Al-Andalus (Muslim Spain) 20th-24th Feb 2020

A group of friends from Bolton UK decided to make a trip to Islamic Spain and discover Al-Andalus. We found the trip to be amazing and felt it went very smooth. Upon returning, a few friends requested a write up of what we did and where we stayed. Hence, this document was prepared.

Why visit Al-Andalus? Spain was ruled by Muslims for nearly 800 years. During this period the Muslims were the intellectual superpowers of the world, excelling in all fields, whilst Europe was in its ‘Dark Ages’. Each city in Muslim Spain was full of glamour, religion, education and sophisticated Muslim culture. Unfortunately, the decline of Al-Andalus happened in 1492. Today, we have been left with the breathtaking works of architecture. Visiting Muslim Spain will make you realise the status that Muslims once had, and will create a little sadness of how we, as an ummah, have declined. We pray that all Muslims turn to their creator and that he shows us the days of glory once again.

Note: We are not experts, but we did spend a lot of time in planning the trip, so hopefully this will help. Effort had been made for the information to be up to date, but to be safe, we would recommend you research details yourself too. Our group consisted of young adults and we did not mind touring and travelling to many places in short amounts of time. However, if there are older people or those who like to tour each place slowly, then they should spread out their trip and stay a few days extra. We enjoyed it a lot and felt it was enough.

Flights: Book the flights as early as possible. The airport you should be looking for is Malaga, on the south coast of Spain. RyanAir normally has the cheapest flights. We booked our tickets from Manchester approximately 3 and a half months earlier and it cost us £50 each. If you are a family, you may consider parking your car at a long-stay car park at the airport, as it may be cheaper than a taxi there and back. (Note: with RyanAir, a 40x20x25cm cabin bag can be taken for free, and a hand luggage/suitcase can be taken at an additional charge)

Travelling around Spain: We would most definitely recommend hiring a car. It makes life much easier and gives the comfort of leaving/arriving at your own times. The tour of Al-Andalus can be made via public transport too. There are train services that connect each of the main cities and bus services within them. Please research the details yourselves before going.

Car hire: We used MalagaCar.com which was very cheap and efficient. We would 100% recommend this website. Malagacar.com is a local company which means it is cheaper than the famous worldwide firms. It would be strongly advised that you select the 'full package'. This will give you peace of mind. No deposit, no worry about scratches and marks (just drop the car off, no checks at all) and a free additional driver. You will have to book online but pay via debit/credit card on the day. The car hire cost us only €90 for 4/5 days. (Try to message them on Facebook and ask for a discount code). Please read all the details on their website.
If you do book with Malagacar.com, do NOT go downstairs to the car hire area at the airport. Instead, head for the normal exit and you’ll see a staff member holding a Malagacar.com sign. They will inform you to exit via the sliding doors, turn right, pass the waiting taxis and head through the ‘tunnel’/under the motorway bridge till the end where you will see the Malagacar.com shuttle bus. Alternatively, once exiting the airport, you can follow the ‘shuttle bus’ signs.

**Driving:** In Spain, cars are left-hand drive. If it’s your first time, you are bound to be nervous. The best advice we could give is that you must be mentally aware at all time and always remember you’re on the opposite side. In this scenario, it’s best to have someone sit next to you who will be awake and remind you. Spanish motorways are normally empty and have very less traffic. Another few tips are: be aware that in many parts of the motorway, there is no slip road. So, if you’re joining the motorway, be ready to put your foot down when it’s free, and if you’re already on, then be aware of cars joining on your right. Also, you’ll be going anti-clockwise on the roundabout. The rules are a little different there, but the best advice would be to stay on the outer lane whenever you can. There aren’t many speed cameras on the motorways, and where there is a camera it’s marked with the sign (the sign looks like a Wi-Fi symbol). Lastly, when in the towns, be mindful of mini-roundabouts. They pop out of nowhere.

**Information book:** Islamic Spain is best enjoyed once a visitor reads up on the history of each place. (We would read the history of each city whilst driving there). One source of information we found extremely helpful was ‘*Huma’s travel guide to Islamic Spain*’. This book includes a detailed history of Islamic Spain, the history of each city and each site, practical travel information, where to stay, visit, eat, shop and much more. It also includes ‘*Fiqh of travelling*’ section written by Mufti AbdurRahman Mangera. (Link: [Humas-Travel-Guide-To-Islamic-Spain](#))

**Food:** In the major cities, there are Turkish/Moroccan restaurants that you can go for food. We took some food from home which last us for a couple of days. For breakfast, we would find a café close by, then have snacks throughout the day and dine at one of the halal restaurants in the evening. We would recommend you do your own research and ask the restaurant staff for clarification before eating. Also, there are halal food places mentioned in ‘*Huma’s travel guide to Islamic Spain*’.
Cordoba (قرطبة)

The city was under Muslim rule from the year 711 to 1236. In its Islamic prime, Cordoba (Qurtuba) was the largest city in Europe, with half a million population, 50 hospitals and many libraries and Masaajid.

