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Córdoba

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Córdoba



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# C O N T E N T S

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## INTRODUCTION

Because of its history and wealth of monuments, Córdoba is listed as a World Heritage Site. Few European cities can boast such a rich, eventful past. Although Córdoba is the fruit of many cultures, it is to the Arabian civilisation that the Mosque, the symbol of the old caliphal city and the most stunning monument to be found in the Western World, owes its existence.

Standing against the mountain range of Sierra Morena, Córdoba looks out across the lands of La Campiña from its location on the banks of the River Guadalquivir. One of Andalusia's eight provincial capitals, it is at an altitude of 123 metres. Its districts, a collection of different villages fused into one big city, have a total population of nearly 350,000.

Córdoba is linked to Madrid and Seville by road and by rail. The A-4 (E-5) Expressway follows the path of Andalusia's great river, splitting the province in two, while National Road 432 goes from north to south, joining the northern region of

*View of Córdoba*





Los Pedroches to the southern regions of La Campiña and La Subbética, or *Lower Baetica*. The high-speed train, known as the AVE, extremely popular among travellers from the north, covers the distance between Córdoba and Madrid in just over one-and-a-half hours. Not far from the city is an airport, used in recent years to accommodate charter flights.

With a broad services network, Córdoba easily meets the needs of the third most highly-populated capital in the southern half of the peninsula. The environmental awareness of the inhabitants, fostered by the Local Administration, has been used

as a blueprint by other capital cities in Spain. The city is also home to one of Spain's leading technical colleges.

As far as tourism is concerned, Córdoba possesses some of the most up-to-the-minute facilities in Andalusia. In recent years, much has been done to enhance quality at hotels and restaurants. There is a state hotel in the hills of Sierra Morena, in the area known as Arruzafa, where Europe's first palm trees were planted in the middle of the tenth century. In addition, the visitor will find a wide range of three and four-star hotels to choose from. Lower-category hotels, many of which are housed in palaces and



*The high-speed train, AVE*

*State hotel*



mansions in the old quarters, are known for their picturesque charm. When it comes to dining, we find restaurants with a traditional menu alongside more venturesome ones offering creative dishes of recent design. However, one indispensable ingredient is common to all: extra virgin olive oil.

With over 3,000 hours of sunshine a year, Córdoba has an average annual temperature of 21 degrees, with mild winters and hot summers. The spring and autumn months are ideal for taking a stroll. Rain is usually at its heaviest towards the end of autumn and winter and during the first days of spring.

## HISTORY

We know from the chronicles that Córdoba was founded between 169 and 153 B.C. by the Roman General, Claudius Marcellus, and was erected at the point where the Guadalquivir ceased being navigable. From the port, ships laden with minerals from Sierra Morena and farm produce from La Campiña set sail for the major cities of the Empire. From the very beginning, Córdoba was the capital of *Baetica*, one of the provinces of *Hispania Ulterior* and, in the course of time, was awarded the distinction of Patrician Colony. The city was the birthplace of philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca and his nephew,





Roman bust

the poet Lucan. In the first century A.D., patrician families such as the Annaei, to which Seneca belonged, embarked on an ambitious building scheme, including the Roman Bridge, one of the key crossroads on the Via Augusta. Córdoba built a theatre which was only six metres smaller than the one in Rome and erected the world's largest amphitheatre.

The effects of the fall of the Roman Empire became noticeable in the third century A.D., during the rule of Emperor Diocletian. As the myth of the early Christian martyrs came into being, Córdoba gradually lost the splendour it had enjoyed in the past. In the fifth century, the city was pillaged by barbaric hordes of Swabians, Alani and Vandals. One hundred years later, in the sixth century, the Visigoths would choose Córdoba as the seat of their government.

However, change was in store, for in October 711, a detachment of 400 soldiers, mostly Arabs and Berbers, set up camp at the city gates. The arrival of this army would mean the beginning of the end for Visigoth domination on peninsular soil. Córdoba was already the capital of *al-Andalus* when Abd al-Rahman I entered the city in 756. The first emir of the Omayya Dynasty took up residence in Arruzafa, where Europe's first palm trees were planted. Abd al-Rahman I ordered the construction of a mosque on top of the Visigoth basilica. His descendants would continue to build onto it until well into the year 1000, making the temple into the leading Moslem monument to be erected on Western soil.

On January 16 929, Abd al-Rahman III proclaimed the constitution of the Caliphate of Córdoba. The new government declared independence from the Caliphate of Damascus and pushed the new caliphate's peninsular borders northwards, to the Cantabrian Sea. The first Cordovan caliph was to go down in history for commanding the construction of Medina Azahara. The palatial residence was extended by his son, al-Hakam II, famous for his library of over 400,000 volumes.

Hisham II, the son of al-Hakam II, placed responsibility for the government of the caliphate in the

hands of the caudillo, Almanzor, who undertook over 50 successful expeditions. His death brought the caliphate's dissolution and the division of the territory into kingdoms under Moorish rulers. At the end of the eleventh century, the capital of *al-Andalus* came to form part of the Kingdom of Seville and would remain so until the Almoravid and Almohad Dynasties arrived on the peninsula. On June 29 1236, Córdoba was reconquered by Fernando III the Holy. Christian Córdoba would experience a new period of glory during the reign of Alfonso X the Wise, who did much to encourage the peaceful co-existence of the Christian, Arab and Jewish communities. During the reign of the Catholic Sovereigns, Córdoba played a central role in the Discovery of America.

When Felipe II was on the throne, the city sank into a period of crisis which would be repeated decades later under Felipe IV. Things were no better under the Bourbons. At the time of the War of Independence, the inhabitants of Córdoba became famous for their heroic resistance.

Moving on to the twentieth century, the sixties witnessed the launching of the silverware industry, now the city's main source of income. With the foundation of the university in 1971, the declaration of the city as a World Heritage Site in 1994, local environmental awareness and improved infrastructures, Córdoba has turned into one of Spain's most flourishing and outgoing cities.

Medina Azahara



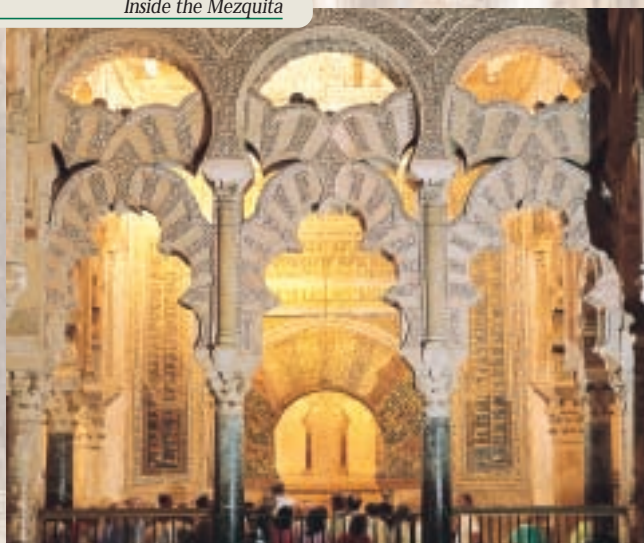


# Tours of the city

## The Mosque

Córdoba's **Mezquita** (mosque), built from the eighth to the eleventh centuries under the rule of the emirs and caliphs of the Omayya Dynasty, is the most outstanding example of Islamic art in the Western World. The first Islamic temple was erected on the original *Basilica of San Vicente*. In 785, Emir Abd al-Rahman I bought the church from the Visigoths for 100,000 dinars. In the architects' design, the mosque was divided into two equal spaces: the *sahn*, or courtyard; and the *iwan*, or prayer-hall.

Inside the Mezquita



The two spaces would experience a number of extensions undertaken by the heirs of the first Omayyad emir.

The Mezquita stands on the banks of the River Guadalquivir. Its square footing rises into four artistic facades which tell of the monument's profuse history. Inside, in addition to the bell tower and the original *sahn*, looms the Christian cathedral, erected in the sixteenth century. The north façade, overlooking the street, Calle Cardenal Herrero, is the most artistic of the four. To the left is the altar known as *Virgen de los Faroles*. The building's main door is *Puerta del Perdón*, fitted in the times of Abd al-Rahman III. Next to it is the cathedral belfry, the highest tower in Córdoba.



A total of 203 steps winding their way up the old Arab minaret take us to the top of its 54 metres. The other three facades have been restored many times in the course of the last 100 years. The biggest restoration works were carried out in 1908, when Burgos architect Ricardo Velázquez Bosco and Cordovan sculptor Mateo Inurria redecorated the doors leading inside the temple with arches, voussoirs, plasterwork and damascenes.

The old courtyard is pervaded by the scent of 96 orange trees and a vast range of botanical specimens, including olive and cypress trees. After the Reconquest, the old *Andalus* arcades were replaced by half-pointed arches, supported on columns finished off with leaf-shaped capitals. In the centre of the patio is the legendary baroque *Fountain of Santa María*, a meeting point for young lovers.

The door, *Puerta de las Palmas*, leads into the Mezquita's interior, where we first see the space occupied by the original oratory, built on the instructions of Abd al-Rahman I in the last third of the eighth century. The darkness flooding the interior is in keeping with what was probably the original atmosphere. Of particular note among the Islamic temple's original and most valued architectural features are the arcades supporting the roof. Nothing like them had ever been seen in the world before. The Omayyad architects projected a double set of arches supported on columns brought mostly from Roman and Visigothic temples. The upper arch is of the horseshoe-type and the lower one is half-pointed. Another of the monument's characteristic features is the red and white voussoirs.





Tower and  
Patio de los Naranjos

In accordance with the instructions of the first Omayyad emir, the Mezquita of Córdoba is orientated towards Mecca, just like the great Mosque of Damascus. The original 11 naves were built perpendicularly to the south *kiblah* wall, to which worshippers turned in prayer. Decisions such as these would set the course of further extensions to the monument.

The first of these extensions took place in the mid-ninth century, under the rule of Abd al-Rahman II; and the second, the most exquisite and lavish of all, was carried out on the suggestion of Caliph al-Hakam II in 961. While he was in power, a lantern-like structure was

built in the space now known as *eje de Villaviciosa*. Thanks to this work of architectural genius, light was allowed to enter the ornate naves leading to the *maqsurá*, the chamber reserved for the Caliph and his family, and the *mihrab*, the sacred niche showing the direction of Mecca. The *mihrab* is the most prepossessing part of the Mezquita. Caliph al-Hakam II requested the Emperor of Byzantium to supply both materials and artists for its construction. In reply, the emperor sent him huge ships packed with 320 quintals of glass tesserae with which to cover the wall of the enclosure.

