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'Lijiang has a fantasy feel after dark, when red lanterns illuminate the maze-like alleys'

Tom Chesshyre explores southwest China

MILENA MONTI



2 La Joya de Cabo de Gata

Where to stay in Andalusia

This is the perfect time to book a trip to southern Spain. **Helen Ochyra** picks the 20 coolest fincas, B&Bs and hotels

1 Balcon de Cordoba Cordoba

This 17th-century Andalusian home is in the heart of Cordoba's Unesco-listed Old Town. Its ten quiet rooms are arranged round three courtyards, its terrace looking the Mezquita in the eye. The rooms share the same cream and olive-toned decor,

but each is different — book Ruzbahan or Maryam for a private terrace. Pairi Daeza restaurant serves local cuisine with a Middle Eastern flavour at tables that overlook the main courtyard garden. Look out for the archaeological artefacts around the hotel.

Details B&B doubles are from £185 a night (00 34 957 49 84 78, balcondecordoba.com). Fly to Seville

2 La Joya de Cabo de Gata Agua Amarga

Everything is slow at Charo's eco-retreat, except perhaps for the lizards you'll see darting across the surrounding desert wilderness. Dune-backed sandy beaches lie a short drive away, or you could stay right here, in a swaying hammock hung in a pepper tree or on a daybed by the Phoenician swimming pool. The three homely cottages sleep 2–4, and can be booked individually by the night. They are decorated with warmth and personality — think

reclaimed furniture and brightly painted shutters. All have bathrooms, kitchens and fireplaces.

Details: Cottages are from £104 room only (00 34 619 15 95 87, lajoyadecabodegata.es). Fly to Almería

3 La Casona de Calderon Osuna

If it's good enough for a *Game of Thrones* scene, it's good enough for us — an ancient bullring is the centrepiece of this appealing, but little-visited town just outside Seville. La Casona de Calderon sits a few steps away, just off the bustling main square, its 15 bedrooms wrapped round the courtyard of the 17th-century farmhouse. Each room is unique and quietly spectacular, with tiled floors, high ceilings and vases of flowers. Some rooms are split-level, others have four-poster beds, beamed ceilings and vast bathrooms.

Details Doubles are from £53 a night, room only (00 34 954 81 50 37, casonacalderon.es). Fly to Seville

4 La Fuente de la Higuera Near Ronda

Dramatic escarpments and a famous bridge help to make Ronda one of Spain's most visited villages. Come early to avoid the crowds, then retreat to this converted olive mill, a ten-minute drive into the hills and surrounded by olive groves. Soak up the sunshine by the pool during the day and stay in at night for fresh local seafood and vegetables grown in the garden. Dinner is served on the bougainvillea-cloaked terrace; rooms are romantic, with muslin-draped beds and open fires.

Details Doubles are from £165 a night, room only (00 34 952 16 56 08, hotellafuente.com). Fly to Malaga





5 Parador de Cadiz
Cadiz

Only those desperate to stay in a historic building at all costs will be disappointed by Cadiz's outpost of the state-owned hotel group. The modern building on the end of the peninsula has sleek rooms with huge balconies and a large outdoor pool that is soaked in sunshine. You could happily stay here all day (there's a poolside café bar), but it's worth taking the few steps out to La Caleta beach, or mustering the energy for a sunset walk along the seafront promenade of the city, said to be Spain's oldest.

Details B&B doubles are from £111 a night (00 34 902 54 79 79, parador.es). Fly to Jerez

6 Finca Cortesin Casares

Finca Cortesin has one of Spain's best golf courses, but this is not a haunt for the diamond jumper set. The elegant, spacious suites rival the average London flat in size, with marble bathrooms, king-size beds and private patio. The spa is one of the best in Spain too, and even has an ice cave. There's a chemical-free indoor pool and two outdoor pools, a beach club and that golf course, plus three restaurants (Japanese Kabuki Raw has a Michelin star). If you find yourself wanting to wrap up the hotel and take it home, you can buy the furniture.

