

## SPAIN: CASTILLA-LA MANCHA - FROM MADRID TO VALENCIA

8-days / 7-nights small group GUIDED inn-to-inn easy to moderate cycling tour



Follow in the footsteps of Don Quixote through the heart of Spain. Discover the secrets of vibrant, stylish Madrid, then travel to the ancient city of Toledo, perched on a hill above the Tagus River. We cycle the lonely plains of Castilla-La Mancha on the Route of Don Quixote (perhaps tilting at the famous windmills of Miguel de Cervantes' classic novel). We explore the remote and beautiful Lagoons of Ruidera nature reserve, and finish in the Mediterranean port city of Valencia. This third largest city in Spain happily concedes the limelight to Madrid and Barcelona, whilst its citizens relish its atmospheric Old Town, its innovative architecture, its lush green parklands and nearby beaches, and its buzzing nightlife. We stay in modern city-centre hotels and relaxed country houses, and we spend two nights in a simple, charming rural hotel in the tiny village of Ruidera.

But above all, the highlights of this tour are the gastronomic delights of Spain. In Madrid we taste typical Spanish tapas: the ubiquitous and delicious cured *jámon*, *tortilla española* (Spanish omelette of potatoes and eggs), or *gambas al ajillo* (prawns cooked in garlic and olive oil). We move on to the cuisine of Castilla-La Mancha, featuring venison and partridge, valuable locally-grown saffron, and *queso manchego*, sheep's milk cheese. And in Valencia, *paella*, the iconic rice dish, rules the culinary scene. As they say in Spain, ¡*Buen provecho!*

The cycling is easy to moderate, over the flat plains of Castilla-La Mancha, alongside the Guadiana River and on the dedicated cycleway Via Verde de la Sierra de Alcaraz, a converted railway line. And of course the support van is available if you choose not to cycle. Well-maintained, specially designed multi-gear touring bikes are provided, or book an E-bike (at extra cost, subject to availability) to make the cycling even more enjoyable.

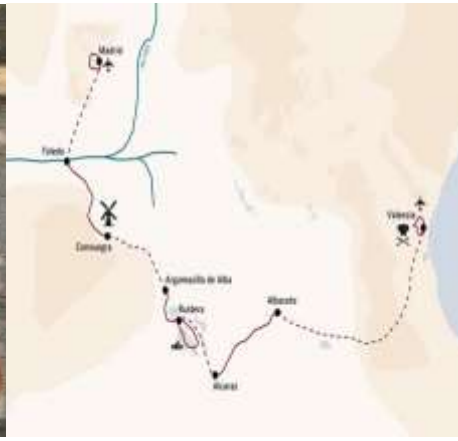
**Cost from:** \$3090 per person twin-share      Single supplement from \$725

**Departs:** 4<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> May; 21<sup>st</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> September, 2019

**Includes:** 7 nights' twin-share accommodation in 3- and 4-star hotels; 7 breakfasts, 5 dinners, 1 lunch; luggage transfers; multi-lingual cycle tour guide; hire of multi-gear touring bicycle; support vehicle; luggage transfers; entry fees and transfers/shuttles as per itinerary; Madrid, Toledo, Alcaraz and Valencia guided city tours; paella cooking course; canoe tour; welcome drink; visitor and tourist taxes.

**Not included:** Meals not mentioned, drinks, personal expenses, entrance / tasting fees unless specified

**Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations**



## Suggested itinerary:

### Day 1: Arrive Madrid

Our hotel in Madrid is opposite the Museo del Prado in Madrid's Triángulo del Arte, which also incorporates the Museo Reina Sofia and the Thyssen-Bornemisza collection. The Prado is Spain's most significant art museum, featuring one of the world's finest arrays of European art from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries, much of it amassed by the Spanish royal family. The Reina Sofia specialises in 20<sup>th</sup> Century art with a wonderful collection of works by Picasso, Dalí and Miró, including Picasso's masterpiece *Guernica*.

We stay in a plush 4-star hotel in a neo-Baroque building overlooking the Fountain of Neptune. At 5.30pm we meet in the hotel lobby for an aperitif, then the evening is yours to enjoy. Dinner is at your own arrangements – there are countless tapas restaurants in Madrid, serving typical Madrileño dishes like *patatas bravas* (fried potatoes with a rich spicy tomato sauce), *cocido madrileño* (meat and chickpea stew), or if you're feeling brave, *oreja a la plancha* (grilled pigs' ears). Ask about extra nights in Madrid at the start of the tour.

