

Spain

HIGHLIGHTS

- **La Sagrada Familia** Fanciful yet packed with serious symbolism, Gaudí's masterpiece in Barcelona is one of the country's most interesting creations (p1047)
- **Seville** Soak up orange blossom scents and surrender to the party atmosphere (p1061)
- **Segovia** Amble under the aqueduct and around the Alcázar (p1038)
- **Best Journey** Follow the pilgrims along the Camino de Santiago (p1082)
- **Off-the-beaten track** Just outside lovely San Sebastián, get inspired at the Chillida-Leku (p1079), an outdoor sculpture garden by Eduardo Chillida

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 505,000 sq km
- **ATMs** ATMs are widespread, and a variety of international cards are accepted
- **Budget** At least €50 per day
- **Capital** Madrid
- **Country code** ☎ 34
- **Famous for** sunshine, late nights, bull-fighting, *gaspacho* (cold tomato soup), *Don Quixote*, Pedro Almodóvar films
- **Head of State** King Juan Carlos I, Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero
- **Languages** Spanish (Castilian or Castellano), Catalan, Basque, Galician (Gallego)
- **Money** euro (€); A\$1 = €0.60; CA\$1 = €0.68; ¥100 = €0.66; NZ\$1 = €0.51; UK£1 = €1.47; US\$1 = €0.78



- **Phrases** *hola* (hello), *gracias* (thanks), *adios* (goodbye)
- **Population** 43 million
- **Time** GMT/UTC +1 winter, +2 from last Sunday in March to last Sunday in September
- **Visas** None required for most visitors for stays up to 90 days

TRAVEL HINTS

Spanish *menús* (fixed-price lunches) are a godsend for the hungry. Also try getting food at local markets. Buy train tickets a day in advance to assure a spot.

ROAMING SPAIN

From Madrid, take day trips to Toledo and Segovia before heading further afield. Your best bets are a journey east to Barcelona, stopping in Zaragoza, or a trip south to Sevilla and Córdoba.

Just say 'Spain' and images of dark-haired flamenco dancers, proud bullfighters and sun-drenched beaches immediately come to mind. Yet these clichés only scratch the surface of the country. The real Spain is a captivating and complex combination of the traditional and the modern. It's the passionate festivals, the historic sites and the quirky customs, but it's also the forward-thinking artists, cutting-edge designers and chefs who are earning Spain a reputation as one of Europe's most creative countries. There's much more to Spain than its tourist-brochure image lets on.



The landscape is every bit as diverse and multifaceted as the culture. Spain is both the rocky shores of the Costa Brava and the desertscapes of Almeria. It's the flat plains of Castile and the peaks of the Pyrenees. It's the wet hills of Galicia and the sun-drenched beaches of Mallorca.

This landscape was the picturesque backdrop for a long and turbulent history that saw Spain rise to the height of world power and fall into the deepest poverty. The country's history is visible at every turn, from abundant Roman ruins to Moorish-influenced *Mudéjar* architecture and splendid medieval cathedrals.

HISTORY

From around 8000 to 3000 BC North African pioneers known as the Iberians crossed the Strait of Gibraltar. They were followed by Celts, Phoenicians, Greeks, Carthaginians and Romans. In AD 409 Roman Hispania was overrun by Germanic tribes; 300 years later the Moors – Muslim Berbers and Arabs from North Africa – took over the region.

The 8th century saw the beginning of the Christian Reconquista. By the mid-13th century the Christians had taken most of the peninsula. In 1469 the kingdoms of Castile and Aragón were united by the marriage of Isabel, princess of Castile, and Fernando, heir to Aragón's throne. Known as the Catholic Monarchs, they united Spain and laid the foundations for the Spanish golden age. They also

expelled and executed thousands of Jews and other non-Christians under the dark cloud of the Inquisition. In 1492 the last Muslim ruler of Granada surrendered to them, thus marking the completion of the Reconquista.

Also in 1492, Columbus stumbled on the Bahamas and claimed the Americas for Spain. This sparked a period of exploration and exploitation that yielded Spain enormous wealth, while destroying the ancient American empires. Spain's downfall began soon after. It would culminate with the disastrous Spanish-American War of 1898, which marked the end of the Spanish empire.

During the Spanish Civil War (1936–39), the Nationalists, led by General Francisco Franco, received heavy military support from Nazi Germany and fascist Italy, while the elected Republican government received support only from Russia and, to a lesser degree, from the International Brigades, made up of foreign leftists. By 1939 Franco had won and an estimated 350,000 Spaniards had died. Franco's 35-year dictatorship began with Spain isolated and crippled by recession. It wasn't until the 1950s and '60s that the country began to recover. By the 1970s Spain had the fastest-growing economy in Europe.

Franco died in 1975, having named Juan Carlos his successor. King Juan Carlos is widely credited with having overseen Spain's transition from dictatorship to democracy. The first elections were held in 1977 and a new constitution drafted in 1978. Spain joined the European Community in 1986.

In 1997 Spain became fully integrated into NATO, and in 1999 it met the criteria for launching the euro. Now Spain has one of the world's fastest-growing economies.

The forward-thinking Spain of today is led by the Socialist Party of Spain (PSOE) and its figurehead, President José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. Zapatero was elected in 2003, just days after the 11 March terrorist attacks in Madrid. The young president made waves immediately; some of his first actions were to withdraw Spanish troops from Iraq and to establish parity in his cabinet, appointing eight female ministers and eight male ministers.

Important issues these days include domestic violence, drought and chronic water shortages, traffic control and an effort to decrease traffic-related deaths, and the Basque terrorist group ETA, who, at the time of writing, had recently signed a cease-fire.

READING UP

For more on Spanish history and current events, pick up *A Traveller's History: Spain* by Juan Laguna or *The New Spaniards* by John Hooper. Good travel literature includes James A Michner's classic *Iberia* and the excellent book of essays *Travellers' Tales Guide: Spain*, edited by Lucy McCauley. Get a feel for modern Spanish literature with *A Traveller's Literary Companion: Spain*, edited by Peter Bush and Lisa Dillman.

THE CULTURE

Spain has a population of 40 million, descended from the many peoples who have settled here over the millennia, among them Iberians, Celts, Romans, Jews, Visigoths, Berbers, Arabs and 20th-century immigrants from across the globe. The biggest cities are Madrid (3.15 million people), Barcelona (1.59 million), Valencia (796,550) and Seville (702,500).

Only about 20% of Spaniards are regular churchgoers, but Catholicism is deeply ingrained in the culture. As the writer Unamuno said, 'Here in Spain we are all Catholics, even the atheists.'

SPORT

Spain's national sport is football (soccer). While every city has at least one team with its loyal band of followers, the greatest rivalry is between Real Madrid and Barça, Spain's top two teams.

Bullfighting is also popular, especially around Madrid and in southern Spain, where it is present at all important festivals. The ethical debate about bullfighting is still raging. Animal-rights groups argue, not without reason, that the slaughter is a cruel, painful 30 minutes that leaves the bull exhausted and defeated. Yet supporters of this 'art' say that *toros bravos* (wild bulls) live like kings until the day of the slaughter. Whether or not you want to see this often disturbing tradition must be a personal decision.

ARTS

The giants of Spain's golden age (1550–1650) were Toledo-based El Greco (originally from Crete) and Diego Velázquez, perhaps Spain's most revered painter. Both excelled with insightful portraits. The genius of the 18th and

19th centuries was Francisco Goya, whose versatility ranged from unflattering royal portraits and anguished war scenes to bullfight etchings.

Catalonia was the powerhouse of early-20th-century Spanish art, claiming the hugely prolific Pablo Picasso (born in Andalucía), the colourful symbolist Joan Miró and surrealist Salvador Dalí. Important artists working today include Catalan abstract artist Antoni Tàpies and Basque sculptor Eduardo Chillida.

ENVIRONMENT

The country covers 84% of the Iberian Peninsula and spreads over some 505,000 sq km, more than half of which is high tableland, the *meseta*. This is supported and divided by several mountain chains, making Spain Europe's second-highest country after Switzerland. The main mountains are the Pyrenees, along the border with France; the Cordillera Cantábrica, backing the northern coast; the Sistema Ibérico, from the central north towards the middle Mediterranean coast; the Cordillera Central, from north of Madrid towards the Portuguese border; and three east-west chains across Andalucía, one of which is the highest range of all – the Sierra Nevada.

Conservation efforts have improved by leaps and bounds in the past 25 years and Spain now has 25,000 sq km of protected areas, including 10 national parks. However, overgrazing, reservoir creation, tourism, housing developments, agricultural and industrial effluent, fires and hunting all still threaten plant and animal life.

TRANSPORT

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Spain has many international airports, but if you're flying in from beyond Europe you'll probably land in either **Madrid** (code MAD; ☎ 902 353 570) or **Barcelona** (code BCN; ☎ 93 298 38 38). Coming from the UK or elsewhere in Europe it might be cheaper to fly into **Almería** (code LEI; ☎ 95 021 37 00), **Bilbao** (code BIO; ☎ 94 486 96 63) or **Málaga** (code AGP; ☎ 95 204 88 04). Ultrabudget carrier Ryanair flies to **Girona** (code GRO; ☎ 97 218 60 00), **Reus** (code REU; ☎ 97 777 98 32) and **Zaragoza** (code ZAZ; ☎ 97 671 23 00). Detailed information about these and other airports can be found through **AENA** (☎ 90 240 47 04; www.aena.es).

Budget airlines have completely changed travel to and within Spain, making short breaks much easier and more wallet-friendly. An Iberia-owned budget airline called Clickair was due to begin service in October 2006.

An Iberia-owned budget airline was due to begin service at the time of research. Along with airlines such as **Iberia** (code IB; ☎ 90 240 05 00; www.iberia.com), **Spanair** (code JK; ☎ 90 213 14 15; www.spanair.com) and **British Airways** (code BA; ☎ 90 211 13 33; www.ba.com), the following are major budget airlines flying here:

Air Europa (code UX; ☎ 90 240 15 01; www.aireuropa.com)
Air Madrid (code NM; ☎ 90 251 52 51; www.airmadrid.com)
easyJet (code U2; ☎ 90 229 99 92; www.easyjet.com)
Ryanair (code FR; ☎ 80 722 02 20; www.ryanair.com)
Vueling (code VY; ☎ 90 233 39 33; www.vueling.com)

Boat

MOROCCO

Several companies run regular ferry services between Spain and Morocco. **Trasmediterránea** (☎ 902 454 645; www.trasmediterranea.es) operates routes including Algeciras–Tangier (€45 to €60, up to 1½ hours) and Almería–Nador (€71.60, six hours).

Don't buy Moroccan currency until you reach Morocco, as you will get ripped off in Algeciras.

UK

If you want to bring your own car, a ferry is your best bet.

Brittany Ferries (☎ UK 08705-360360; www.brittany-ferries.com) runs Plymouth–Santander ferries (24 hours) twice weekly April through mid-November and once weekly in March. A one-way ticket with a car starts at about £240.

P&O European Ferries (☎ UK 08705-980333; www.pferries.com) runs Portsmouth–Bilbao ferries (35 hours) two or three times weekly year-round. A one-way ticket with a car starts at £270.

Bus

There are regular bus services to Spain from such European cities as Lisbon, London and Paris. From London, the mega-company **Eurolines** (☎ 08705-808080; www.eurolines.com) offers regular services to Barcelona (26 hours), Madrid (25 to 28 hours) and other cities. Advance bookings and student ID cards can get you deep discounts. The Eurolines Pass (€115 and up) allows travel throughout Europe, though only to major destinations.

Train

Unless you're simply hopping over the border from France or already have a rail pass, travelling to Spain by train doesn't make much sense. The cost of a Eurostar train from London to Barcelona (via Paris) can exceed €200, which is more expensive than many budget airline tickets.

For details on long-distance rail travel, contact the **Rail Europe Travel Centre** (☎ 08705-848848; www.raileurope.co.uk) in London. See p1213 for more on rail passes and train travel through Europe.

GETTING AROUND

Students are eligible for discounts of 30% to 50% on almost all types of transport within Spain. The travel agency **TIVE** (Map pp1026-7; ☎ 91 543 74 12; tive.juventud@madrid.org; Calle de Fernando El Católico 88, Madrid; ☎ 9am-2pm Mon-Fri) specialises in discounted travel for young people.

Air

Spain's major domestic airline, **Iberia** (☎ 90 240 05 00; www.iberia.com), has faced increasing competition from smaller companies, and prices on domestic travel have fallen. A ticket to Madrid from Barcelona starts at €50, but can reach €350 or more for last-minute travel. Book online for the best fares. See p1023 for airline contact information.

Boat

Regular ferries connect the Spanish mainland with the Balearic Islands. Services can be restricted in bad weather or rough seas. For more details see p1054. The main companies:

Balearia (☎ 90 216 01 80; www.balearia.com)

Iscomar (☎ 90 211 91 28; www.iscomarferrys.com)

Trasmediterránea (☎ 90 245 46 45; www.trasmediterranea.es)

Bus

Spain's bus network is operated by countless independent companies and reaches into the most remote towns and villages. Many towns and cities have one main bus station where most buses arrive and depart, and these usually have an information desk giving information on all services. Tourist offices can also help with information. The best-known national service is run by **ALSA** (☎ 90 242 22 42; www.alsa.es).

Bus tickets vary greatly in cost, depending on the popularity of the route. For example,

a ticket from Madrid to Santiago de Compostela costs about €53, while a ticket from Madrid to Málaga, a comparable distance, costs just €20.

It is not necessary, and often not possible, to make advance reservations for local bus journeys. It is, however, a good idea to turn up at least 30 minutes before the bus leaves to guarantee a seat. For longer trips, try to buy your ticket in advance.

Train

Trains are mostly modern and comfortable, and late arrivals are the exception rather than the rule.

Renfe (☎ 90 224 02 02; www.renfe.es), the national railway company, runs numerous types of train, and travel times can vary a lot on the same route. So can fares, which may depend not just on the type of train but also the day of the week and time of day. Renfe's website is a great resource for schedule and fare information.

Regionales are all-stops trains (think cheap and slow). *Cercanías* provide regular services from major cities to the surrounding suburbs and hinterland, sometimes even crossing regional boundaries. Long-distance trains go by several names (Altaría, Diurno, Estrella etc), depending on the exact services they offer. Talgo is faster than the rest, and most expensive.

The high-speed AVE train runs from Sevilla to Madrid, and from Madrid to Zaragoza and Llerida (and soon on to Barcelona). It's the most comfortable way to travel, though it's not cheap. A Sevilla-Madrid ticket costs €70.

On overnight trains you have the comfortable option to stay in a cabin with a bed for only slightly more than the price of a regular ticket. Most cabins are divided by sexes, though if you're travelling with friends your entire group can stay together.

You can buy tickets and make reservations online, at stations, in Renfe offices in many city centres and at travel agencies displaying the Renfe logo.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- Fire Department (and general emergency number) ☎ 112
- Medical emergencies ☎ 061
- Police ☎ 091

TRAIN PASSES

Rail passes are valid for all long-distance Renfe trains, but Inter-Rail users have to pay supplements on Talgo, InterCity and AVE trains. All passholders making reservations pay a small fee.

Renfe's Flexipass is a rail pass valid for three to 10 days' travel in a two-month period. In tourist class, three days costs €170 and 10 days is €380. Buy the pass from agents outside Europe, or at main train stations in Spain. Spanish residents are not eligible for this pass.

MADRID

pop 3.15 million

Spain's capital is a vibrant place, the hub of the country's government and commerce, and an exciting city bubbling over with creativity. Madrid may not have the effortless elegance of European capitals like Paris or Rome, but it has a raw energy that is infectious. Explore the old streets of the centre, relax in the plazas, soak up the culture in excellent art museums and experience the city's legendary nightlife.

HISTORY

Madrid was little more than a muddy, mediocre village when King Felipe II declared it Spain's capital in 1561. Though established as a Moorish garrison in 854, by the 16th century the population was only 12,000, though that began to change when Madrid became the epicentre of the Spanish court.

The city was a squalid grid of unpaved alleys and dirty buildings until the 18th century, when King Carlos III turned his attention to public works. By the early 20th century Madrid finally began to look like a proper capital.

The 1940s and '50s were trying times for the capital, with rampant poverty. Nowhere was Franco's thumb as firmly pressed down as on Madrid, which lived under a blanket of fear and forced austerity for nearly four decades. When the dictator died in 1975 the city exploded with creativity and life, giving Madrileños the party-hard reputation they still cherish.

ORIENTATION

Spain's largest city by far, Madrid is a sprawling metropolis that can look daunting on a map. Luckily, its easy-to-navigate metro system and relatively compact city centre give travellers a fairly easy time.

The ebullient Puerta del Sol is the city's physical and emotional heart. Literally kilometre zero (all distances in Spain are measured from this point), the plaza is a hotbed of activity. Radiating away from it are the major arteries of Calle Mayor, Calle del Arenal, Calle de Preciados, Calle de la Montera and Calle de Alcalá.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Petra's International Bookshop (Map p1030; ☎ 91 541 72 91; Calle de Campomanes 13; ☎ 11am-9pm Mon-Sat; ☎ Ópera or Santo Domingo) A treasure trove of used books, mainly in English.

Emergency

Ambulance (☎ 91 479 93 61)

City Information (☎ 010)

Lost Objects (☎ 91 588 43 48)

Municipal Police (☎ 092)

Red Cross Emergencies (☎ 91 522 22 22)

Internet Access

Now that so many people surf from home, internet cafés have been closing left and right. You can still find access in small *locutorios* (call centres) and inside casinos and gaming houses. Also, many hostels and some hotels offer free internet access.

Work Center (Map p1030; ☎ 90 211 50 11; www.workcenter.es, in Spanish; Calle del Príncipe 1; per hr €2; ☎ 24hr; ☎ Sevilla) Internet, photocopies and more, with other branches throughout the city.

Laundry

Lavandería Cervantes (Map p1030; ☎ 91 429 92 16; Calle Cervantes 6; per load €2, plus €1 to dry; ☎ 9am-9pm; ☎ Sol or Antón Martín)

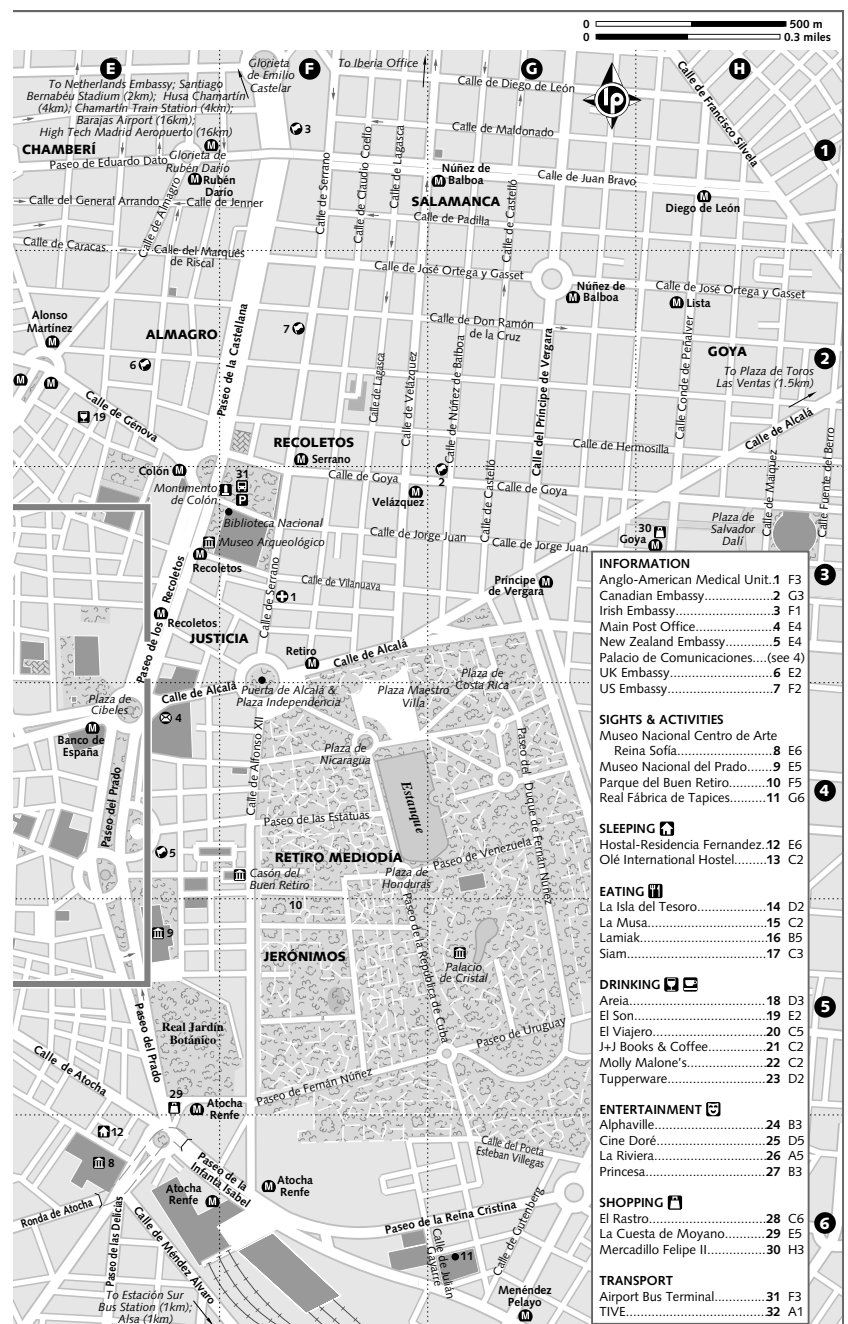
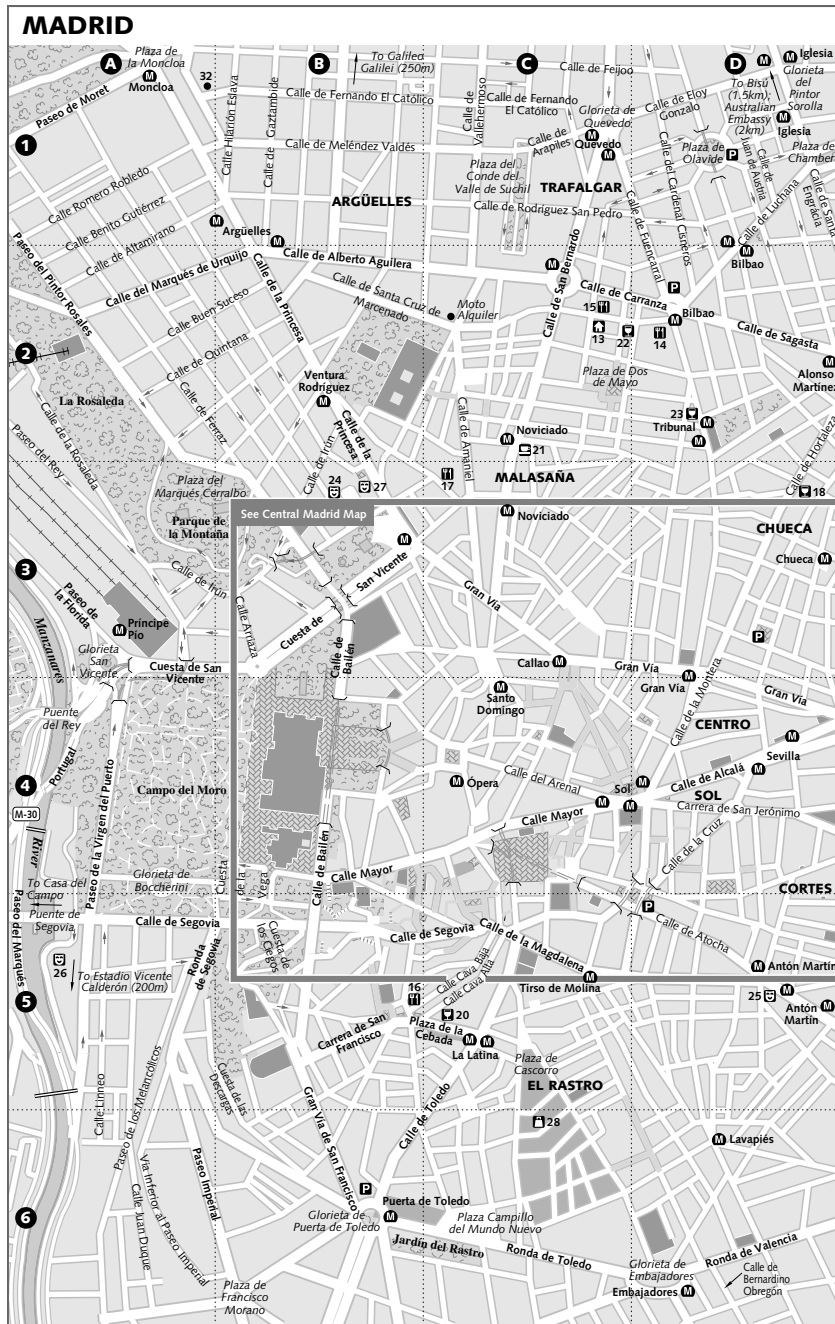
Left Luggage

Spain Storage (Map p1030; ☎ 91 521 79 34; www.spainstorage.com; Calle del Correo 4; per week €10; ☎ 9-11am & 5-8pm Mon-Fri; ☎ Sol) Cheap long-term storage.

Medical Services

Anglo-American Medical Unit (Map pp1026-7; ☎ 91 435 18 23; 3rd fl, Calle Conde de Aranda 1; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat; ☎ Retiro) For medical help in English. Visits by appointment only.

Farmacia Globo (Map p1030; ☎ 91 369 20 00; Plaza Antón Martín 46; ☎ 24hr; ☎ Antón Martín) For minor problems. Other 24-hour pharmacies are at Calle Mayor 13, Calle de Toledo 46 and Calle de Preciados 14. Call ☎ 010 for additional locations.



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GETTING INTO TOWN

Madrid has two principal train stations: Chamartín sits far north of the centre, while Atocha is just south. Both have good metro connections and can get you to the Puerta del Sol in minutes. The main bus station, Estación Sur, is a long hike south from the centre, but the Méndez Álvaro metro line is nearby.

Coming from the airport, the metro (line 8) zips you into the city from the airport's terminal two. The 12-minute trip to the Nuevos Ministerios station costs €1; from there, you can easily connect to all other stations.

Post

Main post office (Map pp1026-7; ☎ 91 396 27 33; Plaza de Cibeles; 🕒 8.30am-9.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-2pm Sat; 🚗 Banco de España) It's almost fun to wait in line (which you'll surely have to do) at the beautiful Palacio de Comunicaciones.

Tourist Information

Municipal tourist office (Map p1030; ☎ 91 588 16 36; www.munimadrid.es; Plaza Mayor 27; 🕒 9.30am-8.30pm; 🚗 Sol)

Regional tourist office (Map p1030; ☎ 90 210 00 07; www.madrid.org, in Spanish; Calle del Duque de Medinaceli 2; 🕒 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-2pm Sun; 🚗 Sevilla) Come to the calmer, less-frequented regional office for more one-on-one attention.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The best way to get under the city's skin is simply to walk its streets, sip coffees in its plazas and relax in its parks. Madrid de los Austrias, the maze of mostly 15th- and 16th-century streets surrounding the Plaza Mayor, is the oldest quarter of the city and makes a nice stroll. You'll also enjoy exploring the cafés and interesting shops around Plaza de Santa Ana.

If you plan to see all Madrid's major museums (the Prado, Reina Sofia and Thyssen-Bornemisza), save a few euros on admission by buying the €12 Art Walk pass, for sale at all three.

Museo Nacional del Prado

Spain's premier museum, and one of the finest art collections in the world, the **Museo Nacional del Prado** (Map pp1026-7; ☎ 91 330 29 00; http://museoprado.mcu.es; Paseo del Prado s/n; adult/child

& EU student under 25yr €6/free, free Sun; 🕒 9am-8pm Tue-Sun; 🚗 Banco de España) is a seemingly endless parade of priceless works from Spain and beyond. The collection is divided into eight major collections: Spanish paintings (1100-1850), Flemish paintings (1430-1700), Italian paintings (1300-1800), French paintings (1600-1800), German paintings (1450-1800), sculptures, decorative arts, and drawings and prints. There is generous coverage of Spanish greats, such as Goya, Velázquez and El Greco. Guided visits are available in English and Spanish; ask for details at the ticket booth.

Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía

If modern art is your cup of tea, the Reina Sofía is your museum. A stunning collection of mainly Spanish modern art, the **Centro de Arte Reina Sofía** (Map pp1026-7; ☎ 91 774 10 00; www.museoreinasofia.es; Calle Santa Isabel 52; adult/student €3/1.50, free Sat 2.30-9pm & Sun; 🕒 10am-9pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 10am-2.30pm Sun; 🚗 Atocha) is home to Picasso's famous *Guernica*, his protest at the German bombing of the Basque town of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War in 1937.

Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza

Sitting just adjacent to the Prado, the **Thyssen-Bornemisza** (Map p1030; ☎ 91 369 0151; www.museothyssen.org; Paseo del Prado 8; adult/student €6/4; 🕒 10am-7pm Tue-Sun; 🚗 Banco de España) is a somewhat eclectic collection of international masterpieces. Formerly the private collection of the Thyssen-Bornemiszas, a German-Hungarian family of magnates, it was purchased by Spain in 1993 for a mere US\$300 million.

Palacio Real & Around

Madrid's 18th-century **Palacio Real** (Map p1030; ☎ 91 454 88 00; www.patrimoniacionacional.es; Calle de Bailén s/n; adult/student €8/3.50, EU citizens on Wed free; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-3pm Sun Apr-Sep, 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 9am-2pm Sun Oct-Mar; 🚗 Ópera) is used mainly for important events. It's King Juan Carlos I's official residence (though no-one actually lives here), and you can visit 50 of its 2800 plus rooms.

Outside the main royal palace, poke your head into the **Farmacia Real** (Royal Pharmacy), where apothecary-style medicine jars line the shelves. Continue on to the interesting **Armería Real** (Royal Armoury), where you can be impressed by the shiny (and surprisingly tiny!)

royal suits of armour, most of them from the 16th and 17th centuries.

The **Catedral de Nuestra Señora de la Almudena** (Map p1030; ☎ 91 522 22 00; www.patrimoniacionacional.es; Calle de Bailén 10; 🕒 9am-9pm; 🚗 Ópera) is just across the plaza from the Palacio Real. Finished in 1992 after a century of work, the cathedral has never really won a place in the hearts of Madrileños. It's worth a quick peek, if only for posterity's sake.

Parque del Buen Retiro

Popular with joggers, families out for a stroll, lovey-dovey couples and anyone else looking for a break from the chaos of the city, this **park** (Map pp1026-7; 🕒 7am-midnight May-Sep, 7am-10pm Oct-Apr; 🚗 Retiro) is as much a Madrid tradition as tapas and *terrazas* (terrace cafés). Come on a weekend for street performers, clowns, puppet shows and the occasional theatre performance.

Real Fábrica de Tapices

Founded in 1721, this **tapestry workshop** (Map pp1026-7; ☎ 91 434 05 50; www.realfatapices.com; Calle Fuenterrabía 2; admission €3; 🕒 10am-2pm Mon-Fri, closed Easter week & Aug; 🚗 Menéndez Pelayo) still produces ornate tapestries and carpets by hand. Take one home for a mere €10,000 per square metre.

Templo de Debod

This authentic ancient **temple** (Map p1030; ☎ 91 366 74 15; Calle de Ferraz 1; admission free; 🕒 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; 🚗 Plaza de España) was transferred here stone by stone in 1972, as a gift from Egypt.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Madrid's social calendar is packed with festivals and special events. Art, music and cultural fairs are happening almost constantly; check with the tourist office or in publications such as the *Guía del Ocio* to see what's on. Major holidays and festivals include the following: **Día de los Reyes** (Three Kings' Day) On 6 January the three kings bring gifts to children and a mammoth parade takes over the city centre. **Fiesta de San Isidro** Street parties, parades, bullfights and other events honour Madrid's patron saint on 15 May. **Fiesta de Otoño** The year's cultural highlight, the month-long Autumn Festival runs from mid-October with music, dance and theatre.

SLEEPING

Prices in Madrid are subject to change. During a major holiday or trade fair, they can be pushed up by 15% or 20%, but during slower periods you might find big discounts, especially in the top-end hotels. Check hotel websites for deals.

Los Austrias & Centro

Los Amigos Ópera Backpackers' Hostel (Map p1030; ☎ 91 547 17 07; www.losamigoshostel.com; 4th fl, Calle de Campomanes 6; dm with shared bathroom €16-17; 🚗; 🚗 Ópera) Owned by an experienced backpacker who wanted to create her ideal hostel, this cheerful spot boasts free wi-fi, laundry service, a community kitchen, extra-big free lockers and some of the cleanest showers we've seen.

