

Córdoba Province



Once the proud queen of Al-Andalus, with its splendid court and cultured caliphs, Córdoba's opulent and enchanting Islamic heritage resonates with faded glory. Although the city's romanticism and imagination-fuelling history still fascinates travellers, Córdoba today has the added ingredients of modernity and commerce, which give it a contemporary, fun feel. So, some of the epithets used to describe it in its more recent past, such as 'museum city' or 'quiet backwater', are starting to lose their aptness. Córdoba's charm is that one can be intoxicated by architectural and historic beauty during the day, and drop into a happening bar and be intoxicated by various sherry wines and cocktails in the evening.

The Mezquita, Córdoba's greatest monument and the sight that everyone flocks to see, is World Heritage listed and one of the world's architectural wonders. But don't forget that Córdoba, despite all its Islamic elements, is quintessentially Andalusian: it has spawned some of the region's most important bullfighters, it's the home of *salmorejo* (a thick gazpacho) and has some of the best places to eat in the region.

Outside of Córdoba, a vast landscape of olive trees encircles the city like miles of braided hair, and there's a fascinating patchwork of small towns, ranging from introverted Islamic mazes to extravagant baroque showpieces. Then there are magnetic pulls such as the award-winning, velvety olive oil of Baena, and treacly Montilla wine, whose wrinkly vines grow south of Córdoba city. The province also produces some of the tastiest cheese and pork products in Andalucía.

HIGHLIGHTS

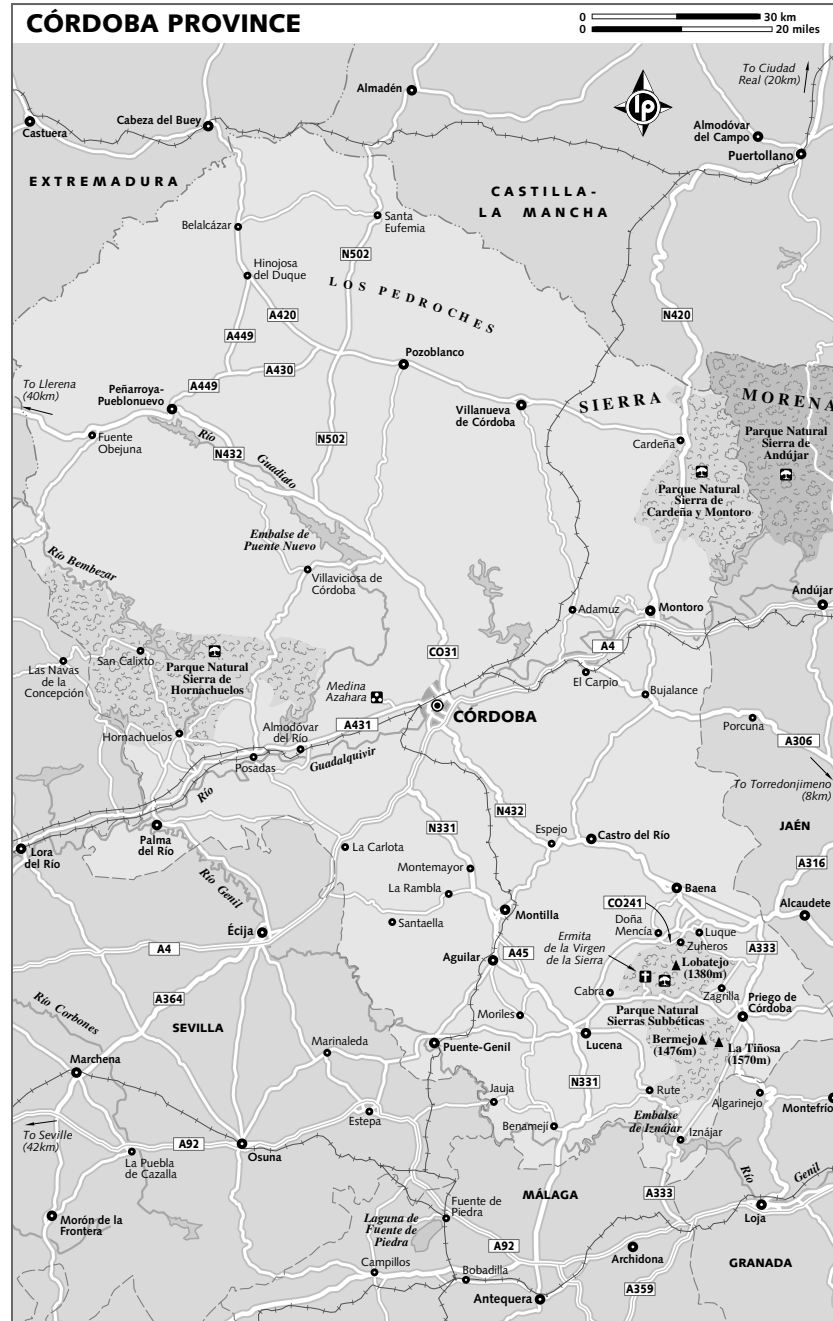
- Visit the **Mezquita** (p301) in the early morning for breathtaking architecture in peace
- Explore the labyrinthine alleys of Córdoba's **Judería** (p307) and celebrate the city's secret patios at the festival of **Cruces de Mayo** (p310)
- Sweat buckets at the renovated **Hammam Baños Árabes** (p310), followed by a hookah and tea
- Imagine the short-lived splendour of the **Medina Azahara** (p306) at the ruins of the palace-city
- Enjoy the extravagant baroque architecture of **Priego de Córdoba** (p320)
- Get a great view from the beautiful mountains of **Parque Natural Sierras Subbéticas** (p318) or the wooded hills of **Parque Natural Sierra de Hornachuelos** (p317)



