

# All about Jerez

As Jerez's famous international flamenco festival gets underway Jon Clarke discovers that behind the city's grandeur lurks a true laid back happiness



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**M**Y first taste of *alegría* didn't come from a glass of cool, refreshing *fino* nor from the swirl of a flamenco dancer. It came from a huddle of dishevelled homeless people as we emerged into sharp sunlight from one of the city centre's typical merchant houses. We had encountered hard stares from them half an hour earlier. But now the *jerezanos* – the majority gypsies – were getting into full voice to a classic flamenco *bulería*. Carrying the look of beggars, but with considerably more class, the threadbare gathering was literally singing and dancing with joy – or *alegría* – as a local soup kitchen dished out their lunch. Just off Plaza de Belen, in one of Jerez's traditional gypsy quarters Barrio de Santiago, their smiles were now genuine and the mood infectious. A slightly down-at-heel quarter of the city, most famous for its sherry and horses, there are few words to describe the splendid architecture, which in the 16th to 19th centuries housed some of Andalusia's richest merchants. The enormous old palaces – many with gateways and courtyards large enough to lodge a horse and carriage – seem to be dozing, almost waiting for their second wind, in a city which is often described as one of

Continued Page 2



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## The dancing never stops

From Page 2

the poorest (or cheapest) in Spain. A *barrio* now sparsely inhabited by mostly pensioners, gypsies and students, the houses are impossibly large (many over 1000 metres square), with balconies and intricate facades. Properties to put half of Mayfair in the shade, it is clear the sort of privileged lives that the wine makers and big landowners once had... and also, unsurprisingly, how for a long time the Jerez region was known for its large number of anarchists.

While in many ways the city still reeks of old money (the anarchists are long gone – or were put to the sword), mostly Jerez is a city waiting for change. Two hours from the hustle and bustle of the Costa del Sol – and overshadowed in size and reputation by Sevilla and its nearby neighbour Cadiz – it might seem to have a job on its hands.

Maybe it's the lack of a focal point like Granada's Alhambra or Malaga's Picasso Museum – that has put it so low in the tourism and investment stakes. But hopefully not for much longer.

**It is an incredibly friendly city unlike Sevilla. People make an effort to be nice**

Here, for example, in Barrio de Santiago, is set to rise the ambitious City of Flamenco museum. While in 'development hell' since 2006 and still waiting for the rubber stamp from the authorities (despite promises from everyone including, apparently, the Prime Minister himself), it will be the key element to reinvigorate the city.

Designed by famous Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron, the 28 million euro project will be a modern version of Jerez's famous *Alcazar*, arranged around a garden of reflect-



**ALEGRIA: A gaggle of gypsies sings and dances outside a soup kitchen in Barrio de Santiago, while (below) Carmen Iniesta Fuente del Berro performs on stage at a recent Jerez flamenco concert**

ing pools and orange trees concealed behind a walled perimeter. Its exhibits will feature a blend of traditions drawn from flamenco, Arabic and everyday popular cultures.

Suddenly, the city will have its ace, a magnet to pull people in. Nearby a number of exciting new hotels have started to spring up as if in anticipation. The best of these, coincidentally, are foreign owned; the charming Hotel La Fonda Barranco, on one side and the trendy eco-hotel Chancilleria on the other. A third, the delightful Hotel Casa Grande, a short walk away, is also owned by a German.

"The City of Flamenco is exactly what the city needs to pull it all together," says local English Grande Dame Jo Francis who is the dynamo behind Hotel Chancilleria.

"It is an incredibly friendly city unlike, say, Sevilla, where people can be quite



arrogant and rude. The pace of life is much slower and people are gentle and make an effort to be nice." Another local entrepreneur, Matthew Goodsell, 39, agrees. So smitten was he on coming to Jerez on a month's placement while at university, he returned frequently and has now found a pretty wife Nuria from the city, with whom he has two children.

