

Exploring Andalusia (February 19 - 27, 2006)

Dawn Jenkins

This February, I fulfilled a life-long dream by traveling to Spain for a vacation with my husband, Al, and my friend, Monica. We stayed in "Costa del Sol," just on the Mediterranean side of Gibraltar. We visited several cities in Andalusia, the lower quarter of Spain. (Andalusia was occupied by the Muslim Moors beginning in 711 until the Spanish reclaimed the territory 1492.) I have always wanted to go to Spain since I took Spanish class in high school. This article was prepared to share some of my experience with family and friends. I have to confess that I have no representative picture and have decided to publish a few choice photographs in this pdf. All the images in this document were taken by myself, Al or Monica with digital cameras. The last page of this document features a map that I created to fix the details of Spain, Andalusia and the places we visited for those who are not familiar with the country. It is a distorted view, intended to highlight the places that we visited. I created it myself, so any credit or complaint should be aired to the author.



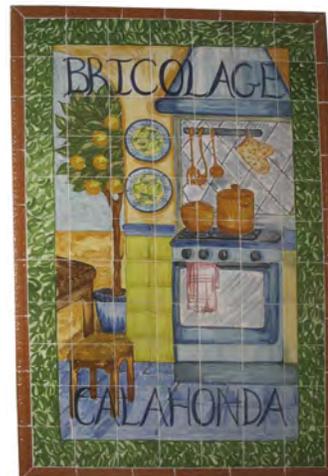
We flew into Madrid, because our plane was late, we had to stay at the airport for four hours before we could hop over to Seville. Because we arrived far too late, we called and had rooms reserved for us in the hotel that we had previously planned to stay in during our last day in Spain.



The next morning, we traveled from Seville in our rental car to our room in Callahonda, where we stayed for six days. On our way, we visited the fabulous city of Ronda! It's located on top of a high cliff and has a long history, dating back to prehistoric times. An excellent vantage point, the Romans and the Moors left their marks here. There's a fabulous view from a bridge, crossing a deep ravine, 120 meters deep! The spectacular view from the bridge is not for anyone fearful of heights. Unfortunately, one picture cannot tell the

story, but here's one from the bridge, looking down the ravine. There's a very famous bullring, one of the oldest in Spain. The above picture of a bull statue is outside this famous ring where there is also a museum. Qué lástima, we had no time to visit the museum or see a bullfight.

We stayed in Callahonda, between Marbella and Malaga, in the resort hotel, Club Callahonda. We had a two-bedroom efficiency with a heated, outdoor pool. We saw people swimming in the morning hours, but we never found the time to enjoy the water ourselves. It was definitely winter, but far greener than Ohio with plenty of palms and pine trees. Madrid, further north, is at the same latitude as Cleveland—but THEY get palm trees and WE don't! Most of the



time I wore my winter coat and gloves, but one day I was able to wear my sweat jacket. When the sun set or hid behind the clouds, it got plenty cold. The pleasant discoveries we made in Spain included wonderful olives, Malaga wine, Jerez sherry, the best ham we'd ever eaten, friendly people and plenty of shopping opportunities. I added four new fans to my collection (I started collecting at age 5!)

We had booked a tour over the internet, to take us across the Mediterranean to Morocco. We had to catch the bus at 6 am and so set off our second day in Spain to find the place where we had to be at that early hour. Al had gotten some directions off the internet that said we had to travel 10k across N340 (the major route we traveled up and down the Costa del Sol) from our hotel to the site. As we passed the kilometer 192 marker, Al remarked about it, but we dutifully followed our directions across the touristy city of Marbella, giving up and pulling into the fancy resort town of Puerto Banus. Here we found out how the other class lives, ending up eating lunch at a little restaurant, beside the marine full of gorgeous and expensive boats. It is the "postcard" view of Costa del Sol, containing the high peak towering over the playground of the British jet-set,



Marbella. We enjoyed the city very much ending our tour in a Spanish mall, El Corte Inglés. A huge place, we had to take pictures of the multitude of hams hanging in the deli and the meat department full of seafood as well as beef and other meats. From there we had to drive back the 10 kilometers to find our stop for the tour bus. Lucky thing, because even though we found the Las Chapas exit, our hotel was the only thing at km marker 192! The exit literally lead to the front lot of the hotel, totally hidden from N340. It was a mere 5 minutes away from our room in Callahonda, but it took us nearly an hour to figure out what we had to do to get there. We returned to our place tired, but well prepared for our 5-minute ride in the morning.

