MARIBEL’S GUIDE TO GRANADA ©

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WEB RESOURCES AND TRAVEL PLANNING

Web Resources

- www.turismodegranada.org - the official Granada city and province tourist web page - excellent.
- www.turgranada.es - very helpful as well.
- www.granadainfo.com - a homemade web page by English speakers residing in Granada but not always accurate, so be careful.
- www.andalucia.com/cities/granada/facts.htm
- www.cicerone.com - a walking tour company that provides quite useful information regarding the city.
- www.vivagranada.com - for a photographic tour of the city.
- www.allwaysspain.com - a local company offering cooking, ceramics, flamenco classes, walking/biking tours.

Recommended Reading

Granada chapter of the following guides

- Cadogan’s Andalucía - the most informative and accurate.
- Footprint Andalucía - 5th edition, ’07
- Thomas Cook: Driving Around Andalucía and the Costa del Sol
- Lonely Planet Andalucia - 5th edition, ’07

Recommended pre-reading for your visit to the Alhambra

- The Alhambra and the Generalife - available at every souvenir shop in Granada and in the Alhambra complex itself.
- Tales of the Alhambra by Washington Irving

TRAVEL PLANNING

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USA Tel: 206.778.0127 / 206.364.6723
WHY VISIT?
This capital of Eastern Andalusia, with a population of 300,000, is blessed with both a stunning setting in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada and a fascinating history, straddling eastern and western civilizations - a city caught between oriental and occidental sensibilities. Its crown jewel, the Alhambra, moored above the city like a ship, is the greatest relic of Islamic Spain, the last stronghold of the Moorish empire and one of the world’s most magical landmarks.

WHEN TO VISIT
Almost anytime! Granada is a destination suitable, really, for all four seasons. In winter, you’ll find fewer crowds, yet the temperatures are still warm enough for pleasant touring; spring brings the heavenly scents of jasmine and myrtle, making a tour of the Generalife gardens an absolute delight; fall is pleasantly cool with fewer crowds; late June - early July brings the added attraction of the prestigious International Festival of Music and Dance, while mid-July through August are the least pleasant months to visit due to the soaring heat and the almost unbearable tourist hordes.

FESTIVALS
El Día de la Toma - Festival commemorating the anniversary of the capture of the city by the Catholic Monarchs and subsequent expulsion of the Moors - January 2.

San Cecilio - City’s patron saint’s day – Pilgrimage to Sacromonte, first Sunday of February.
Las Cruces de Mayo - on and around May 3. Some 30+ enormous crosses made of flowers are installed in the city’s squares by various brotherhoods that compete to win a prize for the best-decorated and most elaborate cross. In each square a temporary bar is also set up for drinks and tapas and of course, spontaneous music and flamenco dancing at night.

Corpus Christi – End of May, early June, depending on when Easter falls in the calendar - a moveable feast, is celebrated on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday.

Although Corpus Christi is celebrated everywhere in Andalucia, it is celebrated most exuberantly in Granada with religious parades, concerts, bullfights and flamenco, and a fairground, El Ferial, set up at the edge of the city, which comes alive each night for an entire week.

The seven-day bullfighting Feria del Corpus coincides with the celebration of Corpus Christi and where the most prestigious matadors in Spain perform in the Plaza de Toros (bullring) at the western end of the city.

International Muséo and Dance Festival - third week of June through first week of July (www.granadafestival.org).

Note for would be festival-attendees: Due to the festival’s enormous prestige throughout Europe, tickets for most performances are extremely difficult to obtain. They are put on sale (online) on a date in mid-April, (in ’09 this magic date was April 18), and tickets to the high-status events can sell out by the end of the day! If you do have your heart set on attending an event, note the date and time on your calendar and be prepared to attempt a purchase at the hour in Granada when the box office opens!

The two major venues are the Generalife gardens (for dance) and the circular courtyard of the Palace of Charles V (for orchestra-soloists). But included in each year’s program are free concerts in the Hospital Real at 12:30 pm and in the patio of El Corral del Carbón at 8:30 pm. Since seating is limited be sure to arrive quite early.
HOW TO REACH GRANADA

Arriving by Air
From the UK - There are flights to the Granada-Jaén Federico García Lorca airport from Liverpool, London Gatwick and Stansted, Nottingham and East Midlands.

From the US - Fly from your home airport in the US to Madrid or Barcelona.

From within Spain
- Madrid: Iberia or Spanair flight (40 minutes) to Granada.
- Barcelona: Vueling, Iberia, Click Air and Spanair fly direct.
- Girona: Ryanair direct
- Palma de Mallorca: Air Europe direct

Arriving by Train
From Madrid - The National Railway of Spain, Renfe (www.renfe.es), currently offers only two daily Altaria trains, taking 4 hr. 30 minutes. Deeply discounted Web (60% off) and Estrella (40% off) are available if ticket is purchased a minimum of 15 days (Web) or 7 days (Estrella) prior to departure. Non-refundable. The comfortable Altaria trains offer two classes of service, turista (tourist class) and preferente or business class with meal served along with wines and cordials plus access to the VIP lounge in Madrid’s Atocha station. Web fares are not available in preferente class.

From Seville - Renfe offers 4 Regional trains; the ride takes 3 hours.

From Barcelona - Renfe has only 2 daily trains to Granada, either an 11 hr. 10 min. long ride on the ARCO, which departs in the morning, or the overnight Trenhotel. From Barcelona it is much better (and quite cheap) to fly!

Granada’s train station is located on Avenida Andalucía, 1.5 km west of the city center, right off Avenida de la Constitución. From there you can take a public bus (4,6,7,9 or 11) from Avda Constitución to the center, or take a taxi for about €7.

Arriving by Bus
From Seville - The best, most economical and comfortable mode of transport to Granada is via the Alsina Graells bus, a division of Alsa (www.alsa.es), which departs from Seville’s Prado-San Sebastian bus station. There are eight daily departures, seven are non-stop and one makes an intermediary stop in Antequera. Buses arrive at Granada’s main bus station on the Carretera de Jaén, 3 km northwest of the city center. The same company offers bus service to Granada from Córdoba and Málaga.

City bus #3 runs from the station to the city center. Taxi fare from the station to a downtown hotel is approximately €7.

From Madrid – Enatcar, another division of Alsa, plies this route with regular and Supra (express; non-stop) service daily from the Estación Sur de Autobuses. Morning buses currently depart at 7:30, 8:00 (Supra), 8:30, 10:30 and 11:30. The one-way fare is
TRANSPORTATION - GRANADA AIRPORT TO DOWNTOWN

By Bus
Autocares José González operates the service between the airport, which is located 17 km outside the city, and downtown Granada, and its blue (unlike the city’s red) buses are timed to meet all flights.

After collecting your luggage, exit the double doors and take a right, walk to the end of the hall and out a second set of double doors and look to your left. You’ll see the bus waiting (well beyond the taxi stand). Stash your luggage in the underbelly, board and buy your €3 ticket from the bus driver. Buses will wait for all delayed flights.

The airport bus makes five intermediary stops before reaching the end of its route at the Palace of Congresses. The entire trip takes between 40 - 45 minutes. If you are staying at a downtown hotel, you can get off at stop 4, on the Gran Vía de Colón (best). If your hotel is located in the Albaicín or on the Alhambra hill, just hail a taxi from the stop on the Gran Vía.

To return to the airport for your flight home, the bus departs from the Paseo del Violón daily at 5:45, 6:30, 7:40, 8:40, 9:45, 10:45, 11:45, 12:45, 13:45, 14:45, 16:00, 17:00, 18:00, 18:45, 19:45 and 20:30. Be sure to check the current schedule at: www.autocaresjosegonzalez.com.

By Taxi
Estimated taxi fares (’08) are as follows: to downtown, 25€; to the Alhambra, 28€; to the Albaicín, 28€; to the Sierra Nevada, 60€.

By Rental Car
The major players, Avis, Europcar, Hertz and Atesa have counters at the airport, but I strongly advise you not to keep a car in Granada. Negotiating the city traffic and poor signage can be a nightmare, even for veteran Spain travelers. A car in the city will be an albatross for you, a genuine handicap.

If you must arrive by car, I urge you to choose a hotel on the Alhambra hill for its ease of access and your driver’s peace of mind. To reach the Alhambra area hotels, one avoids all city traffic completely, by taking the Carretera de Circunvalación or Ronda Sur, which circumvents the downtown and brings traffic through a tunnel and directly up to the Alhambra. Just follow the purple Alhambra signs.

You’ll find downtown parking garages few and far between, cost from 15€ - 20€ per day, there is no parking for most Albaicín hotels and only a few downtown hotels, such as the large convention-type hotels, offer their own on-site garages. But again, finding ones
way to a downtown hotel is a vexing, stress-inducing chore for most tourists, and motorcycle traffic adds to the frustration and confusion.

If you’ll already chosen a downtown hotel that does not have an on-site garage, the simplest way to reach downtown is to take the “Centro-Recogidas” exit. Along Calle Recogidas you’ll find an underground garage on your left. At the top of Calle Recogidas turn right on to Acera del Darro, where you’ll see the central post office. There will be an underground garage on your left after the post office (Correos).

NAVIGATING THE CITY BY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Please do not attempt to drive - leave the navigating to the professionals!

Guidebook quotations regarding driving in downtown Granada:

- Frommer’s: “It’s impossible to get around Granada by driving.”
- Footprint Andalucia: “If arriving by car, the best option is to stash it as soon as possible.”
- Time Out: Andalucia: “The city is a nightmare to negotiate by car (and has been deliberately made so). Finding a parking space in the center is all but impossible, so head straight for a car park.”
- Thomas Cook: “The old center is only open to local traffic or for hotel access during certain hours of the day. Parking is a problem, so if you plan to stay overnight make sure that your hotel has parking facilities...it can cost as much as the accommodation in some places.”
- Insight Guides: “the center of the city is noisy, the narrow streets being simply incapable of coping with the volume of traffic which churns through at all hours of the day and night. The visitor who arrives by car may well find himself swept through and out the other side without either having recognized the center of the town or seen a trace of its much-vaunted monuments.”
- Rick Steves: “Driving in Granada’s historic center is restricted to buses, taxis and tourists with hotel reservations. Signs are posted to this effect, and entrance is strictly controlled. Getting into the old center and finding your hotel or parking garage is a major frustration because of the strict controls and one way streets...Given all the restrictions, it is difficult to drive into Granada even when you know the system.”

Since downtown Granada is extremely congested, many streets are blocked off to vehicular traffic other than taxis and buses, and the layout is labyrinthine in nature, I strongly suggest that you avail yourself of the excellent and easy to use bus system. The red city buses, run by Transportes Rober, are inexpensive and compact enough to handle the narrow streets. A single ride costs €1.10 or a booklet of 7 bus tickets, which can be shared, costs 5€. Buy your single ticket or booklet from the driver, who accepts bills (www.transportesrober.es).
For the short-term visitor, the red minibuses with only about ten seats, designated Alhambrabús, are the most efficient way of seeing the city’s major attractions. These minibuses provide service to the Alhambra hill from 7:15 am until 11:00 pm. Buses 30 and 32 run from downtown to the Alhambra (the 32 bus making a swing through the Albaicín) and the bus 31 runs from the Plaza Nueva to the Albaicín only. Bus 34 detours east to Sacromonte. The fare for the minibuses is one euro.

City bus 8 runs to the Monasterio de la Cartuja. City bus 3 and 33 go to the bus station. Buses 3 and 9 run from the train station, down the Avenida de la Constitución to the cathedral. A taxi fare within the city should cost be between 5€ - 8€.

Granada Tourist Office - on Plaza de Mariana Pineda, 10, is open Monday - Friday 9:30 – 7:00 and Saturday from 10:00 – 2:00. This is the regional tourist office for the city and Granada province as well (www.turismodegranada.org).

Andalucía Tourist Office – Can be found at Calle Santa Ana, 4, near the Plaza Nueva and is open from 9:00 - 7:30 Monday – Friday, Saturday from 10:00 - 7:30 and Sunday from 10:00 – 2:00.
GRANADA’S HIGHLIGHTS:
The “not to miss” tourist attractions
I’ve listed these in order of importance and cultural interest for the first time visitor.

ALHAMBRA (from the Arabic “Al Qal’a al-Hamra” - Red Fort)
This guide will not attempt to relate the history or to give a detailed room-to-room
description of all the wonders of this astonishing World Heritage Site, Spain’s most
visited tourist attraction. For a detailed description of each portion of the Alhambra, I
highly recommend the Alhambra portion of the Cadogan Guide to Andalucía, which, in
my opinion, gives the most informative, accurate and complete explanation of this truly
magnificent Nasrid Dynasty complex.

