

Listen and answer these questions:

1. What architectural style does the mosque remind the journalist of and why?
2. What was the population of Cordoba in the middle ages?
3. What do Muslims want from the Vatican?
4. When was Cordoba reconquered by Christians?
5. Why is the mosque unique?
6. How much of the floor space was used for the new building?
7. What does Isobel Martinez Richter say about the symbolic value of the mosque?
8. How has the attitude to Muslims changed recently in Spain?
9. What has caused this change?
10. What other famous Islamic buildings are mentioned?

Muslims ancient mosque appeal

By Malcolm Billings BBC, southern Spain

In southern Spain, once the centre of an Islamic civilisation in Europe, the Muslim community has appealed to the Vatican to be allowed to pray alongside Christians in what was once the Great Mosque of Cordoba.

Fill each gap with a word or short phrase

It is **(1)**_____ buildings in the Islamic world and **(2)**_____.

The first thing I saw was a courtyard full of orange blossom. A fountain **(3)**_____ in the middle.

I felt that I was already back in the Middle Ages **(4)**_____ the entrance of the mosque itself.

The interior is stunning - a **(5)**_____ of marble pillars supporting hundreds of **(6)**_____ made of pink bricks.

Many of the marble pillars have a curiously Roman look about them.

Not really surprising. They were almost certainly **(7)**_____ a ruined Roman temple that still lies under the mosque.

The buildings under the mosque were **(8)**_____ and the best decorated bits and pieces fell neatly into place as the mosque **(9)**_____ more than 1,200 years ago.

The Great Mosque became the **(10)**_____ of Cordoba when the city, with a population of about half a million, was the biggest and wealthiest in Europe.

The Muslim rulers of southern Spain had created an important cultural centre with a **(11)**_____ made up of Jews, Christians and Arabs.

Appeal to Vatican

I made my way through the arches to the prayer niche, the Mihrab, which was added in the 10th Century, when Christian craftsmen from Constantinople were imported to decorate it with gold, red, green and turquoise coloured tiles.

The 1,000-year-old inscriptions in Arabic praising Allah are still there in this sacred area where Muslims hope to be allowed to pray. **(12)**_____ the Vatican to be allowed to do so.

The 500 or so Muslims now living in Cordoba have **(13)**_____ the small building given to them for prayers in one of the city's parks.

Standing by the prayer wall and facing Mecca I asked a cathedral guide what would happen if a Muslim fell to his knees and began to pray.

"Cathedral security would be here immediately. It's not allowed", she said. "This is cathedral, not a mosque."

And that is the moment when a visitor **(14)**_____.

The Great Mosque was turned into a church when Cordoba fell to the Christians in 1236. Its arcades were **(15)**_____ to become chapels and shrines, and an altar was erected in one of the mosque's central aisles.

Controversial

For almost 300 years Christians worshipped in this curious **(16)**_____ cathedral, but in 1523 the pressure to replace the mosque built up in a militant society that had banished both Jews and Arabs.

The cathedral chapter got permission to build. But what happened is remarkable.

In other cities like Seville, as the re-conquest **(17)**_____, mosques were demolished and churches covered the sites.

(18)_____, a new cathedral was built inside the mosque.

It is a shock which visitors today are rarely prepared for. **(19)**_____ the centre of the building, using perhaps 20-25 per cent of the mosque's floor space, is a Renaissance church that could be **(20)**_____ small churches in Rome.

Marble walls and domes, **(21)**_____ of Christ and the saints, and choir stalls superbly carved in mahogany won from the forests of Spain's new South American colonies, were erected.

They had built the smallest cathedral in Spain in the middle of the largest mosque. Even then the decision was controversial - the town council was against it and Charles V, who sanctioned the project, seemed to regret the intrusion after the deed was done.

Post-bombing fears

Archaeologist Isobel Martinez Richter believes that "people then **(22)**_____ of the mosque as a symbol of tolerance and that the decision not to demolish it was "a sign of respect for the multicultural history of the city".

"The group **(23)**_____", she added, "must have been very wise - I only wish we knew their names."

Spaniards still **(24)**_____ their multicultural roots. The wave of immigration from Morocco to fill the jobs created by a booming economy has created few problems.

But since 9/11 and the terrorist attacks in Madrid, can that tolerance be sustained?

The attacks profoundly shocked Spaniards, many of whom are bewildered by the way Muslim fundamentalism has targeted Spain.

Fear and suspicion of Muslims have become part of everyday life. It is

(25)_____ for discussion about Muslim prayers in Cordoba's cathedral, but local politicians have not ruled it out. Now is not the time though to debate the issue, they say.

Isabel Romero, a Spanish convert to Islam, told a local paper that being allowed to pray in the cathedral is not about claiming anything and much less about re-conquering.

"It does not make sense", she said, "that when Muslims go to pray they are told to get up."

Southern Spain has many superb Islamic buildings from the past - the Alhambra palace at Granada is one of the best known. In Seville the city's **(26)**_____ is the massive minaret of the 12th century mosque.

Cordoba's mosque however is a unique survival - saved only because of a decision in the sixteenth century to insert a Renaissance cathedral in the middle of the building.

Perhaps Friday prayers may once again be heard in one of the finest buildings on the list of World Heritage sites.

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