

The Best of Spain

Spain is one of the most diverse and visually stunning nations of Europe. As you plan your trip, you may find yourself overwhelmed by the number of fascinating sights, beautiful landscapes, and charming towns to fit into your limited time. So let us give you a hand. We've scoured the country in search of the best places and experiences, and we've chosen our favorites below, admittedly very personal and opinionated choices.

1 The Best Travel Experiences

- **Sitting in *Sol* or *Sombra* at the Bullfights:** With origins as old as pagan Spain, the art of bullfighting is the expression of Iberian temperament and passions. Detractors object to the sport as cruel, bloody, and savage. Fans, however, view bullfighting as a microcosm of death, catharsis, and rebirth. If you strive to understand the bullfight, it can be one of the most evocative and memorable events in Spain. Head for the *plaza de toros* (bullring) in any major city, but particularly Madrid, Seville, or Granada. Tickets are either *sol* (sunny side) or *sombra* (in the shade); you'll pay more to get out of the sun.
- **Feasting on Tapas in the *Tascas*:** Tapas, those bite-size portions washed down with wine, beer, or sherry, are reason enough to go to Spain! Tapas bars, called *tascas*, are a quintessential Spanish experience. Originally tapas were cured ham or *chorizo* (spicy sausage). Today they are likely to be anything—*gambas* (deep-fried shrimp), anchovies marinated in vinegar, stuffed peppers, a cool, spicy gazpacho, or hake salad.
- **Getting Caught Up in the Passions of Flamenco:** It's best heard and watched in an old tavern, in a neighborhood like Barrio de Triana in Seville. From the lowliest *taberna* to the poshest nightclub, you can hear the staccato foot stomping, castanet rattling, hand clapping, and sultry guitar chords. Some say its origins lie deep in Asia, but the Spanish Gypsy has given the art an original style dramatizing inner conflict and pain. Performed by a great artist, flamenco can tear your heart out with its soulful, throaty singing.
- **Seeing the Masterpieces at the Prado:** One of the world's premier art museums, the Prado is home to some 4,000 masterpieces, many of them acquired by Spanish kings. The wealth of Spanish art is staggering—everything from Goya's *Naked Maja* to the celebrated *Las Meninas* (*The Maids of Honor*) by Velázquez (our favorite). Masterpiece after masterpiece unfolds before your eyes, including works by Hieronymus Bosch, Goya, Caravaggio, Fra Angelico, and Botticelli. See p. 133.

Spain





- **Sipping Sherry in Jerez de la Frontera:** In Spain, sherry is called Jerez, and it's a major industry and subculture in its own right. Hispanophiles compare the complexities of sherry to those of the finest wines produced in France, and make pilgrimages to the bodegas in Andalusia that ferment this amber-colored liquid. More than 100 bodegas are available for visits, tours, and tastings, opening their gates to visitors interested in a process that dates from the country's Roman occupation. See chapter 9.
- **Wandering the Crooked Streets of Barcelona's Gothic Quarter:** Long before Madrid was founded, the kingdom of Catalonia was a bastion of art and architecture. Whether the Barri Gòtic, as it's called in Catalán, is truly Gothic is the subject of endless debate, but the Ciutat Vella (Old City) of Barcelona is one of the most evocative neighborhoods in Spain. Its richly textured streets, with their gurgling fountains, vintage stores, and ancient fortifications, inspired such artists as Pablo Picasso and Joan Miró (who was born in this neighborhood). See chapter 12.
- **Going Gaga over Gaudí:** No architect in Europe was as fantastical as Antoni Gaudí y Cornet, the foremost proponent of Catalán *modernisme* (aka modernismo). Barcelona is studded with the works of this extraordinary artist, all of which UNESCO now lists as World Trust Properties. A recluse and a celibate bachelor as well as a fervent Catalán nationalist, he lived out his fantasies in his work. Nothing is more stunning than his Sagrada

Família, Barcelona's best-known landmark, a cathedral on which Gaudí labored for the last 43 years of his life. The landmark cathedral was never completed, but work on it still proceeds. If it's ever finished, "The Sacred Family" will be Europe's largest cathedral. See chapter 12.

- **Running with the Bulls in Pamplona:** Okay, maybe it's smarter to watch the bulls, rather than run with them. The Fiesta de San Fermín in July is the most dangerous ritual in Spain, made even more so by copious amounts of wine consumed by participants and observers. Broadcast live on TV throughout Spain and the rest of Europe, the festival features herds of furious bulls that charge down medieval streets, at times trampling and goring some of the hundreds of people who run beside them. Few other rituals in Spain are as breathtaking or as foolhardy. And few others as memorable. See chapter 16.
- **Following the Ancient Pilgrim Route to Santiago de Compostela:** Tourism as we know it began during the Middle Ages, when thousands of European pilgrims journeyed to the shrine of Santiago (St. James) in Galicia in northwestern Spain. Even if you're not motivated by faith, you should see some of Spain's most dramatic landscapes and grandest scenery by crossing the northern tier of the country—all the way from the Pyrenees to Santiago de Compostela. Some of the country's most stunning architecture can be viewed along the way, including gems in Roncesvalles, Burgos, and León. See chapter 19.

Impressions

Three Spaniards, four opinions.