The complex is divided into four main components: the original 13th century fortress, or
Alcazaba, the Royal Nasrid Palace or Palacios Nazaríes - also called the Casa Real, the
Generalife, the sultans’ summer palace and gardens (all part of your ticket) and “the
imperial intrusion” to the Moorish complex, the 16th century Renaissance Palace of
Charles V, which is free-no ticket required. To visit the first three components, one
needs to purchase a combined ticket, and it is imperative that one purchases this ticket
well in advance during the summer months and school holidays.

As noted above, with more than 2 million visitors each year, the Alhambra is the most
popular tourist attraction in Spain. Because entrance to the complex is limited to only
7,250 visitors (6,050 in winter) each day, with 300 visitors per half-hour time slot, and
with only 400 admitted for the night visit, I strongly recommend that you purchase your
Alhambra tickets online, and well ahead of your visit for the summer high season and for
all school holidays, up to 3 months or 90 days in advance.

Only 1,800 tickets are sold daily at the box office, and during the high season, one must
be in line by 7 am for even a chance to secure a ticket for that day; therefore, advanced
booking is preferable, even essential. And during the summer months, because of the
intense heat, I also urge you to choose the very first entrance slot, at 8:30 am, for your
timed ticket, as the bus tour crowds arrive at around 10 am, and the mid-day heat can
make for exhausting touring.

In the winter months, an afternoon visit can be pleasant, with fewer crowds, but be sure
to choose a timed slot for the Nasrid Palace entrance no later than 4:00 - 4:30 pm,
because the complex closes at 6:00 pm November - February.
If you choose this time slot, while waiting your timed entrance to the Nasrid Palaces between 2:00 – 4:00 pm, you can visit the Alcazaba military fortress, the Generalife summer palace and gardens, or Charles V’s Palace (and the two museums lying within) and the remainder of the complex. You will need at least 3 ½ to 4 hours to do justice to the entire site.

Also there are no public dining facilities (café’s and restaurants) within the complex itself, only vending machines for water, soft drinks and sandwiches at the Entrance Pavilion and a bar/café kiosk for the same near the Alcazaba, adjacent to the Puerta del Vino (Wine Gate). Therefore, I also suggest that visitors arm themselves with bottled water in the scorching summer months.

Visitors must deposit backpacks and bags larger than 35 cm. in the checkroom at the Entrance Pavilion.

**Types of Visits**

The Alhambra offers both day and evening visits. Day visits, when the entire complex is open to visitors, are self-guided and divided into morning and afternoon sessions. The morning sessions are for visits between 8:30 am – 2:00 pm. Afternoon sessions allow visits from 2:00 – 6:00 pm from November – March, and 2:00 – 8:00 pm from April - October. These designated sessions refer to the hours in which timed tickets are sold for entrance into the Palacios Nazaríes.

You will need to present your ticket to the guards who will scan its bar code at three separate checkpoints – at the entrance to the Alcazaba military fortress, to enter the Generalife gardens and to at the Nasrid Palace, for which a specific timed slot is required with only a 30 minute window, for example, 10:00 - 10:30h means that you can only enter the Nasrid Palaces rooms during that time frame. For conservation reasons, admission is strictly controlled through these 30-minute time slots, with no more than 300 visitors allowed inside during each half-hour period. However, once inside, you may stay as long as you like.
If your ticket is designated “morning”, you may enter the complex as early as 8:30 and stay until the complex closes, if you like. However, if you purchase an “afternoon” visit, you may not enter the complex itself before 2:00 pm. You can enter the grounds earlier, but must wait until 2:00 pm to visit the areas where your ticket is scanned, the Generalife gardens and Alcazaba fortress. You must wait for your timed slot to enter the Nasrid Palace. Again, once inside the complex, you can stay until the buildings close.

The guided evening visit, which some describe as a “magical experience”, does not substitute for a visit by day, as the entire complex is not open to evening participants—these evening visits only allow admission to the Nasrid Palaces for a maximum of ninety minutes, and the use of flash is prohibited. The evening session is held on Friday and Saturday only from November to February, from 8:00 - 9:30.

From March to October, the visit takes place on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 10:00-11:30 pm.

The Alhambra is open every day of the year except December 25 and January 1.

You can see all the above information, and more, at www.alhambra-patronato.es.

Purchasing Alhambra tickets online

Serví Caixa now handles the online ticket sales (which formerly were managed by the BBVA bank), and the procedure for purchase is relatively simple. Go to www.alhambra-tickets.es.

Note: The site is optimized for Windows. If you are a Mac user and have difficulty with Safari, try Firefox or Opera as your browser, or use a friend’s PC.

1. Choose English (upper right corner).
2. Click on General Visit-Day.
3. Select your date from the calendar (up to 3 months out).
4. On the Ticket Selection page,
   1. How many tickets do you want?
      Choose how many tickets you want (maximum of 10 per person)-Continue
   2. What time do you want to visit?
      Select a time band, either 8:30h – 14:00h for the morning, or 14:00h - 18:00h for the afternoon. At the top of each green time band you will see how many tickets are still available online for purchase-Click continue to see what time slots in your appointed session (morning or afternoon) are still available. For each half hour slot, at the top of the green band you will see how many tickets are still available. Click on your desired time slot (ex: 11:30) - it will turn red – Continue.
   3. See the special offers and compare prices-
      You will see 4 possible discounts available to ticket purchasers

b. Minusvalías más que 33 - People disabled who carry a disabled ID card specifying a disability greater than 33% – **Free**. (If you are a non-EU citizen and carry a similar ID from your country, it will most likely be accepted).

c. Jubilados – Pensioners - **10€** (for EU citizens 65 and over-identification required).

d. Estudiantes DTO - EU students under 30 with a valid ID - **10€**

e. Niños menores 12 - **Children under 12 years of age of any nationality – Free.**

5. If you qualify for any of the above 4 discounts, select the number of tickets you want for each discount. If not, simply click Continue.

6. On the right hand side of the screen you’ll see “Purchasing tickets for...” It will indicate the date and the number of tickets. In red you’ll see this information: **Entry time Nasrid Palaces - De 11:30 a 12:00h.** Please note carefully the time period because this is your appointed entry time for the Nasrid Palace, as referred to as the Casa Real.

7. Complete the Contact Details Box. **Once you’ve chosen a suitable time slot, you will have only 5 minutes to fill in your personal data and credit card number before the transactions is automatically cancelled.**

8. Fill in the Card Payment info to finish your purchase. Be sure not to use a credit card with an **expiration date prior** to the day you plan to visit the Alhambra. You will not receive an email confirmation for this purchase. Be sure to print out the final ticket purchase information, which will have your entry time to the Nasrid Palace in red, your ID and reference number and the credit card number you used for this purchase. You will need this c.c. to swipe at the Servi Caixa ticket dispensing machines. If the transaction is successful, your credit card will be charged immediately. (If your credit card was not charged, the transaction did not go through.)

9. Be very careful to make sure that all details are correct, as you will not be allowed to cancel this purchase.

10. If you have any difficulties with the transaction you can contact Servi Caixa at (34) 934 923 750.

Again, if visiting in the summer I strongly urge you to choose the very earliest time slot you can manage. After 10:00 am the crowds become very, very heavy, reaching their peak at 11:00. While the afternoon slots during the traditional lunchtime and siesta (14:00 - 18:00 hr) are far less crowded, you will not have optimum light for photographs, and the excellent Museum of the Alhambra, in the Palace of Charles V, is closed in the afternoons. I would also **avoid Monday**, if possible, when this particular museum is also closed and on Sunday afternoons when the complex is free to residents of Granada.
Purchasing Alhambra tickets at La Caixa machines throughout Spain

If you arrive in Spain without previously reserving tickets online at www.alhambra-tickets.es (the Servi Caixa ticket purchasing system), and you have no computer access to do so, you can go to any La Caixa bank in Spain and purchase tickets from their terminals located inside the bank. La Caixa banking hours are Monday - Friday from 8:15 - 2:30.

Insert your credit card into the machine. There will be instructions on how to buy Alhambra tickets. If you insert an American credit card, the machine will read it as such, and English instructions will appear. There is a La Caixa bank office in downtown Granada on Acera del Darro, 34. You can attempt your purchase upon arrival in Granada (during regular banking hours), if you don’t wish to try your luck and join the long lines at the Alhambra Ticket Pavilion.

Night visits - Visitas nocturnas

You can also purchase tickets for the guided evening tours of the Alhambra on the Servi Caixa site. From March through October these visits take place from 10:00 - 11:30 pm on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays (during the summer this time period falls within the late Spanish dinner hour), and from Nov. to Feb. they run from 8:00 - 9:30 pm on Friday & Saturday only. Book ahead online using the same procedure as detailed above.

Garden visit - Visita a los jardines

The Alhambra also offers garden visits (with the same morning or afternoon sessions), but this ticket provides access only to the main gardens of the monument during the daytime visit. This ticket is useful only to those who have not been able to secure a ticket to the Nasrid Palaces.

With the 7€ euro garden ticket, visitors may access the following gardens:

- Walk of the Cypresses (Paseo de los Cipreses)
- Un-irrigated Land (Secano)
Private or Group Guided Tours of the Alhambra

After purchasing your tickets online, if you decide that you would like to secure the services of a private guide for your visit rather than depend on the official audio guide, see [www.ciceronegranada.com](http://www.ciceronegranada.com). Send the company an email, advising them of the date of your ticket and time band for entrance to the Nasrid Palace. Cicerone will respond with a price quote for their private guided tour services of the complex. Approximate cost: weekdays, 162.40€ (including 16% vat), Sat./Sun./holidays, 197.20€ (with vat) for groups of 1-10.

Picking up Alhambra tickets purchased online and entry to the complex

When you arrive at the ticket office of the Alhambra, located at the Pabellón de Acceso, do not stand in line there but go instead to the separate small glass enclosed building to your right. There you’ll find a half dozen yellow Servi Caixa machines with touch screens. Swipe your credit card, **the same one that you used for purchasing the tickets** and wait for the machine to print them out. Your ticket will indicate the date (backwards to Americans: February 5 will be 05/02), and next to the bar code you’ll see “horario de visita” which indicates either the morning session, 8:30 - 14:00h, or the afternoon session, 14:00 – 18:00h in the winter and 14:00 – 20:00h during the summer. Underneath you’ll see “horario Palacios Nazaríes” and your appointed half-hour time slot within which you must enter the Royal Palace rooms (**example**: de 10:00 a 10:30 h).

You must be at the door of the Nasrid Palace within the 30-minute slot printed on your ticket. If you are late, you will not be allowed entry. The guides are uniformly strict in enforcing this rule. And if you are early, you must wait. Remember that you may visit the Alcazaba fortress and climb its Vela Tower, visit the Palace of Charles 5th (free-without ticket) and the Generalife gardens **at your leisure** during your morning or afternoon sessions. And once you enter the Nasrid Palace rooms, you may stay there as long as you wish.

Before leaving the entrance complex, if you wish a 3€ audio guide which is available in English, Spanish, French, German and Italian, go to the dedicated **audio guide counter** inside the ticket office. You will be required to leave some sort of identification (driver’s license or passport) as a security deposit.

If you decide to pick up your Alhambra tickets the day before your visit (the Servi Caixa machines are available in the afternoon/evening for you to secure your tickets) and you don’t want to trek back to the ticket pavilion on the morning of your visit, you may enter the complex with ticket in hand through the **Puerta de la Justicia** (Gate of Justice) which is located closer to the monuments.
Once inside, you’ll see a Service Pavilion next to the **Puerta del Vino** (Wine Door) where you can rent your **audio guide**. Also at the Service Pavilion you’ll find vending machines, an ATM and toilets. And remember that since you’ll need to leave a form of I.D. such as passport or driver’s license to secure the audio guide, you must return your audio guide to the same counter where it was rented to retrieve your I.D.

Again, your bar coded ticket will be scanned at **three** entrances secured by turnstiles:

- At the door to the Palacios Nazaries
- At the gate which leads to the Generalife summer palace and gardens
- At the entrance to the Alcazaba fortress.

Entrance to the courtyard of the Palace of Charles V and entrance to the 17th century church, Iglesia de Santa Maria de la Alhambra, and Mosque baths, Baños de la Mezquita, **do not** require the Alhambra ticket, nor does strolling the Calle Real de la Alhambra, where you will find the souvenir shops, bookstore, Hotel América and the Parador. Plus you may also wander freely around the Plaza de los Aljibes in front of the Alcazaba and other public squares.

**Two museums** are housed within the **Palace of Charles V**, one of which charges an entrance fee (except to EU members).