Details Suites are from £440 a night, B&B (00 34 952 93 78 00, fincascortesin.com). Fly to Malaga or Jerez

7 Casa La Siesta
Near Vejer de la Frontera

Children under 16 are not allowed at this *cortijo*, which is surrounded by olive and orange trees. Each of the eight bedrooms is decorated in stone and wood, with beamed ceilings and antique tiled floors, and each has a private terrace. If you want some activity, there are two outdoor pools, yoga, bike hire and tapas tours of nearby Vejer with Annie B's Spanish Kitchen. Cookery classes and in-room massages can be arranged.

Details B&B doubles are from £256 a night (00 34 956 23 20 03, casalasiesta.com). Fly to Jerez

8 Almhalla 51 Archidona

A true escape, this adults-only B&B is tucked away in the virtually unknown town of Archidona, in the heart of Andalusia's olive country and within easy driving of all the main cities. This sporic whitewashed home is all nooks and



crannies, from the five bedrooms reached by creaking staircases to the shaded patios and sunny upper terrace with pool and views across town.

Details B&B doubles are from £77 a night (00 34 952 71 63 70, almohalla51.com). Fly to Malaga or Granada

9 La Fonda Barranco
Jerez de la Frontera

Jerez gave its name to sherry, and you're sure to give plenty of your time here to visiting the sherry houses and wineries. La Fonda Barranco, in the heart of the old Arab city, is ideally located for such a sherry-soaked tour.

Rooms in the 19th-century merchant's house range from basic to two penthouses that have living rooms and kitchenettes, and can sleep a family of four. Couples should book the "romantic double", which has two balconies, a canopied bed and a bathtub.

Details Doubles are from £47 a night, room only (00 34 956 33 21 41, lafondabarranco.com). Fly to Jerez

10 Barcelo La Bobadilla
Sierra de Loja

Midway between the Costa del Sol and Granada, this luxury hotel gives you the best of both worlds — the mountains one



day, the beach the next. It's surprisingly chic for a chain hotel and each room is different, although they all have stone floors, wooden furnishings and Arabic-style baths. Each also has a garden or balcony, and there are indoor and outdoor pools. Autumn is olive harvest season and the spa celebrates with a range of olive oil-inspired treatments that use the hotel's own olives.

Details B&B doubles are from £147 a night (0800 0211256, barcelo.com). Fly to Granada or Malaga

11 El Ladrón de Agua
Granada

This family-run "art hotel" is in the car-free Moorish quarter of Granada, at the foot of the Alhambra. The 16th-century mansion is all Andalusian, from the balconied courtyard at its centre to the local artwork on the walls, and the 15 bedrooms have typical terracotta-tiled floors, wood-panelled ceilings and chunky wooden shutters.

Deluxe rooms have Alhambra views, although the best is from the Generalife suite's private balcony. Book the suite and you'll get a bottle of cava on arrival, and all the guests can join the family every evening (7pm-9pm) for complimentary sherry in the library.

Details Doubles are from £94 a night, room only (00 34 958 21 50 40, ladroneagua.com). Fly to Granada



12 Cuevas Al Jatib Baza

Before air conditioning, the caves of the Altiplano were the one escape from the Andalusian heat. Once rustic dwellings, many have been given the boutique hotel treatment; at Cuevas Al Jatib, a lovingly updated hamlet of cave houses gives you the chance to sleep surrounded by whitewashed rock. The caves are cool in summer, but cosy in winter, and each has an open fire, full kitchen and space for additional beds (children will love it). There's also a hammam and outdoor pool, as well as a restaurant that serves local cuisine.

Details Doubles are from £39 a night, room only (00 34 958 34 22 48, aljatib.com). Fly to Granada

13 La Casa del Califa
Vejer de la Frontera

Vejer's most stylish hotel sits on the main square, its whitewashed 10th-century façade peeking out between the palm trees. Stairways and courtyards link rooms across eight houses, with some bedrooms looking out over the square and others facing the mountains. The Africa suite is loft-style and has views across the sea to Africa, while the Torre suite overlooks the square's medieval tower. Book ahead for dinner in the lush courtyard

14 Alqueria de Morayma
Alpujarras

Perched on the sunny southern flank of the Sierra Nevada mountains, this rural idyll feels a million miles from the nearby costas. Arranged round the farmstead is a collection of sleek and simple rooms and self-catering casas, all with mountain views and most with private terraces. Traditional Spanish dinners are served in the two restaurants and there's a winery producing organic vigiriega, merlot, cabernet sauvignon and syrah, as well as olives, figs and almonds that are harvested annually. If you're a walker, there are plenty of waymarked trails starting from the farm.

