

U3A TRIP TO JEREZ HORSE FAIR MAY 2012

Written by Janet Coleman

Photographs by Frank Lee, Linda Coughlin and Janet Colman

When we booked for the trip to Seville, Jerez and Cadiz through the U3A travel group we were not too sure of what to expect, especially when you think you will be travelling by coach for several hours with a group of people you hardly know, just a little daunting but we can happily say the trip was fantastic and far exceeded our expectations.

We spent six days and five nights seeing some spectacular sights in the company of approximately 50 lovely U3A members whom we got to know quite well and were driven around for hours by a superb coach driver called Pepe. Goodness knows how he managed to get through some of the narrow streets, quite incredible driving.

We left Moraira early Saturday morning and arrived at the Hotel Don Paco late afternoon after three short stops on route. It was a very comfortable drive down and we saw some beautiful country scenery, an abundance of agriculture and olive trees as far as your eyes could see, quite breathtaking. Before evening meal we had time to either rest after the long trip, explore the area around the hotel or watch the football match between Chelsea and Liverpool in the nearest bar, which is what we did, but unfortunately the best team lost!! After a lovely dinner we strolled around the area which consisted of small cobbled streets full of bars, beautifully decorated and overflowing with customers, there was such a wonderful atmosphere everywhere.



Photo by Frank Lee

The next day after a super breakfast Pepé drove us around the centre of Seville on a tour where we also had a tour guide called Marie Luisa on board informing us of the wonderful sights that we could see. Marie Luisa also took us on a walking tour through an amazing park, which started from the American Plaza right through to the spectacular Spanish Plaza.



Photo by Janet Colman



Photo by Frank Lee

It is hard to believe how these gorgeous buildings were constructed, truly remarkable.



Alcazar in Seville Photo by Janet Colman



Photo by Janet Colman

We did notice three men dressed up as Indians with their feather headdresses playing lovely pan pipe music that seemed to follow us from Seville, Cadiz and Jerez, they must have had our itinerary, quite uncanny!!!



Photo by Janet Colman

We also walked around more cobbled streets with bars and shops and saw the Palace, Cathedral, trams and several more outstanding buildings. Just before we had a bite to eat we took the boat cruise up and down the river it was so relaxing. Later on in the afternoon we all re-joined the coach for our trip to the Hotel Sherry Park in Jerez for the Jerez Horse Fair, which is an annual event.

On the Monday morning after a delicious breakfast we had the choice of either exploring Jerez or visiting Cadiz. Most of us chose to visit Cadiz which was only a short distance away and what a delight it was, so historic you could almost visualise the ladies and gentlemen in their Georgian or Victorian costumes being driven around by horse and carriage. Again Pepé was brilliant the way he drove the coach around the narrow roads to give us a little tour and just as we had passed some fantastic historic buildings, right in front of us were two enormous cruise ships, one being the Arcadia, they were incredible to see but looked so out of place there. Luckily we had about four hours to explore as there was so much to see, the Cathedral, other stately buildings and a lovely park by the sea with amazing topiary.



Jenny & Nita, having an ice cream in Cadiz - 7 May 2012

Photo by Frank Lee



Photo by Frank Lee

We also went up the highest watchtower where they had a 360 degree mirror (a camera obscura) little do people realise as they are carrying on with everyday life that they are being spied on by nosey tourists. The view from the top of the tower was simply breath-taking, well worth dragging myself up the 100 plus steps.



Photo by Janet Colman



Photo by Janet Colman

Late afternoon we returned to the super hotel in Jerez for a rest, evening meal and then onto the Horse Fair which was walking distance away. You just had to follow the crowds to find out where it was and at 10pm these amazing lights were switched on to great cheers and applause, what a spectacle, the lights covered the whole of the area which took us an hour to walk around plus another hour to walk through an enormous funfair, the atmosphere was electric (excuse the pun).



