

PROFESSIONAL THEMED GUIDES

GUIDE FOR

# Andalucía

## unexpected

DISCOVERED BY:



## Tourism of the future will be a different type of tourism

The changes in tourism were already evident before 2020, but they are even more so today. The health and economic crisis will accelerate a process that was, for many reasons, as necessary as it was mandatory. Tourism in the 21st century will be different, much less monolithic and homogeneous, more specialised, with travellers looking for new stimuli, services and experiences.

Andalusia is one of the most touristic regions in Spain, Europe and the world. However, to remain so it needs to diversify what it offers to tourists, taking advantage of the extraordinary landscape and cultural, monumental and gastronomic wealth. Like so many other national and international destinations, for too many years tourism has focused on beaches, sunshine, a few cities and monuments. Nowadays these landmarks do not need promotion, but rather to improve the quality of services and reduce the number of tourists. In contrast to this there are numerous extremely attractive areas that are failing to benefit from niche tourism that is eager to find new experiences and places to visit.

The purpose of this guide is precisely that, to show that there are different, unexpected and unknown destinations in Andalusia in order to promote sustainable and high-quality tourism, in less common places in the region. It is not our intention to create a comprehensive compendium of all the charming and unexpected places in Andalusia, but to provide a brief sample based on 8 experiences enjoyed in summer 2019 during press travel and creating a blog organised by a number of Andalusian provincial councils. And especially in summer 2020 during a series of trips to raise awareness for the "ANDALUCÍA DESPIERTA" campaign organised by Tourism and Sports in Andalusia

## Common central concepts with the diversity of niche tourism

Today's tourists no longer choose their destinations for a single reason; their needs

in collaboration with Provincial Councils and Tourist Boards to promote the destination within national territory. It would be impossible to include them all, as nearly all the towns and villages in Andalusia have a certain charm and attraction for the niche tourism of the future. We hope this guide will help travellers to discover many more destinations in the immensely rich and diverse region of Andalusia.

For this reason, we will only be talking about a few areas in each of the eight Andalusian provinces. These are places and districts that we discovered on our travels. Towns and cities where we were also able to talk to politicians, businessmen and women, entrepreneurs and ordinary citizens, who told us about their life, their problems, and showed us their treasures and their projects for improvement. Without them it would have been impossible for the "El Giróscopo Viajero" team to create this guide. Without them, and without the collaboration and hard work of Tourism and Sports in Andalusia, who did so much to find the places, companies and people to help us in this work.

There really should be a special mention for all those who welcomed, helped and cared for us. Andalusia is a place of welcome and a passageway, which is why so many of the initiatives and projects that are bringing about so much change in tourism have come from outside, from other parts of Spain, from Europe and other continents. This contribution by outsiders is essential to give value to these lesser known regions and towns. So that in Andalusia, and in the rest of Spain, the rural area is valued more highly and recognised, together with the natural, patrimonial and human heritage that we enjoy every day and, above all, so that we may share it with more satisfaction.

and tastes are now much more segmented and diversified. The weather, the sea and the

beaches are no longer the only factor. This does not mean that they are no longer an advantage and a positive differential value. The sun, good weather and the coastline are a positive asset and a springboard, but the areas that enjoy these features need to be decongested. Other parts of Andalusia need to receive tourists, because they are true gems, but also because there is an increasing demand for other types of tourism. There will also be new economic opportunities for these regions. The inhabitants will benefit from niche tourism that can establish a population in rural areas, make agricultural production viable and preserve unique natural spaces.

More and more tourists are escaping from big cities, crowded streets and crowded beaches in search of a different kind of travel. Active tourism, nature, sports, wellness, gastronomy, oenology, etc., are just a few examples of rapidly developing tourism niches. The selection of charming accommodation and high-quality restaurants is already another differential feature for travelling to less usual, more unexpected places.

The promotion of those areas that have interesting natural environments, unknown monuments, preserved landscapes and surprising gastronomy needs to start with their recognition within Andalusia itself. The tourism of the future needs to be of good quality, based on good services and fair prices that develop the entire territory. On our travels we discovered a large number public and private institutions that are committed to this path, which is the only way to create positive synergies. So this guide will fill a gap in the promotion of niche tourism, a sector that is growing and will continue to grow in the years to come.

Having said this, we have chosen to represent each province with a few of its most surprising and least known areas, at least from our point of view and our personal experience. Forgive us for not having had time to discover even more. In spite of this, and while recognising that we have not included all of Andalusia's jewels, all those that do appear really do deserve to do so. With a fond desire to give back a part of what this region has given to us, here is our small and modest guide to some of the less known and unexpected places in Andalusia.

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The publisher is not responsible for the opinions and content expressed by the authors.

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**When we think of Almería, we immediately visualise idyllic Mediterranean beaches, crystal clear waters to enjoy during an eternal summer of endless hours of sunshine. We imagine a road trip touring the coastline and the spectacular cliff roads that embrace the unspoilt beaches of Cabo de Gata. But we also remember images of mythical films, the Spaghetti Westerns filmed in the spectacular Tabernas Desert. Because Almería is sea, sun and light; Almería is unspoilt nature; Almería is films.**

“  
Mines, films,  
nature and  
science  
”



# Almería

Almería is a mosaic of landscapes. The Sierra de los Filabres looks out over the desert and the sea from a great height.

**B**ut Almería is so much more. It is a mosaic of contrasting landscapes of great beauty and that tell us about another Almería, where it snows and it is cold but where green also predominates. Beyond the sea and the desert stand the peaks of the Sierra de los Filabres and the fertile valley of the Almanzora river with meadows and orchards. And that is not all, because what people do not know is that a good part of the province is occupied by mountains like Los Filabres, María-Los Velez and Sierra Nevada. And yes, a good part of Sierra Nevada is also in the province of Almería!

Almería also means mining and industrial history: Alto Almanzora, Los Filabres and the Sierra de Cabrera-Bédar with iron mines abandoned in the 20th century, and the Almanzora Valley with marble quarries in Macael that are still active. To explore it you

need to travel through rugged, transformed landscapes in search of its historical heritage, the paths taken by miners from the end of the 19th century until 1970. This is where we discovered hiking routes and mining villages that are recovering their memories, places like Las Menas in Serón and the mining environment in Bédar. And pathways taking us past ancient oak trees and abandoned farmhouses like El Serval and Los Canos known as the “Machu Pichu of Almería”. We cycled along railway lines along which the mineral used to be transported, today converted into Vías Verdes or “Rail Trails”, like the Vía Verde del Hierro in Serón. And we travelled into the bowels of the earth to put ourselves in the shoes of the miners of Mina Rica, and to enjoy the geological wonders of the Geode in Pulpí and the Karst and Gypsum Nature Reserve in Sorbas.

This other unexpected Almería also involves science, the sky is open to the huge telescopes at the Calar Alto Astronomical Observatory, located at an altitude of 2,168 meters of altitude, where Spanish and international scientists can study the universe. Or for hikers like us to reach the highest peak in the Sierra de los Filabres where we can meet the sky and on our way there enjoy incredible panoramic views of Almería’s different landscapes: mountains, desert, the sea.

And Almería is also art and culture. There are treasured, surprising museums like the Ibáñez Museum in Olula del Río, the “Ciudad de la Cultura” (City of Culture), that exhibits one of the largest collections of Contemporary Art in Andalusia, in the heart of the Almanzora Valley.

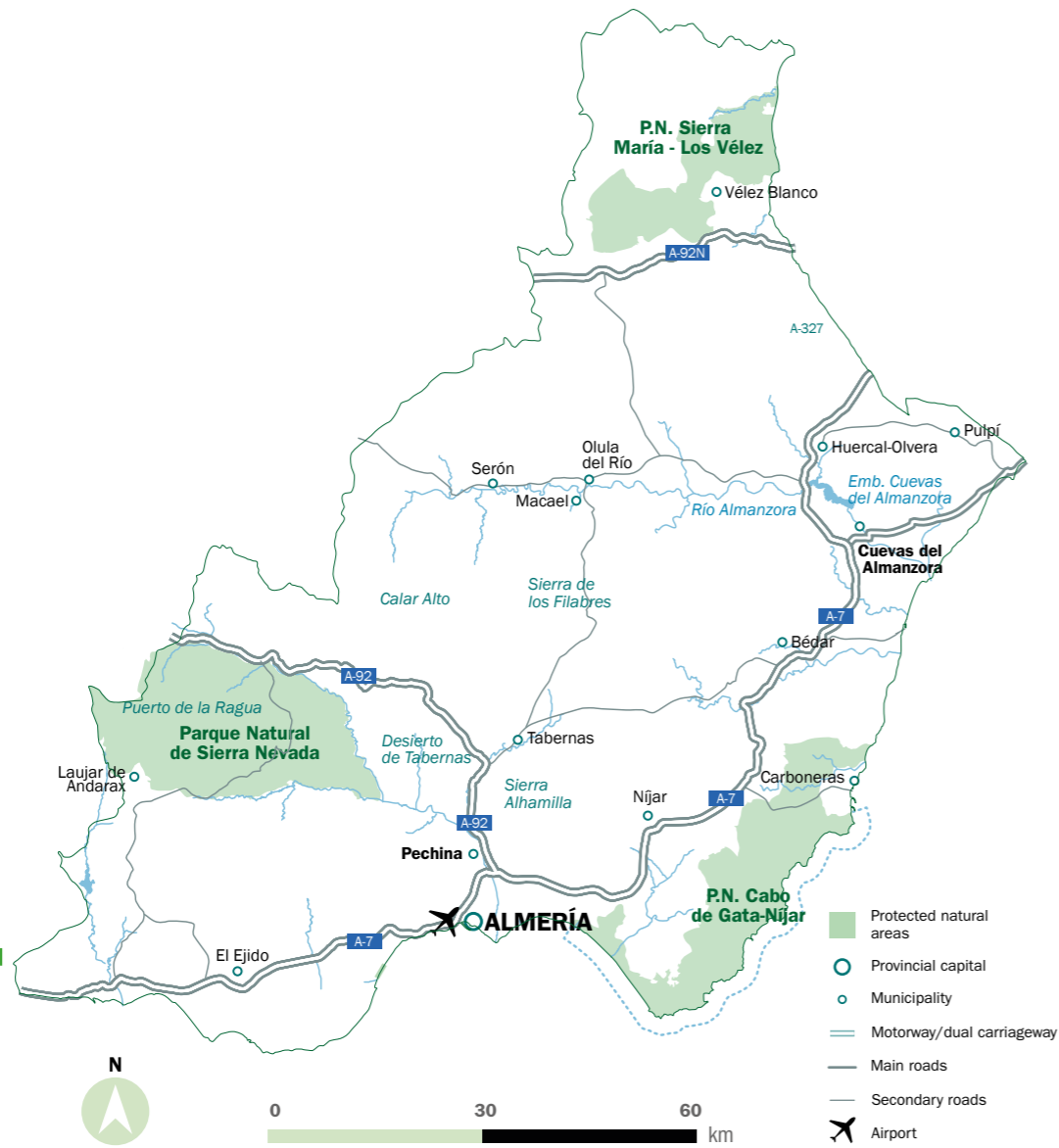
And of course, Almería means gastronomy, but a gastronomy where local produce plays a leading role and where history is always very

present. Very few people know this but Almería also means wine and olive oil, because here there are and have always been vineyards. Few remain, but there are passionate winemakers who know how to blend good grapes, a benign climate and technology to produce surprising wines. And here is another surprise: Almería produces olive oil in the desert, a very special EVOO made from olives that grow right next to Tabernas.

Join us on a journey to this unexpected Almería, to surprising and quite unknown places. We discovered some of them on two trips through the province: One in the Sierra de los Filabres and the Almanzora Valley, and the other in the Alpujarra and the Tabernas Desert. There are many more unexpected places in Almería, but this small sample is clear proof that Almería is much more than a coastal strip, it just all about wanting to discover it.

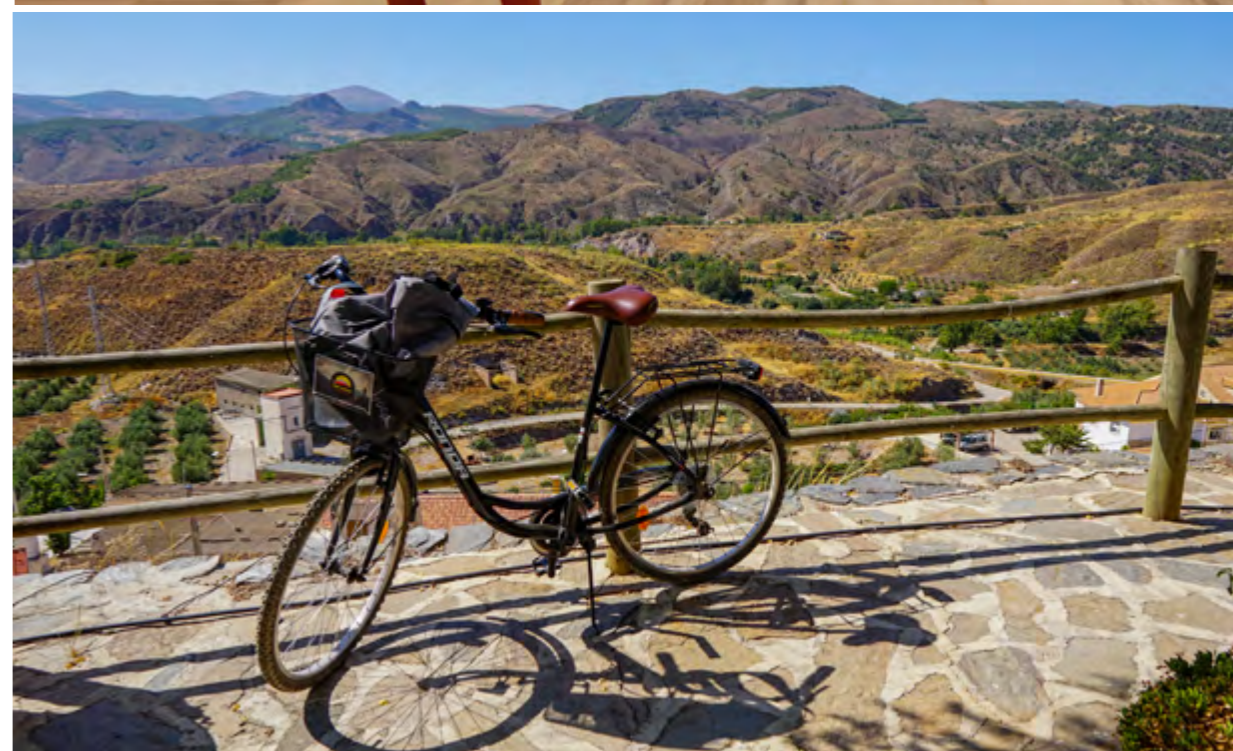


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Almería also means films. The Mini-Hollywood theme park pays tribute to the Spaghetti Westerns filmed in the Tabernas desert

The Ibáñez Museum in Olula del Río exhibits one of the largest collections of Contemporary Art in Andalusia.

You can photograph magnificent postcard scenes of the Sierra de los Filabres along the Vía Verde del Hierro in Serón.





The spectacular Sierra de Los Filabres.

## The Sierra de los Filabres and the Almanzora Valley

The Sierra de los Filabres is one of the scenarios for our unexpected Almería. This massif is part of the Cordillera Penibética mountain range that is over 60 kilometres long and covers an area of 151 thousand hectares. Located at the gateway to the Tabernas desert, is bordered to the north by the Almanzora River Valley. There is a variety of contrasting landscapes that will pleasantly surprise the traveller: the arid desert, the rugged mountains and the lush valley.

The landscape offers all the possibilities for slow tourism

The monumental nature of the Sierra de los Filabres attracts tourists who love nature and active tourism. The vegetation is rich in stands of holm oaks, pines, Portuguese oaks and cork oaks, but there are also orchards with almond and orange trees down in the Almanzora River Valley.

Mountains severely affected by the historical exploitation of their rocks and minerals (marble quarries and iron ore mines), economic activities going back in time that

will be of interest to those making industrial tourism. This crossroads of ancient cultures will delight lovers of history, culture, traditions and gastronomy who will find much to interest them here. Finally, Calar Alto, a great European astronomical centre that will captivate those who are passionate about Science and observing the Universe.

We would like to propose a combination of all these types of tourism. A trip to the Sierra de los Filabres and the Almanzora Valley along hiking trails, itineraries taking advantage of Vías Verdes to discover the mining legacy and the landscape of the mountains. A special journey to Calar Alto, to enjoy the spectacular mountain scenery and watch the stars. And walks through delightful villages nestled in the mountains and towns on the banks of the Almanzora river like Gérgal, Albanchez, Bayarque, Bacares, Macael, Serón, Lubrín, Olula del Río and Purchena, Tíjola to discover the monumental, cultural and gastronomic heritage. Quiet places, ideal for those seeking peace and tranquillity, to enjoy the unconditional features of slow tourism.



A number of hiking trails have been prepared for you to explore mining areas like Las Menas, in Serón.

Tour of the Mining Town of Las Menas where 2,000 people at one time used to live.

### 1.1. Mining and industrial Almería

The Sierra de los Filabres, the Almanzora Valley and the Levante of Almería are areas rich in mineral that has been exploited throughout their history. These mines have left an interesting cultural legacy that is being recovered so we can learn all about it. This industrial tourism can be perfectly combined with active tourism since many old mines are located in preserved natural areas and far from the cities. This means you can discover Almería's mining past by hiking or cycling, and fully enjoy the landscape of the area at the same time. A number of hiking trails have been prepared so you can discover the mining environment of the Sierra de los Filabres and the Almanzora Valley. For example, the mining towns of Las Menas, Los Canos and abandoned farmhouses like El Serval. Routes that are complemented by the Vía Verde del Hierro, which can be taken by bike, on horseback or on foot. There are two important features of the mining heritage of the Sierra de los Filabres and the Almanzora Valley that invite travellers to follow in the footsteps of the past.

In the eastern part or "Levante" of the province of Almería, the mining area of Bédar and almost facing the Mediterranean, the rich mining area of Pulpí, of great industrial value but where you will also find the gigantic Geode of Pulpí. A geological wonder that, together with the Karst Nature Reserve in Yesos de Sorbas, constitutes a new attraction for this trip through unexpected Almería.

### 1.2. Hiking and a historical tour in the mining town of Las Menas in Serón

On a 6.6 km circular hiking route called the Sendero Las Menas SL-A 192 it will take you about 2 and a half hours to discover the mining area around the town of Las Menas. We find ourselves on the northern slope of the Sierra de los Filabres, at an altitude of 1,500 metres, 16 km from Serón. A magnificent, rugged landscape chosen by the mining companies who

worked here from 1887 to 1968 because of the quality of the iron ore. A tour of the different installations in this mining preserve that brought the area wealth and gave work to thousands of families for many years. There are magnificent views of the mining area from the lookout points, as well as of the rugged terrain in the Sierra de los Filabres where winters are snowy and the summers pleasant.

The tour of the mining town of Las Menas is linked to the hiking route, and helps us learn about the history of a town where as many as 2,000 people once lived. The story of three companies (Belgian, English and Dutch) that brought wealth to the area, but also miners who endured very harsh working and living conditions. Work in Las Menas was a complex affair, but the intelligence of the owners improved living conditions and there was considerable social progress for the time. We visited a number of installations, some not at all typical for the province: homes, workshops, a hospital, cinema, casino, football pitch, etc. as well as the Visitor Centre and the Mining Interpretation Centre. We would finally like to say that the campsite in Las Menas, located in the old town, makes an excellent base camp for these two tours.

In the east of Almería there are routes where you can discover the mining past from the 19th century, with the arrival of the railway and the construction of loading docks

### 1.3. A tour of Bédar's mining past. Mining Route (SL-A77)

In eastern Almería, known as the Levante, there are also routes where you can discover the mining past whose splendour arrived in the 19th century together with the railway and the construction of the loading docks. One example is the Mining Route (SL-A77) in Bédar. An 11.2 km mixed route on foot and by car (7.8 km along the trail and 3.3 km to return to the starting point. It is an easy route and can





The magnificent La Peana oak tree, the largest and oldest in Andalusia.

The old Serón railway station, one of the most interesting points on the El Hierro Vía Verde Rail Trail.

Traces of its mining past Bédar SL-A 77 Mining Route.

The most refreshing surprise on the route is a cistern with crystalline waters located at the foot of the Vía Verde rail trail.

The beautiful little town of Serón, within the framework of the Sierra de los Filabres, is an obligatory stop on this route through unexpected Almería.

**The El Hierro Vía Verde rail trail follows the old railway line between Guadix and Almendricos**

be completed in about 4 hours. The route takes you through tunnels along what used to be the railway line, past mines, loading docks and beautiful mountainous countryside.

The route begins at the Tres Amigos loading bay (1897) which used to be the starting point for the mineral railway to Garrucha. You will follow the route of the railway along many parts of the trail. The attractions along the route include the ruins of the mines in La Pobreza, the 200-metre Servalco Tunnel on the mining railway, a locomotive shed, the mine in La Higuera, spectacular views of the Barranco de Baeza ravine, the mining installations in San Manuel, the tunnel in San Manuel and the Vía Vulcana where you can still follow the route taken by the railway wagons to the tunnel. Two short

tunnels and the Vulcano hoppers; the bridge on the Barranco de los Lobos ravine; the Pit of Jupiter.

A route that makes it easy to imagine the route taken by the railway at the time.

#### 1.4. Vía Verde del Hierro, a cycling tour through Serón's mining history

The El Hierro Vía Verde rail trail follows the old railway line between Guadix and Almendricos. It takes hikers and cyclists through the landscapes of the Sierra de los Filabres and the mining history of Serón. It used to be a railway line for transporting iron ore and that saw continuous activity in the 20th century until 1984. An easy 11.8 km route with interesting features: The Los Canos Loading Station and the Rambla Bridge over the Almanzora River.

One of the most beautiful stops is the Serón station, with a passenger building, engine sheds, a stunning loading bay with two aerial cables and the La Estación restaurant serving homemade food. The most refreshing surprise along the route is a cistern with crystalline waters located at the foot of the Vía Verde rail trail. All with panoramic views of the Sierra de los Filabres with amazing gullies, especially as seen from the Mirador de Fuencaliente lookout point. An easy, pleasant cycling route steeped in history.

On the way back, you really should visit the town of Serón nestled in the Sierra. Go up to the Nasrid castle to enjoy the panoramic views, walk through the narrow streets, visit the magnificent History Centre and stop for a bite at one of the restaurants.

#### 1.5. The trail of the ancient holm oaks of Serón - PR-A 319

Through the land that used to be inhabited by miners who lived in the now abandoned farmhouses, a circular route of 10.9 km that is an opportunity for lovers of hiking, trees and history to discover the landscapes of the Sierra de los Filabres.

You really have to stop and see the holm oak of La Peana, the largest and oldest in Andalusia and included in the Andalusian Inventory of Unique Trees and Groves. And this is not the only one, there are other magnificent holm oaks: in Trébedes, La Carrasca de la Poza, outside the chapel of La Loma and in an area called Los Sapos.

It is very special experience to visit the old farmhouses in El Pocico, El Serval and another large mining town called Los Canos, known as the "Machu Pichu of Almería", located at the foot of a spectacular ravine. We saw this from quite a distance, but we hope to return to this trail will surely inspire hikers who love nature and history.

