

## ESCAPE YOUR COMMUTE...

The commute. You either love it or loathe it. For some it's a magic window of time to yourself before a busy day ahead. For others it's a stressful battle for space. Either way, we think it's the perfect opportunity to escape for a while and imagine yourself somewhere entirely different. So, print this out and get yourself to Spain...

## ...TO THE SPAIN WE LOVE

There is definitely more to Spain than meets the eye, so we've uncovered the best of Spain's secret hideouts just for you. Dive off Lanzarote's beautiful coast, find isolation in Gran Canaria, sail yachts into Ibiza's sunset, indulge yourself in one of the many tapas bars in Seville, and sip the good stuff in Rioja. Read on for our take on the secrets of Spain.

## OUR PICK OF SPAIN: FOREST AND CLIFTOP BLISS

Here's one destination which has surprised us recently: the Canary Islands. Over the last few years, luxury boutique hotels have been secretly popping up off the beaten track, and, in our opinion, it has now become a fabulous, unusual holiday destination. So, for an alternative, luxurious Spanish escape with year-round sunlight and great local food away from the crowds, head to Tenerife and Gran Canaria.

Highlights include:

- Climbing to Spain's highest point in Tenerife (a live volcano, no less);
- Playing golf on a manicured cliff top course dotted with waterfalls;
- Enjoying a 4x4 safari through the rugged terrain; and
- Soaking up the rays on a black sand beach or by your luxury pool.



*The rugged landscape of El-Teide, Tenerife*



*Your luxury hotel in Tenerife*



*The gorgeous coast of Tenerife*



*Gran Canaries' beautiful landscapes*

## LIFE'S A PARTY: SPANISH FESTIVALS

The Spanish are a feisty bunch and they certainly know how to throw a good party. Celebrating anything and everything from patron saints to a good ol' food fight, they put on a festival for every occasion.

Hundreds of festivals happen throughout Spain in tiny remote villages, islands and large cities all year round. Some have become so famous that we feel as though we've already experienced them such as the Bull Run in Pamplona. And then there are the truly wacky ones such as one where if you've had a near death experience you climb into a coffin. Talk about unusual.



*Seafood festival, O Grove, Galicia*

In the fishing community of O Grove, Galicia on Spain's Western coast, seafood is a huge part of daily life. Head over in October for the annual seafood festival, where 200,000 people join together to sample the pink meat of the *nécora*, (local crab) and stroll through the many stalls which have given the town a legendary name. See competitors for the lobster and turbot competitions, and smell the steaming clams and saffron muscles. Hungry? Try anything from the extensive range of seafood caught in the *rías* (estuaries) or just off the coast. Try fresh hake, turbot, sea-bass, grouper, sole, *a la plancha* (grilled), *a la gallega* (Galician style) or in a *caldeirada* (fish stew). Other delicacies include shrimp, squid and cuttlefish, fried or served in their ink. Yum. All this to the sound of... you've guessed it... bagpipes. A truly atmospheric, gastronomic experience.

*Battala del Vino, Haro*

Remember the good 'ol days running around the garden armed with a water pistol trying to soak your opponent? Well, let us acquaint you with this adult version. On St Pedro's Day in Haro, La Rioja, northern Spain's wine producing region, thousands of people take to the hills with water pistols loaded with red wine. The festival's origins lay in a land dispute between neighbouring towns, and since then townfolk have been gathering at a particular hill for a good nature battle with wine. If you're more hardcore, then go ahead and arm yourself with a pump action super soaker that will take your wine further afield. But if you rather join the traditionalists, arm yourself with buckets, bottles and old boots to insure that your opponents get truly and utterly soaked in the red stuff. The council takes the pleasure of providing each festival goer with four litres of wine, but with the festival lasting for three hours, you may have to bring your own supermarket ammo.



*La Tomatina, Buñol*

A relative new comer to the Spanish festival scene, *La Tomatina*, is perhaps the most infantile but fun festival out there. The origins of this festival are unknown and there are a couple of rumors knocking about that it began as a food fight between an unhappy busker and a couple of passersby. Either way, we all secretly know that there doesn't need to be a reason for some good childish fun. On the last Wednesday of August, the small town of Buñol in eastern Spain dissolves into the scene of the world's greatest tomato fight. Goggles are recommended, and so is a white t-shirt to show of your battle wounds, but beware, the more touristy you look the more hits you'll receive. So a word of advice, leave the camera, dodgy cap and bum-bag at home.

# GASTRO LUX TOUR OF SPAIN

Glamorous beach-side towns, dramatic iconic hotels and some of the best wine tasting in the world: Spain's scenic Basque country has everything you need for an indulgent gastronomic escape.

Highlights include:

- Private wine tasting and vineyard tour in Spain's renowned wine region, Rioja;
- Being the special guest of a Spanish aristocrat at his family winery;
- Private city tour of San Sebastián and its breathtaking coastal views; and
- Being spoilt for choice with chic bars and Michelin star restaurants.



