



## Cities of al-Andalus

Art, architecture & gardens in Granada & Córdoba

**20–26 March 2023 (MJ 650)**

7 days • £2,610

Lecturer: Professor Amira Bennison

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

Three nights in each city, plus visits to the small Renaissance towns of Úbeda and Baeza.

Two visits to the Alhambra, including an after-hours visit avoiding the crowds.

A rich and fertile region in Roman times, the modern province of Andalucía takes its name from the Arabic term for the entire Iberian peninsula, al-Andalus. Conquered in the early eighth century by Muslim armies from the Middle East and North Africa, the peninsula became the site of a rich and sophisticated Islamic civilisation which brought together the talents of Arabs, Berbers and Iberian converts to Islam. Jewish culture also flourished at this time in communication with Jewish communities throughout the Islamic world.

Islamic Córdoba was the capital of the Arab Umayyad dynasty, rulers of al-Andalus from the eighth to the eleventh centuries. It was 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 Christian Castilians in 1236. The Umayyad Great Mosque or Mezquita was one of the largest in the Islamic world, distinguished by its endless forest of columns, ruptured by the insertion of a sixteenth-century cathedral at its heart.

The fall of Córdoba to the Castilians was accompanied by Christian advances in Portugal to the west and Valencia in the east, rapidly reducing Muslim power to the small southern kingdom of Granada, ruled by the Nasrids, which endured until its capture by the armies of the Most Catholic Kings, Ferdinand and Isabella, in 1492. This mountain kingdom welcomed Muslim refugees from all over the peninsula who transformed it into a flourishing land of verdant gardens, famed for its silk production.

The Alhambra citadel was the Nasrid residence, a luxurious series of palaces and gardens, characterised by intense decoration of flamboyant carved plaster, colourful mosaic tile, and richly inlaid wood which is one of Spain's most enthralling sights and an inspiration to artists from Owen Jones and David Roberts onwards.



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

### Itinerary

**Day 1.** Fly at c. 10.45am from London Heathrow to Málaga (British Airways). Drive to Granada (c. 2 hours) for the first of three nights.

**Day 2: Granada.** The 13th-century Arab palaces of the Alhambra ride high above the city. They are often reckoned to be the greatest expression of Islamic 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 3: Granada.** Visit the Cathedral and Royal Chapel which retains Isabel of Castile's personal art collection. Walk via the Corral del Carbón, the evocative 14th-century caravanserai and silk market and Madrasa, founded in 1349 by the Nasrid monarch Yusuf I. Afternoon walk through the Albaycín, the oldest quarter in town, including El Bañuelo (Arab baths) and the elegant, hispano-moresque gardens of the Instituto de Estudios Árabes. See the Alhambra in a different light with an optional late evening visit.

**Day 4: 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. The church of

El Salvador was designed by Diego de Siloé in 1536. Continue to Córdoba for the first of three nights.

**Day 5: 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 Christian Castilians in 1236. Visit the Alcázar, medieval with earlier architectural remains (and good Roman mosaics), the Baños del Alcázar Califal (Caliphal Baths) and the old Jewish quarter, including the 14th-century synagogue. 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.

**Day 6: Córdoba.** Morning excursion to the excavations of Medina Azahara, with remains of a huge and luxurious 10th-century palace complex. Free afternoon in Córdoba.

**Day 7:** Drive to Málaga airport for the early-afternoon flight, arriving at London Heathrow at c. 4.15pm.

### Lecturer

**Professor Amira Bennison.** Professor in the History and Culture of the Maghrib at the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of Magdalene College. Amira's publications include *The Almoravid and Almohad Empires* (2016), *The Great Caliphs* (2009) and *Jihad & its Interpretations in Precolonial Morocco* (2002) as well as numerous articles on the political, social and cultural history of the Islamic western Mediterranean.

Cities of al-Andalus  
continued

## Practicalities

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**Price, per person. Two sharing:** £2,610 or £2,410 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £3,090 or £2,890 without flights.

*By train: London – Paris – Barcelona – Málaga: c. 28 hours. Contact us for more information.*

**Included:** air travel (economy) with 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. 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. *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: 62 miles.

**Group size:** between 10 and 22 participants.