

Wednesday, September 14th

The Alhambra and the magnificent gardens of the Generalife

For Delegates (full inscriptions, not student inscriptions) and Companions

14:00h Departure from the congress venue (Sercotel Gran Hotel Luna de Granada)

The most part of the technical and cultural visit is going to take place in the Alhambra and Generalife. After that, we will go for a walk by the the surroundings of the complex, going down by the eastern side (“*Cuesta del Rey Chico*”) towards the Darro river. Then, we will go through “*Paseo de los Tristes*” and the Darro Street (“*Carrera del Darro*”), until St. Anne Square (“*Plaza de Santa Ana*”), sited in the old downtown of Granada, where the visit will finish.



THE ALHAMBRA

The Alhambra is a palace and fortress complex located in Granada, Andalusia, Spain. It is placed on a strategic point, with a view over the whole city and the meadow (la Vega), and this fact leads to believe that other buildings were already on that site before the Muslims arrived.



Granada underneath the Alhambra

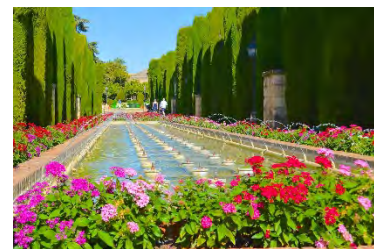
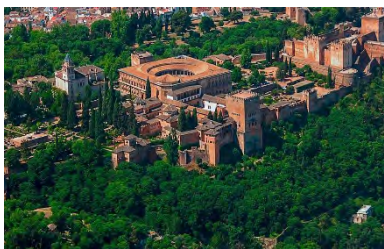
The Alhambra was so called because of its reddish walls (in Arabic, («*qa'lat al-Hamra'*» means Red Castle). It is located on top of the hill al-Sabika, on the left bank of the river Darro, to the west of the city of Granada and in front of the neighbourhood of the Albayzín.



Albayzín neighbourhood

It is now one of Spain's major tourist attractions, exhibiting the country's most significant and well-known Islamic architecture, together with 16th-century and later Christian building and garden interventions. The Alhambra, Generalife and Albayzín neighbourhood are UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Moorish poets described it as “*a pearl set in emeralds*”, an allusion to the colour of its buildings and the woods around them. The palace complex was designed with the mountainous site in mind and many forms of technology were considered. The park (Alameda de la Alhambra), which is overgrown with wildflowers and grass in the spring, was planted with roses, oranges, and myrtles; its most characteristic feature, however, is the dense wood of English elms brought by the Duke of Wellington in 1812. The park has a multitude of nightingales and is usually filled with the sound of running water from several fountains and cascades. These are supplied through a conduit 8 km (5.0 mi) long, which is connected with the Darro river at the monastery of Jesus del Valle above Granada.



The Alhambra: “a pearl set in emeralds”

Brief historical introduction

The first historical documents known about the Alhambra date from the 9th century and they refer to Sawwar ben Hamdun who, in the year 889, had to seek refuge in the Alcazaba, a fortress, and had to repair it due to the civil fights that were destroying the Caliphate of Cordoba, to which Granada then belonged. This site subsequently started to be extended and populated.

The castle of the Alhambra was added to the city's area within the ramparts in the 9th century, which implied that the castle became a military fortress with a view over the whole city. In spite of this, it was not until the arrival of the first king of the Nasrid dynasty, Mohammed ben Al-Hamar (Mohammed I, 1238-1273), in the 13th century, that the royal residence was established in the Alhambra. This event marked the beginning of the Alhambra's most glorious period.

Yusuf I (1333-1353) and Mohammed V (1353-1391) are responsible for most of the constructions of the Alhambra that we can still admire today. From the improvements of the Alcazaba and the palaces, to the Patio of the Lions (Patio de los Leones) and its annexed rooms, including the extension of the area within the ramparts, the Justice Gate (Puerta de la Justicia), the extension and decoration of the towers, the building of the Baths (Baños), the Comares Room (Cuarto de Comares) and the Hall of the Boat (Sala de la Barca). Hardly anything remains from what the later Nasrid Kings did.



Patio of the Lions



Baths



Comares Room

After the conclusion of the Christian Reconquista in 1492, the site became the Royal Court of Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella. It was where Christopher Columbus received royal endorsement for his expedition.

