



Essential Andalucía

Spain's southern province

2–12 March 2026 (MM 891)

11 days • £4,480

Lecturer: Dr Philippa Joseph

Three nights in each of the major cities:
Granada, Córdoba and Seville.

Visits the Picasso Museum in Málaga,
the Alhambra in Granada and the small
Renaissance towns of Úbeda and Baeza.

Varied itinerary covering the great Moorish
sites, medieval, Renaissance and Baroque
architecture, fine art collections and gardens.

Andalucía is Spain's most fascinating and varied region. Varied geographically: stretching southwards from the Sierra Morena to the Mediterranean, it encompasses the permanent snow of the Sierra Nevada as well as the sun-scorched interior.

And varied culturally: here it is possible to see great art and architecture of both Islamic and Christian traditions side by side – even, at Córdoba, one within the other. For Spain is unique in Western Europe in having been conquered by an Islamic power. The Moors first crossed from Africa in AD 711, and in the south of the country they stayed for nearly eight centuries. The Moorish civilization of the cities of Andalucía was one of the most sophisticated of the Middle Ages.

There are also tantalising glimpses of the preceding Visigothic kingdom, and remains of the still earlier Roman occupation – the province of Baetica was one of the most highly favoured in the Roman Empire. Later, both Jews and gypsies made their influence felt, but overwhelmingly the dominant contribution to man-made Andalusian heritage has been created by and for unwavering adherents to Catholicism. The Christian religion does not get much more intense than in southern Spain, and its artistic manifestations rarely more spiritually charged.

The unification of Spain which was ensured by the marriage in 1469 of the 'Catholic Kings', Ferdinand and Isabella, ushered in the period when Spain became the dominant power in Europe. This also coincided with the discovery of the Americas. The cities of the south, particularly Seville, were the immediate beneficiaries of the subsequent colonisation and inflow of huge quantities of bullion and of boundless opportunities for trade and wealth creation.



Córdoba Mosque, lithograph, 1835.

The result was a boom in building and a cultural renaissance, a Golden Age which lasted into the eighteenth century, long after the economy had cooled and real Spanish power had waned. The poverty and torpor of subsequent centuries allowed much of the beauty of the glory days to survive to the present time, when a revival of prosperity has enabled extensive restoration and proper care of the immense artistic patrimony.

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly at c. 9.15am from London Gatwick to Málaga (Vueling). Arrive in time for an introductory lecture in the hotel and a visit to Picasso's birthplace, which houses a small collection of his belongings. Overnight in Málaga.

Day 2: Málaga. The Picasso Museum is magnificent, both the 16th-century building and the collection, which places emphasis on his earlier works. The Carmen Thyssen museum has a fine collection of old masters and 19th-century Spanish painting. Drive to Granada in the late afternoon for the first of three nights.

Day 3: Granada. The 13th-century Arab palaces of the Alhambra ride high above

the city. They are often reckoned to be the greatest expression of Moorish art in Spain, with exquisite decoration and a succession of intimate courtyards. Adjacent are the 16th-century Palace of Charles V and the Generalife, summer palace of the sultans, with gardens and fountains.

Day 4: Granada. Morning visits to the Cathedral and Royal Chapel which retains Isabel of Castile's personal collection of Flemish, Spanish and Italian paintings. Afternoon walk through the Albayzín, the oldest quarter in town, including El Bañuelo (Arab baths). Climb up to San Nicolás from where there are fine views of the Alhambra.

Day 5: Baeza, Úbeda. Drive to Baeza, once a prosperous and important town and now a provincial backwater of quiet charm set among olive groves stretching to the horizon. It has a 16th-century cathedral by outstanding regional architect Andrés de Vandelvira and many grand houses of an alluring light-coloured stone. In Úbeda walk to the handsome Plaza Vázquez de Molina, flanked by elegant palaces including Vandelvira's Casa de las Cadenas and the present day parador. The church of El Salvador was designed by Diego de Siloé in 1536. Continue to Córdoba for the first of three nights.

Essential Andalucía continued

Day 6: Córdoba. From the middle of the 8th-century Córdoba was the capital of Islamic Spain and became the richest city in Europe until its capitulation to the Reconquistadors in 1236. La Mezquita (mosque) is one of the most magnificent of Muslim sites, for some the greatest building of medieval Europe. It contains within it the 16th-century cathedral. In the afternoon drive out to the excavations of Medina Azahara, with remains of a huge and luxurious 10th-century palace complex.

Day 7: Córdoba. Morning visits to the Alcázar, medieval with earlier architectural remains (and good Roman mosaics), and the Archaeological Museum, housed in brand new galleries and a Renaissance mansion, with a fine collection of Roman and Arab pieces. See the narrow streets of the old Jewish quarter, including the 14th-century synagogue. The Fine Arts Museum (optional visit), with Plateresque façade and one delightful ceiling, houses some good Spanish paintings, and the Museo Julio Romero de Torres (optional visit), the former residence of the Cordoban painter, contains a collection of his works. Free afternoon in Córdoba.

Day 8: Écija, Seville. The many church towers of Écija are visible from afar across the surrounding plain. Of the numerous Baroque mansions see the Palacio de Peñaflor and Palacio del Marqués de Benameji, and visit the Gothic-Mudéjar church of Santiago. Drive to Seville for the first of three nights.

Day 9: Seville. Walk to the church and hospital of the Caridad, Seville's most striking 17th-century building, with paintings by Murillo and Valdés Leal. The cathedral is one of the largest Gothic churches anywhere ('Let us build a cathedral so immense that everyone... will take us for madmen'). The Capilla Mayor, treasury and sanctuary are of particular interest. Free afternoon.

Day 10: Seville. Walk through the Barrio de Santa Cruz, a maze of whitewashed alleys and flower-filled patios, to the Casa de Pilatos, the best of the Mudéjar style palaces, with patios and *azulejos*. Afternoon at the Fine Arts Museum, the best in Spain after the Prado, followed by a private visit to the Alcázar, the fortified royal palace, one of Spain's greatest buildings; built by Moorish architects for Castilian kings, it consists of a sequence of apartments and magnificent reception rooms around courtyards and gardens.

Day 11. Free day in Seville, with an optional morning visit to the Palacio Lebrija. Fly from Seville to London Gatwick arriving c. 6.45pm (Vueling).

Lecturer

Dr Philippa Joseph. An art, architectural, and design historian whose research covers artistic and cultural exchange across Europe, especially between Andalucía and Sicily, and the wider Mediterranean basin. Philippa also has an academic interest in, and teaches on, 20th-century Italian architecture and design, about which she is currently writing a monograph for Reaktion Books. She is a Senior Fellow at the Institute of Historical Research, a tutor at the Oxford University Department for Continuing Education, and is a member of the editorial advisory board for *History Today*.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £4,480 or £4,360 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £5,210 or £5,090 without flights.

Included: air travel with Vueling (Airbus 320); private coach; accommodation as described below; breakfasts, 1 lunch and 7 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. **Palacio de Santa Paula, Granada** (marriott.com): 5-star hotel in a converted convent, close to the Royal Chapel; rooms are comfortable and contemporary. **Las Casas de la Judería, Córdoba** (lascasasdelajuderiadecordoba.com): 4-star hotel composed of 5 converted 17th and 18th-century houses in the Jewish quarter, a short walk from the mosque. **Hotel Las Casas de la Judería, Seville** (lascasasdelajuderiasevilla.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? This is a lengthy tour with four hotels, a lot of walking and a fair amount of coach travel. A good level of fitness is essential. Walking is often on uneven streets and uphill. Average distance by coach per day: 33 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.