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Itineraries

Highlights

You’d need months to poke into every corner of Andalucía, but two weeks can bag you the well-known highlights. This greatest hits itinerary is ideal for first-timers or those with a strict time ration.

The best starting point is unmissable Seville, deserving of three days, where the famous cathedral and Alcázar stand side by side in surreal juxtaposition. Head 150km east by train and a few centuries back in time to explore Córdoba, site of the ancient Mezquita and guardian of hidden patios. Free tapas, shadowy tea rooms and the incomparable Alhambra beckon in Granada, where you could fill at least three days reclining in Moorish bathhouses and deciphering the Lorca paraphernalia. Easily reached by bus, Málaga is understated by comparison. Spend a day absorbing the Picasso museum and sample fresh-from-the-Med seafood. Ronda is a dramatic contrast, surrounded by mountains and doused in bullfighting and rebel-rousing history. You’ll be unlucky to hit Jerez de la Frontera and not take in a festival; the city is also famous for its horses, sherry bodegas and flamenco. Forty-five minutes away by train, Cádiz has an abundance of free sights, including a fine city museum and an aficionado’s flamenco club. You can contemplate your trip’s achievements while walking its romantic malecón (sea drive).
To understand every nuance of Andalucía, you need to put aside at least a month and undertake a ‘grand tour’ of all eight provinces. This expansive itinerary is busy and detailed, and will see you staggering home with a virtual PhD in Andalucian culture.

Start in Seville, visiting the obvious sights (the cathedral, Alcázar) and the less obvious ones (Casa de Pilatos, Triana). Sorties to the west lead to Huelva province; there’s prime hiking country in the province’s north, where the gentle pastoral hills around Aracena promise legendary walks between sleepy villages. Passing back through Seville, head east, stopping for a day in gentle Carmona before a serendipitous escape to the serially overlooked Parque Natural Sierra Norte de Sevilla. On week two, head to Córdoba, long a historical foil to Seville, where you can map Andalucian history in its whitewashed streets, Roman relics and Islamic architecture. Tracking east to Jaén province delivers you to the land of olive groves and weighty Renaissance architecture. The former can be seen pretty much everywhere you look. The latter is concentrated in the twin towns of Baeza and Úbeda. Further east, Cazorla is the gateway to Andalucía’s largest protected area, but one visited only by a small minority, Parque Natural Sierras de Cazorla, Segura y Las Villas.

Granada, at the start of week three, is a more mainstream sight, loaded with exotic majesty. To check out all the provinces you’ll now need to circumnavigate the Sierra Nevada to Almería, the dry east that once hosted spaghetti western films. Hit the coast at the unadulterated Spanish town of Almuñécar and follow it west through ever-growing resorts to Málaga, the Costa del Sol city that is actually nothing like the Costa del Sol. Start your last week in white town ‘capital’, Ronda; with its bullfighting museum and plunging gorge, it’s been on most itineraries since Hemingway visited. The white towns continue across the border in Cádiz province; pick and choose between Olvera, Grazalema and Ubrique, and enjoy the surrounding natural parks. Attempts to bypass Arcos de la Frontera are normally futile – the sight of the spectacular hilltop settlement practically drags you off the bus. Your final week can be spent tying up the threads of Andalucía’s culture in Jerez de la Frontera and Cádiz, two ancient yet quintessential cities that contain all the ingredients that have made this region so great.
The Cultural Triangle

If you had to pick a smaller region-within-a-region that best sums up Andalucía’s essence, it would lie in the triangle of territory between Seville, Cádiz and Jerez de la Frontera.

With excellent air, rail and bus connections, Seville is the best starting point for this sojourn. Lap up the Moorish-meets-Gothic architecture and seemingly limitless festivals for a day or two. Fast trains now forge south to Jerez de la Frontera, first stop on the ‘sherry triangle’, where you can spend two days mixing bodega tours with horse shows, authentic flamenco and perhaps a hammam. Continuing west by bus to Sanlúcar de Barrameda gives you the option to compare fino with manzanilla and bag some of the best seafood tapas in Spain. This is also a good base for forays into the biodiverse Parque Nacional de Doñana. Spend the evening in El Puerto de Santa María, home of more bodegas, festivals and fish restaurants. Surrounded by sea, Cádiz feels like the edge of Europe, and the home of something mystical and old. The beaches here are famously broad and they continue south along the Costa de la Luz. Explore them from a base in Vejer de la Frontera, a dramatically perched white town with a refined air.

The West in Detail

Already seen the Alhambra and hiked the Sierra Nevada? Then go west to the proverbial cradle of Andalucian culture.