The Strait of Gibraltar, that narrow access to the Mediterranean, is so close to Africa, that we couldn't resist the urge to take a package tour to Morocco. The city, Tangier, that we visited was international zone under France, Spain, Italy and Britain until 1976. Today it welcomes



international commerce and of course, tourists. In one day we crossed the strait, saw the Kasbah, ate at a Moroccan restaurant, and took a bus tour of the city. We could ride a camel, charm a snake and buy cheap trinkets or expensive carpets. The picture here of a mural emphasizes the sultan's tower and is representative of the city. Although we enjoyed the tour very much, the high pressure to sell us something, presumably *anything*, got to be a little annoying. Saying "no thanks," was pointless and eventually we were told by one of our tour companions, not to speak at all to avoid

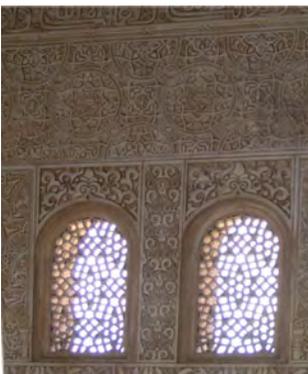
the hard sell. Although we thought it rude, it seemed to work. We left Morocco in a hurry, hustled into the high-speed ferry by our guide.



We spent the next day driving through Malaga and up to the ancient city of Antequerra. Here we visited beautiful old churches, including the Collegiate Church of Santa María la Mayor and the nearby Arch of los Gigantes. It was our hope to travel to the Torcal de Antequera natural park to see if we could spot some of the many flamingos that nest there, but we ran out of time as we were mesmerized in the old church we toured. We traveled back down to the coast in time to grab dinner in Malaga. When we were looking into traveling to Spain, we imagined that we would spend a day or two there, but we ran out of time because of the other sites we wanted to visit. Our dinner in Malaga was our only visit

to that city, the picture to the left shows Al and Dawn in the little bar where we stopped that night for dinner. We arrived back at our rooms in Calahonda, tired but happy, ready for another adventure. And we found it...

The next major site we visited was the Alhambra in Granada, the last major stronghold of the Moorish rulers. I dreamed of visiting this monumental complex as a teenager. If I get the chance again, I'd like to go around the end of April--in the Spring before it gets too hot. It was quite nice, but I'd like to see the gardens in bloom. Alhambra means the red house, then there's the Generalife or Architect's Garden, not to mention the unfinished work of Charles V, Las Placetas. The fabulous Moorish architecture and artwork is really something to behold. I haven't included an garden image here, instead, a view of the Alcazaba, the ruins of a 9th century fortress, is very representative of the Moorish architecture that can be found throughout Andalusia. Granada was the last stronghold of the Moorish culture that held Andalusia for so many years, how incredible it is to think of the centuries they ruled here and how short our own history is in the United States. How I wish



there was time for more discussion and more of our 900+ images. The architecture and the detail in the plasterwork, the woodwork, the tiling makes the Alhambra a world famous place. I placed an extra little picture of two windows, although I'm not certain the size of the image will do it justice. The whole Alhambra complex is overlooking the sprawling city of Granada. On our way back, we tried to find our way into the Arab neighborhood of Granada, but we were unsuccessful at making the proper turns at the right time. The day had been cold and we were tired, so we continued back to Calahonda, stopping to eat at a roadside rest stop that was over run with children, returning home with their school group from their own Alhambra visit.



The next day, Monica and I visited the beach of the Costa del Sol where I exercised more of my hobbies—rock and shell hunting. I couldn't help but walk away with a little piece of Spain. The sky and the sand were gray and rather wintry, and we were pelted with a few drops of rain. But it was nice enough that we ate outside under the shelter of a beachside restaurant—seafood soup and pasta. We had a great time at the street fair, picking up a delicious batch of olives that were being sold at a stand and some other gifts for our friends back home, not to mention a few inexpensive treats for ourselves.

