

The Best of Seville, Granada & Andalusia

This once-great stronghold of Muslim Spain is rich in history and tradition, containing some of the country's most celebrated treasures: the world-famous Mezquita (mosque) in Córdoba, the Alhambra in Granada, and the great Gothic cathedral in Seville. It also has many smaller towns just waiting to be discovered—Ubeda, Jaén, gorge-split Ronda, Jerez de la Frontera, and the gleaming white port city of Cádiz. Give Andalusia at least a week and you'll still have only skimmed the surface.

This dry mountainous region also encompasses the Costa del Sol (Málaga, Marbella, and Torremolinos), a popular coastal strip. Go to the Costa del Sol for beach resorts, nightlife, and relaxation; visit Andalusia for its architectural wonders and beauty.

1 The Most Unforgettable Travel Experiences

- **Getting Lost in the Barrio de Santa Cruz:** In Seville, “famous for its oranges and women,” according to Lord Byron, you can wander at leisure through this Arab-looking ghetto of narrow streets. The brilliantly white-washed little houses festooned with flowering plants and graced Andalusian courtyards epitomize romantic Seville. While away a meal or a whole afternoon at one of the outdoor cafe tables tucked into a handkerchief-size, hidden square. Under the Moors, Jews flourished in this ghetto, but were chased out by the Christians at the time of the Inquisition. The great artist Murillo also called this barrio home. See chapter 5.
- **Drinking Sherry at the Bodegas of Jerez:** Spain's most distinctive fortified wine—“sherry” in English, *jerez* in Spanish—uses this charming little Andalusian town of Jerez de la Frontera as its main production center. Touring the sherry wineries, or bodegas, is one of the province's most evocative undertakings. You can see mixing tanks, fermentation rooms, and warehouses for aging, but nothing is more memorable than an actual tasting. You'll quickly determine your favorite, ranging from *fino* (extra dry) to *dulce* (sweet). It's best to arrive in early September for the annual wine harvest. See chapter 8.
- **Visiting the Great Alhambra:** People from all over the world flock to Granada to enjoy wandering the Alhambra, Andalusia's last remaining fortress-palace constructed by the Muslim caliphs, who staged their last stand here against the Catholic monarchs. Washington Irving, in his *Tales of the Alhambra* in 1832, virtually put it on the tourist map after decades of neglect. Inside its walls is a once royal city and a testament

to past Muslim glory. Expect fountained courtyards, fanciful halls (once filled with dancing girls from the sultan's harem), and miles of intricate plasterwork and precious mosaics. In all, the splendor of *Arabian Nights*. See chapter 7.

- **Experiencing a Bullfight:** With origins as old as pagan Andalusia, bullfighting is a pure expression of Spanish temperament and passion. Detractors call the sport cruel, bloody, and savage. Aficionados, however, view bullfighting as a microcosm of death, catharsis, and rebirth. If you strive to understand the bullfight, it can be a powerful and memorable experience. Head for the Plaza de Toros (bullring) in any major Andalusian city; the best *corridos* are in Seville. See chapter 5.
- **Feasting on Tapas in the Tascas:** Julia Child once said, "Tapas are reason enough to go to Seville." We agree wholeheartedly. These small plates of food can be washed down with wine or beer, but a true Andalusian will accompany them with a glass of sherry. These tasty treats can be almost anything, cured ham or chorizo (spicy

sausage); *gambas* (deep-fried shrimp) are always a favorite, as are marinated anchovies, even stuffed peppers or a hake salad—and most definitely a bowl of soothing gazpacho, a "liquid salad" for a hot summer day.

- **Getting Swept Up in the Passion of Flamenco:** Best heard in the old gypsy taverns of Seville and Granada, in such evocative neighborhoods as Seville's Barrio de Triana or Granada's Albaicín, flamenco traces its Spanish roots to Andalusia. From the poshest nightclub to the lowest taverna, you can hear the staccato sound of foot stomping, castanet rattling, hand clapping, and the sultry sound of an Andalusian guitar. Some critics say the origins of flamenco actually lie somewhere deep in the heart of Asia, but the Andalusian gypsy has given the art a special and distinctive regional interpretation. The flamenco dramatizes inner tension and conflict. Performed by a great *artista*, it can tear your heart out with its soulful, throaty singing. In all cities and towns, flamenco can be heard nightly.

