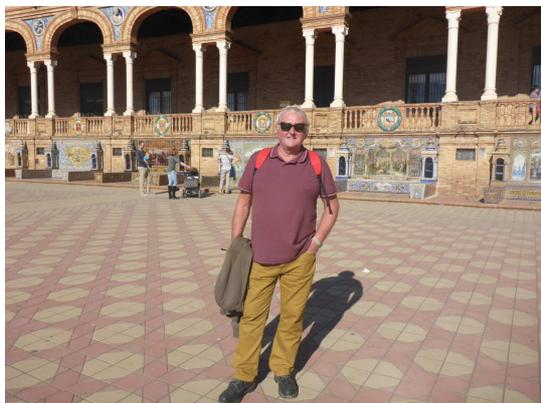


My Andalucía

This document provides an insight to my comings and goings, and favourite places and experiences, whilst visiting Andalucía in the autumn of 2016. Enjoy.



Tony at the Plaza de España, Seville

Tuesday 11th October 2016 (Feurengirola):

I walked to the train station here in Málaga leaving the apartment at 0930, only an hour after it got light, and whilst it was still feeling quite chilly (it was 18°C). The walk to the main train station took 30 minutes and I had a 10 minute wait for the service to Feurengirola. 45 minutes later I arrived at my destination. I was early for meeting up with my friend Ian, so I did a little sightseeing, but quickly formed the opinion that Feurengirola was only a very poor cousin of Málaga – a couple of churches and a Bull Ring and I had finished, that is apart from street after street of shops, bars and cafés. I certainly don't have any desire to return to Feurengirola!

Eventually I met up with Ian, someone I had originally met in Australia in 2006 and who sailed with me in Croatia for 4 weeks in 2007. It was good to reminisce old times with him and to share our many experiences of the past 9 years since we last met. He is an avid traveller too, so we had a lot to talk about. I caught a train back to Málaga at just after 1600 and was back in the apartment soon after.

Tuesday 8th November 2016 (Ronda):

Today I took a day trip by rail to the picturesque city of Ronda (see the pictures in my gallery). Part of the train journey from Málaga was through the El Chorro Gorge, with its trail hanging half way up the cliff faces. The Caminito is a narrow cliffside path hanging 100m above the waters of the river Guadalhorce. The path runs from the Embalse de Guadalhorce reservoir, through the famous El Chorro gorge, to El Chorro village. The train passes through the other side of the gorge to the path and the path is clearly visible - I suffer vertigo and never in a million years could I walk that path! The Caminito del Rey (King's Little Path) is built onto the side of the limestone rock face, and passes through the Desfiladero de los Gaitanes (Gaitanes Gorge) also known as Garganta del Chorro (literally throat of Chorro) after the nearby village and offers spectacular, heart-stopping views down a sheer drop to the churning waters. Originally built around 1905 and improved around 1921 it fell into disrepair and over the past decades, the path became known as 'the most dangerous path in the world' or even the 'walk of death'. Mountaineers from all over were attracted to risk the path in its pre-restoration state. The 'new' Caminito del Rey was re-constructed and reopened to the public on 28 March 2015, with the route and design of the path keeping as closely as possible to the old one. The famous boardwalk section is 2.9 km long and is constructed with a wooded slatted boardwalk and simple 1.2m-high three-wire guard rail. In places it is only one metre wide, hanging to the cliff face. The 'old' path can be seen just below. A highlight is the steel suspension bridge across the gorge, just next to the emblematic aqueduct bridge. The walk can now only be undertaken in a southerly direction and takes three to five hours depending on whether you are marching or taking it easy with plenty of photo stops. The railway station has been renamed El Chorro - Caminito del Red, and I stopped there on my train - the train half emptied as hikers headed off for this amazing adventure, which is obviously proving to be a very popular tourist attraction. It's definitely unique in Europe and has apparently started to be called 'the scariest path in the world'.

Today's visit to Ronda was memorable for the beauty of the the older parts of the city and for the spectacular views over the gorge that separates the two side of the older parts of the town. Ronda is a mountaintop city in Spain's Málaga province in Andalusia that is set dramatically above a deep gorge. This gorge (El Tajo)

separates the city's 15th century new town from its old town, dating to Moorish rule. The new town's Plaza de Toros, and the legendary 18th-century bullring, are one of the city's most recognizable landmarks.

