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HISTORY & TRADITION



Geography of Spain
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Abstract

Well now, having taken a brief journey through the history of man's relationship with the horse in previous articles: from a source of food, to stock horse and war horse, to the development of modern equestrianism in this article I take a bit of a sideways step and indulge my fascination for the history & traditions of Southern Spain.

Being the very proud owner of a very fine Andalusian horse it is fitting to explore the land from whence he came. An overview of how the region of Spain known as Andalusia has fared over the millennia is followed by a brief sojourn into some of the traditions still very much alive and celebrated today.

This is by necessity a brief account – the idea is to create interest and maintain your enthusiasm not drive you to sleep reading this! This article could so easily have turned into a book; now there's a thought ...

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Andalucia: the Basics

Andalucia has 500 miles of coastline 70% of which is sandy beaches. Along the Mediterranean lies the Costa de Almeria, Costa Tropical and of course the Costa del Sol, while on the Atlantic coast we have the Costa de la Luz which lies to the west of Gibraltar. As well as Andalucia's fascinating cities and dazzling shores, the region is sprinkled with tiny unspoiled villages and whitewashed towns - the famous pueblos blancos - such as Casares, Gaucin and Frigilana. Andalucia, this mysterious corner of Europe, is a region of startling contrasts and great charm.

Provincial Map



In the Beginning

Previous texts have come complete with a trip back in time and this is no exception. I like to set things into context and where better to start than a mere 50,000 years ago! For instance, Neanderthal man is known to have lived on the Rock of Gibraltar this far back. Fast forwarding to around 8,000 BC migrating North African tribes established farming settlements throughout southern Spain, and are known today as the Iberians. The Phoenicians settled extensively along Andalucia's coast and they established a chain of trading posts, founding the sea port of Cadiz in 1100BC - which makes it Europe's oldest city by the way - and strongly influencing the way of life of the native Iberians. The Phoenicians were followed by the Celts, who in 800 BC moved south across Europe and into Andalucia. By 700 BC the Tartessus Kingdom was flourishing in Andalucia, and a century later Greek sailors founded trading ports along its shore. By the year 500 BC, the Carthaginians had colonised southern Spain.

The Romans in Spain

In their time, the Romans ruthlessly colonised Europe, North Africa and the Near East. In their struggle against Carthage, the Romans invaded the peninsula in 206 BC, crushing the resistance of the native Iberians and soon transformed Andalucia into one of their richest and best organised colonies, which they called Betis, crisscrossing the region with paved roads. Roman galleys sailed up its main river, now called the Guadalquivir, as far as Cordoba, where they took on board amphorae of olive oil and wine for

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exportation to Rome. Under the Romans, in the 4th century, Spain became a Christian country, and the Spanish language - perhaps the closest modern tongue to Latin - began to take its current shape.



Figure 1: Baelo Claudia

Baelo Claudia (left) is situated on the Atlantic coast overlooking the bay of Bolonia and was a busy fishing town after its construction at the end of the 2nd Century BC.

Not only was it the link between Tingi (Tangiers) and Hispania it was also an important source of salt, salted fish and that peculiar fish sauce, garum. Apparently the Phoenicians developed a recipe for garum that used salted, fermented, mackerel entrails that was considered superior to any other and although they had been supplanted first by the Carthaginians and they in turn by the Romans, the recipe survived on the coast of Hispania Ulterior and it was this particular garum that was in greatest demand amongst the upper classes of Roman society.

Today almost half the 13 hectares have been excavated and it is possible to walk around the forum, temples, market place, taverns, basilica, baths and fish-processing factory. Much of the self guided tour is on the original roads, the main thoroughfare, running east to west was grandly called Decumanus Maximus. The theatre set on the hill with magnificent views over the bay must have been one of the finest in Hispania. The site is considered one of the best and most complete Roman urban sites in Spain.

