

Editor's Choice From This Month's Issue

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In a proudly historic city that has embraced the modern world, the Plaza de Espana is a symbol of grandeur and romance.

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BONUS CONTENT

By David Gibb [March 2022](#)

Contradiction and Color on the Romantic Streets of Seville

Spain has a rustic, macho feel that I find very appealing.

Crossing the border by bus from Portugal, I imagined Clint Eastwood riding horseback over the dirt-packed mountains...and kicking up sand across the desert terrain.

However, that fantasy disappeared as the bus approached a more modern landscape...and my wife, Beverley, and I eagerly awaited our arrival in the thriving metropolis of Seville.

Spain *has* traditionally been a macho society, but nowadays, fathers push baby carriages as often as mothers. In Seville, you'll find flamboyant LGBTQ nightclubs and bars, and same-sex couples proudly walk hand-in-hand. This is a predominantly Catholic society—replete with seemingly endless decorative and costumed parades and processions—but the atmosphere is chill and accepting.

I found myself pondering Spain's contradictions—Old World yet modern, traditional but accepting—while enjoying an afternoon pint of beer, at a café alongside the historic Alameda de Hercules, in Seville's Old Town.

Two ancient pillars, taken from a Roman temple dedicated to Hercules adorn the entrance to this pedestrian promenade. Atop one column sits a sculpture of Hercules, the other a sculpture of Julius Caesar.

I sat at a makeshift table, constructed from an old oil drum painted glossy red, shaded from the hot afternoon sun by a row of mature poplar trees that line both sides of the boulevard. My beer server, a long-haired young hippie, probably born 50 years too late, kept himself busy by burning African musk incense. The aroma was as calming as my surroundings.

(By the way, the cost of my pint of beer, and Beverley's Tinto de Verano [one part wine, one part Fanta, with slice of orange or lemon]: \$4.60.)

The pedestrian square running about a third of a mile long and about 250 feet

The pedestrian square, running about a third of a mile long, and about 200 feet wide, was abuzz with all sorts of activity. Couples holding hands, parents pushing strollers, groups of young women, family groups spanning three generations; all took turns strolling by our table. Guys on scooters rode by, and elderly folk rode bicycles that looked older than themselves.

People were having fun—their energy very different from the work-focused hustle-bustle of North America.

Public displays of affection are a common sight here—and nobody seems to mind. One young suitor, a boy of about five, even approached Beverley at our table to boldly flirt with her in front of me. He had been celebrating a family birthday at the table beside ours (we recognized the “Happy Birthday” melody they sang in unison). When Beverley handed him a brightly colored leaf, he blushed and politely accepted, returning a few minutes later (after being coached by a well-meaning mom) to say, in English, “Thank you for the pretty leaf, lady.”

Seville can bring out the romance in everyone.





Enjoy the romanticism of Seville with a horse-drawn carriage ride around its many historical buildings and neighborhoods. ©David Gibb

A short walk away, Beverley and I enjoyed a stroll around the serene Plaza de Espana, built in 1928 on the edge of Maria Luisa Park for the Spanish Americas Fair of 1929.

We wandered amid half a mile of cascading fountains and rows of colorful azulejo-tiled alcoves with benches (each built to represent a province of Spain) lining the grand boulevard and forming a half circle around the plaza. We watched couples paddling small, gondola-style boats along its calm, narrow canal. Four scenic pedestrian bridges arch over the canal. And, just in case this scene doesn't yet sound like the setting for a Hollywood rom-com, two gray-haired musicians played calming Spanish folk tunes on their guitars in the background.

We indulged ourselves at Seville's oldest bar, El Rinconcillo ("The Little Corner"), located just a few steps away from our rental apartment. Dating back to 1670, it retains its old Seville charm, zapping patrons into a bygone era.

Slabs of Iberian ham dangled by their hooves over the long, antique mahogany bar. While one elderly bartender served drinks—looking much like a saloon barkeep from America's Old West, in a white shirt and formal black vest—another, equally vintage, soul carved the slabs of ham to serve as tapas. Six tiers of wooden shelves, all crammed to the brim with liquor bottles, stretched

up to the vaulted ceiling behind them.

The variety of Arab-Andalusian tapas (we sampled cod with tomato sauce, croquettes, couscous, and that succulent Iberian ham) were as tasty as they were cheap—just €2.50 (\$2.85) each.

When we headed back to the Hercules promenade after sunset, the area exuded a whole different aura than it did during the day. It was a much different kind of energy now, with bars abuzz and nightclubs vibrant and loud.

Neon lights, Coke signs, and giant-sized wall murals of Freddie Mercury, Madonna, and David Bowie, enticed Beverley and I into a small club called 1987. Inside, more neon lights, along with life-sized cutouts of Michael Jackson and Freddie Mercury, recreated a retro theme—replete with 1980s music videos playing on overhead screens, while a DJ enthusiastically spun vintage LPs for the mostly mature crowd. The €10 (\$11.50) cover charge to get inside included two bar drinks.

There were a lot of young people out enjoying themselves, but also plenty of folks over 40. And, with many popular LGBTQ bars in the area, couples took many forms. Outside gatherings were equally as eclectic.

Spain is indeed a country steeped in tradition. But it's also embraced the modern world.

It'll be interesting to watch this transition continue.

Could Beverley and I live full-time in Seville? Probably not. Despite its many draws, it feels too large and too much of a tourist town. Perhaps somewhere smaller, within easy transit time to the city, would suit us better.

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