

Jerez de la Frontera



Getting There

From Carmona take the E-5/A-4, Autovía del Sur, and follow it through Sevilla all the way south to Jerez de la Frontera.

Jerez de la Frontera has a long and kaleidoscopic history, and the most conspicuous of the resulting monuments is the large and impressive Alcázar, a memorial of the centuries of Moorish rule. By the 15th century the city had expanded beyond its walls to become one of the most prosperous in Andalucía. It is its geographical location, however - at one point of the triangle formed with El Puerto de Santa María and Sanlúcar de Barrameda - that is responsible for its unique climate and albariza soil. These attributes, in turn, are the foundation of Jerez's world-wide fame. The Moors brought with their invasion the art of distillation, but it was not until the 18th century that the production and sale of sherry - and of course Brandy - encouraged by the English, grew into the industry that would give the city its identity. Today, the English names emblazoned on the bodegas, literally a place where the barrels are stored but more commonly used to identify a particular company, are familiar to everyone.

The city's agricultural connections have led to a love affair with the horse, and visitors to Jerez will not want to miss a stop at the Royal School of Equestrian Art. During May, the city celebrates the annual Horse Fair *Fería del Caballo*.

Although there are really no monuments of particular note here, what the city does have is a distinctly different, and very charming, ambiance. Consequently, few tourists will be disappointed with a stop in Jerez de la Frontera.



Royal Andalusian School of Equestrian Art
Real Escuela Andaluza del Arte Ecuestre

Without a doubt, this is the highlight of any trip to Jerez and visitors should be careful to

plan accordingly so that they do not miss the world-famous Dancing Horses of Andalucía show. Originated by the famous horseman Álvaro Domecq during the 1970s this features the Cartujana breed of horses, a cross between Arabian and Andalusian horses ridden by extremely talented riders in an 18th-century costume.

However, to do this is quite complicated as there are shows only at Midday on Tuesday (but not during Jan, Feb and from mid-Dec to the end-Dec) and Thursday and also on Friday in August, along with special shows on dates that are posted on their website. Tickets, which must be reserved in advance, cost between €18 and €25.

This is a large complex set in large private grounds of the Recreo de las Cadenas a 19th-century palace, dominated by an elegant mansion and an indoor stadium that leads to the stable areas, and there are other attractions besides the horse show. It is possible to visit between 10-2, with the ticket office closing at 1, on Mon, Wed and Fri and between 11-1, with the last visit at 12:30, to watch the horse training exercises, at an admission price of €10.

Other attractions here are the **Carriage**



Museum and Equestrian Art Museum, both open Tue, Thu and Sat from 10-2, with the ticket office closing at 1, and a combined admission price of €6.

Avda. Duque de Abrantes, s/n; T. 956 318 008; www.realescuela.org



Of course, a visit to a bodega is also highly desirable when in Jerez, and there is no shortage of opportunities. With sprawling Gonzalez Byass Bodega complex, easily identifiable by the familiar signs advertising one of its most famous products, Tio Pepe being the one of choice. Note the two plaques outside the

door, indicating the Vice-Consulancy of Italy and Denmark. In addition to an informative introduction to the intricacies of grape cultivation and the production of famous local wines, there are several interesting surprises such as huge wooden barrels autographed by the great and the good, a bodega designed by Eiffel and even, if you are lucky, you may see the wine glass and little ladder leading up to it left for the local mice to have their evening tittle! Manuel María González, 12; tel: 902 440 077; www.bodegastiopepe.com; Visits in English Mon-Sat Midday, 1, 2, 5, 6:30; adm. €10 with wine tasting and €16 with wine tasting and tapas.



Nearby are the forbidding crenellated walls and towers of the Alcázar, Mosque, Arab Baths and the Camera Obscura. Within this immense square structure that dates from the 12th century and was the home of the Caliph of Sevilla until after the reconquest it became the HQ of the Christian governor is the Mosque Mezquita of Almohade design, and this small and dignified structure dates from the 11th century. Also inside are the Arab Baths, lovely gardens and the rather curious Camera Obscura Cámara oscura. Found in the tower of the Baroque Villavicencio Palace, it offers visitors a bird's eye view of the city. Alameda Vieja; tel: 956 149 955; Open Nov, Dec, Jan Mon-Sun 10-2:30, Feb-mid-July, mid-Sep-Oct Mon-Sat 10-5:30, Sun 10-2:30, mid-Jul-mid-Sep Mon-Fri 10-7:30, Sat-Sun 10-2:30; adm. €3, with Camera Obscura €5.40.

Just a short distance around the Alcázar from the Gonzalez Byass Bodega is the San Salvador Cathedral Catedral. Constructed in the 17th century, over an old mosque, this is an interesting mix of Gothic, Baroque and Neo-Classical styles. It is interesting to note, however, that the main tower is separated from the main structure. Plaza de la Encarnación; tel: 956 348 482; Open Mon-Fri 11-1.

Another church worth a visit is the Iglesia de San Miguel with its huge tower. Dating from the 15th to 16th centuries, its intricate and attractive altar is of particular interest. Plaza San Miguel; tel: 956 343 347; Open Tue-sat 10-1.

