

Madrid and Much More!!!

Having just returned from the Madrid Trip we thought we would put a few of our memories down (now that we have got our breath back).

90 of us, all present and correct, gathered at 8am Monday 22nd at the Rastro car park Jalon, and 90 of us returned at about 9pm Friday 26th, travel weary but again, all present and correct.

Monday - The initial drive to Madrid took us through Castilla-la Mancha and part of the 'meseta', the vast plateau region which as well as its seemingly endless wheat fields is punctuated with forests, mountains and views of wonderful castles and forts along the route.

On arrival in Madrid we were dropped off outside the Palacio Real then doing our own thing, wandered this historic area seeing such landmarks as the Mercado de San Miguel and the Plaza Mayor which is a great place for a welcome drink whilst watching the world go by and marvelling at the mime artists. We were then taken to our hotel which was to be our base for 4 nights. We are not sure they knew what had hit them, catering for such a large party all arriving at once, but we received quick and pleasant service and those who requested dietary alterations etc. were accommodated with no problem. We did our best to outdo the Spanish for the level of noise created at meal times and breakfast gave us all a chance discuss anything we wanted whilst queuing to use the one toaster available but we managed, and I don't think anyone went short of food.

Tuesday so it must be Segovia! Truly beautiful with its amazing Roman viaduct dominating the old town. Though many of us have seen pictures or visited it before it never ceases to amaze. The ingenuity and craftsmanship really does have to be seen to be believed, amazing to think that it was built in the 1st century AD and was still being used until the late 19th. The Gothic Cathedral next to the Plaza Mayor is impressive and the Alcazar is like something out of Disneyland with its spires and turrets. On the return trip to our hotel we stopped off at La Granja de San Ildefonso, a royal hunting lodge with magnificent gardens. Along the journey we had views of Franco's mausoleum and the enormous 150 meter high cross, the Santa Cruz del Valle de los Caídos, (The Holy Cross of the Valley of the Fallen) which dominates the landscape – thought provoking.

Wednesday- Salamanca. A beautiful city with many of its buildings built from golden coloured stone. Again, another impressive Plaza Mayor which is one of Spain's largest and grandest. Our return journey was broken with a visit to Avila, the highest provincial capital in Spain, with its 12th century medieval walls stretching for over two kms, along with 88 turrets it is recognised as the best preserved in Europe.

Thursday – Toledo. Heavy rain fell during the journey but prior to our arrival the weather cleared. A beautiful, medieval city situated on the banks of the River Tagus. We spent our time there wandering around the narrow cobbled streets, at times getting thoroughly lost and bumping into other members of our party, some of whom appeared similarly lost. Our coach, (no. 2) then had an

interesting journey back to the hotel when our driver missed the required turn off, had some difficulty finding it again and took us on a trip of discovery touring the motorways of Madrid. We saw our hotel on several occasions but it always seemed to be on the wrong carriageway. The driver got a loud cheer from us all when, finally he delivered us back in time for dinner.

Friday – Madrid. Up early, cases on board and off to another area of Madrid before heading for home.... well that was the plan but a 14km traffic jam caused us to divert to an alternative route which still took over 2 hours before reaching our destination, the famous museums and galleries of Madrid. Once again, people headed off for their chosen sights and we went to the Museo Nacional Reina Sophia and saw the Picasso exhibition, the Guernica painting being a main feature, something that Angela had set her heart on seeing.

Then another long road journey, taking a different route, back to Jalon through magnificent scenery, with big skies and cloud formations just waiting to be photographed.

We really enjoyed our trip which has left us with an overview of this area of Spain and the incentive to delve deeper. Many thanks from all us for the hard work of the organisers who managed to put together a thoroughly comprehensive trip at a very reasonable cost. The weather was kind to us, raining at night and stopping when we reached our daily destinations – not sure who to thank for that but it did help to make everything work!

Jim and Angela Scottow