

TODAY'S NEWS

By Anne Greeno

Spain and Gibraltar

In May, 2018, Wendy Dunham escorted a group of Maritimers to Spain and Gibraltar. Throughout this 12 day adventure, we visited cities and coastal towns steeped in history and local customs. The visit to the Rock of Gibraltar was a special highlight for me as my father flew into this British colony in the 1970's as part of his duties with the Royal Canadian Air Force.

Architectural Highlights

Europe is known for its very old castles, churches and fortresses. In Spain, the architecture is greatly influenced by its neighbouring Arabic and African countries. For example, synagogues are as popular as churches. The local tours we took highlighted how the many cultures lived together in peace, although not necessarily as one group.



Travel Itinerary

Travelling by coach, we journeyed 3,000 kilometers, starting in the capital city of Madrid, then onto Toledo, Cordoba, Seville, Costa del Sol, Gibraltar, Mijas, Granada, Gaudix, Valencia, Peniscola, and ending in beautiful Barcelona. There were no "favorite" cities or towns as each offered something unique, such as viewing a special painting by El Greco, or travelling by donkey taxi through a hilltop town or visiting the ruined palace of Alhambra. But top on the list were the monkeys of Gibraltar!

In case you were wondering, bull fighting is still carried on legally in Spain and is seen as a form of art or as a cultural event.



Welcome Dinner in Madrid

Zahara de Osborne



Wendy and our Trafalgar Tour Director, Zach McCarthy, hosted a welcome dinner for the group. Zahara de Osborne, located on the Plaza de Santa Ana in the middle of Madrid, prepared delicious Spanish cuisine that included their specialty tapas, soups, main courses and several desserts.



The entire **staff** welcomed our group and treated us as family. As seen in these pictures, they literally smiled through the whole evening.



Shown here is Wendy with the restaurant manager. He was an excellent host to our Maritime group.

Zeharas is a true Spanish restaurant that serves meals sourced from local and fresh ingredients.

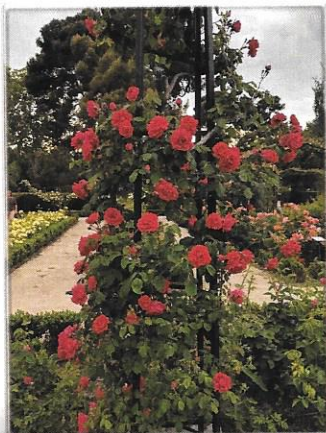
Many **members of our group** have travelled together over the past number of years. Others we met for the first time on this trip. We spent a great evening getting to know one another and had lots of fun reliving old memories and making new ones. As always on these trips, tons of food, wine and laughter.



Madrid

There are many places within Madrid that define the city. It is home to parks and gardens, churches and palaces, art and cultural centres as well as interesting architectural designed plazas and squares.

Parque De El Retiro



Created in the 17th century during the reign of Philip IV, the park is home to one of the world's most beautiful green urban spaces. We visited at the perfect time as the rose garden was in full bloom. Beauty at its best.

The Crystal Palace was built in 1887 and is made of glass set within an iron framework. It is a venue for art exhibits and cultural displays. The pond in front has a beautiful fountain and is home to many swans, ducks and geese.



Plaza Mayor

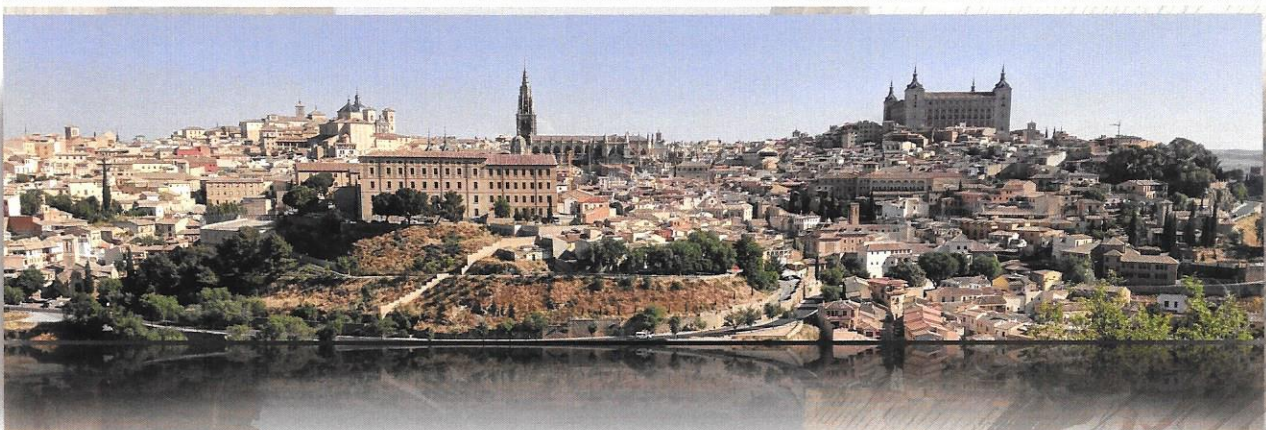
Originally a medieval square of El Arrabal, the space was renovated in 1617 under the direction of Philip III and renamed Plaza Mayor. Its purpose is to accommodate public displays and it hosts many restaurants. The plaza is accessed through three arches, nine gateways and open-air passages. The equestrian statue of Philip III in the middle of the square showcases the Case de la Panaderia structure, also known as the Baker's Guild building.



