



CADIZ OLD CITY

# MOORISH AND MOREISH

**CADIZ, WITH ITS STUNNING COASTAL SETTING AND LONG HISTORY, IS A MUCH BETTER BET THAN COSTA DEL SOL, SAYS ROGER WHEELER**

They claim **Cadiz** is one of the oldest cities in Europe; there has been a settlement there continuously since 1100BC, some 3,000-plus years. In the early 19th century Cadiz was the bastion of Spain's anti-monarchist liberal movement, as a result of which the country's first constitution was declared here in 1812. Standing on a peninsula jutting out into a bay, it is almost entirely surrounded by water and therefore has a famous harbour and, as always, a major naval base (we didn't see many sailors though).



Across the Cadiz bay lies the **US Rota Naval Station**, a useful reminder of the kind of world we live in and the role violence has in it.

The city of Cadiz boasts one of the mildest climates in Spain, thanks to the fact it's on the

Atlantic. As with all major cities there is an urban sprawl before you get to the old central quarter, which is picturesque and quite charming, full of lovely squares with bars and cafes. The **cathedral** is huge and imposing but we didn't visit. Sorry if that offends anyone who has to visit the big religious edifices but they leave us unmoved and the markets were much more fun. The fresh fish, meat, veg and fruit on sale in the main covered market is totally amazing. The variety and scale of the market is a measure of the life of any town or city. Having been to a number, I say Cadiz beats the lot.

The Old City looks quite Moorish in appearance and is intriguing with narrow cobbled streets opening onto small squares. The golden cupola of the cathedral looms high above long white houses and the whole place has a slightly dilapidated air. It takes just an hour to walk around the headland, where you can visit the entire Old City and pass through some lovely parks with sweeping views of the bay. In the Old City there



is only one beach, but it's large and sandy and very busy. We stayed in the **Parador**, one of Spain's government-run hotels, which are usually in old castles and monasteries. This one was a mere 75 years old and looked pretty unprepossessing from the outside, but you don't judge a hotel by its walls. Inside the public spaces were very impressive and the rooms all had balconies and great views over the bay and out over the Atlantic. At €85 (£70) per room per night, it was incredibly good value. If you happen to be over 60 then go for their **Golden Days special offers** – only one of you needs to be over 60 and everyone in the party qualifies for the discount.



THE PARADOR

Getting there is not difficult. You can fly by most of the budget airlines to **Seville** or **Gibraltar**, which are just over an hour's drive away, or take one of four daily trains from **Cordoba**, **Madrid** and **Barcelona**.

We walked down to the commercial harbour and all we could see as we got closer was that all the roads seemed to be blocked by an enormous white wall. It was the *Independence of the Seas*, a 154,000-gross-ton cruise liner on its maiden voyage from Southampton, carrying 3,000



MEDINA-SIDONIA

Brits on a quick cruise of the Med. We saw several groups wandering around – not a pretty sight, but they were only there for about eight hours.

The local coast – **Costa de la Luz** – is a surfer's paradise, with resort hotels and campsites dotted along the coastline from

Gibraltar. Just inland is the ancient town of **Medina-Sidonia**, founded by the Phoenicians and once the capital of the region. It's a lovely

place to visit, all very Moorish with narrow winding streets, a cathedral – of course – and a castle. The main tree-lined square is fabulous, full of cafes and bars. Sit, drink coffee and eat the local famous *alfajor*, made of honey, almonds, sugar, flour, breadcrumbs, coriander, cloves cinnamon and anise – very nice and absolutely no calories at all.



This part of southern Spain is fabulous and well worth a visit. It might not be very popular with the Brits, who tend to stick to the Costa del Sol, but the Spanish love it and so do we.



CADIZ CATHEDRAL