Spain’s most southerly region is the true home of typically Spanish experiences. Bullfighting, tapas, flamenco, the guitar itself, all began in Andalucía and remain deeply embedded here. Other aspects of Spanish life take on their most extreme forms here: Andalucian fiestas are the noisiest and most colourful, Easter processions have more pageantry, the summer heat is more broiling, the people are at their most vivacious, fun-loving and family-oriented. And the coastal tourist resorts are the most densely crowded in the whole country.

But beyond the cliché images, Andalucía is a land of surprises and contradictions. Away from the mass-tourism resorts you’ll find some of the most pristine beaches in the country, on the Cabo de Gata promontory and the Atlantic Costa de la Luz. Inland are green hills, white villages, huge nature reserves (one-fifth of Andalucian territory is under environmental protection), and the snowcapped highest mountain range on the Spanish mainland, the Sierra Nevada.

Andalucía is the proud home of Spain’s most famous building, that bejewelled diadem of Islamic architecture, Granada’s Alhambra, as well as other marvellous relics of medieval Islamic Spain. The region also has a lesser-known but as fabulous heritage of cathedrals, palaces and castles from later eras. Contemporary Andalucía is ever more cosmopolitan and fashionable, with towns and cities full of glitzy boutiques, hip bars, stylish restaurants and pumping nightlife.

Deeply traditional yet ready to seize the modern world, Andalucians always live life to the full. Few visitors to their land fail to get caught up in the fun.
Andalucía was the obvious base for the Muslim invaders who surged onto the Iberian Peninsula from Africa in 711 under Arab general Tariq ibn Ziyad, who landed at Gibraltar with around 10,000 men, mostly Berbers (indigenous North Africans). Córdoba, until the 11th century, then Seville until the 13th and finally Granada until the 15th century, took turns as the leading city of Islamic Spain. At its peak, in the 10th century, Córdoba was the biggest and most dazzling and cultured city in Western Europe, famed for its ‘three cultures’ coexistence between Muslims, Jews and Christians. Islamic civilization lasted longer in Andalucía than anywhere else on the Iberian Peninsula.
and it’s from the medieval name for the Muslim areas of the peninsula, Al-Andalus, that the name Andalucía comes.

The Emirate of Granada, the last bastion of Al-Andalus, finally fell to the Catholic Monarchs, Fernando and Isabel, in 1492. Columbus’ landing in the Americas the same year brought great wealth to Seville, and later Cádiz, the Andalusian ports through which Spain’s trade with the Americas was conducted. But the Castilian conquerors killed off Andalucía’s deeper prosperity by handing out great swaths of territory to their nobles, who set sheep to run on former food-growing lands.

By the late 19th century, rural Andalucía was a hotbed of anarchist unrest. During the civil war Andalucía split along class lines and savage atrocities were committed by both sides. Spain’s subsequent ‘hungry years’ were particularly hungry here in the south, and between 1950 and 1970 some 1.5 million Andalucians left to find work in the industrial cities of northern Spain and other European countries.

But tourism and the almost everlasting building boom that has come with it, plus industrial growth and massive EU subsidies for agriculture (which still provides one Andalucian job in eight), have made a big difference. On the surface Andalucía’s PSOE (Partido Socialista Obrero Español) party has controlled Andalucía’s regional government in Seville since 1982. The worst of Andalusian poverty has been eradicated with the help of grants, community works schemes, a generous dole system and the overall improvement in the Spanish economy. Registered unemployment in Andalucía remains the highest in Spain (14% in 2006), but it’s also a fact that many registered unemployed in Andalucía have jobs. Education and health provision have steadily improved and the PSOE has given Andalucía Spain’s biggest network of environmentally protected areas (though only in the last couple of years has it begun to tackle the rampant overdevelopment of many coastal areas).

The early 21st century has seen an important shift in Andalucía’s ethnic balance with the arrival not just of ever more northern European sun-seekers but also economic migrants, legal and illegal, from Latin America, Morocco, sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Europe.

Andalucía's ethnic mix

It’s hard to overestimate the arrival not just of ever more northern European sun-seekers but also economic migrants, legal and illegal, from Latin America, Morocco, sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Europe. Andalucía within democratic Spain, and sevillano Felipe González became Spain’s prime minister. The Expo ’92 international exhibition (1992) brought the city millions of visitors, eight new bridges across the Guadalquivir and the super-fast AVE rail link to Madrid. Seville’s economy is now steadily improving with a mix of tourism, commerce, technology and industry.

ORIENTATION

Seville straddles Rio Guadalquivir, with most places of interest found on the river’s east bank. The central area is a tangle of narrow, twisting old streets and small squares, with the exception of Plaza Nueva and the broad, straight Avenida de la Constitución. Just east of Constitución are the city’s major monuments: the cathedral, La Giralda and the Alcázar fortress-palace. The quaint Barrio de Santa Cruz, east of the cathedral and the Alcázar, is a popular place to stay and eat. The true centre of Seville, El Centro, is a little further north, around Plaza de San Francisco and Plaza Salvador. The area between Avenida de la Constitución and the river is called El Arenal.

The train station and the two bus stations are on the periphery of the central area, all served by city buses that circle the centre (p707): Prado de San Sebastián bus station is 650m southeast of the cathedral and within Andalucía's other cities put together. It’s the home of art and architecture (Roman, Islamic, Gothic, Renaissance, baroque) without rival in southern Spain. But Seville’s most developed art form is that of enjoying oneself. To be out at night among the city’s relaxed, fun-loving crowds – in the tapas bars, on the streets, in the clubs and discos – is an experience you won’t forget.

There are a couple of catches, of course: Seville is expensive. You might pay €80 here for what would cost €50 elsewhere, and prices go even higher during Semana Santa (fair), the best tapas bars, the best nightlife (discos – is an experience you won’t forget. Things looked up in the 1980s when Seville was named capital of the new autonomous}

SEVILLE pop 714,000

If any one place comes close to rolling together everything that’s quintessentially Andalucian, it’s Seville. Here in the region’s capital and biggest city, that special Andalucian way of life is distilled into its purest and most intense form. Seville has the most passionate and portentous Semana Santa (Holy Week), the most festive and romantic annual feria (fair), the best tapas bars, the best nightlife and the most stylish people in Andalucía. It has more narrow, winding, medieval lanes and romantic, hidden plazas soaked in the scent of orange blossom than half of Andalucía’s other cities put together. It’s the home of those two bulwarks of Andalucian tradition, flamenco and bullfighting, and its heritage of art and architecture (Roman, Islamic, Gothic, Renaissance, baroque) is without rival in southern Spain.

But Seville’s most developed art form is that of enjoying oneself. To be out at night among the city’s relaxed, fun-loving crowds – in the tapas bars, on the streets, in the clubs and discos – is an experience you won’t forget. Things looked up in the 1980s when Seville was named capital of the new autonomous
walking distance of the Barrio de Santa Cruz; Plaza de Armas bus station is 900m northwest of the cathedral, within walking distance of El Arenal; and Santa Justa train station is 1.5km northeast of the cathedral.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Casa del Libro (Map pp692-3; 954 50 29 50; Calle Velázquez 8; 9.30am-9.30pm Mon-Sat) Guidebooks and novels published in several languages. Also, there are maps and dictionaries.

LTC (Map pp692-3; 954 42 59 64; Avenida Menéndez Pelayo 42-44; closed Sat) Andalucía’s top map shop.

Emergency

Ambulance (% 061)
Policía Local (% 092)
Policía Nacional (% 091)

Internet Access

First Center (Map pp692-3; Avenida de la Constitución 34; per hr €2; 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, 9am-9.30pm Sat, noon-9pm Sun)

Internelia (Map pp692-3; Avenida Menéndez Pelayo 46; per hr €2; 10.30-1.30am Mon-Fri, noon-1.30am Sat & Sun)

Sevilla Internet Center (Map pp692-3; 954 50 02 75; Calle Almirantezau 2; per min €0.05; 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-10pm Sat & Sun)

Internet Resources

Discover Sevilla (www.discoversevilla.com)
Explore Sevilla (www.exploreseville.com)
Sevilla Tourism (www.turismo.sevilla.org) The city’s informative official tourism site; it includes a great guide to Sevilla for gays and lesbians, and an ‘Accessible Guide’ listing establishments with disabled access.

Laundry

Laundries here do the job for you (usually in half a day), with washing, drying and folding included in their prices.

Auto-Servicio de Lavandería Sevilla (Map pp692-3; 954 21 05 35; Calle Castelar 2C; per load €6; 9.30am-1.30pm & 5-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat)

La Segunda Vera (Map pp692-3; 954 54 11 48; Calle Alejo Fernández 3; per load €8; 9.30am-1.30pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1.30pm Sat)

Media

El Giralddillo Andalucía-wide what’s-on mag, free at tourist offices and some hotels, with a strong Sevilla emphasis.

Tourist Free mag for tourists with worthwhile information.

Welcome & Olé Ditto.

Medical Services

Centro de Salud El Porvenir (Map pp692-3; 954 03 78 17; cnr Avenidas Menéndez y Pelayo & de Cádiz) Public clinic with emergency service.

Hospital Virgen del Rocío (% 954 01 20 00; Avenida de Manuel Sierra s/n) The main general hospital, 1km south of Parque de María Luisa.

Money

There’s no shortage of banks and ATMs in the central area. Santa Justa train station, the airport and both bus stations have ATMs.

Post

Post office (Map pp692-3; Avenida de la Constitución 32)

Telephone

There are plenty of pay phones around the centre. The following call centres offer inexpensive international calls:

Ciber Alcázar (Map pp692-3; 954 21 04 01; Calle San Fernando 35; 10.15am-10.30pm Mon-Fri, noon-10.30pm Sat & Sun)

First Center (Map pp692-3; Avenida de la Constitución 34; 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-9.30pm Sat, noon-9pm Sun)

Tourist Information

Municipal tourist office (Map pp692-3; 954 22 17 14; barrantes@turismo.sevilla.org; Calle de Arjona 28; 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat & Sun, reduced hr during Semana Santa & Feria de Abril)

Regional tourist offices (Map pp692-3; 954 22 14 04; otsevilla@andalucia.org; 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 3-7pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun, closed holidays); Estación Santa Justa (Map pp688-9; 954 53 76 26; 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun, closed holidays). The Constitution office is well informed but often very busy.

Tourismo Sevilla (Map pp692-3; 954 21 00 05; www.turismo.sevilla.org; Plaza del Triunfo 1; 10.30am-7pm Mon-Fri) Information on all Sevilla province.

SIGHTS

Seville’s major monuments, the cathedral, the Giralda and the Alcázar complex, are all just east of Avenida de la Constitución and south of the city’s true centre (El Centro). But there’s plenty more to see and do in El Centro and neighbouring El Arenal, as well as in areas to the south, north and west.

Cathedral & Giralda

After Seville fell to the Christians in 1248 its main mosque was used as a church until 1401 when, in view of its decaying state, the church authorities decided to knock it down and start again. ‘Let us create such a building that future generations will take us for lunatics’, they reputedly agreed. They certainly got themselves a big and magnificent church. Seville’s cathedral (Map pp692-3; 954 21 49 71; adult/student, senior, disabled/under 12yr £7.50/5.00/free, admission free Sun; 11am-6pm Mon-Sat, 2.30-7pm Sun Sep-Jun, 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 2.30-7pm Sun Jul & Aug) is one of the largest in the world: the main building is 126m long and 83m wide. It was completed by 1507 and was originally all Gothic, though work done after its central dome collapsed in 1511 was mostly in the Renaissance style. The original mosque’s beautiful minaret, La Giralda, still stands on its eastern side (see p694), but the cathedral’s bulky exterior gives few other hints of the treasures within.

SALA DEL PABELLÓN

Selected treasures from the cathedral’s art collection (many of them the work of masters from Seville’s 17th-century artistic golden age) are exhibited in this first room after the ticket office.

CATHEDRAL CHAPELS & STAINED GLASS

The sheer size of the broad, five-naved cathedral is obscured by a welter of interior decoration typical of Spanish cathedrals. The chapels along the northern and southern sides are as rich in sculpture, stained glass and painting as any church chapels in Spain. Near the western end of the northern side is the Capilla de San Antonio, with Murillo’s large 1666 canvas depicting the vision of St Anthony of Padua; thieves excised the kneeling saint in 1874 but he was found in New York and put back.

Don’t forget to look up to admire the Gothic vaulting and rich-hued stained glass. The oldest stained glass, with markedly different colours, in the four westernmost bays on either side of the uppermost storey of the nave, and above the five westernmost chapels on both sides of the nave, was done between 1478 and 1483 by a German, Enrique Alemán.

COLUMBUS’ TOMB

Inside the cathedral’s southern door stands the tomb of Christopher Columbus, an elaborate monument dating from 1902 with four sepulchre-bearers representing the four kingdoms of Spain at the time of Columbus’ 1492 voyage: Castilla, León, Aragón and Navarra. But are the bones within really those of the great explorer? The tomb holds bones brought back from the Caribbean in 1899 and long thought to be Columbus’. However, the Dominican Republic in the Caribbean claims that Columbus’ bones lie beneath a monument in its capital, Santo Domingo. Since 2003 researchers have been conducting tests on various bones from the Seville cathedral tomb and elsewhere to try to resolve the puzzle. In 2006 it was announced that the DNA of the cathedral bones matches that of Columbus’ brother Diego (who was also buried in Seville), indicating that the cathedral bones are indeed the great explorer’s. But Columbus’ bones were moved several times after his death and it’s quite possible that at one stage they went different ways. It would be strangely apt if his mortal remains, as his life, was were divided between Spain and the Caribbean.

CAPILLA MAYOR

Towards the east end of the main nave is the Capilla Mayor, whose Gothic altarpiece is the jewel of the cathedral and reckoned to be the biggest altarpiece in the world. Begun by Flemish sculptor Pieter Dancart in 1482 and completed by others by 1564, this sea of gilded and polychromed wood holds more than 1000 carved biblical figures. A work of the late 16th century, the central figure of the lowest level is the 13th-century image of the Virgen de la Sede, patron of the cathedral.

SACRISTÍAS & CHAPTERHOUSE

South of the Capilla Mayor are rooms containing many of the cathedral’s art treasures. The westernmost of these is the Sacristía de los Cálizis (Sacristy of the Chalices), where Goya’s 1817 painting of the Seville martyrs Santos Justa and Rufina (poster sisters who died at the hands of the Romans in AD 287) hangs above the altar. A lion licks Rufina’s feet, as reputedly happened when she was thrown to the said beasts during her travails. The large domed Sacristía Mayor (Main Sacristy) is a Plateresque creation of 1528–47: the arch over its portal has carvings of 16th-century foods. The room’s centrepiece is the Custodia de Juan de Arfe, a huge 75kg silver monstrosity made in the 1580s by Renaissance metal smith Juan de Arfe. In a glass case are the city keys handed to the conquering Fernando III in 1248.

ANDALUCÍA ••  SIGHTS

SEVILLE ••  Information
Andalucía of the mosque that stood on the site before the way up. The climb affords great views. Easy, as a series of ramps — built so that the

**Giralda Belfry.** High above the archbishop’s ederal, was built between 1558 and 1592 to add in the 16th century, when Christians

**El Giraldillo** stands south of the cathedral across Plaza del Triunfo. This intriguing, beautiful complex is intimately associated with the lives and lore of the Almohads and Christian rulers above all the extraordinary Pedro I of Castilla (1350–69), who was known as either Pedro El Cruel or Pedro El Justiciero (the Justice-Dispenser), depending which side of him you were on.

Originally founded as a fort for the Cordoban governors of Seville in 913, the Alcázar has been expanded and rebuilt many times in its 11 centuries of existence. This makes it a complicated building to understand, but makes it more fascinating. Seville’s prosperous 11th-century Muslim taifa rulers built themselves a palace called Al-Muwarak (the Blessed) in what’s now the western part of the Alcázar. The 12th-century Almohad rulers added another palace east of this, around what’s now the Patio del Crucero. Christian Fernando III moved into the Alcázar in 1248 and several later Christian monarchs used it as their main residence. Alfonso X replaced much of the Almohad palace with a Gothic one. Between 1364 and 1366 Pedro I created the sumptuous Mudéjar Palacio de Don Pedro, partly on the site of the old Al-Muwarak palace. The Catholic Monarchs, Fernando and Isabel, set up court here in the 1480s as they prepared for the conquest of Granada. Later rulers created the Alcázar’s lovely gardens.

**Patio del León**

The Lion Patio was the garrison yard of the Al-Muwarack palace. Off here, the *Sala de la Justicia* (Hall of Justice), with beautiful Mudéjar plasterwork, was built in the 1340s by Alfonso XI, who dispersed here with his mistress Leonor de Guzmán. Alfonso’s dalliances left his heir Pedro I (El Cruel/Justiciero) with five half-brothers and a severe case of sibling rivalry. Pedro had a dozen friends and relatives murdered in his efforts to stay on the throne. One of the half-brothers, Don Fadrique, met his maker right here in the Sala de la Justicia. The room goes on to the pretty **Patio de los Naranjos**, a 19th-century reconstruction of part of the 12th-century Almohad palace.

**Patio de los Naranjos**

Planted with over 60 orange trees, this was originally the courtyard where Muslims performed ablutions before entering the mosque. On its north side is the beautiful Islamic Puerta del Perdón.

**The beautifully domed Cabildo (Chapter-house), in the southeastern corner of the cathedral, was built between 1558 and 1592 to host the designs of Hernán Ruiz, architect of the Giralda belfry. High above the archbishop’s throne at the southern end is a Murillo masterpiece, La Inmaculada. Eight Murillo saints adorn the dome.**

**Giralda**

In the northeastern corner of the cathedral interior you’ll find the passage that leads to the belfry of the Giralda. The ascent is quite easy, as a series of ramps — built so that the guards could ride up on horseback — goes all the way up. The climb affords great views.

Over 90m high, La Giralda was the minaret of the mosque that stood on the site before the cathedral, constructed in brick by Almohad caliph Yusuf Yacub al-Mansur between 1184 and 1198. Its proportions, decoration and colour, which changes with the light, make it perhaps Spain’s most perfect Islamic building. The topmost part (from the bell level up) were added in the 16th century, when Christians were busy ‘improving on’ surviving Islamic buildings. At the very top is El Giraldillo, a 16th-century bronze weathervane, which represents Faith and is a symbol of Seville.

**Patio de los Naranjos**

Planted with over 60 orange trees, this was originally the courtyard where Muslims performed ablutions before entering the mosque. On its north side is the beautiful Islamic Puerta del Perdón.
ANDALUCÍA

Barrio de Santa Cruz
Seville’s medieval judería (Map pp692–3; Jewish quarter), east of the cathedral and Alcázar, is today a tangle of quaint, winding streets and lovely plant-decked plazas perfumed with orange blossom. It’s tourist central, but still a vital part of the city and one that’s remarkably easy and pleasant to wander. Its most characteristic plaza today is Plaza de Santa Cruz, which gives the barrio its name. Its central cross, made in 1692, is one of the finest examples of Seville wrought-iron work. Plaza Doña Elvira is another beautiful spot.

The 17th-century Hospital de los Venerables Sacerdotes (% 954 56 26 96; Plaza de los Venerables; adult/student & senior/under 12yr €5/2.50/free, admission free Sun afternoon; 10am-2pm & 4-8pm) was a residence for aged priests. You can visit the lovely central courtyard, several exhibition rooms, and the church with murals by Valdés Leal and fine sculptures by Pedro Roldán.

El Centro
The real centre of Seville is the densely packed zone of narrow streets north of the cathedral (Map pp692–3), broken up by squares around which the city’s life has revolved for aeons.

PLAZA DE SAN FRANCISCO & CALLE SIERPES

With a lively history as a market square in Muslim times and then the prime spot for Inquisition burnings, Plaza de San Francisco has been Seville’s main public square since the 16th century. The southern end of the ayuntamiento (City Hall) here is encrusted with lovely Renaissance carving from the 1520s and ‘30s. Pedestrianised Calle Sierpes, heading north from the plaza, and the parallel Calle Tétuán/Vélezquez, are the hub of Seville’s fanciest shopping zone. Between the two streets is the 18th-century Capilla de San José (Calle Jovellanos; 8am-12.30pm & 5.30-8.30pm), with breathtakingly intense baroque ornamentation.

The Palacio de la Condesa de Lebrija (% 954 22 78 02; Calle de la Cuna 8; whole bldg/ground fl only admission €7/4; 10.30am-1.30pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat), a block east of Calle Sierpes, is a 16th-century noble mansion remodelled in 1914 by Doña Regla Manjón, Countess of Lebrija — one of those lucky aristocratic travelling archaeologists, hence its name. The ‘Tower of Gold’, inside is a small maritime museum (% 954 22 19; admission €1; 10am-2pm Tue-Fri, 11am-2pm Sat & Sun, closed Aug).
HOSPITAL DE LA CARIDAD
A marvellous sample of Seville golden-age art adorns the church in this charity hospice (954 22 32 32; Calle Temporado 3; admission €4, free Sun & holidays; h 9am-1.30pm & 3.30-7.30pm Mon-Sat, to 1pm Sun & holidays) a block from the river. The hospital was founded in the 17th century by Miguel de Mañara, by legend a notorious libertine who changed his ways after experiencing a vision of his own funeral procession. For the church, Mañara commissioned a collection of top-class 17th-century Sevillian art on the theme of death and redemption. Valdés Leal’s frightening masterpieces In Ictu Oculi (In the Blink of an Eye) and Finis Gloriae Mundi (the End of Earthly Glory) face each other across the western end of the church, chillingly illustrating the futility of worldly success. Four Murillo paintings along the walls illustrate the theme of redemption through mercy. They show Moses drawing water from the rock, the miracle of the ‘loaves and fishes’, St John of God (San Juan de Dios) caring for the sick. Mañara is buried in the crypt beneath the main altar, on which a masterly sculpture portrays Conception Grande (Inmaculada Concepción Grande in Room V, formerly the convent church; Ribera’s very Spanish-looking Santiago A Póstol and Zurbarán’s deeply sombre Cristo Crucificado (Room VI); and further major works by Zurbarán (Room X).

SOUTH OF THE CENTRE
ANTIGUA FÁBRICA DE TABACOS
Seville’s massive former tobacco factory (Map pp692-3; Calle San Fernando; admission free; h 8am-9.30pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat; w 1 – workplace of Bizet’s passionate operatic heroine, Carmen – was built in the 18th century. It had its own jail, stables for 400 mules, 24 patios and even a nursery. Now part of the Universidad de Seville, it’s an impressive if somewhat gloomy neoclassical building.

PARQUE DE MARIA LUISA & PLAZA DE ESPAÑA
A large area south of the tobacco factory was transformed for Seville’s 1929 international fair, the Exposición Iberoamericana, when architects scattered it with all sorts of fine, fancy and funny buildings, many of them harking back to Seville’s eras of past glory or imitating the native styles of Spain’s former colonies. In its midst, the large Parque de María Luisa (Map pp688-9; h 8am-10pm, to midnight Jul & Aug), with 3500 magnificent trees, is a beautiful respite from the traffic and noise of the city.

Plaza de España, one of the city’s favourite relaxation spots with its fountains and minicolonades, faces the park across Avenida de Isabel la Católica. Around it is the grandiose of the 1929 buildings, a semicircular brick-and-tile confection featuring Seville tilework at its gaudiest. On Plaza de América, at the southern end of the park, is Seville’s Museo Arqueológico (Map pp688-9; 954 23 24 01; adult/EU citizen €1.50/for free; h 3-8pm Tue, 9am-8pm Wed-Sat, to 2pm Sun & holidays), whose big collection includes a room of gold jewellery from the mysterious Tartessos culture, and fine collections of Iberian animal sculptures and beautiful Roman mosaics. Facing it is the Museo de Artes y Costumbres Populares (Map pp688-9; 954 23 25 76; adult/EU citizen €1.50/for free; h 3-8pm Tue, 9am-8pm Wed-Sat, to 2pm Sun & holidays), with mock-up workshops of local crafts and some really beautiful old festival costumes.

Isla Mágica
This large amusement park (Map pp688-9; 954 902 161716; www.islamagic.es; adult/under 16yr & senior late Jun–mid-Sep all day €23.50/16.50, evening €16.50/12, late-Sep–late Oct all day €21/15, evening €15/11; h 11am-7pm Tue-Fri, to 10pm Sat & Sun Apr-late Jun, to 11pm Mon-Fri & Sun, to midnight Sat late Jun–early Sep, to 9pm or 10pm Fri & Sat early Sep–Oct, closed Nov-Mar) provides a surefire great day’s fun for kids and all lovers of white-knuckle rides. It stands on the Isla de La Cartuja, a tongue of land lying between two branches of Río Guadalquivir, 2km northwest of the cathedral. The theme is 16th-century Spanish colonial adventure, and highlight rides include El Jaguar, a roller coaster with high-speed 360° turns, and the Anaconda water roller coaster, which features vertiginous drops. Opening hours vary from year to year, so you should confirm times before going.

Isla Mágica uses part of the site of Expo ’92. Other parts of the futuristic site have been turned into a technology park called Cartuja 93.

Both buses C1 and C2 (p707) run to Isla Mágica.

WALKING TOUR
This route will acquaint you with the main central neighbourhoods of Seville as a preliminary to more in-depth investigations.

Start on Plaza del Triunfo, flanked by Seville’s two great monuments, the cathedral (1; p690) and the Alcázar (2; p695). From here take a wander through the narrow lanes and pretty plazas of the Barrio de Santa Cruz (p697) – Plaza Dona Elvira (3), Plaza de los Ven-erable (4), Plaza de Santa Cruz (5), Calle Santa Teresa and Calle Mateos Gago. You’ll very likely want to return to some of the bars, restaurants and shops here later. Calle Mateos Gago brings you out in front of La Giralda (6; p694). Now head up pedestrian Calle Álvarez Quintero to El Centro, the age-old true centre of Seville, for a look at Plaza de San Francisco.

WALKING FACTS
Start Plaza del Triunfo
Finish Cathedral
Distance 4km
Duration two hours plus stops
SEVILLE • Courses

AE ANDALUCÍA

Arts centre.

Espacio Meteora (espaciometeora.com; Calle Duque Cornejo 16A) Innovative contemporary.

Calle Conde de Torrejón 19) Flamenco, classical, hip-hop, one-month intensive summer courses.

North along Calle Sierpes, a key downtown area.

Alcázar gardens

SEVILLE FOR CHILDREN

LINC

Lenguaviva

Spain to study Spanish. The best schools offer further information.

Tourist offices and El Giraldillo (p690) have detailed maps.

Language

Seville is one of the most popular cities in Spain to study Spanish. The best schools offer both short- and long-term courses at a variety of levels:

Carpe Diem (Map pp692-3; % 954 21 70 58; www.carpediemsevilla.com; Calle Fabiola 1) Long-term courses in all flamenco arts, also one-month intensive summer courses.

Sevilla Dance Centre (Map pp688-9; % 954 38 39 02; Calle Conde de Torrejón 19) Flamenco, classical, hip-hop, contemporary.

Albareda 19)

Giralda Center (Map pp692-3; % 954 21 31 65; www.giraldacenter.com; Calle Mateos Gaos 17)

Lenguaviva (Map pp688-9; % 954 90 51 31; www.lenguaviva.es) Carpe Diem

LINC (Map pp692-3; % 954 50 04 59; www.linc.tv; Calle General Polavieja 13)

SEVILLE FOR CHILDREN

Open spaces such as the banks of the Guadalquivir, Parque María Luisa (p698) and the Alcázar gardens (p696) are great places for young children to let off some steam. They’ll enjoy feeding the doves at Plaza de América in Parque María Luisa. Isla Mágica (p699) is a huge day of fun: these aged over 10 will get the most out of the rides. Another sure hit is a city tour (below) in an open-top double-decker or horse-drawn carriage. On Sunday morning visit the pet market in Plaza de la Alfalfa.

TOURS

Cruces Turísticos Torre del Oro (Map pp692-3; % 954 56 16 92; adult/under 14yr €12/free) One-hour sightseeing river cruises from the Torre del Oro, every half-hour from 11am; last departure can range from 6pm in winter to 10pm in summer.

Horse-drawn carriages These wait near the cathedral and Plaza de España and Puerta de Jerez, charging €30 for up to four people for a one-hour trot around the Barrio de Santa Cruz and Parque de María Luisa areas.

Sevilla Tour (% 902 101081; www.citysightseeing-spain.com) Open-topped double-decker buses and converted trams make one-city tours, with earphone commentary in a choice of languages. The €13 ticket (children €5) is valid for 24 hours and you can hop on or off near the Torre del Oro (Map pp692–3; Avenida de Portugal behind Plaza de España (Map pp688–9) or the Isla de La Cartuja (Map pp688–9). Buses typically leave every 30 minutes between 7am and 8pm.

Sevilla Walking Tours (% 902 15 82 26; www.sevilawalkingtours.com) English-language tours of the main monumental area, at 10.30am Monday to Saturday lasting about 1½ hours for €10. The same group also offers tours of the cathedral and Alcázar.

Tour por Sevilla/Sevimara (% 954 56 06 93; www.$busturisticos) Similar deal to Sevilla Tour but doesn’t start till 10am.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Seville’s Semana Santa processions (see the boxed text, opposite) and its Feria de Abril, a week or two later, are worth travelling a long way for.

Feria de Abril The April Fair, in the second half of the month, is a kind of release after the solemnity of Semana Santa. The biggest and most colourful of all Andalucía’s ferias, it takes place on a special site, El Real de la Feria, in the Los Remedios area southwest of the city centre. The ceremonial lighting of the feria grounds on the Monday night is the starting gun for six nights of sevillanos’ favourite activities: eating, drinking, talking, dressing up and dancing till dawn. Much of the site is occupied by private casetas (enclosures), but there are also public ones, where much the same fun goes on. There’s also a huge fairground. In the afternoons from about 1pm, those with horses and carriage parade about the feria grounds in their finery (horses are dressed up too). It’s also during the feria that Seville’s major bullfighting season takes place.

SEMAÑA SANTA EN SEVILLA

Nowhere in Spain is Holy Week marked with quite such intense spectacle, solemnity and joy, and quite such weight of tradition, pride and overriding adoration of the Virgin, as in Seville.

Every day from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday, large, richly bedecked images and life-size tableaux from the Easter story are carried from Seville’s churches through the streets to the cathedral, accompanied by processions that may take more than an hour to pass, and watched by vast crowds. These rites have been going on in their present form since the 17th century, when many of the images – some of which are supreme works of art – were created.

The processions are organised over by 50 different hermandades or cofradías (brotherhoods, some of which include women), each normally with two pasos (sculptural representations of events from Christ’s Passion).

The first paso focuses on Christ; the second is an image of the Virgin. They are carried by teams of about 40 bearers called costaleros, who work in relays as each supports a weight of about 50kg. The pasos move with a hypnotic swaying motion to the rhythm of their accompanying bands and the commands of their bell-striking capataz (leader).

The climactic paso of Holy Week is the madrugada (early hours) of Good Friday, when some of the most respected or popular brotherhoods file through the city. The first to reach the carrera oficial, at about 1.30am, is the oldest brotherhood, El Silencio, which goes in complete silence. At about 2am comes Jesús del Gran Poder, whose 17th-century Christ is a masterpiece of Sevillian sculpture. Around 3am comes La Macarena, whose much adored Virgin is Seville’s supreme representation of the grieving-yet-hoping mother of Christ. Then come El Calvario, from the Iglesia de la Magdalena, then Esperanza de Triana and finally, at about 6am, Los Gitanos, the gitanos (Roma) brotherhood.

The Sunday evening, just four brotherhoods make their way to the cathedral, and finally, on Easter Sunday morning, only one, the Hermandad de la Resurrección.

Procession schedules are widely available during Semana Santa, and the website www.semana-santa.org (in Spanish) is devoted to Holy Week in Seville. It’s interesting to see a brotherhood passing through its own neighbourhood or as it leaves or re-enters its church — always an emotional moment. Crowds along most of the official route make it hard to get much of a view there, but if you arrive near the cathedral early enough in the evening, you can usually get quite a good view.

If you’re not in Seville for Semana Santa, you can see what it’s about from some of the churches housing the famous images. The Basílica de La Macarena (Map pp688–9; % 954 90 18 00; Calle Béquer 1; museum €3; % 9am-2pm & 5-9pm) and the Basílica de Jesús del Gran Poder (Map pp688–9; % 954 91 56 72; Plaza de San Lorenzo 13; % 8am-13pm & 6-9pm Sat-Thu, 10am-10pm Fri) are both north of the centre. The Iglesia de la Magdalena (Map pp692–3; Calle San Pablo 12; % usually 8am–11.30am & 6.30-9pm) is a few streets south of the Museo de Bellas Artes.

SLEEPING

There’s a good range of places to stay in all three of the most attractive areas – Barrio de Santa Cruz (close to the Alcázar and within walking distance of Prado de San Sebastián bus station), El Arenal (convenient for Plaza de Armas bus station) and El Centro.

Room rates in this section are for each establishment’s high season — typically from March
to June and again from September to October. Just about every room in Seville costs even more during Semana Santa and the Feria de Abril, and sometimes between the two as well. The typical increase is between 30% and 60% over normal high-season rates. Book ahead at this time.

Renting a tourist apartment here can be good value: a clean, comfortable, well-equipped apartment typically costs under €100 a night for four people, or between €30 and €70 for two. Try Apartamentos Embrujo de Sevilla (% 625 060937; www.embrujoedesevilla.com) or Sevilla5.com (% 637 01109; www.sevilla5.com).

Barrio de Santa Cruz

**BUDGET**

**Pensión San Pancracio** (Map pp662-3; % fax 954 41 31 04; Plaza de las Cruces 9; s/d without bathroom €20/30, d with bathroom €45) The furnishings are almost as old as the rambling family house, but it’s all sweet and clean. There’s a curfew at 1.30am, when the house closes down for the night (not during Semana Santa or the feria).

**Huéspedes Dulces Sueños** (Map pp662-3; % 954 41 93 93; Calle Santa María La Blanca 21; s/d without bathroom €20/40, s/d with bathroom €40/50. ) ‘Sweet Dreams’ is a friendly little hotel (budget hotel) with spotless rooms. Those overlooking the street are good and bright. Only the doubles have air-con.

Another recommendation:

**Hotel Córdoba** (Map pp662-3; % 954 22 74 98; Calle Farnesio 12; s/d without bathroom €40/50, s/d with bathroom €50/70. ) Run by a friendly older couple, on a quiet pedestrian street.

**MIDRANGE**

**Un Patio en Santa Cruz** (Map pp662-3; % 954 53 94 13; www.patosanatracruz.com; Doncellas 15; s/d €58/68; ) An understated hotel offering the elaborate traditions of Andalucian décor. The rooms are kept stylish and simple, and the roof terrace has views of the Giralda.

**Hotel Alcántara** (Map pp662-3; % 954 50 14 43; www.hotelmadridsevilla.com; Calle Farnesio 6; s/d €70/85; ) An entrepreneurial musician family converted their 18th-century mansion into this marvellously stylish hotel with 14 elegant, fabulously designed rooms. If you’d like to practice piano or violin, there are a couple of soundproof practice rooms. A glass elevator lifts you to your floor or onto the roof terrace, where you can have your breakfast with views of the Giralda.

**Hostería del Laurel** (Map pp662-3; % 954 22 02 95; www.hosteriadellaural.com; Plaza de los Venerables 5; s/d incl breakfast €72/104; ) Above a characterful old bar on a small Santa Cruz plaza, the Laurel has simple, spacious and bright rooms with marble floors and good-sized bathrooms.

Another recommendation:

**Hostal Goya** (Map pp662-3; % 954 21 11 70; hgoyahostal@e.telefonica.net; Calle Mateos Gago 31; s/d €30/40; ) Since the gleaming Goya had a facelift in 2005, it’s more popular than ever. Book ahead.

**TOP END**

**Hotel Puerta de Triana** (Map pp662-3; % 954 21 54 04; www.hotelpuertadetriana.com; Calle Reyes Católicos 5; s/d incl breakfast €70/96; ) The cosy rooms here have traditional fittings but modern comforts, and all with windows onto the street or interior patios. Downstairs are spacious lounge areas.

**Hotel San Francisco** (Map pp662-3; % fax 954 50 15 41; Calle Álvarez Quintano 38; s/d €55/68; ) A small, friendly hotel on a quietish street, the Maestranza has spotless, plain rooms, all equipped with phone, safe and little chandeliers. The singles are small.

**Hotel Simón** (Map pp662-3; % 954 22 66 60; www.hotelsimonesevilla.com; Calle García de Vinuesa 19; s €45-60, d €70-95; ) A charming small hotel in a fine 18th-century house, with spotless and comfortable rooms, the Simón is extremely popular so book well ahead. It’s built around a lovely patio with a fountain, and adorned with antiques and beautiful Sevillian tilework.

**Hotel Puerta de Triana** (Map pp662-3; % 954 21 54 04; www.hotelpuertadetriana.com; Calle Reyes Católicos 5; s/d incl breakfast €70/96; ) The cosy rooms here have traditional fittings but modern comforts, and all with windows onto the street or interior patios. Downstairs are spacious lounge areas.

**Café Bar Las Teresas** (Map pp662-3; 954 22 74 35; www.oasissevilla.com; Calle Don Alonso el Sabio 1A; dm/d €19/40, all incl breakfast) A friendly budget hotel with spotless rooms. The singles are small.

To eat:

**EAT IN**

For a sit-down meal, modern restaurants preparing Spanish food with enlivening international touches abound. Don’t bother looking for dinner until at least 8pm.

**Café Bar Las Teresas** (Map pp662-3; % 954 21 10 69; Calle Teresa 2; tapas €6-12) Hams dangle proudly from the ceiling and punters are kept happy with plates of traditional tapas.

**Oasis Backpackers’ Hostel** (Map pp662-3; % 954 29 37 77; www.oasissevilla.com; Calle Don Alonso el Sabio 1A; dm/d €18/40, all incl breakfast) A charming, buzzy backpacker central, sister hostel of the massively popular Oasis in Granada, offers 24 hour free internet access and breakfasts on a glass-flowered roof terrace. Each dorm bed has a personal safe, the atmosphere is good and the hosts keep you entertained with tapas tours and Spanish classes.

**Casa Sol y Luna** (Map pp662-3; % 954 21 06 82; www.casasolyluna.com; Calle Pérez Galdós 1A; s/d incl without bathroom €22/38/60, all with bathroom €45) This is a first-rate hostal in a large, beautifully decorated old house, with embroidered white linen that makes you feel as if you’re staying at your grandma’s. The bathrooms are the biggest and most beautiful you’ll find in any hostal in Andalucía. Pay special attention to the 24-hour booking confirmation policy.

**Hostería del Laurel** (Map pp662-3; % 954 21 32 46; Calle Mateos Gago; tapas €15-20) A small, friendly hotel on a quietish street, the Maestranza has spotless, plain rooms, all equipped with phone, safe and little chandeliers. The singles are small.

**Hotel Simón** (Map pp662-3; % 954 22 66 60; www.hotelsimonesevilla.com; Calle García de Vinuesa 19; s €45-60, d €70-95; ) A charming small hotel in a fine 18th-century house, with spotless and comfortable rooms, the Simón is extremely popular so book well ahead. It’s built around a lovely patio with a fountain, and adorned with antiques and beautiful Sevillian tilework.

