

Spain

Just say the word 'Spain', and chances are that images of dark-haired flamenco dancers, proud bullfighters, and golden beaches bathed in sunlight immediately come to mind. Yet those clichéd images only scratch the surface of the country's character. The real Spain, captivating and complex, is a 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, the cutting-edge designers and the innovative chefs that are earning the country a reputation as one of Europe's most creative. No doubt, there's a lot more to today's 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 Almería. It's the flat plains of Castilla 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. That history is visible at every turn, from the abundant Roman ruins to the Moorish-influenced *Mudéjar* architecture and the splendid medieval cathedrals.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 505,000 sq km
- **Capital** Madrid
- **Currency** euro (€); A\$1 = €0.60; ¥100 = €0.67; NZ\$1 = €0.50; UK£1 = €1.48; US\$1 = €0.78
- **Famous for** sunshine, late nights, bullfighting, *gazpacho* (cold tomato soup), *Don Quijote*, Pedro Almodóvar films
- **Official Languages** Spanish (Castilian or *castellano*), Catalan, Basque, Galician (*gallego*)
- **Phrases** *hola* (hello); *gracias* (thanks); *adios* (goodbye)
- **Population** 43 million
- **Telephone Codes** country code ☎ 34; international access code ☎ 00



HIGHLIGHTS

- Visit one of the country's most interesting creations, Gaudí's **La Sagrada Familia** (p738) in Barcelona, fanciful yet packed with serious symbolism.
- Eat your way through **San Sebastián** (p752), a gourmand's paradise with an idyllic seaside setting.
- Join the pilgrims making their way along medieval laneways to the magnificent **Catedral del Apóstol** (p760) in Santiago de Compostela.
- Soak up the scent of orange blossom and surrender to the party atmosphere in sunny **Seville** (p778).
- Amble under the aqueduct and around the Alcázar in magical **Segovia** (p724).

ITINERARIES

- **One week** Marvel at Barcelona's modernist architecture and seaside style before taking the train to San Sebastián, with a stop in Zaragoza on the way. Fit in a side trip to the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, and end the trip living it up on Madrid's legendary night scene.
- **One month** Make your way from Madrid to Andalucía, where you can take your time exploring picture-perfect Córdoba, Seville, Granada and Ronda. From here, spend some time on the coast, indulging in Malaga's renowned tapas scene and enjoying the pristine beaches.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Much of Spain is drenched with sunshine year-round, though the green north and snow-capped Pyrenees don't always fit the stereotype. Along the coasts, beach weather begins in late May and lasts to September. In the north, summer is a little shorter, while summer in the south lasts longer.

The Mediterranean coast is mild, but central Spain and the Pyrenees get downright cold. The rains and winds along the Atlantic coasts make winters in Galicia, Cantabria, Asturias and the Basque Country occasionally unpleasant. See Climate Charts (p863) for more information.

HISTORY

Ancient History

The bridge between Africa and Europe, Spain has always been a meeting point for peoples and cultures, though not necessarily a peace-

HOW MUCH?

A Real Madrid ticket €95

Bottle of Sangre de Toro wine €3.95

Bullfighter's suit €2500

Camper shoes €120

Valencia orange juice €2

LONELY PLANET INDEX

1L petrol €1.10

1L bottled water €1.50

Glass of Spanish beer €1.50

Souvenir T-shirt €18

Plate of churros €2

ful one. North African pioneers first began to settle the peninsula around 8000 BC, and in the millennia that followed, Celtic tribes, Phoenician merchants, Greeks and Carthaginians trickled in. The Romans arrived in the 3rd century BC but took 200 years to subdue the peninsula. Peace was short-lived; by AD 419 the Christian Visigoths had established a kingdom that lasted until 711.

Muslim Spain & the Reconquista

By 714 Muslim armies occupied nearly the entire peninsula. Muslim dominion was to last almost 800 years in parts of Spain. In Islamic Spain (known as al-Andalus) arts and sciences prospered, new crops and agricultural techniques were introduced, and palaces, mosques, schools, public baths and gardens were built.

In 1085 Alfonso VI, king of Castilla y León, took Toledo, the first definitive victory of the Reconquista (the struggle to wrestle Spain into Christian hands). By the mid-13th century, the Christians had taken most of the peninsula, except for the state of Granada.

In the process, the kingdoms of Castilla and Aragón emerged as Christian Spain's two main powers, and in 1469 they were united by the marriage of Isabel, princess of Castilla, and Fernando, heir to Aragón's throne. Known as the Catholic Monarchs, they laid the foundations for the Spanish golden age, but they were also responsible for one of the darkest hours in Spain's history – the Inquisition, a witch-hunt to expel



or execute Jews and other non-Christians. In 1492 the last Muslim ruler of Granada surrendered to them, marking the end of the Reconquista.

The Golden Age

Christopher Columbus' so-called discovery of the Americas in 1492 kicked off Spain's golden age. Befuddled Columbus (Colón in Castilian), trying to find a new route to India, stumbled upon the Bahamas, though he never guessed he'd discovered new continents and changed the course of history. His voyages sparked a period of exploration and exploitation that was to yield Spain enormous wealth, while destroying the ancient American empires. For three centu-

ries, gold and silver from the New World were used to finance the rapid expansion and slow decline of the Spanish empire. By the 18th century, the mighty Spanish empire was on its way out, the life sucked out of it by a series of unwise kings, self-seeking noblemen and unsuccessful wars that left the empire in shambles.

The 18th & 19th Centuries

The 18th century dawned with a war over the succession to the throne when Carlos II died heirless, but all was soon put right when Felipe V, the first Bourbon king, took control and ushered in a period of stability. Peace would last until the end of the century, when Spain declared war on France

and then on Britain and Portugal. The wars proved disastrous, and Spain ultimately lost several colonies and nearly all its sea power.

In 1807–08 Napoleon's forces occupied a weakened Spain, and King Carlos IV abdicated without a fight. In his place Napoleon installed his own brother, Joseph Bonaparte. The Spaniards retaliated with a five-year war of independence, and in 1815 Napoleon was defeated by the Duke of Wellington, who had united with the Portuguese and Spanish troops. A Bourbon, Fernando VII, was restored to the Spanish throne.

Fernando's reign was a disastrous advertisement for monarchy: the Inquisition was re-established, liberals were persecuted, Spain entered a severe recession and the American colonies officially won their independence in 1824. After Fernando's death in 1833 came the First Carlist War (1834–39), which ended with Isabel II, Fernando's daughter, taking the throne. In 1868 the monarchy was overthrown during the Septembrina Revolution and Isabel II was forced to flee from Madrid. The First Republic was declared in 1873, but within 18 months the army had restored the monarchy, with Isabel's son Alfonso XII on the throne. Despite political turmoil, Spain's economy prospered in the second half of the 19th century, fuelled by industrialisation.

The disastrous Spanish-American War of 1898 marked the end of the Spanish empire. Spain was defeated by the USA and lost its last overseas possessions – Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines.

The 20th Century

The early 20th century was characterised by growing instability, as anarchists and radicals struggled to overthrow the established order. In 1923, with Spain on the brink of civil war, Miguel Primo de Rivera made himself military dictator, ruling until 1930. In 1931 King Alfonso XIII fled the country and the Second Republic was declared.

Like its predecessor, the Second Republic fell victim to internal conflict. The 1936 elections split the nation in two, with the Popular Front (an uneasy alliance of leftist parties) on one side and the right-wing Nationalists (an alliance of the army, Church and the Fascist-style Falange Party) on the other.

Nationalist plotters in the army rose against the Republican government in July 1936, launching a civil war (1936–39) that would further sink the country in poverty and create bitter wounds that are still healing today. The Nationalists, led by General Francisco Franco, received military support from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, while the elected Republican government received support from the Soviet Union and other foreign leftists.

The war ended in 1939, with Franco the victor. Some 350,000 Spaniards died in the war, most of them on the battlefield but many others in executions, prison camps or simply from starvation. After the war, thousands of Republicans were executed, jailed or forced into exile, and Franco's 36-year dictatorship began with Spain isolated internationally and crippled by recession. It wasn't until the 1950s and '60s, when the rise in tourism and a treaty with the USA combined to provide much-needed funds, that the country began to recover.

Franco died in 1975, having named Juan Carlos, the grandson of Alfonso XIII, as his successor. Instead of accepting power, King Juan Carlos handed it over to a newly created democratic government, earning the lasting respect of the country. The first elections were held in 1977 and a new constitution was drafted in 1978. Spain joined the European Community (EC) in 1986 and celebrated its return to the world stage in style in 1992, with Expo '92 in Seville and the Olympic Games in Barcelona.

Spain Today

The modern, forward-thinking Spain of today has long since thrown off the dark cloud of Franco's dictatorship. In the late 1990s, the centre-right Partido Popular (Popular Party; PP), led by José María Aznar, took control of the nation after the long-ruling Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Socialist Party; PSOE) was voted out under accusations of corruption. The PP went on to establish programmes of economic decentralisation and liberalisation, paving the way for economic success.

In the elections of 2003, just days after the 11 March terrorist attacks in Madrid, the PP lost the presidential election to the PSOE. Newly elected President José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero made waves immedi-

ately; some of his first actions as president were to withdraw Spanish troops from Iraq and to establish parity in his cabinet, appointing eight female ministers and eight male ministers.

These days an important issue in Spain is the changing rights of the country's autonomous regions. Catalonia's revised *Estatut*, a constitution of sorts that lays out a plan for a new division of fiscal and social responsibilities, is at the forefront of this debate. The document has caused deep division among Spaniards. Supporters say it's a necessary step for Spain to deepen its democracy, while critics claim it erodes Spain's unity.

Aside from the constant and tedious back-and-forth bickering between Spain's political parties, important issues include domestic violence, drought and chronic water shortages, traffic control and an effort to decrease traffic-related deaths, and the Basque terrorist group ETA (see p757), who, at the time of writing, had recently signed a cease-fire.

PEOPLE

Spain has a population of approximately 43 million, descended from all 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), Barcelona (1.59 million), Valencia (760,000) and Seville (700,000). Each region proudly preserves its own unique culture, and some – Catalonia and the Basque Country in particular – display a fiercely independent spirit.

RELIGION

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'.

However, many Spaniards have a deep-seated scepticism about the Church. During the civil war, anarchists burned churches and shot clerics because they represented repression and corruption. Later, during Franco's rule, church-going was practically obligatory and those who shunned the Church were often treated as outcasts or targeted as delinquents by Franco's police.

Some people began to see the Church as a haven for hypocrites, and the image still hasn't completely worn off.

ARTS Literature

One of the earliest works of Spanish literature is the *Cantar de Mío Cid* (Song of My Cid), an anonymous epic poem describing the life of El Cid, an 11th-century Christian knight buried in the Burgos cathedral. Miguel de Cervantes' novel *Don Quixote* is the masterpiece of the literary flowering of the 16th and 17th centuries, as well as one of the world's great works of fiction.

The next high point, in the early 20th century, grew out of the crisis of the Spanish-American War that spawned the intellectual Generation of '98. The towering figure was poet and playwright Federico García Lorca, who won international acclaim before he was murdered in the civil war for his Republican sympathies.

Popular contemporary authors include Arturo Pérez Reverte, whose *Capitán Alatriste* books are international best-sellers; Eduardo Mendoza, whose books, including the *City of Marvels*, have been widely translated into English; and Carlos Ruiz Zafon, whose 2002 *Shadow of the Wind* was a runaway bestseller worldwide.

Cinema

Modern Spanish cinema's best-known director is Pedro Almodóvar, whose humorous, cutting-edge films are largely set amid the Movida. His *Todo Sobre Mi Madre* (All About My Mother; 1999) and *Habla Con Ella* (Talk to Her; 2002) are both Oscar winners.

Alejandro Amenábar, the young Chilean-born director of *Abre los Ojos* (Open Your Eyes; 1997), *The Others* (2001) and the Oscar-winning *Mar Adentro* (The Sea Inside; 2004), is Almodóvar's only competition for Spain's 'best director' title.

Architecture

Spain's earliest architectural relics are the prehistoric monuments on Menorca. Reminders of Roman times include the ruins of Mérida, Zaragoza, and Tarragona, and Segovia's amazing aqueduct. The Muslims left behind some of the most splendid buildings in the entire Islamic world,

including Granada's Alhambra, Córdoba's awe-inspiring Mezquita and Seville's Alcazar – the latter an example of *Mudéjar* architecture, the name given to Islamic work done throughout Christian-held territory.

The first main Christian architectural movement was Romanesque. Later came the great Gothic cathedrals (such as Toledo, Barcelona, León, Salamanca and Seville) of the 13th to 16th centuries; Renaissance styles such as the plateresque work so prominent in Salamanca; and the austere work of Juan de Herrera, responsible for El Escorial (see p721). Spain then followed the usual path to baroque (17th and 18th centuries) and neoclassicism (19th century), before Catalonia produced its startling modernist (roughly Art Nouveau) movement around the turn of the 20th century, of which Antoni Gaudí's Sagrada Familia is the most stunning example.

Painting

The giants of Spain's golden age (1550–1650) were Toledo-based El Greco (originally from Crete) and Diego Velázquez, considered Spain's best painter by greats including Picasso and Dalí. Both El Greco and Velázquez were known for their insightful portraits. The genius of both the 18th and 19th centuries was Francisco Goya, whose versatility ranged from unflattering royal portraits and anguished war scenes to bullfight etchings and tapestry designs.

Catalonia was the powerhouse of early-20th-century Spanish art, claiming the hugely prolific Pablo Picasso (although he was born in Andalucía), the colourful symbolist Joan Miró and surrealist Salvador Dalí. Important artists of the late 20th century include Catalan abstract artist Antoni Tàpies and Basque sculptor Eduardo Chillida. Works by these and other major Spanish artists can be found in galleries throughout the country.

Flamenco

Getting to see real, deeply emotional flamenco can be hard, as it tends to happen semispontaneously in little bars and not on big touristy stages. Andalucía is its traditional home and your best chance of catching the real thing is probably at one of the flamenco festivals in the south, usually held in summer. You'll also find quality *tablaos*

(flamenco stages) in Madrid and throughout Andalucía.

ENVIRONMENT

Spain is a geographically diverse country, with landscapes ranging from the near-deserts of Almería to the green countryside and deep coastal inlets of Galicia, and from the sunbaked plains of Castilla-La Mancha to the rugged mountains of the Pyrenees.

The country covers 84% of the Iberian Peninsula and spreads over some 505,000 sq km, more than half of which is high *meseta* (tableland). Spain is divided by several mountain chains, making it Europe's second-hilliest country after Switzerland.

The brown bear, wolf, lynx and wild boar all survive in Spain, although only the boar exists in abundance; farmers delight in shooting and roasting the tasty pest. Spain's high mountains harbour the goatlike chamois and Spanish ibex (the latter is rare) and big birds of prey such as eagles, vultures and the lammergeier. The marshy Ebro delta and Guadalquivir estuary are important for water birds, among them the spectacular greater flamingo. Many of Spain's 5500 seed-bearing plants grow nowhere else in Europe, due to the barrier of the Pyrenees. Spring wildflowers are magnificent in many country and hilly areas.

The conservation picture has 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.

FOOD & DRINK

Reset your stomach's clock in Spain unless you want to eat alone or with other tourists. Most Spaniards start the day with a light *desayuno* (breakfast), perhaps coffee with a *tostada* (piece of toast) or *pastel* (pastry), though they might stop in a bar later for a mid-morning *bocadillo* (baguette).

La comida (lunch) is usually the main meal of the day, eaten between about 1.30pm and 3.30pm. The *cena* (evening meal) is usually lighter and may be eaten as late as 10pm or 11pm; meals out with friends may well last until 1am or later. It's common to

go to a bar or café for tapas around 1pm and again around 7pm or 8pm.

Specialities

Each region has its own style of cuisine and its own specialities. One of the most characteristic dishes, from the Valencia region, is paella – rice, seafood, the odd vegetable and often chicken or meat, all simmered together and traditionally coloured yellow with saffron. Another dish, of Andalusian origin, is *gazpacho*, a cold soup made from tomatoes, breadcrumbs, cucumber and green peppers. Tortillas (like omelettes) are an inexpensive stand-by snack and come in many varieties. *Jamón serrano* (cured ham) is a delicacy available in many different qualities.

Drinks

Start the day with a strong coffee, either as a *café con leche* (half-coffee, half-milk), *café solo* (short black, espresso-like) or *café cortado* (short black with a little milk).

The most common way to order a *cerveza* (beer) is to ask for a *caña*, which is a small draught beer. In the Basque Country this is called a *zurrito*. A larger beer (about 300mL) is often called a *tubo*, or (in Catalonia) a *jarra*. All these words apply to *cerveza de barril* (draught beer) – if you just ask for a *cerveza* you're likely to get bottled beer, which is more expensive.

Vino (wine) comes in *blanco* (white), *tinto* (red) or *rosado* (rosé). Exciting wine regions include Penedès, Priorat and Ribera del Duero. *Tinto de verano*, a kind of wine shandy, is good in summer. There are also many regional grape specialities, such as *jerez* (sherry) in Jerez de la Frontera and *cava* (a sparkling wine) in Catalonia. Sangría, a sweet punch made of red wine, fruit and spirits, is refreshing and very popular with tourists and in summer.

Agua del grifo (tap water) is usually safe to drink but it may not be very tasty in cities or near the coast. *Agua mineral con gas* (sparkling mineral water) and *agua mineral sin gas* (still mineral water) cost about €1.50 for a small bottle.

Where to Eat & Drink

Bars and cafés are open all day, serving coffees, pastries, *bocadillos* and usually tapas, which cost from €1 to €4 each. In the eve-

nings these same bars fill with regulars looking for a quick beer or glass of house wine. Groups can order *raciones*, a large-sized serving of these snacks; a *media ración* is half a *ración*. You can often save by ordering and eating food at the bar rather than at a table.

Self-caterers will no doubt be delighted with Spain's fresh-produce markets, which they will find near the centre of just about every city and town. Load yourself up on colourful veggies, fresh bread and Spanish cheeses.

Spaniards like to eat out, and restaurants abound even in small towns. At lunch time, most places offer a *menú del día* – a fixed-price lunch menu and the budget traveller's best friend. For €7 to €12 you typically get three courses, bread and a drink. The *plato combinado* (combined plate) is a cousin of the *menú* and usually includes a meat dish and a couple of side dishes. Check out the crowd before sitting down; if it's full of locals, that's a good sign.

After dinner, head to a *bar de copas* (pub), where hard drinks are pretty much the only thing on offer.

Vegetarians

Vegetarians may have to be creative in Spain. Though in larger cities and important student centres there's a growing awareness of vegetarianism, traditional restaurants often offer salads and egg tortillas, but little else for noncarnivores. Even salads may come laden with sausages or tuna. Pasta and pizza are readily available, as is seafood.

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 its excellent art museums, and take at least one night to experience the city's legendary nightlife scene.

HISTORY

Through the years city leaders have tried hard to come up with noble, capital-worthy histories for Madrid (saying, for example, that it had Roman origins), but the truth is that 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. That changed fast when it became the epicentre of the Spanish court, and Felipe and crew began the long process of building a capital.

Despite being home to generations of nobles, 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 take on the look of a proper capital.

The post-civil war 1940s and '50s were trying times for the capital, with rampant poverty. Nowhere was Franco's thumb as firmly pressed down as on Madrid, and the city 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.

South of Puerta del Sol is the oldest part of the city, with the Plaza Mayor to the southwest and the busy streets of the Huer-tas district to the southeast. North of the plaza is a modern shopping district and, beyond that, the east-west thoroughfare Gran Vía and the bohemian barrio (district/ neighbourhood) of Chueca. To the west is the stately Palacio Real, while to the east lies the city's green lung, Parque del Buen

Retiro. An upscale shopping quarter, Salamanca, lies north of the park.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

La Casa del Libro (Map p710; ☎ 90 202 64 02; www.casadellibro.com; Gran Vía 29; ☎ 9.30am-9.30pm Mon-Fri, 11am-1pm Sun; 🚗 Gran Vía) This mega bookshop has tons of English and foreign-language titles.

Petra's International Bookshop (Map p710; ☎ 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)

General Emergencies (☎ 112)

Municipal Police (☎ 092)

Red Cross Emergencies (☎ 91 522 22 22)

Internet Access

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

Work Center (Map p710; ☎ 90 211 50 11; www.workcenter.es; Calle de Príncipe 1; per hr €2; ☎ 24hr; 🚗 Sevilla) Internet, photocopies and more. Also other branches throughout the city.

Laundry

Lavandería Cervantes (Map p710; ☎ 91 429 92 16; Calle Cervantes 6; per load wash/dry €2/1; ☎ 9am-9pm; 🚗 Sol or Antón Martín)

Left Luggage

Spain Storage (Map p710; ☎ 24hr 91 521 79 34; www.spainstorage.com; Calle del Correo 4; per week €10; ☎ 9-11am & 5-8pm Mon-Fri; 🚗 Sol) For cheap long-term storage.

Medical Services

Anglo-American Medical Unit (Map pp706-7; ☎ 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 p710; ☎ 91 369 20 00; Plaza Antón Martín 46; 🚗 Antón Martín) For help with minor medical problems. This is one of several 24-hour pharmacies; others are located at Calle Mayor 13, Calle de Toledo 46 and Calle de Preciados 14. Call ☎ 010 for additional locations.

Post

Main post office (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 396 27 33; Plaza Cibeles; 🚗 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

Lost Objects (☎ 91 588 43 48) **Municipal tourist office** (Map p710; ☎ 91 588 16 36; www.munimadrid.es; Plaza Mayor 27; ☎ 9.30am-8.30pm; 🚗 Sol)

Regional tourist office (Map p710; ☎ 90 210 00 07; www.madrid.org/turismo; Calle del Duque de Medinaceli 2; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun; 🚗 Sevilla) Go to the calmer, less-frequented regional office for more one-on-one attention.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Compared with most major cities, Madrid is not particularly dangerous. That said, be smart and aware, especially in touristy areas like Plaza Mayor, Puerta del Sol and Gran Vía. Pickpockets and petty thieves can be astonishingly brash – and quick.

Prostitution (and the slimy clients it attracts) along Calle de la Montera and in the Casa del Campo park means that you need to exercise extra caution in these areas. On a brighter note, increased police presence has made these areas safer.

For details about common scams, see the Spain Directory (p801).

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 Austrios, the maze of mostly 15th- and 16th-century streets surrounding the Plaza Mayor, is the oldest quarter of the city and makes for a nice stroll. You'll also enjoy exploring the cafés and interesting shops around Plaza de Santa Ana.

Don't leave without getting a glimpse of the amazing art and culture on offer here. Three of Europe's top art collections are on display at the outstanding Prado, Reina Sofía and Thyssen-Bornemisza museums.

Museo Nacional del Prado

Spain's premier museum, and one of the finest art collections in the world, the **Museo Nacional del Prado** (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 330 29 00; http://museoprado.mcu.es; Paseo del Prado s/n; adult/child €6/3, EU students under 25 free, free Sun; ☎ 9am-8pm Tue-Sun; 🚗 Banco de España) is a seemingly end-

MADRID IN TWO DAYS

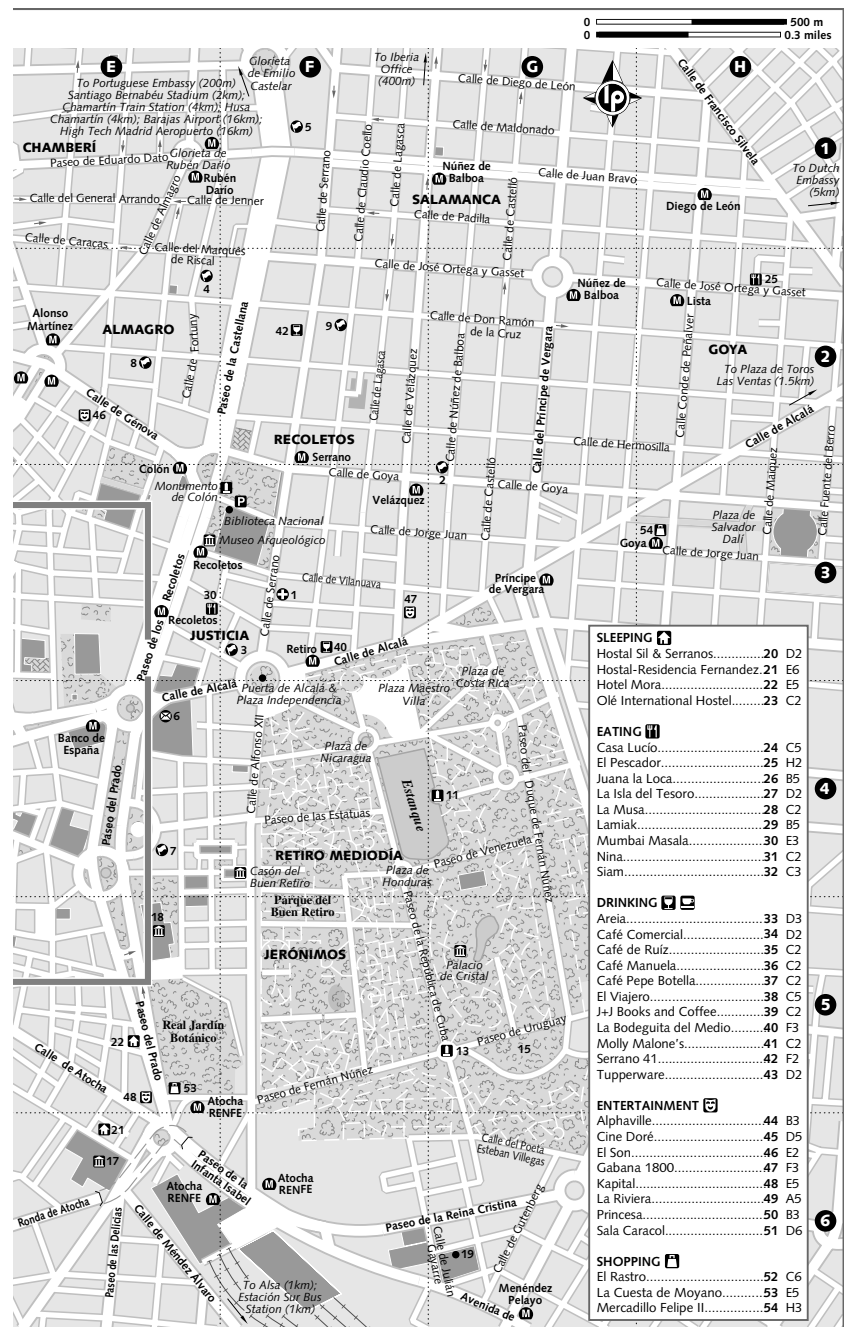
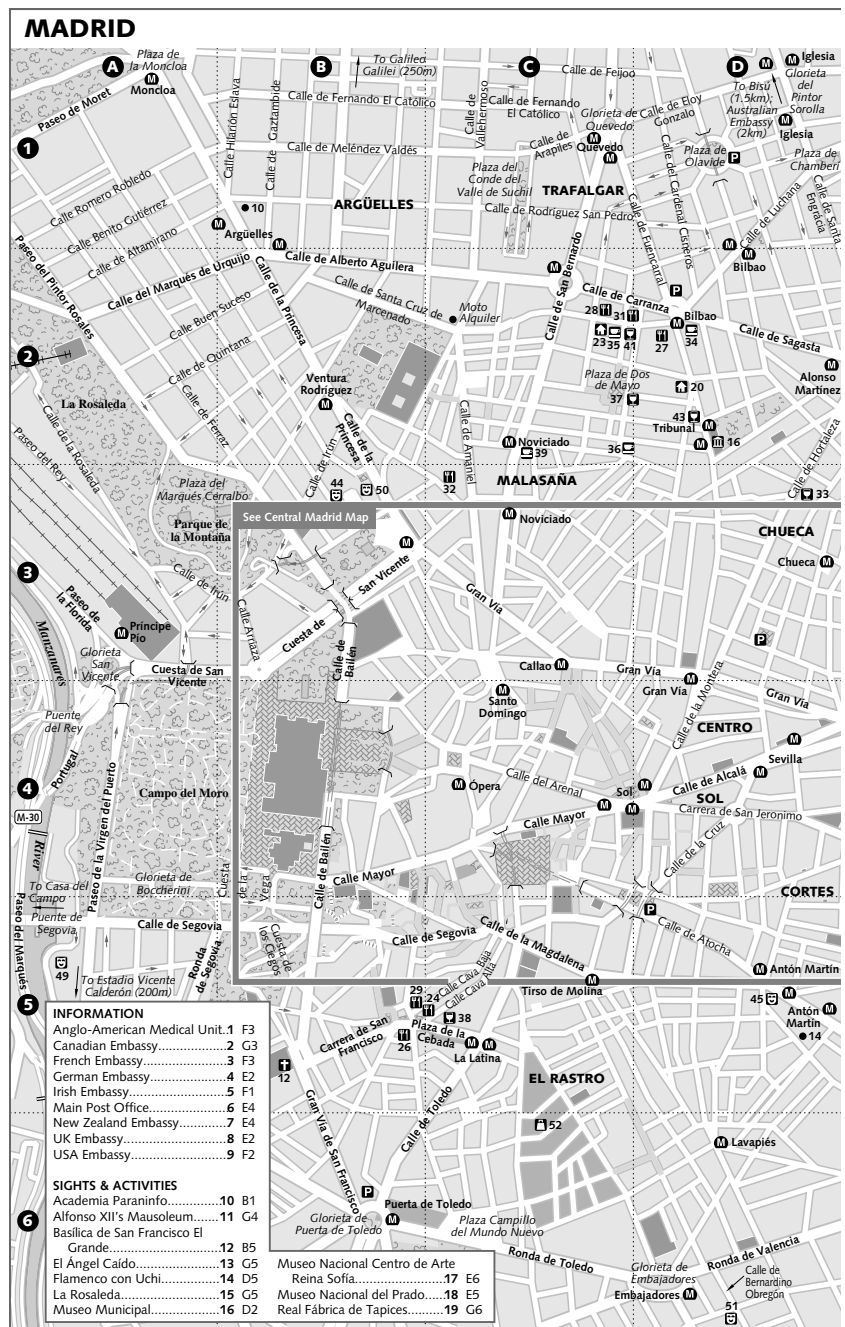
Start with breakfast in the **Plaza de Santa Ana** (left) then visit the **Museo del Prado** (left). Afterwards, walk around **El Retiro** (p709), but save energy for the **Palacio Real** (p708) and evening shopping and tapas in **Chueca** (p715). At night, catch a **flamenco show** (p718).

On day two, sign up for the tourist office's **walking tour** (p711) of historic Madrid, and then visit either the **Thyssen-Bornemisza** (p708) or the **Reina Sofía** (p708) art museums. Make time for a siesta, then hit **Viva Madrid** (p716) for drinks and dancing.

less parade of priceless works from Spain and beyond. At the time of research, only about 1000 of the museum's total collection of 8500 paintings was on display. That will change when the Prado's expansion project, begun in 2001 and scheduled for completion in 2007, finishes and increases exhibition space by 50%.

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 including Goya, Velázquez and El Greco. Prized works include Velázquez' masterpiece *Las Meninas* – depicting maids of honour attending the daughter of King Felipe IV and Velázquez himself painting portraits of the queen and king (through whose eyes the scene is witnessed) – and the Flemish El Bosco's *El Jardín de las Delicias*, a three-panelled painting of the creation of man, the pleasures of the world, and hell. Also look for works by El Greco, including *La Adoración de los Pastores* and *La Trinidad*, both with religious themes.

The museum is laid out in a loosely chronological order. Medieval and Renaissance works are found on the *planta baja* (lower floor), as are the paintings of Velázquez and the Siglo de Oro (Golden Century). Also on this floor are some of Goya's works, which continue on the 2nd floor. Look out for Goya's famous *Maja Desnuda* and *Maja Vestida*; legend has it



SPAIN

SPAIN

FREE & DISCOUNTED MADRID

If you plan well, there are several free attractions in Madrid. Look out for 'Free Days' – the Museo del Prado's is on Sunday and Reina Sofía is free on Saturday afternoon (from 2.30pm to 9pm) and Sunday. 'EU Free Days' incorporate Palacio Real and Monasterio de las Descalzas Reales; both are free to EU citizens on Wednesday.

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

that the woman depicted in this pair of paintings is the Duchess of Alba, Spain's richest woman in Goya's time. Goya was commissioned to paint her portrait by her husband and ended up having an affair with her, so he painted an extra portrait for himself. Showing Goya's darker side is the well-known *Saturno Devorando a Un Hijo* (Saturn Devouring his Son); the name says it all. Also dark are Goya's masterpieces depicting the horrors of the Spanish war of independence.

Guided tours 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 pp706-7; ☎ 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, to 2.30pm Sun; **M** Atocha) is home to Picasso's famous *Guernica* – his protest against the German bombing of the Basque town of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War in 1937 – in addition to housing important works by surrealist Salvador Dalí and abstract paintings by the Catalan artist Joan Miró.

In September 2005 the Reina Sofía unveiled a universally praised new wing, the work of famed French architect Jean Nouvel. Despite a few initial problems (the roof sprang a leak just before the grand opening), the new addition has given the museum some breathing space.

Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza

Sitting just opposite the Prado, the **Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza** (Map p710; ☎ 91 369 01 51; www.museothyssen.org; Paseo del Prado 8; adult/student €6/4; ☎ 10am-7pm Tue-Sun; **M** Banco de España) is a somewhat eclectic collection of international masterpieces. Begin your visit on the 2nd floor, where you'll find medieval religious art, and make your way down to modern works on the ground level, passing paintings by Titian, El Greco, Rubens, Cézanne, Monet, Van Gogh, Miró, Picasso, Gris, Pollock, Dalí and Lichtenstein on the way. Formerly the private collection of the Thyssen-Bornemiszas, a German-Hungarian family of magnates, Spain purchased the collection in 1993 for a mere US\$300 million.

Palacio Real & Around

Still King Juan Carlos I's official residence (though no-one actually lives here), Madrid's 18th-century royal palace, **Palacio Real** (Map p710; ☎ 91 454 88 00; www.patrimonio nacional.es; Calle de Bailén s/n; adult/student €8/3.50, with guided tour €9, audio tour €2.50, free for EU citizens Wed; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 9am-2pm Sun Oct-Mar, 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, to 3pm Sun Apr-Sep; **M** Ópera), is used mainly for important events, such as Prince Felipe and Doña Letizia's 2004 wedding reception. You can visit 50 of its 2800-plus rooms.

When the 16th-century Alcázar that formerly stood on this spot went up in flames on Christmas Eve 1734, King Felipe V ordered a new palace to be built on the same ground, with not a speck of wood used in its construction so that the disaster wouldn't be repeated. The opulent Palacio Real was finished in 1755, and the first monarch (Carlos III) moved in 1764. Though palace decoration has changed greatly through the years, some rooms, including the Throne Room and the Porcelain Room, have hardly been touched.

Look out for the 215 clocks of the royal clock collection and the five Stradivarius violins, used occasionally for concerts and balls. The tapestries and chandeliers throughout the palace are all original.

Outside the main palace, poke your head into the **Farmacia Real** (Map p710; Royal Pharmacy), where apothecary-style jars line the shelves. Continue on to the interesting **Armería Real** (Map p710; Royal Armoury), where you'll be im-

pressed by the shiny (and surprisingly tiny!) royal suits of armour, most of them from the 16th and 17th centuries.

Plaza Mayor

Ringed with numerous cafés and restaurants and packed with people day and night, the arcaded **Plaza Mayor** (Map p710) is an atmospheric place. Built in the 17th century, the plaza was traditionally used as a market. On Sunday morning a stamp market still sets up shop.

The colourful frescoes on one side of the plaza decorate the **Real Casa de la Panadería** (Royal Bakery), which predates the plaza and was restored after a 1790 fire. The equestrian statue dominating the plaza's centre depicts Felipe III and was placed here in 1848.

Churches

The **Catedral de Nuestra Señora de la Almudena** (Map p710; ☎ 91 522 22 00; Calle de Bailén 10; ☎ 9am-9pm; **M** 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, but this massive bulk of stone has nothing on the city's older churches, such as the largely 15th-century **Iglesia de San Nicolás** (Map p710; ☎ 91 559 40 64; Plaza San Nicolás 1; ☎ 6:30am-1:30pm & 5:30-9pm; **M** Ópera), and the imposing 18th-century **Basílica de San Francisco El Grande** (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 365 38 00; Plaza San Francisco 1; museum admission adult/student €3/2; ☎ 11am-12.30pm & 4-6.30pm Tue-Fri, 11am-1.30pm Sat Sep-Jul, 11am-12.30pm & 5-7.30pm Tue-Sun Aug; **M** Puerta de Toledo).

Monasterio de las Descalzas Reales

Opulent inside though with a rather plain Plateresque exterior, the **Monasterio de las Descalzas Reales** (Convent of the Barefoot Royals; Map p710; ☎ 91 454 88 00; www.patrimoniomonal.es; Plaza de las Descalzas Reales 3; adult/student €5/4, EU citizens Wed free; ☎ 10.30am-12.45pm & 4-5.45pm Tue-Thu & Sat, 10.30am-12.45pm Fri, 11am-1.45pm Sun; **M** Sol or Callao) was founded in 1559 by Juana of Austria. Daughter of Spain's King Carlos I and Isabel of Portugal, Juana transformed one of her mother's palaces into the noblewoman's convent of choice. A wealthy religious house thanks to the nobles' gifts of art and other treasures, this convent is still home to a small group of nuns.

On the obligatory guided tour you'll see the celebrated Renaissance stairway, several chapels, a number of fabulous tapestries based on works by Rubens, and Juana's burial place.

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, **Parque del Buen Retiro** (Map pp706-7; ☎ 7am-midnight May-Sep, 7am-10pm Oct-Apr; **M** Retiro), locally called simply El Retiro, is as much a Madrid tradition as tapas and *terrazas* (terrace cafés). Come on a weekend for street performers, clown, puppet shows and the occasional theatre performance.

Start your visit along the **Paseo de las Estatuas**, a path lined with statues originally from the Palacio Real. It ends at the pretty **Estanque** (Lake) overlooked by **Alfonso XII's Mausoleum** (Map pp706-7). Rent a row boat at the northern end. Dotted about the park are a few interesting statues, such as the **El Ángel Caído** (Fallen Angel; Map pp706-7), the first-ever statue dedicated to the devil. Also interesting are gardens such as **La Rosaleda** (Rose Garden; Map pp706-7) and the sadly poetic **Bosque de los Ausentes** (Forest of the Missing), a tribute to the victims of the 11 March terrorist attack, which you'll find between the Puerta del Ángel Caído and Alfonso XII's Mausoleum.

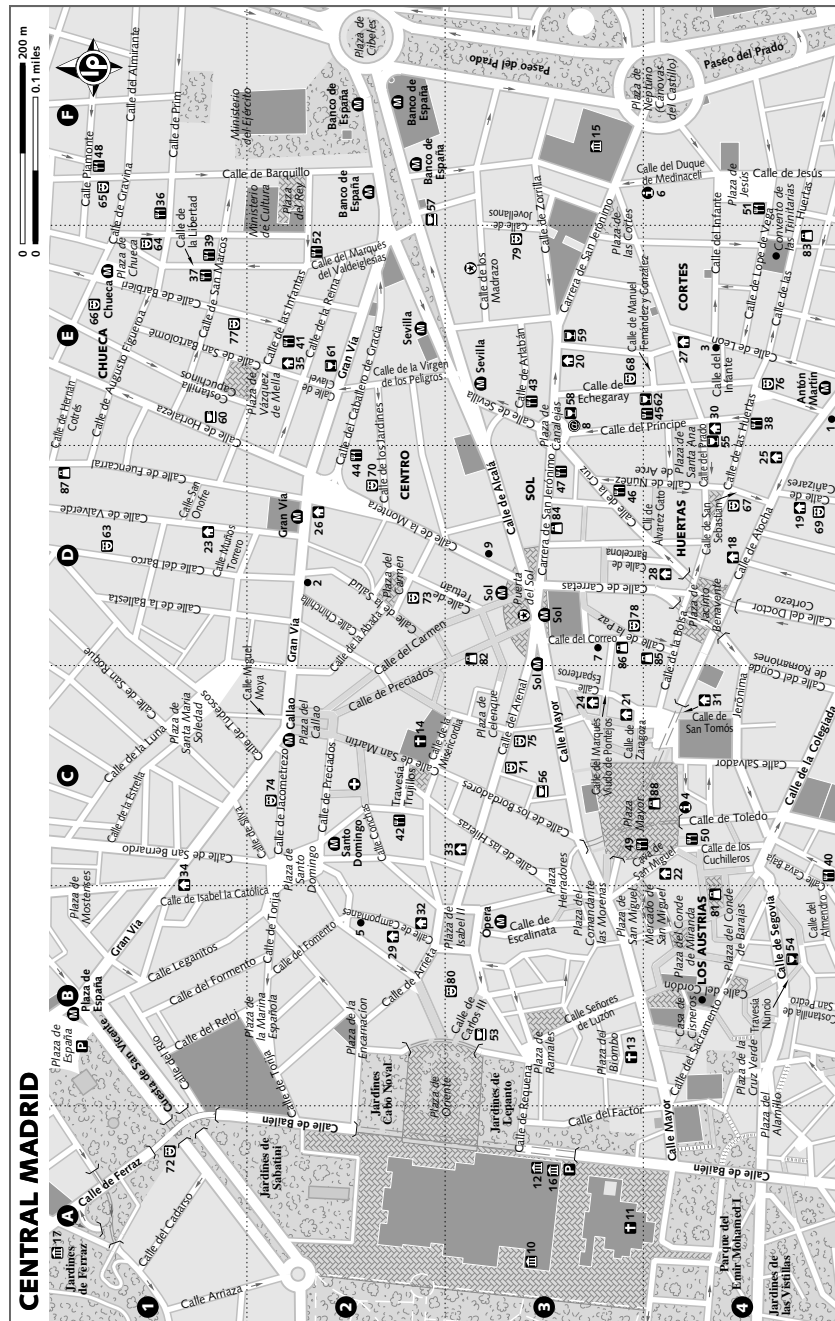
Just outside the park is the **Real Jardín Botánico** (Map pp706-7; adult/student €2/1; ☎ 10am-dusk), which is less crowded and also lovely for strolling.