#### 1.6. Macael Marble and Quarries. Industrial tourism

Macael is a town renowned for its marble, a noble material that has been exploited since ancient times. The people who inhabited the Almanzora

Valley in the Later Neolithic and Chalcolithic eras already appreciated marble and made small idols that they deposited in tombs. But it was the Romans, and later the Moors, who exploited the Macael quarries on a large scale. During the Al-Andalus period, Macael marble was used to build and adorn the Alhambra in Granada and the Mosque in Córdoba. Later in the Modern Age it was used in El Escorial, the Cathedral in Seville, etc. With the arrival of the railway in the 19th century, the industry experienced a revival, with its produce being exported to the rest of Spain and Europe. And it is still alive, with Macael being the largest producer of marble in Spain. On an international scale, it can be found in the Kremlin in Moscow and the Hotel Burj Al Arab in Dubai and marble continues to be a driving force for the economy in Macael.

Its importance is plain to see in the history, the quarries and the excavated hillsides of the Sierra de los Filabres. Also in its streets, where there is a tribute to it on every corner. The Fuente de los Leones like the one in the Alhambra in Granada, a giant pestle and mortar, mosaics of endless stairs, pavements and marble buildings, etc. In short, Macael is an authentic museum, a showcase that tells the history and culture surrounding marble.

To see where this material comes from, you can visit some of the open pit quarries that occupy 10,000 hectares of the Sierra de los Filabres between Macael and Olula del Río.

**Macael marble was used to build the Alhambra in Granada and the Mosque in Córdoba**

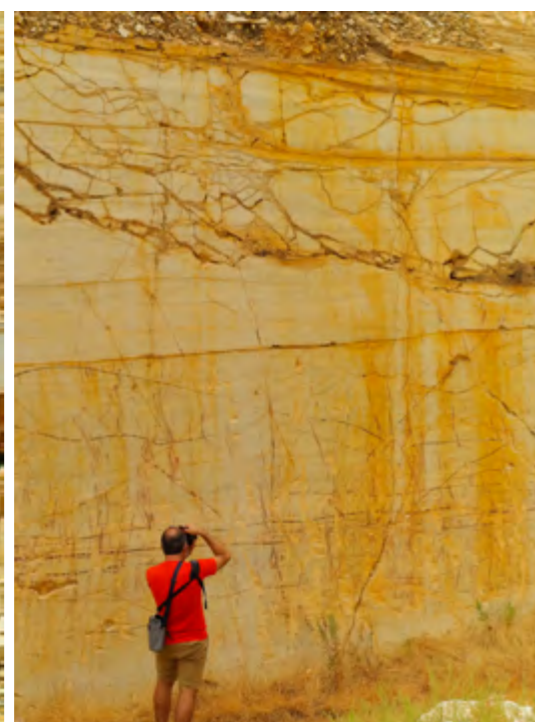




A copy of the Fountain of the Patio de los Leones in the Alhambra in Granada pays tribute to Macael marble in the heart of the town.

At the heart of the quarries there is a pond formed by the water used for extraction.

The fascinating Macael marble quarries are ideal for industrial tourism.



Although these are the only quarries that can be visited, it should be said that there are also active quarries in Olula del Río, Fines, Cantoria, etc.

We suggest a route by car with a number of stops to explore a landscape in continuous transformation, among magnificent veins of marble interspersed with areas of rubble. A visit to the beautiful Macael Viejo quarry really should not be missed, it is an old yellow marble quarry that makes visitors feel so small when standing amongst towering bare walls. An ideal venue for musical and theatrical performances because of the quality of the sound. This is why they are

considering turning this abandoned quarry into an auditorium. A great idea and one that could be a perfect complement to industrial tourism.

Another interesting stop could be at the quarries of the Cosentino Group, a world leader in this market, with a lookout point where you can observe the extraction process and have fantastic views the quarries of La Puntilla. They are the oldest in Macael, from which marble was extracted for the Alhambra palace.

Then you have the "Sendero del Mármol" (Marble Trail), a 4.6 km route to be taken on foot that connects the town with the quarries along the path where the blocks

of marble were lowered. A good way to reach the heart of the quarries, with stops at what is called a "yesera", a pond formed by the water used during the extraction. There are also wonderful lookout points like Cosentino and the Mirador de las Canteras, with spectacular views over a number of mines and the Almanzora Valley.

The route through the quarries should also include stopping at the Macael Marble Visitor Centre. It is in the centre of the town and is a cultural venue explaining the history of the exploitation and extraction of marble. A comprehensive overview of the geological aspects, proposals for restoring



the ecological landscape left by the quarries and the rubble, and the culture surrounding this highly valued material.

We recommend a 1.4 km circular route taking in the historical town centre of Macael and a stroll through the streets and squares where marble plays a leading role. Especially interesting features are the "Calle de las Escalerillas" (with wonderful marble stairways), the "Paseo Escultórico-Bulevar" (Boulevard with sculptures) and the Plaza de la Constitución. Here you will find marble benches, a church, stately houses and the Town Hall with a marble coat of arms, as well as a beautiful replica of the fountain in the Patio de los Leones in the Alhambra.

We made one last stop that left us speechless. Next to one of the roundabouts at the entrance to Macael stands the largest pestle and mortar in the world, a colossal work in white marble. This giant work of one of the most typical attractions in the town and acknowledges the work of the marble craftsmen and women. And to put the icing on the cake, the local restaurant with top-quality cuisine, "La Marmita", where delicacies from the region's gastronomy are served on magnificent marble plates.

Mining and industrial tourism are just one of the numerous attractions of the Sierra de los Filabres and the Almanzora region. A new type of tourism in which Macael is well positioned.

### 1.7. The Ibáñez Museum in the City of Culture in Olula del Río

A great discovery in the Almanzora region was the Ibáñez Museum, located in the town of Olula

del Río, known as the City of Culture. It has one of the largest collections of Contemporary Art in Andalusia, including artists like Goya, Antonio López, Sorolla, Zuloaga, Benlliure etc. and a number of artists from Almería, making it one of the most significant art institutions in the province.

It should be noted that almost all of the more than 1,200 inventoried works were contributed by the artist Andrés García Ibáñez. He founded this museum between 1996 and 2004 and continues to expand it and give it life with passion and perseverance. The museum also features the splendid and suggestive work of this young artist (Olula del Río, 1971), little known but quite striking. One of the most interesting artists of our century, influenced by Goya, Rubens, Velázquez, Beethoven, etc. whose work is eclectic with deep meaning and great artistic value. Andrés García Ibáñez is a friend of Antonio Lopez and a prominent exponent of current realism.

**In Olula del Río, the City of Culture, there are a number of museums and an iconic work by Antonio López**

In the Ibáñez Museum more than 1,200 works have been catalogued, contributed by the founder Andrés García Ibáñez.

The Ibáñez Museum has one of the largest collections of Contemporary Art in Andalusia.





Together with the Ibáñez Museum, special mention should go to the Pérez Siquier Centre, dedicated to the magnificent work of these pioneering photographer in the field of Spanish avant-garde photography who donated his archive to the Ibáñez-Cosentino Art Foundation. Background photos feature images of the popular neighbourhood of La Chanca, in Almería.

Outside, in front of both museums, there is an astonishing monumental sculpture of the head of "La Mujer del Almanzora" (2019), in Macael marble. It is one of the most colossal works by Antonio López, a great Spanish artist of our time. It can be seen from several kilometres away and there is an underground exhibition hall inside. It is part of a monumental trilogy of sculptures on the woman who was born of the Earth.

The extraordinary sculpture and both museums define Olula del Río as a City of Culture, which astonished us with the artistic wealth it houses and because this art continues to thrive thanks to the efforts and talent of Andrés García Ibáñez.

A new building is expected to be opened in 2021, which will not only make the museum's collection larger but also provide bar-cafeteria services. This will finally complete the circle for the City of Culture in Olula del Río

The Pérez Siquier Centre is dedicated to the magnificent work of this avant-garde pioneering Spanish photographer.

The monumental sculpture of the head of "La Mujer del Almanzora" in Macael marble, by Antonio López, presides over the Ibáñez Museum.

The Ibáñez Museum is located in the town of Olula del Río, known as the City of Art.



The recently discovered Geoda de Pulpí is unique for how well it has been preserved and for its size.

Mina Rica shows the working conditions of miners and represents a rich mineral and geological heritage.

In the mine you will find gypsum and other mineral formations, some of which are spectacular due to the degree of crystallisation.

## 2 Geological wonders in the Levante

### 2.1. The Pulpí Geode in Mina Rica

Pulpí lies to the east of the province of Almería, just 3 kilometres from the Mediterranean. In one of its districts, Pilar de Jaravía, on the eastern slope of the Sierra del Aguilón, we visited the Mina Rica, an ancient deposit of iron, silver and lead ore. It was there that, at a depth of 60 metres, the giant Pulpí Geode remained hidden among the galleries. It was discovered in 1999 and this jewel that is covered in selenite crystals (a type of gypsum) is exceptionally transparent. It is a unique geode because it is so well preserved and so large, 8 metres long by 2 metres high, and is now the largest in Europe and the second largest in the world after the one in Naica in Mexico.

Since 2019 it can be visited descending to the third and fourth levels of the mine along galleries and down spiral staircases. Although only authorised personnel may go inside the Pulpí geode, visitors are allowed to peek inside by climbing a few steps to marvel at its beauty and its age which is no less than a million years! Of course, it is a very small space but the shining crystals are really quite wonderful.

As to get to the Pulpí Geode you need to enter Mina Rica, the visit is a good excuse to learn about the fascinating mining history of Pulpí. Pilar de Jaravía was one of the most important mining districts in Spain, especially from the end of the 19th century until the Civil War. Mina Rica demonstrates how hard the miners' job was, the conditions and extraction techniques, the materials used, as well as the minerals extracted. But it is interesting not only because of its historical value, but also for geological reasons. Its heritage is quite extraordinary and this we were able to appreciate during our visit. Apart from the giant geode there are others, like the "Geoda Partida" (Split Geode), the Geode in the Galería de las Colas de Golondrina and the Tajo Rico Geode. In the mine you will find gypsum and other mineral formations, some of which are spectacular due to the degree of crystallisation. There are also amazing luminescent minerals, faults, folds, etc.

**The surprising Geode in Pulpí is the largest in Europe and the second largest in the world**

There are several types of visits. The all-inclusive visit involves a 740-metre tours lasting 1 hr 30 min taking in several sectors





A visit to the giant geode is a good excuse to learn about the fascinating mining history of Pulpí.

The Geode in Pulpí has been open to visitors since 2019 and you can go down to the third and fourth levels of the mine through galleries and spiral staircases.

of the mine with original names like "Quien Tal Pensara" (Who would have thought that) and "Por si Acaso" (Just in case).

What inspired us to go was to see a giant geode, which is something unique and quite marvellous. But it really must be said that penetrating the depths of Mina Rica through galleries and stairs, and seeing those other geological formations along the way, was almost as amazing as the short moment at the end when we were able to peek into the dazzling Pulpí Geode.

## 2.2. The Karst Nature Reserve in Yesos de Sorbas

On this tour of unexpected Almería we discovered another geological wonder about 35 km from Tabernas, located in the Levante of Almería. The Karst Nature Reserve in Yesos de Sorbas, kilometres of caverns (about 600 cavities, very different from the well-known limestone caves) and more than a thousand sinkholes, the result of action over time by rainwater on the gypsum rock. The origin of the Karst in Sorbas lies in the erosion of a gypsum massif about 100 metres thick after the waters of the Sea of Tethys withdrew six million years ago.

**The Yesos de Sorbas Karst opens up a spectacular underground world**

Normally the Karst formation process is very fast in geological time, which makes the gypsum deposits disappear almost completely. But since it rains very little in Almería, the Karst process in Sorbas is slower, making it one of the best preserved on the planet.

A tour of this natural environment took us to a spectacular underground world with hundreds of interconnected cavities, and endless crystalline formations: stalactites, stalagmites, gypsum balls, columns, corals, etc. The Cueva del Agua features as the largest at 8.5 km long, the Covadura Cave (120 m) is the deepest, whilst the Cueva del Yeso or the Cueva del Tesoro, is truly beautiful, with chasms and galleries formed by the action of water. The underground routes vary in difficulty and duration. On the simplest routes you climb and crawl through caves and narrow galleries, always surrounded by incredible formations that are the result of the crystallisation of gypsum, water erosion and the passage of time.

You can also visit the Karst on the surface, crossing the exterior landscape via the Aguas River, a dry riverbed in the shape of a boulevard as far as the Molinos canyon. You will also find endemic flora and fauna that live on the gypsum, plants like the Sorbas daffodil and you may even find a Greek tortoise.

# 3

## The Tabernas desert and Almería in films

Another of our trips to unexpected Almería took us to the Tabernas Desert, located between the Sierra de los Filabres and the Sierra de Alhamilla. 280 square km of spectacular landscape with gullies, fairy chimneys, microcraters, fossil reefs, etc. a true cinema setting that attracted so many Spanish, Italian and American film-makers and producers in the 20th century. In the 60s and 70s Almería was in fact known as "European Hollywood" and had its golden age with the filming of more than 300 westerns, the so-called "Spaghetti westerns". The Tabernas Desert was the location for films by great directors like Sergio Leone, Steven Spielberg and Clint Eastwood. These included "A Fistful of Dollars", "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly", "For a Few Dollars More", as well as "Indiana and the Last Crusade", "Cleopatra" and "Conan the Barbarian". The "Wild West Route" is a tour of locations for well-known films. The film route is a 22-kilometre itinerary.

Crossing the Tabernas Desert listening to the soundtrack of a "Spaghetti western" by Sergio Leone is a trip back to the iconic films of the 70s. It is quite incredible to stop for a moment

in this barren, silent landscape. Take a stroll along tracks that disappear into the scrubland and bushes where the horizon is lost amongst the amazing mountains. You will be surprised to suddenly come across three Wild West towns, film sets from the 1970's that reached us via the large and small screen and left us in a dreamland. These are the Oasis Mini-Hollywood, the Western Leone and Fort Bravo Texas Hollywood, all film sets, the first one also a theme park and although well-known by tourists they are still unexpected. These are the sets for those beloved films whose stills bring back such fond memories.

### 3.1. Tabernas desert. Photographic tourism

Lovers of photography will find in the Tabernas Desert a suggestive landscape full of the most beautiful images. There are enough landscapes and views for thousands of photos. Magnificent gullies crossed by wadis, ravines and dry river beds that turn into rivers during the rare, but torrential rains. Desolate badlands, with a rich but sparse

The Tabernas Desert has a unique natural landscape in Europe that captivates lovers of nature, photography and films.

Wild West town in Mini-Hollywood.

**More than 300 "Spaghetti westerns" were filmed in "European Hollywood" in the 60s and 70s**



vegetation that makes startling photographs. Especially at sunrise or sunset, when the light plays with the relief.

### 3.2. Desert Trail (PR-A 269)

**Tabernas was a location for "Lawrence of Arabia" or "For a Few Dollars More"**

The Tabernas Desert is a geological wonder that can be explored on foot along the Desert Route (PR-A 269), about 5 hours (or a 3-hr short version) along 14 km of trails and ravines. It begins with the film set of Oasis Mini-Hollywood, with a Mexican town, over the Rambla de San Genaro that you descend via bridges and a staircase. Next comes the Rambla de Tabernas, an artificial oasis that together with other areas was the location filming "Lawrence of Arabia" and "For a Few Dollars More". Another ravine, on the Arroyo Verdelecho, is one of the most spectacular stretches, with abandoned film sets and the Leone Ranch.

The Tabernas Desert is a unique natural landscape in Europe that captivates lovers of nature, photography and films.

### 3.3. Olive oil from the Tabernas Desert

It is surprising to find olive groves in the Tabernas Desert. However, the combination of a unique microclimate with so many of hours of sunshine per year and the abundance of the aquifers that feed off the Sierra Nevada favours the production of high-quality olives. Cold pressing of the most select green olives gives an EVOO that is unique in the world. The desert olive grove with 110 thousand olive trees is located next to the Tabernas Desert, and its olives are transported to the Castillo de Tabernas oil mill. There they undergo a careful production process involving innovative methods, the result of which is an olive oil with a natural acidity of 0.1°. A visit to the olive groves and the oil mill and tasting EVOOs produced in the desert is a totally unprecedented experience.



One of the Calar Alto telescopes under the dome of a bright sky.

## 4 Unexpected amongst the unexpected: The Calar Alto Observatory. Science and Astrotourism in Almería

What an incredible surprise to have found ourselves on the highest mountain in the Sierra de los Filabres, at an altitude of 2,168 metres, in the largest astronomical observatory in Europe! An incredible place for observing the universe with first-class scientific facilities and one of the world's leading research centres for the work it does and its discoveries. There are telescopes up to 3.5 meters in diameter, a gamma ray detector, a bolide tracking system, high-quality monitors of the night sky, etc. Installations that also include electronic, mechanical and computer workshops. The fortunate location of Calar Alto has led to Spanish and international universities and research centres entrusting major projects to it.

A search is being made for habitable exoplanets from Calar Alto in the Spanish-German Carmenes Project. A galaxy archive (Califa Project) has also been created; they have collected data for the theory of the accelerated expansion of the universe; they have revealed the mechanism for massive star formation and shown that there are starbursts in galaxies in which they should

not have originated. In a recent project, a dome was installed that will house a new telescope, which will record the impacts on the moon's surface and the atmospheres on extrasolar planets (Midas Project). The discoveries made by this very important astronomical observatory place Almería in a scientific position of the highest order.

What is incredible is that the sky of Calar Alto and the centre itself are open to the public. There are both daytime and night-time guided hiking routes to the top of the mountain. There are unique star and planet observation experiences using a professional 1.23m research telescope, as well as visits to the Astronomical Centre. A great way of providing democratic access to our skies and to make them more understandable to those interested.

It is extraordinary that Calar Alto not only fulfils a scientific function, but also a tourist and educational one.

**The Sierra de los Filabres is home to the largest astronomical observatory in Europe**





Spectacular lower El Calar Alto telescope.

Access stairway to the Calar Alto telescope so you can see it from the inside.

La Merendera - Calar Alto night time hiking route.

From Calar Alto you can observe the Milky Way, the stars and the planets, as well as enjoying Astrophotography.

#### 4.1. La Merendera - Calar Alto night time hiking route. A stroll under the stars

We would recommend three experiences to get the most out of everything Calar Alto has to offer. Start with a 5 km hiking route at sunset from the La Merendera recreational area, in Olula de Castro, to the Calar Alto Astronomical Centre. A leisurely journey, enjoying stops at the natural lookout points to really enjoy the spectacular scenery of the Sierra de los Filabres and the panoramic views of the Tabernas Desert with the Mediterranean Sea in the distance. A route with stunning cliff with extraordinary shades of colour at sunset, with the possibility of taking advantage of the light to get fantastic photographs. It is quite an experience to watch the sky transforming, how when dusk arrives and the celestial dome opens before you and you start to distinguish the stars and planets.

**Calar Alto has a scientific function, but is also ideal for tourism and education**

#### 4.2. Guided observation of the Perseids

At the top of Calar Alto the second night experience begins, walking along a path of lights that, together with the stars, are the only ones that shine in this darkness. A surprising dinner awaits you in the starry night of the Sierra de los Filabres, with local culinary products that you will savour with pleasure. A delicious prelude to the show that is about to begin: the Perseids meteor shower.

Members of the Azimuth company, professional astrophysicists, will guide you on this beautiful journey to the universe. You will be able to look at stars, planets, and galaxies through a telescope. They seem to be so close that you can touch them. You could even say that the planets are relatively close together, but when it comes to the stars, then we are talking about real time travel. It makes you want this magical night to last for hours, despite the fact that on summer nights it really does cool down in the Sierra de los Filabres!

#### 4.3. Visit to the Calar Alto Astronomical Centre

After a splendid night, if you go up to Calar Alto the next day there is another sky that awaits you, blue and bright, and including a visit to the Astronomical Observatory. On a walk through the enclosure you can see the exterior of these incredible time machines that are telescopes in the form of giant white capsules.

You can go inside one of them, once again accompanied by an Azimuth astrophysicist. You will be surprised to find mirrors manufactured by Carl Zeiss decades ago and that are still the best for observing space, together with certain computer improvements. They will explain how they are used, and tell about the history and the operation of the scientific centre, its telescopes and the projects that are underway to discover more about the Cosmos. The visit will seem

very short and you would like it to be when the scientists are working to perhaps discover a planet that bears your name.

#### 4.4. The Planetarium in Serón opens the doors of the universe to children

Finally, we have to talk about the Serón Planetarium, which has opened the doors of the universe for young children and babies. This is an astrophysics installation with a cinematographic format for a 360° screen that shows a film for children under 6 years of age. An experience to which is added direct observation of the sky through telescopes located in small domes.

**The astrophysics installation in the Serón Planetarium brings the universe closer to children**





# 5

## Unexpected Gastronomy

In this unexpected Almería we enjoyed a delicious, varied cuisine, the result of the passage of different cultures throughout its history. We were struck by the presence of recipes recovered from the Al-Andalus, Jewish, Mediaeval past, and everyday dishes and desserts in the houses and restaurants of Almería. Mmm, cold ajoblanco soup, aubergines with honey and "gurullos" (typical pastries)!

Highlighting the importance of local produce brought us closer to those who produce the raw materials for traditional cuisine. Dishes with history, some of which have always been part of the cuisine in Almería, and others that have been rescued or reinvented to conquer our palate.

### 5.1. Al-Andalus cuisine

We invite you on a journey through Andalusian cuisine, a cuisine that has marked the history of Andalusia and that, together with the essentials of the Mediterranean diet, are a delight for the traveller. The arrival of the Moors in the peninsula revolutionised the gastronomy and also uses and customs at the table. Seeing the potential of the lands in the south, they introduced new crops. Greens and vegetables came to have great importance in dishes, as well as spices.

In Almería we met chefs like Yolanda García and Javier Martínez who have rescued recipes from multicultural Al-Andalus. Javier has also recovered the flavours of Sephardic cuisine. We sampled old specialities, other popular dishes and some new inventions. For example, babaganus (aubergine pate), Alcuscus of Segureño lamb, Andalusian-style olives, fried, pickled and salted fish, carob cake, etc.

Enjoying the time spent at the table, the pleasure of savouring slowly, of opening up to the sensations, something we learned on each trip, is also a part of this.

### 5.2. Cuisine with a conscience

The presence of local produce was an essential feature on this gastronomic journey. Appreciating the commitment to diversity of the restaurants and accommodations that we enjoyed during these trips. And an opportunity to suggest a different type of tourism full of quality and character. A movement has even been created called "Gastroconciencia" (Gastro-conscience) by Yolanda García and launched together with the University of Almería, which brings together "cuisine, science and awareness." A cuisine

respecting seasonality and using local products purchased in local markets and shops.

On the route through the Almanzora Valley and the Sierra de los Filabres we found products from farmers, stockbreeders and fishermen from Almería, good, local raw material adapted to haute cuisine.

Traditional local dishes from this region include: "Gurullos" (local pasta), oatmeal porridge, red garlic, "olla de trigo" (local stew), "atascaburras" (winter purée), Moorish soup, "tabernero" (traditional tapa), fried rabbit, black pudding stew, turnip stew with fennel and baked potatoes. And then you have cold meats from the Almanzora Valley and the olive oil from Almería. Desserts include almond and honey "alfajores" (biscuits), fig bread, meringues, almonds, honey ice cream, egg and almond puffs, brandy and orange donuts, almond curd, wine doughnuts, "indalotes" (orange and almond cakes), etc.