Los Amigos Sol Backpackers' Hostel (Map p1030; ☎ 91 559 24 72; www.losamigoshostel.com; 4th fl, Calle del Arenal 26; dm with shared bathroom €16-17; 🚗; 🚗 Sol) A newer version of its twin over on Calle Campomanes.

Mucho Madrid (Map p1030; ☎ 91 559 23 50; www.muchoMadrid.com; Gran Vía 59; dm with shared bathroom €20; 🚗 Gran Vía) Named the safest hostel in the world by hostelworld.com, this tidy place was opened in July 2004 and was a quick hit thanks to its small rooms, colourful décor and quiet atmosphere.

Hostal Orly (Map p1030; ☎ 91 531 30 12; 7th fl, Calle de la Montera 47; s/d/tr €35/46/58; 🚗 Gran Vía) Looking out from the top floor of a grand 19th-century building, it boasts tall ceilings and wooden floors. It's promising air-con for 2007.

FREE MADRID

If you plan well, there are several free attractions in Madrid. Look out for the following:

Free Days

- Museo del Prado, free Sunday
- Reina Sofía, free Saturday afternoons (2.30pm to 9pm) and Sunday

EU Free Days

- Palacio Real, free to EU citizens on Wednesday
- Monasterio de las Descalzas Reales, free to EU citizens on Wednesday

TOP TAPAS

The best place for tapas is the area around Calle Cava Alta and Calle Cava Baja, near the La Latina metro. Other good areas include the streets around the Plaza de Dos de Mayo and the Plaza de Chueca. Expect tapas to cost €1 to €6 each.

El Schotis (Map p1030; ☎ 91 365 3239; Calle Cava Baja 11; 📍 La Latina) This old-fashioned bar gives you a free tapa when you order a glass of beer or wine (€1.10).

Lamiak (Map pp1026-7; ☎ 91 365 52 12; Calle Cava Baja 42; 📍 La Latina) A favourite with students, this is an inexpensive spot for typical-style tapas and drinks.

El Tigre (Map p1030; Calle de las Infantas 30; 📍 Sevilla) Chueca is full of trendy tapas bars, but it's at off-the-beaten-track spots like this one that you'll find the real deal – cheap drinks that come with generous free tapas. No wonder it's always filled to the brim with a student crowd.

Taberna de Dolores (Map p1030; ☎ 91 433 29 43; Plaza de Jesús 4; 📍 Sevilla) A delightful little bar smothered in tiles where beer and wine flow freely at just €1.20 a glass. Here since 1908.

EATING

It's possible to find just about any kind of cuisine in Madrid, but the city's biggest claims to fame are its traditional eateries: the chaotic tapas bars of La Latina, the cave-like taverns around the Plaza Mayor, and the countless neighbourhood favourites serving up local specialities such as *cochinillo asado* (roast suckling pig) or *cocido madrileño*, a hearty stew made of beans and various animals' innards.

Los Austrias & Centro

El Zagal (Map p1030; ☎ 91 542 05 57; Calle Trujillos 7; mains €6-14, menú €12; 📍 Callao) This family-run restaurant serves varied options of tasty Castilian fare and is popular with local office workers.

La Gloria de Montero (Map p1030; ☎ 91 523 44 07; Calle del Caballero de Gracia 10; mains €7-12; 📍 Gran Vía) A minimalist style, tasty Mediterranean dishes and great prices mean that you'll probably have to wait in line to eat here.

Museo del Jamón (Map p1030; ☎ 91 542 26 32; Plaza Mayor 18; mains €3-15; 📍 Sol) Of the many bars on the Plaza Mayor, this Spanish *serrano* (cured) ham chain is one where you can eat pretty well without paying too dearly. Branches throughout the city.

Siam (Map pp1026-7; ☎ 91 559 83 15; Calle San Bernardino 6; mains €7.50-12; 📍 Plaza de España) American-owned

SPLURGE

Sobrino de Botín (Map p1030; ☎ 91 366 42 17; Calle de los Cuchilleros 17; mains €9.25-26.70; ☒; 📍 Sol) Reputedly opened in 1725, this is the oldest restaurant in Madrid and has all the old-world charm to prove it. Famous for roast suckling pig.

Siam has a popular following among lovers of authentic Thai cuisine. Great for vegetarians.

Sol, Huertas & Atocha

La Finca de Susana (Map p1030; ☎ 91 369 35 57; Calle de Arlabán 4; mains €6-12; 📍 Sevilla) A well-priced mix of Spanish and international fare has made this an extremely popular choice with locals and tourists alike.

La Trucha (Map p1030; ☎ 91 429 58 33; Calle de Manuel Fernández y González 3; mains €6-15, menú €12; 📍 Sevilla) An old standard, 'the Trout' serves a broad range of tapas and affordable meat and fish plates. There's another branch on Calle de Núñez de Arce 6, open Tuesday to Saturday.

Casa Alberto (Map p1030; ☎ 91 429 93 56; www.casaalberto.es; Calle de las Huertas 18; mains €12-15; 📍 Antón Martín) Old-timey Casa Alberto has been serving traditional fare and vermouth (the house speciality) since 1827.

La Latina & Lavapiés

This area is best known for its tapas bars. See the boxed text, above, for details.

Malasaña & Chueca

This is the place for international food and creative, contemporary cuisine. Some of the city's best (and best-priced) eateries can be found along the side streets of the trendy Chueca district.

Diurno (Map p1030; ☎ 91 522 00 09; Calle de San Marcos 37; mains €4-8; 📍 Chueca) Great for a quick bite, Diurno's takeaway options include several different salads and tasty sandwiches.

Bazaar (Map p1030; ☎ 91 523 39 05; Calle de la Libertad 21; mains €6-9; 📍 Chueca) An airy, Zen-inspired dining room sets the tone at Bazaar, a restaurant known for its salads and international flair.

La Musa (Map pp1026-7; ☎ 91 448 75 58; Calle Manuela Malasaña 18; mains €7.50-12; 📍 Bilbao) Creative tapas, salads and inventive Mediterranean-style cuisine are the staples at this trendy restaurant and bar.

La Isla del Tesoro (Map pp1026-7; ☎ 91 593 14 40; Calle Manuela Malasaña 3; mains €7.50-12; 📍 Bilbao) Don't let the kitsch *Treasure Island* décor put you off; La Isla's internationally inspired vegetarian menu is a joy for veggie lovers.

DRINKING

Madrileños live life on the streets, and bar hopping is a pastime enjoyed by young and old alike. If you're looking for a traditional bar, head to the Huertas district or around the Calles Cava Alta and Cava Baja in La Latina. For an edgier feel and a gay-friendly crowd, hit Chueca. Malasaña is the place for alternative and grunge locales. In summer, the terrace bars that pop up all over the city are unbeatable.

Bars

LOS AUSTRIAS, CENTRO & LA LATINA

Café del Nuncio (Map p1030; ☎ 91 366 09 06; Calle de Segovia 9; 📍 La Latina) Lace curtains and red-wood panelling set the tone at this bustling bar. In summer, the outdoor terrace is divine.

El Viajero (Map pp1026-7; ☎ 91 366 90 64; Plaza de la Cebada 11; 📍 La Latina) A neighbourhood favourite drawing a mixed crowd, El Viajero has a downstairs restaurant, a cosy upstairs bar and, best of all, a rooftop terrace with fantastic city views.

SOL, HUERTAS & ATOCHA

Ducados Café (Map p1030; ☎ 91 360 00 89; www.ducados-cafe.com, in Spanish; Plaza de la Canalejas 3; 📍 Sevilla) At night the otherwise drab basement of this *cafetería* is transformed into a popular bar and dance spot. Drawing lots of students and travellers, this is a good place to start the night.

Viva Madrid (Map p1030; ☎ 91 429 36 40; www.barvivamadrid.com; Calle de Manuel Fernández y González 7; 📍 Sevilla) A landmark smothered in beautiful coloured tiles, Viva Madrid does tapas earlier in the evening and drinks late into the night.

MALASAÑA & CHUECA

Gay-friendly Chueca is packed with bars for punters of all persuasions, and Malasaña is known for its funky, alternative venues.

Areia (Map pp1026-7; ☎ 91 310 03 07; www.areiachillout.com; Calle de Hortaleza 92; 📍 Alonso Martínez) With

its lounge-like couches and an Arabian-themed décor, you'll want to simply chill out and stay awhile at Areia.

Molly Malone's (Map pp1026-7; ☎ 91 594 12 01; Calle Manuela Malasaña 11; 📍 Bilbao) Dark wood paneling, Guinness on tap, low lights, friendly regulars...Yep, it's everything you'd expect from an Irish pub.

Tupperware (Map pp1026-7; Corredera Alta de San Pablo 26; 📍 Tribunal) Unbelievably kitsch, with plastic dolls and pictures of old TV stars as décor, this fun bar plays danceable pop and '80s music every night of the week.

Cafés

By day, these cafés are great spots to grab a coffee or get recharged for more sightseeing. By night, most serve cocktails and adopt a more sophisticated attitude.

J+J Books & Coffee (Map pp1026-7; ☎ 91 521 85 76; Calle Espiritu Santo 47; 📍 Noviciado) An English bookshop and friendly café, J+J hosts events all week long and is popular with students and expats. A great place to meet people.

Chocolateria San Ginés (Map p1030; ☎ 91 365 65 46; Pasadizo San Ginés 5; 📍 Sol or Ópera) Join the sugar-searching throngs who end the night at this legendary bar (it doesn't close until 7am) – it's famous for its freshly fried *churros* and syrupy hot chocolate.

CLUBBING

Madrid is a great place for dancing; clubs and discos are found in just about every corner of the city. The big-name clubs are concentrated along and around Gran Vía, though Chueca, Malasaña and Huertas are good bets too.

Club prices vary wildly, but most charge between €8 and €15. Dancing mostly starts at around 1am and lasts until daybreak. Come Thursday through Saturday for the best atmosphere.

El Sol (Map p1030; ☎ 91 532 64 90; Calle de los Jardines 3; ☒ Tue-Sat; 📍 Gran Vía) If you want more than just techno music, this funky club is a great bet. Sometimes there's a live show.

Palacio Gaviria (Map p1030; ☎ 91 526 60 69; Calle del Arenal 9; 📍 Sol) Special international student nights and other theme nights bring in big crowds to this club near the Puerta del Sol. The entry can be a bit pricey, but the atmosphere is a notch up too.

Joy Eslava (Map p1030; ☎ 91 366 37 33; www.joy-eslava.com; Calle del Arenal 11; 📍 Sol or Ópera) Housed in a 19th-century neoclassical theatre, Joy hosts

lots of theme parties and student nights. It's a mega club, but can still be a good place to meet people.

El Sol (Map pp1026-7; ☎ 91 532 32 83; Calle Victoria 6; M Sol) You can salsa all week long at this lively Latin club. Midweek, check out the live concerts of Cuban music.

Gay & Lesbian Venues

Chueca is Madrid's lively, gay-friendly neighbourhood, and you'll find lots of gay and lesbian clubs in the area.

Black & White (Map p1030; ☎ 91 531 11 41; Calle de la Libertad 34; M Chueca) A staple of Chueca's gay scene, this popular bar has a dance floor downstairs and a room for shows or private parties upstairs.

Queen Madrid (Map p1030; ☎ 91 522 09 49; Calle de Barbieri 7; M Chueca) While it's not the trendiest spot in the neighbourhood, you'll always have a good time at this classic gay dance club.

ENTERTAINMENT

The entertainment bible is the *Guía del Ocio*, a weekly magazine sold at newsstands for €1. Highlights are given in English at the back.

Cinemas

Several movie theatres are huddled around Gran Vía and Calle de la Princesa. For a selection of flicks screened in their original language (*versión original*), including English, head to **Princesa** (Map pp1026-7; ☎ 91 541 41 00; Calle de la Princesa 3; M Plaza de España) or **Alphaville** (Map pp1026-7; ☎ 91 559 38 36; Calle Martín de los Heros 14; M Plaza de España).

The National Film Library screens fantastic classic and vanguard films for €1.35 a show

at **Cine Doré** (Map pp1026-7; ☎ 91 549 00 11; Calle Santa Isabel 3; M Antón Martín). Buy tickets in advance.

Live Music

FLAMENCO

Many of flamenco's top names perform in Madrid, making it an excellent place to see interpretations of this Andalusian art.

Las Tablas (Map p1030; ☎ 91 542 05 20; Plaza de España 9; admission €18; ☎ show 10.30pm; M Plaza de España) Less established (but cheaper) than many *tablaos* (flamenco stages), this intimate spot is nevertheless a great place to see a variety of flamenco styles.

JAZZ & ROCK

Populart (Map p1030; ☎ 91 429 84 07; www.populart.es; Calle de las Huertas 22; admission free; ☎ show 11pm; M Antón Martín or Sol) Get here early if you want a seat; this smoky jazz bar is always packed.

Galileo Galilei (☎ 91 534 75 57; www.salagalileogalilei.com; Calle de Galileo 100; ☎; M Islas Filipinas) This classic stage just north of Argüelles has performances from comedy acts to magic shows, though its strength is up-and-coming bands.

La Riviera (Map pp1026-7; ☎ 91 365 24 15; Paseo Bajo de la Virgen del Puerto; M Puerta del Ángel) A club and concert venue all in one, La Riviera has a pretty Art Deco interior and open-air concerts in summer.

Sport

Get tickets to football matches and bullfights from box offices or through agents such as **Localidades Galicia** (Map p1030; ☎ 91 531 91 31; www.eol.es/lgalicia; Plaza del Carmen 1; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 4.30-7pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-1pm Sun; M Sol).

MARKET WATCH

Madrid's street markets are great places to browse and, sometimes, to find a bargain. The most famous market is El Rastro.

El Rastro (Map pp1026-7; Calle Ribera Curtidores; ☎ 8am-2pm Sun; M La Latina) A bustling flea market, the chaotic El Rastro sells a bit of everything. The madness begins at the Plaza Cascorro and worms its way downhill. Watch your wallet.

La Cuesta de Moyano (Paseo del Prado or Cuesta de Moyano; ☎ 9.30am-dusk Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2pm Sat & Sun; M Atocha) Temporarily located along the Paseo del Prado, this used book market is a treasure trove of titles in Spanish and other languages.

Mercadillo Felipe II (Map pp1026-7; Av Felipe II; ☎ 10am-9.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun; M Goya) Set among the high-priced shops of the Salamanca district, this is a popular place for cheap clothes and accessories.

Mercado de Pintura (Map p1030; Plaza del Conde de Barajas; ☎ 8am-2pm Sun; M Sol) Browse the original works at this small art market near the Plaza Mayor.

FOOTBALL

Real Madrid plays at the **Santiago Bernabéu Stadium** (☎ 91 398 43 00; www.realmadrid.com; Calle Concha Espina 1; ☎ museum 10.30am-6.30pm, except day after game; M Santiago Bernabéu). Fans can take an interesting tour through the presidential box, dressing room and the field.

BULLFIGHTING

Some of Spain's top *matadores* swing their capes in **Plaza de Toros Las Ventas** (☎ 902 150 025; www.las-ventas.com; Calle de Alcalá 237; M Ventas), the largest ring in the bullfighting world. You can see them every Sunday afternoon from mid-May through October, when fights are held in the plaza.

Get tickets (from €4 in the sun, from €7 in the shade) at the plaza box office, at Localidades Galicia or at official ticket agents along Calle Victoria (Map p1030).

Theatre & Opera

Madrid has a lively cultural scene, with concerts and shows going on throughout the city.

Teatro Real (Map p1030; ☎ 91 516 06 06; www.teatro-real.com; Plaza de Isabel II; M Ópera) This is Madrid's opulent opera house, and it's grandest stage. Here you can see opera, dance or theatre, depending on the offerings. It's open for tours (adult/student €4/2) between 10.30am and 1pm Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday and 11am to 1.30pm Saturday and Sunday.

Teatro de la Zarzuela (Map p1030; ☎ 91 524 54 10; Calle de Jovellanos 4; M Banco de España) Come here for *zarzuela*, a very Spanish mixture of dance, music and theatre.

SHOPPING

For artisan goods and typically Spanish items, explore the maze of streets in Huertas and Los Austrias. Calle de las Huertas and the surrounding streets are home to lots of small, old-fashioned shops. Closer to Plaza Mayor seek out Calle de Toledo, Calle Esparteros or Calle de la Paz for Madrileño-flavoured boutiques.

Alternative, offbeat fashion is found in Chueca; this lively barrio is also a magnet for shoe shops – there are a dozen of them along and around Calle de Augusto Figueroa. Roam Calle de Fuencarral and Calle de Hortaleza for funky clothing stores.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Madrid's international **Barajas airport** (☎ 902 35 35 70; www.aena.es), 16km northeast of the city, is a busy place, with flights coming in from all over

Europe and beyond. Airlines operating here include Spain's major national airline **Iberia** (☎ 902 40 05 00; www.iberia.com; Calle de Velázquez 130) and all the usual big names, as well as low-cost options easyJet, Air Europa, Air Madrid, Germanwings and Vueling. See p1023 for more.

Most out-of-town buses use the **Estación Sur** (☎ 91 468 42 00; www.estaciondeautobuses.com; Calle Méndez Álvaro; M Méndez Álvaro). The largest bus company here is **Alsa** (☎ 902 42 22 42; www.alsa.es). Its many destinations include Barcelona (€25 to €34, eight hours, 21 daily), Valencia (€17, four hours, three daily) and Zaragoza (€13 to €18, four hours, 23 daily).

Renfe (☎ 902 24 02 02; www.renfe.es) trains connect Madrid to just about every other point in Spain. There are two main rail stations: Atocha, south of the centre; and Chamartín, to the north. For ticket information visit the Renfe offices inside the stations or check online. Major destinations include Barcelona (€63, five hours, seven daily), Valencia (€40, 3½ hours, 13 daily) and Zaragoza (€40, two hours, 18 daily).

GETTING AROUND

Madrid's 227km of **metro** (☎ 902 444 403; www.metromadrid.es) lines handle nearly 700 million trips per year, or nearly two million per day. A single ride costs €1 and a 10-ride ticket is €6.15. If you'll be using the metro often, you can get a one-, two-, three-, five- or seven-day travel pass. The metro is quick, clean and relatively safe, and runs from 6am until 2am.

The bus system is also good, but working out the maze of bus lines can be a challenge. Contact **EMT** (www.emtmadrid.es) for more information.

For more details on public transport call ☎ 012 otherwise check online at www.ctm-madrid.es.

CASTILLA Y LEÓN

The true heart of Spain, Castilla y León is littered with hilltop towns sporting magnificent Gothic cathedrals, monumental city walls and rich histories.

ÁVILA

pop 53,496

Ávila's romantic old town has a picture-postcard look and an open-museum feel. It's a perfect place to spend a day strolling down narrow laneways and soaking up history.

There's a **tourist office** (☎ 92 021 13 87; www.turismocastillayleon.com; Plaza Pedro Dávila 4; ☎ 9am-2pm & 5-8pm 15 Sep-Jun, 9am-8pm Sun-Thu, 9am-9pm Fri & Sat Jul-14 Sep) near the Puerta del Rastro. For internet access, try the **lucutorio** (27 Av de Madrid; per hr €2; ☎ 11.30am-3pm & 5-10pm).

Sights & Activities

Don't leave town without walking along the top of Ávila's wonderfully preserved 12th-century **walls** (murallas; ☎ 92 025 50 88; adult/student & child €3.50/2; ☎ 11am-6pm Tue-Sun Sep-Jun, 10am-8pm Jul & Aug), with their 2500 turrets and 88 towers. More than 1km of wall-top (in two sections) is open to the public.

Embedded into the eastern city walls, the splendid **cathedral** (☎ 92 021 16 41; Plaza de la Catedral; museum admission €4; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat, noon-5pm Sun Nov-Mar, 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat, noon-6pm Sun Apr-Jun & Oct, 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat, noon-7pm Sun Jul-Sep) was the first Gothic-style church built in Spain.

The **Convento de Santa Teresa** (☎ 92 021 10 30; Plaza de la Santa; museum admission €2; ☎ museum 10am-1.30pm & 3.30-5.30pm Tue-Sun, relic room 9.30am-1.30pm & 3.30-5.30pm daily, church 8.30am-1.30pm & 3.30-8.30pm daily) was built in 1636 to honour the memory of St Teresa, a 16th-century mystical writer and reformer of the Carmelite order who was born in Ávila. It's home to relics including a piece of the saint's ring finger, as well as a small museum about her life.

Sleeping

Alberge Juvenil Duperier (☎ 92 022 17 16; Av de la Juventud) This student residence functions as a youth hostel in the summer months July and August. It's a 20-minute walk southeast of the train station.

Pensión Santa Ana (☎ 92 022 00 63; 2nd fl, Calle Alfonso de Montalvo 2; s/d with shared bathroom €20/30) This decent budget choice is located in a quiet spot near the train station. The eight large rooms on offer are light, comfortable and extremely clean.

Eating & Drinking

Cafetería Hergós (☎ 92 021 33 70; Calle Don Geronimo 1) This bustling *cafetería* near the cathedral serves up enormous *bocadillos* (€2.75 to €4.50) as well as delicious pastries made at its *pastelería* in Paseo de San Roque.

Restaurante Casa Patas (☎ 92 021 31 94; Calle San Millán 4) Locals are fond of the cheap and tasty *raciones* served in the tiny downstairs bar

in this eatery off Plaza de Santa Teresa. An excellent lunchtime *menú* (€10) is served in the old-fashioned upstairs *comedor* (dining room).

There are several good bars just outside the Puerta de los Leales, the best of which is undoubtedly the noisy, smoky and welcoming **Bodeguito de San Segundo** (☎ 92 025 73 09; Calle San Segundo 19).

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (☎ 92 025 65 05; Av de Madrid) is a five-minute walk northeast from Puerta de San Vicente. There are services to Madrid's Estación Sur (€6.84, 1½ hours, five daily), Segovia (€4, one hour, two daily) and Salamanca (€5.12, 1½ hours, four daily).

The **train station** (Paseo de la Estación) is a 20-minute walk northeast along Av de Madrid from the old town. Services go to Madrid-Chamartín (€7.75, up to two hours, 24 per day) and León (€19, about three hours, three daily).

SALAMANCA

pop 163,815

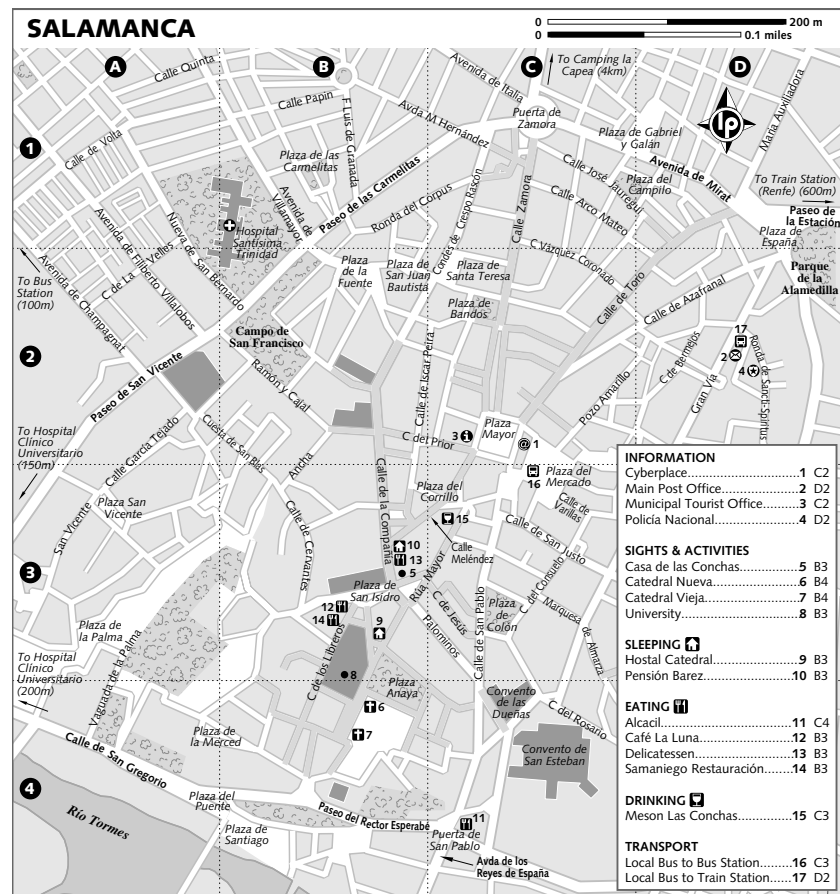
Like university towns the world over, Salamanca has always known how to throw a party. Scholars caroused amid its ornate and often whimsical architecture way back during the Renaissance, and these days it's known throughout the country for its vibrant café and bar scene.

There's a helpful **tourist office** (☎ 902 302 002; informacion@turismodesalamanca.com; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6.30pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Sep-Jun, 9am-2pm & 4.30-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jul & Aug) on Plaza Mayor. For internet, try **Cyberplace** (Plaza Mayor 10; per hr €1; ☎ 11am-midnight Mon-Fri, noon-midnight Sat & Sun).

Sights

The harmonious **Plaza Mayor** was designed in 1755 by José Churriguera, founder of the architectural style that carries his name. Equally impressive is the exterior of the gorgeous **Casa de las Conchas** (House of Shells), a city symbol since it was built in the 15th century and now home to the Regional Tourist Office and a library.

Founded by King Alfonso XI in 1218, the **university** (☎ 92 329 44 00, ext 1150; Calle de los Libreros; adult/student & child €4/2, free entry Mon morning; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1pm & 4-6.30pm Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) is worth a visit.



Salamanca is home to two cathedrals: the new, larger one was built beside its Romanesque predecessor instead of on top of it, as was the norm. The **Catedral Nueva** (New Cathedral; ☎ 92 321 74 76; Plaza Anaya; admission free; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-6pm Oct-Mar, 9am-2pm & 4-8pm Apr-Sep), completed in 1733, is a Gothic masterpiece that took 220 years to build. There's also the 12th-century **Catedral Vieja** (Old Cathedral; admission €3.50; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 4-5.30pm Oct-Mar, 10am-1.30pm & 4-7.30pm Apr-Sep).

Sleeping

Camping la Caepa (☎ 92 325 10 66; Carretera N-630, km 384; camp sites per person €3.20; ☎) This large, shady ground 4km north of the town centre has its own supermarket and *cafetería*. Hourly buses connect it with Gran Vía.

Pensión Barez (☎ 92 321 74 95; 1st fl, Calle Meléndez 19; per person with shared bathroom €12) The Barez offers the cheapest beds in town, complemented by shared bathrooms so clean that they gleam. Rooms vary in size and some are very noisy.

Hostal Catedral (☎ 92 327 06 14; 1st fl, Rúa Mayor 46; s/d €30/45) The rooms at this charming place feature impeccable white linen, comfortable beds, sparkling bathrooms and thick windows.

Eating & Drinking

Café La Luna (Calle de los Libreros 4) Starting your day here with hot chocolate and *churros* will set you back €1.80.

FIND THE FROG

The university's façade is an ornate mass of sculptures and carvings, and hidden among this 16th-century plateresque creation is a tiny stone frog. Legend says that those who find the frog will have good luck in studies, life and love.

A hint: it's sitting on a skull on the pillar that runs up the right-hand side of the façade.

Samaniego Restauración (☎ 92 321 41 52; Calle de los Libreros 18; menú €10) This bright and cheerful eatery serves a *menú* with lots of meat and fish choices, as well as daily *platos combinados* (combination plates, €6.50).

Delicatessen (☎ 92 328 03 09; Calle Meléndez 25) The fitout of this popular place is nearly (but not quite) as glamorous as its bar staff. There's a wide range of tapas and lots of comfortable seating. It also serves a tasty *menú* for €10.

Meson Las Conchas (☎ 92 321 21 67; Rúa Mayor 16) A total contrast to Delicatessen, here you can tuck into the hearty tapas on offer while sampling the cheap house wine and beer and chatting with the gents propping up the bar.

Alcávil (☎ 92 328 05 90; Calle de San Pablo 49; mains €6.50-9, menú 10.50; ☺ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Fri & Sat) A small and extremely attractive vegetarian restaurant, Alcávil serves up simple meals made with quality ingredients.

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (☎ 92 323 22 66) is 1km northwest of Plaza Mayor (bus 4 from Plaza del Mercado will take you there). Buses go to Madrid (€16, 2½ to three hours, 13 daily), Segovia (€9.12, three hours, two daily), Ávila (€5.12, 1½ hours, seven daily), Santiago de Compostela (€17.63 to €22.04, 6¼ hours, one daily) and Bilbao (€17.63 to €22.04, six hours, one daily).

Trains travel between Salamanca and Madrid-Chamartín (€15.30, 2½ hours, seven daily) via Ávila (€7.75, one hour). Bus 1 from the stop near the main post office on Gran Vía will get you to the station.

SEGOVIA

pop 55,766

The most enchanting city in Castilla, Segovia is the type of place that challenges travel writers to come up with enough superlatives to do it justice. In fact, the sheer charm of the town

is hard to put into words – you'll just have to experience it for yourself.

There's a **tourist office** (☎ 92 146 67 20; www.segovia.turismo.es; Plaza Axoguejo 1; ☺ 10am-8pm) next to the aqueduct. The nearby **locutorio** (Calle de San Francisco; per hr €1.80; ☺ 10am-10pm) offers internet access.

Sights

The **Roman aqueduct**, an 894m-long engineering wonder that looks like an enormous comb plunged into the centre of Segovia, is 28m high and was built without a drop of mortar – just good old Roman know-how.

In the heart of town is the resplendent **cathedral** (☎ 92 146 22 05; Plaza de la Catedral; adult/child €2/free, admission free Sun morning; ☺ 9am-5.30pm Nov-Mar, 9am-6.30pm Apr-Oct), home to some exceptional artwork and a graceful Gothic cloister.

The fortified **Alcázar** (☎ 92 146 07 59; www.alcazar.segovia.com; Plaza Reina Victoria Eugenia; adult/student & child €3.50/2.50; ☺ 10am-6pm Oct-Mar, 10am-7pm Apr-Sep) is perched dramatically on the edge of town. Roman foundations are buried somewhere underneath, but what we see today is a 13th-century structure that burned down in 1862 and was subsequently rebuilt. It houses a collection of military gear, but the ornate interiors of the reception rooms and the 360-degree views from the **Torre of Juan II** (admission €1.50; ☺ Wed-Mon) are even better.

Sleeping

Alberge Juvenil 'Emperador Teodosio RJ' (☎ 92 144 11 11; Paseo Conde de Sepúlveda 4; dm under/over 26yr €6.61/9.32) This student residence functions as a youth hostel in July and August. It's near the train station, a few kilometres out of town.

Pensión Ferri (☎ 92 146 09 57; Calle Escuderos 10; s/d with shared bathroom €17/26) The Ferri is in a great position just off Plaza Mayor. Its tiny rooms have uncomfortable beds and worn but clean linen. Bathrooms are basic but relatively clean.

Hostal Don Jaime I & II (☎ 92 144 47 87; hostaldon.jamie@hotmail.com; Calle Ochoa Ondátegui 8; s €25-32, with shared bathroom €20-22, d €38-43, with shared bathroom €25-30; ☑) This excellent *hostal* in a residential area behind the aqueduct offers attractive, spacious rooms with satellite TV.

Eating & Drinking

Valor Chocolaterías (Calle de Teodosio El Grange 8; ☺ 8am-12.30am; ☒) A cup of ultrarich chocolate and a plate of *churros* served in this chichi café costs €2.

Meson Tipico Alejandro (☎ 92 146 00 09; Calle Cabrera 6; menú €6-18) The cheapest *menú* in town is served up at this small tavern. Enter down the cobbled lane off Calle Cronista Lecea, just off Plaza Mayor.

Restaurant/Bar La Catedral (☎ 92 146 05 51; Calle Marqués del Arco 32; menú €12) This small and quietly elegant place en route to the Alcázar serves up an excellent daily *menú* and truly delicious desserts.

Mésón José María (☎ 92 146 02 72; Calle Cronista Lecea 11) The most atmospheric tapas bar in town has loads of standing room, a few tables and a wide choice of drinks.

Late-night drinking action is centred around Plaza Mayor (especially along Calles Escuderos, Colón and Isabel Católica) and along Av de Fernández Ladreda.

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (☎ 92 142 77 07; Paseo Ezequiel González 12) is a 15-minute walk along Av de Fernández Ladreda from the aqueduct. There are direct services between Segovia and Madrid's Paseo de la Florida bus station (€6.04, one hour, 22 daily) as well as services to Ávila (€4, one hour, five daily) and Salamanca (€9.12, 2¼ hours, two daily).