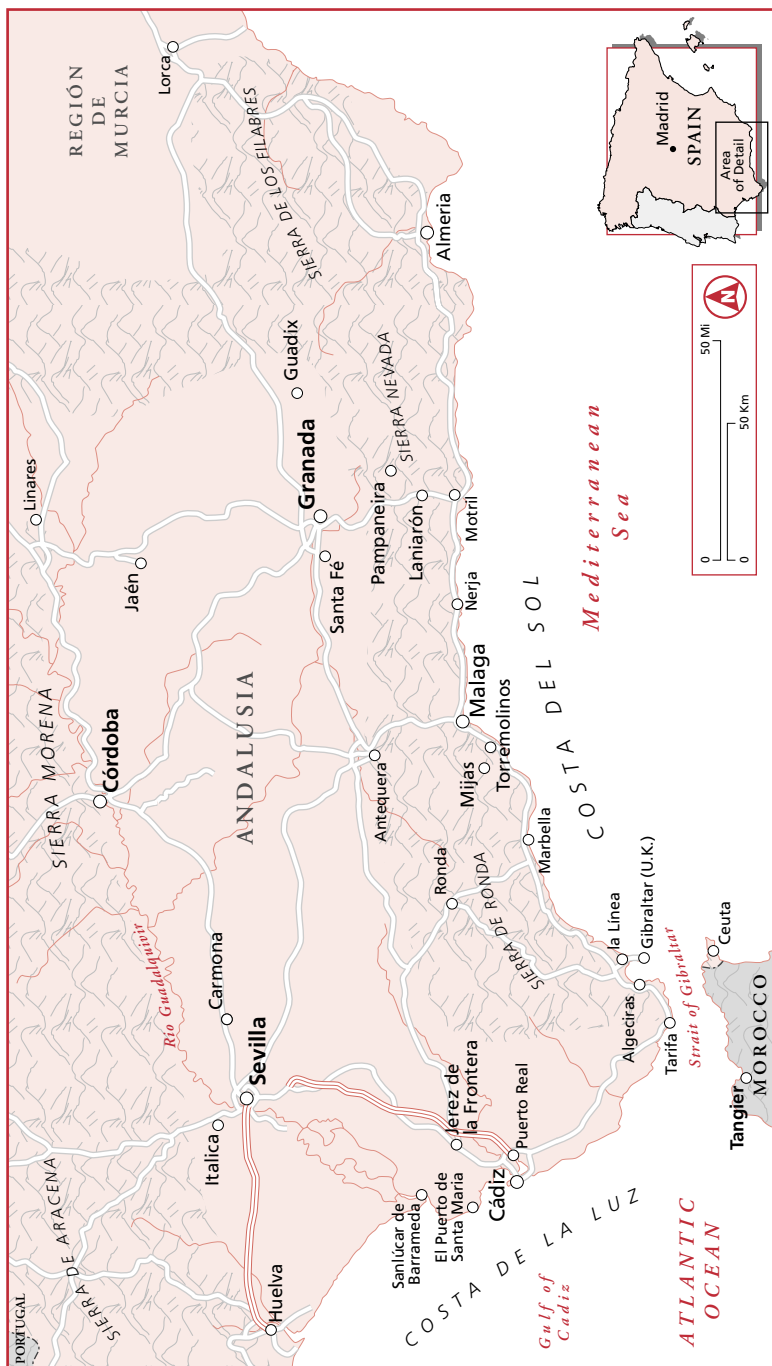
2 The Best Luxury Hotels

- **Hotel Alfonso XIII** (Seville; ☎ 95-491-70-00): This reproduction of a Spanish palace, a fixture in Seville since 1929, is a regal bastion of fine living. From its white marble courtyard to its Moroccan gardens, it is the grande dame of all the Andalusian hotels. The bedrooms in this super-expensive bastion of glamour are ultraspacious. See p. 67.
- **AC Palacio de Santa Paula** (Granada; ☎ 95-880-57-40): It's not quite as magnificent as the Alhambra, but this post-millennium architectural monument to

grandeur is as good as it gets in Granada. The contemporary and the antique have been harmoniously blended, more so than anywhere else in the province. Many buildings, including a 15th-century medieval cloister and two 14th-century Arab houses, came together to create this deluxe hotel. It's both of the past, and as modern as tomorrow. See p. 169.