**What to see:**

- **Mezquita Cathedral** ([link](#))
  - *Calle Cardenal Herrero, 1, 14003 Córdoba, Spain*
  - The Masjid (Mezquita) was built in 785 and remained the grandest Masjid of Spain for over 450 years until it was unfortunately converted into a church.
  - General tickets are €11 after 9:30 till closing time of 6pm.
  - Entry is free from Monday to Saturday from 8:30am-9:30am except on public holidays/celebrations.

- **Medina Azahara**
  - *Ctra. Palma del Río, 4P, 14005 Córdoba, Spain*
  - Medina Azahara is the ruins of a vast, fortified Andalus palace-city built by Abd-ar-Rahman III, the first Umayyad Caliph of Córdoba, and located on the western outskirts of Córdoba, Spain. It was the de facto capital of al-Andalus as the heart of the administration and government was within its walls. The living complex was so big and vast that it was regarded as a city itself. Only ruins now remain.
  - Check opening and closing times before you go as it differs depending on the month. Please note, it is closed on Mondays.
  - The tickets are free for EU and €1.50 for non EU.
  - Visitors park their cars at the museum and take a shuttle bus to the site which is €2.50. The shuttle bus will also take you back to the car park.
  - (Note: the satnav may take you to the entrance of the site, however, visitors can not park there. You will have to park at the museum car park and take the shuttle bus. Please put in Medina Azahara Visitor Centre in your satnav. You will see the car park entrance at the roundabout once you get very close.)

- **Roman Bridge**
  - *Across Guadalquivir river, Cordoba, Spain*
  - The bridge was built by the Romans in the early 1st century BC. During the early Islamic domination, the Muslim governor Al-Samh ibn Malik al-Khawlani ordered a bridge to be built on the ruins of what was left of the old Roman construction.
  - Great views back to the old town, of the water wheel and old mill building ruins in/on the river, and the fortress at the south end. There are no closing times and no tickets are needed.
Where to stay:

Euro Star Maimonides Hotel (link)

Calle Torrijos, 4, 14003 Córdoba, Spain

This 3* hotel located directly in front of the Mezquita. We would definitely recommend this hotel as it situated in the prime location. The rooms were clean, and it has fantastic views of the mezquita (if you’re lucky enough to get one of these rooms). The link above is to their own website, however we booked using their HalalBooking.com link.

An additional advantage of this hotel is that it has its own underground parking. There is a location on their website which if put in the GPS help you find the hotel. (Note: When there is 2/3mins left on the satnav, it will take you to a road with a no entry sign and some Spanish writing underneath. Just drive through it and go to the hotel and give your registration plate in. The no-entry does not apply to taxis and those who are parking at this hotel). The parking at the hotel costs 15 euros a day.

We stayed at this hotel and found it to be perfect (besides the thin walls that wouldn’t block all the sound). The twin rooms we got cost around £20 per person per night. If you do consider other hotels, we would recommend this area of Cordoba and advise you enquire about car parking beforehand.

What we did: Day 1 - Thursday 20th Feb 2020

We departed from Manchester Airport on the 7:25am Ryanair flight and arrived into Malaga Airport at 12:45pm. The journey takes two hours 50 minutes, the time difference is one hour. However, there was a 1hr 20mins delay due to the French airstrikes. After landing, we headed straight to the arrivals where a shuttle bus took us to the car hire.

Once we collected the cars, we headed directly to Madina az Zahara. Depending on your schedule, you could tour Madina Azahara on your way into Cordoba or out. Medina Az Zahara is on the outskirts of Cordoba and is a 1 hour 50 mins drive from Malaga. We arrived just in time for the last shuttle bus up to the site, because of which we missed the short museum tour and guided talk before. Visitors normally spend an hour at Madina az Zahara. After finishing from Madina Az Zahara, we checked in to our hotel in Cordoba which was 15 minutes drive.