From the **train station**, services go to Madrid (€5.20, two hours, seven daily). Bus 8 will take you from the station to the aqueduct and bus 6 goes all the way up to the cathedral.

LEÓN

pop 136,952

Home to one of Europe's great cathedrals, León is worthy of a short visit. Its long boulevards, open squares and historic Barrio Húmedo (Damp District) are attractive, but the overall feel of the city is of stolid respectability, which can be off-putting after visiting its atmosphere-rich neighbours.

A **tourist office** (☎ 98 723 70 82; www.aytoleon.com; Plaza de la Regla 3; ☺ 9am-2pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 6-8pm Sat & Sun) is opposite the cathedral. For internet access, try the rear of **Cafetería Santo Domingo** (Av Ordoño II 3; per 45min €0.90; ☺ 8am-11pm Mon-Fri, 9am-11pm Sun).

Sights

León's breathtaking 13th-century **cathedral** (☎ 98 787 57 70; www.catedraldeleon.org, in Spanish; ☺ 8.30am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-2.30pm & 5-7pm Sun Oct-May, 8.30am-1.30pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-2.30pm & 5-8pm Sun Jun-Sep) is a mar-

vel of Gothic architecture. It's famous for its stained-glass windows, which give it an ethereal quality. Inside, there's a **museum** (admission €3.50; ☺ 9.30am-1.30pm & 4-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1.30pm Sat Oct-Jun, 9.30am-1.30pm & 4-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2pm & 4-7pm Sat Jul-Sep), which is entered through the **cloister** (admission €1).

Nearby is the **Real Basílica de San Isidoro**, a simple Romanesque church housing the **Panteón Real** (☎ 98 787 61 61; www.sanisidorodeleon.org; Plaza de San Isidoro 4; 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), where Leónese royalty lie buried beneath a canopy of some of the finest frescoes in Spain.

Sleeping

Hostal Bayón (☎ 98 723 14 46; 2nd fl, Calle Alcázar de Toledo 6; s/d with shower €25/35, with shared bathroom €15/28) This friendly, plant-filled place is located in the commercial heart of town. Freshly painted rooms feature high ceilings, polished floorboards and satellite TV.

Eating & Drinking

The most popular lunch *menú* in town is served – bizarrely enough – at the enormous *cafetería* at the train station. It costs €10. For delicious *bocadillos grandes* (€3.05) and pastries (€1.40) check out **El Valenciano** (Plaza Santo Domingo).

La Casa del Embutido 'El Tizón' (☎ 98 726 00 94; Calle Platerías 4; ☺ closed Sun dinner & all day Mon) This place has been serving drinks and tapas to satisfied customers since 1973 and shows no signs of its popularity waning. It also serves *menús* (€11.50 to €25.50) in its restaurant.

Most of the bars in town are found in the Barrio Húmedo, but one exception is the funky **El Capitán** (Calle de Ancha 8). Its boudoir ambience comes complete with candlelight and red velvet drapes.

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (☎ 98 721 10 00; Paseo Ingeniero Sáenz de Miera) is on the banks of the river, a 15-minute walk from the old town along busy Av de Ordoño II. Buses go to Madrid (€37.03 to €65.06, at least 3½ hours, 12 daily), Burgos (€23.73, two to four hours, six daily) and Salamanca (€12, three hours, two daily).

The nearby **train station** (Av de Astorga) offers services to Madrid (€23.80 to €35.90, four hours, five daily), Ávila (€17 to €29.20, 2½ hours, seven daily) and Santiago de Compostela (€27.10, six hours, one daily).

BURGOS

pop 170,783

The legendary warrior El Cid was born just outside Burgos and is buried in its magnificent cathedral. Perhaps this is where the city's noble atmosphere comes from, for of all the Castilian cities this is the most sophisticated.

The main entertainment strip is Calle Sombrereria off Plaza Mayor.

Information

Ciber Café (per hr €4; ☎ noon-2am Mon-Thu, noon-4am Fri & Sat, 5pm-1am Sun)

Olivetti (Plaza Alonso Martínez 3; per hr €2; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Fri) This computer shop next to the regional tourist office has three terminals offering the cheapest internet access in town.

Regional tourist office (☎ 94 720 31 25; Plaza Alonso Martínez 7; ☎ 9am-2pm & 5-8pm)

Sights

The gleaming white **cathedral** (☎ 94 720 47 12; www.catedraldeburgos.es; Plaza de Santa María; adult/student/child €4/2.50/1, audio guide €3.50; ☎ ticket office 10am-1.15pm & 4-6.45pm Sep-Jun, 9.30am-1.15pm & 4-7.15pm Jul & Aug) is a Gothic gem. El Cid lies buried beneath the central dome.

The **Monasterio de las Huelgas** (☎ 94 720 16 30; adult/student & child €5/2.50; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3.45-5.30pm Tue-Sat, 10.30am-2pm Sun), an elegant Cistercian order founded in 1187 by Eleanor of Aquitaine, is still home to Cistercian nuns. Guided tours (in Spanish) are compulsory and leave the ticket office every 50 minutes or so. From the cathedral, it's a pleasant 25-minute walk west along the southern bank of the Arlanzón River.

Sleeping & Eating

Pensión Peña (☎ 94 720 63 23; 2nd fl, Calle La Puebla 18; s with shared bathroom €17-19, d €24-26) You'll pay bargain prices for the impeccably clean and very comfortable rooms on offer in this secure, family-occupied building.

Café España (☎ 94 720 53 37; Calle de Lain Calvo 12) Locals have been eating their breakfast here since 1921 and it's easy to see why. The surrounds are charming, the coffee (€1.30) is excellent and the *bocadillos con jamon y queso* (rolls with ham and cheese, €1.30) are delicious.

Restaurante La Riojana (☎ 94 720 61 32; Calle Avelanos 10; menú €7.50) The cheapest lunch *menú* (or *plato del día*) in town is served at this unpretentious eatery.

Prego (☎ 94 726 04 47; Calle Huerto del Rey 4; salads & pasta €5-8, pizza from €12; ☎ closed Jan) One of the city's few good options for vegetarians, Prego serves good pizzas and a wide range of classic Italian dishes.

If you're after fast food, there are plenty of cheap eateries in the streets around Calle de la Paloma, including several kebab joints.

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (☎ 94 728 88 55; Calle Miranda) is just across the river from the cathedral. Services go to Madrid (€14.52 to €22, 2¾ to 3½ hours, 16 daily), Bilbao (€10.93, two to four hours, 14 daily) and León (€23.73, two to four hours, six daily).

The **train station** (Av Conde de Guadalhorce) is southwest of the bus station, a 15-minute walk from the cathedral. Trains travel to Madrid-Chamartín (€20 to €25, five hours, six daily) and Salamanca (€19 to €20, three hours, five daily).

CASTILLA-LA MANCHA

Best known as the home of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, Castilla-La Mancha conjures up images of lonely windmills, medieval castles and bleak plains. The characters of Miguel de Cervantes provide the literary context, but the atmosphere-rich cities of Toledo and Cuenca are the most compelling reasons to visit.

TOLEDO

pop 75,973

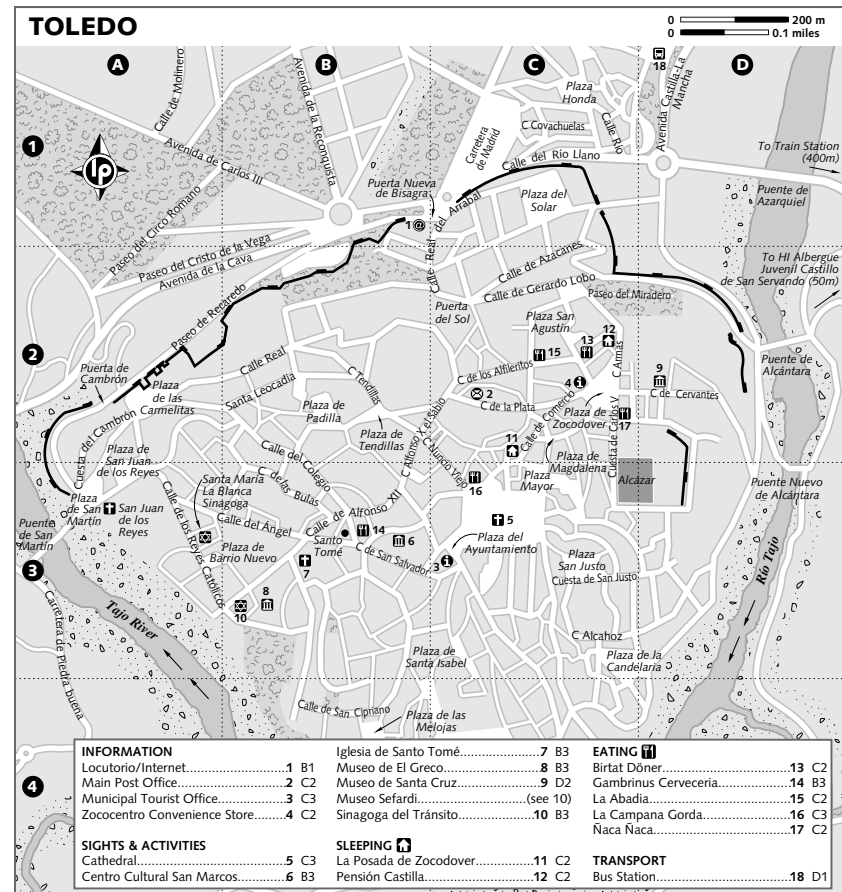
Toledo is a corker of a city. Commanding a hill rising above the Río Tajo, it's crammed with monuments that attest to the waves of conquerors and communities – Roman, Visigoth, Jewish, Muslim and Christian – that have called it home during its turbulent history.

Information

Locutorio/Internet (☎ Plaza de Santiago del Arrabal; per hr €2; ☎ 12.30pm-2am)

Municipal tourist office (☎ 92 525 40 30; Plaza del Ayuntamiento; ☎ 10.30am-2.30pm & 4.30-7pm Tue-Sun, 10.30am-2.30pm Mon)

Zococentro Convenience Store (☎ 92 522 03 00; Calle de la Sillería 14; ☎ 10.30am-6pm) This store just off Plaza de Zocodover has a tourist information desk and one internet terminal (per 20 minutes €1).



Sights

The **cathedral** (☎ 92 522 22 41; Calle Cardenal Cisneros; ☎ 10.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-6.30pm Sun) is Toledo's major landmark. There's loads to see within its hefty stone walls, including art by El Greco, Velázquez, Caravaggio and Goya. You must buy a ticket (€5.50) from the ticket office on Calle Cardenal Cisneros to enter four areas, the **Coro**, **Sacristía**, **Capilla de la Torre** and **Sala Capitulare**, which contain the finest art and craftsmanship.

The **Museo de Santa Cruz** (☎ 92 522 10 36; Calle de Cervantes 3; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) contains a large collection of furniture, faded tapestries and paintings. Upstairs is an impressive collection of El Greco's works.

In the southwestern part of the old city, the queues outside an unremarkable church, the

Iglesia de Santo Tomás (☎ 92 525 60 98; Plaza del Conde; adult/student €1.90/1.40; ☎ 10am-5.45pm Oct-Jun, 10am-6.45pm Jul-Sep), betray the presence of El Greco's masterpiece, *El Entierro del Conde de Orgaz*.

The **Museo de El Greco** (☎ 92 522 44 05; Calle Samuel Levi; admission €2.40; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-Jun, 10am-2pm & 4-9pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jul-Sep) contains the artist's famous *Vista y Plano de Toledo*, plus about 20 of his minor works.

The **Museo Sefardi** (☎ 92 522 36 65; Calle Samuel Levi; admission €2.40; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sun Dec-Feb, 10am-2pm & 4-9pm Tue-Sun Mar-Nov) is housed in the beautiful 14th-century **Sinagoga del Tránsito**.

The recently opened **Centro Cultural San Marcos** (☎ 92 522 16 16; www.clavesdetoledo.com, in Spanish;

Calle Trinidad 7; admission €4; ☎ 10am-8pm Tue-Sat, 10.30am-2.30pm Sun), housed in the Iglesia de San Marco, has 30 audiovisual displays exploring Toledo's fascinating history.

Sleeping

Accommodation is often full, especially from Easter to September and on weekends year-round.

HI Albergue Juvenil Castillo de San Servando (☎ 92 522 16 76; alberquesdm@ccm.es; Subida al Castillo; dm under/over 26yr €9.20/12; 📺 📶) Toledo's youth hostel is housed in an Arabic fortress that started life as a Visigothic monastery. Large two- or four-person rooms have comfortable beds and their own bathroom. There's a *cafeteria*, laundry facilities, swimming pool and free internet access between 5pm and 7pm. It's a 10-minute walk down stairs and over the river from Plaza de Zocodover, or you can catch bus 11.

Pensión Castilla (☎ 92 525 63 18; Calle Recoletos 6; d €27, s/d with shared bathroom €17/24; 🚻) The seven small but charming rooms here feature polished floorboards and ceiling fans; some at the front have their own bathrooms. It's a clean, safe choice.

La Posada de Zocodover (☎/fax 92 525 58 14; Calle Cordonerías 6; d €39; 🚻) Seven rooms are on offer in this old, narrow building. They feature timbered ceilings, pretty brass beds and satellite TV.

Eating & Drinking

Ñaca Naca (☎ Plaza de Zocodover 7; bocadillos €2-3.50) The takeaway *bocadillos* from here are good for late-night munchies or midday snacks.

Birtat Döner (Calle de la Sillería) This Turkish takeaway joint off Plaza de Zocodover stays open late and sells *falafel* and *döner kebab* sandwiches for €3.

Gambrinus Cervceria (☎ 92 521 44 40; Calle de Santo Tomás 10) You can join the locals for a quick breakfast (€2 for coffee, *tostada* and fresh orange juice) at this friendly place, or linger at the bar over an evening drink and a *ración* of tasty *patatas bravas* (potatoes with garlic and tomato sauce, €6.50).

La Abadía (☎ 92 525 11 40; Plaza San Nicolás 3; mains €5.80-12.90; ☎ 8am-midnight Mon-Fri, noon-1am Sat, noon-midnight Sun) There are plenty of reasons why this place is so popular, but we'll single out the attractive African-influenced décor, the excellent exhaust system and the good coffee. The upstairs bar is a great spot for breakfast

or tapas, and the downstairs *comedor* serves up a popular *menú* for €10.

La Campana Gorda (☎ 92 521 01 46; Calle Hombre de Palo 13; menú €9.70) You'll need to get here at the very start of service if you want to score a table and sample the *menú* served in the rear *comedor* of this extremely popular tavern.

Getting There & Away

Toledo's **bus station** (☎ 92 521 58 50; Av Castilla-La Mancha) is northeast of the old town. There are services between Toledo and Madrid's Estación Sur (€4.25, 1½ hours, every 20 minutes), Valencia (€22.50, 5½ hours, one daily) and Cuenca (€9.85, three hours, three daily).

From the **train station** (Calle Paseo Rosa), 400m east of the Puente Azarquiel, express AV trains run to Madrid-Atocha (€8.30, 35 minutes, 10 daily). The first train from Madrid departs at 6.50am, the last from Toledo at 9.20pm.

Bus 5 links the bus and train stations with Plaza de Zocodover in the old town (€0.85).

CUENCA

pop 48,937

Teetering on the edge of the Júcar and the Huécar gorges, Cuenca's *alta ciudad* (high town) is full of crumbling ancient buildings known as *casas colgadas* (hanging houses), which cling for dear life to the steep sides of the ravines.

The **tourist office** (☎ 96 923 21 17; www.cuenca.es; Plaza Mayor 1; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-2pm Sun) is in the *alta ciudad*. For internet, try **Next Level** (Calle Colon 36; per hr €1.60; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-10pm Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm & 4-10pm Sat & Sun), near the train station.

Sights & Activities

Cuenca's 15th-century *casas colgadas* are precariously positioned on a clifftop, their balconies projecting out over the gorge. To view them properly, walk over the **Puente San Pablo** (1902), an iron footbridge that crosses the ravine. Within one of the houses is the excellent **Museo de Arte Abstracto Español** (☎ 96 921 29 83; www.march.es; adult/student €3/1.50; ☎ 11am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Fri, 11am-2pm & 4-8pm Sat, 11am-2.30pm Sun).

On Plaza Mayor you'll find Cuenca's strange **cathedral** (☎ 96 922 46 26; admission €2; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat, 10am-6.30pm Sun). The lines of the unfinished façade are Norman-Gothic and reminiscent of French cathedrals, but the stained-glass windows look like they'd be more at home in the abstract art museum.

Sleeping & Eating

Pensión Central (☎ 96 921 15 11; 2nd fl, Calle Alonso Chirino 7; s with shared bathroom €13-15, d with shared bathroom €22-26) Just off the busy shopping street in the new town, this friendly place has worn but clean rooms.

Pensión Tabanqueta (☎ 96 921 12 90; Calle Trabuco 13; s/d with shared bathroom €15/30) Towards the top of the *alta ciudad* and with views of the Júcar gorge, this simple place is clean and comfortable. There's a lively bar downstairs.

Bar La Tinaja (Calle Obispo Valero 4) Just off Plaza Mayor, this bustling bar serves up cheap drinks and enormous *bocadillos*.

Cafetería Ruiz (Calle Carretería 14) This *confitería* on the main street of the new town serves up fabulous calorie-laden pastries and cakes in a time-warp 1970s interior.

Getting There & Away

From the **bus station** (☎ 96 922 70 87; Calle Fermin Caballero) there are services to AutoRes' Madrid bus station near Conde de Casal (€12.60, two hours, nine daily) as well as to Toledo (€9.85, up to three hours, two daily) and Barcelona (€28.32, nine hours, one daily).

Trains travel between Cuenca's **train station** (Paseo Ferrocarril) and Madrid-Atocha (€9.90, 2½ hours, six daily). There's also a service between Cuenca and Valencia (€10.90, three hours, four daily).

Bus 1 from outside the bus station on the opposite side of the road will save you the crippling uphill climb to the *alta ciudad* (€0.80).

CATALONIA

Home to stylish Barcelona, ancient Tarragona, romantic Girona and countless alluring destinations along the coast, in the Pyrenees and in the rural interior, Catalonia is a treasure box waiting to be opened.

BARCELONA

pop 1.59 million

Perhaps Spain's most un-Spanish city, stylish Barcelona is a forward-thinking place, always on the cutting edge of art, design, and cuisine. Whether you explore its medieval palaces and plazas, gawk at the modernist masterpieces, shop for designer duds along its stylish boulevards, sample its exciting nightlife or just soak up the sun on the city beaches, you'll

be hard-pressed not to fall in love with this vibrant city.

Orientation

Plaça de Catalunya is the heart of the city and marks the divide between historic and modern Barcelona. From here, the long pedestrian boulevard Las Ramblas shoots southeast to the sea, with the busy Barri Gòtic (Gothic Quarter) and El Raval district hugging it on either side. To the northwest of the plaza is L'Eixample, the vast grid-like district where you'll find some excellent shopping areas and the bulk of the city's offices and residences.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Casa del Llibre (Map pp1044-5; ☎ 93 272 34 80; Passeig de Gràcia 62; 📖 Passeig de Gràcia) Great English section.

EMERGENCY

General Emergencies (☎ 112)

Guardia Urbana (City Police; Map p1050; ☎ 092; Las Ramblas 43; 📖 Liceu)

INTERNET ACCESS

Easy Internet Café (Map p1050; Las Ramblas 29; per hr €3; ☎ 8am-2.30am; 📖 Liceu) You can get a better rate if you buy multihour time cards.

WTN Internet (Map p1050; Carrer Unió 16; 📖 Liceu)

LAUNDRY

Wash n' Dry (Map pp1044-5; ☎ 93 412 19 53; Carrer Nou de la Rambla 19; ☎ 7am-11pm; 📖 Liceu)

MEDICAL SERVICES

24-hour Pharmacy (Map p1050; Las Ramblas 98; 📖 Liceu) There are many 24-hour pharmacies in the city, including another at Passeig de Gràcia 90. See www.farmaciesdeguardia.com (in Spanish) for a full listing.
Hospital Clinic (Map pp1044-5; ☎ 93 227 54 00; www.hospitalclinic.org; Carrer Villarroel 170; 📖 Hospital Clinic) Modern hospital with good services for travellers.

POST

Main post office (Map p1050; ☎ 93 486 80 50; Plaça Antoni López; ☎ 8.30am-10pm Mon-Sat, noon-10pm Sun; 📖 Barceloneta)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Main tourist office (Map p1050; ☎ 93 285 38 34; www.barcelonaturisme.com; Plaça de Catalunya 17; ☎ 9am-9pm; 📖 Plaça Catalunya)



GETTING INTO TOWN

The main train station, Sants, is a hike from the centre of town, but it's well connected by metro. Catch the green line (3) to reach Las Ramblas. The main bus station, Estació del Nord, is just northeast of the Barri Gòtic. Walk along the Ronda de Sant Pere for about 15 minutes to reach Plaça de Catalunya or hop on the metro at the nearby Arc de Triomf stop.

Normally, trains link the airport to the Sants and Plaça Catalunya train stations every half-hour (€2.40, 25 to 40 minutes), but construction work on the line has made this an oftentimes slow and complicated route. You're better off taking the Aerobus (€3.75, 30 minutes, every 12 minutes) to the city centre.

Sights & Activities

LAS RAMBLAS

Spain's most famous street, the pedestrian boulevard of **Las Ramblas** is exploding with life. Stretching from **Plaça de Catalunya** to the waterfront, this one-time creek bed is lined with street artists, news kiosks and vendors.

The colourful **Mercat de la Boqueria** (Map p1050; ☎ 93 318 25 84; Las Ramblas 91; ☎ 8am-8.30pm Mon-Sat; 🍷 Liceu), a fresh market with a modernist entryway, is one of Las Ramblas' highlights. Nearby, stop for a tour of the **Gran Teatre del Liceu** (Map p1050; ☎ 93 485 99 14; Las Ramblas 51-59; adult/student €6/4; ☎ 10am-1pm; 🍷 Liceu), the city's fabulous opera house.

Cross Las Ramblas to stop in at **Plaça Reial**, a grand 19th-century square surrounded by arcades and a few good restaurants. At the end of Las Ramblas stands the **Monument a Colom** (Map pp1044-5; adult/child €2.20/1.40; ☎ 10am-6.30pm Oct-May, 9am-8.30pm Jun-Sep; 🍷 Drassanes), a statue of Columbus atop a tall pedestal. A small lift will take you to the top for panoramic views.

BARRI GÒTIC

Though essentially a Gothic creation, Barcelona's looming **cathedral** (Map p1050; ☎ 93 315 15 54; Plaça de la Seu; museum €1, combined ticket museum, choir, rooftop & crypt €4; ☎ church & cloister 8am-1.15pm & 4.30-7.30pm, museum 10am-1pm; 🍷 Jaume I) was built on top of the ruins of an 11th-century Romanesque church. The façade, covered up for cleaning at the time of writing, is a neo-Gothic addition tacked on in the 19th century.

Not far from the cathedral is pretty **Plaça del Rei** and the fascinating **Museu d'Història de la Ciutat** (Map p1050; ☎ 93 315 11 11; Plaça del Rei; adult/student €4/2.50; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun Oct-May, 10am-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun Jun-Sep; 🍷 Jaume I), where you can visit a 4000-sq-metre excavated site of Roman Barcelona under the plaza. The museum encompasses several historic buildings, including the **Palau Reial**

Major (Main Royal Palace), once a residence of the kings of Catalonia and Aragón, and its **Saló del Tinell** (Great Hall). In summer, outdoor concerts are often held in the plaza.

EL RAVAL

To the west of Las Ramblas is El Raval district, a once-seedy, now-funky area overflowing with cool bars and shops. Visit the **Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona** (MACBA; Map p1050; ☎ 93 412 08 10; Plaça dels Angels 1; adult/student €7.50/6; ☎ 11am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun Oct-Jun, 11am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat, 11am-3pm Sun Jul-Sep, closed Tue; 🍷 Plaça Catalunya), which has an impressive collection of international contemporary art.

LA RIBERA

Home to Barcelona's bustling textile industry and to its wealthy merchants, La Ribera was the city's most prosperous medieval quarter. Now it's a trendy district exploding with boutiques, restaurants and bars.

The palaces where some of those wealthy merchants once lived have been converted into the **Museu Picasso** (Map p1050; ☎ 93 319 63 10; Carrer de Montcada 15-23; admission €6; ☎ 10am-8pm Tue-Sun; 🍷 Jaume I), home to more than 3000 Picassos, most from early in the artist's career.

The heart of the neighbourhood is the elegant **Basilica de Santa Maria del Mar** (Map p1050; Plaça del Santa Maria del Mar; ☎ 9.30am-1.30pm & 4.30-8pm; 🍷 Jaume I), a stunning example of Catalan Gothic.

The opulent **Palau de la Música Catalana** (Map p1050; ☎ 902 442 882; www.palaumusica.org; Carrer Sant Francesc de Paula 2; tour €8; ☎ 10am-3.30pm; 🍷 Urquinaona) is one of the city's most delightful modernist works. Designed by Lluís Domènech i Montaner in 1905, it hosts concerts daily.

La Ribera is bordered to the east by the sprawling **Parc de la Ciutadella** (Map pp1044-5;

☎ 10am-dusk; 🍷 Barceloneta), a park ideal for strolling or picnics. It's home to a small, kid-friendly **zoo** (Map pp1044-5; ☎ 93 225 67 80; www.zoobarcelona.com; adult/child €14.50/8.75; ☎ 10am-7pm Jun-Sep, 10am-6pm Mar-May & Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Feb).

L'EIXAMPLE & MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE

Modernisme, an architectural and cultural movement loosely defined as the Catalan version of Art Nouveau, transformed Barcelona's cityscape in the early 20th century. Modernisme's most famous architect was the eccentric Antoni Gaudí (1852–1926), a devout Catholic whose work is full of references to nature and Christianity. His masterpiece, **La Sagrada Família** (Map pp1044-5; ☎ 93 207 30 31; www.sagradafamilia.org; Carrer de Mallorca 401; adult/student €8/5; ☎ 9am-6pm Oct-Mar, 9am-8pm Apr-Sep; 🍷 Sagrada Família), is a work in progress and Barcelona's most famous building. Construction began in 1882 and it's estimated will be complete in 2020.

Eventually there will be 18 towers, all more than 100m high, representing the 12 Apostles, four Evangelists and Mary, Mother of God, plus the tallest tower (170m) standing for Jesus Christ. Climb high inside some of the towers (or take the elevator, €2) for a new perspective.

La Pedrera (Map pp1044-5; ☎ 902 40 09 73; Carrer Provença 261-265; admission €8; ☎ 10am-8pm; 🍷 Diagonal), Gaudí's best-known secular creation, houses a museum about the architect and his work, an apartment decorated with modernist furniture and a surreal rooftop with bizarre chimneys. Concerts are sometimes held here in summer.

Just down the street is the glittering façade of the **Casa Batlló** (Map pp1044-5; ☎ 93 216 03 06; Passeig de Gràcia 43; admission €16; ☎ 9am-8pm; 🍷 Passeig de Gràcia), an allegory for the legend of St George the dragon-slayer (Sant Jordi in Catalan). On the same block are two other modernist jewels: at No 41 there's **Casa Amatller** by Josep Puig i Cadafalch; and at No 35 **Casa Lleó Morera** by Lluís Domènech i Montaner. This mish-mash of architectural styles gave the block its nickname: the *Manzana de Discòrdia*, or Block of Discord.

High up in the Gràcia district sits Gaudí's enchanting **Parc Güell** (☎ 10am-dusk), originally designed to be a self-contained community with houses, schools and shops. The project flopped, but we're left with a Dr Seuss-style playground filled with colourful tile mosaics

and Gaudí-designed paths and plazas. Get here by metro (which involves a steep uphill climb) or on bus 24 from Plaça Universitat.

WATERFRONT

Barcelona has two major ports: the **Port Vell** (Old Port) at the base of Las Ramblas, and **Port Olímpic** (Olympic Port) 1.5km up the coast. Shops, seafood restaurants and nightlife options are plentiful around both marinas, particularly the Port Olímpic. Between the two ports sits the triangular-shaped fishermen's quarter, **La Barceloneta**. It's scruffy and a bit worn around the edges, but it's a great place to escape the crowds and find tasty, affordable seafood.

Barcelona boasts 4km of **city beaches**. Most central is the pebbly Platja Barceloneta. On all beaches, keep a close eye on your belongings.

MONTJUÏC

A forested hill southwest of the centre, Montjuïc serves as a Central Park of sorts and is a great place for a stroll overlooking the city. Public transport is a bit complicated; to get here, either hike up, take bus 61 from Plaça Espanya, or catch the **funicular railway** (one way €1.20; ☎ 9am-10pm) from Parallel metro station.

Several city museums and attractions are here:

Fundació Joan Miró (Map pp1044-5; ☎ 93 443 94 70; Av Miramar 71-75; admission €8; ☎ 10am-7pm Tue-Wed, 10am-9.30pm Thu, 10am-7pm Fri-Sat, 10am-2.30pm Sun) Works by Miró and others.

Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (Map pp1044-5; ☎ 93 622 03 60; admission €8.50; ☎ 10am-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2.30pm Sun) Catalan religious art.

Poble Espanyol (Map pp1044-5; ☎ 93 508 63 30; Av Marquès de Comillas; adult/student €7.50/5.50; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon, 9am-2am Tue-Thu, 9am-4am Fri & Sat, 9am-midnight Sun) Mock Spanish village with craft shops and nightlife.

Festivals & Events

Barcelona's biggest festival is **La Mercè**, a city-wide party culminating on 24 September. Another red-letter date on the calendar is **Sant Joan** (St John's Day, 23 July), when days of endless firecrackers welcome summer. In June and July the **El Grec** arts festival fills Barcelona with theatre, dance and music.

Sleeping

Barcelona seems to get another four- or five-star hotel every week, and if you're looking for luxury there is no shortage of it here. You'll also

find a solid selection of budget *hostales* and *pensiones*, mostly in the Barri Gòtic and around Plaça de Catalunya. Unfortunately, good-value midrange hotels are harder to come by. Your best bet is looking online for deals.

CAMPING

Around the beachy town of Castelldefels, south of Barcelona, the C-31 highway is lined with camping grounds. A sprawling place close to the beach and with its own terrace and bar, **Tres Estrelles** (☎ 936 33 06 37; www.camping3estrelles.com; Autovia de Castelldefels km 186.2; camp sites per 2 adults with tent €22; ☎ 15 Mar-15 Oct) is a good option. Catch bus L95 from Barcelona's Plaça de Catalunya or Plaça Espanya to get there.

LAS RAMBLAS, BARRI GÒTIC & LA RIBERA

The Ciutat Vella (Old City) is packed with budget *hostales* and *pensiones*.

Hostal Parisien (Map p1050; ☎ 93 301 62 83; Las Ramblas 114; s with shared bath €20, d €40-54; ☎; (M) Liceu) Popular with students, the Parisien is clean and friendly, if noisy. If you have earplugs, book one of the brighter exterior rooms.

Hostal Avinyó (Map p1050; ☎ 93 318 79 45; www.hostalavinyo.com; Carrer d'Avinyó 42; d/tr €54/72, s/d with shared bathroom €24/40; ☎; (M) Liceu) Too bad the service here isn't as welcoming as the comfy rooms, which all offer ceiling fans and some balconies. Very centrally located.

Hostal Lausanne (Map p1050; ☎ 93 302 11 39; www.hostalresidencialausanne.com; Av del Portal de l'Àngel 24; s/d €50/60, s/d with shared bathroom €30/49; (M) Plaça Catalunya) The rooms in this pretty, old modernist-style building boast soaring ceilings and attractive tile floors.

Hostal Benidorm (Map p1050; ☎ 93 302 20 54; www.hostalbenidorm.com; Las Ramblas 37; s/d/tr/q €35/55/75/90; ☎; (M) Drassanes) Flowered bedspreads, sparkling tile floors and balconies overlooking Las Ramblas make this a pleasant place to stay.

our pick Hostal Jardí (Map p1050; ☎ 93 301 59 00; www.hoteljardi-barcelona.com; Plaça Sant Josep Oriol 1; r €70-96; ☎; (M) Liceu) Long a city favourite, the Jardí overlooks a pretty plaza (paying extra for a room with a view is worth it!) and has tidy rooms.

Hostal Boqueria (Map p1050; ☎ 93 302 72 60; Las Ramblas 100; s/d/tr/q €55/85/100/120; ☎; (M) Liceu) Surprisingly quiet, the spick-'n-span Boqueria is great value, with bright rooms, marble counters in the bathrooms and attractive décor.

