

SANGUINE IN SPAIN

AN ADVENTURE TO THE ANDALUSIA REGION

By Lindsay Maher

Spain's Andalusia region has soul. The country's southern coast thrives on its history, rooted in Old World beauty, masterful cuisine and cultural delights in art and flamenco dancing. Here, architecture imitates nature, the cities seemingly rising from the earth. Reset your senses and travel to three of the region's top cities, Granada, Seville and Cordoba, and be seduced by their bubbly spirits. In spring, you avoid the rush of summer crowds and the weather is truly perfect. Adjust your body clock accordingly; do as the Spaniards do and be prepared to celebrate and siesta from late until late.



Granada

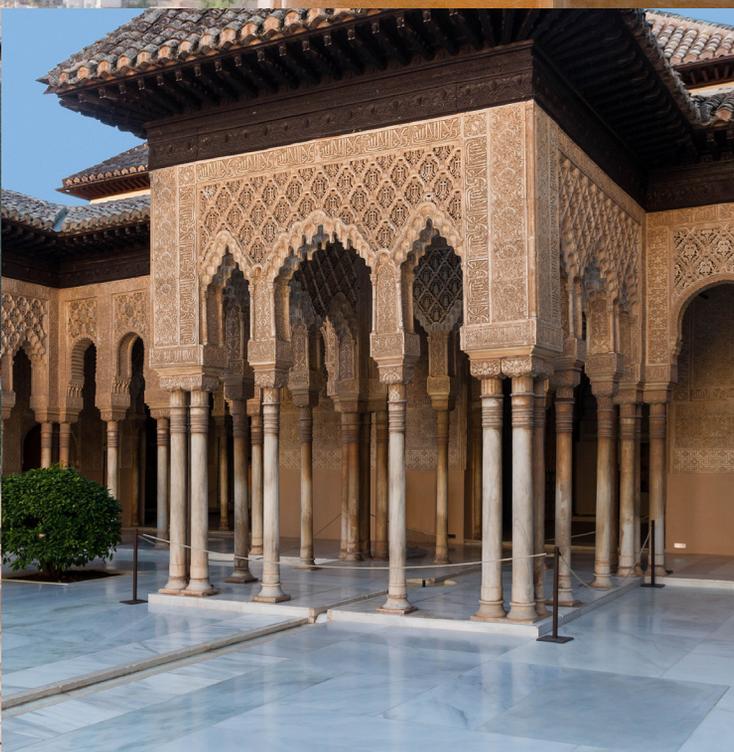
Granada's boundless energy derives from the student and artist populations that congregate here. Add that to its location in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, it's easy to see how inspiration strikes those who flock here. Once part of the Arabic empire, the city glitters with palaces and rolling hills fit for a fairytale and grounds itself in the young creatives who bring the flavor.

The Alhambra is the city's crown jewel, and well worth the hours spent amid a spell-binding display of Moorish and Renaissance architecture. Below is El Bañuelo, 11th century Arab baths, where you can admire skylights shaped like stars and some of the oldest, best-preserved baths in the entire country. A tour of the Basílica San Juan de Díos will drop you right into the center of opulence, the frescoes and intricate embellishments dizzying in their beauty. Take in some of the city's finest art museums, boasting classical and contemporary works alike, perfectly in line with the mystifying history found here.

Granada is one of the few remaining cities in Spain that serves free tapas with alcohol, so this one should be a no brainer. Carrera del Darro, Bar Avila, Bodegas Espadafor and Taberna La Tana are perfect for a quick drop in between sightseeing ventures, or to while away a few hours and maybe catch a match on television.

Head to Fútbol Café for a late afternoon churros con chocolate and opt to sit outdoors for optimum people watching while basking in the shade. After, stroll through the Alcaiceria, home of the Grand Bazaar, to pick up souvenirs and to admire the array of vendors selling their wares. Find your way to Estrellas de San Nicolás for an early dinner, and make a toast to the unforgettable city you find yourself gazing out over.

Hotel Casa 1800 has exactly that many reasons for you to stay. This 25-room boutique hotel, a 16th century estate, is right in the heart of Granada and neighbors the Alhambra. Its picturesque, open concept combines Moorish and modern design, decked in neutral browns and creams and touches of gold. The awe you will feel at the view from your windows is overwhelming, and the hotel feels like a palace at every turn.





