón Jiménez 10; 1hr guided tour €2.50; 11 10.15am-1.15pm & 5.15-7.15pm Tue-Sat, to 1.15pm Sun) is only a five-minute walk from the Monasterio de Santa Clara.

For a bite to eat, give **Mesón El Lobito** (☎ 959 37 06 60; Calle Rábida 31; raciones €7-10; 11 closed Wed) a go. Occupying an old winery, its fish and meat *a la brasa* (char-grilled) are good and inexpensive.

Getting There & Away

At least 10 buses a day leave Huelva for La Rábida (€1, 20 minutes), with half of them continuing to Palos de la Frontera (€1, 25 minutes) and Moguer (€1.10, 30 minutes). The others go on to Mazagón.

PARQUE NACIONAL DE DOÑANA

Spain's most celebrated and in many ways most important wildlife refuge, the Doñana National Park is one of Europe's last remaining great wetlands. Covering 542 sq km in the southeast of Huelva province and neighbouring Sevilla province, this World Heritage site is a vital refuge for such endangered species as the Iberian lynx (with a population here of 30 to 50) and Spanish imperial eagle (eight breeding pairs), and a crucial sanctuary for six million other birds that spend part of the year here. It's a unique combination of ecosystems and a place of haunting beauty that is well worth the effort of getting to. To visit the national park you must take a tour from the Centro de Visitantes El Acebuche (p713) on the western side of the park, or from El Rocío (p712) at the park's northwest corner, or from Sanlúcar de Barrameda (p723) at its southeast corner.

Half the park consists of *marismas* (wetlands) of the Guadalquivir delta. Almost dry from July to October, in autumn the *marismas* fill with water, attracting hundreds of thousands of wintering water birds from the north, including an estimated 80% of Western Europe's wild ducks. As the waters sink in spring, other birds – greater flamingos, spoonbills, storks – arrive, many to nest. The park also has a 28km Atlantic beach, separated from the *marismas* by a band of sand dunes up to 5km wide, and 144 sq km of *coto* (woodland and scrub), which harbours many mammals, including deer, wild boar and semiwild horses.



Interesting areas surrounding the national park are included in the 540-sq-km Parque Natural de Doñana, a separate protected area comprising four distinct zones.

El Rocío

pop 1200

The extraordinary village of El Rocío overlooks a section of the Doñana *marismas* at the park's northwestern corner. The village's sandy streets bear as many hoof prints as tyre marks, and they are lined by rows of verandahed buildings that are empty most of the time. But this is no ghost town: most of the houses belong to the 90-odd *hermandades* (brotherhoods) of pilgrim-revellers who converge on El Rocío every year in the *Romería del Rocío* (see right). In fact, a fiesta atmosphere pervades the village on most weekends as *hermandades* arrive to carry out lesser ceremonial acts.

INFORMATION

The **tourist office** (☎ 959 44 38 08; www.turismodedonana.com; Avenida de la Canaleja s/n; 𠂆 9.30am-1.30pm & 3-5pm Mon-Fri) is by the main road at the western end of the village. It can make reservations for park tours. The **Centro de Información Las Rocinas** (☎ 959 44 23 40; 𠂆 9am-3pm & 4-7pm, to 8pm or 9pm Apr-Aug), 1km south on the A483, has national park information and paths to nearby bird-watching hides.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The heart of the village is the **Ermita del Rocío** (𠂆 8am-9pm), the church housing the celebrated Virgin del Rocío, a tiny wooden image in long, bejewelled robes. Many come to pay their respects every day.

Deer and horses graze in the shallow water in front of the village and you might see a flock of flamingos wheeling through the sky in a great pink cloud. The bridge over the river on the A483, 1km south of the village, is another good **viewing spot**.

Several operators run tours along the northern fringe of the national park to the **Centro de Visitantes José Antonio Valverde** (𠂆 10am-7pm, to 8pm or 9pm Apr-Aug), overlooking a year-round lake. On these trips you have high chances of seeing deer and boar and will definitely see a great diversity of birds. Recommended operators: **Discovering Doñana** (☎ 959 44 24 66; www.discoveringdonana.com; Calle Águila Imperial 150, El Rocío; 6hr trip 1-3 people €110) Expert English-speaking guides; most trips are of broad interest.

Doñana Bird Tours (☎ 95 575 5460; www.donabirdtours.com; 9hr trip 1-3 people €110) Top-class bird tours led by locally-resident British bird expert and author John Butler.

Doñana Nature (☎ 959 44 21 60; www.donana-nature.com; Calle Las Carretas 10, El Rocío; 3½hr trip per person €23) Half-day trips, at 8am and 3.30pm daily, are of general-interest; English- and French-speaking guides available.

Doñana Ecuestre (☎ 959 44 24 74; Avenida de la Canaleja s/n; per 1hr/2hr/half-day €17/23/41) Offers enjoyable guided horse rides through the woodlands west of El Rocío.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Every Pentecost (Whitsuntide), the seventh weekend after Easter, El Rocío is inundated with up to a million pilgrim-revellers from all corners of Spain in the **Romería del Rocío** (Pilgrimage to El Rocío). This vast cult festivity revolves around the tiny image of Nuestra Señora del Rocío, which was found here in a tree by a hunter from Almonte back in the 13th century. Carrying it home, the hunter stopped for a rest and the statue miraculously made its own way back to the tree. Before long a chapel was built where the tree had stood (now El Rocío) and pilgrims were making for it.

Today, nearly 100 *hermandades* (brotherhoods) from around and beyond Andalucía, some comprising several thousand men and women, travel to El Rocío each year on foot, on horseback and in gaily decorated covered wagons pulled by cattle or horses, using cross-country tracks.

Solemn is the last word you'd apply to this quintessentially Andalusian event. The 'pilgrims' dress in bright Andalusian costume and sing, dance, drink and romance their way to El Rocío.

Things reach an ecstatic climax in the early hours of the Monday. Members of the *hermandad* of Almonte, which claims the Virgin for its own, barge into the church and bear her out on a float. Chaotic struggles ensue as others battle with the Almonte lads for the honour of carrying La Blanca Paloma, but somehow good humour survives and the Virgin is carried round to each of the brotherhood buildings, finally returning to the Ermita in the afternoon.

SLEEPING & EATING

Don't bother even trying for a room at *Romería* time.

Camping La Aldea (☎ 959 44 26 77; www.campinglaaldea.com; Carretera El Rocío Km25; sites per adult/tent/car €5.50/5.50/5.50, cabin or bungalow for 4 or 5 adults €100-34; p a i s) At the north end of the village, well-equipped La Aldea has a range of cosy cabins and bungalows as well as over 250 camping spaces.

Penión Cristina (☎ 959 44 24 13; Calle El Real 58; s/d €30/36; mains €6-9) Just east of the Ermita, the Cristina provides reasonably comfortable budget rooms and a popular restaurant serving paella, venison, seafood and more.

Hotel & Restaurante Toruño (☎ 959 44 23 23; Plaza Acebuchal 22; s/d incl breakfast €57/81; mains €12-22; p a) An attractive villa overlooking the *marismas*, Toruño has 30 well-appointed rooms, and its restaurant serves up sizeable portions of well-prepared country and coastal fare.

Aires de Doñana (☎ 959 44 27 19; Avenida de la Canaleja 1; mains €15-19; 𠂆 closed Mon) Most El Rocío eateries focus more on feeding the hungry punters than on culinary niceties. Aires de Doñana makes a great change with its picture windows over the *marismas*, polished service and successfully imaginative menu.

Centro de Visitantes El Acebuche

Twelve kilometres south of El Rocío on the A483, then 1.6km west, El Acebuche (☎ 959 44 87 11; 𠂆 8am-9pm May-Sep, to 7pm Oct-Apr) is the national park's main visitor centre. It has an interactive exhibit on the park, paths to bird-watching hides, and a shop with a large screen showing film of Iberian lynxes in the El Acebuche captive-breeding programme (the programme itself is not open to visitors).

NATIONAL PARK TOURS

Trips in 20-person all-terrain vehicles from El Acebuche are the only way for ordinary folk to get into the interior of the national park from the western side. Book ahead through **Cooperativa Marismas del Rocío** (☎ 959 43 04 32/51; 4hr tour per person €23; 𠂆 8.30am Tue-Sun year-round, 3pm Oct-Apr, 5pm May-Sep). During spring, summer and holidays, the trips can book out over a month ahead, but otherwise a week is usually plenty of notice. Bring binoculars if you can, drinking water in summer, and mosquito protection except in winter. Most guides speak Spanish only. The tour normally starts with a long beach drive, before moving inland. You can be pretty certain of seeing deer and boar, but ornithologists may be disappointed by the limited bird-observation opportunities.

Matalascañas & Mazagón

These two small resorts on the long, sandy beach running northwest from the national park provide alternative bases to El Rocío. Matalascañas town itself is a sad contrast to the adjacent wildernesses, but Mazagón, 28km up the coast, is lower-key. At **Cuesta de Maneli**, between the two, a 1.2km boardwalk leads across 100m-high dunes from a car park to the beach through glorious pines and junipers.

Both towns have large camping grounds and these are the best hotels:

Hotel Albaida (☎ 959 37 60 29; www.hotelalbaida.com; Carretera Huelva-Matalascañas, Mazagón; s €44-65, d €67-102, all incl breakfast; p a) Airy rooms and welcoming staff, among pines just off the highway.

Hotel Doñana Blues (☎ 959 44 98 17; www.donana.blues.com; Sector I, Parcela 129, Matalascañas; r €102-134; a i s) A small hotel in comfortable yet appealingly rustic style. Book ahead.

Parador de Mazagón (☎ 959 53 63 00; www.parador.es; Playa de Mazagón; s/d €120/150; p a i s) The luxurious rooms all have sea views, 6km east of central Mazagón.

Getting There & Away

Three daily buses run between Seville (Plaza de Armas) and Matalascañas (€6, 1¼ hours) via El Rocío (€5.50, 1½ hours). One or two further services along the A483 between Almonte and Matalascañas also stop at El Rocío. All these buses will stop on request outside El Acebuche visitors centre.

From Huelva, buses go to Mazagón (€1.80, 35 minutes, up to 13 daily), with just two of these (Monday to Friday only) continuing to Matalascañas (€3.90, 50 minutes). Extra services may run in summer. You can travel between Huelva and El Rocío by changing buses at Almonte.

WEST OF HUELVA

The coast between Huelva and the Portuguese border, 53km to the west, is lined nearly all the way by a superb, broad, sandy beach backed for long stretches by dunes and trees. The coastal settlements emphasise tourism but also retain port character.

Punta Umbria, Huelva's summer playground, has a friendly atmosphere and an attractive location between the Atlantic beach and the peninsular wetlands of the Marismas del Odiel. Some great seafood eateries are dotted along the ocean beach. Further west, **Isla Cristina** has a bustling fishing port and plenty more of

the same great beach. **Ayamonte** stands beside the broad Río Guadiana, which divides Spain from Portugal. A free road bridge crosses the river 2km north of Ayamonte, but there's also a ferry from the town (€4 for a car and driver, €1.30 for pedestrians).

Recommended hotels (rates dip by 25% to 50% outside July and August):

Hotel Real (% 959 31 04 56; hotelrealpuntaunbria@hotmail.com; Calle Falucho 2, Punta Umbría; s €36-60, d €50-85; a) Good budget place near the east end of Calle Ancha, the pedestrianised main street; the renovated rooms are positively stylish.

Hotel El Paraíso Playa (% 959 33 02 35; www.hotelparaisoplaya.com; Avenida de la Playa, Isla Cristina; s/d €65/129; p a i s) A friendly and attractive two-storey hotel, with restaurant, a stone's throw from Playa Central.

MINAS DE RIOTINTO

pop 4500 / elevation 420m

Tucked away on the fringe of Huelva's northern hills is one of the world's oldest mining districts – an unearthly, sculpted and scarred landscape that makes a fascinating stop. Copper was being dug up here at least 4000 years ago, iron has been mined since at least Roman times, and in the 19th century the British-dominated Río Tinto Company turned the area into one of the world's great copper-mining centres.

The area's hub is the town of Minas de Riotinto, 68km northeast of Huelva.

Sights & Activities

The attractions are run by the **Parque Minero de Riotinto** (% 959 59 00 25; www.parqueminero.riotinto.sigadel.com in Spanish), headquartered at the well-signposted **Museo Minero** (Plaza Ernest Lluch; adult/under 13yr €4/3; h 10.30am-3pm & 4-7pm). The fascinating museum takes you right through the Riotinto area's unique history from megalithic tombs to the Roman and British colonial eras and finally the closure of the mines in 2001. Its best features include a 200m-long re-creation of a Roman mine, and the Vagón del Maharajah, a luxurious carriage used by Alfonso XIII to visit the mines.

An easy and fun way to see the mining area is to ride the **Ferrocarril Turístico-Minero** (adult/child €10/9; h 1.30pm 1 Jun-15 Jul, to 5pm 16 Jul-30 Sep, 4pm Sat, Sun & holidays Oct-Feb, 1pm Mon-Fri, 4pm Sat, Sun & holidays Mar-May), taking visitors 22km (round-trip) through the surreal landscape in restored early-20th-century railway carriages. Trips start at Talleres Minas, 2.5km east of Minas

THE MARTE PROJECT

On trips to Peña de Hierro you'll see the area where, since 2003, scientists from United States's NASA and Spain's Centro de Astrobiología in Madrid have been conducting a research programme called Marte (Mars Analog Research & Technology Experiment), in preparation for seeking life on Mars. It's thought that the high acid levels that give Río Tinto its rust-red colour (the action of acid on iron) are a product of underground microorganisms comparable with those that may exist below the surface of Mars. Experiments in locating these microbes up to 150m below ground level are helping to develop techniques for seeking similar subterranean life on the red planet.

de Riotinto. Another trip is to the old copper and sulphur mines of **Peña de Hierro** (adult/child €8/7; h daily), 9km from Minas de Riotinto. Here you see the source of Río Tinto, an 85m-deep opencast mine, and are taken into a 200m-long underground mine gallery. For both these trips it's essential to book ahead, and schedules may change.

The Parque Minero is not running trips to the **Corta Atalaya**, 1km west of the town. But you can still get a peep at this awesome opencast mine, 1.2km long and 335m deep, if you follow the sign to it as you enter Minas de Riotinto from the southwest.

Sleeping & Eating

Hostal Galán (% 959 59 08 40; www.hostalrestaurantegalan.com; Avenida La Esquila 10; s/d €27/39; menú €8.50; a) Just around the corner from the Museo Minero, Minas de Riotinto's only accommodation has plain but acceptable rooms and a handy restaurant.

Hotel Vázquez Díaz (% /fax 959 58 09 27; personal .telefonica.terra.es/web/hotelvazquezdiaz; Calle Cañadilla 51, Nerva; s/d €26/43; a) A welcoming, well-run hotel with decent rooms and its own good restaurant (*menú* €10), in Nerva, 5km east of Minas.

Getting There & Away

Up to six daily buses run from Huelva to Minas de Riotinto (€5.50, 1½ hours) and Nerva (€6, 1¼ hours), and vice-versa. **Casal** (% 954 99 92 62) has three daily buses from Seville (Plaza de Armas) to Nerva (€4, 1½ hours) and Minas de Riotinto (€4.50, 1¼ hours).

ARACENA

pop 7000 / elevation 730m

This appealing, whitewashed, old market town, spreading around the skirts of Cerro del Castillo, makes a good base for exploring the lovely, rolling hill country of northern Huelva. Most of the hill country lies within the 1840-sq-km **Parque Natural Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche**, Andalucía's second-largest protected area.

Aracena's **Municipal tourist office** (% 959 12 82 06; Calle Pozo de la Nieve; h 10am-2pm & 4-6.30pm) faces the entrance to the Gruta de las Maravillas (see below) and sells some maps of the area.

Sights & Activities

Aracena's biggest tourist attraction, the **Gruta de las Maravillas** (Cave of Marvels; % 959 12 83 55; Calle Pozo de la Nieve; tour adult/under 19yr €8/5.50; h tours every hr or half-hr 10.30am-1.30pm & 3-6pm), ranks among Spain's most picturesque cave systems, and is presented with appropriate theatricality. The **Cerro del Castillo** is surmounted by a beautiful Gothic-Mudéjar church and a ruined castle, both built around 1300.

Sleeping & Eating

Hospedería Reina de los Ángeles (% 959 12 83 67; www.hospederiareinadelosangeles.com; Avenida Reina de los Ángeles s/n; s/d €23/38; i) This former residence for school students, opened as a hotel in 2005, provides 90 good, clean, bright rooms with phone and TV – a good budget deal.

Molino del Bombo (% 959 12 84 78; www.molinodelbombo.com in Spanish; Calle Ancha 4; s/d €23/45; a i) Tastefully rustic yet comfortable, the Molino stands near the top of the town and is a great find.

Finca Valbono (% 959 12 77 11; www.fincavalbono.com; Carretera Carboneras Km1; s/d €73/89, 4-person apt €150; p a i s w w) A converted farmhouse 1km northeast of town, this is Aracena's most charming accommodation. Facilities include a pool, riding stables and a good, medium-priced restaurant (mains €8 to €15).

Café-Bar Manzano (% 959 12 63 37; Plaza del Marqués de Aracena; tapas €1.80-3.50, raciones €9-18; h 8am-8pm or later Wed-Sat & Mon, 10am-8pm Sun) This terrace café on the main plaza is a fine spot to watch Aracena go by and enjoy varied tapas and *raciones*.

Restaurante José Vicente (% 959 12 84 55; Avenida de Andalucía 53; 3-course menú €18; h closed Sun evening, last week Jun & 1st week Jul) The proprietor is an expert on *sierra* cuisine and the fixed-price *menú* (which includes a drink) is excellent. Advisable to book.

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (Avenida de Sevilla) is towards the southeast edge of town. Two daily buses come from Seville (Plaza de Armas; €6, 1¼ hours), one or two from Huelva (€6, 2¼ hours), and up to three from Minas de Riotinto (€2.30, one hour). A Casal bus leaves at 10.30am to the Portuguese border just beyond Rosal de la Frontera, where you can change to onward buses for Lisbon (€16, nine hours from Aracena).

WEST OF ARACENA

The hills, valleys and villages of Huelva's portion of the Sierra Morena form one of Andalucía's most surprisingly beautiful landscapes. Most of the villages grew up around fortresslike churches, or hilltop castles constructed in medieval times to deter the Portuguese. The area is threaded by well maintained walking trails, with ever-changing vistas making for some of the most delightful rambling in Andalucía. Good walking routes are particularly thick in the area between Aracena and Cortegana, making attractive villages such as Alájar, Castaño del Robledo and Almonaster la Real good bases. Discovery Walking Guides' *Sierra de Aracena* and accompanying *Sierra de Aracena Tour & Trail Map* are terrific aids to the walker here.

One kilometre above Alájar (towards Fuenteteridos), the **Peña de Arias Montano** has magical views, as does **Cerro de San Cristóbal** (915m), a 4km uphill drive from Almonaster. Almonaster's 10th-century **mezquita** (mosque; admission free; h 8.30am-7pm approx) is a gem of Islamic architecture. *Jamón serrano* from nearby **Jabugo** is acclaimed as the best in Spain and the village's Carretera San Juan del Puerto is lined with bars and restaurants waiting for your verdict too!

Recommended lodgings:

Posada del Castaño (% 959 46 55 02; www.posadadelcastano.com; Calle José Sánchez Calvo 33, Castaño del Robledo; s/d incl breakfast €35/49) Characterfully converted village house whose helpful young British owners have walkers foremost in mind.

Hotel Casa García (% 959 14 31 09; www.hotelcasagarcia.com; Avenida San Martín 2, Almonaster la Real; s/d €37/53; mains €8-14; p a) Stylish small hotel with highly regarded restaurant.

La Posada (% 959 12 57 12; laposadadealajar.com; Calle Médico Emilio González 2, Alájar; s/d incl breakfast €45/55) Very cosy inn whose owners are keen walkers themselves.

Daily **Casal** (% Seville 954 99 92 62) buses connect nearly all these villages with Aracena and Seville (Plaza de Armas).

CÁDIZ PROVINCE

It's hard to fathom how an area little more than 100km from north to south or east to west can encompass such variety. Cosmopolitan, cultured, fun-loving Cádiz can seem a world away from nearby Jerez de la Frontera, where aristocratic, sherry-quaffing, equestrian elegance rubs shoulders with poor quarters that have nurtured some of the great flamenco artists; and neither city has much in common with the unromantic industrial port of Algeciras. The colourful, bustling towns of the 'sherry triangle' give way to the long, sandy beaches of the Atlantic coast and the hip international surf scene of Tarifa. Inland, the majestic cork forests of Los Alcornocales yield to the rugged peaks and pristine white villages of the Sierra de Grazalema. Active travellers in Cádiz can enjoy Europe's best windsurfing, hike dramatic mountains, trek the countryside on horseback or train their binoculars on some of Spain's most spectacular birds. Meanwhile, the province's fascinatingly diverse history is ever-present in the shape of thrillingly-sited hilltop castles, beautiful churches and medieval mosques.

CÁDIZ

pop 132,000

Once past the coastal marshes and industrial sprawl around Cádiz, you emerge into an elegant, civilized port city of largely 18th- and 19th-century construction. Cádiz is crammed onto the head of a promontory like some huge, overcrowded, ocean-going ship, and the tang of salty air and ocean vistas are never far away. It has a long and fascinating history, absorbing monuments and museums and some enjoyable places to eat and drink – yet it's the people of Cádiz, the *gaditanos*, who make the place truly special. Warm, open, cultured and independent-minded, most *gaditanos* are concerned chiefly to make the most of life – whether simply enjoying each other's company in the city's bars or plazas, or indulging in Spain's most riotous spring carnival.

History

It may be the oldest city in Europe. Classical sources speak of the founding of the Phoenician trading base called Gadir around 1100 BC.

In less-distant times, Cádiz began to boom after Columbus' trips to the Americas. He

sailed from here on his second and fourth voyages. Cádiz attracted Spain's enemies too: in 1587 England's Sir Francis Drake 'singd the king of Spain's beard' with a raid on the harbour, delaying the imminent Spanish Armada. In 1596 Anglo-Dutch attackers burnt almost the entire city.

Cádiz's golden age was the 18th century, when it enjoyed 75% of Spanish trade with the Americas. It grew into the richest and most cosmopolitan city in Spain and gave birth to Spain's first progressive, liberal middle class. During the Napoleonic Wars, Cádiz held out under French siege from 1810 to 1812, and during this time a national parliament meeting here adopted Spain's liberal 1812 constitution, proclaiming sovereignty of the people.

The loss of the American colonies in the 19th century plunged Cádiz into a decline from which it's still recovering.

Orientation

Breathing space between the huddled streets of the old city is provided by numerous squares; the four most important for short-term orientation being Plaza San Juan de Dios, Plaza de la Catedral and Plaza de Topete in an arc in the southeast, and Plaza de Mina in the north. Pedestrianised Calle San Francisco runs most of the way between Plaza San Juan de Dios and Plaza de Mina.

The train station is just east of the old city, off Plaza de Sevilla, with the main bus station (of the Comes line) 900m to its north on Plaza de la Hispanidad. The 18th-century Puertas de Tierra (Land Gates) mark the southern boundary of the old city.

Information

You'll find plenty of banks and ATMs along Calle San Francisco and the parallel Avenida Ramón de Carranza.

Enred@2 (cnr Calles Isabel La Católica & Antonio López; internet per hr €1.50; h 11am-2pm & 5-10pm Mon-Sat)

Hospital Puerta del Mar (% 956 00 21 00; Avenida Ana de Viya 21) The main general hospital, 2.25km southeast of Puertas de Tierra.

Municipal tourist office Main office (% 956 24 10 01; Plaza San Juan de Dios 11; h 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 5-8pm 15 Jun-15 Sep); Information kiosk (Plaza San Juan de Dios; h 10am-1.30pm & 4-6.30pm Sat, Sun & holidays, 5-7.30pm 15 Jun-15 Sep)

Regional tourist office (% 956 25 86 46; Avenida Ramón de Carranza s/n; h 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1.30pm Sat, Sun & holidays)



Sights & Activities

PLAZA SAN JUAN DE DIOS & AROUND

Broad Plaza San Juan de Dios is surrounded by cafés and dominated by the imposing neoclassical **ayuntamiento** built around 1800. Between here and the cathedral is the **Barrio del Pópulo**, the kernel of medieval Cádiz and a focus of the city's recent spruce-up programme, now sporting several craft shops and galleries.

CATHEDRAL

Cádiz's yellow-domed **cathedral** (% 956 28 61 54; Plaza de la Catedral; adult/child €4/2.50; ʘ 10am-1.30pm & 4.30-6.30pm Tue-Fri, to 1pm Sat), fronts a broad, traffic-free plaza. The decision to build the cathedral was taken in 1716, but the cathedral wasn't finished until 1838, by which time neoclassical elements, such as the dome, towers and main façade, had diluted Vicente Acero's original baroque plan. But it's still a beautiful and impressive construction. From a separate entrance on Plaza de la Catedral, climb inside the **Torre de Poniente** (Western Tower; adult/child & over 65 €3.50/2.50; ʘ 10am-6pm, to 8pm 15 Jun-15 Sep) for marvellous vistas.

PLAZA DE TOPETE & AROUND

A short walk northwest from the cathedral, this square is one of Cádiz's liveliest, bright with flower stalls and adjoining the large, animated **Mercado Central** (Central Market). Nearby, the **Torre Tavira** (% 956 21 29 10; Calle Marqués del Real Tesoro 10; admission €3.50; ʘ 10am-6pm, to 8pm 15 Jun-15 Sep) is the highest and most important of the city's old watchtowers (18th-century Cádiz had no less than 160 of these, built so that citizens could observe the comings and goings of ships without leaving home). It provides great panoramas and has a **camera obscura** projecting live images of the city onto a screen.

The **Museo de las Cortes de Cádiz** (% 956 22 17 88; Calle Santa Inés 9; admission free; ʘ 9am-1pm & 5-7pm, 4-7pm Oct-May, Tue-Fri, to 1pm Sat & Sun) is full of historical memorabilia focusing on the 1812 parliament, including a large marvellous 1770s model of Cádiz, made for King Carlos III. Along the street is the **Oratorio de San Felipe Neri** (% 956 21 16 12; Plaza de San Felipe Neri; admission €2; ʘ 10am-1.30pm Mon-Sat), the church where the Cortes de Cádiz met. This is one of Cádiz's finest baroque churches, with an unusual oval interior, a beautiful dome and a Murillo *Inmaculada* on the altarpiece.

MUSEO DE CÁDIZ

Cádiz's fine major **museum** (% 956 21 22 81; Plaza de Mina; adult/EU citizen €1.50/free, admission free Sun; ʘ 2.30-8pm Tue, 9am-8.30pm Wed-Sat, 9.30am-2.30pm Sun) faces one of the city's largest and leafiest squares. The stars of the ground-floor archaeology section are two Phoenician marble sarcophagi, carved in human likeness, and a monumental statue of the Roman emperor Trajan, from Baelo Claudia (p733). The fine arts collection, upstairs, has 21 superb canvases by Zurbarán and the painting that cost Murillo his life – the altarpiece from Cádiz's Convento de Capuchinas. The baroque maestro died from injuries received in a fall from scaffolding while working on this in 1682.

COASTAL WALK

This 4.5km walk takes at least 1¼ hours. Go north from Plaza de Mina to the city's northern seafront, with views across the Bahía de Cádiz. Head along the **Alameda** gardens to the **Baluarte de la Candelaria**, then turn southwest to the quirkily clipped **Parque del Genovés**. Continue to the **Castillo de Santa Catalina** (% 956 22 63 33; admission free; ʘ 10.30am-6pm, to 8pm usually May-Aug), built after the 1596 sacking; inside there's an historical exhibit on Cádiz and the sea, and a gallery hosting temporary exhibitions. Sandy **Playa de la Caleta** (very crowded in summer) separates Santa Catalina from the 18th-century **Castillo de San Sebastián**. You can't enter San Sebastián but do walk along the airy 750m causeway to its gate. Finally, follow the broad promenade along **Campo del Sur** to the cathedral.

PLAYA DE LA VICTORIA

This lovely, wide, ocean beach of fine Atlantic sand stretches about 4km along the peninsula from its beginning 1.5km beyond the Puertas de Tierra. On summer weekends almost the whole city seems to be out here. Bus 1 'Plaza España-Cortadura' from Plaza de España will get you there.

Festivals & Events

No other Spanish city celebrates **carnaval** with the verve of Cádiz, where it turns into a 10-day singing, dancing and drinking fancy-dress party spanning two weekends. Everyone dresses up and the fun, abetted by huge quantities of alcohol, is infectious. Costumed groups (*murgas*) tour the city on foot or on floats, singing witty satirical ditties, dancing

or performing sketches. In addition to the 300 or so officially recognised *murgas*, judged by a panel in the Gran Teatro Falla, there are also the *ilegales* – any group that fancies taking to the streets and trying to play or sing.

Some of the liveliest scenes are in the working-class Barrio de la Viña, and on Calle Ancha and Calle Columela, where *ilegales* tend to congregate.

Rooms in Cádiz get booked months in advance (even though prices can be double their summer rates). If you don't manage to snatch one, you could just visit for the night from anywhere else within striking distance. Plenty of other people do this – many wearing fancy dress.

Sleeping

A reasonable number of budget places can be found in the old city.

Casa Caracol (% 956 26 11 66; www.caracolcasa.com; Calle Suárez de Salazar 4; dm/d incl breakfast €15/28; j) Friendly and crowded, Casa Caracol is a true backpacker hostel. It has bunk dorms for four and eight, a sociable communal kitchen, free internet, and a roof terrace with a few hammocks (€10). There's no sign outside: look for the blue door.

Hostal San Francisco (% 956 22 18 42; Calle San Francisco 12; d €49, s/d without bathroom €24/38) Well situated in the old city, the San Francisco has well kept but moderately sized, pine-veneered furnishings. Some have little natural light.

Hostal Fantoni (% 956 28 27 04; www.hostalfantoni.net; Calle Flamenca 5; s/d €45/60, without bathroom €35/40; a) Recently attractively remodelled, the friendly Fantoni offers a dozen spotless rooms. The roof terrace catches a breeze in summer.

Hostal Canalejas (% /fax 956 26 41 13; Calle Cristóbal Colón 5; s/d €48/66; a) An excellent new *hostal* in the old city: all the neat, comfortable rooms have pine furniture, small bathtub, and one or two single beds.

Hostal Bahía (% 956 25 90 61; hostalbahia@terra.es; Calle Plocía 5; s/d €56/70; a) All rooms are exterior, impeccably looked-after, and have phone, TV and built-in wardrobes.

Hospedería Las Cortes de Cádiz (% 956 21 26 68; www.hotellascortes.com in Spanish; Calle San Francisco 9; s/d incl breakfast €70/102; p a i s w) This excellent old-city hotel occupies a remodelled 1850s mansion centred on an elegant four-storey atrium. The 36 stylish rooms, each dedicated to a figure or place associated with the Cortes

de Cádiz, sport attractive period-style furnishings and plenty of modern comforts. The hotel also has a roof terrace, gym and Jacuzzi.

Parador Hotel Atlántico (% 956 22 69 05; www.paradores.es; Avenida Duque de Nájera 9; s/d €103/129; p a i s w) Cádiz's modern *parador* is comfortable and spacious. All of the rooms have a terrace with a sea view of some sort, and the pool sits in a lawn overlooking the ocean.

Eating

Freiduría Las Flores (% 956 22 61 12; Plaza de Topete 4; seafood per 250g €2.50-8) Cádiz specialises in fried fish and seafood, and Las Flores, a kind of self-respecting fish and chipper, is one of the best places to sample it. To try a combination, have a *surtido* (mixed fry-up).

Bar Zapata (Plaza Candelaria; montaditos €1.50-2, raciones €6-10) The crowd often spills out of the door at this highly popular but very narrow street-corner tapas joint. The scrumptious *montaditos* (open sandwiches) are a specialty, and the jazz/rock/blues soundtrack adds to the enjoyment.

El Aljibe (% 956 26 66 56; www.pablogrosso.com; Calle Plocía 25; tapas €2.50-4, mains €10-15) Refined restaurant upstairs and civilised tapas bar downstairs, El Aljibe is one of the best bets in town. The cuisine developed by *gaditano* chef Pablo Grosso is a delicious combination of the traditional and the adventurous. He stuffs his *solomillo ibérico* (Iberian pork sirloin) with Emmental cheese, ham and piquant peppers.

La Cigüeña (% 956 25 01 79; Calle Plocía 2; mains €13-16; ʘ closed Sun) A few steps off Plaza San Juan de Dios, the friendly and relaxed 'Stork' has a Dutch chef who prepares adventurous and delicious food.

Mesón Cumbres Mayores (% 956 21 32 70; Calle Zorrilla 4; tapas €1.50-2, mains €7-17) This ever-busy place, dangling with hams and garlic, has an excellent tapas bar in the front and a small restaurant in the back. In the bar it's hard to

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

La Gorda Te Da De Comer (Calle General Luque 1; tapas €1.60, salads €2-5, raciones €5; ʘ 9-11.30pm Mon, 1.30-4pm & 9-11.30pm Tue-Sat) Incredibly tasty food at incredibly low prices amid cool pop-art design. No wonder competition for the half-dozen tables is fierce. Try the curried chicken strips with Marie-Rose sauce.

beat the ham and cheese *montaditos*. In the restaurant, there are great salads, seafood, barbecued meats and *guisos* (stews).

El Faro (☎ 956 22 99 16; Calle San Felix 15; mains €6-22; a) Over in Barrio de la Viña, El Faro has a famous and excellent seafood restaurant, decorated with pretty ceramics, and an adjoining less-pricey tapas bar.

Drinking

The Plaza San Francisco-Plaza de España-Plaza de Mina area is the hub of the nocturnal bar scene. Things start to get going around midnight at most places, but can be pretty quiet in the first half of the week.

Medussa (cnr Calles Manuel Rancés & Beato Diego de Cádiz) Number-one nocturnal magnet for an alternative/studenty crowd; it has red walls and banks of lime-green fluorescent lighting to set the tone. Varied DJs and occasional live music – from garage and rock-groove to punk and ska – get the bodies moving.

Cambalache (Calle José del Toro 20; h closed Sun) This elongated, dimly-lit, jazz and blues bar often hosts live music on Thursdays.

Woodstock Bar (☎ 956 21 21 63; cnr Calles Sagasta & Cánovas del Castillo) This watering hole has a good range of on-tap and bottled international beers and plenty of rock music on the TVs.

Café Poniente (☎ 956 21 26 97; Calle Beato Diego de Cádiz 18; h closed Sun & Mon) Gay/mixed house-music pub where the waiters strut their stuff in vest tops (or no tops), and drag shows spice up the week on Thursdays.

The second hot spot is down Playa de la Victoria, with lively music bars along Paseo Marítimo and nearby in the Hotel Playa Victoria area about 2.5km from the Puertas de Tierra. The hippest bars include **Barabass** (☎ 856 07 90 26; Calle General Muñoz Arenillas 4-6; admission incl 1 drink €8; h 4pm-6am).

Entertainment

Dance till dawn? Head out towards Punta de San Felipe (known as La Punta) on the northern side of the harbour. Here, a line of disco bars thumps from around 3am to 6am Thursday to Saturday nights, while **El Malecón** (☎ 956 22 45 51; Paseo Pascual Pery; h from midnight Thu-Sat) is Cádiz's top Latin dance spot.

Peña Flamenca La Perla (☎ 956 25 91 01; Calle Carlos Ollero s/n) Cádiz is one of the true homes of flamenco. This cavernlike club hosts flamenco nights at 10pm many Fridays in spring and summer.

The **Gran Teatro Falla** (☎ 956 22 08 34; Plaza de Falla) and the **Central Lechera** (☎ 956 22 06 28; Plaza de Argüelles s/n) stage busy programmes of theatre, dance and music.

Getting There & Around

BOAT

See opposite for details of the passenger ferry that leaves from the Estación Marítima (Passenger Port), and heads across the bay to El Puerto de Santa María.

BUS

Most buses are run by **Comes** (☎ 956 80 70 59; Plaza de la Hispanidad). Destinations include Seville (€10.50, 1¼ hours, 12 daily), El Puerto de Santa María (€1.70, 30 to 40 minutes, 23 daily), Jerez de la Frontera (€2.70, 40 minutes, 20 daily), Tarifa (€8, two hours, five daily) and other places down the Cádiz coast, Arcos de la Frontera (€5.50, 1¼ hours, six daily), Ronda (€13, three hours, three daily), Málaga (€20, four hours, six daily) and Granada (€28, five hours, four daily).

Los Amarillos operates up to four further daily buses to Arcos de la Frontera (€4.50, 1¼ hours) and El Bosque (€7, two hours), plus up to 11 daily to Sanlúcar de Barrameda (€3, 1¼ hours), from its stop by the southern end of Avenida Ramón de Carranza. Some services go less often on Saturday and Sunday. Tickets and information are available at **Viajes Socialtur** (☎ 956 28 58 52; Avenida Ramón de Carranza 31).

Secorbus (☎ 902 22 92 92; Avenida José León de Carranza 20) operates up to six buses daily to Madrid (€22, eight hours). The stop is 3.6km southeast of the Puertas de Tierra.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The AP4 motorway from Seville to Puerto Real on the eastern side of the Bahía de Cádiz carries a toll of €5.50. The toll-free alternative, the A4, is slower.

There is a handily placed **underground car park** (Paseo de Canalejas; per 24hr €8) near the port area.

TRAIN

From the **train station** (☎ 956 25 10 01) up to 37 trains run daily to El Puerto de Santa María (€2.70, 35 minutes) and Jerez de la Frontera (€3.40, 45 minutes), 11 or more to/from Seville (€9, 1¼ hours) and two or three to/from Córdoba (€33 to €52, three hours) and Madrid (€60, 5½ hours, two daily).

EL PUERTO DE SANTA MARÍA

pop 82,000

El Puerto, across the bay and 10km north-east of Cádiz (22km by road), is easily and enjoyably reached by ferry. It was here that Columbus met the owner of his flagship (the *Santa María*), Juan de la Cosa, who was his pilot in 1492. Later, many palaces were built in El Puerto on the proceeds of American trade. Today it's one of Cádiz province's triangle of sherry-making towns, and its beaches, sherry bodegas (wineries) and tapas bars make it a fine outing from Cádiz or Jerez. In summer it jumps.

Orientation & Information

The heart of the town is on the northwestern bank of Río Guadalete. The ferry *El Vapor* arrives at the Muelle del Vapor jetty, on Plaza de las Galeras Reales. The good **tourist office** (☎ 956 54 24 13; www.turismoelpuerto.com; Calle Luna 22; h 10am-2pm & 6-8pm) is 2½ blocks straight ahead from the Muelle del Vapor.

Sights & Activities

The four-spouted **Fuente de las Galeras Reales** (Fountain of the Royal Galleys), by the Muelle del Vapor, once supplied water to American-bound ships.

The **Fundación Rafael Alberti** (☎ 956 85 07 11; Calle Santo Domingo 25; admission €3; h 11am-4pm Tue-Sun), a few blocks inland, has interesting exhibits on Rafael Alberti (1902-99), one of the great poets of the 'Generation of 27', who lived here as a child. The impressive 15th- to 18th-century **Iglesia Mayor Prioral** (h 8.30am-12.45pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat & Sun) dominates Plaza de España, a little further inland.

The best-known sherry wineries, **Osborne** (☎ 956 86 91 00; Calle Los Moros 7) and **Terry** (☎ 956 85 77 00; Calle Toneleros s/n), offer tours (€5 to €6.50) Monday to Friday. It's best to phone ahead. You can visit **Bodegas 501** (☎ 956 85 55 11; Calle Valdés 9; admission €4; h 10am-1pm Mon-Fri) without booking.

Pine-flanked **Playa de la Puntilla** is a half-hour walk southwest of the town centre – or take bus 26 (€0.80) southwest along Avenida Aramburu de Mora.

Sleeping

Hostal Costa Luz (☎ 956 05 47 01; www.hostalcostaluz.com; Calle Niño del Matadero 2; s/d €40/63; p a i) Friendly, modern *hostal* in the bullring vicinity with 11 appealing, medium-sized rooms.

Casa No 6 (☎ 956 87 70 84; www.casano6.com; Calle San Bartolomé 14; r/find breakfast €70/120; p) This beautifully renovated 19th-century house provides charming, spacious and spotless rooms.

Hotel Los Cántaros (☎ 956 54 02 40; www.hotelloscantaros.com; Calle Curva 6; s/d €98/115; p a i w) Classy Los Cántaros has well-equipped rooms and a restaurant looking out onto a verdant little garden.

Hotel Monasterio San Miguel (☎ 956 54 04 40; www.jale.com/monasterio; Calle Virgen de los Milagros 27; s/d from €140/184; p a s w) Tropical garden, pool, valuable artworks and gourmet restaurant await your pleasure, if your pockets are deep enough for this luxurious hotel in a converted 18th-century monastery.

Eating

Calle Misericordia sports an enticing string of tapas bars.

Bodega La Antigua (Calle Misericordia 8; tapas €3) Tapas menus are in English and French. Try the *albondijas de pescado* (fish balls).

Romerijo (☎ 956 54 12 54; Ribera del Marisco s/n; seafood per 250g from €4) A huge, always busy El Puerto institution, Romerijo has two buildings, one boiling the seafood, the other frying it. Choose from the displays and buy by the quarter-kilogram in paper cones.

Restaurante Shawarma (☎ 956 87 64 23; Ribera del Marisco 11; falafel roll €3.50, mains €9; v) Vegetarians will love this small restaurant with unbeatable falafel. The authentic Lebanese-Greek food (with some meat options too) provides a welcome change.

Casa Luis (☎ 956 87 20 09; Ribera del Marisco s/n; tapas/raciones €3/8; h 1.30-4pm & 9-11pm Tue-Sat, 1.30-4pm Sun) This tightly packed little den with just a few tables offers innovative tapas like delicious *hojaldres* (puff pastries) with prawn or cheese-and-anchovy filling.

Casa Flores (☎ 956 54 35 12; Ribera del Río 9; mains €13-34) For more formal dining, go for tile-bedecked Casa Flores across the street from the river. Try the local speciality *urta roteña* (sea bream cooked in white wine, tomatoes, peppers and thyme).

Getting There & Away

BOAT

The small ferry *El Vapor* (☎ 956 85 59 06), a decades-old symbol of El Puerto, sails to El Puerto (€3, 45 minutes) from Cádiz's Estación Marítima (Passenger Port) five or six times daily from early February to early December

(except nonholiday Mondays between early September and May, by the way). The faster Catamaran (€1.80, 25 min), run by the public **Línea Metropolitana/Consortio de Transportes Bahía de Cádiz** (☎ 956 01 21 00; www.cmtbc.com), sails between Cádiz (Muelle Reina Victoria dock, near the train station) and El Puerto 13 times a day Monday to Friday, six times on Saturday and three on Sunday. In El Puerto, the Catamaran docks on the river in front of the Hotel Santa María.

BUS

From Monday to Friday, buses run to Cádiz (€1.70, 30 to 40 minutes) about half-hourly, 6.45am to 10pm, from the Plaza de Toros (Bullring), and at least seven times from the train station. Weekend services are less frequent. For Jerez de la Frontera (€1, 20 minutes) there are nine to 16 daily buses from the train station and 11 from the bullring. Buses for Sanlúcar de Barrameda (€1.60, 30 minutes, five to 11 daily) depart from the bullring. Buses for Seville (€8.50, 1½ hours, five daily) go from the train station.

TRAIN

The train station is a 10-minute walk northeast of the town centre, beside the Cádiz-Jerez road. Up to 36 trains travel daily to Jerez (from €1.30, 12 minutes) and Cádiz (from €2.20, 30 to 35 minutes), and 10 or more daily to Seville (€6 to €18, 1½ hours).

SANLÚCAR DE BARRAMEDA

pop 63,000

Sanlúcar, 23km northwest of El Puerto de Santa María, is the northern tip of the sherry triangle (see the boxed text, opposite) and a likeable summer resort: it looks across the Guadalquivir estuary to the Parque Nacional de Doñana.

Sanlúcar's nautical history is proud. Columbus sailed from Sanlúcar in 1498 on his third voyage to the Caribbean. So, in 1519, did the Portuguese Ferdinand Magellan, seeking – as Columbus had – a westerly route to the Asian Spice Islands. Magellan succeeded, thanks to the first known voyage round the bottom of South America, but was killed in the Philippines in 1521. His pilot, Juan Sebastián Elcano, completed the first circumnavigation of the globe by returning to Sanlúcar in 1522 with just one of the five ships, the *Victoria*.

Orientation & Information

Sanlúcar stretches 2.5km along the south-eastern side of the estuary and is fronted by a long, sandy beach. Calzada del Ejército (La Calzada), running inland from the seafrost Paseo Marítimo, is the main avenue. A block beyond its inland end is Plaza del Cabildo, the central square. The bus station is on Avenida de la Estación, 100m southwest of the middle of La Calzada. The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 956 36 61 10; www.turismosanlucar.com; 10am–2pm, variable afternoon hr) is on Calzada del Ejército.

The old fishing quarter, Bajo de Guía, site of Sanlúcar's best restaurants and boat departures for Parque Nacional de Doñana, is 750m northeast from La Calzada. Here, the **Centro de Visitantes Fábrica de Hielo** (☎ 956 38 16 35; Bajo de Guía s/n; 10am–7pm or 8pm) provides displays and information on the Parque Nacional de Doñana.

Sights

From Plaza del Cabildo, cross Calle Ancha to Plaza San Roque and head up Calle Bretones, which becomes Calle Cuesta de Belén and doglegs up to the **Palacio de Orleans y Borbon** (admission free; 10am–1.30pm Mon–Fri), a beautiful neo-Mudéjar palace that was built as a summer home for the aristocratic Montpensier family in the 19th century but is now Sanlúcar's town hall. From its entrance at the top of Calle Cuesta de Belén, a block to the left along Calle Caballeros, is the 15th-century **Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la O** (10am–1pm Sun, 7.30–8pm Sun–Fri). Next door is the **Palacio de los Duques de Medina Sidonia** (☎ 956 36 01 61; www.fcmedinasidonia.com in Spanish; Plaza Condes de Niebla 1; admission €3; 11am & noon Sun by appointment, café 9am–2pm & 3.30–9pm daily), the large, rambling and ancient home of the aristocratic family that once owned more of Spain than anyone else. The house bursts with antiques and paintings by Goya, Zurbarán and other famous Spanish artists.

Some 200m further along the street is the 15th-century **Castillo de Santiago** (Plaza del Castillo), which remains closed to visitors, amid buildings of the Barbadillo sherry company. From here walk downhill to the town centre.

Sherry Bodegas

Sanlúcar produces a distinctive sherrylike wine, manzanilla (see the boxed text Liquid Gold, opposite). Three bodegas give tours for which you don't need to book ahead:

LIQUID GOLD

Sherry is famous worldwide and, here in sherry-producing country, the drink has made many a family's fortune. Jerez *coñac* (brandy), widely drunk in Spain, is also profitable – 63 million bottles are produced annually. There are several types of sherry and it has a classy, refined image. Sherry houses (bodegas) are often beautiful buildings in extensive lush gardens, and have well-groomed, well-spoken, multilingual guides who can show you around. A tour will take you through the areas where the wine is stored and aged, inform you about the process and the sherry producers, and, the best bit, give you a tasting.

Sherry is a fortified wine that's produced in the towns of Jerez de la Frontera, El Puerto de Santa María and Sanlúcar de Barrameda, and a few other places nearby. A combination of climate, chalky soils that soak up the sun but retain moisture, and a special maturing process called the *solera* system produce this unique wine.

A sherry can be a *fino* (dry and the colour of straw) or an *oloroso* (sweet, dark and with a strong bouquet). An *amontillado* is an amber, moderately dry *fino* with a nutty flavour and higher alcohol content. A manzanilla is an unfortified camomile-coloured *fino* from Sanlúcar de Barrameda; it slips down nicely with seafood and its delicate flavour comes from sea breezes wafting into the wineries there.

The production of your bottle of sherry begins with the pressing of harvested sherry grapes. The resulting must is left to ferment. Within a few months a frothy veil of yeast (*flor*) appears on the surface. The wine is transferred to the cellars in big barrels of American oak, which add to its flavour.

Wine enters the *solera* process after one year. The barrels, about five-sixths full, are lined up in rows at least three barrels high: those on the bottom layer contain the oldest wine. Around three times a year, 10% of the wine from these is drawn off and replaced with the same amount of wine from the layer above. The wines are left to age for between three and seven years. A small amount of brandy is added to fortify the wine before bottling.

Barbadillo (☎ 956 38 55 00; Calle Luis de Equilaz 11; tours in English €3; 11am Tue–Sat, in Spanish noon & 1pm Mon–Sat) Near the castle.

Bodegas Hidalgo-La Gitana (☎ 956 38 53 04; Calle Banda Playa; tours in English & Spanish €5; 10am–1pm Wed; Fri & Sat)

La Cigarrera (☎ 956 38 12 85; Plaza Madre de Dios; tours €2.50; 10am–2pm Mon–Sat)

Parque Nacional de Doñana

From Bajo de Guía, **Viajes Doñana** (☎ 956 36 25 40; Calle San Juan 20; tours per person €36) operates 3½-hour tours into the national park, at 8.30am and 2.30pm on Tuesday and Friday (the afternoon trips go at 4.30pm from May to mid-September). After the river crossing, the trip is by 20-person 4WD vehicle, visiting much the same spots as the tours from El Acebuche (p713). Book as far ahead as you can and either take mosquito repellent, or cover up.

Festivals & Events

The Sanlúcar summer gets going with the spring **Feria de la Manzanilla**, in late May or early June, and blossoms in July and August with

jazz, flamenco and classical-music festivals, one-off concerts by top Spanish bands, and Sanlúcar's unique horse races, the **Carreras de Caballo**, in which thoroughbred racehorses thunder along the beach during a couple of three- or four-day evening meetings during August.

Sleeping

Book well ahead at holiday times.

Hostal La Bohemia (☎ 956 36 95 99; Calle Don Claudio 5; s/d €25/40) Pretty, folksy-painted chairs dot the corridors of this little *hostal*, 300m northeast of Plaza del Cabildo; rooms are neat and clean.

Hotel Los Helechos (☎ 956 36 13 49; www.hotelloshelechos.com; Plaza Madre de Dios 9; s/d €47/62; p a) Off Calle San Juan, 200m from Plaza del Cabildo, the brightly decorated rooms here are mostly set around two plant-filled patios.

Hotel Posada de Palacio (☎ 956 36 48 40; www.posadadepalacio.com; Calle Caballeros 11; s/d €85/105; p a i) Sanlúcar's most charming and sumptuous lodging is this 18th-century mansion in the upper part of town. Furniture is old-style and heavy.

Hotel Tartaneros (☎ 956 38 20 44; Calle Tartaneros 8; s/d €104/128; p a) At the inland end of Calzada del Ejército, this is a century-old industrialist's mansion with solidly comfortable rooms.

Eating

Spain holds few more idyllic dining experiences than tucking into succulent fresh seafood while watching the sun go down over the Guadalquivir at Bajo de Guía, and washing it down with a glass or two of manzanilla.

Restaurante Virgen del Carmen (Bajo de Guía s/n; fish mains €6-10) This is one of the best of several restaurants at Bajo de Guía. Decide whether you want your fish *plancha* (grilled) or *frito* (fried), and don't skip the starters: *langostinos* (king prawns) and the juicy *coquinas al ajillo* (clams in garlic), both €9, are specialties.

Casa Bigote (☎ 956 36 26 96; Bajo de Guía; fish mains €7-14; h closed Sun) The food here gets excellent reviews from everyone and the place is usually packed. Do try the house speciality – *hamburguesas de bacalao con salsa*, codburgers with a sauce (€8.50).

Cafés and bars, many serving manzanilla from the barrel, surround Plaza del Cabildo: **Casa Balbino** (Plaza del Cabildo 11; tapas €1.50) is a must for tapas.

Entertainment

There are some lively music bars on and around Calzada del Ejército and Plaza del Cabildo, and lots of concerts in summer.

Getting There & Away

Buses leave from the terminal on Avenida de la Estación. Destinations include El Puerto de Santa María (€1.60, 30 minutes, up to 10 daily), Cádiz (€3, 1½ hours, up to 10 daily), Jerez de la Frontera (€1.60, 30 minutes, seven to 15 daily) and Seville (€7, 1½ hours, six to 12 daily).

JEREZ DE LA FRONTERA

pop 196,000

Jerez (heh-*reth*), 38km northeast of Cádiz, beguiles with its eclectic mix of sherry, horses and flamenco. Visitors come to see its sherry bodegas but Jerez is also Andalucía's horse capital and has a large *gitanó* (Roma) people, formerly known as Gypsies) community that is one of the hotbeds of flamenco. It stages fantastic fiestas with sleek horses, beautiful people and passionate music.

The Muslims called the town Scheris, from which 'Jerez' and 'sherry' are derived. The drink was already famed in England in Shakespeare's time. British money was largely responsible for the development of the wineries from around the 1830s. Jerez high society today is a mixture of *andaluz* and British, due to intermarriage among sherry families over the past 150 years. Though the sherry industry has brought greater prosperity to the town, it's still a city of extremes: there is 30% unemployment yet also fancy shops, wide and spacious streets, old mansions, many well-heeled residents, and beautiful churches in its interesting old quarter.

Orientation & Information

The centre of Jerez is between Alameda Cristina and Plaza del Arenal, connected by Calle Larga and Calle Lancería (both pedestrianised). There are plenty of banks and ATMs on and around Calle Larga. The old quarter is west of Calle Larga.

Ciberjerez (Calle Santa María 3, internet per hr €2;

h 10am-11pm Mon-Sat, noon-11pm Sun) Also offers cheap international phone rates.

Tourist office (☎ 956 32 47 47; www.turismojerez.com; Alameda Cristina; h 10am-3pm & 5-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2.30pm Sat & Sun) Expert multilingual staff.

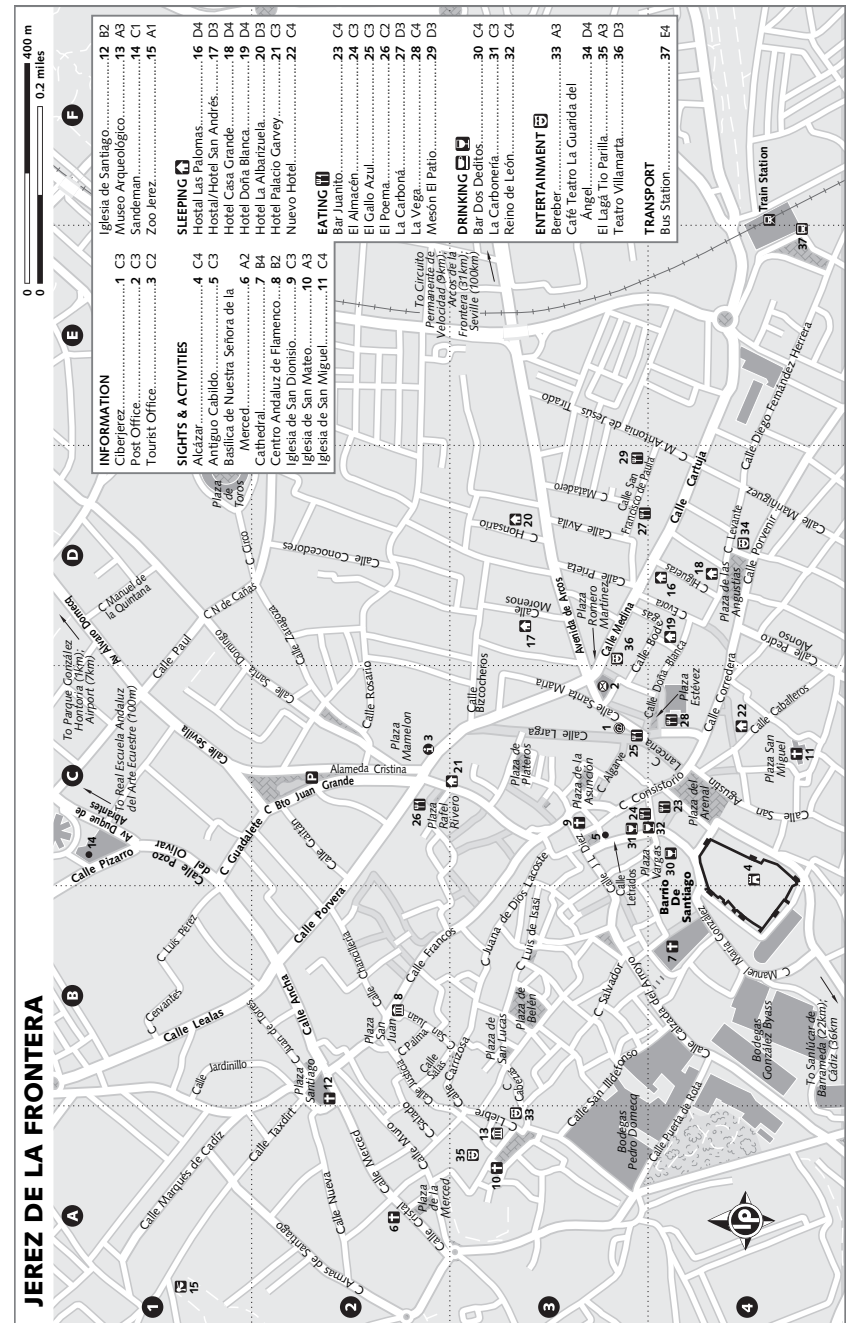
Sights

OLD QUARTER

The obvious place to start a tour of old Jerez is the 11th- or 12th-century Almohad fortress, the **Alcázar** (☎ 956 32 69 23; Alameda Vieja; admission incl/excl camera obscura €5.40/3; h 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, to 2.30pm Sun mid-Sep-Apr; to 8pm Mon-Sat, to 3pm Sun May-mid-Sep). Inside there's a beautiful *mezquita* (mosque), converted to a chapel by Alfonso X in 1264, an impressive set of **Baños Árabes** (Arab Baths), and the 18th-century **Palacio Villavicencio**. In the palace's tower, a *camera obscura* provides a live panorama of Jerez, with multilingual commentary. Sessions begin every half-hour until 30 minutes before closing time.

The orange tree-lined promenade around the Alcázar overlooks the mainly 18th-century **cathedral** (h 11am-1pm Mon-Fri & Mass 7.30pm daily), built on the site of Scheris' main mosque.

A couple of blocks northeast of the cathedral is Plaza de la Asunción, with the handsome 16th-century **Antiguo Cabildo** (Old Town Hall) and lovely 15th-century Mudéjar **Iglesia de San Dionisio**.



Northwest of here is the **Barrio de Santiago**, with a sizable *gitanos* population. The pride of the excellent **Museo Arqueológico** (% 956 33 33 16; admission €3; 10am-2.30pm Tue-Sun mid-Jun-late Aug, to 2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Fri to 2.30pm Sat, Sun & holidays 1 Sep-14 Jun) here is a 7th-century-BC Greek helmet that was found in Río Guadalete. (Also in this area is the **Centro Andaluz de Flamenco** (Andalucian Flamenco Centre; % 956 34 92 65; caf.cica.es in Spanish; Plaza San Juan 1; admission free; 11am-2pm Mon-Fri). Jerez is at the heart of the Seville-Cádiz axis where flamenco began and which remains its heartland today. This centre is a kind of flamenco museum, library and school, with several flamenco videos screened each morning it's open.

Try not to miss what's arguably Jerez's loveliest church, the 16th-century **Iglesia de San Miguel** (Plaza San Miguel; 11am-8pm for Mass), just southeast of Plaza del Arenal.

SHERRY BODEGAS

For most bodegas, you need to ring ahead to book your visit (it's advisable to confirm hours with the tourist offices, which have full details), but you can turn up without booking at these two places:

Bodegas González Byass (% 956 35 70 16; www.bodegastiopope.com; Calle Manuel María González 12; tours in English €8.50; 11.30am-2pm & 3.30-5.30pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr) One of the biggest sherry houses, handily located just west of the Alcázar.

Sandeman (% 956 15 17 11; www.sandeman.com; Calle Pizarro 10; tours in English & Spanish €6; 11.30am-1.30pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 10.30am-2pm Tue & Thu, 11.30am-2pm Sat)

REAL ESCUELA ANDALUZ DEL ARTE ECUESTRE

The famed **Royal Andalucian School of Equestrian Art** (% 956 31 80 08; www.realescuela.org; Avenida Duque de Abrantes) trains horses and riders in dressage, and you can watch them going through their paces in **training sessions** (admission adult/child €8/5; 11am-2pm Mon, Wed & Fri Sep-Jul, to 2pm Mon & Wed Aug). There's an official **espectáculo** (show; admission adult/child €23/14, 11am-noon Tue & Thu Sep-Jul, noon Tue, Thu & Fri Aug), where the handsome white horses show off their tricks to classical music.

ZOO JEREZ

Only a couple of kilometres west of the centre, Jerez's **ZOO** (% 956 15 31 64; Calle Taxdirt s/n; adult/child €6.50/4.50; 10am-6pm Tue-Sun, to 8pm Jun-Sep) houses 1300 beasts, well-established gardens and a recuperation centre for wild animals.

Festivals & Events

Festival de Jerez (late February/early March) Two weeks of music and dance, particularly flamenco.

Feria del Caballo (first half of May) Jerez's week-long Horse Fair is one of Andalucía's biggest festivals, with music, dance and bullfights as well as all kinds of equestrian competitions and colourful horse parades through the Parque González Hontoria fairgrounds in the north of town.

Fiestas de Otoño (September) The three-week Autumn Festivals range from flamenco and horse events to the traditional treading of the first grapes on Plaza de la Asunción.

Sleeping

Most rates go sky-high during the Feria del Caballo and you need to book ahead. Buffet breakfasts cost €6 to €7.

Hostal/Hotel San Andrés (% 956 34 09 83; www.hostal-sanandres.org; Calle Morenos 12; without bathroom €20/28, s/d with bathroom €24/38; a i) The friendly San Andrés' plant filled, tiled entrance patio is one of the prettiest in Jerez. Rooms are adequate.

Hostal Las Palomas (% 956 34 37 73; www.hostal-las-palomas.com; Calle Higuera 17; s/d without bathroom €25/40; s/d with bathroom €30/45) New, youthful management has transformed a plain *hostal* into an appealing choice with a faint Moroccan theme.

Hotel La Albarizueta (% 956 34 68 62; www.hotel-albarizueta.com; Calle Honsario 6; r €66; p a) An ultra-modern place popular with an under-30s crowd, an easy walk east of the centre. A celeste-with-grey-trim colour scheme complements clean-cut lines.

Nuevo Hotel (% 956 33 16 00; www.nuevohotel.com; Calle Caballeros 23; s/d €45/74; a v) In a modernised 19th-century mansion, this popular, family-run hotel provides comfortable rooms with TV and winter heating. It has a bright dining room. You need to book.

Hotel Casa Grande (% 956 34 50 70; www.casa-grande.com.es; Plaza de las Angustias 3; s/d €70/91, ste €164; p a i v) This brilliant hotel occupies a carefully restored and strikingly decorated 1920s mansion. Most rooms are set around a patio.

Hotel Doña Blanca (% 956 34 87 61; www.hotel-donablanca.com in Spanish; Calle Bodegas 11; s/d €77/96; p a i) On a quiet side street in the centre, this is a great hotel with obliging staff, parquet floors and soothing light-blue paintwork.

Hotel Palacio Garvey (% 956 32 67 00; www.sferaho-tele.net; Tornería 24; s/d €226/292; p a i s) The Garvey is a sensational 19th-century neo-classical palace conversion, with part of the ancient city wall visible from the lift and more of it in the gardens. Décor is luscious.

Eating

TAPAS

Two fine central spots to sample tapas with a sherry are **Bar Juanito** (Pescadería Vieja 8-10; tapas €2) and the cavelike **El Almácen** (Calle Ferros 8; tapas €2-3.50) round the corner.

About 500m north, there are even more brilliant tapas bars surrounding quiet little Plaza Rafael Rivero. Head here after 9.30pm. Don't miss the *montaditos* (€1.50 to €5) at **El Poema** (Calle Porvera). **El Gallo Azul** (Calle Larga 2; tapas €1.80) in a beautiful, circular and historic building, has a street level bar with arty tapas including eggs stuffed with prawns in a mould.

RESTAURANTS & CAFÉS

Sherry is used to flavour local dishes and the sherry trade has introduced English and French elements into the local cuisine.

La Vega (Plaza Estévez s/n; breakfast €4, mains €7.50-12) Imbibe a dose of local life over breakfast, or a snack, at this noisy, bustling café. There's something to please everyone including *churros* (long thin doughnuts with sugar) to be eaten with a coffee or hot chocolate.

Mesón El Patio (% 956 34 07 36; Calle San Francisco de Paula 7; fish & meat raciones €5-18; 11am-11pm closed Sun afternoon & Mon) El Patio is convivial yet a touch refined. It has lofty ceilings, warm tones and a collection of old radios. Above all, the food is terrific and there's a huge choice, especially of prawn dishes.

La Carboná (% 956 34 74 75; Calle San Francisco de Paula 2; mains €9-28; 11am-11pm closed Tue) This popular, cavernous restaurant, with an eccentric menu and young wait staff, occupies an old winery. Specialities include grilled meats and fresh fish.

Drinking

A few bars in the narrow streets north of Plaza del Arenal can get lively with an under-30 crowd late in the evening; try **Bar Dos Deditos** (Plaza Vargas 1), **Reino de León** (Calle Ferros) and **La Carbonería** (Calle Letrados 7). Northeast of the city centre, La Plaza de Canterbury has bars around a central courtyard that attract a 20s crowd, as do the music bars a little further northeast on Avenida de Méjico.

Entertainment

For what's-on information, check at the tourist office, visit www.turismojerez.com and look out for posters. A hip venue for live

music and salsa classes is **Café Teatro La Guarida del Ángel** (% 956 34 96 98; Calle Porvenir 1; 11am-8pm-late). Don't miss *café/bar/disco Bereber* (% 956 34 00 16; Calle Cabezas 10; 11am-4.30pm-late), an amazing reformed palace in the Barrio de Santiago, more Moroccan than Spanish. Much of the premises are open-air but there's a sound-proofed disco in the middle.

Several *peñas flamencas* (flamenco clubs) welcome genuinely interested visitors: ask at the tourist office about events. **El Lagá Tio Parrilla** (% 956 33 83 34; Plaza del Mercado; 11am-10.30pm & 12.30am Mon-Sat) has more tourist-oriented flamenco performances but can still be pretty gutsy.

Jerez's **Circuito Permanente de Velocidad** (% 956 15 11 00; www.circuitodejerez.com), on the A382 10km east of town, hosts several motorcycle and car-racing events each year, including one of the Grand Prix races of the World Motorcycle Championship, in April or May. This is one of Spain's biggest sporting events, with around 150,000 fans and their bikes swamping Jerez and nearby towns.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Seven kilometres northeast of town on the NIV is **Jerez airport** (% 956 15 00 00). Budget airline Ryanair flies here from London Stansted twice daily. Belgian and German airlines fly to/from Brussels and many German airports. **Iberia** (% 956 15 00 09) flies direct to/from Madrid and Barcelona.

BUS

The **bus station** (% 956 33 96 66; Plaza de la Estación) is 1.3km southeast of the centre. Destinations include Seville (€7, 1¼ hours, about 15 daily), Sanlúcar de Barrameda (€1.60, 30 minutes, seven or more daily), El Puerto de Santa María (€1, 20 minutes, up to 25 daily), Cádiz (€2.60, 40 minutes, up to 21 daily), Arcos de la Frontera (€2.30, 45 minutes, up to 24 daily), El Bosque (€5, 1½ hours, two to six daily) and Ronda (€19, 2½ hours, up to seven daily).

TRAIN

Jerez **train station** (% 956 34 23 19; Plaza de la Estación) is beside the bus station with trains to El Puerto de Santa María (€1.50, 12 minutes, up to 37 daily), Cádiz (€3.40, 45 minutes, up to 37 daily) and Seville (from €6.50, 1¼ hours, up to 15 daily).

ARCOS DE LA FRONTERA

pop 30,000 / elevation 185m

The old town of Arcos, 30km east of Jerez, could not be more thrillingly sited: it perches on a high, unassailable ridge with sheer precipices plummeting away on both sides. Always prized for its strategic position, Arcos was briefly, during the 11th century, an independent Berber-ruled kingdom before being absorbed by Seville, then Christian Alfonso X took the town in 1255. When the last Duque de Arcos died in 1780, his cousin, the Duquesa de Benavente, took over his lands. With her help, agriculture around Arcos diversified and more-profitable crops and horse breeding replaced sheep farming.

Arcos' charm today lies in exploring the old, mazelike, upper town with its Renaissance palaces, beautiful Gothic churches, whitewashed houses and uniquely spectacular setting.

Orientation & Information

From the bus station, it's a 1.5km uphill walk to the old town. Paseo de los Boliches and Calle Debajo del Corral (becoming Calle Corredera) both lead east up to the old town's main square, Plaza del Cabildo.

The **tourist office** (% 956 70 22 64; Plaza del Cabildo; h 10am-2pm & 3.30-7.30pm, 4-8pm Mar-mid-Oct, Mon-Sat) is on the old town's main square. There's also a **tourist information kiosk** (Paseo de Andalucía).

Banks and ATMs are along Calle Debajo del Corral and Calle Corredera.

Sights

Plaza del Cabildo is surrounded by fine old buildings has a vertiginous **mirador** (lookout) with views over Río Guadalete and countryside, though its crowning glory, the 11th-century **Castillo de los Duques**, is firmly closed to the public. On the plaza's northern side is the Gothic-cum-baroque **Basilica-Parroquia de Santa María** (admission €1.50; h 10am-1pm & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat). On the eastern side, the **Parador Casa del Corregidor** hotel is a reconstruction of a 16th-century magistrate's house.

Along the streets east of here seek out lovely buildings such as the **Iglesia de San Pedro** (Calle Núñez de Prado; admission €1; h 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, to 1.30pm Sun), another Gothic-baroque confection, and the 17th-century **Palacio Mayorazgo**, now a community building, with a Renaissance façade and pretty patios.

Tours

One-hour guided tours (€5) of the old town's monuments start from the tourist office at 10.30am Monday to Saturday. Tours of Arcos' pretty patios start at noon Monday to Friday.

Festivals & Events

Semana Santa (Easter) Processions through the narrow old streets are dramatic; on Easter Sunday there's a hair-raising running of the bulls.

Fiesta de la Virgen de las Nieves (early August)

Three-day festival includes a top-class flamenco night in Plaza del Cabildo.

Feria de San Miguel (end of September) Arcos celebrates its patron saint, San Miguel, with a four-day fair.

Sleeping & Eating

Hostal San Marcos (% 956 70 07 21; Calle Marqués de Torresoto 6; s/d/tr €25/35/45; a) A simple old-town *hostal*, there are four pretty little rooms and a roof terrace.

Hotel Real de Veas (% 956 71 73 70; www.hotelrealdeveas.com; Calle Corredera 12; s €45, d €55-65; a i) Friendly folk run this converted traditional home, which has agreeable rooms around a glass-covered patio and a roof terrace.

Hotel El Convento (% 956 70 23 33; www.webdearcos.com/elconvento; Calle Maldonado 2; s/d from €55/70; a) In a beautiful 17th-century convent, this hotel has a large terrace for taking in the stupendous view; six of the tasteful, varied rooms share the view.

La Casa Grande (% 956 70 39 30; www.lacasagrande.net; Calle Maldonado 10; r €75-95, ste €88-135; a) A gorgeous, rambling, cliffside mansion, the Casa Grande once belonged to the great flamenco dancer Antonio Ruiz Soler. All seven rooms are decorated in different styles. La Casa Grande is closed from 7 January to 6 February.

Parador Casa del Corregidor (% 956 70 05 00; www.parador.es; Plaza del Cabildo; s/d €116/145; a i) Typical *parador* luxury with magnificent panoramas. Eight of the rooms have balconies with cliff views. The restaurant (mains €13 to €21, *menú* €21 to €28) has *andaluz* specialities.

Mesón Don Fernando (% 956 71 73 26; Calle Botica 5; mains €9-20, raciones €6-15; h closed Mon) Up in the old-town maze, Mesón Don Fernando has a lively Spanish atmosphere and flamenco soundtrack. Good *montaditos* and *raciones* are available in the vaulted bar while the small restaurant section serves up meaty main dishes and tempting desserts.

El Convento (% 956 70 32 22; Calle Marqués de Torresoto 7; mains €8-15) In the pillared patio of a palace that dates back to the 17th century, Arcos' finest restaurant turns out country specialities such as herbed lamb in almond sauce.

Getting There & Away

Services from the **bus station** (% 956 70 49 77; Calle Corregidores) run to Jerez (€2.30, 45 minutes, 18 daily), Cádiz (€4.50 to €5.50, 1¼ hours, 15 daily), El Bosque (€2.50, one hour, 11 daily), Ronda (€7.50, two hours, four daily) and Seville (€7, two hours, two daily). Frequencies to some destinations are reduced on Saturday and Sunday.

PARQUE NATURAL SIERRA DE GRAZALEMA

The mountainous Parque Natural Sierra de Grazalema, in northeastern Cádiz province, is one of Andalucía's greenest and most beautiful areas. The landscape here, dotted with white-washed villages, ranges from pastoral river valleys to precipitous gorges and rocky summits. This is fine walking country (the best months are May, June, September and October), and there are opportunities for climbing, caving, canyoning, kayaking and paragliding.

The park extends into northwestern Málaga province, where it includes the Cueva de la Pileta (p758). Useful walking guides include *Walking in Andalucía* by Guy Hunter-Watts and *Eight Walks from Grazalema* by RE Bradshaw. Editorial Alpina's *Sierra de Grazalema* (1:25,000) is the map pick.

El Bosque

pop 1800 / elevation 385m

El Bosque, 33km east of Arcos across rolling country, is prettily situated below the wooded Sierra de Albarracín. A pleasant 5km riverside path to Benamahoma starts beside El Bosque's youth hostel.

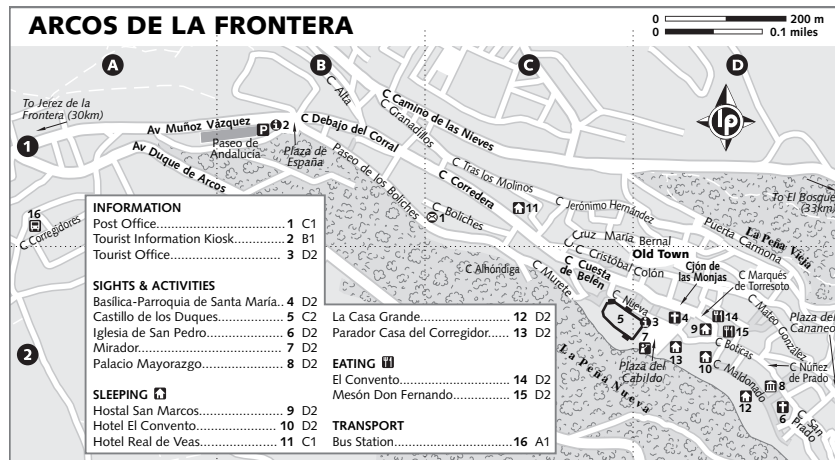
The natural park's **Centro de Visitantes El Bosque** (% 956 72 70 29; Avenida de la Diputación s/n; h 10am-2pm & 6-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm & to 8pm Sat, 9am-2pm Sun, afternoons Oct-Mar 4-6pm Mon-Sat), with limited displays and information on the park, is off the A372 at the western end of town.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel Enrique Calvillo (% 956 71 61 05; Avenida Diputación 5; s/d €25/45; a i) Near the park information office, the 19 attractive rooms, have stained-wood furniture and nicely tiled bathrooms, and there's a comfy lounge with internet.

Hotel El Tabanco (% 956 71 60 81; Calle La Fuente 3; s/d incl breakfast €30/50; h closed 2nd half Jun; a) Up in the village centre, this almost-new hotel provides spotless, tasteful rooms with good beds and bathtubs. The adjoining **Mesón El Tabanco** (% 956 71 60 81; Calle Huelva 1; mains €9-15; h closed 2nd half Jun) serves excellent meat and *revueltos* (scrambled-egg dishes) in two skylit dining rooms. Don't pass up the *queso fresco* salad, with superb local soft goat cheese.

Hotel Las Truchas (% 956 71 60 61; www.tugasa.com/index2.htm; Avenida Diputación s/n; s/d €36/59; p a s) Going since 1970, Las Truchas is a mite stodgy in style but still has comfortable rooms, spacious public areas and an outdoor pool.



Grazalema

pop 2200 / elevation 825m

The most popular traveller's base in the *sierra*, Grazalema is a picture-postcard, red-tile-roofed village tucked into a corner of beautiful mountain country beneath the rock-climbers' crag Peñón Grande. Local products include pure wool blankets and rugs.

The village centre is the pretty Plaza de España, overlooked by the 18th-century Iglesia de la Aurora. Here you'll find the **tourist office** (% 956 13 20 73; 10am-2pm & 4-9pm), with a shop selling local products. Two banks on Plaza de España have ATMs.

Horizon (% /fax 956 13 23 63; www.horizonaventura.com; Calle Corrales Terceros 29; per person from €13) is a highly experienced adventure firm that will take you climbing, bungee jumping, canyoning, caving, paragliding or walking, with English-speaking guides.

SLEEPING & EATING

Casa de las Piedras (% /fax 956 13 20 14; www.casadeaspiedras.net; Calle Las Piedras 32; s/d with shared bathroom €10/20, s/d with bathroom €37/45; a i) This good-value *hostal* occupies a fine old village house with a couple of pleasant patios. All 32 assorted rooms have winter heating and the restaurant (mains €6 to €11) serves hearty meals.

Hotel Peñón Grande (% 956 13 24 34; www.hotelgrazalema.com; Plaza Pequeña 7; s/d €36/53; a) A small, friendly hotel just off Plaza de España. It has an attractively rustic style.

La Mejorana (% 956 13 23 27; www.lamejorana.net; Calle Santa Clara 6; r incl breakfast €50; s) A lovely

country-style house towards the upper end of the village, hospitable La Mejorana has just five rooms with beautiful wrought-iron beds, plus a large lounge and kitchen, and a leafy garden that even manages to fit in a pool.

Mesón El Simancón (% 956 13 24 21; Plaza Asomaderos; mains €7-12, menú €13; 1 closed Tue) There are plenty of places to eat and drink around Plaza de España, and on little Calle Agua, running between the plaza and the large village car park. The Simancón, right by the car park, serves well prepared ham, beef, quail, venison, wild boar and *revueltos* at tables outside or in a dining room adorned with deer heads.

Zahara de la Sierra

pop 1600 / elevation 550m

Topped by a crag with a ruined castle, Zahara is the most dramatically sited of the area's villages. The 18km drive from Grazalema via the vertiginous 1331m Puerto de los Palomas (Doves' Pass, but with more vultures than doves) is quite otherworldly if there's heavy mist along the way. The village centres on Calle San Juan, where you'll find the natural park's helpful **Punto de Información Zahara de la Sierra** (% /fax 956 12 31 14; Plaza del Rey 3; 1 9am-2pm & 4-7pm).

Zahara's streets invite investigation, with vistas framed by tall palms, hot-pink bougainvillea or fruited orange trees. To climb to the 12th-century **castle keep**, take the path almost opposite the Hotel Arco de la Villa – it's a steady 10- to 15-minute climb. The castle's recapture from the Christians by Abu al-Hasan of Granada, in a night raid in 1481,

provoked the Catholic Monarchs to launch the last phase of the Reconquista, which ended with the fall of Granada.

Adventure-tourism firm **Al-qutun** (% 956 13 78 82; www.al-qutun.com), in Algodonales, 7km north of Zahara, organises canyoning, guided walks, kayaking, paragliding, caving and climbing. Get in touch for the schedule.

Hostal Marqués de Zahara (% /fax 956 12 30 61; www.marquesdezahara.com; Calle San Juan 3; s/d €32/42; a) A converted mansion right in the village centre, has cosy rooms with winter heating and a bookcase full of good local reference material.

Hotel Arco de la Villa (% 956 12 32 30; www.tugasa.com/index2.htm; Paseo Nazarí s/n; s/d €36/59; p a) All 17 rooms at this sparkling-clean and modern hotel have jaw-dropping views.

Restaurante Los Naranjos (% 956 12 33 14; Calle San Juan; mains €7-12; 1 9am-11pm) Serves hearty hill-country platefuls both indoors and outside under the orange trees.

Getting There & Around

Los Amarillos (% 902 21 03 17) runs buses to El Bosque from Jerez (€5.50, two hours, six daily), Arcos (€2.50, one hour, 11 daily), five from Cádiz (€7, two hours, four daily) and Seville (Prado de San Sebastián, €7, 2¼ hours, two daily). From El Bosque, buses leave for Grazalema (€2, 30 minutes) at 3.30pm Monday to Saturday. Grazalema-El Bosque buses depart at 5.30am Monday to Friday and 7pm Friday.

Los Amarillos also runs twice daily from Málaga to Grazalema (€10, 2¼ hours) via Ronda.

Comes (% 902 19 92 08) operates two buses each way Monday to Friday between Ronda and Zahara de la Sierra (€3.50, one hour), via Algodonales. There's no bus service between Zahara and Grazalema.

SOUTHERN COSTA DE LA LUZ

The 90km coast between Cádiz and Tarifa can be windy, and its Atlantic waters are a shade cooler than the Mediterranean, but these are small prices to pay for a mostly unspoiled, often wild shore, strung with long, white-sand beaches. Andalusians flock here in July and August, bringing a fiesta atmosphere to the normally dead coastal settlements, and an increasing number of foreigners are choosing to settle here so change is happening fast. Phone ahead for rooms during July and August and at Easter and long weekends throughout the year. Outside the high seasons, prices drop significantly.

Vejer de la Frontera

pop 13,000 / elevation 190m

This old-fashioned white town looms mysteriously atop a rocky hill above the busy N340, 50km from Cádiz. It's experiencing an influx of foreign residents and is a good base for outdoor activities, with some charming places to stay. Buses stop on Avenida Los Remedios, about 500m below the town centre and next to the **tourist office** (% 956 45 17 36; www.turismovejer.com; 1 10am-2pm Mon-Fri, afternoon & weekend opening hr vary depending on season).

Vejer's much-reworked **castle** (1 10am-2pm) has great views from its battlements and a small museum that preserves one of the black cloaks that Vejer women wore until just a couple of decades ago (covering everything but the eyes). You can rent good mountain bikes (from €12 per day) at **Nature Explorer** (% 956 45 14 19; www.natureexplorer.com; Avenida de los Remedios 43). It also runs walking, mountain biking and diving trips (€25 to €55 per person).

SLEEPING & EATING

Hostal La Janda (% 956 45 01 42; Calle Machado s/n; s/d €25/50; p a) A friendly place that is across town from the old walled area. The 36 rooms, some with town vistas, sprawl over a large property. Décor is simple but pretty.

Hostal la Botica (% 902 07 51 30; www.laboticadevejer.com; Calle Canalejas 15; s/d incl breakfast from €55/65; a) La Botica offers appealing rooms set around a patio where breakfast is served. There's a roof terrace with rural views.

