

 **Spain**





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Spain Introduction

My original interest in visiting Spain began with the Alhambra palace complex in Granada but over time, as I learned more about Spain and its history, my destinations list grew to include most of the country and sites dating from Roman times to the present.

On an earlier trip I set out on an ambitious itinerary which started in Barcelona, but a minor injury cut my trip short after a great week there.

This trip addresses the unfinished business – south to Granada, Córdoba, and Seville in Andalusia, and then back to Madrid and central Spain.

Pieces of Spain's history over the past 2000+ years are scattered everywhere, so in the end I've just presented my photos by city, roughly in the sequence of my itinerary.

The clashes between the Christians and Muslims which figure so prominently in Spain's history seem especially relevant today. Inescapably, they are reflected here but I've tried not to be obsessed by them.



Independent travel in Spain for people who do not speak Spanish can be challenging. I've tried to forget the frustrations and concentrate on the incredible beauty and diversity I found.

I've provided a map showing my route on the next page, and a brief outline of history on the two pages following, but you can skip the history if you're only interested in the pictures.

Bruce McKay



Spain Timeline – BC to 1492

218 BC	The Romans began to displace their eastern Mediterranean predecessors. Over the next 600 years they introduced their way of life – with their roads, aqueducts, temples, theatres, and religion.	
476 AD	Visigoths from the north assumed power after the collapse of the Roman Empire, but didn't organize effectively.	
711	Moors , Muslims from North Africa, crossed at Gibraltar in 711 and conquered nearly the entire peninsula by 718. The Moors controlled southern Spain for the next 750 years. They built mosques, libraries, observatories, universities, and irrigation systems. At first Muslim, Christian, and Jewish religions were allowed to co-exist.	
1085	Catholic Christians , who began pushing back down from the north shortly after the Muslim invasion, captured Toledo, the most important city of central Muslim Spain.	
1469	Isabel I of Castile and Fernando II of Aragon married, uniting the two major northern kingdoms into a powerful Christian state. The alliance of Isabel and Fernando, designated as the " Catholic Monarchs " by the Pope, gave new impetus to the <i>Reconquista</i> (Reconquest), which quickly pushed further south.	
1478	Isabel and Fernando stirred up religious bigotry and established the Spanish Inquisition , which saw the Muslims and Jews expelled from Spain and thousands killed before it was abolished in 1834.	
1492	Granada , weakened by dissent within Muslim ranks and eventually the last refuge of Muslims in Spain, fell to Isabel and Fernando. Religious tolerance was promised, but not delivered.	
1492	Christopher Columbus reached the Bahamas, and a new era began. ➡	

Spain Timeline – From 1493

1493	Christopher Columbus returned from America.
1500s	<p>Brilliant but ruthless Conquistadors conquered Mexico (1519), Peru (1532), and Chile (1541), plundering and destroying the Indian civilizations.</p> <p>Vast quantities of gold and silver flowed across the Atlantic, enriching the monarchy, the church, and the nobility. Trade in newly discovered commodities flourished.</p> <p>Spain became the most powerful state in Europe and the most important colonial power in the world. Its empire included southern North America, Central America, western South America, territories in Europe, and colonies in the western Pacific.</p>
1600s - 1800s	<p>Backward-looking and conservative leadership and an endless series of wars in Europe steadily diminished Spain over the following centuries.</p> <p>Spanish sea power was destroyed by the British under Nelson at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. One by one its overseas colonies gained their independence.</p> <p>While the rest of Europe industrialized and became more democratic and unified, in Spain domestic political instability increased steadily.</p>
1900s	<p>In 1936 Spain was finally plunged into a bloody internal conflict, the Spanish Civil War. The Nationalists, under General Francisco Franco, won in 1939, with the support of Hitler, Mussolini, and the German Luftwaffe.</p> <p>General Franco ruled as a conservative dictator until his death in 1975.</p> <p>Free elections were first held in 1977.</p>
2000s	<p>Construction of vacation homes, condos, hotels, and businesses grew the economy rapidly until the world economic crisis of 2008.</p> <p>Adult male unemployment in Spain is now 25%. Youth unemployment is 56%.</p>



Welcome

My inter-city travel will be by rail. High speed AVE service links Madrid to Córdoba and Seville. Travel to Granada is a bit slower.



Welcome

The territory between Madrid and Córdoba is relatively flat and dry.



Welcome

Approaching Granada. Olive groves and more varied terrain.



Granada

Granada's population today is about 250,000. It has been populated from the 8th century BC, ruled in turn by Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Visigoths, Moors, and Christians.



Granada

Today Granada is most famous for the Alhambra, the palace and fortress complex which was the last Moorish refuge to fall to the Christian Reconquista of Spain.