He has now set up the province's first Arabic Baths in a



**CONFLICT: A statue of famous Jerez resident Primo de Rivera - a dictator and hero of Franco - overlooked by local HQ of communist trade union the UGT**

**GRANDEUR: One palatial townhouse said to be for sale for 600,000 euros, while (far right) the City of Flamenco museum designed by Herzog & de Meuron, which will be Jerez's Guggenheim**

beautifully-converted merchant's house, where for just 140 euros a couple can have a two-and-a-half hour his and hers treatment session, including a clay or aloe vera body scrub, massage and facial.

"It's a small town but internationally-known for its sherry, horses and flamenco," he says. "It has been slow to change but finally things are starting to happen."

With the city having land values in comparison to cities like Badajoz in Extremadura it is certainly anything but a bad place to invest.

Going on recent figures, the cost of property in the centre is around 500 to 600 euros per metre square. "That is half the price of Cadiz and Sevilla," says estate agent Nicole Gandy, of Mercers. "In fact it is a smaller version of Sevilla and has the same age, character and feel."

"Its location is fabulous. Close to the sea, with a good airport and the fast track railway (the AVE) on its way, and now an excellent

motorway to the Costa del Sol. It used to take me more than three hours to get to see my grandfather in Benalmadena, now it is less than two hours.

"Best of all you haven't got the hordes of British here with the horrible English pubs."

So interesting is the bank of properties in the city, that Robert Barclay, of property company Andalucia Exclusive is currently looking to move to Jerez from his base in Sevilla.

"Flamenco, horses and sherry. They all go hand in hand in Jerez," says Barclay, whose company specialises in sustainable renovations. "If you are going on price Jerez is a dead cert and the lovely stock of interesting properties is a real pull. In Sevilla it is hard to afford anything decent."

And then comes its location. Little more than 20 minutes drive to beaches of Puerto de Santa Maria, it is also close to the largely unspoilt beaches Costa de la Luz. The mountains of the Grazalema and Alcornocales Natural Parks, as well as the cities



of Seville and Cadiz are only a half-hour drive and one of Spain's most important nature reserve's Donana is literally on your doorstep. "There is no doubt that Jerez is ready for a boom," says Patrick Reid, who swapped his job in corporate affairs at London's fashionable Groucho club to running the family business in Jerez. "It is a slow burn, but it is a strategic and affordable investment."

As well as running two hotels, Reid, 25, and his brother Anthony – whose mother is from the city – have recently set up a business Benchmark offering a service to potential investors. Based out of the family's ancestral home, a beautiful country mansion and hotel, called Hacienda de San Rafael, they are using their local credentials to guide

people through the complicated maze of Spanish property ownership. While the local *jerezanos* have little interest in living in the centre – indeed most seem to have decamped to the suburbs – luckily most of the old houses are still standing. The problem, according to Robert Barclay is that none of the Spanish are interested in converting them. "They get put off

with all the negotiations with builders and plumbers. You get the odd doctor or architect, but in general nobody wants to buy these lovely houses. Basically everything in the historic centre is for sale" he says. "You just need to get the owners to name their price and my advice would be to come here for three or four days to have a good look around."




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**A**MID the creaking conservatism of the sherry business – the tweed jackets and tartan ties – there is a change in the air.

While five years ago you might, at a push, get yourself a tour of the huge commercial operation that is Gonzales Byass, you'd be hard pressed to visit much else.

Today, in part thanks to the city promoting and financing an effort to encourage wine tourism, suddenly there are a dozen or more bodegas possible to visit.

And there is a huge variety from small, traditional family-run bodegas, such as Hidalgo, to the slick, modern operations, like Bodegas Tradicion and Lustau.

At Hidalgo, if you are lucky Juan Manuel Hidalgo will take you on a charming tour through the two centuries the family have produced wine on the edge of the city.

Little changed in 50 years, the office still sports wooden sideboards and old photos that are in need of a dust. The company van looks like something out of a silent movie.

A fifth generation Hidalgo, Juan Manuel, 36, studied law in Pamplona before being hauled back to Jerez to run the family business. Joining a trade that was se-

riously on the wane in the 1980s and 1990s with vineyards being torn up to make way for sunflowers and cotton, he had a clever vision on how to turn things around.

