

Paradors of Spain

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One of the highlights of this tour will be our accommodation in several Spanish heritage buildings including the two finest five-star Paradores in the country at León and Santiago de Compostela. The word parador (inn or stopping place) appears in many classic Spanish texts. While a posada (inn) was a place where animals were stabled for the night, a parador was a lodging offered to people. The Marquis of Vega-Inclan, who was the Royal Tourist Commissioner in 1926, drew upon this tradition when he suggested setting up a series of State Paradores, a project which was personally approved by King Alfonso XIII. The first Parador was constructed in the Gredos mountain range.

As tourism in Spain grew, more establishments were opened up at distances which corresponded to an easy day's journey in the 1920s and 1930s automobiles. This led to the creation of the Paradores of Manzanares, Bailen, Oropesa and Merida. At present, the Red de Paradores del Estado (Network of State Paradores) has a total of eighty-six establishments. The fundamental philosophy of the Paradores is that the state supports the provision of hotel accommodation in areas where it would not be very profitable for private enterprise to do so. Complementing this was the intention to make use of ancient monuments, old hospices, palaces, castles and convents. In this way, the upkeep of national treasures is maintained at small cost to the State, employment is provided in some areas of traditionally high unemployment and access to these places is greatly enhanced.

Thus, travellers will today discover that they can sleep in the same room in the Castle of Jarandilla de la Vera where Carlos V is said to have stayed while he waited for his lodgings to be prepared in the nearby monastery of Yuste; or dine in the rooms which belonged to the University of Alcalá de Henares founded by Cardinal Cisneros, or even spend a few days in the Castle of Fuenterrabia against which the Prince of Conde laid a useless siege three hundred years ago. Parador restaurants all feature regional culinary specialties.

The Parador of Santo Domingo de la Calzada

This parador was built by Santo Domingo de la Calzada on the site of an ancient palace belonging to the King of Navarra. It is situated in a former hospital-hostel which was intended to provide shelter for pilgrims who became ill whilst on pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela.

The Parador of León

The Parador Hostal de San Marcos is a luxury 5 star hotel in a former sixteenth century convent with period furniture. The ancient convent was used as a hospital in order to lodge the pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela. Before its conversion to a hotel in 1964 it was used as a military prison and stable during the Spanish Civil War. The parador, a massive stone building with a fantastic Plateresque facade, is one of the major tourist attractions in the city. Once called the Convento de San Marcos, it houses an interesting archaeological museum and famous eleventh century ivory Carrizo Crucifix. Also of importance within the parador's complex are the church and sacristy (both the work of the famous architect Juan Badajoz), the cloister and choir stalls. Its immense facade is deceptive as there are only thirty-five rooms in the historical part of the edifice. The rest of the space is occupied by an exquisite stone patio 'peopled' with statues of saints.

Parador de Santiago de Compostela

Today's Hostal dos Reis Católicos was originally built as a Royal Hospital in 1499 in order to give shelter and lodgings to the pilgrims, by the Catholic Monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella. It is the oldest hotel in the world. The hotel has been restored in accordance with the most modern techniques, but with respect to its cloisters, Gothic patios, carved jambs, ashlar, etc. To highlight the ancient ambience more than 600 paintings decorate the rooms and galleries. The royal chapel became an auditorium for concerts and exhibitions. Restoration work was completed in 1954 and ever since the Hostal dos Reis Católicos has been considered a grand luxury hotel.