The Dark Ages & the Moors

After the collapse of the Roman Empire, Andalucia was devastated by successive waves of barbarian tribes coming from northern Europe, with the eventual predomination of the Visigoths. This warlike people reigned chaotically over the peninsula for almost two centuries, leaving Spain open to the invasion of the Moors (Islamic warriors from Arabia and North Africa) in the year 711. The Moors called the region al-Andalus because they associated it with the Vandals, one of the barbarian tribes who had, several centuries earlier, swept across the Straits of Gibraltar into North Africa. Thus we get the modern "Andalucia".

The Moors made the region their home for eight centuries and permanently marked it with their cultural legacy, signs of which are still visible in monuments such as the Mosque of Cordoba and the Alhambra Palace in Granada. It was not until the 13th century that the Christian Reconquest reached Andalucia, seizing the cities of Cordoba and Seville. By the end of the 15th century, the Catholic Monarchs, Isabel of Castille and Ferdinand of Aragon, had taken the last stronghold of the Moors: Granada and the Alhambra Palace.

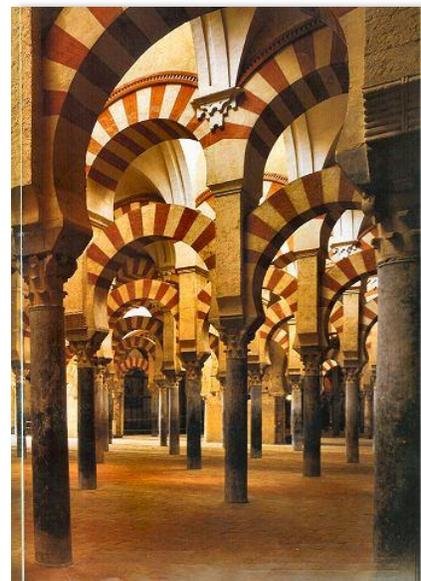


Figure 2: The Mosque in Cordoba

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Spain under the Christians



Figure 3: Seville in the 16th Century

Did you know that Andalucia was the launching point for the discovery of America?

The Upper Guadalquivir had silted up, making it impossible to sail as far inland as Cordoba and so Seville (its capital city) became the main port for the imports of gold from the New World during the 16th and 17th centuries.

Much of the wealth from America was spent on the wars waged by Spain's Hapsburg monarchy against the Lutheran countries in northern Europe and the Ottoman Turks in the Mediterranean, and as the flow of riches decreased, Spain and Andalucia sank into economic decline. Europe was at war and William and Mary were fighting Louis XIV. The region suffered the ravages of the Spanish War of Succession in the early 18th century and, one hundred years later, the Napoleonic invasion and the Battle of Trafalgar, touching off the War of Independence. Andalucia's economy suffered the direct effect of the independence movement in South America during the rest of the 19th century.

Andalucia in the 20th century

The devastating loss of Spain's last colonies, Cuba and the Philippines, led to political instability and further economic decline. In 1913 Blas Infante, the "father of Andalucia" began his fight for an Independent Andalucia. Meanwhile opposition to the autocratic King Alfonso XIII increased, culminating in the deposition of the monarchy and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, in 1936, when the Republic was overthrown by General Franco and his Nationalist movement. Although Spain did not openly take sides in World War II, Franco lent his support to the Axis, as a result of which Spain suffered the disastrous effects of an international blockade after the war. It was not until Franco died, in 1975, that democracy was restored, under the symbolic monarchy of King Juan Carlos II. Spanish government was decentralised and Andalucia became an Autonomous Region in 1982, with its own regional administration, the Junta de Andalucia (Assembly of Andalucia).

Since then, Spain, as an active member of the European Union, has experienced a dramatic improvement in the standard of living. The poverty of the Andalucian countryside has been largely eliminated and its people have regained their pride in the local culture, which flourishes alongside the benefits of improved roads, modern health care and high-tech infrastructures. The romantic image of Andalucia, in spite of progress, is still very much a thing of the present.