Almudena Cathedral

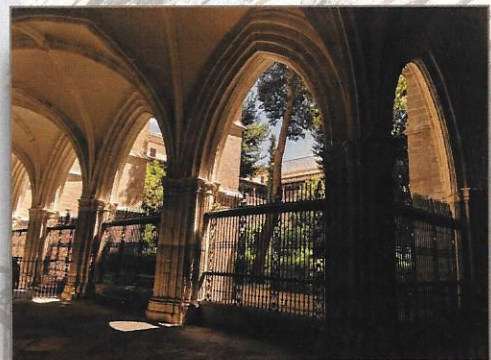
Located on the original site of Madrid's first mosque, the Almudena Cathedral was built starting in 1879 and named after one of Madrid's patron saints, Santa María de la Almudena. It was only completed in 1993. It has a Baroque exterior, with the interior being a Neo-Gothic style with chapels and statues of contemporary artists in heterogeneous styles from historical revivals to "pop-art" decor. It is located adjacent to the Royal Palace, south facing to the Plaza de Armasto.

Toledo



Toledo is steeped in history dating back to 59 BC and is known as the “Imperial City” for two reasons: first, it was the court of Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor; and, second, it was home to several religions, including Christians, Muslims and Jews.

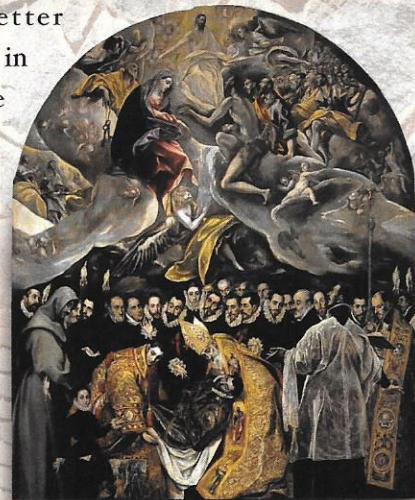
When walking along the cobblestone streets, you couldn't help but notice the beauty within each district. Along with beautiful stone churches and synagogues, there were quaint restaurants, shops, bars and museums. Amongst the tourists like us, local people strolled along with their purchases, stopping to talk with shopkeepers, friends and neighbors. Toledo has that small town feel. I found several small nooks and crannies, some that led to quiet interior church courtyards open to those wishing to sit, relax and enjoy the calmness.



The Burial of the Count of Orgaz

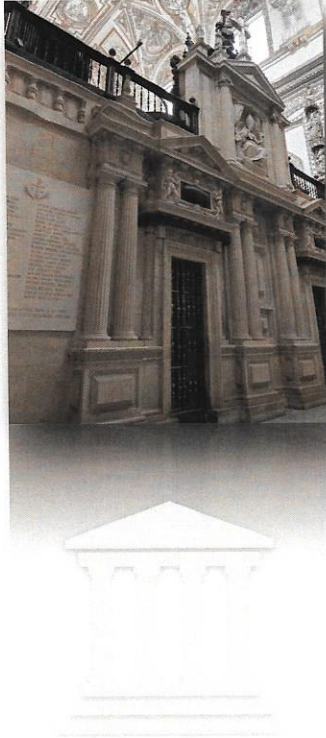


Doménikos Theotokópoulos, better known as El Greco, was born in 1541 in what is now modern day Crete. He moved to Toledo in 1577 to gain employment as an artist to Philip II of Spain. El Greco produced many famous paintings, including The Burial of the Count of Orgaz. Photography is not permitted in the church. This photo is borrowed with my thanks from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/EL_Greco.



The Mosque-Cathedral of Cordoba

A UNESCO World Heritage Site

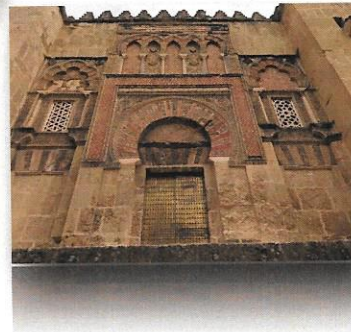


This magnificent collection of buildings dates back to the mid 6th century when the Christian Visigoth Basilica of San Vicente, Cordoba's main Christian temple, was created. In 786, Muslims created the Mosque of Abd al-Rahman I, making this a sacred place shared by two separate faiths.

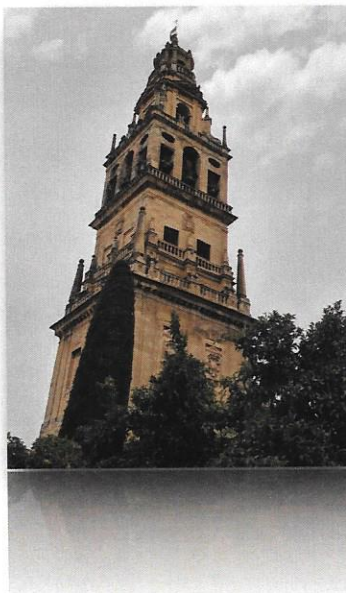
The picture to the left is the Christian temple within the walls of the mosque. This is a very unique feature not often seen in holy places.



The entrance to the sacred grounds are of Islamic architecture. Because of transformations done throughout history to this day, you will notice Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine influences.

