

# New route for Spain's poshest train the Al Andalus (think Orient Express) but what is it really like?

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Dilip Kuner

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**IT'S all change for Spain's most glamorous train journey – and it's never looked better.**

The iconic Al Andalus, dubbed the Orient Express of the South, has just revealed a brand-new itinerary for 2026. This time, the opulent, slow-moving palace on wheels will begin and end its journey in Madrid, with a stunning seven-day tour through some of the country's most iconic cities and heritage sites.

Think silver-service dining, four-poster beds on rails, and champagne toasts as the Spanish countryside glides past your velvet-draped window.

The revamped route takes in Sevilla, Cordoba, Jerez de la Frontera, Toledo, and the Royal Palace of Aranjuez, alongside new stops in Extremadura and Castilla-La Mancha.

Launched in the 1930s to ferry royals around Europe, the Al Ándalus still oozes Belle Époque charm – all silk sofas, wood-panelled walls, and soft, golden lighting.

Prices start at a cool €6,600 per person – but for that, you get a private suite, five-star food, a luxury coach for excursions, and your very own multilingual guide.

To mark the train's 40th anniversary, we're revisiting our own Yzabelle Bostyn's unforgettable journey aboard this roving relic of elegance. Below, she shares exactly what it's like to live like royalty – on rails.....



Yzabelle aboard the Al Andalus Express in 2024. Image: Olive Press

***SIPPING on a glass of ice cold Albarino as the last few rays of sunshine drench endless sunflower fields somewhere near Jerez, I wonder how life could get any better.***

If there is a secret recipe to happiness, the organisers of the Al-Andalus luxury train must know it.

This is the most exclusive way to tick Andalucia's renowned cities off your bucket list.

The luxurious trip naturally comes at a price, but from the taster Renfe gave the *Olive Press*, it's certainly worth it.



I never saw one guest frown during the entire journey, perhaps due to the quality food, great wine, delightful company and plenty of culture.

After walking the red carpet laid along the platform, I admired the historic cars, some of which date back to the 1920s.

The train was once used by the British monarchy while they holidayed in France and the staff still treat their guests today like royalty.

I have never been treated so well: after a day of sightseeing, it was a pleasure to return to the elegant wood panelled rooms, plush sofas and fresh drinks served by friendly, knowledgeable waiters who made every effort to get to know your likes and dislikes.

However, it was not until the end of the first day that we finally glimpsed Spain's answer to the Orient Express. More of which later.

The trip had kicked off at the sumptuous four star Hotel Taberna del Alabardero in the heart of Sevilla, setting the bar high.

The pleasant small talk of getting to know our fellow travellers was punctuated with a childlike excitement as we were presented with our tickets in shiny envelopes.

A healthy mix of English and Spanish speakers – who came from as far and wide as Brazil and Australia – were all given an audio guide, allowing us to seamlessly experience multilingual tours throughout Andalucia's best attractions.

In fact, the word seamless is a great way to summarise the whole trip.

The day begins at 8am, when the twinkling sound of a bell travels through the seven bed carriages to let travellers know breakfast is served.

**READ MORE: [These 3 beauty spots in Andalusia are among the 'must visit' areas in Spain, according to National Geographic](#)**



Photo: The Olive Press

Unraveling themselves from fluffy blankets and towel robes, guests venture out in search of caffeine.

In the restaurant car, elegant piano music drifts out of the speakers along with the aroma of fresh bread, jamon, fruit and more. Much more.

After ordering bespoke omelets and maybe even a mimosa or two, the adventures began at about 9.30am, usually with a city tour.

Knowledgeable and entertaining guides, provided a concise overview of our latest stop, alongside a variety of activities which showcased the unique cultural identity of the area.

**READ MORE: [I visited Setenil de las Bodegas – a town literally carved into rock in southern Spain... these are my tips](#)**



Photo: The Olive Press

In Sevilla, we toured the world famous Alcazar, where despite an earlier visit, I still learnt many more curious facts and grew to appreciate the city's multicultural identity as a cradle of Christian, Muslim and Jewish religions.

After the Alcazar, we wandered the area around the Alcazar, where the opera Carmen is set.

The sounds of Andalusian chatter, fluttering fans and flamenco floated towards us as we made our way to the Plaza de España, as if to make sure we knew we were in the birthplace of many Spanish traditions.

The street performers provided a taste of the flamenco show we were treated to later that afternoon in the Casa de la Memoria.

Dedicated to preserving the art of this folkloric tradition, the dancers oozed passion on stage with palpable chemistry that is so characteristic of the art.



Photo: The Olive Press

These cultural experiences (tours of the Alhambra, the Mezquita de Cordoba, Gonzalez Byass bodega, etc.) are without a doubt, the highlight of the Al-Andalus experience.

