

Andalucía



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: Andalusian 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 Andalusian 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, Andalusians always live life to the full. Few visitors to their land fail to get caught up in the fun.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Revel in **Granada** (p768) – the magical Alhambra, thumping nightlife and free tapas!
- Live the passion of **Semana Santa in Seville** ('Holy Week': p701)
- Play on the golden-sand beaches of Cádiz's **Costa de la Luz** (p731)
- Stalk ibex, wild boar and deer amid the stunning mountain scenery of the **Parque Natural de Cazorla** (p796)
- Marvel at Córdoba's mesmerizing **Mezquita** (p763)
- Tour the mouthwatering tapas bars of **Seville** (p703)
- Climb mainland Spain's highest mountain range, the **Sierra Nevada** (p783), and wend your way along the age-old paths of the beautiful **Alpujarras valleys** (p786)
- Get close to genius at Málaga's **Museo Picasso** (p745)



■ AREA: 87,000 SQ KM

■ AVE SUMMER TEMP: HIGH 37°C,
LOW 20°C (Seville)

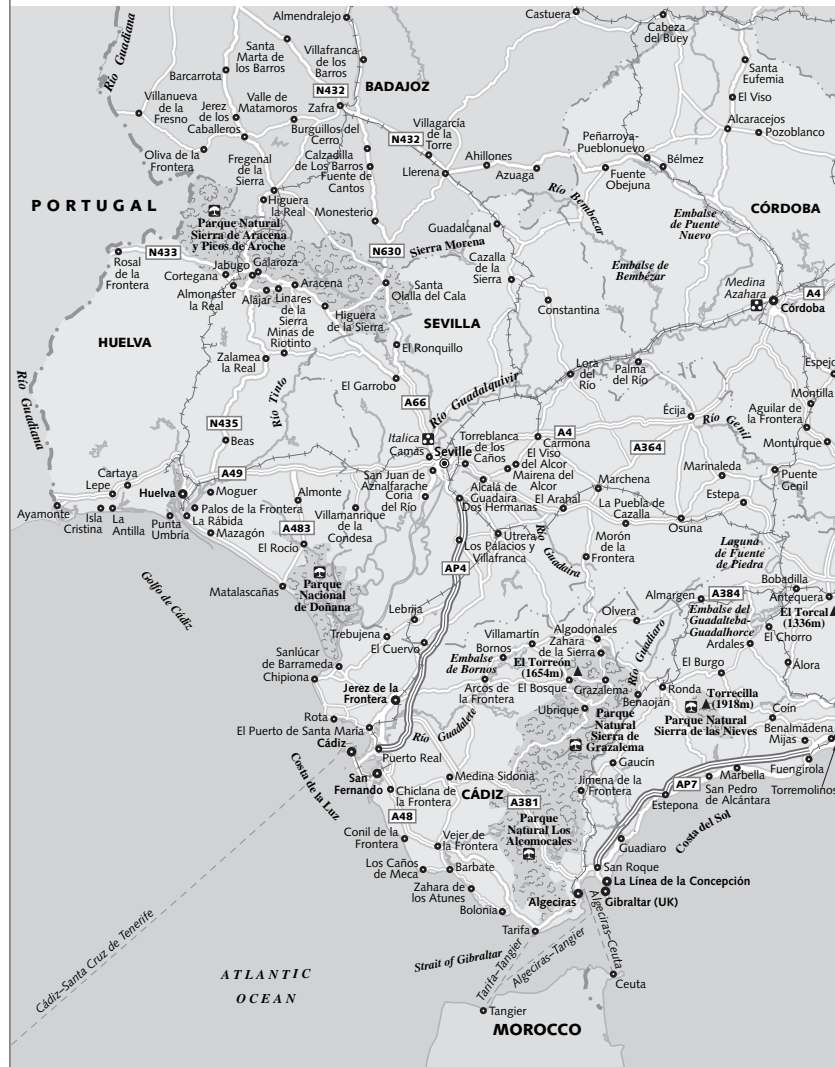
■ POP: 7.9 MILLION

History

Around 1000 or 900 BC, Andalucía's agricultural and mining wealth attracted Phoenician trading colonies to coastal sites such as Cádiz, Huelva and Málaga. In the 8th and 7th centuries BC Phoenician influence gave rise to the mysterious, legendarily wealthy Tartessos civilization, somewhere in western Andalucía.

In Roman times (the 3rd century BC to 5th century AD) Andalucía, governed from Córdoba, was one of the most civilized and wealthiest areas of the Roman Empire. Rome imported Andalusian products such as olives, copper, silver, fish and garum (a spicy seasoning derived from fish), and Andalucía gave Rome two emperors, Trajan and Hadrian.

ANDALUCÍA



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 Andalusians 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 Andalusian job in eight), have made a big difference since the 1960s. The left-of-centre 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.

SEVILLE

pop 714,000

If any one place comes close to rolling together everything that's quintessentially Andalusian, it's Seville. Here in the region's capital and biggest city, that special Andalusian 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 Andalusian 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.

There are a couple of catches, of course: Seville is expensive. You might pay €80 here for a room that would cost €50 elsewhere, and prices go even higher during Semana Santa and the Feria de Abril (April Fair). Also bear in mind that Seville gets *very* hot in July and August: locals, sensibly, leave the city then.

HISTORY

Roman Seville, named Hispalis, was a significant port on Río Guadalquivir, which is navigable to the Atlantic Ocean 100km away. Muslim Seville, called Ishbiliya, became the most powerful of the *taifas* (small kingdoms) into which Islamic Spain split after the Córdoba caliphate collapsed in 1031. Poet-king Al-Mutamid (1069–91) presided over a languid, hedonistic court in the Alcázar palace. In the 12th century a strict Islamic sect from Morocco, the Almohads, took over Muslim Spain and made Seville capital of their whole realm, building a great mosque where the cathedral now stands. Almohad power eventually crumbled and Seville fell to Fernando III (El Santo, the Saint) of Castilla in 1248.

By the 14th century Seville was the most important Castilian city. Its biggest break

came in 1503, when it was awarded a monopoly on Spanish trade with the American continent. Seville – *puerto y puerta de Indias* (port and gateway of the Indies) – rapidly became one of the biggest, richest and most cosmopolitan cities on earth, and a magnet for everyone from priests and bankers to beggars and commoners. Lavish Renaissance and baroque buildings sprouted, and many geniuses of Spain's artistic golden age (the late 16th to late 17th centuries) were based here: painters such as Zurbarán, Murillo and Valdés Leal (though Seville-born Velázquez left for Madrid), and sculptors such as Juan Martínez Montañés and Pedro Roldán.

However a plague in 1649 killed half the city and the Guadalquivir became more silted-up and less navigable for the increasingly big ships of the day. In 1717 the Casa de la Contratación, the government office controlling commerce with the Americas, was transferred to Cádiz. Another Seville plague in 1800 killed 13,000 people. The beginnings of industry in the mid-19th century brought a measure of prosperity for some, but the majority remained impoverished. Seville fell very quickly to the Nationalists at the start of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, despite resistance in working-class areas (which brought savage reprisals).

Things looked up in the 1980s when Seville was named capital of the new autonomous

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 Río 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

SEVILLE IN...

Two Days

On your first morning visit the **cathedral** (p690) and **Giralda** (p694) then wander through the **Barrio de Santa Cruz** (p697) and enjoy lunch at the **Corral del Agua** (p704) or **Restaurante La Albahaca** (p704). In the afternoon head over to Río Guadalquivir and visit the **Plaza de Toros** (p698) or the **Museo de Bellas Artes** (p698). Devote the evening to a relaxed tour of a few tapas bars!

Give your second morning to the **Alcázar** (p695) before heading up to El Centro to visit the **Palacio de la Condesa de Lebrija** (p697) and some of the city-centre shops. In the evening take in a flamenco performance and check out some of the bars in **El Centro** (p705) or around the **Alameda de Hércules** (p705).

Four Days

On day three relax with a visit to the leafy **Parque de María Luisa** (p698) and its museums, followed by whichever of the sights you missed on day one. Treat yourself to dinner at a classy restaurant such as the **Egaña Oriza** (p704) or **Enrique Becerra** (p704). On day four venture out to Santiponce to explore the Roman **Itálica** (p708) and **Monasterio de San Isidoro del Campo** (p708). Wind up with a night out enjoying some live music and, if it's the weekend, a **nightclub** (p705).



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; 11 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; 11 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; 11 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-9.30pm Sat, noon-9pm Sun)

Interneta (Map pp692-3; Avenida Menéndez Pelayo 46; per hr €2; 11 10.30-1.30am Mon-Fri, noon-1.30am Sat & Sun)

Sevilla Internet Center (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 50 02 75; Calle Almirantazgo 2; per min €0.05; 11 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-10pm Sat & Sun)

Internet Resources

Discover Sevilla (www.discoversevilla.com)

Explore Sevilla (www.exploresevilla.com)

Seville Tourism (www.turismo.sevilla.org) The city's informative official tourism site; it includes a great guide to Seville 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; 11 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; 11 9.30am-1.30pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1.30pm Sat)

Media

El Giralillo Andalucía-wide what's-on mag, free at tourist offices and some hotels, with a strong Seville emphasis.

Tourist Free mag for tourists with worthwhile information.

Welcome & Olé Ditto.

Medical Services

Centro de Salud El Porvenir (Map pp692-3; ☎ 955 03 78 17; cnr Avenidas Menéndez y Pelayo & de Cádiz) Public clinic with emergency service.

Hospital Virgen del Rocío (☎ 955 01 20 00; Avenida de Manuel Siurot 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; 11 10.15am-10.30pm Mon-Fri, noon-10.30pm Sat & Sun)

First Center (Map pp692-3; Avenida de la Constitución 34; 11 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-9.30pm Sat, noon-9pm Sun)

Tourist Information

Municipal tourist office (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 22 17 14; barranco.turismo@sevilla.org; Calle de Arjona 28; 11 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat & Sun, reduced hr during Semana Santa & Feria de Abril)

Regional tourist offices Avenida de la Constitución 21 (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 22 14 04; otsevilla@andalucia.org; 11 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 3-7pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun, closed holidays); Estación Santa Justa (Map pp688-9; ☎ 954 53 76 26; 11 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun, closed holidays). The Constitución office is well informed but often very busy.

Turismo Sevilla (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 21 00 05; www.turismosevilla.org; Plaza del Triunfo 1; 11 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 €7.50/1.50/free, admission free Sun; 11 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. At the centre of the lowest level is the 13th-century image of the Virgen de la Sede, patron of the cathedral.

SACRISTIES & 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 Cálices** (Sacristy of the Chalice), where Goya's 1817 painting of the Seville martyrs *Santas Justa y Rufina* (potter 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 475kg silver monstrance 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.

INFORMATION	SLEEPING	DRINKING
Auto-Servicio de Lavandería	Casa Sol y Luna.....34 D3	Alambique.....74 B7
Sevilla.....1 C5	Hostal Córdoba.....35 E5	Antigüedades.....75 D4
Casa del Libro.....2 C2	Hostal Goya.....36 E5	Bare Nostrum.....76 D3
Centro de Salud El	Hostal Museo.....37 B1	Big Ben.....(see 74)
Porvenir.....3 F7	Hostal Residencia	Cabo Loco.....(see 76)
Ciber Alcázar.....4 E7	Naranjo.....38 B3	Café Isbilliya.....77 A4
First Center.....5 C6	Hostería del Laurel.....39 E6	El Capote.....78 A4
Internetia.....6 F5	Hotel Alcántara.....40 E5	El Garlochi.....79 E3
La Segunda Vera.....7 F5	Hotel Amadeus.....41 E5	La Antigua Bodeguita.....80 D3
LTC.....8 F5	Hotel Madrid.....42 A3	La Rebótica.....81 D3
Municipal Tourist	Hotel Maestranza.....43 C4	La Sapotales.....82 D3
Office.....9 A4	Hotel Puerta de Sevilla.....44 F5	Mú d'Aquí.....(see 74)
Post Office.....10 C6	Hotel Puerta de Triana.....45 A4	Nao.....(see 76)
Regional Tourist Office.....11 D6	Hotel San Francisco.....46 D4	P Flaherty Irish Pub.....83 C5
Seville Internet Center.....12 C5	Hotel Simón.....47 C5	Sirocca.....(see 74)
Turismo Sevilla.....13 D5	Hotel Vincci La Rábida.....48 B4	
	Huéspedes Dulces	
	Sueños.....49 F5	
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	Las Casas de la Judería.....50 F5	ENTERTAINMENT
Antigua Fábrica de Tabacos	Las Casas del Rey de	Boss.....84 B7
(Universidad de Sevilla).....14 D8	Baeza.....51 F3	Casa de la Memoria de
Archivo de Indias.....15 D6	Oasis Backpackers Hostel.....52 D3	Al-Andalus.....(see 40)
Ayuntamiento.....16 C4	Península San Pancracio.....53 E5	Empresa Pagés.....85 B5
Capilla de San José.....17 C3	Un Patio en Santa Cruz.....54 F5	La Carbonería.....86 F4
Carpe Diem.....18 D3		Los Gallos.....87 E6
Casa de Pilatos.....19 F3		Sol Café Cantante.....88 E1
Cathedral Entrance.....20 D5	EATING	
CLIC.....21 C3	Bar Alfalfa.....55 E3	SHOPPING
Fundación Cristina Heeren de	Bar Laredo.....56 C4	El Corte Inglés.....89 B2
Arte Flamenco.....22 E5	Bar Levies.....57 E4	El Corte Inglés.....90 B3
Giralda.....23 D5	Bodega Santa Cruz.....58 D5	El Corte Inglés.....91 B3
Giralda Center.....24 E5	Café Bar Las Teresas.....59 E5	El Corte Inglés.....92 C2
Hospital de la	Cervecería Giralda.....60 D5	
Caridad.....25 C6	Corral del Agua.....61 E6	TRANSPORT
Hospital de los Venerables	El Patio San Eloy.....62 C2	Airport Bus Stop.....93 C7
Sacerdotes.....26 E5	Enrique Becerra.....63 C4	Bus No 32 Stop.....94 D2
Iglesia de la Magdalena.....27 B3	Habanita.....64 D3	Bus No C2 Stop.....95 E8
LINC.....28 C3	Kiosco de las Flores.....65 B7	Bus No C3 Stop.....96 E7
Maritime Museum.....(see 33)	La Bodega.....66 E3	Bus No C4 Stop.....97 E7
Museo de Bellas Artes.....29 A2	La Trastienda.....67 E3	Cruceros Turísticos Torre de
Palacio de la Condesa de	Restaurante La Cueva.....68 D6	Oro.....98 B7
Lebrija.....30 C2	Restaurante Egaña Oriza.....69 E7	Estación de Autobuses Prado
Parroquia del Salvador.....31 D3	Restaurante La Albahaca.....70 E5	de San Sebastián.....99 F7
Plaza de Toros de la Real	Restaurante Modesto.....71 F5	Parking Paseo de Colón.....100 A5
Maestranza.....32 B5	Ristorante Cosa Nostra.....72 A7	Renfe Ticket Office.....101 B4
Torre del Oro.....33 B7	Robles Placentines.....73 D4	Sevilla Tour & Tour Por Sevilla
		Bus Stop.....102 B6

The beautifully domed **Cabildo** (Chapterhouse), in the southeastern corner of the cathedral, was built between 1558 and 1592 to 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 for the climb up 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 parts (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.

Alcázar

Residence of many generations of kings and caliphs, the not-to-be-missed **Alcázar** (Map pp692-3; % 954 50 23 23; adult/under 16yr, senior, student, disabled €7/free; 9.30am-8pm Tue-Sat, to 6pm Sun & holidays Apr-Sep, to 6pm Tue-Sat, to 2.30pm Sun & holidays Oct-Mar; √√) stands south of the cathedral across Plaza del Triunfo. This intriguing, beautiful complex is intimately associated with the lives and loves of many Muslim 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-Muwarak palace. Off here, the **Sala de la Justicia** (Hall of Justice), with beautiful Mudéjar plasterwork, was built in the 1340s by Alfonso XI, who disported 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 gives on to the pretty **Patio del Yeso**, a 19th-century reconstruction of part of the 12th-century Almohad palace.

PATIO DE LA MONTERÍA

The rooms on the western side of this patio were part of the Casa de la Contratación, founded by the Catholic Monarchs in 1503 to control American trade. The **Sala de Audiencias** (Audience Hall) contains the earliest known painting on the discovery of the Americas (by Alejo Fernández, 1530s), in which Columbus, Fernando El Católico, Carlos I, Amerigo Vespucci and Native Americans can be seen sheltered beneath the Virgin in her role as protector of sailors.

PALACIO DE DON PEDRO

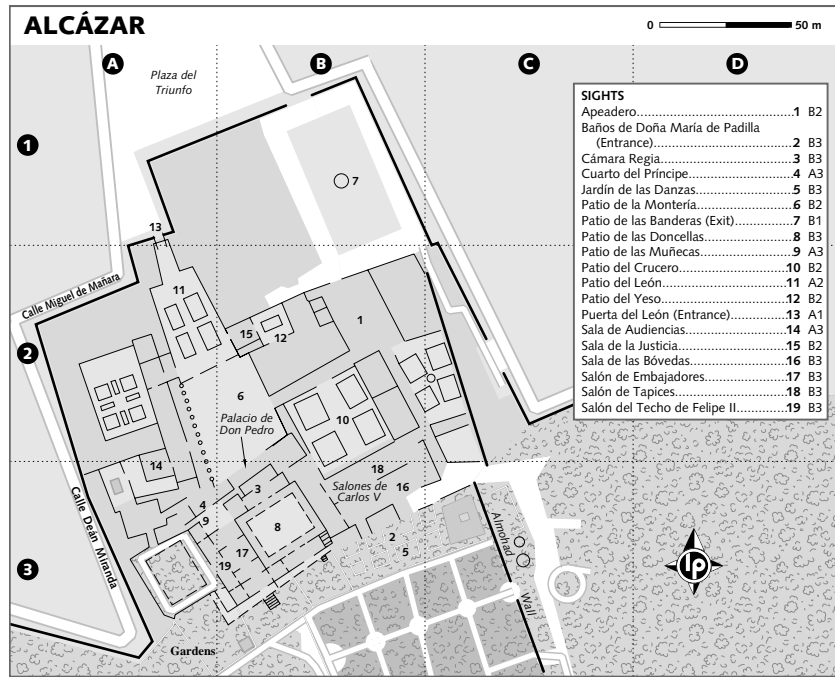
Whatever else Pedro I may have done, posterity owes him a big thank you for building this wonderful palace inside the Alcázar in the 1360s. His Muslim ally Mohammed V of Granada, the man responsible for the Alhambra's fabulous Palacio de los Leones, sent along many of his best artisans to help. These were joined by others from Toledo and Seville, and their work, drawing on the traditions of the Almohads and caliphal Córdoba, is a unique synthesis of Iberian Islamic art.

Inscriptions on the palace's façade on the Patio de la Montería encapsulate the collaborative nature of the enterprise. While one announces in Spanish that the building's creator was 'the very high, noble and conquering Don Pedro', another intones repeatedly in Arabic 'There is no conqueror but Allah'.

At the heart of the palace is the wonderful **Patio de las Doncellas** (Patio of the Maidens), surrounded by beautiful arches and exquisite plasterwork and tiling. In 2004 archaeologists uncovered its original sunken garden from beneath a 16th-century marble covering.

The **Cámara Regia** (King's Quarters) on the northern side of the patio has two rooms with stunning ceilings and more wonderful plasterwork and tiles. Just west is the small **Patio de las Muñecas** (Patio of the Dolls), the heart of the palace's private quarters, with delicate Granada-style decoration; indeed, plasterwork was actually brought here from the Alhambra in the 19th century when the mezzanine and top gallery were added for Queen Isabel II. The **Cuarto del Príncipe** (Prince's Quarters), to its north, has a superb wooden cupola ceiling trying to recreate a starlit night sky and was probably the queen's bedroom.

The spectacular **Salón de Embajadores** (Hall of Ambassadors), off the western end of the



Patio de las Doncellas, was Pedro I's throne room and incorporates aliphath-style door arches from the earlier Al-Muwarak palace. Its fabulous wooden dome of multiple star patterns, symbolising the universe, was added in 1427. On its western side, the beautiful **Arco de Pavones**, with peacock motifs, leads into the **Salón del Techo de Felipe II**, with a handsome Renaissance ceiling (1589–91).

SALONES DE CARLOS V

Reached by a staircase from the Patio de las Doncellas, these are the rooms of Alfonso X's 13th-century Gothic palace, much remodelled since his time. It was here that Alfonso's intellectual court gathered and, a century later, Pedro I installed the mistress he loved, María de Padilla. The **Sala de las Bóvedas** (Hall of the Vault) is adorned with beautiful 1570s tiling, while the **Salón de Tapices** (Tapestry Room) has huge 18th-century tapestries showing Carlos I's 1535 conquest of Tunis.

GARDENS & EXIT

From the Salones de Carlos V you can head out into the Alcázar's large gardens, a nice

place to relax. The gardens in front of the Salones de Carlos V and Palacio de Don Pedro were mostly brought to their present form in the 16th and 17th centuries, while those to the east are 20th-century creations. From the little **Jardín de las Danzas** (Garden of the Dances) a passage runs beneath the Salones de Carlos V to the grotto known as the **Baños de Doña María de Padilla**.

From the new gardens you can leave the Alcázar via the **Apeadero**, a 17th-century entrance hall, and the **Patio de las Banderas** (Patio of the Banners).

Archivo de Indias

On the western side of Plaza del Triunfo, the **Archive of the Indies** (Map pp692–3; % 954 21 12 34; Calle Santo Tomás) is the main archive on Spain's American empire, with 80 million pages of documents dating from 1492 through to the end of the empire in the 19th century. The 16th-century building, designed by Juan de Herrera, was originally built as a merchants' exchange for commerce with the Americas. It was closed for restoration work at the time of writing.

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 Élvira** 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; h 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 Tetuán/Velázquez, are the hub of Seville's fanciest shopping zone. Between the two streets is the 18th-century **Capilla de San José** (Calle Jovellanos; h 8am–12.30pm & 6.30–8.30pm), 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; h 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. The countess filled the house with her rich collection of art and artisanry and treasures from her travels. There are plenty of remains from Roman Itálica (p708), includ-

ing a marvellous mosaic in the lovely central courtyard. Upstairs are Arabic, baroque and Spanish rooms.

PLAZA SALVADOR

This plaza, which has a few popular bars, was once the forum of Roman Hispalis. It's dominated by the **Parroquia del Salvador**, a big baroque church built between 1674 and 1712 on the site of Muslim Ishbiliya's main mosque. Before the mosque, early Christian churches stood here, and before them, a Roman temple. At the time of writing the church was closed for restoration work and archaeological investigation, but on its northern side, the mosque's small **patio** (admission free; h 10am–2pm & 5–7pm) remains open, with a few half-buried Roman columns.

CASA DE PILATOS

Another of the city's finest noble mansions (% 954 22 52 98; Calle Águilas; whole house/lower fl only admission €8/5, EU citizen 1–5pm Tue free; h 9am–7pm Mar–Sep, 9am–6pm Oct–Feb), 500m northeast of the cathedral, is still occupied by the ducal Medinaçeli family. This extensive and splendid 16th-century building is a mixture of diverse architectural styles, with some beautiful tilework, *artesonado* (Mudéjar wooden ceiling with interlaced beams leaving a pattern of spaces for decoration) and gardens. The Patio Principal features lots of wonderful 16th-century tiles, intricate Mudéjar plasterwork, classical statues and busts of Roman historical and mythical figures. The staircase from here to the upper floor has magnificent tiling, with a great golden *artesonado* dome above. If time or money is limited, you could skip the top floor.

El Arenal

A short walk west from Avenida de la Constitución brings you to the bank of Río Guadalquivir, lined by a pleasant footpath. The nearby district of El Arenal (Map pp692–3) is home to some of Seville's most interesting sights.

TORRE DEL ORO

This 13th-century river-bank Islamic watchtower, which once crowned a corner of the city walls, supposedly had a dome covered in golden tiles, hence its name, 'Tower of Gold'. Inside is a small **maritime museum** (% 954 22 24 19; admission €1; h 10am–2pm Tue–Fri, 11am–2pm Sat & Sun, closed Aug).

HOSPITAL DE LA CARIDAD

A marvellous sample of Sevillian golden-age art adorns the church in this **charity hospice** (☎ 954 22 32 32; Calle Temprado 3; admission €4, free Sun & holidays; ⌚ 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 Gloriarum 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 an invalid, and Isabel of Hungary curing the sick. Mañara is buried in the crypt beneath the main altar, on which a masterly sculpture by Pedro Roldán illustrates the final act of mercy, the burial of the dead – in this case, of Christ himself.

PLAZA DE TOROS DE LA REAL MAESTRANZA

Seville's **bullring** (☎ 954 22 45 77; Paseo de Cristóbal Colón 12; tours adult/over-65 €4/3.20; ⌚ half-hourly 9.30am-6.30pm, 9.30am-3pm bullfighting days) is one of the most handsome in Spain and probably the oldest (building began in 1758). It was here, and in the ring at Ronda, that bullfighting on foot (instead of horseback) began in the 18th century. Interesting guided visits, in English and Spanish, take you into the ring and its museum, with a peep into the minihospital for bullfighters who have come off second best.

MUSEO DE BELLAS ARTES

Set in a beautiful former convent, Seville's **fine-arts museum** (☎ 954 22 07 90; Plaza del Museo 9; adult/EU citizen €1.50/free; ⌚ 2.30-8.30pm Tue, 9am-8.30pm Wed-Sat, to 2.30pm Sun; √) does full justice to Seville's leading role in Spain's artistic golden age. The 17th-century Seville masters Murillo, Zurbarán and Valdés Leal are particularly well represented here.

Highlights include Pedro Millán's 15th-century terracotta sculptures (Room I); Pietro

Torrighiano's influential Renaissance sculpture *San Jerónimo Penitente* (Room II); paintings by Velázquez and Alonso Cano (Room III); paintings by Murillo including *Inmaculada Concepción Grande* in Room V, formerly the convent church; Ribera's very Spanish-looking *Santiago Apóstol* 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; ⌚ 8am-9.30pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat; √) – 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 Sevilla, it's an impressive if somewhat gloomy neoclassical building.

PARQUE DE MARÍA 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 spattered 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; ⌚ 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 minicanals, faces the park across Avenida de Isabel la Católica. Around it is the most 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/free; ⌚ 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/free; ⌚ 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; ☎ 902 161716; www.islamagica.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; ⌚ 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 11pm Fri & Sat early Sep–Oct, closed Nov-Mar) provides a sure-fire 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 Doña Elvira** (3), **Plaza de los Venерables** (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**

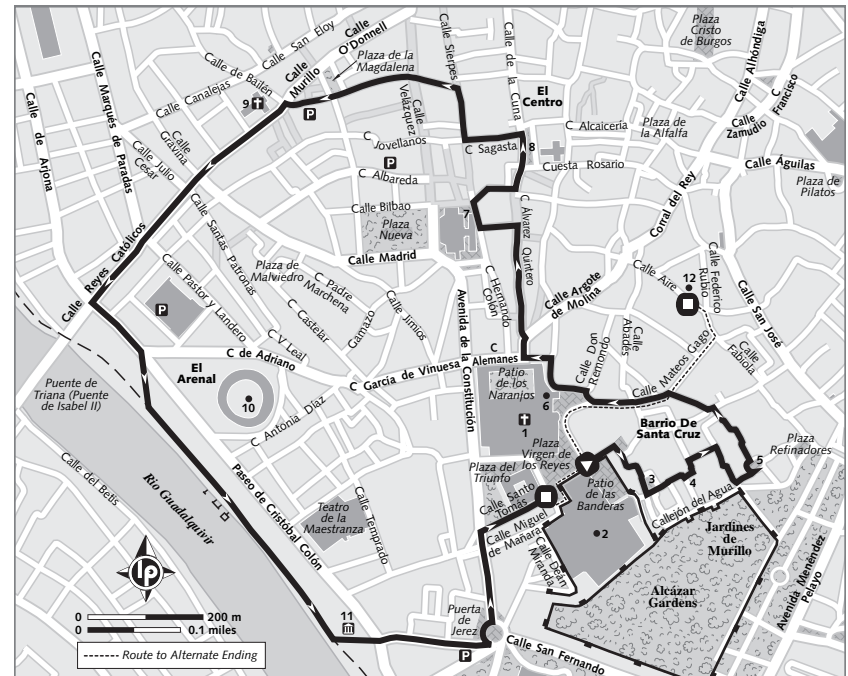
WALK FACTS

Start Plaza del Triunfo

Finish Cathedral

Duration 4km

Duration two hours plus stops



(7; p697) and **Plaza Salvador** (8; p697). Stroll north along Calle Sierpes, a key downtown shopping street. Turn west along Calle Rioja to the **Iglesia de la Magdalena** (9; opposite), then head southwest to Río Guadalquivir. Follow the river southeast along the walking path, passing the **Plaza de Toros de la Real Maestranza** (10; p698), as far as the **Torre del Oro** (11; p697), from where it's a short walk east back to the cathedral. Time to give those weary sightseeing muscles a soothing soak? Head a couple of blocks north the Arab baths **Aire de Sevilla** (12; % 955 01 00 25; www.airedesevilla.com; Calle Aire 15; bath/bath & massage €18/26; 7 every 2hr, 10am-2am), with two warm pools and one cold, plus a steam room.

COURSES

Flamenco & Dance

The city has many dance and flamenco schools. Check these out:

Espacio Meteora (Map pp688-9; % 954 90 14 83; espaciometeora.com; Calle Duque Cornejo 16A) Innovative arts centre.

Fundación Cristina Heeren de Arte Flamenco (Map pp692-3; % 954 21 70 58; www.flamencoheeren.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.

Tourist offices and *El Giralillo* (p690) have further information.

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 85 15; www.carpediemsevilla.com; Calle de la Cuna 13)

CLIC (Map pp692-3; % 954 50 21 31; www.dic.es; Calle Alameda 19)

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

Lenguaviva (Map pp688-9; % 954 90 51 31; www.lenguaviva.es; Calle Viriato 24)

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: those 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

Cruceros 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-hour 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/Sevirama (% 954 56 06 93; www.busturistico.com) 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

SEMANA SANTA IN SEVILLE

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 by over 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).

Each pair of *pasos* has up to 2500 costumed followers, called *nazarenos*. Many of these wear tall Ku Klux Klanlike capes, which cover their heads (except for eye slits), implying that the identity of the penitent is known only to God. The most contrite go barefoot and carry crosses.

From Palm Sunday to Good Friday, about eight brotherhoods leave their churches in the afternoon or early evening, arriving between 5pm and 11pm at Calle Campana, at the northern end of Calle Sierpes. This is the start of the *carrera oficial* (official route), which all then follow along Calle Sierpes, Plaza San Francisco and Avenida de la Constitución to the cathedral. They enter the cathedral at its western end and leave at the east, emerging on Plaza Virgen de los Reyes. They get back to their churches some time between 10pm and 3am.

The climax of the 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 *gitano* (Roma) brotherhood.

On the Saturday 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 **Basilica de La Macarena** (Map pp688-9; % 954 90 18 00; Calle Bécquer 1; museum €3; 7 9am-2pm & 5-9pm) and the **Basilica de Jesús del Gran Poder** (Map pp688-9; % 954 91 56 72; Plaza de San Lorenzo 13; 7 8am-1.30pm & 6-9pm Sat-Thu, 7.30am-10pm Fri) are both north of the centre. The **Iglesia de la Magdalena** (Map pp692-3; Calle San Pablo 12; 7 usually 8am-11.30am & 6.30-9pm) is a few streets south of the Museo de Bellas Artes.

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 afternoon, from about 1pm, those with horses and carriages 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.

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.embrujodesevilla.com) or **Sevilla5.com** (☎ 637 011091; www.sevilla5.com).

Barrio de Santa Cruz

BUDGET

Pensión San Pancraccio (Map pp692-3; ☎ /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 pp692-3; ☎ 954 41 93 93; Calle Santa María La Blanca 21; s/d without bathroom €20/40, s/d with bathroom €40/50; a) 'Sweet Dreams' is a friendly little *hostal* (budget hotel) with spotless rooms. Those overlooking the street are good and bright. Only the doubles have air-con.

Another recommendation:

Hostal Córdoba (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 22 74 98; Calle Farnesio 12; s/d without bathroom €40/60, s/d with bathroom €50/70; a) Run by a friendly older couple, on a quiet pedestrian street.

MIDRANGE

Un Patio en Santa Cruz (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 53 94 13; www.patiosantacruz.com; Calle Doncellas 15; s/d €58/68; a i) An understated hotel defying the elaborate traditions of Andalusian décor. The rooms are kept stylish and simple, and the roof terrace has views of the Giralda.

Hotel Alcántara (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 50 05 95; www.hotelalcantara.net; Calle Jiménez de Enciso 28; s/d €66/84; a ✓) This small, friendly hotel on a pedestrian street has bright rooms with bathtub, marble washbasins, windows on to the hotel's patio and pretty floral curtains.