*Interior of Campillo wineries, in Rioja Alavesa*



*The stunning vineyards of Elciego, in Rioja Alavesa*



*San Sebastián's stunning coastline*



*San Sebastián at night*

## DANCE AWAY IN SPAIN

Walking around Spain you'll notice that everyone is moving to a beat. There seems to be this inherent rhythm to everyone as if they were born to dance, and we're pretty convinced of it. From the strum of the guitar in the *flamenco* to the bagpipes of the *muñeira* dance, here's the best of Spain's dance culture:



### *Flamenco*

The sunny region of Andalusia is home to the stunning dance *the flamenco* that was brought to Spain by travelling gypsies. Everything about *flamenco* is extravagant from the music to the dress. Women don bright ruffled dresses flamboyant enough to make Elton John jealous, and are accompanied by the most serious of guitar players. The role of couple is essentially to interpret the song via their dance. They will stand motionless absorbing the strums of the guitar, feeling the beats of the clap and become inspired by the words of the song before throwing themselves into dance. Before you know it you'll be entranced by her swinging hips, his feet stamping on the floor and the heat between the two. Choreographed shows are put on regularly in '*tablaos*' (traditional flamenco bars) throughout the country, where you can sit back and watch. If you really want to feel the passion travel down to Seville in September for the Biannual Flamenco Festival where the whole city celebrates *flamenco* culture.

### *Muñeira*

The *muñeira* dance can be found in the northern region of Galicia, as well as León and Asturias. Traditionally it was danced around the working mill to pass the time during grinding, but today you are most likely to see the *muñeira* performed during small village festivals. The dance can be performed in pairs, but it's usually a group of women with one dancer presenting the steps whilst the rest of the group follows and dances together. This is one truly unusual dance, which is, believe it or not, accompanied by bagpipes. Confused by the Celtic connection? Galicia was once a Gaelic region which helps explain a little, and is often described as sun-kissed Ireland. The *muñeira* dance is the polar opposite to the flamenco: the dresses are loose and the colours are sombre reflecting the cooler climate and the hardship of life that Galicia once endure in the past.



### *Chotis*

They say a man does not need more than one tile of space to dance the Chotis, so this is one for the experts. This dramatic number, which originated in Scotland, involves a couple dancing face to face, with the woman taking large steps and the man spinning on his axis. Traditionally danced in Madrid's festivals, the woman wears a shawl and the man a beret on his head. The song "Madrid, Madrid, Madrid", by the Mexican composer Agustín Lara is a favourite for this dance, which gives interesting insight into some more traditional moves.

# INSIDER GUIDE TO SPAIN

From island life to city dwelling, Spain's regions are as diverse and unique as they come. We love some of the lesser-visited areas, and here are our reasons why.

## The Canary Islands

Here's a fact: the Canary Islands are not named after birds. These seven specks of volcanic land found just west of Morocco were once named the 'happy islands' because of their fabulous year-round climate (365 days of sunshine, anyone?) in their subtropical location.

Their name actually comes from the wild dogs (canis in Latin) which the Romans found when they first arrived. In our eyes, these islands are hugely underrated. Providing masses of luxurious and adventurous experiences away from the tourist crowds, head over and you'll feel like you have discovered a well-kept secret.

Being separated from mainland Spain, the Islands have their own vibrant culture, which is reflected in the African and Latin-American influenced cooking. Try the *mojo picón*, a hot sauce of olive oil, garlic, chilli-peppers and cumin. Each local chef keeps the secret to his 'mojo' close to his chest, and for sauce this tasty, we would too.

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### Lanzarote

Don't know where to start? If the volcanic island of Lanzarote looks familiar, it's probably because many a cave man film has been shot here. Think Clash of the Titans: rocky landscapes ideal for practicing your photography or some surreal 4x4 drives. Off the coast, the scuba diving and snorkelling is incredible: warm water and fantastic visibility.

In between octopus and seahorses you'll see angel sharks, butterfly rays and barracudas too. Head into craggy caves and rock tunnels, or explore old wrecks.



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### Tenerife

And from the depths of the sea to the highest point in Spain. Whilst Tenerife might be the most well known island of the Canary Islands, the most part of it remains undiscovered. It's home to the dramatic Mount Tiede, around which small rural unexplored towns such as Masca, cling to cliffs. Well worth a visit for the cactus-flecked vistas from the Island's roads alone.

Whilst the northern coast of Tenerife is boarded by steep cliffs, head down south for some stunning beaches and vibrant nightlife in the island's capital, Santa Cruz.

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### Gran Canaria

A short plane hop away (just 30 minutes), Gran Canaria may be famous for its golden sand dunes, but discover the stunning inland landscapes and you'll be pleasantly surprised by the vast, breathtaking views. Thick forests cover the center and north of the island, providing a great retreat far from the busy coastal resorts. As a contrast, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, the capital, has strong culture, glamorous night life and stunning shopping opportunities. Don't forget to visit the capital's Las Canteras 7km sandy beach and the numerous secluded beaches located in the north.

