



Gastronomic Andalucía

Food, wine, art and architecture

23–30 March 2025 (ML 645)

£4,030 • 8 days

Speaker: Gijs van Hensbergen

Starting in Málaga, journey in a sweeping curve through Andalucía: Úbeda, Córdoba, Aracena, Seville, Jerez, Cádiz.

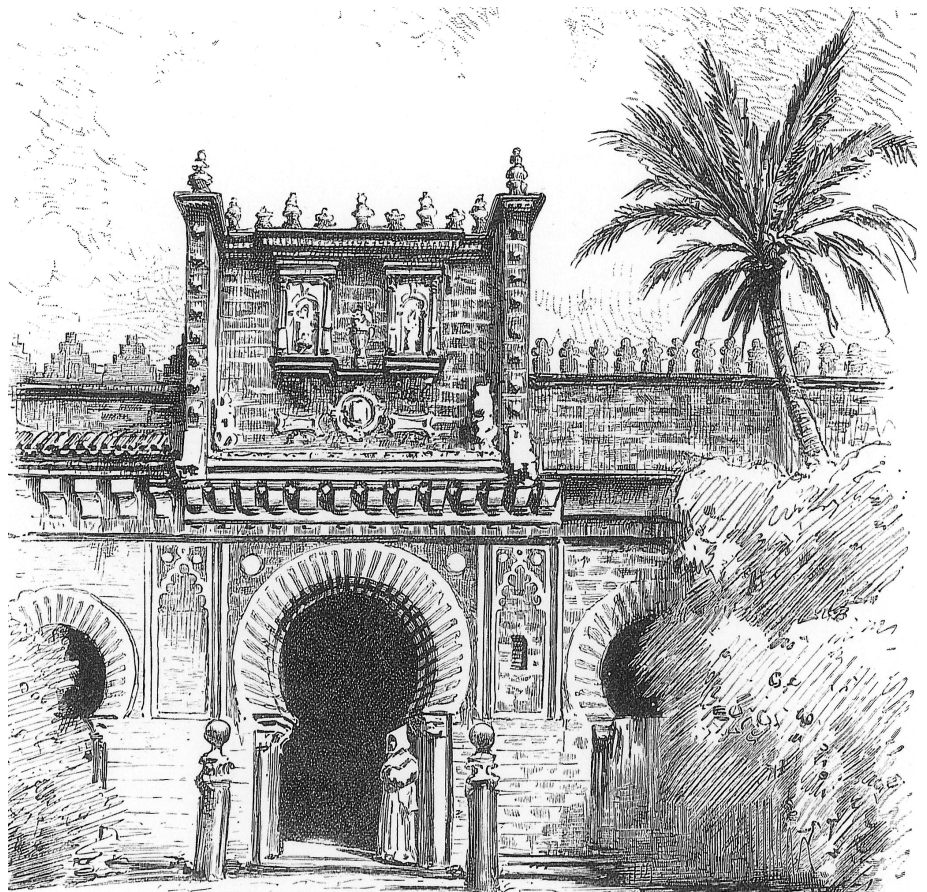
Surveys the history of the region with its cuisine: Roman, Jewish, Moorish, Christian; from the simplest cooking to the elaborate and contemporary.

Some of Spain's greatest monuments are here including the mosque at Córdoba and Seville Cathedral, as well as some lesser-known treasures: wonderful museums, small towns and spectacular countryside.

'Al-Andalus' (the Andalucía of the Moors) are words which immediately evoke fantasies of displays of sweetmeats, saffron-stained rice and jewels of livid red pomegranate. Exotic flavour combinations are countered by the simplicity of perfectly prepared fish; flaking, moist and ivory white. Sophisticated techniques are often tempered by the deeply felt philosophy that, yes, less can be more.

Gastronomic Andalucía is a true feast of the senses: earthy smells are countered by elusive and piquant tastes; sherries, montillas and punchy red caldos of La Mancha wine stand up perfectly to the pickled escabeches of game, the deep-flavoured fish soups, and the marriage of almonds, lemon-steeped olives and air-dried tenderloin of albacore tuna. The backdrop is no less exotic: Úbeda and Baeza, the twin cities of Spain's Renaissance, are surrounded by stands of olive trees that lead the eye out to the horizon and the sierras beyond. The mosque in Córdoba, at the very heart of the Caliphate, makes a complete nonsense of the received wisdom about the so-called Dark Ages. Seville's barrio of Santa Cruz still offers up phantom vistas of an extraordinary cosmopolitan past.

Andalucía, it must be remembered, has a large variety of climates. In the mountains above Seville, the hams of the wild Iberian pig dry perfectly into a product that is second to none. Sea breezes around Sanlúcar signal the flavour of salt on the tongue. South to Baeza, off the tourist track, we enter the land of olives, and a tasting at the family run Castillo de Canena, where Spain's former Business Woman of the Year, Rosa Vañó, inducts us into the arcane wonders of olive oil tasting. Córdoba, of course, needs no advertising; our lunch here at



Córdoba, La Mezquita, engraving, 1883.

three Michelin-starred Noor transports us back to Al-Andalus, with a menu made exclusively from ingredients available in the Caliphate in medieval times.

