

cara

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48 HOURS IN MÁLAGA

Don't overlook this sun-soaked, open-air-museum of a city that's the cultural hub of Andalucía and the birthplace of Picasso. **Amanda Cassidy** reveals its many charms.

DON'T MISS

HIGH LIFE Three thousand years' worth of Roman, Moorish and Christian genius is etched into the polished cobbles of this historically hybrid city. Get lost on purpose amongst the turrets of the domineering **Alcazaba Fortress** perched along the trail to **Gibralfaro Castle**. The summit of this part-military base, part-Arabian palace rewards ambitious legs with apricot-coloured views over Málaga's horizon of jagged spires. (Calle Alcazabilla 2, +34 630 932 987)

HABLO PICASSO Among the world's oldest cities, Málaga's artistic history is often side-lined ahead of its position as tourist gateway to the Costa del Sol. But even non-art aficionados recommend **Museo Picasso Málaga**, located in the tangle of lanes near the Plaza Merced. Delve into the artist's eclectic career and gain a fascinating glimpse into the mind of the city's most famous son. (Palacio de Buenavista Calle San Agustín 8, +34 952 127 600; museopicassomalaga.org)

TUMBLING VINES Allow a full morning to appreciate the magical **La Concepción** botanical gardens, just 8km north of the city centre. This lush oasis, set across 23 hectares of forest walkways, is all palms and birdsong, citrus scents and water features. But the real showstopper is the 150-year-old wisteria arbour. Its billowy purple-pink magnificence reaches peak beauty in and around March/April. (Camino del Jardín Botánico 3, +34 951 926 179; laconcepcion.malaga.eu)



Clockwise from above, find wow-factor wisteria at La Concepción botanical gardens; experience light and shadow at Muelle Uno; a side view of the turreted Alcazaba Fortress, en route to Gibralfaro Castle; cool off in Anantara's inviting turquoise swimming pool; check out the culinary chops at La Deriva; chill out at the bombastic El Pimpi bar.

