

Chapter 15

Seville and Córdoba

In This Chapter

- ▶ Getting around Seville and Córdoba, two legendary Andalusian cities
- ▶ Keeping busy with festivals, monuments, museums, and bullfights
- ▶ Finding the best places to stay and dine
- ▶ Getting out of town: Side trips to Roman and Moorish ruins

The southern region of Andalusia, or Andalucía, is a land of intense summer heat, fiery Gypsy passion, and an inscrutable Arab past. In other words, fairy-tale Spain. In their heyday, the Moors (Arab and Berber conquerors of Spain) dominated almost all of Spain, but their empire took deepest root in the south, the heart of their empire, *Al-Andalus*.

In Córdoba, the Moors built the Great Mosque, or Mezquita — which, along with the Alhambra (see Chapter 17), ranks as Muslim Spain's supreme achievement and legacy. By the tenth century, Córdoba had become Europe's most advanced and populous city, a capital of high culture and learning. Seville later became Spain's leading light in the 16th-century Golden Age, when riches from outposts in the Americas flowed back through the city via the Guadalquivir River, and great artists like Velázquez, Murillo, and Zurbarán created the flourishing Seville School.

The Old Quarters of both cities are pretty jumbles of narrow alleyways lined with tiled portraits of saints and Madonnas, potted plants and bougainvillea, and refreshing interior patios. Seville is unmatched in Spain for ambience: it's the kind of place where the scent of orange trees and the joy of living, not just working, move people to lyrical odes. Córdoba is no longer the great city it once was, but it remains a fascinating, living, historical document. It's known as the city of patios for its flower-bedecked interior spaces, which are celebrated every May. Both cities continue to represent Spain at its most folkloric. Popular celebrations are impossibly infectious, and the people are as radiant and nearly as warm as the blinding sun that beats down.



And that sun in southern Spain is going to make you sweat. Seville and Córdoba are two of the hottest cities in Europe. Winter, though, is mild, and spring and fall are warm but comfortable. The best time to visit Seville and Córdoba is April and May, when flowers are in bloom and the famous festivals, including Easter Week, possess the locals and transform

their cities (although this time is also the hardest to get a hotel). If you can't make it then, fall and winter aren't bad, because the sun shines year-round. Unless you're a masochist, you're better off avoiding the sizzling summers.

Seville and Córdoba are within easy reach of Madrid, especially with the high-speed AVE train, which gets you to Seville in 2½ hours (Córdoba's a stop along the way, 1½ hours from Madrid).

Major Attractions in Seville and Córdoba

Seville and Córdoba form two of the three bases in Spain's southern triangle of Moorish influence (the other is Granada; see Chapter 17).

Seville

Conquered by the Romans and then the Moors, who ruled the city for more than 500 years, Seville lived a grand Golden Age in the arts during the 16th and 17th centuries, as the gateway to the Americas (and the benefactor of all that loot flowing down its river). Plenty of that history is on view, though the city's greatest attraction is perhaps its easygoing vibe and abundantly gregarious people that make it one of the most charming cities in Spain.

You can get a taste of Seville in just a couple of days, but it's the kind of place that you may want to return to over and over. Seville is well known for the following attractions: the **Cathedral**, the world's largest Gothic edifice, **El Alcázar**, the fantastic fortress/royal residence where kings and queens entertained lovers and enemies, **Barrio de Santa Cruz**, the colorful, quintessential Andalusian neighborhood, **Parque de María Luisa** (María Luisa Park), a green oasis, lush enough to beat the heat, and Seville's unrivaled **spring festival season** — Easter and April Fair.

Córdoba

You may find it hard to believe that Córdoba was once Europe's most enlightened and populated city. When the rest of the continent sank into the Dark Ages, Muslim Córdoba soared ahead, with libraries, universities, mathematics, and sophisticated architecture and trade. But the city in which Jews and Christians lived alongside the Moors saw its best days long ago. Once a city of one million, the provincial capital today has scarcely 300,000 inhabitants — one of the few cities in the world to suffer so dramatic a population drop without an accompanying natural disaster.

Córdoba's former greatness, though, is instantly revealed when you slip behind the walls of the Great Mosque and are suddenly enveloped by one of the most awe-inspiring scenes in Europe: an unending horizon of overlapped, candy-cane striped arches. In addition to the **Mezquita** (Great Mosque) — one of Muslim Spain's great monuments — look for the **La Judería**, the old Jewish Quarter of whitewashed streets, lively

bars, and artisans' shops, and Córdoba's spectacular flowered **patios** and May **festivals**.

Seville: City of Festivals

One of the most enjoyable and exuberant cities in Spain, Seville (known as Sevilla in Spanish) invades the senses. Boulevards are lined with orange trees, church bells overlap with the clop-clop of horses' hooves, and the smell of fresh flowers permeates small alleys. Seville has inspired artists and musicians like few other cities; from the art of passionate, soul-baring flamenco to operas like *Don Juan*, *Carmen*, and *The Marriage of Figaro*, Seville has always been a place to sing about.

Spain's fourth-largest city and one of its most sunbaked, Seville never seems in a hurry. *Sevillanos* have earned a reputation, deserved or not, for working less and socializing more than any other region in Spain. Locals love few things as much as gathering at bars with loud groups of friends and family for drinks and tapas. As an outsider, you may be inclined to believe that locals spend a good part of the day, and a good portion of their salary, just hanging out. But natives tell you that they simply know how to live better than the workaholics up north.

Perhaps it's that attitude, as well as the languid air of Andalusia, that makes foreigners adore Seville like few places in Spain. Americans are the number one group of tourists in Seville, ranking ahead of the Germans, French, and Italians for the past decade. Along with Salamanca (see Chapter 14), Seville is also the most popular place for American college students to spend a semester or full academic year.

Getting there

Seville is accessible by air, train, and bus from all major points in Spain, but in all likelihood, you'll cruise into Seville from another point in Andalusia or from Madrid. The easiest way is to glide in on the superfast AVE train, though if you're hopping around Spain by plane, flying into Seville is simple.

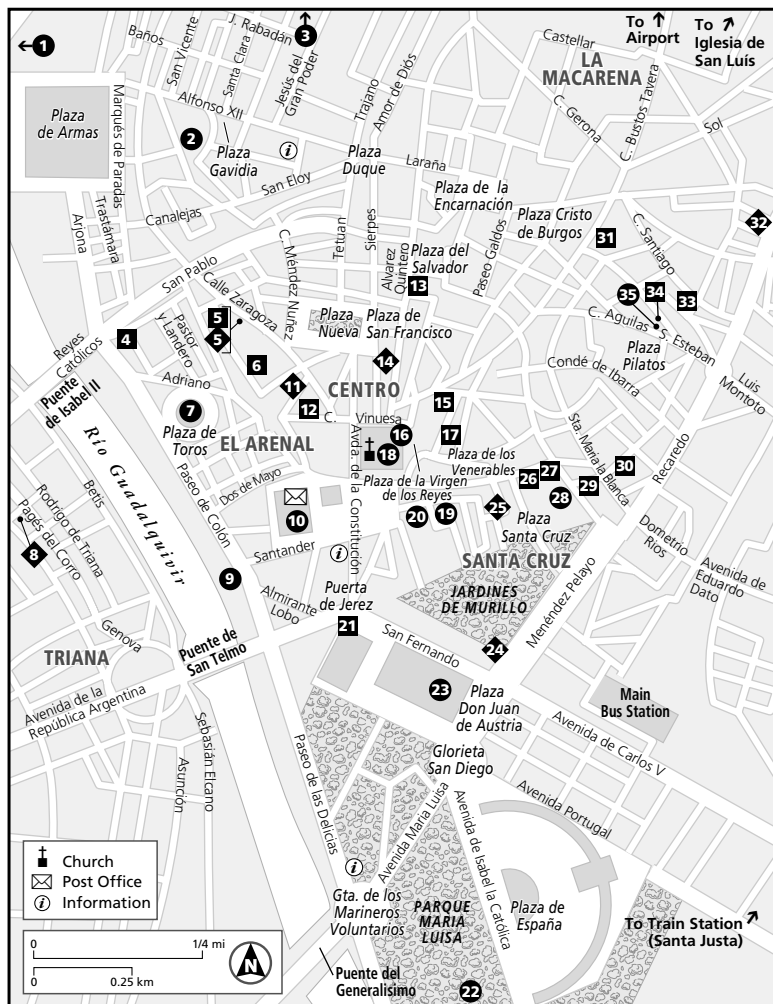
By train

Seville's AVE and regular train station is **Santa Justa**, Avenida de Kansas City, s/n (☎ 95-454-02-02), just north of downtown. Major car-rental agencies are all located at Santa Justa, so picking up a car after arriving in Seville by train is a snap. Ticket and information offices for RENFE, Spain's national railway, are located at Calle Zaragoza, 29 (☎ 902-24-02-02; www.renfe.es). Buses C1 and C2 go from the rail station to downtown Seville. A taxi costs about 5€ (\$6).



Unless you're coming from small towns in Andalusia, where train service is infrequent, I recommend the more comfortable trains over buses, especially in the heat of the south. The fastest and easiest way to get

Seville



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- Hotel Alfonso XIII **21**
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- Hotel Apartamentos Casa Imperial **34**
- Hotel Doña María **17**
- Hotel La Rábida **6**
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- Casa de Pilatos **35**
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- Hospital de la Caridad **10**
- Hospital de los Venerables Sacerdotes **19**
- La Cartuja/Isla Mágica **1**
- La Giralda **16**
- Museo Arqueológico **22**
- Museo de Bellas Artes **2**
- Plaza de Toros de Maestranza **7**
- Real Alcázar de Sevilla **20**
- Real Fábrica de Tabacos (Universidad de Sevilla) **23**
- Torre del Oro **9**

to Seville from either Madrid or Córdoba is the **AVE high-speed train**, which was inaugurated in 1992 for the World Expo in Seville. It's a little more expensive than slower trains, but oh how it goes. It makes the trip to Seville, with stops in Ciudad Real and Córdoba, in about 2½ hours. The one-way fare from Madrid is 65€ (\$78). The trip to/from Córdoba takes about 45 minutes and costs 20€ (\$24).



The AVE train from Madrid and Córdoba to Seville flies like a bird (not coincidentally, because that's what *ave* means in Spanish), and although it's the most expensive regular train service in Spain, it's also one of Europe's fastest and most comfortable. Making the trip even more tempting, certain trips and age categories can save you money on the AVE. A roundtrip ticket saves you 20%; a roundtrip ticket for travel on the same day saves you 25%. Children ages 4 through 11 get a 40% discount, and seniors get 25% off.

If you can't catch the AVE, or you want to save a few euros, hop aboard an **Altaria** train (fast but not lightning fast like the AVE) from Madrid. It takes a little more than three hours and costs 52€ (\$62).

By plane

Seville's international airport, the work of the famed architect Rafael Moneo, is **Aeropuerto Internacional San Pablo**, Autopista de San Pablo, s/n (☎ 95-444-90-00). The national airlines of several European countries fly into Seville, and daily flights arrive on Iberia from Madrid, Barcelona, Bilbao, and Valencia (Air Europa flies to Seville from Barcelona). The airport is 12km (7 miles) north of Seville, on National Highway IV. The **Tourism Information Office** (☎ 95-444-91-28) is open daily from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.

From the airport to downtown, you can take an airport bus, a relatively short ride that goes to Alfonso XIII Hotel, on Puerta de Jerez (2.10€/€2.50). A taxi from the airport to the *zona centro* (anywhere near the Cathedral) costs about 15€ (\$18).

By bus

Seville has two major bus terminals: **Estación Plaza de Armas**, Avenida del Cristo de la Expiración, s/n (☎ 95-490-80-40), for travels throughout Spain (including the province of Huelva); and **Estación Prado de San Sebastián**, Calle Manuel Vázquez Sagastizabal, s/n (☎ 95-441-71-11), for all other destinations in Andalusia. **Alsina** buses (☎ 95-441-88-11) travel to and from the Prado station to Córdoba and Granada. Alsina also makes the trip to Málaga. **Los Amarillos** buses go to Ronda (☎ 95-498-91-84) from Prado. **Comes** (☎ 95-441-68-58) buses depart from the Prado station to Cádiz.

For bus schedules and information, call ☎ 95-442-00-11 or visit www.andalucia.com/travel/bus.

By car

Spain's big cities aren't great places to deal with wheels, so if you're just traveling to Seville (and Córdoba and Granada), and not planning on touring the surrounding country, you could skip renting a car. Driving to Seville from Madrid, take the N-IV (E-5), which veers right (west) at Bailén and passes through Córdoba. The easy trip is all highway from Madrid, but it takes more than five hours, depending on stops and your willingness to do as the Spaniards do and flout speed limits. The A-92 highway connects Seville with Granada and the Costa del Sol. For roadside assistance, call ☎ **900-12-35-05**.

Orienting yourself in Seville

Seville is divided in two by the Guadalquivir River. The city's historic center, which includes the Cathedral, Barrio de Santa Cruz, and just about all the sights you want to see, is on the east side of the river.

Introducing the neighborhoods

Though Seville is a large and complex city, the *barrios* (neighborhoods) of interest to visitors are easy to get a handle on. The **Old City** grew up around the city's major monuments, which are among the most important in Andalusia: the Cathedral and Giralda Tower; the Reales Alcazares palace-fortress; and, immediately to its east, the **Barrio de Santa Cruz**, which is the ancient Jewish Quarter. Parque María Luisa, the major green space in the city, is south of here.

The major avenues running through the Old City are Avenida de la Constitución and Calle Sierpes. The **zona centro**, or modern center of Seville, proceeds outward from the Old City. The working-class, thoroughly authentic *barrio Triana* is across the Guadalquivir River, as is **La Cartuja**, site of the 1992 World Expo. On the river's banks is the Torre del Oro, a 13th-century cylindrical defense tower and one of Seville's enduring landmarks that was once completely sheathed in glimmering golden tiles (hence the name, meaning Tower of Gold).

Finding information after you arrive

The main **Andalusia Tourism Information Office** is located just down the street from the Cathedral, Avenida de la Constitución, s/n (☎ **95-422-14-04**). You can find others at the **San Pablo Airport** (☎ **95-444-91-28**) and **Santa Justa Train Station** (☎ **95-453-76-26**). They're open daily from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. **Municipal tourism offices** are at Plaza de la Concordia, s/n, in front of the Puente de Triana (☎ **902-19-48-97**), and Costurero de la Reina/Paseo de las Delicias, 9 (☎ **95-423-44-65**).

Getting around Seville

Though Seville is large, the principal areas of interest to most visitors make up a compact, walkable area. The Barrio de Santa Cruz, one of Seville's most enchanting neighborhoods, is almost entirely pedestrian.

Almost all the hotels I recommend are within walking distance of the major sights. You really only need public transportation or a taxi to the airport or train station, or in the evening if you want to go over to Triana, across the river, to check out the bars, restaurants, and live music clubs there.

By taxi

Taxis usually line up on Avenida de la Constitución outside the cathedral. You can also hail one anywhere on the street. To call a cab, call **Radio Taxi** (☎ 95-458-00-00), **Radio Taxi Giralda** (☎ 95-467-55-55), or **Tele-Taxi Sevilla** (☎ 95-462-22-22).

By car

If you have time to explore the region, Andalusia is one of the best places in Spain to rent a car and roll through the countryside or along the coast (see Chapter 16). The major agencies in Seville are

- ✓ **Avis**, Avenida de la Constitución, 15 (☎ 95-444-91-22)
- ✓ **Europcar**, Avenida Luis de Morales, s/n (☎ 95-425-42-98)
- ✓ **Hertz**, Avenida República Argentina, 3 (☎ 95-427-88-87)
- ✓ **Thrifty**, Fernando IV, 3 (☎ 95-427-81-84)

By bus

You have little need to take a bus after you've arrived in Seville, although it comes in handy for getting to the train station, **Santa Justa** (see "By train," earlier in this chapter). Bus Nos. 32, C-1, and C-2 go between downtown and the train station. For bus information, call ☎ 95-442-00-11. A single fare on the city buses costs .90€ (\$1.10).

By bike

If horse-drawn carriages (see the section "Seeing Seville by guided tour," later in this chapter) are a little too clichéd for you, Seville is a great place to tool around by bike. You can pick up a day's bike rental at **Embrujo Rent-a-Bike**, Miguel de Mañara, 11-B 2C (☎ 95-456-38-38). They provide half-day and full-day rentals for about 15€ (\$18) a day. Another place to pick up a two-wheeled steed is **Pedal y Aventura**, on San Jacinto, 64, portal 8, 2C (☎ 95-433-17-75).

Staying in style

Seville is one of the best places to stay in Spain. Several hotels positively drip with local character and offer comparatively reasonable rates (though prices across Seville have steadily crept up in the last few years). All the hotels I recommend here are conveniently located within walking distance of most major sites in the old center of romantic Seville. (Several faceless international hotels are available as well, but for the most part

they're removed from what you're going to Seville to see, and so I don't include them.)



If you arrive in town without a reservation, check out **INFHOR**, a private initiative that has a kiosk in the Santa Justa train station and maintains relationships with several dozen hotels in Seville. They'll show you brochures, makes suggestions in your price range, and then call and make a reservation for you (at no cost to you; hotels pay a commission).



Note that prices rise significantly (as much as double) during Seville's famous *Semana Santa* (Holy Week) and *Feria de Abril* (April Fair) celebrations — basically, two weeks a year (see the “Fiesta time! Seville's popular festivals” sidebar in this chapter). The high end of the rates in the following section reflects those increases (but, because those rates distort the overall picture, I don't base the dollar-sign ratings on those special rates). If you intend on coming to Seville for either celebration, make your reservations very early — as much as a year (that's right, one year) in advance, especially for the choicest spots that I mention in the hotel listings.

The top hotels



Hotel Alfonso XIII \$\$\$\$\$ Old City

This old-world classic will break the bank, but if you have a bank to break, it's the place to do it. The finest and most famous hotel in Seville, the historic Alfonso XIII (Alfonso Tray-thay) ranks right up there with Madrid's Ritz and Palace — one of Spain's most distinguished and storied hostleries. When Princess Elena got married in Seville a few years back, she and the entire Royal Family stayed here. A beautiful, imposing structure with the city's most prestigious address, it has opulent halls with marble floors, carved wooden ceilings, and Moorish arches and tiles. The 146 rooms are appropriately regal, as are the gardens and magnificent pool, but this indulgent palace isn't for everyone. As the kind of place where the rich and famous drop in and expect to be treated with deference, it seems a bit stilted and snooty to me, but it's undeniably luxurious.

