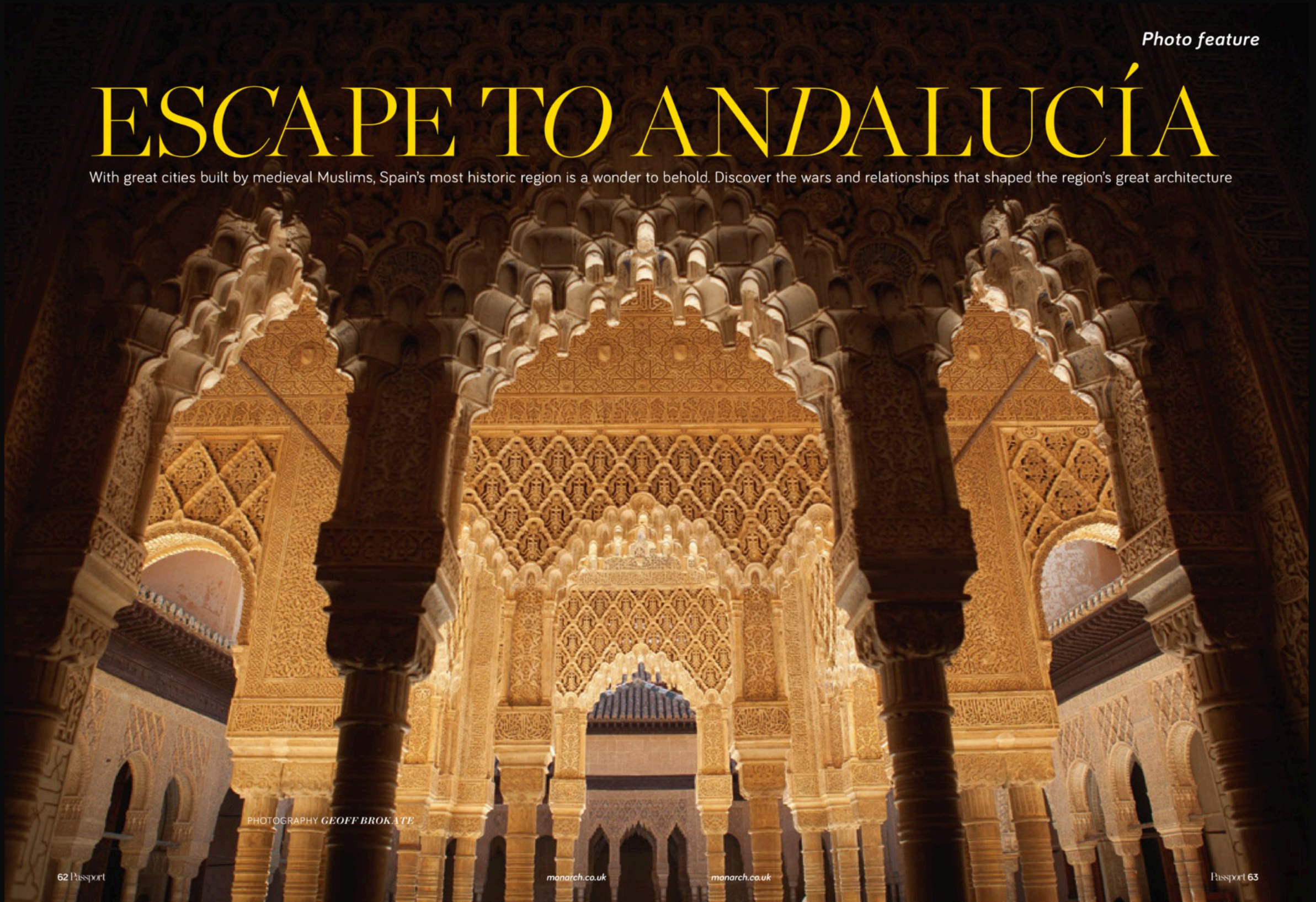


# ESCAPE TO ANDALUCÍA

With great cities built by medieval Muslims, Spain's most historic region is a wonder to behold. Discover the wars and relationships that shaped the region's great architecture



PHOTOGRAPHY *GEOFF BROKATE*

**F**AMED FOR ITS Islamic culture and the indelible imprint that it left on the country, Andalucía has a story that is told through its architecture and folklore. For anyone keen to explore the area

(and who wouldn't be?) there's no better time to visit than during the cooler months of winter and spring. Away from the scorching summer heat and often overwhelming crowds, you're free to discover celebrated destinations like Granada, Seville and Córdoba at your leisure, immersing yourself in the romance and culture that defines so much of this part of southern Spain.

It was the reign of the Moors from the 8th to 15th centuries that gave Andalucía its many awe-inspiring examples of Islamic architecture. From the beguiling palace of Alhambra, proudly overlooking Granada, to the Mudéjar architecture of Seville's Alcázar fortress and the Mezquita, the great mosque of Córdoba, a journey through these treasures reveals Spain's layered history and heritage.

