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## Cordoba Sightseeing Walk 1: the Mosque, Jewish Quarter and Alcazar

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This is the essential walk for sightseers and visitors to Cordoba who are anxious to see the major tourist sights quickly. It is also an itinerary which can be lengthened, savored and repeated-in fact, I've walked the same streets hundreds of times. You'll see evidence of Roman and Moorish civilizations, and of Cordoba's 3 religions, which lived together in relative harmony at the height of the Caliphate of Cordoba. You'll also be strolling through the heart of Cordoba's historic center, declared Universal Heritage in 1994.

2. [Bridge Gate](#). Built in 1571 in honor of King Felipe II's visit to Cordoba. Replaced former Moorish gate on site of Roman gate.

**Walk uphill from the Roman Bridge toward the SW corner of the Mosque and follow the west facade along Torrijos street.**

3. Episcopal Palace and Museum
4. [San Sebastian Hospital](#): Cordoba Conference Center
5. [Cordoba's Mosque-Cathedral \(\\*\\*\\*\)](#) Among the first Universal Heritage Sites declared in Spain in 1984. "The foremost Islamic monument in Spain." (Goodwin, p.55).

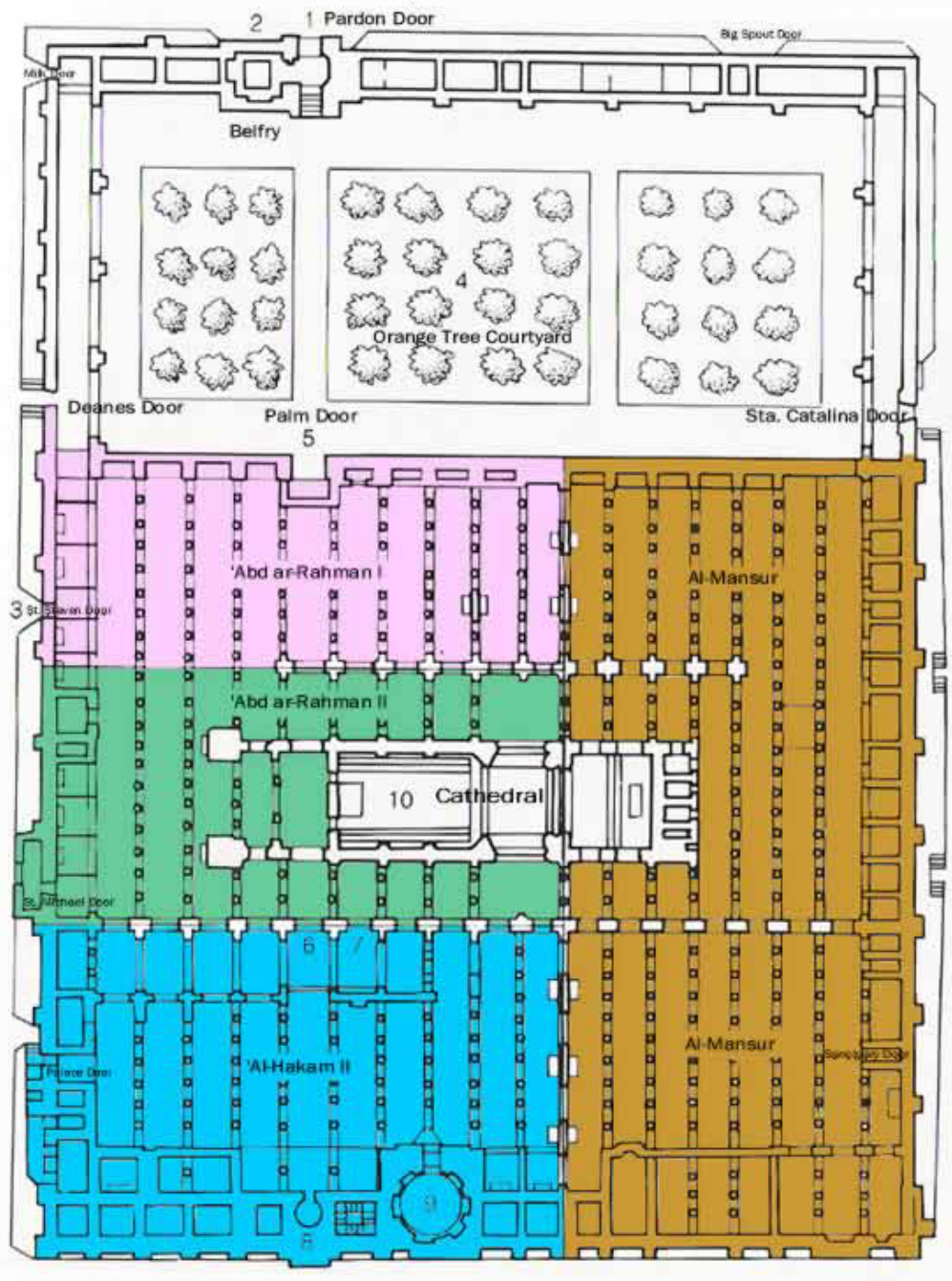
**Enter the Orange Tree Courtyard through Deanes Gate on your right.**