1. The excellent **Museum of the Alhambra** on the ground floor contains an impressive collection of Hispano-Muslim art, such as the original tiles and plaster arabesques from the palace, beautiful ceramics and most importantly, one of the twelve lions from the Courtyard of the Lions, which have all been removed for a major cleaning and restoration. I urge you not to miss this fine museum. The restoration of one of the twelve lions has been completed, and he appears much more beautiful, more slender and svelte, and is displayed along with an interesting slide-show explanation of the painstaking restoration process. Open Tuesday - Saturday 9:00 - 2:30. Closed Sunday and Mondays, free on holidays,

2. The **Museo de Bellas Artes** (Fine Arts Museum) is located on the top floor of the palace and consists of a collection of religious paintings from various Granada churches, including works by Granada native son, Alonso Cano, sometimes referred to as the Spanish Michelangelo (as he was a 17th century painter, sculptor and architect). *This museum, for me, is not a “must see”*. Open Tuesday from 2:30 – 6:00 (8:00 in the summer), Wednesday - Saturday 9:00 – 6:00 (8:00 in the summer) and Sundays 9:00 - 2:30. Closed Monday. Admission: 1.50€ (Free to EU members).

**Note:** **As of late, substantial areas of the Nasrid Palaces are being temporarily closed to visitors due to extensive renovations, particularly during the winter months.** On our last visit in February, the Sala del Rey, the Charles V chambers (inhabited by Washington Irving in 1892) and the hammam, **Baños Arabes**, were all under restoration and closed to the public.
Reaching the Alhambra

- **Arriving by car** - If you drive to the Alhambra from outside Granada, make sure to follow the Ronda Sur-Carretera de Circunvalación signs that will take you up the hill and lead you directly to the very large parking lots on the Avenida de los Alixares, across from the Hotel Guadalupe and Hotel Alixares, just a short distance uphill from the ticket office.

- **Arriving by bus** - To reach the Alhambra by bus from downtown, take the #30 or #32 red Alhambra minibus (fare: 1€), which runs approximately every 10 min., departing from the Plaza Nueva. It stops just below the ticket office.

- **Arriving by taxi** - A ride from the taxi stand at the Plaza Nueva to the Entrance Pavilion should cost around 4€.

- **Arriving on foot** - If you plan to walk up to the Alhambra from downtown, allow 30 minutes to reach the complex. The most direct route will take you up the steep Cuesta de Gomérez, which begins at the Plaza Nueva leading up through the woods to the Puerta de las Granadas. Immediately after the Puerta de las Granadas, turn left up the Cuesta Empedrada path to the fountain, Pilar de Carlos V.

If you already have your ticket, there’s no need to continue walking up to the ticket office at the official Entrance Pavilion. After the fountain take a sharp left and enter the Alhambra through the Puerta de la Justicia (Gate of Justice). There’s an Information stand a short distance inside this gate where you can pick up a map of the grounds. If you do need to pick up your tickets (reserved on line) at the Servi Caixa machines, continue outside the Alhambra walls from the Pilar de Carlos V fountain, a distance of about 600 meters, to the Entrance Pavilion, Pabellón de Acceso. Remember that it is a good 15-minute walk from the Entrance Pavilion to the entrance to the Nasrid Palaces. So be sure to arrive at the Entrance Pavilion with ample time to walk down to the palace before your allotted half-hour slot for entry expires.

Walking back to downtown

There is a delightful walk back down into town by way of the Cuesta de los Chinos (“chinos” referring to the splinter stones that pave the way). It is also called Cuesta del Rey Chico (the “rey chico” being Boabdil, the last Nasrid King of Granada). At La Mimbres restaurant look for the sign pointing the way. This pathway will take you back down into town, running along the ramparts of the Alcazaba fortress on your left, but don’t attempt this walk without very sturdy, thick-soled shoes, as you will be walking on large, irregular stones, the path is steep and the going is slow. It will deposit you at the Paseo de los Tristes, which runs along the Darro river, and from there you can either continue your walk up into the ancient Arab quarter of the Albaicín by turning right and walking up the Cuesta Chapiz, or turn left and walk down the Paseo de los Tristes, which will lead you to the Plaza Nueva and monumental downtown Granada.
Lunch
I usually spend about four hours touring the entire complex, entering the Nasrid Palace rooms first at 8:30, the earliest time slot, and am normally finished with the visit by 12:30, 1:00 pm at the latest, just in time for lunch. If you follow this scenario, I suggest that you follow your visit with lunch up on the Alhambra Hill.

Depending on my budget and/or time constraints, I either choose to have lunch in the interior courtyard of the Hotel América (closed December - February and on Friday and Saturday), which serves soups, salads and sandwiches in a pleasant flower and plant filled atrium (average check: about 20€ - 23€ pp.), or reserve a table in the formal dining room of the wonderfully atmospheric Parador, the former 15th century convent of San Francisco, which has just undergone a major renovation. Whether I dine here for lunch or for dinner, I prefer the set menu (30€), which includes a starter, main course and dessert along with a complimentary small appetizer. The dining room opens for lunch at 1:00 pm daily. If you wish a lighter meal at the Parador, the courtyard is also open to non-hotel guests for lunch, serving a casual bar menu consisting of sandwiches, cheese or ham platters and salads.

Around and below the Access Pavilion and the Guadalupe Hotel there are other dining options, such as the rather pricey La Mimbre, with outside terrace dining (better, more atmospheric at night than during the day), the but none is quite as pleasant or memorable as the two mentioned above. Another good option for casual fare is the Yedra Real (www.layedrareal.com), located 50 meters from the parking lot, below the Hotel Guadalupe. It currently offers a menú del día for 12,90€.
More of Granada’s “not to miss” attractions

Capilla Real (downtown Granada)
Adjoining Granada’s cathedral, this is downtown Granada’s most outstanding Christian building (www.capillarealgranada.com). The Catholic Monarchs, Fernando and Isabel commissioned it after the fall of Moorish Granada as their own mausoleum. They had originally planned to be interred in Toledo but after their victory against the Moors they gave orders to Enrique Egas for the construction of this burial chapel, begun in 1506.

Egas built the chapel in the elaborate and delicate Isabelline Gothic style, but it wasn’t finished until 1521, several years after their deaths, during the reign of their grandson, Charles V. The Monarchs were temporarily buried in the Convento de San Francisco at the Alhambra, now the Parador, until the completion of the Capilla Real. The King and Queen’s magnificently carved Carrera marble sarcophagi, the work of Bartolomé Ordóñez, are found next to those of their daughter, Joan the Mad (mother of Charles V), and her husband, Philip the Fair. The lower two are those of the King and Queen; those of Felipe and Juana lie higher, some say, perhaps because Felipe was the son of the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian. The actual small and simple lead coffins, containing their remains, lie in the crypt below, along with the coffin of Juana and Felipe’s only child. The magnificent central altarpiece of the Chapel depicts the fall of Granada with Boabdil, the last Moorish ruler, handing over the keys to the city.

Note: it’s very much an open question whether the actual remains are still here, as the coffins were opened and desecrated during the Napoleonic invasion in 1812.

The sacristy of the Royal Chapel should not be missed. It’s an impressive museum containing, among other gems, Isabel’s crown and scepter, her ornate jewelry chest, mirror, illuminated missal, Fernando’s sword and the Kings’ personal, mostly Hispano-Flemish, art collection including works by van der Weyen and Hans Memling.

The Royal Chapel is open from April to October from 10:30 – 1:00 and from 4:00 – 7:00. From November - March it’s open from 10:30 – 1:00 and 3:30 – 6:00, and on Sundays from 11:00 – 1:00 and 3:30 – 6:00. Closed Good Friday, December 25, January 1. Admission: 3€, but is free with Bono Turístico.

Cathedral (downtown Granada)
The cavernous cathedral, built on the site of the demolished Great Mosque, was begun in 1518 in Gothic style, but was not finished until 1563 (www.diocesisgranada.org). The architect, Diego Siloe, who replaced Enrique Egas five years after its start, made changes to the design, introducing the Renaissance style to the building. In the Capilla Mayor, note the praying figures of Fernando and Isabel, works by native son Pedro de Mena.

Open Monday - Saturday from 10:45 - 1:30 and 3:30 - 6:30. On Sundays it is only open for visits from 3:30 - 6:30. The main entrance can be found on Gran Vía de Colón.
Monasterio de la Cartuja (downtown Granada)
This over-the-top, lavishly, wildly, flamboyantly Baroque extravaganza, the “Sistine Chapel of Baroque Art”, lies two km northwest of the city, easily reachable by #8 bus, which runs along the Gran Vía (www.diocesisgranada.org). It’s often been described as the Christian answer to the Alhambra, their attempt to upstage the Moors in grandiosity. A Spanish writer describes the high altar as a “motionless architectural earthquake”. For art lovers, missing the Cartuja in Granada would be akin to visiting Rome and failing to see the Vatican.

Open daily from November – March 10:00 – 1:00 and 3:30 – 6:00. From April - October it is open from 10:00 – 1:00 and 4:00 – 8:00. However, on Sundays and holidays it only opens from 10:00 - noon. Admission: 3,50€.

Monasterio de San Jerónimo (downtown Granada)
Diego de Siloé, who took over the construction of Granada’s cathedral, and who is known for his fine Plateresque work, designed this 16th century monastery, located 500 meters west of the cathedral on Calle Rector López Argüeta. The church contains a beautiful two-tiered cloister and inside the ornately frescoed church, the tomb of Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, the Gran Capitán, who won many victories in Italy for the Catholic Monarchs.

Open April - October from 10:00 - 1:30 and 4:00 - 7:30. From November – March it’s from 10:00 - 1:30 and from 3:00 - 6:30. Open Sundays from 10:00 - noon only. Admission: 3€.

El Albaizín
This fascinating, labyrinth-like quarter takes its name, some scholars say, from the Arabic “Rabad el-Bayyazin”, which means “gate of the falconers” or it may refer to the “neighborhood of Baeza, as the former inhabitants of the Al Andalus town of Baeza settled here in Granada in 1227 after Baeza was re-conquered by the Christians.

A daylight stroll through the city’s ancient Islamic quarter, the oldest section of town, which covers the slope directly facing the Alhambra, is a must for all visitors. Here is where the Moors built their first fortress, numerous mosques, and is the refuge where they retreated after the Christian Re-Conquest until they were finally driven out for good in 1609. This former Arab ghetto is a dense medina-like network of narrow and cramped, steep and winding cobbled streets, dead ends and little squares where getting lost is inevitable. As you walk along its streets and into its many squares, you’ll be rewarded at every turn with stunning vistas of the Alhambra looming across the way on the Al-Sabika hill. The Albaicín area, once scruffy and semi-abandoned, is gradually gentrifying, particularly with the opening of small boutique hotels, restaurants-with-views in typical whitewashed cármenes, Arab teahouses, halal grocers and “Little Morocco” - a souk-like bazaar of leather and trinket shops in the lower quarter. The lower section is now inhabited by new Spanish Muslims, Moroccan and Algerian immigrants and New Age types.
You can spend a couple of hours soaking up the flavor of this quarter or spend the entire day lost in its innumerable nooks and crannies.

My introductory Albaicín walking tour
I suggest that you start your tour of this evocative quarter from the Plaza Nueva and walk east along the river on the Carrera del Darro. Your first stop could be at Calle Bañuelo, the fourth street on your left, where you’ll find El Bañuelo, the ancient Moorish bath house, which has three bathing rooms with vaulted ceilings which remain intact. Then continue on the Carrera del Darro, which will become the Paseo de los Tristes (its formal name being Paseo del Padre Manjón), where you’ll find several bars with outdoor terraces. Here to the left you will start you climb north up the very steep Cuesta del Chapiz, which leads up into the quarter.

On the Cuesta del Chapiz, to your right you will pass the Casas del Chapiz, now Granada’s School of Arabic Studies. Ring the bell and ask to be buzzed in for a look at the beautiful gardens. On the opposite side of the street you will find the *Carmen de la Victoria, one of the Albaicín’s best-kept secrets. Again, to enter you must ring the bell (open 9:00 – 10:00 daily) and ask to be allowed in. Go up to the lookout tower, the mirador, for spectacular views of the Alhambra, before continue on up the Cuesta del Chapiz past the Iglesia de San Salvador (open 11:00 - 12:30 and 4:30 - 6:30).
*What is a Carmen? A whitewashed villa perched on a hill and hidden behind a tall white wall, surrounded by cypress trees, with murmuring fountains, terraced gardens planted with fruit trees and filled with flowing bougainvillea. There are more cármenes here in the Albaicín than in any other quarter of Granada. The 17th century poet, Pedro Soto de Rojas, wrote of them in his book entitled: “a paradise closed to many, gardens open to few”. The 20th century Granadine poet, Federico García Lorca wrote: “to live on a different plane, in a Carmen - all the rest is a waste of time!”

Now it’s time to stop for a drink and free tapa on the Plaza Aliatar on your right. Look for the bar with the snail sign, Bar Aliatar-Los Caracoles, and either have your aperitif standing at the bar or sit at its outdoor terrace. The house specialty is the irresistible caracoles, snails cooked with garlic, a little portion of which will be served to you with your beer, soft drink or wine. If you arrive on a Sunday at around 1:00 pm the place will be packed to the rafters with the church-going locals.

