



The Real Alcazar royal palace

An Andalusian Adventure

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Spring is the perfect time to take a weekend break. Laura Paterson finds out why the Spanish city of Seville, which has also been the cinematic backdrop to plenty of films, is worth squeezing into your travels.

Having taken six attempts to pass my driving test, letting me loose on a Segway near main roads in a European city is perhaps ill-advised. But speeding around on two wheels proves to be a novel way to see the sights in the Andalusian capital Seville, in the south of Spain.

Our tour starts in the lush Maria Luisa Park, and after getting to grips with balance, thanks to some patient teaching from the instructors, our group is zipping around the Plaza de Espana on the futuristic devices.

The landmark is no stranger to space-age visitors, having featured in Star Wars: Episode II – Attack of the Clones, in a scene when Anakin and Padme arrive on the planet Naboo. In fact, many of the city's historic landmarks pop up in films, with the five-star Alfonso XIII Hotel – which counts royals including Princess Diana amongst its former guests – appearing in 1962 epic Lawrence Of Arabia, and hit Netflix series The Crown.

Elsewhere, the orange groves, peaceful pools and idyllic gardens of the Real Alcazar double up as the Kingdom of Dorne in Game Of Thrones. Home to the royal family since the 10th Century, this World Heritage Site was partially built by a Christian king at a time of harmony among Christian, Jewish and Muslim people; quotations from the Koran mix with Christian symbols in the beautiful mosaics.



As we head across the Guadalquivir River to Triana – proudly known to some residents as the Independent Republic of Triana – I hit the heady Segway heights of 18kmph.

Originally a working-class neighbourhood packed with ceramic factories, it has become fashionable in recent years, but has a dark past as the headquarters of the Spanish Inquisition.

Our Segway tour ends near the Plaza Nueva, a palm-shaded square filled with the scent of jasmine. It's almost in sight of Seville Cathedral, the third largest church in the world and home to a tomb of Christopher Columbus, containing just 150g of his body. Even more bizarre is a wooden crocodile hanging outside the cathedral; it's a replica of the live animal sent by an Egyptian sultan in a bid to woo a princess in the 13th century.

After failing to win her heart, it was strung up after living out its days in the palace. We finish our journey at the city hall, where a meeting with the mayor reveals that another Hollywood actor may currently be filming in town.

Sadly, I fail to set eyes on Javier Bardem, but I've already clocked up enough A-list sights to fill more than just one blockbuster.

Where to eat?

La Quinta

It's probably worth visiting Seville just to eat here. Based in an Andalusian mansion house, the restaurant offers modern twists on local specialities, with highlights including croquettes filled with local cheese, Iberico ham and prawns, and Iberico pork cheeks slow-cooked and served with a rich and sweet Pedro Ximenez sherry glaze.

Mains from €10.50 (£9); glass of wine from €3 (£2.50). Visit grupopanot.com

Tapas bar La Azotea

Buzzy but relaxed, this modern restaurant has a mix of tapas and larger dishes, all with an emphasis on fresh produce; fish are shown to diners for approval before cooking. Go for the Spanish tomatoes with tuna belly, then a dessert made from local oranges.

Tapas from €4 (£3.50); beer from €1.60 (£1.40). Visit laazoteasevilla.com/en/

Where to stay?

Hotel Inglaterra

On the edge of the Plaza Nueva in the heart of the old city, this hotel is minutes from key sights, including the palace and cathedral – which can be seen from the upmarket roof terrace. Built in 1857, the design is opulent and traditional, with mirrors, dark wood and swathes of marble offsetting the pale blue and yellow decor. Double rooms from £78 on a bed and breakfast basis. Visit hotelinglaterra.es/en/

What to do?

Take a selfie at Las Setas.

The world's largest wooden structure is a futuristic vision among the shops and cafés of Seville city centre. It's officially known as Metropol Parasol, but most people refer to it fondly as Las Setas (the mushrooms). Walking on top of the 28.5m-high sculpture offers great views while below, the Antiquarium archaeological museum tells the city's history.

Las Setas entry €3 (£2.50); Antiquarium entry €2 (£1.70). Visit setasdesevilla.com and antiquarium.icas-sevilla.org

Feel impassioned by a flamenco show.

Shaped by various cultures passing through Andalusia over the past 3,000 years, and used to commemorate persecution of minorities, flamenco is the heart and soul of Seville. Castanets came from the ancient Phoenicians, guitars were brought over from the Middle East, and hand gestures owe their origin to the Roma gypsies making their centuries-long journey from India to Europe. Learning the complex steps and hand movements reputedly takes 10,000 hours to master, so those hoping to appear on Strictly after one lesson can think again. Instead, go to a show. Museo del Baile Flamenco, the world's only flamenco museum, has a nightly performance.

Adult ticket to the museum and show, €26. Visit museodelbaileflamenco.com/en/

Zoom around the sights on a Segway

Segways are permitted on Seville's many cycle lanes, making them an ideal means of zipping about and covering more ground than you would on foot. Cyclotour guides will whisk you around the main sites, stopping regularly to give a local perspective on the city.

Segway tours (30 min) from €17 (£14.50).