See map page 380. San Fernando, 2. At Puerta de Jerez, junction of Avenida Constitución and San Fernando; near Parque María Luisa. ☎ 800-325-3535 or 888-625-5144 in the United States, in Spain 95-491-70-00. Fax: 95-491-70-99. www.hotel-alfonsoxiii.com. Parking: 15€ (\$18). Rack rates: 455€ (\$546) double. Easter and Feria de Abril: 469€–527€ (\$563–\$632). Weekend rates available. AE, DC, MC, V.



Hotel Apartamentos Casa Imperial \$\$\$\$–\$\$\$\$\$ Edge of Old City

Calling this impeccable retreat an aparthotel — a Spanish term that implies cheesy kitchenettes and bad carpeting — seems absurd because nothing is further from the truth. Sure, all rooms have small kitchens and some have small living areas, but this is a refined version, and a great hotel

solution for people wanting space and privacy. With four plant-filled, interior patios, brilliantly tiled staircases, small pools and fountains that kids will love, and boldly painted rooms, the five-year-old Casa Imperial is one of a kind. Near the Casa Pilatos, this 15th-century palace (which incredibly belonged to the *butler* of the Marquis of Tarifa) is charming and intimate with great personal attention. As hard as it is to believe that Casa Imperial lies in the middle of bustling Seville, the hotel is perfectly in tune with the city's romanticism. The 24 apartments are popular with Germans, because the hotel is owned by a joint Spanish and German initiative.

See map page 380. Calle Imperial, 29. One block north of Plaza Pilatos, off San Estéban; northwest of the Cathedral. ☎ 95-450-03-00. Fax: 95-450-03-30. www.casaimperial.com. Parking: 18€ (\$22). Rack rates: 220€–305€ (\$264–\$366) double, breakfast buffet included. Holy Week, Easter, and Feria de Abril: 380€ (\$456). AE, DC, MC, V.

Hotel Las Casas de la Judería **\$\$\$ Barrio de Santa Cruz**

Secluded at the end of a small alley off the edge of the Santa Cruz neighborhood — the former Jewish enclave, la Judería — this is one of the best-value hotels in Spain. But the secret's out. The place is packed year-round, so book a room early. The hotel occupies a 17th-century palace of the Duke of Béja, the patron of Cervantes (the Duke actually owned a series of mansions here). The brightly painted palace — brilliant *Sevillano* yellows, whites, and blues — has a series of tranquil interior patios with gurgling fountains. The 57 rooms are impressively appointed, and are all different. They have handsome antique furnishings, and many have four-poster beds and small living rooms. Service is top-notch, although it can get a little hectic at check-in and check-out times. The sister property, **Hotel Las Casas de los Mercadere**, is very similar in style and a good alternative if this one, one of the most popular hotels in Seville, is full.

See map page 380. Plaza Santa María la Blanca/Callejón de Dos Hermanas, 7. Difficult to find; near the church of Santa María la Blanca, on northeast border of Santa Cruz, down a tiny alleyway. ☎ 95-441-51-50. Fax: 95-442-21-70. www.casaspalacios.com. Parking: 15€ (\$18). Rack rates: 128€–156€ (\$154–\$187) double. Holy Week, Easter, and Feria de Abril: 246€ (\$295). AE, DC, MC, V.

Hotel Las Casas de los Mercaderes **\$\$\$ Zona Centro**

Another in a winning family of character-driven Seville hotels in atmospheric palaces, this hotel is a little smaller and only the slightest bit more exclusive than its sister, Las Casas de la Judería. In the city's commercial center, between Plazas San Francisco and El Salvador, it's only minutes away from the Cathedral. The 47 rooms in this handsome white mansion with yellow- and blue-trimmed windows are set back from the street on a small courtyard. The rooms are impeccably decorated; many have small balconies overlooking the perfect 18th-century Andalusian patio. Guests are equal parts business travelers and vacationers.

See map page 380. Calle Álvarez Quintero. Three blocks north of Cathedral, between Plazas El Salvador and San Francisco. ☎ 95-422-58-58. Fax: 95-422-98-84. Internet: www.casasypalacios.com. Parking: 15€ (\$18). Rack rates: 105€–128€ (\$126–\$154) double. Holy Week, Easter, and Feria de Abril: 210€. AE, DC, MC, V.

Hotel Las Casas del Rey de Baeza

\$\$\$ Zona Centro

Recently purchased by the Epoque Hotel group — it was formerly owned by the same people with the other “Casa” hotels in Seville — this luxury boutique hotel has gotten an additional injection of chic style. In a residential neighborhood near the Casa Pilatos (see the review later in this chapter), it’s just a tad removed from the tourist hordes but still within walking distance of the Cathedral and Santa Cruz district. The 41 spacious and warmly attired rooms have large, modern, marble bathrooms, and a number of them feature living rooms. Rooms are on three levels around a lovely central courtyard of this 18th-century converted mansion. And if those views aren’t enough for you on a warm Seville day, try the ones from the adorable rooftop pool.

See map page 380. Plaza Cristo de la Redención. Off Calle Santiago, between Corral del Conde and Casa Pilatos. ☎ 95-456-14-96. Fax: 95-456-14-41. www.époquehotels.com/hospescasasdelrey.html. Parking: 15€ (\$18). Rack rates: 125€–147€ (\$150–\$176) double. Holy Week, Easter, and Feria de Abril: 288€ (\$346). AE, DC, MC, V.

La Casa del Maestro

\$\$\$ Zona Centro

A charming house that once belonged to a flamenco guitar legend, this warm and handsome small hotel (just 12 rooms), which opened in 2001, is one of the best and most intimate options in the city. It exudes authentic Seville flavor. The rooms, which all carry names like “El Emigrante” and “Gaditanas,” are lovingly decorated without being pretentious or frilly. Photographs and objects related to the Maestro’s music career and fascination with bullfighting fill the common areas. Although it’s some distance from the city’s major attractions, the house sits on a tiny pedestrian alleyway and has a beautiful rooftop deck, ideal for relaxing, reading, and having breakfast.

See map page 380. Almudena, 5. Between Alhondiga and Fco. Carrión, near Iglesia de Santa Catalina. ☎ 95-450-00-07. Fax: 95-450-00-06. www.lacasademaestro.com. Nearby parking: 15€ (\$18). Rack rates: 114€–143€ (\$137–\$172) double. AE, DC, MC, V.

Taberna del Alabardero

\$\$\$\$–\$\$\$\$\$ Zona Centro

Consider yourself lucky if you score one of the seven doubles at this exquisite little place. Forget about Easter and April Fair because they’re booked at least two years in advance, but as long as you don’t plan on scoring one



Luxury on the outskirts of town

If you're willing to stay outside Seville, and you're in the mood for true Andalusian luxury, **Hacienda Benazuza** is the place. In Sanlúcar la Mayor, about 16km (10 miles) from Seville, this sprawling estate was an Arab country house in the tenth century and then a luxurious farmhouse perched on a hill of olive groves. Today it's one of the finest hotels in Spain (with prices to match), a rustic palace with splendidly manicured gardens, Moorish pools and fountains, and palm tree-lined patios. The elegant guest rooms overflow with style and color. The gourmet restaurant, La Alquería, is also one of the best in the country, a true destination for gastronomes, with innovative dishes straight from the mind and laboratory of Ferran Adrià of the famous El Bulli restaurant in Cataluña. Even if you don't stay here, a meal, although very expensive (tasting menu: 100€/120) ranks as perhaps the top dining experience in southern Spain. To get there from Seville, follow the signs for Huelva and go south on the A-49 highway; take exit No. 6.

The hotel is at Virgen de las Nieves, s/n, on a hillside above the little agrarian hamlet of Sanlúcar la Mayor. ☎ 95-570-33-44. Fax: 95-570-34-10. www.hbenazuza.com and www.elbullihotel.com. Free parking. Rack rates: 320€-390€ (\$384-\$468). Four nights' minimum stay required during Semana Santa and Feria de Abril. AE, DC, MC, V. Closed August.

then, you may luck out. It's a meticulously restored 19th-century mansion that belonged to the poet J. Antonio Cavestany. The hotel features a gorgeous arcaded central patio, where breakfast and afternoon coffee are served. The rooms, on the third floor of the mansion, are named for places in Spain. They're all top-of-the-line elegant, with rich fabrics, bold flower patterns, and hot tubs, though each is different in configuration and decoration. As you may expect in a place so small, the service is very personal and friendly. If that isn't enough, the restaurant by the same name is one of the city's finest (see the review later in this chapter).

See map page 380. Zaragoza, 20. Four blocks northwest of the Cathedral, near Maestranza bullfighting ring. ☎ 95-450-27-20. Fax: 95-456-36-66. www.taberna.delalabardero.com. Parking: 15€ (\$18). Rack rates: 145€ (\$174) double. Holy Week, Easter, and Feria de Abril: 235€ (\$282) double. AE, DC, MC, V.

Seville's runner-up hotels

With the exception of Hotel Doña María and Hotel Los Seises, all the following small hotels represent good bargains.

Hotel Alcántara

\$\$ Santa Cruz A small hotel with modern but plain monochromatic rooms, it isn't as nice as the Amadeus or several others in Santa Cruz, but worth a look if those are full. *See map p. 380. Ximénez de Enciso, 28. ☎ 95-450-05-95. www.hotelalcantara.net.*

Hotel Amadeus

\$\$ Santa Cruz This charming, small hotel, in an 18th-century manor house in the heart of Santa Cruz, is new but opts for older-style rooms, which are very nicely decorated (some have touches like exposed brick walls). It also has a splendid deck with great views. *See map p. 380. Farnesio, 6.* ☎ 95-450-14-43. www.hotelamadeussevilla.com.



Hotel Doña María

\$\$-\$\$\$ Old City This small family hotel is a good alternative if you don't mind frilly bedspreads and curtains; it has a nice terrace with a small pool and dreamy views. It's also right across the plaza from the giant Cathedral, the heart of Seville. Kids can watch the horses line up with their carriages along the plaza. But compared to other small hotels in Seville, it's overpriced. *See map p. 380. Don Remondo, 19.* ☎ 95-422-49-90. www.hdmaria.com.

Hotel La Rábida

\$\$ Old City This former 19th-century casa noble (aristocratic mansion) on a quiet street is a real find in the inexpensive category. *See map p. 380. Castelar, 24. Four blocks west of the Cathedral.* ☎ 95-422-09-60. <http://www.2abookings.com>.

Hotel Los Seises

\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$ Old City On a small street behind the Cathedral, Los Seises (say-says) has one of Seville's quintessential views. From the rooftop pool, the cathedral tower is just a few hundred yards away. A former 16th-century palace, it has been updated with touches of modernity. Rooms are well-appointed and very large, with foyers and sunken sitting areas. *See map p. 380. Segovias, 6. Two blocks north of the Cathedral, off Placentines.* ☎ 95-422-94-95. www.sol.com/hotel/los-seises.

Hotel Puerta d' Triana

\$\$ Old City A surprisingly elegant place on busy Reyes Católicos, with ornate public rooms and plainer but large and comfortable guest rooms, this mid-size hotel has a great location for the budget category. *See map p. 380. Reyes Católicos, 5. Three blocks north of Paseo de Cristóbal Colón.* ☎ 95-421-54-04. www.hotelpuertadetriana.com.

Hotel Rey Alfonso X

\$\$ Santa Cruz This small, sleek hotel is nicely decorated and well located, right next to the Plaza Santa María la Blanca and the atmospheric Barrio de Santa Cruz. *See map p. 380. Ximénez de Enciso, 35.* ☎ 95-421-73-07. www.reyalfonsox.com.

Hotel Simón

\$\$ Old City A former 18th-century private mansion, this is Seville's best bargain hotel, important if you're bringing the whole family. It has elegant public rooms, a beautiful interior courtyard, and a stately dining room. Rooms are all different and have nice antiques; the place is frequently full.

See map p. 380. *García de Vinuesa, 19. Two blocks west of the Cathedral.* ☎ 95-422-66-60. *E-mail:* hotel-simon@sol.com.

Dining out

The natural division in Seville is between restaurants where you can enjoy a sit-down dinner and others that are more informal tapas (appetizer) joints. At many of the latter, there's no rule against sitting down — if you're lucky enough to score a coveted seat — but it's an entirely different way of assembling a meal. I love snacking my way across Spain, but the joy of eating at bars and restaurant counters and front rooms in Seville is something special. Even the sit-down places have tapas bars in front, so if you arrive at one and it looks dead or too pricey, go with Plan B, tapas.

For more on Spanish dining customs, including mealtimes, costs, and tipping, see Chapter 2.

Enjoying the top restaurants for a sit-down meal

Becerrita

\$\$\$ **Zona Centro** **ANDALUSIAN**

A classic Seville restaurant with a faithful clientele, this old-style place has the requisite small tapas bar up front and a couple of partitioned, clubby dining rooms. Patrons feasts on *merluza Puerta de Carmona*, hake served with mushrooms, Iberian ham, and prawns. If you're not up for being part of the boys' club, sit at the bar and sample some of the imaginative tapas, such as crepes stuffed with foie gras in orange sauce, or white asparagus mousse. Tapas and main dish specials are featured daily.

See map page 380. *Recaredo, 9.* ☎ 95-441-20-57. *Reservations recommended. Main courses: 12€–24€ (\$14–\$29). AE, DC, MC, V. Open: Mon–Sat lunch and dinner, Sun lunch only. Closed: Last two weeks in Aug.*

Casa Robles

\$\$\$–\$\$\$\$ **Zona Centro** **ANDALUSIAN**

Going strong since the 1950s, Casa Robles is as unpretentious and straightforward as its name, which means oak house. Focusing on fresh, top-quality meat, fish, and vegetables, the Robles brothers maintain their place among Seville's traditional, elite restaurants. The family-owned place has an enthusiastic following among locals, and it always seems to be bustling. The fresh fish always looks good; check out *lubina con naranjas* (sea bass with *Sevillana* oranges), or hake with clams and Serrano ham.

See map page 380. *Álvarez Quintero, 58. Two blocks north of the Cathedral.* ☎ 95-456-32-72. *Reservations recommended. Main courses: 10€–18€ (\$12–\$22). Menú del día: 25€ (\$30). Tasting menu: 36€.* AE, DC, MC, V. *Open: Daily lunch and dinner.*

Eating and drinking like a Sevillano

Fried foods, cold soups, and slightly chilled aperitif wines rule the day in Andalusia. The best way to beat the heat is with a cold bowl of *gazpacho* (gath-potch-oh), a chilled tomato soup. *Pescaíto frito*, deep-fried fish, is served in nearly every bar and restaurant. As in Madrid, the pursuit of tapas and *copas* (all-hours snacking and drinking, respectively) is a local institution, but Andalusians insist that they invented the art of tapas. The *tapeo* (tapas crawl) in Seville and Córdoba is a joyous affair like nowhere else in Spain. Andalusian aperitif wines — *jerez* (sherry), from just south of Seville, and *montilla* (mahn-tee-ya), a splendid dry wine from Córdoba — are superb.



Egaña Oriza

\$\$\$\$ Zona Centro BASQUE/INTERNATIONAL

If you're only visiting southern Spain and you don't have a chance to sample authentic Basque cooking anywhere else, make a beeline here. And if you've come directly from Bilbao, you may have even more reason to check out Seville's best Basque restaurant, which just happens to be its top-rated dining room. A husband-and-wife team innovates at this swank place cater-corner from the city's most prestigious hotel, the Alfonso XIII. The restaurant's stylish decor, in a restored mansion just off the Murillo Gardens, is as inspired as the menu. If you get a chance to dine here, start off with *salmorejo* (the thick Cordoban version of gazpacho) with oysters and serrano ham and follow it up with *lubina con crema de patata al azafrán* (silky sea bass with a saffron-potato cream sauce). Savory game and meats, such as duck and wild boar, are given interesting accents, including wild cherries, plums, figs, and apple puree.

See map page 380. San Fernando, 41. At entrance to Murillo Gardens. ☎ 95-422-72-54. Reservations required. Main courses: 16€–25€ (\$19–\$30). Menú del día: 48€ (\$58). Tasting menu: 51€ (\$61). AE, DC, MC, V. Open: Mon–Fri lunch and dinner, Sat dinner only, bar daily 9 a.m. to midnight. Closed: Aug.

Enrique Becerra

\$\$\$ Zona Centro ANDALUSIAN

At this friendly place just around the corner from Plaza Nueva and Seville's Cathedral, even first-time visitors are welcomed like members of the regular crew, and it has a slew of regulars. A cozy spot that feels more like a tavern than a restaurant, it has got a hopping tapas bar (with stools!) in front with an impossible-to-choose-from lineup of clams, stuffed mushrooms, and more, and an attractive back dining room with deep yellow walls, dark beams, and leaded glass. If you sit down, you can try crispy codfish with asparagus sauce, or roast lamb with honey and stuffed with spinach and pine nuts. The wine cellar is one of Seville's most select.

See map page 380. Gamazo, 2. Three blocks west of the Cathedral, off Castelar in El Arenal district. ☎ **95-421-30-49**. Reservations recommended. Main courses: 12€–19€ (\$14–\$23). Menú del día: 27€ (\$33). AE, DC, MC, V. Open: Mon–Sat lunch and dinner.

La Albahaca

\$\$\$ Barrio de Santa Cruz BASQUE/FRENCH

One of the prettiest restaurants on the prettiest square in the prettiest neighborhood in Seville, La Albahaca has a lot going for it. It's in a lovely Andalusian mansion built in the 1920s, with several dining rooms, a terrace, lots of greenery, and colorful tiles. Because of its location, it gets the upscale tourist trade, who enjoy the Basque chef's crepes stuffed with mushrooms and foie gras in Port wine sauce, and great salads for starters. You can choose partridge braised in sherry or beef sirloin with foie gras for the main course, among many other options.

See map page 380. Plaza de Santa Cruz, 12. Several blocks east of the Cathedral, in heart of Santa Cruz district. ☎ **95-422-07-14**. Reservations recommended. Main courses: 12€–24€ (\$14–\$29). Menú del día: 24€ (\$29). AE, DC, MC, V. Open: Mon–Sat lunch and dinner.

