Andalucía, the southern-most province in Spain, is the part of Western Europe most intimately connected to the history of Islam. The name “Andalucía,” derived from al-Andalus, the Arabic word for Spain, hearkens back to a time, beginning with the conquest of 711, when most of the Iberian Peninsula was ruled by Muslim emirs and caliphs.

Though the Christian kings of Castile, Aragon, and Portugal ultimately claimed the south for themselves, the physical signs of Islamic civilization still dominate the region. From the austere, eighth-century mosque in Córdoba to the lavish fourteenth-century Alhambra palace in Granada, Andalucía boasts some of the most impressive examples of medieval Islamic architecture to be found anywhere on the planet.

But the real charm of Andalucía lies in its countryside, featuring blindingly white mountain villages (the so-called pueblos blancos), endless olive and almond groves, and warm, fun-loving people. Infamous for its scalding summers, Andalucía is equally renowned for its mild springs, the perfect season for enjoying the countryside the way it is meant to be enjoyed: on foot. No walking country in Europe repays the effort more generously than the southernmost tip of Andalucía. It greets its visitors with whitewashed splashes on its craggy hillsides and minarets reshaped into a Christian bell towers. Herds of wild bulls roam the upland pastures, pigs root for acorns under isolated oak trees, and Egyptian vultures soar overhead. The harsh vocal tones and strident beat of flamenco music seem to echo the call to prayer of the muezzin from centuries ago.

Despite the fact that this part of Andalucía is steeped in the legacy of Islam (or perhaps because of it), it is among the best places in the world to experience semana santa, the week leading up to holiest of Christian holidays: Easter. Each of the pueblos blancos seems to vie with one another to put on the most stirring and beautiful procession, complete with lavish “floats” (pasos) carried slowly through the streets by the dozens of men crowded underneath.

Hiking by day and enjoying village life by night in the midst of a week-long festival; what better way to appreciate the unique charms of the southwestern-most corner of Europe?
Itinerary

Saturday, 4 April 2020                          Depart USA
Depart your home city for Spain.

Sunday, 5 April 2020 [Palm Sunday]              Seville / Arcos
Upon arrival at the Sevilla airport, you are met and transfer to the beautiful pueblo blanco of Arcos de la Frontera.
We spend our first two nights in the delightful old ‘parador,’ a village building in typical Andalusian style centered on an open patio and located on the dramatic main square of this beautiful town. Today is Palm Sunday and we have the opportunity to witness the first of the extraordinary Easter processions that are a feature of this part of Spain. Tonight’s procession comes through the square outside our hotel and ends in the adjacent church. (Airport transfer 1.5 hours) R,D
HOTEL – Parador de Arcos – ARCOS – village center location with exceptional views.

Monday, 6 April 2020                              Arcos
After breakfast and a morning lecture, we begin our hike with a gentle trail through the farmland of southern Spain. This is spectacularly beautiful country with open pastures and arable land combining with the more dramatic scenery of low mountain scrub where genista, cistus and countless herbs perfume our walk.
In the afternoon we continue alongside a narrow river valley before returning to Arcos for dinner. Another procession this evening leaves from the church of San Francisco and again enters the main square.  B,L,D
AM - 5 miles. Up 750 feet. Down 800 feet. 2.5 hours.
PM - 3 miles. Up 600 feet. Down 100 feet. 2 hours.

Tuesday, 7 April 2020                             Arcos / Cortijo de Salinas
Leaving Arcos we drive eastwards before starting our walk through the village of Grazalema, through mountain scenery of limestone cliffs and circling eagles to our picnic lunch site by an isolated whitewashed farmhouse. In the afternoon we continue over a ridge to the lakeside beneath Zahara de la Sierra. We travel to our hotel by road, situated between these two small towns, for our two-night stay.
B,L,D
HOTEL – Cortijo de Salinas – country estate property in a rural location
AM - 6 miles. Up 1420 feet. Down 770 feet. 3 hours.
PM - 4 miles. Up 800 feet. Down 170 feet. 2 hours.

Wednesday, 8 April 2020                           Cortijo de Salinas
We drive back to Grazalema from where a morning walk takes us through some of the most magnificent scenery of the trip before reaching our lunch stop at the tiny Moorish village of Benaocaz. A short afternoon walk takes us along a Roman roadway down to the town of Ubrique, before returning to our hotel by road. B,L,D
AM - 6 miles. Up 1560 feet. Down 910 feet. 4 hours.
PM - 3 miles. Up 50 feet. Down 1350 feet. 1.5 hours.
Thursday, 9 April 2020

Cortijo de Salinas / Ronda

Our full day walk takes us through the magnificent scenery of the Libar and on to the village of Montejaque. From here we continue to Ronda, one of the most beautiful and dramatically sited towns in Spain. This evening we are able to witness the wonderful processions of the town of Ronda. There are three important groups this evening all of whom will pass close to our hotel. We spend the next three nights in the Parador - one of the famous chain of state-run hotels. B,L,D

HOTEL – Parador de Ronda – RONDA – town center location with good service and fine views.

AM - 7 miles. Up 790 feet. Down 650 feet. 3.5 hours.
PM - 5 miles. Up 980 feet. Down 1450 feet. 2.5 hours.

