

GRANADA

Granada is a historic city, set at the foot of the Sierra Nevada mountains. It was the last capital of Moorish Spain from the 13th to the 15th century, which has left its mark on the city, in particular the Alhambra, the palace and fortress of the Nasrid kings. Today it is a lively provincial capital and home to one of the largest and best known universities in Spain.



The city lies at the foot of a range of hills where the rivers Darro and Genil meet. The modern city centre is the *Puerta Real* (Royal Gate), and *Acera del Darro*, the main street built over the culverted *Rio Darro*. Rising above the city, on one side of the Darro valley, is the Albaicín, the oldest part of the city and the original Arab city. On the opposite side of the valley is the Alhambra. The centre of the tourist city is the Plaza Nueva.

Granada can be reached as a day trip from Málaga but, to see the Alhambra properly and experience the city's nightlife, it is best to stay overnight.

Getting to Granada

The easiest way to reach Granada is by the express coach from Málaga. Coaches leave both Málaga and Granada every hour on the hour, and take between 1½ and 2 hours depending on traffic conditions. A single ticket is 11.43 to 13.72 euros – the more expensive departures include a free snack, water and

wifi. The service is operated by ALSA and tickets should be bought from the ALSA ticket windows at Málaga and Granada bus stations. The coaches are comfortable, but can be very busy on Friday and Sunday afternoons from 1500, when you may not get a seat on the first departure. For details of times and fares visit www.alsa.es

Granada's bus station is in the northern suburbs. City buses SN1 and SN2 depart frequently from directly outside the bus station. After a few stops change to the LAC bus – anyone on the bus going to the city centre will be changing there. The LAC bus stops in the *Gran Vía* outside the cathedral, and in *Acera del Darro* close to *Plaza Nueva*. The fare is €1.20, which includes the transfer to LAC. A long-delayed metro from the bus station is due to open in late 2016.

The plan of the city centre, on the final page, will help with orientation.

Getting around Granada



Buses cost €1.20 for any journey. The steep Albaicín and Alhambra hills are served by frequent minibuses, which are an adventure in themselves.

Service No. **C1** leaves **Plaza Nueva** for the **Albaicín** every few minutes.

Service No. **C3** leaves from **Plaza de Isabel la Católica** for the **Alhambra** every few minutes.

To reduce congestion and pollution all other buses through the city centre have been replaced by the **LAC** (high capacity line) bus route, which runs every few minutes along the *Gran Vía* and *Acero del Darro*, with free transfers to suburban buses along its route.

The **Granada City Tour** is a hop-on hop-off road train, leaving regularly from *Plaza Nueva* and *Plaza Mariana Pineda* (near *Acera del Darro*). It includes the Alhambra and the Albaicín, travelling along narrow streets that an open top bus could not reach. It costs €8 (over 65s €4 for a 24 hour ticket).

Places to visit – a selection

- * The **Alhambra** is the must-see sight. For details see below.
- * The **Albaicín** is like a village within the city, with clear Arab influences on the houses and street layout. Small squares such as *Plaza Larga* and *Plaza San Miguel Bajo* have cafes and bars, and there are excellent views of the Alhambra complex from the **Mirador de San Nicolás**. The picture of the Alhambra was taken from here – it is best visited in the hour before sunset, when the light is best, and before visiting the Alhambra, to give an idea of its layout.
- * The **cathedral** and *Capilla Real* (**Royal Chapel**), where Ferdinand and Isabella, monarchs of Spain when the reconquest from the Moors was completed in 1492, are buried.
- * the remains of the 11th century **Arab baths**, and nearby **archeological** museum, beside the *Rio Darro*.

- * wander around **the streets and squares** (*Plaza Bib-Rambla and Plaza Trinidad*) behind the cathedral, and the *Realejo* district at the foot of the Alhambra hill.
- * The main **shopping** areas are *Acera del Darro* (where there is an *El Corte Ingles*) and the streets between *Puerta Real* and *Plaza Trinidad*.

Visiting the Alhambra

The **Alhambra** is stunning and not to be missed. It was a city in itself, and covers a large area. At its core are the Moorish Nasrid palaces (*Palacios Nazaríes*), and other areas include the fortress (*Alcazaba*), the palace of Carlos V, extensive grounds, and the Generalife gardens and Summer Palace.