I arrived by train from Málaga shortly before 1200 and had 5 hours available, during which time I visited most (if not all) of the popular historical attractions, crossed the spectacular stone 18th century Puente Nuevo Bridge over the deep El Tajo gorge that carries the rio Guadalevín through its centre (it was completed in 1793 and took forty two years to build), wandered aimlessly around the quiet backstreets away from the main tourists areas, and savoured the breathtaking views over the Serranía de Ronda mountains in the distance. My self conducted 4-hour tour around town took me through a mishmash of ancient cobbled streets to Ronda's loveliest public space, the leafy Plaza Duquesa de Parcent, which boasted a convent, two churches, including the belltower of the iglesia Santa Maria de Mayor, and the handsome arched ayuntamiento (council) building. The Plaza del Campillo overlooked the steps that zigzagged down to a place where one could look at eye-level through the Puente Nuevo (but I didn't go down). From the railway station I walked down the town's pedestrianised main shopping street (Calle Espinel), which leads to the the bullring, beyond which there was a cliff top viewing place over the gorge and the faraway mountains (the Mirador de Aldehuela and Balcón del Coño Viewpoints).

The Plaza Duquesa de Parcent was a particularly picturesque square and was adorned with monuments. The Santa Maria del Mayor church was the highlight, a church which took over 200 years to build and was (I have learned) a mixture of gothic and Renaissance styles. But the Plaza del Socorro was also very special - so much was there to be seen in this remarkable historical city.

Ronda is definitely one of the most beautiful cities in Spain, and I shall probably visit again sometime in the future.

Wednesday 16th November 2016 (Seville):

My bus from the Estación de Autobuses de Málaga arrived at the La Estación de Autobuses "Plaza de Armas" in Sevilla just 3 hours after leaving. It was comfortable and relaxing journey, during which time I watched a movie on my tablet - a great way to travel! On arrival I walked along the waterfront of the river, cutting into the old town in the vicinity of the cathedral. I knew that Sevilla was a jewel to be enjoyed, but I was unprepared for just how breathtaking and remarkable it would be. The old town blends easily with the newer shopping district, but there are parks, plazas, fountains and monuments to be seen almost everywhere in the centre, as well of course as spectacular architecture from a variety of historical periods. And there is the unique Plaza de España, slightly removed from the old town but only 15 minutes walk away. Sevilla is truly fabulous, and after only 6 hours in the city it now features high on my list of my favourite places in the world.

I started my tour by visiting the cathedral, which is the largest Gothic cathedral and the third-largest church in the world. It is also the largest cathedral in the world, as the two larger churches, the Basilica of the National Shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida and St. Peter's Basilica, are not the seats of bishops. It was registered in 1987 by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. It cost me €4 to enter and was money well spent - this was a huge monolith of staggering proportions, beauty and historical interest. After its completion in the early 16th century, the Cathedral supplanted Hagia Sophia as the largest cathedral in the world, a title the Byzantine church had held for nearly a thousand years. The cathedral is also the burial site of Christopher Columbus. I spent almost 2 hours within its walls, savouring the sheer splendour of the alterpiece, the massive organ and other highlights, but also the many works of art that adorn the various chapels, doorways and corners of this remarkable building. I also climbed the ramp up the bell tower to the top, where there were amazing panoramic views of the city to be enjoyed. Sadly I didn't spot the tomb of Christopher Columbus - I'll remember next time.

After leaving the cathedral I should have visited The Alcazaba, which is a royal palace originally developed by Moorish Muslim kings and is only a stone's throw from the cathedral, but I missed it! The palace is renowned as one of the most beautiful in Spain, being regarded as one of the most outstanding examples of mudéjar architecture found on the Iberian Peninsula. Unfortunately I missed it because I was hell-bent on setting course for the Plaza de España, some 15 minutes walk away from the cathedral. Next time in Sevilla I'll be sure not to miss the Alcazaba.

