



# Religious sights

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A stroll through the streets of Salamanca is the discovery at every turn of monuments steeped in history and wisdom, medieval towers alongside Plateresque façades, and Romanesque or Neoclassical constructions next to Baroque and Modernist buildings. This is a dynamic, welcoming city, the fruit of its position on the Vía de la Plata and its university history.

The axis that runs from the church of San Marcos, the circular plan of which constitutes an original example of the Romanesque style, to the Roman bridge over the river Tormes, takes in the most emblematic points of the city. Salamanca was called with the nickname the Little Rome appealing to the wealth of artistic, religious and cultural life that accumulates this Castilian city. City of gold, palaces and halls with coats of arms and titles.

The city was repopulated during the Middle Ages with people of diverse geographical origins. Each group of people wanted to have its own church; for them the church was a meeting place and symbol of their singularity. For centuries the University of Salamanca, Spain's oldest university and one of the oldest in Europe, was the centre of scientific and religious knowledge. Its great reputation attracted the attention and interest of all religious orders. They felt the need to have a convent or monastery in Salamanca to educate their members and to represent them with dignity. Likewise, the Castilian nobility, the most influential and powerful people during the Spanish empire, sought to have their own palaces or manor houses in the town to show off their wealth and power.

All these factors have contributed to the fact that Salamanca is a city crowded with monuments, either civil or religious; many of them are overshadowed by the major ones. This little guide intends to present them.



**Church of San Marcos / Iglesia de San Marcos**

At the Zamora Gate, one of the many gates in the medieval wall, stands this lovely Romanesque church whose origin dates back to the 11<sup>th</sup>. Its main feature is its round structure. It has semicircular apses, and during restoration two primitive altars with Gothic friezes were discovered. There's also a lovely 16th-century statue of Our Lady.



**Saint Juan de Barbalos Church  
Iglesia de San Juan de Barbalos**

In a little square of the same name, in a district which is full of people going round the bars drinking, you will find this simple little church founded in 1150 by the Castilian *re pobladores* (Christians who returned to the city after the moors were expelled). Outside you'll see the apse enhanced by three windows. You mustn't miss the two 15th and 16th statues of Our Lady, and the enormous Romanesque crucifix, which is almost 2 metres high.



**Saint Juan de Sahagún Church  
Iglesia de San Juan de Sahagún**

Going north from the Plaza Mayor, you will see this enormous church, in a shopping area. It was built in the 19th century in honour of San Juan de Sahagún, the patron saint of Salamanca. It's an example of 19th century revivalist architecture, with some Romanesque and Gothic features. Take a look at the pointed bell-tower, inspired by the cathedral's Torre del Gallo (Cock Tower), and inside the magnificent sculptures of saints from extinct parishes.



**Saint Teresa de Jesús House  
Casa de Santa Teresa**

This house, founded in the 16th century, belonged to the famous Ovalle family, whose shields are on the façade. Located opposite the square of the same name, it's a very plain building, with a keystone entrance, a cobbled hallway and a courtyard inside. Its value is more of a sentimental nature, as Santa Teresa de Jesús, founder of the Carmelitas Descalzas order of nuns, lived here when she founded the Colegio de San José. It is said that Teresa of Avila was very afraid there because of the size of the house and its neglected condition. There is also a belief that the famous poem *Vivo sin vivir en mí* was written here.



**Saint Boal Church**  
**Iglesia de San Boal**

Devoted to Saint Baudilio and founded in 1125. It was rebuilt in 1740. The front has a round arch featuring the coats-of-arms of the Seville Herrera and Enríquez families. In the centre of the broken pediment there is a stone with some carved-in verses and, above it, a niche containing the statue of San Baudilio.