Seville

The capital, founded by the Romans, of the Andalusia region is also the largest city. Is also sensual and lures you in without trying: it simply is, and its charm overflows in the way jasmine at this time of year blossoms here.

Seville's renowned architectural style melds Gothic, Renaissance Italian and Mudéjar together. Like at the Alcázar of Seville, a fort-turned-royal palace and labyrinth of breathtaking interior design. Or at Casa de Pilatos, which remains the permanent residency of the Dukes of Medinaceli, where the current Duchess and her family live. There is a section open to the public to view some of the palace's grand salons and gardens.

Balancing the old with the new, the Metropol Parasol was completed in 2011 and stands in the city's old quarter. It is an eclectic sight that swirls and ripples above and around you, and reigns as the world's largest wooden structure, but its contrast to Seville's antique-leaning tendencies is raw and simply stunning. You can walk on it safely, paying a small fee to go up to the terrace, and inside the Metropol Parasol is a cool marketplace.

Though flamenco's origins are clouded in mystery, many consider Triana, a neighborhood on the west bank of Seville, the birthplace of the dance. Seville constantly feels like it's about to burst open with song and



movement, and, really, it is: restaurants, bars and performance spaces that feature flamenco shows are as frequently found as the scent of orange blossom in the air. La Casa del Flamenco is a tourist hotspot, but for the talent and feeling found in every performance, it is a staple. Also visit Tablao El Arenal, one of few places owned by a former flamenco dancer, for authentic Andalusian meals and El Patio Sevillano for a range of traditional dances, including sevillanas, a local style of flamenco.

Seville's annual Feria de Abril, famous for its weeklong festivities of dancing, food, drinks and bullfights (the festival marks the start of bullfighting season), will take place this year from April 15 until April 21. A fireworks display signals the conclusion of the week, truly ending a whirlwind week with a bang. It is one endless party, the kind with little sleep and even less need to care.

Stay at the Hotel Alfonso XIII: luxury reimagined. No two rooms are the same, but each bears Andalusian design infused with a modern twist, and the grounds for its creation make it a landmark of the city. Their San Fernando Restaurant features floor-to-ceiling windows and Andalusian fare, and Ena by Carles Abellán serves traditional tapas. Though there is certainly a world beyond the hotel walls at your fingertips, savor this decadence.

Cordoba

Cordoba's historic center is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, revered for its medieval structures and plazas and bathed in antique charm. It surprises at every turn, depositing you onto another winding passageway or in front of a lively bar that takes you to another world.

Cordoba is famed for its Patio Festival, a centuries-old tradition that will be held from May 1-13 and kicks off with the Battle of the Flowers parade. People deck their courtyards out in spring's treasures and open their gates for all the city to see. If it didn't seem possible for cobblestone-lined, whitewashed, cheery cities to be one hundred times more exquisite drenched in a rainbow of flowers, believe me: it is.

To unlock Spain's complex history, explore the evolution of civilizations at the Mezquita-Cathedral de Cordoba. Its expansion over time is as multifaceted as the layers of its narrative, and standing in its wake both turns back time and humbles indefinitely.

The Alcázar de los Reyes Cristianos is where King Ferdinand and Queen Isabel were introduced to Christopher Columbus and where a slice of paradise can be found in the midst of a bustling city. Roman mosaics alongside fishponds and orange trees are a gorgeous haven to behold. And first built in 1492, the Palacio de Viana is both a product of the Renaissance and a museum committed to preserving the precious artwork, furniture, tiles, patios and palpable sense of power that grace its entirety.

Dine in the finest Cordoba has, which is, honestly, most places. Plaza de las Tendillas is dotted with restaurants and bars and a lovely view of the square. Mercado Victoria has something for everybody, a market with 30 stalls and international flare; and La Tortuga is a home-style breakfast place that converts into a dance venue on Friday and Saturday nights.

The Hotel Hospes Palacio del Baíío, in harmony with Cordoba, transports you to the lap of elegance. Original murals and hand painted stuccos alongside contemporary marble and lightness feel unreal, but are so deserved. Unwind at the Bodyna Spa and choose from a wide range of treatments among calming stones and waters. After refreshing your body and mind, find yourself at the hotel's Restaurante Arsequina to experience dishes inspired by Roman and Arabian cuisine and that use the freshest, highest-quality ingredients.