My next sight to visit was The Plaza de España, which was built to showcase Spain's industry and technology exhibits during the Ibero-American Exposition World Fair in 1929. The architecture is a mix of 1920s Art Decò and "mock Mudéjar", and Neo-Mudéjar styles (although I didn't see the Art Decò - something else to see on my next visit). The Plaza de España complex is built in a huge half-circle, with buildings continually running around the edge, accessible over the moat by numerous bridges representing the four

ancient kingdoms of Spain. In the centre is the Vicente Traver fountain, and by the walls of the Plaza are many tiled alcoves, each representing a different province of Spain. I spent just over an hour in this incredible place, wandering around the moat, crossing the bridges, taking pictures and generally enjoying the surroundings, not realising that it was only built in the the last century - it looked much older.

I spent the remainder of my time in Sevilla wandering through parks, exploring the many historic buildings around town, looking at statues and monuments, and generally absorbing myself in the culture of this fantastic Spanish city - with 45 minutes still remaining before my bus departure, and with very sore feet and tired legs, I sat on a park bench by the river to recuperate and reflect on what a fantastic day it had been.

The return journey to Málaga was just as comfortable as the one going to Sevilla in the morning - 2.5 hours and one movie later I was back in familiar territory at the Málaga bus station and home in the apartment 30 minutes later, tired but very satisfied with my day out.

Friday 18th November 2016 (Mijas Pueblo):

It was a time for another away-day sightseeing tour today - I took the local bus to the village of Mijas Pueblo, located on the high ground to the north of Benalmádena on the coast of the Costa del Sol. The bus took 90 minutes to get there from Málaga, and cost a staggering €2.60! Such amazingly good value, especially as much of the journey offered some spectacular views across the Straits of Gibraltar to the North African coast, which was quite visible - another world, another culture, another continent, but so close!

The bus dropped me off at Mijas Pueblo, which is the whitewashed mishmash of buildings and narrow cobbled streets built on the hillside 428 metres above sea level. My first stop was at the Tourist Information Centre, only a couple of minutes walk from the bus stop. There I picked up a map of the village to help me find my way around, but really it wasn't necessary because this was a small place. Of course, being so close to the densely populated interlinked coastal towns of Benalmádena, Torremolinos, Feurengirola and Marbella, Mijas was going to be very busy, and so it was, spectacularly so! As my readers know, I'm not in my comfort zone when in crowds of tourists, so never really felt comfortable in this highly popular destination. I did however find some quiet streets off the beaten track that the throngs of visitors had miraculously missed, and a few places to pause and wonder at the fabulous views over the coastline and across the Straits of Gibraltar. But generally I didn't gel in this popular tourist destination - it was far too congested for my liking, and to add to my distaste, most of the narrow streets had not been pedestrianised! So when I should have been wandering around enjoying the relative peace and beauty of the place, I was forever dodging traffic, delivery trucks, private motorists, scooters, and ghetto blasters from many of the cars! I had planned to sit and enjoy a glass of wine in some Plaza whilst watching the world go by, but that was impossible in this manic place! And what about the architecture? I'm not sure from whence it originates - Wikipedia cleverly avoids putting dates to their description of Mijas, except to tell the reader that in the 1950s an asbestos factory was built to reduce unemployment and the first small hotel was built because of the growing fame of the Costa del Sol. But despite references to ancient history and the existence of some relics, nowhere can I discover when the village, as it is now, was constructed? Actually most buildings appear relatively recent, but I may be wrong! The average visitor is of course not interested in any of this - it is indeed an attractive place, has the obligatory narrow cobbled streets, whitewashed buildings, plenty of tapas bars, cafés and restaurants and souvenir shops around every corner, and that seems to be what the modern day tourist wants, me not included!

So finally after just 2 hours I decided to call it a day with Mijas Pueblo, and return home to the wonderful city of Málaga. There was no direct bus to catch, but I had no problem changing busses in Torremolinos with only a few minutes to wait. I was back in my apartment not long after 1600. Although it had been a clear, sunny and relatively warm day, it was a chilly evening, so I was happy to be back early.

Tuesday 22nd November 2016 (Torremelinos):

I took the train to Torremelinos today and met up with my friends Sara and Adrian for a walk around the town and for lunch. Torremelinos is a far cry from Malaga and a bit of a cultural wilderness, but is nevertheless a friendly and relaxed place, which feels comfortable and welcoming. We walked through the town, along the waterfront stopping at a beach bar for some Sangria, and then spent a pleasant hour or so over a tapas lunch. It was a good day spent with fine company, and most enjoyed. Thanks Sara and Adrian – enjoy the remainder of your time here in Spain.