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Andalucia: Culture and Tradition



Figure 4: The Museum of Fine Arts in Seville

Now, that's the history lesson over: hopefully you're still with me!

If researching the history of southern Spain was fascinating, its culture is every bit as exciting. There is such a wealth of information that deciding what to include has been difficult. Andalucia is a fabulous place, steeped in traditions that have grown up over the centuries.

Along the way and perhaps especially today certain aspects would have attracted a certain commercialism, but fundamentally it is the passion for life, the region, its religion and traditions that are at the heart of its people today.

The Religious Fiestas of Andalucía

The best way to get to know the inhabitants of Andalucía is through its festivities. If there is something in the Andalucían character that makes it stand out, it is their particular feeling for a feast and their way of celebrating it. The local fiesta is when each town and village strives to put on a splendid show, not only for themselves but for those who come from afar to admire and enjoy. More than 3,000 fiestas are celebrated every year, in nearly 800 communities across the region: from fairs and pilgrimages, carnivals, feasts of Moors and Christians and processions. In fact, there is scarcely a day in the year without its fiesta, with special emphasis on the periods before and after the autumn harvests. Each town has its own patron saint and yearly procession. Religious celebrations are particularly important in Andalucía, very spectacular artistically, and in general, inheritors of the Baroque.

Most fiestas have something to do with religion. Thus, throughout the year there are numerous pilgrimages (El Rocío, known all over the world, is the biggest), dances held on the eve of a saint's day (verbenas), evening gathering (veladas), **Crosses of May** (Cruces de mayo - the ones in **Córdoba** are famous), and livestock and agricultural fairs (the **April Fair in Sevilla** is another example). The stars in all these celebrations are the people and the town, in the main square, main street, or a specially chosen site. Dancing and singing, the dresses and decorations, the lighting and contests, and each area's typical dishes are the fundamental elements of the feast.

El Rocío pilgrimage happens each May where nearly 1 million people assemble in a small hamlet in the Guadalquivir marshes where, since 1280 an image of Virgen del Rocío (Our Lady of the Dew) has been venerated. Pilgrims on foot, on horseback or in carts and from all over Spain, transform the scenery of the area into a landscape full of colour and animation.

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The Jerez May Horse Fair

The Jerez Horse Fair is an exciting and lively event that brings the entire city to the Gonzalo Hontoria Fair Grounds which covers 52,000 square metres giving ample space for the best horses of Jerez to show off to the crowds who flock to the casetas and other attractions. There are plenty of smartly dressed men and women on horseback and lovely horse drawn carriages also make their way through the fairground streets throughout this weeklong extravaganza.



Figure 5: A fine Parade



Figure 6: Traditional Costume

The history of the Jerez Horse Fair goes back to the commercial livestock fairs that were established when Jerez was just a town during the reign of Alfonso X the Sabio (the Wise).

That original event slowly gained momentum as a form of entertainment with the local wine producers setting up stands and then a children's amusement park added and so on until the fair took on its present day form.

This is an excellent Andalucian fair for both horse lovers and those wishing to enjoy the very best of southern Spanish culture – at least in its lightest, most carefree and fun loving versions. Because Jerez is such an important centre for horses and horsemanship, the focus is very much on the equine world.

In common with all southern fairs, you can expect food, drink – you won't escape without having tried several different types of "jerez" (similar to sherry, but locally produced) – dancing and all kinds of performances and entertainment.



Figure 7: How's this for Tack & Turnout!

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Bullfighting History

Like it or loathe it, bullfighting is an important part of Andalusian culture which also in part inspires the fantastic displays of horsemanship for which the region is famed. Although practiced all over Spain, the traditional **corrida** (bullfight) the ritual killing of bulls, originates in Andalusia. It is there where we find the most famous and most beautiful bullrings, such as the "plazas de toro" of Córdoba, Seville, Jerez de la Frontera, Málaga and the famous arena of Ronda, featured in the work of the American actor and movie director Orson Welles. Altogether there are more than 150 bullrings in Andalusia. The bullfighting season lasts from March to November and usually accompanies the local festivals ("ferias").



