

## “Catedral de Santa Maria” Text & Photos by Bruce Hamilton, AIA



**Perspective of the Arch of Santa Maria with the Cathedral Spires in the Background**

Pilgrims’ Road to Santiago de Compostela, a provincial capital in Spain’s autonomous community, which is marked by its medieval architecture. Guarding the entrance to the old town, the Gate of Santa Maria (Spanish: Arco de Santa Maria) stands at the end of the Paseo del Espolon opposite the Puente de Santa Maria (bridge) spanning the Arlanzón River. The massive arch is flanked by two semicircular towers, giving it the appearance of a castle. Behind the Gate of Santa Maria lies the “Plaza Rey San Ferando” opening the view towards the Cathedral of Santa Maria (Spanish:



**Partial View of the Nave/Stunning Cimboria (Lantern)**

Spain has been described as less of a country than a collection of small nations all working together. Everywhere our tour group traveled, towns and cities of timeless beauty perch on hilltops, huddle in valleys and cling to coastal cliffs as tiny but resilient outcrops of old Spain. Traveling north through Castile’s dry flatland on Spain’s highway 1, September 21, 2016, a striking image stands out in the distance; a massive structure that rises above a city silhouette and boldly displays lofty tower spires pointing up toward the sky. According to our tour guide, we were about to enter

Burgos, a city in Castilla-Leon situated on the



**Partial Exterior View Catedral de Santa Maria**

Catedral de Santa Maria).

Declared by the UNESCO in 1984 a World

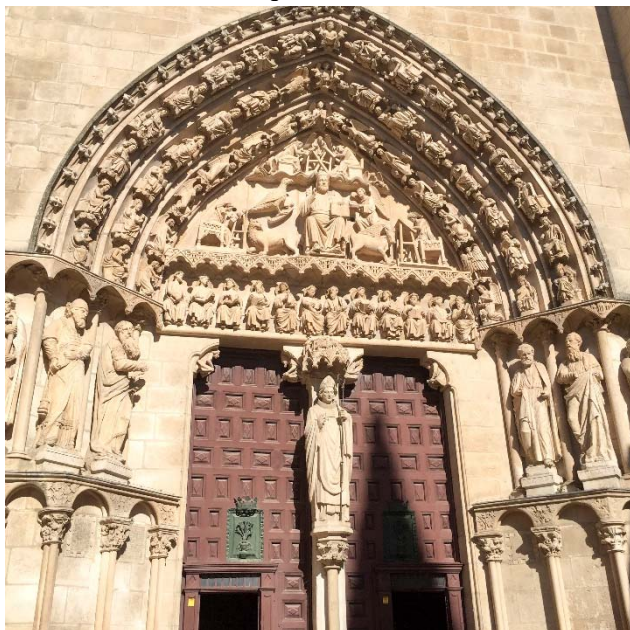
Heritage Site, the Cathedral of Burgos is, apart from the most emblematic monument of the city, an authentic marvel of Spanish Gothic art. The harmony of its lines, the intense and moving labor with which its stone was carved on that gentle hillside that overlooks the banks of the Rio Arlanzón, gives the Cathedral an image of power and singular beauty. Little is known about the identities of the first masters who directed the project, although according to our tour group leader, it is believed that they came from France due to the presence of Gothic elements.



**Entrance to the Golden Staircase**

stunning cimboria (lantern), a marvelous example of Plateresque Art, richly decorated with sculptures and coats of arms, gilded balustrade and superb reliefs.

The medieval town of Burgos was an important stop on the way of Saint James pilgrimage trail to Santiago de Compostela. This intriguing historic town has preserved its old-world charm, seen in the exquisite ancient monuments, quaint cobble stone streets and



**The Tympanum and Statues at the North Entrance - Facade from the 13th Century**

The plan of the Cathedral is based on a Latin cross of harmonious proportions of 84 by 59 meters. To the right of the visitor's entrance on the southern façade of the Cathedral is the uniquely beautiful cloister. The clock is on the main nave about 10 meters above the floor, where bells have struck on the hour since the 18<sup>th</sup> century by the famous automated figure known as Papamosca. To his right is another animated figure (Martinillo) in charge of striking the bells on the quarter of the hour. The awe-inspiring interior is distinguished by the dome of the main nave, which features a lovely mudéjar (Moorish style) vault and the 16<sup>th</sup> century Italian Renaissance style Escalera Dorada (Golden Staircase). Although the staircase has no practical use today, it is still a magnificent decorative element. Within the immense sanctuary are 19 chapels in the side naves and throughout are valuable altarpieces, paintings and sculptures. In the center of the nave is the



**Partial View - Chapel of the Presentation**

shaded promenades. Burgos offers a celebrated example of an integral cathedral with its chapels, cloister and annexes. Built over more than four centuries, the Cathedral bears testimony to the creative genius of architects, sculptors and craftsmen throughout these periods. As our tour group discovered, on the "must see list" in Burgos are numerous monasteries and churches. Visiting the

sanctuaries offers an inspiring spiritual experience as well as a chance to see masterpieces of medieval and renaissance art.

Spain is a country that lives very much in the present and there is a reason - "Fiesta" is one of the best-known words in the Spanish language - life itself is a fiesta here and everyone seems to be invited. Our tour group could sense it along a crowded, post-midnight street in Burgos when all the locals and tourists came out to play. This is a country with music in its soul, a love of fine food and a special talent for celebrating all the good things in life.