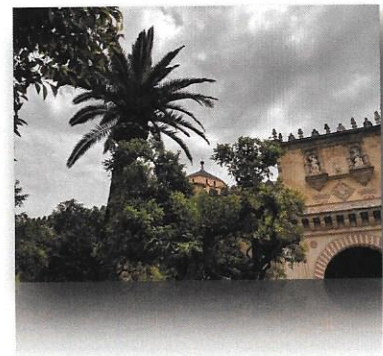


The Mosque's Minaret

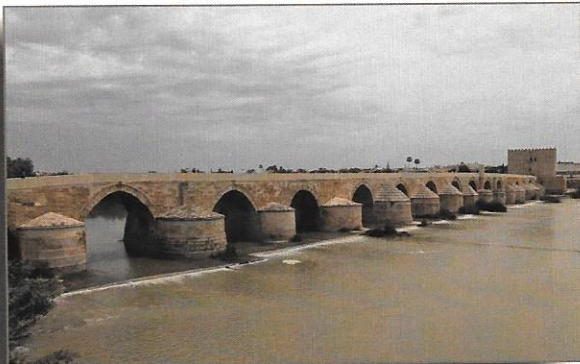


A minaret is a structure in a mosque similar to a tower in a church. Abd al-Rahman III built the original minaret at the mosque in 951. The current structure is the Torre del Alminar Baroque belfry and is built around the original minaret. It is 40 metres tall, with 14 windows on four sides. It has two inside staircases; one for going up, one for coming down.

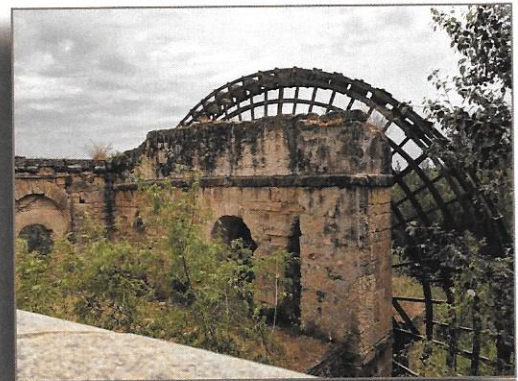
Palm and fruit trees line the courtyard beside the minaret, planted to remind people of their homelands in the Middle East. The mosque was a pilgrimage site for Muslims because it housed an original copy of the Koran and an arm bone of the prophet Muhammad.



The Town of Cordoba



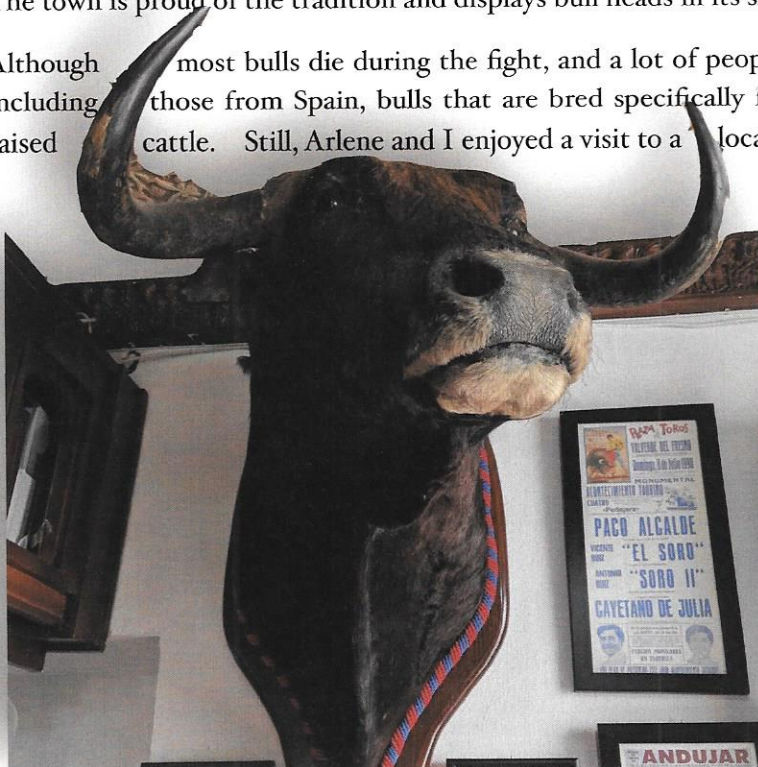
Pulling into Cordoba felt like stepping back in time. The roads leading into the mosque were lined with very old bridges, buildings and water wheels. In fact, this town is so old that remnants of the Neanderthal man from 42,000 to 35,000 BC were found here. However, most of its history dates to the Roman times of Julius Caesar in and around 45-46 BC.



Bullfighting

Cordoba has a large bullfighting presence, an age old tradition that is part of Spain's heritage and culture. The town is proud of the tradition and displays bull heads in its shops, bars and restaurants.

Although most bulls die during the fight, and a lot of people around the world oppose bullfighting, including those from Spain, bulls that are bred specifically for fighting are treated better than farm raised cattle. Still, Arlene and I enjoyed a visit to a local pub and took in the cultural flare.



Seville - El Rinconcillo

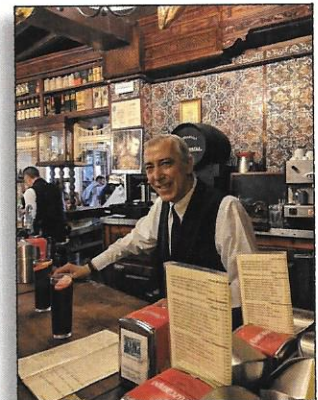


Zach took us to El Rinconcillo for dinner. Dating back to 1670, El Rinconcillo is Seville's most ancient bar. Thankfully, Zach had a reservation for us.