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AUTHOR’S CHOICE

Corral del Agua (Map pp692-3; % 954 22 07 14; Plaza de Santa Cruz 12; mains €18-22, menu €27) Gastro-tonic invention is the mainstay of this swish restaurant. Try the pork troter with mushroom, young garlic and pea mousse!

Restaurant La Cueva (Map pp692-3; % 954 21 31 43; Calle Rodrigo Caro 18; mains €11-24) This popular eatery cooks up a storming fish casserole (€24 for two people) and a hearty Caldereta (lamb stew; €11).

Restaurante Egaña Oriza (Map pp692-3; % 954 22 72 11; Calle San Fernando 41; mains €15-40; % closed Sat lunch & Sun) One of the city’s best restaurants, Egaña Oriza cooks up superb Andalucian-Basque cuisine.

Restaurante Modesto (Map pp692-3; % 954 41 68 11; Calle Cano y Cueto 5; mains €7.50-43) This classy place presents a full range of fish dishes, including lobster.

El Arenal
TAPAS

Mesón Cinco Jotas (Map pp692-3; % 954 21 05 21; Calle Castellar 1; tapas/media-raciones €3/7) Dine on succulent ham from pigs that have snuffed out the finest acorns in the oak forests near the village of Jabugo (p715). The Solomillo Ibérico (Iberian pork sirloin) in sweet Pedro Ximénez village of Jabugo (p715). The finest acorns in the oak forests near the village of Jabugo (p715). The finest acorns in the oak forests near the village of Jabugo (p715). This popular haunt serves up tempting glasses.

La Sapotales (Map pp692-3; % 954 21 31 62; Calle Placentines 2; tapas €2) Modelled on a Jerez wine cellar, this popular haunt serves up tempting dishes such as white asparagus from the Sierra de Córdoba.

RESTAURANTS & CAFES

Bar Laredo (Map pp692-3; cil Calle Sierpes & Plaza de San Francisco) Watch them slap together a variety of bocadillos (bread roll with filling; €3) for rapid consumption at this popular breakfast stop.

Habanita (Map pp692-3; % 954 606 716546; Calle Golfillo 3; raciones €6-9; % closed Sun evening; v%) This top restaurant serves a winning variety of Cuban, Andalucian and vegetarian dishes.

Triana

RESTAURANTS & CAFES

Ristorante Cosa Nostra (Map pp692-3; % 954 27 07 52; Calle del Betis 52; pizzas €5.50-7.50; % closed Mon) Cosa Nostra has an intimate feel that neighbouring Casa Cuesta. They should be; it’s a real find for food and wine lovers alike.

Kiosco de las Flores (Map pp692-3; % 954 27 45 76; Calle del Betis; mains €15-40; raciones €9; % closed Sun evening & Mon) Still revelling in the transformation from 70-year-old shack to a glam conservatory (just check the photos), this eatery does out great pescado frito (fried fish).

DRINKING

Bars usually open 6pm to 2am weekdays, 8pm till 4am at the weekend. Drinking and partying really get going around midnight on Friday and Saturday (daily when it’s hot). In summer, dozens of open-air late-night bars (terrazas de verano) spring up along both banks of the river.

Barrio de Santa Cruz

P Flaherty Irish Pub (Map pp692-3; % 954 21 04 15; Calle Alemanes 7) The location right next to the cathedral makes this one of the busiest bars serving tapas. Guinness and footy are on offer, and if there’s a game on, the atmosphere is fun.

Antiguiedades (Map pp692-3; Calle Argoño de Molina 40) Blending mellow beats with weird manqueño parts and skrewed bread rolls suspended from the ceiling, this is a strange but cool place. Wander past and it’ll suck you in.

El Arenal

El Capote (Map pp692-3; Calle de Arjona) A fabulous place for al fresco drinking right next to Puente de Triana, by day or night. The music is good, and a young, groovy crowd comes here for cocktails, beer or cappuccino.

Café Isibilia (Map pp692-3; % 954 21 04 60; Paseo de Cristóbal Colón 2) Cúpid welcomes you to this gay music bar, which puts on extravagant drag-queen shows on Thursday and Sunday nights.

El Centro

Plaza del Salvador throbs with drinkers from mid-evening to 1am and is a great place to do litros (small filled rolls).

Alambique, Big Ben, Sirocca and Muí d’Aquí.

El Garlochi hits you with clouds of incense, formidable images and potent cocktails with names like Sangre de Cristo (Blood of Christ).

This is one of the oldest and most popular along the street, Central has yellow bar lights, wooden flea-market chairs and a massive crowd that gathers on weekends and sits outside. Habanilla (Map pp688-9; % 954 90 27 18; Alameda de Hércules 63) Opposite Café Central and just as busy, Habanilla’s pièce de résistance is the lovely handmade bottle-chandelier that dominates the room.

Triana

The wall overlooking the river along Calle del Betis forms a fantastic makeshift bar. Carry your drink out from one of the following places: Alambique, Big Ben, Sirocca and Muí d’Aqui.

They’re all clustered at Calle del Betis 54 (Map pp692-3) and open from 9pm.

La Otra Orilla (Map pp688-9; Paseo de Nuestra Señora de la O) Duck through a passage to the river bank to find this buzzing music bar blessed with a great outdoor terrace.

ENTERTAINMENT

Seville presents a feast of night-time delights, from beer-fuelled celebrations and thumping live beats to experimental theatre and steaming flamenco. See www.discoverseville.com or www.exploreseville.com for the latest action.

Clubs

Clubs in Seville come and go but few a stand the test of time. The partying starts between 2am and 4am at the weekend. Dress smarter (so no sportswear) at the weekend as clubs become pickier about their punters.

Boss (Map pp692-3; Calle del Betis 67; admission free with flyer; % 8pm-7am Tue-Sun) Make it past the two gruff bouncers and you’ll find Boss a top dance spot. The music is a total mix.

Weekend (Map pp688-9; % 954 37 88 73; Calle del Torero 43; admission % 11am-8pm Thu-Sat) This is one of Seville’s top live-music and DJ spots.

Lisboa Music Club (Map pp688-9; Calle Faustino Alvarez 27; admission €; % midnight-6am Wed-Sat) A very hip house and techno club.

Aduna (Map pp688-9; % 954 23 85 82; www.aduna.net; Avenida de la Raza s/n; admission varies; % midnight-late Thu-Sat) This huge dance venue, 1km south of Parque de María Luisa, plays nonstop grooves for manic party people.
Live Music
Fun Club (Map p688-9;  954 25 02 49; Alameda de Hércules 86; admission live-band nights €3-6, other nights free;  11.30pm-late Thu-Sun, from 9.30pm live-band nights) With funk, Latin, hip-hop and jazz bands taking the stage it’s not surprising that this little dance warehouse is a music-lovers’ favourite.

La Imperdible (Map p688-9;  954 38 82 19; Plaza San Antonio de Padua 9; admission free) This epicentre of experimental arts stages lots of contemporary dance and a bit of drama and music, usually at 9pm. Its bar, the El Almacén ( 954 90 04 34; admission free), hosts varied music events from around 11pm Thursday to Saturday.

FLAMENCO
Hotels and tourist offices tend to steer you towards tablao flamenco venues, which can be inauthentic and lacking in atmosphere, though Los Gallos (Map p686-9;  954 21 69 81; www.tablaosallos.com; Plaza de Santa Cruz 11; admission incl 1 drink €27;  2hr shows 9pm & 11.30pm) is a cut above the average.

You’ll catch more atmosphere – though unpredictable quality – at one of the venues and bars that stage regular flamenco nights: Casa de la Memoria de Al-Andalus (Map p686-9;  954 56 06 70; Calle Jiménez de Enciso 28; adult/child €11.50;  9pm) Authentic nightly shows in a great patio setting.
La Carbonería (Map p686-9;  954 21 44 60; Calle Levies 18; admission free;  1hr after 8pm-4am) A converted coal yard in the Barrio de Santa Cruz with two large bars, thronged nearly every night with locals and visitors who come to enjoy the social scene, and live flamenco from about 8pm to 4am.
Sól Cafe Cantante (Map p686-9;  954 22 51 65; Calle del Sol 3; adult/concession €16/11;  1hr Wed-Sat) Up-and-coming flamenco artists take the stage here.

Well-known flamenco artists appear fairly frequently at theatres and concert halls. Seville also stages the biggest of all Spain’s flamenco festivals, the month-long Bienal de Flamenco, in September of even-numbered years.

Bullfights
Fights at Seville’s ancient, elegant, 14,000-seat Plaza de Toros de la Real Maestranza (Map p686-9; Paseo de Cristóbal Colón 12; www.maestranza.com) are among the biggest in Spain. Seville’s crowds are some of the most knowledgeable in the bullfighting world and, many say, the most demanding and difficult to please. The season runs from Easter Sunday to early October, with fights every Sunday, usually at 7pm, and every day during the Feria de Abril and the week before it.

From the start of the season until late June/early July, nearly all the fights are by fully fledged matadors. Seats cost €25 to €110 but only cheap tickets (in the sun at the start of proceedings) may be available to those who don’t book in advance. Most of the rest of the season, novice bullfights (novilleras) are held, with tickets costing €9 to €42. Tickets are sold in advance at Empresa Pagés (Map p686-9;  954 50 13 82; Calle de Adriano 37), and from 4.30pm on fight days at the bullring itself.

SHOPPING
The craft shops in the Barrio de Santa Cruz are inevitably tourist-oriented, but many sell attractive ceramics and tiles.
El Centro has a pretty cluster of pedestrianised shopping streets. Calles Sierpes, Cuna, Velázquez and Tétuán have a host of small shops selling everything from polka-dot flamenco dresses to diamond rings. El Corte Inglés department store (Map p686-9) occupies four separate buildings a little west, on Plaza de la Magdalena and Plaza del Duque de la Victoria. Further north, Calle Amor de Dios (close to Prado de San Sebastián) runs along with Calle de la Magdalena and Plaza del Duque de la Victoria. There’s also a city-centre underground car park.

Getting There & Away
Air
Seville’s Aeropuerto San Pablo ( 954 44 90 00) has a fair range of international and domestic flights. Iberia ( 954 20 04 05; www.iberia.com) flies direct to Barcelona, Madrid, half a dozen other Spanish cities, and Paris. Spanair ( 950 13 14 15; www.spanair.com) also flies to Madrid and, along with Air Europa ( 950 40 15 01; www.air-europa.com) and Vueling ( 950 32 39 33; www.vueling.com), to Barcelona.

From the British Isles there are flights with British Airways ( 950 11 13 33; www.ba.com) from London Gatwick, Ryanair ( 954 72 00 32; www.ryanair.com) from Liverpool and London Stansted, and Aer Lingus ( 950 70 27 37; www.aer lingus.com) from Dublin. Spanair, Lufthansa ( 952 20 01 00; www.lufthansa.com), Air Berlin ( 950 11 64 02; www.airberlin.com), Hapagfly ( 950 39 04 00; www.hapagfly.com) and Iberia all offer flights from German airports; Transavia ( 950 11 44 78; www.transavia.com) comes from Amsterdam, and SN Brussels Airlines ( 950 90 14 92; www.flybrus.com) from Brussels.

Train
The Estación de Autobuses Prado de San Sebastián (Map p686-9;  954 41 71 11; Plaza San Sebastián) there are 10 or more buses daily to/from Cádiz (€10.50, 1¼ hours), Córdoba (€9.50, 1¼ hours), Granada (€18, three hours), Jerez de la Frontera (€6.50, 1¼ hours), Ronda (€9, 2½ hours, five days), Málaga (€15, 2½ hours). This is also the station for other towns in Cádiz province, the east of Seville province, and destinations along the Mediterranean coast from the Costa del Sol to Barcelona.

From the Estación de Autobuses Plaza de Armas (Map p686-9;  954 90 77 37; Avenida del Cristo de la Expiración), destinations include Madrid (€16, six hours, 14 daily), El Rocio (€5, 1½ hours, three to five daily and other places in Huelva province, Mérida (€11, three hours, 12 daily), Cáceres (€15, four hours, six days) and northwestern Spain. This is also the station for buses to Portugal. ALSA (www.alsa.es) runs two daily buses to Lisbon (€36, seven hours daily), one via Badajoz and Évora, the other (overnight) via Faro. Casal (www.autocarescasal.com) has a daily service between Seville and the border at Rosal de la Frontera (west of Arcena), where you can connect with Portuguese buses to/from Lisbon for a total journey time of 10 hours, costing €22. Damas (www.damas-ssa.es) runs twice daily (except Saturday, Sunday and holidays from October to March) to/from Lagos (€18, 5½ hours) via Faro and Albufeira.

Getting Around
From the Airport
The airport is 7km east of the city centre on the A4 Córdoba road. Amarillos Tour ( 952 20 03 17) runs buses between the airport and the Puerta de Jerez (€25, 30 minutes, at least 15 daily). A taxi costs about €15.

Bus
Buses C1, C2, C3 and C4 do useful circular routes linking the main transport terminals and the city centre. The C1, from in front of Estación de Santa Justa, follows a clockwise route via Avenida de Carlos V (close to Prado de San Sebastián bus station and the Barrio de Santa Cruz), Avenida de María Luisa, Triana, Isla Mágica and Calle de Rosolana. The C2, heading west from in front of Estación de Santa Justa, follows the same route in reverse. Bus 32, also from outside Santa Justa, runs to/from Plaza de la Encarnación in El Centro.

The clockwise number C3 will take you from Avenida Menéndez Pelayo (near Prado de San Sebastián bus station and the Barrio de Santa Cruz) to the Puerta de Jerez, Triana, Plaza de Armas bus station, Calle del Torneo, Calle de Rosolana and Calle de Recaredo. The C4 does the same circuit anticlockwise except that from Estación de Autobuses Plaza de Armas it heads south along Calle de Arjona and Paseo de Cristóbal Colón to the Puerta de Jerez, instead of crossing the river to Triana.

Bus rides cost €1.

Car & Motorcycle
Hotels with parking usually charge you €10 to €15 a day for the privilege – no cheaper than some public car parks but at least your vehicle will be close at hand. Parking Paseo de Colón (Map p686-9; car Paseo de Cristóbal Colón & Calle Adriano; per hr up to 10hr €1.20, 10-24hr €2) is a relatively inexpensive underground car park.
AROUND SEVILLE
You’ll find Andalucía’s best Roman ruins at Itálica and, on the rolling agricultural plains east of Seville, fascinating old towns such as Carmona and Osuna that bespeak many epochs of history.

Sanitopence
pop 7000
The small town of Sanitopence, 8km northwest of Seville, is the location of Itálica and of the historic Monasterio de San Isidoro del Campo.

Itálica (955 99 65 83; adult/EU citizen €1.50/fee; h 8am-8.30pm Tue-Sat, 9am-3pm Sun Apr-Sep; 9am-5.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Oct-Mar) is at the southern end of Sanitopence (the end nearest Seville), 1.5km from the Itálica entrance. Founded in 1301, it contains a rare set of 15th-century murals, showing saints and Mudéjar geometric and floral designs; and some fine and historically interesting sculpture in two of its churches, notably a masterly 15th-century Carmona combination of brick and stone. But its Patio de los Naranjos with an ine ptus of 15th-century murals, showing saints and Mudéjar geometric and floral designs; and some fine and historically interesting sculpture in two of its churches, notably a masterly 15th-century Carmona combination of brick and stone. But its Patio de los Naranjos exudes a historic atmosphere, and few Andalucían swimming pools are more spectacularly sited! The refectory-style dining room (menú del día €28) is one of the best in the town.

Casa de Carmona (954 19 10 00; www.casadecarmona.com; Plaza de Lasso 1; r incl breakfast €150-180; p a s a) This luxury hotel occupies one of Osuna’s finest baroque mansions.

OSUNA
pop 18,000 / elevation 330m
Osuna, 91km from Seville, just off the A92 towards Granada, is the loveliest of Seville province’s country towns, with beautifully preserved baroque mansions and an amazing Spanish Renaissance monastery. Several of the most impressive buildings were created by the ducal family of Osuna, one of Spain’s richest since the 16th century. On the central Plaza Mayor, the Oficina Municipal de Turismo (954 81 57 32; h 9am-2pm Mon-Sat and the Asociación Turística Cultural Osuna (954 81 28 52; h 10am-2pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 2pm Sat & Sun) both provide tourist information and hand out useful guides.

Sights
Most impressive are the big buildings on the hill overlooking the centre. On the way up from Plaza Mayor, the Museo Arqueológico (954 81 12 07; Plaza de la Duquesa; admission €1.50; h 11.30am-1.30pm & 5.30-6.30pm Tue-Sun, closed Sun after noon Jul & Aug) has a good collection of mainly Iberian and Roman artefacts. Further up the same hill, the 16th-century Colegiata de Santa María de la Asunción (954 81 04 44; Plaza de la Encarnación; admission by guided tour only) offers a historic atmosphere, and few Andalucían swimming pools are more spectacularly sited! The refectory-style dining room (menú del día €28) is one of the best in the town.

CARMONA
pop 25,000 / elevation 250m
Charming old Carmona, fortified since the 8th century BC, perches on a low hill dotted with old palaces and impressive monuments, 38km east of Seville off the A4 to Córdoba.

The helpful tourist office (954 19 09 55; www.turismo.carmona.org; h 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, to 1pm Sun & holidays) is in the Puerta de Seville at the main entrance to the old part of town. Buses from Seville’s Prado de San Sebastián bus station (€2.50, 20 minutes a day Monday to Friday, 10 on Saturday, seven on Sunday) stop 300m west of here, on Paseo de Estatuto.

Sights
Just over 1km southwest of the Puerta de Seville is Carmona’s impressive Roman necropolis (954 14 08 11; Avenida de Jorge Bonser, admission free; h 9am-2pm Tue 15 Jun-15 Sep; to 1pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun rest of year, closed holidays) You can climb down into a dozen family tombs, hewn from the rock.

The tourist office in the Puerta de Seville, the impressive fortified main gate of the old town, sells tickets (€2) for the gate’s interesting upper levels, called the Alcázar de la Puerta de Seville, which include an Almohad patio and traces of a Roman temple.

Up into the old town from here, the 17th-century ayuntamiento (Town Hall; Calle El Salvador; admission free; h 8am-3pm Mon-Fri), contains a large, very fine Roman mosaic of the Gorgon Medusa. The splendid Iglesia Príncipe de la Santa María (Calle Martín López de Córdoba; admission €3; h 9am-2pm & 5.30-7pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat, closed 21 Aug-21 Sep) was built mainly in the 15th and 16th centuries in a typical Carmona combination of brick and stone. But its Patio de los Naranjos was originally a mosque’s courtyard, and has a Visigothic calendar carved into one of its pilars. Behind Santa María, the Museo de la Ciudad (City History Museum; 954 14 01 28; Calle San Ildefonso 1; admission free; h 10am-2pm & 4.30-9.30pm Wed-Mon to 2pm Tue 16 Jun-31 Aug, 11am-7pm Wed-Mon to 2pm Tue Sep–mid-Jun) provides extensive background for explorations of the town.

The Puerta de Córdoba (Calle Dolores Quintanilla), at the end of the street passing the Iglesia de Santa María, is an original Roman gate, through which there are fine panoramas. South of here is the ruined Alcázar, an Almohad fort that Pedro I turned into a country palace. Ruined by earthquakes in 1504 and 1755, it’s now the site of the luxurious parador hotel, a good place to stop for a drink!

Sipping & Eating
Pensión Comercio (954 14 00 18; Calle Torre del Oro 56; s/d €32/45/; A 1) This lovely old tiled building near the Puerta de Seville provides 14 cosy, clean rooms.

Hospedera Marques de las Torres (954 19 62 48; www.hospederramarquesdelastorres.com; Calle Fermín Molpeceres 2; dm €23, r €60; s a) An almost unreal combination of dorm cabins resembling compartments and comfortable hotel rooms with plush beds in a converted palacio, with a fabulous turquoise pool in the sunny garden.

Parador Alcázar del Rey Don Pedro (954 14 10 10; www.parador.es; s/d €129-161; p a s a) Carmona’s luxuriously equipped parador exudes a historic atmosphere, and few Andalucían swimming pools are more spectacularly sited! The refectory-style dining room (menú del día €28) is one of the best in the town.

Casa de Carmona (954 19 10 00; www.casadecarmona.com; Plaza de Lasso 1; r incl breakfast €150-180; p a s a) This luxury hotel occupies one of Osuna’s finest baroque mansions.

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Sleeping
Hostal Caballo Blanco (954 81 01 84; Calle Granada 1; s/d €30/50; p a s) The friendly ‘White Horse Inn’ is an old coaching inn with courtyard parking and comfy rooms.

Hotel Palacio Marques de la Gomera (954 81 22 23; www.hotelpalaciodelmarqueses.com; Calle San Pedro 20; s/d €92/115; p s a) This luxury hotel occupies one of Osuna’s finest baroque mansions.

Getting There & Away
The bus station (954 81 01 46; Avenida de la Constitución) is 500m southeast of Plaza Mayor. Up to 11 daily buses run to Seville (Prado de San Sebastián, €6.50, 1¼ hours). The train station (Avenida de la Estación) is 1km southwest of the centre, with six trains a day to Seville (€6 to €6.50, one hour).

HUELVA PROVINCE
Andalucía’s westernmost province – an afterthought to most travellers who are not on the way to or from Portugal – is in fact a land of many and surprising rewards. Around half the excellent, sandy, Atlantic beaches of the Costa de la Luz lie along Huelva’s coast. Also here is most of that beautiful and hugely important wildlife sanctuary, the Parque Nacional de Doñana. Anyone with a historical leaning will be fascinated by the Columbus sites outside Huelva city. And northern Huelva, focused on the town of Aracena, is a beautiful rolling hill-country district just waiting to be discovered on foot.

HUELVA pop 145,000
The province’s unspectacular but amiable capital, a port and industrial city, was probably founded by the Phoenicians as a trading settlement about 3000 years ago. What’s here today, however, has almost all been built since the devastating Lisbon earthquake of 1755.
Orientation & Information
Huelva stands between the Odiel and Tinto estuaries. The central area is about 1km square, with the bus station at its western edge, on Calle Doctor Rubio, and the train station at its southern edge on Avenida de Italia. The main street is Avenida Martín Alonso Pinzón (also called Gran Via). The nearby Regional tourist office (959 65 02 00; Plaza Alcalde Cote Mora 2; 9am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun) is well informed and helpful.

Sights
The Museo Provincial (959 25 93 00; Alameda Sundheim 13; admission free; 9am-3pm Tue-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) focuses on Huelva province’s archaeological pedigree, especially its millennia of mining history (see p714). Pride of place goes to a huge restored Roman water wheel and a reconstructed gold-and-wood Phoenician funeral cart.

Sleeping & Eating
In the town centre, the NH Luz Huelva (959 25 00 11; www.nh-hotels.com; Alameda Sundheim 26; s/d €65/130) is a bare walled enclosure with the bus station just around the corner, on Calle 15 de Enero. The Hotel Los Condes (959 28 24 00; Alameda Sundheim 14; s/d incl breakfast €40/59) is large, bright, modern rooms, with big gleaming bathrooms, plus friendly reception, free internet and a reasonable restaurant, add up to the best value in town.

The Casa Museo Martín Alonso Pinzón (959 35 04 11; admission incl multilingual audio-guide €3; 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat Apr-Jul & Sep, 10am-1pm to 6.15pm Tue-Sat Oct-Mar) is a former confessor of Queen Isabel La Católica, helped Columbus find support for his far-fetched plans not only from the Spanish royal court but also from the sailors of Palos and Moguer. On the waterfront below the monastery is the Museo de las Carabelas (Wharf of the Caravels; admission free; 10am-2pm & 4.30-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun & holidays) of Columbus’ crew. There’s a helpful tourist office (959 37 18 98; Calle Castillo S/n; h 9am-2pm & 4.30-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun & holidays) a couple of blocks south of the central Plaza del Cabildo, in Moguer’s Castillo (Castle; admission free; same as tourist office), a bare walled enclosure of Almohad origin, expanded in the 14th century.

The 14th-century Monasterio de Santa Clara (959 37 01 07; Plaza de las Monjas; guided tour €2; h 11am-1pm & 5-7pm Tue-Sat) is where Columbus kept a prayerful vigil the night after returning from his first voyage in March 1493. You’ll see a lovely Mudejar cloister and an impressive collection of religious art.

The 1956 Nobel literature laureate Juan Ramón Jiménez came from Moguer and wrote of childhood wanderings here with his donkey in his home, the Casa Museo Zenobia y Juan Ramón Jiménez (959 37 21 48; www.fundacion-jrj.es in Spanish; Calle Juan Ramón Jiménez 10; 1hr guided tour €2.50; h 10.15am-11.15am & 1.30pm-2pm Tue-Sat) a go. Occupying an old winery, its fish and meat a la brasa (char-grilled) are good and inexpensive.

Getting There & Away
From the bus station (959 25 69 00) at least 18 daily buses head to Seville (€7, 1¼ hours), and four to Madrid (€21, seven hours). Two (except Saturday, Sunday and holidays from October to May) head for Lagos (€13, four hours) in Portugal via Faro and Albufeira. From the train station (959 2436 14) four daily trains head to Seville (€7 to €17, 1½ hours).

LUGARES COLOMBINOS
The Lugares Colombinos (Columbus Sites) are the three townships of La Rábida, Palos de la Frontera and Moguer, along the eastern bank of the Tinto estuary, east of Huelva. All three played key roles in the discovery of the Americas and can be combined in a single day trip from Huelva, the Doñana area or the nearby coast.

La Rábida
The most important of the sites is the 14th-century Monasterio de La Rábida (959 35 04 11; admission incl multilingual audio-guide €3; 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat Apr-Jul & Sep, 10am-1pm to 6.15pm Tue-Sat Oct-Mar, 10am-1pm & April-8.45pm Tue-Sat Apr-Aug, 10.15am-1pm Sun year-round), visited several times by Columbus before his great voyage of discovery and today full of Columbus memorabilia. Abbot Juan Pérez, a former confessor of Queen Isabel La Católica, helped Columbus find support for his far-fetched plans not only from the Spanish royal court but also from the sailors of Palos and Moguer.

On the waterfront below the monastery is the Muelle de las Carabelas (Wharf of the Caravels; admission incl multilingual audio-guide €3; 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat Apr-Jul & Sep, 10am-1pm to 6.15pm Tue-Sat Oct-Mar, 10am-1pm & 4.45-8pm Tue-Sat Apr-Aug, 10.45am-1pm Sun year-round), visited several times by Columbus before his great voyage of discovery and today full of Columbus memorabilia. Abbot Juan Pérez, a former confessor of Queen Isabel La Católica, helped Columbus find support for his far-fetched plans not only from the Spanish royal court but also from the sailors of Palos and Moguer.

Palos de la Frontera
Columbus set sail from Palos on 3 August 1492; the town provided two of his three ships, the Niña and Pinta, and more than half his crew. Palos’ access to the Tinto is now silted up but it’s still proud of its role in the European discovery of the Americas.

A short walk uphill from the central plaza, the Casa Museo Martín Alonso Pinzón (959 68 57 09 83; Calle Colón 24; admission free; h 10am-2pm & 8.5-7pm Tue-Sun) was the home of the Pinta’s captain. Further along Calle Colón is the 15th-century Iglesia de San Jorge (h 10am-noon & 7-9pm Tue-Sun), where Columbus and his men took communion before embarking for their great voyage. In a park down the street is La Fontanilla, a brick well from which they drew water. A plaque above marks the site of the embarcadero (jetty) from which they sailed.

Moguer
This attractive small town provided many of Columbus’ crew. There’s a helpful tourist office (959 37 18 98; Calle Castillo S/n; h 9am-2pm & 4.30-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun & holidays) a couple of blocks south of the central Plaza del Cabildo, in Moguer’s Castillo (Castle; admission free; same as tourist office), a bare walled enclosure of Almohad origin, expanded in the 14th century.

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Getting There & Away
At least 10 buses a day leave Huelva for La Rábida (€1, 20 minutes), with half of them continuing to Palos de la Frontera (€1, 25 minutes) and Moguer (€1.10, 30 minutes). The others go on to Mazagón.

PARQUE NACIONAL DE DOÑANA
Spain’s most celebrated and in many ways most important wildlife refuge, the Doñana National Park is one of Europe’s last remaining great wetlands. Covering 542 sq km in the southeast of Huelva province and neighbouring Seville province, this World Heritage site is a vital refuge for such endangered species as the Iberian lynx (with a population here of 30 to 50) and Spanish imperial eagle (eight breeding pairs), and a crucial sanctuary for six million other birds that spend part of the year here. It’s a unique combination of ecosystems and a place of haunting beauty that is well worth the effort of getting to. To visit the national park you must take a tour from the Centro de Visitantes El Acebuche (p713) on the western side of the park, or from El Rocío (p712) at the park’s northwest corner, or from Sanlúcar de Barrameda (p723) at its southeastern corner. Half the park consists of marismas (wetlands) of the Guadalquivir delta. Almost dry from July to October, in autumn the marismas fill with water, attracting hundreds of thousands of wading winter water birds from the north, including an estimated 80% of Western Europe’s wild ducks. As the waters sink in spring, other birds – greater flamingos, spoonbills, storks – arrive, many to nest. The park also has a 28km Atlantic beach, separated from the marismas by a band of sand dunes up to 5km wide, and 144 sq km of coto (woodland and scrub), which harbours many mammals, including deer, wild boar and semiwild horses.

PARQUE NACIONAL DE DOÑANA
Interesting areas surrounding the national park are included in the 540-sq-km Parque Natural de Doñana, a separate protected area comprising four distinct zones. 

El Rocío pop 1200
The extraordinary village of El Rocío overlooks a section of the Doñana Marismas at the park’s northwestern corner. The village’s sandy streets bear as many hoof prints as tyre marks, and they are lined by rows of verandahed buildings that are empty most of the time. But this is no ghost town: most of the houses belong to the 90-odd hermandades (brotherhoods) of pilgrim-revelers who converge on El Rocío every year in the Romería del Rocío (see right). In fact, a fiesta atmosphere pervades the village on most weekends as hermandades arrive to carry out lesser ceremonial acts.

INFORMATION
The tourist office (959 44 38 08; www.turismodedoñana.com; Avenida de la Canaliega s/n; 9.30am-1.30pm & 3-5pm Mon-Fri) is by the main road at the western end of the village. It can make reservations for park tours. The Centro de Información Las Rocinas (959 44 23 40; 9am-3pm & 4-7pm, to 8pm or 9pm Apr-Aug), 1km south on the A483, has national park information and paths to nearby bird-watching hides.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES
The heart of the village is the Ermita del Rocío (h 8am-9pm), the church housing the celebrated statue of the Virgin, which was found here in a tree by a hunter from Almonte back in the 13th century. Carrying it home, the hunter stopped for a rest and the statue miraculously made its own way back to the tree. Before long a chapel was built where the tree had stood (now El Rocío) and pilgrims were making for it. Today, nearly 100 hermandades (brotherhoods) from around and beyond Andalucía, some comprising several thousand men and women, travel to El Rocío each year on foot, on horseback and in gaily decorated covered wagons pulled by cattle or horses, using cross-country tracks.

Solemn is the last word you’d apply to this quintessentially Andalucian event. The ‘pilgrims’ dress in bright Andalucian costume and sing, dance, drink and romance their way to El Rocío.

Things reach an ecstatic climax in the early hours of the Monday. Members of the hermandad of Almonte, which claims the Virgin for its own, barge into the church and bear her out on a float. Chaotic struggles ensue as others battle with the Almonte lads for the honour of carrying La Blanca Paloma, but somehow good humour survives and the Virgin is carried round to each of the brotherhood buildings, finally returning to the Ermita in the afternoon.

SLEEPING & EATING
Don’t bother even trying for a room at Romeria time.

Doñana Bird Tours (95 957 5460; www.donanabirdtours.com; 9hr trip 1-3 people €110) Top-class bird tours led by locally-resident British bird expert and author John Butler.

Doñana Nature (959 44 21 60; www.donana-nature.com; Calle Las Carretas 10, El Rocío; 3hr trip per person €23) Half-day trips, at 8am and 3.30pm daily, are of general-interest, English- and French-speaking guides available.

Donana Escútre (959 44 24 74; Avenida de la Canaliega s/n; per 1hr/2hr/half-day €17/23/41) Offers enjoyable guided horse rides through the woodlands west of El Rocío.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS
Every Pentecost (Whitsun tide), the seventh weekend after Easter, El Rocío is inundated with up to a million pilgrim-revelers from all corners of Spain in the Romería del Rocío (Pilgrimage to El Rocío). This vast cultivity revolves around the tiny image of Nuestra Señora del Rocío, which was found here in a tree by a hunter from Almonte back in the 13th century. Carrying it home, the hunter stopped for a rest and the statue miraculously made its own way back to the tree. Before long a chapel was built where the tree had stood (now El Rocío) and pilgrims were making for it.

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West of Huelva

These two small resorts on the long, sandy beach running northwest from the national park provide alternative bases to El Rocío. Matalascañas town itself is a sad contrast to the adjacent wildernesses, but Mazarón, 28km up the coast, is lower-key. At Cuesta de Manelli, between the two, a 1.2km boardwalk leads across 100m-high dunes from a car park to the beach through glorious pines and junipers. Both towns have large camping grounds and these are the best hotels:

Hotel Albaida (959 37 60 29; www.hotelaibaida.com; Carretera Huelva-Matalascañas, Mazarón; s €44-65, d €67-102, all incl breakfast; p a) A small hotel in comfortable yet appealing rustic style. Book ahead.

Parador de Mazarón (959 53 63 00; www.parador.es; Playa de Mazarón; s/d €120/150; p a) The luxurious rooms all have sea views, 6km east of central Mazarón.

Getting There & Away
Three daily buses run between Seville (Plaza de Armas) and Matalascañas (€6, 1¾ hours) via El Rocío (€5.50, 1½ hours). One or two further services along the A483 between Almonte and El Rocío stop at El Matalascañas. All these buses will stop on request outside El Acebuchete visitors centre.
From Huelva, buses go to Mazarón (€1.80, 35 minutes, up to 13 daily), with just two of these (Monday to Friday only) continuing to Matalascañas (€3.90, 50 minutes). Extra services may run in summer. You can travel between Huelva and El Rocío by choosing buses at Almonte.

WEST OF HUELVA
The coast between Huelva and the Portuguese border, 53km to the west, is lined nearly all the way by a superb, broad, sandy beach backed for long stretches by dunes and trees. The coastal settlements emphasise tourism but also retain port character.

Punta Umbria, Huelva’s summer playground, has a friendly atmosphere and an attractive location between the Atlantic beach and the peninsular wetlands of the Marismas del Odiel. Some great seafood eateries are dotted along the ocean beach. Further west, Isla Cristina has a bustling fishing port and plenty more of...
the same great beach. Ayamonte stands beside the broad Rio Guadiana, which divides Spain from Portugal. A free road bridge crosses the river 2km north of Ayamonte, but there’s also a ferry from the town (€4 for a car and driver, €1.30 for pedestrians).

Recommended hotels (rates dip by 25% to 50% outside July and August):
- **Hotel Real** (€, 959 31 04 56; hotelrealpuntayumba@h tyl.com; Avenida de Sevilla; s/d €50-85; a ) Good budget place near the east end of Calle Ancha, the pedestrianised main street; the renovated rooms are positively stylish.
- **Hotel El Paraíso Playa** (€, 959 31 02 35; www .hotelelparaisoplaya.com; Avenida de la Playa, Isla Cristina; s/d €65/129; p a i s ) A friendly and attractive two-storey hotel, with restaurant, a stone’s throw from Playa Central.

### MINAS DE RIOTINTO
**pop 4500 / elevation 420m**
Tucked away on the fringe of Huelva’s northern hills is one of the world’s oldest mining districts – an unevenly, sculpted and scarred landscape that makes a fascinating stop. Copper was being dug up here at least 4000 years ago, iron has been mined since at least Roman times, and in the 19th century the British-dominated Rio Tinto Company turned the area into one of the world’s great copper-mining centres.

The area’s hub is the town of Minas de Riotinto, 68km northeast of Huelva.

#### Sights & Activities
The attractions are run by the **Parque Minero de Riotinto** (€, 959 59 00 25; www.parquemineroderiotinto.siguad.es in Spanish), headquartered at the well-signposted **Museo Minero** (Plaza Ernest Lluch; adult/under 13yr €6/3; h 9am-3pm & 4-7pm), a former residence for school students, opened as a hotel in 2005, provides 95 rooms are positively stylish.

**Hotel Vázquez Díaz** (€, 959 12 84 55; Avenida de Sevilla; s/d incl breakfast €35/49) Characterfully converted village house whose helpful young British owners have walkers foremost in mind.

**Hotel Casa García** (€, 959 14 31 09; www.hotelcasa garcia.com; Avenida San Martín 2, Almonaster la Real; s/d €73/89, 4-person apt €150; p a i s ) A converted farmhouse 11km northeast of town, this is Aracena’s most charming accommodation. Facilities include a pool, riding stables and a good, medium-priced restaurant (mains €8 to €15).

**Hotel Real** (€, 959 12 83 55; Calle Pozo de la Nieve; tour adult/under 19yr €8/5; h tours every hr or half-hr 10.30am-1.30pm & 3-6pm), ranks among Spain’s most picturesque cave systems, is presented with appropriate theatricality. The **Cerro del Castillo** is surmounted by a beautiful Gothic-Mudéjar church and a ruined castle, both built around 1300.

**Sleeping & Eating**
**Hostal Galán** (€, 959 59 08 40; www.hotelgalan es; Avenida La Esquiva 10; s/d €27/39; menu €8.50; a ) Just around the corner from the Museo Minero, Minas de Riotinto’s only accommodation has plain but acceptable rooms and a handy restaurant.

**Hotel Vázquez Díaz** (€, 959 59 08 27; personal .telefonica.terra.es/web/hotelvazquezdiaz; Calle Cañadilla 51, Nerva; s/d €26/43; a ) A welcoming, well-run hotel with decent rooms and its own good restaurant (menu €10), in Nerva, 5km east of Minas.

### ARACENA
**pop 7000 / elevation 730m**
This appealing, whitewashed, old market town, spreading around the skirts of Cerro del Castillo, makes a good base for exploring the lovely, rolling hill country of northern Huelva. Most of the hill country lies within the 1840-sq-km **Parque Natural Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche**, Andalucía’s second-largest protected area.

**Hotel de la Gruta de las Maravillas** (€, 959 12 82 06; Calle Pozo de la Nieve; h 10am-7pm & 4-6.30pm) Faces the entrance to the Gruta de las Maravillas (see below) and sells some maps of the area.

#### Sights & Activities
**Aracena’s biggest tourist attraction, the Gruta de las Maravillas** (Cave of Marvels; €9, 1¾ hours). The Parque Minero is not running trips to the Gruta de las Maravillas. Another trip is to the Cerro del Castillo, a 200m-long underground mine gallery. For those that make a fascinating stop. Copper was being dug up here at least 4000 years ago, iron has been mined since at least Roman times, and in the 19th century the British-dominated Rio Tinto Company turned the area into one of the world’s great copper-mining centres.