"I started thinking about Jerez over sherry," he explains. "It was as simple as one, two, three. And we started producing purer top quality wines.

"It is rather like the difference between commercial flamenco like Ketama over the pure classical flamenco like El Torta. I love the classical stuff and that is the sherry I am now making here."

We are soon heading off into the cavernous vineyard that is part incorporated in the old city walls.

A fascinating trip, one of the warehouses (or *bodegas*) is bigger than a football field, 14 metres in height and houses 3500 casks alone.

While there are a few that go back to even 1874 when the business started, most of the old oak barrels are at least 100 years in age.

Unlike most vineyards many of Hidalgo's *finos* spend up to 14 years in cask, in the classic *solera* system, while he also produces a cheaper version, which spends four years in cask.

**Next door is the collection proper – 200 paintings from six centuries of Spanish art**

The place is authentic in the extreme and all the old doors and patios have been well conserved, while a barrel mender comes in a few days a week to repair the old vats. It is clear though that while there is an incredible passion here from its owners, the place needs an incredible amount of upkeep with the ceilings in constant need of repair.

"We do a bit of the roof every year," explains Hidalgo. "It is an enormous job."

# The art of wine making

**Jon Clarke discovers how a number of wine producers are favouring high quality pure-bred Jerez over the old-fashioned cheap and cheerful sherries. And how modern art – not to mention Shakespeare's Falstaff – are part of the mix**



On the other side of town in the old Jewish quarter is an entirely different operation. Owned by a wealthy property developer Bodegas Tradicion is a charming mix of top quality wines and art. An anonymous side street and a small door opens into a delightfully modern and well kept bodega. You are led through a charming courtyard into a sumptuous office with the walls filled with delightful paintings. Next door though is the collection proper – some 200 paintings – that straddle six centuries of Spanish art. While there is only space for around 60 of these to be displayed at any one time, you would normally expect to see a Goya or two, a Velazquez, an El Greco and painter of the moment, Joaquin Sorolla. The wine is also of exceptional quality, and the bodega is the only one in the Jerez region to concentrate exclusively on the oldest vintages, with most of them being a minimum of 20 years old.

**The English put Jerez on the map - Falstaff regaled it**

It is appropriate for a city that was founded in 1000BC by the Phoenicians, before the Romans moved in leaving among other relics, appropriately, a mosaic depicting vine leaves and tendrils.

While Jerez was always a favourable site for wine with its chalky *albariza* soils, it was the Moors who in 711 named the city *Scheris*, from which its current name heralds.

While it was the 500 years of Moorish rule to which the city owes much of its rich culture, it was actually the English, who really put the city on the map.

Starting in the 16th century when the taste for sherry reached British shores, by the next century around 70 per cent of the area's wines were being exported to the UK. Written about by Shakespeare



**ANCIENT AND MODERN: Many changes at Bodega Tradicion (left) while (right) at Hidalgo many things haven't changed since the 1950s.**

- whose character Falstaff in King Henry the Fourth, regales that sherry 'ascends into the brain; makes it quick, forgetive, full of nimble, fiery... and becomes excellent wit' – by the late 18th century, dozens of British merchants had opened businesses in Jerez.

Alongside the wealthy Spanish families they were soon building beautiful homes in the centre, not to mention enormous *bodegas*.

Their legacy is obvious today with names such as Harvey's and Williams & Humbert still adorning numerous outbuildings. While there are only a fraction of the once

10,000 bodegas in the city, the ones that stand are a delight to poke around.

A particularly memorable tasting took place at the very highly rated bodega Lustau. Sturdy constructions usually painted in the trademark yellow, white and green, some are now Government departments, while others are supermarkets.

But fortunately though, many of them are still bodegas and producing wine.

And as the *New York Times* mentioned in an article last month, the drink might be due to make a comeback.

Tweed Jackets, bow ties and all, sherry – or Jerez – looks like it is here to stay.