After your pause for refreshment it’s time to continue your climb. The Cuesta del Chapiz becomes the Calle Pagés, which you will take until it ends at the Carretera de Murcia. At this intersection, turn left and walk down the Carretera until you reach the Iglesia de San Cristóbal, where you will have a lookout, another mirador, from which you have magnificent views of the entire city and below you, to the south, the remaining section of the ancient Arab walls.

From this top most point, begin your descent, and prepare to get lost at some point in your meandering down. Take the Larga de San Cristóbal down to the Puerta Almona. Here continue down to the Plaza Larga, the heart of the district, named for its oblong shape. Here you’ll find more outdoor terraces and on Saturday, a lively market.

From the Plaza Larga, ask a local to point you in the direction of San Camilio, which will lead you down to the Albaicín’s most famous square, the Plaza de San Nicolás with its über-famous Mirador de San Nicolás, where everyone comes to soak up the glorious sunsets (make sure to return here by bus or taxi at the sunset hour for a drink at the Huerto de Juan Ranas below the square).

This view is recognizable from all the Alhambra postcards and is the spot where Bill Clinton waxed rhapsodic about the most beautiful sunset of his life. The church at the square was once a mosque, its fountain, where the faithful performed their ablutions before entering. Next door, a new mosque opened in 2003 for the burgeoning Islamic community - the Mezquita Mayor de Granada, whose gardens can be visited (10:00 –
2:00 and 6:00 - 9:30) and whose muezzin calls to prayer five times a day. The square is also home to the resident hippies who perform street theater for the public. If in need of another liquid pick-me-up here, try the popular and inexpensive Bar Kiki.

Please exercise extreme caution on the square as thieves on motorcycles have been known to grab ladies’ purses then zip away.

From below the square, go west on the Camino Nuevo de San Nicolás, which will become the Calle Santa Isabel la Real (where you can pick up the red minibus #31 back downtown if needed). The Monastery of Santa Isabel la Real is open only Monday – Wednesday - Friday from 10:00 -1:30 and 4:00 – 6:00, and on Saturday only from 10:00 – 1:00.

Continue west to the square, Plaza San Miguel Bajo. It’s now time to make your way back down on any street that goes south from this square, which will eventually lead you to “Little Morocco” and the intersection of the souk-like streets of Calderería Vieja and Calderería Nueva. At either, you can stop for a cooling fruit shake, batido, or an herb, spice or fruit tea at a tetería, or purchase pointed toe leather slippers, a brass tray or even a djellaba in this medina-like environment, if that holds appeal.

Note: If you are pressed for time, or have mobility difficulties, you can take your tour of the Albaicín by minibus. Just catch bus #31 from the Plaza Nueva, which makes a 15 - minute loop through the quarter. Fare is €1. The bus #32 does this same loop, but first goes to the Alhambra.

Sacromonte

This desert-like, prickly pear-covered hillside opposite the Generalife gardens is riddled with troglodyte dwellings, once inhabited by gypsy (Gitano) families who were forced out in the floods of 1968 and is now the home largely to hippies with a scattering of gypsies who have returned. These gypsy families perform zambras (flamenco dances) in their cave-homes in the evenings, performances geared solely to tourists. Most of these zambráz caves have the reputation of being classic “rip off joints” best to be avoided. I would tour this quarter only during the day. A walk through Sacromonte can be added to the above recommended walking tour of El Albaicín, simply by detouring east at the intersection of the Cuesta del Chapiz and Camino de Sacromonte. Sacromonte has
only one road, which curves around the hillside. The visitor leaves the city behind and enters a strange and very arid landscape where the only buildings of note are the caves dug out of the hillside.

If you’d like to see a cave replica, the Center for the Interpretation of Sacromonte-Museo Cueva del Sacromonte is a type of ethnographic museum with ten caves displaying gypsy crafts (basketry work, pottery, metalwork, weaving) and the cave dwellers’ way of life. To reach the center you’ll need to climb 300 meters up the steep hill, Barranco de los Negros, from the #34 bus stop and Venta El Gallo restaurant at the end of the Camino del Monte (an extension of Camino de Sacromonte - the main drag). The visit takes about an hour. Admission fee: 5€. It opens Tuesday through Sunday, from April to October from 10:00 – 2:00 and 5:00 – 9:00. From November through March it is open from 10:00 – 2:00 and 4:00 – 7:00. Closed on Monday.

To reach Sacromonte by bus, take the #34 from the Plaza Nueva, which departs every hour from 7:30 am - 8:30 pm. But you will still need to make the 300-meter climb up to visit the Museo Cueva (www.sacromonte.org).

Museo Arqueológico
The Casa de Castril, a Renaissance mansion with ornate Plateresque facade on the Carrera del Darro, is the setting for Granada’s archeological museum housing artifacts from the Paleolithic age to the Islamic period. In room No. 4, upstairs, you’ll find a stunning collection of alabaster burial urns. Open 9:00 - 8:30, but on Tuesdays from 2:30 – 8:00 only and on Sunday from 9:00 - 2:30. Closed Monday. Admission: €1.50 (free to EU citizens)

El Bañuelo-Baños Arabes (downtown Granada)
These brick vaulted 11th century Moorish baths are considered the best preserved in Spain. Note the star-shaped openings in the vaulting. During the Moorish occupation of Granada there was a bath on every street of the Albaicín, the Moors believing that cleanliness was next to godliness. Open Tuesday - Saturday from 10:00 – 2:00. Admission is free. Closed Sunday and Monday.

Fundación Rodríguez-Acosta (Alhambra hill)
This foundation-museum (www.fundacionrodriguezacosta.com) overlooking the city is a private non-profit organization founded in 1941 after the death of Granadino painter José María Rodríguez-Acosta who established the guidelines to the foundation and left his private collection to it. The foundation is housed in a beautiful Carmen on the Alhambra hill near the Torres Bermejas (just below the Hotel Alhambra Palace) and has spectacular gardens and equally spectacular views of Granada. It was declared a National Monument in 1982. Inside you’ll find the Gómez-Moreno museum with a collection of valuable paintings by Zurbarán, Sorolla, Murillo and Fortuny along with archeological finds. Open Wednesday - Sunday from 10:00 – 2:00. Closed Monday, Tuesday, December 24, 25, 31 and January 1, plus other local holidays. Those who present their Alhambra ticket will receive a 50% discount on price of admission. Entrance: 4€.
You can reach the Foundation on the #30 or #32 red Alhambra microbus, getting off at the stop in front of the Hotel Alhambra Palace and walking down about 50 meters to the entrance to the Carmen.

**Campo de los Mártires (Alhambra hill)**
This is an expansive and peaceful garden that offers lovely views of the city. During the Re-Conquest it served as a fortress where captured Christian soldiers were held as prisoners in dungeons tunneled within the rocks. Open in winter, Monday - Friday from 10:00 – 2:00, Saturday and Sunday from 10:00 - 6:00. Open in the summer, Monday - Friday from 10:00 – 2:00 and 6:00 – 8:00, Saturday and Sunday from 10:00 – 8:00. Closed August.

**Casa-Museo de Manuel de Falla (Alhambra hill)**
Located on Antequeruela Alta on the Alhambra hill, near the Alhambra Palace Hotel. For Spanish classical music lovers, this is the home of composer Manuel de Falla, who lived in Granada for almost twenty years (www.museomanueldefalla.com). When he left the city for exile in Argentina in 1939, he left behind his personal belongings, including manuscripts, concert programs, press clippings, posters, photographs, correspondence and books. The city opened the composer’s former home as a museum in 1965. Open Tuesday - Sunday from 10:00 – 2:00. In July and Aug it is only open Thursday - Sunday. Admission: 3€.
Centro de Arte José Guerrero (downtown Granada)
For contemporary art lovers, this is a small museum dedicated to the work of native son, abstract expressionist José Guerrero, a contemporary of Pollock and Rothko. It also houses temporary exhibits. It opens Tuesday - Saturday 11:00 – 2:00 and 5:00 – 9:00, and Sunday from 11:00 – 2:00. Closed Monday (www.centroguerrero.org).

Casa de los Tiros (downtown Granada)
On Calle Pavaneras, 19, the street leading from the Plaza Isabel la Católica to the Realejo neighborhood, this fortress-like 16th century Renaissance palace ("the House of the Shots" - from the musket barrels protruding from the facade), now houses a collection of Royal paintings and lithographs depicting Granada in the 19th century. It opens on Tuesday in the afternoon only from 2:30 - 8:30. From Wednesday – Saturday it is open from 9:00 - 8:30, and on Sunday from 9:00 - 2:30. Closed Monday. Admission: 1.50€. Free to EU citizens.

Following the literary footsteps of Federico García Lorca
Granada’s most illustrious citizen, Federico García Lorca, was one of Spain’s literary giants, a member of the Generation of 1927. Both a renowned poet and playwright, he was brutally assassinated by Franco’s Falangist followers during the opening days of the Spanish Civil War. In July of 1936, García Lorca decided to postpone a planned trip to Mexico and instead spend the summer in Granada. Tragically, this was the moment when the city fell to Franco’s troops, who launched a vendetta to hunt down and exterminate all those who openly sympathized with the Republican cause.

The poet sought refuge in the house of friend and fellow poet, Luis Rosales, but was discovered and dragged away on 16 August. Viznar is where García Lorca spent his final hours before facing the firing squad. Close to the town is the Viznar Gorge where it is thought that his remains, along with those of other Civil War victims, were buried.

Those who have studied his work may want to make the pilgrimage to these three sites in and around the city that honor his memory - the corners of his childhood, his youth and the place of his death:

1. **La Huerta de San Vicente - Casa Museo Federico García Lorca** was the family summer residence between 1926-1936, once outside of town but now found within the burgeoning city limits, having been swallowed up by the city. The city government has transformed this area into a formal park and garden and has opened the home as a museum. Here is where García Lorca produced some of his finest work, including Blood Wedding and Yerma. The family has returned the home to its original state, and half-hour tours are given Tuesday – Sunday. From April - September it is open from 10:00 - 12:30 and from 5:00 - 7:30. From October - March it is open 10:00 - 12:30 and 4:00 - 6:30. It is closed in the afternoons during July and August and on Mondays. Because guided tours are mandatory it’s important to check the calendar at www.huertadesanvicente.com to make sure that a space is available on the tour of your choice. The guided tours are currently given at 10:15, 11:00, 11:45, 12:30, 5:15, 6:00, 6:45 and 7:30 only,
Admission: 3€, but free on Wednesday.

2. García Lorca shrine lies 17 km. due west of the city in the village of Fuente Vaqueros. The Museo Casa-Natal Federico García Lorca is the writer’s birthplace and where he spent his early years. Tours will show you drawings by the young Federico, school photos, manuscripts and memorabilia from performances of his plays. From October – March it is open from 10:00 – 1:00 and 4:00 – 6:00, and from April - June and in September it’s open from 10:00 – 1:00 and 5:00 – 7:00. During July and August it is only open from 10:00 – 2:00. Closed on Mondays.

3. The final stop on the García Lorca memory trail is found outside the village of Alfacar, north of Granada, where tragically, the artist was executed on 18 August 1936. A memorial park has been created in the place where it is believed the poet was assassinated. A wall with fragments of his poems etched on blue painted ceramic tiles surrounds the main square.

About the “Bono Turístico” or City Pass
I only recommend this rather expensive city tourist pass, a creation of the city’s Tourist Board, for those visiting for more than 3 days, if you plan to make extensive use of the bus system, or if you have not purchased your Alhambra tickets on line ahead of time and now discover that tickets are sold out for your stay. This pass which costs 30€, is not in my opinion a real money-saver but if used properly one can break even. It does covers admission to the Alhambra, includes a timed reservation for entrance to the Nasrid Palace and also covers the (small) admission fees to Granada’s other top sights (Capilla Real, Cathedral, Monasterio de San Jerónimo, Museo Arqueológico), a pass for 9 rides on the city bus system, a day on the “hop on-hop off” sightseeing bus and discounts (7%) for bars and restaurants (such as Sevilla, Chikito, la Yedra Real). And it is valid for 7 days.

