



Flying with the Sierra Nevada eagles

Words & Pictures: **Andrew Forbes**

The Sierra Nevada eagles have one of the most privileged views of Granada City and its greatest treasure, the Alhambra. Built in the 14th Century, the hill top Royal city is the legacy of the Nasrid Dynasty and is now one of Spain's most visited sites. On the ground however, residents, workers, visitors and tourists crowd the city. They jostle for tickets to the Alhambra; or push through the narrow alleys bordered by gift shops; or negotiate the busy streets filled with buses, cars and motos on their way to work.

Yet the eagles are not alone in being able to enjoy the peace and space above the noise of the city. It's now possible to take to the skies for an hour or two and take in Granada from a whole new perspective. I did just that, when towards the end of August I made the two hour drive to Granada's airport, on the city's outskirts. If you're not familiar with it, the place is easy to find with plenty of parking directly in front of the terminal building. I was greeted by Estefanía Tenorio Esteban & Silverio Jerónimo González of DimensionAerea, an innovative sightseeing company that's now offering aerial sight-seeing tours of Andalucía.

Well, there was a time when I'd have to hit the airport bar to calm my nerves before taking a flight – and then I would prefer to be on something with 4 engines, multiple exits and at least 15 flight

attendants! Thankfully, my attitude has changed now and flying is something I look forward to, if only for the time to disconnect and just chill out. Yet this day's flight was to be something very different from a shuttle flight between the Spain and the UK. It was not about getting from A to B; it was about the real experience of flight; the freedom and the sheer joy of being on top of the world.

What's more, you don't need to be one of Marbella's lottery winners to take to the skies. For as little as 100 euros, 2 people can experience the thrill of skimming over the rooftops of the city.

I'd had opted for the "Pilot for a day" trip. It's more than just the chance to soar across the ancient UNESCO city of Granada and its magical Alhambra palace. Today was to be a chance to learn the basics of what it is to fly a light aircraft. Cleared by security we entered the heart of the airport building and went to post a flight plan, taking in every detail of the route, aircraft etc. Then it was out to the aircraft, sitting waiting for us on the concrete. It was only 10.30am but already the Andalusian sun was bouncing off the white cement, promising a hot day ahead.

Having a professional showing you the ropes (Silverio is one of the country's most experienced pilots and is an accredited pilot trainer and

examiner) makes the whole process of flying reassuring. The little aircraft looked delicate next to the passenger jets taxiing in the distance, yet with a little understanding of the dials, knobs and handles, things looked well built and sturdy!

The best part, after all the pre flight checks and confirmations, was the privilege to help with take off. As we accelerated down the runway, I pulled back and suddenly we were in the air! I was so busy concentrating that there wasn't much time to be nervous! The aircraft was incredibly responsive, making my 4 x 4 parked by the terminal seem like an old tank. The pilot was in control all the time, but I was buzzing with the excitement of handling the plane.

Then it was time to enjoy the view. The altitude is pretty modest and with the clear, stable Andalusian climate it was a smooth experience. Everything below was crystal clear. It was my first time in a light aircraft and I couldn't grasp just how natural it felt. We flew over palaces, churches, convents, the bull ring, the cathedral and of course the Alhambra.

From this perspective you can truly capture the amazing citadel that is the majestic Alhambra, nestling amongst pines and outcrops of rock. No noisy motos or queues up here; just a 360 degree view of one of the most fascinating and dramatic parts of Andalusia.

If you don't fancy learning about the basics of flying then there is no need to worry. There are regular aerial sightseeing trips available for Granada, and other areas such as the desert of Almeria and also romantic evening flights – or if you want the ultimate adrenalin rush, why not try an acrobatic flight!

It's no surprise that Nasrid, the last of the Moorish Kings of Granada cried when he lost the city to Spain's Catholic Monarchs. This is a magical place this is even more wondrous when seen from the air.



DimensionAerea

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