EL RAVAL

Barcelona Ramblas (Map p1050; ☎ 93 442 36 69; www.barcelonaramblas.com; Carrer Nou de la Rambla 50; per person €30, per person with shared bathroom €28; (M) Drassanes) Right off Las Ramblas, this modern *hostal* boasts plaid bedspreads and prints on the walls.

Hotel España (Map p1050; ☎ 93 318 17 58; www.hotel-espanya.com; Carrer de Sant Pau 9-11; s/d incl breakfast €75/105; ☎; (M) Liceu) The Espanya boasts beautiful modernist décor by Lluís Domènech i Montaner, and breezy rooms with cool tile floors and simple furnishings.

Also recommended:
Gat Raval (Map p1050; ☎ 93 481 66 70; www.gat-accommodation.com; Carrer Joaquim Costa 44; d €60, s/d with shared bathroom €38/54; ☎; (M) Sant Antoni) Neon-green walls, stylish décor and a laid-back attitude.
Gat Xino (Map p1050; ☎ 93 324 88 33; www.gat-accommodation.com; Carrer de l'Hospital 149-55; s/d incl breakfast €60/80; ☎; (M) Paralel) An upgraded version of Gat Raval.

L'EIXAMPLE

You'll find lots of good-value *hostales* and hotels near Plaça de Catalunya.

Centric Point (Map p1050; ☎ 93 231 20 45; www.centric-point.com; Passeig de Gràcia 33; d with shared bathroom €40-55, dm per person €17-22, €1 extra for credit card payment; ☎; (M) Passeig de Gràcia) This huge (400 beds!) youth hostel offers clean but spartan rooms, a kitchen and a nighttime bar. Sheets cost extra.

Hostal Goya (Map p1050; ☎ 93 302 25 65; www.hostal-goya.com; Carrer de Pau Claris 74; s €68, d €75-85; ☎; (M) Urquinaona) Decorated in soothing neutral tones, the cool Ikea-style Goya is one of the best deals in L'Eixample, with friendly staff, comfy rooms and a good location.

Hotel Inglaterra (Map p1050; ☎ 93 505 11 00; www.hotel-inglaterra.com; Carrer de Pelai 14; s €99-160, d €119-200; (M) Universitat) Little brother of the famed five-star Hotel Majestic, this well-equipped hotel boasts a superb location and quiet rooms.

Eating

Barcelona is foodie heaven. It has firmly established itself as one of Europe's gourmet capitals, and innovative, push-the-envelope restaurants abound. Many of the most creative chefs were students of famed contemporary chef Ferran Adrià, whose innovative cooking techniques fuse science and gastronomy and have notably influenced the city's cuisine.

Though the city has a reputation for being the hot spot for the 'new Spanish cuisine',

dishes like shellfish paella, pigs' trotters, rabbit with snails and *butifarra* (a tasty local sausage) are still the backbone of many eateries.

LAS RAMBLAS, BARRI GÒTIC & LA RIBERA

This part of town is loaded with restaurants, including the over-priced touristy places on Las Ramblas and fast-food chains along Carrer Ferran. Self-caterers should make a beeline for the wildly colourful Mercat de la Boqueria (p1046) for fresh food.

Bagel Shop (Map p1050; ☎ 93 302 41 61; Carrer de la Canuda 25; mains €3.50-8; (M) Liceu) Top your bagel with anything from turkey and cheese to Mallorcan *sobrassada* or *butifarra* sausages at this informal café.

Organic (Map p1050; ☎ 93 342 81 03; Mercat de la Boqueria stand 972; mains up to €8; (M) Liceu) At the far back of La Boqueria market is this organic, vegan-friendly stall selling tasty food to go. The same folks have a full restaurant on Carrer Junta Comerç 11.

La Fonda (Map p1050; ☎ 93 301 75 15; Carrer dels Escudellers 10; mains €5.50-10, menú €7.90; (M) Drassanes) Airy and stylish, La Fonda serves Mediterranean fare ranging from pasta and rice dishes to stews and grilled meats. It's great value, so expect to wait for a table. The same owner runs La Rita (see right) and a host of other city restaurants, all known for their cheap lunch *menús*.

Els Quatre Gats (Map p1050; ☎ 93 302 41 40; Carrer de Montsió 3; mains €15-22, menú €11; (M) Urquinaona) The legendary modernist café where Picasso had his first exhibit, 'the Four Cats' now serves excellent (though pricey) Catalan dishes.

Origins 99.9% (Map p1050; ☎ 93 310 75 31; Carrer Viderriera 6-8; menú €10; ☎ 12.30pm-1.30am; (M) Jaume I) This shop-restaurant combo in La Ribera boasts that '99.9%' of everything sold is from Catalonia. The ever-changing daily *menú* features local specialities such as *escalivada* (roasted veggies on bread) and Catalan sausages.

EL RAVAL

Buenas Migas (Map p1050; ☎ 93 412 16 86; Plaça Bonsuccés 6; mains €3.95-4.95; ☎ 10am-11pm Sun-Wed, 10am-midnight Thu-Sat; (M) Liceu) Quiche, focaccias and awesome desserts are served al fresco at this small café.

Mamacafé (Map p1050; ☎ 93 301 29 40; Carrer del Doctor Dou 10; menus €7.40-9.40; (M) Liceu) The slogan here is 'healthy and creative', and it lives up to the claim with a refreshing variety of vegetarian-friendly food including soups, salads and couscous with veggies.

Bar Ra (Map p1050; ☎ 93 301 41 63; Plaça Gardunya; menú €11; (M) Liceu) Just behind La Boqueria, Ra is a funky bar, café and restaurant known for its big terrace (ideal in fine weather) and light, international dishes.

L'EIXAMPLE

Laie Libreria Café (Map p1050; ☎ 93 302 73 10; Carrer de Pau Claris 85; mains €6-12; ☎ Mon-Sat; (M) Passeig de Gràcia) A delightful, sunny café whose delicious buffet and lunch *menú* is packed with healthy food, local specialities and vegetarian options.

Cerveceria Catalana (Map pp1044-5; ☎ 93 216 03 68; Carrer de Mallorca 236; mains €6-15; (M) Passeig de Gràcia) Arrive early to try the delicious tapas and *flautons* (long skinny sandwiches) at this classic tavern off Rambla de Catalunya.

La Rita (Map pp1044-5; ☎ 93 487 23 76; Carrer d'Aragó 279; mains €6-10, menú €7.90; (M) Passeig de Gràcia) For a bit of style, this popular restaurant does the trick. Be prepared to wait in line for samples of its pastas, seafood and traditional dishes.

Mussol (Map p1050; ☎ 93 301 76 10; Carrer de Casp 19; (M) Plaça Catalunya; mains €5.50-15) Specialising in grilled meats and vegetables, this sprawling informal restaurant offers filling portions and excellent value. There's another branch at Carrer d'Aragó 261 (Map pp1044-5).

WATERFRONT

Go to La Barceloneta for seafood; the waterfront Passeig Joan de Borbó is lined with excellent eateries. You can also try the classy (and pricey) restaurants around the Plaça de Pau Vila, or head to the Port Olímpic.

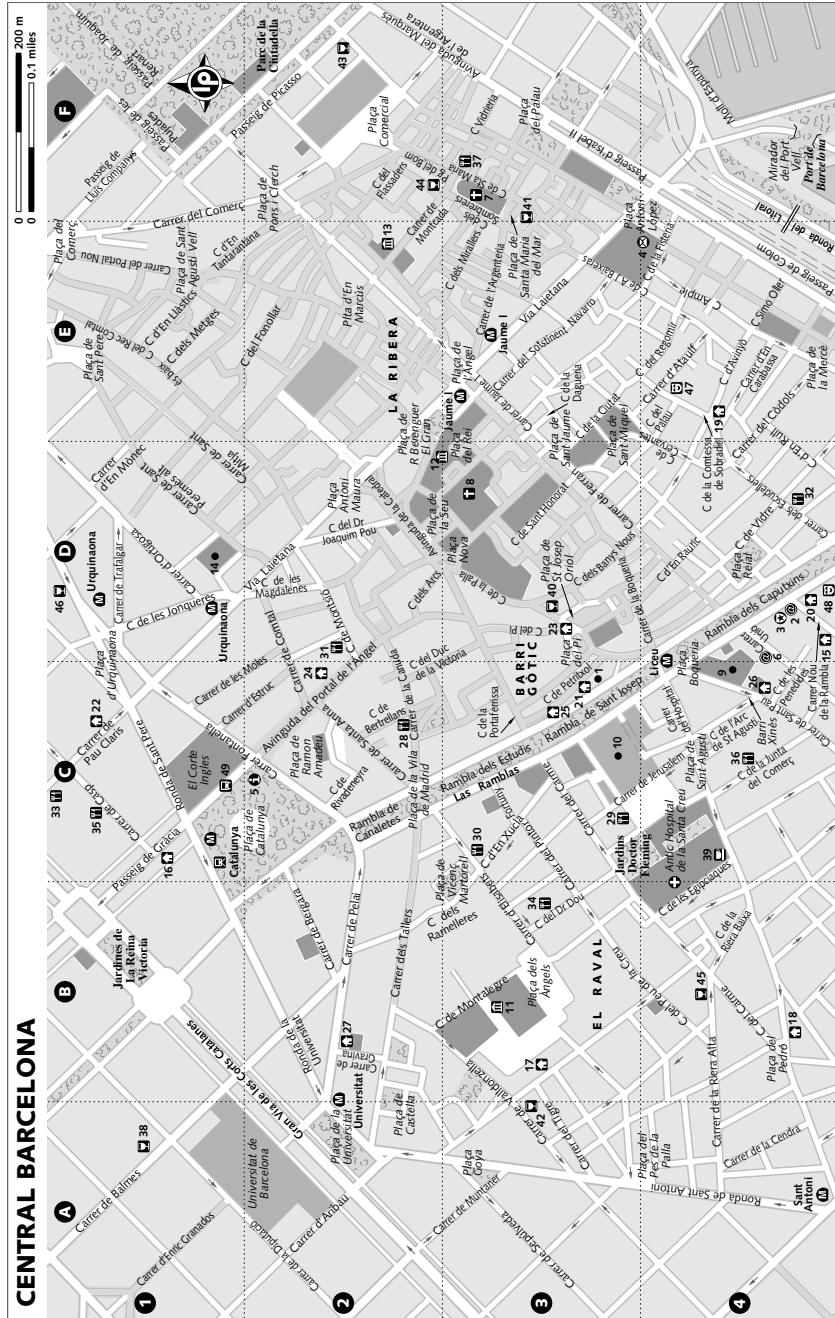
Drinking

Don't worry, you won't go thirsty in Barcelona. The city abounds with day-time cafés, laid-back lounges and lively night-time bars. On weekends, bars stay hopping until 2am and most of the places listed here are open for quiet drinks as early as 8pm.

CAFÉS

Bar El Jardí (Map p1050; ☎ no phone; Jardins de Rubió i Lluch; ☎ 10am-dusk; (M) Liceu) Enjoy teas, coffee, pastries or light lunch fare at this terrace café in the patio garden of the old Hospital de la Santa Creu.

Caelum (Map p1050; ☎ 93 302 69 93; Carrer de la Pallà 8; ☎ Tue-Sun; (M) Liceu) All the delectable pastries and sweets sold in this café and shop are made in convents or monasteries. Head downstairs to the romantic vaulted basement, open evenings only.



Llettraferit (Map p1050; ☎ 93 301 19 61; Carrer Joaquim Costa 43; **M** Sant Antoni) With a chilled but sophisticated vibe, this is a book-lovers' café by day and a cocktail bar by night.

BARS

Muebles Navarro (Map p1050; ☎ 60 718 80 96; Carrer de la Riera Alta 4; **M** Liceu) Funky and decorated like a furniture flea market. Kick back with a cold one and a tapa or two.

Philharmonic (Map pp1044-5; ☎ 93 451 11 53; Carrer de Mallorca 204; **M** Hospital Clinic) Stop in for football matches, English conversation, British breakfasts and occasional live music at this popular pub.

Miramelindo (Map p1050; ☎ 93 310 37 27; Passeig del Born 15; **M** Jaume I) One of many popular bars along the Passeig del Born, Miramelindo is a long-time favourite known for its varied music and good drink selection.

La Vinya del Senyor (Map p1050; ☎ 93 310 33 97; Plaça de Santa Maria del Mar 5; **M** Jaume I) This romantic wine bar sits under the shadow of the basilica.

Virreina (Map pp1044-5; ☎ 93 237 98 80; Plaça Virreina 1; **M** Fontana) With its intimate plazas and narrow streets, the Gràcia district is the perfect spot for a quiet drink. Virreina has a great outdoor terrace and is open day and night.

Alfa (Map pp1044-5; ☎ 93 415 18 24; Carrer Gran de Gràcia 36; **M** Fontana) This fun bar and dance spot is a long-time favourite. Come to Alfa for the great 1980s and '90s music and a laid-back feel.

Clubbing

For discos of every shape, size and variety, head to the Port Olímpic; in summer it's a nonstop party, and winter weekends are fun too. Expect club entry prices to be €10 to €15. The party gets going around 2am and stays strong until 5am or so.

Nitsa Club (Map pp1044-5; ☎ 93 301 00 90; Carrer Nou de la Rambla 113; ☎ Fri & Sat; **M** Paral·lel) Three clubs in one: you can head for the pop zone, the techno pop zone, or the house and breakbeat zone downstairs. Young, stylish crowd.

Moog (Map pp1044-5; ☎ 93 310 72 82; Arc del Teatre 3; ☎ Fri & Sat; **M** Drassanes) Cool design, groovable music, a mixed crowd out to have a good time...no wonder Moog is a hit.

Magic (Map p1050; ☎ 93 310 72 67; Passeig Picasso 40; ☎ Thu-Sun; **M** Arc de Triomf) One of the city's top clubs, with fantastic live music running the gamut from techno to classic rock.

Otto Zutz (Map pp1044-5; ☎ 93 238 07 22; Carrer Lincoln 15; ☎ Tue-Sat; **M** Fontana) Playing a mixture of house and hip-hop, this swanky club has one of the city's top VIP sections.

GAY & LESBIAN VENUES

The gay and lesbian scene is concentrated in the blocks around Carrers Muntaner and Consell de Cent (dubbed Gayxample by the locals). Here you'll find ambience every night of the week in the bars, discos and drag clubs.

Party hard at gay discos **Arena Madre** (Map p1050; ☎ 93 487 83 42; Carrer de Balmes 32; ☎ Tue-Sun; **M** Universitat) and **Salvation** (Map p1050; ☎ 93 318 06 86; Ronda de Sant Pere 19-21; ☎ Fri-Sun; **M** Universitat).

INFORMATION		SLEEPING			
24-hour Pharmacy.....	1 C3	Barcelona Ramblas.....	15 D4	Mussol.....	35 C1
Easy Internet Café.....	2 D4	Centric Point.....	16 C1	Organic.....	36 C4
Guardia Urbana.....	3 D4	Car Raval.....	17 B3	Organic.....	(see 10)
Main Post Office.....	4 E4	Gat Xino.....	18 B4	Origins 99.9%.....	37 F3
Main Tourist Office.....	5 C2	Hostal Avinyó.....	19 E4		
WTN Internet.....	6 D4	Hostal Benidorm.....	20 D4	DRINKING	
		Hostal Boqueria.....	21 C3	Arena Madre.....	38 A1
		Hostal Goya.....	22 C1	Bar El Jordi.....	39 C4
		Hostal Jardí.....	23 D3	Caelum.....	40 D3
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		Hostal Lausanne.....	24 C2	La Vinya del Senyor.....	41 F3
Basilica de Santa Maria del Mar.....	7 F3	Hostal Parisien.....	25 C3	Llettraferit.....	42 A3
Cathedral.....	8 D3	Hotel España.....	26 C4	Magic.....	43 F2
Gran Teatre del Liceu.....	9 C4	Hotel Inglaterra.....	27 B2	Miramelindo.....	44 F2
Mercat de la Boqueria.....	10 C3			Muebles Navarro.....	45 B4
Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA).....	11 B3	EATING		Salvation.....	46 D1
Museu d'Història de la Ciutat.....	12 D2	Bagel Shop.....	28 C2		
Museu Picasso.....	13 E2	Bar Ra.....	29 C3	ENTERTAINMENT	
Palau de la Música Catalana.....	14 D1	Buenas Migas.....	30 C3	Harlem Jazz Club.....	47 E4
Palau Reial Major.....	(see 8)	El Quatre Gats.....	31 D2	Tablao Cordobés.....	48 D4
Saló del Tinell.....	(see 8)	La Fonda.....	32 D4		
		Laie Libreria Café.....	33 C1	TRANSPORT	
		Mamacafé.....	34 B3	Aerobus Bus Stop.....	49 C1

Entertainment

CINEMAS

The best cinema to see subtitled rather than dubbed foreign films is **Verdi** (Map pp1044-5; ☎ 93 238 79 90; Carrer Verdi 32; **M** Fontana), in Gràcia. Big-budget Hollywood flicks are shown in English at **Icària** (Yelmo Cineplex Icaria; ☎ 93 221 75 85; Carrer Salvador Espiritu 61; **M** Vila Olímpica).

LIVE MUSIC

Flamenco

Tablao Cordobés (Map p1050; ☎ 93 317 57 11; Las Ramblas 35; show €30; ☎ shows 8.15pm, 10pm & 11.30pm; **M** Liceu) Barcelona is not the best place to see flamenco, but you can see a fairly authentic show here.

Jazz & Rock

London Bar (Map pp1044-5; ☎ 93 318 52 61; Carrer Nou de la Rambla 34; **M** Drassanes) A popular expat hang-out, hosting concerts almost every night. Groups range from jazz to rock to flamenco.

Harlem Jazz Club (Map p1050; ☎ 93 310 07 55; Carrer de la Comtesa de Sobradriel 8; **M** Liceu) A guaranteed dose of quality jazz and enough smoke to cook a sausage.

SPORT

Football fans can see the FC Barcelona play at **Camp Nou** (Map pp1044-5; ☎ 93 496 36 00; www.fcbarcelona.com; Carrer Aristides Maillol; **M** Collblanc). Even if you can't score tickets, stop by for a peek at the **museum** (games 7 & 9; adult/student €6.50/5, tour €10.50/8; ☎ 10am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun).

THEATRE

Most theatre in the city is in Catalan, but there are quite a few that stage vanguard drama, including the well-regarded **Teatre Nacional de Catalunya** (Map pp1044-5; ☎ 93 306 57 00; Plaça de les Arts 1; **M** Glòries).

Shopping

The queen of Barcelona's shopping districts is the Passeig de Gràcia, north of Plaça de Catalunya, where high-end fashion struts its stuff. El Born, on the eastern edge of La Ribera, was the city's original textile centre, but is now a hot spot for up-and-coming designers. Check out Carrer del Rec and around. Trendy, cheaper labels are found in abundance on Carrer Portaferrisa off Las Ramblas.

Bargain hunters love **Els Encants** (Map pp1044-5; ☎ 93 246 30 30; Carrer Dos de Maig 186; ☎ 7am-3pm Mon, Wed, Fri & Sat; **M** Glòries), a free-for-all morning flea market.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Barcelona's **airport** (☎ 902 404 704; www.aena.es), 14km southwest of the city centre at El Prat de Llobregat, caters to international as well as domestic flights. Budget flights abound with easyJet, Vueling and Air Europa; even Iberia sometimes has good rates. See p1023 for contact details.

BUS

The terminal for domestic and international buses is the **Estació del Nord** (Map pp1044-5; ☎ 902 260 606; www.barcelonanord.com; Carrer Alfai 80; **M** Arc de Triomf). The company **Alsa** (☎ 902 42 22 42; www.alsa.es) goes to Madrid (€25, eight hours, 21 daily), Valencia (€23, five hours, 15 daily), Zaragoza (€12, 3½ hours, 18 daily) and other places.

TRAIN

Virtually all trains travelling to and from destinations within Spain stop at **Estació Sants** (Map pp1044-5; ☎ 902 24 34 02; www.renfe.es; **M** Sants-Estació). Daily trains run to most major cities in Spain, including Madrid (€63, five hours, seven daily), Zaragoza (€25, four hours, 14 daily), Valencia (€32, 3½ hours, 12 daily) and San Sebastián (€36, eight hours, two daily).

Getting Around

Information about Barcelona's public transportation is online at www.tmb.net. You can also call ☎ 010 from any city telephone and get detailed transport information.

Barcelona's metro system spreads its tentacles around the city in such a way that most places of interest are within a 10-minute walk of a station. Buses and suburban trains are needed only for a few destinations. A single metro, bus or suburban train ride costs €1.20, but a T-1 ticket, valid for 10 rides, costs only €6.65.

GIRONA

pop 86,670

Lovely Girona, a medieval city built along the banks of the Onyar River, makes an ideal day trip or a base for exploring the region. The old city sits along the river's eastern bank and is home to what was once one of Catalonia's most important Jewish communities. Get information at the **tourist office** (☎ 97 222 65 75; www.costabrava.org; Rambla de la Llibertat 1).

Wander around the **Call** (Jewish Quarter) and visit the former synagogue, now the **Bonustrucça Porta Jewish Museum** (☎ 97 221 27 61; Carrer

La Força 8; admission €2; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat May-Oct, 10am-6pm Mon-Sat Nov-Apr, 10am-3pm Sun year-round).

Also interesting is the **wall** (☎ dawn-dusk) that runs around the edge of the old quarter. Walk along the top for great views. Don't leave without peeking into the looming **Gothic cathedral** (☎ 97 221 44 26; Plaça Catedral; museum €4, free Sun; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4.30pm Sat, 2-7pm Sun Nov-Mar, 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4.30pm Sat, 2-8pm Sun Apr-Oct), which boasts the world's widest Gothic-style vault (23m).

Across the river from the old town, family-run **Pensió Margarit** (☎ 97 220 10 66; www.hotelmargarit.com; Carrer Ultònia 1; s €26-31, d €36-68, incl breakfast) is a friendly, 30-room *pensió* with no-frills furnishings. It's decorated with framed puzzles completed by the owners.

Cheap eats (sandwiches, tapas and café fare) are widely available along the Rambla de la Llibertat, running parallel to the river.

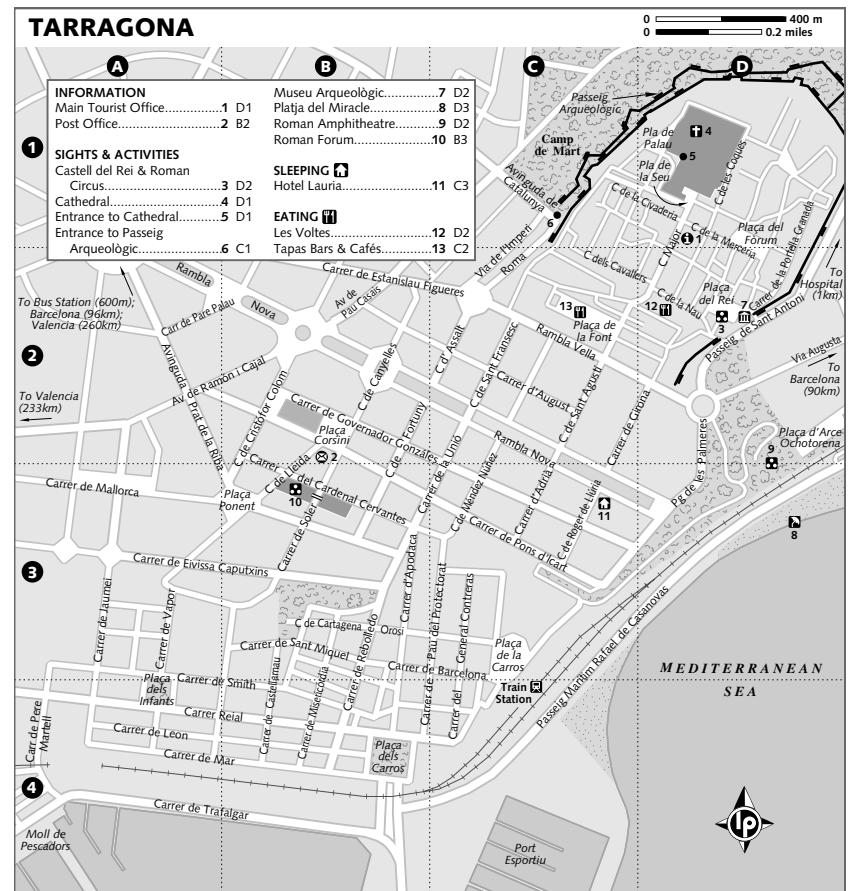
Girona's train station, **Renfe** (www.renfe.es), connects with the rest of Catalonia and France. Hourly trains run from Barcelona (€6.25, 75 minutes).

TARRAGONA

pop 128,150

The 'Rome of Spain', Tarragona was founded in 218 BC and was an important Roman centre. The city's highlights are its Roman ruins, but don't neglect the bustling shopping district or its fabulous beaches.

Get more information at the **tourist office** (☎ 97 725 07 95; www.tarragonaturisme.es; Carrer Major



39; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-May, 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun Jun-Sep).

Sights & Activities

Start at the fascinating **Museu Arqueològic** (☎ 97 723 62 09; Plaça del Rei 5; admission €2.40; ☎ 10am-1.30pm & 3.30-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-May, 10am-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jun-Sep), where you'll get an excellent understanding of Roman Spain.

Several Roman sites are scattered around town. All have the same admission price and opening hours unless stated. Most interesting is the **Castell del Rei** (☎ 97 724 19 52; Plaça del Rei; admission €2.20; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun Oct-May, 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 9am-3pm Sun Jun-Sep), which was once part of the city walls. It's connected to the ruins of the **Roman Circus**, where chariot races were held.

Close to the beach sits the well-preserved **Roman amphitheatre**. On Carrer de Lleida, west of Rambla Nova, are the remains of a **Roman forum**. The **Passeig Arqueològic** (☎ to midnight) is a peaceful walk along a stretch of the old city walls.

The **cathedral** (☎ 10am-1pm & 4-7pm 16 Mar-May, 10am-7pm Jun-15 Oct, 10am-5pm 16 Oct-15 Nov, 10am-2pm 16 Nov-15 Mar) sits grandly at the highest point of Tarragona, overlooking the old town. Some parts of the building date back to the 12th century.

Clean **Platja del Miracle** is the main city beach, south of the Roman amphitheatre. Other beaches are further on.

Sleeping & Eating

Look for tapas bars and inexpensive cafés on the Plaça de la Font. The Moll de Pescadors (Fishermens' Wharf) is the place to go for seafood restaurants.

Hotel Lauria (☎ 97 723 67 12; www.hlauria.es; Rambla Nova 20; r €58; ☎) This three-star hotel is worn around the corners but good value, with a wonderful location and airy rooms. Apartments also available.

Les Voltes (☎ 97 723 06 51; Carrer Trinquet Vell 12; mains €6.50-12) Nestled under the stone arches of an ancient edifice, Les Voltes has lots of atmosphere and serves delicious regional specialities.

Getting There & Away

The **train station** (Plaça Espanya) is southwest of the old town, on the coast. Over 20 regional trains a day run from Barcelona to Tarragona, making this a great option for a day trip from Barcelona. There are about 12 trains daily to Madrid and to Valencia.

The **bus station** (Av Roma), just off Plaça Imperial Tarraco, has services to regional cities such as Barcelona, and beyond.

BALEARIC ISLANDS

pop 916,968

The Balearic Islands (Illes Belears in Catalan) adorn the glittering Mediterranean waters off Spain's eastern coastline. Though they're beach tourism destinations *par excellence*, there's more on offer here than the famed mix of sun, sea and sangria – you'll also find simple fishing and farming villages, Gothic cathedrals and Stone Age ruins.

Note that many accommodation options on the islands are closed between November and April. For the rest of the year it's highly advisable to book ahead.

TRANSPORT Getting There & Away

AIR

Scheduled flights from major cities on the Spanish mainland are operated by several airlines, including Iberia, Europair and Spanair. See p1023 for contact details.

One-way fares from Barcelona to Palma de Mallorca (45 minutes) can cost anywhere between €45 and €157. From Madrid to Palma de Mallorca (1¼ hours) you'll be looking at somewhere between €45 and €208.

Flights between the islands are usually more expensive than the equivalent ferry trips, with Palma to Maó or Ibiza (both 40 minutes) costing up to €85 one way.

BOAT

The major ferry company for the islands is **Trasmediterránea** (☎ 902 45 46 45; www.trasmediterranea.es). The frequency and duration of services vary dramatically, according to the time of year and the type of ferry.

Buques convencionales (slow ferries) service the following routes year-round: Barcelona–Palma (€198 to €228, seven hours, one daily); Palma–Maó (€40, 5½ hours, one weekly); Valencia–Palma (€198 to €228, 7½ hours, one service six days per week); and Palma–Ibiza (€40, four hours, one weekly). These frequencies are the low-season timetable; services are more frequent in the mid and high seasons.

In the mid and high seasons the *buques convencionales* are joined by a marginally

faster 'fast ferry' and the much faster *buques rápidos* (catamarans). The catamarans run between Barcelona and Palma (€80 to €173, 3¾ hours, one daily), and Palma and Ibiza (€54, two hours, daily). Services on the fast ferry are between Palma and Valencia (€80 to €173, 6½ hours, six or seven weekly) via Ibiza (€54).

Another company, **Balearia** (☎ 902 160 180; www.balearia.com), operates two classes of ferry (fast and slow) from Dénia (on the coast between Valencia and Alicante) to Palma (€57 to €81, five or 9½ hours, two daily) via Ibiza (€39 to €54, two or four hours) in the mid and high seasons. It also has year-round services between Ibiza and Palma (€39 to €54, four hours, two daily) and between Port d'Alcúdia on Mallorca and Ciutadella on Menorca (€51.30, one hour, two daily).

Iscomar (☎ 902 11 91 28; www.iscomarferrys.com) runs a service between Ciutadella and Port d'Alcúdia (adult €27, 2½ hours, one or two daily), as well as between Dénia and Ibiza (adult €30, 4½ hours, six days per week).

IBIZA

pop 103,000

Love it or hate it, Ibiza (Eivissa in Catalan) has a unique spirit and a formidable party reputation. It's extreme in both its landscape, which is harsh and rocky, and in the people that it attracts, most of whom fly in solely for the island's world-famous and decidedly louche clubbing scene.

The **tourist office** (☎ 97 130 19 00; www.illesbalears.es; Carrer Antoni Riquer 2; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-1pm Sat Nov-Mar, 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-7.30pm Sat Apr-15 Oct, 9am-1.30pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-1pm Sat 16-31 Oct) is opposite the Estación Marítima. Check email at **Surf@Net** (Carrer de Riambau 8; per 30min €1.80; ☎ 10am-2am).

Sights & Activities

The port area of **Sa Penya** is crammed with funky and trashy clothes boutiques and arty-crafty market stalls. From here, you can wander up into **D'Alt Vila**, the atmospheric old walled town that's home to the **Museu d'Art Contemporani** (☎ 97 130 27 23; Ronda Narcís Puget; admission free; ☎ 10am-1pm & 4-6pm Tue-Fri, 10am-1.30pm Sat & Sun Oct-Apr, 10am-1.30pm & 5-8pm Tue-Fri, 10am-1.30pm Sat & Sun May-Sep), the **cathedral** (Plaça Catedral; ☎ 9.30am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, Sun mass 10.30am) and the **Museu Arqueològic** (☎ 97 130 12 31; Plaça Catedral 3; admission €2.40; ☎ 10am-2pm & 6-8pm Mon-Sat,

10am-2pm Sun 15 Mar-15 Oct, 9am-3pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun 16 Oct-14 Mar).

The heavily developed **Platja de ses Figueretes** beach is a 20-minute walk south of Sa Penya – you're better off heading south to the beaches at **Ses Salines**, a half-hour ride on bus 11 (€1.20).

Ibiza has numerous unspoiled and relatively undeveloped beaches. **Cala de Boix**, on the northeastern coast, is the only black-sand beach on the island, while further north are the lovely beaches of **S'Aigua Blanca**. On the northern coast near Portinatx, **Cala Xarraca** is in a picturesque, secluded bay and near Port de Sant Miquel is the attractive **Cala Benirras**. On the southwestern coast, **Cala d'Hort** has a spectacular setting overlooking two rugged rock islets, Es Verda and Es Verdranell. These can all be accessed via local **bus** (www.ibizabus.com) between May and October.

The tourist office in Ibiza can supply information on popular hiking and mountain-bike routes.

Sleeping

Camping Cala Nova (☎ 97 133 17 74; www.campingcalanova.com; Santa Eulària des Riu; camp sites per person/tent/electricity €6.30/6.30/3; ☎ closed Nov-Apr) Close to a good beach and 15km from Ibiza City, this camping ground offers 125 sites and plenty of shade.