**Carmelite Church**  
**Iglesia del Carmen**

This pretty 17th-century church, which stands on the site of an old school belonging to the Carmelitas Descalzas (Barefoot Carmelite) order of nuns, is located in a big square close to the Plaza Mayor, among palaces and stately homes. The simple façade is a copy of the church of Santa Teresa de Avila, and has the same kind of bell-towers. Inside, if you like baroque-style wood, you'll enjoy

looking at the magnificent main altar, flanked by niches with valuable statues of Saint Teresa and Saint Joseph, from the 17th and 18th centuries respectively.



**La Vera Cruz Chapel**  
**Capilla de la Vera Cruz**

This little chapel was built on the site of an old hospital, and was converted into a chapel in the 16th century. The baroque decor on the main altar, by Joaquín de Churriguera gives the chapel a very acceptable religious touch. Gregorio Fernández's painting of the Immaculate Conception on the main altar is very beautiful, and there's a silver relic-holder containing a piece of the *Lignum Crucis* (Holy Cross) and a statue of Our Lady of Sorrow, used in the Holy Week procession. If you can, go there at midday, when you will hear the nuns singing the Angelus. It is worth visiting this baroque chapel.



**Úrsulas Convent**  
**Convento de las Úrsulas**

Founded in the 16th century by the archbishop Alonso de Fonseca. The church was built in Gothic style. It has one nave, covered by ribbed vaults, and a polygonal apse. In the interior we can see remarkable examples of religious art, such as the tomb of Don Alfonso de Fonseca, which consists of a marble sarcophagus shaped like a burial mound, sculpted by Diego de Siloé. It has an interesting tower and a small curious museum.



**Saint Mary of the Knights Convent**  
**Convento de Santa María de los Caballeros**

In this quiet street in the old part of the city, where there are lots of monuments, you will find this convent belonging to the Adoring Mothers order of nuns. The convent was restored several times during the 16th and 18th centuries, and is very different from the original building. The main chapel in the church is decorated with a magnificent 16th-century altarpiece and a fine Mudéjar stuccoed ceiling.



**Sancti Spiritus Church / Iglesia de Santi Spiritus**

Going up one of the streets leading to the Gran Vía, an area where lots of young people are out at night, you will see this lovely 16th century Gothic church. Before going inside, you must look at the pinnacles, similar to those of the New Cathedral, which give it an Italian look, and the fine plateresque filigree work.



Inside there's a fantastic main altar, with an image of St. James at the battle of Clavijo. On the altar there is a statue of 'Christ the Miracle-Worker', to whom the locals like to pray.



**Arzobispo Fonseca College**  
**Colegio Arzobispo Fonseca**

Farther west of the Plaza Mayor is the former Colegio Mayor Arzobispo Fonseca, also known as the Colegio de los Irlandeses, having originally been built in 1525 for Irish students in Salamanca.

The doorway is Plateresque, and the church itself has a beautiful retablo by Alonso Berruguete and pictures by pupils of his.



It includes a Renaissance courtyard of harmonious proportions, with a very calm atmosphere, and magnificent medallions representing famous humanist characters.



**Saint Blas Church /**  
**Iglesia de San Blas**

This 12th century Romanesque church is located in a hill called Peñuelas de San Blas and opposite the Colegio

de los Irlandeses. From it you can get a wonderful view of the most famous monuments in the city, such as the Clerecía, the university, and the cathedrals. It's said that San Juan de Sahagún, patron saint of the city, gave his last sermon from this church. Since then it has been the subject of various modifications.

The most recent renovations were after the War of Independence and the sale of church lands. It's now a municipal concert hall.

The building is only open for concerts.



**Convent of San Antonio el Real**  
**Convento de San Antonio el Real**

Convento de San Antonio el Real of the Franciscans was built in 1745 (Baroque style) by Father Francisco de la Visitation, a member of the Order and its ruins are divided between the Teatro Liceo (convent and cloister) and the clothing store chain ZARA (church of the convent). It is located near Plaza Mayor.



**Agustinas Recoletas Convent**  
**Covento Agustinas Recoletas**

This quiet convent, in an area with lots of monuments, is joined to Purísima Church, although it has no connection with the church's Italian decor.

