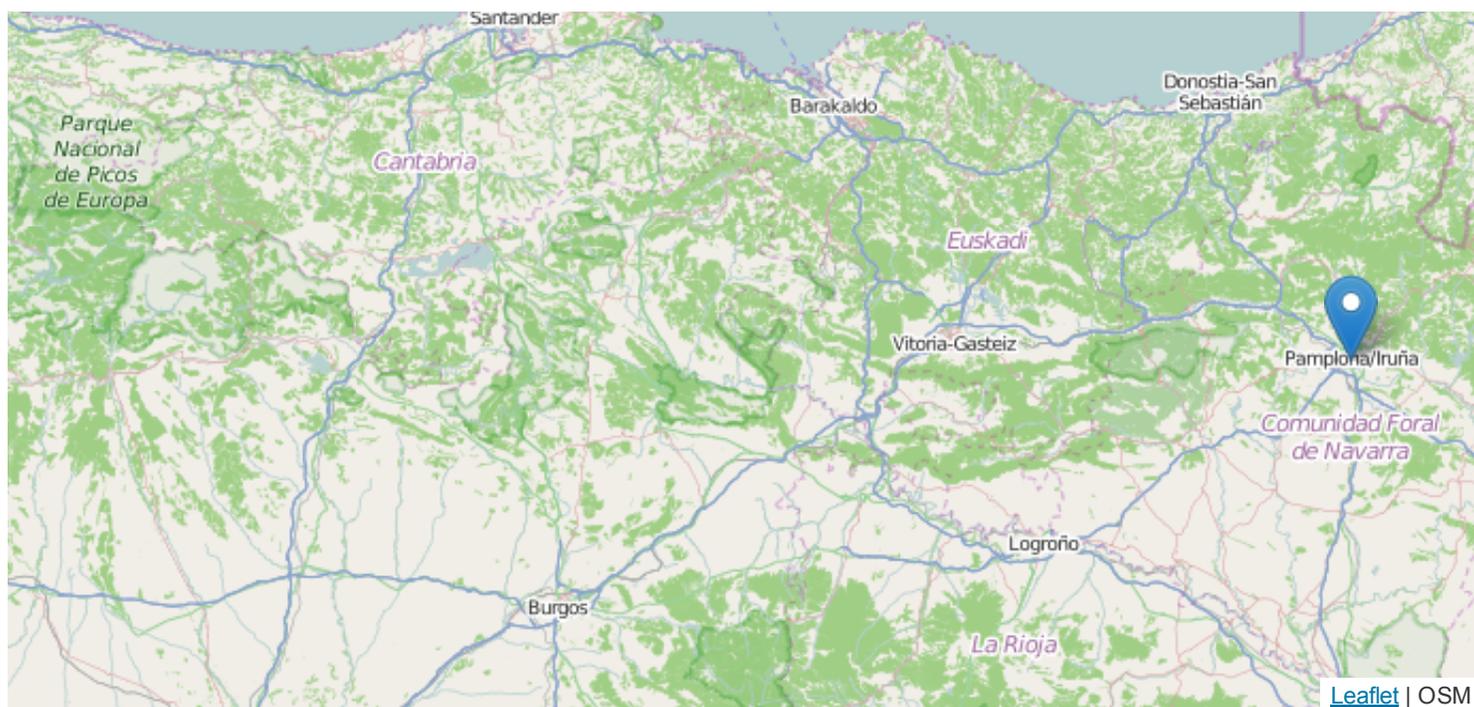


Issue 27 - Sport - Fiesta

ISSUE 27

# FIESTA

— BY KATHERINE RODEGHIER —



Runners mill about the street below my balcony. Most wear the traditional costume: white trousers and shirt, red sash or scarf. Nervous and fidgety, they jump up and down, stretch their legs, anxiously check their shoelaces.

At exactly 8 AM, a rocket explodes, echoing off buildings on the narrow street, and all heads turn toward the tsunami of humans surging their way and the six fighting bulls at their heels. Runners pick up speed, leap to the side to avoid curved, pointed horns. Some stumble and fall. The wave passes below my feet, a blur of white and red and black. In a matter of seconds, they are gone.

The running of the bulls lasts about three minutes when all is said and told: a half-mile scramble from corral to bullring through the cordoned-off old city streets of Pamplona.



No one runs the entire half-mile route. Runners choose a section, each with particular challenges: steep, narrow or curved, which can cause bulls to careen into buildings or barricades and fall on slick streets.

The six fighting bulls run at almost 25 kilometres per hour and weigh around half a tonne. If a bull is separated from the group, it gets disoriented and may stop and charge. Runners are instructed not to touch the bulls, which could cause them to turn and gore. Green-shirted shepherds run with the animals, carrying long sticks to herd them, and may strike any runner that lays a hand on them.

