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¡VIVA ESPAÑA!

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A Palos Verdes writer and equine enthusiast seeks history, heritage and horses in Spain's culturally rich Andalusia region.

Santa Iglesia Catedral de Sevilla
(Holy Cathedral Church of Seville)

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f you trace the latitude line on a globe of the world from the middle of California around to Europe, you will land on the Spanish region of Andalusia, which extends across the entire south of Spain on the Iberian Peninsula. Though it is miles away, Andalusia is akin to California in many ways—most notably stalwart stewardship of the environment, idyllic climates, world-class wineries, grand celebration of the arts and splendid, diverse topographies. Situated above

neighboring North Africa, Andalusia—like California—boasts arid deserts, mountain ranges with the name Sierra Nevada, sundrenched beaches and rugged coastline.

Many years ago, my curiosity about my horse's famous Spanish Arabian grandfather lured me to Andalusia. What was intended to be a one-time equestrian adventure evolved into an affinity for Spain and many journeys back to this captivating place. Since horses are an iconic part of Spain's history and are an integral part of its culture today, the magnificent Andalusian horses that continue to draw me to Epona Equestrian Center and the Royal Andalusian School of Equestrian Art there have also led me to unexpected places, life-changing experiences and the splendid company of some delightful people.

FLAMENCO: THE SPIRIT OF ANDALUSIA

One of the most vibrant displays of the soulful spirit of Andalusians is flamenco. The art of flamenco is an intensely emotional expression of life's joys and sorrows interpreted through dance, song and guitar music. Though it is performed throughout Spain and the world, it originated in Andalusia.

According to legend, it began in the city of Jerez, performed by gypsies starkly contrasting the lives of wealthy landowners and sherry barons. The rhythm is created by the music of Spanish guitars, with the beat kept by clapping hands, the high heels of dancers' feet and wooden castanets. Graceful hand movements and songs express the emotions of the artists.

Today the gypsy quarter of Santiago in the city of Jerez is home to many local artists, and the Andalusian Foundation of Flamenco and Seville's Museum of Flamenco are at the forefront of preserving and promoting the art in the region.

LOCAL FLAVORS, TAPAS & SHERRY

Like flamenco and all things Andalusian, the food and wine is also steeped in history and tradition. Food introduced during Arab rule centuries ago—rice, lemons, oranges, olives, grapes, almonds, many vegetables and spices—has been a part of the cuisine of Southern Spain throughout history.

Tapas—small portions of food for sharing that originated in Andalusia—are a local favorite. Sauces spiced with cumin and saffron, salads with sherry vinegars, gazpacho, and grilled and fried seafood from the nearby Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea are typical fare. Breads, local cheeses and olives from the region's abundant olive groves are daily staples, and black Iberian ham from the mountains of Andalusia is one of the most savored delicacies.

Tapas and Spanish sherry (fortified wine) go hand-in-hand in Andalusia. The city of Jerez (known as Xerez in Roman times, then Sherrish under Moorish rule) has about 100 sherry bodegas (wineries) and is a major contributor to Spain's ranking as one of the world's top wine producers.



PASSION
PLAY
Left: Museum
of Flamenco
in Seville.
Below: Royal
Andalusian
School of
Equestrian
Art in Jerez.



Exports to sherry-loving England date back to the 14th century. Christopher Columbus travelled to the New World with sherry aboard his ship, and stories abound that explorer Ferdinand Magellan spent more on sherry than weapons in preparation to sail around the world. From dry, light fino to the sweeter, richer Manzanilla styles, each bottle bears official stamps of origin with Jerez/Xerez/Sherry that pay homage to the past.

SEVILLE—ARCHITECTURE & HISTORY

With so much rich heritage and beauty to be found in all of Andalusia, each city has its own unique story to tell. But it is Seville, the breathtaking capital of Spain's southernmost region, that has delighted historians and seduced poets, authors, artists and filmmakers more than any other for countless years. Situated on the banks of the Guadalquivir River, Seville was the maritime gatekeeper that controlled immigration and trade traffic to the Atlantic and the New World centuries ago, including Christopher Columbus' fleet departures to discover America.

Orange tree-lined streets, horse-drawn carriages and street performers lend modern-day charm to a backdrop of architecture influenced by a dramatic blend of Moorish, Gothic, Baroque, Renaissance and Arab styles. It is the Moorish style that is the hallmark of the region, though—influenced by many centuries of Islamic civilization.

Ornate arches, exquisite stucco and tile work, and ornamental use of calligraphy dating back to the 700s masterfully adorn buildings juxtaposed with contrasting and more contemporary structures. The palaces, museums, churches, monuments, bullfighting arena and other historical attractions that comprise the unique cityscape are numerous and a history lover's dream come true.