At sunset, we roamed the narrow streets and reached the Roman Bridge for a great view. Across the bridge and taking a right there is a ‘Masjid atTawheed’ where we prayed our Magrib salah. (There is also a smaller masjid called ‘Mosque of Al-Andalus’ which is a few minutes walk from the Mezquita).
Seville was the first and last capital of Islamic Spain and was the richest city in Al-Andalus.

**What to see:**

- **El Real Alcázar (Royal Palace)**
  
  *Patio de Banderas, s/n, 41004 Sevilla, Spain*
  
  It was built under the order of Abdur Rahman II in 913 as a military base. Once the Christians conquered Seville, their king ordered a place to be built on the site and has Muslim craftsmen construct it. These craftsmen secretly carved in the Andalusian motto ‘و لا غالب إلا الله’ (There is no over-powering Being besides Allah) all around the place without the king realising.

  - Tickets can be purchased on-site at the Real Alcazar, but queues are often long. There is a separate queue for those have online booking, however, you will have to select a time and enter during the stated time slot. (We didn’t book online, and had to wait 20 minutes). Depending on the length of the queue, you may consider buying tickets on your mobile phone.

  - Basic general admission tickets are €11.50 (€3 for students 17 to 25) Any advance purchase ticket adds a €1 ‘online’ surcharge. Admission is free on Monday during the final hour of the day. This can also be booked online in advance and you’ll have to pay the €1 online fee.

- **La Giralda**
  
  *Av. de la Constitución, s/n, 41004 Sevilla, Spain*
  
  La Giralda is the minaret of the Masjid on which a Cathedral was built. The minaret is still standing and is unfortunately used a bell tower today. The tower does not have steps, rather 35 inclined platforms which would allow the Muazzin to climb it on horseback to call out the Azaan.

  - Visiting the La Giralda tower is part of visiting the Cathedral. Tickets will include the Cathedral, El Salvador church and the tower. You will walk through the Cathedral and head towards the tower.
  
  - Monday, from 11:00am to 3:30pm. (from 4:30pm to 6:00pm, free tour with audio guide, with advance booking in Spanish and English).
  
  - Tuesday to Saturday, from 11:00am to 5:00pm. Sunday, from 2:30pm to 6:00pm.

  - Price: General admission: €9 (includes a visit to the main Cathedral, El Salvador church and the La Giralda tower.)

**Where to park:**

We toured Seville as a day trip, so didn’t need a hotel to stay. If you do plan on something similar, we’d advise parking your car where we did. Most of the places to see are within 15 minutes walk from here and prices are ok. Cost us approximately €6 for 3hrs. The underground car park is called ‘Parking Avenida de Roma’ and the address is *Paseo de Roma, 41013 Sevilla.*
**What we did: Day 2 - Friday 21st February**

Waking up in the Cordoba hotel, we prayed Fajr early and had breakfast at a cafe. We then headed to the Mezquita at 8:30am for the free entry. We took approximately 45 minutes inside and then went for some souvenir shopping. Thereafter, we went back to the hotel checked out and headed for Seville.

Seville is 1 hour 35 minutes drive from Cordoba.

Once we reached Seville, we parked the car at the car park mentioned above which is right in the middle of the places to see. First, we headed to the Real Alcazar and had to wait in the queue. We decided not to buy tickets in advance due to not know what time we would visit. It isn’t very busy in February, so the wait was not too long. We toured the beautiful palace and the amazing gardens.

After finishing, we followed the Giralda tower we could see in the distance and reached the Cathedral entrance. After purchasing the tickets, we entered the building. The Cathedral is huge with many Christian statues and pictures. Since we weren’t interested in this, we walked straight through to the La Giralda tower. The walk up was a trek and elders would be recommended to take their time with regular stops. At the top, you can see the church bell and enjoy the amazing panoramic views of Seville city centre.

Instead of visiting the Plaza Espana, we decided to set off for Granada early, with the hope of being able to add Marbella into our schedule the next day. The drive from Seville to Granada was 3hrs and we reached perfectly on time for sunset. After checking in at the hotel (details given in Granada section), we set out on foot for some food and to the Granada old town to get a night view of Alhambra. After enjoying the views, we went to the hotel for the night.
Granada was the last major city of Al-Andalus and would be the home to all the Muslims fleeing from the Christian conquests of Reconquista. During this time, it was the only Muslim-controlled region and only Arabic was spoken here. Granada has the best-preserved monument built by the Muslims.