- **AC Quinta Canela Golf** (Ayamonte; ☎ 95-947-78-30): The greatest resort living along the Costa de la Luz is found at this magnificent estate with an 18-hole

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golf course built near an estuary of the Río Guadiana. Stunningly modern, it evokes an elegant Portuguese manor house but with Andalusian architectural motifs. Standing on landscaped grounds, it offers bedrooms both spacious and luxurious. See p. 290.

- **Marbella Club** (Marbella; ☎ 95-282-22-11): This is the grande dame of all Costa del Sol resorts, and the posh resort that made Marbella itself a player in world tourism. Since 1954 the rich and/or famous have flocked to its plush precincts. Boasting the most lavish hotel gardens along the coast, the club today is a hangout for movie stars, fading European aristocracy, and oil-rich sheiks. It's discreet, international, and an elegant bastion. See p. 317.
- **Kempinski Resort Hotel** (Estepona; ☎ 95-280-95-00): A justifiable member of "The Leading Hotels of the World," this is

modern resort-hotel living at its most luxurious along the Costa del Sol. Not as well known as the Marbella Club, it is, nonetheless, a citadel of luxe living, with super, airy, and spacious bedrooms, first-class service, and some of the best cuisine along the coastal strip. See p. 310.

- **Duques de Medinaceli** (El Puerto de Santa María; ☎ 95-686-07-77): This tastefully converted 18th-century palace is one of the grandest hotels of Andalusia, the epitome of taste, style, and luxury. Set in beautifully landscaped gardens, it is imbued with the trappings of yesterday yet all the modern conveniences have been installed as well. Sherry producers in the area view this as one of their favorite addresses, not only for its public and private rooms, but for its first-rate cuisine as well. See p. 255.

3 The Best Paradors

- **Parador de Granada** (Granada; ☎ 95-822-14-40): This is the most famous parador in Spain. Naturally, it's the most sought after and hard to get into. Part of its allure is that it lies within the grounds of the Alhambra itself. With verdant gardens, splashing fountains, and Arab- and mudéjar-inspired architecture, the parador was converted from a former convent founded by Isabella and Ferdinand. The Catholic monarchs were once buried on its grounds. See p. 173.
- **Parador de Córdoba** (Córdoba; ☎ 95-727-59-00): Not all paradors are converted from ancient buildings. This parador, lying in a suburb of Córdoba called El Brilante, is modern with completely

up-to-date amenities. However, it occupies the site of a former caliphate palace. It's known for its garden of orange trees and for the first palm trees planted in Europe. Bedrooms are spacious and luxurious, and the cuisine deserves its high praise. See p. 127.

- **Parador de Jaén** (Jaén; ☎ 95-323-00-00): This parador, 5km (3 miles) east of this historic former Muslim stronghold, opens onto the most panoramic view of any of its competitors. On the site of an old Muslim fortress from the 10th century, it is a showplace today. A citadel of good taste and baronial comfort, it offers bedrooms with balconies and canopied beds. See p. 152.
- **Parador de Ronda** (Ronda; ☎ 95-287-75-00): Sitting on a high cliff

overlooking the fantastic gorge of Ronda, this *parador* offers beautifully furnished bedrooms that look down on the torrents of the Guadalevín River. Dramatically perched in this mountain town, it is a bastion of good taste and fine living. Modern amenities have been installed in all the rooms, and there's even an outdoor pool. See p. 220.