■ POPULATION: 1.14 MILLION

■ CÓRDOBA AV DAILY HIGH: JAN/AUG 11°C/27°C

■ ALTITUDE RANGE: 55M-1570M



CÓRDOBA

pop 319,000 / elevation 110m

Córdoba is ideal for those who like to eat well, explore towns on foot, dive into old bodegas (traditional wine bars) and relish architectural wonders. The city's heart needs no introduction, for it's the most famous in the region: the magnificent Mezquita, a symbol of a worldly and sophisticated Islamic culture lords it over the town centre, and pulls thousands of tourists into its arched womb every day. The tiny streets of the Judería (Jewish quarter) stretch out from the Mezquita like capillaries, and while some are peaceful and bare, many are clogged by kitsch tourist shops. The compact town centre has some excellent bars and restaurants that have become sights in themselves, while the Islamic ruins of Medina Azahara, outside Córdoba, make the imagination tingle with the site's past glory and grandeur.

Córdoba has found its own niche with gastronomic delights, affordable accommodation, a relaxed feeling and pretty patios alongside the Mezquita. The city is quiet and withdrawn during the winter months, but it bursts into life from mid-April to mid-June. At this time of year the skies are blue, the heat is tolerable, the city's many trees and patios drip with foliage and blooms, and Córdoba stages most of its major fiestas.

HISTORY

From its early years Córdoba was the star of the show. The Roman colony of Corduba, founded in 152 BC, became the capital of Baetica province, covering most of today's Andalucía and bringing the writers Seneca and Lucan to the world.

Córdoba fell to Islamic invaders in AD 711 and soon took the role as Islamic capital on the Iberian Peninsula. It was here in 756 that Abd ar-Rahman I set himself up as the independent emir of the Al-Andalus region, founding the Omayyad dynasty, but the town's and region's heyday came under Abd ar-Rahman III (AD 912–61). He named himself caliph (the title of the Muslim successors of Mohammed) in 929, sealing Al-Andalus' long-standing de facto independence from Baghdad.

Córdoba was by now the biggest city in Western Europe, with a flourishing economy based on agriculture and skilled artisan products, and a population somewhere between 100,000 and 500,000. The city shone with hundreds of dazzling mosques, public baths, patios, gardens and fountains. Abd ar-Rahman III's court was frequented by Jewish, Arab and Christian scholars, and Córdoba's university, library and observatories made it a centre of learning whose influence was still being felt in Christian Europe many centuries later. Abulcasis (936–1013), the author of a 30-volume medical encyclopedia and considered the father of surgery, was the area's most remarkable scholar during this age. Córdoba also became a place of pilgrimage for Muslims who could not get to Mecca or Jerusalem.

Towards the end of the 10th century, Al-Mansur (Almanzor), a ruthless general whose northward raids terrified Christian Spain, took the reins of power from the caliphs. But after the death of Al-Mansur's son Abd al-Malik in 1008, the caliphate descended into anarchy. Rival claimants to the title, Berber troops and Christian armies from Castile and Catalonia all fought over the spoils. The Berbers terrorised and looted the city and, in 1031, Omayyad rule ended. Córdoba became a minor part of the Seville *taifa* (small kingdom) in 1069, and has been overshadowed by Seville ever since.