The area’s hub is the town of Minas de Riotinto, 68km northeast of Huelva.

#### Sleeping & Eating**
**Hostal Galán** (€, 959 59 08 40; www.hotelgalan es; Avenida La Esquiva 10; s/d €27/39; menu €8.50; a ) Just around the corner from the Museo Minero, Minas de Riotinto’s only accommodation has plain but acceptable rooms and a handy restaurant.

**Hotel Vázquez Díaz** (€, 959 59 08 27; personal .telefonica.terra.es/web/hotelvazquezdiaz; Calle Cañadilla 51, Nerva; s/d €26/43; a ) A welcoming, well-run hotel with decent rooms and its own good restaurant (menu €10), in Nerva, 5km east of Minas.

### The Marte Project
On trips to Peña de Hierro you’ll see the area where, since 2003, scientists from United States’ NASA and Spain’s Centro de Astrobiología in Madrid have been conducting a research programme called Marte (Mars Analog Research & Technology Experiment), in preparation for seeking life on Mars. It’s thought the high acid levels that give Rio Tinto its rust-red colour (the action of acid on iron) are a product of underground microorganisms comparable with those that may exist below the surface of Mars. Experiments in locating these microbes up to 150m below ground level are helping to develop techniques for seeking similar subterranean life on the red planet.

### Getting There & Away
**The bus station** (Avenida de Sevilla) is towards the southeast edge of town. Two daily buses come from Seville (Plaza de Armas; €6, 1¼ hours), or two from Huelva (€6, 2¼ hours), and up to three from Minas de Riotinto (€2.30, one hour). A Calas bus leaves at 10.30am to the Portuguese border just beyond Rosal de la Frontera, where you can change to onward buses for Lisbon (€16, nine hours from Aracena).

### WEST OF ARACENA
The hills, valleys and villages of Huelva’s portion of the Sierra Morena form one of Andalucía’s most surprisingly beautiful landscapes. Most of the villages grew up around forstreskille churches, or hilltop castles constructed in medi- val times to deter the Portuguese. The area is threaded by well maintained walking trails, with ever-changing vistas making for some of the most delightful rambling in Andalucía. Good walking routes are particularly thick in the area between Aracena and Cortegana, making attractive villages such as Alajár, CAstano del Robledo and Almonaster la Real good bases. Discovery Walking Guides’ **Sierra de Aracena and accompanying Sierra de Aracena Tour & Trail Map** are terrific aids to the walker here.

### Getting There & Away
**The bus station** (Avenida de Sevilla) is towards the southeast edge of town. Two daily buses come from Seville (Plaza de Armas; €6, 1¼ hours), or two from Huelva (€6, 2¼ hours), and up to three from Minas de Riotinto (€2.30, one hour). A Calas bus leaves at 10.30am to the Portuguese border just beyond Rosal de la Frontera, where you can change to onward buses for Lisbon (€16, nine hours from Aracena).
CÁDIZ PROVINCE

It’s hard to fathom how an area little more than 100km from north to south or east to west can encompass such variety. Cosmopolitan, cultured, fun-loving Cádiz can seem a world away from nearby Jerez de la Frontera, where aristocratic, sherry-quaffing, equestrian elegance rubs shoulders with poor quarters that have nurtured some of the great flamenco artists; and neither city has much in common with the unromantic industrial port of Algeciras. The colourful, bustling towns of the ‘sherry triangle’ give way to the long, sandy beaches of the Atlantic coast and the hip international surf scene of Tarifa. Inland, the majestic cork forests of Los Alcornocales yield the rugged peaks and pristine white villages of the Sierra de Grazalema. Active travellers in Cádiz can enjoy Europe’s best windsurfing, hike dramatic mountains, trek the countryside on horseback or train their binoculars on some of Spain’s most spectacular birds. Meanwhile, the province’s fascinatingly diverse history is ever-present in the shape of thrillingly-sited hilltop castles, beautiful churches and medieval mosques.

CÁDIZ
pop 132,000

Once past the coastal marshes and industrial sprawl around Cádiz, you emerge into an elegant, civilised port city of largely 18th- and 19th-century construction. Cádiz is crammed onto the head of a promontory like some huge, overcrowded, ocean-going ship, and the tang of salty air and ocean vistas are never far away. It has a long and fascinating history, absorbing monuments and museums and some enjoyable places to eat and drink – yet it’s the people of Cádiz, the gaditanos, who make the place truly special. Warm, open, cultured and independent-minded, most gaditanos are concerned chiefly to make the most of life – whether simply enjoying each other’s company in the city’s bars or plazas, or indulging in Spain’s most riotous spring carnival.

History
It may be the oldest city in Europe. Classical sources speak of the founding of the Phoenician trading base called Gadir around 1100 BC.

In less-distant times, Cádiz began to boom after Columbus’ trips to the Americas. He sailed from here on his second and fourth voyages. Cádiz attracted Spain’s enemies too: in 1587 England’s Sir Francis Drake ‘singed the king of Spain’s beard’ with a raid on the harbour, delaying the imminent Spanish Armada. In 1596 Anglo-Dutch attackers burnt almost the entire city.

Cádiz’s golden age was the 18th century, when it enjoyed 75% of Spanish trade with the Americas. It grew into the richest and most cosmopolitan city in Spain and gave birth to Spain’s first progressive, liberal middle class. During the Napoleonic Wars, Cádiz held out under French siege from 1810 to 1812, and during this time a national parliament meeting here adopted Spain’s liberal 1812 constitution, proclaiming sovereignty of the people.

The loss of the American colonies in the 19th century plunged Cádiz into a decline from which it’s still recovering.

Orientation
Breathing space between the huddled streets of the old city is provided by numerous squares; the four most important for short-term orientation being Plaza San Juan de Dios, Plaza de la Catedral and Plaza de Topete in an arc in the southeast, and Plaza de Mina in the north. Pedestrianised Calle San Francisco runs most of the way between Plaza San Juan de Dios and Plaza de Mina.

The train station is just east of the old city, off Plaza de Sevilla, with the main bus station (of the Comes line) 900m to its north on Plaza de la Hispanidad. The 18th-century Puertas de Tierra (Land Gates) mark the southern boundary of the old city.

Information
You’ll find plenty of banks and ATMs along Calle San Francisco and the parallel Avenida Ramón de Carranza.

Enred@2 (c/w Calles Isabel La Católica & Antonio López; internet per hr €1.50; 11am-2pm & 5-10pm Mon-Sat)

Hospital Puerta del Mar (%956 00 21 00; Avenida Ana de Via 21) The main general hospital, 2.25km southeast of Puertas de Tierra.

Municipal tourist office Main office (%956 24 10 01; Plaza San Juan de Dios 11; 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 5-6pm 15 Jun-15 Sep; Information kiosk (Plaza San Juan de Dios; 10am-1.30pm & 4-6.30pm Sat, Sun & holidays; 5-7.30pm 15 Jun-15 Sep)

Regional tourist office (%956 25 86 46; Avenida Ramón de Carranza s/n; 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1.30pm Sat, Sun & holidays)
Sights & Activities

PLAZA SAN JUAN DE DIOS & AROUND

Broad Plaza San Juan de Dios is surrounded by cafés and dominated by the imposing neoclassical ayuntamiento built around 1800. Between here and the cathedral is the Barrio del Populo, the kernel of medieval Cádiz and a focus of the city’s recent spruce-up programme, now sporting several craft shops and galleries.

CATHEDRAL

Cádiz’s yellow-domed cathedral (956 28 61 54; Plaza de la Catedral; adult/child €4/2; €3.60-3.90 Tue-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) fronts a broad, traffic-free plaza. The decision to build the cathedral was taken in 1716, but the cathedral wasn’t finished until 1838, by which time neo-classical elements, such as the dome, towers and main façade, had diluted Vicente Acero’s original baroque plan. But it’s still a beautiful and impressive construction. From a separate entrance on Plaza de la Catedral, climb inside the Torre de Poniente (Western Tower; adult/child €10). You have to get permission from where the building, which is now sporting several craft shops and galleries.

MUSEO DE CÁDIZ

Cádiz’s fine major museum (956 21 22 81; Plaza de Mina; adult/EU citizen €10/free; admission free Sun; 10:30-2pm Sat, 3-6pm Sun) faces one of the city’s largest and leafiest squares. The stars of the ground-floor archaeology section are two Phoenician marble sarcophagi, carved in human likeness, and a monumental statue of the Roman emperor Trajan, from Baelo Claudia (p733). The fine arts collection, upstairs, has 21 superb canvases by Zurbarán and the painting that cost Murillo his life – the altarpiece from Cádiz’s Convento de Capuchinas. The baroque maestro died from injuries received in a fall from scaffolding while working on this in 1682.

COASTAL WALK

This 4.5km walk takes at least 1¼ hours. Go north from Plaza de Mina to the coastal promenade, with views across the Bahía de Cádiz. Head along the Alameda gardens to the Baluarte de la Candelaria, then turn southwest to the quirky clipped Parque del Genovés. Continue to the Castillo de Santa Catalina (956 22 63 33; admission free; 10am-6pm, to 8pm May-Aug; 30 minutes walk). This is one of the city’s best views. From here you can see the old city’s watchtowers (18th-century Cádiz had no less than 160 of these, built by cafés and dominated by the imposing ayuntamiento). The crowded, narrow streets of the old town, the San Fernando, is well kept but moderately sized, pine-veener furnishings. Some have little natural light.

Hostal San Francisco (956 22 18 42; Calle San Fernando 12; d €49, s/d without bathroom €34/38). Well situated in the old town, the San Francisco has been well kept but modestly sized, pine-veener furnishings. Some have little natural light.

Hostal Fantoni (956 28 27 04; www.hostalfan toni.net; Calle Flamenco 5; s/d €45/60, without bathroom €35/40). Recently attractively remodelled, the friendly Fantoni offers a dozen spotless rooms. The roof terrace catches a breeze in summer.

Hostal Canalejas (956 26 41 73; Calle Cristobal Colón 48; s/d/ triple €48/60). An excellent new hostal in the old city: all the neat, comfortable rooms have pine furniture, comfortable beds; sharing bathrooms, and one or two single beds.

Hostal Bahía (956 25 90 61; hostalbahia@terra.es; Calle Ploica 5; s/d €50/70). All rooms are exterior, impeccably looked-after and have phone, TV and built-in wardrobes.

Eating

Freiduría Las Flores (956 22 61 12; Plaza de Topete; seafood per 250g €2.50). This ever-busy seafood specialises in fried fish and seafood, and Las Flores, a kind of self-respecting fish and chipspery, is one of the best places to sample. It’s worth a visit.

Bar Zapata (Plaza Candelaria; montaditos €1.50-2, raciones 6-10). The crowd often spills out of the door at this highly popular but very narrow street-corner tapas joint. The scrumptious montaditos (open sandwiches) are a specialty, and the jazz/rock/blues soundtrack adds to the enjoyment.

El Aljibe (956 26 66 56; www.pablogrosso.com; Calle Ploica 25; tapas €2.50-4, mains €10-15). Refined restaurant upstairs and civilised tapas bar downstairs. El Aljibe is one of the best bets in town. The cuisine developed by gaditano chef Pablo Grosso is a delicious combination of the traditional and the adventurous. He stuffs his solomillo ibérico (Iberian pork sirloin) with Emmental cheese, ham and piquant peppers.

La Gorda Te Da De Comer (Calle General Luque 9; tapas €1.50). A local favourite, with a terrace directly opposite the cathedral. The food is excellent, and the variety is immense. You might start with raciones, main courses and desserts; there’s a good selection of seafood, as well as an impressive array of tapas. There’s live music some evenings.

AUTHOR’S CHOICE

La Gorda Te Da De Comer (Calle General Luque 1; tapas €1.50, salads €2.50-4, raciones €6; 9-11.30pm Mon, 1-4.30pm & 9-11.30pm Tue-Sat) An incredibly tasty food at incredibly low prices amid cool pop-art design. No wonder competition for the half-dozen tables is fierce. Try the curried chickenstrips with Marie-Rose sauce.

Book accommodation online at lonelyplanet.com
beet the ham and cheese montaditos. In the restaurant, there are great salads, seafood, barbecued meats and "guisos" (stews).

**El Faro** (% 956 22 99 16; Calle San Felix 15; mains €6-22; _O_ Over in Barrio de la Viña, El Faro has a famous and excellent seafood restaurant, decorated with pretty ceramics, and an adjoining less-pricey tapas bar.

**Drinking**
The Plaza San Francisco-Plaza de España-Plaza de Mina area is the hub of the nocturnal bar scene. Things start to get going around midnight at most places, but can be pretty quiet in the first half of the week.

**Medussa** (cnr Calles Manuel Rancés & Beato Diego de Cádiz) Number-one nocturnal magnet for an alternative/studenty crowd; it has red walls and banks of lime-green fluorescent lighting to set the tone. Varied _Di_ and occasional live music - from garage and rock-groove to punk and ska - get the bodies moving.

**Cambalache** (Calle José del Toro 28; _closed Sun_)
This elongated, dimly-lit, jazz and blues bar often hosts live music on Thursdays.

**Woodstock Bar** (% 956 21 21 63; cnr Calles Sagasta & Cánovas del Castillo) This watering hole has a good range of on-tap and bottled international beers and plenty of rock music on the TVs.

**Café Poniente** (% 956 21 26 97; Calle Beato Diego de Cádiz 18; _closed Mon_)
Gay/mixed house- closed Sun & Mon)

**Entertainment**
Dance till dawn? Head out towards Punta de San Felipe (known as La Punta) on the northern side of the harbour. Here, a line of disco bars thumps from around 3am to 6am.

**The Gran Teatro Falla** (% 956 22 08 34; Plaza de Falla) and the Central Lechera (% 956 22 06 28; Plaza de Arquielles/s/n) stage busy programmes of theatre, dance and music.

**Getting There & Around**
See opposite for details of the passenger ferry that leaves from the Estación Marítima (Passenger Port), and heads across the bay to El Puerto de Santa María.

**BUS**
Most buses are run by _Gomes_ (% 956 80 70 59; Plaza de la Hispanidad). Destinations include Seville (%10.50, 1 hour, 12 daily), El Puerto de Santa María (%1.70, 30 to 40 minutes, 23 daily), Jerez de la Frontera (%8.30am-12.45pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat), and other places down the Cádiz coast, Arcos de la Frontera (%6.50, 1¼ hours, six daily), Ronda (%11, three hours, three daily), Málaga (%20, four hours, six daily) and Granada (%28, five hours, four daily).

Los Amarillos operates up to four further daily buses to Arcos de la Frontera (%4.50, 1½ hours) and El Bosc (%7, two hours, plus up to 11 daily to Sanlúcar de Barrameda (%3, 1¼ hours), from its stop by the southern end of Avenida Ramón de Carranza. Some services go less often on Saturday and Sunday. Tickets and information are available at _Viagens Socialtur_ (% 956 28 58 82; Avenida Ramón de Carranza 31).

_Secorbus_ (% 902 22 92 92; Avenida José León de Carranza 99), one of the great poets of the 'Generation of 27', who lived here as a young man, offers tours (%5 to €6.50) form 11am-4pm Sun-Fri, and a restaurant looking out onto a verdant little garden.

**HOTEL MONASTERIO SAN MIGUEL** (% 956 54 04 40; _www.jale.com/monasterio_)
Calle Virgen de los Milagros 27; s/d from €140/184; p a s w Tropical garden pool, value artworks and gourmet restaurant await your pleasure, if your pockets are deep enough for this luxurious hotel in a converted 18th-century monastery.

**EL PUERTO DE SANTA MARÍA**

**Casa No 6** (% 956 87 70 84; _www.casano6.com_; Calle San Bartolomé 14; _s/f_ breakfast €7/10; _p_ This beautifully renovated 19th-century house provides charming, spacious and spotless rooms.

**Hotel Los Cántaros** (% 956 54 02 40; _www.hotelscantaros.com_; Calle Curva 6; s/d €98/115; p a i w Classy Los Cántaros has well-equipped rooms and a restaurant looking out onto a verdant little garden.

**Getting There & Away**
Calle Misericordia sports an enticing string of cheese-and-anchovy filling.

**Bodeguita La Antigua** (Calle Misericordia 8; tapas €3)
Tapas menus are in English and French. Try the albondigas de pescado (fish balls).

**Romerjo** (% 956 54 12 54; Ribera del Marisco s/n; seafood per 250g from €4) A huge, always busy El Puerto institution, Romerjo has two buildings, one boiling the seafood, the other frying it. Choose from the displays and buy by the quarter-kilogram in paper cones.

**Restaurante Sharmara** (% 956 87 64 23; Ribera del Marisco s/n; _f_ 11am-2.30am & 8-11pm Sun-Sat; _p_ 11am-4am Tue-Sun)

**Car & Motorcycle**
The AP4 motorway from Seville to Puerto Real on the eastern side of the Bahía de Cádiz carries a toll of €5.50. The toll-free alternative, the A4, is slower.

There is a handily placed underground car park (Paseo de Canalejas; per 24hr €8) near the port area.

**TRAIN**
From the _train station_ (% 956 25 10 01) up to 37 trains run daily to El Puerto de Santa María (%2.70, 35 minutes) and Jerez de la Frontera (%3.40, 45 minutes), 11 or more to/from Seville (%9, 1½ hours) and two or three to/from Córdoba (%33 to €52, three hours) and Madrid (%60, 5½ hours, two daily).

**Sleeping**
Hostal Costa Luz (% 956 05 47 01; _www.hostalcostaluz.com_; Calle Ntro. del Matadero 2; s/d €40/63; _p_ a i)
Friendly, modern hostel in the bustling vicinity with 11 appealing, medium-sized rooms.

**EL PUERTO DE SANTA MARÍA**

** popping up across the bay and 10km north-east of Cádiz (22km by road), is easily and enjoyably reached by ferry. It was here that Columbus met the owner of his flagship (the _Santa María_), Juan de la Cosa, who was his pilot in 1492. Later, many palaces were built in El Puerto on the proceeds of American trade. Today it’s one of Cádiz province’s triangle of sherry-making towns, and its beaches, sherry bodegas (wineries) and tapas bars make it a fine outing from Cádiz or Jerez. In summer it jumps.

**Orientation & Information**
The heart of the town is on the northwestern bank of Río Guadalete. The ferry El Vapor arrives at the Muelle del Vapor jetty, on Plaza de las Galeras Reales. The good _tourist office_ (% 956 54 24 13; _www.turismoelpuerto.com_; Calle Luna 22; _10am-2pm & 6-8.30pm_ is 2½ blocks straight ahead from the Muelle del Vapor.

**Sights & Activities**
The four-sported _Fuente de las Galeras Reales_ (Fountain of the Royal Galleys), by the Muelle del Vapor, once supplied water to America-bound ships.

**The Fundación Rafael Alberti** (% 956 85 07 11; Calle Santo Domingo 25; admission _€3;_ _11am-4pm Tue-Sun_, a few blocks inland, has interesting exhibits on Rafael Alberti (1902-99), one of the great poets of the ‘Generation of 27’, who lived here as a child. The impressive 15th- to 18th-century _Iglesia Mayor Prioral_ ( _8.30am-12.45pm Mon-Fri_ , to noon Sat _& Sun_ ) dominates Plaza de España, a little further inland.

The best-known sherry wineries, _Osborne_ (% 956 86 91 00; _Calle Los Moros_ 7) and _Ferrer_ (% 956 85 61; _Paseo Marítimo_ , offer tours ( _€5 to €6.50_ ) Monday to Friday. It’s best to phone ahead. You can visit _Bodegas 501_ (% 956 85 55 11; _Calle Valdés_ ; admission _€3;_ _10am-11pm Mon-Fri_ without booking.

Pliner-knapped _Playa de la Puntilla_ is a half-hour walk southwest of the town centre – or take bus 26 ( _€0.80_ ) southwest along Avenida Aramburu de Mora.

**Getting There & Away**
Boat
The small ferry _El Vapor_ (% 956 85 59 06), a decades-old symbol of El Puerto, sails to El Puerto (€3, 45 minutes) from Cádiz’s Estación Marítima (Passenger Port) five or six times daily from early February to early December.
**Sanlúcar de Barrameda**

Sanlúcar, 23km northwest of El Puerto de Santa María, is the northern tip of the sherry triangle (see the boxed text, opposite) and a likeable summer resort: it looks across the Guadalquivir estuary to the Parque Nacional de Doñana. Sanlúcar’s nautical history is proud. Columbus sailed from Sanlúcar in 1498 on his third voyage to the Caribbean. So, in 1519, did the Portuguese Ferdinand Magellan, seeking – as Columbus had – a westerly route to the Asian Spice Islands. Magellan succeeded, thanks to the first known voyage round the bottom of South America, but was killed in the Philippines in 1521. His pilot, Juan Sebastián Elcano, completed the first circumnavigation of the globe by returning to Sanlúcar in 1522 with just one of the five ships, the Victoria.

**Orientation & Information**

Sanlúcar stretches 2.5km along the south-eastern side of the estuary and is fronted by a long, sandy beach. Calzada del Ejército (La Calzada), running inland from the seafront Paseo Marítimo, is the main avenue. A block beyond its inland end is Plaza del Cabildo, the central square. The bus station is on Avenida de la Estación, 100m northwest of the middle of La Calzada. The helpful tourist office (956 36 61 10; www.turismosanlucar.com; 10am-2pm, variable afternoon h) is on Calzada del Ejército.

The old fishing quarter, Bajo de Guía, site of Sanlúcar’s best restaurants and boat departures for Parque Nacional de Doñana, is 750m northeast from La Calzada. Here, the Centro de Visitantes Fábrica de Hielo (956 36 18 35; Bajo de Guada s/h; 9am-7pm or 8pm) provides displays and information on the Parque Nacional de Doñana.

**Sights**

From Plaza del Cabildo, cross Calle Ancha to Plaza San Roque and head up Calle Bretones, which becomes Calle Cuesta de Belén and doglegs up to the Palacio de Orleáns y Borbon (admission free; 10am-13.30pm Mon-Fri), a beautiful neo-Mudéjar palace that was built as a summer home for the aristocratic Montpensier family in the 19th century but is now Sanlúcar’s town hall. From its entrance at the top of Calle Cuesta de Belén, a block to the left along Calle Caballeros, is the 15th-century Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la O (9am-1pm Sun, 7.30-8pm Sun-Fri). Next door is the Palacio de los Duques de Medina Sidonia (956 36 01 61; www.oficinadasidonia.com in Spanish; Plaza Condes de Nueva 1; admission €3; 9am & noon Sun by appointment, café 9am-2pm & 3.30-5pm daily), the large, rambling and ancient home of the aristocratic family that once owned more of Spain than anyone else. The house bursts with antiques and paintings by Goya, Zurbarán and other famous Spanish artists.

Some 200m further along the street is the 15th-century Castillo de Santiago (Plaza del Castillo), which remains closed to visitors, amid buildings of the Barbajillo sherry company. From here walk downhill to the town centre.

**Sherry Bodegas**

Sanlúcar produces a distinctive sherrylike wine, manzanilla (see the boxed text Liquid Gold, opposite). Three bodegas give tours for which you don’t need to book ahead:

- **Barbadillo** (956 38 55 00; Calle Luis de Eguilaz 11; tours in English €3; 11am Tue-Sat, in Spanish noon & 1pm Mon-Sat) Near the castle.
- **Bodegas Hidalgo-La Gitana** (956 38 53 04; Calle Banda Playa; tours in English & Spanish €3• h noon Wed; Fri & Sat)
- **La Cigarrera** (956 38 12 85; Plaza de Madre de Dios; tours €2.50; 10am-2pm Mon-Sat)

**Parque Nacional de Doñana**

From Bajo de Guia, Vías Doñana (956 36 25 40; Calle San Juan 20, tours per person €16) operates 3½-hour tours into the national park, at 8.30am and 2.30pm on Tuesday and Friday (the afternoon trips go at 4.30pm from May to mid-September). After the river crossing, the trip is by 20-person 4WD vehicle, visiting much the same spots as the tours from El Acebuché (p713). Book as far ahead as you can and either take mosquito repellent, or cover up.

**Festivals & Events**

The Sanlúcar summer gets going with the spring Feria de la Manzanilla, in late May or early June, and blossoms in July and August with jazz, flamenco and classical-music festivals, one-off concerts by top Spanish bands, and Sanlúcar’s unique horse races, the Carreras de Caballo, in which thoroughbred racehorses thunder along the beach during a couple of three- or four-day evening meetings during August.

**Sleeping**

Book well ahead at holiday times.

- **Hostal La Bohemia** (956 36 95 99; Calle Don Claudio 5; s/d €25/40) Pretty, folksy-painted chairs dot the corridors of this little hostal, 300m northeast of Plaza del Cabildo; rooms are neat and clean.
- **Hotel Los Helechos** (956 36 11 49; www.hotelslehechos.com; Plaza Madre de Dios 9; s/d €47/62; p a) Off Calle San Juan, 200m from Plaza del Cabildo, the brightly decorated rooms here are mostly set around two plant-filled patios.
- **Hotel Posada de Palacio** (956 36 48 40; www.posadadepalacio.com; Calle Caballeros 17; s/d €85/105; p a) Sanlúcar’s most charming and sumptuous lodging is this 18th-century mansion in the upper part of town. Furniture is old-style and heavy.
ANDALUCÍA

Eating
Spanish holds few more idyllic dining experiences than tucking into succulent fresh seafood while watching the sun go down over the Guadalequivir at Bajo de Guía and washing it down with a glass of or two of manzanilla.

Restaurante Virgen del Carmen (Bajo de Guía s/n; fish mains €6-10) This is one of the best of several restaurants at Bajo de Guía. Decide whether you want your fish plancha (grilled) or frito (fried), and don’t skip the starters: langostinos (king prawns) and the juicy cajas de ajillo (clams in garlic), both €9, are specialities.

Hotel Tartaneros (% 956 32 65 96; Bajo de Guía; fish mains €7-14; h closed Sun) The food here gets excellent reviews from everyone and the place is usually packed. Do try the house speciality – hamburguesas de bacalao con salsa, codburgers with a sauce (€8.50).

Cafés and bars, many serving manzanilla from the barrel, surround Plaza del Cabildo: Casa Balbino (Plaza del Cabildo 11; tapas €1.50) is a must for tapas.

Entertainment
There are some lively music bars on and around Calzada del Ejército and Plaza del Cabildo, and lots of concerts in summer.

Getting There & Away
Buses leave from the terminal on Avenida de la Estación. Destinations include El Puerto de Santa María (€1.60, 30 minutes, up to 10 daily), Cádiz (€3, 1½ hours, up to 10 daily), Jerez de la Frontera (€1.60, 30 minutes, seven to 15 daily) and Seville (€7, 1½ hours, six to 12 daily).

Sights
OLD QUARTER
The obvious place to start a tour of old Jerez is the 11th- or 12th-century Almohad fortress, the Alcázar (% 956 52 69 23; Alameda Vieja; admission incl/excl camera obscura €5.40/3; h 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, to 2.30pm Sun mid-Sep–Apr; to 8pm Mon-Sat, to 3pm Sun May–mid-Sep). Inside there’s a beautiful mezquita (mosque), converted to a chapel by Alfonso X in 1264, an impressive set of Baños Arábes (Arab Baths), and the 18th-century Palacio Villavicencio. In the palace’s tower, a camera obscura provides a live panorama of Jerez, with simultaneous commentary. Sessions begin every half-hour until 30 minutes before closing time.

The orange tree-lined promenade around the Alcázar overlooks the mainly 18th-century cathedral (h 11am-1pm Mon-Fri & Mass 7.30pm daily), built on the site of Scheris’ main mosque.

C A D I Z  P ROVINCE  ••  Jé r e z  de l a  F r on ter a

JEREZ DE LA FRONTERA

Jerez (heh-reth) 36km northeast of Cádiz, beguiles with its eclectic mix of sherry, horses and flamenco. Visitors come to see its sherry bodegas but Jerez is also Andalucía’s horse capital and has a large gitano (Roma people, formerly known as Gypsies) community that is one of the hotbeds of flamenco. It stages fantastic fiestas with sleek horses, beautiful people and passionate music.

The Muslims called the town Scheris, from which ‘Jerez’ and ‘sherry’ are derived. The drink was already famed in England in Shakespeare’s time. British money was largely responsible for the development of the wineries from around the 1830s. Jerez high society today is a mixture of andaluz and British, due to intermarriage among sherry families over the past 150 years. Though the sherry industry has brought a genuine prosperity to the town, it’s still a city of extremes: there is 30% unemployment yet also fancy shops, wide and spacious streets, old mansions, many well-heeled residents, and beautiful churches in its interesting old quarter.

Orientation & Information
The centre of Jerez is between Alameda Cristina and Calzada del Ejército, this is a century-old industrialist’s mansion with solidly comfortable rooms.

Hotel Tartaneros (% 956 32 65 96; Bajo de Guía; s/d €104/128; p a ) At the inland end of Calzada del Ejército, this is a century-old industrialist’s mansion with solidly comfortable rooms.

Hotel Doña Blanca (% 956 32 47 47; Calle Tartaneros 8; s/d €86/100; p) At the inland end of Calzada del Ejército, this is a century-old industrialist’s mansion with solidly comfortable rooms.

Restaurante Virgen del Carmen (Bajo de Guía s/n; fish mains €6-10) This is one of the best of several restaurants at Bajo de Guía. Decide whether you want your fish plancha (grilled) or frito (fried), and don’t skip the starters: langostinos (king prawns) and the juicy cajas de ajillo (clams in garlic), both €9, are specialities.

Casa Balbino (Plaza del Cabildo 11; tapas €1.50) is a must for tapas.

Eating
Spain holds few more idyllic dining experiences than tucking into succulent fresh seafood while watching the sun go down over the Guadalequivir at Bajo de Guía and washing it down with a glass of or two of manzanilla.

Restaurante Virgen del Carmen (Bajo de Guía s/n; fish mains €6-10) This is one of the best of several restaurants at Bajo de Guía. Decide whether you want your fish plancha (grilled) or frito (fried), and don’t skip the starters: langostinos (king prawns) and the juicy cajas de ajillo (clams in garlic), both €9, are specialities.

Hotel Tartaneros (% 956 32 65 96; Bajo de Guía; fish mains €7-14; h closed Sun) The food here gets excellent reviews from everyone and the place is usually packed. Do try the house speciality – hamburguesas de bacalao con salsa, codburgers with a sauce (€8.50).

Cafés and bars, many serving manzanilla from the barrel, surround Plaza del Cabildo: Casa Balbino (Plaza del Cabildo 11; tapas €1.50) is a must for tapas.

Entertainment
There are some lively music bars on and around Calzada del Ejército and Plaza del Cabildo, and lots of concerts in summer.

Getting There & Away
Buses leave from the terminal on Avenida de la Estación. Destinations include El Puerto de Santa María (€1.60, 30 minutes, up to 10 daily), Cádiz (€3, 1½ hours, up to 10 daily), Jerez de la Frontera (€1.60, 30 minutes, seven to 15 daily) and Seville (€7, 1½ hours, six to 12 daily).

JEREZ DE LA FRONTERA

pop 196,000
Jerez (heh-reth) 36km northeast of Cádiz, beguiles with its eclectic mix of sherry, horses and flamenco. Visitors come to see its sherry bodegas but Jerez is also Andalucía’s horse capital and has a large gitano (Roma people, formerly known as Gypsies) community that is one of the hotbeds of flamenco. It stages fantastic fiestas with sleek horses, beautiful people and passionate music.

The Muslims called the town Scheris, from which ‘Jerez’ and ‘sherry’ are derived. The drink was already famed in England in Shakespeare’s time. British money was largely responsible for the development of the wineries from around the 1830s. Jerez high society today is a mixture of andaluz and British, due to intermarriage among sherry families over the past 150 years. Though the sherry industry has brought a genuine prosperity to the town, it’s still a city of extremes: there is 30% unemployment yet also fancy shops, wide and spacious streets, old mansions, many well-heeled residents, and beautiful churches in its interesting old quarter.

Orientation & Information
The centre of Jerez is between Alameda Cristina and Plaza del Arenal, connected by Calle Larga and Calle Lancería (both pedestrianised). There are plenty of banks and ATMs on and around Calle Larga. The old quarter is west of Calle Larga.

Ciberjerez (Calle Santa María 3, internet per hr €2; h 10am-11pm Mon-Sat, noon-11pm Sun) Also offers cheap international phone rates.

Tourist office (% 956 32 47 47; www.turismojerez.com; Alameda Cristina; h 10am-3pm & 5-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2.30pm Sat & Sun) Expert multilingual staff.

Sights
OLD QUARTER
The obvious place to start a tour of old Jerez is the 11th- or 12th-century Almohad fortress, the Alcázar (% 956 32 69 23; Alameda Vieja; admission incl/excl camera obscura €5.40/3; h 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, to 2.30pm Sun mid-Sep–Apr; to 8pm Mon-Sat, to 3pm Sun May–mid-Sep). Inside there’s a beautiful mezquita (mosque), converted to a chapel by Alfonso X in 1264, an impressive set of Baños Arábes (Arab Baths), and the 18th-century Palacio Villavicencio. In the palace’s tower, a camera obscura provides a live panorama of Jerez, with simultaneous commentary. Sessions begin every half-hour until 30 minutes before closing time.

The orange tree-lined promenade around the Alcázar overlooks the mainly 18th-century cathedral (h 11am-1pm Mon-Fri & Mass 7.30pm daily), built on the site of Scheris’ main mosque.

A couple of blocks northeast of the cathedral is Plaza de la Asunción, with the handsome 16th-century Antiguo Cabildo (Old Town Hall) and lovely 15th-century Mudéjar Iglesia de San Dionisio.
Northwest of here is the Barrio de Santiago, with a sizable gitanó population. The pride of the excellent Museo Arqueológico (% 956 33 33 16; admission €3; 10am-2.30pm Tue-Sun mid-Jun–late Aug, to 2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Fri to 2.30pm Sat, Sun & holidays 1 Sep-14 Jun) here is a 7th-century-BC Greek helmet that was found in Río Guadalete. Also in this area is the Centro Andaluz de Flamenco (Andalucian Flamenco Centre; % 956 34 92 65; cal.cica.es in Spanish; Plaza San Juan 1; admission free; Tue 9am-2pm Mon-Fri). Jerez is at the heart of the Seville–Cádiz axis where flamenco began and which remains its heartland today. This centre is a kind of flamenco museum, lib­rary and school, with several flamenco videos screened each morning it’s open.

Try not to miss what’s arguably Jerez’s loveliest church, the 16th-century Iglesia de San Miguel (Plaza San Miguel; % 8pm for Mass), just southeast of Plaza del Arenal.

SHERRY BODEGAS

For most bodegas, you need to ring ahead to book your visit (it’s advisable to confirm hours with the tourist offices, which have full details), but you can turn up without booking at these two places:

Bodegas González Byass (% 956 35 70 16; www.bodegastiopepe.com; Calle Manuel María González 12; tours in English 6.30; % 11.30am-2pm & 3.30-5.30pm Mon-Sat 10am-2pm Apr-Oct) One of the biggest sherry houses, handily located just west of the Alcázar.

Sandeman (% 956 15 17 11; www.sandeman.com; Calle Pizarro 10; tours in English & Spanish; % 11.30am-1.30pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 10.30am-2pm Tue & Thu, 11.30am-2pm Sat)

REAL ESCUELA ANDALUZ DEL ARTE ECUESTRE

The famed Royal Andalusian School of Equestrian Art (% 956 31 80 06; www.realescuela.org; Avenida Duque de Abrantes) trains horses and riders in dressage, and you can watch them going through their paces in training sessions (admission adult/child €6/5; 11am-2pm Mon, Wed & Fri Sep-Jul, to 2pm Mon & Wed Aug). There’s an official espectáculo (show; admission adult/child €23/14; % noon Tue & Thu-Sep Jul, noon Tue, Thu & Fri Aug), where the handsome white horses show off their tricks to classical music.

ZOO JEREZ

Only a couple of kilometres west of the centre, Jerez’s zoo (% 956 15 31 64; Calle Taxdirt s/n; adult/child €6.50/4.50; % 10am-6pm Tue-Sun, to 8pm Jun-Sep) houses 1300 beasts, well-established gardens and a recuperation centre for wild animals.

Festivals & Events

Festival de Jerez (late February/early March) Two weeks of music and dance, particularly flamenco.

Feria del Caballo (first half of May) Jerez’s week-long Horse Fair is one of Andalucia’s biggest festivals, with music, dance and bullfights as well as all kinds of equestrian competitions and colourful horse parades through the Parque González Hontoria fairgrounds in the north of town.

Fiestas de Otoño (September) The three-week Autumn festival ranges from flamenco and horse events to the traditional treading of the first grapes on Plaza de la Asunción.

Sleeping

Most rates go sky-high during the Feria del Caballo and you need to book ahead. Buffet breakfast costs €6 to €7.

Hostal/Hotel San Andrés (% 956 34 09 83; www.hotelsanandres.org; Calle Moreno 12; without bathroom €20/28, s/d with bathroom €24/38; % 8am-10pm) The friendly San Andrés’ plant filled, tiled entrance patio is one of the prettiest in Jerez. Rooms are adequate.

Hostal Las Palomas (% 956 34 37 73; www.hostal-laspalomas.com; Calle Higueras 17; s/d without bathroom €25/40; % 8am-10pm) A mini hotel that provides comfortable rooms with TV and winter heating. It has a bright, modern and clean-cut lines.

Hotel Palacio Garvey (% 956 32 67 00; www.villahotel-teles.net; Torreñita 4; s/d €22/32, % 2pm & 4pm) The Garvey is a sensational 19th-century neo-classical palace conversion, with part of the ancient city wall visible from the lift and more of it in the gardens. Décor is luscious.

Eating

TAPAS

Two fine central spots to sample tapas with a sherry are Bar Juanito (Pescadería Vieja 8-10; tapas €2) and the cavelike El Almácen (Calle Ferros 8; tapas €2.50) round the corner.

About 500m north, there are even more brilliant tapas bars surrounding quiet little Plaza Rafael Rivero. Head here after 9.30pm. Don’t miss the montaditos (€1.50 to €3.50) at El Poema (Calle Porvera), El Gallo Azul (Calle Larga 2; tapas €1.80) in a beautiful, circular and historic building, has a street level bar with arty tapas including eggs stuffed with prawns in a mould.

RESTAURANTS & CAFÉS

Sherry is used to flavour local dishes and the sherry trade has introduced English and French elements into the local cuisine.

La Vega (Plaza Estévez s/n; breakfast €4, mains €5.70-12) Imbibe a dose of local life over breakfast, or a snack, at this noisy, bustling café. There’s something to please everyone including churros (long thin doughnuts with sugar) to be eaten with a coffee or hot chocolate.

Méson El Patio (% 956 34 07 36; Calle San Francisco de Paula 7; fish & meat raciones €15-20; % closed Sun afternoon & Mon) El Patio is convivial yet a touch refined. It has lofty ceilings, warm tones and a collection of old radiators. Above all, the food is terrific and there’s a huge choice, especially of prawn dishes.