# A drinkers guide

By Justin Roberts

VISITORS to Jerez, especially from the UK, where sherry is a traditional tipple, have many pre-conceived ideas about these great wines.

There are many reasons for this, but don't worry about all of that. Just get yourself into one of the *bodegas* and find out all about the *Vinos de Jerez*.

Find out how from the Palomino grape all the various dry sherries are made and how from another variety, Pedro Ximenez, the only naturally sweet sherry is produced.

With these two grapes it is possible to produce a wide range of wines which can suit just about any situation. Just think of any kind of food, and there is bound to be a sherry you can pair with it – and that is

where sherry wines really come into their own, with food.

There are two broad methods for ageing sherry: Either under a layer of yeast (or '*flor*'), which floats on the surface of the wine, or open to the air. The '*flor*' wines are known as *finos* (the nearby town of Sanlucar de Barrameda has its own version of *flor* called *manzanilla*).

The open-to-the-air wines are called *olorosos*. There is another wine which starts off under '*flor*' and ends up open to the air – this is an *amontillado*.

But one thing all sherries go through is a *solera* system. This system, which blends older and younger wines, helps to iron out differences between harvests and improve quality. The *finos* (and *manzanillas*) are bone-dry and should be drunk ice-cold. They will go beautifully with all kinds of seafood. *Fino* is also perfectly suited to *tapas* as it copes very well with the chopping and changing from meat, to fish to vegetable nibbles. Not many wines can do this. Don't be afraid to order *fino* by the half-bottle or even bottle (along with an ice-bucket) to go with your *tapas*.

The *amontillados* are more suited to lighter meats, like roast chicken or *pate* and the *olorosos* go well with fuller flavoured dishes such as *chorizo* or smoked bacon.

There are sweetened versions of the *amontillado* and *oloroso* wines usually known as Medium or Cream Sherries. These pair up very nicely with salty, blue cheeses and finally the very sweet Pedro Ximenez sherries can be a dessert on their own.

The larger *bodegas* in Jerez have regular guided tours, even on Saturdays and Sundays at some of them. For the smaller *bodegas* a reservation is usually necessary.

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# Treasure trove of good shops



**Jerez has a surprising number of chic places to shop and even a zoco, says interior designer and Hotel La Fonda Barranco owner David Murray**

**D**URING the restoration of my small hotel in central Jerez, I spent a lot of time sourcing furniture, fittings and accessories to get the final look. Among other hotspots, I travelled to Madrid, Bordeaux and Tangier to buy pieces. However I also found a treasure trove of good shops right here on my doorstep. Lighting is, without a doubt, the most important aspect of any decorative scheme. In fact, lighting, as any glamorous woman will attest, can transform how she looks, and that is the same for property. So I was very excited to find that the shop Ferrol in Calle La Torre had a fantastic range of attractive light fittings, with everything from traditional andalusí to well

made reproduction pieces. The shop has its own workshop which makes a lot of the traditional lamps and the team can make almost anything to order including lampshades covered in your own fabric. Single bracket wall lights costas little as €10. Another great find was Nacho Gomez, who is a decorator with fantastic style and taste. He has done some beautiful interiors for well heeled jerezano and sevillano clients and now has a beautiful shop in Calle Paul, where you will find fine Afghan and Tibetan wall hangings, exquisite tableware, great oversized mirrors and elegant chandeliers. Think European-styled Ralph Lauren interiors at a fraction of the prices and with sophisticated Asian touch-

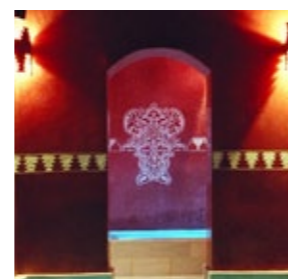
es, and you begin to get an idea. If you want to give your home a touch of class that money can't buy, try Liz Simmins beautiful antique shop Pajarete at Calle Pajarete 10.