One can purchase the pass at the ticket offices of the Alhambra (which requires standing in long lines) and at the kiosk on the Plaza Nueva, whose opening hours are: April – October from Monday - Saturday 9:00 – 7:00 and Sunday from 9:00 – 2:00 and 4:00 – 7:00. From November – March it is open Monday - Saturday from 10:00 – 6:00 and on Sunday from 10:00 – 2:00 and 4:00 – 8:00. Or purchase the pass at the Caja Granada bank on Plaza Isabel la Católica. You can order it in advance at www.caja-granada.es and pick it up at one of the sales points (www.granadatur.com).
THE CITY’S BEST DINING

Compared to other gastronomically renowned Spanish cities, particularly those of the north, San Sebastián, Bilbao, Barcelona, and relative to the other two Andalusian members of the “Golden Triangle”, Seville and Córdoba, Granada has never been highly regarded by gastronomes-in-the-know for its innovative dining. The ironic expression “comer en Granada es poco o nada” pretty much sums it up, according to gourmet critics, when comparing dining here to the culinary fame of the north, although Córdoba is actually considered among the food critics to be the “gourmet capital” of the South.

Granada residents love their traditional recipes and as a conservative dining lot, don’t venture much beyond the tried and true. That said, it’s possible to dine well in Granada, but I would choose the “tapas” route over white tablecloth dining, with a few notable exceptions. Granada’s tapas bars are well known for maintaining the tradition of offering a complimentary tapa along with an order of an alcoholic drink (beer, wine) or a soft drink (but not water, juice or coffee). This tradition not only thrives here, but has also developed into an art form.

These free tapas can be a little dish of stew, a mini sandwich, a slice of omelet, tortilla, a little dish of Russian salad, all quite filling, which makes a traditional “tapas crawl” imminently affordable. With each round of drinks at the bar, you will be given a different complimentary tapa—the waiters remember what complimentary snacks you have already been served and vary your treats. But remember that this is a gift, so one shouldn’t request a particular tapa, unless you’re a regular, but rather just enjoy what is given. And make sure not to order food immediately along with your drink, but instead, wait and order after finishing your tapa(s) so as not to over-order.

Regional dishes of Granada and/or Andalucía

- **Berenjenas con miel** - Breaded eggplant with honey.
- **Habitas con jamón** - Broad beans sautéed with little pieces of Serrano ham
- **Jamón de Trevélez** - Mountain cured Serrano ham from the Alpujarras - cured in caves in the highest village of the Iberian Peninsula.
- **Remojón** - A salad of cod, oranges, black olives, onions and tomatoes
- **Pescaíto Frito** - Lightly battered, fried” little fishes”
- **Tortilla Sacromonte** - An omelet named after the Abbey of Sacromonte, which in its original version contains lambs’ brains and testicles.
- **Choto al ajillo** – Kid (goat) braised in white wine and garlic.
- **Alboronía** - A vegetable medley consisting of eggplant, tomatoes, green peppers and squash.
- **Olla de San Antón** - A stew of lima beans, blood sausage, pig’s head or ear, bacon, dripping, thistles – whatever comes to hand in the cold weeks of mid-January when villagers gather together to celebrate the fiesta of San Antón. Also acts as a hangover cure after Christmas and the New Year...
- **Perdices** - The name for baked potatoes in Granada (also partridges).
- **Piononos** - A dessert from the town of Santa Fe, made with sponge cake, cream, burnt sugar, cinnamon-available in all the city’s pastry shops.
DINING WITH A VIEW
On the Alhambra hill

Parador San Francisco
Without a doubt, the former 15th century convent, now a state run Parador, is the most romantic and serene spot to dine on the Alhambra grounds. A dinner on the terrace of the Parador with a direct view of the Generalife gardens while being serenaded by a classical guitarist, the scent of orange blossoms and jasmine in the air, can be a lovely, romantic experience. However, you will hear mostly English (or German), in the background, as this Parador is extremely popular with and primarily filled up by foreign guests. The dining room does not take reservations for non-hotel guests (or did not prior to the renovation), so your best bet is to arrive a bit before 9:00 pm. (it opens for dinner at 8:00) and wait to be seated on the terrace. There are also terrace tables where one can enjoy a pre-dinner drink, so the wait can be quite pleasant (www.parador.es/).

I always opt for a regional specialty (menu is divided between regional dishes and standard continental fare) and choose the decently priced, 32.50€, three course “menú Parador”, a good value given the magical setting. On the menu there will be seafood options as well as meat dishes. Two of my favorite regional dishes served here are the habitas con jamón (baby limas with ham) and the berenjenas con miel (eggplant with honey). And from the wine list I select the label designated “best wine at the best price”, or the “market discovery”, which has always proved to be a solid bet. These labels are priced below 15€.

If ordering a-la-carte, you will be charged 1.87€ each for the olives, oil, amuse-bouche and breads placed at your table at the beginning of the meal (these are included in the set menu price). For information and reservations call: 958 221 440.

Carmen de San Miguel
This Carmen turned restaurant (www.carmensanmiguel.com) is located immediately below the Torres Bermejas and a short stroll up the street from the guesthouse Carmen de la Alcubilla del Caracol, but somewhat hidden down a cobblestone lane near the Alhambra Palace hotel, past the Fundación Rodríguez-Acosta. This is a lovely hillside villa with a large dining room, which boasts picture windows overlooking the city and a summer terrace affording spectacular and romantic views. Tel: 958 226 723.
DINING WITH A FULL FRONTAL VIEW OF THE ALHAMBRA

In the ancient Arab quarter of Albaicín

San Nicolás
Located at San Nicolás, 3, just west of the square of the same name, is one of several restaurants housed in romantic cármenes, with a lovely garden terrace for dining with spectacular frontal views of the Alhambra (www.restaurantesannicolas.com). Of all these restaurants-with-a-view, this one serves arguably the most memorable, truly gourmet cuisine, is the highest rated in the gourmet guides and has the most beautiful interior décor on two floors with stunning marble staircase. It opens for lunch at 1:00 and for dinner at 8:00. Closed Sunday night and Monday. Tel: 958 804 262.

Mirador de Morayma
Calle Pianista Garcia Carrillo, 2, just east of the Mirador of San Nicolás, this romantic spot, a former private mansion, serves an excellent tasting menu (degustación) for 30€. Clinton, Aznar and Kohl have all sampled its Arab-inspired delicacies. And the chef Mario Batali recently dined there while filming his PBS culinary road trip series, “Spain…On the Road Again”, with Gwyneth Paltrow and Mark Bittman. Its wine list features Alpujarran (local) wines. The extremely pretty gardens are an added plus. It opens for lunch at 1:30 and for dinner at 8:30. Tel: 958 228 290

El Huerto de Juan Ranas
Located just below the Mirador de San Nicolás at Callejón Atarazana Vieja, 8, this restaurant has a splendid vine covered outdoor terrace where both drinks and lunch are served plus a more formal, elegant and rather expensive restaurant downstairs, said to have been a favorite of King Fahd and the Saudi Royal Family. I would go here at sunset for a pre-dinner drink to soak up the sublime views of the “Red Fortress”. Tel: 958 286 925.

Other options for dining with a view of the Alhambra in the upper Albaicín include Carmen de la Verde Luna at Camino Nuevo de San Nicolás, 16, Las Tomasas at Carril de San Agustín, 4, the Mirador de Aixa, next door at Carril San Agustín, 2, and Carmen de Aben Humeya, adjacent to the Cadima Wall (www.abenhumeya.com). But before booking, ask your hotel concierge, or desk staff, which of the above have had the best recent guest feedback. And remember that when dining at any of the above-mentioned spots in the Albaicín, you'll be shelling out more for the views than for the fine cuisine. Count on a minimum of 50€, or more, per person.
DINING DOWNTOWN

El Claustro *
Located in the AC Palacio de Santa Paula Hotel, this is the most romantic and atmospheric setting for gourmet dining downtown, and my top choice for a special occasion (www.ac-hoteles.com). This dining venue is housed in the former cloister of the 1590 convent section of the beautiful hotel and has a stunning coffered wood ceiling and windows overlooking the courtyard. The avant-garde cuisine is a creation of chef Juan Andrés Rodríguez, who has won several prestigious gastronomic awards. Main courses are priced from 20€ - 26€ and all desserts priced at 7€. It opens for lunch at 1:30 and at 8:30 for dinner. Tel: 958 805 740.

Oliver *
At Plaza Pescadería, 12, the restaurant is next door to the more famous, and somewhat more expensive, Cunini. On a recent visit, this friendly, welcoming, “we try harder” dining spot provided me my most memorable and relaxing downtown restaurant meal. You’ll find a lively and attractive tapas bar in front, and an interior dining room divided into several cozy and pleasant alcoves with vaulted ceilings and pretty Andalusian décor. At my recent lunch it was packed to the rafters with hungry locals, not a tourist in sight, and service was prompt and polite (www.restauranteoliver.com). The menu focuses on seafood, as does Cunini’s, but with gentler prices. My selection of dorada (porgy) proved delicious. Try their tarta de yogur con frambuesas y trufas, yoghurt cake with raspberries and chocolate truffles, for dessert. Oliver also serves typical Granadino dishes such as habitas con jamón, along with very fairly priced wines. Open Monday. Tel: 958 262 200.

Chikito
Plaza del Campillo, 9, has been a haunt of Granada’s intellectual elite for years, the meeting place where García Lorca and friends held their tertulias (literary gatherings). Classic Granada dishes include braised oxtail stew, rabo de toro, and baby shrimp, quisquillas, straight from Motril on the coast (www.restaurantechikit.com). Chikito opens up an outdoor terrace on the square in summer and has a lively tapas bar. If you stick to the traditional dishes, you can have a very pleasant meal here at a reasonable cost. It opens for lunch at 1:00 and for dinner at 8:00. Closed Wednesday. Tel: 958 223 364.
Pilar del Toro
Located at Hospital de Santa Ana, 12, across the Carrera del Darro from the Plaza Nueva. This well regarded dining spot consists of an upstairs restaurant and downstairs bar set in the romantic courtyard of a 17th century home, a favorite local couples’ watering hole. Tel: 958 225 470

Azafrán
Can be found at the beginning of the Paseo de los Tristes (at Paseo del Padre Manjón), the continuation of the Carrera del Darro, directly across from the river terraces, this casual-contemporary restaurant serves meals continuously, making it a handy stop for those who explore the Albaicín after a visit to the Alhambra. Try one of their varieties of couscous (lamb with raisins), their loin of pork with yoghurt and saffron sauce or one of their delicious salads. In the summer diners can eat al fresco on the wisteria-covered terrace across the street. Tel: 958 226 882

Puerta del Carmen *
Located across from city hall, on the Plaza del Carmen downtown, this new tapas and small plates “hot spot” has a beautiful Belle Epoque décor, is both elegant and cozy and serves attractively presented plates of charcuterie, smoked fish, carpaccios, sushi-style and tostas or canapés.

The well-chosen wines are served in fine stemware, and everything here is presented in a sophisticated style (www.puertadelcarmenrestaurante.com). Call ahead for reservations: 958 223 737.

DINING IN A BULLRING
La Ermita
This is one of two dining venues located inside Granada’s Plaza de Toros, dining below the seats of the bullring (www.grupoermita.com). La Ermita is the more formal, tablecloth dining of the two venues (dining room upstairs, tapas bar below) and specializes in grill meats - carnes al carbón. Phone: 958 290 257.

Tendido 1
The one next door serves tapas in a more informal setting of bullfight memorabilia and sherry casks. Opens daily from 11:00 am – 2:00 am (www.tendido1.com). You can have a full meal or just go for a bite, have a tapa or ración, such as a plate of Trevélez ham, or cheese at the bar, or you can sit on the outdoor terrace in the summer. Phone: 958 272 302 / 958 278 769.

TAPAS BARS DOWNTOWN
Tapas time in Granada begins before lunch, around 1:00 and before dinner, between 8:00 and 9:00.
Los Diamantes I & II
There are two tapas bars, the first on pedestrian Calle Navas, 26, and the newer cousin on Calle Rosario 12, a continuation of Navas, are the places to frequent for those who love pescaíto frito, battered and lightly fried fish tapas such as boquerones and anchovies, plus delicate batter fried eggplant, berenjena, all watered down by the local brew, an Alhambra beer. Both branches are closed on Sunday and Monday.

Bodegas Castañeda
On Calle Almireceros, 1, is a much-loved classic frequented by locals and students alike who flock here for the unpretentious fare and low prices. As in all the city bars, a free tapa is served along with your drink. Here I would stick to the tried and true—a plate of Trevélez ham and local cheese or one of their 18 varieties of stuffed potatoes.

Taberna Salinas
Also located on Calle Almireceros. Here you can enjoy a nice glass of wine and a montadito, an open-faced sandwich, but I prefer Bodegas Castañeda (above).

Bar Pasiegas
On Plaza de las Pasiegas opposite the cathedral is a designer, Basque-style pintxos bar.

Candela
On Calle Santa Escolastica, 9, the main drag that leads to the Realejo neighborhood, is a local’s hangout for montaditos, a type of canapé with every type of topping imaginable.

La Taberna de Baco and La Opípara
Can be found on the south side of the Campo del Príncipe, the heart of the residential Realejo neighborhood. The best time to visit this “tapas bar central” is on a sultry summer night, when the terraces are open and packed with locals.