Other Sights

Brush up on the city's history and development at the well-organised **Museo Municipal** (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 701 1863; www.munimadrid.es/museo municipal; Calle Fuencarral 78; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-8pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun; **M** Tribunal), which contains paintings and other memorabilia charting the evolution of Madrid.

Founded in 1721, **Real Fábrica de Tapices** (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 434 05 50; www.realfatapices.com; Calle Fuencarral 2; admission €3; ☎ 10am-2pm Mon-Fri, closed Easter week & Aug; **M** Menéndez Pelayo) still makes ornate tapestries and carpets by hand. Take one home for a mere €10,000 per sq metre.

A gift from Egypt, the authentically ancient **Templo de Debod** (Map p710; ☎ 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



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& 4.15-6.15pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar; (M) Plaza de España) was transferred here stone by stone in 1972 as a gesture of thanks to the Spanish archaeologists that helped save Egyptian monuments from the rising waters of the Aswan Dam.

COURSES

Flamenco

Uchi of **Flamenco con Uchi** (Flamenco with Uchi; Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 527 32 18; Calle Santa Isabel 9; ☒ beginners 7pm, advanced 8pm; (M) Antón Martín) is one of several teachers in Madrid. Check out Flamenco World (p719) for up-to-date info on Uchi's and others' classes.

Language

The language schools below offer short-term classes and have been given the stamp of approval by the Instituto de Cervantes, the official institution created to promote Spanish language and culture.

Academia InHispania (Map p710; ☎ 91 521 22 31; www.inhispania.com; Calle de la Montera 10-12;

(M) Gran Vía)

Academia Paraninfo (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 543 31 39; www.paraninfo.com; 1st fl, Calle de la Princesa 70; (M) Sol)

TOURS

For an interesting themed tour, check out **Discover Madrid walking tours** (☎ 91 588 29 06; adult €4-6.50, child €2.50-5), offered in English and Spanish by the municipal tourist office (p705). The open-topped tourist bus **Madrid Visión** (☎ 91 765 10 16; www.madridvision.es; adult €14.50-19, child €8-10) is also recommended; see its website for operating times.

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) The three kings bring gifts to children and a mammoth parade takes over the city centre on 6 January.

Fiesta de San Isidro Street parties, parades, bullfights and other fun events honour Madrid's patron saint on 15 May.

Fiesta de Otoño The year's cultural highlight, the Autumn Festival, running from mid-October through to mid-November, is a time for music, dance and theatre.

SLEEPING

A bundle of new hotels has opened recently in Madrid, meaning that travellers are spoiled for choice when it comes to accommodation. From chic to cheap, there's a little something for everyone, but you'll need to book ahead, especially in peak season.

Prices here 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 deep discounts, especially at the top-end hotels. Check hotel websites for deals.

Los Austrias & Centro

BUDGET

Los Amigos Backpackers' Hostel (Map p710; ☎ 91 547 17 07; www.losamigoshostel.com; 4th fl, Calle de Campomanes 6; dm €16-17; ☑; (M) 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 has another hostel on Calle del Arenal 26.

Mucho Madrid (Map p710; ☎ 91 559 23 50; www.muchoMadrid.com; Gran Vía 59; dm €20; (M) Gran Vía) Named the safest hostel in the world by hostelworld.com, this tidy place opened in July 2004 and was a quick hit thanks to its small rooms, colourful décor and quiet atmosphere.

Hostal Orly (Map p710; ☎ 91 531 30 12; 7th fl, Calle de la Montera 47; s/d/tr €35/46/58; (M) Gran Vía) Looking out from the top floor of a grand 19th-century building, this quiet *hostal* (cheap hotel) boasts tall ceilings and wooden floors. It is also promising air-con for 2007.

Other recommendations:

Cats (Map p710; ☎ 91 369 28 07; www.catshostel.com; Calle de Cañizares 6; dm €16-18; ☑ ☑ ☑; (M) Sol) Always a party waiting to happen. On-site bar.

Hostal Santa Cruz (Map p710; ☎ 91 522 24 41; www.hostalsantacruz.com; 2nd fl, Plaza Santa Cruz 6; s/d €35/48; ☑ ☑; (M) Sol) Fabulous value, with flowered bedspreads and sparkling bathrooms.

Hostal Cruz Sol (Map p710; ☎ 91 532 71 97; www.hostalcruzsol.com; 3rd fl, Plaza Santa Cruz 6; s/d/tr €40/52/70; ☑ ☑; (M) Sol) Cheery. Great location.

MIDRANGE

Hostal La Macarena (Map p710; ☎ 91 365 92 21; www.silserranos.com; Cava de San Miguel 8; s €51-57, d €64-70, tr €72-84, q €84-96; (M) Sol) Rooms are snug but charming at this friendly family-run place by the Plaza Mayor. The management here also runs the Hostal Sil & Serranos (opposite).

Hostal Madrid (Map p710; ☎ 91 522 00 60; www.hostal-madrid.info; 2nd fl, Calle Esparteros 6; s €50-58, d/tr €70/90; ☑ ☑; (M) Sol) A great location, impeccable bathrooms and stylish rooms bathed in light make this a popular choice. There's also free wi-fi. Ask about the owner's rental apartments, ideal for families or groups.

Hotel Plaza Mayor (Map p710; ☎ 91 360 06 06; www.h-plazamayor.com; Calle Atocha 2; s €59-79, d €89-99; ☑ ☑; (M) Sol or Tirso de Molina) This hotel has spacious, stylish rooms just 50m from Plaza Mayor. Original elements of this 150-year-old building (a former church) lend it a special charm.

Room Mate Mario (Map p710; ☎ 91 548 85 48; www.room-matehoteles.com; Calle de Campomanes 4; s €80-105, d €92-118; ☑ ☑ ☑; (M) Ópera) The first of a new chain of ultramodern hotels, Mario's offers sleek décor and futuristic touches like purple fluorescent lights above the bed.

TOP END

Hotel Meninas Madrid (Map p710; ☎ 91 541 28 05; www.hotelméninas.com; Calle de Campomanes 7; s €93-160, d €93-185; ☑ ☑ ☑; (M) Ópera) A refurbished 19th-century mansion, the Meninas combines old-world comfort with modern, clean-lined style.

Sol, Huertas & Atocha

BUDGET

Hostal-Residencia Fernandez (Map pp706-7; ☎ /fax 91 530 81 11; Calle Sánchez Bustillo 3; s/d/tr €35/45/60; ☑ ☑; (M) Atocha) Sitting on a sunny plaza across from the Reina Sofía, this quiet place offers a great deal. Rooms are bright, with wrought-iron beds, colourful décor and decent-sized bathrooms.

Hostal Martín (Map p710; ☎ 91 429 95 79; www.hostalmartin.com; Calle de Atocha 43; s €35-39, d €44-49, tr €57-64; ☑ ☑ ☑; (M) Antón Martín) The decoration is a tad old-fashioned, but this is a bright and clean place to lay your head. Free wi-fi and nice bathrooms.

Hostal Aguilar (Map p710; ☎ 91 429 59 26; www.hostalaguilar.com; 2nd fl, Carrera de San Jerónimo 32; s/d/tr/q €37/49/66/80; ☑ ☑ ☑; (M) Sol) Kitschy but cute, Aguilar offers spacious, cheerful rooms. Ask for one that's been recently refurbished, such as large room 101.

Hostal Sardinero (Map p710; ☎ 91 429 57 56; fax 91 429 41 12; 3rd fl, Calle del Prado 16; s/d €47/59; ☑ ☑; (M) Sol) A dignified sort of place, the Sardinero boasts small balconies, high ceilings, wood floors and well-equipped bathrooms.

MIDRANGE

Hostal Tijal II (Map p710; ☎ 91 360 46 28; www.hostaltijal.com; Calle de la Cruz 26; s/d/tr €50/66/77; ☑ ☑; (M) Sol) Totally re-done a few years back, this sleek *hostal* feels like a three-star hotel, with cool blonde-wood furnishings, key cards and attractive coordinating décor.

Hotel Mora (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 420 15 69; www.hotelmora.com; Paseo del Prado 32; s/d €57/75; ☑ ☑; (M) Atocha) Near the Prado, this simple hotel is good value, with unfussy but tidy rooms, some with a view of the botanical gardens.

Hotel Miao (Map p710; ☎ 91 369 71 20; www.hotelmiao.com; Calle de Príncipe 26; s/d incl breakfast €75/85; ☑ ☑; (M) Sol) For style, this boutique hotel overlooking the Plaza de Santa Ana can't be beaten, but light sleepers beware the noise from revellers below.

TOP END

Catalonia Moratín (Map p710; ☎ 91 369 71 71; www.hoteles-catalonia.es; Calle de Atocha 23; r €126-204; ☑ ☑ ☑; (M) Antón Martín) The spacious, comfortable rooms here are pretty standard, but the 18th-century entryway, interior patio and lobby, which has a gorgeous spiral staircase, provide an extra dose of charm.

Malasaña & Chueca

BUDGET

Olé International Hostel (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 446 51 65; www.olehostel.com; 1st fl, Calle Manuela Malasaña 23; dm €16; ☑; (M) Tribunal or Bilbao) Bright, friendly and with several hang-out areas, this is a good place to meet people. Rooms are a squeeze though, and bathrooms leave something to be desired. Free lockers with your own lock are provided.

MIDRANGE

Hostal Sil & Serranos (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 448 89 72; www.silserranos.com; Calle Fuencarral 95; s €45-57, d €57-70, tr €72-84, q €84-96; (M) Tribunal) Squeaky clean

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hostal Adriano (Map p710; ☎ 91 521 13 39; www.hostaladriano.com; 4th fl, Calle de la Cruz 26; s €45-49, d €58-65; ☑ ☑; (M) Sol) Absolutely fabulous. The flat-screen TV and purple walls at the entrance set the tone for Madrid's most stylish *hostal*. Rooms couldn't be lovelier: each one is individually decorated with fluffy duvets, quirky furnishings, fun colour schemes and great bathrooms.

and oozing with charm, this family-owned *hostal* is great value. For extra space and a pretty view, ask for room 318.

Hostal La Zona (Map p710; ☎ 91 521 99 04; www.hostallazona.com; 1st fl, Calle de Valverde 7; incl breakfast s €50, d €55-65; (M) Gran Vía) Here you'll find small, stylish rooms, lots of light and a primarily gay clientele. There's a good breakfast buffet and free internet access for those who bring their own laptop.

Hotel San Lorenzo (Map p710; ☎ 91 521 30 57; www.hotel-sanlorenzo.com; Calle de Clavel 8; s/d/tr €52/65/99; ☑ ☑; (M) Gran Vía) A quaint spot in a great location, rooms at San Lorenzo are small but charming; some include original decorative elements from this 19th-century building. There's free internet access, if you provide the laptop.

Beyond the Centre

Husa Chamartín (☎ 91 334 49 00; www.hotelchamartin.com; Calle Augustin de Foxá; r €73-203; ☑ ☑ ☑; (M) Chamartín) There's not much personality here, but this comfortable business-style hotel is a great choice if you get in to Chamartín on a late train.

High Tech Madrid Aeropuerto (☎ 91 564 59 06; www.hthoteles.com; Calle Galeón 25; r €80-150; ☑ ☑ ☑ ☑; (M) Aeropuerto) With a free shuttle service to and from the airport, this stylish place can be a lifesaver for those with an early or late flight. The outdoor pool is a nice perk.

EATING

Trendy fusion restaurants, ethnic eateries serving fare from the four corners of the globe, delicious regional specialities from all over Spain... In Madrid these days, it's possible to find just about any kind of cuisine. The city's biggest claim to fame food-wise is its traditional eateries: the chaotic

tapas bars of La Latina, the cavelike taverns around 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).

Expect a meal in a budget restaurant to cost €20 or less, while a meal in a midrange restaurant will run from €20 to €40, and a meal in a top-end restaurant will cost more than €40.

Los Austrias & Centro

Museo del Jamón (Map p710; ☎ 91 542 26 32; Plaza Mayor 18; mains €3-15; **M** Sol) Of the many bars on Plaza Mayor, this Spanish cured ham chain is one where you can eat pretty well without paying too dearly. It's good for breakfast sandwiches, and there are other outlets throughout the city.

El Zagal (Map p710; ☎ 91 542 05 57; Calle Trujillos 7; mains €6-14, menú €12; **M** Callao) This family-run good-value restaurant, with its varied options of tasty Castilian fare, is popular with local office workers.

La Gloria de Montera (Map p710; ☎ 91 523 44 07; Calle del Caballero de Gracia 10; mains €7-12; **M** Gran Vía) Minimalist style, tasty Mediterranean dishes and great prices mean that you'll

probably have to wait in line to eat here. But it's worth it.

Siam (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 559 83 15; Calle San Bernardino 6; mains €7.50-12; **M** Plaza de España) Though owned by an American, Siam has a popular following among lovers of authentic Thai cuisine. Great for vegetarians.

Sobrin de Botín (Map p710; ☎ 91 366 42 17; Calle de los Cuchilleros 17; mains €10-27; ☒; **M** Sol) Reputedly opened in 1725, this is the oldest restaurant in Madrid and has all the old-world charm to prove it. The place is famous for its roast suckling pig.

Sol, Huertas & Atocha

La Finca de Susana (Map p710; ☎ 91 369 35 57; Calle de Arlabán 4; mains €6-12; **M** Sevilla) A well-priced mix of Spanish and international fare has made this an extremely popular choice with locals and tourists alike. You'll probably have to wait a while to eat.

La Trucha (Calle de Manuel Fernández y González (Map p710; ☎ 91 429 58 33; Calle de Manuel Fernández y González 3; mains €6-15, menú €12; **M** Sevilla); Calle Núñez de Arce (Map p710; ☎ 91 532 08 82; Calle Núñez de Arce 6; mains €6-15; ☒ Tue-Sun; **M** Sevilla) An old standard, 'The Trout' serves a broad range of tapas and affordable meat and fish plates.

Casa Alberto (Map p710; ☎ 91 429 93 56; www.casaalberto.es; Calle de las Huertas 18; mains €12-15;

M Antón Martín) Old-timey Casa Alberto has been serving traditional fare and *vermut* (vermouth) since 1827, and stepping through the doors is like stepping back in time.

Lhardy (Map p710; ☎ 91 522 22 07; Carrera de San Jerónimo 8; mains €15-25; **M** Sevilla) In business since 1839, this elegant spot is as beloved as La Trucha, but more upscale.

La Latina & Lavapiés

This area is best known for its tapas bars. See opposite for more.

Casa Lucio (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 365 32 52; Calle Cava Baja 35; mains €11-21; **M** La Latina) Traditional and dignified, Casa Lucio is famous for its *huevos rotos*, fried eggs served runny over potatoes.

Malasaña & Chueca

These are the areas to come to 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 p710; ☎ 91 522 00 09; Calle de San Marcos 37; mains €4-8; **M** Chueca) Great for a quick bite, Diurno's takeaway options include several different salads and tasty sandwiches. This all-in-one spot is also a popular café and a place to rent movies.

Bazaar (Map p710; ☎ 91 523 39 05; Calle de la Libertad 21; mains €6-9; **M** Chueca) An airy, Zen-inspired dining room sets the tone at Bazaar, a restaurant known for its salads and international flair.

Maison Blanche (Map p710; ☎ 91 521 53 08; Calle Piamonte 10; mains €7-11; **M** Chueca) A gourmet boutique and small café-style restaurant, the 'White House' has a French-inspired menu and all-white décor.

La Musa (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 448 75 58; Calle Manuela Malasaña 18; mains €8-12; **M** Bilbao) Creative tapas, salads and inventive Mediterranean-style cuisine are the staples at this trendy restaurant and bar. It's very popular with the student crowd.

La Isla del Tesoro (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 593 14 40; Calle Manuela Malasaña 3; mains €8-12; **M** Bilbao) Don't let the kitschy *Treasure Island* décor put you off; La Isla's internationally inspired vegetarian menu is a joy for veggie lovers. Great wine list.

Wokafé (Map p710; ☎ 91 522 90 69; Calle de las Infantas 44; mains €8-15; ☒ closed Sun; **M** Sevilla) Noo-

dle bowls, 'woks' and other Western-styled Chinese fare is served up with style at this trendy place.

Nina (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 591 0046; Calle Manuela Malasaña 10; mains €9-13; **M** Bilbao) A New York-loft style restaurant owned by an expat named Nina, this eatery runs the gamut from salads to pasta and burgers, and does a mean weekend brunch.

Salamanca & Ventas

El Pescador (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 402 12 90; Calle de José Ortega y Gasset 75; mains €12-18; ☒ closed Sun; **M** Lista) One of the city's best places for fresh Galician shellfish and seafood, the classy 'Fisherman' is worth a splurge.

Mumbai Masala (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 435 71 94; Calle Recoletos 14; mains €18-30; **M** Recoletos) The delicious Indian fare served here has made the refined Mumbai Masala a trendy place. Come midweek for the set-price lunch menu; it's great value and far cheaper than the dinner prices.

DRINKING

Bars, whether they be quaint cafés, artsy coffee houses or late-night drinking holes, abound in Madrid. This is a city that lives life outside on the streets and plazas, and bar hopping is a pastime enjoyed by young and old alike. Locals rarely stay in one bar for long, preferring to skip from bar to bar, ordering just a drink or two then moving on.

If you're looking for a traditional bar, head to the Huertas district or to the bars around 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.

The night-time crowd starts showing up by 8pm for predinner drinks. The mood really gets rolling around midnight, and the bars all close by about 3am on weekends, 2am on weekdays.

Bars

LOS AUSTRIAS & CENTRO

Café del Nuncio (Map p710; ☎ 91 366 09 06; Calle Segoviana 9; **M** La Latina) Lace curtains and red-wood paneling set the tone at this bustling bar. In summer, the outdoor terrace is divine.

Museo Chicote (Map p710; ☎ 91 532 67 37; Gran Vía 12; ☒ closed Sun; **M** Gran Vía) A city classic

TOP TAPAS

The very 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 €2 for something simple, €4 to €6 for an elaborate tapas, or €12 and up for something really exquisite, like a plate of Bellota ham.

El Tigre (Map p710; Calle de las Infantas 30; **M** 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.

El Schotis (Map p710; ☎ 91 365 3239; Calle Cava Baja 11; **M** La Latina) This old-fashioned bar gives you a free tapa when you order a glass of beer or wine (€1.50).

Taberna de Dolores (Map p710; ☎ 91 433 29 43; Plaza de Jesús 4; **M** Sevilla) Here since 1908, this delightful little bar smothered in tiles has beer and wine flowing freely at just €1.50 a glass.

Lamiak (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 365 52 12; Calle Cava Baja 42; **M** La Latina) A favourite with students, this is an inexpensive spot for typical-style tapas and drinks.

Juana la Loca (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 364 05 25; Plaza Puerta de Moros 4; **M** La Latina) If you can, nab a table or a bar spot at this trendy restaurant and tapas bar in La Latina, where elaborate and creative tapas are served to a mixed crowd.

Bar Bardemcilla (Map p710; ☎ 91 521 42 56; Calle de Augusto Figueroa 47; ☒ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, lunch Sat; **M** Chueca) Owned by the renowned Bardem family of actors (Javier is famed for his roles in *Mar Adentro* and *Before Night Falls*), this upscale tapas bar is prime celebrity-spotting ground. Full meals are served too.

popular with socialites and film stars, the Museo Chicote has a lounge atmosphere late at night and a stream of famous faces all day.

LA LATINA & LAVAPIÉS

La Bodeguita del Medio (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 578 47 46; Calle de Alcalá 77; **M** Retiro) Offering great mojitos (lime, mint and rum cocktail) and groovable salsa, this is a little taste of Cuba in Spain.

El Viajero (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 366 90 64; Plaza de la Cebada 11; **M** 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 p710; ☎ 91 360 00 89; www.ducados-café.com; Plaza de Canalejas 3; **M** Sevilla) At night the otherwise drab basement of this *cafetería* (café) is transformed into a popular bar and dance spot. It draws lots of students and travellers, and is a good place to start the night.

Cervecería Alemana (Map p710; ☎ 91 429 70 33; Plaza de Santa Ana 6; ☎ closed Tue & Aug; **M** Sevilla) A classic and classy watering hole, this place is famous for its cold, frothy beers and delicious tapas. It was one of Hemingway's haunts.

Viva Madrid (Map p710; ☎ 91 429 36 40; www.barvivamadrid.com; Calle de Manuel Fernández y González 7; **M** Sevilla or Sol) A landmark smothered in beautiful coloured tiles, Viva Madrid does tapas earlier in the evening and drinks late into the night.

Glass Bar (Map p710; ☎ 91 787 77 70; Carrera de San Jerónimo 34; **M** Sevilla) Madrid's trendiest nightspot (at least for now), the Hotel Urban's Glass Bar is a place to see and be seen, so dress the part. On summer nights, head up to the terrace for cocktails overlooking the city.

MALASAÑA & CHUECA

Areia (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 310 03 07; www.areiachillout.com; Calle de Hortaleza 92; **M** Alonso Martínez) With its wide, bedlike couches and an Arabian-themed décor, at Areia you'll want to simply chill out and stay awhile.

Café Pepe Botella (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 522 43 09; Calle San Andrés 12; **M** Bilbao or Tribunal) The cosy velvet benches and marble-topped tables

give 'Joe Bottle' a retro feel. It's best known for its sherry.

Molly Malone's (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 594 12 01; Calle Manuela Malasaña 11; **M** Bilbao) Dark wood paneling, Guinness on tap, low lights, friendly regulars...yep, it's everything you'd expect from an Irish pub.

Upperware (Map pp706-7; Corredera Alta de San Pablo 26; **M** Tribunal) Unbelievably kitschy, 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.

SALAMANCA & VENTAS

Bisú (☎ 91 447 52 08; Calle José Abascal 8; **M** Gregorio Marañón) Bisú's minimal style and its variety of techno and pop music draws a mixed crowd.

Serrano 41 (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 578 1865; Calle de Serrano 41; **M** Serrano) A stylish, upscale crowd frequents this bar near the Serrano metro station. Come in summer to hang out on the fabulous terrace bar.

Cafés

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

Café de Oriente (Map p710; ☎ 91 547 15 64; Plaza Oriente 2; **M** Ópera) Sip coffee inside this lush modernist-styled café, or sit outside to nibble on ice cream or tapas as you admire the view of the Palacio Real. Light lunch fare is served too (mains from €7.50 to €11).

Círculo de Bellas Artes (Map p710; ☎ 91 360 54 00; Calle Marqués de Casa Riera 2; admission €1; **M** Banco de España) You're charged €1 for the privilege of sipping your tea in this gorgeous *belle époque* café, but it's worth it.

J+J Books & Coffee (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 521 85 76; Calle Espíritu Santo 47; **M** Noviciado) An English bookshop and friendly café, J+J hosts events all week long and is popular with students and expats. It's a great place to meet people.

Chocolatería de San Ginés (Map p710; ☎ 91 365 65 46; Pasadizo San Ginés 5; **M** Sol or Ópera) Join the sugar-searching throngs who end the night at this mythic bar (it doesn't close until 7am), famous for its freshly fried *churros* (fried sticks of dough) and syrupy hot chocolate.

Also recommended:

Mamá Inés (Map p710; ☎ 91 523 23 33; www.mamaines.com; Calle de Hortaleza 22; **M** Chueca)

Popular with gay men, this is a meeting point and a great spot for coffee.

Café Manuela (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 531 70 37; Calle San Vicente Ferrer 29; **M** Noviciado) This cosy, old-timey café offers board games and great cocktails.

Café Comercial (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 521 56 55; Glorieta de Bilbao 7; **M** Bilbao) The faded elegance of this classic café appeals to intellectuals and the artsy crowd.

Café de Ruíz (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 446 12 32; Calle Ruíz 11; **M** Bilbao) Marble tables and velvet-covered seats give this romantic spot the air of a 1930s movie.

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. The best gay guide is *Shanguide*, which you can pick up free in bars around town.

Nightclubs

Madrid is a great city 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. At most places, dancing starts at around 1am and lasts until day-break. Come Thursday through Saturday for the best atmosphere.

El Sol (Map p710; ☎ 91 532 64 90; Calle de los Jardines 3; ☎ closed Sun & Mon; **M** 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 p710; ☎ 91 526 60 69; Calle del Arenal 9; **M** Sol) Special international student nights and other theme nights bring the 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 p710; ☎ 91 366 37 33; www.joy-eslava.com; Calle del Arenal 11; **M** Sol or Ópera) Housed in a 19th-century neoclassical theatre, Joy hosts lots of theme parties and student nights. It's a megaclub, but can still be a good place to meet people.

El Son (Map pp706-7; ☎ 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 Cuban music concerts.

Kapital (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 420 29 06; Calle de Atocha 125; **M** Atocha) A macro club boasting

up to seven different dance floors (though they're rarely all open), this is the spot for the indecisive crowd.

Gabana 1800 (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 576 06 86; Calle de Velázquez 6; **M** Retiro) Catering to a slightly older crowd, the sophisticated Gabana 1800 is more a place for hanging out than really grooving.

Cinemas

Several movie theatres are huddled around Gran Vía and Calle de la Princesa.

Cine Doré (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 549 00 11; Calle Santa Isabel 3; **M** Antón Martín) The National Film Library offers fantastic classic and vanguard films for €1.50 a show at Cine Doré. Buy tickets in advance.

For a selection of original-version (international films shown with subtitles) flicks in this area, head to **Princesa** (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 541 41 00; Calle de la Princesa 3; **M** Plaza de España) or **Alphaville** (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 559 38 36; Calle Martín de los Heros 14; **M** Plaza de España).

Gay & Lesbian Venues

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

Black & White (Map p710; ☎ 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 p710; ☎ 91 522 09 49; Calle de Barbieri 7; **M** Chueca) While not the trendiest spot in the neighbourhood, you'll always have a good time at this classic gay dance club.

Café Acuarela (Map p710; ☎ 91 522 21 43; Calle de Gravina 10; **M** Chueca) For something low-key, head to this quiet bar.

Theatre

Madrid has a lively cultural scene, with concerts and shows taking place throughout the city.

Teatro Albéniz (Map p710; ☎ 91 531 83 11; Calle de la Paz 11; **M** Sol) Staging both commercial and vanguard drama, this is just one of Madrid's quality theatres. For more listings, check out *Guía del Ocio* or local newspapers.

Teatro Real (Map p710; ☎ 91 516 06 06; www.teatro-real.com; Plaza de Isabel II; **M** Ópera) This is Madrid's opulent opera house, and the city's grandest stage. Here you can see opera, dance or theatre, depending on the offerings.

It's also open for tours (adult/student €4/2) between 10.30am and 1pm Monday and Wednesday to Friday and 11am to 1.30pm Saturday and Sunday.

Teatro de la Zarzuela (Map p710; ☎ 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.

Sport

Get tickets to football matches and bullfights from box offices or through agents such as **Localidades Galicia** (Map p710; ☎ 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).

FOOTBALL

Madrid's three major football clubs and accompanying delirious fans are a guarantee that football fever runs high in the city.

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) The mythic Real Madrid plays at this stadium. Fans can visit the stadium and take an interesting tour through the presidential box, dressing room and field.

Estadio Vicente Calderón (☎ 91 366 47 07; www.at-madrid.com; Calle Virgen del Puerto; **M** Pirámides) The also celebrated Atlético de Madrid, whose fans are famed as being some of the country's most devoted, plays at the Estadio Vicente Calderón.

Though it's no match for these first-division teams, the Rayo Vallecano also plays in the city.

BULLFIGHTING

Plaza de Toros Las Ventas (☎ 90 215 00 25; www.las-ventas.com; Calle de Alcalá 237; **M** Ventas) Some of Spain's top matadors (bullfighters) swing their capes in Plaza de Toros Las 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, Localidades Galicia (above) or from official ticket agents along Calle Victoria, leading up to the plaza.

Live Music

FLAMENCO

Many of flamenco's top names perform in Madrid, making it an excellent place to see

interpretations of this Andalusian art. The more 'serious' shows are usually set up in a dinner/theatre style and are aimed at tourists. But many smaller bars also host once-weekly flamenco concerts or shows.

Casa Patas (Map p710; ☎ 91 369 04 96; www.casapatas.com; Calle de Cañizares 10; admission about €35; ☎ shows 10.30pm Mon-Thu, 9pm & midnight Fri & Sat, closed Sun; **M** Antón Martín) One of the best *tablaos* in the city, this is a great place to see passionate dancing, though it's one of the pricier options.

Las Tablas (Map p710; ☎ 91 542 05 20; Plaza de España 9; admission €18; ☎ show 10.30pm; **M** Plaza de España) Less established (but cheaper) than other *tablaos*, this intimate spot is nevertheless a great place to see a variety of flamenco styles.

Also recommended:

Bar & Co (Map p710; ☎ 91 521 24 47; Calle del Barco 34; admission €7; ☎ 9.45pm Thu; **M** Tribunal) Thursday nights only, catch authentic flamenco at this intimate bar. Jazz, rock and other styles are played other nights.

Cardamomo (Map p710; ☎ 91 369 07 57; Calle de Echegaray 15; **M** Sevilla) Wednesday night is the best night for live flamenco at this tiny and very authentic bar.

JAZZ

Café Central (Map p710; ☎ 91 369 41 43; www.cafecentralmadrid.com; Plaza del Ángel 10; admission from €12; ☎ show 10pm; **M** Antón Martín) This Art Deco bar is worth a visit on its own, but the live shows, which range from classic jazz to Latin, fusion or tango-style, are what has made it one of the most popular bars in the city.

Popular (Map p710; ☎ 91 429 84 07; www.popularart.es; Calle de las Huertas 22; admission free; ☎ show 11pm; **M** Antón Martín or Sol) Get here early if you want a seat because this smoky, atmospheric jazz bar is always packed with fans yearning for some soothing live jazz.

Bogui Jazz (Map p710; ☎ 91 521 15 68; www.boguijazz.com; Calle de Barquillo 29; ☎ shows 10.30pm & midnight; **M** Chueca) With concert prices at just €6, this is a good bet for a low-key night of jazz.

ROCK & OTHER

Sala Caracol (Map p710; ☎ 91 527 35 94; www.salacacola.com; Calle de Bernardino Obregón 18; **M** Embajadores) Though mainly rock bands (Spanish and international) take the stage here, the line-up at the 'Snail Room' is never predictable.

Galileo Galilei (☎ 91 534 75 57; www.salagalileo.galilei.com; Calle Galileo 100; ☎; **M** Islas Filipinas) A

classic stage just north of Argüelles, this place stages everything from comedy acts to magic shows, though its strength is up-and-coming bands.

Oba-Oba (Map p710; Calle de Jacometrezo 4; **M** Santo Domingo or Callao) Right off the Plaza de Santo Domingo, this Brazilian hot spot stages great dance music and is packed with Brazilians.

La Riviera (Map p710; ☎ 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.

SHOPPING

It would be impossible to list all the great shops in Madrid in this limited space. Whether you're in search of designer labels, cheap knock-offs, fabulous shoes, tempting gourmet fare or traditional Spanish items like guitars and bullfighting gear, you'll find it somewhere in the city.

For artisan goods and typically Spanish items, explore the maze of streets in Hueras 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 unusual Madrileño-flavoured boutiques.

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

The glitziest shopping district is Salamanca, where all the designer labels show off for drooling window shoppers. This is also the district to find top art, antique and furniture galleries. Good places to go window shopping include Calle de Serrano, Calle de José Ortega y Gasset, Calle de Lagasca, Calle de Jorge Juan and the surrounding streets.

Keep an eye out for the following unique or interesting stores.

Flamenco World (Map p710; ☎ 91 360 08 65; www.flamenco-world.com; Calle de las Huertas 62; **M** Retiro) The name says it all – flamenco dresses, shoes, CDs, how-to DVDs, books and more.

José Ramírez (Map p710; ☎ 91 531 42 29; Calle de la Paz 8; **M** Sol) Find handmade guitars at this

family-run shop. There's a small museum of old guitars out the back.

Justo Algaba (Map p710; ☎ 91 523 35 95; Calle de la Paz 4; **M** Sol) This is the place to buy authentic bullfighters' suits; it's got everything from capes to those sexy pink tights.

Gil (Map p710; ☎ 91 521 25 49; Carrera de San Jerónimo 2; **M** Sevilla) Spanish shawls and veils are the speciality at this historic shop.

Mercado de Fuencarral (Map p710; ☎ 91 521 59 85; Calle de Fuencarral 45; **M** Chueca) Clubbers should head to this small mall, where at least half the clothes on sale have silver studs or leather accents.

El Corte Inglés (Map p710; ☎ 90 222 44 11; Calle de Preciados 1, 2, 3 & 9; **M** Sol) Spain's enormous department store has branches all over the city and sells everything from food and furniture to clothes, appliances and toiletries. It's truly one-stop shopping.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Madrid's international **Barajas Airport** (MAD; ☎ 90 235 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** (☎ 90 240 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 Transport (p877) for more information.

Bus

Though there are several bus stations dotted around the city, most out-of-town buses use **Estación Sur** (☎ 91 468 42 00; www.estaciondeautobuses.com; Calle de Méndez Álvaro; **M** Méndez Álvaro). The largest bus company here is **Alsa** (☎ 90 242 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).

Other important bus companies include **Auto Res** (☎ 90 202 09 99, 91 551 72 00; www.auto-res.net) and **Continental Auto** (☎ 91 745 63 00; www.continental-auto.net).

Car & Motorcycle

If you arrive by car, be prepared to face gridlocked traffic. The city is surrounded by three ring roads, the M-30, M-40 and

M-50. You'll likely be herded onto one of these, which in turn will give you access to the city centre.

Car rental companies abound in Madrid; most have offices both at the airport and in town.

Train

Renfe (☎ 90 224 02 02; www.renfe.es) train services connect Madrid with just about every other place throughout Spain. There are two main train stations: Atocha, southeast of the city centre, and Chamartín, to the north. Both long-distance and *cercanías* (regional trains) trains pass through these two stations. For ticket information, visit the Renfe offices inside the stations or check out the website.

Major destinations include Barcelona (€63, five hours, seven daily), Valencia (€40, 3½ hours, 13 daily) and Zaragoza (€40, two hours, 18 daily).

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Normally, the metro (line No 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. At the time of writing, however, the line was closed due to construction work and the final leg of the airport run was made by bus.

A taxi ride to the centre should cost about €25 and the trip takes around 20 minutes.

Car & Motorcycle

Public transport in Madrid is excellent, so having a car or motorcycle is not necessary (and is usually a big headache!). If you do have a car, be prepared to face plenty of traffic and high parking prices. Public parking is available in the city centre; a big white 'P' on a blue sign denotes a car park.

Driving around Plaza Mayor and the centre is especially challenging, as several roads dive underground and following them can be tricky.

Public Transport

Madrid's 227km of **metro** (☎ 90 244 44 03; 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, 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.

Find out more about public transport by calling ☎ 012 or looking at www.ctm-madrid.es.

Taxi

Madrid's taxis are inexpensive by European standards. They're handy late at night, although in peak hour it's quicker to walk or get the metro. The flag fall is €1.75, after

which you are charged by the kilometre (€0.85 to €1.05). You'll be charged a supplement for airport runs or trips originating at bus or train stations.

To call a taxi from anywhere in the city, contact **Tele-Taxi** (☎ 91 371 21 31; www.tele-taxi.es).

AROUND MADRID

Get out of the city buzz and explore Comunidad de Madrid, the province surrounding the capital. Home to some of Spain's finest royal palaces and gardens, the Comunidad offers several easy day trips from the capital.

Good day trips include the royal palace complexes at **San Lorenzo de El Escorial** (☎ 91 890 59 03; www.sanlorenzoturismo.org; admission €4, EU citizens Wed free; ☹ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar, 10am-7pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep) and **Aranjuez** (☎ 91 892 43 32; www.aranjuez.com; admission €5; ☹ 10am-5.15pm Tue-Sat Oct-Mar, 10am-6.15pm Tue-Sat Apr-Sep), the traditional village of **Chinchón** (www.ciudadchinchon.com), and the university town (and birthplace of Miguel de Cervantes) **Alcalá de Henares** (www.turismoalcala.com). Also interesting is the **Valle de los Caídos** (☎ 91 890 13 98; www.patrimoniacional.es; Carretera de Guadarrama/El Escorial M-600; adult/child €5/2.50; ☹ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Mar), Franco's ostentatious civil war memorial. The basilica and monument are just 9km north of San Lorenzo de El Escorial.

CASTILLA Y LEÓN

The true heart of Spain, Castilla y León is littered with hilltop towns sporting magnificent Gothic cathedrals, monumental city walls and mouth-watering restaurants.

ÁVILA

pop 53,496

Its pretty old town huddled behind intact medieval walls, Ávila has a picture-postcard look and an open-museum feel. It's a perfect place to spend a day strolling narrow laneways and soaking up history. The city is known as the birthplace of Santa Teresa, a mystical writer and reformer of the Carmelite order.

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

Sights

Don't even *think* of leaving town without enjoying the walk along the top of Ávila's wonderfully preserved 12th-century **mural-las** (walls; ☎ 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 is open to the public, though it's divided into two sections broken up by the cathedral.

Embedded into the eastern city walls, the splendid **cathedral** (☎ 92 021 16 41; Plaza de la Catedral; admission €4; ☹ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 6pm Sat, noon-5pm Sun Nov-Mar, 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 7pm Sat, noon-6pm Sun Apr-Jun & Oct, 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 8pm Sat, noon-7pm Sun Jul-Sep) was the first Gothic-style church built in Spain. It boasts rich walnut choir stalls and a long, narrow central nave that makes the soaring ceilings seem all the more majestic.

Even more beloved by locals than the cathedral is 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), built in 1636 at the birthplace of 16th-century mystic and ascetic, Santa Teresa. It's home to relics, including a piece of the saint's ring finger, as well as a small museum about her life.

Sleeping

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. Though basic, the eight large rooms on offer are light and comfortable and the bathrooms are extremely clean.

Hostal Arco San Vicente (☎ 92 022 24 98; www.arcosanvicente.com; Calle López Núñez 6; s €32-43, d €54-64; (P)) This hotel near the Puerta de San Vicente offers good value. Rooms are clean and well appointed, but feature uncomfortable beds.

Hospedería La Sinagoga (☎ 92 035 23 21; www.lasinagoga.net; Calle Reyes Católicos 22; s €50-58, d €70-82; ☹ (P)) Occupying a 15th-century synagogue, this excellent midrange choice features quiet, comfortable and stylish rooms.

Eating & Drinking

Cafetería Hergós (☎ 92 021 33 70; Calle Don Geroni-mo 1) This bustling *cafetería* near the cathedral

MARKET WATCH

Madrid's street markets are great places to browse and, sometimes, to find a bargain. The most famous market is El Rastro, but others specialising in books, stamps or art are fun too.

El Rastro (Map pp706-7; 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 Plaza Cascorro and worms its way downhill. Watch your wallet.

La Cuesta de Moyano (Map pp706-7; Paseo del Prado or Cuesta de Moyano; ☹ 9.30am-dusk Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2pm Sat & Sun; (M) Atocha) Temporarily located along Paseo del Prado, this used-book market is a treasure trove of titles in Spanish and other languages.

Mercadillo Felipe II (Map pp706-7; Av Felipe II; ☹ 10am-9.30pm Mon-Fri, to 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.

Mercadillo de Filatelia y Numismática (Stamp & Coin Market; Map p710; Plaza Mayor; ☹ 8am-2pm Sun; (M) Sol) This classic stamp and coin market draws hobbyists from all over the city.

Mercado de Pintura (Art Market; Map p710; Plaza del Conde de Barajas; ☹ Sun 8am-2pm; (M) Sol) Browse the original works at this small art market near Plaza Mayor.

serves up enormous *bocadillos* (€3 to €4.50) as well as delicious pastries made onsite at its *pastelería* (cake shop) in Paseo de San Roque.

Restaurante Casa Patas (☎ 92 021 31 94; Calle San Millán 4; menú €10) Locals are fond of the cheap and tasty *raciones* served in the tiny downstairs bar in this eatery off Plaza de Santa Teresa, and they're always keen to sample the excellent lunchtime *menú* served in the old-fashioned upstairs *comedor* (dining room).

Reyes Católicos Restaurant (☎ 92 025 56 27; Calle Reyes Católicos 6; menú €17, mains €15-17) The sleek interior and sophisticated menu here are a cut above the local competition. Local specialities such as *chuletón de Ávila* (T-bone steak) are served with style.

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). It serves tasty *raciones* (€6.50 to €17.50) and top-quality house wine by the glass (€3).

