

think on your feet

Seville, Spain

Words by **KATE HAMILTON**

Photos by **TONA STELL** and **KATE HAMILTON**

Within two hours of landing in Seville, I found myself sitting in the front row at a flamenco show. I was slightly wary that I'd bought into one of the city's biggest tourist clichés, but the cool, stone walls of the underground concert room, along with the ice-cold beer in my hand, offered an escape from the oppressive heat of the July afternoon. The first song began, with a lilting rhythm sustained by the steady strum of a guitar; punctuated by the neat clicks of a dancer and the claps of a wailing vocalist. I settled deeper into my seat, and into the beat.

Duende is a Spanish word which roughly translates as 'spirit', and refers to a physical or emotional reaction triggered by art. Duende is what gives you chills down your spine; what makes

the hairs stand up on the back of your neck. Thanks to the 20th-century Andalusian poet and playwright Federico García Lorca, the concept is traditionally associated with flamenco, and each year visitors are drawn to Seville in the hope of discovering duende for themselves.

Many choose to visit during the spring, when the city is steeped in the sweet scent of orange blossom, and anticipating its two most important events. Semana Santa (Holy Week) sees thousands line the streets to catch a glimpse of medieval hooded figures, who process behind life-sized religious effigies to bring the Easter story alive. The solemn spectacle is followed two weeks later by the spirited Feria de Abril (April Fair) a citywide party associated

with much of what we consider to be quintessentially Andalusian. Think bullfighting, flamenco-dancing, sherry-drinking and girls in polka-dot dresses riding horse-drawn carriages through cobbled streets.

But even if you visit in low season, as I did, Seville is charged with elevated emotion. And indeed, without the festivities of Semana Santa and Feria taking centre stage, there is more time to consider the city's rich and textured past. I spent hours one morning wandering the former Jewish quarter of Santa Cruz, my pace slowed by soporific sunlight, and wound up at La Casa de Pilatos. Adorned with kaleidoscopic azulejos (ceramic tiles) and stucco engravings, this 15th-century palace is one of the city's best examples of Mudéjar architecture from Moorish times, a style recognised as the meeting point of Spanish and Islamic aesthetics. Elsewhere, Roman ruins point to the city's earliest settlement, the Arenal neighbourhood speaks of its former colonial glory and Triana, a site of pottery production since the Roman era, was until the 20th century home to Seville's gitano (gypsy) community. (Though gypsies were persecuted for centuries, driven into a submerged underclass from which they are still emerging, they are largely credited with developing the very Spanish art of flamenco.)

Today, different cultures are still encouraging Seville to modulate its traditional flamenco beat. Intense exposure to tourism has resulted in a steady stream of cosmopolitan ideas flowing through the city, and many of the young people I spoke to were excited to share the more outward-facing side of Seville. A place of drawn-out lunches and late-night dinners, the food scene here has in particular benefitted from an increasingly international clientele, with restaurants like conTenedor and No Lugar experimenting with on-trend aesthetics and the concept of slow food. The Alameda de Hércules area, which until 15 years ago was a seedy neighbourhood favoured by prostitutes and drug dealers, is today a lively (and quite beautiful) spot lined with tapas bars and clubs.

But the beat of Seville is not in danger of changing beyond recognition. At the gallery and concept store Delimbo, a hip-hop artist known locally as Jotandjota tells me: "People in Seville tend to really fight for their own culture." The sentiment is shared by 28-year-old designer Luna Medina, who recently returned to live in her native city after spending eight years in Paris and New York. She says: "You can be so much more spontaneous in Seville. Life here is another rhythm completely." And it is certainly a rhythm worth fighting for.





TO STAY

LAS CASAS DE LA JUDERÍA

CALLE SANTA MARÍA LA BLANCA, 5
lascasasdelajuderiasevilla.com
 Rooms from £70

If you're after true taste of old-world Andalusia, this former ducal residence turned quirky hotel is for you. There are 134 rooms set in 27 townhouses, all interlinked by verdant courtyards and underground passageways. There's also a spa inspired by the baths of Ancient Rome, a piano bar which hosts live music nights and a restaurant called Emporió, with embossed leather walls decorated with gold leaf. Escape to the whitewashed rooftop, where there's a salt-water swimming pool and impressive views over the city.

LAS CASAS DE LA JUDERÍA

HOTEL ALFONSO XIII

CALLE SAN FERNANDO, 2
hotel-alfonsoxiii-seville.com
 Rooms from £230

Standing majestically on a corner of the Santa Cruz neighbourhood, this 1929 hotel commissioned by King Alfonso XIII of Spain is synonymous with regal glamour. With its grand Moorish arches, surfaces adorned with decorative ceramics and enough wrought iron to sink a ship, it's just as impressive as the nearby Alcázar Palace. San Fernando, the hotel's elegant courtyard restaurant, is the perfect place for a long lunch – sumptuous teal armchairs providing bright accents against the terracotta-toned walls.