Hostal La Casa del Califa (% 956 44 77 30; www.grupocalifa.com; Plaza de España 16; s €63-94, d €69-112, all incl breakfast; a) This great little place rambles over several floors and has peaceful, comfortable rooms with Islamic décor. La Casa has a great Arabic restaurant, El Jardín del Califa (mains €7.50 to €18), extending out into the garden.

La Bodeguita (% 956 45 15 82; Calle Marqués de Tamarón 9; tapas €1) This hip bar has good vibes, breakfast (in summer), excellent tapas and an extensive music collection.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses run to Cádiz (€4.50, 50 minutes) up to 10 times a day. Buses for Tarifa (€3.80, 50 minutes, about 10 daily), Málaga (€16, 2¼ hours, two daily) and Seville (€14, three hours, five daily) stop at La Barca de Vejer, on the N340 at the bottom of the hill. It's a 15-minute walk up to town from there.

GRAZALEMA RESERVE AREA WALKS

Three of the Sierra de Grazalema's best day walks are the ascent of El Torreón (1654m), the highest peak in Cádiz province; the route from Grazalema to Benamahoma via Spain's best-preserved *pinsapar* (woodland of the rare and beautiful Spanish fir); and the trip into the Garganta Verde, a deep ravine south of Zahara de la Sierra, with a large colony of griffon vultures. All these walks are within a 38-sq-km reserve area with restricted access, meaning that to do any of them you must obtain a (free) permit from the El Bosque visitors centre (p729). You can call or visit El Bosque up to 15 days in advance for this and, if you wish, they will fax permits to be collected at the Zahara information office or Grazalema tourist office. Staff at any of these offices may not speak anything other than Spanish. It's normally only necessary to book ahead for walking on a weekend or public holiday. Authorised local guide companies such as Horizon (above) and Al-qutun (opposite) will guide you on these walks, but you can also do them on your own with a decent map and map-reading skills. Do-it-yourselfers should obtain a decent map such as Editorial Alpina's *Sierra de Grazalema* (1:25,000), which is available locally and includes a walking guide booklet in English and Spanish. A guide from an authorised company is obligatory when embarking on the Pinsapar walk in July, August and September, when fire risk is high, and the Torreón route is closed in these months.

Los Caños de Meca

pop 200

Once a hippie hideaway, Los Caños straggles along a series of sandy coves, beneath a pine-clad hill southwest of Vejer. It maintains its laid-back, offbeat air even at the height of summer.

At the western end of Los Caños a side road leads out to a lighthouse on a low spit of land with a famous name – **Cabo de Trafalgar**. It was off this cape that Spanish naval power was terminated in a few hours one day in 1805 by a British fleet under Admiral Nelson. Wonderful beaches stretch either side of Cabo de Trafalgar. Towards the eastern end of Los Caños, the main street, Avenida Trafalgar, is met by the road from Barbate.

SLEEPING

Hostal Minigolf (% 956 43 70 83; Avenida de Trafalgar 251; s/d €45/50; p a) This good little budget place opposite the Cabo de Trafalgar turn-off has fresh, clean rooms, with TV and winter heating, around a simple, very Spanish patio.

Hostal Mar de Frente (% 956 43 70 25; www.hotelmardefrente.com; Avenida Trafalgar 3; s/d incl breakfast €48/77, r with sea view €102; h closed Dec-Feb; p a) The charming Mar de Frente, right on the cliff edge above the eastern end of the main beach, has bright, comfy rooms with satellite TV and terrace.

Hostal Madreselva (% 956 43 72 55; www.madreselva.hotel.com; Avenida Trafalgar 102; s/d incl breakfast €68/84; h closed Oct-late Mar; p s) The 18 rooms at this artistically designed and friendly place have their own small gardens, and the bar area extends outside to the pool. Mountain biking, horse riding and surfing can be arranged.

Casas Karen (% 956 43 70 67; www.casaskaren.com; Fuente del Madroño 6; r €92-99, q €118-132; p) This eccentric gem, owned by a dynamic young Englishwoman, has seven or so different buildings on a pretty plot, each with a kitchen, lounge, outdoor sitting area and casual *andaluz*-Moroccan décor. Turn off the main road 500m east of Cabo de Trafalgar, at a tiled 'Apartamentos y Bungalows' sign, go 500m, then turn right at the 'Fuente del Madroño' sign.

EATING

Bar Saboy (Carril de Mangueta, Zahora; set menú €10, tagines €9) The Saboy, 200m from the main road west of Los Caños, with a thatched roof and fireplace, offers good snacks and meals. The Moroccan lentil soup is gently spiced.

Bar-Restaurante El Caña (% 956 43 73 98; Avenida Trafalgar s/n; mains €13; h Apr-Sep) This has a super position atop the small cliff above Los Caños beach. Lots of fish and seafood.

Sajorami (% 956 43 70 72; Playa Zahora; mains €10-16; v) Unbeatable sea views, stylish building and excellent Spanish cuisine with international, vegetarian and Moroccan additions.

Restaurante Trafalgar (% 956 43 71 21; Avenida Trafalgar 86; www.elfrafalgar.com; mains €12-18; h Apr-Sep) A high-standard restaurant that has a summer patio, serving creative Mediterranean cuisine. Internet facilities out the back.

DRINKING

In the summer season, good bars include **Los Castillejos** at the eastern end of the village and **Café-Bar Ketama** in the middle. Open year-round are super-relaxed **Las Dunas** on the road out to Cabo de Trafalgar (with music and busy pool table) and **La Pequeña Lulu** (www.lapequenalulu.com; Avenida Trafalgar s/n), a cosy French-run café/bar at the far eastern end of the village, with funky décor and often live music, even some jammin'.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Monday to Friday, there are two Comes buses to/from Cádiz (€5, 1½ hours), and three to/from Barbate (€1, 15 minutes), 12km east of Los Caños, which has up to 13 buses a day to/from Cádiz (€5.50, 50 minutes) and 10 buses to Vejer de la Frontera (€1.10, 10 minutes). There may be extra services from Seville and Cádiz from mid-June to early September.

Zahara de los Atunes

Plonked in the middle of a broad, 12km, sandy beach, Zahara is elemental. At its heart stands the crumbling old Almadraba, once a depot and refuge for the local tuna fishers, who must have been a rugged lot: Cervantes wrote that no-one deserved to be called a *pícaro* (scoundrel) unless they had spent two seasons fishing for tuna at Zahara. Today the nearest tuna fleet is at Barbate and Zahara has become a fashionable Spanish summer resort, with an old-fashioned core of narrow streets. It's a fine spot to let the sun, sea and wind – and, in summer, a spot of lively nightlife – batter your senses.

SLEEPING & EATING

Camping Bahía de la Plata (% 956 43 90 40; Avenida de las Palmeras; sites per adult/tent/car €6.50/5.50/4) Good treed camping ground fronting the beach at the southern end of Zahara.

Hotel Almadraba (% 956 43 92 74; www.hotelesaldraba.com; Calle María Luisa 13; s/d €45/73; h closed Nov; p a) This friendly hotel has just 11 simple but attractive rooms with TV, bathroom, winter heating and a popular restaurant.

Hotel Doña Lola (% 956 43 90 09; Plaza Thompson 1; s €100, d €130-50; p a s) Only two minutes from the beach, this is a modern place with good rooms in an attractive old-fashioned style, lovely grounds, and open leisure areas.

Hotel Gran Sol (% 956 43 93 09; www.hotelgransol.com; Avenida de la Playa s/n; s/d €102/116, d with sea view €121, all incl breakfast; p a s) The Gran Sol occupies the prime beach spot, facing the old Almadraba walls on one side and the ocean on the other. It has large, comfortable rooms.

Most restaurants are on or near Plaza de Tamarón, near Hotel Doña Lola, and most offer similar *Andaluz* fare.

Restaurante La Jabega (% 956 43 04 92; Calle Tomollo 7; raciones €7-8, mains €12-25) Fronting the sands, the Jabega is acclaimed for its fishballs and its rice dish with giant *carabineros* prawns.

ENTERTAINMENT

In July and August a line of marquees and shacks, along the beach south of the Almadraba, serves as bars, discos and teahouses. They get busy from about midnight. Some have live flamenco or other music.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Comes runs four buses daily to and from Cádiz (€6.50, two hours) via Barbate, and one Monday to Friday to/from Tarifa (€3.50, 45 minutes). There are more buses from mid-June to September.

Bolonia

pop 125

This village, hidden on a beautiful bay about 20km up the coast from Tarifa, has a fine white-sand beach, several restaurants and *hostales*, and the ruins of the Roman town **Baelo Claudia** (% 956 68 85 30; adult/EU citizen €1.50/free; h 10am-2pm Sun, to 7pm Tue-Sat, to 8pm Jun-Sep, to 6pm Nov-Feb). The ruins include a theatre, a forum surrounded by temples and other buildings, and workshops that turned out the products that made Baelo Claudia famous in the Roman world: salted fish and *garum*, a prized condiment made from fish entrails. You can walk up the big sand dune at the far end of the beach, or out to Punta Camarinal, the headland protecting the west end of the bay.

The hilly 7km side road to Bolonia heads west off the N340, 15km from Tarifa. You can walk an 8km route along the coast to Bolonia from Ensenada de Valdevaqueros (p735) via Punta Paloma.

SLEEPING & EATING

At least these three *hostales* open year-round (more open seasonally).

Hostal Lola (% 956 68 85 36; www.hostalola.com; El Lenticilal 26; r with shared bathroom €45, with bathroom €55; p) The pretty garden is flower-filled and the rooms are simple but attractive. There's a little Moroccan-inspired sitting area too. Follow the signs on giant surfboards to find it.

Apartamentos Ana (% 956 68 85 50; apt for 2-6 €60-70; p) Ana's provides new, well-fitted, good-value one- and two-bedroom apartments, though they're not oriented towards the ocean. Look for a little cul-de-sac just beyond the Hostal Lola turning.

La Hormiga Voladora (% 956 68 85 62; El Lenticilal 15; d €57-69, apt for 2/3/4 €85/95/105; p) Extending back from the seafloor, the 'Flying Ant' is a warren of carefully decorated and comfortable rooms and apartments set around various courtyards.

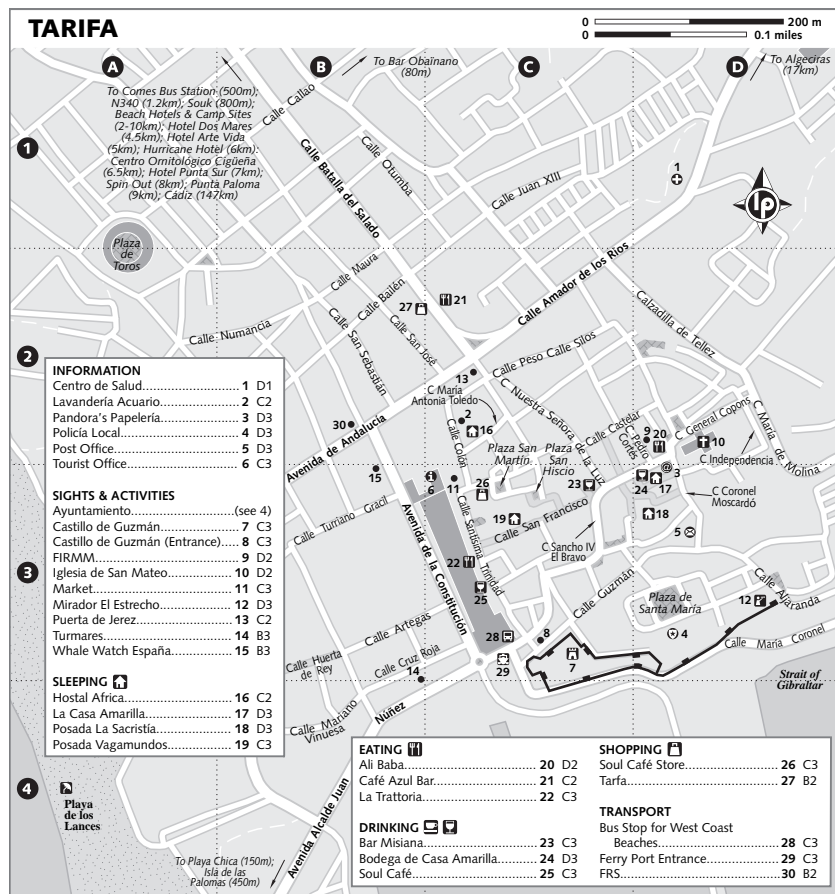
Bar Restaurante Las Rejas (salad €6, paella per person €11; h year-round) The fish and seafood here are terrific and the waiting staff suggest the day's top options.

TARIFA

pop 15,500

Even at peak times, Tarifa is an attractive, laid-back town. Relatively unknown until 15 years ago, it's now a windsurfing and kite-surfing mecca, with some of the very best conditions in Europe for these sports. The beaches have clean, white sand, and inland the country is green and rolling. The old town has narrow streets, whitewashed houses and cascading flowers. A hip, arty, international scene with an eclectic bunch of restaurants, bars and lodgings has grown up around the surf crowd. The only negative – though not for the surfers! – is the wind; for much of the year, either the *levante* (easterly) or *poniente* (westerly) is blowing, which is ruinous for a relaxed sit on the beach and tiring if you're simply wandering around. August, however, can be blessedly still.

Tarifa takes its name from Tariq ibn Malik, who led a Muslim raid in 710, the year before the main Islamic invasion of the peninsula.



Orientation

Two roads head into Tarifa from the N340. The one from the northwest becomes Calle Batalla del Salado, ending at Avenida de Andalucía, where the Puerta de Jerez leads through the walls into the old town. The one from the northeast becomes Calle Amador de los Ríos, meeting Calle Batalla del Salado in front of the Puerta de Jerez. The main street of the old town is Calle Sancho IV El Bravo. To the southwest protrudes the Isla de las Palomas, a military-occupied promontory that is the southernmost point of continental Europe.

Information

Centro de Salud (Health Centre; % 956 68 15 15/35; Calle Amador de los Ríos)

Lavandería Acuario (Calle Colón 14; wash per 4kg €4, wash, dry & fold €7-8; h 10.30am-2pm & 6-8pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-3pm Sat)

Pandora's Papelería (Calle Sancho IV El Bravo; internet per hr €3; h 10am-2pm & 5-9pm)

Policía Local (% 956 61 41 86; Ayuntamiento, Plaza de Santa María)

Post office (Calle Coronel Moscardó 9)

Tourist office (% 956 68 09 93; www.tarifaweb.com; Paseo de la Alameda; h 10.30am-2pm & 4-6pm, 6-8pm Jun-mid-Sep, Mon-Fri)

Old Town

The Mudéjar **Puerta de Jerez** was built after the Reconquista. Look in at the bustling **market** (Calle Colón) before wending your way to the mainly 15th-century **Iglesia de San Mateo** at the

end of Calle Sancho IV El Bravo. The streets south of the church are little changed since Islamic times. The **Mirador El Estrecho**, atop part of the castle walls, has spectacular views across to Africa, only 14km away.

The **Castillo de Guzmán** (Calle Guzmán; closed for refurbishment until Jun 2007; check tourist office for openings hours) is named after the Reconquista hero Guzmán El Bueno. In 1294, when threatened with the death of his captured son, unless he relinquished the castle to Islamic forces trying to recapture Tarifa, El Bueno threw down his own dagger for the deed to be done. Guzmán's descendants became the Duques de Medina Sidonia, one of Spain's most powerful families. The imposing fortress was originally built in 960 on the orders of Cordoban caliph Abd ar-Rahman III.

Beaches

On the isthmus leading out to Isla de las Palomas, **Playa Chica** is sheltered but extremely small. From here the spectacular **Playa de los Lances** stretches 10km northwest to the huge sand dune at Ensenada de Valdevaqueros.

Activities

WINDSURFING & KITESURFING

Most of the action occurs along the coast between Tarifa and Punta Paloma, 10km northwest. El Porro on Ensenada de Valdevaqueros, the bay formed by Punta Paloma, is one of the most popular spots, with easy parking and plenty of space to set up. Kitesurfing is incredibly popular here but kites give way to sails when the wind really gets up.

Buy new or secondhand gear in Tarifa at the shops on Calle Batalla del Salado. For rental or classes try places up the coast such as **Club Mistral** (Hurricane Hotel; % 956 68 90 90; Cortijo Valdevaqueros % 619 340913) or **Spin Out** (% 956 23 63 52; El Porro beach). At Spin Out board, sail and wetsuit rental for windsurfing costs €35/73 per hour/day; a six-hour beginner's windsurfing or kitesurfing course is €150, and a two-hour introduction to kitesurfing €50. It's essential for kitesurfing beginners to take classes: out-of-control kite-surfers are a danger to themselves and others.

HORSE RIDING

On Playa de los Lances **Aventura Ecuestre** (% 956 23 66 32; Hotel Dos Mares) and **Club Hípica** (% 956 68 90 92; Hurricane Hotel) both rent horses with excellent guides. An hour's ride along the beach costs €30. Three-hour beach or inland routes cost €70.

TOP 10 ANDALUCIAN BEACHES

- Ensenada de Valdevaqueros (left)
- Bolonia (p733)
- Zahara de los Atunes (p732)
- Playa del Playazo (p805)
- Cuesta de Maneli (p713)
- Cabo de Trafalgar (p732)
- Calas del Barronal (p805)
- Playa de la Victoria (p718)
- Agua Amarga (p805)
- Isla Cristina (p713)

WHALE-WATCHING

At least three groups run two- to three-hour boat trips to track and watch dolphins and whales (most charge €30/20 for over/under 14 years) in the Strait of Gibraltar (or the Bahía de Algeciras, if the strait is too rough). You're highly likely to see dolphins at least.

FIRMM (% 956 62 70 08; www.firrm.org; Calle Pedro Cortés 4) Uses every trip to record data.

Turmares (% 956 68 07 41; www.turmares.com; Avenida Alcalde Juan Núñez 3; over/under 14yr dolphin & whale-watching €27/14, killer-whale-watching €40/20) Has the largest boat (with glass bottom).

Whale Watch España (% 956 62 70 18; www.whalewatchtarifa.org in Spanish; Avenida de la Constitución 6)

BIRD-WATCHING

When the levante is blowing or there's little wind, the Tarifa area, including the spectacular Mirador del Estrecho lookout point, 7km east on the N340, is a great spot for watching bird migrations across the Strait of Gibraltar. You can visit the **Centro Ornitológico Cigu'eña** (% 639 895350; cocn.tarifa.com; N340 Km7.5; h 5-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), a bird-watching station 4km out of Tarifa, staffed by volunteers who collect data and produce information leaflets.

Sleeping

It's essential to phone ahead in August. Most places cut prices by 25% to 40% for much of the rest of the year.

IN TOWN

Hostal Africa (% 956 68 02 20; hostal_africa@hotmail.com; Calle María Antonia Toledo 12; s/d €40/60) The well-travelled owners of this revamped old house know

just what travellers need. Rooms are bright and attractive, and there's an expansive terrace with wonderful views and an exotic cabana. Storage for boards and bicycles available.

La Casa Amarilla (% 956 68 19 93; www.lacasamarilla.net; Calle Sancho IV El Bravo 9; r €55, apt from €66) Right in the centre, the 'Yellow House' is an imaginatively restored 19th-century building, which retains its glass-vaulted patio. Most of the rooms have a kitchenette and all sport bright paintwork and Moroccan features.

Posada Vagamundos (% 956 68 13 13; Calle San Francisco 18; www.posadavagamundos.com; s/d incl breakfast €60/80, ste €85; j) Right in the centre in a carefully restored old building, this is a great new place with 11 bright double rooms and exotic décor.

Posada La Sacristía (% 956 68 17 59; www.lasacristia.net; San Donato 8; r incl breakfast €115-135) Tarifa's most elegant central accommodation is in a beautifully renovated 17th-century townhouse with rooftop views. Attention to detail is impeccable. The fresh white rooms, with large beds, are set around a central courtyard.

ALONG THE COAST

Five year-round **camping grounds** (www.campingsdetarifa.com in Spanish), with room for more than 4000 campers, and several very attractive, and expensive, hotels are dotted along the beach and road the N340 within 10km northwest of Tarifa.

Hotel Arte-Vida (% 956 68 52 46; www.artevidahotel.com; N340 Km79.3; s/d incl breakfast €110/130; p) The Arte-Vida, 5km from the town centre, combines attractive, medium-sized rooms with an excellent restaurant that has stunning views. Its garden opens on to the beach.

Hotel Dos Mares (% 956 68 40 35; www.dosmareshotel.com; d from €141, bungalow for 2 from €135, all incl breakfast; p a i s) On the beach, about 4.5km from Tarifa, Islamic-themed Dos Mares has a few rooms in the main building, and more bungalows outside. The bar, with views to Africa, is a popular hang-out. The hotel has a tennis court and its own well-run stables, too.

Hurricane Hotel (% 956 68 49 19; www.hotelhurricane.com; r incl breakfast land/ocean side €149/166; p a s) This hip Moroccan-style hotel, 6km from town, is the place to go if you're feeling flush. Set in beachside semitropical gardens, it has large, comfy rooms, two pools and two restaurants. The buffet breakfast is probably the best you'll ever have.

Hotel Punta Sur (% 956 68 43 26; www.puntasurhotel.com; N340 Km77; s/d €117/166; p i s) With

a logo of a surfer riding a wave, the Punta Sur is a Hurricane Hotel project: the design team has worked miracles on what was an ordinary roadside hotel. Modern, futuristic, Gaudíesque and Moroccan influences are evident. The comfortable, eccentrically decorated rooms are set in big, very special gardens.

Eating

Tarifa tempts your tastebuds with a great array of international cuisines.

Ali Baba (Calle Sancho IV El Bravo; falafel or kebab €2.80-3.50) Ali Baba serves up cheap, filling and tasty Arabic food made with lovely fresh ingredients. Take away or eat at the benches and stand-up tables outside.

Café Azul Bar (Calle Batalla del Salado; breakfast €3.50-5; 11 9am-9pm, closed Wed in winter) This place with eye-catching décor has been energised by its new Italian owners who prepare the best breakfasts in town. Don't pass up the large muesli, fruit salad and yogurt. There's good coffee, excellent juices, bocadillos, healthy cakes.

Souk (% 956 62 70 65; Calle Mar Tirreno 46; mains €10-14; v) Souk drips with Moroccan decorations and serves terrific Moroccan- and Asian-inspired food.

La Trattoria (% 956 68 22 25; Paseo de la Alameda; pasta & pizza €5.50-9, mains €10.50-15) A good location, first-class food and efficient service make this one of the best Italian eateries in town.

Miramar (% 956 68 52 46; Hotel Arte-Vida, N340 Km79.3; mains €8-17) Most of the hotels and *hostales* up the coast outside town have restaurants. The Miramar's chefs whip up a range of tasty pasta and meat dishes plus fresh local fish and seafood, and some unique salads – and the expansive beach and ocean views double your enjoyment.

Drinking

Soul Café (Calle Santísima Trinidad 9) This hip, popular bar is run by travel-loving Italians. You may hear guest DJs from Milan play their stuff. Come after 11pm but not in winter, when the owners are travelling.

Bodega de Casa Amarilla (Calle Sancho IV El Bravo 9) A convivial typically Andalusian bar-restaurant that sometimes has live flamenco.

Bar Obainano (Calle Braille 27) This place serves fresh juices and exotic cocktails, which are accompanied by a cheerful background beat.

Bar Misiana (Hotel Misiana, Calle Sancho IV El Bravo) One of *the* places to be seen in Tarifa, this bar's décor is always eye-catching. Come for cocktails, juices, shakes and to dance.

SHOPPING TARIFA

Tarifa's a great place to shop, or window shop if you can't afford the prices. Stroll along **Calle Batalla del Salado** to find countless surf shops and boutiques offering contemporary fashions in casual wear, jewellery, shoes and accessories. Surf brands such as Tarifa Pirates, Rick Shapes, No Work Team, El Niño and Sons of the Desert are well-known names in Spain and most were founded in Tarifa. Rip Curl, Billabong and other international surfwear companies are represented here, too. The **Soul Café Store** (Plaza San Martín) has fashions fresh from Italy, Bali and India. There'll be more of this ilk to follow as the town becomes richer.

A few stores sell groovy homewares and even furniture. **Tarfa** (Calle Batalla del Salado 9) is excellent for gifts or that something special for yourself or your home. Some new warehouses on the N340 stock anything from thatch-roofed Balinese platform shelters (€6000) to glittering cushion covers and chair-shaped hammocks.

Getting There & Around

BOAT

FRS (% 956 68 18 30; www.frs.es; Avenida Andalucía) runs a fast ferry between Tarifa and Tangier, Morocco (passenger/car/motorcycle €27/75/25, 35 minutes one way) up to five times daily, with possibly more sailings in July and August. You can get details of the service at the port. All passengers need a passport.

BUS

Comes (% 902 1992 08, 956 68 40 38; Calle Batalla del Salado) runs five or more buses daily to Cádiz (€8, 1½ hours), Algeciras (€1.70, 30 minutes), and La Línea de la Concepción (€3.50, 45 minutes), one to Jerez de la Frontera (€8.50, 2½ hours), three to Seville (€15, three hours), two to Málaga (€12.50, two hours), one to Barbate (€4, 50 minutes), and one Monday to Friday to Zahara de los Atunes (€3.50, 45 minutes).

In July and August local buses run every 90 minutes northwest along the coast to Punta Paloma. Some go on to Bolonia. There's a stop at the bottom of the Paseo de Alameda, and another stop is at the Comes bus station, where a timetable and prices should be posted.

ALGECIRAS

pop 102,000

Algeciras, the major port linking Spain with Africa, is also an industrial town, a big fishing port and a centre for drug smuggling. If you have time to kill here, wander through the old town up to the palm-fringed main square, **Plaza Alta**, flanked by two old churches. Keep your wits about you in the port, bus station and market.

Algeciras was taken by Alfonso XI from the Merenids of Morocco in 1344, but later razed by Mohammed V of Granada. In 1704

it was repopulated by many of those who left Gibraltar after it was taken by the British.

During summer the port is hectic, as hundreds of thousands of Moroccans working in Europe return home for summer holidays.

Information

If you're going to arrive in Morocco at night, take some dirham with you. Exchange rates for buying dirham in Algeciras are best at banks. There are banks and ATMs on Avenida Virgen del Carmen and around Plaza Alta, plus a couple of ATMs inside the port.

Hospital Punta de Europa (% 956 02 50 50; Carretera de Getares s/n) 3km west of the centre.

Left Luggage (Estación Marítima; per item €2-3; 11 7am-9-30pm) Bags must be secured. There are lockers (€3) nearby and also luggage storage at the bus station.

Policía Nacional (% 956 66 04 00; Avenida de las Fuerzas Armadas 6)

Tourist office (% 956 57 26 36; Calle Juan de la Cierva s/n; 11 9am-2pm Mon-Fri; 3.30-7pm Tue-Fri) English-speaking; has a message board.

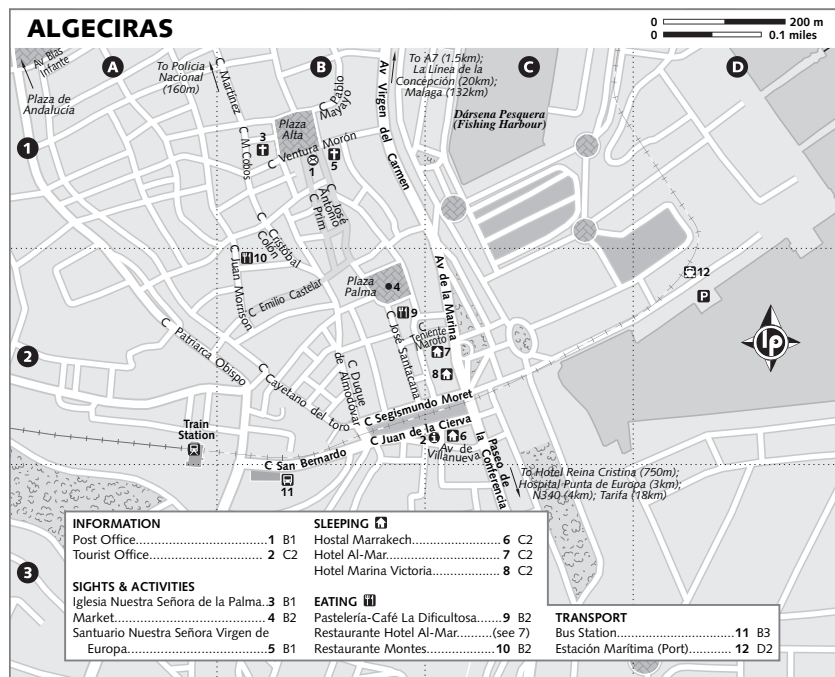
Sleeping

Hostal Marrakech (% 956 57 34 74; Calle Juan de la Cierva 5; s/d €20/30) This is a clean, secure and thoughtfully decorated place run by a helpful Moroccan family.

Hotel Marina Victoria (% 956 63 28 65; Avenida de la Marina 7; s/d €32/50; a) A solid choice with good rooms in a high-rise with excellent views over the port.

Hotel Al-Mar (% 956 65 46 61; Avenida de la Marina 2-3; s/d €51/100; p a) Two oversized Moroccan lamps decorate the foyer of this comfortable midrange place, which is handy for the port. There's a good restaurant. See p738.

Hotel Reina Cristina (% 956 60 26 22; director .reina.cristina@hotetur.com; Paseo de la Conferencia s/n;



s/d €72/107; p a s) For olde-worlde ambience head south from the port to this long-running, colonial-style hotel with two swimming pools and tropical gardens.

Eating

Pastelería-Café La Dificultosa (Calle José Santacana; coffee, toast & juice €4) A good spot for breakfast or a coffee break, which is located near the market.

Restaurante Montes (% 956 65 42 07; Calle Juan Morrison 27; menú €8, mains €8-18) The Montes has a hugely popular lunch *menú* of three courses, bread and wine, and a long list of tempting à la carte seafood.

Restaurante Hotel Al-Mar (% 956 65 46 61; Avenida de la Marina 2-3; breakfast/lunch buffet €6/11, mains €14-22) Top-floor, slightly refined hotel restaurant with big glass windows and sweeping views of the port, offering daily specials and regional dishes.

Getting There & Away

BOAT

Companies such as **Trasmediterránea** (% 956 58 34 00, 902 45 46 45; www.trasmediterranea.es) and **EuroFerry** (% 956 65 11 78; www.euroferry.com) operate frequent daily passenger and vehicle ferries to/from

Tangier, Morocco (2½-hour ferry passenger/car €27/91; 1¼-hour fast ferry passenger/car €32/98) and Ceuta, the Spanish enclave on the Moroccan coast (35-minute fast ferry passenger/car €25/81). **Buquebus** (% 902 41 42 42) operates a similar Ceuta service at least six times daily. From mid-June to September there are ferries almost round the clock to cater for the Moroccan holiday migration – you may have to queue for up to three hours. Buy your ticket in the port or at the agencies on Avenida de la Marina: prices are the same everywhere.

BUS

The bus station is on Calle San Bernardo. **Comes** (% 956 65 34 56) has buses for La Línea (€1.80, 30 minutes) every half-hour (every 45 minutes on weekends). Other daily buses include up to 13 each to Tarifa (€1.70, 30 minutes) and Cádiz (€9.80, 2½ hours), four to Seville (€15, 3½ hours), and one Monday to Friday to Ronda (€9, two to three hours). **Daibus** (% 956 65 34 56, 956 65 22 00) runs four daily buses to Madrid (€26, eight to nine hours), starting from the port then calling at the bus station. **Portillo** (% 902 14 31 44) operates at

least 11 direct buses daily to Málaga (€10, 1¾ hours) and four to Granada (€19, 3½ hours). Several more Málaga buses (€10.50, three hours) stop at towns along the Costa del Sol.

Bacoma/ALSA/Enatcar (% 902 42 22 42), inside the port, runs up to five services daily up Spain's Mediterranean coast, plus buses to Portugal, France, Germany and Holland.

TRAIN

From the **station** (% 956 63 02 02), adjacent to Calle San Bernardo, trains run to/from Madrid (€38 to €57, six or 11 hours, two daily) and Granada (€17, four hours, three daily). All go through Ronda (€6.50 to €17, 1¾ hours) and Bobadilla (€10.50 to €21, 2¾ hours), where you can change for Málaga, Córdoba or Seville.

LA LÍNEA DE LA CONCEPCIÓN

pop 64,000

La Línea, 20km east of Algeciras, is the unavoidable stepping stone to Gibraltar. A left turn as you exit the bus station brings you onto Avenida 20 de Abril, which runs the 300m or so from the main square, Plaza de la Constitución, to the Gibraltar border. The **Municipal tourist office** (% 956 17 19 98; Avenida Príncipe Felipe s/n; h 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) faces the border.

Buses run about every 30 minutes to/from Algeciras (€1.80, 30 minutes). Others go to Málaga (€10.50, 2½ hours, three to five daily), Tarifa (€3.50, 45 minutes, six daily), Cádiz (€12, 2½ hours, four daily) and elsewhere.

To save queuing at the border, many visitors to Gibraltar park in La Línea, then walk across. The underground **Parking Fo Cona**, just off Avenida 20 de Abril, charges €1.90 per hour or €14 per day.

GIBRALTAR

Looming like some great ship off southern Spain, the British colony of Gibraltar is a fascinating compound of curiosities. Despite bobbies on the beat, red post boxes and other reminders of 1960s England, Gibraltar is actually a cultural cocktail with Genoese, Spanish, North African and other elements which have made it fantastically prosperous. Naturally, the main sight is the awesome Rock; a vast limestone ridge that rises to 426m, with sheer cliffs on its northern and eastern sides. For the ancient Greeks and Romans this was one of the two Pillars of Hercules, split from the

other, Jebel Musa in Morocco, in the course of Hercules' arduous Twelve Labours. The two great rocks marked the edge of the ancient world.

Gibraltar's location and highly defensible nature have attracted the covetous gaze of military strategists ever since.

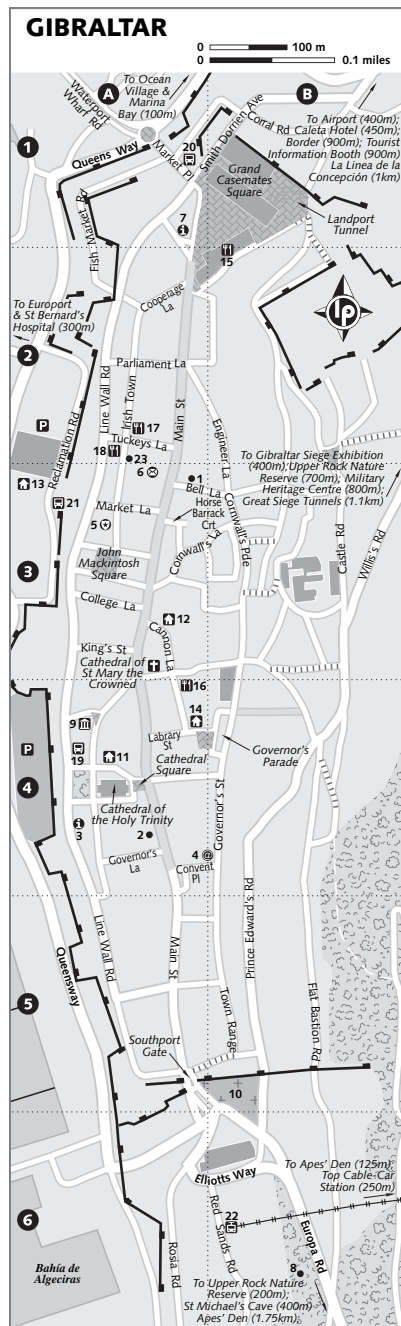
Gibraltarians (77% of the population) speak both English and Spanish and, often, a curious mix of the two. Signs are in English. Gibraltar's terrific agenda for visitors includes exploring its natural world, its military installations, and its quirky town.

History

In 711 Tariq ibn Ziyad, the Muslim governor of Tangier, landed at Gibraltar to launch the Islamic invasion of the Iberian Peninsula. The name Gibraltar is derived from Jebel Tariq (Tariq's Mountain).

Castilla wrested the Rock from the Muslims in 1462. Then in 1704 an Anglo-Dutch fleet captured Gibraltar during the War of the Spanish Succession. Spain ceded the Rock to Britain in 1713, but didn't abandon military attempts to regain it until the failure of the Great Siege of 1779-83. Britain developed it into an important naval base (bringing in a community of Genoese ship repairers). During the Franco period, Gibraltar was an extremely sore point between Britain and Spain: the border was closed from 1967 to 1985. In 1969, Gibraltarians voted, by 12,138 to 44, in favour of British rather than Spanish sovereignty and a new constitution gave Gibraltar domestic self-government. In 2002 the UK and Spain held talks about a possible future sharing of sovereignty over Gibraltar, but Gibraltarians expressed *their* feelings in a referendum (not recognised by Britain or Spain), which voted resoundingly against any such idea.

In December 2005, the governments of the UK, Spain and Gibraltar set up a new, trilateral process of dialogue. The three parties have reached agreement on some issues but tricky topics remain, not the least Britain's military installations and 'ownership' of Gibraltar airport. Gibraltarians want self-determination and to retain British citizenship, making joint sovereignty improbable. Few foresee a change in the status quo but at least relations are less strained. On 18 September 2006, a three-way deal was signed by Spain, Gibraltar and Britain relating to telecommunications on the Rock, Gibraltar airport and other issues, but not



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sovereignty. Gibraltar airport will be expanded across the border into Spain and flights from Spanish cities and other European destinations direct to Gibraltar airport will be introduced.

The mainstays of Gibraltar's economy are tourism, the port and financial services (including, Spanish police complain, the laundering of proceeds from organised crime, though Gibraltar counters that money laundering is tightly controlled). Investment on the Rock continues apace with a huge, luxury waterfront development on its western side.

Orientation

To reach Gibraltar by land you must pass through the Spanish border town of La Línea de la Concepción (p739). Just south of the border, the road crosses Gibraltar airport runway. Gibraltar's town and harbours lie along the Rock's less steep western side, facing Bahía de Algeciras (Bay of Gibraltar). From Casemates Sq, just inside Grand Casemates Gate, Main St, with all the shops, runs south for about 1km.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Bell Books (% 76707; 11 Bell Lane)
Gibraltar Bookshop (% 71894; 300 Main St)

ELECTRICITY

Electric current is the same as in Britain: 220V or 240V, with plugs of three flat pins.

EMERGENCY

Emergency (% 199) For police or ambulance.
Police station (120 Irish Town)

INTERNET ACCESS

PC Clinic & Computer Centre (% 49991; 17 Convent Place; h 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri; per hr £3)

MEDICAL SERVICES

St Bernard's Hospital (% 79700; Europort) 24-hour emergency facilities.

MONEY

The currencies are the Gibraltar pound (£) and pound sterling, which are interchangeable. You can spend euros (except in pay phones and post offices) but conversion rates are poor. Change unspent Gibraltar currency before leaving. Banks are generally open from 9am to 3.30pm weekdays. There are several on Main St.

POST

Post office (104 Main St; h 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri & 10am-1pm Sat, closes at 2.15pm Mon-Fri mid-Jun-mid-Sep)

TELEPHONE

To phone Gibraltar from Spain, precede the five-digit local number with the code % 9567; from other countries, dial the international access code, then the Gibraltar country code (% 350) and local number. To phone Spain from Gibraltar, just dial the nine-digit Spanish number.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Gibraltar has several helpful tourist offices.
Gibraltar Tourist Board (% 45000, 74950; www.gibraltar.gov.uk; Duke of Kent House, Cathedral Sq; h 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri)
Information booth (% 73026; airport; h Mon-Fri, mornings only)
Information booth (% 50762; Customs House, Frontier; h 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat)
Tourist office (% 74982; Grand Casemates Sq; h 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat, to 1pm Sun & holidays)

VISAS & DOCUMENTS

To enter Gibraltar, you need a passport or EU national identity card. EU, USA, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand and South African

passport-holders are among those who do not need visas for Gibraltar. For further information contact Gibraltar's **Immigration Department** (% 51725).

Sights & Activities

THE TOWN

Pedestrianised Main St has an emphatically British appearance, but the Spanish lilt in the air is a reminder that this is still Mediterranean Europe. Most Spanish and Islamic buildings on Gibraltar were destroyed in 18th-century sieges, but the Rock bristles with British fortifications, gates and gun emplacements.

The **Gibraltar Museum** (Bomb House Lane; adult/under 12yr £2/1; h 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) contains good historical, architectural and military displays, among which are a well-preserved Muslim bathhouse and a copy of a 100,000-year-old female Neanderthal skull, found on Gibraltar in 1848. The **Trafalgar Cemetery** (Prince Edward's Rd; h 9am-7pm) gives a more poignant history lesson with its graves of British sailors, who died at Gibraltar after the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. The lush **Alameda Botanic Gardens** (Europa Rd; admission free; h 8am-sunset) are a short distance south.

UPPER ROCK NATURE RESERVE

The most exciting thing about Gibraltar is the Rock itself. Most of the upper Rock, starting just above the town, is a **nature reserve** (adult/child incl attractions £8/4, vehicle £1.50, pedestrian excl attractions £1; h 9.30am-7pm), with spectacular views and several interesting spots to visit. A great way to get up here is by the cable car (p743). During a westerly wind, the Rock is often a fine spot for observing migrations of birds, especially raptors and storks, between Africa and Europe. January to early June is the time for northbound migrations, and late July to early November for southbound migrations. White storks sometimes congregate in flocks of 3000 to cross the strait.

The Rock's most famous inhabitants are its colony of Barbary macaques, the only wild primates in Europe (probably introduced from North Africa in the 18th century). Some of these hang around the **Apes' Den**, near the middle cable-car station; others lurk at the top cable-car station or the Great Siege Tunnels.

About 20 minutes' walk south down St Michael's Rd from the top cable-car station (or 20 minutes up from the Apes' Den), **St Michael's Cave** is a big natural grotto that was

once home to Neolithic inhabitants of the Rock. Today, apart from attracting tourists in droves, it's used for concerts, plays, even fashion shows. There's a café outside.

Princess Caroline's Battery, a half-hour walk north (downhill) from the top cable-car station, houses a **Military Heritage Centre**. From here a road leads up to the impressive **Great Siege Tunnels**, hand-hewn by the British for gun emplacements during the 1779-to-1783 siege. They constitute a tiny proportion of the more than 70km of tunnels in the Rock, most of which are off limits.

On Willis's Rd, which leads down to the town from Princess Caroline's Battery, are the **Gibraltar, A City under Siege** exhibition and the **Tower of Homage**, the last vestige of Gibraltar's Islamic castle, built in 1333.

DOLPHIN-WATCHING

The Bahía de Algeciras has a sizable population of dolphins and, from about April to September, several boats make two or more daily trips out to see them; at other times of the year there's usually at least one in daily operation. You'll be unlucky not to get plenty of close-up dolphin contact. Most boats go from Watergardens Quay or adjacent Marina Bay. The trips last about 2½ hours and cost around £20 per adult. Tourist offices have full details.

Sleeping

Cannon Hotel (☎ 51711; www.cannon.hotel.gi; 9 Cannon Lane; s/d without bathroom £25.50/37.50, d with bathroom £46, all incl breakfast) This is a small, attractive hotel, right in the main shopping area.

Herald Travel Lettings (☎ 712350; www.gibraltar.gi/herald; Ste No 1E Ocean Heights; apt £40-75; ☎) Good apartments from studios to two-bedroom places in a block just a minute or two from Casemates Sq.

Bristol Hotel (☎ 76800; www.gibraltar.gi/bristol.hotel; 10 Cathedral Sq; s/d £49/64, with sea view £53/69; ☎ a s) The rooms are recently refurbished and the hotel has an attractive walled garden and a swimming pool.

Caleta Hotel (☎ 76501; www.caletahotel.gi; Sir Herbert Miles Rd; d without/with sea view £125/140; ☎ a i s) This has a wonderful location overlooking Catalan Bay, on the east side of the Rock, five minutes from town. Its cascading terraces provide panoramic sea views, and a host of luxurious gym and spa facilities.

O'Callaghan Elliott Hotel (☎ 70500; www.ocallaghanhotels.com; 2 Governor's Parade; d £230-260, ste £300-600;

☎ a i s) On a leafy square, the Elliott has sumptuous rooms, fittings and furnishings, a gym and rooftop pool plus a gorgeous rooftop restaurant.

Eating

Café Solo (☎ 44449; Grand Casemates Sq 3; pastas £6-9) With tables inside, and out on the bustling square, this is a good place to stop for coffees and a variety of interesting pasta.

Cannon Bar (☎ 77288; 27 Cannon Lane; mains £5.50-9.50) Justly famous for some of the best fish and chips in town, and in big portions.

Clipper (☎ 79791; 78B Irish Town; mains £3.50-6; ☎) Most of Gibraltar's pubs serve British pub meals. The Clipper is one of the best and busiest, all varnished wood with full-on foody and a cracking Sunday roast. Vegetarians should go for the Greek salad wrap.

House of Sacarello (☎ 70625; 57 Irish Town; daily specials £7-11.50; ☎ closed Sun; ☎) A chic place in a converted coffee warehouse with a good range of vegetarian options. You can linger over afternoon tea (£3.50) between 3pm and 7.30pm.

Nuno's (☎ 76501; Caleta Hotel, Sir Herbert Miles Rd; mains £11-15) A top-class, formal Italian restaurant in the Caleta Hotel, with fabulous terrace views. Delicious homemade pastas and risottos, or tender leg of lamb, are accompanied by an extensive wine list.

Pleasant waterside eateries line Marina Bay.

Shopping

Gibraltar has lots of British high-street stores, such as Next, Marks & Spencer, Body Shop (all on Main St) and Morrisons (in Europort at the northern end of the main harbour). Shops are normally open 9am to 7.30pm weekdays, and until 1pm Saturday.

Getting There & Away

AIR

GB Airways (☎ 79300; www.gbairways.com) flies daily to/from London Gatwick and Heathrow. **Monarch Airlines** (☎ 47477; www.flymonarch.com) flies daily to/from London Luton and Manchester.

BOAT

FRS (☎ 956 68 18 30 in Tarifa, Spain; www.frs.es) operates one ferry a week between Gibraltar and Tangier, departing Gibraltar at 6pm Friday for the 70-minute crossing. One-way/return fares are: adult £23/41, child £11.50/20, car £46/92.

The ferry departs from the terminal in front of the coach park. Purchase tickets from **Turner & Co** (☎ 78305; 67 Irish Town).

BUS

There are no regular buses to Gibraltar, but La Línea de la Concepción bus station (p739) is only a five-minute walk from the border.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Vehicle queues at the 24-hour border and congested traffic in Gibraltar often make it easier to park in La Línea and walk across the border. To take a car into Gibraltar (free) you need an insurance certificate, registration document, nationality plate and driving licence.

Getting Around

The 1.5km walk from the border to the town centre crosses the airport runway. A left turn off Corral Rd takes you through the pedestrian Landport Tunnel into Grand Casemates Sq. Alternatively, several local bus lines (adult/child/senior 60p/40p/30p) run from the border into town about every 15 minutes (every 30 minutes on Saturday and Sunday), until 9pm. Bus 9 goes to Market Pl, number 3 goes to Cathedral Sq and the lower cable-car station, and number 10 runs to Europort (stopping at Morrisons), then Reclamation Rd near the city centre.

All of Gibraltar can be covered on foot, and much of it (including the upper Rock) by car or motorcycle. You can also ascend, weather permitting, by the **cable car** (Red Sands Rd; adult one-way/return £6.50/8, child £4/4.50; ☎ every few min 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat; last cable down 4.45pm). For the Apes' Den, disembark at the middle station.

MÁLAGA PROVINCE

Though best known for the densely packed holiday coast of the Costa del Sol, Málaga province has heaps more to offer. It has a vibrant, increasingly cultured capital city, recently enhanced by a new up-to-the-minute Picasso museum. Inland, the fascinating old towns of Ronda and Antequera ooze history and you'll find wild hill country dotted with picturesque white villages. Málaga has a gorgeous coastline in the east where cliffs drop to pretty coves and bays. Ever more prosperous thanks to unstoppable construction, the

province provides tourists with a good standard of accommodation, an excellent range of restaurants, an exciting range of activities, and a hot nightlife. The local populace, while increasingly urbane, remains unpretentious and fun-loving. Just watch them party at one of the colourful local fiestas!

MÁLAGA

pop 556,000

This exuberant and very Spanish port city, set against a sparkling blue Mediterranean, is both historic and pulsing with modern life. The centre presents the visitor with narrow old streets and wide, leafy boulevards, beautiful gardens and impressive monuments, fashionable shops and a cultural life that is coming to the fore as never before. As expected, the major new museum devoted to Málaga-born Pablo Picasso is dynamising the city. Málaga also has a newish museum of contemporary art and a new fine arts museum is pending. The historic centre is being restored and much of it pedestrianised and the port is being developed as a leisure zone. The city's terrific bars and nightlife, the last word in Málaga *joie de vivre*, stay open very late.

History

Probably founded by Phoenicians, Málaga has long had a commercial vocation. It flourished in the Islamic era, especially as the chief port of the Emirate of Granada, later reasserting itself as an entrepreneurial centre in the 19th century when a dynamic middle class founded textile factories, sugar and steel mills and shipyards. Málaga dessert wine ('mountain sack') was popular in Victorian England. During the civil war Málaga was initially a Republican stronghold. Hundreds of Nationalist sympathisers were killed before the city fell in February 1937, after being bombed by Italian planes. Vicious reprisals followed.

Málaga has enjoyed a steadily increasing economic spin-off from the mass tourism launched on the nearby Costa del Sol in the 1950s.

Orientation

The tree-lined Paseo del Parque and Alameda Principal run along the southern edge of the old town. The main streets leading north into the old town are Calle Marqués de Larios and Calle Molina Lario. The Gibralfaro hill rising above the eastern half of Paseo del Parque



dominates the central area. Avenida de Andalucía continues the Paseo del Parque–Alameda Principal axis west of Río Guadalmedina. The main train and bus stations are around 600m south of Avenida de Andalucía, and the airport is 9km southwest.

Information

There are plenty of banks with ATMs on Calle Puerta del Mar and Calle Marqués de Larios, and ATMs in the airport arrivals hall.

Hospital Carlos Haya (Map p746; % 951 03 01 00; Avenida de Carlos Haya) The main hospital, 2km west of the centre.

Librería Luces (Map p744; Alameda Principal 16) Bookshop with some English titles and a good travel section.

Meeting Point (Map p746; Plaza de la Merced 20; internet per hr €1-2; 10am–1am Mon–Sat, 11am–11pm Sun)

Municipal tourist office (www.malagaturismo.com in Spanish) Plaza de la Marina (Map p744; % 952 12 20 20; 9am–7pm Mon–Fri Apr–Oct, to 6pm Mon–Fri Nov–Mar, 10am–6pm Sat & Sun) Casita del Jardinero (Map p744; % 952 13 47 31; Avenida de Cervantes 1; same hr) Also information booths at the bus station and around town.

Policía Local (Map p744; % 952 12 65 00; Avenida de la Rosaleda 19)

Post office (Map p744; Avenida de Andalucía 1;

8.30am–8.30pm Mon–Fri, to 2pm Sat)

Regional tourist office (Map p746; % 951 30 89 11; Pasaje de Chinitas 4; www.andalucia.org; 9am–7.30pm Mon–Fri, 10am–7pm Sat, to 2pm Sun) Another branch at the airport.

Sights

MUSEO PICASSO MÁLAGA

The new holy grail of Málaga's tourist scene is tucked away on a pedestrian street in what was medieval Málaga's *judería*. The **Museo Picasso Málaga** (Map p746; % 902 44 33 77; www.museopicassomalaga.org; Palacio de Buenavista, Calle San Agustín 8; permanent collection €6, temporary exhibition €4.50, combined ticket €8, seniors & under-26 students half price; 10am–8pm Tue–Thu & Sun, to 9pm Fri & Sat) has 204 Picasso works, donated and lent by his daughter-in-law Christine Ruiz-Picasso and grandson Bernard Ruiz-Picasso, and also stages high-quality temporary exhibitions on Picasso themes. The Picasso paintings, drawings, engravings, sculptures and ceramics on show (many never previously on public display) span almost every phase and influence of the artist's colourful career – blue period, cubism, surrealism and more. For many the most inspiring will be some of the portraits, such as *Olga Kokhlova with Mantilla*, done in a period when Picasso was

looking to return to more traditional forms after the experiments of cubism. The museum is housed in the 16th-century Palacio de Buenavista, sensationally restored at a cost of €66 million. Picasso was born in Málaga in 1881 but moved to northern Spain with his family when he was nine, and only ever returned for holidays between 1891 and 1900. But he always retained a strong affection for his native region.

CATHEDRAL

Málaga's **cathedral** (Map p746; % 952 21 59 17; Calle Molina Lario, entrance Calle Císter; admission €3.50; 10am–6pm Mon–Sat, closed holidays) was begun in the 16th century, on the former site of the main mosque. Building continued for two centuries, so while the northern door, **Portada de la Iglesia del Sagrario**, is Gothic, and the interior, with a soaring 40m dome, is Gothic and Renaissance, the façade is 18th-century baroque. The cathedral is known as La Manquita (The One-Armed), since its southern tower was never completed. Inside, note the 17th-century wooden choir stalls, finely carved by the popular Andalusian sculptor, Pedro de Mena.

ALCAZABA

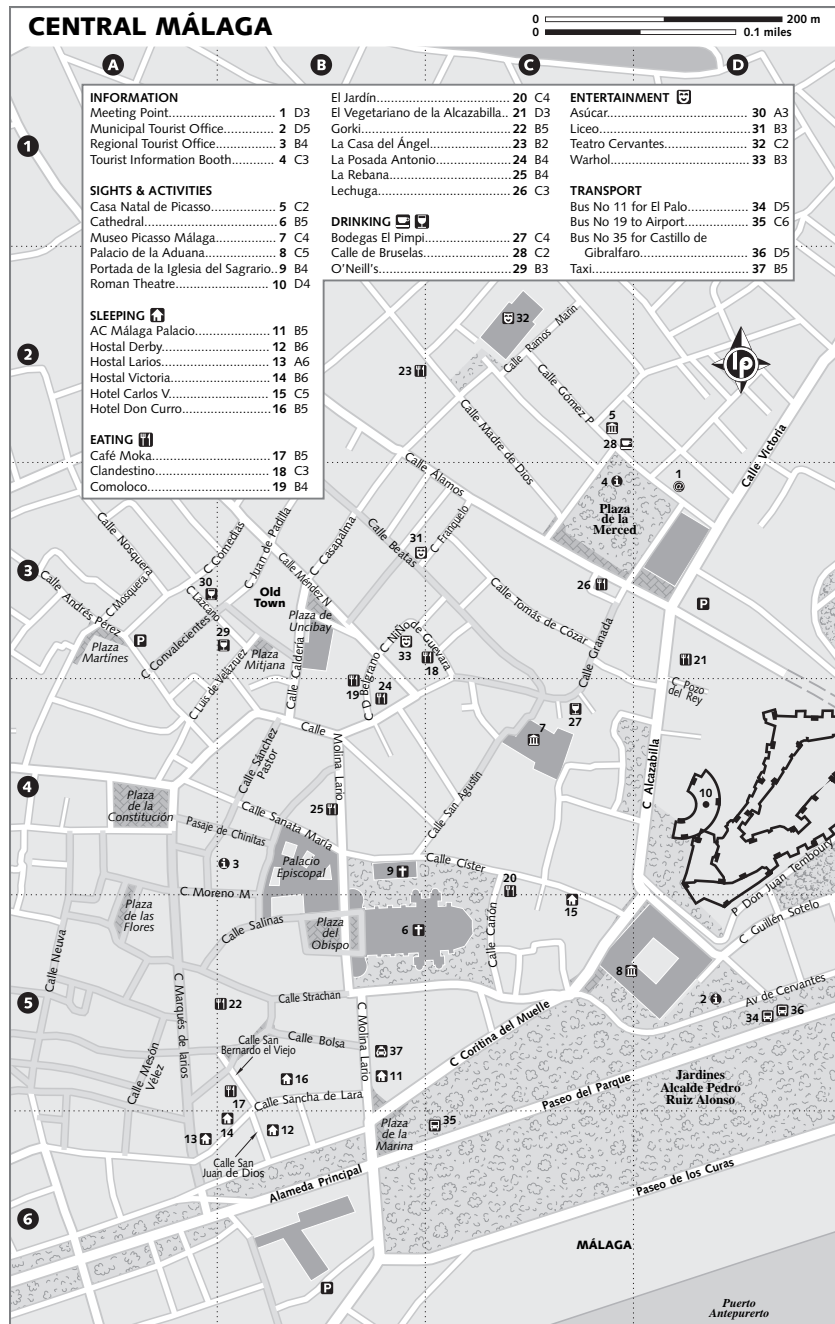
At the lower, western end of the Gibralfaro hill, the **Alcazaba** (Map p744; % 952 22 51 06; Calle Alcazabilla; admission €2, combined ticket incl Castillo de Gibralfaro €3.20; 9.30am–8pm Tue–Sun Apr–Sep, 8.30am–7pm Tue–Sun Oct–Mar; was the palace-fortress of Málaga's Muslim governors. Dating from 1057, it has two rings of walls, lots of defensive towers, cobbled ramps, staggered entrance passages, meandering waterways and leafy terraces – a joy to visit in the summer heat. A lift (elevator) from Calle Guillén Sotelo brings you out in the heart of the Alcazaba.

Below the Alcazaba is a Roman theatre.

CASTILLO DE GIBRALFARO

Above the Alcazaba rises the older **Gibralfaro Castle** (Map p744; % 952 22 72 30; admission €2; 9am–8pm Apr–Sep, to 6pm Oct–Mar), built by Abd ar-Rahman I, the 8th-century Cordoban emir, and rebuilt in the 14th and 15th centuries. Nothing much remains of the interior of the castle, but the walkway around the ramparts affords exhilarating views and there's an interesting museum.

To walk up to the Castillo de Gibralfaro, take the road immediately right of the Alcazaba entrance, and where it bends left into



a tunnel, take the steps on the right; or take bus 35 from Avenida de Cervantes (roughly every 45 minutes).

OTHER MUSEUMS

Casa Natal de Picasso (Map p746; % 952 06 02 15; Plaza de la Merced 15; admission free; 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun, closed holidays) Picasso's birthplace is a centre for exhibitions and research on contemporary art, with a few compelling personal memorabilia.

Centro de Arte Contemporáneo (Map p744; % 952 12 00 55; Calle Alemania; admission free; 10am-8pm, to 2pm & 5-9pm 20 Jun-24 Sep, Tue-Sun) A funky museum of international 20th-century art housed in a skilfully converted 1930s market.

Museo Unicaja de Artes y Costumbres Populares (Museum of Popular Arts & Customs; Map p744; % 952 21 71 37; www.museoartepopulares.com; Pasillo de Santa Isabel 10; adult/under 16yr €2/free; 10am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1.30pm Sat) Located in a 17th-century inn, this museum's speciality is everyday rural and urban life of the past; note the painted clay figures (*barros*) of characters from Málaga folklore.

Palacio de la Aduana (Map p746; Paseo del Parque; admission free; 3-8pm Tue, 9am-8pm Wed-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat & Sun) Temporary exhibitions from the good Museo de Málaga art collection, formerly housed in the Buenavista palace now taken over by Picasso, are shown here. The collection includes great baroque artists such as Zurbarán and Murillo. The Aduana building is to become the permanent home of the city's museum.

BEACHES

Sandy city beaches stretch several kilometres in each direction from the port. **Playa de la Malagueta**, handy to the city centre, has some excellent bars and restaurants close by. **Playa de Pedregalejo** and **Playa del Palo**, about 4km east of the centre, are popular and reachable by bus 11 from Paseo del Parque.

JARDÍN BOTÁNICO LA CONCEPCIÓN

These largely tropical **gardens** (Map p744; % 952 25 21 48; adult/child €3.10/1.60; 9.30am-5.30pm Oct-Mar, 9.30am-8.30pm Apr-Sep, closed Mon), 4km north of the city centre, feature towering trees (including hundreds of palms), 5000 tropical plants, waterfalls, lakes and spectacular seasonal blooms – especially the purple wisteria in spring. You can visit solo, or by 1½-hour guided tour in English.

By car, take the N331 Antequera road north from the Málaga ring road (A7) to Km166 and follow the signs. Alternatively, the MálagaTour bus (below) stops here.

Courses

There are many private language schools in Málaga; the main tourist offices have contact lists. The **Universidad de Málaga** (Map p744; % 952 27 82 11; www.uma.es/estudios/extranj/extranjeros.htm; Avenida de Andalucía 24) also runs very popular courses.

Tours

To pick up the child-friendly, open-topped **MalagaTour bus** (Map p744; % 902 10 10 81; www.malaga-tour.com; adult/child €15/750; every 30 min 9.30am-7pm), head for Avenida Manuel Agustín Heredia or the eastern end of the Paseo del Parque. This hop-on-hop-off tour does a circuit of the city, stopping at all the sights. Tickets are valid for 24 hours.

Festivals & Events

Semana Santa (Holy Week) Solemn and spectacular: the platforms bearing the holy images (*tronos*) are large and heavy, each needing up to 150 bearers. Every night from Palm Sunday to Good Friday, six or seven *tronos* are carried through the city, watched by big crowds. Witness this event on the Alameda Principal, between 7pm and midnight. **Feria de Málaga** (mid- to late August) Lasting nine days, this is the biggest and most ebullient of Andalucía's summer fairs. During daytime, especially on the two Saturdays, celebrations take over the city centre, with music, dancing and horses. At night the fun switches to large *feria* grounds at Cortijo de Torres, 4km southwest of the city centre, with fairground rides, music and dancing.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Hostal Derby (Map p746; % 952 22 13 01; Calle San Juan de Dios 1, 4th fl; s/d €36/48) A good-value *hostal* (simple guesthouse or small place offering hotel-like accommodation) with spacious rooms and big windows, some overlooking the harbour.

Hostal El Cenachero (Map p744; % 952 22 40 88; Calle Barroso 5, 3rd fl; s €32, d €47-55) This modest, family-run *hostal* with 14 pleasant rooms is close to the harbour. It's named after Málaga's folkloric fishmonger character.

Hostal Larios (Map p746; % 952 22 54 90; www.hostal larios.com; Calle Marqués de Larios 9; s/d without bathroom €32/42, s/d with bathroom €40/50;) This central *hostal* outclasses all others in the budget range. The 12 rooms are newly fitted out and painted apricot and blue.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Carlos V (Map p746; % 952 21 51 20; carlosv@spa.es; Calle Cister 10; s €32-50, d €67; a) Close to the cathedral and Picasso museum, the Carlos V is enduringly popular. It's clean, if basic and dark.

Hostal Victoria (Map p746; % 952 22 42 24; hostalvictoria@hostalvictoria.net; Calle Sancho de Lara 3; s/d €52/75; a) Popular, central and friendly, the Victoria provides clean, comfortable rooms with bathtubs.

El Riad Andaluz (Map p744; % 952 21 36 40; www.eliadandaluz.com; Calle Hinestraza 24; s/d 70/90; a) At last a characterful, slightly exotic place to stay in Málaga. This French-run guesthouse has eight rooms with Moroccan décor set around an atmospheric patio.

Hotel Don Curro (Map p746; % 952 22 72 00; www.hotelondoncurro.com; Calle Sancho de Lara 7; s/d €74/104; p a) The busy Don Curro is efficient, comfortable and central, with well-appointed, spacious rooms.

TOP END

AC Málaga Palacio (Map p746; % 952 21 51 85; www.ac-hotels.com; Calle Cortina del Muelle 1; d €137; p a s) This 15-storey, sleek hotel has sensational views over the busy seafront. Smart, modern design and excellent facilities make it the best of Málaga's luxury options.

Parador Málaga Gibralfaro (Map p744; % 952 22 19 02; www.parador.es; s/d €128/162; p a s) With an unbeatable location up on the pine-forested Gibralfaro hill, Málaga's *parador* provides spectacular views and an excellent terrace restaurant.

Eating**TAPAS**

Antigua Casa de Guardia (Map p744; % 952 21 46 80; Alameda Central 18; tapas €1-1.50) This venerable old tavern has been serving Málaga's sweet desert wines since 1840. Try the dark brown, sherry-like *seco* complemented by a plate of monster prawns.

Gorki (Map p746; % 952 22 14 66; Calle Strachan 6; platos combinados €6-16) A popular upmarket tapas bar with pavement tables and an interior full of wine-barrel tables and stools.

La Rebana (Map p746; Calle Molina Lario 5; tapas €3, raciones €5-8.50) A great, noisy and central tapas bar specialising in foies and cured meats. The dark wooden interior is inviting.

Lechuga (Map p746; Plaza de la Merced 1; tapas €2.50-3.60, raciones €8; v) In this calm retreat, vegetables reign supreme and the chef does wonderful things with them.

RESTAURANTS

Málaga's restaurants are well priced and of a good standard due to the largely local clientele. A speciality here is fish fried quickly in olive oil. *Fritura malagueña* consists of fried fish, anchovies and squid.

Café Moka (Map p746; % 952 21 40 02; Calle San Bernardo El Viejo 2; breakfast €3.50) Just off the Calle Larios, this busy little retro café caters to a mainly Spanish crowd.

Comoloco (Map p746; Calle Denis Belgrano 17; salads & pittas €4.50-5; h 1pm-1am) This place with huge windows onto the little street is packed out at lunchtime. The reason, tasty healthy food at a good price in a casual setting.

El Vegetariano de la Alcazabilla (Map p746; % 952 21 48 58; Calle Pozo del Rey 5; mains €9-10.50; h closed Sun; v) Laid-back veggie restaurant combining friendly service with good food.

El Jardín (Map p746; % 952 22 04 19; Calle Cañón 1; mains €12.50; h 9am-midnight Mon-Thu, to 2pm & 5pm-midnight Fri & Sat, 5pm-midnight Sun) Busy Viennese-style café next to the palm-filled gardens behind the cathedral. Great ambience but not outstanding food.

Clandestino (Map p746; % 952 21 93 90; Calle Niño de Guevara 3; mains €9-17; h 1pm-1am) A trendy joint serving up top-notch meals that fuse northern European and Latin cuisines, and hip, house beats played in the background set the mood.

Restaurante Antonio Martín (Map p744; % 952 22 73 98; Playa de la Malagueta; mains €13-24; h closed Sun Nov-Apr) Right on the beach and with a large terrace, Antonio Martín rustles up some of the best fish in town. Celebrities and matadors may be spotted here.

La Casa del Ángel (Map p746; % 952 60 87 50; Calle Madre de Dios 29; mains €14-23; h closed Mon) An extraordinary restaurant filled with the owners' considerable art collection. The cuisine is equally sumptuous: a combination of Andalusian, Arab and international tastes.

Drinking

On weekend nights, the web of narrow old streets north of Plaza de la Constitución comes alive. Look for bars around Plaza de la Merced, Plaza Mitjana and Plaza de Uncibay.

Bodegas El Pimpi (Map p746; % 952 22 89 90; Calle Granada 62; h 7pm-2am) A Málaga institution with a warren of rooms and mini-patios, El Pimpi attracts a fun-loving crowd with its sweet wine and thumping music.

Calle de Bruselas (Map p746; % 952 60 39 48; Plaza de la Merced 16; h 9am-2am) This is a retro Belgian

bar that woos a bohemian crowd. During the day it caters to the coffee scene with pavement tables, then at night the dark little bar comes to life.

O'Neill's (Map p746; % 952 60 14 60; Calle Luis de Velázquez 3; h noon-late) A spit-and-sawdust bar that plays a lot of U2.

Entertainment

Teatro Cervantes (Map p746; % 952 22 41 00; www.teatrocervantes.com; Calle Ramos Marín s/n) The palatial Cervantes has a fine programme of music, theatre and dance.

Liceo (Map p744; Calle Beatas 21; h 7pm-3am Thu-Sat) A grand old mansion turned young music bar, which buzzes with a student crowd after midnight. Go up the winding staircase and discover more rooms.

Warhol (Map p746; Calle Niño de Guevara; h 11pm-late Thu-Sat) A stylish haunt for gay clubbers who want an upmarket atmosphere in which to enjoy the funky house beats mixed by dreadlocked DJs.

Asúcar (Map p746; cr Calles Convalescientes & Luzcano; h 9pm-late) Salsa fans need go no further. Casual salsa classes from 11pm Wednesday to Saturday.

Tetería El Harén (Map p744; Calle Andrés Pérez 3) A large teahouse that rambles over several floors with lots of private nooks. Live music Thursday to Saturday evenings.

Getting There & Away**AIR**

Málaga's busy **airport** (% 952 04 88 38), the main international gateway to Andalucía, receives flights by dozens of airlines (budget and otherwise) from around Europe (see p859).

BOAT

Trasmediterránea (Map p744; % 952 06 12 18, 902 45 46 45; www.trasmediterranea.com; Estación Marítima, Local E1) operates a fast ferry (four hours) and a slower ferry (7½ hours) daily year-round to/from Melilla (passenger fast ferry/ferry €55/36; car €139 on both boats).

BUS

Málaga's **bus station** (Map p744; % 952 35 00 61; Paseo de los Tilos) is just 1km southwest of the city centre. Frequent buses travel along the coasts and others go to Seville (€14.50, 2½ hours, nine or more daily), Granada (€9, 1½ to two hours, 17 daily), Córdoba (€12, 2½ hours, five daily), Antequera (€5, 50 minutes, 13

daily) and Ronda (€7.50 to €9.50, 2½ hours, nine or more daily). Nine buses also run daily to Madrid (€20, six hours) and a few go up Spain's Mediterranean coast. There are services to France, Germany, Portugal and Morocco too.

CAR

Numerous international and local agencies have desks at the airport, many with small cars for around €150 per week.

TRAIN

The main station, **Málaga-RENFE** (Map p744; % 952 36 02 02; Explanada de la Estación) is round the corner from the bus station. Quick Talgo 200s run to Madrid (€52 to €87, 4½ hours, six daily). A slower, cheaper Intercity train for Madrid (€35, 6½ hours) leaves late morning.

Trains also go to Córdoba (€16 to €21, 2½ hours, 10 daily), Seville (€16, 2½ hours, five daily) and Barcelona (€54 to €141, 13 hours, two daily). For Granada (€19, 2½ hours) and Ronda (€8.20, 1½ hours minimum) you need to change at Bobadilla.

Getting Around**TO/FROM THE AIRPORT**

The Aeropuerto train station on the Málaga-Fuengirola line is a five-minute walk from the airport (follow signs from the departures hall). Trains run about every half-hour, 7am to 11.45pm, to Málaga-Renfe station (€1.20, 11 minutes) and Málaga-Centro station. Trains depart for the airport between 5.45am and 10.30pm.

Bus 19 to the city centre (€1.10, 20 minutes) leaves from the 'City Bus' stop outside the arrivals hall, every 20 or 30 minutes, 6.35am to 11.45pm, stopping at Málaga-Renfe train station and the bus station en route. Going out to the airport, you can catch the bus at the western end of Paseo del Parque, and from outside the stations, about every half-hour from 6.30am to 11.30pm.

A taxi from the airport to the city centre costs €15 to €17.

COSTA DEL SOL

Strewn along the seaboard from Málaga almost to Gibraltar, the Costa del Sol stretches like a wall of wedding cakes several kilometres thick. Its recipe for success is sunshine, convenient beaches (of grey-brown sand), cheap package deals and bountiful nightlife and

entertainment. The *costa* (coast) is also a haven for sport lovers, with around 40 golf clubs, several busy marinas, tennis courts, riding schools, swimming pools, gyms and beaches offering every imaginable water sport.

The resorts were once fishing villages, but there's little evidence of that now. The Costa del Sol was launched as a 1950s development drive for impoverished Andalucía and it has succeeded very well indeed, at the cost of turning a spectacular coastline into an eye-stinging, unbroken series of untidy, crowded townscapes. In July and August it's best to ring ahead for a room. Outside these peak months, many room rates drop sharply.

A convenient train service links Málaga's Centro, Renfe and Aeropuerto stations with Torremolinos (€1.30), Arroyo de la Miel (€1.30) and Fuengirola (€2.30). Buses from Málaga link all the resorts, and services to places such as Ronda, Cádiz, Seville and Granada go from the main resorts.

The AP7 Autopista del Sol motorway bypasses all the *costa* towns, with tolls amounting to €7.30 (€12 from June to September and during Semana Santa) for the full 80km. The old coast road, the N340, continues to carry plenty of traffic and you need to take care on it: don't let other drivers force you into going too fast, and watch out for animals and inebriated pedestrians.

Torremolinos

pop 45,000

'Torrie', which led the Costa del Sol's mass-tourism boom of the 1950s and '60s, is a concrete high-rise jungle designed to squeeze as many paying customers as possible into the smallest possible space. It spruced itself up somewhat in the 1990s and a pleasant sea-front walk, the Paseo Marítimo, now extends for nearly 7km and gives some cohesion and character to the resort. Torremolinos has a big gay scene.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

Torremolinos' main pedestrian artery is Calle San Miguel, running most of the 500m from Plaza Costa del Sol (on the main road through town) down to Playa del Bajondillo. Southwest of Playa del Bajondillo is Playa de la Carihuela, once the fishing quarter.

The **bus station** (952 38 24 19; Calle Hoyo) is northeast of Plaza Costa del Sol. Buses to

Marbella stop on Avenida Palma de Mallorca, 200m southwest of Plaza Costa del Sol. The **train station** (Avenida Jesús Santos Rein), is off Calle San Miguel.

Tourist office (952 37 95 12; www.ayto-torremolinos.org; Plaza Pablo Picasso; 9am-1.30pm Mon-Fri) In the town hall. There are also offices on **Playa Bajondillo** (952 37 19 09; 9am-1.30pm) and **Playa Carihuela** (952 37 29 56; 9am-1.30pm).

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Torrie's **beaches** are wider, longer and a slightly paler shade of grey-brown than most on the *costa*, and they get very crowded. The local attractions are mostly child-oriented. In the swish Puerto Deportivo (marina) at Benalmádena Costa, just southwest of Torremolinos, **Sea Life** (952 56 01 50; www.sealifeeurope.com; adult/child €11/9.50; 10am-10pm Jun, to midnight Jul-Sep, to 6pm Oct-May) is a good modern aquarium of mainly Mediterranean marine creatures, with organised games and shark feeding. **Tivoli World** (952 57 70 16; www.tivolico.es; Avenida de Tivoli; admission €6; 11am-8pm Sun Oct-Apr, 1-9pm May; 4-11pm Jun, 6pm-2am Jul-Sep), just five minutes' walk from Benalmádena-Arroyo de la Miel train station, is the biggest amusement park on the *costa*. The Supertivolino ticket (€10) gives unlimited access to more than 35 rides.

SLEEPING & EATING

A couple of dozen *hostales* and hotels are within a few minutes' walk of Torremolinos' train and bus stations. The tourist offices have lists.

Red Parrot (952 37 54 45; www.theredparrot.net; Avenida Los Manantiales 4; s/d €60/65; a s) Newly refurbished and central, the Red Parrot offers comfortable balconied rooms, around a patio, and it has a pool.

Hotel Miami (952 38 52 55; www.residencia-miami.com; Calle Aladino 14, Torremolinos; s/d €38/59; a s) A lovely villa amid tropical gardens, and only 100m from La Carihuela beach, this small hotel has tasteful rooms.

La Fonda Benalmádena (952 56 82 73; www.fondahotel.com; Calle Santo Domingo 7, Benalmádena Pueblo; s/d incl breakfast €60/86; p a i s) Charming La Fonda has large rooms built around Islamic-style patios with fountains, and an excellent, moderately priced restaurant.

Besides British breakfasts and beer, Torremolinos has no shortage of good seafood places, many of them lining the Paseo Marítimo in La Carihuela.

ENTERTAINMENT

The weekend nightlife at Benalmádena Costa's Puerto Deportivo pulls a youthful, zesty crowd from all along the coast. The bars start to throb after midnight on Friday and Saturday. International visitors come to Torremolinos to party hard. **Passion** (Avenida Palma de Mallorca 18) and **Palladium** (Avenida Palma de Mallorca 36), two of Torremolinos' hottest clubs, boast two floors, three different atmospheres, international DJs, live performances, swimming pools, go-go dancers and singers in both venues. The gay 'in crowd' hangs out in the new bars and clubs in **La Nogalera**, the area close to Torremolinos train station. Check out the trendy **El Gato Lounge** (La Nogalera, 11am-4pm till late) or girls' bar **Anfora**.

Fuengirola

pop 52,000

Fuengirola, 18km down the coast from Torremolinos, has more of a family scene but is just as densely packed. The streets between the beach and Avenida Matías Sáenz de Tejada (where the bus station is) constitute what's left of the old town, with Plaza de la Constitución at its centre. The **train station** (Avenida Jesús Santos Rein) is a block further inland. The **tourist office** (952 46 74 57; Avenida Jesús Santos Rein 6; 9.30am-2pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) is near the train station.

The **Hipódromo Costa del Sol** (952 59 27 00; www.carraerentertainment.com; Urbanización El Chaparral; admission €7; 10pm-2am Sat Jul-Sep, 11.30am-4pm Sun Oct-Jun), Andalucía's leading horse-racing track with regular racing, is off the N340 at the southwestern end of Fuengirola.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hostal Italia (952 47 41 93; Calle de la Cruz 1; s/d €40/64; a) A friendly, clean and comfortable budget option, a couple of blocks from the beach.

Hotel El Puerto (952 47 01 00; www.hotel-elpuerto.com; Calle Marbella 34; s incl breakfast €75-104, d incl breakfast €88-134; a s) A towering three-star hotel on the beach with sea views and a rooftop pool.

Lizzaran (952 47 38 29; Avenida Jesús Santos Rein 1; raciones €4.50-11.50) A welcome Spanish relief from the overwhelming number of Chinese and Italian eateries. Tuck into salty sardine or ham *pinxos* (bread with toppings).

Restaurante Portofino (952 47 06 43; Paseo Marítimo 29; mains €12-17; 11am-11pm closed Mon) One of Fuengirola's better offerings, this restaurant has an international menu featuring a host of classic fish dishes.

Mijas

A village of winding Muslim-origin streets and white buildings situated in the hills 8km north of Fuengirola is where you'll find *Mijas*. It is now surrounded by villas and *urbanizaciones* (housing estates), and full of busloads up from the *costa*. But it remains a strikingly pretty place and the **Casa Museo de Mijas** (952 59 03 80; Calle Málaga; admission free; 11am-2pm & 4-7pm Sep-Mar, afternoons 5-8pm Apr-Jun, 6-9pm Jul-Aug) gives a poignant glimpse into life in the area before the 1960s tourist deluge. There are good hotels and lots of restaurants, cafés and craft shops. Frequent buses run from Fuengirola (€1, 25 minutes).

Marbella

pop 101,000

Overlooked by the dramatic Sierra Blanca 28km west of Fuengirola, Marbella has been the Costa del Sol's glossiest resort ever since part-Mexican, part-Austrian Alfonso von Hohenlohe built the exclusive Marbella Club Hotel, just west, in the 1950s. A unique mix of glamorous boutiques, pretty plazas, down-to-earth bars, good and bad restaurants, moderate beaches and ritzy nightlife make it easily the Costa del Sol's most fascinating playground. Fortunately the scandals and crime that accompany this locale (see the boxed text, p752) won't interfere with the fun of ordinary travellers.

ORIENTATION

The N340 through town takes the names Avenida Ramón y Cajal and Avenida Ricardo Soriano. The old town is centred on Plaza de los Naranjos.

INFORMATION

Hospital Costa del Sol (952 82 82 50; Carretera N340 Km187) Big public hospital 6km east of the centre.
Municipal tourist office (www.marbella.es in Spanish; 9.30am-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat); Fontanilla (952 77 14 42; Glorieta de la Fontanilla); Naranjos (952 82 35 50; Plaza de los Naranjos 1)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Pretty **Plaza de los Naranjos**, with its 16th-century town hall, is the heart of the largely pedestrianised, chocolate-box-perfect old town. Nearby are the **Iglesia de la Encarnación** (Plaza de la Iglesia), begun in the 16th century, and the **Museo del Grabado Español Contemporáneo** (Museum of Contemporary Spanish Prints; 952 76 57 41; Calle Hospital Bazán

s/n; admission €2.50; h 10am-2pm & 5.30-8.30pm Tue-Sat, evenings mid-Jun-mid-Sep 7-9pm) exhibiting work by Picasso, Joan Miró and Salvador Dalí, among others.

The charming **Museo Bonsai** (% 952 86 29 26; adult/child €3/1.50; h 10am-1.30pm & 4-7pm, evenings Jul-Aug 5-8pm), devoted to the Japanese miniature-tree art, is in Parque de la Represa just northeast of the old town.

Avenida del Mar, leading down to the central **Playa de Venus**, a standard Costa del Sol beach, is peppered with crazed sculptures by Salvador Dalí. For a longer, broader stretch of sand walk to the 800m **Playa de la Fontanilla**, or **Playa de Casablanca** beyond Playa de la Fontanilla.

Puerto Banús, the Costa del Sol's flashiest marina, is 6km west of Marbella. Some truly enormous floating palaces are tied up here. Marbella's 'spend, be seen, have fun' ethos is at its purest here, with the constant parade of the glamorous, the would-be glamorous and the normal in front of the boutiques and busy restaurants strung along the waterfront.

There are good walks in the Sierra Blanca, starting from the Refugio de Juanar, a 17km drive north of Marbella.

MARBELLA VICE

Marbella is a byword for glitzy ostentation and overdevelopment, municipal corruption and international mafia activity. With Spain's all-powerful construction lobby keen to open up new land for building, the temptation for municipal corruption is always high, especially since Spanish town halls receive much of their income from fees charged for building permits. It's a perfect scenario for heavier crime to get involved. Only in the last few years have Andalucía's political and judicial authorities started to tackle the problem with any commitment.

Marbella's problems on this score really got going in the 1990s during the mayoralty of Jesús Gil y Gil, a populist, right-wing construction magnate who perfected the art of running a town for the benefit of himself and his henchmen. He died in 2004, having overseen rampant property development and embroiled himself and Marbella in endless corruption and financial scandals. Many were ready to step into his shoes.

In 2005, in the so-called Ballena Blanca (White Whale) case, 41 people were arrested in Marbella on suspicion of organising Europe's biggest money-laundering network, worth at least €250 million. In another operation in 2005, police arrested 28 alleged Mafia bosses from former Soviet republics on the Costa del Sol and in other Mediterranean Spanish towns. The mobsters supposedly laundered the proceeds of nefarious activities back home through a network of property, restaurants and bars in Spain.

Then in 2006 Marbella's mayor, deputy mayor and several other councillors and town hall officials were among over 50 people arrested in connection with a web of bribery and illegal building permits. During their investigations police seized property worth €2.4 billion including 275 works of art, 103 thoroughbred horses and 200 fighting bulls. A caretaking committee appointed to run Marbella's affairs immediately started sealing off suspected illegal building sites that had been ordered to stop work by Andalucía's Supreme Court. Up to 5000 Marbella homes could face demolition for having been built illegally.