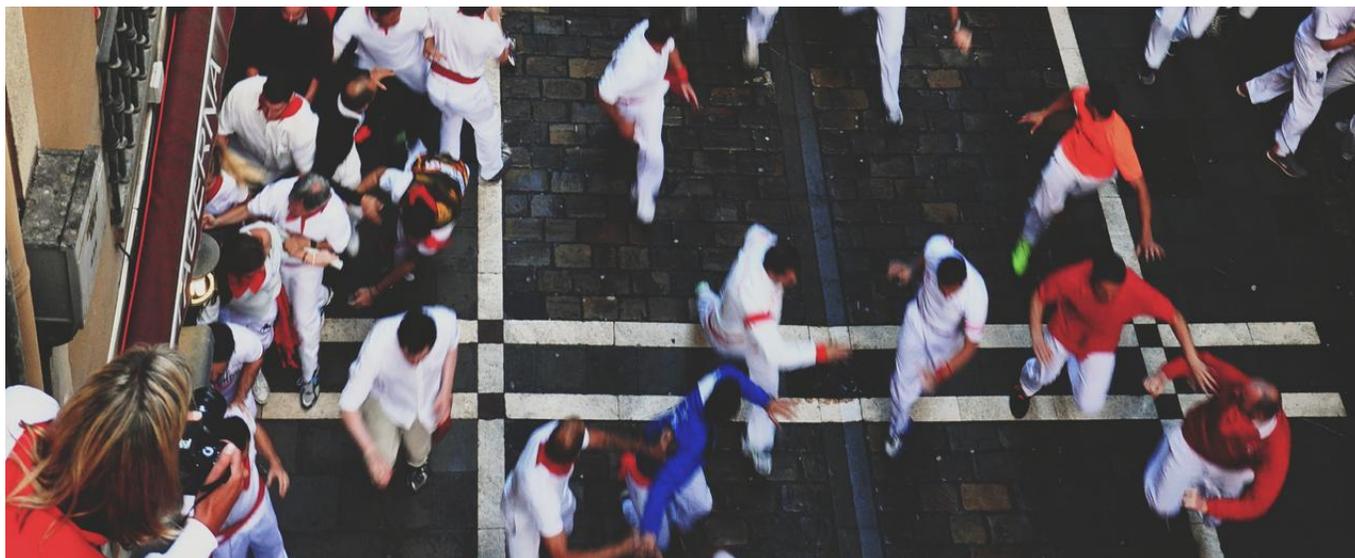
Between 200 and 300 runners are injured each year; an average of ten are gored, but because ambulances line the route to quickly treat the injured, there have been only fifteen deaths in the past century.

There might be more if not for the rules. Runners must be at least eighteen and not still inebriated from the previous night's party. Sandals are forbidden, as are backpacks—bulls are drawn to the swaying when its owner runs—and no cameras or phones are allowed. Last year a runner stopped to pose for a selfie. Bad idea; it can cause a dangerous pile-up of man and beast.

Selfies or no selfies, pile-ups still occur. More runners are crowding the streets than ever before, raising the likelihood of misadventure. Between two and five thousand runners join the run each day, the largest

turnout on weekends. Most are inexperienced first-timers. About 80 percent of runners are under age 35; eight percent are women, 60 percent are foreigners.





While the morning bull runs get most of the attention during the festival, the bullfights also grab headlines. The six bulls that run through the streets every morning die in the bullring every evening. While animal rights protests put an end to bullfights in some cities in Spain, they remain an essential part of Pamplona's festival, especially after the success of Hemingway's novel and its glamorisation of bullfighting.

