

FROM THE  
**BRIDGE**



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ENCORE**

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on *Radiance of the Seas*

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BEST  
OF THE

# West

The western Mediterranean's sun-kissed ports have a reputation for being more-ish.

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La Rambla, Barcelona's main artery, is easily accessible from the port



Enjoy flamenco at its source in the Spanish city of Seville



See why the Provençal countryside is Eden to artists and perfumers

## Amble along this shady corridor, past vibrant street performers, to La Boqueria market.

The western Mediterranean Sea is like Neapolitan ice-cream. While each country in the basin has its own distinct flavour, they also make for a great mix of cruise destinations. Here's a sample of ports of call in Spain, France and Italy's west to whet your appetite.

Cádiz, the oldest city in Western Europe, is also the Andalusian coastal playground of choice for Spanish holiday-makers. Everything

glistens along this peninsula in the country's south, from the golden dome of the cathedral, to the contemporary resort vibe. Strolling around the Old City, you could be forgiven for thinking you've wandered into Havana (charming Cádiz stood in for Cuba's capital in the James Bond film *Die Another Day*). If you can prise yourself away from the blistering sun on Cádiz's white-sand beach, just 1.5 hours' drive inland is Seville, the original home of flamenco and tapas. Here, if you have the stomach for it, watch vainglorious bullfighters strut their stuff in killer frou-frou at the Plaza de Toros de la Maestranza bullring.

Also in Andalusia, the port of Málaga is a pilgrimage stop for art-lovers on the trail of Pablo Picasso, one of Spain's foremost contemporary artists and the city's favourite son. Glean insights into the artist's life and works at the Casa Natal Picasso, the home where he was born in 1881, and the Museo Picasso. About an hour's drive inland is a fork-in-the-road dilemma. Turn left for Fuente de Piedra Natural Reserve to see the lake transformed into a spectacular sea of pink flamingos (spring to midsummer). Turn right for an eye-ful of the otherworldly Alhambra,

an elaborate Moorish palace and fort complex overlooking Granada. If its distinctive red walls could talk, you'd hear whispers of lovers' trysts and the haunting echoes of a princess' enchanting silver lute.

Spain's Balearic Islands are something of a microcosm. In Mallorca's capital, Palma, (try to) follow the maze of narrow streets that wind past the Gothic, Moorish and Renaissance architecture of various historical rulers. Ibiza, the world's party capital after hours, has a more chilled-out vibe by day, when you can enjoy watersports, visit the hippy markets or explore the World Heritage fortified Upper Town.

On Spain's north-east coast, Barcelona's main artery, La Rambla, is easily accessible from the port. Amble along this shady corridor, past vibrant street performers, to La Boqueria, arguably the best food market in Europe. Lose yourself among endless rows of Catalan staples—legs of *jamón ibérico* (cured Iberian ham), aromatic tomatoes for *pa amb tomàquet* (bread rubbed with tomato), *bacalao* (salted cod) and goat's cheese—before stopping for a jug of refreshing *sangria de cava* (sangria made with white sparkling wine). >



Treat yourself at La Boqueria, one of Europe's best food markets

Other must-dos are Antoni Gaudí's over-the-top, Gothic-inspired La Sagrada Família cathedral and his mosaic-inlaid Parc Güell municipal garden, which both encapsulate Barcelona's aesthetic and offer unparalleled views of the city. If you fancy tripping out, join a daytrip to the whimsical Salvador Dalí Theatre-Museum in Figueres—the world's largest surrealist work and Dalí's resting place.

Crossing into French waters, Marseille is the access port for the town of Aix and the picturesque Provençal countryside where French post-impressionist Paul Cézanne painted his masterpieces. While Barcelona has Els Quatre Gats (The Four Cats) bar and restaurant, which was the haunt of Picasso and other young Spanish bohemians, Aix has Les Deux Garçons (The Two Boys). Pull up a pew at this historical watering hole patronised by Cézanne and other French luminaries and enjoy a spot of people-watching on the elegant, tree-lined Cours Mirabeau avenue. To literally walk in the footsteps of the town's famous painter, follow the Circuit de Cézanne (Cézanne Trail) marked by bronze plaques embedded in the footpaths.

Speaking of artists, when the buzz of Cannes' annual film festival subsides, the French Riviera's glamorous port maintains its lustre as the gateway to Monte Carlo, the casino resort of the rich and famous, and Grasse, the perfume capital of the world. It doesn't get more glamorous than creating your own signature scent at workshops hosted by the perfume houses of Molinard and Fragonard.

Just around the bend, on the Italian Riviera, the port of La Spezia is a short drive or train trip to Riomaggiore, the first of the 'five lands' of Cinque Terre that appear to be tumbling down the sheer coastal cliffs to the impossibly turquoise Ligurian Sea. Following the contours of terraced vineyards, lemon orchards, olive groves and old goat tracks, the 10-kilometre walking trail from the first to the fifth town requires a moderate level of fitness and is achievable in a day. Otherwise, you can let the connecting train and ferry services do the hard work for you. If time is tight, home in on picture-perfect Vernazza, clamber up to the tower restaurant and sip on local limoncello while enjoying the best panorama this side of Italy.

Arriving at the port of Livorno, further south, venture into Florence to get your fill of reasonably priced leather goods at San Lorenzo



Climb to the rooftop of St Peter's Basilica for a bird's-eye view of Rome

Market and priceless Renaissance artworks such as Michelangelo's *David* and Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*. Alternatively, do the rounds of Tuscany's medieval towns, from lofty San Gimignano with its cloud-wreathed towers, to Siena with its magnificent cathedral and Piazza del Campo, where the Palio horserace is staged twice a year.

From Sardinia's port of Cagliari, explore the island's 6-kilometre Poetto Beach (Italy's longest) or the medieval citadel, Il Castello. On the neighbouring French island of Corsica, Napoleon Bonaparte's memory looms large in Ajaccio, where you can visit his childhood home.

Accessed via the port of Civitavecchia, Rome presents first-time visitors with an overwhelming number of must-dos. At least climb to the rooftop of St Peter's Basilica for a bird's-eye view of the Eternal City and souvenir a phial of holy water from the gift shop on high. For respite from the crowds, forgo pounding Rome's black cobblestones in favour of strolling through the Villa Borghese gardens. Marvel at sculptor Bernini's ability to render voluptuous flesh in cold, hard marble at the Galleria Borghese before stopping at Caffè Ciampini, near the top of the Spanish Steps, for views over the city's rooftops and a slice of local culinary history. The recipe for the restaurant's signature chocolate ice-cream, Tartufo Ciampini, has been a closely guarded family secret since 1945. Roman intrigue in every mouthful. ■



Get in on the action of Siena's famous horserace, the Palio

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