



Spain 1492

Queen Isabella, Columbus and the Age of Discovery

11–19 March 2026 (MM 897)

£4,040 • 9 days

Speaker: Giles Tremlett

Triumphs, trophies and tragedies – Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragón's ambitious and brutal conquest of southern Spain.

A deep dive into Spain's medieval history and its legacy, by one of its leading historians.

Centred in the glorious cities of Granada, Córdoba and Seville, exploring major landmarks and little-known sites.

The year 1492 changed Spain utterly, and then also changed the world. The extraordinary and powerful Queen Isabella of Castile – with her husband and co-monarch King Ferdinand of Aragón – oversaw events of huge global consequence. They ended the eight centuries-long Christian reconquista of Spain from the Muslims by capturing Granada and its still-glittering jewel, the Alhambra Palace. They expelled the last members of the world's largest Jewish community, provoking the Sephardic diaspora. They sent Columbus on a wild and perilous journey across the Atlantic towards Asia. He returned with exotic goods and travel companions having "discovered" the Americas. As a result, Spain became a superpower. This was the first empire "on which the sun never sets", extending into Europe, Asia and Africa. Global power shifted from Asia to the Atlantic. For centuries, this new "western world" dominated the globe. The exchange of plants, animals and diseases between newly-connected continents changed how people lived, farmed, travelled and ate across the planet. Muslim expansion into Europe was halted and Sephardic Jews established themselves across the world.

Exploring these themes starting from the events of 1492, we tell the story from southern Andalusia by investigating the great cities of the time: Granada, Córdoba and Seville. We look at the diversity of religions and cultures, asking how and why Spain was poised for such a momentous set of events. We find the imprint in grandiose palaces and fortresses, but also in small churches, hidden convents, unexpected archives and the countryside. We investigate the Inquisition, the beginnings of transatlantic slavery, the war of Reconquista, the expulsions of Jews and Muslims, Spain's navigators and the workings of a nascent empire. At the centre of it all sits Isabella of Castile, Europe's first queen –



Granada, Courtyard of the Lions in The Alhambra, chromolithograph c. 1890 after a drawing 1833 by David Roberts RA.

the woman who, with her husband, first united Spain and set it on a course to glory.

Itinerary

Day 1: Malaga, Granada. Fly at c. 9.45am from London Gatwick to Malaga (Vueling). Arrive in Granada in time for an introductory talk and dinner. First of three nights in Granada.

Day 2: Granada. The defeat of the Moors was sealed on 2nd January 1492 with the fall of Granada, symbolised by the handover of the Alhambra, the greatest Islamic monument in Europe. El Generalife, its summer palace and gardens, is our vantage point for setting into context Isabella's role in this momentous event. The shady, scented gardens, interspersed with pools and fountains, would become a favourite place for the queen. The Arab-built *acequias* – the irrigation system which enabled their creation – also underpinned the cultural success of the entire region. From admiring the palace 'water staircase', we travel out into the hills of Viznar to the Fountain of Aynadamar, the ancient cistern that still bubbles like tears. Returning to Granada we walk through the Albayzín, the historic quarter, where the Arab baths are situated, alongside merchant houses built by grandees linked to the Catholic monarchs.

Day 3: Granada. Spend the morning at the Alhambra, considering the palace in terms of the Catholic conquest; Isabella took up residence here for a period in 1499. The museum in the 16th-century palace of Charles V holds artefacts from the Nasrid period and the reconquista. After lunch, visit the Cathedral and the tombs of Isabella and Ferdinand. The Royal Chapel (Capilla Real), is the repository of Isabella's most personal devotional possessions and her art collection, which tells its own story.

Day 4: Granada, Santa Fe, Lucena, Córdoba. The small fortified town of Santa Fe was built during the siege of Granada on Isabella's orders, as a more permanent base from whence to run a military hospital and overwinter while sitting out the siege. Here Columbus visited the monarchs to lobby for his Atlantic foray, and here in March 1492 Isabella and Ferdinand issued the edict of the Expulsion of the Jews. With this in mind, en route to Córdoba, we stop at Lucena, the site of what was once the largest Jewish necropolis in Spain. Córdoba was capital of Islamic Spain and the richest city in Europe until 1236. After that La Mezquita, the great mosque, became a cathedral, dramatically illustrated by its 16th-century additions. First of two nights in Córdoba.