Manuel Fonseca y Zúñiga, Count of Monterrey, had the convent built for his daughter, Inés de Zúñiga, in the 16th century. Its sober appearance is very well suited to the enclosed Augustine order of nuns. Inside there is an important collection of pictures, gold and silver work, sculptures and statues.



**Saint Julián and Saint Basilisa Church**  
**Iglesia de San Julián y Santa Basilisa**

Very close to the Plaza Mayor and facing the small, quiet Plaza de los Sexmeros, you will find this lovely little Romanesque church, founded in 1107, when the city was repopulated. The church has been renovated a number of times and the only original feature is the north door. Inside, the decor is baroque and the main altar has salomonic columns and an alabaster statue of the Virgen de los Remedios, the old patron saint of the city, in the middle.



**Saint Benito Church**  
**Iglesia de San Benito**

This attractive parish church was built in 1104 with a covered Gothic façade and it stands in a peaceful square. The interior houses numerous tombs that give it a funerary air and you'll find the Fonseca family coat-of-arms hanging from the walls. It was Archbishop Fonseca of Santiago de Compostella who had the church rebuilt. The church is famous because it was used as a place of refuge by one of the rival noble groups who terrorized the city during their power struggles in the 15th century.



**Our Lady Convent**  
**Convento de la Madre de Dios**

This convent belonging to the Franciscan order is located on the way down Calle de la Compañía, one of the city's most emblematic street. The famous Spanish writer, philosopher and academic, Miguel de Unamuno, used to walk down here most days as do many students still. The building's austere façade is lightened by an attractive vaulted niche holding an image of Our Lady. It's worth looking at the church that forms part of the convent to see the door flanked by elegant pilasters with Ionic capitals.



**Saint Martín Church**  
**Iglesia de San Martín**

One of the most important examples of Romanesque architecture in Spain. It was built in the 12th century, on the initiative of the Count Martín Fernández, on top of an old chapel that was devoted to St. Peter. It has a rectangular floor plan with three naves and three apses. A remarkable feature of its exterior is the Romanesque south portal, decorated with archivolt. In one of its niches we see a relief that depicts St. Martin sharing his tunic with a pauper.



**Saint Cristóbal Church**  
**Iglesia de San Cristobal**

In the centre of Plaza de San Cristóbal, very close to the Gran Vía, you'll find this simple Romanesque solid-looking church. It was founded in the 12th century, and was used as a school for generations until it was restored. Don't miss the decorative capitals of the transept with vegetable themes, and the magnificent 17th century sculpture of the Santo Entierro (Holy Burial).



**Saint Paul Church / Iglesia de San Pablo**

Next to the statue of Christopher Columbus in the Plaza de Colón, surrounded by palaces and gardens is this church which belonged to the old Trinitarios Convent, built in the 17th century. Before going inside, stop and look at the façade, which has three gates with semi-circular arches, and the belfry, where a number of families of storks make their nests. Inside, on the main altar, you'll see the statue of 'Jesús Rescatado' (the Risen Christ), to which the locals like to pray. Once a year, the locals make endless queues to kiss the feet of the statue.



**Saint Clara Convent / Convento de Santa Clara**

This quiet 13th-century convent, located very near Gran Vía, was the residence of the Franciscan order of nuns, which was rebuilt in the 16th and 17th centuries after a fire. When the building was restored, marvellous 14th-century murals were discovered under whitewashed walls. This restoration won the *Europa Nostra* prize, presented by Queen Sofía of Spain. Be sure to have a look at Joaquín Churriguera's magnificent main altar.





**Saint Sebastián Church / Iglesia de San Sebastián**

This parish church is located opposite the New Cathedral in the Plaza Anaya. It used to belong to the neighbouring Colegio de Anaya (Palacio de Anaya). It was built according to Alberto Churriguera's pure baroque design between 1731-1744. (The Plaza Mayor was also designed by Alberto and his brother, José.) Sebastiano Conca's painting dating from 1640 and located on the main altar is striking. The main altar itself is a fine work of art dating from the early-20th century.