Poncio

\$\$\$\$ Triana ANDALUSIAN/SPANISH

This distinguished, sedate restaurant is a welcome find. It's on the other side of the river in Triana, where you're more likely to find mass-market fish restaurants and tapas bars. It has a clubby atmosphere, with deep red, earthy walls, black beamed ceilings, red tile floors, and black-framed oil paintings. Service is excellent and the food is prepared in simple, elegant fashion, with such dishes as oxtail canelones and *arroz de setas* (similar to mushroom risotto).

See map page 380. Victoria, 8. ☎ **95-434-00-10**. Reservations recommended. Main courses: 13€–22€ (\$16–\$26). Tasting menu: 45€ (\$54). AE, MC, V. Open: Mon–Sat lunch and dinner.



Taberna del Alabardero

\$\$\$\$ Zona Centro SPANISH

If you're lucky enough to secure a coveted room at this tiny hotel (reviewed earlier in this chapter), you can saunter downstairs to dine at one of the city's hottest restaurants. Even if you're not sleeping here, though, you can eat alongside the king, president, and just about everybody else. In a sumptuous 19th-century palace with dark wood, mirrors, and oil paintings, the restaurant boasts five dining rooms (four private, for all those famous folks). The kitchen is the work of the owner, Luis Lezama, who is also a priest, and the head chef, Juan Marcos. The menu is eclectic, offering delicacies like red fruit soup with mascarpone cheese, Sanlúcar prawn carpaccio, lamb sweetbreads, and tournedos of fresh cod.



Hamming it up

Spaniards are wild about ham; *jamón serrano* (cured ham) pretty much qualifies as a national obsession. But Spaniards go absolutely crazy over *pata negra* (sweet cured ham named for its source, the black-hoofed Iberian pig) and especially *jamón de Jabugo*. Jabugo is a tiny town in the mountains of Andalusia, in the province of Huelva, and is famed for producing the most delectable cured ham in all Spain. Aficionados of Iberian ham — dry and sliced razor thin — claim that jamón serrano is Spain's greatest delicacy. As such, it doesn't come cheap; a *ración* (portion) of thin shavings of the stuff can cost as much as 20€, or \$24. Check out **Casa Ruíz**, Francos, 59, a tapas bar specializing in its own pata negra and other ham products (☎ 95-422-86-24).

Every year in February, the restaurant celebrates its utter Spanishness with *semana de arroz* — rice week, which glorifies the art of paella (a casserole of rice, seafood, and meat). Though the restaurant has won a national gastronomy prize and is one of the most ballyhooed restaurants in Seville, I have occasionally felt it a little uninspired and stodgy.

See map page 380. Zaragoza, 20. Four blocks northwest of the Cathedral, near Maestranza bullfighting ring. ☎ 95-450-27-21. Reservations required. Main courses: 12€–25€ (\$14–\$30). Tasting menu: 39€ (\$47). AE, DC, MC, V. Open: Daily lunch and dinner. Closed: Aug.

Experiencing the best tapas bars

If you've been to other Spanish cities by the time you stroll into Seville (or read the other dining sections of this book), you know that tapas are a fundamental feature of the Spanish dining scene. But in Seville, tapas amount to a joyous popular religion. They aren't as fancy and filling as they are in the Basque Country, but they're hands down the best way to get a handle on Seville. Feasting on tapas is also a great way to get to know the charming, universally friendly *Sevillanos* who delight in nothing as much as popping into bars — sampling squid, prawns, blood sausage, and cured ham along with a great aperitif wine like a *fino* (dry sherry) — and chatting up bartenders and newly made friends.

I've spent days in Seville without ever so much as sitting down to a proper meal — but I always ate exceedingly well. *Sevillanos* often set out on *tapeos* just prior to regular mealtimes and continue until midnight or later — basically, until the bars run out. Even breakfast (*tostadas* — toast, with pate or *sobrassada* sausage spread) is just another excuse for hitting tapas bars. Meals at tapas bars generally fall into the inexpensive or moderate range (\$–\$\$).



Kids are sure to love this form of eating (all snacking, all the time), though you may have to pick and choose carefully among the tapas (octopus and small fried fish that one eats whole, head and all, may not go over so well).

The best way to dive into a Seville-style *tapeo* (tapas crawl) is to choose a *barrio* (neighborhood), loosen your belt, and start eating. To wash it all down, ask for a *caña* (*kahn-ya*, draft beer), a *manzanilla* (deliciously dry sherry), or a *vino tinto* or *vino blanco* (red or white wine, respectively). Though tapas bars are all over the city, I suggest only those from three neighborhoods that are particularly ripe for snacking: Triana, Santa Cruz, and Zona Centro.

In Triana

Tourists seldom visit this rambling neighborhood across the Guadalquivir River. Too bad, because they're missing some of Seville's best tapas spots, as locals well know. Check out these great tapas locations:

- ✔ **Kiosco de las Flores**, Betis, s/n (☎ 95-433-38-98), lost its decades-old location wedged into the Triana Bridge; it's now next door to Rio Grande. A rarity, it has outdoor tables with terrific views. Locals fill up on full *raciones* of *jamón de Jabugo* (see the "Hamming it up" sidebar, earlier in this chapter). But the fish is the specialty; try *coquinas* (tiny sautéed clams), baby eels, or shellfish salad.
- ✔ **La Albariza**, Betis, 6 (☎ 95-433-89-60), is down the street, the main drag that lines the west side of the river, from Rio Grande. It has a stand-up bar with black wine barrels as tables. The bar area is pure Andalusian casual dining and is much more *auténtico* (authentic) than the restaurant in back. Lean on a barrel and order up *tortillitas de camarones* (yummy, tiny fried shrimp omelettes), great, huge pickled olives, and fried *boquerones* (white anchovies).
- ✔ **Rio Grande**, Betis, s/n (☎ 95-427-83-71), is a fancy full-scale restaurant with a happening terrace scene overlooking the river. Skip dinner and go for tapas instead — stick to the fish dishes.
- ✔ **Sol y Sombra**, Castilla, 149–151 (☎ 95-433-39-35), evokes a *taurino* (bullfighting) culture and serves delightfully earthy tapas. It's a good place for razor-thin cured ham, *puntillitas* (garlicky beef tenderloin), and blood-red Rioja wine. Closed for lunch Mondays and Tuesdays and all of August.

In Santa Cruz

Seville's cool old Jewish Quarter is a favorite of most visitors, and it's a good spot to tapas-hop in the early evening.

- ✔ **Bar Giralda**, Mateos Gago, 1 (☎ 95-422-74-35), with old vaults that once formed part of a Moorish bathhouse, is a famous student hang-out. Boisterous and hip *Sevillanos* come for *pastel de puerros y espinacas* (leek and spinach pie) and *pimientos rellenos* (stuffed peppers).
- ✔ **Bar Modesto**, Cano y Cueto, 3 (☎ 95-441-68-11), a seafood restaurant, is more ramshackle than modest. Its lively downstairs tapas bar is popular with *Sevillanos* and tourists alike. The famous dish here is Tío Diego, a stir-fry of cured ham, shrimp, and mushrooms.

- ✓ **Casa Román**, Plaza de los Venerables, 1 (☎ 95-422-84-83), is a location that you'll probably pass repeatedly. It's perfect for a meat fix; try the *chorizo* (spicy pork sausage), Serrano ham, and other basics, such as a wedge of *tortilla española* (potato and onion omelette).
- ✓ **Hostería del Laurel**, Plaza de los Venerables, 5 (☎ 95-422-02-95), also a small, historic hotel (see the sidebar "Did Don Juan win the bet?"), sets tables out in its delightful square. If you've pictured yourself a Don Juan or Carmen, sipping sangría and savoring cured meats, this place is tailor-made.

In Zona Centro (Central Seville)

The central, commercial district of Seville has too many tapas haunts to keep track of. Check out the following, but if you see one with people hanging about the bar and out the door, that's all the information you need to pop in and enjoy.

- ✓ **Bodega Extremeña**, San Esteban (☎ 95-441-70-60), is a dark, atmospheric little place with hanging garlic and hams, near Casa Pilatos. It has a range of cheap tapas, including *morcilla al vino* (blood sausage soaked in sherry) and, for the really adventurous, *orejas en adobo* (I shouldn't tell you, but that's pig's ears in oregano and vinegar).
- ✓ **Casa Morales**, García de Vinuesa, 11 (☎ 95-422-12-42), just a block back from Avenida de Constitución, is a fantastic old wine bar and tapas joint that dates to 1850, and it looks like it hasn't changed a bit since then. You can get *chorizo* and other snacks to go with your beer or wine, but the best thing to do is to go across the street to **La Isla**, García de Vinuesa, 13 (☎ 95-422-83-55), a fry stand where you can pick up a newspaper full of *pescado frito* (tiny fried fish), shrimp, or fish 'n chips (priced by the kilo) to take back to the bar. (Morales is one of the only places I know that doesn't have a problem with BYOT — Bring Your Own Tapas.)
- ✓ **Entrecárceles**, Faisanes, 1 (no phone), just off Plaza del Salvador, is a tiny nook of a place with hanging hams, a wooden bar, an old wooden refrigerator, and walls with peeling ochre paint. A tavern since 1894, it looks like a movie set, but was being totally overhauled on my last visit. I can only hope it remains as atmospheric. Tapas are written on a chalkboard and on tiles. Try *salmorejo* (the thick Cordoban version of *gazpacho*) with ham, *pimientos rellenos de carne o bacalao* (peppers stuffed with meat or cod), or *lomo al camembert* (pork loin with Camembert cheese).
- ✓ **El Rinconcillo**, Gerona, 2 (☎ 95-422-31-83), may be a little out of your way, but it has been a tavern since 1670, making it the oldest tapas bar in Seville. The name means Little Corner. It has a gorgeous wraparound wooden bar (on which bartenders tally your tab in chalk), walls lined with gorgeous *azulejos* (ceramic tiles), marble-topped tables, and tons of tapas. Popular with the locals, it features

a regular cast of characters around the bar. I can still taste the *espinacas con garbanzos* (spinach with chickpeas).

- ✓ **Las Coloniales**, Plaza Cristo de Burgos, s/n (no phone), is a comfortable neighborhood restaurant with a long bar, a few tables inside, and a half-dozen very coveted tables on the sidewalk at the edge of a low-key square. Try any of the daily tapas specials the friendly barmen or waitresses recommend (written on the chalkboard inside).

Exploring Seville

You can cover almost everything you want to see in a first or second visit to Seville — everything, in other words, that I outline here — on foot (if you have a car, leave it in the hotel parking area). Seville's loaded with monuments, cathedrals, and other sights, but as important as any of those is the city's special character — its hole-in-the-wall tapas bars overflowing with boisterous patrons, fragrant orange trees, and the unmistakable sounds of flamenco song and dance spilling out into the street. Don't be so intent on seeing the sights that you miss picking up on what makes the city unique. Slow down, like *Sevillanos* do, and soak up the atmosphere.

Did Don Juan win the bet?

In pop culture, a Don Juan is an irresistible stud, but it wasn't always that way. In the original story, written in the 1600s by Tirso de Molina (a priest who later received the honor of having a Madrid neighborhood and, er, Metro stop named after him), the legendary rogue roams Seville in search of willing — and unwilling — maidens. Don Juan challenges a friend to see who can seduce more women in a calendar year. The rivals meet up one year later to check their scorecards; Don Juan, with six dozen notches on his belt, is declared the winner, but he can't stop there. On a roll, he ups the ante, claiming that in just six days he'll seduce not only his rival's fiancée, but also a nun.

Recall that a priest wrote the story of Don Juan. (Like he's gonna get away with stealing a nun's virtue.) The rascal's designs on Sister Doña Inés are the last straw for God, who strikes Don Juan down and condemns him to a sinner's life in hell.

Evidently that struck the 19th-century playwright José Zorilla as much too harsh a penalty, and too dark an ending. In Hollywood fashion, he rewrote the story. In his version, the rivals meet up at *Hostería de Laurel* in the Barrio de Santa Cruz (where you can go today and test your pick-up lines). Don Juan announces his assault on the holy church, but in the rewrite, he gets the girl (the one in the black habit) and rides off with her to life everlasting. So guess which version lived on? Of course, the one with the scandalous but happy ending.



Keep in mind as you wander the city that the sun in Andalusia can be scorchingly hot, with an average temperature of 93 degrees in summer. I recommend setting out early in the day, so that you aren't rushing around to hit the sights during the crucial overhead sun hours (11 a.m.–2 p.m.). Bring along a hat or cap and, especially in the summertime, remember to slather on the sunscreen. Also bring bottled water to prevent dehydration, and take frequent breathers — tapas stops are good ways to duck out of the sun — but watch your alcohol intake, because it acts as a dehydrator. Your last defense? Fool-proof deodorant.

The top attractions

Barrio de Santa Cruz

The labyrinthine Santa Cruz district, a Jewish ghetto in the Middle Ages, became the fashionable neighborhood of Seville's aristocrats and nobility during the 17th century. The city's most colorful neighborhood, Barrio de Santa Cruz is Seville at its romantic best. Its winding whitewashed alleyways, with names like *Gloria* (Glory), *Vida* (Life), and *Angeles* (Angels), are full of wrought-iron grilles, leafy plazas, and plant- and flower-filled patios. The area remains picturesque despite the hordes of tour-guide-led groups traipsing through in all major Indo-European languages. Work your way along the *barrio's* streets until you find the **Plaza de Santa Cruz**, a pretty square with a Baroque cross at its center. South of the square are the Murillo Gardens, strolling gardens along Menéndez Pelayo. The main attraction within the Santa Cruz district is the **Hospital de los Venerables Sacerdotes** (see review later in this chapter). Allow the better part of a full morning or afternoon in Seville's most picturesque neighborhood.

See map p. 380. Barrio de Santa Cruz begins just east of the Reales Alcázares; walk through the small passageway that appears to be a part of the fortress. You pass through a courtyard, the Patio de Banderas, and a small tunnel, and enter the streets of Santa Cruz — beginning with the Callejón del Agua (Water Alley).



Catedral and La Giralda

Zona Centro/Old City

Seville's massive stone Cathedral, built on the site of an ancient mosque, left no doubts about Christian intentions in Andalusia. Begun in 1401 (and, amazingly, finished only a century later), it was intended to make the largest possible statement about Spain's future religious and political rule. Before going in, circle the exterior to get a good look at its rose windows and Gothic flying buttresses. Enter through the **Patio de los Naranjos** (the orange tree courtyard, a holdover from the old Mosque, where worshippers performed their ablutions before entering to pray). Inside, the Cathedral's an impressive sight, with incredible proportions, great art works, and fantastic details in individual chapels. Don't miss the **Capilla Mayor** (Chancel) and its spectacular **Retablo Mayor**, an overwhelming altarpiece (the world's largest) of delicately carved gold leaf depicting the life of Christ. Behind it is the **Capilla Real** (Royal Chapel), with an ornate dome, the tombs of Alfonso X of Castile and his mother, Beatrice

(Ferdinand's wife), and a Romanesque Virgin de los Reyes. The patron saint of Seville, this last figure, is removed for the Feast of the Assumption every year and paraded through the streets for her cult of followers. Other highlights include the **Tesoro**, (treasury), with works by Goya and Murillo, and the showy 19th-century **Monument to Columbus** — a larger-than-life-size coffin held airborne by the kings of Spain's medieval kingdoms.

About the time the wrecking ball was smashing into the mosque previously on the site of the **Catedral**, the builders reportedly said, "Let us build a cathedral so immense that everyone, on beholding it, will take us for madmen." Those madmen went on to build the largest Gothic building in the world and the third-largest church in Europe (after St. Peter's in Rome and St. Paul's in London). Because of its size, plan on spending a couple of hours getting lost in it (and climbing La Giralda, the tower — see the following review).

La Giralda, the brick minaret that originally stood tall as part of the great mosque on this site, was given gradual makeovers throughout the centuries and incorporated into the Cathedral. Your admission ticket to the Cathedral allows you to climb the neverending but, surprisingly, not-all-that-taxing inclined ramp of the belfry/minaret. Horsemen used to ride up the ramp to announce prayers, but you can go up just for the splendid panoramic views, which kids are sure to enjoy. Make sure to stay up long enough to hear the bells bong, and take your camera and a map of Seville so you can pick out the tiny neighborhoods and monuments below — the vistas are pretty incredible. The belfry, by the way, is named for its weather vane on top, a statue of faith.

See map p. 380. Plaza del Triunfo/Avenida de la Constitución. Corner of Avenida de la Constitución and Alemanes. ☎ 95-5456-33-21. Admission: (including visit to Giralda Tower) 6€ (\$7.20) adults, 1.50€ (\$1.80) children and students. Open: Mon–Sat 11 a.m.–7 p.m., Sun 2:30–6 p.m.



Real Alcázar de Sevilla **Zona Centro**

If you're not going to Granada to see the Alhambra (see Chapter 17), this jaw-dropping royal residence (plain on the outside but spectacular within) is the next best thing. An awesome display of mudéjar architecture (Christian architecture employing Arab motifs and elements), it's the kind of place you can lose yourself in for hours. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, and one of the oldest royal residences in Europe, it was built by master craftsmen from Granada, and is awash in delicately carved arches, brilliant tiles, and heavenly ceilings. In 1364, Pedro I (also called Pedro the Cruel) ordered its construction on a site previously occupied by a Roman acropolis, a Moorish castle, and the first Moorish fortress in Spain. The palace itself has an amazing history: A long line of monarchs married, gave birth, had affairs, and ruled here; traitors and enemies met untimely ends here; and Columbus and Magellan both came here to beg royal approval for their expeditions.

Royally cruel

Pedro the Cruel, who established his court in Seville, receives much of the credit for creating the **Alcázar**, the gorgeous royal residence (though the structure was considerably expanded and enhanced by later monarchs). But Pedro left his mark in other ways — primarily blood stains. In the **Hall of Justice**, he murdered his brother, Don Fabrique, who conducted a brazen affair with Pedro's wife, Doña Blanca. On a different occasion, King Cruel dispensed with his dinner guest, the Emir of Granada, but not without first pocketing the Moor's fantastic uncut ruby and other priceless jewels. But what goes around comes around: Pedro was eventually assassinated by his own half-brother, Henry the Magnificent.