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (☎ 92 025 65 05; Av de Madrid) is a five-minute walk northeast from the cathedral. **Larrea** (☎ 90 222 22 82) operates at least five bus services per day to Madrid's Estación Sur (€6.85, 1½ hours). There are four or more services per day to Salamanca (€5.15, 1½ hours) on **AutoRes** (☎ 91 559 89 55; www.auto-res.net) and at least two services per day to Segovia (€4, one hour) on **La Sepulvedana** (☎ 91 559 89 55; www.lasepulvedana.es).

From the **train station** (Paseo de la Estación), services go to Madrid-Chamartín (€7.75, up to two hours, 24 daily), León (€19, about three hours, three daily) and Salamanca (€7.75, 1½ hours, seven 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 and rich cultural life.

King Alfonso XI founded what was to become Spain's greatest university in 1218.

These days the university isn't considered to be one of Spain's most elite, but it still draws scholars from throughout Spain and beyond.

Information

Cyber Anvario (Calle la Latina 8; internet per hr €1.50;

☎ 10am-midnight Mon-Sat, 1-10pm Sun)

Cyberplace (Plaza Mayor 10; internet per hr €1;

☎ 11am-midnight Mon-Fri, noon-midnight Sat & Sun)

Municipal tourist office (☎ 90 230 20 02; informacion@turismodesalamanca.com; Plaza Mayor 32; ☎ 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)

Regional tourist office (Casa de las Conchas; ☎ 92 326 85 71; www.turismocastillayleon.com; Rúa Mayor; ☎ 9am-2pm & 5-8pm daily Sep-Jun, 9am-8pm Sun-Thu, to 9pm Fri & Sat Jul & Aug)

Sights & Activities

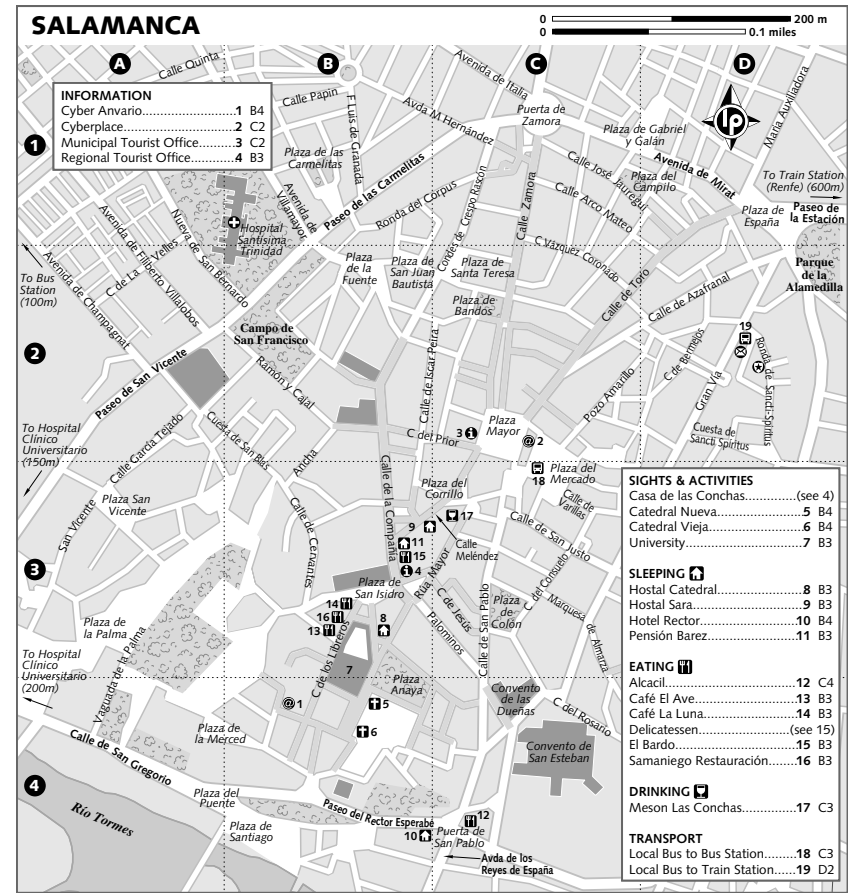
The harmonious **Plaza Mayor** was designed in 1755 by José Churriguera, founder of the architectural style that carries his name. Equally impressive is the exterior of the glorious **Casa de las Conchas** (House of Shells), a city symbol since it was built in the 15th century and now home to a tourist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

The **university** (☎ 92 329 44 00, ext 1150; Calle de los Libreros; adult/student & child €4/2, Mon morning free; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1pm & 4-6.30pm Sat, 10am-1pm Sun), with its ubiquitous presence, is worth a visit. You can visit the old classrooms, chapel, library and small museum.

Curiously, Salamanca is home to two cathedrals: the newer and larger cathedral was built beside the old Romanesque one 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

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.



1733, is a Gothic masterpiece that took 220 years to build. When inside, you can make your way to the **Catedral Vieja** (Old Cathedral; admission €3.50; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 4-5.30pm Oct-Mar, 10am-1.30pm & 4-7.30pm Apr-Sep), a 12th-century temple with a stunning altar and several noteworthy chapels.

Sleeping

Pensión Barez (☎ 92 321 74 95; 1st fl, Calle Meléndez 19; per person with shared bathroom €12) Near to being the cheapest beds in town, they're complemented by shared bathrooms so clean that they gleam. Rooms vary in size and some are musty, so ask to see a few before deciding. Be warned that the ones at the front can be very noisy.

Hostal Catedral (☎ 92 327 06 14; 1st fl, Rúa Mayor 46; s/d €30/45) Light and attractive rooms here feature impeccable white linen, comfortable beds, sparkling bathrooms and thick windows; some have cathedral views. Recommended.

Hostal Sara (☎ 92 328 11 40; www.hostalsara.org; Calle Meléndez 11; s €35-45, d €38-50; ☎ ☎) Two-star *hostales* rarely come with the level of comfort offered here. Light and airy rooms feature satellite TV, minibars and lovely bathrooms; some even have small, fully equipped kitchenettes. Front rooms are sensibly double-glazed.

Hotel Rector (☎ 92 321 84 82; www.hotelrector.com; Paseo del Rector Esperabé 10; s/d €89/112; ☎ ☎ ☎) Housed in a grand Art Nouveau building,

the Rector offers 13 supremely comfortable and quiet rooms, exemplary service and the best breakfast in Spain (€10).

Eating & Drinking

Café La Luna (Calle de los Libreros 4) Starting your day here with hot chocolate and *churros* will set you back only €2.

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

Café El Ave (☎ 92 326 45 11; Calle de los Libreros 24) A few doors away from Samaniego Restauración, this café offers similar-priced *menús* and *platos combinados*.

Delicatessen (☎ 92 328 03 09; Calle Meléndez 25; menú €10) The fitout of this popular place is nearly (but not quite) as glamorous as its bar staff. The youngish patrons tend to start out striking poses while lolling on the sleek furniture, but become less self-conscious after downing a few drinks and grazing on a wide range of tapas.

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, chatting with the gents propping up the bar or watching music videos.

Alcávil (☎ 92 328 05 90; Calle 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. The *berenjanas al gratin* (eggplant gratin) and cream-based soups are particularly delicious.

El Bardo (☎ 92 326 90 26; Calle de la Compañía 8; mains €9-13, menú €24) Offering rustic surroundings, a good wine list and a daily *menú* with meat and vegetarian options, it's no wonder El Bardo is perennially popular.

Getting There & Away

Salamanca's **bus station** (☎ 92 323 22 66) is about 1km northwest of Plaza Mayor (bus 4 from Plaza del Mercado near Plaza Mayor will take you there). **AutoRes** (☎ 91 559 89 55; www.auto-res.net) has services to Madrid (€16, 2½ to three hours, 13 daily), Segovia (€9.15, three hours, two daily) and Ávila (€5.15, 1½ hours, seven daily). **Dainco** (☎ 90 242 22 42; www.dainco.es) travels to Santiago de Compostela (€17.65 to €22.05, 6¼ hours, one daily) and **Alsa** (☎ 90 242 22 42;

www.alsa.es) goes to Bilbao (€17.65 to €22.05, six hours, one daily).

Trains travel between Salamanca and Madrid-Chamartín (€15.30, 2½ hours, seven daily) via Ávila (€7.75, one hour). There are also services to Bilbao (€27.10, 5½ hours, one daily). Bus 1 from the stop near the main post office on Gran Vía will take 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. Yes, the Roman aqueduct is majestic, the old town is atmospheric and the Alcázar is the stuff of which fairytales are made, but the sheer charm of the city's setting and the fabulous unexpectedness of its gourmet achievements are hard to put into words. You'll just have to experience it for yourself.

Information

Locutorio/Internet access (Calle de San Francisco; per hr €2; ☎ 10am-10pm)

Municipal tourist office (☎ 92 146 67 20; www.segoviaturismo.es; Plaza del Azoguejo 1; ☎ 10am-8pm)

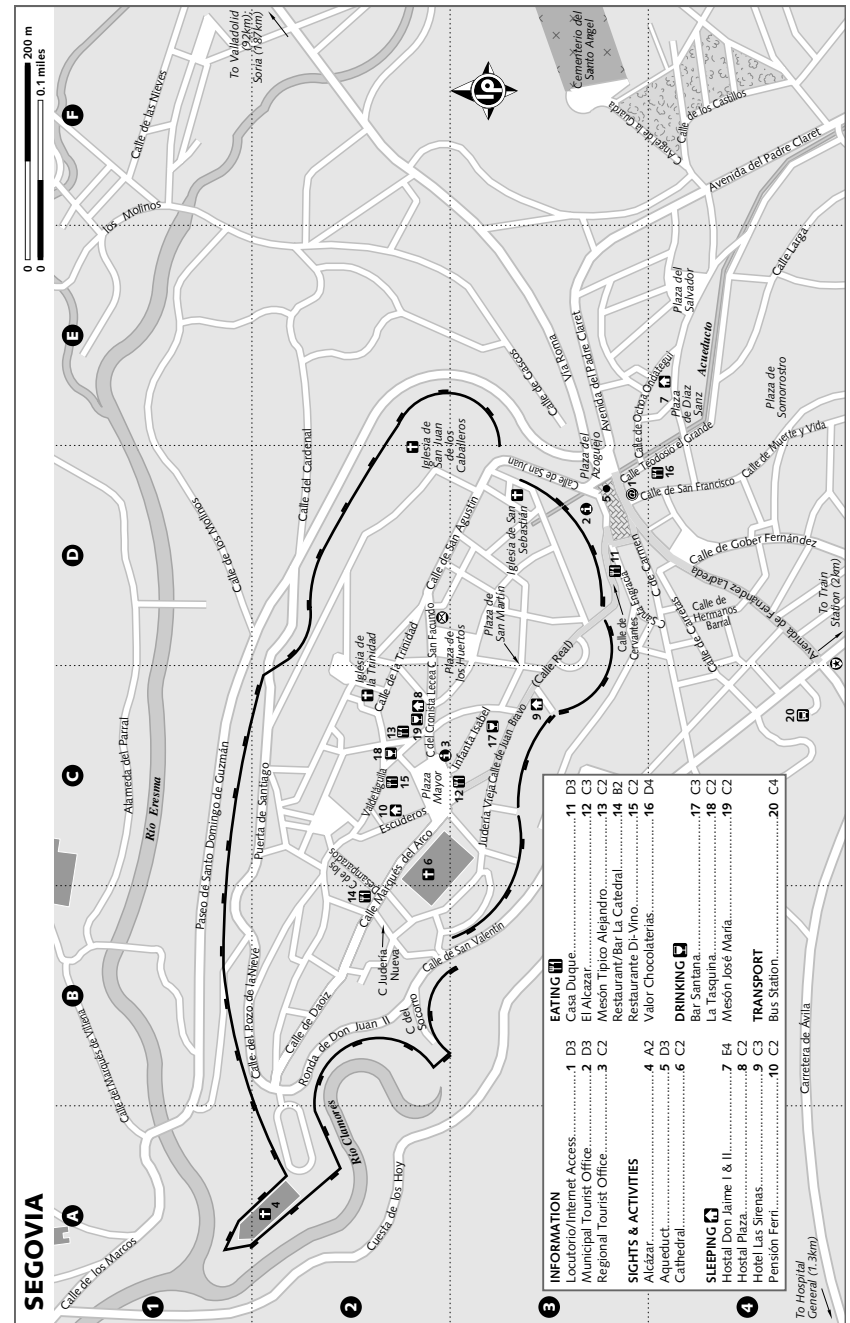
Regional tourist office (☎ 92 146 03 34; www.turismocastillayleon.com; Plaza Mayor 6; ☎ 9am-2pm & 5-8pm, closed btwn Christmas & New Year)

Sights

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

From here, the lively commercial streets Calle de Cervantes and Calle de Juan Bravo (together referred to as Calle Real) climb into the innards of Segovia. In the heart of town is the resplendent **cathedral** (☎ 92 146 22 05; Plaza de la Catedral; adult/child €2/free, free Sun morning; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Nov-Mar, to 6.30pm Apr-Oct), completed in 1577.

The fortified **Alcázar** (☎ 92 146 07 59; www.alcazaresegovia.com; Plaza Reina Victoria Eugenia; adult/student & child €3.50/2.50; ☎ 10am-6pm Oct-Mar, to 7pm Apr-Sep) is perched dramatically on the edge of Segovia. Roman foundations are buried somewhere underneath this splendour, but what we see today is a 13th-century



structure that burned down in 1862 and was subsequently rebuilt. Inside is a collection of armour and military gear, but even better are the ornate interiors of the reception rooms and the 360-degree views from the **Torre de Juan II** (admission €1.50; ☒ closed Tue).

Sleeping

Pensión Ferri (☎ 92 146 09 57; Calle Escuderos 10; s/d with shared bathroom €17/26) In a great position just off Plaza Mayor, the Ferri is the cheapest place to sleep in town. Its tiny rooms have uncomfortable beds, worn but clean linen and an ever-present scent of cigarette smoke. Bathrooms are basic but relatively clean.

Hostal Don Jaime I & II (☎ 92 144 47 87; hostaldonjaime@hotmail.com; Calle de Ochoa Ondátegui 8; s €25-32, d €38-43, with shared bathroom s €20-22, d €25-30; ☐ ☒) This excellent *hostal* in a residential area behind the aqueduct offers attractive, spacious rooms with satellite TV. Some rooms have small balconies onto the street, others look onto rear lightwells.

Hostal Plaza (☎ 92 146 03 03; www.hostal-plaza.com; Calle del Cronista Lecea 11; s/d €35/45, r with shared bathroom €32; ☐ ☒) This decent choice in the old town has small rooms with double-glazed windows and comfortable beds. Half have air-con and some have balconies onto the street.

Hotel Las Sirenas (☎ 92 146 26 63; www.hotel.sirenas.com; Calle de Juan Bravo 30; s €45-53, d €60-70; ☐ ☒ ☒) There's something quite endearing about this elegant but faded hotel. Rooms have parquet floors, comfortable beds and satellite TV; ask for one at the rear overlooking the hills.

Eating & Drinking

Valor Chocolaterías (Calle de Teodosio el Grande 8; ☒) 8am-12.30am; ☒) A cup of thick, ultrarich chocolate and a plate of *churros* served in this chichi café will set you back €2 for breakfast.

El Alcázar (Plaza Mayor; ☒) 10am-2.30pm & 4.30-8pm Mon-Fri) For a sweet treat during the day, visit this traditional *pastelería* opposite the cathedral. It sells Segovian specialities such as *rosquillas Segovianas* (a type of donut, €1.50).

Meson Típico Alejandro (☎ 92 146 00 09; Calle Cabrtería 6; menús €6-18) The cheapest *menú del día* in town is served up at this small place, but its legions of regulars often opt for more substantial and slightly more expensive *menús de la casa* (house menus). Enter down the cobbled lane off Calle del 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.

Casa Duque (☎ 92 146 24 87; Calle de Cervantes 12; mains €14-22) Segovia's oldest restaurant has been serving up sensational *cochinillo* since 1895.

Restaurante Di-Vino (☎ 92 146 16 50; Calle Valdeláguila 7; menú €25) The city's most stylish eatery is developing a national reputation for its innovative food and extensive wine list. It's worth splurging €40 to indulge in the *menú degustación*, which features six courses made with seasonal produce.

Mésón José María (☎ 92 146 02 72; Calle del Cronista Lecea 11) The most atmospheric tapas bar in town, this place has loads of standing room, a few tables and a choice of excellent wines by the glass.

La Tasquina (☎ 92 146 19 54; Calle Valdeláguila 3) Specialising in wine and *cava*, nearby chic Tasquina is also worth a visit.

Entertainment

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

Bar Santana (☎ 92 146 35 64; Calle Infanta Isabel 18; ☒) 10.30am-3am, to 4am Fri & Sat) This is one of the town's most popular nightspots; it attracts a mainly young crowd.

Getting There & Away

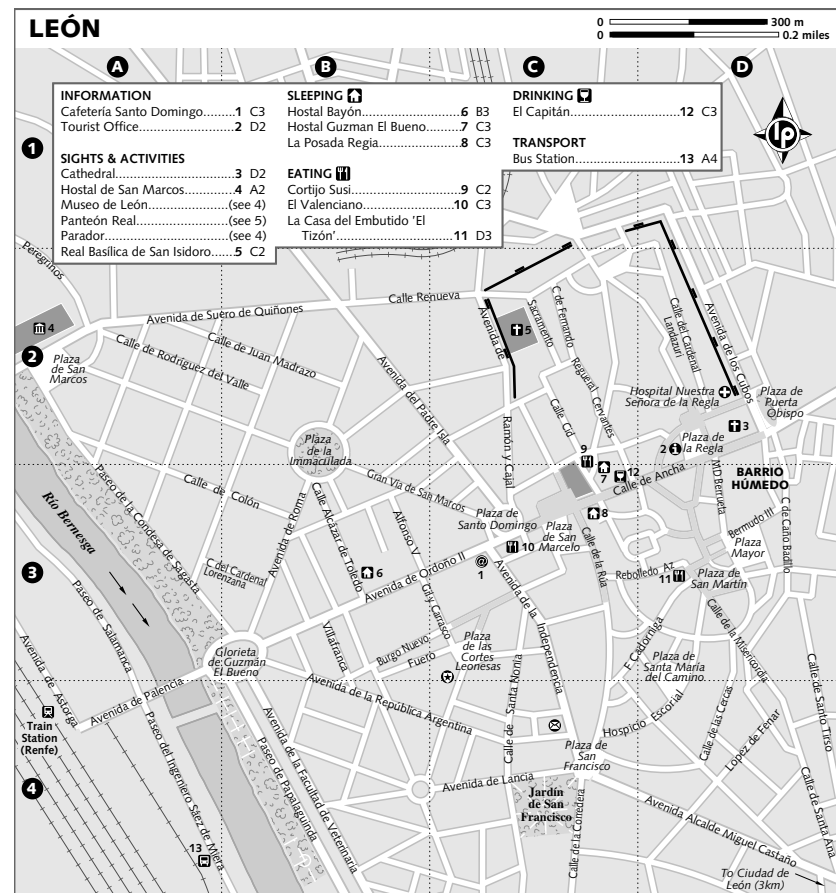
The **bus station** (☎ 92 142 77 07; Paseo Ezequiel González 12) is a 15-minute walk from the aqueduct. La Sepulvedana runs direct services between Segovia and Madrid's Paseo de la Florida bus station (€6.05, one hour, 22 daily) and also has services to Ávila (€4, one hour, five daily). AutoRes has services to Salamanca (€9.15, 2¾ 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 (and vice versa).

LEÓN

pop 136,952

León is the type of city that benefits from proper investigation. Its long boulevards, open squares and historic Barrio Húmedo



(Damp District) demand exploration, and its cathedral is one of the most magnificent in the whole of Europe.

The **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 de Ordoño II 3; per 45min €1; ☒) 8am-11pm Mon-Fri, 9am-11pm Sun).

Sights

León's best and best-known monument is its breathtaking 13th-century **cathedral** (☎ 98 787 57 70; www.catedraldeleon.org; ☒) 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). A marvel of Gothic

architecture, it has an extraordinarily intricate façade with a rose window, three richly sculptured doorways and stained-glass windows (with a surface of 1800 sq metres) that give the place 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) entered through the church's **cloister** (admission €1).

Nearby is the **Real Basílica de San Isidoro**, a simple Romanesque church that houses the **Panteón Real** (☎ 98 787 61 61; www.sanisidorodeleon.org; Plaza de San Isidoro 4; admission €3, free Thu afternoon; ☒) 10am-1.30pm & 4-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1.30pm Sun Sep-Jun, 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun Jul & Aug), where Leónese royalty lie buried beneath

a canopy of some of the finest frescoes in all of Spain.

Across town is the impressive **Hostal de San Marcos**, a former pilgrims' hospital that now houses a parador (luxurious state-owned hotel). The **Museo de León** (☎ 98 724 50 61; Plaza de San Marcos; adult/child €1.50/free, free Thu; ☎ 10am-2pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Sep-Jun, 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jul & Aug), which is also housed here, gives access to some parts of the building.

Sleeping

Hostal Bayón (☎ 98 723 14 46; 2nd fl, Calle Alcázar de Toledo 6; s/d €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 floors and satellite TV.

Hostal Guzman El Bueno (☎ 98 723 14 62; jabgostaguzman@hotmail.com; Calle López Castrillón 6; s €27-32, d €40-48) This is a bland but reasonably priced place off Calle de Ancha offering rooms with comfortable beds and small bathrooms.

La Posada Regia (☎ 98 721 31 73; www.regialeon.com; Calle Regidores 9-11; s/d incl breakfast €59/97; ☎ ☎) This 14th-century inn has lovely rooms, all of which are individually decorated and half of which have air-con. Stand out features are the attractive bathrooms and period furniture. Try for a room in the original building rather than the newly opened extension around the corner.

Eating & Drinking

The most popular lunch *menú* in town is served – bizarrely enough – at the train station's enormous *cafetería*. It costs €10.

El Valenciano (Plaza de Santo Domingo) Check out this place for utterly delicious *bocadillos grandes* (€3) and pastries (€1.50).

La Casa del Embutido 'El Tizón' (☎ 98 726 00 94; Calle Platerías 4; mains €11-18, *menús* €11.50-25.50; ☎ closed Sun dinner & Mon) This perennially jam-packed place has been serving drinks and tapas to satisfied customers since 1973 and shows no signs of its popularity wavering. It also serves *menús* in its restaurant.

Cortijo Susi (☎ 98 727 39 96; Calle López Castrillón 1; mains €12.50-16.50, *menú* €15) Forget stodgy and badly cooked meals featuring pig, pig and more pig, this mega-stylish addition to León's dining scene serves up a fabulous *menú* with a light and modern Mediterranean slant.

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

Getting There & Away

From the **bus station** (☎ 98 721 10 00; Paseo del Ingeniero Sáez de Miera), Alsa has services to Madrid (€37.05 to €65.10, at least 3½ hours, 12 daily), Burgos (€23.75, two to four hours, six daily) and Ávila (€28.70, 3½ hours, one daily). There are also two daily services to Salamanca (€12, three hours).

The **train station** (Av de Astorga) has 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 reassuringly solid and sophisticated. Its cultured inhabitants frequent its many bookshops and galleries and like nothing more than sauntering along its gracious riverside promenades. Visitors usually follow their lead.

Information

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

Municipal tourist office (☎ 94 728 88 74;

festejos@aytoburgos.es; Teatro Principal, Paseo Espolón 1; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-Jun, 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jul-Sep)

Olivetti (☎ 94 726 42 28; 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 **cathedral** (☎ 94 720 47 12; www.catedraldeburgos.es; Plaza de Santa Maria; 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

the Gothic jewel in Burgos' crown. On this site, a modest Romanesque church once stood, but today we see ornate spires piercing the skyline, each representing 84m of richly decorated fantasy. 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

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

Hotel Norte y Londres (☎ 94 726 41 25; www.hotelnorteylondres.com; Plaza Alonso Martínez 10; s €45-64, d €50-95; ☎) Its attractive old-fashioned décor, excellent location, comfortable rooms and high standards of service mean that the Norte y Londres is often full, so book ahead.

Eating

If you're after fast food, there are plenty of cheap eateries in the streets around Calle de la Paloma, including a number of kebab joints. The main entertainment strip is Calle Sombrerería off Plaza Mayor.

Café Espana (☎ 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 (€1.50) is excellent and the *bocadillos con jamon y queso* (rolls with ham and cheese, €1.50) are delicious.

Restaurante La Riojana (☎ 94 720 61 32; Calle Avellanos 10; *menú* or *plato del día* €7.50) The cheapest lunch *menú* 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, *menú* €13; ☎ closed Jan) One of the city's few good options for vegetarians, Prego serves good pizzas and a wide range of classic Italian dishes.

Tapelia (☎ 94 727 80 00; Plaza Rey San Fernando; *menú* €15) Specialising in Alicantan rice

dishes, this classy restaurant opposite the cathedral's ticket office serves absolutely delicious food in 'Iberian chic' surrounds. It's rare to see a *menú* of this quality for such a reasonable price and we highly recommend it.

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (☎ 94 728 88 55; Calle Miranda) is just across the river from the cathedral. **Continental-Auto** (☎ 90 233 04 00; www.continental-auto.es) travels to Madrid (€14.55 to €22, 2¼ to 3½ hours, 16 daily) and Bilbao (€10.95, two to four hours, 14 daily). Alsa travels between Burgos and León (€23.75, 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 Quijote and Sancho Panza, Castilla-La Mancha conjures up images of lonely windmills, medieval castles and bleak, treeless plains. The characters of Miguel de Cervantes provide the literary context, but the richly historic 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 Tajo River, it's crammed with monuments that attest to the waves of conquerors and communities – Roman, Visigoth, Jewish, Muslim and Christian – who have called it home during its turbulent history. There's no wonder it's one of the country's major tourist attractions.

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)

Regional tourist office (☎ 92 522 08 43; www.jccm.es; Puerta de Bisagra; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, to 3pm Sun)

TOLEDO

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Zococentro Convenience Store (☎ 92 522 03 00; Calle de la Sillería 14; internet per 20min €1; ☎ 10.30am-6pm) This store just off Plaza de Zocodover has a tourist information desk that is semifunded by the municipality, as well as one internet terminal.

Sights & Activities

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 stained-glass windows, tombs of kings and art by the likes of El Greco, Velázquez, Caravaggio, Raphael and Goya. You have to 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**

Capitular – which contain some of the finest art and artisanship.

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

In the southwestern part of the old city, the queues outside an otherwise unremarkable church, the **Iglesia de Santo Tomé** (☎ 92 525 60 98; Plaza del Conde; adult/student €2/1.50; ☎ 10am-5.45pm Oct-Jun, to 6.45pm Jul-Sep), betray the presence of El Greco's masterpiece *El Entierro del Conde de Orgaz* (The Burial of the Count of Orgaz).

The **Museo de El Greco** (☎ 92 522 44 05; Calle Samuel Levi; admission €2.50; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-Jun, 10am-2pm & 4-9pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jul-Sep), in Toledo's former Jewish quarter, contains the artist's famous *Vista y Plano de Toledo* (View and Map of Toledo), plus about 20 of his minor works.

The **Museo Sefardi** (☎ 92 522 36 65; Calle Samuel Levi; admission €2.50; ☎ 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**. Toledo's other synagogue, the nearby **Santa María La Blanca** (☎ 92 522 72 57; Calle de los Reyes Católicos 4; adult/student & child €2/1.50; ☎ 10am-5.45pm Oct-Mar, to 6.45pm Apr-Sep), dates back to the beginning of the 13th century.

A little further northwest is **San Juan de los Reyes** (☎ 92 522 38 02; Calle San Juan de los Reyes 2; admission €2; ☎ 10am-6pm Oct-Jun, to 7pm Jul-Sep), a Franciscan monastery and church founded by Fernando and Isabel.

The **Centro Cultural San Marcos** (☎ 92 522 16 16; www.clavesdetoledo.com; Calle Trinidad 7; admission €4; ☎ 10am-8pm Tue-Sat, 10.30am-2.30pm Sun), housed in the Iglesia de San Marco, is an excellent interpretative centre with 30 audiovisual displays exploring Toledo's fascinating history.

The **Alcázar** is closed for renovation and isn't expected to re-open until 2008.

Sleeping

Accommodation is often full, especially from Easter to September.

HI Albergue Juvenil Castillo de San Servando (☎ 92 522 16 76; albergueclm@jcm.es; dm under/over 30yr €9.50/12; (P) (M) (S)) 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, a 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; (X)) The seven small but charming rooms here feature polished floorboards and ceiling fans; some at the front have exposed beams and their own bathrooms. It's a clean, safe choice that is an absolute bargain at these rates.

La Posada de Zocodover (☎/fax 92 525 58 14; Calle Cordoneras 6; d €39; (S)) Seven rooms are

on offer in this old, narrow building. They feature timbered ceilings, pretty brass beds, satellite TV and clean bathrooms.

Hotel Santa Isabel (☎ 92 525 31 20; www.santa-isabel.com; Calle Santa Isabel 24; s €32-35, d €49-60; (P) (S)) Well located in a quiet street near the cathedral, this hotel occupies an attractive 14th-century building and offers stylish, recently renovated rooms with wooden panelling, comfortable beds and smallish bathrooms.

Hotel Abad (☎ 92 528 35 00; www.hotelabadoletoledo.com; Calle Real del Arrabal 1; s €86-88, d €106-109, ste €175-179; (P) (X) (S)) As hip as Toledo gets, this new hotel near the Puerta del Sol at the entrance to the old town has 22 glam rooms with wonderfully comfortable beds, stylish linen, double-glazed windows and super-swish bathrooms; most have good views.

Eating & Drinking

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

Birtat Döner (Calle de la Sillería) Also open late, this Turkish takeaway joint off Plaza de Zocodover sells falafel and doner kebab sandwiches for €3.

Gambrinus Cervecería (☎ 92 521 44 40; Calle de Santo Tomé 10) This is a friendly place where you can join the locals for a quick breakfast (€2 for coffee, *tostada* and fresh orange juice) or linger at the bar over a 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 €6-13, menú €10; ☎ 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 and the good coffee – and, for non-smokers, the excellent exhaust system. The upstairs bar is a great spot for breakfast or tapas and the downstairs *comedor* serves up a popular *menú*.

La Campana Gorda (☎ 92 521 01 46; Calle Hombro de Palo 13; menú €10) 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.

Los Cuatro Tiempos (☎ 92 522 37 82; Calle Sixto Ramón Parro 5; mains €16-20; (S) closed Sun dinner) You'll find this modern and extremely

attractive restaurant just behind the cathedral. Inevitably full of cashed-up 30-something couples from Madrid visiting Toledo for the day, it has a sophisticated menu specialising in light servings using top-quality ingredients.

Restaurantes Casa Aurelio (mains €18-21, menú €28.50; ☎ closed Wed); Plaza del Ayuntamiento (☎ 92 522 77 16; Plaza del Ayuntamiento 8); Sinagoga (☎ 92 522 13 92; Sinagoga 1); Sinagoga (☎ 92 522 20 97; Sinagoga 6) This Toledan institution is the eatery of choice for those wanting to sample top-quality examples of rustic local specialities. The *menú* of *sopa Castellano* (soup with ham, egg and bread), *perdiz roja estifada a la Toledana* (stewed partridge in the Toledan style) and *sorbete de crema de limón al cava* (lemon and sparkling-wine sorbet) is a knockout. It ain't cheap, but it's worth every céntimo. There are three restaurants around town, two of which are in the same building.

Confitería y Mazapanes Santo Tomás (☎ 92 522 37 63; cnr Plaza de Zocodover 7 & Calle Santo Tomás 3; ☎ 10am-9pm) Toledo is known for its delicious rich *mazapán* (marzipan) – this is the best shop to buy it from.

Getting There & Away

Toledo's **bus station** (☎ 92 521 58 50; Av Castilla-La Mancha) is northeast of the old town. Continental-Auto runs services between Toledo and Madrid's Estación Sur (€4.25, 1½ hours, every 20 minutes). **Alsina** (☎ 93 265 65 92; www.alsinagraells.es) has services to Valencia (€22.50, 5½ hours, one daily) and **AISA** (☎ 92 525 62 93; www.aisa-grupo.com) travels between Toledo and Cuenca (€9.85, three hours, three daily). Bus 5 stops at the bus station every 20 minutes from 7am to 10pm (€0.85) on its route between the train station and Plaza de Zocodover.

From the **train station** (Calle Paseo Rosa), 400m east of the Puente de 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 6 runs between here and Plaza de Zocodover every 10 to 15 minutes between 6.45am and 11.30pm (€0.85).

CUENCA

pop 48,937

Teetering right on the edge of the Júcar and 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 gorges. It's worth a stopover when travelling between Madrid and Valencia.

Information

Main tourist office (☎ 96 923 21 19; Plaza Hispanidad) Near the train and bus stations.

Next Level (Calle Colon 36; per hr €2; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-10pm Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm & 4-10pm Sat & Sun) Internet access near the train station.

Old town tourist office (☎ 96 923 21 17; www.cuenca.es; Plaza Mayor 1; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-2pm Sun)

Sights & Activities

Cuenca's 15th-century *casas colgadas* are precariously positioned on a cliff-top, 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 is the **Museo de Arte Abstracto Español** (☎ 96 921 29 83; www.march.es; adult/student €3/1.50; ☎ 11am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Fri, to 8pm Sat, 11am-2.30pm Sun), an exciting collection with works by Zobel, Sempere, Millares and Chillida.

Among the religious art and artefacts inside the **Museo Diocesano** (☎ 96 922 42 10; Calle Obispo Valero 2; adult/child €2/free; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) are a couple of El Grecos and a stunning 14th-century Byzantine diptych. Opposite, the **Museo de Cuenca** (☎ 96 921 30 69; Calle Obispo Valero 12; adult/student €1.50/1, free Sat & Sun; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun) has a minor collection, in which Roman artefacts from classical Hispania are the highlight.

On the 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 are somewhat reminiscent of French cathedrals, but the stained-glass windows look like they would be more at home in the abstract-art museum.

Sleeping & Eating

Pensión Central (☎ 96 921 15 11; 2nd fl, Calle Alonso Chirino 7; s €13-15, d €22-26, all with shared bathroom) Just off the busy shopping street in the new town, this friendly place has rooms spanning the length of a long dark corridor. All

are in need of a coat of paint, but they're clean and offer excellent value for money.

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

Posada de San José (☎ 96 921 13 00; www.posada-sanjose.com; Calle Julián Romero 4; s €50, d €73-128, s/d with shared bathroom €25/38) This would have to be one of the most charming midrange hotels in Spain. Perched on the edge of Júcar gorge, the Canadian/Spanish owners have converted a 17th-century palace into a boutique hotel with a large variety of room types and prices. It's well worth paying extra for a room with a view and balcony.

Bar La Tinaja (Calle Obispo Valero 4) Just off Plaza Mayor, this very friendly bar serves up enormous *bocadillos* for €2 to €3.

Cafetería Ruiz (Calle Carretería 14) This *pastelería* on the main street of the new town serves up fabulous calorie-laden pastries and cakes in a time-warp 1970s interior. The sit-down area is closed on Sunday but the aforementioned pastries are still available for takeaway.

Meson Casas Colgadas (☎ 96 922 35 09; Calle Canónigos 3; mains €12-22, menús €27-33; ☎ closed Mon) Cuenca's most famous eatery has marvelous views of the Huécar gorge and an excellent Castilian menu. The same knockout views can be enjoyed at the downstairs bar (raciones €6 to €12).

Getting There & Away

From the **bus station** (☎ 96 922 70 87; Calle Fermin Caballero) AutoRes travels to its Madrid bus station near Conde de Casal (€12.60, two hours, nine daily). AISA travels between Cuenca and Toledo (€9.85, up to three hours, two daily). **Samar** (www.samar.es) travels to Barcelona (€28.35, nine hours, one daily) and Alsina travels to/from Valencia (€13, 2½ to 4½ hours, three 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 (opposite side of the road) will take you up to Plaza Mayor in the old town for €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 (Catalunya in the local language, Catalan, and Cataluña in Castilian) is a treasure box waiting to be opened. A smallish triangle in the northeastern corner of the peninsula, this proud region was once an independent kingdom, and it still sees itself as distinctive.

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.

Barcelona is a master at reinventing itself. The city has morphed from a wannabe Roman town into a prosperous medieval centre, to a rebellious city during the Spanish Civil War, and finally to its modern cosmopolitan self. The effects of so many changes can be seen on the streets. Important splashes of Gothic, Romanesque, modernist and contemporary works pop up in even the most unexpected corners of the city, haphazardly mixed together like the paella eaten for Sunday lunch.

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 Gotic (Gothic Quarter) and El Raval (Raval district) hugging it on either side. To the northwest of the plaza is L'Eixample, the vast gridlike district where you'll find shopping areas and the bulk of the city's offices and residences.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Altair (Map p740; ☎ 93 342 71 71; Gran Vía de les Corts Catalanes 616; ☎) **Universitat** All travel books.

BARCELONA IN TWO DAYS

Be sure to see Gaudí's masterpieces, **La Sagrada Família** (p738) and **La Pedrera** (p738), in L'Eixample. Next, stroll down **Passeig de Gràcia** (p744) to reach Plaça de Catalunya and the old quarter. Head down **Las Ramblas** (right) and duck into the **Barri Gòtic** (right) for a glimpse of the cathedral.

On day two, visit the **Museu Picasso** (opposite) and the **Basílica de Santa Maria del Mar** (opposite) in El Born. Stop off for tapas and wine at **La Vinya del Senyor** (p744) before making your way to the **waterfront** (opposite). End the day with a meal in **La Barceloneta** (p743).

Casa del Llibre (Map pp736-7; ☎ 93 272 34 80; Passeig de Gràcia 62; 📍 Passeig de Gràcia) Great English section.

EMERGENCY

Guardia Urbana (City Police; Map p740; ☎ 092; Las Ramblas 43; 📍 Liceu)

INTERNET ACCESS

The price per hour for navigating online hovers around €3, but you can get a better rate if you buy multihour time cards.

Easy Internet Café (Map p740; Las Ramblas 29; ☎ 8am-2.30am)

Electric Internet Company (Map p740; Carrer Misser Ferrer 1; ☎ 9am-midnight)

WTN Internet (Map p740; Carrer Unió 16)

LAUNDRY

Wash n' Dry (Map pp736-7; ☎ 93 412 19 53; Carrer Nou de la Rambla 19; ☎ 7am-11pm; 📍 Liceu)

MEDICAL SERVICES

24-hour Pharmacy (Map p740; Las Ramblas 98; 📍 Liceu) There's another pharmacy at Passeig de Gràcia 90. These are two of many 24-hour pharmacies in the city. See www.farmaciesdeguardia.com (in Spanish) for a full listing.

Hospital Clinic (Map pp736-7; ☎ 93 227 54 00; www.hospitalclinic.org; Carrer Villarroel 170; 📍 Hospital Clinic) Modern hospital with good services for travellers.

MONEY

The main tourist office (see right) has a good money-changing service. You can also head to banks such as La Caixa or **Caixa Catalunya** (branches throughout city; ☎ 8.30am-2pm Mon-

Fri & 4-8pm Thu), which offer fair rates. Avoid the *casas de cambio* (exchange houses) on Las Ramblas; the rates are exorbitant.

POST

Main post office (Map p740; ☎ 93 486 80 50; Plaça Antoni López; 📍 Barceloneta)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Main tourist office (Map p740; ☎ 93 285 38 34; www.barcelonaturisme.com; Plaça de Catalunya 17; ☎ 9am-9pm; 📍 Plaça Catalunya)

Dangers & Annoyances

Purse snatching and pickpocketing are major problems, especially around Plaça de Catalunya, Las Ramblas and Plaça Reial. See p801 for common scams.

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, it's lined with street artists, news kiosks and vendors selling everything from live chickens to blue roses.

The colourful **Mercat de la Boqueria** (Map p740; ☎ 93 318 25 84; Las Ramblas 91; ☎ 8am-8.30pm Mon-Sat; 📍 Liceu), a fresh food market with a modernist entryway, is one of Las Ramblas' highlights. Nearby, stop for a tour of the **Liceu** (☎ 93 485 99 14; Las Ramblas 51-59; adult/student €6/4; ☎ 10am-1pm; 📍 Liceu), the city's fabulous opera house.

Also stop at the **Plaça Reial**, a grand 19th-century square surrounded by arcades and a few good restaurants. The square is known as a meeting point for drug users, so be aware. At the end of Las Ramblas stands the **Monument a Colom** (Map pp736-7; adult/child €2.50/1.50; ☎ 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.

Just west of Las Ramblas is the **Museu Marítim** (Map pp736-7; ☎ 93 342 99 20; Av Drassanes; admission €6; ☎ 10am-7pm; 📍 Drassanes). Housed in the city's medieval shipyard, a gorgeous Gothic creation, the museum takes an in-depth look at Catalonia's seafaring past.

BARRI GÒTIC

Though essentially a Gothic creation, Barcelona's looming **Cathedral** (Map p740; ☎ 93 315

15 54; Plaça de la Seu; admission 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. Highlights include the verdant cloister, the tomb of martyr Santa Eulàlia (Barcelona's patron) and the lift to the rooftop (€2).

Not far from the cathedral is pretty **Plaça del Rei** and the fascinating **Museu d'Història de la Ciutat** (Map p740; ☎ 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 also 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). Entry to these buildings is included in the admission to the museum.

