

Suggested Reading List for Spain & Portugal

Books

Russian History: A Very Short Introduction *Geoffrey Hosking*

The Shadow of the Wind *Carlos Ruiz Zafón*

Awaking on his eleventh birthday with the realisation that he can no longer picture his mother's face, Daniel is consoled by his widowed father with initiation into the secretive Cemetery of Forgotten Books. The novel that he chooses from this repository of rare stories opens the door to the darkest secrets of war-torn Barcelona, in an epic of murder, magic and doomed love.

The Angel's Game *Carlos Ruiz Zafón*

Zafón returns to the Cemetery of Forgotten Books in his prequel to *The Shadow of the Wind*. This time the protagonist is a 1920s novelist who shuts himself away from the real world by writing his own fantasies on the dark goings on of the underworld, but eventually realises his imaginations are uncomfortably close to the real world. Visitors to Barcelona will enjoy the way the city's Gothic and modern architecture is woven into the heart of the story.

The Basque History of the World *Mark Kurlansky*

The puzzling uniqueness of the Basque corner of Spain is investigated in some detail by Kurlansky with illuminating results. The oldest nation in Europe, despite never having their own state, and with a language seemingly unconnected to any other, the Basque people have retained a culture under threat from different directions over the course of the centuries and this book demonstrates the wider impact they have had on global exploration, gastronomy, business and leisure.

The Return *Victoria Hislop*

The history and beauty of Granada's Alhambra is the backdrop to a tale that unfolds amid the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s. A beguiling and moving story reveals how families were divided and torn apart as personal and political loyalties collided to rip through the heart of society.

The Sun Also Rises *Ernest Hemingway*

The first novel from the Nobel Prize-winning author, *The Sun Also Rises* is the quintessential story of the 1920s 'Lost Generation'. Its two protagonists showcase an age of spiritual dissolution among the centuries-old bullrings and demonstrate the disillusionment and angst that engulfed the Spanish peninsula between the two World Wars.

Winter in Madrid *C. J. Sansom*

Again, wartime provides the backdrop for this spy thriller in Madrid. Sansom's novel is narrated from the perspective of an English intelligence officer in 1940 though, and General Franco is on the cusp of bringing Spain into WWII on the side of the Axis Powers. An intriguing journey of damaged friendships, double-crossing and deception unfolds.

The Time in Between *Maria Duenas*

The history of Spain is richly entwined with that of North Africa, just a short distance across the Strait of Gibraltar, and the twin interplay manifests wonderfully in Duenas' wartime tale. Stranded by her lover in Spanish Morocco, the protagonist winds up as a dress-maker for leading Nazi businessmen and military officers, leaving her in a profitable but risky position with the gossip she frequently overhears.

A Small Death in Lisbon *Robert Wilson*

Like Spain, Portugal underwent decades of rule under fascist dictatorship that left a strong imprint on the country's recent history and society. Wilson gives us a glimpse of the before and after in a narrative that switches between the fascist and post-fascist eras. Two seemingly different stories merge into one in a thrilling climax.

Night Train to Lisbon *Pascal Mercier*

Also visiting the era of the Salazar dictatorship is Mercier's reflective story told from the perspective of a curious Swiss teacher (the story was adapted for a film of the same name, released in 2013). The protagonist is drawn away from his quiet and comfortable life in Bern after saving a Portuguese woman from suicide. His journey into Portuguese society leads him to the reflective writings of a fascist-era doctor who muses on the theme of atonement and causes the Swiss to consider his own past during many 'night train' contemplations.

The Last Kabbalist of Lisbon *Richard Zimler*

A 500-year trip back in time, Zimler transports us to medieval Portugal at a time of particularly fierce religious fracture. We are drawn into the world of Lisbon's Kabbalist Jews just a few years after the wider Jewish community were massacred and see how those driven to practice their religion underground are driven to risk their lives by emotions of revenge and love.

The Ultimate Porto Guide *Germano Silva*

Silva reveals his hometown to us through the means of seven city walks. As you explore the routes he sets out you discover the history and secrets behind the iconic cobblestone streets, tiled buildings and imposing bridges that make up this vibrant city's attractive riverside setting.