- **Parador de Cádiz** (Cádiz; ☎ 95-622-69-05): This modern resort hotel opens onto one of the most beautiful beaches along the Bay of Cádiz outside this historic old port. Originally built as a private hotel in 1929, it has been extensively remodeled and updated.

Today it offers a luxurious setting, first-rate cuisine, and luxurious bedrooms, with both a health club and an outdoor pool. See p. 271.

- **Parador de Nerja** (Nerja; ☎ 95-252-00-50): This *parador* is in a gem of a setting atop a bluff overlooking the Mediterranean, with one of the best beaches along the Costa del Sol only a short stroll away. It centers around a flower-filled courtyard with a splashing fountain. Bedrooms are spacious and bastions of comfort and good taste. The on-site restaurant features a top-notch international and Andalusian regional cuisine. See p. 352.

4 The Best Dining Experiences

- **Egaña Oriza** (Seville; ☎ 95-422-72-11): Seville's best and most fashionable restaurant, set in a restored mansion near the Murillo Gardens, serves a savory mix of Basque and international specialties. Many of the ingredients, notably the wild game, originate in Andalusia. Try the woodcock flamed in Spanish brandy. See p. 80.
- **Bodegas Campos** (Córdoba; ☎ 95-749-75-00): Not particularly elegant or grand, this restaurant has another allure: it serves the best food in Córdoba, with both Spanish and Andalusian dishes on its menu. Going strong since 1908, it uses market-fresh ingredients to concoct an array of the tastiest food in town. See p. 133.
- **Los Santanderinos** (Granada; ☎ 95-812-83-35): In the newer part of Granada, this is a genuinely wonderful dining choice, serving the finest cuisine, a mixture of Spanish and Andalusian dishes, within the city proper.

Chef Jesús Diego Díaz is a media darling of the Spanish gastronomic press, and he deserves his acclaim. His tapas are among the tastiest in Granada. See p. 180.

- **La Meridiana** (Marbella; ☎ 95-277-61-90): Sophisticated and fashionable, this deluxe restaurant in a romantic setting with a garden terrace delights the most discerning palates of the Costa del Sol. In a swank setting, with top-rate service, the chefs turn out the best Italian and international cuisine to be had in Marbella and beyond. Yes, foie gras, Beluga caviar, and freshly caught lobster—all those high-end favorites—are routinely dished up here. See p. 323.
- **Tragabuches** (Ronda; ☎ 95-219-02-91): High in the mountains, chef/owner Daniel García turns out modern Spanish and Andalusian cuisine with sublime flavors from his inventive menu. His cooking technique is impeccably sharp and refined. See p. 224.
- **El Ventorillo del Chato** (Cádiz; ☎ 95-625-00-25): In the ancient

port city of Cádiz, this Andalusian restaurant has origins going back to 1780. But on the culinary front, it's stayed ahead of the times, turning out a virtual celebration of

regional dishes. Sometimes, for added flavor, flamenco shows are also presented. Chefs have finely turned their time-tested recipes. See p. 272.

5 The Best Beaches

If you're from a country with terrific beaches, such as Australia or the United States, you probably won't be impressed with the beaches in Spain. But while you're vacationing along the Costa del Sol or Costa de la Luz, here's a preview of the best beaches, such as they are, that await you.

- **Playa Victoria**, Cádiz: One of the best beaches in Spain is found among the champagne-colored sands in this historic old port city. Local authorities work to keep the beach wide by pumping tons of sand here from points offshore. The beach stretches for 2km (1¼ miles), making it one of the finest beachfronts in southern Spain. Watersports galore are found along these sands, and the beach is flanked by dozens of restaurants, bars, and nightlife options. Drop in at any one of the *chiringuitos* (beach bars) that captures your fancy. Although richly built up, the *playa* still isn't junky. See p. 269.
- **Playa de la Caleta**, Cádiz: Locals call this beach **Baño de la Vina**, for the barrio that abuts it. In the old part of town, the beach forms a half-moon of golden sands to the immediate east of Castillo de Santa Catalina. To the immediate west is another fortification, Castillo de San Sebastián. The latter fortress lies on an islet reached by causeway. This beach and bay were once used by the Phoenicians, but it's kept up with the times, and is more favored by local residents than the tonier Playa Victoria. Watersports are popular, but many of the townspeople

come here just to absorb the sun. If you want another beach in town, head over to the **Playa Santa María del Mar**, which is found just 500m (1,640 ft.) east of the Cathedral. For more information, see p. 269.

