Marrakech & Southern Spain

with Lisa Balabanlilar
March 12–24, 2018
Straddling the Mediterranean on both sides of the Strait of Gibraltar, the stunning landscapes and colorful cities of Morocco and Andalucía reflect a dizzyingly diverse and rich history.

For countless centuries, these lands were both a flash point and a meeting point between Christian, Muslim, and Jewish civilizations. The resulting layers of cultural heritage are absolutely unique, from the fabled souk (market) and stunning gardens of Marrakech to the romantic tile-covered courtyards of Seville, the incredible mosque-cathedral of Córdoba, and the paradise-on-earth that was the Alhambra and its Generalife gardens. Rice is delighted to offer this custom-created tour led by longtime favorite lecturer Professor Lisa Balabanlilar, exploring the cultural overlay of different ages and civilizations, uncovering beautiful homes, palaces, places of worship, museums, and gardens. Along the way, elegant hotels in historic districts and delicious meals featuring local cuisines will make the tour that much more memorable.

Explore a Berber village in the High Atlas Mountains.
Visit a family-run factory that has dedicated itself to olive oil production for generations.
Enjoy a special Flamenco performance at one of Seville’s traditional tablaos.

Travel with Lisa Balabanlilar

LISA BALABANLILAR serves as Associate Professor in the Department of History at Rice University and joined the faculty in 2007. She is a scholar of the Mughal dynasty and her research focuses on Islamic kingship among Turks. In 2012, she published her book Imperial Identity in the Mughal Empire: Memory and Dynastic Politics in Early Modern South and Central Asia and has had other articles appear in various academic journals. At Rice, she has been recognized as the 2010 winner of the Phi Beta Kappa Sophie Meyer Farb Prize for Teaching Excellence. Dr. Balabanlilar has led Traveling Owls journeys to Turkey, India, Morocco, and the Silk Road, and is looking forward to leading this program.
**March 12: Departures**  Depart the U.S. on an overnight flight to Marrakech.

**March 13: Welcome to Marrakech**  Arrive in Marrakech in the afternoon and meet your ISDI tour manager and local Moroccan guide. Transfer by private coach to the luxurious Sofitel Marrakech Palais Imperial for check-in, with time to settle in and relax. Enjoy a welcome dinner of traditional Moroccan cuisine at a terrace restaurant with breathtaking views overlooking the Medina and Koutoubia Mosque.

*Sofitel Marrakech Palais Imperial (D)*

**March 14: Marrakech’s Sites & Souks**  Set out on a guided tour through historic Marrakech beginning with the Saadian Tombs, renowned for their intricate cedar wood carving. Continue to the Dar Si Said Museum, housed in an opulent palace with a collection devoted to Moroccan arts. Visit the meditative 16th-century Ben Youssef Medersa, one of the most important Islamic monuments in Marrakech. At the Marrakech Museum, view a fine collection of Moroccan art and sculpture. Savor Moroccan cuisine in the garden patio of a historic riad (palace). Continue to the city’s cultural epicenter, Jemaa el-Fna Square. At the 12th-century Koutoubia Mosque, view its famous 250-foot minaret, a prototype for others of its kind around the world. Stop at the nonprofit vocational training and daycare center Al Kaoutar, where impoverished women learn to make embroidery and linens. Then delve into the heart of Marrakech at the labyrinthine souk (market), where tiny emporia and handicraft workshops are devoted to spices, leather, ironwork, pottery, and countless other trades. The evening is at leisure.

*Sofitel Marrakech Palais Imperial (B, L)*

**March 15: Go Berber in the High Atlas**  Drive in SUVs to the High Atlas Mountains, stopping to photograph snow-dappled mountains and valleys in full flower. Set out on a beautiful hour-long walk through farming lands to the village of Agounsane. Spend the morning with a local Berber family helping to bake bread and prepare tagine, a traditional stew. While lunch is simmering, try working wet clay during a ceramics workshop or weaving a colorful kilim on the ancestral looms at the women’s weaving center. Explore the village and surrounding farmlands, learning about ancient irrigation and subsistence farming methods. After lunch, meet the community’s youngest members at the local preschool. En route back to Marrakech, make stops along the way to learn more about Berber life in the valley. The evening is at leisure.

*Sofitel Marrakech Palais Imperial (B, L)*

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**TOUR INFORMATION**

**TOUR COST**

| Land Only | $6,295 |
| Single Supplement | $1,295 |

Tour price is per person based on double occupancy, with a minimum of 15 paying participants. Land prices are calculated as of July 2017 and are subject to change.