Hostal Sol y Brisa (☎ 97 131 0818; fax 97 130 30 32; Av Bartolomé Vte Ramón 15; s/d with shared bathroom €18/30) Occupying two floors of an apartment building near the water, Ibiza City's cheapest accommodation option offers faded rooms with washbasins and saggy beds.

Casa de Huespedes Navarro (☎ 97 131 07 71; Carrer sa Creu 20; d/tr with shared bathroom €38/50; ☎ closed Nov-Mar) This place is in a good central location. It has 10 rooms at the top of a long flight of stairs, as well as a sunny rooftop terrace.

Hostal Parque (☎ 97 130 13 58; www.hostalparque.com; Plaça del Parque 4; s/d €70/100, with shared bathroom €50/80; ☎) This excellent midrange option has small but airy rooms that have been recently redecorated and come complete with satellite TV. Try for one with a balcony (or at least a window) overlooking the attractive *plaça*, but be prepared for lots of late-night noise.

Eating & Drinking

Croissant Show (☎ 97 131 76 65; Plaça Constitució; ☎ 7am-3pm) This is where the beautiful people come for a post-clubbing refuel. The croissants (€1) are as good as any baked in

France, but the painting of Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie is a bit much to take early in the morning.

Cervceria Scenicus (☎ 97 131 60 74; Paseo Vara de Rey 4) The very tasty *plato del día* (€4) here is a bargain.

Comidas-Bar San Juan (☎ 97 131 16 03; Carrer Guillem de Montgri 8; mains €6-12; ☹ Mon-Sat) Hearty, good-value food is served at this popular tavern.

KM5 (☎ 97 139 63 49; www.km5-lounge.com; Carretera San José 5; ☹ 8pm-1.30am) Named after its highway location, this is where the glam set come to dance and drink in the gardens before moving on to the superclubs. It's on the road to San Josep, 5km from Ibiza city.

Nothing beats starting the evening with a drink and some people-watching at one of the bars lining the lively Plaça del Parque. The most popular is probably the laid-back **Bliss** (☹ 11.30am-midnight). Nearby **Viper** (☎ 97 130 45 69; Via Púnica 12; ☹ 9am-3pm) has an in-house DJ after 4pm.

In San Antonio, the famous **Café Del Mar** (☎ 97 134 25 16; Carrer de Vara del Rey; ☹ 5pm-4am) is still serving pricey drinks and playing the ambient music (a mix of classical, blues and jazz) that it features on its famous chillout albums. The sunset views here are justly famous.

Entertainment

Ibiza's summer nightlife is world renowned. At night, designer-chic couples and seriously studded swingers wander the fashion catwalk of cobbled streets, dodging the outrageous PR performers hired by the superclubs to lure dusk-to-dawn clubbers. After a few drinks at the bars around the port, most visitors head to the superclubs, all of which charge a hefty €50 or more for entry. To get to the clubs, there's a handy Discobus service that operates in summer from midnight until 6am. Check details at the tourist office in Ibiza.

The big-name clubs are **Pacha** (☎ 97 131 36 00; www.pacha.com; Av d'Agost), on the northern side of Ibiza City's port; **Privilege** (☎ 97 119 80 86; www.privilege.es; Urb San Rafael), **Amnesia** (☎ 97 119 80 41; www.amnesia-ibiza.com; Ctra San Antonio), **Eden** (☎ 97 134 25 51; www.edenibiza.com; Av Dr Fleming) and **Es Paradis Terrenal** (☎ 97 134 66 00; www.esparadis.com; Av Dr Fleming) in San Antonio; **El Divino** (☎ 97 131 83 38; www.eldivino-ibiza.com; Puerto Ibiza Nueva), across the water from the town centre (hop on one of its boats); and **Space** (☎ 97 139 67 93; www.space-ibiza.es) and **Kiss** (☎ 97 130 64 17; www.kiss-ibiza.com; Carrer de les Alzines) in Platja d'En Bossa.

Between October and April only El Divino and Pacha are open, and then only on Friday and Saturday nights.

Getting Around

Bus routes run between the **airport** (☎ 97 180 90 00) and Ibiza City every 30 minutes from 7.20am to 11.50pm in summer (€1.20, 15 minutes). Buses to other parts of the island leave from the series of bus stops along Av d'Isidoro Macabich.

Plenty of ferries make daily short trips between Ibiza City and the neighbouring island of Formentera. Tickets cost around €20 return on a *buque* (slow ferry) and €33.50 on a *línea-JET* (fast ferry).

MALLORCA

pop 741,000

It's hardly surprising that over the decades so many great artists and writers have chosen to make this beguiling Mediterranean island their home. The capital city of Palma, with its attractive buildings and its rich cultural scene, is a joy to explore. Inland, visitors can happily lose themselves trekking in the mountains before stumbling across a hilltop village seemingly unchanged for centuries. And then there are the gorgeous beaches...

The **Consell de Mallorca tourist office** (☎ 97 117 39 90; www.infomallorca.net; ☹ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) is on Plaça de la Reina in Palma. The cheapest internet access in town is offered in the telephone annexe of the **main post office** (Carrer de la Constitució 6, Palma; per hr €1.50; ☹ 10am-11pm Mon-Fri, 11am-midnight Sat, noon-11pm Sun).

Sights & Activities

An awesome mass of sandstone walls and flying buttresses, Palma's landmark **cathedral** (La Seu; ☎ 97 172 31 30; Carrer del Palau Reial 29; adult/student/child under 10yr €3.50/2.80/free; ☹ 10am-3.15pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar, 10am-5.15pm Mon-Fri Apr-May & Oct, 10am-6.15pm Mon-Fri Jun-Sep, 10am-2.15pm Sat year-round, closed Sun) overlooks the city and its port.

The **Museo de Arte Moderno y Contemporáneo** (Es Baluard; ☎ 97 190 82 00; www.esbaluard.org; Plaça Porta de Santa Catalina; adult/student €6/4.50; ☹ 10am-8pm Tue-Sun Oct-15 Jun, 10am-midnight daily 16 Jun-Sep) is Palma's striking museum of modern and contemporary art. Its collection includes works from 20th-century artists such as Miró and Picasso.

Those wanting to see even more of Miró's work should visit the **Fundació Pilar I Joan Miró** (☎ 97 170 14 20; Carrer Joan de Saridakis 29; adult/student/

child €4.80/2.60/free, camera or video €5; ☹ 10am-6pm Tue-Sat Oct-Mar, 10am-7pm Tue-Sat Apr-Sep, 10am-3pm Sun year-round), west of the city. To get here catch bus 3 from Plaça d'Espanya or bus 6 from Plaça de la Reina.

The disused but atmospheric **banys Àrabs** (Arab baths; ☎ 97 172 15 49; Carrer Ca'n Sera 7; admission €1.50; ☹ 9am-7.30pm Apr-Nov, 9am-6pm Dec-Mar), the only remaining monument to the Muslim domination of the island, are well worth a visit.

One of the most popular excursions on the island is the trip on the **Palma-Sóller train** (see right). Sóller is the best place on the island to base yourself for **trekking** and the nearby village of **Fornalutx** is said to be the prettiest on Mallorca.

From Sóller, it's a 10km walk to the beautiful hill-top village of **Deià**, where the poet and author Robert Graves lived for most of his life. From the village, you can scramble down to **Cala de Deià**, where the small shingle beach is a laid-back haven of naked swimming and weekend-long beach parties.

Tramuntana Pursuits (☎ 0034 635 891 308; www.tramuntana-pursuits.com) offers a range of guided adventure activities around the island, including climbing, caving, sea kayaking, canyoning and walking. Prices hover around €85 per day, including instructors and equipment.

Sleeping

PALMA

Hostal Apuntadores (☎ 97 171 34 91; www.palma-hostales.com; Carrer Apuntadores 8; dm €20, s/d with shared bathroom €30/45) Right in the centre of town, this modern *hostal* has an institutional air and freshly painted rooms with handbasins and uncomfortable beds. The best thing about the place is the roof terrace, which has a spectacular view of the cathedral and is a wonderful spot for an evening drink in summer (beer €2.75). Breakfast costs between €3.50 and €5.50.

Hostal Ritzi (☎ 97 171 46 10; www.hostalritzi.com; Carrer Apuntadores 6; s/d with shared bathroom incl breakfast €30/45) Run by an enthusiastic English chap, the Ritzi is much friendlier than the neighbouring Apuntadores. Rooms are extremely basic but clean. A generous breakfast is served in the cute dining room and at night this is the venue for candlelit meals (*menú* €10). There's a small communal lounge with satellite TV, a book-swap collection and mountain-bike hire (€10 per day).

Hostal Brondo (☎ 97 171 90 43; www.hostalbrondo.net; Carrer Ca'n Brondo 1; s/d €50/60, s/tw with shared bath-

room €30/45) Run by an English couple, this simple *hostal* has rooms with high ceilings and balconies fronting the street.

AROUND THE ISLAND

The Consell de Mallorca tourist office in Palma (see opposite) can supply information on accommodation in *fincas* (country estates), *pequeños* (small rural hotels) and inexpensive *ermites i refugis* (hermitages and monasteries) around the island.

Eating & Drinking

PALMA

If you're putting together a picnic, go to the **Mercat de l'Olivar** (Plaça del Olivar; ☹ 7am-2pm Mon-Sat), Palma's central produce market.

Bon Lloc (☎ 97 171 86 17; Carrer de San Feliu 7; ☹ lunch Mon-Sat; ☹) This popular place serves a hearty four-course vegetarian *menú* (€15).

Restaurant Cellar Sa Premsa (☎ 97 172 35 29; Plaça del Bisbe Berenguer de Palau 8; *menú* €20-24; ☹ daily Sep-Jun, Mon-Fri Jul-Aug) Sitting at one of this tavern's long benches and sampling the excellent traditional Mallorcan cuisine on offer is an obligatory exercise when in Palma. It's worth the splurge.

Good late-night drinking dens include **Atlantico** (Carrer Sant Feliu 12; ☹ 8pm-4am) and **Barcelona Café Jazz Club** (Carrer Apuntadores 5; admission €4; ☹ 8.30pm-1am Mon-Thu, 8.30pm-3am Fri & Sat), a cramped but enjoyable live music venue.

The island's nightclubs are in the port area around Passeig Marítim, Av de Joan Miró and Plaça de Gomila.

Getting Around

Sant Joan airport (☎ 97 178 90 99) is approximately 10km east of Palma. Bus 1 runs from Plaça Espanya to the airport (€1.80) and then back to the centre via the ferry terminal (€1.10) every 20 minutes.

LATE LAMENTED LUGGAGE

Backpackers visiting Palma will encounter problems if they need a safe spot to leave their luggage while waiting for flights/ferries or when on an overnight camping trip. There are no left-luggage facilities on the island and the *hostales* in Palma are loath to look after bags due to a spate of thefts in recent times. If you do leave luggage at a *hostal*, be warned that you do so at your own (considerable) risk.

Most parts of the island are accessible by bus from Palma. These generally depart from or near the **bus station** (☎ 97 117 77 77; <http://tib.caib.es>; Plaça Espanya). Mallorca's two train lines leave from the nearby **train station** (☎ 97 175 22 45). There are regular services to the inland towns of Inca (€1.80), Sa Pobla (€2.85) and Manacor (€3.70) on one line; and five trains per day make the trip to Sóller (one way/return €9/14, one hour) on the other.

MENORCA

pop 77,000

Menorca is the least developed of the Balearics. If nightlife and adventure sports are on your agenda, this island isn't for you. But if you're seeking a spot on a pristine and sparsely populated beach, and fancy the idea of exploring archaeological sites and environmentally significant landscapes, it might be just what you're looking for.

The capital, Maó, is known as Mahón in Castilian. A main road leads from it to the island's second-largest town, Ciutadella.

The main **municipal tourist office** Maó (☎ 97 136 37 90; infomenorcamao@cime.es; Carrer de sa Rovellada de Dalt 24; ☹ 9am-1.30pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat); Ciutadella (☎ 97 138 26 93; Plaça la Catedral 5; ☹ 9.30am-1.30pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) is in Maó. For internet access head to **Ciber Principal** (☎ 97 136 26 89; Carrer Nou 25, Maó; per hr €3.50; ☹ 9.30am-10pm Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm & 6-10pm Sat & Sun).

Sights & Activities

From Maó and Ciutadella you'll have to commute to the beaches. Maó gets a lot of tourist traffic but Ciutadella, with its smaller harbour has a more distinctly Spanish feel.

In the centre of the island, the 357m **Monte Toro** has great views of the whole island; on a clear day you can see as far as Mallorca.

With your own transport and a bit of footwork, you'll be able to discover some of Menorca's off-the-beaten-track beaches. North of Maó, a drive across a lunar landscape leads to the lighthouse at **Cap de Favàritx** and eight secluded beaches.

On the northern coast, the picturesque town of **Fornells** is on a large bay popular with windsurfers.

Sleeping

Menorca's two camping grounds are **Camping S'atalaia** (☎ 97 137 42 32; www.campingsatalaia.com, in Spanish; camp sites per person/tent/electricity €6.30/4.10/4;

☹ closed Nov-Mar), near the resorts of Santa Galdana, about 4km south of Ferreries; and **Camping Son Bou** (971 37 27 27; www.campingsonbou.com; camp sites per person/tent/electricity €7.10/4/3.90; ☹ closed Nov-Mar), near Son Bou, south of Alaior.

Posada Orsi (☎ 97 136 47 51; posadaorsi@hotmail.com; Carrer de la Infanta 19, Maó; d with shower €45-47, s/d with shared bathroom €23/38) A riot of acid colours and stripy sofas, Orsi is (very) bright, clean and well located.

Eating & Drinking

The ports in both Maó and Ciutadella are lined with bars and restaurants.

MAÓ

Casanova (☎ 97 135 41 69; Andén Poniente 15; pizzas €7) This popular pizzeria makes good use of its wood-fired oven.

El Muelle (Moll de Llevant 33; meals €15; ☹ lunch Mon-Fri, lunch & dinner Sat) Locals swear by the down-to-earth tapas, fish dishes and *bocadillos* offered at this eatery.

Mirador Café (☎ 97 135 21 07; Plaça d'Espanya 9; ☹ 10am-2am Mon-Sat) You'll find this small and atmospheric music bar in a laneway between the top of Casta de ses Voltes and the Mercat Claustre del Carme.

CIUTADELLA

Martin's Pub (Costa d'es Moll 20) Join the crowds spilling out of this tiny bar onto the lane and you'll soon be soaking up the beer and loud Spanish techno on offer.

Getting Around

Buses run from **Mahon airport** (☎ 97 115 70 00) into Maó every half-hour from 5.45am to 10.15pm; tickets cost €1.50.

TMSA (☎ 97 136 04 75; www.e-torres.net) runs buses between Maó and Ciutadella (€3.75), with occasional connections to the major resorts on the southern coast. In summer there are also daily bus services to most of the coastal towns from both Maó and Ciutadella.

VALENCIA & MURCIA

A warm climate, interesting cities and an abundance of seaside resorts make this area of Spain a popular destination. The beaches of the Costa Blanca (White Coast) draw most of the visitors, but venture beyond the shore to get a real feel for the region.

VALENCIA

pop 796,550

The birthplace of paella, the home of the Holy Grail and the host of the 2007 America's Cup, Valencia is a friendly, if slightly chaotic city. Hugging the now dry Rio Turia (whose riverbed has been transformed into a wonderfully verdant park), Valencia may be Spain's third-largest city, but it's an extremely walkable place that combines old and new with effortless charm.

Head to the Barrio del Carmen, Valencia's oldest quarter, for quirky shops and the best nightlife. Other key areas are the Plaza del Ayuntamiento, the Plaza de la Reina and the Plaza de la Virgen.

Information

Ono Centro de Internet (☎ 96 328 19 02; Calle San Vicente 22; per hr €2-3; ☹ 9-1am)

Post office (☎ 96 351 23 70; Plaza del Ayuntamiento 24; ☹ 8.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2pm Sat)

Tourist offices Calle Paz (☎ 96 398 64 22; www.turisvalencia.es; Calle Paz 48; ☹ 9am-2.30pm & 4.30-8pm Mon-Fri); Plaza de la Reina (☎ 96 315 39 31; Plaza de la Reina 19; ☹ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun)

Sights & Activities

Don't leave Valencia without making a visit to the Romanesque-Gothic-Baroque-Renaissance **cathedral** (Plaza Reina; ☹ 7.30am-8pm, obligatory guided tour 10am-6.30pm). Most interesting is the Holy Grail Chapel, which houses the chalice Christ supposedly used in the Last Supper. It's the only Holy Grail recognised by the Vatican. The tour costs €3.

Valencia's architectural pride and joy, the stunning **Ciudad de las Artes y las Ciencias** (☎ 90 210 00 31; www.caces; adult €7.20-28.80, student €5.60-21.60; ☹ 10am-9pm, check individual museum times) is a complex of museums including L'Oceanogràfic aquarium, the Príncipe Felipe science museum, L'Hemisfèric IMAX theatre, L'Umbracle covered garden and the Palau Reina Sofia per-

BURN BABY BURN

In mid-March, Valencia hosts what has become one of Europe's wildest street parties: **Las Fallas de San José**. For one week the city is engulfed by an anarchic swirl of fireworks, music, festive bonfires and all-night partying. On the final night, giant *niños* (effigies), many of them of political and social personages, are torched in the main plaza.

forming arts centre. Bus 35 goes from the Plaza del Ayuntamiento.

Valencia's beach, the **Playa de la Malvarrosa**, lies east of town and is lined with a pretty promenade. Get there on the tram (see p1060).

Sleeping

Devesa Gardens (☎ 96 161 11 36; www.devesagardens.com, in Spanish; Ctra El Saler km 13; camp sites per person/tent/car €5.25/4.75/5.25; ☹) The city's nearest camping ground is 13km south of Valencia, near El Saler beach. The complex includes restaurants, tennis courts and even a mini zoo.

Hôme Youth Hostel (☎ 96 391 62 29; www.likeathome.net; Calle Lonja 4; s/d/tr/q per person with shared bathroom from €20/19/17/15; ☹) With its brightly painted rooms, big kitchen, healthy DVD stash and even laundry facilities, this place is pure backpacking heaven. The owners run two other Hôme hostels (see below).

Also recommended:

Pensión Paris (☎ 96 352 67 66; www.pensionparis.com; Calle Salvá 12; d €38, s with shared bath €20, d with shared bath €30-35) Sunny and clean in a peaceful location.

Hôme Backpackers (☎ 96 391 37 97; www.likeathome.net; Plaza Vicente Iborra; dm from €12; ☹) Themed parties, two big terraces, a huge kitchen and clean dorm rooms.

Hôme Deluxe (☎ 96 392 46 91; www.likeathome.net; Calle Cadrires 11; d incl breakfast €40; ☹) Stylish, individually designed double rooms.

Eating

For authentic paella, head for Las Arenas, just north of the port, where a strip of restaurants serve up the real stuff for about €12 per person.

One of Spain's prettiest markets, Valencia's **Mercado Central** (Plaza Mercado; ☹ 8am-2.30pm) is a feast of colours and smells, with nearly 1000 stallholders crammed under the market's modernist glass domes.

Bar El Kiosko (☎ 96 391 01 59; Calle Derechos 38; mains €1.25-6.25) Tasty fried fish and tapas are the staples at this scruffy café, which has a few tables on the sunny plaza.

La Utielana (☎ 96 352 94 14; Calle San Andrés 4; mains €3.75-6.75) Amazingly cheap stews, rice and fish dishes mean there's always a line at this chaotic yet homey spot. Take a number and wait to savour the local flavour.

Nam (☎ 96 351 48 37; Calle San Andrés 4; mains €4-8) A loud *cafetería* serving cheap sandwiches, salads and burgers. It's next door to La Utielana.

Drinking & Entertainment

Much of the action centres on Barrio del Carmen and caters for every taste, from grunge to glam.

Café San Jaume (☎ 96 391 24 01; Calle Caballeros 51) A stalwart of Carmen's bar scene, with lots of room upstairs and a particularly fine terrace for eyeing up the characters on Calle Caballeros.

Lounge Café-Bar (☎ 96 391 80 94; Calle Estamiñera Vieja 2) This popular international hang-out has comfy sofas and free internet. Good snacks too.

Radio City (☎ 96 391 41 51; Santa Teresa 19) Dance to salsa, house and cheesy pop at this popular hall. There's occasionally live flamenco.

Getting There & Away

Daily services from the **bus station** (☎ 96 349 72 22; Av Menéndez Pidal) go to/from Madrid (€40.60, three hours), Barcelona (€37, three hours) and Alicante (€24.50, 1½ hours). From Valencia's **Estación del Norte** (Calle Jativa), trains also go to/from Madrid, Barcelona and Alicante, among other destinations.

Regular car and passenger ferries go to the Balearic Islands (see p1054).

Getting Around

EMT (☎ 96 352 83 99) buses run until about 10pm, with night services until around 1am. Bus 8 connects the bus station with Plaza Ayuntamiento.

The high-speed tram leaves from the FGV tram station, 500m north of the cathedral, at the Pont de Fusta. It's a pleasant way to get to the beach, the paella restaurants of Las Arenas and the port. Metro lines primarily serve the outer suburbs.

ALICANTE

pop 312,391

With its elegant, palm-lined boulevards, lively nightlife scene and easy-to-access beaches, Alicante is the kind of all-in-one Spanish city that makes a great one- or two-day stopover.

Visit the main **tourist office** (☎ 96 592 98 02; www.alicanteturismo.com; Calle Portugal 17; ☎ 10am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) for more information. Get internet access at **CBR Internet** (☎ 96 514 14 25; Calle Teniente Álvarez Soto 8; per hr €1.65-2.70; ☎ 10am-2am).

Sights & Activities

A multilevel fortress dating from the 12th century, the imposing **Castillo de Santa Bárbara** (Saint Barbara Castle; ☎ 96 526 31 31; Monte Benacantil;

admission free; ☎ 10am-7pm, exhibits 10.30am-2.30pm & 4-6.30pm) affords magnificent views over the city and sea. To get here, cross the footbridge beside the **Playa del Postiguet** (the main city beach) and take the elevator to the top.

Sleeping

Camping Costa Blanca (☎ 96 563 06 70; www.campingcostablanca.com; Calle Convento 143, El Campello; camp sites per person €3.20-4.75, tent €3.20-7.05, car €3.20-4.75; ☎) Considered the best camping ground in the area, it's 10km north of Alicante and only 200m from the beach.

Hostal-Pensión La Milagrosa (☎ 96 521 69 18; www.hostallamilagrosa.com, in Spanish; Calle Villavieja 8; per person €20, per person with shared bathroom €15; ☎ ☎) All rooms are smallish, but they're clean and some have views of the Santa María church. Free access to kitchen and lovely rooftop terrace. Washing machine available.

Hostal Les Monges Palace (☎ 96 521 50 46; www.lesmonges.net; Calle San Agustín 4; s €27-39, d €41-52; ☎ ☎ ☎) Each room has been lovingly decorated in this renovated 1912 building. Some of the options: canopy bed, balcony, original stone walls, antique furniture or an ultramodern design.

Eating

Mercado Central (Covered Market; ☎ 96 514 07 63; Av Alfonso X El Sabio) The Art Nouveau-styled covered market is ideal for self-caterers.

Biomenú Restaurante Vegetariano (☎ 96 521 31 44; Calle Navas 17; mains €3-5) Come for the excellent pay-by-weight salad bar, available for take-away. There's a small organic food shop too.

Casa Ibarra (☎ 96 514 56 25; Calle Mayor 33; mains €5-10, menú €9) Popular with locals for its filling fixed-price lunch, Ibarra boasts picturesque plaza-side tables.

Entertainment

The Barrio, a web of streets around the cathedral, is packed with bars. The port is another buzzing area. Nearby coastal resorts have mega *discotecas* popular in summer.

Getting There & Away

At the **bus station** (☎ 96 513 07 00; Calle Portugal 17) look to **Alsa** (☎ 902 42 22 42; www.alsa.es) for a ride to major destinations such as Madrid (€24.60, nine hours, five daily) and Valencia (€16.30, 2½ hours, 12 daily). They also make runs to towns in the region. Alicante's city bus 6 heads to the airport.

From the **train station** (☎ 96 592 02 02; www.renfe.es; Av Salamanca s/n) there are services to Madrid (€38.60, four hours, up to nine daily), Valencia (€24.50, two hours, 11 daily), Barcelona (€47.40, six hours, nine daily), Murcia (€5.40 to €14.60, one hour 20 minutes, 23 daily) and other cities.

For scenic (and slow) travel, try the **Ferrocarriles de la Generalitat Valenciana** (FGV; ☎ 90 072 04 72; www.fgv.es), whose narrow-gauge *trenet* (little train) makes the journey up the coast to Dénia, stopping in resort towns like Villa Joyosa, Altea and Benidorm along the way. The trip from the Puerta de Mar station (up to €7.75, 2½ hours to Dénia, hourly) requires a train change in El Campello.

MURCIA

pop 409,800

The capital of the rural Murcia region, Murcia City was founded in 825 as an Islamic settlement called Mursiya.

Get more information at the friendly **tourist office** (☎ 96 835 87 49; www.murciaciudad.com; Plaza Cardinal Belluga; ☎ 10am-2pm & 6.30-8.30pm Mon-Sat, 5-9pm Sun). Internet cafés are few and far between, and most are small like the **Civer Troll Locutorio-Internet** (☎ 968 21 52 82; Plaza Cruz Roja 1; ☎ 9am-midnight; per hr €1.50).

Head to the **cathedral** (Plaza Cardinal Belluga; ☎ 7am-1pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat, 7am-1.30pm Sun) to marvel at its fabulously opulent Baroque façade. The cathedral took four centuries to build and is a hodge-podge of architectural styles. Highlights include the 92m tower and the Capilla de los Veléz, a Gothic jewel.

Sleeping

Pensión Murcia (☎ 968 21 99 63; Calle Vinadel 6; d €53, s with shared bath €23; ☎) On a side street near Plaza Santa Isabel, this quiet *penión* has just had a major facelift. Doubles boast new furnishings and bathrooms.

Hotel Hispano-2 (☎ 968 21 61 52; www.hotelhispano.net; Calle Radio Murcia 3; s €45-52, d €50-68, t €65-80; ☎) Dignified, if not fancy, the clean and central Hotel Hispano has a few perks like internet access and nice parquet floors. It also runs a *penión* (singles €24 to €27, doubles €38) just around the corner.

Eating

Murcia is known for its tapas (some of the best areas to try are Plaza Romeo, Plaza Santo Domingo and Plaza de las Flores) and for its

wonderfully fresh veggies, which are grown in the region. Finally, a Spanish city that caters to vegetarians!

Los Zagales (☎ 968 21 55 79; Calle Polo Medina 4; tapas €0.70-4.50, meals from €10) Just off the Plaza Cardenal Belluga is this local favourite, an old-fashioned tapas bar where you can feast on concoctions like 'fried blood with onions'.

El Rincón de Pepe (☎ 96 821 22 39; Calle Apóstoles 34; mains €9-22) Set inside the Gran Casino Murcia, this is a city fixture known for its innovative take on local specialities. The same owners run an informal tapas bar just around the corner.

Drinking

The streets around the university, in particular **Calle Enrique Villar**, are packed with bars that get popular Thursday through Saturday nights. The **Plaza de Toros** is another good option. Several bars are set up inside the bullring itself, making for a uniquely Spanish alternative to the regular bar scene.

Getting There & Away

Renfe (☎ 902 24 02 02; www.renfe.es) trains connect Murcia with Madrid (€38.60, four hours, five daily), Alicante (€5.40 to €14.60, one hour 20 minutes, 23 daily), Cartagena (€3.60, 50 minutes, 12 daily) and other Spanish cities. From the train station, take bus 9 or 39 to Gran Vía, in the city centre.

Buses serve Almería (one hour 20 minutes, 23 daily) and coastal towns like La Manga (1½ hours, three daily).

ANDALUCÍA

In the past, armies of Muslims and Christians fought over this sun-drenched part of Spain; these days, tourists are the only visitors to arrive in battalions.

SEVILLE

pop 702,516

It's obligatory to use superlatives when describing Seville, and we're happy to oblige. A sexy, sophisticated and gorgeous-looking city, it's home to two of Spain's most colourful festivals, an amazing tapas culture, fascinating and distinctive *barrios* (neighbourhoods), and a local population that lives life to the fullest. Nothing beats a few days spent within its seductive, orange-scented embrace.

SEVILLE

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Barrio de Santa Cruz

Barrio de San Sebastián

Information

Internetia (☎ 95 450 25 43; Calle Av Menendez Palayo; per hr €2.20; ☎ 10am-1am Mon-Fri, 11am-1am Sat & Sun)

Municipal tourist office (☎ 95 450 56 00; Calle de Arjona 28; ☎ 8.15am-8.45pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-2.30pm Sat & Sun)

Regional tourist offices (www.andalucia.org)

Constitución (☎ 95 422 14 04; Av de la Constitución 21; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 3-7pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun); Santa Justa (☎ 95 453 76 26; Estación Santa Justa; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun); Airport (☎ 95 444 91 28; ☎ 9am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun)

Sights & Activities

The city's towering and lavishly decorated **cathedral** (☎ 95 421 49 71; Calle Alemanes; adult/student €7.50/2, free Sun; ☎ 11am-5pm Mon-Sat Sep-Jun, 9.30am-3pm Mon-Sat Jul-Aug, 2.30-6pm Sun year-round) was built on the site of Muslim Seville's main mosque between 1401 and 1507. The adjoining tower, **La Giralda**, was the mosque's minaret and dates from the 12th century.

A residence of Muslim and Christian royalty for many centuries, Seville's **Alcazar** (☎ 95 450 23 23; Plaza del Triunfo; adult/child €7/free; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Sat, 9.30am-1.30pm Sun Oct-Mar, 9.30am-7pm Tue-Sat, 9.30am-5pm Sun Apr-Sep) was founded in 913 as a Muslim fortress. It has been adapted by Seville's rulers in almost every century since, which makes it a mishmash of styles but adds to its fascination. Make sure you book into one of the tours of the exquisite **Upper Palace** (admission €4, maximum tickets per tour 15), which are scheduled every half hour from 10.30am to 1pm.

The fabulous **Museo de Bellas Artes** (☎ 95 422 07 90; Plaza Museo 9; admission non-EU/EU citizens €1.50/free; ☎ 2.30-8.30pm Tue, 9am-8.30pm Wed-Sat, 9am-2.30pm Sun) has a beautifully housed collection of outstanding Spanish art, focusing on local artists such as Bartolomé Esteban Murillo and Francisco Zurbarán.

WALKS & PARKS

To fully appreciate **Barrio de Santa Cruz**, the old Jewish quarter immediately east of the cathedral, head for the tangle of narrow streets and plazas east of Calle Mateus Gago. There's no better place to get lost.

A more straightforward walk is along the **riverbank** and past Seville's famous bullring, the **Plaza de Toros de la Real Maestranza** (☎ 95 422 45 77; www.maestranza.com; Paseo de Cristóbal Colón 12; guided tours €4; ☎ 9.30am-7pm, 9.30am-3pm bullfight days),

one of the oldest in Spain. The (compulsory) tour here is in English and Spanish.

South of the centre is **Parque de María Luisa**, with its maze of paths, tall trees, flowers, fountains and shaded lawns. Be sure to seek out the magnificent **Plaza de España**, with its fountains, canal and simply dazzling semicircle of buildings clad in *azulejo* (ceramic tiles).

Festivals & Events

Semana Santa During the week leading up to Easter Sunday, members of religious brotherhoods dress in strange penitents' garb with tall, pointed hoods and join long processions carrying sacred images through the city. **Feria de Abril** Held in late April, the Feria involves six days of music, dancing, horse-riding and traditional dress, plus daily bullfights.

Sleeping

Note that prices over **Semana Santa** and **Feria** can be up to double the high-season rates cited here. The city's accommodation is often full on weekends and is always booked solid during festivals.

Hostal Nuevo Suizo (☎ 95 422 91 47; www.nuevo-suizo.com; Calle Azofafo 7; dm €21-25, s with shared bathroom €39-43, d with shared bathroom €49-69, all incl breakfast; ☎ ☎ ☎) Near the vibrant Calle San Eloy bar strip, the Nuevo Suizo occupies an attractive old house and offers rooms and dorms; only the rooms have air-con. There's one clean shared bathroom for every 10 beds, a roof terrace and free (24-hour) internet, tea and coffee. Though overpriced, it's the only true backpacker hostel in the centre of town.

Pensión Vergara (☎ 95 421 56 68; pensionvergara.sevilla@yahoo.es; Calle Ximenez de Enciso 11; per person with shared bathroom €20-25; ☎ ☎) Attractive, welcoming and quirky in equal parts, the Vergara occupies a former 15th-century convent close to the cathedral. Go up the steep stairs to discover 12 rooms with high ceilings and pretty décor.