- **Playa Isla Canela**: The little town of Ayamonte lies 37km (22 miles) east of the provincial capital of Huelva where Columbus dared to dream "the impossible dream." One of the best beaches along the strip known as the Costa de la Luz is Playa Isla Canela. Expect tranquil waters protected by the sandbars 50 to 100m (164–328 ft.) found in the area. At low tide these sandbars become virtual islands. There's not a lot of tourist infrastructure here; it's a great place just to bask in the sun. When you tire of the sands, you'll find little kiosks on the beach renting water sports equipment or others hawking freshly cooked (or caught) seafood for your lunch. Coverage of Ayamonte begins on p. 290.
- **Playa Zahara**, near Tarifa: The little city of Tarifa is the southernmost town in continental Europe. Its windy beaches also make it the windsurfing capital of Europe. At the little fishing village of Zahara de los Atunes (p. 281) you'll come across some of the Costa de la Luz's most beautiful white sandy beaches. Here **Playa Zahara** stretches for a total of 8km (5 miles). If you don't mind the almost constant winds, these are fabulous beaches. The landscape is

a bit savage here, and the panoramic views are of the coast of Africa. See p. 281.

- **Playa de la Carihuela**, Torremolinos: Even if the beach here is not among the world's greatest, you'll have a roaring good time on the sands of La Carihuela bordering the old fishing village of this wildly popular resort along the Costa del Sol. An expat population of Germans, Scandinavians, and Brits can be found playing volleyball or sunning themselves on the beige sands in skimpy suits. When you tire of the sands, a bevy of excellent seafood restaurants lines the waterfront. The beach has facilities for paragliding, windsurfing, water-skiing, and plain old sailing. For more on Torremolinos, see our coverage beginning on p. 298.

- **El Fuerte** and **La Fontanilla**, Marbella: On either side of the Costa del Sol's glossiest resort stretches the sands of these two good beaches, both famous and fashionable since the 1960s. The beaches are protected from the winds from the north by the mountains of Sierra Blanca, which can extend the bathing season from May to October. If you find the sands too crowded, you can also sample two of Marbella's other beaches, the **Playa de la Bajadilla** in the east and the amusingly named **Playa de Venus**, both of which lie between the resort's twin harbors. Many watersports such as sailing and water-skiing are possible from these beaches. See chapter 10.

6 The Most Charming Towns

- **Ubeda**: In Jaén province, this is the gem of the area, containing Plaza Vázquez de Molina, the most architecturally harmonious square in Andalusia. Its Moorish legacy lives on its *esparto* (grass) weaving and pottery making, but the town mainly evokes 16th-century Spain and the Renaissance. Ubeda is dramatically built over an escarpment overlooking the valley. Its palaces, churches, and mansions are best seen on a leisurely stroll. See p. 158.
- **Arcos de la Frontera**: The term *de la frontera* (frontier) dates from the days when this town marked the boundaries between the Muslim controlled territories and the encroaching Catholic-held lands. Hemmed in on three sides by the Guadalete River, Arcos is one of the most beautiful of the Pueblos Blancos (the white towns or villages of the interior of Andalusia).

This seemingly impregnable site was captured by King Alfonso X in 1250. A hair-raising terrace opens onto a valley of neatly cultivated green fields and flowering orchards. Except for the city of Ronda, Arcos has the best hotels you'll encounter on a driving tour of this area. See p. 233.

- **Mijas**: This Pueblo Blanco is the only white town that most visitors from the Costa del Sol drive up to see on a day's excursion. Even though mobbed, Mijas still retains its original charm. It occupies a panoramic site, welded to the side of a mountain. Its whitewashed houses look like a stack of sugar cubes. On a clear day you can enjoy stunning views of the Mediterranean and across the sea to the foreboding Rif Mountains of Morocco. To get around you can rent a *burro taxi* (guided donkey). See "Mijas" in chapter 8.