Invading Spain from North Africa, the Moors began transforming the region into their vision of paradise. During an epoch known as the Islamic Golden Age, poetry and architecture became a celebration of beauty, love and devotion.

They named their new domain al-Andalus. Back then, Córdoba was its capital, a place where Muslim, Christian and Jewish lives and cultures entwined to create the finest city in all of Europe. Its half-million inhabitants even had running water and street lamps.

In 1031, the empire unravelled into civil war as the provinces of al-Andalus, under their various governors, split away. Seville found itself at the centre of the power struggle that ensued as it became the dominant city in southern Spain. A great mosque was built in the centre of the city with a minaret so immense that the muezzin could ride up its wide spiral ramp on a horse to call the faithful to prayer. All that now remains of the mosque

is the minaret, known as the Giralda, which was converted into a bell tower for the cathedral that the Spanish built after they retook Seville from the Moors – this was known as the Reconquista.

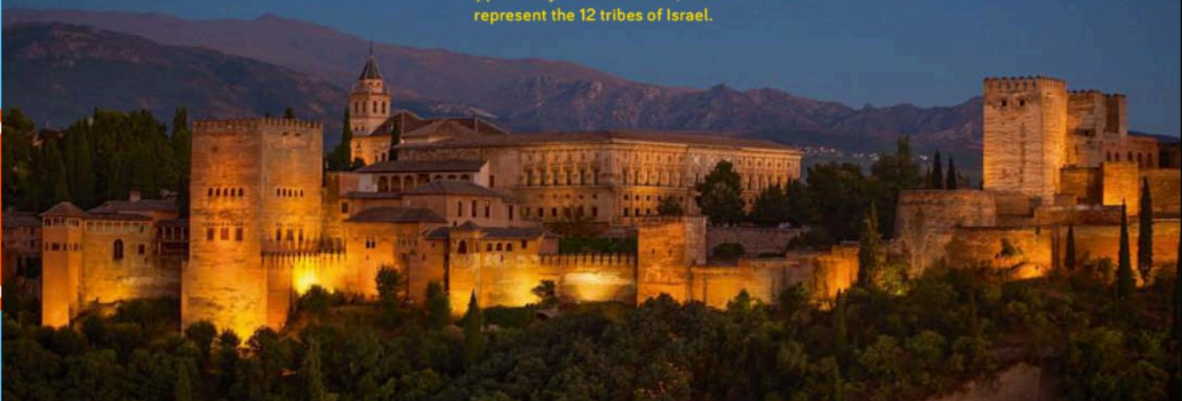
King Pedro I of Castile and León (1334-1369) made Seville his capital. He took the Moors' fine palace, the Alcázar (begun in 1181 under the Almohad dynasty), for himself and oversaw the addition of many rooms in the same Moorish style.

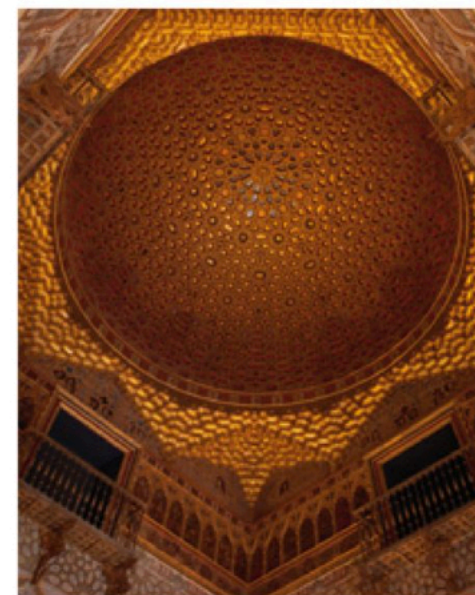
As the frontiers of Christian Iberia expanded, the Moors found themselves pushed down to the southernmost reaches of Spain. Almería – at the intersection of mountains, desert and sea – ►

### STUNNING SIGHT

**Built on a rocky outcrop protected by the Sierra Nevada mountains, Granada's Alhambra is the most-visited tourist attraction in Spain. Originally a fort and then a palace, the complex houses a military area and royal courts. The three interconnecting Nasrid Palaces, built in the 14th century, and celebrated for their stunning and intricate decoration, are the best part. In 1832, the US diplomat and writer Washington Irving summed it up perfectly: "Everything here... is delicate and beautiful. The very light falls tenderly from above, through the lantern of a dome tinted and wrought as if by fairy hands."**

**Previous pages: The Patio of the Lions, at the heart of the Alhambra, is surrounded by galleries and columns in the style of a Christian cloister. It's named after the recently restored Fountain of Lions, an alabaster basin supported by 12 marble lions, which represent the 12 tribes of Israel.**





### LEGENDARY BATHS

Originally a Moorish fort, the Alcázar of Seville became a palace in the 14th century when King Pedro I of Castile and León moved in and made the city his capital.