Hotel Puerta de Sevilla (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 98 72 70; www.hotelpuertadesevilla.com; Calle Santa María la Blanca 36; s/d €65/85; p a i) A small shiny hotel in a great location, the Puerta de Sevilla is all flower-pattern textiles, wrought-iron beds and pastel wallpaper. Rooms have plasma-screen TVs and writing tables.

Hotel Amadeus (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 50 14 43; www.hotelamadeussevilla.com; Calle Farnesio 6; s/d €70/85; p a i) 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 pp692-3; ☎ 954 22 02 95; www.hosteriadellaurel.com; Plaza de los Venerables 5; s/d incl breakfast €72/104; a) 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 pp692-3; ☎ 954 21 11 70; hgoya@hostalgoya.e.telefonica.net; Calle Mateos Gago 31; s/d €50/80; a) Since the gleaming Goya had a facelift in 2005, it's more popular than ever. Book ahead.

TOP END

Las Casas de la Judería (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 41 51 50; www.casasypalacios.com; Callejón Dos Hermanas 7; s/d from €108/167; p a) This charming hotel is in fact a series of restored houses and mansions based around several lovely patios and fountains. Most of the rooms and suites sport four-poster beds, bath *and* shower and writing table. An amazing range of art decks the walls.

El Arenal

BUDGET

Hostal Residencia Naranjo (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 22 58 40; Calle San Roque 11; s/d €35/50; a) Colourful bedspreads and pine furniture add a touch of warmth; the rooms are all equipped with TV and phone.

Hotel Madrid (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 21 43 07; www.hotelmadridsevilla.com; Calle San Pedro Mártir 22; s/d €40/55; p a) This friendly hotel is pretty good value. All rooms have firm beds, and balconies overlooking quiet, orange-tree lined streets.

Hostal Museo (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 91 55 26; www.hostalmuseo.com; Calle Abad Gordillo 17; s/d €45/62; a i) The immaculate rooms are endowed with solid wooden furniture, comfortable beds, phone, wi-fi and reading lamps. There's a lift too.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Maestranza (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 56 10 70; www.hotel-maestranza.com; Calle Gamazo 12; s/d €49/87; a i) 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 pp692-3; ☎ 954 22 66 60; www.hotelsimonsevilla.com; Calle García de Vinuesa 19; s €45-60, d €70-95; a) 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 pp692-3; ☎ 954 21 54 04; www.hotelpuertadetriana.com; Calle Reyes Católicos 5; s/d incl breakfast €70/96; a) 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.

TOP END

Hotel Vincin La Rábida (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 50 12 80; www.vincinhotels.com; Calle Castelar 24; s/d €154/182; p a i) A beautiful four-storey columned atrium-lounge greets you in this converted 18th-century palace, now a classy four-star hotel with extremely comfortable rooms. The seasonal rooftop bar-café has magnificent views of the cathedral.

El Centro

BUDGET

Oasis Backpackers' Hostel (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 29 37 77; www.oasissevilla.com; Calle Don Alonso el Sabio 1A; dm/d €18/40, all incl breakfast; a i) Seville's stylish, buzzing backpacker central, sister hostel of the massively popular Oasis in Granada, offers 24 hour free internet access and breakfasts on a glass-floored 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 pp692-3; ☎ 954 21 06 82; www.casasolyluna1.com; Calle Pérez Galdós 1A; s/d/tr without bathroom €22/38/60, d 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.

MIDRANGE

Hotel San Francisco (Map pp692-3; ☎ /fax 954 50 15 41; Calle Álvarez Quintero 38; s/d €55/68; a ✓) This good-value hotel on a pedestrianised street

occupies an 18th-century home. Nearly all the good-sized rooms look onto the street or an interior patio; all have marble floors and air-con/heating.

TOP END

Las Casas del Rey de Baeza (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 56 14 96; www.hospes.es; Plaza Jesús de la Redención 2; s/d €171/198; p a i s) This expertly run and marvellously designed hotel occupies former communal housing patios dating from the 18th century. The large rooms, in tasteful hues, boast attractive modern art, CD player, DVD and wi-fi. Public areas include a super-comfortable lounge and reading room and a gorgeous pool.

North of the Centre

TOP END

Hotel San Gil (Map pp688-9; ☎ 954 90 68 11; www.fp-hooteles.com; Calle Parras 28; s/d €126/158; p a s) Around the corner from the Basílica de la Macarena, San Gil is one of the city's hidden gems. The renovated early-20th-century building focuses on a pretty garden-courtyard and combines acclaimed modern design with beautiful antique tiling and other traditional touches.

EATING

Seville is one of Spain's tapas capitals, with scores of bars serving all sorts of delectable bites. To catch the city's atmosphere, plunge straight in and follow the winding tapas trail. Most tapas bars open at lunchtime as well as in the evening.

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.

Barrio de Santa Cruz & Around

TAPAS

Bodega Santa Cruz (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 21 32 46; Calle Mateos Gago; tapas €1.50-2) A focal point for tapas pilgrims, this bar has a wonderful choice of flavoursome bites. Santa Cruz' popularity speaks volumes.

Cervecería Giralda (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 22 74 35; Calle Mateos Gago 1; tapas €1.50-2.50) Exotic variations are merged with traditional dishes at this bar in what was once a Muslim bathhouse.

Café Bar Las Teresas (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 21 30 69; Calle Santa Teresa 2; tapas €2-4) Hams dangle proudly from the ceiling and punters are kept happy with plates of traditional tapas.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Corral del Agua (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 22 07 14; Callejón del Agua 6; mains €12-18, menú €23; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) If you're hankering for inventive food on a hot day, book a table at Corral del Agua. Its cool, green courtyard is a lovely spot to sample traditional stews and Arabic-inspired desserts.

RESTAURANTS & CAFÉS

Restaurante La Albahaca (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 22 07 14; Plaza de Santa Cruz 12; mains €18-22, menú €27) Gastronomic invention is the mainstay of this swish restaurant. Try the pork trotter 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 Andalusian-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 Castelar 1; tapas/media-rationes €3/7) Dine on succulent ham from pigs that have snuffled out the finest acorns in the oak forests near the village of Jabugo (p715). The *solomillo ibérico* (Iberian pork sirloin) in sweet Pedro Ximénez wine is divine.

RESTAURANTS

Enrique Becerra (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 21 30 49; Calle Gamazo 2; mains €15-21; 🍷 closed Sun) Adding a smart touch to El Arenal, Enrique Becerra cooks up hearty Andalusian dishes to rave about. The lamb drenched in honey sauce and stuffed with spinach and pine nuts is just one of the delectable offerings.

El Centro

TAPAS

Plaza de la Alfalfa is the hub of the tapas scene, with a flush of first-rate bars serving tapas

from around €1.80 to €3. On Calle Alfalfa just off the plaza, hop from sea-themed La Trastienda to the intimate Bar Alfalfa and on to La Bodega where you can mix head-spinning quantities of ham and sherry.

El Patio San Eloy (Map pp692-3; Calle San Eloy 9; tapas €1.50-2) Hams hang like stalactites at the always-busy Patio San Eloy, where you can sit on the steps at the back and feast on a fine array of *burguillos* (small filled rolls).

Bar Levies (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 21 53 08; Calle San José 15; tapas €1.50-4) The ultimate student tapas bar, crowded Levies serves a tapa of *solomillo al whisky* as big as a ración – and beer in big glasses.

Robles Placentines (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 & CAFÉS

Bar Laredo (Map pp692-3; cnr 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; ☎ 606 716456; Calle Golfo 3; raciones €6-9; 🍷 closed Sun evening; ✓) This top restaurant serves a winning variety of Cuban, Andalusian and vegetarian food.

Triana

RESTAURANTS & CAFÉS

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 pizza-and-pasta joints lack.

Casa Cuesta (Map pp688-9; ☎ 954 33 33 37; Calle de Castilla 3-5; mains €9-10) Something about the carefully buffed wooden bar and gleaming beer pumps suggests the owners are proud of 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 doles 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

PFlaherty 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 around. Guinness and footy are on offer, and if there's a game on, the atmosphere is fun.

Antigüedades (Map pp692-3; Calle Argote de Molina 40) Blending mellow beats with weird mannequin parts and skewered 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 Isbiliyya (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 21 04 60; Paseo de Cristóbal Colón 2) Cupid 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 down a couple of beers alfresco. Grab a drink from **La Antigua Bodeguita** (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 56 18 33) or **La Sapotales** next door and sit on the steps of the Parroquia del Salvador.

Calle Pérez Galdós, off Plaza de la Alfalfa, has a handful of pulsating bars: **Bare Nostrum** (Map pp692-3; Calle Pérez Galdós 26), **Cabo Loco** (Map pp692-3; Calle Pérez Galdós 26), **Nao** (Map pp692-3; Calle Pérez Galdós 28) and **La Rebótica** (Map pp692-3; Calle Pérez Galdós 11). If you're in a party mood, you should find at least one with a scene that takes your fancy.

El Garlochi (Map pp692-3; Calle Boteros 4) Dedicated entirely to the sensations of Semana Santa, El Garlochi hits you with clouds of incense, sombre processional music, Jesus and Virgin images and potent cocktails with names like *Sangre de Cristo* (Blood of Christ).

Alameda de Hércules

In terms of hipness and trendy places to go out, the Alameda is where it's at. The area's slightly run-down feeling allows the boho lot to have the place more or less to themselves. It's also the heartbeat of gay Seville.

Bulebar Café (Map pp688-9; ☎ 954 90 19 54; Alameda de Hércules 83; 🍷 4pm-late) This place fills up with young sweaty bodies at night, but is pleasantly chilled in the early evening.

Café Central (Map pp688-9; ☎ 954 38 73 12; Alameda de Hércules 64) 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 Mui d'Aquí. They're all clustered at Calle del Betis 54 (Map pp692-3) and open from 9pm.

La Otra Orilla (Map pp688-89; 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 steamy flamenco. See www.discoversevilla.com or www.exploresevilla.com for the latest action.

Clubs

Clubs in Seville come and go fast but a few 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 Torneo 43; admission €7; 🍷 11pm-8am Thu-Sat) This is one of Seville's top live-music and DJ spots.

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

Aduana (Map pp688-9; ☎ 954 23 85 82; www.aduana.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 pp688-9; ☎ 958 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, Latino, 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 pp688-9; ☎ 954 38 82 19; Plaza San Antonio de Padua 9; admission €5-6) 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 *tablaos* (expensive, tourist-oriented flamenco venues), which can be inauthentic and lacking in atmosphere, though **Los Gallos** (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 21 69 81; www.tablaolosalgallos.com; Plaza de Santa Cruz 11; admission incl 1 drink €27; 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 pp692-3; ☎ 954 56 06 70; Calle Ximénez de Enciso 28; adult/child €11/5; 11.30pm) Authentic nightly shows in a great patio setting.

La Carbonería (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 21 44 60; Calle Levies 18; admission free; 11.30pm-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.

Sol Café Cantante (Map pp692-3; ☎ 954 22 51 65; Calle del Sol 5; adult/concession €18/11; 11.30pm 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 pp692-3; Paseo de Cristóbal Colón 12; www.realmaestranza.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 *sol* seats (in the sun at the start of proceedings) may be available to those who don't hold season tickets. 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 pp692-3; ☎ 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 Tetuán have a host of small shops selling everything from polka-dot flamenco dresses to diamond rings. **El Corte Inglés** department store (Map pp692-3) 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 and Calle Doctor Letamendi (Map pp688-9) have more alternative shops.

The large Thursday **mercadillo** (flea market; Map pp688-9; Calle de la Feria) near the Alameda de Hércules is a colourful event that's well worth a visit.

In the traditional **tile-making area** of Triana, a dozen shops and workshops still offer charming, artful ceramics around the junction of Calle Alfarería and Calle Antillano Campos (Map pp688-9).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Seville's **Aeropuerto San Pablo** (☎ 954 44 90 00) has a fair range of international and domestic flights. **Iberia** (☎ 902 40 05 00; www.iberia.com) flies direct to Barcelona, Madrid, half a dozen other Spanish cities, and Paris. **Spanair** (☎ 902 13 14 15; www.spanair.com) also flies to Madrid and, along with **Air Europa** (☎ 902 40 15 01; www.air-europa.com) and **Vueling** (☎ 902 33 39 33; www.vueling.com), to Barcelona.

From the British Isles there are flights with **British Airways** (☎ 902 11 13 33; www.ba.com) from London Gatwick, **Ryanair** (☎ 807 22 00 32;

www.ryanair.com) from Liverpool and London Stansted, and **Aer Lingus** (☎ 902 50 27 37; www.aerlingus.com) from Dublin. Spanair, **Lufthansa** (☎ 902 22 01 01; www.lufthansa.com), **Air-Berlin** (☎ 901 11 64 02; www.airberlin.com), **Hapagfly** (☎ 902 39 04 00; www.hapagfly.com) and **Iberia** all offer flights from German airports; **Transavia** (☎ 902 11 44 78; www.transavia.com) comes from Amsterdam, and **SN Brussels Airlines** (☎ 902 90 14 92; www.flysn.com) from Brussels.

Bus

From the **Estación de Autobuses Prado de San Sebastián** (Map pp692-3; ☎ 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 or more daily) and Málaga (€15, 2½ hours). This is also the station for other towns in Cádiz province, the east of Sevilla province, and destinations along the Mediterranean coast from the Costa del Sol to Barcelona.

From the **Estación de Autobuses Plaza de Armas** (Map pp688-9; ☎ 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), Arcena (€6, 1¼ hours, two daily) and other places in Huelva province, Mérida (€11, three hours, 12 daily), Cáceres (€15, four hours, six daily) 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-sa.es) runs twice daily (except Saturday, Sunday and holidays from October to May) to/from Lagos (€18, 5½ hours) via Faro and Albufeira.

Train

The **Estación de Santa Justa** (Map pp688-9; ☎ 954 41 41 11; Avenida Kansas City) is 1.5km northeast of the city centre. There's also a city-centre **Renfe ticket office** (Map pp692-3; Calle Zaragoza 29).

Fourteen or more super-fast AVE trains, reaching speeds of 280km/h, whiz daily to/from Madrid (€64 to €70, 2½ hours). There are cheaper 'Altaria' services (€55, 3½ hours).

Other destinations include Barcelona (€53 to €88, 10½ to 13 hours, three daily), Cádiz (€9 to €29, 1¼ hours, nine daily), Córdoba (€7 to €24, 40 minutes to 1½ hours, 21 or more daily), Granada (€20, three hours, four daily), Huelva (€7 to €16, 1½ hours, four daily), Jerez de la Frontera (€6 to €16, one to 1¼ hours, nine daily), Málaga (€16, 2½ hours, five daily) as well as Mérida (€12, five hours, one daily).

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

The airport is 7km east of the city centre on the A4 Córdoba road. **Amarillos Tour** (☎ 902 21 03 17) runs buses between the airport and the Puerta de Jerez (€2.50, 30 to 40 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 Resolana. 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 Resolana 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 pp692-3; cnr Paseo de Cristóbal Colón & Calle Adriano; per hr up to 10 hr €1.20, 10-24 hr €12) 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.

Santiponce

pop 7000

The small town of Santiponce, 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/free; 𠄎 8.30am-8.30pm Tue-Sat, 9am-3pm Sun Apr-Sep; 9am-5.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Oct-Mar), on the northern edge of Santiponce, was the first Roman town in Spain. Founded in 206 BC for veterans of Rome's victory over Carthage at nearby Ilipa, Itálica was also the hometown of the 2nd-century-AD Roman emperors Trajan and Hadrian. The partly reconstructed ruins include one of the biggest of all the Roman amphitheatres, broad paved streets, ruins of several houses with beautiful mosaics, and a theatre.

The **Monasterio de San Isidoro del Campo** (☎ 955 99 69 20; admission €2; 𠄎 10am-2pm Wed & Thu, to 2pm & 5.30-8.30pm Fri & Sat, to 3pm Sun & holidays, also 4-7pm Fri & Sat Oct-Mar) is at the southern end of Santiponce (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 its two churches, notably a masterly *retablo* by the great 17th-century Sevillian sculptor Juan Martínez Montañés. It was here that the Bible was first translated into Spanish, by the monk Casiodoro de Reina, in the 1550s.

Casa Venancio (☎ 955 99 67 06; Avenida Extremadura 9; mains €6-13), opposite the Itálica entrance, does good rabbit or partridge with rice (€17 for two).

Buses run to Santiponce (€0.80, 30 minutes) from Seville's Plaza de Armas bus station, at least twice an hour from 6.30am to 11pm Monday to Friday, and a little less often at weekends. They stop near the monastery and outside the Itálica entrance.

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; 𠄎 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, to 3pm Sun & holidays) is in the Puerta de Sevilla at the main entrance to the old part of town. Buses from Seville's Prado de San Sebastián bus station (€2, 45 minutes, 20 a day Monday to Friday, 10 on Saturday, seven on Sunday) stop 300m west of here, on Paseo del Estatuto.

Sights

Just over 1km southwest of the Puerta de Sevilla is Carmona's impressive **Roman necropolis** (☎ 954 14 08 11; Avenida de Jorge Bonsor; admission free; 𠄎 9am-2pm Tue-Sat 15 Jun-14 Sep; to 5pm 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 Sevilla**, 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 Sevilla, 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; 𠄎 8am-3pm Mon-Fri), contains a large, very fine Roman mosaic of the Gorgon Medusa. The splendid **Iglesia Prioral de Santa María** (Calle Martín López de Córdoba; admission €3; 𠄎 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 pillars. Behind Santa María, the **Museo de la Ciudad** (City History Museum; ☎ 954 14 01 28; Calle San Ildefonso 1; admission €2, free Tue; 𠄎 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!

Sleeping & Eating

Pensión Comercio (☎ 954 14 00 18; Calle Torre del Oro 56; s/d €32/45; ☪) This lovely old tiled building near the Puerta de Sevilla provides 14 cosy, clean rooms.

Hospedería Marques de las Torres (☎ 954 19 62 48; www.hospederiamarquesdelastorres.com; Calle Fermin Molpeceres 2; dm €23, r €60; ☪) An almost unreal combination of dorm cabins resembling train 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; ☪ a i s) Carmona's luxuriously equipped *parador* exudes a historic atmosphere, and few Andalusian swimming pools are more spectacularly sited! The refectory-style dining room (*menú del día* €28) is one of the best in town.

Casa de Carmona (☎ 954 19 10 00; www.casade-carmona.com; Plaza de Lasso 1; r incl breakfast €150-180; ☪ a s) A super-luxurious hotel in a beautiful 16th-century palace, the Casa de Carmona has the genuine feel of the aristocratic home that it used to be. Its elegant restaurant (mains €16 to €22, *menú* €24 to €48) serves *haute cuisine* with an *andaluz* (Andalusian) touch.

There are several places to eat around Plaza San Fernando, near the ayuntamiento. **Café Bar El Tapeo** (☎ 954 14 43 21; Calle Prim 9; tapas/raciones €1.50/5) is friendly, down-to-earth and popular.

OSUNA

pop 18,000 / elevation 330m

Osuna, 91km from Seville, just off the A92 towards Granada, is the loveliest of Sevilla 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; 𠄎 9am-2pm Mon-Sat) and the **Asociación Turístico Cultural Osuna** (☎ 954 81 28 52; 𠄎 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri, to 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; 𠄎 11.30am-1.30pm & 5-6.30pm Tue-Sun, closed Sun afternoon 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 €2; 𠄎 10am-1.30pm

& 4-6.30pm Tue-Sun, closed Sun afternoon Jul & Aug), contains a wealth of sacred art, including several paintings by José de Ribera. The visit includes the lugubrious Sepulcro Ducal, the Osuna family vault. Opposite the Colegiata is the **Monasterio de la Encarnación** (☎ 954 81 11 21; admission €2; 𠄎 same as Colegiata), now Osuna's museum of religious art, with beautiful tile work and a rich collection of baroque art.

Sleeping

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

Hotel Palacio Marqués de la Gomera (☎ 954 81 22 23; www.hotelpalaciodelmarques.com; Calle San Pedro 20; s/d €92/115; ☪ a i) 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 Vía). The nearby **Regional tourist office** (☎ 959 65 02 00; Plaza Alcalde Coto Mora 2; 11 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; 11 2.30-8.30pm Tue, 9am-8.30pm Wed-Sat, 9am-2.30pm 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

Instalación Juvenil de Huelva (☎ 959 65 00 10; www.inturjuven.com; Avenida Marchena Colombo 14; per person incl breakfast under 26yr €13-15, over 26yr €17-19; √√) This is a good modern youth hostel where all rooms have a bathroom. It's 2km north of the bus station: city bus 6 (€0.80) from there stops just around the corner from the hostel, on Calle JS Elcano.

Hotel Los Condes (☎ 959 28 24 00; Alameda Sundheim 14; s/d incl breakfast €40/59; p a i) 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.

NH Luz Huelva (☎ 959 25 00 11; www.nh-hotels.com; Alameda Sundheim 26; s/d €100/105; p a i) This is the best hotel Huelva has to offer, with attractive, comfy rooms in an ugly building with concrete, scallop-shaped balconies. Check the website for discount offers, and ring ahead for a parking spot.

Taberna El Condado (☎ 959 26 11 23; Calle Sor Ángela de la Cruz 3; tapas €1.50, raciones €10-15; 11 closed Sun) An atmospheric tapas bar of just two small rooms dominated by a ham-heavy bar, specialising in tasty local meats.

Trattoria Fuentevieja (Avenida Martín Alonso Pinzón; mains €6-11; 11 closed Sun evening) This ultra-popular Italian spot serves a good range of salads as well as pizza, pasta and meat dishes, with touches of vaguely classical art amid tasteful sky-blue-and-lemon décor.

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 24 56 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

pop 400

The most important of the sites is the 14th-century **Monasterio de La Rábida** (☎ 959 35 04 11; admission incl multilingual audio-guide €3; 11 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 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.

On the waterfront below the monastery is the **Muelle de las Carabelas** (Wharf of the Caravels; ☎ 959 53 05 97; admission €3.20; 11 10am-2pm & 5-9pm Tue-Fri, 11am-9pm Sat, Sun & holidays Jun-Sep, 10am-7pm Tue-Sun Oct-May), where you can board replicas of Columbus' tiny three-ship fleet, crewed by ludicrous mannequins.

Palos de la Frontera

pop 7000

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** (☎ 618 57 09 83; Calle Colón 24; admission free; 11 10am-2pm & 5-7pm Tue-Sun) was the home of the *Pinta's* captain. Further

along Calle Colón is the 15th-century **Iglesia de San Jorge** (11 10am-noon & 7-8pm 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.

El Bodegón (☎ 959 53 11 05; Calle Rábida 46; mains €8-20; 11 closed Tue), a noisy, atmospheric cavern of a restaurant, cooks up fish and meat on wood-fired grills and doles out plates of good cheese and *jamón serrano* (cured hill-country ham).

Moguer

pop 13,000

This attractive small town provided many of Columbus' crew. There's a helpful **tourist office** (☎ 959 37 18 98; Calle Castillo s/n; 11 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; 11 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; 11 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 Mudéjar 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 *Platero y Yo* (Platero and I). His home, the **Casa Museo Zenobia y Juan Ramón** (☎ 959 37 21 48; www.fundacion-jrj.es in Spanish; Calle Juan Ramón Jiménez 10; 1hr guided tour €2.50; 11 10.15am-1.15pm & 5.15-7.15pm Tue-Sat, to 1.15pm Sun) is only a five-minute walk from the Monasterio de Santa Clara.

For a bite to eat, give **Mesón El Lobito** (☎ 959 37 06 60; Calle Rábida 31; raciones €7-10; 11 closed Wed) a go. Occupying an old winery, its fish and meat *a la brasa* (char-grilled) are good and inexpensive.

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 Sevilla 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 southeast 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 wintering 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.



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-revellers 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.turismodedonana.com; Avenida de la Canaleja s/n; 𠂆 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; 𠂆 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** (𠂆 8am-9pm), the church housing the celebrated *Virgen del Rocío*, a tiny wooden image in long, bejewelled robes. Many come to pay their respects every day.

Deer and horses graze in the shallow water in front of the village and you might see a flock of flamingos wheeling through the sky in a great pink cloud. The bridge over the river on the A483, 1km south of the village, is another good **viewing spot**.

Several operators run tours along the northern fringe of the national park to the **Centro de Visitantes José Antonio Valverde** (𠂆 10am-7pm, to 8pm or 9pm Apr-Aug), overlooking a year-round lake. On these trips you have high chances of seeing deer and boar and will definitely see a great diversity of birds. Recommended operators: **Discovering Doñana** (☎ 959 44 24 66; www.discoveringdonana.com; Calle Águila Imperial 150, El Rocío; 6hr trip 1-3 people €110) Expert English-speaking guides; most trips are of broad interest.

Doñana Bird Tours (☎ 95 575 5460; www.donana-birdtours.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; 3½hr trip per person €23) Half-day trips, at 8am and 3.30pm daily, are of general-interest; English- and French-speaking guides available.

Doñana Ecuestre (☎ 959 44 24 74; Avenida de la Canaleja 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 (Whitsuntide), the seventh weekend after Easter, El Rocío is inundated with up to a million pilgrim-revellers from all corners of Spain in the **Romería del Rocío** (Pilgrimage to El Rocío). This vast cult festivity 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.

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 Andalusian event. The 'pilgrims' dress in bright Andalusian 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 *Virgen* 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 *Virgen* 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 *Romería* time.

Camping La Aldea (☎ 959 44 26 77; www.campinglaaldea.com; Carretera El Rocío Km25; sites per adult/tent/car €5.50/5.50/5.50, cabin or bungalow for 4 or 5 adults €100-34; p a i s) At the north end of the village, well-equipped La Aldea has a range of cosy cabins and bungalows as well as over 250 camping spaces.

Penión Cristina (☎ 959 44 24 13; Calle El Real 58; s/d €30/36; mains €6-9) Just east of the Ermita, the Cristina provides reasonably comfortable budget rooms and a popular restaurant serving paella, venison, seafood and more.

Hotel & Restaurante Toruño (☎ 959 44 23 23; Plaza Acebuchal 22; s/d incl breakfast €57/81; mains €12-22; p a) An attractive villa overlooking the *marismas*, Toruño has 30 well-appointed rooms, and its restaurant serves up sizeable portions of well-prepared country and coastal fare.

Aires de Doñana (☎ 959 44 27 19; Avenida de la Canaleja 1; mains €15-19; 𠂆 closed Mon) Most El Rocío eateries focus more on feeding the hungry punters than on culinary niceties. Aires de Doñana makes a great change with its picture windows over the *marismas*, polished service and successfully imaginative menu.

Centro de Visitantes El Acebuche

Twelve kilometres south of El Rocío on the A483, then 1.6km west, El Acebuche (☎ 959 44 87 11; 𠂆 8am-9pm May-Sep, to 7pm Oct-Apr) is the national park's main visitor centre. It has an interactive exhibit on the park, paths to bird-watching hides, and a shop with a large screen showing film of Iberian lynxes in the El Acebuche captive-breeding programme (the programme itself is not open to visitors).

NATIONAL PARK TOURS

Trips in 20-person all-terrain vehicles from El Acebuche are the only way for ordinary folk to get into the interior of the national park from the western side. Book ahead through **Cooperativa Marismas del Rocío** (☎ 959 43 04 32/51; 4hr tour per person €23; 𠂆 8.30am Tue-Sun year-round, 3pm Oct-Apr, 5pm May-Sep). During spring, summer and holidays, the trips can book out over a month ahead, but otherwise a week is usually plenty of notice. Bring binoculars if you can, drinking water in summer, and mosquito protection except in winter. Most guides speak Spanish only. The tour normally starts with a long beach drive, before moving inland. You can be pretty certain of seeing deer and boar, but ornithologists may be disappointed by the limited bird-observation opportunities.

Matalascañas & Mazagón

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 Mazagón, 28km up the coast, is lower-key. At **Cuesta de Maneli**, 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.hotelalbaida.com; Carretera Huelva-Matalascañas, Mazagón; s €44-65, d €67-102, all incl breakfast; p a) Airy rooms and welcoming staff, among pines just off the highway.

Hotel Doñana Blues (☎ 959 44 98 17; www.donana-blues.com; Sector I, Parcela 129, Matalascañas; r €102-134; a i s) A small hotel in comfortable yet appealingly rustic style. Book ahead.

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

Getting There & Away

Three daily buses run between Seville (Plaza de Armas) and Matalascañas (€6, 1¼ hours) via El Rocío (€5.50, 1½ hours). One or two further services along the A483 between Almonte and Matalascañas also stop at El Rocío. All these buses will stop on request outside El Acebuche visitors centre.

From Huelva, buses go to Mazagón (€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 changing 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 Río 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; hotelrealpuntaunbria@hotmail.com; Calle Falucho 2, Punta Umbría; s €36-60, 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 33 02 35; www.hotelparaisoplaya.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 unearthly, 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 Río 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.parquemineroderioto.sigadel.com in Spanish), headquartered at the well-signposted **Museo Minero** (Plaza Ernest Lluch; adult/under 13yr €4/3; h 10.30am-3pm & 4-7pm). The fascinating museum takes you right through the Riotinto area's unique history from megalithic tombs to the Roman and British colonial eras and finally the closure of the mines in 2001. Its best features include a 200m-long re-creation of a Roman mine, and the Vagón del Maharajah, a luxurious carriage used by Alfonso XIII to visit the mines.

An easy and fun way to see the mining area is to ride the **Ferrocarril Turístico-Minero** (adult/child €10/9; h 1.30pm 1 Jun-15 Jul, to 5pm 16 Jul-30 Sep, 4pm Sat, Sun & holidays Oct-Feb, 1pm Mon-Fri, 4pm Sat, Sun & holidays Mar-May), taking visitors 22km (round-trip) through the surreal landscape in restored early-20th-century railway carriages. Trips start at Talleres Minas, 2.5km east of Minas

THE MARTE PROJECT

On trips to Peña de Hierro you'll see the area where, since 2003, scientists from United States's 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 that the high acid levels that give Río 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.

de Riotinto. Another trip is to the old copper and sulphur mines of **Peña de Hierro** (adult/child €8/7; h daily), 9km from Minas de Riotinto. Here you see the source of Río Tinto, an 85m-deep opencast mine, and are taken into a 200m-long underground mine gallery. For both these trips it's essential to book ahead, and schedules may change.

The Parque Minero is not running trips to the **Corta Atalaya**, 1km west of the town. But you can still get a peep at this awesome opencast mine, 1.2km long and 335m deep, if you follow the sign to it as you enter Minas de Riotinto from the southwest.

Sleeping & Eating

Hostal Galán (% 959 59 08 40; www.hostalrestaurantegalan.com; Avenida La Esquila 10; s/d €27/39; menú €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 (% /fax 959 58 09 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 (menú €10), in Nerva, 5km east of Minas.

Getting There & Away

Up to six daily buses run from Huelva to Minas de Riotinto (€5.50, 1½ hours) and Nerva (€6, 1¼ hours), and vice-versa. **Casal** (% 954 99 92 62) has three daily buses from Seville (Plaza de Armas) to Nerva (€4, 1½ hours) and Minas de Riotinto (€4.50, 1¼ hours).

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 Arocha**, Andalucía's second-largest protected area.

Aracena's **Municipal tourist office** (% 959 12 82 06; Calle Pozo de la Nieve; h 10am-2pm & 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; % 959 12 83 55; Calle Pozo de la Nieve; tour adult/under 19yr €8/5.50; h tours every hr or half-hr 10.30am-1.30pm & 3-6pm), ranks among Spain's most picturesque cave systems, and 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

Hospedería Reina de los Ángeles (% 959 12 83 67; www.hospederiareinadelosangeles.com; Avenida Reina de los Ángeles s/n; s/d €23/38; i) This former residence for school students, opened as a hotel in 2005, provides 90 good, clean, bright rooms with phone and TV – a good budget deal.

Molino del Bombo (% 959 12 84 78; www.molinodelbombo.com in Spanish; Calle Ancha 4; s/d €23/45; a i) Tastefully rustic yet comfortable, the Molino stands near the top of the town and is a great find.

Finca Valbono (% 959 12 77 11; www.fincavalbono.com; Carretera Carboneras Km1; s/d €73/89, 4-person apt €150; p a i s w w) A converted farmhouse 1km 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).

Café-Bar Manzano (% 959 12 63 37; Plaza del Marqués de Aracena; tapas €1.80-3.50, raciones €9-18; h 8am-8pm or later Wed-Sat & Mon, 10am-8pm Sun) This terrace café on the main plaza is a fine spot to watch Aracena go by and enjoy varied tapas and *raciones*.

Restaurante José Vicente (% 959 12 84 55; Avenida de Andalucía 53; 3-course menú €18; h closed Sun evening, last week Jun & 1st week Jul) The proprietor is an expert on *sierra* cuisine and the fixed-price *menú* (which includes a drink) is excellent. Advisable to book.

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), one or two from Huelva (€6, 2¼ hours), and up to three from Minas de Riotinto (€2.30, one hour). A Casal 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 fortresslike churches, or hilltop castles constructed in medieval 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 Alájar, Castaño 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.