The last and largest extension to the Mezquita took place in the times of Almanzor. It differed from the previous extensions in that it concerned the floor. The marble laid in the Omayyad extensions was replaced by the reddish tiling which is still there today. The least suited from the aesthetic

point of view, this extension was turned to political advantage by its promoter, for the bells plundered by Almanzor from Santiago de Compostela Cathedral during his *razzia* of July 3 997 were to be hung precisely from the ceilings of these naves.

After the Christian Reconquest in 1236, the Mezquita underwent a number of alterations. Fernando III commanded the construction of an oratory, discreetly situated on one side so as to avoid spoiling the Islamic temple. Some years later, Alfonso X the Wise sponsored a royal chapel designed by Mudéjar architects and built next to the Villaviciosa lantern, where the first chancel would be constructed towards the end of the fifteenth century.

The cathedral was started in 1523, when don Alonso Manrique was Bishop of



The cathedral

Córdoba. From that time onwards, the cathedral has been a controversial issue on account of its unusual location. Its footing, in the shape of a Latin cross, occupies the centre of the original Islamic temple. The first works were born of the hands of Hernán Ruiz the Elder, to be continued by his son, Hernán Ruiz the Younger, in the mid-sixteenth century. The marble *high altarpiece* is a masterpiece dating back to the early



Córdoba. The Mezquita





*Cathedral choir stalls*

seventeenth century. Other interesting features include the tracery vault over the high altar and the ones crowning the arms of the transept; not forgetting the central, surbased barrel vault, complete with lunettes, worked by Juan de Ochoa and decorated by stuccoer Francisco Gutiérrez. There is a seventeenth-century organ on either side of the central nave. The choir, one of the most notable artistic pieces in the cathedral, is the work of Pedro Duque Cornejo. Carved in exotic woods brought from the Caribbean, its benches, seating 50 choristers, are on two levels. Scenes from the Old and New Testaments are portrayed on the backs. The wall erected at the foot of the temple is a superb, late sixteenth-century Renaissance work by Juan de Alfaro, who also designed the retrochoir in the same period.

Beside the *maqsur*a is the *Chapel of Santa Teresa*, familiarly known as the Chapel of the Treasure, where the monstrance designed in the early sixteenth century by German silversmith Enrique de Arfe is kept. Once a year, the monstrance is removed and carried in the Corpus Christi Procession.

All four sides of the Mezquita are lined with dozens of chapels, one of which houses the tomb of Cordovan poet Luis de Góngora. The Chapel of Santiago, dedicated to Sagrario, is on the south side. Its three naves are decorated with frescoes painted by artist César Arbasia in the last third of the sixteenth century.

Added to all this, the Mezquita boasts two museums. At the Visigothic museum, **Museo Visigodo de San Vicente**, situated in the temple's south-west corner, we find pieces salvaged from the original basilica, which was built from the sixth to the eighth centuries. At **Museo de San Clemente**, occupying the nave which was extended in the times of Almanzor, we may admire pieces of Arab and Christian origin recovered during restoration works carried out in the twentieth century.



## Córdoba, a World Heritage Site

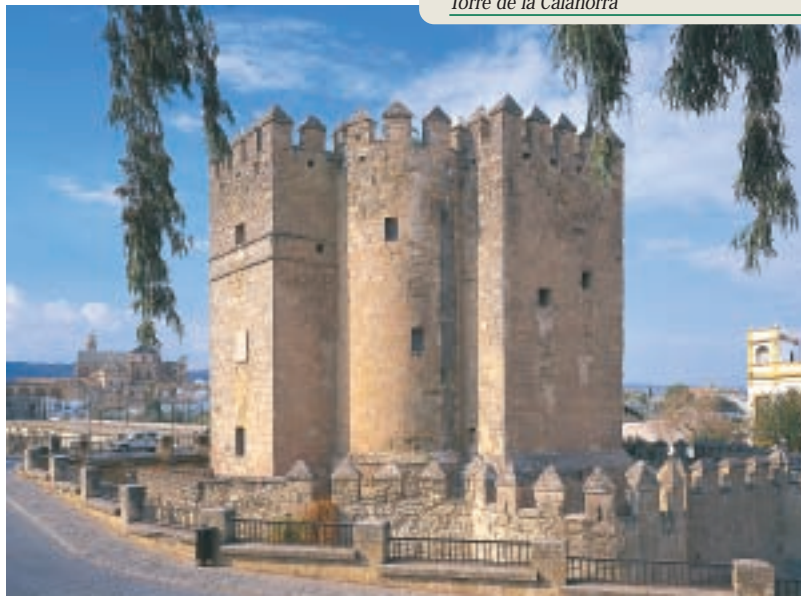
Opposite the sightseeing area, the tower, **Torre de la Calahorra** (1), holds sway over the River Guadalquivir.

The construction of the gate leading into the district known as Campo de la Verdad was commissioned in the mid-fourteenth century for the purpose of defending one of the historical entrances to the city. Since it was first built, the tower has been put to a variety of uses. At the present time, the foundation, Fundación Roger Garaudy, holds exhibitions there, such as *Córdoba, Puente entre Oriente y Occidente*, interesting for the busts of men of wisdom such as Averroes, Maimonides,

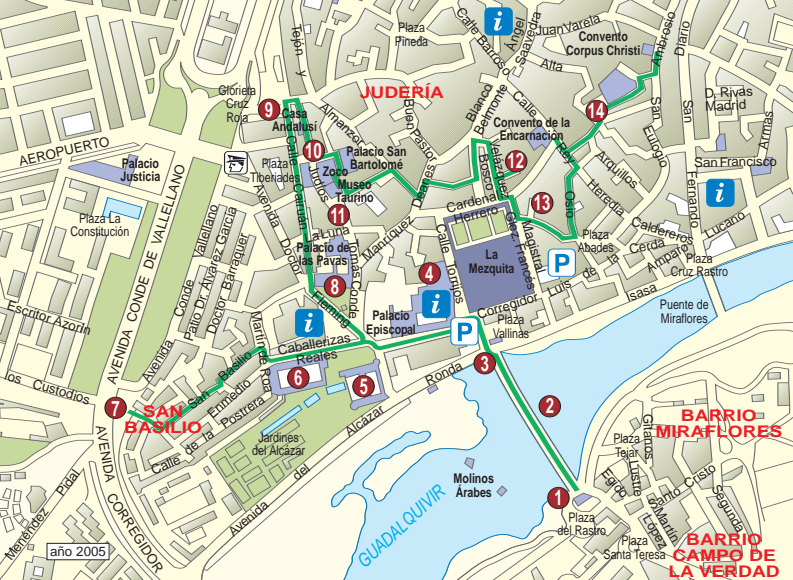
Ibn al'Arabi and Alfonso X, which, by means of maxims and aphorisms, re-create the co-existence of the three cultures. From the top of the tower, one of the finest panoramic views of the city may be enjoyed.

With a length of 230 metres, the **Roman Bridge** (2), consisting of 16 arches, was reinforced in Arab times and redesigned in the Christian era. In its centre stands a stone sculpture of St. Raphael the Archangel, the guardian of the city. From the Roman Bridge we can see the **Groves of Albolafia**, a designated area of natural beauty where thousands of migratory birds build their nests. Perched on the right bank, close by the walls of the fortress, Alcázar de los Reyes Católicos, is the *Albolafia Mill*, which became

*Torre de la Calahorra*







*Alcázar de los Reyes Cristianos*

one of Córdoba's emblems when it was included in the city's coat of arms in the mid-fourteenth century.

**Puerta del Puente (3)**, once part of the old Arab walls, was renovated in 1571 by Hernán Ruiz III, who added something of the Renaissance style to it. When it was restored in 1928, the architects decided to decorate the inner side with motifs matching the ones on the huge portico. Nearby stands the *Triumph of St. Raphael*, built from 1765 to 1781 by architect Miguel Verdiguier. For the base, Verdiguier drew his inspiration from the fountains in Rome's Piazza Navona. The road, Calle Torrijos, runs parallel to the Mezquita's west façade. Facing Córdoba's

great monument is the museum, **Museo Diocesano**, with an interesting art gallery and an extensive collection of ritual objects, religious images and tapestries.

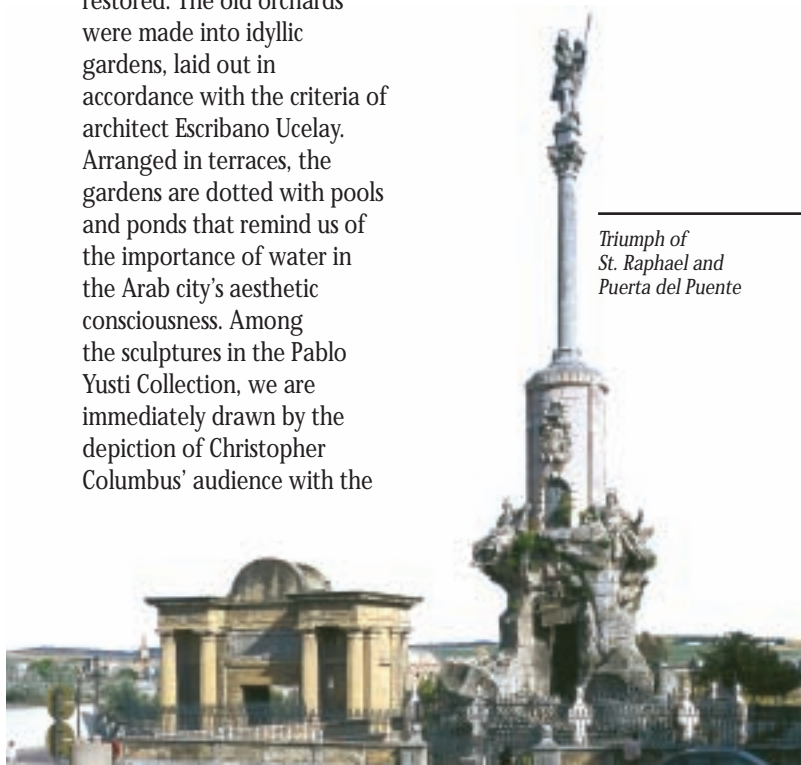
In 1986, **Hospital de San Sebastián (4)** was converted into a congress and exhibition hall. Designed by Hernán Ruiz the Elder, the building possesses one of the city's most exquisite Gothic frontispieces.

