



**CICERONI**  
T R A V E L

## ROMANS & CONQUISTADORS EXTREMADURA'S RICHES REVEALED

SATURDAY 16 – SATURDAY 23 MAY 2020 (8 DAYS)

LECTURER: TOM DUNCAN

£2935

- Discover one of Spain's least known regions, full of wonderful historic towns
- See some of Europe's finest Roman monuments at Mérida and Alcántara
- The conquistador towns of Cáceres, Trujillo and Jerez de los Caballeros included
- We stay in two centres, Mérida and Cáceres, both immensely charming
- Excellent food and wine plus the opportunity to explore the amazing restaurant scene in Cáceres



Mérida, The Roman Amphitheatre

### OVERVIEW

When the Romans began their conquest of the Iberian Peninsula, little did they realise that it would take several hundred years. Perhaps it was an indomitable spirit twinned with an innate stubbornness which made the locals so hard to subdue? This combination surfaced again when many centuries later, the inhabitants of the now Spanish part of the old Roman province of Lusitania set forth to conquer the New World - it is from what today we call Extremadura that so many of these fearsome warriors hailed, above all Francisco Pizarro, the conqueror of Peru.

Throughout Extremadura there are many fine towns of varying size and background. From the Roman period, Mérida, the capital of Roman Lusitania, is unique and not to be missed, as indeed is the amazing Roman Bridge at Alcántara. While Visigoth and Moorish remains can also be found, it is not until Christopher Columbus 'discovered' the Americas that the locals once again occupy the front of stage as wealth plundered from the conquered peoples of Central and South America filtered home.

We shall see this extraordinary blossoming as we visit towns such as Jerez de los Caballeros, Trujillo and Cáceres full of newly built palaces, churches and monasteries bedecked with amazing altarpieces. Equally interesting are the monastic sites at Yuste and Guadalupe, the one a peaceful retirement home chosen by the Emperor Charles V, the other one of Spain's most important pilgrimage sites. So, more than enough to keep us occupied!

We stay for two nights in the **4\* Parador de Mérida** in the centre of the pretty riverside town of Mérida and for five nights in Cáceres at the **4\* Hotel Palacio de Oquendo**, close to the historic centre. Extremadura is an area of many contrasts. Its landscape varies from the lush pastures and blossom covered hill of the north to the flat plains to the south. Nature has been kind and it produces some wonderful food and wine, reflected in a newly vibrant gastronomic scene which participants will have ample free time to explore during our visit.

### ITINERARY OUTLINE

**Day 1:** Saturday 16 May – We fly directly from Heathrow to Madrid and drive south-west to **Mérida** for a two-night stay at the **4\* Parador de Mérida**. We have dinner in the Parador – wine, water and coffee are included with all group lunches and dinners.

**Day 2:** Sunday 17 May – **Mérida** is the finest surviving Roman city in Spain and we begin with an orientation walk through the modern town which will reveal a number of the major surviving urban monuments of Roman times and the site of the ancient **Forum**. We continue to the monumental ruins of the ancient **Theatre and Amphitheatre**. After some free time for lunch (not included), we visit the **National Museum of Roman Art**, built in 1986, and unquestionably one of the finest new European museums of recent years. We end the day with a

short bus journey to the outskirts of Mérida to see the partially surviving **Roman Aqueduct** and the **Roman Bridge**, which is still in use. There will be a group dinner that evening in a local restaurant.

**Day 3:** Monday 18 May – We leave Mérida and drive to **Jerez de los Caballeros** which sits close to the border with neighbouring Andalucía. The town produced a number of conquistadores, such as Vasco Nuñez de Balboa, the discoverer of the Pacific. Today it is dominated by the ruins of a fine **Templar Castle** and a series of extravagant **Church Towers**, all of which we shall visit. We continue to nearby **Zafra** and after a group lunch we explore the historic centre formed round two delightful arcaded **Plazas**. Nearby, there is an important **Castle** (now a Parador) with a very fine renaissance courtyard, which we shall visit. We continue to **Cáceres** for a five-night stay in the **4\* Hotel Palacio de Oquendo**. The evening will be free.

**Day 4:** Tuesday 19 May – **Cáceres** has an almost perfectly preserved walled town, full of Roman, Moorish and later monuments, many associated with the conquistadores and we shall spend a gentle day wandering through this historic centre. Within the walls we shall visit the wonderful Gothic **Concatedral de Santa Maria** and a few other churches. Then there are the fine **private palaces** which are abundantly scattered about, several of which we plan to include. Lunch is not included today and we have a group dinner in the hotel restaurant La Tapería de Yuste.

**Day 5:** Wednesday 20 May – This morning we drive north into the lovely countryside of **La Vera**, an area of hills, lush pastures and many streams, to visit **Plasencia**. Here we shall see, amongst many fine buildings, a most unusual **Cathedral**, where there are in fact two, built ‘back to back’. We continue to **Jarandilla de la Vega** where we lunch in the local Parador, once a temporary refuge used by Charles V. It was this part of Spain that was chosen by the Habsburg emperor, Charles V, as his retirement home and he spent his final years at the **Monasterio de Yuste**, which we shall visit. We return to Cáceres and the evening will be free.

**Day 6:** Thursday 21 May – One of the great sights of Extremadura is the famous **Roman Bridge of Alcántara**, its name derived from the Arabic for “bridge”. More than worth a detour, it was completed in AD 105 during the reign of the Emperor Trajan, on which there is also a Triumphal Arch, with an adjacent small Temple. The sheer scale of this construction has to be seen to be believed. The nearby town, where we shall have a group lunch, was the former headquarters of the Knights of Alcántara, the **Convento San Benito**, which is undergoing restoration. We return to Cáceres and the evening will be free.

**Day 7:** Friday 12 May – We leave our hotel and drive out to visit the nearby pilgrimage centre of **Guadalupe**, one of Spain’s most important Catholic shrines. Here we shall see the fine monastery church and the adjacent cloisters and conventual quarters. We travel onward to **Trujillo**; like Cáceres, it is a town dominated by its conquistador past - Francisco Pizarro, the conqueror of Peru, was born here. Easily the most attractive town in Extremadura, it is centred on a magnificent **Plaza Mayor**, from which lead many streets full of escutcheoned palaces, fine churches and much else besides. There will be time for lunch on arrival (not included) after which the afternoon will be spent exploring the town. We return to Cáceres and later that evening we have our final group dinner in a local restaurant.

**Day 8:** Saturday 23 May – We leave after breakfast for the journey to Madrid and the return flight to Heathrow.

## PRACTICALITIES

**Price** £2935    **Price without flights** £2795    **Deposit** £375    **Single Supplement** £345 (Double for Sole Use)

**Hotels** 2 nights at 4\* Parador de Mérida, 5 nights at 4\* Hotel Palacio de Oquendo in Cáceres (hotels on a bed & breakfast basis)

### Flights Iberia

Outward:        **BA7055** Depart London Heathrow (Terminal 5) **1035** arrive Madrid **1405**

Return:         **BA7050** Depart Madrid **1700** arrive London Heathrow (Terminal 5) **1825**

**Price includes** 4 dinners & 3 lunches with water, wine & coffee, all local transfers, entry fees & gratuities, services of Tom Duncan & our local tour manager, David Sketchley

**Not included** Travel to & from Heathrow, 3 dinners & 4 lunches



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