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SPANISH CITY IS A TREAT IN SUMMER



MIGHTY... cathedral and, left, Sun girl Leigh in sunflower garden

The thrill of Seville

LEGEND has it intrepid explorer Christopher Columbus is buried in Seville.

It's just as well he wasn't born here. The Spanish city is such a delight he may never have left.

Today it is all too easy to come and go – British Airways makes the two-hour hop five times a week from Gatwick.

This city is picture-perfect from every angle. To say it's stunning is an understatement.

All of the main attractions are within walking distance, or a horse-drawn carriage if you want to treat yourself.

The cathedral is a good place to start. Its hulking gothic form dominates the skyline and is well worth the £6.50 entrance fee.

The Alcazar Palace is equally impressive, easily one of the most beautiful buildings I've ever seen.

Now home to the Spanish royal family, it was built by very different kings – the Moors who dominated southern Spain in the middle ages.

If you are a film buff, you may have seen it before. The palace has been pulling in camera crews since Lawrence of Arabia. Game of Thrones featured its mighty facade and it even cropped up in Star Wars Episode II.

Behind the scenes, Seville's gardens are just as impressive – fragrant flowers, fruit trees, orchards and pools provide a beautiful getaway from the city.

Use the tranquil setting to gear up to the next one – which could hardly be more different. The

GO: Andalucia

GETTING THERE: British Airways flies five times weekly from Gatwick from £119 return. See ba.com.

STAYING THERE: B&B at the Corral del Rey starts from £155 including tax (corraldelrey.com). B&B at the Hacienda de San Rafael is from £158 including tax; visit haciendaosanrafael.com.

MORE INFO: See spain.info.

Rafael. A hotel so special I almost want to keep it a secret.

The 40-year-old building is set on an old olive grove and is surrounded by sunflower fields as far as the eye can see.

A floral paradise surrounds three pools

The yellow army faces the sun in a view so spectacular you won't want to pull yourself away. But when you do, more stunning sights await.

A floral paradise surrounds three pools at the Hacienda, where a secluded setting continues. Choose to stay in one of the rooms around the bougainvillea-lined courtyard, or one of the three casitas that surround a private pool.

Either way, you won't be disappointed. And yet again, you won't want to leave.

It's a shame the flight home is as easy as the one out. But that's always an excuse to come back.

LEIGH WILLIAMS



LAND OF BULLS... sculpture

BE THE FIRST TO CRUISE INTO CUBA

YOU can now cruise to Cuba. Carnival's new brand fathom – the lack of a capital F is their idea – has been launched to provide “purpose-oriented, social-impact experiences”.

What we think that means is cruises with educational value. Which is handy, because that is what the US Treasury demands of companies visiting Cuba. Prices for seven-day itineraries are expected to start at around £1,950 per person.

Carnival President Arnold Donald said: “We are excited about receiving US approval as the very important first step to ultimately take travellers to Cuba. We look forward to working with the Cuban authorities to help make the social, cultural and humanitarian exchanges between US citizens and the people of Cuba a reality.”

● P&O Cruises has some of the UK's best-known and best-loved celebrity chefs on board.

Britannia will host Lawrence Keogh, James Tanner and Vivek Singh. Throw in Daniel Galmiche then combine James Martin and Antonio Carluccio before adding a dash of Paul Rankin.

Finish with a tasty blend of Marco Pierre White and Paul A. Young, serve and enjoy.

All these chefs will be joining Britannia on sailings throughout the year and guests will have a unique opportunity to get up close and personal to them and learn from some of the hottest culinary talent in Britain today.

Along with hands-on cookery classes, the chefs will host exclusive chef's-table dinners and participate in Q&A sessions

and book signings. All the chefs will be travelling on different routes. Telly favourite James Martin, for example, will be on B523, a 14-night Spain, Monaco and Italy cruise departing October 9.

Antonio Carluccio will also be on-board and prices start from £1,299 per person.

Inspirational chocolatier Paul A. Young will be travelling on B525A – a 14-night Caribbean cruise departing November 6 with Marco Pierre White. Prices start from £1,829 per person.

The two-hour cookery classes cost £100 per person – or £200 per person when hosted by two chefs – and will take place in a dedicated cookery school with 12 stations for up to 24 people. Bookings open four months before departure.

To find out more, visit pocruises.com or call 0843 374 0111.