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**One Month
in Spain,
A Lifetime
of Memories**

FEBRUARY 2026

Cover Photo by Doreen Sargente

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Spain Reimagined:

A Month Made for Falling in Love (With Life All Over Again)

PHOTOS & ARTICLE WRITTEN BY DOREEN SARGENTE

How We Stopped Chasing Destinations and Let Spain Catch Us

Spain wasn't new to me, but it certainly felt new. The last time I'd been to Madrid was in 1972, when Franco still ruled and the city moved to a much slower, more serious rhythm. This time, it felt reborn — vibrant, confident, and very much awake. It was the perfect start to what turned into a five-week journey filled with discovery, good food, new friends, and the kind of moments that feel tailor-made for a February romance issue... even if the romance was mostly between us and Spain itself.

Madrid: Tuk Tuks, Tapas, and the World's Oldest Roast Dinner

We began our adventure with five nights in Madrid, just enough time to find our footing, marvel at how much the city had changed, and remember how to pronounce “caña” without accidentally ordering a bathtub-sized beer. A Tuk Tuk tour kicked things off, whisking us through grand boulevards and tiny side streets while our guide gave us a lively crash course in Madrid's past and present.

We made a pilgrimage to Toledo for a day — because if you can stand in a medieval hilltop city and not feel swept up in a storybook, check your pulse — and also dutifully hit the Prado. After about the 100th portrait of a stern aristocrat, I realized one of us was going to need a snack or a nap (preferably both), and neither of those things were on display in Room 28.

However, dinner that night made up for everything. We joined a guided tour of Botín, officially the oldest restaurant in the world. The history alone was wonderful, and the food didn't hurt. We even saw the famous Hemingway table — though we were seated at the “Mickey Mouse table,” directly under

a vintage sketch of Mickey himself. Fitting? Somehow, yes. If you know, you know.

Valencia & The Good Life Abroad: A Month That Felt Like a Second Home

From Madrid, a smooth train ride delivered us to Valencia for the heart of our trip: thirty days with The Good Life Abroad (TGLA), a company specializing in “slow travel” — month-long stays in cities like Paris, London, Prague, Lisbon, Barcelona, Split, and several more. While we were there, they even rolled out a two-week program for a few select cities like Nice and Edinburgh, among others, perfect for those who want the experience but not the full month-long commitment.

Our group of eighteen settled into the lively Ruzafa neighborhood, each of us in our own small but comfortable apartment (about 525 square feet) in the same building. It made spontaneous gatherings feel natural, even inevitable — a bit like a grown-up version of a college dorm, minus the exams and better wine.

Our community manager, Suzie, quickly became our guiding star. Young, upbeat, and endlessly patient, she balanced logistics, personalities, and the occasional minor emergency with grace. When our oldest traveler — a spry 90-year-old — took a fall and needed an ambulance, she handled translation, reassurance, and hospital navigation like a seasoned pro. A powerful reminder: travel insurance is not optional.

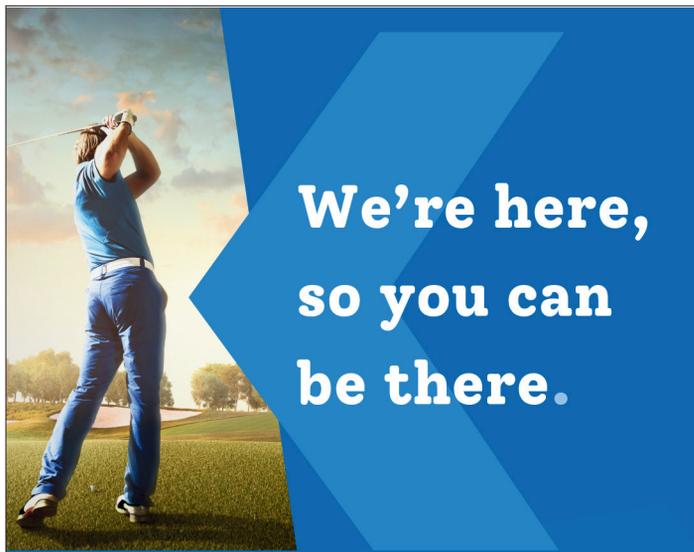
A Rhythm of Activity and Independence

TGLA has a standard weekly structure — activities on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, leaving plenty of time to explore on your own. It was a mix that suited us perfectly.