SLEEPING

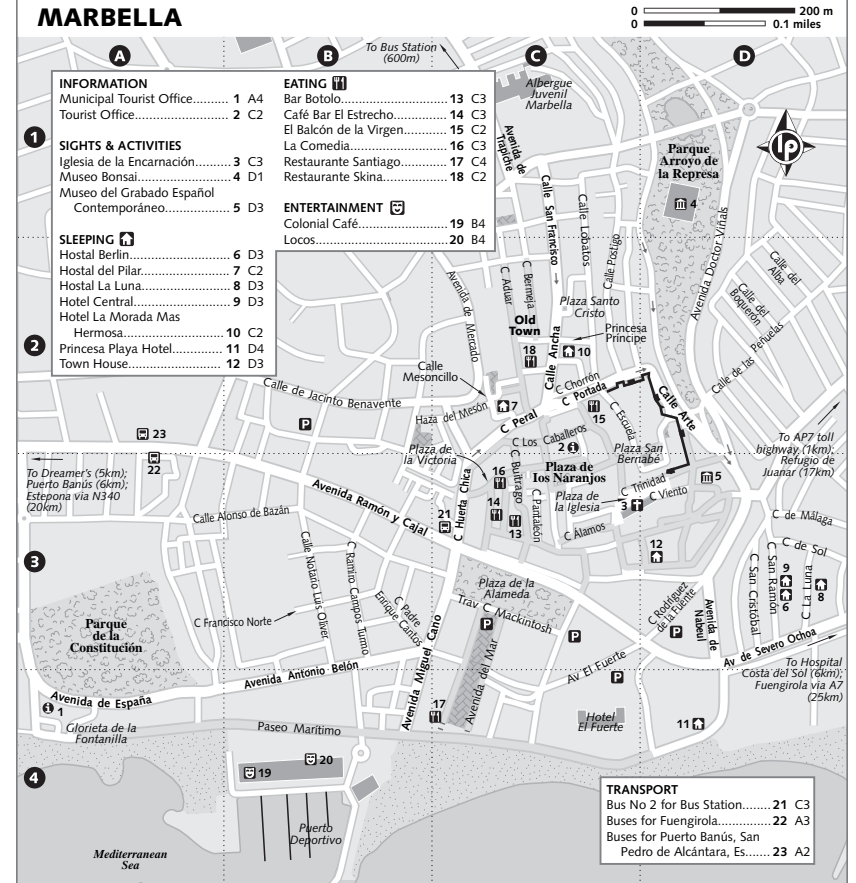
Hostal del Pilar (% 952 82 99 36; www.hostel-marbella.com; Calle Mesoncillo 4; s/d/tr without bathroom €25/35/50) This is a popular and backpacker-friendly British-run place off Calle Peral. There's a bar, a roof terrace for sunbathing, and breakfast.

Hostal La Luna (% 952 82 57 78; Calle La Luna 7; r €55; a) Calle La Luna is one of four pedestrian lanes dotted with decent *hostales* just east of the centre and close to the beach. Balconied rooms overlook an internal patio at this delightful spot.

Hostal Berlin (% 952 82 13 10; www.hostalberlin.com; Calle San Ramón 21; s/d/tr €40/60/70; p a i) A very friendly *hostal* with good facilities on a quiet street parallel to Calle La Luna. Breakfast is €2.50.

Hotel Central (% 952 90 24 42; www.hotelcentralmarbella.com; Calle San Ramón 15; r €78; a i) A cut above the neighbouring *hostales*, the Hotel Central enjoys the same quiet location but has 15 large, tasteful rooms with bathtubs.

Hotel La Morada Mas Hermosa (% 952 92 44 67; www.lamoradamashermosa.com; Calle Montenebros 16A; s/d €73/92; a i) A small, character-filled hotel on a tranquil, flowery, old-town street. The six quaintly decorated rooms are in major demand.



Town House (% 952 90 17 91; www.townhouse.nu; Calle Alderete 7; s/d incl breakfast €115/130; a) A superb, small hotel in a traditional town house, with nine rooms. Design is chic and there's a fabulous roof terrace.

Princesa Playa Hotel (% 952 82 09 44; www.princesa-playa.com; Avenida Duque de Ahumada s/n; s/€113-29, d €132-50; p a s) With super sea views, this modern apartment hotel represents great value for money on the seafont.

EATING

Dining in Marbella doesn't necessarily mean chichi interiors and bikini-size portions at whale-sized prices. There are some authentic tapas bars and a few trendy restaurants doing delicious, good-value cuisine.

Café Bar El Estrecho (% 952 77 00 04; Calle San Lázaro; tapas €1.20) This is a good, busy old-town tapas bar.

Bar Bartolo (% 952 82 69 50; Calle San Lázaro; tapas €1.80) Located nearby, this tapas bar is also varied in its tapas offering and, like El Estrecho, it has strong, viscous coffee.

El Balcón de la Virgen (% 952 77 60 52; Calle Virgen de los Dolores; mains €8-16; h closed Sun) One of the best restaurants near Plaza de los Naranjos, this has a lovely summer *terrazza* overlooked by a 300-year-old grieving Virgin and a large bougainvillea. The fare is typical Andalusian.

Restaurante Santiago (% 952 77 00 78; Paseo Marítimo 5; mains €18-25; h closed Nov) Santiago is right on the seafont, offering top-class seafood in elegant surrounds.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

La Comedia (% 952 77 64 78; Calle San Lázaro; mains €15-25; 17 7pm-1am Tue-Sun) This creative downtown, upstairs restaurant is run by a dedicated Swedish duo who put together some terrific taste combinations. The mussels in white wine sauce are delicious and are hopefully a regular menu item. Follow them with duck breast in fruit compote, sweet chicken curry or a vegetarian couscous crepe. The place is candlelit yet animated, with interesting art on the walls, and there are balcony tables overlooking little Plaza Victoria.

Restaurante Skina (% 952 76 52 77; Calle Aduar 12; mains €20-7; 17 7-11.30pm Mon-Sat) A good bet for an imaginative meal, tiny Skina is great for outdoor dining on summer evenings. Try sole with lime and ginger or suckling pig with caramelized tomatoes.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

Marbella's revamped Puerto Deportivo (marina) now provides an entertaining after-dark scene without the sleaze. Head for **Colonial Café** (% 649 08 41 72; 17 6pm-3am or later), a hip disco-pub playing funky-house and reggae-dub, or **Locos** (17 1.30pm-4am or later), at the back of the marina, with an alternative feel. In the old town, Calle Pantaleón has a string of popular *cervecerías* (beer bars).

The busiest nightlife zone in the Marbella area is at Puerto Banús, where dozens of **pubs** and varied **dance clubs** cluster along a couple of narrow lanes behind the marina. The serious big-name clubs cluster around the 'Golden Mile' (the 5km road between Marbella and Puerto Banús). **Dreamer's** (% 952 81 20 80; www.dreamers-disco.com in Spanish; Carretera de Cádiz 175, Río Verde) gives house-lovers a chance to truly let their hair down, with its mix of tribal, vocal and light shows, bongo beats and an ever-changing menu of DJs.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Half-hourly buses to Fuengirola (€2.50, one hour), Puerto Banús (€1, 20 minutes) and Estepona (€2.40, one hour) have stops on Avenida Ricardo Soriano. Other services use the **bus station** (% 952 76 44 00; Avenida Trapiche), 1.2km from Plaza de los Naranjos. Bus 7 (€1) runs between the bus station and the central

Fuengirola/Estepona bus stop (Avenida Ricardo Soriano); returning to the bus station, take bus 2 from Avenida Ramón y Cajal.

Marbella's streets are notoriously traffic-clogged. Fortunately there are a number of pay car parks (see the Marbella map, Map p753) where you can take refuge on arrival.

Estepona
pop 43,000

Estepona, southwest of Marbella, has controlled its development relatively carefully and remains a fairly agreeable seaside town. The big attraction here is the popular safari park, **Selwo Aventura** (% 902 19 04 82; www.selwo.es; Carretera A7 Km162.5; admission €22, under 8yr €15; 17 10am-6pm Sep-Jun, to 8pm Jul-Aug, closed early Dec-early Feb), 6km east of town, with over 200 exotic animal species. A direct bus runs to Selwo from Málaga via Torremolinos, Fuengirola and Marbella (phone Selwo for information).

EL CHORRO & BOBASTRO

pop (El Chorro) 100

Fifty kilometres northwest of Málaga, Río Guadalhorce and the main railway in and out of Málaga both pass through the awesome **Garganta del Chorro** (El Chorro Gorge), which is 4km long, up to 400m deep and as little as 10m wide. The gorge is a magnet for rock climbers, with hundreds of varied routes of almost every grade of difficulty. Anyone can view the gorge by walking along the railway from the tiny El Chorro village (ask locally for directions).

Swiss-owned **Finca La Campana** (opposite), which is popular with adventure-lovers, offers climbing courses, climbing, caving, kayaking and mountain-bike trips, and bike rentals (€10 per day). One thrilling outing is its five-hour climbing trip along the Camino del Rey (King's Path), a crumbling concrete catwalk clinging to the gorge wall 100m above the river – worth every céntimo of the €90 (one to three people).

Near El Chorro is **Bobastro**, the hilltop redoubt of the 9th-century rebel, Omar ibn Hafsun, a sort of Islamic Robin Hood, who led a prolonged revolt against Cordoban rule. Ibn Hafsun at one stage controlled territory from Cartagena to the Strait of Gibraltar. From El Chorro village, follow the road up the far (western) side of the valley and after 3km take the signed Bobastro turning. Nearly 3km up here, an 'Iglesia Mozárabe' sign indicates

a 500m path to the remains of a remarkable little Mozarabic church cut from the rock. It's thought that Ibn Hafsun converted from Islam to Christianity (thus becoming a Mozarab) before his death in 917 and was buried here. When Córdoba finally conquered Bobastro in 927, the poor chap's remains were taken for grisly posthumous crucifixion outside Córdoba's Mezquita. At the top of the hill, 2.5km further up the road and with unbelievable views, are faint traces of Ibn Hafsun's rectangular Alcázar (fortress).

Sleeping & Eating

Pensión Estación (% 952 49 50 04; r without bathroom €25) At El Chorro station, this *pensión* has clean rooms, and its **Bar Isabel**, a renowned climbers' gathering place, serves *platos combinados* (€5).

Apartamentos La Garganta (% 952 49 50 00; www.lagarganta.com; 2/4-person apt €60/90; mains €10; p a s w) The best option in El Chorro, this converted flour mill has beautifully-decorated apartments and excellent food.

Finca La Campana (% 952 11 20 19; www.el-chorro.com; dm €10, d €24, 2-8-person apt €38-88; a s) More than just a great place to stay, this is a club of like-minded adrenaline junkies, with a cult following to show. During the climbing season (October to March) the Finca is very busy, so book ahead. To get there follow signs from behind Apartamentos La Garganta.

Getting There & Away

Trains run to El Chorro from Málaga (€3.40, 45 minutes, two daily except Sunday and holidays), from Ronda (€5.50, 70 minutes, one daily except Sunday and holidays) and Seville (€13.50, two hours, one daily). No buses run to El Chorro. Drivers can get there via Álora (south of El Chorro) or Ardales (west of El Chorro).

RONDA

pop 35,000 / elevation 744m

Perched on an inland plateau riven by the 100m fissure of El Tajo gorge and surrounded by the beautiful Serranía de Ronda, Ronda is the most dramatically sited of all the *pueblos blancos*. Just an hour north of the Costa del Sol, Ronda is a world away from the coastal scene. It attracts its quota of visitors, but many are day-trippers.

With its setting, quaint old Islamic town and a romantic place in Spanish folklore,

Ronda has fascinated travellers from Dumas to Hemingway and beyond. For most of the Islamic period, Ronda was the capital of an independent statelet, and its near-impregnable position kept it out of Christian hands until 1485. Modern-day alternative-lifestylers have set up home in and around the town, adding an arty touch.

Orientation

The old Muslim town, called La Ciudad, stands on the southern side of El Tajo. The newer town to the north has most of the accommodation and restaurants, and the bus and train stations. Three bridges span the gorge, the main one being the Puente Nuevo. Both parts of town end abruptly on their western side in cliffs plunging away to the valley of Río Guadalquivir.

Information

Banks and ATMs are mainly on Calle Virgen de la Paz and Plaza Carmen Abela.

Municipal tourist office (% 952 18 71 19; www.turismoderonda.es; Paseo de Blas Infante; 17 10am-

7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.15am-2pm & 3.30-6.30pm Sat, Sun & holidays) Helpful and friendly staff with a wealth of information on the town and region.

Regional tourist office (% 952 87 12 72; www.andalucia.org; Plaza de España 1; 17 9am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat)

Sights**PLAZA DE ESPAÑA & PUENTE NUEVO**

The majestic Puente Nuevo (New Bridge), spanning El Tajo from Plaza de España, the main square on the north side of the gorge, was completed in 1793. Folklore claims that its architect, Martín de Aldehuela, fell to his death while trying to engrave the date on the bridge's side. Chapter 10 of Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* tells how, early in the Spanish Civil War, the 'fascists' of a small town were clubbed and flailed by townspeople 'in the plaza on the top of the cliff above the river', then thrown over the cliff. The episode was based on real events in Ronda, though the perpetrators were from Málaga.

LA CIUDAD

The old Muslim town retains a typical medieval Islamic character of twisting narrow streets.

The first street to the left, after you cross the Puente Nuevo, leads down to the **Casa**

del Rey Moro (☎ 952 18 72 00; Calle Santo Domingo 17). This 18th-century house, supposedly built over the remains of an Islamic palace, is itself closed, but you can visit its cliff-top gardens and climb down **La Mina** (gardens & La Mina adult/child €4/2; h 10am-7pm), an Islamic-era stairway cut inside the rock right down to the bottom of the gorge (take care!).

Back uphill, enjoy the views from **Plaza María Auxiliadora**. Nearby is **Palacio de Mondragón** (☎ 952 87 84 50; admission €2; h 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat & Sun), now the town museum, built for Abomelic, the ruler of Ronda in 1314. Of its three courtyards, the Patio Mudéjar still preserves an Islamic character. A horseshoe arch leads into a small cliff-top garden.

A minute's walk southeast is Plaza Duquesa de Parcent, where the **Iglesia de Santa María La Mayor** (☎ 952 87 22 46; admission €3; h 10am-7pm Apr-Oct, 6pm Nov-Mar) stands on the site of Islamic Ronda's main mosque. The tower and the handsome galleries beside it date from Islamic times, and just inside the entrance is an arch, covered with Arabic inscriptions, which was the mosque's mihrab (prayer niche).

Nearby, the amusing **Museo del Bandolero** (☎ 952 87 77 85; Calle de Arniñán 65; admission €3; h 10.30am-8pm Apr-Sep, to 6pm Oct-Mar) is dedicated to the banditry for which central Andalucía was renowned in the 19th century.

Beside the museum, steps lead down to an impressive stretch of La Ciudad's old walls. Follow the path down to the beautiful 13th- and 14th-century **Baños Árabes** (Arab Baths; ☎ 656 950937; Calle San Miguel; admission €2; h 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat & Sun). From the northern side of the nearby **Puente Viejo** (1616) you can make your way back up to Plaza de España via a small park along the gorge's edge.

PLAZA DE TOROS & AROUND

Ronda's elegant **bullring** (☎ 952 87 41 32; Calle Virgen de la Paz; admission €5; h 10am-8pm Apr-Sep, to 6pm Oct-Mar) is one of the oldest in Spain – it opened in 1785 – and has seen some of the most important events in bullfighting history. It was here, in the 18th and 19th centuries, that three generations of the Romero family – Francisco, Juan and Pedro – established the basics of modern bullfighting on foot. The bullring's museum is crammed with memorabilia such as blood-spattered costumes worn by Pedro Romero, and photos of famous fans including Hemingway and Orson Welles.

Vertiginous cliff-top views open out from **Paseo de Blas Infante**, behind the Plaza de Toros, and the leafy **Alameda del Tajo** nearby.

Festivals & Events

During the first two weeks of September, **Feria de Pedro Romero** (an orgy of partying, including the important flamenco Festival de Cante Grande) takes place. It culminates in the **Corridas Goyesca** (bullfights in honour of legendary bullfighter Pedro Romero).

Sleeping

Hotel Morales (☎ 952 87 15 38; Calle de Sevilla 51; s/d €25/42; a) A friendly, small hotel, which has 18 pleasant rooms and thorough information on the town and nearby parks.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

EnFrente Arte (☎ 952 87 90 88; www.enfrentearte.com; Calle Real 40; r incl breakfast & all drinks €82-106; a i s) Funky modern/oriental décor combined with a recreation room, pool, flowery patio, bar, sauna, film room and fantastic views of the Sierra de las Nieves make this a special place to stay.

Hotel San Francisco (☎ 952 87 32 99; www.hotelsanfrancisoronda.com; Calle María Cabrera 18; s/d incl breakfast €38/59; a v) This is possibly the best budget option, offering a warm welcome. It was recently refurbished and upgraded from *hostal* to hotel, with facilities to match.

Hotel Alavera de los Baños (☎ 952 87 91 43; www.andalucia.com/alavera; Hoyo San Miguel s/n; s/d incl breakfast €50/85; a s) Taking its cue from the Arab baths next door, the Alavera continues the Hispanic-Islamic theme, with oriental décor and tasty Arabic-inspired cuisine.

Hotel San Gabriel (☎ 952 19 03 92; www.hotelsan gabriel.com; Calle José M Hologado 19; s/d €73/96; a) This charming, historic hotel, run by a delightful family, is filled with antiques and photographs offering insights into Ronda's history.

Hotel Montelirio (☎ 952 87 38 55; www.hotelmontelirio.com; Calle Tenorio 8; s/d €100/150; a s) Sensitively converted mansion with sumptuous fittings and magical views of Ronda's gorge.

Parador de Ronda (☎ 952 87 75 00; www.parador.es; Plaza de España s/n; s/d €129/161; p a i s) More gorge-side luxury!

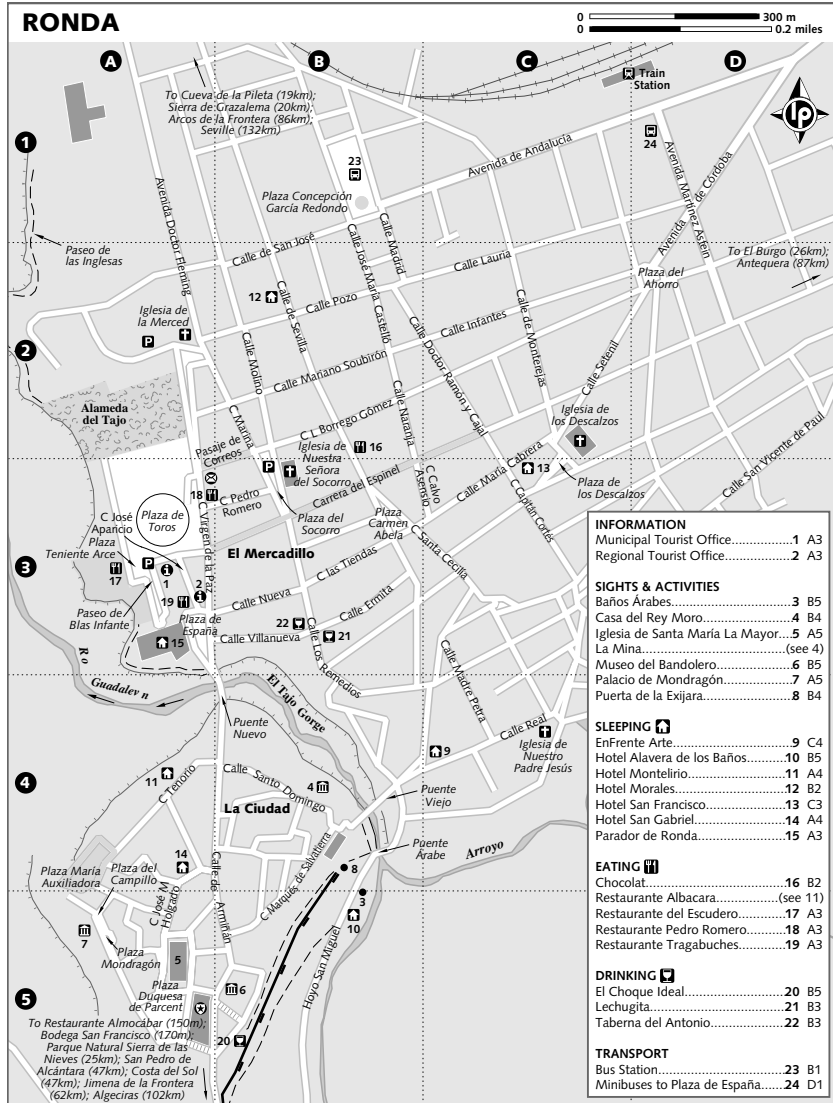
Eating

Traditional Ronda food is hearty mountain fare that's big on stews, trout, game such as rabbit, partridge and quail, and, of course, oxtail.

Chocolat (Calle Seville 18; breakfast from €2.20) A sophisticated café placed next door to Hotel San Cayetano. Choose from a long list of teas, coffees, breakfasts and a bogging array of cakes and pastries at this elegant café.

Bar Restaurant Almocábar (☎ 952 87 59 77; Calle Ruedo Alameda 5; tapas €1.50, mains €10-14; h 1.30-5pm & 8pm-1am Wed-Mon) In the Barrio San Francisco, Almocábar is an excellent authentic tapas bar, barely touched by the tourist hordes at the top of town.

Restaurante Pedro Romero (☎ 952 87 11 10; Calle Virgen de la Paz 18; mains €15-18) This celebrated eatery, dedicated to bullfighting, turns out classic Ronda dishes – a good place to try the oxtail.



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Restaurante Albacara (☎ 952 16 11 84; Calle Tenorio 8; meals €15-19) Situated in the old stables of gorge-side Hotel Montelirio, the Albacara serves up creative meals.

Restaurante del Escudero (☎ 952 87 13 67; Paseo de Blas Infante 1; mains €17-21; 𠂇 closed Sun evening & Mon) Tragabuches' (see below) sister restaurant with more-reasonable prices, is set in an attractive garden.

Restaurante Tragabuches (☎ 952 19 02 91; Calle José Aparicio 1; mains €26-9; 𠂇 closed Mon) Sleek, modern Tragabuches is famous for its creativity. Try venison and sweet potatoes, or pork trotters with squid and sunflower seeds.

Drinking

El Choque Ideal (☎ 952 16 19 18; www.elchoqueideal.com; Calle Espíritu Santo 9; 𠂇 9.30am-3am Feb-Oct, 1pm-1am Nov-Jan) This funky café has fantastic views. It puts on a host of events from films out on the terrace to live bands.

A modest nightlife zone centres on Calle Los Remedios with the ever-popular **Taberna del Antonio** (Calle Los Remedios 22) and **Lechugueta** (Calle Los Remedios 25). Down in the Barrio San Francisco try the heaving **Bodega San Francisco** (Calle Ruedo Alameda).

Getting There & Away

BUS

From the **bus station** (Plaza Concepción García Redondo 2), **Los Amarillos** (☎ 952 18 70 61) goes to Málaga (€8.50, two hours, at least four daily), Grazalema (€2.30, 35 minutes, two daily) and Seville (€10, 2½ hours, three to six daily); **Comes** (☎ 952 87 1992) has three or four buses daily to Arcos de la Frontera (€7.50, two hours), Jerez (€10, 2½ hours) and Cádiz (€13, 2½ hours); and **Portillo** (☎ 952 87 22 62) runs to Málaga (€9.50, 1½ hours, at least three daily) via Marbella.

TRAIN

The **train station** (☎ 952 87 16 73; Avenida de Andalucía) is on the highly scenic Bobadilla-Algeciras line. Trains run to/from Algeciras (€6.50 to €16, 1¼ hours, six daily), Granada (€11.50, 2½ hours, three daily) via Antequera, Córdoba (€18 to €22, 2½ hours, two daily) and Málaga (€5.50, two hours, one daily except Sunday). For Seville, change at Bobadilla or Antequera.

Getting Around

Minibuses operate every 30 minutes to Plaza de España from Avenida Martínez Astein, across the road from the train station.

AROUND RONDA

The beautiful green hills of the Serranía de Ronda, dotted with white-coloured villages, stretch in all directions from Ronda. This area has many traditional houses converted into gorgeous rural accommodation. For information try Ronda's municipal tourist office, www.serraniaronda.org and www.rusticblue.com.

Cueva de la Pileta

Palaeolithic paintings of horses, goats, fish and even a seal, dating from 20,000 to 25,000 years ago, are preserved in this large **cave** (☎ 952 16 73 43; adult/student/child €6.50/3/2.50; 𠂇 hourly tours 10am-1pm & 4-6pm), 20km southwest of Ronda. You'll be guided by kerosene lamp and one of the knowledgeable Bullón family from the farm in the valley below. A family member found the paintings in 1905. The Cueva de la Pileta is 250m (signposted) off the Benaolán-Cortes de la Frontera road, 4km from Benaolán. Guides speak a little English. If it's busy, you may have to wait, but you can phone ahead to book a particular time.

Parque Natural Sierra de las Nieves

This 180-sq-km protected area, southeast of Ronda, offers some good walks. Torrecilla (1910m), the highest peak in the western half of Andalucía, is a five- to six-hour (return) walk from Área Recreativa Los Quejigales, which is 10km east by unpaved road from the A376 Ronda-San Pedro de Alcántara road.

Hotel La Casa Grande (☎ 952 16 02 32; www.hotel-lacasagrande.com; Calle Mesones 1; d €66; a i) In the likeable small rural town El Burgo, within striking distance of the park, is the charming Casa Grande, which has spacious, well-furnished rooms, a cosy sitting room and a restaurant.

ANTEQUERA

pop 39,000 / elevation 575m

Set on the edge of a plain 50km north of Málaga, with rugged mountains to the south and east, the sleepy provincial town of Antequera is a mass of red-tiled roofs punctuated by 30 church towers. Here hides one of the richest historical legacies in Andalucía. Antequera's 'golden age' was during the 15th and 16th centuries.

Orientation & Information

The old heart of Antequera is below the north western side of the hill, crowned by the Islamic Alcazaba. The main street, Calle Infante Don

Fernando, runs northwest from Plaza de San Sebastián.

Tourist office (☎ 952 70 25 05; www.turismoantequera.com; Plaza de San Sebastián 7; 𠂇 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun)

Sights

The main approach to the **Alcazaba** (Fortress) passes through the **Arco de los Gigantes**, built in 1585 and incorporating stones with Roman inscriptions. What remains of the Alcazaba affords great views. Just below it is the **Colegiata de Santa María la Mayor** (Plaza Santa María; 𠂇 10am-2pm & 4.30-6.30pm Tue-Fri, 10.30am-2pm Sat, 11.30am-2pm Sun), a 16th-century church with a beautiful Renaissance façade.

The pride of the **Museo Municipal** (Plaza del Coso Viejo; tour €3; 𠂇 10am-1.30pm & 4.30-6.30pm Tue-Sat, 11am-1.30pm Sun) is **Etebo**, a beautiful 1.4m bronze Roman statue of a patrician's 'toy boy', unearthed near Antequera in the 1950s – one of the finest pieces of Roman sculpture found in Spain.

Only the most jaded would fail to be impressed by the **Iglesia del Carmen** (Plaza del Carmen; admission €1.50; 𠂇 10am-2pm) and its marvellous 18th-century Churrigueresque retable. Carved in red pine by Antequera's Antonio Primo, it's spangled with statues of angels, saints, popes and bishops.

Some of Europe's largest megalithic tombs stand on the fringes of Antequera. The **Dolmen de Menga** and **Dolmen de Viera** (admission free; 𠂇 9am-6pm Tue-Sat, 9.30am-2.30pm Sun) are 1km from the city centre, on the road leading northeast to the A45. In about 2500 or 2000 BC the local folk managed to transport dozens of huge rocks from nearby hills to construct these earth-covered tombs for their chieftains. Menga is 25m long, 4m high and composed of 32 slabs, the largest weighing 180 tonnes.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel San Sebastián (☎ /fax 952 84 42 39; Plaza de San Sebastián 5; s/d €27/43; a) You can't get much more central than this smartly refurbished San Sebastián.

Hotel Coso Viejo (☎ 952 Calle Encarnación 9; www.hotelcosoviejo.es; s/d incl breakfast €47/70; p a) A converted 17th-century neoclassical palace in the heart of Antequera. The comfortable and stylish rooms are set around a handsome patio with a fountain. There is a cafeteria and restaurant.

Parador de Antequera (☎ 952 84 02 61; www.parador.es; Paseo García del Olmo s/n; s/d €95/118; p a s)

In a quiet area north of the bullring, the *parador* is set amid pleasant gardens with wonderful views.

Restaurante La Espuela (☎ 952 70 30 31; Calle San Agustín 1; mains €12-16; 𠂇 closed Mon) In a charming cul-de-sac off Calle Infante Don Fernando, La Espuela plays background jazz and offers a fine selection of Antequeran specialities and international fare.

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (Paseo García de Olmos/s/n) is 1km north of the city centre. At least 12 daily buses run to/from Málaga (€6, one hour), and three to five each to/from Osuna (€6, one hour), Seville (Prado de San Sebastián; €10.50, two hours), Granada (€7, 1¼ hours) and Córdoba (€8, 1½ hours).

The **train station** (Avenida de la Estación) is 1.5km north of the city centre. Two to four trains a day travel to/from Granada (€6.50 to €7.50, 1½ hours), Seville (€12, 1¼ hours) and Ronda (€5.50, 1¼ hours). For Málaga or Córdoba, change at Bobadilla.

AROUND ANTEQUERA

El Torcal

Sixteen kilometres south of Antequera, Nature has sculpted this 1336m **mountain** into some of the weirdest, most wonderful rock formations you'll see anywhere. Its 12 sq km of gnarled, pillared and deeply fissured limestone began life as sea bed about 150 million years ago.

Two marked walking trails, the 1.5km 'Ruta Verde' (Green Route) and the 3km 'Ruta Amarilla' (Yellow Route), start and end near the information centre.

Laguna de Fuente de Piedra

This shallow lake, close to the A92, 20km northwest of Antequera, is one of Europe's two main breeding grounds for the spectacular **greater flamingo** (the other is France's Camargue). After a wet winter as many as 20,000 pairs of flamingos breed at the lake. They arrive in January or February, with the chicks hatching in April and May, and stay till about August.

The **Centro de Información Fuente de Piedra** (☎ 952 11 17 15; 𠂇 10am-2pm & 4-6pm), at the lake, on the edge of Fuente de Piedra village, hires out binoculars. Three to six daily buses (€1, 30 minutes) run between Antequera bus station and Fuente de Piedra village.

EAST OF MÁLAGA

The coast east of Málaga, sometimes called the Costa del Sol Oriental, is less developed than the coast to the west, but is striving hard to fill the gaps.

Behind the coast, **La Axarquía**, a region dotted with white villages (of Islamic origin) linked by snaking mountain roads, climbs to the *sierras* along the border of Granada province. There's good walking here (best in April and May, and from mid-September to late October). Once impoverished and forgotten, La Axarquía has experienced a surge of tourism and an influx of expat residents in recent years.

Nerja

pop 14,000

Nerja, 56km east of Málaga, is older, whiter and a little more charming than the towns to its west, though still inundated by (mainly British) tourism. The **tourist office** (☎ 952 52 15 31; www.nerja.org; Puerta del Mar; h 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) is just off the Balcón de Europa promenade and lookout point, which has gorgeous coastal vistas. The best beach is **Playa Burriana**, on the eastern side of town.

SLEEPING

Rooms in the better hotels get booked up well in advance for the summer period.

Hostal Mena (☎ 952 52 05 41; hostalmena@hotmail.com; Calle El Barrio 15; s/d €26/39) A short distance west of the tourist office, this friendly *hostal* has immaculate rooms (some with sea views) and a pleasant garden.

Hostal Miguel (☎ 952 52 15 23; www.hostalmiguel.com; Calle Almirante Ferrandiz 31; s/d €36/49) Straddled between two streets in the old town, this friendly English-run place has good rooms with a Moroccan theme, and a roof terrace.

Hostal Marissal (☎ 952 52 01 99; www.marissal.com; Balcón de Europa; s/d €45/60; a i) Right by the Balcón de Europa, the Marissal delights with its soothingly clean, quiet and comfortable rooms decked with tasteful art, and a good restaurant.

Hotel Paraiso del Mar (☎ 952 52 16 21; www.hotelparaisodelmar.com; Calle Prolongación de Carabeo; s/d €104/120; p a s) To the east of the centre above Playa Carabeo, the Paraiso del Mar has great sea views and range of spa facilities.

Hotel Carabeo (☎ 952 52 54 44; www.hotelcarabeo.com; Calle Carabeo 34; d/ste incl breakfast €91/198;

p a i s) This small family-run hotel is full of stylish antiques and set above well-tended gardens right on the cliff-edge.

EATING

Merendero Ayo (☎ 952 52 12 53; Playa Burriana; mains €9-13) One of the best feeds in town is at this always-busy open-air restaurant on Nerja's best beach. You can down a plate of paella, cooked on the spot in great sizzling pans, then go back for a refill.

Casa Luque (Plaza Cavana 2; mains €15-19) Casa Luque has a wonderfully panoramic terrace and, with an elegant haute-Med menu, more character than most Nerja eateries.

A Taste of India (☎ 952 52 00 43; Calle Carabeo 51; mains €8-13) This fantastic Goan-style Indian place serves delicious coconut curry and other spicy meals cooked on the spot.

Restaurante 34 (☎ 952 52 54 44; www.hotelcarabeo.com; Hotel Carabeo, Calle Carabeo 34; mains €15-24) Truly gorgeous setting both indoors and outside overlooking the sea. Delicious and exotic food combinations but nouvelle-size portions.

ENTERTAINMENT

Nightlife focuses on the aptly named Tutti-Frutti Plaza, with an international clutch of bars and clubs. Check out what's on at the admirable **Centro Cultural Villa de Nerja** (☎ 952 52 38 63; Calle Granada 45).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

From the N340 near the top of Calle Pintada, **Alsina Graells** (☎ 952 52 15 04) runs to Málaga (€3.50, one hour, 14 daily), Almuñécar (€2.30, 25 minutes, up to 13 daily), Almería (€11, 2½ hours, nine daily) and Granada (€8.50, 1½ hours, two to three daily).

Around Nerja

The big tourist attraction is the **Cueva de Nerja** (☎ 952 52 95 20; adult/child €7/3.50; h 10am-2pm & 4-6.30pm, later in Jul & Aug), just off the N340, 3km east of town. This enormous cavern remains impressive, like some vast underground cathedral, despite the crowds traipsing through it. About 14 buses run daily from Málaga and Nerja, except Sunday.

Further east the coast becomes more rugged, and with your own wheels you can head out to **Playa El Cañuelo** and other scenic, if stony, beaches down tracks from the N340, around 8km to 10km from Nerja.

Cómpeta & Around

elevation 640m

The hill village of Cómpeta (pop 3000), 17km inland, is a popular base for exploring La Axarquía and the mountains, although it's in danger of being overwhelmed by heavy construction traffic and estate agents as the *costa* building boom spreads uncontrollably up the inland valleys. There's a **tourist office** (☎ 952 55 36 85; Avenida de la Constitución; h 10am-2pm & 3-6pm Wed-Sun, Tue-Sat Jul-Sep) by the bus stop at the foot of the village. Three buses run daily from Málaga (€3.20, two hours) via Torre del Mar.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

A few kilometres down the valley from Cómpeta, **Árchez** has a beautiful Almohad minaret next to its church. From Árchez a road winds 8km southwest to **Arenas**, where a steep but drivable track climbs to the ruined Islamic **Castillo de Bentomiz**, which crowns a hilltop. **Los Caballos del Mosquín** (☎ 608 658108; www.horse-riding-andalucia.com), just outside Canillas de Albaida, 2km northwest of Cómpeta, offers horse rides in the mountains from one hour to several days. An exhilarating long walk is up the dramatically peaked **El Lucero** (1779m), from whose summit, on a clear day, you can see both Granada and Morocco. This is a demanding full-day return walk from Cómpeta, but it's possible to drive as far up as Puerto Blanquillo pass (1200m) via a slightly hairy mountain track from Canillas de Albaida. From Puerto Blanquillo a path climbs 200m to another pass, the Puerto de Cómpeta. One kilometre down from there, past a quarry, the summit path (1½ hours), marked by a signboard, diverges to the right across a stream bed, marked by a signboard.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel Balcón de Cómpeta (☎ 952 55 35 35; www.hotel-competa.com; Calle San Antonio 75; s/d €49/67; p a s w) Cómpeta's only hotel has comfortable rooms with balconies, a good restaurant, a bar, a big pool and a tennis court.

You can book houses, apartments and rooms through **Cómpeta Direct** (www.competa-direct.com).

The two best restaurants, both serving excellent and varied Spanish/international food, are **El Pilon** (☎ 952 55 35 12; Calle Laberinto; mains €10-15) and **Cortijo Paco** (☎ 952 55 36 47; Avenida Canillas 6; mains €10-15). In summer ask for an upstairs terrace table at either place.

CÓRDOBA PROVINCE

Córdoba city was capital of Al-Andalus when Al-Andalus was at its zenith, home to the glittering, cultured and tolerant courts of rulers such as caliph Abd ar-Rahman III and, fittingly, to one of the most magnificent of all Islamic buildings, the city's mesmerising Mezquita (Mosque). This romantic medieval architectural and cultural heritage is what draws visitors to Córdoba today. Beyond the city stretches an essentially rural province that produces some of Andalucía's best olive oil and wine, with many smaller towns, broad rolling plains and some attractive hill country.

CÓRDOBA

pop 302,000 / elevation 110m

Standing on a sweep of Río Guadalquivir with countryside stretching far in every direction around, Córdoba is both a sophisticated metropolis and the heart of a very rural part of Andalucía. Apart from its great historical attractions, it's also today a thriving modern city with great restaurants, thronged taverns and a hip nightlife. The best time to visit is between mid-April and mid-June, when the skies are big and blue, the temperatures are just right, and the city's beautiful patios and old lanes are at their best, dripping with foliage and blooms.

History

The Roman colony of Corduba, founded in 152 BC, became capital of Baetica province, covering most of today's Andalucía. In 711 Córdoba fell to the Muslim invaders and soon became the Islamic capital on the Iberian Peninsula. It was here in 756 that Abd ar-Rahman I set himself up as emir of Al-Andalus.

Córdoba's heyday came under Abd ar-Rahman III (912-61), who in 929 named himself caliph to set the seal on Al-Andalus' independence of the Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad. Córdoba was then the biggest city in Western Europe and it had dazzling mosques, libraries, observatories and aqueducts, a university and highly skilled artisans in leather, metal, textiles and glazed tiles. Abd ar-Rahman III's multicultural court was frequented by Jewish, Arab and Christian scholars, even if Córdoba was certainly not the fabulously tolerant paradise that's sometimes imagined.

Towards the end of the 10th century, Al-Mansour (Almanzor), a fearsome general,

CÓRDOBA

INFORMATION

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SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		Hotel Albucahis	26 C3	ENTERTAINMENT	
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Museo de Bellas Artes	(see 13)	EATING		TRANSPORT	
Museo Julio Romero de Torres	13 D3	Amaltea	32 C4	Bus No 3 to City Centre	47 A1
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Posada de los Naranjos	15 C4	Bodega Campos	34 D3	Bus Station	49 A1
Posada del Potro	16 D3	Casa Pepe de la Judería	35 C4		
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Puerta del Perdón	18 C4				

took the reins of power and struck terror into Christian Spain with over 50 *razzias* (forays) in 20 years. When he destroyed the cathedral at Santiago de Compostela, home of the Santiago cult, he had its bells carried to Córdoba by Christian slaves and hung upside down as oil lamps in the Mezquita. But after his death bands of Berber troops terrorised Córdoba and the caliphate descended into anarchy.

Córdoba's intellectual traditions, however, lived on. Twelfth-century Córdoba produced two of the most celebrated of all Al-Andalus' scholars: the Muslim Averroës (Ibn Rushd) and the Jewish Maimonides, polymaths best remembered for their philosophical efforts to harmonise religious faith with reason. Córdoba's intellectual influence was still being felt in Christian Europe many centuries later.

Córdoba was captured in 1236 by Fernando III of Castilla and became a provincial town of shrinking importance. The decline began to be reversed only with the arrival of industry in the late 19th century.

Orientation

The fascinating part of Córdoba is the World Heritage-listed medieval city, a labyrinth of narrow streets focused on the Mezquita, which is immediately north of Río Guadalquivir. The main square of modern Córdoba is Plaza de las Tendillas, 500m north of the Mezquita.

Information

Most banks and ATMs are around Plaza de las Tendillas and Avenida del Gran Capitán. The bus and train stations have ATMs.

Ch@t (Calle Claudio Marcelo 15; per hr €2; 10am-1pm & 5-9.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) Many terminals and efficient internet access.

Hospital Reina Sofia (% 957 21 70 00; Avenida de Menéndez Pidal s/n) Located 1.5km southwest of the Mezquita.

Luque Libros (Calle José Cruz Conde 19) Sells city and Michelin maps cheaper than the tourist shops near the Mezquita.

Municipal tourist office (% 957 20 05 22; Plaza de Judá Levi; 8.30am-2.30pm Mon-Fri)

Policía Nacional (% 95 747 75 00; Avenida Doctor Fleming 2)

Post office (Calle José Cruz Conde 15)

Regional tourist office (% 957 47 12 35; Calle de Torrijos 10; 9.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun, to 8pm Mon-Sat Apr-Jul) Facing the western side of the Mezquita.

Sights & Activities

Opening hours for Córdoba's sights change frequently, so check with the tourist offices for updated times. Most places (except the Mezquita) close on Monday. Closing times are generally an hour or two earlier in winter than summer.

MEZQUITA

It's hard to exaggerate the beauty of the Córdoba **mosque** (% 957 47 05 12; adult/child €8/4; 10am-7pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, to 6pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar, 9-10.45am & 1.30-6.30pm Sun year-round), one of the great creations of Islamic architecture, with its shimmering golden mosaics and rows of red-and-white-striped arches disappearing into infinity. Even the large numbers of tourists passing through the place today cannot destroy the mesmerising effect of the Mezquita's ever-changing perspectives and plays of light.

Emir Abd ar-Rahman I founded the Mezquita in 785 on the site of a Visigothic church that had been partitioned between Muslims and Christians, reputedly purchasing the Christian half from the Christian community. The Mezquita was Córdoba's Friday Mosque, always the most important building in an Islamic city, where men must go for prayers every Friday at noon. The Mezquita was enlarged and embellished by Abd ar-Rahman II in the 9th century, Al-Hakim II in the 960s, and Al-Mansour in the late 10th century. Ultimately it extended over nearly 23,000 sq metres in total, one of the biggest of all mosques. Its 14,000-sq-metre prayer hall incorporated 1293 columns, some of which had stood in the Visigothic church, in Roman buildings in Córdoba, and even in ancient Carthage. Today 856 of the columns remain.

Architecturally revolutionary, the Mezquita recalls in a unique way the yards of desert homes that formed the original Islamic prayer spaces – in this case with a roof over the worshippers' heads, supported by a forest of columns and arches suggestive of an oasis palm grove. What we see today is the Mezquita's final Islamic form with two big changes: a 16th-century cathedral plonked right in the middle (which explains the often-used description 'Mezquita-Catedral'); and the closing of the 19 doors, which communicated the Mezquita with the outside world and filled it with light. Also missing, of course, are the

CÓRDOBA'S PATIOS

For centuries, Córdoba's beautiful leafy patios have provided shade during the searing heat of summer, a haven of peace and quiet, and a place to talk and entertain. They probably originated with the Romans, and the tradition was continued by the Arabs, with the happy addition of a central fountain.

In the first half of May, you'll notice 'Patío' signs in Córdoba's streets and alleys; this means that you're invited to view what is for the rest of the year hidden behind heavy wooden doors or wrought-iron gates. At this time of year, when new blooms proliferate, the patios are at their prettiest. Many patios participate in the annual Concurso de Patios Cordobéses, a competition with prizes for the best patios. The tourist office can provide a map of patios that are open for viewing. If you don't have a lot of time, those in the vicinity of Calle de San Basilio, about 400m west of the Mezquita, are some of the best.

During the concurso, the patios are generally open from 5pm to midnight weekdays, and noon to midnight weekends. Entry is usually free but sometimes there's a container for donations.

rows and rows of kneeling men, praying in unison, who would have filled the Mezquita when it was a *mezquita*.

The main entrance is the **Puerta del Perdón**, a 14th-century Mudéjar gateway on Calle Cardenal Herrero, with the ticket office immediately inside. Beside the Puerta del Perdón is a 16th- and 17th-century tower built around the remains of the Mezquita's minaret. Inside the gateway is the pretty **Patio de los Naranjos** (Courtyard of the Orange Trees), originally the mosque's ablutions courtyard, from which a door leads inside the prayer hall itself.

From this door you can see straight ahead to the mihrab, the prayer niche in a mosque's *qibla* wall (the wall indicating the direction of Mecca) that is the focus of prayer. The first 12 transverse aisles inside the entrance, a forest of pillars and arches, comprise the original **8th-century mosque**. The columns support two tiers of arches, necessary to give the building sufficient height to maintain its sense of openness.

In the centre of the building is the Christian cathedral, surrounded by Islamic aisles, pillars and arches. Just past the cathedral's western end, the approach to the mihrab begins, marked by heavier, more elaborate arches. Immediately in front of the mihrab is the **maksura**, the royal prayer enclosure (today enclosed by railings) with its intricately interwoven arches and lavishly decorated domes. The **maksura** and mihrab were created by Caliph Al-Hakim II in the 960s and are the most lavishly decorated sections of the Mezquita. The decoration of the **mihrab portal** – the Córdoba caliphate's artistic high point – incorporates

1600kg of gold mosaic cubes, a gift from the Christian emperor of Byzantium, Nicephoras II Phocas. The mosaics give this part of the Mezquita something of the mysterious aura of a Byzantine church.

After the Christians captured Córdoba, the Mezquita was used as a church. In the 16th century the centre of the building was torn out to allow construction of a cathedral comprising the **Capilla Mayor**, now adorned with a rich 17th-century jasper and marble **retablo**, and the **coro** (choir), with fine 18th-century carved-mahogany stalls. The forests of Islamic arches and pillars provide a magnificent setting for the Christian structures, but if you think of the building in its original terms, you've got to agree with Carlos I, who reputedly exclaimed to the church authorities: 'You have destroyed something that was unique in the world'.

JUDERÍA

Jews were among the most dynamic citizens of Islamic Córdoba, holding posts as administrators, doctors, jurists and philosophers. The medieval Judería, extending northwest from the Mezquita almost to Avenida del Gran Capitán, is today a maze of narrow streets and small plazas, whitewashed buildings with flowery window boxes, and wrought-iron doorways giving glimpses of plant-filled patios.

The beautiful little 14th-century **Sinagoga** (Calle de los Judíos 20; adult/EU citizen €0.30/free; 11 9.30am-2pm & 3.30-5.30pm Tue-Sat, to 1.30pm Sun & holidays) is one of Spain's very few surviving medieval synagogues. It retains its upstairs women's gallery, and Hebrew inscriptions and intricate Mudéjar patterns in stucco. The

Casa Andalusi (Calle de los Judíos 12; admission €2.50; 11 10am-7pm) is a 12th-century house decked out with exhibits on Córdoba's medieval Islamic culture, but also including a Roman mosaic in the cellar.

Nearby, the **Museo Taurino** (Bullfighting Museum; 957 20 10 56; Plaza de Maimónides; admission €3, free Fri; 11 10am-2pm & 4.30-6.30pm Tue-Sat Oct-Apr, to 2pm & 5.30-7.30pm Tue-Sat May-Jun & Sep-Oct, 8.30am-2.30pm Tue-Sat Jul-Aug, 9.30am-2.30pm Sun & holidays year-round) celebrates Córdoba's legendary *toreros*, with rooms dedicated to El Cordobés and Manolete, and even the forlorn, pegged-out hide of Islero, the bull that fatally gored Manolete in 1947.

ALCÁZAR DE LOS REYES CRISTIANOS

Just southwest of the Mezquita, the **Castle of the Christian Monarchs** (957 42 01 51; Campo Santo de Los Mártires s/n; admission €4, free Fri; 11 10am-2pm & 4.30-6.30pm Tue-Sat mid-Oct-Apr, 10am-2pm & 5.30-7.30pm Tue-Sat May-Jun & Sep-mid-Oct, 8.30am-2.30pm Tue-Sat Jul-Aug, 9.30am-2.30pm Sun & holidays year-round) began as a palace and fort for Alfonso X in the 13th century. From 1490 to 1821 the Inquisition operated from here. Its gardens, full of fish ponds, fountains, orange trees, flowers and topiary, are among the most beautiful in Andalucía. The building houses an old royal bathhouse, the Baños Califales.

PUENTE ROMANO & AROUND

Just south of the Mezquita, the much-restored **Puente Romano** (Roman Bridge) crosses the Guadalquivir. Just downstream, near the northern bank, is a restored **Islamic water wheel**.

At the southern end of the bridge is the **Torre de la Calahorra** (957 29 39 29; Puente Romano s/n; adult/child €4/2.50; 11 10am-2pm & 4.30-8.30pm May-Sep, to 6pm Oct-Apr), a 14th-century tower with a curious museum highlighting the intellectual achievements of Islamic Córdoba and focusing rather rose-tintedly on its reputation for religious tolerance.

MUSEO ARQUEOLÓGICO

Córdoba's excellent **archaeological museum** (957 47 40 11; Plaza de Jerónimo Páez 7; adult/EU citizen €1.50/free; 11 3-8pm Tue, 9am-8pm Wed-Sat, to 3pm Sun & holidays), provides a real insight into pre-Islamic Córdoba. A reclining stone lion takes pride of place in the Iberian section, and the Roman period is well represented from large mosaics and gladiatorial tombstones to elegant ceramics and tinted glass bowls. The upstairs is devoted to medieval

Córdoba, including a graceful Byzantine bronze stag from Medina Azahara.

PLAZA DEL POTRO

This attractive, pedestrianised plaza, 400m northeast of the Mezquita, was a celebrated hang-out for traders and adventurers in the 16th and 17th centuries. Miguel de Cervantes lived for a while in the **Posada del Potro** (957 48 50 18; Plaza del Potro 10; admission free; 11 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri Aug-May), then an inn (which he described in *Don Quijote* as a 'den of thieves') and today an exhibition hall.

A former hospital houses what is, surprisingly enough, Córdoba's most visited museum, the **Museo Julio Romero de Torres** (957 49 19 09; Plaza del Potro 1; admission €3, free Fri; 11 10am-2pm & 4.30-6.30pm Tue-Sat mid-Oct-Apr, to 2pm & 5.30-7.30pm Tue-Sat May-Jun & Sep-mid-Oct, 8.30am-2.30pm Jul-Aug, 9.30am-2.30pm Sun & holidays year-round), devoted to revered local painter Julio Romero de Torres (1873-1930). Romero de Torres specialised in sensual portraits of Cordoban women – voyeuristic eroticism to some, the quintessence of all things Andalusian to others. In the same building is the **Museo de Bellas Artes** (Fine Arts Museum; adult/EU citizen €1.50/free; 11 3-8pm Tue, 9am-8pm Wed-Sat, to 3pm Sun & holidays), with a collection mainly of other Cordoban artists.

HAMMAM BAÑOS ÁRABES

Follow the lead of the medieval Cordobans and indulge your senses at the recently renovated **Arab baths** (957 48 47 46; www.hammampain.com/cordoba; Calle Corregidor Luis de la Cerda; bath/bath & massage €12/16; 11 2hr sessions at 10am, noon, 2pm, 4pm, 6pm, 8pm & 10pm), where you pass between baths of different temperatures and can even enjoy an aromatherapy massage, tea, hookah and Arabic sweets. Swimming costumes are available to rent if you don't have your own.

Festivals & Events

Spring and early summer is the chief festival time for Córdoba.

Concurso & Festival de Patios Cordobeses (Early May) See the boxed text Córdoba's Patios (opposite); at the same time there's a busy cultural programme.

Feria de Mayo (Last week of May/first days of June) Ten days of party time for Córdoba, with a giant fair, concerts and bullfights.

Festival Internacional de Guitarra (Late June/early July) Two-week celebration of the guitar, with live classical, flamenco, rock, blues and more; top names play in the Alcázar gardens at night.

Sleeping

Córdoba heaves with budget accommodation (though finding single rooms for a decent price is not easy). Many lodgings are built around some of the city's charming patios. Booking ahead is wise from March to October and essential during the main festivals. Prices are generally reduced from November to mid-March, and some places also cut their rates during hot July and August.

BUDGET

Hostal El Reposo de Bagdad (% 957 20 28 54; www.hostalbagdad.eresmas.com; Calle Fernández Ruano 11; s/d €22/38) Hidden in a tiny street in the Judería, this 200-year-old house is an interesting and beautiful place to stay, at bargain prices. The rooms are simple with crisp, white linen, and there's an Arabic *tetería* (tea shop) on the ground floor, off a gorgeous leafy patio.

Hostal Osio de Córdoba (% /fax 957 48 51 65; Calle Osio 6; d €40; a) Great facilities are available here at a very reasonable price. This hotel is a refurbished mansion with two patios and the proprietor speaks English.

Hostal Séneca (% /fax 957 47 32 34; Calle Conde y Luque 7; s/d ind breakfast €44/46) The charming, friendly Séneca occupies a rambling house with a marvellous pebbled patio that's filled with greenery.

Hotel Maestro (% 957 47 24 10; Calle Romero Barros 4; s/d €35/49, apt €58; p a) This place has comfortably furnished rooms with all the mod cons. The helpful reception staff speak English. The same proprietors run an equally good *hostal* a few doors down (Number 16).

MIDRANGE

Hotel González (% 957 47 98 19; hotelgonzalez@wanadoo.es; Calle Manriquez 3; d €66; a) Rich baroque décor with golden everything and numerous paintings in a building that was once home to the son of Córdoba's favourite artist, Julio Romero de Torres. The restaurant is set in the pretty flower-filled patio and the friendly proprietors speak fluent English.

Hotel Mezquita (% 957 47 55 85; hotelmezquita@wanadoo.es; Plaza Santa Catalina 1; s/d €36/69; a) One of the best-value places in town, this hotel is right opposite the Mezquita itself. The 16th-century mansion has large, elegant rooms, some with views of the great mosque.

Hotel Albucahis (% /fax 957 47 86 25; Calle Buen Pastor 11; s/d €45/75; p a) Tucked away in a quiet location in the Judería is the Albucahis' big

plus. Décor is in stern medieval style, though the rooms are clean and plain, in khaki and white.

Hotel Lola (% 957 20 03 05; www.hotelconencan.tolola.com; Calle Romero 3; d ind breakfast €114; p a) A quirky and individual hotel with large antique beds and full of smaller items that you just wish you could take home. You can eat your breakfast on the roof terrace overlooking the Mezquita bell tower.

Casa de los Azulejos (% 957 47 00 00; www.casa.de.los.azulejos.com/marco.htm; Calle Fernando Colón 5; d low/high season €85/130; a i) Andalucía meets Mexico in this gorgeously stylish hotel, where the patio is all banana trees, fluffy ferns and tall palms, bathed in sunlight. The rooms are in a colonial style, and there's a good Mexican restaurant downstairs.

TOP END

Hotel Amistad Córdoba (% 957 42 03 35; www.nh-hotels.com; Plaza de Maimónides 3; s/d €106/130; p a i) Occupying two 18th-century mansions with original Mudéjar patios, the Amistad is part of the modern NH chain with elegant rooms and all the requisite facilities including babysitting.

Parador Nacional Arruzafa (% 957 27 59 00; www.parador.es; Avenida de la Arruzafa s/n; s/d €116/145; p a s w) Best if you're driving, the *parador* is 3km north of the city centre. It's fabulously situated on the site of Abd ar-Rahman I's summer palace and is a modern affair amid lush green gardens where Europe's first palm trees were planted.

Eating

Dishes common to most Cordoban restaurants include *salmorejo*, a very thick tomato-based gazpacho, and *rabo de toro* (oxtail stew). Some restaurants feature recipes from Al-Andalus such as garlic soup with raisins, honeyed lamb, or meat stuffed with dates and nuts. The local tippie is wine from nearby Montilla and Moriles, similar to sherry but unfortified.

There are lots of places to eat right by the Mezquita. A few mostly better-value places are a short walk west into the Jewish quarter. A longer walk east or north turns up further options.

Bar Santos (Calle Magistral González Francés 3; tortillas €2.50) The legendary Santos serves the best *tortilla de patata* in town – eaten with plastic forks on paper plates, while gazing at the Mezquita. Don't miss it.

Taberna San Miguel (% 957 47 01 66; Plaza San Miguel 1; tapas €1.50, media-rationes €3-6; h closed Sun & Aug) Córdoba prides itself on its *tabernas* – busy bars where you can usually also sit down to eat. The San Miguel has been going strong since 1880 and, known locally as El Pisto (The Barrel), is full of local characters. You'll find a good range of dishes here and inexpensive Moriles wine waiting in jugs on the bar.

Amaltea (% 957 49 19 68; Ronda de Isasa 10; mains €6-10; v) Specialises in organic food and wine, with a good range of dishes including a delicious green salad with avocado and walnuts or Lebanese-style tabouleh.

Taberna Salinas (% 957 48 01 35; Calle Tundidores 3; tapas/rationes €2/8; h closed Sun & Aug) Dating back to 1879, this large patio restaurant fills up fast, developing a lively atmosphere. Try the delicious aubergines with honey or potatoes with garlic.

Comedor Árabe Andalusi (% 957 47 51 62; Calle Alfayatas 6; mains €8-11) Indulge your North African tastes at this low-seated, dimly-lit eatery where you can choose from *kofte*, *falafel*, *tagines* or bowls of fluffy couscous with chicken, lamb, greens and herbs.

Casa Pepe de la Judería (% 957 20 07 44; Calle Romero 1; mains €9-15) A great roof-terrace with views of the Mezquita and a labyrinth of dining rooms that are always packed. Down a complimentary glass of Montilla before launching into the house specials, including Cordoban oxtails or venison fillets.

El Churrasco (% 957 29 08 19; Calle Romero 16; mains €12; h closed Aug) The food is rich, the portions generous and the service attentive. Meaty dishes include the eponymous *churrasco*, a barbecued pork fillet with exotic Arabian sauce.

Bodega Campos (% 957 49 75 00; Calle de Lineros 32; tapas/rationes €5/11, mains €13-19; h closed Sun evenings) This atmospheric winery-cum-restaurant sports dozens of different rooms lined with oak barrels, and its own house Montilla. The restaurant, full of swankily dressed *cordobeses*, serves up a delicious array of meals. For a cheaper but no less enjoyable evening, try the huge plates of tapas in the bar.

Drinking

Córdoba's liveliest bars are mostly scattered around the newer parts of town and come alive at about 11pm or midnight on weekends. Most bars in the medieval centre close around midnight.

Amapola (% 957 47 37 40; Paseo de la Ribera 9; h noon-3am) This is where the young and beautiful lounge on green leather sofas and consume elaborate cocktails. The DJ whips up a storm of music in his booth. Party in style till late at night.

Soul (% 957 49 15 80; Calle de Alfonso XIII 3; h 9am-3am Mon-Fri & 10am-3am Sat & Sun) A friendly DJ bar that gets hot and busy on weekends, attracting a hip and arty crowd.

Bodega Guzmán (Calle de los Judíos 7) Don't miss this atmospheric old-city favourite, with Montilla from the barrel.

Milenium (Calle Alfáros 33) A popular gay haunt that plays a broad range of ambient house.

Entertainment

Jazz Café (% 957 47 19 28; Calle Espartería s/n; admission free; h 8am-late) This fabulous laid-back bar puts on regular live jazz and jam sessions.

Gran Teatro de Córdoba (% 957 48 02 37; www.teatro.cordoba.com in Spanish; Avenida del Gran Capitán 3) This theatre hosts a busy programme of concerts, theatre, dance and film.

Surfer Rosa (% 957 75 22 72; Feria El Arenal 4; admission free; h 11pm-late Thu-Sat) This is a huge and popular riverbank techno and breakbeat club in the Recinto Ferial El Arenal (location of the Feria de Mayo). Live bands play here frequently.

Shopping

Córdoba is known for its *cuero repujado* (embossed-leather) goods, silver jewellery (particularly filigree) and attractive pottery. Craft shops congregate around the Mezquita. **Meryan** (% 95 747 59 02; Calleja de las Flores) is a top place for embossed leather.

Getting There & Away

BUS
The **bus station** (% 957 40 40 40; Plaza de las Tres Culturas) is 1km northwest of Plaza de las Tendillas, behind the train station. Destinations include Seville (€9.50, 1½ hours, six daily), Granada (€10.50, three hours, nine daily), Madrid (€14, 4½ hours, six daily), Málaga (€10.50, 2½ hours, five daily) and Jaén (€7, 1½ hours, seven daily).

TRAIN

Córdoba's **train station** (% 957 40 02 02; Avenida de América) is on the high-speed AVE line between Madrid and Seville. Rail destinations include Seville (€7.50 to €22, 45 to 90 minutes, 23 or more daily), Madrid (€28 to €52, 1¼ to

6¼ hours, 23 or more daily), Málaga (€16 to €21, 2½ hours, nine daily), Barcelona (€52 to €85, 10½ hours, four daily) and Jaén (€8, 1½ hours, one daily). For Granada (€16, four hours), change at Bobadilla.

Getting Around

Bus 3 (€1), from the street between the train and bus stations, runs to Plaza de las Tendillas and down Calle de San Fernando, east of the Mezquita. For the return trip, you can pick it up on Ronda de Isasa, just south of the Mezquita.

Taxis from the bus or train station to the Mezquita cost around €5.

For drivers, Córdoba's one-way system is nightmarish, but routes to many hotels and *hostales* are fairly well signposted with a 'P' if they have parking. Hotels charge about €10 to €12 per day for parking.

AROUND CÓRDOBA

Medina Azahara

In 936 Abd ar-Rahman III began the construction of a magnificent new capital for his new caliphate, 8km west of Córdoba, and by 945 was able to install himself there. Legend has it that **Medina Azahara** (Madinat al-Zahra; % 957 32 91 30; adult/EU citizen €1.50/free; ⌚ 10am-6.30pm Tue-Sat, to 8.30pm May-mid-Sep, to 2pm Sun) was built for the caliph's favourite wife Az-Zahra.

The new capital was amazingly short-lived. Between 1010 and 1013, during the caliphate's collapse, Medina Azahara was wrecked by Berber soldiers. Today, though less than one-tenth of it has been excavated, and only about a quarter of that is open to visitors, Medina Azahara is still a fascinating place to visit.

The visitor route leads down to the **Dar al-Wuzara** (House of the Viziers), a substantial building with several horseshoe arches, fronted by a square garden, and on to the most impressive building, the painstakingly restored **Salón de Abd ar-Rahman III**. This was the caliph's throne hall, with beautiful horseshoe arching and exquisitely carved stuccowork, of a lavishness that was unprecedented in the Islamic world.

Medina Azahara is signposted on Avenida de Medina Azahara, which leads west out of Córdoba onto the A431. Try to visit before 11am to avoid the coaches.

A taxi costs €24 for the return trip, with one hour to view the site, or you can book a three-hour coach tour for €5 to €10 through many Córdoba hotels.

GRANADA PROVINCE

Some places in this world seem to have it all: the looks, the jewels, the sense of fun, a streetwise edge. Granada is one of those places. Millions of people pour into the town just to see its crown gem: the Alhambra, a place that carries with it coffers-full of stories, dreams and mysteries of the last 2½ centuries of a great civilisation. If there's one don't-miss destination in Andalucía, this is it. But Granada the province is more than Granada the city: it's the snowcapped Sierra Nevada, the highest mountain range in mainland Spain; it's the mystically beautiful Alpujarras valleys; and it's the Costa Tropical, Granada's own slice of the Mediterranean coast.

GRANADA

pop 265,000 / elevation 685m

Granada has an edge over other Andalusian cities. Many visitors don't get past the allure of the Alhambra, with its woods and the Sierra Nevada as magnificent backdrops, and the mystery of the winding streets of the Albayzín. But what you'll find if you stick around is Andalucía's hippest, youthful city, with a free-tapas culture, innovative bars, tiny flamenco holes and thumping clubs. Here, the Islamic past feels recent as a growing North African population has filled the Albayzín with kebab and cake shops and slipper and tea nooks and even a newly-constructed mosque.

History

Granada's history reads like an excellent thriller, with complicated plots, conspiracies, hedonism and tricky love-affairs. Granada began life as an Iberian settlement in the Albayzín district. Muslim forces took over from the Visigoths in 711, with the aid of the Jewish community around the foot of the Alhambra hill in what was called Garnata al Jahud, from which the name Granada derives; *granada* also happens to be Spanish for pomegranate, the fruit on the city's coat of arms.

After the fall of Córdoba (1236) and Seville (1248), Muslims sought refuge in Granada, where Mohammed ibn Yusuf ibn Nasr had set up an independent emirate. Stretching from the Strait of Gibraltar to east of Almería, this 'Nasrid' emirate became the final remnant of Al-Andalus, ruled from the increasingly lavish Alhambra palace for 250 years. Granada

became one of the richest cities in medieval Europe, flourishing with its swollen population of traders and artisans. Two centuries of artistic and scientific splendour peaked under emirs Yusuf I and Mohammed V in the 14th century.

It all went pear-shaped as the 15th century wore on: the economy stagnated and violent rivalry developed over the succession. One faction supported the emir, Abu al-Hasan, and his harem favourite Zoraya. The other faction backed Boabdil, Abu al-Hasan's son by his wife Aixa. In 1482 Boabdil rebelled, setting off a confused civil war. The Christian armies invading the emirate took advantage, besieging towns and devastating the countryside, and in 1491 they finally laid siege to Granada. After eight months, Boabdil agreed to surrender the city in return for the Alpujarras valleys and 30,000 gold coins, plus political and religious freedom for his subjects. On 2 January 1492 the conquering Catholic Monarchs, Isabel and Fernando, entered Granada ceremonially in Muslim dress. They set up court in the Alhambra for several years.

Religious persecution soon ensued. Jews were expelled from Spain, and persecution of Muslims led to revolts across the former emirate and their eventual expulsion from Spain in the 17th century. Lacking these talented elements of its populace, Granada sank into a deep decline from which it only began to emerge with the interest drummed up by the Romantic movement from the 1830s on. This set the stage for the restoration of Granada's Islamic heritage and the arrival of tourism.

Another black period occurred when the Nationalists took over Granada at the start of the civil war, and an estimated 4000 *granadinos* (Granadans) with left or liberal connections were killed, among them Federico García Lorca, Granada's most famous writer. Granada has a reputation for political conservatism.

Orientation

The two major central streets, Gran Vía de Colón and Calle Reyes Católicos, meet at Plaza Isabel La Católica. From here Calle Reyes Católicos runs southwest to Puerta Real, an important intersection, and northeast to Plaza Nueva. Cuesta de Gómez leads northeast up from Plaza Nueva towards the Alhambra on its hilltop. The old Muslim district, the Albayzín, rambles over another hill that rises north of Plaza Nueva.

The bus station (northwest) and train station (west) are both out of the city centre but linked by buses.

Information BOOKSHOPS

Cartográfica del Sur (Map pp770-1; % 958 20 49 01; Calle Valle Inclán 2) Granada's best map shop, in the south of the city, just off Camino de Ronda.

Metro (Map p774; % 958 26 15 65; Calle Gracia 31) Stocks an excellent range of English-language novels, guidebooks and books on Spain, plus plenty of books in French.

EMERGENCY

Policía Nacional (Map p774; % 958 80 80 00; Plaza de los Campos) The most central police station.

INTERNET ACCESS

Thanks to Granada's 60,000 students, internet cafés are cheap and open long hours.

Internet Elvira (Map p774; Calle de Elvira 64; per hr €1.60, students €1)

N@veg@web (Map p774; Calle Reyes Católicos 55; per hr €1.20)

INTERNET RESOURCES

Ayuntamiento de Granada (www.granada.org in Spanish) Granada city hall's website with good maps and a broad range of information on what to do, where to stay and so on. For tourist info click 'La Ciudad'.

Turismo de Granada (www.turismodegranada.org) Good website of the provincial tourist office.

LAUNDRY

Lavomatique (Map p774; Calle Paz 19) Wash and dry machine load for €8.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Hospital Ruiz de Alda (% 958 02 00 09, 958 24 11 00; Avenida de la Constitución 100) Central, with good emergency facilities.

MONEY

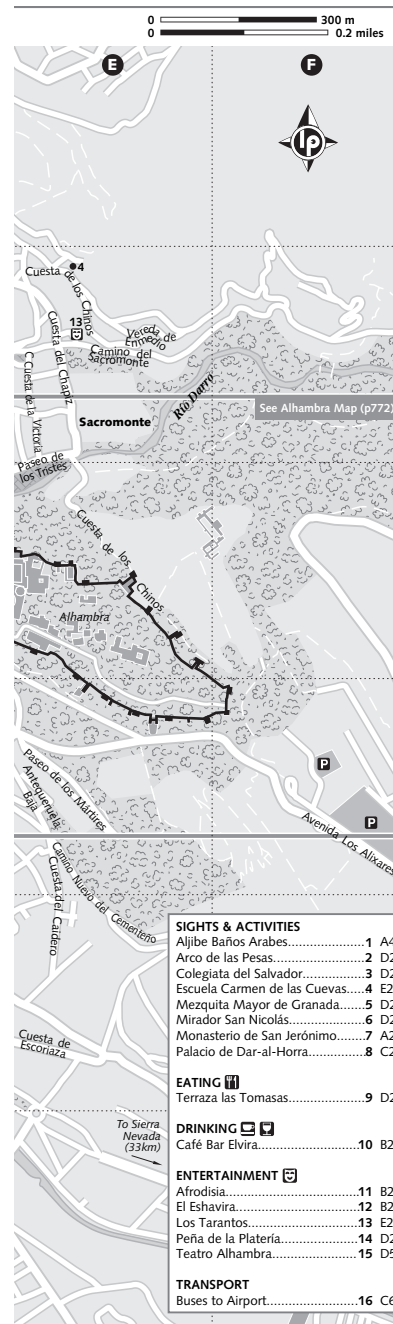
There are plenty of banks and ATMs on Gran Vía de Colón, Plaza Isabel La Católica and Calle Reyes Católicos.

POST

Post office (Map p774; Puerta Real s/n; ⌚ 8.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2pm Sat) Often has long queues.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Provincial tourist office (Map p774; % 958 24 71 28; www.turismodegranada.org; Plaza de Mariana Pineda 10; ⌚ 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Sat,



10am-3pm Sun May-Sep, 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat, to 3pm Sun Nov-Apr) Helpful staff; a short walk east of Puerta Real.

Regional tourist office Plaza Nueva (Map p774; ☎ 958 22 10 22; Calle Santa Ana 1; 🗺 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun & holidays); Alhambra (Map p772; ☎ 958 22 95 75; ticket-office bldg, Avenida del Generalife s/n; 🗺 8am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm & 4-7.30pm Sat & Sun, closes at 6pm Nov-Feb, 9am-1pm holidays) Information on all of Andalucía.

Sights & Activities

Most major sights are within walking distance of the city centre, though there are buses to save you walking uphill.

ALHAMBRA

Stretched along the top of the hill known as La Sabika, the **Alhambra** (Map p772; ☎ 902 441221; www.alhambra-patronato.es; adult/EU senior €10/5, disabled & under 8yr free, Generalife only €5; 🗺 8.30am-8pm Mar-Oct, to 6pm Nov-Feb, closed 25 Dec & 1 Jan) is the stuff of fairy tales and, once you've visited it, you'll long to return. From outside, its red fortress towers and walls appear plain, if imposing, rising from woods of cypress and elm, with the Sierra Nevada forming a magnificent backdrop. Inside the marvellously decorated emirs' palace, the Palacio Nazaries (Nasrid Palace) and the Generalife gardens, you're in for a treat. Water is an art form here and its sounds take you far from the bustle of the city.

The spell can be shattered by the average 6000 visitors who traipse through the site each day, so try to visit first thing in the morning or late in the afternoon, or treat yourself to a magical night by visiting the Palacio Nazaries (p773 for details).

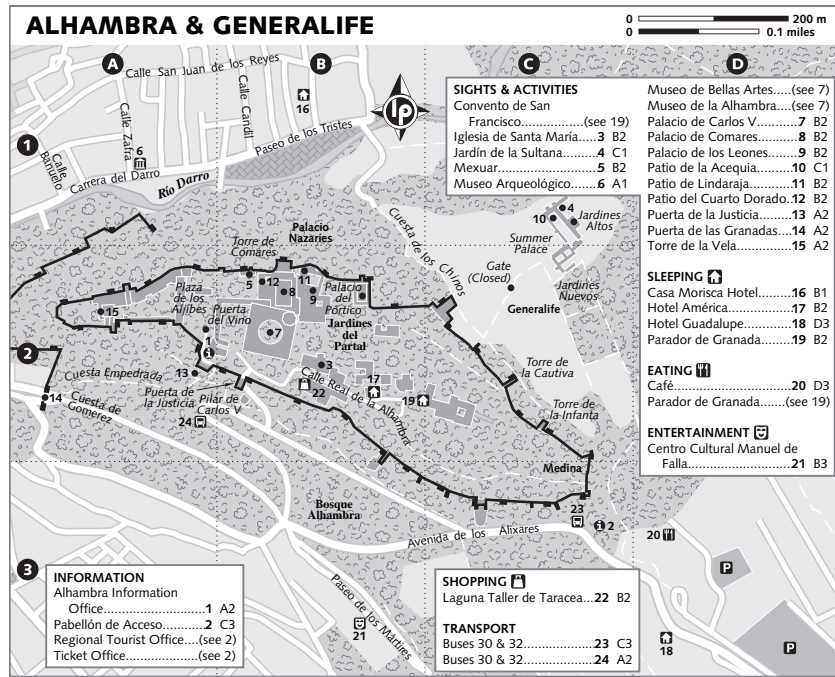
The Alhambra has two outstanding sets of buildings, the Palacio Nazaries and the Alcazaba (Citadel). Also within its walls are the Palacio de Carlos V, the Iglesia de Santa María de la Alhambra, two hotels, several book and souvenir shops as well as lovely gardens, including the supreme Generalife.

There's a small café by the ticket office but only the two hotels offer sit-down meals.

History

The Alhambra, from the Arabic *al-qala'at al-hamra* (red castle), was a fortress from the 9th century. The 13th- and 14th-century Nasrid emirs converted it into a fortress-palace complex adjoined by a small town (*medina*),

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Arco de las Pesas.....	2 D2
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Escuela Carmen de las Cuevas.....	4 E2
Mezquita Mayor de Granada.....	5 D2
Mirador San Nicolás.....	6 D2
Monasterio de San Jerónimo.....	7 A2
Palacio de Dar-al-Horra.....	8 C2
EATING 🍴	
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DRINKING ☕ ☪	
Café Bar Elvira.....	10 B2
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of which only ruins remain. Yusuf I (1333–54) and Mohammed V (1354–59 and 1362–91) built the magnificent Palacio Nazaries.

After the Christian conquest the Alhambra's mosque was replaced with a church and the Convento de San Francisco (now the Parador de Granada) was built. Carlos I, grandson of Isabel I and Fernando II, had a wing of the Palacio Nazaries destroyed to make space for a huge Renaissance palace, the Palacio de Carlos V (using his title as Holy Roman Emperor).

In the 18th century the Alhambra was abandoned to thieves and beggars. During the Napoleonic occupation it was used as a barracks and narrowly escaped being blown up. In 1870 it was declared a national monument as a result of the huge interest stirred by Romantic writers such as Washington Irving, who wrote the entrancing *Tales of the Alhambra* in the Palacio Nazaries during his brief stay in the 1820s. Since then the Alhambra has been salvaged and very heavily restored. Together with the Generalife gardens and the Albayzín, it now enjoys Unesco World Heritage status.

Admission

Some areas of the Alhambra can be visited at any time without a ticket, but the highlight areas can only be entered with a ticket. Up to 6600 tickets are available for each day. At least 2000 of these are sold at the ticket office on the day, but in Easter week, June, July, August and September these sell out early and you need to start queuing by 7am to be reasonably sure of getting one.

It's highly advisable to book in advance (€0.90 extra per ticket). You can book up to a year ahead, in three ways:

Alhambra website (www.alhambratickets.com) Online booking in English, Spanish and French.

Banca Telefónica BBVA (% 902 22 44 60 within Spain, 00-34-91 537 91 78 from outside Spain; 7am-5.55pm) Telephone booking service provided by BBVA bank; English speakers available.

BBVA Book in person at any of the 4000 BBVA bank branches around Spain: there's a convenient Granada branch on Plaza Isabel La Católica (7 8.30am-2.15pm Mon-Fri year-round, 8.30am-1pm Sat Oct-Mar).

For internet or phone bookings you need a Visa card, MasterCard or Eurocard. You

receive a reference number, which you must show, along with your passport, national identity card or credit card, at the Alhambra ticket office when you pick up the ticket on the day of your visit.

Every ticket is stamped with a half-hour time slot for entry to the Palacio Nazaries. Once inside the *palacio*, you can stay as long as you like. Each ticket is also either a *billete de mañana* (morning ticket), valid for entry to the Generalife or Alcazaba until 2pm, or a *billete de tarde*, for entry after 2pm.

The Palacio Nazaries is also open for **night visits** (7 10pm-11.30pm Tue-Sat Mar-Oct, 8pm-9.30pm Fri & Sat Nov-Feb). Tickets cost the same as daytime tickets: the ticket office opens 30 minutes before the palace's opening time, closing 30 minutes after it. You can book ahead for night visits in the same ways as for day visits.

Alcazaba

The ramparts and several towers are all that remain of the citadel. The most important is the **Torre de la Vela** (Watchtower), with a winding staircase to its top terrace, which has splendid views. The cross and banners of the Reconquista were raised here in January 1492. In the past the tower's bell chimes controlled the irrigation system of Granada's fertile plain, the Vega.

Palacio Nazaries

This is the Alhambra's true gem, the most brilliant Islamic building in Europe, with its perfectly proportioned rooms and courtyards, intricately moulded stucco walls, beautiful tiling, fine carved wooden ceilings and elaborate stalactite-like *muqarnas* vaulting, all worked in mesmerising, symbolic, geometrical patterns. Arabic inscriptions proliferate in the stuccowork.

The **Mexuar**, through which you normally enter the palace, dates from the 14th century and was used as a council chamber and antechamber for audiences with the emir. The public would have gone no further.

From the Mexuar you pass into the **Patio del Cuarto Dorado**, a courtyard where the emirs gave audiences, with the **Cuarto Dorado** (Golden Room) on the left. Opposite the Cuarto Dorado is the entrance to the Palacio de Comares through a beautiful façade of glazed tiles, stucco and carved wood.

Built for Emir Yusuf I, the **Palacio de Comares** served as a private residence for the ruler. It's built around the lovely **Patio de los Arrayanes**

(Patio of the Myrtles) with its rectangular pool. The southern end of the patio is overshadowed by the walls of the Palacio de Carlos V. Inside the northern **Torre de Comares** (Comares Tower), the **Sala de la Barca** (Hall of the Blessing), with a beautiful wooden ceiling, leads into the **Salón de Comares** (Comares Hall), where the emirs would have conducted negotiations with Christian emissaries. This room's marvellous domed marquetry ceiling contains more than 8000 cedar pieces in a pattern of stars representing the seven heavens of Islam.

The Patio de los Arrayanes leads into the **Palacio de los Leones** (Palace of the Lions), built under Mohammed V – by some accounts as the royal harem. The palace rooms surround the famous **Patio de los Leones** (Lion Courtyard), with its marble fountain channelling water through the mouths of 12 marble lions. The palace symbolises the Islamic paradise, which is divided into four parts by rivers (represented by water channels meeting at the fountain). The patio's gallery, with beautifully ornamented pavilions at its ends, is supported by 124 slender marble columns.

Of the four halls around the patio, the southern **Sala de los Abencerrajes** is the legendary site of the murders of the noble Abencerraj family, whose leader, the story goes, dared to dally with Zoraya, Abu al-Hasan's favourite. At the eastern end of the patio is the **Sala de los Reyes** (Hall of the Kings), with leather-lined ceilings painted by 14th-century Christian artists. The name comes from the painting on the central alcove, thought to depict 10 Nasrid emirs. On the northern side of the patio is the richly decorated **Sala de Dos Hermanas** (Hall of Two Sisters), probably named after the slabs of white marble at either side of its fountain. It features a fantastic *muqarnas* dome with a central star and 5000 tiny cells, reminiscent of the constellations. This may have been the room of the emir's favourite paramour. At its far end is the **Sala de los Ajimeces**, with low-slung windows through which the favoured lady could look over the Albayzín and countryside, while reclining on ottomans and cushions.

From the Sala de Dos Hermanas a passage leads through the **Estancias del Emperador** (Emperor's Chambers), built for Carlos I in the 1520s, some of them later used by Washington Irving. From here, descend to the **Patio de la Reja** (Patio of the Grille) and **Patio de Lindaraja**

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and emerge into the **Jardines del Partal**, an area of terraced gardens. Leave the Partal gardens by a gate facing the Palacio de Carlos V, or continue along a path to the Generalife.

Palacio de Carlos V

This huge Renaissance palace was begun in 1527 by Pedro Machuca, a Toledo architect, and was never completed. The imposing building is square but contains a surprising circular, two-tiered courtyard with 32 columns. Were the palace in a different setting, its merits might be more readily appreciated.

On the ground floor, the **Museo de la Alhambra** (% 958 02 79 00; admission free; h 9am-2.30pm Tue-Sat) has an absorbing collection of Islamic artefacts from the Alhambra, Granada province and Córdoba, with explanatory texts in English and Spanish. A highlight is the elegant **Alhambra Vase**, decorated with gazelles.

Upstairs, the **Museo de Bellas Artes** (% 958 22 48 43; admission free; h 9am-2pm Mon-Fri) is worth a visit for its impressive collection of Granada-related paintings and sculptures such as the carved wooden relief of the Virgin and Child (c 1547) by Diego de Siloé.

Other Christian Buildings

The **Iglesia de Santa María** was built between 1581 and 1617 on the site of the former palace mosque. The **Convento de San Francisco**, now the Parador de Granada hotel (p780), was erected over an Islamic palace. Isabel and Fernando were buried in the patio before being transferred to the Capilla Real (right).

Generalife

The name Generalife means 'Architect's Garden', and this soothing composition of pathways, patios, pools, fountains, trimmed hedges, tall trees and, in season, flowers of every imaginable hue, is the perfect place to end an Alhambra visit. The Muslim rulers' summer palace is in the corner furthest from the entrance. Within the palace, the **Patio de la Acequia** (Court of the Water Channel) has a long pool framed by flowerbeds and 19th-century fountains, whose shapes sensuously echo the arched porticos at each end. Off this patio is the **Jardín de la Sultana** (Sultana's Garden), with the trunk of a 700-year-old cypress tree, where Abu al-Hasan supposedly caught his lover, Zoraya, with the head of the Abencerraj clan, leading to the murders in the Sala de los Abencerrajes.