- **Jerez de la Frontera:** This is home base for Andalusia's distinctive fortified wine—sherry—which was received enthusiastically by English, Scottish, and Irish shippers in the 16th century. Touring and tasting wine in the wineries, or bodegas, is traditionally viewed as a prime attraction of Andalusia. There are more than 100 bodegas in all, with such famous names as Sandeman, González Byass, and Harvey. Jerez is also the center for the Real Escuela Andaluza del Arte Ecuestre, a rival to Vienna's renowned Spanish Riding School. These "dancing horses" are Jerez's other major attraction. See "Jerez de la Frontera" in chapter 8.
- **Nerja:** East of Málaga, this town of whitewashed buildings opens onto the "Balcony of Europe," a marble-paved projection above a headland jutting into the sea. Lying at the mouth of the Río Chillar, it stands on a sloping site beneath a wall of jagged coastal mountains. The town is filled with some sandy beaches and fishing boats bobbing at anchor. It's the perfect antidote to the tourist crowds in Torremolinos and Marbella in the west. See "Nerja" in chapter 10.

7 The Best Architecture

- **Seville Cathedral,** Seville: This is the largest Gothic structure on the planet and the third-largest church in Europe, topped only by St. Peter's in Rome and St. Paul's in London. "Let us build a cathedral so immense that everyone on beholding it will take us for madmen," the chaplain said when workers were tearing down an ancient mosque to erect this splendid edifice. This cathedral is one of the last to be built in the Gothic style but it also shows obvious Renaissance motifs. Works of art abound, including magnificent stained-glass windows from the 15th century. The Treasury contains art by such Spanish masters as Goya, Murillo, and Zurbarán. See p. 94.
- **Giralda Tower,** Seville: Next to the cathedral, this Muslim tower conjures up Seville, as the Eiffel Tower conjures up Paris. It was constructed in the 12th century, modeled after the Koutoubia in Marrakesh and the Hassan Tower in Rabat. Amazingly, the Christian overlords allowed this Moorish tower to stand with certain alterations. The top story, which has a Renaissance motif, was added in the 16th century. From its top, one of the great city views in all Spain is visible. See p. 94.
- **Alcázar,** Seville: Ordered constructed by Pedro the Cruel, this splendid 14th-century mudéjar palace is the oldest royal residence in Europe still in use. It lies north of the cathedral. Some remains of the original Alcázar of the Almoahads can still be seen. Centuries of architects and builders have produced an ornate complex of pavilions, fountains, pools, patios, and ornamental gardens. Residents Ferdinand and Isabella, who received Columbus here, greatly influenced its architecture. Moorish influences join forces with Gothic, Renaissance, and baroque elements, yet it all comes together harmoniously with its own very particular charm. See p. 92.
- **Alcázar de los Reyes Cristianos,** Córdoba. One of Spain's greatest examples of military architecture was commissioned in 1328 by Alfonso XI. Ferdinand and Isabella lived here at this fortress on the

Río Guadalquivir as they made plans to send their armies to conquer Granada. The complex is distinguished by its towers, Torre de los Leones and Torre de Homenaje, the former containing intricately carved ogival ceilings that are the most notable examples of Gothic architecture in Andalusia. The gardens still show their Moorish origins, a vast architectural complex of landscaping, fountains, and pools. See p. 138.

- **Mezquita-Catedral de Córdoba,** Córdoba: This is a 1,200-year-old masterwork by a succession of caliphs that is one of the architectural wonders of Europe. Its interior is a virtual forest of pillars and red-and-white candy-striped Moorish horseshoe arches. The phantasmagoric rows of columns stretch in every direction. In the midst of it all, as impossible as it sounds, is a florid cathedral in a Gothic and Renaissance architectural motif. This wonder is the third-largest mosque in the world, even though it hasn't been used as

such since 1236. This Great Mosque, the crowning glory of Muslim architecture in the West, is reason enough to visit Córdoba. See p. 139.