Alhambra

The complex is massive, with a view over the whole city and the surrounding region from its perch atop a steep cliff.



Alhambra

The Alhambra consists of separate sections. First came the Moors' defensive fortress, the Alcazaba, which dates from 889 AD.



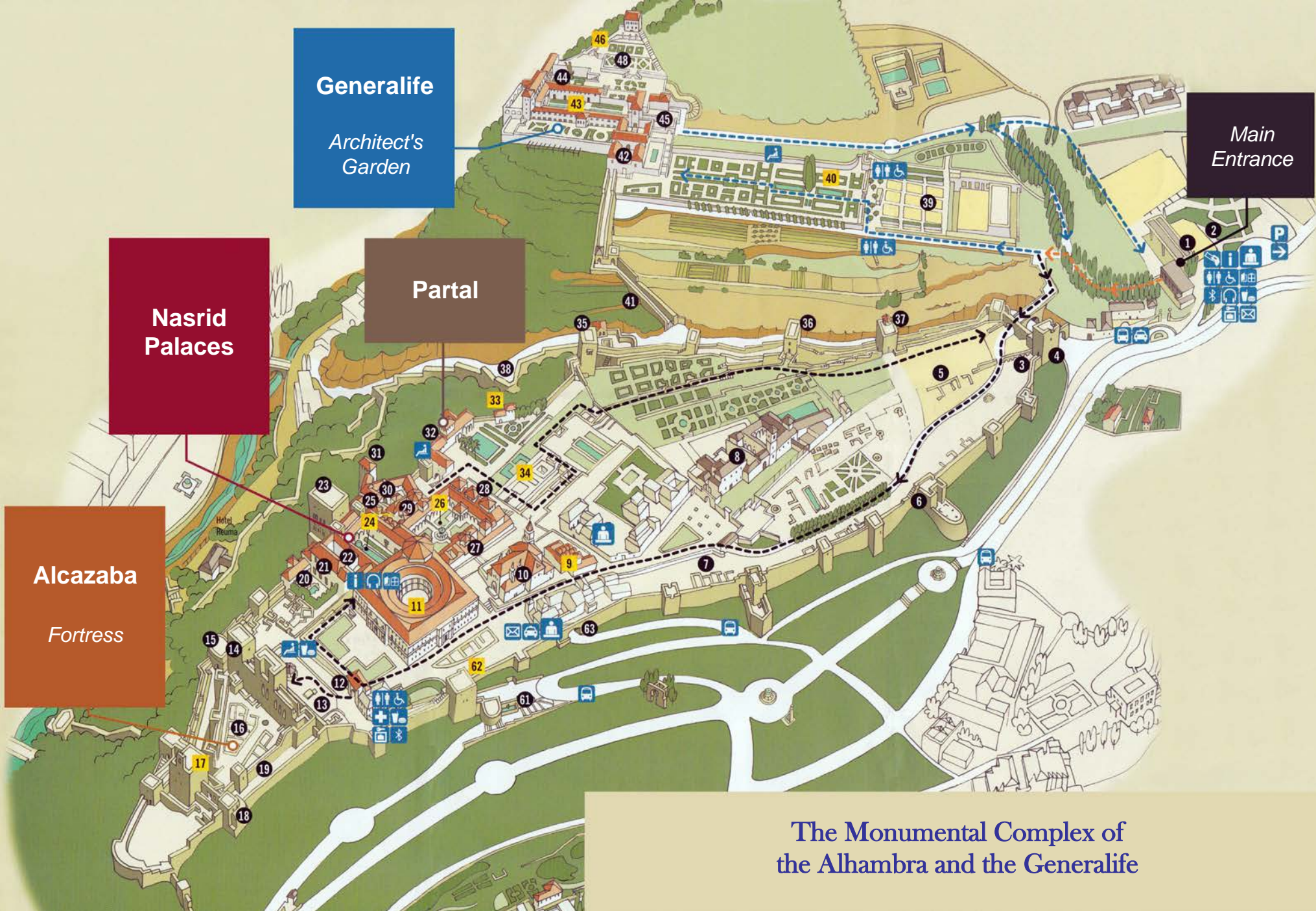
Alhambra

The Nasrid Palaces and the Partal were mostly added by the Muslim emirs in Spain between the mid 11th and mid 14th centuries.



Alhambra

The Generalife palace and gardens complex was added during the early 14th century. Generalife is pronounced "heh-neh-rah-lee-feh".



The Monumental Complex of
the Alhambra and the Generalife

Alhambra

The overall complex stretches across a width of about 1 km / 0.6 miles.
I split my visit across two days.