Figure 8: Plaza de Toro, Sevilla

To fight against a bull weighing 500 or 600 kilograms from a horse, was during the 19th Century a privilege of the noble class. Today it has its fans in all groups of society, although it splits public opinion into two groups: decided opponents and enthusiastic supporters of this "art".

Bull breeding is a lucrative business, if we consider that after spending 4 years of his best life in the greenest pastures a fighting bull has a high market price.

Ritual

Bullfighting is a ritual. Usually six animals are killed in a corrida by three "**toreros**". The ritual lasts about 20 minutes and consists of carefully prearranged stages, as called for by the tradition of the corrida. In the showdown the "matador" tries to kill the bull if possible with one sword thrust. If he succeeds, loud "olé"-calls can be heard and depending on his performance the torero gets one or two ears and (or) the tail of his victim.

The four stages are:

- Suerte de capa
- Suerte de varas
- Suerte de banderillas
- Suerte de matar

The lead roles are played by the bull and the matador in the arena. It is a ritual that requires a sacrifice, a sacrifice to the death.

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Only this thought can justify the ritual, the performance, the bullfight, the celebration; and that is death. Man, in his complex relationship with the fear of death but also his willingness to risk it, seeks to vanquish death. He does that by physically overcoming death; and doing so in the arena, he seeks immortality. The bull, therefore, is death personified.

Man's melodrama is forgotten for an instant. The matador, representing mankind and dressed for his date with death in the fantastical if impractical *traje de luz*, suit of lights, goads, mocks and sentences the bull to death with the *estocada*, the death blow, from his sword. The most spectacular *estocada* is the *estocada recibido* ('received', when the matador stands his ground and lets the enraged bull charge him) but it isn't seen that often. The ritual has been carried out, the bull is dead and the matador is triumphant. Man has defeated death - today he is immortal.

Flamenco

A trip to Andalucía wouldn't be complete without a little about Flamenco – the traditional song and dance of the Gypsies (flamencos). The art form developed over several centuries from Gypsy, Moorish, Andalusian, and other roots. Flamenco music and dance became popular in the early 19th century as café entertainment.



Figure 9: Flamenco Dancer

Canto ("song") is the core of flamenco, and like *baile* ("dance"), it has three forms: *grande* or *hondo* ("grand" or "deep"), intense, profound songs, tragic in tone, and imbued with *duende*, the transformation of the musician by the depth of the emotion; *intermedio* ("intermediate"), moderately serious, the music sometimes Oriental-sounding; and *pequeño* ("small"), light songs of exuberance, love, and nature.

Individual genres include the light *bulerías*; the more serious *soleares* and its lighter descendant, the *alegrías*; the *fandangos grandes*, a serious adaptation of a lighter non-Gypsy genre; the *malagueñas*, an offshoot of the *fandangos*; and *cantos grandes* such as the *siguiriyas gitanas* and *saetas*.

Both words and melody of these songs, like the flamenco dance, are improvised within traditional structures such as characteristic rhythms and chords.

Zapateado, intricate toe- and heel-clicking steps, characterizes the men's dance. The traditional women's dance is based more on grace of body and hand movement.

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The *baile grande*, especially, is believed to retain elements of the dance of India, where the Gypsies originated. Castanets, found in Andalusian dance, are not traditional to flamenco. Song and dance may be accompanied by *jaleo*, rhythmic finger snapping, hand clapping, and shouting. In the 19th century, guitar accompaniment became common for many genres, and guitar solos also developed. In the 20th century, commercial pressure distorted much of the traditional flamenco dance.

Footnote

Well, there you have it: Andalusia, this mysterious corner of Europe, a region of startling contrasts and great charm. I hope you have enjoyed the journey with me. Thank you for reading!

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