



IBERIAN INDULGENCE

In our series on European short-break destinations, **Paul Gogarty** spends two days in Seville, sightseeing and shopping, and two days recuperating in a small but luxurious hotel in the hills to the north of the city

The sweet scent of fresh lilies greeted us as we stepped into the intimate lobby of Corral del Rey, a two-year old boutique hotel with six bedrooms carved out of a handsome town house in the heart of Seville. Over tea, receptionist Gabrielle designed our itinerary for the next couple of days, marking everything neatly on a map.

Just four hours after leaving London, we were ready to lose ourselves to the atmospheric maze of Spain's most vibrant city. Following Gabrielle's tips, we started with a caleche ride that clippopped its way round the main sights, along the river and through the vast botanic garden of the Parque de María Luisa, lined with the fabulous pavilions of the 1929 Ibero-American Exhibition.

Over the next 48 hours we ticked off most of her other 'must-dos', such as ascending the 35 ramps that lead to the top of the Giralda - the bell tower of Seville's cathedral - and grazing in a whole host of tapas bars (our favourite, Bodega Paco Gongora, however, we simply stumbled on ourselves).

The highlights of our brief stay were a lengthy visit to the Real Alcázar - which rivals the Alhambra in its transcendent Moorish beauty - and a spellbinding and authentic flamenco show in an intimate town house, Casa de la Memoria, in the Barrio Santa Cruz. In between visits to a succession of ever more exquisite churches, we shopped - for ham, leather bags and shoes - and when our feet grew weary, we retreated to the oasis of the Corral del Rey, where our eyes were soothed from the firmament of the city by terracotta-coloured walls, limed oak floors, muted scatter rugs and heavy wooden shutters. We rarely made it to bed before 1am, and rose - from our slatted of plumped pillows shrouded in linen - at around 9am, to breakfast on the roof terrace, staring dreamily across the city's bubbling domes to the nearby Giralda Tower.

On the third morning we drove north for an hour into the hills, through rippling fields of wheat and forests, until view opened up to reveal Trasierra, a manse built as a retreat for the Dean of Seville in the early twentieth century. Its bell tower, giant agave, palms and avalanche of pantiles conjured up images of a mission in Baja California or Mexico, but inside, Catholic austerity had been eschewed in favour of stylish, rustic beauty.

The guest books in each of the 18 rooms set the tone - there were no televisions, no newspapers, mobile conversations were banished to the outer walls, and breakfast was served 'punctually between 9 and 12'. Thankfully, too, there was no music: by day, there was just the sound of songbirds; at night, wood crackling on the terrace fire, mingling with the contented percussion of cutlery emanating from wisteria-clad alcoves.

Trasierra has been divinely designed and service is as discreet as it is friendly. Its 18 distinctly individual rooms all have terraces and balconies flanked by rosemary or jasmine. Inside, furnishings have been collected or created over 30 years with an inspired touch by the English designer owner, Charlotte Scott. Typical of the idiosyncratic inspiration found in every corner is the swimming-pool shower, concealed behind one half of a giant wine vat.

Trasierra's terraces provide expansive views across the estate's 450 acres of orange groves, figs and venerable olive trees rollicking their way to the horizon. Even the guests at Trasierra appear more at home than elsewhere, chatting easily and joining each other's tables after dinner, having instantly bought into the 'anti-hotel' ethos. For the active there is a tennis court and marked walks through the groves and wooded hills; for the inactive there is simply enchantment □



Ways & means

Paul Gogarty travelled as a guest of **Kirker Holidays** (020-7593 1899; www.kirkerholidays.com). Two nights at **Corral del Rey** costs from £611 per person, including twin/double room with breakfast, scheduled flights, private transfers, the Kirker Guide notes to restaurants, museums and sightseeing, and the Kirker Concierge service. **Trasierra** (00-34-954 88 43 24; www.trasierra.co.uk), double rooms from €200, B&B.



The Giralda (top) soars above Seville's squares. Corral del Rey (above) provides a cool retreat. Trasierra's groves (left) span some 450 acres. The furnishings (far left) have been collected over 30 years