

The Land of Lorca in Granada, Spain

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Views from the country road linking Viznar and Alfacar, Spain.

Beyond the Alhambra—Exploring Granada in the Footsteps of Spain’s Most Famous Poet

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The Alhambra is Spain’s most magnificent tribute to the Moors, who ruled over southern Spain for 800 years and built this medieval fortified palace, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



Federico (left) with his brother Francisco, on display in Valderrubio

But there's more to [Granada](#) than the Alhambra, and leading the way is [Federico García Lorca](#), Spain's most famous poet and playwright. Never mind that he's been dead for 87 years.

Lorca's Star Status

A charismatic legend in his own time and revered far beyond what his 38 years on earth might suggest, García Lorca wrote about love, class, tradition, tragedy, nature, and mortality. He is the world's most translated Spanish poet; his fans have been passionate.

American poet Langston Hughes translated several of Lorca's works into English. Joan Baez recited two of Lorca's poems in her album "Baptism." Canadian singer and songwriter Leonard Cohen wrote "Take This Waltz" based on a translation of a Lorca poem; he even named his daughter Lorca.



Ferdinand and Isabella built the Cathedral of Granada on the site of a Moorish mosque. Beth Reiber photos.

But you don't have to be a fan of García Lorca, or even poetry, to let his spirit guide you in and around Granada to places you might never stumble upon on your own.

“We must catch a glimpse of the ancient souls who once walked the solitary squares we now tread; it is essential to be one and a thousand, to experience things in their myriad shades,” Lorca wrote in his first book, *Impressions and Landscapes*, published when he was 19.



A shopping street in Granada, Spain.

Lorca's Granada

There are reasons Granada is considered one of Spain's most beautiful cities, including its medieval historic center of winding streets, leafy squares, imposing churches and sidewalk cafes offering plenty of places to soak it all in.



The Museo Cuevas del Sacromonte features 10 man-made caves where families lived until the early 1900s and offers flamenco performances.

There's the heady smell of spices sold from vendors in the shadows of Granada's Cathedral and the riot of colorful goods in the Alcaiceria, once a Moorish silk market and now a bazaar offering Arab-influenced clothes and goods.

The Province of Granada is known for its wine, bread, honey, Trevélez ham, Segureño lamb,

asparagus, custard apple, and olive oil, but everywhere you look there's the pomegranate, the city's symbol. In fact, Granada is the Spanish word for "pomegranate."



Statue of Federico Garcia Lorca on Avenida de la Constitution in Granada.

Once García Lorca is on your radar, you'll find reminders of him everywhere, hiding in plain sight. Granada's airport is named after him. There he is on Boulevard Avenida de la Constitución, his statue inviting fans to snap a picture of themselves seated next to him on a bench.

You can visit the nearby Andalusian village where he was born in 1898, wander Granada's old Moorish Albaicín (also spelled Albaycín) neighborhood, and, in what is now a nature park outside Granada, ponder the brutality of his 1936 execution by Franco's Nationalist forces for his anti-fascist sentiments—and quite possibly his homosexuality.

Sites Related to Lorca

Of course, you should visit the splendid halls and gardens of Alhambra and the adjoining Generalife summer palace, just as García Lorca often did with his friends.

But you must also trace his steps along Granada's prettiest lane, Acera del Darro, where a young Lorca once resided with his family and which hugs the narrow Darro River in the shadow of the Alhambra.

Take any steep, uphill alley on the left to Albaicín, part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site that includes Alhambra and Generalife.

Medieval Albaicín



A square in Albaicín, Spain.

With its twisting cobblestone streets, inviting small squares, and whitewashed homes, Albaicín still retains its medieval Moorish origins, despite Catholic monarchs Ferdinand II and Isabella I, who ousted the Moors in 1492 and rebuilt Granada as the center of their Catholic universe.

Jews were given the choice of exile or baptism. Islam was banned. The Spanish Inquisition was a reign of terror, torture, and death.