La Carbona (% 956 34 74 75; Calle San Francisco de Paula 2; mains €9-28; % closed Tue) This popular, cavernous restaurant, with an eccentric menu and young wait staff, occupies an old winery. Specialities include grilled meats and fresh fish.

Drinking

A few bars in the narrow streets north of Plaza del Arenal can get lively with an under-30 crowd late in the evening: Don Bar Deditos (Plaza Vargas 1), Reino de León (Calle Ferros) and La Carboneria (Calle Laredo 7). Northeast of the city centre, La Plaza de Canterburys has bars around a central courtyard that attract a 20s crowd, as do the music bars a little further northeast on Avenida de Méjico.

Entertainment

For what’s-on information, check at the tourist office, visit www.turismojerez.com and look out for posters. A hip venue for live music and salsa classes is Café Teatro La Guardia del Ángel (% 956 34 96 98; Calle Porvera 1; % 8pm-late). Don’t miss café/bar/disco Bereber (% 956 34 00 16; Calle Cabezas 10; % 4.30pm-late), an amazing reformed palace in the Barrio de Santiago, more Moroccan than Spanish. Much of the premises are open-air but there’s a soundproofed disco in the middle.

Several peñas flamencas (flamenco clubs) welcome genuinely interested visitors: ask at the tourist office about events.

Jerez’s Circuito Permanente de Velocidad (% 956 15 11 00; www.circuitodejerez.com), on the A382 10km east of town, hosts several motorcycle and car-racing events each year, including one of the Grand Prix races of the day. El Pórtico Championship, in April or May. This is one of Spain’s biggest sporting events, with around 150,000 fans and their bikes swamping Jerez and nearby towns.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Seven kilometres northeast of town on the NIV is Jerez airport (956 15 00 00). Budget airline Ryanair flies here from London Stansted twice daily and Germanwings flies daily to/from Brussels and many German airports. Iberia (% 956 15 00 09) flies direct to/from Madrid and Barcelona.

BUS

The bus station (% 956 33 96 66; Plaza de la Estación) is 1.3km southeast of the centre. Destinations include Seville (€7, 1¼ hours, about 15 daily), Sanlúcar de Barrameda (€1.60, 30 minutes, seven or more daily), El Puerto de Santa María (€1.20, 20 minutes, seven or more daily), Puerto de Santa María (€1.20, 25 minutes), Cádiz (€2.60, 40 minutes, up to 21 daily), Arcos de la Frontera (% 0.30, 45 minutes, up to 24 daily), El Bosque (€5, 1½ hours, two to six daily) and Ronda (€19, 2½ hours, up to seven daily).

TRAIN

Jerez train station (% 956 34 23 19; Plaza de la Estación) is beside the bus station with trains to El Puerto de Santa María (€1.50, 12 minutes, up to 37 daily), Cádiz (€3.40, 45 minutes, up to 37 daily) and Seville (€6.50, 1¼ hours, up to 15 daily).
**Orientation & Information**
From the bus station, it’s a 1.5km uphill walk to the old town’s main square, Plaza del Cabildo.

- **Tourist office** (956 70 22 66; Plaza del Cabildo; 10am-2pm & 6-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun).<br>
- **Banks and ATMs** are along Calle Debajo del Corral.

- **Tourist Information kiosk** (Posto de Información Turística) is on the old town’s main square. There’s also a **Post Office**.

**Festivals & Events**
Semana Santa (Easter) Processions through the narrow old streets are dramatic; on Easter Sunday there’s a hair-raising running of the bulls.

- **Fiesta de las Lienves** (early August) Three-day festival includes a top-class flamenco night in Plaza del Cabildo.

**Sights**
Plaza del Cabildo is surrounded by fine old buildings with a vertiginous **mirador** (lookout) with views over Río Guadalete and countryside, though its crowning glory, the 11th-century **Castillo de los Duques**, is firmly closed to the public. On the plaza’s northern side is the Gothic-cum-baroque **Basílica-Parroquia de Santa María** (admission €1.50; 10am-1pm & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat, Oct-Mar). On the eastern side, the **Parador Casa del Corregidor** hotel is a reconstruction of a 16th-century magistrate’s house.

Along the streets east of here seek out lovely buildings such as the **Iglesia de San Pedro** (Calle Núñez de Prado; admission €1; 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 1.30pm Sun), another Gothic-baroque confection, and the 17th-century **Palacio Mayorazgo**, now a community building, with a Renaissance façade and pretty patios.

**Tours**
One-hour guided tours (€5) of the old town’s monuments start from the tourist office at 10.30am Monday to Saturday. Tours of Arcos’ pretty patios start at noon Monday to Friday.

**SLEEPING & EATING**
**Hotel Enrique Calvillo** (956 71 16 05; Avenida la Diputación s/n; 10am-2pm & 6-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm & 6-8pm Sat, 9am-2pm Sun; 9am-1pm & 4-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun; www.tugasa.com; Calle Huelva 1; mains €9-15; 4% Hacienda) Near the park information office, the 19 attractive rooms, have stained-wood furniture and nicely tiled bathrooms, and there’s a comfy lounge with internet.

**Hotel Tabanco** (956 71 60 81; Calle Fuente 3; s/d incl breakfast €30/50; closed 2nd half Jun; closed 2nd half Jun; s/d €25/45; 5% IVA). Up in the village centre, this almost-new hotel provides spotless, tasteful rooms with good beds and bathrooms. The adjoining **Mesón El Tabanco** (956 71 60 81; s/d €25/45; 5% IVA) has a lively Spanish atmosphere and flamenco soundtrack. Good montaditos and raciones are available in the vaulted bar while the small restaurant section serves up meaty main dishes and tempting desserts.

**El Convento** (956 70 33 22; Calle Marqués de Torresoto 7; 10am-2pm & 8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm & 6-8pm Sat, 9am-2pm Sun; www.elconvento.com; Plaza del Cabildo; s/d €116/145; 5% IVA). A simple old-town hotel, there are four pretty little rooms and a roof terrace.

**Hotel Real de Veas** (956 70 49 77; Calle Corredores; s/d €20/25; 5% IVA). A simple old-town hotel, there are four pretty little rooms and a roof terrace.

**Hotel El Convento** (956 70 22 66; Calle Marqués de Torresoto 5; 10am-2pm & 6-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat, 9am-1pm Sun; www.parador.es; Plaza del Cabildo; s/d €116/145; 5% IVA). Typical parador luxury with magnificent panormas. Eight of the rooms have balconies with cliff views. The restaurant (mains €13 to €21, menú €21 to €28) has andaluz specialities such as herb bread and almond sauce.

**Mesón Don Fernando** (956 71 73 26; Calle Botica 5; mains €9-15; 4% IVA). In the pulperia of a palace that dates back to the 17th century, Arcos’ finest restaurant turns out country specialties such as herb bread and almond sauce.

**Getting There & Away**
Services from the **bus station** (956 70 49 77; Calle Corredores) run to Jerez (€2.30, 45 minutes, 18 daily), Cádiz (€4.50 to €5.50, 1¼ hours, 15 daily), El Bosque (€2.50, four hours, 1 daily), Ronda (€7.50, two hours, four daily) and Seville (€7, two hours, two daily). Frequencies to some destinations are reduced on Saturday and Sunday.
Grazalema  

pop 2200 / elevation 825m  

The most popular traveller’s base in the Sierra de Grazalema is a picture-postcard, red-tile-roofed village tucked into a corner of beautiful mountain country beneath the rock-climbers’ crag Peñón Grande. Local products include pure wool blankets and rugs.

The village centre is the pretty Plaza de España. Plaza Pequeña, 7; s/d incl breakfast €31; h 7am-2pm & 4-9pm, with a shop selling local products. Two banks on Plaza Españ a have ATMs.

Horizon (% /fax 956 13 23 63; http://www.horizonaventura.com; Calle Cortales Terceros 29; per person from €13) is a highly experienced adventure firm that will take you climbing, bungee jumping, canyoning, caving, paragliding or walking, with English-speaking guides.

SLEEPING & EATING  

Casa de las Piedras (% /fax 956 13 20 14; www.casadelaspiedras.net; Calle Las Piedras 32; s/d with shared bathroom €10/20, s/d with bathroom €37/45; a i) This good-value hostal occupies a fine old village house with a couple of pleasant patios. All 32 assorted rooms have winter heating and the restaurant (menus €6 to €11) serves hearty meals.

Hotel Peñón Grande (% 956 13 24 34; www.hotelgraza lema.com; Plaza de España 7; s/d incl breakfast €31; h 7am-2pm & 4-9pm). A small, friendly hotel just off Plaza de España. It has an attractively rustic style.

La Mejorana (% 956 13 23 27; www.lamejorana.net; Calle Santa Gara 6; incl breakfast €15; s) A lovely country-style house towards the upper end of the village, hospitable La Mejorana has just five rooms with beautiful wrought-iron beds, plus a large lounge and kitchen, and a leafy garden that even manages to fit in a pool.

Mesón El Simancón (% 956 13 24 21; Plaza Azomaderos; mains €7-12, menu €13; h closed Tue). There are plenty of places to eat and drink around Plaza de España, and on little Calle Agua, running between the plaza and the large village car park. The Simancón, right by the car park, serves well prepared ham, beef, guail, venison, wild boar and relevitos at tables outside or in a dining room adorned with deer heads.

Zahara de la Sierra  

pop 1600 / elevation 550m  

Topped by a crag with a ruined castle, Zahara is the most dramatically sited of the area’s villages. The 18km drive from Grazalema via the vertiginous 1331m Puerto de los Palomars (Doves’ Pass, but with more vultures than doves) is quite otherworldly if there’s heavy mist along the way. The village centres on Calle San Juan, where you’ll find the natural park’s helpful Punto de Información Zahara de la Sierra (% /fax 956 12 31 14; Plaza del Rey 3; h 9am-2pm & 4-7pm).

Zahara’s streets invite investigation, with vistas framed by tall palms, hot-pink bougainvillea or fruited orange trees. To climb the hill to the 12th-century castle keep, take the path almost opposite the Hotel Arco de la Villa – it’s a steady 10- to 15-minute climb. The castle’s recapture from the Christians by Abu al-Hasan of Granada, in a night raid in 1481, provoked the Catholic Monarchs to launch the last phase of the Reconquista, which ended with the fall of Granada.

Adventure-tourism firm Al-qutun (% 956 13 78 82; www.al-qutun.com), in Algodonales, 7km north of Zahara, organises canyoning, guided walks, kayaking, paragliding, caving and climbing. Get in touch with the tourist office.

Hostal Marqués de Zahara (% /fax 956 12 30 41; www.marquesdezahara.com; Calle San Juan 3; s/d €22/42; p a) A converted mansion right in the village centre, has cozy rooms with winter heating and a bookcase full of good local reference material.

Hotel Arco de la Villa (% 956 12 32 30; www.tugas a.com/index2.htm; Paseo Nazari s/n; s/d €36/59; p a) All 17 rooms at this sparkling-clean and modern hotel have jaw-dropping views.

Restaurante Los Naranjos (% 956 12 33 14; Calle San Juan; mains €7-12; h 9am-7pm) Serves hearty hill-country platefuls both indoors and outside under the orange trees.

Getting There & Around  

Los Amarillos (% 902 21 03 17) runs buses to El Bosque from Jerez (€5.50, two hours, six daily), Arcos (€2.50, one hour, 11 daily), live from Cádiz (€7, two hours, four daily) and Seville (Prado de San Sebastián, €7, 2¼ hours, two daily). From El Bosque, buses leave for Grazalema (€2, 30 minutes) at 3.30pm Monday to Saturday for rooms during July and August and depart at 5.30am Monday to Friday and 7pm Friday. Los Amarillos also runs twice daily from Málaga to Grazalema (€10, 24 hours) via Ronda.

Comes (% 902 19 92 08) operates two buses each way Monday to Friday between Ronda and Zahara de la Sierra (€3.50, one hour), via Algodonales. There’s no bus service between Zahara and Grazalema.

SOUTHERN COSTA DE LA LUZ  

The 90km coast between Cádiz and Tarifa can be windy, and its Atlantic waters are a shade cooler than the Mediterranean, but these are normally dead coastal settlements, and an intensive music collection.

La Bodeguita (% 956 45 15 82; Calle Marqués de Tamarón 9; tapas €1) This hip bar has good vibes, breakfast (in summer), excellent tapas and an extensive music collection.

Getting There & Away  

Buses run to Cádiz (€4.50, 50 minutes) up to 10 times a day. Buses for Tarifa (€3.80, 50 minutes, about 10 daily), Málaga (€16, 2¾ hours, about five daily) and Seville (€14, three daily, about five daily) stop at La Barca de Vejer, on the N340 at the bottom of the hill. It’s a 15-minute walk up to town from there.
Los Caños de Meca  
**pop 200**  
Once a hippie hideaway, Los Caños straggles along a series of sandy coves, beneath a pine-clad hill southwest of Vejer. It maintains its laid-back, offbeat air even at the height of summer.

At the western end of Los Caños a side road leads out to a lighthouse on a low spit of land with a famous name – Cabo de Trafalgar. It was off this cape that Spanish naval power extended outside to the pool.

**SLEEPING**

*Hostal Minigolf* (% 956 43 70 83; Avenida de Trafalgar 25; s/d €45/50)  
This good little budget place opposite the Cabo de Trafalgar turn-off has fresh, clean rooms, with TV and winter heating, around a simple, very Spanish patio.

*Hostal Mar de Frente* (% 956 43 70 25; www.hotelmardefrente.com; Avenida Trafalgar 3; s/d incl breakfast €48/77, r with sea view €102; h closed Dec-Feb)  
The charming Mar de Frente, right on the cliff edge above the eastern end of the main beach, has bright, comfy rooms with satellite TV and terrace.

*Hostal Madreselva* (% 956 43 72 55; www.madreselva-hotels.com; Avenida Trafalgar 102; s/d incl breakfast €68/84; h closed Oct-March; p a)  
The 18 rooms at this artistically designed and friendly place have their own small gardens, and the bar area extends outside to the pool. Mountain biking, horse riding and surfing can be arranged.

*Casas Karen* (% 956 43 70 67; www.casaskaren.com; Fuente del Madroño 6; r €55-99, q €110-132; p)  
This ecocentric gem, owned by a dynamic young Englishwoman, has seven or so different buildings on a pretty plot, each with a kitchen, lounge, outdoor sitting area and casual andaluz-Moroccan décor. Turn off the main road 500m east of Cabo de Trafalgar, at a tiled ‘Aparta-

**EATING**

*Bar Saboy* (Carril de Manqueuta, Zahara; set menu €10, tagines €9)  
The Saboy, 200m from the main road west of Los Caños, with a thatched roof and fireplace, offers good snacks and meals. The Moroccan lentil soup is gently spiced.

**SLEEPING & EATING**

*Hostal Lola* (% 956 34 70 72; Playa Zahora; mains €10-16; v)  
Unbeatable sea views, stylish building and excellent Spanish cuisine with international, vegetarian and Moroccan additions.

**RESTAURANTES**

*Restaurante La Jabega* (% 956 43 09 42; Calle Tomillo 7; raciones €7-8, mains €12-25)  
Fronting the sands, the Jabega is acclaimed for its fishballs and its fish dish with giant carabineros prawns.

**GETTING THERE & AWAY**

Cádiz from mid-June to early September.

**Zahara de los Atunes**

Plonked in the middle of a broad, 12km, sandy beach, Zahara is elemental. At its heart stands the crumbling old Almadraba, once a depot and refuge for the local tuna fishers, who must have been a rugged lot: Cervantes wrote that no-one deserved to be called a pícaro (scoundrel) unless they had spent two seasons fishing for tuna at Zahara. Today the nearest tuna fleet is at Barbate and Zahara has become a fashionable Spanish summer resort, with an old-fashioned core of narrow streets. It’s a fine spot to let the sun, sea and wind – and, in summer, a spot of lively nightlife – batter your senses.

**SLEEPING & EATING**

*Camping Bahía de la Plata* (% 956 43 90 40; Avenida de las Palmeras; sites per adult/tent €6.50/5.50)  
Good treed camping ground fronting the beach at the southern end of Zahara.

**Hotel Almadraba** (% 956 43 92 74; www.hotelsalma-

draba.com; Calle María Luisa 13; s/d €45/73; h closed Nov; p a)  
This friendly hotel has just 11 simple but attractive rooms with TV, bathroom, winter heating and a popular restaurant.

**Hotel Dona Lola** (% 956 43 90 09; Plaza Thompson 1; s €100, d €130-50; p a)  
Only two minutes from the beach, this is a modern place with good rooms in an attractive old-fashioned style, lovely grounds, and open leisure areas.

**Hotel Gran Sol** (% 956 43 93 09; www.hotelsanalgrim.
com; Avenida de la Playa s/n; s/d €102/116, with sea view €121, all incl breakfast; p a)  
The Gran Sol occupies the prime beach spot, facing the old Almadraba walls on one side and the ocean on the other. It has large, comfortable rooms.

Most restaurants are on or near Plaza de Tamarón, near Hotel Dona Lola, and most offer similar Andalusian fare.

**RESTAURANTE**

La Jabega (% 956 43 09 42; Calle Tomillo 7; raciones €7-8, mains €12-25)  
Fronting the sands, the Jabega is acclaimed for its fishballs and its fish dish with giant carabineros prawns.

**ENTERTAINMENT**

In July and August a line of marquees and shades, along the beach south of the Almadraba, serves as bars, discos and tea-houses. They get busy from about midnight. Some have live flamenco or other music.

**GETTING THERE & AWAY**

This village, hidden on a beautiful bay about 20km up the coast from Tarifa, has a fine white-sand beach, several restaurants and hostales, and the ruins of the Roman town Baello Claudia (% 956 68 85 30; adult/EU citizen €1.50/free; h 10am-2pm Sun, to 7pm Tue-Sat, to 8pm Jun-Sep, to 6pm Nov-Feb). The ruins include a theatre, a forum surrounded by temples and other buildings, and workshops that turned out the products that made Baello Claudia famous in the Roman world: salted fish and garum, a prized condiment made from fish entrails. You can walk up this big sand dune at the far end of the beach, or out to Punta Cama-

**TARIFA**  
**pop 15,500**

Even at peak times, Tarifa is an attractive, laid-back town. Relatively unknown until 15 years ago, it’s now a windsurfing and kiteboarding mecca, with some of the very best conditions in Europe for these sports. The beaches have clean, white sand, and inland the country is green and rolling. The old town has narrow streets, whitewashed houses and cascading flowers. A hip, artsy, international scene with an eclectic bunch of restaurants, bars and lodgings has grown up around the surf crowd. The only negative – though not for the surfers! – is the wind; for much of the year, either the levante (easterly) or poniente (westerly) is blowing, which is ruinous for a relaxed sit on the beach and tiring if you’re simply wandering around. August, however, can be blessed.

Tarifa takes its name from Tariq ibn Malik, who led a Muslim raid in 710, the year before the main Islamic invasion of the peninsula.
end of Calle Sancho IV El Bravo. The streets south of the church are little changed since Islamic times. The Mirador El Estrecho, atop part of the castle walls, has spectacular views across to Africa, only 14 km away.

The Castillo de Guzmán (Calle Guzmán; closed for refurbishment until Jun 2007; check tourist office for openings hours) is named after the Reconquista hero Guzmán El Bueno. In 1294, when threatened with the death of his captured son, unless he relinquished the castle to Islamic forces trying to recapture Tarifa, El Bueno threw down his own dagger for the deed to be done. Guzmán’s descendants became the Duques de Medina Sidonia, one of Spain’s most powerful families. The imposing fortress was originally built in 960 on the orders of Cordoban caliph Abd ar-Rahman III.

Beaches
On the isthmus leading out to Isla de las Palomas, Playa Ochía is sheltered but extremely small. From here the spectacular Playa de los Lances stretches 10 km northwest to the huge sand dune at Ensenada de Valdevaqueros.

Activities
WINDSURFING & KITESURFING
Most of the action occurs along the coast between Tarifa and Punta Paloma, 10 km northwest. El Porro on Ensenada de Valdevaqueros, the bay formed by Punta Paloma, is one of the most popular spots, with easy parking and plenty of space to set up. Kitesurfing is incredibly popular here but kiters give way to sails when the wind really gets up.

Buy new or secondhand gear in Tarifa at the shops on Calle Batalla del Salado. For rental or classes try places up the coast such as Club Mistral (Hurricane Hotel; tel 956 68 90 90; Cortijo Valdevaqueros; 956 61 49 91) or Spin Out (956 23 63 52; El Porro beach). At Spin Out board, sail and wetsuit rental for windsurfing costs €35/73 per hour/day; a six-hour beginner’s windsurfing or kitesurfing course is €150, and a two-hour introduction to kitesurfing €50. It’s essential for kitesurfing beginners to take classes: out-of-control kite-surfers are a danger to themselves and others.

HORSE RIDING
On Playa de los Lances Aventura Ecuestre (% 956 23 66 32; Hotel Bos Mares) and Club Hipica (% 956 68 90 92; Hurricane Hotel) both rent horses with excellent guides. An hour’s ride along the beach costs €30. Three-hour beach or inland routes cost €70.

WHALE-WATCHING
At least three groups run two- to three-hour boat trips. For information and whale-watching tours contact Whale Watching España (Calle Guzmán; closed for refit until Jun 2007; tel 956 68 70 78; www.whalewatchtarifa.org; Avenida de la Constitución 6) uses every trip to record data. Turmares (% 956 68 07 41; www.turmares.com; Avenida Alcalde Juan Núñez 3; over/under 14yr dolphin & whale-watching €27/41, killer-whale-watching €40/€60) has the largest boat (with glass bottom).

BIRD-WATCHING
When the levante is blowing or there’s little wind, the Tarifa area, including the spectacular Mirador del Estrecho lookout point, 7 km east on the N340, is a great spot for watching bird migrations across the Strait of Gibraltar. You can visit the Centro Ornitológico Cigüeña (% 956 68 93 50; www.cenortoco.com; N340 Km 78,5; h 9am–7pm Wed-Sat, 10am–2pm Sun), a bird-watching station 4 km out of Tarifa, staffed by volunteers who collect data and produce information leaflets.

Sleeping
It’s essential to phone ahead in August. Most places cut prices by 25% to 40% for much of the rest of the year.

IN TOWN
Hostal África (% 956 68 02 20; hostel_africa@hotmail.com; Calle María Antonia Toledo 12; s/d €40/60) The well-travelled owners of this revamped old house know...
just what travellers need. Rooms are bright and attractive, and there’s an expansive terrace with wonderful views and an exotic cabana. Storage for boards and bicycles available.

La Casa Amarilla (% 956 68 19 93; www.lacasamarilla.net; Calle Sancho IV El Bravo 9; r €55, apt from €66) Right in the centre, the ‘Yellow House’ is an imaginatively restored 19th-century building, which retains its glass-vaulted patio. Most of the rooms have a kitchenette and all sport bright paintwork and Mediterranean features.

Posada Vagamundos (% 956 68 13 13; Calle San Francisco 18; www.posadavagamundos.com; s/d incl breakfast €60/80, st €85) Right in the centre in a carefully restored old building, this is a great new place with 11 bright double rooms and exotic décor.

Posada La Sacristía (% 956 68 17 59; www.lasacristia.net; San Donato 8; r incl breakfast €115-135) Tarifa’s most elegant central accommodation is in a beautifully renovated 17th-century townhouse with rooftop views. Attention to detail is impeccable. The fresh white rooms, with large beds, are set around a central courtyard.

ALONG THE COAST

Five-year-round camping grounds (www.campingdetarifa.com in Spanish), with room for more than 4000 campers, and several very attractive, and expensive, hotels are dotted along the beach and road the N340 within 10km northwest of Tarifa.

Hotel Arte-Vida (% 956 68 52 46; www.hotelartevida.com; N340 Km79.3; s/d incl breakfast €110/130) The Arte- Vida, 5km from the town centre, combines attractive, medium-sized rooms with an excellent restaurant that has stunning views. Its garden opens on to the beach.

Hotel Los Mares (% 956 68 40 35; www.hoteldosmareshotel.com; from €141, bungalow for 2 from €135, all incl breakfast; p a s) On the beach, about 4.5km from Tarifa, Islamsic-themed Dos Mares has a few more rooms in the main building, and more bungalows outside. The bar, with views to Africa, is a popular hang-out. The hotel has a tennis court and its own well-run stables, too.

Hurricane Hotel (% 956 68 49 19; www.hotelhurricane.com; r incl breakfast land/ocean side €149/166, s/d €117/166) A leg of a surfer riding a wave, the Punta Sur is a Hurricane Hotel project: the design team has worked miracles on what was an ordinary roadside hotel. Modern, futuristic, Gaudiesque and Moroccan influences are evident. The comfortable, eccentrically decorated rooms are set in big, very special gardens.

Eating

Tarifa tempts your tastebuds with a great array of international cuisines.

Ali Baba (Calle Sancho IV El Bravo; falafel or kebab €2.80-3.50) Ali Baba serves up cheap, filling and tasty Arabic food made with lovely fresh ingredients. Take away or eat at the benches and stand-up tables outside.

Café Azul Bar (Bar La Batalla del Salado; breakfast €3.50-5; h 9am-9pm, closed Wed in winter) This place with eye-catching décor has been energised by its new Italian owners who prepare the best breakfasts in town. Don’t pass up the large muesli, fruit salad and yogurt. There’s good coffee, excellent drinks, bocadillos, healthy cakes.

Souk (% 956 62 70 76; Calle Mar Tirreno 46; mains €10-14) Souk drips with Moroccan decorations and serves terrific Moroccan- and Asian-inspired food.

La Trattoria (% 956 68 22 25; Paseo de la Alameda; pasta & pizza €5.50-9, mains €10-15) A good location, first-class food and efficient service make this one of Tarifa’s best Italian eateries. La Trattoria has a fast ferry between Tarifa and Tangier, Morocco, passengers/car/motorcycle €27/75/25, 35 minutes one way) up to five times daily, with possibly more sailings in July and August. You can get details of the service at the port. All passengers need a passport.

BUS

Comes (% 902 19 92 08, 956 68 40 38; Calle Batalla del Salado) runs five or more buses daily to Cádiz (€8, 1¾ hours), Algeciras (€1.70, 30 minutes), and La Línea de la Concepción (€3.50, 45 minutes), one to Jerez de la Frontera (€8.50, 2½ hours), three to Seville (€15, three hours), two to Málaga (€12.50, two hours), one to Barbate (€4, 50 minutes), and one Monday to Friday to Zahara de los Atunes (€3.50, 45 minutes).

In July and August local buses run every 90 minutes northwest along the coast to Punta Paloma. Some go on to Bolonia. There’s a stop at the bottom of the Paseo de Alameda, and another stop is at the Como bus station, where a timetable and prices should be posted.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Boat

FRS (% 956 68 18 30; www.frs.es; Avenida Andalucía) runs a fast ferry between Tarifa and Tangier, Morocco (passenger/car/motorcycle €27/75/25, 35 minutes one way) up to five times daily, with possibly more sailings in July and August. You can get details of the service at the port. All passengers need a passport.

Shopping

Tarifa’s a great place to shop, or window shop if you can’t afford the prices. Stroll along Calle Batallad el Salado to find countless surf shops and boutiques offering contemporary fashions in casual wear, jewellery, shoes and accessories. Surf brands such as Tarifa Pirates, Rick Shapes, No Work Team, El Niño and Sons of the Desert are well-known names in Spain and most were founded in Tarifa. Rip Curl, Billabong and other international surfwear companies are represented here, too. The Soul Café Store (Plaza San Martín) has fashions fresh from Italy, Bali and India. There’ll be more of this ilk to follow as the town becomes richer.

On the sea side La Frontera and even further south, Tarifa (Calle Batalla del Salado) is excellent for gifts or that something special for yourself or your home. Some new warehouses on the N340 stock anything from thatched-roof Balinese platform shelters (€6000) to glittering cushion covers and chair-shaped hammocks.

Sleeping

Hostal Marrakech (% 956 65 34 74; Calle Juan de la Cierva 5; s/d from €25/60) A solid choice with good rooms in a high-rise with excellent views over the port.

Hotel Al Mar (% 956 65 46 61; Avenida de la Marina 2-3; s/d from €31/60) Two oversized Moroccan lamps decorate the foyer of this comfortable midrange place, which is handy for the port. There’s a good restaurant. See p738.

Hotel Reina Cristina (% 956 60 26 22; director reina.cristina@hotetur.com; Paseo de la Conferencia s/n;
For olde-world ambience head south from the port to this long-running, daily passenger and vehicle ferries to/from Spain’s Mediterranean coast, plus buses to Portugal, France, Germany and Holland.

**Getting There & Away**

**bus station**

- From the station (956 63 02 02), adjacent to Calle San Bernardo, trains run to/from Madrid (€38 to €57, six or 11 hours, two daily) and Granada (€17, four hours, three daily). All go through Ronda (€6.50 to €17, 1 ¼ hours) and Bobadilla (€10.50 to €21, 2 ¼ hours), where you can change for Málaga, Córdoba or Seville.

**LA LÍNEA DE LA CONCEPCIÓN**

La Línea, 20km east of Algeciras, is the unavoidably stepping stone to Gibraltar. A left turn as you exit the bus station brings you onto Avenida 20 de Abril, which runs the 300m or so from the main square, Plaza de la Constitución, to the Gibraltar border. The Municipal tourist office (956 17 19 98; Avenida Príncipe Felipe s/n; 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) faces the border.

- Buses run every 30 minutes to/from Algeciras (€1.80, 30 minutes). Others go to Málaga (€10.50, 2 ½ hours), three to five daily, Tarifa (€3.50, 45 minutes, six daily), Cádiz (€12, 2 ½ hours, four daily) and elsewhere.
- To save queuing at the border, many visitors to Gibraltar park in La Línea, then walk across. The underground Parking Fo Cona, just off Avenida 20 de Abril, charges €1.90 per hour or €14 per day.

**GIBRALTAR**

Looming like some great ship off southern Spain, the British colony of Gibraltar is a fascinating compound of curiosities. Despite bobbies on the beat, red post boxes and other reminders of 1960s England, Gibraltar is actually a cultural cocktail with Genoese, Spanish, North African and other elements which have made it fantastically prosperous. Naturally, the main sight is the awesome Rock; a vast limestone (€10) age that rises to 426m, with sheer cliffs on its northern and eastern sides. For the ancient Greeks and Romans this was one of the two Pillars of Hercules, split from the other, Jebel Musa in Morocco, in the course of Hercules’ arduous Twelve Labours. The two great rocks marked the edge of the ancient world.

Gibraltar’s location and highly defensible nature have attracted the covetous gaze of military strategists ever since. Gibraltarians (77% of the population) speak both English and Spanish and, often, a curious mix of the two. Signs are in English. Gibraltar’s terrific agenda for visitors includes exploring its natural world, its military installations, and its quirky town.

**History**

In 711 Tariq ibn Ziyad, the Muslim governor of Tangier, landed at Gibraltar to launch the Islamic invasion of the Iberian Peninsula. The name Gibraltar is derived from Jebel Tariq (Tariq’s mountain). Castilla wrested the Rock from the Muslims in 1462. Then in 1704 an Anglo-Dutch fleet captured Gibraltar during the War of the Spanish Succession. Spain ceded the Rock to Britain in 1713, but didn’t abandon military attempts to regain it until the failure of the Great Siege of 1779–83. Britain developed it into an important naval base (bringing in a community of Genoese ship repairers). During the Franco period, Gibraltar was an extremely somber spot between France and Spain, and the border was closed from 1967 to 1985. In 1969, Gibraltarians voted, by 12,138 to 44, in favour of British rather than Spanish sovereignty and a new constitution gave Gibraltar domestic self-government. In 2002 the UK and Spain held talks about a possible future sharing of sovereignty over Gibraltar, but Gibraltarians expressed their feelings in a referendum (not recognised by Britain or Spain), which voted resoundingly against any such idea.

In December 2005, the governments of the UK, Spain and Gibraltar set up a new, trilateral process of dialogue. The three parties have reached agreement on some issues but tricky topics remain, not least Britain’s military installations and ‘ownership’ of Gibraltar airport. Gibraltarians want self-determination and to retain British citizenship, making joint sovereignty improbable. Few foresee a change in the status quo but at least relations are less strained. On 18 June 2000, a three-way deal was signed by Spain, Gibraltar and Britain relating to telecommunications on the Rock, Gibraltar airport and other issues, but not...
sovereignty. Gibraltar airport will be expanded across the border into Spain and flights from Spanish cities and other European destinations direct to Gibraltar airport will be introduced.

The mainstays of Gibraltar’s economy are tourism, the port and financial services (including, Spanish police complain, the laundering of proceeds from organised crime, though Gibraltar counters that money laundering is tightly controlled). Investment on the Rock continues apace with a huge, luxury waterfront development on its western side.

Orientation
To reach Gibraltar by land you must pass through the Spanish border town of La Linea de la Concepcion (p739). Just south of the border, the road crosses Gibraltar airport runway. Gibraltar’s town and harbours lie along the Rock itself. Most of the upper Rock, starting just above the town, is a nature reserve (adult/child incl. attractions £8/4; vehicle £1.50, pedestrian excl. attraction £1; 9am-7pm), with spectacular views and several interesting spots to visit. A great way to get up here is by the cable car (p743).

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UPPER ROCK NATURE RESERVE
The most exciting thing about Gibraltar is the Rock itself. Most of the upper Rock, starting just above the town, is a nature reserve (adult/child incl. attractions £8/4; vehicle £1.50, pedestrian excl. attractions £1; 9am-7pm), with spectacular views and several interesting spots to visit. A great way to get up here is by the cable car (p743).

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ULTIMATE ROCK NATURE RESERVE
The most exciting thing about Gibraltar is the Rock itself. Most of the upper Rock, starting just above the town, is a nature reserve (adult/child incl. attractions £8/4; vehicle £1.50, pedestrian excl. attractions £1; 9am-7pm), with spectacular views and several interesting spots to visit. A great way to get up here is by the cable car (p743).

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once home to Neolithic inhabitants of the Rock. Today, apart from attracting tourists in droves, it’s used for concerts, plays, even fashion shows. There’s a café outside.

Princess Caroline’s Battery, a half-hour walk north (downhill) from the top cable-car station, houses a Military Heritage Centre. From here a road leads up to the impressive Great Siege Tunnels, hand-hewn by the British for gun emplacements during the 1779-1783 siege. They constitute a tiny proportion of the more than 70km of tunnels in the Rock, most of which are off limits.

On Willis’s Rd, which leads down to the town from Princess Caroline’s Battery, are the Gibraltar, A City under Siege exhibition and the Tower of Homage, the last vestige of Gibraltar’s Islamic castle, built in 1333.

**DOLPHIN-WATCHING**

The Bahia de Algeciras has a sizable population of dolphins and, from about April to September, several boats make two or more daily trips out to see them; at other times of the year there’s usually at least one in daily operation. You’ll be unlucky not to get plenty of close-up dolphin sightings. Most boats go from Watergardens Quay or adjacent Marina Bay. The trips last about 2½ hours and cost around £20 per adult. Tourist offices have full details.

**Sleeping**

Cannon Hotel (96; 51717); www.cannonhotel.gi; 9 Cannon Lane; s/d without bathroom £25.50/37.50, d with bathroom £50-£60 (adult £23/41, child £11.50/20, car £46/92). On a leafy square, the Eliott has sumptuous rooms, fittings and furnishings, a gym and rooftop pool plus a generous rooftop restaurant.

Eating

Café Solo (96; 44449; Grand Casemates Sq 3; pastas £6-9) With tables inside, and out on the bustling square, this is a good place to stop for coffees and a variety of interesting pasta.

Cannon Bar (96; 72288; 27 Cannon Lane; mains £5.50-9.50) Justly famous for some of the best fish and chips in town, and in big portions.

Clipper (96; 7971); 788 Irish Town; mains £3.50-6; v) Most of Gibraltar’s pubs serve British pub meals. The Clipper is one of the best and busiest, all vanished wood with full-on footy and a cracking Sunday roast. Vegetarians should go for the Greek salad wrap.

House of Sacarello (96; 70625; 57 Irish Town; daily specials £7-11.50; h closed Sun; v) A chic place in a converted coffee warehouse with a good range of vegetarian options. You can linger over afternoon tea (£3.50) between 3pm and 7.30pm.

Nuno’s (96; 76501; Caleta Hotel, Sir Herbert Miles Rd; mains £11-15) A top-class, formal Italian restaurant in the Caleta Hotel, with fabulous terrace views. Delicious homemade pastas and risottos, or tender leg of lamb, are accompanied by an extensive wine list. Pleasant waterside eateries line Marina Bay.

**Shopping**

Gibraltar has lots of British high-street stores, such as Next, Marks & Spencer, Body Shop (all on Main St) and Morrisons (in Europort at the northern end of the main harbour). Shops are normally open 9am to 7.30pm weekdays, and until 1pm Saturday.

**Getting There & Away**

AIR

GB Airways (96; 79300; www.gbabways.com) flies daily to/from London Gatwick and Heathrow.

Monarch Airlines (96; 47447; www.monarch.com) flies daily to/from London Luton and Manchester.

BOAT

FRS (96; 956 68 18 30 in Tarifa, Spain; www.frs.es) operates one ferry a week between Gibraltar and Tangier, departing Gibraltar at 6pm Friday for the 70-minute crossing. One-way/return fares are: adult £23/41, child £11.50/20, car £46/92.

The ferry departs from the terminal in front of the coach park. Purchase tickets from Turner & Co (96; 78305; 67 Irish Town).

**BUS**

There are no regular buses to Gibraltar, but La Linea de la Concepción bus station (p739) is only a five-minute walk from the border.

**CAR & MOTORCYCLE**

Vehicle queues at the 24-hour border and congested traffic in Gibraltar often make it easier to park in La Linea and walk across the border. To take a car into Gibraltar (free) you need an insurance certificate, registration document, nationality plate and driving licence.

**Getting Around**

The 1.5km walk from the border to the town centre crosses the airport runway. A left turn off Corral Rd takes you through the pedestrian Landport Tunnel into Grand Casemates Sq. Alternatively, several local bus lines (adult/child/senior 60p/40p/30p) run from the border into town about every 15 minutes (every 30 minutes on Saturday and Sunday), until 9pm. Bus 9 goes to Market Pl, number 3 goes to Cathedral Sq and the lower cable-car station, and number 10 runs to Europort (stopping at Morrisons), then Reclamation Rd near the coach park. Purchase tickets from Turner & Co.

All of Gibraltar can be covered on foot, and much of it (including the upper Rock) by car or motorcycle. You can also ascend, weather permitting, by the cable car (Red Sands Rd; adult one-way/return £6.50/8, child £4/4.50; h every few min 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat; last cable down 4.45pm). For the Apes’ Den, disembark at the middle station.

**MÁLAGA PROVINCE**

Though best known for the densely packed holiday coast of the Costa del Sol, Málaga province has heaps more to offer. It has a vibrant, increasingly cultured capital city, renowned for its art and a new fine arts museum is pending. Pablo Picasso is dynamising the city. Málaga province provides tourists with a good standard of accommodation, an excellent range of restaurants, an exciting range of activities, and a hot nightlife. The local populace, while increasingly urbane, remains unpretentious and fun-loving. Just watch them party at one of the colourful local fiestas!