—Old Spanish proverb

2 The Best Small Towns

- **Cuenca:** Set amid a landscape of rugged limestone outcroppings at the junction of two rivers, Cuenca is a fascinating combination of medieval masonry and cantilevered balconies that seem to float above the steep gorges below. The angularity of the architecture here is said to have inspired early versions of cubism, a fact commemorated in Cuenca's Museo de Arte Abstracto Español. This museum is considered one of the finest modern art museums in Spain. See chapter 6.
- **Zafra:** Zafra's 15th-century castle is the largest and best preserved in the region. It is set within the angular, stark white architecture of Zafra, which is also said to have inspired the cubists. See chapter 8.
- **Baeza:** After it was wrenched away from the Moors in 1227, Baeza became a frontier town between the Christian and Moorish worlds, and a die-hard symbol of the Catholic ambition to occupy all of Iberia. Today, a wealth of architecture survives as evidence of the splendor of Iberian history. See chapter 9.
- **Carmona:** Pint-size, sleepy Carmona packs a historical wallop, evoking the Roman occupation of Iberia. The town claims an architectural legacy from every occupying force since 206 B.C., when the Romans defeated the resident Carthaginian army. See chapter 9.
- **Ronda:** The site appears inhospitable—a gorge slices through the town center and its twin halves are connected with bridges that are antiques in their own right. But the winding streets of this old Moorish town are perfect for wandering, and the views of the surrounding Andalusian countryside are stupendous. Ronda is also revered by bullfighting fans, both for its bullring (the oldest and most beautiful in Spain) and the region's skill in breeding the fiercest bulls in the country. See chapter 9.
- **Mijas:** Wander through streets and alleys once trod by the Phoenicians, the Celts, and the Moors. Today, the town offers a welcome dose of medieval flair on the Costa del Sol, a region otherwise filled with modern, anonymous, and often ugly resort hotels. See chapter 10.
- **Nerja:** On the Costa del Sol at the Balcón de Europa (Balcony of Europe) lies this Mediterranean gem and its palm-shaded promenade jutting into the sea. Lined with antique iron lamp-posts, the village overlooks a pretty beach and fishing fleet. The resort town is on a sloping site at the foot of a wall of jagged coastal mountains. You can snuggle up in the parador or lodge at one of the little inns on the narrow streets. See chapter 10.
- **Elche:** Although famed as a charming medieval village, Elche is best known as the excavation site of one of the premier sculptures of the Roman Empire in Iberia, *La Dama de Elche*, now exhibited in Madrid's archaeological museum. These days, you can still see date palms planted originally by the Phoenicians. A "mystery play" celebrating the Assumption of the Virgin has been performed in the village church every year since the 1300s. See chapter 11.
- **Sitges:** South of Barcelona is Spain's most romantic Mediterranean beach town, with a 2.5km-long (1½-mile) sandy beach and a promenade studded with flowers and palm trees. Sitges is a town with a rich connection to art; Picasso and Dalí both spent time here. Wander its small lanes and inspect

the old villas of its Casco Antiguo, the old quarter. When not at the beach, you can view three good art museums. Nowadays, thousands of gays and lesbians flock to Sitges, which attracts a wide spectrum of visitors of all persuasions. See chapter 13.

- **Cadaqués:** The 16th-century church that dominates this town from a nearby hilltop isn't particularly noteworthy, but Cadaqués—on the Costa Brava near the French border—still charms visitors with its whitewashed, fishing-village simplicity. The azure waters of the Mediterranean appealed to surrealist master Salvador Dalí, who built a suitably bizarre villa in the adjoining hamlet of Lligat. See chapter 14.
- **Santillana del Mar:** Jean-Paul Sartre called it “the prettiest village in Spain.” Only 6 blocks long and just 5km (3 miles) from the sea, Santillana del Mar perfectly captures the spirit

of Cantabria. It's also near the Cuevas de Altamira (Altamira Caves), often called “the Sistine Chapel of prehistoric art.” Romanesque houses and mansions line the ironstone streets. People still sell fresh milk from their stable doors, as if the Middle Ages had never ended, but you can live in comfort at one of Spain's grandest paradors, Parador de Santillana, a converted 17th-century mansion. See chapter 18.

- **Deià:** On the island of Majorca, you'll find this lovely old village (also spelled Deyá), where the poet Robert Graves lived until his death in 1985. Following in his footsteps, artists and writers flock to this haven of natural beauty, 27km (17 miles) northwest of Palma. The views of the sea and mountains are panoramic. Gnarled and ancient olive trees dot the landscape. You can book into cozy nests of luxury like La Residencia or Es Molf. See chapter 20.

3 The Best Beaches

Spain may be flanked to the east by France and the Pyrenees and to the west by Portugal, but most of the country is ringed with sand, rock, and seawater. That, coupled with almost year-round sunshine, has attracted many millions of beachgoers.

- **Costa del Sol:** Stretching east from Gibraltar along the southernmost coast of Spain, the Costa del Sol is the most famous, party-hearty, overdeveloped string of beaches in Iberia. The beaches feature superb sand, and the Mediterranean waters are calm and warm throughout most of the year. But these charms have brought throngs of visitors, making this the most congested string of coastal resorts in Europe. The most important resorts here are Marbella, Torremolinos, Málaga, and Nerja. Look for soaring skyscrapers; eye-popping bikinis; sophisticated resorts and restaurants;

lots of sunshine; and interminable traffic jams. See chapter 10.

- **Costa Blanca:** This southeastern coast embraces the industrial city of Valencia, but its best-known resorts, Benidorm and Alicante, are packed with northern European sun-seekers every year. The surrounding scenery isn't particularly dramatic, but the water is turquoise, the sand is white, and a low annual rainfall virtually guarantees a sunny vacation. See chapter 11.
- **Costa Brava:** Rockier, more serpentine, and without the long stretches of sand that mark the Costa Blanca, the cliff-edged Costa Brava stretches from Barcelona to the French border. Look for the charming, sandy-bottomed coves that dot the coast. Although there are fewer undiscovered beaches here than along Spain's Atlantic coast,

the Costa Brava retains a sense of rocky wilderness. One of the more eccentric-looking villas along this coast belonged to the late Salvador Dalí, the region's most famous modern son who lived much of his life near Cadaqués. See chapter 14.

- **Costa Verde:** Radically different from the dry and sunbaked coastline of Andalusia, the rocky Costa Verde (Green Coast) resembles a sunny version of Ireland's western shore. It's temperate in summer, when the rest of Spain can be unbearably hot. Much of the coast lies within the ancient province of Asturias, a region rife with Romanesque architecture and medieval pilgrimage sites—and one that has not yet been overwhelmed

with tourism. Premier resorts include some districts of Santander, Gijón and, a short distance inland, Oviedo. See chapter 18.

- **The Balearic Islands:** Just off the coast of Catalonia and a 45-minute flight from Barcelona, this rocky, sand-fringed archipelago attracts urban refugees seeking the sun, jet-set glitterati, and exhibitionists in scanty beachwear. The Mediterranean climate is warmer here than on the mainland. The city of Palma de Majorca has the greatest number of high-rises and the most crowded shorelines. Much of Ibiza is party central for young people and gay visitors during the summer. Sleepy Minorca offers more isolation. See chapter 20.