The street, Calle Amador de los Ríos, leads to the fortress, **Alcázar de los Reyes Cristianos (5)**, built in 1328 on the instructions of Alfonso XI the Just. Originally a hostel and then a royal palace, centuries later, it would be used as the headquarters of

the Inquisition, a military prison, a wine storehouse and a municipal warehouse. During the twentieth century, the fortress was thoroughly restored. The old orchards were made into idyllic gardens, laid out in accordance with the criteria of architect Escribano Ucelay. Arranged in terraces, the gardens are dotted with pools and ponds that remind us of the importance of water in the Arab city's aesthetic consciousness. Among the sculptures in the Pablo Yusti Collection, we are immediately drawn by the depiction of Christopher Columbus' audience with the

Catholic Sovereigns, where the terms and conditions of his voyage to the New World were discussed. In the fortress's Gothic rooms, there

*Triumph of St. Raphael and Puerta del Puente*







*Traditional patio*

is a permanent exhibition of Roman pieces and mosaics found on archaeological digs. Particularly noteworthy are the mosaics portraying Cupid and Venus, Polyphemus and Galatea and Medusa. Another piece not to be missed is the Roman sarcophagus, dating back to the first quarter of the third century.

Just by Alcázar de los Reyes Cristianos are the royal stables or **Caballerizas Reales** (6), built in 1570 by Felipe II for the purpose of rearing Spanish thoroughbred horses. All the outbuildings are arranged round a huge, rectangular courtyard. Stable 1, situated next to the main entrance, is in a better state of preservation than the rest. Caballerizas Reales now houses the offices of the Tourism Consortium and is also used for cultural and social events.

The District of San Basilio has some of the city's prettiest courtyards, decorated with potted plants and flowerbeds. We might stop at N°. 50 on the street of the same name to admire one of Córdoba's most famous courtyard houses. It is now the head office of a society founded to preserve the city's courtyards: **Asociación de Amigos de los Patios**.

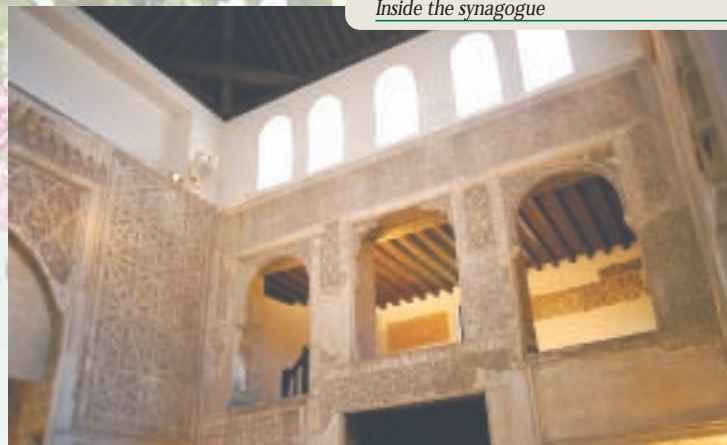
As we approach the Gate of Seville, **Puerta de Sevilla** (7), where we come upon a sculpture of poet Ibn Hazam, we reach the end of the sightseeing belt. We must retrace our footsteps if we wish to visit **Campo Santo de los Mártires** (8) and the Caliphal Baths, opened in the times of al-Hakam II. Taking the street, Calle Cairuán, which runs alongside the mediaeval wall, we see the sculpture of philosopher and physician Averroes, ushering us on to **Calleja de la Luna**, one of the most popular spots in the Jewish Quarter. Calleja de la Luna is flanked by two palaces: **Pavas**, whose Renaissance frontispiece looks out onto Calle Tomás Conde; and **Villaceballos**. Calle Cairuán slopes upwards towards **Puerta de Almodóvar** (9), guarded by a sculpture of Seneca, which was executed by artist Amadeo Ruiz Olmos in the mid-twentieth century.



*Puerta de Sevilla*

The **Jewish Quarter** is one of the main sights to be seen when visiting Córdoba. Narrow streets, tiny squares, ancestral homes and mansions all combine to produce a unique atmosphere which is enhanced by the events written into its history. Leaving Puerta de Almodóvar behind, we stroll down Calle Judíos to **Casa Andalusi**, where the Mudéjar courtyard is skirted by a paper museum. Further down, the only remaining **synagogue** (10) in Andalusia awaits us. Built in 1315, when Alfonso XI the Just was on the throne, it was

listed as a national monument in 1885. Visitors might be interested to know that, among its many functions, it was once used as a hospital for the hydrophobic, or people with a fear of drinking fluids. With a square footing, the building stands proud of the ornamental work on its walls, although a lot of the decoration in the lower part has been lost. Nevertheless, towards the top, it is still possible to see the filigree work of Córdoba's Jewish masters.



*Inside the synagogue*





*Inside the Souk*

Opposite the Synagogue, the **Souk**, opened in 1954 to accommodate the city's craftsmen. Calle Averroes, the location of the **San Bartolomé Oratory**, takes us along to Plaza del Cardenal Salazar, complete with a palace of the same name. The buildings round the baroque courtyard are occupied by the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the University of Córdoba.

On one side of **Plaza de Maimonides** (11), we might step inside the bullfighting museum, **Museo Taurino**; on the other, the Palace of **Condes de Hornachuelos**; and, to the right, in the colonnaded courtyard of a hotel, a full collection of capitals from the Roman, Visigothic and Arab eras is on display. In **Plaza de Tiberiades**, a bronze sculpture of Jewish philosopher

Maimonides reigns supreme. **Plaza Judá Levi** leads us to Calle Deanes and then on to **Calleja de la Hoguera**, another of the Jewish Quarter's quaintest spots. In the proximities of the Mezquita, to one side of Calle Velázquez Bosco, is **Calleja de las Flores** (12), one of Córdoba's distinctive picture-postcard scenes. From one end of this side street, with a gushing fountain close by, we can make out the cathedral's belfry, framed by whitewashed walls bedecked with potted plants.

Calle Martín Rucker starts out from the Mezquita's east façade, which looks out onto Calle Magistral González Francés. As we reach **Plaza de las Conchas**, we turn down an alleyway popularly known as **Calleja del Pañuelo** (13) to arrive at a tiny square featuring a fount with an Arab basin set into one of the walls, watched over by two orange trees. The most striking thing about the square is its size: it is considered to be the smallest in the world.

Calle Osio, lined with superb ancestral homes complete with charming courtyards, leads onto Calle Rey Heredia, where the convent, **Convento de la Encarnación**, stands. **Plaza Jerónimo Páez** (14) was built

on the ruins of the Roman Theatre. The latest archaeological discoveries reveal that Córdoba's Roman Theatre was one of the largest in the Empire, with a diameter just six metres smaller than the Marcello in Rome. On one side of the square, we find **Casa del Judío** (the Jew's House) and Cuesta de Pero Mato. Opposite, the **Páez de Castillejo Palace**. With a Renaissance façade, the palace accommodates the **Archaeological Museum**, one of Spain's best. The museum is arranged in historical periods, starting with the Palaeolithic and ending with the Middle Ages. Its eight rooms and three courtyards contain a good part of the history of capital and province. The collection from the Roman Era, one of the most remarkable and comprehensive in Spain, includes sculptures, mosaics, household ware, decorative objects, sarcophagi, urns and architectural pieces of great historical value.

The building's upper floor is devoted entirely to Arab culture, one of the most prized pieces being the musicians' capital, worked in marble towards the end of the tenth century. In one of the galleries, we shall see stone plaques and basins, alongside other pieces belonging to the minority



*Sculpture of Maimonides*

cultures appearing in Córdoba during the time of the caliphs. The Mozarabic bell, made by Abad Sansón in 930, is thought to be the oldest in Christendom to be found in Spain.

In another room on the museum's upper floor, the theme is the Palatinate of Medina Azahara. Here, we take time to admire *The Bronze Fawn*, an eye-catching sculpture which stood in one of the many gardens in the grounds of the palatinate's fortress at the end of the tenth century.

Not far from Plaza Jerónimo Páez, we come to the old convent, **Convento del Corpus Christi**, now the premises of Fundación Antonio Gala. Behind it, the College and Church of Santa Victoria.





The outer city.  
La Ajerquía

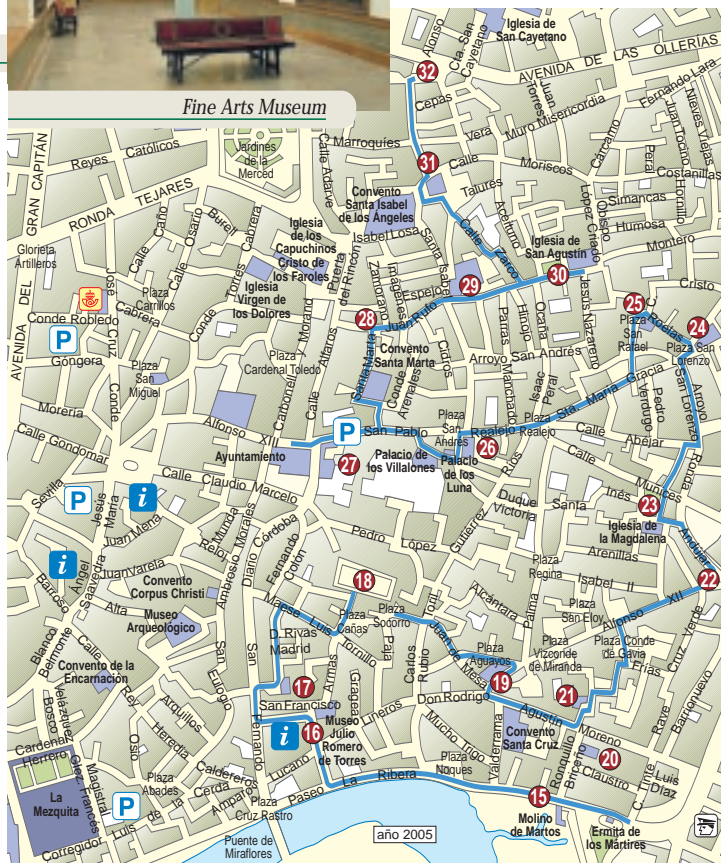
Paseo de la Ribera and Ronda de los Mártires (15) follow the course of the River Guadalquivir. Ronda de los Mártires is the location of the hermitage of the same name and the mill, **Molino de Martos**, an old industrial plant now housing the museum, Museo de Interpretación del Río. The historical esplanade takes us down to **Plaza del Potro** (16), situated in La Ajerquía, the old suburb built in the latter years of the caliphal period and in the early days of the Reconquest.