Photo by Linda Coughlin



Photo by Janet Colman

The following morning we walked to the Real Escuela Andaluza Del Arte Ecuestre to see the most fabulous horse show and what a treat it was, extremely skilled horsemen and women on stunning looking horses performing super tricks followed by horse drawn carriages that also gave us a wonderful display.



Photo by Frank Lee



Photo by Frank Lee



Photo by Janet Colman

Before the show we were able to see a very impressive video, walk around the lovely garden grounds, see the palace and watch the horses practising. There were also a couple of horses that were from an ancient breed, quite strange looking but lovely. After we left the showground we hopped onto one of the many horse drawn carriages that were being driven around and visited the historic area but I know that quite a few of us took the carriages with bells jangling along the main road to the fair arena, a lovely experience.

Again in the afternoon we had a choice of exploring the area or visiting the Tio Pepé Bodega, which is what we did and thoroughly enjoyed it. We had a ride on a red noddy train around the site, saw thousands of casks full of sherry, some of them signed by very famous and royalty. The best part was the tasting after the tour, the sherry was delicious, so pleased we went back to the hotel for a lie down!! After another superb evening meal we returned to the horse fair arena where earlier in the evening we had sat and watched the most gorgeous horses and carriages being driven around with everyone looking brilliant in their typical Spanish riding costumes and the Senoritas in their stunning flamenco dresses (I must lose weight) it was all quite mind blowing especially with the noise of the crowds of people and music all around you.



Photo by Janet Colman



Photo by Janet Colman

On the Wednesday morning we boarded the coach for our jaunt to Granada, quite a longish trip but again amazing countryside through the Grazalema National Park, passing some lovely white villages and stopping at Ronda. We spent a pleasant couple of hours roaming around Ronda with spectacular views from various view points and the historic deep arched bridge that Ronda is famous for. It is a beautiful old village with an extremely ancient bullring and many cobbled streets full of museums, shops and restaurants, well worth visiting. In the afternoon we continued our journey to Granada where it was not too long before we spotted the snowy white mountain tops of the Sierra Nevada, what a dazzling sight.

We arrived at the Hotel Alixares late afternoon and were pleasantly surprised at how near it was to the Alhambra Palace (becoming foot weary now). After a lovely dinner where we were serenaded (did not buy the CD!!) a group of us spent a very enjoyable last evening in the bar of the next hotel putting the world to rights.



Photo by Janet Colman

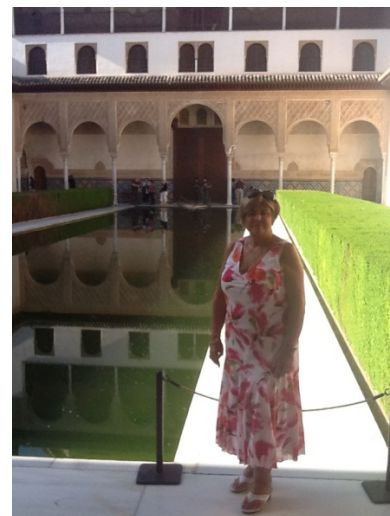
The next morning we had a choice of looking around Granada or visiting Alhambra Palace which is where I have wanted to visit for a very long time. I was not disappointed; the Palace with its incredibly sculptured archways, the history, amazing gardens and views was quite astounding.

In the afternoon it was with great sadness (on my behalf anyway, work, washing and cooking to get back to!!) we boarded the coach for the return trip to Moraira. Again stunning countryside, passing the houses or caves in the mountain sides which were quite strange to see, then we had one comfort stop followed by the gorgeous sea views as we were nearing home. We arrived in Moraira around 7pm on Thursday evening after one of our most enjoyable trips away, really looking forward to our next holiday with the U3A travel group. We thank Pepé for his excellent driving and special thanks you to Carol for organising this fun filled action packed holiday, well done.

Your photographers were:



Frank Lee in Cadiz



Linda Coughlin at the Alhambra



Photo by Linda Coughlin

AND

Janet Coleman who also kindly volunteered to do the write up for us. Janet is pictured here with her husband Graham.

Design & layout of this presentation by Carol Mantle