4 The Best Castles & Palaces

- **Palacio Real** (Madrid): No longer occupied by royalty, but still used for state occasions, the Royal Palace sits on the bank of the Manzanares River. It was built in the mid-18th century over the site of a former palace. It's not Versailles, but it's still mighty impressive, with around 2,000 rooms. No one has lived here since 1931, but the chandeliers, marble columns, gilded borders, paintings, and objets d'art, including Flemish tapestries and Tiepolo ceiling frescoes, are well preserved. The empty thrones of King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofía are among the highlights of the tour. See p. 137.
- **El Alcázar** (Segovia): Once the most impregnable castle in Spain, El Alcázar rises dramatically from a rock spur near the ancient heart of town. Isabella's marriage to Ferdinand at this foreboding site eventually led to the unification of Spain. Today, it's the single most photographed and dramatic castle in Iberia. See p. 179.
- **Palacio Real** (Aranjuez): Built at enormous expense by the Bourbon cousins of the rulers of France, the palace was designed to emulate the glories of Versailles in its 18th-century neoclassicism. The gardens are even more fascinating than the palace. The gem of the complex is the Casita del Labrador, an annex as rich and ornate as its model—Marie Antoinette's Petit Trianon at Versailles. See p. 174.
- **Alhambra** (Granada): One of Spain's grandest sights, the Alhambra was originally conceived by the Muslims as a fortified pleasure pavilion. Its allure was instantly recognized by Catholic monarchs after the Reconquest. Despite the presence of a decidedly European palace at its center, the setting remains one of the most exotic (and Moorish) in all of Europe. See p. 298.
- **Alcázar** (Seville): The oldest royal residence in Europe still in use was built by Peter the Cruel (1350–69) in 1364, 78 years after the Moors left

Seville. Ferdinand and Isabella once lived here. One of the purest examples of the Mudéjar, or Moorish, style, its decoration is based on that of the Alhambra in Granada. A multitude of Christian and Islamic motifs are

combined architecturally in this labyrinth of gardens, halls, and courts, none more notable than the Patio de las Doncellas (Court of the Maidens). See p. 261.

5 The Best Museums

The spectacular Prado in Madrid is no mere museum, but a travel experience. In itself, it's worth a journey to Spain. (See "The Best Travel Experiences," earlier in this chapter.)

- **Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum** (Madrid): Madrid's acquisition of this treasure trove of art in the 1980s was one of the greatest coups in European art history. Amassed by a central European collector beginning around 1920, and formerly displayed in Lugano, Switzerland, its 700 canvases, with works by artists ranging from El Greco to Picasso, are arranged in chronological order. The collection rivals the legendary holdings of the queen of England herself. See p. 138.
- **Museo de Arte Abstracto Español** (Cuenca): The angular medieval architecture of the town that contains the museum is an appropriate foil for a startling collection of modern masters. A group of some of Spain's most celebrated artists settled in Cuenca in the 1950s and 1960s, and their works are displayed here. They included Fernando Zobel, Antoni Tàpies, Eduardo Chillida, Luis Feito, and Antonio Saura. See p. 193.
- **Museo de Santa Cruz** (Toledo): Built by the archbishop of Toledo as a hospital for the poor, this is the most important museum in New Castile. It's known for its Plateresque architecture—notably its intricate facade—and for the wealth of art inside. Among its noteworthy collection of 16th- and 17th-century paintings are 18 works by El Greco, including his *Altarpiece of the Assumption*, completed in 1613 during his final period. The gallery also contains a collection of primitive paintings. See p. 166.
- **Museo Nacional de Escultura** (Valladolid): The greatest collection of gilded polychrome sculpture—an art form that reached its pinnacle in Valladolid—is on display here in the 15th-century San Gregorio College. Figures are first carved in wood, then painted with great artistry to achieve a lifelike appearance. The most remarkable exhibit is an altarpiece designed by Alonso Berruguete for the Church of San Benito. Be sure to see his *Martyrdom of St. Sebastian*. See p. 213.
- **Museo Nacional de Arte Romano** (Mérida): A museum that makes most archaeologists salivate, this modern building contains hundreds of pieces of ancient Roman sculpture discovered in and around Mérida. The Roman treasures included theaters, amphitheaters, racecourses, and hundreds of tombs full of art objects, many of which are on display here. In 1986, the well-known and award-winning architect Rafael Moneo designed this ambitious and innovative brick building. Designing the building on a grand scale, he freely borrowed from Roman motifs and daringly incorporated an ancient Roman road discovered when the foundations were dug. See p. 233.

- **Museo Provincial de Bellas Artes de Sevilla** (Seville): The Prado doesn't own all the great Spanish art in the country. Located in the early-17th-century convent of La Merced, this museum is famous for its works by such Spanish masters as Valdés Leal, Zurbarán, and Murillo. Spain's Golden Age is best exemplified by Murillo's monumental *Immaculate Conception* and Zurbarán's *Apotheosis of St. Thomas Aquinas*. See p. 262.
- **Museu Picasso** (Barcelona): Picasso, who spent many of his formative years in Barcelona, donated some 2,500 of his paintings, drawings, and engravings to launch this museum in 1970. It's second only to the Picasso Museum in Paris. Seek out his notebooks, which contain many sketches of Barcelona scenes. The pieces are arranged in rough chronological order, so you'll discover that he completely mastered traditional representational painting before tiring of it and beginning to experiment. Watch for numerous portraits of his family, as well as examples from both his Blue Period and his Rose Period. His obsessive *Las Meninas* series—painted in 1959—offers exaggerated variations on the theme of the famous Velázquez work hanging in Madrid's Prado Museum. See p. 418.
- **Teatre Museu Dalí** (Figueres): The eccentric Salvador Dalí is showcased here as nowhere else. The surrealist artist—known for everything from lobster telephones to *Rotting Mannequin in a Taxicab*—conceived of his art partly as theater. But be warned: As Dalí's final joke, he wanted the museum to spew forth “false information.” See p. 473.

6 The Best Cathedrals & Churches

- **Catedral de Avila:** One of the earliest Gothic cathedrals in Castile, this rugged, plain edifice was called “a soldier's church.” A brooding, granite monolith, which in some ways resembles a fortress, it is the centerpiece of a city that produced St. Teresa, the most famous mystic of the Middle Ages. The interior of the cathedral, with its High Gothic nave, is filled with notable works of art, including many Plateresque statues. See p. 188.
- **Catedral de Toledo:** Ranked among the greatest of all Gothic structures, this cathedral was built on the site of an old Arab mosque. A vast pile from the 13th to the 15th centuries, it has an interior filled with masterpieces—notably an immense polychrome retable carved in Flamboyant Gothic style, and magnificent 15th- and 16th-century choir stalls. In the treasury is a splendid 16th-century silver-and-gilt monstrance, weighing about 500 pounds. See p. 164.
- **Real Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial** (near Madrid): Philip II, who commissioned this monastery in the 1530s, envisioned it as a monastic fortress against the distractions of the secular world. More awesome than beautiful, it's the world's best example of the religious devotion of Renaissance Spain. This huge granite fortress, the burial place for Spanish kings, houses a wealth of paintings and tapestries—works by everyone from Titian to Velázquez. See p. 176.
- **Catedral de León:** Filled with more sunlight than any other cathedral in Spain, this one was begun in 1250 with a design pierced by 125 stained-glass windows and 57 oculi, the oldest of which date from the 13th century. The architectural achievement is stunning but also dangerous. Architects

fear that an urgent restoration is needed to strengthen the walls to prevent collapse. The well-preserved cloisters are also worth a visit. See p. 208.