In the Golden Age, Plaza del Potro, mentioned by Miguel de Cervantes in *Don Quixote*, was packed with lodging houses and inns ready to welcome traders and customers from one of Andalusia's best-known horse and mule markets, held in the middle of the square round a statue of St. Raphael. Wedged between the streets of Lucano and Lineros, the square slopes gently down towards the bank of the Guadalquivir. Opposite La Posada, now a Tourist

Information Office, and Hospital de la Caridad, there is a Renaissance fountain, crowned with a stone sculpture of a foal rearing on its hind legs.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, the building of what used to be Hospital de

la Caridad has been used first as the fine arts museum, **Museo de Bellas Artes**, and more recently, as **Museo Julio Romero de Torres**, where the work of Córdoba's most acclaimed painter is on display. Calle de San Fernando, popularly known as Calle Feria, once marked the dividing line between the inner city and the new districts forming La Ajerquía. On this street, our gaze is met by the baroque portico leading to **Compás de San Francisco** (17).





The church was built in two stages: the three apses at the front date back to the thirteenth century, the period of what are known as the Fernandine Churches, built under Fernando III after the city was reconquered; the rest of the building belongs to the Baroque Period.

Crossing **Plaza de Cañas**, we pass **Convento de la Piedad** and come out on the rectangular **Plaza de la Corredera** (18), one of the city's traditional meeting points. Once the scene of street markets, public shows, bullfights and even autos-da-fé, the square's baroque and Castilian aura is enhanced by no less than 61 arches and 360 balconies.

**Arco Bajo**, one of Plaza de la Corredera's oldest exit points, is the gateway into **Plaza del Socorro**, with a hermitage of the same name.

The squares known as **Almagra** and **San Pedro** are linked by a short street which comes out at the Fernandine Church of the Holy Apostle. It is worth stopping at the **Church of San Pedro** (19) to admire the Renaissance frontispiece, the work of architect Hernán Ruiz II.

Calle Agustín Moreno, bordering Ronda de los Mártires and the River Guadalquivir, takes us to **Convento de la Santa Cruz** and the **Church of Santiago** (20), another Fernandine construction, erected on an early Omayyad mosque. Its Gothic frontispiece is tucked away in a narrow street that leads down to the riverbank. The bell tower was built on the old

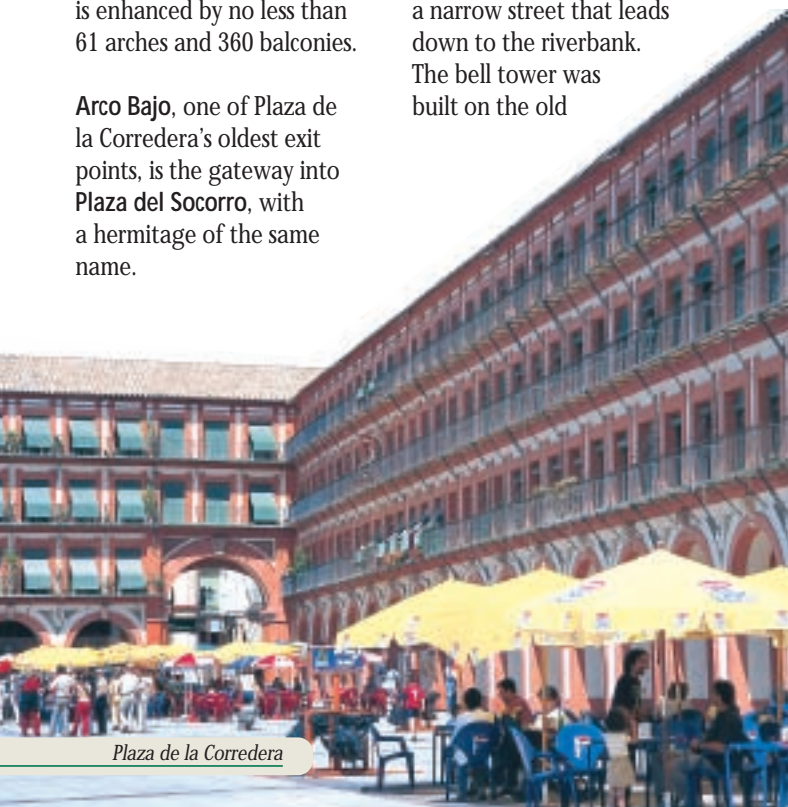
Arab minaret, of which two horseshoe-arch windows still remain today.

Opposite the entrance to the Church of Santiago, **Calle de las Siete Revueltas** begins. One of the prominent features is **Casa de las Campanas** (21), with one of the city's prettiest old courtyards. Passing through **Plaza Conde de Gavia**, we step into Calle Alfonso XII, which ends at **Puerta Nueva** (22), a crossroads where the **Church of Nuestra Señora del Carmen** stands. Inside, paintings by baroque artist Juan de Valdés Leal are on display. Adjacent to the church, the Law Faculty surrounds the old cloister of the Carmelite Convent, the most exquisite example of baroque to be found in Córdoba. Ronda de Andújar opens onto **Plaza de la Magdalena** (23), where we find the church of the same name, which, like all the other temples built in La Jerarquía, belongs to the Fernandine era. No longer used as a place of worship, its Gothic-style naves are now the scene of cultural activities.

**San Lorenzo** (24), one of Córdoba's loveliest and most treasured churches, was erected on an old mosque. In the Gothic style, this Fernandine church is noted

for its atrium and superb rose window. The belfry, erected on a minaret, was designed by Hernán Ruiz II. With a rectangular footing, the church is divided into three naves topped with Mudéjar-style wooden beams. In one of the chapels, worshippers pray to one of the city's most precious images: Cristo del Remedio de Ánimas, an anonymous, seventeenth-century carving which is carried in the silent procession held on the night of Easter Monday.

We now direct our steps to the nearby **Church of San Rafael** (25), popularly known as Iglesia del Juramento, or Church of the Oath. According to religious tradition, it was



Plaza de la Corredera

Church of San Lorenzo







*Palacio de los Villalones*

here that St. Raphael the Archangel appeared before priest Andrés de las Roelas on the evening of May 7 1587 to swear that he was guardian and custodian of the city of Córdoba. In the Neoclassic style, the church is in the form of a huge rotunda in whose centre we see a shrine containing the figure of an archangel, carved in wood by image-maker Alonso Gómez de Sandoval in 1735.

*Church of San Pablo*



Taking Calle Santa María de Gracia, we come to the **Church of San Andrés** (26), whose original structure, dating back to the late thirteenth century, has undergone considerable alteration. The baroque façade overlooks Calle Realejo. The only original Gothic features remaining are the central apse, one of the sides and the main entrance of the former Fernandine church.

Round Calle San Pablo, two Renaissance palaces may well arouse our interest: **Luna** and **Villalones**. The **Church of San Pablo** (27) looks towards Calle Capitulares, where City Hall and the Roman Theatre are situated. A baroque frontispiece supported by wreathed columns invites us into this Fernandine church, the largest to be built in the thirteenth century. Structured round three naves, the central one crowned with Mudéjar-style wooden beams, the church is particularly proud of one of its chapels, Nuestra Señora de las Angustias, presided over by a fine Pietá, carved by image-maker Juan de Mesa in 1627.

Passing the Convent of Santa Marta on the alleyway of the same name, we arrive at **Plaza de la Fuenseca** (28).



*Patio. Palacio de Viana*

A few steps away stands **Palacio de Viana** (29), a prime example of the Andalusian mansion house. Its more than 6,500 square metres include 12 courtyards and a huge romantic garden, in addition to dozens of halls, chambers and parlours containing furniture, paintings and objects of great historical value. The home of the Marquis of Villaseca until 1980, the mansion house is now used for cultural and social activities. The main façade, designed by Juan de Ochoa, overlooks Plaza de Don Gome.

In **Plaza de San Agustín** (30), the Fernandine church of the same name is of particular interest for its fine belfry.

The convent, **Convento de Santa Isabel de los Ángeles**, where worshippers flock on Wednesdays to pray to San Pancracio, the patron saint of health and work, is opposite the Fernandine **Church of Santa Marina** (31), a combination of the Gothic, Mudéjar and Cistercian styles.

**Plaza del Conde de Priego** is surveyed by a sculpture in honour of Cordovan bullfighter Manolete, who met his death in the Linares Bullring (Jaén) in 1947. Manolete lived with his mother in the nearby **Plaza de La Lagunilla**, just opposite the hermitage, **Ermita de San Acisclo y Santa Victoria**, not far from **Puerta de Colodro** (32).





Roman Temple

## The city centre

The **Roman Temple** (33), situated between the streets of Capitulares and Claudio Marcelo, was built in the first century A.D. in honour of the goddess Diana. What strikes us most about the age-old temple is its columns, finished off with magnificent capitals in the Corinthian style. The monument's pillars continue as far as **City Hall** and are visible in the interior of the municipal offices. We might step inside the vestibule to admire the sculpture, *Seneca enlightens Nero*, made by Enrique Carrón in 1904.

Bathed in the scent of 80 orange trees planted as a tribute to Claudius Marcellus,

the Roman consul and founder of Córdoba, Calle Claudio Marcelo is edged with interesting historicist buildings by the leading architects of early twentieth-century Andalusia. From here, it is not far to the **Círculo de la Amistad** (34), a long-standing social and cultural institution where the early paintings of a young Julio Romero de Torres are kept. There is also a colonnaded courtyard in the Mudéjar style and an aristocratic salon decorated with paintings on historical themes by José Rodríguez Losada.

Calle Claudio Marcelo brings us to **Plaza de las Tendillas** (35), whose buildings were designed in the early twentieth century by



architects Anibal González and Félix Hernández.

The square's focal point is the equestrian statue of the Gran Capitán, by Mateo Inurria. Just opposite, an unusual clock reminds us of the time by reproducing the flamenco guitar music of Juanito Serrano.

The **Church of San Miguel** (36) was built on old mosque. On the command of Fernando III, works commenced towards the end of the thirteenth century and would continue over the next 200 years. In a plain Gothic style, the freestanding church is a far cry from the ostentation found in other Fernandine temples. Inside, one of the best examples of Cordovan Mudéjar awaits us in the form of the funeral chapel belonging to the Vargas Family.

Calle Gondomar, the commercial hub of the modern town, links Plaza de las Tendillas to **Gran Capitán**, a wide pedestrian avenue where we find another Fernandine church, **San Nicolás de la Villa** (37). As far as the exterior goes, the prominent feature is the belfry, with an exquisite contour surrounded by tiny blind arches. There are two

Plaza de las Tendillas







*Palacio de la Merced*

entrances to the church, one at the north, while the other, going back further in time, stands at the south end.

Of the three naves into which the interior is divided, the central one is covered in fine Mannerist woodwork from the seventeenth century. We should not miss the central altarpiece with a carving of St. Nicholas by Alonso Gómez de Sandoval. Next to the apse to our left is the chapel, *Capilla del Bautismo*, executed by Hernán Ruiz II from 1540 to 1555. A short walk will take us to the Collegiate **Church of San Hipólito** (38), built by Alfonso XI in 1343 as a royal pantheon. Particularly interesting for the harmony pervading its baroque cloister, the church guards the mortal remains of Fernando IV and of his son, Alfonso XI.