MÁLAGA pop 556,000

This exuberant and very Spanish port city, set against a sparkling blue Mediterranean, is both historic and pulsing with modern life. The centre presents the visitor with narrow old streets and wide, leafy boulevards, beautiful gardens and impressive monuments, fashionable shops and a cultural life that is coming to the fore as never before. As expected, the major new museum devoted to Málaga-born Picasso is dynamising the city. Málaga also has a new museum of contemporary art and a new fine arts museum is pending. The historic centre is being restored and much of it pedestrianised and the port is being developed as a leisure zone. The city’s terrific bars and nightlife, the last word in Málaga joie de vivre, stay open very late.

History

Probably founded by Phoenicians, Málaga has long had a commercial vocation. It flourished in the Islamic era, especially as the chief port of the Emirate of Granada, later reasserting itself as an entrepreneurial centre in the 19th century when a dynamic middle class founded textile factories, sugar and steel mills and shipyards. Málaga dessert wine (‘mountain sack’) was popular in Victorian England. During the civil war Málaga was initially a Republican stronghold. Hundreds of Nationalist sympathisers were killed before the city fell in February 1937, after being bombarded by Italian planes. Vicious reprisals followed.

Málaga has enjoyed a steadily increasing economic spin-off from the mass tourism launched on the nearby Costa del Sol in the 1950s.

**Orientation**

The tree-lined Paseo del Parque and Alameda Principal run along the southern edge of the old town. The main streets leading north into the old town are Calle Marqués de Larios and Calle Molina Lario. The Gibralfaro hill rising above the eastern half of Paseo del Parque...
dominates the central area. Avenida de Andalucía continues the Paseo del Parque–Alameda Principal axis west of Río Guadalmedina. The main train and bus stations are around 600m south of Avenida de Andalucía, and the airport is 9km southwest.

Information
There are plenty of banks with ATMs on Calle Puerta del Mar, and Calle Marqués de Larios, and ATMs in the airport arrivals hall.

Hospital Carlos Haya (%; 95 12 20 20; Avenida de Carlos Haya) The main hospital, 2km west of the centre.

Librería Luces (Map p744; Alameda Principal 16) Bookshop with some English titles and a good travel section.

Meeting Point (Map p746; Plaza de la Merced 20; internet per hr €1-2; h 10am-1am Mon-Sat, 11am-11pm Sun)

Municipal tourist office (www.malagaturismo.com in Spanish) Plaza de la Marina (Map p744; %; 95 22 20 20; h 9.30am-8pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, 8.30am-7pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar; W) is the main mosque. Building continued for two centuries, so while the northern door, Portada de la Iglesia del Sagrario, is Gothic, and the interior, with a soaring 40m dome, is Gothic and Renaissance, the façade is 18th-century baroque. The cathedral is known as La Manquita (The One-Armed), since its southern tower was never completed. Inside, note the 17th-century wooden choir stalls, finely carved by the popular Andalucian sculptor, Pedro de Mena.

ALCAZABA
At the lower, western end of the Gibralfaro hill, the Alcazaba (Map p744; %; 95 22 21 51 06; Calle Alcazabilla; admission €2, combined ticket incl Castillo de Gibralfaro €3.20; h 9.30am-8pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, 8.30am-7pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar; W) was the palace-fortress of Málaga’s Muslim governors. Dating from 1057, it has two rings of walls, lots of defensive towers, cobbled ramps, staggered entrance passages, meandering waterways and leafy terraces – a joy to visit in the summer heat. A lift (elevator) from Calle Guillén Sotoel brings you out in the heart of the Alcazaba.

Below the Alcazaba is a Roman theatre.

CASTILLO DE GIBRALTAR
Above the Alcazaba rises the older Gibralfaro Castle (Map p744; %; 95 22 22 72 30; admission €2; h 9am-8pm Apr-Sep, to 6pm Oct-Mar), built by Abd ar-Rahman I, the 8th-century Cordoban emir, and rebuilt in the 14th and 15th centuries. Nothing much remains of the interior of the castle, but the walkway around the ramparts affords exhilarating views and there’s an interesting museum.

To walk up to the Castillo de Gibralfaro, take the road immediately right of the Alcazaba entrance, and where it bends left into
a tunnel, take the steps on the right; or take bus 35 from Avenida de Cervantes (roughly every 45 minutes).

**OTHER MUSEUMS**

*Casa Natal de Picasso* (Map p746; % 952 06 02 15; Plaza de la Merced 15; admission free; 1 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun, closed holidays) Picasso’s birthplace is a centre for exhibitions and research on contemporary art, with a few compelling personal memorabilia.

*Centro de Arte Contemporáneo* (Map p744; % 952 12 00 55; Calle Alemania; admission free; 1 10am-8pm, to 2pm & 5-9pm 20 Jun-24 Sep, Tue-Sun) A funky museum of international 20th-century art housed in a skilfully converted 1930s market.

*Museo Unicaja de Artes y Costumbres Populares* (Museum of Popular Arts & Customs; Map p744; % 952 21 71 37; www.museoarteypopulares.com; Pasillo de Santa Isabel 10; adult/under 16yr €2/free; 1 9am-3pm & 4-7pm Tue-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat) Located in a 17th-century inn, this museum’s speciality is everyday rural and urban life of the past; note the painted clay figures (bárrots) of characters from Málaga folklore.

*Palacio de la Aduana* (Map p746; Paseo del Parque; admission free; 1 3-8pm Tue, 9am-8pm Wed-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat & Sun) Temporary exhibitions from the good Museo de Málaga art collection, formerly housed in the Buenavista palace now taken over by Picasso, are shown here. The collection includes great baroque artists such as Zurbarán and Murillo. The Aduana building is to become the permanent home of the city’s museum.

**BEACHES**

Sandy city beaches stretch several kilometres in each direction from the port. *Playa de la Malagueta*, handy to the city centre, has some excellent bars and restaurants close by: *Playa de Pedregalejo* and *Playa del Palo*, about 4km east of the centre, are popular and reachable by bus 11 from Paseo del Parque.

**JARDÍN BOTÁNICO LA CONCEPCIÓN**

These largely tropical gardens (Map p744; % 952 25 21 48; adult/child €3.10/1.60; 1 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-8.30pm Apr-Sep, closed Mon), 4km north of the city centre, feature towering trees (including hundreds of palms), 5000 tropical plants, waterfalls, lakes and spectacular seasonal blooms – especially the purple wisteria in spring. You can visit solo, or by 1½-hour guided tour in English.

By car, take the N331 Antequera road north from the Málaga ring road (A7) to Km166 and follow the signs. Alternatively, the MálagaTour bus (below) stops here.

**Courses**

There are many private language schools in Málaga; the main tourist offices have contact lists. The *Universidad de Málaga* (Map p744; % 952 27 82 71; www.uma.es/estudios/estran/estранero.htm; Avenida de Andalucía 24) also runs very popular courses.

**Tours**

To pick up the child-friendly, open-topped *MálagaTour bus* (Map p744; % 952 10 10 81; www.malagatur.com; adult/child €15/7.50; 1 every 30 min 9.30am-7pm), head for Avenida Manuel Agustín Heredia or the eastern end of the Paseo del Parque. This hop-on-hop-off tour does a circuit of the city, stopping at all the sights. Tickets are valid for 24 hours.

**Festivals & Events**

*Semana Santa* (Holy Week) Solemn and spectacular: the platforms bearing the holy images (trocitos) are large and heavy, each nedding up to 150 bearers. Every night from Palm Sunday to Good Friday, six or seven trocitos are carried through the city, watched by big crowds. Witness this event on the Alameda Principal, between 7pm and midnight.

*Feria de Málaga* (mid- to late August) Lasting nine days, this is the biggest and most ebullient of Andalucía’s summer fairs. During daytime, especially on the two Saturdays, celebrations take over the city centre, with music, dancing and horses. At night the fun switches to large fiesta grounds at Cortijo de Torres, 4km southwest of the city centre, with fairground rides, music and dancing.

**Sleeping**

**BUDGET**

*Hostal Derby* (Map p746; % 952 22 13 01; Calle San Juan de Dios 1, 4th fl; s/d €36/48) A good-value hostal (simple guesthouse or small place offering hotel-like accommodation) with spacious rooms and big windows, some overlooking the harbour.

*Hostal El Cenachero* (Map p744; % 952 22 40 88; Calle Barros 5, 3rd fl; s €32, d €47-55) This modest, family-run hostal with 14 pleasant rooms is close to the harbour. It’s named after Málaga’s folkloric fishmonger character.

*Hostal Larios* (Map p746; % 952 22 54 99; www.hostal Larios.com; Calle Marqués de Larios 9; s/d without bathroom €32/42, s/d with bathroom €40/50) This central hostal outclasses all others in the budget range. The 12 rooms are newly fitted out and painted apricot and blue.
**Andalucía**

Unbeatable location up on the pine-forested mountain, with pavement tables and an interior full of characterful, slightly exotic crowds. The venerable old tavern has been serving Málaga's sweet dishes for decades. It's clean, if basic and dark.

€2.50-3.60, raciones €8; closed Sun.

**Entertainment**

**Teatro Cervantes**

(Map p746; 952 22 41 00; www.teatrocervantes.com; Calle Ramos Marin s/n) The palatial Cervantes has a fine programme of music, theatre and dance.

**Liceo**

(Map p744; Calle Beatas 21; 7pm-3am Thu-Sat) A grand old mansion turned young music venue, which buzzes with a student crowd after midnight. Go up the winding staircase and discover more rooms.

**Warhol**

(Map p746; Calle Niño de Guevara; 11pm-late Thu-Sat) A stylish haunt for gay clubbers who want an upmarket atmosphere in which to enjoy the funky house beats mixed by drenched-tooled DJs.

**Asícar**

(Map p745; cnr Calles Convalescientes & Luzcano; 9pm-late) Salsa fans need go no further. Enjoy the Salsa boom as you enjoy live music Thursday to Saturday evenings.

**Getting There & Away**

**AIR**

Málaga’s busy airport (952 04 88 38), the main international gateway to Andalucía, receives flights by dozens of airlines (budget and otherwise) from around Europe (see p859).

**BOAT**

Transmediterránea (Map p744; 952 06 12 18, 902 45 45 45; www.transmediterranea.com; Estación Marítima, Local 81) operates a fast ferry (four hours) and a slower ferry (7½ hours) daily year-round to/from Melilla (passenger fast ferry/ferry €55/36; car €139 on both boats).

**BUS**

Málaga’s bus station (Map p744; 952 35 00 61; Paseo de los Tilos) is just 1km southwest of the city centre. Frequent buses travel along the coast and also go to Seville (€14.50, 2½ hours, nine or more daily), Granada (€9, 1½ to two hours, 17 daily), Córdoba (€12, 2½ hours, five daily), Antequera (€5, 50 minutes, 13 daily) and Ronda (€7.50 to €9.50, 2½ hours, nine or more daily). Nine buses also run daily to Madrid (€20, six hours) and a few go up Spain’s Mediterranean coast. There are services to France, Germany, Portugal and Morocco too.

**Car**

Numerous international and local agencies have desks at the airport, many with small cars for around €150 per week.

**Train**

The main station, Málaga–Renfe (Map p744; 952 36 02 02; Estación de la Estación) is round the corner from the bus station. Quick Talgo 200s run to Madrid (€52 to €87, 4½ hours, six daily). A slower, cheaper Intercity train for Madrid (€35, 6½ hours) leaves late morning.

Trains also go to Córdoba (€16 to €21, 2½ hours, 10 daily), Seville (€16, 2½ hours, five daily) and Barcelona (€54 to €141, 13 hours, two daily). For Granada (€19, 2½ hours) and Ronda (€8.20, 1½ hours minimum) you need to change at Bobadilla.

**Getting Around**

**TO/FROM THE AIRPORT**

The Aeropuerto train station on the Málaga–Fuengirola line is a five-minute walk from the airport (follow signs from the departures hall). Trains run about every half-hour, 7am to 11.45pm, to Málaga–Renfe station (€1.20, 11 minutes) and Málaga–Centro station. Trains depart for the airport between 5.45am and 10.30pm.

Bus 19 to the city centre (€1.10, 20 minutes) leaves from the ‘City Bus’ stop outside the airport (follow signs from the departures hall). Trains run about every half-hour, 7am to 11.45pm, to Málaga–Renfe station (€1.20, 11 minutes) and Málaga–Centro station. Trains depart for the airport between 5.45am and 10.30pm.

A taxi from the airport to the city centre costs €15 to €17.

**Costa del Sol**

Strewn along the seashore from Málaga almost to Gibraltar, the Costa del Sol stretches like a wall of wedding cakes several kilometres thick. Its recipe for success is sunshine, convenient beaches (of grey-brown sand), cheap package deals and bountiful nightlife and...
Marbella stop on Avenida Palmera de Mallorca, 200m southwest of Plaza Costa del Sol. The train station (Avenida Jesús Santos Rein), is off Calle San Miguel.

Tourist office (952 97 51 52; www.turismodebaja.com; Plaza de la Constitución; 9am-1.30pm Mon-Fri). In the town hall. There are also offices on Playa Bajondillo (952 39 10 99; 9am-1.30pm) and Playa Carihuela (952 39 29 54; 9am-1.30pm).

ENTERTAINMENT
The weekend nightlife at Benalmádena Costa’s Puerto Deportivo pulls a youthful, zesty crowd from all along the coast. The bars start to throb after midnight on Friday and Saturday. International visitors come to Torremolinos to party hard. Passion (Avenida Palmera de Mallorca 18) and Palladium (Avenida Palmera de Mallorca 36), two of ‘Torremolinos’ hottest clubs, boast two floors, three different atmospheres, international DJs, live performances, swimming pools, go-go dancers and singers in both venues. The gay ‘in crowd’ hangs out in the new bars and clubs in La Nagüera, the area close to Torremolinos train station. Check out the trendy El Gato Lounge (La Nagüera, from 4pm till late) or girls’ bar Anfora.

Fuengirola pop 52,000
Fuengirola, 18km down the coast from Torremolinos, has more of a family scene but is just as densely packed. The streets between the beach and Avenida Matias Sáenz de Tejada (where the bus station is) constitute what’s left of the old town, with Plaza de la Constitución as its centre. The train station (Avenida Jesús Santos Rein) is a block further inland. The tourist office (952 46 74 57; Avenida Jesús Santos Rein 6) is from 9.30am-2pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) is near the train station.

The Hipódromo Costa del Sol (952 59 27 00; www.carreteradestra.com; Urbanización El Chaparral; admission €7; 10am-2am Sun-Thu, 10am-1am Fri & Sat) is a horse racing track with regular racing.

Mijas
A village of winding Muslim-origin streets and white buildings situated in the hills 8km north of Fuengirola is where you’ll find Mijas. It is now surrounded by villas and urbanizaciones (housing estates), and full of busloads up from the Costa Blanca. But it remains a strikingly pretty place and the Casa Museo de Mijas (952 59 03 80; Calle Málaga; admission free; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm May-Sep, Mon-Fri & Sun Apr-Jun, 9am-1pm Jul-Aug) gives a poignant glimpse into life in the area before the 1960s tourist deluge. There are good hotels and lots of restaurants, cafés and craft shops. Frequent buses run from Fuengirola (€1, 25 minutes).

Marbella pop 101,000
Overlooked by the dramatic Sierra Blanca 28km west of Fuengirola, Marbella has been the Costa del Sol’s glossiest resort ever since part-Mexican, part-Austrian Alfonso von Hohenlohe built the exclusive Marbella Club Hotel, just west, in the 1950s. A unique mix of glamorous boutiques, pretty plazas, down-to-earth bars, good and bad restaurants, moderate beaches and ritzy nightlife make it easily the Costa del Sol’s most fascinating playground. Fortunately the scandals and crime that accompany this locale (see the boxed text, p75) won’t interfere with the fun of ordinary travellers.

ORIENTATION
The N340 through town takes the names Avenida Ramón y Cajal and Avenida Ricardo Soriano. The old town is centred on Plaza de los Naranjos.

INFORMATION
Hospital Costa del Sol (952 82 82 50; Carretera N340 Km187) Big public hospital 6km east of the centre.

Municipal tourist office (952 82 82 50; www.marlabeles.es in Spanish; 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat; Forntierra (952 77 14 42; Glorieta de la Fontanilla); Naranjos (952 82 35 50; Plaza de los Naranjos 1)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES
Pretty Plaza de los Naranjos, with its 16th-century town hall, is the heart of the largely pedestrianised, chocolate-box-perfect old town. Nearby are the Iglesia de la Encarnación (Puerto de la Iglesia), begun in the 16th century, and the Museo del Grabinado Español Contemporáneo (Museum of Contemporary Spanish Prints; 952 76 57 41; Calle Hospital Bazaín...
ANDALUCÍA
Art, is in Parque de la Represa just northeast of restaurants strung along the waterfront, or Playa de Casablanca (2km). A small, character-filled hotel on a tranquil, flowery, old-town street. The six quaintly decorated rooms are in major demand.

MARBELLA

Marbella vice

Marbella is a byword for glitzy ostentation and overdevelopment, municipal corruption and international mafia activity. With Spain’s all-powerful construction lobby keen to open up new land for building, the temptation for municipal corruption is always high, especially since Spanish town halls receive much of their income from fees charged for building permits. It’s a perfect scenario for heavier crime to get involved. Only in the last few years have Andalucia’s political and judicial authorities started to tackle the problem with any commitment.

Marbella’s problems on this score really got going in the 1990s during the mayoralty of Jesús Gil y Gil, a populist, right-wing construction magnate who perfected the art of running a town for the benefit of himself and his henchmen. He died in 2004, having overseen rampant property development and embroiled himself and Marbella in endless corruption and financial scandals. Many were ready to step into his shoes.

In 2005, in the so-called Baleal Blanca (White Whale) case, 41 people were arrested in Marbella on suspicion of organising Europe’s biggest money-laundering network, worth at least €250 million. In another operation in 2005, police arrested 28 alleged Mafia bosses from former Soviet republics on the Costa del Sol and in other Mediterranean Spanish towns. The mobsters supposedly laundered the proceeds of nefarious activities back home through a network of property, restaurants and bars in Spain.

Then in 2006 Marbella’s mayor, deputy mayor and several other councillors and town hall officials were among over 50 people arrested in connection with a web of bribery and illegal building permits. During their investigations police seized property worth €2.4 billion including 275 works of art, 103 thoroughbred horses and 200 fighting bulls. A caretaking committee appointed to run Marbella’s affairs immediately started sealing off suspected illegal building sites that had been ordered to stop work by Andalucia’s Supreme Court. Up to 5000 Marbella homes could face demolition for having been built illegally.

SLEEPING

Hostal del Pilar (95 92 82 99 36; www.hostel-marbella.com; Calle Mesoncillo 4; s/d/tr without bathroom €25/35/50) This is a popular and backpacker-friendly British-run place off Calle Peral. There’s a bar, a roof terrace for sunbathing, and breakfast.

Hostal La Luna (95 92 82 57 78; Calle La Luna 7; r €55; a) Calle La Luna is one of four pedestrian lanes dotted with dozens of hostales just east of the centre and close to the beach. Balconied rooms overlook an internal patio at this delightful spot.

Hostal Berlin (95 92 82 13 10; www.hostalberlin.com; Calle San Ramón 21; s/d/tr without bathroom €25/35/50) A very friendly hostel with good facilities on a quiet street parallel to Calle La Luna. Breakfast is €2.50.

Hotel Central (95 92 90 24 42; www.hotelcentralmarbella.com; Calle Ramón 15; r €78; a) A cut above the neighbouring hostales, the Hotel Central enjoys the same quiet location but has 15 large, tasteful rooms with bathrooms.

Hotel La Morada Mas Hermosa (95 92 94 46 47; www.lamoradamashermosa.com; Calle Montenbeiros 16; s/d/tr €73/92; p a i) A small, character-filled hotel on a tranquil, flowery, old-town street. The six quaintly decorated rooms are in major demand.

EATING

Dining in Marbella doesn’t necessarily mean chic interiors and bikini-size portions at Travessa-sized prices. There are some authentic tapas bars and a few trendy restaurants doing delicious, good-value cuisine.

Café Bar El Estrecho (95 77 00 04; Calle San Lázaro; tapas €1.20) This is a good, busy old-town tapas bar.

Bar Bocalo (95 92 82 69 50; Calle San Lázaro; tapas €1.80) Located nearby, this tapas bar is also varied in its tapas offering and, like El Estrecho, it has strong, viscous coffee.

El Balcón de la Virgen (95 77 60 52; Calle Virgen de los Dolores; mains €8.16; h closed Sun) One of the best restaurants near Plaza de los Naranjos, this has a lovely summer terraza overlooked by a 300-year-old grieving Virgin and a large bougainvillea. The fare is typical Andalucian.

Restaurante Santiago (95 92 77 00 78; Paseo Marítimo 5; mains €18-25; h closed Nov) Santiago is right on the seafront, offering top-class seafood in elegant surrounds.
Author's choice

La Comedia (€95 925 77 64 78; Calle San Lázaro; mains €15-25; ⑦ 7pm-1am Tue-Sun) This creative downtown, upstairs restaurant is run by a dedicated Swedish duo who put together some terrific taste combinations. The mussels in white wine sauce are delicious and are hopefully a regular menu item. Follow them with duck breast in fruit compote, sweet chicken curry or a vegetarian couscous crepe. The place is candlelit yet animated, with interesting art on the walls, and there are balcony tables overlooking little Plaza Victoria.

Drinking & Entertainment

Marbella’s streets are notoriously traffic-clogged. Fortunately there are a number of pay car parks (see the Marbella map, Map p753) where you can take refuge on arrival.

Estepona pop 43,000

Estepona, southwest of Marbella, has controlled its development relatively carefully and remains a fairly agreeable seaside town. The big attraction here is the popular safari park, Selva Aventura (€95 928 19 48 42; www.selvo.es; Carretera A7 Km162.5; admission €22, under 8yr €15; ⑦ 10am-6pm Sep-Jun, to 8pm Jul-Aug, closed early Dec-early Feb), 6km east of town, with over 200 exotic animal species. A direct bus runs to Selwo from Málaga via Torremolinos, Fuengirola and Marbella (phone Selwo for information).

EL CHORRO & BOBASTRO pop (El Chorro) 100

Fifty kilometres northwest of Málaga, Río Guadalhorce and the main railway in and out of Málaga both pass through the awesome Garganta del Chorro (El Chorro Gorge), which is 4km long, up to 400m deep and as little as 10m wide. The gorge is a magnet for rock climbers, hikers, at the back of the marina, with an alternative feel. A direct bus runs to Selwo from Málaga via Torremolinos, Fuengirola and Marbella (phone Selwo for information).

Getting There & Away

Trains run to El Chorro from Málaga (€3.40, 45 minutes, two daily except Sunday and holidays), from Ronda (€5.50, 70 minutes, one daily except Sunday and holidays) and Seville (€13.50, two hours, one daily). No buses run to El Chorro, Drivers can get there via Álora (south of El Chorro) or Ardales (west of El Chorro).

Ronda pop 35,000 / elevation 744m

Perched on an inland plateau riven by the 100m fissure of El Tajo gorge and surrounded by the beautiful Sierra de Ronda, Ronda is the most dramatically sited of all the pueblos blancos. Just an hour north of the Costa del Sol, Ronda is a world away from the coastal scene, but with a quota of visitors, but many are day-trippers.

With its setting, quaint old Islamic town and a romantic place in Spanish folklore, Ronda has fascinated travellers from Dumas to Hemingway and beyond. For most of the Islamic period, Ronda was the capital of an independent statelet, and its near-impregnable position kept it out of Christian hands until 1485. Modern-day alternative-lifestylers have set up home in and around the town, adding an arty touch.

Orientation

The old Muslim town, called La Ciudad, stands on the southern side of El Tajo. The newer town to the north has most of the accommodation and restaurants, and the bus and train stations. Three bridges span the gorge, the main one being the Puente Nuevo. Both parts of town end abruptly on their western side in cliffs plunging away to the valley of Río Guadalevin.

Information

Banks and ATMs are mainly on Calle Virgen de la Paz and Plaza Carmen Abela.

Regional tourist office (€95 928 17 11 19; www.turismoneroda.es; Paseo de Blas Infante; ⑦ 10am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.15am-2pm & 3.30-6.30pm Sat, Sun & holidays) Helpful and friendly staff with a wealth of information on the town and region.

LA CIUDAD

The old Muslim town retains a typical medieval Islamic character of twisting narrow streets. The first street to the left, after you cross the Puente Nuevo, leads down to the Casa
del Rey Moro (% 952 18 72 00; Calle Santa Domingo 17). This 18th-century house, supposedly built over the remains of an Islamic palace, is itself closed, but you can visit its cliff-top gardens and climb down La Mina (gardens & La Mina adult/child €4/2; h 10am-7pm), an Islamic-era stairway cut inside the rock right down to the bottom of the gorge (take care!).

Back uphill, enjoy the views from Plaza María Auxiliadora. Nearby is Palacio de Mondragón (% 952 87 84 50; admission €2; h 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat & Sun), now the town museum, built for Abomelch, the ruler of Ronda in 1314. Of its three courtyards, the Patio Mudéjar still preserves an Islamic character. A horseshoe arch leads into a small cliff-top garden.

A minute’s walk southeast is Plaza Duquesa de Parcent, where the Iglesia de Santa María la Mayor (% 952 87 22 46; admission €3; h 10am-7pm Apr-Oct, 6pm Nov-Mar) stands on the site of Islamic Ronda’s main mosque. The tower and the handsome galleries beside it date from Islamic times, and just inside the entrance is an arch, covered with Arabic inscriptions, which was the mosque’s mihrab (prayer niche).

Nearby, the amusing Museo del Bandolero (% 952 87 77 85; Calle de Armiñán 65; admission €3; h 10.30am-8pm Apr-Sep, to 6pm Oct-Mar) is dedicated to the banditry for which central Andalucía was renowned in the 19th century.

Beside the museum, steps lead down to an impressive stretch of La Ciudad’s old walls. Follow the path down to the beautiful 13th- and 14th-century Baños Árabes (Arab Baths; % 956 950957; Calle San Miguel; admission €2; h 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat & Sun). From the northern side of the nearby Puente Viejo (1616) you can make your way back up to Plaza de España via a small park along the gorge’s edge.

PLAZA DE TOROS & AROUND
Ronda’s elegant bullring (% 952 87 41 32; Calle Virgen de la Paz; admission €5; h 10am-8pm Apr-Sep, to 6pm Oct-Mar) is one of the oldest in Spain – it opened in 1785 – and has seen some of the most important events in bullfighting history. It was here, in the 18th and 19th centuries, that three generations of the Romero family – Francisco, Juan and Pedro – established the basics of modern bullfighting on foot. The bullring’s museum is crammed with memorabilia such as blood-spattered costumes worn by Pedro Romero, and photos of famous fans including Hemingway and Orson Welles.

Vergtuous cliff-top views open out from Paseo de Blas Infante, behind the Plaza de Toros, and the leafy Alameda del Tajo nearby.

Festivals & Events
During the first two weeks of September, Feria de Pedro Romero (an orgy of partying, including the important flamenco Festival de Cante Grande) takes place. It culminates in the Corridas Goyesca (bullfights in honour of legendary bullfighter Pedro Romero).

Sleeping
Hotel Morales (% 952 87 15 38; Calle de Sevilla 51; s/d €25/42; a) A friendly, small hotel, which has 18 pleasant rooms and thorough information on the town and nearby parks.

AUTHOR’S CHOICE

Hotel San Francisco (% 952 87 32 99; www.hotelsanfranciscoanda.com; Calle María Cabrera 18; s/d incl breakfast €38/59; a W) This is possibly the best budget option, offering a warm welcome. It was recently refurbished and upgraded from hostel to hotel, with facilities to match.

Hotel Alavera de los Baños (% 952 87 91 43; www.alaveraandalucia.com/alavera; Hoyo San Miguel s/n; s/d incl breakfast €50/85; a) Taking its cue from the Arab baths next door, the Alavera continues the Hispanic-Islamic theme, with oriental décor and tasty Arabic-inspired cuisine.

Hotel San Gabriel (% 952 19 03 92; www.hotelsanandrian.com; Calle José M Holgado 10; s/d €73/96; a) This charming, historic hotel, run by a delightful family, is filled with antiques and photographs offering insights into Ronda’s history.

Hotel Montelirio (% 952 87 38 55; www.hotelmonte
erio.com; Calle Tenorio 8; s/d €100/150; a) Sensitively converted mansion with sumptuous fittings and magical views of Ronda’s gorge.

Parador de Ronda (% 952 87 75 00; www.parador.es; Plaza de España s/n; s/d €129/161; p a i s) More gorge-side luxury!

Eating
Traditional Ronda food is hearty mountain fare that’s big on stews, trout, game such as rabbit, partridge and quail, and, of course, oxtail. Chocolat (Calle Seville 18; breakfast from €2.20), a sophisticated café placed next door to Hotel San Cayetano. Choose from a long list of teas, coffees, breakfasts and a boggling array of cakes and pastries at this elegant café.

Bar Restaurant Almocábar (% 952 87 59 77; Calle Ruedo Almocábar 6; tapas €1.50, mains €10-14; h 1.30-5pm & 8pm-1am Wed-Mon) In the Barrio San Francisco, Almocábar is an excellent authentic tapas bar, barely touched by the tourist hordes at the top of town.

Restaurante Pedro Romero (% 952 87 11 10; Calle Virgen de la Paz 18; mains €15-18) This celebrated eatery, dedicated to bullfighting, turns out classic Ronda dishes – a good place to try the oxtail.
AROUND RONDA
The beautiful green hills of the Serranía de Ronda, dotted with white-coloured villages, stretch in all directions from Ronda. This area has many traditional houses converted into gorgeous rural accommodation. For information try Ronda’s municipal tourist office, www.serranionord.org and www.rusticblue.com.

Cueva de la Pileta
Palaeolithic paintings of horses, goats, fish and even a seal, dating from 20,000 to 25,000 years ago, are preserved in this large cave (€6.50/3.50/2.50; hourly tours 10am-1pm & 4-6pm), 20km southwest of Ronda. You’ll be guided by kerosene lamp and one of the knowledgeable Bullón family from the farm in the valley below. A family member found the paintings in 1905. The Cueva de la Pileta is 250m (signposted) off the Benaoján–Cortes de la Frontera road, 4km from Benaoján. Guides speak a little English. If it’s busy, you may have to wait, but you can phone ahead to book a particular time.

Parque Natural Sierra de las Nieves
This 180-sq-km protected area, southeast of Ronda, offers some good walks. Torrecilla (1910m), the highest peak in the western half of Andalucía, is a five- to six-hour (return) walk from Área Recreativa Los Quejigales, which is 10km east by unpaved road from the A376 Ronda–San Pedro de Alcántara road.

Hotel La Casa Grande
Calle Mesones 1; t 952 16 02 12; www.hotellacasagrande.com 

Hotel Albarca
Calle Abarca 1; t 952 18 11 84; www.albarca.com 

Hotel La Posada
Calle Dávila 1; t 952 18 11 84; www.hotellaposada.com

Hotel La Ermita
Calle Ancianos 1; t 952 18 11 84; www.hotellapermita.com

Dolmen de Menga
Cueva de la Pileta; t 952 16 73 45; adult/student/child €6.50/3/2.50; tours hourly 10am-1pm & 4-6pm. This is the largest of Europe’s largest megalithic tombs, standing on the fringes of Antequera. The Dolmen de Menga is 25m long, 4m high and composed of 32 slabs, the largest weighing 180 tonnes.

Sleeping & Eating
Hotel San Sebastián
Calle San Sebastián; t 952 16 73 45; www.sanstebastian.com

Dolmen de Viera
Cueva de la Pileta; t 952 16 73 45; admission free; tours hourly 10am-1pm & 4-6pm. Three to six daily buses (€1, 30 minutes) run between Antequera bus station and Fuente de Piedra village.

Getting There & Away
The bus station (Plaza Conception García Redondo 2) is 1km north of the city centre. At least 12 daily buses run to/from Málaga (€6, one hour), and two to three daily to/from Granada (€6.50 to €7, 1½ hours). Two to four trains a day travel to/from Granada (€6.50 to €7.50, 1½ hours), Seville (€12, 1¼ hours) and Ronda (€5.50, 1¼ hours). For Málaga or Córdoba, change at Bobadilla.

AROUND ANTEQUERA
El Torcal
Sixteen kilometres south of Antequera, Nature has sculpted this 1336m mountain into some of the widest, most wonderful rock formations you’ll see anywhere. Its 12 sq km of gneared, pillared and deeply fissured limestone began life as sea bed about 150 million years ago.

Two marked walking trails, the 1.5km ‘Ruta Verde’ (Green Route) and the 3km ‘Ruta Amarilla’ (Yellow Route), start and end near the information centre.

Laguna de Fuente de Piedra
This shallow lake, close to the A92, 20km northwest of Antequera, is one of Europe’s two main breeding grounds for the spectacular greater flamingo (the other is France’s Camargue). After a wet winter as many as 20,000 pairs of flamingos breed at the lake. They arrive in January or February, with the chicks hatching in April and May, and stay till about August.

The Centre de Información Fuente de Piedra
This fascinating tourist centre (€6.50/3.50/2.50, 10am-2pm & 4-6pm), at the lake, on the edge of Fuente de Piedra village, hires out binoculars. Three to six daily buses (€1, 30 minutes) run between Antequera bus station and Fuente de Piedra village.
EAST OF MÁLAGA

The coast east of Málaga, sometimes called the Costa del Sol Oriental, is less developed than the coast to the west, but is striving hard to fill the gaps.

Behind the coast, La Axarquía, a region dotted with white villages (of Islamic origin) linked by snaking mountain roads, climbs to the Sierra Sur along the border of Granada province. There’s good walking here (best in April and May, and from mid-September to late October). Once impoverished and forgotten, La Axarquía has experienced a surge of tourism and an influx of expat residents in recent years.

Nerja pop 14,000

Nerja, 56km east of Málaga, is older, whiter and a little more charming than its counterparts to its west, though still inundated by (mainly British) tourism. The tourist office (952 52 15 31; www.nerja.org; Puerta del Mar, h 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) is just off the Balcón de Europa promenade and lookout point, which has gorgeous coastal vistas. The best beach is Playa Burriana, on the eastern side of town.

SLEEPING

Rooms in the better hotels get booked up well in advance for the summer period.

Hostal Mena (952 52 05 41; hostalmena@hotmail; Calle El Barrio 15; s/d €26/39) A short distance west of the tourist office, this friendly hostal has immaculate rooms (some with sea views) and a pleasant garden.

Hostal Miguel (952 52 15 23; www.hostalmiguel.com; Calle Almirante Fernandez 3; s/d €36/49) Straddled between two streets in the old town, this friendly English-run place has good rooms with a Moroccan theme, and a roof terrace.

Hostal Mariscal (952 52 01 99; www.mariscal.com; Balcón de Europa; s/d €45/60) Right by the Balcón de Europa, the Mariscal delights with its soothingly clean, quiet and comfortable rooms decked with tasteful art, and a good restaurant.

Hotel Paraiso del Mar (952 52 16 21; www.hotelparaisodelmar.com; Calle Prolongación de Carabeo; s/d €104/120; p a s) To the east of the centre above Playa Burriana, the Paraiso del Mar has great sea views and range of spa facilities.

Hotel Carabeo (952 52 54 44; www.hotelcarabeo.com; Calle Carabeo 34; d/t/e incl breakfast €91/198; p a i s) This small family-run hotel is full of stylish antiques and set above well-tended gardens right on the cliff-edge.

EATING

Merendero Ayo (952 52 12 53; Playa Burriana; mains €9-13) One of the best feeds in town is at this always-busy open-air restaurant on Nerja’s best beach. You can down a plate of paella, cooked on the spot in great sizzling pans, then go back for a refill.

Casa Luque (Plaza Cavana 2; mains €15-19) Casa Luque has a wonderfully panoramic terrace and, with an elegant haute-Med menu, more character than most Nerja eateries.

A Taste of India (952 52 00 43; Calle Carabeo 51; mains €8-13) This fantastic Goan-style Indian place serves delicious coconut curry and other spicy meals cooked on the spot.

Restaurant 34 (952 52 54 44; www.hotelcarabeo.com; Calle Carabeo, Calle Carabeo 34; mains €15-24) Truly gorgeous setting both indoors and outside overlooking the sea. Delicious and exotic food combinations but nouvelle-size portions.

ENTERTAINMENT

Nightlife focuses on the aptly named Tutti-Frutti Plaza, with an international clutch of bars and clubs. Check out what’s on at the Centro Cultural Villa de Nerja (952 52 38 63; Calle Granada 45).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

From the N340 near the top of Calle Pintada, Alsina Graells (952 52 15 04) runs to Málaga (€3.50, one hour, 14 daily), Almuñécar (€2.30, one hour, 14 daily), Frutti Plaza, with an international clutch of bars and clubs. Check out what’s on at the Centro Cultural Villa de Nerja (952 52 38 63; Calle Granada 45).

Cómpesta & Around
elevation 640m

The hill village of Cómpesta (pop 3000), 17km inland, is a popular base for exploring La Axarquía and the mountains, although it’s in danger of being overwhelmed by heavy construction traffic and estate agents as the Costa building boom spreads uncontrollably up the inland valleys. There’s a tourist office (952 53 36 85; Avenida de la Constitución, h 10am-2pm & 3-6pm Wed-Sun, Tue-Sat (Jul-Sep) by the bus stop at the foot of the village. Three buses run daily from Málaga (€3.20, two hours) via Torre del Mar.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

A few kilometres down the valley from Cómpesta, Archez has a beautiful Almohad minaret next to its church. From Archez a road winds 8km southwest to Arenas, where a steep but drivable track climbs to the ruined Islamic Castillo de Bentomiz, which crowns a hilltop. Los Caballos del Mosquín (968 658108; www.hone riding-andalucia.com), just outside Canillas de Albaicín, 2km northwest of Cómpesta, offers horse rides in the mountains from one hour to several days. An exhilarating long walk is up the dramatically peaked El Lucero (1779m), from whose summit, on a clear day, you can see both Granada and Morocco. This is a demanding full-day return walk from Cómpesta, but it’s possible to drive as far up as Puerto Blanquillo pass (1200m) via a slightly hairy mountain track from Canillas de Albaicín. From Puerto Blanquillo a path climbs 200m to another pass, the Puerto de Cómpeta. One kilometre down from there, past a quarry, the summit path (1½ hours), marked by a signboard, diverges to the right across a stream bed, marked by a signboard.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel Balcón de Cómpeta (952 55 35 35; www.hotelcompesta.com; Calle San Antonio 75; s/d €49/67; p a s w) Cómpesta’s only hotel has comfortable rooms with balconies, a good restaurant, a bar, a big pool and a tennis court. You can book houses, apartments and rooms through Competa Direct (www.competa-direct.com).