Alcazaba

The Gate of Justice, the exterior gate of the fortress section, was built in 1348. It is the largest and most impressive of the four gates in the Alhambra walls.



Alcazaba

Entrance to the fortress itself is via another massive gate, Puerto del Vino (Wine Gate).



Alcazaba

In the Plaza de Armas (Arms Square) all that remains are the foundations of the buildings which provided services and lodgings for the civil population and the troops.



Alcazaba

The Watchtower on the western end of the fortress is the tallest, rising 27 metres / 90 feet above the cliff.



Alcazaba

The bell atop the Watchtower has been moved and replaced several times, sometimes after being struck by lightning.



Alcazaba

The views from the towers of the Alcazaba permitted surveillance of the entire surrounding region.



Alcazaba

And they provide a close look into the adjoining Nasrid Palaces.



**Nasrid
Palaces**

Entrance to the Mexuar Palace





**Nasrid
Palaces**

The Nasrid king met with his ministers and received members of the public in the Mexuar Palace.





**Nasrid
Palaces**

Court of the Myrtles, centre of the official residence



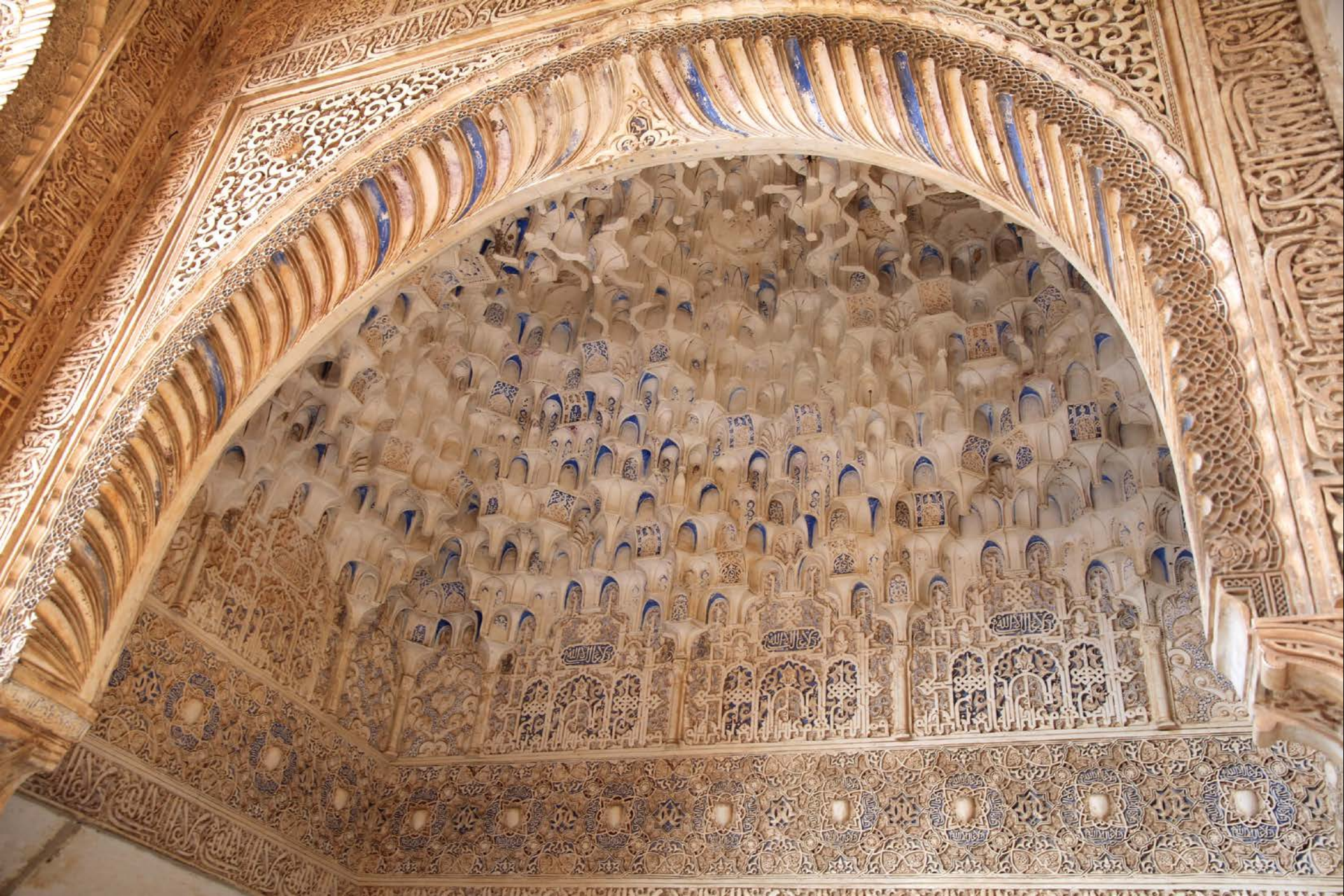
**Nasrid
Palaces**

Entrance to the Comares Tower



**Nasrid
Palaces**

Hall of the Ambassadors, for official negotiations



**Nasrid
Palaces**

Comares Palace



**Nasrid
Palaces**

The domed ceiling with stalactite vaulting in the Hall of the Abencerrages produces a star-like effect.