The king and his mistress, María de Padilla, appreciated Moorish culture, especially the luxurious elements. María's eerily still baths, los Baños de Doña María de Padilla, lie underneath the palace. It is said that María used magic to keep King Pedro under her spell, and perhaps also the gentlemen of court, who – according to legend – drank the water after she bathed in it.

*The Alcázar fortress in Seville may well overtake the Alhambra in Granada as Andalucía's most popular tourist attraction when it features in season five of HBO's Game of Thrones*

remained an important stronghold for the statelet of Granada until 1489.

**t**he Moors built Almería's impressive Alcazaba (fort) way back in the 8th century, on the foundations of a Phoenician settlement. It sits resplendently like a crown on top of a cliff, majestically overlooking the city. Although much of the Alcazaba's former grandeur has been lost in three major earthquakes, it's possible to wander around its typically lavish gardens and imagine how the king of this grand castle felt as he looked out at his kingdom and at the vast blue expanse of sea and sky. Unlike other grand monuments built by the Moors, most visitors will have the place all to themselves. Removed from the bustle of the city below, you can explore the fort and gardens and its surrounding hills, cave houses and well-preserved fortified wall undisturbed.

By the 1260s, the kingdom of Granada was all that remained of the once formidable al-Andalus. Despite its small size, Granada became a sophisticated centre of art and learning as Moors flooded in from the ▶

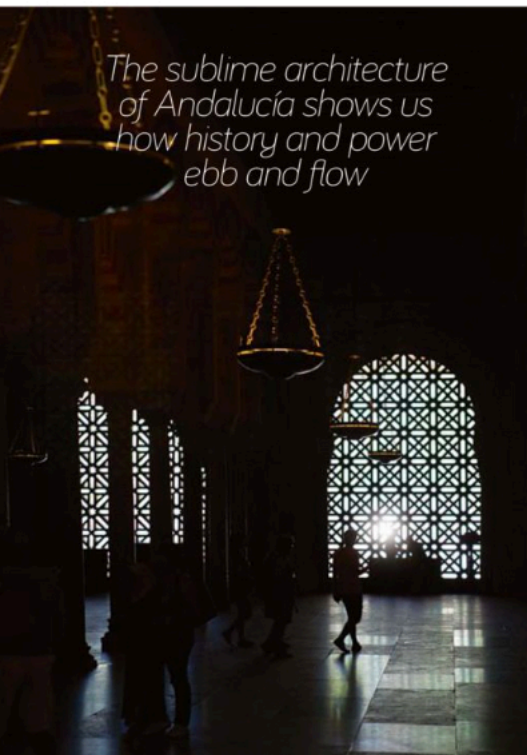
### GAME OF THRONES

Seville's Alcázar (left and above) may well overtake the Alhambra as Andalucía's most popular tourist attraction when it features in season five of HBO's *Game of Thrones* in April 2015. Many empires and dynasties have triumphed and declined in Seville, and each has left its mark on the Alcázar's patchwork of architectural styles.



## REFLECTION OF HISTORY

The Mezquita is now a glorious cathedral but its former use as a mosque is very much in evidence



*The sublime architecture of Andalucía shows us how history and power ebb and flow*

Catholic north. The frontier with Spain was just 30 miles from the city of Granada but, although the Moors must have known their paradise was in jeopardy, the final kings of al-Andalus created a palace that's an enduring monument to pleasure and beauty.

Eventually even the mighty Sierra Nevada mountains couldn't hold off the Spanish armies. After 10 years of fighting, the city fell on 2 January 1492. This Moorish Shangri-la came to an end but, mercifully, the Spaniards who reconquered the area did not destroy its buildings, so their testament to pleasure, the Alhambra, still stands.

Boabdil (1460-1533), the final Moorish ruler of Granada, famously gave a last sigh as he looked back on his lost paradise. As tears fell down his cheeks, his mother chastised him: "You do well to weep like a woman for what you failed to defend like a man."

The sublime architecture of Andalucía reaches through time to show us how history and power ebb and flow. Although the flowering that was al-Andalus is forever past, its legacy of beauty and celebration lives on for the rest of us to enjoy. ▶

## SITE OF THREE RELIGIONS

The jewel in the crown of Córdoba is the Mezquita (left and above). Legend has it that it began life as a Roman temple, then the Visigoths built a Christian basilica on the site. After the Moors invaded, they converted it to a mosque. Now it stands as a cathedral and an emblematic symbol of Spain's heterogeneous influences.

**BOTH MOSQUE  
AND CATHEDRAL**

As you step inside the Mezquita, your eyes need a few moments to adjust to the soft, dusky glow within. The bright Andalusian sun beams through skylights, punctuating the space with dashes of light, echoing the perfect symmetry of the pillars. The juxtaposition of Christian and Islamic architecture and design makes it a remarkable building.

*In Cordoba, Muslim, Christian and Jewish cultures entwined to create the finest city in Europe*