

Four classic road trips in Spain and Portugal

Head to Spain to see the highlights of sunny Andalucía or the historic cities and towns north of Madrid, and to Portugal for Atlantic surf breaks or a tour of the Douro's vineyards

Rachel Dixon and Gemma Bowes The Guardian, Friday 15 March 2013 21:00 GMT



The old Moorish quarter of Córdoba, Andalucía. Photograph: Ken Welsh/Getty Images

All the best bits of Andalucía, southern Spain

870 miles Two weeks Fly into Málaga (1), pick up a hire car and drive east along the coast. An obvious place to stop for a day on the beach is Nerja (2): there are some quieter sands off the coast road towards Sierra Nevada.

You could spend months hiking in the Sierra Nevada national park (3), so if you can spare a few days, do. One of the white villages in the foothills of the Alpujarras would make for a magical base for hiking. Bubion has incredible views, and Casa la Sevillana B&B, where doubles cost from €55.

Dominated by 10th century fortifications, Almería (4) is an attractive port that still has a north African feel, and there's a new movie museum, Casa del Cine. The beaches of the Cabo de Gata (5) are gorgeous, sweeping and almost deserted.

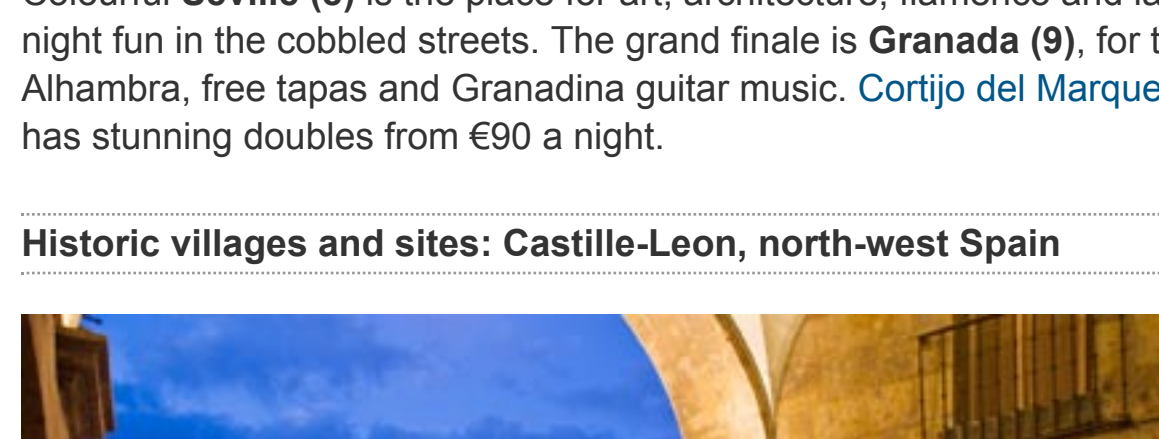


Then head on to Murcia (6), which many say has the best tapas in the land. Tour and chomp around the cathedral and bishop's palace, trying squid, mussels, and cazo (spiced hake), and enjoy the Moorish architecture.

Córdoba (7) is another attractive Arabic city. Established in 1908, the Bodegas Campos is a recommended restaurant for dishes such as tiny fried fish with gazpacho or Iberian pig's cheek casserole.

Colourful Seville (8) is the place for art, architecture, flamenco, and late-night fun in the cobbled streets. The grand finale is Granada (9), for the Alhambra, free tapas and Granadina guitar music. Corijo del Marques, has stunning doubles from €90 a night.

Historic villages and sites: Castilla-Leon, north-west Spain



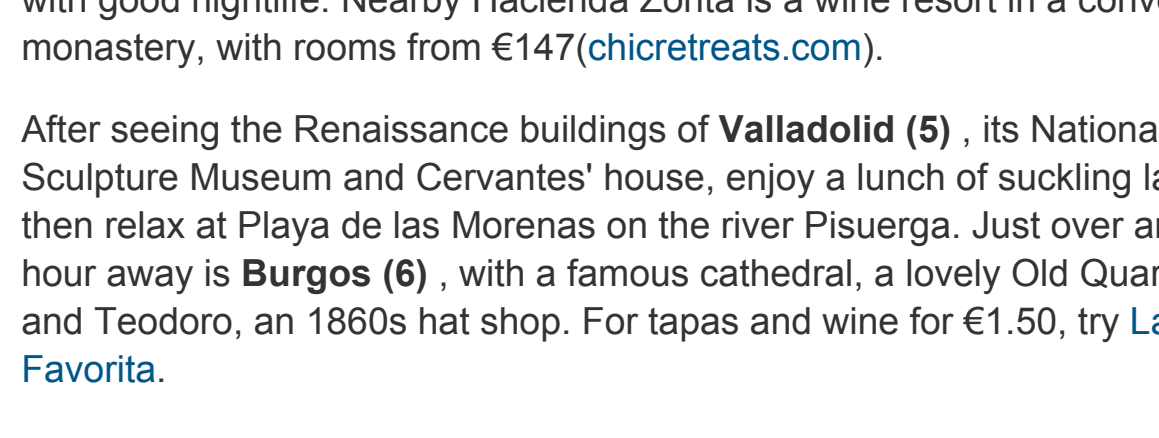
Salamanca's Plaza Mayor. Photograph: Massimo Borchi/Atlantide Phototravel/Corbis