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 p740; ☎ 93 412 08 10; Plaça dels Àngels 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

Translated as 'the waterfront', La Ribera is a good 10-minutes' walk from the beach, but in medieval days this was indeed a stone's throw from the Mediterranean; through the years, land was filled in, and the city expanded out into the sea. Home to Barcelona's bustling textile industry and to its wealthy merchants, La Ribera was the city's most prosperous 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 p740; ☎ 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 **Basílica de Santa Maria del Mar** (Map p740; Plaça Santa Maria; ☎ 9.30am-1.30pm & 4.30-8pm; 📍 Jaume I), a stunning example of Catalan Gothic.

The opulent **Palau de la Música Catalana** (Map p740; ☎ 90 244 28 82; 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 northeast by the sprawling **Parc de la Ciutadella** (Map pp736-7; ☎ 10am-dusk; 📍 Barceloneta), a park ideal for strolling or picnics. It's home to a small, kid-friendly zoo (Map pp736-7; ☎ 93 225 67 80; www.zoobarcelona.com; adult/child €14.50/9; ☎ 10am-7pm Jun-Sep, to 6pm Mar-May & Oct, to 5pm Nov-Feb).

WATERFRONT

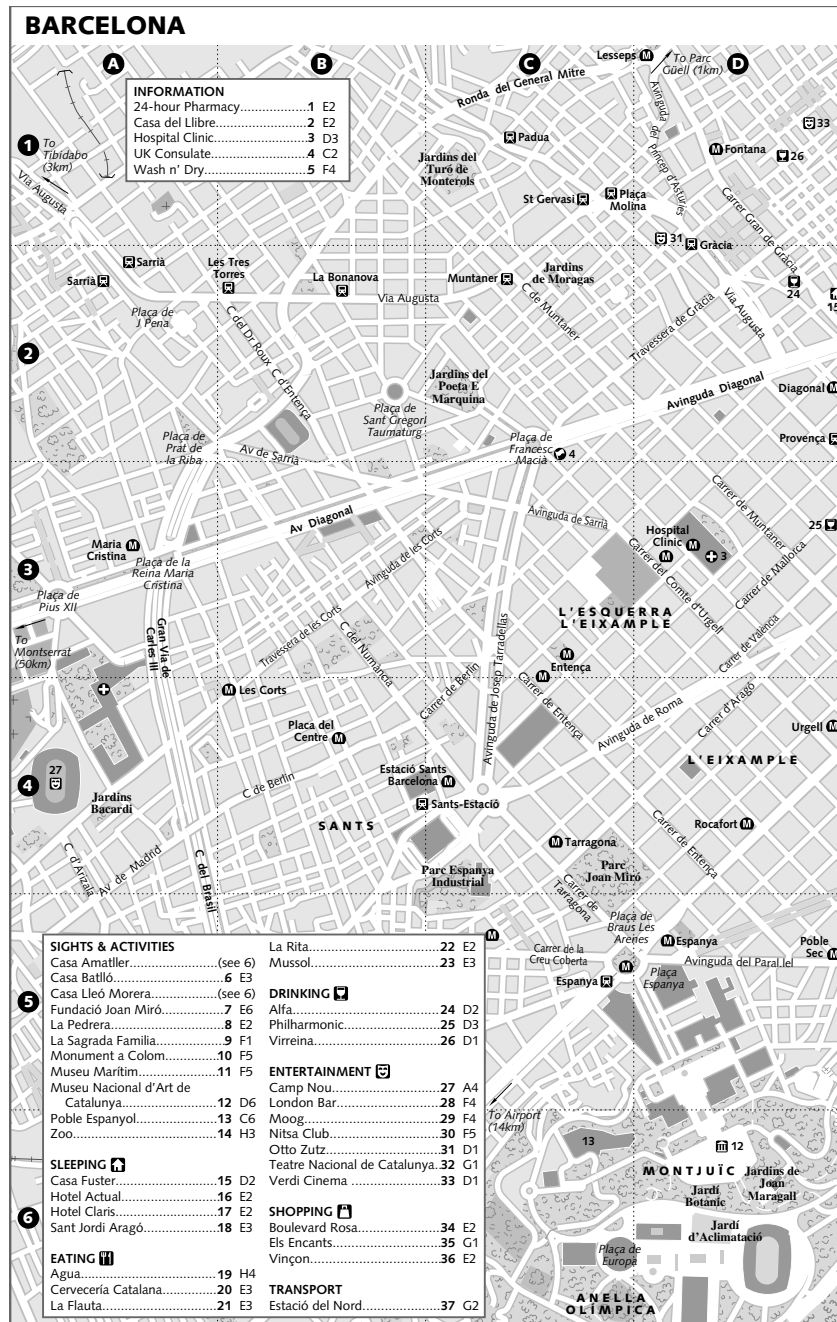
Barcelona has two major ports, **Port Vell** (Old Port) at the base of Las Ramblas, and **Port Olímpic** (Olympic Port) 1.5km up the coast. Shops, seafood restaurants and nightlife options are plentiful around both marinas, particularly the Port Olímpic. Between the two ports sits the triangular-shaped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

Barcelona boasts 4km of city *platjas* (beaches), beginning with the pebbly **Platja de la Barceloneta**, and continuing northeast to the busy **Passeig Marítim**, the sports-oriented **Nova Icària**, the long **Bogatell**, the nudist **Mar Bella** and the relatively clean **Nova Mar Bella**. On all beaches, keep a close eye on your belongings.

L'EIXAMPLE & MODERNISME

Modernisme, an architectural and cultural movement loosely defined as the Catalan version of Art Nouveau, transformed Barcelona's cityscape in the early 20th century. Most modernist works were built in L'Eixample, the district being developed at the time.

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 pp736-7; ☎ 93 207 30 31; www.lasagradafamilia.org; Carrer Mallorca 401; adult/student €8/5; 🕒 9am-6pm Oct-Mar, to 8pm Apr-Sep; 📍 Sagrada Família), is a work in progress and Barcelona's most famous building. Construction began in 1882 and is estimated to be completed in 2020.

Gaudí spent 40 years working on the church, though he only saw the crypt, the apse and the nativity façade completed. Most of Gaudí's designs and models were burned after his death, so work today continues based largely on lead architect Josep Maria Subirachs' interpretation of Gaudí's style.

Eventually there'll 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.

Gaudí's **La Pedrera** (Map pp736-7; ☎ 90 240 09 73; Carrer Provença 261-265; admission €8; 🕒 10am-8pm; 📍 Diagonal), his best-known secular creation, is an architectural wonder whose structure relies on a series of pillars and arches instead of heavy, light-blocking walls. Inside, you can visit a museum about Gaudí and his work, an apartment decorated with modernist furniture, and the surreal rooftop with its bizarre chimneys. Concerts are sometimes held here in summer.

Just down the street is the glittering façade of the **Casa Batlló** (Map pp736-7; ☎ 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, the **Casa Amatller** (Passeig de Gràcia 41) by Josep Puig i Cadafalch and the **Casa Lleó Morera** (Passeig de Gràcia 35) by Lluís Domènech i Montaner. This mish-mash of architectural styles gave the block its nickname the *Manzana de Discòrdia* (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 mosaics and Gaudí-designed paths and

plazas. Gaudí himself bought one of the houses here after it had been on the market for years; it's now the **Casa-Museu Gaudí** (☎ 93 219 38 11; www.casamuseugaudi.org; admission €9; Casa-Museu Gaudí & La Sagrada Família combination €4; 🕒 10am-6pm Oct-Mar, to 8pm Apr-Sep; 📍 Lesseps), a museum about his life. Get here by metro (which involves a steep uphill climb) or on bus 24 from Plaça de la Universitat.

The website www.rutadmodernisme.com is a great resource on modernisme in Barcelona.

MONTJUÏC

A forested hill southwest of the city centre, Montjuïc serves as a Central Park of sorts and is a great place for a jog or stroll overlooking the city. Public transport in the area is a bit complicated; to get here, start at Plaça Espanya and either hike the distance, take bus 61, or hop on the slow and scenic **Tren Montjuïc** (€3.50; 🕒 Apr-Sep), leaving every 30 minutes. You can also catch the **funicular railway** (1-way €1.50; 🕒 9am-10pm) from Paral·lel metro station, or ride the **cable car** (Transbordador Aeri; ☎ 93 225 27 18; one-way €7.50; 🕒 11am-8pm mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 10.45am-7pm mid-Sep-Dec & Mar-mid-Jun, 10am-6pm Jan-Feb) over from La Barceloneta.

Several museums and attractions are here:

Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (Map pp736-7; ☎ 93 622 03 60; admission €8.50; 🕒 10am-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2.30pm Sun) Catalan religious art.

Poble Espanyol (Map pp736-7; ☎ 93 508 63 30; Avinguda Marquès de Comillas; adult/student €7.50/5.50; 🕒 9am-8pm Mon, to 2am Tue-Thu, to 4am Fri & Sat, to midnight Sun) Mock village with craft shops and nightlife.

Fundació Joan Miró (Map pp736-7; ☎ 93 443 94 70; Av Miramar 71-75; admission €8; 🕒 10am-7pm Tue, Wed, Fri & Sat, to 9.30pm Thu, to 2.30pm Sun) Works by Miró and others.

Tours

The three routes of the **Bus Turístic** (1/2-day €18/22; 🕒 9am-7pm Nov-Mar, to 8pm Apr-Oct) link all the major tourist sights. Buy tickets on the bus or at the tourist office.

The main tourist office (see p734) offers daily **walking tours** (€9) in English and Spanish/Catalan.

Festivals & Events

Barcelona's biggest festival is the **La Mercè**, a city-wide party culminating on 24 Septem-

ber. Another red-letter day 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* (guest-houses), 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.

Numerous private apartment-rental companies operate in Barcelona. These can often be a better deal than staying in a hotel, especially if you're travelling in a group. Check out www.intobarcelona.com or www.selfcateringhols.com.

CIUTAT VELLA: LAS RAMBLAS, BARRI GÒTIC & LA RIBERA

The *Ciutat Vella* (Old City) is packed with budget *hostales* and *pensiones*. This selection of especially charming and good-value-for-money options merely scratches the surface.

Budget

Hostal Parisien (Map p740; ☎ 93 301 62 83; Las Ramblas 114; d €40-54, s with shared bathroom €20; 📍; 📍 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 p740; ☎ 93 318 79 45; www.hostalavinyo.com; Carrer d'Avinyó 42; d/tr €54/72, s/d with shared bathroom €24/40; 📍; 📍 Liceu) Too bad the service here isn't as welcoming as the comfy rooms, which all boast ceiling fans, and some, balconies. Very centrally located.

Hostal Benidorm (Map p740; ☎ 93 302 20 54; www.hostalbenidorm.com; Las Ramblas 37; s/d/tr/q €35/55/75/90; 📍; 📍 Drassanes) Flowered bedspreads, sparkling tile floors and balconies overlooking Las Ramblas make this a pleasant place to stay. Perks include satellite TV and hotel-style bathrooms with marble countertops.

Hostal Lausanne (Map p740; ☎ 93 302 11 39; www.hostalresidencialausanne.com; Avinguda del Portal de l'Àngel 24; s/d €50/60, with shared bathroom €30/49; 📍 Plaça de Catalunya) Housed in a pretty, old

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hotel Banys Orientals (Map p740; ☎ 93 268 84 60; www.hotelbanysorientals.com; Carrer de l'Argentera 37; s/d €80/95; 📍 Jaume I) If you want cool Barcelona style at an equally cool price, look no further than this fabulous hotel in the Born. An all white and black décor lends a distinct Mediterranean air to this chic boutique hotel.

modernist-style building, rooms here boast soaring ceilings and attractive tile floors.

Midrange & Top End

Hostal Boqueria (Map p740; ☎ 93 302 72 60; Las Ramblas 100; s/d/tr/q €55/85/100/120; 📍; 📍 Liceu) Surprisingly quiet, the spic-'n'-span Boqueria is great value, with bright rooms, marble counters in the bathrooms and attractive décor.

Hostal Jardí (Map p740; ☎ 93 301 59 00; www.hoteljardi-barcelona.com; Plaça de Sant Josep Oriol 1; r €70-96; 📍; 📍 Liceu) Long a city favourite, the Jardí overlooks a pretty plaza (paying extra for a room with a view is worth it!) and boasts tidy rooms, some with balconies.

Park Hotel (Map p740; ☎ 93 319 60 00; www.parkhotelbarcelona.com; Avinguda del Marquès de l'Argentera 11; s/d incl breakfast €101/124; 📍 Barceloneta) Head to this three-star for breezy, Mediterranean style near the waterfront. Smallish rooms are done in pale wood and a black-and-white colour scheme. If traffic noise bothers you, book an interior room.

EL RAVAL

Budget

Barcelona Ramblas (Map p740; ☎ 93 442 36 69; www.barcelonaramblas.com; Carrer Nou de la Rambla 50; per person €30, with shared bathroom €28; 📍 Drassanes) Right off Las Ramblas, this modern *hostal* offers good value. Spotless rooms have plaid bedspreads and prints on the walls, though bathrooms are tiny.

Also recommended:

Gat Raval (Map p740; ☎ 93 481 66 70; www.gataccommodation.com; Carrer Joaquim Costa 44; d €60, s/d with shared bathroom €38/54; 📍; 📍 Sant Antoni) Neon-green walls, stylish décor and a laid-back attitude.

Gat Xino (Map p740; ☎ 93 324 88 33; www.gataccommodation.com; Carrer de l'Hospital 149-55; s/d incl breakfast €60/80; 📍; 📍 Paral·lel) An upgraded version of Gat Raval.



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Midrange & Top End

Hostal Opera (Map p740; ☎ 93 318 82 01; info@hostalopera.com; Carrer de Sant Pau 20; s/d €43/63; **M** Liceu) Don't expect frills, but this homy *hostal* is a friendly place with clean rooms, decent-sized en-suite bathrooms and a great location just off Las Ramblas. Cons include thin walls and no in-room TVs.

Hotel España (Map p740; ☎ 93 318 17 58; www.hotelespanya.com; Carrer de Sant Pau 9-11; s/d incl breakfast €75/105; ☎; **M** Liceu) The España boasts beautiful modernist décor, the work of famed architect Lluís Domènech i Montaner, and breezy rooms with cool tiled floors, a mustard colour scheme and simple furnishings.

Hotel Gaudi (Map p740; ☎ 93 317 90 32; www.hotelgaudi.es; Carrer Nou de la Rambla 12; s €90-130, d €120-180; **M** Drassanes) Gaudi-inspired mosaics decorate the lobby at this comfortable three-star near Las Ramblas.

L'EIXAMPLE

Budget

Centric Point (Map p740; ☎ 93 231 20 45; www.centricpointhostel.com; Passeig de Gràcia 33; dm €17-22, d with shared bathroom €40-55; ☎; **M** Passeig de Gràcia) This huge (400 beds!) youth hostel offers clean but spartan rooms, a kitchen and a night-time bar. Sheets cost extra, and there's a €1 surcharge for credit card payments. The owners run several other

hostels in the city; see www.equity-point.com for details.

Sant Jordi Aragó (Map pp736-7; Carrer d'Aragó 268; dm €22-24; ☎; **M** Passeig de Gràcia) This friendly hostel is a great place to meet people and is a huge hit with travellers, though some complain of small rooms and bathrooms. The price includes linen and access to the internet and kitchen, but lockers and laundry are extra.

Midrange

Hotel Pelayo (Map p740; ☎ 93 302 37 27; www.hotelpelayo.com; Carrer de Pelai 9; s/d €55/75; ☎; **M** Universitat) An unbeatable location and decent, if slightly time-worn, rooms make this spot near Plaça Catalunya a good bet.

Hostal Goya (Map p740; ☎ 93 302 25 65; www.hostalgoya.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 near the metro.

Top End

Hotel Inglaterra (Map p740; ☎ 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, spacious rooms.

Philharmonic (Map pp736-7; ☎ 93 451 11 53; Carrer Mallorca 204; **M** Provença) Call in at this popular pub for televised football matches, some English conversation, great English breakfasts and, at night, occasional live music.

Miramelindo (Map p740; ☎ 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 p740; ☎ 93 310 33 97; Plaça de Santa Maria del Mar 5; **M** Jaume I) This is a romantic wine bar sitting under the shadow of the Basilica.

Virreina (Map pp736-7; ☎ 93 237 98 80; Plaça Virreina 1; **M** Fontana) The Gràcia district, with its intimate plazas and narrow streets, is the perfect spot for a quiet drink. Virreina has a great outdoor terrace and is open day and night.

Alfa (Map pp736-7; ☎ 93 415 18 24; Carrer Gran de Gràcia 36; **M** Fontana) This fun bar and dance spot is a long-time favourite. Come for great '80s and '90s music and a laid-back feel.

Entertainment NIGHTCLUBS

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 to cost from €10 to €15. The party gets going around 2am and stays strong until 5am or so.

Nitsa Club (Map pp736-7; ☎ 93 301 00 90; 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 break-beat zone downstairs. It attracts a young, stylish crowd.

Moog (Map pp736-7; ☎ 93 301 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 such a hit.

Magic (Map p740; ☎ 93 310 72 67; Passeig de Picasso 40; ☎ Thu-Sun; **M** Arc de Triomf) This is one of the city's top clubs, with fantastic live music running the gamut between techno and classic rock.

Otto Tutz (Map pp736-7; ☎ 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.

CINEMAS

The best cinema for subtitled foreign films is **Verdi** (Map pp736-7; ☎ 93 238 79 90; Carrer Verdi

32; **M** Fontana), in Gràcia. Big-budget Hollywood flicks are shown in English at **Icària** (Yelmo Cineplex Icària; ☎ 93 221 75 85; Carrer Salvador Espirito 61; **M** Vila Olímpica).

GAY & LESBIAN VENUES

The gay and lesbian scene is concentrated in the blocks around Carrers de 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 classic gay discos such as **Arena Madre** (Map p740; ☎ 93 487 83 42; Carrer de Balmes 32; ☎ closed Mon; **M** Universitat) and **Salvation** (Map p740; ☎ 93 318 06 86; Ronda de Sant Pere 19-21; ☎ Fri-Sun; **M** Universitat).

The low-key Bar-Bodega Fortuny is a popular lesbian hangout.

THEATRE

Most theatre in the city is in Catalan. There are quite a few venues that stage vanguard drama, including the well-regarded **Teatre Nacional de Catalunya** (Map pp736-7; ☎ 93 306 57 00; Plaça de les Arts 1; **M** Glòries).

SPORT

Football fans can see FC Barcelona play at **Camp Nou** (Map pp736-7; ☎ 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** (gates 7 & 9; adult/student €6.50/5, tour €10.50/8; ☎ 10am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun).

LIVE MUSIC

London Bar (Map pp736-7; ☎ 93 318 52 61; Carrer Nou de la Rambla 34; **M** Drassanes) This bar hosts concerts almost every night. Groups range from jazz to rock to flamenco.

Harlem Jazz Club (Map p740; ☎ 93 310 07 55; Carrer Comtessa de Sobradriel 8; **M** Liceu) Here you'll find a guaranteed dose of quality jazz and enough smoke to cause a sausage.

Tablao Cordobés (Map p740; ☎ 93 317 57 11; Las Ramblas 35; **M** Liceu) Though Barcelona is not the best place to see flamenco, you can catch a reasonably authentic show here.

Shopping

The queen of Barcelona's shopping districts is the Passeig de Gràcia, where high-end fashion struts its stuff. For unique clothing and shoes, browse the intimate shops in the mall-like **Boulevard Rosa** (Map pp736-7; Passeig de

Gràcia 53-57; **M** Passeig de Gràcia). If you like design, you'll love gadget-happy **Vinçon** (Map pp736-7; ☎ 93 215 60 50; Passeig de Gràcia 96; **M** Diagonal).

El Born, the city's original textile centre, is now a hot spot for up-and-coming designers. Check out Carrer del Rec and surrounds. Trendy, cheaper labels are found in abundance on Carrer de la Portaferrissa. Here you can also check out the punk fashions at **El Mercadillo** (Map p740; Carrer de la Portaferrissa 17; **M** Plaça Catalunya) and the tasty Spanish *turrón* candy at **Casa Colomina** (Map p740; ☎ 93 317 46 81; Carrer de la Portaferrissa 8; **M** Plaça Catalunya). Nearby, there's a Saturday **art market** (Map p740; Plaça de Sant Josep Oriol; **M** Liceu) where you'll find prints and originals from local artists, while the connecting Plaça del Pi hosts an artisan food fair on Thursdays.

Bargain hunters love **Els Encants** (Map pp736-7; ☎ 93 246 30 30; Carrer Dos de Maig 186; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon, Wed, Fri & Sat; **M** Glòries), a free-for-all flea market.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Barcelona's airport, **El Prat de Llobregat** (BCN; ☎ 90 240 47 04; www.aena.es), is 14km southwest of the city centre. It caters to international as well as domestic flights. Budget flights abound with easyJet, Vueling and Air Europa; even Iberia sometimes has good rates. See p878 for contact details.

BUS

The terminal for virtually all domestic and international buses is the **Estació del Nord** (Map pp736-7; ☎ 90 226 06 06; www.barcelonanord.com; Carrer Ali Bei 80; **M** Arc de Triomf). **Alsa** (☎ 90 242 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 many other destinations.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The A-7 motorway comes in from the French border, and the A-2 motorway heads towards Zaragoza. Both are toll roads. The N-II is a nontoll alternative, but it's slower and more dangerous. In general, highways near Barcelona are good, but crowded, especially in the evening and on Friday and Sunday.

TRAIN

Virtually all trains travelling to and from destinations within Spain stop at **Estació**

Sants (Map pp736-7; ☎ 90 224 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 transport is available online at www.tmb.net. You can also call ☎ 010 from any city telephone and get detailed transport information.

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Normally, trains link the airport to the Sants and Plaça de 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** (Map p740; ☎ 93 415 56 18) to the city centre (€3.75, 30 minutes, every 12 minutes). A taxi from the airport to Plaça de Catalunya costs about €20.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Parking a car is difficult and, if you choose a parking garage, quite expensive (€2.20 per hour). It's better to ditch your car and rely on public transport.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

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.

TAXI

Barcelona's black-and-yellow taxis are plentiful, very reasonably priced and handy for late-night transport. The flag fall is €1.45 weekdays, and €1.55 for nights and weekends. If you can't find a street taxi, call ☎ 93 303 30 33.

MONESTIR DE MONTSERRAT

The prime attraction of Monestir de Montserrat, 50km northwest of Barcelona, is its incredible setting. The Benedictine **monastery** sits on the side of a 1236m-high

HUMAN CASTLES

An element in nearly every Catalan festival is *castellers*, or human castle builders. The tradition is simple: competing teams try to build the biggest human pyramid possible, and whoever collapses first loses. It's serious competition between *colles* (casteller teams).

You can see *castellers* at most major festivals throughout Catalonia. The best teams are usually from the towns of Vilafranca del Penedès and Valls, both southwest of Barcelona. Every two years a huge *casteller* competition is held in early October in Tarragona's bullring. If you're visiting then, it's definitely worth a day trip.

mountain of weird, bulbous peaks. The monastery was founded in 1025 after a statue of the Virgin Mary was found here, and pilgrims still come from all over Christendom to kiss the Black Virgin (La Moreneta), the 12th-century wooden sculpture of Mary that's regarded as Catalonia's patron.

Mass is held several times daily; at the 1pm Monday to Saturday mass the monastery's boys' choir sings.

The monastery's **information centre** (☎ 93 877 77 77; www.montserratvisita.com, www.abadiamontserrat.net; ☎ 10am-5.45pm) has a couple of good free leaflets and maps on the mountain and monastery, as well as information about the **Museu de Montserrat** (☎ 93 877 77 77; adult/student €5.50/4.50; ☎ 10am-5.45pm).

Eating & Sleeping

There are two accommodation options at the monastery itself.

Abat Marçet Cells (☎ 93 877 77 77; d €40) Self-catering apartments for up to four people. There's a two night minimum stay.

Hotel Abat Cisneros (☎ 93 877 77 77; s/d €46/80) For comfort and excellent value, try three-star Hotel Abat Cisneros. The restaurant (*menú* €25) here is miles better than the self-serve cafeteria (mains €4 to €10) down the mountain.

Getting There & Away

The FGC R5 train runs from Barcelona's Plaça Espanya to the Aeri de Montserrat (one hour, 19 daily), from where you can catch a cable car up the mountain. Or,

stop at Monistrol-Vila, where you can hop on a rack railway to head up (15 minutes, every 20 minutes). The combined return ticket costs €12.60. Find out more at www.cremallerademontserrat.com.

GIRONA

Lovely Girona, a medieval city built along the banks of the Onyar River, makes an ideal day trip or 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).

Sights & Activities

Wander the narrow streets of the **Call** (Jewish Quarter) and visit the former synagogue, now the **Bonastruc ça Porta Jewish Museum** (☎ 97 221 27 61; Carrer La Força 8; admission €2; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat May-Oct, to 6pm 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; admission museum €4, free Sun; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 4.30pm Sat, 2-7pm Sun Nov-Mar, 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 4.30pm Sat, 2-8pm Sun Apr-Oct), which boasts the world's widest Gothic-style vault (23m).

Sleeping & Eating

Pensió Margarit (☎ 97 220 10 66; www.hotelmargarit.com; Carrer Ultonia 1; s €26-31, d €36-68, all ind breakfast) Across the river from the old town, the family-run Margarit is a friendly, 30-room *pensió* with no-frills furnishings. It's decorated with framed puzzles completed by the owners. They say the huge one in the dining room took 750 hours to finish!

Hotel Historic (☎ 97 222 35 83; www.hotelhistoric.com; Carrer Bellmirall 4; s/d €102/114) Housed in a historic building beside the cathedral, this is a romantic place offering small but fashionable rooms. There are apartments for rent too (€90 to €150).

Restaurant Boira (☎ 97 221 96 05; Plaça Independència 17; mains €10-19) Overlooking the river and specialising in rice and seafood dishes, Boira is a great choice for a nice meal.

Cheap eats (sandwiches, tapas and *café fare*) are widely available along the Ram-

bla de la Llibertat, running parallel to the river.

Getting There & Away

Girona's **train station** (www.renfe.es), connects with the rest of Catalonia and France. Catch the hourly trains from Barcelona (€6.25, 75 minutes) to get here.

THE COSTA BRAVA

The Costa Brava (Rugged Coast) was Catalonia's first tourist centre, and after you visit its rocky coastline, romantic cove beaches and white-washed fishing villages, you'll see why. Though overdevelopment threatens the coast's charm, this is still one of Catalonia's most beautiful areas. Save time to explore the medieval villages and important historic and cultural sites inland, including the Dalí museum in Figueres (right).

Ask for information at the **tourist offices** (☎ 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Sep-Jun, 9am-9pm daily Jul-Aug; Figueres ☎ 97 250 31 55; www.figueresciutat.com; Plaça del Sol; Palafrugell ☎ 97 261 18 20; www.palafrugell.net; Plaça de l'Església) in the towns around the area.

Sights & Activities

COASTAL RESORTS & ISLANDS

The Costa Brava is all about picturesque inlets and coves. Beaches tend to be small and scattered. Some longer beaches at places such as L'Estartit and Empúries are worth visiting, especially in the off season.

Cadaqués, at the end of an agonising series of hairpin bends one hour from Figueres, is postcard perfect. Beaches are of the pebbly variety, so people spend a lot of time sitting at waterfront cafés or strolling. A 15-minute walk from town is Dalí's house (see right). Some 10km northeast of Cadaqués is **Cap de Creus**, a rocky mountain park where you can hike and visit a **monastery**.

For an interesting stroll through antiquity, check out the ruins of the Greek and Roman town of **Empúries** (☎ 97 277 02 08; www.jescala-empuries.com; admission €2.50; ☎ 10am-dusk), down the coast, 2km outside L'Escala.

Past L'Escala and L'Estartit are three gorgeous beach towns near Palafrugell: **Tamarit** (the smallest, least crowded and most exclusive), **Llafranc** (the biggest and busiest), and **Calella de Palafrugell** (never overcrowded and always relaxed).

DIVING IN THE COSTA BRAVA

The Costa Brava is one of the best places to dive in the Mediterranean, thanks to its interesting underwater rock formations and healthy marine environment. One of the most exciting places to dive is around the **Illes Medes** (www.enestartit.es), seven small islets a kilometre off the coast from L'Estartit. These islets and their surrounding coral reefs have been declared a natural park to protect their diverse flora and fauna. Many local companies lead dives, charging around €30 per dive, including equipment. If you choose to dive on your own, you'll need permission from the park office (☎ 97 275 11 03).

DALÍLAND

This area of Catalonia, Salvador Dalí's birthplace, is home to several museums dedicated to the surrealist. **Teatre-Museu Dalí** (☎ 97 267 75 00; www.salvador-dali.org; Plaça Gala i Salvador Dalí 5, Figueres; admission €10; ☎ 10.30am-5.45pm Tue-Sun Oct-Jun, 9am-7.45pm daily Jul-Sep), housed in a 19th-century theatre converted by Dalí himself, has a huge and fascinating collection of his strange creations. The **Salvador Dalí Museum-House** (☎ 97 225 10 15; www.salvador-dali.org; Portlligat; adult/student €8/6; ☎ 10.30am-6pm Tue-Sun mid-Mar-mid-Jun & mid-Sep-Jan, 10.30am-9pm daily mid-Jun-mid-Sep), near Cadaqués, was his home and workshop. Completing the Dalí triangle is the **Casa-Museu Castell Gala-Dalí** (☎ 97 248 86 55; www.salvador-dali.org; Púbol; adult/student/child €6/4/free; ☎ 10.30am-6pm Tue-Sun mid-Mar-mid-Jun & mid-Sep-Jan, 10.30am-9pm daily mid-Jun-mid-Sep), a castle Dalí decorated for his beloved Gala.

PALS & PERATALLADA

Of the many historic towns inland from the Costa Brava, Pals and Peratallada are the most charming. **Pals** (www.pals.es), 6km inland, is an impeccably restored medieval town. Peek into the **church**, stand at the base of the 15m **Torre de les Hores** (Clocktower) and enjoy the views from the **Mirador del Pedró**.

Nearby, **Peratallada** (www.peratallada.info) is another medieval jewel. Walled and surrounded by a moat dug out of the rock (hence the name, which translates to 'cut stone'), this impossibly romantic hamlet makes a great sightseeing base.

EL BULLI

Just outside the town of Roses, in the far northern tip of the Costa Brava, sits an unassuming looking farmhouse restaurant. Step inside, however, and you'll discover the wildly unusual creations of chef Ferran Adrià, widely considered the most creative food mind working today. A reservation at the three-Michelin-starred **El Bulli** (www.elbulli.com) is all but impossible to get (of the 300,000 requests they get a year, they can only seat about 8000!), but if you do score a table be prepared for a veritable symphony of flavours and smells as you're presented with the 30 or 40 tiny dishes that make up his tasting menu. 'Liquid Ravioli', 'Deconstructed Tortilla' and 'Air' are some of his past creations.

Sleeping & Eating

Many visitors to the Costa Brava rent apartments. If you are interested in renting your own pad for a week or so, contact local tourist offices or check property-rental sites such as www.homelidays.com.

FIGUERES

With so many beautiful towns around, it really doesn't make much sense to stay in the comparatively unattractive Figueres.

Hotel Emporda (☎ 97 250 05 62; www.hotelemporda.com; Antigua Carretera de Fraça; s €58-70, d €92-110) If you must find a place to lay your head, try this friendly and stylish place with a popular restaurant (mains €10 to €15).

Lizarran (☎ 97 250 66 67; Calle Monturiol 3; tapas €1.50) Near the Dalí museum, you can get a fast, inexpensive lunch at this popular Basque-style tapas chain.

CADAQUÈS

Hotel Playa Sol (☎ 97 225 81 00; www.playasol.com; Carrer Planc 3; r €62-160; ☎ ☎) Right on the beach, Playa Sol offers simple rooms, most with balconies and fabulous views. The cheaper rooms have no view.

AROUND PALAFRUGELL

Hotel Port Bo (☎ 97 261 49 62; www.hotelportbo.net; Carrer August Pi i Sunyer 6, Calella de Palafrugell; per person €20-58, 2-4 person apt €60-180, 4-6 person apt €79-228, all incl breakfast) A fabulous deal in the off season, though pricey in summer, the Port Bo is a

family-style hotel with comfy rooms and a fantastic breakfast.

PALS & PERATALLADA

Camping options abound on the coast near Pals.

Interpals (☎ 97 263 61 79; www.interpals.com; Av Mediterrània Km 4.5, Platja de Pals; adult €4-5.50, child €3-3.50, tent & car €40-18.50; ☎ Ap-Oct; ☎) A self-sufficient resort 300m from the beach, this is a well-run, clean camping ground popular with families.

Ca l'Aliu (☎ 97 263 40 61; www.calaliu.com; Carrer Roca 6, Peratallada; r incl breakfast €54-66) For real charm, head to this homy guesthouse built right in to the medieval walls of Peratallada.

Getting There & Away

Renfe (www.renfe.es) trains zip up hourly to Girona and Figueres from Barcelona. Few small towns have train stations, but you can reach any little hamlet with **SARFA** (☎ 90 230 20 25; www.sarfa.com) bus services from Girona.

TARRAGONA

pop 128,000

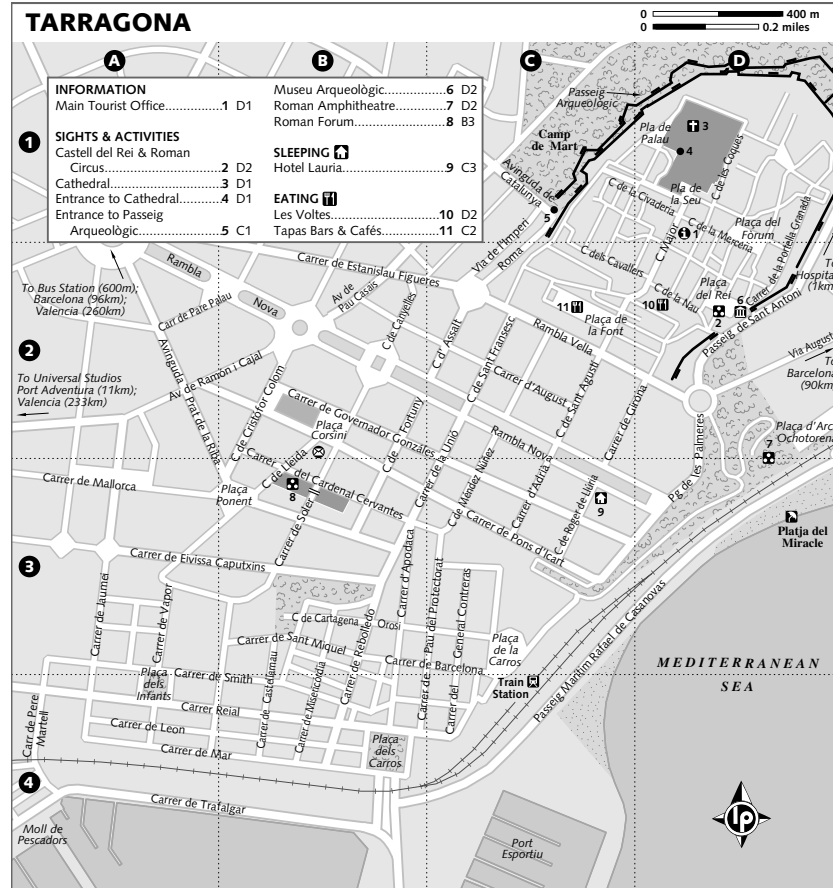
The 'Rome of Spain', Tarragona was founded in 218 BC and was an important Roman centre. The city's highlights are its Roman ruins, but don't neglect the bustling shopping district or its fabulous city beaches.

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 €2.50; ☎ 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. The **Castell del Rei** (☎ 97 724 19 52; Plaça del Rei; admission €2.50; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun Oct-May, 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 9am-3pm Sun Jun-Sep) was once part of the city walls, and from here you can reach the ruins of the **Roman Circus**, where chariot races were held.



INFORMATION		Museum Arqueològic.....	
Main Tourist Office.....	1 D1	6	D2
		Roman Amphitheatre.....	7 D2
		Roman Forum.....	8 B3
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		SLEEPING	
Castell del Rei & Roman		Hotel Lauria.....	9 C3
Circus.....	2 D2		
Cathedral.....	3 D1	EATING	
Entrance to Cathedral.....	4 D1	Les Voltes.....	10 D2
Entrance to Passeig		Tapas Bars & Cafés.....	11 C2
Arqueològic.....	5 C1		

Close to the beach sits the well-preserved **Roman amphitheatre** and on Carrer de Lleida 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** (Pla de Palau; ☎ 10am-1pm & 4-7pm mid-Mar-May, 10am-7pm Jun-mid-Oct, 10am-5pm mid-Oct-mid-Nov, 10am-2pm mid-Nov-mid-Mar) sits at the highest point of Tarragona. 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.

PORT AVENTURA

Near Salou, 7km west of Tarragona, is **Universal Studios Port Aventura** (☎ 97 777 90 90; www

.universalmediterranea.com; adult/child €37/30; ☎ 10am-7pm Apr-Oct, Jul & Aug hrs longer, holidays & weekends only Nov-Mar), a US-style theme park, fun for the family or the young at heart. Get there by **Renfe** (www.renfe.es) train.

Sleeping & Eating

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

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

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

Getting There & Away

The **train station** (www.renfe.es; Plaça Espanya) is southwest of the old town, on the coast. More than 20 regional trains a day run from Barcelona to Tarragona (€5.40, 1½ hours), making this a great option for a day trip from Barcelona. There are about 12 trains daily to Madrid (€60.40, four hours) and Valencia (€31.30, two hours).

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

ARAGÓN, BASQUE COUNTRY & NAVARRA

The arid hills and proud history of Aragón; the lush coastline and gourmet delights of the Basque Country (País Vasco); the wine country and famous festivals of Navarra: this northeastern area of Spain is brimming with fascinating destinations.

Zaragoza is the capital of the expansive Aragón region, though by no means is the city its only attraction. The parks and pretty towns of the Pyrenees are well worth exploring too.

The Basques, whose language has no known origins and is believed to be among the world's oldest, claim two of Spain's most interesting cities – San Sebastián and Bilbao – as their own. Head to stately San Sebastián for an upscale resort experience and some of the best food Spain has to offer. Visit Bilbao for a look at the majestic Guggenheim Bilbao museum.

Navarra, historically and culturally linked to the Basque Country, is well-known for its fine wines and for hosting the legendary San Fermín festival in Pamplona.

ZARAGOZA

pop 647,300

Sitting on the banks of the once-mighty Ebro River, Zaragoza is a fast growing city that's managed to hold on to its small-town feel. The centre is crowned with the fairy-

tale **Basílica del Pilar**, and 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 **Caesaraugusta**, 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 €2; ☎ 10am-11pm Mon-Fri, 11am-11pm Sat & Sun) Internet access.

Police (☎ 97 672 41 00)

Post office (☎ 97 623 68 68; Paseo de la Independencia 33)

Torreón de la Zuda tourist office (☎ 90 220 12 12; Glorieta Pio 12; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4.30-8pm) Climb to the top for a small exhibition about Zaragoza and a view of the river bank.

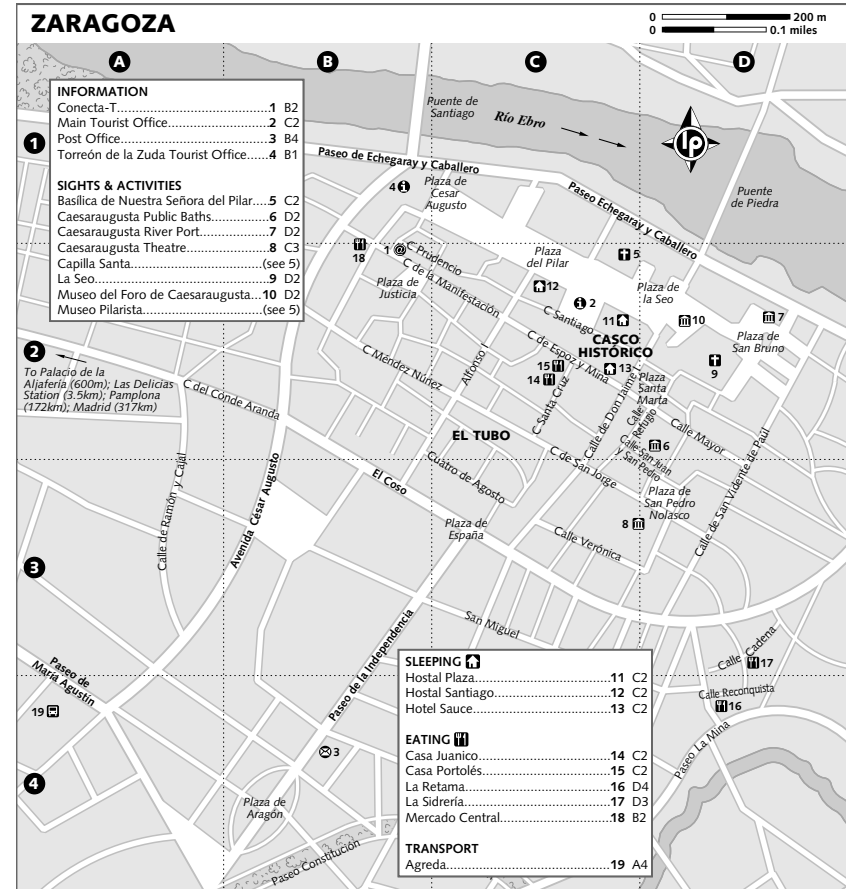
Tourist office (☎ 90 220 12 12; www.turismozaragoza.com; Plaza del Pilar; ☎ 10am-8pm) Housed in a futuristic glass cube.