Perfectly fried aubergines are a foil for the oxtail, fillets of fish with herbs and oil are trapped in a flash, in a film of the lightest batter and laid out on a bed of the speciality, fried lettuce. Oaky Montilla wine is taken standing.

Seville and Jerez are worlds of their own. Sherry houses are famous for producing unique tastes. Less known are the *almacenistas*, passionate amateurs, whose houses, basements, shops and even living rooms are turned over to storing and nursing their barrels. In Seville, Michelin-starred Julio Fernández Quinteiro offers us his take on Andalusian cuisine at Restaurante Abantal.

Itinerary

Day 1: Málaga. Fly at c. 1.30pm (Vueling) from London Gatwick to Málaga. with dinner on arrival. Overnight in Málaga.

Day 2: Málaga, Úbeda. Begin at the magnificent Picasso Museum, which combines Phoenician ruins beneath a fine 16th-century palace and a collection which places emphasis on his earlier works and the women in his life. A light lunch before an afternoon drive to the handsome town of Úbeda, whose streets and squares are lined with palaces, one of which is our hotel. First of two nights in Úbeda.

Day 3: Úbeda. The town of Úbeda thrived in the 16th century and is richly endowed with Renaissance monuments. Lunch is at the town's most innovative restaurant, Antique. The Arab Castle of Canena is deep in olive-grove country of the Guadalquivir valley and home to the Vañó family, famed producers; tasting and visit here.

Gastronomic Andalucía
continued

Day 4: Córdoba, Seville. Drive west to Córdoba and focus on La Mezquita, one of the largest and most beautiful mosques in the world, and within it the 16th-century cathedral. Walk through the old Jewish quarter, with 14th-century synagogue, before a Moorish lunch at Noor (3 Michelin stars), where chef Paco Morales only uses ingredients that were available in Al-Andalus. Continue to Seville for the first of four nights.

Day 5: Sierra de Aracena, Jabugo. Drive north to the Sierra de Aracena, the low mountains which form the border with Extremadura. Here we taste the exquisite jamón ibérico. There is an optional walk in the foothills along farm tracks lined with oak, chestnut and olive trees and livestock. Alternatively remain in the town of Aracena. Dinner is at a tapas restaurant in Seville's atmospheric Old Town.

Day 6: Seville. Begin at the Alcázar, one of Spain's greatest buildings, built by Moorish architects for Spanish kings, with its courtyards, gardens and magnificent tapestries. The 15th-century cathedral is one of the largest Gothic churches anywhere, with a Late Gothic retable and paintings by Murillo, Zurbarán and Goya. Lunch is at Restaurante Abantal, whose chef was the first in Seville to win a Michelin star. Late afternoon visit to the Fine Arts Museum, the finest collection in Spain after the Prado.

Day 7: Jerez de la Frontera, Cádiz. Drive south to Jerez, at the heart of sherry production. Visit and tasting at Bodegas Tradición, also home to an impressive art collection. Continue to the historic port of Cádiz, laid-back and unspoiled. Lunch is at legendary seafood restaurant El Faro, which takes fish frying to a new level and is the best place in Spain to eat line-caught bass baked in a salt crust.

Day 8: Seville. Free day in Seville perhaps to visit the 15th-century Casa de Pilatos, a mix of Mudéjar, Gothic and Renaissance styles, or the church and hospital of the Caridad, Seville's most striking 17th-century building, with paintings by Murillo and Valdés Leal. Drive to Seville airport for the late-afternoon flight to London Gatwick, arriving at c. 7.30pm.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £4,030 or £3,840 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £4,440 or £4,250 without flights.

Included: air travel (economy class) with Vueling (Airbus 320); travel by private coach; accommodation as described below; breakfasts, 6 lunches and 3 dinners with water, wine or beer, soft drinks and tea or coffee; all admissions; all tips for waiters, drivers and guides; all taxes; the services of the lecturer, tour manager and local guides.

Accommodation. Hotel Molina Lario, Málaga (hotelmolinalario.com): functional, comfortable 4-star hotel in the centre. **Parador de Úbeda** (parador.es): 4-star *parador* in a Renaissance palace on the most handsome square in town; comfortable rooms, traditionally furnished. **Hotel Las Casas de la Judería, Seville** (lascasadelajuderiasevilla.com): charming 4-star hotel in the Barrio Sta Cruz created from several contiguous buildings connected by open-air patios. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use throughout.*

How strenuous? There is quite a lot of walking over uneven ground and up and down hill (as well as an optional countryside walk) and some days involve a lot of driving. Average distance by coach per day: 100 miles. Dinners tend to be at 8.30 or 9.00pm in Spain, so you might get to bed later than you would usually.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.