- **The Alhambra,** Granada: Set against the snowcapped peaks of the Sierra Nevada mountain range, the Alhambra is one of the most fabled landmarks in the world, evoking a fantasy of *1,001 Arabian Nights*. It is the single-most visited attraction in all of Andalusia. It was the last bastion of luxury living for the Nasrid kings, the last Muslim rulers of Spain, and their harems filled with dancing girls. The palace-fortress is girded by more than 1.6km (1 mile) of ramparts, enclosing a virtual royal city. Actually the Alhambra is a series of three palaces of architectural wonder, with courtyards, fountains, fanciful halls, and scalloped windows framing vistas. The oldest section is the Alcazaba, dating from the 9th century. See p. 189.

8 The Best Gifts & Souvenirs

- **Antiques:** Many avid shoppers land in Andalusia and go on shopping binges for antiques and accessories. Seville in particular offers antiques hunters some rare possibilities. There is a wide range of dealers throughout the province; you'll often find them in some of the smaller villages, stores marked just by a little sign. Many items purchased in these shops are small decorative pieces that can be shipped home easily. Some of the most popular "antiques" purchased in Andalusia are old posters, many from the 1800s. Posters advertising the famous Andalusian fairs or else the well-attended *corridos* (bullfights) sell the most copies.
- **Ceramics and Tiles:** Throughout the province, stores sell highly distinctive ceramics (each town or region has its own style) as well as *azulejos* (hand-painted tiles). For example, to suit the preferences of the many English expats who settled in and around Cádiz, florals and busy scenic designs became popular in this area. Many of these floral motifs, however, were rooted in Spanish cultural traditions from the 18th century. Other pieces have ancient geometric patterns inherited from the Arabs. Some wall plates are enameled and trimmed in 24-karat gold.
- **Clothing:** Flamenco dress, as it's often called, along with *feria* (fair

or festival) clothing fill the stores of Granada and Seville, among other towns and cities of Andalusia. If you picture yourself as Carmen, in polka dots and a fan, snapping castanets, you have come to the right place. Clothing stores sell all sorts of traditional Andalusian dress for women to wear, some of it classical, not corny. You can purchase all the mantillas, hair ornaments, and Spanish fans you've dreamed about. It is a land of ruffled skirts, dangling earrings, and *mantoncillos* (flamenco scarves). Surprisingly, Seville has become a center of high fashion for the 21st century. Boutique after boutique sells stylish clothing. Seville hardly rivals Milan in fashion, but many of its young designers are garnering praise from the international fashion press. See chapters 5 and 7.

- **Guitars:** In the land of flamenco, guitars are highly prized by visitors. Artisans in Granada turn out top-quality, custom-made guitars. Of course, you can purchase ready-made guitars a lot more cheaply. We especially like to stroll Calle Cuesta de Gómez, a narrow and sloping street uphill from the Alhambra in Granada. Artisans along this street turn out some of the world's finest instruments. Many of their guitars often end up in the possession of famed musicians. See chapter 7.
- **Leather Goods:** For centuries, leather products have been associated with Andalusia, especially Cordovan leather. Andalusian leather items are soft and supple, and are usually a good value. Unlike the softer leather from sheep, cow leather is of heavier quality and is often made into jackets and coats. In general, shoppers can tell the quality of the leather by its feel—the softer, of course, being the more expensive. Many outlets for leather goods are found in the old quarter of Seville, Barrio de Santa Cruz. Córdoba, in particular, is famed for its embossed leather products, including such items as cigarette boxes, jewel cases, attaché cases, book and folio covers, ottoman covers, and the like. See chapter 6.
- **Marquetry:** Marquetry has been a famous product of Granada since the Muslim empire. Artisans still make furniture and other items inlaid with ivory and colored woods in the Moorish design. Inlaid boxes are a particularly good item to take home as gifts, and they become lasting souvenirs. Throughout Granada, especially in the Albaicín, which is a virtual North African souk (marketplace), you will see shop after shop hawking this extremely delicate work. See chapter 7.