Perhaps the finest rooms are the **Apartamentos de Carlos V** (Apartments of Carlos V), decked out in gorgeous tapestries and tiles; the **Salón de Embajadores** (Ambassadors' Hall), crowned by a world-class carved cupola of gilded wood; the **Patio de las Doncellas** (Patio of the Maidens), with rich, intricate plasterwork that rivals the Alhambra; and the **Patio de las Muñecas** (Dolls' Patio), which is small, charming, and spectacularly intricate. Look for two small faces, the dolls of the patio name, supposedly carved into a column (don't worry if you can't find them; I never have). The Moorish gardens are the equal of the sumptuous interiors, and a perfect place to relax amid lush terraces and fountains. You need a couple of hours at least to appreciate the intricacies of the buildings and gardens here.

See map p. 380. Plaza del Triunfo, s/n. Across from the Cathedral. ☎ 95-450-23-23. Admission: 5€ (\$6), free for students and seniors. Open: Tues–Sat 9:30 a.m.–7 p.m., Sun 9:30 a.m.–5 p.m.

Hospital de los Venerables Sacerdotes Barrio de Santa Cruz

While in the Barrio de Santa Cruz, visit the **Hospital for Venerable Priests**, a handsome old structure. It was founded in 1675 as an asylum for priests and is flush with 17th-century Baroque art. The only way to see it, though, is to join a tour that's given in Spanish. The language isn't really the problem; the guide I had was the least inspired, monotone bore I've seen. If you don't understand Spanish, you won't miss anything (the pamphlet in English gives you much more information anyway). The hospital chapel has impressive frescoes by the Seville painter Valdés Leal.

See map p. 380. Plaza de los Venerables, 8. Enter neighborhood east of Reales Alcázares; corner of Reinoso and Rueda. ☎ 95-456-26-96. Admission: 4.75€ (\$5.70). Open: Daily 10 a.m.–2 p.m. and 4–8 p.m. Hourly guided visits.

Museo de Bellas Artes Zona Centro

This handsome fine-arts museum, a mini-Prado, is almost worth a visit even if you were to skip the art. A painstaking restoration has left this 17th-century former convent in beautiful shape, and its peaceful open-air patios, orange trees, and aged *azulejos* (ceramic tiles) are a great place to view art. The collection is impressive: Many of Spain's greats are here, including works by the 17th-century Seville School's Murillo, Valdés Leal, and Ribera; Velázquez; and Zurbarán. Don't miss **Sala V** (Room 5), a room with frescoed domes and Murillo's terrific angels and saints.

See map p. 380. Plaza del Museo, 9. Just off Alfonso XII, three long blocks west of Plaza Duque de la Victoria. ☎ 95-422-07-90. Admission: 1.50€ (\$1.80), free for students and members of EU. Open: Tues 3–8 p.m., Wed–Sat 9 a.m.–8 p.m., Sun 9 a.m.–2 p.m.

More cool things to see and do

Looking for something else to keep you and the kids busy while in Seville? Check out the following ideas.

Cooling off in the shade



When Seville's unrelenting heat begins to barbecue your brain, bolt for (or more likely, stagger to) the park. The lushly shaded gardens of **Parque María Luisa**, designed in the late-19th century along the Guadalquivir River, are the best thing this side of a cold bath. (In the dead of summer, you may be tempted to rip off your clothes and go screaming into the fountain, but don't — the punishing sun beats down on the tiles as if they were the sands of the Sahara.) In spring, the acacia trees and rose bushes are particularly fragrant, and the Arab-style fountains and ponds, punctuated with floating swans, are extremely romantic. Within the park is the **Plaza de España**; a massive semi-circular palace with decorative tiles commemorating each province in Spain, it was built for the 1929 Ibero-American Exposition. Though kids are always captivated by this huge structure, it's in a sad state of neglect. (Many of the tiles I took so many photos of 15 years ago on my first visit are now chipped and faded.) Kids still enjoy rowing boats around the moat, and water still springs from the fountain, but the Plaza already seems like a relic.

One of the best ways to visit the park is to hire a horse-drawn carriage (see "Seeing Seville by guided tour," later in this chapter), but if you're walking back to the center of town, take Avenida de María Luisa to San Fernando. On the southwest corner, across from the gardens of the Alcázar, is Seville's university, which inhabits the **Real Fábrica de Tabacos** (Royal Tobacco Factory). This factory is where the Gypsy seductress Carmen, best known as the heroine of Bizet's famous opera set in Seville, rolled cigars along with about 10,000 other Andalusian women. Presumably, they sang and danced all the while. You're welcome to take a stroll through and see the grandeur that came with a 19th-century state tobacco monopoly.

Visiting Casa de Pilatos (Pilate's House)

North of the Cathedral, Pilate's House, Plaza de Pilatos, 1 (southeast section of the Old City; four blocks west of Menéndez Pelayo; ☎ 95-422-52-98), is a superb, two-story, 15th-century Renaissance palace built by the Marquis of Tarifa. Without doubt one of the finest homes in Seville, it's bursting with grand architectural and artistic treasures: Greek and Roman busts, frescos, handsome painted ceilings, courtyard sculptures, walls plastered with colorful glazed ceramic tiles, and a carved dome mudéjar ceiling over the staircase. My father's fond of saying "They don't make 'em like they used to," so I brought him here to prove him right. Admission to the ground floor (patio and gardens) is 5€ (\$6), to the museum as well 8€ (\$9.60); on Tuesdays admission is free. It's open daily from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Picking a side at the bullfights

Plaza de Toros de Maestranza (my-eh-strahn-tha) is one of Spain's oldest, grandest, and most important bullfighting rings — the oldest is a little farther south, in Ronda (see Chapter 16). It's located at Paseo de Cristóbal Colón, 12 (intersection of Paseo de Cristóbal Colón and Adriano, across from the river; ☎ 95-450-13-82). Work started in 1761 and was completed 120 years later. Not round, but oval, the stark white ring seats 14,000 people. As in all Spanish bullrings, you can buy the cheap seats in the *sol* (sun) or the more expensive ones in the *sombra* (shade). You'll understand the price difference after you sit through a bullfight in the intense Seville sun — you'll be virtually dead in the afternoon. Bullfights used to last all day, with 12 *toros* (bulls) meeting their maker and almost as many horses. The steeds that brought in the *pica-dores* (horsemen who jab the bulls around the neck and shoulders to wear them down) didn't wear protective gear until the 1920s, and many were fatally gored. Today only bulls — six during every bullfight — are slain.

The bullring tour includes a visit to the museum (**Museo Taurino**), which displays various flashy *trajes de luces* (suits of lights) worn by matadors, photos of bull aficionados like Ernest Hemingway, and paintings of bull lore. You finish the group tour in the chapel, where the bullfighters come to pray to La Macarena, the patron saint of *toreros* (yes, she of the world-famous song and dance number). Admission is 4€ (\$4.80); it's open daily from 9:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. (on bullfight days, it's open 9:30 a.m.–3 p.m. only).

The bullfighting season at la Maestranza begins the first week in April and lasts through October, with fights taking place on various days of the week (check ahead to be sure you're in town on the right day). You can download an advance schedule if you've got a matador of choice (www.realmaestranza.com) or pick one up from the tourism office when you arrive in Seville. Tickets are available at the box office or at kiosks set up in major tourist districts in the center.

Discovering La Macarena!

Perhaps you remember the cheesy Spanish pop song *Macarena*, which topped the charts all over the world back in the mid-90s. Believe it or not, La Macarena's more than just a participatory dance number. She is one of Seville's most revered Madonnas, a tearful patron saint of bull-fighters, a favorite of Gypsies, and a legend when it comes to Holy Thursday's procession. You can see the colonial-looking **Basilica de la Macarena**, Calle Bécquer, 1 (Puerta de la Macarena, intersection of Muñoz León and San Luis; ☎ **95-437-01-95**), on the extreme northern ring of the Old City (the fastest way to get here is to take a cab along the outer ring: Colón to Torneo to Resolana Andueza). It's a bit of a hike, but if you're at all fascinated by the cult of Madonna worship that's especially strong in the south of Spain, a visit here is obligatory. You can visit the Macarena museum, with its over-the-top processional floats of Our Lady of Hope (her official name) — one's covered in a forest of candlesticks, another is a shiny golden chariot. If you just want to see the famous crying virgin Mary, enter the church through the front door with the faithful. Admission to the basilica is free; it costs 3€ (\$3.60) to enter the museum. Both are open daily from 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 5 to 9 p.m.

Traveling into the past

La Cartuja, across the river from Seville's major downtown area, was the site of the 1992 World Expo and a place that Sevillanos hoped would develop into a major tourist attraction. Although the installations languished for a few years after the Expo, they've finally been put to work as a theme park, and one with a 16th-century motif at that. **Isla Mágica** (Magic Island) takes the little ones back in time. Rides and show themes include the *Amazon*, *Gateway to the Americas*, and *El Dorado*. The park also has a motion theater with seats that shimmy and shake like the vehicles on the screen you're ostensibly piloting (it's pretty cool and realistic — the kids will love it!). It's located at Pabellón de España, Isla de la Cartuja — across Puente de la Barqueta Bridge, take bus C2 from the city center (☎ **95-902-16-17-16**; www.islamagica.es). Admission for adults, according to season, is 19€ to 21€ (\$23–\$25) for the whole day or 13€ to 14.50€ (\$16–\$17) for the afternoon only. Admission for children 5 through 12 years old ranges from 13€ to 14.50€ (\$16–\$17) (whole day), and 10€ to 11€ (\$12–\$13) (afternoon). Children under 5 enter for free. The park is open March through November daily from 11 a.m. to midnight in summer, with reduced hours in other months.

Going to the hospital — for art's sake

Hospitals are rarely tourist attractions, but hidden within Seville's 17th-century **Hospital de la Caridad** (Hospital of Charity) is a splendid Baroque chapel that is a minimuseum of art. Established to care for the destitute, infirm, and criminal, the hospital — built by a man on whom the legendary character Don Juan was reportedly based — today houses works by the painter Juan de Valdés Leal, including his famous *Postrimerías*, the sculptor Pedro Roldán, and a dozen paintings by native son Bartolomé Murillo, one of the greats of the Seville School. You'll also

find a handsome altarpiece by Simón de Pineda. It's located at Temprado, 3 (☎ 95-422-32-32) and is open Monday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and 3:30 to 6:30 p.m.; Sunday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Admission is 3€ (\$3.60).

Fiesta time! Seville's popular festivals

Seville is renowned for its rituals and celebrations during **Semana Santa** (Holy Week), just before Easter, and **Feria de Abril**, the April Fair that erupts two weeks after Easter. During these two weeks, Seville is the most festive and spectacular place in Spain, overflowing with vibrant color. But if you're not in the mood for crowds, packed hotels, inflated prices, and religious ceremonies, plan to be somewhere else.

Semana Santa

Holy Week (the week before Easter) is one big march of processions throughout the city. Assemblies of men carry flower-bedecked, Madonna-topped floats on their shoulders. Penitents in long robes and pointy hoods accompany them — to an American, the uncomfortable visual reference is the KKK (though fortunately, these folks have different things on their minds). Mournful dirge music and candles complete the somber, almost spooky mood. Processions go on all week, but the best days are Holy Thursday and Good Friday. Thursday night is pretty spectacular — parades pass hourly. Don't miss **La Macarena**, not the now-dissed dance, but the patron saint of bullfighters (see “More cool things to see and do,” earlier in this chapter), or **El Gran Poder**. Macarena returns to her Basilica on Friday around 1 p.m. Pick up schedules of processions, particularly the pamphlet “Sevilla en Semana Santa,” from the tourism office.

Feria de Abril

After the somber expressions of faith during Holy Week, Seville explodes during its annual April Fair, a festival of flamenco and sevillana dancing, drinking, horse parades, and wonderful costumes. Andalusian women, from little girls to elegant older ladies, are decked out in gay, brightly colored, and often polka-dotted flamenco dresses. Men, atop fine Andalusian horses, look like gentlemen ranchers, with their broad-brimmed hats. The roots of the party are in fact agricultural — it accompanied annual livestock auctions in the mid-19th century. The *alegría* (joy) is contagious, and it lasts all week.

Rocking El Rocío

One of Spain's most spectacular expressions of religious faith is the El Rocío pilgrimage, which takes place at the end of May in the province of Huelva (near Almonte and the Parque Nacional de Doñana), west of Seville. It's like a rowdy religious rave. Accompanied by flutes and tambourines, thousands of the devout travel on foot, on horseback, and in oxen-led carriages to the Almonte marshlands. The faithful, donning their best flamenco duds, take flowers and wax figures to worship at the

Our Lady of El Rocío sanctuary. When the float of la Virgen del Rocío — the Virgin of the Dew — passes, mayhem erupts as everyone tries to lay a hand on her and be touched by her saintliness. For more information on this festival, see www.andalucia.com/festival/rocio.htm.

To find out this year's dates for Semana Santa (Easter), Feria de Abril (April Fair), and the El Rocío pilgrimage, contact the tourism office or visit the Web sites www.andalucia.com and www.sevilla.org.

Seeing Seville by guided tour

Sevilla Walking Tour offers complete walking tours of the city, leaving daily at 2:45 p.m. from the Tourist Information Office on Avenida de la Constitución. Tours cost from 9€ to 18€ (\$11–\$22).

You can choose from two sightseeing bus tours in Seville. **Sevirama** (☎ 95-421-60-52) has stops at the Torre del Oro, Plaza de España, and Isla Mágica. It's one of those open-top, get-on-and-get-off buses. **Sevilla Tour** offers multilingual tours in buses designed to look like trolley cars (☎ 902-10-10-81). A ticket is good for 24 hours, and you can pick up the bus at Torre del Oro, Plaza de España, Isla Mágica, and Cartuja (the Expo '92 site).

Among specialty tours are **Cruceros Turísticos Torre del Oro** (river cruises down the Guadalquivir), Paseo Alcalde Marqués del Contadero, s/n, at the Torre del Oro (☎ 95-456-16-92), and **Toros Tours** (☎ 95-566-42-61), organized visits to see Spanish bulls and horses outside of the ring.



You can't miss the **horse-drawn carriages** lined up outside Seville's cathedral. They're a very popular way to clop-clop around Seville, and this attractive, romantic city is one of the most enjoyable places in Spain to get off your feet and behind a horse. If you've thought about it in other places like Córdoba and haven't hopped aboard, Seville is the place to do it, especially if you have your sweetie by your side. Fares are posted and are non-negotiable (unless you find a rogue driver); they run about 25€ to 30€ (\$30–\$36) for an hour (and more during the high-demand season, Holy Week, Easter, and the April festivals). Besides the stop in the plaza fronting the Cathedral, there are stops in María Luisa Park, Plaza del Triunfo, Plaza Virgen de los Reyes, and Torre del Oro.

Shopping in Seville

Seville's a joy for shopping hounds — as much for the pleasure of strolling the streets, as for the typically Andalusian goods that make great gifts.

Best shopping areas

The principal shopping districts are **Barrio de Santa Cruz**, for artisan's shops, antiques, and trinkets, and **Zona Centro** (center, just north of the Cathedral Tower) — particularly the pedestrian streets **Sierpes** and

Tetuán, where you can find traditional guitar, ceramics, and flamenco dress shops as well as a wide array of modern clothing stores. The area west of the Cathedral, **El Arenal**, is packed with cool little antiques shops, as are **Mateos Gago** and **Rodrigo Caro** in Santa Cruz.

What to look for and where to find it

Look for hand-painted ceramics, old *azulejos* (glazed ceramic tiles), antiques, and, for women who want to play the part of charming *Sevillana* seductress, fans, embroidered shawls, and colorful flamenco dresses.

You have to depend on your feet or taxis to get around Seville. Map out where you want to go; if anything looks too far (more than five blocks, say), hop in an inexpensive, air-conditioned taxi. And remember that shops are closed for long lunch breaks, often from 1:30 to 5 p.m. If you must shop at midday, head to **El Corte Inglés** department store (on Plaza Duque de la Victoria), which doesn't dare close or turn off the mega-watt air-conditioning.

Antiques

Run by a gregarious *Sevillano* family, **Felix e Hijo** (Felix and Son . . . and daughter and in-laws), Avenida de la Constitución, 20 (☎ 95-422-33-34), deals in classical archaeological finds: Greek vases, Egyptian masks, and Roman mosaics. Not everything is impossibly expensive and impossible to lug home — you may just find an affordable piece that crystallizes Andalusia's storied past. And if you do find one, Felix also arranges shipping. Mari Carmen, Felix's daughter, runs **Felix**, Avenida de la Constitución, 26 (☎ 95-421-80-26), specializing in antique Andalusian posters — of the April Fair, bullfights, and hard-to-find deco advertising posters. The old posters of *Semana Santa* and *Feria de Abril* are particularly fetching with affordable prices to match.

Baked goods from on high

For pastries from heaven, check out what the nuns are baking. At **Convento de San Leandro**, Plaza de San Ildefonso, 1, the sisters sell *yemas de San Leandro* (egg yolk candies). You can get all kinds of airy pastries, some made especially for the Christmas holidays, at **Convento de Santa Inés**, Doña María Coronel, 5, and jams and marmalades at **Convento de Santa Paula**, Santa Paula, 11 (☎ 95-442-13-07). During the month of December, visit the **Palacio Arzobispal** (Archbishop's Palace), Plaza Virgen de los Reyes across from the Cathedral, for a stupendous selection of *dulces navideños* (Christmas sweets).

Books

One of the largest sources of international books is **Vértice**, San Fernando, 33 (☎ 95-421-16-54). Three guesses as to what's sold at **English Bookshop**, Marques de Nervión, 70 (☎ 95-465-57-54). If you need a traveling fix, check out the selection of novels and travel books, which are all in the English language.

Ceramics

El Postigo, Arfe, s/n (☎ 95-421-39-76), has one of the largest stocks of hand-painted ceramics in Seville with a selection of pottery, planters, and other patio-perfect pieces. You can find good, nontouristy ceramics across the river in Triana; have a look at two shops on Calle Antilliano Campos: **Cerámica Terra** (no. 3) and **Cerámica Rocío** (no. 8). For hand-painted vases, tiles, and plates with historic Andalusian patterns, check out **Martian Ceramics**, Sierpes, 74 (☎ 95-421-34-13). The selection's good, although not out of this world.