TAPAS BARS IN THE ALBAICÍN
El Rincón del Aurora
Located on Plaza San Miguel Bajo, 7. This tiny bar with outdoor terrace has been recommended in Food and Wine (September ’08) in an article regarding the filming of the PBS series, “Spain…On the Road Again”. It was one the bars frequented by the series’ protagonists, Chef Mario Batali and Mark Bittman during their filming.

MOROCCAN STYLE TEA HOUSES - Teterías
These funky, bohemian, pseudo-Moroccan tea lounges, opened by Moroccan immigrants, are quite in vogue these days among the university students or young at heart. Most are found in the area of the Albacín now known as Little Morocco, on Calderería Nueva and Calderería Vieja, a souk-like bazaar filled with shops hawking wares imported from Morocco and other areas of the Middle East. These teahouses have an Arab atmosphere.
of dimly lit rooms, floors covered with carpets, horseshoe arches, marble columns and seating on velvet sofas piled with brightly colored cushions, with low carved wood tables, North African background music. All offer exotic teas - herbal, spice and fruit - plus shakes, batidos, sweet Arab pastries, such as baklava or khadaifi, and a drag on a narghile (hookah). Most are open from noon until midnight.

The best of the lot may be El Bañuelo Tetería, which is not on the Calderería Nueva/Vieja, but instead behind the ancient Arab baths on Bañuelo, 5, near the Placeta de la Concepción. It advertises itself as “a little to drink, a little to eat and plenty of space”.

BEST ICE CREAM IN THE CITY
The city’s best ice cream and horchata (a refreshing milk-like drink made of the Valencian chufa root) can be found at the super-popular Los Italianos, Gran Vía, 4. Opens from March to October only.

PASTRIES
Regional pastry specialties, such as soplillos, cuajada de Carnaval and tortas mohínas can be found at Calle Reyes Católicos, 39, at the venerable Pastelería López Mezquita, a Granada tradition since 1862, open from 9:00 am until 11:00 pm.

CREPES
You’ll find numerous bars with outdoor terraces on the Paseo de los Tristes, the continuation of the Carrera del Darro that runs along the river, directly across from the Alhambra hill, one of which, Bar au lait, specializes in crepes and coffees.

CHURROS & CHOCOLATE
Grandadinos flock to the pretty Plaza Bib-Rambla downtown for their morning or late afternoon churros y chocolate treats at the Gran Café Bib-Rambla and the Cafetería Alhambra.
GRANADA SHOPPING

Wandering the narrow walkways of the Alcaicería (behind the cathedral) and the streets of Calderería Nueva and Calderería Vieja in the lower Albayzin, referred to as “Little Morocco”, you’ll come across several souk-like markets filled with handicrafts, all imported from Morocco or the Middle East, which may or may not appeal. Nothing here is indigenous, but if you’ve never shopped in a medina, this is your chance to pick up some North African leather slippers. The Alcaicería stands at what was once the original Arab silk market, but is now a tourist - trinket - souvenir shop filled bazaar that for me at least, holds little appeal.

HANDICRAFTS

Granada is known for two indigenous handicrafts: its pretty Fajalauza ware, the lovely pottery with blue and green designs on a white background, and an ancient craft known as taracea or marquetry. You’ll find marquetry items galore in the shops on Cuesta Gomérez, the steep street leading up to the Alhambra and in the shops on the Alhambra hill as well. The craft consists of materials such as bone, metal, mother of pearl, inlaid in wood in intricate patterns. This craft dates from the 14th - 15th centuries. You’ll find taracea jewelry boxes, picture frames, trays, mirrors, chess sets and backgammon boards, small tables and even writing desks.

Laguna Taracea

On the street leading from the Palace of Charles 5th, up to the Generalife gardens in the Alhambra complex, you’ll pass the studios of Laguna Taracea (www.laguna-taracea.com), where all the tour groups stop to see the artisans in action and purchase inexpensive gifts. When you enter the shop, head to the display room on your right and turn to the shelves on your right side for the genuine items inlaid with mahogany, rosewood, walnut and bone. The cheap, plastic touristy trinkets will be on your left.

Artesanía El Suspiro

The shop in town with the best, or widest selection of Granada’s traditional blue, white and green Fajalauza pottery is Artesanía El Suspiro on the Plaza Santa Ana adjacent to the Plaza Nueva. The owners speak English.

Also peruse the pottery wares at Ceràmica Fabre on the Plaza Pescadería 10, next to the Plaza Bib-Rambla.

GUITARS

Guitar aficionados will want to stop for a visit to Guitarrería Gil at Plaza del Realejo, 5 (www.granadaguitar.com). Several guitar makers hone their skills on the Cuesta de Gomérez, the street leading directly from the Plaza Nueva up to the Alhambra. Look for Germán Pérez Barranco (www.guitarreria.com), Eduardo Ferrer Castillo at number 26 and Francisco Manuel Díaz at number 29, among others.
WINES
For a nice selection of wines, with 300 references from all the Spanish wine producing regions, head to La Carte des Vins, on Calle Navas, 29. It sells one hundred wine labels for less than 10€/bottle. Opening hours are Monday – Saturday, 11:00 am until 9:30 pm and Sundays from 11:00 until 5:00. Their “express” wine tasting course takes 45 minutes and costs 8€.

FOOD
For gourmet food items, gastronomes must seek out the small but delightful La Oliva, at Rosario, 9 (www.laolivagourmet.com). The friendly, English speaking owner, Francisco Lillo, is a fountain of knowledge regarding Andalusian (and local) foods and wines and will help you with your selection of a perfect gift to take home.

BOUTIQUES
Granada’s most up-market shopping street is the boutique-lined Angel Ganivet, which runs southeast from the Puerta Real. Here you’ll find a lovely children’s clothing boutique, a Loewe luxury leather emporium and Salvador Bachiller designer shoes.

ONE STOP SHOPPING
For everything under the sun, both locals and tourists alike head straight to the large El Corte Inglés department store on Carrera del Genil, 20, which has a very handy and vast basement supermarket for picnic items, snacks, wines and delicatessen products. The most selective gourmet items (such as the best of the Iberian “belloita” hams) are found in the “El Club de Gourmets” section. El Corte Inglés is open Monday - Saturday from 10:00 – 10:00. By law it can only open on eight Sundays during the year. To check the Sunday opening days in ’08/09, see www.elcorteingles.es; at the bottom right of the home page under centros comerciales, click on horarios y aperturas, then Andalucia.

WALKING TOURS
Cicerone
Offers guided walking tours around the historical city center and the Albaicín that last approximately 2-1/2 hours (www.ciceronegranada.com). From March through October they depart from the meeting point, a kiosk at the Plaza Bib-Rambla at 10:30 am, and from November through February at 11 am. No reservations are needed; just arrive at the meeting point 10 - 15 minutes ahead of time. Cost: 12€. Children under 14 can come along for free. A 2€ voucher is available on line.

Full day Tours
Something out of the ordinary, especially for “foodies”, is the new Olive Oil Tour, which is offered in English, French, or Spanish, and is a full-day tour to discover the varieties of olives, oils, to visit a traditional working mill and to experience new flavors.
The tour departs daily, picking participants up at their hotels between 9:30 – 10:00, returning between 3:30 – 4:00. The first stop is at a 15th century oil mill in Niguelas, where participants learn about the olive oil process and the different varieties and characteristics of olives, then it’s on to an exhibition of more than 300 olive oils at a museum in Vélez de Benaudalla, followed by a tasting and time to purchase in the shop. The visit continues with a drive through the Lecrín Valley countryside and culminates with a paella lunch in a typical Andalusian mesón. Book at www.oliveoiltour.com.

ENTERTAINMENT
For relaxing, Arab sultan style, in a traditional Moorish bathhouse, a reproduction hammam, there are two bathhouses from which to choose:

**Aljibe Baños Arabes** - San Miguel Alta, 41, at the corner of Obispo Hurtado, is open daily, including holidays with passes at 10:00 am – 12:00 – 2:00 – 4:00 – 6:00 – 8:00 and 10:00 pm. Choose between a session in the hot and cold baths in 7 different pools of varying temperatures, or take the waters followed by a massage and aromatherapy. A simple bathing session costs 17€ and the second option, 26€, 28€ on weekends. The bathhouse is only closed on Christmas Day. For a reservation call 958 522 867 (www.aljibesanmiguel.es)

**Hammam** - Calle Santa Ana, 16, off the Plaza Nueva, offers the same services as the above, but with an additional late night pass at 11:30. Reserve online at: www.granada.hammamspan.com.

**Flamenco**
Although the city of Granada has produced some of the country’s great flamenco artists,
it can no longer be considered the premiere spot, outside of major festivals, for experiencing the most genuine flamenco. The various tablaos or zambras in the caves of Sacromonte, from a flamenco purist point of view, simply don’t put on a highly authentic or inspired show, full of duende (roughly defined as “soul”) because they are geared solely to tourists. If you plan to travel on to Seville or Jerez, I suggest that you save your flamenco experience for those cities.

The only flamenco I recommend for authenticity would be the occasional Saturday night performances at the Centro Internacional de Estudios Gitano La Chumbera on Camino del Monte in the Sacromonte neighborhood. Pick up a performance schedule at the tourist office.

A private, members-only flamenco club, or peña, Peña Platería (www.laplateria.org.es), found deep in the heart of the Albaicín, at Placeta de Toqueros, 7, near San Miguel Bajo, opens its doors to non-members for its regular performances on Thursdays, and sometimes on Saturdays if visitors come in a small enough group. Performances begin at 10:30 pm. Inquire at the tourist office.

The International Festival of Music and Dance in late June-July includes on its yearly program the most important flamenco figures in Spain, such as Sara Baras, Antonio Canales, Eva Yerbabuena. And during the Festival de Otoño, the first week of December, the brightest stars of the flamenco world come to perform at the Teatro Isabel la Católica, Acera Del Casino.

**Live music**

Hidden away on Postigo de la Cuna, a little alleyway off Calle Azacayas (look for the name painted on the white wall), which is off the Gran Vía, you’ll find a dark and smoky little bohemian bar and cavernous performing space, El Eshavira, where live jazz, world music and impromptu flamenco are performed on Thursdays and Sundays.

Also you can hear flamenco music at Bar Soniquete on the Carrera del Darro, 51, on Friday and Saturday at 11:00 pm. Cover charge: 10€, includes the first drink.

**Dance clubs**

A restored cinema is the venue for Granada, 10, which plays movies and serves drinks during the evening and after midnight; it is transformed into a disco that hops until 6:00 am. Located just off the Gran Vía at Calle Cárcel Baja, below Calle Elvira.
MY ACCOMMODATIONS GUIDE

How to choose your Granada lodgings

The Alhambra Hill
The Hill is best suited for those who seek romance, peace, quiet and seclusion away from the cacophony of bustling and always noisy downtown Granada. For those who dream of taking moonlit strolls in the woods around the Alhambra grounds, with the murmur of gurgling fountains, water cascading from the many watercourses, the air redolent of oleander, myrtle and jasmine, this is your magic place. It’s perfect for honeymooners and first time visitors spending only a night or two, and for those who arrive in the city by car, as it’s a breeze to reach via the Ronda Sur, which handily circumvents completely the confusing downtown maze.

The Albaicín
For young laid-back romantics, Washington Irving-Richard Ford types, who want to be transported back to the Oriental realm and who can overlook the graffiti, don’t mind the noise and don’t mind negotiating the narrow, very steep streets, almost all of which are closed off to traffic.

Downtown
For those who arrive by train, plane or bus and wish to be in the center of the city action, who want a downtown buzz and wish to partake of the nightlife. Also for those who demand 5-star luxury hotels appointed with full service spas and gourmet restaurants (Hotels Villa Oniria, Hospes Palacio de los Patos, AC Palacio de Santa Paula)

LODGING FOR ROMANTICS AND HONEYMOONERS

On the Alhambra hill

Luxury

4-star Parador San Francisco *
For those who dream of a small, romantic, atmospheric, secluded, utterly peaceful and historically significant hotel, this Parador, with the most highly coveted rooms in the Parador system, just can’t be beat (www.parador.es). Although it is the most expensive Parador in the crown and must be booked months in advance, it is worth the one time splurge for those who love Spanish Paradors and want to sleep literally within the Alhambra grounds. The Parador, or Convento de San Francisco, in fact, was the first religious building in Granada erected by Fernando and Isabel after the capture of the city. Here they established a Franciscan convent whose chapel later served as the Royal Monarchs’ temporary burial quarters. Their remains were interred here until 1521, when they were moved to more regal quarters in the cathedral’s Royal Chapel. The convent suffered considerable damage during the Napoleonic occupation in the early 1800s. It was inaugurated as a Parador in 1944 and has housed a long list of illustrious guests including Salvador Dali, Arthur Rubenstein, Andrés Segovia, Grace Kelly and Prince Rainier (on their honeymoon) and President Johnson.
Its original 40 rooms have been recently transformed, 4 rooms (all standard) are brand new, added during the recent renovation, and all newly decorated guest chambers sport a contemporary look, in soft colors, and brand new baths. The front desk area has been spiffed up as well, and the solarium has an enlarged reflecting pool with sun loungers, but no swimming pool. Rooms 205, 206 and 207 boast terraces, and the hotel has only two suites, 203 and 304. Suite 304 is a two-story loft space with Jacuzzi tub in the bath. The new restaurant and bar area were finished on June 15, and dining is open to the general public. Parking is free as is Wi-Fi access throughout the hotel. But since the Parador San Francisco is Spain’s very most popular Parador, it’s wise to book at least six months to a year in advance. And because of its extreme popularity, the Parador does not offer rooms during low season on the Parador 5-night discount plan.

