

With Love from Spain

- Riddhima Shishupal

Day 1- The Travel

Bye! Bye! Mumbai. All of us gathered at the airport patiently anticipating what's going to take place next. As we checked in for our flight at 5am with heavy eyes, we introduced ourselves to each other. You definitely don't want to guess what happens when majority of the travel writers who are females meet up for a FAM. Flying via Turkish Airlines has been the best experience ever. The cheese platter on flight was incredible. Having a break journey at Istanbul was all we needed. As we walked up to the Turkish Airlines Lounge, the sight was so pleasing. The whole lounge so beautifully decorated with antique chandeliers and has altogether different themes in each and every section. The food was mouth watering and the Turkish coffee (which I was craving for) stole the show. Taking a 2pm flight from Istanbul to Madrid, obviously via Turkish Airlines again and experiencing authentic Turkish food on flight was a superb experience. What more can one ask for? At the Madrid, Barajas airport, we took a mini bus to the Ayre Gran Colón Hotel. One of the most luxurious properties in the city and why not, after all it's owned by the Palladium group of hotels. Ok, so now the trip had started and we reached our first dinner place Le Platea. Heaven of a place! It's like a small food mall with different types of cuisines on every floor and a stage where one could have live performances. Caught up on a sexy ariel act there.



THE MOSQUE CATHEDRAL-
CORDOBA



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FLAMENCO DANCE MUSEUM
-SEVILLE



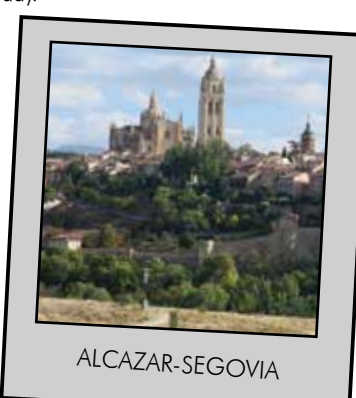
METROPOL PARASOL - SEVILLE

Day 2- Madrid- Segovia

So the day has started and we are all ready to explore this wonderful city of Madrid. Meeting the other representatives of Spain tourism at the Mayor plaza, we begin discovering this beautiful city. A walk in the streets, a beautiful square where all bull fights and other festivities take place. A market place which looks like a small fairytale house in the middle of a busy street and the lovely Palacio Real. Our guide was really an enthusiast. Loved the way he explained each and everything in detail. Quickly returning to the hotel we packed our bags and left for the AVE station for our next destination Segovia. The Renfe AVE bullet trains are the best thing that could happen to Spain. The connectivity is superb and you can commute to cities within Spain minutes. Segovia is declared a World heritage site by UNESCO. The city is over 2000 years old and is located only 87kms from Madrid. The city is beautiful due to his architectonic configuration. Checking into the San Antonio el Real, we had an authentic lunch at the Restaurant Claustro there... (loved the tuna). Segovia is known for its traditional roasts, legumes and amazing table wines. After a good lunch and a quick siesta, we went around to see what each and every traveller comes down to Segovia for- The Aqueduct. You cannot miss this one. The first time you see it, the picture of this ravishing stone on stone beauty remains etched in your mind forever. A magnificent work done by the Romans. We also visited the Mint where currency printed using hydrolic technology. A Superb bus ride (panoramic tour) ended the day.



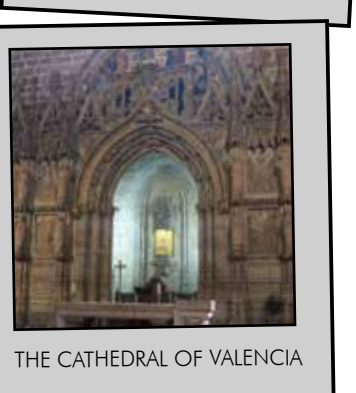
AQUEDUCT-SEGOVIA



ALCAZAR-SEGOVIA



PLAZA DE ESPANA - SEVILLE



THE CATHEDRAL OF VALENCIA

I would definitely say that it was more of a trek than a trip. Must have lost a couple of kilos for sure. *haha*. But on a serious note, it was definitely worth every bit. Spain has always been that one place, I have looked forward to mainly because of its amazing food, (Tapas- cant forget mentioning that), the beautiful Rico wine and most of all, the picturesque beauty that cannot be compared. Five cities, eight days and here I am with a billion memories all set to pen them down. Special thanks to **Spain Tourism for this truly amazing experience.**

