



# CÓRDOBA

Roger Wheeler visits the city that changed the world

Way back in the mid 1960s Brighton's very first coffee bar opened on the corner of Cambridge Road and Western Road (okay that's in Hove actually) called **The Cordoba**. It was the place where all us groovy and trendy guys would go to drink frothy coffee. Our parents were horrified. We even wore jeans - it was the beginning of the end. 45 years later I went to the city this infamous coffee bar was named after. I'm pretty sure that the owners just saw the name having no idea that it was a city in southern Spain that was once the biggest, richest city in Europe, now a UNESCO World heritage site.

About 120km from Malaga, **Córdoba** is now a modern sprawling, prosperous city. Founded by the Romans in 152BC, they made it the capital of their Hispanic empire. Its main claim to fame and it's a big one, is **The Mezquita**. This is one of the most visited sites in Spain with 1.5m visitors a year, although going on a late afternoon in June meant that we had the place almost to ourselves. It is one of the largest Islamic mosques in the world and was known as the

But there's a lot more to Córdoba than The Mezquita. Built in a wide flat valley, so there are no hills to climb. The silver shadowed narrow streets of the old Jewish quarter, **La Juderia**, are terrific. It's a maze of winding alleyways with shops, bars, restaurants and little squares plus of course the obligatory five star hotels wedged into the most unlikely



of spaces. The modern city is pleasant, not one of the most beautiful in Spain by any means, but it has all the necessary shops, restaurants, bars, pretty squares and fountains that you and its 315,000 citizens could want. There is a thriving gay scene with half a dozen bars and clubs, but it is a city famous for its tolerance to everyone no matter their colour, creed or sexuality and so everyone feels relaxed wherever you happen to be.

For centuries the city was a centre for all three main religions, Christianity, Judaism and Islam, living side by side in perfect harmony; this was the start of what became western civilisation. It has several other modest claims to fame: it was the first city to have street lighting in the 10th century and the first ever purpose built orphanage. And they built patios, hundreds of them; there is even a **Festival of the Patios** in May.



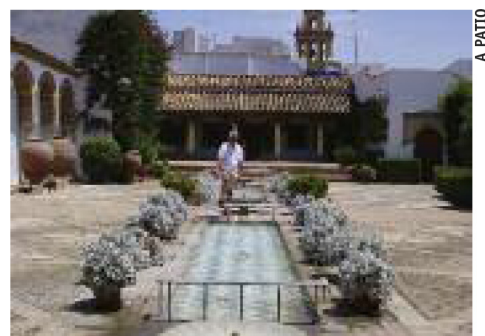
Córdoba is situated in the valley of one of Spain's greatest rivers, the **Guadalquivir**. This 560km long river flows right across Andalucía and ends up in the Atlantic near Cadiz. The Romans built the first major bridge across the river called, not surprisingly, the **Roman Bridge**. It's still one of the main attractions, although now pedestrianised it's worth a stroll across to look back at the view of the city.

We stayed at the 82 room **Parador**, situated in the hills about 3km outside the city. It's a reasonably modern hotel, built in 1964, not one of the famous old monasteries or castles that normally house Paradors. For all that it's a very nice hotel, and as it's getting a bit tired now, is being refurbished. It offers some surprisingly good deals, between €75 and €90 (average of £70) per room with breakfast which, for a four star hotel, is exceptional value. It's also has one of the best restaurants in the city. For €29 (£23) we had one of the best dinners we have ever had in Spain of about five courses and various wines, all local specialities. There are dozens of good hotels though ranging in price from about £30 to £200+.

Flying direct to Córdoba is impossible as its small airport doesn't have any scheduled flights. **Malaga Airport** is only 100km away and just about every airline flies there. There are loads of direct connections either by train or bus for around €20 (£16) or you can hire a car and drive there in less than two hours. They have built a new motorway from Malaga to Córdoba on Roman road lines, ie in a straight line.

We loved, Córdoba, its history, architecture, little squares, bars and cafes, the general vibe of a cosmopolitan city with a past and most of all the Mezquita. It's said that Córdoba witnessed the dawn of western civilisation and it's one of those places you have to see before you die.

[www.whatcordoba.com](http://www.whatcordoba.com)  
[www.andalucia.com](http://www.andalucia.com)  
[www.paradores.es](http://www.paradores.es)



THE CATHEDRAL INSIDE THE MEZQUITA



Mecca of the West. When the Christians conquered the city in 1236, King Ferdinand III had a Christian cathedral built inside. It's quite simply breathtaking and worth visiting the city even if you see nothing else. It is said to be one of the finest examples of Moorish architecture anywhere, I've not seen a lot of Moorish buildings but I can certainly believe this claim.