Crafts

Artesanía Textil, Sierpes, 70 (☎ 95-456-28-40), is a great place for hand-woven Andalusian blankets, table linens, and shawls. **El Bazar del Barrio** (The Neighborhood Bazaar), Mateos Gago, 24 (☎ 95-456-00-89), a cute shop in the Santa Cruz district, has everything from antique *azulejos* (glazed ceramic tiles) to watercolors of bullfighting scenes. The items are more carefully selected than those you find in souvenir shops.

Department stores

El Corte Inglés, Plaza Duque de la Victoria, 10 (☎ 95-422-09-31), is the megastore that dominates Spain like a fortress on the plains; you can get anything from flamenco dresses, dishes, and vacuum cleaners to shoe polish and CDs of flamenco artists.

Fashion

Zara, Plaza Duque de la Victoria, 1 (☎ 95-421-48-75), something akin to the Galician incarnation of Banana Republic, has affordable and hip fashions for men, women, and kids. (The menswear Zara is up the street at Calle Tetuán.) One of the hottest names in Spanish fashion is **Victorio & Lucchino**, Sierpes, 87 (☎ 95-422-79-51). The pricey dresses, skirts, and shawls by this Andalusian design couple are Spain's version of Dolce & Gabbana, but more elegant and sophisticated.

Flamenco dresses and fans

You can find cheaper *trajes sevillanos* (flamenco dresses) and shawls in almost any souvenir shop, but you won't find any more exquisite than the hand-embroidered numbers at **Angeles Berral**, Pajaritos, 7 (☎ 95-456-31-30), a small, personalized shop just a few doors down from Casa Pilatos. They're extremely elegant and tasteful (and pricey). **Pilar Vera**, Rivero, 2 (☎ 95-422-81-53), has designed classic flamenco dresses and accessories for women for more than two decades, while generations of *Sevillanas* have gone to **Perdales**, Cuna, 23 (☎ 95-421-37-09), for the perfect, body-hugging costume to wow 'em at the April festivals (see the sidebar, "Fiesta time! Seville's popular festivals," earlier in this chapter). The outfits aren't cheap (and I have a hard time figuring out when would be the right moment back home to wear one . . .), but if you need a showy number to go with your castanets and fan, this is the place. Don't forget the color-coordinated shoes. **Casa Rubio**, Sierpes, 56 (☎ 95-422-68-72),

has a terrific selection of fans, from fancy hand-painted numbers to modern functional items that can keep you cool in the wicked Seville heat.

Flea markets

Los hippies is what locals call these flea-market locations for leather goods, hippie fashions, costume jewelry, and heavenly junk. Wednesday and Thursday it's at Rioja and Plaza Magdalena; Friday and Saturday in Plaza del Duque. On Thursdays, check out "El Jueves," the most traditional market in Seville, on Plaza Feria and Alameda, for antiques, paintings, and furniture.

For the ranch

For more than 20 years, **Arcab**, Paseo de Cristóbal Colón, 18 (☎ 95-422-34-64), has been a sturdy place to get a hand-tooled saddle, riding boots, and other items related to the majestic Andalusian horse (or your regular old Texas steed). For riding saddles, boots, spurs, buckles, blankets, leather pouches, and more, try **San Pablo**, Calle Murillo, 9 (☎ 95-422-56-34). This family-owned place has dealt in equestrian accessories for half a century.

Music

Allegro, Dos de Mayo, 37 (☎ 95-421-61-93), just beside the Teatro de la Maestranza, specializes in classical music. It also has a top-notch selection of Spanish music, including flamenco and zarzuela. You can give a listen before buying. **Sevilla Rock**, on Alfonso XII, 1, is the place to come for CDs for your rental car or musical souvenirs of Andalusia. You can find the latest in Spanish pop-flamenco or the deep-throated *cante hondo* stuff (like an anthology of the great singer Camarón de la Isla).

Feeling the rhythm: Seville's nightlife

You don't want to miss the fun on a sultry Seville night. Make sure you try out the following three activities to keep yourself grooving to the rhythm:

- ✓ A rousing professional flamenco *tablaó* (performance)
- ✓ Outdoor cafes and bars (either near the Cathedral or along either side of the river) for people watching, tapas munching, and libation quaffing
- ✓ Live, combustible music, with rhythmic hand-claps, cries of *¡olé!* and a palpable sense of community, at clubs where you see locals get down and dirty, performing *sevillanas* (an informal gathering of singing, music, and dancing)

For listings of what's on and what's going down, check out *El Giradillo*, a free publication that contains a detailed monthly list of Seville's nightlife options, exhibitions, and other goings-on (available at tourism offices throughout the city).



Die-hard aficionados of flamenco can plan their visit to Seville to coincide with the annual **Bienal de Flamenco**. During September and the first week of October, the city hosts a daily surfeit of flamenco-related dance, music, and theater. For additional advance information and a program schedule, see www.bienal-flamenco.org. Make sure you purchase your tickets in advance (at the Lope de la Vega box office or by calling ☎ **95-459-28-70**), because most shows sell out (and hotels are difficult to come by as well).

Seeing a flamenco show

El Arenal, Rodo, 7 (☎ **95-421-64-92**; www.tablaoelarenal.com), produces one of the best flamenco song and dance shows in Seville. In the back room of a 17th-century building with small tables, the place and performances practically shout passionate Andalusia. Shows are 32€ (\$38) (dinner and show, 61€/73\$); there are two “passes” every night, at 9 and 11 p.m. It’s located between Dos de Mayo and Varflora, near the bullring and Paseo Colón.

Dressed up like a Seville patio, **El Patio Sevillano**, Paseo de Cristóbal Colón, 11 (☎ **95-422-20-68**; www.elpatiosevillano.com), popular with large tourist groups, forsakes the intimate, flamenco-focused program for one with exotic costumes and a wide range of Spanish music and dance. Two shows are performed nightly (7:30 and 11 p.m.; 27€/32\$). It’s near the Maestranza Bullring, on the east side of Guadalquivir River.

Los Gallos, Plaza de Santa Cruz, 11 (☎ **95-421-69-81**; www.tablaolosgallos.com), is in the heart of the old Jewish Quarter, Barrio de Santa Cruz. It’s unapologetically touristy, but the flamenco is pretty authentic, and the place is lively and intimate. Visitors love it, and you may even find a local or two in attendance. There are two shows daily (29€/35\$), at 9 and 11:30 p.m. It’s two blocks south of Ximénez de Enciso, along Santa Teresa.



Catching Flamenco fever

Flamenco fever flows through Seville. If you’ve been to see a flamenco troupe and want to discover how to stomp your heels dramatically and twirl your arms seductively, maybe a dance class is in order. **Estudio de Baile Mario** offers classes in flamenco, *danza española*, and *sevillanas* Monday through Friday from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and 6 to 9 p.m. The studio’s on Procurador, 20 (☎ **95-433-89-14**). **Taller Flamenco** offers four-day music and dance classes in small groups. They’re on Siete Revueltas, 5 (☎ **95-456-42-34**; www.tallerflamenco.com). The **Cristina Herren Flamenco Foundation**, Fabiola, 1 (☎ **95-421-70-58**; www.flamencoheeren.com), offers intensive, and expensive, dance courses for those who are serious about learning (all levels available).

Concert performances focusing on young flamenco artists and *nuevo flamenco* are held at **Sol Café Cantante**, Sol 5 (☎ 95-422-51-65), in the old Sala Talía (near Plaza Los Terceros). Shows are Thursday through Saturday at 10 p.m. (12€/14).

Clapping along to Sevillanas

Casa Anselma, Pagés del Corro, 49 (no phone), on the west side of the river, rocks with communal singing and camaraderie. Either get here obscenely early to get a table or come around midnight, when it starts to get really steamy — and packed. The garrulous owner, Anselma, is a local institution and quite a singer herself. To get there, take a taxi; Casa Anselma is four blocks back from Betis in Triana on the west side of Guadalquivir River.

Along the river, an area packed with bars and great little places for an evening *tapeois* **Lo Nuestro**, Betis, 31-A (☎ 95-472-60-10), where locals do their thing — sing and dance and drink. To get there, walk across San Telmo Bridge toward the Triana neighborhood; take the first right past the bridge, on the main street facing the river. The bar's about halfway down on the right side.

Making it a night at the opera

Seville's fancy, newish opera house, **Teatro de la Maestranza**, Paseo de Cristóbal Colón, 22 (☎ 95-422-33-44; www.teatromaestranza.com), is the place to catch a Seville-inspired production of *Carmen*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, or *The Barber of Seville*. Also look for jazz concerts and recitals here. The box office is open from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 5 to 8 p.m. As you face the Guadalquivir River, the opera house is halfway between the San Telmo and Isabel II bridges.

Enjoying the theater

On the northern edge of María Luisa Park is this handsome theater, **Teatro Lope de Vega**, Avenida de María Luisa, s/n (☎ 95-459-08-53/5), which brings some of the best productions to Seville — from García Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba* to rousing flamenco shows and theater. Productions are in Spanish only (but that doesn't appear to stop large contingents of foreign visitors from attending). It's near the intersection of Menéndez Pelayo, Avenida de Isabel la Católica, and Avenida de Portugal.

Surviving Seville's bars

For a full roster of tapas bars, a superb way to spend an evening in Seville, see “Dining in Seville,” earlier in this chapter. Plaza del Salvador is always hopping with *jaleo* (commotion). The tiny bars there (**La Antigua Bodeguita** and **Los Soportales**) spill out into the square, where there are rickety little tables and lots of beer-drinking, good-natured, good-looking young people; the scene looks remarkably like a college party.

Abades, Abades, 13 (☎ 95-422-56-22), is a pub in the guise of a converted 19th-century Barrio de Santa Cruz mansion. This is lounge culture at its finest; slip into the rich living room and decadent ambience and enjoy a cocktail with other stylin' folks. To get there, take Mateos Gago east of the Cathedral and turn left on Abades. Perched on the banks of the Guadalquivir, **Bar Capote**, Paseo de Cristóbal Colón, 11 (☎ 95-421-41-20), is the place to down a few cocktails in the open air and dance when a *señorita* (lady) or *caballero* (gentleman) catches your eye. It's next to the Maestranza Bullring, facing the river.

At **Bar Quitapesares** (also called Taberna Peregil), Plaza Padre Jerónimo de Córdoba, 3 (☎ 95-421-89-66), proprietor Pepe Peregil is so gregarious it's contagious. His bar is packed with young and old, and a group usually gathers in back with guitars and voices in full swing. Young women often get up and show off their *sevillana* dance moves. Pepe's place is a little removed from the city center near the Church of Santa Catalina. To get there, take Martín Villa (which becomes Laraña) east off of Sierpes, all the way to Plaza Ponce de León, just west of the plaza that the bar is on. Take a taxi there and back; walking is way too far. (Nearer to the center of town is Pepe's son's bar, **La Goleta**, on Mateos Gago, 20, in Barrio de Santa Cruz.) **Casa Morales** (García de Vinuesa, 11; ☎ 95-422-12-42) makes a great watering hole as well. It's an evocative mid-19th-century tapas bar, with huge casks of wine and cement floors — the kind of place where the barkeep writes your tab in chalk on the bar top.

Side trips from Seville

A great if rather pricey way to get out of town is to board the **Al Andalus Expreso**, a vintage luxury train whose 12 cars are straight out of the 1920s, and set out for the highlights of Andalusia. Along the way, you pass (in air-conditioned luxury) through the south's spectacular scenery — dry, rugged mountains and rolling olive groves. The Seville-to-Seville roundtrip pulls into **Córdoba**, **Granada** (see Chapter 17), and two of Andalusia's famed *Pueblos Blancos*, or white towns, **Ronda** and **Jerez** (see Chapter 16). A Madrid–Madrid roundtrip takes in the major sights of Andalusia before returning to the capital. On either, you dine aboard in the luxurious dining car or in fine restaurants (frequently *paradores*). The price includes meals with wine, tours, visits, transfers, and taxes, but traveling in such princely style doesn't come cheap. Prices for seven-day, six-night trips range from 3,000€ to 4,250€ (\$3,600–\$5,100) per person (depending on cabin type) for the Madrid roundtrip and 2,850€ to 4,070€ (\$3,420–\$4,884) for the Seville roundtrip. The train hits the tracks from April to October, skipping the extremely hot months of July and August. Visit the Web site, www.alandalusexpreso.com, or contact your travel agent or **Marketing Ahead**, a Spanish travel specialist in New York, at ☎ 800-223-1356 or 212-686-9213; Fax 212-686-0271; www.marketingahead.com. If a fancy all-inclusive train's not your style, try one of the following recommended side trips.

Itálica: The Roman ruins

Before the Moors and the Visigoths, the Romans ruled Andalusia. The ruins of the Roman city of Itálica, which was founded in 206 B.C., are so close to Seville (10km/6 miles) that you can almost walk there. Two of the most famous emperors of the Roman Empire, Trajan and Hadrian, were born in Itálica, and the city was one of the Empire's most important. The main feature is the elliptical amphitheater, which held 25,000 spectators and was the largest the Romans built. The town had about 10,000 inhabitants at its height. Excavations are ongoing, and Roman mosaics continue to be unearthed and transported to the Seville Archaeological Museum. In summer, concerts and dance festivals are held here — an evocative bit of staging.

Itálica is 10km (6 miles) northwest of Seville. To get there by car, take Highway N-360 in the direction of Mérida. By bus, take the Santiponce bus that leaves from Calle Marqués de Parada near the Santa Justa rail station. Call ☎ **95-599-73-76** for more information. The site is open Tuesday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., and Sunday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission is 1.50€ (\$1.80), free for EU citizens.

Carmona: A crossroads of cultures

Carmona, a pretty, ancient walled city on a plateau an hour from Seville, has narrow whitewashed streets, a number of handsome, noble Renaissance homes, and a handful of churches and convents. It also has three Moorish fortresses. Carmona's fame rests on its reputation as one of the oldest inhabited places in Spain (Phoenicians and Carthaginians preceded the Romans). It has two landmark gates — the **Puerta de Sevilla** and **Puerta de Córdoba**. Have a peek at the Gothic **Iglesia de Santa María**, too. But the town's best sight may be the cool **Roman Necropolis** (☎ **95-414-08-11**; open Tues–Sat 9 a.m.–5 p.m., Sun 10 a.m.–2 p.m.; admission free), where 1,000 former citizens are buried in underground tombs carved out of rock. Look for the impressive *Elephant and Seville* tombs. The necropolis is on the outskirts of town and clearly signposted. You can hit it on the way into or out of town.

Carmona is 32km (20 miles) east of Seville. If you're coming into Seville from Córdoba (or, of course, going on to Córdoba from Seville), it's an easy stopover — just follow the signs from the N-V highway.



Carmona's also a great place to overnight with two superb hotels. The **Parador Alcázar del Rey Don Pedro**, Alcázar, s/n (☎ **95-414-10-10**; www.parador.es), one of the best (and best values) in the *parador* system, inhabits a beautiful 14th-century Moorish *alcázar*, or royal residence, and is stunningly evocative of Andalusia's Arab past. It has an Alhambra-style patio, public rooms adorned with tapestries and antiques, an inviting pool, and breathtaking views of the countryside. Rooms are spacious and very handsomely decorated in classic style. A step up from the *parador*, in both luxury and cost, is the superb **Casa de Carmona**, Plaza Lasso, 1 (☎ **95-419-10-00**; www.casadecarmona.com), a

Relax and Chateaux property in a 1560 palace, the oldest surviving mansion in Carmona. This sumptuously designed and elegant hotel — which very much looks the part of a Renaissance palace with *mudéjar* (Arab-Christian) details and four interior courtyards — is one of the finest in Spain. The rooms are warm, cozy, and luxurious, and each evokes a different era of Andalusian history. The slender pool is very much in character with the region's Moorish architecture, and the restaurant is exquisite — well worth making a reservation at even if you're not staying the night.

Fast Facts: Seville

Area Code

Seville's area code is **95**, which you must dial before every number.

American Express

The office is located at Plaza Nueva, 7 (☎ 95-421-16-17). Open Monday through Friday from 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and 4:30 to 7:30 p.m., and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

ATMs/Currency Exchange

You can find banks and ATMs along the main drag in the *centro*, Avenida de la Constitución, just behind the cathedral, and on Plaza Nueva.

Embassies/Consulates

Many Western countries have consulates in Seville: Australia's is at Federico Rubio, 14 (☎ 95-422-09-71); Canada's is at Avenida de los Pinos, 34, casa 4 (☎ 95-422-94-13); Ireland's is at Plaza Santa Cruz, 6, Bajos A (☎ 95-421-63-61); and the United States' is at Paseo de las Delicias, 7 (☎ 95-423-18-85).

Emergencies

For medical emergencies, dial ☎ **061**, or call the Cruz Roja (Red Cross; Avenida de la Cruz Roja) at ☎ **95-422-22-22** or Casa de Socorro (First Aid), Menéndez Pelayo, ☎ **95-441-17-12**. To call an ambulance, dial ☎ **95-442-55-65**. In case of fire, call

☎ **95-422-00-80**. For the police, call ☎ **091**. For roadside assistance, call ☎ **900-12-35-05**.

Hospitals

Hospital Virgen del Rocío is on Avenida Manuel Siurot, s/n (☎ 95-445-81-81). You can find Hospital Universitario Virgen Macarena at Avenida Doctor Fedriani, s/n (☎ 95-500-80-00).

Information

The main Andalucía Tourism Information Office is located just down the street from the Cathedral, Avenida de la Constitución, s/n (☎ 95-422-14-04). You can find others at the San Pablo airport (☎ 95-444-91-28) and Santa Justa train station (☎ 95-453-76-26). They're open daily from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Municipal tourism offices are at Plaza de la Concordia, s/n, in front of the Puente de Triana (☎ 95-490-48-97), and Costurero de la Reina/Paseo de las Delicias, 9 (☎ 95-423-44-65). Dial ☎ **010** (8 a.m.–10 p.m.) for general information about the city, including transportation. The information is available in English as well as other languages.