Getting There & Away

Buses 30 and 32 (€1) both run between Plaza Nueva and the Alhambra ticket office every five to nine minutes from 7.15am to 11pm.

If you opt to walk up Cuesta de Gomérez from Plaza Nueva you soon reach the **Puerta de las Granadas** (Gate of the Pomegranates), built by Carlos I. Above this are the Bosque Alhambra woods. If you already have your Alhambra ticket, you can climb the Cuesta Empedrada path up to the left and pass through the austere **Puerta de la Justicia** (Gate of Justice), constructed in 1348 as the Alhambra's main entrance.

If you need to go to the ticket office, in the **Pabellón de Acceso** (Access Pavilion), continue on for about 900m from the Puerta de las Granadas. From the Pabellón de Acceso you can enter the Generalife, and move on from there to other parts of the complex.

For drivers coming from out of town, 'Alhambra' signs on the approach roads to Granada direct you circuitously to the Alhambra car parks (per hr/day €1.40/14) on Avenida de los Alixares, above the ticket office.

CAPILLA REAL

The **Royal Chapel** (Map p774; % 958 22 92 39; www.capillareal.granada.com; Calle Oficios; admission €3; h 10.30am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 11am-1pm & 4-7pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10.30am-1pm & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-1pm & 3.30-6.30pm Sun Nov-Mar), adjoining the cathedral, is Granada's outstanding Christian building. Spanish-history fans will enjoy this connection with the Catholic Monarchs, Isabel and Fernando, who commissioned this elaborate Isabelline Gothic style building as their mausoleum. It was not completed until 1521, hence their temporary interment in the Convento de San Francisco.

The monarchs lie in simple lead coffins in the crypt beneath their marble monuments in the chancel, which is enclosed by a stunning gilded wrought-iron screen created in 1520 by Bartolomé de Jaén. The coffins, from left to right, are those of Felipe El Hermoso (Philip the Handsome, husband of the monarchs' daughter Juana la Loca), Fernando, Isabel, Juana la Loca (Joanna the Mad) and Miguel, the eldest grandchild of Isabel and Fernando. The marble effigies of the first four, reclining above the crypt, were a tribute by Carlos I to his parents and grandparents. The representations of Isabel and Fernando are slightly lower than those of Felipe and

Juana because Felipe was the son of the Holy Roman emperor, Maximilian. On the dense Plateresque *retablo*, note the kneeling figures of Isabel (lower right) and Fernando (lower left), attributed to Diego de Siloé, and the brightly painted bas-reliefs below depicting the defeat of the Muslims and subsequent conversions to Christianity.

The sacristy contains a small but impressive museum with Fernando's sword and Isabel's sceptre, silver crown and personal art collection, which is mainly Flemish but also includes Botticelli's *Prayer in the Garden of Olives*. Felipe de Vigarni's two fine early-16th-century statues of the Catholic Monarchs at prayer are also here.

CATHEDRAL

Adjoining the Capilla Real but entered separately, from Gran Vía de Colón, the cavernous Gothic-Renaissance **cathedral** (Map p774; % 958 22 29 59; admission €2.50; 10.45am-1.30pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat, 4-8pm Sun, to 7pm Nov-Mar) was begun in 1521, and directed by Diego de Siloé from 1528 to 1563. Work was not completed until the 18th century. The main façade on Plaza de las Pasiegas, with four heavy buttresses forming three great arched bays, was designed in the 17th century by Alonso Cano.

In the gilded and painted Capilla Mayor (de Siloé's work), spot the 17th-century carvings of the Catholic Monarchs at prayer, one above each side of the main altar, by Pedro de Mena. Above the monarchs are busts of Adam and Eve by Cano.

ALCAICERÍA & PLAZA BIB-RAMBLA

Just south of the Capilla Real, the **Alcaicería** (Map p774) was the Muslim silk exchange, but what you see now is a restoration after a 19th-century fire, filled with tourist shops. Just southwest of the Alcaicería is the large, popular **Plaza Bib-Rambla** with restaurants, flower stalls and a central fountain with statues of giants. This square was the scene of jousting, bullfights and Inquisition burnings.

CORRAL DEL CARBÓN

You can't miss the lovely, horseshoe-arched, Islamic façade of this **building** (Map p774; Calle Mariana Pineda), which began life as a 14th-century inn for merchants. It was later used as an inn for coal dealers (hence its modern name, meaning Coal Yard) and subsequently a theatre. It houses government offices and a government-run crafts shop, Artespaña.

ALBAYZIN

On the hill facing the Alhambra across the Darro valley, Granada's old Muslim quarter, the Albayzín, is one of the city's most fabulous treasures. The steep, winding, cobblestone streets with gorgeous *cármenes* (large mansions with walled gardens, from the Arabic *karm* for garden), reveal the best views of the Alhambra and, likewise, the best views of the Albayzín are from the Alhambra. The Albayzín's name derives from 1227, when Muslims from Baeza (Jaén province) moved here after their city was conquered by the Christians. It survived as the Muslim quarter for several decades after the Christian conquest in 1492. Islamic ramparts and fountains remain, and many of the Albayzín's *cármenes* and churches incorporate Islamic remains. Despite all this charm and beauty, this neighbourhood is still a work-in-progress and, unfortunately, its narrow streets are often havens for thieves and muggers. We have had reports of muggings, some violent, in the Albayzín so if you are alone try to avoid this area during siesta time (3pm to 5pm) and after dark.

Buses 31 and 32 both run circular routes from Plaza Nueva around the Albayzín about every seven to nine minutes from 7.30am to 11pm.

MONASTERIO DE SAN JERÓNIMO

This 16th-century **monastery** (Map pp770-1; % 958 27 93 37; Calle Rector López Argueta 9; admission €3; 10am-1.30pm & 4-7.30pm Apr-Oct, to 1.30pm & 3-6.30pm Nov-Mar), 500m west of the cathedral, is the burial place of El Gran Capitán (the Great Captain), Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, the military right-hand man of the Catholic Monarchs. It's a treat for fans of Gothic and Renaissance architecture, and stone carving. Don't miss the two lovely Plateresque doorways in the cloister, carved by the chief architect, Diego de Siloé, or the profusion of brightly painted sculpture inside the monastery church. El Gran Capitán's tombstone is at the foot of the steps before the altar.

MONASTERIO DE LA CARTUJA

Another architectural gem stands 2km northwest of the city centre, reached by bus 8 from Gran Vía de Colón. **La Cartuja Monastery** (% 958 16 19 32; Paseo de la Cartuja; admission €3; 10am-1pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, to 1pm & 3.30-6pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar, to noon Sun year-round) was built between the 16th and 18th centuries. People come to see the lavish

monastery church, especially the *sagrario* (sanctuary) behind the main altar, a confection of coloured marbles, golden capitals, profuse sculpture and a beautiful frescoed cupola; and, to the left of the main altar, the *sacristía* (sacristy), the ultimate expression of Spanish late-baroque, in effusive 'wedding-cake' stucco, and brown-and-white Lanjarón marble, resembling a melange of chocolate mousse and cream.

HUERTA DE SAN VICENTE

This **house** (% 958 25 84 66; Calle Virgen Blanca s/n; admission €1.80, free Wed, by guided tour in Spanish; 11 tours about every 45 min, 10am-12.30pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar, to 1pm & 5-8pm Tues-Sun Apr-Jun, to 3pm Jul-Aug), where Federico García Lorca spent summers and wrote some of his best-known works, is a 15-minute walk south of the city centre. It was once surrounded by orchards. Today the modern **Parque Federico García Lorca** separates it from whizzing traffic.

The house contains some original furnishings, including Lorca's writing desk and piano, some of his drawings and other memorabilia, and exhibitions connected with his life and work. To get there, head 700m down Calle de las Recogidas from Puerta Real, turn right along Calle del Arbabal, then take the first left into Calle Virgen Blanca.

Walking Tour

Plaza Nueva extends northeast into Plaza Santa Ana, where the **Iglesia de Santa Ana (1)** incorporates a mosque's minaret in its bell-tower. Along narrow Carrera del Darro, stop by the 11th-century Muslim bathhouse, the **Baños Árabes El Bañuelo (2)**; % 958 02 78 00; Carrera del Darro 31; admission free; 10am-2pm Tue-Sat). Further along is the **Museo Arqueológico (3)**; Archaeological Museum; % 958 22 56 40; Carrera del Darro 43; adult/EU citizen €1.50/free; 10am-2pm Tue, 9am-8pm Wed-Sat, to 2.30pm Sun), displaying finds from Granada province. It's curious to find ancient Egyptian amulets (brought by the Phoenicians) here.

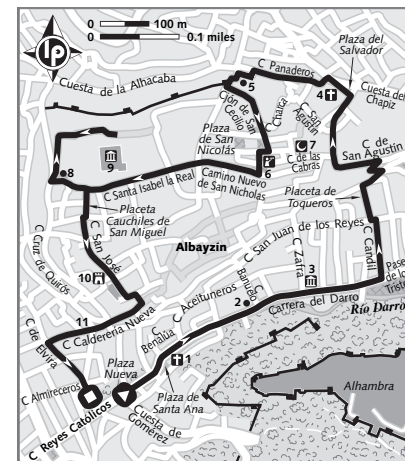
Shortly past the museum, Carrera del Darro becomes Paseo de los Tristes. Turn up Calle Candil and climb, via Placeta de Toqueros and Carril de San Agustín, to Plaza del Salvador, near the top of the Albayzín. Plaza del Salvador is dominated by the **Colegiata del Salvador (4)**; % 958 27 86 44; admission €0.80; 10am-1pm & 4pm-7.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, 10.30am-12.30pm & 4.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar), a 16th-century church on the site of the Albayzín's main mosque; the mosque's horseshoe-arched patio survives at

WALK FACTS

Start/Finish Plaza Nueva

Distance 5.5km

Duration four to five hours including stops



its western end. From here head west to Plaza Larga and through the **Arco de las Pesas (5)**, an impressive gateway in the Albayzín's 11th-century defensive wall. Callejón de San Cecilio leads to the **Mirador San Nicolás (6)**, a lookout with unbeatable views of the Alhambra and Sierra Nevada. Come back here later for sunset (you can't miss the trail then!). At any time of day take care: skilful, well-organised wallet-lifters and bag-snatchers operate here.

Just east of Mirador San Nicolás, off Cuesta de las Cabras, the Albayzín's first new mosque in 500 years, the **Mezquita Mayor de Granada (7)**; % 958 20 23 31; 11am-2pm & 6-9.30pm), has been built to serve modern Granada's growing Muslim population.

Return to the lookout, take the steps down beside it and follow the street down to Camino Nuevo de San Nicolás. Turn right and head downhill to **Placeta de San Miguel Bajo (8)**, with its lively café-restaurants. Leave the square by Callejón del Gallo, turn right at the end of this short lane, and you'll come to the 15th-century **Palacio de Dar-al-Horra (9)**; Callejón de las Monjas s/n; admission free; 10am-2pm Mon-Fri), a mini-Alhambra that was home to the mother of Boabdil, Granada's last Muslim ruler.

Return to Placeta de San Miguel Bajo and head down Placeta Cauchiles de San Miguel, which becomes Calle San José, where the lovely **Alminar de San José** (10; San José Minaret) survives from an 11th-century mosque. Calle San José meets the top of **Calle Calderería Nueva** (11), which is lined by *teterías* (Middle Eastern-style teahouses) and shops brimming with slippers, hookahs, jewellery and North African pottery. Stop for a Moroccan mint tea, or head back to Plaza Nueva.

Courses

Granada is a great place to study Spanish. It also has several Spanish dance schools. The provincial tourist office has lists of schools, or check out www.granadaspanish.org and www.spanishcourses.info.

Centro de Lenguas Modernas (Modern Languages Centre; Map p774; % 958 21 56 60; www.clm-granada.com; Placeta del Hospicio Viejo s/n) Granada University's modern-language department offers a variety of popular Spanish-language and cultural programmes. Intensive language courses, at all levels, start at 10 days (40 hours of classes) for €305.

Escuela Carmen de las Cuevas (Map pp770-1; % 958 22 10 62; www.carmencuevas.com; Cuesta de los Chinos 15, Sacromonte) Private school with good reports. Teaches Spanish language and culture, and flamenco dance and guitar. A two-week intensive language course (40 hours) costs €284.

Tours

Granavisión (% 902 33 00 02) Offers guided tours of the Alhambra and Generalife (€38) and Historic Granada tours (€43). Phone direct or book through a travel agent.

HAMMAMS

Granada has two *Baños Árabes* (Arabic baths) and a visit to one of these is a must for the sheer lazy pleasure of it. Both baths offer a similar deal: a bath and aromatherapy massage that last for two hours (bath one hour 45 minutes, massage 15 minutes) and both need advance reservations. Swimwear is obligatory (you can rent it), towels are provided, and all sessions are mixed. The better of the pair is **Aljibe Baños Árabes** (Map p774; % 958 52 28 67; www.aljibesanimiguel.es; San Miguel Alta 41; bath/bath & massage €15/22). **Hammam Baños Árabes** (Map p774; % 958 22 99 78; www.hammamspain.com/granada in Spanish; Calle Santa Ana 16; bath/bath & massage €16/25) is older and smaller.

City Sightseeing Granada (% 902 10 10 81) Operates Granada's double-decker city tour bus. It has 20 stops outside the main sights. Hop on and off where you like; the ticket (€15) is valid for 24 hours.

Festivals & Events

Semana Santa (Holy Week) This and the Feria de Corpus Christi are the big two. Benches are set up in Plaza del Carmen to view the Semana Santa processions.

Día de la Cruz (Day of the Cross; 3 May) Squares, patios and balconies are adorned with floral crosses (the Cruces de Mayo) and become the setting for typical *andaluz* revelry – drinking, horse riding, polka-dot dresses and *sevillanas* (traditional Andalusian dances with high, twirling arm movements).

Feria de Corpus Christi (Corpus Christi Fair; early June 2007, mid-May 2008) Fairgrounds, bullfights, more drinking and *sevillanas*.

Festival Internacional de Música y Danza (2½ weeks from late June to early July) Features mainly classical performances, some free, many in historic locations.

Sleeping

Granada is almost oversupplied with hotels – the ones reviewed here are just a tiny selection. However, it's definitely worthwhile booking ahead from March to October, and especially during Semana Santa and Christmas.

BUDGET

At busy times, prime-location rooms tend to fill up before noon, especially on Cuesta de Gómez.

Camping

Camping Sierra Nevada (% 958 15 00 62; Avenida de Madrid 107; sites per adult/tent/car €5/5.50/5.50; s) Close to the bus station, 2.5km northwest of the centre, this camping ground has big clean bathrooms and a laundrette. Bus 3 runs between here and the centre.

Plaza Nueva & Around

Hostal Venecia (Map p774; % 958 22 39 87; Cuesta de Gómez 2; r €32; s/d/tr/q without bathroom €15/28/39/52) A lovely *hostal* with friendly hosts and flower-and-picture-filled turquoise corridors. The nine characterful rooms are all different. The owners bring you a soothing herbal infusion to drink each morning. Relaxing background music plays, incense wafts, and it's warm in winter and fan-cooled during the hot summer months.

Oasis Backpackers' Hostel (Map p774; % 958 21 58 48; www.oasisgranada.com; Placeta Correo Viejo 3; dm

€15, d€36; a i) Granada's top hostel, in a renovated house, seconds away from the *Caldererías* and bars on Calle Elvira. This place is designed for serious backpackers and word spreads fast, so book ahead to enjoy its little luxuries: happy staff, free internet access, rooftop terrace and personal safes.

Hostal Britz (Map p774; % /fax 958 22 36 52; Cuesta de Gómez 1; s/d €32/44, s/d without bathroom €25/34) The friendly, efficient Britz has 22 clean rooms with double glazing, gleaming wooden surfaces and central heating. There's also a lift.

Hostal Landázuri (Map p774; % /fax 958 22 14 06; Cuesta de Gómez 24; s/d/tr/q €28/45/50/60, s/d without bathroom €20/28; p) This folksy place boasts a terrace with Alhambra views, and a café. The rooms are modern enough and the triples are large and bright.

Plaza de la Trinidad & Around

Hostal Sevilla (Map p774; % 958 27 85 13; Calle Fábrica Vieja 18; hostalsevilla@telefonica.net; r €35, s/d without bathroom €18/27; p) The friendly, clean Sevilla, run by a young family, has pretty tiles and lampshades, and a great, large attic double.

Hostal Meridiano (Map p774; % /fax 958 25 05 44; www.hostalpensionmeridiano.com; Calle Angulo 9; r €38, s/d without bathroom €18/32, 4-/6-person apt €35/40; p a i) This residence is run by a helpful couple who are tuned in to travellers' needs. Six of the attractive and homely rooms have bathrooms; internet is free.

MIDRANGE

Hostal La Ninfa (Map p774; % 958 22 79 85; Campo del Príncipe s/n; s/d €45/65; a) A rustic place covered inside and out with brightly painted ceramic stars. It has clean, cosy rooms, friendly owners and an attractive breakfast room. But ear plugs may be necessary.

Hostal Guadalupe (Map pp770-1; % 958 22 34 23; www.hotelguadalupe.es; Avenida Los Alixares s/n; s/d €76/104; p a i) Almost on the Alhambra's doorstep, the jolly Guadalupe has spacious, beautifully fitted-out rooms with Alhambra or olive-grove views.

Hostal América (Map p772; % 958 22 74 71; www.hotelamericagranada.com; Calle Real de la Alhambra 53; s/d €70/106; h Mar-Nov; a) Within the Alhambra grounds, this is in an early 19th-century building. Reserve well in advance, as rooms are limited.

Puerta de las Granadas (Map p774; % 958 21 62 30; www.hotelpuertadelasgranadas.com; Calle Cuesta de Gómez 14; s/d €77/99, superior r €107-80; a i) This

19th-century building, renovated in modern-minimalist style, has wooden shutters and elegant furnishings. The luxury rooms have Alhambra or cathedral views.

There are several hotels in beautiful renovated Albayzín mansions.

Hotel Casa del Capitel Nazari (Map p774; % 958 21 52 60; www.hotelcasacapitel.com; Cuesta Aceituneros 6; s/d €73/91; a i) Understated décor and ambience, focussing on a 16th-century patio with wooden balconies and ancient pillars.

Casa del Aljarife (Map p774; % /fax 958 22 24 25; www.granadainfo.com/most; Placeta de la Cruz Verde 2; r €95; a) This beautifully restored 17th-century house has helpful hosts, just four spacious and characterful rooms, and a patio.

Hotel Zaguán (Map p774; % 958 21 57 30; www.hotelzaguán.com; Carrera del Darro; s €50, r €80-100; a i) A risen-from-ruins and tastefully restored 16th-century house with a bar/restaurant. The 13 rooms are all different; some look out at Río Darro.

Hotel Carmen de Santa Inés (Map p774; % 958 22 63 80; www.carmensantaines.com; Placeta de Porras 7; s/d €95/105, r with sitting room €125-200; a) This Islamic-era house, extended in the 16th and 17th centuries, is furnished with antiques, and its lovely patio opens onto a garden of myrtles, fruit trees and fountains.

These are good city-centre hotels:

Hotel Los Tilos (Map p774; % 958 26 67 12; Plaza Bib-Rambla 4; www.hotellostilos.com; s/d €41/65; a) Comfortable rooms with good-sized doubles. Some rooms overlook the characterful plaza and there's a small roof terrace.

Hotel Maciá Plaza (Map p774; % 958 22 75 36; www.maciahotels.com; Plaza Nueva 4; s/d €49/73; p a i) One of four Maciá hotels in Granada, the Maciá Plaza has comfortable rooms with bright-enough décor in an excellent location.

Hotel Anacapri (Map p774; % 958 22 74 77; www.hotelanacapri.com; Calle Joaquín Costa 7; s/d €78/105; a) The Anacapri has pretty rooms with floral bedspreads, cork floors and satellite TV. Its friendly reception is in an attractive 18th-century patio fitted out with cane chairs and palm trees.

TOP END

Casa Morisca Hotel (Map p772; % 958 22 11 00; www.hotelcasamorisca.com; Cuesta de la Victoria 9; s/d interior €90/119, exterior €120/150; a) Occupies a late-15th-century Albayzín mansion, with 14 stylish rooms centred on an atmospheric patio with an ornamental pool and wooden galleries.

Hotel Palacio de Santa Paula (Map p774; % 902 29 22 93; www.ac-hotels.com; Gran Vía de Colón; r from €205; p a i) This opulent five-star hotel occupies a former 16th-century convent, some 14th-century houses with patios and wooden balconies, and a 19th-century aristocratic house, all with a contemporary overlay. The rooms sport every top-end luxury and there's a Turkish bath.

Parador de Granada (Map p772; % 958 22 14 40; www.parador.es; Calle Real de la Alhambra s/n; s/d €214/268; p a) The most expensive *parador* in Spain can't be beaten for its location within the Alhambra and its historical connections. Book ahead.

Eating

Here's a place where gastronomy stays down to earth, but still experiments. Granada is one of the last bastions of that fantastic practice of free tapas with every drink. Depending on where you are, you can get Arabic couscous, Brazilian chicken or *haute cuisine* tapas, served in dinky dishes. You'll also find hearty local fare like *rabo de toro* (ox-tail stew), *habas con jamón* (broad beans with ham) and *tortilla Sacromonte*, a tasty omelette (traditionally made with calf brains and bull testicles!).

NEAR PLAZA NUEVA

Café Central (Map p774; % 958 22 97 06; Calle de Elvira; tapas €1.95, raciones €5-9) Perk up with a strong morning coffee (€1.60) at this no-nonsense café opposite Plaza Nueva.

Al Andalus (Map p774; % 958 22 67 30; Calle de Elvira; mains €3-6) The first in a range of over-the-counter, Arabic fastfood-feast kebab houses. Al Andalus does a mean parcel of falafel in pitta (€3).

Bodegas Castañeda (Map p774; Calle Almirantes; raciones from €6) An institution among locals and tourists alike, the Castañeda whips up traditional food in a typical bodega (traditional wine bar) setting. Get yourself some Spanish tortilla and *alioli* (aioli; garlic mayonnaise).

Antigua Castañeda (Map p774; Calle de Elvira; raciones €7-14) If the potent 'Costa' wine from the Sierra de la Contraviesa tempts you to the point of befuddlement, sober up with a few *montaditos* (small sandwiches; €3.20 to €4.50).

For fresh fruit and veg, head for the large covered **Mercado Central San Agustín** (Map p774; Calle San Agustín; h 8am-2pm Mon-Sat), a block west of the cathedral.

ALHAMBRA

Parador de Granada (Map p772; % 958 22 14 40; Calle Real de Alhambra s/n; h 11am-11pm; sandwiches from €5) The effortlessly charming Parador de Granada has a swanky restaurant, and a terrace bar where you can contemplate the Alhambra's magnificence.

ALBAYZIN

The labyrinthine Albayzín holds a wealth of eateries all tucked away in the narrow streets. Find one with a terrace and be rewarded with mesmerising Alhambra views. Calle Calderería Nueva is a muddle of *teterías* and Arabic-influenced takeaways.

Kasbah (Map p774; Calle Calderería Nueva 4; tea €1.80-2.40) Duck into this candlelit tea den, sit on a glimmering cushion and absorb the aroma of incense and herbal infusions. Select your tea and maybe try a calorie-laden chocolate-and-cream crepe (€2.30).

Restaurante Arrayanes (Map p774; % 958 22 84 01; Cuesta Marañás 4; mains €7-17; h from 8pm) This much-applauded Moroccan favourite cooks up insanely delicious lamb *tagines* with dates and almonds, and excellent chicken couscous. The décor mixes cushions and little mirrors and there's no alcohol.

El Agua (Map p774; % 958 22 33 58; Plaza Aljibe de Trillo 7; fondues per person €14-19, minimum 2 people; h lunch Wed-Mon, dinner daily) Wild fondue feasts are the mainstay of this first-rate restaurant, which also offers fabulous views of the Alhambra.

Terraza las Tomasas (Map p774; % 958 22 41 08; Carril de San Agustín 4; mains €16-20; h lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Wed-Sat) Ring the little bell, descend the stairs and be in awe of the Alhambra views in this classy restaurant. Service is impeccable and the food commendable.

PLAZA BIB RAMBLA & AROUND

Poë (Map p774; Calle Paz; media-ración €3) Imagination and a Brazilian influence have resulted in a great mix of excellent free tapas, such as *fejjoada* or chicken stew with polenta, and a trendy international vibe.

Om-Kalsum (Map p774; Calle Jardines 17; media-ración €3) Decamp from Poë to Om-Kalsum to start on its Arabic-influenced tapas (mini-lamb *tagines*, gorgeous bite-sized chicken kebabs in pitta bread etc). All the dishes here are really good.

Guerrero (Map p774; % 958 28 14 60; Plaza de la Trinidad 7; raciones €5.50-6.50) A low-key café-bar and many a hungover person's breakfast choice, this is where you come for *tostadas* (€1.50),

freshly squeezed orange juice and a tall glass of *café con leche* (milk coffee).

Los Diamantes (Map p774; % 958 22 70 70; Calle Navas 26; media-ración €6) Heaven for anyone who loves fish and seafood. The plates are heaped with an amazing mix of *pescado frito* (fried fish) and prawns to die for. A *caña* (small glass of beer) makes perfect company.

Cunini (Map p774; % 958 25 07 77; Plaza de Pescadería 14; set menú €18) A good reputation surrounds this little up-market seafood bar and restaurant on the old Fishmonger Sq, where you can get first-class fish and seafood as tapas if you stand at the bar, or full meals out back.

Drinking

Granada buzzes with floorboard-bashing flamenco dancers, bottle-clinking travellers and grooving students out on the prowl. The best street for drinking is Calle Elvira but other chilled bars line Río Darro at the base of the Albayzín and Campo del Príncipe attracts a sophisticated bunch.

Bodegas Castañeda (opposite) (Calle Almirantes) and **Antigua Castañeda** (opposite) (Calle de Elvira) are the most inviting, with out-of-the-barrel wine and bites of tapas to keep things going.

El Circulo (Map p774; Calle de Elvira) A calm and unpretentious tapas bar with a slightly retro feel. After one of the large spirit measures you might be wishing there were more seats.

Café Bar Elvira (Map pp770-1; Calle de Elvira 85; h from noon) A jolly hang-out for the dreadlocks, whistle and dog-on-a-bit-of-string type crowd. There's drinking, singing and shouting all day – partly thanks to the large spirit measures.

Anais Café (Map p774; Calle Buensuceso 13; h 9am-1pm) A bar for imbibing bookworms, literary evenings and tarot readings, as well as mindless fun.

Entertainment

The excellent monthly *Guía de Granada* (€1), available from kiosks, lists entertainment venues and places to eat, including tapas bars.

CLUBS

Look out for posters and leaflets around town advertising live music and nontouristy flamenco. The bi-weekly flyer *Yuzin* (www.yuzin.com) lists many live-music venues, some of which are also dance clubs where DJs spin the latest tracks.

Industrial Copera (% 958 25 84 49; www.industrialcopera.net; Carretera Armilla, Calle la Paz, warehouse 7;

admission varied; h 11pm-late) This club has been voted Andalucía's best. It's a warehouse where serious clubbers go for serious all-nighters. You can count on lots of techno, a fair amount of hip-hop, and DJs from Ibiza, Madrid and Barcelona. Get a cab.

Granada 10 (Map p774; Calle Cárcel Baja; admission €6; h from midnight) A glittery converted cinema is now Granada's top club for the glam crowd, who recline on the gold sofas and go crazy to cheesy Spanish pop tunes.

Planta Baja (Map p774; Calle Horno de Abad 11; www.plantabaja.net; admission €5; h 12.30am-6am Tue-Sat) Planta Baja's popularity never seems to wane, and it's no wonder since it caters to a diverse crowd *and* has top DJs like Vadim. There's old school, hip-hop, funk and electroglam downstairs, and lazy lounge sessions on the top floor.

Afrodisia (Map pp770-1; www.afrodisiadclub.com; Calle Almona del Boquerón; admission free; h 11pm-late) If you dig Granada's ganja-driven scene, this is where you'll find a like-minded lot. DJs spin 'original black sounds' aka hip-hop, ska and reggae, funk and even jazz on Sundays.

FLAMENCO

El Eshavira (Map pp770-1; % 958 29 08 29; www.eshavira.com; Postigo de la Cuna 2; h from 10pm) Duck down the spooky alley, off Calle Azacayas, to this dark, smoky haunt of sultry flamenco and cool jazz.

El Upsetter (Map p774; % 958 22 72 96; Carrera del Darro 7; admission for flamenco show €10; h 11pm-late) The Upsetter has a decent Saturday-night flamenco show, and doubles as a dreadlock-swinging reggae bar for the rest of the week.

Peña de la Platería (Map pp770-1; % 958 21 06 50; Placeta de Toqueros 7) Buried deep in the Albayzín warren, this is a genuine aficionados' club with a large outdoor patio. Catch a 9.30pm performance on Thursday or Saturday.

The Sacromonte caves harbour a string of touristy flamenco haunts for which you can pre-book through hotels and travel agencies, some of whom offer free transport. Try the Friday or Saturday midnight shows at **Los Tarantos** (Map pp770-1; % 958 22 45 25 day, 958 22 24 92 night; Camino del Sacromonte 9; admission €21) for a lively experience.

OTHER ENTERTAINMENT

The foyer of **La Madraza** (Map p774; Calle Oficios), opposite the Capilla Real, has large posters listing forthcoming cultural events.

Centro Cultural Manuel de Falla (Map p772; % 958 22 00 22; Paseo de los Mártires s/n) A haven for classical-musical lovers, this venue near the Alhambra presents weekly orchestral concerts.

Teatro Alhambra (Map pp770-1; % 958 22 04 47; Calle de Molinos 56) and the more central **Teatro Isabel La Católica** (Map p774; % 958 22 15 14; Acera del Casino) have ongoing programmes of theatre and concerts (sometimes flamenco).

Shopping

Classic pots with distinctive *granadino* green, or blue, and white glazing can be bought at **Cerámica Fabre** (Map p774; Calle Pescadería s/n). A distinctive local craft is *taracea* (marquetry), used on boxes, tables, chess sets and more – the best have shell, silver or mother-of-pearl inlays. Marquetry experts can be seen at work in **Laguna Taller de Taracea** (Map p772) in the Alhambra. Other *granadino* crafts include embossed leather, guitars, wrought iron, brass and copper ware, basket weaving and textiles. Look out for these in the Alcaicería and Albayzín, on Cuesta de Gómez and in the government-run **Artespaña** in Corral del Carbón (Map p774).

The Plaza Nueva area is awash with jewellery vendors, selling from rugs laid out on the pavement, and ethnic-clothing shops.

For general shopping, trendy clothes and shoes, try pedestrianised Calle de los Mesones or **El Corte Inglés** (Map p774; Acera del Darro).

Getting There & Away

AIR

Iberia (Map p774; % 958 22 75 92; Plaza Isabel La Católica 2) flies daily to/from Madrid and Barcelona. From the UK, two low-cost web-based airlines fly daily to Granada: **Ryanair** (www.ryanair.com) and **Monarch Airlines** (www.flymonarch.com).

BUS

Granada's **bus station** (Map pp770-1; Carretera de Jaén) is nearly 3km northwest of the city centre. All services operate from here, except those going to a few nearby destinations, such as Fuente Vaqueros (opposite). **Alsina Graells** (% 958 18 54 80) runs to Córdoba (€12, three hours direct, nine daily), Seville (€18, three hours direct, 10 daily), Málaga (€9, 1½ hours direct, 16 daily), Las Alpujarras (see p789 for details) and Guadix (€4.50, one hour, up to 14 daily). Alsina also handles buses to destinations in Jaén province and on the Granada, Málaga and Almería coasts, and to Madrid (€15, five to six hours, 10 to 13 daily).

ALSA (% 902 42 22 42; www.alsa.es) operates buses up the Mediterranean coast to Barcelona (€60 to €70, seven to 10 hours, five daily) and to many international destinations.

CAR

Car rental is expensive. **ATA** (Map p774; % 958 22 40 04; Plaza Cuchilleros 1) has small cars for €71/83/219 for one/two/seven days.

TRAIN

The **train station** (Map pp770-1; % 958 20 40 00; Avenida de Andaluces) is 1.5km west of the centre, off Avenida de la Constitución. Four trains run daily to/from Seville (€20, three hours) and Almería (€13, 2¼ hours) via Guadix, and six daily to/from Antequera (€6.50 to €7.50, 1½ hours). Three go to Ronda (€11, three hours) and Algeciras (€16, 4½ hours). For Málaga (€12, 2½ hours) or Córdoba (€14, four hours) take an Algeciras train and change at Bobadilla (€7, 1½ hours). One or two trains go to each of Madrid (€31 to €35, six hours), Valencia (€42 to €62, 7½ to eight hours) and Barcelona (€52 to €125, 12 to 14½ hours).

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

The **airport** (% 958 24 52 23) is 17km west of the city on the A92. **Autocares J González** (% 958 49 01 64) runs buses between the airport and a stop near the Palacio de Congresos (€3, five daily), with a stop in the city centre on Gran Vía de Colón, where a schedule is posted opposite the cathedral. A taxi costs €18 to €20.

BUS

City buses cost €0.90. Tourist offices have leaflets showing routes. Bus 3 runs between the bus station and Gran Vía de Colón in the city centre. To reach the city centre from the train station, walk to Avenida de la Constitución and pick up bus 4, 6, 7, 9 or 11 going to the right (east). From the centre (Gran Vía de Colón) to the train station, take number 3, 4, 6, 9 or 11.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Vehicle access to the Plaza Nueva area is restricted by red lights and little black posts known as *pilonas*, which block certain streets during certain times of the day. If you are going to stay at a hotel near Plaza Nueva, press the button next to your hotel's name beside the *pilonas* to contact reception, which will be able to lower the *pilonas* for you.

Many hotels, especially in the midrange and above, have their own parking facilities. Central underground public car parks include **Parking San Agustín** (Calle San Agustín; per hr/day €1/16) and **Parking Plaza Puerta Real** (Acera del Darro; per hr/day €1/12). Free parking is available at the Alhambra car parks.

TAXI

If you're after a taxi, head for Plaza Nueva, where they line up. Most fares within the city cost between €4.50 and €7.50.

AROUND GRANADA

Granada is surrounded by a fertile plain called La Vega, planted with poplar groves and crops ranging from melons to tobacco. The Vega was an inspiration to Federico García Lorca, who was born and died here. The **Parque Federico García Lorca**, between the villages of Víznar and Alfacar (about 2.5km from each), marks the site where Lorca and hundreds, possibly thousands, of others are believed to have been shot and buried by the Nationalists, at the start of the civil war.

Fuente Vaqueros

The house where Lorca was born in 1898, in this village 17km west of Granada, is now the **Casa Museo Federico García Lorca** (% 958 51 64 53; www.museogarcialorca.org in Spanish; Calle Poeta Federico García Lorca 4; admission €1.80; guided visits hourly 10am-1pm & 5-7pm Tue-Sun Apr-Jun, to 2pm & 6-8pm Tue-Sun Jul-Sep, 10am-1pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar). The place brings his spirit to life, with numerous charming photos, posters and costumes from his plays, and paintings illustrating his poems. A short video captures him in action with the touring Teatro Barraca.

Buses to Fuente Vaqueros (€1.50, 20 minutes) by **Ureña** (% 958 45 41 54) leave from Avenida de Andaluces in front of Granada train station. Departures from Granada at the time of research were at 9am and 11am then hourly from 1pm to 8pm except at 4pm, Monday to Friday, and at 9am, 11am, 1pm and 5pm on Saturday, Sunday and holidays.

GUADIX

pop 20,000 / elevation 915m

The A92 northeast from Granada starts off through forested, hilly country before entering an increasingly arid landscape. Guadix (gwah-deeks), 55km from Granada, is famous for its cave dwellings – not prehistoric remnants but

the homes of about 3000 modern-day townsfolk. The typical 21st-century cave has a white-washed wall across the entrance, and a chimney and TV aerial sticking out of the top. Some have many rooms and all mod cons. Spending a night in a cave is the obvious attraction.

Guadix's **tourist office** (% 958 66 26 65; Carretera de Granada s/n; 11 9am-3pm Mon, to 4pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) is on the Granada road leaving the town centre.

Sights

At the centre of Guadix is a fine sandstone **cathedral** (admission €2; 11 10.30am-1pm & 2-7pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-1pm Sun), built between the 16th and 18th centuries in a succession of Gothic, Renaissance and baroque styles.

A short distance south is the 11th-century Islamic castle, the **Alcazaba** (Calle Barradas 3; admission €1.20; 11 11am-2pm & 4-6.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun). From the Alcazaba there are views south to the main cave quarter, the Barriada de las Cuevas, where the **Cueva Museo Municipal** (Plaza de Padre Poveda; admission €1.50; 11 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun) recreates typical cave life.

Sleeping & Eating

Cuevas Pedro Antonio de Alarcón (% 958 66 49 86; www.cuevaspedroantonio.com; Barriada San Torcuato; s/d/ q €40/61/104; p s) Get the genuine Guadix experience at this comfy, modern apartment-hotel that has a pool and a restaurant. It's 3km from the centre, along the Murcia road.

Hotel Comercio (% 958 66 05 00; www.hotelcomercio.com in Spanish; Calle Mira de Amezcueza 3; s €43, d €55-65; a) This very comfy central hotel has a fine restaurant with a wide variety of medium-priced Spanish fare.

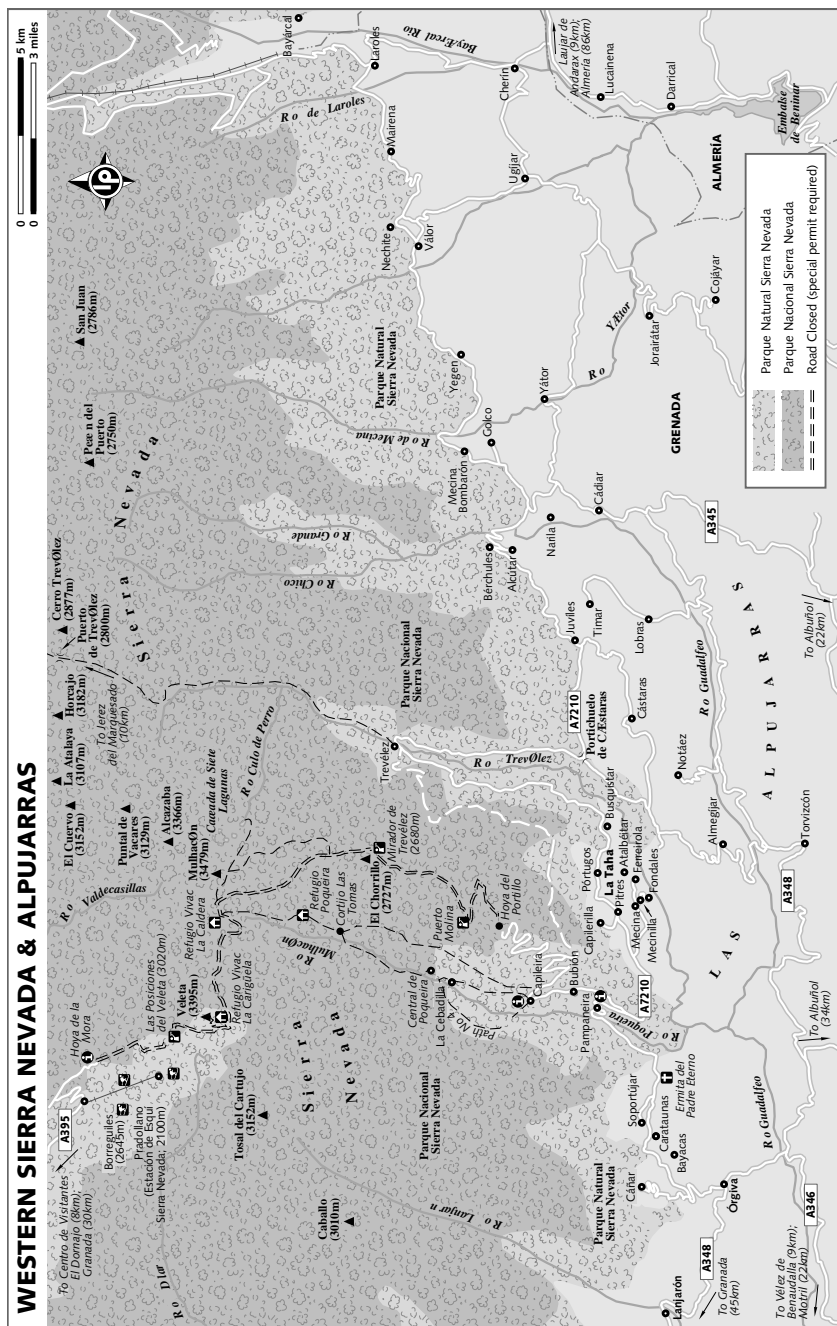
Guadix has some remarkable tapas bars, but the best are **La Bodeguita** (Calle Doctor Pulido 4; drink & tapa €1) and **Bodega Calatrava** (Calle La Tribuna s/n; drink & tapa €1.50).

Getting There & Away

Guadix is about one hour from Granada (bus €4.50, train €6) and 1½ hours from Almería (bus €7.50, train €6.20 to €14) by at least nine buses and four trains daily in each direction.

SIERRA NEVADA

The Sierra Nevada, which includes mainland Spain's highest peak, Mulhacén (3479m), forms an almost year-round snowy southeastern backdrop to Granada. The range stretches about 75km from west to east, extending



into Almería province. All its highest peaks (3000m or more) are towards the Granada end. The upper reaches of the range form the 862-sq-km **Parque Nacional Sierra Nevada**, Spain's biggest national park, with a rare high-altitude environment that is home to about 2100 of Spain's 7000 plant species. Andalucía's largest ibex population (about 5000) is here too. Surrounding the national park at lower altitudes is the 848-sq-km **Parque Natural Sierra Nevada**. The mountains and the Alpujarras valleys (p786) along their southern flank comprise one of the most spectacular areas in Spain, and the area offers wonderful opportunities for walking, horse riding, climbing and mountain biking and, in winter, good skiing and snowboarding at Europe's most southerly ski station.

The **Centro de Visitantes El Dornajo** (% 958 34 06 25; h 10am-2pm & 6-8pm Apr-Sep, 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Oct-Mar), about 23km from Granada, on the A395 towards the ski station, has plenty of information on the Sierra Nevada.

Estación de Esquí Sierra Nevada

The **Sierra Nevada Ski Station** (% 902 708090; www.sierranevadaski.com), at Pradolano, 33km south-east of Granada, is one of Spain's biggest and liveliest ski resorts. It can get overcrowded at weekends and holiday times. The ski season normally lasts from December to April.

The resort has 70 marked downhill runs (mainly red and blue with a few black and green) totalling over 80km, a dedicated snowboarding area and some cross-country routes. Some runs start almost at the top of Veleta, the Sierra Nevada's second-highest peak. A one-day ski pass plus rental of skis, boots and stocks or snowboard costs €50 to €60 depending when you go. The resort has several ski and snowboard schools: six hours' skiing instruction in group classes costs €63.

Nonskiers can ride cable cars up from Pradolano (2100m) to Borreguiles (2645m) for €10 return, and then ice-skate, dogsled or snowshoe. One cable car has wheelchair access. Outside the ski season **Sierra Nevada Activa** (www.sierranevadaactiva.com in Spanish) operates a host of warmer-weather activities, such as mountain biking, trekking, horse riding and canyoning.

SLEEPING

The ski station has around 20 hotels, *hostales* and apartment-hotels. None is cheap (double

rooms mostly start at €80) and reservations are always advisable. Ski packages, which can be booked through the station's website or phone number, start at around €150 per person for two days and two nights, with half board and lift passes. Book two weeks ahead, if you can.

Instalación Juvenil Sierra Nevada (% 958 48 03 05; Calle Peñones 22; dm incl breakfast under/over 26yr €15/20; p √) The youth hostel near the top of the ski station has rooms that sleep from two to four, including six doubles with wheelchair access.

Hotel Ziryab (% 958 48 05 12; www.cetursa.es; Plaza de Andalucía; r from €131; h late Nov-early May; s √) This three-star hotel, near the foot of the resort, is reasonably attractive, and built of stone and wood.

Other recommendations:

Hostal El Ciervo (% 958 48 04 09; www.eh.etursa.es; Edificio Penibético; r €58-98; h Dec-May)

Hotel Apartamentos Trevenque (% 958 48 08 62; www.cetursa.es; Plaza de Andalucía 6; r €132; p)

Getting There & Away

In the ski season **Autocares Bonal** (% 958 46 50 22) operates three daily buses (four at weekends) from Granada bus station to the ski station (one way/return €4/7, one hour). Outside the ski season there's just one bus daily (9am from Granada, 5pm from Pradolano). A taxi from Granada to the ski station costs around €40.

A road climbs right over the Sierra Nevada from the ski station to Capileira village in Las Alpujarras, on the southern side of the range, but it's snowbound much of the year and in any case always closed to private motor vehicles between Hoya de la Mora (2550m), 3km up from Pradolano, and Hoya del Portillo (2150m), 12.5km above Capileira. From about late June to the end of October the national park shuttle-bus services, called the Servicio de Interpretación Ambiental Altas Cumbres (High Peaks Environmental Interpretation Service), run about 6km up the road from Hoya de la Mora (to the Posiciones del Veleta, at 3020m), and some 21km up from Capileira (to the Mirador de Trevélez, at 2680m). Tickets (one way/return €4/6 on either route) and further information are available from the national park information posts at **Hoya de la Mora** (% 630 95 97 39; h during bus-service season approx 8.30am-2.30pm & 3.30-7.30pm) and **Capileira** (% 958 76 34 86, 686 414576; h year-round approx 9am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm).

WALKING THE SIERRA NEVADA

The Sierra Nevada's two highest peaks, Mulhacén (3479m) and Veleta (3395m), rise to the south-east of the ski station and above the head of the Poqueira valley in Las Alpujarras to their south. In the warmer seasons the mountains and Las Alpujarras offer wonderful walking, but the best conditions in the high mountains (early July to early September) unfortunately don't coincide with the most comfortable months down in the Alpujarras. In the Sierra Nevada – which are serious mountains – be prepared for cloud, rain or strong, icy winds *any* day, and come well equipped. Three British climbers froze to death up here in March 2006.

Many exciting walks start where the national park shuttle bus routes drop you (p785). From the Posiciones del Veleta it's about 4km to the top of Veleta, an ascent of some 370m (1½ hours), 14km to the top of Mulhacén (four to five hours), or about 15km (six hours) all the way over to the Mirador de Trevélez. From the Mirador de Trevélez it's around three hours to the top of Mulhacén (6km, 800m ascent).

You can sleep overnight in high-mountain refuges. **Refugio Poqueira** (☎ 958 34 33 49; dm €9), with bunks, hot showers and meals (breakfast/dinner €3.50/10), is towards the top of the Poqueira valley at 2500m, a 4km walk from the Mirador de Trevélez. Phone ahead if possible. Two *refugios vivac* (stone shelters with boards to sleep on) are free but reservations are not possible: **Refugio Vivac La Caldera** is below the west flank of Mulhacén, a 1½-hour walk up from Refugio Poqueira; **Refugio Vivac La Carigüela** is a 2½-hour walk west along the road from Refugio La Caldera, at the 3200m Collado del Veleta pass below the summit of Veleta.

LAS ALPUJARRAS

Below the southern flank of the Sierra Nevada lies one of the oddest crannies of Andalucía, the 70km-long jumble of valleys known as Las Alpujarras. Arid hillsides split by deep ravines alternate with oasis-like white villages set beside rapid streams and surrounded by gardens, orchards and woodlands. An infinity of good walking routes links valley villages, and heads up into the Sierra Nevada: the best times to visit are between April and mid-June, and mid-September and early November.

The Berber-style villages have houses similar to those in Morocco's Atlas Mountains, and the terraced and irrigated hillsides are reminders of the Islamic past. Some of these villages and towns on the lower slopes of the mountains simmer with New Age hippies hoping to get spiritual in front of confused locals. A recent upsurge in tourism and foreign (mainly British) settlers has given the area a new dimension.

Still, there are some villages in the Alpujarras where tourists rarely set foot, and you'll know those places by their narrow car-unfriendly roads and incredible silence. These nooks of Las Alpujarras remain a world apart, with a rare sense of timelessness and mystery.

History

In the 10th and 11th centuries the Alpujarras was a great silkworm farm for the silk workshops of Almería. This activity arose in

tandem with a wave of Berber settlers to the area. Together with irrigated agriculture, it supported at least 400 villages and hamlets by the late 15th century.

On his surrender to Fernando and Isabel in 1492, Boabdil, the last Granada emir, was given the Alpujarras as a personal fiefdom. He soon left for Africa, however, and as Christian promises of tolerance gave way to forced conversions and land expropriations, Muslims rebelled in 1500 across the former Granada emirate, with the Alpujarras in the thick of things. When the revolt failed, Muslims were given the choice of exile or conversion. Most converted but the change was barely skin-deep. A new decree by Felipe II in 1567, forbidding Arabic names, dress and language, sparked a new Alpujarras revolt in 1568. Two years of vicious guerrilla war ended only when Felipe's half-brother, Don Juan of Austria, came to quash the insurrection. The Alpujarras population was deported to Castilla and western Andalucía, and most of the villages were resettled with Christians from the north. The rest were abandoned and the silk industry fell by the wayside.

South from Granada by Gerald Brenan, an Englishman who lived in the Alpujarras village of Yegen in the '20s and '30s, gives a fascinating picture of what was then a very isolated, superstitious corner of Spain. Another Englishman, Chris Stewart, settled here more recently, as a sheep farmer near Órgiva. His entertaining

best-selling *Driving over Lemons* tells of life as a foreigner in Las Alpujarras in the '90s.

Órgiva

pop 5000 / elevation 725m

The western Alpujarras' main town, Órgiva, is a scruffy but bustling place. On Thursday mornings locals and the area's international populace (with a big hippy-New Age element) gather to buy and sell everything from vegetables to bead necklaces at a colourful market in the upper part of town, the Barrio Alto.

Hotel & Hostel Mirasol (☎ 958 78 51 08/59; www.hotelmirasol.com; Avenida González Robles 5 & 3; s/d hostel €17/28, hotel €35/45) provide plain but adequately comfortable rooms with tiled floors and all-white walls.

Hotel Taray (☎ 958 78 45 25; www.hoteltaray.com; A348 Km18.5; r from €73; p a i s w), in a rural setting about 1.5km south of the centre, is Órgiva's best hotel, with pleasant pastel rooms in Alpujarras-style buildings, a good restaurant and a lovely big pool.

Pampaneira, Bubión & Capileira

pop 1270 / elevation 1050-1440m

These small villages clinging to the side of the deep Barranco de Poqueira valley, 14km to 20km northeast of Órgiva, are three of the prettiest, most dramatically sited (and most touristed) in Las Alpujarras. Their whitewashed stone houses seem to clamber over each other in an effort not to slide down into the gorge, while streets decked with flowery balconies wriggle between. Capileira is the best base for walks.

INFORMATION

You'll find ATMs outside the car-park entrance in Pampaneira, and in Capileira at **La General** (Calle Doctor Castilla).

Punto de Información Parque Nacional de Sierra Nevada (☎ 958 76 31 27; Plaza de la Libertad, Pampaneira; h 10am-3pm Sun & Mon, to 2pm & 5-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sat approx mid-Oct-Easter) Plenty of information about Las Alpujarras and Sierra Nevada; maps and books for sale.

SIERRA NEVADA & ALPUJARRAS MAPS

The best overall maps of the area are Editorial Alpina's *Sierra Nevada, La Alpujarra* (1:40,000) and Editorial Penibética's *Sierra Nevada* (1:50,000). Both come with booklets, in English or Spanish, describing walking, biking and skiing routes. An invaluable resource is *34 Alpujarras Walks* by Charles Davis, published by Discovery Walking Guides, which has an accompanying *Tours & Trails* map.

Servicio de Interpretación de Altos Cumbres

(☎ 958 76 34 86, 686 414576; h approx 9am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm) By the main road in Capileira; information mainly about the national park, but also on Las Alpujarras.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

All three villages have solid 16th-century **Mudéjar churches** (h Mass times). They also have small **weaving workshops**, descendants of a textile tradition that goes back to Islamic times, and plentiful **craft shops**. In Bubión, get a marvellous glimpse of bygone Alpujarras life at the excellent little folk museum, **Casa Alpujarreña** (Calle Real; admission €1.80; h 11am-2pm Sun-Thu, to 2pm & 5-7pm Fri, Sat & holidays), beside the church.

Eight **walking trails**, ranging from 4km to 23km (two to eight hours), are marked out in the beautiful Barranco de Poqueira with little colour-coded posts. Their starting points can be hard to find, but they are marked and described on Editorial Alpina's *Sierra Nevada, La Alpujarra* map. Most start from Capileira. Path number 4 (8km, 3½ hours) takes you from Capileira up to the hamlet of La Cebadilla, then down the western side of the valley and back up to Capileira. To start, walk down Calle Cubo from Plaza Calvario, at the northern end of Capileira, turn right where the street takes its second turn to the left, and follow the street out into the countryside. Fork right 125m after the last village building.

Nevadensis (☎ 958 76 31 27; www.nevadensis.com), at the information office in Pampaneira, offers hikes and treks, 4WD trips, horse riding, mountain biking, climbing and canyoning, with knowledgeable guides.

SLEEPING & EATING

Book ahead for rooms around Easter, and from July to September. Many villages have apartments and houses for rent; ask in tourist offices or check websites such as **Turgranada** (www.turgranada.com) or **Rustic Blue** (www.rusticblue.com).

Alpujarras food is basically hearty country fare, with good meat and local trout. Trevélez is famous Spain-wide for its *jamón serrano* (mountain-cured ham), but many other villages produce good hams too. A *plato alpujarreño* consists of fried potatoes, fried eggs, sausage, ham and maybe a black pudding, usually for around €6.

Pampaneira

Two good-value *hostales* face each other at the entrance to the village: **Hostal Pampaneira** (958 76 30 02; Avenida Alpujarra 1; s/d €26/36), with a friendly local owner; and **Hostal Ruta del Mulhacén** (958 76 30 10; www.rutadelmulhacen.com; Avenida Alpujarra 6; s €25-35, d €30-45), where some rooms have terraces with views down the valley.

Restaurante Casa Diego (958 76 30 15; Plaza de la Libertad 3; mains €5-9), along the street, has a pleasant upstairs terrace; trout with ham, and local ham and eggs, are good economical bets.

Bubión

Hostal Las Terrazas (958 76 30 34; www.terrazalpujarra.com; Plaza del Sol 7; s/d €22/29, 2-/4-/6-person apt €48/59/77) Located below the main road, the *hostal* has neat little rooms with folksy textiles, and apartments nearby.

Teide Restaurant (958 76 30 84; Carretera de Sierra Nevada; menú €8) A good, traditional restaurant favoured for its *menú del día* that includes generous portions of lentils for starters, meat in a tomato sauce, plus salad, and coffee.

Capileira

Campileira (958 76 34 19; Carretera de Sierra Nevada; dm €12, d €27, sites per adult/tent €3.50/6.50; p s) Some 500m up the Sierra Nevada road from the top of the village, Campileira provides clean dorms, camping on a grassy terrace, wonderful views and breakfast/dinner (€2.50/9).

Hostal Atalaya (958 76 30 25; www.hostalatalaya.com; Calle Perchel 3; s/d incl breakfast with view €22/36, without view €17/32) The Atalaya is geared to budget travellers, with simple rooms and plenty of information.

Finca Los Llanos (958 76 30 71; www.hotelfincalosllos.com; Carretera de Sierra Nevada; s/d €45/72; p s) At the top of the village, Los Llanos has tasteful rooms and nifty suites, a good restaurant, a pool and a library.

Cortijo Catifalarga (958 34 33 57; www.catifalarga.com; s €58-69, d €73-90, apt from €73; mains €6-12; p v) This renovated old farmstead is the choicest base in the Poqueira valley. The driveway begins

750m up the Sierra Nevada road from the top of Capileira. You can dine indoors or out, and the views and eclectic food are both fabulous.

Restaurante Ibero-Fusión (958 76 32 56; Calle Parra 1; salads €5-9, mains €7-10; h dinner; v) You'll get a change from the regular Alpujarras fare at this restaurant just below the church – an *andaluz*, Arabic and Indian fusion, with plenty of vegetarian specialities.

Pitres & La Taha

pop 800

Pitres (elevation 1245m) is a break from the tourism and souvenirs in the Poqueira Gorge villages, although not quite as pretty. The beautiful valley below it, with five tranquil hamlets (Mecina, Mecinilla, Fondales, Ferreirola and Atalbéitar), all grouped with Pitres in the *municipio* called La Taha, is particularly fascinating to explore. Its ancient pathways, wending their way through lush woodlands to the ubiquitous tinkle of gently running water, are a walker's delight.

SLEEPING & EATING

L'Atelier (958 85 75 01; www.ivu.org/atelier; Calle Alberca 21, Mecina; s/d €29/42, incl breakfast €30/45; h dinner Wed-Mon; v) A welcoming little French-run guesthouse, in an ancient village house, L'Atelier also serves gourmet vegetarian meals and has an art gallery.

Sierra y Mar (958 76 61 71; www.sierramar.com; Calle Albaicín, Ferreirola; s/d incl breakfast €36/56) Hidden away along the sun-bleached alleys of the gorgeously quiet village of Ferreirola, this charming guesthouse has just nine rooms set around multiple patios and gardens. You couldn't hope for more helpful or knowledgeable hosts, especially when it comes to planning walks.

Hotel Albergue de Mecina (958 76 62 41; Calle La Fuente s/n, Mecina; r €65; p s) A tasteful hotel that's modern and comfortable, with touches of traditional Alpujarras style.

Trevélez

pop 800 / elevation 1476m

Trevélez, in a valley almost as impressive as the Poqueira Gorge, claims to be the highest village in Spain (but Valdellinares, Aragón, reaches above 1700m) and produces famous *jamón serrano*. Along the main road, you're confronted by a welter of *jamón* and souvenir shops, but a wander into the upper parts reveals a lively Alpujarran village.

SLEEPING & EATING

Camping Trevélez (958 85 87 35; www.campingtrevlez.net; Carretera Trevélez-Órgiva Km1; sites per adult/tent/car €4.50/5/3.50; p s) On a leafy, terraced hillside 1km out of Trevélez, the camping ground has ecologically-minded owners and a good-value restaurant with vegetarian options.

Hotel La Fragua (958 85 86 26; Calle San Antonio 4; s/d €23/35) Popular with walking groups, this hotel/towards the top of town provides comfortably pine-furnished rooms. Its restaurant, Mesón La Fragua (mains €6 to €9), a few doors away, is one of the best in town, with a menu ranging from partridge in walnut sauce to some good vegetarian dishes.

Hotel Pepe Álvarez (958 85 85 03; www.andalucia.co.uk; Plaza Francisco Abellán s/n; s/d €23/41) By the main road at the foot of the village; some rooms have terraces overlooking the busy plaza.

East of Trevélez

East of Trevélez the landscape becomes barer and more arid, yet there are still oases of greenery around the villages. The central and eastern Alpujarras have their own magic, but see far fewer tourists than the western villages.

BÉRCHULES

Seventeen kilometres from Trevélez, Bérchules is in a green valley stretching far back into the hills, with attractive walks. **Hotel Los Bérchules** (958 85 25 30; www.hotelberchules.com; Carretera s/n; s/d €42/45; mains €6-11; p) , by the main road, has good, clean, bright rooms, helpful English-speaking hosts who can help you set up all manner of activities, and an excellent restaurant (try the local lamb with mint).

YEGEN

Gerald Brenan's home in the 1920s is 12km east of Bérchules, off the main plaza with the fountain. Parts of the valley below Yegen have a particularly moonlike quality. Several walking routes have been marked out locally including a 2km 'Sendero de Gerald Brenan'. **El Rincón de Yegen** (958 85 12 70; www.aldearural.com/rincondeyegen; s/d €25/36; mains €7-13; p s) , on the eastern edge of the village, has comfortable rooms and an excellent, medium-priced restaurant. Succumb to the pears in local wine and hot chocolate!

Getting There & Away

Alsina Graells (958 18 54 80) runs three daily buses from Granada to Órgiva (€4, 1½ hours), Pampaneira (€5, two hours), Bubión (€5.50,

2¼ hours), Capileira (€5.50, 2½ hours) and Pitres (€5.50, 2¾ hours). Two of these continue to Trevélez (€6.50, 3¼ hours) and Bérchules (€7.50, 3¾ hours). The return buses start from Bérchules at 5am and 5pm, and from Pitres at 3.30pm. Alsina also runs twice-daily buses from Granada to Cádiar (€7, three hours) and Yegen (€8, 3½ hours).

THE COAST

Granada's rugged, cliff-lined, 80km coast has a few reasonably attractive beach towns, linked by several daily buses to Granada, Málaga and Almería.

Salobreña

pop 11,000

Salobreña's huddle of white houses rises on a crag above the Mediterranean. The helpful **tourist office** (958 61 03 14; Plaza de Goya; h 9.30am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat) is 200m off the N340. Up at the top of the town is the impressive 13th-century **Castillo Árabe** (admission €3; h 10.30am-1.30pm & 4-8pm). The ticket also includes the nearby **Museo Arqueológico**, open the same hours. Below all this is a long, dark-sand beach, extremely popular with *granadinos* in August.

A fine place to stay is the spick-and-span **Hostal San Juan** (958 61 17 29; www.hotel-san-juan.com in Spanish; Calle Jardines 1; d €42; a) , on a quiet street about 400m from the tourist office. The best place to rest your head is the **Hotel Avenida** (958 61 15 44; www.hotelavenidatropical.com; Avenida Mediterráneo 35; s €35-55, d €50-80; p a i) a family-oriented hotel between the town centre and beach. It has 30 comfortable, stylish rooms with phone, satellite TV and bathtub, plus its own restaurant. Features such as the Jacuzzi and sun terrace may mean you never see the town.

There are loads of restaurants and beachside *chiringuitos* (small open-air bars), and a spot of nightlife, on and near the beachfront.

Almuñécar

pop 23,000

From the highway Almuñécar seems an uninviting group of apartment blocks with pebbly beaches, but it has a more attractive older heart around the 16th-century castle. The **bus station** (958 63 01 40; Avenida Juan Carlos I 1) is just south of the N340. The **main tourist office** (958 63 11 25; www.almunecar.info; Avenida Europa s/n; h 10am-2pm & 5-7pm) is 1km southwest, just back from Playa de San Cristóbal.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Just behind Playa de San Cristóbal is a tropical-bird aviary, **Parque Ornitológico Loro-Sexi** (% 958 63 02 80; adult/child €2/1.50; h 11am-2pm, 5-7pm approx May-Sep, 4-6pm approx Oct-Apr). Atop the hill above is the post-Reconquista **Castillo de San Miguel** (% 958 63 12 52; adult/child incl Museo Arqueológico €2/1.50; h 10.30am-1.30pm & 5-7.30pm Tue-Sat, to 1.30pm Sun, afternoons 4-6.30pm approx Oct-Apr), with great views and an interesting little **museum**. The castle ticket includes the worthwhile **Museo Arqueológico** (% 958 63 12 52; Calle Málaga), a few streets northeast in a set of Roman underground galleries called the Cueva de Siete Palacios.

You can paraglide, windsurf, dive, sail, ride a horse or descend canyons in and around Almuñécar and nearby La Herradura. The tourist office and its website have plenty of information.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel California (% 958 88 10 38; www.hotelcaliforniaspain.com; Carretera N340 Km313; s/d €33/48; p v) With rooms and a restaurant overlooking the town and sea from an elevated position just off the N340, the California provides colourful touches of Moroccan style and tasty food, including vegetarian options. The hotel offers special packages for paragliders.

Hotel Casablanca (% 958 63 55 75; www.almunecar.info/casablanca; Plaza de San Cristóbal 4; s/d €45/64; p a) Just off Playa de San Cristóbal, the slim-line Casablanca has spacious rooms with beautiful and distinctive handmade furnishings.

JAÉN PROVINCE

Set on Andalucía's border with Castilla-La Mancha, Jaén alternates between wild mountain ranges and rolling country covered with lines of olive trees (it produces about 10% of the world's olive oil). This is back country where life for many still isn't easy, but it's scattered with back-country gems – the marvellous Renaissance architecture of Andrés de Vandelvira in the unlikely provincial settings of Úbeda, Baeza and Jaén city, and the equally marvellous mountainscapes of the Parque Natural de Cazorla in eastern Jaén.

The Desfiladero de Despeñaperros pass on Jaén's northern border has, from time immemorial, been the most important gateway into Andalucía from central Spain. Back in 1212 Christian forces opened the door to Andalucía

by routing the Almohad Muslim army at Las Navas de Tolosa, just south of the pass. Today the A4 from Madrid enters Andalucía by this same route.

The Jaén diet is pretty traditional but varied, with plenty of game (partridge, venison, wild boar), especially in the mountains. Many bars still have the endearing habit of serving free tapas with drinks.

The website www.promojaen.es has lots of interesting information about the province.

JAÉN

pop 113,000 / elevation 575m

The provincial capital is a bustling university city and well worth some of your time.

Orientation

Old Jaén, dominated by the huge cathedral, huddles beneath the high, castletopped Cerro de Santa Catalina. The focal point of the newer part of town is Plaza de la Constitución, 200m northeast and downhill from the cathedral. From here the main artery of the new city, Calle Roldán y Marín, becoming Paseo de la Estación, heads northwest to the train station, 1km away.

Information

There's no shortage of banks or ATMs around Plaza de la Constitución.

Cyber Cu@k (Calle Adarves Bajos 24; per 30min €1.20;

h 10.30am-12.30pm & 5.30pm-midnight)

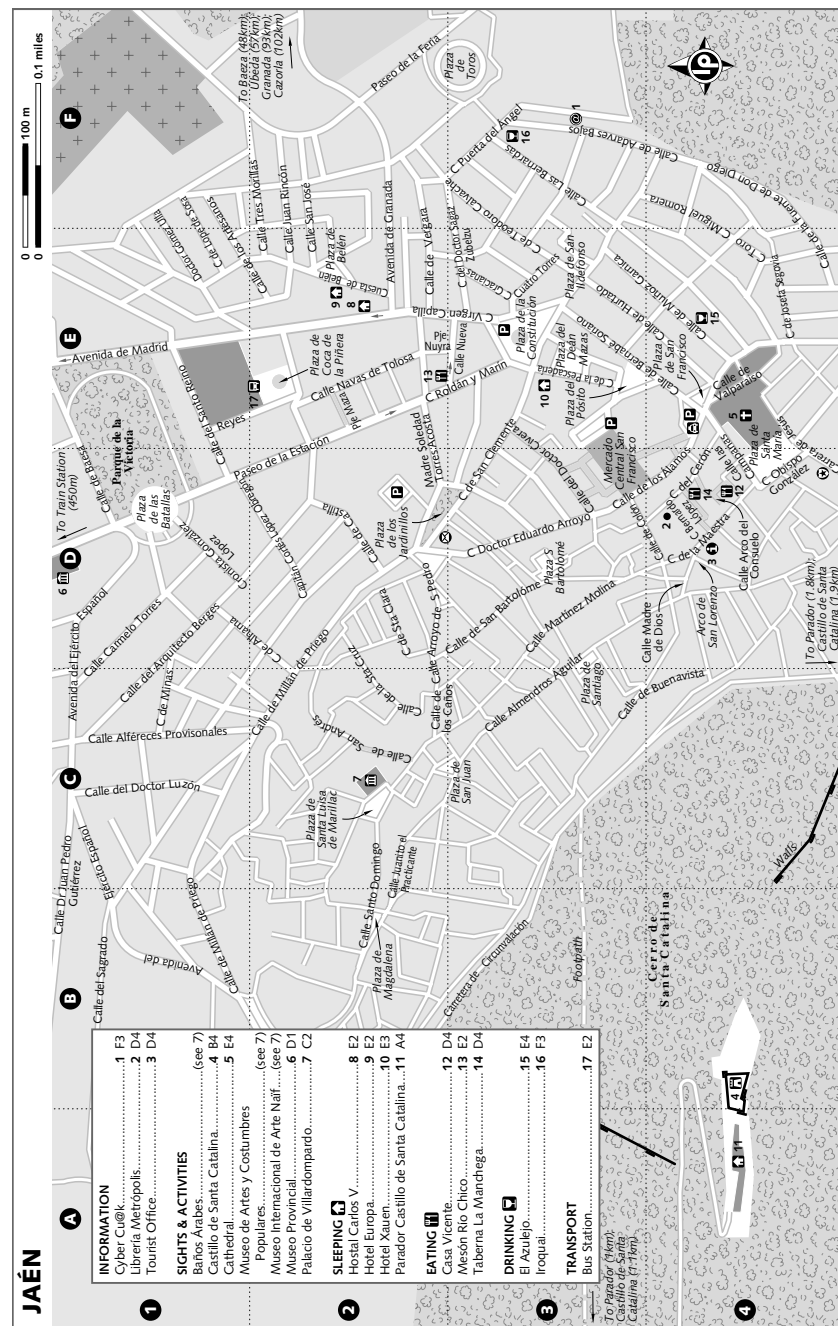
Librería Metrópolis (Calle del Cerón 17) Good for maps.

Tourist office (% 953 19 04 55; otjaen@andalucia.org; Calle de la Maestra 13; h 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 7pm Oct-Mar, to 1pm Sat, Sun & holidays) Helpful, multilingual staff with plenty of free information about the city and province.

Sights

Jaén's huge **cathedral** (% 953 23 42 33; h 8.30am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar, to 1pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat Apr-Sep, 9am-1pm & 5-7pm Sun) was built mainly in the 16th and 17th centuries, and mainly to the Renaissance designs of Andrés de Vandelvira – though the southwestern façade on Plaza de Santa María sports a dramatic array of 17th-century baroque statuary.

The **Palacio de Villardompardo** (% 953 23 62 92; Plaza de Santa Luisa de Marillac; admission free with passport; h 9am-8pm Tue-Fri, 9.30am-2.30pm Sat & Sun, closed holidays), another Renaissance treasure, houses three excellent attractions: the beautiful 11th-century **Baños Árabes** (Arab Baths), one of



MASS FERVOUR IN THE SIERRA MORENA

On the last Sunday of every April, around half a million people converge on a remote shrine in the Sierra Morena in the northwest of Jaén province for one of Spain's biggest religious gatherings, the festive pilgrimage known as the *Romería de la Virgen de la Cabeza*. The original 13th-century Santuario de la Virgen de la Cabeza, 31km north of Andújar, was destroyed in the civil war, when Francoist troops occupying it were besieged by the Republicans for eight months, but the shrine has since been rebuilt. The annual festivities see a tiny statue of the Virgin Mary, known as *La Morenita* (the Little Brown One), being carried around the Cerro del Cabezo for about four hours from about 11am. It's a festive and emotive occasion, with children and items of clothing being passed over the heads of the crowd to priests who touch them to the Virgin's mantle.

Spain's biggest Islamic bathhouses; and the **Museo de Artes y Costumbres Populares**, devoted to the artefacts of the harsh rural lifestyle of pre-industrial Jaén province; and the **Museo Internacional de Arte Naïf**, with a large international collection of colourful and witty naïve art.

The **Museo Provincial** (☎ 953 25 06 00; Paseo de la Estación 27; adult/EU citizen €1.50/free; ⌚ 3-8pm Tue, 9am-8pm Wed-Sat, to 3pm Sun) has the finest collection of 5th-century-BC Iberian sculptures in Spain. Found in Porcuna, they show a clear Greek influence in their fluid form and graceful design.

Jaén's most exhilarating spot is the top of the Cerro de Santa Catalina, where the **Castillo de Santa Catalina** (☎ 953 12 07 33; admission €3; ⌚ 10am-2pm & 5-9pm Tue-Sun, afternoons Oct-Mar 3.30-7pm) was surrendered to Fernando III in 1246 by Granada after a six-month siege. Audiovisual gimmicks add fun to the visit to the castle's keep, chapel and dungeon. The castle is a circuitous 4km drive from the city centre (€6 by taxi), but you can walk up in 45 minutes using a steep path almost opposite the top of Calle de Buenavista.

Sleeping

Hostal Carlos V (☎ 953 22 20 91; Avenida de Madrid 4, 2nd fl; s/d without bathroom €21/35; a) The best budget option in town, the friendly, family-run Carlos V provides pleasant rooms with wrought-iron beds and a TV in each room.

Hotel Xauen (☎ 953 24 07 89; www.hotelxauenjaen.com; Plaza del Deán Mazas 3; s/d €40/55; p a i) The Xauen has good facilities and spacious, well-appointed rooms, making it popular with businessfolk.

Hotel Europa (☎ 953 22 27 00; www.husa.es; Plaza de Belén 1; s/d €34/57; p a) Though the rooms are only adequate, the Europa's location off Avenida de Granada makes it a convenient option for drivers.

Parador Castillo de Santa Catalina (☎ 953 23 00 00; www.parador.es; s/d €116/145; p a s) Next to the castle at the top of the Cerro de Santa Catalina, this hotel has an incomparable setting and theatrical vaulted halls. Rooms are incredibly comfortable with four-poster beds and tiled Islamic details, and there is also an excellent restaurant.

Eating

Taberna La Manchega (☎ 953 23 21 92; Calle Bernardo López 12; platos combinados €4; ⌚ lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) A terrific old-town bar, more than a century old, with an atmospheric cellar restaurant. The food is cheap and tasty. Wander along nearby Calles Cerón and Arco del Consuelo for further quirky old tapas bars.

Mesón Río Chico (☎ 953 24 08 02; Calle Nueva 2; menú €8) The downstairs *taberna* serves delicious tapas and *raciones* of meat, *revueltos* (scrambled-egg dishes) and fish. There is a more expensive restaurant upstairs.

Casa Vicente (☎ 953 23 28 16; Calle Francisco Martín Mora; menú €30) Set in a restored old-town mansion with a patio, Casa Vicente is one of the best restaurants in town. Take tapas in the bar or sit down for specialties such as *cordero mozárabe*, lamb with honey and spices.

Drinking

Cool drinking spots include stylish **El Azulejo** (Calle de Hurtado 8) playing everything from pop to electronic to jazz, and **Iroquai** (Calle Adarves Bajos 53) which usually has live rock, blues, flamenco or fusion on Thursday.

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (☎ 953 25 01 06; Plaza de Coca de la Piñera) is 250m north of Plaza de la Constitución. Destinations include Granada (€7, 1½ hours, 14 daily), Baeza (€3.50, 45 minutes, up to 11 daily), Úbeda (€4.50, 1¼ hours, up to

12 daily), Córdoba (€7, 1½ hours, seven daily), Cazorla (€7.50, two hours, two daily) and Madrid (€23, four hours, up to five daily).

Most days there are only five departures from the **train station** (☎ 953 27 02 02). One, at 8am, goes to Córdoba (€8, 1½ hours) and Seville (€16, three hours), and up to four go to Madrid (€22 to €26, four hours).

BAEZA

pop 16,000 / elevation 790m

This country town, 48km northeast of Jaén, is replete with gorgeous Gothic and Renaissance buildings from the 16th century, when local nobility ploughed much of their wealth from grain-growing and textiles into beautiful sand-coloured churches and huge mansion palaces that are a delight to the 21st-century eye.

Orientation & Information

The heart of town is Plaza de España and the adjacent Paseo de la Constitución. The **tourist office** (☎ 953 74 04 44; Plaza del Pópulo; ⌚ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 4-6pm Sat Oct-Mar, 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 5-7pm Sat Apr-Sep, to 1pm Sun) is just southwest of Paseo de la Constitución.

Sights

Opening times of some buildings vary unpredictably.

In the centre of beautiful **Plaza del Pópulo** is the **Fuente de los Leones** (Fountain of the Lions), topped by an ancient statue believed to represent Imilce, a local Iberian princess who was married to Hannibal. On the southern side of the plaza is the Plateresque Casa del Pópulo from about 1540 (housing Baeza's tourist office).

Now a high school, Baeza's **Antigua Universidad** (Old University; Calle Beato Juan de Ávila; admission free; ⌚ 10am-1pm & 4-6pm Thu-Tue) was founded in 1538 and closed (for being too progressive) in 1824. The main patio has two levels of elegant Renaissance arches. Round the corner is the early-16th-century **Palacio de Jabalquinto** (Plaza Santa Cruz; admission free; ⌚ 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Thu-Tue), a mansion with a flamboyant Isabel-line-Gothic façade and lovely Renaissance patio with a fantastically carved baroque stairway. Across the square, the 13th-century **Iglesia de la Santa Cruz** (⌚ 11am-1.30pm & 4-6pm Mon-Sat, noon-2pm Sun), one of the first churches to be built in Andalucía after the Reconquista, may be the only Romanesque church in Andalucía.

Baeza's eclectic **cathedral** (Plaza de Santa María; donations welcome; ⌚ 10.30am-1pm & 5-7pm Apr-Sep, to 1pm & 4-6pm Oct-Mar) is chiefly in 16th-century Renaissance style, with an interior designed by Andrés de Vandelvira and Jerónimo del Prado. The grille on the **antiguo coro** (old choir) is a masterpiece by Jaén's 16th-century wrought-iron supremo, Maestro Bartolomé.

A block north of Paseo de la Constitución, the **ayuntamiento** (town hall; Paseo del Cardenal Benavides 9) has a marvellous Plateresque façade.

Sleeping & Eating

Hostal El Patio (☎ 953 74 02 00; Calle Conde Romanos 13; d €30) This dilapidated 17th-century mansion has a covered patio full of rugged sofas and overflowing plants. The rooms are drab, but there are also even cheaper ones sharing bathrooms.

Hostal Palacete Santa Ana (☎ 953 74 16 57; info@palacetesantaana.com; Calle Santa Ana Vieja 9; s/d €42/66; a) A stylish hotel with beautifully furnished rooms, in a restored 16th-century nunnery. The Palacete Santa Ana prides itself on its art and archaeology collection and the owners have a classy restaurant right next door, serving up regional specialties.

Hospedería Fuentesueva (☎ 953 74 31 00; www.fuentesueva.com; Paseo Arco del Agua s/n; s/d incl breakfast €43/72; a s) This former women's prison is now a beautifully restored small hotel, with large, comfortable rooms in good-girl colours, such as subdued oranges and salmon-pinks, and marble bathrooms.

Hostal Puerta de la Luna (☎ 953 74 70 19; www.hotelpuertadelaluna.com in Spanish; Calle Candónigo Melgares Raya s/n; d Mon-Thu €95, Fri-Sun €110; p a s) This is a fantastically luxurious mansion hotel with real character and wonderful facilities. The rooms are kitted out with crisp damask sheets and antiques.

La Góndola (☎ 953 74 29 84; Portales Carbonería 13, Paseo de la Constitución; mains €8-14) The terrific local atmosphere here is helped along by the glowing wood-burning grill, cheerful service and good food. Try *patatas baezanas*, a huge vegetarian delight of sautéed potatoes and mushrooms.

Restaurante Vandelvira (☎ 953 74 81 72; Calle de San Francisco 14; mains €7-16; ⌚ closed Sun night & Mon) Installed in part of the restored Convento de San Francisco, this is a classy, friendly restaurant. Treat yourself to dishes such as partridge pâté salad or *solomillo al carbón* (char-grilled steak).

Getting There & Away

From the **bus station** (☎ 953 74 04 68; Paseo Arco del Agua), 700m east of Plaza de España, buses go to Jaén (€3.50, 45 minutes, 11 daily), Úbeda (€0.90, 30 minutes, 15 daily), Cazorla (€4, €2.40, 2 hours, two daily) and Granada (€10, 2½ hours, five daily).

Linares-Baeza train station (☎ 953 65 02 02) is 13km northwest. Buses connect with most trains Monday to Saturday; a taxi is €14.

ÚBEDA

pop 34,000 / elevation 760m

Just 9km east of Baeza, bigger Úbeda has an even finer collection of marvellous buildings. In the 16th century, an Úbeda name named Francisco de los Cobos y Molina became first secretary to Carlos I; his nephew, Juan Vázquez de Molina, succeeded him in the job and kept it under Felipe II. Much of the wealth their influence brought to Úbeda was lavished on a profusion of Renaissance mansions and churches that remain its pride and glory today – many of them, of course, designed by Jaén's Renaissance master, Andrés de Vandelvira, born in 1509 at Alcazar in neighbouring Albacete province.

Orientation & Information

The fine architecture is mostly in the south-eastern old part of town, a web of narrow streets and expansive plazas. Budget accommodation and the bus station are in the drab new town in the west and north.

The **tourist office** (☎ 953 75 08 97; Calle Baja del Marqués 4; 11am–2.45pm & 4–7pm Mon–Fri, 10am–2pm Sat) is in the 18th-century Palacio Marqués de Contadero in the old town.

Sights

PLAZA VÁZQUEZ DE MOLINA

This plaza, Úbeda's crown jewel, is almost entirely surrounded by quite beautiful 15th- and 16th-century stone buildings.

The **Capilla de El Salvador** (admission €2.25; 11am–2pm & 4.30–7pm) faces the eastern end of the plaza. Founded in the 1540s by Francisco de los Cobos y Molina as his family funerary chapel, it was Vandelvira's first commission in Úbeda. The basic concept is by Diego de Siloé, architect of Granada cathedral, but Vandelvira added plenty of his own touches, including the elaborate main façade, an outstanding piece of Plateresque design with an orgy of classical sculpture on the underside of the

arch by Frenchman Esteban Jamete. Lit up at night, the whole façade leaps out in dynamic 3D. The sacristy, by Vandelvira, has a portrait of Francisco de los Cobos y Molina. The richly decorated chancel is modelled on Siloé's Capilla Mayor in Granada cathedral, with a frescoed dome. The Cobos family crypt lies beneath the nave.

Next to the Capilla de El Salvador stands what was the abode of its chaplains – in fact one of Vandelvira's best palaces, the **Palacio del Deán Ortega**. It's now Úbeda's *parador* and its elegant courtyard is a lovely spot for refreshments.

The harmonious proportions of the Italianate **Palacio de Vázquez de Molina** (11am–2pm & 5–9pm), at the western end of the plaza, make it one of the finest buildings in the town. Now Úbeda's town hall, it was built around 1562 by Vandelvira for Juan Vázquez de Molina, whose coat of arms surmounts the doorway.