**Foundation of Andalusian Flamenco
Fundación Andaluza de Flamenco.**

Found in the lovely 18th century Palace of Pemartín Palacio Pemartín. This is the home

of the Foundation of Andalucian Flamenco Fundación Andaluza de Flamenco, a favorite place in Jerez. Not only is the palace itself a place of great charm; it houses a wealth of interesting exhibits detailing this fascinating art form. There is an audiovisual demonstration on the hour every hour but, without doubt, the highlight of a visit here is watching the dancers, accompanied by a guitarist, practicing their steps and perfecting their form in the audience of a huge mirror. Plaza san Juan, 1; tel: 956 814 132; Open Mon-Fri 10-2.

El Palacio del Tiempo, Clock Museum Museo de Relojes

This is housed in a neo-classical mansion La Atalaya, which is situated amidst beautiful grounds populated by peacocks, black swans, and a variety of other exotic birds. The museum itself, considered one of the best of its kind in the world, displays a collection of over 300 clocks occupying over half of the house. It goes without saying that the best time to visit is just before the hour. Calle Pizarro, 19; tel: 956 182 100; Visits Tue-Fri 9:30, 10:30, 11:30, 12:30, 13:15; adm. €6.

Jerez de la Frontera is an anomaly within Spain, a rare town whose central plaza is not named Mayor or España. Here, it is called the Plaza del Arenal and is surrounded by towering palm trees, and dominated by the watchful eye of Don Miguel Primo de Rivera y Orbaneja, astride his mount upon a plinth in a fountain adorned pool.



Primo de Rivera y Orbaneja, 1870-1930, 2nd Marquess of Estella, was born in Jerez and besides being an aristocrat and military officer was appointed Prime Minister by the King and reigned as a dictator from 1923 to 1930.

Places to Eat

Hotel Royal Sherry Park has, as you would expect, a delightful formal restaurant. There is also a surprise, and as time may be of importance a useful one too. Next to the pool

is a terrace cafeteria offering basic, but plentiful and well cooked, dishes at very competitive prices. And the ambiance is charming. Álvaro Domecq, 11; tel: 956 317 614.

On the way back to Carmona it is interesting to make a quick visit to two very different places. Firstly, take the A-382 east towards **Arcos de la Frontera** which, sitting on top of a



towering sandstone hill the Peña Nueva overlooking the River Guadalete, is easy to recognize as it totally dominates the surrounding countryside.

Arcos is one of the traditional 19 Pueblos Blancos that share a history involving the centuries-long fight of the Spaniards to reconquer Spain from the Muslims (Moors). The de la Frontera in these villages' names reflects this frontier history, with some of the villages changing hands multiple times between the first Arab conquest (711) and the final Spanish victory (1492). Arcos' Castillo, built by the Moors in the 11th century, reflects the Arab occupation. On the border between Castile and Granada, the towns became desirable bounty. Their signature barred window architecture reflects each town's defensive emphasis.

After the final reconquest the ancient nobility began to enjoy the cultural activities which accompanied Spain's Renaissance. Traces of this can be found today in Arcos' array of old-town buildings and churches rich with works of art from the 1500s and 1600s.

The place to see here is the Plaza de España, at the highest point of town. It makes up for its small size, by the buildings that surround three sides and the dramatic balcony right on the edge of the cliff overlooking the surrounding area. If you can find a place to park here – always difficult, it's worth a short stop to admire the view as well as the Santa María de la Asunción church with its surprising mix of Romanesque, Gothic and Mudejar styles, the Town Hall Ayuntamiento and even take a peek inside the magnificent Casa del Corregidor once the residence of the governor and now a beautiful Parador hotel. Driving through Arcos can be a little difficult as besides being steep the roads are often narrow, but even a short visit here will give you a good idea of the old-fashioned ambiance of Arcos de la Frontera. It is unusual, too, in Andalucía in that at certain

times of the year they even release toros to run through these narrow streets.

The next stop is even more dramatic, so take the A-393 east to the junction with the A-374 then, after a short distance south, take a short diversion off the A-374 on the A-2300 to **Zahara de la Sierra**.



Sitting atop a mountain hill underneath the ruins of a castle strategically located between Sevilla and Ronda, and overlooking a very large reservoir whose dam you have to cross, Zahara is a startlingly dramatic village with amazing views over the surrounding countryside and mountains.

To return to Carmona take the A-2300 back to the A-374 then continue north to the A-384 when, after a short distance west turn north again on the A-8126 towards Morón de la Frontera.

This part of the trip is considerably more attractive, and just after Coripe before you begin to ascend a hill you will see on the left-hand side there is what looks like an ordinary farm. In fact, though, it's a fighting bull toro bravo breeding ranch. Those with an interest in seeing these animals close-up, and exploring little bit off-road, should take the rough road at the bottom of the hill and meander along for a few hundred yards. Besides beautiful country, you will see small pens where a toro bravo is allocated a harem of around twenty to twenty-five cows vacas and, often, the young calves too - a process known in Spanish as un lote de cubrición. Be warned, though, this is private land and these animals can be very dangerous, so treat everything with respect and do not get out of the car to take closer photographs.

From there, continue on past Pozo Amargo to Morón de la Frontera then take the A-361 to the junction with the A-92 and continue on the A-364 to Marchena from where the A-380 will return you to Carmona.

This last stretch is across an agricultural plain, and who will be the first to spot the Little Goat Farm Cortijo Cabrito?

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