In *Impressions and Landscapes*, Lorca imagined Albaicín as it might have been before what he called the “disaster” of 1492: chaotic, crowded, full of life, stairs going every which way, and Muslims, Jews and Christians living in harmony. Make your way to San Nicolas, where you can have lunch at one of the outdoor cafes and gaze upon the best views of the Alhambra.



Garcia Lorca is given his own place of honor at Restaurante Chikito, where a literary group called El Rinconcillo once gathered.

Sacramonte District

Just beyond Albaicín is the even more compact Sacramonte district, settled by Gypsies, or Roma, in the 15th century after the arrival of the Spanish Monarchs and famous for its flamenco shows and homes built into man-made hillside caves.

García Lorca was greatly influenced by gypsies and flamenco and was part of the collaborative and hugely successful Flamenco Song Contest of 1922, staged to preserve primitive Andalusian flamenco against what some saw as cliché renditions being performed in tourist venues. In 1928 Garcia Lorca wrote Gypsy Ballads, which made him famous, followed by his 1931 collection of poems inspired by flamenco, Poem of the Deep Song.

Learning about Garcia Lorca on a Granada Guided Tour

To learn about Lorca's Granada, I signed up for the Federico García Lorca Free Tour offered by [Lolita's Tours](#). It's in Spanish only, but I had my own translator in the form of my traveling companion, Jonathan, a professor of Spanish literature. There are also phone apps that will do the trick.



Info A Spanish teenager, who writes poetry and is a huge fan of Garcia Lorca, visits the Lorca family home in Valderrubio.

Our guide, Carmen Ruiz Fernandez, was born in the same village as García Lorca and is passionate about what she calls his human side.

As we followed in Lorca's footsteps, she described his early years, his deformed leg that prevented him from walking properly until he was four years old, his effeminate and sensitive nature, and his compassion for those less fortunate.

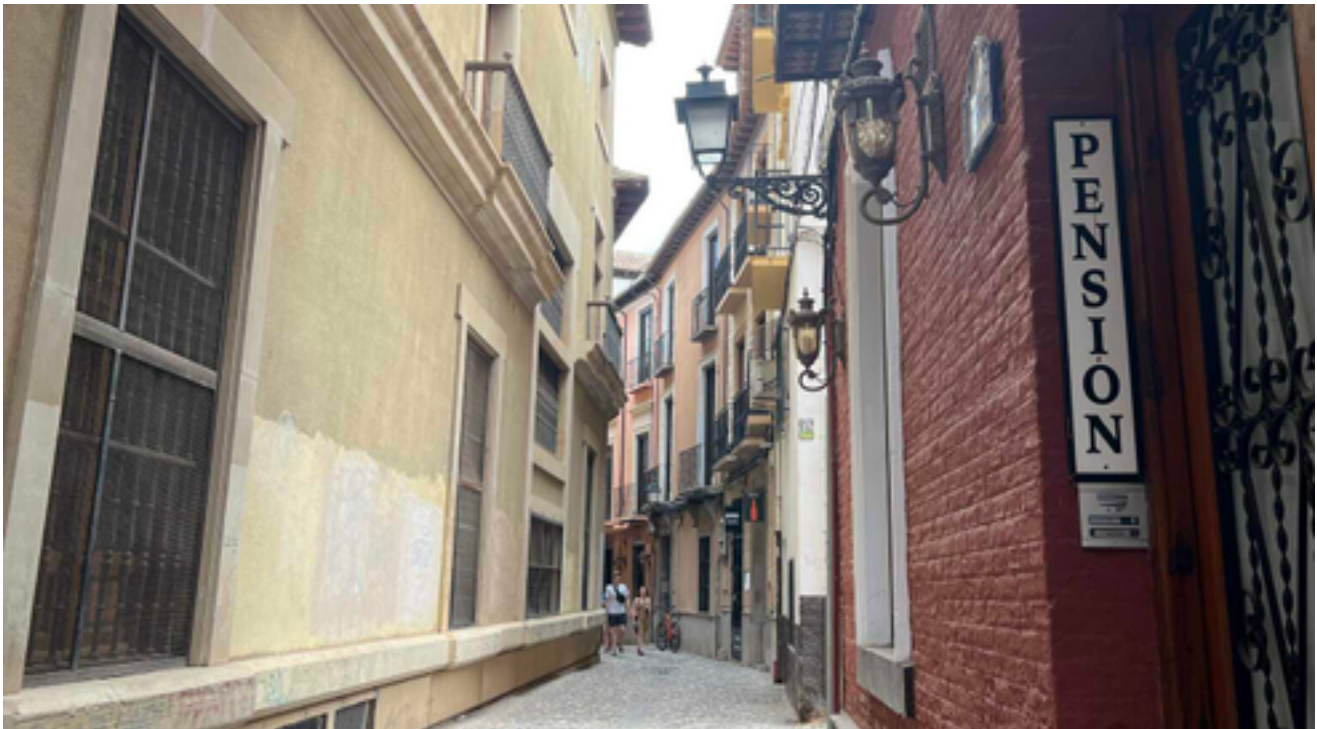
"He realized he had lots of clothes and others didn't," she said, adding that his father was