HOTEL ALFONSO XIII

CORRAL DEL REY

CALLE CORRAL DEL REY, 12
corraldelrey.com
 Rooms from £230

Set behind heavy studded Moorish doors on a winding cobbled street of the same name, it's easy to miss this boutique hotel. All of the 13 rooms at Corral Del Rey incorporate a palette of sandstones and greys, and come fitted with intricate Moroccan mirrors, oak-panelled floors and beamed ceilings. You'll find remnants here from the hotel's history as a 17th-century casa. There's also a rooftop terrace with an honesty bar, as well as a small plunge pool offering a welcome respite from the stifling heat of summer.



CORRAL DEL REY

TO EAT | TAPAS

SAL GORDA

CALLE ALCAICERÍA DE LA LOZA, 17

This sunny spot specialises in craft beer and traditional-with-a-twist tapas. Swing by at lunchtime and tuck into chicken wings with kimchee salsa, porcini mushroom and langoustine risotto, or white prawn tartar with yuzu dressing. Take heed: portions are small in size but rich in stature.

EL RINCONCILLO

CALLE GERONA, 40

A historic little corner that has been around since 1670 and is perennially packed with locals who crowd around 'tables' of waist-high sherry barrels under rows of strung-up hams. Once you've elbowed your way to the wooden counter, place your order quickly because the bartenders don't mess around.

MERCADO DE FERIA

PLAZA CALDERÓN DE LA BARCA

Located at the back of a fish market opposite a Mudéjar-Gothic church, this gourmet food market houses stands specialising in regional dishes – including salmorejo soup, slabs of tortilla and seafood rice. But you can also pick up oysters, sushi and Mexican food if you prefer. Most locals sit on the patio outside, especially at weekends when there's a programme of live music.



EL RINCONCILLO

BAR MANOLO

CALLE ALFALFA, 3

Rows of aluminium chairs and red, beer-branded awning mark this neighbourhood tapas bar. Go traditional and order a measure of salty gazpacho, a serranito sandwich filled with pork fillet, ham, pepper and tomatoes, a plate of adobo (fried dogfish) and wash down with an ice-cold Cruzcampo beer.

OVEJAS NEGRAS

CALLE HERNANDO COLÓN, 8

With a name that translates to 'black sheep', you can expect something different from this gastro tapas bar – think braised pork cheek with mashed potato and gravy, a mini hamburger with curry mayonnaise and Chinese chicken dumplings. It's a lively and sociable place – the perfect spot to begin a night out.

BAR ALFALFA

CALLE CANDILEJO, 1

A beautiful Art Deco building wraps around one very tight corner in the Alfalfa district, home to a lively bar serving tapas with an Italian twist. Ancient wine bottles dressed in cobwebs peer down at you from racks above the bar, willing you to choose them next. Order grilled aubergine in vinegar or the bresaola with parmesan and rocket.



BAR ALFALFA



EL RINCONCILLO



| RESTAURANTS

CONTENEDOR

CALLE SAN LUIS, 50

This vibrant spot is filled with mismatched furniture, colourful artwork and whimsical mobiles. The daily changing menu is scribbled in alternating colours on a large chalkboard, and follows the slow-food mandate of using top-quality regional ingredients prepared according to local traditions. Sharing is the name of the game – pair the prawn pasta with the duck-and-mushroom rice.

LA AZOTEA

CALLE MATEOS GAGO, 8

Ask any young foodie for a round-up of their favourite places to eat in Seville and La Azotea will be near the top of the list – and with good reason. This Santa Cruz establishment experiments with traditional ingredients (cod with almond béchamel and basil hummus, anyone?) and even has a flexible menu, which means you can order dishes in three sizes: tapas, media (starter) or ración (main).

NO LUGAR

CALLE TRAJANO, 16

With kitsch tableware, nautical lanterns and modern prints lining the walls, the design of this restaurant is eclectic, an approach which extends to their rather scattergun menu. But then with a name that means ‘no place’, we think that’s sort of the point. Locals come here in groups and set up shop around hulking communal tables before sharing curries and couscous. Card payment is not accepted.

NIKKEI

CALLE CALATRAVA, 34

Chef Ernesto Malasaña likes to keep busy, heading a total of four restaurants and tapas bars across the city. Located just behind the main drag of the Alameda de Hércules, Nikkei is a Japanese-Peruvian hotspot which serves light, fresh ceviche and sushi (a welcome break from patatas bravas and manchego.) We recommend perching at the counter and watching the action in the open kitchen.

JAYLU

LOPEZ DE GOMARA, 19

Don’t let appearances deceive you. This slightly stuffy high-end restaurant with its starched white tablecloths may be located in a rundown part of the city, but serves the best seafood around. Choose a wine from their excellent list and enjoy a plate of silky sautéed calamari before tucking into a pan of their rich, salty seafood rice. Skip the main dining room with its yellowish lighting and sit outside or at the bar.