Casa Sol y Luna (☎ 95 421 06 82; www.casasolyluna1.com; 1st fl, Calle Pérez Galdós 1; d €45, s/d with shared bathroom €22/38; ☎ ☎) Run by a young and very friendly English/Spanish couple, this *península* occupies the 1st floor of an 18th-century apartment building. Rooms have hand-painted tiled floors, high ceilings and beds with pristine linen; the front ones are particularly attractive. Bathrooms are modern and sparkling clean.

Hostal Córdoba (☎ 95 422 74 98; hostalcordoba@mixmail.com; Calle Farnesio 12; s €35-50, d €55-70, s with shared bathroom €30-40, d with shared bathroom €45-60; ☎ ☎) Otto the West Highland terrier will welcome

GETTING INTO TOWN

The easiest way to travel get from the airport to the city centre is to catch a bus (€2.30, every half hour between 6.15am and 11pm) run by **Amarillos Tours** (☎ 90 221 03 17) to Puerta Jerez in the city centre. A taxi from the airport to the city centre will cost between €20 and €3 depending on traffic and how many bags you have.

Seville has two principal bus stations: Prado de San Sebastián and Plaza de Armas. Prado de San Sebastián is only a short walk from the Alcázar; bus C1 stops close to here on its route between Santa Justa train station and the city centre. Plaza de Armas is approximately 1.5km northwest of the Giralda; bus C4 travels between it and Puerta Jerez in the centre. Tickets for both of these routes cost €0.95.

The huge and extremely efficient Santa Justa train station is 1.5km northeast of the centre. To get from it to the centre, leave the station via Exit 2 and walk across the carpark to Calle José Laguillo, where buses C1 and C2 stop. These follow a clockwise and anticlockwise circuit (you could catch either) via Ave de Carlos V, close to the Prado de San Sebastian bus station and the city centre; tickets cost €0.95. The best place to get off the bus is at Plaça Don Juan de Austria, near the Alcázar gardens; the Barrio de Santa Cruz and the centre are a short walk away.

you to this extremely friendly, family-run *hostal*. The simple rooms are light and immaculately maintained.

Hostal Museo (☎ 95 491 55 26; www.hostalmuseo.com; Calle Abad Gordillo 17; s €35-40, d €45-55; 🚻) The most unassuming of a growing number of boutique-style hotels in Seville, the Museo has a tranquil ambience and stylish (if tiny) rooms with satellite TV.

Eating

Horno de San Buenaventura (cnr Av de la Constitución & Calle García Vinuesa) This cavernous place serves everything from early-morning coffee (€1.30) and *tostadas* (€0.90) to lunchtime *platos combinados* (€8.85 including bread and wine). Locals love it to bits.

Aladdin (Calle Santa María la Blanca 15; falafel sandwich €4, chicken shwarma €5) For a fresh and tasty snack, take a seat in the luridly decorated *comedor* of this friendly café. If the pumping Arabic music videos don't make you feel like dancing, the quality and price of the fresh and tasty food on offer certainly will.

Patio San Eloy (☎ 95 422 11 48; Calle San Eloy 9; tapas €1.50) This bar has been high on Seville's popularity meter for years. Locals of all ages flock here to sit on the tiled rear steps and catch up over *burguillos* (small filled rolls, €1.20 to €1.80) and cheap drinks.

Bodega Belmonte (☎ 95 421 40 14; Calle Mateos Gago 24; tapas €2-4) In the shadow of the cathedral, this ever-busy place has an impressive selection of wines and good-quality tapas.

La Alacena de San Eloy (☎ 95 421 55 80; Calle San Eloy 31; tapas €1.80-2.25, raciones €5-18) Most of Seville's

tapas bars serve rustic plates and subscribe to the 'there's nothing more atmospheric than a stuffed bull's head' school of interior decoration, but this modern place bucks the trend. Full of chattering locals sampling the excellent list of wines by the glass and ordering up big from the fabulous tapas menu, it's as stylish as it is satisfying.

Al Medina (☎ 95 421 54 51; Calle San Roque 13; mains €10.50-14.50, menú degustación €20; 🚻; closed Mon & Sun dinner) For the best Moroccan food this side of Marrakesh, make your way to this enchanting restaurant near the Museo de Bellas Artes. The décor is wonderfully evocative of the medina and the food is quite delicious. It's tiny (only 11 tables) so make sure you book ahead.

Drinking & Clubbing

The crowd spills out onto the footpath in front of the tiny **Bodega Alvaro Peregil** (Calle Mateos Gago) from early morning till late at night. On the other side of the street you'll find **Cerveceria Giralda** (☎ 954 22 74 35; Calle Mateos Gago 1), a popular bar occupying a former Muslim *hammam* (bathhouse).

Plaza Salvador is full of drinkers every evening until around 1am, as well as on weekend afternoons. Grab a beer at La Antigua Bodeguita or Bodeguita Los Soportales and either prop up at one of the barrel tables or sit on the steps of the Parroquia del Salvador. It's great fun.

Sports fans tend to gravitate towards **Flaherty's Irish Pub** (☎ 95 421 04 17; Calle Alemanes 7; 🚻; 11am-late), which occupies a premium position opposite the cathedral.

The Alameda de Hércules area, a former red-light district north of the city centre, is a buzzing *barrio* with lots of offbeat bars. Some, such as the **Fun Club** (☎ 95 438 93 29; Alameda de Hércules 86; live music about €5; 🚻; 10pm-6am Thu-Sat), have live music.

In summer there's a lively scene along the eastern bank of the Guadalquivir River, which is dotted with temporary bars. On Calle del Betis, on the far bank, you'll find some good clubs, including the enormous **Boss** (☎ 95 499 01 04; Calle del Betis 57; admission free; 🚻; 11pm-7am Wed-Sat, closed Jun-Aug).

Aduana (☎ 95 423 49 40; Av de la Raza) was the city's club *de jour* at the time of research. House and electro is played on one dance floor and pop on the other.

Entertainment

FLAMENCO

The sprawling **La Carbonería** (☎ 95 421 44 60; Calle Levies 18; admission free; 🚻; 9pm-4am) is thronged every night of the week with tourists and locals who come to mingle at the bar and enjoy the live flamenco on offer. For a very different experience, book a ticket at the well-priced **Casa de la Memoria de Al-Andalus** (☎ 95 456 06 70; Calle Ximénez de Enciso 28; adult/student/child €12/8/6; Calle Ximénez de Enciso 28; adult/student/child €12/8/6), which puts on excellent nightly performances in a wonderful patio setting.

BULLFIGHTING

Seville's bullfighting season runs from Easter to October, with fights about 6.30pm most Sundays, and every day during the Feria and the preceding week. Tickets cost €20 to €100, depending on who's fighting, and can be bought from 4.30pm on fight days at the bullring.

Getting There & Away

AIR

There's a range of domestic and international flights in and out of Seville's **San Pablo airport** (☎ 95 444 90 00).

BUS

There are regular services from the **Plaza de Armas bus station** (☎ 95 490 80 40; Av del Cristo de la Expiación) to destinations outside Andalucía. These include Madrid (€17.50, six hours, 14 daily), Mérida (€11.52, three hours, nine daily), Cáceres (€15.53, four hours, seven daily), Barcelona (€69.40, 14½ to 16½ hours, three daily), Valencia (€45, 10 to 10½ hours, four daily) and Lisbon (€36, 7½ hours, two daily).

Buses to other parts of Andalucía use **Prado de San Sebastián bus station** (☎ 95 441 71 11; Plaza San Sebastián), with services to Córdoba (€9.45, 1¼ hours to 2¼ hours, nine daily), Granada (€17.60, three hours, 10 daily), Málaga (€14.40, 2½ hours, 10 daily), Tarifa (€14.80, 3½ hours, four daily) and Cádiz (€10.30, 1¼ hours, 10 daily).

TRAIN

From Seville's **Estación de Santa Justa** (Av Kansas City), 1.5km northeast of the centre, there are both super-fast AVE trains and regular trains to Madrid (€54.70 to €127.10, 2½ to 3¼ hours, hourly) and Córdoba (€7.55 to €38.60, 45 minutes to 1¼ hours, hourly).

Other trains travel to Cádiz (€9.10 to €29.70, 1½ to two hours, 12 daily), Granada (€20.05, 3¼ hours, four daily), Málaga (€16.05, 2½ hours, six daily) and Barcelona (€72.90 to €191.20, 10½ to 13 hours, two daily).

Getting Around

The airport is 8.5km from the centre. **Amarillos Tours** (☎ 90 221 03 17) runs a bus service between it and Puerta Jerez in the city every half-hour between 6.15am and 11pm daily (€2.30).

Bus C1, in front of Santa Justa train station, follows a clockwise circuit via Av de Carlos V, close to Prado de San Sebastián bus station and the city centre; bus C2 does the same route anticlockwise. Bus C4, south down Calle de Arjona from Plaza Armas bus station, goes to Puerta de Jerez in the centre; returning, take bus C3. Tickets for these routes cost €0.95.

CÓRDOBA

pop 323,613

Córdoba was the effective Islamic capital on the peninsula following the Muslim invasion in 711, and today it pays graceful testament to its Moorish past. Its magnificent Mezquita (mosque) has been described as the greatest visual representation of homesickness ever constructed, and is one of the highlights of any visit to Spain.

There are helpful **tourist office kiosks** (☎ 90 220 17 74; www.turismodecordoba.org; 🚻; 10am-2pm & 4.30-7pm) at Plaza de las Tendillas, Campo Santos Mártires, Plaza Posada del Potro and the train station.

You'll find three coin-operated internet terminals in the small public reception area at the **Hostal el Pilar Del Potro** (Calle de Lucano; per 30min €1).



Sights & Activities

Inside the **Mezquita** (☎ 95 747 05 12; adult/child/under 10yr €8/4/free, audio guide €3; 🕒 10am-7.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-Jun, 10am-7pm Mon-Sat Mar & Jul-Oct, 10am-6pm Mon-Sat Nov & Feb, 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat Dec-Jan, 8.30-10.15am & 2-6pm Sun year-round), which was begun by emir Abd ar-Rahman I in 785 and enlarged by subsequent generations, you'll find a mesmerising sequence of two-tier arches aimed at thickening of columns resembling palm trees. The mosque was used as a church from 1236, and a cathedral was (unfortunately) built right in its centre in the 16th century. Entrance is free if you visit between 8.30am and 10am Monday to Saturday and observe strict silence.

The **Judería**, Córdoba's medieval Jewish quarter, is an intriguing maze of narrow streets, small plazas and traditional houses with pretty, flower-filled patios. Don't miss the beautiful little **Sinagoga** (☎ 95 720 29 28; Calle de los Judios; admission non-EU/EU citizens €0.30/free; 🕒 9.30am-2pm & 3.30-5.30pm Tue-Sat, 9.30am-1.30pm Sun).

Southwest of the Mezquita, the **Alcazar de los Reyes Cristianos** (Fortress of the Christian Monarchs; ☎ 95 742 01 51; adult/student €4/2, free on Fri; 🕒 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 year-round) has large and lovely gardens.

It's well worth the 8.5km trip west of Córdoba to the intriguing **Madinat Al-Zahra** (☎ 95 732 91 30; Carretera Palma del Rio, km 5.5; admission non-EU/EU citizens €1.50/free; 🕒 10am-6.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), a once-mighty Muslim city-palace dating from the 10th century. Catch the tourist bus (€5), which leaves from Av del Alcázar at 11am and returns 2½ hours later. Tickets can be purchased from municipal tourist booths.

Sleeping

Instalación Juvenil Córdoba (☎ 95 729 01 66; Plaza de Judá Levi; dm incl breakfast under/over 26yr €14.50/19; 🕒 🕒) Located on a pretty plaza, this excellent youth hostel occupies two buildings (one new, one old) around attractive, palm-filled courtyards. The two-bed rooms are fabulous, with private bathroom, vaulted ceilings and comfortable single beds; the four-bed rooms have bunks and private bathroom.

Hostal Séneca (☎ 95 747 32 34; hostalseneca@erasmas.com; Calle Conde y Luque 7; s/d incl breakfast €37/50, with shared bathroom €25/43) Basic and slightly overpriced rooms are on offer at this old-fashioned place. Its patio is a quiet and cool haven in summer.

Hotel Maestre (☎ 95 747 24 10; www.hotelmaestre.com; Calle Romero Barros 4 & 6; s €25-35, d €42-49; 🕒) This well-run modern hotel has a comfortable indoor/outdoor foyer sitting area and well-appointed rooms.

Eating & Drinking

Taberna San Miguel (Plaza San Miguel 1; tapas €1.50; 🕒 closed Sun & Aug) Known locally as *El Pisto* (the Barrel), this busy place has been serving rustic food and cheap jugs of Moriles wine since 1880.

Comedor Arabe-Andalusi (☎ 95 747 51 62; Plaza Abades 4; mains €4-6; 🕒 Tue-Sun) Set on a pretty plaza, this excellent Arabian-style eatery has dim lighting, oriental carpets and low tables.

Bodegas Mezquita (☎ 95 749 00 04; www.bodegasmezquita.com; in Spanish; Calle Céspedes 12; raciones €4-6) This new addition to Córdoba's food and drink scene has a shop selling local gourmet produce and an attached and very popular *bodega* that serves more than 40 different tapas and 60 wines. There's another branch (produce store only) at Calle Corregidor Luis de la Cerda 73.

Casa Pepe de la Judería (☎ 95 72007 44; Calle Romero 1; media-raciones €2.25-5.86, mains €11-18) This local classic is always busy. You can eat hearty Córdoba specialties such as *cabo de toro a la Córdoba* (bulls' tail Córdoba style, €10.82) in the rooms set around the patio or graze on tapas at the bar. Pricy, but worth it.

Jazz Café (Calle Espartería; 🕒 5pm-4am) A laid-back bar hosting jam sessions on Tuesdays and live jazz on Wednesdays.

Soul (☎ 95 749 15 80; Calle de Alfonso XIII 3; 🕒 10-3am Mon-Fri, 5pm-4am Sat & Sun) Attracts student/arty types and hosts regular live music.

Getting There & Away

From the **bus station** (☎ 95 740 40 40; Plaza de las Tres Culturas), about 1km northwest of Plaza de las Tendillas, there are services to Seville (€9.45, 1½ hours to 2¼ hours, nine daily), Granada (€11.40, 2¼ hours to four hours, 10 daily), Málaga (€11.53, 2¼ hours to 3¼ hours, five daily) and Madrid (€13.50, 4¼ hours, six daily).

From the nearby **train station** (Av América), services go to Seville (€7.55 to €21.90, 45 minutes to 1¼ hours, 27 daily) and Madrid (€38.60 to €64.60, 1¼ hours to 2¼ hours, six daily). There's also a service to Barcelona (€76.10 to €139.50, eight to 11 hours, four daily).

GRANADA

pop 237,592

Some cities build reputations; others trade on them. Granada does both. Nestled at the foot of the snow-clad Sierra Nevada, the city was a sanctuary for Muslims after the fall of Córdoba and Seville, and reminders of this period are easily discernable in the maze-like Albayzín and in the commanding presence of the Alhambra. But Granada is also building a reputation for its vibrant cultural life, with students, travellers and street artists from Spain and overseas putting a decidedly contemporary stamp on the city's identity.

Staff at the **provincial tourist office** (☎ 95 824 71 28; www.turismodegranada.org; Plaza de Mariana Pineda 10; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun Nov-Apr, 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun May-Oct) are extremely helpful. For internet and phone access, your best bet is **Navegaweb** (Calle Reyes Católicos 55; per hr €1.20; ☎ 10am-11pm).

Sights & Activities

ALHAMBRA

One of the greatest accomplishments of Islamic art and architecture, the **Alhambra** (☎ 902 44 12 21; adult/child €10/free; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Nov-Feb, 8.30am-8pm Mar-Oct, night visits 8-9.30pm Fri & Sat Nov-Feb, 10-11.30pm Tue-Sat Mar-Oct) is simply breathtaking. Much has been written about its fortress, palace, patios and gardens, but nothing can really prepare you for seeing the real thing.

The **Alcazaba** is the Alhambra's fortress, dating from the 11th to the 13th centuries. There are spectacular views from the tops of its towers. The **Palacio Nazaríes** (Nasrid Palace), built for Granada's Muslim rulers in their 13th- to 15th-century heyday, is the centrepiece of the complex. The beauty of its patios and intricacy of its stucco and woodwork are unrivalled anywhere in the world. Admission to the soul-soothing **Generalife** (Palace Garden) is included in the overall ticket, or you can visit it alone for €5.

OTHER ATTRACTIONS

Exploring the narrow, hilly streets of the **Albayzín**, the old Moorish quarter across the river from the Alhambra, is highly enjoyable. When doing this, keep your wits about you, as muggings sometimes occur around here. Make sure you climb uphill to reach the **Mirador de San Nicolás** – a viewpoint with breathtaking vistas and a relaxed, hippy scene.

It's also well worth exploring the streets and lanes surrounding **Plaza de Bib-Rambla** and

ALHAMBRA TICKETS

It's sensible to book tickets to the Alhambra in advance. You can reserve via any branch of the Banco Bilbao Viscaya (BBVA), including the Granada branch on Plaza Isabel la Católica; by calling ☎ 90 222 44 60 from within Spain (☎ 00 34 91 537 91 78 from abroad); or by credit card online at www.alhambratickets.com. An extra €0.88 is charged for the service.

Note that Alhambra tickets are only valid for half a day – you'll need to specify whether you wish to visit in the morning or afternoon. To book night visits, call ☎ 95 857 51 26 or ☎ 95 857 51 27.

visiting the **Capilla Real** (Royal Chapel; ☎ 95 822 92 39; Calle Oficios; admission €3; ☎ 10.30am-1pm & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-1pm Sun Nov-Feb, 10.30am-1pm & 4.30-7pm Mon-Sat, 11am-1pm Sun Mar-Oct), where Fernando and Isabel, the Christian monarchs who conquered Granada in 1492, are buried. When here, don't miss Roger van der Weyden's extraordinary *Crucifixion* in the main chapel or his *Nativity* in the adjoining museum.

Sleeping

Granada's accommodation gets booked up year-round, so it's a good idea to phone or email ahead.

Oasis Backpackers' Hostel (☎ 95 821 58 48, free call in Spain 9001 OASIS; www.oasisgranada.com; Placeta del Correo Viejo 3; 6-bed dm/2-bed dm incl breakfast €15/18; ☎) Granada's original backpackers' hostel has relocated to this new building and we're pleased to say that it hasn't lost any of its appeal as a result. Most dorms have six bunk beds with comfortable mattresses, plus personal safes, a fridge and a good-sized bathroom. There's a roof terrace, free internet access, a *cafetería*, a TV room with satellite channels, and a laundry service. Though crowded, it's a damn fine choice.

Funky Backpacker's Hostel (☎ 95 822 14 62; funky@alternativeacc.com; Cuesta Rodrigo del Campo 13; 6-bed dm/2-bed dm incl breakfast €15/18; ☎) Funky is another excellent option. Dorms have air-con and some have great views; most have their own bathrooms. Communal areas aren't as impressive as those at Oasis, though the tiny bar/*cafetería* on the roof has a great feel, a satellite TV and wonderful views. There's a book swap, free internet access, a laundry service and communal kitchen.



Hostal Venecia (☎ 95 822 39 87; 2nd fl, Cuesta de Gómez 2; s/d with shared bathroom €15/32) The Venecia's friendly owners offer guests a complimentary herbal tea and a bright smile in the morning. Beds are comfortable, but the cramped bathrooms are barracks-like.

Hostal Britz (☎ 95 822 36 52; www.lisboaweb.com; Cuesta de Gómez 1; s/d €30/45, with shared bathroom €25/32) If the saggy beds here don't interrupt your sleep, the noisy street probably will. Nevertheless, rooms are clean and there's a particularly nice top-floor triple with private bathroom (€54).

Eating

For fresh fruit and veggies, visit the large covered **market** (Calle San Agustín) near the cathedral. Local cheese, meats and wine can be picked up at **Al Sur de Granada** (☎ 95 827 02 45; Calle Elvira 150).

Cafetería Alhambra (☎ 95 852 39 29; Plaza Bib-Rambla 27; ración of churros €1.55; ☎ 8am-midnight) The *churros* made fresh at this bustling *cafetería* are fabulous.

Nemrut (☎ 95 822 67 30; Plaza Neuva 1) A branch of the national chain, this fast-food joint serves excellent Turkish sandwiches at its indoor and outdoor tables. There's a good-value *menú* offering a *döner kebab bocadillo*, *patatas fritas* (fried potato chips), baklava and a drink for €6.

Samarkanda (☎ 95 821 00 04; Calle Calderería Vieja 5; mains €7-9; ☎ Thu-Tue) Lebanese restaurants aren't very common in Spain, so this simple family-run place in the Albayzín is as unusual as it is welcoming. The food packs a flavour punch – try the tangy *fattoosh* (€5.50) and the simple but delicious *wara ainab* (stuffed vine leaves, €6). Drinks include local beer and Lebanese wine.

Restaurante Arrayanes (☎ 95 822 84 01; Cuesta Marañas 4; mains €11-12.50) In the Albayzín, this intimate restaurant serves decent Moroccan dishes in a dining area strewn with rugs and brightly coloured cushions. No alcohol is served, but the house *limonade* (€1.50) is a refreshing substitute.

Drinking

Try any of the following options: **La Gran Taberna** (☎ 95 822 88 46; Plaza Nueva 12; tablas €5-9); **Rincón de San Pedro** (Carrera del Darro 12); **Agora Pub** (Cuesta de Gómez; ☎ Mon-Sat); **Bodegas Castañeda** (Calle Almircecos) and **Bodega la Antigualla Comida Mexicana** (Calle de Elvira). All are near Plaza Nueva and stay open late.

Granada's Moorish legacy lives on in the Albayzín's fabulous Arabian-style *teterías* (teahouses). One of the best is **Kasbah** (☎ 95 822 79 36; Calle Calderería Nueva 4; teas €2; ☎ 12.30pm-12.30am), which also hosts live flamenco and belly dancing.

Granada 10 (Calle Cárcel Baja; admission €6; ☎ mid-night-dawn) holds its 'Soul Kitchen' on Wednesday nights. The same promoters run the hip **Tantra Bar** (off Calle Elvira), which has an in-house DJ.

One of the city's longest functioning gay dance clubs is the slightly seedy **Zoo** (Plaza Cam-pillo; ☎ 2-8am Thu-Sun).

Entertainment

Eshavira (☎ 95 829 08 29; www.eshavira.com; Postigo de la Cuna 2; ☎ 8.30pm-3am) Hosts live jazz and flamenco. The prices of drinks rise when the live music starts.

Getting There & Away

Autocares J Gonzalez (☎ 95 849 01 64; www.autocaresjosegonzalez.com) runs a bus service between Granada's new **airport** (☎ 95 824 52 00; www.aena.es) and the city centre. The service runs between 9.10am and 11pm (10pm on Saturday), takes 35 minutes and costs €3.

The **bus station** (☎ 95 818 54 80; Carretera de Jaén) is 3km northwest of the centre. Buses 3 and 33 (€1) travel between the two. Buses go to Madrid's Estación Sur (€14.70, five hours, 12 daily), Málaga (€8.87, 1½ hours, 18 daily), Seville (€17.60, three to four hours, 10 daily) and Córdoba (€11.40, 2¾ hours, 11 daily).

The **train station** (Av de Andaluces) is about 1.5km northwest of the centre. Catch bus 4, 6, 7, 9 or 11 going east (right) from Av de la Constitución to get to the centre (€1). There are trains to Madrid-Chamartín (€31.30 to €35.40, six hours, two daily), Seville (€20.05, three hours, four daily) and Algeciras (€17, 4¾ hours, three daily). Two services travel to Barcelona (€52.10 to €188.60, 12 hours) via Valencia (€42.70 to €174, 7½ hours) each day.

COSTA DE ALMERÍA

The coast east of Almería in eastern Andalucía is perhaps the last section of Spain's Mediterranean coast where you can have a beach to yourself. This is Spain's sunniest region – even in late March it can be warm enough to strip off and take in the rays. For information, visit Almería City's **tourist office** (☎ 95 027 43 55; Parque Nicolás Salmerón).

Sights & Activities

The **Alcazaba** (☎ 95 027 16 17; Calle Almanzor; admission non-EU/EU citizens €1.50/free; ☎ 9.30am-1.30pm & 3.30-7pm Oct-Apr, 10am-2pm & 5-8pm May-Sep), an enormous 10th-century Muslim fortress, is the highlight of Almería City.

North of Almería, the landscape of canyons and rocky wastelands looks like something straight out of America's Wild West. In the 1960s and '70s, Western moviemakers shot dozens of films here, including parts of *The Magnificent Seven* and *A Fistful of Dollars*. The industry left behind three Wild West town sets that can be visited; the most popular of these is **Mini Hollywood** (☎ 95 036 52 36; Carretera Nacional 340, km 464; adult/child/under 4yr €17/9/free; ☎ 10am-7pm Tue-Sun 15 Dec-Mar, 10am-9pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, closed 1 Nov-14 Dec).

The best thing about the region is the wonderful coastline and semidesert scenery of the **Cabo de Gata** promontory. Some of the most beautiful and empty beaches on the Mediterranean alternate with precipitous cliffs and scattered villages all along the 50km coast from El Cabo de Gata village to Agua Amarga. The main village is **San José** with the great beaches **Playa de los Genoveses** and **Playa de Mónsul**.

Sleeping

ALMERÍA

Instalación Juvenil Almería (☎ 95 026 9788; almeria.itj@juntadeandalucia.es; dm incl breakfast under/over 26yr €14.50/19) This excellent new HI hostel has double rooms with private bathrooms. It's on the east side of town next to the Estadio Juventud sports ground. To get there catch the bus 1 from the corner of Av Frederico García Lorca and Calle Gregorio Maraón.

Hostal Americano (☎ 95 028 10 15; Av de la Estación 6; s/d with shared bathroom from €18.50/32) Long popular with backpackers, this basic, 50-room place is well located between the city centre and the bus station.

CABO DE GATA

In San José you'll find **Camping Tau** (☎ 95 038 01 66; www.parquenatural.com/tau, in Spanish; camp sites per person/tent/electricity €4.25/4.25/5; ☎ closed Oct-Mar) and the friendly non-HI hostel **Albergue Juvenil de San José** (☎ 95 038 03 53; www.alberguesanjose.com, in Spanish; Calle Montemar; dm €12; ☎ closed Nov-Mar).

Getting There & Away

From Almería's **bus station** (☎ 95 026 20 98; Plaza de Barcelona), services travel to Granada (€10.10 to €12.23, 2½ to four hours, five daily), Málaga

(€14.53, 3¼ hours, nine daily) and Seville (€27.70 to €28.58, 7½ to nine hours, three daily).

From the **train station** (Plaza de la Estación) there are services to Madrid (€33.90 to €38, seven hours, one daily), Granada (€13.40, 2¼ hours, four daily) and Seville (€32.10, 5½ hours, four daily).

MÁLAGA

pop 553,916

This exuberant port city suffers unfairly from its proximity to the overdeveloped and unattractive Costa del Sol. In reality, Málaga is an enticing mix of pedestrianised streets, vibrant nightlife and great tapas, with a world-class gallery thrown in for good measure. It's got Andaluz charm in spades, particularly during *Semana Santa* and the *August feria*.

The **tourist office** (☎ 95 221 34 45; www.andalucia.org; Pasaje de Chinitas 4; ☎ 9am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) is centrally located. **Internet Meeting Point** (per hr €1-2 according to time of day; ☎ 10am-12.30am) is on Plaza de Merced.

Sights

Don't leave town without visiting the fabulous **Museo Picasso Málaga** (☎ 95 212 76 99; www.museopicassomalaga.org; Calle San Agustín 8; permanent exhibition adult/student €6/3, temporary exhibitions €4.50/2.25, combined ticket €8/4; ☎ 10am-8pm Tue-Thu & Sun, 10am-9pm Fri & Sat). Set in the contemplative setting of the lovely 16th-century Palacio de Buenavista, it's filled with over 200 works covering the length and breadth of Picasso's astonishing career.

The **Alcazaba** (☎ 95 222 72 30; Calle Alcazabilla; admission €1.90, free after 2pm on Sun; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar, 9.30am-8pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct) fortress and palace dates from the 8th century. Nearby is the recently restored **Teatro Romano** (Roman amphitheatre; admission free; ☎ 10am-2.30pm & 4-7pm Wed-Sat, 10am-2.30pm Sun Nov-Mar, 10am-2.30pm & 5-8pm Wed-Sat, 10am-2.30pm Sun Apr-Oct).

The hill-top **Castillo de Gibralfaro** (admission €1.90; ☎ 9am-5.45pm Nov-Mar, 9am-7.45pm Apr-Oct), a Moorish castle, commands spectacular views across the city and sea.

Sleeping

Málaga is short on accommodation, so book ahead. Prices shoot up in August and during Easter week.

Instalación Juvenil Málaga (☎ 95 230 85 00; malaga.itj@juntadeandalucia.es; Plaza Pló XII 6; dm incl breakfast

SPLURGE

Hotel Larios (☎ 95 222 22 00; www.hotel-larios.com; Calle Marqués de Larios 2; r €117-193, ste €172-246; ☒ ☒ ☒) From the Hoffman couch in the foyer to the Steinway grand in the bar, this hotel oozes style and quality. The location couldn't be better, and the rooms are extremely comfortable. The Málagañan owners are committed to fostering the city's cultural life, and hold regular film festivals, poetry readings and live music in the luxe restaurant/bar. In summer the action moves to the 5th-floor terrace bar, which has spectacular views.

under/over 26yr €14.50/19) This HI hostel is 1.5km west of the city centre and offers comfortable doubles, many of which have private bathrooms. Take bus 14 or 31 from the Alameda Principal to get there.

Hostal La Palma (☎ 95 222 67 72; 1st fl, Calle Martínez 7; d €38-43, s with shared bathroom €23, d with shared bathroom €30-38; ☒) Run by the genial Antonio, this excellent *hostal* has a reception area on the 1st floor and two floors of rooms above. Those on the 4th level have wash-basins and tiled floors but are a tad dark. The slightly more expensive rooms are on the floor below; these have air-con and some have private bathrooms and balconies onto the street.

Eating

Cortijo de Pepe (Plaza de la Merced; tapas €1.75-2.50) Overlooking busy Plaza de la Merced, this long-standing favourite offers an array of well-priced tapas, beer and wine.

Bar Lo Güeno (☎ 95 222 30 48; Calle Marín García 9; tapas €2-4.20) Cramming into this famous tapas bar is a mandatory activity while in Málaga. There are over 50 varieties of freshly prepared snacks on offer.

El Vegetariano de la Alcazabilla (☎ 95 221 48 58; Calle Pozo del Rey 5; mains €6-8; ☒ Mon-Sat) Fresh dishes are served at this popular vegetarian restaurant.

Al-Yamal Restaurante Árabe (☎ 95 221 20 46; Calle Blasco de Garay 7; mains €11-16; ☒ Mon-Sat) For a simple Moroccan meal cooked with love, make your way to this intimate eatery near the port. The aromatic *harira* (lamb and vegetable soup, €5.50) is delicious, as is the hummus served with home-baked pita bread (€2).

At lunch, locals tend to gravitate towards the excellent fish restaurants at Playas de Pedregeljo and Palo, a few kilometres east of the centre, which specialise in *fritura Málagaña* (fried fish, anchovies and squid).

Drinking

Serious party time kicks off at about midnight around Calle Granada and Plaza Merced. Popular spots include **O'Neills Irish Pub** (Calle Luis de Velázquez 3) and **Liceo** (Calle Beatas 21). **Warhol** (Calle Niño de Guevara; ☒ Thu-Sat) caters to a predominantly gay clientele.

Getting There & Away

Málaga's **airport** (☎ 95 204 88 38; www.aena.es) handles a wide range of domestic and international flights. Buses run between it and platform No 30 at Málaga bus station between 6.35am and 11.35pm daily (€1, tickets available on bus).

Another way of travelling between the city centre and the airport is on the Málaga-Fuengirola train, which leaves from the city centre and stops at the bus station and airport (€1.10 Monday to Friday, €1.20 Saturday and Sunday, 15 minutes) before travelling on to Torremolinos (€1.10 Monday to Friday, €1.20 Saturday and Sunday) and Fuengirola (€1.75 Monday to Friday, €1.85 Saturday and Sunday).