Start in Huelva province’s Parque Nacional de Doñana, possibly Andalucía’s finest natural attraction and a rare European wetland replete with bird life. Seville broadcasts a litany of well-known sights, but its provincial hinterland is less heralded. Visit the tranquil towns of Carmona, with its Alcázar, and Osuna, with its grand palaces. Rugged Ronda is well on the tourist map, though if you stay overnight you’ll wave goodbye to 80% of them. Recommended stops on the way to Málaga include El Chorro gorge and ancient Antequera. Málaga is a ballsy yet arty city that offers great seafood and a decent August feria. With time to linger you can visit some of Cádiz province’s less trodden jewels: Jimena de la Frontera demands a detour, as does hiking in the Parque Natural Los Alcornocales. Gibraltar lures expat Brits missing roast beef and warm beer. Ply the Costa de la Luz next, spending at least one night in the white village of Vejer de la Frontera. A final few days can be devoted to the culturally intense city of Cádiz, with a detour for sherry and flamenco in Jerez de la Frontera.
The east is Andalucía’s less obvious itinerary, filled with more obscure attractions. Spend three days each in the two big-hitter cities and then branch out. Córdoba is a must-see – a one-time Iberian capital with one of the finest Islamic mosques ever built. Granada showcases the later Nasrid era in its Alhambra, Albayzín and Moorish-style bathhouses. You can use both cities as a base for rural forays into nearby mountainous regions. Córdoba province’s ample wilderness includes the Parque Natural Sierras Subbéticas. Granada has the Parque Nacional Sierra Nevada and Las Alpujarras, the valleys that embellish the sierra’s southern slopes. Detours from here can include Guadix, with its unusual inhabited caves, and coastal Almuñécar, a bit of domestic seaside bliss detached from the Costa resorts. Jaén is olive-oil heaven and guardian of fine tapas bars, while Baeza and Úbeda are unique for their Renaissance architecture. Almería province is Andalucía’s far east: Mojácar promises a sometimes boho, sometimes glitzy taste of the Levant; Cabo de Gata is the region’s most unspoiled coastal enclave; and Almería city is a kind of Granada-on-the-sea, with plenty of mystic Moorish relics.

The coast looms large in Andalucía, lapping five of its eight provinces. Empires were once built here, although more recently resorts have colonised the littoral. Most coastal towns are linked by bus. Start in underdeveloped Cabo de Gata, a spectacular combination of cliffs and salt flats. Tracking west you’ll dock in Almería, worth a stop for its Moorish Alcazaba and winding streets. Granada’s Costa Tropical is precipitous and authentic; Almuñécar is a great base for exploring and La Herradura offers good diving. A short bus ride west, Nerja has tempered its development better than other resorts, while excellent hiking beckons in La Axarquía. Málaga deserves three days of this trip; its international reputation has skyrocketed in recent years thanks to its fine art and inventive gastronomy. Marbella is possibly the most interesting stop on the busy Costa del Sol, though Mijas merits a day trip. Further west, Gibraltar guards the jaws of Europe with British pubs and fascinating military history. Starting in windsurfing mecca Tarifa, the Costa de la Luz harbours a variety of flavours and different food. While away three days in Barbate and Los Caños de Meca, then it’s a grand two-day finale in Cádiz.
Map Legend

Sights
- Beach
- Bird Sanctuary
- Buddhist
- Castle/Palace
- Christian
- Confucian
- Hindu
- Jain
- Jewish
- Monument
- Museum/Gallery/Historic Building
- Ruin
- Shinto
- Sikh
- Taoist
- Winery/Vineyard
- Zoo/Wildlife Sanctuary
- Other Sight

Activities, Courses & Tours
- Bodysurfing
- Diving
- Canoeing/Kayaking
- Course/Tour
- Sento Hot Baths/Onsen
- Skiing
- Snorkelling
- Surfing
- Swimming/Pool
- Walking
- Windsurfing
- Other Activity

Sleeping
- Sleeping
- Camping

Eating
- Eating

Drinking & Nightlife
- Drinking & Nightlife
- Cafe

Entertainment
- Entertainment

Shopping
- Shopping

Information
- Bank
- Embassy/Consulate
- Hospital/Medical
- Internet
- Police
- Post Office
- Toilet
- Tourist Information
- Other Information

Geographic
- Beach
- Gate
- Hut/Shelter
- Lighthouse
- Lookout
- Mountain/Volcano
- Oasis
- Park
- Picnic Area
- Waterfall

Population
- Capital (National)
- Capital (State/Province)
- City/Large Town
- Town/Village

Transport
- Airport
- Border crossing
- Bus
- Cable car/Funicular
- Cycling
- Ferry
- Metro station
- Monorail
- Parking
- Petrol station
- S-Bahn/S-train/Subway station
- Taxi
- T-bane/Tunnelbana station
- Train station/Railway
- Tram
- Tube station
- U-Bahn/Underground station
- Other Transport

Note: Not all symbols displayed above appear on the maps in this book

Routes
- Tollway
- Freeway
- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary
- Lane
- Unsealed road
- Road under construction
- Plaza/Mall
- Steps
- Tunnel
- Pedestrian overpass
- Walking Tour
- Walking Tour detour
- Path/Walking Trail

Boundaries
- International
- State/Province
- Disputed
- Regional/Suburb
- Marine Park
- Cliff
- Wall

Hydrography
- River, Creek
- Intermittent River
- Canal
- Water
- Dry/Salt/Intermittent Lake
- Reef

Areas
- Airport/Runway
- Beach/Desert
- Cemetery (Christian)
- Cemetery (Other)
- Glacier
- Mudflat
- Park/Forest
- Sight (Building)
- Sportsground
- Swamp/Mangrove
OUR STORY
A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that’s all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, Across Asia on the Cheap. Within a week they’d sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Beijing and Delhi, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony’s belief that ‘a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse’.

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