



Amber Road Tours

Small group cultural tours since 2003

January Newsletter 2014

We still love Italy, but we've got three new tours in Southern Europe!

Slovenia

Adriatic fishing villages, Lombard towns and ancient Roman cities. A *pletna* boat ride on enchanting Lake Bled, Alpine peaks, the charm of the capital city Ljubljana and the wines of Maribor, Experience natural beauty and cultural diversity on our **Friuli-Venezia Giulia/Slovenia Tour!**



Spain

Beautiful landscapes, royal palaces, world-renowned works of art, medieval castles, roman ruins, exquisite food, authentic Castilian culture, and fine Spanish wine. Discover the heart of the Iberian Peninsula on our **Central Spain Tour!**



Croatia, Bosnia & Montenegro

Surprising Sarajevo and the Tunnel of Hope. The breathtaking Dalmatian Coast, Diocletian's Palace, magnificent Dubrovnik, and Montenegro, the *gem of the Mediterranean*. Explore some of Southern Europe's greatest treasures on our **South Croatia Tour!**





Tapas - Spain's Small Plates have Mysterious Beginnings

Tapas - small dishes served in bars and cafes - have become as integral to Spanish culture as the traditional Flamenco and the afternoon siesta. Theories abound in Spain regarding the origin of Tapas, each tale more colorful than the last.

Some claim that 13th Century Spanish King Alfonso "The Wise" started the trend when he miraculously recovered from an illness after substituting small snacks for large meals.

More practical theorists argue that field workers used bread and Serrano ham to cover their wine jugs as they worked in order to keep flies from spoiling the wine. Directly translated, "tapa" literally means cover or lid.

Others believe that 16th century tavern owners from Castilla La Mancha discovered that the strong taste and smell of mature cheese could help disguise the taste of bad wine. Being unable to store the wine in Spain's warm climate, tavern owners always kept strong cheese on hand to keep their patrons coming back.

More far-fetched legends state that wine in Cadiz was always served covered by ham to keep the coastal sands out of the wine, or finally that King Felipe III was so fed-up with public drunkenness that he made it illegal to serve alcohol without food as an accompaniment. Whether or not public drunkenness disappeared in Spain is debatable, but the idea of Tapas certainly stuck!

Tapas Today

More often than not, when ordering any drink in a bar in Spain you will be given a complimentary tapa. Most Spanish bars have long food windows running the length of the bar filled with everything from fresh mussels to strong cheese to cured ham. Since the tapas are complimentary with a drink, the bartender usually selects your tapa, and Spaniards generally just go with whatever they are given. The quality and quantity of the tapas varies depending on the region, and typically, the further you are from bigger cities the larger and more "cocina casera" (home-made) the tapas become.

With tapas, every meal becomes a culinary adventure. Instead of one large plate, you have the opportunity to taste so many Spanish delicacies in one setting... All accompanied with a fine Spanish wine of course!





Diego Velazquez's 1656 masterpiece "Las Meninas" (The Maids of Honor), has been hailed as one of the most influential pieces in Western painting. Velazquez's depiction of the Spanish court is so striking primarily for its composition, which treats the viewer as part of the painting. Prior to Velazquez's work, most paintings were formally arranged modelling sessions in which the concept of the viewer was ignored. Velazquez flips this trend by painting an informal snap-shot of modern life, and by having subjects of the painting looking at you, the viewer. Velazquez's emphasis on the viewer's perspective is also driven home because we can see Velazquez painting the picture. We are actually standing behind the canvas and watching the scene takes place. This striking shift in the philosophy of perspective changed Western art forever.

Chef's Corner



Tortilla Española (Spanish Omelet) - Serves 4

Ingredients:

6-7 Medium potatoes, peeled
1 Whole yellow onion
5-6 Large eggs
2-3 Cups olive oil for pan frying
Salt & Pepper to taste

Preparation:

Cut the peeled potatoes in half lengthwise. Slice the potato in pieces approximately 1/8" thick. Peel and chop the onion into 1/4" pieces. Put potatoes and onions into a bowl and mix them together and salt.

In non-stick frying pan, heat the olive oil on medium high heat and cook potatoes and onion. If you can poke a piece of potato with a spatula and it easily breaks in two, your potatoes are done. Remove and drain potatoes and onion.

Crack eggs into a mixing bowl and beat. Pour in the potato onion mixture and mix. Pour 1-2 Tbsp. of olive oil into a small, non-stick frying pan (approx. 9- 10") and heat on medium heat.

When hot, pour mixture into the pan and spread out evenly. Allow the egg to cook around the edges. Then you can carefully lift up one side of the omelet to check if the egg has slightly "browned". The inside of the mixture should not be completely cooked and the egg will still be runny. When the mixture has browned on the bottom, flip the omelet and cook the other side. Use the spatula to shape the sides of the omelet. Let the omelet cook for 3-4 more minutes. Turn the heat off and let the tortilla sit in the pan for 2 minutes.



Language Corner

Not all Spaniards are native speakers of Castilian "Spanish". There are in fact 4 official languages in Spain (Castilian, Catalan, Basque and Galician). There are also 3 unofficial regional languages (Asturian, Arogonese, Valencian). While regional languages are marks of pride for speakers, almost all Spaniards can speak Castilian.

To see our complete 2014 schedule click [HERE](#).

Or call us at [843.579.2828](tel:843.579.2828).

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