Internet Access/Cybercafes

In some Spanish cities, locating a good cybercafe to be able to tap into your *correo electrónico* (e-mail) while traveling can be tough. Seville, though, with its

throng of foreign students, has several places where you can surf on good machines. Web surfing generally runs about 2€ (\$2.40) for a half-hour, or 3€ to 4€ (\$3.60–4.80) per hour. Check into Seville Internet Center, Almirantazgo, 2 (2nd floor, corner of Avenida de la Constitución; ☎ 95-450-02-75), which is usually packed with study-abroad students. Open from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Friday, and Saturday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., it's across from the Cathedral. Another place to check out is Cyber Olé, an Internet cafe with art exhibitions, San Jancinto, 74 (no phone). Work Center, San Fernando, 1, at the corner of Avenida de la Constitución (☎ 95-421-20-74), is a 24-hour copy center with about a dozen Internet terminals. Finally, a bar/cafe with a couple of computers at the back is Alfalfa 10, on Plaza Alfalfa, 10 (☎ 95-421-38-41). It's open daily from noon to 10 p.m., later on weekends.

Mail

You can find Seville's Central Post Office on Avenida de la Constitución, 32 (☎ 95-422-47-60). A branch is located at Avenida de la Raza, 4 (☎ 95-461-56-95).

Maps

The Tourism Office distributes city maps that are sufficient for most visitors. Otherwise, check with the tourist-oriented shops right around the Cathedral.

Police

For a police emergency, call ☎ **091** (national) or ☎ **092** (local). The municipal police station is at Avenida de las Delicias, 15 (☎ 95-461-54-50). The national police office is located at Plaza de la Concordia (☎ 95-422-88-49).

Safety

Locals aren't reticent about issuing safety warnings, which you need to take seriously. Seville has earned an unenviable reputation for having talented thieves, who can spot a rental car with helpless tourists at the wheel at more than 100 paces. If you must park your car anywhere other than a guarded hotel parking garage, don't leave anything of value in it — no cameras, no passports, nothing. Seville, still part of the poorest region in Spain, is also one of Spain's biggest tourist draws. Be vigilant in Seville, especially at night. Carry only the amount of money you expect to spend (or don't mind losing) that day, and keep it in your front pocket. Also be very careful around the Santa Cruz district late at night (despite the blistering sun, it's preferable to do your sightseeing there during the day).

Taxis

Radio Taxi (☎ 95-458-00-00), Radio Teléfono Giralda (☎ 95-496-00-00), or Tele-Taxi (☎ 95-462-22-22).

Córdoba: A Glorious Past

Home to the Mezquita, or Great Mosque, one of the greatest monuments in Spain, the Romans founded Córdoba and it became the largest city of their Iberian empire. But greater glories were in store. The Moors captured Córdoba in A.D. 711, and, while the rest of Europe foundered, the city thrived under the North African Muslims. Córdoba was not only the independent caliphate (the office of the caliph, who served as the spiritual head of Islam) of the Moors and the spiritual and intellectual center of Western Islam, but also a place where Muslims, Jews, and Christians lived side-by-side. By the tenth century, Córdoba was a city of nearly one

million and possessed Europe's greatest libraries (not surprising when you realize that only the Moors knew how to make paper), a superlative university excelling in mathematics and science, and the only paved and lighted streets on the peninsula. The one-time capital also boasted 600 Arab baths, 60,000 noble mansions, 50 hospitals, and 27 schools.

Although Córdoba was instrumental in pulling Europe out of the Dark Ages, the city's preeminence under the Moors didn't last long. The Christian Reconquest captured the city in 1236, and Córdoba never recovered its former glory.



The city's charms aren't limited to the Great Mosque, but unless you're here in May, when the city is especially alluring — it bubbles over with festivals, sweet-smelling flowers, and abundant *alegría* (joy) — you may find unpretentious Córdoba a little rough around the edges. Only during festival time will you need much more than a day or two to explore its major sights.

Arriving in Córdoba

You'll most likely roll into Córdoba by road or rail from another point in Andalusia or from Madrid. However, you won't fly to the city; Córdoba has an airport, but no commercial routes use it. You have to fly into Granada, Seville, or Málaga, all at least two hours away.

By car

If you go by car, you drive along undulating olive groves, and a car is virtually the only way to see some of the *Pueblos Blancos* (white towns) (see Chapter 16 for more about the white towns) efficiently. Driving to Córdoba from Madrid, take the N-IV (E-5), which veers right (west) at Bailén. The toll-free trip takes about three hours. (The same highway continues directly to Seville.)

The N-342 highway connects Córdoba with Granada, and the N-331 unites Córdoba with Málaga.

By train

The fastest and least complicated way to get to Córdoba from either Madrid or Seville is definitely the **AVE High-Speed Train**. Though the most expensive method of public transportation, I highly recommend it for its efficiency and incredibly smooth ride. From Madrid, the trip takes about 1 hour, 45 minutes; from Seville, just under 45 minutes. Fifteen trains travel daily to both destinations. The one-way fare from Madrid is 43€–48€ (\$52–\$58) (from Seville, 18€–20€/ \$18–\$24). If you can't catch the AVE, or want to save a few euros, hop on board a **Talgo 200** train (fast but not superfast like the AVE). It takes about two hours and costs 36€–40€ (\$43–\$48) from Madrid. Three Talgo trains per day travel between Madrid and Córdoba. Slower regional trains (which go by the names Intercity, Estrecho, García Lorca, and Andalucía Expres) are

Córdoba



cheap, but considerably less comfortable and wastes of valuable time for most travelers.

Córdoba's handsome new train/bus station is northwest of the old town at Plaza de las Tres Culturas off the Avenida de América (☎ 957-40-02-02). Bus No. 3 goes directly from outside the train station to the old quarter. The **RENFE advance ticket office** is located at Ronda de los Tejares, 10 (☎ 957-47-58-84). For **AVE** train schedules and information, call ☎ 902-24-02-02 or visit www.renfe.es.

By bus

Getting to Córdoba by bus is a simple enough proposition, until you factor in the confusion of local bus stations. Each line has a separate terminal scattered about the city. There are eight terminals in Córdoba; several of them service Madrid (trips take about five hours). The separate terminals can make your trip a bit confusing, especially when the train is so simple. I recommend taking the bus only if you're going to or coming from a small town in which train service isn't available.

Córdoba's busiest terminal is **Alsina Gräells**, Diego Serrano, 14 (☎ 957-23-64-74), on the outskirts of town near Paseo de la Victoria. It has buses to Cádiz, Granada, Seville, and Jaén. **Ureña**, Avenida de Cervantes, 22 (☎ 957-47-23-52) serves Seville three times a day; the terminal's located a few blocks south of Córdoba's main train station, which is at the corner of Avenida de America and Avenida de Cervantes. The terminals **Priego**, Paseo de la Victoria, 29 (☎ 957-29-01-58), and **López**, Paseo de la Victoria, 15 (☎ 957-47-75-51), also service Madrid. For bus information to Seville, Málaga, and Granada, call ☎ 957-23-64-74.

Orienting yourself in Córdoba

The provincial capital of Córdoba hugs the banks of the Guadalquivir River, which also flows through Seville, just 129km (80 miles) to the southeast. The Old City, where you find the great Mosque and old Jewish Quarter, is north of the river, across the Roman bridge. Parts of the medieval Arab ramparts still stand on the fringes of the old town. The modern commercial and residential neighborhoods (and the RENFE train station) are north of the Old City, as Córdoba trails off into the foothills of the Sierra Morena Mountains.

Introducing the neighborhoods

Virtually everything you want to see in Córdoba is in or near the *centro* (historic center), which is along the river and around the Mezquita (Great Mosque). Immediately northwest of the Mezquita is the **Barrio de la Judería**, the old Jewish Quarter, Córdoba's most enchanting neighborhood.

Finding information after you arrive

There's a tourist information kiosk on the main concourse of the AVE train station. The helpful **Andalusia Provincial Tourism Office** is located at Torrijos, 10 (☎ 957-47-12-35), right next to (or across from) the Mezquita. **Municipal tourism offices** are located at the Alcázar de los Reyes Cristianos, Campo Santo de los Mártires (☎ 957-29-95-35) and Plaza de las Tendillas, 5 (☎ 957-49-16-17), in the modern center of town. They're all open daily from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Getting around Córdoba

Córdoba's Old City is small and perfect for walking. In fact, many of the streets in this labyrinthine area around the Mezquita are pedestrian only. If you stay at one of the hotels a bit removed from the old center, you'll either need to cover substantial distances by foot or call upon the assistance of taxis and the occasional buses.

By taxi

You find taxi stops on Avenida del Gran Capitán, Calles Cañero, Ciudad Jardín, Arcos de la Frontera, Agustín Moreno, and the Plazas Colón and Tendillas. To order up a cab, call **Radio Taxi** (☎ 957-76-44-44). Taxis are

inexpensive; unless you take one out to the ruins of Medina Azahara, no trip should cost you more than 6€ (\$7.20).

By car

Wheels are the way to get the most out of your travels in Andalusia, especially if you plan on seeing more than just the three big cities of the south (Córdoba, Seville, and Granada). If you only go to these, and don't plan to do any exploring, I advise against a car, because driving around the cities is difficult and potentially dangerous, with streets originally designed for the horse and buggy.

If you want to rent a car to explore the countryside or the coast, the major agencies in Córdoba are **Avis**, Plaza de Colón, 32 (☎ 957-47-68-62); **Europcar**, Rep. Argentina, s/n, and Camino de los Sastres, local 1 (☎ 957-2-34-60); and **Hertz**, Avenida América, s/n, RENFE Railway station (☎ 957-40-20-60).

By bus

You probably won't have much need for buses, unless it's from your hotel or the train station to the Old Quarter. For **bus information**, call ☎ 957-25-57-00. Your hotel can also indicate a nearby bus to the major sights in the old town

Horse for hire?

If you want to clop-clop around the Old Quarter, hire a horse-drawn carriage. You find carriage stops at Campo Santo de los Mártires (next to the Alcázar) and Calle Torrijos (next to the Mezquita). The atmospheric Old Quarter of Córdoba certainly makes the notion appealing, but on my last visit most of the horses looked a little anemic. If you're going on to Seville, I think you're better off getting a horse carriage there (if you must choose). The cost in both cities is about 25€ (\$30) an hour, though some of the drivers in Córdoba may bargain with you out of high season.

Staying in Córdoba

Córdoba gets lots of daytrippers who file into the city to see the Mezquita (Great Mosque) and dash right out of town — which is probably why the hotel scene is somewhat limited. It's a great place for budget travelers, though, with a disproportionate number of good, simple, and inexpensive lodgings near the Mezquita and old Jewish Quarter. At the upper end, choices are considerably slimmer. Prices go up, but not ridiculously so, during high season — April through May across the board, and September through October at some hotels.



Make your reservations far in advance if you want to stay in Córdoba during the popular May festivals.

Fiesta! Celebrating in Córdoba

Semana Santa (Holy Week) is intense in Andalusia and is one of the greatest professions of faith in all Spain. Córdoba doesn't exactly take Easter lightly. And forget bunnies, chicks, and chocolate eggs; the worshippers crowding Córdoba's streets are waiting for the passing of 32 colorful ceremonial processions, including floats and penitents. Certain processions, such as *María Santísima de la Esperanza* (Holy Mary of Hope) and *La Virgen de los Dolores* (The Virgin of Sorrow) have enthusiastic, cult-like followings. Check with the Tourism Office for a schedule of processions and routes.

Córdoba is even more famous for its May festivals — if you can get a room (book at least a couple of months in advance), it's by far the best time for a visit to the city. **Las Cruces en Mayo** (May Crosses) marks the beginning of the month-long celebrations. Crosses are erected in patios and courtyards and decorated with potted plants, flowers, and even shawls. Neighborhood associations, or *peñas*, also set up flamenco stages and small bars nearby — free-flowing wine is about as abundant as flowers in May. *Barrios* (neighborhoods) that traditionally sprout May Crosses are **San Agustín**, **Alcázar Viejo**, **San Lorenzo**, and **Santa María**.

After the decorated crosses, Córdoba's May party moves to courtyards, when the **Festival de los Patios Cordobeses** — a contest for best patio in Córdoba — takes over about 50 of them across the city. Such exuberant vegetation — red and green pots of roses, carnations, geraniums, jasmine, honeysuckle, and ivy — against the backdrop of stark, whitewashed buildings is a photo op at every turn. Some patios entered in the competition are communal neighborhood efforts, and others belong to palaces or convents.

Finally, the celebrations reach a crescendo with the **Feria de Mayo** (Mayfair), also called the **Feria de Nuestra Señora de la Salud** (Festival of Our Lady of Health). It's the grand finale, beginning around May 25 and bringing the month's festivities to a rousing close. *Feria de Mayo* is a smorgasbord of bullfights, flamenco, theater, and *casetas* (stages) set up by neighborhood associations for skits and performances. On generous display is the traditional Córdoba costume, with the *sombrero Cordobés* (wide-brimmed hat), Andalusian horses, and, of course, lots of *fino* (fine) wines.

For more information on the best-decorated crosses, the most lavishly verdant patios, and other events, contact the main Tourism Office at ☎ 957-47-12-35 (see "Finding information after you arrive," earlier in this chapter).



Hostal Maestre \$ East of Centro

A ten-minute walk from the Mosque and Jewish Quarter, on two tiny, back-to-back streets overrun with *hostales* and *pensiones* (both informal types of guesthouses), this is the best of the lot. It's a three-in-one establishment — hotel, hostel, and apartments — that hasn't stopped expanding since the mid-1970s. The hotel's the newest of the bunch, dating to 1992. Its 26 rooms are sparse and a bit dull, but they've got the basics: television,

air conditioning, and small bathrooms. The lobby and interior courtyards, with Andalusian tiles and lots of greenery, are more comfortably outfitted than the rooms, so decide how much time you plan to spend in your room. If your answer's "not much," and that's about the amount you want to spend, you'll do fine here. If you've got a family in tow, check out the apartments, which feature one and two bedrooms, small kitchens, and eating areas.

See map page 414. Romero Barros 4–6. Small street off of San Fernando. ☎ 957-47-24-10. Fax: 957-47-53-95. www.hotelmaestre.com. Parking: 8€ (\$10). Rack rates: 36€–47€ (\$43–\$56). MC, V.



Hotel Albucasis

\$\$ Old Quarter

A quiet little hotel on an equally quiet little street in the Barrio de la Judería (the Jewish Quarter), the Albucasis does everything in its power to keep its cool in the Andalusian sun. The friendly, family-run hotel has a pretty, plant-filled courtyard, cool marble floors, and green-tiled bathrooms. The 15 air-conditioned rooms (only nine are doubles) are decently sized, with functional, sturdy furnishings. The common areas — a nice breakfast nook, a cozy sitting area, and the inviting patio — are excellent places to relax and share travel tales. Within echo range of the great Mosque's bells, the Albucasis is one of the city's best bargains.

See map page 414. Buen Pastor, 11. Three blocks from Mosque, just off Deanes. ☎/Fax: 957-47-86-25. Parking: 13€ (\$16). Rack rates: 55€–75€ (\$66–\$90). MC, V.



Hotel González

\$–\$\$ Old Quarter

A small hotel in a restored 16th-century palace, this charmer feels perfectly Andalusian. It's just minutes from the Mosque, in the heart of the old Jewish Quarter, which is packed with historic monuments and bustling tourist-oriented shops. Though rooms are simple, they're also delightful, with colorful floor-to-ceiling drapes, antique furnishings, and tile floors (and air conditioning — which is a blessing in steaming Córdoba). The 16 rooms either overlook a pretty square, Plaza Judá Leví, or the hotel's equally pretty interior patio. Original artwork lines the central hall and corridors. The González is easily one of the top bargain places to stay in Córdoba. If you can't get in here, try the owners' other hotel, Hotel Mezquita, with similar facilities and identical prices (see the listing later in this section).

See map page 414. Manríquez, 3. Off Herreros and Deanes, just west of the Mosque. ☎ 957-47-98-19. Fax: 957-48-61-87. Parking: 9€ (\$11). Rack rates: 48€–72€ (\$58–\$86). AE, DC, MC, V.

Hotel Maciá Alfaro

\$\$–\$\$\$ Centro

A large, four-star hotel opened in 1992, the Alfaro pretends to be grand, playing up its neo-Moorish design as its clear historical connection to old

Córdoba. The result, though, is mostly pretend-palace. The entrance — a garage on a narrow, busy downtown street 15 minutes north of the Mezquita — couldn't be less auspicious. The interior has the feel of an upscale tourist hotel in a modern Arab nation — Saudi Arabia, maybe. Alfaros has large and airy public spaces, with marble-and-stone floors, Moorish motifs, and a long, popular bar. The 131 rooms, although ample and comfortable, seem a bit of an afterthought. They're not constructed with the same quality materials and suffer from a lack of soundproofing. The hotel's finest feature is its courtyard pool; ask for a room facing it.

See map page 414. Alfaros, 18. Three blocks from Plaza Colón. ☎ 957-49-19-20. Fax: 957-49-22-10. www.maciahoteles.com. Parking: 18€ (\$22). Rack rates Jan to mid-Mar, July, Aug, Nov, Dec: 95€ (\$114); mid-Mar to June and Sept-Oct: 119€ (\$143). AE, DC, MC, V.

Hotel Maimónides \$\$-\$\$\$ Old Quarter

If what you care about is location, location, location, you can hardly do better than the Maimónides. Stumble out the front door and you run smack into the Mosque. And if it's the Mezquita you want to see, request a room with unequalled views of its rooftop (floodlit at night). That's probably enough to justify the price tag for some, but this once-grand hotel isn't up to the standards of the nearby NH Hotel Amistad (see review later in this section). Even though it was fully renovated in 2000, rooms are still unexceptional, and bathrooms aren't exactly spacious. But the unpretentious Maimónides is a comfortable place to stay, and ideally positioned for short walks not only to the Mosque, but also to the flamenco show down the street, and some of Córdoba's best restaurants in the Jewish Quarter.

See map page 414. Torrijos, 4. Across from west side of Mosque. ☎ 957-47-15-00. Fax: 957-48-38-03. www.hotelmaimonides.com. Parking: 12€ (\$14). Rack rates: 53€-128€ (\$64-154). AE, DC, MC, V.



Hotel Mezquita \$-\$\$ Old Quarter

You can't get closer to the Mosque unless you sneak in and sleep inside (not something I recommend). This hotel faces the main entrance of the great Mezquita-Catedral — hard to believe at these bargain prices. Its 21 immaculate rooms, all with individual air-conditioning units and satellite TV, are well-appointed; the antique furnishings, Moorish arches, and bold drapes and bedspreads give the hotel a funky charm. Some rooms have coveted views of the Mosque, although others overlook a cool, boldly colored central patio — a good place to hide from the heat of midday (unless you bolt straight for the air-conditioning). Like the Hotel González, which is owned by the same folks, this place has real Andalusian character at bargain prices.