Making our way along Calle Concepción, we come to the gate, **Puerta Gallegos**, and **Paseo de la Victoria** (39). On one side of this broad avenue lie **Jardines de la Victoria**, and, a little further north, **Jardines de Agricultura**, two of the inner city's main parks.

**Ronda de los Tejares** runs into **Plaza de Colón** (40), situated next to the park, *Jardines de la Merced*. Here, the building of greatest interest is the baroque **Palace of La Merced**, now the seat of the Provincial Council of Córdoba. Built in the eighteenth century, the palace was once the Convent of *Nuestra Señora de La Merced*. Unfortunately, the church's beautiful altarpiece, the work of Alonso Gómez de Sandoval, was destroyed by fire. Of the two courtyards surrounding the church, the one on the left is the prettier.

Inside the church, there is a notable collection of twentieth-century paintings and sculptures.

While in the vicinity of **Plaza de Colón**, we might visit **Plaza de Capuchinos** (41), one of Córdoba's most charming and cherished spots. Extolled by poets and travellers down through the centuries, **Plaza de Capuchinos** probably reflects Cordovan aesthetics better than any other place in the city. Designed between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, the rectangular square is the setting chosen to erect the *Cristo de los Desagravios* y *Misericordias*, also known as *Cristo de los Faroles*. On one side of the square, we shall see an old people's home and the Church, **Iglesia de la Virgen de los Dolores**, where the faithful worship *La Señora de Córdoba*, a carving by Juan Prieto dated 1718.



*Cristo de los Faroles*

On another side of the square stands the convent church, **Iglesia Conventual del Santo Ángel**, also known as *Iglesia de los Capuchinos*. Its gardens and orchards line **Cuesta del Bailío** (42), a slope divided into flights of steps that take us down to Calle Alfaro.



*Cuesta del Bailío*





Medina Azahara

## The surrounding area

Córdoba is situated on the banks of the River Guadalquivir, sheltered by Sierra Morena. In the foothills, facing the city and the riverbank, nestle the **Hermitages of Nuestra Señora de Belén**, about a dozen oratories dotting the wild, rough countryside. Their origin goes back to the sixth century A.D., when Bishop Osio was in charge of the Church. The hermits lived here, there and everywhere until the early seventeenth century, when, under the instructions of Father Francisco de Jesús, they were made to form a single community and a church was built. Works began in 1703 and concluded in 1709.

In 1836, the hermits were dispossessed of their retreat when the Expropriation Acts came into force. Nine years later, they would return and stay there until 1958, the year of the last hermit's death. Now the place is in the hands of a small community of Carmelite monks.

We enter the enclosure through a portico formed by three half-pointed arches. To our right, a path will take us down to **Balcón del Mundo**, a spectacular vantage point crowned by a statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, built by Lorenzo Coullaut Valera in 1929. It is worth taking a close look at the pedestal to admire the fine relief worked

into the marble, depicting scenes from the Calvary. The right-hand path leads us to the spot known as Rodadero de los Lobos, where Bishop Pedro Antonio de Trevilla had a cross and a stone bench built in 1803. Tradition has it that young girls who sit on the bench will not be long in finding romance.

At the hermitage entrance, a straight path known as **Paseo de los Cipreses** begins. As we come to the end of the path, we see the cross, **Cruz del Humilladero**. In the niche at its foot, a nameless skull bears the following inscription: "As you see yourself now, I once saw myself; as you see me now, you will see yourself one day. It all comes down to this. Think on it and you will be free of sin." Although there are 13 hermitages scattered among the hills, visits are restricted to the one built in honour of Mary Magdalene. In the stark, austere, bare-walled interior, there is nothing but a tiny hearth and a few pieces of plain furniture. In the hall, photographs from the early twentieth century tell of how the hermits spent their time.

The cemetery is a collection of nameless niches. A baroque portico ushers us into the

church, where the first thing to meet our gaze, alongside an array of everyday objects, is another skull with a note that reads as follows: "From this skull, food was eaten and water was drunk by Brother Juan de Dios de San Antonino, Marquis of Santaella y Villaverde, the Elder of this Brotherhood of Hermits." Decorated with mural paintings, the hermitage has just one nave, leading up to the altarpiece on which an image of Nuestra Señora de Belén is seated.

Leaving the Hermitages of Nuestra Señora de Belén behind, we take the Santa Maria de Trassierra Road and arrive at the archaeological site of Medina Azahara. Not far from the old palatine city stands the **Monastery of San Jerónimo de Valparaíso**, one of the finest examples of Cordovan Gothic art. The monks were forced to abandon their retreat when the monastery was expropriated in 1836. In the course of time, it was bought by the Marquis del Mérito, who keeps it closed to the public.

**Medina Azahara** is one of Spain's major yet little known archaeological sites. In the bowels of the earth lies a palatine city which, around



the year 1000, was unrivalled in the known world. It was built on the instructions of Abd al-Rahman III in 940, 11 years after his proclamation as caliph.

Contrary to the version of romantic travellers, Medina Azahara is not a palace dedicated to the memory of a concubine but a well-thought-out idea devised by a governor who remained unchallenged in the early years of the first millennium. Medina Azahara became his great political project, the symbol and testimony of a royal dynasty which, in a matter of a few years, would start to see the signs of a hopeless decline.

Works commenced in the early days of 940 with the fortress, where the administrative offices, ostentatious audience chambers and the private rooms of the caliph, his family and the court would be situated.

Not long after this, work started on the mosque, which was completed in 944. Medina Azahara was divided into three distinct parts: the upper and middle areas were occupied by living quarters and the government, while craftsmen's shops, the medina,

the souk and the mint would be set up in the lower area.

The mid-tenth century witnessed the start of works on the Salón Rico, the palace's most sumptuous chamber.

On the death of Abd al-Rahman III, his son, al-Hakam II would continue with the extensions. His death in 971 marked the onset of the decline of both the city and the Omayya Dynasty. It was not long before the new caliph, Hisham II, committed powers to Caudillo Almanzor, who brushed Medina Azahara aside to focus his attention on a new palatine city called Madinat al-Zahira. His death triggered the outbreak of a civil war in which Berber hordes would raze Medina Azahara to the ground so as to wipe out the legacy of the former governors. As a result of all the sacking and pillaging, Medina Azahara was abandoned and even the Almohad caliph, al-Mansur, failed in his attempt in the mid-twelfth century to recover and reinstate it as the capital of *al-Andalus*. When Fernando III passed through the city gates in 1236, Medina Azahara was nothing but a blurred memory.

In 1832, archaeologist Ceán Bermúdez set about digging for Medina Azahara.

To date, only the caliph's private chambers and government offices, accounting for a mere tenth of the palatine city, have been uncovered. A good part of the unearthed perimeter may be observed from the North Gate. The walls of Medina Azahara form a rectangle measuring 1,500 metres from east to west and 750 metres from the foothills of Sierra Morena in the north down to the waters of the Guadalquivir, in the south.

Two roads start from the **North Gate**: the one on the right leads to the caliph's residential quarters and the slope on the left goes down towards the fortress's administrative area. This is also the location of **Casa de los Visires** and the remains of senior public servants' offices, built round a huge garden.

A sloping street runs down to the great portico which was once the main entrance to Medina Azahara.

The palace's most luxurious area is the **Salón Rico**, built between 953 and 957. It was here that the caliph received his ambassadors and took his most important decisions of government.

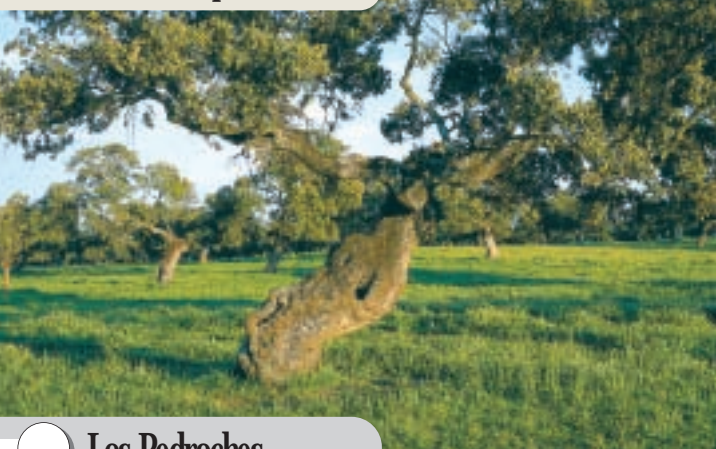
One of the most outstanding samples of Islamic art in the world, the Salón Rico is arranged on a basilican footing divided into three naves. The horseshoe arches are decorated in voussoirs where red strips alternate with carved white damascenes. The top of the room served as a *mihrab*, overlooked by a blind arch designed to heighten the caliph's power as he stood before his subjects and guests.

Medina Azahara





## Tours of the province



### Los Pedroches

**Los Pedroches** is a region situated in the north of the province of Córdoba, bordering on the Autonomous Communities of Extremadura and Castilla-La Mancha. Its 17 towns stand on high, flat, stony land, clad in meadows of holm oak and cork trees.

When visiting the region of Los Pedroches, there are two sights not to be missed: the Church of San Juan Bautista in **Hinojosa del Duque** and the Sotomayor de Belalcázar Castle. The first, known as “the cathedral of the hills”, is listed as a National

Monument. Built in the mid-fifteenth century by Hernán Ruiz I and II, the building’s most noteworthy feature is the plateresque façade, designed as a magnificent scene of triumph where columns, Corinthian capitals and finely-worked friezes go to make up a striking architectural icon. The Gothic interior is structured round three naves. Looking up, we admire the Mudéjar-style coffered ceiling over the central nave and the tracery vaults on either side, completing our tour with a visit to the superb plateresque baptistery.

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Just eight kilometres away from Hinojosa del Duque lies **Belalcázar**, a tiny village with a population of 4,000. Perched on the highest point is the Sotomayor Castle, a splendid granite fortress built on the remains of an old Arab watchtower in the second half of the fifteenth century by the Lords of

Zúñiga and Sotomayor, the Counts of Belalcázar. Years later, a Renaissance palace would be added. In 1810, at the time of the French invasion, the castle was used to billet Napoleon’s troops, who damaged some of the main chambers. In the form of a quadrangle, the castle has eight towers, the most

*Belalcázar Castle*





impressive of which is the 45-metre-high keep, topped in turn by a set of projecting turrets. While in Belalcázar, we should find time to visit the late-fifteenth-century Church of Santiago el Mayor, with a Gothic exterior and Renaissance interior.