From the **bus station** (☎ 95 235 00 61; Paseo de los Tilos; www.estabus.emsam.es) there are services to Madrid (€19.65, six hours, nine daily), Granada (€8.87, 1½ hours, 18 daily), Seville (€14.40, 2½ hours, 10 daily), Almería (€14.53, 3¼ hours, nine daily), Algeciras (€9.94 to €10.40, 1¾ to three hours, 11 daily), Cadiz (€19.66 to €20.12, four to 5½ hours, three daily), Tarifa (€12.10, two hours, two daily), La Línea (€10.03, three hours, four daily) and Barcelona (€70.50 to €83.50, six daily) via Valencia (€46.38 to €53.08, six daily).

From the **train station** (Explanada de la Estación), there are services to Madrid (€52.10 to €87.50, 4¼ hours, six daily) via Córdoba (€15.60 to €25, 2¼ hours, six daily). There's also a service to Seville (€16.05, 2½ hours, eight daily).

ALGECIRAS

pop 112,857

An unattractive industrial and fishing town between Tarifa and Gibraltar, Algeciras is the major port linking Spain with Morocco. Keep your wits about you, and ignore offers from

the legions of moneychangers, drug pushers and ticket hawkers who hang out here. If you need a room, there are several budget options in the streets behind Av de la Marina. The **tourist office** (☎ 95 657 26 36; Calle Juan Cierva; ☒ 9am-2pm Mon-Fri) is near the port.

About 400m inland from the port, **Comes** (☎ 95 665 34 56; Calle San Bernardo) runs buses to Tarifa (€1.70, 25 to 45 minutes, 21 daily), Cádiz (€9.72, two hours, 10 daily) and Seville (€14.80, 3¼ to 4½ hours, four daily). **Portillo** (Av Virgen del Carmen 15), 200m north of the port, goes to Málaga (€9.94 to €10.40, 1¾ to three hours, 11 daily).

From the **train station** (Calle Agustín Bálsamo 12), services run to Madrid (€38 to €56.30, six to 11 hours, two daily), Córdoba (€22.40 to €43.80, four to 4½ hours, two daily) and Granada (€17, 4¾ hours, three daily).

Frequent ferries between Spain and Tangier, in Morocco, and Ceuta, the Spanish enclave on the Moroccan coast, are operated by **Trasmediterránea** (☎ 902 45 46 45; www.trasmediterranea.es), **Euroferry**s (☎ 95 665 11 78; www.euroferry.com), **Buquebus** (☎ 902 41 42 42; www.buquebus.es) and other companies. There are regular services to Tangier (adult/child €32.90/20.30, one hour) and even more to Ceuta (adult €30.10 to €34.56, child €10.75 to €17.28, 35 minutes). Buy your ticket at the port or at agencies on Av de la Marina – prices are the same.

CÁDIZ

pop 130,968

Cádiz is crammed onto the head of a promontory like some huge and overcrowded ocean-going ship. Columbus sailed from here on his second and fourth voyages, and after his success in the Americas it grew into Spain's richest and most cosmopolitan city in the 18th century. The best time to visit is during the February *carnaval*, which is up there with Rio's in terms of outrageous exuberance.

The **tourist office** (☎ 95 624 10 01; Plaza San Juan de Dios 11; ☒ 9.30am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri) has helpful staff. For internet access try **EnRed@2** (Calle Isabel La Católica 3; per hr €1.80; ☒ 11am-3pm & 6-11pm).

Sights & Activities

The yellow-domed 18th-century **cathedral** (☎ 95 625 98 12; Plaza de la Catedral; adult/child €4/2.50; ☒ 10am-1.30pm & 4.30-7pm Tue-Fri, 10am-12.30pm Sat) is the city's most striking landmark.

Get your bearings by climbing up the baroque **Torre Tavira** (☎ 95 621 29 10; www.torretavira

.com; Calle Marqués del Real Tesoro; adult/student €3.50/2.80; ☒ 10am-6pm 16 Sep-14 Jun, 10am-8pm 15 Jun-15 Sep), the highest of Cádiz's old watchtowers. It features a camera obscura and sweeping views of the city.

The **Museo de Cádiz** (☎ 95 621 22 81; Plaza de Mina; non-EU/EU citizens €1.50/free; ☒ 2.30-8.30pm Tue, 9am-8.30pm Wed-Sat, 9am-2.30pm Sun) has a magnificent collection of archaeological remains, as well as a fine-art collection.

Sleeping & Eating

Quo Qadis (☎ /fax 95 622 19 39; www.quoqadis.com; Calle Diego Arias 1; dm incl breakfast €6-12, d €30, with shared bathroom €24; ☒) This non-HI youth hostel is housed in an old mansion and offers crowded but cheerful accommodation.

Hostal Bahía (☎ 95 625 90 61; Calle Plocia 5; d €52-69; ☒) You'll find this well-maintained *hostal* just off the bustling main square (fortunately it has double-glazed windows).

El Faro (☎ 95 622 19 59; Calle San Félix 15; mains €15-20) The city's most famous restaurant specialises in fresh *pescados de la bahía* (fish from the bay). Happily, its national reputation doesn't make the atmosphere intimidating or the prices outrageous. Its attached tapas bar is excellent.

Cádiz's *freidurías de pescado* (fried-fish bars) are wonderful spots to grab a cheap but delicious meal. Try **Freiduría Las Flores** (☎ 95 622 61 12; Plaza de Topete 4), which sells the catch of the day and local specialities such as *puntillitas* (tiny legs of baby squid).

Getting There & Away

From the **bus station** (☎ 95 680 70 59; Plaza de la Hispanidad) services travel to Madrid (€21.55, eight hours, three daily), Algeciras (€9.72, two hours, 10 daily), Seville (€10.30, 1¾ hours, 10 daily), Málaga (€19.66 to €20.12, four to 5½ hours, two daily) and Tarifa (€7.69, two hours, five daily).

From the **train station** (Plaza Sevilla) services go to Seville (€9.10 to €29.70, 1½ to two hours, 12 daily), Madrid (€59.90 to €92.70, 5¼ hours, two daily) and Córdoba (€32.80 to €51.10, three to 3½ hours, three daily).

TARIFA

pop 17,418

Windy, laid-back Tarifa is so close to Africa that you can almost hear the call to prayer issuing from Morocco's minarets. The town is a bohemian haven of cafés and crumbling Moorish ruins. There's also a lively windsurfing and kite-surfing scene.

The **tourist office** (☎ 95 668 09 93; www.aytotarifa.com; Paseo de la Alameda; ☎ 9am-9pm Jun-Sep, 9am-3pm Oct-May) has lots of information on the area, as has the independently run www.tarifa.info.com. For internet access try **Planet** (Calle Santísima Trinidad; per hr €3; ☎ 10.30am-2.30pm & 6-10pm).

Sights & Activities

The **Castillo de Guzmán** (☎ 95 668 46 89; Calle Guzmán El Bueno; adult/child €1.80/0.60; ☎ 11am-2pm & 6-8pm Tue-Sat Jul-Sep, 11am-2pm & 5-7pm Tue-Sat Apr-Jun, 11am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sat Oct-Mar) dates from the 10th century.

The waters of Algeciras Bay are prime whale- and dolphin-watching territory. **Whale Watch España** (☎ 95 662 70 13; www.whalewatchtarifa.net; Av Constitución 6; adult/child from €30/20) is one of several companies running daily two-hour **boat excursions**.

The tiny, protected **Playa Chica**, just south-east of the centre, is best for swimming. **Playa de los Lances**, the 10km-long beach beloved of wind- and kite-surfers, stretches northwest from Tarifa. For windsurf and kite-surf rental and classes, try places along Calle Batalla de Salado. Board, sail and wetsuit rental costs around €70 per day; windsurfing courses for beginners start at around €150.

Sleeping & Eating

Camping Tarifa (☎ 95 668 47 78; www.camping-tarifa.com; camp sites per person/tent/electricity €6.40/3.80/3.50) This facility 5km west of town overlooks Playa de los Lances. It has plenty of shade, a supermarket, bakery and restaurant. Prices increase dramatically during July and August.

Hostal Alameda (☎ 95 668 11 81; www.hostalalameda.com; Paseo de la Alameda 4; s/d €30/50; ☎) Good-value, smallish rooms are on offer here. Some have sea views.

Café Central (☎ 95 668 05 90; Calle Sancho IV El Bravo; ☎ 9am-1am) This legendary café posts a daily wind report on its walls and serves the best breakfasts in town.

Souk (☎ 95 668 07 08; Huerta del Rey 11; mains €10-14; ☎ Wed-Mon) For the aromas and tastes of nearby Morocco, nothing beats this atmospheric eatery.

Getting There & Away

Comes (☎ 95 668 40 38; Batalla del Salado) runs buses to Algeciras (€1.70, 25 to 45 minutes, 21 daily), La Línea (€3.49, one hour, seven daily), Cádiz (€7.69, two hours, five daily) and Seville (€14, three hours, four daily).

FRS (☎ 95 668 18 30; www.frs.es; Estación Marítima) runs fast ferries between Tarifa and Tangier (adult/child/car €27/16/73, 35 minutes, five daily).

GIBRALTAR

pop 26,404

The British colony of Gibraltar is a time-capsule of 1960s Britain. Coachloads of middle-aged day-trippers from the Costa del Sol lap up the nostalgia, but most backpackers end up hoofing out of here fast, particularly when they discover the over-the-top eating and accommodation prices.

Occupying a huge lump of limestone almost 5km long and over 1km wide near the mouth of the Mediterranean, the colony has certainly had a rocky history. It was the bridgehead for the Muslim invasion of Spain in 711 and though Castilla finally wrested it from the Muslims in 1462, an Anglo-Dutch fleet captured it from the Spanish in 1704. Spain gave up military attempts to regain it from Britain after the failure of the Great Siege of 1779-83. These days, Britain and Spain are talking about joint Anglo-Spanish sovereignty.

Information

To enter Gibraltar you must have a passport or EU national identity card. Gibraltar is outside the Schengen area, and visitors who intend to enter from Spain should ensure that they have a double-entry visa if they wish to return to Spain. Nationals from certain countries require a visa to enter; contact the **Immigration Department** (☎ 46411; rgpimm@gibgibtelecom.net) for more details.

The currency is the Gibraltar pound. Change any unspent Gibraltar pounds before you leave. You can also use euros or pounds sterling while here.

To phone Gibraltar from Spain, the telephone code is ☎ 9567; from other countries dial the international access code, then ☎ 350 and the local number. To phone Spain from Gibraltar, just dial the nine-digit Spanish number.

There's internet access at **General Internet Business Centre** (☎ 44227; 36 Governor's St; per hr €3; 10am-10pm Tue-Sat, noon-9pm Sun & Mon).

There are a couple of **tourist offices** Main office (☎ 74950; www.gibraltar.gov.gi; Duke of Kent House, Cath-

edral Sq; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri); Casemates Sq (☎ 74982; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat, 10am-1pm Sun).

Sights & Activities

Central Gibraltar can get crowded and claustrophobic but the **Gibraltar Museum** (☎ 74289; Bomb House Lane; adult/child £2/1; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat), with its interesting historical collection and Muslim-era bathhouse, is worth a peek. Wander into the **Alameda Botanical Gardens** (Red Sands Rd; ☎ 8am-sunset) for some chill-out time.

The large **Upper Rock Nature Reserve** (☎ 74950; adult/child/car £8/4/1.50; ☎ 9.30am-7pm), covering most of the upper rock, has spectacular views. The rock's most famous inhabitants are its colony of Barbary macaques, the only wild primates in Europe. Some of these hang around the **Apes' Den** near the middle cable-car station; others can often be seen at the top station or Great Siege Tunnels. Other attractions include **St Michael's Cave**, a large natural grotto renowned for its stalagmites and stalactites, and the **Great Siege Tunnels**, a series of galleries hewn from the rock by the British during the Great Siege to provide new gun emplacements.

A **cable car** (adult/child return £8/4.50; ☎ 9.30am-5.15pm Mon-Sat year-round, 9.30am-5.15pm Sun Apr-Oct) leaves its lower station on Red Sands Rd every few minutes. Disembark at the middle station for the Apes' Den.

Sleeping & Eating

Emile Youth Hostel (☎ 51106; www.emilehostel.com; Montagu Bastion, Line Wall Rd; dm incl breakfast £15-20, s £20-30, d £30-50) The Emile is extremely basic and has a slightly sleazy atmosphere – it's not recommended for women travelling solo.

Cannon Hotel (☎ 51711; www.cannonhotel.gi; 9 Cannon Lane; d £45, s/d with shared bathroom £24.50/36.50, all incl English breakfast) This friendly and recently refurbished hotel is in the heart of town. It has a bar, charming patio and airy rooms.

Lord Nelson (☎ 50009; 10 Casemates Sq; mains £5-8; ☎ 10am-2am) Landlubbers and sailors alike gravitate towards this brasserie, which is decked out as Nelson's ship. Fish and chips (£6.50) are popular, but the mussels in white wine, garlic and cream (£6.95) are tastier. There's live music at weekends.

For basic pub grub and plentiful drinks try **Star Bar** (☎ 75924; Parliament Lane; ☎ 7am-11pm), Gibraltar's oldest pub; or the **Clipper** (☎ 79791; Irish Town; Sunday roasts £5.95; ☎ 9.30am-11pm), which

offers sport on TV. Rousing renditions of 'Rule Britannia' can usually be had at both places.

Getting There & Away

GB Airways (☎ 79300, UK 0845-77 333 77; www.gbarways.com) flies daily to/from London's Heathrow and Gatwick airports. One-way fares start at £41. **Monarch Airlines** (☎ 47477, UK 08700-405040; www.flymonarch.com) flies from London's Luton airport and from Manchester; return fares start at about £96.

There are no regular buses to Gibraltar, but La Línea bus station is only a five-minute walk from the border.

EXTREMADURA

A sparsely populated stretch of vast skies and open plains, Extremadura is far enough from most beaten tourist trails to give you a genuine sense of exploration, something for which Extremeños themselves have always had a flair.

TRUJILLO

pop 9283

Trujillo is a delightful little town that can't be much bigger now than it was in 1529, when its most famous son, Francisco Pizarro, set off with his three brothers and a few local buddies for an expedition that eventually culminated in the bloody conquest of the Incan empire.

There's a **tourist office** (☎ 92 732 26 77; ofitur@ayo-trujillo.com; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm) on Plaza Mayor. For internet, try **Giber Recio** (Calle de la Encarnación; per hr €2; ☎ 9am-midnight), opposite the Museo del Queso.

Sights

A **statue of Pizarro** dominates the splendid Plaza Mayor. On the plaza's southern side, the **Palacio de la Conquista** (closed to visitors) sports the carved images of Francisco Pizarro and the Inca princess Inés Yupanqui.

Up the hill, the **Iglesia de Santa María la Mayor** (admission €1.40; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4.30-7pm) is an interesting hotchpotch of 13th- to 16th-century styles, with some fine paintings by Fernando Gallego of the Flemish school. At the top of the hill, Trujillo's Moorish **castillo** (admission €1.40; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-6.45pm) is an impressive structure commanding great views.

The **Museo del Queso** (Museum of Cheese; ☎ 92 729 00 81; www.museodelqueso.org, in Spanish; Calle Barriónuevo 7; admission €2; ☎ 10am-2pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) is a new addition to the town's cultural attractions. The admission price includes a tasting of Torta del Casar, the local favourite.

Sleeping & Eating

Pensión Roque (☎ 92 732 23 13; www.aloja2.com; Calle Domingo de Ramos 30; r €30, with shared bathroom €25) A quiet place featuring homey rooms and a lovely rear patio.

Pensión Plaza Mayor (☎ 92 732 23 13; www.aloja2.com; 2nd fl, Plaza Mayor 6; s/d €21/36; 🚻) The owners of Pensión Roque also run the more comfortable and slightly more expensive Plaza Mayor.

Restaurante Pizarro (☎ 92 732 02 55; Plaza Mayor 13; mains €8.50-15.50) The Pizarro offers a stellar position on the main square and a simple but tasty *menú* for €13.

Restaurante La Troya (☎ 92 723 13 64; Plaza Mayor 10; *menú* €15) The *menú* here is of average quality but is absolutely enormous – perfect for patrons who've just spent eight hours labouring in the fields, overwhelming for anyone else.

Getting There & Away

From the **bus station** (☎ 92 732 12 02; Calle San Juan Bautista de la Salle 1), 500m south of Plaza Mayor, buses travel to Cáceres (€2.83, 45 minutes, eight daily), Mérida (€6.95, 1½ hours, three daily) and Madrid (€14.90 to €19, three to four hours, five daily).

CÁCERES

pop 91,010

Cáceres' *ciudad monumental* (old town), built in the 15th and 16th centuries, is so perfectly preserved it can seem lifeless at times. The town's action centres on Plaza Mayor, at the foot of the old town, and on busy Av de España, a short distance south.

There's a **tourist office** (☎ 92 724 71 72; Calle Ancha 7; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm Mon-Fri Oct-May, 10am-2pm & 5.30-8.30pm Mon-Fri Jun-Sep) in the *ciudad monumental*. For internet, try **Ciberjust** (Calle Diego María Crehuet 7; per hr €2; ☎ 10.30am-11.30pm Mon-Fri, 5-11.30pm Sat & Sun) off Av de España.

Sights

The *ciudad monumental* is still surrounded by walls and towers raised by the Almohads in the 12th century. Entering from Plaza Mayor, you'll see the fine 15th-century **Concatedral de**

Santa María (admission to museum €1.50; ☎ 10am-1pm & 4-6pm Oct-Jun, 10.30am-1.30pm & 5-7pm Jul-Sep).

The impressive **Museo de Cáceres** (☎ 92 701 08 77; www.museosextramadura.com, in Spanish; Plaza de la Veletas 1; admission non-EU/EU citizens €1.50/free; ☎ 10am-1pm & 5-6.15pm Tue-Sat, 10.45-11.45am & 5-6.15pm Sun 1 Oct-13 April, 10am-1pm & 6-7.15pm Tue-Sat, 10.45-11.45am & 6-7.15pm Sun 14 April-30 Sep) is housed in a 16th-century mansion built over a 12th-century Moorish *aljibe* (cistern).

Sleeping

Albergo Turístico las Velatas (☎ /fax 92 721 12 10; Calle Margallo 36; dm €18.80, d €53, d with shared bathroom €41; 🚻) Just around the corner from Plaza Mayor, this privately run hostel occupies an attractive old mansion and offers 38 rooms. The dorms are the best value.

Eating & Drinking

El Corral de las Gigueñas (Calle Cuesta de Aldana 6; www.elcorralcc.com; ☎ 8am-1pm & from 8pm Wed-Sat, from 6pm Sun) In the heart of the *ciudad monumental*, the fabulous ivy-clad courtyard of this café/bar is a wonderful spot for breakfast. On summer nights it hosts live music and discos.

Casa Mijhaeli (☎ 92 724 32 60; Calle Barrio Nuevo 6; mains €9-15; ☎ closed dinner Sun; 🚻) This stylish brasserie in a street behind Plaza Mayor is a great place to enjoy a bowl of pasta (€6 to €7.50) or a vegetarian main.

Mesón Los Arcos (☎ 92 724 51 45; Plaza Mayor 22; *menú* €15, mains €12-26) To sample well-priced meals featuring Extremeño pork and cheese products you need look no further than this bustling tavern just off the plaza.

Getting There & Away

From the **bus station** (☎ 92 723 25 50; Carretera Gijón-Sevilla), 1.5km southwest of Plaza Mayor, buses travel to Trujillo (€2.83, 45 minutes, eight daily) and Mérida (€4.47, 1½ hours, four daily).

Services from the **train station** (☎ 92 723 50 61; Av de Alemania) go to Madrid (€16.80 to €37, three to 4½ hours, seven daily) and Mérida (€3.60 to €13, one hour, seven daily). There's also a daily train to Lisbon (€37 to €163.50, 5½ hours).

MÉRIDA

pop 52,763

Once the biggest city in Roman Spain, Mérida is home to more ruins of that age than anywhere else in the country and is a wonderful spot to spend a few days. The **tourist office** (☎ 92

400 97 30; otmerida@eco.juntaex.es; Av José Álvarez Saenz de Buruaga; ☎ 9am-1.45pm & 4-6pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2pm Sat & Sun Oct-May, 9am-1.45pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2pm Sat & Sun Jun-Sep) is by the gates to the Roman theatre. For internet, try **Gibersala** (Calle Camilo Cela 28; per hr €1.65; ☎ 11am-2pm & 4.30pm-midnight).

Sights

The awesome ruins of Mérida's **Teatro Romano & Anfiteatro** (☎ 92 431 25 30; admission €6.50) shouldn't be missed. The theatre was built in 15 BC and the gladiators' ring, or *anfiteatro*, seven years later. Combined they could hold 20,000 spectators. Other monuments of interest include the **Casa del Anfiteatro** (☎ 92 431 85 09; admission €3.50), the **Casa Romana del Mitreo** (☎ 92 430 15 04; admission €4), the **Alcazaba** (☎ 92 431 73 09; admission €3.50) and the **Museo Nacional de Arte Romano** (☎ 92 431 16 90; adult/student & child €2.40/1.20, free Sat afternoon & Sun morning; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sat Dec-Feb, 10am-2pm & 4-9pm Tue-Sat Mar-Nov, 10am-2pm Sun year-round).

The opening hours for all sites except the museum are 9.30am to 1.45pm and 4pm to 6.15pm October to May and 9.30am to 1.45pm and 5pm to 7.15pm June to September. It's definitely worth buying an **entrada conjunta** (combined entry ticket; adult/student & child €9/5), which gives you entrance to all sites within a 24-hour period.

Various other reminders of imperial days are scattered about town, including the **Puente Romano**, at 792m one of the longest bridges the Romans ever built.

Sleeping & Eating

Hostal Nueva España (☎ 92 431 33 56; fax 92 431 32 11; Av de Extremadura 6; s €22-25, d €35-38; 🚻) The owners of this *hostal* on the main road near the train station have gone to some trouble to make its common areas attractive. Rooms are freshly painted and very clean, if a bit worn.

Hostal El Alfarero (☎ 92 430 31 83; www.hostalalalfarero.com; Calle Sagasta 40; s €30-40, d €40-45; 🚻) This friendly place has very clean rooms with high-tech showers and hand-painted washbasins. There's a downstairs patio and a small lounge.

Café-Bar Bocados (☎ 92 431 67 66; Calle Suárez Somonte 96; *tostada* & coffee €1.80) Stop at this bright café for breakfast before visiting the Roman ruins, which are directly opposite.

El Yantar (☎ 92 431 63 54; Av de José Álvarez Seaz de Buruaga) A few doors down from the Bocados, this shop/tavern specialises in quality Extremeño products.

Casa Benito (☎ 92 433 07 69; Calle San Francisco 3; *tapas* €2-2.75, *bocadillos* €2.45) Established in 1870, this atmospheric *tapas* bar celebrates the art of bullfighting, with photographs, posters and bull's heads adorning every wall.

Café Galileo (☎ 92 431 55 05; Calle John Lennon 28; *pizza* €4-6.40, *pasta* €5.50-6.50) There can't be too many places in the world where you dine while sitting over glass-covered Roman ruins, but that's what happens here.

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (☎ 92 437 14 04; Av Libertad) is over the river. You can walk across the Puente Lusitania or catch bus 4 to get to the centre of town (€0.70). There are services to Seville (€11.52, three hours, one daily), Madrid (€20.20 to €25, four to five hours, eight daily) and Trujillo (€7 to €14, one hour to 1½ hours, four daily).

From the **train station** (Calle Cardero), services run to/from Cáceres (€3.60 to €13, one hour, seven daily), Seville (€12, 4¾ hours, one daily Monday to Friday) and Madrid (€20.75 to €31.30, 4¼ to seven hours, five daily).

ARAGÓN, BASQUE COUNTRY & NAVARRA

The arid hills and proud history of Aragón. The lush coastline and gourmet delights of the Basque Country. The wine country and famous festivals of Navarra. This northeastern area of Spain is brimming with fascinating destinations.

ZARAGOZA

pop 647,300

Sitting on the banks of the once-mighty Ebro River, Zaragoza is crowned with the fairy-tale Basílica del Pilar. Surrounding this place of pilgrimage are the Casco Histórico (Historic Quarter) and El Tubo (literally, the Tube), a maze of streets that hides countless *tapas* bars and cafés.

Founded by the all-too-modest Caesar Augustus as the Roman city Caesaragusta, Zaragoza later became a Muslim stronghold, and that culture's influence can be seen in the widespread use of brick as a building material and in the abundance of *Mudéjar*-style architecture. There are many fascinating Roman ruins to visit here as well.

Information

Conecta-T (☎ 97 620 59 79; Calle Murallas Romanas 4; per hr €1.60; ☎ 10am-11pm Mon-Fri, 11am-11pm Sat & Sun)

Police (☎ 091, 97 672 41 00)

Post office (☎ 97 623 68 68; Paseo de la Independencia 33; ☎ 8.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2pm Sat)

Tourist office (☎ 902 20 12 12; www.turismozaragoza.com; Plaza del Pilar; ☎ 10am-8pm) Housed in a futuristic glass cube.

Sights

Follow the Roman route through the city, visit the many *Mudéjar*-styled buildings and churches, or simply soak up Zaragoza's easy-going atmosphere.

The Baroque **Basilica de Nuestra Señora del Pilar** (☎ 97 629 95 64; Plaza del Pilar; ☎ 5.45am-8.30pm Sep-Jun, 5.45am-9.30pm Jul & Aug) towers over Zaragoza both literally and figuratively. The spiritual heart of Aragón, this has long been a place of pilgrimage. The faithful flock to the **Capilla Santa** to kiss a piece of marble pillar believed to have been left by the Virgin Mary when she visited St James here in AD 40. A beloved statue of the Virgin sits atop the pillar, and her ornate skirt is changed every single day.

At the plaza's southeastern end is Zaragoza's 12th- to 16th-century cathedral, **La Seo** (Plaza de La Seo; ☎ 97 629 12 38; adult/child €2/1; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Fri, 10am-1pm & 4-6pm Sat, 10am-noon & 4-6pm Sun, 1hr later in summer). Its northwestern façade is a *Mudéjar* masterpiece, and inside is an impressive 15th-century main altarpiece in coloured alabaster.

Begin the Roman tour of Zaragoza with a stop at the **Museo del Foro de Caesar Augusta** (☎ 97 639 97 52; Plaza de La Seo; adult/student €2/1.50; ☎ 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), an interesting museum about Roman life. Some 70m underground lie the remains of the Roman town, brought to life by a fantastic audiovisual show. The historically curious can also visit the **Caesar Augusta Theatre** (☎ 97 620 50 88; Calle San Jorge 12; adult/student €3/2; ☎ 10am-9pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun).

Sleeping

You'll find most of the sleeping options on and around Plaza del Pilar and Avenida César Augusta.

Hostal Plaza (☎ 97 629 48 30; www.hostalplaza-santiago.com, in Spanish; Plaza del Pilar 14; s/d €35/45; ♿) In a distinguished old building on the plaza,

rooms have pretty décor, small but clean bathrooms and tiled floors.

Hostal Santiago (☎ 97 639 45 50; www.hostalplaza-santiago.com, in Spanish; Calle Santiago 3-5; s €28, d €40-45; ♿) Neon-green walls add an original touch to the otherwise standard *hostal*. The 26 rooms are cheerful and comparatively spacious.

Eating & Drinking

Good tapas bars are scattered around El Tubo, especially around Plaza Santa Marta, and in La Zona, a trendy area south of the centre.

Mercado Central (Plaza de Lanuza; ☎ 8am-2pm) Get your fresh fruits and veggies at the main city market.

Casa Juanico (☎ 97 639 72 52; Calle Santa Cruz 21; mains €7-12; ☎ Wed-Mon) For cheap tapas and a friendly atmosphere, this place can't be beat, and the summer terrace is ideal.

La Retama (☎ 97 639 79 10; Calle Reconquista 4; mains €6.20-10.30; ☎ lunch only Mon-Thu, closed Sun) One of the few vegetarian spots around, the all-organic La Retama serves simple soups and salads as well as more elaborate dishes.

Getting There & Away

Zaragoza's modern new train station, Las Delicias (still under construction), offers connections throughout Spain. The high-speed AVE train connects Zaragoza with Madrid (€40, 10 daily, eight non-AVE daily) in under two hours and with the pre-Pyrenean city of Lleida (€20 to €26, one hour, six daily, 16 non-AVE daily). Other trains head to Barcelona (€24 to €35, three hours, 14 daily), Valencia via Teruel (€21, five hours, three daily) and San Sebastián (€29, four hours, three daily) via Pamplona.

Though construction is under way on Las Delicias bus terminal, which will one day be the city's one-stop bus stop, currently stations are scattered all over town. The bus company **Agreda** (☎ 97 622 93 43; www.agredasa.com, in Spanish) runs to most major Spanish cities, including Madrid, from Paseo María Agustín 7.

SAN SEBASTIÁN

pop 182,930

The Basque Country's most stylish city, San Sebastián (Donostia in Basque) has the air of an upscale resort, complete with an idyllic location on the shell-shaped Bahía de la Concha. Head to the buzzing Parte Vieja (Old Quarter) for tempting tapas bars and restaurants showing off the best of Basque cuisine, or stroll the

stately boulevards of the newer districts to soak up San Sebastián's refined air.

Information

Donosti-Net (☎ 94 342 58 70; Calle Narrica 3; internet per hr €3.30; ☎ 9am-11pm) This is a one-stop travellers' service, with email, office services, travel info and even a spot to leave your luggage (per day €9). English spoken.

Emergency (☎ 112)

Lavomatique (☎ 93 442 38 71; Calle de Iñigo 14; per 4kg wash €3.80; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 4-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) Self-serve laundromat.

Post office (☎ 94 344 68 26; Calle Urdaneta 7;

☎ 8.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2pm Sat)

Tourist office (☎ 94 348 11 66; www.sansebastian-turismo.com; Calle Reina Regente 3; ☎ 8am-8pm daily Jun-Sep, 9am-1.30pm & 3.30-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-May)

Sights & Activities

San Sebastián's beautiful city beaches, **Playa de la Concha** and **Playa de Ondarreta**, are popular spots year-round. The *paseo* stretching along the waterfront is perfect for strolling, and at the far western end of it you'll find Eduardo Chillida's renowned sculpture **Los Peines del Viento** (Combs of the Wind), well worth the longish walk. East of the Urumea River is the somewhat less crowded **Playa de la Zurriola**, popular with surfers.

For good views, take the 30-minute walk up to **Monte Urgull**, a hill topped by low castle walls and a statue of Christ. The walk begins at a stairway in Plaza Zuloaga.

The best vista in San Sebastián is to be had from **Monte Igeldo**. Drive up or catch the **funicular** (☎ 94 321 05 64; return €1.90; ☎ 11am-6pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 11am-8pm Sat & Sun Feb, Mar, Nov & Dec, 11am-8pm daily Apr-Jun & 15 Sep-Oct, 10am-10pm daily Jul-Aug, closed Jan & 1-14 Sep) from the western end of the seafront *paseo*. At the top, visit the **Parque de Atracciones** (☎ 94 321 05 64; admission €1.50), an old-time funfair open summer and weekends only.

San Sebastián's best museum (by far) is the **Chillida-Leku** (☎ 94 333 60 06; www.eduardo-chillida.com; B° Jauregui 66 Hernani; adult/student €8/6; ☎ 10.30am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-3pm Sun Jun-Sep, 10.30am-3pm Oct-May), 10km outside the city centre. An outdoor sculpture garden featuring 40 large-scale works by the famed Basque artist Eduardo Chillida, this is a peaceful place ideal for picnics. To get there, take bus G2, run by **Garayar** (☎ 94 355 66 58), from Calle Okendo.

Sleeping

Countless cheap *pensiones* and *hostales* huddle in the Parte Vieja. This is a great place if you like being in the thick of things, but for more peace and quiet choose a spot south of the old quarter.

Pensión San Lorenzo (☎ 94 342 55 16; www.pension-sanlorenzo.com; Calle San Lorenzo 2; r €25-48; ♿) A cheerful place run by friendly folk, the well-located San Lorenzo offers perks like in-room fridge, toaster, tea/coffee and free wi-fi.

Hostal Alemana (☎ 94 346 25 44; www.hostalalemana.com; Calle San Martín 53; s €51-71, d €63-90) The Alemana is a quiet place with comfortable beds (the all-white linens and duvets are heavenly), spacious rooms, elegant bathrooms and hotel-like perks including key cards, mini bars, a hair dryer and in-room internet access. Highly recommended.

ourpick **Pensión Edorta** (☎ 94 342 37 73; www.pensionedorta.com; Calle Puerto 15; s €30-50, d €60-80, d with shared bath €30-60) The original stone walls and wood-beam ceilings of this 1830s building give the Edorta a special charm. Stylish décor, sparkling bathrooms, wheelchair access and extras like in-room internet make it extra comfortable.