The two best restaurants, both serving excellent and varied Spanish/international food, are El Pirón (952 55 35 12; Calle Laberinto; mains €10-15) and Cortijo Paco (952 55 36 47; Avenida Canillas 6; mains €10-15). In summer ask for an upstairs terrace table at either place.

CÓRDOBA

Córdoba was city capital of Al-Andalus when Al-Andalus was at its zenith, home to the glit- tering, cultured and tolerant courts of rulers such as caliph Abd ar-Rahman III and, fittingly, to one of the most magnificent of all Islamic buildings, the city’s mesmerising Mezquita (Mosque). This romantic medieval architectural and cultural heritage is what draws visitors to Córdoba today. Beyond the city stretches an essentially rural province that produces some of Andalucía’s best olive oil and wine, with many smaller towns, broad rolling plains and some attractive hill country.

CÓRDOBA

pop 302,000 / elevation 110m

Standing on a sweep of Rio Guadalquivir with countryside stretching far in every direction around, Córdoba is both a sophistication metropolis and the heart of a very rural part of Andalucía. Apart from its great historical attractions, it’s also today a thriving modern city with great restaurants, thronged taverns and a hip nightlife. The best time to visit is between mid-April and mid-June, when the skies are big and blue, the temperatures are just right, and the city’s beautiful patios and old lanes are at their best, dripping with foliage and blooms.

History

The Roman colony of Corduba, founded in 152 BC, became capital of Baetica province, covering most of today’s Andalucía. In 711 Córdoba fell to the Muslim invaders and soon became the Islamic capital on the Iberian Peninsula. It was here in 756 that Abd ar-Rahman I set himself up as emir of Al-Andalus. Córdoba’s heyday came under Abd ar-Rahman III (912–61), who in 929 named himself caliph to set the seal on Al-Andalus’ independence of the Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad. Córdoba was then the biggest city in Western Europe and it had dazzling mosques, libraries, observatories and aqueducts, a university and highly skilled artisans in leather, metal, textiles and glazed tiles. Abd ar-Rahman III’s multi-cultural court was frequented by Jewish, Arab and Christian scholars, even if Córdoba was certainly not the fabulously tolerant paradise that’s sometimes imagined.

Towards the end of the 10th century, Al-Mansour (Almanzor), a fearsome general,
took the reins of power and struck terror into Christian Spain with over 50 razzias (forays) in 20 years. When he destroyed the cathedral at Santiago de Compostela, home of the Santiago cult, he had its bells carried to Córdoba by Christian slaves and hung upside down as oil lamps in the Mezquita. But after his death bands of Berber troops terrorised Córdoba and the caliphate descended into anarchy.

Córdoba’s intellectual traditions, however, lived on. Twelfth-century Córdoba produced two of the most celebrated of all Al-Andalus’ scholars: the Muslim Averroës (Ibn Rushd) and the Jewish Maimonides, polymaths best remembered for their philosophical efforts to harmonise religious faith with reason. Córdoba’s intellectual influence was still being felt in Christian Europe many centuries later.

Córdoba was captured in 1236 by Fernando III of Castilla and became a provincial town of shrinking importance. The decline began to be reversed only with the arrival of industry in the late 19th century.

Orientation
The fascinating part of Córdoba is the World Heritage-listed medieval city, a labyrinth of narrow streets focused on the Mezquita, which is immediately north of Río Guadalcquivir. The main square of modern Córdoba is Plaza de las Tendillas, 500m north of the Mezquita.

Information
Most banks and ATMs are around Plaza de las Tendillas and Avenida del Gran Capitán. The bus and train stations have ATMs.

Sights & Activities
Opening hours for Córdoba’s sights change frequently, so check with the tourist offices for updated times. Most places (except the Mezquita) close on Monday. Closing times are generally an hour or two earlier in winter than summer.

**MEZQUITA**

It’s hard to exaggerate the beauty of the Córdoba mosque (€, 957 47 05 12; adult/child €8/4; h 10am-7pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, to 6pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar, 9:10-4:50am & 1:30-6:30pm Sun year-round), one of the great creations of Islamic architecture, with its shimmering golden mosaics and rows of red-and-white-striped arches disappearing into infinity. Even the large numbers of tourists passing through the place today cannot destroy the mesmerising effect of the Mezquita’s ever-changing perspectives and plays of light.

Emir Abd al-Rahman I founded the Mezquita in 785 on the site of a Visigothic church that had been partitioned between Muslims and Christians, reputedly purchasing the Christian half from the Christian community. The Mezquita was Córdoba’s Friday Mosque, always the most important building in an Islamic city, where men must go for prayers every Friday at noon. The Mezquita was enlarged and embellished by Abd al-Rahman II in the 9th century, Al-Hakim II in the 960s, and Al-Mansour in the late 10th century. Ultimately it extended over nearly 23,000 sq metres in total, one of the biggest of all mosques. Its 14,000-sq-metre prayer hall incorporated 1293 columns, some of which had stood in the Visigothic church, in Roman buildings in Córdoba, and even in ancient Carthage. Today 856 of the columns remain.

Architecturally revolutionary, the Mezquita recalls in a unique way the yards of desert homes that formed the original Islamic prayer spaces – in this case with a roof over the worshippers’ heads, supported by a forest of columns and arches suggestive of an oasis palm grove. What we see today is the Mezquita’s final Islamic form with two big changes: a 16th-century cathedral plonked right in the middle (which explains the often-used description ‘Mezquita-Catedral’); and the closing of the 19 doors, which communicated the Mezquita with the outside world and filled it with light. Also missing, of course, are the
CÓRDOBA’S PATIOS

For centuries, Córdoba’s beautiful leafy patios have provided shade during the searing heat of summer, a haven of peace and quiet, and a place to talk and entertain. They probably originated with the Romans, and the tradition was continued by the Arabs, with the happy addition of a central fountain.

In the first half of May, you’ll notice ‘Patio’ signs in Córdoba’s streets and alleys; this means that you’re invited to view what is for the rest of the year hidden behind heavy wooden doors or wrought-iron gates. At this time of year, when new blooms proliferate, the patios are at their pristine, polished best. Many patios participate in the annual Concurso de Patios Cordobeses, a competition with prizes for the best patios. The tourist office can provide a map of patios that are open for viewing. If you don’t have a lot of time, those in the vicinity of Calle de San Basilio, about 400m west of the Mezquita, are some of the best.

During the concurso, the patios are generally open from 5pm to midnight weekdays, and noon to midnight weekends. Entry is usually free but sometimes there’s a container for donations.

rows and rows of kneeling men, praying in unison, who would have filled the Mezquita when it was a mosque.

The main entrance is the Puerta del Perdón, a 14th-century Mudéjar gateway on calle Cardenal Herrero, with the ticket office immediately inside. Beside the Puerta del Perdón is a 16th- and 17th-century tower built around the remains of the Mezquita’s minaret. Inside the gateway is the pretty patio de los Naranjos (Courtyard of the Orange Trees), originally the mosque’s ablutions courtyard, from which a door leads inside the prayer hall itself.

From this door you can see straight ahead to the mihrab, the prayer niche in a mosque’s qibla wall (the wall indicating the direction of Mecca) that is the focus of prayer. The first 12 transverse aisles inside the entrance, a forest of pillars and arches, comprise the original 8th-century mosque. The columns support two tiers of arches, necessary to give the building sufficient height to maintain its sense of openness.

In the centre of the building is the Christian cathedral, surrounded by Islamic aisles, pillars and arches. Just past the cathedral’s western end, the approach to the mihrab begins, marked by heavier, more elaborate arches. Immediately in front of the mihrab is the makteur, the royal prayer enclosure (today enclosed by railings) with its intricately interwoven arches and lavishly decorated domes. The makteur and mihrab were created by Caliph Al-Hakim II in the 960s and are the most lavishly decorated sections of the Mezquita. The decoration of the mihrab portal – the Córdoba caliphate’s artistic high point – incorporates 1600kg of gold mosaic cubes, a gift from the Christian emperor of Byzantium, Nicephorus II Phocas. The mosaics give part of the Mezquita something of the mysterious aura of a Byzantine church.

After the Christians captured Córdoba, the Mezquita was used as a church. In the 16th century the centre of the building was torn out to allow construction of a cathedral called the Capilla Mayor, now adorned with a rich 17th-century jasper and marble retablo, and the coro (choir), with fine 18th-century carved-mahogany stalls. The forests of Islamic arches and pillars provide a magnificent setting for the Christian structures, but if you think of the building in its original terms, you’ve got to agree with Carlos I, who reputedly exclaimed to the church authorities: ‘You have destroyed something that was unique in the world.’

JUDERÍA

Jews were among the most dynamic citizens of Islamic Córdoba, holding posts as administrators, doctors, jurists and philosophers. The medieval Judería, extending northwest from the Mezquita almost to Avenida del Gran Capitán, is today a maze of narrow streets and small plazas, whitewashed buildings with flowery window boxes, and wrought-iron doorways giving glimpses of plant-filled patios.

The beautiful little 14th-century Sina-goga (Calle de los Judíos 20; adult/child €6/3.30; Tue-Sat, 1.30pm Sun & holidays) is one of Spain’s very few surviving medieval synagogues. It retains its upstairs women’s gallery, and Hebrew inscriptions and intricate Mudéjar patterns in stucco. The exquisite little 14th-century Alcázar gardens at night.

Casa Andalusi (Calle de los Judíos 12; admission €2.50; h 10am-7pm) is a 12th-century house decked out with exhibits on Córdoba’s medieval Islamic culture, but also including a Roman mosaic in the cellar.

Nearby, the Museo Taurino (Bullfighting Museum; 95 975 20 10 56; Plaza de Maimónides; admission free; h 10am-2pm & 4.30-6.30pm Tue-Sat mid-Oct–Apr, to 2pm & 5.30-7.30pm Tue May-Jun & Sep-Oct, 8.30am-2.30pm Tue-Sat Jul-Aug, 9.30am-2.30pm Sun & holidays year-round) celebrates Córdoba’s legendary toreros, with rooms dedicated to El Cordobés and Manolete, and even the forlorn, pegged-out hide of Islero, the bull that fatally gored Manolete in 1947.

ALCÁZAR DE LOS REYES CHRISTIANOS

Just southwest of the Mezquita, the Castle of the Christian Monarchs (95 975 42 01 51; Campo Santo de los Mártires s/n; admission €4, free Fri; h 10am-2pm & 4.30-6.30pm Tue-Sat mid-Oct–Apr, to 2pm & 5.30-7.30pm Tue May-Jun & Sep–mid-Oct, 8.30am-2.30pm Tue-Sat Jul-Aug, 9.30am-2.30pm Sun & holidays year-round) began as a palace and fort for Alfonso X in the 13th century. From 1490 to 1821 the Inquisition operated from here. Its gardens, full of fish ponds, fountains, orange trees, flowers and topiary, are among the most beautiful in Andalucia. The building houses an old royal bathhouse, the Baños Califales.

PUENTE ROMANO & AROUND

Just south of the Mezquita, the much-restored Puente Romano (Roman Bridge) crosses the Guadalquivir. Just downstream, near the northern bank, is a restored Islamic waterwheel.

At the southern end of the bridge is the Torre de la Calahorra (95 975 29 39 29; Puente Romano s/n; adult/child €2/1.50; h 10am-2pm & 4.30-8.30pm May-Sep, to 6pm Oct-Apr), a 14th-century tower with a museum highlighting the intellectual achievements of Islamic Córdoba and focusing rather rose-tinted on its reputation for religious tolerance.

MUSEO ARQUEOLÓGICO

Córdoba’s excellent archaeological museum (95 975 47 40 11; Plaza de Jerónimo Páez 7; adult/child €6/3; Tue-Sat, to 2pm Sun & holidays) is one of Spain’s very few surviving medieval synagogues. It retains its upstairs women’s gallery, and Hebrew inscriptions and intricate Mudéjar patterns in stucco. The upstairs is devoted to medieval Córdoba, including a graceful Byzantine bronze stag from Medina Azahara.

PLAZA DEL POTRO

This attractive, pedestrianised plaza, 400m northeast of the Mezquita, was a celebrated hang-out for traders and adventurers in the 16th and 17th centuries. Miguel de Cervantes lived for a while in the Posada del Potro (95 975 48 50 18; admission free; h 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri, Sat, then an inn (which he described in Don Quijote as ‘a den of thieves’) and today an exhibition hall.

A former hospital houses what is, surprisingly enough, Córdoba’s most visited museum, the Museo Julio Romero de Torres (95 975 19 09; Plaza del Potro s/n; admission €3, free Sun; h 10am-2pm & 4.30-6.30pm Tue-Sat mid-Oct–Apr, to 2pm & 5.30-7.30pm Tue May-Jun & Sep–mid-Oct, 8.30am-2.30pm Tue-Sat Jul-Aug, 9.30am-2.30pm Sun & holidays year-round), devoted to revered local painter Julio Romero de Torres (1873–1930). Romero de Torres specialised in sensual portraits of Cordoban women – voyeuristic eroticism to some, the quintessence of all things Andalucian to others. In the same building is the Museo de Bellas Artes (Fine Arts Museum; adult/EU citizen €1.50/free; h 3pm Tue, 9am-8pm Wed-Sat, to 3pm Sun & holidays), with a collection mainly of other Cordoban artists.

HAMMAM BAÑOS ARABES

Follow the lead of the medieval Cordobans and indulge your senses at the recently renovated Arab baths (95 975 48 47 46; www.hammamspain.com/cordoba; Calle Corregidor Luis de la Cerda; bath/bath & 1hr session at 10am, noon, 2pm, 4pm, 6pm, 8pm & 10pm), where you pass between baths of different temperatures and can even enjoy an aromatherapy massage, tea, hookah and Arabic sweets. Swimming costumes are available to rent if you don’t have your own.

Festivals & Events

Spring and early summer is the chief festival time for Córdoba.

Concurso & Festival de Patios Cordobeses (Early May) See the boxed text Córdoba’s Patios (opposite); at the same time there’s a busy cultural programme.

Feria de Mayo (Last week of May/first days of June) Ten days of party time for Córdoba, with a giant fair, concerts and bullfights.

Festival Internacional de Guitarra (Late June/early July) Two-week celebration of the guitar, with live classical, flamenco, rock, blues and more; top names play in the Alcázar gardens at night.
Sleeping
Córdoba heaves with budget accommodation (though finding single rooms for a decent price is not easy). Many lodgings are built around some of the city’s charming patios. Booking ahead is wise from March to October and essential during the main festivals. Prices are generally reduced from November to mid-March, and some places also cut their rates during hot July and August.

HOSTAL REPOSO DE BAGDAD

Hostal El Reposo de Bagdad (€75: 95 70 28 54; www.hostalbagdad.eresmas.com; Calle Fernández Ruano 11; s/d €22/38) Hidden in a tiny street in the Judería, this 200-year-old house is an interesting and attractive location in the Judería of Córdoba. The proprietors speak fluent English.

CASA DE LOS AZULEJOS

Casa de los Azulejos (€75: 95 47 00 00; www.casa-debosazulejos.com/marco.htm; Calle Fernando Colón 5; d/low/high season €85/130; p a) Andalucía meets Mexico in this gorgeously stylish hotel, where the patio is all banana trees, fluffy ferns and tall palms, bathed in sunlight. The rooms are in a colonial style, and there’s a good Mexican restaurant downstairs.

TOP END

Hotel Amistad Córdoba (€125: 95 42 03 33; www.nh-hotels.com; Plaza de Maimónides 3; s/d €106/130; p a) Occupying two 18th-century mansions with original Mudéjar patios, the Amistad is part of the modern NH chain with elegant rooms and all the requisite facilities including babysitting.

Parador Nacional Arruzafa (€75: 95 77 59 00; www.parador.es; Avenida de la Arruzafa s/n; s/d €116/145; p a) Best if you’re driving, the parador is 3km north of the city centre. It’s fabulously situated on the site of Abd ar-Rahman I’s summer palace and is a modern affair amid lush green gardens where Europe’s first palm trees were planted.

Eating
Dishes common to most Cordoban restaurants include salmorejo, a very thick tomato-based gazpacho, and rabo de toro (oxtail stew). Some restaurants feature recipes from Al-Andalus such as garlic soup with raisins, honeyed lamb, or meat stuffed with dates and nuts. The local tipple is wine from nearby Montilla and Moriles, similar to sherry but unfortified.

There are lots of places to eat right by the Mezquita. A few mostly better-value places are short walk west into the Jewish Quarter. A longer walk east or north turns up further options.

BAR SANTOS

Calle Magistral González Francés 3; tortillas €2.50) The legendary Santos serves the best torilla de patata in town – eaten with plastic forks on paper plates, while gazing at the Mezquita. Don’t miss it.

Taberna San Miguel (€75: 95 47 01 66; Plaza San Miguel 1; tapas €11.50 – 16.50; p a) This friendly Séneca occupies a rambling house attractively furnished rooms with all the mod cons. Great facilities are available here at a very reasonable price. This hotel is a refurbished mansion with two patios and the proprietor speaks English.

HOSTAL SÉNECA

Hostal Séneca (€75: 957 47 32 34; Calle Conde y Lude 7; s/d incl breakfast €44/66) The charming, friendly Séneca occupies a rambling house with a marvellous pebbled patio that’s filled with greenery.

Hotel Marion (€75: 95 74 24 10; Calle Romero Barros 4; s/d €35/49, apt €56; p a) This place has comfortably furnished rooms with all the mod cons. The helpful reception staff speak English. The same proprietors run an equally good hostel a few doors down (Number 16).

MIDRANGE

Hotel González (€75: 95 74 98 19; hotelgonzalez@wanadoo.es; Calle Marmitec 3; d €66; g) Rich baroque décor with gold everywhere and numerous paintings in a building that was once home to the son of Córdoba’s favourite artist, Julio Romero de Torres. The restaurant is set in the pretty flower-filled patio and the friendly proprietors speak fluent English.

Hotel Mezquita (€75: 95 74 55 85; hotelmezquita@wanadoo.es; Plaza Santa Catalina 1; s/d €36/69; p a) One of the best-value places in town, this hotel is right opposite the Mezquita itself. The 16th-century mansion has large, elegant rooms, some with views of the great mosque.

Hotel Albuscias (€75: 95 74 45 75; p a) Tucked away in a quiet location in the Judería is the Albuscias’ big plus. Décor is in stern medieval style, though the rooms are clean and plain, in khaki and white.

Hotel Lola (€75: 95 20 03 05; www.hotelenconcan tolo.com; Calle Romero 3; d incl breakfast €114; p a) A quirky and individual hotel with large antique beds and full of smaller items that you just wish you could take home. You can eat your breakfast on the roof terrace overlooking the Mezquita bell tower.

Taberna Salinas (€75: 95 48 01 35; Calle Tundidores 3; tapas/€12/8; p a) Dating back to 1879, this large patio restaurant fills up fast, developing a lively atmosphere. Try the delicious aubergines with honey or potatoes with garlic.

Comedor Arabe Andaluís (€75: 95 47 51 62; Calle Alfayatlas 6; mains €8-11) Indulge your North African tastes at this low-seated, dimly-lit eatery where you can choose from köfte, falafel, tagines or bowls of fluffy couscous with lamb, greens and herbs.

Casa Pepe de la Judería (€75: 95 20 07 44; Calle Romero 1; mains €9-15) A great roof-terrace with views of the Mezquita and a labyrinth of dining rooms that are always packed. Down a complementary glass of Montilla before launching into the house specials, including Cordoban oxtails or venison fillets.

El Churrasco (€75: 95 29 08 19; Calle Romero 16; mains €12; p a) The food is rich, the portions generous and the service attentive. Meaty dishes include the eponymous Churrasco, a barbecued pork fillet with exotic Arabian sauce.

Bodega Campos (€75: 95 47 75 00; Calle de Lineros 32; tapas/€15/7; mains €13-19; p a) This atmospheric winery-cum-restaurant serves up a delicious array of meals. For a cheaper but no less enjoyable evening, try the huge plates of tapas in the bar.

Drinking
Córdoba’s liveliest bars are mostly scattered around the newer parts of town and come alive at about 11pm or midnight on weekends. Most bars in the medieval centre close around midnight.

Taberna San Miguel (€75: 95 47 07 40; Paseo de la Ribera 9; h noon-3am) This is where the young and beautiful lounge on green leather sofas and consume elaborate cocktails. The DJ whips up a storm of music in his booth. Party in style till late at night.

Soul (€75: 95 74 15 80; Calle de Alfonso XIII 3; h 9am-3am Mon-Fri & 10am-3am Sat & Sun) A friendly DJ bar that gets hot and busy on weekends, attracting a hip and arty crowd.

Bodega Guzmán (Calle de los Judíos 7) Don’t miss this atmospheric old-city favourite, with Montilla from the barrel.

Milenium (Calle Alfareros 33) A popular gay haunt that plays a broad range of ambient house.

Entertainment

Jazz Café (€75: 95 47 19 28; Calle Espartería s/n; admission free; p a) This fabulous laid-back bar puts on regular live jazz and jam sessions.

Gran Teatro de Córdoba (€75: 95 48 02 37; www.teatro cordoba.com in Spanish; Avenida del Gran Capitán 3) This theatre hosts a busy programme of concerts, theatre, dance and film.

Surfer Rosa (€75: 95 77 22 72; Feria El Arenal; admission free; p a) A popular riverbank techno and breakbeat club in the Recinto Ferial El Arenal (location of the Feria de Mayo). Live bands play here frequently.

Shopping
Córdoba is known for its Cuero repujado (embossed-leather) goods, silver jewellery (particularly filigree) and attractive pottery. Craft shops congregate around the Mezquita. Meryan (€95: 97 47 59 02; Calle de las flores) is a top place for embossed leather.

Getting There & Away

Buses

The bus station (€75: 95 40 40 40; Plaza de las Tendillas, 1km northwest of Plaza de las Tendillas, behind the train station. Destinations include Seville (€9.50, 1½ hours, six daily), Granada (€10.50, three hours, nine daily), Madrid (€14.5, ¼ hours, six daily), Málaga (€10.50, 2½ hours, five daily) and Jaén (€7.1¼ hours, seven daily).

Train

Córdoba’s train station (€75: 95 40 02 02; Avenida de América) is on the high-speed AVE line between Madrid and Seville. Rail destinations include Seville (€7.50 to €22, 45 to 90 minutes, 23 or more daily), Madrid (€28 to €52, 1¼ to
6½ hours, 23 or more daily), Málaga (€16 to €21, 2½ hours, nine daily), Barcelona (€52 to €85, 10½ hours, four daily) and Jérez (€8, 1½ hours, one daily). For Granada (€16, four hours), change at Bobadilla.

Getting Around
Bus 3 (€1), from the street between the train and bus stations, runs to Plaza de las Tendillas and down Calle de San Fernando, east of the Mezquita. For the return trip, you can pick it up on Ronda de Isasa, just south of the Mezquita.

Taxis from the bus or train station to the Mezquita cost around €5.

For drivers, Córdoba’s one-way system is nightmarish, but routes to many hotels and hostales are fairly well signposted with a ‘P’ if they have parking. Hotels charge about €10 to €12 per day for parking.

AROUND CÓRDOBA
Medina Azahara
In 936 Abd ar-Rahman III began the construction of a magnificent new capital for his caliphate, 8km west of Córdoba, and by 945 was able to install himself there. Legend has it that Medina Azahara (Madinat al-Zahra; % 957 32 91 30; adult/EU citizen €1.50/free; 10am-6:30pm Tue-Sat, to 8.30pm May–mid-Sep, to 2pm Sun) was built for the caliph’s favourite wife Az-Zahra.

The new capital was eminently successful. Between 1010 and 1013, during the caliphate’s collapse, Medina Azahara was wrecked by Berber soldiers. Today, though less than one tenth of it has been excavated, and only about a quarter of that is open to tourists, Medina Azahara is still a fascinating place to visit.

The visitor route leads down to the Dar al-Wuzara (House of the Viziers), a substantial building with several horseshoe arches, fronted by a square garden, and on to the most impressive building, the painstakingly restored Salón de Abd ar-Rahman III. This was the caliph’s throne hall, with beautiful horseshoe arching and exquisitely carved stuccowork, of a lavishness that was unprecedented in the Islamic world.

Medina Azahara is signposted on Avenida de Medina Azahara, which leads west out of Córdoba onto the A431. Try to visit before 11am to avoid the coaches.

A taxi costs €24 for the return trip, with one hour to view the site, or you can book a three-hour coach tour for €5 to €10 through many Córdoba hotels.

GRANADA PROVINCE

Some places in this world seem to have it all: the looks, the jewels, the sense of fun, a streetwise edge. Granada is one of those places. Millions of people pour into the town just to see its crown gem: the Alhambra, a place that carries with it coffers-full of stories, dreams and mysteries of the last 2½ centuries of a great civilisation. If there’s one don’t-miss destination in Andalucía, this is it. But Granada the province is more than Granada the city: it’s the snowcapped Sierra Nevada, the highest mountain range in mainland Spain; it’s the mysteriously beautiful Alpujarras valleys; and it’s the Costa Tropical, Granada’s own slice of the Mediterranean coast.

GRANADA
pop 265,000 / elevation 685m

Granada has an edge over other Andalucian cities. Many visitors don’t get past the allure of the Alhambra, with its woods and the Sierra Nevada as magnificent backdrops, and the mystery of the winding streets of the Albaicín. But what you’ll find if you stick around is Andalucía’s hippest, youthful city, with a free-tapas culture, innovative bars, tiny flamenco restaurants, and down Calle de San Fernando, east of the Mezquita. For the return trip, you can pick it up on Ronda de Isasa, just south of the Mezquita.

Getting Around
Metro (Map p774; % 958 26 15 65; Plaza de la Constitución; % 958 20 49 01; Calle de la Isla 12) Granada’s best map shop, in the south of the city, just off Camino de Ronda.

Contact for tourist info click ‘La Ciudad’ (www.turismodegranada.org) Good website of the provincial tourist office.

Laundry
Lavomatique (Map p774; Calle Paz 19) Wash and dry clothes.

Medical Services
Hospital Ruiz de Alda (% 958 02 00 09, 958 24 11 08; Avenida de la Constitución 100) Central, with good emergency facilities.

Money
There are plenty of banks and ATMs on Gran Via de Colón, Plaza Isabel La Católica and Calle Reyes Católicos.

Post
Post office (Map p774; Puerta Real s/n; 8.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2pm Sat) Often has long queues.

Tourist Information
Provincial tourist office (Map p774; % 958 24 71 28; www.turismodegranada.org; Plaza de Mariano Pineda 10; 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Sat,
**GRANADA PROVINCE •• Granada**

10am-3pm Sun May-Sep, 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat, to 3pm Sun Nov-Apr) Helpful staff; a short walk east of Puerta Real.

**Regional tourist office** Plaza Nueva (Map p774; % 958 22 10 22; Calle Santa Ana 1; h 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun & holidays); Alhambra (Map p772; % 958 22 95 75; ticket-office bldg, Avenida del Generalife s/n; h 8am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm & 4-7.30pm Sat & Sun, closes at 6pm Nov-Feb, 9am-1pm holidays) Information on all of Andalucía.

**Sights & Activities**

Most major sights are within walking distance of the city centre, though there are buses to save you walking uphill.

### ALHAMBRA

Stretched along the top of the hill known as La Sabika, the Alhambra (Map p772; % 902 441221; www.alhambra-proturismo.es; adult/EU senior €10/5, disabled & under 8yr free, Generalife only €5; h 8.30am-8pm Mar-Oct, to 6pm Nov-Feb, closed 25 Dec & 1 Jan) is the stuff of fairy tales and, once you’ve visited it, you’ll long to return. From outside, its red fortress towers and walls appear plain, if imposing, rising from woods of cypress and elm, with the Sierra Nevada forming a magnificent backdrop. Inside the marvellously decorated emirs’ palace, the Palacio Nazaries (Nasrid Palace) and the Generalife gardens, you’re in for a treat. Water is an art form here and its sounds take you far from the bustle of the city.

The spell can be shattered by the average 6000 visitors who tramp through the site each day, so try to visit first thing in the morning or late in the afternoon, or treat yourself to a magical night by visiting the Palacio Nazaries (p773 for details).

The Alhambra has two outstanding sets of buildings, the Palacio Nazaries and the Alcazaba (Citadel). Also within its walls are the Palacio de Carlos V, the Iglesia de Santa María de la Alhambra, two hotels, several book and souvenir shops as well as lovely gardens, including the supreme Generalife.

There’s a small café by the ticket office but only the two hotels offer sit-down meals.

**History**

The Alhambra, from the Arabic al-qala‘at al-hamra (red castle), was a fortress from the 9th century. The 13th- and 14th-century Nasrid emirs converted it into a fortress-palace complex adjoined by a small town (medina),
of which only ruins remain. Yusuf I (1333–54) and Mohammed V (1354–59 and 1362–91) built the magnificent Palacio Nazaries.

After the Christian conquest the Alhambra’s mosque was replaced with a church and the Convento de San Francisco (now the Parador de Granada) was built. Carlos I, grandson of Isabel I and Fernando II, had a wing of the Palacio Nazaries destroyed to make space for a huge Renaissance palace, the Palacio de Carlos V (using his title as Holy Roman Emperor).

In the 18th century the Alhambra was abandoned to thieves and beggars. During the Napoleonic occupation it was used as a barracks and narrowly escaped being blown up. In 1870 it was declared a national monument as a result of the huge interest stirred by the renowned travel writer Washington Irving, who wrote the entrancing Tales of the Alhambra in the Palacio Nazaries during his brief stay in the 1820s. Since then the Alhambra has been salvaged and very heavily restored. 

Admission

Some areas of the Alhambra can be visited at any time without a ticket, but the highlight areas can only be entered with a ticket. Up to 6600 tickets are available for each day. At least 2000 of these are sold at the ticket office on the day, but in Easter week, June, July, August and September these sell out early and you need to start queuing by 7am to be reasonably sure of getting one.

It’s highly advisable to book in advance ($6.90 extra per ticket). You can book up to a year ahead, in three ways: Alhambra website (www.alhambratickets.es) Online booking in English, Spanish and French. Banca Telefónica BBVA (% 902 22 44 60 within Spain, 00-34-91 537 91 78 from outside Spain; 8am–5.35pm) Telephone booking service provided by BBVA bank; English speakers available. BBVA Book in person at any of the 4000 BBVA bank branches around Spain; there’s a convenient Granada branch on Plaza Isabel La Católica (8.30am–2.15pm Mon–Fri year-round, 8.30am–1pm Sat Oct–Mar).

For internet or phone bookings you need a Visa card, MasterCard or Eurocard. You receive a reference number, which you must show, along with your passport, national identity card or credit card, at the Alhambra ticket office when you pick up the ticket on the day of your visit.

Every ticket is stamped with a half-hour time slot for entry to the Palacio Nazaries. Once inside the pala00, you can stay as long as you like. Each ticket is also either a billete de mañana (morning ticket), valid for entry to the Generalife or Alcazaba until 2pm, or a billete de tarde, for entry after 2pm.

The Palacio Nazaries is also open for night visits (10pm–11.30pm Tue–Sat Mar–Oct, 8pm–9.30pm Fri & Sat Nov–Feb). Tickets cost the same as daytime tickets: the ticket office opens 30 minutes before the palace’s opening time, closing 30 minutes after it. You can book ahead for night visits in the same ways as for day visits.

Alcazaba

The ramparts and several towers are all that remain of the citadel. The most important is the Torre de la Vela (Watchtower), with a winding staircase to its top terrace, which has splendid views. The cross and banners of the Reconquista were raised here in January 1492. In the past the tower’s bell chimes controlled the irrigation system of Granada’s fertile plain, the Vega.

Palacio Nazaries

This is the Alhambra’s true gem, the most brilliant Islamic building in Europe, with its perfectly proportioned rooms and courtyards, intricately moulded stucco walls, beautiful tiling, fine carved wooden ceilings and elaborate stalactite-like muqarnas vaulting, all worked in mesmerising, symbolic, geometrical patterns. Arabic inscriptions proliferate in the stuccowork.

The Mexuar, through which you normally enter the palace, dates from the 14th century and was used as a council chamber and antechamber for audiences with the emir. The public would have gone no further.

From the Mexuar you pass into the Patio del Cuarto Dorado, a courtyard where the emirs gave audiences, with the Cuarto Dorado (Golden Room) on the left. Opposite the Cuarto Dorado is the entrance to the Palacio de Comares through a beautiful façade of glazed tiles, stucco and carved wood.

Built for Emir Yusuf I, the Palacio de Comares served as a private residence for the ruler. It’s built around the lovely Patio de los Arrayanes (Patio of the Myrtles) with its rectangular pool. The southern end of the patio is overshadowed by the walls of the Palacio de Carlos V. Inside the northern Torre de Comares (Comares Tower), the Sala de la Barca (Hall of the Blessing), with a beautiful wooden ceiling, leads into the Salón de Comares (Comares Hall), where the emirs would have conducted negotiations with Christian emissaries. This room, with its vast painted ceiling, contains more than 8000 cedar pieces in a pattern of stars representing the seven heavens of Islam.

The Patio de los Arrayanes leads into the Palacio de los Leones (Palace of the Lions), built under Mohammed V – by some accounts as the royal harem. The palace rooms surround the famous Palacio de los Leones (Lion Court-yard), with its marble fountain channelling water through the mouths of 12 marble lions. The palace symbolises the Islamic paradise, which is divided into four parts by rivers (represented by water channels meeting at the fountain). The patio’s gallery, with beautifully ornamented pavements at its ends, is supported by 124 slender marble columns.

Of the four halls around the patio, the southern Sala de los Abencerrajes is the legendary site of the murders of the noble Abencerraj family, whose leader, the story goes, dared to daily kiss Zoraya, Abu al-Hasan’s favourite. At the eastern end of the patio is the Sala de los Reyes (Hall of the Kings), with leather-lined ceilings painted by 14th-century Christian artists. The name comes from the painting on the central alcove, thought to depict 10 Nasrid emirs. On the northern side of the patio is the richly decorated Sala de Dos Hermanas (Hall of Two Sisters), probably named after the slabs of white marble at either side of its fountain. It features a fantastic muqarnas dome with a central star and 5000 tiny cells, reminiscent of the constellations. This may have been the room of the emir’s favourite paramour. At its far end is the Sala de los Ajimeces, with low-slung windows through which the favoured lady could look over the Albayzin and countryside, while reclining on ottomans and cushions.

From the Sala de Dos Hermanas a passage leads through the Estancias del Emperador (Emperor’s Chambers), built for Carlos I in the 1520s, some of them later used by Washington Irving. From here, descend to the Patio de la Reja (Patio of the Grill) and Patio de Lindaraja.
and emerge into the Jardines del Partal, an area of terraced gardens. Leave the Partal gardens by a gate facing the Palacio de Carlos V, or continue along a path to the Generalife.

**Palacio de Carlos V**

This huge Renaissance palace was begun in 1527 by Pedro Machuca, a Toledo architect, and was never completed. The imposing building ticket you can climb a stairwell circular, two-tiered courtyard with 32 columns. Were the palace in a different setting, its merits might be more readily appreciated.

On the ground floor, the Museo de la Alhambra (€9.58 02 79 00; admission free; 9am-2.30pm Tue-Sat) has an absorbing collection of Islamic artefacts from the Alhambra, Granada province and Córdoba, with explanatory texts in English and Spanish. A highlight is the elegant Alhambra VIII, decorated with gilded stucco.

Upstairs, the Museo de Bellas Artes (€9.58 22 48 43; admission free; 9am-2pm Mon-Fri) is worth a visit for its impressive collection of Granada-related paintings and sculptures such as the carved wooden relief of the Virgin and Child (c. 1547) by Diego de Siloé.

**Other Christian Buildings**

The Iglesia de Santa María was built between 1581 and 1617 on the site of the former palace of the Convento de San Francisco. The Parador de Granada hotel (p780), was erected over an Islamic palace. Isabel and Fernando were buried in the patio before being transferred to the Capilla Real (right).

**Generalife**

The name Generalife means ‘Architect’s Garden’, and this soothing composition of pathways, patios, pools, fountains, trimmed hedges, tall trees and, in season, flowers of every imaginable hue, is the perfect place to end an Alhambra visit. The Muslim rulers’ summer palace is in the corner furthest from the entrance. Within the palace, the Patio de la Acequia (Court of the Water Channel) has a long pool framed by flowerbeds and 19th-century fountains, whose shapes sensuously echo the arched porticos at each end. Off this patio is the Jardín de la Sultana (Sultana’s Garden), with the trunk of a 700-year-old cypress tree, where Abd al-Hasan supposedly caught his lover, Zoraya, with the head of the Abencerraj clan, leading to the murders in the Sala de los Abencerrajes.

**Getting There & Away**

Buses 30 and 32 (€1) both run between Plaza Nueva and the Alhambra ticket office every five to nine minutes from 7.15am to 11pm.

If you opt to walk up Cuesta de Gomérez from Plaza Nueva you soon reach the Puerta de las Granadas (Gate of the Pomegranates), built by Carlos I. Above this are the Bosque Alhambra woods. If you already have your Alhambra ticket, you can climb the Cuesta Empedrada path up to the left and pass through the austere Puerta de la Justicia (Gate of Justice), constructed in 1348 as the Alhambra’s main entrance.

If you need to go to the ticket office, in the Pabellón de Acceso (Access Pavilion), continue on for about 900m from the Puerta de las Granadas. From the Pabellón de Acceso you can enter the Generalife, and move on from there to other parts of the complex.

For drivers coming from out of town, ‘Alhambra’ signs on the approach roads to Granada direct you circuitously to the Alhambra car parks (€1.40/14) on Avenida de los Alixares, above the ticket office.

**CAPILLA REAL**

The Royal Chapel (Map p774; 958 229 329; www.capilla-real.granada.com; Calle Oficios; admission €3; 10.30am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 11am-1pm & 4-7pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10.30am-1pm & 3-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-1pm & 3-6.30pm Sun Nov-March) is Granada’s outstanding Christian building. Spanish-history fans will enjoy this connection with the Catholic Monarchs, Isabel and Fernando, who commissioned this elaborate Isabelline Gothic style building as their mausoleum. It was not completed until 1521, hence their temporary interment in the Convento de San Francisco.

The monarchs lie in simple lead coffins in the crypt beneath their marble monuments in the chancel, which is enclosed by a stunning gilded wrought-iron screen created in 1520 by Bartolomé de Jaén. The coffins, from left to right, are those of Felipe El Hermoso (Philip the Handsome, husband of the monarchs’ daughter Juana la Loca), Fernando, Isabel, Juana la Loca (Joanna the Mad) and Miguel, the eldest grandchild of Isabel and Fernando. The marble effigies of the first four, reclining above the crypt, were a tribute by Carlos I to his parents and grandparents. The representations of Isabel and Fernando are slightly lower than those of Felipe and...
ALBAYZÍN

On the hill facing the Alhambra across the Darro valley, Granada’s old Muslim quarter, the Albayzín, is one of the city’s most fabulous treasures. The steep, winding, cobblestone streets with gorgeous cármenes (large mansions with walled gardens, from the Arabic karmán for garden), reveal the best views of the Alhambra and, likewise, the best views of the Albayzín. The Alhambra’s name derives from 1227, when Muslims from Baeza (Jaén province) moved here after their city was conquered by the Christians. It survived as the Muslim quarter for several decades after the Christian conquest in 1492. Islamic ramparts and fountains remain, and many of the Alhambra’s cármenes and churches incorporate Islamic remains. Despite all this charm and beauty, this neighbourhood is still a work-in-progress and, unfortunately, its narrow streets are often havens for thieves and muggers. We have had reports of muggings, some violent, in the Albayzín so if you are alone try to avoid this area during siesta time (3pm to 5pm) and after dark.

