



UNDERRATED CITIES

Sell an alternative city break with
Laura French's guide to the best
second-time spots in Spain and Portugal

From the honey-hued buildings of Salamanca to the Moorish palaces of Granada, the centuries-old houses of Cuenca to the cultural festivities of Valencia, Spain isn't short on spectacular cities.

But some of them remain under the radar, overshadowed by their better-known siblings – the Gaudí creations of Barcelona, the colourful palaces of Seville, the grandeur of Madrid.

The same can be said of Portugal, where the eye-popping architecture of Lisbon and Porto tend to steal the show from the likes

of Evora, a Unesco World Heritage Site known for its Roman-era Old Town, and Braga, home to the oldest cathedral in the country.

With growing demand for socially-distanced, sustainable travel away from the crowds, it might be time to start shining a light on less-trodden spots and give clients an alternative glimpse into these two culturally diverse, heritage-rich countries.

To help you do just that, we've put together a guide to some of the best cities for second-time stays, helping you and your clients dig a little deeper on the next visit.



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MADRID

The Spanish capital holds diverse appeal, from its elegant boulevards and baroque masterpieces to a renowned art scene that sees the likes of Goya, Picasso, Dalí and other Spanish painters fill its galleries. Round-the-clock bars and clubs bring party lovers flocking, while Michelin-starred menus sit beside lively tapas bars, and gardens such as Parque del Buen Retiro add peaceful strolls into the mix.

BILBAO

THE VIBE: Madrid isn't the only city for art devotees in Spain. The capital of the Basque Country offers its own hoard of treasures, with a dedicated art district where open-air sculptures by Dalí and other artists frame the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, an architecturally iconic behemoth of shiny titanium and glass designed by Frank Gehry and home to one of the world's best collections of modern art.

HIGHLIGHTS: Beyond the art district, you'll find the Casco Viejo – the historic Old Town, where *pintxo* (tapas) bars line medieval lanes – and characterful neighbourhoods such as Indautxu, known for its nightlife. Elsewhere there's La Ribera market, which lays claim to being the biggest covered market in Europe; and Mount Artxanda, where a funicular shuttles visitors up its slopes for panoramic views over the surrounding lush-green hills.

BOOK IT: Cox & Kings has a seven-day Spotlight on the Basque Country tour from £1,595 including a private tour of the Guggenheim, a full-day tour of Bilbao, day trips to San Sebastian and Burgos, and flights. coxandkings.co.uk

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LISBON

Steep cobble streets, striking azulejo tiles, elaborate palaces and trendy galleries come together in the city often termed Europe's coolest capital, with rollicking nightlife and a growing culinary scene to boot. Key draws include the historic Alfama district, where backstreet cafes line narrow alleys, along with the São Jorge Castle and the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, one of several museums scattered across the city centre.

COIMBRA

THE VIBE: Lisbon hasn't always been Portugal's capital. Coimbra held the crown for more than a century during medieval times, and today its historic stone walls remain, meeting head-on with Moorish influences and the city's pride and joy, its university, whose foundation in 1290 makes it one of the oldest in the world.

HIGHLIGHTS: The city has a wealth of historic sites, but for one of the most intriguing, suggest a visit to Seminário Maior de Coimbra, an Italian-inspired divinity school that's home to several fascinating buildings, including the elaborate Episcopal Chambers. Other attractions include Fado ao Centro, which hosts singers of Portuguese folk music fado; the Santa Clara-a-Velha Monastery, founded in 1283; and the many Unesco-listed university buildings, including the baroque Joanina Library, which boasts more than 60,000 works dating from the 12th to the 18th centuries.

BOOK IT: Kirker Holidays offers three nights' B&B at the four-star Quinta Das Lágrimas from £598 per person, based on two sharing with flights and car hire. kirkerholidays.com

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SEVILLE

Moorish mansions, medieval lanes and tapas joints characterise historic Seville, while lively plazas, flamenco clubs and a roster of annual festivals add life to its streets. Attractions include the Real Alcázar, an opulent royal palace that showcases the city's Islamic heritage; and the biggest Gothic cathedral in the world, featuring the Giralda bell tower and the colossal tomb of Christopher Columbus.

CORDOBA

THE VIBE: For a lesser-visited area of Andalusia, look to Córdoba. This colourful city, once the capital of the Muslim Al-Andalus empire, boasts its own array of Moorish architecture, exemplified by the Great Mosque, a gold-covered masterpiece that was converted into a Catholic church in the 13th century. Like Seville, it's also known for its tapas, with laid-back bars and jazz cafes offering a calmer nightlife scene than its bigger sibling.

HIGHLIGHTS: The city's entire historic centre is a Unesco World Heritage Site and boasts several attractions. They include the Puente Romano, a Roman bridge from the first century BC; the Alcázar de los Reyes Cristianos, a royal palace built in the 14th century; and a cluster of flower-bedecked courtyards, built over centuries to provide shelter from the searing Andalusian sun, and now celebrated at a festival that's been running every year since 1918.

BOOK IT: Osprey Holidays offers three nights' B&B at the NH Collection Amistad from £430 per person, including flights and return rail transfers, departing March 13, 2022. ospreyholidays.com

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