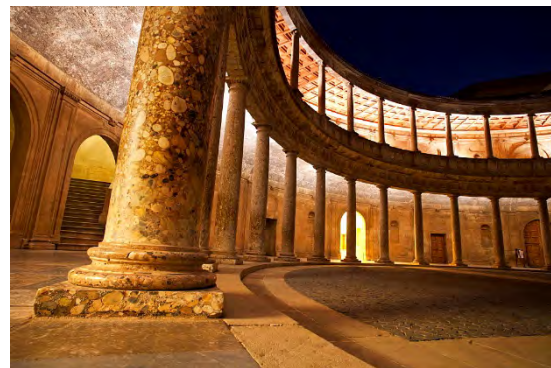


Granada's surrender in 1492 (Francisco Pradilla, 1882)



Catholic Monarchs and Christopher Columbus (Emanuel Leutze, 1843)

From the time of the Catholic Monarchs until today we must underline that Charles V ordered the demolition of a part of the complex in order to build the palace which bears his name. We must also remember the construction of the Emperor's Chambers and the Queen's Dressing Room (“Peinador de la Reina”).



Charles V palace

Throughout the 18th century the Alhambra was abandoned. During the French domination part of the fortress was blown up. It was not until the 19th century when the site was rediscovered, starting the process of repairing, restoring and preserving which is still maintained nowadays.



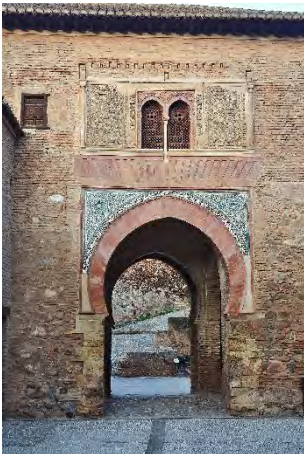
During the 18th century the Alhambra was abandoned



Restoration works

Architectural & artistic introduction

The Nasrid architecture marked the end of the glorious period that started with the Umayyads in Cordoba in the 8th century. The architects of the Cordovan mosque, which was built a long time before the Alhambra, did not influence this architecture. It includes some of the typical elements of the andalusian architecture, such as the horseshoe arch with sprandel (square wide frame which envelops the arch) and the arch scallops (arch scallop of triangular shape), as well as its own special elements such as the capitals of the columns of the Alhambra.



Horseshoe arch with sprandel (Wine Gate)



Arch scallop of triangular shape



Column detail

Most of the palace buildings are quadrangular in plan, with all the rooms opening on to a central court, and the whole reached its present size simply by the gradual addition of new quadrangles, designed on the same principle, though varying in dimensions, and connected with each other by smaller rooms and passages.

Alhambra was extended by the different Muslim rulers who lived in the complex. However, each new section that was added followed the consistent theme of “paradise on earth”. Column arcades, fountains with running water, and reflecting pools were used to add to the aesthetic and functional complexity. In every case, the exterior was left plain and austere. Sun and wind were freely admitted. Blue, red, and a golden yellow, all somewhat faded through lapse of time and exposure, are the colors chiefly employed.

The greatest concern of the architects of the Alhambra was to cover every single space with decoration, no matter the size of the space. No decorative element was enough. Most of the interior arches are false arches, with no structure; they are there only to decorate. Walls are covered with beautiful and extremely rich tile mosaics (“alicatado”) and plasterwork (carved stucco) rather than stone. And the coverings have wooden frames that have been exquisitely carved, etc.



Tile detail at the Alhambra



Carved stucco at the Alhambra

Even though the Muslim art bans the representation of figures, the decorating themes in the Alhambra are quite varied. The classical calligraphic decoration is used, in particular cursive and kufic inscriptions, which reproduce the words of Zawi ben Ziri (founder of the Nasrid dynasty): “*Only God is Victor*”, and poems written by different poets of the court. The decorative elements most often used by these architects were stylised vegetal forms (“ataurique”), interlacing decoration and complicated mathematical patterns (“lacería”).



Kufic inscriptions



Ataurique

The Alhambra was built with its own special type of column, which is not used in any other building. This column has a very fine cylindrical shaft, the base of which has a big concave moulding and is decorated with rings on the top part. The capital is divided into two bodies and the first one, cylindrically shaped, has a very simple decoration and a prism with a rounded-angled base and stylised vegetal forms as decoration.