To protect its heritage there is a maximum number of visitors allowed each day. It is necessary to book your visit in advance – to get any remaining tickets on the day you have to queue from early morning. The Alhambra is managed by the *Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife*, www.alhambra-patronato.es and their official ticket agents are *Ticketmaster* and *La Caixa* bank.

To buy tickets follow the links on the Alhambra website. Select the general admission (*visita general diurna*) option. Choose the day you wish to visit and select either the morning (0830 – 1400) or afternoon (from 1400) session. Entrance to the Nasrid Palaces is further limited to a maximum number of people each half-hour and you have to select a time.

Tickets should then be collected from the Alhambra entrance when you arrive. You will need the same credit card with which you bought the tickets and the reference number. They can also be collected in advance from any Servicaixa cash machine.

You must pass through the ticket checkpoints within the half-day time slot, and the entrance to the Nasrid palaces within the half-hour time slot. Once inside the palaces you can remain for as long as you wish.



Places to eat and drink

In Granada, almost everywhere, a free **tapa** comes with every drink, and it is usual for locals to spend an evening wandering from bar to bar eating *tapas* – many places have their own specialities. You may not need to eat anything else, or if you are hungry, order (and pay for!) a larger plate (*racion*) from the menu. It is important to be aware that the *tapa*

is seen as a gift from the house. Therefore it can be seen as rude to turn it down when it arrives, or to ask for something different. If you really do not want anything to eat, say so when you order a drink. Enjoy.

In the city centre:

- * For **outdoor** drinking and eating there are umpteen places with outside terraces in the *Plaza Nueva*, further up the Darro valley in *Paseo de los Tristes* with fine views of the Alhambra, and also in the modern city centre along *Acera del Darro*, and the *Rio Genil* riverside.
- * **Bodegas Castañeda**, in *C/Almireceros*, across *Gran Vía* from the cathedral, is a fine old bar with local wines and sherries and good tapas. (*C/ = Calle = street*).
- * **Calle Navas** is a key destination for the *tapeador* – try **Los Diamantes** (always packed), with tremendous fish tapas, and the bizarre **El Tabernaculo**, where it's Easter Week every day.
- * Other suggestions are **Puerta del Carmen**, an upmarket café-bar opposite the town hall, **Taberna Gamboa** outside the Hesperia Hotel, **Bar Reca** in *Plaza Trinidad*, and **Mesón la Alegría** in *C/Moras*, all of which serve good tapas.

In the Albaicín

- * **Bar Kiki** at the *Mirador de San Nicolás* has a tremendous location.
- * **Rincón del Aurora** in *Plaza San Miguel Bajo* is a pleasant neighbourhood bar

For a full meal

- * **Mesón la Alegría** serves excellent traditional Spanish dishes, heavy on the pork, including stews, sausages and black pudding, at a very reasonable price.
- * **Las Tomasas** in the Albaicín has a terrace with an excellent view of the Alhambra and serves mid-priced good quality Spanish food. Reserve on 958 224 108
- * **El Carmen de San Miguel** on the slopes of the Alhambra, overlooking the city, serves tremendous (and expensive) modern Andalusian cooking. Reserve on 958 226 723.

Places to stay



See my **Where to Stay in Spain** guide for details of the hotels we have stayed in, and the **Rough Guide to Andalucía** for recommendations in all price categories. For the best combination of price, location and comfort I suggest the **Hotel Hesperia** in Plaza Gamboa www.hesperia.es pictured. Though in a quiet street, like all city centre hotels in Granada there may be some late night street noise, particularly during University terms.

Other info.

- * Many places in Granada keep traditional **hours**, with shops closed between 1400 and 1700, and restaurants closed from 1600 to 2000. The Cathedral and Royal Chapel are closed between 1300 and 1600.
- * There is a large Mercadona **supermarket** in *Acera del Darro*, close to the *Rio Genil*, which sells cheap water, wine and picnic supplies.
- * the main **souvenir** and **gift** shops (open all day) are in the lane next to the Cathedral and Royal Chapel.
- * Across the *Gran Vía* in *C/Caldería Nueva* is a group of **Moroccan** gift shops, teahouses and restaurants.
- * The plan on the next page will help you find your way around the city centre.

