

Pilgrimage country prepares for largest ever crowd

By Beth Doherty

VAMOS! is the newest word in the vocabulary of an Australian delegation who travelled to Spain to start preparations for World Youth Day Madrid in late October.

The Spanish word, meaning literally “we go” in also translates as “let’s go”, and in the case of stragglers “hurry up” as the group of 32 struggled to fit into four days what they would spend three weeks doing next year in August.

On 20 October, 2010, The World Youth Day Office in Madrid hosted the Australian and New Zealand delegation of leaders who would bring back advice to Aussie pilgrims of the experiences they might have travelling in Spain. The delegation spent a full day with the coordinators, and later met with the Australian Ambassador to Spain and she assured the group of continuing embassy support and consular help for pilgrims if required.

They were then taken by tour-guide Javier to religious landmarks in Avila (the place of ministry for both Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross), Segovia and Toledo. Others travelled by themselves to Cordoba and Salamanca, and two from Maitland-Newcastle Diocese took the opportunity to walk the final 100 kilometres of the Camino where they will take their pilgrims next year.

The four day whirlwind tour was coordinated by Harvest Pilgrimages who are the Official tour operator for WYD Madrid. WYD Projects Officer for the Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life is former events manager Bernadette Kreutzer whose bubbly personality brought the 32-strong delegation together.

“The WYD Madrid 2011 staff is waiting to welcome the world including up to 5,000 pilgrims from Australia in August next year. They are well-prepared and are working keenly to deliver an amazing faith experience”, she said.

“The staff was warm, welcoming and so hospitable – they asked that we keep them in our prayers and were grateful for the resources and the work they were able to study from WYD Sydney”, said Bernadette.



Like virtually no other country in the world, Spain has pilgrimage sights that draw thousands of spiritual seekers each year; most notably “El Camino” the famous way of St James to Santiago de Compostela.

With its incredible religious heritage Spain expects to host in excess of 2.1 million people for WYD Madrid which will include pilgrimages to places as diverse as Loyola, Extremadura and Barcelona.

World Youth Day coordinator for the Archdiocese of Melbourne Annaliese Wursthorn was interviewed about her time in Madrid and enthusiastically recommends this WYD to all pilgrims considering going.

“We visited the sites for all the main events and the main key attractions of the city, including the beautiful Madrid Cathedral. We were able to visit the convent of St Teresa of Avila, including the chapel where she had her visions, and walk through the cobblestone streets of the walled city. We also went out to Salamanca which is the venue for Melbourne’s Post WYD retreat.”

“The site for the Papal Mass is an airfield on the outskirts of the city. I think the key message here is that it's going to be pretty dry and hot. We'll have to think carefully about how we can shade ourselves during the day. The good thing is, it's only eight kilometres from the city, so even if the train isn't much use, we can probably walk it easily enough.”

Annaliese also highly recommends the Spanish cuisine, especially if you like to eat different types of meat and seafood.

“The food was amazing! I loved the paella and tapas. We also had the opportunity to try some local delicacies like suckling pig! One of the great surprises is that they eat churros (deep-fried Spanish doughnuts) for breakfast!”

Parramatta CEO’s WYD Youth and Schools Project Officer Bethany Lentern has also attended two World Youth Days, in Cologne, Germany and Sydney, Australia and attests that each one is subtly different and can be a spectacularly moving faith experience.

“Each World Youth Day is different – it’s hard to say exactly what you will find. They are like “a mashup” of faith and culture” says Bethany.

“In WYD, the ‘songs’ reflect the faith and culture of the country. The blending and layering creates an explosive event that changes your perception and appreciation of faith and culture in such a way that you never get the song of WYD out of your head” said Bethany.

Those interested in attending WYD are encouraged to get in contact with your local diocese, youth group, or the national office wyd@catholic.org.au.