**Her look is the Classic English Country House Chic, which the jerezanos adore**

Liz is an Englishwoman, who came to Jerez after leaving the Loreto Nuns in St. Albans and never went back. Now she returns to England on buying expeditions, returning with beautiful Georgian and Victorian furniture and objects. Her look is the Classic English Country House Chic, which the angophile jerezanos adore.

Just behind us in Plaza Peones is the Zoco de Artesanes, an initiative of the town hall. In a restored 18th century patio house they have established 25 shops selling Andalusian and Moroccan Craftwork. Here, you can buy anything from a made to measure flamenco style gypsy dress to beautiful ethnic jewellery. The best are Naam, which stocks elegant contemporary Moroccan lighting, ceramics and clothes, and Almenara on the floor below selling more traditional Moroccan ceramics, as well as exquisite silver jewellery set with semi precious stones. It amazes me, that she can buy ceramics from an ethical trading co-op set up to help impoverished women in Fez, and still sell her wares for the same price as I used to buy them in Tangier.

**ENCHANTING: Items on sale in the Zoco shops**



**Top tip - Soak up Jerez culture**

**ONE** thing you have to do when in Jerez is to visit Hammam Andalusi, the Arabic Baths. A beautifully converted 18th century town-house, combined with relaxing eastern music and subtle lighting, and you forget who you are and where you came from as you pass from warm to hot to cold pools, repeating the circuit until you reach a state of relaxation not easily found anywhere. The bathing part holds the key to relaxation: helping to gently bring your body and mind gently down from the whirlwind that is daily modern life. Add in a 15 or 30 minute massage or aloe vera facial treatment, or have the body scrub with half-hour massage to really push the boundaries of pampering. Don't forget to reserve first. You won't regret it.

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# Flamenco's coming home

**J**EREZ is often termed the home of flamenco. And this month, some of the world's best flamenco singers, guitarists - and particularly dancers - will be coming home for the 13th annual Jerez Flamenco Festival. Spanning over two weeks the festival attracts around 35,000 fans and participants from around the world and features seminars, classes and a series of top class shows. Kicking off the festival from Friday 27 is Eva Yerbabuena with her show Lluvia, with later that evening - at the very flamenco hour of midnight - a show from highly-rated artist Moraito. But right the way through the following fortnight is an incredible array of acts including celebrated stars such as Maria Pages and Rocio Molina. With an emphasis on dance, the festival is a real dynamo for the city and brings thousands of Japanese tourists alone every year. Activities coordinator Francisco Alfonsin explained: "It is a very important event for Jerez and last year thousands of people came for

classes from Japan, Norway, England and South Africa. "It is basically the social kick off for the year and we are trying to involve the whole city, from the clubs, to the restaurants and to the bodegas. There will be flamenco everywhere." An actor, Alfonsin spent eight years in Newcastle in England before moving back to his hometown of Jerez. His picks: "Mercedes Ruiz is getting bigger and better and as she is a hometown girl I think this is going to be her festival. But I also think Ida Gomez is great and the tribute to Mario Maya will be a highlight."



There is more information to be found at [www.festivaldejerez.com](http://www.festivaldejerez.com) or call the ticket office on 902101212 or email [taquilla@teatrovillamarta.es](mailto:taquilla@teatrovillamarta.es)