578 miles One week minimum

Pick up a car in Madrid (1), and drive to Segovia (2), a stunning walled town with a Roman aqueduct, and fortress. Try the suckling pig, a local speciality, at the Parador Hotel. Avila (3) is a Unesco-protected city with medieval fortifications.

Head to Salamanca (4), a lively university city easily explored on foot, with good nightlife. Nearby Hacienda Zorita is a wine resort in a converted monastery, with rooms from €142 (chicretreats.com).

After seeing the Renaissance buildings of Valladolid (5), its National Sculpture Museum and Cervantes' house, enjoy a lunch of suckling lamb, then relax at Playa de las Morenas on the river Pisuerga. Just over an hour away is Burgos (6), with a famous cathedral, a lovely Old Quarter, and Teodoro, an 1860s hat shop. For tapas and wine for €1.50, try La Favorita.



Fossil fanatics will like the archeological site at the caves of the Sierra de Atapuerca (7) (book ahead, +34 902 024246, atapuerca.org) and the Museum of Human Evolution. Hikers should head for the Sierra de la Demanda (8). There are villages and churches, lots of routes – and a dinosaur museum.

Lastly, Soria (9) has Romanesque architecture and a beautiful square. Stay at La Posada de Numancia (doubles from €70) and admire its antiques.

Fly back from Madrid.

Wine and vineyards, Douro Valley, northern Portugal



Vineyards in the Douro Valley. Photograph: Peter Horree/Alamy

367 miles One week

Start in Porto (1) with a visit to the port wine lodges (the first of many tastings is vintage), hang out at the waterfront cafes of the Ribeira district and take a wine trip, tram to the beach at Foz do Douro.

Drive 22 miles east to Penafiel (2) to sample vinho verde at Quinta da Aveleda (aveledaportugal.com). Continue to beautiful Amarante (3), set in a dramatic gorge with an 18th-century bridge over the Tâmega. Eat at Largo do Paço (casadacalcada.com), a Michelin-starred restaurant serving inventive tasting menus with matching wine.

Next head east. Peso da Régua (4) isn't the prettiest place you'll stop, but it's well worth a visit for the Museu do Douro for the history of the area, and its Solar do Vinho do Porto (for a history of the wine).



Take a detour to the Casa de Mateus, a baroque mansion that is home to the famous rosé wine of the same name. It has beautiful gardens and hosts concerts in the summer. A mile or so up the road is Vila Real (5), where you can stop overnight, and visit the Parque Natural do Alvão the following day.

Back in the Douro valley, there is a great viewpoint at Galafura, en route to the little town of Pinhão (6), the centre of port production. Check out Pinhão's train station, with its tiles depicting the grape harvest, a wine museum and a wine shop. The Vintage House Hotel (doubles from €150) is right on the river, surrounded by vineyards.

Cross to the south side of the river and continue through the Alto Douro region for 37 miles to Vila Nova de Foz Côa (7). At the Côa Valley Archaeological Park you'll find rare open-air Paleolithic rock art, some 22,000 years old. On your way back to the airport, stop to admire the medieval bridge in Ucanha and the monastery in Tarouca. In Lamego (8), climb the 600 steps to the church of Nossa Senhora dos Remédios and try the local raposeira, Portugal's sparkling wine.