- **Catedral de Santa María** (Burgos): After its cornerstone was laid in 1221, this cathedral became the beneficiary of creative talent imported from England, Germany, and France. It is the third-largest cathedral in Spain, after Seville and Toledo. Art historians claim that among medieval religious buildings, it has the most diverse spectrum of sculpture in Gothic Spain—so diverse that a special name has been conjured up to describe it: the School of Burgos. El Cid is buried here. See p. 217.
- **Catedral de Sevilla:** The Christians are not the only occupants of Seville who considered this site holy; an enormous mosque stood here before the Reconquista. To quote the Christians who built the cathedral, they planned one “so immense that everyone, on beholding it, will take us for madmen.” They succeeded. After St. Peter’s in Rome and St. Paul’s in London, the cathedral of this Andalusian capital is the largest in Europe. Among its most important features are the tomb of Columbus, Patio de los Naranjos (Courtyard of the Orange Trees), Giralda Tower, and Capilla Real (Royal Chapel). See p. 261.
- **Mezquita-Catedral de Córdoba:** In the 1500s, the Christian rulers of Spain tried to convert one of the largest and most elaborate mosques in the Muslim world, the Mezquita, into a Catholic cathedral. The result, a bizarre amalgam of Gothic and Muslim architecture, is an awesomely proportioned cultural compromise that defies categorization. In its 8th-century heyday, the Mezquita was the crowning Muslim architectural achievement in the West. See p. 249.
- **Catedral de Barcelona:** Completed in 1450, this cathedral grew to represent the spiritual power of the Catalán empire. With its 81m (270-ft.) facade and flying buttresses and gargoyles, it is the Gothic Quarter’s most stunning monument. The interior is in the Catalán Gothic style with slender pillars. See p. 415.
- **Montserrat** (near Barcelona): Since its inauguration in the 9th century by Benedictine monks, Montserrat has been the preeminent religious shrine of Catalonia and the site of the legendary statue of La Moreneta (the Black Madonna). Its glory years ended in 1812, when it was sacked by the armies of Napoléon. Today, sitting atop a 1,200m (4,000-ft.) mountain, 11km (7 miles) long and 5.5km (3½ miles) wide, it is one of the three most important pilgrimage sites in Spain. See chapter 13.
- **Catedral de Santiago de Compostela:** During the Middle Ages, this verdant city on the northwestern tip of Iberia attracted thousands of religious pilgrims who walked from as far away as Italy to seek salvation at the tomb of St. James. The cathedral itself shows the architectural influences of nearly 800 years of religious conviction, much of it financed by donations from exhausted pilgrims. Its two most stunning features are its Obradoiro facade (a baroque masterpiece), and its carved Doorway of Glory behind the facade. An enormous silver censor called the Botafumeiro swings from the transept during major liturgical ceremonies. See p. 568.

7 The Best Vineyards & Wineries

Spanish wines are some of the best in the world and are remarkably affordable here. Here's a list of bodegas that receive visitors. For more information about the 10 wine regions—and the 39 officially recognized wine-producing Denominaciones de Origen scattered across those regions—contact **Wines from Spain**, c/o the Commercial Office of Spain, 405 Lexington Ave., 44th Floor, New York, NY 10174-0331 (☎ 212/661-4959).

RIBERA DEL DUERO

Halfway between Madrid and Santander, this region near Burgos is the fastest developing wine district in the country and the beneficiary of massive investments in the past few years. Cold nights, sunny days, the highest altitudes of any wine-producing region in Spain, and fertile alkaline soil produce flavorful, award-winning wines. Among the noteworthy individual vineyards is:

- **Bodegas Señorío de Nava**, Nava de Roa (☎ 98-720-97-12): This is one of the region's best examples of a once-sleepy and now-booming vintner. Merlot and cabernet sauvignon grapes are cultivated, as are more obscure local varieties such as Tinta del País (also known as Tempranillo) and Garnacha (or Grenache, as it's called across the border in France). Some of the wines bottled here are distributed under the brand name Vega Cubillas.

JEREZ DE LA FRONTERA

This town of 200,000 (most of whom work in the wine trade) is surrounded by a sea of vineyards, which thrive in the hot, chalky soil. Ninety-five percent of the region is planted with the hardy and flavorful Palomino Fino to produce sherry, one of the most beloved products of Spain. Few other regions contain so many

bodegas, any of which can be visited. See chapter 9 for more information; in the meantime, outstanding choices include:

- **Emilio Lustau**, Jerez de la Frontera (☎ 95-634-15-97): This bodega was established in 1896 by a local lawyer and, ever since, it has produced exotic forms of sherry snapped up as collectors' items by aficionados everywhere.
- **Antonio Barbadillo**, Sanlúcar de Barrameda (☎ 95-636-00-10): This firm controls 70% of the sherry produced in the region around Sanlúcar, a town just 24km (15 miles) north of Jerez. Venerable and respected, it boasts impressive headquarters—a palace originally conceived as a residence for a local bishop. Although established in 1821, it remained a small-time player until the 1960s, when production and quality zoomed upward. Some of its wine is distributed in Britain as Harvey's of Bristol.
- **González Byass**, Jerez de la Frontera (☎ 95-635-70-16): Flourishing since 1835, this bodega has gained enormous recognition from one of the most famous brand names and the world's best-selling sherry, Tío Pepe. It isn't as picturesque as you might have hoped, since modernization has added some rather bulky concrete buildings to its historic core. Nonetheless, it's one of the most visible names in the industry.
- **Pedro Domecq**, Jerez de la Frontera (☎ 95-615-15-00; www.domecq.es): The oldest of all the large sherry houses was established in 1730 by Pedro Domecq, a young French nobleman. Its bodega contains casks whose contents were once destined for such sherry lovers as William Pitt, Lord Nelson, and the duke of

Wellington. If you visit this sprawling compound, look for La Mezquita bodega, whose many-columned interior recalls the famous mosque in Córdoba.