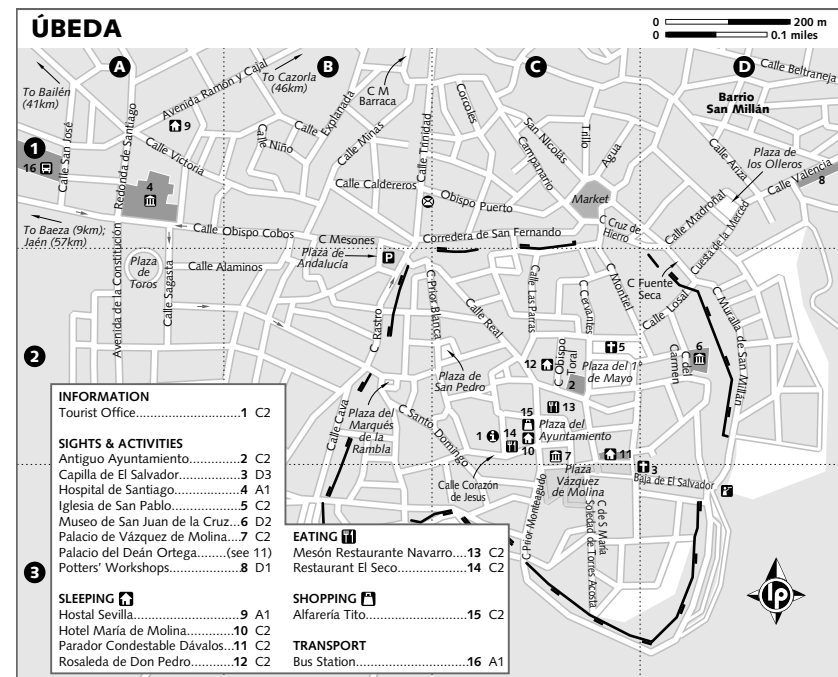
PLAZA 1° DE MAYO & AROUND

Plaza 1° de Mayo used to be Úbeda's market square and bullring, and the Inquisition burnt heretics where its kiosk now stands. Worthies would watch the merry events from the gallery of the elegant 16th-century **Antiguo Ayuntamiento** (Old Town Hall) in the southwestern corner. Along the top (northern) side of the square is the **Iglesia de San Pablo** (11am–7–9pm), with a fine late-Gothic portal from 1511.

The **Museo de San Juan de la Cruz** (☎ 953 75 06 15; Calle del Carmen; admission €1.20; 11am–1pm & 5–7pm Tue–Sun) is devoted to the mystic and religious reformer St John of the Cross, who died here in 1591. Even if you can't understand the Spanish-speaking monks who guide all visits, you'll still get to see a couple of the saint's fingers and some of his bones, preserved in cabinets, and other memorabilia.

HOSPITAL DE SANTIAGO

Completed in 1575, Andrés de Vandelvira's last **building** (Calle Obispo Cobos; admission free; 8am–3pm & 4–10pm Mon–Fri, 11am–3pm & 6–10pm Sat & Sun) is on the western side of town. This sober, grand-scale, late-Renaissance masterpiece has been dubbed the 'Escorial of Andalucía'. Off the classic Vandelvira two-level patio are a chapel, now restored as an auditorium (the hospital is now a cultural centre), and a staircase with colourful frescoes.



Sleeping & Eating

Hostal Sevilla (☎ 953 75 06 12; Avenida Ramón y Cajal 9; s/d €20/33) Úbeda's *hostales*, all near each other in the modern part of town, are rather grim in appearance. The pleasant, family-run Sevilla is the best of the bunch, offering good-value rooms with winter heating.

Rosaleda de Don Pedro (☎ 953 79 51 47; www.rosaledadedonpedro.com; Calle Obispo Toral 2; s €64–77, d €80–96; p a i s w) The Don Pedro offers good three-star facilities in a central old-town location, including beautiful custom-made beds, a good restaurant and the only pool in the historic centre.

Hotel María de Molina (☎ 953 79 53 56; www.hotel-maria-de-molina.com in Spanish; Plaza del Ayuntamiento; s/d €52/84; a) This attractive hotel occupies a 16th-century *palacio* on picturesque Plaza Ayuntamiento. Well-appointed rooms are arranged around a typical patio and the hotel has an excellent restaurant.

Parador Condestable Dávalos (☎ 953 75 03 45; www.parador.es; Plaza Vázquez de Molina; s/d €129/161; p a) Úbeda's fabulous *parador* overlooks the wonderful Plaza Vázquez de Molina. The hotel is an historic monument, now of course

comfortably modern and appropriately luxurious. Its restaurant is deservedly the most popular in town, serving up delicious and elegant dishes (around €12 to €17). Try local specialities such as *carruecano* (green peppers stuffed with partridge) or *cabrito guisado con piñones* (stewed kid with pine nuts).

Mesón Restaurante Navarro (☎ 953 79 06 38; Plaza del Ayuntamiento 2; raciones €4–9) Crammed, smoky and noisy, the Navarro is a cherished local favourite. In summer it's nice to sit out on the plaza.

Restaurante El Seco (☎ 953 79 14 52; Calle Corazón de Jesús 8; menú €12) On a pretty old-town square, El Seco has good traditional dishes such as steaming *carne de monte* (usually venison) with a rich tomato sauce or lightly grilled trout with mixed vegetables.

Shopping

The typical green glaze on Úbeda's attractive pottery dates back to Islamic times. Several workshops on Cuesta de la Merced and Calle Valencia in the Barrio San Millán, the potters' quarter northeast of the old town, sell their wares on the spot, and the potters are

often willing to explain some of the ancient techniques they still use. **Alfarería Tito** (Plaza del Ayuntamiento 12) has a large selection too.

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (% 953 75 21 57; Calle San José 6) is in the new part of town. Destinations include Baeza (€0.90, 30 minutes, 15 daily), Jaén (€4.50, 1¼ hours, up to 12 daily), Cazorla (€3.30, 45 minutes, up to 10 daily) and Granada (€11, 2¾ hours, seven daily).

CAZORLA

pop 9000 / elevation 885m

Cazorla, 45km east of Úbeda, is the main gateway to the Parque Natural de Cazorla and a quaintly intriguing hillside town of narrow old streets in its own right. It can get pretty busy at Spanish holiday times.

Orientation & Information

Three plazas delineate the town's central axis. Plaza de la Constitución is the main square of the northern, newer part of town. Plaza de la Corredera is 150m further south along Calle Doctor Muñoz, and Plaza de Santa María, downhill through narrow, winding streets another 300m southeast, is the heart of the oldest part of town.

The **Oficina de Turismo Municipal** (% 953 71 01 12; Paseo del Santo Cristo 17; 10am-1pm & 5.30-8pm) is 200m north of Plaza de la Constitución.

Sights

At one end of lovely **Plaza de Santa María** is the large shell of the **Iglesia de Santa María**, built by Andrés de Vandelvira in the 16th century but wrecked by Napoleonic troops. A short walk up from here, the ancient **Castillo de la Vedra** houses the **Museo del Alto Guadalquivir** (adult/EU citizen €1.50/free; 1-3-8pm Tue, 9am-8pm Wed-Sat, to 3pm Sun & holidays), with art and relics of past local life.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Guadalquivir (% 953 72 02 68; www.hguadalquivir.com in Spanish; Calle Nueva 6; s/d €35/47; a) The Guadalquivir has comfortable, pine-furnished rooms: the singles can be a bit cramped but it's good value in a good location.

Molino la Farraga (% 953 72 12 49; www.molinola.farraga.com; Calle Camino de la Hoz s/n; d €64; s) The tranquil old La Farraga mill, with a wild and luxuriant garden, is just up the bucolic valley from Plaza Santa María. Understated comfort is the theme.

Hotel Ciudad de Cazorla (% 953 72 17 00; Plaza de la Corredera 9; s/d incl breakfast €63/74; p a s) This modern structure on mansion-ruled Plaza de Corredera has had resistance from tradition-minded locals, but it's a good building with spacious rooms and all the requisite facilities.

Bar Las Vegas (Plaza de la Corredera 17; raciones €6) Several bars on Cazorla's three main squares serve good tapas and *raciones*. At Las Vegas you can sample *gloria bendita* (blessed glory), a tasty prawn-and-capsicum *revuelto*.

Mesón Don Chema (% 953 72 00 68; Calle Escaleras del Mercado 2; mains €7-9) Down a lane off Calle Doctor Muñoz, this cheerful place serves up good-value local fare. A good choice is *huevos cazorleña*, a sizzling mix of sliced boiled eggs, chorizo sausage and vegetables.

Getting There & Away

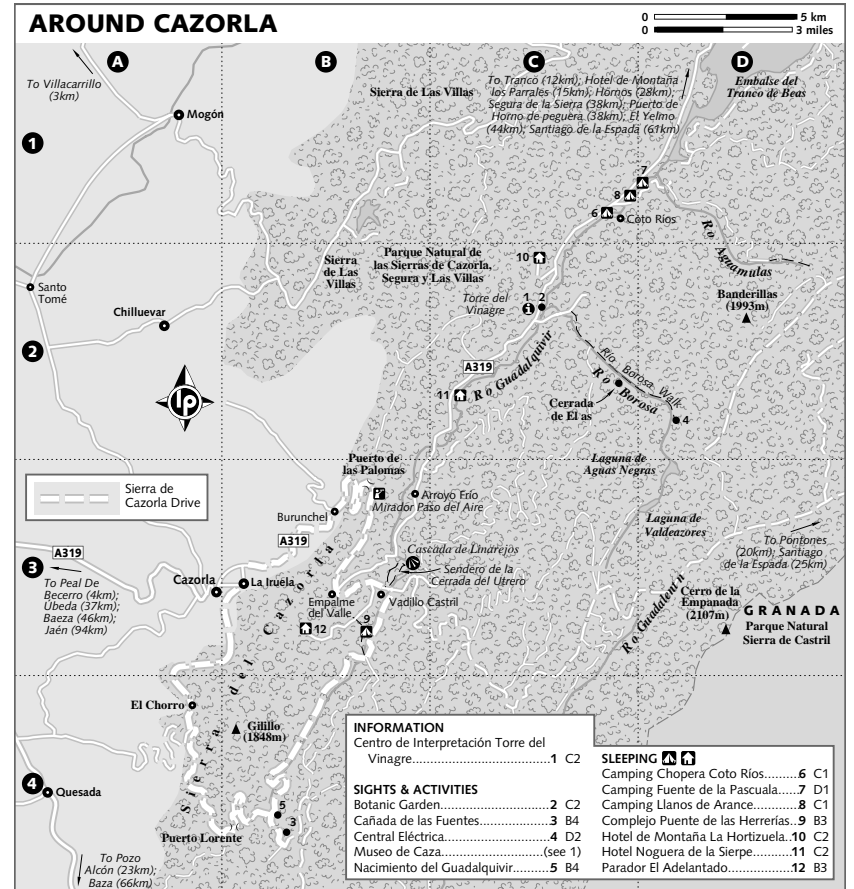
Alsina Graells runs buses to/from Úbeda (€2.95, 45 minutes, up to 10 daily), Jaén (€6.50, two hours, two daily) and Granada (€12, 3½ hours, two daily). The main stop in Cazorla is Plaza de la Constitución; the tourist office has timetables.

PARQUE NATURAL DE CAZORLA

The **Parque Natural de las Sierras de Cazorla, Segura y Las Villas**, filling almost all the east side of Jaén province, is a memorably beautiful region of rugged mountain ranges divided by high plains and deep, forested valleys, and it's one of the best places in Spain for spotting wildlife in the wild. At 2143 sq km, it's also the biggest protected area in the country. If you do a spot of walking, you stand a good chance of seeing wild boar, red and fallow deer, ibex and mouflon (a large wild sheep), and you may even come across deer or boar on some of the main roads. The park also supports 2300 plant species.

The Guadalquivir, Andalucía's longest river, rises in the south of the park and flows north into the Embalse del Tranco de Beas reservoir, then west towards the Atlantic.

To make the most of the park, you need wheels to reach some of the most spectacular areas and walks. The best times to visit are between late April and June, and September and October, when the vegetation is at its most colourful and the weather at its best. In spring, the flowers are magnificent. Peak visitor periods are *Semana Santa*, July and August.



Orientation & Information

Entering the park from Cazorla, the A319 winds over the 1200m Puerto de las Palomas pass and down to the Empalme del Valle junction, where it turns north and follows the Guadalquivir valley.

The main information centre is the **Centro de Interpretación Torre del Vinagre** (% 953 71 30 40; 11am-2pm & 5-8pm Apr-Sep, to 2pm & 4-7pm Oct-Mar), 16km north of Empalme del Valle on the A319. The **Museo de Caza** (Hunting Museum) with stuffed park wildlife, is in an adjoining building; a more-cheerful **botanic garden** is just along the road.

Editorial Alpina's 1:40,000 *Sierra de Cazorla*, which covers the south of the park and is available in English, and *Sierra de Segura*,

which covers the north, are the best maps, showing selected walks that are described in accompanying booklets. You may be able to get the maps locally but don't count on it.

Sights & Activities

SIERRA DE CAZORLA DRIVE

For those with wheels, this itinerary of about 60km is a good introduction to the parts of the park nearest Cazorla, with a couple of stops to stretch your legs. It's all passable for ordinary cars, if bumpy in places.

Head first up to La Iruela, 1km east of Cazorla, and turn right along Carretera Virgen de la Cabeza. About 12km along here, during which the road ceases to be paved, is **El Chorro**, a gorge that's good for watching vultures. Just

beyond El Chorro, ignore another dirt road forking down to the right. Your track winds round over the **Puerto Lorente** pass and down to a junction after 12km. Fork right here, and after about 200m a 'Nacimiento del Guadalquivir' sign to your left points down to the official **source of the Guadalquivir**.

The road heads a short distance past the Nacimiento to the **Cañada de las Fuentes** picnic area, a convenient stop. From here head back northward down the beautiful valley of the infant Guadalquivir. At a T-junction after 14km, about 1km beyond the northern end of the **Complejo Puente de las Herreras**, go left; after 400m the **Sendero de la Cerrada del Utrero** begins on the right. This marked 2km-loop walk takes you under imposing cliffs to the **Cascada de Linarejos**, then above a narrow reservoir on the Guadalquivir and back to the road. Another 3.5km west along the road and you're at Empalme del Valle, from which it's 17km back to Cazorla.

RÍO BOROSA WALK

Though it gets busy at weekends and holidays, this walk of about seven hours return (plus stops) is the park's most popular for good reason. It follows the course of Río Borosa upstream to two beautiful mountain lakes: an ascent of 500m in the course of 12km from Torre del Vinagre. Using the bus to Torre del Vinagre, you can do it as a day trip from Cazorla (but confirm bus schedules before setting off). You can top up your water bottle at good, drinkable springs along the walk; the last is at the Central Eléctrica hydroelectric station.

A road signed 'Central Eléctrica', opposite Torre del Vinagre, soon crosses the Guadalquivir and, within 1km, reaches the marked start of the walk, on your right beside Río Borosa. The first section is an unpaved road, crisscrossing the tumbling river on bridges. After 4km, where the road starts climbing to the left, take a path forking right. This takes you through a beautiful 1.5km section, where the valley narrows to a gorge (**Cerrada de Elías**) and the path takes to a wooden walkway to save you from swimming. Rejoining the main track, continue for 3km to the Central Eléctrica hydroelectric station. Just past this, a sign points you on up towards the Laguna de Valdeazores. This path will lead you, via some dramatic mountain scenery and two tunnels supplying water to the power station (there's room to stay dry as you go through), to reservoir **Laguna de Aguas Negras**, then the natural **Laguna de Valdeazores**.

HORNOS & EL YELMO

The small village of Hornos sits atop a high rocky outcrop with a small, ruined Islamic castle and panoramic views over the northern end of the Embalse del Tranco. About 10km northeast of Hornos is the Puerto de Horno de Peguera pass and junction. One kilometre north from here, a dirt road turns left to the top of El Yelmo (1809m), one of the most distinctive mountains in the north of the park. It's 5km to the top, an ascent of 360m – drivable, but better as a walk, with superb views and griffon vultures wheeling around the skies (plus paragliders and hang-gliders at weekends). At a fork after 1.75km, go right.

SEGURA DE LA SIERRA

The most spectacular and interesting village inside the park, Segura sits 20km north of Hornos, atop a 1100m hill crowned by a castle dominating the countryside for far around. When taken in 1214 by the Knights of Santiago, Segura was one of the very first Christian conquests in Andalucía.

As you reach the upper part of the village, there's a **tourist office** (☎ 953 12 60 53; 10.30am–2pm & 6.30–8.30pm) beside the Puerta Nueva arch. Segura's two main monuments are normally left open all day every day, but you should check this before proceeding.

The **Baño Moro** (Muslim Bathhouse; Calle Caballeros Santiaguistas), built about 1150, has three elegant rooms (for cold, tepid and hot baths) with horseshoe arches and barrel vaults studded with skylights. The **castle**, at the top of the village, has Islamic (or maybe even earlier) origins. From its three-storey keep there are great views across to El Yelmo and far to the west.

Tours

A number of operators offer trips to some of the park's less accessible areas, plus other activities. Hotels and camping grounds in the park can often arrange for them to pick you up.

Excursiones Bujarkay (☎ 953 71 30 11; www.swin.net/usuarios/jcg; Calle Borosa 81, Coto Ríos) Walking, 4WD, biking and horse-riding trips with local guides.

Tierraventura (☎ 953 72 20 11; www.tierraventura.cazorla.com in Spanish; Calle Ximénez de Rada 17, Cazorla) Multiadventure activities including canoeing, hiking and rock climbing.

TurisNat (☎ 953 72 13 51; www.turisnat.org in Spanish; Paseo del Santo Cristo 17, Cazorla) Offers 4WD trips to *zonas restringidas* (areas where vehicles are not normally allowed) for €25/45 per person per half/full day.

Sleeping & Eating

There's plenty of accommodation in the park, much of it dotted along the A319 north of Empalme del Valle. At peak times it's worth booking ahead. Most restaurants in the park, except small, casual roadside cafés, are part of hotels or *hostales*.

CAMPING

Camping is not allowed outside the organised camping grounds. From October to April you should check ahead that these are open.

Complejo Puente de las Herreras (☎ /fax 953 72 70 90; near Vadillo Castril; sites per adult/tent/car €4/3.60/3.60, 2-person cabin €44; p a s) This is the largest camping ground in the park, with room for about 1000 people, plus a restaurant and a pool. You can arrange horse riding, canoeing, canyoning and climbing here.

Just off the A319, between 3km and 7km north of Torre del Vinagre, are three medium-sized camping grounds beside the Guadalquivir, all charging between €13 and €15 for two people with a tent and car:

Camping Chopera Coto Ríos (☎ 953 71 30 05)

Camping Fuente de la Pascuala (☎ 953 71 30 28)

Camping Llanos de Arance (☎ 953 71 31 39)

HOTELS & APARTMENTS

El Parral (☎ 953 72 72 65; Arroyo Frío; 4-person apt €40; p a s) Attractive, spacious apartments that have well-equipped kitchens and scenic terraces.

Hotel de Montaña Los Parrales (☎ 953 12 61 70; www.turismoencazorla.com/parrales.html in Spanish; Carretera del Tranco Km78; s/d €25/35; p a) North of Tranco along the road towards Hornos, cheerful Los Parrales has idyllic views of the reservoir and a sweet rustic dining room. You can arrange any number of activities here.

Hotel de Montaña La Hortizuela (☎ 953 71 31 50; www.turismoencazorla.com/hortizuela.html in Spanish; Carretera del Tranco Km53; s/d €33/55; p a s) This cosy hotel has a tranquil setting, 1km along a signed track off the A319, 2km north of Torre del Vinagre. The restaurant serves a *menú* at €9.

Los Huertos de Segura (☎ 953 48 04 02; www.loshuertosdesegura.com; Calle Castillo 11, Segura de la Sierra; 2-/4-person apt €55/65; p a) Excellent apartments whose friendly owners are full of information about tours and walking in the area.

Los Enebrós (☎ 953 72 71 10; www.lfhotels.com in Spanish; Arroyo Frío; s/d half-board €55/88, 4-person apt €105; p a s) At the northern end of Arroyo Frío village, on the A319, this complex

has a hotel, apartments, chalets and a small camping ground. The accommodation is a bit rough and ready, but it has two pools and a playground, and a huge range of activities can be arranged here.

Hotel Noguera de la Sierpe (☎ 953 71 30 21; www.lfhotels.com in Spanish; Carretera del Tranco Km 51; s/d €63/97; p a s) This curious hotel, overlooking a picturesque little lake 5km north of Arroyo Frío, is a hunters' favourite and decked out with trophies, including an alert-looking stuffed lion in the lobby. The rooms are comfortable, if not exactly cosy. You can arrange riding sessions at the hotel's stables and there is a good rustic restaurant.

Parador El Adelantado (☎ 953 72 70 75; www.parador.es; s/d €103/129; p a s) This hunting-lodge-style *parador* has a lovely pine forest setting, grassy garden and good pool, but only nine of the 33 rooms have views. It's at the end of the JF7094, near Vadillo Castril.

Getting There & Away

Carcesa (☎ 953 72 11 42) runs two daily buses (except Sunday) from Cazorla's Plaza de la Constitución to Empalme del Valle (€1.50, 30 minutes), Arroyo Frío (€1.80, 45 minutes), Torre del Vinagre (€3.50, one hour) and Coto Ríos (€3.50, 70 minutes). Pick up the latest timetable from the Cazorla tourist office.

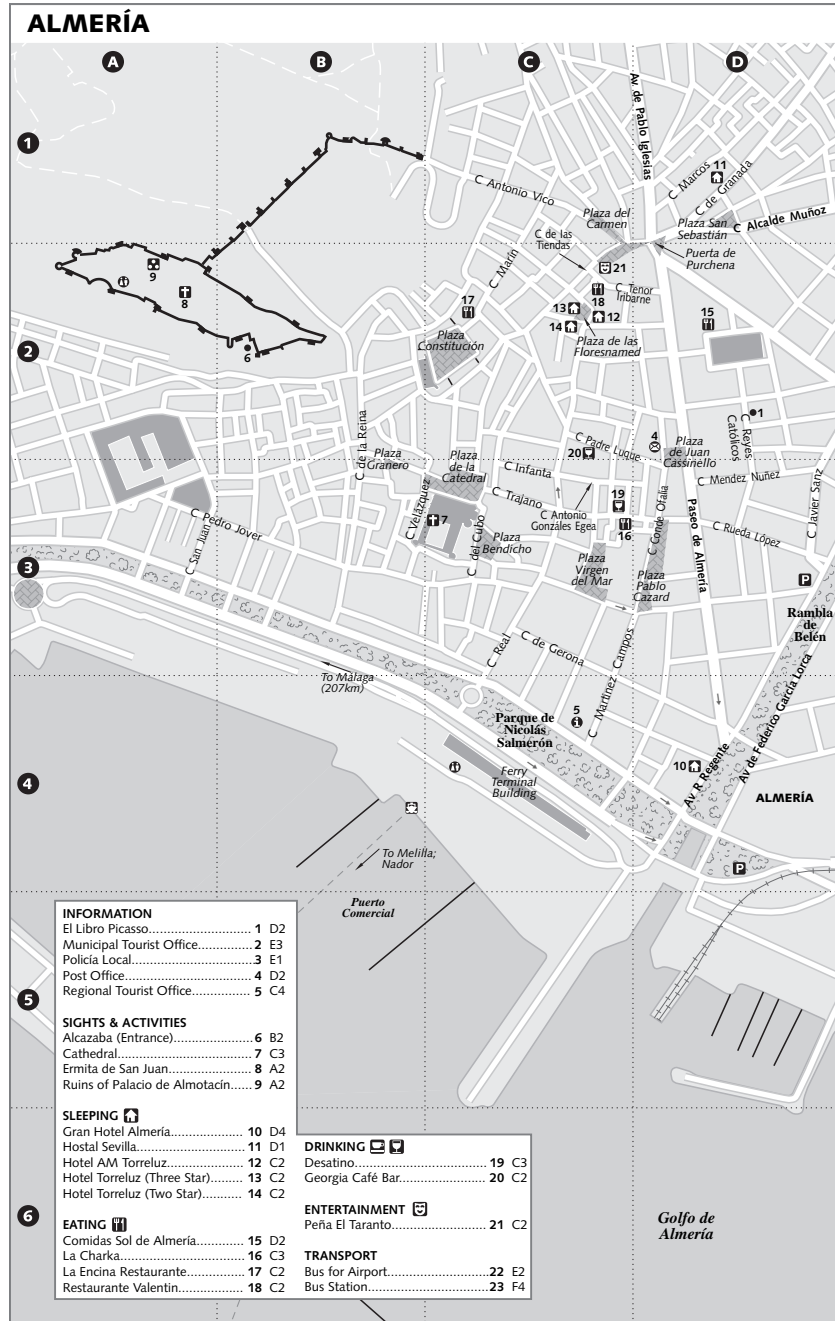
ALMERÍA PROVINCE

Andalucía's remote, parched and mountainous eastern province, long impoverished, has harnessed its main resource – more than 3000 hours of sunshine a year – to achieve a spectacular economic comeback through tourism and intensive horticulture in ugly plastic greenhouses, where much of the labour is done by thousands of migrant Moroccan workers. Though some of the coast has suffered from dreary Costa-del-Sol style ribbon development, the dramatic Cabo de Gata promontory remains more or less pristine and its beaches are easily the best in Mediterranean Andalucía.

ALMERÍA

pop 171,000

The hefty, cliff-ringed Alcazaba fortress dominating Almería is a dramatic reminder of past glories. As the chief port of the Córdoba caliphate and, later, capital of an 11th-century *taifa*, Islamic Almariya grew wealthy weaving



silk from the silkworms of the Alpujarras. Devastated by an earthquake in 1522, Almería is today an increasingly prosperous port city and magnet for migrant job-seekers. Agrieros from the province's horticulture are helping to fund a revival and chic bars and clubs stay open till dawn.

Orientation

The city centre lies between the Alcazaba and the Rambla de Belén, a broad promenade created from a dry riverbed. Paseo de Almería, cutting northwest from Rambla de Belén to the Puerta de Purchena intersection, is the main city-centre artery. The bus and train stations are together on Plaza de la Estación, east of Rambla de Belén.

Information

There are numerous banks on Paseo de Almería.

El Libro Picasso (% 950 23 56 00; Calle Reyes Católicos 17 & 18) Excellent book and map shop.

Internet (Avenida de Pablo Iglesias; per hr €2; 11am-2am)

Municipal tourist office (% 950 28 07 48; Rambla de Belén; 11am-1pm & 5.30-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon Sat)

Policia Local (% 950 21 00 19; Calle Santos Zárate)

Regional tourist office (% 950 27 43 55; Parque de Nicolás Salmerón s/n; 11am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun)

Sights & Activities

ALCAZABA

The founding of the Alcazaba (% 950 27 16 17; Calle Almanzor s/n; adult/EU citizen €1.50/free; 11am-2pm & 5-8pm May-Sep, 9.30am-1.30pm & 3.30-7pm Oct-Apr) by the Córdoba caliph Abd ar-Rahman III in 955 was what turned Almería into the major port of Al-Andalus. It still rises triumphantly from impregnable cliffs and commands exhilarating views, though earthquakes and time have spared little of its internal splendour.

The lowest of the Alcazaba's three compounds, the Primer Recinto, originally served as a military camp and a refuge in times of siege. The Segundo Recinto was the heart of the Alcazaba. At its eastern end is the **Ermita de San Juan** chapel, which was converted from a mosque by the Catholic Monarchs, who took Almería in 1489. On its northern side are the remains of the Muslim rulers' palace, the **Palacio de Almotacín**. The Ventana de la Odalisca (Concubine's Window) here gets

its name from a slave girl, who, legend says, leapt to her death from the window after her imprisoned Christian lover had been thrown from it. The Tercer Recinto, at the top end of the Alcazaba, is a fortress added by the Catholic Monarchs.

CATHEDRAL

Almería's weighty **cathedral** (Plaza de la Catedral; admission €2; 11 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) is at the heart of the old part of the city below the Alcazaba. Begun in 1524, its fortresslike appearance, with six towers, was the inevitable result of pirate raids from North Africa.

The interior has a Gothic ribbed ceiling and is trimmed with jasper and local marble. The chapel behind the main altar contains the tomb of Bishop Diego Villalán, the cathedral's founder, whose broken-nosed image is a work of Juan de Orea, who also created the Sacristía Mayor with its fine carved stonework.

BEACH

A long, grey-sand beach fronts the palm-lined Paseo Marítimo, east of the city's centre. **Eolo** (% 950 26 17 35; www.eolo-wind.com; Avenida del Cabo de Gata 187), nearby, organises out-of-town trips (€39 to €90) with English-speaking staff to explore some of the dramatic cliffs and beaches of the Parque Natural Cabo de Gata-Níjar by windsurfing, kayaking, catamaran and other water-related activities.

Sleeping

Hostal Sevilla (% 950 23 00 09; Calle de Granada 23; s/d €34/54; a) This best budget bet is a cheerful and efficient place that offers clean rooms with flickering TV. Old-fashioned grey phones are the *hostal's* design peak.

Hotel Torreluz (% 950 23 43 99; www.torreluz.com; Plaza de las Flores 2 & 3; s/d 2-star €39/57, 3-star €56/74; p a) Burnt plum walls, spacious, comfortable beds, good prices and the conveniences of a modern hotel make this one of Almería's best value places to stay – especially in the two-star section, which has pretty much all the three-star amenities but at lower prices. An additional bonus is the location – bright, pretty Plaza de las Flores.

Hotel AM Torreluz (% 950 23 49 99; www.amtorreluz.com; Plaza de las Flores 5; s/d €69/92; p a s) A grand four-star place with lots of brass and marble and a huge sweeping staircase, this is a favourite with business clientele and prices are reduced by up to 40% on weekends.

Gran Hotel Almería (% 950 23 80 11; www.granhotlalmeria.com; Avenida Reina Regente 8; s/d €108/135; p a s) For expansive seaward views, you can't beat the Gran Hotel's comfortable, modern rooms.

Eating

La Charka (% 950 25 60 45; Calle Trajano 8; drink & tapa €1.50) This very popular tapas haunt in Almería's busiest bar area is a great spot to graze in the earlier part of the evening.

Comidas Sol de Almería (Calle Circunvalación, Mercado Central; menú €9; 11 closed Sun & Mon evenings) A fun little restaurant, opposite the busy covered market, with a large patio behind it. Hungry shoppers stream in for the extensive and hearty lunch *menú*.

Restaurante Valentín (% 950 26 44 75; Calle Tenor Iribarne 19; mains €10-15; 11 closed Mon & Sep) A secluded, intimate little restaurant with stylish service and good food. If you really want to eat in style, the *langosta* (lobster) will set you back €52.

La Encina Restaurante (% 950 27 34 29; Calle Marín 3; mains €11-21; 11 closed Sun & Mon evenings) Almería's most exciting restaurant for inventive cuisine. Get yourself some pork medallions with mushrooms, pine nuts and sweet *moscatel* wine and if there's space, finish with a fondue of fresh fruit and chocolate.

Drinking & Entertainment

Georgia Café Bar (% 950 25 25 70; Calle Padre Luque 17; 11 8pm-late) A dozen or so music bars cluster in the streets between the post office and cathedral. The Georgia, going for more than 20 years, stages occasional live jazz and even the piped music is great.

Desatino (Calle Trajano 14; 11 8pm-late) A trendy bar with mirrored windows, playing Cuban rumbas. It doesn't fill up until late.

Peña El Taranto (% 950 23 50 57; Calle Tenor Iribarne 20) Hidden in the renovated Aljibes Árabes (Arab Water Cisterns), this is Almería's top flamenco club. Live performances (€20), open to the public, often happen at weekends.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Almería **airport** (% 950 21 37 00) receives flights from several European countries. **Easyjet** (www.easyjet.com) flies from London Gatwick and Stansted, **Ryanair** (www.ryanair.com) from Stansted, and **Monarch Airlines** (www.flymonarch.com) from Birmingham and Manchester. **LTU**

(www.ltu.de), **Hapagfly** (www.hapagfly.com) and **Air-Berlin** (www.airberlin.com) fly from several German cities, and **Transavia** (www.transavia.com) from Amsterdam. **Iberia** (www.iberia.com) flies direct to/from Barcelona, Madrid and Melilla.

BOAT

Trasmediterránea (% 950 23 61 55; www.trasmediterranea.es; Estación Marítima) sails daily to/from Melilla, and twice or more daily from June to September. The trip takes up to eight hours. A *butaca* (seat) costs €29 one way; car fares start at €123 for a small vehicle. Three Moroccan lines sail to/from Nador, the Moroccan town neighbouring Melilla, with similar frequency and prices. Trasmediterránea also has summer sailings to Ghazaouet, Algeria.

BUS

Destinations served from the clean, efficient **bus station** (% 950 26 20 98) include Granada (€10 to €12.25, 2¼ hours, 10 daily), Málaga (€15, 3¼ hours, 10 daily), Murcia (€5, 2½ hours, 10 daily), Madrid (€23, seven hours, five daily) and Valencia (€31 to €38, 8½ hours, five daily).

TRAIN

Four daily trains run to Granada (€14, 2¼ hours) and Seville (€32, 5½ hours) and two to Madrid (€33 to €38, 6¾ to 10 hours).

Getting Around

The airport is 8km east of the city; the number 20 'Alquíán' bus (€1) runs from Calle Doctor Gregorio Marañón to the airport every 30 to 45 minutes from 7am to 10.30pm (but less frequently on Saturday and Sunday). The last bus from the airport to the city leaves at 10.08pm (11.03pm Saturday and Sunday).

AROUND ALMERÍA

Mini Hollywood

Beyond Benahadux, north of Almería, the landscape becomes a series of canyons and rocky wastes that look straight out of the Arizona badlands, and in the 1960s and '70s movie-makers shot around 150 Westerns here. Locals played Indians, outlaws and cavalry, while Clint Eastwood, Raquel Welch, Charles Bronson and co did all the talking bits.

The movie industry has left behind three Wild West town sets that are open as tourist attractions. **Mini Hollywood** (% 950 36 52 36; adult/child €17/9; 11 10am-9pm Apr-Oct, to 7pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar), the best known and the best preserved

of these, is 25km from Almería on the Tabernas road. Parts of more than 100 movies, including classic 'spaghetti westerns' (so called because their director was the Italian Sergio Leone) such as *A Fistful of Dollars* and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, were filmed here. At 5pm (and 8pm from mid-June to mid-September) a hammed-up bank hold-up and shootout is staged (dialogue in Spanish of course). Rather bizarrely, the ticket also includes entry to the adjoining **Reserva Zoológica** with lions, elephants and numerous other species of African and Iberian fauna. You will need your own vehicle to visit from Almería.

Níjar

Attractive and unusual glazed pottery and colourful striped cotton rugs, known as *jarapas*, are made and sold in this small town 34km northeast of Almería. It's well worth a little detour if you're driving this way.

CABO DE GATA

Some of Spain's most beautiful and least crowded beaches are strung between grand cliffs and capes around this arid promontory east of Almería city, where dark volcanic hills tumble straight into a sparkling turquoise sea. This is the driest place in Europe and scattered palm groves and clusters of whitewashed, flat-roofed houses give it a positively North African air at times. Though Cabo de Gata is not undiscovered, it still has a wild, elemental feel and, with a couple of exceptions in July and August, its scattered villages remain low-key. You can walk along, or not far from, the coast right round from Retamar in the northwest to Agua Amarga in the northeast (61km), but in summer there's little shade.

It's worth calling ahead for accommodation over Easter and in July and August.

The **Parque Natural de Cabo de Gata-Níjar** covers Cabo de Gata's 60km coast plus a slice of hinterland. The park's main information centre is the **Centro de Interpretación Las Amoladeras** (% 950 16 04 35; 11 10am-2pm & 5.30-9pm mid-Jul-mid-Sep, to 3pm Tue-Sun mid-Sep-mid-Jul), about 2.5km west of Ruescas.

El Cabo de Gata Village

Fronted by a long straight beach, this village (officially San Miguel de Cabo de Gata) is composed largely of holiday houses and apartments (deserted out of season), but has an old nucleus, with a small fishing fleet, at the



southern end. The **Oficina de Información** (☎ 950 38 00 04; Avenida Miramar 88; h 10am-2.30pm & 5.30-9pm) rents out bicycles (€4/13 per two hours/day) – a nice way to explore the area.

South of the village stretch the **Salinas de Cabo de Gata**, which are salt-extraction lagoons. In spring many migrating greater flamingos and other birds call in here: some stay on to breed, then others arrive in summer, and by late August there can be 1000 flamingos here. There's a public viewing hide just off the road, 3km south of the village.

You should see a good variety of birds any time except winter, when the *salinas* (salt-extraction lagoons) are drained.

SLEEPING & EATING

Camping Cabo de Gata (☎ /fax 950 16 04 43; sites per adult/tent €4/8, bungalow €76; p s) This extremely well-run camping site, 1km from the beach, has all the necessary amenities including a restaurant. It's 2.5km north of the village by dirt roads.

Hostal Las Dunas (☎ 950 37 00 72; www.lasdunas.net; Calle Barrio Nuevo 58; s/d €36/51; p) A friendly family house with well-kept, modern rooms and crazy balustraded balconies in carved marble.

El Naranjero (☎ 950 37 01 11; Calle Iglesia 1; mains €10-25; h dosed Sun) One of the nearest things to a proper restaurant, set right at the entrance to the village. It specialises in fish and seafood.

Faro de Cabo de Gata & Around

Beyond the Salinas de Cabo de Gata, a narrow road winds 4km round the cliffs to the **Faro de Cabo de Gata**, the lighthouse at the promontory's tip. A turning by Café Bar El Faro, just before the lighthouse, leads to the **Torre Vigía Vela Blanca**, an 18th-century watchtower atop 200m cliffs, with awesome views. Here the road ends but a walking and cycling track continues down to Playa de Mónsul (one hour on foot).

San José

pop 550

San José, spreading round a bay on the eastern side of Cabo de Gata, is a mildly chic resort in summer, but it remains a small, pleasant, low-rise place and is a base for both water and land-bound activities.

Out of season you may have San José almost to yourself.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

The road from the north becomes San José's main street, Avenida de San José, with the beach and harbour a couple of blocks down to the left. On Avenida de San José you'll find a **natural-park information office** (☎ 950 38 02 99; Calle Correo; h 10am-2pm & 5-9.30pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun), a bank and an ATM. The information office can tell you about bicycle rental, horse riding, boat trips and diving.

BEACHES

Some of the best beaches on Cabo de Gata lie along a dirt road southwest from San José. **Playa de los Genoveses**, a broad strip of sand about 1km long, with shallow waters, is 4.5km away. **Playa de Mónsul**, 2.5km further from town, is a shorter length of grey sand, backed by huge lumps of volcanic rock. Away from the road, the coast between these two beaches is strung with a series of isolated, sandy, cove beaches, the **Calas del Barronal**, reachable only on foot.

SLEEPING & EATING

Camping Tau (☎ 950 38 01 66; e@parquenatural.com; sites per adult/tent/car €4/5/5.50; h Apr-Sep) Set 250m from the beach, the small but shady Tau is very popular with families.

Hostal Sol Bahía (☎ 950 38 03 07, fax 950 38 03 06; Avenida de San José; d €35-70; a) The Sol Bahía and its sister establishment, Hostal Bahía Plaza, across the street, are in the centre of San José and have attractive, clean rooms in bright, modern buildings. Half a dozen other *hostales* and hotels have similar or not much higher prices.

Hotel Cortijo el Sotillo (☎ 950 61 11 00; www.hotel.sotillo.com; Carretera Entrada a San José s/n; s €100-20, d €117-41; mains €8-14; p a s) This fun ranch-style complex, popular with families, has a host of great facilities, on-site riding and a huge, excellent restaurant serving hearty regional cuisine.

Restaurante El Emigrante (☎ 950 38 03 07; Avenida de San José; fish & meat mains €6-12) Under the same ownership as the Bahía *hostales*, the Emigrante is a dependable option in the centre of town.

Mesón El Tempranillo (☎ 950 38 00 59; Puerto de San José 6-7; mains €9-15) One of several good fish restaurants beneath colourful awnings near the harbour.

San José to Las Negras

The rugged coast northeast of San José allows only two small settlements, the odd fort and a few beaches before the village of Las Negras,

17km away as the crow flies. The road spends most of its time ducking inland.

The hamlet of **Los Escullos** has a short beach. You can walk here from San José, along a track starting at Cala Higueras bay. One kilometre beyond Los Escullos, **La Isleta del Moro** is a tiny village with a beach and a couple of fishing boats. **Casa Café de la Loma** (☎ 950 38 98 31; www.degata.com/laloma; s/d €30/45, Aug €35/52), on a small hill above the village, is a friendly, relaxed little place with airy rooms, terrific views and, in summer, a part-vegetarian restaurant with weekly jazz or flamenco concerts.

From here the road heads inland past the former gold-mining village of **Rodalquilar**. About 1km past Rodalquilar is the turning to **Playa del Playazo**, a good beach between two headlands, 2km along a level track. From here you can walk near the coast to the village of **Las Negras**, which is set on a pebbly beach and largely given over to seasonal tourism.

On Las Negras' main street, **Hostal Arrecife** (☎ 950 38 81 40; Calle Bahía 6, Las Negras; s/d €26/38) has cool, quiet, well-maintained rooms, some with sea views from their balconies. **Camping La Caleta** (☎ 950 52 52 37; sites per adult/tent/car €5/4.50/5; h year-round; p s) lies in a separate cove 1km south of Las Negras. It can be fiercely hot in summer, but there is a good pool. Other accommodation in Las Negras is mostly holiday apartments and houses to let. **Restaurante La Palma** (☎ 950 38 80 42; mains €5-10), overlooking the beach, plays good music and serves excellent fish at medium prices.

Las Negras to Agua Amarga

There's no road along this secluded, cliff-lined stretch of coast, but walkers can take an up-and-down path of about 11km, giving access to several beaches. **Playa San Pedro**, one hour from Las Negras, is the site of a ruined hamlet (with castle), inhabited erratically by hippies and naturists. It's 1½ hours on from there to **Cala del Plomo** beach, with another tiny village, then 1½ hours further to **Agua Amarga**.

Drivers must head inland from Las Negras through Hortichuelas. A mostly unsealed road heads northeast, cross-country from the bus shelter in Fernán Pérez. Keep to the main track at all turnings and after 10km you'll reach a sealed road running down from the N341 to Agua Amarga, a chic and expensive but still low-key former fishing village on a straight sandy beach that attracts cool young professional types from as far away as Madrid.

Breezy, beachfront **Hostal Restaurante La Palmera** (☎ 950 13 82 08; Calle Aguada s/n; d low/high season €60/90; mains €7-15; a) has 10 bright rooms with half-moon balconies, and its restaurant is Agua Amarga's most popular lunch spot. Chic, slick **miKasa** (☎ 950 13 80 73; www.mikasasuites.com; Carretera Carboneras s/n; d ind breakfast €105-90; p a s) is an elegant, super-comfortable, romantic hideaway for the long-weekend crowd.

Getting There & Away

From Almería bus station buses run to El Cabo de Gata (€2, 30 minutes, 10 daily), San José (€2.50, 1¼ hours, four daily Monday to Saturday), Las Negras (€3.40, 1¼ hours, one daily Monday to Saturday) and Agua Amarga (€4, 1¼ hours, one daily Monday to Friday).

MOJÁCAR

pop 5000

Mojácar, northeast of Cabo de Gata, is actually two towns: the old Mojácar Pueblo, a jumble of white, cube-shaped houses on a hilltop 2km inland; and Mojácar Playa, a modern beach resort strip 7km long but only a few blocks wide. Though dominated by tourism, the Pueblo is picturesque with its mazelike streets and bougainvillea-swathed balconies. Mojácar Playa has few high-rise buildings, a long, clean beach, and a lively summer scene.

From the 13th to 15th centuries, Mojácar found itself on the Granada emirate's eastern frontier, finally falling to the Catholic Monarchs in 1488. Tucked away in an isolated corner of one of Spain's most backward regions, it was decaying and half-abandoned by the mid-20th century, before its mayor started luring artists and others with giveaway property offers.

Orientation & Information

Pueblo and Playa are joined by a road that heads uphill from the Parque Comercial shopping centre, towards the northern end of Mojácar Playa.

The very helpful **tourist office** (☎ 950 61 50 25; www.mojacar.es; Calle Glorieta 1; h 10am-2pm & 5-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-1.30pm Sat) is just off Mojácar Pueblo's main square, Plaza Nueva. In the same building are the post office and **Policía Local** (☎ 950 47 20 00).

Sights & Activities

Exploring the Pueblo is mainly a matter of wandering the winding streets, with their flower-decked balconies, and nosing into

craft shops, galleries and boutiques. The **Mirador El Castillo**, at the topmost point, provides magnificent views. The fortress-style **Iglesia de Santa María** (calle Iglesia) dates from 1560, and may have once been a mosque.

The most touching spot is the **Fuente Mora** (Moorish Fountain; Calle La Fuente) in the lower part of the Pueblo. Though remodelled in modern times, it maintains the medieval Islamic tradition of making art out of flowing water. An inscription records the moving speech made here, according to legend, by Alavez, the last Islamic governor of Mojácar, to the envoy of the Catholic Monarchs in 1488, pleading for his people to be permitted to stay and 'continue working the land of our ancestors'.

For good windsurfing equipment (per hour €12), canoeing, sailing and water-skiing (per session €20) check out **Samoa Club** (☎ 950 47 84 90; Playa de las Ventánicas) in Mojácar Playa.

Sleeping & Eating

MOJÁCAR PUEBLO

Hostal Arco Plaza (☎ 950 47 27 77; fax 950 47 27 17; Calle Aire Bajo 1; s/d €36/52; a) Bang in the centre of the village, the Arco Plaza has rooms in pretty pastel shades with spacious bathrooms and crisp, white linen. The management are incredibly friendly and efficient.

Pensión El Torreón (☎ 950 47 52 59; Calle Jazmín 4; d without bathroom €60) This breathtakingly beautiful little *hostal*, with quaint rooms and yet more great views, was allegedly the birthplace of Walt Disney, who locals maintain was the love child of a village girl and a wealthy landowner.

El Mirador del Castillo (☎ 950 47 30 22; www.elcastillomojacar.com; Mirador El Castillo; d €48-76; i s) A laid-back *hostal* with a no-fuss bohemian atmosphere and fantastic views.

Hostal Mamabel's (☎ 950 47 24 48; www.mamabels.com; Calle Embajadores 5; d/ste €65/87) This exquisite small hotel hugs the very edge of the Pueblo, with rooms seemingly piled on top of each other. All are large and individually styled and some have fantastically precipitous views. Mamabel herself is quite a character and makes costumes for Mojácar's colourful Moros y Cristianos festival on the weekend nearest 10 June. The stylish restaurant here, El Horno (mains €11 to €16), offers the best homecooked food in Mojácar, including a tasty couscous.

La Taberna (☎ 647-724367; Plaza del Cano 1; tapas & platos combinados from €4; v) This thriving little eatery, inside a warren of cavelike rooms, serves

extremely well-prepared meals with plenty of tasty vegetarian options. The enormous house kebab arrives on its own scaffolding!

Restaurante El Viento del Desierto (Plaza Frontón; mains €5-6) Good-value Moroccan-cum-Spanish eatery just by the church.

MOJÁCAR PLAYA

Hotel Río Abajo (☎ 950 47 89 28; Calle Río Abajo; d €57; p s) Blue-and-white pueblo-style chalets are dotted among lush gardens with direct access to the broad sandy beach at the far north end of Mojácar Playa. A good place for kids.

Hotel Felipe San Bernabé (☎ 950 47 82 02, fax 950 47 27 35; Playa Las Ventánicas; d €66; mains €11-16; p a) The San Bernabé is a swish and good-value hotel set back from one of the better beaches. It has a plush, conservatory-style restaurant providing excellent Spanish cooking, with a good selection of fish dishes.

Drinking & Entertainment

Classical music, live comedy acts and jazz concerts are staged at the lively **Café Bar Mirador del Castillo** (☎ 950 47 30 22; h 11am-11pm or later) in Mojácar Pueblo. The Pueblo's better bars (open evenings only, from around 8pm) include the Mexican-style **Caipirinha Caipirosa** (Calle Horno), reggae-rhythm'd **Azul Marino**

(Calle Enmedio) and **La Muralla** (Calle Estación Nueva), which boasts the most romantic views from its terrace. Stylish **Time & Place** (Plaza de las Flores) keeps the drinks and conversation going till the early hours.

Alternatively, just hang out in the beachfront bar of the moment, **La Mar Salada** (Paseo del Mediterráneo 62; h 10am-late Mon-Fri, 11am-late Sat) or lively **Tito's** (☎ 950 61 50 30; Playa de las Ventánicas; h Apr-Oct), which features live music, including jazz.

Getting There & Around

Long-distance buses stop at the Parque Comercial and the Fuente stop at the foot of Mojácar Pueblo. The tourist office has timetables. Destinations include Murcia (€9, 2½ hours, four daily), Almería (€5.50, 1¼ hours, two daily), Granada (€15, four hours, two daily) and Madrid (€29, eight hours, two daily).

A local bus service (€1) runs a circuit from the southern to northern ends of Mojácar Playa, then back to the Parque Comercial, up to the Pueblo (Calle Glorieta), then back down to the Parque Comercial and the southern end of the Playa. It runs every half-hour, 9am to 11.30pm, from April to September, and every hour from 9.30am to 7.30pm between October and March.

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Extremadura



Extremadura is aptly named. This land of extremes, bordering Portugal at Spain's furthest western limit, is boiling in summer and bitingly cold in winter.

It's mostly broad, sparsely populated tableland. Geometrical patterns of wheat fields and grasslands roll to the horizon, their summer beige and fawn contrasting with the green of oak, cork and olive trees. Here storks plane against the evening sky or lord it from their higgledy-piggledy twig nests, piled atop church towers, pinnacles – anywhere small, flat and high.

Wooded sierras rise up along the region's northern, eastern and southern fringes. The north in particular has a sequence of beautiful ranges and green valleys dotted with villages full of character. Two of Spain's major rivers, the Tago and the Guadiana, cross Extremadura from east to west. The craggy Parque Nacional Monfragüe, straddling the Tago between Plasencia and Trujillo, has some of Spain's most spectacular bird life.

Reconquered from the Muslims in the 13th century, the land was handed to knights who turned it into one great sheep pen. Those who did not work the land often had only one choice – migration. Small wonder that many 16th-century conquistadors, including Pizarro and Cortés, sprang from this land. The riches they brought back from the Americas are reflected in the lavish mansions they constructed.

Long before Pizarro and Cortés, the Romans flourished in the city of Mérida, and plenty of evidence of this remains. The urban splendour continues in the old centre of Cáceres, while on a smaller scale towns such as Trujillo and Guadalupe are enchanting.

HIGHLIGHTS

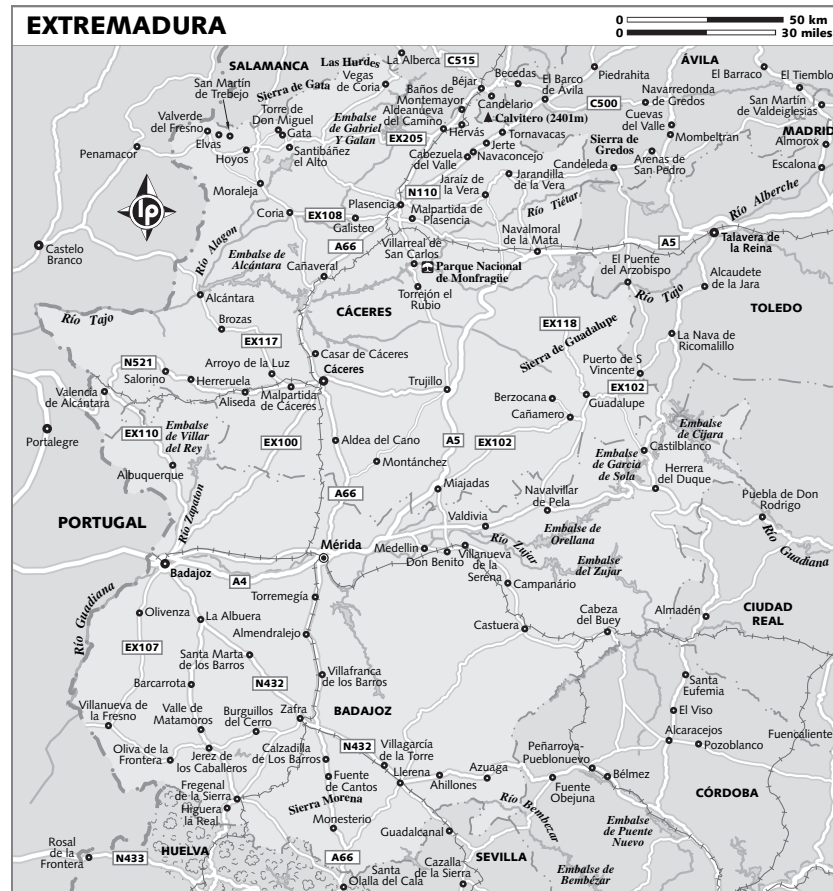
- Prowl Ciudad Monumental's cobbled streets in **Cáceres** (p819)
- Spot majestic birds of prey as they wheel over the **Parque Nacional Monfragüe** (p818)
- Explore Spain's finest Roman ruins in **Mérida** (p830)
- Travel to **Trujillo** (p824), home town of some of Latin America's most (in)famous conquistadors
- Walk the Ruta del Emperador, following the traces of Carlos I's last journey to tranquil Monasterio de Yuste at **La Vera** (p810)
- Wander among white buildings in the southern town of **Zafra** (p836)



■ AREA: 41,634 SQ KM

■ AVE SUMMER TEMP: HIGH 38°C, LOW 26°C

■ POP: 1.084 MILLION



NORTHERN EXTREMADURA

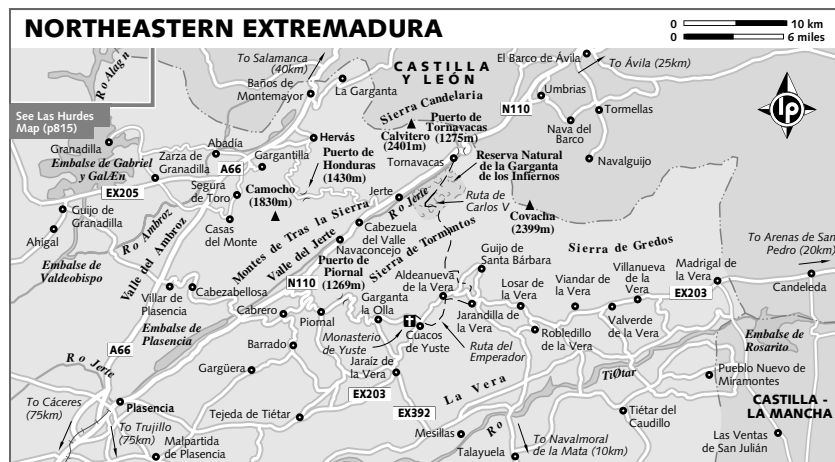
The western reaches of the Cordillera Central arch around Plasencia from the Sierra de Gredos in the east to the Sierra de Gata in the west. In the northeast are three valleys: La Vera, Valle del Jerte and Valle del Ambroz. Watered by mountain streams and dotted with ancient villages, they offer a good network of places to stay and some fine walking routes.

The once remote Las Hurdes region in the northernmost tip of Extremadura has a harsh beauty, while the Sierra de Gata in the northwest is pretty and more fertile.

LA VERA

Fertile La Vera, on the northern side of Río Tíetar valley, produces raspberries, asparagus, figs and, above all, paprika (*pimentón*), sold in old-fashioned tins and locally called *oro rojo* (red gold). Here too grows 80% of Spain's tobacco (look out for the brick drying sheds with their honeycombs of air vents). Much of the country's tobacco crop is subsidised by the EU, though Brussels' support for the cultivation of something with proven health risks is increasingly challenged.

Typical too of La Vera are half-timbered houses leaning at odd angles, their overhanging upper storeys supported by timber or stone pillars.



Information

Asociación de Turismo de la Vera (www.aturive.com in Spanish) Useful website for the valley, with tips on walks, villages and accommodation.

Comarca de la Vera (www.comarcadelavera.com) Another useful regional website.

Tourist office (☎ 927 17 05 87; Avenida de la Constitución 167, Jaraz de la Vera; h 9.30am-2pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun) If you're here to hike, ask for its useful walking brochure describing signed walks in and around the valley.

Tourist office (☎ 927 56 04 60; www.jarandilla.com in Spanish; Plaza de la Constitución 1, Jarandilla de la Vera; h 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sun)

Sights & Activities

Cuacos de Yuste, 45km northeast of Plasencia, is rich in typical La Vera half-timbered houses, including **Casa Juan de Austria** (Plaza Juan de Austria); look for the bust of Carlos I before it. Here, the emperor's illegitimate son (Don Juan de Austria, later a charismatic admiral who beat the Turks at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571), reputedly stayed while visiting his father at the Monasterio de Yuste.

The **Monasterio de Yuste** (☎ 927 17 21 30; 30-min guided tour in Spanish €2.50; h 9.30am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat, to 11.15am & 3-6pm Sun) is 2km northwest of Cuacos. The gouty Carlos I of Spain (also known, confusingly and with equal frequency, as Carlos V of Austria, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire) withdrew here in 1557 to spend his dying years, having divided the world's biggest empire between his brother and his legitimate son, Felipe II. A closed order

of Hieronymite monks occupies the monastery itself but you can visit the outlying church with its Gothic and Plateresque cloisters, and the modest royal chambers where the ailing monarch's bed was placed to give him a direct view of the altar. Ask for the accompanying pamphlet in English.

A pocked, narrow road offering spectacular views continues 7km beyond the monastery (if you're hesitant, take the better quality one from Jaraz de la Vera) to **Garganta la Olla**, a picturesque, steeply pitched village whose door lintels are inscribed with the date of construction and name of the original owner. Look out for the Casa de las Muñecas at No 3 on the main street. The House of the Dolls gets its name from the much weathered female form on the stone door archway. Painted in blue, the come-on colour of the time, it was a brothel in Carlos I's time. From the village you can make the spectacular drive over the 1269m **Puerto de Piornal** pass to the Valle del Jerte.

Jarandilla de la Vera, 10km northeast of Cuacos de Yuste, has a 15th-century fortified church on Plaza de la Constitución and a magnificent **parador** (opposite).

The **Ruta del Emperador**, a 10km walking trail, replicates the Emperor's route from Jarandilla to the Monasterio de Yuste. Follow the sign south from the church below the town's **parador** and turn right at a T-junction to leave town via Calle Marina.

Other La Vera villages with fine traditional architecture are **Valverde de la Vera** and **Villanueva de la Vera**. The former is particularly

engaging; pretty Plaza de España is lined with timber balconies and water gushes down ruts etched into the middle of the cobbled lanes.

Sleeping & Eating

Many villages have camping grounds, often with good riverside positions, and there are some fine *casas rurales* (rural houses with rooms to let).

CUACOS DE YUSTE

Camping Carlos I (☎ 927 17 20 92; sites per adult/tent/car €4/4/4; h Easter-mid-Sep; s p) About 1km east of Cuacos de Yuste, this shady spot has a pool, tennis court and **restaurant** (h Jul & Aug). Bungalows (€59) accommodating up to four are open year round.

Hotel Moregón (☎ 927 17 21 81; www.moregon.com in Spanish; Avenida de la Constitución 77; s/d €30/48; a) Handy for the Monasterio de Yuste, this modern place has 16 varied rooms, most with elements of exposed brick wall, cool floor tiles and a colour scheme ranging from sunny yellow to wine red. There's also a good **restaurant** (mains €7-12).

GARGANTA LA OLLA

There are several good modest restaurants in the cramped little lanes off Plaza Diez de Mayo. **Restaurante La Fragua** (☎ 927 17 95 71; Calle de Toril 4; menú €10, mains €9-11) offers good local cooking in a busy dining room, all timber beams and exposed stone walls.

JARAZ DE LA VERA

Finca Valvellidos (☎ 927 19 41 43; www.valvellidos.com in Spanish; d €45-56; p n a) This impeccably restored farmhouse has five spacious double rooms and also bungalows and self-contained apartments (€60 to €75), all in a gentle

country setting 2km along a dirt track off the EX392, 2km south of Jaraz. Horse-riding (€24 for two hours) is an option and downstairs is a small restaurant for guests; breakfast is €3.50 and the €15 set menu is rich in local dishes.

JARANDILLA DE LA VERA

Camping Jaranda (☎ 927 56 04 54; campingjaranda@eresmas.com; sites per adult/tent/car €4/4/4; h mid-Mar-mid-Sep; s) This camping ground, 1.25km west of Jarandilla, is particularly good for walkers and provides sketch maps for gentle hikes in the area. It's beside a gurgling brook and has a restaurant, plenty of shade and also bungalows (€58 to €90).

Hotel Don Juan de Austria (☎ 927 56 02 06; www.donjuandeustria.com; Avenida Soledad Vega Ortiz 101; r €75; a i s) This longstanding hotel has recently grafted on a spa offering all sorts of watery activities and massages (including – lick this one if you can – *envoltura en chocolate*, being smothered in chocolate). Rooms, some with brass beds and others with dark-oak bedheads, are furnished in antique style and a few have vistas of the Sierra de Gredos and Valle Jaranda.

Parador (☎ 927 56 01 17; jarandilla@parador.es; Avenida de García Prieto 1; s/d €108/135; p n a s) Push out the boat and emulate the emperor by staying overnight in this stylish 15th-century castle-turned-hotel. Within the stout walls and turrets are tastefully decorated rooms with period furniture.

Getting There & Away

Up to three buses daily run between lower La Vera villages and Plasencia. The journey from Plasencia to Madrigal de la Vera (one daily), the most distant village, takes 1¼ hours.

EASTER SUFFERING

Villanueva de la Vera is the scene, on the day before Good Friday, of one of the more bizarre of Spain's religious festivities, **Los Empalaos** (literally 'The Impaled'). Several penitent locals submit to this Via Crucis, their arms strapped to a beam (from a plough) and their near-naked bodies wrapped tight with cords from waist to armpits, and all along the arms to the fingertips. Barefoot and with two swords strapped to their backs, veiled and wearing a crown of thorns, these 'walking crucifixes' follow a painful Way of the Cross, watched on in respectful silence by townsfolk and visitors from far and wide. Hanging from the timber are chains of iron that clank in a sinister fashion as the penitents make their painful progress. Guided by *cirineos* (guides who light the way and help them if they fall), the *empalaos* occasionally cross paths. When this happens they kneel and rise again to continue their laborious journey. Doctors stay on hand, as being so tightly strapped does nothing for blood circulation.

VALLE DEL JERTE

This valley, separated by the Sierra de Tormantos from La Vera, grows half of Spain's cherries and is a sea of white blossom in late March or early April. Go in May or early June and every second house is busy boxing the ripe fruit.

The Plasencia-Ávila N110 runs up the valley, crossing into Castilla y León by the Puerto de Tornavacas (1275m).

Information

Tourist office (☎ 927 47 25 58; www.turismovalledeljerte.com in Spanish; 11 10am-3pm Mon, to 3pm & 4-5.30pm Tue-Fri, to 2pm Sat) This office, 600m north of Cabezuela del Valle, covers the whole valley.

Valle del Jerte tourism (www.elvalledeljerte.com in Spanish) Another useful website.

Sights & Activities

Piornal (1200m), on the southeast flank of the valley and famous for its Serrano ham, is well placed for walks along the Sierra de Tormantos.

In **Cabezuela del Valle**, Plaza de Extremadura, leading into Calle Hondón, has some fine houses with overhanging wooden balconies. A spectacular, winding 35km road leads from just north of Cabezuela over the 1430m Puerto de Honduras to Hervás in the Valle del Ambroz.

Jerte is another good base for walks within the beautiful **Reserva Natural de la Garganta de los Infernos**. This nature reserve of 'Hell's Gorge' has a small display and **information office** (11 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Easter-Sep, 9am-1pm & 3-6pm Oct-Easter) beside Camping Valle del Jerte. Ask for its illustrated brochure and map highlighting eight walks within the reserve. An easy 1½-hour 7km return walk from the office takes you to Los Pilones, with its strange, smooth rock formations through which the emerald-and-sapphire crystal-clear stream threads.

Tornavacas, yet another Extremaduran village with a huddled old quarter, is the starting point of the **Ruta de Carlos V**. Twenty-eight kilometres long, the trail (PR1) follows the route by which Carlos I was borne over the mountains to Cuacos de Yuste (p810) via Jarandilla de la Vera. You can walk it in one day – just as Carlos' bearers did in the 1550s. The route crosses the Sierra de Tormantos by the 1479m Collado (or Puerto) de las Yeguas.

Sleeping & Eating

Camping Río Jerte (☎ 927 17 30 06; www.campingriojerte.com in Spanish; sites per adult/tent/car €4/4/4, 4-6 person bungalows €59-91; ☎) On the river's right bank 1.5km southwest of Navaconejo, it hires out bikes (per hour/day €3/16) and has attractive stone bungalows. To cool off, you can choose from the natural riverside pool or a standard artificial one.

Camping Valle del Jerte (☎ 927 47 01 27; www.campingbungalowvalledeljerte.com in Spanish; sites per adult/tent €4/8, 2-8 person bungalow €45-96; 11 mid-Mar-mid-Sep; ☎) Just outside Jerte, this camping ground boasts a tennis court, bar-restaurant and mini-market.

Hotel Aljama (☎ 927 47 22 91; Calle Federico Bajo s/n, Cabezuela del Valle; s/d €26/45; a) Almost touching the church across the street as it overhangs the very narrow lane, this hotel preserves several traditional architectural features of the region such as cork floors and plenty of wooden beams. Rooms are spacious and the restaurant offers generous mains (€6 to €11) and a *menú del día* (€9).

Hospedería La Serrana (☎ 927 47 60 34; www.hospederiaserrana.com in Spanish; Carretera Garganta la Olla s/n; s/d €38/60 with breakfast; p) Constructed as a sanatorium for TB patients and located 1km east of Piornal, this low-slung house in the country offers large, well-furnished, excellent-value rooms. It's ideally placed for exploring the sierra's signed walking trails.

Hotel Los Arenales (☎ 927 47 02 50; www.hotel-arenales.com; s €30-4, d €42-52; a p v) Just 1.5km southwest of Jerte on the N110, this is a decent roadside stopover with 33 rooms (two equipped for the handicapped) and a restaurant. It's about 500m from Río Jerte and the Garganta de los Infernos park.

The valley is known for its *casas rurales*, (village houses or farmhouses) often booked well in advance on weekends. **El Cerezal de los Sotos** (☎ 927 47 04 29, 607 752197; www.elcerezaledelosotos.net in Spanish; Jerte; d with breakfast €70; 11 mid-Feb-mid-Dec; p s a) is a wonderful six-bedroom sprawling stone house set amid cherry orchards above the east bank of Río Jerte. Follow signs from Jerte and the N110 and do book in for dinner (€20), rich in local specialities.

Getting There & Away

From Plasencia there's one weekday bus to Piornal and up to four along the valley as far as Tornavacas.

DEHESAS

The Spanish word *dehesa* means simply 'pastureland', but in parts of Extremadura, where pastures are often dotted with evergreen oaks, it takes on a dimension that sends environmentalists into rapture. *Dehesas* of *encina* (holm oak) or *alcornoque* (cork oak) are textbook cases of sustainable exploitation. The bark of the cork oak can be stripped every nine years for cork (*corcho*) – you'll see the scars on some trees, a bright terracotta colour if they're new. The holm oak can be pruned about every four years and the wood used for charcoal. Meanwhile, livestock can graze the pastures, and in autumn pigs are turned out to gobble up the fallen acorns (*bellotas*) – a diet that produces the best ham of all.

Such, at least, is the theory. In practice a growing number of Extremadura's *dehesas* are used to less than their full potential. Some belong to absentee landlords, who use them only for shooting; others are left untended because people are finding easier ways of earning a crust. More recently, the increasingly widespread use of plastic corks threatens an important element in Extremadura's ecocycle.

VALLE DEL AMBROZ

This broader valley west of the Valle del Jerte, once split by the Roman Vía de la Plata (see the boxed text p814), nowadays carries the N630 and advancing A66 motorway, running from Plasencia to Salamanca in Castilla y León. The area's **tourist office** (☎ 927 47 36 18; www.valleambroz.com in Spanish; Calle Braulio Navas 6; 11 10am-2pm & 4-6pm or 5-7pm Tue-Fri, to 2pm Sat & Sun) is in Hervás.

Hervás

pop 3900

This colourful town has Extremadura's best surviving **barrio judío** (Jewish quarter), which thrived until the 1492 expulsion of the Jews, when most families sought refuge in Portugal. Explore especially Calles Rabilero and Cuestecilla then, for a fine view, climb up to the **Iglesia de Santa María**, on the site of a ruined Knights Templar castle.

The **Museo Pérez Comendador-Leroux** (☎ 927 48 16 55; Calle Asensio Neila; admission €1.20; 11 4-8pm Tue, 11am-2pm & 4-8pm Wed-Fri, 10.30am-2pm Sat & Sun), in an impressive 18th-century mansion on the main street, houses works of Hervás-born 20th-century sculptor Enrique Pérez Comendador and his wife, the French painter Magdalena Leroux.

The **Museo de la Moto Clásica** (☎ 927 48 12 06; Carretera de la Garganta; adult/child €10/5; 11 10.30am-1.30pm & 4-7.30pm Tue-Fri, 10.30am-8pm Sat & Sun), on a hillock 200m north of the river, has lots of classic motorcycles, ranging from Harleys to Zundapps. In separate pavilions are collections of classic cars and horse-drawn carriages.

The small **Centro de Interpretación Ferrocarril** (☎ 927 01 47 14; Paseo de la Estación; admission free; 11 10am-2pm & 4-7pm), in Hervás' decommissioned station,

has a multimedia display recounting the history of the railway in Extremadura.

SLEEPING & EATING

Camping El Pinajarro (☎ 927 48 16 73; www.campingel-pinajarro.com in Spanish; sites per adult/tent/car €4/4/4, 2/4 person bungalows €44/61; 11 mid-Mar-Sep, Fri-Sun Oct-mid-Mar) On the EX205, 1.5km southwest of Hervás, this shady, top-class camping ground is run by a welcoming young couple. With a shop, restaurant (July and August), nature talks and plenty of children's activities in summertime, it's warmly recommended.

Albergue de la Vía de la Plata (☎ 927 47 34 70; albergueviaplata@hotmail.com; Paseo de la Estación s/n; per person €20) Here's a delightfully original, brand new hostel-type place, open to all. With one double with private bathroom and four quads with shared bathroom, it's in a converted railway station building (no noise though; the last train steamed by in 1984), furnished in bright colours. There's a bar as well as self-catering facilities.

Hospedería Valle del Ambroz (☎ 927 47 48 28; www.hospederiavalledelambroz.com in Spanish; Plaza del Hospital s/n; s/d €65/105; a s p) Occupying a beautifully restored 17th-century monastery, this place is not all it seems. The monumental façade belies a rather more modern interior, where you are met by soft pastel colours and contemporary art.

Granadilla

About 25km west of Hervás, **Granadilla** (admission free; 11 10am-1pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 5-7pm Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) is a picturesque village complete with its own turreted castle. Abandoned after the creation in the 1960s of the reservoir that

RUTA DE LA PLATA

The name of this ancient highway, also called the Via de la Plata, derives from the Arabic *bilath*, meaning tiled or paved (and no, if you remember your schooldays Spanish, it's nothing to do with *plata*, meaning silver). But it was the Romans in the first century who originally laid this 1000km-long artery, linking Seville in the south with the coast of Cantabria and Bay of Biscay. Along its length moved goods, troops, travellers and traders. Later, it also served an alternative pilgrim route for the faithful walking from Andalucía to Santiago de Compostela along the Camino Mozarabe.

Nowadays it's closely paralleled by the N630, which has usurped large tracts for motor traffic. But much of the original remains and alternative walking tracks often run where the highway has intruded. Entering Extremadura south of Zafrá, it passes through Mérida, Cáceres and Plasencia, then heads for Salamanca in Castilla y León.

Neglected and virtually abandoned when motorised transport first dominated, it's now promoted as a valued tourist and cultural resource. Take a look at www.rutadelaplata.com or pick up its equivalent guide (€3) from tourist offices on the route. And should you be tempted to trek a stretch or two, pack *Walking the Via de la Plata* by Ben Cole and Bethen Davies.

laps around it and located in a lush green setting amid pinewoods, Granadilla is gradually being restored by visiting school and student groups. To get here, drive to Abadía or Zarza de Granadilla and follow the signs.

Baños de Montemayor

Water and wicker bring visitors to this small spa town, 7km north of Hervás. Its two springs, both dispensing sulphurous waters at 43°C, were first tapped by the Romans, whose baths soothed the muscles of weary travellers along the Via de la Plata. At the **Balneario de Baños de Montemayor** (☎ 923 42 83 02; www.villateral.com; Avenida de las Termas 57; 1 Mar–mid-Dec) you can follow a 45-minute water-based relaxation programme (€40) in the remains of the Roman bathhouse. A host of other treatments are also available.

The **Centro de Interpretación Via de la Plata** (☎ 923 02 03 28; Calle Castañar 48; admission free; 10am–2pm & 4–6pm Mon–Fri, 10am–2pm Sat) uses modern media within a restored traditional building to recount the history of this vital communications route from Roman times onward.

Baskets of all shapes and sizes, mats, even hats, cascade from the wicker shops along the main street. Check the label if something takes your fancy; much of what's on sale nowadays comes from the Far East.

Getting There & Away

Up to five buses daily run between Cáceres, Plasencia and Salamanca via the Valle del Ambroz, calling by Hervás (€2.25) and Baños de Montemayor (€2.60).

LAS HURDES

Las Hurdes has taken nearly a century to shake off its image of poverty, disease and chilling tales of witchcraft, even cannibalism. In 1922 the miserable existence of the *hurdanos* prompted Alfonso XIII to declare during a horseback tour, 'I can bear to see no more'. A decade later Luis Buñuel made *Las Hurdes – Terre Sans Pain* (Land without Bread), his short, harrowing documentary about rural poverty. Today the slick roads and growth of could-be-anywhere housing have robbed much of the picturesque feel from its villages but notably improved locals' living standards. Even so, outsiders are still a rare enough phenomenon to attract stares.

The austere, rocky terrain yields only small terraces of cultivable land along the riverbanks. The few remaining original, squat stone houses resemble slate-roofed sheep pens as much as human dwellings and in the hilly terrain donkeys and mules remain more practical than tractors. Here and there clusters of beehives produce high-quality honey.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 927 43 53 29; www.todohurdes.com; Avenida de Las Hurdes s/n; 10am–2pm & 4.30–7pm Tue–Sat, 11am–1.30pm Sun Jun–Sep, 10am–2pm & 4–7pm Tue–Sat, to 2pm Sun Oct–May), beside the EX204 in Caminomorisco, is the area's lone information office. Within the Casa de la Cultura (Cultural Centre), it has a useful map outlining walks and drives in Las Hurdes.

Sights & Activities

The valley of Río Hurdano, slicing northwest from Vegas de Coria and cut by the EX204, is at the heart of Las Hurdes. From Nuñomoral, 7.5km up the valley, a road heads west up a side valley to **El Gasco**, from where there's a particularly good one-hour return walk to **El Chorro de la Meancera**, a 70m waterfall. This side valley, the most picturesque of the area, has hard-won farming terraces carved out of the ravine's steep banks and clusters of traditional stone and slate-roofed houses huddled together in hamlets such as **Cottolengo**.

Back in the main valley **Casares de las Hurdes**, 9km northwest of Nuñomoral, has a pleasant main square with good views down the valley. To get a feel for Las Hurdes at the pace it demands, set aside a day to walk the PR40, a near-circular 28km route that follows ancient shepherd trails from here to Las Heras via La Huestre.

Beyond Casares de las Hurdes, the road winds up through Carabusino and Robledo to the border of Salamanca province, from where you can continue 25km to Ciudad Rodrigo (p191).

Alternatively, take a right turn 20m before the border marker to wind 9km down through forest to the isolated villages of **Riomalo de Arriba**, **Ladrillar** and **Cabezo** as far as **Las Mestas**, at the junction of the forest-lined road that leads up into the Peña de Francia towards La Alberca (p192). Las Mestas is a pretty stop, with a *piscina natural* (river swimming spot) and several local stores selling honey and pollen products.

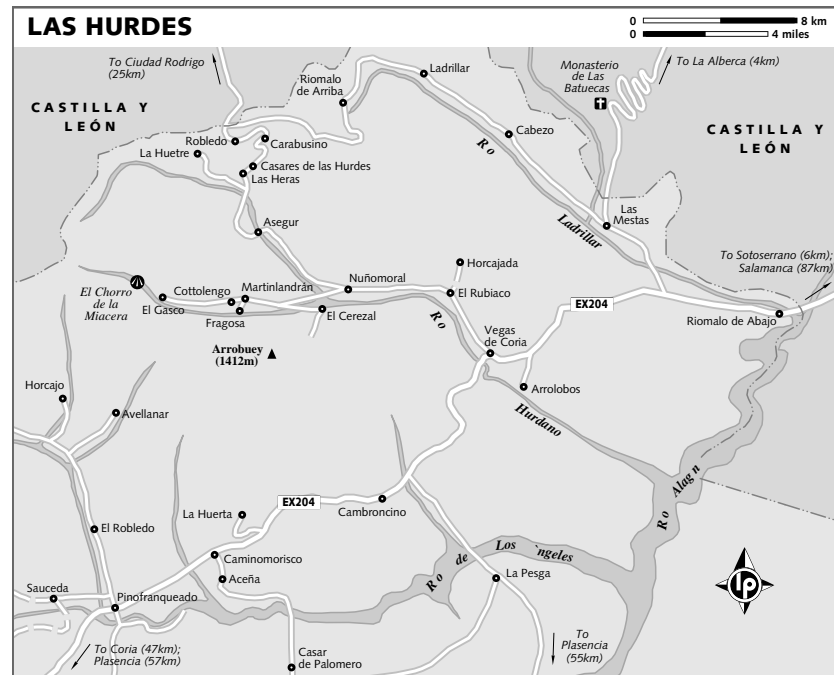
Sleeping & Eating

Most of the main villages of Las Hurdes have at least one hotel, which usually has its own restaurant.

Pensión Hurdano (☎ 927 43 30 12; Avenida Padre Rizabala; Nuñomoral; s/d without bathroom €18/27, d with bathroom €30) Deep into the valley and run by an engaging old couple, this is a little gem that also runs a bar and restaurant.

Hostal Montesol (☎ 927 67 61 93; Calle Lindón 7; r without/bathroom €30/32; a p) In Casares de las Hurdes, high up in the austere valley, it has rear rooms with great views. There's also a restaurant serving hearty fare.

Las Cabañas de Mestas (☎ 927 43 40 25; www.lasmestas.com; Finca La Viña Grande; cabins €45–55; a p)



These cabins, accommodating up to four people, and each having a porch, kitchen and a scratch of garden, enjoy a lovely setting amid olive groves. You may find the service as rustic as the bungalows.

Getting There & Away

Transport isn't easy here. On weekdays, one bus runs daily between Plasencia and Vegas de Coria (€4.90, 1½ hours) and Casares de las Hurdes (€6, 2¼ hours). Another runs between Riomalo de Arriba and Vegas de Coria (€2.30, 30 minutes), connecting with the Plasencia service. Two Coria-Salamanca buses call by Caminomorisco Monday to Saturday and one bus connects the town with Plasencia on weekdays.

SIERRA DE GATA

The Sierra de Gata, to the southwest of Las Hurdes, is almost as remote, its villages just as appealing. It's a land of wooded hills and valleys, through which poke spectacular outcrops of granite, the building material of choice in the vernacular architecture, with its carved stonework and external staircases.

Hoyos, formerly the summer residence of the bishops of Coria, has some impressive *casas señoriales* (mansions). The solid sandstone mass of its 16th-century Iglesia de Nuestra Señora del Buen Varón is surrounded on three sides by wide plazas and balconies bright with cascading flowers. About 5km out of central Hoyos (follow the signs for *piscina natural* just outside the east exit) is a popular local freshwater stream that widens out and is used as a local summer pool.

Santibáñez el Alto, high up on a lonely wind-swept ridge to the east, has the dinkiest bull-ring you'll ever see, built into the partially ruined walls of the mostly 13th-century castle that once guarded this vantage point.

Of all the hamlets in the sierra, the most engaging is **San Martín de Trevejo**. Beside cobblestone lanes with water coursing down central grooves, traditional houses jut out upon timber-and-stone supports. A couple of *casas rurales* offer rooms in the old village centre and several bars and a restaurant have food. On the northern edge of the village you can stroll out along an original Roman road. Here and in the two next villages looking west, **Eivas** and **Valverde del Fresno**, the folk speak their own isolated dialect, a strange mix of Spanish and Portuguese.

Getting There & Away

From Coria, four buses run daily to Hoyos (€2.25), and one or two to Valverde del Fresno (€4.40, 1¾ hours). There's one bus daily on weekdays from Plasencia to Valverde del Fresno (2¾ hours) via San Martín de Trevejo. Two run from Plasencia to Hoyos and another to Santibáñez (one hour).

CORIA & AROUND

pop 12,950

South of the Sierra de Gata, massive and largely intact protective walls surround Coria's old quarter, its whitewashed houses watched over by a mighty keep.

Information

Esitat-Coria (Calle Almanzor 12; per hr €3; 11am-2pm & 4-11pm) Internet access.

Tourist office (% 927 50 13 51; Avenida de Extremadura 39; 11am-2pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun) It has a pamphlet in English with a plan and description of the old town's main sights.

Sights & Activities

The **cathedral** (Plaza de la Catedral; 10am-1pm & 4-6.30pm), primarily Gothic, has intricate Plateresque decoration around its north portal. Attached is a small **ecclesiastical museum** (admission €2). On the plain below is a fine stone bridge, abandoned in the 17th century by Río Alagón, which now takes a more southerly course.

The **Convento de la Madre de Dios** (Calle de las Monjas s/n; admission €1.50; 10am-12.45pm & 4.15-6.45pm Sun-Fri, 4.15-6.45pm Sat) is a thriving 16th-century convent with an elegant cloister. The sisters sell a variety of delicious home-made sweets and pastries.

The **Museo de la Carcel Real** (Calle de las Monjas 2; admission €1.20; 10.30am-2pm & 5.30-8.30pm Wed-Sun), once the town's lock-up, houses Coria's tiny archaeological museum. Step inside the dark, poky *celda del castigo* (punishment cell), then see how the cushy first floor cells differed from the plebs' prison below.

Galisteo, 26km east of Coria on the EX109, has near-intact Muslim-era walls, the remains of a 14th-century fort with a curiously disproportionate cone-shaped tower added later and a Mudéjar brick apse to its old church.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel los Kekes (% & fax 927 50 40 80; Avenida de la Sierra de Gata 49; s/d €22/36) In the heart of town, these neat, well-furnished rooms make for an inviting stop. Prices rise a little in August.

El Bobo de Coria (% 927 50 07 95; Calle de las Monjas 6; mains €11; 11am-2pm Tue-Sun) Particularly strong on local mushroom dishes in season, The Idiot of Coria (named after a Velazquez painting) is also rich in traditional Extremadura dishes. The food's safe here; the walls are scarcely visible for the collection of locks, keys and bolts that adorn them.

Casa Campana (% 927 50 00 38; Plaza San Pedro 5; meals €20-25; 11am-2pm Wed-Mon) The slightly kitsch décor of the dining room, with its hunk of Roman wall and orange paint job, doesn't detract from Casa Campana's fine country cooking. And you can always dine on the terrace if it offends you.

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (% 927 50 01 10; Calle de Chile) is in the new part of town, about 1km from the old quarter. Buses run to/from Plasencia (€3.85, three daily) and Cáceres (€5.25 five daily).