See map page 414. Plaza Santa Catalina, 1. Off M.G. Francés; on east side of the Mosque. ☎ 957-47-55-85. Fax: 957-47-62-19. Nearby parking: 12€ (\$14). Rack rates: 45€-70€ (\$54-\$84). AE, DC, MC, V.



Eating and drinking like a Cordobés

The local cuisine, heavy on garlic and the olive oil in which Andalusia practically swims, concentrates on fried fish and stout meat dishes such as oxtail stew. Don't leave Córdoba without trying *salmorejo* (sahl-moe-ray-ho), a thick, tomato-based soup served cold. It's similar to gazpacho, but more like a puree and more substantial. On a hot day, it can feed you for lunch all by itself. You also find white gazpacho, or *ajoblanco* (ah-hoe-blahn-koe), made with olive oil, garlic, and almonds, topped off with grapes. *Rabo de toro* (rah-bow day toe-roe, oxtail stew) is a staple in the Córdoba diet, as are *caldereta de cordero* (kahl-day-ray-tah day core-day-roe; lamb) and *cochifrito de la sierra* (koh-chee-free-toh day lah see-ay-rah; goat or mutton stew). Desserts show ancient Jewish and Moorish influences; try such pastries as *pastel judío* (pahs-tell-hoo-dee-oh, a pastry made with citron preserves), *pestiños* (pess-teen-yos, honey pancakes), and *buñuelos* (boon-you-ay-los, fritters). Although Andalusia's the place for *jerez* (hair-eth, sherry), try the local variety, *montilla*, an excellent dry and fragrant wine from the wine-producing region Montilla–Moriles. Perfect for tapas, *montilla* comes, like sherry, in several varieties: *finos* (fine and dry); *finos viejos*, also called *amontillados* (aged, fine wines); *olorosos* (aromatic wines); and *olorosos viejos* (aged aromatic wines).

NH Hotel Amistad Córdoba **\$\$\$ Old Quarter**

Occupying two former 18th-century mansions that face each other across a quiet plaza in the heart of the Jewish Quarter, this five-year-old hotel quickly leapt to the top of the heap, leaving old war horses Meliá Córdoba and Gran Capitán to the package tours. It's easily the choicest place to stay in Córdoba, and pretty fairly priced for the level of comfort it offers. The neo-classical facades give way to a gorgeous central patio with Moorish arches and columns. Furnishings are cleanly modern, focusing on light woods, soft earthy tones, and occasional bright contemporary touches, like the royal purple chairs in the bar area. An upscale member of the Spanish NH hotel chain, it's next to the bullfighting museum and just a short shuffle from the old synagogue. The entrance, cut right into the old Arab wall, is a nice touch.

See map page 414. Plaza de Maimónides, 3. Off Judíos in Jewish Quarter. ☎ 957-42-03-35. Fax: 957-42-03-65. www.nh-hotels.es. Nearby parking: 12€ (\$14). Rack rates: 140€–153€ (\$168–\$184). Occasional weekend promotions: 97€ (\$116). AE, DC, MC, V.

Parador de Córdoba (la Arruzaña) **\$\$\$ Outskirts of Córdoba**

Córdoba's large and thoroughly modern *parador* (a historic government-run inn) is inconveniently located about 3 miles north of the historic quarter. It's not one of the *parador* system's best efforts — the NH Amistad in

the Jewish Quarter (see the preceding review) beats it by a mile. You're best off staying here if Córdoba's heat and tourist hordes get to you; you can get away from it all with a dip in the refreshing pool or a volley on the tennis courts. The gardens are attractive and the panoramic vistas of the city are quite nice. The rooms aren't bad, though they don't rise much above the conventional. Try to get one with a balcony.

See map page 414. *Avenida de la Arruzafa, 33. Three miles north of city limits, in El Brillante neighborhood.* ☎ 957-27-59-00. Fax: 957-29-04-09. www.parador.es. Free parking. Rack rates: 113€ (\$136). AE, DC, MC, V.

Dining in Córdoba

Córdoba has a small stable of good Andalusian restaurants, most of them clustered in and around the old Jewish Quarter. However, in contrast to the hotel scene, the city doesn't have too many dependable places for a good, cheap meal. Your best bet is to assemble something informal by tapas grazing; see the section "Setting out on a tapas and tavern crawl," later in this chapter. Casa El Pisto and Taberna Salinas are both perfect for tapas sampling, as are the bars at several of the restaurants listed below.



Almudaina

\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$ Old Quarter SPANISH/CONTINENTAL

The top-rated restaurant in Córdoba is also one of its most attractive. Almudaina is in a handsomely restored 16th-century mansion on a pleasing plaza, close to the Mezquita and Alcázar. You can choose from six dining rooms — including a brick-walled and vine-covered central patio — and elegant side rooms with lush drapes and chandeliers. Edelmiro Jiménez's market-based menu is continually changing, ranging from regional *Cordobés* dishes to French-inspired entrees. It's really hard to go wrong here; you may start with the excellent eggplant and *champiñones* (mushrooms), or the house foie gras, followed by *lubina* (sea bass) with shrimp and mushrooms. For dessert, the pear and nut mousse sounded great, but I was too stuffed to try it.

See map page 414. *Jardín de los Santos Mártires, 1. Across Plaza Campo Santo de los Santos Mártires from the Alcázar.* ☎ 957-47-43-42. Reservations recommended. Main courses: 10€–24€ (\$12–\$29). Menú del día: 18€ (\$22). Tasting menu: 33€ (\$40). AE, DC, MC, V. Open: Mon–Sat lunch and dinner, Sun lunch only. Closed: Sun June–Aug.

Bodegas Campo

\$\$\$ Centro SPANISH/CONTINENTAL

A tavern and *bodega* (wine cellar) since 1908, this restaurant is one of the most inviting in Córdoba. The handsome, warmly rustic environment, decorated with vintage posters of the Córdoba May Festival, is filled with locals day and night. If you arrive early enough, have a drink in the *Sacristy*, a small atmospheric temple in back, past the wall lined by wooden wine vats signed

by famous guests. Although wine is clearly an essential, the food is far from an afterthought. The kitchen of Javier Campos concentrates on local and regional dishes; for an appetizer, try the overflowing plate of *pescaditos fritos* (tiny fried fish, eaten whole), or the scrumptious *salmorejo* (a *Cordobés* version of gazpacho). *Solomillo ibérico* (sirloin steak) is a good choice for the main course, if you've got a big appetite. Oh, and the cellar: It has a fine list of Spanish wine. Some are rather pricy, but the house red is excellent and a bargain.

See map page 414. *Lineros, 32. One block in from Paseo de la Ribera along river; two blocks east of Plaza del Potro. ☎ 957-49-75-00. Reservations recommended. Main courses: 9€–18€ (\$11–\$22). AE, DC, MC, V. Open: Mon–Sat lunch and dinner, Sun lunch only. Closed: Sun June–Aug.*

El Caballo Rojo

\$\$\$ Old Quarter ANDALUSIAN/SPANISH

Córdoba's most famous and popular restaurant, *El Caballo Rojo* (The Red Horse) was a pioneer of *Cordobés* cooking, reviving ancient Moorish influences. Just yards from the Mezquita, this lively restaurant is one of the top spots to sample some classic Andalusian dishes, like *salmorejo* (cold, thick *Cordobés* gazpacho) and *rabo de toro* (oxtail stew), as well as inventive dishes, such as almond-and-apple white gazpacho and *rape mudéjar* (monkfish with raisins and pine nuts). The wine cellar is one of the most extensive in the city. The bar downstairs is always noisy with long-time regulars and tourists who've just stumbled in from the Mosque. Though that may make you fear for the worst, if you can handle the racket, you'll probably have a fun and even memorable meal here.

See map page 414. *Cardinal Herrero, 28. Off Plaza de la Hoguera across from the Mosque. ☎ 957-47-53-75. Reservations recommended. Main courses: 11€–23€ (\$13–\$28). Menú del día: 18€ (\$22). AE, DC, MC, V. Open: Daily lunch and dinner.*

El Churrasco

\$\$\$ Old Quarter SPANISH

Right in the heart of the historic Judería, this is the place to come — as the name reminds you — for *churrasco*, or juicy grilled meats. If the *Cordobés* sun has been beating on your head all day and meat sounds like a daunting proposition, start off with *ajoblanco* (white gazpacho) or artichokes in virgin olive oil, and see how your tastebuds warm to the idea. If you're not up to charcoal-grilled beef or pork loin, sample any of the tasty fish items, such as *rape a la oliva negra* (monkfish with black olives). The downstairs dining room, with the look of a Moorish courtyard, is more informal than the upstairs rooms. The bar at the entrance is a great place for a sherry or cold beer and tapas, either before or instead of a meal.

See map page 414. *Romero, 16. Two blocks west of the Mosque. ☎ 957-29-08-19. Reservations recommended. Main courses: 11€–22€ (\$13–\$26). Menú del día: 21€ (\$25). AE, DC, MC, V. Open: Daily lunch and dinner. Closed: Aug.*



Restaurante Pizzería Da Vinci

\$\$ Centro ITALIAN/INTERNATIONAL

Tucked away in a *barrio* north of the historic Jewish Quarter, this isn't the straightforward pizza joint you'd expect from the name. Antonio Romero's restaurant does have an fragrant wood oven, and it does serve some excellent pastas, but he is equally focused on tempting roast meats, grilled and marinated fish, and nicely prepared salads. Da Vinci is the kind of good-value, neighborhood restaurant that's ideal for families — it has something for just about everybody, even grandma (if your grandma was like mine, stubbornly ordering spaghetti at seafood restaurants, and vice-versa).

See map page 414. Plaza de Los Chirinos, 6. One block from José Cruz Conde. ☎ 957-47-75-17. Reservations recommended. Main courses: 7€–13€ (\$8–\$16). V. Open: Daily lunch and dinner.

Exploring Córdoba

Córdoba can't compare with Seville or Granada: though its history matches or surpasses the history of the other cities, it has fewer modern-day attractions. Though the Mezquita is one of the definitive highlights of Spain, a day or day and a half is really all you need to explore the city's major sights. On the other hand, during festival time, you may never want to leave.



Córdoba's municipal museums, including the **Alcázar de los Reyes Cristianos** (Royal Fortress and Gardens), **Museo Taurino** (Bullfighting Museum), and **Julio Romero de Torres Museum** (a collection of the *Cordobés* painter, on Plaza del Potro), are all free on Fridays.

The top attractions



Mezquita (Great Mosque)

Old Quarter

Córdoba's astonishing Mosque is one of Moorish Spain's greatest achievements, one of Spain's most enduring and treasured monuments, and one of the world's most remarkable mosques. It's brilliant, surprising, and it packs a historical wallop. You'd hardly guess its glory from the mostly plain exterior, though. The Moorish Emir Ab-ar Rahman I ordered it built in A.D. 786 at the height of power of al-Andalus — Muslim Spain (the Moors controlled all but a small sliver of northern Spain, in the present-day Basque Country). The Mosque was significantly enlarged over the next two centuries (the original mosque makes up only about one-fifth of the present structure), but in the 16th century, part of it was destroyed. In an act of either *hubris* or revenge, Christians constructed a cathedral smack in the middle of the mosque. This juxtaposition may strike you as an abomination; at the very least, it stands as a fascinating document of Spanish religious and political history.

Two for the price of one

You can draw your own conclusions about whether or not it was a heinous crime to insert a cathedral into the middle of the Great Mosque, thereby destroying the Mosque's perfect symmetry (and about a quarter of its pillars). Before the building of the Cathedral, one could see across the forest of pillars, surely a mind-bending optical effect. The Cathedral also destroyed the Mosque's perfect acoustics. (Even King Carlos V, who gave the okay to build the Cathedral, was dismayed upon seeing it. He reportedly exclaimed, "You have destroyed something unique to build something commonplace.")

Ironically, the building of the Cathedral may have saved the Mezquita. Of 300 mosques that once existed in Córdoba, the Great Mosque is the only one that remains, no doubt in tribute to its Christian church and treasures within, which prevented it from being sacked along with other remnants of Muslim Spain.

Enter through the **Patio de los Naranjos** (a large patio of orange trees, where the faithful prayed and cleansed themselves before entering the mosque). Even if you've seen pictures of the interior, the magical forest of candycane striped arches — a seemingly limitless horizon of dazzling harmony — will astound you. More than 850 columns and purely decorative arches of granite, jasper, and marble fill 19 aisles. Notice the capitals, which were rescued in large part from ancient (that is to say, *more* ancient) structures in Córdoba (the Mosque was built on the site of a Visigothic basilica). The mosaic tiles and marble that once covered the floors are now sadly gone, as are most of the polychrome ceilings, but the Mosque's grandeur resonates throughout. Wander in a delirious daze, but don't miss the **mihrab**, the wonderfully ornate prayer niche in the southeast corner of the mosque. A feast of carved marble, stucco, alabaster, and mosaics, it pointed to Mecca and was the most sacred part of the Mosque. Look up at its magnificent cupola.

The **Capilla Real** (Royal Chapel) and **Capilla Villaviciosa** (Villaviciosa Chapel), the first Christian components of the complex, are mudéjar (a hybrid of Moorish and Christian architecture) in style and were ordered by Ferdinand III in 1236, as part of the Reconquest. The ostentatious Italianate dome of the **Catedral** (Cathedral), begun in 1253, is a startling contrast to the mesmerizing quiet beauty of the Mosque. The Cathedral's saving graces are its magnificently carved mahogany choir stalls, which date to 1758 and depict the Old and New Testaments, and its pulpits, also beautiful works of carving.

Unfortunately, you won't get to enjoy the spectacular views of Córdoba and the Sierra from the top of the belfry; it remains closed for restoration, as it has been for years.



In summer, the Mosque's interior is heaven on earth, a blessed retreat from the sun (something the Moors surely considered when they designed it in Córdoba). But if you visit Córdoba in winter, even though the sun may shine brilliantly outside and you're decked out comfortably in shorts and

sandals, it can get very chilly inside the Mosque. As when you go to the movie theater on a blistering day, you're wise to bring a sweater.

See map page 414. *Torrijos, 10. One block north of river.* ☎ **957-47-05-12**. Admission: 6.50€ (\$8), 3.25€ (\$4) ages 10–14, under 10 free. Open: Winter Mon–Sat 10 a.m.–6:30 p.m., Sun, 2–6 p.m.; summer Mon–Sat 10 a.m.–7:30 p.m., Sun, 2–7 p.m.



Alcázar de los Reyes Cristianos

Constructed on top of an old Moorish palace, the 14th-century Fortress of the Christian Monarchs, strategically located along the Guadalquivir River, served military and mercantilist purposes. For about eight years during the Reconquest, the Christian monarchs made the Gothic Alcázar their palace, and Christopher Columbus came here to schmooze and lobby the kings for funds to make his maiden voyage to the New World. The extensive gardens, perfect for kids who need to stretch out a bit, are truly regal, with a series of pools, water terraces, fountains, and palm and orange trees that reflect Córdoba's Moorish roots. Within the spare palace quarters (which once served as Inquisition headquarters) are archaeological finds from the area, including Roman mosaics and a sarcophagus from the third century. Below the Mosaics Room are steam baths that date to the time of the Moorish caliphate.

The fortress's imposing towers, the **Torre de los Leones** (Tower of the Lions) and **Torre de Homenaje** (Homage Tower), have reopened after restoration. Climb to the top for excellent panoramic views of the Old Quarter of Córdoba.

See map page 414. *Caballerizas Reales, s/n. Between Guadalquivir River and Campo Santo de los Mártires.* ☎ **957-42-01-51**. Admission: 3€ (\$3.60). Open: Tues–Sat 10 a.m.–2 p.m. and 5:30–7:30 p.m., Sun and holidays 9:30 a.m.–2:30 p.m.

Barrio de La Judería

Córdoba's Jewish Quarter is a fascinating and wonderfully alive area of impossibly narrow and crooked streets, ancient whitewashed houses with cool, colorful interior patios, and historic religious monuments. A stroll through the area is like a history lesson on Moorish Spain. When Córdoba was the largest and most advanced city in Europe in the tenth century,

Flower power: Calleja de las Flores

Córdoba's Calleja de las Flores (little street of flowers) isn't much more than an alleyway just west of the Mosque (off Calles Blanco Belmonte and Víctor Bosco), but it's a charming spot: a picture-perfect montage of wrought-iron grilles, potted flowers, and window boxes filled with colorful geraniums. Domestic courtyards, often shared and gardened communal-style by a number of families, also come alive in spring; annual contests crown the best patios in Córdoba. The Tourism Office organizes springtime visits to a number of them; call ☎ **957-49-16-77** for additional information and tour times.

the cobbled streets teemed with silversmiths and craftsmen, and the residents — Jews, Christians, and Moors — all lived as they did in Toledo, in peace. Visit the **Sinagoga (Synagogue)**, built in 1315 and the only Jewish temple in Andalusia that survived the tumult of the Inquisition and expulsion of Jews and Moors. If you're expecting cathedral-like grandeur, its utter simplicity will shock you: except for the stucco decorations, it's just a tiny, plain box. An important Jewish community once thrived in Spain and built hundreds of synagogues, but the religious fervor of the Inquisition and Expulsion led to most Jews publicly renouncing their faith or, more commonly, fleeing Spain. Only three synagogues remain in Spain: two in Toledo and the modest one in Córdoba.

Across the street from the synagogue, but a world away, is the **Museo Taurino** — the Bullfighting Museum. Housed in a noble 16th-century house, Casa de las Bulas, it displays a replica of the famous bullfighter Manolete's tomb and other *toro* (bull) relics and memorabilia, including bulls' heads and the hide of the bull that gored Manolete to death. Four of Spain's greatest bullfighters, revered throughout the country, came from Córdoba and were known as the "four Caliphs of Córdoba."

Next to the museum is the **Zoco**, the old *souk*, or market area. Today it's again a market vying for your tourist dollars with small shops dealing Córdoba crafts and jewelry. Just up the street from the synagogue is the **Puerta del Almodóvar** — Almodóvar's Gate. Nothing to do with Spain's hippest filmmaker, it's part of the original medieval entrance to the old Jewish Quarter. On the west side of the Judería are the remains of the old Arab city walls.

