

# Aficionado

Luxury lifestyle magazine for men – Middle East – Issue 8

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# SIGHTSEEING IN SEVILLE

*Aficionado goes in search of a luxury escape and discovers an architect's paradise along the way...*

BY VINEETHA MENON

**T**here are no direct flights to Seville from the Middle East, but that's a good thing. You couldn't ask for a better introduction to the Andalusian capital than by catching the train from bustling Madrid and watching scenes of rolling hills, fields and small towns play out before you like a photo flipbook.

Seville is so much more than flamenco, bitter oranges and bullfights. The city manages to layer old-world charm with genuine hospitality and some of the best architecture you could hope to explore, from elaborate Moorish and Renaissance buildings to grand Baroque examples. To explore Seville, head out on foot.

**Explore.** Start with the **Seville Cathedral**, which was founded in 1403 on the site of a former mosque after the Reconquest. The UNESCO World Heritage site houses the tomb of Spanish explorer Christopher Columbus and is the largest Gothic building in the whole of Europe. What makes it interesting is the fact that it has retained some elements of the Great Mosque, such as some columns and the Giralda, a minaret that was converted into a bell tower. As expected, it's not an easy climb to the top, but you'll be rewarded with some of the best views of the city.

Further away is the **Plaza de España** that featured in the movie *Lawrence of Arabia* and, more interestingly, *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones*. Built in 1929, this massive half-circle of buildings is a beautiful example of Renaissance Revival architecture. Take your time to really explore – the walls of the Plaza sport colourful tiled alcoves, each meant to represent different provinces in Spain, and there are museums where you can indulge the historian in you. Rent a boat to row in the canal (the Plaza is known as the Venice of Seville) or cycle around the grounds – even doing nothing here feels special.



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## TRAVEL IN TIME

While in Seville, try a very unique walking tour – **Past View** ([www.pastview.es/en](http://www.pastview.es/en)) that takes in the most important sights of the city with a twist. Wearing a special pair of glasses, the technology lets you travel in time and see buildings, streets and squares as they used to be, and you'll get to meet key historical figures along the way. Historic Seville never felt so real.

For a uniquely modern attraction, visit the **Metropol Parasol**. Completed in 2011, it's said to be the largest wooden structure in the world that takes the shape of giant mushrooms, and you get a chance to walk on it for more great views of the city (with telescopes for those who want a closer look).

Save the best for last with the **Alcázar** – a palatial fortress that was built in 712 by Arabs. Following the Reconquest, it was renovated under the reign of Peter the Cruel in 1248 and remains one of the best examples of mudéjar architecture. Since its creation, it has always been the official royal residence in the city, making it the oldest Royal Palace of Europe still in use.

Built and rebuilt from the early Middle Ages right up to our times, Alcázar consists of a group of palatial buildings and extensive gardens – what stands out is the mix of cultural influences. There are areas of the original Almohad palace – such as the Patio del Yeso and the Jardines del Crucero – along with constructions reflecting every style, from neoclassical to renaissance.

**Stay.** *Aficionado* stayed at the **Gran Meliá Colon Seville** – the preferred choice of A-list celebrities and generations of bullfighters. You'll soon realise why as the five-star



luxury hotel brings together art, design and history in the old quarter of Seville, and is within walking distance of high street stores and the city's most important monuments, including the Cathedral. What's unique about the hotel is that each floor is dedicated to a different Spanish artist and every door represents one of their paintings, so you'll find exquisite reproductions from Valdés and Murillo as well as Velázquez and Goya, giving you the impression you're walking down the corridors of a museum rather than a hotel.

Book the spacious Penthouse Suite where you'll be welcomed by Francisco de Goya's most iconic paintings, *Dressed Maja*, at the door. The suite, aside from boasting all of the best modern luxury trappings, also offers 360-degree views of Seville from your private terrace, which comes complete with a whirlpool pool.

Another exceptional classic luxury hotel worth considering is the **Hotel Alfonso XIII**, just minutes from the Plaza de España, that has a grand selection of decorative suites.

**Dine.** On to the glorious food – favourites such as cold gazpacho soup and spicy chorizo sausage are always in demand but, if you're feeling more adventurous, visit the many inns and restaurants tucked away in alleys to sample the many delicious 'house' specials.



For a more elegant Spanish dining experience, you can't go wrong with **Burladero** at the Gran Melia Colon for traditional Andalusian cuisine with a contemporary touch or the **Taberna del Alabardero**, close to the Cathedral, which is the preferred choice of royalty and politicians, or the stylish **Egaña Oriza** at Murillo Gardens that serves up seasonal specialities with flair.

**Experience.** Try the hammams and Baños Arabes (Arab baths) around town if you get the chance. The **Aire de Sevilla** in Santa Cruz, housed in a 16th century mansion, is famous for its luxurious treatments.

Whether you believe bullfighting is a cultural tradition worth preserving or not, there's no escaping it in Seville – people here are among its most passionate supporters. Witness the action at **Plaza de toros de la Real Maestranza de Caballería de Sevilla**, the oldest bullring in Seville. Also, make sure you catch

a flamenco show while here – **Los Gallos** is one of the city's oldest *tablaos* and remains family owned and operated.

Thrill-seekers won't be disappointed as **Skydive Spain** has a dropzone close to Seville, where you'll experience freefall from 15,000 feet. A number of tour operators will also arrange a host of water sports such as sailing or kayaking at the Guadalquivir river, but if you're looking for something a little more relaxing, we recommend teeing off at the **Real Club de Golf de Sevilla**, a grand 18-hole golf course designed by José María Olazábal.

Take a moment to relish it all because, all too soon, it will be time to leave. Seville may be just one of many European destinations that charm, but it will always stand out for its fusion of cultures and styles – you might have seen it all and done it all, but never in a city quite as unique as this. ■