PLASENCIA

pop 39,600

This pleasant, bustling town is the natural hub of northern Extremadura. Rising above a bend of Río Jerte, it retains long sections of its defensive walls. Founded in 1186 by Alfonso VIII of Castilla (see his handsome equestrian statue outside Puerta del Sol), Plasencia only lost out to Cáceres as Extremadura's premier town in the 19th century. It has an attractive old quarter of narrow streets and stately stone buildings, many emblazoned with noble coats of arms. Sights are well signed in both Spanish and English.

Information

Municipal tourist office (% 927 42 58 43; www.aytoplasencia.es/turismo in Spanish; Calle Santa Clara 2; 11am-2pm & 4-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Sat & Sun)

Regional tourist office (% 927 01 78 40; www.turismoextremadura.com; off Avenida del Ejército; 11am-2pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 9.45am-2pm Sat & Sun Jun-Sep, 9am-2pm & 4-6pm Mon-Fri Oct-Apr) Within Torre Lucia.

Sights

Heart of town is lively, arcaded **Plaza Mayor**, meeting place of 10 streets and scene of a Tuesday farmers market since the 12th century. The little fellow who strikes the hour on top of the much-restored Gothic transitional **town hall** is El Abuelo Mayorga (Grandpa Mayorga), an unofficial symbol of the town.

Plasencia's **cathedral** (Plaza de la Catedral; 11am-1pm & 5-7pm Mon-Sat, to 1pm Sun May-Sep, to 2pm & 4-6pm Mon-Sat, to 1pm Sun Oct-Apr) is actually two in one. The 16th-century **Catedral Nueva** (admission free) is mainly Gothic with a handsome Plateresque façade and robustly carved early-16th-century choir stalls that mix sacred and secular. Within the Romanesque **Catedral Vieja** (admission €2), entered through the Catedral Nueva via its bijou of a cloister, are the fine Capilla de San Pablo and the cathedral museum with 15th- to 17th-century Spanish and Flemish art.

Nearby is the **Museo Etnográfico-Textil** (% 927 42 18 43; Plazuela Marqués de la Puebla; admission free; 11am-2pm & 5-8pm Wed-Sat, to 2pm Sun), which displays local handicrafts and costumes.

The **Centro de Interpretación Torre Lucia** (% 927 41 68 40; off Avenida del Ejército; admission free; 11am-2pm & 5-8pm Jun-Sep, 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Oct-Apr) tells the history of medieval Plasencia through a video, models and artefacts. It also gives access to a hunk of the city wall, which you can walk along.

Sleeping

Hotel Rincón Extremeño (% 927 41 11 50; www.hotelrincon.com in Spanish; Calle Vidrieras 6; s/d €30/39; a) This unpretentious hotel has good, clean rooms and also runs a popular restaurant. It's down a busy little lane cluttered with eateries and bars just off Plaza Mayor.

Hotel Alfonso VIII (% 927 41 02 50; www.hotelalfonsoviii.com in Spanish; Avenida Alfonso VIII 32; s €60-70, d €105-20; p a n) Cool and gracious, on a busy street just outside the old city walls, this early-20th-century hotel offers comfortable, sound-proofed, spacious rooms, though the décor's a little dated. It runs a highly regarded restaurant. Wi-fi and parking (€11) are available.

Parador (% 927 42 58 70; plasencia@parador.es; Plaza San Vicente Ferrer s/n; s/d €112/140; p n a) The austere outside of this 15th-century Dominican convent gives no hint of the resplendent Renaissance cloister, the delightful rooms (with wi-fi) and richly tiled dining room, once the monks' refectory. Parking is €12.

Eating

Tapas are the thing in Plasencia. At lunch-time and sunset the bars and terraces on and around the Plaza Mayor fill up with eager punters, downing *cañas* (a small draught beer) or the local *pitarrá* red at €1 a shot. With each tittle comes a tapa for free. Depending on your tolerance for the grog, you can easily lunch or dine this way!

La Pitarra del Gordo (☎ 927 41 45 05; Plaza Mayor 8) This is one of myriad busy tapas bars. Favourites are its sausages and sliced ham (see the fat legs dangling from the bar's roof). It has two other branches around town.

Casa Juan (☎ 927 42 40 42; Calle Arenillas 5; mains €12-15; 11 Fri-Wed) Tucked away in a quiet lane, Casa Juan does well-prepared *extremeño* meat dishes such as shoulder of lamb and suckling pig. The chef's French; for starters, try his homemade melt-in-the-mouth *foie gras*. Eat in the vast dining room or on the smaller rear terrace.

Shopping

Casa del Jamón (Calle Zapatería 15) is a pleasantly pungent, tempting delicatessen with a great selection of wines, sausages, cheeses and boutique beers.

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (Calle de Tornavacas 2) is about 750km east of Plaza Mayor. The **train station** is off the Cáceres road, about 1km southwest of town.

Up to five buses daily run to/from Cáceres (€3.25, 50 minutes) and five to seven to/from Madrid (2½ hours).

Local services, weekdays only, include La Vera (up to three daily), Hervás (up to five daily), Coria (three daily), Hoyos (two daily) and one each to Caminomorisco, and Valverde del Fresno. Up to five services run to Salamanca (€7.40, 2½ hours).

Train depart from Plasencia to Madrid (€17.85, three to 3½ hours, two to six daily), Cáceres (€4, 1½ hours, up to five daily) and Mérida (€6.90, 2½ hours, two to three daily).

PARQUE NACIONAL MONFRAGÜE

Spain's 14th and newest national park, created in 2006, is a hilly paradise for bird watchers. Straddling the Tajo valley, it's home to some of Spain's most spectacular colonies of raptors and more than 75% of Spain's protected species. Among some 175 feathered varieties are around 250 pairs of black vultures (the largest concentration of Europe's biggest bird of prey) and populations of two other rare large birds: the Spanish imperial eagle and the black stork. At ground level, you'll be very lucky indeed to spot the endangered lynx, which still just manages to hang on in the park. The best time to visit is between March and October since storks and several raptors winter in Africa.

The park **information centre** (☎ 927 19 91 34; 11 9am-7.30pm Apr-Oct, 9am-6.30pm Nov-Mar) is in the hamlet of Villarreal de San Carlos on the EX208 Plasencia-Trujillo road. Ask there for the English version of its excellent illustrated map, which describes three signed walking trails of between 2½ and 3½ hours and shorter loops too. You can also drive to several of the hides and lookout points, such as the hilltop **Castillo de Monfragüe**, a ruined 9th-century Muslim fort. It's 20 minutes on foot from the castle car park or an attractive 1½-hour walk from Villarreal.

On the Peña Falcón crag, over on the opposite (west) bank of Río Tajo, are griffin vultures, black storks, Egyptian vultures, peregrine falcons, golden eagles and eagle owls.

The park maintains a couple of **Centros de Interpretación**, one about water (its video has an optional English soundtrack) and the other presenting the park's natural environment.

The nearest towns with accommodation are Torrejón el Rubio, 16km south of Villarreal, and Malpartida de Plasencia, 18.5km north. Villarreal has a couple of *casas rurales* and reservations are normally essential.

Al Mofrag (☎ 927 19 90 86; www.casauralalmofrag.com in Spanish; Cañada Real 19; s/d incl breakfast €35/50) Six cosy rooms in a fully renovated house, opened in 2006.

El Cabrerín (☎ & fax 927 19 90 02; Calle Villarreal 3; s/d €35/48) Ask at the bar opposite the information centre.

Precisely 14km north of Villarreal on the EX208 is **Camping Monfragüe** (☎ 927 45 92 33; www.campingmonfrague.com in Spanish; sites per adult/tent/car €4/4/4, 4-person bungalows €40-62; 11 year-round; s), a mature, shady camping ground with restaurant, shop and pool. It rents out bikes and does four-hour 4WD guided tours of the park (€25).

CENTRAL EXTREMADURA

CÁCERES

pop 89,050

Extremadura's largest city after Badajoz is a lively place. Given extra vitality by a sizable student population, it has some great restaurants and a vigorous nightlife.

The Ciudad Monumental, the old town with its cobbled streets, mansions and public buildings, is a joy to wander through. Protected by defensive walls, it has survived almost intact from its 16th-century heyday. It owes its construction to wealth brought in by migrating nobles from León in the wake of the Reconquest, supplemented richly by loot from the Americas.

Stretching at its feet, arcaded Plaza Mayor is one of Spain's finest public squares.

Orientation

The Ciudad Monumental rises above the 150m-long Plaza Mayor. Around both, a tangle of streets, mostly pedestrianised, extends to Avenida de España. From Plaza de América, at its southern end, Avenida de Alemania runs 1km southwest to the train and bus stations.

Information

Ciberjust (Calle Diego Maria Crehuet 7; per hr €2; 11 10.30am-11.30pm Mon-Fri, 5pm-11.30pm Sat & Sun) Closest internet café to the Ciudad Monumental.

Junta de Extremadura tourist office (☎ 927 01 08 34; Plaza Mayor 3; 11 9am-2pm & 4-6pm or 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 9.45am-2pm Sat & Sun)

Municipal tourist office (☎ 927 24 71 72; Calle Ancha 7; 11 10am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm or 5.30-8.30pm Tue-Sun)

Post office (Paseo Primo de Rivera 2)

Ciudad Monumental

'Monumental City' captures it. The churches, palaces and towers are indeed huge and hugely impressive but no-one lives here and there's only a sprinkling of bars and restaurants. The place lacks soul, especially after dark. But let's not be churlish. It's magnificent and merits at least two visits: first by day, then by night to enjoy the buildings illuminated.

Many of the mansions – all carved with the coats of arms of their founding families – are still in private, often absentee, hands; others are used by the provincial government, the local bishop and the Universidad Extremeña.

PLAZA DE SANTA MARÍA

Entering the Ciudad Monumental from Plaza Mayor through the 18th-century **Arco de la Estrella**, you'll see ahead the **Concatedral de Santa María** (Plaza de Santa María; 11 10am-1pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-2pm & 5-8pm Sun), Cáceres' 15th-century Gothic cathedral. On its southwest corner is a modern statue of San Pedro de Alcántara, a 16th-century *extremeño* ascetic (see how his toes have been worn shiny by the hands and lips of the faithful). Inside, drop €1 in the slot to the right of the Santa Rita chapel to light up the magnificent carved 16th-century cedar altarpiece. There are several fine noble tombs and a small **ecclesiastical museum** (admission €1).

Also on Plaza de Santa María, the Ciudad Monumental's most impressive plaza, are the **Palacio Episcopal** (Bishop's Palace), the **Palacio de Mayoralgo** and the **Palacio de Ovando**, all in 16th-century Renaissance style. Just off the plaza's northeast corner is the **Palacio Carvajal** (Calle Amargura 1; admission free; 11 10am-2pm & 5-9pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun). Within this late-15th-century mansion, there's a small, very visual display of sites of interest throughout northern Extremadura.

Not far away, in the northwest corner of the walled city, the **Palacio Toledo-Moctezuma** was once the home of a daughter of the Aztec

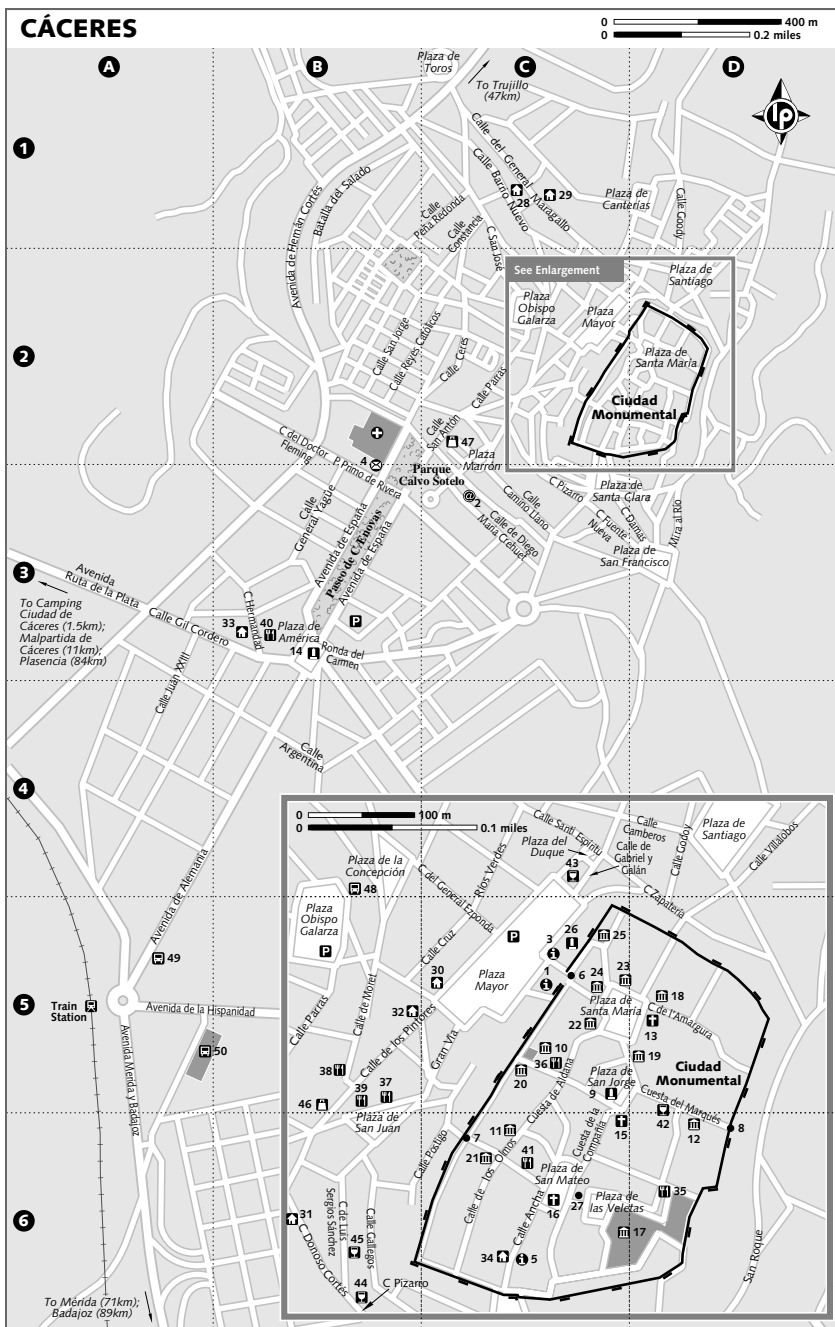
WOOLLY WANDERERS

If you travel the byways of Extremadura, Castilla y León, Castilla-La Mancha or western Andalucía you may find your road crossing or running beside a broad grassy track, which might have signs saying *cañada real* (royal drove road) or *via pecuaria* (secondary drove road). What you've stumbled upon is one of Spain's age-old livestock migration routes. The Visigoths were the first to take their flocks south from Castilla y León to winter on the plains of Extremadura – a practice that avoided the cold northern winter and allowed pastures to regenerate.

This twice-yearly *trashumancia* (migration of herds) grew to epic proportions in the late Middle Ages, when sheep became Spain's economic mainstay. The vast network of drove roads is estimated to have totalled 124,000km.

The biggest of them – veritable sheep freeways measuring up to 75m wide – were the *cañadas reales*. The Cañada Real de la Plata, which roughly followed the Roman Via de la Plata from northwest to southwest Spain, passes just west of Salamanca, enters Extremadura by the Valle del Ambroz, crosses the Parque Natural Monfragüe, and then follows stretches of the EX208 to Trujillo.

In modern times the drove roads fell into disuse, although since the late 1990s an effort has been made to maintain some of them and even resuscitate the *trashumancia*. The most publicised example takes place in Madrid, where in autumn a flock of 2000 or so sheep is driven through the city centre as a symbolic act.



emperor Moctezuma, who was brought to Cáceres as the bride of conquistador Juan Cano de Saavedra. Just around the corner, heading back towards Arco de la Estrella, you can climb the 12th-century **Torre de Bujaco** (adult/child €2/free; 10am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm or 5.30-8.30pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun). From the top of this tower, there's a good bird's eye view (literally: you're within feather-ruffling distance of a couple of stork nests) of the Plaza Mayor.

PLAZA DE SAN JORGE

Southeast of Plaza de Santa María, past the Renaissance-style **Palacio de la Diputación**, is Plaza de San Jorge, above which rises the **Iglesia de San Francisco Javier**, an 18th-century Jesuit church. Beside it, the 15th-century **Casa de los Becerra** (Plaza de San Jorge 2) is a recently restored mansion, now functioning as a cultural centre, which you're free to wander around.

Nearby, the **Casa-Museo Árabe Yussuf Al-Borch** (Cuesta del Marqués 4; admission €1.50; 11am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) is a private house decked out by its owner with an eccentric mix of Oriental and Islamic trappings. The **Arco del Cristo**, at the bottom of this street, is a Roman gate.

PLAZA DE SAN MATEO & PLAZA DE LAS VELETAS

From Plaza de San Jorge, Cuesta de la Compañía climbs to Plaza de San Mateo and the **Iglesia de San Mateo**, traditionally the church of the landowning nobility and built on the site of the town's Arab mosque.

Just to the east is the **Torre de las Cigüeñas** (Tower of the Storks). This was the only Cáceres tower to retain its battlements when the rest were lopped off in the late 15th century, on Isabel la Católica's orders, to exert royal authority and put a stop to rivalry between the city's fractious nobility.

Below the square is the excellent **Museo de Cáceres** (9% 927 01 08 77; Plaza de las Veletas 1; admission/EU citizens €1.20/free; 10am-2.30pm & 4-7.15pm or 5-8.15pm Tue-Sat, 10.15am-2.30pm Sun). This museum is in a 16th-century mansion built over an elegant 12th-century *aljibe* (cistern), the only surviving element of Cáceres' Muslim castle. It has an impressive archaeological section, rooms devoted to traditional crafts and costumes and a good little fine-arts display, with works by El Greco, Picasso and Miró.

OTHER BUILDINGS

Also worth a look within the Ciudad Monumental are the **Palacio de los Gólfines de Arriba** (Calle de los Olmos 2), where Franco was declared head of state in 1936, and the **Casa Mudéjar** (Cuesta de Aldana 14), still showing Muslim influence in its brickwork and 1st-floor window arches. On opposite sides of Plaza de los Caldereros are the **Palacio de la Generala** and **Casa de los Rivera**, both now university administrative buildings.

Tours

The **Asociación de Guías Turísticas** (Tourist Guides Association; Plaza Mayor 2) leads regular 1½-hour tours (€4.50, Tuesday to Sunday) in Spanish of the

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Ciudad Monumental, starting from its office on Plaza Mayor. Ask for the accompanying pamphlet in English.

Festivals & Events

For three hectic days in May, Cáceres stages the Spanish edition of **Womad** (World of Music, Arts and Dance; www.granteatrocc.com in Spanish), with international bands ranging from reggae and Celtic to African, Indian and Australian Aboriginal, playing in the old city's squares.

From 21 to 23 April the town celebrates the **Fiesta de San Jorge** in honour of its patron saint.

Sleeping

Albergue Turístico Las Veletas (% 927 21 12 10; www.alberguesturisticos.es; Calle General Maragallo 36; dm €20, d without/with bathroom €43/56; h Tue-Sun; r j) This modern hostel with its large rear garden offers agreeable accommodation in rooms of two, four or more. Reserve in advance, especially out of season, since it works primarily with groups.

Hostal Alameda (% 927 21 12 62; Plaza Mayor 33; d €45; a) This hostel is a great deal; it's on the 3rd floor, and it has five spacious rooms with comfortable beds and tile flooring. They're high enough above the busy main square to escape most of summer's nocturnal party-going street noise.

Hotel Don Carlos (% 927 22 55 27; www.hoteldoncarloscaceres.net in Spanish; Calle Donoso Cortés 15; s €33-48, d €48-65; a) Rooms are tastefully decorated at this welcoming, family-owned hotel, which has been recently and sensitively created from a long-abandoned early-19th-century private house. The hotel has free internet connection.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Alameda Palacete (% 927 21 16 74; www.alamedapalacete.com; Calle General Maragallo 45; s/d/tr/q €44/60/75/85; a) Restored with taste and flair by the owner herself, this elegant two-storey early-20th-century townhouse has eight beautifully arranged rooms. Three, big as small studios, can sleep up to four. Exquisite ceramic floors, high ceilings and the small patio, where plants and fresh flowers tumble, make for a pleasant stay. Little details, such as silk flowers in the bathrooms, make all the difference.

Hotel Iberia Plaza Mayor (% 927 24 76 34; www.iberiahotel.com in Spanish; Calle de los Pintores 2; s/d/tr €40/50/60; a) Located in an 18th-century building just off Plaza Mayor, this 36-room hotel, decorated with flair, is full of character.

Iberia Plaza América (% 927 21 09 06; www.iberiahotel.com in Spanish; s/d/tr €40/50/60; Calle Hermandad 12; p a) Rooms in this sister hotel to the Iberia Plaza Mayor are neat and trim. In a modern building down a quiet side street, it has its own underground garage (€8) and a tranquil rear patio.

Parador de Cáceres (% 927 21 17 59; caceres@parador.es; Calle Ancha 6; s/d €108/135; p r a) A grand 14th-century noble townhouse is the scene for this elegant accommodation (with wi-fi) in the walled town. Sit around in the courtyard or dine in its fine restaurant. Parking costs €14.

Eating

You'll find several cheap and cheerful restaurants and cafés around Plaza Mayor.

El Corral de las Cigüeñas (Cuesta de Aldana 6; h 8am-1pm Mon-Fri, 7pm-3am Tue-Sat, 5-11pm Sun) The sunny, quiet courtyard with its two towering palm trees is the perfect spot for one of the best-value breakfasts around: fresh orange juice, coffee and pastry or toast, all for €2!

Mesón Ibérico (% 927 21 67 19; Plaza San Juan 10; menú €12, mains €6-15; h Wed-Mon) Head upstairs from the bar to the tiny dining room for fresh local food. Start with a *tabla* (platter) of mixed cheeses and ham, then proceed to a hearty meat main. Round off with *técula mécula*, a divine and heavy dessert made of egg yolk, almonds and acorns.

Figón de Eustaquilo (% 927 24 43 62; Plaza San Juan 14; menú €16-19, mains €9-19) In this venerable, low-beamed, multi-roomed option, in business for 60 years, you'll be treated to such dishes as *vacuno a la crema de anchoa*, strange bedfellows of steak in a cream of anchovy sauce. The lengthy menu will be a test of your speed-reading talent.

Quin Qué (% 927 22 08 84; Calle Hermandad 9; mains €14-17; h Tue-Sat & lunch Sun) This chic restaurant offers creative avant-garde cuisine, confectioning dishes such as *manitas de cerdo glaseadas rellenas de cerezas de Jerte y piñones* (glazed pigs trotters stuffed with Jerte cherries and pine nuts). There's live jazz on Friday nights.

Mesón El Asador (% 927 22 38 37; Calle Moret 34; menú €15-26, mains €15-18; h Mon-Sat) The pork here has crackling that really crackles – you won't taste better roast pork or lamb in town. Its

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Restaurante Torre de Sande (% 927 21 11 47; Calle Condes 3; menú €42, mains €14-19; h Tue-Sat & lunch Sun) Inside is pleasantly cosy and intimate but really you should be dining in the gorgeous courtyard. High walls are masked by a thick cloak of ivy, to which swifts dart home to roost and feed their fledglings. There's an extensive cellar (the wine list reads like a book) and the cuisine delightfully prepared and presented. More modestly, you could simply stop for a drink and a tapa (€4.50) on the terrace of their interconnecting **Taperia**.

bar also serves *bocadillos* (bread rolls with filling) and a wide range of *raciones* (large tapas servings).

Chez Manou (% 927 22 76 82; Plaza de las Veletas 4; menú €26.40, mains €13-18.50; h Tue-Sat & lunch Sun) Dark-wood tables and chairs spread beneath the lofty, sloping, timber ceiling of this fine old house. On offer is an enticing mix of local and French dishes. On cold winter's days it's the perfect refuge; on a hot summer's night, dine under the stars on the terrace.

Drinking

The northern end of Plaza Mayor and offshoots such as Calle General Ezponda (known to locals as Calle de los Bares), Calle Gabriel y Galán and Plaza del Duque, are lined with lively late-night bars, most playing recorded music.

Just beyond the walls on the south side of the Ciudad Monumental more bars, such as **Habana** (Calle Pizarro 1) and **María Mandiles** (Calle de Luis Sergio Sánchez) line Calle Pizarro and its continuation, Calle Luis Sergio Sánchez. The new part of the city also offers plenty of action, including several clubs, in an area known as La Madrila and around Calle Doctor Fleming.

Farmacia de Guardia (Plaza Mayor 20; h 6pm-2.30am), far from being a pharmacy, is a lively bar with a terrace.

For a warm mood, head to **El Lancelot** (Rincón de la Monja 2; h 8pm-1am Wed-Mon). Surrounded by stained wood and rustic panelling, this is a great spot for a tippie and live (generally Irish) music on Sunday. If you are after a cool place to drink, check out **El Corral de las Cigüeñas** (opposite), which occasionally stages live music.

Shopping

La Jamoneria de Pintores (Calle Pintores 30) This is a good shop for local hams, sausages, cheeses and liquors.

Sala de Promoción de la Artesanía (Calle San Antón 17) This enterprise is run by the provincial government, and you can see and buy typical *extremeño* handicrafts.

Getting There & Away

Bus services include Trujillo (€3.20, 45 minutes, eight daily), Plasencia (€3.25, 50 minutes, up to five daily), Guadalupe (€9.10, 2½ hours, two daily), Mérida (€4.50, 50 minutes, up to three daily), Badajoz (€7.70, 1¼ hours, up to eight daily) and Madrid (€21.50, four hours, eight daily).

Up to five trains per day run to/from Madrid (€22.75 to €27.60, four hours), Plasencia (€4, 1½ hours) and Mérida (€4.85, one hour).

Getting Around

Bus L-1 from the stop outside the train station – close to the bus station – will take you into town.

For a taxi, call h 927 21 21 21.

VALENCIA DE ALCÁNTARA

pop 6100

This pretty town is 7km short of the Portuguese frontier and 92km west of Cáceres. Its well-preserved old centre is a curious labyrinth of whitewashed houses and mansions. One side of the old town is watched over by the ruins of a medieval castle and the **Iglesia de Rocamador** (which sounds like something from a Tolkien novel).

The surrounding area is known for its busy cork industry and some 50 ancient dolmens scattered about the countryside.

Up to three buses run daily from Cáceres (€4.55, 1½ hours).

ALCÁNTARA

pop 1750

Alcántara is Arabic for 'The Bridge'. West of town, a six-arched **Roman bridge** – 204m long, 61m high and much reinforced over the centuries – spans Río Tajo below a huge dam retaining the Embalse de Alcántara. An inscription above a small Roman temple on the river's left bank honours the bridge's original architect, Caius Julius Lacer – though no-one knows how many, if any, of his original building blocks remain.

The town itself (62km northwest of Cáceres) retains some of its old walls, the remains of a castle and several imposing mansions. From 1218 it was the headquarters of the Orden de Alcántara, an order of Reconquista knights that ruled much of western Extremadura as a kind of private fiefdom.

Hostal Kantara Al Saif (☎ 927 39 08 33; www.hotelpuenteromanos.com in Spanish; Avenida de Mérida s/n; s/d Mon-Fri Sep-Jul €22/36, Sat & Sun, all Aug €30/45; Ⓟ a) is a modern, unexciting but comfortable place on the eastern edge of town as you enter. Parking is €3.

Up to four buses run daily to/from Cáceres (€4.90, 1½ hours).

TRUJILLO

pop 9700

With its labyrinth of terracotta-tiled houses and mansions, leafy courtyards, fruit gardens, churches and convents, Trujillo is one of the most charming and engaging small towns in Spain.

The town only truly came into its own with the conquest of the Americas. Then, Francisco Pizarro, its most famous son, and his co-conquistadors enriched the city with a grand new square and imposing Renaissance mansions that, for the most part restored after years of neglect, again look down confidently upon the town.

The well-preserved old town rises above the wonderful, broad, pedestrianised Plaza Mayor.

Information

Ciberalia (Calle Tiendas 18; per hr €2; h 10.30am-midnight) Internet access.

Post office (Calle Encarnación 28)

Tourist office (☎ 927 32 26 77; www.ayto-trujillo.com in Spanish; Plaza Mayor s/n; h 10am-2pm & 4-7pm or 4.30-7.30pm)

Sights

PLAZA MAYOR

A large equestrian **Pizarro statue** by American Charles Rumsey looks down over Plaza Mayor. There's a tale that Rumsey originally sculpted it as a statue of Hernán Cortés to present to Mexico, but Mexico, which takes a poor view of Cortés, declined it, so it was given to Trujillo as Pizarro instead.

On the plaza's south side, carved images of Pizarro and his lover Inés Yupanqui (sister of the Inca emperor Atahualpa) decorate the

corner of the **Palacio de la Conquista**. To the right is their daughter Francisca Pizarro Yupanqui with her husband (and uncle), Hernando Pizarro. The mansion was built in the 1560s for Hernando and Francisca after Hernando – the only Pizarro brother not to die a bloody death in Peru – emerged from 20 years in jail for the killing of Diego de Almagro. Higher up, a bas relief-carving shows the Pizarro family shield (two bears and a pine tree), the walls of Cuzco (in present-day Peru), Pizarro's ships and a group of Indian chiefs.

Through a twisting alley above the Palacio de la Conquista is the **Palacio Juan Pizarro de Orellana** (admission free; h 10am-1.30pm & 4.30-6pm), converted from miniature fortress to Renaissance mansion by one of the Pizarro cousins who took part in the conquest of Peru and lived to reap the benefits back home. Now a school, its patio is decorated with the coats of arms of the two most famous local families: the Pizarros and the Orellanas (Francisco Orellana was the first European to explore reaches of the Amazon).

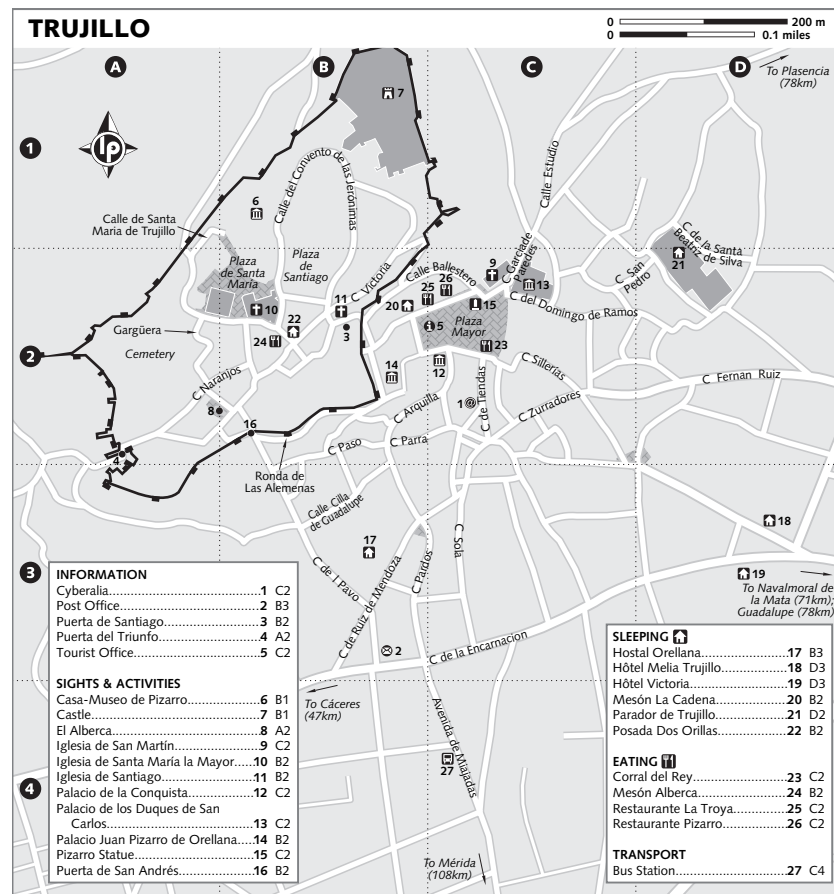
Overlooking the Plaza Mayor from the northeast corner is the mainly 16th-century **Iglesia de San Martín** with delicate Gothic ceiling tracing and a couple of noble tombs. It's one of the few churches in Trujillo still functioning as a place of worship.

Across the street rears the solid presence of the 16th-century **Palacio de los Duques de San Carlos**, nowadays a convent but open for visits. Its treasures are the sober classical patio and a grand marble staircase. Peer up at the roof, where the chimneys were designed to reflect in miniature the pyramids and monuments of the subjugated Aztecs, Incas and other indigenous cultures.

TIMES & TICKETS

A combined ticket (€4.70), which includes a comprehensive guidebook available in English, gives entry to the Iglesia de Santiago, Casa-Museo de Pizarro and the castle. To include the Iglesia de San Martín costs €5.30, and it's €6.75 if you want to join a guided tour (in Spanish). All are on sale at the tourist office.

Unless we indicate otherwise, tariffs and times are constant for all **sights** (adult/child €1.40/free; h 10am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm or 5-8pm).



UPPER TOWN

The 900m of walls circling the upper town date from Muslim times. Here, the newly settled noble families built their mansions and churches after the Reconquista. The western end is marked by the **Puerta del Triunfo** (Gate of Triumph), through which it is said conquering Christian troops marched in 1232, when they wrested the city from the Muslims. About 100m inside is the recently restored **El Alberca**, with stairs leading down to a naturally occurring pool, thought to date from Roman times and used as public baths until 1935.

Coming up from Plaza Mayor, you pass through the **Puerta de Santiago**. To its right is the deconsecrated **Iglesia de Santiago**, founded in the 13th century by the Knights of Santiago

(look for their scallop-shell emblem). You can climb the bell tower and visit the simply furnished sacristan's sleeping quarters.

The **Iglesia de Santa María la Mayor** has a mainly Gothic nave and a Romanesque tower that you can ascend for fabulous views. It also has tombs of leading Trujillo families of the Middle Ages, including that of Diego García de Paredes (1466-1530), a Trujillo warrior of legendary strength who, according to Cervantes, could stop a mill wheel with one finger. The church has a fine altarpiece with Flemish-style 15th-century paintings.

The 15th-century **Casa-Museo de Pizarro** (☎ 927 32 26 77; Calle Convento de las Jerónimas 12) was the ancestral home of the great conquistador family. Restored in the style of the 15th and 16th

EXTREMADURA & AMERICA

Extremeños jumped at the opportunities opened up by Columbus' discovery of the Americas in 1492.

In 1501 Fray Nicolás de Ovando from Cáceres was named governor of all the Indies. He set up his capital, Santo Domingo, on the Caribbean island of Hispaniola. With him went 2500 followers, many of them from Extremadura, including Francisco Pizarro, the illegitimate son of a minor noble family from Trujillo. In 1504 Hernán Cortés, from a similar family in Medellín, arrived in Santo Domingo too.

Both young men prospered. Cortés took part in the conquest of Cuba in 1511 and settled there. Pizarro, in 1513, accompanied Vasco Núñez de Balboa (from Jerez de los Caballeros) to Darién (Panama), where they discovered the Pacific Ocean. In 1519 Cortés led a small expedition to what's now Mexico, rumoured to be full of gold and silver. By 1524, with combined fortitude, cunning, luck and ruthlessness, Cortés and his band had subdued the Aztec empire. Though initially named governor of all he had conquered, Cortés soon found royal officials arriving to usurp him. He returned to Spain in 1540.

Pizarro, after forays south of Panama had led to contact with the Inca empire, won royal backing for his plan to subjugate the territory and was named, in advance, governor of newly styled Nueva Castilla.

Before returning to Panama, Pizarro visited Trujillo, where he received a hero's welcome and collected his four half-brothers – Hernando, Juan and Gonzalo Pizarro, and Martín de Alcántara as well as other relatives and friends. Their expedition set off from Panama in 1531, with just 180 men and 37 horses. Pizarro and his force crossed the Andes and managed to capture the Inca emperor Atahualpa, despite the emperor having a 30,000-strong army. The Inca empire, with its capital in Cuzco and extending from Colombia to Chile, resisted until 1545, by which time Francisco had died (he is buried in the cathedral of Lima, Peru).

About 600 people of Trujillo made their way to the Americas in the 16th century, so it's no surprise that there are about seven Trujillos in North, Central and South America. There are even more Guadalupes, for conquistadors and colonists from all over Spain took with them the cult of the Virgen de Guadalupe in eastern Extremadura, one which remains widespread throughout Latin America.

centuries, the house contains a small informative display (in Spanish) on the Inca empire and the Pizarros. Whether Francisco Pizarro ever lived here is doubtful. Though he was the eldest of his father Gonzalo's nine children (by four women), Francisco was illegitimate and never accepted as an heir. What's attested is that his siblings brought Francisco in triumph to this house on his visit to Trujillo in 1529.

At the top of the hill, Trujillo's **castle**, of 10th-century Muslim origin (evident by the horseshoe-arch gateway just inside the main entrance) and later strengthened by the Christians, is impressive, even though bare, but for a lone fig tree. Patrol the battlements for magnificent 360-degree sweeping views.

Festivals & Events

The last weekend in April is a pungent period as cheese makers from all over Spain and elsewhere display their best at Trujillo's **Feria del Queso** (Cheese Fair). The town's annual **Fiestas**

de Trujillo, with music, theatre and plenty of partying, are spread over a few days around the first Saturday in September.

Sleeping

Mesón La Cadena (% 927 32 14 63; fax 927 32 31 16; Plaza Mayor 8; s/d €35/43; \bar{a}) Occupying part of a 16th-century mansion on the grand central square, this place's location is unbeatable. Its nine austere, cell-like rooms offer monastic comfort; their air-con makes for a welcome retreat from a hot summer day. Three overlook the plaza while 206 and 207 have good views sweeping up to the castle.

Hostal Orellana (% 927 32 07 53; Calle Ruiz de Mendoza 2; d €42; \bar{a}) The lovingly restored rooms in this 16th-century house, just a short walk from the centre, are all the more attractive for the exposed stone walls, dark timber and warm décor.

Hôtel Victoria (% & fax 927 32 18 19; Plaza del Campillo 22; s/d €58/72; \bar{p} \bar{n} \bar{a}) The rooms of this

early-20th-century hotel open onto the central atrium with its slender pillars and delicate wrought-ironwork into which light floods. Those on the ground and 1st floors are more spacious. With a grassy rear garden, it's an excellent midrange choice, including wi-fi facilities. Parking costs €6.

Posada Dos Orillas (% 927 65 90 79; www.dosorillas.com; Calle de Cambrones 6; d Sun-Thu €70-90, Fri & Sat €81-107; \bar{a} \bar{i}) This tastefully renovated 16th-century mansion in the walled town once served as a silk-weaving centre. Its 13 beautifully appointed double rooms replicate Spanish colonial taste. Those in the older wing bear the names of the 'seven Trujillos' of Extremadura and the Americas. The more recent six are named after various Central and South American countries. Relax in the sunny patio or dine in its courtyard restaurant (right).

Hôtel Melia Trujillo (% 927 45 89 00; www.solmelia.com; Plaza del Campillo 1; r€80-145; \bar{p} \bar{n} \bar{a} \bar{s}) If you favour 21st-century pampering in a historic setting, this renovated convent, styling itself a boutique hotel despite having 77 rooms, is your place. Rooms, furnished in warm, attractive orange-and-brown fabrics, have marble bathrooms and the dining room occupies the old monastery refectory. Buffet breakfasts are especially lavish; there's no comparison with the monks' meagre fare. Parking costs €12.85.

Parador de Trujillo (% 927 32 13 50; trujillo@parador.es; Calle Santa Beatriz de Silva 1; s/d €96/120; \bar{p} \bar{n} \bar{a}) Also located in a beautiful former convent with a peaceful cloistered courtyard and gently bubbling fountains, this hotel makes a fine retreat in the winding back streets of the old town. Wi-fi is available and parking costs €15.

Eating

Restaurante Pizarro (% 927 32 02 55; Plaza Mayor 13; menú €20-31, mains €9-16; \bar{h} Wed-Mon) Much esteemed

locally and run by two sisters, this spot has been offering subtle versions of traditional fare and winning gastronomic awards since 1985. The setting is appropriately grand, to accompany the house special of *gallina trufada* (chicken prepared with truffles), when in season, and various roasts.

Posada Restaurante Dos Orillas (mains €15-18; \bar{v}) Just as the hotel is a gem, so the restaurant is a place of quiet, refined eating, whether al fresco in the patio or dining room with its soft-hued fabrics. There's ample choice for vegetarians.

Mesón Alberca (% 927 32 22 09; Calle de Cambrones 8; menú €15-22; \bar{h} Thu-Sun) Dark-timber tables laid with gingham cloths, set in a restored house within the old walled city, create a warm atmosphere for classic *extremeño* cooking. The speciality is oven roasts.

Corral del Rey (% 927 32 30 71; Corral del Rey 2; mains €18-26; \bar{h} Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) As if hiding away in a little corner chipped off the main square, this grand restaurant offers worthy fare. Settle for a simple *menú del día* (€16) or be more adventurous and choose from a tempting range of grills, roasts and fish dishes.

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (% 927 32 12 02; Avenida de Mijadas) is 500m south of Plaza Mayor. There are services to/from Madrid (€14.90 to €19, three to 4¼ hours, up to 10 daily), Guadalupe (€5.45, two daily), Cáceres (€3.18, 45 minutes, eight daily), Mérida (€7, 1¼ hours, three daily) and Salamanca (one daily) via Plasencia.

GUADALUPE

pop 2250

Approached from the north along the EX118 road, the bright, white town of Guadalupe (from the Arabic meaning 'hidden river') appears as though from nowhere, huddled around

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Restaurante La Troya (% 927 32 13 64; Plaza Mayor 10; set meal €15) The restaurant and its owner, Concha Alvarez, whose dour countenance glowers from a wall full of photos of her with celebrities great and small, are *extremeño* institutions. Since shortly after WWII, the restaurant has stuck to a simple formula in this rambling old mansion. You will be directed to one of several dining areas and there, without warning, be presented with a plate of tortilla, chorizo and salad, served with wine and water. You are then asked in machine-gun fashion what you want for a first course (ranging from gazpacho to hearty bean stews and paella). Shortly thereafter staff will want to know your choice of main (listen out for *pruebas de cerdo*, tender paprika-spiced morsels of roast pork). Servings are truly gargantuan and staff take an obvious pride in their reputation for speed and efficiency. You drop the standard €15 on the way out.

the massive stone hulk of the Real Monasterio de Santa María de Guadalupe. This engaging town, with its uneven cobbled squares, squat porticoed houses and bubbling fountains is a bright jewel set in the green crown of the surrounding ranges and ridges of the Sierra de Villuercas. Thick woods of chestnut, oak and cork mesh with olive groves and vineyards, great for peaceful walks and drives.

At the heart of the village, crouched at the base of the monastery steps, is Plaza Santa María de Guadalupe, usually called simply Plaza Mayor.

Information

Fotobías (Calle Gregorio López 24; per hr €1.80;

10am-2pm & 5-8.30pm Mon-Sat) Internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 927 15 41 28; Plaza Mayor;

10am-2pm & 4-6pm or 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun)

Sights

REAL MONASTERIO DE SANTA MARÍA DE GUADALUPE

The **monastery** (☎ 927 36 70 00; Plaza Santa María de Guadalupe; 10am-8pm), a Unesco World Heritage site, was founded in 1340 by Alfonso XI on the spot where, according to legend, a shepherd had found an effigy of the Virgin, hidden years earlier by Christians fleeing the Muslims. It remains one of Spain's most important pilgrimage sites.

In the 16th century, the Virgin of Guadalupe was so revered that she was made patron of all Spain's New World territories. On 29 July 1496, Columbus's Indian servants were baptised in the fountain in front of the monastery, an event registered in the monastery's first book of baptisms. The Virgin of Guadalupe, patron of Extremadura, remains a key figure for many South American Catholics.

Inside the **church** (admission free) the Virgin's image occupies the place of honour within the soaring *retablo* (altarpiece). The 45-minute **guided tour** (adult/child €3/1.50; 10 tours 9.30am-1pm & 3.30-6.30pm) of the rest of the complex, although only in Spanish, should not be missed. To get the most out of it, buy in advance the English version of the visitors guide (€2), which, in stilted English, describes the route followed.

At the centre of the monastery is a 15th-century Mudéjar cloister, off which are three museums. The **Museo de Bordados** displays wonderfully embroidered altar cloths and vestments; the **Museo de Libros Miniados**

has a fine collection of illuminated choral song books from the 15th century onwards; and the **Museo de Pintura y Escultura** includes three paintings by El Greco, a Goya and a beautiful little ivory crucifixion attributed to Michelangelo. In the elaborately decorated baroque **sacristía** (sacristy) hang 11 paintings by Zurbarán and a lantern captured from the Turkish flagship at the 1571 Battle of Lepanto (notice the twin holes made by the bullet that passed right through it). The **Relicario-Tesoro** houses a variety of other treasures, including a snaking 18th-century Italian chandelier and a 200,000-pearl cape for the Virgin. Finally the tour reaches the **camarin**, a chamber behind the altarpiece where the image of the Virgin is revolved for the faithful to contemplate her at close quarters and kiss a fragment of her mantle.

Walking

One splendid option is to take the Madrid-Miadas bus to the village of **Cañamero**, southwest of Guadalupe, and hike back along the **Ruta de Isabel la Católica**, a well-signed 17km trail. The tourist office has plans and printed material in Spanish describing other shorter and easier circular routes of three to five hours.

Festivals & Events

Colourful processions wind through the heart of the town during **Easter Week**, between the 6 and 8 September in honour of the Virgin of Guadalupe, and on 12 October, the **Día de la Hispanidad**, celebrated throughout the Spanish-speaking world. Wednesday is the local market day.

Sleeping

Camping Las Villuercas (☎ 927 36 71 39; sites per adult/tent/car €3/3/2.50; 1 Apr-Dec; s) Being the nearest camping option to Guadalupe, it has a pretty site in a river valley a short distance off the EX102, 3km south of the village. It also has self-catering apartments (two/four people €32/50).

For such a tiny place that can be overwhelmed with visitors, Guadalupe has some excellent value choices.

Cerezo (☎ 927 36 73 79; www.hostalcerezo.com in Spanish; Calle Gregorio López 20; s/d/tr €29/43/52; a) This 16-room *hostal*, a mere 50m from the Plaza Mayor, has neat rooms, all with bathtub. Ask for one at the rear with balcony, overlooking the quiet countryside. Its more-than-decent

restaurant (menú €9-19, mains €8.40-15.20) has a picture window offering the same view beyond a tangle of citrus and fig trees. Its smaller sister, **Cerezo II** (☎ 927 15 41 77; Plaza Mayor 23), on the main square, offers similar facilities.

Hospedería del Real Monasterio (☎ 927 36 70 00; Plaza Juan Carlos I; s/d €43/61; a p) Centred on the monastery's beautiful 16th-century Gothic cloister, this is *the* sleeping option in Guadalupe with by far the most character and offers excellent value. Some rooms look directly onto the heart of the cloister. Book well ahead as it is frequently full with wedding parties.

Posada del Rincón (☎ 927 36 71 14; www.posadadelrincon.com in Spanish; Plaza Mayor 11; s €42-47 d €65-72) Behind its tiny façade, Posada del Rincón, first mentioned in writing in the late 15th century, has 20 warm-coloured rooms, exposed brick and stonework, dark-timber furniture and oak ceilings. It's a fine option with a long bar and bijou internal patio.

Parador Zubarán (☎ 927 36 70 75; guadalupe@parador.es; Calle Marqués de la Romana 12; s/d €96/120; a s p) Guadalupe's premier hotel occupies a converted 15th-century hospital opposite the monastery. Spacious rooms are tastefully decorated and the internal courtyard is a pleasure to relax in.

Eating

In addition to the following, the restaurants in the Parador Zubarán and Posada del Rincón also have quality restaurants.

Mesón El Cordero (☎ 927 36 71 31; Calle Alfonso El Onceno 27; menú €12, mains €11.50-15; 1 Tue-Sun Mar-Jan) This is the best place in town for the house speciality, *cordero asado* (roast lamb). Wash it down with a porcelain jug of house *vino pitarra* (simple, robust red). The setting is rustic, with polished wooden floors, old leather and wooden seats. Shame about the TV blaring in the background.

Hospedería del Real Monasterio (see above; meals €25) In summer it's a delight to take up a seat in the magnificent Gothic cloister. Inside are two grand dining halls rich with 17th-century timber furnishings and antique ceramics. There's a competent range of both meat and fish dishes, and most of the desserts are rustled up in the kitchens.

Shopping

There's a lot of tat around. Amid the gewgaws and piled-up ceramics are some fine food products, among them *vino pitarra*, *queso di*

Ibores (local goat's cheese), various honeys and liqueurs produced in the monastery, and the rich, sweet *rosco di muégado* (made of a dough composed of wheat, flour, egg, aniseed, oil and cilantro, deep fried in strips and drenched in toasted honey). Take your pick of the goodies at **Atrium** (Calle Alfonso El Onceno 6), which is also a neat little café.

Getting There & Away

Buses stop on Avenida Conde de Barcelona near the town hall, a two-minute walk from Plaza Mayor. **Mirat** (☎ 927 23 48 63) runs two services daily to/from Cáceres (€9.10, 2½ hours) via Trujillo (€5.45). **La Sepulvedana** (☎ 902 22 22 82) has two daily buses to/from Madrid (€14, 3¼ hours). The tourist office has timetables.

SOUTHERN EXTREMADURA

MÉRIDA

pop 53,100

Mérida, seat of the Junta de Extremadura, the regional government, feels further south. The scent of orange blossom in season and the bright, low houses along the cobbled lanes lend a distinct touch of Andalucía to its centre. Founded as Augusta Emerita in 25 BC for veterans of Rome's campaigns in Cantabria, it has Spain's most complete Roman ruins and a magnificent classical museum.

Difficult to imagine today but, with more than 40,000 inhabitants, Mérida was the capital of the Roman province of Lusitania, the largest city on the Iberian Peninsula and its political and cultural hub.

Orientation

The train station is a 10-minute walk from central Plaza de España. From the **bus station** (Avenida de la Libertad), 150m west of Río Guadiana, a 15-minute walk takes in a spectacular view of the Puente Romano from the Puente Lusitania, a modern suspension bridge designed by the internationally renowned Spanish architect, Santiago Calatrava.

The most important Roman ruins are within easy walking distance of each other on the east side of town. Pedestrianised Calle Santa Eulalia, heading northeast from Plaza de España, is the main shopping street.

Information

Friends on Line (Calle Romero Leal 5; per hr €2;

11am-2pm & 4pm-midnight) Internet access.

Junta de Extremadura tourist office (☎ 924 00 97

30; otmerida@eco.juntaex.es; Avenida José Álvarez Saenz

de Buruaga s/n; 9am-1.45pm & 4-6pm or 5-7pm

Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1.45pm Sat & Sun) Right beside the gates to the Roman theatre and amphitheatre.

Municipal tourist office (☎ 924 33 07 22; Calle Santa

Eulalia 64; 9.30am-2pm & 4-7pm or 5-8pm)

Post office (Plaza de la Constitución)

Sights

ROMAN REMAINS

The **Teatro Romano**, built around 15 BC to seat 6000 spectators, has a dramatic and particularly well-preserved two-tier backdrop

of stone columns. The adjoining **Anfiteatro**, opened in 8 BC for gladiatorial contests, had a capacity of 14,000. Nearby, the **Casa del Anfiteatro**, the remains of a 3rd-century mansion, has some reasonable floor mosaics.

Los Columbarios (Calle del Ensanche) is a Roman funeral site, well documented and illustrated in Spanish. A footpath connects it with the **Casa del Mitreo** (Calle Oviedo), a 2nd-century Roman house with several intricate mosaics (especially the *mosaico cosmológico* with its allegories and bright colours) and a well-preserved fresco.

The **Puente Romano** over Río Guadiana, 792m long with 60 granite arches, is one of the longest bridges built by the Romans. The 15m-high **Arco de Trajano** over Calle de

Traiano may have served as the entrance to the provincial forum, from where Lusitania province was governed. The **Templo de Diana** (Calle Sagasta) stood in the municipal forum, where the city government was based. Parts were incorporated into a 16th-century mansion, built within it. The restored **Pórtico del Foro**, the municipal forum's portico, is just along the road. The **Centro de Interpretación Las VII Sillas** (Calle José Ramón Mérida 20; admission free) has the remains of a noble mansion and a sizable hunk of Roman, Visigoth and Arab wall. A 13-minute DVD in Spanish takes you on a virtual tour of the Roman city.

Northeast of the amphitheatre are the remains of the 1st-century **Circo Romano**, the only surviving hippodrome of its kind in Spain, which could accommodate 30,000 spectators. Inside you can see brief footage in Spanish about Diocles, a champion *auriga* (chariot racer) who served his apprenticeship in Mérida before going on to the big league in Rome. Further west, the **Acueducto Los Milagros** (Calle Marquesa de Pinares), highly favoured by nesting storks, once supplied the Roman city with water from the dam at Lago Proserpina, about 5km out of town.

MUSEO NACIONAL DE ARTE ROMANO

This excellent **museum** (☎ 924 31 16 90; Calle José Ramón Mérida; adult/child €2.40/1.20; 10am-2pm & 4-6pm or 4-9pm Tue-Sat, to 2pm Sun) houses a superb collection of statues, mosaics, frescoes, coins and other Roman artefacts. Designed by the architect Rafael Moneo, the grand brick structure, reminiscent of the best in Roman engineering, makes a remarkable home for the collection.

ALCAZABA

This large **Muslim fort** (Calle Graciano) was built in AD 835 on a site already occupied by the Romans and Visigoths. The 15th-century monastery in its northeast corner now serves as the Junta de Extremadura's presidential offices. Its *aljibe* (cistern) incorporates marble and stone slabs with Visigothic decoration that were recycled by the Muslims. Climb up to the walls to gaze out over the Guadiana.

IGLESIA DE SANTA EULALIA

Originally built in the 5th century in honour of Mérida's patron saint, this church was completely reconstructed in the 13th century. Beside it, a museum and open excavated areas

enable you to identify Roman houses, a 4th-century Christian cemetery and the original 5th-century basilica.

MUSEO DE ARTE VISIGODO

Many of the Visigothic objects unearthed in Mérida are exhibited in this **museum** (☎ 924 30 01 06; Calle Santa Julia; admission free; 10am-2pm & 4-6pm or 5-7pm Tue-Sat, to 2pm Sun), just off Plaza de España.

ZONA ARQUEOLÓGICA DE MORERÍA

This excavated Moorish quarter along Paseo de Roma contains the remains of a cemetery, walls and houses dating from Roman to post-Islamic times.

Festivals & Events

The prestigious summer **Festival de Teatro Clásico** (www.festivaldemerida.es in Spanish; admission €10-30; 11am-11pm most nights Jul & Aug), at the Roman theatre and amphitheatre, features Greek and more recent drama classics, plus music and dance. Mérida lets its hair down a little later than most of Extremadura in its **Feria de Septiembre** (September Fair; 1-15 September).

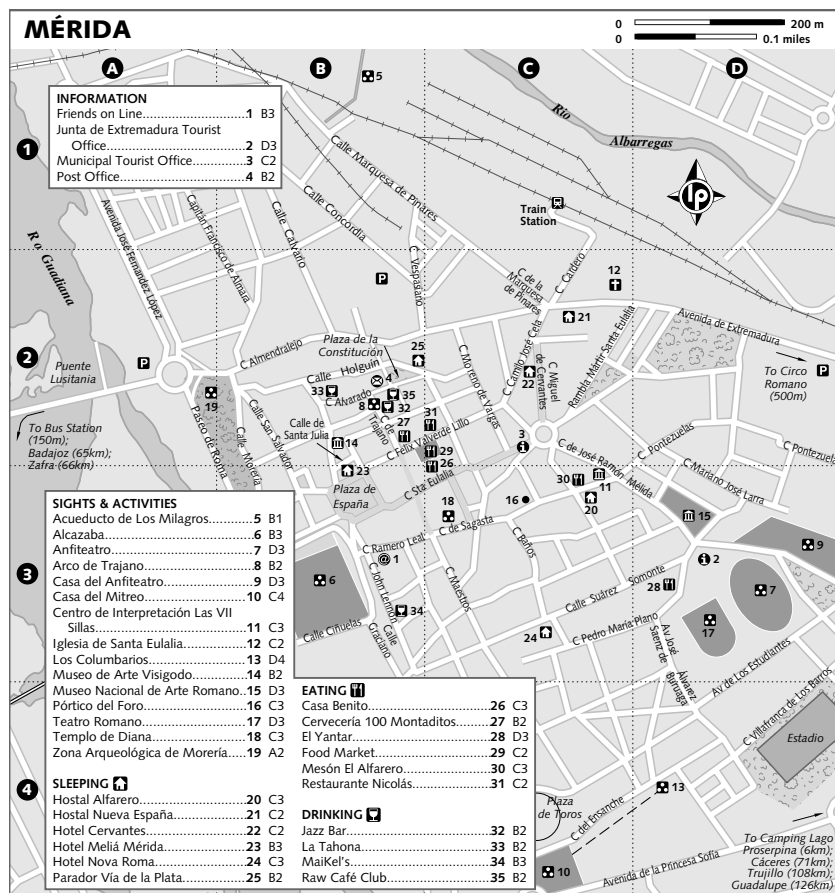
Sleeping

Hostal Nueva España (☎ 924 31 33 56; Avenida de Extremadura 6; s/d €25/38; a) With 18 bright, modern rooms, all with bathtub, this central cheapie makes a reasonable choice. It's beside a busy road so ask for a room at the rear.

Hostal Alfarero (☎ 924 30 31 83; www.hostalalfarero.com; Calle Sagasta 40; r €45; a) This pretty little yellow house, right in the heart of town, is the choice budget option. It has rustic décor, a pleasant little internal patio and lounge, and jolly, quirky ceramics by the original owner's father.

Hotel Cervantes (☎ 924 31 49 61; www.hotelcervantes.com; Calle Camilo José Cela 8; s €40-50, d €60-70; a p) This smallish, family-run hotel is a comfortable, reliable midrange option, aimed mostly at a small, local business market. Parking costs €6.

Hotel Nova Roma (☎ 924 31 12 61; www.novaroma.com in Spanish; Calle Suárez Somonte 42; s/d €62/84; a) What a bizarre place. The tall brick frontage hides a pseudo-Roman Empire interior, complete with heavy layers of marble and copies of headless statues. The rooms themselves at this tour group favourite – bright and spacious with light pastel-coloured décor – are altogether less kitsch. Parking is an extra €10.50.



Parador Via de la Plata (☎ 924 31 38 00; merida@parador.es; Plaza de la Constitución 3; s/d €108/135; p n a s) You're sleeping on the site of a Roman temple in a building that started life as a convent (get spiritual in its lounge, once the chapel), then served as both hospital and prison. In the gardens, the assembled hunks of Roman, Visigoth and Mudéjar give a brief canter through Mérida's architectural history. Rear room balconies look onto a quiet garden with fountains. Parking costs €10.50.

Hotel Meliá Mérida (☎ 924 38 38 00; www.solmelia.com; Plaza de España 19; r€120; p n a i s) The hotel occupies two adjacent and strikingly different buildings: a 16th-century palace with a gorgeous if over-restored patio and a 19th-century town house with a lovely filigree wrought-iron atrium. Rooms are spacious with Roman-style mosaic décor and muted timber furniture.

Eating

Cervecería 100 Montaditos (Calle Felix Valverde Lillo 3; 11am-midnight) Yes, you've a choice of 100 fillings to your *montadito* (miniroll; €1 to €1.20). Fill in the order form at your table, choose a drink and present it at the counter. Speedy, superb value and served on wooden platters.

Mesón El Alfarero (☎ 924 30 29 59; Calle de Sagasta 29; mains from €7) At this friendly place, opposite the companion Hostal Alfarero (p831), you can sip a fine wine, nibble on tapas or enjoy a full-scale meal. Around the walls are photos of Rafael Ortega, the potter who made the ceramics that bedeck the place, in the company of the great and good.

El Yantar (☎ 924 31 63 54; Avenida José Álvarez Saez de Buruaga; meals €25) This cheerful *mesón* (tavern) is popular for the freshness of the local pro-

duce it uses. Taste small servings of *extremeño* dishes. Gourmets should plunder the shop for its top-quality ham, Torta del Casar cheese and other goodies.

Restaurante Nicolás (☎ 924 31 96 10; Calle Felix Valverde Lillo 15; mains €8-11; 11 Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) Long admired as a local favourite, this is one of the classier city dining options. Its relaxing ground-floor bar serves *raciones* while upstairs the food is decidedly more exciting than the restaurant's rather drab décor.

Casa Benito (☎ 924 33 07 69; Calle San Francisco 3; mains €11-17) Squeeze onto a tiny stool in the wood-panelled dining room, prop up the bar or relax on the sunny terrace for tapas and *raciones* at this bullfight enthusiasts' hang-out, its walls plastered with photos, posters and memorabilia from the ring.

Self-caterers can ferret out plenty of delights in Mérida's busy **food market**.

Drinking

Calle John Lennon is lined with noisy little bars, a couple of clubs, snack bars and other eateries. You'll find a more diverse selection of bars in and around Plaza de la Constitución.

La Tahona (Calle Alvarado 5; 11 1pm-2.30am), a sprawling, spit-and-sawdust place much beloved of local youth, belts out 'Span pop' hits of the 1990s, puts on Argentine grilled meat in its adjacent restaurant and occasionally gets in local bands to jam.

Raw Café-Club (Plaza de la Constitución 2; 11 5pm-3am Wed-Mon) has a cool café-bar upstairs, where you can chill and look out over the square. Head to **Jazz Bar** (Calle Alvarado 10; 11 4pm-2am Tue-Sat) for a soothing atmosphere while tippling. **Maikel's** (Calle John Lennon 19; 11 10pm-5am Thu-Sat) is the place to move your booty in downtown Mérida.

Getting There & Around

Bus destinations include Badajoz (€4.05, one hour, five to nine daily), Seville (€11.55, 2½ hours, five daily), Cáceres (€4.50, 50 minutes, two to four daily), Trujillo (€7, 1¼ hours, three daily) and Madrid (€20.20 to €25, four to five hours, eight daily).

There are four trains to Madrid (€28 to €31.30, 4½ to 5½ hours) and two to Seville (€11.85, five hours) via Zafra (€3.60). Up to six trains run to/from Cáceres (€4.85, one hour).

For a **taxi**, call ☎ 924 37 11 11.

BADAJOZ

pop 143,100

Badajoz, provincial capital of the southern half of Extremadura, straddles Río Guadiana just 4km from Portugal. It's a sprawling, primarily industrial city with a dilapidated historic heart that's gradually being turned around thanks to generous local and European Union investment and a number of prestige constructions on a grand scale.

The town has had more than its share of strife. After centuries of Muslim occupation, it was first occupied by Portugal in 1385, then again in 1396, 1542 and 1660. It was besieged during the War of the Spanish Succession, then three times by the French in the Peninsular War. In 1812 the British expelled the French in a bloody battle that cost 6000 lives. In the Spanish Civil War, the Nationalists carried out atrocious massacres when they took Badajoz in 1936. The latest of its many trials was in 1997 when Río Guadiana burst its banks and flash floods coursed through the city causing 24 deaths.

Orientation

Plaza de España is the centre of the old town. The pedestrianised streets to its west are full of eateries and bars. The main commercial centre is to the south, around Avenida Juan Carlos I and Paseo San Francisco.

The **bus station** (Calle José Rebollo López) is 1km south of the city centre. The **train station** (Avenida de Carolina Coronado) is 1.5km northwest of the city centre, across the river.

Information

Junta de Extremadura tourist office (☎ 924 01 36 59; Plaza de la Libertad 3; 11 9am-2pm & 4-6pm or 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun)

Municipal tourist office (☎ 924 22 49 81; www.turismobadajoz.com; Pasaje San Juan s/n; 11 10am-2pm & 4-6pm or 6-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) The better choice for town information.

Post office (Plaza de la Libertad)

Sights

Here's something that better-endowed tourist towns might like to copy: admission to all Badajoz's sights, except for the cathedral museum, is free.

Highlights of the **Catedral de San Juan** (Plaza de España; 11 11am-1pm & 6-8pm Tue-Sat), built in the 13th century on the site of a mosque and subsequently much altered, are the Baroque altar-

piece, elaborate even by Spain's lavish standards, and the shimmering chandelier, weighing in at 3.7 tonnes. Its **museum** (entry from Calle San Blas; admission €1; 11 11am-1pm & 5-7pm Tue-Sat) contains a treasure chest of religious objects and artworks.

The unkept remains of the walled Arab **Alcazaba** stand on the hilltop north of the centre. Guarding all is the **Torre Espantaperros** (Scare-Dogs Tower), symbol of Badajoz, constructed by the Arabs and topped by a 16th-century Mudéjar bell tower. At its feet is the **Plaza Alta**, spruce and freshly painted after years of neglect. Within the fort area, a restored Renaissance palace houses the **Museo Arqueológico Provincial** (☎ 924 00 19 08; admission free; 11 10am-3pm Tue-Sun), with artefacts from prehistoric times through Roman, Islamic and medieval Christian periods.

The **Museo de Bellas Artes** (☎ 924 21 24 69; Calle Duque de San Germán 3; admission free; 11 10am-2pm & 4-6pm or 6-8pm Tue-Fri, to 2pm Sat & Sun) is an excellent gallery with works by Zurbarán, Morales, Picasso, Dalí, plus striking works by the 19th-century Badajoz-born artist Felipe Checa.

The **Puente de Palmas**, an impressive 582m-long granite bridge built in 1596, leads over Río Guadiana from the 16th-century **Puerta de Palmas** city gate, so insensitively over-restored that it could be an import from Disneyland.

Badajoz's pride and joy is the **Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo** (MEIAC; ☎ 924 01 30 60; Calle Virgen de Guadalupe 7; admission free; 11 10am-1.30pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 10.30am-1.30pm Sun). This commanding modern building, dedicated to Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American contemporary art, houses a wide-ranging collection of avant-garde painting and sculpture.

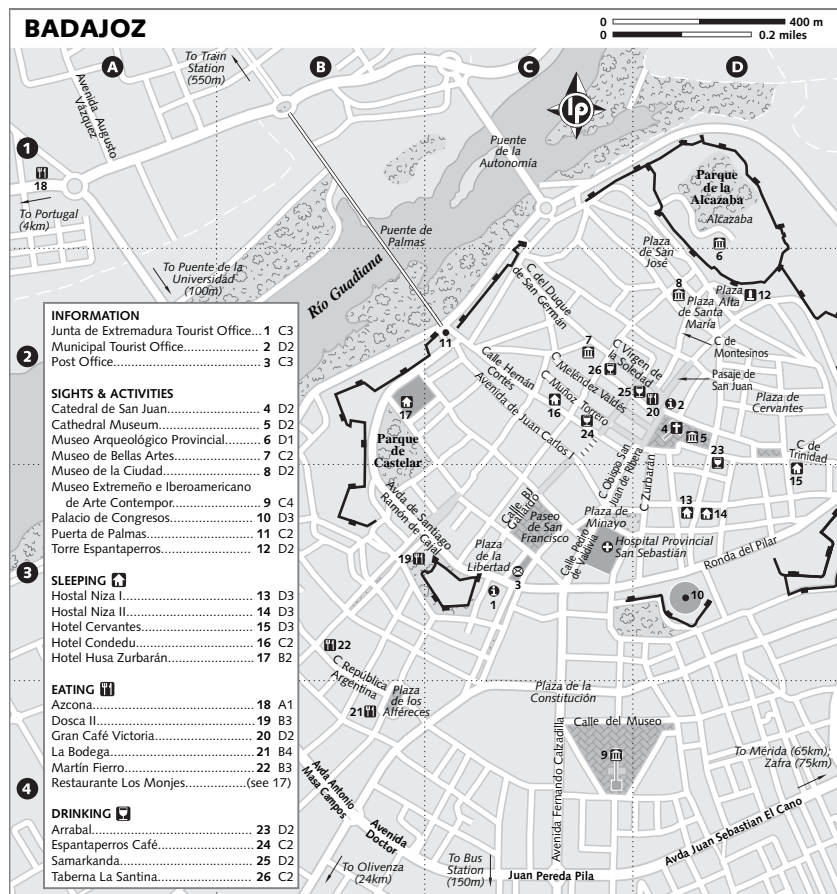
The **Museo de la Ciudad** (City Museum; ☎ 924 20 06 87; Plaza Santa María; admission free; 11 10am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm or 6-9pm Tue-Sat, to 2pm Sun) is above all part of an attempt to regenerate this much rundown part of old Badajoz. Recounting the story of the city through illustrative panels and interactive displays (all in Spanish), it takes you through the glory days of Islamic Badajoz and the Reconquista to today.

Badajoz's latest prestige building is its innovative **Palacio de Congresos** (Conference Centre; Ronda del Pilar s/n), a huge, light-as-air circular (it's built over the one-time bullring) construction, with a state of the art auditorium.

Lusiberia (☎ 924 28 60 98; Avenida de Elvas, Antigua Frontera de Caya) is a gigantic family theme park, bang up against the Portuguese frontier,

THE TAPAS TRAIL

Here's a brilliant idea: a gastronomic pilgrimage around town and Mérida's equivalent of the pub crawl. Pick up a map and card from the municipal tourist office and visit any or all of the 14 participating bars, *mesones* and *tabernas*. Each offers a tapa and glass of wine for €2. Have your card stamped and, should you manage to visit all 14 (within a period of ten days), the tourist office will award you a bottle of Extremeño wine.



with a recently opened **water park** (adult/child €13/9.50).

Festivals & Events

Badajoz's big bash is the **Feria de San Juan**, celebrated for a full week around 24 June.

Running a close second are the town's **Car-naval** celebrations, among the most elaborate in Spain, in the build-up to Lent.

Sleeping

Hostal Niza II (% 924 22 31 73; Calle Arco Agüero 45; s/d €25/40; a p) This place has light, decent rooms. Hostal Niza I across the road at No 34 is a recently constructed new building occupying the site of the original Niza. With less character, it offers more comfort.

Hotel Cervantes (% 924 22 37 10; Calle Trinidad 2; s/d €27/40; a p) This wonderful old-time place overlooks a leafy square. With ceramic walls around its green timber-banistered atrium, it has worn but evocative rooms in the old half and quieter, better equipped rooms in the newer wing. Parking costs €6.

Hotel Condedu (% 924 20 72 47; condedu@infonegocio.com; Calle Muñoz Torrero 27; s/d €40/55; a p) Constructed in the 1970s, the Condedu's strong point is its central location. Rooms are unspectacular but spacious, tranquil and spotless, each equipped with minibar and safe.

Hotel Husa Zurbarán (% 924 00 14 00; www.husa.es; Paseo Castelar s/n; r from €85; p s) Something of a concrete monster from the outside, the Zurbarán is considerably warmer and more

attractive within. A peacock struts by the pool and relaxation area, public areas are on the grand scale and rooms well furnished. It runs **Restaurante Los Monjes**, by common consent Badajoz's finest restaurant.

Eating

Gran Café Victoria (% 924 26 32 23; Calle Obispo San Juan de Ribera 3; breakfasts €2-3) With its huge central lamp arrangement, tall dark pillars and wine-red couches, this café has a dignified ambience for your morning coffee and croissant.

La Bodega (% 924 23 90 62; Plaza los Alféreces 8; menú €7.50, mains €6-10) The appropriately named La Bodega is one of several restaurants with sprawling terraces that ring this popular square. Within, you can dine among wine barrels and wood, darkened over the years. Whichever you choose, this is a splendid economical choice where the set lunchtime menu varies daily.

Dosca II (% 924 22 02 40; Avenida Colón 3; mains €9-16; h Tue-Sun) Opt for one of the generous, tender meat dishes at this unpretentious place. Then select from the list of tempting *postres caseros* (home-made desserts) rather than one of the photographed choices, which are bought in. Around the walls are photos of old Badajoz and each of the many hanging coloured cords is all that remains of a leg of ham that met its last here.

Azconá (% 924 27 24 07; Avenida Adolfo Díaz Ambrona 20; meals €20-25; h lunch daily, dinner Mon & Thu-Sat) This cheerful yellow-and-wine-red house rewards the long haul across Puente de la Universidad with its hearty local fare, impeccably prepared.

Martín Fierro (% 924 25 86 02; Calle República Argentina 16; mains €12-18) You can enjoy a tippie and dip into the ample selection of tapas at the bar with its dark-wood furniture and impressive array of wines. Or you can make your way to the dining room for something more substantial such as their juicy *chuletón de buey con dos salsas*, tenderest prime steak with a couple of accompanying sauces.

Drinking

Taberna La Santina (Calle Virgen de la Soledad 25b; h Mon-Sat) Bullfighting memorabilia bedecks this recently refurbished wine tavern with an Andalusian feel.

Late-night bars are scattered around the streets near the cathedral. Among the liveliest are **Espantaperros Café** (Calle Hernán Cortés 14A;

h 8pm-3am Mon-Thu & 4pm-4am Fri-Sun), **El Arrabal** (Calle San Blas 14; h 5pm-2.30am), with its garden bar, and **Samarkanda** (Calle Virgen de la Soledad 5A; h 4.30pm-2.30am), the pick of the crop.

Getting There & Around

You can get buses to most main points in the region from Badajoz. Further afield, buses run to/from Mérida (€4.05, one hour, five to nine daily), Madrid (€23.80, 4½ to 5½ hours; nine daily), Lisbon (€24, three hours, three daily) and Seville (€13.10, three hours; six daily) via Zafra (€5.25; 50 minutes).

Trains are much less frequent and the station awkwardly placed.

For a taxi, call % 924 24 31 01.

AROUND BADAJOS

Albuquerque

pop 5650

Looming large above the small town, 38km north of Badajoz, is the intact **Castillo de la Luna** (admission free; h guided visits in Spanish 11am-1pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sun). The centrepiece of a complex frontier defence system of forts, the castle was built on the site of its Muslim predecessor in the 13th century and subsequently expanded. From the top, views dominate the Portuguese frontier (whence repeated attacks came until the Portuguese actually took the town for a few years in the early 18th century). Among many curiosities is a hole set in the wall of one of the towers. It was used by the castle's masters as a toilet – sending an unpleasant message to hostile forces below when under siege.

Up to four buses a day (€3.60, 45 minutes) between Badajoz and San Vicente de Alcántara stop by.

Olivenza

pop 11,400

Olivenza, 24km south of Badajoz, clings to its strong Portuguese heritage. The whitewashed houses, typical turreted defensive walls and penchant for blue-and-white ceramics give a hint of its past; it has only been Spanish since 1801.

The town was fortified because of its strategic position as a Portuguese outpost on the fertile Guadiana plain. Smack bang in its centre is the 14th-century **castle**, dominated by the **Torre del Homenaje**, 37m high, from which there are fine views. The castle houses an **ethnographic museum** (% 924 49 02 22; admission €1;

┌ 11am-2pm & 4-7pm or 5-8pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sun). Eternal Peter Pans will savour the collection of toy cars on the 1st floor. The most impressive section of the original **defensive walls** is around the 18th-century **Puerta del Calvario**, on the west side of town.

Restaurante Hostal Dosca (% 924 49 10 65; www.hoteldosca.com; Plaza de la Constitución 15; s/d €40/50; a), run by the same family and to the same high standard as Dosca II in Badajoz (p835), makes an excellent lunch stop (menú €11 to €21) or overnight stay.

Buses to Badajoz (€1.60, 30 minutes) run almost hourly during the week from the bus station on Calle Avelino, five minutes' walk east of Plaza de España.

ZAFRA

pop 15,700

The gorgeous old town of Zafra, as white as any of Andalucía's *pueblos blancos* to the south, was originally a Muslim settlement and makes a serene, attractive stop en route between Seville and Mérida.

The **tourist office** (% 924 55 10 36; www.ayto-zafra.com in Spanish; ┌ 9.30am-2pm & 4-7pm or 5-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1.30pm & 5-7pm or 6-8pm Sat & Sun) is on Plaza de España, the main square.

Zafra's 15th-century **castle**, now the town's *parador*, was built over the former Muslim Alcázar. **Plaza Grande** and the adjoining **Plaza Chica**, arcaded and bordered by cafés, are a pair of charming squares. Peek into the courtyard of the **ayuntamiento** (town hall; Plaza Pilar Redondo), its brick arches supported by slender pillars, and the 16th-century **Iglesia de la Candelaria** (Calle Tetuán; 10.30-1pm & 5.30-7.30 or 6.30-8.30pm Thu-Tue) with its fine altarpieces.

Sleeping & Eating

Albergue Convento San Francisco (% 924 02 98 17; Calle Ancha 1; dm €10) Open to all, this former monas-

tery is the choice of walkers along the Ruta Vía de la Plata (see the boxed text, p814). It has 18 beds in simple but comfortable rooms (one double and dorms sleeping five or six).

Hotel Huerta Honda (% 924 55 41 00; www.hotelhuertahonda.com; Calle López Asme 30; s €59, d from €74; p n a s) Although the 'olde-worlde' atmosphere is perhaps a trifle overdone, this charming number with its sunny patio and beautifully appointed rooms (dark ceramic floors, timber ceilings and four-posters in some) is tempting. Parking costs €7.

Parador Hernán Cortés (% 924 55 45 40; zafra@parador.es; Plaza Corazón de María 7; s/d €96/120; r a s) They say a man's home is his castle: well here it's the other way around. Its 51 bedrooms are spacious with plenty of warm, dark wood and you can dine in the mighty classical courtyard. Wi-fi is available.

Both the *parador* and Hotel Huerta Honda have enticing restaurants. For a coffee, wine or snack, try one of the many cafés and bars on Plaza Grande.

La Rebotica (% 924 55 42 89; Calle Boticas 12; meals €30-35; ┌ Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) Set in a modest house just off Plaza Chica, La Rebotica offers both Extremeño dishes and more international fare, subtly prepared (Rudy Koster, the chef, these days as Spanish as they come, hails from the Netherlands).

Getting There & Away

Zafra is on the main bus and train routes linking Seville to the south with Mérida and Badajoz.

AROUND ZAFRA

Roads through the rolling Sierra Morena into Andalucía head southwest through Fregenal de la Sierra into northern Huelva province, and southeast into the Parque Natural Sierra Norte in Sevilla province.

In **Fregenal de la Sierra** you'll find a castle and adjoining church, both dating from the 13th century, together with a bullring and market square in an unusual grouping. Walled and hilly **Jerez de los Caballeros**, 42km west of Zafra, was a cradle of conquistadors. It has a Knights Templar castle and several handsome churches, three with towers emulating the Giralda in Seville (the Iglesia de San Bartolomé is the most

exuberant). Quiet **Burguillos del Cerro**, southwest of Zafra, is overlooked by a 15th-century castle atop a grassy hill. Just outside **Casas de Reina** on the Guadalcanal road are impressive remains of a Roman theatre and a hilltop Muslim castle.

One weekday bus runs between Zafra and Fregenal de la Sierra (one hour), Jerez de los Caballeros (one hour) and Burguillos del Cerro (30 minutes).

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Casa Palacio Conde de la Corte (% 924 56 33 11; www.condedelacorte.com in Spanish; Plaza Pilar Redondo 2; r with breakfast €96-120; p n a s) This delightful boutique choice (with wi-fi) has 15 large rooms ranged around a central atrium bordered by delicate wrought-iron pillars and balustrades. Go for No 103, which is especially big, with twin sinks, a kidney-shaped bath and separate shower cabin. The theme throughout is bullfighting (look for the photos of that pair of macho strutters, Ernest Hemingway and Orson Welles), a nod in the direction of the previous owner, who raised bulls for the *corrida* on the rolling plains of Extremadura. There's the cosiest of lounges with a library and carved wooden fireplace, a roof terrace with views and an extensive rear garden and patio. Parking is available for €7.

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ACCOMMODATION

There's generally no need to book ahead for a room in the low or shoulder seasons, but when things get busier it's advisable (and in high periods it can be essential) to make a reservation if you want to avoid a wearisome search for a room. At most places a phone call earlier the same day is all that's needed: they'll probably ask your approximate time of arrival and will tell you that they'll hold the room for you until a specific hour. Some may ask for a credit card number. Many hotels take reservations by email.

Prices throughout this guidebook are high-season maximums. In many cases this means you may be pleasantly surprised if you travel in the low-season. What constitutes low or high season depends on where and when.

BOOK ACCOMMODATION ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com. You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

Most of the year is high season in Barcelona, especially during trade fairs. August can be dead in the cities. Winter is high season in the Pyrenees and low season in the Balearic Islands (indeed, the islands seem to shut down between November and Easter). July and August in the Balearics offer sun and fun, but finding a place to stay without booking ahead can be a pain. Weekends are high season for boutique hotels and *casas rurales* (country homes; see opposite), but bad for multistar business hotels in Madrid and Barcelona (which often offer generous specials then).

We divide accommodation categories into budget, midrange and top end. As prices vary greatly from one part of the country to another, the dividing line can be at times a little arbitrary. In places such as Barcelona and Madrid, and other popular tourist locations, a budget place can mean anything up to €40/60 for an *individual/doble* (single/double). At the higher end of this range you can generally expect to find good, comfortable rooms with private bathrooms. Shave a few euros off and you may find the place only has shared bathrooms in the corridor. In less-travelled regions, such as Extremadura, Murcia and Castilla-La Mancha, it can be relatively easy to find perfectly acceptable single/double rooms (usually with shared bathroom) for around €30/45. If you want to go for rock bottom, youth hostels, where a bed can cost anything up to €23 but more often around €16 and €19, are probably the best bet.

Midrange places in the big cities can range up to about €200 for a fine double, and there are plenty of good and on occasion outright charming options for less. Anything above

that price takes you into luxury level. Again, though, much depends on the location and period. Cities like Madrid and Barcelona, with busy trade fair calendars, can become more expensive still during such fairs, while some business-oriented hotels almost give away rooms during slow periods. In many other parts of Spain you'd be hard-pressed to pay more than €150 for the best double in town. Within each area we have divided up the offerings on the basis of local conditions. A double in a *parador* (see p841) in Castilla-La Mancha at around €100 might be rated top end; the same price will get you a nice but smallish midrange room in Madrid.

A *habitación doble* (double room) is frequently just that: a room with two beds (which you can often shove together). If you want to be sure of a double bed (*cama matrimonial*), ask for it!

Two websites with online hotel booking facilities are **Hotelkey** (☎ in Spain 902 303555; www.hotelkey.com) and **Madeinspain** (www.madeinspain.net). The national tourist office website (www.spain.info) is another option.

Apartments, Villas & Casas Rurales

Throughout Spain you can rent self-catering apartments and houses from one night upwards.

Villas and houses are widely available on the main holiday coasts and in popular country areas. Rural tourism continues to boom, with accommodation available in many new and often charming *casas rurales*. These are usually comfortably renovated village houses or farmhouses with a handful of rooms. Some just provide rooms, while others offer meals or self-catering accommodation. Lower-end prices typically hover around €25/45 (single/double) per night, but a growing number of boutique establishments can easily charge up to €80 for a double. Many are rented out by the week. Also known as '*agroturismo*', this kind of place is being turned into a fine art in ever greater swathes of the country.