Next, **Dos Torres**, where the Gothic Church of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción awaits us. With three naves crowned by a finely-worked Mudéjar-style coffered ceiling, the church opens out onto a bare square edged in interesting ancestral homes.

The town of **Pedroche** is the location of the church, Iglesia del Salvador, also known as the Church of the Transfiguration. Here, the houses are built round a hillock which acts as a backcloth for the church's bell tower. Designed in part by Hernán Ruiz II, the tower is one of the region's most remarkable Renaissance works.

The busy commercial activity of the town of **Pozoblanco**, generally considered to be the regional capital of Los Pedroches, seems to be at variance with the artistic interest of some of its sights, such as the Churches of Santa Catalina and San Bartolomé.

In **Santa Eufemia**, nature was turned to advantage with the construction on a nearby hill of a rock fortress of Moslem origin, the Castle of Miramontes, now in ruins. Nevertheless, it is an ideal spot to enjoy a panoramic view of the town and most of the region.

Moving on to **Torrecampo**, the main attraction is the ethnographic museum named after chronicler Esteban Márquez. Housed in the old inn known as El Moro, the museum possesses an interesting collection of tools and objects, in addition to paintings and sculptures and an archaeological section.

We might also care to visit the Mudéjar Gothic Parish Church of San Esteban and the Hermitage of Jesús Nazareno, which was renovated in the baroque period and now guards one of the region's most cherished religious images.

**Villanueva de Córdoba** is set amid vast meadows of holm oak and cork trees. White houses contrast with the granite stone of the Church of San Miguel Arcángel, built in the mid-sixteenth century. The town's prominent feature is the Antigua Audiencia, a seventeenth-century building with an engaging baroque frontispiece.

In the neighbouring town of **Villanueva del Duque**, the Church of San Mateo, dating back to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, stands proud of its high altarpiece, a great artistic work which contrasts with the Gothic style found in the two chapels. On the outskirts, we find the Hermitage of Virgen de Guía, built in the Gothic style peculiar to the times of Isabel II. It is here that pilgrims come to worship in mid-August.

*Santa Eufemia*





## The Guadalquivir Valley



Montoro

Montoro, a sightseer's delight, is embraced by a curve in the River Guadalquivir. Clustered round an imposing hill, the town spreads into the whitewashed district of Retamar, situated at the other end of the Donadas Bridge, built during the reign of the Catholic Sovereigns. According to history, funds for the bridge's construction were raised through the sale of jewellery belonging to the local women while manpower was provided by their husbands. In exchange, the sovereigns declared that Montoro would be exempt from the duty of provisioning the troops dispatched to the area to deal with the frequent borderline skirmishes. The Fountain of Santo

Domingo is situated at the side of Camino Nuevo, a road running from the riverbank and the outskirts of the town to La Corredera, Montoro's high street. With ancestral homes and baroque palaces on either side, La Corredera leads into Plaza de España, where we might step inside the town's greatest architectural asset: the Church

of San Bartolomé. Originally built to Gothic design, it has been adapted to new styles both inside and out as time has elapsed. Facing the church is the Town Hall, where official ceremonies are held in a chamber noted for its fine Mudéjar beams.

There are two first-class museums in Montoro. One, dedicated to local painter

Antonio Rodríguez Luna, is to be found in the eighteenth-century chapel of San Jacinto, where, amongst others, the painting titled *Toro Furioso* is on display. The other museum is the Museo de Arqueología, housed in Palacio de las Tercias, Plaza de Santa María.



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Church of San Bartolomé, Montoro





We shall be fascinated by a rich collection of archaeological pieces unearthed in the surrounding area.

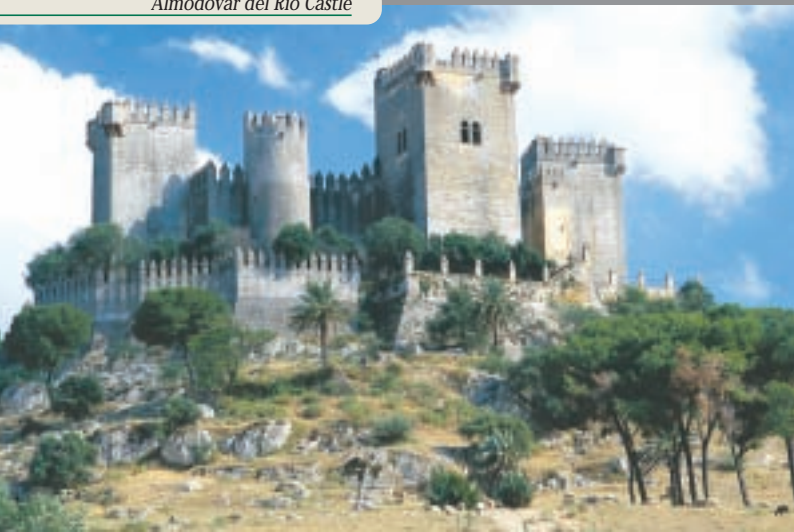
Across the river, towards the north, lies one of the province's prime designated areas of natural beauty. Part of the Sierra Morena, **Parque Natural de Cardena-Montoro** is blanketed in a precious wood of holm oak and cork trees.

Beyond the city of Córdoba, the Guadalquivir flows on to the town of **Almodóvar del Río**, where one of Andalusia's most highly-valued castles looks down at the world from the area's topmost point. Although the first foundations are thought to have been laid in Roman times, the castle did not assume a role of importance

until the establishment of the Emirate of Córdoba. In 1240, it was handed over to Fernando III the Holy. In the course of time, Pedro I the Cruel would reinforce the castle to make it safe to store his treasure. Legend has it that he had a black giant spider brought from Africa to ward off and deter anyone with an eye on his riches. Centuries later, Felipe IV sold the castle to a Knight of the Order of Santiago and ever since, it has been the property of the Marquisate of La Motilla.

In the early twentieth century, Rafael Desmaisières, Count of Torralba, had the castle rebuilt, hiring architect Adolfo Fernández Casanova for the purpose. It took Casanova 36 years to restore the castle as we see it today.

*Almodóvar del Río Castle*



*Hornachuelos*

Nine turrets run along the walls while a bastion commands a view of the hill overlooking the Guadalquivir. Within the walls, a well with a capacity for over 170,000 litres lies beneath a spacious parade ground. The keep is divided into three storeys: the one at the top is Mudéjar; the middle one is eight-sided; and the lower one was used as a prison for many a century.

The foot of the castle fuses with the whitewashed houses of Almodóvar del Río, where the main attraction is the baroque church, Iglesia de la Inmaculada Concepción, in the shape of a Latin cross. The eighteenth-century Town Hall building and the hermitage, Virgen del Rosario, with a splendid baroque frontispiece, are also worth a visit.

Just outside Almodóvar del Río lies the nature park, **Parque Natural de la Sierra de Hornachuelos**, one of Córdoba's major green belts. Like Cardena, Hornachuelos belongs to the mountain range of Sierra Morena. With a long hunting tradition, Hornachuelos is renowned not only for its scenery but also for its sizeable community of black and griffon vultures, imperial eagles, falcons and goshawks.

Downstream, before entering the province of Seville, the Guadalquivir passes through **Palma del Río**, a town with an interesting array of baroque buildings. The belfry on the main church is one of the most eloquent examples of the architecture found on the Guadalquivir Plain.





## La Campiña

The Ducal Palace of Fernán Núñez is one of Córdoba's most interesting civil buildings. Built in 1783 on the instructions of the Duke of Fernán Núñez, don Carlos Gutiérrez de los Ríos, a military officer, diplomat and enlightened man of his time, the palace sits on the foundations of an old castle which was destroyed during the Lisbon Earthquake in 1755. Highly reminiscent

of the palaces of Lisbon, where don Carlos was ambassador, the classical building's distinguishing features are its reddish walls and the arrangement of its wings. The main façade is flanked by two august towers and a row of cannons seized from the English Admiral Blake by one of the lords of Fernán Núñez in the second half of the seventeenth century.

A few kilometres from Fernán Núñez, in the middle of the region of La Campiña, we approach Montilla, known near and far for its vineyards and quality wines. The town's cellars form part of Spain's grape and wine-growing history and Montilla is one of the *appellations d'origine* to rank highest among connoisseurs' preferences. Set amid estates crisscrossed by twisted vines, Montilla lies back on one of the folds formed in a high ridge upon which we can see the remains of the old castle, demolished in 1508 on Fernando the Catholic's command. In its place, a barn was built inside the crumbling walls and towers to store the grain collected by the lords from their vassals. The early sixteenth-century Church of

Santiago is Montilla's chief place of worship. Standing next to the site of the old castle, the church has a baroque belfry and main frontispiece. The interior is structured round three spacious vaulted naves. In one of the chapels, the faithful kneel in prayer before a carving of the city's patron saint, San Francisco Solano, attributed to sculptor Pedro de Mena. Another of the chapels honours the Christ of Zacatecas, a beautiful carving by indigenous Mexican masters. It was brought to Spain in 1576.

The Convent of Santa Clara, founded in 1525, is situated by Paseo de Cervantes, next to the Ducal Palace of Medinaceli. Walking through the circular garden, we come







*Montilla*

to the frontispiece and revolving window of the church, which is in the care of

*Plaza de San José.  
Aguilar de la Frontera*



the nuns of the Order of St. Clare. The oratory consists of a single nave with an impressive beamed roof in the Mudéjar style. A short distance away stands the house-museum of Inca Garcilaso. The sixteenth-century mansion, home of the distinguished Peruvian writer from 1561 to 1591, now houses the library, Biblioteca Americanista, and the Municipal Tourist Office. Other buildings of interest in Montilla are the Churches of San Sebastián and La Encarnación, not forgetting the Town Hall, which occupies what was once the Chapel of San Juan de Dios, mentioned by Cervantes in his literary works.

**Aguilar de la Frontera** is one of the largest towns in the region of La Campiña in terms



*View of Baena*

of population. In the district known as La Villa, we have another chance to contemplate the work of Hernán Ruiz the Elder, who played a part in the design of the Gothic-Mudéjar Church of Santa María de Soterraño. As we go in, we discover two baroque chapels: Sagrario (1639) and Nuestro Padre Jesús Nazareno (1750). One of the town's symbolic features is the clock tower, a freestanding belfry situated in the centre. Dating back to 1770, the tower was built in mock brick in accordance with the aesthetic standards ruling Andalusian baroque belfries. Plaza de San José is one of Andalusia's few polygonal

squares. By all accounts, its design was inspired on Archidona's octagonal square, as suggested by its baroque and neoclassic flavour. Other buildings of interest in Aguilar are the baroque convent, Convento de las Descalzas, and the seventeenth-century church, Iglesia de la Vera Cruz, with its baroque chapel, Virgen de la Rosa.

