



Granada & Córdoba

with Úbeda & Baeza

17–24 February 2025 (ML 625)

8 days • £3,210

Lecturer: Gijs van Hensbergen

Ample time at the key sites of Moorish Spain: the Alhambra in Granada and the Mosque in Córdoba, with time also for the lesser-known.

Visit the Picasso Museum and Carmen Thyssen collection in Málaga and the small Renaissance towns of Úbeda and Baeza.

Southern Spain – savage peaks soar over passes that are snow-bound in winter, while plains below are well-watered by spring rivers, hot, harsh and arid in the summer, mellow in late autumn and winter.

The cities reveal the magnitude of past achievements through the greatness of the architecture and the brilliant elaboration of decoration. Andalucía was a bountiful Roman province, in Arab times the scene of highly sophisticated Umayyad and Nasrid princedoms and a major province of the most powerful kingdom in (Christian) Europe's sixteenth century. The artistic riches are immensely varied, though the unique distinguishing mark is the heritage from eight hundred years of rule by Muslims from North Africa and Arabia.

Arab Córdoba became the capital of al-Andalus and the largest city in Europe, market for all the luxuries of East and West and scene of Europe's most splendid court until its fall to the Reconquistadors in 1236. The mosque, La Mezquita, was one of the largest anywhere, and arguably the most beautiful; Christian possession in the sixteenth century created within it a totally contrasting cathedral.

Granada was the last Islamic princedom in Spain, only falling to the Christians in 1492. The concatenation of palaces and gardens of the Alhambra, with its cascading domes and gilded decoration like frozen fireworks, is one of Spain's most enthralling sights.

Although millions of tourists pour through Málaga Airport every year en route to the Costa del Sol, comparatively few set foot in the old town. The narrow streets, palm-lined squares and seafront promenades conserve Phoenician, Roman, Moorish, Gothic, Baroque and late-nineteenth-century monuments. Birthplace and childhood home of Pablo Picasso, the city boasts a major collection of his works, while the eponymous museum of Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza includes some excellent nineteenth-century Spanish art with Andalusian themes.



The Alhambra in Granada from 'The Magazine of Art', 1894.

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly at c. 9.45am from London Gatwick Airport to Málaga (Vueling). Arrive in time for a visit to Picasso's birthplace, which houses a small collection of his belongings. Overnight in Málaga.

Day 2: Málaga. Begin at the Picasso Museum, a 16th-century building with a magnificent collection which places emphasis on his earlier works. The Carmen Thyssen museum has a fine collection of old masters and 19th-century Spanish painting. In the afternoon drive north to Granada. First of three nights in Granada.

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 visit to the Cathedral and Royal Chapel which retains Isabel of Castile's personal collection of Flemish, Spanish and Italian paintings. In the late afternoon there is an optional walk through the Albaycín, 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 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.

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 mediaeval 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 visit to the Archaeological Museum, housed in brand new galleries and a Renaissance mansion, with a fine collection of Roman and Arab pieces. Visit the Alcázar, medieval with earlier architectural remains (and good Roman mosaics), and the narrow streets of the old Jewish quarter, including the 14th-century synagogue. The Fine Arts Museum, with Plateresque façade, houses some good Spanish paintings. Free afternoon in Córdoba.

Granada & Córdoba
continued

Day 8: Drive to Málaga airport for a midday flight (British Airways), arriving at London Heathrow airport at c. 2.30pm.

Please note this tour departs from London Gatwick and returns to London Heathrow.

Lecturer

Gijs van Hensbergen. Art historian and author specialising in Spain and the USA. His books include *Gaudí, In the Kitchens of Castile, Guernica* and most recently, *La Sagrada Familia*, and he has published in the Burlington Magazine and Wall Street Journal. He read languages at Utrecht University and Art History at the Courtauld, and undertook postgraduate studies in American art of the 1960s. He has worked in England, the USA and Spain as exhibitions organiser, TV researcher and critic and is a Fellow of the Cañada Blanch Centre for Contemporary Spanish Studies at the LSE.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £3,210 or £3,040 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £3780 or £3,610 without flights.

By train: London – Paris – Barcelona – Málaga: c. 17 hours. Contact us for more information.

Included: air travel (economy) with Vueling and British Airways (Airbus 320); private coach; accommodation as described below; breakfasts, 1 lunch and 4 dinners, with 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 4-star in the centre. **AC Palacio de Santa Paula, Granada** (marriott.com): comfortable, contemporary hotel in the centre; comparable to a 4-star. **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. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use throughout.*

How strenuous? The tour involves a lot of walking in town centres, where coach access is restricted, and a lot of standing in museums and churches. Uneven ground and irregular paving are standard. Average distance by coach per day: 52 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.

Combine this tour with *Essential Rome*, 25 February–3 March 2025.