

# The Best of Seville, Granada & Andalusia

This once-great stronghold of Muslim Spain is rich in beauty, history, and tradition, and contains some of the country's most celebrated architectural wonders: the world-famous Mezquita (mosque) in Córdoba, the Alhambra in Granada, and the great Gothic cathedral in Seville. Andalusia's smaller towns include Úbeda, Jaén, gorge-split Ronda, Jerez de la Frontera, and the gleaming white port city of Cádiz.

This dry mountainous region also encompasses the Costa del Sol (Málaga, Marbella, and Torremolinos), a coastal strip popular among those seeking beach resorts, nightlife, and relaxation.

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## 1 THE MOST UNFORGETTABLE TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

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- **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 whitewashed 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 6.
- **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, 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 grape harvest. See chapter 9.
- **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. In 1832, Washington Irving, in his *Tales of the Alhambra*, virtually put it on the tourist map after decades of neglect. Inside its walls is a once royal city with fountained courtyards, fanciful halls (once filled with dancing girls from the sultan's harem), and miles of intricate plasterwork and precious mosaics, which all pay testament to past Muslim glory. See chapter 8.
- **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, but the most spectacular *corridos* (bullfights) are in Seville. See chapter 6.

- **Feasting on Tapas in the *Tascas*:** Julia Child once said, “Tapas are reason enough to go to Seville.” 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. Cured ham or chorizo (spicy sausage), *gambas* (deep-fried shrimp), and marinated anchovies are favorites, as are stuffed peppers or a hake salad—and

most definitely a bowl of cool gazpacho, a “liquid salad” for a hot summer day.

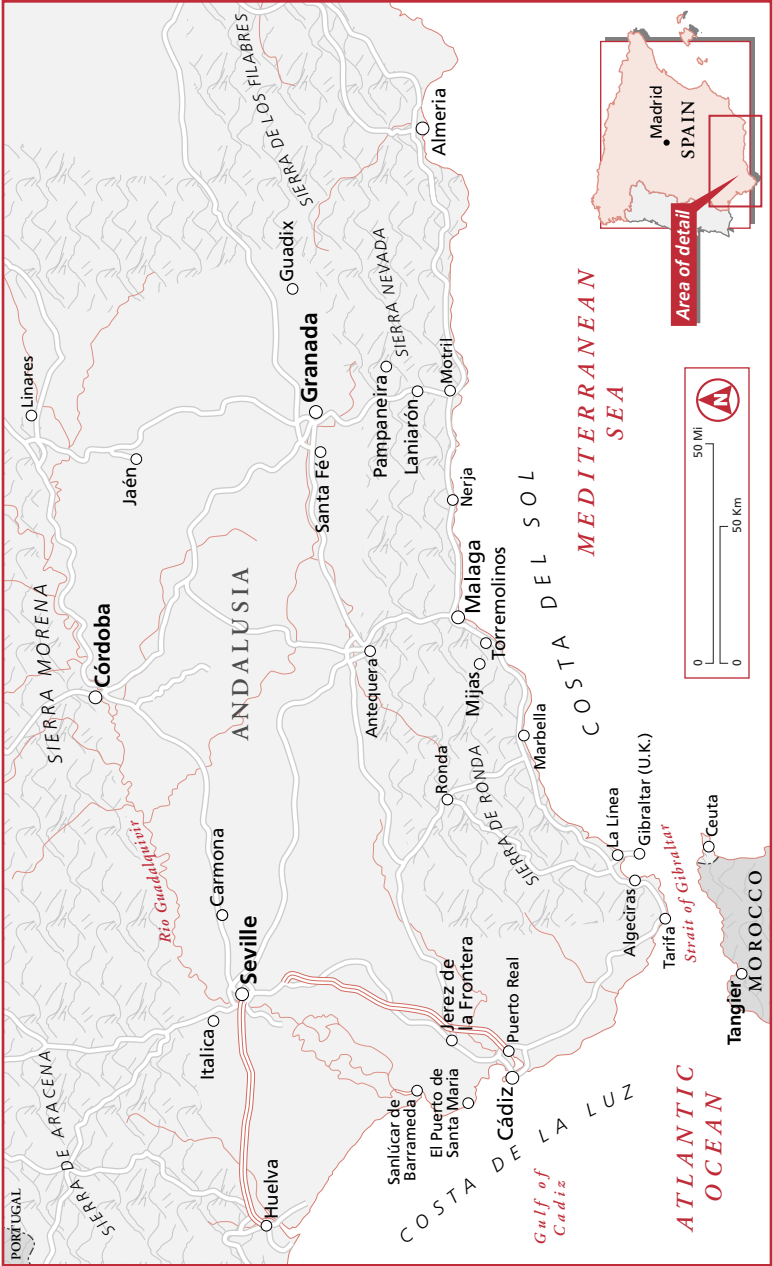
- **Getting Swept Up in the Passion of Flamenco:** Flamenco, which traces its Spanish roots to Andalusia, is best heard in old Gypsy taverns in such evocative neighborhoods as Seville’s Barrio de Triana or Granada’s Albaicín. From the poshest nightclub to the lowest taverna, flamenco’s foot stomping, castanet rattling, hand clapping, and sultry Andalusian guitar strains can be heard nightly. Some say flamenco’s origins actually lie somewhere deep in the heart of Asia, but the Andalusian Gypsy has given the art a special and distinctive interpretation. Performed by a great *artista*, flamenco’s dramatization of inner tension and conflict can tear your heart out with its soulful, throaty singing.