**Nasrid
Palaces**

Court of the Lions



**Nasrid
Palaces**

The Lions Fountain



**Nasrid
Palaces**

Palace of the Lions



**Nasrid
Palaces**

Palace of the Lions



**Nasrid
Palaces**

The Partal was added adjacent to the original Nasrid Palaces later.



**Nasrid
Palaces**

Partal Gardens



**Nasrid
Palaces**

View from the Partal Palace portico



Nasrid Palaces

Just one discordant note. In 1527 King Carlos V ordered the destruction of part of the complex to accommodate the construction of his own large Renaissance palace.



**Nasrid
Palaces**

The huge Palace of Carlos V is not only out of place, but suffers in comparison to the elegance of the original Moorish palaces.



Generalife

Generalife ("heh-neh-rah-lee-feh") translates as Architect's Garden. It was a separated private refuge from the palaces for the Nasrid kings.



Generalife

Lower Generalife gardens



Generalife

Court of the Water Channel.



Generalife

The water jets cool the air and are soothing.



Generalife

Sala Regia (Royal Chamber)



Generalife

Nasrid Palaces seen from Generalife



Generalife

Upper Generalife gardens



Generalife

Alhanbra and Granada seen from upper gardens



Generalife

Granada and the Alhambra finally surrendered to the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella, in 1492.



**Catholic
Granada**

Statue showing Queen Isabella listening to Columbus' plans for westward voyages in the square in Granada bearing her name.



**Catholic
Granada**

Granada's Cathedral was built between 1522 and 1704.



**Catholic
Granada**

Granada's Muslims and Jews were promised religious tolerance under the terms of surrender but were expelled by the 1600s.



Córdoba

The Roman Bridge across the Guadalquivir River in Córdoba was built in the early 1st century BC, and is believed to have replaced a previous wooden structure.



Córdoba

The bridge has been restored several times,
but two original arches remain.



Córdoba

By the 10th century Córdoba was the most populous city in the world, with 500,000 inhabitants, and had become a centre for education under its Islamic rulers.



Córdoba

The Calahorra Tower at the southern end of the Roman Bridge houses a Cultures Museum highlighting the intellectual achievements of Islamic Córdoba.



Córdoba

Córdoba's libraries and universities imported, translated, and extended Greek learning, and its medical schools made advances in surgical techniques.



Córdoba

The astrolabe, the navigation instrument so important in the exploration of the New World, was one product of the advances in mathematics and science.



Córdoba

The hydraulic engineering expertise of the Romans was extended.
This Islamic water wheel would have raised water to the caliph's palace.



Córdoba

But the golden period did not last. During the latter part of the 11th century internal power struggles between different Muslim factions led to destruction and a steady decline.



**Mesquita /
Cathedral**

Construction of the Great Mosque of Córdoba, also called the Mezquita, was begun in 784 and extended in stages until 984.



**Mesquita /
Cathedral**

The Mequita is most notable for its rows and rows of columns crowned with red and white arches.



**Mesquita /
Cathedral**

There are 856 columns of jasper, onyx, marble, and granite.



**Mesquita /
Cathedral**

Mihrab: This richly ornamented prayer niche indicates the direction to Mecca, and held a gilt copy of the Koran.



Wikipedia photo

**Mesquita /
Cathedral**

Beginning in 1523 the central part of the mosque was destroyed to accommodate the insertion of a Catholic Cathedral.



**Mesquita /
Cathedral**

The Cathedral of Córdoba, inside the former mosque



**Mesquita /
Cathedral**

Islamic law forbids images of people or of God in mosques.



**Mesquita /
Cathedral**

**Chapel of the Conception, one of several chapels
inserted around the edges of the former mosque.**



**Mesquita /
Cathedral**

The Córdoba Cathedral Treasury houses a large silver monstrance used to display the Host on special occasions, paintings, and nine statues of saints.



**Mesquita /
Cathedral**

The conflicted dual identity of this mosque / cathedral remains contentious to this day.



**Mesquita /
Cathedral**

The Courtyard of the Orange Trees, part of the original mosque, has been retained, but is now covered with paving stones.