But the city's intellectual traditions lived on. It was home to two important 11th-century philosopher-poets, Ibn Hazm (who wrote in Arabic) and Judah Ha-Levi (who wrote in Hebrew). Twelfth-century Córdoba produced the two most celebrated scholars of Al-Andalus – the Muslim philosopher Averroës (1126–98; p46) and the Jewish philosopher Moses ben Maimon (known as Maimónides; 1135–1204). Their philosophical efforts to harmonise religion with Aristotelian reason were met with ignorance and intolerance: the Almohads put Averroës in high office, and persecuted Maimónides until he fled to Egypt.

When Córdoba was taken by Castile's Fernando III in 1236, much of its population fled. Córdoba became a provincial city and its decline was only reversed by the arrival of industry in the late 19th century. But something of old Córdoba remained –

one of the greatest Spanish poets, Luis de Góngora (1561–1627) was from the city.

ORIENTATION

The medieval city is immediately north of the Río Guadalquivir. It's a warren of narrow streets surrounding the Mezquita, which is just a block from the river. Within the medieval city, the area northwest of the Mezquita was the Judería, the Muslim quarter was north and east of the Mezquita, and the Mozarabic (Christian) quarter was further to the northeast.

The main square of Córdoba is Plaza de las Tendillas, 500m north of the Mezquita, with the main shopping streets to the plaza's north and west. The train and bus stations are 1km northwest of Plaza de las Tendillas.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Luque Libros (☎ 957 47 30 34; Calle José Cruz Conde 19) City and Michelin maps half the price of those from the tourist shops near the Mezquita. There are also CNIG and SGE maps, and Editorial Alpina maps.

Emergency

Ambulance (☎ 957 21 79 03, 957 29 55 70)
Policía Nacional (☎ 95 747 75 00; Avenida Doctor Fleming 2) The main police station.

Internet Access

Ch@t (Calle Claudio Marcelo 15; per hr €2; ☎ 10am–1pm & 5–9.30pm Mon–Fri, 10am–2pm Sat) A large internet room in the modern part of town.

Mundo Digital (Calle del Osario 9; ☎ 10am–2pm & 5–10pm Mon–Fri, 11am–2pm & 5–10pm Sat & Sun) Has similar prices to those of Ch@t.

Internet Resources

Info Cordoba (www.infocordoba.com) A useful site with general information on Córdoba.

Left Luggage

Bus station (Plaza de las Tres Culturas; per day €3; ☎ 8am–8pm Mon–Fri) Has a baggage deposit facility in the form of lockers.

Train station (Avenida de América; 8am–8pm Mon–Fri) Also has lockers, which operate similar hours to those at the bus station.

Medical Services

Hospital Cruz Roja (Red Cross Hospital; ☎ 957 29 34 11; Avenida Doctor Fleming s/n) The most central hospital.

Hospital Reina Sofia (☎ 957 21 70 00; Avenida Menéndez Pidal s/n) Nearly 2km southwest of the Mezquita.

Money

Most banks and ATMs are in the newer part of the centre, around Plaza de las Tendillas and Avenida del Gran Capitán. The bus and train stations also have ATMs.

Post

Post office (Calle José Cruz Conde 15)

Tourist Information

Information booth (☎ 10am–2pm & 4.30–8pm Mon–Fri) A kiosk at the train station.

Municipal tourist office (☎ 957 20 05 22; Plaza de Judá Levi; ☎ 8.30am–2.30pm Mon–Fri) A block west of the regional tourist office, with information and maps of Córdoba city.

Regional tourist office (☎ 957 47 12 35; Calle de Torrijos 10; ☎ 9.30am–8pm Mon–Sat, 10am–2pm Sun Apr–Jul, 9.30am–7pm Mon–Sat, 10am–2pm Sun Aug–Mar) In a 16th-century chapel facing the western side of the Mezquita. A good source of information about Córdoba province.

SIGHTS

All of Córdoba's sights can be found in a compact area on the north side of the Río Guadalquivir, with the main tourist activity concentrated around the Mezquita and the adjacent Judería.

Most people take a good half-day to enjoy the Mezquita, and another day or two to explore the city's museums and palaces, which are all a short walk to the northeast. A not-to-be-missed day trip is to the ruins of the palace-city, Medina Azahara, located 8km west of Córdoba.

Mezquita

It's impossible to overestimate the beauty of Córdoba's **Mezquita** (Mosque; ☎ 957 47 05 12; adult/child €8/4; ☎ 10am–7pm Mon–Sat Apr–Oct, 10am–6pm

OPENING HOURS

Opening hours for Córdoba's sights change frequently, so check with the tourist offices for updated times. Most places except the Mezquita close on Monday. Closing times are generally an hour or two earlier in winter than summer.