Surf safari, Portugal's Atlantic coast



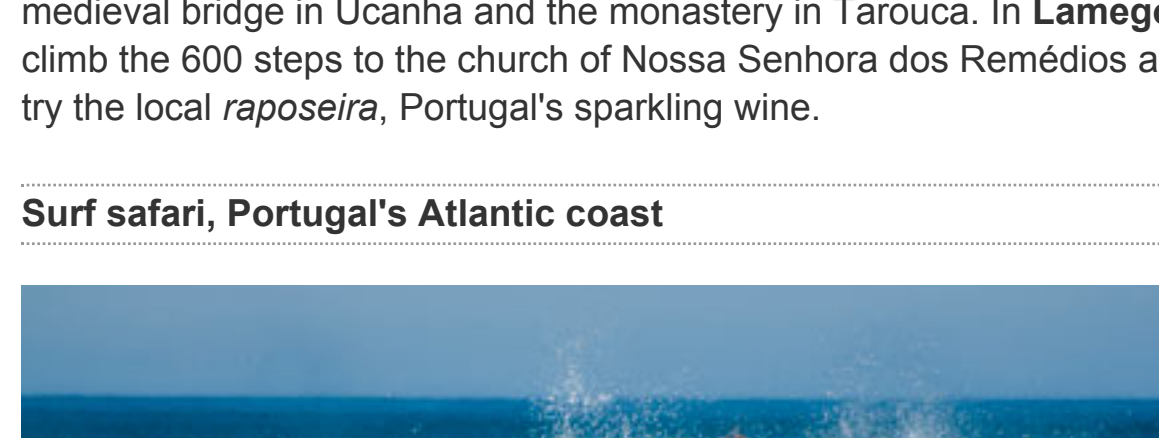
Surfing at Figueira da Foz, Portugal. Photograph: Alamy

550 miles Two weeks

Fly to Porto (1), hire a car, then head south. Any dirt track off the N109 towards the ocean will most likely bring your own private breaks. Roughly halfway between Porto and Lisbon, Figueira da Foz (2) has a wide beach, two main breaks, lots of bars and the Paintshop hostel (dorms €20 a night, private room €50).

Drive down the coast to Peniche (3), the famous surf town, with eight top wave is Medão Grande, also called Super tubos. See penichesurfguide.com for where to eat and sleep.

To the south again is Ericeira (4), a World Surfing Reserve, which regularly hosts a round of the ASP World Tour Championship. Ribeira d'Ilhas, a mile north of town, is the best beach. Then head on to Cascais (5), another surfing mecca and a very pretty town, too. The big-name beach is Praia do Guincho, home to swanky beach Bar do Guincho. There's a campsite nearby at Orbitur Point (campings.com/camping-orbitur-guincho-cascais).



Stay in Lisbon (6) for a night or two and try Carcavelos beach and Costa da Caparica over the river. Lisbon's Bairro Alto is the place to party, or try cocktail specialist Cinco Lounge (cincolounge.com).

Take the motorway south to Sagres (7), a historic port town on the southwesterly tip of Portugal (and of mainland Europe). There are more surf beaches a little way up the coast at Arrifana and Carrapateira.

The south-west coast is quiet, which is great if you want a beach to yourself, but the Algarve is an up-and-coming surf region: Praia da Rocha, in the big tourist resort of Portimão, is one of the best-known.

Fly home from Faro (8).

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All comments Staff replies Guardian picks

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6 comments. Showing 50 conversations, threads collapsed, sorted oldest first.

thedoc 16 March 2013 12:21pm Dont forget to look up about those pesky electronic toll roads in Portugal. They are hard to make a payment if you do not have a Portuguese registered hire car. Some Portuguese car hire companies also do not have the right electronic toll device installed in their cars and this also makes it hard to pay those electronic tolls.

andrevanderwal169 16 March 2013 7:49pm Casa de Mateus isn't "home to the famous rosé wine of the same name". The link is pure marketing, and ironically Casa de Mateus actually makes its own, superior, wine.

Spaniola 17 March 2013 8:53pm All the best bits? Impossible. I've lived here 26 years and am scratching the surface of the best.

haylejayne 17 March 2013 9:48pm We spent 3 weeks last year driving around Spain. We started our trip in Bilbao, made our way to Madrid, Salamanca, Gibralt, spent a week along the South coast as a base for trips to Ronda, Cadiz and Seville, headed for Granada, Valencia and finished up in Barcelona.

I loved Seville, it had a great atmosphere and feel to it, great park too. Also really enjoyed Granada, the Alhambra and great food.

Three weeks of beautiful scenery, stunning architecture, beautiful churches and cathedrals and fantastic tapas! Highly recommend the Mercado de San Miguel, the Meeting Point have gorgeous steak sandwiches and the best burgers I have ever tasted. The University in Salamanca is well worth a visit for the great views from the top of the towers and the Plaza Mayor is a lovely place to spend an evening with a cold glass of wine. There's a little street in Granada close to the town hall that has a great array of restaurants all great seafood and fish platters, fresh and fried and of course the Guggenheim in Bilbao.