PENEDES

In ancient times, thousands of vessels of wine were shipped from this region of Catalonia to fuel the orgies of the Roman Empire. Much of the inspiration for the present industry was developed in the 19th century by French vintners, who found the climate and soil similar to those of Bordeaux. The region produces still wines, as well as 98% of Spain's sparkling wines (*cava*), which stand an excellent chance of supplanting French champagne in the minds of celebrants throughout the world. In fact, Freixenet is the largest selling sparkling wine in the world.

- **Codorníu**, Sant Sadurní d'Anoia (☎ 93-818-32-32; www.codorniu.com): With a history dating from the mid-1500s, this vineyard became famous after its owner, Josep Raventós, produced Spain's first version of sparkling wine. During the harvest, more than 2.2 million pounds of grapes, collected from about 1,000 growers, are pressed daily. The company's headquarters, designed around the turn of the 20th century by Puig i Cadafalch, a contemporary of Gaudí, sits above the 31km (19 miles) of underground tunnels where the product is aged.
- **Freixenet**, Sant Sadurní d'Anoia (☎ 93-891-70-00; www.freixenet.es): Cordoníu's largest and most innovative competitor began in 1861 as a family-run wine business that quickly changed its production process to incorporate the radical developments in sparkling *cava*. Today, although still family owned, it's an awesomely efficient factory pressing vast numbers of grapes, with at least a million cases sold to the United States every year.

Award-winning brand names include Cordon Negro Brut and Carta Nevada Brut. The company now operates a vineyard in California. It produces the sparkling wine, Gloria Ferrer, which has won awards in the United States.

- **Miguel Torres**, Vilafranca del Penedés (☎ 93-817-74-27; www.torreswines.com): This winery was established in 1870 by a local son (Jaime Torres), who returned to his native town after making a fortune trading petroleum and oil in Cuba. Today, you can see what was once the world's largest wine vat (132,000 gal.); its interior was used as the site of a banquet held in honor of the Spanish king. Thanks to generations of management by French-trained specialists, Miguel Torres is now one of the region's most sophisticated and advanced vineyards. Like the other bodegas, its location permits side trips to Barcelona, the beach resort of Sitges, and the ancient monastery of Montserrat.

LA RIOJA

Set in the foothills of the Pyrenees close to the French border, La Rioja turns out what most people have in mind when they think of Spanish wines. The region produced millions of gallons during the regime of the ancient Romans, and it boasts quality-control laws promulgated by a local bishop in the 9th century. Here are some of the best vineyards for a visit:

- **Herederos de Marqués de Riscal**, Elciego (☎ 94-560-60-00): This vineyard was founded around 1850 by a local entrepreneur who learned wine-growing techniques in France. The modern-day enterprise still bases most of its income on the 199 hectares (492 acres) acquired by the organization's founding father. Despite several disappointing years between 1975 and 1985, it remains one of the most respected in the region.

- **Bodegas Riojanas**, Cenicero (☎ 94-145-40-50; www.bodegrasriojanas.com): Set on the main street of the wine-growing hamlet of Cenicero, this century-old bodega expanded massively in the 1980s, and upgraded its visitor information program. You'll be received in a mock-feudal tower where you can learn the nuances of the wine industry.
- **Bodegas Muga**, Haro (☎ 94-131-04-98; www.bodegasmuga.com): This bodega adheres more to 19th-century old-world craftsmanship than any of its competitors. It was founded in 1932 by Isaac Muga and his wife, Aurora Cao, who both came from a long line of families in the wine-making industry. The winery contains an assortment of old-fashioned casks made from American or French oak. Production is small, eclectic, and choice.
- **La Rioja Alta**, Haro (☎ 94-131-03-46; www.riojalta.com): Another bodega in the wine-growing community of Haro, La Rioja Alta is set near the railway station. Founded in 1890, it has the dank and atmospheric cellars you'd expect. It was graced in 1984 by a visit from Spain's royal family. About 85% of the production at this small but quality outfit is bottled as *reservas* (aged at least 3 years) and *gran reservas* (aged at least 5 years).

GALICIA

This Celtic outpost in the northwestern corner of Spain produces white wines praised by connoisseurs as the perfect accompaniment to local seafood. The marketing name for the product, appropriately, is El Vino del Mar (Sea Wine), although the Denominación de Origen includes the appellations Rias Baixas and Ribeiro. Per-capita wine consumption in Galicia is the highest in Spain; a majority of the wine produced here was formerly consumed locally. Massive investments during the 1980s changed all that.

- **Bodega Morgadio**, Albeos-Crecente (☎ 98-666-61-50): This vineyard, near Pontevedra, launched the Denominación de Origen Rias Baixas in 1984. Four friends to whom locals referred as "madmen" bought 28 hectares (70 acres) of land that, with the Albariño grape, they transformed into one of the most respected and award-winning vineyards in the district. Fertilizers for each year's crop comes from the bodega's own flock of sheep. The success of old-fashioned farming methods coupled with state-of-the-art fermentation tanks is a model of entrepreneurial courage in an otherwise economically depressed outpost of Spain.

8 The Best Festivals

- **The Autumn Festival**, Madrid (☎ 91-588-10-00): Held in October and November, the **Festival de Otoño** is the best music festival in Spain, with a lineup that attracts the cream of the European and South American musical communities. The usual roster of chamber music, symphonic pieces, and orchestral works is supplemented by a program of *zarzuela* (musical comedy), as well as Arabic and

Sephardic pieces composed during the Middle Ages. See p. 48.

- **Feria del Caballo**, Jerez de la Frontera (☎ 95-633-47-47): Few events show off Spain's equestrian traditions in such a flattering light. Costumes are appropriately ornate; riders demonstrate the stern, carefully controlled movements developed during medieval battles; and the entire city of Jerez becomes one enormous riding ring for the

presentation of dressage and jumping events. Horse buying and trading are commonplace at this May event. See p. 45.

