

April Fair – FERIA DE ABRIL DE SEVILLA



History

The origins of Seville's Spring Fair or Feria de Abril date back to 1846. It was originally conceived as a livestock market by José María Ybarra, first Count of Ybarra, and Narciso Bonaplata, during the period when the Count of Montelirio was Mayor of Seville, but it was not until the following year that it was officially inaugurated, with the event lasting three days. After a few years, the popularity of the Feria increased considerably, as did the number of livestock sellers and buyers, as well as travelling merchants who came to sell their wares to visitors. Gradually the atmosphere of the fair took on a more festive and recreational character as the general public

began to attend dances organised in the casetas (marquees) and small platforms installed on the site.

The event was declared a Fiesta Mayor by the City Council in 1910, thus encouraging visitors to travel to Seville during the designated dates in April.

Around the same time bullfights began to be held at the Maestranza bullring and this contributed to increasing the popularity of the Feria even more.

For the celebration in Seville of the 1929 Latin American Exhibition, the Feria, which by then had become an essentially festive event with no connection with the trading of livestock, was moved to the Prado de San Sebastián, which remained its official site until 1972, its 125th anniversary. It then moved to its current location in an unused open area in the barrio of Los Remedios, and the opportunity for growth which the new space offered led to the Feria reaching the worldwide level of fame and importance it enjoys today, becoming the city's most iconic cultural and festive event, and an epicentre for social life where Sevillanos enjoy a

whole week of partying with family and friends. The Feria de Abril is held one or two weeks after Holy Week and lasts for a week. It officially begins on Saturday night or “sábado del pescaíto”, when the hundreds of thousands of light bulbs installed on the feria site are turned on to mark its inauguration (after which it is traditional to sample pescaíto frito or fried fish in the casetas), and comes to an end at midnight the following Saturday with a spectacular firework display next to the river Guadalquivir.

With its casetas, arranged along streets named after famous bullfighters, the Feria almost becomes a small ephemeral town. Entrance to the site is through a colourful and monumental portada or gateway which is installed every year. Illuminated with thousands of lights, the portada, which is different each year, makes reference to a particular monument in the city and is a popular meeting place for the locals. The whole Feria site is lit with thousands of light bulbs covered by farolillos (spherical paper lanterns). The streets themselves are covered with compressed albero (a bright yellow soil sourced from the nearby municipality of Alcalá de Guadaira, which is traditionally used in Seville in gardens and bullrings).

The Casetas



The casetas are a modern version of the candle-lit platforms covered with canopies originally installed in the earliest livestock ferias to shelter the public from the weather. Over time, thanks to the characteristic idiosyncrasy of the Sevillanos, a more festive and lively atmosphere began to develop around the casetas. Today, the casetas are composed of one or several modules of a specific size with an entrance delimited by a fence or railing. They are completely covered with a white canopy with green or red stripes which is decorated in the centre above the entrance with a triangular pañoleta or shawl and various artistic motifs. Most of the social interaction between the visitors to the caseta takes place in the frontal or finer part, which is what we can see from outside. This is where all the dancing and singing takes place and there are usually tables and chairs for relaxing and enjoying a typical dish accompanied by a good

Fino or Manzanilla. Out of sight in the back part or trastienda are the kitchen, bar (ideal for a quiet conversation) and toilets. More than a thousand casetas belonging to families, societies, organisations, companies and neighbourhoods (the latter with free admission) are installed each year in the feria. The vast majority are privately owned and therefore it is recommended that visitors go to the Feria with someone from Seville who can take them to the casetas of their colleagues and friends.

CASETAS WITH FREE ADMISSION

The casetas belonging to various of the city's neighbourhoods and political parties have free admission and remain open until three in the morning with people dancing to rumbas and sevillanas.

CASETA DEL TURISTA

c/ Pascual Márquez 225

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Pascual Márquez, 225

Distrito Casco Antiguo

c/ Antonio Bienvenida 97-101

Distrito Este – Cerro - Amate

c/ Pascual Márquez 215-219

Distrito Macarena – Macarena Norte

c/ Pascual Márquez 85-89

Distrito Nervión-San Pablo-Santa Justa

c/ Costillares 22-26

Distrito Sur-Bellavista-La Palmera

c/ Ignacio Sánchez Mejías 61-65

Distrito Triana-Los Remedios

c/ Pascual Márquez 153-157

Caseta de Fiestas Mayores.

