

A Day in the Life of an American in Spain

The "Route of Sun and Wine" passes right through our village...a far cry from the Costa del Sol of high-rise tourist traps.

When we first moved to Spain, family and friends figured it was because of the climate... and if the sun was so important to us, why didn't we instead move to Florida?

Our three bedroom, marble-floored villa with Mediterranean and mountain views cost a fraction of what a similar home would anywhere in the States. And although we've nothing against Florida...as food and travel writers, we couldn't bear to live somewhere more than 30 minutes from vineyards, and where the only local cheese comes wrapped in sheets of plastic.



When you think of the Costa del Sol, you might (rightly) picture overbuilt high-rise tourist traps. But when you travel beyond the resort towns closest to the airport, you find small towns and villages where no building can go over three stories, and it is impossible to tell the difference between an 800-year-old Moorish mansion and a brand-new townhouse. Local fisherman still haul in the night's catch long before sunrise, and pounds of delicious fresh seafood can be had for just a few dollars--either right there on the beach (if you get up early enough) or in the ancient market in Malaga, which dates back to Phoenician times.

The region we live in is known as the Axarquia, a small group of pueblo blancos (white villages) in the southernmost part of Andalucia. A short drive takes us to Roman ruins and Moorish fortresses, and a brief stroll takes us to the sea. If we are too lazy to carry down our own chairs, a sun bed can be rented for 3 euro (\$4) a day, and our waiter brings us a never-ending supply of calamaritos (fried whole baby squid) accompanied by a cold bottle of Verdejo, a crisp citrusy Spanish white wine. Our tapa and drink in the sun will set us back a total of \$15.

The days we don't feel lazy, we hike the foothills of the Sierra Nevada, bike along the hilly coast road, or kayak in the calm blue sea. We can walk to the town cultural center, which may feature a traveling orchestra from Germany, a passionate flamenco performance, or a visiting concert pianist from New York. At the end of the show, we join our friends and neighbors at a richly-tiled restaurant with a wood-beamed ceiling, and feast on rosemary-scented lamb chops and locally cured Serrano ham.

The magical cities of Granada, Sevilla, and Ronda are all a short drive away. The Ruta de Sol y Vino, The Route of Sun and Wine, passes right through our village, and sweet local wines which are perfect as an aperitif or with cheese go for 2 euro per liter (about \$2 a bottle). Sebastian at our local wine shop fills the bottle directly from the barrel, corks it, shrink-wraps the foil, and only affixes a label if we tell him it is a gift. There are so many things to do and to see in our adopted homeland, we fall asleep every night wondering how we ever had time to work.