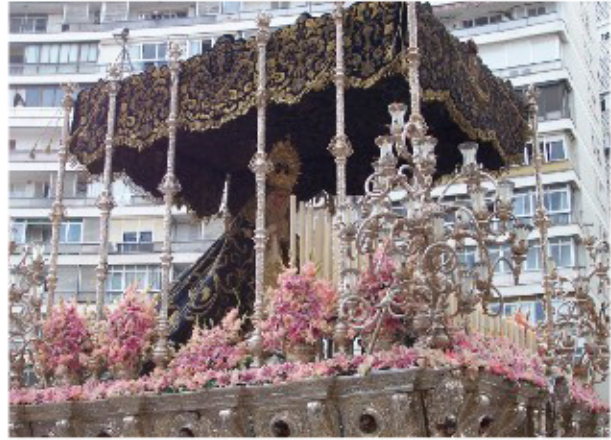


Saints and Sinners

The wail of a saeta, a mournful flamenco-style hymn, greets your ears at the same moment you become aware of the steady pounding of a drum nearby. As you turn the corner, you catch the first glimpse of an enormous trono, or throne, bearing the image of the Virgin of Sorrows. You can tell her apart from the other images of Mary you are likely to see this week: She is the only statue draped not in velvet, but in flowers. Thousands of pink and white lilies flow from the hem of her dress to form a sea of blossoms at her feet, covering the entire truck-sized litter on which she is carried.



Semana Santa (Holy Week) in Malaga, a city southwest of Granada in southern Spain, is a spectacle not to be missed. Holy Thursday (April 5 this year) is said to be the best day for viewing the many religious statues that are carried through the city. The processions start on Palm Sunday (April 1) and are held on Wednesday, Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday.

Six-ton floats

Each church in the city sends out one float—reportedly weighing up to six tons—that is carried on the backs, necks, and shoulders of hundreds of robed penitentes, or penitents. The penitentes belong to cofradias, or brotherhoods, which are parish, neighborhood, and trade organizations dating back hundreds of years. Some members are blindfolded, some are barefoot, but each time a rest is signaled by the ring of a bell, almost all of them swiftly light up a cigarette for an urgent smoke.

Although numerous websites list times and places for best viewing, you can let your ears guide you toward the numerous cavalcades snaking through the ancient streets. And don't forget to stop and refresh yourself with a glass and a plate at any one of Malaga's tapas bars. Just be thankful that you are free to move about as you please, without the weight of a float or a year's worth of sins bearing down on you.

Best tapas stops in Malaga

Antigua Casa del Guardia, Alameda Principal 18 (Malaga's main broad tree-lined avenue). Giant sherry barrels, each labeled with its contents, line one wall of this block-long space. Your bill will be totaled in chalk on the bar, so no worries if your Spanish fails you. The cost of a glass of premium sherry is around 1 euro (\$1.30)—most are 0.80 euro (\$1). On the wall opposite the bar is a small counter serving mussels, shrimp, and fried fish, each perfect with a glass of fino (sherry).

Bar El Pimpi, Calle Granada.

This richly tiled spot is another Malaga institution, offering sherry, wine, and beer. Don't be put off if the front room and bar seem crowded—this is a large place, rambling over several stories and around corners. Politely push your way toward the largest salon in the rear, pick a table near the oversized sherry barrels, and enjoy a drink with a plate of seafood, ham, cheese, or a small sandwich. A plate of ham and cheese and two glasses of wine should set you back no more than 5 euros (\$6.70).

Bodegas Quitapenas, Calle Sanchez Pastor 2.

This is one of several tapas bars run by a sherry producer; its wide range of products, from dry to sweet sherry, are recommended, although beer and wine are also available. The selection of inexpensive seafood tapas—fried, steamed, or mixed into salads—will set you up for more trono watching.

Mike DeSimone