See map page 414. *La Sinagoga: Calle Judíos. ☎ 957-20-29-28. Admission: .30€ (\$35), free to EU members. Open: Tues–Sat 10 a.m.–2 p.m. and 3:30–5:30 p.m., Sun 10 a.m.–1:30 p.m.*

Museo Taurino: Plaza de Maimónides. ☎ 957-20-10-56. Admission: 3€ (\$3.60), children under 18 free, Fri free. Open: Tues–Sat 10 a.m.–2 p.m. and 5:30–7:30 p.m., Sun 9:30 a.m.–2:30 p.m.

Pretty on the inside

Andalusian patios serve a very practical purpose — their construction at the center of the house, with cooling ceramic tiles and potted plants and vines, is essential for keeping the house cool. (The labyrinthine design of the Old Quarter, a Moorish innovation featuring houses close together on narrow streets, achieves the same cooling purpose.) But the patios' aesthetic flourishes also reflect a less pragmatic concern. At the heart of the Muslim religion is the notion that beauty is fundamentally internal and should be kept private. Thus, most old Andalusian houses are simple on the outside; decoration is limited to the interior. The same concepts are apparent even in the Moors' greatest monuments; in Córdoba's Great Mosque, notice how severe and unadorned its exterior is, compared to the unrestrained visual beauty concealed inside.

More cool things to see and do

Do you still have a few extra hours or days in town? If so, check out these other fun activities to do in Córdoba.

- ✔ **Peeking in on patios.** Córdoba is known for its splendid patios, but outside of the May patio festival, finding and getting in to see the best ones is sometimes hard. For the best glimpse of aristocratic Córdoba, you have to venture a bit north of the Old Quarter. Tucked away in a busy commercial district, **Palacio de Viana**, Plaza de Don Gome, 2 (5 blocks west of Calle Alfaro, southwest of Plaza de Colón — take bus to Plaza Colón; ☎ 957-49-67-41), is a sumptuous 16th-century palace, which locals call El Museo de los Patios — The Patio Museum. The mansion has 14 elegant interior patios, as well as halls decorated with rich furnishings, Goya tapestries, carved cedar ceilings, and rare tiles. Admission is 6€ (\$7.20) (if visiting only the patios, 3€/\$3.60). It's open daily from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. and closed the first two weeks of June (but you can still visit the patios).
- ✔ **Taking a magical history tour.** South of the Mosque, at the bend in the Guadalquivir River, are two important works of architecture dating to Córdoba's Roman and Moorish eras, Calahorra Tower and the Roman Bridge. The bridge isn't a quaint Roman artifact, but a heavily trafficked thoroughfare with 16 arches. The sad river, all but washed up now, mirrors the city's decline. The Romans used the river as a commercial waterway, and the Moors tapped into its power with waterwheels and mills (still visible from the bridge today). Cross the bridge (notice the shrine to St. Raphael, the archangel of Córdoba, about mid-way, which is usually decorated with flowers and lit candles) to approach the **Torre de la Calahorra**, an imposing tower built in the mid-14th century to guard the entrance to the city. Today it houses an audiovisual museum, **Museo Vivo de Al-Andalus**, Puente Romano, s/n (☎ 957-29-39-29), with exhibits and a multimedia presentation on the three distinct religions and cultures upon which Córdoba is founded. Although a good opportunity to find out more about Moorish Spain, the museum is probably best if you approach it like an escapist action flick on a hot summer day — a place of refuge. To get there, cross the Roman bridge just south of the Mosque. Admission is 4€ (\$4.80); the multimedia presentation is an additional 1.20€ (\$1.45). The museum is open daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. (Multivisión projection at 11 a.m., and 12, 1, 3, and 4 p.m.)
- ✔ **Hanging out in a plaza.** The attractively weathered square **Plaza del Potro** is best known for its historic inn, La Posada del Potro (Inn of the Colt), where Miguel de Cervantes, the author of *Don Quixote*, once stayed (the plaza figures into his epic novel). Across the plaza, the **Museo de Bellas Artes de Córdoba** (Fine Arts Museum), Plaza del Potro, 1 (1 block west of Calle San Fernando; a 10-minute-walk from the Mosque; ☎ 957-47-13-14), occupies a 15th-century charity hospital and has a small collection of Seville

school painters and *Cordobés* artists. Admission is 1.50€ (\$1.80); free for members of the EU (European Union). The museum is open Wednesday to Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 8:30 p.m., Sunday and holidays from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., and Tuesday from 2:30 to 8:30 p.m. A number of outdoor cafes occupy the pedestrian street opposite the plaza and are good places to rest your legs and slurp an icy lemonade.

- ✓ **Digging up the past.** Most everything of interest in Córdoba relates to the city's multilayered past, so a good way to explore those layers is to see what's been unearthed at Córdoba's **Museo Arqueológico** (Archaeology Museum), Plaza de Jerónimo Páez, 7 (between the Mosque and Plaza del Potro; ☎ 957-47-40-11). It occupies a handsome Renaissance palace and is a survey of the city's (which is to say, Spain's) history, with Roman, Visigothic, Muslim, Mudéjar, and Renaissance pieces. The diverse collection includes fantastic ceramics, mosaics, sarcophagi, and a terrific bronze stag that came from a fountain at the Medina Azahara palace (see "Side trips from Córdoba: A visit to the ruins of Medina Azahara," later in this chapter). The Moorish decorative arts are particularly well represented. Admission is 1.50€ (\$1.80), free for members of the EU. The museum is open Wednesday to Saturday from 9 a.m. to 8:30 p.m., Sunday and holidays from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., and Tuesday from 2:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Shopping for Córdoba crafts

The Reconquest was long ago, but Córdoba is still known for traditional Moorish crafts, such as handmade gold and silver filigree and embossed leather goods, known worldwide as Cordovan leather. Shops featuring these traditional *Cordobés* goods, and many more, line the Judería — a bit too thickly for some tastes. A mark — a crowned lion and the name of the city — distinguishes the embossed Cordovan leathers.

Bulls and horses

Toro, Toro, Toro: Córdoba's new Plaza de Toros (bullfighting ring), **Coso de los Califas**, is on the outskirts of town, on Avenida Gran Vía. Most big bullfighting events are in May (usually the last week), to coincide with the city festivals, but look for other scheduled bullfights in this *toros*-crazy town. Call ☎ 957-23-25-07 for information and tickets. Prices range from 5€ (\$6) to about 75€ (\$90).

Horsing around: Andalusia is famous for its gorgeous, regal purebred horses, and you see them dolled up and on parade during the city's famous May Festivals. The **Club Hípico de Córdoba** hosts jumping tournaments, and horse-taming exhibitions take place at Caballerizas Reales, next to the Alcázar. If you want to hop up in the saddle yourself, visit the Club Hípico de Córdoba, Carretera de Trassiera, km 9 (☎ 957-35-02-08).



If you're in the market for traditional leather goods from Córdoba, be careful of items advertised as embossed or handtooled Cordovan leather. Some of the sneakier shops may try to pass off inferior stamped leather from Morocco as the real thing. Unfortunately, the work is generally of lesser quality. Touch and inspect the product, and look for the lion symbol (though that too may be an imposter). After you've seen the real stuff, distinguishing between it and the inferior imposters shouldn't be too hard.

For authentic leather goods, drop by the shop of talented artisan **Carlos López-Obrero**. His shop, specializing in hand-tooled leather and embossed leather products, is on Calleja de las Flores, 2 (no phone). **Taller Meryan**, at the same address (☎ 957-47-59-02), is one of Córdoba's best shops and factories for quality embossed leather products.

Good souvenirs include *sevillana* dresses (the ruffly and frequently polka-dotted dresses worn by flamenco dancers and Andalusian women and girls during spring festivals) and *sombreros Cordobeses* (flat, wide-brimmed, black hats).

For handcrafts of all sorts, particularly jewelry, check out the **Zoco Municipal de Artesanía**, the old *medina* (Middle Eastern market) on Calle Judíos, just behind the bullfighting museum. It's open daily from 10 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. So many shops line the streets Deanes, Romero, and the Plaza Leví that picking out just a couple is impossible. Browse the streets near the Mezquita.

If you want to pick up some local montilla (dry sherry), other wines, or Andalusian olive oil, check out the well-stocked **Bodegas Mezquita**, on Corregidor Luis de la Cerda, 73 (☎ 957-49-81-17), just behind the Great Mosque. They let you taste wines and, sometimes, oils and cheese.

Discovering Córdoba's nightlife

You're in one of the legendary cities of Andalusia, the old Moorish kingdom. So what to do at night? Simple. Join the waves of *Cordobeses* at taverns for tapas and local spirits, and after that, be a tourist: Catch an animated flamenco show. If you're in Córdoba during the annual Guitar Festival (July), you won't want to miss seeing some great picking on the Spanish guitar.

Setting out on a tapas and tavern crawl

A tapas and tavern crawl in Córdoba is virtually irresistible. Here are a few local faves, great places to duck in out of the heat, have a *montilla* (local version of a dry sherry, similar to *manzanilla*), and order a small portion of Serrano ham, chorizo, *aceitunas* (green olives), or *queso* (cheese). These places are very casual and not the type where you need reservations — plus, virtually no one speaks English here. You don't need to call ahead, so I don't list phone numbers here.

Arab baths and teahouses

To relive the elegance and sophistication of Al-Andalus, the Moors' dynasty in southern Spain, pop into a *tetería* (teahouse) or the new *baños Árabes*, or Turkish-style bathhouse. Though Granada has probably done a better job connecting its Moorish past to the present, Córdoba now has a couple of establishments directed at both locals and visitors that give a taste of Arab traditions. For a phenomenally relaxing couple of hours, don't miss the new **Hamman Arabic Baths** on Corregidor Luis de la Cerda, 51 (☎ 957-48-47-46), which summons a bit of the flavor found at the Mezquita and Alhambra (the latter, in Granada). A series of hot and cold steam pools have been installed under brick arches and tiled walls. The freezing cold pool, in the first room, is only for the hearty. The baths (with or without massage) are every couple of hours, from 10 a.m. to midnight (lasting 90 minutes). Prices for one session range from 12€ to 18€ (\$14–\$22). Hamman has a teahouse upstairs and occasional belly dance performances, every day in summer beginning at 9 p.m. Reservations are essential. Another teahouse worth stopping into for a hot or cold mint tea or thick shake (*batido*) is **Salon de Té**, Buen Pastor, 13 (☎ 957-48-79-84), a lounge-like spot in the heart of the old Jewish quarter.

Casa El Pisto, or Taberna de San Miguel, Plaza de San Miguel, 1, is a charming old tavern, not far from Seville's Roman temple, that has mudéjar-style tiles, wood beams, and hanging hams and peppers along with hundreds of small framed photos of old bullfighters. If you hit only one bar in town, make it this one. The front bar is always crowded with people knocking back tapas and small glasses of wine or beer; you can continue to stand or wait for a table in the restaurant in back. Near the restored Plaza de la Corredera, **Taberna Salinas**, Tunidores, 3, at Espartería is an appealing spot, dating from 1879, for a few tapas and a *montilla*. Choose from the tiny bar at the front or a traditional courtyard sitting area with tables out back. A good option here is the classic Córdoba dish *naranjas 'picas' con aceite y bacalao* (strips of cod served with wedges of sweet Andalusian oranges and slices of onion, bathed in virgin olive oil) — as weird as it is wonderful.

Bodega Zoco, Judíos, s/n, is a fantastic underground stone catacomb of a place in the old *medina*. Go down the stairs at the back of the market into the relief of natural refrigeration. The *chorizo al vino* (sausage soaked in *montilla* wine) is a house specialty. Just up the street is **Bodegas Guzman**, Judíos, s/n, an atmospheric spot with wonderful 1920s and '30s posters from the May Festivals at the entrance and a crowd of regulars at the bar. **Bodegas Campo**, Calle de los Lineros, 32, is an excellent restaurant (see the listing in the restaurant section of this chapter) with a tiny bar at the entrance, but the real star is the sexy *Sacristía* (a tapas temple) at back, past the wine vats. **Mesón Juan Peña**, Dr. Fleming, 1, has a terrific wine cellar. The cinematic bar **Pepe el de la Judería** (Pepe of the Jewish Quarter) Romero, 1, is a revered institution

that has served drinks to generations of *Cordobeses*, and looks the part. Pick up a copy of the owner's book, *Cordobeses Ilustres* (Illustrious Cordovans). But the oldest-tavern-in-Córdoba award goes to **Casa Miguel**, Plaza Cirino, 7, serving great tapas since the early 1800s.

Performing arts: Flamenco and more



You're in the heart of Andalusia, and though the local flamenco scene is small, it's still one of the most traditional places in Spain to see flamenco dancing and emotional *cante hondo* (deep song). The place to be is **Tablao Cardenal**, Torrijos, 10 (☎ 957-48-33-20), just across from the Mezquita. In a pretty open-air square, the group puts on a very respectable flamenco show that doesn't pander to tourists or try to wow them with cheap pyrotechnics. The sparks here are real. There are shows Tuesday through Saturday at 10:30 p.m. The price is 18€ (\$22), which includes your first drink. Reserving a spot in advance is wise, because it's popular, and as soon as a large group shows up, you may be out of luck. Try to score a seat as close to the stage as possible. The other locale in town for flamenco music and dance is **Mesón Flamenco La Bulería**, on Pedro López, 3 (☎ 957-48-38-39), near the Plaza de la Corredera. Shows every night at 10:30. Cost is 12€ (\$14), including one drink.

On occasion, you can catch flamenco at the **Gran Teatro de Córdoba**, but more often you find opera, classical music, and ballet. It's on Avenida del Gran Capitán (☎ 957-48-02-37).

Guitarra flamenca: The art of flamenco guitar

Most Spanish guitar greats — such as Paco de Lucía and Tomatito — hail from Andalusia. Spanish classical and flamenco guitar derives — like most everything in southern Spain — from the region's indelible Moorish past. The playing evolved from the sounds of the classical Arab lute. Every July, Córdoba hosts the **Festival Internacional de la Guitarra** (International Guitar Festival), one of its most popular events. If you're here then, it's a great opportunity to see Spanish guitar maestros work their magic on the strings. From classical Spanish guitar to flamenco, you can see some of the fastest hands in the west, performing in great spots in the Old City — the gardens of the Alcázar, the Botanical Gardens, and the Gran Teatro (Grand Theater of Córdoba). The Spanish Tourism Offices abroad (see the Appendix) usually have their hands on a schedule several weeks in advance, or, as soon as you're in Córdoba, ask for a schedule of performances at the Tourism Office.

Side trips from Córdoba: A visit to the ruins of Medina Azahara

If Córdoba's Great Mosque has whetted your appetite for more remnants of the glorious Moorish domination of Spain, consider a short side trip to the ruins of **Medina Azahara**, or Medinat al-Zahara (☎ 957-32-91-30). Built in the foothills of the Sierra Morena in 961 A.D. by the Caliph Adb ar Rahman III as a gift to one of his wives (judging by the opulence, she was

a favorite), the palace was once a small, stunning city with 400 houses, 300 baths, a mosque, fortress, zoo, and luxurious gardens. Archaeologists believe that the palace was perhaps unrivaled in its opulence with jewel-encrusted pillars, gold fountains, and quicksilver pools. The caliph supposedly had almond trees planted all the way to Córdoba — he liked the visual effect of the trees in bloom, which rolled out a snowy white carpet up to his dream palace. Just seven decades after its laborious construction (which required 10,000 men), the 300-acre compound was sacked and destroyed by the Almoravids, a group of Berbers with a political beef against the Al Mansur dynasty. The ruins of the grand hall, terraces, and living quarters, unearthed this century, merely suggest the grandeur of the palace-city on the outskirts of Córdoba, but they're worth a visit, even though they're surely not the posthumous record of his rule that ar-Rahman meant to leave. Sections are being painstakingly reconstructed, though, and the Royal Palace doesn't require much imagination.

Medina Azahara is 8km (5 miles) west of Córdoba at km 5.5. A car or taxi is pretty much essential (the bus leaves you about 3km/2 miles from the palace). Take Avenida de Medina Azahara and C-431 west from Córdoba to Palma del Río. Admission is 1.50€ (\$1.80); free for EU citizens. Hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Fast Facts: Córdoba

Area Code

Córdoba's area code is **957**, which you must dial before every number.

Currency Exchange

You can find banks and ATMs in the main shopping district in the Old Quarter near the Mezquita and along Avenida Gran Capitán in the modern business section of town (Banco de España, Banco Bilbao Vizcaya, and Banco BNP España are all located almost on top of each other on that street). A *casa de cambio* (exchange house) is Cambio de Divisas, Calle Cardenal Herrero, 30 (☎ 957-47-96-99).

Emergencies

For medical emergencies, dial ☎ **061** or call the Cruz Roja (Red Cross) at ☎ **957-22-22-22**. For an ambulance call ☎ **957-29-55-70**. In case of fire call ☎ **080**. For a police emergency, call ☎ **091**.

Hospitals

Hospital Reina Sofía is located on Avenida Menéndez Pidal, s/n (☎ 957-21-70-00). Hospital Los Morales is on Sierra de Córdoba, s/n (☎ 957-27-56-50).

Information

The Andalusia Provincial Tourism Office is located at Torrijos, 10 (☎ 957-47-12-35), right next to the Mezquita. Municipal tourism offices are located at the Alcázar de los Reyes Cristianos, Campo Santo de los Mártires (☎ 957-29-95-35) and Plaza de las Tendillas, 5 (☎ 957-49-16-17), in the modern center of town. There's also a tourist information kiosk on the main concourse of the AVE train station. They're all open daily from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Police

The municipal police station is at Campo Madre de Dios, s/n (☎ 957-23-37-53 or ☎ 092).

Post Office

Córdoba's main post office is on Cruz Conde, 15 (☎ 902-19-71-97).

Safety

Córdoba is a low-key town, but it's also a city that suffers perennially from unemployment and economic hardship. With the large number of tourists that traipse in and

out, often along twisting, confusing streets, the city has gained an unfortunate reputation as a place where thieves prey on tourists — though it has always seemed safe to me. Although there's no need to be alarmed, be careful if you venture beyond the Jewish Quarter and the area around the Mosque — areas with a noticeable police presence. Some parts west of Calle de San Fernando are uncomfortably deserted and perfect places for thieves-in-waiting. Leave valuables and extra money at the hotel safe, and try to carry things that you don't want to lose on the front of your body.