c/ Costillares 13-17

PSOE Andalucía

c/ Antonio Bienvenida 79

Partido Popular

c/ Pascual Márquez 66

Partido Andalucista

c/ Juan Belmonte 196

La PeCera

c/ Pascual Márquez 9

UGT

c/ Antonio Bienvenida 10

CCOO

c/ Pascual Márquez 81

USO

c/ Curro Romero 29

THE FLAMENCO DRESS

It is a firm tradition that Sevillian women go to the feria wearing the classical flamenco or gypsy dress. Its origins can be traced back to the early livestock fairs, where the women who accompanied the traders and dealers, mostly gypsies and peasants from Andalusia, usually wore cheap percale dresses with the classic polka dots. With the passing of time, these long working dresses ending in two or three horizontal ruffles became increasingly fashionable because of the way they enhanced the shape and grace of a woman's figure. The Seville Exhibition of 1929 contributed to the consolidation of the flamenco dress, leading to its being accepted by the wealthier classes as essential wear for the feria. The characteristics and shape of the dress have evolved with the passing of time: V-shaped, rounded or square necklines; tight-fitting waist with the skirt opening like a flower; hair tied up in a bun; and a special focus on the accessories (flowers in the hair, a scarf or a manila shawl, earrings, etc). Today, the flamenco dress is the only form of regional costume which still follows the dictates of women's fashion.

DAY FERIA/ NIGHT FERIA

There are many different moments to enjoy the feria, and the atmosphere varies depending on the time of day.

Thus, we can make a differentiation between the daytime and night-time feria. The daytime activity tends to begin around 2.30 pm, with people arriving at the casetas to have lunch, enjoy the festive and colourful atmosphere, and admire what is popularly known in Seville as the "paseo de caballos", an iconic parade of horses and carriages, a spectacle which is unique in the world. A good piece of advice: find a shaded spot in any of the streets to watch the parade

of hundreds of horses ridden and embellished in a country style fashion by men and women dressed in short bolero jackets and breeches (the traditional costume of Andalusian peasants) and wide brimmed hats. The majestic display of horse drawn carts and carriages, and the skilful control of the drivers and footmen is a ritual which has been enacted year after year for more than a century. Rather than going anywhere, they are simply parading up and down and enjoying being the focus of attention as they pass by on horseback or in a carriage being pulled by spectacular horses or mules.

On the morning of the Sunday leading up to the Feria, a driving competition held in the Maestranza bullring offers an excellent opportunity to admire the various carts and carriages which participate in the paseo de caballos during the feria week. The event is promoted by the Real Club de Enganches de Andalucía and includes a display of the various technical and aesthetic characteristics of each discipline. Extremely interesting. Night time tends to be for the young or the real feria enthusiasts. It begins when the bullfights finish around 9.30 pm, and, after dining in the casetas or in the restaurants located in the area surrounding the site, it is time to enjoy everything the Feria has to offer, with the flamenco and the drinking carrying on until well into the early hours of the morning.

THE FUNFAIR

The Funfair offers a wide range of amusements and attractions for all the family. Known as the “Calle del Infierno” or “road of hell” because of loud music and noisy atmosphere created around the attractions, the temporary funfair occupies a large open area situated next to the feria site itself. There are some four hundred different attractions, ranging from the more

traditional – the big wheel, the whip, dodgems, rollercoaster, etc., - to other more modern and spectacular ones: the human catapults, windmills, freefall towers, and other spectacular attractions

which reach dizzying heights and speeds. Our unquenchable desire to win a prize either by luck or skill, means that the various stalls with tombolas and other games are also very popular: camel races, hooking ducks, water guns, bingo, etc.

To one side of the Funfair are the marquees of the circus, an itinerant artistic spectacle which includes acrobats, clowns, magicians, animal trainers and other artists, and always delights the younger ones amongst us.



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SEVILLANAS

Sevillanas are the typical form of song and dance of Seville's Feria. They are derived from ancient compositions which were known as "seguidillas castellanas", which, over time, evolved into the form of song and dance that we know today. There are many types of sevillanas which in terms of their lyrics and themes can be classified into: regionalist (Feria, Holy Week, celebrities, bullfighting, Seville, etc.); songs of love; rocieras; corraleras, etc. There are also slower and faster styles.

Sevillanas are usually danced in pairs, although there are exceptions and more experimental forms in which the dance is performed by more than two people carrying out the steps and movements at the same time.



THE MAESTRANZA AND BULLFIGHTING

The Feria de Sevilla would certainly not be the same without the bullfighting. Together with Las Ventas in Madrid, Seville's Maestranza bullring is considered the most important in the world, therefore to earn international recognition, it is essential that bullfighters deliver an outstanding performance in Seville's arena. The bullfighting season at La Maestranza starts on Easter Sunday, and there are also other events throughout the year. The season called "de farolillos" lasts until the last day of the Feria, attracting the most celebrated matadors of the day and the finest Spanish bulls.

