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Keeping the Faith

INTEL / ARTICLE

In Seville, the divine is never far. Church bells ring out constantly at arbitrary hours, religious holidays stuff the calendar, and you're bound to upset your aunt if you don't call her on her saint day. The Virgin Mary in her seemingly infinite forms hangs in silver around necks and wrists, gets tiled on walls, and is framed over headboards. A tapas bar is said to be better the more photos of Jesus and Mary it has on its walls. Yet despite the proliferation of Catholicism in Seville, these practices and affiliations are far more cultural than they are deeply faithful; churches are packed to the brim for baptisms and first communions, while daily mass remains sparse, save for a few pews peppered with older generations.



Semana Santa, or Holy Week, is the most extreme example of culture versus spirit. Extravagantly celebrated all over Spain and Latin America, it is by far the most important week in the Catholic calendar, and Seville's particularly elaborate celebration attracts visitors from all over the world. Devout church brotherhoods called hermandades process wooden figures of the Virgin Mary and depictions of Christ's crucifixion through the streets. Weighing upward of two tons, these opulent displays are carried on the backs of burly gentlemen and accompanied by hundreds or even thousands of decorated followers with candles, bowel-shaking horns and drums, potent incense, and ornate pageantry. The streets become a sea of people of all ages, who stand for hours in their Sunday best waiting for the passing of their favorite processions, their hearts on their sleeves and a picnic packed to wait out the storm. Yet after a week of celebration, when the streets are slicked with candle wax, the pews are left empty once again.

Travelers don't have to come to Seville during Semana Santa to get a taste of the Holy Week fanfare. Specialty incense shops around town sell the scents all year round, and they especially love to pump them through the streets in the month leading up to the big week. Processions also happen randomly yet regularly, whether it's for a saint or virgin, or folks practicing in the late hours of the evening.