### 5.3. Olive oil from Almería

We have already spoken about olive oil in Almería but we need to say more. There is a clear commitment to quality instead of quantity: 90% is Extra Virgin. The oil is exquisite, even though it does not have the huge production or reputation of other Andalusian provinces.

Four varieties of excellent EVOO (Picual, Arbequina, Hojiblanca and Lechín de Granada) produced in a number of locations in the Almanzora Valley (Serón, Albox, Tíjola, Arboleas and Urrácal) as well as in the Tabernas Desert. They can be tried in the Castillo de Tabernas oil mill and in restaurants in the Almanzora Valley.

### 5.4. Cheeses, hams, chorizo sausages from Serón, etc.

Cheeses and cold meats from Serón play a leading role in the gastronomy of the Almanzora Valley and the Sierra de los Filabres. You can taste craft cheeses from the Serón Cheese Factory, exquisite goat cheeses with a thousand and one aromas: ham, rosemary, orange, with red wine, with almonds, olive oil, etc. El Gourmet is considered one of the best in the world!

And then there are the craft cold meats and hams. And they have a special ingredient: the microclimate in this privileged region on the northern slopes of the Sierra de los Filabres that favours natural curing. You can taste the cold meats from Peña Cruz, which faithfully follow traditional recipes.



Almería's cuisine is delicious and full of flavours.

Yolanda García cooks with a conscience. In the garden in the Posada del Candil.

Babaganus or Baba Ganush, an aubergine pate garnished with pomegranate seeds, is a traditional Andalusian dish.

The delicious cheeses from Serón.





The Hotel Casona Granada, a traditional Almería mansion converted into a delightful boutique hotel. It maintains its local character in the heart of Lubrín's historical town centre and in a quiet natural setting.

La Posada del Candil is rural accommodation in the heart of Sierra de los Filabres that is ideal for relaxing in contact with nature.

# 6

## Practical information about unexpected Almería

### 6.1. How to get there

It is quite easy to get to the Tabernas Desert, the Sierra de los Filabres and the Almanzora Valley as they are all quite well connected by road. You can travel to the city of Almería by plane and then hire a car. It is less than half-an-hour by motorway to the Tabernas Desert, 1 hour 24 mins to Serón and 1 hour 14 mins to Pulpí. You can of course go by your own car or camper van because these regions of Almería are well-prepared to accommodate larger vehicles. Cyclotourists will be delighted to cycle through the Filabres and El Valle del Almanzora along the Vía Verde Rail Trail.

### 6.2. Where to sleep in unexpected Almería

- ◆ **Hostal Casona Granada.**  
45 Paraje el Pilar, 04271, Lubrín.  
rooms@casonagranado.com  
<https://casonagranado.com/es/>
- ◆ **La Posada del Candil.**  
Al-5406 dual carriageway, km 2  
04890 Serón.  
reservas@laposadadelcandil.com  
[www.laposadadelcandil.com](http://www.laposadadelcandil.com)
- ◆ **Hotel Jardines de la Tejera.**  
Carretera Baza, s/n.  
04860 Olula del Río.  
reservas@jardineslatejera.com

- ◆ **Las Menas Campsite.**  
Dual carriageway A-1178 Gergal-Serón, km 18.  
04890 Serón.  
info@campinglasmenasdeseron.com  
<http://campinglasmenasdeseron.com/es>

### 6.3. Where to eat in unexpected Almería

- ◆ **La Posada del Candil. Yolanda García, Espacio Gastroconciencia.**  
Al-5406 dual carriageway, km 2.  
04890 Serón.  
reservas@laposadadelcandil.com  
<https://www.laposadadelcandil.com>

- ◆ **Restaurante Hermanos Cuadrado.**  
Av. de Lepanto, nº 63.  
04890, Serón.  
Tel. 950 426 081.

- ◆ **Restaurante La Estación, Serón.**  
Antigua Estacion de Serón s/n.  
04899 Serón, Almería.  
<https://laestaciondeseronrestaurante.es>

- ◆ **Restaurante Albar.**  
Casona Granada. 45  
Paraje el Pilar, 04271, Lubrín.  
albar@enalbar.com  
<https://enalbar.com/es/>

- ◆ **Restaurante La Marmita.**  
Calle Pedro Tapia Espinosa, s/n.  
Multifunctional Building.  
04867, Macael.

### 6.4. Service companies. What to do and other activities

- ◆ **Natur Sport Sorbas.**  
Paraje Barranco del Infierno.  
Highway A-1102, km 0.7  
04270 Sorbas, Almería.  
[www.cuevasdesorbas.com](http://www.cuevasdesorbas.com)
- ◆ **Routes through Almería.**  
info@rutasporalmeria.com  
<https://www.rutasporalmeria.com/>

- ◆ **Nature - Paredes Nature Classrooms**  
Abla-Ohanes Regional dual carriageway, km 8. Exit by forest track to Cortijo de Paredes.  
04520 Abrucena (Almería)  
natures@natures.es  
<http://www.natures.es>

- ◆ **DXT Serious Leisure & Adventure.**  
Pasaje Venta Levita.  
04890 Serón.  
dxtserious@gmail.com

- ◆ **Serón History Centre.**  
Calle Alta, 36, 40.  
04890 Serón, Almería.  
centrodehistoriadeseeron@gmail.com

- ◆ **Serón Planetarium Observatory and School of Astronomy.**  
Calle Estación  
04890 Serón, Almería.  
<https://planetariodeseron.com>

- ◆ **Azimuth Spain - Compl. Calar Alto Astronomical Observatory.**  
Sierra de los Filabres.  
04550 Gérgal, Almería.  
<https://www.azimuthspain.com>

- ◆ **Menaventuras / Las Menas Campsite**  
Ctra. A-1178 Gergal-Serón, km 18.  
04890 Serón.  
info@campinglasmenasdeseron.com  
<http://www.campinglasmenasdeseron.com/es>

Exquisite cuisine from Almería served on Macael marble dishes. Restaurante La Marmita.

Ajoblanco (traditional cold soup) is one of the star dishes of Andalusian cuisine.



**Cádiz is a popular tourist destination for many reasons: the kilometres-long Costa de la Luz with countless idyllic beaches, the beautiful white city with watchtowers and a silver sea, the "two Fronteras" Sanlúcar and Jerez. Also for the charming white villages, Flamenco resonating in the "tablaos", the flavours of the sea and the fine wines, and the mythical skies at sunset.**

“  
Where it rains the most in all of Spain, nature, surprises and culinary delicacies  
”



# Cádiz

The Costa de la Luz, with virgin beaches and unspoilt nature.

**B**ut Cádiz is much more. Cádiz is synonymous with nature, first because of the Doñana National Park, a magnificent natural jewel that it shares with Huelva and Seville. But also because of three spectacular nature reserves aligned from north to south to the east of the province: El Estrecho, Los Alcornocales and Grazalema, which are home to a unique natural wealth that we discovered on our trip in search of unexpected routes.

The Strait of Gibraltar Nature Reserve has a varied landscape of cliffs, lagoons, mountains, countryside, unspoilt beaches with golden sand and crystal clear waters. Located between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, it enjoys (and suffers from) west and east winds, strong currents and giant waves that windsurfers from

all over the world come here to ride. But above all, the Strait is a privileged passageway for millions of birds as they migrate to and from the African continent. And paradise for passionate birdwatchers!

And there are extraordinary natural treasures inland, among the white villages anchored in the landscapes. The largest cork oak forest on the Iberian Peninsula begins just a step away from the Strait: Los Alcornocales Nature Reserve, a natural parapet facing the sea winds. Loaded with humidity, they persistently cover the forests with mist, creating a natural area full of magic and mystery. That is where Los Alcornocales begins, in the so-called "Bosque de Niebla" (Forest of Mist) that can be seen from Tarifa persistently shrouded in mist. And in the valleys

lives a very special lepidoptera: none other than the Monarch butterfly.

It is one of the largest nature reserves in Spain, stretching north as far as the Sierra de Grazalema Nature Reserve, the place where it rains the most in all of Spain. A landscape of rugged mountains that are part of the Baetica Mountain range, and that hide beautiful canyons and underground labyrinths of caves and abysses. And forests of Spanish firs that survived the retreat of the glaciers. And we

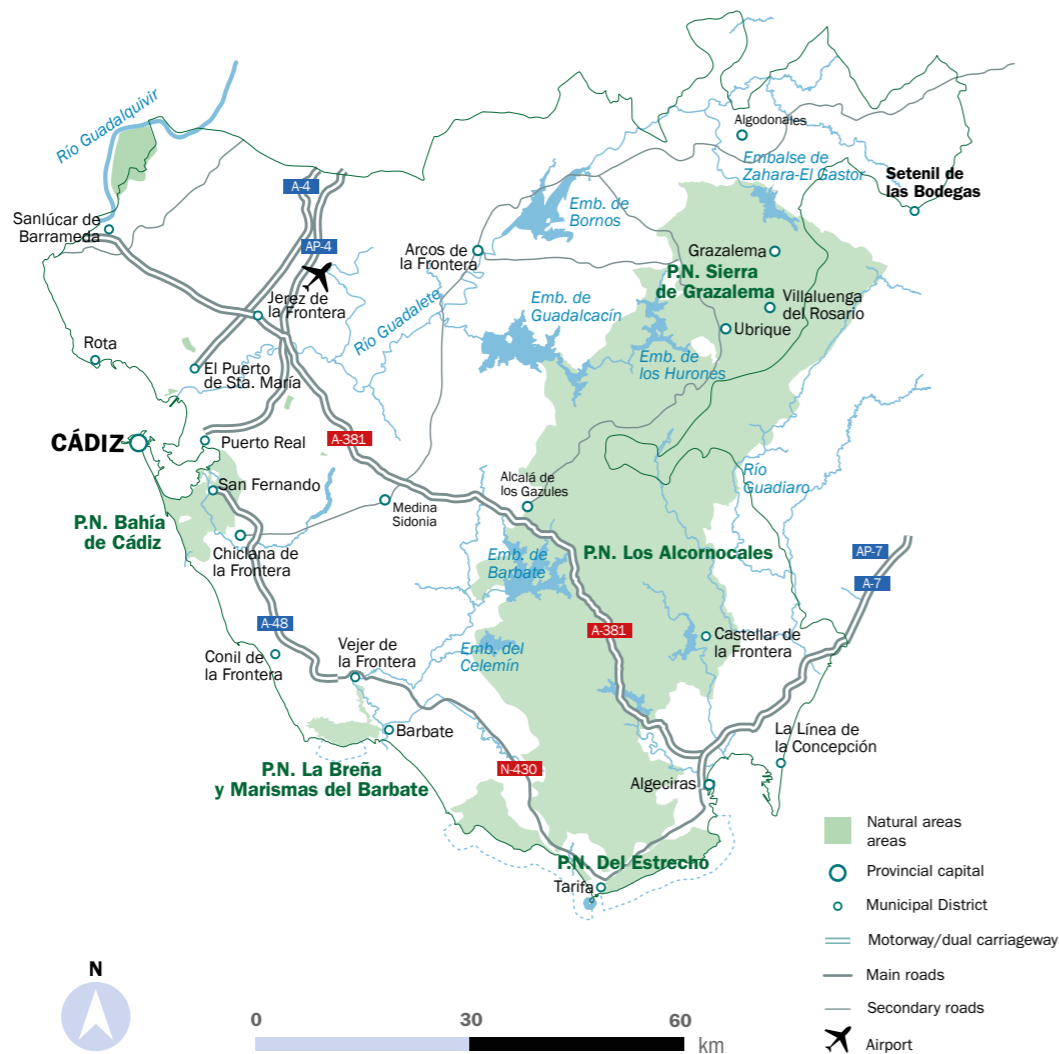
should also not forget that Sierra de Grazalema with its delightful white villages.

These nature reserves are the lungs of the east of the province and an ideal setting for this journey through unexpected Cádiz.

We are aware that there are countless new routes in the province, so we ask you to take this guide as a small sample of the wonders that are there to be discovered on an alternative trip through the province of Cádiz.



# Map



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Cádiz is synonymous with a magnificent monumental and landscape heritage. Arcos de la Frontera.

A very special lepidoptera inhabits the Alcornocales Nature Reserve: none other than the Monarch butterfly.

The Strait Nature Reserve is a birdwatcher's paradise.





The Strait is a paradise for birdwatchers from all over the world who attend the Andalusia Global Bird Weekend in spring and autumn.

## 1 Strait Nature Reserve. Natural Treasure

### 1.1. Birdwatcher's paradise. Andalusia Global Bird Weekend

You will find the Strait Nature Reserve at the southernmost tip of the Iberian Peninsula and continental Europe, just 14 kilometres from Africa. Located next to the Strait of Gibraltar and washed by the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, it has exceptional biodiversity. It is a passageway for hundreds of thousands of migratory birds and marine mammals that can be observed from the network of observatories. But the nature reserve also has numerous resident birds: griffon vultures, black kites, honey buzzards, white storks, imperial eagles, Egyptian vultures, etc. You can also observe cetaceans when you take a boat from Tarifa or Algeciras.

The Strait is a paradise for birdwatchers from all over the world who attend the Andalusia Global Bird Weekend in spring and autumn, a global get-together for birdwatchers. For us it was an

opportunity to learn all about the Strait Nature Reserve and its natural wealth.

### 1.2. Isla de las Palomas, Sierra de la Plata, Marisma de Barbate, La Janda

All of Andalusia is an interesting destination for birdwatchers, as well as the Strait being a strategic passageway for millions of migratory birds because of its funnel shape and the favourable winds that make it easy to cross. We toured through a number of areas where we could observe hundreds of birds. Isla de las Palomas, in Tarifa, is a protected area because of its ecological value, an exceptional passageway for birds that cross the Strait and the Mediterranean. It is also of historical interest: there are remains of Phoenician-Punic funerary hypogea, an 18th-century defensive battery, a 20th-century barracks and sandstone (ostionera) quarries that have been extracting rock since Roman times.

Another stop for bird lovers is the Sierra de la Plata, with beautiful silvery rocky outcrops and

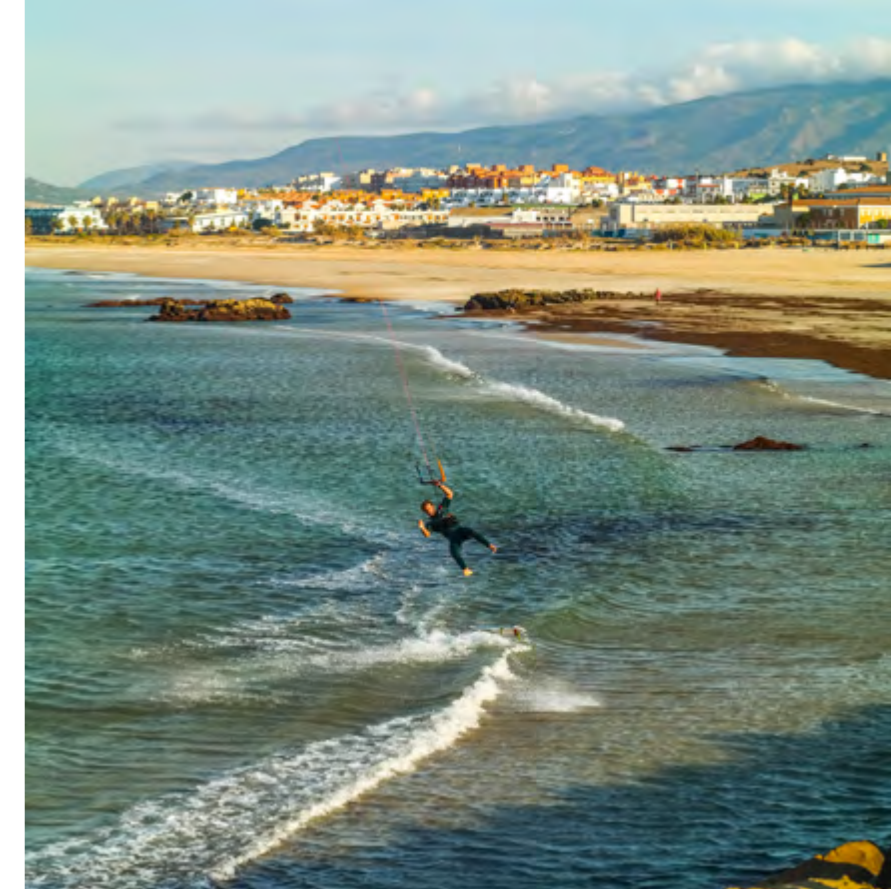
spectacular views of the unspoilt beaches of Tarifa: Playa de El Cañuelo beach and Bolonia beach and dunes. From Tarifa it takes about 50 minutes to climb up to Collado de Laja de la Zarga and observe griffon vultures.

The marshes and lagoons of Barbate are also home to numerous birds and nesting areas during migrations, although they belong to the neighbouring La Breña y Marismas de Barbate Nature Reserve. Near to both you will find what was the largest wetland in the Iberian Peninsula: La Janda, it was drained in the 1960s to become agricultural and livestock lands. Even today it is home to a great variety of habitats: rice fields, olive groves and pastures, a refuge for thousands of birds.

### 1.3. Unspoilt beaches and dunes of the Strait. Nature and windsurfing

The beaches of the Strait Nature Reserve are wonderful extensions of fine golden sand, where the wind plays a leading role, which is why they remain free from urbanisations and sunshine and beach tourism. They are especially attractive for lovers of nature and windsurfing. The Playa de Los Lances beach is a natural area where birdwatchers will find a wide variety of migratory birds. Hidden in the waters there are numerous wrecks that scuba divers find fascinating, together with the extraordinary wealth of the sea beds. The lagoon is a passageway for eagles, kites and hawks, and a nesting place for Kentish plovers.

The Playa de Bolonia beach is home to a natural monument that is more than 30 metres high and 200 metres wide fed by the easterly winds: the Dune of Bolonia. One of the most unspoilt and best preserved places on the Cádiz coast, so much so that there you can see retinta cattle with their calves enjoying their natural habitat. From the Camarinal Lighthouse Trail, you can see the magnificent Playa de Bolonia beach and the Baelo Claudia archaeological site. A one-kilometre walk or bike ride takes you to the lighthouse, the old Torre del Cabo de Gracia (16th century).



The beaches in the Strait Nature Reserve are ideal for lovers of nature and windsurfing.

### 1.4. Cultural heritage of the Strait Nature Reserve

The wealth of the Strait is not limited to nature, as it has been a passageway for civilisations throughout history. There are archaeological remains of great value, like the ancient Roman city of Baelo Claudia (2nd century B.C.), located in the bay of Bolonia. It was an important seaport and strategic enclave for the salting industry and "garum de la Bética" (fish sauce made from entrails that was really popular in the Roman Empire). The surprising state of preservation is evident during visit, in which you will see the gateways, the forum, the curia, the courthouse, the temples, remains of an industrial area, streets, aqueducts, etc. It is a good example of Roman urbanism and has been declared a National Historical Monument.

In the Sierra de la Plata you will find the Cueva del Moro, on top of a 40-metre wall of siliceous sandstone. A two-story shelter with cave paintings from the Upper Palaeolithic, featuring a pregnant mare. It was discovered by Lothar Bergmann, a German researcher and speleologist who created the name "Southern Art" to protect this group of rock shelters in the eastern part of Cádiz. It cannot be visited, but the views from the Cueva del Moro lookout point, a little further down, are magnificent.

The archaeological remains of Baelo Claudia are a splendid example of Roman urbanism





A forest of mist that can be seen from Tarifa. Another of the wonders of the Los Alcornocales Nature Reserve.

Los Alcornocales Nature Reserve has one of the largest stands of cork oak trees on the Iberian Peninsula. View of the Almoraima from Castellar.

## 2 Los Alcornocales Nature Reserve. The last "forest" in Europe

They say that the Alcornocales Nature Reserve is the last "forest in Europe", because of the almost 170 thousand hectares of vegetation favoured by a special microclimate, with characteristics similar to those of the subtropics. A Mediterranean climate with Atlantic influence, mild and constant temperatures due to the proximity of the sea, abundant rains and summer mists ("barbas de levante") that provide humidity. But the most valuable feature of the nature reserve is that it has one of the largest stands of cork oak trees in the Iberian Peninsula and one of the largest in the world. This is mainly due to the traditional use of its bark in the wine industry. And alongside the cork oak trees there are a variety of shrubs, flowers and fauna that increase the diversity of the reserve. The beauty of this "Mediterranean forest" is also due to the stands of Algerian oaks, the oak trees of Andalusia. These are endemic in North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula where they grow in humid environments.

Epiphytic ferns, mosses, lichens, climbing plants, all rare in these southern latitudes,

colonise them and make extraordinary picture postcards.

Another of the wonders of the Los Alcornocales Nature Reserve are the forests of cloud that are formed by marine humidity in narrow and deep valleys called "canutos". These forests provide ideal conditions for preserving this flora from the Tertiary Era, only to be found in the Canary Islands and the remaining islands in Macaronesia: the Laurel forest. So amongst the cork oaks and Portuguese oaks you will find laurels, ferns, holly trees, rhododendrons and laurestines. Many of these "canutos" have the oldest fern on Earth, which inhabits tropical areas, how extraordinary to find it here!

In short, the Los Alcornocales Nature Reserve is an authentic, truly unknown natural treasure. Crossing it by car is quite an experience. 80 kilometres from north to south and 35 kilometres from east to west of a dense mass of cork oak forests intermingled with wild olive trees, Portuguese oaks, Pyrenean oaks and Mediterranean scrub. It is stunning to travel along winding roads between mountains up



Los Alcornocales on the Arroyo de San Carlos del Tiradero circular route.

to 1,000 metres high without seeing anything but these majestic trees, many of them "wounded" but slowly regenerating. The beauty is captivating as you climb up from Castellar de la Frontera to Villaluenga del Rosario, now in the Sierra de Grazalema. And on foot, along one of the many hiking trails on old pathways and cobbled paths, surrounded by the immemorial silence of the cork oak trees. You can stop at lookout points with extraordinary views of the different habitats in the Los Alcornocales Nature Reserve: mountain ranges, forests of cork oak and olive trees, scrub, riverbank forest and pastures.

It is possible to visit the caves and shelters with cave paintings (the Sanctuary of Bacinete, with paintings and a necropolis), and take a dip in some of the numerous pools and waterfalls. And the park is also ideal for active tourism, with activities like bird watching; mountaineering on the Picacho and the Aljibe; canyoning; pot-holing; kayaking, paddle surfing on the reservoir; and cycling routes. In the nature reserve there is a section of EUROVELO Route 8 or Mediterranean Route, a European network of long-distance cycling routes that enables you to cross Europe. The "Camino de Ojén" section (16.7 km)

between Los Barrios and Facinas was the first included and marked on this route in Andalusia.

Although it must be said that the greatest discovery on this trip through unexpected Cadiz was the Monarch butterfly Route in Castellar de la Frontera. Yes, those migratory butterflies that travel thousands of kilometres in North America also inhabit the forests of Cádiz! We will tell you all about it in the "Unexpected amongst the unexpected" section.

This journey is completed with visits to medieval towns like Castellar and white villages like Ubrique, Villaluenga del Rosario and Grazalema, surprises in themselves because of their white beauty embraced by forests and mountains that are unique natural balconies.