One kilometre above Alájar (towards Fuenteteridos), the **Peña de Arias Montano** has magical views, as does **Cerro de San Cristóbal** (915m), a 4km uphill drive from Almonaster. Almonaster's 10th-century **mezquita** (mosque; admission free; h 8.30am-7pm approx) is a gem of Islamic architecture. *Jamón serrano* from nearby **Jabugo** is acclaimed as the best in Spain and the village's Carretera San Juan del Puerto is lined with bars and restaurants waiting for your verdict too!

Recommended lodgings:

Posada del Castaño (% 959 46 55 02; www.posadadelcastano.com; Calle José Sánchez Calvo 33, Castaño del Robledo; 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.hotelcasagarcia.com; Avenida San Martín 2, Almonaster la Real; s/d €37/53; mains €8-14; p a) Stylish small hotel with highly regarded restaurant.

La Posada (% 959 12 57 12; laposadadealajar.com; Calle Médico Emilio González 2, Alájar; s/d incl breakfast €45/55) Very cosy inn whose owners are keen walkers themselves.

Daily **Casal** (% Seville 954 99 92 62) buses connect nearly all these villages with Aracena and Seville (Plaza de Armas).

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 to 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, civilized 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 'singd 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 (cnr Calles Isabel La Católica & Antonio López; internet per hr €1.50; h 11am-2pm & 5-10pm Mon-Sat)

Hospital Puerta del Mar (% 956 00 21 00; Avenida Ana de Viya 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; h 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 5-8pm 15 Jun-15 Sep); Information kiosk (Plaza San Juan de Dios; h 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; h 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 Pópulo**, 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 €4/2.50; \uparrow 10am-1.30pm & 4.30-6.30pm Tue-Fri, to 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 neoclassical 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 & over 65 €3.50/2.50; \uparrow 10am-6pm, to 8pm 15 Jun-15 Sep) for marvellous vistas.

PLAZA DE TOPETE & AROUND

A short walk northwest from the cathedral, this square is one of Cádiz's liveliest, bright with flower stalls and adjoining the large, animated **Mercado Central** (Central Market). Nearby, the **Torre Tavira** (% 956 21 29 10; Calle Marqués del Real Tesoro 10; admission €3.50; \uparrow 10am-6pm, to 8pm 15 Jun-15 Sep) is the highest and most important of the city's old watchtowers (18th-century Cádiz had no less than 160 of these, built so that citizens could observe the comings and goings of ships without leaving home). It provides great panoramas and has a **camera obscura** projecting live images of the city onto a screen.

The **Museo de las Cortes de Cádiz** (% 956 22 17 88; Calle Santa Inés 9; admission free; \uparrow 9am-1pm & 5-7pm, 4-7pm Oct-May, Tue-Fri, to 1pm Sat & Sun) is full of historical memorabilia focusing on the 1812 parliament, including a large marvellous 1770s model of Cádiz, made for King Carlos III. Along the street is the **Oratorio de San Felipe Neri** (% 956 21 16 12; Plaza de San Felipe Neri; admission €2; \uparrow 10am-1.30pm Mon-Sat), the church where the Cortes de Cádiz met. This is one of Cádiz's finest baroque churches, with an unusual oval interior, a beautiful dome and a Murillo *Inmaculada* on the altarpiece.

MUSEO DE CÁDIZ

Cádiz's fine major **museum** (% 956 21 22 81; Plaza de Mina; adult/EU citizen €1.50/free, admission free Sun; \uparrow 2.30-8pm Tue, 9am-8.30pm Wed-Sat, 9.30am-2.30pm 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 1½ hours. Go north from Plaza de Mina to the city's northern seafront, with views across the Bahía de Cádiz. Head along the **Alameda** gardens to the **Baluarte de la Candelaria**, then turn southwest to the quirkily clipped **Parque del Genovés**. Continue to the **Castillo de Santa Catalina** (% 956 22 63 33; admission free; \uparrow 10.30am-6pm, to 8pm usually May-Aug), built after the 1596 sacking; inside there's an historical exhibit on Cádiz and the sea, and a gallery hosting temporary exhibitions. Sandy **Playa de la Caleta** (very crowded in summer) separates Santa Catalina from the 18th-century **Castillo de San Sebastián**. You can't enter San Sebastián but do walk along the airy 750m causeway to its gate. Finally, follow the broad promenade along **Campo del Sur** to the cathedral.

PLAYA DE LA VICTORIA

This lovely, wide, ocean beach of fine Atlantic sand stretches about 4km along the peninsula from its beginning 1.5km beyond the Puertas de Tierra. On summer weekends almost the whole city seems to be out here. Bus 1 'Plaza España-Cortadura' from Plaza de España will get you there.

Festivals & Events

No other Spanish city celebrates **carnaval** with the verve of Cádiz, where it turns into a 10-day singing, dancing and drinking fancy-dress party spanning two weekends. Everyone dresses up and the fun, abetted by huge quantities of alcohol, is infectious. Costumed groups (*murgas*) tour the city on foot or on floats, singing witty satirical ditties, dancing

or performing sketches. In addition to the 300 or so officially recognised *murgas*, judged by a panel in the Gran Teatro Falla, there are also the *ilegales* – any group that fancies taking to the streets and trying to play or sing.

Some of the liveliest scenes are in the working-class Barrio de la Viña, and on Calle Ancha and Calle Columela, where *ilegales* tend to congregate.

Rooms in Cádiz get booked months in advance (even though prices can be double their summer rates). If you don't manage to snatch one, you could just visit for the night from anywhere else within striking distance. Plenty of other people do this – many wearing fancy dress.

Sleeping

A reasonable number of budget places can be found in the old city.

Casa Caracol (% 956 26 11 66; www.caracolcasa.com; Calle Suárez de Salazar 4; dm/d incl breakfast €15/28; j) Friendly and crowded, Casa Caracol is a true backpacker hostel. It has bunk dorms for four and eight, a sociable communal kitchen, free internet, and a roof terrace with a few hammocks (€10). There's no sign outside: look for the blue door.

Hostal San Francisco (% 956 22 18 42; Calle San Francisco 12; d €49, s/d without bathroom €24/38) Well situated in the old city, the San Francisco has well kept but moderately sized, pine-veneered furnishings. Some have little natural light.

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

Hostal Canalejas (% /fax 956 26 41 13; Calle Cristóbal Colón 5; s/d €48/66; a) An excellent new *hostal* in the old city: all the neat, comfortable rooms have pine furniture, small bathtub, and one or two single beds.

Hostal Bahía (% 956 25 90 61; hostalbahia@terra.es; Calle Plocía 5; s/d €56/70; a) All rooms are exterior, impeccably looked-after, and have phone, TV and built-in wardrobes.

Hospedería Las Cortes de Cádiz (% 956 21 26 68; www.hotellascortes.com in Spanish; Calle San Francisco 9; s/d incl breakfast €70/102; p a i s w) This excellent old-city hotel occupies a remodelled 1850s mansion centred on an elegant four-storey atrium. The 36 stylish rooms, each dedicated to a figure or place associated with the Cortes

de Cádiz, sport attractive period-style furnishings and plenty of modern comforts. The hotel also has a roof terrace, gym and Jacuzzi.

Parador Hotel Atlántico (% 956 22 69 05; www.parador.es; Avenida Duque de Nájera 9; s/d €103/129; p a i s w) Cádiz's modern *parador* is comfortable and spacious. All of the rooms have a terrace with a sea view of some sort, and the pool sits in a lawn overlooking the ocean.

Eating

Freiduría Las Flores (% 956 22 61 12; Plaza de Topete 4; seafood per 250g €2.50-8) Cádiz specialises in fried fish and seafood, and Las Flores, a kind of self-respecting fish and chipper, is one of the best places to sample it. To try a combination, have a *surtido* (mixed fry-up).

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 Plocía 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 Cigüeña (% 956 25 01 79; Calle Plocía 2; mains €13-16; \uparrow closed Sun) A few steps off Plaza San Juan de Dios, the friendly and relaxed 'Stork' has a Dutch chef who prepares adventurous and delicious food.

Mesón Cumbres Mayores (% 956 21 32 70; Calle Zorrilla 4; tapas €1.50-2, mains €7-17) This ever-busy place, dangling with hams and garlic, has an excellent tapas bar in the front and a small restaurant in the back. In the bar it's hard to

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

La Gorda Te Da De Comer (Calle General Luque 1; tapas €1.60, salads €2-5, raciones €5; \uparrow 9-11.30pm Mon, 1.30-4pm & 9-11.30pm Tue-Sat) 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 chicken strips with Marie-Rose sauce.

beat 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; Ⓜ) 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 DJs and occasional live music – from garage and rock-groove to punk and ska – get the bodies moving.

Cambalache (Calle José del Toro 20; Ⓜ 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 Sun & Mon) Gay/mixed house-music pub where the waiters strut their stuff in vest tops (or no tops), and drag shows spice up the week on Thursdays.

The second hot spot is down Playa de la Victoria, with lively music bars along Paseo Marítimo and nearby in the Hotel Playa Victoria area about 2.5km from the Puertas de Tierra. The hippest bars include **Barabass** (☎ 856 07 90 26; Calle General Muñoz Arenillas 4-6; admission incl 1 drink €8; Ⓜ 4pm-6am).

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 Thursday to Saturday nights, while **El Malecón** (☎ 956 22 45 51; Paseo Pascual Pery; Ⓜ from midnight Thu-Sat) is Cádiz's top Latin dance spot.

Peña Flamenca La Perla (☎ 956 25 91 01; Calle Carlos Ollero s/n) Cádiz is one of the true homes of flamenco. This cavernlike club hosts flamenco nights at 10pm many Fridays in spring and summer.

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

Getting There & Around

BOAT

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 **Comes** (☎ 956 80 70 59; Plaza de la Hispanidad). Destinations include Seville (€10.50, 1½ hours, 12 daily), El Puerto de Santa María (€1.70, 30 to 40 minutes, 23 daily), Jerez de la Frontera (€2.70, 40 minutes, 20 daily), Tarifa (€8, two hours, five daily) and other places down the Cádiz coast, Arcos de la Frontera (€5.50, 1¼ hours, six daily), Ronda (€13, 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, 1¼ hours) and El Bosque (€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 **Viajes Socialtur** (☎ 956 28 58 52; Avenida Ramón de Carranza 31).

Secorbus (☎ 902 22 92 92; Avenida José León de Carranza 20) operates up to six buses daily to Madrid (€22, eight hours). The stop is 3.6km southeast of the Puertas de Tierra.

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, 1¼ hours) and two or three to/from Córdoba (€33 to €52, three hours) and Madrid (€60, 5½ hours, two daily).

EL PUERTO DE SANTA MARÍA

pop 82,000

El Puerto, 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 & 6-8pm) is 2½ blocks straight ahead from the Muelle del Vapor.

Sights & Activities

The four-spouted **Fuente de las Galeras Reales** (Fountain of the Royal Galleys), by the Muelle del Vapor, once supplied water to American-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 **Terry** (☎ 956 85 77 00; Calle Toneleros s/n), 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 9; admission €4; Ⓜ 10am-1pm Mon-Fri) without booking.

Pine-flanked **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.

Sleeping

Hostal Costa Luz (☎ 956 05 47 01; www.hostalcostaluz.com; Calle Niño del Matadero 2; s/d €40/63; Ⓜ a i) Friendly, modern *hostal* in the bullring vicinity with 11 appealing, medium-sized rooms.

Casa No 6 (☎ 956 87 70 84; www.casano6.com; Calle San Bartolomé 14; r/find breakfast €70/120; Ⓜ) This beautifully renovated 19th-century house provides charming, spacious and spotless rooms.

Hotel Los Cántaros (☎ 956 54 02 40; www.hotelloscantaros.com; Calle Curva 6; s/d €98/115; Ⓜ a i w) Classy Los Cántaros has well-equipped rooms 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; Ⓜ a s w) Tropical garden, pool, valuable artworks and gourmet restaurant await your pleasure, if your pockets are deep enough for this luxurious hotel in a converted 18th-century monastery.

Eating

Calle Misericordia sports an enticing string of tapas bars.

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

Romerijo (☎ 956 54 12 54; Ribera del Marisco s/n; seafood per 250g from €4) A huge, always busy El Puerto institution, Romerijo 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 Shawarma (☎ 956 87 64 23; Ribera del Marisco 11; falafel roll €3.50, mains €9; √) Vegetarians will love this small restaurant with unbeatable falafel. The authentic Lebanese-Greek food (with some meat options too) provides a welcome change.

Casa Luis (☎ 956 87 20 09; Ribera del Marisco s/n; tapas/raciones €3/8; Ⓜ 1.30-4pm & 9-11pm Tue-Sat, 1.30-4pm Sun) This tightly packed little den with just a few tables offers innovative tapas like delicious *hojaldres* (puff pastries) with prawn or cheese-and-anchovy filling.

Casa Flores (☎ 956 54 35 12; Ribera del Río 9; mains €13-34) For more formal dining, go for tile-bedecked Casa Flores across the street from the river. Try the local speciality *urta roteña* (sea bream cooked in white wine, tomatoes, peppers and thyme).

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

(except nonholiday Mondays between early September and May, by the way). The faster Catamaran (€1.80, 25 min), run by the public **Línea Metropolitana/Consortio de Transportes Bahía de Cádiz** (☎ 956 01 21 00; www.cmtbc.com), sails between Cádiz (Muelle Reina Victoria dock, near the train station) and El Puerto 13 times a day Monday to Friday, six times on Saturday and three on Sunday. In El Puerto, the Catamaran docks on the river in front of the Hotel Santa María.

BUS

From Monday to Friday, buses run to Cádiz (€1.70, 30 to 40 minutes) about half-hourly, 6.45am to 10pm, from the Plaza de Toros (Bullring), and at least seven times from the train station. Weekend services are less frequent. For Jerez de la Frontera (€1, 20 minutes) there are nine to 16 daily buses from the train station and 11 from the bullring. Buses for Sanlúcar de Barrameda (€1.60, 30 minutes, five to 11 daily) depart from the bullring. Buses for Seville (€8.50, 1½ hours, five daily) go from the train station.

TRAIN

The train station is a 10-minute walk northeast of the town centre, beside the Cádiz-Jerez road. Up to 36 trains travel daily to Jerez (from €1.30, 12 minutes) and Cádiz (from €2.20, 30 to 35 minutes), and 10 or more daily to Seville (€6 to €18, 1½ hours).

SANLÚCAR DE BARRAMEDA

pop 63,000

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 southwest of the middle of La Calzada. The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 956 36 61 10; www.turismosanlucar.com; 10am–2pm, variable afternoon hr) 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 38 16 35; Bajo de Guía s/n; 10am–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 Orleans y Borbon** (admission free; 10am–1.30pm 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** (10am–1pm Sun, 7.30–8pm Sun–Fri). Next door is the **Palacio de los Duques de Medina Sidonia** (☎ 956 36 01 61; www.fcmedinasidonia.com in Spanish; Plaza Condes de Niebla 1; admission €3; 11am & noon Sun by appointment, café 9am–2pm & 3.30–9pm 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 Barbadillo 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:

LIQUID GOLD

Sherry is famous worldwide and, here in sherry-producing country, the drink has made many a family's fortune. Jerez *coñac* (brandy), widely drunk in Spain, is also profitable – 63 million bottles are produced annually. There are several types of sherry and it has a classy, refined image. Sherry houses (bodegas) are often beautiful buildings in extensive lush gardens, and have well-groomed, well-spoken, multilingual guides who can show you around. A tour will take you through the areas where the wine is stored and aged, inform you about the process and the sherry producers, and, the best bit, give you a tasting.

Sherry is a fortified wine that's produced in the towns of Jerez de la Frontera, El Puerto de Santa María and Sanlúcar de Barrameda, and a few other places nearby. A combination of climate, chalky soils that soak up the sun but retain moisture, and a special maturing process called the *solera* system produce this unique wine.

A sherry can be a *fino* (dry and the colour of straw) or an *oloroso* (sweet, dark and with a strong bouquet). An *amontillado* is an amber, moderately dry *fino* with a nutty flavour and higher alcohol content. A manzanilla is an unfortified camomile-coloured *fino* from Sanlúcar de Barrameda; it slips down nicely with seafood and its delicate flavour comes from sea breezes wafting into the wineries there.

The production of your bottle of sherry begins with the pressing of harvested sherry grapes. The resulting must is left to ferment. Within a few months a frothy veil of yeast (*flor*) appears on the surface. The wine is transferred to the cellars in big barrels of American oak, which add to its flavour.

Wine enters the *solera* process after one year. The barrels, about five-sixths full, are lined up in rows at least three barrels high: those on the bottom layer contain the oldest wine. Around three times a year, 10% of the wine from these is drawn off and replaced with the same amount of wine from the layer above. The wines are left to age for between three and seven years. A small amount of brandy is added to fortify the wine before bottling.

Barbadillo (☎ 956 38 55 00; Calle Luis de Equilaz 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 €5; 10am–noon Wed; Fri & Sat)

La Cigarrera (☎ 956 38 12 85; Plaza Madre de Dios; tours €2.50; 10am–2pm Mon–Sat)

Parque Nacional de Doñana

From Bajo de Guía, **Viajes Doñana** (☎ 956 36 25 40; Calle San Juan 20; tours per person €36) 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 Acebuche (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 13 49; www.hotelloshelechos.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 11; s/d €85/105; p a i) Sanlúcar's most charming and sumptuous lodging is this 18th-century mansion in the upper part of town. Furniture is old-style and heavy.

Hotel Tartaneros (☎ 956 38 20 44; Calle Tartaneros 8; 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.

Eating

Spain holds few more idyllic dining experiences than tucking into succulent fresh seafood while watching the sun go down over the Guadalquivir at Bajo de Guía, and washing it down with a glass 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 *coquinas al ajillo* (clams in garlic), both €9, are specialties.

Casa Bigote (☎ 956 36 26 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*), 38km 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 *gitanó* (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 greater 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.

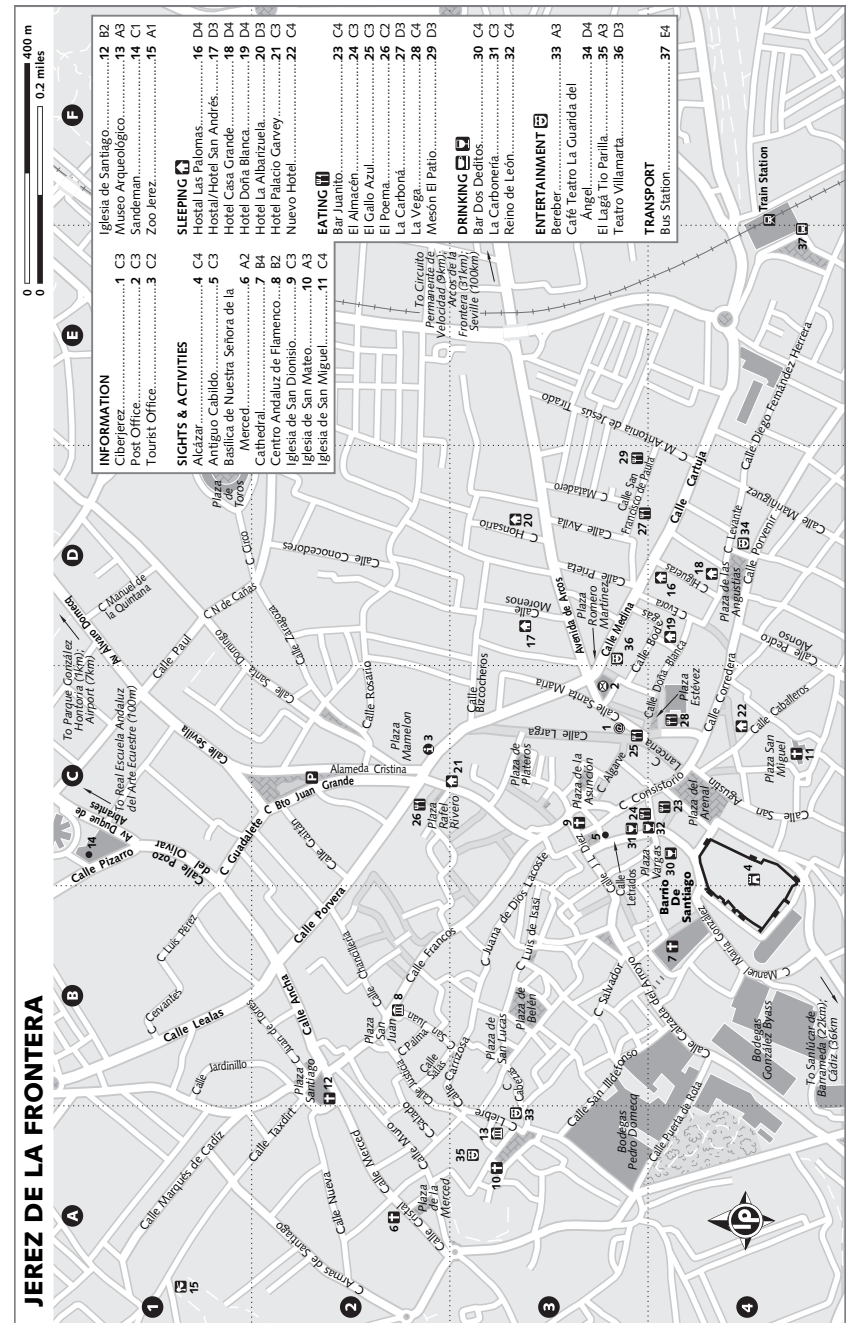
Sights

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 Árabes** (Arab Baths), and the 18th-century **Palacio Villavicencio**. In the palace's tower, a *camera obscura* provides a live panorama of Jerez, with multilingual 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 *gitanos* 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; caf.cica.es in Spanish; Plaza San Juan 1; admission free; 11am-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; 11am-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.bodegastiopope.com; Calle Manuel María González 12; tours in English €8.50; 11.30am-2pm & 3.30-5.30pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr) 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 €6; 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 Andalucian School of Equestrian Art** (% 956 31 80 08; 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 €8/5; 11am-2pm Mon, Wed & Fri Sep-Jul, to 2pm Mon & Wed Aug). There's an official **espectáculo** (show; admission adult/child €23/14, 11am-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 Andalucía'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 Festivals range 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 breakfasts cost €6 to €7.

Hostal/Hotel San Andrés (% 956 34 09 83; www.hostal-sanandres.org; Calle Morenos 12; without bathroom €20/28, s/d with bathroom €24/38; a i) 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-las-palomas.com; Calle Higuera 17; s/d without bathroom €25/40; s/d with bathroom €30/45) New, youthful management has transformed a plain *hostal* into an appealing choice with a faint Moroccan theme.

Hotel La Albarizueta (% 956 34 68 62; www.hotel-albarizueta.com; Calle Honsario 6; r €66; p a) An ultra-modern place popular with an under-30s crowd, an easy walk east of the centre. A celeste-with-grey-trim colour scheme complements clean-cut lines.

Nuevo Hotel (% 956 33 16 00; www.nuevohotel.com; Calle Caballeros 23; s/d €45/74; a v) In a modernised 19th-century mansion, this popular, family-run hotel provides comfortable rooms with TV and winter heating. It has a bright dining room. You need to book.

Hotel Casa Grande (% 956 34 50 70; www.casa-grande.com.es; Plaza de las Angustias 3; s/d €70/91, ste €164; p a i v) This brilliant hotel occupies a carefully restored and strikingly decorated 1920s mansion. Most rooms are set around a patio.

Hotel Doña Blanca (% 956 34 87 61; www.hotel-donablanca.com in Spanish; Calle Bodegas 11; s/d €77/96; p a i) On a quiet side street in the centre, this is a great hotel with obliging staff, parquet floors and soothing light-blue paintwork.

Hotel Palacio Garvey (% 956 32 67 00; www.sferaho-tele.net; Tornería 24; s/d €226/292; p a i s) 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 Almácén** (Calle Ferros 8; tapas €2-3.50) 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 €5) 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 €7.50-12) 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.

Mesón El Patio (% 956 34 07 36; Calle San Francisco de Paula 7; fish & meat raciones €5-18; 11am-11pm closed Sun afternoon & Mon) El Patio is convivial yet a touch refined. It has lofty ceilings, warm tones and a collection of old radios. Above all, the food is terrific and there's a huge choice, especially of prawn dishes.

La Carboná (% 956 34 74 75; Calle San Francisco de Paula 2; mains €9-28; 11am-11pm 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; try **Bar Dos Deditos** (Plaza Vargas 1), **Reino de León** (Calle Ferros) and **La Carbonería** (Calle Letrados 7). Northeast of the city centre, La Plaza de Canterbury 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 Guarida del Ángel** (% 956 34 96 98; Calle Porvenir 1; 11am-8pm-late). Don't miss *café/bar/disco Bereber* (% 956 34 00 16; Calle Cabezas 10; 11am-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 sound-proofed disco in the middle.

Several *peñas flamencas* (flamenco clubs) welcome genuinely interested visitors: ask at the tourist office about events. **El Lagá Tio Parrilla** (% 956 33 83 34; Plaza del Mercado; 11am-10.30pm & 12.30am Mon-Sat) has more tourist-oriented flamenco performances but can still be pretty gutsy.

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 World Motorcycle 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. Belgian and German airlines fly 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 minutes, up to 25 daily), Cádiz (€2.60, 40 minutes, up to 21 daily), Arcos de la Frontera (€2.30, 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 (from €6.50, 1¼ hours, up to 15 daily).

ARCOS DE LA FRONTERA

pop 30,000 / elevation 185m

The old town of Arcos, 30km east of Jerez, could not be more thrillingly sited: it perches on a high, unassailable ridge with sheer precipices plummeting away on both sides. Always prized for its strategic position, Arcos was briefly, during the 11th century, an independent Berber-ruled kingdom before being absorbed by Seville, then Christian Alfonso X took the town in 1255. When the last Duque de Arcos died in 1780, his cousin, the Duquesa de Benavente, took over his lands. With her help, agriculture around Arcos diversified and more-profitable crops and horse breeding replaced sheep farming.

Arcos' charm today lies in exploring the old, mazelike, upper town with its Renaissance palaces, beautiful Gothic churches, whitewashed houses and uniquely spectacular setting.

Orientation & Information

From the bus station, it's a 1.5km uphill walk to the old town. Paseo de los Boliches and Calle Debajo del Corral (becoming Calle Corredera) both lead east up to the old town's main square, Plaza del Cabildo.

The **tourist office** (% 956 70 22 64; Plaza del Cabildo; h 10am-2pm & 3.30-7.30pm, 4-8pm Mar-mid-Oct, Mon-Sat) is on the old town's main square. There's also a **tourist information kiosk** (Paseo de Andalucía).

Banks and ATMs are along Calle Debajo del Corral and Calle Corredera.

Sights

Plaza del Cabildo is surrounded by fine old buildings has 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 **Basilica-Parroquia de Santa María** (admission €1.50; h 10am-1pm & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat). 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; h 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, to 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.

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 la Virgen de las Nieves (early August)

Three-day festival includes a top-class flamenco night in Plaza del Cabildo.

Feria de San Miguel (end of September) Arcos celebrates its patron saint, San Miguel, with a four-day fair.

Sleeping & Eating

Hostal San Marcos (% 956 70 07 21; Calle Marqués de Torresoto 6; s/d/tr €25/35/45; a) A simple old-town *hostal*, there are four pretty little rooms and a roof terrace.

Hotel Real de Veas (% 956 71 73 70; www.hotelrealdeveas.com; Calle Corredera 12; s €45, d €55-65; a i) Friendly folk run this converted traditional home, which has agreeable rooms around a glass-covered patio and a roof terrace.

Hotel El Convento (% 956 70 23 33; www.webdearcos.com/elconvento; Calle Maldonado 2; s/d from €55/70; a) In a beautiful 17th-century convent, this hotel has a large terrace for taking in the stupendous view; six of the tasteful, varied rooms share the view.

La Casa Grande (% 956 70 39 30; www.lacasagrande.net; Calle Maldonado 10; r €75-95, ste €88-135; a) A gorgeous, rambling, cliffside mansion, the Casa Grande once belonged to the great flamenco dancer Antonio Ruiz Soler. All seven rooms are decorated in different styles. La Casa Grande is closed from 7 January to 6 February.

Parador Casa del Corregidor (% 956 70 05 00; www.parador.es; Plaza del Cabildo; s/d €116/145; a i) Typical *parador* luxury with magnificent panoramas. Eight of the rooms have balconies with cliff views. The restaurant (mains €13 to €21, *menú* €21 to €28) has *andaluz* specialities.

Mesón Don Fernando (% 956 71 73 26; Calle Botica 5; mains €9-20, raciones €6-15; h closed Mon) Up in the old-town maze, Mesón Don Fernando 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 32 22; Calle Marqués de Torresoto 7; mains €8-15) In the pillared patio of a palace that dates back to the 17th century, Arcos' finest restaurant turns out country specialities such as herbed lamb in almond sauce.

Getting There & Away

Services from the **bus station** (% 956 70 49 77; Calle Corregidores) run to Jerez (€2.30, 45 minutes, 18 daily), Cádiz (€4.50 to €5.50, 1¼ hours, 15 daily), El Bosque (€2.50, one hour, 11 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.

PARQUE NATURAL SIERRA DE GRAZALEMA

The mountainous Parque Natural Sierra de Grazalema, in northeastern Cádiz province, is one of Andalucía's greenest and most beautiful areas. The landscape here, dotted with white-washed villages, ranges from pastoral river valleys to precipitous gorges and rocky summits. This is fine walking country (the best months are May, June, September and October), and there are opportunities for climbing, caving, canyoning, kayaking and paragliding.

The park extends into northwestern Málaga province, where it includes the Cueva de la Pileta (p758). Useful walking guides include *Walking in Andalucía* by Guy Hunter-Watts and *Eight Walks from Grazalema* by RE Bradshaw. Editorial Alpina's *Sierra de Grazalema* (1:25,000) is the map pick.

El Bosque

pop 1800 / elevation 385m

El Bosque, 33km east of Arcos across rolling country, is prettily situated below the wooded Sierra de Albarracín. A pleasant 5km riverside path to Benamahoma starts beside El Bosque's youth hostel.

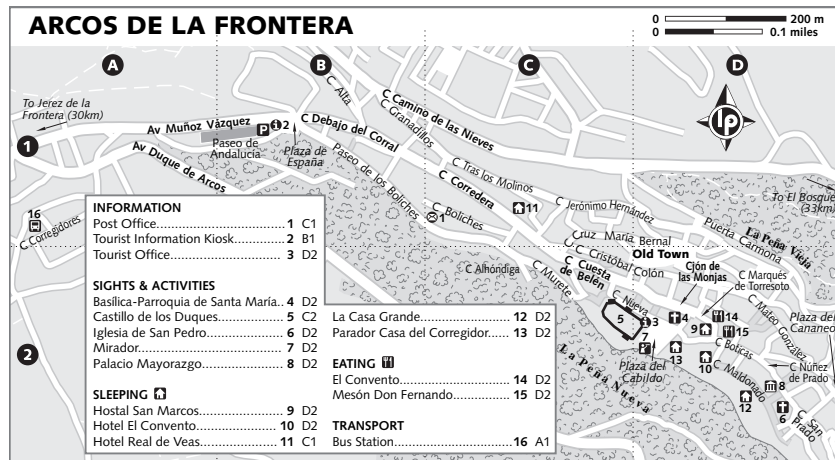
The natural park's **Centro de Visitantes El Bosque** (% 956 72 70 29; Avenida de la Diputación s/n; h 10am-2pm & 6-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm & to 8pm Sat, 9am-2pm Sun, afternoons Oct-Mar 4-6pm Mon-Sat), with limited displays and information on the park, is off the A372 at the western end of town.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel Enrique Calvillo (% 956 71 61 05; Avenida Diputación 5; s/d €25/45; a i) 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 El Tabanco (% 956 71 60 81; Calle La Fuente 3; s/d incl breakfast €30/50; h closed 2nd half Jun; a) Up in the village centre, this almost-new hotel provides spotless, tasteful rooms with good beds and bathtubs. The adjoining **Mesón El Tabanco** (% 956 71 60 81; Calle Huelva 1; mains €9-15; h closed 2nd half Jun) serves excellent meat and *revueltos* (scrambled-egg dishes) in two skylit dining rooms. Don't pass up the *queso fresco* salad, with superb local soft goat cheese.

Hotel Las Truchas (% 956 71 60 61; www.tugasa.com/index2.htm; Avenida Diputación s/n; s/d €36/59; p a s) Going since 1970, Las Truchas is a mite stodgy in style but still has comfortable rooms, spacious public areas and an outdoor pool.



Grazalema

pop 2200 / elevation 825m

The most popular traveller's base in the *sierra*, 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, overlooked by the 18th-century Iglesia de la Aurora. Here you'll find the **tourist office** (% 956 13 20 73; 11 10am-2pm & 4-9pm), with a shop selling local products. Two banks on Plaza de España have ATMs.

Horizon (% /fax 956 13 23 63; www.horizonaventura.com; Calle Corrales 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.casadeaspiedras.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 (mains €6 to €11) serves hearty meals.