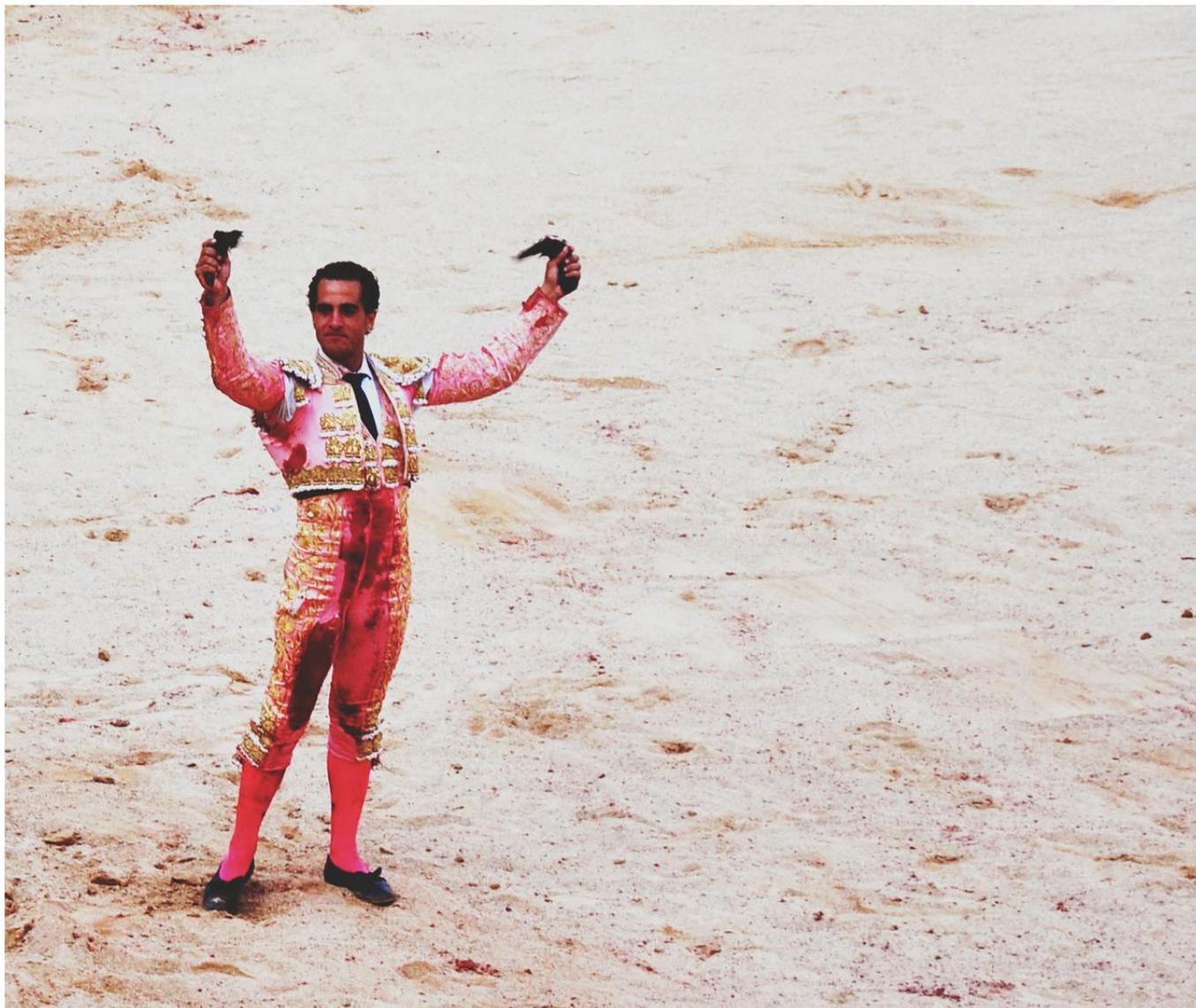


Three matadors take turns facing two bulls apiece. The whole process, by tradition, must take no more than 22 minutes. If a matador performs well, one ear of the bull is cut off and presented to him—two if the performance is exceptional.

Spectators fall into two categories. Those in seated in the shade are usually curious visitors or bullfighting aficionados. Those in the sun are a raucous bunch of young revellers, or neighbourhood groups that come in costume, waving banners and playing musical instruments.

And the bull? His carcass is dragged off by a team of mules or horses and the meat is sold to butchers.

Not everyone in Pamplona is pleased with bullfighting or the festival that capitalizes on it. A taxi driver, who ran with the bulls as a teen, told me he no longer goes to bullfights after seeing blood spurting from a bull when seated at close range and, aside from shuttling customers around, he doesn't participate in San Fermin. "We shouldn't do that to animals," he said, shaking his head. "Hemingway should have stayed at home."



San Fermin, Pamplona's martyred third-century saint, is honoured every July 7, when the faithful remove his bejewelled figure from its chapel in the Church of San Lorenzo and carry it through the streets. Almost everyone along the parade route wears the festival costume. Some claim the white outfits symbolise the saint's purity and the red scarf the blood of his decapitation. Others say it represents the white apron and blood-stained towel of butchers who once ran with the bulls to judge the quality of their meat.

After the parades and morning bull runs, spectators line up for churros still warm from the kettle at family-run La Manueta Churreria, a Pamplona institution since 1872. Because of her age, the grandmother who runs the operation now opens only during the festival, plus a few days in June and October. Her four adult children take time off from successful professional careers to help out, slicing coils of fried dough, running the cash register and manning kettles of oil set over fires of axe-cut beechwood.



In the late evening, on the Plaza del Castillo, diners compete for prime restaurant seating under umbrella tables where they can watch bands and folk musicians perform. Waiters slice slivers of Iberico ham onto plates for

serving. During San Fermin, dishes of bull meat, such as rabo de toro, bull's tail, and estofado de toro, bull stew, are big sellers. Cafe Iruna, the city's oldest, occupies prime space on the plaza. This was Hemingway's hangout; a life-size statue of the author leans against the bar.

Early in his career, Hemingway had rooms at the now-closed Hotel Quintana, which he named the Hotel Montoya in his 1926 novel. After he made some money, he moved across Plaza del Castillo to the Gran Hotel La Perla where he'd view the bull run from the balcony of room 217. When the five-star hotel reopened in 2007 after renovations, Hemingway's room, renumbered 201, got an updated bathroom, but the bedroom remained the same as when he occupied it: writing desk, pink loveseat, dial phone, twin beds.

Those who can't book Hem's room content themselves with rubbing his nose on a bust in the lobby. The lucky snag tables by the windows of the hotel restaurant to watch the bulls run past over breakfast.

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## more from this issue

Fun and Games in  
Ancient Greece

Dubai at Dawn: Part  
One

The Sporting Life

Dubai at Dawn: Part  
Two

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