

*Sights of Spain

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Madrid, who stayed with them for the duration of the trip. Janine is Brazilian and speaks Portuguese, Spanish, English and some French. Two other groups traveled with the Kosciusko troop, and they were from Louisiana and Missouri.

The travel group landed in Madrid at around 8:30 a.m., and wasted no time in beginning the tour. Janine introduced them to “The Market of St. Michael” where the travelers experienced the local cuisine of Madrid and made their own selections for lunch. There was everything under that roof from calamari to fruit! Afterwards, at the Prado Museum, they saw many beautiful works of art such as: Diego Velazquez’s masterpieces, “Las Medinas” and “Christ Crucified,” Bosch’s “The Garden of Earthly Delights,” El Greco’s “The Nobleman with His Hand on His Chest,” and Goya’s “La Maja Desnuda.” That evening the group enjoyed a delicious meal featuring a beef stew at a local restaurant, La Casa de las Torrijas.

The third day of the tour, and the second morning in Madrid, the tour members were treated to a sightseeing tour including Las Ventas, the world’s most famous bullfighting ring, the main street in the old city of Madrid, the Calle Mayor and the Puerta del Sol, which is the heart of the Spanish capital and is one of the busiest squares in the city. The morning ended with a visit to the breathtaking Royal Palace, the Palacio Real, which made some in the group remark that it reminded them of Versailles in Paris. It was indescribably beautiful! The palace contains more than 2,000 rooms. That afternoon, the Kosciusko group treated themselves to an authentic “Paella” for lunch. Paella is a Spanish dish consisting of rice, saffron, chicken and fish. Lunch consisted of three courses, so all of them wondered how they could possibly have room for dinner that evening! After lunch, the tourists went to a class to learn how to dance the flamenco! Spectators from the group were definitely entertained watching as the travelers “tried” to catch on to the steps of the flamenco. There was a dance move called, “take the

money and put it in your pocket,” that Jamie remarked that her husband was especially good at performing. Before dinner, the tour group was entertained by an authentic flamenco with dancing, singing and Spanish guitar. Janine informed the group that all through Spain and Portugal there are reminders in the architecture and culture of times past when they were under Muslim rule. The Moors were overthrown in 1492; however their culture is still quite ubiquitous in Spain and Portugal. The travelers had their dinner right around the corner at a lovely little restaurant called Restaurante Dudua where they enjoyed delicious baked chicken. After dinner the group was given free time at a local mall or a chance to see the beautiful Casa de Campo Park where the locals gather to exercise and relax. Janine commented that Casa de Campo Park is near her home, and that she regularly visits the park with her husband and daughters.

On the fourth day of the tour, the travelers enjoyed an excursion to ancient Toledo where a local guide mesmerized the travelers with beautiful sights and buildings. The Cathedral of Saint Mary of Toledo, which is counted among the greatest Gothic structures in Europe, was the first stop. Next the sojourners made a stop at the Church of Santo Tome to see El Greco’s famous “Burial of the Count of Orgaz,” and also a synagogue known as “The Synagogue of Santa Maria la Blanca” which is considered the oldest synagogue building in Europe. At one point during its history, it was a mosque. The Catholic Church owns and preserves it today. A damascene factory was the last stop, for a sword-making demonstration. Toledo has been a traditional sword-making center since 500 BC, and is known especially for the hardness of its steel. Later in the afternoon, after returning to Madrid, some of the group chose to tour Las Ventas, the famous bullfighting ring, and others toured Madrid’s famous soccer stadium, Santiago Bernabeu Stadium. Both were very impressive, but all who toured the bullfighting ring agreed that none of them would want to see an actual bull fight. At dinner, the group members enjoyed “tapas” at the Palacio restaurant. A tapa

is an appetizer that may be cold, like mixed olives and cheese, or hot which can be battered or fried. They can be combined to make a full meal, and the group agreed that they were absolutely delicious! Before retiring for the evening, Janine took the visitors to West Park where they saw the people of Madrid bicycling, walking their dogs and relaxing. At the park, they were in awe to see the Debod Temple, an authentic Egyptian temple built in the second century, BC, that had been taken down and moved to Madrid in 1968. It was rebuilt upon its arrival to the city.

Day five took the tourists to Salamanca by way of Avila. The morning was spent in picturesque Avila, home to St. Teresa of Jesus, whose famous quote is: “Let nothing disturb you; God alone suffices.” Avila is best known for its intact medieval city walls and is sometimes referred to as “The Town of Stones and Saints.” Many in the group toured the Convent of Saint Joseph, which was founded by St. Teresa and built in 1562, and the city’s main cathedral, The Cathedral of Avila, which started its building process in 1107. The vacationers had lunch at various restaurants in Avila and were delighted to sample the local cuisine. That afternoon the travelers arrived in Salamanca and were given free time to shop, explore, and to locate some churros! Everyone enjoyed dinner at their lovely hotel.

Day six began with a tour of the charming city of Salamanca, which is sometimes referred to as the land of Spanish scholars. The group’s first stop was at the public library called “The House of Shells” because of the beautiful shells that adorn the outside of the ancient building. Its construction began in 1493. The vacationers then visited Salamanca University, founded in 1218, and were impressed to see the halls, courtyards and classrooms in Spain’s most prestigious university. The ancient library upstairs had a sign that threatened the students with excommunication if they were caught stealing a book. Next, the travelers toured Salamanca’s Old Cathedral and New Cathedral which are joined together. The Old Cathedral, whose construction was begun in the 12th century in Romanesque



Sardines on toast was among the Spanish delicacies sampled in Avila, Spain. (Courtesy Photo)

style, was finished in the Gothic style in the 14th century. The New Cathedral was constructed during the 16th-18th centuries and during a 1992 renovation to the outside facade, as per the tradition of restorers adding details to their work as a signature, Jeronimo Garcia was given permission to carve an astronaut and a dragon eating an ice cream cone into the artwork surrounding the door. It is strange, to say the least, to discover an astronaut carved into the artwork of a building that is over 500 years old!

