



Two Spains: The Spanish Civil War & its Aftermath

Madrid, Priorat, Barcelona

14–22 October 2026 (MM 193)

9 days

Speaker: Giles Tremlett

A turbulent period of Spain's recent history explored with acute analysis of its impact.

Led by historian and journalist Giles Tremlett, author of *The International Brigades: Fascism, Freedom and the Spanish Civil War*. He has interviewed Spaniards on both sides of the conflict for his best-selling *Ghosts of Spain*.

Time in Madrid and Barcelona, as well as some of the most attractive countryside in Catalonia.

Stay in three five-star hotels: in the centre of Madrid and Barcelona, and a luxurious estate amid the vineyards of the scenic Priorat region.

In a tragically prescient poem written in 1912, Antonio Machado warned infant Spaniards that they had been born into a divided country. "May God take mercy on you/ One of the two Spains will freeze your heart". In 1936, the confrontation between those two Spains provoked a ferocious, three-year civil war between the Republicans and the Nationalists in which 400,000 died – many of them civilian victims of death squads or tribunals set up by the victor, General Francisco Franco. Spain returned to democracy after his 40-year dictatorship, but ghosts from that time still haunt the country.

This tour investigates these two Spains and the violent conflict they produced in which both sides committed atrocities. How did they emerge? What sparked the final collision between fascist-backed, traditionalist reactionaries and their opponents, ranging from moderate democrats and separatists to violent anarchists and communists? Spain has tried to turn its back on the civil war, so accessing its history is difficult. Where is it today?

This is not a battlefield tour with a focus on military logistics, though battlefields will be seen and contemplated. We will turn over the stones – visiting secret museums, hidden graves, underground basilicas, research institutes and galleries that help to explain what happened and why. Goya, Picasso, Gaudí, Orwell all provide clues. The International Brigades and other foreign volunteers who fought for the Republicans against Franco – from Laurie Lee and John Cornford to Orwell and Simone Weil – will help us assess the



Belchite, photograph used under license from shutterstock.com

impact of the conflict on civilians and society, politics, church and state.

Those who came to watch – Hemingway, Dos Passos, Robert Capa, Gerda Taro and Martha Gellhorn – will shed light on why this war (in which Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin all took part, while Britain embarked on appeasement) was so important to a world that was preparing for the bloody confrontation of ideologies that began in 1939.

Itinerary

Day 1: Madrid. Fly at c. 9.15am from London Heathrow to Madrid (Iberia). An introductory lecture is followed by a walk to The Prado, to examine four history paintings that place Spain into context for what unfolded in the 20th century. First of three nights in Madrid.

Day 2: Madrid, Valle de Los Caídos, Brunete. The Reina Sofia gallery houses Picasso's *Guernica*, the predominant artistic symbol of the civil war. Drive west to Valle de Los Caídos (Valley of the Fallen), site of Franco's vast and controversial mausoleum. Onwards to Brunete. Here, over the course of a fortnight in July 1937, the Republican attempt to relieve Nationalist pressure on the capital was thwarted.

Day 3: Madrid, Jarama. Though trenches scar the olive groves, the thyme-scented hills at Jarama appear to reveal little of the bloody battle of February 1937, in which 10,000 Republicans were killed, including many fresh volunteers to the International Brigades. A memorial to the latter remains a rallying point for commemorations by their descendants. Poems and diaries, maps and photographs help build a picture of events on site. At Morata de Tajuña, a large private museum has become a repository of photographs, memorabilia and artefacts relating to the conflict.

Day 4: Madrid, Belchite, Zaragoza. Take the high-speed train to Zaragoza, regional capital of Aragón. The cathedral was bombed in August 1936, but the bombs miraculously failed to detonate and remain to be seen. In the afternoon drive southeast to Belchite. This thriving town, with its medieval and baroque buildings, was decimated in summer 1937. Described 'as a particular kind of battle at close quarters', it bore the brunt of a fullscale – but ultimately failed – Republican offensive to seize Zaragoza. Later, Franco ordered the ruins to be left untouched as a 'living' monument of war. Overnight Zaragoza.