- **Las Hogueras de San Juan**, Alicante (☎ 96-520-00-00): Bonfires blaze through the night on June 20 as a celebration of a festival revered by Celtic pagans and Romans alike—the summer solstice. Stacks of flammable objects, including discarded finery and cardboard replicas of sinners and witches, are set ablaze. The bonfire signals the beginning of 5 days of parades and 5 nights of fireworks, during which normal business comes to a virtual standstill. See p. 46.
- **Moros y Cristianos**, Alcoy, near Alicante (☎ 96-520-00-00): The agonizing, century-long process of evicting the Moors from Iberia is re-created during 3 days of simulated, vaudeville-style fighting between “Moors” and “Christians” every April (dates vary). Circus-style costumes worn by the Moors are as absurdly anachronistic as possible. When the Christians win, a statue of the Virgin is carried proudly through the city as proof of Alcoy’s staunchly passionate role as a bastion of Christianity. See p. 45.
- **La Tomatina**, Buñol, Valencia (☎ 96-398-64-22): Every year on the last Wednesday in August, nearly everyone in the town, along with thousands from neighboring towns and villages, join this 2-hour-long tomato war (11am–1pm). The local government sponsors the festival, bringing in truckloads of tomatoes totaling more than 88,000 pounds of vegetable artillery. Local bands provide the music for dancing and singing and plenty of drinking. Portable showers are installed for the participants. See p. 47.
- **La Rapa das Bestas (The Capture of the Beasts)**, San Lorenzo de Sabucedo, Galicia (☎ 98-122-18-22): In the verdant hills of northwestern Spain, horses graze at will. On the first weekend of July, they are rounded up and herded into a corral. Here, each is branded and then released back into the wild after a few days of medical observation. For information, contact the Office of Tourism in Pontevedra. See p. 46 and p. 579.
- **Misteri d’Elx (Mystery of Elche)**, Elche (☎ 96-545-38-31): Based on the reputed mystical powers of an ancient, black-faced statue of the Virgin, the citizens of Elche have staged a mystery play in the local church every year for more than 6 centuries. The chanting and songs that accompany the plot line are in an archaic dialect that even Castilians can barely understand. Competition is fierce for seats during the August event, and celebrations precede and follow the play. See p. 369

9 The Best Paradors

Funded and maintained by the government, Spain’s paradors (*paradores* in Spanish) are hostleries that showcase a building or setting of important cultural and historic interest. Some are much older and grander than others. Here are the country’s most interesting and unusual.

- **Parador de Avila**, Avila (☎ 92-021-13-40): Built as an enlargement of a 15th-century palace (Palacio de Piedras

Albas, also known as Palacio de Benavides), this parador features gardens that flank the northern fortifications of this well-preserved, 11th-century walled city. While only some of the comfortable, airy guest rooms are in the original palace, it’s still the region’s most intriguing hotel. In the parador’s restaurant, try the roast suckling pig, a regional specialty. See p. 190.

- **Parador de Cuenca**, Cuenca (© 96-923-23-20): This 16th-century building, once a Dominican convent, is one of the newer paradors in Spain. Like the medieval houses for which Cuenca is famous, the balconies here jut over rocky cliffs, overlooking swift-moving rivers below. The sight of *casas colgadas*, or “suspended houses,” is unforgettable. An adjoining restaurant specializes in seasonal wild game. See p. 193.
- **Parador de Toledo**, Toledo (© 92-522-18-50): Although this is a relatively modern building, the architecture subtly evokes much older models. Views from the windows, boasting faraway glimpses of the city’s historic core, evoke the scenes El Greco painted in his *View of Toledo*. A swimming pool is a welcome relief in blistering Toledo. Such regional dishes as stewed partridge are featured in the hotel restaurant. See p. 168.
- **Parador San Marcos**, León (© 98-723-73-00): Originally home to the Order of Santiago—a group of knights charged with protecting journeying pilgrims—the building was expanded and converted into a monastery some 400 years later. These days, set beside the Bernesga River and with a lavishly decorated church on the grounds, it’s one of Spain’s most deluxe paradors. The public areas are pure medieval grandeur: a dramatic lobby, a huge cast-iron chandelier, and stone staircases. See p. 210.
- **Parador de Zamora**, Zamora (© 98-051-44-97): This one-time Moorish fortress-turned-Renaissance palace is among the most beautiful and richly decorated paradors in Spain. A medieval aura is reflected in the details: armor, coats-of-arms, tapestries, and attractive four-poster beds. A swimming pool enhances the tranquil back garden. Castilian fare such as stuffed roast veal typifies the restaurant’s offerings. See p. 207.
- **Parador de Cáceres**, Cáceres (© 92-721-17-59): Live like royalty at this palace, built in the 1400s on the site of Arab fortifications. The parador is in the city’s old quarter, recently declared a World Heritage Site. The spacious public areas are decorated with soft cream shades and rough-hewn ceiling beams. Venison with goat cheese and roast kid with rosemary are typical of the varied Extremaduran cuisine served in the parador’s restaurant. See p. 230.
- **Parador de Trujillo**, Trujillo (© 92-732-13-50): Set in the inviting 16th-century convent of Santa Clara, this parador was originally built in a combination of medieval and Renaissance styles. The building was transformed into a hotel in 1984; the guest rooms are considerably more lavish than they were during their stint as nuns’ cells. The cuisine is the best in town. See p. 227.
- **Parador de Mérida**, Mérida (© 92-431-38-00): A 16th-century building that was at various times a convent and a prison, this parador once hosted a meeting between the much-hated dictators of Spain (Franco) and Portugal (Salazar) in the 1960s. Mudéjar, Roman, and Visigothic elements adorn the interior in unusual but stunning juxtaposition. The inner courtyard and Mozarabic gardens add graceful notes. The kitchen serves the area’s best, including gazpacho, *calderetas extremeñas* (stews), and the famous Almoharin figs. See p. 234.
- **Parador de Jaén**, Jaén (© 95-323-00-00): In the 10th century, Muslims built this fortress on a cliff high above town. Later, Christians added Gothic vaulting and touches of luxury, which remain in place thanks to renovation by the government. Guest rooms provide sweeping views over Andalusia. A swimming pool is a welcome retreat from the burning sun. Sample such

dishes as cold garlic soup and partridge salad in the panoramic restaurant. See p. 240.

- **Parador de Santillana Gil Blas**, Santillana del Mar (☎ 94-202-80-28): This bucolic parador recalls the manor houses that dotted northern Spain's verdant hillsides more than 400 years ago. Composed of thick stone walls and heavy timbers, it's pleasantly isolated and elegantly countrified. A bonus is its proximity to what has been called "the Sistine Chapel of prehistoric art"—the Caves of Altamira. See p. 545.
- **Parador Molino Viejo (Parador de Gijón)**, Gijón (☎ 98-537-05-11): As the name implies, this hotel was built around the decrepit remains of a *molino*, or cider mill (and the antique presses are still at hand). Close to San Lorenzo Beach, it's the only parador in the northern province of Asturias. The dining room serves typical Asturian cuisine, including the famous *fabada*, a rich stew of white beans and pork. See p. 555.
- **Parador de Pontevedra**, Pontevedra (☎ 98-685-58-00): The building is a 16th-century Renaissance palace built on foundations at least 200 years older than that. It's famous as one of Spain's first paradors. Inaugurated in 1955, its success led to the amplification of the parador program. The hotel is still alluring today, with its delightful terrace garden and stately dining room, which serves the fresh fish and seafood for which Galicia is known. See p. 579.
- **Hostal de Los Reyes Católicos**, Santiago de Compostela (☎ 98-158-22-00): We saved the best for last—this is one of the most spectacular hotels in Europe. Originally a hospice for wayfaring pilgrims, it boasts a lavish 16th-century facade, four open-air courtyards, and a bedchamber once occupied by Franco. Today, the hotel is a virtual museum, with Gothic, Renaissance, and baroque architectural elements. It boasts four beautiful cloisters, elegant public areas, and spectacular guest rooms. See p. 569.

