

Welcome to Andalucía

The scent of orange blossom, the thrash of a flamenco guitar, the glimpse of a white village perched spectacularly atop a crag: memories of Andalucía stay with you like collected souvenirs.

The Essence of Spain

Immortalised in operas and vividly depicted in 19th-century artworks, Andalucía often acts as a synonym for Spain as a whole: a sun-dappled, fiesta-loving land of guitar-wielding troubadours, reckless bullfighters, feisty operatic heroines and roguish Roma singers wailing sad laments. While this simplistic portrait might be outdated and overly romantic, it carries an element of truth. Andalucía, despite creeping modernisation, remains a spirited and passionate place where the atmosphere – rather like a good flamenco performance – creeps up and taps you on the shoulder when you least expect it.

A Cultural Marinade

Part of the fascination Andalucía holds for people springs from its peculiar history. For eight centuries the region sat on a porous frontier between two different faiths and ideologies, Christianity and Islam. Left to ferment like a barrel of the bone-dry local sherry, the ongoing cross-fertilisation has thrown up a slew of cultural colossi: ancient mosques transformed into churches; vast palace complexes replete with stucco; a cuisine infused with dashes of North African spices; and a chain of lofty white towns that dominates the arid, craggy landscape, from the tightly knotted lanes of Granada's Albayzín to the hilltop settlements of Cádiz province.

Wild Andalucía

It takes more than a few thirsty Costa del Sol golf courses to steamroller Andalucía's diverse ecology. Significant pockets of the region's southern coast remain relatively unblemished, while inland you'll stumble into bucolic, agriculturally dependent villages where life doesn't seem to have changed much since playwright Federico Lorca envisioned *Bodas de sangre* (Blood Wedding). Twenty percent of Andalucía's land is sheltered in natural and national parks, and the protective measures are showing dividends. The Iberian lynx is no longer impossibly elusive, while the handsome ibex is positively flourishing. Another laudable reclamation project is the region's *via verdes*, old railway lines reborn as biking and hiking greenways.

Duende

One of Andalucía's most intriguing attractions is the notion of *duende*, the elusive spirit that douses much of Spanish art, especially flamenco. *Duende* loosely translates as a moment of heightened emotion experienced during an artistic performance, and it can be soulfully evoked in Andalucía if you mingle in the right places. Seek it out in a Lorca play at a municipal theatre, an organ recital in a Gothic church, the hit-or-miss spontaneity of a flamenco *peña* (club) or the remarkable art renaissance currently gripping Málaga.



Why I Love Andalucía

By Brendan Sainsbury, Author

Andalucía is where I met my wife, developed an incurable infatuation with flamenco and worked for several halcyon seasons as a travel guide. No small wonder that the region ranks so highly in my hit parade of 'favourite places on the planet'. Its crowning glory for me will always be Granada, though I also admire Seville and Málaga, and have a typically British affection for Gibraltar. For rural satisfaction, I love running along the region's *via verdes*, trying to keep up with the cyclists.

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