Sights

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

The baroque **Basílica de Nuestra Señora del Pilar** (☎ 97 629 95 64; Plaza del Pilar; admission free; ☎ 5.45am-8.30pm Sep-Jun, to 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. Inside the Basílica, visit the **Museo Pilarista** (admission €1.50; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4-6pm), where the skirts are on display.

At Plaza del Pilar's southeastern end is Zaragoza's brooding 12th- to 16th-century cathedral, **La Seo** (☎ 97 629 12 38; Plaza de la Seo; adult/child €2/1; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Fri, 10am-1pm & 4-6pm Sat, 10am-noon & 4-6pm Sun, 1hr later Jun-Aug). 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 Caesaraugusta** (☎ 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 below lie the remains of the Roman town, brought to life by a fantastic audiovisual show. The historically curious can also visit the **Caesaraugusta Theatre** (☎ 97 620 50 88; Calle de San Jorge 12; adult/student €3/2; ☎ 10am-9pm Tue-Sat, to 2pm Sun), the **Caesaraugusta Public Baths** (☎ 97 629 72 79; Calle San Juan y San Pedro 3-7) and the **Caesaraugusta River Port** (☎ 97 639 31 57; Plaza de San Bruno 8).

The Public Baths and River Port have the same admission fee and opening hours as the Foro. If you plan to visit all four museums, buy the Ruta Caesaraugusta (pass per adult/student €6/4.50), available at the sites themselves.

Also well worth visiting is the **Palacio de la Aljafería** (☎ 97 628 96 83; Calle Diputados s/n; admission €3, free Sun; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4.30-8pm Sat-Wed, 10am-2pm Fri mid-Mar–mid-Oct, 10am-2pm & 4.30-6.30pm Mon-Wed & Sat, 10am-2pm Fri & Sun mid-Oct–mid-Mar), Spain's most outstanding Muslim building outside Andalucía. Built as the palace of the Muslim rulers who held the city from 714 to 1118, it is now home to Aragón's parliament. Guided tours are available.

Tours

The tourist office offers daily **walking tours** (€2) in Spanish from Easter week through to 15 October. Themed **walking tours** (€4) in English are offered Wednesday and Saturday at 10.30am year-round. Call to reserve on ☎ 90 220 12 12.

Sleeping

On and around the Plaza del Pilar and Av César Augusto you'll find most of the sleeping options.

Hostal Santiago (☎ 97 639 45 50; Calle Santiago 3-5; s €28, d €40-45; 🏠) Neon-green walls add an original touch to this otherwise standard *hostal*. The 26 rooms are cheerful and comparatively spacious, though there's a lingering smoky smell.

Hostal Plaza (☎ 97 629 48 30; www.hostalplaza-santiago.com; Plaza del Pilar 14; s/d €35/45; 🏠) This *hostal*, housed in a distinguished old building on the plaza, offers a great deal. Rooms have pretty décor, small but clean bathrooms and tiled floors.

Hotel Sauce (☎ 97 620 50 50; www.hotelsauce.com; Calle de Espoz y Mina 33; s €45-64, d €55-91; 🏠) Charming and immaculately cared for, the Hotel Sauce is one of the best options in town. Rooms are all different; those in the older section have plush carpet and a Provençal style, while newer rooms have rich dark-wood floors and elegant furnishings.

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 fruit and veggies at Central, the main city market.

La Retama (☎ 97 639 79 10; Calle Reconquista 4; mains €6.50-10.50; 🕒 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 such as veggie lasagne and quiche.

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

La Siderria (Calle Cadena 15; mains €7-15) Get self-serve cider at this authentic Asturian cider house. The house speciality is *ternasco* (lamb), served in huge portions.

Casa Portolés (☎ 97 639 06 65; Calle Santa Cruz 21; mains €10-18; 🕒 closed Sun dinner & Mon) Next to Casa Juanico, Casa Portolés boasts a traditional air and a refined menu full of local specialities.

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 underway on the Las Delicias bus terminal, which will one day be the city's one-stop bus stop, at the time of research stations were scattered all over town. The bus company **Agreda** (☎ 97 622 93 43; www.agredasa.com) runs to most major Spanish cities, including Madrid, from Paseo de María Agustín 7.

ARAGÓN

Once-mighty Aragón is now often overlooked by travellers, but the countryside north of Zaragoza offers some wonderful destinations for nature lovers (especially those with their own transport). Head to the **Parque Nacional de Ordesa** (www.ordesa.net), on Aragón's French border, for excellent hiking. **Torla** (☎ tourist office 97 448 61 52; Av Ordesa 4) is the park's gateway town. The **Parque Natural de los Cañones y La Sierra de Guara** (☎ 97 429 32 01; www.aragob.es in Spanish), outside Huesca, is a paradise for canyoneers and climbers. Most of the hotels and restaurants are found in and around the historic town of **Alquézar** (☎ tourist office 97 431 82 65; www.somontano.org; Plaza Ramón y Cajal).

You can also visit **Teruel** (☎ tourist office 97 860 22 79; Calle Tomás Nogués 1), sitting just between Zaragoza and Valencia, to see beautiful *Mudéjar* architecture.

SAN SEBASTIÁN

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. The natural setting – crystalline waters, a flawless beach, green hills on all sides – is captivating, but the city itself has plenty to offer as well. 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 €3.50; 🕒 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.

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

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

Tourist office (☎ 94 348 11 66; www.sansebastian-turismo.com; Calle Reina Regente 3; 🕒 8am-8pm 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* (promenade) 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. To escape the crowds, take the small **boat** (🕒 10am-8pm Jun-Sep) to the **Isla de Santa Clara**, an island in the middle of the bay. From here you can enjoy pretty views of the seafont.

For more 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 de Zuloaga.

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

San Sebastián's best museum (by far) is the **Chillida-Leku** (☎ 94 333 60 06; www.eduardo

chillida.com; Bº Jauregui 66 Hernani; adult/student €8/6; 🕒 10.30am-8pm Mon-Sat, to 3pm Sun Jun-Sep, 10.30am-3pm Oct-May), located 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.

Kids and adults alike will have fun at San Sebastián's **aquarium** (☎ 94 344 00 99; www.aquariumss.com; Plaza Carlos Blasco de Imaz 1; adult/student/child €10/8/6; 🕒 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 9pm Sat & Sun Easter-Jun & Sep, 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 8pm Sat & Sun Oct-Easter, 10am-9pm daily Jul & Aug), which is home to more than 5000 tropical fish, morays, sharks and a variety of other finned creatures.

Tours

The tourist office offers self-guided **audio tours** (☎ 68 742 06 74; www.euskatrip.com) for €10. You can also hop on the **Tourist Train** (☎ 94 342 29 73; Alameda del Blvd 25; adult/child €4.50/2.50; 🕒 11am-9pm Jul-mid-Sep, 11am-1pm & 4-7pm mid-Sep-Jun) or the **Donosti Tour Tourist Bus** (☎ 69 642 98 47; Calle Reina Regente; adult/child €10/5; 🕒 11am-8pm Jul & Aug, times vary Sep-Jun).

Sleeping

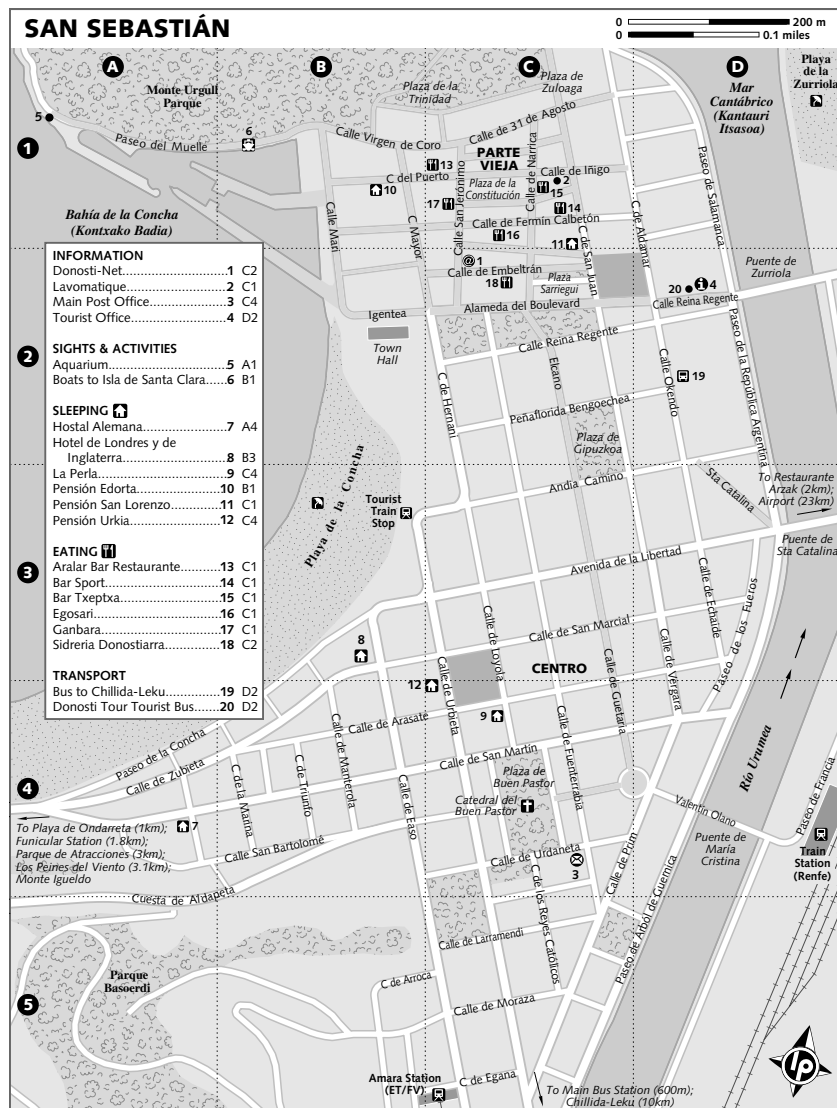
Countless cheap *pensiones* and *hostales* huddle in the Parte Vieja. This is a great place if you like being in the thick of things, but for more peace and quiet choose a spot south of the Old Quarter.

BUDGET

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 such as in-room fridge, toaster, tea/coffee and free wi-fi.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

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



Also recommended:

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

Pensión Urkia (☎ 94 342 44 36; www.pensionurkia.com; Calle de Urbeta 12; s €27-32, d €32-50) Spic 'n' span. Check out big room number four—it has a cute closed-in balcony.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Hostal Alemana (☎ 94 346 25 44; www.hostalalemana.com; Calle de San Martín 53; s €51-71, d €63-90; ☑) The Alemana is a quiet place with comfortable beds (the all-white linen and duvets are heavenly), spacious rooms, elegant bathrooms and hotel-like perks including key cards, minibars, hair dry-

ers and in-room internet access. Highly recommended.

Hotel de Londres y de Inglaterra (☎ 94 344 07 70; www.hlondres.com; Calle de Zubietta 2; €100-220; ☑ ☑ ☑) Hands down the best hotel in town, this is a classy place offering breathtaking views of the bay.

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 *pintxos*, 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 in to a bar that looks appealing. Step two: graze for as long as you like, picking up whatever tiny tapas take your fancy and devour 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 you ate 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 de 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 Plaza de la Constitución boasts a wall full of prizes and press clippings.

Ganbara (☎ 94 342 25 75; Calle San Jerónimo 21; ☑) closed Mon) This intimate spot is a great place to be baptized into the world of *pintxos*; the service is friendly and the offerings mix standard ingredients with more daring items, such as spider crab and octopus.

Egosari (☎ 94 342 82 10; Calle de Fermín Calbetón 15; mains €10.50-16.50; ☑) 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 specialties.

RESTAURANTS

Aralar Bar Restaurante (☎ 94 342 63 78; Calle del 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.

Sidreria Donostiarra (☎ 94 342 04 21; Calle de Embeltrán 5; mains €11-16.50; ☑) closed dinner Sun & lunch Mon & Tue) Expect a memorable meal at this raucous tavern, where traditional cider is served from the barrel. The typical cider-house *menú* includes codfish followed by quince for dessert.

Restaurante Arzak (☎ 94 327 84 65; Av Alcalde Jose Elosegui 273; meal €80-100 without wine; ☑) closed dinner Sun & Mon, also Tue Jan-Jun) Juan Maria Arzak, the 'father of modern Spanish cuisine', is the chef and owner of this fabulous, three-Michelin-star temple to food. More than a restaurant, it's an experience.

Drinking

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 pre-dinner round of *pintxos*, and the revelry lasts until midnight midweek, and till the cock crows on weekends. Another hot spot is the area around Calle de los Reyes Católicos, behind the Catedral del Buen Pastor.

Getting There & Away

From **San Sebastián airport** (EAS; ☎ 90 240 47 04; www.aena.es), catch the **Interbus** (☎ 94 364 13 02) that runs regularly to the Plaza de Gipuzkoa in town (€3, times vary).

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** (☎ 90 254 32 10; www.euskotren.es; Calle de 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 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** (☎ 90

210 12 10; 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 (€6, 1¼ hours, up to 12 daily).

BILBAO

pop 350,000

The commercial hub of the Basque Country, Bilbao (Bilbo in Basque) is best-known for the magnificent Guggenheim Museum. An architectural masterpiece by Frank Gehry, the museum was the catalyst of a turn-around that saw Bilbao transformed from an industrial port city into a vibrant cultural centre. 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, *pintxos* bars and several small but worthy museums.

Information

Left Luggage (☎ 7am-10pm Mon-Fri, 8am-9pm Sat & Sun; lockers per day €1) At Termibus bus station.

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

Postal Transfer (☎ 94 415 30 42; Calle Santa Maria 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.

Teatro Arriaga 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, 9.30am-2pm & 5-7.30pm Sat, 9.30am-2pm Sun Oct-May) There's also an information kiosk beside the Guggenheim.

Sights

Designed by Frank Gehry, the spectacular **Guggenheim Museum** (☎ 94 435 90 80; www.guggenheim-bilbao.es; Abandoibarra Et 2; adult/student €10.50/6.50, child under 12 free; ☎ 10am-8pm Tue-Sun year-round, 10am-8pm Mon Jul & Aug) is an experience to remember. The building itself, undulating forms covered in titanium scales, was inspired by the shapes of ships and fish, two of Bilbao's traditional industries. Inside, the guts of the building are exposed, with few columns, support beams or, for that matter, floors and walls obstructing the view. Many credit this creation with revitalising modern architecture and creating a new standard in vanguard design.

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, to 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, better yet, ride across on the gondola (€0.50 to €1) that hangs from the world's oldest 'transporter bridge'. The walkers' view from the top is great.

Sleeping

Pensión La Estrella (☎ 94 416 40 66; Calle María Muñoz 6; s/d/tr €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.

Hostal Begoña (☎ 94 423 01 34; www.hostalbegona.com; Calle Amistad 2; s €38-48, d €48-61; ☎) This place has a hotel feel with a *península* price. It has great bathrooms and tasteful décor.

Bilbao Jardines (☎ 94 479 42 10; www.hotelbilbaojardines.com; Calle Jardines 9; s €40-60, d €60-80, tr €75-95; ☎) Opened in March 2005, this stylish two-star hotel offers tidy rooms and friendly service in the heart of the Casco Viejo. No wonder it's a hit with travellers.

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

Eating

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

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

Victor Montes (☎ 94 415 70 67; www.victormontesbilbao.com; Plaza Nueva 8; mains €9-16) Downstairs this is an informal *pintxos* bar packed with locals. Head upstairs for the intimate dining room, where Basque specialities such as *bacalao pil-pil* (cod in olive oil sauce) are served with style.

Drinking

Las Siete Calles, the seven parallel streets on the southern end of the Casco Viejo,

ETA

The Basque terrorist group ETA, which stands for Euskadi Ta Askatasuna or 'Basque Homeland and Freedom', has killed more than 800 people since its bloody campaign for independence began in 1961, during the Franco dictatorship. In 2006 the group announced a cease-fire and claimed to be willing to pursue peace. Only time will tell if they mean it this time.

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 Plaza Nueva.

Getting There & Away

Bilbao airport (BIO; ☎ 90 240 47 04; 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, 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, **Fevé** (www.feve.es), has train services heading westward to Cantabria and beyond. Often enough these bumpy rides take considerably longer than the bus trip to the same destinations.

Bilbao's 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 city centre. **PESA** (☎ 90 210 12 10; www.pesa.net) operates services to San Sebastián (€8.30, one hour, up to 27 daily). **Alsa** (☎ 90 242 22 42; www.alsa.es) operates buses to Santander (€4.65 to €10.65, 90 minutes, up to 27 daily) while **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 trains, trams and buses crisscrossing the city and heading into the countryside.

PAMPLONA

Immortalized 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 a 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) Internet access.

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 (☎ 84 842 04 20; www.navarra.es; Calle Eslava 1; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) Don't expect this otherwise helpful office to provide much guidance during ultracrowded Sanfermines (it's open 8am to 8pm daily during the festival).

Sleeping

Accommodation is expensive and hard to come by during Sanfermines; you'll need to book months in advance. Prices below don't reflect the huge (up to 300%) markup you'll find in mid-July.

Pensión Escaray (☎ 94 822 78 25; jescaray@pnte.cfnavarra.es; Calle Nueva 25; s/d with shared bathroom €18/36) This is a friendly, family-run spot with some antique furniture and old-fashioned style. Rooms boast wide wooden floorboards and high ceilings.

Hotel Castillo de Javier (☎ 94 820 30 40; www.hotelcastillodejavier.com; Calle San Nicolás 50-52; s €40, d €55-61) Rooms are on the small side here, but with the modern furnishings, new bathrooms and a superb location, we're not complaining.

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 place near the bus station. A fabulous choice.

SURVIVING SANFERMINES

The madcap Sanfermines festival is held 6–14 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.

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.

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).

Bar Otano (☎ 94 822 50 95; Calle Nicolás 5; mains €8-19) Though it's known for its varied *pintxos*, Otano is also a great spot for roasted and grilled meats.

Mesón Pirineo (☎ 94 820 77 02; Calle Estafeta 41; mains €9-18) This rustic tavern offers a solid selection of Basque- and Navarran-style dishes, such as hake in green sauce with clams.

Restaurant Saraste (☎ 94 822 57 27; Calle San Nicolás 21; menú €10-15) Salads, couscous, quiche, pasta... this is one of the few restaurants in Pamplona that caters to vegetarians.

Café Iruña (☎ 94 822 20 64; Plaza Castillo 44; menú €12) This old Hemingway haunt was mentioned 14 times in *The Sun Also Rises*. It's a popular spot for breakfast, coffee or a light meal.

Bar Baserri (☎ 94 822 20 21; www.restaurante-baserri.com; Calle San Nicolás 32; pintxos €2-5, menú €12.50-22) One of the better-known *pintxos* bars, Baserri uses seasonal, local ingredients to create innovative tapas.

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.laburundesa.com) heads to Bilbao (€11.60, two hours, five daily) and Vitoria (€6.80, 90 minutes, up to 11 daily). It also offers occasional services to Santander, Irun and the surfing town Zarautz. Find more information at www.autobusesdenavarra.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. Oh, and there's loads of rain, too.

SANTANDER

pop 183,184

Staid Santander has a relatively pretty centre, but its main drawcard is **El Sardinero**, a beach that is wildly popular with locals during summer. The town is as quiet as a graveyard for the rest of the year.

Information

Ciberlope (Calle Lope de Vega 14; internet per hr €2; ☎ 10.30am-midnight Mon-Fri, 11.30am-midnight Sat, 5pm-midnight Sun)

Municipal tourist office (☎ 94 220 30 00; www.ayto-santander.es; Jardines de Pereda; ☎ 9.30am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat)

Regional tourism office (☎ 94 231 07 08; http://turismodecantabria.com; Calle de Hernán Cortés 4; ☎ 9.30am-1.30pm & 4-7pm) In the Mercado del Este.

Sleeping

Hospedaje La Porticada (☎ 94 222 78 17; www.hla-porticada.com; 1st fl, Calle Méndez Núñez 6; s €28-48, d €34-48, with shared bathroom s €21-39, d €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.

Pensión La Corza (☎ 94 221 29 50; 3rd fl, Calle de Hernán Cortés 25; d €33-50, with shared bathroom €27-40) It can be disconcerting to encounter the

resident pyjama-clad grandma and granddad watching TV in the lounge, but this sprawling family-run apartment is in a great position and offers clean and comfortable rooms for reasonable prices.

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 locals breakfast (coffee €1, croissant €1.30) for decades. The *picoteo* (small breakfast rolls) are delicious and the terrace is a great spot for people watching.

Arrabal 11 (☎ 94 207 43 62; 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 Pombo.

Old Santander is full of traditional-style *mesónes* (inns) and *bodegas* where you can drink, eat or do both. Two of the best are **Bodega Cigaleña** (☎ 94 221 30 62; Calle de Daoiz y Velarde 19; mains €15; ☎ closed Sun) and **Cañadio** (☎ 94 231 41 49; Calle Gómez Oreña 15; mains €21).

The main entertainment precincts are the Puerto Chico area in the centre and the Vargas area near the train station.

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 on Continental-Auto (€25.60, 5½ hours, six daily) via Burgos (€10, three hours). Also has regular services to Bilbao (€6.05 to €11.10, 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).

AROUND SANTANDER

Thirty kilometres southwest of Santander is the fascinating **Cueva de Altamira**, a 270m-long cave of prehistoric paintings that's been dubbed the Sistine Chapel of the pre-

historic world. The waiting list to get into the cave is years long, but you can visit an excellent on-site **museum** (☎ 94 281 80 05; http://museodealtamira.mcu.es; adult/child €2.50/free, free after 2.30pm Sat & all day Sun; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Sat, to 3pm Sun Oct-May, 9.30am-7.30pm Tue-Sat, to 3pm Sun Jun-Sep), which features good replicas of the cave art.

Getting There & Away

Catch a morning bus (€3.90 return) from Santander's bus station to Santilla del Mar, from where you can pick up a taxi to take you the 2km to Altamira.

LA CORUÑA

pop 243,088

A lively port city adorned with 19th-century houses with distinctive *galerías* (glassed-in balconies), La Coruña (A Coruña in Gallego) has an insouciant and welcoming air. It is also a fabulous place to sample the seafood dishes that Galicia is so famous for.

Information

Municipal tourist office (☎ 98 118 43 44; www.turismocoruna.com; Plaza María Pita; ☎ 9am-2.30pm & 4-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun)

Regional tourist office (☎ 98 122 18 22; Dársena de la Marina; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm & 5-7pm Sat, 11am-2pm Sun)

Videoclub/Marina 21 (Av de la Marina 21; internet per hr €1.50; ☎ 10am-2pm & 5-9.30pm Mon-Sat)

Sights

With so much ocean around, beaches are naturally a major part of La Coruña's attraction. The main beach, **Playa del Orzán**, runs along the western border of the town centre.

The city's best-known and best-loved monument is the **Torre de Hércules** (☎ 98 122 37 30; Av Navarra; adult/child €2/free, free 3rd Sat of month Oct-Jun; ☎ 10am-5.45pm Oct-Mar, to 6.45pm Apr-Jun & Sep, to 8.45pm Jul & Aug), which locals claim is the oldest functioning lighthouse in the world. The 18th-century tower that stands today was built over Roman foundations. The climb is steep (232 steps) and the view from the top is wonderful. The tower is a one-hour walk from town; alternatively buses 3 and 3A (€0.96) will take you there from the Dársena de la Marina.

Sleeping & Eating

Pensión Residencia Alborán (☎ 98 122 65 79; r.alboran@gmail.com; Calle Riego de Agua 14; s €23-26, d €33-46) The four floors of this *penión* off Plaza María Pita are filled with freshly painted, attractively decorated rooms complete with small bathrooms. Good-sized but noisy front rooms have lovely French doors and balconies; the tiny singles are dark and claustrophobic.

Hostal Residencia La Provinciana (☎ 98 122 04 00; www.laprovinciana.net; 2nd fl, Rúa Nueva 9; s €27-35, d €36-47; (P)) Extremely comfortable rooms with spotless bathrooms are on offer in this large 1970s apartment. Recommended.

La Barra El Huerto (☎ 98 192 33 32; Calle Riego de Agua 33-35; tapas €3-6.50) This sleek and modern bar serves a large selection of wines by the glass (€2.50 to €3) and tapas to glammed-up locals. It's also a good spot for breakfast (toast, coffee and fresh orange juice €3).

Pizzeria da Alberto (☎ 98 121 40 82; Calle de la Franja 23; pizza €4-7; ☎ 11am-1am) This tiny, fluorescent-lit place serves up pizza good enough to stand up and be counted in Naples. You can order by the slice or by the pie, and draft beer is available for €1.50. *Delizioso!*

Mesón do Pulpo (☎ 98 120 24 44; Calle Franja 9-11; mains €8-10) This is the best place in town to try the local speciality, *pulpo gallego* (spicy boiled octopus dressed with paprika, rock salt, garlic and olive oil).

Bodega Priorato (☎ 98 122 70 51; Calle de la Franja 16A) This is the real thing: an unassuming and phenomenally popular *bodega* where wine is served in a *porrón* (glass jug with a long thin spout through which wine is poured into the mouth) and where locals throw peanut shells onto the sawdust-covered floor with aplomb. Go.

Getting There & Away

From the **bus station** (☎ 98 118 43 35; Calle Caballeros 21), **Castromil** (☎ 90 229 29 00) travels to Santiago de Compostela (€6.15, one hour, at least 10 daily). Alsa travels to Madrid (€36.40 to €51.60, six to eight hours, 11 daily) via Burgos (€37.60).

From the **train station** (Av de Alfonso Molina), there are regular services to Santiago de Compostela (€3.40 to €4.60, 50 minutes to one hour, hourly). There are also two trains per day between La Coruña and Madrid (€44.80 to €58.90, 8½ hours to 10½

hours), stopping en route in Ávila (€40.60 to €53.70).

Local buses 1 and 1A (€0.96) follow a route between the train and bus stations and Av de la Marina in the centre of town.

SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA

pop 92,703

The supposed burial place of Saint James, Santiago (as it is commonly known) is 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.

Information

Camino de Santiago information (Xacobeo; ☎ 90 233 20 10; www.xacobeo.es; Rúa do Vilar 30; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Fri)

CyberNova 50 (Rúa Nova 50; internet per hr €1.50; ☎ 9am-midnight)

Municipal tourist office (☎ 98 155 51 29; www.santiagoturismo.com; Rúa do Vilar 63; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Oct-May, 9am-9pm Jun-Sep)

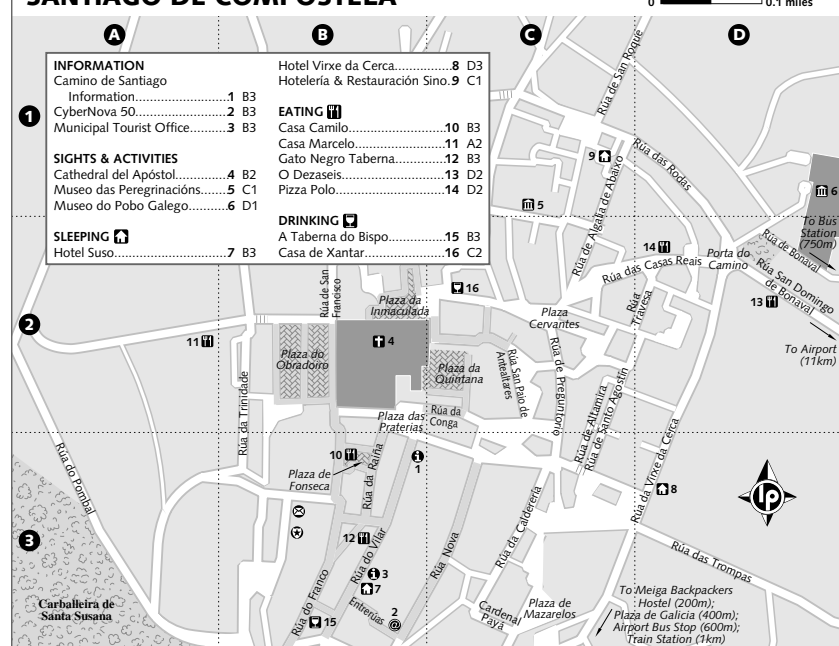
Sights

The **Catedral del Apóstol** (☎ 98 156 05 27; Plaza do Obradoiro; ☎ 7am-9pm), 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 AD and rediscovered in 813. Today, visitors line up to kiss his statue, which sits behind the main altar. Mass is held at noon and 6pm daily. The **Museo da Catedral** (admission €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. Note that the museum sells its last tickets one hour before official closing times.

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), 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; admis-

SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA



sion 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 €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, a small but comfortable lounge, and a muffin-and-coffee breakfast is included in the rate.

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 rooms feature marble bathrooms and comfortable beds.

Hotel Virxe da Cerca (☎ Madrid 90 240 58 58; www.pousadasdecompostela.com; Rúa da Virxe da Cerca 27; s €70-113, d €81-123; (P) ☎) Housed in a converted Jesuit monastery, this hotel is no-

table for its tranquil rear garden, exemplary service and extremely comfortable rooms.

Hotelería & Restauración Sino (☎ 98 155 44 36; www.sino-compostela.com; Praña de Arriba 5; s €75, d €75-120, all incl breakfast; ☎ ☎ ☎) This very stylish boutique hotel is an alluring and well-priced addition to the town's midrange accommodation scene. Fifteen quiet rooms have parquet floors and well-equipped bathrooms. There's a lovely communal lounge with leather couches, a large-screen satellite TV and an internet terminal, as well as a top-notch restaurant and bar (mains €13 to €21, menú €15).

Eating

O Dezaseis (☎ 98 156 48 80; Rúa de San Pedro 16; raciones €3-9.50, mains €10.50-12) Near the Museo do Pobo Galego, this small eatery serves an extremely popular *menú* for €11.

Istanbul Döner Kebap (Av Rosalía de Castro 5; kebabs €3.50) The town's student population swears by the huge takeaway kebabs served up here.

Gato Negro Taberna (☎ 98 158 31 05; Rúa da Raiña; raciones €4-8.50) 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.

Pizza Polo (☎ 98 158 72 72; Rúa das Casas Reais 27; pizza 66) Another tasty and cheap takeaway option. Polo offers pizza of the day.

Casa Camilo (☎ 98 158 45 93; Calle Raiña 24; menú €13.50) Seafood is the local speciality, and this long-running restaurant is a good place to sample it. The fish-laden *menú* is very good value.

Casa Marcelo (☎ 98 155 85 80; Rua Hortas 1; meals €40; ☹ closed Sun-Tue) Santiago's best restaurant is nestled in the shadow of the cathedral. Its 'rustic chic' interior is only marginally less impressive than its delectable Michelin-rated set menu, which features Galician produce and changes every day.

Drinking

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 Conga, the Rúa San Paio de Antealtares and the Plaza Cervantes.

Casa de Xantar (☎ 98 158 19 09; Calle da Troia 10) Here you'll find a laid-back student vibe and cheap drinks accompanied by complimentary tapas.

A Taberna do Bispo (☎ 98 157 75 03; Rúa Villar 35) At this perennially packed place you'll encounter the most impressive array of tapas in town.

Getting There & Around

From the **airport** (SQ; ☎ 98 154 75 01; www.aena.es), **Empresa Freire** (☎ 98 158 81 11) buses travel to the bus station and to Rúa do Doutor Teixeiro close to Plaza de Galicia. The service operates between 7.15am and 11.30pm on Monday to Friday and 8.30am and 10pm on Saturday and Sunday. A ticket costs €1.70. A taxi costs around €16.

From the **bus station** (☎ 98 154 24 16; Calle San Gaetano) you can hop on bus 5 to get to Plaza de Galicia. Also buses travel to León (€23.95 to €24.65, 6½ hours, one daily) and Madrid (€37.70 to €52.70, 6¾ to 9½ hours, at least three daily). Both Castromil and Alsa have regular services to La Coruña (€5.95 to €6.15, one hour).

From the **train station** (Av de Lugo), trains go to La Coruña (€3.30 to €11.50, one hour,

hourly) and Madrid (€40.50, eight hours, two daily). It's a 15-minute walk from the station to central Plaza de Galicia.

VALENCIA & MURCIA

A warm climate, an abundance of seaside resorts, and interesting cities 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 Turia River (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 Virgen.

Information

America's Cup information office (☎ 96 346 2007; www.americascup.com; Edificio Varadero, Port America's Cup)

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

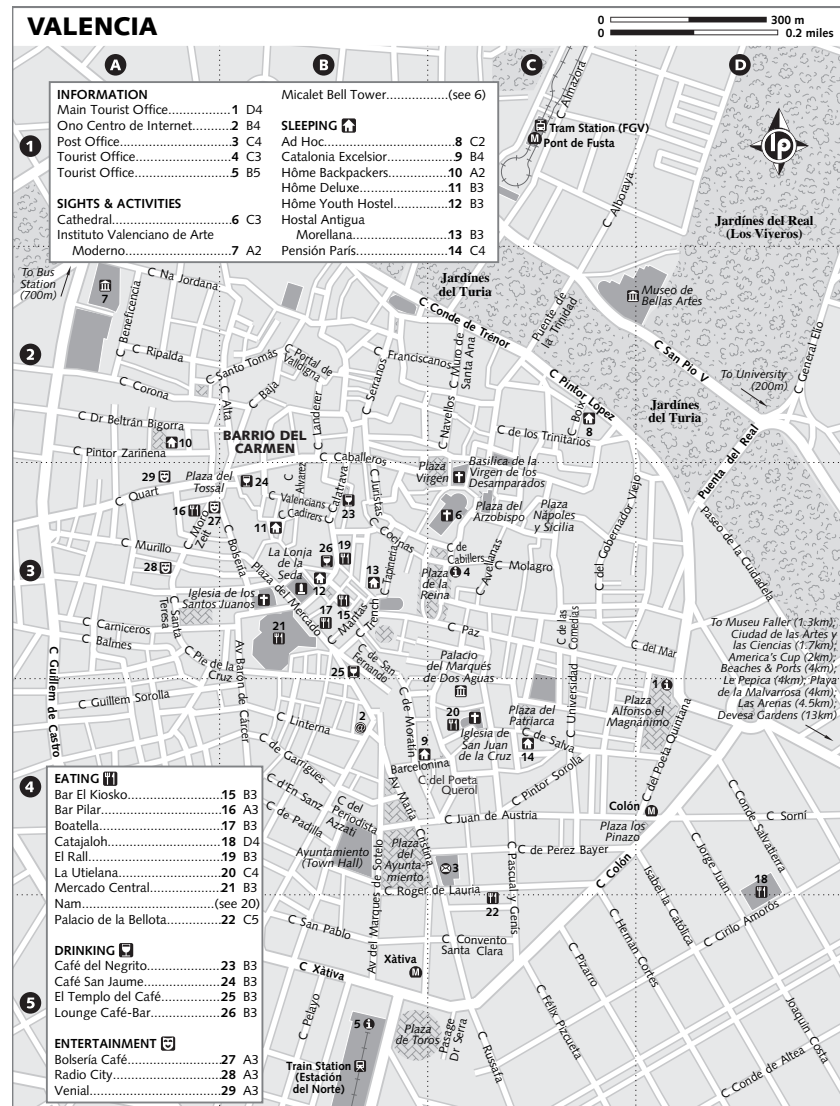
Post office (☎ 96 351 23 70; Plaza del Ayuntamiento 24)

Tourist office (www.turisvalencia.es); Main office (☎ 96 398 64 22; Calle Paz 48; ☹ 9am-2.30pm & 4.30-8pm Mon-Fri); Estación del Norte (☎ 96 352 85 73; Calle Jativa; ☹ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun); Plaza de la Reina (☎ 96 315 39 31; Plaza de la Reina 19; ☹ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun)

Sights & Activities

You'll see Valencia's best face by simply wandering around the **Barrio del Carmen**, strolling the **Jardines del Turia** or people watching in one of the city's many plazas.

But don't leave without a visit to the Romanesque-Gothic-baroque-Renaissance **cathedral** (☎ 96 391 81 27; Plaza Reina; ☹ 7.30am-8pm). 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. Also interesting is the withered left arm of St Vincent and the **Micalet bell tower** (admission €2; ☹ 10.30am-6.30pm). Climb up for sweeping views of the city. Obligatory guided tours of the cathedral (€3) are conducted between 10am and 6.30pm.

Valencia's architectural pride and joy, the stunning **Ciudad de las Artes y las Ciencias** (☎ 90 210 00 31; www.cac.es; adult €7.50-29, student €6-22; ☹ 10am-9pm) is a large complex of museums including the L'Oceanogràfic aquarium, the Príncipe Felipe science museum, L'Hemisfèric IMAX theatre, L'Umbracle covered garden, and the Palau Reina Sofia

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 *niñots* (effigies), many of political and social personages, are torched in the main plaza.

If you're not in Valencia then, see the *niñots* saved from the flames by popular vote at the **Museu Faller** (☎ 96 352 54 78; Plaza Monteolivete 4; admission €2; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4.30-8.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun).

performing arts centre. For information on individual museums' opening hours, check online or telephone. Bus 35 goes from the Plaza del Ayuntamiento.

Check the pulse on Valencia's art scene at the **Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno** (IVAM; ☎ 96 386 30 00; Calle Guillem de Castro 118; adult/student €2/free, free Sun; ☎ 10am-10pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-8pm Tue-Sun Oct-May).

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

Sleeping

Devesa Gardens (☎ 96 161 11 36; www.devesagardens.com; Ctra El Saler Km 13; per person/tent/car €5.50/5/5.50; ☎) The city's nearest camping ground is 13km south of Valencia, near El Saler beach. The complex includes restaurants, tennis courts and even a minizoo.

Hôme Youth Hostel (☎ 96 391 62 29; www.likeat.home.net; Calle Lonja 4; s/d/tr/q with shared bathroom per person 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 hostels, Hôme Backpackers and Hôme Deluxe.

Hostal Antigua Morellana (☎ 96 391 57 73; www.hostalam.com; Calle En Bou 2; s €38-48, d €48-58; ☎) In an elegant renovated 18th-century building, this helpful hotel has cosy, good-sized rooms with satellite TV and balconies.

Ad Hoc (☎ 96 391 91 40; www.adhochoteles.com; Calle Boix 4; r €80-180; ☎) This charming boutique hotel has stencilled ceilings, pretty balconies and fabulous colour schemes.

Also recommended:

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

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

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

Catalonia Excelsior (☎ 96 351 46 12; Calle Barcelonina 5; www.hoteles-catalonia.com; s/d €103/128) Quiet location near everything. Comfy three-star hotel.

Eating

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

Bar El Kiosko (☎ 96 391 01 59; Calle Derechos 38; mains €1.50-6.50) Tasty fried fish and tapas are the staples at this scruffy café, which has a few tables on the sunny plaza.

Bar Pilar (☎ 96 391 04 97; Calle Moro Zeit 13; tapas €2-10) This Valencian classic is where everyone comes to eat mussels, chucking the shells into the plastic buckets on the floor.

Boatella (Plaza del Mercado 33; tapas €3) This place is crammed with locals who are busy throwing down glasses of beer and platefuls of fried fish and other seafood.

La Utielana (☎ 96 352 94 14; Calle San Andrés 4; mains €4-7) Amazingly cheap stews, and rice and fish dishes mean there's always a line at this chaotic yet homy spot. Take a number (like at the butcher's!) 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, this place is next door to La Utielana.

Catalajoh (☎ 96 394 00 01; Mercado de Colón; mains €6-15) This trendy spot inside the beautiful Mercado de Colón has a high-class feel and lots of light soup-and-salad options.

La Pepica (☎ 96 371 03 66; Playa de Levante 6; mains €8-20) Of the many beachside restaurants serving fish and rice dishes, this sprawling restaurant is the locals' favourite.

El Rall (☎ 96 392 20 90; Calle Tundidores 2; mains €10-15) A firm favourite, El Rall serves up paellas, meat dishes and great desserts in a funky setting and has a good outside terrace.

Palacio de la Bellota (☎ 96 351 49 94; Calle Mosén Femades 7; mains €10-22) The cured ham that hangs from the ceilings here is absolutely divine, but this place is also famous for its Valencian *all i pebre* (eel stew).

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

Drinking

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

Café San Jaime (☎ 96 391 24 01; Calle Caballeros 51) This is a stalwart of Carmen's bar scene, with lots of room upstairs and a particularly fine terrace for eyeing off 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.

Café del Negrito (☎ 96 391 42 33; Plaza Negrito) On a kicking little plaza, this bar is generally packed with lots of liberal, arty 30-somethings.

El Templo del Café (☎ 96 315 20 80; Av María Cristina 12) A roomy café and tea house, this is just the thing for your caffeine fix. It serves good sandwiches too.

Entertainment

Head to these bars and clubs after midnight for drinks and dancing.

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

Bolsería Café (☎ 96 391 89 03; Calle Bolsería 41) This is a fashionable place that plays house music upstairs.

Venial (☎ 96 391 73 56; Calle Quart 26) Valencia's oldest gay club hosts theme parties throughout the year. There's a big open-plan dance floor and chill-out zone.

Getting There & Away

Valencia's airport, **Aeropuerto de Manises** (VLC; ☎ 90 240 47 04; www.aena.es), is 10km west of the centre.

From the **bus station** (☎ 96 349 72 22; Av Menéndez Pidal), daily services 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 p769).