Buses 31 and 32 both run circular routes from Plaza Nueva around the Albayzín about every seven to nine minutes from 7.30am to 11pm.

MONASTERIO DE SAN JÉRÔMINO

This 16th-century monastery (Map pp70-1; % 958 27 93 37; Calle Rector López Arqueta 9; admission €3; h 10am-1.30pm & 4-7.30pm Apr-Oct, to 1.30pm & 3-6.30pm Nov-Mar), 500m west of the cathedral, is the burial place of El Gran Capitán (the Great Captain), Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, the military right-hand man of the Catholic Monarchs. It’s a treat for fans of Gothic and Renaissance architecture, and stone carving. Don’t miss the two lovely Plateresque doorways in the cloister, carved by the chief architect, Diego de Siloé, or the profusion of brightly painted sculpture inside the monastery church. El Gran Capitán’s tombstone is at the foot of the steps before the altar.

MONASTERIO DE LA CARTUJA

Another architectural gem stands 2km north-west of the city centre, reached by bus 8 from Gran Vía de Colón. La Cartuja Monsters (958 16 19 32; Paseo de la Cartuja; admission €3; h 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, to 1pm & 3.30-6pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar, to noon year-round) was built between the 16th and 18th centuries. People come to see the lavish monastery church, especially the sagrario (sanctuary) behind the main altar, a confection of coloured marbles, golden capitals, profuse sculpture and a beautiful frescoed cupola; and, to the left of the main altar, the sacristía (sacristy), the ultimate expression of Spanish late-baroque, in effusive ‘wedding-cake’ stucco, and brown-and-white Lanjaron marble, resembling a melange of chocolate mousse and cream.

HUERTA DE SAN VICENTE

This house (% 958 25 84 66; Calle Virgen Blanca s/n; admission €1.80, free Wed, by guided tour in Spanish; h tours about every 45 min, 10am-12.30pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar, to 1pm & 5-8pm Tues-Sun Apr-Jun, to 3pm Jul-Aug), where Federico García Lorca spent summers and wrote some of his best-known works, is a 15-minute walk south of the city centre. It was once surrounded by orchards. Today the modern Parque Federico García Lorca separates it from whizzing traffic.

The house contains some original furnishings, including Lorca’s writing desk and piano, some of his drawings and other memorabilia, and exhibitions connected with his life and work. To get there, head 700m down Calle de las Recogidas from Puerta Real, turn right along Calle del Arabial, then take the first left into Calle Virgen Blanca.

Walking Tour

Plaza Nueva extends northeast into Plaza Santa Ana, where the Iglesia de Santa Ana (1) incorporates a mosque’s minaret in its bell-tower. Along narrow Carrera del Darro, stop by the 11th-century Muslim bathhouse, the Baños Arabes El Bañuelo (2; % 958 02 78 00; Carrera del Darro 31; admission free; h 10am-2pm Tue-Sat). Further along is the Museo Arqueológico (3; Archaeological Museum; % 958 22 56 40; Carrera del Darro 43; adult/EU citizens €1.50/free; h 3-8pm Tue, 9am-8pm Wed-Sat, to 2.30pm Sun), displaying finds from Granada province. It’s curious to find ancient Egyptian amulets (brought by the Phoenicians) here.

Shortly past the museum, Carrera del Darro becomes Paseo de los Tristes. Turn up Calle Candil and climb, via Placeta de Toqueros and Carril de San Agustín, to Plaza del Salvador, near the top of the Alhambra. Plaza del Salvador is dominated by the Colegiata del Salvador (4; % 958 27 86 44; admission €0.80; h 10am-1pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, 10.30am-12.30pm & 4.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar), a 16th-century church on the site of the Alhambra’s main mosque; the mosque’s horseshoe-arched patio survives at its western end. From here head west to Plaza Larga and through the Arco de las Pesas (5), an impressive gateway in the Alhambra’s 15th-century defensive wall. Callejón de San Cecilio leads to the Mirador San Nicolás (6), a lookout with unbeatable views of the Alhambra and Sierra Nevada. Come back here later for sunset (you can’t miss the trail then!). At any time of day take care: skillful, well-organised walletlifters and bag-snatchers operate here.

Just east of Mirador San Nicolás, off Cuesta de las Cabras, the Alhambra’s first new mosque in 500 years, the Mezquita Mayor de Granada (7; % 958 20 23 31; h gardens 11am-2pm & 6-9.30pm), has been built to serve modern Granada’s growing Muslim population.

Return to the lookout, take the steps down beside it and follow the street down to Camino Nuevo de San Nicolás. Turn right and head downhill to Placeta de San Miguel Bajo (8), with its lively café-restaurants. Leave the square by Callejón del Gallo, turn right at the end of this short lane, and you’ll come to the 15th-century Palacio de Dar-al-Horra (9; Callejón de las Monjas s/n; admission free; h 10am-2pm Mon-Fri), a mini-Alhambra that was home to the mother of Boabdil, Granada’s last Muslim ruler.
Return to Placeta de San Miguel Bajo and head down Placeta Cauchyes de San Miguel, which becomes Calle San José, where the lovely Almiran de San José (10; San José Mina- ret) survives from an 11th-century mosque. Calle San José meets the top of Calle Calderería Nueva (11), which is lined by teterías (Middle Eastern-style teahouses) and shops brimming with slippers, hookahs, jewellery and North African pottery. Stop for a Moroccan mint tea, or head back to Plaza Nueva.

Courses
Granada is a great place to study Spanish. It also has several Spanish dance schools. The provincial tourist office has a list of schools, or check out www.granadaspanish.org and www.spanishcourses.info.

Centro de Lenguas Modernas (Modern Languages Centre, Map p774; % 958 21 56 60; www.clm-granada.com; Placeta del Hospicio Viejo s/n) Granada University’s modern-language department offers a variety of popular Spanish-language and cultural programmes. Intensive language courses, at all levels, start at 10 days (40 hours of classes) for €305.

Escuela Carmen de las Cuevas (Map pp770-1; % 958 22 10 62; www.carmencuevas.com; Cuesta de los Chinos 15, Sacromonte) Private school with good reports. Teaches Spanish-language and cultural programmes. Intensive language courses, at all levels, start at 10 days (40 hours of classes) for €305.

Feria de Corpus Christi (Corpus Christi Fair; early June 2007, mid-May 2008) Fairgrounds, bullfights, more drinking and sevillanas.

Festival Internacional de Música y Danza (2½ weeks from late June to early July) Features mainly classical performances, some free, many in historic locations.

Sleeping
Granada is almost oversupplied with hotels – the ones reviewed here are just a tiny selection. However, it’s definitely worthwhile booking ahead from March to October, and especially during Semana Santa and Christmas.

BUDGET At busy times, prime-location rooms tend to fill up before noon, especially on Cuesta de Gomérez.

City Sightseeing Granada (% 902 10 10 81) Operates Granada’s double-decker city tour bus. It has 20 stops outside the main sights. Hop on and off where you like; the ticket (€15) is valid for 24 hours.

Festivals & Events
Semana Santa (Holy Week) This and the Feria de Corpus Christi are the big two. Benches are set up in Plaza del Carmen to view the Semana Santa processions.

Día de la Cruz (Day of the Cross; 3 May) Efficient Britz has 22 clean rooms with double glazing, gleaming wooden surfaces and central heating. There’s also a lift.

Hostal Landázuri (Map p774; % fax 958 22 14 06; Cuesta de Gomérez 24; s/d/tr/q €28/45/50/60, s/d without bathroom €20/28; p) This folksy place boasts a terrace with Alhambra views, and a café. The rooms are modern enough and the triples are large and bright.

Plaza de la Trinidad & Around
Hostal Sevilla (Map p774; % 958 27 85 13; Calle Fábrica Vieja 18; hostalsevilla@telefonica.net; r €35, s/d without bath- room €18/27; p) The friendly, clean Sevilla, run by a young family, has pretty tiles and lamp-shades, and a great, large attic double.

Hostal Meridiano (Map p774; % fax 958 25 05 44; www.hostalpensionmeridiano.com; Calle Angulo 9; r €38, s/d without bathroom €18/32, 4-/6-person apt €35/40; p a) This residence is run by a helpful couple who are tuned in to travellers’ needs. Six of the attractive and homely rooms have bathrooms; internet is free.

Midrange
Hostal La Ninfá (Map p774; % 958 22 79 85; Campo del Príncipe s/n; s/d €45/65; a) A rustic place covered inside and out with brightly painted ceramic stars. It has clean, cosy rooms, friendly owners and an attractive breakfast room. But ear plugs may be necessary.

Hostal Guadalupe (Map pp770-1; % 958 22 34 23; www.hoteluadialupe.es; Avenida Los Alekures s/n; s/d €76/104; p a) Almost on the Alhambra’s doorstep, the jolly Guadalupe has spacious, cork floors and satellite TV. Its friendly reception is in an attractive 18th-century patio fitted out with cane chairs and palm trees.

Hotel América (Map p772; % 958 22 74 71; www.hotelamericagranada.com; Calle Real de la Alhambra 53; s/d €70/106; f Mar-Nov; a) Within the Alham- bra grounds, this is in an early 19th-century building. Reserve well in advance, as rooms are limited.

Puerta de las Granadas (Map p774; % 958 21 62 30; www.hotelpuertadelasgranadas.com; Calle Cuesta de Gomérez 14; s/d €77/99, superior r €107-80; a i ) This 19th-century building, renovated in modern-minimalist style, has wooden shutters and elegant furnishings. The luxury rooms have Alhambra or cathedral views.

There are several hotels in beautiful renovated Albayzin mansions.

Hotel Casa del Capitol Nazari (Map p774; % 958 21 52 60; www.hotelsacapitol.com; Cuesta Acetilencos 6; s/d €73/91; a i ) Understated décor and ambient music play in a 16th-century patio with wooden balconies and ancient pillars.

Casa del Aljíarife (Map p774; % fax 958 22 24 25; www.granadainfo.com; Mosta; Placeta de la Cruz Verde 2; r €95; a) This beautifully restored 17th-century house has helpful hosts, just four spacious and characterful rooms, and a patio.

Hotel Zaguán (Map p774; % 958 21 57 30; www.hotelsaguán.com; Carrera del Darro; s €60; a) A risen-from-ruins and tastefully restored 16th-century house with a bar/restaurant. The 13 rooms are all different; some look out to Río Darro.

Hotel Carmen de Santa Inés (Map p774; % 958 22 63 80; www.carmensantaines.com; Placeta de Ponras 7; s/d €95/105, r with sitting room €125-200; a) This Islamic-era house, extended in the 16th and 17th centuries, is furnished with antiques, and its lovely patio opens onto a garden of myrtles, fruit trees and fountains.

There are good city-centre hotels:

Hotel Los Tíos (Map p774; % 958 26 67 12; Plaza Bib-Rambla 4; www.hotellostilos.com; s/d €41/65; a) Comfortable rooms with good-sized doubles. Some rooms overlook the characterful plaza and there’s a small roof terrace.

Hotel Macía Plaza (Map p774; % 958 22 75 36; www.maciahotels.com; Plaza Nueva 4; s/d €49/73; p a) One of four Macía hotels in Granada, the Macía Plaza has comfortable rooms with bright-enough decor in an excellent location.

Hotel Anacapri (Map p774; % 958 22 74 77; www.hotelanacapri.com; Calle Joaquín Costa 7; s/d €78/105; a) The Anacapri has pretty rooms with floral beds-spreads, cork floors and satellite TV. Its friendly reception is in an attractive 18th-century patio fitted out with cane chairs and palm trees.

Top End
Casa Morisca Hotel (Map p772; % 958 22 11 00; www.hotelcasmorisca.com; Cuesta de la Victoria 9; s/d/interior €90/119; exterior €120/150; a) Occupies a late-15th-century Alhambra mansion, with 14 stylish rooms centred on an atmospheric patio with an ornamental pool and wooden galleries.
ALHAMBRA
Parador de Granada (Map p72; 958 22 14 40; Calle Real de Alhambra s/n; 11am-11pm; sandwiches from €5) The effortlessly charming Parador de Granada has a swanky restaurant, and a terrace bar where you can contemplate the Alhambra’s magnificence.

ALBAYZÍN
The labyrinthine Albayzín holds a wealth of eateries all tucked away in the narrow streets. Find one with a terrace and be rewarded with mesmerising Alhambra views. Calle Calderería Nueva is a muddle of terrazas and Arabic-influenced takeaways.

Café Bar Elvira
(Map p774; Calle de Elvira 85; coffee €2.70; Mon-Sat) This much-applauded Moroccan favourite cooks up insanely delicious lamb tagines with dates, and excellent chicken couscous. The décor mixes cushions and little mirrors and there’s no alcohol.

El Agua
(Map p774; 958 22 33 58; Plaza Aljibe de Trillo 7; fondue per person €10-15; minimum 2 people; 11am-11pm) A low-key café-bar and restaurant which is the mainstay of this first-rate restaurant, which also offers fabulous views of the Alhambra.

Terraza las Tomasas
(Map p774; 958 22 41 08; Carril de San Agustín 4; mains €16-20; 1 lunch Mon-Sat, dinner daily) This delightful backstreet has large sofas, and a Brazilian influence.

El Círculo
(Map p774; Calle de Elvira 11; tapas €3-6) A friendly wine bar and tapas joint. Find one with a terrace and be rewarded with an amazing mix of pescado frito (fried fish) and prawns to die for. A café (small glass of beer) makes perfect company.

Cunini
(Map p774; 958 25 07 77; Plaza de Pescadería 14; set menu €13) A good reputation surrounds this little up-market seafood bar and restaurant on the old Fishmonger Sq, where you can get first-class fish and seafood as tapas if you stand at the bar, or full meals out back.

Drinking
Granada buzzes with floorboard-bashing flamenco dancers, bottle-clinking travellers and grooving students out on the prowl. The best street for drinking is Calle Elvira but other chilled bars line Río Darro at the base of the Albayzín and Campo del Príncipe attracts a sophisticated bunch.

Bodegas Castañeda (opposite) (Calle Almímacos) and Antigua Castañeda (opposite) (Calle de Elvira) are the most inviting, with out-of-the-barrel wine and bites of tapas to keep things going.

El Circulo
(Map p774; Calle de Elvira) A calm and unpretentious tapas bar with a slightly retro feel. After one of the large spirit measures you might be wishing there were more seats.

Café Bar Elvira
(Map p770-1; Calle de Elvira 85; 11am-1pm) A jolly hang-out for the dreadlocks, whistle and dog-on-a-bit-of-string type crowd. There’s drinking, singing and shouting all day – partly thanks to the large spirit measures.

Anais Café
(Map p774; Calle Buenos Aires 13; 9am-1pm) A bar for imbibing bookworms, literary evenings and tarot readings, as well as mindlessly fun.

Entertainment
The excellent monthly Guía de Granada (€1), available from kiosks, lists entertainment venues and places to eat, including tapas bars.

CLUBS
Look out for posters and leaflets around town advertising live music and nontouristy flamenco. The bi-weekly flyer Yuzin (www.yuzin.com) lists many live-music venues, some of which are also dance clubs where DJs spin the latest tracks.

Industrial Copera (€5, 11am-late) This club has been voted Andalucía’s best. It’s a warehouse where serious clubbers go for serious all-nighters. You can count on lots of techno, a fair amount of hip-hop, and DJs from Ibiza, Madrid and Barcelona. Get a cab.

Granada 10
(Map p774; Calle Cárkel Baja; admission €6; 11pm-midnight) A glittery converted cinema is now Granada’s top club for the glam crowd, who recline on the gold sofas and go crazy to catchy Spanish pop tunes.

Planta Baja
(Map p774; Calle Horno de Abad 11; www.plantabaja.net; admission €5; 11pm-2am) If you dig Granada’s ganja-driven scene, this is where you’ll find a like-minded lot. DJs spin ‘original black sounds’ aka hip-hop, ska and reggae, funk and even jazz on Sundays.

FLAMENCO
El Esquivar
(Map pp70-1; 958 29 08 29; www.esquivar.com; Postigo de la Cuna 2; 10pm) A traditional flamenco haunt, off Calle Azacayas, to this dark, smoky haunt of sultry flamenco and cool jazz.

El Upsetter
(Map p774; 958 22 72 96; Carrera del Darro 7; admission for flamenco show €10; 11pm-midnight) The Upsetter has a decent Saturday-night flamenco show, and doubles as a dreadlock-swinging reggae bar for the rest of the week.

Peña de la Platería
(Map pp70-1; 958 21 06 50; Placeta de Toqueiros 7) Buried deep in the Albayzín warren, this is a genuine aficionados’ club with a large outdoor patio. Catch a 9.30pm performance on Thursday or Saturday.

The Sacromonte caves harbour a string of touristic flamenco haunts for which you can pre-book through hotels and travel agencies, some of whom offer free transport. Try the Friday or Saturday midnight shows at Los Tarantos (Map pp70-1; 958 22 45 25 day, 958 22 49 92 night; Camino del Sacromonte 9; admission €21) for a lively experience.

OTHER ENTERTAINMENT
The foyer of La Madrara (Map p774; Calle Oficios), opposite the Capilla Real, has large posters listing forthcoming cultural events.
Many hotels, especially in the midrange and above, have their own parking facilities. Central underground public car parks include Parking San Agustín (Calle San Agustín; per hr/day €1/€16) and Parking Plaza Puerta Real (Avenida del Parque; per hr/day €1/€12). Free parking is available at the Alhambra car parks.

TAXI
If you’re after a taxi, head for Plaza Nueva, where they line up. Most fares within the city cost between €4.50 and €7.50.

AROUND GRANADA
Granada is surrounded by a fertile plain called La Vega, planted with poplar groves and crops ranging from melons to tobacco. The Vega was an inspiration to Federico García Lorca, who was born and died here. The Parque Federico García Lorca, between the villages of Víznar and Alfacar (about 2.5km from each), marks the site where Lorca and hundreds, possibly thousands, of others are believed to have been shot and buried by the Nationalists, at the start of the civil war.

Fuente Vaqueros
The house where Lorca was born in 1898, in this village 17km west of Granada, is now the Casa Museo Federico García Lorca (€958 51 64 53; www.casemuseofedericolarca.org in Spanish; Calle Poeta Federico García Lorca, 22; admission €1.80; guided visits hourly 10am-1pm & 4-6.30pm Tue-Sun). The place brings his spirit to life, with numerous charming photos, posters and costumes from his plays, and paintings illustrating his poems. A short video captures him in action with the touring Teatro Barraca.

Buses to Fuente Vaqueros (€1.50, 20 minutes) by Urena (€958 46 41 54) leave from Avenida de Andalucía in front of Granada train station. Departures from Granada at the time of research were at 9am and 11am then hourly from 1pm to 8pm except at 4pm, Monday to Friday, and at 9am, 11am, 1pm and 5pm on Saturday, Sunday and holidays.

GUADIX
pop 10,000 / elevation 915m
The A92 northeast from Granada starts off through forested, hilly country before entering an increasingly arid landscape. Guadix (gwah-deeks), 55km from Granada, is famous for its cave dwellings—not prehistoric remnants but the homes of about 3000 modern-day townsmen. The typical 21st-century cave has a whitewashed wall across the entrance, and a chimney and TV aerial sticking out of the top. Some have many rooms and all mod cons. Spending a night in a cave is the obvious attraction.

Guadix’s tourist office (€958 66 26 65; Carretera de Granada s/n; 9am-3pm Mon, to 4pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) is on the Granada road leaving the town centre.

Sights
At the centre of Guadix is a fine sandstone cathedral (admission €2; 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), built between the 16th and 18th centuries in a succession of Gothic, Renaissance and baroque styles. A short distance south is the 11th-century Islamic castle, the Alcazaba (Calle Barradas; admission €1.20; 11am-2pm & 4-6.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun). From the Alcazaba there are views south to the main cave quarter, the Barriada de las Cuevas, where the Cueva Museo Municipal (Plaza de Padre Poveda; admission €1.50; 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun) recreates typical cave life.

Sleeping & Eating
Cuevas Pedro Antonio de Alarcón (€958 66 49 86; www.cuevaspedroantonioc.com; Barriada San Torcuato; s/d €40/60/184; p s ) Get the genuine Guadix experience at this comfy, modern apartment-hotel that has a pool and a restaurant. It’s 3km from the centre, along the Murcia road.

Hotel Comercial (€958 66 05 00; www.hotelmocomercial.com in Spanish; Calle Mira de Amezcua 3; s €43, d €55-65; a ) This very comfy central hotel has a fine restaurant with a wide variety of medium-priced Spanish fare.

Guadix has some remarkable tapas bars, but the best are La Bodeguita (Calle Doña Cruces; drink & tapa €1) and Bodega Calatava (Calle La Tribuna s/n; drink & tapa €1.50).

Getting There & Away
Guadix is about one hour from Granada (bus €4.50, train €6) and 1½ hours from Almería (bus €7.50, train €6.20 to €14) by at least nine buses and four trains daily in each direction.

SIERRA NEVADA
The Sierra Nevada, which includes mainland Spain’s highest peak, Mulhacén (3479m), forms an almost year-round snowy southeastern backdrop to Granada. The range stretches about 75km from west to east, extending...
into Almería province. All its highest peaks (3000m or more) are towards the Granada end. The upper reaches of the range form the 862-sq-km Parque Nacional Sierra Nevada, Spain’s biggest national park, with a rare high-altitude environment that is home to about 2100 of Spain’s 7000 plant species. Andalucía’s largest ibex population (about 5000) is here too. Surrounding the national park at lower altitudes is the 848-sq-km Parque Natural Sierra Nevada. The mountains and the Alpujarras valleys (p786) along their southern flank comprise one of the most spectacular areas in Spain, and the area offers wonderful opportunities for walking, horse riding, climbing and mountain biking and, in winter, good skiing and snowboarding at Europe’s most southerly ski station.

The Centro de Visitantes El Dornajo (% 958 34 06 25; h 10am-2pm & 3-6pm) about 23km from Granada, on the A395 towards the ski station, has plenty of information on the Sierra Nevada.

Estación de Esquí Sierra Nevada

The Sierra Nevada Ski Station (% 902 708 090; www.sierranevadaeskibi.com), at Pradollano, 33km south-east of Granada, is one of Spain’s biggest and liveliest ski resorts. It can get overcrowded at weekends and holiday times. The ski season normally lasts from December to April.

The resort has 70 marked downhill runs (mainly red and blue with a few black and green) totalling over 80km, a dedicated snowboarding area and some cross-country routes. Some runs start almost at the top of Veleta, the Sierra Nevada’s second-highest peak. A one-day ski pass plus rental of skis, boots and stocks or snowboard costs €50 to €60 depending when you go. The resort has several ski and snowboard schools, six-hour skiing instruction in group classes costs €63.

Nonskiers can ride cable cars up from Pradollano (2100m) to Borreguiles (2645m) for €10 return, and then ice-skate, dogsled or snowshoe. One cable car has wheelchair access. Outside the ski season Sierra Nevada Activa (www.sierranevadaactiva.com in Spanish) operates a host of warmer-weather activities, such as mountain biking, trekking, horse riding and canyoning.

SLEEPING

The ski station has around 20 hotels, hostales and apartment-hotels. None is cheap (double rooms mostly start at €80) and reservations are always advisable. Ski packages, which can be booked through the station’s website or phone number, start at around €150 per person for two days and two nights, with half board and lift passes. Book two weeks ahead, if you can.

Instalación Juvenil Sierra Nevada (% 958 48 03 05; Calle Peltone 22; dm incl breakfast under/over 26yr €15/20; p w ) The youth hostel near the top of the ski station has rooms that sleep from two to four, including six doubles with wheelchair access.

Hotel Ziryab (% 958 48 05 12; www.cetur.es; Plaza de Andalucía; r from €151; h late Nov–early May) This three-star hotel, near the foot of the resort, is reasonably attractive, and built of stone and wood.

Other recommendations: Hostal El Clérigo (% 958 49 49 09; www.hotelclerigo.com; Edificio Penibético; r €58-98; h Dec-May)

Hotel Apartamentos Trevenque (% 958 48 06 62; www.cetur.es; Plaza de Andalucía; r €132; p )

Getting There & Away

In the ski season Autocares Bonal (% 958 46 30 22) operates three daily buses (four at weekends) from Granada bus station to the ski station (one way/return €41/71, one hour). Outside the ski season there’s just one bus daily (9am from Granada, 5pm from Pradollano). A taxi from Granada to the ski station costs around €40.

A road climbs right over the Sierra Nevada from the ski station to Capileira village in Las Alpujarras, on the southern side of the range, but it’s snowbound much of the year and in any case always closed to private motor vehicles between Hoya de la Mora (2550m), 3km up from Pradollano, and Hoya del Portillo (2150m), 12.5km above Capileira. From about late June to the end of October, the national park shuttle-bus services, called the Servicio de Interpretación Ambiental Altas Cumbres (High Peaks Environmental Interpretation Service), run about 6km up the road from Hoya de la Mora to the Posiciones del Veleta, at 3020m, and some 21km up from Capileira (to the Mirador de Trevélez, at 2680m). Tickets (one way/return €4/6 on either route) and further information are available from the national park information posts at Hoya de la Mora (% 963 98 97 97; h 0800-2030 & 1330-1730) and Capileira (% 958 76 36 86, 686 414576; h year-round approx 9am-2pm & 4-7pm).
WALKING THE SIERRA NEVADA

The Sierra Nevada’s two highest peaks, Mulhacén (3479m) and Veleta (3395m), rise to the southeast of the ski station and above the head of the Poqueira valley in Las Alpujarras to their south. In the warmer seasons the mountains and Las Alpujarras offer wonderful walking, but the best conditions in the high mountains (early July to early September) unfortunately don’t coincide with the most comfortable months down in the Alpujarras. In the Sierra Nevada – which are serious mountains – be prepared for cold, rain or strong, icy winds any day, and come well equipped.

Three British climbers froze to death up here in March 2006. Many exciting walks start where the national park shuttle bus routes drop you (p785). From the Posiciones del Veleta it’s about 4km to the top of Veleta, an ascent of some 370m (1½ hours), 14km to the top of Mulhacén (four to five hours), or about 15km (six hours) all the way over to the Mirador de Trevélez. From the Mirador de Trevélez it’s around three hours to the top of the Mulhacén (6km, 800m ascent).

You can sleep overnight in high-mountain refuges. Refugio Poqueira (% 958 34 33 49; dm €9), with bunks, hot showers and meals (breakfast/dinner €3.50/10), is towards the top of the Poqueira valley at 2500m, a 4km walk from the Mirador de Trevélez. Phone ahead if possible. Two refugios vivac (stone shelters with boards to sleep on) are free but reservations are not possible: Refugio Vivac La Caldera is below the west flank of Mulhacén, a 1½-hour walk up from Refugio Poqueira; Refugio Vivac La Cariguá is a 2½-hour walk west along the road from Refugio La Caldera, at the 3200m Collado del Veleta pass below the summit of Veleta.

LAS ALPUJARRAS

Below the southern flank of the Sierra Nevada lies one of the oddest corners of Andalucía, the 70km-long jumble of valleys known as Las Alpujarras. Arid hillsides split by deep ravines alternate with oasis-like white villages set beside rapid streams and surrounded by gardens, orchards and woodlands. An infinity of good walking routes links valley villages, and heads up into the Sierra Nevada: the best times to visit are between April and mid-June, and mid-September and early November.

On his surrender to Fernando and Isabel in 1492, Boabdil, the last Granada emir, was given the Alpujarras as a personal fiefdom. He soon left, but adventurers, tourists, and a Christian promise of tolerance gave way to forced conversions and land expropriations. Muslims rebelled in 1500 across the former Granada emirate, with the Alpujarras in the thick of things. When the revolt failed, Muslims were given the choice of exile or conversion. Most converted but the change was barely skin-deep. A new decree by Felipe II in 1567, forbidding Arabic names, dress and language, sparked a new Alpujarras revolt in 1568. Two years of vicious guerrilla war ended only when Felipe’s half-brother, Don Juan of Austria, came to quash the insurrection. The Alpujarras population was deported to Castilla and western Andalucía, and most of the villages were resettled with Christians from the north. The rest were abandoned and the silk industry fell by the wayside.

Still, there are some villages in the Alpujarras where tourists rarely set foot, and you’ll know those places by their narrow car-unfriendly roads and incredible silence. These nooks of those places by their narrow car-unfriendly roads and incredible silence. These nooks of Las Alpujarras remain a world apart, with a rare sense of timelessness and mystery.

History

In the 10th and 11th centuries the Alpujarras was a great silkworm farm for the silk workshops of Almería. This activity arose in tandem with a wave of Berber settlers to the area. Together with irrigated agriculture, it supported at least 400 villages and hamlets by the late 15th century.

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South from Granada by Gerald Brennan, an Englishman who lived in the Alpujarras village of Yegen in the ’20s and ’30s, gives a fascinating picture of what was then a very isolated, superstitious corner of Spain. Another Englishman, Chris Stewart, settled here more recently, as a sheep farmer near Órgiva. His entertaining best-selling Driving over Lemons tells of life as a foreigner in Las Alpujarras in the ’90s.

Órgiva

pop 5000 / elevation 725m

The western Alpujarras’ main town, Órgiva, is a scruffy but bustling place. On Thursday mornings locals and the area’s international populace (with a big hippy-New Age element) gather to buy and sell everything from vegetables to bead necklaces to colourful material in the upper part of town, the Barrio Alto.

Hotel & Hostal Mirasol (% 958 78 51 08/59; www.hotelmirasol.com; Avenida Gonzalez Robles 5 & 3; s/d/hostal €17/28, hotel €35/45) provide plain but adequately comfortable rooms with tiled floors and all-white walls.

Hotel Taray (% 958 78 45 25; www.hoteltaray.com; €348/m, free from €3; p a i s w l), in a rural setting about 1.5km south of the centre, is Órgiva’s best hotel, with pleasant pastel rooms in Alpujarras-style buildings, a good restaurant and a lovely big pool.

Pampaneira, Bubión & Capileira

pop 1270 / elevation 1050-1440m

These small villages clinging to the side of the deep Barranco de Poqueira valley, 14km to 20km northeast of Órgiva, are three of the prettiest, most dramatically sited (and most tourist-ridden) in Las Alpujarras. Their whitewashed stone houses seem to clamber over each other in an effort not to slide down into the gorge, while streets decked with flowery balconies wriggle between. Capileira is the best base for walks.

INFORMATION

You’ll find ATMs outside the car-park entrance in Pampaneira, and in Capileira at La General (Calle Doctor Castilla).

Punto de Información Parque Nacional de Sierra Nevada (% 958 76 31 27; Plaza de la Libertad, Pampalona; 10am-3pm Sun & Mon, to 2pm & 5-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sat approx mid-Oct–Easter) Plenty of information about Las Alpujarras and Sierra Nevada; maps and books for sale.

SIERRA NEVADA & ALPUJARRAS MAPS

The best overall maps of the area are Editorial Alpina’s Sierra Nevada, La Alpujarra (1:40,000) and Editorial Penibética’s Sierra Nevada (1:50,000). Both come with booklets, in English or Spanish, describing walking, biking and skiing routes. An invaluable resource is Sierra Nevada, La Alpujarra map. Most start from Capileira. Path number 4 (8km, 3½ hours) takes you from Capileira up to the hamlet of La Cebadilla, then down the western side of the valley and back up to Capileira. To start, walk down Calle Cubo from Plaza Calvario, at the northern end of Capileira, turn right where the street takes its second turn to the left, and follow the street out into the countryside. Fork right 125m after the last village building.

Nevadensis (% 958 76 31 27; www.nevadensis.com), at the information office in Pampaneira, offers hikes and treks, 4WD trips, horse riding, mountain biking, climbing and canyoning, with knowledgeable guides.

SLEEPING & EATING

Book ahead for rooms around Easter, and from July to September. Many villages have apartments and houses for rent; ask in tourist offices or check websites such as Turgranada (www.turgranada.com) or RusticBlue (www.rusticblue.com).

Serviceo de Interpretación de Altos Cumbres (% 958 76 34 86, 686 415476; h approx 9am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm) by the main road in Capileira; information mainly about the national park, but also on Las Alpujarras.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

All three villages have solid 16th-century Mudéjar churches (h Masses). They also have small walking workshops, descendants of a textile tradition that goes back to Islamic times, and plentiful craft shops. In Bubión, get a marvellous glimpse of bygone Alpujarras life at the excellent little folk museum, Casa Alpujarreña (Calle Real; admission €1.80; h 11am-2pm Sun-Thu, to 2pm & 5-7pm Fri, Sat & holidays), beside the church.

Eight walking trails, ranging from 4km to 23km (two to eight hours), are marked out in the beautiful Barranco de Poqueira with little colour-coded posts. Their starting points can be hard to find, but they are marked and described on Editorial Alpina’s Sierra Nevada, La Alpujarra map. Most start from Capileira. Path number 4 (8km, 3½ hours) takes you from Capileira up to the hamlet of La Cebadilla, then down the western side of the valley and back up to Capileira. To start, walk down Calle Cubo from Plaza Calvario, at the northern end of Capileira, turn right where the street takes its second turn to the left, and follow the street out into the countryside. Fork right 125m after the last village building.

Visit Granada (www.visitgranada.com) or RusticBlue (www.rusticblue.com) for more information.
Alpujarras food is basically hearty country fare, with good meat and local trout. Trevélez is famous Spain-wide for its jamón serrano (mountain-cured ham), but many other villages produce good hams too. A plato alpujarreño consists of fried potatoes, fried eggs, sausage, ham and maybe a black pudding, usually for around €6.

Pampaneira
Two good-value hostales face each other at the entrance to the village: Hostal Pampaneira (958 76 30 02; Avenida Alpujarra 1; s/d €62/96; Ca. N of the village, has tasteful rooms and nifty suites, a good restaurant with vegetarian options.

Hotel La Fragua (958 85 86 26; Calle San Antonio 4; s/d €23/35) Popular with walking groups, this hotel towards the top of town provides comfortably pine-furnished rooms. Its restaurant, Mesón La Fragua (mains €6 to €9), a few doors away, is one of the best in town, with a menu ranging from partridge in walnut sauce to some good vegetarian dishes.

East of Trevélez
East of Trevélez the landscape becomes barer and more arid, yet there are still oases of greenery around the villages. The central and eastern Alpujarras have their own magic, but see fewer tourists than the western villages.

BERCHULES
Seventeen kilometres from Trevélez, Bérchules is in a green valley stretching far back into the hills, with attractive walks. Hotel Los Bércules (958 85 25 30; www.hotelsberchules.com; Carretera s/n; s/d €42/45; mains €6-13; ), by the main road, has good, clean, bright rooms, helpful English-speaking hosts who can help you set up all manner of activities, and an excellent restaurant (try the local lamb with mint).

YEGIN
Gerald Brenan’s home in the 1920s is 12km east of Bérchules, on the main plaza with the fountain. Parts of the valley below Yegen have a particularly moonlike quality. Several walking routes have been marked out locally including a 2km ‘Sendero de Gerald Brenan’. El Rincon de Yegen (958 85 12 70; www.aldearural.com/rincondoyegen; s/d €25/36; mains €7-13; ), on the eastern edge of the village, has comfortable rooms and an excellent, medium-priced restaurant. Succumb to the pears in local wine and hot chocolate!

Getting There & Away
Alsinas (958 18 54 80) runs three daily buses from Granada to Órgiva (€4, 1½ hours), Pampaneira (€5, two hours), Bubión (€5.50, 2¼ hours), Capileira (€5.50, 2½ hours) and Pitres (€5.50, 2½ hours). Two of these continue to Trevélez (€6.50, 3¼ hours) and Bérchules (€7.50, 3¼ hours). The return buses start from Bérchules at 5am and 5pm, and from Pitres at 3.30pm. Alsina also runs twice-daily buses from Granada to Cúadar (€7, three hours) and Yegen (€8, 3½ hours).

The Coast
Granada’s rugged, cliff-lined, 80km coast has a few reasonably attractive beach towns, linked by several daily buses to Granada, Málaga and Almería.

Salobreña
pop 11,000
Salobreña’s huddle of white houses rises on a crag above the Mediterranean. The helpful tourist office (958 31 03 14; Plaza de Goya; €3.50; 9.30am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat) is 200m off the N340. Up at the top of the town is the impressive 13th-century Castillo Arabe (admission €3; 10.30am-1.30pm & 4-8pm). The ticket also includes the nearby Museo Arqueológico, open the same hours. Below all this is a long, dark-sand beach, extremely popular with granadinos in August.

A fine place to stay is the spick-and-span Hostal Sal, Juan (958 61 17 29; www.hotel-sanjuan.com in Spanish; Calle Juan Carlos I 1; s/d €42/45; on a quiet street about 400m from the tourist office. The best place to rest your head is the Hotel Avenida (958 61 15 44; www.avedianadematapleco.com; Avenida Mediterráneo 35; s/€35-55, d/€50-80; a family-oriented hotel between the town centre and beach. It has 30 comfortable, stylish rooms with phone, satellite TV and bathtub, plus its own restaurant. Features such as the Jacuzzi and sun terrace may mean you never see the town. There are loads of restaurants and beachside chiringuitos (small open-air bars), and a spot of nightlife, on and near the beachfront.

Almuñécar
pop 23,000
From the highway Almuñécar seems an uninviting group of apartment blocks with pebbly beaches, but it has a more attractive older heart around the 16th-century castle. The bus station (958 63 01 40; Avenida Juan Carlos I) is just south of the N340. The main tourist office (958 63 11 25; www.almunecarinfo.com; Avenida Europa s/n; €3.50-10.50; 10am-2pm & 5.30-7pm) is 1km southwest, just back from Playa de San Cristóbal.
by routing the Almohad Muslim army at Las Navas de Tolosa, just south of the pass. Today the A4 from Madrid enters Andalucía by this same route.

The Jaén diet is pretty traditional but varied, with plenty of game (partridge, venison, wild boar), especially in the mountains. Many bars still have the endearing habit of serving free tapas with drinks.

The website www.promojaen.es has lots of interesting information about the province.

JAÉN

pop 113,000 / elevation 575m
The provincial capital is a bustling university city and well worth some of your time.

Orientation
Old Jaén, dominated by the huge cathedral, huddles beneath the high, castletopped Cerro de Santa Catalina. The local point of the newer part of town is Plaza de la Constitución, 200m northeast and downhill from the cathedral. From here the main artery of the new city, Calle Roldán y Marín, becoming Paseo de la Estación, heads northwest to the train station, 1km away.

Information
There’s no shortage of banks or ATMs around Plaza de la Constitución.

Cyber Café (Calle Arboles Bajos 24; per 30min €1.20; 10.30am-12.30pm & 5-7.30pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat & Sun)

Librería Metrópolis (Calle del Cerón 17) Good for maps.

