

Small-scale dynamism

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Building reputations ... a piece by designer Cristobal Balenciaga on display at the Balenciaga Museum.

Annie Bennett discovers must-see exhibitions in museums and galleries well beyond the big cities.

Spain's small museums don't have the profile of Madrid's Museo Nacional del Prado, Barcelona's Picasso Museum or the Guggenheim Bilbao, nor do they have the queues. What they do have is exquisite collections with key appeal, often housed in buildings that are themselves works of art.

Spain's larger museums are generally closed on Mondays and smaller museums and galleries may be closed at other times of the week too, so it's advisable to check in advance. The smaller museums may also have erratic opening times so, again, check before planning a visit.

Entry fees tend to be reasonable and many don't charge admission at all. Non-worshippers may be charged admission at cathedrals, monasteries and other churches.

Balenciaga Museum, Getaria

The designer Cristobal Balenciaga was born in Getaria, between Bilbao and San Sebastian, and this museum opened in June with more than 1200 examples of his work. The exhibition, *The approach of the genius, the master's technique*, is showing until the end of the year.

Aldamar Parkea 6; phone +34 943 008 840; see cristobalbalenciagamuseoa.com; €8 (\$11), over-65s and under-18s €5.

Maritime Museum, Santander

An hour spent in this waterfront museum gives you an idea of the importance of the sea in the development of Santander, a city on Spain's north coast. A skeleton of a whale stretches across the floor of the museum and the aquarium contains examples of the many fish that inhabit the adjacent Bay of Biscay. There is a stylish cafe and restaurant on the top floor of the museum with views across the bay from the terrace.

Promontorio San Martin de Bajamar; phone +34 942 274 962; see museosdecantabria.com/maritimo; €6, over-65s and 5-12 years €4.

MARQ Archaeological Museum, Alicante

With a string of awards for its design and dynamic displays, the MARQ is always worth a look when you are on the Costa Blanca. A terrific temporary exhibition, *Hermitage: Treasures of Russian Archaeology*, runs until October 16. Many of the 500 exhibits, which are part of one of the most important archaeological collections in the world, are being shown for the first time outside Russia. The gold comb from the Solokha tomb, from 500BC, is a highlight.

Plaza Dr Gomez Ulla s/n; phone +34 965 149 000; see www.marqalicante.com; €3, over-65s and 7-15 years €1.50.

Centro Cultural Bancaja, Valencia

Until November 13, this arts centre has a fascinating exhibition of photographs from the collection of the Hispanic Society of America, charting the history of Spain from the late 19th century to the 1930s, taken by 20 Spanish and international photographers including Charles Clifford, Jean Laurent, Kurt Hielscher, Anna Christian and Ruth Matilda Anderson. There is also a smaller selection on display at the Centro Cultural Bancaja in Alicante.

Plaza de Tetuan, 23; phone +34 963 875 864; see obrasocial.bancaja.es; admission free.

Carmen Thyssen Museum, Malaga

Modern Tradition in the Carmen Thyssen Collection, which is on until October 16, contains work by Miro, Picasso, Matisse and Monet among others, and encompasses the period from 1890 to 1960. Highlights of the permanent collection at this new museum, in a remodelled 16th-century palace in the centre of Malaga, include *Santa Marina* by Zurbaran and *Fin de Siglo* by Julio Romero de Torres.

Calle Compania 10; phone +34 902 303 131; see carmenthyssenmalaga.org; €8; over-65s €4.50.

Juan March Foundation Museum, Palma, Majorca

Housed in an elegant 17th-century mansion in the heart of Majorca's capital, the museum has a staggering collection of 20th-century art, including work by Picasso, Dali and Miro, as well as contemporary artists Miquel Barcelo, Jose Maria Sicilia and Antoni Tapies. An exhibition of the work of German abstract expressionist Willi Baumeister is running until December 10. There is also a good shop for art books and gifts.

Carrer Sant Miquel, 11; phone +34 971 713 515; see march.es/arte/palma; admission free.

Tenerife Espacio de las Artes, Santa Cruz de Tenerife

Designed by Swiss architect Herzog & de Meuron, this dynamic centre in Tenerife's capital city has a permanent collection focused on Oscar Dominguez, a contemporary of Dali and Picasso and regarded as one of Spain's leading surrealist artists. There are regular temporary exhibitions, as well as film screenings and other events. The cafe is pretty stylish, too.

Avenida de San Sebastian, 10; phone +34 922 849 057; see teatenerife.com; €5; over-65s €1; under-12s free.

Cesar Manrique Foundation, Lanzarote

The artist, architect and environmentalist Cesar Manrique designed a series of extraordinary buildings that accentuate the geology of Lanzarote and are now its main attractions. His home, built into the boulders in a lava field, is now a foundation dedicated to his work. The ground-floor exhibits are by his contemporaries, including Tapies, Millares, Picasso and Saura. It's a good idea to come here at the beginning of your holiday to get an idea of what Manrique is all about, as you'll see his work everywhere as you explore the island.

Taro de Tahiche, Teguise; phone +34 928 843 138; see fcmnrique.org; €8; under-12s free.