The Real Maestranza bullring is situated in the very heart of the barrio of El Arenal in an area delimited by the boulevard of Paseo de Cristóbal Colón, and calles Adriano and Antonia Díaz. It was built between the 18th and 19th centuries, between 1761 and 1881 to be precise, and its beautiful façade is in a baroque style with marked regionalist features, such as the distinctively Andalusian combination of white and albero colours. Its upper terraces are covered by a roof supported by marble arches and columns. On the eastern side is the Puerta del Príncipe, the most famous door in the world of bullfighting. When a bullfighter performs exceptionally well (a minimum reward of "three ears") they emerge through this door carried on their followers' shoulders. In Seville, the experience of bullfighting has a special intensity which starts with the paseillo and does not finish until the aficionado arrives home. Indeed, the fiesta does not draw to a sudden halt with the dying of the last bull, the passion and enthusiasm continue on the streets, in the bars, or in the Feria, where friends gather to comment on what happened in the plaza that afternoon. This is why in Seville bullfighting takes on a special meaning: it is a ritual, a deeply rooted tradition of which both the sevillanos and the bullfighting world is immensely proud. The expectant hush, the ovations and the respect with which the public appreciate the professionalism of matadors demonstrate the true respect which people have for the art. The Real Maestranza de Caballería and Plaza de Toros de Sevilla. The very Mecca of bullfighting.

GASTRONOMY AND THE FERIA DE ABRIL



Eating and drinking are two of the essential pleasures for visitors to the feria. All the casetas offer a wide range of delicious food which permits people to satiate their hunger or quench their thirst at any time of day. Without doubt, the first great gastronomic experience of the feria is the night of the *pescaíto*. This is a specially prepared supper, which is exclusive to the paying members of the casetas, and is held on the first night as a form of introduction for what is to come. The meal tends to last until sometime after the “alumbrao” (the official switching on of the lights) which takes place at midnight. The main dish served during the meal is, as the name suggests, “*pescaíto frito*”, a selection of freshly fried or marinated fish including dabs, baby hake, fresh anchovies, and squid.

During the Feria, the Iberico or Jabugo Ham, as well as other cured meats from acorn fed pigs, and the King Prawns from Sanlúcar, are an absolute must. They are usually accompanied by two traditional types of sherry produced in Andalusia, Manzanilla from Sanlúcar de Barrameda and Fino from Jerez. It is also common to drink beer or the popular rebujito: manzanilla mixed with a fizzy lemon and lime drink to reduce the alcohol content which is accompanied by plenty of ice. Each day for lunch, it is customary for each caseta to prepare a guiso (or pot of stew). The wide range of guisos includes potatoes with chocos (cuttlefish), chickpeas, caldereta (pork stew) and a wide variety of other typically Andalusian dishes which are best eaten with a spoon. Other simpler but equally delicious specialities include the Iberico pork products, prawns from Huelva, scrambled eggs, salmorejo (a version of gazpacho), fried peppers, montaditos (small sandwiches),

and of course, the famous and exquisite tortilla española or potato omelette.



Although there is not a specific time, lunch in the Feria is usually eaten rather late, usually between 3.00 and 3.30 pm or even at 4.00. The reason for this is that Monday to Friday are normally working days in the city, and locals arrive there after work. Visitors, or those who, for one reason or another, do not have to work during feria week, can start with an aperitif a little earlier in any of the city's numerous bars and restaurants. It is very common for groups of friends or work colleagues to meet for lunch in the feria, especially on the first two days of the week. It is the perfect setting and time to enjoy a little socialising and get away from the daily routine with a pleasant chat, a story or two, or simply by enjoying the company of friends in an atmosphere which is completely different from any other day. Often these meals are followed by a long after-lunch conversation which tends to last until well into the evening. Dinner, if it happens at all, (since quite often people start snacking in the mid afternoon and simply continue until the evening) is very similar to lunch, although it usually does not include the guiso of the day. Later in the evening, when the effects of the constant drinking are beginning to take their toll there is nothing better than an energy-restoring consommé which is usually seasoned with mint leaves.

Another tradition of the feria is to eat buñuelos (small doughnuts) or churros (fritters) accompanied with a cup of hot chocolate. As we set off on our way home, we come across an array of stalls, run by gypsy families, selling buñuelos. Seeing the women in their spotless white aprons deep frying the buñuelos in huge pots filled with boiling oil is a memorable sight in itself. Alternatively, one can opt for one of the numerous churros stalls which are dotted along the streets between the feria site and the city centre for one last snack before getting that well-deserved rest.

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