## 2 THE BEST LUXURY HOTELS

- **Hotel Alfonso XIII** (Seville; © 800/221-2340 or 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 grandest of Andalusia’s hotels. See p. 76.
- **AC Palacio de Santa Paula** (Granada; © 95-880-57-40; www.ac-hotels.com): It’s not quite as magnificent as the Alhambra, but this post-millennium architectural monument to grandeur harmoniously blends the contemporary and the antique. Many buildings, including a 15th-century medieval cloister and two 14th-century Arab houses, came together to create this deluxe hotel. See p. 171.
- **Vincci Selección Canela Golf Resort** (Ayamonte; © 95-947-78-30; www.vincchoteles.com): The most luxurious resort living along the Costa de la Luz is at this magnificent estate and 18-hole

golf course built near an estuary of the Río Guadiana. Stunningly modern, it evokes an elegant Portuguese manor house on landscaped grounds but with Andalusian architectural motifs. See p. 285.

- **Marbella Club** (Marbella; © 800/448-8355 or 95-282-22-11; www.marbellaclub.com): This posh, discreet, Costa del Sol resort put Marbella on the board. Since 1954 the rich and/or famous have flocked to its plush precincts. Boasting the most lavish hotel gardens along the coast, the club is a hangout for movie stars, fading European aristocracy, and oil-rich sheiks. See p. 311.
- **Kempinski Hotel Bahía Estepona** (Estepona; © 95-280-95-00; www.kempinski-spain.com): 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 airy, spacious bedrooms, first-class service, and some of the best cuisine on the coast. See p. 304.

- **Duques de Medinaceli** (El Puerto de Santa María; ☎ 95-686-07-77; www.jale.com/dmedinaceli): The epitome of taste, style, and luxury, this tastefully converted 18th-century palace is one of

the flashiest hotels in Andalusia. Amid beautifully landscaped gardens, this hotel is imbued with the ambience of yesterday, yet all the modern conveniences of today. Local sherry producers cite this as one of their favorite addresses, not only for its public and private rooms, but also for its first-rate cuisine. See p. 252.

### 3 THE BEST PARADORS

- **Parador de Granada** (Granada; ☎ 95-822-14-40; www.parador.es): Within the grounds of the Alhambra itself, the most famous parador in Spain is naturally the most sought after and difficult to get into. 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. 175.
- **Parador de Córdoba** (Córdoba; ☎ 95-727-59-00; www.parador.es): Not all paradors are converted from ancient buildings. This modern example, in the El Brillante suburb of Córdoba, occupies the site of a former Caliphate palace. It's known for its garden of orange trees, the first palm trees planted in Europe, and its highly praised cuisine. Oh yeah—its bedrooms are spacious and luxurious, too. See p. 132.
- **Parador de Jaén** (Jaén; ☎ 95-323-00-00; www.parador.es): 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 a 10th-century Muslim fortress, it is a citadel of good taste and baronial comfort,

with bedrooms featuring balconies and canopied beds. See p. 155.

- **Parador de Ronda** (Ronda; ☎ 95-287-75-00; www.parador.es): On a high cliff overlooking the fantastic gorge of Ronda, this parador offers beautifully furnished bedrooms overlooking the torrents of the Guadalevín River. Dramatically perched in this mountain town, it exemplifies good taste and fine living. There's even an outdoor pool. See p. 218.
- **Parador Hotel Atlantico** (Cádiz; ☎ 95-622-69-05; www.parador.es): 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, Atlantico now offers luxury, first-rate cuisine, a health club, and an outdoor pool. See p. 267.
- **Parador de Nerja** (Nerja; ☎ 95-252-00-50; www.parador.es): This comfortable and tasteful parador is dramatically set on a bluff above the Mediterranean, with an on-site restaurant featuring top-notch international and Andalusian regional cuisine, and one of the best beaches along the Costa del Sol only a short stroll away. See p. 345.