**Moderately Expensive**

**4-star Alhambra Palace * **

Before I discovered the lovely guesthouse below, the Alhambra Palace had been my Granada hotel of choice since 1971 ([www.h-alhambrapalace.es](http://www.h-alhambrapalace.es)). This legendary, grand Old European style hotel was commissioned in 1910 by the Duke of San Pedro de Galatino and built in a park-like setting on the Alhambra hill at Peña Partida, 2. Its bold pinkish salmon, neo Moorish exterior can be spotted from far away, and it has become almost as much of a landmark as the Alhambra itself.

The lavish pseudo Moorish interiors, which a few find gaudy, but most find harmonious, are meant to transport guests back to the times of the Nasrid dynasty, as the delicate stuccowork with Kufic calligraphy, the horseshoe arches, the coffered ceilings duplicate those of the neighboring Nasrid palace. Guest rooms provide the usual four-star comforts along with pretty green; blue and tile work in the spacious baths. The terrace is THE place to be on the hill at sunset. Those who book one of the eleven jr. suites or suites with terraces overlooking the city and the snow capped Sierra Nevada, will be in heaven.

**Moderate**

**3-star Carmen de la Alcubilla del Caracol **

An oasis of charm, tranquility and exquisite taste, this delightful B&B is found just below the Hotel Alhambra Palace, at the top of the Realejo neighborhood, on the slopes of the
Alhambra hill. The friendly and refined owner, Manuel, takes much pride in his second home and great care of his guests. Manuel is very, very much a “hands on” host, who loves to educate visitors in the history of his beloved city. Manuel is a professor who teaches fine arts at the University of Granada, and his guest house reflects his profession and passion, with its walls adorned with the family’s impressive original art collection, and with sitting room coffee tables piled high with beautiful art tomes. Manuel spends considerable time each morning during the breakfast hours devising daily detailed touring itineraries for his guests and dispensing dining and entertainment advice while preparing his guests’ coffee and delicious pan con tomate. His afternoon and evening helpers, Ana and Paula, both speak excellent English and provide each guest with equally personalized service (www.alcubilladelcaracol.com).

The house has a total of eight guest quarters distributed on three levels. One downstairs bedroom is handicapped accessible, but there is no elevator to the upper floors. All of the beautiful, individually decorated rooms have their own unique charms. Other favorites are La Buganvilla and La Glicenia, which have direct access to the handsome verandah. In the garden, whose cypresses have been immortalized by Spanish impressionist, Joaquin Sorolla, you’ll find orange and lemon trees and walkways of intricate geometric stone patterns. The minute you step into the garden, you’ll feel a sense of privacy and peace, blissfully removed from the cacophony of downtown Granada.

La Torre (my personal favorite) is the most requested bedroom, the tower room at the top of the house, affording absolute privacy, with a delectable terrace overlooking the entire city and the Sierra Nevada. This is a highly romantic space, and the floor-to-ceiling windows afford spectacular sunrise and sunset views. The bedroom is outfitted with a comfortable king bed, a large wardrobe, flat screen TV with satellite channels and a writing desk, the robin’s egg blue walls decked out with contemporary art.

The continental breakfast, consisting of toast or tomato bread, cold cuts, fruit, cereal, juice and coffee is served on the terrace or on marble top tables in the downstairs breakfast room/bar. The bar is self-service at night, after Manuel’s helpers leave at 11 pm. The staff is happy to serve you a drink and/or a snack in the bar or on the terrace but does ask guests not to bring food and beverages into the house from the outside, and guest quarters do not have mini bars. Since this is a small inn rather than full service hotel, the house is not (yet) equipped with Wi-Fi, although guests are welcomed to use the front desk computer to check email or check in online for their flights.

In the reception area guests will find a plethora of brochures, maps, business cards, guide
and history books about the city. Guests are asked to leave their room keys in the basket at the reception desk each morning before departing for sightseeing. Guests are given a key to the outside gate, which is kept locked, so the house is perfectly secure.

Since the inn is located on a very steep, cobblestone way that winds its way down below the Torres Bermejas and Carmen de San Miguel restaurant (where there is free car parking), it really isn’t suitable for those with serious mobility difficulties. And the walk down to the Realejo district shops is via some steep steps down the Real del Realejo (with handrails), but it’s only a five-minute walk to the lively tapas bars on the Campo del Príncipe Square. The Alhambra entrance pavilion is around a ten-minute uphill walk.

If you plan to arrive by car, Manuel will send you very specific instructions to reach the top of the street (where the Carmen de San Miguel restaurant is located) and warn you not to use your GPS (you’ll understand why when you arrive). Then simply call Manuel upon arrival, and he or a helper will come to free you of your car, park it in his garage below (or on the street), handle your bags and upon your departure will bring your car up to you pointed in the right direction for an easy exit.

If you are arriving in Granada by plane, Manuel will send his trusted taxi driver to meet you. I took advantage of this service (which costs 30€) for an easy return to the airport.

The hotel has been featured in Mi Casa and Man magazine, along with the Hoteles con encanto, Charming Hotels Guide.

I have enjoyed Manuel’s warm hospitality immensely (and think he’s a “gem” of an innkeeper), and I find this intimate Carmen to suit my needs and tastes perfectly. Those who prefer the anonymity of a large 4 & 5-star chain hotel and more bells and whistles (such as mini bars, coffee/tea making facilities, elevator, ATM, soda machines, pool or in house restaurant) may not be so enamored of the highly personalized and intimate experience this lodging provides. The Carmen has been rated number one in popularity on Trip Advisor (www.tripadvisor.com). I suggest that you read through the guest reviews there to decide if this type of hostelry fits your particular travel style.
Upper Budget to Moderate

1-star Hotel América

When I’ve been restricted by serious budget constraints or simply haven’t wanted to splurge for the Parador or Alhambra Palace, I’ve also stayed in the homey, cozy, and quaint rather than luxurious little Hotel América, situated immediately below the Parador on Calle Real de la Alhambra (www.hotelamericaagranada.com). It’s a whitewashed family run inn with only 16 rather petite rooms, built in the mid-19th century as a private home, the summer residence of a Duchess, and run as a hotel since 1919 by the Garzón family.

Downstairs you’ll find a cute but cluttered sitting room chock-a-block with ferns and statues, walls decorated with mirrors, oils and ceramics plus an interior courtyard adorned with grape vines and more plants, where lunch is served on blue and white tile tables under the trellises.

The bedrooms are simply furnished with wrought iron or carved wooden headboards, Andalusian rugs on terracotta floors, and most are quite small, but they do have renovated bathrooms. No TV, no mini-bar, no in-room safe (guests may leave valuables in the front desk safe), but rooms do come appointed with telephone, a/c and free Wi-Fi. The inn has one suite with a separate sitting room, and one double room does sport its own terrace. Rates are from a low of 110€ for a simple double to 189€ for the suite, or double, with terrace. The dining room is not open on Fri./Sat. And the entire hotel closes from November until the first of March. The América receives one red gable for charm in the ’08 Michelin guide.

3-star Hotel Guadalupe

This tidy two-star hotel built in 1969, sandwiched between souvenir shops and across from the Alhambra parking lot number 1, and far more prosaic than those above, represents a solid value for the budget traveler (www.hotelguadalupe.es). Guest quarters are distributed on two floors and in an annex (whose rooms are rather dark and should be avoided). Some rooms on the top floor have balconies facing the Alhambra complex, and all are equipped with flat screen satellite TV (CNN), mini bar, writing desk and a/c, but no in-room safe - leave valuables in the front desk safe. Room 305 is a large double with windows overlooking the Alhambra. Room 412 has a huge balcony also with those captivating Alhambra views. This little “good value” hotel is kept spotlessly clean and is very quiet, and its restaurant serves a decent, well priced evening meal. There is a computer in the lobby for guests’ use, and the desk staff has been praised as friendly and helpful.

Downside: it does accept motor coach groups, and some guests have remarked about noisy plumbing and hard mattresses. Those who stay here receive a discount for Alhambra parking, which reduces the daily parking lot charge to 13€.
**In the Albaicín**

**Moderate to Moderately Expensive**

**3-star Casa Morisca**

On Cuesta de la Victoria at the end of the Carrera del Darro, 600 yards from the Plaza Nueva this arguably is the most atmospheric lodging option in the quarter. A 15th century restored three-storey town house (Casa Morisca = "Moorish home") with 14 rooms and one suite located around and above a lovely interior courtyard with gurgling pool. The word Morisco refers to the Muslims who remained in Christian Spain after the 1492 re-Conquest. The wooden gallery where the guest rooms are found is original to the home, painstakingly restored. Guests enter this little guesthouse through an enormous oak door, and the sensation is akin to stepping into a little piece of Morocco in Granada, like staying in a Casablanca Riad with exquisite North African furnishings and bright kilims adorning the floors ([www.hotelcasamorisca.com](http://www.hotelcasamorisca.com)).

So the feel here is that of a lovingly renovated home rather than a hotel, transporting guests back to the pre-Re-Conquest Moorish glory days. The owner-architect, Carlos Sánchez, says that what makes the house unique is the convergence of Renaissance, Gothic and Islamic architectural elements. Sánchez won the National Restoration Award in for his labor of love.

Splurge for the Mirador suite (€198) in the tower with breathtaking views of the Alhambra, even from the bathroom. It boasts an original poly chromed coffered mudéjar ceiling, a separate sitting area with six-foot silk sofa and a separate cozy sleeping alcove. Rooms 14 and 15 (in the tower) also have Alhambra views, and room 10 has a sitting area. Avoid room 2 next to the reception desk.

Breakfast is taken in the cellar, a cave-like grotto, with white brick barrel-vaulted ceiling, which is quite charmingly decorated. Breakfast is a buffet of hot dishes and freshly squeezed O.J. There are glimpses of the Alhambra also to be had from the patio garden where guests can rest from a long day of sightseeing with a drink (there is no bar, so you can bring your own beverage). The home offers high speed Wi-Fi access throughout. The helpful staff receives many accolades from Trip Advisor reviewers. Inns of Spain, JP Moser, Rusticae, Tablet Hotels and i-escape.com represent this boutique property. It is also featured in Sawday’s Special Places to Stay/Spain and has been recommended by Travel & Leisure.

**Downside:** Don’t expect hotel-like services, as this is a guesthouse for young romantics who don’t need handholding and are willing to forgo standard hotel amenities. Also it’s extremely difficult to reach by car, down a narrow street, which is normally closed to vehicles save for the Alhambra bus and taxis, and which is clogged with pedestrians at all hours. Although the hotel will give you detailed instruction to reach the house and will save you a parking space on the street, reaching the inn can be a stress-inducing experience. Come here to stay without a car!
Ladrón de Agua
This member of Relais de Silence and Rusticae, a group of charming boutique hotels, is located directly on the narrow pedestrian clogged and local traffic choked Carrera del Darro, which runs along the Darro river, directly facing Al-Sabika hill and the Alhambra citadel. It’s another exquisite 16th century palace-home built around a central courtyard, recently converted to a sophisticated little inn (www.ladrondeagua.com). But unlike the Casa Morisca, the courtyard with its marble floors and Tuscan columns is decorated in a pared down contemporary style. Each of the 15 rooms carries the name of a poem or line of poems, and 8 have Alhambra views, and some sport Jacuzzi baths. Rooms come equipped with a/c and flat screen satellite TV. While the bedrooms maintain their original coffered ceilings and Moorish ceiling lamps and have terracotta floors covered by oriental rugs, the bedroom furnishings are spare and uncluttered. Deluxe room Isabel II Sueño boasts Alhambra views both from the bedroom and the Jacuzzi. There is a computer terminal for guests’ use in the downstairs library, and breakfast is taken in a cave-like basement breakfast room. This boutique inn receives solid reviews on TripAdvisor and has been awarded a “Q” for quality.