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Day 5: Zaragoza, L'Espluga de Francolí, Falset. Drive from Zaragoza to the hills of Catalonia (c. 2.5 hours). A sophisticated modern museum, built at the behest of a local pharmaceutical entrepreneur, is housed in the former soap factory that formed the basis of its founder's fortune. Devoted to the rural history of Catalonia, it also holds an archive of photographs relating to the civil war era. First of two nights in Priorat.

Day 6: Falset, Priorat. The landscape of Priorat is one of striking natural beauty, known for its vineyards, rock-clinging villages and pine-clad slopes. The caves here, used for centuries by locals for storage and shelter, provided the Republican army with hiding places for munitions and people. As the last great battle of the civil war dashed Republican hopes of victory in the summer of 1938, the vast cave of Santa Lúcia, near La Bisbal de Falset, was swiftly transformed into a remarkable field hospital where many international volunteers spent time.

Day 7: Castelldefels, Barcelona. Drive northeast to Barcelona. Stop at Colònia Güell, a purpose-built modernist utopian 'village' and factory complex erected by textile industrialist, Eusebio Güell for millworkers. Anarchism, trade unionism and workers' movements flourished here, and during the civil war the mill was collectivised. Prior to that, Güell had commissioned Antoni Gaudí to design a church for the estate. Though never completed, the crypt is an exquisite construction, showing the architect at his most innovative. Nearby, the fort of Castelldefels was used as a prison for Republican deserters and enemies. On top of rococo decor that reflects a chapel's former usage, remarkable pencil 'frescoes' and political drawings made by the prisoners survive. First of two nights in Barcelona.

Day 8: Barcelona. A morning walk down the leafy pedestrianised Rambla follows in the footsteps of Orwell and the internecine divisions of the left described in *Homage to Catalonia*. In the Gothic quarter, anarchists burned churches to the ground. Take the metro to the National Museum of Catalan Art, which as well as its famous Romanesque collection, has rooms devoted to art produced during the conflict and after, as well as posters and sculpture. Some free time to explore other parts of the gallery.

Day 9: Barcelona. The cemetery at Fossar de la Pedrera overlooks the city. High up past the avenues of graves is the former quarry that now forms the tranquil setting for a memorial to the dead and disappeared, and several memorials to the volunteers and brigadists who lost their lives. Late afternoon flight from Barcelona to London Heathrow (British Airways), arriving c. 6.00pm.

Lecturer

Giles Tremlett. Journalist and historian. Former Madrid correspondent for the *Economist* and the *Guardian*, he has lived in Spain for over 20 years. His books include *Ghosts of Spain: Travels through Spain and Its Silent Past* and *Isabella of Castile: Europe's First Great Queen*, for which he won the 2018 Elizabeth Longford Prize for Historical Biography. His latest book is *The International Brigades: Fascism, Freedom and the Spanish Civil War*.

Practicalities

Included: rail travel between Madrid and Zaragoza; travel by private coach; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts, 4 lunches and 7 dinners with wine, water and coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. **NH Collection Palacio de Tepa, Madrid** (nh-collection.com): small and excellently located 5-star hotel. Rooms are comfortable and décor is contemporary. **Hotel Catalonia el Pilar, Zaragoza** (cataloniahotels.com): modern 4-star hotel, comfortable and excellently situated. **Gran Hotel Mas d'en Bruno, Priorat** (masdenbruno.com): recently-opened, 5-star estate in spectacular countryside. **NH Collection Gran Hotel Calderón, Barcelona** (nh-collection.com): a centrally-located contemporary 5-star hotel.

How strenuous? A lot of walking is involved in town centres and on battlefields, over rough terrain and up some steep gradients. A good level of fitness is necessary. You will be on your feet for lengthy stretches of time. It should not be attempted by anyone who has difficulty with everyday walking and stair-climbing. There are some long distances travelled by coach and three hotel changes. Average distance by coach per day: 68 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.