I couldn't recommend a Spanish road trip highly enough. The roads were great to drive on too.

1 PERSON, 2 COMMENTS

JacquesCustard 18 March 2013 4:02pm A nice article but driving the long distance from Almeria to Murcia - a pretty unremarkable city in the main - just to get a rumoured best tapas in Spain, is completely unnecessary and doesn't warrant inclusion...especially when the next three destinations are also cities. Instead, better ending the trip in Ronda before dropping the hire car off at Malaga and going to Granada after Nerja instead.

JacquesCustard JacquesCustard 18 March 2013 4:11pm @JacquesCustard - going to Granada after Nerja instead. Or Cabo de Gata

Comments for this discussion are now closed.

Readers' tips

Madrid: Madrid Orgullo - Pride Parade The Chueca neighbourhood holds every year, at the beginning of the summer, the LGBT demonstration and festivals with parades, concerts, sports, expositions... Posted by estheralmena 22 Jun 2013

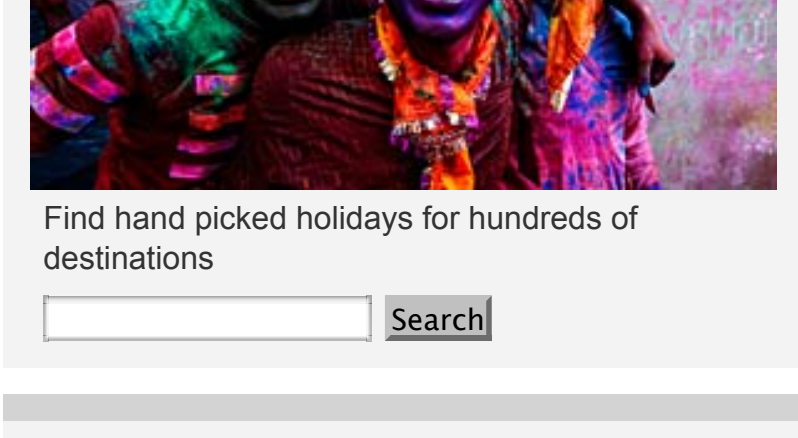
Madrid: Feria del Libro (Book Fair in the Retiro Park) This book fair is very popular among madrileños. The location, in the Retiro Park, is excellent and the atmosphere is perfect for a day with the kids. In... Posted by estheralmena 31 May 2013

Madrid: El Caldero (Paella in Madrid) Best paella I have ever had in Madrid. They bring the ingredients every day from the coast and the seafood is fantastic. The rice needs to be shared... Posted by estheralmena 13 Jun 2013

Madrid: Circulo de Bellas Artes rooftop Amazing views of the city, for just 3€. You can see almost everything, go at the end of your day and try to spot all the places you have visit, it's so... Posted by estheralmena 24 May 2013

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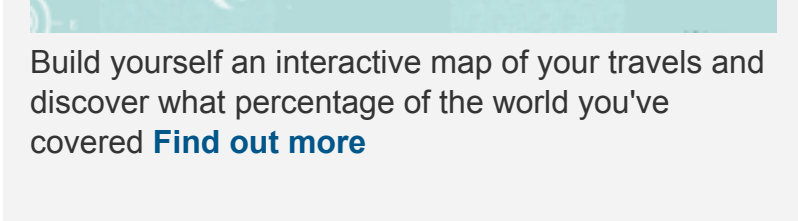
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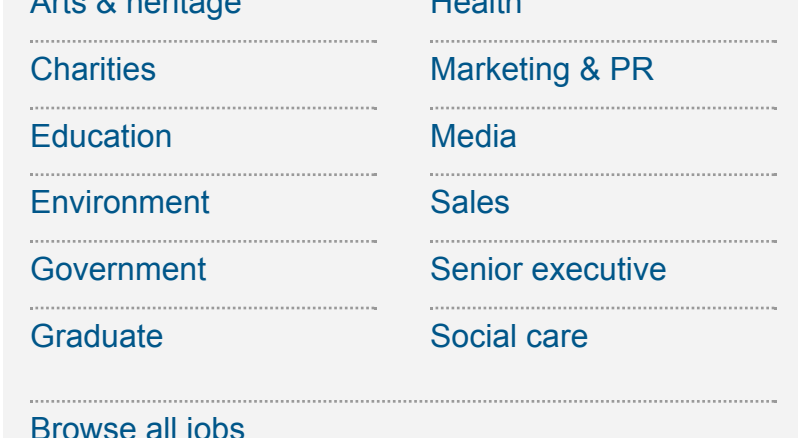
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