



WORDS ELISABETH KING

SEVILLE A SMORGASBORD FOR THE SENSES

I FIRST visited Seville during the Feria de Abril. The English translation of spring fair is a lame description for the colour, vibrancy and joie-de-vivre of really good-looking men and women parading on horseback, dancing as if no one was watching and slaking their thirst with sherry diluted with lemonade. Few people need an excuse to visit this Andalusian hotspot, but Lonely Planet has re-focused the world's attention by naming Seville the best city to visit in 2018.

Art and architecture lovers come here for the Moorish palaces, ancient Roman ruins and the world's largest Gothic cathedral, famously designed to awe the locals during its construction "because those who see it built will say we're mad". Home to the tomb of Christopher Columbus, its spectacular presence is rivaled these days by the Metropol Parasol, which claims to be the largest wooden structure on the planet. Dreamed-up by German star architect Jurgen Mayer, the six giant parasols shaped like giant mushrooms were completed in 2011 and the climb to the top offers the best view of Seville.

The other building not to be missed is the Real (Spanish for royal) Alcazar. It's dazzling tiled and domed patios and rooms "starred" in Game of Thrones as a stage set for the kingdom of Dorne and the slave city of Meereen. But the blockbuster attraction of the year is centred on Murillo. Or, rather the 400th anniversary of the Baroque painter's birth. A flurry of major exhibitions and events such as Cooking in Murillo's Time will be staged through to March 2019.

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Several now enjoy pilgrimage status, thanks to constant repeats of the TV series, Rick Stein's Spain. One of my favourites is Casa Morales, close to the cathedral, a classic mix of burnished wooden bar, career waiters and tinajas (wine jars). The default summer choice is jamon serrano, sluiced down with the local Cruzcampo beer.

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Seville showcases its centuries-long rule by the Moors with a tradition of flat rooftops to enjoy cooler evening breezes. Several hotels sport well-patronised roof bars such as the oldest one in the city - the terrace on top of the Hotel Dona Maria - a magical place to be when the cathedral is flood-lit at night. During summer, the reasonably priced drinks menu is only part of the pleasure as the bar stages thrice-weekly flamenco concerts. The cathedral is also front and centre from the roof bar at the Hotel Fontecruz, where you can sip your wine or sherry reclining on the deeply comfortable sofas.

The definitive view of the Metropol Parasol is the magnet at the multi-storey terrace bar at the Casa Romana Hotel, which is also

lit up at night. Bookings are mandatory as both locals and visitors converge on the atmospheric setting.

Spain's most famous wines - riojas and verdejos - hail from the north, but Seville's wine bars will extend your palate further. La Barrica Dulce, a small hideaway near Calle San Luis, shines the spotlight on sweet wines from Malaga, long known for its fortified wines made from pedro ximenez and moscatel grapes. The bar is directly supplied by a family-run winery and there are six types of vino dulce (sweet wine) up for grabs to enjoy with chorizo, ham or cheese.

The Taberna Alvaro Peregil on Calle Mateos Gagos is a textbook hole-in-the-wall wine bar. In business for 114 years, vino de naranja (orange wine) is a speciality. The original decor has been preserved intact and it's standing room only, as in there are no chairs. Another treat worth sampling is the fortified strawberry wine.

Founded by a local chef and an American sommelier, the La Azoteca Vinos & Mas chain now has four locations across the city. Each one holds catas (wine tastings) and you can enjoy an extensive list of wines from all over Spain teamed with smoked meats, seafood and artisan breads.

Sherry is the major focus at Vineria San Telmo, which boasts one of the most extensive list of wines by the glass in Seville. The tapas are exceptional value and the wines of the month, selected by owner Juan Manuel, also fall into the bargain-basement category.

Even though it's a fixture on the tourist trail, El Rinconcillo claims to be the oldest tavern in Spain. Dating back to 1670, it's an historic vision of walls lined with bottles to the ceiling,

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tiled walls, hams hanging on hooks and the wait staff chalk up your tapas intake until you have decided to call it quits. Perching on a barrel as you sip a fino is a made-for-Instagram image.

Garlochi has achieved global fame as Seville's most kitsch bar. It goes beyond eclectic with religious statuary from winged cherubs to myriad versions of the Virgin Mary juxtaposed with antique bric-a-brac that looks as if it's been culled over the years from Seville's Thursday market. The house cocktail is Sangre de Cristo (Christ's Blood) - a challenging blend of whisky, Grenadine and cava, Spain's trademark sparkling wine.

A contemporary take on traditional Spanish cuisine has been in place for decades and the torch has been passed to a new generation of chefs in Seville. Restaurante conTenedor started life as an experimental pop-up and has become one of the city's go-to restaurants with an emphasis on slow food, locally sourced ingredients and Andalucian tastes re-cast for a hip audience. The sleek space gleams with polished concrete floors, eclectically selected chairs and an art gallery's worth of paintings. The menu changes seasonally but a signature dish is arroz con setas y pato (rice with mushrooms and duck). The wine list is skewed towards organic and biodynamic wines from Andalucia.

Bar-Restaurante Eslava trumped new gastronomy favourite, La Brunilda, as "the best bar for creative cuisine" in 2017. Very narrow and with dining space at a minimum, there seems to be a permanent queue for the fried sea anemones and - strange as it sounds - ripe cheese ice cream. Justifiably so. 🍷



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