Madrid to Marrakech

**Valid for departures departing until the end of 2025**

# Trip Map



# Itinerary

## Day 1 Madrid

You can arrive at any time on day 1 as there are no activities planned until the important welcome meeting at 6pm. If your flight arrives too late we recommend that you consider booking a night's accommodation prior to the trip so you can ensure you are able to attend this meeting. We will collect your insurance details and next of kin information at this meeting so please ensure you have all details on hand to provide to your leader.

Check-in time at our joining point hotel is after 2pm. Early check-in is not guaranteed, however if you arrive early, luggage storage is available. Speak to the hotel reception on arrival.

There are no activities included in Madrid and we depart on day 2 so we recommend you arrange a few extra days in Madrid to see the sights.

Madrid is an enchanting city boasting history, architecture, museums, galleries, beautiful parks and of course a wild nightlife. There are endless things to do (with time permitting). Suggested sites to visit include the Museo del Prado, one of the greatest art galleries in the world, and a definite highlight. For a more modern view, check out the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, a private collection of paintings from Titian to Picasso. The beautiful Real Jardin Botanico, located near the Prado, is a great spot to relax or simply enjoy a coffee in one of the many Plaza Mayor cafes.

If you're seeking to experience a more traditional piece of Spain, a day trip to the medieval city of Toledo (approx. 1.5hrs) could be exactly what you're looking for!

## Day 2 Salamanca

This morning we head north-west by bus to the historical university town of Salamanca (approx. 3.5hrs). Welcome the Spanish atmosphere and inspect some of the unique architecture, including the distinctly decorated ***Casa de las Conchas*** (House of the Shells). Explore the central plaza and discover the historic stone buildings that the city is known for.

Situated amongst beautiful pastures and rolling green hills on Spain's northern plateau, the rose-hued medieval town of Salamanca is a hidden gem. In Salamanca, the citizens speak the "purest" Spanish in Spain - Castilian. This is why Salamanca is vastly popular with people from all over the world who have the desire to learn the language. Salamanca is a real university city; Spanish students are everywhere and you can travel to practically all places by foot. The central Plaza Mayor is a true centre of local life. Not only is it architecturally beautiful, but it buzzes with activity as locals meet and take coffee, tapas or cocktails on the square.

Salamanca is known for its many festivals. They are big celebrators of music and entertainment, showing off traditional costume and fiestas in honour of ancient leaders of the city. Check out the festivals that are on during your planned trip dates.

## Days 3-4 Coimbra

We head further west by bus (approx. 5hrs) and cross the border into Portugal as we are introduced to the laid-back city of Coimbra. Some historical buildings in this city were originally built in the 12th century, displaying some of the best examples of Romanesque churches and elegant museums in Portugal.

A local guide will escort you on a walk to help you orientate yourself in the maze of alleyways. Half the fun of Coimbra is just to wander and explore. It is a beautiful and ancient town, in typical white stone and with several excellent examples of colourful azulejos tiling.

The region produces a major red wine and is distinctly known for its smooth texture, deep colour and rich brownish tone as it ages. Rose is among one of the most popular types of wine enjoyed alongside a platter of traditional yellow sausage, Alheiras, garnished with varieties of goats cheese. It is common for the culture to include piri piri (small fiery chillies) in traditional dishes, as well as cinnamon, vanilla and saffron for intense flavours.

Day 4 is free time. A recommendation would be to head out into the countryside in search of ancient Roman ruins (about 30mins each way by bus). The ruins of Conimbriga, from which the town of Coimbra got its name, are rich in mosaics and a great insight into ancient Roman life. Spend as little or as much time here as you like, as there are several options to return - including a walk through the countryside to the unspoilt rural town of Condeixa (approx. 3km).

You may want to kick back and relax on a short boat tour to take in the view of Coimbra from a different angle. There is also plenty of time to visit the university, one of the oldest in the world and situated in a former palace. With its ancient library, beautiful throne room turned assembly hall, and even student prison cells, there are many interesting tales and legends to be discovered here. Alternatively just wander and take in the many and varied sights and sounds of the old town.

In the evening we experience the local tradition of Fado - soulful, beautiful music that tells mournful tales of unrequited love or sailors lost at sea. Coimbra Fado is unique in that you will also hear amusing student's tales about the struggles of academic life and the tyranny of their tutors, as well as serenades to be sung from underneath a lover's window. Performances in Coimbra are daily and held in a lovely old chapel in the heart of the old town.

