

# SundayTravel

WITH: NEW ENGLAND DESTINATIONS

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PHOTOS BY DAVID LYON FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE, PATRICIA HARRIS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE (BOTTOM LEFT)

## Waterfront invigorates Málaga

Historic Mediterranean city steps artfully into a busy 21st century

By Patricia Harris  
and David Lyon  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENTS

**M**ÁLAGA, Spain — The evening promenade is a fine old Spanish tradition, and this ancient Mediterranean city has put a graceful modern spin on a stroll by the sea. As Málaga renews itself, the harborfront Palmeral de las Sorpresas has emerged as the best place in town for a leisurely walk to breathe in the salt air. When we visited Málaga recently after a four-year absence, we found that the “Palm Garden of Surprises,” was indeed a marvelous surprise — or, more accurately, a stunning transformation of a grungy working port into a lyrical walkway that presents Málaga’s best face to the sea.

Ever since high-prowed Phoenician cargo vessels docked in the deep harbor 3,000 years ago, Málaga has been a working port. But the city decided to move the giant container ships and oil barges of contemporary commerce outside the old harbor to make room for waterfront development that mates a new cruise port with a pedestrian-friendly seaport. The Palmeral, a broad walkway lined with hundreds of palm trees, is the showpiece of the project.

The seafont path is a joy during the day when the futuristic metal arcade along its length casts undulating shadows on the marble pavement shared by walkers, bicyclists, and skateboarders. It is even better in the evening, when strollers can gaze at the illuminated walls of Málaga’s 11th-century Moorish fortress zig-zagging up the hillside.

This interplay between old and new has given Málaga a

much-needed shot in the arm. Andalucía’s second-largest city often gets the brushoff from beach-bound tourists who head straight from the airport to the honky-tonk sands of the Costa del Sol. History buffs tend to set their sights on nearby Sevilla, Córdoba, and Granada with their more impressive monuments and more compelling tales of Moorish sovereignty and Spanish reconquest. But because it wears the mantle of history more lightly, Málaga has freely reinvented itself and, in the process, boosted its allure as a destination. Even travelers planning to soak up the rays on Costa del Sol beaches should consider basing themselves in Málaga, taking the 20-minute light rail connection to the beach, and returning to a truly Spanish city in time for the evening promenade and some serious (and better-priced) dining.

The 2011 debut of the Palmeral was followed by the opening of Muelle Uno, a wharf that doglegs off the walkway and stretches out into the harbor to La Farola, the 1816 lighthouse that still guides sailors into port. Harbor excursion boats cozy up to the side of the wharf and shops, bars, and restaurants run its entire length. As a final flourish in the waterfront’s transformation, the first branch of Paris’s Pompidou contemporary art museum outside France, Pompidou Centre Málaga, is scheduled to open at the end of this month. Located in “El Cubo,” a giant glass box situated at the intersection of the Palmeral and Muelle Uno, it’s a huge vote of confidence in Málaga’s resurgence.

But it’s not just Málaga’s waterfront that’s jumping feet first into the 21st century. The central city got a big boost from



Baroness Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza, the art collector who (with her late husband) assembled the vast collection of European art in Madrid’s Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza. The Barcelona-born Thyssen selected Málaga for a museum to house her outstanding personal collection of 19th- and early-20th-century Spanish paintings. The Museo Carmen Thyssen Málaga opened in 2011 in a Renaissance-era palace just off Plaza de la Constitución. It’s easily reached by walking up Calle Larios, the city’s pedestrian shopping zone.

**Clockwise: Moorish walls at night; the city’s waterfront centerpiece Palmeral de las Sorpresas; the pedestrian Calle Larios; the Museo Carmen Thyssen Málaga; and a statue of Picasso outside the house where he was born in 1881.**

Within the former palace, two levels of galleries circle a serene courtyard. Visitors often linger in front of the 19th-century paintings of gypsies, flamenco dancers, bullfighters, and women in mantillas demurely fluttering their fans — the artistic clichés that helped turn Spain into one of the most romanticized destinations of the day.

But Málaga also nurtured the most original artist of the 20th century. Pablo Picasso was born in 1881 in a rented apartment on Plaza de la Merced. His family lived on the plaza until they left for northwest

Picasso preserves his birth home as a small museum, where paintings and old photographs capture the city of Picasso’s youth, and artifacts such as baby Pablo’s christening dress and tiny lead soldiers provide a touching glimpse of the artist as a small boy. Exhibits explore his lifelong fascination with bullfighting and flamenco, proving that even clichés reach new heights in the hands of a genius.