### 2.1. Ojén Valley and a hiking route in San Carlos del Tiradero

From the Puerto de Ojén lookout point you can see a good sample of the varied landscape in the Los Alcornocales Nature Reserve: the Sierra de la Luna and the Sierra de Ojén, dense stands of cork oak trees on the slopes, humid areas of Portuguese oaks and areas of open





Delightful alleyways in Castellar Viejo.



Traces of the "saca" in cork oak trees.



Cork from cork oak trees.



The beauty of Retinta cattle, an inseparable feature of this countryside.

pastures with wild olive trees for Retinta cattle. The Port of Ojén was historically an important communication passageway, where a Roman road, mediaeval Arab routes, the current forest track and the old provincial road built by Civil War prisoners ran.

There are a number of possible routes for hikers: El Palancar, La Teja, and a short, circular route along the Arroyo de San Carlos del Tiradero (2.5 km), where the gallery and riverside forests are a prominent feature. You will be surrounded by stunning, ancient cork oak and wild olive trees, and in the more humid areas you will cross forests of Portuguese and Andalusian oak trees. These beautiful, robust trees can be up to 30 metres tall. The hundreds of ferns so unusual in Andalusia are another surprising feature with many of them growing on Portuguese oaks, taking advantage of the organic material deposited on them. Some of the Portuguese oaks look like candelabra, as a result of the pruning they were subjected to to extract wood to build ships and produce charcoal. Next you will see an example of the

deep, narrow valleys carved out by the river: the so-called "canutos", populated with laurels, laurustines, ash trees, alders, hazelnut trees, rhododendrons, etc. that form a beautiful gallery forest. In summer you can take a dip in one of the pools along the stream's to really enjoy this unique natural environment.

**Castellar Viejo is a medieval fortress with stunning views of the Bay of Algeciras, Gibraltar and Africa**

### 2.2. Castellar Viejo. A villa-fortress amongst cork oak trees.

Castellar Viejo is located right in the Los Alcornocales Nature Reserve at an altitude of 248 metres. A medieval fortress with a castle that dominates the surrounding countryside and has magnificent views of the Bay of Algeciras, Gibraltar and Africa. It is one of the three focal points in Castellar de la Frontera. Throughout its history it has been a strategic stronghold: the Moors built this fortress town in the 10th century, and it adopted its current appearance between the 13th and 14th centuries. When you pass through the gateway to the fortress there is a small parade ground that leads to streets reminiscent of its past. It is a pleasure to stroll through a fortress that is full of life with winding, cobbled streets and whitewashed houses decorated with flowers. It is one of a few inhabited nuclei inside a fortification where 200 people live, a large number of them foreigners who have settled in the area, giving life to the town with all kinds of workshops and shops.

From the nearby La Almoraima lookout point (2 minutes by car) there are spectacular views of Castellar Castle and the Guadarranque reservoir. Castellar Viejo has some delightful features, like the "Balcón de los Amorosos" (Lovers' Balcony) with wonderful views over the reservoir. In the keep in Castellar's castle there is a hotel with a lookout point that has stunning 360° panoramic views, the highest point in Castellar Viejo.

### 2.3. Ancestral art of uncorking. "La saca"

As you walk through the dense cork oak forests in the nature reserve, much denser than those at other latitudes, you will see that most of them are "naked", having been stripped of a part of their bark. As you approach them you will see that there is an inner, orange-coloured layer and where it has been cut there is new bark appearing that will become cork.

The cork oak trees in the nature reserve have literally "stripped naked" every year for centuries now for making cork. It is an ancestral practice that is locally called the "saca" (removing the cork) and it still survives today, in order to make corks for wine bottles.

It is hard work undertaken by hand by the "corkers", skilled craftsmen who are masters of the, since there is no access for machines amongst ravines and narrow paths. They are organised into gangs led by a "manijero" (foreman), and consist of: "hacheros" (axmen), "rajaores" (who introduce a lever behind the large pieces of cork to tear them off the trunk), "guardapilas" (stackers) and "zapateros" (cobblers). Then you have the "recogeores" who gather the material for the "arrieros" to load them evenly on the mules (loads of between 180 and 230 kilos). Visitors to Los Alcornocales in summer will surely be able to witness extraordinary "saca" of the cork workers.

**The "saca" (removing the cork) is an ancestral practice to make corks for wine bottles**

### 2.4. Retinta cattle, residents of Los Alcornocales

The Los Alcornocales Nature Reserve has a very special inhabitant who eats in the grasslands and walks along the paths, they can be seen on the secondary roads that cross the park. They are the Retinta cattle from the Guadalquivir, a rustic breed with reddish hair, broad horns curved towards the front, which have been bred from the Cádiz blonde, Andalusian red and Extremadura red breeds. They are tough, and adapted to contrasting environment and climate, which means they can make long journeys in search of pastures. The best pastures for them are the result of the climate and the wild, leguminous flora. The largest number of Retinta cattle can be found in the province of Cádiz, especially in Campo de Gibraltar and La Janda. In Los Alcornocales they can be seen them grazing placidly in the lowland areas, amongst wild olive trees, where they are an inseparable feature of the countryside.





Grazalema, a white village in the heart of the Nature Reserve.

# 3

## Grazalema Nature Reserve. A landscape of mountains, Spanish firs and white villages

You cross the Alcornocales Nature Reserve to Sierra de Grazalema, 1 hour along the C-3331 road, 50 kilometres from Castellar de la Frontera to Venta Puerto de Gáliz, and by the A-375 to Villaluenga del Rosario. A route by car with sharp bends and continuous views of the stands of cork oak trees, a true wonder of nature! The same landscapes that we had on the trip from Gaucín, in Málaga, to Ubrique, in Cádiz, you should not forget that both provinces share this nature reserve. Until you reach a spectacular landscape of rugged mountains, with stunning canyons and the highest peaks in the province of Cádiz: the Grazalema Nature Reserve. Here you will find dense forests of cork oak trees, holm oaks and Portuguese oaks, although the tree that features most prominently is the Spanish fir, a relic of the Tertiary Era. There is a magnificent forest of Spanish firs in Sierra del Pinar and along the numerous hiking routes through the park.

The nature reserve provides numerous activities and hiking trails

In the nature reserve numerous activities are available including signposted hiking routes that can be enjoyed on foot or on horseback, such as the old Roman road from Benaocaz to Ubrique. Or lovers of mountaineering could climb the highest peaks: El Reloj and El Torreón. Rock climbing could include Peñón Grande, Peñaloja, Cortados de Montejaque and La Veredilla, both in Grazalema and in Benaocaz. Canoeing on the Zahara-Gastor reservoir, hang gliding and paragliding in Cerro Albarracín (El Bosque), a visit to the Cueva de la Pileta (Beanaoján) which has magnificent prehistoric remains. Birdwatching, species like the Bonelli's eagle and the griffon vulture, which has one of the largest colonies in Europe in Grazalema. Or watching otters in the upper reaches of the Majaceite River, which has a magnificent gallery forest of willows, white poplars and poplars. The gallery forest along the upper course of the El Bosque River, and the Tío Tavizna River is also very beautiful. As you delight in the natural wealth you will be able to better understand why the Grazalema Nature Reserve is a Biosphere Reserve.

Nestled amongst these majestic mountains there are beautiful white villages like Ubrique, Grazalema, Benaocaz, El Bosque and Zahara de la Sierra which offer visitors splendid cultural routes.

### 3.1. The place where it rains the most in the Iberian Peninsula

Nobody could imagine that Andalusia is the rainiest place in the entire Iberian Peninsula. This is because the Grazalema massif acts like a wall for the wet winds that come from the Atlantic Ocean and discharge very intense and concentrated rains. So much so that in some parts of Sierra de Grazalema this can be more than two thousand two hundred millimetres. Water has created the landscape of the nature reserve, where karst modelling predominates: its erosive force has created magnificent canyons, such as the Garganta Verde that is 400 metres deep. As well as a huge labyrinth of chasms and grottos, and the longest cave in Andalusia with 8 kilometres of galleries home to the largest population of bats in Spain (a total of 100 thousand).

There is water everywhere in the Grazalema Nature Reserve in the form of rivers, streams, waterfalls, fountains and springs that filter through chasms and sinkholes. Water provides a constant spectacle and the inhabitants of Grazalema have built cisterns all over the mountains to store it. For a completely different experience, visitors should take a hiking route after a few days of rain in Grazalema to appreciate the force with which the rivers descend with magnificent waterfalls, and watch how the waters appear from beautiful springs.

The Spanish fir is endemic and descends from a fir tree that populated the forests in the Ice Age.

Water has created the landscape in the Grazalema Nature Reserve.

Spanish firs seen up close.







The white village of Villaluenga del Rosario is perched high up in a stunning mountain range.



The Spanish fir is a relic from the forests of the Tertiary Period.

### 3.2. Spanish firs. Relics of the Tertiary Era

Spanish firs have survived in the Sierra de las Nieves National Park and in Sierra Bermeja, in the province of Málaga And in Cádiz you will find the "rainiest" place on the Iberian Peninsula: the Sierra del Pinar. It is endemic and descends from a fir tree that populated the forests in the Ice Age.

You can find Spanish firs in the Sierra del Pinar, a place of spectacular beauty, with about three hundred hectares of Spanish firs. You need to check beforehand as it can only be visited at certain times of the year and there are restrictions. In any case, you will be able to see isolated fir trees and in groves along the Grazalema hiking trails in the different mountain ranges that exist in the park. They tend to coexist with holm oaks, rowan trees and maples in the highlands and with Portuguese oaks in the lowlands. We were fortunate to see a few of them just a short distance from the white town of Grazalema, and their impressive, immemorial presence was astonishing.

### 3.3. White villages Villaluenga del Rosario tastes like Payoya goat cheese

Villaluenga del Rosario is a white village perched at an altitude of 858 meters on a stunning rocky massif, the highest in the province. In any season of the year it is beautiful, but in winter the white blends with that of the snow. It can be seen from one of the lookout points, at the foot of Navao Alto,

in the Sierra del Caíllo and facing the Sierra de Líbar. Your attention is drawn by the steep streets, the whitewashed white houses, the octagonal bullring (the oldest in the province, 18th century) and by the caves, it is truly a haven for cavers.

But if Villaluenga del Rosario is known for anything, it is for its craft cheeses, especially those made from Payoya goat's milk, which can be tasted at the Queso Payoyo Cheese Factory. To get to know the surrounding area and the typical geological formations in the nature reserve (Villaluenga has three of the four most important chasms in Andalusia) the best way is to take the Llanos del Republicano trail (5 km, low difficulty) which has spectacular views.

### 3.4. Llano del Endrinal Trail. The landscapes of Grazalema

A 2.2 km route in continuous ascent that takes you to the heart of the Sierra del Endrinal, dotted with blackthorns, holm oaks and even a few Spanish firs. In spring, you will find a great variety of orchids. You pass through the gorge of Mahón, to the Puerto del Endrinal, and on the way you can enjoy magnificent panoramic views of the landscape and the Grazalema mountains. You get to see the Fresnillo dam, Pico Malaver and the villages of Montecorto, Olver and Pruna. This route also gives you an opportunity to learn about the geology of the nature reserve, as there is a magnificent example of a sinkhole in the Llano del Endrinal. The rocks along the way have acquired very peculiar shapes as they are of limestone. From El Llano you can see the peaks of El Reloj and El Simancón. On the way



back to Grazalema you will see Payoya goats, highly esteemed inhabitants of these mountains.

### 3.5. Grazalema, white beauty

The white beauty of Grazalema shines amongst the green of the vegetation and the grey of the karst landscape. You will immediately understand why it has been listed as one of the most beautiful towns in Spain. Nestled in the midst of nature, it should be seen first from the lookout points (Mirador de los Asomadores and Mirador El Tajo), and then from inside, always on foot. It has a typically Moorish structure (the area was settled in the middle of the 8th century) with narrow streets with whitewashed walls, cobbled streets, gabled roofs and flowers on the balconies. The town is bright and full of life, especially on the terraces of the Plaza de España. There are numerous churches and many fountains, which remind us of the importance of water in the nature reserve. Remains of the old Roman road are still preserved.

There are numerous hiking routes from Grazalema to explore the nature reserve, like the Garganta Verde Route, where you will find a spectacular canyon that can be seen very well at the beginning of the trail, from the Bocaleones River lookout point. The route to the Majaceite River; or the Torreón Route, which takes you to the highest peak in the province of Cádiz (1,648 m.).

### 3.6. White villages Ubrique, embraced by two nature reserves

Ubrique is in the heart of two national parks: Grazalema and Los Alcornocales, making it an



Architecture of Grazalema.

Views of the white village of Ubrique from the El Calvario lookout point.

interesting starting point to discover them. The town appears resplendent amongst spectacular mountains that look down on it and admire its luminous whiteness. We can also look down on it from numerous lookout points and so we can see it from so many points of view. This is the Route of the Lookout Points: the Mirador del Calvario, the Chapel of San Antonio, Ubrique Alto, the Plaza del 28 de Febrero, Los Olivares, the old Viña del Perro, Las Cumbres and the Mojón de la Vibora. It also snows here in winter, Ubrique changes its appearance to the rhythm of the seasons. A walk through the old town is essential, with an urban layout of Moorish influence. Some of the houses are adapted to the physiognomy of the rocks, like the Peñón de la Becerra.

From Ubrique there are a number of hiking trails that are ideal for discovering the surrounding nature. For example, the archaeological site of Ocuri, located at the top of Santo de la Mora, 2 km from Ubrique. It is the ancient Roman city with remains of houses, public buildings, cisterns and baths, as well as the necropolis and the mausoleum. And 4 km from Ubrique, the Castle of Cardela, a fortress from the Moorish period, located on a hilltop with difficult access and views of the Ocuri mountains. A third route is the old Roman road, which runs from Benaocaz to Ubrique.

Two surprises you will find in Ubrique: Firstly leather goods, a tradition of working with leather that has existed since the Middle Ages and which continues to be a pillar of its economy. And secondly

**On the Route of the Lookout Points you can enjoy magnificent views of the luminous whiteness of Ubrique surrounded by magnificent mountains**

**Villaluengo del Rosario is renowned for its craft cheeses, especially those made from Payoya goat's milk.**





Delicious desserts.

Scrambled eggs with golden thistles, a traditional recipe from the Sierra de Cádiz.

Payoya goat and sheep cheese from the El Bosqueño cheese factory in El Bosque.

the festivity of the "Crujía de los gamones" that is celebrated in May, when the town is filled with candles, fires and flowers and the inhabitants enjoy the "Crujía de los gamones" (wild plants that heat up and produce an explosion as if they were fireworks).

### 3.7. Gastronomy. Grazelema cheeses made from the milk of Payoya goats and Grazelema sheep

The gastronomy in the Sierra de Grazelema is based on high-quality local products from which dishes are prepared with distinctly authentic flavours. There is garlic soup, Iberian sausages, lamb stew, tuna with onion and grilled meats, as well as a dish that caught our attention because of how exotic and surprising it seemed to us. This is the case of scrambled eggs with tagarninas (a variety of thistle), a typical recipe from the Sierra de Cádiz. "Tagarninas" are a species of wild cactus which in times of scarcity were an important part of the diet, together with wild asparagus.

However, the prominent gastronomic products from Grazelema are the cheeses which include Payoya goat cheese and Grazelema sheep cheese. The Payoya goat is an autochthonous breed from the Sierra de Grazelema and Serranía de Ronda Nature Reserve (they can

also be found in a part of the Los Alcornocales Reserve), where it is subjected to harsh weather conditions. "Payoyo" is how the inhabitants of Villaluenga del Rosario are called, and by extension the goat breed has been given the same name. It produces very high-fat milk of excellent quality due to its natural diet, an essential raw material for these unique cheeses.

In the Sierra de Grazelema, a network of cheese factories has been developed that produce very high quality cheeses in towns such as Arcos de la Frontera, El Bosque, Grazelema, Villaluenga del Rosario, Rota and Alcalá de los Gazules. And its cheeses have been acknowledged internationally. On our trip to the Sierra de Grazelema we stopped at two cheese factories: El Bosqueño and Queso Payoyo, to discover the delights of these cheeses. The El Bosqueño Cheese Factory is located in El Bosque and its products include aged cheeses, cheese with oil, with wheat bran (a process called "emborrado"), hot paprika, Arrayan liquor and butter. It is also home to the El Bosqueño Cheese Museum and Visitor Centre where you can learn more about the cheeses from the Sierra de Cádiz.

In Villaluenga del Rosario we visited the Payoyo Cheese Factory (registered trademark). They produce goat, sheep and blended cheeses. Cured, semi-cured, wrapped in butter, paprika, rosemary, wheat bran, etc., flavours that remain a long time on your palate.

## 4 Unexpected amongst the unexpected. Castellar de la Frontera Monarch Butterfly Trail

### 4.1. Migrating butterflies crossing mountain ranges and oceans

We are not in Michoacán, Mexico, but in the town of Castellar de la Frontera, in the province of Cádiz! Yes, these trails are also inhabited by the famous monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*)! A beautiful migratory lepidopteran that travels up to 4,000 kilometres from Canada and the United States to Mexico to the surprise of entomologists and scientists around the world. Monarch butterflies that live east of the Rocky Mountains migrate south to winter in 12 mountainous areas in Mexico, and those that live west of the Rockies go to California. They have a life expectancy of about one month, so those that start the trip are not the same ones that end it, but they reproduce before dying, so their descendants continue the trip. The resistance and flight capacity of these butterflies has enabled them to migrate since the 19th century to the Caribbean, Hawaii, Australia and New Zealand. Now we are going to explain to you how and why it is possible to see monarch butterflies in Europe also since the 19th century.

### 4.2. Why are there monarch butterflies in Europe?

It is true that man intervenes voluntarily or involuntarily by displacing species, but these also travel naturally due to atmospheric phenomena, sea currents, thaws, etc. even if there are oceans in between. Some specimens were introduced by man accidentally or absurdly by letting them loose at weddings instead of rice. Although the most decisive cause is that they drifted towards the ocean during migration in America as a result of air currents. Their presence has been recorded since 1876; in the Canary Islands since 1880 and in other Macaronesian







This trail is also an opportunity to enjoy the wealth of natural features in the Los Alcornocales Nature Reserve.

The Monarch Butterfly Trail in Castellar de la Frontera runs along the banks of the Guadarranque River.

islands: Madeira, Porto Santo and the Azores. These are territories located in the middle of air currents coming from America and when they are favourable they can bring Monarch butterflies in just 4 days!

On the Portuguese Atlantic coast, in Gibraltar and Andalusia there are data confirming their occasional presence also since the end of the 19th century, and in Galicia, Andalusia, Valencia and Catalonia since 1970. The colonies disappeared due to cold waves and due to a reduction of food resources. However, the colonies that extend through the Tarifa area and some parts of the Sierra de Cádiz have been quite well established for a number of years.

At the end of the day, what is difficult is not the journey of the Monarch butterflies but that they can reproduce and thrive in an ecosystem. There are two main factors that favour these stable settlements. Firstly, the mild climate that is never harsh: butterflies seek warmth, but also shade in woodland areas. Secondly, there needs

to be food: two plants necessary for the survival of the Monarch butterfly: "Milkweed" (*Asclepia curassavica*) and the "Narrow leaf cotton bush" (*Gomphocarpus fruticosus*). They are poisonous plants from which the Monarch butterfly extracts a toxic compound that it absorbs into its body, which protects them from predators. These plants can be found in parts of the Sierra de Cádiz and Tarifa and they are in flower for very long periods (up to 10 months a year),

which guarantees food for the Monarchs. These areas are also conducive to reproduction: they lay their eggs on the plants and the larvae grow by feeding on them. The chrysalis hang from these plants, although due to their small size and transparency it is difficult to detect them.

During our visit to Los Alcornocales Nature Reserve, we were able to see these plants that feed the Monarch butterflies, although not in their maximum splendour, and we also saw larvae feeding on the leaves.

#### 4.3. As many Monarch butterflies as in Mexico or the USA? A question of patience

And yes, we did see Monarch butterflies! but not in the same way that they are seen in the sanctuaries in Mexico, where they seek protection and food in winter, and thousands of them can be seen flying and settled in trees. At certain times we saw them fluttering about along the Castellar de la Frontera trail. It is a question of patience, if you get close up to the "Milkweed" and the "Narrow leaf cotton bush", you will end up seeing them. But when you go along the trail it is important not to be in a hurry, to know how to wait and to pay attention. And, above all, do not move too much when they appear so as not to scare them away and you can then enjoy their presence.

Monarch butterflies can be seen most of the year. However, it is in the hottest months when these Lepidopterans seek shade in the forests, so it is in summer when you are more likely to see them. The Castellar Monarch Butterfly Trail is a place where there is an important colony,

although there is also one in Tarifa, in the Strait Nature Reserve. They can also be seen along other hiking trails and even by the roadside. So do not despair if you do not see any, you just need to look for *Milkweed* and *Narrow leaf cotton bush* and wait.

#### 4.4. Castellar de la Frontera Monarch Butterfly Trail

We went along the Castellar de la Frontera Monarch Butterfly Trail in the autumn, mid-October. There were hardly any hikers and the chances of seeing butterflies had diminished, since the plants had almost all been eaten by the larvae and they no longer sought shade as in summer. The day before we had seen our first Monarch butterfly next to El Collado de la Laja de la Zarga in Tarifa, since *Milkweed* could also be found there. Before starting out on the route, when we reached Los Alcornocales from the Strait Nature Reserve, we saw some butterflies at the side of the road. We had decided to stop because it has some Narrow leaf cotton bush and we also had the opportunity to observe the larvae that are green and yellow, beautiful.

Once on the trail, you should always follow the banks of the Guadarranque River (from the Arabic *Wadi-Ramke*, the river of the mares). We saw the first butterflies next to some plants that were almost dry and it was really exciting, because they are such a beautiful colour (males are orange and females are yellow), and they have such a broad wingspan. Soon after that we saw a group and we decided that the best thing to do was to hide behind a *milkweed* bush and wait. They appeared soon after. Our the cameras taking pictures barely broke the silence while they were nibbling the flowers, opening and closing their wings: so beautiful!

After that we hardly saw anymore butterflies, but we were still delighted. This trail is also an opportunity to enjoy the wealth of natural beauty in the Los Alcornocales Nature Reserve: Portuguese oaks, ash trees, white poplars, alders, native Andalusian palm trees, etc. We finished the route delighted to have seen Monarch butterflies in Europe, something we did not expect.



Monarch butterfly larvae.

*Asclepias curassavica* is one of the plants required for the Monarch butterfly to survive.

#### 4.5. Protecting the Monarch butterfly. Not to die of success

The Monarch Butterfly Trail in Castellar de la Frontera could be an incentive to attract tourists who can then discover the Los Alcornocales Nature Reserve. But it could also result in this route becoming crowded with people and this would also affect the Monarch butterfly, so its success could kill it off. This is why we recommend people respect these lepidopterans by walking calmly along the route without disturbing them.

#### Information about the Castellar Monarch butterfly trail

**Location:** Castellar de la Frontera  
**Distance:** 5.8 km  
**Starting point/arrival point:** The bridge next to the Venta La Cantina - a point next to the Venta Jarandilla.  
**Duration (one way):** 3 hours  
**Degree of difficulty:** medium  
**Reduced mobility:** unsuitable. Complex terrain.