Getting Around

At the time of research, the No 5 metro line was being extended; when completed it will connect the airport, downtown and port. Aero-Bus (€2.50, 20 minutes, every 20 minutes) leaves from a stop outside the airport's upper departures area and terminates beside metro Bailén, just south of the main train station.

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. This is 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. The city is at its most charming at night, when tapas bars and taverns in El Barrio (Old Quarter) come alive. The atmosphere kicks up a big notch during the Fiesta de Sant Joan (24 June), when Alicante stages its own version of Las Fallas (see opposite).

Information

CBR Internet (☎ 96 514 14 25; Calle Teniente Álvarez Soto 8; per hr €2-3; ☎ 10am-2am)

Main Tourist Office (☎ 96 592 98 02; www.alicante.turismo.com; Calle del Portugal 17; ☎ 10am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat)

Sights & Activities

A multilevel fortress dating to 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. Down the steps and a few metres back towards the centre is a long tunnel that digs deep into the mountain, leading to an elevator that climbs through the bowels of Monte Benacantil. Zoom to the top to begin the visit, then wind your way down.

In summer, head to the beach. At the base of Castillo de Santa Bárbara is the often-crowded **Playa del Postiguet**. Further on are the quieter **Playa de la Albufereta**, in an area with important archaeological ruins, and the **Playa de San Juan**. All are on bus lines 21 and 22.

For a real treat, zip over to **Isla de Tabarca**, 11km offshore (€16 return, four trips daily in summer). An old pirates' lair, the island boasts a quaint historic town, loads of restaurants and excellent scuba diving. Ferries are run by **Kon Tiki** (☎ 96 521 63 96).

To learn about Alicante's ancient history, visit **Museo Arqueológico** (MARQ; ☎ 96 514 90 00; www.marqalicante.com; Plaza Dr Gómez Ulls s/n; adult/student €3/1.50; ☎ 10am-7pm Tue-Sat); **Museo de Fogueres** (☎ 96 514 6828; Rambla de Méndez Núñez 29; admission free; ☎ 10am-2pm & 6-9pm Tue-Sun Oct-May, 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep) focuses on the Fiesta de Sant Joan.

Sleeping

Camping Costa Blanca (☎ 96 563 06 70; www.campingcostablanca.com; Calle Convento 143, El Campello; per person €3.50-5, per tent €3.50-7.50, per car €3.50-5; 🚻) Considered the best camping ground in the area, this place is 10km north of Alicante and only 200m from the beach.

Hostal-Pensión La Milagrosa (☎ 96 521 69 18; www.hostallamilagrosa.com; Calle de Villavieja 8; r per person €20, with shared bathroom €15; 🚻 🚰) All rooms are smallish here, but they're clean and some have views of the Santa María

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

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. Options include canopy bed, balcony, original stone walls, antique furniture or an ultramodern design. The common areas are decorated with the owner's extensive art collection.

church. There's free access to the kitchen, a lovely rooftop terrace and a washing machine available.

Mediterránea Plaza (☎ 96 521 01 88; www.hotelmediterranea plaza.com; Plaza del Ayuntamiento 6; s €87-127, d €99-140; 🚻 🚰) The spacious, sparkling rooms here boast wood floors and stylish décor; some overlook the plaza and have castle views.

Eating & Drinking

Biomenú Restaurante Vegetariano (☎ 96 521 31 44; Calle Navas 17; mains €3-5) Come here for the excellent pay-by-weight salad bar, available for takeaway. 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.

El Buen Comer (☎ 96 521 31 03; Calle Mayor 8; mains €7-13.50) Cheese and Iberian sausage plates, local rice dishes and seafood tapas are the specialties at this touristy but tasty spot.

Dársena (☎ 96 520 75 89; www.darsena.com; Muelle de Levante 6; mains €10-28) Of the many, many, many eating options by the port, this is the best (though not the cheapest!). Enjoy harbour views as you savour local rice and seafood specialties.

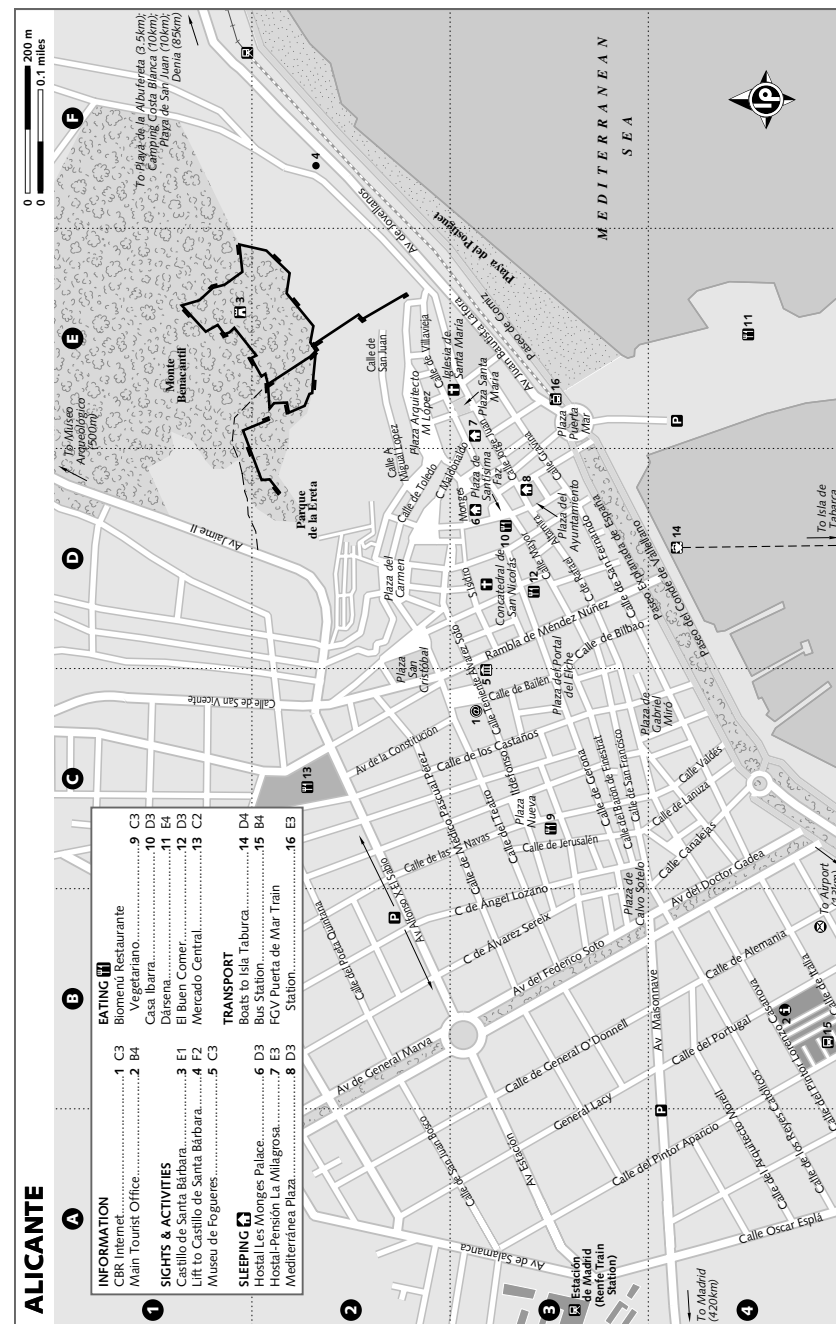
Mercado Central (Covered Market; ☎ 96 514 07 63; Av Alfonso X El Sabio) The Art Nouveau-styled covered market is ideal for self-caterers. Try local specialties such as dried tuna or octopus.

El Barrio, a packed with bars. The port is another buzzing area. Nearby coastal resorts have mega-*discotecas* (discos) that are popular in summer.

Getting There & Away

Around 12km southwest of the centre, Alicante's **El Altet airport** (ALC; ☎ 96 691 91 00; www.aena.es), gateway to the Costa Blanca, is served by charters and scheduled flights from all over Europe. Bus C-6 runs every 40 minutes between Plaza Puerta del Mar and the airport, passing by the north side of the bus station.

At the **bus station** (☎ 96 513 07 00; Calle Portugal 17), look to **Alsa** (☎ 90 242 22 42; www.alsa.es) for a ride to major destinations including Madrid (€24.60, nine hours, five daily) and Valencia (€16.30, 2½ hours, 12 daily). Alsa



also makes runs to towns in the region. Alicante's city bus 6 heads to the airport.

From the **train station** (☎ 96 592 02 02; Av de 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 **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 such as Villa Joyosa, Altea and Benidorm along the way. The trip from the FGV Puerta de Mar station (up to €7.75, 2½ hours to Dénia, hourly) requires a train change in El Campello.

COSTA BLANCA

Clean white beaches, bright sunshine and a rockin' nightlife have made the Costa Blanca one of Europe's favourite summer playgrounds. There's no getting around the fact that many resorts are shamefully overbuilt, but it is still possible to discover charming towns and unspoilt coastline. Some of the best towns to explore include **Altea**, whose church with its pretty blue-tiled dome is its crowning glory; **Benidorm**, a nightlife hot spot in summer, though filled to the brim with pensioners the rest of the year; and **Calpe**, known for the Gibraltar-like **Peñon de Ifach** (332m).

It's easy to travel between coastal towns on the tramlike *trenet* (see p768). For helpful information about the region, check out www.costablanca.org.

MURCIA & THE COSTA CALÍDA

Murcia, many travel writers and tour guides will tell you, is 'the real Spain'. Though other Spanish provinces might be surprised at the distinction, it is true that Murcia, with its rural interior, small coastal resorts and lively capital city, is as authentically Spanish as it gets. A conservative province, Murcia is known for its fabulous local produce, rich tapas tradition and unusually warm coast.

Murcia

pop 409,800

The capital of the rural Murcia region, an area known for its abundant vegetable crops, Murcia City was founded in AD 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** (☎ 96 821 52 82; Plaza Cruz Roja 1; per hr €1.50; ☹ 9am-midnight).

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

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

For fun, peek into the **Museo Taurino** (☎ 96 828 59 76; Jardín del Salitre, Calle Francisco Rabal 3; admission free; ☹ 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), a bullfighting museum just past the bar of the local 'taurino club'.

SLEEPING

Pensión Murcia (☎ 96 821 99 63; Calle Vinadel 6; d €53, s with shared bathroom €23; ☺) On a side street near Plaza Santa Isabel, this quiet *pensión* has had a major facelift. Doubles boast new furnishings and bathrooms.

Hotel Hispano-2 (☎ 96 821 61 52; www.hotelhispano.net; Calle Radio Murcia 3; s €45-52, d €50-68, tr €65-80; ☺) Dignified, if not fancy, the clean and central Hotel Hispano has a few perks including internet access and nice parquet floors. The owners also run a *pensión* (single €24 to €27, double €38) just around the corner.

NH Rincón de Pepe (☎ 96 821 22 39; www.nh-hotels.com; Calle Apóstoles 34; r €58-119) Long a favourite with both tourists and business travellers, 'Pepe's Corner' is a solid choice with all you'd expect from a business-style hotel.

EATING

Murcia is known for its tapas (some of the best areas to go are Plaza Romeo, Plaza Santo Domingo and Plaza de las Flores) and for its wonderfully fresh veggies. Finally, a Spanish city that caters to vegetarians!

Restaurante Hispano (☎ 96 821 61 52; Calle Arquitecto Cerdán 7; mains €8-21; ☹ closed dinner Sun) With a big tapas bar and traditional-style dining room, this place specialises in local dishes like *dorada a la Murciana* (rice and grilled vegetables).

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Los Zagales (☎ 96 821 55 79; Calle Polo Medina 4; tapas €1-4.50, meals from €10) Just off the Plaza Cardinal Belluga is this local favourite, an old-fashioned tapas bar where you can feast on concoctions like fried blood with onions (they say it's tasty!).

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 innovative takes on local specialities. The owners also 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 plaza itself, making for a uniquely Spanish alternative to the regular bar scene.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Renfe (☎ 90 224 02 02) 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 such as La Manga (1½ hours, three daily).

Costa Calida

You'll find plenty of attractive spots on Murcia's Costa Calida (Warm Coast). Most popular is the **Mar Menor**, a vast saltwater lagoon separated from the sea by a 22km sliver of land known as **La Manga**. The water here is so warm you can swim year-round.

BALEARIC ISLANDS

pop 916,968

The Balearic Islands (Illes Belears in Catalan) adorn the glittering Mediterranean waters off Spain's eastern coastline. Beach tourism destinations *par excellence*, they are also home to simple fishing and farming

villages and a wealth of natural, historical and archaeological treasures. Travellers who make it here will benefit from heading out of the major cities and exploring the rural hearts of each distinctly individual island.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Scheduled flights from the major cities on the Spanish mainland are operated by several airlines, including Iberia, Air Europa and Spanair.

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. It's worth shopping around and booking ahead.

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** (☎ 90 245 46 45; www.trasmediterranea.es), with offices in Barcelona (☎ 93 295 90 00), Valencia (☎ 96 367 65 12), Palma de Mallorca (☎ 97 140 50 14), Maó (☎ 97 136 60 50) and Ibiza city (☎ 97 131 51 00). The frequency and duration of the services it offers varies dramatically, according to the time of year and type of ferry.

Buques convencionales (slow ferries) service the routes all year. Services on these are between: Barcelona and Palma (€198 to €228, seven hours, one daily); Palma and Maó (€40, 5½ hours, one weekly); Valencia and Palma (€198 to €228, 7½ hours, six weekly); and Palma and Ibiza (€40, four hours, one weekly). The frequencies cited here are from the low-season timetable; in the mid- and high seasons there are more-frequent services.

In the mid- and high seasons the *buques convencionales* are joined by a marginally faster 'fast ferry' and the much faster *buques rápidos* (catamarans). Services on the catamarans are between Barcelona and Palma (€80 to €173, 3¼ hours, one daily) and between 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).

Taking a small car from the mainland to the islands costs €146 on a *buques convencionales* and €171 on a catamaran or fast ferry. Between the islands it costs €105 on all services.

Another company, **Balearia** (☎ 90 216 01 80; 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** (☎ 90 211 91 28; www.iscomar ferrys.com) runs a service between Ciutadella and Port d'Alcúdia (adult €27, small car €58, 2½ hours, one or two daily), as well as between Dénia and Ibiza (adult €30, small car €90, 4½ hours, six days per week). **Cape Balear** (☎ 90 210 04 44; www.capebalear.es) operates fast ferries to Ciutadella from Cala Ratjada in Mallorca (€64, 55 minutes, two services six days per week).

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 rich cultural and culinary 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 beaches...

Information

Azul (Carrer Apuntadores 6, Palma; internet per hr €3; ☎ 9.30am-3pm & 6-8pm Mon, 9.30am-3pm & 5-8pm Tue, Wed & Fri, 9.30am-3pm Sat)

Consell de Mallorca tourist office Main office (☎ 97 117 39 90; www.infomallorca.net; Plaça de la Reina 2, Palma; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat; airport (☎ 97 178 95 56; ☎ 8.30am-8.30pm Mon-Sat, to 1.30pm Sun) **Main post office** (Carrer de la Constitució 6, Palma; internet per hr €1.50; ☎ 10am-11pm Mon-Fri, 11am-midnight Sat, noon-11pm Sun) Internet terminals in the telephone office attached to the post office.

Municipal tourist office (☎ 9am-8pm) Main branch (☎ 90 210 23 65; www.a-palma.es; Plaça d'Espanya, Palma); Passeig des Born (☎ 90 210 23 65; Palma)

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, Palma; adult/student/child under 10 €3.50/3/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) overlooks the city and its port.

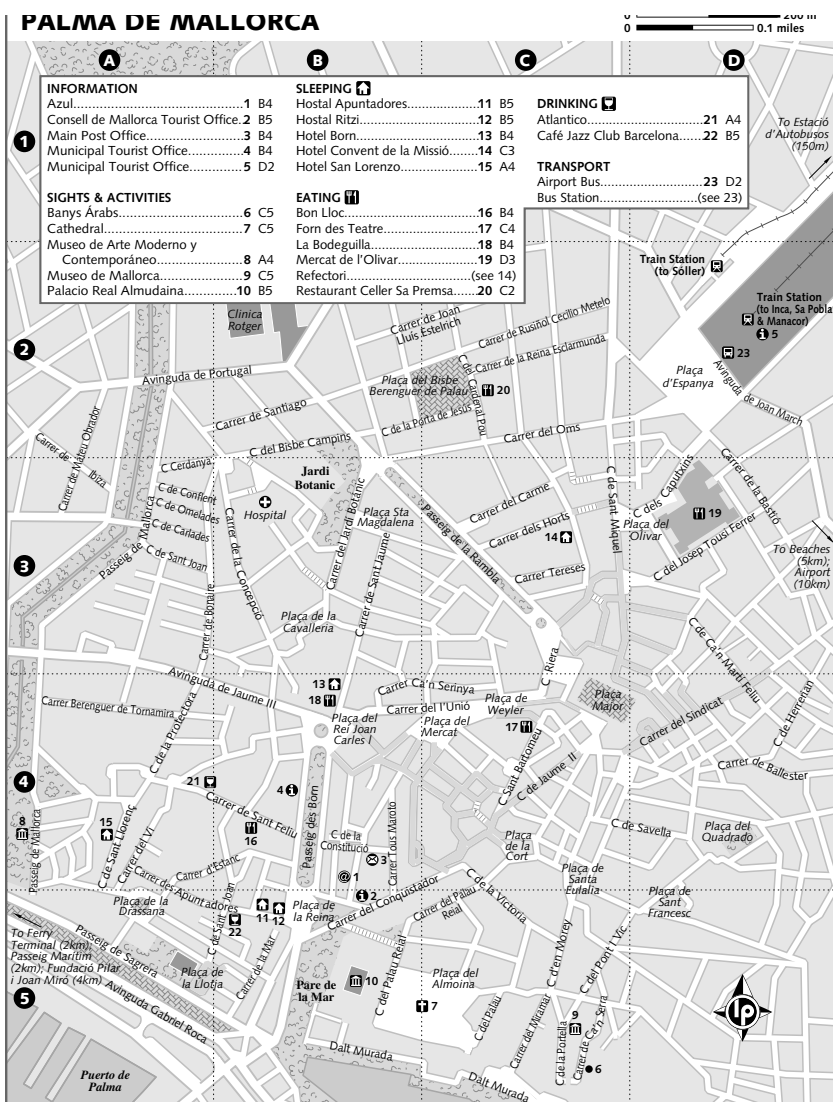
Opposite the cathedral is the **Palacio Real Almudaina** (☎ 97 121 41 34; Carrer del Palau Reial, Palma; adult/student €3.50/2.30; ☎ 10am-1.15pm & 4-5.15pm Oct-Mar, 10am-5.45pm Apr-Sep, closed Sat afternoon & Sun), the one-time residence of the Mallorcan monarchs. Inside is a collection of tapestries and artworks.

The **Museo de Arte Moderno y Contemporáneo** (Es Baluard; ☎ 97 190 82 00; www.esbaluard.org; Plaça Porta de Santa Catalina, Palma; adult/student €6/4.50; ☎ 10am-8pm Tue-Sun Oct-mid-Jun, 10am-midnight daily mid-Jun-Sep) is Palma's striking museum dedicated to modern and contemporary works of art. Its collection includes works from 20th-century artists including 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 €5/3/free, camera or video €5; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sat Oct-Mar, to 7pm Tue-Sat Apr-Sep, to 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 **Museo de Mallorca** (☎ 97 171 75 40; Carrer de la Portella 5, Palma; admission €2.50; ☎ 10am-6.30pm Tue-Sat, 10.30am-1.30pm Sun) houses archaeological finds, as well as paintings and furniture from the 19th and 20th centuries. Nearby, are the atmospheric **Banys Àrabs** (Arab Baths; ☎ 97 172 15 49; Carrer de Ca'n Serra 7; admission €1.50; ☎ 9am-7.30pm Apr-Nov, to 6pm Dec-Mar), the only remaining monument to the Muslim domination of the island.

Mallorca's northwestern coast is a world away from the high-rise tourism on the other side of the island. Dominated by the Serra de Tramuntana, it's a beautiful region of olive groves, pine forests and small villages with shuttered stone buildings; it also has a rugged and rocky coastline. There are a couple of highlights for drivers: the



hair-raising road down to the small port of **Sa Calobra**, and the amazing trip along the peninsula leading to the island's northern tip, **Cap Formentor**.

If you don't have wheels, take the **Palma-Sóller train** (see p773). It's one of the most popular and spectacular excursions on the island. Sóller is also the best place to base

yourself for trekking, and the nearby village of **Fornalutx** is said to be the prettiest on Mallorca.

From Sóller, it is a 10km walk to the beautiful hilltop village of **Deià**, where Robert Graves, poet and author of *I Claudius*, lived for most of his life. From the village, you can scramble down to the **Cala de Deià**,

where the small shingle beach is a laid-back haven of naked swimming and weekend-long beach parties.

Tramuntana Pursuits (☎ 97 140 42 22; 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 des Apuntadores 8; dm €19-20, d €55-60, 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 tiled floors, hand basins and uncomfortable beds. The best thing about the place is the roof terrace on the 7th floor, which has a spectacular view of the cathedral and is a wonderful spot for an evening drink in summer (beer €3). Breakfast costs between €3.50 and €5.50.

Hostal Ritzi (☎ 97 171 46 10; www.hostalritzi.com; Carrer des Apuntadores 6; d €47-57, s/d with shared bathroom incl breakfast (€30/45)) Recently taken over by an enthusiastic English chap, the Ritzi is much friendlier than the neighbouring Apuntadores. Rooms are basic but clean, with hand basins and hard beds. 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).

Hotel Born (☎ 97 171 29 42; infoborn@hotelborn.com; Carrer de Sant Jaume 3; s €50-65, d €73-105, all incl breakfast; ☎) This Palma institution has the feel of an old-fashioned railway hotel. The large rooms are comfortable but could do with a style overhaul; the best look out onto a stunning Mallorcan patio filled with palm trees.

Hotel San Lorenzo (☎ 97 172 82 00; www.hotel-sanlorenzo.com; Calle de San Llorenç 14; s €118-204, d €139-246; ☎) The charming rooms in this converted 17th-century manor house have beamed ceilings, extremely comfortable beds and luxurious tiled bathrooms; most rooms have large windows or terraces overlooking a bougainvillea-adorned pool area.

Hotel Convent de la Missió (☎ 97 122 73 47; www.conventdelamissio.com; Carrer de la Missió 7A; d €210, ste €260-320, all incl breakfast; ☎ ☎ ☎) We're talking hip hotel here. Very, very hip. In a former 17th-century convent, this place looks more like an art gallery than a hotel. Rooms are quiet and utterly gorgeous, with every luxurious touch imaginable (we were particularly impressed by the Bulgari toiletries). There's a sensational restaurant (see opposite) and an atmospheric plunge pool and sauna in the basement.

OUTSIDE PALMA

The Consell de Mallorca tourist office in Palma (p770) can supply information on accommodation in *fincas* (country estates), *pequeños* (small rural hotels) and *ermites i refugis* (hermitages and monasteries) around the island.

Note that most accommodation options outside Palma are closed between December and February.

Deià

Pensión Miramar (☎ 97 163 90 84; www.pensionmiramar.com; C'an Oliver; per person incl breakfast €30-42; ☎) This family-run *península* in a 19th-century farmhouse offers nine charming rooms and great views.

Fornalutx

Cán Verdera (☎ 97 163 82 03; www.canverdera.com; Carrer Toros 1; d €190-480; ☎ ☎) Occupying an old stone building with original beams, this boutique hotel has 11 rooms, a restaurant and an absolutely delightful pool and garden.

East Coast

Hostal Playa Mondragó (☎ 97 165 77 52; Cala Mondragó; s/d €32/64; ☎ closed Nov-Apr; ☎ ☎ ☎) Five storeys high, this small beach resort overlooks one of the island's best sandy beaches. Ask for a room with a balcony overlooking the sea.

Finca Son Gener (☎ 97 118 36 12; Apartat de Correus 136, Son Servera; d incl breakfast €255; ☎ closed Dec-Feb; ☎ ☎ ☎) Between the villages of Son Servera and Art'a, this idyllic retreat is set in a cluster of beautifully converted 18th-century farmhouses. Its 10 junior suites have every imaginable mod con; added extras include sea views, two pools, a restaurant and a well-stocked wine cellar.

Eating & Drinking

PALMA

La Bodeguilla (☎ 97 171 82 74; Carrer de Sant Jaume 3; tapas €5-15.50, mains €13-21; ☎ closed Sun) A sleek and very attractive wine bar serving modern takes on traditional tapas, La Bodeguilla serves tasty morsels such as *croquetas de espinaca y taco de jamón* (spinach croquettes wrapped in Iberian ham, €6.50).

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

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.

Refectori (☎ 97 122 73 47; Carrer de la Missió 7A; mains €25-26, menú €38; ☎ closed Sat & Sun lunch) This exquisite restaurant in the modern and elegant surrounds of the Convent de la Missió hotel (see opposite) serves the best food in Palma. The chef uses top-notch local produce in his seasonal menus, concocting perfectly balanced dishes, such as Magret duck basted in spices with a red sweet-potato cream (€25).

Atlántico (Carrer de Sant Feliu 12; ☎ 8pm-4am) With its unique combination of knockout cocktails and grunge, this is a good late-night drinking den.

Café Jazz Club Barcelona (Carrer des Apuntadores 5; admission €4; ☎ 8.30pm-1am Mon-Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat) Another good drinking spot, this is a cramped but enjoyable live-music venue.

If you're putting together a picnic, go to the **Mercat de l'Olivar** (Plaça del Olivar; ☎ 7am-2pm Mon-Sat), the city's central produce market, and then stop in at **Forn des Teatre** (☎ 97 171 52 54; Plaça de Weyler 9; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat) for some of the island's signature *ensaimadas* (yeast-based pastries).

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

Getting Around

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

LATE LAMENTED LUGGAGE

Backpackers visiting Palma will encounter problems if they need to find 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.

taxi from the airport to the centre of town will cost around €14; from the ferry terminal to the centre costs around €7.

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 d'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; five trains per day make the trip to Sóller (one-way/return €9/14, one hour) on the other. Both journeys are highly picturesque.

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, many of whom fly in solely for the island's world-famous and decidedly louche clubbing scene. If posers give you the irritis, you should definitely give Ibiza a miss, as during the clubbing season (the only time when it's worth visiting) they're here in force.

Information

Surf@Net (Carrer de Riambau 8, Ibiza City; internet per 30min €2; ☎ 10am-2am)

Tourist office (☎ 97 130 19 00; www.illesbalears.es; Carrer Antoni Riquer 2, Ibiza City; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-1pm Sat Nov-Mar, 9am-1.30pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-1pm Sat 16-31 Oct, 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-7.30pm Sat Apr-15 Oct)

Wash and Dry.Com (Avinguda Espanya 53, Ibiza City; internet per hr €2, wash & dry per load €10; ☎ 10am-1.30pm & 5-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) Go online while doing a load of washing.

Sights & Activities

Ibiza City's port area of **Sa Penya** is crammed with funky and trashy clothing 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 de la Catedral; ☎ 9.30am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, mass 10.30am Sun); and the **Museu Arqueològic** (☎ 97 130 12 31; Plaça de la Catedral 3; admission €2.50; ☎ 10am-2pm & 6-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun mid-Mar–mid-Oct, 9am-3pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun mid-Oct–mid-Mar).

The heavily developed **Platja de ses Figueretes** beach is a 20-minute walk south of Sa Penya, but 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 Verdrell. These can all be accessed via local bus (www.ibizabus.com) between May and October.

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

Sleeping

IBIZA CITY
Many of Ibiza City's hotels and *hostales* are closed in the low season and heavily booked between April and October. Make sure you book ahead.

Hostal Sol y Brisa (☎ 97 131 08 18; fax 97 130 30 32; Avinguda de Bartolomé Vicent Ramón 15; s/d with shared bathroom €18/30; ☎ closed Jan & Feb) Occupying the 2nd and 3rd floors of an apartment building near the water, Ibiza City's cheapest accommodation option offers faded rooms with washbasins and saggy beds.

Casa de Huéspedes Navarro (☎ 97 131 07 71; Carrer de 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 des Parc 4; s/d €70/100, with shared bathroom €50/80; ☎) This is an excellent midrange option. Its small but airy rooms 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* (plaza), but be prepared for lots of late-night noise. The friendly staff and downstairs *cafeteria* are definite pluses. Recommended.

Hostal-Restaurante La Marina (☎ 97 131 01 72; www.hostal-lamarina.com; Carrer de Barcelona 7; s €62, d €77-150; ☎) On the waterfront, La Marina has brightly painted rooms with wrought-iron furniture, satellite TV and tiny bathrooms; some have balconies overlooking the harbour and a couple have private terraces.

Hotel La Ventana (☎ 97 139 08 57; www.laventanaibiza.com; Carrer de Sa Carossa 13; d €177-257, ste €423; ☎) One of the few options in the D'Alt Vila, this charming 15th-century house is set on a leafy square. Some of the 13 rooms have their own terraces and all are beautifully decorated. Worth the splurge.

OUTSIDE IBIZA CITY

Most accommodation options outside Ibiza City are closed between November and April.

Camping Cala Nova (☎ 97 133 17 74; www.campingcalanova.com; Santa Eulària des Riu; per person/tent/electricity €6.30/6.30/3) Close to a good beach and 12km from Ibiza City, this is one of Ibiza's best camping grounds. There are 125 sites and there's plenty of shade.

Pensió Sa Plana (☎ 97 133 50 73; d with shared bathroom incl breakfast €58; ☎) Near the S'Aigua Blanca beaches, this place has a poolside bar and barbecue.

C'an Curreu (☎ 97 133 52 80; www.cancurreu.com; Ctra Sant Carles Km 12; d €257, ste €353-396, all incl breakfast; ☎) This beautifully restored Eivissan farmhouse has a sauna, gymnasium, stables and a fabulous pool terrace. The rooms have exposed beams and open fireplaces.

Eating & Drinking

IBIZA CITY
Croissant Show (☎ 97 131 76 65; Plaça de la Constitució; ☎ 7am-3pm) All we can say is *ooh la la!* This is where the beautiful people come for a



postclubbing 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.

Cerveceria Scenicus (☎ 97 131 60 74; Passeig de Vara de Rey 4) This unassuming place serves up a good-value and very tasty *plato del dia* (plate of the day, €4).

Comidas-Bar San Juan (☎ 97 131 16 03; Carrer de Guillem de Montgri 8; mains €6-12; ☎ closed Sun) This is a popular, family-run tavern where diners share tables. The food is hearty and extremely good value for money.

Restaurant Car'Alfredo (☎ 97 131 12 74; Passeig de Vara de Rey 16; mains €10-25) This classy eatery has been serving up local specialties since 1934. Though Restaurant Car'Alfredo

claims the paella as its house speciality, you would be much better off opting for more traditional Eivissan plates such as the flavour-packed *surtido de canapés de pan payés con anchoas y sobrasada* (assorted canapés of farmhouse bread with anchovies and spicy sausage, €6), or the simple but beautifully prepared fish dishes such as *ragut de mero y rape al Pedro Ximénez* (grouper and anglerfish stew with Pedro Ximénez wine, €25).

We recommend starting your evening with a drink and some people watching at one of the bars lining the lively Plaça des Parc. The most popular is probably the laid-back **Bliss** (☎ 11.30am-midnight), which is also one of the few open during winter. Nearby

Viper (☎ 97 130 45 69; Vía Púnica 12; 🕒 9am-3am) has an in-house DJ after 4pm.

OUTSIDE IBIZA CITY

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 comes to dance and drink in the gardens before moving onto the superclubs. It's on the road to San Josep, 5km from Ibiza city.

Entertainment

Ibiza's summer nightlife is 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, they 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.

The big-name clubs are **Pacha** (☎ 97 131 36 00; www.pacha.com; Av 8 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; Cntra 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

Buses run between the airport, **Es Codola** (IBZ; ☎ 97 180 90 00; www.aena.es), and Ibiza City every 30 minutes from 7.20am to 11.50pm in summer (€1.20, 15 minutes); a taxi costs around €12 to €15. Buses to other parts of the island leave from the series of bus stops along Avinguda d'Isidoro Macabich. Pick up a timetable from the tourist office.

Plenty of ferries make the short trip between Ibiza City and the neighbouring island of Formentera each day. Tickets cost

around €20 return on a *buque convencional* (slow ferry) and €33.50 on a *lineaJET* (fast ferry).

MENORCA pop 77,000

Renowned for its pristine beaches, archaeological sites and environmental areas, tranquil Menorca is the least developed of the Balearics. It was declared a Biosphere Reserve by Unesco in 1993. The capital, Maó, is known as Mahón in Castilian.

Information

Ciber Principal (☎ 97 136 26 89; Carrer Nou 25, Maó; internet per hr €3.50; 🕒 9.30am-10pm Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm & 6-10pm Sat & Sun)

Municipal tourist office Main office (☎ 97 136 37 90; infomenorca@tome.es; Carrer de sa Rovellada de Dalt 24, Maó; 🕒 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)

Sights & Activities

Maó and Ciutadella are both harbour towns, and from either place you'll have to commute to the beaches. Maó absorbs most of the tourist traffic. While you're here, you can take a boat cruise around the impressive harbour.

Ciutadella, with its smaller harbour and historic buildings, has a more distinctly Spanish feel to it. Follow the shopping baskets to the colourful **market** (Plaça Llibertat), which is surrounded by lively tapas bars.

In the centre of the island, the 357m-high **Monte Toro** has great views of the island; on a clear day you can see 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 **Favàritx Cape**. If you park just before the gate to the lighthouse and climb up the rocks behind you, you'll see a couple of the eight beaches that are just waiting for scramblers such as yourself to explore.

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

Sleeping

Many accommodation options on the island are closed between November and April.

MAÓ

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

Hotel del Almirante (☎ 97 136 27 00; www.hotel.delalmirante.com; Carretera de Maó-Es Castel; s €48-72, d €65-96; 📞) A magnificent Georgian-style mansion and a former residence of Nelson's second-in-command at Trafalgar, this place offers simple rooms (ask for one in the main building) and features lovely gardens, a pool, tennis court and crowds of British tourists.

CIUTADELLA

Hostal-Residencia Oasis (☎ 97 138 21 97; Carrer de Sant Isidre 33; d €46-50) In the old quarter, this old-fashioned place offers rooms set around a large garden courtyard.

OTHER AREAS

Camping S'atalaia (☎ 97 137 42 32; www.camping.satalaia.com; per person/tent/electricity €6.30/4.50/4; 🕒 closed Nov-Mar) One of Menorca's two camping grounds. Camping S'atalaia is near the resorts of Santa Galdana, about 4km south of Ferreries.

Camping Son Bou (☎ 97 137 27 27; www.camping.sonbou.com; per person/tent/electricity €7.50/4/4; 🕒 closed Nov-Mar) This camping ground is near Son Bou, south of Alaior.

Hotel Rural Morvedrà Nou (☎ 97 135 95 21; www.morvedranou.es; Camí Sant Joan de Misa; d €100-126, ste €127-134, all incl breakfast; 📞) A perfect place to get away from it all, this converted 17th-century farmhouse 7km outside Ciutadella has sea views, a bar-restaurant and 16 rooms with private terraces.

Eating & Drinking

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

MAÓ

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

Es Fosquet (☎ 97 135 00 58; Moll Llevant 256; mains €10-14; 🕒 1-4pm & 8-11.30pm Thu-Sun) A tiny but chic hole-in-the-wall place, Es Fosquet serves up freshly caught fish and shellfish.

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

Café Balear (☎ 97 138 00 05; Plaça de Sant Joan 15; meals €25-30; 🕒 lunch only Tue-Sun, lunch & dinner Sun Dec-Oct) This long-standing favourite offers attractive outdoor seating and an excellent seafood-dominated menu.

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.

FORNELLS

Es Pla (☎ 97 137 66 55; Pasaje des Pla; winter menú €15, summer menú €21) The Spanish royals are said to love the lavish seafood dishes served up at this Menorcan restaurant. Its speciality is *caldereta de langosta* (spiny lobster stew).

Getting Around

Buses run from the **Mahon airport** (MAH; ☎ 97 115 70 00; www.aena.es) into Maó every half-hour from 5.45am to 10.15pm; tickets cost €1.50. A taxi costs around €10.

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.

ANDALUCÍA

The tapping feet and clapping hands of a passionate flamenco performance is an Andalusian signature that's as distinctive as the sweet aroma of orange blossom or the voluptuous flavour offered by a glass of chilled summer *gazpacho*.

In years past, armies of Christians and Muslims fought over this sun-drenched part of Spain; these days, tourists are the only visitors to arrive in battalions, lured here by Andalucía's beaches, incomparable Islamic monuments and full-blooded culture.

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 and a local population that lives life to the fullest. Nothing beats a few days spent within its seductive embrace.

Information

Internetia (☎ 95 450 25 43; Calle Av Menendez Palayo; internet per hr €2.50; ☎ 10am-1am Mon-Fri, 11am-1am Sat & Sun) The scene here is hopping, with more than 50 terminals, a lounge area for laptops and a popular café.

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 office (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 de 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)

Turismo Seville (☎ 95 423 44 65; Plaza del Triunfo 5; ☎ 10.30am-2.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat)

Sights & Activities

CATHEDRAL & LA GIRALDA

Seville's **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 structure is primarily Gothic, though most internal decoration is in later styles. The adjoining tower, **La Giralda**, was the mosque's minaret and dates from the 12th century. The climb to the top is worth it for the stunning city views. One highlight of the cathedral's lavish interior is Christopher Columbus' supposed tomb, though recent research indicates he was probably laid to rest in the Caribbean and that the remains here are those of his lesser-known son Diego. The four sepulchre-bearers represent the four kingdoms of Spain at the time Columbus sailed to the Americas.

ALCÁZAR

Seville's **Alcázar** (☎ 95 450 23 23; adult/child €7/free; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Sat, to 1.30pm Sun Oct-Mar, 9.30am-

7pm Tue-Sat, to 5pm Sun Apr-Sep), a residence of Muslim and Christian royalty for many centuries, 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.

WALKS & PARKS

The best way to appreciate **Barrio de Santa Cruz**, the old Jewish quarter immediately east of the cathedral, is to head for the tangle of narrow streets and plazas east of the main Calle Mateos Gago artery. There's no better place to get lost.

A more straightforward walk is along the **river bank** 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 a simply dazzling semicircle of *azulejo*- (ceramic tile) clad buildings.

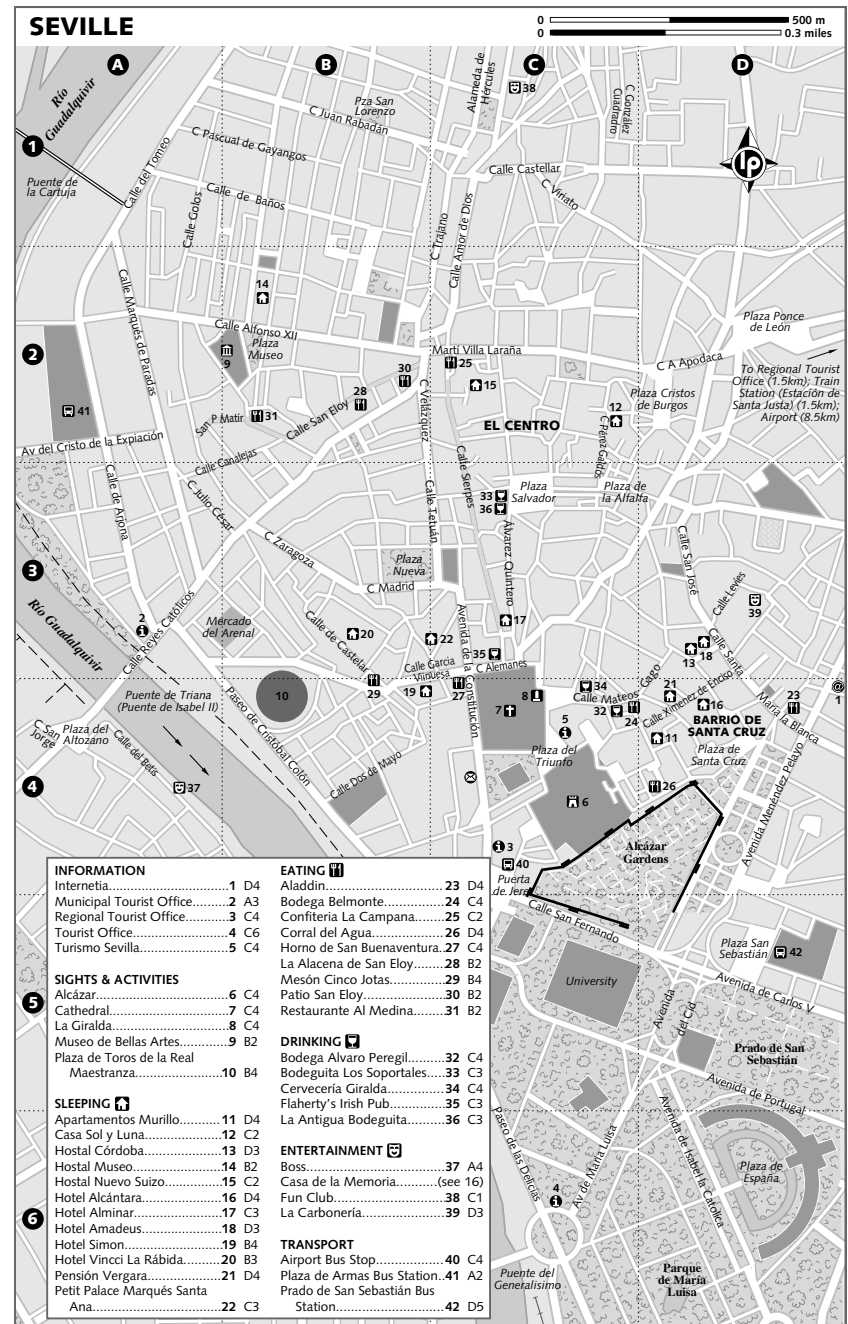
MUSEUMS

The **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 an outstanding, beautifully housed collection of Spanish art, focusing on local artists such as Bartolomé Esteban Murillo and Francisco Zurbarán.

