Contents

04 Córdoba
The city that saw the rise and fall of so many empires has a thousand stories to tell

06 Cáceres
Possibly the most unspoilt medieval town in Europe, where time seems to stand still

07 Roman heritage
Roman capital Tarragona's treasures, and the marvel of Merida, capital of Lusitania

08 Santiago de Compostela
Discover why pilgrims have been coming to this spectacular city for 1,000 years

10 Castilla Leon: Segovia and Ávila
Two medieval fort towns: Segovia's iconic Roman aqueduct, Ávila's immense walls

11 Secrets of the islands
3,000 years of history in Ibiza Town, and Renaissance splendour on Tenerife

12 University heritage
Salamanca's dreaming spires and colourful stories in Alcalá de Henares' ancient halls

14 Castilla La Mancha
From the hanging houses of Cuenca to beautiful Toledo – and a real taste of Spain

Editor Dave Hall
Produced for Guardian Plus, a commercial division of Guardian News and Media, to a brief agreed with the Spanish Tourist Board. All editorial content commissioned by the Guardian
Paid for by the Spanish Tourist Board
Contact Alexandra Kilpatrick on 020-3353 4422
For information on supplements visit:
guardian.co.uk/supp-guidelines

From Rome to Renaissance

Over millennia, Spanish culture has absorbed and spread worldwide and left a spectacular legacy to be cherished and protected, which is why 13 of its cities boast world heritage status

A lot can happen in 3,000 years. First settled by Phoenicians around 1100BC, the country we now know as Spain was successively ruled by Carthaginians Romans, Visigoths, Arabs and Christians. Dynasties grew and then crumbled, but all left a lasting inheritance in the architecture, language and art that makes up the mosaic of Spanish culture we see today. It is a legacy that reaches far beyond Spain and remains woven into the very fabric of western society, in science, arts and classical thought handed down through millennia from the ancient Greeks and beyond. Spain was also the stage for European colonisation of the New World, ultimately leading to the establishment of the great European empires. With a history like this, it's perhaps not surprising that Spain can boast such a varied cultural legacy. It's certainly one worth protecting and celebrating, which is why no less than 13 entire Spanish cities have been given world heritage status by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco). It's these remarkable cities we focus on in this special supplement.

It seems appropriate that we start with **Córdoba** (p4), as it is a city with so many stories to tell, and a crossroads for events that changed world history. Empires rose and fell in this Andalucian city, Roman, Jewish, Arab and Christian influences being quietly absorbed in the narrow streets and ancient walls and towers we see today. Its jewel is the astounding Mezquita – an astonishing mix of architectural and cultural styles that tells a poignant story of Muslim sovereignty and Christian reconquest. Throughout the ages it has been the birthplace of artists, writers and thinkers and some of Spain's greatest flamenco stars. Any study of Spanish heritage is incomplete without a visit to Córdoba.

Paradores: Spain's heritage hotels

The National Trust doesn't do hotels, but if it did, they would be remarkably similar to Spain's Paradores. These are state-run hotels set up in 1928 to encourage tourism in untravelled parts of Spain. It turned out to be an inspired idea – fulfilling both the role of tourism and restoration, renovating derelict historical buildings for use as hotels.

Today they include Renaissance palaces, fortresses, convents and medieval castles, though there are also modern hotels, built in traditional style, in areas of outstanding beauty.

The combination of cultural heritage and modernity has proved to be a success: they are now a respected institution and there are more than 90 Paradores across the country.

They tend to be reasonably priced by international standards for a luxury hotel. Throughout the supplement we will be featuring the Paradores at each heritage destination.

For more information see parador.es or book through the official UK agent Keytel International at keytel.co.uk

Roman heritage

Córdoba was much loved by the Romans, whose 700-year rule over Hispania, as it was known, has made its mark on the landscape of Spain to this day. Part of that legacy lies waiting to be discovered in the remarkable ruins of **Tarragona** (p6). Nowadays it is somewhat overshadowed by its illustrious neighbour Barcelona to the north-east, but Tarragona was an important strategic capital in the early Roman era. Surprisingly, it's only in the past two decades that the precious ruins have been protected by Unesco. Likewise, far to the west, **Mérida**, the capital of the old Roman province of Lusitania, was an important trading post and, to the Romans, the most important city on the Iberian peninsula. It's best known for its well-preserved theatre and amphitheatre, but, excitingly, much of this old Roman city is still being discovered by archaeologists.

Medieval treasures

In nearby **Cáceres** (p7) lies a different kind of experience entirely, in what might well be the most unspoilt medieval town in Spain. Cáceres grew from the ninth to 15th centuries, changing hands between Moors and Christians along the way, and both left their legacy in its ancient architecture and narrow streets. It's a town with an almost eerily serene atmosphere, yet it's very much lived-in, and it's somehow curious to see modern life go on inside buildings that have changed very little in over 600 years.

Likewise, the towns of **Segovia** and **Ávila** at the heart of Castilla León (p10) have changed little since medieval times. The Spanish call the Renaissance town of Segovia the "ship of stone", and it's easy to see why as it seems to sail through the surrounding plain, its cathedral and famous Alcázar fortress dominating the horizon. These alone could have been enough to earn the city its world heritage status, but there is also the unmissable Roman aqueduct, a two-storey, 800-metre marvel that towers over the town below.