**Saint Millán Church / Iglesia de San Millán**

This Romanesque church of the late twelfth century, is one of the great unknown monuments even to the inhabitants of the city. Its location, practically hidden in the old town has contributed to this situation, leaving in the anonymity its fine collection, including its Gothic tower of the sixteenth century. The church devoted to San Millán has been almost completely rebuilt, except the apse of the thirteenth century, holding the saint's statue on a round arch. It is near the old Jewish quarter.



**The convent of las Dueñas / Convento de las Dueñas**

The convent of Las Dueñas in Salamanca for enclosed nuns has one of the finest Renaissance cloisters in Spain but also a fine view of the Cathedral. The Dominican nuns founded the convent in 1419. It is located at the end of the Gran Vía Street. You really ought to try the delicious sweets made by the nuns.



**Saint Thomas Beckett Church  
Iglesia de Santo Tomás de Canterbury**

In a little square, just a few metres from the Paseo de Canalejas, one of the roads leading to the city centre, you will find this Romanesque marvel dedicated to Saint Thomas Beckett, Archbishop of Canterbury. It's the first church in Europe dedicated to this saint.



**Calatrava College  
Colegio de Calatrava**

The architect, Joaquín de Churriguera, built this imposing baroque palace in the 18th century for the powerful Military Order of Calatrava. It's located opposite the Romanesque church of St Thomas Beckett (Archbishop of Canterbury) and close to Convento de San Esteban. Its square shape with four towers give the impression that it's a fortress.

The monumental baroque staircase that leads to the main entrance makes it stand out from the surrounding buildings. Flags bearing the Calatrava Order's coat-of-arms hang by the doorway. The building is used by the bishop's administration.



**Saint Francis Church  
Iglesia de San Francisco**

Well located, opposite the Campo de San Francisco, one of the quietest parks in the city, and on the site of the old San Francisco Convent, stands this lovely baroque church, which dates back to 1746. At the entrance, there are two columns, with a picture of St. Louis and the shield of the order of St. Francis.

The inside is even more baroque, in the style of Churriguera, the architect. Particular features include the full-sized angels, and the choir where there's a mural depicting the church being offered to St. Francis by King Fernando III.



**Corpus Christi Convent  
Convento del Corpus Christi**

When you are looking for peaceful contemplation, and find yourself near Casa de Santa Teresa, you will find this

Franciscan convent which is worth a visit to see the lovely plateresque entrance to the church. It's a Mudejar Renaissance style entrance, of the kind which was used for the entrances to churches in the Middle Ages, where you can admire the medallions (decorative relief mouldings) of martyrs and the anagram of Mary with vegetable motifs. Inside, the main altar and the side altars are in plain pine, and the 16th century statue of the Virgen de la Leche is worth a look.



**Trinity Convent  
Covento de la Trinidad**

This church stands alongside the Montellano Palace, close to the Plaza Mayor. The humble order of Trinitarian monks built it on their arrival in the city during the 17th century. The impressive façade is made of carved masonry that's particularly intricate around the main entrance. The central niche holds a statue representing the Holy Trinity, by Juan Rodríguez along with the Trinitarian Order's insignia.



**Church of Our Lady of Monte Carmelo  
Iglesia de Nuestra Señora del Carmen**

Saint Teresa established this convent in the 16th century outside the city walls on the road to Villamayor. The little church is all that's left of the original convent and its architectural features combine the simplicity and beauty associated with the Carmelite religious order who lived here. The façade displays a niche with a bust of San José and the infant Jesus. Inside, you'll see images of the Virgen del Carmen and Santa Teresa dating from the 17th century that are considered to be among the best examples in Salamanca.





**Saint Elizabeth Convent**  
**Convento de Santa Isabel**

On a corner of Calle Zamora, in a shopping area, you will find a quiet street where Isabel Suárez de Solís founded this Franciscan convent in the 15th century. Its main chapel is in the 14th century church, which was used as a mausoleum by the Solís family whose coat of arms is part of the decor.