Córdoba Mesquita / Cathedral

The mosque's minaret was torn down and replaced by this bell tower.



Córdoba
Alcázar

The Alcázar de los Reyes Cristianos (Castle of the Christian Monarchs) occupies a site originally occupied by a Visigoth fortress and incorporates parts of a Moorish alcázar.



Córdoba
Alcázar

Christians took Córdoba in 1236. Conversion of the Alcázar began in 1328. Isabella and Ferdinand used it while planning for the capture of Granada and for the Inquisition.



Córdoba
Alcázar

The gardens outside the main castle walls occupy about 55,000 m² / 14 acres.



Córdoba
Alcázar

Despite originating in the Christian era these gardens are typically Moorish in design.



Córdoba
Alcázar

The gardens feature ponds, fountains, and aromatic plants.



Córdoba
Alcázar



Córdoba
Alcázar

The Alcázar gardens were an unexpected delight ...



Córdoba
Alcázar

... and a pleasant and relaxing way to finish my visit to Córdoba.



Seville

Seville is situated on the plain of the River Guadalquivir. Although it is 80 km / 50 miles from the Atlantic, the river is navigable all the way to Seville.



Seville

Seville harbour is the only river port in Spain, and this gave the city great economic advantage at various times in the past.



Seville

The Torre del Oro (Tower of Gold) was built by the Moors in the 13th century. It was an anchor point for a chain to block passage up the river.



**Seville
Alcázar**

The Reales Alcázares de Sevilla, Seville's royal palace, was originally a Moorish fort.



Seville
Alcázar

In 1364 Spanish King Pedro I ordered the construction of a royal residence within the palaces which had been built by Moorish rulers in the 12th century.



Seville
Alcázar

Although commissioned by a Catholic monarch, the palace is one of the best remaining examples of mudéjar architecture. It was built by craftsmen from Granada and Toledo.



Seville
Alcázar

The facade of the palace of King Pedro I



Seville
Alcázar

Mudéjar architecture



Seville
Alcázar

Patio of the Maidens



Seville
Alcázar

Patio of the Maidens



Seville
Alcázar

The Alcázar's large gardens were added in later centuries to provide a refuge from the heat and bustle of Seville.



Seville
Alcázar

Alcázar gardens



**Seville
Alcázar**

In 1503 Isabella and Ferdinand added the Casa de Contratación (House of Trade) annex to personally regulate trade with the New World colonies from Seville.



Seville
Alcázar

The royal monopoly required all New World shipping to pass through Seville. Treasures like the gold and silver from the Incas ushered in Seville's Golden Age.