EL PINTÓN

CALLE FRANCOS, 42

El Pintón is popular with a young, cosmopolitan crowd, and makes use of traditional Sevillian ceramics alongside tall whitewashed walls, mismatched furniture and low-hanging spotlights. The restaurant’s modern take on traditional favourites sees Andalusian dishes imbued with Asian flavours.



EL PINTÓN



CONTENEDOR

TO DO*Santa Cruz***VISIT TRIANA**

Located on the west side of the Guadalquivir River, just over the iconic bridge the Puente de Isabel II, Triana was once home to a large gypsy community, sailors and fishermen. Today the pastel-coloured riverfront road Calle Betis houses restaurants bars and clubs. The revamped Triana market is decked out with the colourful ceramic tiles for which the neighbourhood is famous.

LA CASA DE PILATOS

PLAZA DE PILATOS, 1

Standing on a sun-drenched plaza on the edge of Santa Cruz, this 15th-century palace is every bit as beautiful as the Alcázar Palace – and ten times more peaceful. It was the permanent residence of the ducal Medinaceli family until three years ago, and today it welcomes visitors to its sweet-scented gardens and rooms. The architecture is a mixture of Mudéjar (Spanish-Islamic), Gothic and Italian styles, all kaleidoscopically tiled with Sevillian ceramics.

SOHO BENITA

A few streets from the Metropol Parasol – a modern wooden structure also known as ‘the mushroom’ – this enclave has become home to offbeat and trendy eateries. Be sure to stop by Delimbo Gallery, a concept store and art space offering urban art books and streetwear labels. Run by designers Seleka and Laura Calvarro, it’s a hub for the city’s young creative scene.



LA CASA DE PILATOS

PARQUE DE MARÍA LUISA

The heart of central Seville is Maria Luisa park, home to colourful tiled benches hosting snoozing Sevillanos, and shaded paths which snake under tropical trees. Wander from the opulent Plaza de España fringed by a boating lake towards the southern end of the park. Here you’ll find the Archaeology Museum, with its exhibition of Roman sculptures and mosaics.

BELLAS ARTES

PLAZA DEL MUSEO, 9

Housed in a salmon-coloured former convent, much of the work in Seville’s Fine Art Museum is of the dark, brooding religious type, paying homage to the city’s 17th-century artistic role in Spain’s Siglo de Oro (Golden Age). Galleries are arranged chronologically around three patios and display works by masters including Zurbarán, Juan de Mesa and Velázquez.



PARQUE DE MARÍA LUISA



PLAZA DE ESPAÑA

TO DRINK + DANCE

CAFÉ RED HOUSE

CALLE AMOR DE DIOS, 7

You'll find this café/bar/gallery/antique shop tucked behind an enormous set of double doors covered in graffiti. It's a hotbed for local artists who come to work during the day, fuelled by coffee and delicious pastries (almost everything sold or used in the café is locally produced.) The pace changes as the sun goes down, and Red House turns into a casual bar with chilled-out beats.

OBPIO

CALLE TRASTAMARA, 29

A gay bar and club with an old-school disco vibe, hosting eccentric nights that have been known to go on until 12PM the next day. It also has a quieter side, putting on cultural events including debates, exhibitions and cinema screenings. OBPIO's second outpost is called Sala Holiday, and is equally lively.

LA ALAMEDA DE HÉRCULES

It's hard to believe that little more than 15 years ago, this poplar-lined square was a seedy, no-go area. Today La Alameda buzzes with a young crowd on any night of the week. Begin your evening on the patio of Mexican haunt **Mano de Santo**, and choose from an extensive list of mezcal-based cocktails. Later stroll over to **Gigante Bar** or **Moscow Art & Spirits** to enjoy a drink surrounded by local pieces of art. End your night at reggae-fuelled club **Kafka**.

LA BICICLETERÍA

CALLE FERIA, 36

La Biciclería has the look and feel of a clandestine bar and the erratic opening hours to match. (In order to keep disturbance to the neighbours at a minimum, the bar is closed on Fridays and Saturdays, so plan a mid-week party.) Expect a local living-room vibe with jazz, funk, soul or reggae – and be prepared to leave in the early hours smelling of cigarettes.

URBANO COMIX

CALLE MATAHACAS, 5

Step out of the street and into, well, what looks like another street. This quirky bar is laid out with a cobbled road, pavement and 'houses'. It has been open since 1986 and is a true stalwart on the Seville scene. Check out their Facebook page for upcoming concerts and parties, or just rock out and dance.

EL GARLOCHI

CALLE BOTEROS, 26

With burgundy walls draped in velvet and lined with family portraits, gilded mirrors and Catholic iconography, this eccentric establishment is dedicated to the spirit of Semana Santa (Holy Week). Order a punchy sangre de Cristo (blood of Christ) cocktail made with whisky, cava and grenadine and stay as long as you can stand the incense.



EL GARLOCHI



MANO DE SANTO