Details Doubles are from £61 a night, room only (00 34 958 34 32 21, alqueriamorayma.com). Fly to Granada or Almeria

15 Hostal Alcoba
Sanlúcar de Barrameda

Far more stylish than its name might

suggest, this little place has ten bright and breezy bedrooms looking out over shady gardens and a pool. Bright red rugs and bedspreads bring a splash of colour to the white decor, and even the smallest rooms are filled with light. The lounge has free newspapers and self-service tea, and there are bikes for hire and even flamenco dresses that you can borrow. Sanlúcar is the best base for exploring the Doñana national park, Europe's largest wetland reserve, and the hotel can help with booking boat trips, four-wheel-drive safaris and horse treks.

Details Doubles are from £52 a night, room only (00 34 956 38 31 09, hotelalcoba.com). Fly to Jerez

16 Hotel Mazagonia
Mazagon

This sophisticated hotel comes as a surprise in the windswept pine forests of Mazagon, its polished concrete walls and white sofas more Ibiza than Costa de la Luz. The large outdoor pool and terrace look out to sea, as do the bedrooms, all of which have a private balcony. It's a pleasant 15-minute stroll to Mazagon's beach and marina, but a car is recommended; there are numerous wide sandy beaches along this coastline and in the autumn you're likely to get one to yourself.

Details Doubles are from £74 a night,

room only (00 34 959 37 78 70, hotelmazagonia.com). Fly to Seville or Faro

17 Gran Melia Colon
Seville

This five-star hotel is all glamour from the moment you step into the pillared lobby, with its art nouveau stained glass dome and cherry red Philippe Starck chairs — there's even a hot tub on the roof. Rooms have gold-leaf headboards, reproductions of Spanish paintings and views of the surrounding city, while booking "red level" gives you access to a lounge with complimentary drinks and snacks. You'll also escape the buffet breakfast méele with an à la carte breakfast here. You can easily walk to all of Seville's main sights.

Details B&B doubles are from £173 a night (0808 2341953, melia.com). Fly to Seville

18 Casa Viña de
Alcantara Near Jerez

Once a hunting lodge, this coolly elegant country house hotel sits in the vineyards of the Del Río González-Gordon wine



estate. There are nine bedrooms; those upstairs are the cosiest, with beamed roofs and parquet floors. All have marble bathtubs, antique furniture and paintings by the owner's mother, Luisa. There's a comfy drawing room with an open fire, and a large outside pool is surrounded by grass and shaded by mature trees. You'll need your own transport because Jerez, the nearest town, is a ten-minute drive.

Details B&B doubles are from £138 a night (00 34 956 39 30 10, vinadalcantara.com). Fly to Jerez

19 Finca Buenvino
Sierra de Aracena

A stay at this finca feels like staying with friends. Sam and Jeannie relocated from Scotland to create a hilltop home from home. Each of the five guest rooms dotted round the family house is decorated differently — the pink room has a bathtub with views out over the sierra. Breakfast is served on the terrace or in the conservatory, and there's a saltwater pool with more hill views. Jeannie also cooks dinner, served at one big table on the terrace.

Details B&B doubles are from £120 a night (00 34 959 12 40 34, fincabuenvino.com). Fly to Seville

20 Enfrente Arte
Ronda

You need to know only one thing about this hip hotel's owner, Filip Eyckmans: he invented Bossaball, a volleyball-football-gymnastics hybrid played on an inflatable court. Imagine the sort of hotel such a man would operate, and that's Enfrente Arte. Nothing is purely functional: a gold Fiat 500 has become a bench seat, a bright blue hand protrudes from the wall of the swimming pool, and tyres have been turned into bar tables. Rooms are, naturally, all different. The standard rooms are cosy and on the ground floor, the deluxe has its own living room. You're a five-minute walk from the centre of Ronda too.

Detail B&B doubles are from £69 a night (00 34 952 87 90 88, enfrentearte.com). Fly to Malaga

