



Dear Meredith Travel Alumnae and Friends,

We have enjoyed planning our tour of Spain and Morocco more than almost any other, largely because of the number of contrasting but equally exotic opportunities it offers. There are many connections between these two countries notwithstanding the Mediterranean Sea that separates them, but they are, at the same time, so very different.

We will fly out on September 28, 2023, arriving in Barcelona on the 29th. We will spend our first two nights by the sea at Castelldefels, a few miles away. The focus of our tour will be on those aspects of Barcelona that make it unique, aspects that make Catalonia different from the rest of Spain and explain its desire for independence. We will stroll from one end of tree-lined Las Ramblas to the other with a delicious stop at La Boqueria, a market famous for its fruit, vegetables, meats, fish, and flowers since the first half of the 19th century. We will focus on Gaudi's amazing architecture, including Park Guell, his house museum, and the Sagrada Familia, where we are sure, of all of the churches in the world, the Almighty would inhabit if a choice was required. It will take your breath away.

On October 1st we will sadly say good bye to Barcelona after lunch and head south, taking the coastal road to Valencia. We will arrive in time for a glass of horchata in this city of contrasts—in particular a charming old town alongside amazing examples of modern architecture. We will dine in a local restaurant, enjoying one of the rice dishes for which Valencia is famous, and visit the largest aquarium in Europe, one of the best in the world, in fact.

Our next stop is one of the highlights of our tour—Granada, home to the Alhambra, one of the best preserved palaces in the Islamic World. How so? In 711 CE Muslims from Morocco crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and invaded southern Spain, establishing an intimate connection between the two countries, one that persisted until the late 15th century. Ferdinand and Isabella captured Granada in 1492. That date rings a bell with Americans, does it not?! Andalusia, as this southern province of Spain is known, is, as you will see, a region of amazing contrasts—in history, topography, prosperity, vegetation, architecture, culture, and touristic appeal. We will spend two nights in

Granada, touring the Alhambra and Sacromonte, a distinctive Roma community that is touristy but very interesting.

On October 4th we will travel first to the cathedral town of Gaudix, well off the beaten path and famous for both its amazing cave dwellings and its pottery. When you hear the term cave dwellings do not think primitive. They are not. The next time we travel there, Becky and I are going to stay in them. They just do not have enough space to accommodate all of us. In the meantime, we can all hope we will get invited in by locals to see their amazing homes, but at the very least we will visit Tropolis, a cave museum. Villamena, where we will spend the night, is our next stop. The hacienda we will be staying in is surrounded by vineyards so it is only natural that we will be having a wine tasting in advance of our special dinner.

The next day, October 5th, we head south and west for Malaga, the birthplace of Picasso. En route we will stop in Salobrena for lunch at El Penon, our favorite beach restaurant on the coast of Spain and in the world. El Penon means “the Rock” in Spanish and that is where you will be lunching on local paella, the best we have ever eaten. We are in Malaga for one night only, giving us time to visit the Picasso museum and explore on our own one of the oldest towns in Europe. It is also one of the most beautiful. And because we cannot be so close to Ronda without visiting it, we will rise early and head west and north on October 6th to see the most amazing 328 foot El Tajo Gorge. You have never, we promise, seen anything like it.

Our next stop is the Strait of Gibraltar, from which we will take a ferry ride across the western- most part of the Mediterranean Sea to Tangier, where we will spend the night. Nothing will make it clearer that we are no longer in Spain than our evening entertainment of live music, belly-dancing, and Moroccan food.

The next morning, October 7th, we will travel along what was the infamous Barbary Coast to Rabat and from there to Meknes where we will have a guided tour of the Royal Stables. We will spend the night in Fez, where, like Dorothy, we will all be 100% certain we are not in Kansas. Exotic is the word that comes closest to describing it.

On the 8th, we will tour Fez's Medina, which, with its narrow winding streets, is considered one of the most extensive and best conserved examples of the Arab-Muslim world. The market is amazing and the 1,000 year old tannery, arguably more so. After our guided tour, we will have time of explore on our own. Don't get lost. We may never find you again.

The following day we will travel 300 miles to Marrakesh—all things considered, an easy day after our busy one in Fez. This trek to the south and west will give us a chance to experience the varied sceneries that make Morocco so interesting.

Our guided tour of Marrakesh on October 10th will include the Bahia Palace, the Saadian Tombs, and the Djemaa-El-Fna Square. In the afternoon we will have time on our own, in anticipation of our outdoor dinner under the sky in the Agafay Desert. Memorable!

No trip to Morocco is complete without time in Casablanca, where we will spend our final night, October 11th. We will visit Hassan II Mosque, the largest in Africa and the 7th largest in the world. Our final dinner will be especially special, at one of Casablanca's finest restaurants. We wish we could guarantee you that we will meet Humphrey Bogart in a nightclub after our lovely dinner, but, alas, we can't.

October 12th will find us at Casablanca Airport saying goodbye to each other and to a travel experience that we hope and believe will have been one of the most interesting of the Meredith Friends and Alumnae Tours.

Becky Bailey, Betty Webb and Taylor Twine
Your Meredith Friends and Alumnae Travel Team