



**Magnificent:** the Alhambra's architecture takes a long time to explore.



**Water feature:** the beautiful grounds of the Alhambra at Granada.



**Capital sounds:** musicians on the colourful streets of Madrid.

# Between pleasure and Spain

From the quirky buildings of Barcelona to the cliffs of Ronda, Spain is a visual feast. Photographer **Ewen Bell** shares his favourite spots

## MARKETS OF MADRID

ART lovers are inclined to head for El Prado when they reach Madrid to see the works of Goya and Picasso, but at the other end of town the El Rastro flea market is also bursting with style. More than three million people live in the metropolis of Madrid and most of them seem to be at El Rastro on a Sunday, flooding the streets around Plaza del Cascoro on the trail of bargains, fashion and music.

Bands perform on corners and patrons of tapas bars spill on to the footpaths. Tatty souvenirs such as bull horns and flamenco fans are easy to find, but so are expressive works from local artisans.

The Prado is very nice, but at least at El Rastro you can afford to buy what you see.

[www.turismomadrid.es](http://www.turismomadrid.es)

## LIVING ON THE EDGE

THE treasure of Ronda is enjoying the comforts you expect from a larger city with the charms of rural Spain at your doorstep.

Ronda rests on the top of an escarpment overlooking Andalucia. Olive trees, grape vines and wheat fields colour the surrounding land like daubs of paint.

Modern villas and Moorish gardens line the edge of the ravine and its 100m drop. Even if you can't afford accommodation with a view, plenty of public spaces have equal access to the scenery.

A stroll down the meandering streets away from the cliffs takes you through centuries of history, revealing influences dating from Roman times.

[www.turismoderonda.es](http://www.turismoderonda.es)



## SURFED AND SERVED

THE coastal town of Tarifa marks the point at which the Mediterranean meets the Atlantic Ocean. It's a quiet little town loved by windsurfers and kite boarders.

It's also a seafood-lover's paradise. A fresh catch lands at the market daily and is sold to local restaurants by mid-morning.

Return after dark to the old town's whitewashed laneways, brimming with little diners serving deep-fried tuna and calamari with lemon and salt.

Nightlife switches from cuisine to cocktails about 11pm and the mojito bars kick into high gear. Every hot-spot puts its own twist on the basics of white spirits mulled with ice and mint.

Places like Il Mosquito Bar give you an entire menu to choose from.

[www.tarifa.net](http://www.tarifa.net)

## MAGNIFICENT MEZQUITA

NO SINGLE building symbolises the history of southern Spain better than Cordoba and its grand mosque, the Mezquita.

Built in the 8th century at the height of Moorish rule, the Mezquita is remarkable in its scale and beauty. Double-tiered red and white arches, supported by finely sculpted columns, dominate the interior architecture.

The granite from which the arches are carved was recut from a Roman temple that once occupied the site.

Cordoba's Christian rulers built chapels and a cathedral at the very centre of the Mezquita between the 14th and 18th centuries.

The new additions made no attempt to integrate with the Mezquita's Islamic aesthetics, resulting in an abrupt juxtaposition of cultures.

The rest of Cordoba has done better at integrating centuries of diversity, which makes the town a fascinating place to wander in search of Roman, Christian and Jewish influences.

[www.turismodecordoba.org](http://www.turismodecordoba.org)

## ALLURE OF THE ALHAMBRA

HIGH above the city of Granada the Alhambra is more than a castle, it's a network of palaces and gardens that peaked in the 15th century and remains magnificently preserved.

Viewed from a distance the red-brick walls catch the evening light and glow with colour, contrasting against the snow-capped Sierra Nevada mountains beyond.

Alhambra's name comes from the Arabic for "crimson castle" and water is a constant theme within the grounds.

Pools, fountains, streams and ducts are essential elements of the architecture and are skilfully combined with arches, mosaics and courtyards.

Water was more than a source of life to the Moorish rulers. It represented the sacred connection between kings and divinity.

It took more than 200 years to build the Alhambra and you'll need at least two days to explore it.

[www.alhambra.org](http://www.alhambra.org)

## BARCELONA BOHEMIANS

BARCELONA is not a city, it's a theme park run by bohemians and beatniks. Modernism has taken over the streets and filled in every exposed

surface with performers, painters and pedestrians.

Everything starts at La Rambla, a tree-lined promenade alive with people all day and most of the night.

Peddlers push their wares along the length of the parade, competing for attention with street theatre.

Next to La Rambla is the Gothic Quarter, where you can disappear into a 14th-century maze of laneways to seek out cafes, galleries and plazas.

Medieval architecture tells us something of Barcelona's heritage, but the audacious designs of Antoni Gaudi reveals its character.

Only a city dedicated to modern art could have nurtured the inspiration that led to Gaudi's Sagrada Familia and Guell Park.

Barcelona's melting pot of Gaudi, gothic and avant-garde is not merely for the enjoyment of fine-art lovers, they are treasures anyone can enjoy.

[www.bcn.es/turisme](http://www.bcn.es/turisme)

## REFRESHINGLY RED

TINTO de verano is ice-cold wine with a bit of fizz, served up at a bar. The name means "summer wine" and it's the drink of choice in Spain's south, refreshing the body in the afternoon and evening.

However, don't confuse tinto de verano with sangria, a popular late-night drink in which red wine is disguised with fruity flavours, then laced with enough sherry to bring down a donkey.

The ingredients for tinto de verano are simple: one part ice, one part lemon soda and one part house wine. Day or night you can enjoy a tinto with a meal. The first one goes down in seconds, quenching your thirst. Order a second to be savoured slowly while grazing on tapas.

**Great view:** (above) Andalucia from the town of Ronda.

**Striking:** (right) Antoni Gaudi's Casa Batllo in Barcelona.



**Fleet street:** the fishing fleet at Tarifa.



**Arch triumph:** the magnificent interior arches of the Mezquita in Cordoba.

## THE DEAL



✈️ **Getting there:** Thai Airways flies Melbourne to Madrid daily with a single stop in Bangkok. Fares from \$2015 including taxes. Ph: 1300 651 960 or visit [www.thaiairways.com.au](http://www.thaiairways.com.au)

✈️ **Getting around:** Spain has an easy-to-use rail network. Buses are useful for shorter journeys.

✈️ **Touring:** STA Travel is offering a Great Moorish Experience to visit Madrid, Barcelona and some cities in Andalucia. The 14-day adventure costs less than \$2300. Ph: 13 47 82 or visit [www.statravel.com.au](http://www.statravel.com.au)

✈️ **Information:** [www.spain.info](http://www.spain.info)

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