one of the wealthiest in the village.

“He had four pairs of shoes and others had none. So he gave away shoes, clothes, and coats when he was six years old. He stole food from his family to give away.”

Lorca’s early interests were in music (he began playing piano and guitar as a child and once thought of becoming a musician), the natural world around him, and in staging puppet shows and theatrical renditions of a Catholic mass.

Our guide said he studied law at the University of Granada to please his father, but finally recognizing his genius, his family sent him to Madrid, where he met filmmaker Luis Buñel and artist Salvador Dalí (a possible love affair between Lorca and Dalí has been the subject of much speculation).



Garcia Lorca most likely walked this very street in the San Matias Realejo neighborhood.

Universo Lorca

The 90-minute free tour covered lots of ground, but the best tool for learning about Garcia Lorca and visiting sites associated with him is the website [Universo Lorca](#). If it doesn't

make you a fan, nothing will.

A good place to start is at Centro Federico García Lorca in the heart of Granada, which preserves 5,000 Lorca manuscripts, holds exhibitions related to Lorca and his contemporaries, and stages performances such as flamenco.

Restaurant Chikito

Following Universo Lorca's recommended locales, Jonathan and I had a fine lunch at Restaurante Chikito, formerly the Alameda Café, where Lorca and other cultural movers and shakers communed. A statue of Lorca sits at his own table, pencil in hand, his signature bow tie around his neck.

I have a voyeuristic love of seeing inside people's homes, so we made the recommended steep trek up the Alhambra hill to a two-story modest home that Lorca often visited and where composer Manuel de Falla lived from 1922 to 1939.

Looking like Falla had just stepped out, it's filled with belongings that paint a better portrait than a picture ever can, including a zither given to him by Lorca, a chair where Lorca sat, a Hokusai print, Falla's collection of stylish hats, and a bedroom filled with various medicines (the guide at the house said Falla was a hypochondriac, smoked three packs of cigarettes a day, loved bullfighting, went to church daily, never married and lived with his sister).



Garcia Lorca's desk in his family home in Valderrubio.

Granada's most important Lorca destination is the family's summer house, Huerta de San Vicente, where García Lorca lived the last 10 years of his life and wrote some of his greatest works. Once surrounded by farmland and orchards but now imprisoned in a park, it's imbued with the poet's spirit.

There's the piano he loved to play. His upstairs bedroom remains pretty much unchanged from when he fled in August 1936, to protect his family from fascists who claimed García Lorca was a Russian spy and later came searching for a purported communication device hidden in the piano.

The right-wing squad found and arrested García Lorca seven days later at the Rosales' family home, now a hotel.



The patio and well at the birthplace of Garcia Lorca in Fuente Vaqueros.