A simple one-bedroom apartment in a coastal resort for two or three people might cost as little as €30 per night, although more often you'll be looking at nearly twice that much, and prices can jump even further in high season. More luxurious options with a swimming pool might come in at anything between €200 and €400 for four people. These options are most worth considering if you plan to stay several days or more, in which case there will usually be discounts from the daily rate.

Tourist offices can supply lists of places for rent, and in Britain the travel sections of the broadsheet press carry private ads for such places. Agencies include:

PRACTICALITIES

- If your Spanish is up to it, try the following newspapers: *El País* (or the free, constantly updated, downloadable version, *24 Horas*, on www.elpais.es), the country's leading daily and left-of-centre oriented; *ABC*, for a rightwing view of life; Barcelona-based *La Vanguardia*, which on Friday has a great listings magazine for that city; and *Marca*, an all-sports (especially football) paper.
- Tune into: Radio Nacional de España (RNE)'s Radio 1, with general interest and current affairs programmes; Radio 5, with sport and entertainment; and Radio 3 ('Radio d'Espol'), with admirably varied pop and rock music. The most popular commercial pop and rock stations are 40 Principales, Cadena 100 and Onda Cero.
- Switch on the box to watch Spain's state-run Televisión Española (TVE1 and La 2) or the independent commercial stations (Antena 3, Tele 5, Cuatro, La Sexta and Canal Plus). Regional governments run local stations, such as Madrid's Telemadrid, Catalonia's TV-3 and Canal 33 (both in Catalan), Galicia's TVG, the Basque Country's ETB-1 and ETB-2, Valencia's Canal 9 and Andalucía's Canal Sur. Cable and satellite TV is becoming more widespread.
- Buy or watch videos on the PAL system.
- Bring an international adapter because plugs have two round pins; the electric current is 220V, 50Hz.
- Use the metric system for weights and measures.

Apartments-Spain (www.apartments-spain.com)

Casas Cantabricas (96 in UK 01223 328 721; www.casas.co.uk)

Holiday Serviced Apartments (96 in UK 0845 060 4477; www.holidayapartments.co.uk)

Individual Travellers Company (96 08700 780 194; www.indiv-travellers.com)

Owners Direct (www.ownersdirect.co.uk)

Simply Travel (96 08701 664 979; www.simplytravel.co.uk)

Top Rural (96 91 523 58 00; www.toprural.com)

Travellers' Way (96 in UK 0845 612 9001; www.travellersway.co.uk)

Vintage (96 in UK 0845 344 0457; www.vintageattravel.co.uk)

Camping & Caravan Parks

Spain has around 1000 officially graded *campings* (camping grounds). Some are well located in woodland or near beaches or rivers, but others are on the outskirts of towns or along highways. Few are near city centres, and camping isn't particularly convenient if you're relying on public transport.

Camping grounds are officially rated as first class (1^AC), second class (2^AC) or third class (3^AC). There are also a few that are not officially graded, usually equivalent to third class. Facilities generally range from reasonable to very good, although any camping ground can be crowded and noisy at busy times (especially July and August). Even a third-class camping ground is likely to have hot showers, electrical hook-ups and a café. The best ones have heated swimming pools, supermarkets, restaurants, laundry service, children's playgrounds and tennis courts. Sizes range from a capacity of under 100 people to over 5000.

Camping grounds usually charge per person, per tent and per vehicle – typically €4 to €7 for each. Children usually pay a bit less than adults. Many camping grounds close from around October to Easter.

The annual *Guía Oficial de Campings*, available in bookshops around the country, lists most of Spain's camping grounds and their facilities and prices. Tourist offices can always direct you to the nearest camping ground.

You sometimes come across a *zona de acampada* or *área de acampada*, a country camping ground with minimal facilities (maybe just tap water or a couple of barbecues), little or no supervision and little or no charge. If it's in an environmentally protected area, you may need

to obtain permission from the local environmental authority to camp there.

With certain exceptions – such as many beaches and environmentally protected areas and a few municipalities that ban it – it is legal to camp outside camping grounds (but not within 1km of official ones!). Signs usually indicate where wild camping is not allowed. If in doubt you can always check with tourist offices. You'll need permission to camp on private land.

Various websites list camping grounds around the country, including www.campin.guia.com and www.campingonline.com/espana. The former contains comments (mostly in Spanish) and links, while you can book on the latter.

Hostels

Spain's 200 or so youth hostels – *albergues juveniles*, not be confused with *hostales* (budget hotels) – are often the cheapest places for lone travellers, but two people can usually get a double room elsewhere for a similar price. Some hostels are only moderate value, lacking in privacy, often heavily booked by school groups, and with night-time curfews and no cooking facilities (although if there is nowhere to cook there is usually a cafeteria). Others, however, are conveniently located, open 24 hours and composed mainly of double rooms or small dorms, often with a private bathroom. An increasing number have rooms adapted for people with disabilities. Some even occupy fine historic buildings.

Most Spanish youth hostels are members of the **Red Española de Albergues Juveniles** (REAJ, Spanish Youth Hostel Network; www.reaj.com), the Spanish representative of **Hostelling International** (HI; www.hihostels.com).

Most Spanish hostels are also members of the youth hostel association of their region (Andalucía, Catalonia, Valencia etc). Each region usually sets its own price structure and has a central booking service where you can make reservations for most of its hostels. You can also book directly with hostels themselves. Central booking services include:

Andalucía (96 902 51 00 00; www.inturjuven.com)

Catalonia (96 93 483 83 41; www.tujuca.com)

Valencia (96 902 22 55 52; www.ivaj.es in Spanish)

Just a few youth hostels are independent of regional associations – although they may still be REAJ and HI members! A good website for

seeking out hostels, affiliated or otherwise, is www.hostelworld.com.

Prices at youth hostels often depend on the season, and vary between about €10 and €18 for under-26s (the lower rate is usually applied to people with ISIC cards too) and between €14 and €23 for those 26 and over. In some hostels the price includes breakfast. A few hostels require you to rent sheets (around €2 to €4 for your stay) if you don't have your own or a sleeping bag.

Most hostels require you to have an HI card or a membership card from your home country's youth hostel association; others don't require a card (even though they may be HI hostels), but may charge more if you don't have one. You can obtain an HI card in Spain at most hostels.

You will sometimes find independent *albergues* offering dormitory accommodation for around €9 to €15, usually in villages in areas that attract plenty of Spanish walkers and climbers. These are not specifically youth hostels – although the clientele tends to be under 35. They're a kind of halfway house between a youth hostel and a *refugio* (mountain shelter; see p842). Some will rent you sheets for a couple of euros if you need them.

Hotels, Hostales, Pensiones & Hospedajes

Officially, places to stay are classified into *hoteles* (hotels; one to five stars), *hostales* (one to three stars) and *pensiones* (basically small private hotels, often family businesses in rambling apartments; one or two stars). These are the categories used by the annual *Guía Oficial de Hoteles*, sold in bookshops, which lists almost every such establishment in Spain, except for one-star *pensiones*, with approximate prices.

In practice, places listing accommodation use all sorts of overlapping names to describe themselves, especially at the budget end of the market. In broad terms, the cheapest are usually places just advertising *camas* (beds), *fondas* (traditionally a basic eatery and inn combined, though one of these functions is now often missing) and *casas de huéspedes* or *hospedajes* (guesthouses). Most such places will be bare and basic. Bathrooms are likely to be shared. Your room may be small, possibly lacking a window, and it may have alarming electrical fittings and erratic hot water – but in most cases it will be kept pretty clean. The

beds may make you feel as though you're lying diagonally across a bumpy hillside – or they may be firm, flat and comfortable. In winter don't hesitate to ask for extra blankets. Singles/doubles in these places generally cost from around €15/25 to €20/30.

A *pensión* is usually a small step up from the above types in standards and price. Some cheap establishments forget to provide soap, toilet paper or towels. Don't hesitate to ask for these necessities. *Hostales* are in much the same category. In both cases the better ones can be bright and spotless, with rooms boasting full en suite bathroom. Prices can range up to €40/60 for singles/doubles in more popular/expensive locations.

The remainder of establishments call themselves *hoteles* and run the gamut of quality, from straightforward roadside places, bland but clean, through charming boutique jobbies and on to super luxury hotels. Even in the cheapest hotels, rooms are likely to have an attached bathroom and there'll probably be a restaurant. Among the most tempting hotels for those with a little fiscal room to manoeuvre are the **Paradores** (96 in Spain 902 547 979; www.parador.es), a state-run chain of hotels in stunning locations, among them towering castles and former medieval convents. Similarly, you can find stunning hotels in restored country homes and old city mansions, and these are not always particularly expensive. A raft of bijoux and/or luxury hotels set in rural areas or mansions add to the spread of choice. Cutting edge, hip design hotels with androgynous staff and a feel à la New York can be found in the big cities and major resort areas.

Many places to stay of all types have a range of rooms at different prices. At the budget end, prices will vary according to whether the room has only a *lavabo* (washbasin), *ducha* (shower) or *baño completo* (full bathroom), that is bath/shower, basin and loo. At the top end you may pay more for a room on the *exterior* (outside) of the building or with a *balcón* (balcony) and will often have the option of a suite. Seaside views frequently attract higher rates. Many places have rooms for three, four or more people where the per-person cost is lower than in a single or double, which is good news for families.

Checkout time is generally between 11am and noon.

Monasteries

An offbeat possibility is staying in a monastery. In spite of the expropriations of the 19th century and a sometimes rough run in the 20th, plenty of monastic orders have survived (albeit in diminishing numbers) across the country. Some offer rooms to outsiders – often fairly austere monks' or nuns' cells.

Monastery accommodation is generally a single-sex arrangement, and the idea in quite a few is to seek refuge from the outside world and indulge in quiet contemplation and meditation.

Refugios

Mountain shelters (*refugios*) for walkers and climbers are liberally scattered around most of the popular mountain areas (mainly the Pyrenees), except in Andalucía, which has only a handful. They're mostly run by mountaineering and walking organisations. Accommodation – usually bunks squeezed into a dorm – is often on a first-come, first-served basis, although for some *refugios* you can book ahead. In busy seasons (July and August in most areas) they can fill up quickly and you should try to book in advance or arrive by midafternoon to be sure of a place. Prices per person range from nothing to €12.50 a night. Many *refugios* have a bar and offer meals (dinner typically costs around €8 to €10), as well as a cooking area (but not cooking equipment). Blankets are usually provided, but you'll have to bring any other bedding yourself. Bring a torch too.

BUSINESS HOURS

Generally, Spaniards work Monday to Friday from about 9am to 2pm and then again from 4.30pm or 5pm for another three hours. Shops and travel agencies are usually open similar hours on Saturday as well, although many skip the evening session. The further south you go, the longer the afternoon break tends to be, with shops and the like staying closed until 6pm or so.

Big supermarkets and department stores, such as the nationwide El Corte Inglés chain, open from about 10am to 10pm Monday to Saturday. Shops in tourist resorts sometimes open on Sunday too.

Many government offices don't bother opening in the afternoon, any day of the year. In summer, offices tend to go on to *horario intensivo*, which means they can start as early as 7am and finish up for the day by 2pm.

Museums all have their own opening hours: major ones tend to open for something like normal Spanish business hours (with or without the afternoon break), but often have their weekly closing day on Monday.

Pharmacies have a wide variety of opening hours. The standard hours follow those of other shops. In the bigger centres you will find several that open 24 hours a day. Some have extended hours, say 8am to 10pm, usually on a rota basis. To find out where late-opening pharmacies are in the cities and bigger towns, pick up the local paper.

For bank and post office opening hours, respectively, see p851 and p852.

As a general rule restaurants open their kitchens for lunch from 1pm to 4pm and for dinner from 8pm to midnight. The further south you go, the later locals tend to go out to eat. While restaurants in Barcelona may already be busy by 9.30pm, their Madrid counterparts are still half empty at this time. At lunch and dinner you can generally linger quite a while after the kitchen closes. Some, but by no means all, places close one or two days a week. Some also shut for a few weeks' annual holiday – the most common period for this is during August.

Bars have a wider range of hours. Those that serve as cafés and snack bars can open from about 8am to the early evening. Those that are more nightlife bars may open in the early evening and generally close around 2am to 3am. Some places combine the two roles. As the bars close the clubs open (generally from around midnight or 1am to around 5am or 6am).

Reviews in this guidebook won't list business hours unless they differ from these standards.

CHILDREN Practicalities

As a rule Spaniards are very friendly to children. Any child whose hair is less than jet black will be dubbed *rubio/rubia* (blond/e). Accompanied children are welcome at all kinds of accommodation, as well as in many cafés, bars and restaurants, where outside tables often allow kids a bit of space and freedom while the grown-ups sit and eat or drink. Spanish children stay up late and at fiestas it's common to see even tiny ones toddling the streets at 2am or 3am. Visiting kids like this idea too – but can't always cope with it quite so readily.

Always make a point of asking staff at tourist offices if they know of family activities and for suggestions on hotels that cater for kids. Discounts are available for children (usually under 12) on public transport and for admission to sights. Those under four generally go free.

You can hire car seats for infants and children from most car-rental firms, but you should always book them in advance. You cannot rely on restaurants having high chairs and few have nappy-changing facilities. In better hotels you can generally arrange for childcare and in some places child-minding agencies cater to temporary visitors.

You can buy baby formula in powder or liquid form, as well as sterilising solutions such as Milton, at *farmacias* (pharmacies). Disposable nappies (diapers) are widely available at supermarkets and *farmacias*. Fresh cow's milk is sold in cartons and plastic bottles in supermarkets in big cities, but can be hard to find in small towns, where UHT is often the only option.

Sights & Activities

As well as the obvious attractions of beaches (and all the seaside activities), swimming pools and playgrounds, there are plenty of other good options for kids. Aquaparks, zoos and aquariums are generally winners. Barcelona's L'Aquàrium (p291), with its extraordinary walk-through shark-infested tunnel, is one of the best in all Europe.

Most kids and not a few adults succumb to the siren call of extravagant theme parks like Catalonia's Port Aventura (p392) or Terra Mítica in Benidorm (p615). On a slightly different note are Mini Hollywood (p803) and other Western movie sets in the Almería desert.

Keep an eye out for sights that might be of special interest to children. Castles, of which Spain is full (they are especially numerous across the two Castillas), are often the easiest sights to sell to young ones.

Certain museums will also interest children. The Museu Marítim (p285) and CosmoCaixa (p296) interactive science museum in Barcelona, for instance, have imaginative and engaging displays. Equally, Valencia's Ciudad de las Artes y las Ciencias (p581) is a magnificent attraction.

Football-addicted youngsters (and many of their parents) will probably want to visit either FC Barcelona's Camp Nou (p298) or Real Ma-

drid's Santiago Bernabéu (p162) football stadiums or, better still, go to a match.

Most younger children are fascinated by the ubiquitous street-corner *kioscos* selling sweets or *gusanitos* (corn puffs) for a few *céntimos*. The magnetism of these places often overcomes a child's inhibitions enough for them to carry out their own first Spanish transactions. Town fairs and festivals are also great fun for kids.

For further information, see Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children* or visit the websites www.travelwithyourkids.com and www.familytravelnetwork.com.

CLIMATE CHARTS

The *meseta* (high tableland of central Spain) and Ebro basin have a continental climate: scorching in summer, cold in winter, and dry. Madrid regularly freezes in December, January and February, and temperatures climb above 30°C in July and August. Valladolid on the northern *meseta* and Zaragoza in the Ebro basin are even drier, with only around 300mm of rain a year (little more than Alice Springs in Australia). The Guadalquivir basin in Andalucía is only a little wetter and positively broils in high summer, with temperatures of 35°C-plus in Seville that kill people every year.

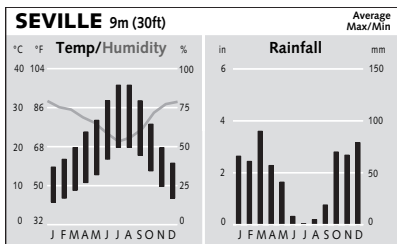
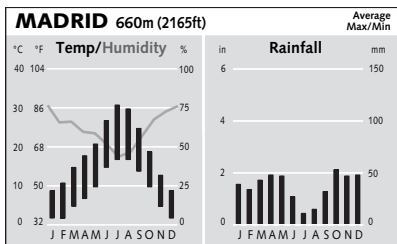
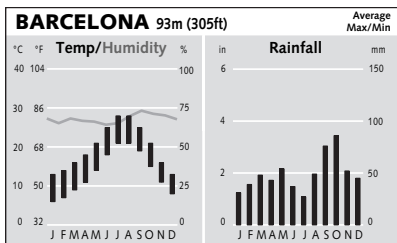
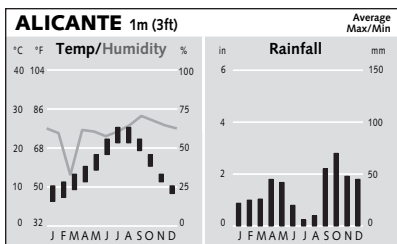
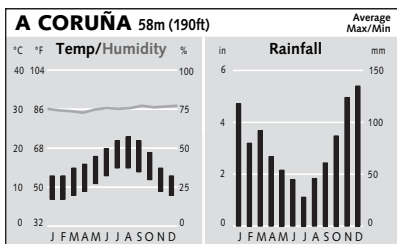
The Pyrenees and the Cordillera Cantábrica, backing the Bay of Biscay, bear the brunt of cold northern and northwestern airstreams, which bring moderate temperatures and heavy rainfall (three or four times as much as Madrid's) to the north coast. Even in high summer you never know when you might get a shower.

The Mediterranean coast and Balearic Islands get a little more rain than Madrid, and the south can be even hotter in summer. The Mediterranean, particularly around Alicante, also provides Spain's warmest waters (reaching 27°C or so in August). Barcelona's weather is typical of the coast – milder than in inland cities but more humid.

In general you can usually rely on pleasant or hot temperatures just about everywhere from April to early November. In Andalucía there are plenty of warm, sunny days right through winter. In July and August, temperatures can get unpleasantly hot inland.

Snowfalls in the mountains can start as early as October and some snow cover lasts all year on the highest peaks.

For more tips on the best times to travel see p21.



COURSES

A spot of study in Spain is an excellent way to meet people – Spaniards as well as other travellers – and learn something more about the country and culture. More than anything else, people are drawn to Spain from all over Europe and North America for language courses – after all, Spanish is the world's third most spoken tongue after Chinese and English!

The **Instituto Cervantes** (www.cervantes.es), with branches in over 30 cities around the world, promotes the Spanish language and culture. It's mainly involved in Spanish teaching and in library and information services. The institute's London branch has a library (☎ 020-7235 0353; 102 Eaton Sq, London SW1 W9AN) with a wide range of reference books, periodicals, videos and DVDs (including feature films), language-teaching material, electronic databases and music CDs. You can find more addresses on the institute's website. It can send you long lists of places offering Spanish-language courses in Spain. Some Spanish embassies and consulates can also provide information on courses.

A number of Spanish universities offer good-value language courses. Barcelona (p311), Granada (p778), Madrid (p141), Salamanca (p187) and Seville (p700) are popular locations. The **Escuela Oficial de Idiomas** (EOI; www.eoifinet.com) is a nationwide language institution where you can learn Spanish and locals other languages. Classes can be large and busy but are generally fairly cheap. There are branches in many major cities. On the website's opening page, hit EOIs en la Red to get to a list of schools.

Private language schools as well as universities cater for a wide range of levels, course lengths, times of year, intensity and special requirements. Many courses have a cultural component as well as language. University courses often last a semester, although some are as short as two weeks or as long as a year. Private colleges can be more flexible. One with a good reputation is **don Quijote** (www.donquijote.com), with branches in Barcelona, Granada, Madrid, Salamanca and Valencia.

Costs vary widely. A typical 40-hour course over two to four weeks will cost around €300 to €400 at a university. At private schools you could be looking at up to €1000 for a month of tuition at 30 hours a week. Accommodation can be arranged with families, or in student flats or residences. You might pay €450 per month in a shared student flat or €800 to €900 for full board with a family.

It's also worth finding out whether your course will lead to any formal certificate of competence. The **Diploma de Español como Lengua Extranjera (DELE)** is recognised by Spain's Ministry of Education and Science.

Of course, language is not the only learning route you can follow. You might join salsa classes in Barcelona, a flamenco school in Madrid or cooking courses in Valencia city.

CUSTOMS

Duty-free allowances for travellers entering Spain from outside the EU include 2L of wine (or 1L of wine and 1L of spirits), and 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 250g of tobacco.

There are no duty-free allowances for travel between EU countries but equally no restrictions on the import of duty-paid items into Spain from other EU countries for personal use. You can buy VAT-free articles at airport shops when travelling between EU countries.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Spain is generally a pretty safe country. The main thing to be wary of is petty theft (which may of course not seem so petty if your passport, cash, travellers cheques, credit card and camera go missing). Most visitors to Spain never feel remotely threatened, but a sufficient number have unpleasant experiences to warrant an alert. What follows is intended as a strong warning rather than alarmism.

Scams

There must be 50 ways to lose your wallet. As a general rule, talented petty thieves work in groups and capitalise on distraction. More imaginative strikes include someone dropping a milk mixture on to the victim from a balcony. Immediately a concerned citizen comes up to help you brush off what you assume to be pigeon poo, and thus suitably occupied you don't notice the contents of your pockets slipping away.

Beware: not all thieves look like thieves. Watch out for an old classic: the ladies offering flowers for good luck. We don't know how they do it, but if you get too involved in a friendly chat with these people, your pockets always wind up empty.

On some highways, especially the AP7 from the French border to Barcelona, bands of delinquents occasionally operate. Beware of men trying to distract you in rest areas and

don't stop along the highway if people driving alongside indicate you have a problem with the car. While one inspects the rear of the car with you, his pals will empty your vehicle. They have even been reported puncturing tyres of cars stopped in rest areas, then following and 'helping' the victim when they stop to change the wheel. Hire cars and those with foreign plates are especially targeted. When you do call in at highway rest stops, try to park close to the buildings and leave nothing of value in view.

Even parking your car can be fraught. In some towns fairly dodgy self-appointed parking attendants operate in central areas where you may want to park. They will direct you frantically to a spot. If possible, ignore them and find your own. If unavoidable, you may well want to pay them some token not to scratch or otherwise damage your vehicle after you've walked away. You definitely don't want to leave anything visible in the car (or open the boot/trunk if you intend to leave luggage or anything else in it) under these circumstances.

Terrorism

International terrorism struck with a vengeance in Madrid in March 2004 when a series of bombs placed by suspected Al-Qaeda members ruptured three early-morning commuter trains and left 190 people dead.

But Spain has long had its own home-grown terrorism problem. The Basque terrorist organisation ETA frequently issues chilling warnings to tourists to stay away from Spain, but there were cautious hopes about a possible peace settlement after the organisation declared an indefinite, nationwide ceasefire in early 2006.

Repeated arrests of ETA members and a tough stance by the central government and French authorities seem to have dented the group's capacity to strike. Whether the ceasefire is a genuine first step to peace or a time-gaining tactic remains to be seen.

Overall, the chances of being in the wrong place at the wrong time is not much greater nowadays than any other Western country.

Theft & Loss

Theft is mostly a risk in tourist resorts, big cities and when you first arrive in the country or at a new city and may be off your guard. You are at your most vulnerable when dragging

around luggage to or from your hotel. Barcelona, Madrid and Seville have the worst reputations for theft and, on isolated occasions, muggings.

The main things to guard against are pick-pockets, bag snatchers and theft from cars. Theft can occur around the sights and areas frequented by tourists, on the metro (trains and stations) and at main points of arrival. Some thieves operate in groups and have no scruples about attacking in broad daylight in crowded areas. Unfortunately, police are thin on the ground and generally seem fairly blasé about such incidents (they've seen it all before and know they can do little).

Carry valuables under your clothes if possible – not in a back pocket, a day pack or anything that can easily be snatched away. Don't leave baggage unattended and avoid crushes (eg on public transport). Be cautious with people who start talking to you for no obviously good reason. This could be an attempt to distract you and make you an easier victim. Ignore demands to see your passport unless they come from a uniformed police officer; some gangs recycle stolen passports. Keep a firm grip on day packs and bags at all times.

Always remove the radio and cassette player from your car and never leave any belongings visible when you leave the car.

Anything left lying on the beach can disappear in a flash when your back is turned. Avoid dingy, empty city alleys and backstreets, or anywhere that just doesn't feel 100% safe, at night.

You can also help yourself by not leaving anything valuable lying around your room, above all in any hostel-type place. Use a safe if one is available.

Report thefts to the national police. You are unlikely to recover your goods but you need to make this formal *denuncia* for insurance purposes. To avoid endless queues at the *comisaría* (police station), you can make the report by phone (% 902 102112) in various languages or on the Web at www.policia.es (click on Denuncias). The following day you go to the station of your choice to pick up and sign the report, without queuing.

If your passport has gone, contact your embassy or consulate for help in issuing a replacement. Embassies and consulates can also give help of various kinds in other emergencies, but as a rule cannot advance you money to get home. Many countries have consulates

in a few cities around Spain (such as Alicante, Barcelona, Málaga, Palma de Mallorca, Seville and Valencia), and your embassy can tell you where the nearest one is (see opposite).

DISCOUNT CARDS

At museums, never hesitate to ask if there are discounts for students, young people, children, families or seniors.

Senior Cards

There are reduced prices for people over 60, 63 or 65 (depending on the place) at various museums and attractions (sometimes restricted to EU citizens only) and occasionally on transport. You should also seek information in your own country on travel packages and discounts for senior travellers, through senior citizens organisations and travel agents.

Student & Youth Cards

At some sights discounts (usually half the normal fee) are available to students and people under 18. You will need some kind of identification to prove age or student status. An ISIC (International Student Identity Card; www.isic.org) may come in handy (there is also a teachers' version, ITIC) for travel discounts but is not accepted at many sights.

You'll have more luck with a Euro<26 (www.euro26.org) card (known as Carnet Joven in Spain), which is useful for those under 26. For instance, Euro<26 card holders enjoy 20% or 25% off most 2nd-class train fares; 10% or 20% off many Trasmediterránea ferries and some bus fares; good discounts at some museums; and discounts of up to 20% at some youth hostels.

For nonstudent travellers under 25 there is also the International Youth Travel Card (IYTC; www.istc.org), which offers similar benefits.

Student cards are issued by hostelling organisations, student unions and some youth travel agencies worldwide.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Spanish Embassies & Consulates

To find the details of any Spanish embassy or consulate, check out the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Web page (www.mae.es), click on Servicios Consulares and then choose the country you want. Among those with representation are:

Andorra (% 800 030; Carrer Prat de la Creu 34, Andorra la Vella)

Australia Canberra (% 02-6273 3555; www.embaspain.au; 15 Arkana St, Yarralumla ACT 2600); Melbourne (% 03-9347 1966; 146 Elgin St, Vic 3053); Sydney (% 02-9261 2433; Level 24, St Martin's Tower, 31 Market St, NSW 2000)

Canada Ottawa (% 613-747 2252; www.embaspain.ca; 74 Stanley Ave, Ontario K1M 1P4); Montreal (% 514-935 5235; Ste 1456, 1 Westmount Sq, Québec H3Z 2P9); Toronto (% 416-977 1661; Simcoe Pl, Ste 2401, 200 Front St, Ontario M5V 3K2)

France (% 01 44 43 18 00; www.amb-espagne.fr; 22 Ave Marceau, 75008 Paris)

Germany Berlin (% 030-254 00 70; www.spanische.botschaft.de; Lichtensteinallee 1, 10787); Düsseldorf (% 0211-43 90 80; Hombergerstr 16, 40474); Frankfurt am Main (% 069-959 16 60; Nibelungenplatz 3, 60318); Munich (% 089-998 47 90; Oberföhringerstr 45, 81925)

Ireland (% 01-269 1640; 17A Meryln Park, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4)

Japan (% 03-3583 8533; embesjp@mail.mae.es; 1-3-29 Roppongi Minato-ku, Tokyo 106-0032)

Morocco Rabat (% 07-63 39 00; emb.rabat@mae.es; rue Ain Khalouiya, Route des Zaers, Km5.3, Souissi); Casablanca (% 02-22 07 52; 31 rue d'Alger); Tangier (% 09-93 70 00; 85 Ave Président Habib Bourghiba)

Netherlands (% 070-302 49 99; www.claboral.nl; Lange Voorhout 50, The Hague 2514 EG)

New Zealand See Australia

Portugal (% 01-347 2381; embespt@correo.mae.es; Rua do Salitre 1, Lisbon 1269-052)

UK London (% 020-7235 5555; spain.embassyhomepage.com; 39 Chesham Pl, SW1X 8SB); Edinburgh (% 0131-220 1843; 63 North Castle St, EH2 3LJ); London consulate (% 020-7589 8989; 20 Draycott Pl, SW3 2RZ); Manchester (% 0161-236 1262; 1a Brook House, 70 Spring Gardens, M2 2BQ)

USA Washington DC (% 202-728 2340; www.spainemb.org; 2375 Pennsylvania Ave NW, 20037); Boston (% 617-536 2506); Chicago (% 312-782 4588); Houston (% 713-783 6200); Los Angeles (% 213-938 0158); Miami (% 305-446 5511); New York (% 212-355 4080); San Francisco (% 415-922 2995)

Embassies & Consulates in Spain

The embassies are in Madrid. Some countries also maintain consulates in major cities, particularly in Barcelona. Embassies and consulates include:

Australia Madrid (Map p113; % 91 353 66 00; www.spain.embassy.gov.au; Plaza del Descubridor Diego de Ordás 3); Barcelona (Map pp272-3; % 93 490 90 13; Plaça de Gal. la Placidia 1)

Canada Madrid (Map p120; % 91 423 32 50; www.canada-es.org; Calle de Núñez de Balboa 35); Barcelona (Map pp268-9; % 93 204 27 00; Carrer d'Elisenda de Pinós 10; FGC Reina Elisenda)

France Madrid (Map p120; % 91 423 89 00; www.ambafrance-es.org; Calle de Salustiano Olózaga 9); Barcelona (Map pp274-5; % 93 270 30 00; Ronda de l'Universitat 22B)

Germany Madrid (Map p120; % 91 557 90 00; www.embajada-alemania.es; Calle de Fortuny 8); Barcelona (Map pp272-3; % 93 292 10 00; Passeig de Gràcia 111)

Ireland Madrid (Map pp114-15; % 91 436 40 93; embajada@irlanda.es; Paseo de la Castellana 46); Barcelona (Map pp268-9; % 93 491 50 21; Gran Via de Carles III 94)

Japan (Map p113; % 91 590 76 00; www.es.emb-japan.go.jp; Calle de Serrano 109)

Morocco (Map p113; % 91 563 10 90; www.mae.gov.ma/madrid; Calle de Serrano 179)

Netherlands Madrid (Map p112; % 91 353 75 00; www.embajadapaisesbajos.es; Avenida del Comandante Franco 32); Barcelona (Map pp268-9; % 93 363 54 20; www.cgholbar.org; Avinguda Diagonal 601); Palma de Mallorca (Map p633; % 971 71 64 93; Calle de San Miquel 36)

New Zealand Madrid (Map p125; % 91 523 02 26; www.nzembassy.com; Plaza de la Lealtad 2); Barcelona (Map pp272-3; % 93 209 03 99; Travessera de Gràcia 64)

Portugal (Map pp114-15; % 91 782 49 60; www.embajadaportugal-madrid.org; Calle del Pinar 1)

UK Madrid (Map p120; % 91 700 82 00; www.ukinspain.com; Calle de Fernando el Santo 16); Consulate (Map p120; % 91 524 97 00; Paseo de Recoletos 7/9); Barcelona (Map pp272-3; % 93 366 62 00; Avinguda Diagonal 477); Palma de Mallorca (Map p633; % 971 71 24 45; Plaza Mayor 3D)

USA Madrid (Map pp114-15; % 91 587 22 00; www.embusa.es; Calle de Serrano 75); Barcelona (Map pp268-9; % 93 280 02 95; Passeig de la Reina Elisenda de Montcada 23-25; FGC Reina Elisenda) Consular Agencies in A Coruña, Fuengirola, Palma de Mallorca, Sevilla and Valencia.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Spaniards like nothing more than indulging in their love of colour, noise, crowds, dressing up and partying at innumerable local fiestas (festivals) and *ferias* (fairs); even small villages will have at least one, probably several, during the year, all with unique twists and local peculiarities. Many fiestas are religion-based but are celebrated with an earthy party spirit. A few of the most outstanding include the following:

January**Festividad de San Sebastián** (p469; 20 January)

During this festival everyone in San Sebastián dresses up and goes berserk.

February–March

Carnaval This event involves several days of fancy-dress parades and merrymaking. It is at its wildest in Cádiz (p718) and Sitges (p335), but is also good in Ciudad Rodrigo (p192). It usually ends just before Lent, on the Tuesday 47 days before Easter Sunday.

March

Las Fallas (15-19 March) This festival consists of several days of all-night dancing and drinking, first-class fireworks and processions. Its principal stage is Valencia city (p587), but it is also celebrated in Gandia (p610) and Benidorm (p613). The festivities culminate in the ritual burning of (sometimes enormous) effigies in the streets.

Semana Santa (Holy Week) The week leading up to Easter Sunday entails parades of *pasos* (holy images) and huge crowds. It is most extravagantly celebrated in Seville (see p701), but is also big in Málaga (p747), Córdoba (p765), Toledo (p247), Ávila (p179), Valladolid (p200) and Zamora (p206). Holy Week can also fall in April or across the two months.

April

Moros y Cristianos (p623; 22-24 April). Colourful parades and 'battles' between Christian and Muslim 'armies' in Alcoy, near Alicante, make this one of the most spectacular of several similar events in Valencia and Alicante provinces through the year.

Feria de Abril (p700; late April) This is a week-long party in Seville held after the religious fervour of Semana Santa.

Romería de la Virgen de la Cabeza (p790; last Sunday in April) Hundreds of thousands of people make a mass pilgrimage to the Santuario de la Virgen de la Cabeza near Andújar, in Jaén province.

May

Feria del Caballo (p726; early May) A colourful equestrian fair in Andalucía's horse capital, Jerez de la Frontera. **Concurso de Patios Cordobeses** (p764; early to mid-May) Scores of beautiful private courtyards are opened to the public for two weeks in Córdoba.

Fiesta de San Isidro (p143; 15 May) Madrid's major fiesta features bullfights, parades, concerts and more. Some of the events, such as the bullfighting season, last a month.

May/June

Romería del Rocío (p712) Focused on Pentecost weekend, the seventh after Easter, this is a festive pilgrimage by up to one million people to the shrine of the Virgin in the Andalusian village of El Rocío.

Corpus Christi (Thursday of the ninth week after Easter)

Religious processions and celebrations in Toledo (p247) and other cities.

June

Hogueras de San Juan (23 June) Midsummer bonfires and fireworks, notably along the southeastern and southern coasts, on the eve of the Fiesta de San Juan (24 June). Celebrated with particular gusto in Ciutadella, Menorca (p668).

July

Fiesta de San Fermín or Sanfermines (p482; 6-14 July) For many the highlight of this week-long nonstop festival and party is the *encierro* (running of the bulls) in Pamplona, an activity also pursued in dozens of other cities and towns through the summer.

Día de la Virgen del Carmen (16 July) Around this date at most coastal towns, the image of the patron of fisher folk is carried into the sea or paraded on it amid a flotilla of small boats.

Día de Santiago (p545; Feast of St James; 25 July) This is the national saint's day and is spectacularly celebrated in Santiago de Compostela, site of his tomb.

August

Semana Grande or Aste Nagusia Dates vary from place to place for this week of general celebration, heavy drinking and bad hangovers on the north coast.

La Tomatina (p594; second-last or last Wednesday in August) This massive tomato-throwing festival in Buñol, Valencia, must be one of the messiest festivals in the country.

September

Festes de la Mercè (p312; around 24 September) Barcelona's gigantic party marks the end of summer and is held over four days with parades, concerts, theatre, fire-running and more.

FOOD

Glorious food. There's plenty of it in Spain and the regional variety is remarkable. From myriad seafood curiosities in Galicia to the venison of Castilla and the avant-garde *nueva cocina* that's cooking in Barcelona, Madrid and the Basque Country, Spain offers no shortage of surprises. For an overview of what's in store in Spain's kitchens, see p99.

In the course of this guidebook we provide a broad selection of eateries. In order to provide a guide to what you might pay for your grub, we divide listings into budget (up to €15 for a full meal), midrange (€16 to €50) and top end (€50 and up). On some

occasions, dining listings have been ordered by type (café, restaurant etc) and this division is based on the situation in the bigger cities. You may well find yourself eating like royalty in out-of-the-way towns and spending less than this split would indicate. A budget place in Madrid might well cost the same as a lower midrange joint in Murcia.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Homosexuality is legal in Spain and the age of consent is 13, as for heterosexuals. In 2005, the Socialist president, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, gave the country's conservative Catholic foundations a shake with the legalisation of same sex marriages in Spain.

Lesbians and gay men generally keep a fairly low profile, but are more open in the cities. Madrid, Barcelona, Sitges, Torremolinos and Ibiza have particularly lively scenes. Sitges is a major destination on the international gay party circuit; gays take a leading role in the wild Carnaval there in February/March (p335). As well, there are gay parades, marches and events in several cities on and around the last Saturday in June, when Madrid's gay and lesbian pride march takes place (p143).

Worth looking for is *Guía Gay de España*, a countrywide guide published by Shangay, a gay publishing group, and *El País* for gay and gay-friendly bars, restaurants, hotels and shops around the country.

A couple of informative free magazines are in circulation in gay bookshops and gay and gay-friendly bars. One is the biweekly *Shangay*. It is jammed with listings and contact ads and aimed principally at readers in Barcelona and Madrid. The monthly *MENSUAL* (€2) is available at newsstands. There is a Web version at www.mensual.com.

For more information, check out the following sites on the internet:

Chueca.com (www.chueca.com) You have to become a member of Chueca XL (€20 a year) if you want to access the site's Guía Nocturna for bars and clubs.

Coordinadora Gai-Lesbiana (www.cogailles.org) A good site presented by Barcelona's main gay and lesbian organisation, with nationwide links. Here you can zero in on information ranging from bar, sauna and hotel listings through to contacts pages.

Corazon Gay (www.corazongay.com in Spanish) Gay personals and internet search engine.

GayBarcelona.Net (www.gaybarcelona.net in Spanish) News and views and an extensive listings section covering bars, saunas, shops and more in Barcelona and Sitges.

Gays Abroad (www.gays-abroad.com) For gay men moving to Barcelona.

LesboNet.Org (www.lesbonet.org in Spanish) A lesbian site with contacts, forums and listings.

Nación Gay (www.naciongay.com in Spanish) News on the gay community across Spain.

Voz Gay (www.vozgay.com in Spanish) A Spanish community website with listings for the whole country.

Organisations

Casal Lambda (Map pp274-5; ☎ 93 319 55 50; www.lambdaweb.org; Carrer de Verdaguera i Callis 10). A gay and lesbian social, cultural and information centre in Barcelona.

Colectivo de Gais y Lesbianas de Madrid (Map pp122-3; ☎ 91 523 00 70; www.cogam.org; Calle de la Puebla 9) Has an information office and social centre.

Coordinadora Gai-Lesbiana (Map pp268-9; ☎ 93 298 00 29; www.cogailles.org; Carrer de Finlàndia 45). Barcelona's main coordinating body for gay and lesbian groups. It also runs an information line, the Línia Rosa (☎ 900 601601).

Fundación Triángulo (Map pp114-15; ☎ 91 593 05 40; www.fundaciontriangulo.es; Calle de Eloy Gonzalo 25) Another source of information on gay issues in Madrid.

HOLIDAYS

The two main periods when Spaniards go on holiday are Semana Santa (the week leading up to Easter Sunday) and August. At these times accommodation in resorts can be scarce and transport heavily booked, but other places are often half-empty.

There are at least 14 official holidays a year – some observed nationwide, some locally. When a holiday falls close to a weekend, Spaniards like to make a *puente* (bridge), meaning they take the intervening day off too. Occasionally when some holidays fall close, they make an *acueducto* (aqueduct)! National holidays are:

Año Nuevo (New Year's Day) 1 January
Viernes Santo (Good Friday) March/April
Fiesta del Trabajo (Labour Day) 1 May
La Asunción (Feast of the Assumption) 15 August
Fiesta Nacional de España (National Day) 12 October
La Inmaculada Concepción (Feast of the Immaculate Conception) 8 December
Navidad (Christmas) 25 December

Regional governments set five holidays and local councils two more. Common dates for widely observed holidays include:

Epifanía (Epiphany) or **Día de los Reyes Magos** (Three Kings' Day) 6 January
Día de San José (St Joseph's Day) 19 March

Jueves Santo (Good Thursday) March/April. Not observed in Catalonia and Valencia.

Corpus Christi June. This is the Thursday after the eighth Sunday after Easter Sunday.

Día de San Juan Bautista (Feast of St John the Baptist) 24 June

Día de Santiago Apóstol (Feast of St James the Apostle) 25 July

Día de la Constitución (Constitution Day) 6 December

INSURANCE

A travel-insurance policy to cover theft, loss and medical problems is a good idea. It may also cover you for cancellation or delays to your travel arrangements. Paying for your ticket with a credit card can often provide limited travel-accident insurance and you may be able to reclaim the payment if the operator doesn't deliver. Ask your credit card company what it will cover. Worldwide travel insurance is available at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services. You can buy, extend and claim online anytime – even if you're on the road.

For details of car and health insurance, respectively, see p870 and p874.

INTERNET ACCESS

Travelling with a laptop is a great way to stay in touch with life back home. Make sure you have a universal AC adapter, a two-pin plug adapter for Europe and a reputable 'global' modem if you plan to use dial-up. Spanish telephone sockets are the US RJ-11 type. Most laptops now come equipped with wi-fi, meaning you can log on to hotspots where they're available. These are still thin on the ground in Spain, and in many cases (such as in airports) you must pay a fee to access the internet this way.

The number of hotels equipped with internet availability (in rooms or in the foyer) is growing. Hotels in this guide with such services are indicated with an icon (i). For more details on travelling with a portable computer, see www.teleadapt.com.

If you intend to rely on cybercafés, you'll need three pieces of information: your incoming (POP or IMAP) mail-server name, your account name and your password. Most travellers make constant use of internet cafés and free Web-based email such as Yahoo (www.yahoo.com) or Hotmail (www.hotmail.com). You typically have to pay about €1.50 to €3 per hour to go online in most cybercafés.

Check out the following websites on p23 before arriving in Spain.

LEGAL MATTERS

If you're arrested you will be allotted the free services of an *abogado de oficio* (duty solicitor), who may speak only Spanish. You're also entitled to make a phone call. If you use this to contact your embassy or consulate, the staff will probably be able to do no more than refer you to a lawyer who speaks your language. If you end up in court, the authorities are obliged to provide a translator.

In theory, you are supposed to have your national ID card or passport with you at all times. If asked for it by the police, you are supposed to be able to produce it on the spot. In practice it is rarely an issue and many people choose to leave passports in hotel safes.

Drugs

The only legal drug is cannabis and only for personal use, which means very small amounts. Public consumption of any drug is illegal, although in a few bars you may find people smoking joints openly. Travellers entering Spain from Morocco should be prepared for drug searches, especially if they have a vehicle.

Police

Spain is well endowed with police forces. The *Policia Local* or *Policia Municipal* operates at a local level and deals with such issues as traffic infringements and minor crime. If your car has been towed, it's because these guys called up a tow truck.

The *Policia Nacional* is the state police force, dealing with major crime and operating primarily in the cities. The military-linked *Guardia Civil* (created in the 19th century to deal with banditry) is largely responsible for highway patrols, borders and security, and often has a presence in more remote areas where there is no *comisaria* (*Policia Nacional* station). They

LEGAL AGE

- The right to vote: 18 years old
- Age of consent: 13 years old (heterosexual and homosexual)
- Driving age: 18 years old

Travellers should note that they can be prosecuted under the laws of their home country regarding age of consent, even when abroad.

also deal with major crime and terrorism, and there is frequently an overlap (and occasional bickering) with the *Policia Nacional*.

Just to complicate matters, several regions have their own police forces, such as the *Mossos d'Esquadra* in Catalonia and the *Ertaintxa* in the Basque Country.

MAPS

Make sure you get a hold of the latest versions of country maps, as a series of highway code changes in 2004 caused some confusion for a while.

City Maps

For finding your way around cities, the free maps handed out by tourist offices are often adequate, although more detailed maps are sold widely in bookshops. The best Spanish series of maps are produced by Telstar, Alpina and Everest, while Lonely Planet produces a sturdy and helpful *Barcelona City Map*.

Small-Scale Maps

Some of the best maps for travellers are by Michelin, which produces the 1:1,000,000 *Spain Portugal* map and six 1:400,000 regional maps covering the whole country. These are all pretty accurate, even down to the state of minor country roads, are frequently updated and detailed, yet easy to read. They're widely available in Spain. Also good are the GeoCenter maps published by Germany's RV Verlag.

Probably the best physical map of Spain is *Península Ibérica, Baleares y Canarias* published by the Centro Nacional de Información Geográfica (CNIG), the publishing arm of the Instituto Geográfico Nacional (IGN). Ask for it in good bookshops.

Walking Maps

Useful for hiking and exploring some areas (particularly in the Pyrenees) are Editorial Alpina's *Guía Cartográfica* and *Guía Excursionista y Turística* series. The series combines information booklets in Spanish (and sometimes Catalan) with detailed maps at scales ranging from 1:25,000 (1cm to 250m) to 1:50,000 (1cm to 500m). They are an indispensable hiker's tool but have their inaccuracies. The Institut Cartogràfic de Catalunya puts out some decent maps for hiking in the Catalan Pyrenees that are often better than their Editorial Alpina counterparts. Remember that for

hiking only maps scaled at 1:25,000 are seriously useful. The CNIG also covers most of the country in 1:25,000 sheets.

You can often pick up Editorial Alpina publications and CNIG maps at bookshops near trekking areas, and at specialist bookshops such as *Llibreria Desnivel* (☎ 91 369 47 27; www.libreriadensnivel.com; Plaza de Matute 6) or *Altair* (☎ 93 342 71 71; www.altair.es; Gran Via de les Cortes Catalanes 616) or *Quera* (☎ 93 318 07 43; Carrer de Petritxol 2) in Barcelona. Some map specialists in other countries, such as *Stanfords* (☎ 020-7836 1321; www.stanfords.co.uk; 12-14 Long Acre, London WC2E 9LP) in the UK, also have a good range of Spain maps.

MONEY

As in 12 other EU nations, the euro is Spain's currency. The euro is divided into 100 cents. Coin denominations are one, two, five, 10, 20 and 50 cents, €1 and €2. The notes are €5, €10, €20, €50, €100, €200 and €500.

Exchange rates are given on the inside front cover of this book and a guide to costs can be found on p21.

Spain's international airports have bank branches, ATMs and exchange offices. They're less frequent at road crossings now as Spain's neighbours – Andorra, Portugal and France – all use the euro. If you're coming from Morocco, get rid of any dirham before you leave.

Banks and building societies tend to offer the best exchange rates, and are plentiful: even small villages often have at least one. They mostly open from about 8.30am to 2pm Monday to Friday. Some also open Thursday evening (about 4pm to 7pm) or Saturday morning (9am to 1pm). Ask about commissions before changing (especially in exchange bureaux).

Prices in this guidebook are quoted in euros (€), unless otherwise stated.

ATMs

Many credit and debit cards (Visa and MasterCard are the most widely accepted) can be used for withdrawing money from *cajeros automáticos* (automatic telling machines). This is handy because many banks do not offer an over-the-counter-cash advance service on foreign cards (and where they do, the process can be wearisome). The exchange rate used for credit and debit card transactions is usually more in your favour than that for cash exchanges. Bear in mind, however, the costs involved. There is usually a charge (hovering

around 1.5% to 2%) on ATM cash withdrawals abroad. This charge will appear on your statements.

Cash

There is little advantage in bringing foreign cash into Spain. True, exchange commissions are often lower than for travellers cheques, but the danger of losing the lot far outweighs such gains.

Credit & Debit Cards

You can use plastic to pay for many purchases (including meals and rooms, especially from the middle price-range up). You'll often be asked to show your passport or some other form of identification when using cards. Among the most widely accepted are: Visa, MasterCard, American Express (Amex), Cirrus, Maestro, Plus, Diners Club and JCB. Many institutions add 2.5% or more to all transactions (cash advance or purchases) on cards used abroad – this charge does not generally appear on your bank statements.

If your card is lost, stolen or swallowed by an ATM, you can telephone toll free to have an immediate stop put on its use. For MasterCard the number in Spain is % 900 971231; for Visa % 900 991124; for Amex % 900 994426; and for Diners Club % 901 101011.

Moneychangers

As well as at banks, you can exchange both cash and travellers cheques at exchange offices – usually indicated by the word *cambio* (exchange). They abound in tourist resorts and other places that attract high numbers of foreigners. Generally they offer longer opening hours and quicker service than banks, but worse exchange rates. Their commissions are, on occasion, outrageous.

Taxes & Refunds

In Spain, value-added tax (VAT) is known as IVA (*ee-ba; impuesto sobre el valor añadido*). On accommodation and restaurant prices, it's 7% and is often included in quoted prices. On retail goods and car hire, IVA is 16%. To ask 'Is IVA included?', say *¿Está incluido el IVA?*

Visitors are entitled to a refund of the 16% IVA on purchases costing more than €90.16 from any shop if they are taking them out of the EU within three months. Ask the shop for a cash back (or similar) refund form showing

the price and IVA paid for each item, and identifying the vendor and purchaser. Then present the refund form to the customs booth for IVA refunds at the airport, port or border from which you leave the EU. This works best at airports, where you will need your passport and a boarding card that shows you are leaving the EU. The officer will stamp the invoice and you hand it in at a specified bank at the departure point for immediate reimbursement. Otherwise you will have to send the forms off from your home country and have the amount credited to your credit card.

Tipping

The law requires menu prices to include a service charge; tipping is a matter of choice. Most people leave some small change if they're satisfied: 5% is normally fine and 10% generous. Porters will generally be happy with €1. Taxi drivers don't have to be tipped, but a little rounding up won't go amiss.

Travellers Cheques

Travellers cheques usually bring only a slightly better exchange rate than cash, usually offset by the charges for buying them in the first place.

The advantage, of course, is that they protect your money because they can be replaced if lost or stolen. Visa, Amex and Travelex are widely accepted brands with (usually) efficient replacement policies. Amex offices will cash Amex travellers cheques commission-free – but you should always compare exchange rates with those offered in banks. Remember to take along your passport when you cash travellers cheques.

Get most of your cheques in fairly large denominations (the equivalent of €100 or more) to save on any per-cheque commission charges.

If you lose your Amex cheques, call a 24-hour freephone number (% 900 994426). For Visa cheques call % 900 948973; for MasterCard cheques call % 900 948971. It's vital to keep your initial receipt, and a record of your cheque numbers and the ones you have used, separate from the cheques themselves.

POST

The Spanish postal system, *Correos* (% 902 197197; www.correos.es), is generally reliable, if a little slow at times. Central post offices in most cities open around 8.30am to 10pm,

Monday to Saturday. Many branch post offices open 8am to 2pm, Monday to Friday, although there are variations depending on the branch.

Postal Rates & Services

A postcard or letter weighing up to 20g costs €0.57 from Spain to other European countries, and €0.78 to the rest of the world. The same would cost €2.77 and €2.98, respectively, for registered (*certificado*) mail. Sending such letters *urgente*, which means your mail may arrive two or three days sooner than usual, costs €2.89 and €2.75, respectively. You can send mail both *certificado* and *urgente* if you wish. Stamps for regular letters, including those being sent abroad, can also be bought at most tobacconists (*estancios*) – look for the 'Tabacos' sign.

Receiving Mail

Delivery times are similar to those for outbound mail. All Spanish addresses have five-digit postcodes; using postcodes will help your mail arrive more quickly.

Lista de correos (poste restante) mail can be addressed to you anywhere in Spain that has a post office. It will be delivered to the place's main post office, unless another is specified in the address. Take your passport when you pick up mail. A typical *lista de correos* address looks like this:

Jenny JONES
Lista de Correos
28080 Madrid
Spain

Sending Mail

Delivery times are erratic but ordinary mail to other Western European countries can take up to a week (although often as little as three days); to North America up to 10 days; and to Australia or New Zealand (NZ) up to two weeks.

SHOPPING

There are some excellent *mercadillos* and *rastreros* (flea markets) around the country, and craft shops can be found in many villages and towns. You may also pick up crafts at weekly or daily markets. The single most likely place you'll find any particular item in most cities is the nationwide department store El Corte Inglés.

Bargaining

Bargaining is not an option in department stores and high street shops. At markets and more souvenir-oriented stores you can try your luck (you've got nothing to lose, after all).

Clothes & Textiles

Label lovers and fashion victims can keep themselves well occupied in the big cities, such as Madrid and Barcelona, where local and international names present a broad range of options. Ibiza in summer is also a bit of a magnet for clubbing and summer-wear seekers.

Inexpensive rugs, blankets and hangings are made all over the country, notably in Andalucía and Galicia. In Andalucía head for Las Alpujarras and Nijar for colourful items. *Jarpas* (rugs) feature weft threads made of different types of cloth. Other textiles include lace tablecloths and pillowcases (especially from Galicia), and embroidery. Places particularly known for their embroidery include Segovia, La Alberca (Salamanca province), Carbajales (Zamora province), and Lagartera, Oropesa and Talavera (Toledo province).

In Andalucía, every major city centre has a cluster of flamenco shops, selling embroidered shawls, hand-painted fans, flat-top Cordoban hats and of course lots of flouncy dresses.

Leather

Prices of leather goods aren't as low as they used to be, but you can get good deals on jackets, bags, wallets, belts, shoes and boots in many places. Mallorca shoe brands like Camper and Farrutx have become international beacons – their products are stylish, moderately priced and, especially in the case of Camper, easily found all over Spain.

Pottery

Crockery, jugs, plant pots, window boxes and tiles are cheap. Islamic influence on design and colour is evident in much of the country. Original techniques include the use of metallic glazes and *cuerda seca* (dry cord), in which lines of manganese or fat are used to separate areas of different colour. Toledo, Talavera de la Reina, Seville, Granada and Úbeda are centres of production.

Other Crafts

Damascene weapons (made of steel encrusted with gold, silver or copper) are still being produced in Toledo. There is some very pleasing

woodwork available, such as Granada's marquetry boxes, tables and chess sets, some of which are inlaid with bone or mother-of-pearl. Baskets and furniture made from plant fibres are produced throughout Spain but are most common near the coasts.

SOLO TRAVELLERS

About the only real practical disadvantage of travelling solo in Spain is the cost of accommodation. As a rule, single rooms (or doubles let as single rooms) cost around two-thirds of the price of a double. Some hotels make little or no discount on double-room rates.

Females travelling alone shouldn't encounter problems either, at least in more travelled parts of Spain. In more out-of-the-way places, the sight of a lone female traveller may raise local eyebrows. You should be choosy about your accommodation too. Bottom-end fleapits with all-male staff can be insalubrious locations to bed down for the night. Lone women should also take care in city streets at night – stick with the crowds. Hitching for solo women travellers, while feasible, is risky.

TELEPHONE

The ubiquitous blue payphones are easy to use for international and domestic calls. They accept coins, phonecards (*tarjetas telefónicas*) issued by the national phone company Telefónica and, in some cases, various credit cards. Phonecards come in €6 and €12 denominations and, like postage stamps, are sold at post offices and tobacconists.

Public phones in bars and cafés, and telephones in hotel rooms, are almost always a good deal more expensive than street payphones.

TAKING YOUR MOBILE PHONE

If you plan to take your own mobile phone to Spain, check in advance with your mobile network provider that your phone is enabled for international roaming, which allows you to make and receive calls and messages abroad. Ask what you have to dial in order to use international roaming.

- Consider buying an alternative SIM card for use on a local network in Spain. If your phone is not blocked (check before leaving home), you can buy any local pay-as-you-go SIM card.
- Take an international adapter for the charger plug.
- Note your phone's number and serial number (IMEI number) and your operator's customer services number. This will help if your phone is stolen.
- For more advice on using mobile phones abroad go to www.ofcom.org.uk.

Mobile Phones

Spaniards adore *teléfonos móviles* (mobile or cell phones), and shops on every high street sell phones with prepaid cards. The most basic models of mobile phones start from around €80.

Spain uses GSM 900/1800, which is compatible with the rest of Europe and Australia but not with the North American GSM 1900 or the system used in Japan. (Some North Americans, however, have GSM 1900/900 phones that do work in Spain.)

You can rent a mobile phone by calling the Madrid-based **Cellphone Rental** (% 91 523 21 59, 656 266 844; www.onspanishtime.com/web). In Madrid, delivery and pick-up are done in person at a cost of US\$12 (US\$15 on weekends and holidays). Elsewhere in the country, it's delivered by courier (US\$25). The basic service costs US\$35 a week for the phone, plus postal costs (except in Madrid). You also pay US\$150 to discourage scarping with the phone. The whole operation is done on the Web.

Phone Codes

Dial the international access code (% 00 in most countries), followed by the code for Spain (% 34) and the full number (including the code, 91, which is an integral part of the number. For example to call the number % 91 455 67 83 in Madrid, you need to dial the international access code followed by % 34 91 455 67 83.

The access code for international calls from Spain is % 00. To make an international call, dial the access code, wait for a new dialling tone, then dial the country code, area code and number you want.

International collect calls are simple. Dial 900 followed by the code for the country you're calling:

Australia % 99 00 61

Canada % 99 00 15

France % 99 00 33

Germany % 99 00 49

Ireland % 99 03 53

Israel % 99 09 72

New Zealand % 99 00 64

UK for BT % 99 00 44

USA for AT&T % 99 00 11, for Sprint and various others % 99 00 13

You'll get straight through to an operator in the country you're calling. The same numbers can be used with direct-dial calling cards.

If for some reason the above information doesn't work for you, in most places you can get an English-speaking Spanish international operator by dialling % 1008 (for calls within Europe) or % 1005 (rest of the world).

For international directory inquiries dial % 11825. Be warned: a call to this number costs €2!

Within Spain, you must always dial the full area code with the number. All numbers have nine digits and begin with 9. Dial % 1009 to speak to a domestic operator, including for a domestic reverse-charge (collect) call (*llamada por cobro revertido*). For national directory inquiries dial % 11818.

Mobile phone numbers start with 6. Numbers starting with 900 are national toll-free numbers, while those starting 901 to 905 come with varying conditions. A common one is 902, which is a national standard rate number. In a similar category are numbers starting with 803, 806 and 807.

Phonecards

Cut-rate prepaid phonecards can be good value for international calls. They can be bought from *estancos* (tobacconists) and newsstands in the main cities and tourist resorts. If possible, try to compare rates because some are better than others. *Locutorios* (private call centres) that specialise in cut-rate overseas calls have popped up all over the place in the centre of bigger cities. Again, compare rates – as a rule the phonecards are better value and generally more convenient.

TIME

Mainland Spain and the Balearic Islands have the same time as most of the rest of Western Europe: GMT/UTC plus one hour during winter and GMT/UTC plus two hours during the daylight-saving period, which runs from the last Sunday in March to the last Sunday in October.

The UK, Ireland, Portugal and the Canary Islands, a part of Spain in the Atlantic Ocean off the northwestern coast of Africa, are one hour behind mainland Spain. Morocco is on GMT/UTC year-round. From the last Sunday in March to the last Sunday in October, subtract two hours from Spanish time to get Moroccan time; the rest of the year, subtract one hour.

Spanish time is USA Eastern Time plus six hours, and USA Pacific Time plus nine hours.

During the Australian winter (Spanish summer), subtract eight hours from Australian Eastern Standard Time to get Spanish time; in the Australian summer subtract 10 hours. For information about other time zones and their relation to Spain, see the World Time Zones map on pp914–15.

Although the 24-hour clock is used in most official situations, you'll find people generally use the 12-hour clock in everyday conversation.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Local Tourist Offices

All cities and many smaller towns have an *oficina de turismo* or *oficina de información turística*. In the country's provincial capitals you'll sometimes find more than one tourist office – one specialising in information on the city alone, the other carrying mostly provincial or regional information. National and natural parks also often have visitor centres offering useful information. Their opening hours and quality of information vary widely.

Turespaña (www.spain.info, www.tourspain.es), the country's national tourism body, presents a variety of general information and links on the entire country in its Web pages. There is also a nationwide tourist information line in several languages, which might come in handy if you are calling from elsewhere in Spain. For basic information in Spanish, English, French and German call % 901 300600 from 9am to 10pm daily.

Tourist Offices Abroad

Information on Spain is available from the following branches of Turespaña abroad:

Canada (☎ 416-961 3131; www.tourspain.toronto.on.ca; 2 Bloor St W, Ste. 3042, Toronto M4W 3E2)

France (☎ 01 45 03 82 50; www.espagne.infotourisme.com; 43 rue Decamps, 75784 Paris)

Germany (☎ 030-882 6543; berlin@tourspain.es; Kurfürstendamm 63, 10707 Berlin) Branches in Düsseldorf, Frankfurt am Main and Munich.

Netherlands (☎ 070-346 59 00; www.spaansverkeersbureau.nl; Laan van Meerdervoort 8a, 2517 The Hague)

Portugal (☎ 21-354 1992; lisboa@tour.spain.es; Avenida Sidónio Pais 28 3° Dto, 1050-215 Lisbon)

UK (☎ 020-7486 8077; www.tourspain.co.uk; 2nd fl, 79 New Cavendish St, London W1W 6XB)

USA (☎ 212-265 8822; www.okspain.org; 666 Fifth Ave, 35th fl, New York, NY 10103) Branches in Chicago, Los Angeles and Miami.

TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

Spain is not overly disabled-friendly but some things are slowly changing. Disabled access to some museums, official buildings and hotels represents something of a sea change in local thinking, although it remains a minority phenomenon. In major cities more is slowly being done to facilitate disabled access to public transport and taxis. Where hotels and sights are said to be wheelchair accessible, we have marked them with an icon (♿). You need to be a little circumspect about hotels advertising themselves as disabled-friendly, as this can mean as little as wide doors to rooms and bathrooms, or other token efforts.

Organisations

Accessible Travel & Leisure (☎ 01452-729739; www.accessibletravel.co.uk; Avionics House, Naas Lane, Gloucester GL2 2SN) Claims to be the biggest UK travel agent dealing with travel for the disabled and encourages the disabled to travel independently.

Disability Now (☎ 020 7619 7323; www.disabilitynow.org.uk) Has a limited list of disabled-friendly accommodation in Spain.

ONCE (☎ 91 436 53 00; www.once.es; Calle de José Ortega y Gasset 18, Madrid) The Spanish association for the blind. You may be able to get hold of guides in Braille to a handful of cities, including Madrid and Barcelona, although they are not published every year.

Royal Association for Disability & Rehabilitation (RADAR; ☎ 020-7250 3222; www.radar.org.uk; Unit 12, City Forum, 250 City Rd, London EC1V 8AF) RADAR may be able to point you to useful organisations dealing with travel abroad for the disabled.

VISAS

Spain is one of 15 member countries of the Schengen Convention, an agreement whereby all the then EU member countries (except the UK and Ireland) plus Iceland and Norway abolished checks at internal borders in 2000. As of 1 January 2007, the EU is made up of 27 countries. For detailed information on the EU, including which countries are member states, visit <http://europa.eu.int>.

EU, Norwegian, Swiss and Icelandic nationals need no visa, regardless of the length or purpose of their visit to Spain. If they stay beyond 90 days, they are required to register with the police (although many do not). Legal residents of one Schengen country (regardless of their nationality) do not require a visa for another Schengen country.

Nationals of many other countries, including Australia, Canada, Israel, Japan, NZ, Switzerland and the USA, do not need a visa for tourist visits of up to 90 days in Spain, although some of these nationalities may be subject to restrictions in other Schengen countries and should check with consulates of all Schengen countries they plan to visit. If you wish to work or study in Spain, you may need a specific visa, so contact a Spanish consulate before travel. If you are a citizen of a country not mentioned in this section, check with a Spanish consulate whether you need a visa.

The standard tourist visa issued by Spanish consulates is the Schengen visa, valid for up to 90 days. A Schengen visa issued by one Schengen country is generally valid for travel in all other Schengen countries.

Those needing a visa must apply *in person* at the consulate in the country where they are resident. You may be required to provide proof of sufficient funds, an itinerary or hotel bookings, return tickets and a letter of recommendation from a host in Spain. Issue of the visa does *not*, however, guarantee entry.

Coming from Morocco, you are unlikely to get into Spain's North African enclaves of Ceuta or Melilla without a Spanish visa (if you are supposed to have one), and passports are generally checked again when you head on to the peninsula. You may well be able to board a boat from Tangier (Morocco) to Algeciras and certainly to Gibraltar but, again, passports are generally closely checked by the Spaniards at Algeciras and you could be sent back to Morocco.

Extensions & Residence

Schengen visas cannot be extended. You can apply for no more than two visas in any 12-month period and they are not renewable once in Spain. Various transit visas also exist. Nationals of EU countries, Iceland, Norway and Switzerland can enter and leave Spain at will and don't need to apply for a *tarjeta de residencia* (residence card), although having one can make things like opening bank accounts easier.

People of other nationalities who want to stay in Spain longer than 90 days are supposed to get a residence card, and for them it can be a drawn-out process, starting with an appropriate visa issued by a Spanish consulate in their country of residence. Start the process well in advance.

Non-EU spouses of EU citizens resident in Spain can apply for residency too. The process is lengthy and those needing to travel in and out of the country in the meantime who would normally require a visa should ask for an *exención de visado* – a visa exemption. In most cases, the spouse is obliged to make the formal application in their country of residence.

Photocopies

All important documents (passport data page and visa page, credit cards, travel insurance policy, driving licence etc) should be photocopied before you leave home. Leave one copy with someone at home and keep another with you, separate from the originals.

VOLUNTEERING

Several possibilities for volunteering to participate in projects present themselves in Spain. **Sunseed Desert Technology** (www.sunseed.co.uk) is a UK-run project, developing sustainable ways for living in semiarid environments, based in the hamlet of Los Molinos del Río Agua in Almería. At **Pueblo Inglés** (www.puebloingles.com) volunteers spend their days conversing with Spaniards in English at various locations in Spain. A good website with further volunteering options, ranging from excavations in Mallorca to work on restoring the wetlands of Manga del Mar Menor, is **Transitions Abroad** (www.transitionsabroad.com).

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Travelling in Spain is as easy as travelling anywhere in the Western world. Spanish women now travel widely around their own country without men, and Spaniards are

quite accustomed to foreign women travelling in Spain without men. Spanish men under about 40, who have grown up in the liberated post-Franco era, conform less to old-fashioned sexual stereotypes, although you might notice that sexual stereotyping becomes more pronounced as you move from north to south in Spain, and from city to country. And in terms of equality of the sexes, Spain still has a long way to go. The Socialist Zapatero government has introduced measures to promote equality in employment for women, but the battle has barely begun, with few women reaching top positions and women's wages lower than those of men for the same kind of work.

Women travellers should be ready to ignore stares, catcalls and unnecessary comments. Learn the word for help (*socorro*) in case you need to draw other people's attention.

By and large, Spanish women have a highly developed sense of style and put considerable effort into looking their best. While topless bathing and skimpy clothes are in fashion in many coastal resorts, people tend to dress more modestly elsewhere.

There are women's bookshops in Madrid, Barcelona and a few other cities that are also useful sources of information on women's organisations and activities. The websites of many women's organisations can be reached through the feminist website www.nodo50.org/mujeresred.

WORK

Nationals of EU countries, Switzerland, Norway and Iceland may freely work in Spain. If you are offered a contract, your employer will normally steer you through any bureaucracy.

Virtually everyone else is supposed to obtain, from a Spanish consulate in their country of residence, a work permit and, if they plan to stay more than 90 days, a residence visa. These procedures are well nigh impossible unless you have a job contract lined up before you begin them.

You could look for casual work in fruit picking, harvests or construction, but this is generally done with imported labour from Morocco and Eastern Europe, with pay and conditions that can best be described as dire.

Translating and interpreting could be an option if you are fluent in Spanish and a language in demand.

Another option might be au pair work, organised before you come to Spain. A useful guide is *The Au Pair and Nanny's Guide to Working Abroad*, by Susan Griffith and Sharon Legg. Susan Griffith's *Work Your Way Around the World* is also worth looking at.

University students or recent graduates might be able to set up an internship with companies in Spain. The **Association of International Students for Economics and Commerce** (www.aiesec.org), with branches throughout the world, helps member students find internships in related fields.

You can start a job search on the Web, for instance at **Think Spain** (www.thinkspain.com).

Language Teaching

This type of work is an obvious option for which language-teaching qualifications are a big help. Language schools abound and are listed under 'Academias de Idiomas' in the Yellow Pages. Getting a job is harder if you're not an EU citizen. Some schools do employ non-EU citizens without work papers, but usually at lower than normal rates. Giving private lessons is another avenue, but is unlikely to bring you a living wage straight away.

Sources of information on possible teaching work – in a school or as a private tutor –

include foreign cultural centres, such as the British Council, Alliance Française etc, foreign-language bookshops, universities and language schools. Many have notice boards where you may find work opportunities or can advertise your own services.

Tourist Resorts

Summer work on the Mediterranean coasts is a possibility, especially if you arrive early in the season and are prepared to stay a while. Many bars (especially of the UK and Irish persuasion), restaurants and other businesses are run by foreigners. Check any local press in foreign languages, such as the Costa del Sol's *Sur In English*, which lists ads for waiters, nannies, chefs, baby-sitters, cleaners and the like.

Yacht Crewing

It is possible to stumble upon work as crew on yachts and cruisers. The best ports to look include (in descending order) Palma de Mallorca, Gibraltar and Puerto Banús.

In summer the voyages tend to be restricted to the Mediterranean, but from about November to January a few boats head for the Caribbean. Such work is usually unpaid and about the only way to find it is to ask around on the docks.

Transport

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THINGS CHANGE...

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

By law you are supposed to have your passport or ID card with you at all times in Spain. It doesn't happen often, but it could be embarrassing if you are asked by the police to produce a document and you don't have it with you. You will need one of these documents for police registration when you book a hotel room.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Spain is one of Europe's top holiday destinations and is well linked to other European countries by air, rail and road. Regular car ferries and hydrofoils run to and from Morocco and there are ferry links to the UK, Italy, the Canary Islands and Algeria.

As competition in the air grows, flying is increasingly the cheapest and fastest option from other European countries.

Some good direct flights are available from North America. Those coming from Australasia have fewer choices and will usually have to make at least one change of flight.

ENTERING THE COUNTRY Passport

Citizens of the 25 European Union (EU) member states and Switzerland can travel to Spain with their national identity card alone. If such countries do not issue ID cards – as in the UK – travellers must carry a full valid passport (UK visitor passports are not acceptable). All other nationalities must have a full valid passport.

If applying for a visa (see p856), check that your passport's expiry date is at least six months away. If you are not an EU citizen you may be required to fill out a landing card (at airports only), scattered about in the area just prior to passport control.

AIR

High season in Spain generally means Christmas/New Year, Easter and roughly June to September. This varies somewhat, however, depending on the specific destination. You may find reasonably priced flights available to places such as Madrid in August because it is stinking hot and everyone else has fled to the mountains and the sea. As a general rule, November to March is when air fares to Spain are likely to be at their lowest, and the intervening months can be considered shoulder periods.

Airports & Airlines

The main gateway to Spain is Madrid's **Barajas airport** (Aeropuerto de Barajas; % national flight information 902 40 47 04; www.aena.es), although many European direct flights serve other centres, particularly Barcelona's Aeroport del Prat, Málaga, Palma de Mallorca and Valencia. Charter flights and low-cost airlines (mostly from the UK) are flying direct into a growing number of regional airports, including A Coruña, Alicante, Almería, Asturias, Bilbao, Girona (for the Costa Brava and Barcelona), Ibiza, Jerez de la Frontera, Murcia, Reus and Seville.

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Climate change is a serious threat to the ecosystems that humans rely upon, and air travel is the fastest-growing contributor to the problem. Lonely Planet regards travel, overall, as a global benefit, but believes we all have a responsibility to limit our personal impact on global warming.

Flying and climate change

Pretty much every form of motorised travel generates CO₂ (the main cause of human-induced climate change) but planes are far and away the worst offenders, not just because of the sheer distances they allow us to travel, but because they release greenhouse gases high into the atmosphere. The statistics are frightening: two people taking a return flight between Europe and the US will contribute as much to climate change as an average household's gas and electricity consumption over a whole year.

Carbon offset schemes

Climatecare.org and other websites use 'carbon calculators' that allow travellers to offset the level of greenhouse gases they are responsible for with financial contributions to sustainable travel schemes that reduce global warming – including projects in India, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Uganda.

Lonely Planet, together with Rough Guides and other concerned partners in the travel industry, support the carbon offset scheme run by climatecare.org. Lonely Planet offsets all of its staff and author travel.

For more information check out our website: www.lonelyplanet.com.

Iberia, Spain's main national carrier, flies to most Spanish cities (many via Madrid) from around the world but is generally the expensive way to go.

Among the airlines that fly to and from Spain are the following:

Aer Lingus (EI; % 0818 365000 in Ireland; www.aerlingus.com) Flies to Alicante, Almeria, Barcelona, Bilbao, Madrid, Málaga, Palma de Mallorca, Seville and Valencia, as well as to Alicante, Barcelona and Málaga from Cork.

Air Berlin (AB; % 01805 737800 in Germany, 902 320737 in Spain; www.airberlin.com) German budget airline with direct flights from cities all over Germany, as well as Amsterdam, Helsinki, London and Zürich, to Madrid, Barcelona and other destinations. Many flights run via Palma de Mallorca.

Air Europa (UX; % 902 40 15 01 in Spain; www.air.europa.com) Flies to Madrid from London, Paris, Rome, Milan and New York, and from destinations all over Spain.

Air Madrid (DRI; % 902 51 52 51 in Spain; www.airmadrid.com) An intercontinental budget airline linking Madrid with various South American destinations, including Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico and Peru. There are connections to Barcelona and other Spanish and European destinations.

Air Scotland (GRE; % 0141 222 2363 in UK; www.air-scotland.com) Flies from Birmingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Manchester and Newcastle to Alicante, Barcelona, Girona, Málaga and Palma de Mallorca.

Alpi Eagles (E8; % 899 500 058 in Italy; www.alpieagles.com) Flights from Venice and Naples to Barcelona.

BMI (BD; % 0870 607 0555 in UK; www.flybmi.com) Flights from Heathrow airport (London) and other UK airports to Alicante and Palma de Mallorca.

British Airways (BA; % 0870 850 9850 in UK, 902 11 13 33 in Spain; www.britishairways.com) London direct to Madrid, Barcelona and Málaga. Some flights also from Manchester and Birmingham.

Brussels Airlines (SN; % 902 90 14 92 in Spain, 070 351111 in Belgium; www.flysn.com) Operates flights from Brussels to Barcelona, Bilbao, Madrid, Málaga, Murcia, Palma de Mallorca, Seville and Valencia.

Continental (CO; % 900 961266 in Spain, 1-800-523 3273 in USA; www.continental.com) Direct flights to Barcelona and Madrid from New York (Newark).

Delta (DL; % 800 241 4141 in USA, 901 116 946 in Spain; www.delta.com) Flies from New York JFK to Madrid and Barcelona.

EasyJet (U2; % 0905 821 0905 in UK, 902 29 99 92 in Spain; www.easyjet.com) Flies to Alicante, Almeria, Asturias, Barcelona, Bilbao, Ibiza, Madrid, Málaga, Maó, Palma de Mallorca and Valencia from various London and other UK airports. Some of these destinations are also served from Berlin (Schönefeld), Dortmund, Geneva and Paris (Orly).

Excel Airways (XL; % 0870 169 0169 in UK) Flights from UK destinations to Alicante, Maó, Málaga and Palma de Mallorca.

FlyGlobeSpan (GSM; % 0870 556 1522 in UK; www.flyglobespan.com) Flights from Edinburgh and Glasgow to Barcelona.

Germanwings (4U; % 0900-1919100 in Germany, 91 625 97 04 in Spain; www15.germanwings.com) Flies from Cologne, Stuttgart and other cities to Alicante, Barcelona, Ibiza, Jerez de la Frontera, Málaga, Madrid and Palma de Mallorca.

Iberia (IB; % 902 40 05 00 in Spain; www.iberia.es) Destinations all over Spain from major cities worldwide.

Jet2 (LS; % 0871 226 1737 in UK; www.jet2.com) A budget airline that flies from Leeds and Belfast to Alicante, Barcelona, Málaga, Murcia and Palma de Mallorca.

LTU (LT; % 0211 941 8456 in Germany; www.ltu.com) Flights from all over Germany to Alicante, Almeria, Ibiza, Madrid, Maó, Málaga, Palma de Mallorca, Seville and Valencia. It also offers all-in packages.

Meridiana (IG; % 199 111 333 in Italy; www.meridiana.it) Flights from Florence, Pisa and Catania to Barcelona and connections throughout Italy.

MyAir (8I; % 899 500060 in Italy; www.myair.com) A budget airline with flights to Barcelona, Ibiza, Madrid, Palma de Mallorca from Venice and/or Milan (Orio).

Monarch (ZB; % 0870 040 5040 in UK, 800 099260 in Spain; www.flymonarch.com) Has scheduled and charter flights from London Gatwick and Luton and other UK cities to Alicante and Málaga: London Luton to Alicante, Almeria, Barcelona, Málaga, Menorca and Palma de Mallorca.

Royal Air Maroc (AT; % 09000 0800 in Morocco; www.royalairmaroc.com) Also known as RAM, it covers much of the air traffic between Spain and Morocco.

Ryanair (FR; % 0906 270 5656 in UK, 0530 787787 in Ireland, 807 220032 in Spain; www.ryanair.com) Flies to Girona (Ryanair's hub for Barcelona), Granada, Jerez de la Frontera, Málaga, Murcia, Reus, Santander, Santiago de Compostela, Seville, Valencia, Valladolid, Vitoria and Zaragoza. Flights run from London Stansted to all these destinations (except Málaga, which is connected to Dublin, Shannon and Brussels). A plethora of connections from all over Western Europe also fly to some or all of these destinations.

Sky Europe (NE; % 02 4850 4850 in Slovakia, 06 1777 7000 in Hungary, 807 001204 in Spain; www.skyeurope.com) Flights to Barcelona from Bratislava, Budapest, Krakow, Prague and Salzburg.

Spanair (JK; % 902 13 14 15 in Spain; www.spanair.com) Direct flights to Barcelona and Madrid from Ancona, Copenhagen and Oslo, and a web of domestic flights. Also connections to other European and some US cities.

Sterling Airlines (NB; % 7010 74 74 in Denmark; www.sterlingticket.com) Flights from Copenhagen, Stockholm, Helsinki and other Scandinavian airports to Alicante, Barcelona, Madrid, Málaga and Palma de Mallorca.

Swiss (LX; % 0848 700700 in Switzerland, 901 11 67 12 in Spain; www.swiss.com) Now owned by Germany's

Lufthansa, Swiss sometimes has surprisingly good deals from Geneva and Zürich to various Spanish cities.

Thomson Fly (TOM; % 0870 190 0737 in UK; www.thomsonfly.com) Frequent flights from Coventry (UK) to Barcelona and a host of less regular flights from various UK locations to Alicante, Girona, Ibiza, Málaga, Menorca and Palma de Mallorca.

Transavia (HV; % 0900 0737 in Netherlands, 902 11 44 78 in Spain; www.transavia.com) Low-cost flights from Amsterdam and/or Rotterdam to Alicante, Almeria, Barcelona, Girona, Madrid, Málaga, Palma de Mallorca, Seville and Valencia.

Virgin Express (TV; % 070 353637 in Belgium, 902 88 84 59 in Spain; www.virgin-express.com) Regular flights from Brussels to Barcelona, Madrid, Málaga, Madrid, Murcia and Palma de Mallorca.

Vueling (VLG; % 902 33 39 33 in Spain; www.vueling.com) Barcelona-based budget airline with flights to Amsterdam, Brussels, Lisbon, Milan, Paris, Rome and a growing range of Spanish destinations.

Tickets

World aviation has never been so competitive and the Internet is often the easiest way of locating and booking reasonably priced seats.

Full-time students and those under 26 have access to discounted fares. You have to show a document proving your date of birth or a valid International Student Identity Card (ISIC) when buying your ticket. Other cheap deals include the discounted tickets released to travel agents and specialist discount agencies. 'No-frills' carriers, however, sell direct to travellers. Many airlines also offer excellent fares to Internet surfers, and there is no shortage of online agents:

www.cheaptickets.com
www.ebookers.com
www.expedia.com
www.openjet.com
www.opodo.com
www.planesimple.co.uk
www.skyscanner.net
www.travelocity.co.uk
www.tripadvisor.com

Africa

From South Africa a host of major airlines service Spain but usually via major European hubs such as Frankfurt, London and Paris. British Airways, Air France and Lufthansa are among the airlines offering the best deals flying out of Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg. **Flight Centre** (www.flightcentre.co.za), **STA Travel** (www.statravel.co.za) and **Rennies Travel**

(www.renniestravel.com) have offices throughout Southern Africa. Check their websites for the nearest branches to you

Morocco's national airline, Royal Air Maroc (RAM), dominates the flying trade from Morocco to major Spanish cities, with flights to Barcelona, Madrid, Málaga and Valencia. Most of the direct flights are from Casablanca. Morocco's Regional Air Lines operates some flights in codeshare with RAM to Málaga from Casablanca and Tangier. Iberia also flies to Casablanca and a few other Moroccan destinations.

The Iberia subsidiary Iberia Regional-Air Nostrum flies to/from Málaga (up to six times daily), Almería, Granada and Madrid from Melilla, the Spanish enclave on the Moroccan coast. The Moroccan crossing point into Melilla is the neighbouring town of Nador.

Asia

Bangkok, Singapore and Hong Kong are the best places to shop around for discount tickets. **STA Travel** Bangkok (☎ 02-236 0262; www.statravel.co.th); Singapore (☎ 6737 7188; www.statravel.com.sg); Hong Kong (☎ 2736 1618; www.statravel.com.hk); Japan (☎ 03 5391 2922; www.statravel.co.jp) proliferates in Asia. Another resource in Japan is **No 1 Travel** (☎ 03 3205 6073; www.no1-travel.com); in Hong Kong try **Four Seas Tours** (☎ 2200 7760; www.fourseas-travel.com).

Australia

Cheap flights from Australia to Europe generally go via Southeast Asian capitals. As a rule there are no direct flights from Australia to Spain.

STA Travel (☎ 1300 733 035; www.statravel.com.au) and **Flight Centre** (☎ 133 133; www.flightcentre.com.au) are major dealers in cheap airfares, although discounted fares can also be found at your local travel agent. Look at the travel ads in the Saturday editions of Melbourne's *Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*. For online bookings, try www.travel.com.au.

Canada

Scan the travel agencies' advertisements in the *Toronto Globe & Mail*, *Toronto Star* and *Vancouver Sun*. **Travel CUTS** (☎ 1-866 246 9762; www.travelcuts.com), called **Voyages Campus** in Quebec, has offices in all major cities in Canada.

Iberia has daily flights from Toronto via London to Madrid. Other major European

airlines offer competitive fares to most Spanish destinations via other European capitals.