**What to see:**

- **Alhambra palace** ([link](#))
  - *Calle Real de la Alhambra, s/n, 18009 Granada, Spain*
  - A grand collection of palaces and gardens. It was built under the order of the sultan who was named Al-Ahmar (‘the Red’- due to his red hair). The Alhambra palace combines a breath-taking blend of human artistry with natural beauty.
  - There are 4 mains sections to Alhambra. Alcazaba (fortress), the Palace of Carlos V (with museums), the Generalife (gardens) and finally the amazing Nazrid Palaces.

- **Nasrid Palace**
  - Within the Alhambra, there are the Nasrid Palace rooms. This complex is a combination of palaces, patios and gardens built to dazzle the viewers by its beauty. Each room here contains spectacular decorations, arches, domes and stunning craftsmanship. There are about 10,000 Arabic inscriptions, of which 1000 are Quranic verses. Throughout the palace, the phrase "لا غالب إلا الله" (there is no Overpowering Being besides Allah) is echoed over every wall.
  - You need a ticket to visit the Alhambra and Generalife Gardens. Please [pre-book](#) as soon as possible as people book 2 to 3 months in advance. (The number of admissions per day and hour is limited to protect the monument, and tickets usually sell out before the day.) Each ticket has an allocated entry time for the Nasrid Palaces and can only be visited at that time. If you miss it, you won’t be allowed in to see this stunning complex of buildings. The Nasrid palace can be up to 30mins walk from some entrances of the Alhambra, so please be wary of timings.

- 'Individual Tickets’ cost 14.00€ (plus 1.40€ if paying by card) per adult from the Alhambra ticket office.

- The general visiting hours for the Alhambra are as follows:
  - - 15 Mar to 14 Oct: Morning session: 8:30-14:00, Afternoon session: 14:00-20:00, Night session: (Tue to Sat) 22.00-23.30.
  - - 15 Oct to 14 Mar: Morning session: 8:30-14:00 hrs, Afternoon session: 14:00- 18:00, Night session: (Fri and Sat) 20.00-21.30.

- **Albaicin/Albayzin**
  - Is the old Muslim area with narrow street and lots of shops and restaurants. A good way of viewing it is to put the Masjid as your destination, allowing you to enjoy the walk through Albayzin.
Mirador de San Nicolas
- Calle Espaldas a San Nicolas s/n, 18009 Granada, Spain
- This is situated very close to the Masjid in Granada. It is a popular place to get an amazing evening/night view of the Alhambra.

Grand Mosque of Granada
- Plaza de San Nicolás, s/n, 18010 Granada, Spain
(Note: driving in the Granada city centre is not permitted between 07:30 and 22:30.)

Where to stay:
There are two options for where to stay in Granada. The first is to stay in the city centre. This will be ideal for when you go shopping for souvenirs, food, dessert and will be in a generally livelier place. However, car parking may be a problem. The second option is to stay close to the Alhambra Palace, as we did. It will obviously be closer to Granada’s main attraction and will be easier to access via car. Also, you could park the car in the Alhambra car park (€19 a day). However, it will be a long (20mins) walk to the city centre, or a 5/10 mins taxi ride (€5-€7).

We took the second option and stayed at:

**Hotel Alixares (link)**
Paseo de la Sabica, 40, 18009 Granada, Spain
This 4* hotel is situated around 8 minutes from the Alhambra. We used their Booking.com link. The rooms were lovely and it was a pleasant stay. Once we parked up, the chauffeur took our keys and parked the cars in their car park. Parking cost €19 per day. The car park is small, but if it’s full they recommend the Alhambra car park, which costs the same. The hotel was approximately 20 minutes walk from the city centre.

What we did: Day 3 - Saturday 22nd February

Once again, we woke up early for the buffet breakfast at the hotel which cost €11. We did consider other cafes, but it was a long walk and we had to reach Alhambra early. We had purchased the Alhambra tickets well in advance and chose the entry time of 9am. This meant we would go straight to the Nasrid Palaces. After checking the tickets, we were let into the rooms. The rooms are breath-taking with the Arabic inscription all around will stun the viewer. There are many rooms and small gardens with fountains. You can just imagine how this was the pinnacle of worldly pleasures for the Muslims rulers of the time. After the rooms, the visitors are led towards the gardens. We spent a little time there and then headed for Palace of Carlos V. This is a circular building with an open courtyard in the middle. After spending 20 minutes there, we headed for the last of the attractions, the Alcazaba fortress. We climbed on to the roof of this castle-like building and enjoyed the 360-degree views of the Granada city and the amazing mountains behind it.
Once we finished, we returned to the hotel for around 11:30 and got ready for the 12:00 checkout. Once checking out, we asked reception if we could collect the cars later. We were told that the roads will be close from 3-5pm for that day only due to a cycling event. So, headed out on foot to the city centre with a plan of a 2pm return. We went to a baklava shop called ‘Natura Morisca’ (*Calle Caldereria Vieja, 12, 18010 Granada*). The shop owned by the very friendly brother called Abdul Fattah has the most delicious baklava in various flavours. However, we did find it to be a little expensive. Once we purchased some to take home, we went to a restaurant for lunch and then returned to collect our cars.