## Days 5-6 Lisbon

Lisbon is one of Europe's most pleasant and affordable capital cities, combining the best elements of Portuguese life. A train journey (approx. 3.5 hrs) through the countryside of central Portugal brings us to the country's capital, offering fantastic architecture, a multicultural population, delicious seafood and a non-stop night life.

Included will be a trip to the medieval Citadel in central Lisbon as well as an orientation/sightseeing walk led by your group leader. Lisbon is a city swarming with endless angular white houses and buildings with distinct terracotta red rooftops. From the citadel this makes a sharply contrasting panorama when viewed against the deep blue of the sky and ocean.

Lisbon has a number of remarkable museums of modern and ancient art, some of which are Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, National Museum of Contemporary Art, National Coach Museum, and Carmo Archaeological Museum. However, Lisbon isn't all history and culture - Bairro Alto is the centre of nightlife with various bars and restaurants where traditional Portuguese music, Fado, can be enjoyed.

Try some braised squid or hot pickled pork at a local restaurant for authentic native taste. For those not as daring, go for a green bean dish or a delicious bread-based dessert instead.

Day 6 is free for you to enjoy the atmosphere of this remarkable capital city. A highly recommended excursion is to the mountainous region of Sintra, just 45 mins away by train. This starkly beautiful area offers great walking, stunning cliff top palaces and unique Moorish architecture.

## Days 7-8 The Algarve

The southern coastline of Portugal is known for its fertile plains, rich with orange and olive groves, fig trees, almonds and maize fields. Long beaches and hidden coves await us as we journey by bus to the Algarve (approx. 5 hrs).

With a historical old town, relaxed pace of life and beautiful sunsets, our base in Olhao offers pleasant relaxation and a welcome break from the excitement and buzz of the capital city. On day 8 we visit some of the lesser known areas with beautiful walking paths and golden sandy beaches.

## Day 9 Jerez

We leave Portugal for the hills of Andalucia travelling by bus (approx. 7 hrs) to the traditional and historic town of Jerez. With its ancient Alcazar (Moorish fortress), beautiful eclectic cathedral and huge selection of high quality tapas bars, Jerez is an undiscovered jewel in the heart of Andalucia. This town is best known for sherry - it was the place the drink derived its name! Enjoy a bodega tour and sample the sherries on offer.

## Days 10-11 Chefchaouen

We travel by bus (approx. 3 hrs) to the port town of Algeciras, with its spectacular view of the great rock of Gibraltar. From here we board a ferry (approx. 1.5 hrs) and cross the straits to the chaotic and buzzing city of Tangier.

In the evening we travel by bus to Chefchaouen (approx. 3 hrs) which is in the centre of a mountainous agricultural region. Chefchaouen lies beneath two mountain tops, known as Ech-Chaoua, "the horns". Chefchaouen means "look at the horns". It's among Morocco's most attractive towns, with an apparent style, presenting houses usually all white with blue doors set along narrow streets climbing the mountainside.

This destination is popular for its shopping, as it offers many native handicrafts that are not available elsewhere in Morocco, such as wool garments and woven blankets. The goats' cheese on offer is also a popular treat enjoyed by many visitors.

Day 11 is free to ease into the relaxed pace of life in this rural retreat. With its blue and white houses and evocative atmosphere, this is a wonderful place to chill out. Take a stroll through the ancient medina, go hiking in the Rif Mountains or simply sit at a cafe and enjoy the pleasure of time passing by. It is easy to appreciate the idyllic surroundings offered by this tranquil yet attractive town.

## Days 12-13 Fes

In the early afternoon we take a public bus to Fes (approx. 5 hrs). Fes is the most complete medieval city in the Arab world. The most ancient of Morocco's Imperial cities, it exists suspended in time. Tonight consider a visit to the Palais Jamai for an evening drink. Watching the sun set over the huge medina whilst hundreds of prayer calls vie for attention is an experience you are likely to remember forever. Tonight there is the option to sample an extravagant Moroccan feast trying Moroccan specialities like harira (chickpea soup) and chicken-stuffed pastilla with couscous.

In the morning of day 13 we take a guided walk of Fes. Descending into the labyrinthine alleyways of the medina is like taking a giant step back to the Middle Ages. Preserved by the French for its historical value, this preservation also led to the decline of the city's importance, as both government and financial centres were set up elsewhere in the country. Nevertheless, this ancient centre of learning remains a fascinating living museum where getting lost is half the fun! Occupants of the city are called 'Fassis', and they fancy themselves as the most sophisticated and intellectual of all Moroccans, having their own food staples and style of dress to prove it. In the afternoon you are free to explore Fes at your leisure. For a truly local experience, you may want to round off the day in a hamam (bath house).