**DATES** | March 12–24, 2018

**ACTIVITY LEVEL** | Moderate, good walking ability

**DEPOSIT & FINAL PAYMENT**

A deposit of $1,000 per paying participant is required to guarantee participation in the program. This deposit may be paid by check or by Visa or MasterCard. Final payment will be invoiced and is due on November 9, 2017 by check only to International Seminar Design, Inc. Registrants will be accepted beyond this date on a space-available basis with payment in full by check only.

**FLIGHTS** | Airfare is not included in the tour price. Participants are responsible for all aspects of their air arrangements, into Marrakech, Morocco and out of Málaga or Granada, Spain.

**TERMS & CONDITIONS**

International Seminar Design, Inc. (ISDI) acts only as an agent for the participant with respect to transportation, accommodations, and all other services relating to this tour. ISDI, the Association of Rice Alumni, and/or their agents assume no responsibility or liability for any act, error or omission, or for any injury, loss, accident, delay or irregularity, which may be caused by any defect in any aircraft, ship, train, bus, or other carrier, or through neglect or default of any subcontractor or other third party, which may be used wholly or in part in the performance of their duty to the participants of the tour. ISDI and the Association of Rice Alumni reserve the right to cancel any tour prior to departure for any reason including insufficient numbers of participants, as well as the right to decline to accept or retain any person as a member of the tour at any time. If bookings fall below the minimum required, passengers will be advised of additional costs or itinerary alterations before departure date.

**CANCELLATIONS & REFUNDS**

All cancellations must be received in writing by ISDI, and charges are calculated as of the day notification is received in writing by ISDI. If a tour member cancels, the following scale of charges is incurred: There is a non-refundable administrative fee of $500 per person. Written cancellation received by ISDI on or before November 9, 2017: full refund minus $500 per person administrative fee. Written cancellation received by ISDI after November 9, 2017: no refund. Refunds will be made by check only to the person(s) listed on the Registration Form.
March 16: Garden Oases & Savory Tagines
Spend the morning at Marrakech’s renowned gardens beginning with Cyber Park’s acres of beautiful succulents, flowers, trees, and free Wi-Fi! Continue to Majorelle, a psychedelic desert mirage of innumerable plant species created by French painter Jacques Majorelle, and visit the Berber Museum, housed in Majorelle’s transformed studio. Finish at the expansive Menara Garden, with olive trees established in the 12th century, a 16th-century pavilion, and a centuries-old hydraulic system. Following an afternoon at leisure, learn classic Moroccan recipes for pastille, couscous, tagines, and dishes created by dadas (traditional female cooks) for holy celebrations at Marrakech’s famed cooking school. Visit a spice market and communal bread oven, then try Moroccan cooking techniques at a workshop, dining on the dishes that you have just prepared!

*Sofitel Marrakech Palais Imperial (B, D)*

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### March 17: Marrakech/Seville

Enjoy a morning walking tour through Marrakech’s evocative Jewish quarter (Mellah). Following a quick lunch, fly nonstop from Marrakech to Seville. En route to Seville’s historic center, enjoy an orientation coach tour passing the impressive Expo ‘92 site, the soaring Alamillo Bridge by Santiago Calatrava, and the iconic Plaza de España, famous for its Renaissance Revival Spanish architecture. Check into the historic, four-star Hotel Bécquer. Enjoy a casual dinner at a nearby restaurant.

*Hotel Bécquer, Seville (B, L, D)*

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### March 18: Roman Ruins & Gothic Marvels

Drive to Itálica for a guided tour of the extensive Roman ruins, the birthplace of Roman Emperors Trajan and Hadrian, and home to the third largest amphitheater in the Roman Empire at the time. Visit the extraordinary Casa de Pilatos, one of the finest examples of Andalusian architecture of 16th-century Seville with a blend of Gothic, Renaissance, and Mudéjar styles. After a tapas lunch at a local restaurant, take a guided tour of the stunning 16th-century Seville Cathedral, the world’s largest Gothic cathedral and burial site of Christopher Columbus. The evening is at leisure.

*Hotel Bécquer, Seville (B, L)*

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### March 19: Seville’s Historic Center

Walk to Reales Alcázares for a guided tour of Seville’s royal palace exploring its courtyards, chambers, and fountain-filled gardens. Enjoy free time to shop and explore the city or continue on an optional walking tour through the Santa Cruz neighborhood. This evening, watch a Flamenco performance over dinner at an Andalusian *tablao*.

*Hotel Bécquer, Seville (B, D)*

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### Tour Price Inclusions
- Accommodations, as outlined in the itinerary; breakfast daily, six (6) lunches, six (6) dinners (two glasses of wine or beer at dinners); one group airport transfer on arrival and departure as outlined; land transportation by private motor coach as outlined; one (1) economy-class ticket from Marrakech, Morocco to Seville, Spain; entrance fees to sites per itinerary; services of an ISDI Tour Manager; expert, local English-speaking guides; gratuities to local guides and drivers; bottled water daily; taxes, services and portage fees.