Day 5: Córdoba. A free morning is followed by a visit to the Jewish quarter. The 14th-century Sepharad's house is a privately owned

Spain 1492
continued

museum and Jewish cultural centre telling the story of the diaspora. The small 14th-century synagogue nearby shows evidence of the three cultures; Jewish, Islamic and Christian.

Day 6: Córdoba, Seville. Drive to Seville. Some time to settle in and an orientation walk to the Golden Tower at the river's edge, used in the Inquisition. The nearby Nao Victoria Foundation introduces the age of discovery through the Magellan-Elcano voyage of 1519, the first to circumnavigate the globe. The theme of trade, empire and the colonies continues in the afternoon. The Archive of the Indies was the repository of Spain's documents of empire in the Americas and in Asia. Designed as a centre for mercantile activity by Escorial architect Juan de Herrera in 1572, slaves were also sold on its steps. Adjacent is the remarkable cathedral, and Columbus's tomb. First of three nights in Seville.

Day 7: Seville. The fortified Alcázar in Seville, built by Moorish architects for Castilian kings, is one of Spain's greatest monuments; it consists of a sequence of apartments and magnificent reception rooms around courtyards and gardens. Isabella enjoyed occupying the exquisite palaces designed by the conquered Muslims in southern Spain. During her residence here, in February 1502, the queen issued a further edict of the inquisition, expelling the Mudéjar communities who also represented a threat to the Catholic hegemony. In the afternoon, we visit La Hermandad de Los Negros de Sevilla, and discover the complexities of the history of Spain's black and African communities, whose story starts long before 1492 but changes dramatically as transatlantic slavery takes off and, for Spain, reaches a 19th-century crescendo.

Day 8: Seville, Rábida, Moguer. Drive west to the Monastery of La Rábida. Visited by Columbus on the eve of his voyages, the monastery has been overly restored, but its location gives further insight into Columbus and his engagement with his royal patrons. We lunch in Moguer before visiting the impressive Mudéjar monastery of Santa Clara, where Columbus prayed on his return from the Indies. Founded in 1337 by an admiral from Castile and his wife, the large monastery was for Franciscan-Clarisa nuns. There are medieval misericords, early tombs and frescoes.

Day 9: Seville. Free morning in Seville. Evening flight from Seville to London Gatwick arriving c. 8.00pm.

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 Elizabeth Longford Prize for Historical Biography. His new biography of Franco will be published in October 2025.

Practicalities

Price. Two sharing: £4,040 or £3,830 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £4,670 or £4,460 without flights.

Included: air travel with Vueling (Airbus 320); private coach; accommodation as described below; breakfasts, 3 lunches and 5 dinners with water, wine or beer, soft drinks and tea or coffee; all admissions; all tips for waiters, drivers and guides; all taxes; the services of the lecturer, tour manager and local guides.

Accommodation. Palacio de Santa Paula, Granada (marriott.com): 5-star hotel in a converted convent, close to the Royal Chapel; rooms are comfortable and contemporary. **Las Casas de la Judería, Córdoba** (lascasasdelajuderiadecordoba.com): 4-star hotel composed of 5 converted 17th and 18th-century houses in the Jewish quarter, a short walk from the mosque. **Hotel Las Casas de la Judería, Seville** (lascasasdelajuderiasevilla.com): charming 4-star hotel in the Barrio Sta Cruz created from several contiguous buildings connected by open-air patios. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use throughout.*

How strenuous? This is a lengthy tour with three hotels, a lot of walking and a fair amount of coach travel. There is a lot of standing around at the sites visited. A good level of fitness is essential. Walking is often on uneven streets and uphill, and the coach can not drop off directly outside many of the places we visit.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.