

Travel Buzz | From Andalusia to Albuquerque

by Tracy L. Barnett, contributing writer

Some of us travel to seek the thrill of the unknown. Others go to take in legendary landmarks that have defined the human experience. For still others, it's simply a chance to get away from it all, to leave the mundanity of daily existence behind.

Regardless of our reasons, there's one thing most travelers agree on. One of the best parts is coming home, reflecting on our experience and sharing it with others. That's what this column, *Travel Buzz*, is all about.

I want to hear from the travelers among you and to hear about your adventures: where you went and what you saw, heard, tasted, smelled and felt. What amazed you and thrilled you? What will stay with you forever?

I also want to know what you might have done differently, had you known what you know now. Sometimes sharing the mistakes we make along the road can spare others from similar disappointments.

And it doesn't matter whether you've gone to the Far East or to East Texas. A travel story well-told is a story worth sharing, and *Travel Buzz* includes destinations near and far. As *Tropic of Cancer* author Henry Miller said, "One's destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things."

I'm looking forward to seeing the world in a new way through your eyes. I hope you will contact us so that we can share your stories and photos.

Meanwhile, I'd like to share a couple of my own adventures, one near and one far.

Andalusia, Spain

If I lived in the south of Spain, I would be a painter or a poet, or both.

The beauty is as warm and as casual as a kiss on the cheek: a simple, tiled-roof house in a field of olive trees, an arched portico of a patio filled with jasmine, the snow-capped backdrop of the Alpujarras. No surprise that this is the land that produced a Picasso and a Garcia Lorca. Some travel tips for you:

- Take the AVE. These sleek new trains are the envy of other countries, with British and U.S. transportation officials studying the system to take lessons back home. Cruising at speeds

close to 200 mph, they maximize comfort and efficiency. Buy online at www.renfe.com to get the best rate.

- Visit the Mezquita. Many people have heard of Granada's Alhambra fortress, and justifiably so – its magnificence inspired Ernest Hemingway and Washington Irving. But the Mezquita (a mosque-turned-cathedral) in Cordoba is equally stunning in its preservation of the exquisite Moorish architecture of Andalusia's Golden Age.

- Taste the tapas. Many restaurants offer tapas, or small-plate servings, that are cheap and delicious. The most common is the delightful regional manchego cheese with thinly sliced Spanish ham and olives. A couple of tapas paired with a glass of fine but inexpensive rioja wine, and you've got yourself a meal. Bodegas Mezquita in Cordoba, across from the Mezquita, has a tapas menu that can't be beat.

- Enjoy the night life. Follow the lead of the Spaniards and take a siesta in the heat of the day so you can enjoy the spectacle that unfolds after dark. Plazas in every city and pueblo come alive as families come out to listen to live music and watch street performers.

- Catch a flamenco show. The Casa de la Memoria in Sevilla will live on in my memory forever. See www.casadelamemoria.es. The show in this intimate and authentic venue

almost always sells out, so get your tickets in advance.

- Take a bicycle tour. It's a great way to enjoy the sights while setting your own pace. Two young women have started a first-rate company that offers maintained bikes, maps and bottled water, a friendly orientation and an MP3 player with self-guided tours in English and Spanish. See www.bici4city.com.

Albuquerque

No place matches the magic of Spain like New Mexico, where the first Europeans were Spaniards. The beauty of the alpine and desert landscapes are matched by the colorful blend of native, Spanish and Mexican heritage, and you don't have to spend a bundle to enjoy it. Many travelers to New Mexico fly into Albuquerque only to leave it for Santa Fe, Taos and other tourist destinations. They're missing out, because this city has attractions all its own.

- Take a hike. Petroglyphs National Monument offers breathtaking views and a window onto the region's history. Explore the meanings behind the mysterious symbols left



Albuquerque's skies fill with color during the International Balloon Fiesta, but hot-air balloon enthusiasts will enjoy the Balloon Capital of the World year-round.

behind by the ancients, and stop by the visitor's center to check out workshops on Pueblo pottery or Spanish tin-stamp-

ing, or captivating sessions with local storytellers.

- Balloon it. Every October, the skies fill with hot air balloons of every shape, color and size at the International Balloon Fiesta. But Albuquerque is a ballooning mecca year-round, with the quirky International Balloon Museum (www.cabq.gov/balloon/) and a wealth of balloonists offering rides. I went with Rainbow Ryders for some spectacular views. See www.rainbowryders.com.

- Catch a show. The world-class National Hispanic Cultural Center is a performing arts center, museum, community center and restaurant. Performances blend ancient heritage with edgy modern themes and technology. See www.nhccnm.org.

- Savor the *sabor*: New Mexico's distinctive regional cuisine is a literal melting pot of its dominant cultures. You'll find savory blue-corn tortillas, roasted green Hatch chiles and golden-fried sopapillas, a traditional Mexican pastry often drizzled with honey and cinnamon. Check out El Pinto, voted as a best restaurant in Albuquerque and featured on the NBC *Today Show*. See www.elpinto.com.

It's time to close the cover on my book of memories and invite you to open yours.

Editor's Note: Please contact Travel Buzz at info@thebuzzmagazines.com to have your stories and photos considered for an upcoming issue. Tracy L. Barnett is a travel editor and writer living in Houston. Her blog can be found at www.tracybarnettonline.com.



The millennial city of Cordoba, lying in a curve of the Rio Guadalquivir, is even more beautiful at night.

10 tips on travel photography

Visual storytelling should not be an afterthought. You need preparation. But you don't have to be a professional photographer to get memorable shots. Here are some tips to make sure your photos blow everyone away – and hopefully land you in an upcoming *Travel Buzz*.

1. Know the difference between high and low resolution. No matter how beautiful your sunset shot might be, if it is low res, it will not be publishable in a magazine. This is the single largest reason that photos get rejected. Resolution refers to the number of pixels per inch, also referred to as dots per inch. You can check the size using a photo-editing program, or just check the size of the file in your browser. If it's smaller than 500 KB, it probably will not be printable. If all of this is Greek to you, take your camera to a friendly photographer or camera store and make sure it is set to take high-resolution photos.

2. Get closer. Almost any photograph can be improved by zooming in or approaching the subject by at least 50 percent. Don't be shy! Unless you're going for a landscape or wide-angle shot, proximity can improve impact and clarity.

3. Think close up, landscape and midrange. Yes, you want the mountains, but you also want the details – like a close up of a columbine, a baby alligator or the weathered hands of an artisan. Amateurs often only shoot the midrange.

4. Look for variety in subject matter. Include a mixture of dramatic scenery, colorful details and people in action.

5. When shooting people, being able to see a person's face, especially his or her eyes, makes for a better image. A few portrait-type shots are fine, particularly if there's something really distinctive about the person, but don't have people posing in all your photos. Action shots are good, but the subject should not be looking at the camera in these.

6. Leave time for good photography. If you're rushing from place to place, you won't even see the good shot, much less frame it and shoot it. Always have your camera with you so you don't miss those unexpected moments.

7. Change your perspective. Kneel down, climb up, go around to the side or even experiment with tilting your camera. Sometimes a different angle makes all the difference.

8. Learn about composition and lighting and then practice. Here's a library on composition to get you started.

See www.photoinf.com.

9. Make good use of captions. They are some of the most-read items on a page and can draw readers into a story. So take note of the names of the places, buildings, people and relevant facts about a shot, so editors can construct good captions later.

10. Consider making a slide show. Web sites like slide.com, flickr.com and Picasa.com make it easy to organize your photos into collections and share them. *Travel Buzz* can refer readers to your slide shows to see more photos and, through the captions, learn more about your destination.