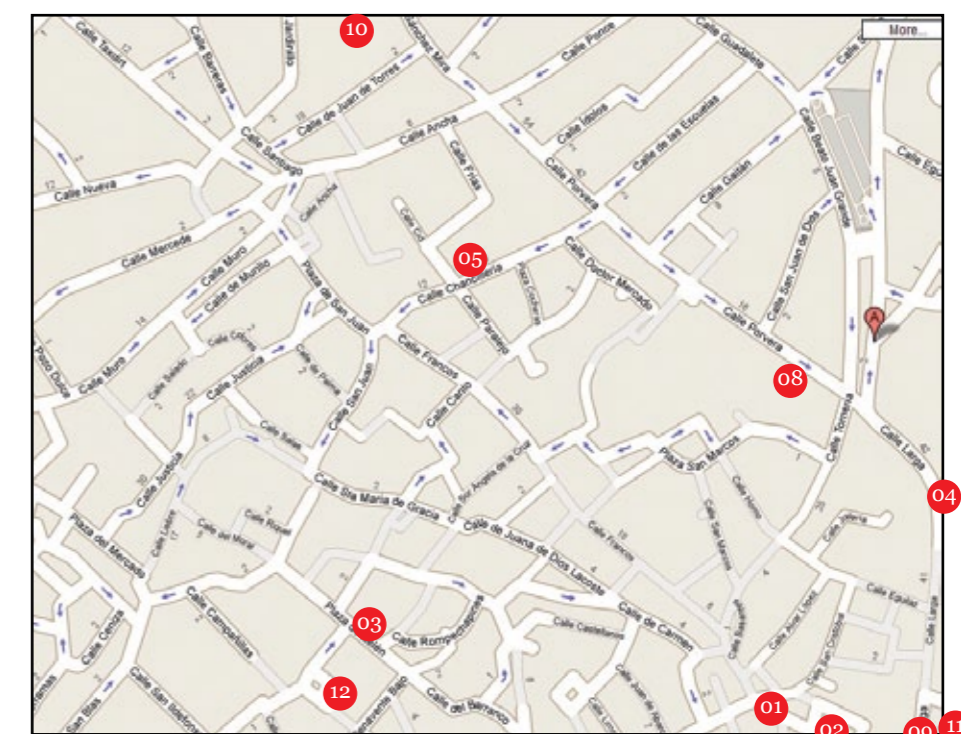
## WHERE TO STAY

IN the last five years there has been a quiet revolution in Jerez. While there have always been the big, grand and expensive affairs it is great that a trio of new foreign-owned places now dominate the top three spots on Trip Advisor. First and foremost is the excellent value, family-run hotel La Chancilleria ([www.hotelchancilleria.com](http://www.hotelchancilleria.com)), where Jo and her husband Anthony (and sons) run a tight ship. It's an eco-friendly place with an excellent restaurant attached. Nearby, also in the same gypsy barrio is Hotel La Fonda Barranco ([www.lafondabarranco.es](http://www.lafondabarranco.es)), an urbane and stylish boutique hotel, also with some excellent deals. Last, but certainly not least, is the Michelin-recommended family home-style hotel of Monika Schroder ([www.casagrande.com.es](http://www.casagrande.com.es)) with its light and airy style and a stunning roof top terrace. Outside the city are the delightful country retreats of Hacienda de San Rafael ([www.haciendadesanrafael.com](http://www.haciendadesanrafael.com)) and the recently opened Casa la Siesta near Vejer ([www.casalasiesta.com](http://www.casalasiesta.com)).

## WHERE TO EAT

DINING always used to be much better in nearby Puerto de Santa Maria, where you have Aponiente and El Faro to name but two. But Jerez has come on in leaps and bounds over the last couple of years and now has more than enough good places to keep you within its city walls. For starters there is restaurant Sabores in Hotel Chancilleria, which serves up a mean bulls tail stew in a contemporary atmosphere.

Nearby, off the main square, is the excellent Churchills ([www.churchillsespana.com](http://www.churchillsespana.com)) run by a very able English couple who have recently moved to Jerez from Madrid. Other places worth a try are the Palacio Garvey hotel, as well as, in particular, La Cruz Blanca ([www.lacruzblanca.com](http://www.lacruzblanca.com)), which not only serves up by far the best tapas, but also has a good atmosphere most nights of the week.



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AGES	MONTHLY	QUARTERLY	HALF YEARLY	ANNUALLY
Up To 49 Years	29 € *	85 €	167 €	327 €
From 50 To 64 Years	49 €	144 €	282 €	553 €
Over 64 Years	64 €	188 €	368 €	722 €
INSURANCE CHECK : 3 €		TAXES INCLUDED		



\*The monthly payment in the section up to 49 years only will be valid for policies with more than 1 policyholder

*For more information, please call your local representative:*

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