

Selected historical sites and monuments

Alhambra The fortress and gardens that are perhaps the most important Moorish monument in Spain. It takes at least half a day to take in the complex's various sections, including the *Alcazaba* (fortress), *Palacio Nazaries*, *mexuar*, *serallo*, *harén* (harem), *Generalife* ('Garden of the Architect), and *Palacio de Carlos V* (the main Christian monument inside the Alhambra containing two museums).

Capilla Real The 16th century Royal Chapel is the best of Granada's Christian buildings. It is adjacent to the Cathedral, just south of Gran Vía de Colón.

Cathedral Built between the 16th and 18th centuries.

La Madraza The old Muslim university, part of the modern university and retaining some interesting Moorish features. Also known as the *Casa del Cabildo Antiguo* because it was later used as a town hall.

Corral del Carbón The name means Coal Yard but under the Moors this was an inn for merchants. It has a lovely façade and now houses a tourist office and a government-run crafts shop.

Alcaicería The Muslim silk exchange, now housing tourist shops. South-east of the *Capilla Real*.



Unrestored, and KISSED BY NATURE



Lower Albayzín: STARTING THE CLIMB

up court in the Alhambra for several years. Isabella would die in 1504 and Ferdinand in 1516, the two having achieved the unification of Spain for the first time since the Visigoths. Both monarchs are buried in Granada.

Isabella's confessor Cardinal Cisneros was ordered to oversee the Inquisition, starting with the conversion of Granada's Muslims. He did this by burning Islamic books, banning the Arabic language, confiscating land, and carrying out forced mass baptisms. In 1500, a revolt against this persecution spread from the Alpujarras valleys to the rest of the former emirate. Following the Christians' success in putting the rebellion down, Muslims were given the ultimatum to convert or leave the territory. Those who chose to convert and stay became known as Moriscos. Despite their conversion, they continued to suffer persecution under subsequent Catholic kings. The final expulsion or elimination of the Moriscos from Spain was decreed by Felipe III in 1609 and completed by 1614.

Having lost both Jews and Arabs, Granada fell into decline for two hundred years and Moorish monuments fell into decay. The Romantic movement of the early 19th century restored interest in the historical city, but Muslim buildings were torn down to make way for new streets and structures. Franco's Nationalists took the city in 1936 at the start of the Spanish civil war, killing 4,000 Republicans or Republican sympathisers. Although it is somewhat of a counter-culture mecca within modern Spain, the city's reputation for conservatism remains.

Nature omnipresent

After covering the past, we can experience the city's present wandering off the beaten path. If history is manifest in Granada, so is nature. It bears repeating: the setting could not be more dramatic. The town is at the heart of La Vega, a fertile plain with trees and crops such as tobacco, potatoes, corn, and gourds, which has always been a source of food and inspiration for the local population. Visible from anywhere within the city, the Sierra Nevada for its part beckons majestically with its snowy peaks. Travellers and writers have also long praised the Alpujarras Valleys on the other side of the mountain. For anyone spending a substantial amount of time in the city, these and many other natural havens are only short jaunts away.

Dramatic relief is the norm in the city itself, with the Albayzín and the Alhambra separated by the Río Darro valley, whose greenness is evident on the opening page of this article. Within the Albayzín itself, planted patios are common in both modest and larger properties, and so flowering vines and other plants hang out over the walls offering their aroma as a gift to passers-by. The climbing approach to the Alhambra is within a cool and relatively quiet wooded area, the *Bosque Alhambra*, offering those who choose to walk a chance to meditate on the passage of time before arriving at the gates of the fortress.

The countless Moorish motifs seen throughout the city are not all period originals. Walking through the Albayzín for instance, the archetypal horseshoe arch seems quite the common feature. Such fakes need not be unattractive, sometimes even seeming more

continues >>>