**There is a colony along the Monarch Butterfly Trail in Castellar, although they can also be seen in Tarifa and along other hiking trails**





Payoya goat and sheep cheese from the El Bosqueño cheese factory in El Bosque.

Spotting and photographing Monarch butterflies is a matter of patience. In the photo, Iñigo Pedrueza, following instructions from Javier Elorriaga, from Birding the Strait.

In El Collado de Laja de la Zarga you can see griffon vultures. With members of Birding Tarifa.

Members of Birding Tarifa watching birds in the marshes and lagoons of Barbate.

# 5

## Practical information about unexpected Cádiz

### 5.1. How to get there.

- ◆ **The Isla de las Palomas, Tarifa**  
The Isla de las Palomas is a 1.5 km walk from the centre of Tarifa. At the moment, you need to get a permit from the Civil Guard in Tarifa.
- ◆ **El Collado Laja de la Zarga**  
Collado Laja de la Zarga is 31 km by car from Tarifa via the N-340 and CA-8202.
- ◆ **La Janda**  
La Janda is 72 km from Tarifa, about 1hr 13 min via the N-340.
- ◆ **Castellar de la Frontera**  
To get to Castellar from Algeciras, take the Mediterranean Motorway (A-7 and A-405). It is 21.7 km and it takes about 20 minutes.
- ◆ **Ubrique**  
Ubrique is 105 km, 1 hr 12 min from Cádiz via the A-372.

### ◆ Grazales

Grazales is 113 km, 1 hr 32 min from Cádiz via the A-372. 26.5 km, about 38 minutes from Ubrique. And 34.7 km, about 43 minutes from Ronda in the province of Málaga.

### ◆ Villaluenga del Rosario

Villaluenga del Rosario is 13.6 km, 20 min from Grazales via the A-372 and A-374. And 13.2 km, about 21 min from Ubrique.

### 5.2. Where to sleep in unexpected Cádiz.

There are a lot of hotels and interesting country houses where you can stay in these nature reserves. We can suggest a few that we got to see, but you will find many more on the Tourism and Sports in Andalusia website: [www.andalucia.org](http://www.andalucia.org).

### ◆ Hotel La Posada, Villaluenga del Rosario.

Calle Torre, 1, 11611.  
A Guesthouse right in the centre of the town, with rustic decoration and a menu serving local products, including Payoya goat cheese.

### ◆ Hotel Castillo de Castellar

Calle del Rosario, 3, 11350  
Castellar de la Frontera, Cádiz  
Tel. 956 69 31 50  
<https://www.tugasa.com/hotel-castillo-de-castellar>

### 5.3. Where to eat in unexpected Cádiz.

This is just a small sample of restaurants where you can enjoy the gastronomic delights of these nature reserves in the province of Cádiz. You will find many more restaurants on the Tourism and Sports in Andalusia website: [www.andalucia.org](http://www.andalucia.org)

### ◆ Restaurante "El Aljibe", Castellar Viejo

Home cooking, delicious dishes.  
Calle del Rosario, 3  
11350 Castellar de la Frontera, Cádiz.

### ◆ Restaurante Café del Mar.

Seafront restaurant serving modern cuisine.  
Calle Pintor Guillermo Pérez Villalta, 60  
11380 Tarifa.

### ◆ Restaurante "Cádiz El Chico" Grazales

Exquisite traditional cuisine with high-quality products.

Specialising in game and lamb. You should try the traditional Grazales soup, wild boar with raspberry, scrambled eggs with golden thistles, fried cheese, aubergines with blue cheese and ham.

### 5.4. Service companies. What to do and other activities.

#### ◆ Birding Tarifa

Bird-watching and nature tours along the Strait of Gibraltar, in the province of Cádiz, Doñana and Morocco. Graduates in environmental sciences and lovers of ornithology and nature.  
Calle Constitución, 14, 1ºA, 11391 Facinas, Cádiz.  
<https://www.birdingtarifa.es>

#### ◆ Birding the Strait

Ornithological tourism along the Strait of Gibraltar and in the province of Cádiz and other places in Spain and Morocco. Experienced ornithologists with a passion for birds, nature photography and wildlife.  
<https://www.birdingthestrain.com/es>

#### ◆ El Bosqueño Cheese Factory (see gastronomy)

Calle Antonio Machado, 11670 El Bosque.  
<https://www.quesoselbosque.com>

#### ◆ Quesería Queso Payoyo S. L. (see gastronomy)

Calle Ermita, 14, 11611 Villaluenga del Rosario.  
<https://www.payoyo.com>



**The Cordoba Subbética Nature Reserve is at the geographical centre of Andalusia. It is located in the southernmost part of the province of Córdoba, between the provinces of Málaga to the south, Seville to the west, and Jaén and Granada to the east. A region that perfectly combines natural spaces, a wealth of heritage, gastronomical delights and good tourist services. All within a region covering almost 1,600 km<sup>2</sup>, but with only 125,000 inhabitants who live mainly in the villages that surround the mountainous massif. The Cordoba Subbética is a very little known region and full of attractions that we would be delighted to show you.**

“  
The  
geological,  
sporting  
and  
delicious  
Subbética  
”



Almedinilla, a white town in the Cordoba Subbética.

The Subbética has the great advantage of being right in the middle of a number cultural and tourist routes. It is very near provincial capital cities like Málaga, Córdoba, Granada and Seville, there are excellent connections with Madrid by train and road, and by plane with the rest of Europe from a number of Andalusian airports. Accessible and modern, the Subbética has an unknown, diverse natural environment, a broad cultural heritage, excellent cuisine and numerous possibilities for active tourism.

There is easy access and it is just as easy to find roads through the mountains in search of tranquillity or the unexpected. There are long, hiking trails through karst landscapes where you come across fossilised ammonites in what was the ancient sea of Tethys. Or perhaps you would

rather cycle along "vías verdes" (rail trails) or ride an Andalusian horse through a green, ochre and white sea of olive groves.

There is a great historical presence in the Subbética, from hidden eras, like those found in the Subbética Geopark. And there is archaeological, monumental heritage that brings you closer to the present, all of which can be combined with the best wines and some of the best olive oils (EVOO, of course) in Spain.

Finally, you will see that there is a genuine desire for improvement that can be seen in the projects for high-quality tourism. Delightful accommodation and excellent restaurants are easy to find. Hotels managed by professionals prepared to take the next step towards tourism

of the future; tourism companies that are searching for quality, and that provide activities and services adapted to all types of sports and adventure tourism, gastronomy, culture and well-being.

Organic agriculture is also developing hand in hand with public, private and cooperative initiatives, improving the quality of oils, wines, fruits and garden products. A human wealth and a spirit of change and progress making the Subbética even more attractive. You just need

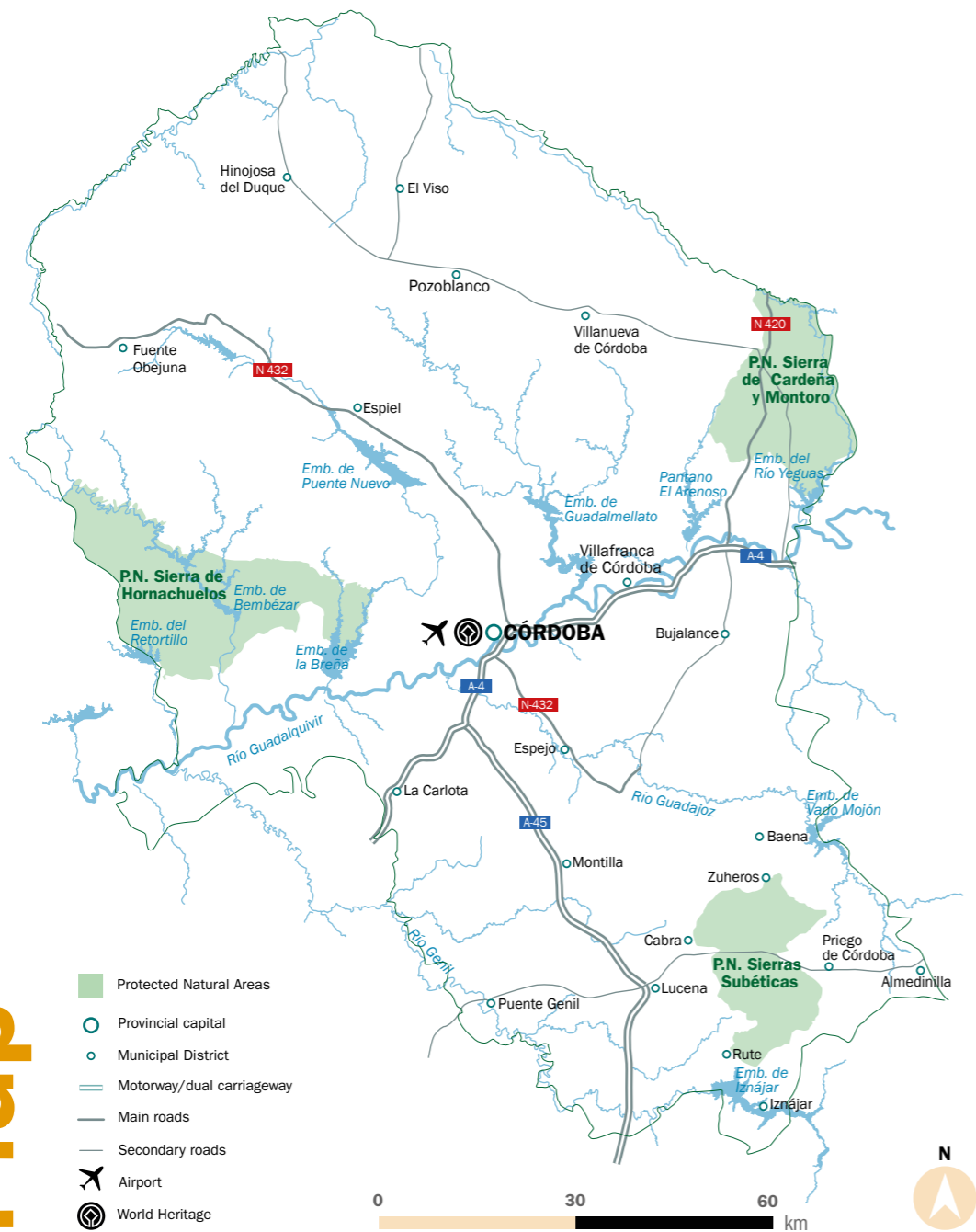
to place it on the map and start enjoying one of the most unexpected regions in Andalusia.

If to this we add that prices are very reasonable and the quality is higher than in other busier area, discovering the Córdoba Subbética is not a just a stage on a trip between Andalusia's tourist capitals, it is without a doubt, a fantastic trip all in itself. Or several.



# Map

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The Iznájar Reservoir is the largest in Andalusia and is an excellent point for bird watching.

The dome of the Tabernacle of the Church of La Asunción de Priego in Córdoba, one of the masterpieces of the Spanish Baroque.

From the Patio de las Comedias lookout point you can see part of the delightful town of Iznájar and the reservoir.





The white village of Rute and the beautiful landscape of the Subbética.

## Nature and sports in the Subbética: From the Sea of Tethys to the Subbética Geopark

Nature was the first thing that left an impression on us in the Subbética. Although we should warn you warn that it is not a colossal mountain like those in the Sierra Nevada. The mountains of the Subbética are more modest in height but they are equally untamed and proud.

Because they are full of geological curiosities; of incredible hiking trails that follow canyons and mountain rivers; of beautiful villages and the cuisine is always delicious. And the area is largely unknown outside the province of Córdoba itself. All this makes the wealth and variety of tourist attractions, the sports activities, the festivals and the traditions, even more unexpected and surprising. La Subbética does not look at the Sierra Nevada with envy, it simply offers a different type of tourism, which complements that

which you find in the better-known Andalusia.

The region is located between the two main Betic mountain ranges, combining a plateau with an altitude between 400 and 800 metres and mid-mountain areas that are over 1,500 metres high. The limestone materials that had once been the bed of the Sea of Tethys during the Triassic era 200/250 million years ago, rose from the depths of the ocean to form the plains and mountain ranges that make up the Subbética. Even though they are not more than 1,600 metres high, they are still real mountains full of a wealth of flora and fauna and geological features.

There are dozens of hiking trails through the mountains and valleys of the Subbética, both within and outside the Nature Reserve. The relief of the region runs through another sea, a sea of olive trees, which become more dispersed

**La Subbética is full of geological curiosities, incredible hiking trails, delightful towns and villages and delicious cuisine**



The Zuheros Bat Cave is a spectacular example of the variety of karst formations in the Subbéticas Geopark.

There are thousands of fossilised ammonites amongst the rocks in the Subbéticas, reminiscent of the prehistoric Sea of Tethys.

as you climb up towards the mountains and hills dominated by karst landscapes. The area is an example of a pure continental climate, with very hot summers, cold winters and well-defined seasons, although the relief creates multiple biotopes and microclimates. Water is abundant in the karst massif, enabling diverse and unexpected agriculture: Vineyards and olive grove have adapted to achieve exquisite flavours. One more incentive for a visit that it will be hard to cut short.

### 1.1. Córdoba Subbética Nature Reserve and Geopark

This is a jewel on which the entire region depends, since it brings together in the same territory a Nature Reserve and a Geopark located in the mountainous area at the centre of Subbética. To have both these features is a special attraction. In 2006 Unesco included the Subbética in the Network of Geoparks because of the variety of karst reliefs, something that is easily observed when walking through the park and at the Visitor Centre.

We have already spoken about the formation of the Subbética and all Baetica Mountain Ranges, an ancient seabed that has been raised and folded. This folding is the reason why so many fossils that formed on the bed of the Sea of Tethys are now found in such abundance in the mountains that make up the Baetica Mountain Range. They usually consist of thousands and thousands of fossilised ammonites whose shells were turned into rock. They are not only to be found in the mountains and along the tracks and pathways, you will also find them in the marble decorating the churches and monuments in the region, as well as in the walls of houses and building throughout the Subbética.

The climate is continental with very hot summers and cold winters, when snowfalls are not at all rare. There is great natural diversity,

favoured by the abundance of water. In the limestone hills and mountains there is a wide variety of biotopes that enable the existence of numerous endemic plants and a variety of fauna. In the Subbética you will find species that are not generally found in such southern latitudes. The most flamboyant species to be found include the European pond turtle, salamanders, eagle owls, numerous birds of prey, wild cats, and the very rare Cabrera moss.

In the Sierras Subbéticas Geopark there is a tremendous variety of karst formations, with poljes (valleys or depressions); limestone pavements (areas of eroded rock that form ridges and grooves); sinkholes, chasms and about eight hundred caves, grottos and cavities. The most famous of the caves are to be found in the Bat Cave system.

These caves are a clear example of a very complex aquifer system that retains an immense amount of water. The importance of this natural deposit is a key factor in present-day life, since it supplies water to half of the province of Córdoba.

### 1.2. Hiking routes

The trails through the Subbética Nature Reserve are one of the main attractions for nature lovers. They are little known but harbour numerous secrets. There are routes adapted to all levels and durations; here are just a few suggestions. You will find more information at the tourist offices in each town. The Bailón River Canyon, a trail that goes upstream from the town of Zuheros is one of the best known and most spectacular routes.

**Bailón River Route**, between Cabra and Zuheros. This is perhaps the best known. You can start at the Chapel of La Virgen de la Sierra de Cabra,

**In 2006 Unesco included the Subbética in the Network of Geoparks because of the variety of karst reliefs**





You can enjoy the Sierra Subbética landscape along the Bailón River Trail, which leads to the beautiful village of Zuheros.

The Bailón River Trail runs through the karst landscape of the mountains.

Along the banks of the Iznájar reservoir there are hiking trails where you can enjoy the landscape and bird watching.

walk about 13 km and arrive in Zuheros in about six hours. It can also be done in the opposite direction. There are spectacular karst formations in the mountains and the vegetation changes depending on the season. Following the course of the river Bailón, you cross the polje de La Nava, a karst formation in the shape of a crater or closed valley, a typical limestone relief. There are spectacular springs and waterfalls like those of Las Chorreras or those that suddenly appear near Zuheros.

**La Tiñosa Route**, in Priego de Córdoba. A 16-km trail, that is a little more if you climb up to the peak of La Tiñosa, the highest on Córdoba. The gentlest climb to the peak is up the west face, a little steeper if you take the north face called "El fantasma". An alternative would be to start in Rute, crossing the whole Subbética and finishing at 1,570 metres at the top of La Tiñosa. But this would be 24 km and take at least 5 hours, and that is only one way!

**Sierra del Caballo Route**, in Almedinilla. Ideal trail for those who do not have much experience since the difficulty is low and it is only 1.5 km (40 minutes) but you get to enjoy the Salto del Caballo waterfall. The Sierra de Albayate and the Caicena River show that Subbética is a region where you are never short of water. The remains of a number of flour mills show the economic importance of these waterways.



**Route along the left bank of the Iznájar reservoir.** Trail of medium difficulty, 15 km, starting from the Agroman Bridge, with spectacular views of the rugged village of Iznájar and the eponymous reservoir. This route is very interesting for birdwatchers, since there are a great number of water birds that spend time on the reservoir. Various species of ducks, herons and seagulls. In the area around the Sierra de las Cuevas de San Marcos you will often see griffon vultures and peregrine falcons. The route starts and ends on the Iznájar reservoir.

**Route of Las Buitreras.** Luque and Carcabuey share a route of almost 18 km and medium difficulty where you will see precipices and rocky cliffs where a large number of griffon vultures nest. Abandoned farmhouses and trails take you to the heart of the Nature Reserve, visiting the Polje in La Nava de Luque.

**Route from the Sierra de Cabra to Mount Picacho.** This is also highly recommended as you can see five Andalusian provinces from the peak. This route also passes through the polje in La Nava de Luque.

In the town of Zuheros you will find the **Cave of the Bats**, inhabited since prehistoric times and another milestone along a path full of surprises.

## 2 The Via Verde del Aceite Rail Trail

A section of an old railway line, converted into a route for cyclists and hikers, around the northern part of the Subbética. A transversal axis that connects Linares in the province of Jaén with Puente Genil and that takes you through the northern part of the Subbética. In the past, the railway line was used to transport olive oil from the provinces of Jaén and Córdoba, and today it is an attraction for tourists from all over Europe. An essential communications artery within the region and an invitation for those seeking more leisurely travel and greater contact with the people and the territory.

Along this 128-km route between the provinces of Jaén and the entire northern area of the Córdoba Subbética we found an excellent selection of services and accommodation that are being developed throughout the area. 15 mountain bike routes with more than 250 km of marked and approved pathways, with a special mention for the public-private project by the Cyclo-Tourism Centre in the town of Doña Mencía, an example of what this type of tourism can contribute on a social and economic level.

At the old railway station in Cabra there are a number of locomotives and buildings, a railway heritage that needs to be restored and preserved and that will the section through this town much more interesting. The section from Baena to Cabra itself is one of the most beautiful, as it passes through Zuheros, crossing several viaducts and bridges. In Carcabuey, Iznájar and Almedinilla there are information points, car parks and repair shops serving a large part of the Subbética and this network of cycling routes.

### 2.1. Sport and active tourism

The Via Verde del Aceite rail trail is the setting for a number of sports events. For example, the 10-km Córdoba Subbética Popular Night Race. A race that is suitable for almost everyone and that runs along the smooth profile of this old railway line between Luque and Doña Mencía, passing



through Zuheros. The La Subbética Cycling Challenge is a road cycling event that lasts three days and covers the entire region.

With regard to active tourism, it should first be noted that in the Subbética there are numerous limestone walls that are ideal for climbing. Another activity for those that do not suffer from vertigo or leaping into the void is bungee jumping that can be enjoyed on the Hernán Ruíz bridge, in Benamejil, over the Génil river. For canyoning one of the best areas is the Barranco de Genilla canyon, near Priego de Córdoba.

Even though it is quite a long way from the coast, the Iznájar reservoir and the Genil river are ideal for canoeing, paddle surfing and sailing. The Genil river is the meeting point for lovers of whitewater rafting, kayaks and unsinkable canoes. Not forgetting rafting from Benamejil to Palenciana (medium difficulty).

Zip lines and via ferratas are also highly recommended activities that can be enjoyed in numerous locations in the Subbética. We would finally like to highlight the Cueva de Yeso, near Baena, where you can see peculiar formations in speleology mode.

In short, the relief of the Subbética provides almost endless opportunities to enjoy intense, entertaining, but above all safe sports activities. The companies that guide us through the caving routes, canyoning, bungee jumping, via ferratas and water activities on the Iznájar reservoir and the Genil River, are all very professional and have a lot of experience.

There are 15 mountain bike routes with more than 250 km of marked and approved paths

Stop at the Doña Mencía Cyclo-Tourism Centre, Via Verde del Aceite rail trail.

Mikado steam locomotive. Cabra Via Verde del Aceite rail trail Visitor Centre.





The extraordinary dome of the Sanctuary of the Virgin of Araceli, one of Lucena's treasures.

# 3

## Cultural heritage and traditions

The small towns and villages in the Subbética have a varied and little-known monumental heritage. Traditions and traces of the past, from Prehistory to the Iberian and Roman times, which can be found in caves and archaeological sites.

For example, the Cueva de los Murciélagos in Zuheros, at an altitude of almost a thousand metres. A site inhabited from the Middle Palaeolithic to the Roman era. The karst formations in the Subbética appear in all their splendour during a visit that combines geology, history and highlighting the importance of one of the most spectacular craters in the area.

**The monumental heritage of the towns and villages in the Subbética is varied and little known**

The Moorish era and the Middle Ages, with the Renaissance and the Baroque, these are all evident in citadels transformed into castles, and mosques into churches. This resulted in the layout of mountain villages, with Moorish roots and whitewashed walls, anchored to the cliffs. Zuheros, again, is a good sample, but also Iznájar, hanging from a mountain next

to the reservoir of the same name. Almedinilla and Priego de Córdoba are other examples of Moorish towns that became Castilian after the conquest in the thirteenth century. There was a change of ruler, but the population remained mixed for several centuries. Moors, Christians and Jews lived together for better or worse and the presence of these three religions created a very rich cultural diversity. Lucena and Rute are two of the towns with an important Jewish heritage. Lucena, in fact, belongs to the Network of Jewish Quarters in Spain, called "Camino de Sefarad".

The Mozarab "Camino de Santiago" dates from that same time, with two branches going either side of the Subbética. Starting from Almería and Málaga respectively they come together in Baena, with one having passed through Alcalá La Real and Alcaudete, and the other through Lucena, Cabra and Doña Mencía. The most spectacular monumental heritage can be found in Cabra, Baena and Lucena, where there are numerous churches. Priego de Córdoba, Luque, Zuheros, Baena and Lucena are gastronomic and cultural cities through which the Mozarabic Camino de Santiago and the

Route of the Caliphate both passed. A melting pot of cultural influences, memories of the past, recovered heritage that is displayed to the traveller with pride.

### 3.1. Towns in the Subbética

In Priego de Córdoba, the olive trees surround the town like a sea standing on the edge of a gorge, a ravine through which the water that makes life possible runs. Aromas of oil mills and pressed olives full of the vigour of the mountains, and which make the EVOOs with P.D.O. from the Subbética so special. Without doubt, Priego is an ideal destination for those who come to Córdoba attracted by oleotourism. They will also love the colourful Barrio de la Villa neighbourhood. The narrow, beautifully decorated streets, the fountains and springs, the Church of La Asunción and its splendid tabernacle, are just a few of the attractions.