**Cross to the north side of the courtyard to the ticket office, on the right of the belfry and the Pardon door.**

**Enter the Mosque through the Palm Door. Walk south to the Mihrab, then to the apse of the cathedral and finally exit by way of Almanzor's addition.**

6. The Original Mosque of Abd Al-Rahman I (786) is some 13 aisles of columns deep, with the southern limit of cathedral's gothic nave. Some columns have disappeared into chapel walls and a line of the cathedral's flying buttresses. The eastern limit of this section is easy to identify, in line with the high altar and two spaces between columns which were filled in with masonry and decorated with paintings, etc.
7. Abd Al-Rahman II's expansion (833) is the most altered by the construction of the cathedral in the 16 th century. It extends a further 9 aisles of columns to the south (3 aisles beyond the cathedral's nave and up to the line of flying buttresses extending to the east.
8. Al-Hakam II's expansion (964) and the Mihrab lies beyond the flying buttresses and the northern limit is marked by a nave 5 rows wide and 3 rows deep cleared of columns with raised ceilings, a rose window and Christian tombstones in the floor. This is the 14 th century cathedral. Just to the east is the fabulous Villaviciosa Chapel, followed by 2 enclosed chapels, including the Royal Chapel. At the back of the Mosque, on the south wall, is the richly decorated Mihrab, and to the left, the Cardinal's Chapel, now the Cathedral Museum .
9. Almanzor's Expansion (987) is the largest, but most poorly decorated, part of the mosque, extending it 8 aisles to the east and turning it from a rectangular building, deeper than it was wide, into a building with a nearly square floor plan. With its courtyard, the Mosque is 22,250 square meters in area, and it then boasted of some 850 columns.
10. The Cathedral was begun in 1523 and built during the remainder of the 16 th century, with Gothic structure, Renaissance vaulting and domes, and baroque choir stalls and pulpits (1750).

### Plan of Mosque Cathedral of Cordoba



*About the Mosque-Cathedral of Cordoba:* The original mosque and the first two expansions make up about two-thirds of the width of the current building's expanse, or 11 naves extending from the west wall (to your right) up to the eastern limit of the cathedral's high altar (to your left) and extend successively southward towards the river to the Mihrab. The eastern third of the building is the most recent addition, built by Almanzor in 988. In the center of the Mosque is the 16th-century Cathedral.

Further reading:

[http://www.infocordoba.com/spain/andalusia/cordoba/articles/mezquita\\_spanish\\_cathedrals.htm](http://www.infocordoba.com/spain/andalusia/cordoba/articles/mezquita_spanish_cathedrals.htm)

**Exiting the Mosque and leaving the Orange Tree Courtyard through the eastern, Santa Catalina door, turn left up Magistral Gonzalez Frances street to the NE corner of the Mosque and turn left on Cardenal Herrero Street.**

**Take a short detour with an immediate right on Velasquez Bosco and then again into Callejita de las Flores .**

11. [Callejita de las Flores Street](#)

**Back on Cardenal Herrera Street , continue straight leaving the Pardon Door and Belfry on your left until you reach the NW corner of the Mosque. This is the probable location of one of the Jewish Quarter's medieval gates and the southeastern corner of the triangle-shaped neighborhood.**

12. [Jewish Quarter](#)

**Continue straight into Juderia Street past several souvenir shops and turn right on Deanes street . Then take an immediate left into Romero street . This street was most likely the eastern boundary to the Jewish quarter.**

Historical Notes on Jewish Quarter: "...With the fall of the Caliphate in 1031, however, came the decline of both Arab and Jewish vitality in Cordoba. Civil war and the religious intolerance of the Almohad berbers from North Africa laid waste to much of the city's prosperity. Gone were the outlying palaces, large neighborhoods, wide avenues and orderly markets which extended beyond the city walls. Many Jews fled to Christian territories in the north of Spain or abroad. With the end of peace and religious tolerance in Cordoba, the city's political, economic and cultural greatness evaporated, leaving only traces of aristocratic superiority in the wounded consciousness of its provincial inhabitants for the next 30 generations.

One of the brilliant minds to abandon the former capital at this time was **Maimonides** (1135-1204), who went into exile with his family to finally settle in Egypt. He became one of the two most-studied Jewish philosophers of all time (also recognized by Christians and Moslems as a revolutionary religious thinker), as well as a physician. Among his works are the great Misneh Torah and the controversial Guide to the Perplexed. Until recently, only a stone in the courtyard of the synagogue commemorated him.

When **Fernando III** took Cordoba from the hands of the bickering Moorish Taifa Kingdoms, the Jewish community once again briefly prospered under Christian rule, maintaining their self-governing community, as in Moslem times. The last Jewish neighborhood we know of in Cordoba was separated and protected by walls on all sides, and lay approximately within the triangle formed by the city walls from Almodovar Gate to the Arab baths (once the northern, walled limit of the old Alcazar), Manríquez/Deanes streets and Almanzor street. Outside Almodovar gate there was once a Jewish cemetery.