**Las Bernardas Church – Calasanz College**  
**Iglesia de las Bernardas – Colegio Calasanz**

The Bernadas church is located in the courtyard of what is now a school (Padres Escolapios School) run by a religious order. The school was originally a monastery built by the architect Gil de Hontañón in the 16th century. The whole complex is predominantly late-Gothic in style with Renaissance touches. The church itself has a single nave, a simple transept and a strangely flat apse. The attractive entrance-way to the church displays plateresque features and statues of Our Lady and San Bernardo in an external niche.



**Siervas de San José College**  
**Colegio de las Siervas de San José**

This building was once the General Hospital and is now the Siervas de San José School. It's located close to San Esteban. It began to be known as the General Hospital during the 16th century because it incorporated a number of local health centres. Regular theatrical performances were held here in order to raise funds to support the hospital. The plateresque courtyard - with its fantastic sandstone capitals and Gothic platforms in the corners supporting statues - is well worth visiting. The late-Gothic style chapel houses a lovely carved wooden baroque altarpiece.



**Ruins of Saint Polo Church**  
**Ruinas de la Iglesia de San Polo**

This Mudejar style church was founded in 1112. Currently only the header and one of the walls remain, with a door and several windows, which have been restored.

Near the ruins of this church, or rather taking advantage of these, has built a hotel. It has three apses that are visible through the window pane of the cafeteria, integrated in the hotel. The ruins are located in the southern entrance of town, near the Orchard of Calixto and Melibea.



**Carmelite Church and Convent**  
**Nuestra Señora del Carmen de Abajo**

The building is also the Barefoot Carmelite Convent, the first construction dates back to fifteenth century but was destroyed due to the flood of St. Polycarp in 1626. Again

the building was severely damaged during the War of Independence and also inside a fire destroyed much of the altarpieces. When this place was a monastery San Juan de la Cruz lived here as a student of art and theology. The front displays the shield of the Carmelite Order and inside we can see two paintings by Claudio Coello.



**Saint Mary de la Vega Convent**  
**Convento de Santa María de la Vega**

In the Tormes lowlands stands this monastery, built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century on the site of the old Romanesque church of Santa María de la Vega, patron saint of the city. It was at first placed in the care of the canons of the monastery of San Isidoro de León, which the Salamanca Bishop didn't like; this caused great conflict, and to resolve it was necessary the mediation of Pope Alexander II and the King of León. The only remains of the old monastery are five arches in the cloister, which are certainly worth a look. The church, with its three naves separated by cylindrical columns with lovely Renaissance capitals, is also worth seeing. At the present time it is run by the Fundación Rodríguez Fabrés.



**Premostratenses College**  
**Colegio Premostratenses**

This building was a hall of residence to house students at the university. It was built in 1570, and in those days, the halls and adjoining church stood outside the old town, close to the River Tormes. Little remains of the original construction and a characterless modern church has been built on the site. However, the magnificent two-storey, 16<sup>th</sup> century interior cloister has been preserved and is well worth visiting.

The cloister was designed by Juan Moreno - a master of Salamanca proto-baroque architecture - with interesting mannerist motifs.



**Saint Jacob Church**  
**Iglesia de Santiago**

On the way out of the city, on the banks of the River Tormes and by the Roman Bridge, stands the only 12<sup>th</sup> century Mudejar church in Salamanca. Built in a strategic place, where the Way of St. James meets the La Plata Roman Road, it is in a lovely setting.



The church has been completely restored after being virtually abandoned for some time. Inside the main features are three decorative apses.



**New Trinity Church**  
**Iglesia de la Santísima Trinidad del Arrabal**

It was built near the River Tormes in the seventeenth century to replace the old one of the 12<sup>th</sup>, which was ruined. It is within the pilgrimage route from the south following the route of la Plata Roman Road.