Baena is another of the towns around the Nature Reserve. It was the first to be designated as olive oil with Designation of Origin. A visit to the olive-oil mill in Nuñez de Prado is a very good option to discover the world of olive oil.

Baena has a rich archaeological heritage, featuring the Torreparedones site, one of the most important in all of Córdoba as there are Tartessian, Iberian, Roman and Mediaeval remains. Within the same urban area you will also find the Moorish-style street plan in the old part of the town and the remains of an old Moorish fortress/castle.

Baena, Cabra and Lucena, are the towns in the Subbética that belong to the network of cities called the "Camino de Pasión". A bold, regional development project based on high-quality tourism revolving around the heritage and a number of events during the festivities at Easter. In Baena, this can be seen in the "Cascos de Judíos" (literally Jewish Helmets), an unusual custom that involves

The "Cueva de los Murciélagos" (Bat Cave) in Zuheros has stunning limestone formations created by water over thousands of years.

La Fuente del Rey, a magnificent 16th-century work of art in marble by Priego de Córdoba.

Cellar with huge, 18th-century earthenware jars at the Nuñez de Prado olive-oil mill in Baena.







decorating associations tin the parades with helmets, drums and traditional costumes made of moulded brass. The design of the helmets probably originated in France or Great Britain, and was adapted to this Catholic Religious festivity at the time of the War of Independence against Napoleon's troops. It is included in Unesco's Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Cabra, which is committed to sports tourism and the Vía Verde rail trail, has both remarkable churches and unique traditions. In the old town, some parts of the wall around the old citadel/ castle and the Palace of the Condes de Cabra have been preserved which has led to it being called one of Andalusia's Baroque capitals.

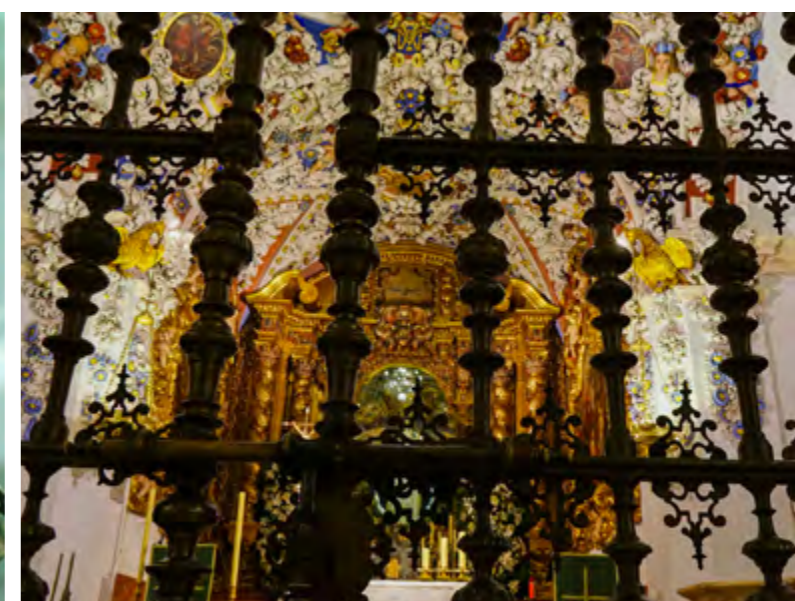
The churches in Cabra were decorated with pink limestone, with numerous fossils of ammonites and other creatures that lived in the Sea of Tethys. When this stone is polished and carved it resembles marble and is a distinctive feature in the floors, columns and stairways of Córdoba Baroque buildings in Cabra. Without doubt, the most spectacular can be found in the Tabernacle in the Gothic Renaissance church of San Mateo, which even rivals those of the French Rococo! In Cabra there are also interesting stately homes and we recommend visiting the Fuente del Río, one of the sources of the Subbética aquifers.

Although it is not included in the "Caminos de Pasión", you could well make a stop at Doña Mencía, near Cabra, to visit the old quarter and the local archaeological museum.

The last stop along the route of the "Caminos de Pasión" is Lucena which has a rich tradition of both religious and civil silver- and goldsmithing. Craft goldsmiths like Angulo Bronces maintain this tradition by adapting to the tastes and requirements of the present. Lucena prides itself on a mixed and diverse past, with a broad Jewish, Moorish and Christian presence. Known as the "Pearl of Sepharad" it had great prominence until the Jews were expelled in 1492. Here you will find the largest excavated Jewish necropolis in Spain.

Narrow streets and alleyways in Priego de Córdoba decorated with a thousand and one flowers in the Barrio de la Villa neighbourhood.

The church of La Asunción in Cabra. Córdoba Baroque can be clearly seen in the town's Mediaeval neighbourhood.



The Sanctuary of the Virgin of Araceli, located on a hill overlooking Lucena and the Subbética Nature Reserve is a special place with incredible views. Many people come here to meditate and also to enjoy sports, looking out over the natural surroundings of the Subbética. If you have time, you should take the route from Lucena to the top of the hill. It is a climb that runners and cyclists enjoy.

Almedinilla is a white village surrounded by rocks and olive groves, with important archaeological sites like the "El Ruedo" Roman Villa and the "Cerro de la Cruz" Iberian settlement, one of the few from the Low Iberian Era. A visit to the Historical-Archaeological Museum displays the wealth of its archaeological heritage, like

a sculpture of Hypnos, the Greco-Roman god of sleep. You can attend an event called "The pleasures of the Roman table" that will take you back in time with a theatrical re-enactment and meals made following recipes from Roman times. To overnight we recommend rural accommodation like La Hospedería la Era where you can enjoy the landscapes, heritage, gastronomy and slow tourism.

Zuheros from its fortress.

In Baena the ancient artisan tradition of making Jewish costumes, helmets and drums has been kept alive. "Cascos de judío" handcrafted by José Luis Burrueco.

Almedinilla has a stunning archaeological heritage. The Historical-Archaeological Museum features a statue of Hypnos, the Greco-Roman god of sleep.

Baroque Lucena. The beautiful Sanctuary of the Virgin of Araceli.

**"Caminos de Pasión" highlights the importance of the heritage associated with Easter**





Stone mill with 3 conical stones in the Núñez de Prado Olive Mill in Baena.

Hundred-year-old olive tree at the Almazara Núñez de Prado olive mill, Baena.

# 4

## Committed to high-quality, classical, organic products

Each one of the towns and villages in the Subbética has a number of specialities or benchmark products. Many of them are very little known outside the region, which makes your journey a discovery in every way.

### 4.1. Land of mountain olive oil, organic EVOO

The Extra Virgin Olive Oils from the Subbética are of high quality and full of trace elements. Olives pressed cold and carefully. They owe part of their quality to the relief of the Subbética, which is a blend of plateaus with an altitude of between 500 and 800 metres and a continental climate with hot summers and cold winters. Oleotourism has been developed based on a commitment to high quality by many of the local producers. The Priego and Baena PDO produces oils of different varieties, but all with great character and aromatic richness.

Many producers have decided to produce organically, which improves the virtues of the oil and also makes them more valuable and competitive in the market. Picual, Hojiblanca, Picuda, are the names of some of the varieties that abound in the Subbética and you

**Picual, Hojiblanca, and Picuda are varieties of EVOO that abound in the Subbética**

will become familiar with them after a trip to Andalusia.

Almedinilla provided the aroma for cultivated oil, even before Roman times. On a visit to the Caicena River eco-museum and the olive-oil section you will learn so much. The Roman Gastronomical Forums are events not to be missed. Recipes taken from a book on gastronomy written by Marco Gavius Apicius in the 1st century are accompanied by theatrical performances.

In addition to olive oil, Priego de Córdoba also produces exquisite almonds, as well as truffles, which grow among the roots of the oak trees in the region. Two museums will remind you of the importance of both products.

Carcabuey is the third town that is part of the Priego D.O. and where olive oil occupies a prominent position. This should not prevent you from discovering and enjoying the excellent natural quinces, cured meat products, pork derivatives, pastries and local doughnuts.

Cabra does not only pay homage to olive oil with the El Molino Viejo museum, it is also where you really should taste the Cabra-style table olives.

It is also renowned for its chacinas (traditional sausages) and, of course, for its sweet products: "pestiños", traditional doughnuts and chocolate sponge cakes made by the Augustinian nuns.

### 4.2. Recovery of forgotten products and recipes

In Zuheros you can enjoy a humble and unknown delicacy: maidenstears (Silene vulgaris). A plant that grows amongst the olive trees and that we had discovered in the Sierra de Grazalema, in Villaluenga del Rosario. Loaded with minerals and substances, these plants that many think of as weeds are an example of the recovery of forgotten recipes.

Restaurants in the area have begun to value and reinvent recipes of Andalusian, Jewish and Mediaeval origin that had been thought lost. Local produce that was often rejected or even despised because of its association with "peasants" has also acquired value. With the recovery of the value of the countryside, nature and "authentic" produce, the future of these plants and products could well be a catalyst for differentiation and attract tourism based on well-being and high quality. Traditional bread-based coups called "cachorreñas", kid goat in sauce, tomato-based cold dishes called "mojetes" are complemented with delicious cheeses. For dessert you have curds, "pestiños" and traditional wine doughnuts. And to top it off, another unexpected delight: a unique saffron quince with cheese mousse and red berries.

Doña Mencía is an obligatory stop if you are feeling hungry. If you are tired after the trail or the vía verde rail trail, the cuisine in Doña Mencía will help you get your strength back, with stews from a mixture of all kinds of beans which they simply call "cocina". Other specialities are "apandillo", roast tomatoes and a variant of gazpacho called "salmorejo". The delicious menu is completed with Montilla Moriles wines, sweet dishes and goat cheeses.

Benamejé is known for its "Remojón", a delicious dish made with cod, hard-boiled egg and oranges! The melons here are also excellent.

In Encinas Reales you really have to try the potato stew with pork ribs, veal, onion, tomato and peppers, which are also typical here.

Th gastronomy in Priego focusses on pork and D.O. olive oils. Another attractive feature of the cuisine in Priego de Córdoba are truffles. The first Mycological Garden in all Europe is located between two of its districts: Zagrilla Baja and Zagrilla Alta. It is renowned for stuffed artichokes and a dish with kid goat called "chivo al ajillo pastor". And sweets feature "turrolate", chocolate eclairs filled with almond paste.

Fuente Tojar contributes with pork products and olive oil from the Priego de Córdoba D.O. There are also excellent, delicious capers, although

Extra Virgin Olive Oil with PDO from Priego de Córdoba. Tastings and olive-oil tourism to experience this "gold" in Priego.

The humility and flavour of the Silene vulgaris or maidenstears that grow fresh from the olive trees are a delight for the visitor.

**The restaurants in the area have recovered numerous recipes of Andalusian, Jewish and Mediaeval origin**





A famous Andalusian duo: "Salmorejo" (similar to gazpacho) and "ajoblanco" (chilled garlic and almond soup).

Delicious aubergines with honey.

their complex may take time to get used to. There are other specialities in Fuente Tojar: "relleno de carnaval" (a traditional cured mat dish) and a dish called "sopa de sobremesa" (after-dinner soup).

Iznájar, a town overlooking the reservoir, has many dishes associated with celebrations and with each season. Pork products in winter. During Carnival you have the above-mentioned "relleno de carnaval", made with cured meat, egg, ham, turkey and breadcrumbs. For Christmas, syrupy doughnuts, homemade buns and tortilla chips. Easter is the time for honey fritters and "huevos de santo",

The cuisine is excellent in Lucena, with "roñas de habicholones" (bean stew), cauliflower and pepper salad, tomatoes stuffed with rice and "tortilla al charco". The best is surely "naranjas picás": peeled orange salad to which fish, vegetables and spices are added. The numerous sweet dishes include nougat, puff pastry, candied fruits, muffins, macaroons, etc. And Lucena is renowned for its tapas and pinchos route!

Luque is renowned for its olive oil, this time from the Baena D.O., so you can enjoy the differences and nuances of all these high-quality EVOOs. Local delights include doughnuts, "piñonates" and "cachorreras".

In Baena, as in many towns in the Subbética, the gastronomy focusses on pork derivatives and D.O. olive oil. And the star of the sweets is the

delicious "turrolate", chocolate eclairs filled with almond paste.

Palenciana has "porra crúa" (a variant of gazpacho) and "roñas", a stew with olive oil that is eaten cold. There are numerous typical Christmas sweets, which are similar to those in Antequera region in the province of Málaga.

You can really eat well in Andalusia!

#### 4.3. Cheeses for cheese lovers

We are real cheese lovers and on our travels we discovered cheeses that even changed the route we took. Fortunately the cheeses we found in the Subbética, in Zuheros, Baena and Carcabuey were a real hidden treasure. We never dreamed that they made such good cheeses in Andalusia. But the discovery of payoyo cheese in the province of Cádiz really opened our eyes and palate, and we became ambassadors of Andalusian cheese!

We know we are not wrong when we say that the goat and sheep cheeses in the Subbética are some of the very best in Spain! Goat and sheep cheeses, mixed cheeses, in oil, seasoned, cream cheese and, of course, all those extraordinary additions in the dishes and specialities of the Subbética.

Travelling to these towns and villages to buy cheese is a journey in itself, but it becomes ecstatic when we consider it to be the culmination of a journey full of nature, sport and culture!

#### 4.4. Wines and liqueurs

Cabra and Lucena belong to the Montilla-Moriles D.O. and they contribute excellent, generous wines and Pedro Ximénez. Benamejí and Palenciana, located south of the Subbética, on the border with the province of Malaga, are included in the Malaga D.O., with different but equally tasty wines.

More surprising, because it was so unexpected was to find a whole world of anises. There is an ancient tradition of anise in Rute and it is the basis for an important local industry (see Rute: Unexpected amongst the unexpected), but it is not only in Rute where you will find anise. Anise is undoubtedly typical of the Subbética in its many variants. In Encinas Reales you will find one of the most peculiar drinks on Andalusia, "arresoli", made of aniseed, coffee and sometimes lemon verbena! And another in Luque, here it is called "Resol" and is made with aniseed, coffee and cinnamon!

#### 4.5. Development of Organic Cooperatives

In Almedinilla we discovered a charming accommodation -Hospedería La Era - that is committed to the quality and the promotion of good local products. This that attracts many tourists from all over Europe in search of authenticity, quality and guarantees of sustainability. One of the pillars of the work of Davinia and Raúl in the Hospedería La Era is cooperating with Subbética Ecológica (all data

at the end of the guide), a regional association that has been promoting high-quality organic agriculture since 2009, based on the principles of Economy for the Common Good (ECG).

Subbética Ecológica promotes the production and consumption of vegetables, fruits and other foods, making farm work socially and economically viable. Under a system of direct sales on a short circuit, 50 families are now able to live with increasing dignity in and with the countryside. It values, dignifies, respects and appreciates the hard work done by those who have taken the step towards high-quality organic production. Subbética Ecológica is promoting a decent standard of living for producers charging the consumer surprisingly low prices! Over 500 families regularly buy healthier and tastier products. A small-scale economy that establishes a fixed population within the territory and protects the environment. And a driving force for the development of a different type of tourism, since it also caters to dozens of "Large Consumers", restaurants, school canteens, local shops and delightful accommodation like Almedinilla. The network extends 150 kilometres around the headquarters in Cabra. An example of support and promotion that should be copied.

Delicious cheeses from Zuheros: cured sheep cheese, goat cheese with ash.

The Subbética Ecológica Association, food for the common good.

**The cheeses in Zuheros, Baena and Carcabuey are a true hidden treasure**

**Anises are an ancient tradition in Rute and are the basis for an important local industry**





A multi-award-winning magical patio near the Rute Anise Museum.

"The Mosque in Sugar" from the "Andalusia in sugar" exhibition by Luis Muixí, professor at the Barcelona pastry school and master pastry chef.

The famous Piononos de Rute, an explosive delight made of toasted flour, eggs, milk, cinnamon and filled with Abuela Dolores cream.

The Galleros Artesanos chocolate Nativity Castle, the largest in the world, made by hand for over 90 years.

# 5

## Unexpected amongst the unexpected: Rute, a town with flavour

Rute is a lively and active Andalusian white town with just over 10,000 inhabitants, nestled on the slopes of the southwestern Subbética. A unique town, but not for its beautiful appearance which is common to many in the region. Neither is it due to the damage caused to old town between 1240 and 1433 when it passed from Nasrid to Castilian control a number of times, which led to settlement in less rugged areas. Rute surprised us by its emphasis of its industriousness and its passionate people. And much more. There several unique museums, atypical museums related to the town's economy. Outside of Andalusia it is unknown, but Rute is a centre for the production of anise liqueurs.

It is a town known for taste and smell. We were very surprised to find the Sugar Museum 'La Flor De Rute', where you can not only enjoy sweets and shortbreads, you can see small-scale sugar sculptures of Spanish and universal monuments. Small but no less artistic and laborious, the models were made by two great pastry chefs, one Catalan and the other from Rute: Luis Muixí and Juanjo Garrido. The Mosque of Córdoba, the Giralda, the Torre del Oro, the Sydney Opera House, the Taj Mahal and the Cathedral of San Basilio, which cannot be eaten but they can certainly be enjoyed. To whet your appetite, you have "Cordobesas" (chocolates with hazelnuts), "Glorias de Coco" (chocolate-covered coconut balls), Pastel de Ángel, etc.

Another place not to be missed is the Galleros Artesanos factory who compete in delicacies with nougat, "turrolate", chocolate eclairs filled with almond paste, "alfajores", puff pastry, and the local Piononos de Rute, etc. and as nothing is done by halves here, you should visit the life-size sculptures of famous people.

There is also a museum for ham in Rute. The area is at an altitude of 800 metres making it ideal for curing ham. The Rute Casa Museo de Jamones reminds you of this and highlights its importance with an ethnographic exhibition. It was founded in the 1970s by the Jiménez family and there is also a shop where you will find the best souvenirs, those you can eat!

Confectionery brings us to another of Rute's specialities, anise from Rute, strong distilled liqueurs made from aniseed and secret recipes. Machaquito, Anís y Licores is a traditional distillery that was founded in 1876. You can visit the copper stills that are still at work extracting the fragrant alcohol. The route continues with a visit to the Anise Museum, the work of Anselmo Córdoba, an outgoing personality who is a scholar of anise, an activist, disseminator of

culture, as well as being an economic and social agitator. Our prolonged visit included anecdotes and stories, with Anselmo guiding us through his innovative museum that is a blend of artistic avant-garde, kitsch and tradition. His emphasis on modernising the image of anise promises beautiful days for this industry in Rute. But that is not all, since right next to the Anise Museum is the Patio con Duende, a magical patio that is an example of the architectural heritage that is hidden behind the gates of Rute. Not only the city of Córdoba capital has beautiful patios, in Rute there is one that has won many prizes. Passing through a cellar stocked with centuries-old wine barrels, an unexpected door leads you to this oasis. There is a pond, dozens of flowers and blue pots, covered by hundred-year-old citrus trees, the aromas and sounds of Andalusia, both classic and ground breaking, all looking towards the future that looks to be diverse, generous and multifaceted. The Patio con Duende is ideal for events and celebrations, but a simple visit already shows you in a simple patio the wealth of a region with a future.

**Rute's gastronomic delights of Rute delight visitors with their taste and aromas**

In the Rute Anise Museum, objects are exhibited that show the importance that women had in promoting anise for centuries.

The Sydney Opera House made in sugar by master pastry chef Juanjo Garrido, owner of Flor de Rute together with his brother. Sugar Museum.

The Galleros Artesanos Chocolate Nativity Scene is made with 1,450 kilos of chocolate.





The rooms in the Hotel Rural Zuhayra have magnificent views of the Córdoba Subbética landscape.

The beautiful Hospedería La Era takes great care with the details in the Andalusian-style rooms, with poetic notes, like that of "Arbolé, arbolé" in homage to Federico García Lorca.

# 6

## Practical information about unexpected Córdoba

### 6.1. How to get there

It is easy to get to the Córdoba Subbética. Access would appear to be difficult, but nothing could be further from the truth. The paradox of the Subbética is that it is a quiet and little-known region, but with excellent communications. Of course distances vary, depending on the town you visit. By road it is less than an hour from the city of Córdoba; 1 hr 40 min from Seville; 1 hour from Málaga and 1 hr 15 min from Granada.

The region is also well prepared for motorhomes, which is another excellent travel option.

The High Speed Train (AVE) has stops in Córdoba, Puente Genil, Antequera, Granada and Málaga, all these towns and cities are located around the Subbética.

Málaga airport is one of the most important in all of Spain with connections to all of Europe. Seville and Granada can also be airports within easy reach of the Subbética. So there is no excuse for not visiting this little-known but really interesting region. And we have already spoken about the Vía Verde rail trail, so cyclists can come ecologically!

### 6.2. Where to stay

- ◆ **Hotel Rural Zuhayra, Zuheros**  
Calle Mirador, 10, 14870 Zuheros, Córdoba  
Tel: 957 69 46 93  
hotelzuhayra@zercahoteles.com  
<https://turismodelasubbetica.es/zuheros/location/hotel-zuhayra/>
- ◆ **Hospedería la Era, Almedinilla**  
Plaza La Era, 1, 14812 Almedinilla, Córdoba  
laera@hospederialaera.com  
<https://hospederialaera.com>  
Tel. 615 26 33 08
- ◆ **Hotel Santo Domingo, Lucena.**  
Calle Juan Jiménez Cuenca, 16  
14900 Lucena, Córdoba.  
Tel. 957 51 11 00  
<https://hotelsantodomingolucena.negocio.site>

- ◆ **Casa Baños de la Villa, Priego de Córdoba**  
Calle Real, 63  
14800, Priego de Córdoba  
Tel. 957 54 72 74  
<http://www.casabanosdelavilla.com/>

### 6.3. Where to eat

- ◆ **Restaurante Zuhayra**  
Calle Mirador, 10, 14870 Zuheros, Córdoba  
Tel. 957 69 46 93  
hotelzuhayra@zercahoteles.com  
<https://turismodelasubbetica.es/zuheros/location/hotel-zuhayra/>
- ◆ **Restaurante Tres Culturas**  
Calle Herrería, 2, 14900 Lucena,  
Tel. 957 51 04 51  
<https://tresculturasrestaurante.wordpress.com>

- ◆ **Restaurante Río**  
Calle del Río 5, 14800 Priego de Córdoba  
Tel. 957 54 00 74

The Hotel Santo Domingo in Lucena and the Hospedería la Era in Almedinilla serve excellent food and use local products.