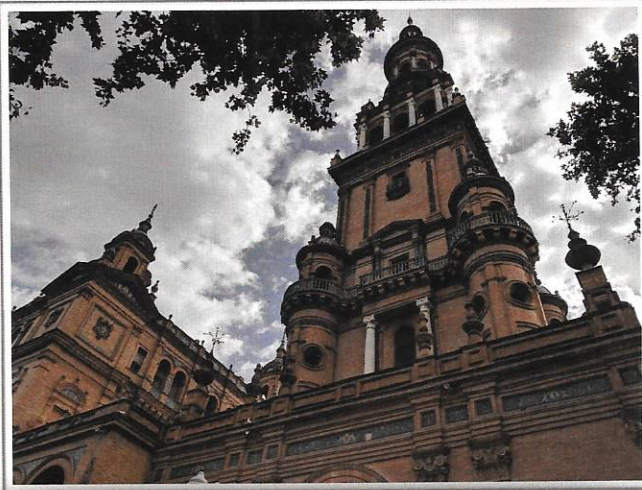
The bar and upstairs restaurant are comprised of two original buildings, one from the corner of Gerona Street and the other on Alhóndiga Street.



The interior of the building still has most of its original Andalusian decorations. A mahogany bar is the centre point of the tavern area. Notice the ceramic tiles on the walls that are from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries.



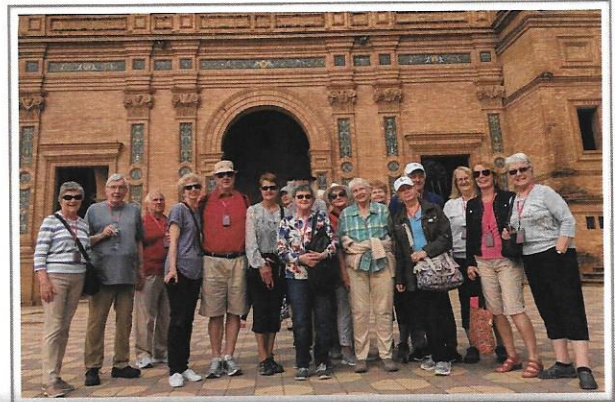
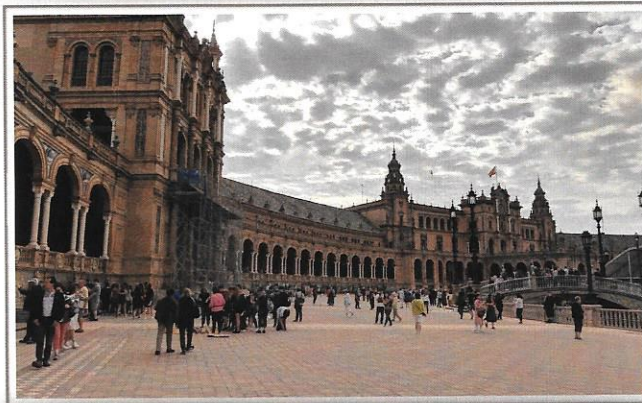
Seville



Plaza de España

Located in the Parque de María, the Plaza de España was built in 1928 for the Ibero-American Exposition of 1929. Many other countries also created buildings for the exhibition, however, none were as ornate as this one.

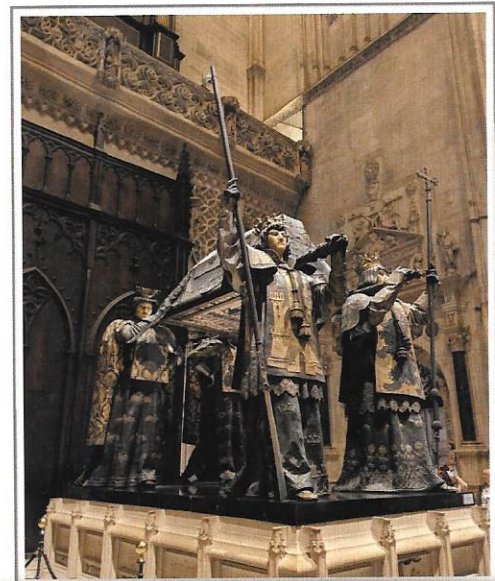
The architecture of the Plaza is a mix of Renaissance and Moorish Revivals. All along the curved wall are titled alcoves, each representing a different province of Spain.



Seville Cathedral - UNESCO World Heritage Site

The Cathedral was built starting in 1400 on grounds where once stood an Almohad mosque, demolished by the Spanish to make way for their church that would better reflect the city's rich trading centre.

Christopher Columbus and his son, Diego, are said to be buried in the Cathedral. Here is an ornate statue of four guards with Christopher's tomb hoisted onto their shoulders. Even if he's not buried here, it still is a truly spectacular piece of art depicting the significance of his life and the dedication and sacrifices he made for his country, Spain.



The Streets of Seville



The Food of Spain

Spain is known for their food and wine, rightfully so. Trafalgar includes many meals in the daily itineraries so we were always eating local and fresh seafood, pork, chicken and beef dishes. Lunches were on our own, and we found many great places to eat, including little pub style venues with outdoor tables.