Day 3- Segovia- Valencia

The day began early since we just had half of the day in this small and pretty city. Putting on my sports shoes, we set off for a walking tour of the entire city. Another beautiful spot was The Alcazar. Built during the 11th century over the remains of a Roman fortress, the Alcazar stands amidst the valleys formed by Eresma and Clamores rivers. A clear fairytale castle, which we read in those Ladybug books. Walking out from there was the stunning Cathedral. I can say its Gothic architecture at its best. It's known as the Dame of Cathedrals. The pictures could speak more. Shopping Tip: Please do buy Olive oil from the local market here. Asuper awesome lunch at the El Fogón Sefardi and then a quick transfer to the AVE station to our next stop Valencia. We also an entry into Renfe Lounge which was totally an icing on the cake. The business class of these Renfe bullet trains is mind blowing. Highly comfortable and super luxurious. Moving on, Valencia is one of the most beautiful places in Spain. My personal favorite on the whole trip. Its is the third largest city in Spain after Madrid and Barcelona. Checked in at the NH Collection hotel. A Lovely luxurious property. I loved room, the view and just all of it. A super amazing Asian dinner at the Ma Khin café. Beautifully decorated tables and all that's dreamy and pretty. The chicken croquettes are a must have here.



MADRID



CERVEZAS CALIFA- CORDOBA

Day 5- Cordoba- Seville

Making our way to the Mosque Cathedral which is another World heritage site was next on our cards. The Mosque cathedral of Cordoba is the largest Islamic monument in the world. It's basically a cathedral built inside a mosque. (at least there is peace in some corner of the world). The evolution of Caliphate's art can be clearly seen in the mosque however in the cathedral inside one can see Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque influences. Very peaceful and serene experience. In the drizzle, we walked towards the Alley of Flowers. So, it's a narrow, winding street with its iron wrought iron grilles and balconies decked up with flowers. We just experienced a beautiful view of the tower from this street. Just there, was The Patio. It's a traditional Cordoban house with whitewashed stone pillars on three sides. Just managed to buy a few souvenirs because I dint want to leave a chance to enjoy the Spanish rains. *Haha*. Spain is definitely an alcoholic treat because next we went to have a look at a micro beer brewery Cervezas Califa and it was loaded with beery flavors, I had never heard of. Finally, I figured the darkest beer on the menu would be listed last. That's how I ended up with the Sultana, a chocolate-and-coffee-infused one. Then, it was time for some munching so we ended up at the La Almudaina restaurant. Phew!!! Packed up bags stood ready and we were once again on our way to the AVE station to our next destination Seville. Thanks to the speed trains, we reached our place at 5pm. Checked into the suite of NH Collection hotel. We even explored the hotel a little in the beginning but I couldn't stop myself from visiting the Supercor which was just behind the hotel. Shopping and girls, I tell you! After taking a short break, we proceeded with a long 30 min walk to the Plaza de Espana. Now, this is one of the most beautiful squares in Seville. Currently it's used for a lot of activities like running, exercising, dancing etc. It's more of fitness square now. Finally, a silent dinner at La Raza.

Day 4- Valencia- Cordoba

Valencia is like the most happening cities of Spain. As we walked down the street in the morning, we saw people all set for the marathon. Loud music covered the streets people we dancing and walking around to the tunes. Real fun to do a good dance on the street with the crowd roaring and so happening. Valencia has got the beach so the climate is very much like Mumbai. Spain is full of Graffiti and Valencia is no exception. Not a wall that's not covered with spray paint and they are super awesome ones. The best place I visited here was the Cathedral because I got a glimpse of the most sacred Holy Grail of Jesus Christ. Felt so good. Also, we did experience a festivity outside the cathedral premises, where a bunch of men dress up like pirates with their shooting guns were bursting crackers. Something I had never experienced before. We then headed to the city of Arts and Sciences. A good walk through the entire place. The place is very futuristic and made in a way that you might just need one full day to see it completely. This was then followed by Lunch at the beachside restaurant Sorolla at Las Arenas. All I could speak about now was paella! Paella! I don't want to compare it to biryani because they are pretty same still way different. Off to the AVE station once again to our next destination Cordoba. I had heard a lot about the city having a lot of Islamic influence. Was eager to see the Roman-Islamic mix. Thanks to the Renfe bullet trains, the journey seemed nothing. The day ended with checking in at the Las Casas de la Judería hotel and a warm dinner at the La Fragua tavern. I have never really had such amazing Salmorejo ever. Got the recipe. *haha*