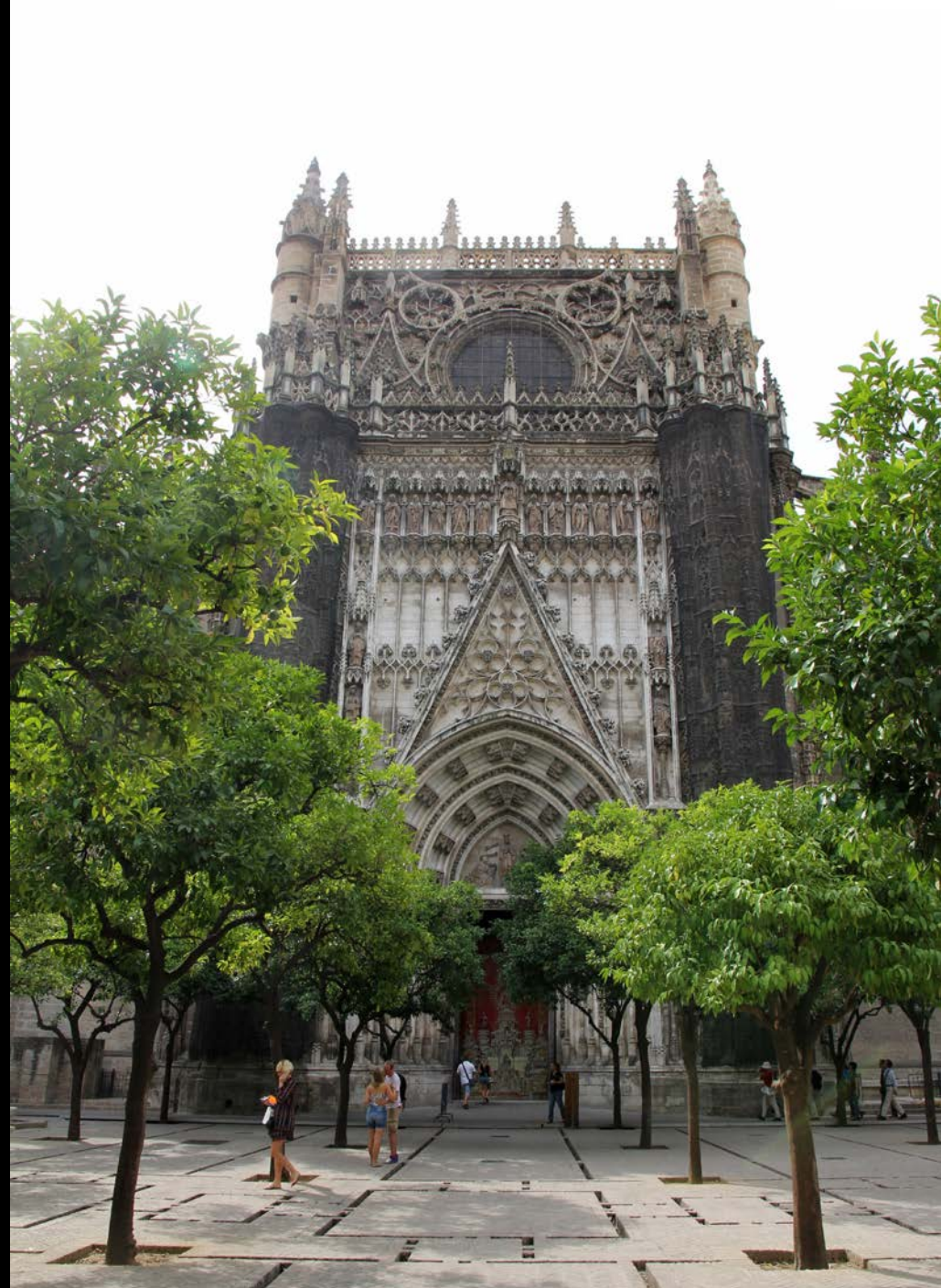
**Seville
Cathedral**

The Cathedral of Seville is an expression in stone of post-Reconquest confidence and wealth. Work began in 1402 and continued for centuries.



**Seville
Cathedral**

It is the third-largest church and the largest Gothic building in Europe. It also boasts the largest altarpiece in the world.



**Seville
Cathedral**

Apparently the members of the cathedral chapter said "Let us build a church so beautiful and so great that those who see it will think we were mad."



**Seville
Cathedral**

The Cathedral was built on the site of a mosque. Only the courtyard and a modified form of the minaret were retained.



**Seville
Cathedral**

The exterior exhibits traces of Moorish influences.
The crowds come to see the treasures in the interior, which do not.



Seville
Cathedral

The Tomb of Christopher Columbus. Columbus was originally buried in Havana, but Spain transferred his remains to Seville in 1902.



**Seville
Cathedral**

Seville Cathedral is also known as the
Cathedral of Saint Mary of the See.



