

ESCAPE



Amazing ALMERIA

With its deserted beaches and coves, Almeria whose Arabic name translates as Mirror of the Sea, is definitely worth a visit

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Tucked away in a corner of Andalusia, the port city of Almeria is often overshadowed by its more famous rivals Cordoba, Granada and Sevilla which form the Golden Triangle, the classic tour of Moorish Spain. Nestled at the base of the spectacular Sierra Nevada range and giving access to the wild beauty of the Cabo de Gata-Níjar Nature Park with its deserted beaches and coves, Almeria whose Arabic name translates as Mirror of the Sea, is definitely worth a visit.

Start your tour of Almeria with its crowning glory the magnificent Alcazaba (Arabic for citadel) which occupies a commanding position atop a hill overlooking the city and the Mediterranean Sea. Second only in size and importance to the Alhambra in Granada, this immense fortress was built by Abd-ar-Rahman III in 995 AD to defend against enemy attack from the sea. Catastrophic earthquakes in the 16th century devastated much of the original Alcazaba but its walls and towers have been beautifully reconstructed and makes for a delightful tour. From here the views are magnificent and you can gaze over the colourful rooftops of the Barrio de la Chanca, the old cave quarter which stretch down the steep hillside to the south as far as the dazzling blue of the Mediterranean.

Leave the Alcazaba through the Puerta de la Justicia and wander down peaceful Almanzor Street. It is hard to imagine that this was the actual set of a most thrilling jeep chase in Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade! A few minutes walk will bring you to the imposing Almeria Cathedral. Originally built centuries ago it was completely destroyed in the great earthquake of 1522 and then rebuilt in its present Renaissance style after that. The unique feature of the cathedral is that it doubles as a fortress as can be seen by its robust construction with sturdy buttresses and cannons placed within



Previous page: Cabo de Gata, Lighthouse
Top: View of Alcazaba **Bottom:** Beach scene, Near San Jose, Costa de Almeria;
Opposite page (Top): Beach boats in San Miguel **Middle:** Traditional dishh of Migas, **Bottom:** Almerian dish of artichokes



each of its four fortified towers. It would serve as a place of refuge for the local population when they were under siege from the frequent attacks of the pirates of the Barbary Coast. Step inside to admire its soaring ribbed ceilings with baroque trimmings made of jasper and local marble, the wood carvings in the choir stalls and works of art in its side chapels by artists such as Murillo, Ribera and Alonso Cano. A 16th century carved sun, the Sol de Portocarrero, found on the eastern façade is now the official emblem of the City of Almería.

End your day with a guided walk through the tunnels of the Museo Refugio De La Guerra Civil which parallels the main avenue of Paseo De Almería. These underground shelters were built at the time of the Spanish Civil War to protect the civilian population from the incessant bombing from the land and the sea by the Germans. Only about 1 Km of the entire network of 4.5 Kms can be visited but it is a poignant memory of the Civil War and the eye for meticulous planning by architect Guillermo Langle Rubio can be seen in the breathing air vents, the underground pantries and even a surgical operating theatre.

Day Two: Almería has a couple of museums that are well worth visiting. The



WHERE TO EAT?

Almería offers a wide range of eating places where you can experience traditional Spanish cuisine and some excellent Andalusian specialities. Top of your list should be Casa Puga; Almería's oldest bar where you can enjoy some excellent tapas and wine. You can order from a rich selection of tapas.

Another highly rated tapas bar, also located in the old quarter, is Taberna Nuestra Tierra. The specials include: migas, an ancient dish made of crumbs of bread and spices; gachas, gurrillos, a kind of pasta typical of the province of Almería; and zaramandoña de la sierra de los Filabres which, a salad made of sun dried tomatoes, olives and a host of mouth watering ingredients which makes salad a much desirable dish.

You must not leave this corner of Moorish Spain without sampling Moroccan food and the best place to experience this is Teteria Almedina, a stone's throw from the Alcazaba. Teteria means an Arabic-style tearoom and this lovely little cafe serves delicious tagines, couscous dishes, salads and other Moroccan favourites, plus a fascinating range of teas, infusions and sweets.



first is the Archaeological Museum housed in a modern building on the Carretera de Ronda whose collection includes items from the Middle Paleolithic Era through to the present day and comes largely from archaeological sites in Andalusia. It has an extensive collection of weapons, pottery and popular costumes presented in an inspiring and interactive way with modern interpretation and complete English translations. The museum has won several awards including the European Museum of the Year Award in 2008 and is free to visitors.

The second is the Casa del Cine which opened in 2011 to commemorate Almeria's rich legacy as the outdoor set of choice for many Hollywood movies with its arid desert landscapes and sunny climate (see Box on Hollywood comes to Andalusia). This museum of cinema history is housed within a grand mansion on the outskirts of town and uses scenographic exhibitions and displays with impressive special



Top: Narrow street in the Old Town, **Below:** Mini Hollywood set, **Opposite page:** Poster of Lawrence of Arabia





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HOLLYWOOD COMES TO ANDALUSIA

The Tabernas desert which forms the hinterland of Almeria has achieved international fame because it has spawned a most unusual industry. Attracted by the harsh mountainous landscapes, dazzling natural light and the low production costs, Hollywood has made it a favoured outdoor set for films that run the entire gamut from spaghetti Westerns and war movies to adventure fantasies and historical epics. Over 600 films have been shot here with the big breakthrough coming when David Lean chose the Tabernas desert as the backdrop for the towering epic *Lawrence of Arabia* starring Peter O'Toole in 1962. This was followed by a string of low-budget Westerns directed by Sergio Leone including the famous trilogy - *A Fistful of Dollars*, *For a Few Dollars More* and *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* which really put the region on the cinematic map. In 1989 Steven Spielberg shot scenes from *Indiana Jones* and the *Last Crusade* here and most recently Ridley Scott based his TV series *Exodus: Gods and Kings* in the Tabernas desert.

A visit to Almeria would not be complete without a trip out to this desert area called Mini-Hollywood. There are three theme parks that offer you the choice of reliving your Western film fantasy called *Oasys Park*, *Western Leone* and *Fort Bravo*. There is a daily enactment of a gunfight with stunt riding and much pointing of guns set to an Ennio Morricone soundtrack. The *Yellow Rose* saloon is original from the swing doors up to the stage area and features an enthusiastic can-can show twice a day. The bank houses an interesting film museum with a number of old cameras and projectors and the original Spanish posters of films made on the set.

Almeria is more than just a cine paradise for famous Hollywood directors

effects spread through ten rooms. Its past occupants range from influential movie directors such as David Lean to famous actors such as Peter O'Toole and Yul Brynner. Even the immortal John Lennon resided in the house for a short period during the filming of the satire *How I Won the War* and is said to have been inspired to write the Beatles classic *Strawberry Fields* during his stay. The use of state-of-the-art compositing technology allows you to take part in green-screen sets and see yourself acting in real-life film scenes.

In the afternoon for a complete change of scene take a car and drive out to the Cabo de Gata Natural Park about 20 KM miles to the east of Almeria. The volcanic

origins of this park, which comprise 500 Sq Km of land area and 150 Sq Km of marine reserve, have created a stunning landscape where steep cliffs plunge into the sea interspersed with miles of secluded coves, unspoilt beaches and sand dunes.

If you are an outdoor enthusiast, you will love being able to engage in walking, cycling, horse riding, mountain biking and 4X4 excursions amid this spectacular scenery. If you prefer being out on the water, the park offers sailing, windsurfing and kite surfing, sea kayaking and fishing while underwater the coral reefs and colourful marine life invite divers and snorkelers. 🇪🇸