10 The Best Luxury Hotels

- **Park Hyatt Villa Magna**, Madrid (☎ 91-587-12-34): Although it looks like a House of Parliament, this elegant hotel is regal and sedate, giving off the aura of a country estate. Fine furnishings, beautiful linen, and such designer toiletries as fragrant Maja soaps can be found in the exquisite guest rooms. The hotel is surrounded by beautiful gardens. See p. 110.
- **The Ritz**, Madrid (☎ 91-701-67-67): Flawless service is the hallmark of Madrid's most distinguished hotel. Guest rooms contain antiques, gracious marble bathrooms, and elegant detailing. This Edwardian grand hotel is more relaxed than it once was, the old haughtiness of former management gone with the wind—it long ago rescinded its policy of not allowing movie stars as guests. You still may have to wear a coat and tie, however. See p. 111.
- **Hotel Alfonso XIII**, Seville (☎ 95-491-70-00): The royal family stayed here when the Infanta Elena, daughter of Juan Carlos, married in Seville in 1995. Built to house visitors for the Iberoamerican Exposition of 1929, this grand hotel features Moorish-style rooms with doors opening onto small balconies; they overlook a Spanish courtyard with a bubbling fountain and potted palms. Set in front of the city's fabled Alcázar, the Alfonso XIII is one of Spain's most legendary hotels. See p. 266.

- **Hotel La Bobadilla**, Loja (☎ 95-832-18-61): The most luxurious retreat in the south of Spain, this secluded oasis lies in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada, an hour's drive northeast of Málaga. Whitewashed *casas* (small individual villas) cluster around a tower and a church. Each individually designed *casa* is complete with roof terrace and balcony overlooking olive groves. Guests live in luxury within the private compound of 708 hectares (1,750 acres). See p. 341.
- **Marbella Club**, Marbella (☎ 95-282-22-11): Built during the Golden Age of the Costa del Sol (the 1950s), this bastion of chic is composed of ecologically conscious clusters of garden pavilions, bungalows, and small-scale annexes. The luxurious rooms are modeled after those displayed in a European design magazine. The Marbella Club has many competitors but remains an elite retreat. See p. 322.
- **Puente Romano**, Marbella (☎ 95-282-09-00): On manicured and landscaped grounds facing the beach, Puente Romano evokes a highly stylized Andalusian village. Exotic bird life flutters through lush gardens planted with banana trees and other vegetation. Villas are spacious and beautifully outfitted with tasteful wood furnishings, big mirrors, and marble floors and bathrooms. During summer, flamenco dancers entertain here. See p. 324.
- **Hotel Ritz**, Barcelona (☎ 93-318-52-00): A 1919 grand luxe hotel formerly known as the Palace, this is one of the finest hotels in Spain, if not in all of Europe. Guests are treated to dazzling elegance, with all the gilt, marble, and fresh flowers you would ever want. Classic Belle Epoque detailing extends to the plush guest quarters, many of which have high, ornate ceilings and gold bathroom fixtures. See p. 392.
- **Hotel María Cristina**, San Sebastián (☎ 94-343-76-00): One of the country's great Belle Epoque treasures, this old-world seafront hotel has sheltered discriminating guests since 1912. Oriental rugs, antiques, potted palms, high ceilings, formal lounges, marble pillars, and marble floors show off a turn-of-the-20th-century glamour. The guest rooms are traditional in style, with wood furnishings and tasteful pastel fabrics. Nothing else in the Basque country quite measures up to this old charmer. See p. 516.
- **La Residencia**, Deià, Majorca (☎ 97-163-90-11): Set amid 12 hectares (30 acres) of citrus and olive groves, this tranquil hotel was converted from two Renaissance-era manor houses. Jasmine-scented terraces open onto panoramas of surrounding villages and mountains. Pampered guests are served a creative cuisine that features local produce. Leisure facilities include a swimming pool fed by mountain spring water. Many of the guest rooms have regal four-poster beds. The hotel is a haven from the rest of overcrowded Majorca. See p. 608.

11 The Best Hotel Bargains

- **Hotel Opera**, Madrid (☎ 91-541-28-00): Enjoying a great location in the heart of Madrid, this is one of the capital's relatively undiscovered boutique hotels, charging affordable prices for its comfortable guest rooms—many quite spacious. First-rate furnishings and marble-clad bathrooms with dual basins characterize this winner. See p. 108.
- **Hostal del Cardenal**, Toledo (☎ 92-522-49-00): The summer residence of Toledo's 18th-century Cardinal Lorenzani, built right into the walls of the

Old City next to Bisagra Gate, this just happens to have Toledo's best restaurant. But the setting—rose gardens, cascading vines, and Moorish fountains—makes it an ideal place to stay as well. Spanish furniture and a scattering of antiques recapture the aura of Old Castile. See p. 169.