Two Villages in La Vega

Time permitting, you should venture outside Granada to two nearby unassuming villages where Lorca spent the first decade of his life and returned on summer vacations (buses run about once an hour; ask the tourist office next to the Cathedral for schedules).

Both are located in La Vega, a flat, fertile plain planted with tobacco, corn and asparagus, dotted with poplar groves, and sustained by fresh water from the snow-capped Sierra Nevada rising in the distance.

Everything about it—the scenery, scents, colors and sounds—served as inspiration for a young Federico García Lorca, who later wrote: “It is built on water. Everywhere water canals sing and high poplars grow, through which the wind’s music gently plays in the summer.”

García Lorca was born June 5, 1898, in Fuente Vaqueros (a 25-minute bus ride from Granada), in a house that contains family photographs and mostly original furnishings, including the bed where García Lorca was born, his cradle and a baby walking chair. Because they were wealthy landowners, the family was the first in the village to acquire electricity, a phonograph, and radio.

About 2.5 miles away and connected by the same bus from Granada is Valderrubio, where the Lorca family lived from 1906 to 1909 and spent summer vacations until 1925. A large compound with a granary, stable, and servants' quarters, the museum house displays family photographs, and, in García Lorca's bedroom, his bed and desk (because he often wrote all night, his brother pleaded for and was given a different bedroom).

Connected to the Lorca house is the home that served as the inspiration for one of García Lorca's most famous plays, "The House of Bernarda Alba," which begins with a burial and ends with a suicide. Written around 1936 as one of Lorca's last works, it remains one of his best-known and most-performed plays, but

Lorca never lived to see its success (banned in Spain, it premiered in Argentina in 1945). A short version of the play is presented to visitors through videos and holograms.

García Lorca's last days

Jonathan and I ended our two-week stay in Granada with a sobering pilgrimage to hills northeast of Granada, where a 1.9-mile hike follows [Lorca's Route Through Víznar and Alfacar](#). It begins in the pretty hilltop village of Víznar, with peaceful views extending over a valley of olive orchards.

Granada native Sergio Romero Gonzalez (right) enjoys food and conversation in a restaurant in Fuente Vaquero.

Soon enough, however, we came to the 18th-century Cuzco Palace, now dilapidated and gated, where militaristic pro-Franco Nationalist forces oversaw the steady transport of

Granada civilians condemned to death.

García Lorca arrived between August 17 and 19 and spent his last night imprisoned in a former children's camp before being taken to an undisclosed ravine and executed by firing squad.

From Víznar our walk took us along a curving country road, lined with poplar trees and offering grand vistas until a gravel pathway led uphill through a Parque Natural to Barranco de Víznar (Víznar Ravine). Declared a Place of Memory, an estimated 5,000 civilians were murdered here during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and buried in mass graves. Many of their bodies, including Lorca's, were never found.

Because Francisco Franco's military dictatorship ended only with his death in 1975, many grieving families never learned what happened to their loved ones (100,000 Spaniards were executed during the civil war). The pain is ongoing. Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar addressed this very tragedy in his 2021 film, "Parallel Mothers," with scenes of mass grave excavations finally giving families closure.



Heightened Senses

As we walked to Barranco de Víznar, my senses became acutely heightened. The wind whispered through the replanted pines. Cicadas buzzed, birds sang, and dogs barked in the distance. Suddenly, Jonathan and I came across university students exhuming the bones of victims.

This cave dwelling in Sacramonte is open to the public

Nearby were plaques commemorating loved ones and a memorial that stated simply “LORCA ERAN TODOS” (All were Lorca). The scene was overwhelming.

Jonathan, who has spent his entire professional life researching and writing books on Lorca, began to weep. On the bus taking us back to Granada, we heard a song playing softly in the background: John Lennon’s “Imagine.” That’s when I began to cry.

Farewell

If I die,

leave the balcony open.

The little boy is eating oranges.

(From my balcony I can see him.

The reaper is harvesting the wheat.

(From my balcony I can hear him.)

If I die,

leave the balcony open!

Garcia Lorca