Seville
Cathedral

Chapel of the Grand Conception



Seville
Cathedral

Sacristia Mayor



**Seville
Cathedral**

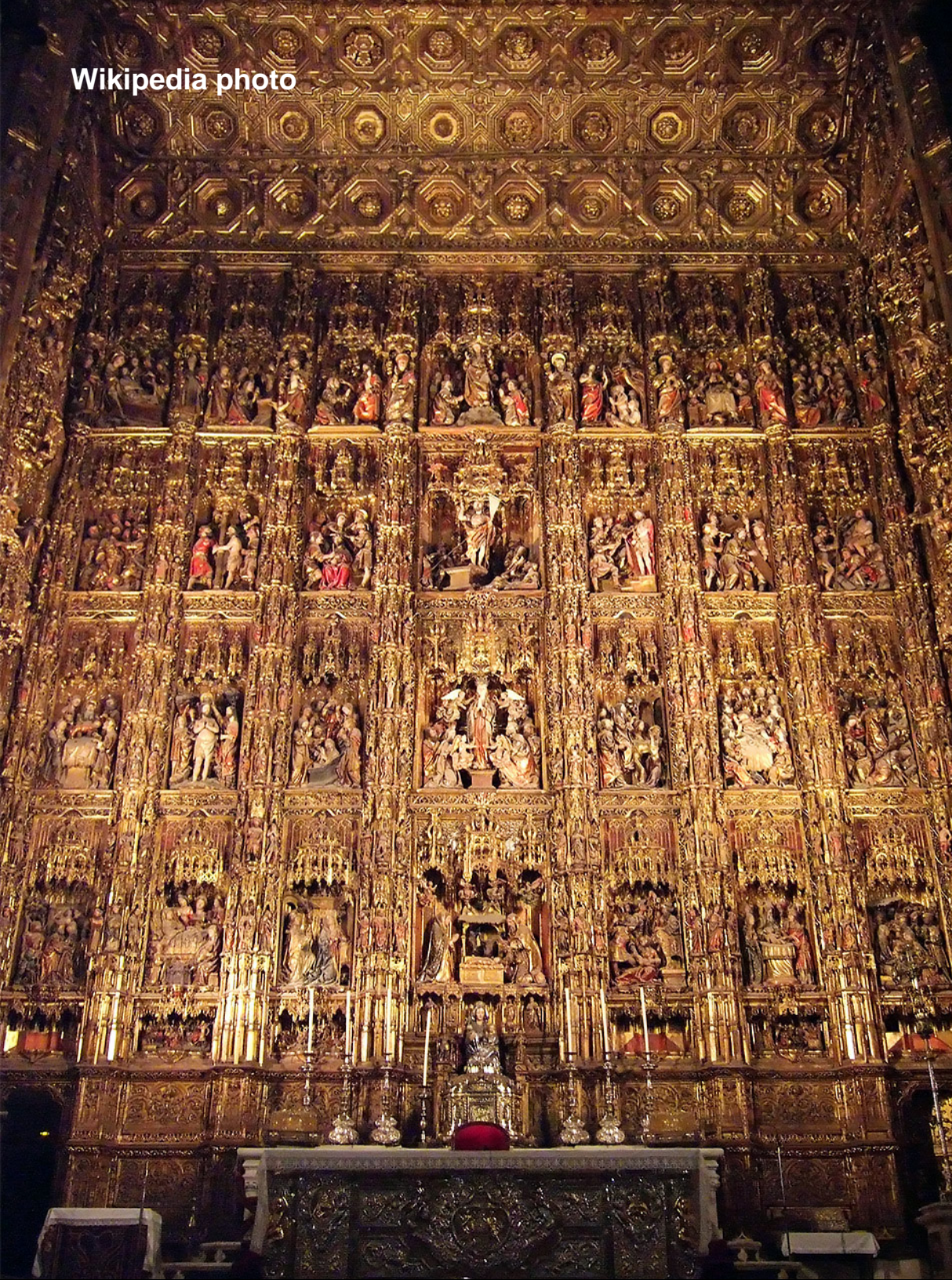
**Seville Cathedral's 16th century Custodia de Corpus by
Juan de Arfe (left) and other treasures in the Sacristy**



Seville
Cathedral

Monstrance for Holy Week

Wikipedia photo



Seville Cathedral

The main altarpiece, the Cathedral's main claim to fame, is being restored and is all covered up.

It consists of 45 carved scenes from the life of Christ.

It was the life's work of single craftsman, Fleming Pieter Dancart.

It is carved in wood and covered in gold.

It is the largest and richest altarpiece in the world.



**Plaza de
España**

**You've seen this before, with your friend Luke Skywalker.
Plaza de España was used as a location for Star Wars Episodes I and II.**



**Plaza de
España**

This massive semi-circular building was constructed for the 1929 Ibero-American Exposition hosted by Seville.



**Plaza de
España**

The bridges over the moat represent
the four ancient kingdoms of Spain.



**Plaza de
España**

The architecture is described as a mix of
Art Deco and Renaissance / neo Moorish.



**Plaza de
España**

Tall towers mark the north and south ends of the building, which now houses government offices.



**Plaza de
España**

Along the wall by the canal are 48 alcoves with painted ceramic murals and benches, one for each province of Spain.



**Plaza de
España**

A delightful finish to my visit to Seville.



Segovia

**Back in central Spain. Segovia is 90 km / 50 miles north of Madrid.
The land here can support raising cattle.**



Segovia

Back to Roman times. Segovia's aqueduct was built at the end of the 1st century AD and remained in use until the late 1800s.



Segovia

The aqueduct is built of unmortared brick-like granite blocks.
There are a total of 167 arches in the portion of the aqueduct in the city.



Segovia

The aqueduct brought water from a mountain river 17 km / 11 miles from the city.



Segovia

Segovia's Alcázar occupies the site of Roman and Arab fortifications. It was built in stages mostly from the 12th through 16th centuries.



Segovia

Segovia Cathedral was built between 1525 and 1577 and was the last great Gothic cathedral to be built in Spain.



Ávila

The centre of Ávila, 65 km / 40 miles west of Segovia, is encircled by the finest-preserved medieval walls in Europe.



Ávila

The 11th and 12th century walls are 2.5 km / 1.5 miles long, punctuated by 88 semi-circular towers.



Ávila

The walls average 3 m / 10 feet wide and 12 m / 40 feet high.
The fortifications are the most complete in Spain.