Hotel Peñón Grande (% 956 13 24 34; www.hotelgrazalema.com; Plaza Pequeña 7; s/d €36/53; a) 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 Clara 6; r incl breakfast €50; 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 Asomaderos; mains €7-12, menú €13; 1 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, quail, venison, wild boar and *revueltos* 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 Palomas (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; 11 9am-2pm & 4-7pm).

Zahara's streets invite investigation, with vistas framed by tall palms, hot-pink bougainvillea or fruited orange trees. To climb 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 for the schedule.

Hostal Marqués de Zahara (% /fax 956 12 30 61; www.marquesdezahara.com; Calle San Juan 3; s/d €32/42; a) A converted mansion right in the village centre, has cosy rooms with winter heating and a bookcase full of good local reference material.

Hotel Arco de la Villa (% 956 12 32 30; www.tugasa.com/index2.htm; Paseo Nazarí 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; 11 9am-11pm) 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), five 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. Grazalema-El Bosque buses depart at 5.30am Monday to Friday and 7pm Friday.

Los Amarillos also runs twice daily from Málaga to Grazalema (€10, 2¼ 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 small prices to pay for a mostly unspoiled, often wild shore, strung with long, white-sand beaches. Andalusians flock here in July and August, bringing a fiesta atmosphere to the normally dead coastal settlements, and an increasing number of foreigners are choosing to settle here so change is happening fast. Phone ahead for rooms during July and August and at Easter and long weekends throughout the year. Outside the high seasons, prices drop significantly.

Vejer de la Frontera

pop 13,000 / elevation 190m

This old-fashioned white town looms mysteriously atop a rocky hill above the busy N340, 50km from Cádiz. It's experiencing an influx of foreign residents and is a good base for outdoor activities, with some charming places to stay. Buses stop on Avenida Los Remedios, about 500m below the town centre and next to the **tourist office** (% 956 45 17 36; www.turismovejer.com; 11 10am-2pm Mon-Fri, afternoon & weekend opening hr vary depending on season).

Vejer's much-reworked **castle** (11 10am-2pm) has great views from its battlements and a small museum that preserves one of the black cloaks that Vejer women wore until just a couple of decades ago (covering everything but the eyes). You can rent good mountain bikes (from €12 per day) at **Nature Explorer** (% 956 45 14 19; www.natureexplorer.com; Avenida de los Remedios 43). It also runs walking, mountain biking and diving trips (€25 to €55 per person).

SLEEPING & EATING

Hostal La Janda (% 956 45 01 42; Calle Machado s/n; s/d €25/50; p a) A friendly place that is across town from the old walled area. The 36 rooms, some with town vistas, sprawl over a large property. Décor is simple but pretty.

Hostal la Botica (% 902 07 51 30; www.laboticadevejer.com; Calle Canalejas 15; s/d incl breakfast from €55/65; a) La Botica offers appealing rooms set around a patio where breakfast is served. There's a roof terrace with rural views.

Hostal La Casa del Califa (% 956 44 77 30; www.grupocalifa.com; Plaza de España 16; s €63-94, d €69-112, all incl breakfast; a) This great little place rambles over several floors and has peaceful, comfortable rooms with Islamic décor. La Casa has a great Arabic restaurant, El Jardín del Califa (mains €7.50 to €18), extending out into the garden.

La Bodega (% 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, 2¼ hours, two daily) and Seville (€14, three hours, 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.

GRAZALEMA RESERVE AREA WALKS

Three of the Sierra de Grazalema's best day walks are the ascent of El Torreón (1654m), the highest peak in Cádiz province; the route from Grazalema to Benamahoma via Spain's best-preserved *pinsapar* (woodland of the rare and beautiful Spanish fir); and the trip into the Garganta Verde, a deep ravine south of Zahara de la Sierra, with a large colony of griffon vultures. All these walks are within a 38-sq-km reserve area with restricted access, meaning that to do any of them you must obtain a (free) permit from the El Bosque visitors centre (p729). You can call or visit El Bosque up to 15 days in advance for this and, if you wish, they will fax permits to be collected at the Zahara information office or Grazalema tourist office. Staff at any of these offices may not speak anything other than Spanish. It's normally only necessary to book ahead for walking on a weekend or public holiday. Authorised local guide companies such as Horizon (above) and Al-qutun (opposite) will guide you on these walks, but you can also do them on your own with a decent map and map-reading skills. Do-it-yourselfers should obtain a decent map such as Editorial Alpina's *Sierra de Grazalema* (1:25,000), which is available locally and includes a walking guide booklet in English and Spanish. A guide from an authorised company is obligatory when embarking on the Pinsapar walk in July, August and September, when fire risk is high, and the Torreón route is closed in these months.

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 was terminated in a few hours one day in 1805 by a British fleet under Admiral Nelson. Wonderful beaches stretch either side of Cabo de Trafalgar. Towards the eastern end of Los Caños, the main street, Avenida Trafalgar, is met by the road from Barbate.

SLEEPING

Hostal Minigolf (☎ 956 43 70 83; Avenida de Trafalgar 251; s/d €45/50; Ⓟ a) 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.hostalmardefrente.com; Avenida Trafalgar 3; s/d incl breakfast €48/77, r with sea view €102; ⓓ closed Dec-Feb; Ⓟ a) 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 hotel.com; Avenida Trafalgar 102; s/d incl breakfast €68/84; ⓓ closed Oct-late Mar; Ⓟ s) 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 €92-99, q €118-132; Ⓟ) This eccentric 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 'Apartamentos y Bungalows' sign, go 500m, then turn right at the 'Fuente del Madroño' sign.

EATING

Bar Saboy (Carril de Mangueta, Zahora; set menú €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.

Bar-Restaurante El Caña (☎ 956 43 73 98; Avenida Trafalgar s/n; mains €13; ⓓ Apr-Sep) This has a super position atop the small cliff above Los Caños beach. Lots of fish and seafood.

Sajorami (☎ 956 43 70 72; Playa Zahora; mains €10-16; ✓) Unbeatable sea views, stylish building and excellent Spanish cuisine with international, vegetarian and Moroccan additions.

Restaurante Trafalgar (☎ 956 43 71 21; Avenida Trafalgar 86; www.elfrafalgar.com; mains €12-18; ⓓ Apr-Sep) A high-standard restaurant that has a summer patio, serving creative Mediterranean cuisine. Internet facilities out the back.

DRINKING

In the summer season, good bars include **Los Castillejos** at the eastern end of the village and **Café-Bar Ketama** in the middle. Open year-round are super-relaxed **Las Dunas** on the road out to Cabo de Trafalgar (with music and busy pool table) and **La Pequeña Lulu** (www.lapequenalulu.com; Avenida Trafalgar s/n), a cosy French-run café/bar at the far eastern end of the village, with funky décor and often live music, even some jammin'.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Monday to Friday, there are two Comes buses to/from Cádiz (€5, 1½ hours), and three to/from Barbate (€1, 15 minutes), 12km east of Los Caños, which has up to 13 buses a day to/from Cádiz (€5.50, 50 minutes) and 10 buses to Vejer de la Frontera (€1.10, 10 minutes). There may be extra services from Seville and 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/car €6.50/5.50/4) Good treed camping ground fronting the beach at the southern end of Zahara.

Hotel Almadraba (☎ 956 43 92 74; www.hotelesalmadraba.com; Calle María Luisa 13; s/d €45/73; ⓓ closed Nov; Ⓟ a) This friendly hotel has just 11 simple but attractive rooms with TV, bathroom, winter heating and a popular restaurant.

Hotel Doña Lola (☎ 956 43 90 09; Plaza Thompson 1; s €100, d €130-50; Ⓟ a s) 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.hotelgransol.com; Avenida de la Playa s/n; s/d €102/116, d with sea view €121, all incl breakfast; Ⓟ a s) 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 Doña Lola, and most offer similar *Andaluz* fare.

Restaurante La Jabega (☎ 956 43 04 92; Calle Tomollo 7; raciones €7-8, mains €12-25) Fronting the sands, the Jabega is acclaimed for its fishballs and its rice dish with giant *carabineros* prawns.

ENTERTAINMENT

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

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Comes runs four buses daily to and from Cádiz (€6.50, two hours) via Barbate, and one Monday to Friday to/from Tarifa (€3.50, 45 minutes). There are more buses from mid-June to September.

Bolonia

pop 125

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 **Baelo Claudia** (☎ 956 68 85 30; adult/EU citizen €1.50/free; ⓓ 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 Baelo Claudia famous in the Roman world: salted fish and *garum*, a prized condiment made from fish entrails. You can walk up the big sand dune at the far end of the beach, or out to Punta Camarinal, the headland protecting the west end of the bay.

The hilly 7km side road to Bolonia heads west off the N340, 15km from Tarifa. You can walk an 8km route along the coast to Bolonia from Ensenada de Valdevaqueros (p735) via Punta Paloma.

SLEEPING & EATING

At least these three *hostales* open year-round (more open seasonally).

Hostal Lola (☎ 956 68 85 36; www.hostalola.com; El Lenticilal 26; r with shared bathroom €45, with bathroom €55; Ⓟ) The pretty garden is flower-filled and the rooms are simple but attractive. There's a little Moroccan-inspired sitting area too. Follow the signs on giant surfboards to find it.

Apartamentos Ana (☎ 956 68 85 50; apt for 2-6 €60-70; Ⓟ) Ana's provides new, well-fitted, good-value one- and two-bedroom apartments, though they're not oriented towards the ocean. Look for a little cul-de-sac just beyond the Hostal Lola turning.

La Hormiga Voladora (☎ 956 68 85 62; El Lenticilal 15; d €57-69, apt for 2/3/4 €85/95/105; Ⓟ) Extending back from the seafloor, the 'Flying Ant' is a warren of carefully decorated and comfortable rooms and apartments set around various courtyards.

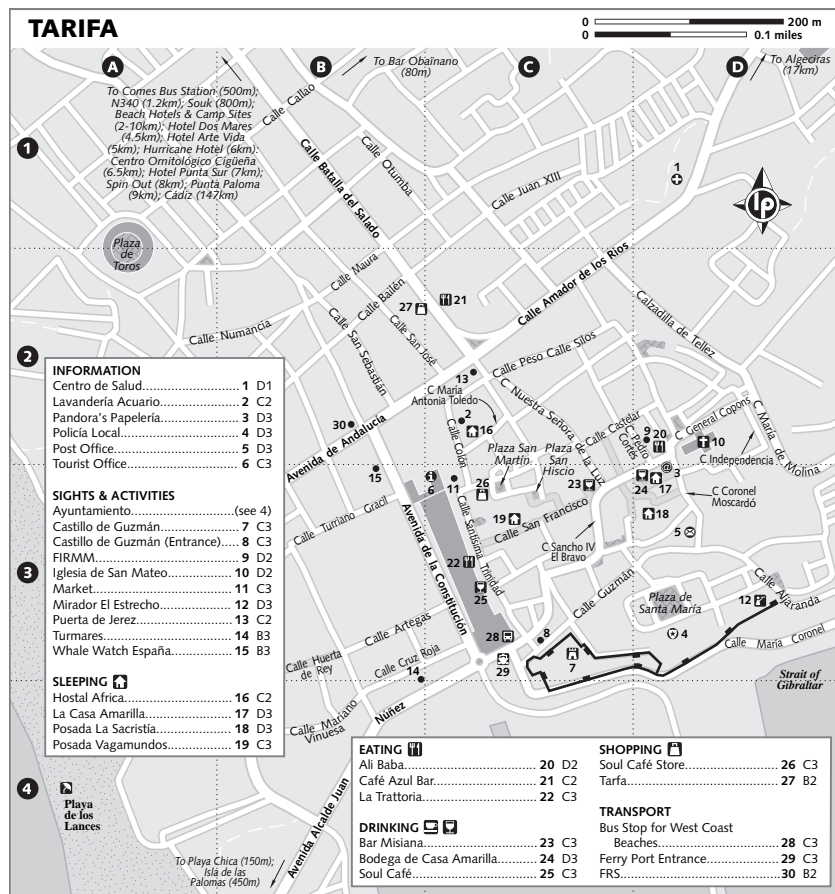
Bar Restaurante Las Rejas (salad €6, paella per person €11; ⓓ year-round) The fish and seafood here are terrific and the waiting staff suggest the day's top options.

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 kite-surfing 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, arty, 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 blessedly still.

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.



Orientation

Two roads head into Tarifa from the N340. The one from the northwest becomes Calle Batalla del Salado, ending at Avenida de Andalucía, where the Puerta de Jerez leads through the walls into the old town. The one from the northeast becomes Calle Amador de los Ríos, meeting Calle Batalla del Salado in front of the Puerta de Jerez. The main street of the old town is Calle Sancho IV El Bravo. To the southwest protrudes the Isla de las Palomas, a military-occupied promontory that is the southernmost point of continental Europe.

Information

Centro de Salud (Health Centre; % 956 68 15 15/35; Calle Amador de los Ríos)

Lavandería Acuario (Calle Colón 14; wash per 4kg €4, wash, dry & fold €7-8; h 10.30am-2pm & 6-8pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-3pm Sat)

Pandora's Papelería (Calle Sancho IV El Bravo; internet per hr €3; h 10am-2pm & 5-9pm)

Policía Local (% 956 61 41 86; Ayuntamiento, Plaza de Santa María)

Post office (Calle Coronel Moscardó 9)

Tourist office (% 956 68 09 93; www.tarifaweb.com; Paseo de la Alameda; h 10.30am-2pm & 4-6pm, 6-8pm Jun-mid-Sep, Mon-Fri)

Old Town

The Mudéjar **Puerta de Jerez** was built after the Reconquista. Look in at the bustling **market** (Calle Colón) before wending your way to the mainly 15th-century **Iglesia de San Mateo** at the

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 14km 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 Chica** is sheltered but extremely small. From here the spectacular **Playa de los Lances** stretches 10km 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, 10km 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 kites 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; % 956 68 90 90; Cortijo Valdevaqueros % 619 340913) 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 Dos Mares) and **Club Hípica** (% 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.

TOP 10 ANDALUCIAN BEACHES

- Ensenada de Valdevaqueros (left)
- Bolonia (p733)
- Zahara de los Atunes (p732)
- Playa del Playazo (p805)
- Cuesta de Maneli (p713)
- Cabo de Trafalgar (p732)
- Calas del Barronal (p805)
- Playa de la Victoria (p718)
- Agua Amarga (p805)
- Isla Cristina (p713)

WHALE-WATCHING

At least three groups run two- to three-hour boat trips to track and watch dolphins and whales (most charge €30/20 for over/under 14 years) in the Strait of Gibraltar (or the Bahía de Algeciras, if the strait is too rough). You're highly likely to see dolphins at least.

FIRMM (% 956 62 70 08; www.firrm.org; Calle Pedro Cortés 4) 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 €27/14, killer-whale-watching €40/20) Has the largest boat (with glass bottom).

Whale Watch España (% 956 62 70 18; www.whalewatchtarifa.org in Spanish; Avenida de la Constitución 6)

BIRD-WATCHING

When the levante is blowing or there's little wind, the Tarifa area, including the spectacular Mirador del Estrecho lookout point, 7km east on the N340, is a great spot for watching bird migrations across the Strait of Gibraltar. You can visit the **Centro Ornitológico Cigu'eña** (% 639 895350; cocn.tarifa.com; N340 Km7.5; h 5-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), a bird-watching station 4km 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 Africa (% 956 68 02 20; hostal_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 Moroccan features.

Posada Vagamundos (% 956 68 13 13; Calle San Francisco 18; www.posadavagamundos.com; s/d incl breakfast €60/80, ste €85; j) 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.campingsdetarifa.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.artevidahotel.com; N340 Km79.3; s/d incl breakfast €110/130; p) 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 Dos Mares (% 956 68 40 35; www.dosmareshotel.com; d from €141, bungalow for 2 from €135, all incl breakfast; p a i s) On the beach, about 4.5km from Tarifa, Islamic-themed Dos Mares has a few 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; p a s) This hip Moroccan-style hotel, 6km from town, is the place to go if you're feeling flush. Set in beachside semitropical gardens, it has large, comfy rooms, two pools and two restaurants. The buffet breakfast is probably the best you'll ever have.

Hotel Punta Sur (% 956 68 43 26; www.puntasurhotel.com; N340 Km77; s/d €117/166; p i s) With

a logo 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, Gaudíesque 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 (Calle Batalla del Salado; breakfast €3.50-5; 11 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 juices, bocadillos, healthy cakes.

Souk (% 956 62 70 65; Calle Mar Tirreno 46; mains €10-14; v) 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 €10.50-15) A good location, first-class food and efficient service make this one of the best Italian eateries in town.

Miramar (% 956 68 52 46; Hotel Arte-Vida, N340 Km79.3; mains €8-17) Most of the hotels and *hostales* up the coast outside town have restaurants. The Miramar's chefs whip up a range of tasty pasta and meat dishes plus fresh local fish and seafood, and some unique salads – and the expansive beach and ocean views double your enjoyment.

Drinking

Soul Café (Calle Santísima Trinidad 9) This hip, popular bar is run by travel-loving Italians. You may hear guest DJs from Milan play their stuff. Come after 11pm but not in winter, when the owners are travelling.

Bodega de Casa Amarilla (Calle Sancho IV El Bravo 9) A convivial typically Andalusian bar-restaurant that sometimes has live flamenco.

Bar Obainano (Calle Braille 27) This place serves fresh juices and exotic cocktails, which are accompanied by a cheerful background beat.

Bar Misiana (Hotel Misiana, Calle Sancho IV El Bravo) One of *the* places to be seen in Tarifa, this bar's décor is always eye-catching. Come for cocktails, juices, shakes and to dance.

SHOPPING TARIFA

Tarifa's a great place to shop, or window shop if you can't afford the prices. Stroll along **Calle Batalla del 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.

A few stores sell groovy homewares and even furniture. **Tarfa** (Calle Batalla del Salado 9) is excellent for gifts or that something special for yourself or your home. Some new warehouses on the N340 stock anything from thatch-roofed Balinese platform shelters (€6000) to glittering cushion covers and chair-shaped hammocks.

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.

BUS

Comes (% 902 1992 08, 956 68 40 38; Calle Batalla del Salado) runs five or more buses daily to Cádiz (€8, 1½ 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 Comes bus station, where a timetable and prices should be posted.

ALGECIRAS

pop 102,000

Algeciras, the major port linking Spain with Africa, is also an industrial town, a big fishing port and a centre for drug smuggling. If you have time to kill here, wander through the old town up to the palm-fringed main square, **Plaza Alta**, flanked by two old churches. Keep your wits about you in the port, bus station and market.

Algeciras was taken by Alfonso XI from the Merenids of Morocco in 1344, but later razed by Mohammed V of Granada. In 1704

it was repopulated by many of those who left Gibraltar after it was taken by the British.

During summer the port is hectic, as hundreds of thousands of Moroccans working in Europe return home for summer holidays.

Information

If you're going to arrive in Morocco at night, take some dirham with you. Exchange rates for buying dirham in Algeciras are best at banks. There are banks and ATMs on Avenida Virgen del Carmen and around Plaza Alta, plus a couple of ATMs inside the port.

Hospital Punta de Europa (% 956 02 50 50; Carretera de Getares s/n) 3km west of the centre.

Left Luggage (Estación Marítima; per item €2-3; 11 7am-9-30pm) Bags must be secured. There are lockers (€3) nearby and also luggage storage at the bus station.

Policía Nacional (% 956 66 04 00; Avenida de las Fuerzas Armadas 6)

Tourist office (% 956 57 26 36; Calle Juan de la Cierva s/n; 11 9am-2pm Mon-Fri; 3.30-7pm Tue-Fri) English-speaking; has a message board.

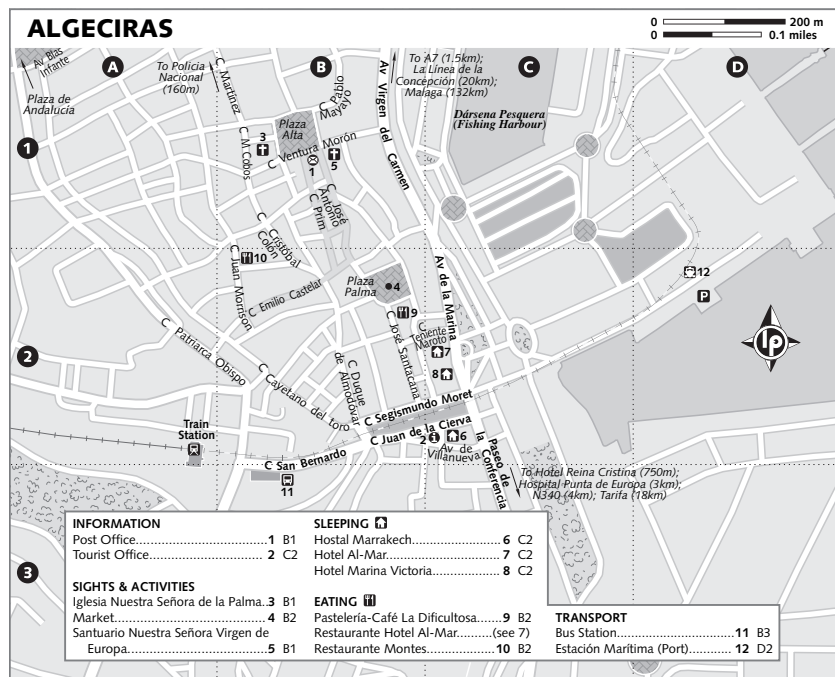
Sleeping

Hostal Marrakech (% 956 57 34 74; Calle Juan de la Cierva 5; s/d €20/30) This is a clean, secure and thoughtfully decorated place run by a helpful Moroccan family.

Hotel Marina Victoria (% 956 63 28 65; Avenida de la Marina 7; s/d €32/50; a) 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 €51/100; p a) 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;



s/d €72/107; p a s) For olde-worlde ambience head south from the port to this long-running, colonial-style hotel with two swimming pools and tropical gardens.

Eating

Pastelería-Café La Dificultosa (Calle José Santacana; coffee, toast & juice €4) A good spot for breakfast or a coffee break, which is located near the market.

Restaurante Montes (% 956 65 42 07; Calle Juan Morrison 27; menú €8, mains €8-18) The Montes has a hugely popular lunch *menú* of three courses, bread and wine, and a long list of tempting à la carte seafood.

Restaurante Hotel Al-Mar (% 956 65 46 61; Avenida de la Marina 2-3; breakfast/lunch buffet €6/11, mains €14-22) Top-floor, slightly refined hotel restaurant with big glass windows and sweeping views of the port, offering daily specials and regional dishes.

Getting There & Away

BOAT

Companies such as **Trasmediterránea** (% 956 58 34 00, 902 45 46 45; www.trasmediterranea.es) and **EuroFerry** (% 956 65 11 78; www.euroferry.com) operate frequent daily passenger and vehicle ferries to/from

Tangier, Morocco (2½-hour ferry passenger/car €27/91; 1¼-hour fast ferry passenger/car €32/98) and Ceuta, the Spanish enclave on the Moroccan coast (35-minute fast ferry passenger/car €25/81). **Buquebus** (% 902 41 42 42) operates a similar Ceuta service at least six times daily. From mid-June to September there are ferries almost round the clock to cater for the Moroccan holiday migration – you may have to queue for up to three hours. Buy your ticket in the port or at the agencies on Avenida de la Marina: prices are the same everywhere.

BUS

The bus station is on Calle San Bernardo. **Comes** (% 956 65 34 56) has buses for La Línea (€1.80, 30 minutes) every half-hour (every 45 minutes on weekends). Other daily buses include up to 13 each to Tarifa (€1.70, 30 minutes) and Cádiz (€9.80, 2½ hours), four to Seville (€15, 3½ hours), and one Monday to Friday to Ronda (€9, two to three hours). **Daibus** (% 956 65 34 56, 956 65 22 00) runs four daily buses to Madrid (€26, eight to nine hours), starting from the port then calling at the bus station. **Portillo** (% 902 14 31 44) operates at

least 11 direct buses daily to Málaga (€10, 1¾ hours) and four to Granada (€19, 3½ hours). Several more Málaga buses (€10.50, three hours) stop at towns along the Costa del Sol.

Bacoma/ALSA/Enatcar (% 902 42 22 42), inside the port, runs up to five services daily up Spain's Mediterranean coast, plus buses to Portugal, France, Germany and Holland.

TRAIN

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, 1¾ hours) and Bobadilla (€10.50 to €21, 2¾ hours), where you can change for Málaga, Córdoba or Seville.

LA LÍNEA DE LA CONCEPCIÓN

pop 64,000

La Línea, 20km east of Algeciras, is the unavoidable 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; h 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) faces the border.

Buses run about every 30 minutes to/from Algeciras (€1.80, 30 minutes). Others go to Málaga (€10.50, 2½ hours, three to five daily), Tarifa (€3.50, 45 minutes, six daily), Cádiz (€12, 2½ 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 ridge 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.

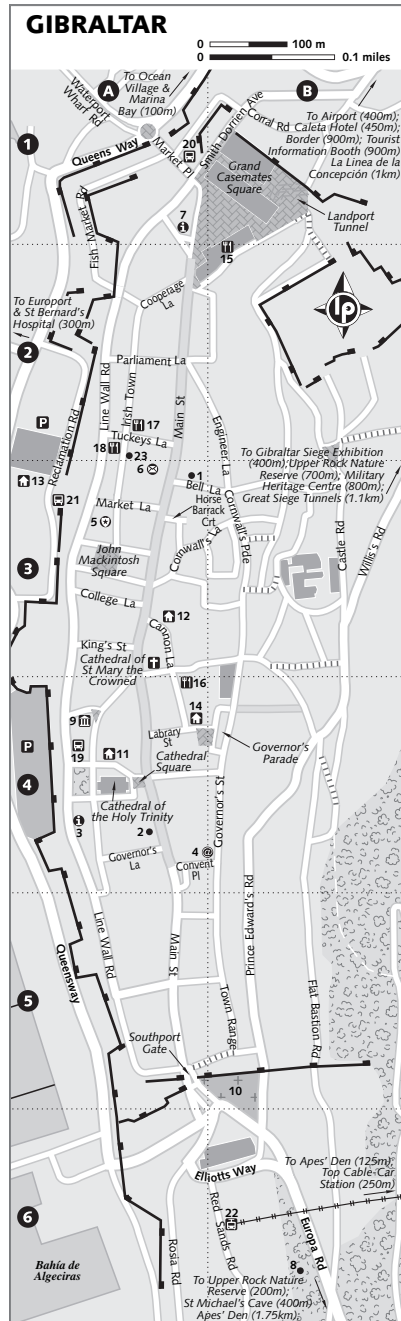
Gibraltarians (77% of the population) speak both English and Spanish and, often, a curious mix of the two. Signs are in English. Gibraltar's terrific agenda for visitors includes exploring its natural world, its military installations, and its quirky town.

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 sore point between Britain and Spain: 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 the 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 September 2006, a three-way deal was signed by Spain, Gibraltar and Britain relating to telecommunications on the Rock, Gibraltar airport and other issues, but not



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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 Línea de la Concepción (p739). Just south of the border, the road crosses Gibraltar airport runway. Gibraltar's town and harbours lie along the Rock's less steep western side, facing Bahía de Algeiras (Bay of Gibraltar). From Casemates Sq, just inside Grand Casemates Gate, Main St, with all the shops, runs south for about 1km.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Bell Books (% 76707; 11 Bell Lane)
Gibraltar Bookshop (% 71894; 300 Main St)

ELECTRICITY

Electric current is the same as in Britain: 220V or 240V, with plugs of three flat pins.

EMERGENCY

Emergency (% 199) For police or ambulance.
Police station (120 Irish Town)

INTERNET ACCESS

PC Clinic & Computer Centre (% 49991; 17 Convent Place; h 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri; per hr £3)

MEDICAL SERVICES

St Bernard's Hospital (% 79700; Europort) 24-hour emergency facilities.

MONEY

The currencies are the Gibraltar pound (£) and pound sterling, which are interchangeable. You can spend euros (except in pay phones and post offices) but conversion rates are poor. Change unspent Gibraltar currency before leaving. Banks are generally open from 9am to 3.30pm weekdays. There are several on Main St.

POST

Post office (104 Main St; h 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri & 10am-1pm Sat, closes at 2.15pm Mon-Fri mid-Jun-mid-Sep)

TELEPHONE

To phone Gibraltar from Spain, precede the five-digit local number with the code % 9567; from other countries, dial the international access code, then the Gibraltar country code (% 350) and local number. To phone Spain from Gibraltar, just dial the nine-digit Spanish number.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Gibraltar has several helpful tourist offices.
Gibraltar Tourist Board (% 45000, 74950; www.gibraltar.gov.uk; Duke of Kent House, Cathedral Sq; h 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri)
Information booth (% 73026; airport; h Mon-Fri, mornings only)
Information booth (% 50762; Customs House, Frontier; h 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat)
Tourist office (% 74982; Grand Casemates Sq; h 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat, to 1pm Sun & holidays)

VISAS & DOCUMENTS

To enter Gibraltar, you need a passport or EU national identity card. EU, USA, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand and South African

passport-holders are among those who do not need visas for Gibraltar. For further information contact Gibraltar's **Immigration Department** (% 51725).

Sights & Activities

THE TOWN

Pedestrianised Main St has an emphatically British appearance, but the Spanish lilt in the air is a reminder that this is still Mediterranean Europe. Most Spanish and Islamic buildings on Gibraltar were destroyed in 18th-century sieges, but the Rock bristles with British fortifications, gates and gun emplacements.

The **Gibraltar Museum** (Bomb House Lane; adult/under 12yr £2/1; h 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) contains good historical, architectural and military displays, among which are a well-preserved Muslim bathhouse and a copy of a 100,000-year-old female Neanderthal skull, found on Gibraltar in 1848. The **Trafalgar Cemetery** (Prince Edward's Rd; h 9am-7pm) gives a more poignant history lesson with its graves of British sailors, who died at Gibraltar after the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. The lush **Alameda Botanic Gardens** (Europa Rd; admission free; h 8am-sunset) are a short distance south.

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; h 9.30am-7pm), with spectacular views and several interesting spots to visit. A great way to get up here is by the cable car (p743). During a westerly wind, the Rock is often a fine spot for observing migrations of birds, especially raptors and storks, between Africa and Europe. January to early June is the time for northbound migrations, and late July to early November for southbound migrations. White storks sometimes congregate in flocks of 3000 to cross the strait.

The Rock's most famous inhabitants are its colony of Barbary macaques, the only wild primates in Europe (probably introduced from North Africa in the 18th century). Some of these hang around the **Apes' Den**, near the middle cable-car station; others lurk at the top cable-car station or the Great Siege Tunnels.

About 20 minutes' walk south down St Michael's Rd from the top cable-car station (or 20 minutes up from the Apes' Den), **St Michael's Cave** is a big natural grotto that was

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-to-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 Bahía 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 contact. 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 (☎ 51711; www.cannon.hotel.gi; 9 Cannon Lane; s/d without bathroom £25.50/37.50, d with bathroom £46, all incl breakfast) This is a small, attractive hotel, right in the main shopping area.

Herald Travel Lettings (☎ 712350; www.gibraltar.gi/herald; Ste No 1E Ocean Heights; apt £40-75; ☎) Good apartments from studios to two-bedroom places in a block just a minute or two from Casemates Sq.

Bristol Hotel (☎ 76800; www.gibraltar.gi/bristol.hotel; 10 Cathedral Sq; s/d £49/64, with sea view £53/69; ☎ a s) The rooms are recently refurbished and the hotel has an attractive walled garden and a swimming pool.

Caleta Hotel (☎ 76501; www.caletahotel.gi; Sir Herbert Miles Rd; d without/with sea view £125/140; ☎ a i s) This has a wonderful location overlooking Catalan Bay, on the east side of the Rock, five minutes from town. Its cascading terraces provide panoramic sea views, and a host of luxurious gym and spa facilities.

O'Callaghan Elliott Hotel (☎ 70500; www.ocallaghanhotels.com; 2 Governor's Parade; d £230-260, ste £300-600;

☎ a i s) On a leafy square, the Elliott has sumptuous rooms, fittings and furnishings, a gym and rooftop pool plus a gorgeous rooftop restaurant.

Eating

Café Solo (☎ 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 (☎ 77288; 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 (☎ 79791; 78B Irish Town; mains £3.50-6; ☎) Most of Gibraltar's pubs serve British pub meals. The Clipper is one of the best and busiest, all varnished wood with full-on foody and a cracking Sunday roast. Vegetarians should go for the Greek salad wrap.

House of Sacarello (☎ 70625; 57 Irish Town; daily specials £7-11.50; ☎ closed Sun; ☎) 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 (☎ 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 (☎ 79300; www.gbairways.com) flies daily to/from London Gatwick and Heathrow. **Monarch Airlines** (☎ 47477; www.flymonarch.com) flies daily to/from London Luton and Manchester.

BOAT

FRS (☎ 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** (☎ 78305; 67 Irish Town).

BUS

There are no regular buses to Gibraltar, but La Línea 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 Línea 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 city centre.

