

In the quiet back streets of Lérida and Barbaastro I seemed to catch a momentary glimpse, a sort of far-off rumour of the Spain that dwells in everyone's imagination. White sierras, goatherds, dungeons of the Inquisition, Moorish palaces, black winding trains of mules, grey olive trees and groves of lemons, girls in black mantillas, the wines of Málaga and Alicante, cathedrals, cardinals, bull-fights, gypsies, serenades—in short, Spain.

George Orwell
Homage to Catalonia

Sixty-five years later, Spain presents a different face, one overtaken by interstate highways, specific tourist stops, high-speed rail, democracy, and terrorism on a mass scale.

Only in the medieval village of Sos del Rey Católico, about 30 miles from Pamplona, on a winding two-lane mountain road in the shadow of windmills erected to generate electricity rather than present a challenge for Don Quixote does Orwell's rumor of Spain seem to be a fact.

Fifteen of us are on a two-week art and architecture tour of selected cities in Spain, and while we were pleased with Barcelona, we

were overcome by Sos del Rey Católico. The town is so small it does not appear on any but the most detailed of maps. Most of it sits on a hill with the best site to visit being the Iglesia y Cripta de San Esteban. The church was established in 1065 and has been expanded, the last time in the 16th century, according to the priest-tour guide, who has served the parish for 30 years. Photographs are not allowed and that's easy to



understand when you see the peeling frescoes that would be harmed by a camera's flash. One partial fresco shows a young Christ riding on the shoulders of St. Christopher, a painting we will see again in other churches.

There is so much to see in Barcelona that one feels rushed rather than satiated. One member of our party declared the entire city "sculptural" and, indeed, if you were not told that the Hospital de La Santa Creu I Sant Pau was a hospital, you would think it was the work of Gaudí. It has been, in fact, designated as a world heritage monument.

Another architectural wonder is Gaudí's Church of the Holy Family, which was begun in 1882, taken over by Gaudí in a year later, and continues today as a work in progress, complete with hard-hat tours of the construction areas. What intrigues the tourist is seeing how the

Spaniards of the 21st century are interpreting how they think Gaudí would have finished the church. Another Gaudí site is his childhood home, now a museum located in a major garden not far from the church.



The Picasso Museum, while not containing any of his major works, nevertheless presents enough of his paintings to provide an educational room-by-room timeline that traces the artist as a young man to his final days. The Miró Museum displays not only works by that artist but also mobiles by Alexander Calder.

One non-tourist activity was a reception led by our hostess, Kay Kustanbauter, executive director of the Nittany Lion Club. In addition to getting to know better the others in our group, we also met an alumna and her husband, who lives in Spain, and two international business majors who are enthusiastically blue and white.

However, be assured that for non-classroom attitudes, Spanish students seem to be pretty much like Penn State students when it comes to politics. A newspaper in Aragon published a story one day pointing out that the students were apathetic about an upcoming local election. “El Campus no vibra con las elecciones,” read the headline in the *Heraldo de Aragón*.

Spain has many good museums, but the Guggenheim in Bilbao, an industrial city in the north in Basque country, is perhaps more of an attraction than what it contains. Built as part of \$1.5 billion effort to revive Spain’s fifth-largest city, the Guggenheim was designed by Frank Gehry, an American architect, to look like a whale. It has no straight lines whatsoever and its titanium siding makes it stand out even though it’s really no higher than the nearby seven- and eight-story apartment buildings. Inside the belly of the beast, museum-goers see pop art, including Andy Warhol’s Marilyn Monroe and Big Mao Painting.

Bilbao is reminiscent of Pittsburgh in that city’s early stages of its first renaissance. Just as it is fascinating to compare the Pittsburgh of old with the current, someday tourists will enjoy a new Bilbao as well.

On the way to Madrid, we spent a few hours in Burgos, most of that in its gothic cathedral, which was started in 1221 and which today is a UNESCO world heritage monument. The town of Burgos, with its variety of pedestrian walkways and plazas and sculpted trees, charms everyone.

Like New York City, Madrid is haunted by mass terror—the death of nearly 200 train commuters on March 11 having become Spain’s equivalent of 9-11.

Among Spain’s art treasures is Picasso’s “Guernica,” in which he depicted the horror of the German bombing and subsequent massacre of perhaps as many as 1600 non-combatant residents of that Spanish city

in 1937. Picasso's painting is housed in the Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, ironically just across the street from the city's main train station. In a way, Picasso's "Guernica" reads like a timeless condemnation of all terrorism.

We also spent a few worthwhile hours in the Prado, which contains masterpieces by Spain's most treasured painters, including El Greco, Goya and Velázquez, as well as some of the great artists from other European countries. Another good museum is the Thyssen-Bornemisza, which contains not only classic pieces but also modern European and American works such as Winslow Homer, James Whistler and Georgia O'Keeffe. The 2800-room rococo Royal Palace, where no one lives now, gives us an idea of how Spanish royalty used to live until Alfonso XIII abdicated in 1931.



A day in Toledo includes a stop at the parish Church of St. Thomas, where El Greco's "Entierro del Señor de Orgaz" can be seen (but not photographed). The city's cathedral yields yet more art, most of it by El Greco, who immortalized the medieval city with his paintings. The narrow streets of Toledo are shared by cars and pedestrians, making for some close calls and harrowing walking.

Coincidentally, Orwell has returned to Spain. A British play based on his book about the Spanish Civil War will be staged in May and June in Madrid and some newspapers said that the play would provide yet another opportunity to reflect on the victims of 3-11. At the same time it will add to the cultural diversity of Spain.

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