### Day 2: Madrid to Toledo

**Cycling distance @ 10km**

After breakfast we discover Madrid by bicycle, finding traffic-free options when we can, perhaps through beautiful Retiro Park or the many car-free plazas of the city. In the afternoon we take the train to Toledo, capital of Castilla-La Mancha, and after lunch (included in the tour) we take a stroll through the narrow streets, followed by leisure time to explore further. Toledo is known as the 'city of three cultures' as Christians, Jews and Arabs co-existed peacefully here for generations. We stay tonight at a charming 3-star country house hotel overlooking the Toledo and Tagus Rivers. We dine in the hotel restaurant which has wonderful views over Toledo's skyline.

### Day 3: Toledo to Ruidera

**Cycling distance @ 40km**

We leave Toledo in the morning by bus to Consuegra, viewing from afar Cervantes' famous windmills. Eleven of the original thirteen have been preserved. Continuing on we reach the small town of Argamasilla de Alba where local legend says that Cervantes was once imprisoned. From there we cycle on the *Ruta de Don Quijote*, following the supposed path of the famous character created by Miguel de Cervantes across the wide open plains of La Mancha where the starry-eyed and unworldly chevalier travelled.

After lunch we cycle on the Ruta de Don Quijote alongside the river Guadiana to the Peñarroya Reservoir and the Lagunas de Ruidera nature reserve. The cycling is challenging but the peaceful atmosphere and beautiful scenery more than make up for it. The lagoons are variously crystal clear, deep green or vivid turquoise, and are connected by many small streams and waterfalls. We cycle to Ruidera and our hotel for the next two nights.

In Ruidera we stay in a simple and quaint 3-star rural hotel in an ivy-covered building next to the lagoon. We dine on delicious home-style cuisine here, perhaps including local specialties like manchego cheese, locally caught partridge, or *asadillo manchego*, a tomato and roasted capsicum sauce often served with hard-boiled eggs.

### Day 4: Lagoons of Ruidera

**Cycling distance @ 25km**

We set off on our bikes along the southern part of the nature reserve where there are more than fifteen lagoons created by the Guadiana and linked by waterfalls, creeks and underground rivers. Then we get to see the lagoons from a different perspective on a guided canoe tour. In the clear waters look for carp and pike; among the holm oaks, junipers and poplars you may spot partridges, woodpigeons and azure-winged magpies; and seek out ducks, purple herons, grebes and other waterfowl among the reed beds and on the shoreline. We return to our hotel and after lunch there is free time to relax or have a swim in the lagoon.

### Day 5: Ruidera to Alcaraz

**Cycling distance @ 40km**

Today our cycling route takes us through a quiet and sparsely populated area and an undulating landscape to the Renaissance town of Alcaraz, nestled on the northern edge of the Sierra de Alcaraz. A city walk in the afternoon takes in the main square with its two churches Santisima Trinidad and Santa Maria, which is reputedly

among the most beautiful in Spain, and the 11<sup>th</sup> Century Castillo de Alcaraz which offers spectacular views over the surrounding countryside to the mountains beyond. Tonight's comfortable, typically Spanish hotel has gardens and a spa, offering a relaxed, rural ambience. Dinner is in a traditional restaurant.

#### **Day 6: Alcaraz to Valencia**

**Cycling distance @ 42km**

In the morning we transfer up to the Sierra de Alcaraz for a freewheeling descent to the start of the Via Verde de la Sierra de Alcaraz, an abandoned railway line which has been transformed into a beautiful cycle track. We pass by deserted stations and flat pastureland dotted with grazing sheep whose milk is used to make the typical manchego cheese. In the afternoon, we bid farewell to the arid Castilian plains and transfer by bus to Valencia. We stay here two nights in a contemporary city-centre 4-star hotel with a rooftop pool. Dinner is at your own arrangement tonight with a great opportunity to discover this vibrant city.

#### **Day 7: Valencia city tour**

**Cycling distance @ 10km**

We head to Valencia's market for fresh produce for our evening meal and a glass of *horchata*, a typical Valencian drink made from tigernuts and sugar, often served with spongy sweet cake (called *farçon*) for dipping. We explore Valencia by bike with its monuments, medieval buildings and 13<sup>th</sup> Century Gothic cathedral. We pass the spectacular and futuristic City of Arts and Sciences building with its parkland created by diverting the River Turia. Tonight we have arranged a paella cooking class. This iconic Spanish dish originated in Valencia. We learn how to prepare and cook paella, and of course afterwards eat the results together as our farewell dinner.

#### **Day 8: Departure day**

Tour ends after breakfast in Valencia. Extend your stay in Valencia – ask about the cost of extra nights.



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**Contact Outdoor Travel direct for more details and reservations:**

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