After the tour group was given free time for eating lunch and shopping in Salamanca, they continued their journey on to Portugal.

Their first stop that afternoon was Coimbra where they met a local guide for a tour of the medieval city and Coimbra University.

Coimbra University was founded in 1290 and is Portugal’s oldest university and one of the oldest universities in Europe. While touring the old part of the university, the tourists were able to see the prison cell where students used to be sentenced to six months jail time for cheating on tests! Next the travelers were thrilled to see to the ancient library where scenes from Harry Potter have been filmed.

On day seven, the travel group spent the whole day in lovely

Porto. The day began with a guided cruise down the scenic Duoro River where the group saw magnificent sites such as a bridge that was designed by Eiffel. Yes, that is the same Eiffel who built the Eiffel Tower in Paris. After the relaxing cruise, the group took a sky lift up to the main city of Porto. Next, the travelers were treated a vintage cable car ride to their next stop, which was the Torre dos Clerigos which is a church tower that was built 1763 where one could get a panoramic view of the entire city. A climb of 240 steps up a winding, very narrow stair case. Once the trekkers reached the top of the tower, they said the climb was well worth the effort. Later in the day, the group went to Sao Bento railway station to see the beautiful historical pictures that decorate the interior made from azulejo tiles. These are glazed ceramic tiles that are normally blue and white and can be found everywhere in Portugal adorning everything from the walls of churches and monasteries to palaces, regular homes and train stations. Later, the travelers went to their lovely hotel and had a buffet dinner fit for a king.

Day eight took the sojourners to Fatima for several hours. For some, it was the highlight of the trip. Some of the travelers shopped in the beautiful shops of the quaint little village, while others were able to attend Mass on Pentecost Sunday in an outdoor arena situated in front of the Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary. It was estimated that 20,000 people attended the services. Afterwards, the group was joined by a local guide who told them the story of Fatima, and took them inside the Basilica and also took them inside the Basilica of the Holy Trinity that was built in order to hold religious services for the huge crowds of people who go there in large-scale pilgrimages. The Basilica of the Holy Trinity will hold over 8,600 people. Next the travelers met their local tour guide at the awe-inspiring Batalha Monastery, “Monastery of the Battle,” which was built in honor of the victorious 1385 Battle of Aljubarrota, and served as a Dominican convent in years past. After leaving Batalha, the group headed for their final destination on the trip, Lisbon. After the group members were settled into their hotel, the group walked a couple of blocks to the shore and dipped their feet into the Atlantic Ocean. Some members of the group actually dipped their whole bodies in the Atlantic for a nice evening swim!

The ninth day of the tour started early with an expert-led tour of Lisbon. The travelers first stop

was a nice photo op at Belem Tower, or the Tower of Saint Vincent, that served as a fortress and a gateway to Lisbon. The next photo op was at the Padrao dos Descobrimentos which was built in honor of Portugal’s Prince Henry the Navigator. It is a gorgeous monument on the edge of the Tagus River that is shaped like a cross on the front, but on the side looks like a massive ship with a plethora of navigators and explorers carved into its side. The group also saw the magnificent Jeronimos monastery. Next the tourists were taken to beautiful Eduardo VII Park that covers 26 hectares and is where the largest flag in Portugal flies. The group made a stop at the famous Pasteis de Belem for some delicious Pastel de Nata. These are egg tarts that are the most famous pastries found in Lisbon, and absolutely delight the taste buds!

The local guide helped the visitors experience the Old World atmosphere as they made their way through the labyrinth of winding streets in Lisbon’s Alfama district. They were able to discover the hidden balconies, archways, terraces, and courtyards of the hillside medieval quarter as they explored Lisbon’s former center of Moorish aristocracy. The group was given free time to eat lunch, shop, and explore the beautiful city of Lisbon for the afternoon. Janine took several in the Kosciusko group to a food court called “Time Out” that served food only from Lisbon’s local cuisine. Lisbon is world famous for its sardines, and Sam Sample was thrilled to find a vendor that served fresh grilled sardines. Jamie does not like sardines any way you find to serve them, but Sam thought they were utterly delicious. The last scheduled event of the tour was a Lisbon Fado evening. A Fado can be traced back to the 1820’s and is comprised of Portuguese melancholy songs accompanied by the mandolin and the guitar. The tour group thoroughly enjoyed the Fado, then headed back to their hotel to pack for the trip home the next morning.

Mrs. Sample gave credit to the wonderful group members and their awesome tour director, Janine, for making the Culture and Religion in Spain and Portugal Tour one of the most pleasant, memorable trips she had ever taken. She stated that the trip could not have possibly been any better.

Mrs. Sample is planning a 2020 trip to Iceland and a Greek Island Cruise in 2021.

Please contact her if you are interested in traveling to either of these destinations at jamiesample58@yahoo.com



The Las Ventas Bullfighting Ring in Madrid, Spain was one of several landmarks on the group’s itinerary. Pictured above, front row (from left): Callie Welch, Jamie Sample, Marianna Sistrunk, Sue Dorrill and Jamie Welch; Back row (from left): Alex Cruz, Leobardo Cruz, Joseph Mallett, Sam Sample, Lakelynn Fancher, Abigail, Welch and Gerard Welch. (Courtesy Photo)