Festivals & Events

The first of Seville's two great festivals is **Semana Santa**, the week leading up to Easter Sunday. Throughout the week, long processions of members of religious brotherhoods dressed in strange penitents' garb with tall, pointed hoods accompany sacred images through the city, while huge crowds look on.

The **Feria de Abril**, a week in late April, is a welcome release after this solemnity: the



DEATH IN THE AFTERNOON

Seville's bullfight season runs from Easter to October, with fights about 6.30pm most Sundays, and every day during the Feria de Abril and the preceding week. Tickets cost between €20 and €100, depending on who's fighting. *Sol* (sun) seats are cheaper than *sombra* (shade) seats. If you get a particularly good matador, the atmosphere in the ring can be electrifying. Tickets can be purchased in advance from **Empresa Pagés** (☎ 95 450 13 82; Calle de Adriano 37) and from 4.30pm on fight days at the bullring itself.

festivities involve six days of music, dancing, horse-riding and traditional dress, plus daily bullfights and a city-wide party.

Sleeping

Note that prices over Semana Santa and Feria can be up to double the high-season prices cited here. The city's accommodation is often full on weekends and is always booked solid during festivals, so it's a good idea to book ahead.

BUDGET

Hostal Nuevo Suizo (☎ 95 422 91 47; www.nuevosuizo.com; Calle Azofaifo 7; dm incl breakfast €21-25, s €39-43, d €49-69, all with shared bathroom; ☒ ☑ ☒) Near the vibrant San Eloy bar strip, the Nuevo Suizo occupies an attractive old house and offers rooms and some dorms; only the rooms have air-con. There's one clean shared bathroom for every 10 beds, a roof terrace, a lounge 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.casosolyluna1.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 *penión* occupies the 1st floor of an 18th-century apartment building near Plaza

Salvador. 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 and there's a convivial communal lounge.

Hostal Córdoba (☎ 95 422 74 98; hostalcordoba@mixmail.com; Calle Farnesio 12; s €35-50, d €55-70, with shared bathroom s €30-40, d €45-60; ☑) Otto, the West Highland terrier, will welcome you to this extremely friendly, family-run *hostal*. The simple rooms are light and immaculately maintained. This is a good choice, particularly if you opt for the rooms that share a bathroom, as these are very well priced.

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. It offers three-star amenities for two-star prices, meaning that it's often fully booked.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Simon (☎ 95 422 66 60; www.hotelsimonsevilla.com; Calle García Vinuesa 19; s €49-65, d €72-102, ste €107-129; ☑) Renowned for its genteel ambience and tranquil internal courtyard, the Simon offers comfortable rooms adorned with colourful tiles. The front doubles are particularly attractive and offer good value for money, but the singles are tiny, dark and overpriced.

Hotel Alcántara (☎ 95 450 05 95; www.hotelalcantara.net; Calle Ximenez de Enciso 28; s €55-66, d €62-75; ☑) Sometimes it makes sense to trade character for service and comfort, and that's certainly the case at this well-located hotel. Large, light rooms overlook a pleasant internal courtyard and are blessedly quiet; they also have satellite TV and comfortable beds.

Hotel Alminar (☎ 95 429 39 13; reservas@hotelalminar.com; Calle Álvarez Quintero 52; s €60-90, d €90-145, all incl breakfast; ☒ ☑ ☒) The Alminar opened in 2005 and has quickly built a reputation for its friendly service and very stylish rooms, all of which have sleek bathrooms, CD players and satellite TV. Two have private terraces with cathedral views.

Hotel Amadeus (☎ 95 450 14 43; www.hotelamadeussevilla.com; Calle Farnesio 6; s €65, d €80-175, ste

€130-210; ☒ ☑ ☒) What a gorgeous looking hotel this is! Occupying a handsome 18th-century house and filled with fresh flowers, musical instruments and antique furniture, it's a perfect base from which to explore the city. Rooms are well set up, though sound-proofing is a problem in a few.

Apartamentos Murillo (☎ 95 421 09 59; apartamentos@hotelmurillo.com; Calle Reinoso 6; 1-bedroom apt €77-94, 2-bedroom apt €99-156; ☑) Families will adore these fabulously located apartments. Recently outfitted, they come complete with comfortable beds, fully-equipped kitchens, swish bathrooms and work desks. Terrific value.

TOP END

Hotel Vinci La Rábida (☎ 95 450 12 80; www.vincioteles.com; Calle de Castelar 24; r €84-164, ste €236-327; ☒ ☑ ☒) Seville has a surfeit of top-class hotels, and though this centrally located option doesn't have the fame of some of its competitors, it compensates with its impressive levels of service, comfort and value for money. Rooms are large and have every amenity; suites are absolute knockouts. There are a number of sunny patios, and there's a library and rooftop bar-restaurant with cathedral views.

Petit Palace Marqués Santa Ana (☎ 95 422 18 12; msa@hoteles.com; Calle Jimios 9-11; r €97-174; ☒ ☑ ☒) This new hotel has the wow factor in spades. If the sleek foyer doesn't immediately bowl you over, the hi-tech rooms with their massage showers, enormous beds, clothes press, laptop computer and exercise bike certainly will. A top location and stunning décor complete an ultraglam package.

Eating

Horno de San Buenaventura (cnr Av de la Constitución & Calle García Vinuesa) A perfect stop for breakfast or a light lunch, and even better for a midafternoon cake intake, this cavernous place serves everything from early morning coffees (€1.50) and *tostadas* (€1) to lunch-time *platos combinados* (€9 including bread and wine). Tables at the downstairs window are highly prized; those not fortunate enough to score one are relegated to the upstairs area.

Confitería La Campana (Calle Sierpes 1) The bar at the rear of this popular *pastelería* is a perfect spot to enjoy a morning coffee and

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Restaurante Al Medina (☎ 95 421 54 51; Calle San Roque 13; mains €10.50-14.50, menú degustación €20; ☒ closed Mon & dinner Sun) 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 (as soon as we saw the fresh rose petals scattered on the tabletops we became customers for life) and the food is quite wonderful – try the *couscous de pollo* (chicken couscous) and you too will become a devotee. It's tiny (11 tables only), so make sure you book ahead.

croissant. For a slightly greater outlay you can even commandeer a table on the sunny front terrace.

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 perch on the tiled rear steps and catch up over *burguillos* (small filled rolls, €1.50 to €2) and cheap drinks.

La Alacena de San Eloy (☎ 95 421 55 80; Calle San Eloy 31; tapas €2-2.50, 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.

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.

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 food on offer certainly will.

Corral del Agua (☎ 95 422 07 14; Callejón del Agua 6; mains €12-16; ☒ closed Jan & Feb & Sun year-round) The cool courtyard and attentive service make this a great spot to enjoy an indulgent lunch or dinner. Opt for local specialties such as the *solomillo de tenera a la sevillana* (veal sirloin in the Sevillian style).

Mesón Cinco Jotas (☎ 95 421 07 63; Calle de Castellar 1; raciones €7-21.50, mains €14-23) It's mandatory to sample *jamón* when in Spain, and this is one of the best places in the country to do so. Its succulent 'Jamón 5' comes from pigs that have snuffled out the finest acorns and is utterly delicious.

Drinking

Bodega Alvaro Peregil (Calle Mateos Gago) The crowd spills out onto the footpath in front of this tiny place from early morning till late at night.

Cervecería Giralda (☎ 95 422 74 35; Calle Mateos Gago 1) On the other side of the street from Alvaro Peregil, you'll find this popular bar occupying a former Muslim *hammam* (bathhouse).

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

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, a large baroque church. It's great fun.

Entertainment

Seville is arguably Spain's flamenco capital and you're most likely to catch a spontaneous atmosphere (of unpredictable quality) in one of the bars staging regular nights of flamenco with no admission fee.

La Carbonería (☎ 95 421 44 60; Calle Levías 18; ☎ 9pm-4am) The sprawling La Carbonería throngs every night of the week with tourists and locals who come to mingle and enjoy the live flamenco on offer.

Casa de la Memoria Al-Andalus (☎ 95 456 06 70; Calle Ximenez de Enciso 28; adult/student/child €12/8/6) For a very different experience, book a ticket at this well-priced place, which puts on excellent nightly flamenco performances in a wonderful patio setting.

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

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 dance bars/discos, including **Boss** (☎ 95 499 01 04; Calle del Betis 57; admission free; ☎ 11pm-7am Wed-Sat, closed Jun-Aug), Seville's biggest nightclub.

Getting There & Away

AIR

There's a range of domestic and international flights in and out of Seville's **San Pablo airport** (SVQ; ☎ 95 444 90 00; www.aena.es), which is 8.5km from the city centre.

BUS

There are regular services from the **Plaza de Armas bus station** (☎ 95 490 80 40; Av del Cristo de la Expiración) to destinations outside Andalucía. **Socibus** (☎ 90 222 92 92; www.socibus.es) travels to Madrid (€17.50, six hours, 14 daily), and Also goes to Mérida (€11.55, three hours, nine daily), Cáceres (€15.55, 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). **Alsina Graells** (☎ 95 740 40 40) services Córdoba (€9.45, 1¾ hours to 2¾ hours, nine daily), Granada (€17.60, three hours, 10 daily) and Málaga (€14.40, 2½ hours, 10 daily). **Los Amarillos** (www.losamarillos.com) serves Ronda (€9.90, 2½ hours, five daily). **Comes** (☎ 90 219 92 08; www.tgcomes.es) runs to Tarifa (€14.80, 3½ hours, four daily) and Cádiz (€10.30, 1¾ hours, 10 daily).

TRAIN

From Seville's **Estación de Santa Justa** (Av Kansas City), 1.5km northeast of the centre, there are super-fast AVE trains as well as regular trains to Madrid (€54.70 to €127.10, 2½ to 3¾ hours, hourly) and Córdoba (€7.55 to €38.60, 45 minutes to 1¼ hours, hourly).

Other trains serve Cádiz (€9.10 to €29.70, 1½ to two hours, 12 daily), Granada (€20.05, 3¾ 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

Amarillos Tours (☎ 90 221 03 17) runs a bus service between the airport and Puerta de Jerez in the city every half-hour between 6.15am

and 11pm daily (€2.30). A taxi will cost between €20 and €30 depending on traffic and the number of bags you have.

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 de Armas bus station, goes to Puerta de Jerez in the centre; returning, take C3. Tickets for these routes cost €0.95.

CÓRDOBA

pop 323,613

Modern-day Córdoba 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.

Information

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

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

Regional tourist office (☎ 95 747 12 35; Calle de Torrijos 10; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Nov-Feb, to 7pm Mon-Fri Mar-Oct)

Sights & Activities

The inside of the famous **Mezquita** (☎ 95 747 05 12; adult/child 10 & over/child under 10 €8/4/free, audio guide €3; ☎ 10am-7.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-Jun, to 7pm Mon-Sat Mar & Jul-Oct, to 6pm Mon-Sat Feb & Nov, to 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, is a mesmerising sequence of two-tier arches amid a thicket of columns. From 1236, the mosque was used as a church and in the 16th century a cathedral was built right in its centre – somewhat wrecking the effect of the original Muslim building. 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 northwest of the Mezquita, is an intriguing maze of narrow streets, small plazas and traditional houses with flower-filled patios. Don't miss the beautiful little **Sinagoga** (☎ 95 720 29 28; Calle de los Judíos; 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 stands the **Alcázar de los Reyes Cristianos** (Fortress of the Christian Monarchs; ☎ 95 742 01 51; adult/student €4/2, free 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), with its large and lovely gardens.

On the southern side of the river, across the Puente Romano, is the **Torre de la Calahorra** (☎ 95 729 39 29; Puente Romano; adult/child €4.50/3; ☎ 10am-6pm) with a museum highlighting the intellectual achievements of Islamic Córdoba.

It's well worth the 8km trip west of Córdoba to the intriguing **Madinat Al-Zahra** (☎ 95 732 91 30; Carretera Palma del Río, Km 5.5; admission non-EU/EU citizens €1.50/free; ☎ 10am-6.30pm Tue-Sat, to 2pm Sun), a mighty Muslim city-palace from the 10th century. If you don't have a car, catch the tourist bus (€5), which leaves from Av del Alcázar at 11am and returns

FLAMENCO FUSION

Flamenco has become much more than the traditional signature music of southern Spain. Once exclusively the music of the Gitanos (Roma people), in recent years flamenco has also morphed into a modern fusion of different rhythms and styles. Since the 1970s, bands have experimented with blues, rock, Latin, jazz and even punk to create cool new sounds as well as a new fan base of young Spaniards. So much so that these days you are as likely to hear flamenco hip-hop blasting out of a souped-up car on a Friday night as to catch it at a tourist show.

Bands that first broke the ground in this new wave of flamenco include the bluesy-style Pata Negra, Ketama (African, Cuban and Brazilian rhythms) and Radio Tarifa (North African and medieval mix). In recent years Chambao has hit the mark with its flamenco chill and Mala Rodriguez has put flamenco hip into hip-hop.

2½ hours later. Tickets can be purchased from municipal tourist booths.

Sleeping

Instalación Juvenil Córdoba (☎ 95 729 01 66; Plaza de Judá Levi; dm under 25/25 & over €14.50/19; ☒ ☒) What an excellent youth hostel this is! Located on a pretty plaza, it 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.

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. Those at the rear are quieter and slightly larger.

Hotel González (☎ 95 747 98 19; www.hotelgonzalez.com; Calle Manríquez 3; s €27-37, d €44-71; ☒) The González may not be the most stylish of the midrange choices on offer, but it's certainly one of the cheapest and most comfortable. Large rooms have comfortable beds, satellite TV and stained pine furniture. There's also a charming patio.

Hostal Lineros 38 (☎ 95 748 25 17; www.hostal.lineros38.com; Calle de Lineros 38; s €32-52, d €52-58, ste €97-110; ☐ ☒ ☒) Rooms in this boutique hotel are individually decorated, featuring brightly painted walls, exposed beams and four-poster beds. Service can be a bit unfriendly.

Hotel Lola (☎ 95 720 03 05; www.hotelconcantolola.com; Calle Romero 3; d incl breakfast €85-122; ☒) The Lola's eight rooms feature typical Córdoba décor, with original tiled floors, beamed ceilings and antique furniture; mod cons come in the form of satellite TV and minibar. The rooms aren't quite as well maintained as they should be at these prices, but the service is exemplary.

Eating & Drinking

Taberna San Miguel (Plaza San Miguel 1; tapas €1.50, media raciones €3-7; ☒ closed Sun & Aug) Known locally as *El Pisto* (Barrel), this busy place has been serving rustic food and cheap jugs of Moriles wine since 1880.

Comedor Árabe-Andalusí (☎ 95 747 51 62; Plaza Abades 4; mains €4-6; ☒ closed Mon) Set on a pretty plaza, this Arabian-style eatery has dim lighting, Persian carpets and low tables. The

meat kebabs are succulent and the salads and falafel are fresh and delicious.

Bodegas Mezquita (☎ 95 749 00 04; www.bodega.mezquita.com; 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 (☎ 95 720 07 44; Calle Romero 1; media raciones €2.50-6, mains €11-18) This local classic is always busy; you can eat hearty Córdoba specialties such as *cabo de toro a la Córdoba* (bull's tail Córdoba style, €11) in the rooms set around the patio or graze on tapas at the bar.

Bodega Campos (☎ 95 749 75 00; Calle de Lineros 32; mains €14-20; ☒ closed Sun dinner) The restaurant of choice for wealthy Córdobaes since 1908, this swish place is where you should come to try well-cooked local specialties such as *bacalao con salsa de garbanzos y espinacas* (bacalao with a sauce of chickpeas and spinach, €18.90), served with complimentary glasses of Fino and Amontillado.

Entertainment

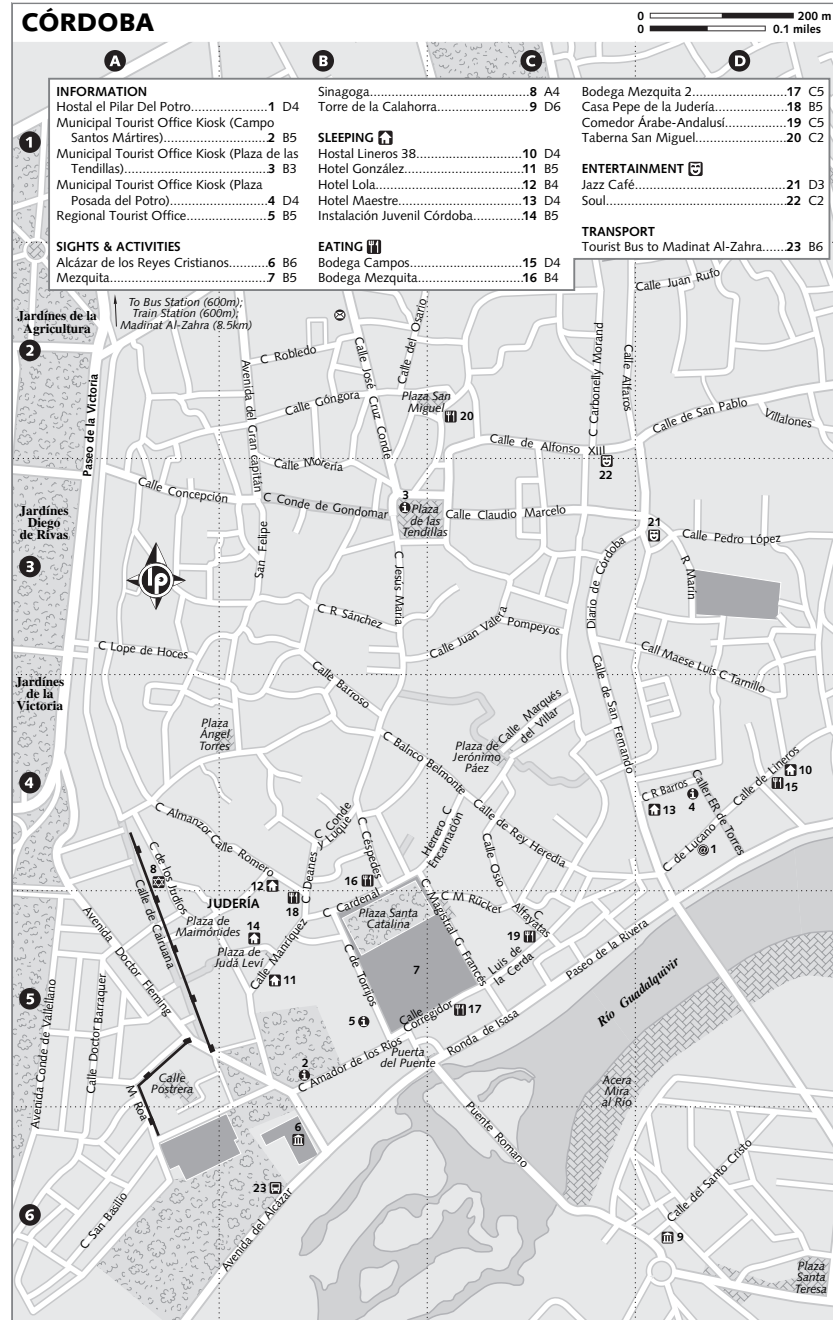
Jazz Café (Calle Espartería; ☒ 5pm-4am) This is a laid-back bar hosting jam sessions on Tuesday and live jazz on Wednesday.

Soul (☎ 95 749 15 80; Calle de Alfonso XIII 3; ☒ 10am-3am Mon-Fri, 5pm-4am Sat & Sun) Attracting student/artty types, this venue 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, Alsina Graells runs services to Seville (€9.45, 1¼ hours to 2¼ hours, nine daily), Granada (€11.40, 2¾ hours to four hours, 10 daily) and Málaga (€11.55, 2¾ hours to 3¾ hours, five daily). **Secorbus** (☎ 90 222 92 92; www.secorbus.es) travels to Madrid (€13.50, 4¾ hours, six daily).

From the **train station** (Av Málaga), 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 are also trains to Málaga (€15.60 to €16.60, 2¼ hours, six daily) and 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 Nevada Mountains (Sierra Nevada), this city was a sanctuary for Muslims after the fall of Córdoba and Seville, and reminders of this period are easily discernible in the maze-like Albayzín and in the commanding presence of the Alhambra. But the city 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.

Information

Navegaweb (Calle Reyes Católicos 55; per hr €1.50; ☎ 10am-11pm) Internet and phone access.

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)

Regional tourist offices Plaza Santa Ana (☎ 95 857 52 02; otgranada@turismo-andaluz.com; Calle Santa Ana; ☎ 9am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun); Alhambra (☎ 95 822 95 75; ticket office Bldg, Av del Generalife; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm & 4-6pm Sat & Sun Nov-Feb, 8am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm & 4-7.30pm Sat & Sun Mar-Oct, 9am-1pm public holidays)

Sights & Activities

ALHAMBRA

One of the greatest accomplishments of Islamic art and architecture, the **Alhambra** (☎ 90 244 12 21; adult/child €10/free; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Nov-Feb, to 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**, the Alhambra's fortress, dates 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 Alhambra. The beauty of its patios and intricacy of its stuccoes and woodwork, epitomised by the **Patio de los Leones** (Patio of the Lions) and **Sala de las Dos Hermanas** (Hall of the Two Sisters), are stunning. The **Generalife** (Palace Gardens)

is a great spot to relax and contemplate the complex from a little distance. Admission to it 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, make sure you keep your wits about you, as muggings sometimes occur around here. After heading uphill to reach the **Mirador de San Nicolás** – a viewpoint with breathtaking vistas and a relaxed, hippy scene – you may wish to return to Plaza Nueva via the **Museo Arqueológico** (☎ 95 822 56 40; Carrera del Darro; admission non-EU/EU citizen €1.50/free; ☎ 9am-8.30pm Wed-Sat, 2.30-8.30pm Tue, 9am-2.30pm Sun).

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

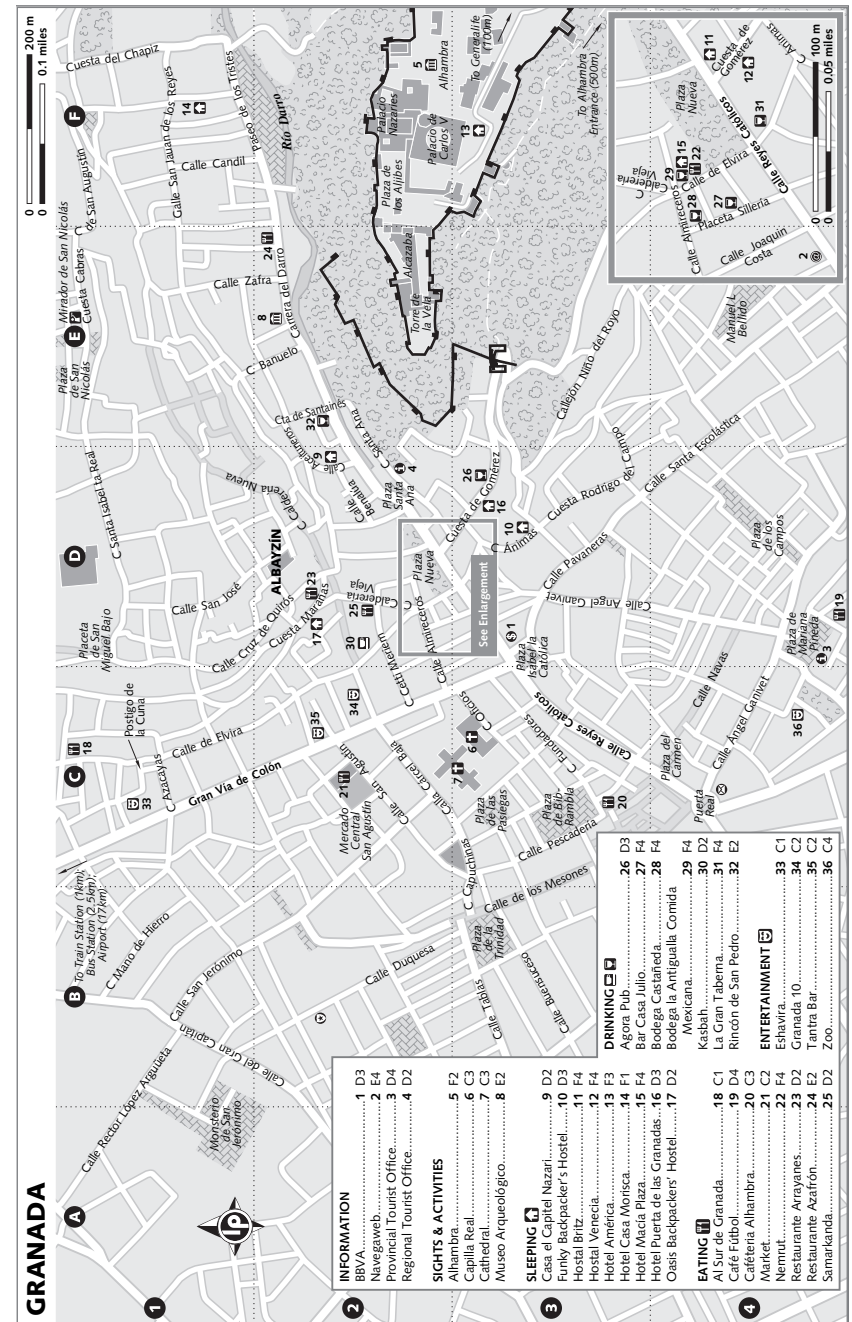
Next door to the chapel is Granada's **cathedral** (☎ 95 822 29 59; admission €3; ☎ 10.45am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat Nov-Feb, to 8pm Mar-Oct), which dates from the early 16th century.

Sleeping

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

BUDGET

Oasis Backpackers' Hostel (☎ 95 821 58 48, free call in Spain 9001 OASIS; www.oasisgranada.com; Placeta del Correo Viejo 3; 6-bed dm €15, 2-bed dm €18, all incl breakfast; ☎ ☎) 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 attractions 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 **cafeteria**, 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@alternativaacc.com; Cuesta Rodrigo del Campo 13; 6-bed dm €15, 2-bed dm €18, all incl breakfast; ☒ ☑ ☒) Funky is another excellent choice. 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-cafeteria 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 a 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 a bit barrackslike.

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, staff speak English and there's a particularly nice top-floor triple with private bathroom (€54).

MIDRANGE

Hotel Macía Plaza (☎ 95 822 75 36; www.macia.hoteles.com; Plaza Nueva 4; s/d €53/78; ☒ ☑ ☒) This is a well-located, modernised hotel with cheerful rooms overlooking noisy Plaza Nueva and quiet but dark rear alternatives. All come with decent-sized bathrooms, satellite TV and comfortable beds.

Casa el Capitol Nazari (☎ 95 821 52 60; www.hotelcasacapitel.com; Cuesta Aceituneros 6; r €60-102, with Alhambra views €72-114; ☑ ☒) The Capitol Nazari has more than its fair share of charm. Occupying a 16th-century courtyard house, its rooms are comfortable and some have private terraces (try for room 22).

Hotel Puerta de las Granadas (☎ 95 821 62 30; www.hotelpuertadelasgranadas.com; Cuesta de Gómez 14; r €64-173; ☒ ☑ ☒) About as modern as Granada gets, this three-star hotel near Plaza Nueva offers small but well set-up rooms that look as if they've been decorated by Ikea consultants. Staff members are extremely helpful and there's free internet access. Beware the front rooms, which face a very noisy pub.

Hotel América (☎ 95 822 74 71; www.hotelamerica.granada.com; Calle Real de la Alhambra 53; s €70, d €107-130; ☒ ☑ ☒) Its magical position within the walls of the Alhambra means

that you need to reserve well ahead of your stay to score a room here.

TOP END

Hotel Casa Morisca (☎ 95 822 11 00; www.hotelcasamorisca.com; Cuesta de la Victoria 9; s €118, d €118-148; ☒ ☑ ☒) The penthouse room at this quietly elegant hotel has Alhambra views; other rooms are set around the fountain-adorned central patio or overlook surrounding laneways. Décor is Moorish-inspired and the amenities include satellite TV, crisp white linen and brightly tiled bathrooms.

Eating

Caféteria Alhambra (☎ 95 852 39 29; Plaza de Bib-Rambla 27; ración de churros €2; ☒ ☑ ☒) The churros made fresh at this bustling cafeteria are fabulous, and the coffee and chocolate are nearly as good.

Café Fútbol (☎ 95 822 66 62; Plaza de Mariana Pineda 6; ☒ ☑ ☒) 6am-midnight, later during festivals) This 1922 Art Nouveau café near the provincial tourist office is another great choice for chocolate and churros.

Nemrut (☎ 95 822 67 30; Plaza Nueva 1; filled bocadillos €3.50) A branch of a national chain, this fast-food joint serves excellent Turkish sandwiches at its indoor and outdoor tables. There's a good-value *menú* offering a doner 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; ☒ ☑ ☒) 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 *fat-toosh* (toasted khobz bread, tomatoes, onions and mint leaves with a smattering of pomegranate syrup; €5.50) and the simple but delicious *wara ainab* (stuffed leaves; €6). Drinks include local beer and Lebanese wine. Recommended.

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 brocade banquettes, rugs and brightly coloured cushions. No alcohol is served, but the house lemonade (€1.50) is a refreshing substitute.

Restaurante Azafrón (☎ 95 822 68 82; Paseo de los Tristes 1; mains €11-16) A chic brasserie overlooking the Alhambra, Azafrón takes itself a bit more seriously than its food warrants,

but it's still an enjoyable place for a lunch or dinner, particularly if you can score a window table.

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

Drinking

Bar Casa Julio (Calle Hermosa) This traditional bar is renowned for its tapas, especially the *boquerones fritos* (fried fresh anchovies).

La Gran Taberna (☎ 95 822 88 46; Plaza Nueva 12; tablas €5-9) Everyone feels welcome at this traditional-style *bodega*, where drinks are accompanied by complimentary tapas.

Kasbah (☎ 95 822 79 36; Calle Calderería Nueva 4; tea €2; ☒ ☑ ☒) 12.30pm-12.30am) Granada's Moorish legacy lives on in the Albayzín's fabulous Arabian-style *teterías* (teahouses). One of the best is Kasbah, a candle-lit den filled with Persian rugs and secret alcoves. It also has live flamenco and belly dancing.

Other good choices for a drink or two are **Rincón de San Pedro** (Carrera del Darro 12), **Agora Pub** (Cuesta de Gómez; ☒ ☑ ☒) (closed Sun), **Bodega Castañeda** (Calle Almirantes) and **Bodega la Antigualla Comida Mexicana** (Calle de Elvira). All are near Plaza Nueva and stay open late.

Entertainment

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

Granada 10 (Calle Cárcel Baja; admission €6; ☒ ☑ ☒) (midnight-dawn) This place holds its 'Soul Kitchen' on Wednesday nights. It also runs the hip Tantra Bar off Calle de Elvira, which has an in-house DJ.

Zoo (Plaza Campillo; ☒ ☑ ☒) 2am-8am Thu-Sun) Slightly seedy Zoo is one of the city's longest functioning gay dance clubs.

Getting There & Away

Autocares J Gonzalez (☎ 95 849 01 64; www.auto.caresjosegonzalez.com) runs a bus service between Granada's new **airport** (GRX; ☎ 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. A taxi costs €20 to €25.

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. Alsina Graells has services to Madrid's Estación Sur (€14.70, five hours, 12 daily), Málaga (€8.90, 1¼ hours, 18 daily), Seville (€17.60, three to four hours, 10 daily) and Córdoba (€11.40, 2¼ hours, 11 daily). Also travels to Barcelona (€61.90 to €73.05, seven to 10 hours, six daily).

The **train station** (Av de Andaluces) is about 1.5km southwest of the centre. Catch bus 4, 6, 7, 9 or 11 (€1) going east (right) from Av de la Constitución to get to the centre. 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, 4¼ hours, three daily) via Ronda (€11.35, 2¼ hours). 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.

The best thing about the region is the wonderful coastline and semidesert scenery of the **Cabo de Gata** promontory. All along the 50km coast from El Cabo de Gata village to Agua Amarga, some of the most beautiful and empty beaches on the Mediterranean alternate with precipitous cliffs and scattered villages. Roads or paths run along or close to this whole coastline, which is a protected area. The main village is laid-back **San José**, with excellent beaches nearby, such as **Playa de los Genoveses** and **Playa de Mónsul**.

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 movie makers shot dozens of films here, including parts of *The Magnificent Seven* and *A*

ALHAMBRA TICKETS

It is a good idea 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, or by calling ☎ 90 222 44 60 from within Spain (☎ 00 34 91 537 91 78 from abroad) or paying by credit card on the website www.alhambratickets.com. An extra €0.88 is charged for the on-line service.

Note that Alhambra tickets are only valid for half a day, so you'll need to specify whether you wish to visit in the morning or afternoon. To book night visits, call ☎ 95 857 51 26/7.

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 4 & over/child under 4 €17/9/free; ☎ 10am-7pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar, to 9pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, closed 1 Nov-14 Dec).

Sleeping & Eating
ALMERÍA

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

La Perla (☎ 95 023 88 77; fax 95 027 58 16; Plaza del Carmen 7; d €48-61; ☎ ☎) The oldest hotel in town, this recently renovated option has comfortable rooms with satellite TV.

Taberna Torreluz (☎ 95 023 43 99; Plaza Flores 3; raciones €8; ☎ noon-4pm & 7.30pm-12.30am) This wood-panelled bar is famed for its fabulous *raciones*.

CABO DE GATA

Casa Emilio (☎ 95 038 97 61; r €40-50) In the quiet village of Los Escullos, a few kilometres up the coast, Casa Emilio offers clean, simple rooms with balconies, as well as a downstairs bar-restaurant.

In San José there is **Camping Tau** (☎ 95 038 01 66; www.parquenatural.com/tau; per person/tent €4.50/4.50, electricity €3-5; ☎ closed Oct-Mar) and the friendly non-HI hostel **Albergue Juvenil de San José** (☎ 95 038 03 53; www.alberguesanjose.com; Calle Montemar; dm €12; ☎ closed Nov-Mar).

MOJÁCAR

Hostal La Esquinica (☎ 95 047 50 09; Calle Cano 1; s/d with shared bathroom €20/25) Tiny and covered in climbing plants, this *hostal* has sweet but simple rooms with wooden beds.

Hostal Mamabel's (☎ 95 047 24 48; www.mamabels.com; Calle Embajadores 5; d/ste €65/87; ☎) The nine large rooms here have sea views, and four even have private terraces. There's also an excellent restaurant (mains €11 to €18).

Mesón Casa Egea (Paseo Mediterráneo 127, Playa Mojácar; mains €15; ☎ closed Nov & Mon Sep-Jun) Local fishermen supply fresh fish here each day, and visitors flock to eat it in the air-conditioned dining room or on the sea-facing terrace.

Getting There & Away

From Almería's **bus station** (☎ 95 026 20 98; Plaza de Barcelona), Alsina Graells travels to Granada (€10.10 to €12.25, 2½ to four hours, five daily), Málaga (€14.55, 3¼ hours, nine daily) and Seville (€27.70 to €28.60, 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

Seeking *andaluz* charm? You need look no further than Málaga. This exuberant port city suffers unfairly from its proximity to the overdeveloped and unenticing Costa del Sol; in reality, it's an enticing mix of pedestrianised streets, rollicking nightlife, great tapas and world-class galleries and museums.

Information

Internet Meeting Point (Plaza de la Merced 20; per hr €1-2; ☎ 10-12.30am) The price of internet usage fluctuates according to time of day.

Municipal tourist office (☎ 95 213 47 30; www.malagaturismo.com; Av de Cervantes 1; ☎ 8am-2.30pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1.30pm Sat)

Regional tourist office (☎ 95 221 34 45; www.andalucia.org; Pasaje de Chinitas 4; ☎ 9am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun)

Sights & Activities

The **Alcazaba** (☎ 95 222 72 30; Calle Alcazabilla; admission €2, free after 2pm 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 Romanano** (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 hilltop **Castillo de Gibralfaro** (admission €2; ☎ 9am-5.45pm Nov-Mar, to 7.45pm Apr-Oct), a Moorish castle, commands spectacular views across the city and sea.

Málaga's **cathedral** (☎ 95 221 59 17; Calle Molina Lario; admission €3.50; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat Nov-Mar, 10am-6.45pm Mon-Fri, to 5.45pm Sat Apr-Oct) has a peculiar lopsided look (the south tower was never completed) and a magnificent 18th-century baroque façade.

Whatever you do, don't leave 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 exhibition €4.50/2.50, both €8/4; ☎ 10am-8pm Tue-Thu & Sun, to 9pm Fri & Sat). Set in the contemplative setting of the lovely 16th-century Palacio de Buenavista, the museum is stacked with more than 200 works covering the length and breadth of Picasso's astonishing career.

Sleeping

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

Hostal La Palma (☎ 95 222 67 72; 1st fl, Calle Martínez 7; d €38-43, with shared bathroom s €23, d €30-38) Run by the genial Antonio, this excellent *hostal* has a reception area on the 1st floor and rooms on upper floors. Those on the 4th floor have washbasins 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.

Hostal Derby (☎ 95 222 13 01; fax 95 222 13 02; 4th fl, Pasaje San Juan de Dios 1; s/d €36/45, with shared bathroom €30/40; ☎) The *senora* here is extremely friendly, and keeps her *hostal* impeccably clean. Large front rooms have views of the port.

Hotel Venecia (☎ 95 221 36 36; www.hotelveneciamalaga.com; Alameda Principal 9; s/d €58/72; ☎) An old-fashioned place with large rooms featuring comfortable beds, satellite TV and enormous bathrooms, the Venecia is an acceptable midrange choice. There's a very good *cafetería* downstairs.

Hotel Don Curro (☎ 95 222 72 07; www.hoteldoncurro.com; Calle Sancha de Lara 7; s/d €79/116; ☎ ☎ ☎) With 118 rooms and a loyal business clientele, this central choice deserves its three-star rating. Singles are small, but the recently renovated double rooms are a good size. Ask for an exterior room with balcony.

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. Its location couldn't be better, and its rooms are extremely comfortable. The Málagaean owners have a commitment to fostering the city's cultural life, and host regular film festivals, poetry readings, gourmet evenings and live music in the luxe restaurant-bar. In summer the action moves to the 5th-floor terrace bar, which has spectacular views. Highly recommended.

Eating

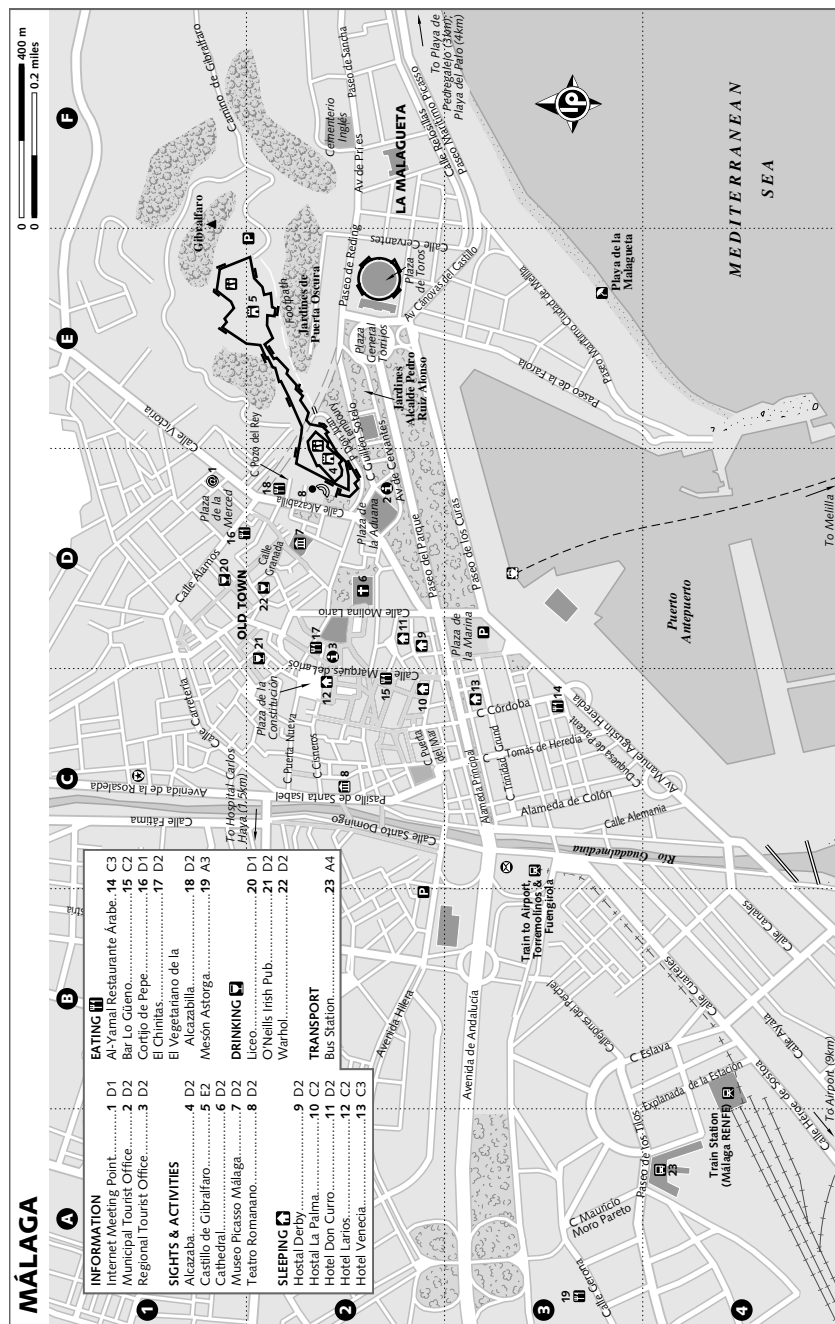
Cortijo de Pepe (Plaza de la Merced; tapas €2-2.50, montados €2) Overlooking busy Plaza de la Merced, this long-standing favourite offers an array of well-priced tapas, tasty *montados* (small filled rolls), beer and wine.