### 6.4. Service Companies. What to do and other activities

- ◆ **Alúa, a company organising activities.**  
Albergue Escuela Náutica (Water Sports School + Hostel) in Iznájar  
Playa de Valdearenas s/n  
14970 Iznájar, Córdoba  
Tel. +34 678 483 395  
reservas@alua.es  
<https://alua.es/>
- ◆ **Subbética Cyclo-Tourism Centre**  
Bicycles for hire all over Spain  
The old railway station  
14860 Doña Mencía, Córdoba  
Tel. 691 84 35 32  
info@centrocicloturistasubbetica.com  
<https://centrocicloturistasubbetica.com>
- ◆ **Subbética Ecológica**  
EcoCentre and Headquarters  
Calle Puente Mojarín nº 19  
14940 Cabra, Córdoba.  
Tel. +34 693 59 30 02  
info@subbeticaecologica.com  
<https://subbeticaecologica.com/>
- ◆ **Orfebrería Angulo Bronces (Gold- and Silversmith)**  
Polígono Industrial Los Velones - Calle del Bronce 20,  
14900 Baena  
Tel. 957 51 00 45  
bronces@angulobronces.com  
<http://www.orfebresangulobronces.es>
- ◆ **José Luis Burrueco "Cascos de Judío" (Jewish Helmets)**  
Calle Poeta Rafael Alberti, 22 - 14850 Baena  
Tel. 957 670 902
- ◆ **Casa Museo del Jamón Rute**  
Calle Ntra. Sra. de la Cabeza, 5 - 14960 Rute  
Tel. 957 53 83 46  
jamones@jamonesrute.com  
<http://www.jamonesrute.com>
- ◆ **La Flor de Rute Dulces de Navidad (Christmas Sweets)**  
C/ Blas Infante, 20-22 14960 Rute (Córdoba)  
Tel. +34 957 53 86 61  
info@laforderute.es  
<http://www.laforderute.es>
- ◆ **Galleros Artesanos**  
Calle Juan Carlos I, 4 | Calle Fresno, 28  
14960 Rute (Córdoba)  
Tel. +34 957 53 20 78 / 957 53 22 29  
detodaconfianza@gallerosartesanos.com  
<http://www.gallerosartesanos.com>
- ◆ **Machaquito, Anís y Licores**  
Paseo del Fresno, 7 - 14960 Rute  
Tel. 957 53 80 40  
<https://www.machaquito.com/>
- ◆ **Anise Museum and Patio con Duende**  
Calle Paseo del Fresno, 2 - 14960 Rute  
Tel. 957 53 81 43  
info@destileriasduende.com  
[www.museodelanis.com](http://www.museodelanis.com)

El Círculo de la Amistad de Cabra, a former convent-hospital transformed into a casino, with a beautiful Andalusian patio where you can taste the specialities of Andalusia.

Alúa Active Tourism will take you along the Bailon River Trail, in Zuheros. They organise activities and nature tourism for the family in the Córdoba Subbética.



**Granada, a beautiful Nasrid city that is another of the star attractions of Andalusian tourism, and it is no wonder. However, the pre-eminence of the Alhambra and the Sierra Nevada has left many of the province's other wonders in the background. On our travels through the province we discovered some of these hidden treasures, without exploring the city! Although it is quite normal for Andalusia to surprise you, we found Granada even more surprising with a huge variety of tourist attractions.**

“

**There were caves, deserts and mountains**

”



# Granada

One of the settings for this tour through unexpected Granada was the beautiful Gorafe Desert.

**A** trip with so many regions and destinations that we were unable to complete it. Just imagine what you will find going from the Costa Tropical to the peaks in the Sierra Nevada. Or from the rich and complex western Granada, watered by the Genil River, in Loja and Alhama and very near to the neighbouring Subbética and Axarquía regions.

We will focus on the east of the province, the world of films in Guadix and the surrounding Gorafe desert. A land of cave houses and surprising festivities like Cascamorras (shared with Baza).

And to finish, we will go to where Granada meets Jaén, a green and mountainous corner, a little piece of Granada in the Sierra de Cazorla, the Sierra de Castril.

Just a small portion of the province but incredibly rich in history, nature and culture. A little-known region even though it has appeared so many times on cinema screens. An area of extreme geological contrasts, between basins and mountains, desert and oasis.

A place where the rugged terrain has phantasmagorical forms, shaken in desert dust and river torrents.

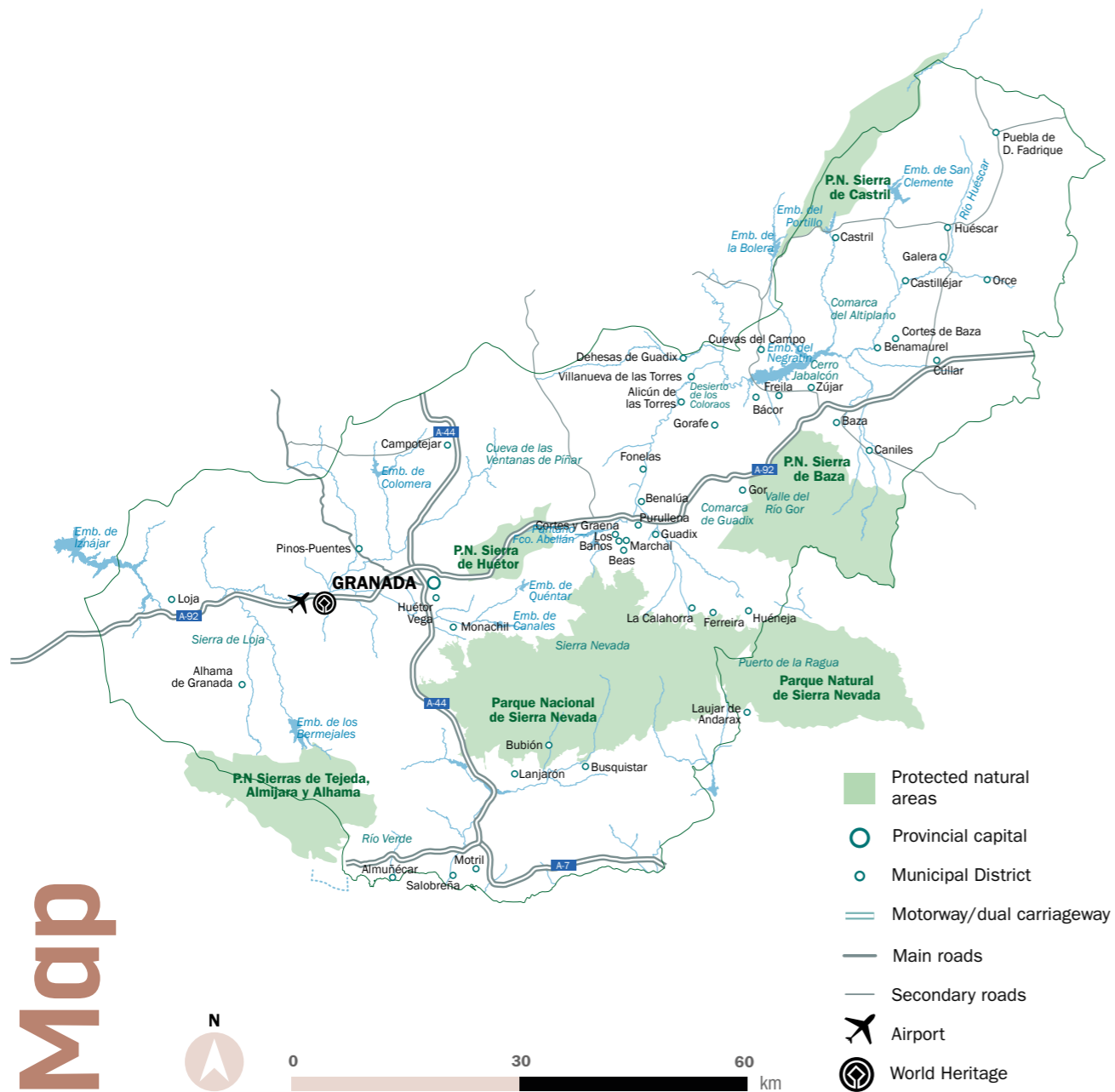
A place where people have excavated the entrails to eek out a living and where a different future for tourism is now being cultivated just as eagerly. A land of human and tourism qualities that is meeting the present by looking towards the future.

There was so much to see that you should not be surprised by what is missing, incredible, delightful places, so many unknown attractions in this Granada that goes from coast to mountain, lush gardens to desert, precipices to plains, basins to mountains. We will continue to discover it, but we will start by telling you what has already amazed us.



# Map

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Guadix and the cave houses also play a leading role in singular and unexpected Granada.

Here is another of the landscapes in this guide: the Sierra de Castril and the river that runs through it.

Cuevas Hammam Abuelo José Purullena in El Bejarín next to Guadix.







Countless films were shot in Guadix because of the landscape and the wealth of heritage.



Entrance to the Plaza de la Constitución, Guadix.



Panoramic views of Guadix from the cathedral.

## Guadix, land of film sets and cave houses.

### 1.1. Guadix, land of film sets and cave houses.

The name of Guadix is familiar but we are not sure why, we place it somewhere in Andalusia but we are not sure exactly where. Perhaps it is because of everything it hides and how little is recognised. But it was due to the impact made by some of its inhabitants, entrepreneurs and tourism professionals that we were led to Guadix and the surrounding region. It was its own desire to show itself and make us welcome that we discovered it and came back delighted. Now it only remains for us to share it.

Guadix is a surprising town because it has everything. To begin with, an old town dominated by an imposing cathedral. It is located on the former site of a Moorish mosque, and at its foot there are the remains of the grandstands of the Roman theatre of Julia Gemella Acci, the Roman city. The Roman theatre is perhaps the

most stunning element, but there are remains of secular settlement within the region, the Iberian oppidum and, of course, the megalithic area of Gorafe. From the Roman name, Acci, comes the adjective to describe the inhabitants of Guadix: "accitano" (meaning from Guadix).

The Cathedral of La Encarnación was begun in the 16th and finished in the 18th century and made use of most of the material left from the old mosque that stood in the same place. The cathedral in Guadix was largely the responsibility of Diego de Siloé, one of the most prominent architects of the 16th century. It is a stunning example of the blend of architectural styles found in many of the churches in Andalusia which, because they took so long to build, are usually an architectural compendium ranging from late Gothic to Neoclassical.

The 11th century citadel located on another small hill, and which, like the theatre, had to be restored, is another surprising attraction for visitors to this town.

The cathedral dominates the old town, but there are numerous monuments in Guadix. The entire old town is full of stately houses, palaces and mansions built by wealthy and powerful families in Guadix, especially during the times of splendour following the Castilian conquest during the 16th and 17th centuries. The most remarkable palaces that we discovered included the Palace of Peñafior, that has appeared in numerous films, and the Palace of Oñate that has been converted into a highly recommendable hotel with charm and restaurant. Other buildings not to be missed are: the Palace of Villalegre with Moorish foundations and structure; the Julio Visconti Foundation House, where the important local artist lived; the Palacio de Mendoza and the Antigua Lonja, with a Neo-Mudéjar façade that always inspires photographers and visitors.

This monumental panorama culminates in a number of squares and views that always look like film sets. For example, the Plaza de la Catedral, the Plaza de las Palomas and

the Plaza de la Constitución, where the Town Hall and the Tourist Office are located. This 16th-century Mudéjar-style square was built over Roman and Moorish remains.

In Guadix there are numerous attractions where you come up against history, the present and the fantasy of all the films and series that have been shot on location in the streets of the town of Guadix.

### 1.2 Guadix in films

Guadix's participation in the Seventh Art is a facet that is not as well-known as it deserves. Together with Almería, eastern Granada is one of the areas in Spain most popular with film makers. Many of the Spaghetti Westerns from the 1960s and 1970s were filmed in these two provinces. Sergio Leone realised the potential of the area and avoided long and expensive trips

The cathedral in Guadix was largely the responsibility of Diego de Siloé, one of the most prominent architects of the 16th century.

This monumental panorama ends with a number of squares and views that look more like film sets





to the United States. North American westerns were copied but given a European touch, more artistic and the action was a little different. A whole genre in which Spain made a great contribution.

Guadix is working hard to make this heritage a tourist resource to add to all that it already possesses. Because the streets, palaces, monuments, and the entire landscape surrounding the town, including the amazing Gorafe desert, have been the location for countless films and television series. If we were to tell you that Sean Connery, Harrison Ford, Clint Eastwood, Omar Sharif, Warren Beatty, Klaus Kinski and Laurence Olivier have all walked the streets of Guadix and its landscapes, would you believe us? Well they have, because "Doctor Zhivago" (1965); "A bullet for the Revolution" (1967); "Once Upon a Time in the West" (1968); "The Hunting Party" (1971); "Red Sun" (1971); "Clash of the Titans" (1980); "Rojos" (1981)... And of course the trilogy by Sergio Leone, with music by Enio Morricone: "A Fistful of Dollars" (1964), "For a Few Dollars More" (1965) and "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly" (1966), were all filmed in the area! In many of them a steam locomotive, known as Baldwin-La Guadix, also played a leading role. A steam locomotive built in Spain, in Bilbao at the famous Babcock & Wilcox factory in Sestao, but was adopted by Andalusia and is now an icon in world cinema.

Another of the most iconic images of Guadix was the conversion of the Renfe railway station into the Iskenderum market in "Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade" (1988)! Steven Spielberg made the station an essential images in world cinema and almost two hundred local people from Guadix participated as extras in the film. Many of them remember those days with affection and admiration, and they surely continue to proudly show people the frames in which they appear! As a heartfelt and intelligent tribute, a tourist route has been created that

Guadix, land of film sets. Museum dedicated to films.

Director's chair located at the Mirador del Padre Poveda lookout point in the Barrio de las Casas Cueva in Guadix.

The Baldwin, a legendary locomotive that appears in numerous films shot in Guadix.



The Barrio de las Cuevas neighbourhood in Guadix.

runs all through the town, with director's chairs where you can sit and frame the shots used by Leone, David Lean and Spielberg himself in their films. And there is an app that gives you a variety of information about these films.

But Guadix in Films does not end with the cinema, since numerous series have also been filmed here. For example, Gorafe and the Desert House appear in "Smithereens", the second chapter of the fifth season of the "Black Mirror" series and also many shots were taken for "Emerald City", a version of The Wizard of Oz.

There are a number of projects for the near future to continue taking advantage of these incredible natural and urban settings related to films. The creation of a Film Museum to exhibit and the items that have been preserved in Guadix, starting with the Baldwin locomotive that were able to visit during our trip, would be quite an event! It would also be fantastic if at least a section of the railway could be recovered so the steam engine could run again, and they could restore some of the fantastic old building associated with the railway. It would be wonderful if the natural and film attractions of Guadix could be used to develop film tourism. What has been preserved has been thanks to the passionate labours of many people in Guadix, and they provide a new opportunity to create new niche tourism that we be a complement to the attractions already existing in the province of Granada.

### 1.3. Accommodation in cave houses

For a long time, cave houses were simply humble dwellings for many people in the Guadix region and other parts of Spain. They are associated with poverty and need, but in the 21st century it has been shown that these types of underground construction are much more interesting, intelligent and useful than previously thought. Troglodyte dwellings have been seen to be the ideal solution for a number of architectural challenges, once they have been adapted to current needs.

We were able to see that they are a good example of a "passivhaus" or passive house standard, that are dwellings that consume hardly any energy and maintain a pleasant, stable temperature throughout the year. A temperature of about 18°C and 50% relative humidity, ideal in an area like La Hoya de Guadix, with a continental climate. They are excavated in areas of very compact clay, and when the walls have hardened and been treated, they guarantee the best conditions of humidity and

**Cave houses are a fine example of accommodation for wellness tourism**





The Barrio de las Casas Cueva neighbourhood from the Mirador del Padre Poveda lookout point.

sound insulation, representing an architectural model and an example of accommodation for Wellness tourism.

This represents an ecological transition and acknowledgment for this kind of construction of which there are nearly twenty thousand in the province of Granada alone. This new tourism is committed to the obligatory challenge of renewal to improve its standing in a market that is becoming increasingly demanding and which will require additional services and activities to give this accommodation more interest and charm. The Association of Cave Houses has highlighted the importance of numerous houses of this type throughout the north-eastern region of Granada. And it has been a success.

For the traveller, it is perhaps better to start by visiting the Cave Museum, in the neighbourhood of the cave houses of Guadix, next to the Mirador del Padre Poveda lookout point and its cave chapel. A suitable introduction to understand the work of the master "picadors" or cave diggers, true professionals in design and underground architecture.

Most of the cave houses in La Hoya de Guadix were excavated in clay areas, true badlands that were transformed into underground neighbourhoods or hamlets. The material in this area is suitable for excavation, but it needs to be undertaken with care and skill if you want the houses to last a long time. Cave houses are flexible dwellings,

to which new rooms can be added as required. This adaptability means that serve a multitude of purposes: houses, wine cellars, shops, charming accommodation and even chapels. This timeless popular wisdom is being brought up to date with more contemporary projects that combine ancient methods and the best that the 21st century has to offer.

We visited the Cave Museum as guests of honour. We were given an enormous key that leads to this cave where the extraordinary work of the "picadors" is presented and recognised. Original architecture and tools belonging to the family that inhabited it from 1928 to the 1980s and contributions by many residents of Guadix. There are also tools and audio-visual material showing the skill of the cave diggers. Finally, in another of the rooms we also discovered "El Cascamorras", a truly colourful and curious festivity, shared by Baza and Guadix itself, and which we will talk about later.

Nearby there is the Padre Poveda lookout point which really should not be missed. The view is incredible, so it is not surprising that it appears in so many films. It is a real postcard from the Wild West that was invented in Andalusia. But it is authentic, with eroded hills, the white chimneys of the cave houses and a framework of carved natural mounds. Dwellings created out of necessity and by chance, they are now proud and a possibility for tourism in the future. Guadix is not the only town that has cave houses, but it is one of those that have the most, making it the European capital of cave houses with more than

**40% of the population of Guadix lives in troglodyte dwellings**

two thousand underground dwellings, this means that 45% of the population live in troglodyte houses!

On our travels through the eastern part of Granada we spent several nights in cave houses. One in El Bejarín, a few kilometres from Guadix, in the Hammam Abuelo José Purullena Cave, located in a very interesting natural environment with a number of services for high-quality, well-being tourism. Another was when we crossed the border between the Sierra de Castril and Cazorla, now in the province of Jaén. In Hinojares, the Cazorla Cave Houses guarantee a unique accommodation, very quiet and adapted to niche tourism and travelling on horseback.

#### 1.4. Fiesta del Cascamorras

Another incredible surprise in the region of Guadix and Baza was to discover a curious festivity shared by these two towns in Granada. On a visit to the Museum of the Cave Houses we saw a strange, multicoloured costume that vaguely resembled that of a harlequin or a carnival costume. They explained to us that this was the costume of the "Cascamorras" and they were very surprised that we knew nothing about it. So you do not have the same problem that we did, we would like to explain all about this festivity. Unfortunately we were unable to experience it first-hand, because it is held in September. We would like to return one day to experience it and photograph it, because without a doubt it should be an amazing festivity for photographers looking to capture anthropological experiences and colourful crowds. The festivity is religious in origin, but it has been transformed into an event that displays and then dissolves regional rivalry in a bloodless struggle that finally unites Baza and Guadix.

Legend has it that after the defeat of the Nasrid kingdom, a construction worker from Guadix, named Juan Pederal, appears to have found a sculpture of the Virgin Mary, hidden in the wall of an old mosque in Baza. When the worker's pick struck the figure as he was extracting it from the ruins, the Virgin said "Baza, Guadix, have mercy on me!" Juan was from Guadix and wanted to keep the sculpture, but as it was found in Baza, the town also wanted to keep it. In spite of the obvious economic interest surrounding relics

and the implicit rivalry between the two towns, legend has it that a surprisingly intelligent and peaceful solution was found. There was a tacit agreement between the two towns that determined that if an envoy sent from Guadix managed to remain clean when he arrived at the church in Baza where the sculpture was kept, he could take it back

to Guadix. Such a feat would obviously prove to be impossible because on the day when the envoy was sent from Guadix, the whole town was waiting armed with soot and grease to throw at him. This rivalry became a task worthy of Sisyphus, but much more fun and festive. So, on 5 September the chosen envoy sets off from Guadix amongst cheers and festivities. He covers the almost 40 km on foot and is welcomed by thousands of people in Baza where there is a festive battle during which the "Cascamorras" and all the participants get very dirty. The festivity is ideal for spectacular action photos. It is not violent as you would imagine, but displays a ritual pact of which everyone knows the end. The Virgen de la Piedad stays in Baza, but the "Cascamorras" returns to Guadix as a hero, on 9 September. It is an honour and enormously prestigious to be the "Cascamorras".

The Cascamorras festivities last three days and fill both towns with colour and atmosphere, so we definitely recommend visiting both towns during the event. In addition to religious ceremonies in a number of churches, the two towns join together to celebrate an extraordinary festivity, where everybody knows how it will end, but where no one feels victorious or defeated. An impossible battle that is repeated every year, but this ultimately makes the festivity unique, more epic if that were possible.

**The Cascamorras festivities last for three days**



Welcome to the Guadix Cave Museum.





The village of Gorafe, an example of a cave house settlement.

# 2

## Unexpected amongst the unexpected. Gorafe Desert Georoute.

Gorafe is very close to Guadix. This is the name given to a village of less than 400 inhabitants located in a natural oasis of greenery and humidity produced by the Gor River. Flanked by two ridges of hills, Gorafe is a fine example of a cave house village, as almost 90% of the dwellings are troglodytes.

Just a short distance from the narrow valley you will find the homonymous Gorafe desert. Another world. A desert of badlands, arid hills and incredibly beautiful geological formations. Apparently a desert but home to plants, fauna and, above all, one of the areas with the highest concentration of megaliths in the world. To the

northwest, the Negratín reservoir is another contrast. A "lake" of fresh water, a jewel for the entire region that surrounds this desert of stone and hills that could be a postcard view of Montana or Arabia, but it is in Granada. The extraordinary features of Gorafe led to its declaration as a Geopark in July 2020.

**A desert of badlands, arid hills and incredibly beautiful geological formations.**

Access to the entrance to the Gorafe desert is easy from Guadix, it takes barely 20 minutes to travel the 30 kilometres. There are numerous routes within the park, you just need to take care not to stray off the pathways or perhaps you could go in the company of a guide who knows the area. Do not make the mistake of thinking yourself an expert when you are only here to learn. Two great starting points for a tour are the village of Gorafe itself and the Megalithic Park.

### 2.1. A lake turned into a desert

The desert is bordered by the Gor River and the Guadiana Menor, but it was once a lake that occupied what is now the Guadix-Baza basin. Only a hundred thousand years ago the area was a lake full of fresh water that emptied and evaporated, creating the formations that we now enjoy and that extend to the horizon. The desert is divided into two major geological zones. The first, to the west, is more abrupt, with great red clay canyons up to a hundred and fifty metres in height. The second, the badlands, where the



canyons are not so deep, fairy chimneys abound and the colours are whiter and yellower.

The Gorafe desert can be visited on foot, or by mountain, traditional or electric bicycle. By bike the routes can be 20, 30 or 40 km depending on the time you have. On foot you can take plenty of time to enjoy the tracks, the cliffs, the gullies and the hills.

Without a doubt, Gorafe is a paradise for photographers, geologists and naturalists. At sunrise and sunset, the light is softer and oblique, and this naturally enhances the colours of the different strata. The flora features the caper plant with delicious edible flowers. A modest but hardy and durable plant, one of the few that has tamed and still tames the desert. There is also quite numerous fauna with over 100 species of birds, including griffon vultures, golden and booted eagles, bullfinches, warblers, etc.

Badlands, arid landscapes that for centuries have hampered agriculture and forced many people to emigrate, yet are now an opportunity for economic development. High-quality tourism, specialising in new activities, is becoming increasingly popular and more interesting for local entrepreneurs. Torrential rain and wind have created canyons, ravines, gorges, and, curiously shaped columns that are known as fairy chimneys. Depending on the minerals that make up the strata, the rock changes colour, going from bluish black to red, yellow and white. After heavy rainfall many fossils become exposed revealing unexpected surprises.