Picasso last visited Málaga when he was 19, but expressed the wish that some of his work be displayed in the city. Although the Museo Picasso Málaga didn’t open until 30 years after his 1973 death, the artist effectively paid a debt of gratitude to his birthplace by catapulting it onto the artistic map. The collection of about 300 works is largely unfamiliar because many were part of the family’s private holdings. They may not be his greatest, but the paintings, drawings, and sculptures illustrate Picasso’s multifaceted genius and highlight his uncanny ability to work in different styles simultaneously. During the same period when he was helping invent Cubism, for example, Picasso also drew delicate portraits of his son so realistic that they could be photographs. Perhaps the ability to jump from style to style came naturally to an artist born in a city with so many layers of history. Beneath the 16th-century palace turned art museum, archaeological excavations reveal traces of the Phoenician, Roman, and Moorish eras.

Visitors don’t live by art alone, but like most cities on the upswing, Málaga’s restaurant scene is popping. Casual dining has always been great here — the tiny fried fish called “pescaito frito malagueño” are famous — but the city now has restaurants that stand with any in Spain. Some of the better (and more expensive) new spots sit on Muelle Uno, including Restaurante José Carlos García. The glass-box dining room and open kitchen are the base for one of Spain’s star chefs and a destination for foodies up and down the Costa del Sol. Nearby, the more modestly priced Godoy Marisquería was also a Muelle Uno pioneer. The speciality of its seafood menu is

### IF YOU GO . . .

#### HOW TO GET THERE

Flying from Boston to Málaga (AGP) usually requires a change in New York, London, Paris, Amsterdam, or Madrid, depending on the airline. The local train from the airport (\$2.85) takes 8 minutes from Terminal 3 to the new downtown train station. There are also a dozen high-speed trains daily from Madrid (2½ hours) and 10 from Sevilla via Córdoba (2-2½ hours). For train schedules and ticket prices, see [www.renfe.com](http://www.renfe.com).

#### WHERE TO STAY

**Room Mate Larios**  
Calle Larios, 2  
011-34-95-222-22-00  
[www.room-matehotels.com](http://www.room-matehotels.com)  
Art Deco-era building in convenient location has been made into a stylish hotel with a great rooftop terrace and a generous buffet breakfast served until noon. Doubles from \$114, including breakfast.

#### WHERE TO EAT

**Restaurante José Carlos García**  
Muelle Uno  
011-34-95-200-35-88  
[www.restaurantejcg.com](http://www.restaurantejcg.com)  
Main dishes from \$40, 12-course tasting menu \$123.  
**Godoy Marisquería**  
Muelle Uno, 34-35  
011-34-95-229-03-12  
[www.marisqueriagodoy.com](http://www.marisqueriagodoy.com)  
Main dishes from \$13.  
**Manzanilla Málaga**  
Calle Fresca, 12  
011-34-95-222-68-51  
[www.manzanillamalaga.com](http://www.manzanillamalaga.com)  
Tapas from \$2.75, main dishes from \$6.

#### WHAT TO DO

**Museo Carmen Thyssen Málaga**  
Plaza Carmen Thyssen  
011-34-90-230-31-31  
[www.carmenthyssenmalaga.org](http://www.carmenthyssenmalaga.org)  
Open Tue-Sun 10 a.m.-8 p.m.  
Adults \$8.25, seniors and students \$4.75.  
**Fundación Picasso**  
Plaza de la Merced, 15  
011-34-95-192-60-60  
[fundacionpicasso.malaga.eu](http://fundacionpicasso.malaga.eu)  
Open daily 9:30 a.m.-8 p.m.  
Adults \$2.75, seniors and students free.  
**Museo Picasso Málaga**  
Calle San Agustín, 8  
011-34-95-212-76-00  
[museopicassomalaga.org](http://museopicassomalaga.org)  
Open Tue-Thu, Sun 10 a.m.-8 p.m., Fri-Sat 10 a.m.-9 p.m.  
Adults \$9.50, seniors and students \$4.75.

tional fish stew with monkfish, clams, and cockles in a tomato-fish broth.

More modest and more casual dining is offered in literally dozens of restaurant-bars on the small streets around Calle Larios. Many eateries serve lightened and modernized dishes, but even as the city moves forward, Malagueños retain a soft spot for tradition, maybe best exemplified at El Pimpi. This warren of rooms in an 18th-century house just down Calle Granada from the Museo Picasso Málaga is less than 50 years old, but looks like an ancient taberna. Huge barrels of Málaga wine (similar to sherry) are stored throughout. The food is as traditional as the tile-encrusted walls, offering everything from bulls-tail sliders to grilled monkfish topped with Dublin prawns.

Fortunately, the late evening Spanish dinner hour (never before 9, usually not before 10) leaves plenty of time for a promenade along the Palmeral. Salt air, after all, is said to stimulate the appetite.

Patricia Harris and David Lyon can be reached at [harris@bostonglobe.com](mailto:harris@bostonglobe.com)