

Toledo

Toledo is one of the Spanish cities with the most monuments. It is known as the 'city of three cultures' due to the co-existence of Christians, Arabs and Jews for centuries.

Behind Toledo's walls you will find an artistic and cultural legacy consisting of churches, palaces, fortresses, mosques and synagogues. This great diversity of artistic styles has converted the old part of the Manchegan capital into an outdoor museum.



The city of Toledo has its origins in Toletum, the name given by the Romans to this settlement on the banks of the river Tajo after conquering it in 190 BC. The city maintained its importance for centuries and in the Visigothic era it became the capital of Hispania (6th century). The arrival of the Arabs in the 8th century, together with the presence of Christians and Jews, made Toledo the 'city of three cultures'. This was one of Toledo's most splendid eras, and the famous Escuela de Traductores de Toledo (Toledo Translator School) was founded. Later on, when Carlos V ascended to the throne in 1519 the city became the imperial capital.

The labyrinth of streets which constitutes the historic quarter is surrounded by city walls which contain a countless amount of gates.

The Gate of Bisagra is the main access to the city behind the walls. This majestic gate of Muslim origin contains a central courtyard, and it was remodelled during the reign of Carlos I. The Gate of Alfonso VI, or the Old Gate of Bisagra, was constructed in 838 AD and it is one of the purest examples of Muslim art in the city. In the 13th century the Gate of the Sun was constructed in the Mudejar (Muslims living under Christian rule) style. It contains the rests of a paleo Christian sarcophagus.

Through these and other city gates you reach picturesque places such as the Plaza de Zocodover. In the Arab era this central square was home to a large market, and fiestas and social events took place there. Today the plaza, which is surrounded by buildings with arcades, is still one of the most visited places in the city.

Synagogues, mosques and churches along these narrow streets are all characterized by the mixture of styles.

The Mosque del Cristo de la Luz, constructed before the Christian reconquest, was built in 999 at the same time as the Mosque of Córdoba. It is a square one-storey construction covered by nine vaults from the Muslim era.

Good examples of the Mozarabic (Christian under Muslim rule) architecture are the churches of San Sebastián and Santa Eulalia, whereas the Muslims under Christian rule left a style rich with Arab decorations. Santiago del Arrabal is one of the best examples of this style in Toledo, which has given it the nickname the Cathedral of Mudejar. The origin of its construction is unknown, but it is thought to have been under the rule of King Alfonso VI. A tower similar to a Muslim minaret rises from its simple structure.

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Another example of this style is the Church of Santo Tomé, which houses a famous painting by El Greco called 'The Funeral of Conde Orgaz'. A Mudejar tower rises above the rest of the construction, which dates back to the 12th century and which has Visigothic elements on its main façade.

If Toledo could be defined by any one name, it would be by El Greco. His House-Museum shows some of the greatest works of this painter, who made the city world famous.

You can also still see vestiges of the Hebrew community in Toledo in the synagogues of Santa María la Blanca and the Tránsito. The former, probably from the 12th century, is also a good example of the Mudejar art in Toledo. It has five naves of descending heights. The synagogue of Tránsito, constructed in 1357, boasts one of the best coffered ceilings of all the ones conserved in Toledo, and richly decorated walls. Nowadays, this synagogue is home of the sefardic museum which holds an interesting collection of art and various objects used in religious ceremonies.

One of the most outstanding buildings of the city is the Cathedral, which is considered the height of Gothic art. The construction of this monumental five nave building started in 1226, but it was not finished until the end of the 15th century. This resulted in a great mixture of styles, and a large number of artists of renown left their mark on it.

The façade is dominated by the portal, which consists of three doors: the door to hell, the door to forgiveness and the door to judgement.

The renaissance is also represented in Toledo, in the Hospital de Tavera, which has been converted into a museum that holds treasures such as paintings by El Greco, Ribera and Titian. Some of the greatest architects of the era participated in the construction of this building.

And finally, the Baroque style, which can be seen in the palaces of Lorenzana, where the university can be found, and Fuensalida.

The fortress, of Medieval origin, dominates the whole city and is an impressive sight. It contains the military museum and one of Spain's biggest public libraries. A great courtyard and an Imperial stairway hide behind its impenetrable walls. The south façade, the oldest one conserved, has a vantage point from where you can appreciate the panoramic view of the river Tajo and the city's surroundings.

If you would like to visit this city steeped in history, contact us here at the Trust offices, and we will help you arrange your trip.