

Captivating Cadiz

02/07/2024

Spanish News, Spanish Tit-Bits



Cadiz is a combination of the colonial, the cultural and the cosmopolitan

With its golden domed Cathedral looking out over the Atlantic, Cadiz has one of the most striking and instantly recognisable cityscapes in Spain. Considered as one of the oldest cities in the western world. 'Gadir', was founded by the Phoenicians around 1100 B.C. and remained a strategically important trading colony for the Carthaginians, Romans, Visigoths and Moors, who would all subsequently settle there.

Most famously, Columbus chose Cadiz as the point of departure for his second voyage to the New World. With Seville in decline, the city became the port to The Indies, drawing the flow of trade with the American Continent. This frantic commercial activity brought about an era of economic, cultural splendour, when Baroque palaces with their characteristic towers were built.

The new riches flowing in from The Indies, however, attracted the attention of pirates. As a result, Cadiz was fortified, and the remains of this defence system are still in evidence today. Las Puertas de Tierra, the city gates, retain sections of walls and semi-bastions such as those of San Roque and Santa Elena, on both sides. The Puertas de Tierra Walls clearly divide the new city regained from the sea –built along a great avenue and along the extensive, landscaped promenade– and the old. The historic centre of the city has narrow streets and small squares in popular districts such as La Viña – the fisherman's district - the Mentidero, Santa María and El Pópulo. Most distinctive of all, however, is the

Cathedral. With its distinctive golden dome, it combines both the Baroque and Neoclassical styles fit and lends the city its distinctive colonial air.

Cadiz is a fascinating kaleidoscope of individual districts. El Pópulo, which is the oldest of these, retains the three gates to the original Medieval city: the El Pópulo, De la Rosa and De los Blancos Arches, and is also home to the Roman amphitheatre and former cathedral, Santa Cruz. The emblematic Plaza de San Juan de Dios is the perfect place to savour typical “pescaíto frito” fried fish. Santa María houses stately residences such as the Baroque Casa Lasquetty and the Royal Jail, an important Neoclassical building. On the nearby San Francisco Square, La Santa Cueva, “The Holy Cave” contains paintings by the Spanish master Goya paintings. A short walk brings you to The Oratory of San Felipe Neri, a Baroque place of worship, which was the seat of the Cadiz Cortes in 1812. The first Spanish Constitution was drawn up here and nicknamed “la Pepa”, thanks to its conception date (Saint Joseph’s Day).

If you have visited Cuba, then a stroll along the Cadiz sea front, from La Caleta to the Campo del Sur, will remind you of Havana. The city has had a huge influence on the look of many Latin American cities, thanks to the constant flow of people travelling between Cadiz and the New World. The cathedral is a good example of this, as are several of the historic townhouses. Fans of James Bond will be interested to know that Cadiz doubled for Havana in the film “Die Another Day”, which memorably included a bikini wearing Halle Berry emerging from the sea. I have watched this scene numerous times – to marvel at the splendour of Cadiz’s historic buildings of course!

If the thought of a bracing dip with a Bond Girl has made you peckish, Calle Zorrilla, is full of tapas bars, while La Vina district is the perfect setting to try the typical dish of mackerel with ‘piriñaca’ (a tomato and pepper salad). After lunch, take a stroll along La Caleta beach that stretches for 3 km along the coast.

If you are planning a trip, try to make your visit coincide with Carnival. Declared an event of International Tourist Interest, the entire population dons fancy dress and heads for the street to take part in the fun, the laughter and the partying in the midst of the choral groups, the satirical ‘chirigotas’ and the swaying, rhythmic ‘comparsas’, who parody and criticise the year’s events. The satire and parody are without equal, and the Cadiz sense of fun unleashes its full force, laughing and holding no punches, like nowhere else in the world!