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## 4 THE BEST DINING EXPERIENCES

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- **Egaña Oriza** (Seville; ☎ 95-422-72-11): In a restored mansion near the Murillo Gardens, Seville's best and most fashionable restaurant 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. 86.
- **Bodegas Campos** (Córdoba; ☎ 95-749-75-00): Not particularly elegant or grand, this restaurant still serves the best Spanish and Andalusian food in Córdoba. Going strong since 1908, Bodegas Campos uses market-fresh ingredients to concoct the tastiest food in town. See p. 136.
- **Los Santanderinos** (Granada; ☎ 95-812-83-35): In the newer part of Granada, this wonderful dining choice serves a fine mixture of Spanish and Andalusian dishes within the city proper. Chef Jesús Diego Díaz is a media darling of the Spanish gastronomic press, and his tapas are among the tastiest in Granada. See p. 181.
- **La Meridiana** (Marbella; ☎ 95-277-61-90): Sophisticated and fashionable, this swank restaurant in a romantic setting with a garden terrace pleases the most discerning palates of the Costa del Sol. With top-rate service, the chefs turn out the best Italian and international cuisine in Marbella and beyond. All those high-end favorites—foie gras, Beluga caviar, freshly caught lobster—are routinely dished up here. See p. 317.
- **Tragabuches** (Ronda; ☎ 95-219-02-91): High in the mountains, Daniel García's impeccably sharp and refined restaurant turns out modern Spanish and Andalusian cuisine with sublime flavors from his inventive menu. See p. 222.
- **El Ventorillo del Chato** (Cádiz; ☎ 95-625-00-25): In the ancient port city of Cádiz, this Andalusian restaurant's origins date to 1780. But on the culinary front, it's outpaced the times, turning out a virtual celebration of time-tested regional dishes. For added flavor, flamenco shows are also presented. See p. 269.

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## 5 THE BEST BEACHES

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

- **Playa Victoria**, Cádiz: Counted among the best beaches in Spain are the champagne-colored sands in this historic old port city. 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 wide beach is flanked by dozens of restaurants, bars, and *chirriguitos* (beach bars). Although richly built up, the *playa* avoids being tacky. See p. 265.
- **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, on an islet reached by causeway. Once used by the Phoenicians, this beach and bay are more

favored by sporty local sunbathers than the tonier Playa Victoria. For another beach in town, head over to the **Playa Santa María del Mar**, just 500m (1,640 ft.) east of the cathedral. See p. 266.

- **Playa Isla Canela**, Ayamonte: 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 Costa de la Luz is **Playa Isla Canela**, with tranquil waters protected by huge sandbars 50 to 100m (164–328 ft.) offshore. There’s not a lot of tourist infrastructure here; but when you tire of basking in the sun, check out the beach kiosks renting watersports equipment or others hawking freshly cooked (or caught) seafood for your lunch. See p. 285.
- **Playa Zahara**, near Tarifa: The little city of Tarifa is the southernmost town in continental Europe. Its reliably windy beaches also make it the windsurfing capital of Europe. The little fishing village of Zahara de los Atunes (p. 276) is home to some of the Costa de la Luz’s most beautiful white sandy beaches, and **Playa Zahara** stretches for a total of 8km (5 miles). The landscape is a bit savage

here, and the panoramic views include the coast of Africa. See p. 276.

- **Playa de la Carihuela**, Torremolinos: Even if the beach is not among the world’s greatest, you’ll have a roaring good time on the beige sands of this wildly popular Costa del Sol resort. An expat population of Germans, Scandinavians, and Brits play volleyball, sun themselves in skimpy suits, or indulge at the bevy of excellent seafood restaurants that line the waterfront. The beach has facilities for paragliding, windsurfing, water-skiing, and plain old sailing. See p. 328.
- **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 bathing season extends from May to October because the beaches are protected from the northerly winds by the Sierra Blanca. If they’re too crowded, you can try two of Marbella’s other beaches, the **Playa de la Bajadilla** and the **Playa de Venus**, both of which are between the resort’s twin harbors. Popular Marbella watersports include sailing and water-skiing. See chapter 11.

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## 6 THE MOST CHARMING TOWNS

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- **Ubeda**: The gem of Jaén province, Ubeda contains palaces, churches, mansions, and 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. See p. 160.
- **Arcos de la Frontera**: The term *frontera* (frontier) dates from when this town was the boundary between the Muslim

territories and the encroaching Catholic lands. Hemmed in on three sides by the Guadalete River, Arcos is one of the most beautiful of the Pueblos Blancos (interior Andalusia’s white towns or villages). 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 in this area. See p. 231.

