

A Week in Sevilla

A couple of weeks ago we visited our friend, Sue, in Sevilla, one of the southern most cities in Spain. Sue was one of the first people we met in Barcelona in 2016 and it was through meeting her that we made all our other friends here (she moved to Sevilla in 2017). Sevilla is Spain's fourth biggest city (recently pipped for third place by Valencia – the home of paella).

Monday 29 April

We traveled to Sevilla via high speed train, a distance of about 990km. At a top speed of 300km/hr it took 6hrs 40mins, including a 45mins change in Madrid. A very comfortable way to travel and, of course, a great way to see the changing Spanish landscape. Interestingly, this showed Spain to be heavily agricultural – almost completely crop based, I only saw a couple of small herds of cows and sheep.

We had a fantastic 6 days in Sevilla – a gastronomic and visual feast. Sue loves to eat out and she's been 'saving up' a couple of favourite restaurants to share with us.

Tuesday 30 April



Behind this unpretentious facade hides a Michelin star restaurant, complete with Maitre D' in suit, professional waiters in long black aprons and elegant tableware. As with nearly all our meals in Sevilla, we shared a number of dishes. The highlight was the serving of the fish. The waiter put a small table next to ours, then brought over a large oval platter which he presented to us, displaying a large, butterflied white fish with the backbone removed but with head, fins and tail intact. (We never did figure out exactly what type of fish it was.) The waiter then deftly removed all the inedible bits and divided the fish into three portions – taking great care that the portions were of equal size. We could almost see his brain working! The fish, and the rest of the meal was delicious and the service excellent. I'd love to share photos of the food but it really wasn't a place for whipping out my phone. [No, I don't know how to pronounce the restaurant's name – its Basque, as in the food they serve.]

To get to the restaurant we strolled through the beautiful Parque de María Luisa. As with many parks and gardens in Spain, this had been a royal residence, eventually passed to the local government and so made available to the public. The park is very extensive, the largest in Sevilla, and is very popular (as we found out on the sunny Saturday afternoon when we strolled through another section).





Part of the (ex) royal residence.





I had to take this one – yes, that's an Australian gum-tree! It is an import and while it's fine in a garden like this, they are a problem in rural Spain and Portugal as they are overwhelming the native ecosystem.

That's Sue on the path. I will share a better photo later.

From the gardens we walked down to the Guadalquivir River. At 657 km it is the second longest, and the only major navigable river in Spain. While it was quiet when we saw it, Sue told us that its very much a working river with a busy port.



The sky is very gray, unusual for Sevilla at this time of year, and we got rained on out walking on Monday evening. But it fined up over the week. It was starting to rain again Tuesday morning so I quickly bought an umbrella. It didn't rain again for the whole trip.

Along the left bank of the river you can see the 'old' Sevilla juxtaposed with contemporary architecture. Sevilla is a vibrant city which is successfully retaining its architectural history while embracing the new.



Another view along the river. This one for the orange trees. There are Sevilla orange trees planted all over the city, along many of the streets. Unfortunately the oranges aren't good for eating and every year they just fall on the ground and have to be cleaned up. These oranges make great marmalade but marmalade hasn't taken off in Spain.

After lunch we strolled around Los Remedios, the area local to the restaurant, then through Triana, the centre of ceramic making. The architecture of old Sevilla, as with all the older parts of Spain we've visited, presents a visual feast. The Spanish love to decorate their buildings and do it beautifully. Every surface holds a decorative possibility – including the underside of balconies.

Sevilla is famous for ceramics and for being very religious (Catholic). The big event on the Sevilla Calendar is *Semana Santa* – Holy Week – Easter. All the big churches have parades with elaborate floats depicting all aspects of the events of Easter. This is where the tall pointy headdresses with only the eyes cut out, regrettably appropriated by the Klu Klux Klan, originate. In Spain these costumes are worn by the Nazarenos and are a sign of mourning and shame for sins committed through the year. There is no connection between them and the KKK.

But back to the ceramic decorations. I mentioned the religious aspect of Sevilla because we saw many religious pictures in ceramics. On churches, of course, but also walking along ordinary streets on ordinary houses like this:



This one was on a church, one of a set.



More ceramic decoration and a view of the streets of 'old' Sevilla. This might be the original Sevilla but its no museum, these streets are very much where people live and work





Again, Sue's back view, this time with Ron's.



These colours are typical.



The entrance to a number of apartments.

Spain has embraced the Islamic style of accommodation with a solid door/entrance that leads to a private, central courtyard or garden. Sometimes, as in this case, outsiders can get a glimpse of the interior but often there is no indication at all of what lies behind the door.

Below: why wouldn't you decorate underneath the balcony?



A reminder of a darker period of Sevilla's, and Spain's, history.



Prisoners taken down this lane generally didn't come back.

Wednesday 1 May

1 May – May Day – is a holiday in many European countries. We joined many others to gaze with wonder at *Plaza de España*. [Many cities in Spain have a *Plaza de España* but few could top this one.]

This vast brick-and-tile confection was built in 1928 for the Ibero-American Exposition of 1929 and mixes elements of the Baroque Revival, Renaissance Revival and Moorish Revival (Neo-Mudéjar) styles of Spanish architecture. The buildings are accessible by four bridges over a moat, which represent the ancient kingdoms of Spain. In the centre is the Vicente Traver fountain. [You can hire a boat and row around the moat.]

The *Plaza de España* complex is a huge half-circle. This photo shows about half of it.



For Star Wars fans: The building was used as a location in *Star Wars: Episode II – Attack of the Clones* (2002) — in which it featured in exterior shots of the City of Theed on the Planet Naboo

It's all very over the top, but it's undeniably impressive with its flamboyant neo-Mudéjar architecture, fountains, and Venetian-style bridges. And must have been a huge boon to the ceramics industry. Beautifully designed and crafted ceramics have been used as decoration across the entire building.



A series of ceramic tile panels depict maps and historical scenes from each Spanish province.



Ceramic railing and streetlight.



Close inspection reveals the ceramic detailing.



The grand central section of the complex.

From 2007 to 2010, the Sevilla City Council invested 9 million euros restoring the Plaza de España. The objective was to recover the original monument as the architect, Aníbal González, conceived it. As part of this renovation the inside of the buildings were sensitively renovated and adapted for use as offices for government departments. Beats any office building I've ever worked in!

I might give you a break here and write a separate blog with the rest of our trip.
Hasta luego!