Friday, 10 April 2020 [Good Friday]

Ronda

We spend a full day in the Sierra de las Nieves with the chance to reach the highest point in this part of southern Spain (weather permitting). The views from here over the Straits of Gibraltar and into the Rif mountains of Morocco are stunning. Return by minibus to Ronda. Tonight is Good Friday, the most important day in the processional calendar. Ronda can boast some of the most emotional of all these celebrations including the famous silent brotherhood of María Santísima en la Soledad. B,L,D

Circular walk. Total for the day up to 11 miles. Up 2020 feet. Down 2020 feet. 6.5 hours.

Saturday, 11 April 2020

Ronda

After breakfast and a morning lecture, our walk takes us through the town of Ronda giving us the chance to see some of its hidden charms. Later we travel through rolling farmland to a river valley where we lunch. This afternoon we continue along a delightful gorge to the next town before returning to Ronda by road. Join your fellow walkers this evening for a final dinner. B,L,R,D

AM - 6 miles. Up 1100 feet. Down 1480 feet. 3 hours.
PM - 4 miles. Up 300 feet, down 400 feet. 2 hours.

Sunday, 12 April 2020

Ronda / Seville / US

We return to Seville airport for flights home. B

Walking Group, Spain 2012
TRIP INCLUSIONS:
- Group transfers from Seville Airport on April 5, departing from Seville Airport on April 12.
- 7 nights hotel accommodations based on double or single occupancy
- Meals as indicated in the itinerary: R= Reception, B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner
- Lunches and dinners include bottled water and wine
- Hotel taxes and service charges on quoted services

TRIP EXCLUSIONS:
- Cost of obtaining a passport and/or visa
- Communications costs, such as phone calls, emails, and faxes
- Any items of a personal nature
- Any items not included in inclusions
- International air reservations

COST PER PERSON:
$4955.00 per person based on two people sharing a twin-bedded room. The trip cost is based on a minimum of 15 paying participants. We reserve the right to cancel this trip if a minimum number of participants is not reached.

A limited number of single rooms are available at an additional cost of $635.00.

A deposit of $1,000 per person is required at the time of booking. Final payment is due no later than January 15, 2020.

Should you cancel your trip for any reason before January 15, 2020, a $1,000 per person cancellation fee is charged. If you cancel between January 16 and February 5, 2020, a fee equal to 50% of the tour cost is charged. No refund can be paid if cancelled after February 6, 2020. If we can resell your booking, a $500 per person transfer fee will be charged.

Airline tickets have separate charges and cancellation fees depending on fare paid and date of change or cancellation. TRAVEL INSURANCE IS STRONGLY RECOMMENDED.

CONDITIONS AND CONTRACT: Travelstore VIP is the principal tour operator and is responsible to the participants for all arrangements and for all tour services and accommodations offered in these tours. Travelstore VIP, its agents, servants and employees shall not be responsible for personal injury or property damage, loss or delay, or change of itinerary incurred by any person or tour participant arising out of the act or negligence of any direct or supplemental air carrier, hotel or other person rendering any of these services, or accommodations being offered in this tour; nor shall Travelstore VIP be responsible for any injuries, death, damages, loss or delay in any means of transportation or by reason of any event beyond the actual control of Travelstore VIP or of any agent supplier or due to force majeure. The right is reserved to decline or accept or to retain any person as a member of a trip, or to cancel a trip, due to circumstances beyond the control of Travelstore VIP.

If the contract between Travelstore VIP and the passenger, on the one hand, and/or the contract between Travelstore VIP, and the designated carrier, on the other hand, is cancelled by the tour...
operator for any reason whatsoever, all partial or full payments made for the trip will be refunded in their entirety, without further obligation on the part of the tour operator.

The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category or change schedules without prior notice should circumstances so demand. In the event of a change in the itinerary necessitated by factors or conditions beyond the actual control of Travelstore VIP, no refund can be made, nor will credit be allowed, provided that in the event of such change in itinerary, Travelstore VIP shall attempt to provide accommodations and services of comparable quality and standards as set forth in the brochure.

Any such change shall not modify the cancellation provisions in the brochure. No credit will be allowed, or refund given for any services provided in the Itinerary and Conditions List should any such services not be utilized by the tour members. Availability of refunds for air transportation depends on the type of air tickets purchased, and the point at which transportation is not used.

Travelstore VIP shall not be responsible for any injuries, damages, or losses caused to any traveler in conjunction with other actions, omissions, or conditions outside Travelstore VIP's control including terrorist activities, social or labor unrest, mechanical or construction difficulties, diseases, local law, climatic conditions, abnormal conditions, or developments, or any other actions, omissions, or other conditions outside Travelstore VIP's control.

PASSPORTS: The U.S. State Department recommends that all travelers’ passports remain valid for six months beyond their expected return date. They also recommend that all travelers’ passports have a minimum of at least two blank pages left or travel may be refused to certain countries.

INSURANCE: Travel insurance for travel accident, loss/damage/delay of baggage, flight insurance and trip cancellation insurance is strongly recommended. Applications will be sent on request.

OPERATORS: This program is operated by Travelstore VIP of Irvine, California, and Duende Travel, UK, and hotels listed in the itinerary.

For further information, please contact:

Travelstore VIP
Karen Goodrich
18881 Von Karman Avenue, Suite 1400
Irvine, CA 92612
Tel: 949.930.9288
Fax: 949.930.9261
Email: Karen.go@travelstore.com