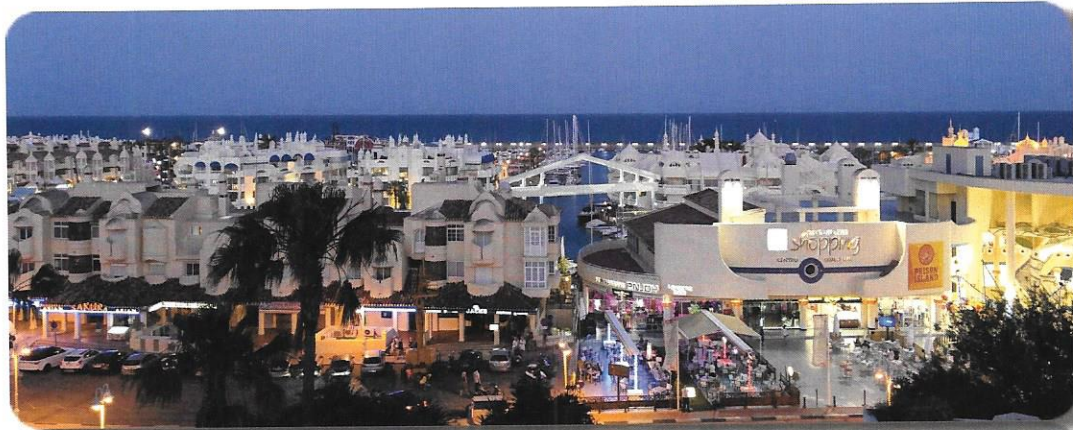
Frank Meets a New Friend

Forever the conversationalist, Frank had to stop and say hello to a new friend. Although this caballo has a job providing transportation to tourists, he took a few minutes out of his day to listen to Frank's stories, even though he doesn't understand English.

But wait, maybe this is the "guy" who gave Frank Spanish lessons.



Costa del Sol



We spent a great day travelling through the Andalusian countryside before reaching the beautiful seaside region of Costa del Sol. Known now as one of the most expensive tourist resort areas in Europe, it was originally an area of trade, mostly in wine and raisins.

The region was a prosperous commercial and industrial centre for most of the 19th century, before experiencing severe economic problems in the 1880's and 1890's. This is when tourism took over as a way to generate funds to get through the current economic crises.



Moving along to 1960's, the world caught onto the region's year-round warm climate and its beautiful beaches. Hotels and apartments were built and the nearby Malaga Airport was rebuilt to accommodate the large increase in charter flights. It was now a top destination of people from northern Europe, especially the UK. It became known as "Costa del Crime" because British criminals would escape justice at home by moving there to live their lives in luxury.



Several of us enjoyed a great evening on the boardwalk, sampling local cuisine and wine. This is how special moments are created and remembered. These ladies are all true friends for life.



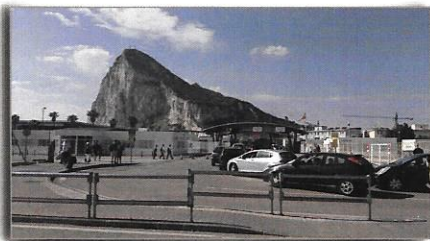
Gibraltar

Where is Gibraltar?



Gibraltar is a British overseas territory located on Spain's southern border. Everyone entering the country across the Spain-Gibraltar border has to go through Immigration and show their passports. We then saw our first British telephone booth.

Is Gibraltar an Island?



The answer is no. Gibraltar is 6.7 square kilometres of land, of which 1.2 kilometres is land bordered with Spain. Known as the Rock of Gibraltar, it is 426 meters high and is riddled with road tunnels from its past and continued military presence. My father, Ronald MacInnis, was in Gibraltar with the RCAF in the 1970's.



Crossing over into Gibraltar is a bit risky, as the connecting land with Spain is actually the Gibraltar International Airport. In Canada we wait for trains. In Gibraltar, they wait for airplanes.



Our In-Country Host

Trafalgar hires local guides that provide us with a lot of history. Our guide in Gibraltar was amazing. He toured us around for several hours, showing us the highlights of the Rock, including Europa Point overlooking Algeciras, Spain to the west and Morocco to the south; St. Michael's Cave in the upper rock area, and a driving tour of the town area, complete with olden day pictures.

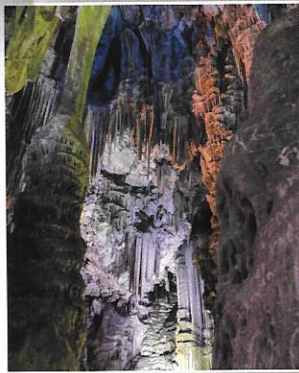


Caves and Monkeys in Gibraltar

St. Michael's Cave

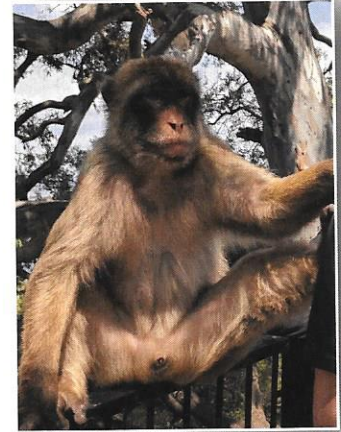
Located in the Upper Rock Nature Reserve, this network of 150 limestone caves was created by water eroding away over thousands of years, leaving beautiful stalactites and stalagmites in its many caverns.

Interesting fact: During WWII, the entire cave system was turned into a military hospital. During this repurposing in 1942, it was decided to create another entrance for ventilation and for safety reasons. During blasting, another set of caves was discovered and named the New St. Michael's Cave, sometimes referred to as Lower St. Michael's Cave.



Spain and Gibraltar

It's All About The Monkeys



The monkeys in Gibraltar are barbary macaques, with their origins from Morocco. They are protected by law and are free to roam. The population of 300, living in five troops, mostly stay in the Upper Rock Nature Reserve area.

Our group had a super time meeting the monkeys in the wild. They were sociable and enjoyed treats



of fruit and nuts. They have no fear of humans because, as Gibraltar's top tourist attraction, they see over one million visitors each year.



