

Bill and Cathy McArthur in Spain: 16

The week started with a fierce windstorm with an east wind dominating. The Mediterranean was very rough, but we've seen the Atlantic Ocean rougher during nor'easters and passing hurricanes. The beaches along El Palo and Malaga don't have sand dunes or high seawalls for the most part, so the water inundated the walkways along the beach and littered everything with trash, sand, and rocks. Evidently this happened all along the Costa del Sol. We were told that this kind of event only happens every 20 years or so. The cleanup continued all week, but the mess is only about 50% gone by week's end.

For the weekend, we took a bus to Cordoba, which lies upriver from Seville. This is a city of rich history involving the "tres culturas": Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim. When we were planning the trip, we found available hotel rooms scarce and expensive. When we arrived and got acquainted with the city, we saw that this city is a popular destination for tour groups. Everywhere there were bus-sized groups walking around together like so many schools of fish swimming in the sea. Our own touring strategy quickly became one of avoiding being absorbed by any of the groups as we moved around the city.

As with many of the other cities we have explored, there are Roman, Visigoth, Jewish, Muslim, and Catholic influences throughout the old part of town. We began the day on Saturday with a tour of the Mezquita, an old mosque converted into a cathedral. We arrived just before the official opening hour and were allowed in without tickets. The interior is filled with an array of pillars and arches laid out in a deep mathematical manner. Bill found it to be similar to the look of some of the works of the Dutch artist Escher. We discovered a multi-site exhibit of the works of the Cordoba artist, Julio Romero de Torres (1874-1930) and wandered around the city visiting several of the sites and viewing his work.

The war in Iraq was fully underway while we were traveling and touring. The almost unanimous attitude in Spain is against this war and to some degree against Americans (Nord Americanos). We saw "No a la Guerra" signs everywhere and there was an anti-war rally (manifestación) on Saturday night. A couple of hours before the rally, we accidentally crossed through its location and saw a big group of tattooed, multi-pierced young people dressed mostly in black priming themselves on beer and wine. I had visions of being dragged behind a truck (or a motor-scooter, more likely) as T.V. cameras watched. We got a lot of ugly looks as we walked through the plaza, but no one said anything. Because of our presence in Europe for the past three months, we have the same perception of the war as do the majority of Europeans and wonder why the U.S. is abandoning the U.N.

From here it looks like a huge mistake. We hope it will work out for the best, but there will be many fences to mend with our former allies and friendly nations.

Bill has been reading a book called “The New Spaniards” which is an encyclopedic account of what Spain and her people are like and how and why things are the way they are. There was a period of economic depression in the mid twentieth century when a great number of people abandoned their small towns and came to the cities to live in shantytowns on the outskirts. The governmental response was to build high-rise housing projects in those same outlying areas. Cordoba provides a good example of this phenomenon; the result is not pretty, but it is probably functional. Our hotel is on the edge of an array of these structures on the side of the river across from the old town.

Overall we enjoyed our stay in Cordoba. Visiting this capital of the Moorish state “Al Andalus” has added to our understanding of the history and culture of Spain.

Bill and Cathy