



The Bullfight

Man has been challenging the bull since time immemorial, not only in pursuit of meat and clothing. The famous paintings in the Altamira Caves, where Neolithic man depicted his slaying of bison and bulls using the very blood of his foes, strongly suggest that the encounter had as much to do with ritual and mystery as with food.

Bulls were the object of worship in ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia and Crete, not to mention the sacred cattle of India. They were the old deities of many pagan religions which often involved curious fertility rites. Perhaps the most notable was Mithraism, the Sun-Bull religion which was widespread throughout the Roman Empire.

Spain's brave fighting bull is a fierce untamed animal, whose bloodlines and pedigrees have been protected over the centuries in order to maintain its purity and the characteristics which make it both fundamental and particularly apt for the *corrida de toros*, the bull fight.

The fighting bull is not trained to charge; this herbivorous creature is born with the tendency to attack anything that moves or challenges its predominance. It is a fallacy that bulls charge only red for they are colour-blind, but a bull has been known to charge an express train which crossed its path.

It is, in fact, the bull's selected bloodlines, responsible for its innate bravery, nobility and proud bearing, which have preserved it from the slaughterhouse and granted it an almost enviable life. Pampered as a valuable thoroughbred, the *toro bravo* is destined to an existence of four to five years of splendour in the grass before it is faced with the ultimate test, its appearance in the arena.

Bullfighting goes back for centuries or perhaps millennia, and even Julius Caesar is said to have challenged and speared a bull from horseback. During Spain's most glorious historic period, bullfighting was an important part of public life. For some 600 years, the aristocracy was responsible for breeding bulls and then fighting them before king and court. The spectacle was enjoyed by court and public alike, much like the northern European tradition of the joust.