Mijas



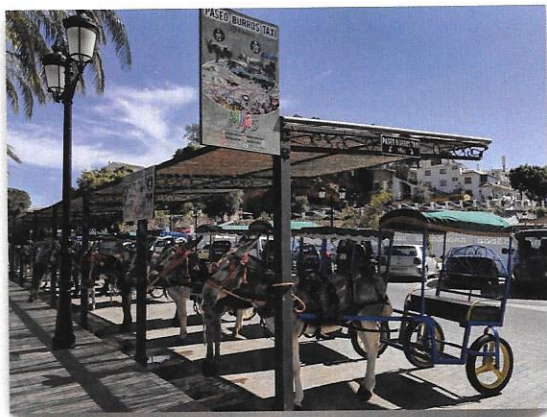
For our group, the town of Mijas was all about having fun!

This beautiful hilltop municipality is located in the Province of Malaga, an Andalusian community.

Mijas' economy used to be based on agriculture, fishing, farming, mineral extraction and grape production but these failed over the years for various reasons. With the rise of tourism in the Costa Del Sol region in the 1950's, roads were built to link remote towns such as Mijas that enabled them to offer tourists a vacation destiny.

Taxi Anyone?

Mijas' tourist mode of transportation is by donkey, not taxi. The donkey's have their own "donkey stand" and each is licensed by the municipality. See the little guy on the right? He has his permit on his forehead. So cute. We took a spin around town and enjoyed looking over the valley towards the ocean.



It's hard to believe we got it all in, but we visited both Gibraltar and Mijas on the same day. We were appreciative that we had enough time to visit the town, enjoy the donkey taxi rides and shop for a few souvenirs. Mijas is definitely a place that warrants a revisit.



Granada

Alhambra Palace

The Alhambra complex is actually a collection of palaces built over several centuries.

Originally a fortress from AD 889, it was reconstructed as a palace in 1238 by Muhammad I Al-Ahmar, founder of the Nasrid dynasty. In 1492, Isabel I of Castille and Fernando II of Aragon turned it into a Royal House and assigned it military functions.

The Alhambra was declared a National Monument in 1870, and in 1984 it received World Heritage status through the UNESCO World Heritage Committee.

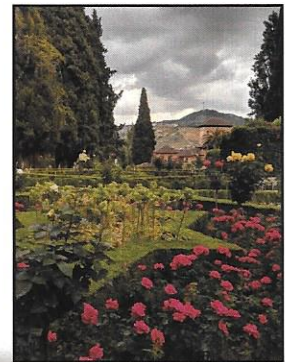
Alhambra palace is protected by a Moorish designed arched gatehouse, the **Torre de la Justicia** (Tower of Justice).



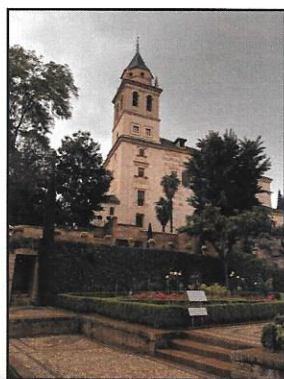
We walked through **Arms Square**, the location of remnants of the many service buildings that were needed to run the palace. The remnants are well maintained.



Before entering the main part of the complex, we stopped to enjoy the beautiful **gardens** that are reminiscent of the palace's glory days.



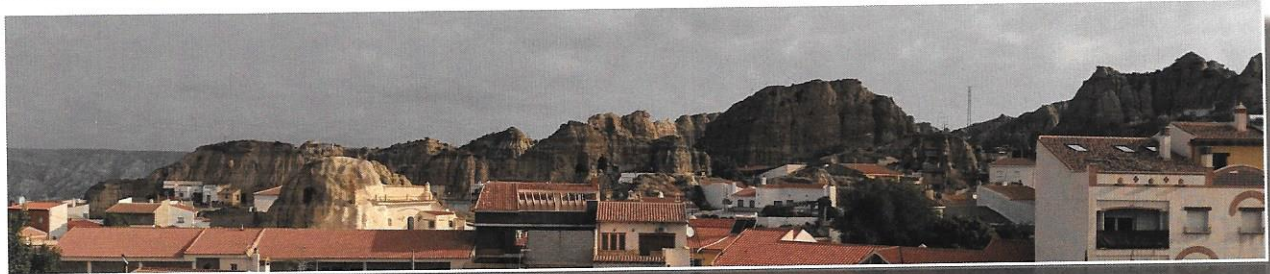
The **Palacio de Carlos V** is an interesting building. It has a two-tiered circular courtyard supported by 32 columns. It was designed by a Toledo Architect, Pedro Machuca, to symbolize the unity of heaven and earth.



The **Iglesia de Santa María de la Alhambra** was built starting in 1576. The exterior follows the Mudejar tradition of using brick, except for the base which was made of stone. All facades remain undecorated, with only the royal and episcopal crests put on the main facade and the tower's steeple. There are beautiful gardens, statues and fountains located on the grounds adjacent to the church.



Guadix



Guadix is a very unique town. It has cave houses! These dwellings are called troglodytes and many have been there for centuries. In the picture above, you can see caves in the hills. In addition to houses, churches, government buildings, restaurants and hotels are also underground.

Cave homes in this Andalusia region are man-made. They were carved out of hard clay and earth where rock formed from sediments of a prehistoric sea.



We visited a local family's home to see and feel what it was like to live underground. The temperature stays consistent year-round, around 18 degrees Celsius, providing cooling in the summer and maintaining heat in the winter.

There are three caves to this home. The first cave is where the family currently lives. The second one is much older and is decorated with period furniture. The third cave is now a museum. It is located high up inside the mountain. They have many items on display, including dishes, tools, furniture and clothing, some items dating back 600 years.