One of the most impressive decorative elements used in the Alhambra is the mocarabe vault, formed by little cells or alveoluses placed one on top of the other one and which may be admired in the Hall of the Abencerrajes (“Sala de los Abencerrajes”) and the Hall of the Two Sisters (“Sala de las Dos Hermanas”).



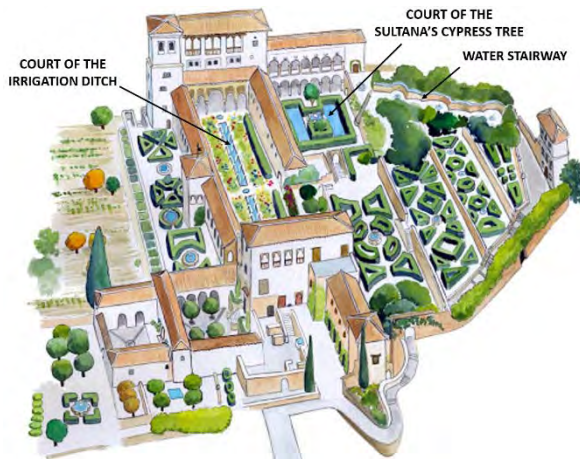
Special type of Alhambra's columns



Mocarabe vault (Hall of the Abencerrajes)

THE GENERALIFE

The Generalife became a leisure place for the kings of Granada when they wanted to get away from the official affairs of the palace. It occupied the slopes of the Hill of the Sun, from which there is a complete view over the city and the valleys of the rivers Genil and Darro. There are different interpretations of the meaning of its name: the Governor's Garden, the Architect's (“*alarife*”) Garden, the Vegetable Garden of the Gypsy Festivity Organiser, etc.



General perspective of Generalife



Court of the Irrigation Ditch

It was built in the 13th century. In spite of it being very close to the Alhambra and the close relationship between the two complexes, it is considered to be outside the city. Nowadays the Generalife is formed by two groups of buildings connected by the Court of the Irrigation Ditch. Nevertheless it is difficult to know what the Generalife originally looked like, as it has been altered and rebuilt at different moments throughout the Christian period. These changes were at first necessary due to the sorry state of deterioration and neglect that was the result of the late Muslim period and later on they changed its layout and distorted many of its features.

In the Generalife there is no kind of decorative excess or points of interest in its architecture. Unlike the Alhambra, all the buildings of the Generalife are quite solid, but in general poor and simple. This indicates an intimate and peaceful atmosphere that the kings were looking for when

they retired to these gardens to rest. There are only some decorative motifs of plasterwork, which are not very varied, but are exquisitely fine and tasteful.

Besides of the Patio of the Irrigation Ditch, which is the most important part of the Generalife, another interesting space is the Court of the Sultana’s Cypress Tree. It is named after its most famous old cypress. The Water Stairway, one of the staircases in these gardens is especially beautiful because of its beauty and originality.



Court of the Sultana’s Cypress Tree



Water Stairway

19:00h Walking towards Granada’s downtown.

As it was previously referred, we will go down towards Granada’s downtown by Rey Chico Street. Then, we will go through “Paseo de los Tristes” and the Darro Street until St. Anne Square, where the visit will finish.



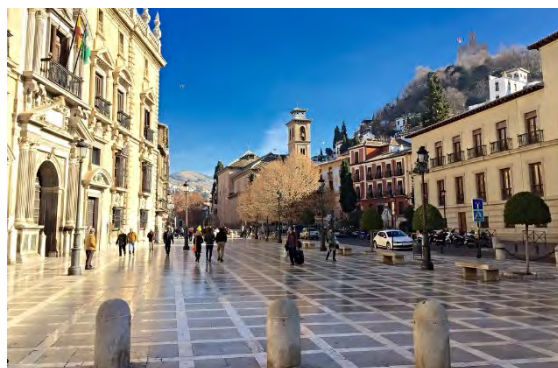
Rey Chico Street



“Paseo de los Tristes”



Darro Street



New Square and St. Anne Square

Around 19:30h Arriving at Granada’s downtown.