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### Tour Price Exclusions
- Airfare, airline taxes, and fuel surcharges; airport porterage; excursions, activities, or meals during traveler’s free time; personal items; personal services; travel extensions; personal insurance for health, baggage and tour cancellation; passport fees; visa fees; gratuities for hotel housekeeping staff.

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**Travel Insurance**
The purchase of trip cancellation insurance is strongly recommended for coverage of expenses in conjunction with cancellation due to illness or accident. Baggage insurance is also recommended. In the event that you must cancel your participation in a travel program, trip cancellation insurance may be the only source of reimbursement. Travel insurance information will be emailed to you from the Traveling Owls upon receipt of your registration.
March 20: Ruins of Madinat Al-Zahra & Córdoba  Check out of the hotel and drive two hours to Córdoba, stopping to visit the ruins of the former palace complex of Madinat al-Zahra, a fascinating look at medieval Muslim life in Andalucía. Following lunch, visit the 16th-century Palacio de Viana, featuring an enchanting garden and a maze of 16 interconnecting patios with fountains and high walls for shade. Enter historic Córdoba through La Judería, the picturesque Jewish quarter, passing the birthplace of the great philosopher Maimonides and Spain’s smallest synagogues. Visit the Zoco, once a Moorish bazaar that now houses artisan ateliers. Check into the elegant NH Amistad hotel in Córdoba’s historic city center. The evening is at leisure.  
NH Amistad, Córdoba (B, L)  

March 21: Córdoba—City of Mosques & Patios  Discover the awe-inspiring Mezquita on a guided tour of Córdoba’s mosque-turned-cathedral. Built between the 8th and 10th centuries, Mezquita’s giant arches and columns of jasper, onyx, marble, and granite originated from a Roman temple that once stood on the site. Next, explore the towers, patios, and gardens of Alcázar de los Reyes Cristianos, a fortress and palace once used as a prison and the headquarters of the Spanish Inquisition. Following an afternoon at leisure, enjoy dinner at one of Córdoba’s best restaurants.  
NH Amistad, Córdoba (B, D)  

March 22: Olive Oil Country & Royal Tombs  Depart Córdoba on a scenic drive through olive country to the lovely town of Baena, home of the renowned family of olive oil producers Núñez de Prado. Learn about olive cultivation, see the presses and vats, and taste the olive oil during a visit to the family-operated factory. After lunch in Granada, follow an expert local guide on a walking tour of Granada’s Renaissance city center. See the luminous interior of Granada’s cathedral, visit Capilla Real where Queen Isabella I and King Ferdinand II are buried, and admire the exterior architectural detailing of the Madraza, the first Arab university in Granada. Check into the five-star Hotel Alhambra Palace. Finish the afternoon at the Fundación Rodríguez Acosta to see one of the most unusual and delightful gardens in Spain. The evening is at leisure.  
Hotel Alhambra Palace, Granada (B, L)  

March 23: The Alhambra  Embark on an in-depth guided tour of the Alhambra, examining the ornamental details that make it the pinnacle of Spain’s Moorish architecture. Begin with an exploration of the Nasrid Palaces with their mysterious courtyards and delightful gardens. Stroll through the terraced gardens of Generalife, the Nasrid “summer palace” of Granada’s caliphs. Enjoy free time for lunch and independent explorations. In the early evening, drive to the Moorish quarter, Albayzin, and walk to the Mirador San Nicolás to admire magnificent views of the Alhambra. Bid adiós during an unforgettable farewell dinner.  
Hotel Alhambra Palace, Granada (B, D)  

March 24: Departures  Take an early morning transfer to the Málaga Airport or taxi independently to the Granada Airport for independent flights back to the U.S.
Marrakech & Southern Spain
with Lisa Balabanlilar
March 12–24, 2018

Discover impressive historic and contemporary gardens.
Cook Moroccan cuisine during a class at Marrakech’s renowned cooking school.
Witness the vastness of the Mezquita of Córdoba.
Explore the incomparable Alhambra and exotic Generalife, the summer palace and gardens of Granada’s Nasrid sultans.

Indian Ocean & Southern Africa
with Lisa Balabanlilar
April 20–May 2, 2018

Experience the beauty of Victoria Falls and the Okavango Delta.
Discover the cultural richness of South Africa and its wine country.
Explore the wildlife and natural beauty of this region.
Discover the wonders of Madagascar's unique ecosystem.