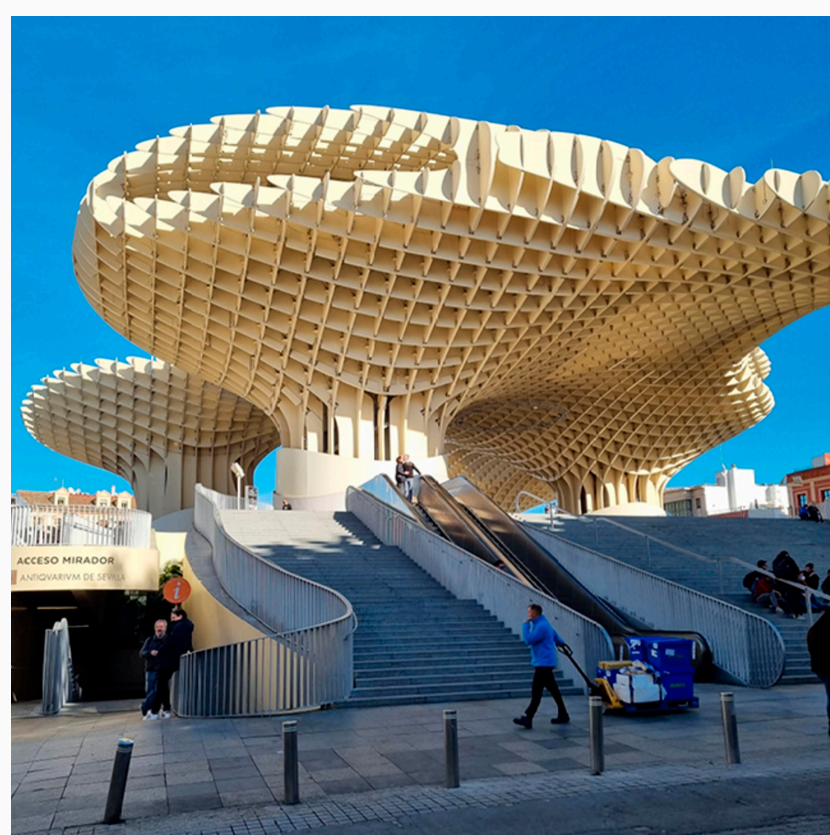
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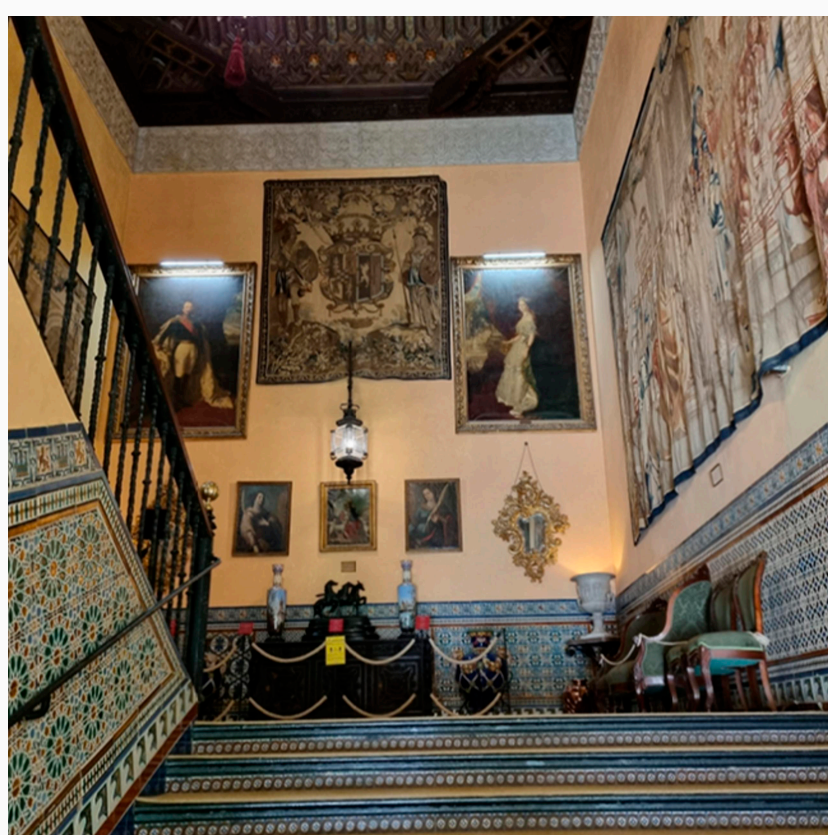
Giralda & Seville Cathedral 📌

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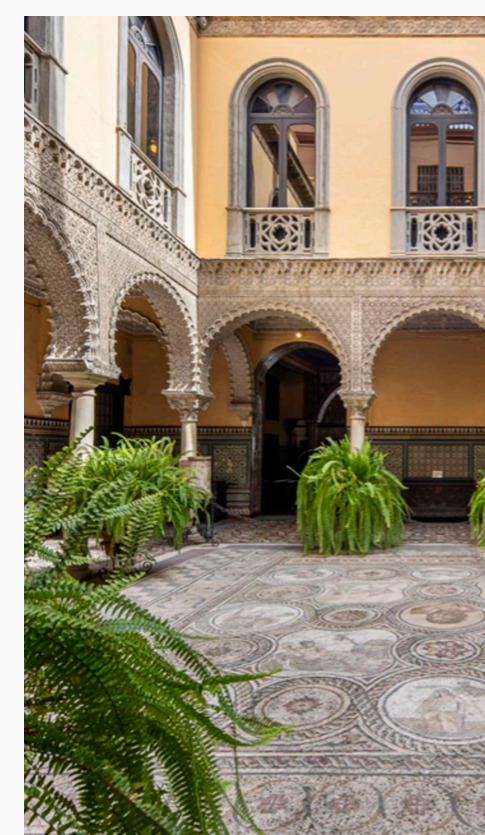
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