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; ☎ 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, recently enhanced by a new up-to-the-minute Picasso museum. Inland, the fascinating old towns of Ronda and Antequera ooze history and you'll find wild hill country dotted with picturesque white villages. Málaga has a gorgeous coastline in the east where cliffs drop to pretty coves and bays. Ever more prosperous thanks to unstoppable construction, the

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 Pablo Picasso is dynamising the city. Málaga also has a newish 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 bombed 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 (Map p744; % 951 03 01 00; 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; 10am–1am Mon–Sat, 11am–11pm Sun)

Municipal tourist office (www.malagaturismo.com in Spanish) Plaza de la Marina (Map p744; % 952 12 20 20; 9am–7pm Mon–Fri Apr–Oct, to 6pm Mon–Fri Nov–Mar, 10am–6pm Sat & Sun) Casita del Jardinero (Map p744; % 952 13 47 31; Avenida de Cervantes 1; same hr) Also information booths at the bus station and around town.

Policía Local (Map p744; % 952 12 65 00; Avenida de la Rosaleda 19)

Post office (Map p744; Avenida de Andalucía 1;

8.30am–8.30pm Mon–Fri, to 2pm Sat)

Regional tourist office (Map p746; % 951 30 89 11; Pasaje de Chinitas 4; www.andalucia.org; 9am–7.30pm Mon–Fri, 10am–7pm Sat, to 2pm Sun) Another branch at the airport.

Sights

MUSEO PICASSO MÁLAGA

The new holy grail of Málaga's tourist scene is tucked away on a pedestrian street in what was medieval Málaga's *judería*. The **Museo Picasso Málaga** (Map p746; % 902 44 33 77; www.museopicassomalaga.org; Palacio de Buenavista, Calle San Agustín 8; permanent collection €6, temporary exhibition €4.50, combined ticket €8, seniors & under-26 students half price; 10am–8pm Tue–Thu & Sun, to 9pm Fri & Sat) has 204 Picasso works, donated and lent by his daughter-in-law Christine Ruiz-Picasso and grandson Bernard Ruiz-Picasso, and also stages high-quality temporary exhibitions on Picasso themes. The Picasso paintings, drawings, engravings, sculptures and ceramics on show (many never previously on public display) span almost every phase and influence of the artist's colourful career – blue period, cubism, surrealism and more. For many the most inspiring will be some of the portraits, such as *Olga Kokhlova with Mantilla*, done in a period when Picasso was

looking to return to more traditional forms after the experiments of cubism. The museum is housed in the 16th-century Palacio de Buenavista, sensationally restored at a cost of €66 million. Picasso was born in Málaga in 1881 but moved to northern Spain with his family when he was nine, and only ever returned for holidays between 1891 and 1900. But he always retained a strong affection for his native region.

CATHEDRAL

Málaga's **cathedral** (Map p746; % 952 21 59 17; Calle Molina Lario, entrance Calle Císter; admission €3.50; 10am–6pm Mon–Sat, closed holidays) was begun in the 16th century, on the former site of 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 Andalusian sculptor, Pedro de Mena.

ALCAZABA

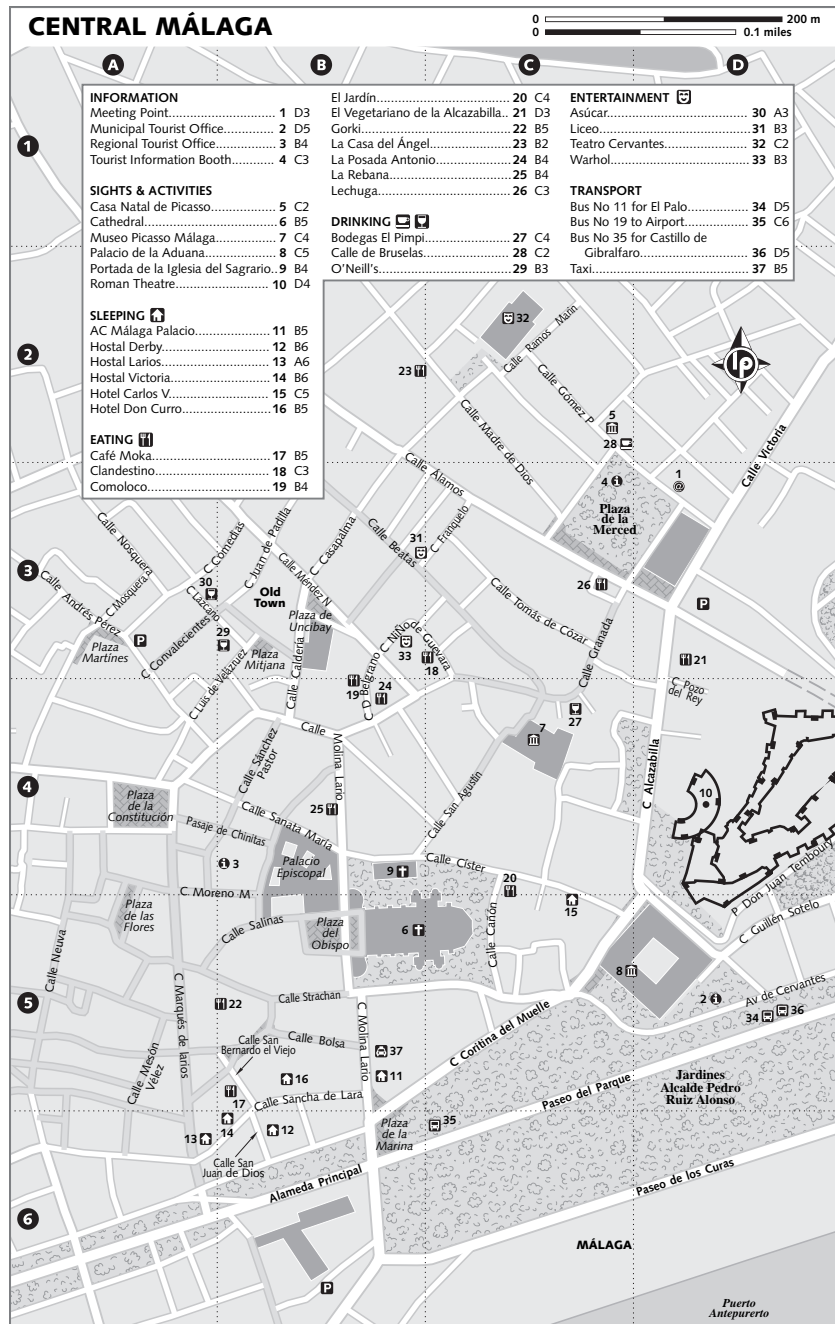
At the lower, western end of the Gibralfaro hill, the **Alcazaba** (Map p744; % 952 22 51 06; Calle Alcazabilla; admission €2, combined ticket incl Castillo de Gibralfaro €3.20; 9.30am–8pm Tue–Sun Apr–Sep, 8.30am–7pm Tue–Sun Oct–Mar; was the palace-fortress of Málaga's Muslim governors. Dating from 1057, 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 Sotelo brings you out in the heart of the Alcazaba.

Below the Alcazaba is a Roman theatre.

CASTILLO DE GIBRALFARO

Above the Alcazaba rises the older **Gibralfaro Castle** (Map p744; % 952 22 72 30; admission €2; 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; 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; 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.museoartepopulares.com; Pasillo de Santa Isabel 10; adult/under 16yr €2/free; 10am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1.30pm 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 (*barros*) of characters from Málaga folklore.

Palacio de la Aduana (Map p746; Paseo del Parque; admission free; 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; 9.30am-5.30pm Oct-Mar, 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 11; www.uma.es/estudios/extranj/extranjeros.htm; Avenida de Andalucía 24) also runs very popular courses.

Tours

To pick up the child-friendly, open-topped **MalagaTour bus** (Map p744; % 902 10 10 81; www.malaga-tour.com; adult/child €15/750; 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 (*tronos*) are large and heavy, each needing up to 150 bearers. Every night from Palm Sunday to Good Friday, six or seven *tronos* 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 *feria* 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 Barroso 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 90; 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.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Carlos V (Map p746; % 952 21 51 20; carlosv@spa.es; Calle Cister 10; s €32-50, d €67; a) Close to the cathedral and Picasso museum, the Carlos V is enduringly popular. It's clean, if basic and dark.

Hostal Victoria (Map p746; % 952 22 42 24; hostalvictoria@hostalvictoria.net; Calle Sancho de Lara 3; s/d €52/75; a) Popular, central and friendly, the Victoria provides clean, comfortable rooms with bathtubs.

El Riad Andaluz (Map p744; % 952 21 36 40; www.eliadandaluz.com; Calle Hinestraza 24; s/d 70/90; a) At last a characterful, slightly exotic place to stay in Málaga. This French-run guesthouse has eight rooms with Moroccan décor set around an atmospheric patio.

Hotel Don Curro (Map p746; % 952 22 72 00; www.hotelondoncurro.com; Calle Sancho de Lara 7; s/d €74/104; p a) The busy Don Curro is efficient, comfortable and central, with well-appointed, spacious rooms.

TOP END

AC Málaga Palacio (Map p746; % 952 21 51 85; www.ac-hotels.com; Calle Cortina del Muelle 1; d €137; p a s) This 15-storey, sleek hotel has sensational views over the busy seafront. Smart, modern design and excellent facilities make it the best of Málaga's luxury options.

Parador Málaga Gibralfaro (Map p744; % 952 22 19 02; www.parador.es; s/d €128/162; p a s) With an unbeatable location up on the pine-forested Gibralfaro hill, Málaga's *parador* provides spectacular views and an excellent terrace restaurant.

Eating**TAPAS**

Antigua Casa de Guardia (Map p744; % 952 21 46 80; Alameda Central 18; tapas €1-1.50) This venerable old tavern has been serving Málaga's sweet desert wines since 1840. Try the dark brown, sherry-like *seco* complemented by a plate of monster prawns.

Gorki (Map p746; % 952 22 14 66; Calle Strachan 6; platos combinados €6-16) A popular upmarket tapas bar with pavement tables and an interior full of wine-barrel tables and stools.

La Rebana (Map p746; Calle Molina Lario 5; tapas €3, raciones €5-8.50) A great, noisy and central tapas bar specialising in foies and cured meats. The dark wooden interior is inviting.

Lechuga (Map p746; Plaza de la Merced 1; tapas €2.50-3.60, raciones €8; v) In this calm retreat, vegetables reign supreme and the chef does wonderful things with them.

RESTAURANTS

Málaga's restaurants are well priced and of a good standard due to the largely local clientele. A speciality here is fish fried quickly in olive oil. *Fritura malagueña* consists of fried fish, anchovies and squid.

Café Moka (Map p746; % 952 21 40 02; Calle San Bernardo El Viejo 2; breakfast €3.50) Just off the Calle Larios, this busy little retro café caters to a mainly Spanish crowd.

Comoloco (Map p746; Calle Denis Belgrano 17; salads & pittas €4.50-5; h 1pm-1am) This place with huge windows onto the little street is packed out at lunchtime. The reason, tasty healthy food at a good price in a casual setting.

El Vegetariano de la Alcazabilla (Map p746; % 952 21 48 58; Calle Pozo del Rey 5; mains €9-10.50; h closed Sun; v) Laid-back veggie restaurant combining friendly service with good food.

El Jardín (Map p746; % 952 22 04 19; Calle Cañón 1; mains €12.50; h 9am-midnight Mon-Thu, to 2pm & 5pm-midnight Fri & Sat, 5pm-midnight Sun) Busy Viennese-style café next to the palm-filled gardens behind the cathedral. Great ambience but not outstanding food.

Clandestino (Map p746; % 952 21 93 90; Calle Niño de Guevara 3; mains €9-17; h 1pm-1am) A trendy joint serving up top-notch meals that fuse northern European and Latin cuisines, and hip, house beats played in the background set the mood.

Restaurante Antonio Martín (Map p744; % 952 22 73 98; Playa de la Malagueta; mains €13-24; h closed Sun Nov-Apr) Right on the beach and with a large terrace, Antonio Martín rustles up some of the best fish in town. Celebrities and matadors may be spotted here.

La Casa del Ángel (Map p746; % 952 60 87 50; Calle Madre de Dios 29; mains €14-23; h closed Mon) An extraordinary restaurant filled with the owners' considerable art collection. The cuisine is equally sumptuous: a combination of Andalusian, Arab and international tastes.

Drinking

On weekend nights, the web of narrow old streets north of Plaza de la Constitución comes alive. Look for bars around Plaza de la Merced, Plaza Mitjana and Plaza de Uncibay.

Bodegas El Pimpi (Map p746; % 952 22 89 90; Calle Granada 62; h 7pm-2am) A Málaga institution with a warren of rooms and mini-patios, El Pimpi attracts a fun-loving crowd with its sweet wine and thumping music.

Calle de Bruselas (Map p746; % 952 60 39 48; Plaza de la Merced 16; h 9am-2am) This is a retro Belgian

bar that woos a bohemian crowd. During the day it caters to the coffee scene with pavement tables, then at night the dark little bar comes to life.

O'Neill's (Map p746; % 952 60 14 60; Calle Luis de Velázquez 3; h noon-late) A spit-and-sawdust bar that plays a lot of U2.

Entertainment

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

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

Warhol (Map p746; Calle Niño de Guevara; h 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 dreadlocked DJs.

Asúcar (Map p746; cr Calles Convalescientes & Luzcano; h 9pm-late) Salsa fans need go no further. Casual salsa classes from 11pm Wednesday to Saturday.

Tetería El Harén (Map p744; Calle Andrés Pérez 3) A large teahouse that rambles over several floors with lots of private nooks. 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

Trasmediterránea (Map p744; % 952 06 12 18, 902 45 46 45; www.trasmediterranea.com; Estación Marítima, Local E1) 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 coasts and others 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; Explanada 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 arrivals hall, every 20 or 30 minutes, 6.35am to 11.45pm, stopping at Málaga-Renfe train station and the bus station en route. Going out to the airport, you can catch the bus at the western end of Paseo del Parque, and from outside the stations, about every half-hour from 6.30am to 11.30pm.

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

COSTA DEL SOL

Strewn along the seaboard 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

entertainment. The *costa* (coast) is also a haven for sport lovers, with around 40 golf clubs, several busy marinas, tennis courts, riding schools, swimming pools, gyms and beaches offering every imaginable water sport.

The resorts were once fishing villages, but there's little evidence of that now. The Costa del Sol was launched as a 1950s development drive for impoverished Andalucía and it has succeeded very well indeed, at the cost of turning a spectacular coastline into an eye-stinging, unbroken series of untidy, crowded townscapes. In July and August it's best to ring ahead for a room. Outside these peak months, many room rates drop sharply.

A convenient train service links Málaga's Centro, Renfe and Aeropuerto stations with Torremolinos (€1.30), Arroyo de la Miel (€1.30) and Fuengirola (€2.30). Buses from Málaga link all the resorts, and services to places such as Ronda, Cádiz, Seville and Granada go from the main resorts.

The AP7 Autopista del Sol motorway bypasses all the *costa* towns, with tolls amounting to €7.30 (€12 from June to September and during Semana Santa) for the full 80km. The old coast road, the N340, continues to carry plenty of traffic and you need to take care on it: don't let other drivers force you into going too fast, and watch out for animals and inebriated pedestrians.

Torremolinos

pop 45,000

'Torrie', which led the Costa del Sol's mass-tourism boom of the 1950s and '60s, is a concrete high-rise jungle designed to squeeze as many paying customers as possible into the smallest possible space. It spruced itself up somewhat in the 1990s and a pleasant sea-front walk, the Paseo Marítimo, now extends for nearly 7km and gives some cohesion and character to the resort. Torremolinos has a big gay scene.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

Torremolinos' main pedestrian artery is Calle San Miguel, running most of the 500m from Plaza Costa del Sol (on the main road through town) down to Playa del Bajondillo. Southwest of Playa del Bajondillo is Playa de la Carihuela, once the fishing quarter.

The **bus station** (952 38 24 19; Calle Hoyo) is northeast of Plaza Costa del Sol. Buses to

Marbella stop on Avenida Palma de Mallorca, 200m southwest of Plaza Costa del Sol. The **train station** (Avenida Jesús Santos Rein), is off Calle San Miguel.

Tourist office (952 37 95 12; www.ayto-torremolinos.org; Plaza Pablo Picasso; 9am-1.30pm Mon-Fri) In the town hall. There are also offices on **Playa Bajondillo** (952 37 19 09; 9am-1.30pm) and **Playa Carihuela** (952 37 29 56; 9am-1.30pm).

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Torrie's **beaches** are wider, longer and a slightly paler shade of grey-brown than most on the *costa*, and they get very crowded. The local attractions are mostly child-oriented. In the swish Puerto Deportivo (marina) at Benalmádena Costa, just southwest of Torremolinos, **Sea Life** (952 56 01 50; www.sealifeeurope.com; adult/child €11/9.50; 10am-10pm Jun, to midnight Jul-Sep, to 6pm Oct-May) is a good modern aquarium of mainly Mediterranean marine creatures, with organised games and shark feeding. **Tivoli World** (952 57 70 16; www.tivolico.es; Avenida de Tivoli; admission €6; 11am-8pm Sun Oct-Apr, 1-9pm May; 4-11pm Jun, 6pm-2am Jul-Sep), just five minutes' walk from Benalmádena-Arroyo de la Miel train station, is the biggest amusement park on the *costa*. The Supertivolino ticket (€10) gives unlimited access to more than 35 rides.

SLEEPING & EATING

A couple of dozen *hostales* and hotels are within a few minutes' walk of Torremolinos' train and bus stations. The tourist offices have lists.

Red Parrot (952 37 54 45; www.theredparrot.net; Avenida Los Manantiales 4; s/d €60/65; a s) Newly refurbished and central, the Red Parrot offers comfortable balconied rooms, around a patio, and it has a pool.

Hotel Miami (952 38 52 55; www.residencia-miami.com; Calle Aladino 14, Torremolinos; s/d €38/59; a s) A lovely villa amid tropical gardens, and only 100m from La Carihuela beach, this small hotel has tasteful rooms.

La Fonda Benalmádena (952 /fax 952 56 82 73; www.fondahotel.com; Calle Santo Domingo 7, Benalmádena Pueblo; s/d incl breakfast €60/86; p a i s) Charming La Fonda has large rooms built around Islamic-style patios with fountains, and an excellent, moderately priced restaurant.

Besides British breakfasts and beer, Torremolinos has no shortage of good seafood places, many of them lining the Paseo Marítimo in La Carihuela.

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 Palma de Mallorca 18) and **Palladium** (Avenida Palma 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 Nogalera**, the area close to Torremolinos train station. Check out the trendy **El Gato Lounge** (La Nogalera, 11am-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 Matías Sáenz de Tejada (where the bus station is) constitute what's left of the old town, with Plaza de la Constitución at 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; 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.carraeraentertainment.com; Urbanización El Chaparral; admission €7; 10pm-2am Sat Jul-Sep, 11.30am-4pm Sun Oct-Jun), Andalucía's leading horse-racing track with regular racing, is off the N340 at the southwestern end of Fuengirola.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hostal Italia (952 47 41 93; Calle de la Cruz 1; s/d €40/64; a) A friendly, clean and comfortable budget option, a couple of blocks from the beach.

Hotel El Puerto (952 47 01 00; www.hotel-elpuerto.com; Calle Marbella 34; s incl breakfast €75-104, d incl breakfast €88-134; a s) A towering three-star hotel on the beach with sea views and a rooftop pool.

Lizzaran (952 47 38 29; Avenida Jesús Santos Rein 1; raciones €4.50-11.50) A welcome Spanish relief from the overwhelming number of Chinese and Italian eateries. Tuck into salty sardine or ham *pinxos* (bread with toppings).

Restaurante Portofino (952 47 06 43; Paseo Marítimo 29; mains €12-17; 11am-11pm closed Mon) One of Fuengirola's better offerings, this restaurant has an international menu featuring a host of classic fish dishes.

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*. But it remains a strikingly pretty place and the **Casa Museo de Mijas** (952 59 03 80; Calle Málaga; admission free; 11am-2pm & 4-7pm Sep-Mar, afternoons 5-8pm Apr-Jun, 6-9pm 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, p752) 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 (www.marbella.es in Spanish; 11am-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat); Fontanilla (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** (Plaza de la Iglesia), begun in the 16th century, and the **Museo del Grabado Español Contemporáneo** (Museum of Contemporary Spanish Prints; 952 76 57 41; Calle Hospital Bazán

s/n; admission €2.50; 10am-2pm & 5.30-8.30pm Tue-Sat, evenings mid-Jun-mid-Sep 7-9pm) exhibiting work by Picasso, Joan Miró and Salvador Dalí, among others.

The charming **Museo Bonsai** (‰ 952 86 29 26; adult/child €3/1.50; 10am-1.30pm & 4-7pm, evenings Jul-Aug 5-8pm), devoted to the Japanese miniature-tree art, is in Parque de la Represa just northeast of the old town.

Avenida del Mar, leading down to the central **Playa de Venus**, a standard Costa del Sol beach, is peppered with crazed sculptures by Salvador Dalí. For a longer, broader stretch of sand walk to the 800m **Playa de la Fontanilla**, or **Playa de Casablanca** beyond Playa de la Fontanilla.

Puerto Banús, the Costa del Sol's flashiest marina, is 6km west of Marbella. Some truly enormous floating palaces are tied up here. Marbella's 'spend, be seen, have fun' ethos is at its purest here, with the constant parade of the glamorous, the would-be glamorous and the normal in front of the boutiques and busy restaurants strung along the waterfront.

There are good walks in the Sierra Blanca, starting from the Refugio de Juanar, a 17km drive north of 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 Andalucía'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 Ballena 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 Andalucía's Supreme Court. Up to 5000 Marbella homes could face demolition for having been built illegally.

SLEEPING

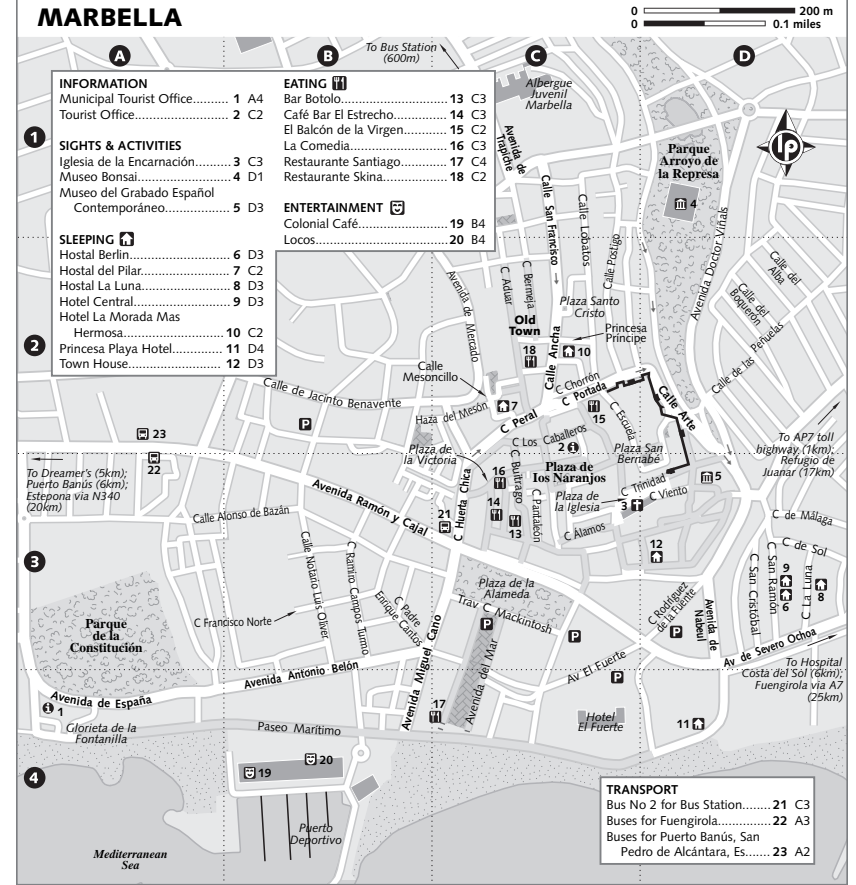
Hostal del Pilar (‰ 952 82 99 36; www.hostel-marbella.com; Calle Mesoncillo 4; s/d/tr without bathroom €25/35/50) This is a popular and backpacker-friendly British-run place off Calle Peral. There's a bar, a roof terrace for sunbathing, and breakfast.

Hostal La Luna (‰ 952 82 57 78; Calle La Luna 7; r €55; a) Calle La Luna is one of four pedestrian lanes dotted with decent *hostales* just east of the centre and close to the beach. Balconied rooms overlook an internal patio at this delightful spot.

Hostal Berlin (‰ 952 82 13 10; www.hostalberlin.com; Calle San Ramón 21; s/d/tr €40/60/70; p a i) A very friendly *hostal* with good facilities on a quiet street parallel to Calle La Luna. Breakfast is €2.50.

Hotel Central (‰ 952 90 24 42; www.hotelcentralmarbella.com; Calle San Ramón 15; r €78; a i) A cut above the neighbouring *hostales*, the Hotel Central enjoys the same quiet location but has 15 large, tasteful rooms with bathtubs.

Hotel La Morada Mas Hermosa (‰ 952 92 44 67; www.lamoradamashermosa.com; Calle Montenebros 16A; s/d €73/92; a i) A small, character-filled hotel on a tranquil, flowery, old-town street. The six quaintly decorated rooms are in major demand.



Town House (‰ 952 90 17 91; www.townhouse.nu; Calle Alderete 7; s/d incl breakfast €115/130; a) A superb, small hotel in a traditional town house, with nine rooms. Design is chic and there's a fabulous roof terrace.

Princesa Playa Hotel (‰ 952 82 09 44; www.princesa-playa.com; Avenida Duque de Ahumada s/n; s/€113-29, d €132-50; p a s) With super sea views, this modern apartment hotel represents great value for money on the seafont.

EATING

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

Café Bar El Estrecho (‰ 952 77 00 04; Calle San Lázaro; tapas €1.20) This is a good, busy old-town tapas bar.

Bar Bartolo (‰ 952 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 (‰ 952 77 60 52; Calle Virgen de los Dolores; mains €8-16; 1 closed Sun) One of the best restaurants near Plaza de los Naranjos, this has a lovely summer *terrace* overlooked by a 300-year-old grieving Virgin and a large bougainvillea. The fare is typical Andalusian.

Restaurante Santiago (‰ 952 77 00 78; Paseo Marítimo 5; mains €18-25; 1 closed Nov) Santiago is right on the seafont, offering top-class seafood in elegant surrounds.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

La Comedia (% 952 77 64 78; Calle San Lázaro; mains €15-25; 17 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.

Restaurante Skina (% 952 76 52 77; Calle Aduar 12; mains €20-7; 17 7-11.30pm Mon-Sat) A good bet for an imaginative meal, tiny Skina is great for outdoor dining on summer evenings. Try sole with lime and ginger or suckling pig with caramelized tomatoes.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

Marbella's revamped Puerto Deportivo (marina) now provides an entertaining after-dark scene without the sleaze. Head for **Colonial Café** (% 649 08 41 72; 17 6pm-3am or later), a hip disco-pub playing funky-house and reggae-dub, or **Locos** (17 1.30pm-4am or later), at the back of the marina, with an alternative feel. In the old town, Calle Pantaleón has a string of popular *cervecerías* (beer bars).

The busiest nightlife zone in the Marbella area is at Puerto Banús, where dozens of **pubs** and varied **dance clubs** cluster along a couple of narrow lanes behind the marina. The serious big-name clubs cluster around the 'Golden Mile' (the 5km road between Marbella and Puerto Banús). **Dreamer's** (% 952 81 20 80; www.dreamers-disco.com in Spanish; Carretera de Cádiz 175, Río Verde) gives house-lovers a chance to truly let their hair down, with its mix of tribal, vocal and light shows, bongo beats and an ever-changing menu of DJs.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Half-hourly buses to Fuengirola (€2.50, one hour), Puerto Banús (€1, 20 minutes) and Estepona (€2.40, one hour) have stops on Avenida Ricardo Soriano. Other services use the **bus station** (% 952 76 44 00; Avenida Trapiche), 1.2km from Plaza de los Naranjos. Bus 7 (€1) runs between the bus station and the central

Fuengirola/Estepona bus stop (Avenida Ricardo Soriano); returning to the bus station, take bus 2 from Avenida Ramón y Cajal.

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, **Selwo Aventura** (% 902 19 04 82; www.selwo.es; Carretera A7 Km162.5; admission €22, under 8yr €15; 17 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, with hundreds of varied routes of almost every grade of difficulty. Anyone can view the gorge by walking along the railway from the tiny El Chorro village (ask locally for directions).

Swiss-owned **Finca La Campana** (opposite), which is popular with adventure-lovers, offers climbing courses, climbing, caving, kayaking and mountain-bike trips, and bike rentals (€10 per day). One thrilling outing is its five-hour climbing trip along the Camino del Rey (King's Path), a crumbling concrete catwalk clinging to the gorge wall 100m above the river – worth every céntimo of the €90 (one to three people).

Near El Chorro is **Bobastro**, the hilltop redoubt of the 9th-century rebel, Omar ibn Hafsun, a sort of Islamic Robin Hood, who led a prolonged revolt against Cordoban rule. Ibn Hafsun at one stage controlled territory from Cartagena to the Strait of Gibraltar. From El Chorro village, follow the road up the far (western) side of the valley and after 3km take the signed Bobastro turning. Nearly 3km up here, an 'Iglesia Mozárabe' sign indicates

a 500m path to the remains of a remarkable little Mozarabic church cut from the rock. It's thought that Ibn Hafsun converted from Islam to Christianity (thus becoming a Mozarab) before his death in 917 and was buried here. When Córdoba finally conquered Bobastro in 927, the poor chap's remains were taken for grisly posthumous crucifixion outside Córdoba's Mezquita. At the top of the hill, 2.5km further up the road and with unbelievable views, are faint traces of Ibn Hafsun's rectangular Alcázar (fortress).

Sleeping & Eating

Pensión Estación (% 952 49 50 04; r without bathroom €25) At El Chorro station, this *pensión* has clean rooms, and its **Bar Isabel**, a renowned climbers' gathering place, serves *platos combinados* (€5).

Apartamentos La Garganta (% 952 49 50 00; www.lagarganta.com; 2/4-person apt €60/90; mains €10; p a s w) The best option in El Chorro, this converted flour mill has beautifully-decorated apartments and excellent food.

Finca La Campana (% 952 11 20 19; www.el-chorro.com; dm €10, d €24, 2-8-person apt €38-88; a s) More than just a great place to stay, this is a club of like-minded adrenaline junkies, with a cult following to show. During the climbing season (October to March) the Finca is very busy, so book ahead. To get there follow signs from behind Apartamentos La Garganta.

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 Serranía 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. It attracts its 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 Guadalquivir.

Information

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

Municipal tourist office (% 952 18 71 19; www

.turismoderonda.es; Paseo de Blas Infante; 17 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.

Regional tourist office (% 952 87 12 72; www.andalucia.org; Plaza de España 1; 17 9am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat)

Sights**PLAZA DE ESPAÑA & PUENTE NUEVO**

The majestic Puente Nuevo (New Bridge), spanning El Tajo from Plaza de España, the main square on the north side of the gorge, was completed in 1793. Folklore claims that its architect, Martín de Aldehuela, fell to his death while trying to engrave the date on the bridge's side. Chapter 10 of Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* tells how, early in the Spanish Civil War, the 'fascists' of a small town were clubbed and flailed by townspeople 'in the plaza on the top of the cliff above the river', then thrown over the cliff. The episode was based on real events in Ronda, though the perpetrators were from Málaga.

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 Santo 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; 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; 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat & Sun), now the town museum, built for Abomelic, 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; 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 Bandidero** (952 87 77 85; Calle de Arniñán 65; admission €3; 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; 952 950937; Calle San Miguel; admission €2; 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; 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.

Vertiginous 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

EnFrente Arte (952 87 90 88; www.enfrentearte.com; Calle Real 40; r incl breakfast & all drinks €82-106; a i s) Funky modern/oriental décor combined with a recreation room, pool, flowery patio, bar, sauna, film room and fantastic views of the Sierra de las Nieves make this a special place to stay.

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

Hotel Alavera de los Baños (952 87 91 43; www.andalucia.com/alavera; Hoyo San Miguel s/n; s/d incl breakfast €50/85; a s) 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.hotelsan gabriel.com; Calle José M Holgado 19; 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.hotelmontelirio.com; Calle Tenorio 8; s/d €100/150; a s) 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!