- **Hostería Real de Zamora**, Zamora (☎ 98-053-45-45): Once the dreaded headquarters of the local Spanish Inquisition, today this hotel offers a far friendlier welcome. Guests enjoy coffee on the patio and the pleasures of a garden planted along the city's medieval fortifications. Imagine if these 15th-century walls could talk. See p. 206.
- **Hotel Doña María**, Seville (☎ 95-422-49-90): Near the fabled cathedral, this hotel boasts a rooftop terrace with unmatched views of the Andalusian capital. A private villa that dates from the 1840s, the Doña María has a swimming pool ringed with garden-style lattices and antique wrought-iron railings. Guest rooms are uniquely designed with tasteful Iberian antiques. See p. 268.
- **Hotel Reina Victoria**, Ronda (☎ 95-287-12-40): This country-style hotel is best known as the place where the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke wrote *The Spanish Trilogy*. Its terrace, perched on a dramatic precipice, offers commanding views of the countryside. An Englishman built this Victorian charmer in 1906 to honor his recently deceased monarch, Queen Victoria. See p. 292.
- **Hotel América**, Granada (☎ 95-822-74-71): This former private villa, within the walls of the Alhambra, is one of the most popular small hotels in Granada. Its cozy guest rooms are filled with reproductions of Andalusian antiques. Plants cascade down the white plaster walls and the ornate grillwork onto the shaded patio. Good-tasting, inexpensive meals are served in the hotel restaurant. See p. 306.
- **Hotel Mijas**, Mijas (☎ 95-248-58-00): The most charming affordable hotel along the Costa del Sol, the Mijas is designed in typical Andalusian style, with flowering terraces, wrought-iron accents, and sun-flooded guest rooms. Although built in the 1970s, it blends perfectly with the region's gleaming white buildings. See p. 332.
- **Huerto del Cura**, Elche (☎ 96-661-00-11): From your room you'll have a panoramic view of Priest's Grove, a formidable date-palm forest. Between Alicante and Murcia, this is one of the choice addresses in the south of Spain. Guest rooms are handsomely maintained and beautifully furnished; a swimming pool separates the rooms from the palm grove. The regional cuisine in the hotel's restaurant is excellent. See p. 370.
- **Mesón Castilla**, Barcelona (☎ 93-318-21-82): This two-star charmer with an Art Nouveau facade is right in the heart of Barcelona. It is well maintained and well managed, with prices that are blessedly easy on the wallet. Comfortable rooms often come with large terraces. Only breakfast is served, but many nearby taverns serve excellent food. See p. 391.

12 The Best Restaurants

- **El Amparo**, Madrid (☎ 91-431-64-56): In the old days of Franco, gastronomes flocked to Jockey or Horcher. Today their savvy sons and daughters head to El Amparo, the trendiest of Madrid's gourmet restaurants. It serves haute Basque cuisine against a backdrop of cosmopolitan glamour. Patrons sample everything from cold marinated salmon with a

tomato sorbet to ravioli stuffed with seafood. See p. 124.

- **Sobrino de Botín**, Madrid (© 91-366-42-17): Since 1725, this restaurant has been celebrated for its roast suckling pig, prepared in a 200-year-old tile oven. Hemingway even mentioned it in *The Sun Also Rises*. The roast Segovian lamb is equally delectable. There is little subtlety of flavor here—the food is prepared according to time-tested recipes that have appealed to kings as well as Castilian peasants. The aromas waft clear across Madrid’s Old Town. See p. 131.
- **Mesón de Cándido**, Segovia (© 92-142-59-11): Foodies from around the country flock to this 19th-century Spanish inn, “The House of Cándido,” for one dish: roast suckling pig, acclaimed the best in Spain (even by Hemingway, who might otherwise be seen at Botín in Madrid). In Spanish it’s called *cochinillo asado*, and it’s delectable—prepared according to a century-old recipe. The *cordero asado*, or roast baby lamb, is not as well known, but it’s equally flavorful. See p. 182.
- **Mesón Casa Colgadas**, Cuenca (© 96-922-35-09): Without a doubt, this is the most spectacularly situated restaurant in Spain—a “hanging house” precariously suspended over a precipice. The food is Spanish and international, with an emphasis on regional ingredients. The dishes can be ingenious, but the culinary repertoire usually includes proven classics that might have pleased your grandparents. See p. 194.
- **Chez Víctor**, Salamanca; © 92-321-31-23): In the historic center of this university town, Chez Víctor is the most glamorous Continental restaurant around. Chef Victoriano Salvador gives customers terrific value for their euros with his imaginative, oft-renewed menus. The freshly prepared fish and his traditional version of roast lamb are especially tempting. Regionally rooted but modern in outlook, Salvador has a finely honed technique and isn’t afraid to be inventive on occasion. See p. 204.
- **El Caballo Rojo**, Córdoba (© 95-747-53-75): Begin your evening with a sherry in the popular bar, followed by a visit to the traditional dining room. Not only Andalusian dishes are served here; some classics are based on ancient Sephardic and Mozarabic specialties. Most guests begin with a soothing gazpacho and wash everything down with sangria. Finish off the meal with one of the homemade ice creams—we recommend pistachio. See p. 256.
- **Jaume de Provença**, Barcelona (© 93-430-00-29): The Catalán capital has more great restaurants than even Madrid. At the western end of the Eixample district, this Catalán/French restaurant is the domain of one of the city’s most talented chefs, Jaume Bargués. He serves modern interpretations of traditional Catalán and southern French cuisine—such dishes as pigs’ trotters with plums and truffles, or crabmeat lasagna. His personal cooking repertoire is distinctive, and he has been known to create new taste sensations when he’s feeling experimental. See p. 404.
- **Botafumeiro**, Barcelona (© 93-218-42-30): The city’s finest seafood is prepared here, in a glistening, modern kitchen visible from the dining room. The king of Spain is a frequent patron, enjoying paellas, *zarzuelas*, or any of the 100 or so ultrafresh seafood dishes. The chef’s treatment of fish is the most intelligent and subtle in town—but don’t expect such quality to come cheap. See p. 408.
- **La Dama**, Barcelona (© 93-202-06-86): Among the most acclaimed restaurants in Spain, this “dame” serves

one of the most refined Catalán and international cuisines along the country's east coast. Stylish and well managed, it turns out masterpieces based on the season's best in food shopping. See p. 404.

- **Empordá**, Figueres (© 97-250-05-62): Although ordinary on the outside, this hotel restaurant is one of the finest on the Costa Brava. It was a favorite of Salvador Dalí, who once wrote his own cookbook. Haute Catalán cuisine is the specialty—everything from duck foie gras with Armagnac to suprême of sea bass with flan. The flavors are refined yet definite. See p. 475.
- **Akelare**, San Sebastián (© 94-321-20-52): The Basques are renowned for their cooking, and the owner-chef of this San Sebastián restaurant,

Pedro Sabijana, pioneered the school of *nueva cocina vasca* (modern Basque cuisine). His restaurant has attracted gourmets from around Europe. Sabijana transforms such seemingly simple dishes as fish cooked on a griddle with garlic and parsley into something magical. No other eatery in northern Spain comes close to equaling the superb viands dispensed here. There are those (and we are among them) who consider Sabijana the best chef in Spain. See p. 518.

- **Torrijos**, Valencia (© 96-373-29-49): The Costa Levante's best restaurant, in the city that's said to have "invented" paella, this stellar restaurant serves a Mediterranean and international cuisine, and does so superbly well. Expect a flavor-filled cuisine based on the freshest of ingredients. See p. 360.