Our first official gathering was a local restaurant, Pane & Vino, which is run by a young couple, Suzanna and Ricardo, whose warmth was as memorable as their wine list. It became our unofficial clubhouse—the kind of place where you could count on seeing familiar faces and share a toast or two.

A small sampling of some of the group activities:

Paella class with Ramón, the recent winner of Valencia’s annual paella contest. Traditional Valencian paella uses chicken and rabbit — and believe me, after tasting his



**We’re here,
so you can
be there.**

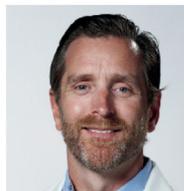
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A few of the activities we did on our own:

A three-hour bike tour, pedaling from the historic center all the way to the beach. Our guide kept us laughing and learning the entire way — and no, the sea breeze didn't hurt.

A wine tour with a small group of four. Our guide was wonderful, the winery warm and welcoming, and the lunch they prepared felt like something out of a rustic Spanish cookbook.

A truly invigorating hike through rocky, hilly terrain — and here's where I confess: I'm not a hiker. Not even close. We were both gloriously exhausted that night, in the best way possible. We rewarded ourselves by slipping into "thermal springs," though at 75 degrees, the only thing thermal was our optimism.

A Side Trip to Altea: Fireworks, Seaside Air, and Pure Magic

We stole away for two nights in Altea, a coastal town straight from a postcard — whitewashed buildings, cobblestone streets, and sea views that are etched in my mind.

Our beachfront apartment felt like a dream,

saffron-bright, smoky masterpiece, we understood why he'd won. You could practically hear the rice applaud.

Fallas Museum, home to the rescued "ninots" (intricate life-size figures) spared each year from the fiery Fallas festival. They range from whimsical to jaw-dropping in detail, and seeing them up close was unforgettable.

Albufera boat ride, gliding across a serene natural lagoon before sitting down to a paella lunch in a charming, authentic restaurant that felt like a secret passed down through generations.

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but the real show began unexpectedly. Just as we were dozing off around midnight, an explosive boom shook the windows. I rushed outside expecting a commotion and instead found... fireworks. Massive, dazzling, heart-stopping fireworks being launched so close we felt the vibrations in our teeth. They lasted nearly half an hour, turning the Mediterranean into a shimmering mirror of color. My husband slept through the entire spectacle, and I didn't get a single photo — but it's a memory I'll keep forever.

The Joy of Staying Put

People have asked whether we got bored spending a whole month in one city. Not even for a minute.

I discovered I adore slow travel — the rhythm of living, not just passing through.

Mornings at cafés. Afternoons wandering without an agenda.

Evenings filled with tapas, conversation, and the comfortable sense that the city was ours, if only temporarily.

Sure, I celebrated my arrival back home with a meatball sub — balance is important — but I quickly found myself missing



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Valencia's effortless charm. The spontaneity. The warmth. The music, both literal and figurative, of daily life echoing from balconies and plazas.

Why The Good Life Abroad Has Everyone Talking

Since returning in October, a surprising number of people have asked about TGLA — far more than I expected. The appeal seems clear: one destination, one suitcase, one set of keys. No constant packing, unpacking, repacking, or wondering where you left your favorite sweater.

For many, the idea of settling in for a month — or even the new two-week option — feels more relaxing, more immersive, and frankly more doable than whirlwind travel.

Interested? I'm Hosting an Informational Talk

So many residents have asked for details that I'm planning an informational session about The Good Life Abroad on February 26 at the Commons from 4-6— what the month looks like, what's included, how it works, and why it might just be the most enjoyable way to travel.

If you've ever dreamed of spending extended time in Europe without the hassle of constant motion, this is your chance to learn more. Keep your eye on your emails from the Wellness Center and register early!

Spain may not have been new, but the experience certainly was — romantic, surprising, joyful, and wonderfully slow in all the right ways. Sometimes the best adventures aren't about how far you go, but how deeply you settle in.

And sometimes, staying put is the most unforgettable journey of all.

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