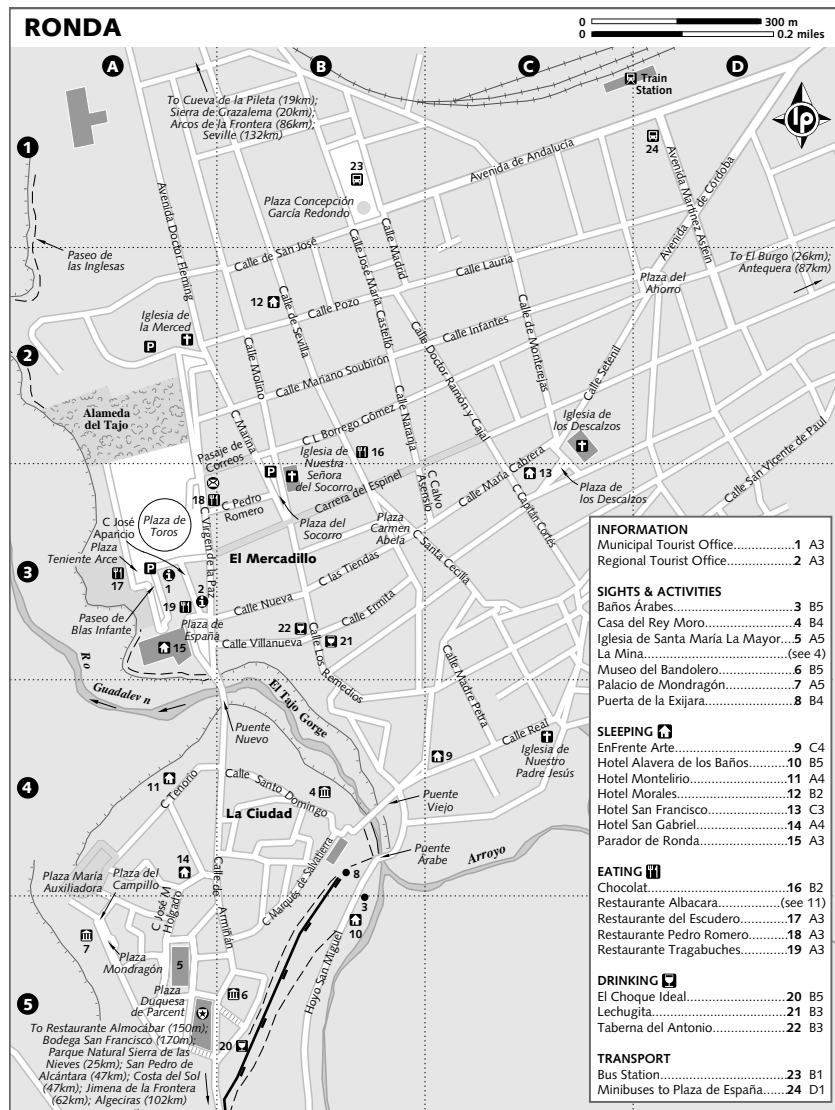
Eating

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 bogging array of cakes and pastries at this elegant café.

Bar Restaurant Almocábar (952 87 59 77; Calle Ruedo Alameda 5; tapas €1.50, mains €10-14; 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.



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Restaurante Albacara (☎ 952 16 11 84; Calle Tenorio 8; meals €15-19) Situated in the old stables of gorge-side Hotel Montelirio, the Albacara serves up creative meals.

Restaurante del Escudero (☎ 952 87 13 67; Paseo de Blas Infante 1; mains €17-21; 𠂇 closed Sun evening & Mon) Tragabuches' (see below) sister restaurant with more-reasonable prices, is set in an attractive garden.

Restaurante Tragabuches (☎ 952 19 02 91; Calle José Aparicio 1; mains €26-9; 𠂇 closed Mon) Sleek, modern Tragabuches is famous for its creativity. Try venison and sweet potatoes, or pork trotters with squid and sunflower seeds.

Drinking

El Choque Ideal (☎ 952 16 19 18; www.elchoqueideal.com; Calle Espíritu Santo 9; 𠂇 9.30am-3am Feb-Oct, 1pm-1am Nov-Jan) This funky café has fantastic views. It puts on a host of events from films out on the terrace to live bands.

A modest nightlife zone centres on Calle Los Remedios with the ever-popular **Taberna del Antonio** (Calle Los Remedios 22) and **Lechugueta** (Calle Los Remedios 25). Down in the Barrio San Francisco try the heaving **Bodega San Francisco** (Calle Ruedo Alameda).

Getting There & Away

BUS

From the **bus station** (Plaza Concepción García Redondo 2), **Los Amarillos** (☎ 952 18 70 61) goes to Málaga (€8.50, two hours, at least four daily), Grazalema (€2.30, 35 minutes, two daily) and Seville (€10, 2½ hours, three to six daily); **Comes** (☎ 952 87 1992) has three or four buses daily to Arcos de la Frontera (€7.50, two hours), Jerez (€10, 2½ hours) and Cádiz (€13, 2½ hours); and **Portillo** (☎ 952 87 22 62) runs to Málaga (€9.50, 1½ hours, at least three daily) via Marbella.

TRAIN

The **train station** (☎ 952 87 16 73; Avenida de Andalucía) is on the highly scenic Bobadilla-Algeciras line. Trains run to/from Algeciras (€6.50 to €16, 1¼ hours, six daily), Granada (€11.50, 2½ hours, three daily) via Antequera, Córdoba (€18 to €22, 2½ hours, two daily) and Málaga (€5.50, two hours, one daily except Sunday). For Seville, change at Bobadilla or Antequera.

Getting Around

Minibuses operate every 30 minutes to Plaza de España from Avenida Martínez Astein, across the road from the train station.

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.serraniaronda.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** (☎ 952 16 73 43; adult/student/child €6.50/3/2.50; 𠂇 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 Benaolán-Cortes de la Frontera road, 4km from Benaolán. 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 (☎ 952 16 02 32; www.hotel-lacasagrande.com; Calle Mesones 1; d €66; a i) In the likeable small rural town El Burgo, within striking distance of the park, is the charming Casa Grande, which has spacious, well-furnished rooms, a cosy sitting room and a restaurant.

ANTEQUERA

pop 39,000 / elevation 575m

Set on the edge of a plain 50km north of Málaga, with rugged mountains to the south and east, the sleepy provincial town of Antequera is a mass of red-tiled roofs punctuated by 30 church towers. Here hides one of the richest historical legacies in Andalucía. Antequera's 'golden age' was during the 15th and 16th centuries.

Orientation & Information

The old heart of Antequera is below the north western side of the hill, crowned by the Islamic Alcazaba. The main street, Calle Infante Don

Fernando, runs northwest from Plaza de San Sebastián.

Tourist office (☎ 952 70 25 05; www.turismoantequera.com; Plaza de San Sebastián 7; 𠂇 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun)

Sights

The main approach to the **Alcazaba** (Fortress) passes through the **Arco de los Gigantes**, built in 1585 and incorporating stones with Roman inscriptions. What remains of the Alcazaba affords great views. Just below it is the **Colegiata de Santa María la Mayor** (Plaza Santa María; 𠂇 10am-2pm & 4.30-6.30pm Tue-Fri, 10.30am-2pm Sat, 11.30am-2pm Sun), a 16th-century church with a beautiful Renaissance façade.

The pride of the **Museo Municipal** (Plaza del Coso Viejo; tour €3; 𠂇 10am-1.30pm & 4.30-6.30pm Tue-Sat, 11am-1.30pm Sun) is **Etebo**, a beautiful 1.4m bronze Roman statue of a patrician's 'toy boy', unearthed near Antequera in the 1950s – one of the finest pieces of Roman sculpture found in Spain.

Only the most jaded would fail to be impressed by the **Iglesia del Carmen** (Plaza del Carmen; admission €1.50; 𠂇 10am-2pm) and its marvellous 18th-century Churrigueresque retable. Carved in red pine by Antequera's Antonio Primo, it's spangled with statues of angels, saints, popes and bishops.

Some of Europe's largest megalithic tombs stand on the fringes of Antequera. The **Dolmen de Menga** and **Dolmen de Viera** (admission free; 𠂇 9am-6pm Tue-Sat, 9.30am-2.30pm Sun) are 1km from the city centre, on the road leading northeast to the A45. In about 2500 or 2000 BC the local folk managed to transport dozens of huge rocks from nearby hills to construct these earth-covered tombs for their chieftains. Menga is 25m long, 4m high and composed of 32 slabs, the largest weighing 180 tonnes.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel San Sebastián (☎ /fax 952 84 42 39; Plaza de San Sebastián 5; s/d €27/43; a) You can't get much more central than this smartly refurbished San Sebastián.

Hotel Coso Viejo (☎ 952 Calle Encarnación 9; www.hotelcosoviejo.es; s/d incl breakfast €47/70; p a) A converted 17th-century neoclassical palace in the heart of Antequera. The comfortable and stylish rooms are set around a handsome patio with a fountain. There is a cafeteria and restaurant.

Parador de Antequera (☎ 952 84 02 61; www.parador.es; Paseo García del Olmo s/n; s/d €95/118; p a s)

In a quiet area north of the bullring, the *parador* is set amid pleasant gardens with wonderful views.

Restaurante La Espuela (☎ 952 70 30 31; Calle San Agustín 1; mains €12-16; 𠂇 closed Mon) In a charming cul-de-sac off Calle Infante Don Fernando, La Espuela plays background jazz and offers a fine selection of Antequeran specialities and international fare.

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (Paseo García de Olmos/s/n) is 1km north of the city centre. At least 12 daily buses run to/from Málaga (€6, one hour), and three to five each to/from Osuna (€6, one hour), Seville (Prado de San Sebastián; €10.50, two hours), Granada (€7, 1¼ hours) and Córdoba (€8, 1½ hours).

The **train station** (Avenida de la Estación) is 1.5km north of the city centre. 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 weirdest, most wonderful rock formations you'll see anywhere. Its 12 sq km of gnarled, 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 **Centro de Información Fuente de Piedra** (☎ 952 11 17 15; 𠂇 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 *sierras* 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 the towns 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.com; 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 Ferrandiz 31; 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 Marissal (☎ 952 52 01 99; www.marissal.com; Balcón de Europa; s/d €45/60; a i) Right by the Balcón de Europa, the Marissal 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 Carabeo, 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/ste 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.

Restaurante 34 (☎ 952 52 54 44; www.hotelcarabeo.com; Hotel 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 admirable **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, 25 minutes, up to 13 daily), Almería (€11, 2½ hours, nine daily) and Granada (€8.50, 1½ hours, two to three daily).

Around Nerja

The big tourist attraction is the **Cueva de Nerja** (☎ 952 52 95 20; adult/child €7/3.50; h 10am-2pm & 4-6.30pm, later in Jul & Aug), just off the N340, 3km east of town. This enormous cavern remains impressive, like some vast underground cathedral, despite the crowds traipsing through it. About 14 buses run daily from Málaga and Nerja, except Sunday.

Further east the coast becomes more rugged, and with your own wheels you can head out to **Playa El Cañuelo** and other scenic, if stony, beaches down tracks from the N340, around 8km to 10km from Nerja.

Cómpeta & Around

elevation 640m

The hill village of Cómpeta (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 55 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 Cómpeta, **Árchez** has a beautiful Almohad minaret next to its church. From Árchez 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** (☎ 608 658108; www.horse-riding-andalucia.com), just outside Canillas de Albaida, 2km northwest of Cómpeta, 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 Cómpeta, but it's possible to drive as far up as Puerto Blanquillo pass (1200m) via a slightly hairy mountain track from Canillas de Albaida. 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.hotel-competa.com; Calle San Antonio 75; s/d €49/67; p a s w) Cómpeta'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 **Cómpeta Direct** (www.competa-direct.com).

The two best restaurants, both serving excellent and varied Spanish/international food, are **El Pilon** (☎ 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 PROVINCE

Córdoba city was capital of Al-Andalus when Al-Andalus was at its zenith, home to the glittering, 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 Río Guadalquivir with countryside stretching far in every direction around, Córdoba is both a sophisticated 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 multicultural 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,

CÓRDOBA

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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 Guadalquivir. 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.

Ch@t (Calle Claudio Marcelo 15; per hr €2; 10am-1pm & 5-9.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) Many terminals and efficient internet access.

Hospital Reina Sofia (% 957 21 70 00; Avenida de Menéndez Pidal s/n) Located 1.5km southwest of the Mezquita.

Luque Libros (Calle José Cruz Conde 19) Sells city and Michelin maps cheaper than the tourist shops near the Mezquita.

Municipal tourist office (% 957 20 05 22; Plaza de Judá Levi; 8.30am-2.30pm Mon-Fri)

Policía Nacional (% 95 747 75 00; Avenida Doctor Fleming 2)

Post office (Calle José Cruz Conde 15)

Regional tourist office (% 957 47 12 35; Calle de Torrijos 10; 9.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun, to 8pm Mon-Sat Apr-Jul) Facing the western side of the Mezquita.

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; 10am-7pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, to 6pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar, 9-10.45am & 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 ar-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 ar-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 prettiest. Many patios participate in the annual Concurso de Patios Cordobéses, 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 *mezquita*.

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 **maksura**, the royal prayer enclosure (today enclosed by railings) with its intricately interwoven arches and lavishly decorated domes. The **maksura** 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, Nicephoras II Phocas. The mosaics give this 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 comprising 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 **Sinagoga** (Calle de los Judíos 20; adult/EU citizen €0.30/free; 11 9.30am-2pm & 3.30-5.30pm Tue-Sat, to 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

Casa Andalusi (Calle de los Judíos 12; admission €2.50; 11 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; 957 20 10 56; Plaza de Maimónides; admission €3, free Fri; 11 10am-2pm & 4.30-6.30pm Tue-Sat Oct-Apr, to 2pm & 5.30-7.30pm Tue-Sat 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 CRISTIANOS

Just southwest of the Mezquita, the **Castle of the Christian Monarchs** (957 42 01 51; Campo Santo de Los Mártires s/n; admission €4, free Fri; 11 10am-2pm & 4.30-6.30pm Tue-Sat mid-Oct-Apr, 10am-2pm & 5.30-7.30pm Tue-Sat 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 Andalucía. 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 water wheel**.

At the southern end of the bridge is the **Torre de la Calahorra** (957 29 39 29; Puente Romano s/n; adult/child €4/2.50; 11 10am-2pm & 4.30-8.30pm May-Sep, to 6pm Oct-Apr), a 14th-century tower with a curious museum highlighting the intellectual achievements of Islamic Córdoba and focusing rather rose-tintedly on its reputation for religious tolerance.

MUSEO ARQUEOLÓGICO

Córdoba's excellent **archaeological museum** (957 47 40 11; Plaza de Jerónimo Páez 7; adult/EU citizen €1.50/free; 11 3-8pm Tue, 9am-8pm Wed-Sat, to 3pm Sun & holidays), provides a real insight into pre-Islamic Córdoba. A reclining stone lion takes pride of place in the Iberian section, and the Roman period is well represented from large mosaics and gladiatorial tombstones to elegant ceramics and tinted glass bowls. 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** (957 48 50 18; Plaza del Potro 10; admission free; 11 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri Aug-May), 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** (957 49 19 09; Plaza del Potro 1; admission €3, free Fri; 11 10am-2pm & 4.30-6.30pm Tue-Sat mid-Oct-Apr, to 2pm & 5.30-7.30pm Tue-Sat May-Jun & Sep-mid-Oct, 8.30am-2.30pm 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 Andalusian to others. In the same building is the **Museo de Bellas Artes** (Fine Arts Museum; adult/EU citizen €1.50/free; 11 3-8pm Tue, 9am-8pm Wed-Sat, to 3pm Sun & holidays), with a collection mainly of other Cordoban artists.

HAMMAM BAÑOS ÁRABES

Follow the lead of the medieval Cordobans and indulge your senses at the recently renovated **Arab baths** (957 48 47 46; www.hammampain.com/cordoba; Calle Corregidor Luis de la Cerda; bath/bath & massage €12/16; 11 2hr sessions 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.

BUDGET

Hostal El Reposo de Bagdad (% 957 20 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 beautiful place to stay, at bargain prices. The rooms are simple with crisp, white linen, and there's an Arabic *tetería* (tea shop) on the ground floor, off a gorgeous leafy patio.

Hostal Osio de Córdoba (% /fax 957 48 51 65; Calle Osio 6; d €40; a) 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 (% /fax 957 47 32 34; Calle Conde y Luque 7; s/d ind breakfast €44/46) The charming, friendly Séneca occupies a rambling house with a marvellous pebbled patio that's filled with greenery.

Hotel Maestro (% 957 47 24 10; Calle Romero Barros 4; s/d €35/49, apt €58; 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 *hostal* a few doors down (Number 16).

MIDRANGE

Hotel González (% 957 47 98 19; hotelgonzalez@wanadoo.es; Calle Manriquez 3; d €66; a) Rich baroque décor with golden everything 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 (% 957 47 55 85; hotelmezquita@wanadoo.es; Plaza Santa Catalina 1; s/d €36/69; 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 Albucahis (% /fax 957 47 86 25; Calle Buen Pastor 11; s/d €45/75; p a) Tucked away in a quiet location in the Judería is the Albucahis' big

plus. Décor is in stern medieval style, though the rooms are clean and plain, in khaki and white.

Hotel Lola (% 957 20 03 05; www.hotelconencan.tolola.com; Calle Romero 3; d ind 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.

Casa de los Azulejos (% 957 47 00 00; www.casa.de.los.azulejos.com/marco.htm; Calle Fernando Colón 5; d low/high season €85/130; a i) 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 (% 957 42 03 35; www.nh-hotels.com; Plaza de Maimónides 3; s/d €106/130; p a i) 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 (% 957 27 59 00; www.parador.es; Avenida de la Arruzafa s/n; s/d €116/145; p a s w) 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 tippie 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 a 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 *tortilla de patata* in town – eaten with plastic forks on paper plates, while gazing at the Mezquita. Don't miss it.

Taberna San Miguel (% 957 47 01 66; Plaza San Miguel 1; tapas €1.50, media-raciones €3-6; h closed Sun & Aug) Córdoba prides itself on its *tabernas* – busy bars where you can usually also sit down to eat. The San Miguel has been going strong since 1880 and, known locally as El Pisto (The Barrel), is full of local characters. You'll find a good range of dishes here and inexpensive Moriles wine waiting in jugs on the bar.

Amaltea (% 957 49 19 68; Ronda de Isasa 10; mains €6-10; v) Specialises in organic food and wine, with a good range of dishes including a delicious green salad with avocado and walnuts or Lebanese-style tabouleh.

Taberna Salinas (% 957 48 01 35; Calle Tundidores 3; tapas/raciones €2/8; h closed Sun & Aug) 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 Árabe Andalusi (% 957 47 51 62; Calle Alfayatas 6; mains €8-11) Indulge your North African tastes at this low-seated, dimly-lit eatery where you can choose from *kofte*, *falafel*, *tagines* or bowls of fluffy couscous with chicken, lamb, greens and herbs.

Casa Pepe de la Judería (% 957 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 complimentary glass of Montilla before launching into the house specials, including Cordoban oxtails or venison fillets.

El Churrasco (% 957 29 08 19; Calle Romero 16; mains €12; h closed Aug) 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 (% 957 49 75 00; Calle de Lineros 32; tapas/raciones €5/11, mains €13-19; h closed Sun evenings) This atmospheric winery-cum-restaurant sports dozens of different rooms lined with oak barrels, and its own house Montilla. The restaurant, full of swankily dressed *cordobeses*, 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.

Amapola (% 957 47 37 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 (% 957 49 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 Alfáros 33) A popular gay haunt that plays a broad range of ambient house.

Entertainment

Jazz Café (% 957 47 19 28; Calle Espartería s/n; admission free; h 8am-late) This fabulous laid-back bar puts on regular live jazz and jam sessions.

Gran Teatro de Córdoba (% 957 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 (% 957 75 22 72; Feria El Arenal 4; admission free; h 11pm-late Thu-Sat) This is a huge and 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** (% 95 747 59 02; Calleja de las Flores) is a top place for embossed leather.

Getting There & Away

BUS
The **bus station** (% 957 40 40 40; Plaza de las Tres Culturas) is 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, 4½ hours, six daily), Málaga (€10.50, 2½ hours, five daily) and Jaén (€7, 1½ hours, seven daily).

TRAIN

Córdoba's **train station** (% 957 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

6¼ hours, 23 or more daily), Málaga (€16 to €21, 2½ hours, nine daily), Barcelona (€52 to €85, 10½ hours, four daily) and Jaén (€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 new 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 amazingly short-lived. 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 visitors, 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 mystically 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 Andalusian 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 Albayzín. But what you'll find if you stick around is Andalucía's hippest, youthful city, with a free-tapas culture, innovative bars, tiny flamenco holes and thumping clubs. Here, the Islamic past feels recent as a growing North African population has filled the Albayzín with kebab and cake shops and slipper and tea nooks and even a newly-constructed mosque.

History

Granada's history reads like an excellent thriller, with complicated plots, conspiracies, hedonism and tricky love-affairs. Granada began life as an Iberian settlement in the Albayzín district. Muslim forces took over from the Visigoths in 711, with the aid of the Jewish community around the foot of the Alhambra hill in what was called Garnata al Jahud, from which the name Granada derives; *granada* also happens to be Spanish for pomegranate, the fruit on the city's coat of arms.

After the fall of Córdoba (1236) and Seville (1248), Muslims sought refuge in Granada, where Mohammed ibn Yusuf ibn Nasr had set up an independent emirate. Stretching from the Strait of Gibraltar to east of Almería, this 'Nasrid' emirate became the final remnant of Al-Andalus, ruled from the increasingly lavish Alhambra palace for 250 years. Granada

became one of the richest cities in medieval Europe, flourishing with its swollen population of traders and artisans. Two centuries of artistic and scientific splendour peaked under emirs Yusuf I and Mohammed V in the 14th century.

It all went pear-shaped as the 15th century wore on: the economy stagnated and violent rivalry developed over the succession. One faction supported the emir, Abu al-Hasan, and his harem favourite Zoraya. The other faction backed Boabdil, Abu al-Hasan's son by his wife Aixa. In 1482 Boabdil rebelled, setting off a confused civil war. The Christian armies invading the emirate took advantage, besieging towns and devastating the countryside, and in 1491 they finally laid siege to Granada. After eight months, Boabdil agreed to surrender the city in return for the Alpujarras valleys and 30,000 gold coins, plus political and religious freedom for his subjects. On 2 January 1492 the conquering Catholic Monarchs, Isabel and Fernando, entered Granada ceremonially in Muslim dress. They set up court in the Alhambra for several years.

Religious persecution soon ensued. Jews were expelled from Spain, and persecution of Muslims led to revolts across the former emirate and their eventual expulsion from Spain in the 17th century. Lacking these talented elements of its populace, Granada sank into a deep decline from which it only began to emerge with the interest drummed up by the Romantic movement from the 1830s on. This set the stage for the restoration of Granada's Islamic heritage and the arrival of tourism.

Another black period occurred when the Nationalists took over Granada at the start of the civil war, and an estimated 4000 *granadinos* (Granadans) with left or liberal connections were killed, among them Federico García Lorca, Granada's most famous writer. Granada has a reputation for political conservatism.

Orientation

The two major central streets, Gran Vía de Colón and Calle Reyes Católicos, meet at Plaza Isabel La Católica. From here Calle Reyes Católicos runs southwest to Puerta Real, an important intersection, and northeast to Plaza Nueva. Cuesta de Gómez leads northeast up from Plaza Nueva towards the Alhambra on its hilltop. The old Muslim district, the Albayzín, rambles over another hill that rises north of Plaza Nueva.

The bus station (northwest) and train station (west) are both out of the city centre but linked by buses.

Information BOOKSHOPS

Cartográfica del Sur (Map pp770-1; % 958 20 49 01; Calle Valle Inclán 2) Granada's best map shop, in the south of the city, just off Camino de Ronda.

Metro (Map p774; % 958 26 15 65; Calle Gracia 31) Stocks an excellent range of English-language novels, guidebooks and books on Spain, plus plenty of books in French.

EMERGENCY

Policía Nacional (Map p774; % 958 80 80 00; Plaza de los Campos) The most central police station.

INTERNET ACCESS

Thanks to Granada's 60,000 students, internet cafés are cheap and open long hours.

Internet Elvira (Map p774; Calle de Elvira 64; per hr €1.60, students €1)

N@veg@web (Map p774; Calle Reyes Católicos 55; per hr €1.20)

INTERNET RESOURCES

Ayuntamiento de Granada (www.granada.org in Spanish) Granada city hall's website with good maps and a broad range of information on what to do, where to stay and so on. For tourist info click 'La Ciudad'.

Turismo de Granada (www.turismodegranada.org) Good website of the provincial tourist office.

LAUNDRY

Lavomatique (Map p774; Calle Paz 19) Wash and dry machine load for €8.

MEDICAL SERVICES

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

MONEY

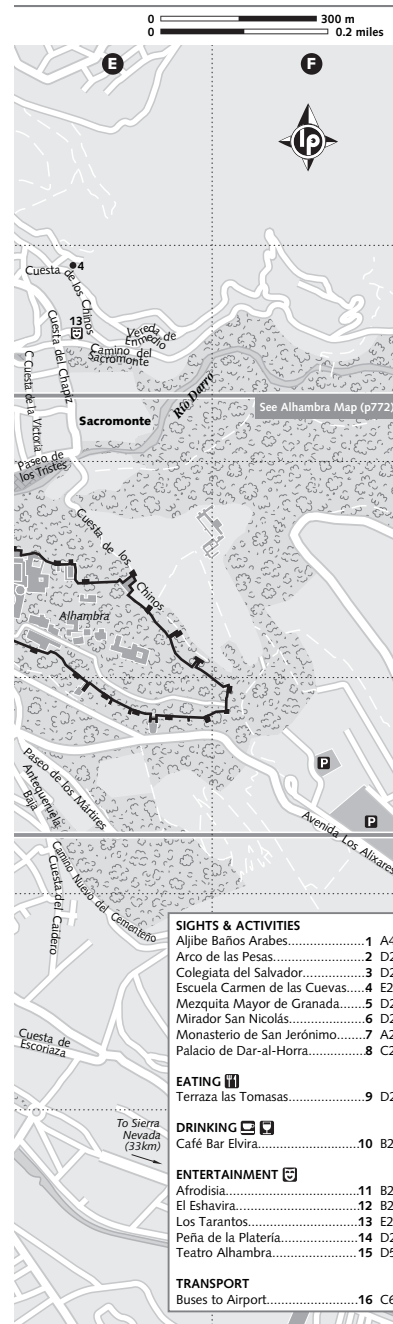
There are plenty of banks and ATMs on Gran Vía de Colón, Plaza Isabel La Católica and Calle Reyes Católicos.

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 Mariana Pineda 10; ⌚ 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Sat,



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; ☗ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun & holidays); Alhambra (Map p772; ☎ 958 22 95 75; ticket-office bldg, Avenida del Generalife s/n; ☗ 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-patronato.es; adult/EU senior €10/5, disabled & under 8yr free, Generalife only €5; ☗ 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.

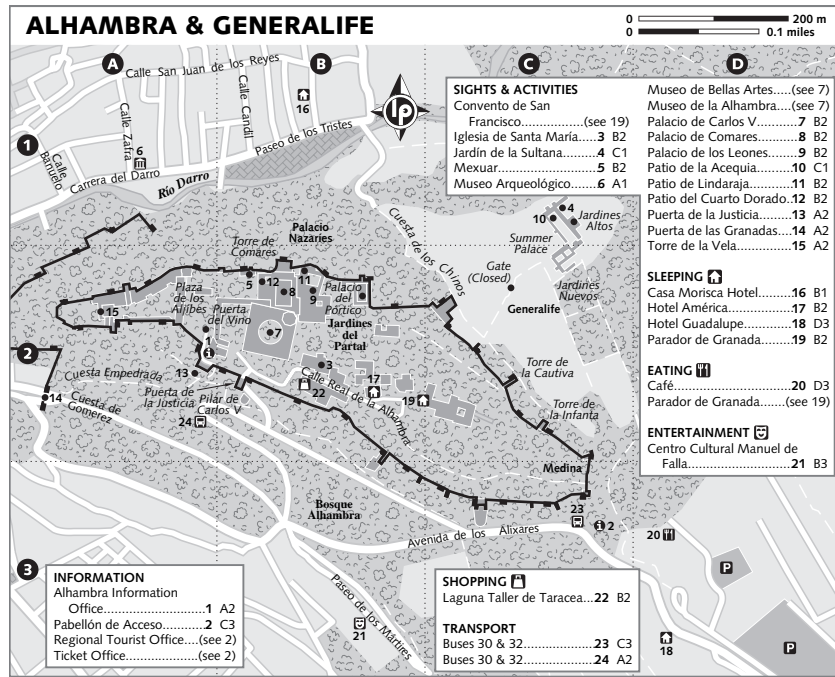
The spell can be shattered by the average 6000 visitors who traipse through the site each day, so try to visit first thing in the morning or late in the afternoon, or treat yourself to a magical night by visiting the Palacio Nazaries (p773 for details).

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 Romantic writers such as 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. Together with the Generalife gardens and the Albayzín, it now enjoys Unesco World Heritage status.

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 (€0.90 extra per ticket). You can book up to a year ahead, in three ways:

Alhambra website (www.alhambratickets.com) 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; 7am-5.55pm) 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 (7 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 *palacio*, 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** (7 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's marvellous domed marquetry 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 **Patio de los Leones** (Lion Courtyard), 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 pavilions 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 dally with 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 Albayzín 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 Grille) and **Patio de Lindaraja**

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Bus Stop.....	59	C3
Iberia.....	60	C3
Parking Plaza Puerta Real.....	61	B5
Parking San Agustín.....	62	B2

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 is square but contains a surprising 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** (% 958 02 79 00; admission free; h 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 Vase**, decorated with gazelles.

Upstairs, the **Museo de Bellas Artes** (% 958 22 48 43; admission free; h 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 mosque. The **Convento de San Francisco**, now 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 Abu 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 (per hr/day €1.40/14) on Avenida de los Alixares, above the ticket office.

CAPILLA REAL

The **Royal Chapel** (Map p774; % 958 22 92 39; www.capillareal.granada.com; Calle Oficios; admission €3; h 10.30am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 11am-1pm & 4-7pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10.30am-1pm & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-1pm & 3.30-6.30pm Sun Nov-Mar), adjoining the cathedral, 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

Juana because Felipe was the son of the Holy Roman emperor, Maximilian. On the dense Plateresque *retablo*, note the kneeling figures of Isabel (lower right) and Fernando (lower left), attributed to Diego de Siloé, and the brightly painted bas-reliefs below depicting the defeat of the Muslims and subsequent conversions to Christianity.

The sacristy contains a small but impressive museum with Fernando's sword and Isabel's sceptre, silver crown and personal art collection, which is mainly Flemish but also includes Botticelli's *Prayer in the Garden of Olives*. Felipe de Vigarni's two fine early-16th-century statues of the Catholic Monarchs at prayer are also here.

CATHEDRAL

Adjoining the Capilla Real but entered separately, from Gran Vía de Colón, the cavernous Gothic-Renaissance cathedral (Map p774; % 958 22 29 59; admission €2.50; $\bar{\text{h}}$ 10.45am-1.30pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat, 4-8pm Sun, to 7pm Nov-Mar) was begun in 1521, and directed by Diego de Siloé from 1528 to 1563. Work was not completed until the 18th century. The main façade on Plaza de las Pasiegas, with four heavy buttresses forming three great arched bays, was designed in the 17th century by Alonso Cano.

In the gilded and painted Capilla Mayor (de Siloé's work), spot the 17th-century carvings of the Catholic Monarchs at prayer, one above each side of the main altar, by Pedro de Mena. Above the monarchs are busts of Adam and Eve by Cano.

ALCAICERÍA & PLAZA BIB-RAMBLA

Just south of the Capilla Real, the Alcaicería (Map p774) was the Muslim silk exchange, but what you see now is a restoration after a 19th-century fire, filled with tourist shops. Just southwest of the Alcaicería is the large, popular Plaza Bib-Rambla with restaurants, flower stalls and a central fountain with statues of giants. This square was the scene of jousting, bullfights and Inquisition burnings.

CORRAL DEL CARBÓN

You can't miss the lovely, horseshoe-arched, Islamic façade of this building (Map p774; Calle Mariana Pineda), which began life as a 14th-century inn for merchants. It was later used as an inn for coal dealers (hence its modern name, meaning Coal Yard) and subsequently a theatre. It houses government offices and a government-run crafts shop, Artespaña.

ALBAYZIN

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 *karm* for garden), reveal the best views of the Alhambra and, likewise, the best views of the Albayzín are from the Alhambra. The Albayzín'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 Albayzín'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 JERÓNIMO

This 16th-century monastery (Map pp770-1; % 958 27 93 37; Calle Rector López Argueta 9; admission €3; $\bar{\text{h}}$ 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 northwest of the city centre, reached by bus 8 from Gran Vía de Colón. **La Cartuja Monastery** (% 958 16 19 32; Paseo de la Cartuja; admission €3; $\bar{\text{h}}$ 10am-1pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, to 1pm & 3.30-6pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar, to noon Sun 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 Lanjarón marble, resembling a mélange 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; $\bar{\text{h}}$ 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 Arbabial, 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 Árabes El Bañuelo (2)**; % 958 02 78 00; Carrera del Darro 31; admission free; $\bar{\text{h}}$ 10am-2pm Tue-Sat). Further along is the **Museo Arqueológico (3)**; Archaeological Museum; % 958 22 56 40; Carrera del Darro 43; adult/EU citizen €1.50/free; $\bar{\text{h}}$ 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.