In the municipal district of **Baena**, situated midway between La Campiña and Sierra Subbética, lie fields bursting with olive trees, whose fruits are used to make one of Spain's prime olive oils.





## La Subbética, Priego and Lucena

*Zuheros Castle*

In the nature park, **Parque Natural de la Sierra Subbética**, down in the south of the province of Córdoba, an irregular karstic landscape formed by limestone rock lies beneath a rich Mediterranean forest and a vast spectrum of flora and fauna. This designated area of natural beauty is further enhanced by the nearby towns and villages, where history has left a considerable monumental and artistic heritage.

Starting at the north, we call at **Zuheros**, one of Andalusia's most picturesque villages.

Reclining on a rocky crag, the village stands out for its impressive white architecture and a castle-cum-palace which used to be the gateway between La Campiña and the mountains. While in the area, we must not forget to visit the cave, Cueva de los Murciélagos, stretching right into the mountain's bowels, where prehistoric ruins are zealously guarded.

The villages of **Luque**, **Doña Mencía** and **Carcabuey** all belong to Sierra Subbética. Each is noted for its main square and baroque churches.



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*Cueva de los Murciélagos*

The prominent feature in **Cabra** is the Shrine to Virgen de la Sierra, strategically balanced on a hill affording a view of almost the entire province of Córdoba. The hill's slopes are grooved by the River Bailón, which then flows downstream into the limestone mountains of Zuheros.

As far as sightseeing goes, **Priego** is one of Andalusia's most interesting towns. In the proximities of the old Arab castle, we enter the popular district of La Villa,

where alleys and tiny squares speak of its mediaeval past. Strolling past houses embellished with pot plants, fountains and flowerbeds, we finally come out at the Adarve vantage point, where we enjoy a lovely view of the olive-growing region.

Priego's main sight is the parish church, Parroquia de la Asunción, commenced in the early sixteenth-century. Originally of Gothic-Mudéjar inspiration, in the course of the eighteenth century, it gradually changed into what

*Luque*







*A street in Priego*

it is today, thanks to the work of architect Jerónimo Sánchez de Rueda. Divided into three naves, the church features a high altarpiece which dates back to the second half of the sixteenth century and has been attributed to Juan Bautista Vázquez the Elder. The church's pride and joy is the chapel, Capilla del Sagrario, one of the culminating works of Andalusian baroque art. Designed by Francisco Javier Pedrajas, its vestibule leads to an octagonal enclosure

crowned by an amazing vault which gleams in the light from a set of *oeils-de-boeuf* and large casements arranged at two different levels. In fact, the chapel's most striking feature is its brightness, heightened by the vast assortment of white plaster ornamental work conceived for the sole purpose of bedazzling the visitor.

Round every corner in Priego, we find baroque buildings like the churches, Aurora and San Francisco. Calle Río, a string of palaces and ancestral homes, is famous for its Fuente del Rey, a group of ponds containing 139 gushing spouts decorated with mythological figures.

**Lucena** is the second most highly-populated city in Córdoba. History's main legacy to the town is the castle, Castillo del Moral, which was, by all accounts, built on the foundations of an old Roman temple. The residence of the Duke of Medinaceli in

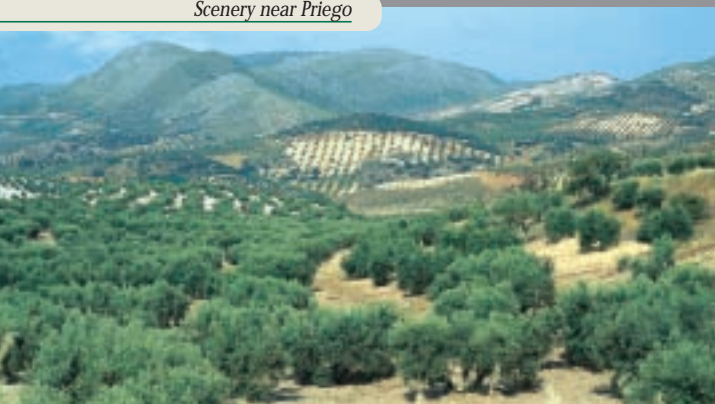
the eighteenth century, the fortress was constructed on a square footing protected by a double line of walls and four turrets. Nowadays, the open parade ground is used for social and cultural functions, while the castle accommodates a tourist office and a museum.

To one side of the fortress, we might stop at the Church of San Mateo, the town's chief religious monument. The earliest evidence of a Christian church goes back to 1240. Apparently built on the pillars of a mosque and a Jewish synagogue, the church as we now see it was commenced in 1498 and was not finished until the eighteenth century. With a Gothic-Mudéjar structure, the interior is worth a visit for its high altarpiece, the work of Jerónimo Hernández and Juan Bautista Vázquez the Elder, who

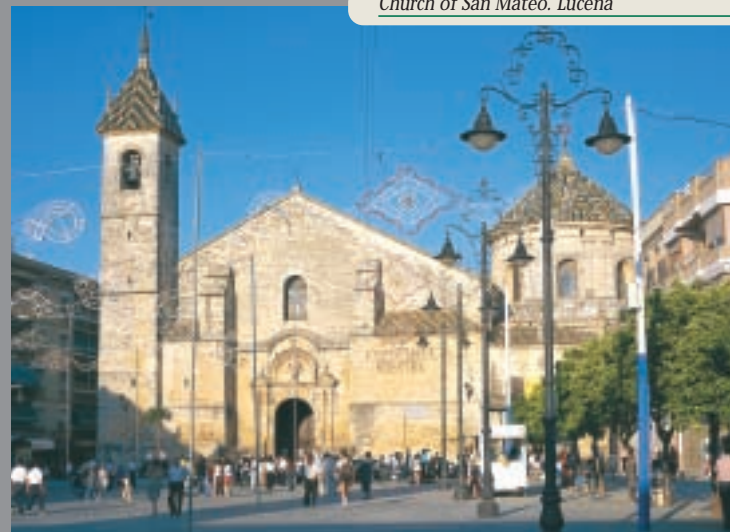
carved it between 1570 and 1578. This magnificent Mannerist piece features a profusion of paintings and sculptures depicting some of the most significant chapters in the Bible. The other remarkable work of art at the Church of San Mateo is the chapel, Capilla del Sagrario, one of the finest examples of Andalusian baroque of all time. Completed in 1772, the chapel is the work of artists Pedro de Mena, Juan del Pino and Leonardo Antonio de Castro, all of whom were born in Lucena.

The outskirts of the town are graced by the Shrine to Nuestra Señora de Araceli, seated on a hill considered to be the geographical centre of Andalusia. From the top, we can enjoy a view of five of Andalusia's eight provinces (Córdoba, Granada, Jaén, Málaga and Seville).

*Scenery near Priego*



*Church of San Mateo. Lucena*





## Leisure and shows

### Gastronomy

Extra virgin olive oil is the key ingredient in Córdoba's gastronomy. The province possesses two *appellations d'origine*: Priego and Baena. The slightly bitter, piquant Priego oil leaves a pleasant aftertaste, enhanced by a strong floral aroma. The *appellation* also covers the towns of Almedinilla, Carcabuey and Fuente Tójar. Baena's cloudy, buttery oils

are fruitier and have a touch of almond. The *appellation* also includes the towns of Doña Mencía, Luque, Nueva Carteya and Zuheros.

However, the production of olive oil does not stop here. In fact, some of Andalusia's most renowned virgin oils are made in Montoro, El Carpio, Lucena and Puente Genil.

Another essential feature of Cordovan gastronomy is wine, the epicentre being Montilla-Moriles, an area midway between La Campiña and the mountains, where grapes have been grown since Roman times. Montilla and Moriles are the names of two towns that joined forces



*Olive tree plantation*

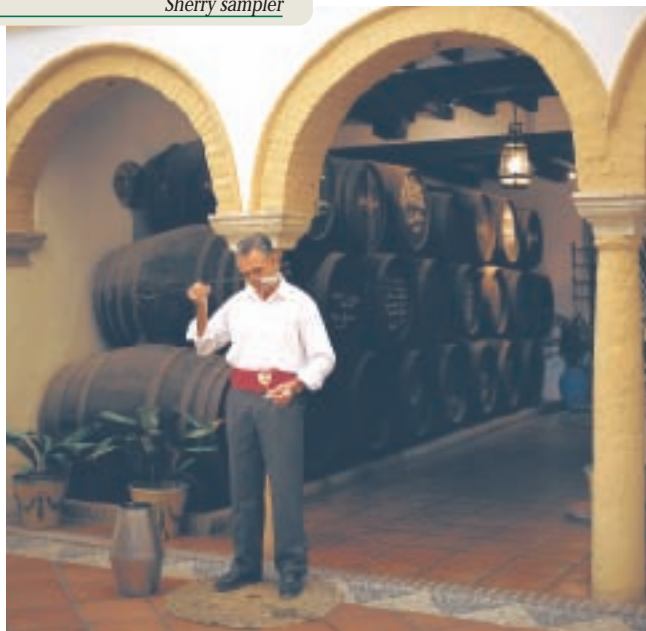
to constitute one of Spain's leading grape and wine-growing *appellations d'origine*. Their cellars produce a pale, yellowish *fino*, dry, sharp and biting on the palate; *amontillado*, a full-bodied wine ideal with a heavy meal; *oloroso*, a deep-tasting wine the colour of old gold, made in accordance with the *solera* method; and the deep, dark, somewhat heady *pedro ximénez*, the best choice to accompany a dessert or a light meal.

In Córdoba, wine-tasting is a ritual which may be observed at any of the inns and taverns scattered over the city, where there is never a shortage either of Iberian ham, produced from pigs

reared in the vast meadows of holm oak and cork trees covering the region of Los Pedroches. Iberian pork produce is used extensively in Cordovan dishes. In accordance with tradition, pigs are slaughtered during the winter months to produce the succulent meats and cured pork products on sale at any of the city's first-class shops.

Córdoba's gastronomy has been strongly influenced by the climate. In spring and summer, cold soups like *salmorejo* and *ajo blanco* come to the fore. *Salmorejo* is a form of *gazpacho* made from tomatoes and garlic with bits of Iberian ham and hardboiled egg thrown in, all drizzled with virgin olive oil.

*Sherry sampler*







*Traditional dish*

*Ajo blanco* and its almond dressing take us right to the heart of Andalusia's culinary tradition.

