

Out & About in Spain

Historic city of Burgos

The ancient walled city of Burgos is the capital of the province of Burgos in northern Spain. The city is situated at the high altitude of 856 metres above sea level so the climate and temperature ranges can be extreme. It is not unusual to see snow in the winter when temperatures drop below 0°C.

It was founded in 884 and has been the favoured seat and burial site of the kings of León and Castile.

Burgos was a major stop for pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela and became the centre of trade between the Bay of Biscay and the south, attracting a large population of foreign merchants.

Burgos has been the scene of many wars including the struggle against the Moors, the Napoleonic Peninsular War against France and in the 19th century the Carlist civil wars of the Spanish succession. During the Spanish Civil War, Burgos was the base for General Franco's rebel Nationalist government.

All modes of transport can be found at Burgos with an international railway station servicing the high-speed AVE and an airport operating internal and short haul flights.

Burgos province is famous for Queso de Burgos, a fresh white soft cheese, originally made with sheep's milk but now uses cow's milk or a mixture of both.

The other food speciality is Morcilla de Burgos, a pigs-blood sausage, spiced with onion and herbs and mixed with rice, often mistaken for fat. This makes this one of the lightest and healthiest products of its kind.

The main fiesta dates are 28th January - San Lesmes, 10th June Fiesta del Curpilllos and 29th June for the Fiestas de San Pedro y San Pablo.

The city is rich in ancient churches and convents. The most noteworthy is the impressive cathedral with its highly sculpted octagonal chapel of the Condestable.

Burgos Cathedral

Burgos Cathedral began construction in 1221 with further modifications added in the 15th, 16th and 18th centuries. The high altar was first consecrated in 1260.

The principal façade was inspired by the French Gothic style of cathedrals in Paris and Reims. It consists of three bays topped by two lateral, square towers. The steep spires are of German influence and were added in the 15th century.



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The cathedral was declared a world heritage site by UNESCO on 31st October 1984. It is the only Spanish cathedral that has an independent distinction, without being jointly associated with its city.

It is dedicated to the Virgin Mary and is also home of sculptures and paintings by Spanish artists and in 1919 became the burial place of El Cid and his wife. An element of most interest is the curious Papamoscas (flycatcher), an articulated statue that opens its mouth on the ringing of the bells at each hour.

Other Architecture



Other buildings of note include the two monasteries outside of the city walls and the castle that was built back in 884AC. The Convento de la Merced, occupied by the Jesuits, and the Hospital del Rey are also of historic and architectural interest as well as the famous gateway of Santa María, erected for the first entrance of the Emperor Charles V, and the arch of Fernán González.

Monasterio de las Huelgas Reales (Monastery of the Royal Retreats) was founded in 1180. Construction began in a pre-Gothic style but over the centuries most other architectural styles have been added. The remarkable cloisters have been described as 'unrivalled for beauty of both design and style in any part of Europe' (1911 Britannica Encyclopaedia).

The Cartuja de Miraflores, a carthusian monastery, is situated about four kilometres from the city centre. Inside is the mausoleum to King John II and his wife Isabel. The top frieze is decorated with miniature statues of angels. Some of these are headless after the French soldiers cut them off and took them back to France during the War of Independence in 1814.