

# Culture of Northern Spain & Portugal

## 9 or 11 Night Parador and Pousada Tour

### Your itinerary

The following pages contain general information about your car or motorcycle tour and the locations where you will stay. The order in which they appear may not be the order your hotels have been confirmed for you - for your individual itinerary please refer to your holiday documentation.





**Maps and route planning** To help plan your trip we provide you with an excellent map of Spain. It's also useful to go to travel websites such as Google maps, [viamichelin.com](http://viamichelin.com)\* or [www.theaa.co.uk](http://www.theaa.co.uk).

\*Motorway tolls, where applicable, are indicated on this site.

**Hotel directions** With your travel documents is an information sheet for each hotel which has been booked for you giving directions together with some further details.

**Arrival** Unless stated, you will be expected to arrive at each of the hotels pre-booked for you by 6pm each day. This should allow time for a fairly leisurely drive between overnight stops but if you find you will be arriving later than this please ring the hotel so your room is held for you.

This tour is on a half board basis (except the Pousada at Ourém which is B&B only), with breakfast and set menu dinner included.

Your itinerary takes you from the northern shore of Spain to Portugal's Atlantic coast staying at Paradores and Pousadas, taking in a variety of different landscapes including vineyards, beautiful city architecture, a Roman amphitheatre and the Picos de Europa mountains. Here we give some suggestions for places to see in and around each of your overnight stops

## Lerma



En route to Lerma you may like to stop at the medieval walled city of Medina de Pomar or the region's capital, Burgos, which has a magnificent Gothic cathedral. 36k south of Burgos, Lerma is a historic little town above the Arlanza river which can be seen from some distance away as you approach it. The Parador

stands in the square on the town's highest point, on the site of the Ducal Palace which was built in the 16thC for King Filipe III. The old town is entered by a huge gate set between 2 round towers and it's a fairly steep climb to the top of town. For wonderful views of the river and surrounding scenery to the left of the town hall take the steps up to the ramparts. About 20 minutes' drive away is the village of Covarrubias, another ancient place with lovely medieval streets. A little further is the 18thC monastery of Santo Domingo de Silos where Gregorian chants can be heard and the nearby gorge of La Yecla is also worth visiting.



## Salamanca

This is a very attractive university city built of golden stone with some fantastic monuments, domes and spires. The city is small enough to be able to explore on foot, and the central Plaza Mayor with its lively bars and cafés is a popular meeting place and a stage for outdoor entertainers, sometimes in period costume. Alba de Tormes (23k) is known for its pottery making and is the resting place for Santa Teresa. Ledesma (40k) is a pretty, partly walled small medieval town with a pleasant main square and a Roman bridge, near a huge reservoir.

## Mérida

The road from Salamanca to Mérida follows part of the ancient Vía de la Plata pilgrimage route taking in the charming towns of Guijuelo, Béjar and Cáceres. Mérida is one of the most historic cities in Spain, founded by the Romans in 23BC and still full of monuments, sculptures and Roman remains, especially the well



preserved theatre, amphitheatre and the ruins of a stadium where chariot races were held. There's also a temple, an aqueduct and one of the longest bridges built by the Romans. Altogether this is a dream of a place for those with an interest in ancient history!

## Palmela/Lisbon



The quaint village of Palmela is in the heart of one of Portugal's richest wine growing areas at the edge of the Arrábida mountain range. It centres around a 12thC fortified castle high on a hill which has impressive views of the surrounding plains and national park, extending as far as Lisbon on a good day. Adjoining the castle, the old cloisters and beautiful architecture of the converted monastery have been cleverly integrated to create the lovely Pousada de Palmela.

Lisbon is half an hour's drive away and this fascinating capital city has a wealth of history and culture to captivate visitors. Its setting on the Atlantic coast and by the estuary of the Tagus river made it an important trading port for centuries and is today a popular stopping point for cruise liners.

## Ourém



The Pousada de Ourém is a charming place to stay with friendly, hospitable staff and wonderful views from its hilltop position just below the castle. The village itself is beautifully

preserved and peaceful with very little traffic. Approximately midway on your drive towards Porto is atmospheric Coimbra, one of Portugal's oldest cities with a university dating back 700 years and a Romanesque cathedral. Built around medieval structures, to get the most out of your visit, park on the outskirts and visit the centre on foot where the main attractions are all within walking distance.

Just south of Coimbra is the lovely little town of Condeixa a Nova, and Conimbriga, one of the best preserved Roman settlements in Portugal.

## Porto



With its dramatically hilly location on the Atlantic coast, the pretty old city of Porto (6k) with its narrow, winding streets is best known as the historic home of port wine but it also

boasts extravagant Baroque churches and World Heritage-protected status. The mighty Douro river offers long, peaceful walks to miles of sandy beaches, while its steep banks are dotted with shady parks and panoramic viewing stops. The Pousada do Porto is a historical palace overlooking the river Douro and its entire Baroque façade, which became a national monument in 1910, was carefully preserved when the building was converted into the sumptuous hotel it is today.

## Bragança



One of Portugal's most interesting medieval cities and a real cultural gem, Bragança is in a relatively remote province of Portugal that has a wild and beautiful landscape. Close to the Montesinho natural park where

wild boar and other game still roam in freedom, this area is ideal for the leisure pursuits the great outdoors offers and is perhaps not one of the usual tourist spots, particularly as this region does not enjoy the best weather. Named after the hill on which it sits, the Pousada is a pleasant walk from the old town and looks down towards the city across the plateau to the mountains.

## Zamora

Built on the right bank of the river Douro, Zamora has ancient origins with city walls dating from 893. There are narrow lanes, dozens of medieval buildings and beautiful Romanesque churches including its 12thC cathedral. It's a great place to soak up the atmosphere of a

friendly, unspoilt and typically Spanish city. Nearby Toro is another place with an outstanding cathedral and gives its name to a very good red wine.



## Cervera de Pisuerga

Cervera is in an excellent position to explore the breathtaking scenery of the surrounding lakes and mountains. It's also a good base for seeing some of the Romanesque architecture of the



region, which is considered to be the most abundant in Europe. The nearby town of Aguilar de Campó has some good examples of this and some picturesque medieval houses with bold coats of arms. The town sits in a green valley below a ruined 11th century castle and near a man made lake (Embalse de Aguilar de Campó) with beaches and watersports.

## Santander & Bilbao



Standing along the north shore of a great bay of stunning natural beauty Santander is one of the most traditional holiday resorts of northern Spain where many of the Spanish choose to holiday. There is a superb sandy beach, modern leisure amenities and an attractive promenade, popular with the locals who enjoy strolling along it in the early evening and at weekends. The city has wonderful restaurants and shops plus a variety of nightlife and entertainment.

Over recent years Bilbao has been transformed into a vibrant modern city with plenty to entice tourists. The top visitor attraction is the Guggenheim museum with its striking modern architecture which is spectacular both inside and out. There are permanent art displays and regular temporary exhibitions held here. There is much more to see (and best explored on foot) - the atmospheric Casco Viejo old quarter with its maze of cobbled streets filled with shops, cafés and restaurants; remarkable buildings, stunning bridges, squares, lovely parks, museums, art galleries.