Ávila

Santa Teresa Gate, one of nine



Ávila

View from Santa Teresa Gate



Madrid

Madrid doesn't have a big Roman or even medieval history. When King Philip II chose Madrid as his capital in 1561 it had just 20,000 inhabitants.



Old Madrid

Some of Madrid's most historic secular buildings are located around Plaza de la Villa.



Old Madrid

The Casa de los Lujanes on Plaza de le Villa, with its Gothic portal and Mudéjar-style horseshoe arches dates from the 15th century.



Plaza Mayor

Plaza Mayor, at the heart of Old Madrid, was started in 1617 and built in just two years, replacing slum houses.



Plaza Mayor

The most prominent building on the square is the Casa de la Panaderia, built as the seat of the powerful bakers' guild.



Plaza Mayor

The equestrian statue at the centre of the Plaza is of Philip III, who ordered the square's construction.



Plaza Mayor

Bullfights, pageants, and trials and executions by the Inquisition were all held here, watched by crowds, often in the presence of the reigning king and queen.



Plaza Mayor

Balconies gave the monarchs good views of the festivities.



Royal Palace

Madrid's vast and lavish Royal Palace was built to impress. After a fire in 1734 King Philip V commissioned a truly palatial replacement.



Royal Palace

The Palace has 135,000 m² / 1,450,000 sq ft of floor space and contains 3,418 rooms. It is the largest palace in Europe by floor area.



Royal Palace

The interior of the Palace is notable for its wealth of art and the fine construction and decoration of its rooms. Interior photography is not permitted.



Royal Palace

The memorial to King Philip IV which faces the Royal Palace in the Plaza de Oriente was sculpted between 1634 and 1640.



Puerta del Sol The Puerta del Sol (Gate of the Sun) is a late 19th century semi-circular plaza which competes with Plaza Mayor as the focus of Old Madrid.



Puerta del Sol This building has housed the city's post office, Spain's Ministry of the Interior, and police cells during the Franco regime. It is now home to regional government.



Puerta del Sol The equestrian statue on this plaza is of King Charles III who inaugurated many public works programs in Madrid.



Puerta del Sol All roads lead to and from Madrid. Puerta del Sol is Kilometre / Mile Zero. This stone marks the centre of Spain's radial transportation systems.



**Bourbon
Madrid**

The French Bourbon monarchs ruling Spain in the 18th century expanded Madrid to the east and set about embellishing the city.



**Bourbon
Madrid**

The Puerta de Alcalá was constructed between 1769 and 1778.
Until the mid-19th century it marked Madrid's easternmost boundary.



**Bourbon
Madrid**

The Palacio de Comunicaciones, originally headquarters of the postal service, was added to Plaza de Cibeles between 1905 and 1917.



**Bourbon
Madrid**

The fountain in Plaza de Cibeles depicts Cybele, the Greco-Roman goddess of nature, sitting in her lion-drawn chariot. It was sculpted between 1777 and 1782.



**Bourbon
Madrid**

The Paseo del Prado, one of Madrid's main boulevards, runs south from Plaza de Cibeles and is the location of some of the city's most important cultural institutions.



**Bourbon
Madrid**

The Prado Museum is on Paseo del Prado, but I don't have time to begin to explore its vast collection of art treasures.



**Sofia
Museum**

But I do want to visit the Reina Sofia Museum to see Picasso's war protest painting, *Guernica*, perhaps the most famous single work of art of the 20th century.



Guernica

Oil on canvas, 7.8 x 3.5 m / 25.5 x 11.5 ft

PABLO PICASSO

1937

© Sucesion Pablo Picasso

Interpretative detail at:
[Wikipedia | Guernica](#)

**Sofia
Museum**

Picasso was outraged by the devastating bombing of the Basque town of Guernica by German warplanes flying in support of Spanish Nationalist forces in April 1937.



Retiro Park

Retiro Park is a large (1.4 km² / 350 acre) park created as a private retreat by the king in 1632 and opened to the public in 1869.



Retiro Park

It is entirely surrounded by present-day Madrid, and a popular destination for families on weekends.



Retiro Park

The park is filled with sculptures, monuments, galleries, and a large artificial lake where you can rent row boats.



Retiro Park

Even a lake has to have an equestrian statue.
This is a monument to King Alfonso XII (1857 – 1885).



Gran Via

The Gran Vía, a main artery of modern Madrid, was built between 1904 and 1929. The project required demolishing many buildings in the centre of the city.



Gran Via

The new road created opportunities for architects to create a showcase of 20th century architecture. The Edificio Metrópolis on the corner is most famous.



Gran Via

Gran Via is called the Spanish Broadway, and it is said that it never sleeps. But I have to catch some rest because tomorrow I head home.

< End >



Spain