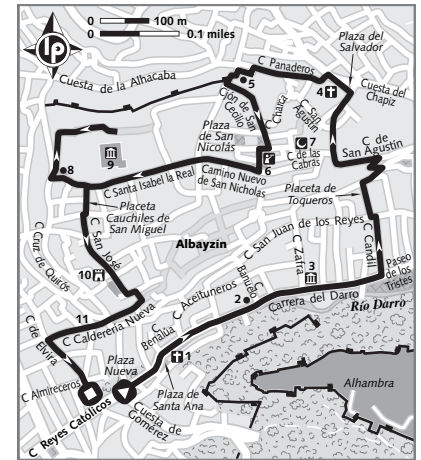
Shortly past the museum, Carrera del Darro becomes Paseo de los Tristes. Turn up Calle Candil and climb, via Placeta de Toqueros and Carril de San Agustín, to Plaza del Salvador, near the top of the Albayzín. Plaza del Salvador is dominated by the **Colegiata del Salvador (4)**; % 958 27 86 44; admission €0.80; $\bar{\text{h}}$ 10am-1pm & 4pm-7.30pm 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 Albayzín's main mosque; the mosque's horseshoe-arched patio survives at

WALK FACTS

Start/Finish Plaza Nueva

Distance 5.5km

Duration four to five hours including stops



its western end. From here head west to Plaza Larga and through the **Arco de las Pesas (5)**, an impressive gateway in the Albayzín's 11th-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: skilful, well-organised wallet-lifters and bag-snatchers operate here.

Just east of Mirador San Nicolás, off Cuesta de las Cabras, the Albayzín's first new mosque in 500 years, the **Mezquita Mayor de Granada (7)**; % 958 20 23 31; $\bar{\text{h}}$ 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; $\bar{\text{h}}$ 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 Cauchiles de San Miguel, which becomes Calle San José, where the lovely **Alminar de San José** (10; San José Minaret) 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 lists 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 culture, and flamenco dance and guitar. A two-week intensive language course (40 hours) costs €284.

Tours

Granavisión (% 902 33 00 02) Offers guided tours of the Alhambra and Generalife (€38) and Historic Granada tours (€43). Phone direct or book through a travel agent.

HAMMAMS

Granada has two *Baños Árabes* (Arabic baths) and a visit to one of these is a must for the sheer lazy pleasure of it. Both baths offer a similar deal: a bath and aromatherapy massage that last for two hours (bath one hour 45 minutes, massage 15 minutes) and both need advance reservations. Swimwear is obligatory (you can rent it), towels are provided, and all sessions are mixed. The better of the pair is **Aljibe Baños Árabes** (Map p774; % 958 52 28 67; www.aljibesanimiguel.es; San Miguel Alta 41; bath/bath & massage €15/22). **Hammam Baños Árabes** (Map p774; % 958 22 99 78; www.hammamspain.com/granada in Spanish; Calle Santa Ana 16; bath/bath & massage €16/25) is older and smaller.

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) Squares, patios and balconies are adorned with floral crosses (the Cruces de Mayo) and become the setting for typical *andaluz* revelry – drinking, horse riding, polka-dot dresses and *sevillanas* (traditional Andalusian dances with high, twirling arm movements).

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 Gómez.

Camping

Camping Sierra Nevada (% 958 15 00 62; Avenida de Madrid 107; sites per adult/tent/car €5/5.50/5.50; s) Close to the bus station, 2.5km northwest of the centre, this camping ground has big clean bathrooms and a laundrette. Bus 3 runs between here and the centre.

Plaza Nueva & Around

Hostal Venecia (Map p774; % 958 22 39 87; Cuesta de Gómez 2; r €32; s/d/tr/q without bathroom €15/28/39/52) A lovely *hostal* with friendly hosts and flower-and-picture-filled turquoise corridors. The nine characterful rooms are all different. The owners bring you a soothing herbal infusion to drink each morning. Relaxing background music plays, incense wafts, and it's warm in winter and fan-cooled during the hot summer months.

Oasis Backpackers' Hostel (Map p774; % 958 21 58 48; www.oasisgranada.com; Placeta Correo Viejo 3; dm

€15, d€36; a i) Granada's top hostel, in a renovated house, seconds away from the *Caldererías* and bars on Calle Elvira. This place is designed for serious backpackers and word spreads fast, so book ahead to enjoy its little luxuries: happy staff, free internet access, rooftop terrace and personal safes.

Hostal Britz (Map p774; % /fax 958 22 36 52; Cuesta de Gómez 1; s/d €32/44, s/d without bathroom €25/34) The friendly, 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 Gómez 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 bathroom €18/27; p) The friendly, clean Sevilla, run by a young family, has pretty tiles and lampshades, 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 i) 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 Ninfa (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.hotelguadalupe.es; Avenida Los Alixares s/n; s/d €76/104; p a i) Almost on the Alhambra's doorstep, the jolly Guadalupe has spacious, beautifully fitted-out rooms with Alhambra or olive-grove views.

Hostal América (Map p772; % 958 22 74 71; www.hotelamericagranada.com; Calle Real de la Alhambra 53; s/d €70/106; h Mar-Nov; a) Within the Alhambra 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 Gómez 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 Albayzín mansions.

Hotel Casa del Capitel Nazari (Map p774; % 958 21 52 60; www.hotelcasacapitel.com; Cuesta Aceituneros 6; s/d €73/91; a i) Understated décor and ambience, focussing on a 16th-century patio with wooden balconies and ancient pillars.

Casa del Aljarife (Map p774; % /fax 958 22 24 25; www.granadainfo.com/most; 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.hotelzaguán.com; Carrera del Darro; s €50, r €80-100; a i) A risen-from-ruins and tastefully restored 16th-century house with a bar/restaurant. The 13 rooms are all different; some look out at Río Darro.

Hotel Carmen de Santa Inés (Map p774; % 958 22 63 80; www.carmensantaines.com; Placeta de Porras 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.

These are good city-centre hotels:

Hotel Los Tilos (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 Maciá Plaza (Map p774; % 958 22 75 36; www.maciahotels.com; Plaza Nueva 4; s/d €49/73; p a i) One of four Maciá hotels in Granada, the Maciá Plaza has comfortable rooms with bright-enough décor 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 bedspreads, 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.hotelcasamorisca.com; Cuesta de la Victoria 9; s/d interior €90/119, exterior €120/150; a) Occupies a late-15th-century Albayzín mansion, with 14 stylish rooms centred on an atmospheric patio with an ornamental pool and wooden galleries.

Hotel Palacio de Santa Paula (Map p774; % 902 29 22 93; www.ac-hotels.com; Gran Vía de Colón; r from €205; p a i) This opulent five-star hotel occupies a former 16th-century convent, some 14th-century houses with patios and wooden balconies, and a 19th-century aristocratic house, all with a contemporary overlay. The rooms sport every top-end luxury and there's a Turkish bath.

Parador de Granada (Map p772; % 958 22 14 40; www.parador.es; Calle Real de la Alhambra s/n; s/d €214/268; p a) The most expensive *parador* in Spain can't be beaten for its location within the Alhambra and its historical connections. Book ahead.

Eating

Here's a place where gastronomy stays down to earth, but still experiments. Granada is one of the last bastions of that fantastic practice of free tapas with every drink. Depending on where you are, you can get Arabic couscous, Brazilian chicken or *haute cuisine* tapas, served in dinky dishes. You'll also find hearty local fare like *rabo de toro* (ox-tail stew), *habas con jamón* (broad beans with ham) and *tortilla Sacromonte*, a tasty omelette (traditionally made with calf brains and bull testicles!).

NEAR PLAZA NUEVA

Café Central (Map p774; % 958 22 97 06; Calle de Elvira; tapas €1.95, raciones €5-9) Perk up with a strong morning coffee (€1.60) at this no-nonsense café opposite Plaza Nueva.

Al Andalus (Map p774; % 958 22 67 30; Calle de Elvira; mains €3-6) The first in a range of over-the-counter, Arabic fastfood-feast kebab houses. Al Andalus does a mean parcel of falafel in pitta (€3).

Bodegas Castañeda (Map p774; Calle Almirantes; raciones from €6) An institution among locals and tourists alike, the Castañeda whips up traditional food in a typical bodega (traditional wine bar) setting. Get yourself some Spanish tortilla and *alioli* (aioli; garlic mayonnaise).

Antigua Castañeda (Map p774; Calle de Elvira; raciones €7-14) If the potent 'Costa' wine from the Sierra de la Contraviesa tempts you to the point of befuddlement, sober up with a few *montaditos* (small sandwiches; €3.20 to €4.50).

For fresh fruit and veg, head for the large covered **Mercado Central San Agustín** (Map p774; Calle San Agustín; h 8am-2pm Mon-Sat), a block west of the cathedral.

ALHAMBRA

Parador de Granada (Map p772; % 958 22 14 40; Calle Real de Alhambra s/n; h 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.

ALBAYZIN

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 *teterías* and Arabic-influenced takeaways.

Kasbah (Map p774; Calle Calderería Nueva 4; tea €1.80-2.40) Duck into this candlelit tea den, sit on a glimmering cushion and absorb the aroma of incense and herbal infusions. Select your tea and maybe try a calorie-laden chocolate-and-cream crepe (€2.30).

Restaurante Arrayanes (Map p774; % 958 22 84 01; Cuesta Marañás 4; mains €7-17; h from 8pm) This much-applauded Moroccan favourite cooks up insanely delicious lamb *tagines* with dates and almonds, 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; fondues per person €14-19, minimum 2 people; h lunch Wed-Mon, dinner daily) Wild fondue feasts are 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; h lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Wed-Sat) Ring the little bell, descend the stairs and be in awe of the Alhambra views in this classy restaurant. Service is impeccable and the food commendable.

PLAZA BIB RAMBLA & AROUND

Poë (Map p774; Calle Paz; media-ración €3) Imagination and a Brazilian influence have resulted in a great mix of excellent free tapas, such as *fejjoada* or chicken stew with polenta, and a trendy international vibe.

Om-Kalsum (Map p774; Calle Jardines 17; media-ración €3) Decamp from Poë to Om-Kalsum to start on its Arabic-influenced tapas (mini-lamb *tagines*, gorgeous bite-sized chicken kebabs in pitta bread etc). All the dishes here are really good.

Guerrero (Map p774; % 958 28 14 60; Plaza de la Trinidad 7; raciones €5.50-6.50) A low-key café-bar and many a hungover person's breakfast choice, this is where you come for *tostadas* (€1.50),

freshly squeezed orange juice and a tall glass of *café con leche* (milk coffee).

Los Diamantes (Map p774; % 958 22 70 70; Calle Navas 26; media-ración €6) Heaven for anyone who loves fish and seafood. The plates are heaped with an amazing mix of *pescado frito* (fried fish) and prawns to die for. A *caña* (small glass of beer) makes perfect company.

Cunini (Map p774; % 958 25 07 77; Plaza de Pescadería 14; set menú €18) 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 Almirantes) 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 pp770-1; Calle de Elvira 85; h from noon) 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 Buensuceso 13; h 9am-1pm) A bar for imbibing bookworms, literary evenings and tarot readings, as well as mindless 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 (% 958 25 84 49; www.industrialcopera.net; Carretera Armilla, Calle la Paz, warehouse 7;

admission varied; h 11pm-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 Cárcel Baja; admission €6; h from 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 cheesy Spanish pop tunes.

Planta Baja (Map p774; Calle Horno de Abad 11; www.plantabaja.net; admission €5; h 12.30am-6am Tue-Sat) Planta Baja's popularity never seems to wane, and it's no wonder since it caters to a diverse crowd *and* has top DJs like Vadim. There's old school, hip-hop, funk and electroglam downstairs, and lazy lounge sessions on the top floor.

Afrodisia (Map pp770-1; www.afrodisiaclub.com; Calle Almona del Boquerón; admission free; h 11pm-late) 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 Eshavira (Map pp770-1; % 958 29 08 29; www.eshavira.com; Postigo de la Cuna 2; h from 10pm) Duck down the spooky alley, 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; h 11pm-late) 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 pp770-1; % 958 21 06 50; Placeta de Toqueros 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 touristy 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 pp770-1; % 958 22 45 25 day, 958 22 24 92 night; Camino del Sacromonte 9; admission €21) for a lively experience.

OTHER ENTERTAINMENT

The foyer of **La Madraza** (Map p774; Calle Oficios), opposite the Capilla Real, has large posters listing forthcoming cultural events.

Centro Cultural Manuel de Falla (Map p772; % 958 22 00 22; Paseo de los Mártires s/n) A haven for classical-musical lovers, this venue near the Alhambra presents weekly orchestral concerts.

Teatro Alhambra (Map pp770-1; % 958 22 04 47; Calle de Molinos 56) and the more central **Teatro Isabel La Católica** (Map p774; % 958 22 15 14; Acera del Casino) have ongoing programmes of theatre and concerts (sometimes flamenco).

Shopping

Classic pots with distinctive *granadino* green, or blue, and white glazing can be bought at **Cerámica Fabre** (Map p774; Calle Pescadería s/n). A distinctive local craft is *taracea* (marquetry), used on boxes, tables, chess sets and more – the best have shell, silver or mother-of-pearl inlays. Marquetry experts can be seen at work in **Laguna Taller de Taracea** (Map p772) in the Alhambra. Other *granadino* crafts include embossed leather, guitars, wrought iron, brass and copper ware, basket weaving and textiles. Look out for these in the Alcaicería and Albayzín, on Cuesta de Gómez and in the government-run **Artespaña** in Corral del Carbón (Map p774).

The Plaza Nueva area is awash with jewellery vendors, selling from rugs laid out on the pavement, and ethnic-clothing shops.

For general shopping, trendy clothes and shoes, try pedestrianised Calle de los Mesones or **El Corte Inglés** (Map p774; Acera del Darro).

Getting There & Away

AIR

Iberia (Map p774; % 958 22 75 92; Plaza Isabel La Católica 2) flies daily to/from Madrid and Barcelona. From the UK, two low-cost web-based airlines fly daily to Granada: **Ryanair** (www.ryanair.com) and **Monarch Airlines** (www.flymonarch.com).

BUS

Granada's **bus station** (Map pp770-1; Carretera de Jaén) is nearly 3km northwest of the city centre. All services operate from here, except those going to a few nearby destinations, such as Fuente Vaqueros (opposite). **Alsina Graells** (% 958 18 54 80) runs to Córdoba (€12, three hours direct, nine daily), Seville (€18, three hours direct, 10 daily), Málaga (€9, 1½ hours direct, 16 daily), Las Alpujarras (see p789 for details) and Guadix (€4.50, one hour, up to 14 daily). Alsina also handles buses to destinations in Jaén province and on the Granada, Málaga and Almería coasts, and to Madrid (€15, five to six hours, 10 to 13 daily).

ALSA (% 902 42 22 42; www.alsa.es) operates buses up the Mediterranean coast to Barcelona (€60 to €70, seven to 10 hours, five daily) and to many international destinations.

CAR

Car rental is expensive. **ATA** (Map p774; % 958 22 04 04; Plaza Cuchilleros 1) has small cars for €71/83/219 for one/two/seven days.

TRAIN

The **train station** (Map pp770-1; % 958 20 40 00; Avenida de Andaluces) is 1.5km west of the centre, off Avenida de la Constitución. Four trains run daily to/from Seville (€20, three hours) and Almería (€13, 2¼ hours) via Guadix, and six daily to/from Antequera (€6.50 to €7.50, 1½ hours). Three go to Ronda (€11, three hours) and Algeciras (€16, 4½ hours). For Málaga (€12, 2½ hours) or Córdoba (€14, four hours) take an Algeciras train and change at Bobadilla (€7, 1½ hours). One or two trains go to each of Madrid (€31 to €35, six hours), Valencia (€42 to €62, 7½ to eight hours) and Barcelona (€52 to €125, 12 to 14½ hours).

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

The **airport** (% 958 24 52 23) is 17km west of the city on the A92. **Autocares J González** (% 958 49 01 64) runs buses between the airport and a stop near the Palacio de Congresos (€3, five daily), with a stop in the city centre on Gran Vía de Colón, where a schedule is posted opposite the cathedral. A taxi costs €18 to €20.

BUS

City buses cost €0.90. Tourist offices have leaflets showing routes. Bus 3 runs between the bus station and Gran Vía de Colón in the city centre. To reach the city centre from the train station, walk to Avenida de la Constitución and pick up bus 4, 6, 7, 9 or 11 going to the right (east). From the centre (Gran Vía de Colón) to the train station, take number 3, 4, 6, 9 or 11.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Vehicle access to the Plaza Nueva area is restricted by red lights and little black posts known as *pilonas*, which block certain streets during certain times of the day. If you are going to stay at a hotel near Plaza Nueva, press the button next to your hotel's name beside the *pilonas* to contact reception, which will be able to lower the *pilonas* for you.

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** (Acera del Darro; 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.museogarcialorca.org in Spanish; Calle Poeta Federico García Lorca 4; admission €1.80; guided visits hourly 10am-1pm & 5-7pm Tue-Sun Apr-Jun, to 2pm & 6-8pm Tue-Sun Jul-Sep, 10am-1pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar). 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 **Ureña** (% 958 45 41 54) leave from Avenida de Andaluces 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 20,000 / 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 townsfolk. The typical 21st-century cave has a white-washed 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; 11 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; 11 10.30am-1pm & 2-7pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-1pm 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 3; admission €1.20; 11 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; 11 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.cuevaspedroantonio.com; Barriada San Torcuato; s/d/ q €40/61/104; 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 Comercio (% 958 66 05 00; www.hotelcomercio.com in Spanish; Calle Mira de Amezcueza 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 Doctor Pulido 4; drink & tapa €1) and **Bodega Calatrava** (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

WALKING THE SIERRA NEVADA

The Sierra Nevada's two highest peaks, Mulhacén (3479m) and Veleta (3395m), rise to the south-east 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 cloud, 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 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 Carigüela** 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 crannies 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.

The Berber-style villages have houses similar to those in Morocco's Atlas Mountains, and the terraced and irrigated hillsides are reminders of the Islamic past. Some of these villages and towns on the lower slopes of the mountains simmer with New Age hippies hoping to get spiritual in front of confused locals. A recent upsurge in tourism and foreign (mainly British) settlers has given the area a new dimension.

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 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.

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 for Africa, however, and as Christian promises 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.

South from Granada by Gerald Brenan, 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 at a colourful market in the upper part of town, the Barrio Alto.

Hotel & Hostal Mirasol (☎ 958 78 51 08/59; www.hotelmirasol.com; Avenida González Robles 5 & 3; s/d hostel €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; A348 Km18.5; r from €73; p a i s w), 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, Bubiñ & 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 touristed) 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, Pampaneira; h 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 *34 Alpujarras Walks* by Charles Davis, published by Discovery Walking Guides, which has an accompanying *Tours & Trails* map.

Servicio de Interpretación de Altos Cumbres

(☎ 958 76 34 86, 686 414576; 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 Mass times). They also have small **weaving workshops**, descendants of a textile tradition that goes back to Islamic times, and plentiful **craft shops**. In Bubiñ, 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.

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 **Rustic Blue** (www.rusticblue.com).

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 €26/36), with a friendly local owner; and **Hostal Ruta del Mulhacén** (958 76 30 10; www.rutadelmulhacen.com; Avenida Alpujarra 6; s €25-35, d €30-45), where some rooms have terraces with views down the valley.

Restaurante Casa Diego (958 76 30 15; Plaza de la Libertad 3; mains €5-9), along the street, has a pleasant upstairs terrace; trout with ham, and local ham and eggs, are good economical bets.

Bubión

Hostal Las Terrazas (958 76 30 34; www.terrazalpujarra.com; Plaza del Sol 7; s/d €22/29, 2-/4-/6-person apt €48/59/77) Located below the main road, the *hostal* has neat little rooms with folksy textiles, and apartments nearby.

Teide Restaurant (958 76 30 84; Carretera de Sierra Nevada; menú €8) A good, traditional restaurant favoured for its *menú del día* that includes generous portions of lentils for starters, meat in a tomato sauce, plus salad, and coffee.

Capileira

Campileira (958 76 34 19; Carretera de Sierra Nevada; dm €12, d €27, sites per adult/tent €3.50/6.50; p s) Some 500m up the Sierra Nevada road from the top of the village, Campileira provides clean dorms, camping on a grassy terrace, wonderful views and breakfast/dinner (€2.50/9).

Hostal Atalaya (958 76 30 25; www.hostalatalaya.com; Calle Perchel 3; s/d incl breakfast with view €22/36, without view €17/32) The Atalaya is geared to budget travellers, with simple rooms and plenty of information.

Finca Los Llanos (958 76 30 71; www.hotelfincalosllos.com; Carretera de Sierra Nevada; s/d €45/72; p s) At the top of the village, Los Llanos has tasteful rooms and nifty suites, a good restaurant, a pool and a library.

Cortijo Catifalarga (958 34 33 57; www.catifalarga.com; s €58-69, d €73-90, apt from €73; mains €6-12; p v) This renovated old farmstead is the choicest base in the Poqueira valley. The driveway begins

750m up the Sierra Nevada road from the top of Capileira. You can dine indoors or out, and the views and eclectic food are both fabulous.

Restaurante Ibero-Fusión (958 76 32 56; Calle Parra 1; salads €5-9, mains €7-10; p dinner; v) You'll get a change from the regular Alpujarras fare at this restaurant just below the church – an *andaluz*, Arabic and Indian fusion, with plenty of vegetarian specialities.

Pitres & La Taha

pop 800

Pitres (elevation 1245m) is a break from the tourism and souvenirs in the Poqueira Gorge villages, although not quite as pretty. The beautiful valley below it, with five tranquil hamlets (Mecina, Mecinilla, Fondales, Ferreirola and Atalbéitar), all grouped with Pitres in the *municipio* called La Taha, is particularly fascinating to explore. Its ancient pathways, wending their way through lush woodlands to the ubiquitous tinkle of gently running water, are a walker's delight.

SLEEPING & EATING

L'Atelier (958 85 75 01; www.ivu.org/atelier; Calle Alberca 21, Mecina; s/d €29/42, incl breakfast €30/45; p dinner Wed-Mon; v) A welcoming little French-run guesthouse, in an ancient village house, L'Atelier also serves gourmet vegetarian meals and has an art gallery.

Sierra y Mar (958 76 61 71; www.sierramar.com; Calle Albaicín, Ferreirola; s/d incl breakfast €36/56) Hidden away along the sun-bleached alleys of the gorgeously quiet village of Ferreirola, this charming guesthouse has just nine rooms set around multiple patios and gardens. You couldn't hope for more helpful or knowledgeable hosts, especially when it comes to planning walks.

Hotel Albergue de Mecina (958 76 62 41; Calle La Fuente s/n, Mecina; r €65; p s) A tasteful hotel that's modern and comfortable, with touches of traditional Alpujarras style.

Trevélez

pop 800 / elevation 1476m

Trevélez, in a valley almost as impressive as the Poqueira Gorge, claims to be the highest village in Spain (but Valdellinares, Aragón, reaches above 1700m) and produces famous *jamón serrano*. Along the main road, you're confronted by a welter of *jamón* and souvenir shops, but a wander into the upper parts reveals a lively Alpujarran village.

SLEEPING & EATING

Camping Trevélez (958 85 87 35; www.campingtrevlez.net; Carretera Trevélez-Órgiva Km1; sites per adult/tent/car €4.50/5/3.50; p s) On a leafy, terraced hillside 1km out of Trevélez, the camping ground has ecologically-minded owners and a good-value 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.

Hotel Pepe Álvarez (958 85 85 03; www.andalucia.co.uk; Plaza Francisco Abellán s/n; s/d €23/41) By the main road at the foot of the village; some rooms have terraces overlooking the busy plaza.

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 far fewer tourists than the western villages.

BÉRCHULES

Seventeen kilometres from Trevélez, Bérchules is in a green valley stretching far back into the hills, with attractive walks. **Hotel Los Bérchules** (958 85 25 30; www.hotelberchules.com; Carretera s/n; s/d €42/45; mains €6-11; p s), 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).

YEGEN

Gerald Brenan's home in the 1920s is 12km east of Bérchules, off 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 Rincón de Yegen** (958 85 12 70; www.aldearural.com/rincondeyegen; s/d €25/36; mains €7-13; p s) 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

Alsina Graells (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, 2¾ hours). Two of these continue to Trevélez (€6.50, 3¼ hours) and Bérchules (€7.50, 3¾ 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 Cádiar (€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 61 03 14; Plaza de Goya; p 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 Árabe** (admission €3; p 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 San Juan** (958 61 17 29; www.hotel-san-juan.com in Spanish; Calle Jardines 1; d €42; a), 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.hotelavenidatropical.com; Avenida Mediterráneo 35; s €35-55, d €50-80; p a i) 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 1) is just south of the N340. The **main tourist office** (958 63 11 25; www.almunecar.info; Avenida Europa s/n; p 10am-2pm & 5-7pm) is 1km southwest, just back from Playa de San Cristóbal.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Just behind Playa de San Cristóbal is a tropical-bird aviary, **Parque Ornitológico Loro-Sexi** (% 958 63 02 80; adult/child €2/1.50; h 11am-2pm, 5-7pm approx May-Sep, 4-6pm approx Oct-Apr). Atop the hill above is the post-Reconquista **Castillo de San Miguel** (% 958 63 12 52; 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** (% 958 63 12 52; 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 (% 958 88 10 38; www.hotelcaliforniaspain.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 colourful touches of Moroccan style and tasty food, including vegetarian options. The hotel offers special packages for paragliders.

Hotel Casablanca (% 958 63 55 75; www.almunecar.info/casablanca; Plaza de San Cristóbal 4; s/d €45/64; 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

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 focal 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 Cu@k (Calle Adarves Bajos 24; per 30min €1.20;

h 10.30am-12.30pm & 5.30pm-midnight)

Librería Metrópolis (Calle del Cerón 17) Good for maps.

Tourist office (% 953 19 04 55; otjaen@andalucia.org;

Calle de la Maestra 13; h 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 7pm

Oct-Mar, to 1pm Sat, Sun & holidays) Helpful, multilingual

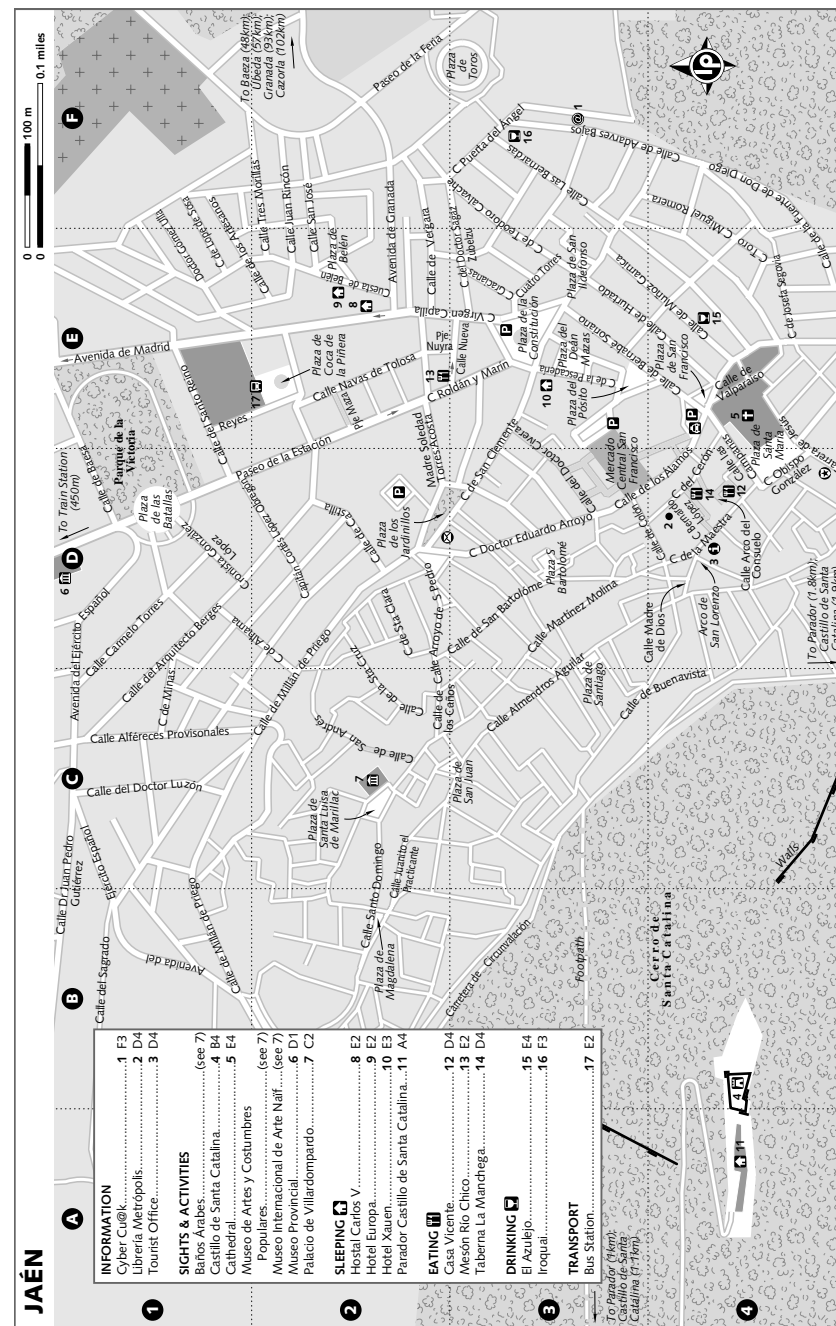
staff with plenty of free information about the city and

province.

Sights

Jaén's huge **cathedral** (% 953 23 42 33; h 8.30am-1pm & 4-7pm 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 Villardompardo** (% 953 23 62 92; Plaza de Santa Luisa 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 Árabes** (Arab Baths), one of



MASS FERVOUR 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 priests 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 Naïf**, with a large international collection of colourful and witty naïve art.

The **Museo Provincial** (☎ 953 25 06 00; Paseo de la Estación 27; adult/EU citizen €1.50/free; ⌚ 3-8pm Tue, 9am-8pm Wed-Sat, to 3pm 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 graceful design.

Jaén's most exhilarating spot is the top of the Cerro de Santa Catalina, where the **Castillo de Santa Catalina** (☎ 953 12 07 33; admission €3; ⌚ 10am-2pm & 5-9pm Tue-Sun, afternoons Oct-Mar 3.30-7pm) was surrendered to Fernando III in 1246 by Granada after a six-month siege. Audiovisual gimmicks add fun to the visit to the castle's keep, chapel and dungeon. The castle is a circuitous 4km drive from the city centre (€6 by taxi), but you can walk up in 45 minutes using a steep path almost opposite the top of Calle de Buenavista.

Sleeping

Hostal Carlos V (☎ 953 22 20 91; Avenida de Madrid 4, 2nd fl; s/d without bathroom €21/35; 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 (☎ 953 24 07 89; www.hotelxauenjaen.com; Plaza del Deán Mazas 3; s/d €40/55; p a i) The Xauen has good facilities and spacious, well-appointed rooms, making it popular with businessfolk.

Hotel Europa (☎ 953 22 27 00; www.husa.es; Plaza de Belén 1; s/d €34/57; p a) Though the rooms are only adequate, the Europa's location off Avenida de Granada makes it a convenient option for drivers.

Parador Castillo de Santa Catalina (☎ 953 23 00 00; www.parador.es; s/d €116/145; p a s) 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 (☎ 953 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.

Mesón Río Chico (☎ 953 24 08 02; Calle Nueva 2; menú €8) The downstairs *taberna* serves delicious tapas and *raciones* of meat, *revueltos* (scrambled-egg dishes) and fish. There is a more expensive restaurant upstairs.

Casa Vicente (☎ 953 23 28 16; Calle Francisco Martín Mora; menú €30) Set in a restored old-town mansion with a patio, Casa Vicente is one of the best restaurants in town. Take tapas in the bar or sit down for specialties such as *cordero mozárabe*, lamb with honey and spices.

Drinking

Cool drinking spots include stylish **El Azulejo** (Calle de Hurtado 8) playing everything from pop to electronic to jazz, and **Iroquai** (Calle Adarves Bajos 53) which usually has live rock, blues, flamenco or fusion on Thursday.

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (☎ 953 25 01 06; Plaza de Coca de la Piñera) is 250m north of Plaza de la Constitución. Destinations include Granada (€7, 1½ hours, 14 daily), Baeza (€3.50, 45 minutes, up to 11 daily), Úbeda (€4.50, 1¼ hours, up to

12 daily), Córdoba (€7, 1½ hours, seven daily), Cazorla (€7.50, two hours, two daily) and Madrid (€23, four hours, up to five daily).

Most days there are only five departures from the **train station** (☎ 953 27 02 02). One, at 8am, goes to Córdoba (€8, 1½ hours) and Seville (€16, three hours), and up to four go to Madrid (€22 to €26, four hours).

BAEZA

pop 16,000 / elevation 790m

This country town, 48km northeast of Jaén, is replete with gorgeous Gothic and Renaissance buildings from the 16th century, when local nobility ploughed much of their wealth from grain-growing and textiles into beautiful sand-coloured churches and huge mansion palaces that are a delight to the 21st-century eye.