Day 6- Seville

We started the day at The Royal Alcazar, which is one of the most important Seville's history. It is a group of palaces built throughout Seville's different historical periods. The Moorish architecture is worth a watch. It is the oldest royal palace still used in Europe. Next to it, is the Cathedral. It is the biggest Gothic building in the world, and the third biggest temple in Christendom, after Saint Peter in Rome and Saint Paul in London. Beautiful paintings and not seen before art decorates the Cathedral. Lovely stories revolve around all the artwork. Walking out from there we reached our lunch place, Gourmet El Corte Ingles. Commendable Tapas, must say! The city is all brand conscious with the presence of ultimate brands like ZARA, Valentino, HnM etc. From there we walked to the beautiful Santa Cruz (definitely not like the one after Khar road). It is the oldest Jewish Quarter. Next, was the Metropol Parasol. The view of the city is breath taking from the top. Then came the most favorite part of the trip- The Flamenco Dance. Shaking a quick leg with our Flamenco instructor, Victorat Museum of Flamenco Dancing was a delightful experience. We tried our best to get it right as we were totally motivated us by Victor's Perfecto. We were mesmerized by the performance we saw next. 1 one hour of watching sheer excellence. I couldn't take my eyes off them. The band and the dancers were flawless and up to the beat. Dinner and conversations ended the day at the restaurant El Rinconcillo.

Day 7- Seville- Madrid

Checking out from the hotel, on our way back to Madrid, via the Renfe high speed trains, watching the view through the window and sipping on a hot cup of coffee, I really wished I could spend more time in this country. The last day was pretty light. We visited the YOUNIQUE in Only YOU Hotel & Lounge (it's compact and cute) which also a Palladium hotel property and also an under construction site of the hotel near Atocha AVE station in Madrid. After that, we visited the Turkish airlines head office in Madrid where their officials gave us a deep insight of the airline and its current reach post which we took off the Madrid city tour bus and explored the city quickly. A quiet Spanish dinner at the Restaurant La Capilla de la Bolsa made our last dinner very special.

Day 8- The Return

We had an awesome trip back home. Thanks to Turkish Airlines for its wonderful onflight facilities, Renfe, for its super fast connectivity within all the cities which actually made our travel much lighter and Spain Tourism for making this a memorable one. Spain never felt so good. Adios.

Flying with Turkish Airlines...

Basically, I flew with Turkish Airlines for the first time and trust me guys, the experience was phenomenal. The warmth, comfort and the food are just too good to be compared. Its luxury is altogether to another level. From the smooth take off to my first step in Madrid, it was all so well arranged and things were put together so well, that the journey of 11.5 hours didn't feel much of a headache. (though we did have a break journey at Istanbul). The crew on all our 4 flights was friendly and caring. I can say this because I called for orange juice 4 times. And she never really denied once. Haha. The hospitality and services offered by Turkish Airlines mesmerize you into the essence of Turkey. Totally in awe.



The Turkish Airlines lounge at Istanbul

The Turkish lounge is an exquisite property of Turkish Airlines at the Istanbul Airport. So, business class passengers (like us) get to relax and chill for a while before jumping on to our connecting flight. The place has got amazing interiors and each section is designed with a unique theme catering to Turkish Air. It's a 2 floor wide spread lounge having ample of space for passengers to have a quick bite and enjoy the wifi connectivity. There is a separate section for reading with an enormous range of books, a small box golf course, a mini movie theatre and some more amazing activities. The food is extravagant. It's like a feast. The architecture and design will definitely leave an impression on you and will surely force you to visit Turkey again. And yes, please do not forget to have the authentic Turkish coffee at the lounge. It's surely never had before stuff.

"Thank you Turkish Airlines for this truly amazing experience. You guys rock!"