Also recommended:

La Perla (☎ 94 342 81 23; www.pensionlaperla.com; Calle Loyola 10; s €24-35, d €35-50) Simple furnishings, high ceilings, old-fashioned feel and quiet.

Pensión Urkia (☎ 94 342 44 36; www.pensionurkia.com; Calle Urbieta 12; s €27-32, d €32-50) Spick-'n-span. Big room number four has a cute closed-in balcony.

Eating

San Sebastián is absolute paradise for food lovers. Considered the birthplace of *nouvelle cuisine* in Spain, this area is home to some of the country's top chefs and is practically a galaxy of Michelin stars. Yet not all the good food is pricey. Head to the Parte Vieja to experience San Sebastián's famed *pintxo* (Basque-style tapas).

PINTXOS

The idea with *pintxo* bars is so wonderfully simple that you'll wonder why it hasn't caught on in the rest of the world. Step one: walk into a bar that looks appealing. Step two: graze for as long as you like, picking up whatever tiny tapas strike your fancy and devouring them on the spot. Step three: order glasses of *txakoli* (local fizzy wine) when you get parched. Step four: when you've finished, tell the bartender

how many tapas you've eaten and pay up. Step five: move on to the next bar and begin the process all over again.

Expect *pintxos* to cost between €1 (for simple creations) and €4 (for something more elaborate). Prices aren't often posted, so you may have to ask.

Bar Sport (☎ 94 342 68 88; Calle Fermín Calbetón 10) You can't go wrong at this informal and ever-crowded bar, where seafood *pintxos* are prepared on the spot.

Bar Txepitxa (☎ 94 342 22 27; Calle Pescadería 5) Famous for its anchovies (they're served countless ways), this tiny bar near the Plaza Constitución boasts a wall full of prizes and press clippings.

Egosari (☎ 94 342 82 10; Calle Fermín Calbetón 15; mains €10.40-16.40; ☹ closed Mon & Thu) Another good choice, here you'll find a wide variety of standard and creative *pintxos*. There's also a formal dining room serving local Basque specialities.

RESTAURANTS

Aralar Bar Restaurante (☎ 94 342 63 78; Calle Puerto 10; mains €5-14) Offering a wide range of tapas as well as good-value fish and meat dishes, this rustic spot is ideal for a leisurely lunch.

Sidrería Donostiarra (☎ 94 342 04 21; Calle Embeltran 5; mains €10.75-16.25; ☹ closed Sun dinner & lunch Mon-Tue) Expect a memorable meal at this raucous tavern, where traditional cider is served from the barrel. The typical cider-house menu includes codfish followed by quince for dessert.

Entertainment

The Parte Vieja is a fun place to be any night of the week. Around 8pm the tapas bars start hopping as people enjoy a predinner round of *pintxos* and the revelry lasts until midnight midweek and until the cock crows on week-ends. Another hot spot is the area around Calle Reyes Católicos, behind the Cathedral del Buen Pastor.

Getting There & Away

From the **airport** (☎ 902 404 704; www.aena.es), catch the **Interbus** (☎ 94 364 13 02) that runs regularly to the Plaza Gipuzkoa in town (times vary, €3).

Trains leave the **Renfe station** (www.renfe.es; Paseo de Francia) daily headed to Madrid (€35, eight hours, four daily), Barcelona (€36 to €46, eight to 10 hours, two daily) and Pamplona (€14 to €17, two hours, three daily), among

other destinations. **Eusko Tren** (☎ 902 543 210; www.euskotren.es; Calle Easo) is a private company (international passes not valid) running trains around the region.

The **bus station** (Plaza Pio XII) is a 20-minute walk south of the Parte Vieja. City bus 28 makes the run to and from the centre. Get more city bus information from **CTSS** (☎ 94 300 02 00; www.ctss.es).

From the station, buses leave for destinations all over Spain. **PESA** (☎ 902 101 210; www.pesa.net) has services to Bilbao (€8.30, one hour, up to 27 daily), while **La Roncalesa** (☎ 97 522 44 01) goes to Pamplona (€5.98, 1¼ hours, up to 12 daily).

BILBAO

pop 372,000

The commercial hub of the Basque Country, Bilbao (Bilbo in Basque) is best known for its magnificent Guggenheim Museum. After visiting this must-see temple to modern art, spend time exploring Bilbao's Casco Viejo (Old Quarter), a grid of elegant streets dotted with shops, cafés, *pintxo* bars and several small but worthy museums.

Information

Left luggage (☹ 7am-10pm Mon-Fri, 8am-9pm Sat & Sun; lockers per day €1) In the Termibus bus station.

Police (☎ 092 or 94 420 50 00; Calle Luis Briñas 14)

Postal transfer (☎ 94 415 30 42; Calle Santa María 5; internet per hr €1.50; ☹ 9am-10pm Mon-Sat, noon-11pm Sun) Run by the state post office, this is the place to come to send packages, receive faxes or connect cheaply to the internet.

Tourist office (☎ 94 479 57 60; www.bilbao.net; Teatro Arriaga, Paseo del Arenal; ☹ 9.30am-2pm & 4-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-2pm Sun Jun-Sep, 11am-2pm & 5-7.30pm Mon-Fri, Sat 9.30am-2pm & 5-7.30pm, Sun 9.30am-2pm Oct-May) There's an information kiosk behind the Guggenheim.

Sights & Activities

Designed by Frank Gehry, the spectacular **Guggenheim Museum** (☎ 94 435 90 80; www.guggenheim-bilbao.es; Abandoibarra Et 2; adult/student/child under 12yr €10.50/6.50/free; ☹ 10am-8pm Tue-Sun year-round, open Mon Jul & Aug) is an experience to remember. The building itself, consisting of undulating forms covered in titanium scales, was inspired by the shapes of ships and fish, two of Bilbao's traditional industries. Many credit this amazing creation with revitalising modern architecture.

To dig further into the local culture, head to the **Euskal Museoa** (Basque Museum; ☎ 94 415 54 23; www.euskal-museoa.org; Plaza Miguel Unamuno 4; adult/student €3/1.50; ☹ 11am-5pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun), a museum documenting the history and lifestyle of the Basque people.

Take the metro to the **Puente Colgante** (Hanging Bridge; ☎ 94 463 88 54; www.puente-colgante.com; Calle Barria 3, Las Arenas (Getxo); ☹ 10am-sunset) to walk or ride the gondola (€0.30 to €0.95) across the world's oldest 'transporter bridge'. The walkers' view from the top is great.

Sleeping

Pensión La Estrella (☎ 944 16 40 66; Calle María Muñoz 6; s/d/t €30/48/65) With the style of a boutique hotel, this fabulous 1st-floor walk-up boasts spotless rooms and a beautifully renovated façade and entryway.

Iturriena Ostata (☎ 94 416 15 00; Calle Santa María 14; s; €50-60, d €60-66, tr €80; ☹) Pretty décor, balconies and original architectural elements like stone walls and wood-beam ceilings give this B&B unbeatable charm.

Also recommended:

Hostal Begoña (☎ 944 23 01 34; www.hostalbegona.com; Calle Amistad 2; s €38-48, d €48-61; ☹) Hotel feel, *penión* price. Great bathrooms and tasteful décor.

Eating

Restaurante Victor (☎ 94 415 16 78; Plaza Nueva 2; mains €8-15) On the Plaza Nueva, this very popular rustic spot has checked green tablecloths and hardy Basque fare.

Rio-Oja (☎ 94 415 08 71; Calle Perro 4; mains €6-12; ☹ Tue-Sun) Tapas, stews, local fish dishes and typical Basque cuisine are on offer at this wallet-friendly spot near the Catedral de Santiago.

Entertainment

Las Siete Calles, the seven parallel streets on the southern end of the Casco Viejo, are transformed into one big street party at night. Bars and discos line the streets, especially rowdy Calle Barrenkale. For something a bit more low-key, take your pick of the cafés on the Plaza Nueva.

Getting There & Away

Bilbao's **airport** (☎ 902 404 704; www.aena.es) is the international gateway to the Basque Country and is well served by budget airlines, including easyJet and Vueling. From the airport, bus 3247 (€1.15, 25 minutes) leaves every half-

hour from 6.15am until midnight and drops you off at the Termibus bus station, where there is a tram stop and a metro station.

Bilbao has two train stations and two rail companies, Renfe and Feve, both located beside the river. **Renfe** (www.renfe.es) offers services to Madrid (€32 to €42, six to eight hours, three daily) and Barcelona (€38 to €49, nine hours, two daily).

The national narrow-gauge railway line, **Feve** (www.feve.es), has trains heading westward to Cantabria and beyond. Often these bumpy rides take considerably longer than the bus trip to the same destinations.

The main bus station (Termibus) is west of town but sits just next to the San Mamés metro/tram stop, a five-minute ride from the centre. **PESA** (☎ 902 101 210; www.pesa.net) has services to San Sebastián (€8.30, one hour, up to 27 daily); **Alsa** (☎ 902 422 242; www.alsa.es) goes to Santander (€4.61 to €10.64, 90 minutes, up to 27 daily); and **La Unión** (☎ 94 439 50 77) heads to Pamplona (€11.20, two hours, up to six daily).

Bilbao has an outstanding public transport system, with an easy-to-follow web of metros, trams and buses crisscrossing the city and heading into the countryside.

PAMPLONA

pop 193,300

Immortalised by Ernest Hemingway in *The Sun Also Rises*, the busy pre-Pyrenean city of Pamplona (Iruña in Basque) is, of course, the home of the wild Sanfermines (aka Encierro or Running of the Bulls) festival, but it's also an extremely walkable city that's managed to mix the charm of old plazas and buildings with modern shops and lively nightlife.

This is the capital of Navarra, but there are few noteworthy sights in town, which means you can party all night and not feel guilty for whiling the day away in the street cafés. Make an exception for the **cathedral** (☎ 94 821 08 27; ☹ 10am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1.30pm Sat), a 14th-century Gothic creation with a neoclassical façade.

Information

Kuria.net (☎ 94 822 30 77; Calle Curia 15; per hr €3; ☹ 10am-10pm)

Left luggage (☹ 6.15am-9.30pm Mon-Sat, 6.30am-1.30pm & 2-9.30pm Sun) Leave bags at the bus station for €3 per day.

Police (☎ 092)

Tourist office (☎ 848 420 420; www.navarra.es, in Spanish; Calle Eslava 1; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun, during Sanfermines 8am-8pm daily) Don't expect this otherwise-helpful office to provide much guidance during frantically busy Sanfermines.

Sleeping

Accommodation is expensive and hard to come by during Sanfermines; you'll need to book months in advance. The prices below don't reflect the huge (up to 300%) mark-up you'll find in mid-July.

Pensión Escaray (☎ 94 822 78 25; Calle Nueva 25; jescaray@pnte.cfnavarra.es; s/d with shared bath €18/36) A friendly, family-run spot with some antique furniture and an old-fashioned style. Rooms boast wide wooden floorboards and high ceilings.

Hostal Navarra (☎ 94 822 51 64; www.hostalnavarra.com; Calle Tudela 9; s/d €45/60; ☎) With all the extras you'd expect from a hotel, the great-value Navarra is a stylish family-run hotel near the bus station. A fabulous choice.

Eating & Drinking

Central streets such as Calle San Nicolás and Calle Estafeta are lined with tapas bars, many of which morph into nightspots on weekends.

Bar Otano (☎ 94 822 50 95; Calle San Nicolás 5; mains €7.80-19) Though it's known for its varied *pintxos* and tapas, Otano is also a great spot for roasted and grilled meats.

Sagardotega Iruñazarra (☎ 94 822 51 67; Calle Mercaderes 15; mains €7.50-18) Most cider houses are out in the countryside, but this one delivers real rustic flavour in the heart of the city. Locals come especially for the €25 cider menu (with all the cider you can catch in your cup).

Restaurant Saraste (☎ 94 822 57 27; Calle San Nicolás 21; daily menú €10-15) Salads, couscous, quiche,

pasta...this is one of the few restaurants in Pamplona that caters to vegetarians.

Getting There & Away

Renfe (www.renfe.es) trains arrive daily from Madrid (€48.50, four hours). Bus 9 connects the station with the centre.

Several companies operate out of Pamplona's central bus station near Plaza Castilla. **Burundesa** (☎ 94 822 17 66; www.laborundesa.com) heads to Bilbao (€11.60, two hours, five daily) and Vitoria (€6.80, 90 minutes, up to 11 daily). It offers occasional service to Santander, Irun and the surfing town Zarautz. There's more information at www.autobusesde.navarra.com (in Spanish).

CANTABRIA, ASTURIAS & GALICIA

With a landscape reminiscent of parts of the British Isles, 'Green Spain' offers great walks in national parks, seafood feasts in sophisticated towns and oodles of opportunities to plunge into the ice-cold waters of the Bay of Biscay.

SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA

pop 92,703

The supposed burial place of St James, Santiago (as it is commonly known) is perhaps the most beautiful city in Spain. Christian pilgrims journeying along the Camino de Santiago often end up mute with wonder on entering its medieval centre and encountering the utterly magnificent Catedral del Apóstol. Fortunately, they usually regain their verbal capacities over a celebratory late-night foray into the city's lively bar scene.

The helpful **municipal tourist office** (☎ 98 155 51 29; www.santiagoturismo.com; Rúa do Vilar 63; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Oct-May, 9am-9pm Jun-Sep) is in the centre of town, as is **CyberNova 50** (Rúa Nova 50; per hr €1.20; ☎ 9am-midnight).

Sights

The **Catedral del Apóstol** (☎ 98 156 05 27; Plaza Obradoiro; ☎ 7am-9pm, mass noon & 6pm daily), a superb Romanesque creation of the 11th to 13th centuries, is the heart and soul of Santiago. It's said that St James' remains were buried here in the 1st century and rediscovered in 813. Today, visitors line up to kiss his statue, which sits behind the main altar. The **Museo da**

Catedral (adult €5; ☎ 10am-1.30pm & 4-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1.30pm Sun) includes the cathedral's cloisters, treasury and crypt, as well as the Pazo de Xelmírez, a bishop's palace built in 1120.

To get a grasp on local culture, visit the **Museo do Pobo Galego** (☎ 98 158 36 20; www.museo.dopobo.es; Rúa San Domingos de Bonaval; admission free; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun), which is housed in the attractive former Convento de San Domingos de Bonaval.

The **Museo das Peregrinacións** (☎ 98 158 15 58; www.mdperegrinacions.com; Rúa de San Miguel 4; admission free; ☎ 10am-8pm Tue-Fri, 10.30am-1.30pm & 5-8pm Sat, 10.30am-1.30pm Sun) explores the pilgrim culture that has so shaped Santiago. Look out for the fascinating illuminated map showing pilgrimage destinations across the world.

Sleeping

Meiga Backpackers Hostel (☎ 98 157 08 46; www.meiga-backpackers.es; 3rd fl, Fonte de San Antonio 25; dm incl breakfast €14-15; ☎) A newcomer to the Santiago sleeping scene, Meiga is sure to become a permanent fixture if it maintains its excellent standards. It offers four-, six- and eight-bed dorms with bunk beds and two squeaky-clean shared bathrooms. There's a well-equipped communal kitchen and a small but comfortable lounge.

Hostal Suso (☎ 98 158 66 11; Rúa do Vilar 65; s €19-20, d €35-39) This place is a real bargain! Its recently renovated (but sometimes noisy) rooms feature posh marble bathrooms and comfortable beds.

Eating & Drinking

The town's student population swears by the huge take-away kebabs (€3.20) served at **Istanbul Döner Kebap** (Av Rosalía de Castro 5). Another tasty and cheap option is **Pizza Polo** (☎ 98 158 72 72; Casas Reais 27), which offers a pizza of the day for €6.

Gato Negro Taberna (☎ 98 158 31 05; Rúa Raiña) This rough-as-guts place serves up hefty slabs of potato-and-sardine-packed *empanada* (savoury pie) for €2.50. Served with a glass of Estrella Galicia (€1.50), they make a super-cheap and satisfying meal.

O Dezaseis (☎ 98 156 48 80; Rúa San Pedro 16; mains €10.50-12) Near the Museo do Pobo Galego, this small eatery serves an extremely popular *menú* for €11.

The old quarter is home to atmospheric bars and pubs popular with the city's large student population. Some of the best spots are around the Rúa da Congo, the Rúa San Paio

de Anteañares and the Plaza Cervantes. At **Casa de Xantar** (☎ 98 158 19 09; Calle da Troia 10) you'll find a laid-back student vibe and cheap drinks accompanied by complimentary tapas. At the perennially packed **A Taberna do Bispo** (☎ 98 157 75 03; Rúa Villar 35) you'll encounter the most impressive array of tapas in town.

Getting There & Around

From the **airport** (☎ 98 154 75 01), **Empresa Freire** (☎ 98 158 81 11) buses travel to the bus station and to Rúa do Doutor Teixeiro close to Praza de Galicia. The service operates between 7.15am and 11.30pm on weekdays and 8.30am and 10pm on weekends. A ticket costs €1.70.

From the **bus station** (☎ 98 154 24 16; Calle San Gaetano) you can hop on bus 5 to get to Praza de Galicia. Buses travel to León (€23.94 to €24.65, 6½ hours, one daily) and Madrid (€37.66 to €52.68, 6¼ to 9½ hours, at least three daily).

From the **train station** (Av de Lugo) trains go to Madrid (€40.50, eight hours, two daily). It's a 15-minute walk from the train station to Praza de Galicia.

SANTANDER

pop 183,184

Staid Santander has a relatively pretty centre, but its main drawcard is **El Sardinero**, a beach that's wildly popular with locals during summer.

There's a **tourist office** (☎ 94 231 07 08; http://turismodecantabria.com; Calle de Hernán Cortés 4; ☎ 9.30am-1.30pm & 4-7pm) in the Mercado del Este (Old Eastern Market). Excellent internet connections are available at **Ciberlope** (Calle Lope de Vega 14; per hr €2; ☎ 10.30am-midnight Mon-Fri, 11.30am-midnight Sat, 5pm-midnight Sun).

Sleeping

Hospedaje La Porticada (☎ 94 222 78 17; www.hla.porticada.com; 1st fl, Calle Méndez Núñez 6; s €28-48, d €34-48, s with shared bathroom €21-39, d with shared bathroom €27-39) The closest thing Santander has to a backpacker hostel, this place near the bus and train stations is run by a friendly guy who makes a real effort to make it as welcoming, clean and comfortable as possible. Five of the rooms have balconies overlooking the water.

Eating & Drinking

Café de Pombo (☎ 94 222 32 24; Calle de Hernán Cortés 21) This elegant place occupies a prime spot on the main square and has been serving

SURVIVING SANFERMINES

The madcap Sanfermines festival runs from 6 to 14 July, when the city is overrun with thrill-seekers, curious onlookers and, oh yeah, bulls. The Encierro (Running of the Bulls) begins at 8am daily, when bulls are let loose from the Corralillos Santo Domingo. The 825m race lasts just three minutes, so don't be late. The safest place to watch the Encierro is on TV. If that's too tame for you, try to sweet-talk your way onto a balcony or book a room in a hotel with views.

locals breakfast (coffee €1, croissant €1.30) for decades.

Arrabal 11 (☎ 942 074 362; Calle Arrabal 11; pintxos from €1.50; ☎ 9am-midnight Mon-Sat) Forget the rustic and often barely edible food dished out in Santander's traditional *bodegas* – the tapas choices on offer at this stylish and friendly bar are a far more attractive proposition. You'll find it halfway between Plaza Porticada and the Plaza de Pomo.

Old Santander is full of traditional-style *mesones* (inns) and *bodegas* where you can drink, eat or do both. Two of the best are **Cañadío** (☎ 94 231 41 49; Calle Gómez Oreaña 15; mains €21) and **Bodega Cigaleña** (☎ 94 221 30 62; Calle de Daoiz y Velarde 19; mains €15; ☎ Mon-Sat).

Getting There & Away

Santander's ferry port is one of Spain's largest, and regular **Brittany ferries** (☎ 94 236 06 11; www.brittanyferries.co.uk) arrive here from the UK between April and November.

From the **bus station** (☎ 94 221 19 95; www.santandereabus.com; Plaza Estaciones) you can travel to Madrid (€25.57, 5½ hours, six daily) via Burgos (€10, three hours). There are also regular services to Bilbao (€6.03 to €11.08, 1½ hours).

Renfe trains travel to Madrid (€24.45 to €47.90, 5½ to 8½ hours, four daily) via Ávila (€18.85 to €40.60). **Feve** (☎ 94 221 16 87; www.feve.es) trains are usually slower than the bus, but are a scenic way to get to and from Bilbao (€6.75, 2½ hours, three daily).

SPAIN DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Prices in this chapter are for rooms with attached bathrooms and do not include breakfast unless stated otherwise.

Always check room charges before putting down your bags, and remember that prices can and do change with time. The price of any type of accommodation varies with the season and accommodation prices listed in this book are a guide only.

Virtually all accommodation prices are subject to IVA, the Spanish version of value-added tax, which is 7%. This may or may not be included in the price. To check, ask: *Está incluido el IVA?* (Is IVA included?). In some cases you will be charged the IVA only if you ask for a receipt.

Camping

Spain's camping grounds vary greatly in service, cleanliness and style. They're rated from 1st to 3rd class, and priced accordingly. Expect to pay €5 and up per person, tent and/or car/camper. There are lots of helpful online guides, including www.vayacamping.net (in English).

A few warnings. Some camping grounds close from around October to Easter. With very few exceptions, camping outside camping grounds is illegal, as is building fires. You'll need permission to camp on private land.

Hotels, Hostales & Pensiones

Most other options fall into the categories of hotels (one to five stars, full amenities), *hostales* (high-end guesthouses with private bathroom; one to three stars) or *pensiones* (guesthouses usually with shared bathroom; one to three stars). Expect a double room at a pension to cost €35 and up per night. At a *hostal* the price will raise slightly to around €45 and up, and a three-star hotel will cost at least €70. Often, you can get great hotel deals online.

Youth Hostels

Youth hostels (*albergues juveniles*) are cheap places to stay, especially for lone travellers. Expect to pay €15 and up per night. Spain's official Hostelling International (HI) organisation **Red Española de Albergues Juveniles** (REAJ; ☎ 91 522 70 07; www.reaj.com) has 200 youth hostels spread throughout Spain. Though they're often heavily booked by school groups, the official hostels are almost never as good value as private-run hostels. These official hostels require HI membership (buy a membership card for €3.50 at virtually all hostels), most have curfews and some only admit young (ie aged under 30) travellers, especially in peak season. At private hostels you'll get none of this bother, and far more charm to boot.

ACTIVITIES

Skiing

Skiing is cheap compared to the rest of Europe, and facilities and conditions are good, but queuing at lifts can be a mad scramble. The season runs from December to May. The most accessible resorts are in the Sierra Nevada (close to Granada) and the Pyrenees (north of Barcelona). Contact tourist offices in these cities for information. Affordable day trips can be booked through travel agents.

Surfing, Windsurfing & Kite Surfing

The País Vasco has good surf spots, including San Sebastián, Zarauz and the legendary left at Mundaca. Tarifa, with its long, deserted beaches and ceaseless wind, is generally considered to be the windsurfing capital of Europe. It has also recently seen a rise in the sport of kite-surfing.

Cycling

Bike touring isn't as common in Spain as in other parts of Europe because of deterrents such as the often-mountainous terrain and summer heat. It's a more viable option on the Balearic Islands than on much of the mainland, although plenty of people get on their bikes in spring and autumn in the south. Mountain biking is popular; areas such as Andalucía and Catalonia have many good tracks.

Walking

Spain is a trekker's paradise. Read about some of the best treks in the country in Lonely Planet's *Walking in Spain*. The maps by Editorial Alpina are useful for hiking and exploring some areas, and some have information in English. The series combines information booklets with detailed maps. Buy them at bookshops, sports shops and sometimes at petrol stations.

Some of Spain's best walking areas are in its natural and national parks. Throughout Spain you'll find GR (Grandes Recorridos, or Great Treks) trails. These are indicated with a red-and-white marker and are usually easy to navigate. The Camino de Santiago (St James Way) is perhaps Spain's best-known trek.

BUSINESS HOURS

Banks ☎ 8.30am-2pm Mon-Fri

Bars ☎ from early evening, but there won't be much going on until after the dinner hour

Clubs ☎ from 2am-5am

Museums ☎ variable opening hours; many museums close Mon.

Post offices ☎ 8.30am to 2pm or 8.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1.30pm Sat

Offices ☎ 9am-2pm & 4.30pm or 5pm-8pm Mon-Fri.

Some people still follow the tradition of heading home for lunch and a siesta.

Restaurants ☎ 1.30pm-3.30pm or later & 8.30pm-nearly midnight

Shops Usually open regular business hours on Sat too, though some may skip the evening session

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Embassies & Consulates in Spain

Some 70 countries have their embassies in Madrid. Most embassies' office hours are 9am to 2pm.

Australia (☎ 91 441 93 00; www.spain.embassy.gov.au; Plaza del Descubridor Diego de Ordás 3, Edificio Santa Engracia 120)

Canada (Map pp1026-7; ☎ 91 423 32 50; www.canada-es.org; Calle de Núñez de Balboa 35)

Ireland (Map pp1026-7; ☎ 91 576 35 00; Calle de Claudio Coello 73)

Netherlands (☎ 91 353 75 00; nogovmad@ctv.es; Av Comandante Franco 32)

New Zealand (Map pp1026-7; ☎ 91 523 02 26; www.nzembassy.com; Plaza Lealtad 2)

UK Madrid (Map pp1026-7; ☎ 91 319 02 00; Calle Fernando el Santo 16); Barcelona (Map pp1044-5; ☎ 93 366 62 00; www.ukinspain.com; Av Diagonal 477)

USA Madrid (Map pp1026-7; ☎ 91 577 40 00; www.embusa.es; Calle de Serrano 75); Barcelona (☎ 93 280 22 27; http://barcelona.usconsulate.gov; Paseo Reina Elisenda de Montcada 23)

Spanish Embassies & Consulates Abroad

Following is a list of Spanish diplomatic missions abroad. For more information see www.mae.es.

Australia Canberra (☎ 02-6273 3555; embespa@mail.mae.es; 15 Arkana St, Yarralumla, Canberra ACT 2600);

Melbourne (☎ 03-9347 1966); Sydney (☎ 02-9261 2433)

Canada (www.embaspain.ca) Ottawa (☎ 613-747 2252; embespa@mail.mae.es; 74 Stanley Ave, Ottawa, Ontario K1M 1P4); Montreal (☎ 514-935 5235; conspmontreal@mail.mae.es); Toronto (☎ 416-977 1661; www.cgspaintoronto.com)

Ireland (☎ 269 16 40; embespie@mail.mae.es; 17A Merlyn Park, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4)

UK London (☎ 020-7235 5555; embespu@mail.mae.es; 39 Chesham Pl, London SW1X 8SB); Edinburgh (☎ 0131-220 1843); Manchester (☎ 0161-236 1262)

USA (www.spainemb.org) Washington DC (☎ 202-452 0100; cog.washington@mae.es; 2375 Pennsylvania Ave NW, Washington DC 20037); Boston (☎ 617-536 2506); Chicago (☎ 312-782 4588); Houston (☎ 713-783 6200); Los Angeles (☎ 323-938 0158); Miami (☎ 305-446 5511); New Orleans (☎ 504-525 4951); New York (☎ 212-355 4080); San Francisco (☎ 415-922 2995)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS January

Festividad de San Sebastián Held in San Sebastián on 20 January; the whole town dresses up and goes berserk.

February-March

Carnaval A time of fancy-dress parades and merrymaking celebrated around the country on the eve of the Christian Lent season (40 days before Easter) The wildest parties are in Tenerife, Cádiz and Sitges.

Las Fallas de San José Valencia's week-long mid-March party, with all-night dancing and drinking, mammoth bonfires, first-class fireworks and processions.

April

Semana Santa Parades of holy images and huge crowds, notably in Seville, during Easter week.

Feria de Abril A week-long party held in Seville in late April, a kind of counterbalance to the religious peak of Easter.

July

Sanfermines The highlight of this originally religious festival is the running of the bulls in Pamplona, in early July.

August

Semana Grande A week of heavy drinking and hangovers all along the northern coast during the first half of August.

September

Festes de la Mercè Barcelona's week-long party, held around 24 September.

HOLIDAYS

Spain has at least 14 official holidays a year, some observed nationwide, some very local. When a holiday falls close to a weekend, Spaniards like to make a *puente* (bridge), taking the intervening day off, too. The holidays listed following are observed virtually everywhere.

New Year's Day 1 January

Three Kings' Day 6 January; when children receive presents

Good Friday Before Easter Sunday

Labour Day 1 May

Feast of the Assumption 15 August

National Day 12 October

All Saints' Day 1 November

Feast of the Immaculate Conception 8 December

Christmas 25 December

The two main periods when Spaniards go on holiday are *Semana Santa* (the week leading up to Easter Sunday) and the month of August. At these times accommodation in beachside resorts can be scarce and transport heavily booked.

INTERNET RESOURCES

There's an avalanche of online information. Helpful trip-planning sites include the Spanish tourist board's www.spain.info and the online guide www.justspain.org. Info about alternative accommodations can be found at www.vayacamping.net or www.guiasmonasterios.com (in Spanish). For fun, check out the photo street finder (useful for checking out the façade of your hostel) at www.qdq.com.

LANGUAGE

Spanish, or Castilian (Castellano) as it is more precisely called, is spoken throughout Spain, but there are also three other important regional languages. Catalan (Català) – another Romance language with close ties to French – is spoken in Catalonia, and dialects of it are spoken in the Balearic Islands and in Valencia. Galician (Gallego), similar to Portuguese, is spoken in Galicia. Basque (Euskara; of obscure, non-Latin origin) is spoken in the Basque Country and in Navarra.

MONEY

Banks tend to give better exchange rates than currency-exchange offices. Travellers cheques attract a slightly better rate than cash. Spain has one of the world's highest numbers of ATMs per inhabitant, probably because most small shops still prefer cash over credit cards.

In restaurants, prices include a service charge, and tipping is a matter of personal choice – most people leave some small change; 5% is plenty, 10% is generous. It's common to leave small change in bars and cafés. Bargaining in Spain is not common, though you could ask for a discount for long-term room rental and the like.

POST

Stamps are sold at post offices and also at *estancos* (tobacco shops with the Tabacos sign in yellow letters on a maroon background). A standard airmail letter or postcard costs €0.29 within Spain, €0.57 to the rest of Europe and €0.78 to the rest of the world.

Mail to/from Europe normally takes up to a week, and to North America, Australia or New Zealand around 10 days, but there may be some long, unaccountable delays.

Poste-restante mail can be addressed as either *poste restante* or *lista de correos* (the Spanish name for it) at the city in question. It's a fairly reliable system, but mail may arrive late.

TELEPHONE

International reverse-charge (collect) calls are easy: dial ☎ 900 99 00 followed by the country code. For example, ☎ 61 for Australia, ☎ 44 for the UK, ☎ 15 for Canada and ☎ 11 (AT&T) for the USA.

Area codes in Spain are an integral part of the phone number. All numbers are nine digits and you just dial that nine-digit number, wherever in the country you are calling from. All numbers prefixed with ☎ 900 are toll-free numbers, though there is a toll (though it's slightly lower than the normal fixed rate) for 901 and 902 numbers.

Blue public payphones are common and fairly easy to use. They accept coins, phone-cards and, in some cases, credit cards.

A three-minute call from a pay phone costs about €0.15 within a local area, €0.35 to other places in the same province, €0.45 to other provinces, or €1 to another EU country or the USA. Telephone service in Spain is not cheap, but there are discounts if you call between 8pm and 8am weekdays and on weekends.

VISAS

Citizens of EU countries can enter Spain with their national identity card or passport. Citizens of the UK must take a full passport with them, not just a British visitor passport. Non-

EU nationals must also take their passport to gain entry.

EU, Norway and Iceland citizens do not need a visa. Nationals of Australia, Canada, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, Switzerland and the USA need no visa for stays of up to 90 days, but must have a passport valid for the whole visit. This 90-day limit applies throughout the EU. South Africans are among nationalities that do need a visa.

It's best to obtain the visa in your country of residence. Single-entry visas are available for 30 days and 90 days, and there's also a 90-day multiple-entry visa, though if you apply in a country where you're not resident, the 90-day option may not be available. Multiple-entry visas will save you a lot of time and trouble if you plan to leave Spain (say to Gibraltar or Morocco), then re-enter it.

Spain is one of the Schengen countries; see the boxed text, p1200, in the main directory of this book.

EU, Norway and Iceland nationals planning to stay in Spain for more than 90 days are supposed to apply for a residence card during their first month in the country. This can be a complicated procedure; if you intend to subject yourself to it, consult a Spanish consulate before you go to Spain, as you'll need to take certain documents with you.

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