

# INTRODUCING MUSLIM SPAIN

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## 1.1 Why Go

When the drizzle gets too much, there's always Spain. For a European nation it often seems a taste of another world, crested with snowy mountain ranges, edged with soft sandy beaches, peppered with some of the most spectacular medieval monuments in the world and enriched with a warm, cheerful culture that owes more than a little to the 800 years of Muslim culture that once flourished there. And with over 57 million tourists visiting Spain each year, flights are generally affordable, regular and easy.

While Spain's major cities promise breathtaking sights and fiestas that give Carnival a run for its money, the countryside offers wild, untouched landscapes, hiking, cycling, skiing, surfing, horse riding, wild swimming, and much more. You can create your own adventure

along ancient trade paths through magnificent valleys dusted with delicate pink almond blossoms and into caves where Paleolithic and Neolithic man left elegant paintings depicting their lives. Or you can simply wander the mazes of old, whitewashed stone villages, soaking up the atmosphere of a culture so rich, so refreshing, and yet so accessible.

For the Muslim traveller, Spain holds a special kind of attraction. As a land where Muslims created a uniquely Iberian Islamic culture over the course of hundreds of years, there is not only the physical presence of Al-Andalus waiting around every corner, especially in Andalusia, but there is also the tangible sense that this is where Muslims lived, worked, studied, traded, and are buried.

In the music, the food, the language, the sayings, the agriculture and the hospitality, Spain is a fascinating blend of cultures that bears testimony to the lasting influence of Islam there. For Western Muslims, learning about its history whilst spending time absorbing the sense of each place offers a welcome insight into a form of Islam that was at once Middle Eastern and European.

## 1.2 When To Go

If you are heading for the historical Muslim areas of Spain, which are mostly concentrated in the southern region of Andalusia, it is worthwhile working around the hottest time of year, which can be unbearable on long sightseeing tours. July and August register the highest average temperatures (37°C in Cordoba and Seville, the ‘frying pan of Spain’), so unless you plan to rent a villa in the countryside and spend all day in the pool, this is not the ideal time of year to visit.

The best months to visit are May and September, as prices are not at their highest, the weather tends to be very fair and the natural environment really comes into its own, with orange blossoms emerging in May and the russet colours on the trees in autumn. April and October are also usually good times to visit, especially if you prefer cooler weather, although there is a risk of catching a rainy spell.

While Andalusia experiences little rainfall compared to the rest of Europe, hence the serious problems of desertification in many areas, winter in mountainous areas such as the Granada province can be very cold and stormy, with winds up to 87 km per hour recorded recently in

the Alpujarras. However, Malaga has the mildest winter of anywhere in mainland Europe, and Andalusia can be stunning on one of its many sunny winter days. If you keep an eye on the weather forecasts and don't book too far ahead, this can be a great off-peak time to escape terrible northern winters.

## Climate

Although it is famous for its sunshine, the weather in Spain varies greatly from place to place; while in the northern area of Galicia and the Basque country rain is the norm, there is a serious risk of desertification all over Andalusia. However, taking into account seasonal variations of sun, snow, rain and wind, the classic idyllic image of Andalusia basking under a blue sky isn't too far from the truth; you might well find yourself eating lunch outside on a sunny December day.

Below you'll find the average maximum and minimum temperatures for the major areas covered in this book:

Average Temp °C/F	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Cordoba	15/4	18/5	21/8	23/10	27/13	33/17	37/19	37/20	31/17	25/13	19/8	15/6
Granada	14/0	16/2	20/4	21/6	26/10	32/14	35/16	35/16	29/13	23/9	17/4	14/2
Malaga & Ronda	17/7	18/8	20/10	22/11	25/14	28/18	31/20	31/21	28/19	24/15	20/11	18/9
Seville	17/6	19/7	23/9	24/11	28/14	33/18	37/20	36/20	32/18	26/14	21/10	17/7
Toledo & Madrid	11/2	13/3	17/5	18/7	23/11	29/16	33/18	32/18	27/15	20/10	14/5	11/3

Rain, the stuff that off-peak tourists flee from but Spanish farmers long for, is unlikely to ruin your trip; March, the wettest month for Andalusia, has an average of 90mm rainfall over the entire month, yet only nine days of rain. Below you'll find average rainfall figures for Andalusia and the average days of precipitation per month:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Average rainfall (mm)	73	59	90	51	36	9	1	5	25	66	68	76
Average days of precipitation	8	6	9	7	5	1	0	0	2	5	6	8