Thursday 24th November 2016 (Córdoba):

I walked the 30 minutes from the apartment to catch the 0915 train from the Estación María Zambrano in Málaga to the city of Córdoba, just one hour distant on the excellent high-speed, quiet and comfortable train service. The Estación de Córdoba is just 20 minutes walk, mostly through a park, to the older part of the

town, where the main historic sites are located. This city, like Seville and Málaga, has a wealth of incredible places to visit, but it is also a pleasure to just roam between the major historic sites through the narrow cobbled side streets, and in the case of Córdoba, by the old city wall.

The city lies on the banks of the Guadalquivir River and was conquered by Muslim armies in the eighth century to become the capital of the Islamic Emirate and then Caliphate of Córdoba, which included most of the Iberian Peninsula. During these centuries, Córdoba became a predominantly Muslim society with minorities living in peace and harmony with their Muslim neighbours. It returned to Christian rule in 1236, and now is a moderately sized modern city with a population of about 330,000. The historic centre was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

This was sightseeing at its best – I was totally unprepared for the amazing Mosque-Cathedral (the Mezquita), one of the world's greatest Islamic buildings. It's a symbol of the worldly and sophisticated Islamic culture that flourished here in Córdoba more than a millennium ago, when Córdoba was the capital of Islamic Spain, and Western Europe's biggest and most cultured city. I spent about 90 minutes in this incredible historic building, with its Islamic and Christian architecture blending into one, wandering amongst the arches, chapels, alters, and other great symbols of these two great faiths, which refined an age in history when Muslims, Jews and Christians lived side by side and enriched the city with their diverse and vibrant cultures.

After leaving the Mezquita I walked across the great Roman Bridge (Puente Romano), which spans the Guadalquivir River close to both the Mosque-Cathedral and the Alcázar de los Reyes Cristianos. Apparently the bridge was first built by the Romans in the early 1st century BC, perhaps replacing a previous wooden one. Now many centuries later and after an Islamic reconstruction, it has 16 arcades and a total length of 247 meters. During its history, the bridge was restored and renovated several times (in particular in the 10th century), and now only the 14th and 15th arches are original. Its present form dates mainly from the Medieval period, with the latest changes being made in 1876. There are sixteen arches, four of which are pointed and the rest semi-circular. It was extensively restored in 2006, although still has an appearance of its historical past, and the 19th-century cobbled paving did give a Roman feel. I was on the bridge for perhaps an hour, enjoying particularly the view from the bridge over the Mosque-Cathedral, with the river and the Roman Gate of the Bridge in the foreground. As with everywhere else in Córdoba, my camera was getting white hot with the number of shots per minute being taken.

After leaving the bridge I found myself a quiet garden bench with a nice view, out of the wind and in the sun, to sit and eat my lunch (baguette chunks with ham and cheese brought in my backpack from Malaga) and drink a bottle of water (from the tap in the apartment and also brought from Malaga!). It was a pleasant interlude, during which time I chatted to a girl from Thailand, who holidays in Europe each year, and this year has her hotel in Seville, from where she is doing day trips. An interesting person.

Next on my itinerary today was the Alcázar de los Reyes Cristianos, with its fabulous terraced gardens, full of fish ponds, fountains, orange trees and flowers. The Alcázar building itself was built in the 13th and 14th centuries on the remains of a Moorish predecessor. One hall displayed some remarkable Roman mosaics, apparently dug up from the Plaza de la Corredera in the 1950s. But the best part of the Alcázar was the gardens and ponds, which I spent roaming for almost an hour, chatting to some American tourists as I went my merry way!

Leaving the Alcázar, and by now with my legs and feet feeling fatigued, I just wandered slowly, not really caring where I was in this beautiful city, enjoying the tiny narrow cobbled streets, the old city wall, a few more churches and the surrounding atmosphere! Eventually I found the local El Corte Inglés department store, went to their supermarket and bought some energy (chocolate milk), to sustain me for the walk back to the train station, and later after arriving in Malaga. I had a final rest on a park bench in a park not far from the station, but was pretty tired by the time I boarded the train to return to Malaga.

Checking the internet after my visit to Córdoba for places I might have missed, the Plaza de la Corredera and Plaza del Potro come top of a short list. I'll have to remember them next time. You can read about these places in my document "Córdoba Information".