- **Mijas**: This Pueblo Blanco is the most popular day trip from the Costa del Sol.

Though usually mobbed, Mijas still retains its original charm, with white-washed houses perched panoramically on the side of a mountain. On clear days, views of the Mediterranean and across the sea to the foreboding Rif Mountains of Morocco are stunning. See p. 223.

- **Jerez de la Frontera:** Received enthusiastically by 16th-century English, Scottish, and Irish shippers, Andalusia's distinctive sherry is a prime attraction of Andalusia. Tour and taste this fortified wine in the more than 100 wineries, or bodegas, with such famous names as Sandeman, González Byass, and Harvey.

Since Jerez is the center for the Real Escuela Andaluza del Arte Ecuestre, a rival to Vienna's renowned Spanish Riding School, "dancing horses" are Jerez's other major attraction. See p. 242.

- **Nerja:** East of Málaga at the mouth of the Río Chillar, this town of white-washed buildings opens onto the "Balcony of Europe," a marble-paved projection above a headland jutting into the sea. On a sloping site beneath a wall of jagged coastal mountains, the town with sandy beaches and fishing boats bobbing at anchor is the perfect antidote to crowded Torremolinos and Marbella. See p. 344.

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## 7 THE BEST ARCHITECTURE

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- **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, and art by such Spanish masters as Goya, Murillo, and Zurbarán. See p. 96.
- **Giralda Tower,** Seville: Next to the cathedral, this Muslim tower conjures up Seville as the Eiffel Tower does Paris. It was constructed in the 12th century, modeled after the Koutoubia in Marrakech 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 and was added in the 16th century—affords one

of the greatest city views in all of Spain. See p. 96.

- **Alcázar,** Seville: Constructed north of the cathedral by Pedro the Cruel, this splendid 14th-century Mudéjar palace is the oldest European royal residence that is still in use. Residents Ferdinand and Isabella, who received Columbus here, greatly influenced its architecture. Remains of the original Alcázar of the Almohads coexist with centuries of ornate pavilions, fountains, pools, patios, and ornamental gardens. Moorish influences join forces with Gothic, Renaissance, and baroque elements, yet it all melds with harmonious charm. See p. 95.
- **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 at this fortress on the Río Guadalquivir while 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. A vast architectural complex of landscaping, fountains, and pools, the gardens are a tribute to their Moorish origins. See p. 141.

- **Mezquita-Catedral de Córdoba**, Córdoba: This 1,200-year-old masterwork by a succession of caliphs is one of the architectural wonders of Europe. Its interior is a virtual forest of pillars, red-and-white candy-striped Moorish arches, and rows of columns stretching in every direction. In the midst of it all 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. See p. 142.

- **The Alhambra**, Granada: Set against the snowcapped peaks of the Sierra Nevada, the Alhambra is one of the most fabled landmarks in the world and 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 comprised of three palaces, with courtyards, fountains, fanciful halls, and scalloped windows framing vistas. See p. 191.

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## 8 THE BEST GIFTS & SOUVENIRS

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- **Antiques:** Many avid shoppers go on shopping binges for antiques and accessories in Andalusia, particularly Seville. A wide range of dealers operate throughout the province, often in some of the smaller villages, with stores marked only 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 & 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, busy scenic designs and floral motifs rooted in Spanish cultural traditions from the 18th century became popular in this area. 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, fills the stores of Granada and Seville, among other towns and cities of Andalusia. You can purchase all the mantillas, hair ornaments, and Spanish fans you've dreamed about in this land of ruffled skirts, dangling earrings, and *mantoncillos* (flamenco scarves). Surprisingly, Seville's boutiques have become centers of high fashion for the 21st century. Seville hardly rivals Milan, but many of its young designers are garnering international praise. See chapters 6 and 8.
- **Leather Goods:** For centuries, leather products have been associated with Andalusia, especially Cordovan leather. Andalusian leather is soft, supple, and usually a good value. Unlike the softer, more-prized leather from sheep, cow leather is heavier, cheaper, and often made into jackets and coats. 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 cigarette boxes, jewel cases, attaché cases, book and folio covers, ottoman covers, and the like. See chapter 7.

- **Marquetry:** Granada has been famous for its marquetry 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 souvenirs. Throughout Granada, especially in the Albaicín, which is a virtual North African souk (marketplace), shop after shop

hawks this extremely delicate work. See chapter 8.

- **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. Along Calle Cuesta de Gómez, a narrow and sloping street uphill from the Alhambra in Granada, artisans turn out some of the world's finest instruments, many of which end up in the hands of famous musicians. See chapter 8.