Orientation & Information

The heart of town is Plaza de España and the adjacent Paseo de la Constitución. The **tourist office** (☎ 953 74 04 44; Plaza del Pópulo; ⌚ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 4-6pm Sat Oct-Mar, 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 5-7pm Sat Apr-Sep, to 1pm Sun) is just southwest of Paseo de la Constitución.

Sights

Opening times of some buildings vary unpredictably.

In the centre of beautiful **Plaza del Pópulo** is the **Fuente de los Leones** (Fountain of the Lions), topped by an ancient statue believed to represent Imilce, a local Iberian princess who was married to Hannibal. On the southern side of the plaza is the Plateresque Casa del Pópulo from about 1540 (housing Baeza's tourist office).

Now a high school, Baeza's **Antigua Universidad** (Old University; Calle Beato Juan de Ávila; admission free; ⌚ 10am-1pm & 4-6pm Thu-Tue) was founded in 1538 and closed (for being too progressive) in 1824. The main patio has two levels of elegant Renaissance arches. Round the corner is the early-16th-century **Palacio de Jabalquinto** (Plaza Santa Cruz; admission free; ⌚ 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Thu-Tue), a mansion with a flamboyant Isabeline-Gothic façade and lovely Renaissance patio with a fantastically carved baroque stairway. Across the square, the 13th-century **Iglesia de la Santa Cruz** (⌚ 11am-1.30pm & 4-6pm Mon-Sat, noon-2pm Sun), one of the first churches to be built in Andalucía after the Reconquista, may be the only Romanesque church in Andalucía.

Baeza's eclectic **cathedral** (Plaza de Santa María; donations welcome; ⌚ 10.30am-1pm & 5-7pm Apr-Sep, to 1pm & 4-6pm Oct-Mar) is chiefly in 16th-century Renaissance style, with an interior designed by Andrés de Vandelvira and Jerónimo del Prado. The grille on the **antiguo coro** (old choir) is a masterpiece by Jaén's 16th-century wrought-iron supremo, Maestro Bartolomé.

A block north of Paseo de la Constitución, the **ayuntamiento** (town hall; Paseo del Cardenal Benavides 9) has a marvellous Plateresque façade.

Sleeping & Eating

Hostal El Patio (☎ 953 74 02 00; Calle Conde Romanos 13; d €30) This dilapidated 17th-century mansion has a covered patio full of rugged sofas and overflowing plants. The rooms are drab, but there are also even cheaper ones sharing bathrooms.

Hostal Palacete Santa Ana (☎ 953 74 16 57; info@palacetesantaana.com; Calle Santa Ana Vieja 9; s/d €42/66; a) A stylish hotel with beautifully furnished rooms, in a restored 16th-century nunnery. The Palacete Santa Ana prides itself on its art and archaeology collection and the owners have a classy restaurant right next door, serving up regional specialties.

Hospedería Fuentesueva (☎ 953 74 31 00; www.fuentesueva.com; Paseo Arco del Agua s/n; s/d incl breakfast €43/72; a s) This former women's prison is now a beautifully restored small hotel, with large, comfortable rooms in good-girl colours, such as subdued oranges and salmon-pinks, and marble bathrooms.

Hostal Puerta de la Luna (☎ 953 74 70 19; www.hotelpuertadelaluna.com in Spanish; Calle Candónigo Melgares Raya s/n; d Mon-Thu €95, Fri-Sun €110; p a s) This is a fantastically luxurious mansion hotel with real character and wonderful facilities. The rooms are kitted out with crisp damask sheets and antiques.

La Góndola (☎ 953 74 29 84; Portales Carbonería 13, Paseo de la Constitución; mains €8-14) The terrific local atmosphere here is helped along by the glowing wood-burning grill, cheerful service and good food. Try *patatas baezanas*, a huge vegetarian delight of sautéed potatoes and mushrooms.

Restaurante Vandelvira (☎ 953 74 81 72; Calle de San Francisco 14; mains €7-16; ⌚ closed Sun night & Mon) Installed in part of the restored Convento de San Francisco, this is a classy, friendly restaurant. Treat yourself to dishes such as partridge pâté salad or *solomillo al carbón* (char-grilled steak).

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, €2.40, 2 hours, two daily) and Granada (€10, 2½ 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 name 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 Alcazar in neighbouring Albacete province.

Orientation & Information

The fine architecture is mostly in the south-eastern old 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 **tourist office** (☎ 953 75 08 97; Calle Baja del Marqués 4; 11am–2.45pm & 4–7pm Mon–Fri, 10am–2pm Sat) is in the 18th-century Palacio Marqués de Contadero 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; 11am–2pm & 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 his own 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 Siloé'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** (11am–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.

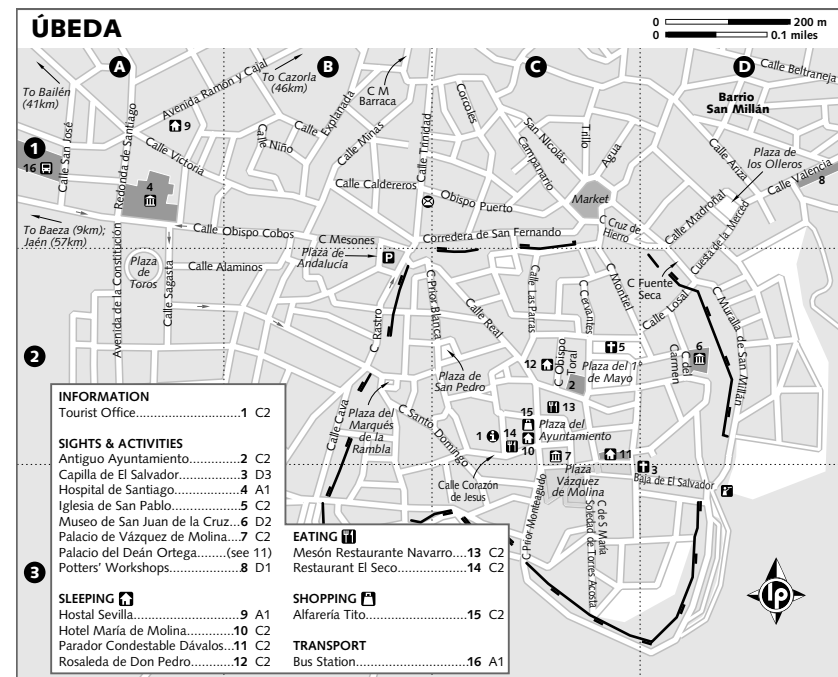
PLAZA 1° DE MAYO & AROUND

Plaza 1° 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 southwestern corner. Along the top (northern) side of the square is the **Iglesia de San Pablo** (11am–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; 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; 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-level patio are a chapel, now restored as an auditorium (the hospital is now a cultural centre), and a staircase with colourful frescoes.



Sleeping & Eating

Hostal Sevilla (☎ 953 75 06 12; Avenida Ramón y Cajal 9; s/d €20/33) 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.rosaledadedonpedro.com; Calle Obispo Toral 2; s €64–77, d €80–96; p a i s w) 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 luxurious. Its restaurant is deservedly the most popular in town, serving up delicious and elegant dishes (around €12 to €17). Try local specialities such as *carruécano* (green peppers stuffed with partridge) or *cabrito guisado con piñones* (stewed kid with pine nuts).

Mesón Restaurante Navarro (☎ 953 79 06 38; Plaza del Ayuntamiento 2; raciones €4–9) Crammed, smoky and noisy, the Navarro is a cherished local favourite. In summer it's nice to sit out on the plaza.

Restaurante El Seco (☎ 953 79 14 52; Calle Corazón de Jesús 8; menú €12) On a pretty old-town square, El Seco has good traditional dishes such as steaming *carne de monte* (usually venison) with a rich tomato sauce or lightly grilled trout with mixed vegetables.

Shopping

The typical green glaze on Úbeda's attractive pottery dates back to Islamic times. Several workshops on Cuesta de la Merced and Calle Valencia in the Barrio San Millán, the potters' quarter northeast of the old town, sell their wares on the spot, and the potters are

often willing to explain some of the ancient techniques they still use. **Alfarería Tito** (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 Baeza (€0.90, 30 minutes, 15 daily), Jaén (€4.50, 1¼ hours, up to 12 daily), Cazorla (€3.30, 45 minutes, up to 10 daily) and Granada (€11, 2¾ hours, seven daily).

CAZORLA

pop 9000 / elevation 885m

Cazorla, 45km east of Úbeda, 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 Corredera 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 Santo Cristo 17; 10am-1pm & 5.30-8pm) 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 Vandelvíra in the 16th century but wrecked by Napoleonic troops. A short walk up from here, the ancient **Castillo de la Vedra** houses the **Museo del Alto Guadalquivir** (adult/EU citizen €1.50/free; 1-3-8pm Tue, 9am-8pm Wed-Sat, to 3pm Sun & holidays), with art and relics of past local life.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Guadalquivir (☎ 953 72 02 68; www.hguadalquivir.com in Spanish; Calle Nueva 6; s/d €35/47; ☎) 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.molinola-farraga.com; Calle Camino de la Hoz s/n; d €64; ☎) The tranquil old La Farraga mill, with a wild and luxuriant garden, is just up the bucolic valley from Plaza Santa María. Understated comfort is the theme.

Hotel Ciudad de Cazorla (☎ 953 72 17 00; Plaza de la Corredera 9; s/d incl breakfast €63/74; p a s) This modern structure on mansion-ruled Plaza de Corredera has had resistance from tradition-minded locals, but it's a good building with spacious rooms and all the requisite facilities.

Bar Las Vegas (Plaza de la Corredera 17; raciones €6) Several bars on Cazorla's three main squares serve good tapas and *raciones*. At Las Vegas you can sample *gloria bendita* (blessed glory), a tasty prawn-and-capsicum *revuelto*.

Mesón Don Chema (☎ 953 72 00 68; Calle Escaleras del Mercado 2; mains €7-9) Down a lane off Calle Doctor Muñoz, this cheerful place serves up good-value local fare. A good choice is *huevos cazorleña*, a sizzling mix of sliced boiled eggs, chorizo sausage and vegetables.

Getting There & Away

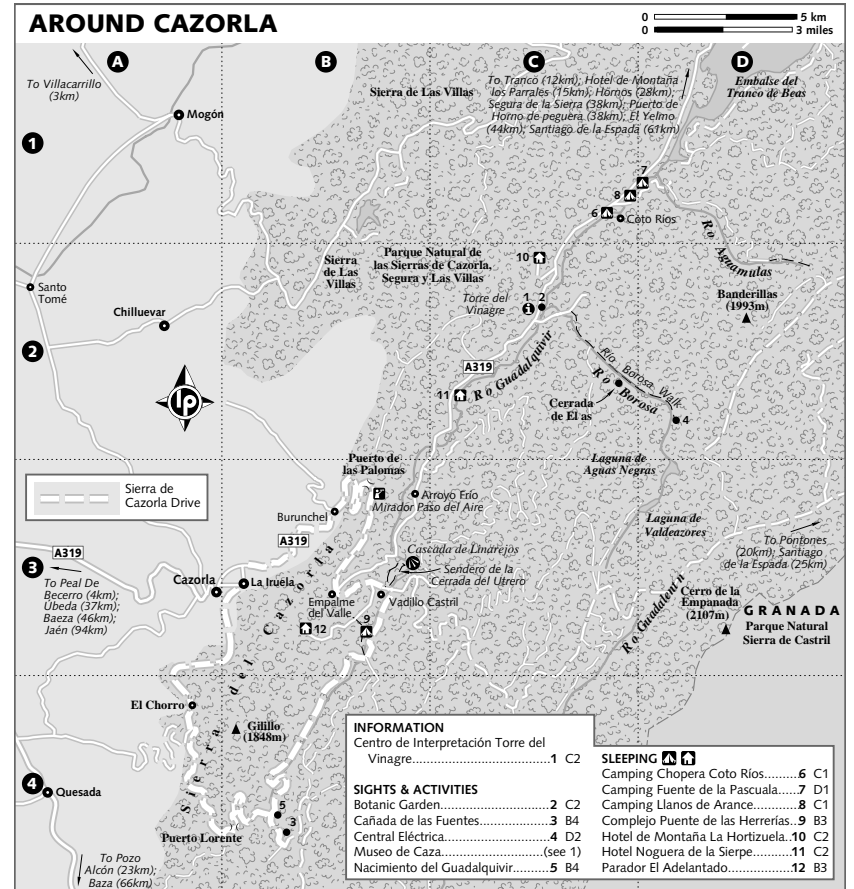
Alsina Graells runs buses to/from Úbeda (€2.95, 45 minutes, up to 10 daily), Jaén (€6.50, two hours, two daily) and Granada (€12, 3½ hours, two daily). The main stop in Cazorla is Plaza de la Constitución; the tourist office has timetables.

PARQUE NATURAL DE CAZORLA

The **Parque Natural de las Sierras de Cazorla, Segura y Las Villas**, filling almost all the east side of Jaén province, is a memorably beautiful region of rugged mountain ranges divided by high plains and deep, forested valleys, and it's one of the best places in Spain for spotting wildlife in the wild. At 2143 sq km, it's also the biggest protected area in the country. If you do a spot of walking, you stand a good chance of seeing wild boar, red and fallow deer, ibex and mouflon (a large wild sheep), and you may even come across deer or boar on some of the main roads. The park also supports 2300 plant species.

The Guadalquivir, Andalucía's longest river, rises in the south of the park and flows north into the Embalse del Tranco de Beas reservoir, then west towards the Atlantic.

To make the most of the park, you need wheels to reach some of the most spectacular areas and walks. The best times to visit are between late April and June, and September and October, when the vegetation is at its most colourful and the weather at its best. In spring, the flowers are magnificent. Peak visitor periods are *Semana Santa*, July and August.



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; 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

beyond El Chorro, ignore another dirt road forking down to the right. Your track winds round over the **Puerto Lorente** pass and down to a junction after 12km. Fork right here, and after about 200m a 'Nacimiento del Guadalquivir' sign to your left points down to the official **source of the Guadalquivir**.

The road heads a short distance past the Nacimiento to the **Cañada de las Fuentes** picnic area, a convenient stop. From here head back northward down the beautiful valley of the infant Guadalquivir. At a T-junction after 14km, about 1km beyond the northern end of the **Complejo Puente de las Herreras**, go left; after 400m the **Sendero de la Cerrada del Utrero** begins on the right. This marked 2km-loop walk takes you under imposing cliffs to the **Cascada de Linarejos**, then above a narrow reservoir on the Guadalquivir and back to the road. Another 3.5km west along the road and you're at Empalme del Valle, from which it's 17km back to Cazorla.

RÍO BOROSA WALK

Though it gets busy at weekends and holidays, this walk of about seven hours return (plus stops) is the park's most popular for good reason. It follows the course of Río Borosa upstream to two beautiful mountain lakes: an ascent of 500m in the course of 12km from Torre del Vinagre. Using the bus to Torre del Vinagre, you can do it as a day trip from Cazorla (but confirm bus schedules before setting off). You can top up your water bottle at good, drinkable springs along the walk; the last is at the Central Eléctrica hydroelectric station.

A road signed 'Central Eléctrica', opposite Torre del Vinagre, soon crosses the Guadalquivir and, within 1km, reaches the marked start of the walk, on your right beside Río Borosa. The first section is an unpaved road, crisscrossing the tumbling river on bridges. After 4km, where the road starts climbing to the left, take a path forking right. This takes you through a beautiful 1.5km section, where the valley narrows to a gorge (**Cerrada de Elías**) and the path takes to a wooden walkway to save you from swimming. Rejoining the main track, continue for 3km to the Central Eléctrica hydroelectric station. Just past this, a sign points you on up towards the Laguna de Valdeazores. This path will lead you, via some dramatic mountain scenery and two tunnels supplying water to the power station (there's room to stay dry as you go through), to reservoir **Laguna de Aguas Negras**, then the natural **Laguna de Valdeazores**.

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 de 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 1.75km, 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 12 60 53; 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** (Muslim 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 Bujarkay (953 71 30 11; www.swin.net/usuarios/jcg; Calle Borosa 81, Coto Ríos) Walking, 4WD, biking 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.

TurisNat (953 72 13 51; www.turisnat.org in Spanish; Paseo del Santo Cristo 17, Cazorla) Offers 4WD trips to *zonas restringidas* (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 Herreras (953 72 70 90; near Vadillo Castril; sites per adult/tent/car €4/3.60/3.60, 2-person cabin €44; 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 off 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 Chopera 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 s) 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 €25/35; 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 €33/55; p a s) This cosy hotel has a tranquil setting, 1km along a signed track off the A319, 2km north of Torre del Vinagre. The restaurant serves a *menú* 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 Enebrós (953 72 71 10; www.lfhotels.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 71 30 21; www.lfhotels.com in Spanish; Carretera del Tranco Km 51; s/d €63/97; 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 Adelantado (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 JF7094, 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.

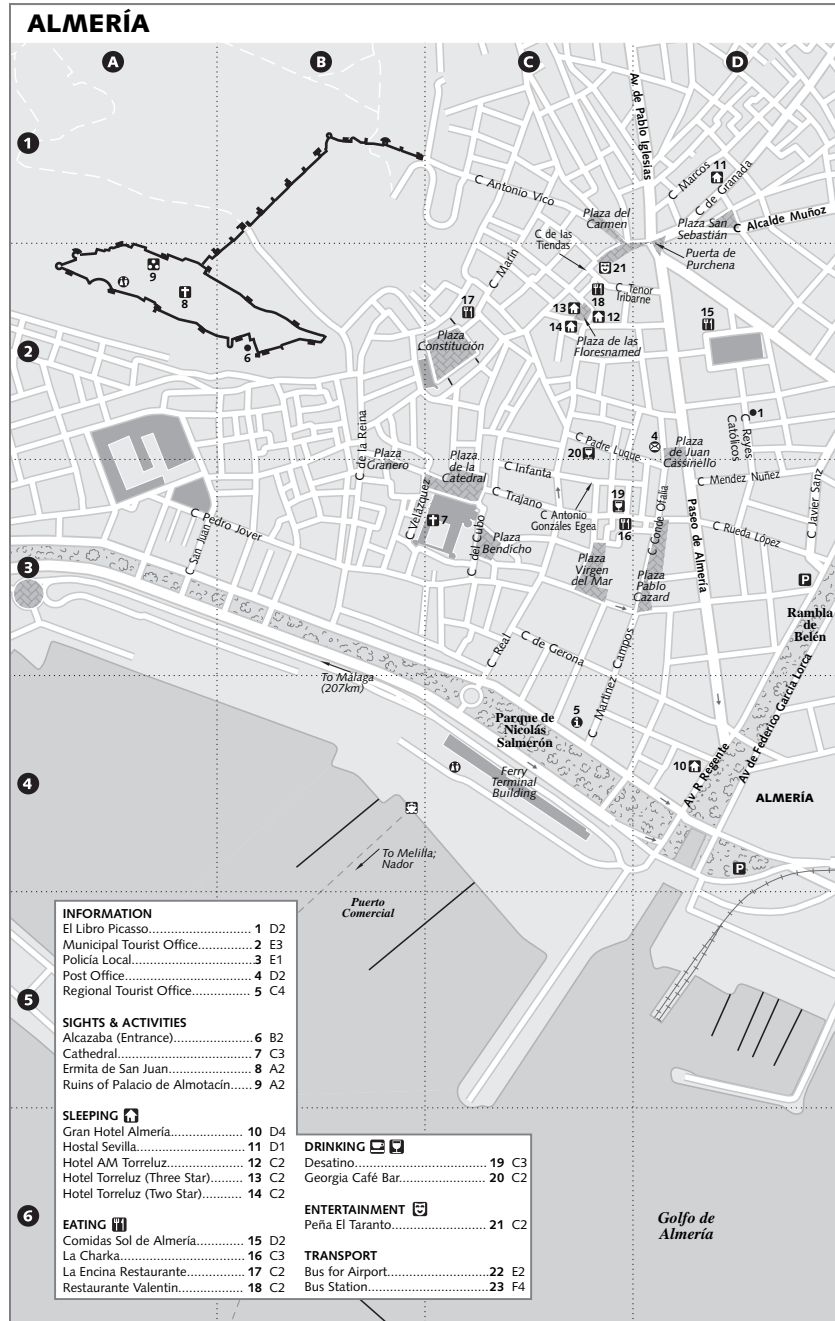
ALMERÍA PROVINCE

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

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 Almariya 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. Agrieros 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; 11am-2am)

Municipal tourist office (% 950 28 07 48; Rambla de Belén; 11am-1pm & 5.30-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon Sat)

Policia Local (% 950 21 00 19; Calle Santos Zárate)

Regional tourist office (% 950 27 43 55; Parque de Nicolás Salmerón s/n; 11am-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; 11am-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 the Alcazaba. At its eastern end is the **Ermita de San Juan** chapel, which was converted from a mosque by the Catholic Monarchs, who took Almería in 1489. On its northern side are the remains of the Muslim rulers' palace, the **Palacio de Almotacín**. The Ventana de la Odalisca (Concubine's Window) here gets

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 €2; 11 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 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 Villalán, 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-Níjar by windsurfing, kayaking, catamaran and other water-related activities.

Sleeping

Hostal Sevilla (950 23 00 09; Calle de Granada 23; s/d €34/54; a) This best budget bet is a cheerful and efficient place that offers clean rooms with flickering TV. Old-fashioned grey phones are the *hostal's* design peak.

Hotel Torreluz (950 23 43 99; www.torreluz.com; Plaza de las Flores 2 & 3; s/d 2-star €39/57, 3-star €56/74; p a) Burnt plum walls, spacious, comfortable beds, good prices and the conveniences of a modern hotel make this one of Almería's best value places to stay – especially in the two-star section, which has pretty much all the three-star amenities but at lower prices. An additional bonus is the location – bright, pretty Plaza de las Flores.

Hotel AM Torreluz (950 23 49 99; www.amtorreluz.com; Plaza de las Flores 5; s/d €69/92; p a s) A grand four-star place with lots of brass and marble and a huge sweeping staircase, this is a favourite with business clientele and prices are reduced by up to 40% on weekends.

Gran Hotel Almería (950 23 80 11; www.granhotlalmeria.com; Avenida Reina Regente 8; s/d €108/135; p a s) For expansive seaward 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 busiest bar area is a great spot to graze in the earlier part of the evening.

Comidas Sol de Almería (Calle Circunvalación, Mercado Central; menú €9; 11 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 Valentín (950 26 44 75; Calle Tenor Iribarne 19; mains €10-15; 11 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; 11 closed Sun & Mon evenings) Almería's most exciting restaurant for inventive cuisine. Get yourself some pork medallions with mushrooms, pine nuts and sweet *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; 11 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; 11 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

Almería **airport** (950 21 37 00) receives flights from several European countries. **Easyjet** (www.easyjet.com) flies from London Gatwick and Stansted, **Ryanair** (www.ryanair.com) from Stansted, and **Monarch Airlines** (www.flymonarch.com) from Birmingham and Manchester. **LTU**

(www.ltu.de), **Hapagfly** (www.hapagfly.com) and **Air-Berlin** (www.airberlin.com) fly from several German cities, and **Transavia** (www.transavia.com) from Amsterdam. **Iberia** (www.iberia.com) flies direct to/from Barcelona, Madrid and Melilla.

BOAT

Trasmediterránea (950 23 61 55; www.trasmediterranea.es; Estación Marítima) sails daily to/from Melilla, and twice or 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 Ghazaouet, Algeria.

BUS

Destinations served from the clean, efficient **bus station** (950 26 20 98) include Granada (€10 to €12.25, 2¼ hours, 10 daily), Málaga (€15, 3¼ 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, 2¼ hours) and Seville (€32, 5½ hours) and two to Madrid (€33 to €38, 6¾ to 10 hours).

Getting Around

The airport is 8km east of the city; the number 20 'Alquíán' 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 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; 11 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 **Reserva Zoológica** with lions, elephants and numerous other species of African and Iberian fauna. You will need your own vehicle to visit from Almería.

Níjar

Attractive and unusual glazed pottery and colourful striped cotton rugs, known as *jarapas*, are made and sold in this small town 34km northeast of Almería. It's well 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 it a positively North African 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-Níjar** covers Cabo de Gata's 60km coast plus a slice of hinterland. The park's main information centre is the **Centro de Interpretación Las Amoladeras** (950 16 04 35; 11 10am-2pm & 5.30-9pm mid-Jul-mid-Sep, to 3pm Tue-Sun mid-Sep-mid-Jul), about 2.5km west of Ruescas.

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



southern end. The **Oficina de Información** (☎ 950 38 00 04; Avenida Miramar 88; h 10am-2.30pm & 5.30-9pm) rents out bicycles (€4/13 per two hours/day) – a nice way to explore the area.

South of the village stretch the **Salinas de Cabo de Gata**, which are salt-extraction lagoons. In spring many migrating greater flamingos and other birds call in here: some stay on to breed, then others arrive in summer, and by late August there can be 1000 flamingos here. There's a public viewing hide just off the road, 3km south of the village.

You should see a good variety of birds any time except winter, when the *salinas* (salt-extraction lagoons) are drained.

SLEEPING & EATING

Camping Cabo de Gata (☎ /fax 950 16 04 43; sites per adult/tent €4/8, bungalow €76; p s) This extremely well-run camping site, 1km from the beach, has all the necessary amenities including a restaurant. It's 2.5km north of the village by dirt roads.

Hostal Las Dunas (☎ 950 37 00 72; www.lasdunas.net; Calle Barrio Nuevo 58; s/d €36/51; p) A friendly family house with well-kept, modern rooms and crazy balustraded balconies in carved marble.

El Naranjero (☎ 950 37 01 11; Calle Iglesia 1; mains €10-25; h dosed Sun) One of the nearest things to a proper restaurant, set right at the entrance to the village. It specialises in fish and seafood.

Faro de Cabo de Gata & Around

Beyond the Salinas de Cabo de Gata, a narrow road winds 4km round the cliffs to the **Faro de Cabo de Gata**, the lighthouse at the promontory's tip. A turning by Café Bar El Faro, just before the lighthouse, leads to the **Torre Vigía Vela Blanca**, an 18th-century watchtower atop 200m cliffs, with awesome views. Here the road ends but a walking and cycling track continues down to Playa de Mónsul (one hour on foot).

San José

pop 550

San José, spreading round a bay on the eastern side of Cabo de Gata, is a mildly chic resort in summer, but it remains a small, pleasant, low-rise place and is a base for both water and land-bound activities.

Out of season you may have San José almost to yourself.

ORIENTATION & 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 Correo; h 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 Mónsul**, 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 strung 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; a) The Sol Bahía and its sister establishment, Hostal Bahía Plaza, across the street, are in the centre of San José and have attractive, clean rooms in bright, modern buildings. Half a dozen other *hostales* and hotels have similar or not much higher prices.

Hotel Cortijo el Sotillo (☎ 950 61 11 00; www.hotel.sotillo.com; Carretera Entrada a San José s/n; s €100-20, d €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.

Mesón El Tempranillo (☎ 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.

The hamlet of **Los Escullos** has a short beach. You can walk here from San José, along a track starting at Cala Higueras bay. One kilometre beyond Los Escullos, **La Isleta del Moro** is a tiny village with a beach and a couple of fishing boats. **Casa Café de la Loma** (☎ 950 38 98 31; www.degata.com/laloma; s/d €30/45, Aug €35/52), on a small hill above the village, is a friendly, relaxed little place with airy rooms, terrific views and, in summer, a part-vegetarian restaurant with weekly jazz or flamenco concerts.

From here the road heads inland past the former gold-mining village of **Rodalquilar**. About 1km past Rodalquilar is the turning to **Playa del Playazo**, a good beach between two headlands, 2km along a level track. From here you can walk near the coast to the village of **Las Negras**, which is set on a pebbly beach and largely given over to seasonal tourism.

On Las Negras' main street, **Hostal Arrecife** (☎ 950 38 81 40; Calle Bahía 6, Las Negras; s/d €26/38) has cool, quiet, well-maintained rooms, some with sea views from their balconies. **Camping La Caleta** (☎ 950 52 52 37; sites per adult/tent/car €5/4.50/5; h year-round; p s) lies in a separate cove 1km south of Las Negras. It can be fiercely hot in summer, but there is a good pool. Other accommodation in Las Negras is mostly holiday apartments and houses to let. **Restaurante La Palma** (☎ 950 38 80 42; mains €5-10), overlooking the beach, plays good music and serves excellent fish at medium prices.

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 11km, 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 Hortichuelas. 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 chic 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** (☎ 950 13 82 08; Calle Aguada s/n; d low/high season €60/90; mains €7-15; a) has 10 bright rooms with half-moon balconies, and its restaurant is Agua Amarga's most popular lunch spot. Chic, slick **miKasa** (☎ 950 13 80 73; www.mikasasuites.com; Carretera Carboneras s/n; d ind breakfast €105-90; 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 Negras (€3.40, 1¼ hours, one daily Monday to Saturday) and Agua Amarga (€4, 1¼ hours, one daily Monday to Friday).

MOJÁCAR

pop 5000

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. Though dominated by tourism, the Pueblo is picturesque with its mazelike streets and bougainvillea-swathed balconies. Mojácar Playa has few 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.

Orientation & Information

Pueblo and Playa are joined by a road that heads uphill from the Parque Comercial shopping centre, towards the northern end of Mojácar Playa.

The very helpful **tourist office** (☎ 950 61 50 25; www.mojacar.es; Calle Glorieta 1; h 10am-2pm & 5-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-1.30pm Sat) is just off Mojácar Pueblo's main square, Plaza Nueva. In the same building are the post office and **Policía Local** (☎ 950 47 20 00).

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.

The most touching spot is the **Fuente Mora** (Moorish Fountain; Calle La Fuente) in the lower part of the Pueblo. Though remodelled in modern times, it maintains the medieval Islamic tradition of making art out of flowing water. An inscription records the moving speech made here, according to legend, by Alavez, the last Islamic governor of Mojácar, to the envoy of the Catholic Monarchs in 1488, pleading for his people to be permitted to stay and 'continue working the land of our ancestors'.

For good windsurfing equipment (per hour €12), canoeing, sailing and water-skiing (per session €20) check out **Samoa Club** (☎ 950 47 84 90; Playa de las Ventánicas) in Mojácar Playa.

Sleeping & Eating

MOJÁCAR PUEBLO

Hostal Arco Plaza (☎ 950 47 27 77; fax 950 47 27 17; Calle Aire Bajo 1; s/d €36/52; a) Bang in the centre of the village, the Arco Plaza has rooms in pretty pastel shades with spacious bathrooms and crisp, white linen. The management are incredibly friendly and efficient.

Pensión El Torreón (☎ 950 47 52 59; Calle Jazmín 4; d without bathroom €60) This breathtakingly beautiful little *hostal*, with quaint rooms and yet more great views, was allegedly the birthplace of Walt Disney, who locals maintain was the love child of a village girl and a wealthy landowner.

El Mirador del Castillo (☎ 950 47 30 22; www.elcastillomojacar.com; Mirador El Castillo; d €48-76; i s) A laid-back *hostal* with a no-fuss bohemian atmosphere and fantastic views.

Hostal Mamabel's (☎ 950 47 24 48; www.mamabels.com; Calle Embajadores 5; d/ste €65/87) This exquisite small hotel hugs the very edge of the Pueblo, with rooms seemingly piled on top of each other. All are large and individually styled and some have fantastically precipitous views. Mamabel herself is quite a character and makes costumes for Mojácar's colourful Moros y Cristianos festival on the weekend nearest 10 June. The stylish restaurant here, El Horno (mains €11 to €16), offers the best homecooked food in Mojácar, including a tasty couscous.

La Taberna (☎ 647-724367; Plaza del Cano 1; tapas & platos combinados from €4; v) This thriving little eatery, inside a warren of cavelike rooms, serves

extremely well-prepared meals with plenty of tasty vegetarian options. The enormous house kebab arrives on its own scaffolding!

Restaurante El Viento del Desierto (Plaza Frontón; mains €5-6) Good-value Moroccan-cum-Spanish eatery just by the church.

MOJÁCAR PLAYA

Hotel Río Abajo (☎ 950 47 89 28; Calle Río 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 (☎ 950 47 82 02, fax 950 47 27 35; Playa Las Ventánicas; 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

Classical music, live comedy acts and jazz concerts are staged at the lively **Café Bar Mirador del Castillo** (☎ 950 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 Caipirosa** (Calle Horno), 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 **Tito's** (☎ 950 61 50 30; Playa de las Ventánicas; h Apr-Oct), which features live music, including jazz.

Getting There & Around

Long-distance buses stop at the Parque Comercial and the Fuente stop at the foot of Mojácar Pueblo. The tourist office has timetables. Destinations include Murcia (€9, 2½ hours, four daily), Almería (€5.50, 1¼ hours, two daily), Granada (€15, four hours, two daily) and Madrid (€29, eight hours, two daily).

A local bus service (€1) runs a circuit from the southern to northern ends of Mojácar Playa, then back to the Parque Comercial, up to the Pueblo (Calle Glorieta), then back down to the Parque Comercial and the southern end of the Playa. It runs every half-hour, 9am to 11.30pm, from April to September, and every hour from 9.30am to 7.30pm between October and March.

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