Visitors are only taken to the most iconic and very best venues, showcasing the incredible legacy of Andalucia.

From Sevilla, the train travels to Jerez, winding through infinite vineyards and olive groves set against a perfectly blue sky.

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Photo: The Olive Press

As we settled down to dinner, it was always hard to know whether you should concentrate on your food or take in the gorgeous views.

Travelling alone? Don't worry you'll soon be invited to a table, or will find everyone around you asking questions and making you feel at home.



Photo: The Olive Press

Each meal was meticulously designed to compliment the day's experiences, with wines from local vineyards and typical delicacies, such as queso payoyo in Ronda or seafood in Cadiz.

This was the ideal way to end the first day on the Al-Andalus, as the deliciously sweet sherry from our next stop, Jerez, lulled the guests into a restful evening.

The next morning, full of tostada con tomate drizzled with local olive oil, we set out on a day trip to Cadiz.

Passing over the salt fields, our tour leader, Maria, provided interesting tidbits to illuminate what could have easily been a mundane bus journey.

She pointed out flamingoes and told us about the area's traditional industry, explaining the word 'salary' comes from Roman times when local workers were paid in salt.

Once we arrived, the local Gaditano (Cadiz native) guides took over to gave a panoramic walking tour of the city's wonderful coastline and old town.

***[READ MORE: This little-known city an hour from Madrid makes the perfect day trip for history buffs and literature lovers](#)***



Photo: The Olive Press

Then, as always, we were given a comprehensive list of recommendations on how to spend our free time that afternoon.

Day trips are always finished with a sumptuous four-course lunch at a high quality restaurant, including Sanlucar de Barameda's Casa Bigote, which is an institution on the Guadalquivir river facing Donana National Park and rightfully in the Michelin guide.

Throughout the trip, evening events are held in the restaurant car or bar, including skilled guitarists, pianists and even magicians.

The 'Murder on the Al Andalus Express' magic show was a particular highlight, with funny, ingenious tricks that left every guest stumped.

Other highlights included the wine tour at the home of Tio Pepe in Jerez.



Photo: The Olive Press

Not only were the sherries delicious but they are rich in history with their enormous bodegas often termed the real 'cathedrals' of the city.

Of course, we could not leave the city without seeing the famous dancing horses at the Royal School of Equestrian Art.

Elegant and flawless, the show triumphed, picking up speed in the second half with complicated routines and impressive choreography.

We looked forward to our next excursion, a guided tour around Ronda, followed by free time.

Curiously, while including the typical elements of a picturesque old town and interesting churches, our tour of Ronda also included a visit to the bull ring.

One of the oldest in Spain and while I wasn't thrilled to be visiting it as a vegan, it was still interesting to learn about this part of Spanish culture.

Then, I grabbed an ice cream before heading down to the brand new Desfiladero del Tajo, where you can catch an iconic view of Ronda's famous bridge.

**[READ MORE: 'I visited Ronda's answer to the Caminito del Rey to test if it's just as hair-raising as the original – this is my verdict'](#)**



Photo: The Olive Press

After a meal at the parador surrounded by stunning views of the nearby countryside, we boarded the train to Cordoba.

The next morning, we had a whistle stop tour of the old town before visiting the mezquita and Michelin star restaurant, Casa Rubio.

A full-on day, we also visited the often missed but nonetheless worth seeing, Ubeda and an olive oil factory.

Then, it was time to watch the sun go down over the Andalucian countryside as we travelled to Granada.

An absolute must-see for any trip to Spain, we enjoyed an in depth tour of the breathtaking Alhambra palace before a delicious lunch at the Restaurante Carmen San Miguel.

That evening, the goodbye party was bittersweet as we didn't know when we would see our new found friends again.

Luckily, we had one final day in Malaga to look forward to, complete with a city tour and sumptuous meal.



Photo: The Olive Press

The trip is well balanced when it comes to rest, activities and entertainment while providing a great taste of the region's many jewels.

As the train passed through the Serrania de Ronda's miles of olive groves, I felt grateful to have been part of this truly magical journey.

The Al Andalus train is a special experience which holds itself to the highest standards... and only running a few dozen trips a year.

Each day is an indulgent dive into Andalucia's culture, history and gastronomy of which guests will never tire.

But, if they do, there's a deluxe bed waiting for them with a cold glass of wine just a phone call away.

The Al Andalus train is run by Renfe, with prices starting at €9,500 for a couple for six nights. Find out more here: [eltrenandalus.com](http://eltrenandalus.com)

**READ MORE: [MUST VISIT: This charming town once dubbed the 'rural capital' of Spain remains one of Andalusia's hidden gems](#)**

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