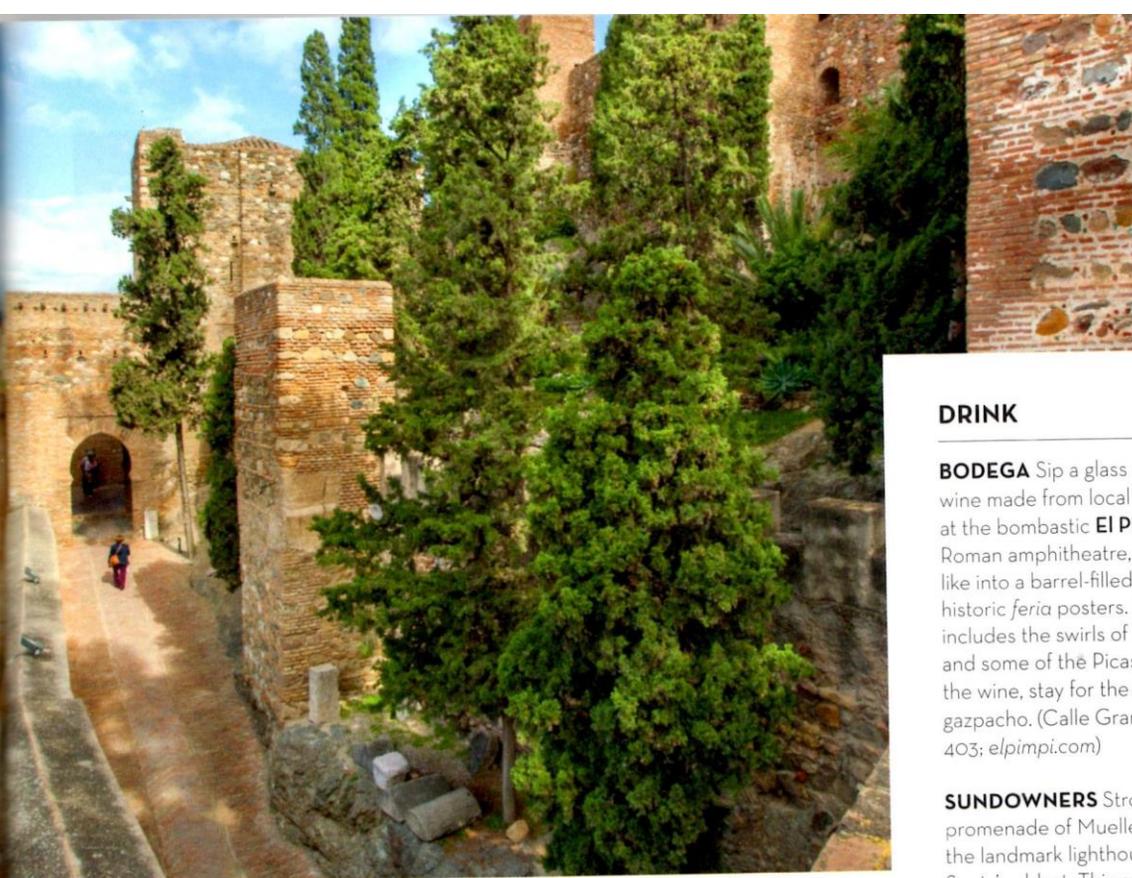


EAT

BOHO For a memorable meal in a city partly responsible for Southern Spain's gastronomic Renaissance, the cheerful **Casa Lola** is worth the queue. Tucked behind shuttered streets in the Old Town, here you'll eat elbow-to-elbow with Malagueños. Try the *bacalao ahumado* (smoked cod) and *pepito lola* (Iberian ham), then people-watch over steaming paella under the prettiest canopy of fairy lights. (Calle Granada 46, +34 952 223 814; tabernacasalola.com)

GRILLSVILLE Drift from the Medieval monuments, past the marble-paved shopping streets and towards the soft sand of Málaga's oldest fishing neighbourhoods, to try *espeto de sardinas* (skewers of fried and salted Mediterranean sardines). By the seafront at Pedregalejo, you'll find family-run **Chiringuito Gutierrez Playa**, where the quality is exceptional and prices reasonable. Delightful pre-siesta, toes-in-the-sand dining. (Calle Pacífico 29, +34 952 118 908)

CROWD-PLEASER A laid-back spot with serious culinary appeal, **La Deriva** is a terraced bistro with an extensive wine list (more than 200 to choose from) and some wacky tapas fusion. Experiment with silky saffron risotto, Galician lobster or beef tenderloin tacos. Wonky-wood furniture and guitar-jamming locals make for an authentic and atmosphere-laden Andalucían fiesta. (Alameda de Colón 7, +34 638 086 529; laderiva.es)



DRINK

BODEGA Sip a glass of Málaga Virgen (sweet wine made from local Pedro Ximénez grapes) at the bombastic **El Pimpi**. Overlooking a Roman amphitheatre, this bar winds warren-like into a barrel-filled den decorated with historic *feria* posters. Its signed wall of fame includes the swirls of Antonio Banderas and some of the Picasso family. Come for the wine, stay for the heavy-on-the-garlic gazpacho. (Calle Granada 62, +34 952 225 403; elpimpi.com)

SUNDOWNERS Stroll towards the tree-lined promenade of Muelle Uno Marina beside the landmark lighthouse La Farola, one of Spain's oldest. This once down-at-heel port is now a stylish shopping hub. On the second Sunday of each month, El Zoco market sells handmade crafts and local produce. Afterwards, grab a bucketful of icy beers (*cubos*) at the nautical-inspired **Cervecería la Sureña**. (Calle Muelle 1, +34 902 197 494; lasurena.es)

GLITTERATI Upscale, trend-hunter hangout **Terraza de Larios**, on the fifth floor of Mate Larios Hotel, offers a dazzling panorama of the golden skyline. Sip ice-laden Aperol Spritz with a gargoyle's-eye view of the mighty La Manquita Cathedral (translated as "one-armed lady", because of its unfinished tower). Packed at weekends, this buzzy rooftop bar is cool in all the right places. (Calle Marqués de Larios 2, +34 952 222 200; matehotels.com)

STAY

NOOK Down a small alley in the heart of the city, **Petit Palace Plaza** is located on the corner of Larios Street, one of the busiest shopping nubs. This dusty-pink, four-star hotel, run by charming staff and just steps from the main cathedral, offers 66 spacious, family-friendly rooms. The beach is a 15-minute walk away and guests can avail of free bicycle rental. Rooms from €71. (Calle Nicasio Calle 3, +34 952 222 132; petitpalace.com)

TRENDY With a finca-meets-New York-loft vibe, **Room Mate Valeria** overlooks the revamped marina in the trendy, yet down-to-earth, Soho District. Its dazzling Art Deco inspired design and clubby rooftop bar make it a fashionable spot for discerning travellers. Expect sustainable ethics (staff uniforms are made from recycled plastic) and no-nonsense pricing. Rooms from €135. (Plaza Poeta Alfonso Canales 5, +34 952 060 401; room-matehotels.com)

OPULENCE Further towards yacht-filled Marbella, the lavish **Anantara Villa Padierna Palace** sits among three award-winning golf courses. A sculpture-filled lobby, lined with Italian architectural prints, opens into a fountain-fringed pool courtyard. Indulge in the signature massage at its glorious five-star spa and don't miss the outstanding fine dining by two Michelin-star chef Paco Roncero.

This is a true VIP (Michelle Obama is a fan) haven. Rooms from €215. (Urbanización Los Flamings Golf, Carretera de Cádiz, Marbella, +34 952 889 150; anantara.com)

SMART FLIERS

AER LINGUS flies from Dublin to **MÁLAGA** up to twice daily and from Cork three times per week.

