

CUT-OUT-AND-GO GUIDE | FLAMBOYANT JEREZ



instant escapes

# Flamboyant Jerez

Spain's sherry-laced heart has a very special beat. Step two and follow!

Summer may be fading elsewhere, but Moorish Jerez, in Spain's exotic south, is still beautifully balmy. What's more, it's perennially as cheap as chips (make that patatas bravas). Fire yourself up on the Andalucían triumvirate — ice-cold sherry copitas, crooning flamenco singers, nimble white horses — and you've got the perfect weekend twirl. By Alicia Miller



**SEE & DO**

The clinking of copitas of Fino sherry — or 'jerez' — resounds at every turn. But to appreciate the full splendour of the sherry empire in its heyday, visit the bodega (sherry house) of Tio Pepe (bodegastiopepe.com; from £9; ①). Behind its capacious walls are barrels of this famous Fino signed by Thatcher and Picasso, as well as the original bottling workshop, full of antiques. Meanwhile, boutiquey Bodegas Tradición (bodegastadicion.es; £14; ②) excels at sweeter Oloroso and nutty Amontillado sherries; post-tour, wander its gallery of artworks by Goya and Velázquez.

History practically drips from the 12th-century Alcázar (£5; ③), a Moorish fortress ringed by a towering stone wall lined with rustling trees. Amble through the garden, past the mosque and hammam ruins, then scale the towers for a breezy view over the city centre. The modern palace, coloured candy-floss pink, is home to a remarkable, if anachronistic, 19th-century pharmacy.

There's romance to the crumbling buildings of Jerez's aged centre; sun-baked and wind-worn, they evoke bygone days of prosperity and power. Wandering through the warren of sleepy streets that radiate from the Plaza del Arenal ④ is perfection on a lazy afternoon. Wind north to the atmospheric Moorish centre, as sunlight turns the archways of the Old City Hall ⑤ shades of honey and gold.

**TRY IT, YOU'LL LIKE IT**

Forget memories of the cloying stuff stashed in your nan's cupboard — Fino sherry is fresh, dry and nutty. We think even sceptics will be converted

**TIMELY VISIT**

The camera obscura at the pinnacle of the Alcázar's palace is worth a visit, but check the opening times ahead — they change daily with the shifting sunset hour

Water cooler: fountain on the Plaza del Cabildo in Sanlúcar de Barrameda; below left, flamenco dancers; tranquil Hammam Andalusi

Step aside, Seville — Jerez is the real home of flamenco. But there's no weeping and wailing here — the local variant, buleria, is fast-paced, raucous and raunchy. In a sexy Spanish answer to Riverdance, singing ladies in flamboyant dresses battle foot-stomping men in loud, lively song-and-dance showdowns. Most bars only host performances on weekends, but Pura Arte Tablao Flamenco puts on an electrifying nightly show, with top performers (puroarteflamencojerez.com; from £21, including a drink; ⑥).

Feel the last of your workday worries fade in the grotto-like Hammam Andalusi, a modern update on one of the city's oldest Moorish traditions (hammandalus.com; from £17; ⑦). Soak in three tranquil pools filled with mineral-rich water — each a different temperature — then let massage therapists give your aching muscles what for.

Billowing white tails and powerful, sweat-glazed flanks are the photogenic symbols of Spain's finest riding centre. The Royal Andalucían School of Equestrian Art holds regular midday shows, in which the pure-bred Andalucían horses prance, pirouette and piaffe (realescuela.org; from £15; ⑧). Arrive early to explore the extensive grounds and adjoining carriage and art museums.

Gaudy — and often gruesome — treasures of Spanish Catholicism fill the chambers of Jerez's buttressed Cathedral of San Salvador (catedraldejerez.es; £3.50; ⑨). Explore rooms stuffed with gilded chalices, magnificent golden monstrances and relics containing human remains, then wind up in the peaceful orangery garden for a serene afternoon break.

Escape the heat for salty breezes in Sanlúcar de Barrameda on the coast ⑩, a 45-minute bus ride away. Here the pace is even slower: you could spend a whole day sipping Manzanilla, the more savoury local variant of Fino sherry, while tucking into freshly landed fish at the beachside restaurants on Calle Pórtico Bajo de Guia. Don't leave without stopping off at La Gitana bodega for one last sherry tasting (lagitana.com; free). >