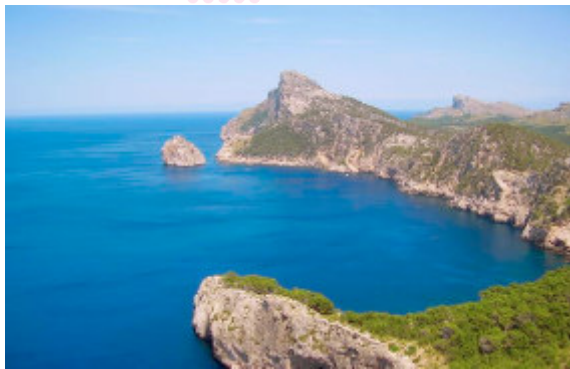


## The Balearic Islands

For a balance of hedonistic luxury, shopping and partying, and natural sun-kissed beaches with authentic Spanish island life, the Balearics are the perfect island archipelago. Set in the warm azure waters of the western Mediterranean Sea, Ibiza is perfect for setting sail into the sunset, Mallorca offers great rugged terrain for a challenging hike and Formentera has the perfect isolated beach to sit back and relax on.

### *Ibiza*

Whether you prefer yachts by day or night, Ibiza is the place to be for the discerning party-goer. Hit the beautiful sandy beaches and watch the super-yachts sail in and out of the marina. Then, why not get involved yourself and hire out a yacht for the evening for sunset cocktail (or three) while taking in the pulsating beats of the Ibiza nightlife?



### *Mallorca*

For clear waters, white sandy beaches, olive and lemon groves, and moorish architecture, Mallorca is a glam island with a difference. Hike through the north-west of the island for a sense of isolation in rugged terrain, visit the villages of Deia and Valldemosa for a taste of true sleepy Spanish life and end your day shopping around one of the islands many local markets.

### *Formentera*

Formentera, the smallest of the Pitiuses archipelago has been dubbed the last paradise of the Mediterranean. In our opinion, it's the last secret, so get there before everyone else does. Great for its pristine beaches and encouragement total relaxation with a back-to-nature feel, Formentera is our favourite Balearic gem. At low tide, we highly recommend wading out to the nearby uninhabited island of Espalmador for a natural mud bath.



## The Mainland

Head into the heart of Spain to get a taste of urban Spanish life where you can immerse yourself amongst the gorgeous architecture of Seville, sip the good stuff in Rioja or tantalise your taste buds in Barcelona.

### *Age-old traditions in Seville and Sierra de Aracena*

With a 2,000 year-old history in the lesser known West of Spain, Seville is a vibrant, traditional city with a strong sense of its own heritage.

Escape the hot sun inside fascinating Moorish convents, churches, 14th century palaces and gothic cathedrals, and stroll through open squares stopping for sweet, freshly squeezed orange juice. Climb the steps of the Giralda tower for the best views of the city, indulge on one of the many (we're talking over a thousand) tapas bars and finish the night off in a flamenco hall: feel the passion drumming from the dancer's strong steps. Out of the city the atmosphere turns rugged and driving or cycling through Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche will show you a rarely-seen side to Spain's countryside: oak fed pata negra pigs walking freely around the pastures.



### *World-class wine in Rioja's countryside*

Spain's most famous wine region, Rioja has the perfect balance of year-round sun and rolling green hills to produce some of the most famously quality vintages in the world. Dotted with stone villages each with a stunning church and their own unusual traditions (fighting with wine as ammunition is our favourite) the scenery here is simply stunning.

Home to one of the most architecturally striking luxury hotels around (you'll recognise Elciego's Marqués de Riscal), this is the place to visit small wineries and have dinner with the owner while learning about the rituals and traditions of the wine making industry

In nearby San Sebastián, you can sunbathe on white sand surrounded by historical monuments. The hot or cold pintxos (tapas-style snacks) here are fresh and delicious, and the fish restaurants second to none. This glamorous beach resort is a food and drink haven, ideal for a gastronomic experience. Buen apetito.



### *The art of fine dining in Catalonia*

With its own rich culture, a vibrant capital beach city and it's own language, Catalonia is a unique and artistically significant region of Spain. Surrealist artist Dali lived, worked and was inspired by the fishing village of Cadaqués, just an hour south of Barcelona city where you can see their works presented in museums within the gothic quarter.

If art is your thing, head up to the Joan Miró Foundation on a hill overlooking the city for an indoor and outdoor gallery to see his colourful masterpieces and enjoy the view. More of a foodie? Catalonia hosts many Michelin-starred restaurants, including El Bulli (in Roses, Girona), voted the best restaurant in the world. Not many cities can claim that. Take a cookery course by morning and flop on Barceloneta beach in the afternoon, before enjoying the city's varied nightlife: an outdoor riverside club with giant illuminated cubes for lights, anyone? Cutting edge hotels, super-glamorous shopping and a long coastline to boot: what more could you ask for?