Indeed, dressings play a central role in local cuisine and are typically served with fried fish, such as horse mackerel, dogfish and anchovies.

Among the most popular dishes we find chickpea and chard pottage; *maimones*, a soup made with bread and oil; dried beans with aubergines; and stewed

lamb. Of course, this list would not be complete without the famous bull's tail, served in a rich sauce with chipped potatoes.

Córdoba is equally well known for its bread, particularly *regañás*, baked to a turn all over the province in only the best wood ovens. For dessert, we might go for the renowned Cordovan cake, consisting of delectable puff pastry filled with gourd pulp.

As each *fiesta* comes round, nuns at the enclosed convents make almond tarts and sponges oozing with liqueurs, in addition to honey-coated pancakes, their very own version of French toast and cream-filled fritters. The town of Puente Genil is the best place for quince jelly; Montoro is famed for its Christmas marzipan; and lastly, Rute, where we might call at the thematic museum to watch how the town's much-sought-after anisette is made.

## Culture and fiestas

Córdoba's calendar of festivities commences early in the year with the traditional Twelfth Night Procession. In the third week of January, a mediaeval market is held in Plaza de la Corredera, where local craftsmen gather with drama groups re-enacting episodes from Córdoba's history. February brings two important events: first, the Antique Book Fair and second, Carnival, which centres round the District of

*Holy Week Procession*





San Agustín. Meanwhile, street musicians, bands in carnival costume and comedians perform at the city's main theatre, Gran Teatro, situated on Avenida del Gran Capitán.

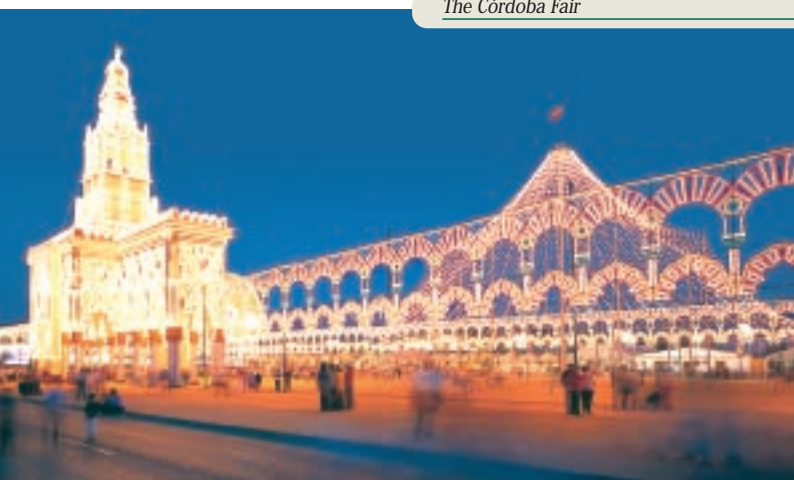
March kicks off with the Three Cultures Music Cycle, a contest in which a travelling panel of judges goes round the city's main districts to assess the performance of groups in the Christian, Arab and Hebrew traditions, centred in the main round the Middle Ages.

Córdoba's Holy Week is a designated event of National Touristic Interest. Processions are enhanced by floats of great baroque beauty,

particularly the Stations of Penance in which the statue, Cristo de las Ánimas, is carried on the night of Easter Monday.

April and May are both key months on Córdoba's calendar. First comes the Book Fair, held on the pedestrian avenue, Avenida del Gran Capitán, to be followed on the second Sunday in April by the pilgrimage in honour of Santo Domingo de Scalacoei. The sanctuary is situated in the foothills of Sierra Morena, just 10 km from the city, in a place known as Torre de Berlanga, founded in the fifteenth century by San Álvaro. A few days later, it is time for the Battle of

*The Córdoba Fair*



*Cruz de Mayo*

Flowers, a prelude to one of Córdoba's major celebrations, Cruces de Mayo, when crosses are placed in the city's most prized spots by societies, brotherhoods and residents' associations. In an array of bright colours, the crosses are bedecked in all kinds of articles and contrivances.

May commences with the Pilgrimage of Virgen de Linares, whose sanctuary is only seven km from Córdoba, not far from the Badajoz

Road. Tradition has it that the temple was built on the instructions of Fernando III in 1236 after the recovery of the city from the Arabs, when the monarch donated a Gothic carving of the virgin.

The other chief festive event, the Festival of Courtyards, Grilles and Balconies, takes place in mid-May, when the city's courtyards and palaces are open to the public and wine-tasting sessions are organised at inns and taverns.





*Traditional patio*

May draws to a close with the Córdoba Fair, held in honour of Nuestra Señora de la Salud in Arenal, just by the Arcángelos Stadium. Celebrations include bullfights at the Califas Bullring, formerly Plaza de los Tejares.

Corpus Christi is celebrated with the performance of a Eucharistic play in Patio de los Naranjos at the Mosque/Cathedral. June brings the Brazilian Music Festival and the start of the outdoor cinema season, when filmgoers have a choice of four different locations.

As July is one of the hottest months of the year in Córdoba, cultural activities are held when the sun goes down. The International Sephardic Music Festival comes just one week before the Guitar Festival, a top cultural event in Andalusia. The competition is open to up-and-coming flamenco guitarists and also to acclaimed maestros of a variety of genres who perform all over the city. One of the best venues is the fortress, Alcázar de los Reyes Cristianos.

From July to September, the old quarter comes alive with

a season of Flamenco Nights, staged at Alcázar de los Reyes Cristianos, Casa de las Campanas and Plaza del Potro. Lasting a little bit longer (from July to October), the season of Magic Nights includes plays, guided tours and music concerts, while taverns, pavement cafés and *boîtes* open well into the night.

The Jewish Quarter has its own music cycle in August. September is the month for congresses and trade fairs promoting silverware and footwear. September 8 is earmarked for the *fiesta* in honour of Virgen de la Fuensanta.

October is livened up by the International Jazz Festival, with performances at Gran Teatro and various jazz halls dotted round the city. The city's guardian, San Rafael, is fêted on October 24, when morning services are held in his honour at the church, Iglesia del Juramento, followed by a trip to the hills and a chance to enjoy *el perol*, a juicy rice dish washed down with Montilla-Moriles wine.

In the wake of November and All Saints' Day comes a tight schedule in the last month of the year, when the Photography Biennial takes place. New Year's Eve

*The Córdoba Fair*







is a particularly important day in Córdoba as this is when the clock in Plaza de las Tendillas rings in the New Year for all of Andalusia.

Throughout the year, music and plays can be enjoyed at Córdoba's Gran Teatro, where one of Andalusia's leading orchestras, Orquesta Ciudad de Córdoba, heads the programme.

As for the towns and villages in the province of Córdoba, there are countless fairs and *fiestas* all year round,

mostly of a religious nature. In the first week of June, the people of Aguilar de la Frontera go on a pilgrimage known as La Candelaria. On the first Wednesday in October, Baena has its Royal Fair, concerned, amongst other things, with the promotion of olive oil. One of the most original Cordovan processions may be seen on the third Sunday in June at the Sanctuary of Virgen de la Sierra de Cabra, the destination of the national gypsy pilgrimage. On the first Sunday in May, the neighbouring town

of Lucena holds *fiestas* in honour of its patron saint, Nuestra Señora de Araceli. Later, on the first Sunday in September, Montilla celebrates the grape harvest by paying tribute to wine, the region's main source of income. The people of Pozoblanco go on a pilgrimage in honour of Virgen de la Luna and, on the second Sunday in September, Priego de Córdoba is immersed in its own *fiestas*, known as La Aurora.

## Handicrafts

Córdoba is renowned for its handmade silver and leather goods. In fact, most of the city's craftsmen specialise in silverware, which has become the city's main source of income. Wholesale workshops and family businesses engage in the design and manufacture of all kinds of silverware, which is sold at specialised shops on Lineros and Lucano and also in the area of Plaza de las Tendillas.



Handmade silverware



The museum, Museo Regina, situated in Plaza Luis Venegas, occupies the former house-museum of plastic artist and jewel designer, José García Espaliú. A comprehensive display of the history of Cordovan silverware gives us an insight into the jewellery of various periods, ranging from antiques to venturesome designs by contemporary artists. In addition, we may learn about the way jewels are made: design, melting, setting and polishing. The exhibition is completed with an interesting display of tools and sculptures in silver.

Leather first came to Córdoba in the times of *al-Andalus*. When the Omayya Dynasty was in power, craftsmen who had set up their workshops round the Mezquita showed people how to prepare, tan and gild leather. The most painstaking leatherwork is the one known as *cordoban*, he-goatskin treated with sumac, a plant rich in tanning properties which makes leather more flexible and resistant. Although *cordoban* has been used traditionally



Photograph: Córdoba Tourist Board

*Leatherwork*

in shoes, tablecloths, gloves and mats, more recently it has become an ornament in its own right.

Another craft for which Córdoba has earned a well-deserved reputation is *guadamecí*, an art of oriental origin consisting in applying gold and silver leaf to ram's skin. Traditionally used as a wall covering, *guadamecí* is now a technique exploited by designers of caskets and cases, chairs, tables and picture frames.

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3. Puerta del Puente
4. Hospital de San Sebastián
5. Alcázar de los Reyes  
Cristianos
6. Caballerizas Reales
7. Puerta de Sevilla
8. Campo Santo de  
los Mártires
9. Puerta de Almodóvar
10. Synagogue
11. Plaza de Maimónides
12. Calleja de las Flores
13. Calleja del Pañuelo
14. Plaza Jerónimo Páez

**The outer city:  
La Ajerquía**

15. Paseo de la Ribera and  
Ronda de los Mártires
16. Plaza del Potro
17. Compás de San Francisco
18. Plaza de la Corredera
19. Church of San Pedro
20. Church of Santiago
21. Casa de las Campanas
22. Puerta Nueva
23. Plaza de la Magdalena
24. Church of San Lorenzo
25. Church of San Rafael

26. Church of San Andrés
27. Church of San Pablo
28. Plaza de la Fuenseca
29. Palacio de Viana
30. Plaza de San Agustín
31. Church of Santa Marina
32. Puerta de Colodro



**The city centre**

33. Roman Temple
34. Círculo de la Amistad
35. Plaza de las Tendillas
36. Church of San Miguel
37. Church of San Nicolás  
de la Villa
38. Church of San Hipólito
39. Paseo de la Victoria
40. Plaza de Colón
41. Plaza de Capuchinos
42. Cuesta del Bailío

**The surrounding  
area**

43. Medina Azahara
44. The hermitages

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ZAFRA 45 km

VALDEPEÑAS 106 km

SEVILLA 12 km

GRANADA 99 km

MOTRIL 69 km



MÁLAGA 54 km