One of the most notable architectural masterpieces is the Gothic-style Santa Iglesia Catedral de Sevilla (Holy Cathedral Church of Seville), which was built in the ninth century and is the third largest cathedral in the world. Its magnificent walls contain a treasure of more than 500 paintings, statues and other artifacts dating as far back as the 16th century, along with the tomb of Columbus.

Within walking distance from the cathedral is another must-see historical landmark: the royal palace called Alcázar, which is touted to be the most ancient royal residence in Europe. It was at Alcázar that explorer and cartographer Amerigo Vespucci drew maps of the New World for Columbus' voyage, which were signed Amerigo and later became the name for America.

From then to now and through the course of time, whether living simply in quiet, whitewashed villages or living the aristocratic life, there is a common thread that inherently runs through the hearts of the people of Andalusia. Their shared cultural pride and contagious spirited zest for life ensures that their rich historical tradition will live on.

When I drive through Malaga Cove in the South Bay, the name Málaga (a Spanish city on the Mediterranean coast), ocean breezes and our California coastline often conjure up memories of smiling Spaniards, horse hooves on cobblestone streets and flamenco dancers' heels on wooden stages in that special place part-way around the globe that has captured my heart forever. *iViva España!* ●

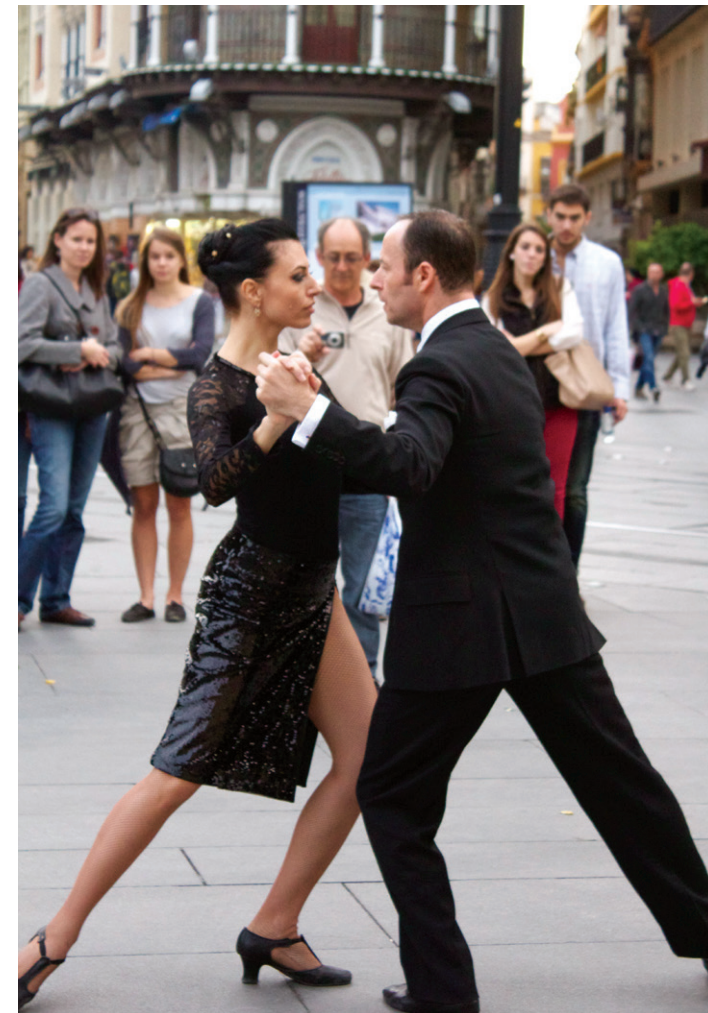
Special thanks to the tourist offices of Spain and Seville, Epona Equestrian Center, the Royal Andalusian School of Equestrian Art and the Casa Sacristia Santa Ana Hotel. For more information, visit spain.info, andalucia.com and seville.org.



EDEN REVISITED
The gardens at Alcazar of Seville. Above: Dressage training with Andalusian horses at Epona.



ARTFUL EXPRESSION
Above: Hand-painted tiles celebrate the history of Spanish horses and tile art. Below: Street performers dance a passionate tango for onlookers in the heart of Seville.



STRUCTURALLY SPEAKING
Left: Moorish arches at the royal palace Alcazar of Seville built in the 1300s. Middle: Casa Sacristia Santa Ana Hotel in the center of Seville. Bottom: Epona Equestrian Center in the Carmona countryside.