



## MAGICAL MOORISH SPAIN

By Caroline Preston

Andalucía, the hot southernmost region of Spain. Beyond the resorts this vast landscape supplies wow in abundance. Breathtaking mountain views and stunning architecture I set out to discover 'real' Spain.

Supplying 44% of the world's olive oil and boasting 40,000 hectares of Vineyards it's not only agriculturally rich but historically rich. In 711 AD North African invaders known as the 'Moors' invaded Southern Spain and Portugal and ruled until 1492. During this time great advancement was achieved, literature and learning thrived, and great architecture flourished.

I'm starting in the town of Coin 'Co-Inn' located at the foot of the Sierra de Mijas mountains, Coin has an interesting old town and great local facilities. It's here I'm staying with family, but many accommodation options exist for visitors. Finca la Toronja [www.finca-la-toronja.com](http://www.finca-la-toronja.com) is a fine example in this former country ranch, doubles from €90. Bigger groups could consider a holiday rental, luxurious Finca Maroc offers 9 bedrooms, designer pool, your very own rural pad in Andalucía. [www.mijas-villas.com/finca-maroc-villa-mijas-costa-del-sol](http://www.mijas-villas.com/finca-maroc-villa-mijas-costa-del-sol)

Next stop rural Monda, and vineyard Reamsamen. Dutch expats René and Marjolijn offer a fascinating tour of their adventure setting up a vineyard in Spain in search of less stress. Their sparkling white rural home now sits proudly and despite many setbacks they now produce some delicious wine. A tasting is included and costs €13 per person, book at [www.remsamen.com](http://www.remsamen.com)

Onward to Mijas Pueblo (Village of Mijas) a tourist hotspot and one of the most picturesque Moorish villages. Pretty wrought iron balconies and colourful plant pots adorn whitewashed walls and the winding streets offer an array of cafes and restaurants for a leisurely lunch or tranquil evening. A must see is Paseo de la Muralla, at 430 meters above sea level the stunning views are not to be missed.

Onto the City of Granada and the grand Alhambra. Our accommodation, Suites Campo del Principe in the Realejo district. Handily close to the Alhambra yet minutes to the city our two-storey apartment with spiral staircase is a bargain at €78 per night [www.suitescampodelprincipe.com](http://www.suitescampodelprincipe.com)

In the Centro district The Alcaicería is Granada's Bazaar and original Moorish Silk Market. Featuring Arabian inspired walkways and shops this is now the only original part in what would have previously been many streets. At every turn here, you'll find stunning buildings and streets that open onto plazas adorned with eateries.

Eating is big news here; during daytime, backstreets come alive with alfresco diners. The menu del dia is worth noting, €8-12 gets you great set menus and this gigantic wine region offers refreshment at bargain prices.

Evenings are a quieter affair here, the trendy Realejo district offers some eclectic choices. Stumbling upon street Campo del Principe, several eateries appear. Taberna La Ninfa is an easy choice boasting amazing Moorish decor, open kitchen and wood oven. We ordered Calamari, King Prawns and delicious pizza washed down with excellent white wine, for €40 we dined like Kings under the stars, my kind of heaven.

Budget eating in Granada is very doable, you can actually eat for free... Tapas are a huge part of Spanish life and here, one is offered 'gratis' for each drink purchased, a fun way to sample Spanish cuisine.

Onto the Alhambra, this is bucket list architecture. Featuring three distinct buildings the first view for many and mega structure is Alcazaba the Fort. Climbing the multitude of steps to the very top offers the best view of snowy Sierra Nevada mountains and city beneath.

The Generalife Gardens, so grand and beautiful thanks to much needed water from the 'Rio Daro'. Early engineering enabled an 8km diversion of this river to supply the many fountains and streams even today. The Nasrid Palace, such exotic rooms were occupied by Nasrid Kings. The intricate Arabic design and decor adorns and it's still the most impressive Islamic building in Europe. Access is by strict time slots on booking.

Tickets for the Alhambra can sell out months in advance and a full day is recommended. Temperatures can exceed 40 C in summer, early June saw 32 C. The gorgeous Parador de Granada in Castle grounds provides a tranquil quality refreshment stop.

One final 'to do' in Granada, 'Flamenco'. 'El Tabanco' on Cuesta de San Gregorio, little more than a converted house offering authentic performances to tiny audiences. Entry €9, beers €1.50...booking essential. The Albaicin is one of the oldest centres of Muslim Culture, the narrow streets of this UNESCO World Heritage site show fine examples of ancient Moorish architecture.

Heading away from Granada to one final destination, Ronda. Situated on top of spectacular El Tajo Gorge this beautiful white town offers the most amazing feature, Puente Nuevo, the bridge joining either side of Gorge. Popular with tourists my top tip is to head to Casa Don Bosco, the €2 entry fee allows access to this 20th Century Mansion, rear gardens and crowd free viewing platform for the ultimate photo. It's here I leave Andalucía, the warmth of its people and the wow moments of its towns, cities and landscapes. Farewell for now but with so much yet to explore, I'm already planning a return.

Caroline travelled flight only with TUI from Newcastle International to Malaga for 7 nights. 5 nights were spent with family in Coin and 2 nights in Granada at Suites Campo del Principe [www.hotels.com](http://www.hotels.com) or [www.suitescampodelprincipe.com](http://www.suitescampodelprincipe.com). Doubles from €78, prices based on travel in June 2019.

Many flight options exist flying from Newcastle International to Malaga (AGP), fly direct with [www.easyjet.com](http://www.easyjet.com) [www.ryanair.com](http://www.ryanair.com) [www.jet2.com](http://www.jet2.com) [www.tui.co.uk/flights](http://www.tui.co.uk/flights) and indirect with [www.airfrance.com](http://www.airfrance.com) [www.britishairways.com](http://www.britishairways.com)