Valencia



Valencia dates back to the Roman era of 138 BC. In 714 it was occupied by Moroccan and Arab Moors, then starting in 1238 by Christian Spaniards. All of these nationalities brought their traditions and cultures, still evident today in various types of architectures, festivals and celebrations.



Bullfighting

Unlike other regions of Spain, Valencia still hosts bullfighting competitions. They are held in March, May, July and October coinciding with the festivities of Fallas, the 'Virgen de los Desamparados', 'San Jaime' and the Day of the Valencian Community.

Valencia's bullfighting ring, Plaza de Toros, was built in 1861, based upon the same structure as Rome's Colosseum. When not being used for bullfighting, it is used for concerts and circuses.



Paella

Our group was treated to a Trafalgar regional meal at **El Coso del Mar** restaurant where, once again, there was an over abundance of delicious food. Spain's traditional dish is paella and we ate plenty of it. So good!

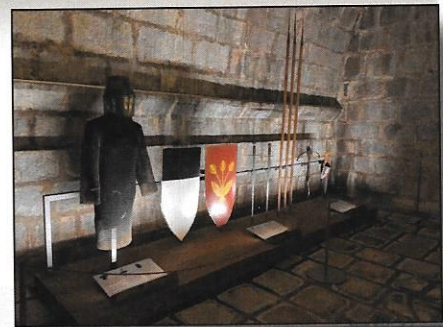


Castillo de Peniscola

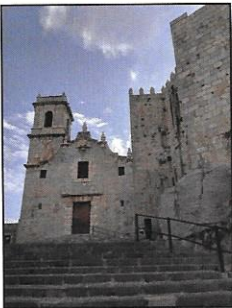


The Templars

The Castillo de Peniscola was both a fortress and a monastery. It is here that the **knights of the Order of the Temple** resided from 1294 to 1307. They were the strongest Christian military force and had the most diversified economic power on the Mediterranean. After this period, the templars “disappeared” and became a legend.



Papa Luna's Castle

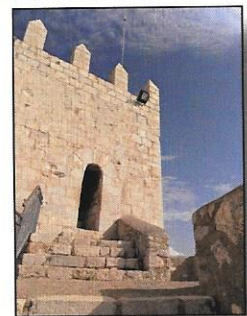


In 1411, Pope Benedict XIII, known as **Papa Luna**, announced he was making the castle his pontifical seat. In the Catholic world, he was not accepted as a pope and spent the next 12 years defending his rights. He died in isolation at the castle.

While living at the castle, Papa Luna wrote about his life, leading to his best work, “The Book of Consolations of Human Life”.

Artillery Park and Fortifications

The castle sits on an enormous rock that overlooks the Mediterranean. It is protected by tall walls and towers, along with five batteries. The latest expansion took place in the 16th century under the reign of Charles I and Philip II.



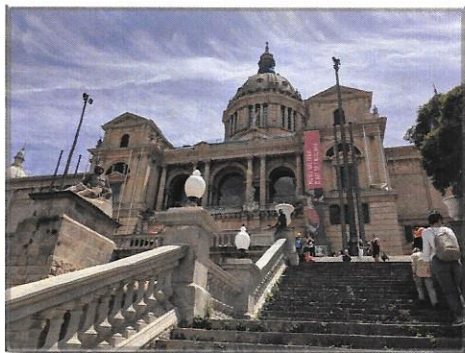
Barcelona

We arrived in Barcelona to spend two nights before heading home. Our Trafalgar guide took us through many of the city's districts and brought us to several of Barcelona's most famous sights.

The **Sagrada Familia** is a UNESCO World Heritage Site in the district of Catalan, designed by the famous Architect, Antoni Gaudí. Construction of the basilica started in 1882, however, it is not yet complete. The newly announced anticipated completion date is now 2019.

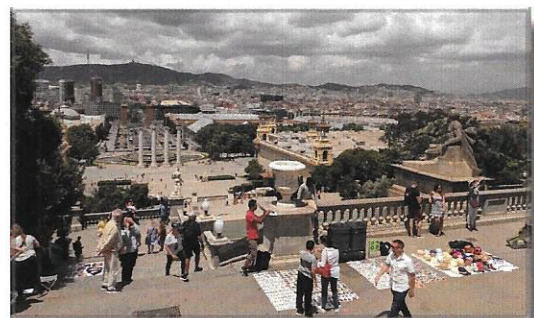
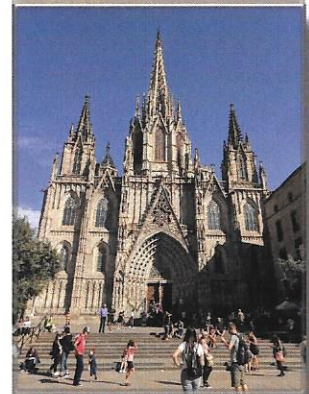
Antoni Gaudí was a unique Architect, creating numerous buildings and monuments. Each structure was influenced by the period of the time, including Orientalist, neo-gothic and naturalist. In 1984, his work was recognized by World Heritage as "representing an exceptional and outstanding creative contribution to the development of architecture and building technology in the late 19th and early 20th centuries".

The **Cathedral of the Holy Cross and Saint Eulalia** is in the Gothic Quarter of the Catalan district. It was built primarily in the 14th century and is home to the Archbishop of Barcelona. Interesting fact: The Cathedral contains a cloister where 13 white geese are kept in honour of Eulalia, a co-patron saint of Barcelona. She was a 13 year old virgin who suffered martyrdom during Roman times. Her body is entombed in the cathedral's crypt.