Segovia's neighbour **Ávila** has just as much to discover. At more than 1,000 metres above sea level, it is the highest city in Spain. Take a train from Madrid and experience the dramatic mountain scenery on the way. If Segovia is famous for its aqueduct, then Ávila is known for its immense 11th-century walls. The huge ramparts run for 2.5km around the old town, taking in nine gates and 88 towers along the way.

A trip through La Mancha

In medieval times the Spanish used to call **Cuenca** (p14) the unconquerable city. It is easy to see why. Like something out of legend, this ancient citadel perches on a steep rocky peak with the deep Huécar canyon encircling the city like a moat. Like Cáceres, Cuenca has robustly retained its Spanish way of life, and even most visitors here are Spanish. Among its better-known attractions are the first gothic cathedral in Spain, and the famous hanging houses, built into the cliff face in the 15th century and seemingly about to topple into the gorge.

The authentic experience continues on a ramble through La Mancha toward Toledo, taking in the dramatic countryside around Cuenca. The largest forest in Spain and the eerie prehistoric rocky landscapes of rock known as the Enchanted City and *Los Callejones* (the Little Streets) are just a short drive away. Then we sample some of the hidden gems off the tourist trail via the historic town of Huete and the El Pago de Calzadilla bodega – one of the winemakers now blazing a trail for La Mancha's newfound status as a quality wine producer.

Our trip through La Mancha concludes by losing ourselves in the labyrinthine backstreets of beautiful **Toledo** (p15), once Spain's capital. We tour the city through the eyes of its greatest artist, El Greco, taking in the cathedral and its sacristy, with its collections by Caravaggio, Goya, Raphael, Rubens, Titian, Van Dyck and El Greco himself; and then explore the imposing Alcázar fortress.

Spain's solid grounding in learning and scholarship is reflected in its historic university towns. **Salamanca's** university (p12), cradle of the Castilian language, was built in 1218, and the compact, historic town centre is still as abuzz with students as it was 800 years ago.

The other of these venerable old institutions is set in a town that already has 2,000 years of colourful history, was settled by Romans, Moors and Christians, is a former royal residence and the birthplace of Spain's greatest literary genius, Cervantes. Yet it is the university of **Alcalá de Henares** (p13) that rightly earns this town its world heritage status, and it is a place where history tells colourful stories around every corner.

Meanwhile, in Spain's north-west lies **Santiago de Compostela** (p8). This holy Galician city has been attracting tourists for more than 1,000 years. Said to be the site of the tomb of St James, this is still the final destination on the 780km Camino de Santiago trail, and footsore pilgrims of every persuasion still land wearily on the steps of the splendid Romanesque cathedral every year. This magical city also boasts a wealth of more secular architectural treasures in a mix of styles reflecting the city's two golden ages in the 12th and 16th centuries. The city also enjoys a vibrant arts scene and nightlife, the cafes and clubs pulsing with life till late.

Island surprises

Finally we feature two "offshore" world heritage destinations that, scandalously, most Britons don't often hear about (p11). Take a cultural break from the beach to explore the old fort town of **Eivissa**, or Ibiza Town, declared a world heritage site 10 years ago. You might be surprised at the variety on offer, but then, a site that has been settled in turn by Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans, Moors and Catalans is bound to leave a little history behind. Enjoy a ramble around the old town, saunter through the seafront districts of La Marina and Sa Penya and then settle down in a friendly cafe on the quay for a beer and some tapas.

Equally surprising and perhaps even less well known is **San Cristóbal de la Laguna** (p11), which lies in the greener, more temperate north-east of Tenerife. Founded in 1496, Laguna was Tenerife's first capital, and as a stepping stone for travellers to the New World, it quickly became a boom town. European traders and businessmen arrived en masse, built splendid homes here and a rich cultural legacy was assured. It's a day well spent just idling through its leafy groves, before exploring the rest of the historic towns and rugged green landscapes of northern Tenerife.

Dave Hall
For more information visit spain.info/uk

Above: El Sauzal and Mount Teide on the greener north side of Tenerife – home to historic San Cristóbal de La Laguna (p11). Below: the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia (p8), the end of the 800km Camino de Santiago

There is a lasting inheritance in architecture, language and art that makes up the modern mosaic of Spanish culture

Win a two-night holiday in Santiago de Compostela!

Discover Santiago de Compostela, the capital of the Region of Galicia. Where gastronomy is an art, this world heritage city is the final destination on the Camino de Santiago. With its university atmosphere and nature Santiago is much more than a cultural city. A real getaway to the heart of Galicia and monumental Spain.

Visit **www.spain.info/uk/tourspain/worldheritage** for your chance to win!!

Terms and conditions
Entries will be accepted until the 13th October 2009. The winners will be selected randomly using a computer program. The prize is a 2-night holiday for two people to Santiago de Compostela, including return flights. Prize valid for two people departing the UK between October 2009 and December 2009. Always subject to availability and excluding departures during Christmas and any UK or local bank holidays or public holidays. Accommodation will be at a 3/4 star Hotel selected and provided by Galicia Tourist Authorities in a bed and breakfast board only based on two adults sharing an ensuite twin or double room (winner's choice). Full terms & conditions available at www.spain.info/uk/tourspain/worldheritage

TURGALICIA Secretaría Xeral para o Turismo
ESPAÑA

4CORNERS / FANTUZ OLIMPIO, ALAMY, ANNA GORDON, AXIOM PHOTOGRAPHIC, CORBIS, SAMUEL ARANDA/GETTY