In 1315 Simon Majeb built the **Synagogue (\*)** which still stands today. It is one of the three significant synagogues remaining in Spain and is largely unaltered (its Mudejar reliefs were covered and it was used as a rabies hospital, seat of the shoe-makers' guild and finally a

19th-century primary school). The buildings around it were probably used as public baths and a Talmudic school.

The rest of the neighborhood has a distinctly Islamic air. Nearby is the **Zoco** (Souk), a medieval version of the famed Arabic souks which used to dot the urban landscape of the Caliphate. Below the oldest houses are Roman remains, and while some of the houses are higher and increasingly modern, they respect the ancient urban layout.

Anti-Semitic Papal bulls in the 1340s and local jealousy of Jews' wealth and influence lead to their neighborhood being stormed in 1391 and an end to their isolation. Perhaps at this time the eastern and southern walls and their 2 gates were torn down, disappearing along with the northern walls of the old alcazar, which used to enclose the Arab baths, just outside the Jewish Quarter. In 1492, as a part of their consolidation of power over a newly unified Spain, **Ferdinand and Isabel** presented the Jews with the choice of forced conversion or exile in 1492, causing the mass emigration of the Sephardic Jews from all over Spain....”

### 13. Cardinal Salazar Hospital

**Continue past the University (the street becomes Almanzor street ) and turn left when you get to Fernandez Ruano. This is the northernmost point of the medieval Jewry.**

14. [Almodovar Gate](#): the best preserved of Cordoba's original city gates. Just outside used to be the Jewish cemetery.

15. [City walls](#): Just outside Almodovar Gate is a good viewing point of the city walls, flanked by fountains and gardens.

**Turn south on Judios street . The city wall just to your right formed another boundary to the district.**

16. Synagogue(\*), built by Simon Majeb in 1315. It is one of the three significant synagogues remaining in Spain and is largely unaltered (its Mudejar stucco work was covered and it was used as a rabies hospital, seat of the shoe-makers' guild and finally a 19th-century primary school). The buildings around it were probably used as public baths and a Talmudic school.

17. [Souk](#): a medieval market with a distinctly Moorish air through a narrow passageway on the left.

18. Statue Maimonides: tourists seem to think that rubbing this great Jewish thinker's shoe gives good luck.

**From Maimonides Square go south on Tomas Conde Street, leaving the Jewish Quarter and arriving to Campo Santo de los Martires Park.**

19. Caliphate Baths. Briefly opened and then closed again in 2004. Once part of the Caliph's walled complex of palaces and government buildings stretching south to the present-day Alcazar and east to the Episcopal Palace.

## Cross south to [Alcazar](#)

20. Mosaic Room

21. Patios

22. Gardens

**The Alcazar palace** was built in the 13th century by King Alfonso XI, and until the late 15th century, the kings of Spain used the Alcazar as a royal residence. The palace has two courtyards and Arab baths.

On display in the Inquisition Tower are impressive 2ndC Roman mosaics-discovered in Corredera Square-and a 3rdC Roman sarcophagus carved from one piece of marble.

The renaissance gardens, refreshed by abundant fountains and pools, are in Arab style. Statues of the kings of Spain are contemporary.

An old Visigoth fortress, strategically placed along the Roman walls, the Alcazar castle overlooked the Roman bridge and was re-built by emirs of the Damascus Caliphate. During times of political instability, it protected the residence of the emir or caliph, who-at the height of Al-Andalus-enjoyed palaces, gardens, baths and the West's greatest library in a compound that was much larger than today.

After the conquest of Cordoba in 1236, Alfonso XI built the present palace within this Acazaba fortress, which was later used as a royal residence by Spanish monarchs such as Ferdinand and Isabella. The other parts of the extensive grounds of the original Alcazar were donated to the bishop, the Order of Calatrava and powerful nobles who had assisted in the re-conquest.

This castle was vital to Cordoba during the civil war between Henry IV and his brother, and its defenses were adapted with the introduction of gunpowder. The main tower, now called the Inquisition Tower, was built during this time. Ferdinand and Isabella donated the castle to the Inquisition in 1482, and it became an administrative and ecclesiastical center in the Order's effort to discover false converts to Christianity, mostly Jews who had decided not to flee Spain in 1492. In 1810 it was turned into a garrison by Napoleon's invading troops, and in 1821 the city converted it into a jail. The government opened it as a national monument in the 1950s.

Because of its long and complex history, it is difficult to accurately date many of its elements. Although many appear Islamic, they are from different stages of Christian occupation. Some tourist guides describe the gardens as from the caliphate, yet they are renaissance with 18th and 19th century additions; the Arab baths on the lower level of the palace were built by King Alfonso XI, proof of the profound influence that Moorish culture had on Spanish architecture.

## **Exit Alcazar and turn right. Cross street and return to starting point via Amador de los Rios street .**

23. Triumph of Saint Rafael column, dedicated to Cordoba's archangel protector.

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