Tourist office (953 19 04 55; otjaen@andalucia.org; Calle de la Maestra 13; 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 7pm Sat & Sun; holidays)

Helpful, multilingual staff with plenty of free information about the city and province.

Sights
Jaén’s huge cathedral (953 23 42 33; h 8.30am-1pm & 5-7pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar, to 1pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat Apr-Sep, 9am-1pm & 5-7pm Sun) was built mainly in the 16th and 17th centuries, and mainly to the Renaissance designs of Andrés de Vandelvira – though the southwestern façade on Plaza de Santa María sports a dramatic array of 17th-century baroque statuary.

The Palacio de Villamomprado (953 23 62 92; Plaza de Santa María de Marillac; admission free with passport; h 9am-8pm Tue-Fri, 9.30am-2.30pm Sat & Sun, closed holidays), another Renaissance treasure, houses three excellent attractions: the beautiful 11th-century Baños Arabes (Arab Baths), one of

SANCTUARIES

Cueva de Siete Palacios. (Calle de la Maestra 13; 10.30am-12.30pm & 4.30pm-midnight Mon-Sat, to 12.30pm Sun)

Museo Arqueológico (Calle del Santo Reino; 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 7pm Sat & Sun) Fine collections of Islamic and Roman artefacts and artefacts everywhere, and courses jarras information, fine walking, fascinating orillas.

Museo Internacional de Arte Naïf (Calle de los Artesanos; 10am-8pm Tue-Fri, 11am-2pm Sat & Sun, to 7pm Sun)

Museo Provincial (Calle de los Artesanos; 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 7pm Sat & Sun)

Parque Ornitológico Loro-Sexi (Calle de los Artesanos; 10am-8pm Tue-Sun)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Just behind Playa de San Cristóbal is a tropical bird aviary, Parque Ornitológico Loro-Sexi (€ 953 23 62 92; adult/child €2/1.50; h 11am-2pm, 5-7pm approx May-Sep, 4-6pm approx Oct-Apr). Above the hill above is the post-Reconquista Castillo de San Miguel (€ 953 23 42 33; adult/child incl Museo Arqueológico €2/1.50; h 10.30am-1.30pm & 5-7.30pm Tue-Sat, to 1.30pm Sun, afternoons 4-6.30pm approx Oct-Apr), with great views and an interesting little museum. The castle ticket includes the worthwhile Museo Arqueológico (€ 953 23 42 33; Calle Málaga), a few streets northeast in a set of Roman underground galleries called the Cueva de Siete Palacios.

You can paraglide, windsurf, dive, sail, ride a horse or descend canyons in and around Almuñécar and nearby La Herradura. The tourist office and its website have plenty of information.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel California (€ 953 88 10 38; www.hotelmalaspiang.com; Carretera N340 Km313; s/d €33/48; p v) With rooms and a restaurant overlooking the town and sea from an elevated position just off the N340, the California provides colourfully touches of Moroccan style and tasty food, including vegetarian options. The hotel offers special packages for paragliders.

Hotel Casablanca (€ 953 63 55 75; www.almunecar info@casablanca; Plaza de San Cristóbal 4; s/d €65/80; p a) Just off Playa de San Cristóbal, the slim-line Casablanca has spacious rooms with beautiful and distinctive handmade furnishings.

JAÉN PROVINCE

Set on Andalucía’s border with Castilla-La Mancha, Jaén alternates between wild mountain ranges and rolling country covered with lines of olive trees (it produces about 10% of the world’s olive oil). This is back country where life for many still isn’t easy, but it’s scattered with back-country gems – the marvellous Renaissance architecture of Andrés de Vandelvira in the unlikely provincial settings of Úbeda, Baeza and Jaén city, and the equally marvellous mountainscapes of the Parque Natural de Cazorla in eastern Jaén.

The Desfiladero de Despeñaperros pass on Jaén’s northern border has from time immemorial, been the most important gateway into Andalucía from central Spain. Back in 1212 Christian forces opened the door to Andalucía
MASS FEVER IN THE SIERRA MORENA

On the last Sunday of every April, around half a million people converge on a remote shrine in the Sierra Morena in the northwest of Jaén province for one of Spain’s biggest religious gatherings, the festive pilgrimage known as the Romería de la Virgen de la Cabeza. The original 13th-century Santuario de la Virgen de la Cabeza, 31km north of Andújar, was destroyed in the civil war, when Francoist troops occupying it were besieged by the Republicans for eight months, but the shrine has since been rebuilt. The annual festivities see a tiny statue of the Virgin Mary, known as La Morenita (the Little Brown One), being carried around the Cerro del Cabezo for about four hours from about 11am. It’s a festive and emotive occasion, with children and items of clothing being passed over the heads of the crowd to those who touch them to the Virgin’s mantle.

Spain’s biggest Islamic bathhouses; and the Museo de Artes y Costumbres Populares, devoted to the artefacts of the harsh rural lifestyle of pre-industrial Jaén province; and the Museo Internacional de Arte Naf, with a large international collection of colourful and witty naive art.

The Museo Provincial (%95 93 25 06 00; Paseo de la Estación 27; adult/EU citizen €3.50/free; 9.30am-3pm Tue-Sat, 9am-6pm Sun) has the finest collection of 5th-century-BC Iberian sculptures in Spain. Found in Porcuna, they show a clear Greek influence in their fluid form and clear artistic style.

The castillo’s keep, chapel and dungeon. The Audiovisual gimmicks add fun to the visit to the castle’s keep, chapel and dungeon. The food is cheap and tasty. Wander along nearby Calles Cerón and Arco del Consuelo for further quirky old tapas bars.

A terrific old-town bar, more than a century old, with an atmospheric cellar restaurant. The food is cheap and tasty. Wander along nearby Calles Cerón and Arco del Consuelo for further quirky old tapas bars.

The downstairs taberna serves delicious tapas and raciones of meat, revueltos (scrambled-egg dishes) and fish. There is a more expensive restaurant upstairs.

Good food. Try the tapas in the bar or sit down for specialities such as cordero mazarrón, lamb with honey and spices.

Sleeping Hostal Carlós V (%95 93 22 20 91; Avenida de Madrid 4, 2nd fl; s/d €67/80; p a) The best budget option in town, the friendly, family-run Carlos V provides pleasant rooms with wrought-iron beds and a TV in each room.

Hotel Xauen (%95 93 24 07 89; www.hotelexaunjaen.com; Plaza del Deán Mazas 3; s/d €40/55; p a) The Xauen has good facilities and spacious, well-appointed rooms, making it popular with businessfolk.

Hotel Europa (%95 93 22 27 00; www.husea.es; Plaza de Belén 1; s/d €34/57; p a) Though the rooms are only adequate, the hotel’s location opposite Avenida de Granada makes it a convenient option for drivers.

Parador Castillo de Santa Catalina (%95 93 23 00 00; www.parador.es; s/d €116/145; p a) Next to the castle at the top of the Cerro de Santa Catalina, this hotel has an incomparable setting and theatrical vaulted halls. Rooms are incredibly comfortable with four-poster beds and tiled Islamic details, and there is also an excellent restaurant.

Eating Taberna La Manchega (%95 93 23 21 92; Calle Bernardo López 12; platos combinados €4; lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) A terrific old-town bar, more than a century old, with an atmospheric cellar restaurant. The food is cheap and tasty. Wander along nearby Calles Cerón and Arco del Consuelo for further quirky old tapas bars.

Eating & Drinking

Booze

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Getting There & Away

From the bus station (953 74 04 68; Paseo Arco del Agua), 700m east of Plaza de España, buses go to Jaén (€3.50, 45 minutes, 11 daily), Úbeda (€0.90, 30 minutes, 15 daily), Cazorla (€4, 2¼ hours, two daily) and Granada (€10, 2¼ hours, five daily).

Linares-Baeza train station (953 65 02 02) is 13km northwest. Buses connect with most trains Monday to Saturday; a taxi is €14.

ÚBEDA
pop 34,000 / elevation 760m

Just 9km east of Baeza, bigger Úbeda has an even finer collection of marvellous buildings. In the 16th century, an Úbeda gent named Francisco de los Cobos y Molina became first secretary to Carlos I; his nephew, Juan Vázquez de Molina, succeeded him in the job and kept it under Felipe II. Much of the wealth their influence brought to Úbeda was lavished on a profusion of Renaissance mansions and churches that remain its pride and glory today – many of them, of course, designed by Jaén’s Renaissance master, Andrés de Vandelvira, born in 1509 at Alcaraz in neighbouring Albacete province.

Orientation & Information

The fine architecture is mostly in the southeastern part of town, a web of narrow streets and expansive plazas. Budget accommodation and the bus station are in the drab new town in the west and north.

The tour office (953 75 08 97; Calle Baja del Marqués 4; h 9am-2.45pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) is in the 18th-century Palacio Marqués de Contradero in the old town.

Sights

PLAZA VÁZQUEZ DE MOLINA

This plaza, Úbeda’s crown jewel, is almost entirely surrounded by quite beautiful 15th- and 16th-century stone buildings.

The Capilla de El Salvador (admission €2.25; h 10am-2.40pm & 4.30-7pm) faces the eastern end of the plaza. Founded in the 1540s by Francisco de los Cobos y Molina as his family funerary chapel, it was Vandelvira’s first commission in Úbeda. The basic concept is by Diego de Siloé, architect of Granada cathedral, but Vandelvira added plenty of touches, including the elaborate main façade, an outstanding piece of Plateresque design with an orgy of classical sculpture on the underside of the arch by Frenchman Esteban Jamete. Lit up at night, the whole façade leaps out in dynamic 3D. The sacristy, by Vandelvira, has a portrait of Francisco de los Cobos y Molina. The richly decorated chancel is modelled on Siloe’s Capilla Mayor in Granada cathedral, with a frescoed dome. The Cobos family crypt lies beneath the nave.

Next to the Capilla de El Salvador stands what was the abode of its chaplains – in fact one of Vandelvira’s best palaces, the Palacio del Deán Ortega. It’s now Úbeda’s parador and its elegant courtyard is a lovely spot for refreshments.

The harmonious proportions of the Italianate Palacio de Vázquez de Molina (h 10am-2pm & 5-9pm), at the western end of the plaza, make it one of the finest buildings in the town. Now Úbeda’s town hall, it was built around 1562 by Vandelvira for Juan Vázquez de Molina, whose coat of arms surmounts the doorway.

PLAZA 1º DE MAYO & AROUND

Plaza 1º de Mayo used to be Úbeda’s market square and bullring, and the Inquisition burnt heretics where its kiosk now stands. Worthies would watch the merry events from the gallery of the elegant 16th-century Antiguo Ayuntamiento (Old Town Hall) in the south-west corner. Along the top (northern) side of the square is the Iglesia de San Pablo (h 7-9pm), with a fine late-Gothic portal from 1511.

The Museo de San Juan de la Cruz (953 75 06 15; Calle del Carmen; admission €1.20; h 11am-1pm & 5-7pm Tue-Sun) is devoted to the mystic and religious reformer St John of the Cross, who died here in 1591. Even if you can’t understand the Spanish-speaking monks who guide all visits, you’ll still get to see a couple of the saint’s fingers and some of his bones, preserved in cabinets, and other memorabilia.

HOSPITAL DE SANTIAGO

Completed in 1575, Andrés de Vandelvira’s last building (Calle Obispo Cobos; admission free; h 8am-3pm & 4-10pm Mon-Fri, 11am-3pm & 6-10pm Sat & Sun) is on the western side of town. This sober, grand-scale, late-Renaissance masterpiece has been dubbed the ‘Escorial of Andalucía’. Off the classic Vandelvira two-lobed patio is a chapel, now restored as an auditorium (the hospital is now a cultural centre), and a stair-case with colourful frescoes.

Sleeping & Eating

Hostal Sevilla (953 75 06 12; Avenida Ramón y Cajal 9; s/d €40/63) Úbeda’s hostales, all near each other in the modern part of town, are rather grim in appearance. The pleasant, family-run Sevilla is the best of the bunch, offering good-value rooms with winter heating.

Rosaleda de Don Pedro (953 79 51 47; www.rosaledadonedonpedro.com; Calle Obispo Toral 2; s/d €64-77, d €80-96) The Don Pedro offers good three-star facilities in a central old-town location, including beautiful custom-made beds, a good restaurant and the only pool in the historic centre.

Hotel María de Molina (953 79 53 56; www.hotel-maria-de-molina.com in Spanish; Plaza del Ayuntamiento; s/d €52/84; a) This attractive hotel occupies a 16th-century palacio on picturesque Plaza Ayuntamiento. Well-appointed rooms are arranged around a typical patio and the hotel has an excellent restaurant.

Parador Condestable Dávalos (953 75 03 45; www.parador.es; Plaza Vázquez de Molina; s/d €129/161; p a) Úbeda’s fabulous parador overlooks the wonderful Plaza Vázquez de Molina. The hotel is an historic monument, now of course comfortably modern and appropriately luxuriously. Its restaurant is deservedly the most popular in town, serving up delicious and elegant dishes (around €12 to €17). Try local specialities such as Carruca “green peppers stuffed with partridge” or Cebolla guisada con piñones (“stewed kid with pine nuts”).

Meson Restaurante Navarro (953 79 06 38; Plaza del Ayuntamiento 2; raciones €9-4) Cramped, smoky and noisy, the Navarro is a cherished local favourite. In summer it’s nice to sit out on the plaza.

Restaurant El Seco (953 79 14 52; Calle Corazón de Jesús 8; menu €12) On a pretty old-town square, El Seco has good traditional dishes such as Cordero a la plancha (“steamed lamb on the grill”) with rich tomato sauce or lightly grilled lamb (green peppers with pine nuts).

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often willing to explain some of the ancient techniques they still use. Alfarería Titó (Plaza del Ayuntamiento 12) has a large selection too.

Getting There & Away
The bus station (953 75 21 57; calle San José 6) is in the new part of town. Destinations include Baena (€60.90, 30 minutes, 15 daily), Jaén (€4.50, 1½ hours, up to 12 daily), Cazorla (€3.50, 45 minutes, up to 10 daily) and Granada (£11, 2½ hours, seven daily).

CAZORLA
pop 9000 / elevation 885m
Cazorla, 45km east of Ubeda, is the main gateway to the Parque Natural de Cazorla and a quaintly intriguing hillside town of narrow old streets in its own right. It can get pretty busy at Spanish holiday times.

Orientation & Information
Three plazas delineate the town’s central axis. Plaza de la Constitución is the main square of the northern, newer part of town. Plaza de la Corredora is 150m further south along Calle Doctor Muñoz, and Plaza de Santa María, downhill through narrow, winding streets another 300m southeast, is the heart of the oldest part of town.

The Oficina de Turismo Municipal (953 71 01 12; Paseo del General Perón 17; t/t 10am-1pm & 5-8pm) is 200m north of Plaza de la Constitución.

Sights
At one end of lovely Plaza de Santa María is the large shell of the Iglesia de Santa María, built by Andrés de Vandelvira in the 16th century but wrecked by Napoleonic troops. A short walk up from here, the ancient Castillo de la Yedra houses the Museo del Alto Guadalquivir (adult/ EU citizen €1.50/ free; t/t 3-8pm Tue, 9am-8pm Wed-Sat, to 3pm Sun & holidays), with architecture and relics of past local life.

Sleeping & Eating
Hotel Guadalquivir (953 72 02 68; www.hotelguadalquivir.com in Spanish; Calle Nueva 6; s/d €35/47; a) The Guadalquivir has comfortable, pine-furnished rooms: the singles can be a bit cramped but it’s good value in a good location.

Molino la Farraga (953 72 12 49; www.molino

Orientation & Information
Entering the park from Cazorla, the A319 winds over the 1200m Puerto de las Palomas pass and down to the Empalme del Valle junction, where it turns north and follows the Guadalquivir valley.

The main information centre is the Centro de Interpretación Torre del Vinagre (953 71 30 40; t/t 11am-2pm & 5-8pm Apr-Sep, to 2pm & 4-7pm Oct-Mar), 16km north of Empalme del Valle on the A319. The Museo de Caza (Hunting Museum) with stuffed park wildlife, is in an adjoining building: a more-cheerful botanic garden is just along the road.

Editorial Alpina’s 1:40,000 Sierra de Cazorla, which covers the south of the park and is available in English, and Sierra de Segura, which covers the north, are the best maps, showing selected walks that are described in accompanying booklets. You may be able to get the maps locally but don’t count on it.

Sights & Activities
Sierra de Cazorla Drive
For those with wheels, this itinerary of about 60km is a good introduction to the parts of the park nearest Cazorla, with a couple of stops to stretch your legs. It’s all passable for ordinary cars, if bumpy in places.

Head first up to La Iruela, 1km east of Cazorla, and turn right along Carretera Virgen de la Cabeza. About 12km along here, during which the road ceases to be paved, is El Chorro, a gorge that’s good for watching vultures. Just
HORNOS & EL YELMO
The small village of Hornos sits atop a high rocky outcrop with a small, ruined Islamic castle and panoramic views over the northern end of the Embalse del Tranco. About 10km northeast of Hornos is the Puerto de Horno Peguera pass and junction. One kilometre north from here, a dirt road turns left to the top of El Yelmo (1809m), one of the most distinctive mountains in the north of the park. It’s 5km to the top, an ascent of 360m – drivable, but better as a walk, with superb views and griffon vultures wheeling around the skies (plus paragliders and hang-gliders at weekends). At a fork after 1.7km, go right.

SEGURA DE LA SIERRA
The most spectacular and interesting village inside the park, Segura sits 20km north of Hornos, atop a 1100m hill crowned by a castle dominating the countryside for far around. When taken in 1214 by the Knights of Santiago, Segura was one of the very first Christian conquests in Andalucía.

As you reach the upper part of the village, there’s a tourist office (953 126053; 10.30am-2pm & 6.30-8.30pm) beside the Puerta Nueva arch. Segura’s two main monuments are normally left open all day every day, but you should check this before proceeding.

The Baño Moro (Moorish Bathhouse; Calle Caballeros Santiaguistas), built about 1150, has three elegant rooms (for cold, tepid and hot baths) with horseshoe arches and barrel vaults studded with skylights. The castle, at the top of the village, has Islamic (or maybe even earlier) origins. From its three-storey keep there are great views across to El Yelmo and far to the west.

Tours
A number of operators offer trips to some of the park’s less accessible areas, plus other activities. Hotels and camping grounds in the park can often arrange for them to pick you up.

Excursiones Buñjarky (953 71 30 11; www.swim.net/usarios/jc); Calle Boraí 80, Coto Ríos) Walking, 4WD, hiking and horse-riding trips with local guides.

Tierraventura (953 72 20 11; www.tierraventura cazorla.com in Spanish; Calle Ximénez de Rada 17, Cazorla) Multiadventure activities including canoeing, hiking and rock climbing.

Turisflat (953 72 13 51; www.turisflat.org in Spanish; Paseo del Santo Cristo 17, Cazorla) Offers 4WD trips to restricted areas (areas where vehicles are not normally allowed) for €25/45 per person per half/full day.

Sleeping & Eating
There’s plenty of accommodation in the park, much of it dotted along the A319 north of Empalme del Valle. At peak times it’s worth booking ahead. Most restaurants in the park, except small, casual roadside cafés, are part of hotels or hostales.

CAMPING
Camping is not allowed outside the organised camping grounds. From October to April you should check ahead that these are open.

Complejo Puente de las Herrerías (953 72 70 90; near Vadillo Castril; sites per adult/tent/car €4/3.60/3.60, 2-person cabin €4; p a s) This is the largest camping ground in the park, with room for about 1000 people, plus a restaurant and a pool. You can arrange horse riding, canoeing, canyoning and climbing here.

Just north of the A319, between 3km and 7km north of Torre del Vinagre, are three medium-sized camping grounds beside the Guadalquivir, all charging between €13 and €15 for two people with a tent and car:

Camping Choperas Coto Ríos (953 71 30 05) Camping Fuente de la Pascuala (953 71 30 28) Camping Llanos de Arance (953 71 31 39)

HOTELS & APARTMENTS
El Parral (953 72 72 65; Arroyo Frío; 4-person apt €40; p a ) Attractive, spacious apartments that have well-equipped kitchens and scenic terraces.

Hotel de Montaña Los Parrales (953 12 61 70; www.turismoencazorla.com/parrales.html in Spanish; Carretera del Tranco Km78; s/d €42/55; p a ) North of Tranco along the road towards Hornos, cheerful Los Parrales has idyllic views of the reservoir and a sweet rustic dining room. You can arrange any number of activities here.

Hotel de Montaña La Hortizuela (953 71 31 50; www.turismoencazorla.com/hortizuela.html in Spanish; Carretera del Tranco Km53; s/d €35/55; p a s) This lovely hotel has a tranquil setting, 1km along a signed track off the A319, 2km north of Torre del Vinagre. The restaurant serves a menu at €9.

Los Huertos de Segura (953 48 04 02; www.loshuertosdesegura.com; Calle Castillo 11, Segura de la Sierra; 2/4-person apt €55/65; p a ) Excellent apartments whose friendly owners are full of information about tours and walking in the area.

Los Enebreros (953 72 71 10; www.lfhoteles.com in Spanish; Arroyo Frío; s/d half-board €55/88, 4-person apt €105; p a s) At the northern end of Arroyo Frío village, on the A319, this complex has a hotel, apartments, chalets and a small camping ground. The accommodation is a bit rough and ready, but it has two pools and a playground, and a huge range of activities can be arranged here.

Hotel Noguera de la Sierpe (953 73 70 20; www.lfhoteles.com in Spanish; Carretera del Tranco Km 51; s/d €65/97; p a s) This curious hotel, overlooking a picturesque little lake 5km north of Arroyo Frío is a hunters’ favourite and decked out with trophies, including an alert-looking stuffed lion in the lobby. The rooms are comfortable, if not exactly cosy. You can arrange riding sessions at the hotel’s stables and there is a good rustic restaurant.

Parador El Aldeadorado (953 72 70 75; www.parador.es; s/d €103/129; p a s) This hunting-lodge-style parador has a lovely pine forest setting, grassy garden and good pool, but only nine of the 33 rooms have views. It’s at the end of the JP7094, near Vadillo Castril.

Getting There & Away
Carcesa (953 72 11 42) runs two daily buses (except Sunday) from Cazorla’s Plaza de la Constitución to Empalme del Valle (€1.50, 30 minutes), Arroyo Frío (€1.80, 45 minutes), Torre del Vinagre (€3.50, one hour) and Coto Ríos (€3.50, 70 minutes). Pick up the latest timetable from the Cazorla tourist office.

ALMERÍA PROVINCE
Andalucía’s remote, parched and mountainous eastern province, long impoverished, has harnessed its main resource – more than 3000 hours of sunshine a year – to achieve a spectacular economic comeback through tourism and intensive horticulture in ugly plastic greenhouses, where much of the labour is done by thousands of migrant Moroccan workers. Though some of the coast has suffered from dreary Costa-del-Sol style ribbon development, the dramatic Cabo de Gata promontory remains more or less pristine and its beaches are easily the best in Mediterranean Andalucía.

ALMERÍA PROVINCE
Almería pop 171,000
The hefty, cliff-ringed Alcazaba fortress dominating Almería is a dramatic reminder of past glories. As the chief port of the Córdoba caliphate and, later, capital of an 11th-century taifa, Islamic Almamiya grew wealthy weaving
silk from the silkworms of the Alpujarras. Devastated by an earthquake in 1522, Almería is today an increasingly prosperous port city and magnet for migrant job-seekers. Agri-euros from the province’s horticulture are helping to fund a revival and chic bars and clubs stay open till dawn.

Orientation
The city centre lies between the Alcazaba and the Rambla de Belén, a broad promenade created from a dry riverbed. Paseo de Almería, cutting northwest from Rambla de Belén to the Puerta de Purchena intersection, is the main city-centre artery. The bus and train stations are together on Plaza de la Estación, east of Rambla de Belén.

Information
There are numerous banks on Paseo de Almería.

El Libro Picasso (% 950 23 56 00; Calle Reyes Católicos 17 & 18) Excellent book and map shop.

Internet (Avenida de Pablo Iglesias; per hr €2; h 8am-2am)

Municipal tourist office (% 950 28 07 48; Rambla de Belén; h 10am-1pm & 3–7.30pm Mon–Fri, 10am–noon Sat)

Policía Local (% 950 21 00 19; Calle Santos Zárate)

Regional tourist office (% 950 27 43 55; Parque de Nicolás Salmerón s/n; h 9am-7pm Mon–Fri, 10am–2pm Sat & Sun)

Sights & Activities

ALCAZABA

The founding of the Alcazaba (% 950 27 16 17; Calle Almanzor s/n; adult/EU citizen €1.50/free; h 10am-2pm & 5-8pm May-Sep, 9.30am–1.30pm & 3.30–7pm Oct–Apr) by the Córdoba caliph Abd ar-Rahman III in 955 was what turned Almería into the major port of Al-Andalus. It still rises triumphantly from impregnable cliffs and commands exhilarating views, though earthquakes and time have spared little of its internal splendour.

The lowest of the Alcazaba’s three compounds, the Primer Recinto, originally served as a military camp and a refuge in times of siege. The Segundo Recinto was the heart of Al-Andalus. It still rises triumphantly from impregnable cliffs and commands exhilarating views, though earthquakes and time have spared little of its internal splendour.

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its name from a slave girl, who, legend says, leapt to her death from the window after her imprisoned Christian lover had been thrown from it. The Tercer Recinto, at the top end of the Alcazaba, is a fortress added by the Catholic Monarchs.

**CATHEDRAL**
Almería’s weighty cathedral (Plaza de la Catedral; admission €1.50; to 1pm Sat) is at the heart of the old part of the city below the Alcazaba. Begun in 1524, its fortresslike appearance, with six towers, was the inevitable result of pirate raids from North Africa.

The interior has a Gothic ribbed ceiling and is trimmed with jasper and local marble. The chapel behind the main altar contains the tomb of Bishop Diego Villálán, the cathedral’s founder, whose broken-nosed image is a work of Juan de Orea, who also created the Sacristía Mayor with its fine carved stonework.

**BEACH**
A long, grey-sand beach fronts the palm-lined Paseo Marítimo, east of the city’s centre. **Eolo** (% 950 26 17 35; www.eolo-wind.com; Avenida del Cabo de Gata 187), nearby, organises out-of-town trips (€39 to €90) with English-speaking staff to explore some of the dramatic cliffs and beaches of the Parque Natural Cabo de Gata-Nijar by windsurfing, kayaking, catamaran and other water-related activities.

**Gran Hotel Almería** (% 950 23 80 11; www.granhotelalmeria.com; Avenida Reina Regente 8; s/d €108/135) For expansive seaside views, you can’t beat the Gran Hotel’s comfortable, modern rooms.

**Eating**

- **La Charka** (% 950 25 60 45; Calle Trajano 8; drink & tapa €1.50) This very popular tapas haunt in Almería’s business area is a great spot to graze in the earlier part of the evening.

- **Comidas Sol de Almería** (Calle Circunvalación, Mercado Central; menu €9; closed Sun & Mon evenings) A fun little restaurant, opposite the busy covered market, with a large patio behind it. Hungry shoppers stream in for the extensive and hearty lunch menú.

- **Restaurante Valentin** (% 950 26 44 75; Calle Tenor Iribarne 19; mains €10-15; closed Mon & Sep) A secluded, intimate little restaurant with stylish service and good food. If you really want to eat in style, the langosta (lobster) will set you back €52.

- **La Encina Restaurante** (% 950 27 34 29; Calle Marín 3; mains €11-21; closed Sun & Mon evenings) Almería’s most exciting restaurant for inventive cuisine. Get yourself some pork medallions with moscatel wine and if there’s space, finish with a fondue of fresh fruit and chocolate.

**Drinking & Entertainment**

- **Georgia Café Bar** (% 950 25 25 70; Calle Padre Luque 17; 8pm-late) A dozen or so music bars cluster in the streets between the post office and cathedral. The Georgia, going for more than 20 years, stages occasional live jazz and even the piped music is great.

- **Desatino** (Calle Trajano 14; 8pm-late) A trendy bar with mirrored windows, playing Cuban rumbas. It doesn’t fill up until late.

- **Peña El Taranto** (% 950 23 50 57; Calle Tenor Iribarne 20) Hidden in the renovated Aljibes Árabes (Arab Water Cisterns), this is Almería’s top flamenco club. Live performances (€20), open to the public, often happen at weekends.

**Getting There & Away**

**AIR**

**BOAT**
Trasmediterránea (% 950 23 61 55; www.trasmediterranea.es; Estación Marítima) sails daily to/from Melilla and two to more daily from June to September. The trip takes up to eight hours. A butaca (seat) costs €29 one way; car fares start at €123 for a small vehicle. Three Moroccan lines sail to/from Nador, the Moroccan town neighbouring Melilla, with similar frequency and prices. Trasmediterránea also has summer sailings to Ghazzaouet, Algeria.

**BUS**
Destinations served from the clean, efficient bus station (% 950 26 05 08) include Granada (€10 to €12.25, 2½ hours, 10 daily), Málaga (€15, 3½ hours, 10 daily), Murcia (€5, 2½ hours, 10 daily), Madrid (€23, seven hours, five daily) and Valencia (€31 to €38, 8½ hours, five daily).

**TRAIN**
Four daily trains run to Granada (€14, 2½ hours) and Seville (€32, 1½ hours) and two to Madrid (€33 to €38, 6½ to 10 hours).

**Getting Around**
The airport is 8km east of the city; the number 20 ‘Alquían’ bus (€1) runs from Calle Doctor Gregorio Marañón to the airport every 30 to 45 minutes from 7am to 10.30pm (but less frequently on Saturday and Sunday). The last bus from the airport to the city leaves at 10.08pm (11.03pm on Saturday and Sunday).

**AROUND ALMERÍA**

**Mini Hollywood**
Beyond Benahadux, north of Almería, the landscape becomes a series of canyons and rocky wastes that look straight out of the Arizona badlands, and in the 1960s and ’70s movie-makers shot around 150 Westerns here. Locals played Indians, outlaws and cavalry, while Clint Eastwood, Raquel Welch, Charles Bronson and co did all the talking bits.

The movie industry has left behind three Wild West town sets that are open as tourist attractions. **Mini Hollywood** (% 950 36 52 36; adult/child €17/9; 10am-9pm Apr-Oct, to 7pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar), the best known and the best preserved of these, is 25km from Almería on the Tabernas road. Parts of more than 100 movies, including classic ‘spaghetti westerns’ (so called because their director was the Italian Sergio Leone) such as A Fistful of Dollars and The Good, the Bad and the Ugly, were filmed here. At 5pm (and 8pm from mid-June to mid-September) a hammed-up bank hold-up and shootout is staged (dialogue in Spanish of course). Rather bizarrely, the ticket also includes entry to the adjoining Reserve Zoológica, with lions, elephants and numerous other species of African and Iberian fauna. You will need your own vehicle to visit from Almería.

**Nijar**
Attractive and unusual glazed pottery and colourful striped cotton rugs, known as jarapas, are made and sold in this small town 3km northeast of Almería. It’s worth a little detour if you’re driving this way.

**CABO DE GATA**
Some of Spain’s most beautiful and least crowded beaches are strung between grand cliffs and capes around this arid promontory east of Almería city, where dark volcanic hills tumble straight into a sparkling turquoise sea. This is the driest place in Europe and scattered palm groves and clusters of whitewashed, flat-roofed houses give a positively North African feel to the air at times. Though Cabo de Gata is not undiscovered, it still has a wild, elemental feel and, with a couple of exceptions in July and August, its scattered villages remain low-key. You can walk along, or not far from, the coast right round from Retamar in the northwest to Agua Amarga in the northeast (61km), but in summer there’s little shade.

It’s worth calling ahead for accommodation over Easter and in July and August.

The Parque Natural de Cabo de Gata-Nijar covers Cabo de Gata’s 60km coast plus a slice of hinterland. The park’s main information centre is the Centro de Interpretación Las Almodáleras (% 950 16 04 35; 10am-2pm & 10:30-9pm mid-Jul–mid-Sep, to 3pm Tue-Sun mid-Sep–mid-Jul), about 2.5km west of Ruesca.

**El Cabo de Gata Village**
Fronted by a long straight beach, this village (officially San Miguel de Cabo de Gata) is composed largely of holiday houses and apartments (deserted out of season), but has an old nucleus, with a small fishing fleet, at the
CABO DE GATA

ORTIENTATION & INFORMATION
The road from the north becomes San José’s main street, Avenida de San José, with the beach and harbour a couple of blocks down to the left. On Avenida de San José you’ll find a natural-park information office (950 38 02 99; Calle Correos; 10am-2pm & 5-9.30pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun), a bank and an ATM. The information office can tell you about bicycle rental, horse riding, boat trips and diving.

BEACHES
Some of the best beaches on Cabo de Gata lie along a dirt road southwest from San José. Playa de los Genoveses, a broad strip of sand about 1km long, with shallow waters, is 4.5km away. Playa de Monsul, 2.5km further from town, is a shorter length of grey sand, backed by huge lumps of volcanic rock. Away from the road, the coast between these two beaches is strewn with a series of isolated, sandy, cove beaches, the Calas del Barronal, reachable only on foot.

SLEEPING & EATING
Camping Tau (% 950 38 01 66; e@parquenatural.com; sites per adult/tent/car €4/5/5.50; h Apr-Sep) Set 250m from the beach, the small but shady Tau is very popular with families.

Hostal Sol Bahía (% 950 38 03 07; fax 950 38 03 06; Avenida de San José; d €35-70; f This fun ranch-style restaurant serves hearty regional cuisine. Hostal Bahía Plaza, across the street, are in the centre of San José and have similar, cleaner rooms in bright, modern buildings. Half a dozen other hostales and hotels have similar prices.

Hotel Cortijo el Sotillo (% 950 38 01 60; www.hostal-el-sotillo.com; Carretera de Ingilis 3; d €60-100, f €117-41; mains €8-14; p a s) This fun ranch-style complex, popular with families, has a host of great facilities, on-site riding and a huge, excellent restaurant serving hearty regional cuisine.

Restaurante El Emigrante (% 950 38 03 07; Avenida de San José; fish & meat mains €6-12) Under the same ownership as the Bahía hostales, the Emigrante is a dependable option in the centre of town.

Meson El Tempanillo (% 950 38 00 59; Puerto de San José 6-7; mains €9-15) One of several good fish restaurants beneath colourful awnings near the harbour.

San José to Las Negras
The rugged coast northeast of San José allows only two small settlements, the odd fort and a few beaches before the village of Las Negras, 17km away as the crow flies. The road spends most of its time ducking inland.

Las Negras to Agua Amarga
There’s no road along this secluded, cliff-lined stretch of coast, but walkers can take an up-and-down path of about 1km, giving access to several beaches. Playa San Pedro, one hour from Las Negras, is the site of a ruined hamlet (with Castle), inhabited erratically by hippies and naturists. It’s 1½ hours on from there to Cala del Plomo beach, with another tiny village, then 1½ hours further to Agua Amarga.

Drivers must head inland from Las Negras through Horticules. A mostly unsealed road heads northeast, cross-country from the bus shelter in Fernán Pérez. Keep to the main track at all turnings and after 10km you’ll reach a sealed road running down from the N341 to Agua Amarga, a tiny and expensive but still low-key former fishing village on a straight sandy beach that attracts cool young professional types from as far away as Madrid.
Breezy, beachfront Hostal Restaurante La Palmera (€, 95 90 13 82 08; Calle Aguada s/n; d low/high season €60/90; mains €7-15; ) has 10 bright rooms with half-moon balconies, and its restaurant is Agua Amarga’s most popular lunch spot. Chic, slick mikiSasa (€, 95 90 13 80 73; www.mikasasuites.com; Carretera Carboneras s/n; d €65/90; p a s) is an elegant, super-comfortable, romantic hideaway for the long-weekend crowd.

Getting There & Away
From Almería bus station buses run to El Cabo de Gata (€2, 30 minutes, 10 daily), San José (€2.50, 1¼ hours, four daily Monday to Saturday), Las Negas (€3.40, 1¼ hours, one daily Monday to Saturday) and Agua Amarga (€4, 1¼ hours, one daily Monday to Friday).

MOJÁCAR pop 3000
Mojácar, northeast of Cabo de Gata, is actually two towns: the old Mojácar Pueblo, a jumble of white, cube-shaped houses on a hilltop 2km inland; and Mojácar Playa, a modern beach resort strip 7km long but only a few blocks wide.

Orientation & Information
Though dominated by tourism, the Pueblo is picturesque with its mazelike streets and bougainvillea-swathed balconies. Mojácar Playa has many high-rise buildings, a long, clean beach, and a lively summer scene.

From the 13th to 15th centuries, Mojácar found itself on the Granada emirate’s eastern frontier, finally falling to the Catholic Monarchs in 1488. Tucked away in an isolated corner of one of Spain’s most backward regions, it was decaying and half-abandoned by the mid-20th century, before its mayor started luring artists and others with giveaway property offers.

Sights & Activities
Exploring the Pueblo is mainly a matter of wandering the winding streets, with their flower-decked balconies, and nosing into craft shops, galleries and boutiques. The Mirador El Castillo, at the topmost point, provides magnificent views. The fortress-style Iglesia de Santa María (Calle Iglesia) dates from 1560, and may have once been a mosque.

Getting There & Away
From Almería bus station buses run to El Cabo de Gata (€2, 30 minutes, 10 daily), San José (€2.50, 1¼ hours, four daily Monday to Saturday), Las Negas (€3.40, 1¼ hours, one daily Monday to Saturday) and Agua Amarga (€4, 1¼ hours, one daily Monday to Friday).

MOJÁCAR PLAYA
Hotel Rio Abajo (€, 95 90 47 89 28; Calle Rio Abajo; d €57; p s) Blue-and-white pueblo-style chalets are dotted among lush gardens with direct access to the broad sandy beach at the far north end of Mojácar Playa. A good place for kids.

Hotel Felipe San Bernabé (€, 95 90 47 82 02, fax 95 90 47 27 35; Playa Las Ventanicas; d €66, mains €11-16; p a) The San Bernabé is a swish and good-value hotel set back from one of the better beaches. It has a plush, conservatory-style restaurant providing excellent Spanish cooking, with a good selection of fish dishes.

Drinking & Entertainment
Classic music, live comedy acts and jazz concerts are staged at the lively Café Bar Mirador del Castillo (€, 95 90 47 30 22; h 11am-11pm or later) in Mojácar Pueblo. The Pueblo’s better bars (open evenings only, from around 8pm) include the Mexican-style Caipirinha Caipirinha (Calle Mora), reggae-rhythm d Azul Marino (Calle Enmedio) and La Muralla (Calle Estación Nueva), which boasts the most romantic views from its terrace. Stylish Time & Place (Plaza de las Flores) keeps the drinks and conversation going till the early hours.

Alternatively, just hang out in the beachfront bar of the moment, La Mar Salada (Paseo del Mediterráneo 62; h 10am-late Mon-Fri, 11am-late Sat) or lively Tiyo’s (€, 95 90 61 58 30; Playa de las Ventanicas; h 11am-late), which features live music, including jazz.

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