Canary Islands

Few visitors to the Canary Islands combine their trip with another to mainland Spain (or vice versa). There is no financial incentive to do so, as flights from other parts of Europe to the Canaries are often cheaper than those between the islands and the mainland.

Iberia, Spanair, Air Europa and charters fly from Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and, less frequently, Lanzarote and Fuerteventura to Madrid, Barcelona and other mainland destinations.

Continental Europe

Air travel between Spain and other places in continental Europe is worth considering if you are short on time. Short hops can be expensive, but for longer journeys you can often find air fares that beat overland alternatives.

In France the student travel agency **OTU Voyages** (☎ 01 55 82 32 32; www.otu.fr in French) is a safe bet for cut-price travel. Have a look at **Lastminute** (☎ 0892 705 000; www.lastminute.fr) too.

In Germany, **STA Travel** (☎ 069 7430 3292; www.statravel.de in German) is one of the best student and discount travel agencies. **Just Travel** (☎ 089 747 3330; www.justtravel.de) is also worth a look.

Amsterdam is a popular departure point and a good budget flight centre. Try the bucket shops along Rokin. Or try **Air Fair** (☎ 0900 771717; www.airfair.nl in Dutch). **Kilroy Travels** (☎ 0900 0400636; www.kilroytravels.nl in Dutch) is also worth checking out.

The best place to look for cheap fares in Italy is at **CTS** (Centro Turistico Studentesco e Giovanile; ☎ 199 501150; www.cts.it), which has branches in cities throughout the country.

In Lisbon, Portugal, **Tagus** (☎ 892 5454; www.viagenstagus.pt; Rua Camilo Castelo Branco 20) is a reputable travel agency. It has branches around the country.

New Zealand

Unfortunately, there are no direct flights between New Zealand (NZ) and Spain. The *New Zealand Herald* has a travel section in which travel agencies advertise fares. **STA Travel** (☎ 0508 782872; www.statravel.co.nz) has offices in Auckland, as well as in Hamilton, Palmerston North, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin. **Flight Centre** (☎ 0800 243544;

www.flightcentre.co.nz) has branches in Auckland and throughout the country.

South America

Iberia and a series of South American national airlines connect Spain with Latin America. Most flights converge on Madrid, although some continue to Barcelona.

Asatej (www.asatej.com) is a Hispanic youth travel organisation, with offices in Argentina, Mexico, Uruguay and the USA.

The UK & Ireland

Discount air travel is big business in London. Advertisements for many travel agencies appear in the travel pages of the weekend newspapers, such as the *Independent*, the *Guardian* on Saturday and the *Sunday Times*.

STA Travel (☎ 0870 1630026; www.statravel.co.uk) and **Traifinders** (☎ 0845 0585858; www.traifinders.com), both of which have offices throughout the UK, sell discounted and student tickets.

No-frills airlines are increasingly big business for travel between the UK and Spain. EasyJet and Ryanair are the main operators, getting some competition from smaller outfits like Jet2. Prices vary wildly according to season and also depend on how far in advance you can book them.

The two national airlines linking the UK and Spain are British Airways and Iberia. They both operate regular direct flights to Madrid and Barcelona, as well as a growing range of other centres.

Most British travel agents are registered with the ABTA (Association of British Travel Agents). If you've paid for your flight with an ABTA-registered agent who goes bust, ABTA will guarantee a refund or an alternative.

Good agencies for charter flights from the UK to Spain include **Avro** (☎ 0870 4582841; www.avro.com), **JMC** (www.5.thomascook.com) and **Thomson** (☎ 0870 1650079; www.thomson.co.uk).

From Ireland, check out offers from Aer Lingus and Ryanair.

USA

Several airlines fly 'direct' (many flights involve a stop elsewhere in Europe en route) to Spain, landing in Madrid and Barcelona. These include KLM, British Airways and Iberia.

Discount travel agencies in the USA are known as consolidators. San Francisco is the ticket-consolidator capital of America,

although some good deals can be found in other big cities. The *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune* and *San Francisco Examiner* all produce weekly travel sections. **STA Travel** (☎ 800 781 4040; www.statravel.com) has offices around the country. **Travel Cuts** (☎ 1-800-592 2887; www.travelcuts.com) is a similar operation.

Discount and rock-bottom options from the USA include charter, stand-by and courier flights. Stand-by fares are often sold at 60% of the normal price for one-way tickets. **Courier Travel** (www.couriertravel.org) is a search engine for courier and stand-by flights. You can also check out the **International Association of Air Travel Couriers** (www.courier.org).

LAND

You can enter Spain by train, bus and private vehicle along various points of its northern border with France (and Andorra) and the western frontier with Portugal. Bus is generally the cheapest option but the train is more comfortable, especially for long-haul trips.

Border Crossings

The main road crossing into Spain from France is the highway that links up with Spain's AP7 tollway, which runs down to Barcelona and follows the Spanish coast south (with a branch, the AP2, going to Madrid via Zaragoza). A series of links cut across the Pyrenees from France and Andorra into Spain, as does a coastal route that runs from Biarritz in France into the Spanish Basque Country.

The A5 freeway linking Madrid with Badajoz crosses the Portuguese frontier and continues on to Lisbon and there are many other road connections up and down the length of the Hispano-Portuguese frontier.

As Spain, France and Portugal are members of the EU and the Schengen area (see p856) there are usually no border controls between them. The tiny principality of Andorra is not in the EU and border controls remain in place.

Bus

Eurolines (www.eurolines.com) and its partner bus companies run an extensive network of international buses across 26 European countries and Morocco. In Spain they serve many destinations from the rest of Europe, although services often run only a few times a week.

See individual country sections for more information on bus transport.

BUS PASSES

Travellers planning broader European tours that include Spain could find one of the following passes useful.

Busabout (‰ 020-7950 1661 in UK; www.busabout.com; 258 Vauxhall Bridge Rd, London SW1V 1BS) is a UK-based hop-on, hop-off bus service aimed at younger travellers. It has passes of varying durations allowing you to use a network of 36 cities in 11 countries. The main passes are of interest only to those travelling a lot beyond Spain (where there are four stops). You can pick up a three-stop Spanish Explorer pass for UK£99, or opt for a wider loop (or loops). A Western Loop pass taking in Spain, France and Switzerland costs UK£275.

Eurolines (www.eurolines.com) offers a low-season pass valid for 15/30 days that costs UK£135/205 (UK£115/159 for under-26s and senior citizens over 60). This pass allows unlimited travel between 40 European cities. The only Spanish cities included are Barcelona and Madrid. Fares increase to UK£225/299 (UK£189/245) between June and mid-September.

Car & Motorcycle

When driving in Europe always carry proof of ownership of a private vehicle. Third-party motor insurance is required throughout Europe (see p870).

Every vehicle should display a nationality plate of its country of registration. A warning triangle (to be used in case of breakdown) is compulsory. In Spain, a reflective jacket is also compulsory. Other recommended accessories are a first-aid kit, spare-bulb kit and fire extinguisher.

Pre-booking a rental car before leaving home will enable you to find the cheapest deals (for multinational agencies see p870). No matter where you hire your car, make sure you understand what is included in the price and your liabilities.

Spain is great for motorcycle touring and motorcyclists swarm into the country in summer. With a bike you rarely have to book ahead for ferries and can enter restricted traffic areas in cities.

An interesting website packed with advice for people planning to drive in Europe is **Ideamerge** (www.ideamerge.com), with information on the Renault company's car leasing plan, motor home rental and much more.

Your vehicle could be searched on arrival from Andorra. Spanish customs look out for contraband duty-free products destined for illegal resale in Spain. The same generally goes on arrival from Morocco or the Spanish North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. In this case the search is for controlled substances.

See p869 for comprehensive information on road rules, petrol, insurance and other driving tips for Spain.

Train

The principal rail crossings into Spain pierce the Franco-Spanish frontier along the Mediterranean coast and via the Basque Country. Another minor rail route runs inland across the Pyrenees from Latour-de-Carol to Barcelona. From Portugal, the main line runs from Lisbon across Extremadura to Madrid.

Direct trains link Barcelona with Paris, Geneva, Zürich, Turin and Milan at least three times a week. Direct overnight trains also connect Paris with Madrid. Check details on the **Spanish national railways** (Renfe; ‰ 902 24 34 02 in Spain for international trips; www.renfe.es) website.

Andorra

Regular buses connect Andorra with Barcelona (including winter ski buses and direct services to the airport) and other destinations in Spain (including Madrid) and France. For details see p398.

France

BUS

Eurolines (www.eurolines.fr) heads to Spain from Paris and more than 20 other French cities and towns. It connects with Madrid (17½ hours), Barcelona (15¼ hours) and many other destinations. There is at least one departure per day for main destinations.

TRAIN

About the only truly direct trains to Madrid and Barcelona are the *trenhoteles*, which are expensive sleeper trains. The Barcelona service leaves from Paris Austerlitz at 8.32pm daily and arrives at 8.24am (stopping at Orléans, Limoges, Perpignan, Figueres, Girona and Barcelona Sants). The Madrid equivalent leaves from Paris at

7.43pm daily and arrives in Madrid Chamartín at 9.13am (stopping at Orléans, Blois, Poitiers, Vitoria, Burgos and Valladolid).

There are several other less luxurious possibilities. Two or three TGV trains leave from

Paris Montparnasse for Irún, where you change to a normal train for the Basque Country and on towards Madrid. Up to three TGVs also put you on the road to Barcelona (leaving from Paris Gare de Lyon), with a change of train

RAIL PASSES

The InterRail Pass and Rail Europe Senior Card are available to people who have lived in Europe for six months or more. They can be bought at most major stations and student travel outlets.

Eurail passes and Eurail Selectpass are for those who have lived in Europe for less than six months and are supposed to be bought outside Europe. They are available from leading travel agencies and online at www.eurail.com.

InterRail Pass

The **InterRail** (www.interrail.net) map of Europe is divided into zones, one of which comprises Spain, Portugal and Morocco. The pass is designed for people aged under 26, but there is a more expensive version for older folk: the InterRail 26+. There are three types of ticket: 16 days in one zone under 12yr/under 26yr/over 26yr (€143/195/286), 22 days in two zones (€198/275/396) and one month in all zones (€273/385/546). Cardholders get discounts on travel in the country where they purchase the ticket.

Rail Plus Senior Railcard

Senior citizens can get a Rail Plus Senior Railcard (available at all major stations), which is valid for a year for trips that cross at least one border and which entitles you to 30% off standard fares. In the UK the card costs UK£12 but you must already have a **Senior Railcard** (www.senior-railcard.co.uk; UK£20).

Eurail Passes

Eurail passes are good for travel in 18 European countries (not including the UK) but forget it if you intend to travel mainly in Spain. People aged over 26 pay for a 1st-class pass (Eurailpass) and those aged under 26 for a 2nd-class pass (Eurailpass Youth). Passes are valid for 15 or 21 days or for one, two or three months. These cost US\$605/785/975/1378/1703 respectively for the Eurailpass. The Eurailpass Youth comes in at US\$394/510/634/896/1108. Children aged between four and 11 pay half-price for the Adult 1st-class passes. The Europass Saver is for two people and brings a 15% reduction in the standard Adult prices. Another option is the Eurail Flexipass (with Adult, Saver and Youth versions), which gives you 10 or 15 days travel in two months). The 15-day version costs US\$940/611 for the Adult/Youth versions.

Eurail Selectpass

This provides between five and 15 days of unlimited travel within a two-month period in two to five bordering countries (from a total of 22 possible countries). As with Eurail passes, those aged over 26 pay for a 1st-class pass, while those aged under 26 can get a cheaper Europass Youth for travel in 2nd class. The basic five-day pass costs US\$473/306 for the Adult/Youth version. There is also a Europass Saver that works like the Eurailpass Saver (see above).

Regional & National Passes

Eurail also offers a Spain national pass and a regional pass for Spain and Portugal. You can choose from three to 10 days' train travel in a two-month period for either pass. The 10-day national pass costs US\$470/385 for 1st class Adult/2nd class Youth. The 10-day regional pass (1st class only) costs US\$504. A Saver version costs US\$439. As with all Eurail passes, you want to be sure you will be covering a lot of ground to make this worthwhile. Check some sample prices in euros of where you intend to travel on the **Renfe** (www.renfe.es) website to compare.

at Montpellier or Narbonne. Two daily direct Talgo services connect Montpellier with Barcelona (and on to Murcia). A slow overnight train runs from Paris to Latour-de-Carol, where you change for a local regional train to Barcelona.

For more information on French rail services check out the SNCF (www.voyages-sncf.com) website.

Morocco

Buses from several Moroccan cities converge on Tangier to make the ferry crossing to Algeciras and then fan out across to main Spanish centres. Several companies, including ALSA (www.alsa.es), run these routes.

Portugal

BUS

AutoRes (% 902 02 09 99 in Spain, 218 94 02 50 in Portugal; www.auto-res.net) runs one or two buses a day from Lisbon to Madrid via Badajoz. The trip takes about seven hours.

Other services from the Portuguese capital run to Seville via Aracena; to Málaga via Badajoz, Seville, Cádiz, Algeciras and the Costa del Sol; to Granada via Albufeira, Huelva, Seville, Málaga and Almuñécar.

Another service runs north via Porto to Tui, Santiago de Compostela and A Coruña in Galicia. Local buses cross the border from towns such as Huelva in Andalucía, Badajoz in Extremadura and Ourense in Galicia.

TRAIN

An overnight train runs daily from Lisbon to Madrid and another to Irún. See Renfe (www.renfe.es) for details.

UK

BUS

Eurolines (% 0870 5808 080; www.nationalexpress.com/eurolines) runs buses to Barcelona, Madrid and other Spanish destinations several times a week. The London terminal is at Victoria Coach Station (Buckingham Palace Rd). Journey times (including a wait in Paris of up to two hours) can range from 24 to 26 hours to Barcelona and 25 to 30 hours to Madrid.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

You can take your car across to France by ferry or via the Channel Tunnel on Eurotunnel (% 0870 5353 535; www.eurotunnel.com). The latter runs four crossings (35 minutes) an hour between Folkestone and Calais in the high season.

For breakdown assistance both the AA (% 0800 085 2840 for European breakdown cover; www.theaa.com) and the RAC (% 0870 5722 722 in UK; www.rac.co.uk) offer comprehensive cover in Europe.

TRAIN

The passenger-train service Eurostar (www.eurostar.com) travels between London and Paris, from where you can connect with trains to Spain. Alternatively, you can purchase a train ticket that includes crossing the English Channel by ferry, SeaCat or hovercraft.

For the latest fare information on journeys to Spain, including the Eurostar, contact the Rail Europe Travel Centre (% 0870 8371 371 in UK; www.raileurope.co.uk). Another source of rail information for all of Europe is Rail Choice (www.railchoice.com). Travel times depend in large measure on what connections you make in Paris.

SEA

Ferries run to mainland Spain regularly from the Canary Islands, Italy, North Africa (Algeria, Morocco) and the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla) and the UK. Most services are run by the Spanish national ferry company, Acciona Trasmediterránea (% 902 45 46 45; www.trasmediterranea.es).

Algeria

Acciona Trasmediterránea runs daily ferries from Alicante to Oran (13 hours, leaving at 7pm) and from Almería to Ghazaouet (eight hours, leaving at midnight) in Algeria.

Canary Islands

An Acciona Trasmediterránea car ferry leaves from Santa Cruz de Tenerife (5pm) and Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (2pm) every Saturday for Cádiz. It's a long and bumpy ride, taking about 48 hours from Santa Cruz.

Italy

Ferries run from Genoa to Barcelona three times a week and up to six times a week from Civitavecchia (near Rome). For more information see p330.

Morocco

You can sail from the Moroccan ports of Tangier, Al Hoceima and Nador, as well as from Ceuta or Melilla (Spanish enclaves on the Moroccan coast) to Almería, Málaga, Algeciras, Gibraltar and Tarifa. The routes are: Melilla–Almería, Al Hoceima–Almería,

Nador–Almería, Melilla–Málaga, Tangier–Gibraltar, Tangier–Algeciras, Ceuta–Algeciras and Tangier–Tarifa. All routes usually take vehicles as well as passengers.

The most frequent sailings are to/from Algeciras to Tangier (taking 1¼ to 2½ hours) and Ceuta (35 to 45 minutes). Extra services are put on during the peak summer period (mid-June to mid-September) to cater for the stream of Moroccans resident in Europe heading home for the holidays and the Tangier–Tarifa route may be restricted to people with EU passports or EU residence papers during this period. Acciona Trasmediterránea and various other companies compete for business. For more details, see the appropriate sections in the Andalucía chapter (p683). In September 2006, a weekly service between Genoa (Italy) and Tangiers began to call in at Barcelona as well. It is run by Grandi Navi Veloci (Grimaldi). The trip takes 24 hours and leaves Barcelona at 7pm.

UK

PLYMOUTH–SANTANDER

From Milbay Docks in Plymouth, Brittany Ferries (% 0870 3665 333 in UK; www.brittanyferries.co.uk) runs a car ferry twice a week to Santander from mid-March to mid-November. See also p505.

PORTSMOUTH–BILBAO

Throughout the year P&O Ferries (% 0870 5980 333 in UK; www.poferry.com) operates a service from Portsmouth to Bilbao. As a rule there are two sailings a week. Acciona Trasmediterránea (% 0871 7206 445 in UK; www.atferries.com) launched a similar service in 2006. See also p460.

VIA FRANCE

You can transport your car by Hoverspeed or ferry to France from the UK. Hoverspeed (% 0870 1642 114; www.norfolkline-ferries.com) fast boats take about two hours to cross from Dover to Dunkirk. P&O Ferries (% 0870 5980 333 in UK; www.poferry.com) has frequent car ferries from Dover to Calais (1¼ hours).

GETTING AROUND

You can reach almost any destination in Spain by train or bus, and services are generally efficient and cheap. For longer distances there are plenty of domestic air services and prices have become more competitive in recent

years. However, your own wheels give you the most freedom.

AIR

Airlines in Spain

Iberia and its subsidiary, Iberia Regional-Air Nostrum, have an extensive network covering all of Spain. Competing with Iberia are Spanair, Air Europa and Vueling. They both rival Iberia on the busy Madrid–Barcelona run and fly to a host of other Spanish destinations. In late 2006, UK and Irish low-cost airlines EasyJet and Ryanair won concessions to start operating on a handful of domestic Spanish routes. This could lead to quite a price shakedown. For airline contact details see p859.

Increasingly, customers are booking their domestic flights in Spain on the airlines' websites. It is worth shopping around, and for return flights there is nothing to stop you booking each leg with a different airline.

Typical cheaper return fares between Madrid and Barcelona hover around €80 to €120, but it can range up to €250. Cheaper tickets are generally nonrefundable, must be booked up to two weeks in advance and allow no changes. All applicable airport taxes are factored into the price of your ticket.

BICYCLE

Years of highway improvement programmes across the country have made cycling a much easier prospect than it once was. There are plenty of options, from mountain biking in the Pyrenees to distance riding along the coast.

If you get tired of pedalling it is often possible to take your bike on the train. All regional trains have space for bikes (usually marked by a bicycle logo on the carriage), where you can simply load the bike. Bikes are also permitted on most *cercanías* (local area trains around big cities such as Madrid and Barcelona). On long-distance trains there are more restrictions. As a rule you have to be travelling overnight in a sleeper or couchette to have the (dismantled) bike accepted as normal luggage. Otherwise, it can only be sent separately as a parcel. It's often possible to take your bike on a bus – usually you'll just be asked to remove the front wheel.

In the UK the Cyclists' Touring Club (CTC; % 0870 8730 060 in UK; www.ctc.org.uk; Parklands, Railton Rd, Guildford, Surrey GU2 9JX) can help you plan your own

bike tour or organise guided tours. Membership costs UK£33 per annum (UK£12 for those under 26).

Hire & Purchase

Bicycle rental is not too common in Spain, although it is more so in the case of mountain bikes (*bici todo terreno*) and in the more popular regions such as Andalucía and coastal spots like Barcelona. Costs vary considerably but you can be looking at around €10 per hour, €15 to €20 per day and €50 to €60 per week. You can purchase any kind of bicycle you want in the bigger centres and prices are average by European standards. A basic city bike with no gears won't come for much less than €100. For a decent mountain bike with 16 gears you're looking at €250 or more and racing bikes can be more expensive still.

BOAT

Ferries and hydrofoils link the mainland (La Península) with the Balearic Islands and Spain's North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. For details of the latter, see p866 and the relevant sections in the Andalucía chapter (p738, p749 and p803). For more on ferries between the mainland and the Balearic Islands, see p629.

The main national ferry company is **Acciona Trasmediterránea** (☎ 902 454645; www.trasmediterranea.es). It runs a combination of slower car ferries and modern high-speed, passenger-only fast ferries and hydrofoils. On overnight services between the mainland and the Balearic Islands you can opt for seating or sleeping accommodation in a cabin.

BUS

A plethora of companies provide bus links, from local routes between villages to fast intercity connections. It is often cheaper to travel by bus than by train, particularly on long-haul runs, but also less comfortable.

Local services can get you just about anywhere, but most buses connecting villages and provincial towns are not geared to tourist needs. Frequent weekday services drop off to a trickle on Saturday and Sunday. Often just one bus runs daily between smaller places during the week and none operate on Sunday. It's usually unnecessary to make reservations; just arrive early enough to get a seat.

On many regular runs (say, from Madrid to Toledo) the ticket you buy is for the next

bus due to leave and *cannot* be used on a later bus. Advance purchase in such cases is generally not possible.

For longer trips (such as Madrid–Seville, or to the coast), and certainly in peak holiday season, you can (and should) buy your ticket in advance. On some routes you have the choice between express and all-stops services.

In most larger towns and cities, buses leave from a single bus station (*estación de autobuses*). In smaller places, buses tend to operate from a set street or plaza, often unmarked. Locals will know where to go. Usually a specific bar sells tickets, although in some cases you may have to purchase tickets on the bus.

Bus travel within Spain is not overly costly. The trip from Madrid to Barcelona costs around €25 one way. From Barcelona to Seville, one of the longest trips you could do (15 to 17 hours) you pay up to €82 one way for the faster services.

People under 26 should inquire about discounts on long-distance trips. Occasionally a return ticket is cheaper than two singles.

ALSA (☎ 902 42 22 42; www.alsa.es) Has routes all over the country that it operates in association with various companies, such as Enatcar and Eurobus. From Madrid it runs buses to Barcelona, Zaragoza, Tarragona, Ávila, Segovia, Valladolid, León, major towns in Galicia, Alicante, Murcia and Almería. From Seville buses run up through Extremadura and Salamanca into Galicia, as well as through Córdoba through the east of the country to Barcelona.

Alsina Graells (☎ 902 33 04 00; www.continental-auto.es) Part of the Continental-Auto group. It runs buses from Barcelona across Catalonia to destinations west and northwest, such as Vielha, La Seu d'Urgell and Lleida.

AutoRes (☎ 902 02 09 99; www.auto-res.net) Operates buses from Madrid to Extremadura, western Castilla y León (eg Tordesillas, Salamanca and Zamora) and Valencia via eastern Castilla-La Mancha (eg Cuenca).

Continental-Auto (☎ 902 33 04 00; www.continental-auto.es) Runs from Madrid to Burgos, Logroño, Navarra, the Basque Country, Santander, Soría, Alcalá de Henares, Guadalajara, Granada (and most of Andalucía) and Toledo.

La Sepulvedana (☎ 902 22 22 82; www.lasepulvedana.es) Buses to Segovia, parts of Castilla-La Mancha, Extremadura and some parts of Andalucía from Madrid.

Socibus & Secorbus (☎ 902 22 92 92; www.socibus.es) These two companies jointly operate services between Madrid and western Andalucía, including Cádiz, Córdoba, Huelva and Seville.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE Automobile Associations

The **Real Automóvil Club de España** (Map pp114-15; RACE; ☎ 902 40 45 45; www.race.es; Calle de Eloy Gonzalo 32, Madrid) is the national automobile club. In an emergency you can call its road assistance service on ☎ 902 30 05 05. You will be charged for this service and should thus obtain a contact number from your own national insurer before heading to Spain.

Bring Your Own Vehicle

If bringing your own car, remember to have your insurance and other papers in order (see p864).

Driving Licence

All EU member states' driving licences are fully recognised throughout Europe. Those with a non-EU licence are supposed to obtain a 12-month International Driver's Permit (IDP) to accompany their national licence, which your national automobile association can issue. People who have held residency in Spain for one year or more must apply for a Spanish driving licence. If you want to hire a

car or motorcycle you will need to produce your driving licence.

Fuel & Spare Parts

Gasolina (petrol) in Spain is pricey, but generally cheaper than in its major EU neighbours (including France, Germany, Italy and the UK). About 30 companies, including several foreign operators, run petrol stations in Spain, but the two biggest are the home-grown Repsol and Cepsa.

Prices vary between service stations (*gasolineras*). Lead free (*sin plomo*; 95 octane) costs an average €1.08/L. A 98-octane variant costs €1.19/L. Diesel (*gasóleo*) comes in at €1/L. As world oil prices climb, so do the tank prices.

Petrol is about 10% cheaper in Gibraltar than in Spain and 15% cheaper in Andorra. It's about 40% cheaper in Spain's tax-free enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in North Africa.

You can pay with major credit cards at most service stations.

Most vehicle makes can be dealt with by local mechanics, but some of the more popular brands include Seat, Volkswagen, Renault and Fiat.

ROAD DISTANCES (km)

Badajoz	696																	
Barcelona	515	1022																
Bilbao	817	649	620															
Córdoba	525	272	908	795														
Granada	353	438	868	829	166													
A Coruña	1031	772	1118	644	995	1043												
León	755	496	784	359	733	761	334											
Madrid	422	401	621	395	400	434	609	333										
Málaga	482	436	997	939	187	129	1153	877	544									
Oviedo	873	614	902	304	851	885	340	118	451	995								
Pamplona	673	755	437	159	807	841	738	404	407	951	463							
San Sebastián	766	768	529	119	869	903	763	433	469	13	423	92						
Seville	609	217	1046	933	138	256	947	671	538	219	789	945	1007					
Toledo	411	368	692	466	320	397	675	392	71	507	510	478	540	458				
Valencia	166	716	349	633	545	519	961	685	352	648	803	501	594	697	372			
Valladolid	615	414	663	280	578	627	455	134	193	737	252	325	354	589	258	545		
Zaragoza	498	726	296	324	725	759	833	488	325	869	604	175	268	863	396	326	367	
	Alicante	Badajoz	Barcelona	Bilbao	Córdoba	Granada	A Coruña	León	Madrid	Málaga	Oviedo	Pamplona	San Sebastián	Seville	Toledo	Valencia	Valladolid	

Hire

A selection of multinational car rental agencies is listed below.

Autos Abroad (☎ 0870 0667 788 in UK; www.autosabroad.com)

Avis (☎ 902 180854 in Spain; www.avis.com)

Budget (☎ 1-800 472 33 25 in USA; www.budget.com)

Europcar (☎ 91 343 45 12 in Spain; www.europcar.com)

Hertz (☎ 91 749 90 69 in Spain; www.hertz.com)

National/Atesa (☎ 902 100101 in Spain; www.atesa.es)

Pepecar (☎ 807 414243 in Spain; www.pepecar.com)

This low-cost company specialises in cheap rentals of mostly small cars, such as Smarts, Seat Altea and Renault Modus, and some compact eight-seaters. They have outlets in Barcelona, Ibiza, Madrid, Palma de Mallorca, Seville, Valencia and a growing number of other locations. If you book far enough ahead, it can cost you around €15 per day (with 100km free), plus a credit-card handling fee and a €14 cleaning charge.

To rent a car in Spain you have to have a licence, be aged 21 or over and, for the major companies at least, have a credit or debit card. Smaller firms in areas where car hire is particularly common (such as the Balearic Islands) can sometimes live without this requirement. Although those with a non-EU licence should also have an IDP, you will find that national licences from countries like Australia, Canada, NZ and the USA are often accepted.

Insurance

Third-party motor insurance is a minimum requirement in Spain and throughout Europe. Ask your insurer for a European Accident Statement form, which can simplify matters in the event of an accident. A European breakdown assistance policy such as the AA Five Star Service or RAC Eurocover Motoring Assistance is a good investment.

Car-hire companies also provide this minimum insurance but be careful to understand what your liabilities and excess are and what waivers you are entitled to in case of accident or damage to the hire vehicle.

Road Rules

Drive on the right. In built-up areas the speed limit is 50km/h, which increases to 100km/h on major roads and up to 120km/h on *autovías* and *autopistas* (toll-free and tolled dual-lane highways, respectively). Cars towing caravans are restricted to a maximum

speed of 80km/h. The minimum driving age is 18 years old.

Motorcyclists must use headlights at all times and wear a crash helmet if riding a bike of 125cc or more. The minimum age for riding motorbikes and scooters of 80cc and over is 16, for those 50cc and under it's 14. A licence is required.

Spanish truck drivers often have the courtesy to turn on their right indicator to show that the way ahead of them is clear for overtaking (and the left one if it is not and you are attempting this manoeuvre).

Vehicles in traffic circles (roundabouts) have the right of way.

The blood-alcohol limit is 0.05%. Breath tests are becoming more common and if found to be over the limit you can be judged, condemned, fined and deprived of your licence within 24 hours. Fines range up to around €600 for serious offences. Nonresident foreigners will be required to pay up on the spot (at 30% off the full fine). Pleading linguistic ignorance will not help – your traffic cop will produce a list of infringements and fines in as many languages as you like. If you don't pay, or don't have a Spanish resident go guarantor for you, your vehicle will be impounded.

HITCHING

Hitching is never entirely safe in any country in the world and we don't recommend it. Travellers who decide to hitch should understand that they are taking a small but potentially dangerous risk. People who do choose to hitch will be safer if they travel in pairs and let someone know where they are planning to go.

Hitching is illegal on *autopistas* and *autovías*, and difficult on other major highways. Choose a spot where cars can safely stop before highway slipways, or use minor roads. The going can be slow on the latter, as the traffic is often light. Overall, Spain is not a hitchhiker's paradise. It is more difficult still in the south, where drivers tend to be more wary.

LOCAL TRANSPORT

All the major cities have good local transport. Madrid and Barcelona have extensive bus and metro systems and other major cities also benefit from generally efficient public transport.

Bicycle

Few of the big cities offer much in the way of encouragement to cycle. Barcelona is an exception, where cycling lanes have been laid out along main roads and several hire outlets make it possible for visitors to enjoy them. Driver attitudes are not always so enlightened, so beware.

Bus

Cities and provincial capitals all have reasonable bus networks. You can buy single tickets (up to €1.20, depending on the city) on the buses or at tobacconists, but, in the case of cities such as Madrid and Barcelona, you are better off buying combined 10-trip tickets (see Metro, below) that allow the use of a combination of bus and metro, and which work out cheaper per ride. These can be purchased in any metro station.

Regular buses run from about 6am to shortly before midnight. In the big cities a night bus service generally kicks in on a limited number of lines in the wee hours. In Madrid they are known as *búhos* (owls) and in Barcelona more prosaically as *nitbusos* (night buses).

Metro

Madrid has the country's most extensive metro network. Barcelona follows in second place with a reasonable system. Valencia and Bilbao also have limited metros, and Seville is building one. Tickets must be bought in metro

stations (from counters or vending machines). Single tickets cost the same as for buses (ie, up to €1.20). The best value for most visitors wanting to move around the major cities over a few days are the 10-trip tickets, known in Madrid as *Metrobús* (€6.15) and in Barcelona as *T-10* (€6.65). Monthly and season passes are also available.

Taxi

You can usually find taxi ranks at train and bus stations or you can telephone for radio taxis. In larger cities taxi ranks are also scattered about the centre and taxis will stop if you hail them in the street. Look for the green light and/or the *Libre* sign on the passenger side of the windscreens. The bigger cities are well populated with taxis, although finding one when you need to get home late on a Friday or Saturday night in places such as Madrid and Barcelona can be next to impossible. No more than four people are allowed in a taxi.

Flag fall is around €1.20 to €1.55. You then pay around €0.80 to €1 per kilometre depending on the time of day. There are airport and luggage surcharges. A cross-town ride in a major city will cost about €5 to €8, while a taxi between the city centre and airport in either Madrid or Barcelona will cost €18 to €25 with luggage.

Tram

Trams were stripped out of Spanish cities decades ago but they are making a timid comeback

MEMORABLE TRAIN JOURNEYS

The romantically inclined could opt for one of a couple of opulent and slow-moving, old-time rail adventures.

In Andalusia, climb aboard the **El Andalus Expreso** (www.alandalusexpreso.com), which does a rambling circuit from Seville to Córdoba, Granada, Jerez de la Frontera and back, with leisurely city visits. You sleep on the train, but have the option of booking into a hotel in Seville and/or Granada. The trips take place up to three times a month from April to October and cost €3800/5400 for a single/double cabin.

Up north, catch the **Transcantábrico** (www.transcantabrico.feve.es), a journey on a picturesque narrow-gauge rail route from Santiago de Compostela, travelling via O Ferrol, Oviedo, Santander and Bilbao along the coast and then a long inland stretch to finish in León. The trip (€3000/4400 per single/double, departures up to four times a month from April to October) can also be done in reverse and lasts for eight days. The package includes visits to various towns along the way, including the Museo Guggenheim in Bilbao and the Cuevas de Altamira and Santillana del Mar. The food is as pleasurable for the palate as the sights are for the other senses, with some meals on board but most in various locations.

The trains don't travel at night, making sleep easy and providing the opportunity to stay out at night.

in some. Barcelona has a couple of new sub-urban tram services in addition to its tourist Tramvia Blau run to Tibidabo. Valencia has some useful trams to the beach.

TRAIN

Renfe (☎ 902 24 02 02; www.renfe.es) is the national state train system that runs most of the services in Spain. A handful of small private railway lines are noted in the course of this book.

Spain has several types of trains. For short hops, bigger cities such as Madrid, Barcelona, Bilbao, Málaga and Valencia have a local network known as *cercanías*. Long-distance (aka *largo recorrido* or *Grandes Líneas*) trains come in all sorts of different flavours. They range from all-stops *regionales* operating within one region to the high-speed AVE trains that link Madrid with Seville and Tarragona (and, by early 2008, Barcelona). Similar trains used on conventional Spanish tracks (which differs from the standard European gauge) connect Barcelona with Valencia in the Euromed service. A whole host of modern intermediate speed services (Intercity, Talgo, Talgo 200, Alaris, Altaria and Arco) offer an

increasingly speedy and comfortable service around the country.

You'll find *consignas* (left-luggage facilities) at all main train stations. They are usually open from about 6am to midnight and charge from €3 to €4.50 per day per piece of luggage.

Classes & Costs

All long-distance trains have 2nd and 1st classes, known as *turista* and *preferente*, respectively. The latter is about 40% more expensive. Fares vary enormously depending on the service (faster trains cost more) and, in the case of some high-speed services such as the AVE, on the time and day of travel. If you get a return ticket, it is worth checking whether your return journey is by the same kind of train. If you return on a slower train than the outward-bound trip you may be entitled to a modest refund on the return leg. Alternatively, if you return by a faster train you will need to pay more to make your return ticket valid for that train.

Children aged between four and 12 years are entitled to a 40% discount; those aged

under four travel for free. Buying a return ticket gives you a 20% discount on the return trip. Students and people up to 25 years of age with a Euro<26 Card (Carnet Joven in Spain) are entitled to up to 25% off some prices.

On overnight trips within Spain it's worth paying extra for a *litera* (couchette; a sleeping berth in a six- or four-bed compartment). The cost depends on the type of train and length of journey. Only a few trains offer this service now. A more comfortable and expensive way to travel is by *trenhotel*, which offers *turista*

(sitting up or sleeping), *preferente* (sleeping single or double) and *gran clase* (luxury sleeping, single or double) classes. The lines covered are Madrid–La Coruña, Barcelona–Córdoba–Seville, Barcelona–Madrid (and on to Lisbon) and Barcelona–Málaga.

Reservations

Reservations are recommended for long-distance trips and you can make them in train stations, Renfe offices, travel agencies as well as online (this can be a little complicated though).



Health

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BEFORE YOU GO

Prevention is the key to staying healthy while abroad. Some predeparture planning will save trouble later. See your dentist before a long trip, carry a spare pair of contact lenses and glasses, and take your optical prescription with you. Bring medications in their original, clearly labelled, containers. A signed and dated letter from your physician describing your medical conditions and medications, including generic names, is also a good idea. If carrying syringes or needles, be sure to have a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity.

INSURANCE

If you're an EU citizen, a European Health Insurance Card, available from health centres or, in the UK, post offices, covers you for most medical care in public hospitals. It will not cover you for non-emergencies or emergency repatriation home. So even with the card, you will still have to pay for medicine bought from pharmacies, even if prescribed, and perhaps for a few tests and procedures. The card is no good for private medical consultations and treatment in Spain; this includes virtually all dentists, and some of the better clinics and surgeries. Citizens from other countries should find out if there is a reciprocal arrangement for free medical care between their country and Spain. If you do need health

insurance, strongly consider a policy that covers you for ambulances and the worst possible scenario, such as an accident requiring an emergency flight home.

Find out in advance if your insurance plan will make payments directly to providers or reimburse you later for overseas health expenditures; if you have to claim later make sure you keep all documentation. The former option is generally preferable, as it doesn't require you to pay out of your own pocket in a foreign country.

Worldwide travel insurance is available at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services. You can buy, extend and claim online anywhere – even if you're already on the road.

RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

No jabs are necessary for Spain. However, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that all travellers should be covered for diphtheria, tetanus, measles, mumps, rubella and polio, regardless of their destination. Since most vaccines don't produce immunity until at least two weeks after they're given, visit a physician at least six weeks before departure.

INTERNET RESOURCES

International Travel and Health, a WHO publication, is revised annually and is available online at www.who.int/ith. Other useful websites:

Age Concern (www.ageconcern.org.uk) Advice on travel for the elderly.

Fit for Travel (www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk) General travel advice for the lay person.

Marie Stopes International (www.mariestopes.org.uk) Information on women's health and contraception.

MD Travel Health (www.mdtravelhealth.com) Travel health recommendations for every country; updated daily.

IN TRANSIT

DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS (DVT)

Blood clots may form in the legs during plane flights, chiefly because of prolonged immobility. The chief symptom of DVT is swelling or pain of the foot, ankle or calf, usually but not always on just one side. When a blood clot

travels to the lungs, it may cause chest pain and breathing difficulties. Travellers with any of these symptoms should immediately seek medical attention.

To prevent the development of DVT on long flights you should walk about the cabin, contract your leg muscles while sitting, drink plenty of fluids, and avoid alcohol and tobacco.

IN SPAIN AVAILABILITY & COST OF HEALTH CARE

If you need an ambulance, call % 061. For emergency treatment go straight to the *urgencias* (casualty) section of the nearest hospital.

Good health care is readily available, and *farmacias* (pharmacies) offer valuable advice and sell over-the-counter medication. In Spain, a system of *farmacias de guardia* (duty pharmacies) operates so that each district has one open all the time. When a pharmacy is closed, it posts the name of the nearest open one on the door.

Medical costs are lower in Spain than many other European countries, but can still mount quickly if you are uninsured.

TRAVELLER'S DIARRHOEA

If you develop diarrhoea, be sure to drink plenty of fluids, preferably an oral rehydration solution, such as Dioralyte. If diarrhoea is bloody, persists for more than 72 hours or is accompanied by a fever, shaking, chills or severe abdominal pain, you should seek medical attention.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Altitude Sickness

Lack of oxygen at high altitudes (over 2500m) affects most people to some extent. Symptoms of Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS) usually develop during the first 24 hours at altitude but may be delayed up to three weeks. Mild symptoms include headache, lethargy, dizziness, difficulty sleeping and loss of appetite. AMS may become more severe without warning and can be fatal. Severe symptoms include breathlessness, a dry, irritative cough (which may progress to the production of pink, frothy sputum), severe headache, lack of coordination and balance, confusion,

irrational behaviour, vomiting, drowsiness and unconsciousness. There is no hard-and-fast rule as to what is too high: AMS has been fatal at 3000m, although 3500m to 4500m is the usual range.

Treat mild symptoms by resting at the same altitude until recovery, usually for a day or two. Paracetamol or aspirin can be taken for headaches. If symptoms persist or become worse *immediate descent is necessary*; even 500m can help. Drug treatments should never be used to avoid descent or to enable further ascent.

Diamox (acetazolamide) reduces the headache caused by AMS and helps the body acclimatise to the lack of oxygen. It is only available on prescription and those who are allergic to the sulphonamide antibiotics may also be allergic to Diamox.

In the UK, fact sheets are available from the **British Mountaineering Council** (% 0870 010 4878; www.thebmc.co.uk; 177-179 Burton Rd, Manchester, M20 2BB).

Heat Exhaustion & Heatstroke

Heat exhaustion occurs following excessive fluid loss with inadequate replacement of fluids and salt. Symptoms include headache, dizziness and tiredness. Dehydration is happening by the time you feel thirsty – aim to drink sufficient water to produce pale, diluted urine. Replace lost fluids by drinking water and/or fruit juice, and cool the body with cold water and fans. Treat salt loss with salty fluids, such as soup, or add a little more table salt to foods than usual.

Heatstroke is much more serious, resulting in irrational and hyperactive behaviour, and eventually loss of consciousness and death. Rapid cooling by spraying the body with water and fanning is ideal. Emergency fluid and electrolyte replacement by intravenous drip is recommended.

Bites & Stings

Bees and wasps only cause real problems to those with a severe allergy (anaphylaxis). If you have a severe allergy to bee or wasp stings, carry an 'epipen' or similar adrenaline injection.

In forested areas watch out for the hairy reddish-brown caterpillars of the pine processionary moth. They live in silvery nests up in the pine trees and, come spring, they leave the nest to march in long lines (hence the name). Touching the caterpillars' hairs sets off a severely irritating allergic skin reaction.

Some Spanish centipedes have a very nasty but nonfatal sting. The ones to watch out for are those with clearly defined segments, which may be patterned with, for instance, black and yellow stripes.

Jellyfish, with their stinging tentacles, generally occur in large numbers or hardly at all, so it's fairly easy to know when not to go in the sea.

Mosquitoes are found in most parts of Europe. They may not carry malaria, but can cause irritation and infected bites. Use a DEET-based insect repellent.

Sandflies are found around the Mediterranean beaches. They usually cause only a nasty itchy bite but can carry a rare skin disorder called cutaneous leishmaniasis.

Scorpions are found in Spain and their sting can be distressingly painful, but not considered fatal.

The only venomous snake that is even relatively common in Spain is Lataste's viper. It has a triangular-shaped head, is up to 75cm long, and grey with a zigzag pattern. It lives in dry, rocky areas, away from humans. Its bite can be fatal and needs to be treated with a serum, which state clinics in major towns keep in stock. Also to be avoided is the Montpellier snake, which is blue with a white underside and prominent ridges over the eyes. It lives mainly in scrub and sandy areas, but keeps a low profile and is unlikely to be a threat unless trodden on.

Check for ticks if you have been walking where sheep and goats graze: they can cause skin infections and other more serious diseases.

Hypothermia

The weather in Spain's mountains can be extremely changeable at any time of year. Proper

preparation will reduce the risks of getting hypothermia. Even on a hot day the weather can change rapidly; carry waterproof garments and warm layers, and inform others of your route.

Hypothermia starts with shivering, loss of judgment and clumsiness. Unless rewarming occurs, the sufferer deteriorates into apathy, confusion and coma. Prevent further heat loss by seeking shelter, warm dry clothing, hot sweet drinks and shared body warmth.

Water

Tap water is generally safe to drink in Spain. If you are in any doubt, ask *¿Es potable el agua (de grifo)?* (Is the (tap) water drinkable?). Do not drink water from rivers or lakes as it may contain bacteria or viruses that can cause diarrhoea or vomiting.

TRAVELLING WITH CHILDREN

Make sure your children are up to date with routine vaccinations, and discuss possible travel vaccines well before departure as some vaccines are not suitable for children under one year of age.

WOMEN'S HEALTH

Travelling during pregnancy is usually possible but always seek a medical check-up before planning your trip. The most risky times for travel are during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy and after 30 weeks.

SEXUAL HEALTH

Condoms are widely available, but emergency contraception may not be, so take the necessary precautions. When buying condoms, look for a European CE mark, which means they have been rigorously tested. Remember to also keep them in a cool, dry place so that they don't crack and perish.

Language

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Spanish (*español*), or Castilian (*castellano*) as it is more precisely called, is spoken throughout Spain, but there are also three important regional languages: Catalan (*català*), another Romance language with close ties to French, spoken in Catalonia, the Balearic Islands and Valencia; Galician (*galego*), similar enough to Portuguese to be regarded by some as a dialect, spoken in Galicia; and Basque (*euskara*), of obscure, non-Latin origin, spoken in the Basque Country and Navarra.

English isn't as widely spoken as many travellers expect, though you're more likely to find people who speak some English in the main cities and tourist areas. Generally, however, you'll be better received if you try to communicate in Spanish.

For a more comprehensive guide to the Spanish language than we're able to offer here, get a copy of Lonely Planet's *Spanish Phrasebook*. For information on language courses available in Spain, see p844.

PRONUNCIATION

Spanish pronunciation isn't difficult – many Spanish sounds are similar to their English counterparts, and there's a clear and consistent relationship between pronunciation and spelling. If you stick to the following rules you should have very few problems making yourself understood.

Vowels

Unlike English, each of the vowels in Spanish has a uniform pronunciation that doesn't vary. For example, the Spanish *a* has only one pronunciation, similar to the 'u' in 'nut'. Many Spanish words are written with an acute accent (eg *días*) – this normally indicates a stressed syllable and doesn't change the sound of the vowel. Vowels are pronounced clearly even if they are unstressed.

Spanish Pronunciation Guide

a	a	as the 'u' in 'nut'
ai	ai	as in 'aisle'
au	ow	as in 'cow'
e	e	as in 'met'
ei	ey	as in 'they'
i	ee	as in 'keep'
ia	ya	as in 'yard'
ie	ye	as in 'yes'
o	o	as in 'hot'
oy	oy	as in 'boy'
u	oo	as in 'hoof'
	–	silent after <i>q</i> and in <i>gue/gui</i>
ue	we	as in 'wet'
uy	ooy	as the 'oy' in 'boy'
ü	w	as in 'wet'

Semiconsonant

Spanish also has the semiconsonant *y*. When occurring at the end of a word or standing alone (meaning 'and') it's pronounced like the Spanish *i*. As a consonant, it's somewhere between the 'y' in 'yonder' and the 'g' in 'beige', depending on the region you're in.

Consonants

Some Spanish consonants are the same as their English counterparts. The pronunciation of others varies according to which vowel follows and which part of Spain you happen to be in. The Spanish alphabet also contains three consonants that are not found within the English alphabet: *ch*, *ll* and *ñ*. In newer dictionaries the letters *ch* and *ll* are listed under *c* and *l* respectively, but *ñ* is still treated as a separate letter and comes after *n*.

Spanish Pronunciation Guide

b	b	as in 'book' when at the start of a word or preceded by m or n; elsewhere as the 'v' in 'van'
c	k	as in 'cat' when followed by a, o, u or a consonant
	th	as in 'thin' before e and i
ch	ch	as in 'church'
cu	kw	as the 'qu' in 'quite'
d	d	as in 'dog' when word-initial or when preceded by l or n
	th	as in 'then'
	–	not pronounced in some words ending in -ado, eg <i>complicado</i> (complicated) is often pronounced kom-plee-ka-o
f	f	as in 'frame'
g	g	as in 'get' when initial and before a, o and u
	kh	as the 'ch' in the Scottish <i>loch</i> before e or i
h	–	always silent
j	kh	as the 'ch' in the Scottish <i>loch</i>
l	l	as in 'let'
ll	ly	as the 'lli' in 'million'; some people pronounce it like the 'y' in 'yellow'
m	m	as in 'many'
n	n	as in 'nana'
ñ	ny	as the 'ni' in 'onion'
p	p	as in 'pop'
q	k	as in 'kick'
r	r	a rolled 'r' sound; longer when initial or doubled
s	s	as in 'see'
t	t	as in 'top'
v	b	as in 'bus'
vu	vw	as the 'voi' in the French <i>voir</i>
x	ks	as in 'taxi' when between two vowels
	s	as in 'see' when preceding a consonant
z	th	as in 'thin'

WORD STRESS

Stress is indicated by italics in the pronunciation guides included with all the words and phrases in this language guide. In general, words ending in vowels or the letters n or s have stress on the next-to-last syllable, while those with other endings have stress on the last syllable. Thus *vaca* (cow) and *caballos* (horses) both carry stress on

the next-to-last syllable, while *ciudad* (city) and *infeliz* (unhappy) are both stressed on the last syllable.

Written accents indicate a stressed syllable, and will almost always appear in words that don't follow these rules, eg *sótano* (basement) and *porción* (portion).

GENDER & PLURALS

Spanish nouns are marked for gender (masculine or feminine) and adjectives will vary according to the gender of the noun they modify. There are rules to help determine gender – with exceptions, of course! Feminine nouns generally end with -a or with the groups -ción, -sión or -dad. Other endings typically signify a masculine noun. Endings for adjectives also change to agree with the gender of the noun they modify (masculine/feminine -o/-a).

Where necessary, both forms are given for the words and phrases below, separated by a slash and with the masculine form first, eg *perdido/a* (lost).

If a noun or adjective ends in a vowel, the plural is formed by adding s to the end. If it ends in a consonant, the plural is formed by adding es to the end.

ACCOMMODATION

I'm looking for ...	<i>Estoy buscando ...</i>	e-stoy-boos-kar-do ...
Where is ...?	<i>¿Dónde hay ...?</i>	don-de ai ...
a hotel	<i>un hotel</i>	oon o-tel
a boarding house	<i>una pensión/ un hospedaje</i>	oo-na pen-syon/ oon os-pe-da-khe
a youth hostel	<i>un albergue juvenil</i>	oon al-berge khoo-ve-neel
I'd like a ... room.	<i>Quisiera una habitación ...</i>	kee-syera oo-na a-bee-ta-thyon ...
double	<i>doble</i>	do-ble
single	<i>individual</i>	een-dee-vee-dwal
twin	<i>con dos camas</i>	kon dos ka-mas

How much is it per ...?	<i>¿Cuánto cuesta por ...?</i>	kwan-to kwes-ta por ...
night	<i>noche</i>	no-che
person	<i>persona</i>	per-so-na
week	<i>semana</i>	se-ma-na

May I see the room?

<i>¿Puedo ver la habitación?</i>	pwe-do ver la a-bee-ta-thyon
----------------------------------	------------------------------

Does it include breakfast?

<i>¿Incluye el desayuno?</i>	een-kloo-ye el de-sa-yoo-no
------------------------------	-----------------------------

I don't like it.

<i>No me gusta.</i>	no me goos-ta
---------------------	---------------

It's fine. I'll take it.

<i>Vale. La cojo.</i>	vale la ko-kho
-----------------------	----------------

I'm leaving now.

<i>Me voy ahora.</i>	me voya-ora
----------------------	-------------

full board	<i>penión completa</i>	pen-syon kom-ple-ta
private/shared bathroom	<i>baño privado/ compartido</i>	ba-nyo pree-va-dol kom-par-tee-do
too expensive	<i>demasiado caro</i>	de-ma-sya-do ka-ro
cheaper	<i>más económico</i>	mas e-ko-no-mee-ko
discount	<i>descuento</i>	des-kwen-to

MAKING A RESERVATION

(for phone or written requests)

To ...	<i>A ...</i>
From ...	<i>De ...</i>
Date	<i>Fecha</i>
I'd like to book ...	<i>Quisiera reservar ... (see Accommodation on p878 for bed/room options)</i>
in the name of ...	<i>en nombre de ...</i>
for the nights of ...	<i>para las noches del ...</i>
credit card ...	<i>tarjeta de crédito ...</i>
number	<i>número</i>
expiry date	<i>fecha de caducidad</i>
Please confirm ...	<i>Puede confirmar ...</i>
availability	<i>la disponibilidad</i>
price	<i>el precio</i>

CONVERSATION & ESSENTIALS

When talking to people familiar to you or younger than you, use the informal form of 'you', *tú*, rather than the polite form *Usted*. Wait for your Spanish friends to suggest you use the *tú* form. The polite form is used in all cases in this guide; where options are given, the form is indicated by the abbreviations 'pol' and 'inf'.

Hello.	<i>Hola.</i>	o-la
Good morning.	<i>Buenos días.</i>	bwe-nos dee-as
Good afternoon.	<i>Buenas tardes.</i>	bwe-nas tar-des
Good evening/ night.	<i>Buenas noches.</i>	bwe-nas no-ches
Goodbye.	<i>Adiós.</i>	a-dyos
Bye/See you soon.	<i>Hasta luego.</i>	as-ta lwe-go
Yes.	<i>Sí.</i>	see
No.	<i>No.</i>	no

Please.	<i>Por favor.</i>	por fa-vor
Thank you.	<i>Gracias.</i>	gra-thyas
Many thanks.	<i>Muchas gracias.</i>	moo-chas gra-thyas
You're welcome.	<i>De nada.</i>	de na-da
Pardon me.	<i>Perdon/ (getting attention)</i>	per-don/ dees-kool-pe-me
Sorry.	<i>Discúlpeme. (when apologising)</i>	lo see-en-to
Excuse me.	<i>Permiso. (when asking to get past someone)</i>	per-mee-so

How are things?

<i>¿Qué tal?</i>	ke tal
------------------	--------

What's your name?

<i>¿Cómo se llama Usted?</i>	ko-mo se lya-ma oo-ste (pol)
<i>¿Cómo te llamas?</i>	ko-mo te lya-mas (inf)

My name is ...

<i>Me llamo ...</i>	me lya-mo ...
---------------------	---------------

It's a pleasure to meet you.

<i>Encantado/a.</i>	en-kan-ta-do/a
---------------------	----------------

Where are you from?

<i>¿De dónde es/eres?</i>	de don-de es/eres (pol/inf)
---------------------------	-----------------------------

I'm from ...

<i>Soy de ...</i>	soy de ...
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Where are you staying?

<i>¿Dónde está alojado/a?</i>	don-de es-ta a-lo-kha-do/da (pol)
<i>¿Dónde estás alojado/a?</i>	don-de es-tas a-lo-kha-do/da (inf)

May I take a photo?

<i>¿Puedo hacer una foto?</i>	pwe-do a-ther oo-na fo-to
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DIRECTIONS

How do I get to ...?

<i>¿Cómo puedo llegar a ...?</i>	ko-mo pwe-do lye-gara ...
----------------------------------	---------------------------

Is it far?

<i>¿Está lejos?</i>	es-ta le-khos
---------------------	---------------

Go straight ahead.

<i>Siga/Vaya derecho.</i>	see-gal/va-ya de-re-cho
---------------------------	-------------------------

Turn left.

<i>Gire a la izquierda.</i>	kheere-a la eeth-kyer-da
-----------------------------	--------------------------

Turn right.

<i>Gire a la derecha.</i>	kheere-a la de-re-cha
---------------------------	-----------------------

SIGNS

Abierto	Open
Cerrado	Closed
Comisaría	Police Station
Entrada	Entrance
Prohibido	Prohibited
Prohibido Fumar	No Smoking
Salida	Exit
Servicios/Aseos	Toilets
Hombres	Men
Mujeres	Women

Can you show me (on the map)?

¿Me lo podría indicar (en el mapa)? me lo po-dree a een-dee-kar (en el mapa)

here	<i>aquí</i>	a-kee
there	<i>allí</i>	a-lyee
avenue	<i>avenida</i>	a-ve-nee-da
street	<i>calle/paseo</i>	ka-lye/pa-seo
traffic lights	<i>semáforos</i>	se-ma-fó-rós
north	<i>norte</i>	nor-te
south	<i>sur</i>	soor
east	<i>este</i>	es-te
west	<i>oeste</i>	o-este

EMERGENCIAS

Help! *¿Socorro!* so-ko-ro
Fire! *¿Incendio!* een-then-dyo
Go away! *¿Vete! ¿Fuera!* ve-tel/fi-ve-ra

Call ...!
¿Llame a ...! lya-me a

an ambulance
una ambulancia oo-na am-boo-lan-thya
a doctor
un médico oon me-dee-ko
the police
la policía la po-lee-thee-a

It's an emergency.
Es una emergencia.
 es oo-na e-mer-khen-thya

Could you help me, please?
¿Me puede ayudar, por favor?
 me pwe-de a-yoo-dar por fa-voor

I'm lost.
Estoy perdido/a.
 es-toy per-dee-do/da
Where are the toilets?
¿Dónde están los baños?
 don-de es-tan los ba-nyos

HEALTH

I'm sick.
Estoy enfermo/a. es-toy en-fer-mo/ma
I need a doctor.
Necesito un médico (que habla inglés). ne-the-see-to oon me-dee-ko (ke a-bla een-gles)
Where's the hospital?
¿Dónde está el hospital? don-de es-ta el os-pee-tal
I'm pregnant.
Estoy embarazada. es-toy em-ba-ra-tha-da

I've been vaccinated.
Estoy vacunado/a. es-toy va-koo-na-do/da

I'm allergic to ...
Soy alérgico/a a ... soy a-ler-khee-ko/ka a ...
antibiotics
los antibióticos los an-tee-byo-tee-kos
penicillin
la penicilina la pe-nee-thee-lee-na
nuts
las nueces las nwe-thes
peanuts
los cacahuetes los ka-ka-we-tes

I'm ...
Soy ... soy ...
asthmatic
asmático/a as-ma-tee-ko/ka
diabetic
diabético/a dya-be-tee-ko/ka
epileptic
epiléptico/a e-pee-lep-tee-ko/ka

I have ...
Tengo ... ten-go ...
a cough
tos tos
diarrhea
diarrea dee-a-re-a
a headache
un dolor de cabeza oon do-lor de ka-be-tha
nausea
náusea now-se-a

LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES

Do you speak (English)?
¿Habla/Hablas (inglés)? a-bla/a-blas (een-gles) (pol/inf)

Does anyone here speak English?
¿Hay alguien que hable inglés? ai al-gyen-ke a-ble een-gles

I (don't) understand.
Yo (no) entiendo. yo (no) en-tyen-do

How do you say ...?
¿Cómo se dice ...? ko-mo se dee-the ...

What does ...mean?
¿Qué quiere decir ...? ke kye-re de-theer ...

Could you please ...?
¿Puede ... por favor? pwe-de ... por fa-voor

repeat that
repetirlo re-pe-tee-ro
speak more slowly
hablar más despacio a-blar mas des-pa-thyo
write it down
escribirlo es-kree-beer-lo

NUMBERS

0	<i>zero</i>	the-ro
1	<i>uno</i>	oo-no
2	<i>dos</i>	dos
3	<i>tres</i>	tres
4	<i>cuatro</i>	kwa-tro
5	<i>cinco</i>	theen-ko
6	<i>seis</i>	seys
7	<i>siete</i>	sye-te
8	<i>ocho</i>	o-cho
9	<i>nueve</i>	nwe-be
10	<i>diez</i>	dyeth
11	<i>once</i>	on-the
12	<i>doce</i>	do-the
13	<i>trece</i>	tre-the
14	<i>catorce</i>	ka-tor-the
15	<i>quince</i>	keen-the
16	<i>dieciséis</i>	dye-thee-seys
17	<i>diecisiete</i>	dye-thee-sye-te
18	<i>dieciocho</i>	dye-thee-o-cho
19	<i>diecinueve</i>	dye-thee-nwe-be
20	<i>veinte</i>	veyn-te
21	<i>veintiuno</i>	veyn-tyoo-no
30	<i>treinta</i>	treyn-ta
31	<i>treinta y uno</i>	treyn-tai oo-no
40	<i>cuarenta</i>	kwa-ren-ta
50	<i> cincuenta</i>	theen-kwen-ta
60	<i>sesenta</i>	se-sen-ta
70	<i>setenta</i>	se-ten-ta
80	<i>ochenta</i>	o-chen-ta
90	<i>noventa</i>	no-ven-ta
100	<i>cien</i>	thyen
101	<i>ciento uno</i>	thyen-to oo-no
200	<i>doscientos</i>	dos-tyen-tos
500	<i>quinientos</i>	keen-yen-tos
1000	<i>mil</i>	meel
5000	<i>cinco mil</i>	theen-ko meel

SHOPPING & SERVICES

I'd like to buy ...
Quisiera comprar ... kee-sye-ra kom-prar ...

I'm just looking.
Solo estoy mirando. so-lo es-toymee-ran-do

May I look at it?
¿Puedo mirar (lo/la)? pwe-do mee-rar (lo/la)

How much is it?
¿Cuánto cuesta? kwan-to kwesta

That's too expensive for me.
Es demasiado caro para mí. es de-ma-sya-do ka-ro pa-ra mee

Could you lower the price?
¿Podría bajar un poco el precio? po-dree-a ba-khar-oon po-ko el pre-thyo

I don't like it.
No me gusta. no me goos-ta

I'll take it.
Lo llevo. lo lye-vo

Do you accept ...?
¿Aceptan ...? a-thep-tan ...
credit cards
tarjetas de crédito tar-khe-tas de kre-dee-to
travellers cheques
cheques de viajero che-kes de vya-khe-ro

less *menos* me-nos
more *más* mas
large *grande* gran-de
small *pequeño/a* pe-ke-nyo/nya

I'm looking for the ...
Estoy buscando ... es-toy boos-kan-do ...
ATM
el cajero automático el ka-khe-ro ow-to-ma-tee-ko
bank
el banco el ban-ko
bookstore
la librería la lee-bre-ree-a
chemist/pharmacy
la farmacia la far-ma-thya
embassy
la embajada la em-ba-kha-da
laundry
la lavandería la la-van-de-ree-a
market
el mercado el mer-ka-do
post office
correos ko-re-os
supermarket
el supermercado el soo-per-mer-ka-do
tourist office
la oficina de turismo la o-fee-thee-na de too-raes-mo

What time does it open/close?
¿A qué hora abre/cierra?
 a-ke ora a-bre/they-ra
I want to change some money/travellers cheques.
Quiero cambiar dinero/cheques de viajero.
 kye-ro kam-byar-dee-ne-ro/che-kes de vya-khe-ro
What is the exchange rate?
¿Cuál es el tipo de cambio?
 kwal es el tee-po de kam-byo
I want to call ...
Quiero llamar a ...
 kye-ro lya-ma-a ...

airmail *correo aéreo* ko-re-o a-e-re-o
letter *carta* karta

registered mail stamps	correo certificado sellos	ko-re-o ther-tee-fee-ka-do sa'lyos
------------------------	---------------------------	------------------------------------

TIME & DATES

What time is it?

¿Qué hora es? ke o-ra es

It's one o'clock.

Es la una. es la oo-na

It's seven o'clock.

Son las siete. son las sye-te

midnight

medianoche me-dya-no-che

noon

mediodía me-dyo-dee-a

half past two

dos y media dos ee me-dya

today	hoy	oy
tonight	esta noche	esta no-che
tomorrow	mañana	ma-nyaa-na
yesterday	ayer	a-yer

Monday	lunes	loo-nes
Tuesday	martes	mar-tes
Wednesday	miércoles	myer-ko-les
Thursday	jueves	khwe-bes
Friday	viernes	vyer-nes
Saturday	sábado	sa-ba-do
Sunday	domingo	do-meer-go

January	enero	e-ne-ro
February	febrero	fe-bre-ro
March	marzo	mar-tho
April	abril	a-breel
May	mayo	ma-yo
June	junio	khoo-nyo
July	julio	khoo-lyo
August	agosto	a-gos-to
September	septiembre	sep-tyem-bre
October	octubre	ok-too-bre
November	noviembre	no-vyem-bre
December	diciembre	dee-thyem-bre

TRANSPORT

Public Transport

What time does ... leave/arrive?

¿A qué hora sale/llega ...? a ke o-ra sa-le/lye-ga ...?

the bus	el ow-to-boos
the plane	el a-vyon
the ship	el barko
the train	el tren

airport	el aeropuerto	el a-e-ro-pwer-to
bus station	la estación de autobuses	la es-ta-tyon de ow-to-boos-es
bus stop	la parada de autobuses	la pa-ra-da de ow-to-boos-es
luggage check room	consigna	kon-seeg-na
taxi rank	la parada de taxi	la pa-ra-da de tak-see
ticket office	la taquilla	la ta-keelya
train station	la estación de trenes	la es-ta-tyon de tre-nes

The ... is delayed.

El/La ... está retrasado/a. el/la ... es-ta re-tra-sa-do/da

I'd like a ticket to ...

Quiero un billete a ... kyero oon bee-lye-te a ...

Is this taxi free?

¿Está libre este taxi? e-sta lee-bre este tak-see

What's the fare to ...?

¿Cuánto cuesta hasta ...? kwan-to kwes-ta a-sta ...

Please put the meter on.

Por favor, ponga el taxímetro. por fa-vor pon-ga el tak-see-me-tro

a ... ticket	un billete de ...	oon bee-lye-te de ...
one-way	ida	ee-da
return	ida y vuelta	ee-da ee vwe'ta
1st-class	primera clase	pree-me-ra kla-se
2nd-class	segunda clase	se-goon-da kla-se
student	estudiante	es-too-dyan-te

Private Transport

I'd like to hire a/an ...

Quisiera alquilar ... kee-sye-ra al-kee-lar ...

4WD	un todoterreno	oon to-do-te-re-no
car	un coche	oon ko-che
motorbike	una moto	oo-na mo-to
bicycle	una bicicleta	oo-na bee-thee kle-ta

Is this the road to ...?

¿Se va a ... por esta carretera? se va a ... por esta ka-re-tera

Where's a petrol station?

¿Dónde hay una gasolinera? don-de ai oo-na ga-so-lee-ne-ra

Please fill it up.

Lleno, por favor. lye-no por fa-vor

ROAD SIGNS

Acceso	Entrance
Aparcamiento	Parking
Ceda el Paso	Give Way
Despacio	Slow
Desvío	Detour
Dirección Única	One Way
Modere Su Velocidad	Slow Down
No Adelantar	No Overtaking
Peaje	Toll
Peligro	Danger
Prohibido Aparcar	No Parking
Prohibido el Paso	No Entry
Salida	Exit (Freeway/Motorway)

I'd like (20) litres.

Quiero (veinte) litros. kyero (veyn-te) lee-tros

diesel	gasóleo	ga-so-lyo
petrol	gasolina	ga-so-lee-na

(How long) Can I park here?

¿(Por cuánto tiempo) Puedo aparcar aquí? (por kwan-to tyem-po) pwe-do a-par-ka-a-kee

Where do I pay?

¿Dónde se paga? don-de se pa-ga

I need a mechanic.

Necesito un mecánico. ne-the-see-to oon me-ka-nee-ko

The car has broken down at ...

El coche se ha averiado en ... el ko-che se a-a-ve-rya-do en ...



Also available from Lonely Planet:
Spanish Phrasebook

The motorbike won't start.

No arranca la moto. no a-ran-ka la mo-to

I have a flat tyre.

Tengo un pinchazo. ten-go oon peen-cha-to

I've run out of petrol.

Me he quedado sin gasolina. me e-ke-da-do seen ga-so-lee-na

I've had an accident.

He tenido un accidente. e-te-nee-do oon ak-thee-der-te

TRAVEL WITH CHILDREN

I need ...

Necesito ... ne-the-see-to ...

Do you have ...?

¿Hay ...? ai ...

a car baby seat

un asiento de seguridad para bebés oon a-tyen-to de se-goo-ree-da para be-bés

a child-minding service

un servicio de cuidado de niños oon ser-vee-tyo de kwee-da-do de nee-nyos

a children's menu

un menú infantil oon me-noo-een-fan-teel

a crèche

una guardería oon-na gwar-de-ree-a

(disposable) nappies/diapers

pañales (de usar y tirar) pa-nyales (de oo-sar-ee tee-ra)

an (English-speaking) babysitter

un canguro (de habla inglesa) oon kan-go-ro (de a-bla een-gle-sa)

formula (milk)

leche en polvo le-che en pol-vo

a highchair

una trona oo-na tro-na

a potty

un orinal de niños oon o-ree-nal de nee-nyos

a stroller

un cochecito oon ko-che-thee-to

Do you mind if I breast-feed here?

¿Le molesta que dé de pecho aquí? le mo-les-ta ke de de pe-cho a-kee

Are children allowed?

¿Se admiten niños? se ad-mee-ten nee-nyos

Glossary

Unless otherwise indicated, these terms are in Castilian Spanish.

abierto – open
abogado de oficio – duty solicitor
absenta – absinthe
acequia – Islamic-era canals
aficionado – enthusiast
agroturismo – rural tourism, see also *turismo rural*
ajuntament – Catalan for *ayuntamiento*
alameda – tree-lined avenue
albergue – refuge
albergue juvenil – youth hostel
alcalde – mayor
alcázar – Muslim-era fortress
alfiz – rectangular frame about the top of an arch in Islamic architecture
aljibe – cistern
altar mayor – high altar
alud – avalanche
años de hambre – literally ‘years of hunger’; a period in the late 1940s when Spain was hit by a UN-sponsored trade boycott
apartado de correos – post-office box
área de acampada – see *zona de acampada*
armadura – wooden *Mudejar* ceiling
arroyo – stream
artesonado – wooden *Mudejar* ceiling with interlaced beams leaving a pattern of spaces for decoration
auriga – chariot racer
auto-da-fé – elaborate execution ceremony staged by the Inquisition
autonomía – autonomous community or region: Spain’s 50 provincias are grouped into 17 of these
autopista – tollway
autovía – toll-free highway
AVE – Tren de Alta Velocidad Española; high-speed train
ayuntamiento – city or town hall
azulejo – glazed tile

bailaor – male flamenco dancer
bailaora – female flamenco dancer
baile – dance in a flamenco context
bakalao – ear-splitting Spanish techno music
balcón – balcony
balneario – spa
baño completo – full bathroom with toilet, shower and/or bath and washbasin
barranco – dry riverbed
barrio – district/quarter (of a town or city)

bata de cola – frilly flamenco dress
bateas – platforms where mussels, oysters and scallops are cultivated
batipueras – wooden half-doors
biblioteca – library
bici todo terreno (BTT) – mountain bike
bodega – cellar (especially wine cellar); also a winery or a traditional wine bar likely to serve wine from the barrel
bomberos – fire brigade
bota – sherry cask or animal-skin wine vessel
botijo – jug, usually earthenware
buceo – snorkelling; also used to mean diving; see *submarinismo*
búhos – night-bus routes
butaca – seat
buzón – letter box

cabrito – kid
cajero automático – automated teller machine (ATM)
cala – cove
calle – street
callejón – lane
cama – bed
cambio – change; also currency exchange
campings – officially graded camping grounds
caña – small glass of beer
canguro – babysitter
cante jondo – literally ‘deep song’; song of the *gitanos*
capea – amateur bullfight
capilla – chapel
capilla mayor – chapel containing the high altar of a church
carmen – walled villa with gardens, in Granada
carnaval – traditional festive period that precedes the start of Lent; carnival
carretera – highway
carta – menu
casa de huéspedes – guesthouse; see also *hospedaje*
casa de labranza – *casa rural* in Cantabria
casa de pagès – *casa rural* in Catalonia
casa rural – village or country house or farmstead with rooms to let
casco – literally ‘helmet’; often used to refer to the old part of a city; more correctly, *casco antiguo/histórico/viejo*
castellano – Castilian; used in preference to *español* to describe the national language
castellers – Catalan human-castle builders
Castile – Castilla (the province)
castillo – castle

castizo – literally ‘pure’; refers to people and things distinctly from Madrid
castro – Celtic fortified village
català – Catalan language; a native of Catalonia
catedral – cathedral
caudillo – Franco’s title; roughly equivalent to the German Führer
caza – hunting
centro de salud – health centre
cercanías – local train network
cerrado – closed
certificado – certified mail
cervecería – beer bar
chato – small glass
churrigueresque – ornate style of baroque architecture named after the brothers Alberto and José Churriguera
cigarrales – country estates
ciudad – city
claustró – cloister
CNIG – Centro Nacional de Información Geográfica; producers of good-quality maps
cofradía – see *hermandad*
colegiata – collegiate church
coll – Catalan for *collado*
collado – mountain pass
comarca – district; grouping of *municipios*
comedor – dining room
comisaría – national police station
completo – full
comunidad – fixed charge for maintenance of rental accommodation (sometimes included in rent); community
comunidad autónoma – see *autonomía*
condones – condoms
conquistador – conqueror
consigna – left-luggage office or lockers
converso – Jew who converted to Christianity in medieval Spain
copas – drinks; literally ‘glasses’
cordillera – mountain range
coro – choir; part of a church, usually in the middle
correos – post office
corrida de toros – bullfight
cortado – short black coffee with a little milk
Cortes – national parliament
costa – coast
coto – woodland and scrub
cruceiro – standing crucifix found at many crossroads in Galicia
cuenta – bill, cheque
cuesta – lane, usually on a hill
custodia – monsternace

dehesa – pastureland
DELE – Diploma de Español como Lengua Extranjera; language qualification recognised by the Spanish government

día del espectador – cut-price ticket day at cinemas; literally ‘viewer’s day’
diapositiva – slide film
dolmen – prehistoric megalithic tomb
ducha – shower
duende – spirit

embalse – reservoir
embarcadero – pier or landing stage
encierro – running of bulls Pamplona-style; also happens in many other places around Spain
entrada – entrance
ermita – hermitage or chapel
iglesia – Catalan for *iglesia*
estació – Catalan for *estación*
estación – station
estación de autobuses – bus station
estación de esquí – ski station or resort
estación de ferrocarril – train station
estación marítima – ferry terminal
estanco – tobacconist shop
estanque – pond
estany – lake
Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) – the name stands for Basque Homeland and Freedom
extremeño – Extremaduran; a native of Extremadura

fallas – huge sculptures of papier-mâché (or nowadays more often polystyrene) on wood used in Las Fallas festival of Valencia
farmacia – pharmacy
faro – lighthouse
feria – fair; can refer to trade fairs as well as to city, town or village fairs that are basically several days of merrymaking; can also mean a bullfight or festival stretching over days or weeks
ferrocarril – railway
FEVE – Ferrocarriles de Via Estrecha; a national train company
fiesta – festival, public holiday or party
fin de semana – weekend
flamenco – flamingo or Flemish; also means flamenco music and dance
frontón – walled court where *pelota vasca* is played
funicular aéreo – cable car; also called *teleférico*
fútbol – football (soccer)

gaditano – person from Cádiz
gaita – Galician version of the bagpipes
gallego – Galician; a native of Galicia
galería – Galician glassed-in balcony
garum – a spicy, vitamin-rich sauce made from fish entrails throughout the Roman Empire, used as a seasoning or tonic
gasolina – petrol
gatos – literally ‘cats’; also a colloquial name for *madriñeños*

gitanos – the Roma people (formerly known as Gypsies)
glorieta – big roundabout/traffic circle
Gran Vía – main thoroughfare
GRs – (senderos de) Gran Recorrido; long-distance hiking paths
guardia civil – military police
gusanitos – corn puffs sold at *kioscos*

habitaciones libres – literally 'rooms available'
hermandad – brotherhood (including men and women), in particular one that takes part in religious processions
hórreo – Galician or Asturian grain store
hospedaje – guesthouse
hostal – cheap hotel
hostal-residencia – *hostal* without any kind of restaurant
huerta – market garden; orchard
humedal – wetland

iglesia – church
infanta/infante – princess/prince
interiores – room without a street view
IVA – *impuesto sobre el valor añadido*, or value-added tax

jai-alai – Basque name for *pelota vasca*
jardines – gardens
jondura – depth
jondo – short for *cante jondo*; early form of flamenco
judería – Jewish *barrio* in medieval Spain

kiosco – kiosk; newspaper stand

la gente guapa – literally 'the beautiful people'
lavabo – washbasin
lavandería – laundrette
levante – easterly
librería – bookshop
lidia – the art of bullfighting
lista de correos – poste restante
litera – couchette or sleeping carriage
llegada – arrival
locutorio – private telephone centre
lugares colombinos – Columbus sites
luz – light; also a common name for household electricity

macarras – Madrid's rough but (usually) likable lads
madrileño/a – a person from Madrid
madrugada – the 'early hours', from around 3am to dawn
manchego – La Mancha; a person from La Mancha
marcha – action, life, 'the scene'
marismas – wetlands
marisquería – seafood eatery
martinete – early form of flamenco song
más tasas – plus tax
medina – Arabic word for town or city

mercadillo – flea market
mercado – market
mercat – Catalan for *mercado*
meseta – the high tableland of central Spain
mihrab – prayer niche in a mosque indicating the direction of Mecca
mirador – lookout point
Modernisme – literally 'modernism'; the architectural and artistic style, influenced by Art Nouveau and sometimes known as Catalan modernism, whose leading practitioner was Antoni Gaudí
Modernista – an exponent of *modernisme*
pinsapar – popular Cuban-based rum concoction
monasterio – monastery
morería – former Islamic quarter in a town
morisco – a Muslim who converted (often only superficially) to Christianity in medieval Spain
moro – 'Moor' or Muslim (usually in a medieval context)
movida – similar to *marcha*; a *zona de movida* is an area of a town where lively bars and discos are clustered
Mozarab – Christian living under Muslim rule in early medieval Spain
mozarabic – style of architecture developed by Mozarabs, adopting elements of classic Islamic construction to Christian architecture
Mudéjar – Muslims who remained behind in territory reconquered by Christians; also refers to a decorative style of architecture using elements of Islamic building style applied to buildings constructed in Christian Spain
muelle – wharf or pier
municipio – municipality, Spain's basic local administrative unit
muralla – city wall
murgas – costumed groups
museo – museum
museu – Catalan for *museo*
muwallad – descendant of Christians who converted to Islam in medieval Spain

nitbusos – Catalan for *búhos*
novilleras – novice bullfights
número uno – best, literally number one

objetos perdidos – lost-and-found office
oficina de turismo – tourist office; also *oficina de información turística*

Páginas Amarillas – phone directory; the Yellow Pages
palloza – traditional circular, thatch-roofed house
Pantocrator – Christ the All-Ruler or Christ in Majesty, a central emblem of Romanesque art
parador – luxurious state-owned hotels, many of them in historic buildings
parque nacional – national park; strictly controlled protected area

parque natural – natural park; a protected environmental area
paseo – promenade or boulevard; to stroll
paso – mountain pass
pasos – figures carried in *Semana Santa* parades
pelota vasca – Basque form of handball, also known simply as *pelota*, or *jai-alai* in Basque
peña – a club, usually of flamenco aficionados or Real Madrid or Barcelona football fans; sometimes a dining club
pensión – small private hotel
pinchadiscos – DJs
pinchos – snacks
pinsapar – woodland of the rare and beautiful Spanish fir
pintxos – Basque for *tapas*
piscina – swimming pool
plaza – Catalan for *plaza*
Plateresque – early phase of Renaissance architecture noted for its intricately decorated façades
platja – Catalan for *playa*
playa – beach
plaza – square
plaza de toros – bullring
poniente – westerly
porrón – jug with a long, thin spout through which you (try to) pour wine into your mouth
port – Catalan for *puerto*
PP – Partido Popular (People's Party)
PRs – (*senderos de*) *Pequeño Recorrido*; short distance hiking paths
presa – dam
preservativos – condoms
prohibido – prohibited
pronunciamiento – pronouncement of military rebellion
provincia – province; Spain is divided into 50 of them
PSOE – Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Socialist Workers Party)
pueblo – village
punte – bridge; also means the extra day or two off that many people take when a holiday falls close to a weekend
puerta – gate or door
puerto – port or mountain pass; see also *port*
punta – point or promontory

RACE – Real Automóvil Club de España
rambla – avenue or riverbed
rastro – flea market; car-boot sale
REAJ – Red Española de Albergues Juveniles, which is the Spanish HI youth hostel network
real – royal
Reconquista – the Christian reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula from the Muslims (8th to 15th centuries)
refugi – Catalan for *refugio*
refugio – mountain shelter, hut or refuge
refugios vivac – stone shelters with boards to sleep on

reja – grille, especially a wrought-iron one dividing a chapel from the rest of a church
Renfe – Red Nacional de los Ferrocarriles Españoles; the national rail network
rederos – decoration behind an altar
reservas nacional de caza – national hunting reserves, where hunting is permitted but controlled
retablo – altarpiece
Reyes Católicos – Catholic monarchs; Isabel and Fernando
ría – estuary
río – river
riu – Catalan for *rio*
rodalies – Catalan for *cercanías*
romería – festive pilgrimage or procession
ronda – ring road

sacristía – sacristy; the part of a church in which vestments, sacred objects and other valuables are kept
sagrario – sanctuary
sala capitular – chapter house
salida – exit or departure
salinas – salt-extraction lagoons
santuario – shrine or sanctuary
según mercado – meaning 'according to market price'
Semana Santa – Holy Week, the week leading up to Easter Sunday
Sephardic Jews – Jews of Spanish origin
servicios – toilets
seu – cathedral (Catalan)
sevillana – Andalusian folk dance
SGE – Servicio Geográfico del Ejército (Army Geographic Service); producers of good-quality maps
sida – AIDS
sidra – cider
sidrería – cider bar
sierra – mountain range
s/m – on menus, an abbreviation for *según mercado*
s/n – sin número (without number), sometimes seen in addresses
submarinismo – scuba diving
supermercado – supermarket

tablaó – tourist-oriented flamenco performances
taifa – small Muslim kingdom in medieval Spain
tajines – earthenware dishes with pointed lids
tapeo – *tapas-bar* crawl
taquilla – ticket window
taracea – marquetry
tarjeta de crédito – credit card
tarjeta de residencia – residence card
tarjeta telefónica – phonenumber
tasca – *tapas bar*
techumbre – roof; specifically a common type of *armadura*
teleférico – cable car; also called *funicular aereo*
temporada alta/media/baja – high/mid/low season

terrazza – terrace; pavement café

terrazas de verano – open-air late-night bars

tertulia – informal discussion group or other regular social gathering

tetería – teahouse, usually in Middle Eastern style, with low seats around low tables

tienda – shop or tent

tocaor – male flamenco guitarist

tocaora – female flamenco guitarist

topoguías – detailed Spanish walking guides

toque – guitar-playing

toreros – bullfighters

torno – revolving counter in a convent by which nuns can sell cakes, sweets and other products to the public without being seen

torre – tower

transept – the two wings of a cruciform church at right angles to the nave

trascoro – screen behind the *coro*

trenet – Catalan for little train

trono – literally ‘throne’; also the platform on which an image is carried during a religious procession

tunas – groups of university students dressed up in medieval garb and busking towards the end of the academic year

turismo – means both tourism and saloon car; el turismo can also mean ‘tourist office’

turismo rural – rural tourism; usually refers to accommodation in a *casa rural* and associated activities, such as walking and horse riding

tympanum – semicircular or triangular space above the lintel of the main entrance to a church or other public building

urbanització – Catalan for *urbanización*

urbanización – suburban housing development

urgencia – emergency

vall – Catalan for *valle*

valle – valley

venta de localidades – ticket office

villa – small town

VO – abbreviation of *versión original*; a foreign-language film subtitled in Spanish

zarzuela – Spanish mix of theatre, music and dance

zona de acampada – country camp site with no facilities, no supervision and no charge; also called *área de acampada*

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