Bar Lo Güeno (☎ 95 222 30 48; Calle Marín García 9; tapas €2-4.50; ☎ 1-4.30pm & 8pm-midnight) Cramming into this famous tapas bar is a mandatory activity while in Málaga. There are over 50 varieties of freshly prepared snacks on offer, including delicious *coquerones en vinagre* (pickled fresh anchovies, €2.50).

El Chinitas (☎ 95 221 09 72; Calle Moreno Monroy 4-6; tapas €1.50-3.50, montados €2-3) The tapas here are hit and miss, but when the chefs get it right they really shine. Opt for in-season delicacies such as *esparragos plancha* (grilled asparagus €3.50).

El Vegetariano de la Alcazabilla (☎ 95 221 48 58; Calle Pozo del Rey 5; mains €6-8; ☎ closed Sun) Honest and fresh dishes are served in unpretentious surrounds in the city's most popular vegetarian restaurant.

Al-Yamal Restaurante Árabe (☎ 95 221 20 46; Calle Blasco de Garay 7; mains €11-16; ☎ closed Sun) 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).



Mesón Astorga (☎ 95 234 68 32; Calle Gerona 11; meals €15-22; ☺ closed Sun) Using the very best local produce, the chefs at this highly regarded restaurant prepare meat and fish dishes with a modern slant.

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

Drinking

Serious party time kicks off at about midnight around Calle Granada and Plaza de la Merced.

O'Neill's Irish Pub (Calle Luis de Velázquez 3) This place appeals enormously to young Malagueños, who can't seem to get enough Guinness and U2. Go figure.

Liceo (Calle Beatas 21) In a grand old mansion, the two levels of this bar are often full of students. The music is mainly electronic and pop.

Warhol (Calle Niño de Guevara; ☺ Thu-Sat) This stylish haunt is frequented by a predominantly gay clientele.

Getting There & Away

The **Pablo Ruiz Picasso Airport** (AGP; ☎ 95 204 88 38; www.aena.es) handles a wide range of domestic and international flights. Buses run between it and platform 30 at Málaga's bus station between 6.35am and 11.35pm daily (€1, tickets available on bus).

Another way of travelling between the town 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) and then returning via the same stops.

From the **bus station** (☎ 95 235 00 61; www.estabus.emtsam.es; Paseo de los Tilos), **Daibus** (☎ 90 227 79 99; www.daibus.es) travels to Madrid (€19.65, six hours, nine daily). Alsina Graells services Granada (€8.90, 1¼ hours, 18 daily), Seville (€14.40, 2½ hours, 10 daily) and Almería (€14.55, 3¼ hours, nine daily). **Portillo** (☎ 90 214 31 44; www.ctsa-portillo.com) travels between Málaga and Ronda (€9.40, two hours, four daily), Algeciras (€9.95 to

€10.40, 1¾ to three hours, 11 daily), Cadíz (€19.70 to €20.15, four to 5½ hours, three daily), Tarifa (€12.10, two hours, two daily) and La Linéa (€10.05, three hours, four daily). Also travels to and from Barcelona (€70.50 to €83.50) via Valencia (€46.40 to €53.10) six times per day.

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). There's also a service to Seville (€16.05, 2½ hours, eight daily).

RONDA

pop 34,832

Picturesque Ronda is split in two by the savagely deep El Tajo gorge and is at the heart of some lovely hill country.

The **Municipal tourist office** (☎ 95 218 71 19; www.turismoderonda.es; Paseo de Blas Infante s/n; ☺ 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 3.30-6.30pm Sat & Sun) is helpful but can get crowded.

Sights & Activities

The **Plaza de Toros** (1785), considered the national home of bullfighting, is a mecca for aficionados; inside is the small but fascinating **Museo Taurino** (Bullfighting Museum; ☎ 95 287 41 32; adult/student €5/3; ☺ 10am-8pm).

The amazing 18th-century **Puente Nuevo** (New Bridge) is an incredible engineering feat crossing the 100m-deep gorge to the originally Muslim old town (La Ciudad). Those interested in learning more about the bridge's construction can visit the **interpretation centre** (☎ 64 996 53 38; adult/student €2/1; ☺ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat & Sun) next to the bridge. At the **Casa del Rey Moro** (House of the Moorish King; ☎ 95 218 72 00; Calle Santo Domingo 17; adult/child €4/2; ☺ 10am-8pm), you can climb down La Mina, a Muslim-era stairway cut inside the rock, right to the bottom of the gorge. Also well worth a visit are the beautiful 13th-century **Baños Arabes** (Arab Baths; ☎ 65 695 09 37; Barrio Padre Jesus; adult/child €2/free, free Sun; ☺ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat & Sun) and **Santa Maria la Mayor** (☎ 95 287 22 46; Plaza Duquesa de Parcent; admission €1.50; ☺ 10am-7pm), a 13th-century mosque that was converted into a church by Ferdinand the Catholic.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Morales (☎ 95 287 15 38; reserves@hotelmorales.com; Calle Sevilla 51; s €20-23, d €36-42) This friendly place offers basic but clean rooms.

Alavera de los Baños (☎ 95 287 91 43; www.andalucia.com/alavera; Hoyo San Miguel; s €60, d €80-95, all incl breakfast; ☹ closed Dec & Jan; (P) ☹ ☹) A blissfully quiet hotel next to the Arab baths, the Alavera is rustic and romantic in equal measure. There are only nine rooms; try for one with a private terrace. Be warned that the climb up to town is very steep – most guests end up eating at the hotel's small restaurant (meals €25 to €30) rather than attempting it at night.

Hotel Jardín de la Muralla (☎ 95 287 27 64; www.jardindelamuralla.com; Calle Espiritu Santo 13; d/stg incl breakfast €86/107; ☹ ☹ ☹) Set in a lush garden, this charming place makes a perfect base for exploring the town. Its pool terrace, comfortable rooms and handsome common areas might mean that you're loathe to set foot outside, though!

Relax Vegetariano Café-Bar (☎ 95 287 72 07; Calle Los Remedios 27; pasta €6) This British-owned café has bright red walls, rustic wooden tables and tasty vegetarian food (something unusual in this bull-obsessed town).

Restaurante Pedro Romo (☎ 95 287 11 10; Calle Virgen de la Paz 18; mains €10-16; ☹ 10am-10pm) Ronda's most famous eatery is opposite the bullring and is an excellent and atmospheric place to sample local dishes such as braised bull's tail.

Getting There & Away

From the **bus station** (☎ 95 287 26 57; Plaza Concepción García Redondo), Portillo has services to Málaga (€9.40, two to 2¾ hours, four daily) and Los Amarillos travels to Seville (€9.90, 2½ hours, five daily).

From the **train station** (Av Andalucía), trains run to Granada (€11.35, 2¾ hours, three daily), Córdoba (€17.20 to €21.90, 2½ hours, two daily), Málaga (€8.15, two hours, one daily), Algeciras (€6.25 to €25, 1¾ to two hours, six daily) and Madrid (€34.90 to €52.60, 9¾ hours, two 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. The **tourist office** (☎ 95 657 26 36; Calle Juan Cierva; ☹ 9am-2pm Mon-Fri) is near the port.

Sleeping

Hotel Reina Cristina (☎ 95 660 26 22; www.reina.cristina.com; Paseo de la Conferencia; s/d €85/126; (P) ☹ ☹) If you're in need of a rest after getting off the ferry, head to this gracious colonial-style hotel with its large and comfortable rooms, swimming pools and lush gardens.

Getting There & Away

BOAT

Frequent ferries to/from Tangier, in Morocco, and Ceuta, the Spanish enclave on the Moroccan coast, are operated by **Trasmediterránea** (☎ 90 245 46 45; www.trasmediterranea.es), **Euroferrys** (☎ 95 665 11 78; www.euroferrys.com), **Buquebus** (☎ 90 241 42 42; www.buquebus.es) and other companies. There are regular services to Tangier (adult/child/car €32.90/20.30/91.80, one hour) and even more to Ceuta (adult €30.10 to €34.60, child €10.75 to €17.30, car €62.75 to €75.95, 35 minutes). Buy your ticket in the port or at agencies on Av Marina – prices are the same.

BUS

About 400m inland from the port, **Comes** (☎ 95 665 34 56; Calle San Bernardo) runs services to Tarifa (€1.70, 25 to 45 minutes, 21 daily), Cádiz (€9.75, two hours, 10 daily) and Seville (€14.80, 3¾ to 4½ hours, four daily). **Portillo** (Av Virgen del Carmen 15), 200m north of the port, goes to Málaga (€9.95 to €10.40, 1¾ to three hours, 11 daily).

TRAIN

From the **train station** (Calle Agustín Bálamo 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), Ronda (€6.25 to €25, 1¾ to two hours, six daily) and Granada (€17, 4¾ hours, three daily).

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 Cádiz grew into Spain's richest and most cosmopolitan city in the 18th century. The best time to visit is during the February *carnaval* (carnival), which rivals Rio in terms of outrageous exuberance.

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

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 €3.50/3; ☹ 10am-6pm mid-Sep–mid-Jun, to 8pm mid-Jun–mid-Sep), the highest of Cádiz' old watchtowers, which features 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. The city's lively **central market** (Plaza de las Flores) is on the site of a former Phoenician temple.

Sleeping & Eating

Quo Qádis (☎ /fax 95 622 19 39; www.quoqadis.com; Calle Diego Arias 1; dm incl breakfast €6-12, d €30, with shared bathroom €24; ☹) Housed in an older mansion, this independent youth hostel has somewhat crowded but cheerful accommodation on offer.

Hostal Bahía (☎ 95 625 90 61; Calle Plocia 5; d €52-69; ☹) Just off the bustling main square (but with double-glazed windows), this well-maintained *hostel* is a safe choice.

Hospedería Las Cortes de Cádiz (☎ 95 621 26 68; www.hotellascortes.com; Calle San Francisco 9; s €70-97, d €102-134, all incl breakfast; (P) ☹ ☹) Housed in an elegant 19th-century mansion, this charming hotel has comfortable rooms and facilities including a café, roof terrace and gym.

Freiduría Las Flores (☎ 95 622 61 12; Plaza de Topete 4; seafood per 250g €2.50-8) Cádiz' *freidurías de pescado* (fried-fish bars) are wonderful spots to grab a cheap but delicious meal; Las Flores sells the catch of the day and local specialities such as *puntillitas* (tiny legs of baby squid).

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 mean that the atmosphere is

intimidating or the prices outrageous. Its attached tapas bar is excellent.

Getting There & Away

From the Cádiz **bus station** (☎ 95 680 70 59; Plaza de la Hispanidad), Sociobus goes to Madrid (€21.55, eight hours, three daily). Portillo and Comes service Algeciras (€9.75, two hours, 10 daily), Seville (€10.30, 1¾ hours, 10 daily), Málaga (€19.70 to €20.15, four to 5½ hours, two daily) and Tarifa (€7.70, 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.

Stretching west are the long, sandy (and largely deserted) beaches of the Costa de la Luz (Coast of Light), backed by cool pine forests and green hills.

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

Sights & Activities

When here, explore Tarifa's winding old streets and visit the **Castillo de Guzmán** (☎ 95 668 46 89; Calle Guzmán El Bueno; adult/child €2/1; ☹ 11am-2pm Tue-Sat year-round & 6-8pm Tue-Sat Jul-Sep, 5-7pm Apr-Jun, 4-6pm Oct-Mar), which 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 a number of companies running daily 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

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.

La Casa Amarilla (☎ 95 668 19 93; www.lacasaamarilla.net; Calle Sancho IV El Bravo 9; r €36-60, 2-person studio €47-70, 3-person studio €63-94) Right in the thick of things, this place has exquisite (and slightly quirky) studios and rooms.

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 breakfast in town.

Mesón Perulero (☎ 95 668 19 97; Plaza San Hiscío; tapas €1.50) In a gorgeous building with an airy patio, this place does excellent fishy tapas; try the *ortigas de mar* (anemones). There's live flamenco here in summer.

Souk (☎ 95 668 07 08; Huerta del Rey 11; mains €10-14; ☎ closed Tue) 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 (€3.50, one hour, seven daily), Cádiz (€7.70, two hours, five daily) and Seville (€14, three hours, four daily). Portillo travels to/from Málaga (€12.10, two hours, two 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 like 1960s Britain on a sunny day. It's both safe and old-fashioned, attracting coachloads of day-trippers from the Costa del Sol who come here to be reassured by the helmet-wearing policemen, the double-decker buses and the fried-egg-and-chip-style eateries.

Occupying a huge lump of limestone almost 5km long and over 1km wide near the mouth of the Mediterranean, the colony of Gibraltar has certainly had a rocky history. It was the bridgehead for the Muslim invasion of Spain in AD 711. Castilla finally wrested it from the Muslims in 1462, but in 1704 an Anglo-Dutch fleet captured it. Spain gave up military attempts to regain it from Britain after the failure of the Great Siege of 1779-83, but after 300 years of concentrated Britishness, both Britain and Spain are now 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 on 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.

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).

To call Gibraltar from Spain, the telephone code is ☎ 9567; from other countries dial the international access code, then ☎ 350 and the local number. To call Spain from Gibraltar, just dial the nine-digit Spanish number. There are a couple of **tourist offices** (www.gibraltar.gov.gi; Main office ☎ 74950; Duke of Kent House, Cathedral 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, to 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/vehicle £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. For the Apes' Den, disembark at the middle station.

Sleeping & Eating

Compared with Spain, expect to pay through the nose for accommodation and food.

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 incl breakfast £45, s/d with shared bathroom & breakfast £24.50/36.50) 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 (£7) are tastier. There's live music at weekends.

House of Sacarello (☎ 70625; 57 Irish Town; mains £5-11; ☎ 9am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat) This attractive eatery is known for its cream teas (£3) and vegetarian menu options.

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 £6; ☎ 9.30am-11pm), which offers sport on TV and friendly bar staff. Rousing renditions of 'Rule Britannia' can usually be had at both places for no charge.

Getting There & Away

GB Airways (code GT; ☎ 79300, in UK 0845-77 333 77; www.gbairways.com) has flights daily to/from London's Heathrow and Gatwick airports. One-way fares start at £41. **Monarch Airlines** (code ZB; ☎ 47477, in UK 08700-405040; www.flymonarch.com) flies from London's Luton 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.

To take a car into Gibraltar, you need an insurance certificate, registration document, nationality plate and driving licence. You do *not* have to pay any fee, despite what con artists might try to tell you. The border is open 24 hours and there is plentiful parking outside the city walls, though very little within them.

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 culminated in the bloody conquest of the Incan empire.

There's a **tourist office** (☎ 92 732 26 77; ofitur@ayto-trujillo.com; Plaza Mayor; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm) on Plaza Mayor. For internet, try **Ciber 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 €1.50; ☎ 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 €1.50; ☎ 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; Calle Barriouuevo 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 Plaza Mayor (☎ 92 732 23 13; www.aloja2.com; 2nd fl, Plaza Mayor 6; s/d €21/36; ☎) In the thick of the action (if there can be said to be such a thing in Trujillo), this recently opened *pensión* offers large rooms with satellite TV and comfortable beds.

Posada Dos Orillas (☎ 92 765 90 79; www.dosorillas.com; Calle Cambrones 6; r €107-107; ☎) Who would have thought that a simple town like Trujillo would be home to one of the country's most exquisite boutique hotels? The 13 rooms here are individually decorated and have wooden ceilings, satellite TV, brass beds and swish bathrooms. Its courtyard restaurant (mains €15 to €19), which features lots of vegetarian choices, is perfect on summer nights.

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 absolutely enormous – perfect for patrons who've just spent eight hours labouring in the fields; overwhelming for anyone else. The quality of the dishes is only average, but the surroundings are attractive and it's very family friendly.

Getting There & Away

From the **bus station** (☎ 92 732 12 02; Calle San Juan Bautista de la Salle 1), 500m south of Plaza Mayor, AutoRes and **Mirat** (☎ 92 732 03 14; www.mirat.net) travel to Cáceres (€2.85, 45 minutes, eight daily). AutoRes also travels to 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 busy Av de España, a short distance south.

The **regional tourist office** (☎ 92 701 08 34; otcaceres@bme.es; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4-6pm Mon-Fri Oct-May, 9am-2pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri Jun-Sep, 9.45am-2pm Sat & Sun year-round) is on Plaza Mayor and the **municipal 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) is in the old town. For internet access, try **Ciberjust** (Calle Diego Maria Crehuet 7; per hr €2; ☎ 10.30am-11.30pm Mon-Fri, 5-11.30pm Sat & Sun).

Sights & Activities

The *ciudad monumental* is still surrounded by walls and towers raised by the Almohads in the 12th century. Entering it from Plaza Mayor, you'll see ahead 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).

Many of the old city's churches and imposing medieval mansions can be admired only from the outside, but you can visit the impressive **Museo de Cáceres** (☎ 92 701 08 77; www.museoextremadura.com; 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 Oct-mid-April, 10am-1pm & 6-7.15pm Tue-Sat, 10.45-11.45am & 6-7.15pm Sun mid-April-Sep), which is housed in a 16th-century mansion built over a 12th-century Moorish *aljibe* (cistern).

Sleeping

Hotel Iberia (☎ 92 724 76 34; www.iberiahotel.com; Calle Pintores 2; s/d €43/54; ☎) Enter this elegant former palace, and you'll be immediately won over. The rooms are extremely comfortable and the best ones (at the front) have the added extra of double-glazing. Amazing value for money.

Alameda Palacete (☎ 92 721 12 62; www.alameda.palacete.com; Calle General Margallo 45; s/d incl breakfast €44/60; ☎) Another conversion of a grand old building, this quiet place near Plaza Mayor has a boutique feel. Its eight rooms have been lovingly decorated by the proud owner and feature gorgeous linen and spacious bathrooms.

Eating & Drinking

El Corral de las Cigüeñas (Calle Cuesta de Aldana 6; ☎ 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; ☎) With a stylish and modern fitout, this 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, AutoRes and Mirat travel to Trujillo (€2.85, 45 minutes, eight daily) and **Leda SA** (☎ 92 723 43 56; www.leda.es) goes to Mérida (€4.50, 1¼ hours, four daily).

From the **train station** (☎ 92 723 50 61; Av de Alemania), services go to Madrid (€16.80 to €37, three to 4¼ hours, seven daily) and Mérida (€3.60 to €13, one hour, seven daily). There's also a daily train to Lisbon, Portugal (€37 to €163.50, 5¼ 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 archaeologically-inclined 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 Oct-May, 9am-1.45pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri Jun-Sep, 9.30am-2pm Sat & Sun year-round) is by the gates to the Roman theatre. For internet access, try **Cibersala** (Calle Camilo Cela 28; per hr €2; ☎ 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 are the **Casa del An-**

fiteatro (☎ 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), the **Basílica de Santa Eulalia** (☎ 92 430 34 07; admission €3.50; ☎ 10am-1.45pm & 4-6.15pm) and the **Museo Nacional de Arte Romano** (☎ 92 431 16 90; adult/student & child €2.50/1.50, 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 basilica and 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. You can purchase it from a ticket booth outside the Teatro Romano and Anfiteatro.

Various other reminders of imperial days are scattered about town, including the **Puente Romano**. At 792m, it's one of the longest bridges the Romans ever built and it's still possible to walk its length.

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 the common areas here attractive. Rooms are freshly painted and very clean, if a bit worn.

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

Café-Bar Bocados (☎ 92 431 67 66; Calle Suárez Somonte 96; tostada & coffee €2) 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 Bocados, this is a fabulous shop-tavern specialising in quality Extremeño produce.

Casa Benito (☎ 92 433 07 69; Calle San Francisco 3; tapas €2-3, bocadillos €2.50) Established in 1870, this atmospheric tapas bar celebrates the art of bullfighting, with photographs, posters and bulls' heads adorning every wall.

Café Galileo (☎ 92 431 55 05; Calle John Lennon 28; pizza €4-6.50, 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 at the Galileo. If that's a tad too archaeological for you, the roof terrace overlooking the Alcazaba is an equally impressive alternative. The food's adequate rather than inspired.

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (☎ 92 437 14 04; Av Libertad) is across the river. You can walk across the Puente Lusitania or catch bus 4 to get to the centre of town (€0.70). Leda SA travels to Seville (€11.55, three hours, one daily) and Cáceres (€4.50, 1¼ hours, four daily). Auto Res services Madrid (€20.20 to €25, four to five hours, eight daily) and Trujillo (€7 to €14, one to 1¼ 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, 5½ to seven hours, five daily).

SPAIN DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

In this chapter, budget options (doubles €60 and under) include everything from dorm-style youth hostels to family-style *pensiones* and slightly better heeled *hostales*. At the upper end of this category you'll find rooms with air-conditioning and private bathrooms. Midrange *hostales* and hotels (€61 to €120) are more comfortable and most offer standard hotel services. Business hotels, trendy boutique hotels, and luxury hotels are in the top-end category (€121 and up). All prices quoted are for rooms with attached bathroom unless otherwise specified.

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. In most cases, we've given either high-season prices or the full range of prices.

Virtually all accommodation prices are subject to IVA (*impuesto sobre el valor añadido*), 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 first to third 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.vaya camping.net.

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 *pensión* 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

Albergues juveniles (youth hostels) 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, and though they're often heavily booked by school groups, the official hostels are almost never as good value as the privately run ones. 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 under 30) travellers, especially in peak season. At private hostels, you'll get none of this bother, and far more charm to boot.

ACTIVITIES Cycling

Bike touring isn't as common as in other parts of Europe because of deterrents such as the often-mountainous terrain and sum-

mer 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.

Skiing

Skiing is cheap compared with 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 Nevada Mountains, 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 Basque Country 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.

Walking

Spain is a trekker's paradise. Read about some of the best treks in the country in Lonely Planet's *Walking in Spain*. Useful for hiking and exploring some areas are maps by Editorial Alpina, some with 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

Generally, people work Monday to Friday from 9am to 2pm and then again from 4.30pm to 5pm to about 8pm. Some people still follow the tradition of heading home for lunch and a siesta. Shops and travel agencies are usually open regular business

hours on Saturday too, though some may skip the evening session. Large supermarkets open from 9am until 9pm, but many smaller grocers close for lunch from 2pm until 5pm.

Museums all have their own unique opening hours; major ones tend to open for something like normal business hours (with or without the afternoon break), but often have their weekly closing day on Monday.

Banks are open from 8.30am until 2pm, Monday to Friday.

Main post offices in provincial capitals are usually open from either 8.30am to 2pm or 8.30am to 8.30pm Monday to Friday, and from about 9am to 1.30pm Saturday.

Restaurants open 1.30pm until 3.30pm and 8.30pm until 11pm; bars open in the early evening and serve until around 2am.

COURSES

There are hundreds of private language colleges throughout the country; the **Instituto Cervantes** (www.cervantes.es; Spain ☎ 91 436 76 00; Palacio de la Trinidad, Calle Francisco Silvela 82, 28028 Madrid; UK ☎ 020-7235 0353; 102 Eaton Sq, London SW1 W9AN) can send you lists of these and of universities that run courses. Also have a look at the excellent website www.spanish-in-spain.biz.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Stay alert, and you can avoid most of these thievery techniques. Common scams include the following:

- Kids crowding around you asking for directions or help. They may be helping themselves to your wallet.
- A man pointing out bird droppings on your shoulder; it's chocolate (or some other brown substance his friend has sprinkled on you), and if he tries to help clean it off he'll probably take off with your belongings.
- Kids playing football. You get involved in the game. They have easy access to your pockets and/or bags.
- Girls 'reading' maps or newspapers as they walk. The paper just covers their arm, which is then free to reach into purses or backpacks.
- The guys who tell you that you have a flat tyre. Beware, this may be a ruse to steal your car once you pull over and get out to check.

- The classic snatch-and-run. Never leave your purse, bag, wallet, mobile phone etc unattended or alone on a table.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Spanish Embassies & Consulates

Following is a list of Spanish diplomatic missions abroad. For more information see www.mae.es.

Australia Canberra (☎ 02-6273 3555; embespau@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; embespca@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)

France (☎ 01 44 43 18 00; www.amb-espagne.fr; 22 Ave Marceau, 75381 Paris, Cédex 08)

Germany (☎ 030-254 0070; www.spansichebotschaft.de; Lichtensteinallee 1, 10787 Berlin)

Ireland (☎ 269 16 40; embespie@mail.mae.es; 17A Merlyn Park, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4)

Portugal (☎ 21-347 2381; embesppt@mail.mae.es; Rua do Salitre 1 Lisbon)

UK London (☎ 020-7235 5555; embespuk@mail.mae.es; 39 Chesham Pl, London SW1X 8SB); Edinburgh (☎ 0131 220 1843); Manchester (☎ 0161 236 1262)

USA (www.spainemb.org) 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); Washington DC (☎ 202-452 0100; cog.washington@mae.es; 2375 Pennsylvania Ave NW, Washington DC 20037)

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 pp706-7; ☎ 91 423 32 50; www.canada-es.org; Calle de Núñez de Balboa 35)

France (☎ 91 435 55 60; Calle Salustiano Olózaga 9)

Germany (☎ 91 557 90 00; zreg@madri.auswaertiges-amt.de; Calle Fortuny 8)

Ireland (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 576 35 00; Calle de Claudio Coello 73)

Netherlands (☎ 91 353 75 00; nogovmad@ctv.es; Av Comandante Franco 32)

New Zealand (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 523 02 26; www.nzembassy.com; Plaza Lealtad 2)

Portugal (☎ 91 782 49 60; Calle Pinar 1)

UK Madrid (Map pp706-7; ☎ 91 319 02 00; Calle Fernando el Santo 16); Barcelona (Map pp736-7; ☎ 93 366 62 00; www.ukinspain.com; Avinguda Diagonal 477)

USA Madrid (Map pp706-7; ☎ 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)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Spaniards indulge their love of colour, noise, crowds and partying at innumerable local festivals, fiestas and *ferias* (fairs). Many are based on religion. Most local tourist offices can supply detailed information. Following is a partial list of important festivals.

January

Fiesta 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. It's held 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

Fiestas de la Mercè Barcelona's week-long party, held around 24 September. It honours the patroness of Barcelona, La Mercè.

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 *punte* (bridge), taking the intervening day off, too. The holidays listed following are observed virtually everywhere.

New Year's Day 1 January

Three Kings' Day (when children receive presents) 6 January

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.

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; and Basque (*Euskara*; of obscure, non-Latin origin) is spoken in the Basque Country and in Navarra.

LEGAL MATTERS

Spaniards no longer enjoy liberal drug laws. No matter what anyone tells you, it is not legal to smoke dope in public bars. There is a reasonable degree of tolerance when it comes to people having a smoke in their own home, but not in hotel rooms or guest-houses.

If you are arrested in Spain, you have the right to an attorney and to know the reason you are being held. You are also entitled to make a phone call.

MAPS

If you're driving around Spain, consider investing in a road atlas with detailed road maps as well as maps of all the main towns and cities. Most travel shops and petrol stations stock them.

Good city and road maps are widely available in bookshops and petrol stations. Michelin maps, which come in many scales and formats, are among the most reliable.

MEDIA

Magazines

International current-affairs magazines (or their international editions) can be found in major cities and resort areas. Among Spain's numerous magazine titles, the most popular is the glossy and gossipy *¡Hola!*.

Newspapers

The major daily newspapers in Spain are the solidly liberal *El País*, the very conservative *ABC*, the more populist *El Mundo*, and the Catalonia-focused *La Vanguardia*. There's also a welter of regional news and sports dailies, many of them with a regional slant.

International press, such as the *International Herald Tribune*, and daily papers from Mediterranean European countries reach major cities and tourist areas on the day of or day after publication.

Radio

You'll hear a lot of talk radio and a substantial proportion of music in English. The national pop/rock station, RNE 3, has well-varied programming.

Television

Spanish TV is nothing to get excited about. Gossip shows, talent shows and Big Brother-style reality shows make up the bulk of programming. Most TVs receive six channels: two state-run (TVE1 and La2), three privately run (Antena 3, Tele 5 and Canal Plus) and one regional channel.

MONEY

Spain's currency is the euro (€). Banks tend to give better exchange rates than do the currency-exchange offices. Travellers cheques attract a slightly better rate than cash. It's easy to withdraw money – Spain has one of the world's highest ATM-to-person ratios, probably because most small shops still prefer cash over credit cards.

In Spain, VAT (value-added tax) is known as *impuesto sobre el valor añadido* (IVA). On accommodation and restaurant prices, there's a flat IVA of 7%, which is usually,

but not always, included in quoted prices. On such items as retail goods, alcohol and electrical appliances, IVA is 16%. Non-EU visitors, however, don't always have to pay the tax. If you spend €90.15 or more in one store (services don't count), you're eligible for a tax refund. First, request a Spain Refund Cheque, then fill it out and present it to a customs officer at the airport or border crossing. They will stamp it and you can then cash it in. Find more information at www.spainrefund.com.

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 *estancos* (tobacco shops with the Tabacos sign in yellow letters on a maroon background). A standard airmail letter or card costs €0.29 to send 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 could well be some long, unaccountable delays.

Poste-restante mail can be addressed to you at either poste restante or *lista de correos*, the Spanish name for it, at the city in question. It's a fairly reliable system, although mail may well arrive late.

TELEPHONE

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 payphone 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 at night (between 8pm and 8am) and on weekends.

International reverse-charge (collect) calls are simple to make: dial ☎ 900 99 00 followed by the country code. For example:

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Ambulance ☎ 061
Fire ☎ 080
General Emergencies ☎ 112
Police ☎ 091

☎ 61 for Australia, ☎ 44 for the UK, ☎ 64 for New Zealand, ☎ 15 for Canada, and ☎ 11 (AT&T) for the USA.

Fax

Most main post offices have a fax service, but you'll often find cheaper rates at internet cafés or copy shops.

Mobile Phones

Mobile phone numbers in Spain start with the number 6. Calls to mobiles vary, but a three-minute call should cost about €1.20.

Phone Codes

Telephone 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.

PhoneCards

A wide variety of *tarjetas telefónicas* (phone-cards) are available at post offices, newspaper kiosks and *estancos*.

TIME

Spain is one hour ahead of GMT/UTC during winter, and two hours ahead of GMT/UTC from the last Sunday in March to the last Sunday in September.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Most towns and large villages of any interest have a helpful *oficina de turismo* (tourist office) where you can get maps and brochures. A **nationwide phone line** (☎ 90 130 06 00; ☎ 8am-10pm) offers basic information in English. See www.spain.info for more.

Tourist Offices Abroad

Spain has about 30-odd international tourist offices:

Canada (☎ 416-961 3131; www.tourspain.toronto.on.ca; 2 Bloor St W, Toronto)

France (☎ 01-45 03 82 50; www.espagne.infotourisme.com; 43 Rue Decamps, Paris)

Germany (☎ 030-882 6543; berlin@tourspain.es; Kurfürstendamm 63, Berlin)

Portugal (☎ 01-21 354 1992; lisboa@tourspain.es; Ave Sidónio Pais 28, Lisbon)

UK (☎ 020-7486 8077, brochure request 0084 59 400 180; www.tourspain.co.uk; PO Box 4009, London, W1A 6NB)

USA (☎ 212-265 8822; www.okspain.org; 35th fl, 666 Fifth Ave, New York, NY)

VISAS

Citizens of EU countries can enter Spain with their national identity card or passport. Citizens of the UK must have a full passport, not just a British visitor passport. Non-EU nationals must take their passport.

Norway, Iceland and EU 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 the nationalities that do need a visa.

It's best to obtain the visa in your country of residence. Single-entry visas are available in 30-day and 90-day flavours, and there's a 90-day multiple-entry visa, too, 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 (to go to, say, Gibraltar or Morocco), then re-enter it.

Spain is one of the Schengen countries; see p805 for details of the other countries. A visa for one Schengen country is valid for the others. Compare validity, prices and permitted entries before applying.

Norway, Iceland and EU nationals planning to stay in Spain 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.

WORK

Norway, Iceland and EU nationals are allowed to work in Spain without a visa, but if they plan to stay more than three months

they are supposed to apply within the first month for a residence card. Virtually everyone else is supposed to obtain (from a Spanish consulate in their country of residence) a work permit and, if they plan to stay more than 90 days, a residence visa. These procedures can be difficult and time-consuming.

Having said that, quite a few people do manage to work in Spain one way or another – although with Spain's unemployment rate running at around 15%, don't rely on it. Teaching English is an obvious option; a TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) certificate will be a big help. Another possibility to consider is gaining summer work in a bar or restaurant in a tourist resort, many of which are run by foreigners.

TRANSPORT IN SPAIN

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Spain has many international airports, including the following:

Alicante (ALC; ☎ 96 691 94 10)

Almería (LEI; ☎ 95 021 37 00)

Barcelona (BCN; ☎ 93 298 38 38)

Bilbao (BIO; ☎ 94 486 96 63)

Girona (GRO; ☎ 97 218 60 00)

Ibiza (IBZ; ☎ 97 180 90 00)

Madrid (MAD; ☎ 90 235 35 70)

Málaga (AGP; ☎ 95 204 88 04)

Menorca (MAH; ☎ 97 115 70 00)

Palma de Mallorca (PMI; ☎ 97 178 92 08)

Reus (REU; ☎ 97 777 98 32)

Santiago de Compostela (SCQ; ☎ 98 154 75 00)

Seville (SVQ; ☎ 95 444 90 00)

Valencia (VLC; ☎ 96 159 85 00)

Zaragoza (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.

The informative website www.flycheapo.com tells you which budget airlines fly where. Some of the major budget airlines flying to Spain include easyJet, Ryanair, Vueling and Air Europa.

Airlines operating in Spain include the following:

- Aer Lingus** (code EI; ☎ 90 250 27 37; www.aerlingus.com)
Air Europa (code UX; ☎ 90 240 15 01; www.aireuropa.com)
Air France (code AF; ☎ 90 220 70 90; www.airfrance.com)
Air Madrid (code NM; ☎ 90 251 52 51; www.airmadrid.com)
Alitalia (code AZ; ☎ 90 210 03 23; www.alitalia.com)
BMI Baby (code WW; ☎ 90 210 07 37; www.brimibaby.com)
British Airways (code BA; ☎ 90 211 13 33; www.ba.com)
British Midland (code BD; ☎ 91 393 72 53; www.flybmi.com)
Delta (code DL; ☎ 90 111 69 46; www.delta.com)
easyJet (code EZY; ☎ 90 229 99 92; www.easyjet.com)
Germanwings (code 4U; ☎ 93 297 11 55; www.germanwings.com)
Iberia (code IB; ☎ 90 240 05 00; www.iberia.com)
Jet2 (code LS; ☎ 44 207 170 07 37; www.jet2.com)
KLM (code KL; ☎ 90 222 27 47; www.klm.com)
Lufthansa (code LH; ☎ 90 222 01 01; www.lufthansa.com)
Monarch Airlines (code ZB; ☎ 90 250 27 37; www.flymonarch.com)
Ryanair (code FR; ☎ 80 722 02 20; www.ryanair.com)
SAS (code SK; ☎ 07 707 27 727; www.sas.se)
Spanair (code JK; ☎ 90 213 14 15; www.spanair.com)
Swiss Air (code LX; ☎ 90 111 67 12; www.swiss.com)
US Airways (code UA; ☎ 90 111 70 73; www.usairways.com)
Virgin Express (code TV; ☎ 90 288 84 59; www.virgin-express.com)
Vueling (code VY; ☎ 90 233 39 33; www.vueling.com)

Land

BUS

There are regular bus services to Spain from European cities such as Lisbon, London and Paris. From London, the popular megacompany **Eurolines** (☎ 08705-808 080; 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.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

If you're driving or riding to Spain from England, you'll have to choose between

going through France or taking a direct ferry from England to Spain (see below).

TRAIN

Unless you're simply hopping over the border from France or you 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 be €200 or more, 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 p889 for more on rail passes and train travel through Europe.

Sea

MOROCCO

Several companies offer regular ferry services between Spain and Morocco. **Trasmediterránea** (☎ 90 245 46 45; www.trasmediterranea.es) offers routes including Algeciras–Tangier (€45 to €60, up to 1½ hours) and Almería–Nador (€71.60, six hours). Other possible routes include Algeciras–Ceuta, Gibraltar–Tangier, Tarifa–Tangier, Málaga–Melilla and Almería–Melilla. Fast jetfoil service (at nearly double the price) is available for most of these routes. Taking a car will cost €100 and up.

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

UK

If you want use your own car, a ferry is your best bet. **Brittany Ferries** (☎ in 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 (☎ in UK 08705-980 333; www.poferries.com) runs Portsmouth–Bilbao ferries (35 hours) two or three times weekly year-round. A one-way ticket with a car starts at £270.

GETTING AROUND

Students and seniors are eligible for discounts of 30% to 50% on almost all types of transport within Spain. The travel agency **TIVE** (☎ 91 543 74 12; tive.juventud@madrid.org; Calle Fernando el Católico 88, Madrid; ☎ 9am–2pm Mon–Fri)

specialises in discounted travel for students and young people.

Air

As Spain's major domestic airline **Iberia** (☎ 90 240 05 00; www.iberia.com) gets more competition from smaller companies, domestic travel prices 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. For airline contact information see opposite.

Bicycle

Finding bikes to rent in Spain is a hit-and-miss affair, so it's best to bring your own. However, the Spanish do enjoy recreational cycling, so getting hold of spare parts shouldn't be a problem. Cyclists should be aware that quiet roads may suddenly merge into frenetic *autopistas* (freeways) without much warning.

Spain's high-speed AVE and Talgo trains will not allow bicycles on board unless boxed, but slower regional trains will. Provided there's room, buses will take bikes in their lower luggage hold (you'll probably have to remove the front wheel).

Boat

Regular ferries connect the Spanish mainland with the Balearic Islands. In bad weather or rough seas, services will be restricted. For more details see opposite. 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.

Car & Motorcycle

Spain's roads vary enormously but are generally quite good. Fastest are the *autopistas*; on some, you have to pay hefty tolls (from Zaragoza to Barcelona, for example, it's about €17). Minor routes can be slow going but are usually more scenic. Trying to find a parking spot in larger towns and cities can be a nightmare. Spanish drivers will seemingly park anywhere, but *grúas* (tow trucks) can and will tow your car. The cost of bailing out a car can be €200 or more.

Spanish cities do not have US-style parking meters at every spot. Instead, if you park in a blue zone from 8am to 2pm or from 4pm to 8pm, you have to obtain a ticket from a street-side meter, which may be a block away. Display the ticket on the dash. If you bring your own vehicle into Spain, remember to always carry the vehicle registration document.

Petrol stations are easy to find along highways and *autopistas*. They sell the more-expensive *gasolina* (unleaded) petrol as well as *gasóleo* (diesel).

AUTOMOBILE ASSOCIATIONS

The Spanish automobile club **Real Automóvil Club de España** (RACE; ☎ 90 240 45 45; www.race.es) offers a 24-hour, nationwide, on-road emergency service.

DRIVING LICENCE

All EU member states' driving licences (pink or pink and green) are recognised. Other foreign licences should be accompanied by an International Driving Permit. These are available from automobile clubs in your country and valid for 12 months.

HIRE

Rates vary widely from place to place. The best deals tend to be in major tourist areas, including airports. Expect a compact car to cost €30 and up per day. See p887 for information on major car-hire companies.

INSURANCE

Third party motor insurance is a minimum requirement, and it is compulsory to have a Green Card, an internationally recognised proof of insurance, which can be obtained from your insurer.

ROAD RULES

Driving in Spain is not too bad. Locals respect road rules but do have a tendency to tailgate. Speed limits are 120km/h on the *autopistas*, 90km/h or 100km/h on other country roads and 50km/h in built-up areas. The blood-alcohol limit is 0.04%, though some politicians are pushing for a zero-tolerance law. Seat belts must be worn, and motorcyclists must always wear a helmet and keep headlights on day and night.

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 trains, 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 (eg *Altaría*, *Diurno*, *Estrella*), depending on the exact services they offer. *Talgo* is faster than the rest, and the most expensive.

The high-speed AVE train runs from Seville 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 Seville–Madrid ticket costs €70 one way.

On overnight trains, you have the comfortable option of staying 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, at travel agencies displaying the Renfe logo and in Renfe offices in many city centres.

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. The pass can be purchased from agents outside Europe, or at main train stations in Spain. Spanish residents are not eligible for this pass.