Room Mate Migueletes
A less quirky-charming, more dependable “hotel-like” property, this Room Mate (one of three in Granada) is also located just off the Carrera del Darro in the lower Albaicín. One enters through a pretty, open courtyard (although the retractable canvas cover over it could use a thorough cleaning - a minor quibble). The Migueletes does have an elevator (don’t accept a room near the elevator because of the noise), but rooms are scattered about in a warren of different levels, some in hidden nooks and crannies and accessible only by steps. Rooms are pleasantly decorated with pretty Castilian furniture and carved headboards, and free Wi-Fi is available. Room 26 enjoys Alhambra views and carries a €20 supplement. The vast Alhambra suite sports a four-poster bed, huge sitting area and bath with separate Jacuzzi room and double sinks. But at a rate of 340€ - 350€, this suite costs even more than a deluxe room at the Parador.

Daily newspapers are provided in the downstairs library-lounge, along with a computer terminal. Sherry and snacks are served in the evening in the bodega (although not during holidays).

Breakfast here is also taken in the bodega-a cave-like basement room, and as is the case at most Room Mates, the ample buffet, consisting of meats, cheeses, fruit, cereals and pastries, is served until noon. The friendly, young staff provides a handy restaurant guide.

Downside: Guests need to carry their own bags 100 yards down a narrow cobblestone alleyway to reach the entrance, as taxis cannot enter. Some rooms are quite small and suffer from noise emanating from the courtyard, and the rooms are not particularly well soundproofed. Stay here only if car free (www.room-matehoteles.com).

Two (more economical) Room Mate cousins have opened in Granada in ’08: The 33-room, contemporary looking Leo, on Mesones 15, downtown, near the cathedral, and the 19-room Shalma, downtown, on Plaza Fortuny in the Realejo neighborhood. These two
offer the same Room Mate amenities such as free Wi-Fi throughout the hotel, an internet corner in the lobby, free buffet breakfast served until noon, flat screen TVs, American sized towels.

**Budget**

**3-star Casa del Capitel Nazarí**

Recommended with reservations ([www.hotelcasacapitel.com](http://www.hotelcasacapitel.com)). Although it is a selection in Alistair Sawday’s Special Places to Stay/Spain and i-escape.com, and is described as “cozy and quaint”, some rooms here seem quite dark and look out over derelict houses rather than the Alhambra. It is a Renaissance palace-home, built in 1503, complete with interior courtyard lined with marble columns and wooden galleries built around it, but it lacks some of creature comforts that my other recommended accommodations have—an elevator, for example, and direct Alhambra views. Like the Room Mate Migueletes, there is no direct taxi access up this small alley, so guests need to carry their own bags up from the street. Guests have commented on noise from other rooms when staying in the bedrooms located around the courtyard. But for eurosavers, free coffee and tea are available all day, and the price is certainly right. Again, this is a budget choice for young romantics who come to Granada sans car. It’s featured in the Rick Steves guide.

**Downtown**

**Luxury**

**5-star AC Palacio de Santa Paula** *

This AC Selection hotel ([www.ac-hoteles.com](http://www.ac-hoteles.com)) is my favorite luxury lodging in Granada, housed in a reconverted 16th century monastery, right in the heart of downtown on the Gran Vía within easy walking distance of the cathedral and the Plaza Nueva. The building actually consists of the reconverted monastery with an ancient Moorish home (casa morisca) attached, along with a contemporary wing, where the reception hall lies. The romantic restaurant sits in the former refectory, next to the beautiful courtyard, the former monastery cloister. The hotel offers handy valet parking for its garage (garage parking costs 18€/day), and it supplies fitness buffs with a downstairs gym plus sauna, Turkish bath and Jacuzzi. Also downstairs adjacent to the restaurant and cloister you’ll find an attractive reading room where newspapers, including the IHT, are provided.

The hotel has 115 rooms, eleven jr. suites and four suites distributed among the original monastery section, Moorish house and modern wing. The very modern (standard) rooms
in the new wing more spacious and well appointed than the usual AC corporate type rooms. But they lack the charm of the superior rooms arranged around the stunning cloister or the very secluded superior rooms in the Casa Morisca, which have their own private interior courtyard. All baths are decorated with beautiful Moorish tiles and offer the customary ample selection of AC bath amenities. Arguably the “best” room is number 121 with original artesonado (coffered) ceiling and 17th century ceramic candleholders above the beds. The AC buffet breakfast almost rivals in variety and quality that of the Paradors and is served for an additional 19€. Turndown service leaves a chocolate and weather forecast on one’s pillow. The red #32 minibus, that serves the Alhambra and the Albaicín, stops close by, at the Plaza Isabel la Católica, and there is a city bus stop right outside the door. Is a selection of Lugares Divinos (www.lugaresdivinos.com) and a member of the Small Leading Hotels of the World.

5-star Hospes Palacio de los Patos *

Although its official address is Solarillo de Gracia, the front of this impressive turn-of-the-century palace-mansion faces the very noisy and hectic shopping street of Calle Recogidas, which constitutes its only drawback (www.hospes.es). On this busy and congested thoroughfare, this exquisite manor is the odd man out. It gets its name, Palace of the Ducks, from the carved marble swans that guard the fountain at the entrance. This palatial neoclassical home, built by a sugar merchant, sat languishing behind its wrought-iron railings while the city grew up around it, until it was rescued and restored by the Hospes group who made this local landmark into a luxury 42-room boutique hotel. Despite its less than stellar location, there is much “to wow about” here. The first “wow” comes when contemplating the stunning carved white marble staircase that leads to the 22 sumptuous bedrooms upstairs. The upstairs guest rooms of the original mansion maintain their delicate original freezes above the doorways and have been done in a restful white, silver and cream color palette and have whimsical modern touches such as mirrored bedside cubes serving as night tables. Room 30 is the former library and the Hospes design team has maintained its dark wood bookshelves and original wardrobe. The outstanding feature of the grand presidential suite is its magnificent trompe l’oeil ceiling along with its huge walkout balcony, although it unfortunately looks out on the busy thoroughfare.

The 20 guestrooms located in the very contemporary Alabaster annex, although very ample in size, have less character with their pared down, minimalist look and trendy furnishings plus their humdrum views of an adjacent apartment building. However, in this minimalist modern building, you’ll find the Bodyna spa, the crown jewel of these Hospes hotel spas, along with a Senzone restaurant, now considered one of the top gourmet spots in the city. The Bodyna Spa boasts a wonderful indoor pool with Jacuzzi, Turkish bath, sauna and gym. The Senzone restaurant offers terrace seating for dinner in the garden. Other hotel amenities include the signature AC free mini bar, natural bath essences, bathrobes and slippers in guest rooms, a DVD library, 24-hour room service and a garage. This is also a selection of Lugares Divinos (www.lugaresdivinos.com).
5-star Villa Oniria *
Like the Hospes, this is yet another palatial home dating from the 19th century, recently reconverted into a luxury boutique hotel (www.villaoniria.com). And along with the Palacio de los Patos it offers a garden setting, interior patio with fountain, a SPA and gastronomic restaurant but is smaller and more intimate and with a more peaceful location, yet just 100 meters from the Puerta Real. The interior design was created by decoratorto-royalty, Pascua Ortega, designer of the interiors of Madrid’s Hesperia and Orfila hotels.

Its 31 rooms are appointed with plasma TV, Internet access, bath with separate rain shower, Penhaligon toiletries. But as with many design hotels, only a semi-transparent wall separates the sleeping area from the bath. Alvaro Arriaga, a Basque who trained with Michelin starred Pedro Subijana at Akelarre in San Sebastián, directs the kitchen of La Fábula, the hotel’s gourmet dining space. But reviewers remark that the young dining room staff still needs to hone its skills. The spa offers a lap pool, sauna, Jacuzzi, gym and massage treatments. For well-heeled romantics and honeymooners, it would be difficult to choose among the three-Villa Oniria, the AC Palacio de Santa Paula and Hospes Palacio de los Patos. They all provide valet parking, which is a godsend in this traffic-chocked city. This boutique property is another selection of Rusticae, a group of charming boutique inns and bookable through www.innsofspain.com.

Coming in April
A 5-star property from the Fontecruz Hotel group (www.fontecruz.com), the owners of Toledo’s 5-star Palacio de Eugenia de Montijo, will open on Gran Vía de Colón, 20, across from the AC Palacio de Santa Paula. This new luxury hotel has kept the classical façade of the historic building but its interior space will be avant-garde. It and will have 41 guests rooms (doubles, jr. suites and a presidential suite), a spa/solarium, and roof top terrace with Alhambra views. Its restaurant will be supervised by chef Iván Álvarez de Santamaría of the Fontecruz Palacio de Arenales in Cáceres. The hotel is currently running an inaugural promotion of 120 for a double rooms and buffet breakfast along with welcome cocktail (7% vat is additional). This offer will be available every day except from April 30 - May 4, May 14 - 17 and June 10 - 14.

Moderate
3-star Palacio de los Navas
A 19-room boutique property on pedestrian Calle de los Navas, this Palacio was built by a Granadino aristocrat, Francisco Navas, in the 16th century and later became the Mint, Casa de la Moneda (www.palaciodelosnavas.com). It has a very charming and cozy blend of the traditional and new. Upon opening the heavy wood door, one comes upon an antique desk where guests register and on into a pretty and relaxing interior courtyard with gurgling fountain, tables and chairs for enjoying a drink and sofa and arm chairs where one can catch up on reading or plan the next day’s touring. In the gallery above lie the 19 individually decorated rooms, distributed on five floors, done in soft creams and whites with high ceilings that give them both a luminous and spacious look. The rooms
are well appointed with flat screen TV, a/c, safe, mini bar, bathrobes and slippers. The Palacio is easily reachable by taxi, handy to the tapas bars of Navas and within an easy walk of the downtown monuments, yet it seems removed from “tourist central”. This is the Conde Nast Johansens Guide selection for Granada that I most enthusiastically recommend, along with the more luxurious, and more expensive, Hospes.

Budget

3-star Hotel Reina Cristina
Owned by the Jiménez family, this small typically Andalusian hotel has a lovely central patio that oozes typical Granadino style: marble floors and fountain, antique mirrors, original watercolors, lanterns and plants cascading from the guestroom windows above. Rooms are appointed with safes, satellite TV, mini bars. Room and laundry services are also available. The bar is frequented by locals, as is the restaurant, El Rincón de Lorca. In the 1930s this small hotel was a home that belonged to the Rosales family, where the poet Federico García Lorca spent his final days (www.hotelreinacristina.com). It enjoys an excellent downtown location, just steps from the cathedral and near the delightful Plaza Bib-Rambla. It’s also a Rick Steves pick.

3-star Hotel Anacapri
Joaquín Costa 7, another Rick Steves guide budget selection, offers 49 rooms and is handily positioned downtown between the Plaza Isabel la Católica and Plaza Nueva, just a short walk from the cathedral (www.hotel-anacapri.com). It’s housed in an 18th century Granadino mansion and maintains the lovely interior marble courtyard, which is attractively decorated with vases of flowers, plants, oil paintings and wicker furniture. The guest quarters come equipped with mini bar, satellite TV, a/c, hairdryers but older furniture and plain wooden floors. Some have maintained their beamed wood ceilings, and a few are loft-like suites that sleep up to 5 persons and have a living room with sofa and coffee table. Downstairs the hotel offers a reading room with television and a handy bar and cafeteria, open from 8:00 am - 11:00 pm, where the buffet breakfast (continental) is served from 8:00 - 10:30 am. Other amenities include laundry and pressing services and WiFi. Kathy, an American from Iowa, mans the front desk and gets rave reviews for her helpfulness and knowledge of the city.

At the entrance into the city

4-star Macía Real de la Alhambra
The primary reason to choose this new 4-star business class property would be for the ease of reaching it when traveling to Granada by car (www.maciahoteles.com). The primary disadvantage: its further distance to the sights, but city buses stop 50 yards from the hotel entrance - one bus takes guests downtown, another goes up to the Access Pavilion of the Alhambra. And a taxi to the center will cost a bit under 4€. In addition, the parking garage costs only 8€ rather than 18€ - 20€ in garages which lie within the
city’s “Moorish-maze” core, plus street parking usually is readily available. The 185 rooms are sparsely decorated but all have the usual four-star amenities, including free Wi-Fi. The hotel serves an ample buffet breakfast for only €9 pp.

If you choose to go this route, to stay in this “off center” but easily reachable hotel, be sure to request an upper floor room with views of the Sierra Nevada.

Another plus here: the outdoor pool, really quite important for families with children traveling to Granada in the sweltering months of July and August. The hotel is rated #2 in popularity on Trip Advisor due to its low price-high quality ratio, its pool and ease of access. Children under 12 are free. It’s easier and quicker to find than other hotels because it lies at the end of the Ronda Sur, the ring road, so to reach it one can completely avoid the stress-inducing downtown traffic.