## Days 14-15 Marrakech

In the early morning we travel by train to Marrakech (approx. 8 hrs). On arrival, we can head off and explore the amazing Medina of Marrakech. Marrakech is a feast for the senses. Be enticed by the alluring scents and brilliant colours of the spice markets, the entrancing sounds of the musicians, the rich folds of carpets, delectable foods, acrobats and perfumed gardens reflected in the shimmering waters of the many pools. Come evening the Djemaa el Fna transforms with huge crowds converging to see the singers, drummers, dancers, snake charmers, fortune tellers, storytellers, jugglers and even old medicine men, who together make up what has been dubbed the greatest spectacle on earth. An al fresco dinner at one of the many stalls is also on the cards.

The monuments of Marrakech are numerous and range from the well-known Koutoubia Mosque and its superb minaret - famous throughout the world as one of the greatest minarets and the 'sister' to the Giralda in Seville, to the lesser-known tropical gardens of the French Painter Jacques Marjorelle (now owned by Yves Saint Laurent). There is the Palais Bahia, a superb example of Muslim architecture, and the ruins of the Palais Badi, reputedly one of the most beautiful palaces in the world in its time. The Saadian tombs are a recently uncovered gem of the Medina. All of the above can be a challenge to locate, but that is all a part of the experience of exploring the phenomenal medinas of Morocco! As we only have one afternoon here in Marrakech if you really want to explore this fascinating city we suggest you stay for a few extra nights.

Day 15 is departure day and we say 'Maa salama shokran bizaf' for memories that will last a lifetime. There are no activities planned for today and you are able to depart the hotel at any time. Check out time from the hotel is 10am. If you are departing later, you can arrange luggage storage at the hotel reception. There may be a small service fee.

# Itinerary Disclaimer

The itinerary attached is correct at time of printing. Please note: occasionally our itineraries are updated during the year to incorporate improvements stemming from past travellers' comments and our own research. Our brochure is usually released in December each year. As such the information given in this itinerary may be slightly different to that in the brochure. It is **VERY IMPORTANT** that you print and review a final copy of your Trip Notes a couple of days prior to travel, in case there have been changes that affect your plans.

# Culture Shock Rating

Expect some culture shock. You will be exposed to signs of poverty and access to services may be sporadic. The food will be quite different and English speakers harder to find. Respecting the local culture will make it easier to fit in and really experience the location.

# Physical Rating

Some easy physical activities included in your trip. No physical preparation is required to make the most of the journey.

# Included Activities

This is a list of included activities on this trip. All other activities are optional and at your own expense. If you choose not to participate in the included activities on this itinerary, the cost will not be refunded.

* Casa de las Conchas in Salamanca
* Fado performance in Coimbra
* Citadel in Lisbon
* Algarve beach excursion
* Jerez bodega tour and sherry tasting
* Fes guided tour

# Optional Activities

Madrid:

* 3 museum visit voucher 'Abono Paseo dell´Arte' - EUR15
* Prado Museum - EUR6
* Reina Sofia - EUR6
* Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza - EUR6
* Real Jardín Botánico - EUR2

Salamanca:

* Art Nouveau and Art Deco Museum - EUR3
* Unamuno House-Museum - EUR2
* Bullfighting Museum - EUR3
* Old Cathedral - EUR5
* Cathedrals rooftop - EUR4
* University of Salamanca - EUR4

Coimbra:

* Portugal Dos Pequenitos - EUR4
* University of Coimbra - EUR5
* Boat tour - EUR6
* Conimbriga ruins - EUR5

Lisbon:

* National Art Museum - EUR3
* Folk Art Museum - EUR3
* Gulbenkian Museum - EUR3
* Puppet Museum - EUR2.50
* Fado House - EUR2.50
* Naval Museum - EUR3

Sintra day trip:

* 1 day transport ticket - EUR7
* Castelo dos Mouros - EUR3
* Palacio da Pena - EUR5
* Palacio Real - EUR3

Jerez:

* Alcazar - EUR4
* Moorish baths - EUR2

Marrakech:

* Saadien tombs - MAD10
* Palais Bahia - MAD10
* Hamam (public baths) - MAD50-200
* Henna tattooing - MAD20-50