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Best of Florence & Tuscany

## Southern Spain Essentials

Indagare's **Sasha Feldman** tours the southern region of Spain and shares tips on how to best enjoy the region.

**A**fter a morning tour of Seville's Alcazar, I wandered the city's narrow, winding streets in search of the perfect tapas lunch. I was committed to finding the most authentic restaurant. I ended up at Indagare favorite **La Moneda** (*Calle Almirantazgo 4; 34-954-22-36-42*), where I sat next to some Spanish gentlemen enjoying wines from their vineyard in Rioja. It was not long before we were sampling vintages together, exchanging life stories and brainstorming on how I should spend the rest of my time

in the country. Every small decision I made during my stay in southern Spain set off a chain of events that cumulatively created a unique, holistic experience.

What makes the south of Spain so fantastic is that every turn down a *calle*, every stop in a remote mountain town or at a countryside hacienda, every meal next to a local leads to an interaction, suggestion or invitation that both deepens and broadens your experience. Andalusians are sociable and congenial. They share both a love of life that informs their

daily exchanges and an ability to develop genuine rapport with those around them. Visitors quickly realize that the Andalusian culture, largely insulated from the outside world, is well worth exploring. If southern Spain fails to offer the five-star experience of the French Riviera or the Amalfi Coast, that is a mark of its authenticity and local flair. For that reason, a trip to this region requires precision and an acute attention to detail. Here are eight tips to help plan unforgettable journeys and get the most from your visit.

Clockwise from left: The rooftop at Corral del Rey; a bedroom and living room at Hacienda de San Rafael; the entrance to Trasierra



### 1. Choose your restaurants wisely

It is an essential part of the Spanish lifestyle to gather with friends and family in the late afternoons and even later evenings to socialize over sherry and tapas in *bodeguitas*. The streets of Andalusia are lined with tapas spots, with the authentic nearly indistinguishable from the tourist traps, and restaurants everywhere offer delicious slow-cooked meats and fresh seafood in a buzzy atmosphere. To discover those with the right ambiance and crowd, refer to Indagare's

destination reports. (Hint: some of the most terrific spots are unassuming, with one English-speaking waiter who is brought over to assist foreigners with menu selections.) You can also contact Indagare for tailor-made suggestions.

### 2. Do as the locals do, wherever possible

Truly experiencing southern Spain means taking part in local recreations, from *fútbol* matches to Flamenco, from attending Spanish guitar concerts to spending an afternoon in one of the Pueblos

Blancos. But choose those that are suited to your tastes and sensibility. Is attending a bullfight appropriate for you and your family? Would you prefer the experience offered by a Flamenco show or a Flamenco bar? (The latter is much less touristed and performances regularly take place well past midnight.)

### 3. Know when to spend a night in the countryside

One of the wonderful things about Andalusia is its wealth of charming estates. Whether you rent a villa in the wild



Sierras or stay for a few nights at a family-owned hacienda, the countryside offers active adventures and sweeping vistas. Ride on horseback through sunflower-filled fields at a property like **Hacienda de San Rafael** ([haciendadesanrafael.com](http://haciendadesanrafael.com)), located on an 18th-century olive-growing estate tucked between Seville and Marbella. Or stay at a beautiful guesthouse like **Trasierra** ([trasierra.eu](http://trasierra.eu)), a stylish private villa in a beautiful landscape.

#### 4. Know when to live like a local and when to enlist the support of a hotel

If your goal is to experience an authentic local way of life, the question then becomes

whether this is better achieved by renting a pied-à-terre or checking in to a hotel. The answer may depend on the area. Surprisingly, the hotel option is ideal in some of Andalusia's smaller, UNESCO World Heritage Sites, like Cordoba and Granada. These cities, which are lush, tropical and more Mediterranean, are also some of the most toured, because of their palaces, mosques and cathedrals. Staying in a luxury property like the **Palacio del Bailio** ([hospes.com](http://hospes.com)), in Cordoba, or the **Palacio de Los Patos** ([hospes.com](http://hospes.com)), in Granada, in no way detracts from the experience. When visiting larger metropolises, like Seville, you might consider

forgoing the high-end tourist properties for boutique ones like **Corral del Rey** ([corraldelrey.com](http://corraldelrey.com)). Located farther from the main attractions, they inspire guests to wander the streets, discovering local spots.

#### 5. Transform your transfers into road trips

Southern Spain is relatively small geographically, and trains run regularly through its towns and cities. In a couple of hours or less, you can reach Seville from Madrid or Granada from Cordoba. Driving, however, allows for fun excursions including stops in places like the beautiful Pueblos Blancos, "white towns," of the region. These include

Clockwise from top left: a lounge at Finca Cortesin; the Alhambra; a terrace at Trasierra; the entrance to Hacienda de San Rafael; a Seville street scene



**Ronda**, perched on the edge of a canyon, the small **Montejaque**, with panoramic views of the Sierras, and **Setenil de las Bodegas**, built into the walls of a river gorge.

Navigating winding roads in warm, sunny weather, you will pass through verdant countryside, including lush vineyards and rolling farmland. Continuing over the Sierra Mountains to the Costa del Sol, you will come upon scenic landscapes that offer incredible photographic opportunities.

## 6. Know which cities are best for day trips.

Seville, with its undeniable energy and charm, merits a few nights' stay and makes

a perfect home base for day trips to places like Cordoba or Granada. If you want to see both those cities, however, you should probably remain a night or two in Granada, to fully savor its rich Moorish architecture, and take a day trip to Cordoba from here. The coastal town of Marbella is off the general tourist track and so requires a stopover. Finish your itinerary with a few nights at one of the coastal area's five-star properties, like Finca Cortesin.

## 7. Sometimes you don't need a guide...

Unlike some European destinations, which can be fully appreciated only through

full days of guided touring, Andalusia is ideal for wandering. Enlist a private guide to tour historical sites in the early morning or late afternoon, but leave plenty of free time to explore on your own. Lunches should be long and laid back, not condensed into quick bites between stops. Dine as the locals do, sharing multiple rounds of tapas, socializing with strangers around outdoor tables, people watch and let time pass slowly.

## 7. Dress to impress.

Spaniards take great pride in donning stylish attire whether they're on the way to a big night out or running a quick errand. Andalusia's slow pace, walkable cities, fantastic weather and sophisticated populace make planning your outfits a part of the experience. Perusing stores for pieces by great Spanish designers that you can walk out wearing makes shopping all the more fun. Members can contact Indagare's bookings team to arrange specialized shopping guides and exclusive fashion experiences throughout Spain.

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Visit [www.indagare.com](http://www.indagare.com) to read Indagare's full destination reports on Seville, Marbella and everywhere in between. Members can contact the Bookings Team (212-988-2611) for assistance planning a trip.