We then set off for the south coast and beach area around the Malaga province. It was a 2.5hrs drive and we first went to the Marbella area. We went directly to the beautiful King Abdul Aziz masjid, pray Zuhr and Asr. We then went to the beach and concluded the day with some food and a drive to our hired villa near Fuengirola.

**Other Islamic places to visit**

There are other places in the Al-Andalus area which have significant Islamic history we, unfortunately, could not visit them due to time. However, if you have the time, be sure to go.

**Gibraltar** – The name is derived from جبل طارق (Jabal Ṭāriq), literally meaning Mount of Tariq and is named after the 8th century Moorish military leader Tariq ibn Ziyad. He was the man who first crossed the narrow sea from Morocco and started the conquest of Spain. Gibraltar is 2hr drive from Malaga.

**Alpujarras mountain village** – is the area which was where the last Muslims of Al-Andalus fled. These villages are spread around the snowy mountain and approx 2hrs drive from Granada.

**Ronda** – a historic Islamic city which was one of the longest-held Muslim strongholds in Al-Andalus. Its a city that is surrounded by green hills and mountains and has amazing bridges which arc over the river. Ronda is approximately 1.5hrs drive from Malaga.

Other cities and villages with Islamic history are mentioned in ‘Huma’s travel guide’.

**Costa del Sol**

Once touring the former Islamic cities is done, one can spend a few days on the south coast of Spain and enjoys the sun and the sea. The beaches are beautiful, with many areas having mountains in the horizon on the opposite side.

There are many cities on the east and west of Malaga that you could stay at. We would recommend the west of Malaga. Marbella is a popular destination for many celebrities and rich tourist. The amazing King Abdul Aziz Masjid is also situated in Marbella. Marbella is approximately 1hr from Malaga.
We stayed in the coastal city of Fuengirola. We hired a villa for a couple of days nearby. Places to rent out can be found on Airbnb, booking.com and other similar websites. (We stayed at [https://abnb.me/UIPugUqt4](https://abnb.me/UIPugUqt4). There is a stunning Masjid built in Fuengirola which is 5/10 minutes walk from the beach. Fuengirola also has their famous weekly market where souvenirs, fresh/dried fruit, branded (non-genuine, we think) clothing and much more. The main market is on Tuesdays and a smaller version is held on Sundays (address below).

A few more attractions close by are: **Nerja Caves** – amazing natural formed caves which will leave you stunned. **Benalmádena Cable cars** – the cable cars will take you from the beach up to the top of the mountain where the 360 views are amazing. **Horse riding** – many provide this experience. We booked a 2hr trek on the beach at Benalmadena with David on Airbnb ([https://abnb.me/MLKXqvkrt4](https://abnb.me/MLKXqvkrt4)).

**Places to visit near Fuengirola:**

- **King Abdul Aziz Masjid Marbella**
  
  29602, Urb. Lomas Marbella-S, 18, 29602 Marbella, Málaga, Spain

- **Fuengirola Masjid**
  
  Av. Santa Amalia, 10, 29640 Fuengirola, Málaga, Spain

- **Fuengirola markets**
  
  Tuesday: 9am-2pm - Calle Recinto Ferial, 29640 Fuengirola
  
  Sunday: 9am-1pm - Av. Santa Amalia, 10, 29640 Fuengirola,

- **Benalmádena Cable cars**
  
  29630 Benalmádena, Málaga, Spain
  
  Return tickets cost €16.90

- **Nerja Caves** ([link](https://abnb.me/UIPugUqt4))
  
  Carr. de Bajada a Playa de Maro, 29787, Málaga, Spain
  
  Tickets cost €13 at the gates and €11 online

Thank you for reading and we hope you found this beneficial. The following email address has been made so that you can contact us and we can remain anonymous. Be sure to leave us a comment or a suggestion. We’d love to hear from you if this document was helpful. Contact: [AlArdhTravel@gmail.com](mailto:AlArdhTravel@gmail.com)
Cordoba

These photos we took won’t do justice to the stunning views, but we added them anyway. Enjoy!