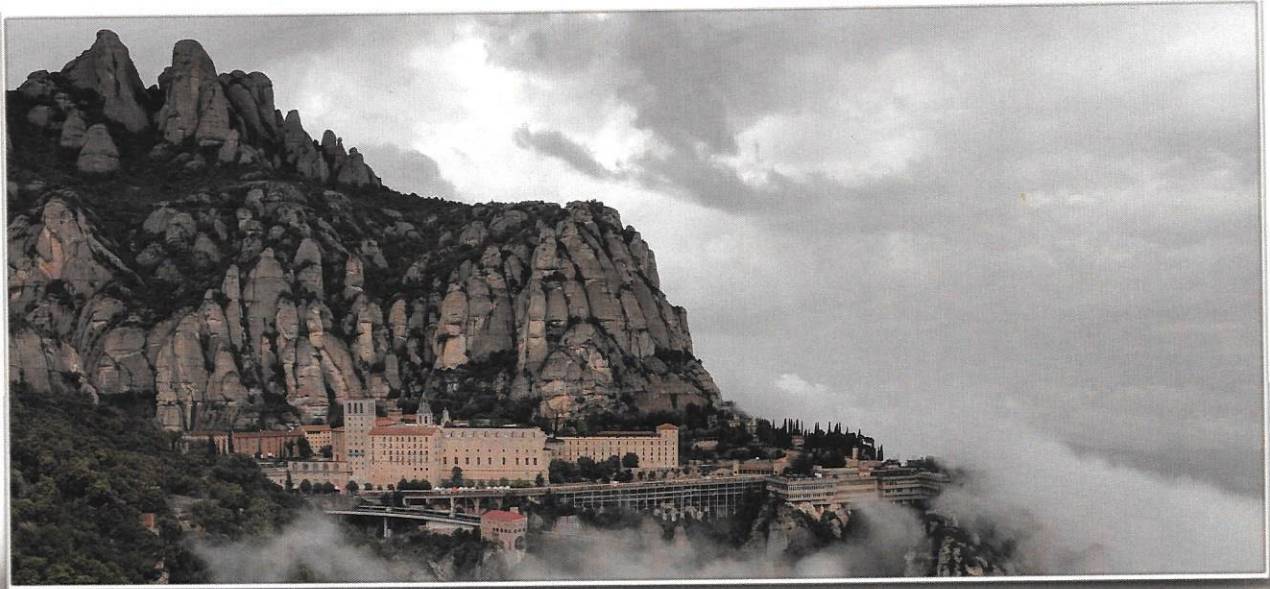


The front of the museum has terrific views of Barcelona.

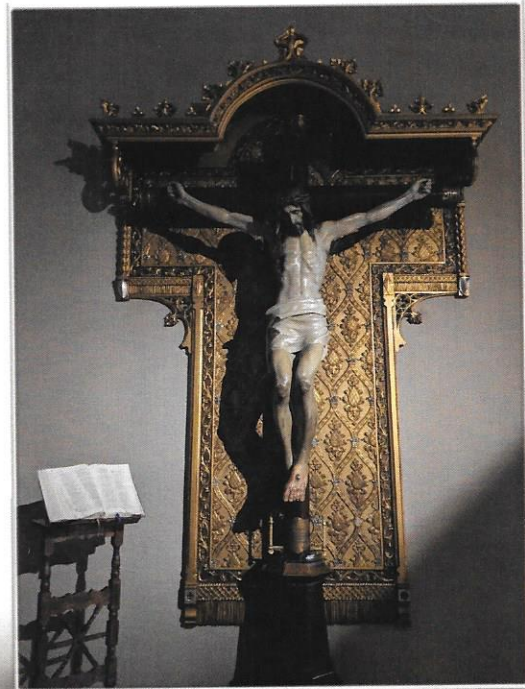
The **Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya** is located in the Catalan district on Montjuïc Hill, close to the Olympic Stadium. It is a museum of visual art and is known for its collection of romanesque church paintings.



Montserrat



The **Santa Maria de Montserrat** monastery is a Benedictine abbey high up on the Montserrat mountain. This religious retreat is home to 100 monks. The Virgin of Montserrat, known as the Black Madonna, is located in the sanctuary of the Mare de Deu de Montserrat. This niche was designed by Antoni Gaudi. In 1844, Pope Leo XIII declared the Virgin of Montserrat patroness of Catalonia.



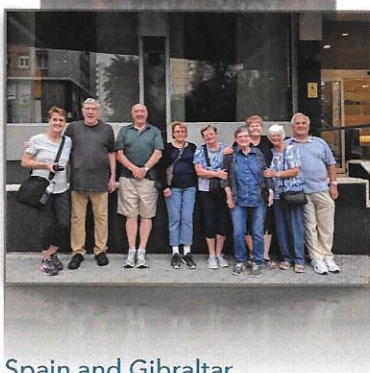
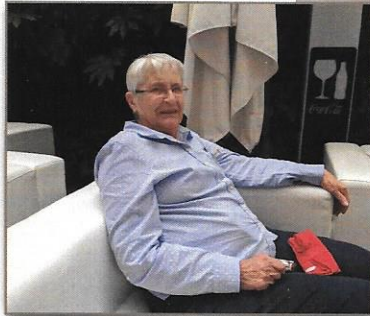
Time To Say Goodbye, For Now

Our group made many happy memories during this trip to Spain. Lots of laughs along the adventure. I look forward to when we all meet again. Stay well my friends!

Adiós mis amigos.



Spain, 2018



Spain and Gibraltar