We swung by the rock of Gibraltar on the way back, but it was so windy, we didn't go to the British side. We made a pit stop at a little diner in a train car, much like the one in our hometown of Lakewood, OH. But unlike home, a good supply of alcohol graced the counter and the waitress was serving some up in one of our pictures, taken around 10:30 in the morning. Hoping back in our car, we continued our trek, stopping to admire the view from a scenic overlook near the city of Tarifa, a very windy place that was dotted with windmills. I'm sure we saw over a hundred of them! I found myself wondering how much power they provide for the area. It was great to see an alternative energy source hard at work. Most of the windmills were turning steadily, except for the few that were pointed in different directions that must catch the wind when it comes from that direction. (There were very few of these!)



Then we arrived in Jerez de la Frontera, where we stayed in the ultramodern AC hotel, connected to a soccer arena. I couldn't help taking pictures of the bathroom, where the sink and the shower were constructed of clear glass. But our final goal this day (Feb. 26) was the peninsula city of Cadiz, where saw the opening day of this year's Carnival for holy week was kicked off with a parade. This became my favorite part of the trip because it was a very family-oriented event.



Lots of people and most of the kids were dressed up in various costumes. I snapped many pictures of the floats—trains, musical bands, witches, Sponge Bob, exotic dancers, wizards! Traditional and modern, all of our favorite idols seemed to be represented. The carnival in Cadiz is the best-known celebration in Spain, but there is a big bash during holy week in every major city all over the country. Another traffic jam to get off the peninsula found us back in Jerez for the usual late night dinner. (There is no supper to be had in this country from 4 pm until 9 pm!)

We spent our last day shopping in Jerez and Seville. Jerez was marked with lots of construction. The tiny streets of these cities were jam packed with people, a constant stream that seemed to last all day. Jerez de la Frontera is the sherry capital of Spain. This is where we purchased our sherry to take home, and also where we stopped to have a glass of sherry in the street at a sidewalk café. We parked in a parking garage. We had discovered that garages in Spain do not have little booths where a friendly attendant takes your money. No, you have to find a little machine (generally not well marked) and plunk your Euros into a slot so that you can have your card stamped. That card goes into the gate and if you've paid, the gate will lift and you can leave. We drove to Seville and took a cab into a shopping district. Walking back, we stopped in the nearby park for a nightcap.

In Spain, most places shut down around 4 pm, so we learned to get out early. We tried to make sure we ate something in the afternoon before things closed, but we weren't always successful. There is so much more to tell about this trip—and the pictures tell a story I am unable to relate. I've tried to hit the major points—this was my first time off the North American continent. I'd go back in a minute—the food was great and the people were friendly. Gasoline cost us about \$5.00 per gallon and before we left we had a grasp on how much we were spending when we paid 10 Euros for dinner. (The exchange rate during our trip was around 1.20 dollars per euros.) Costa del Sol is really beautiful, even in the winter. Everywhere in Spain, the houses are painted white, the windows are shuttered and outfitted with wrought iron bars so they can be left open in the summer. Fabulous tilework and mosaics are everywhere and most of the streets are paved with brick and stone arranged in pleasant patterns and designs. Hope you enjoyed reading about our trip to Spain. It would be easy to spend 3 days to a week in any of the major cities and still not do everything you wanted. I certainly saved a few things for the next trip. Who knows, next time maybe, a bullfight, flamenco dancing and even Barcelona!!!



Spain Trip February 2006

- 19 – Arrive Madrid, Spain
Seville
- 20 – Seville to Ronda
Ronda to Calahonda
- 21 – Puerto Banus
- 22 – Morocco, Tangiers
- 23 – Antequera, Malaga
- 24 – Granada, La Alhambra
- 25 – Mijas Costa
- 26 – Gibraltar, Cadiz
- 27 – Jerez de la Frontera
- 28 – Seville, Barcelona, New York, Cleveland

All descriptions, text, images and maps are copyright ©2006 Dawn E. Jenkins and should not be used without permission. Permission can be obtained by e-mail to astra@astras-stargate.com