### 2.2. Routes through Gorafe, "Los Coloraos" and the Mirador del fin del Mundo lookout point

The Gorafe badlands have also been the location for numerous films, especially Spaghetti Westerns during the 1960s and 1970s, as well as many other fantasy, science fiction and adventure films. We did not ride through the hills and trails of Gorafe on horseback, like they



The wonders of the Grand Canyon in Spanish Colorado and the badlands of the Gorafe desert.

Just over 1 hour from the city of Granada, authentic natural wonders like the Gorafe Desert.

up during the rains which are infrequent but torrential. We stopped so many times to take photos from a thousand different perspectives, enjoying the variety of views and colours painted in a different way each time.

The route of Los Colorados is the most famous, because it is a small-scale landscape of what you would find in areas of the Colorado Canyon in the USA. As you leave the Gorafe Megalithic Park, there are a number of obligatory stops along the Los Colorados route, in the Loma de Enmedio area for example. After an exciting electric bike ride round bends and up and down hills, we came across an almost vertical rock face. This was where we saw all the colours of the Gorafe desert, from dark blue-black to the brightest red, with all the tones of ochre and white. At each moment of the day the colours are different, although it is always better to get up early, or wait for sunset, but never approach when the sun is at its highest and most intense.

Then we began a descent of more than 250 metres to the Rambla de los Anchurones. In the middle of the ravine you feel like you are in another place and time. So close to civilisation but so deep in the desert, feeling the solitude and calm of these badlands that are ultimately so beautiful and look like leather. A landscape that seems eternal but is only fleeting, as it changes with the weather and its vicissitudes. A desert is so malleable and subject to change which happens much faster than it seems, but in the end always looks the same.

**The route of the Colorados is renowned for resembling the Colorado Canyon in the USA**





Cycling through the Gorafe Desert through magnificent ravines makes you feel really small.

The third and final stage of our route crosses the Campos Mones trail and the Cocón Geodesic Point. A section of almost 20 km of ascent along winding tracks where you need to keep looking back so as not to miss extraordinary photos and views. The trail ends at the Cocón Geodesic Point at an altitude of almost 1,000 metres. In the middle of this eroded plateau, you can stop and look towards the Sierra Nevada, there in the distance with its peaks of over 3,500 metres. A beautiful climax to a spectacular route that only really needed us to take more time and discover even more trails and pathways.

The path to the Mirador del Fin del Mundo lookout point, another amazing feature that really stands out when visiting Gorafe. A panoramic view of a plain eroded by a stream that has created spectacular rock formations, exposing strata and fossils that crumble over time. A spectacular route runs through the Purullena and Marchal "Miradores del Fin del Mundo" lookout points. This superb landscape is due to the very special geology of the surrounding area. The ductility of the sedimentary materials has caused a piping type erosion, with tunnels and constant collapses that make the visit somewhat ephemeral. You have to enjoy it each time you come because maybe next year it will have changed.

It consists of a steep, rugged cliff that appears where a plateau ends and looks out over a landscape of gullies, fairy chimneys and hills eaten away by the elements. A landscape that deserves to be in a film and shared by three villages: Beas de Guadix, Purullena and Marchal. It is a simple route that runs along the edge of a sheer drop, a natural cliff, so it is very flat. It can be accessed

**There are more than 240 megalithic remains in the Gorafe Megalithic Park**

by bicycle or you can go by car as far as the car park to continue on foot to the Badlands Lookout Point and then on to the Mirador de Purullena lookout point. In the background stands the village of Marchal that is embedded where the badlands end, through which a stream runs that channels the rains and is responsible for the erosion in the area. And behind there is the 1,400-metre Cerro Postrero that acts as a watchtower.

### 2.3. Gorafe Megalithic Park

The Gorafe Megalithic Park was created in 1998 with the intention of protecting and providing accessibility to one of the largest concentrations of these prehistoric monuments in Europe. Over 240 megalithic remains have been catalogued along the 20 km of plateau ridges that run alongside the Gor river. Excavations indicate that they would have been symbolic, funerary manifestations created by people who lived in the area for about six thousand years, from the Middle Neolithic (2500 BC) to the Chalcolithic (1700 BC), when cereals could still be grown here.

The Megalithic Park Visitor Centre was created to combat looting and to develop three educational routes where you can visit about a hundred dolmens. The dolmens are arranged in eleven necropolises concentrated in a 20-km valley. The three routes are the Hoyas del Coquín (1.2 km), the Llano de Olivares (3.6 km) and the Majadillas (2.1 km).

The importance of the area during the Bronze Age can be seen from the abundance and diversity of settlements and dolmens. Some of the structures are very simple, whilst others are more elaborate, with a five-sided floor plan and false domes. There is only one engraving on the limestone slabs, but there are many different types of construction in terms of shape and size. The variations appear to depend on social status in communities that were already becoming complex and where differences in wealth and power were beginning to become evident. The dimensions of the largest ones exceed two metres in height and four and a half metres in length, but the area has been heavily

looted over and many stones have evidently been re-used. In fact, very few stone circles remain and most of the domes and lintels are missing.

Human remains of more than 200 people have appeared, ornaments and decorative elements made of bone, some made of metal, pieces that give a lot of information about society at that time. The presence of numerous funerary objects and the remains of skeletons have made it possible to better understand the megalithic complex, although archaeologists still have a lot of work to do.

Although the necropolises are not gigantic, their historical value and the spectacular nature of Gorafe's natural environment make a visit highly recommended.

### 2.4. Mirador de Gorafe lookout point, the Glass House

The Glass House or "Casa del Desierto" is an ultra contemporary housing project that resembles the Case Study Houses experiments made in the 1930s in California. A completely glass-fronted house, located on the edge of the plateau overlooking the Gorafe desert. A unique building, totally isolated and offering views of the spectacular Gorafe chasm, with unique sunsets and sunrises at the foot of one of the least known deserts in the world. The house has been designed to be practically autonomous, thus guaranteeing a minimum impact on the area. The house is also removable so its location can be changed.

This unusual accommodation is also ideal for enjoying the sky of Gorafe, one of the clearest skies and with the least artificial light in all of Europe. This is why Gorafe was awarded the Starlight Star Park certificate.



Walking towards the Mirador del Fin del Mundo Lookout Point in Purullena.

The village of Marchal sits right in the middle of this extraordinary landscape.

The glass house that overlooks the Gorafe Desert.





The river Castril with blue, lively, cold mountain waters shapes the valley as it emerges from a huge fissure in the rocky wall of the Cazorla massif.

# 3

## The Sierra de Castril

The last of the secrets that we discovered on our travels through Granada was the beautiful Sierra de Castril. A section of the mountains that make up the well-known Cazorla, in the province of Jaén, but which on this side is in the province of Granada. The river Castril with blue, lively, cold mountain waters shapes the valley as it emerges from a huge fissure in the rocky wall of the Cazorla massif. Then it jumps between rocks, zipping along a high water course, until coming to rest in the Portillo reservoir before reaching the dam where the nature reserve ends, in the town of Castril, 90 km from Guadix (1 hour 10 minutes).

### 3.1. The town of Castril and the Peña de Castril

**The Castril Visitor Centre is highly recommended**

Castril stands at an altitude of almost 900 metres and is today a busy little town with about 2,000 inhabitants, anchored in the rock that gave it its name. The rock was a natural fortress that was already settled by humans in the Neolithic era. A Roman fort that

recovered importance in the Almoravid period, as it was on the border between Christians and Moors between the 12th and 15th centuries. There are remains of a Moorish citadel, but it is in the complex layout adapted to the relief that the architects of Al-Andalus left their mark. The views towards the Peña de Castril and the Portillo reservoir continue to show why this place was chosen as a settlement for so many centuries.

The Castril Visitor Centre is highly recommended as it will give you an overall view of the Nature Reserve. Together with a presentation of the geology, flora and fauna, it also features an anthropological history of the region, its industries and its accomplishments. Among the curious exhibits, special mention should be given to a traditional curved tile (monk and nun tile), which in Andalusia is called an Arabic tile, which explains its origin of which we were not aware. Another exhibit recalls the wood extracted from the trees in the area, poplars for example.

The final exhibit describes the glass industry, which is something we did not expect as this

area is so far from the manufacturing areas in Spain. But it has a very old history, because glass manufacturing was begun in 1504 by Hernando de Zafra to produce bottles and carafes after the conquest of Granada. The abundance of silica in the Sierra de Cazorla/Castril was a key factor. Silica was brought from the Arena cave, there was an abundance of wood and soda was extracted by burning a plant. The particular blue colour of soda produced from ice plants (*Mesembryanthemum crystallinum*) gives Castril glass its very personal bluish-green tone, that is apparent in examples of "Jarra Castrileña" (a spherical jar with handles and an open neck) and a kind of flat canteen that was covered with a sheath made of esparto called a "lengua de vaca" (ox tongue). The factory closed in 1878.

### 3.2. Hiking routes

The Baetica Mountain Ranges are karst terrain, where erosion of the limestone has created beautiful, complex landscapes. The Castril area therefore has all the elements of a karst landscape: peaks over 2,000 metres, caves, chasms, sinkholes, fields of limestone

pavements and sheer rock faces where numerous birds nest.

There is a great variety of routes, some of which are easy that which takes you to the Cerrada de la Magdalena from where the Castril river cascades. The route can be taken by bicycle, a round trip of about 28 km starting and ending in Castril, or you can go by car as far as the Puente de Pino Hermoso bridge and from there continue on foot. In this case it is a round trip of less than 4 km. The most spectacular is when you arrive where the Castril river emerges, bursting out of a limestone wall and cascading down. The water pours out of a fissure in the rock and eventually reaches the Atlantic via the Guadiana river, after irrigating half of Andalusia and filling it with life. But long before that, that same water forms a pool at the foot of the mountain which is enjoyed as a natural swimming pool by people of all ages, those who are from the village and those who are from elsewhere. In the sky above, griffon vultures and the occasional bearded vulture hover over the

**The "Cerrada de la Magdalena" is just one of the waterfalls along the Castril river**

An encounter with nature in the Sierra de Castril Nature Reserve. Cerrada de la Magdalena.

Cerrada del Río Castril is a wonderful hiking route that runs through the canyon behind the town.





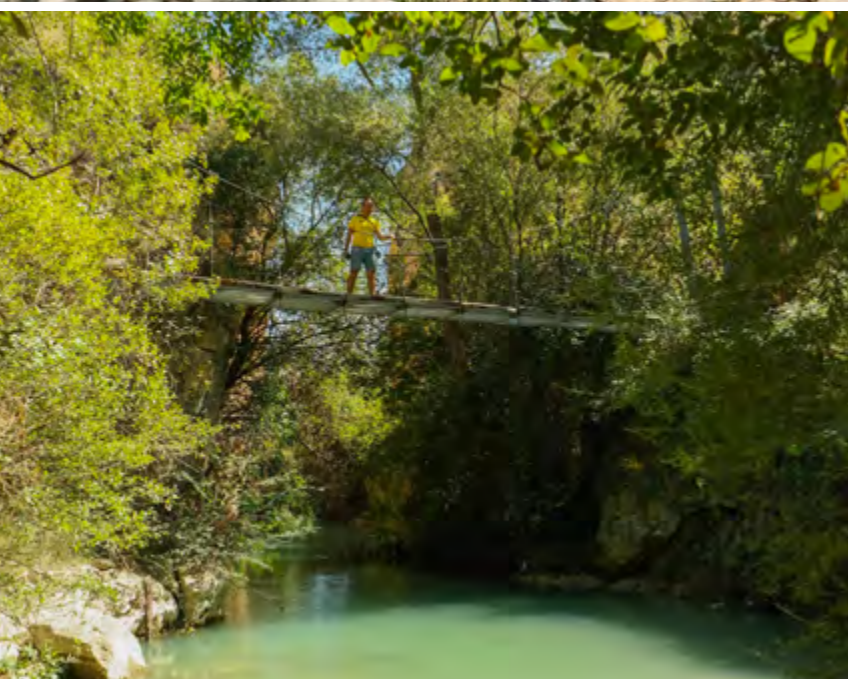
valley searching for food and taking advantage of the warm air currents.

This is quite a simple route, there are others that are more demanding that take you to the peaks of the mountains where it snows in winter and you can find sinkholes, uvala landforms and limestone pavements. We will leave these for another time, when we can return with more time.

And for the more relaxed, we recommend the short footbridge path over the Castril riverbed, the "Cerrada del Río Castril", right in the town. This circular route is about 2 km and runs through the town and the river canyon, following the old installations that were part of the first dam that used to power the eater to generate electricity. The canyon walls are high, as the river has made deep excavations. That is why in some areas it is very narrow, the walls appear to be touching and you think you can jump from one side to the other. Under the wooden walkways, the mountain water is very bluish and surely very cold. A 70-meter tunnel crosses a particularly complicated section and ends at a point where the Castril flows into another waterfall. Several bridges and a 19th century water mill complete a highly educational route for children and adults.

### 3.3. The Portillo Reservoir

The new dam was completed in 2000 just before the canyon excavated by the Castril river. A highlight of the landmarks along the trail is the "Fábrica de la Luz" (power station), one of the two micro hydroelectric plants that were built



The "Cerrada de la Magdalena" waterfall is an excellent example of a karst spring.

The Castril river on the Cerrada route.

Spectacular panoramic view over the Portillo Reservoir.



The town of Castril and the Peña de Castril.

at the beginning of the 20th century. The other, called the "Central del Nacimiento", is still in operation. A good example of these micro-power stations that are still useful and feasible in the 21st century. The Portillo Reservoir is ideal for water sports like kayaking and canoeing, as well as fishing for trout which are then returned to the water.

The views in the Sierra de Castril are different depending on the season, snow appears in winter, everything turns green in spring and bears its fruit in summer before being tinged in gold when autumn arrives. The relief and abundance of water throughout the year makes the vegetation much more varied and includes less common species such as willows, ash trees, and sweetcorn in the fields that surround Castril.

A number of majestic birds can be seen in the Reserve, like golden eagle, bearded vultures and numerous griffon vultures that nest in the sheer cliffs. The wealth and variety of birds has

led the EU to classify the Castril Nature Reserve as a Special Protection Area for Birds. In fact, we were able to observe the majestic flight of bearded vultures that have been reintroduced to the area recently. It is to be hoped they will settle here, as the diversity of the fauna and the sustainability of ecosystems go hand in hand. Wild fauna, livestock, agriculture and human presence need to coexist with the space they require. Protecting nature also means protecting human life. And also creating new economic sectors that favour rural settlement, improving the quality of life of the people who live there.

Finally, it should be noted that Castril is also ideal for observing the sky, because of its meteorology and the absence of light pollution. On our travels through unexpected Andalusia we have already discovered a number of very interesting locations for astrophotography and for lovers of stary nights.

**In the Nature Reserve, you can see majestic birds like the golden eagle, the griffon vulture and the bearded vulture**





## 4 Activities in eastern Granada

### 4.1. Activities in Castril

The area features active tourism that includes trekking and guided nature tours to observe the fauna and the landscapes. Possible activities include geology, birdwatching and stargazing.

And then there are sports activities like caving, mountain and electric bicycle routes, via ferratas, climbing and zip lines. Finally, you can combine Castril with Cazorla, since several companies offer tours combining both mountain ranges.

The area between Castril and Cazorla is also well prepared for horseback tourism and horse trekking.

### 4.2. Activities in the Guadix area

If you wish to discover more about the troglodyte dwellings, we recommend a visit to Trópolis, a cultural and leisure venue located in a large cave house where there is an interesting exhibition on this subject. It is also a starting point for a number of trekking routes through the Zalabí Valley area.

But Trópolis is also a place where you can discover the importance and flavour of local products. They also organise bread-baking workshops and tastings of local cheeses and wines. La Calahorra and Senet cheeses, Granada wines and bread baked in a wood oven. It is a multi-purpose centre where you can organise product presentations, symposiums, conferences and company meetings.

Hiking, one of the star activities in the nature reserve.

Trópolis, a bread workshop in a cave house.

## 5 Gastronomy in Granada

The gastronomy of Guadix, Gorafe and Castril is a clear sample of the diversity and wealth of Andalusian and Iberian cuisine. A huge melting pot of historical gastronomic influences together with contributions that have been made century after century, which were hugely enriched by new products coming from America and Asia.

Al-Andalus cuisine, with a Mediaeval and Jewish-Moorish undercurrent, has developed and maintains many flavours and recipes that have been lost in other parts of Spain and Europe. These influences have been maintained by tradition and craftwork in convents, with a special mention for the typical desserts of Guadix and the surrounding area. Many of these desserts are strongly related to Easter. "Tocino de cielo" (a kind of egg custard) and "pestiños" (sesame flavoured dough) are common in other parts of Andalusia, but there are other more local ones like "felipes" (a type of doughnut) and "roscos fríos" (another type of doughnut). Crackling and lard cakes are eaten more in winter and associated with Christmas. A long list of products to try, and if you don't know what something is, order it and give it a try! This is another journey.

But we should take them one at a time. "Churros" are a kind of fritter highly appreciated in Guadix, and while there are plenty of confectioners there are also plenty making "churros".

"Gorrino, cerdo, puerco, chón, cochino" are just some of the names for a pig, whose delicious meat is the king of gastronomy in the eastern region of Granada. For lunch it contributes in stews and soups, and of course on cold cured meats. The include such delicacies as black pudding, chorizo sausage, ham and loin, always accompanied by local wines and cheeses.

Many of the dishes are an essential feature of this part of Granada. It should be remembered that the region has a harsh continental climate, with really hot summers and



The gastronomy of the area is delicious.



cold winters, often with snow. Dishes such as traditional breadcrumbs, kid or rabbit with garlic, "papas a lo pobre", porridge, sustenance food, "olla de San Antón", Guadix soup are just some of the dishes that will warm your body and soul on a visit to Granada. And for something a little lighter, roast peppers.

In Gorafe, you have to try the extraordinary stews, and the most typical being "tarbinas", made with wheat flour. In Gorafe you also have cold cured meat products and excellent partridge.

In Castril, cold cured meats again, but kept in oil, as well as filling and "longaniza" sausage. Segureño lamb is always delicious and Castril river trout, a special delicacy. "Maimones" (a type of garlic soup), porridge, hare with noodles, rabbit rolls and, something that we would have loved to try if we had just left a little room: chickpea stew with chard. But in the north of Granada the list of dishes is also endless. Rice "guisafillo", "migas del pastor", a wilder,

mountain variant, paprika with rabbit or chicken legs and with local mushrooms added to all autumn dishes. Mmmm.

The bread in Guadix is also highly reputed, which speaks volumes for its cereals. There is a good reason for highlighting the manufacture and baking of traditional bread on our visit to Trópolis.

You can, and should, try many of the typical products from the Guadix area in the bars. The tapas culture is very popular in Guadix, and they should be enjoyed with a cold beer or one of the local wines that are becoming more and more popular.

Olive oil is not as well known or as abundant as in Córdoba and Jaén. But it is very good, so at the slightest opportunity, just try it. You should also try Castril honey and the mosto wines. And throughout Granada the local wines will always be a pleasant surprise.

In Trópolis you will discover the importance and flavour of local products.



Desserts at the Palacio de Oñate, a renowned restaurant in Guadix.

The interior of the Abuelo José Purullena cave house, an example of a troglodyte dwelling.

# 6

## Practical information about unexpected Granada

### 6.1. Where to eat and stay

#### ◆ Restaurante Palacio de Oñate

Calle Mira de Amezcua, 3  
18500 Guadix  
Tel. 958 66 05 00  
<http://palaciodeonate.com>

#### ◆ Abuelo José Purullena Cave Hamman

18500 El Bejarín  
Tel. 625 56 03 71

#### ◆ Cazorla Cave Houses

Calle Cuevas Nuevas, 37,  
23486 Hinojares, Jaén  
Tel. 678 31 23 21  
<https://www.casascuevacazorla.com>

#### ◆ Posada los Guilos de Gorafe - Rural Hotel

Main road GR-6100, 29, in the centre of town  
18890 Gorafe  
Tel. 958 69 31 84  
<https://www.salillas.net/posadalosguilos/>

#### ◆ Desert house

Gorafe

#### ◆ Andalusian Association of Tourist Caves

Complejo Cerro Kabila, s/n

18510, Benalúa (Granada)  
Tel. 958 341 742 - 600 429 877  
[promocion@cuevasdeandalucia.org](mailto:promocion@cuevasdeandalucia.org)  
<https://cuevasdeandalucia.org>

### 6.2. Service Companies. What to do and other activities. Transport and Guide

#### ◆ Trópolis

Avda. Jose Fuentes, S/N,  
18511 Alcudia de Guadix, Granada  
Tel. +34 958 698 286  
Mobile: +34 665 611 436  
[reservas@tropolis.es](mailto:reservas@tropolis.es)  
[www.tropolis.es](http://www.tropolis.es)

#### ◆ Pedales de Granada.

Cuesta Alhacaba, 31-19  
18010 Granada Tel. +34 666 96 34 72  
[info@pedalesdegranada.com](mailto:info@pedalesdegranada.com)

#### ◆ Ecoactiva.

Calle Nueva del Río, 18,  
18816 Castril, Granada.  
Tel. 958 72 00 59  
<https://ecoactivaturismo.es>



Located at the western end of the Sierra Morena, and in the north of the province of Huelva, the Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche Nature Reserve is a wonderful alternative to the Huelva coast.

“  
The surprising  
Sierra de  
Aracena y  
Picos de  
Aroche.  
”



# Huelva

Gothic-Mudejar Church of San Martín in Almonaster la Real.

An extensive mass of forest mass resulting from the high rainfall concentrated in a few months makes the climate cool and mild. This "sierra" confuses visitors who have not made a prior study of this landscape which in principle is typical of the north but in fact belongs to the western-most part of the Andalusian mountains.

The towns in the Sierra continually dispute the title of the most beautiful in the province. And it is not easy to choose, Aroche, Alájar, Aracena, Cortegana, Linares de la Sierra and Almonaster la Real are some of the jewels in a crown that invites you to stay longer or come back as soon as you can. To the natural heritage you should add cultural and gastronomic attractions that are unique in Andalusia and only make you want to stay longer.

The Jabugo Protected Designation of Origin is undoubtedly a major factor when trying to understand the hallmark of the Sierra. The "dehesas" or pastures, declared a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO, are much more than just a landscape or ecosystem. They are the result of centuries of human interaction with the territory, creating an environment of holm oaks and cork oaks where purebred Iberian pigs eat acorns during the fattening process known as the "montonera".

The forests cover the meandering slopes from an altitude of 350 to 950 metres. To the south where it is drier, the slopes are populated by holm oaks. On the opposite side, which is wetter, there are cork oaks and the when you get up higher there are different varieties of Portuguese oaks, Pyrenean oaks and areas with

reforested black pines creating a green carpet over the mountains. In the riverbeds there are poplars, ash trees, willows and alders of great size which act as protection for walkers.

As for the fauna, the survival of these forests has made them a refuge for mammals like lynxes, bobcats, genets, martens, weasels, badgers, Egyptian mongooses and otters. They are not the only predators, since the Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche is ideal

terrain for bird watching, with species including black and griffon vultures, golden eagles, Bonelli's eagles, short-toed eagles, booted eagles, sparrowhawks, black kites, peregrine falcons, kestrels, eagle-owls, black storks and tawny owls.

Finally, a traditional hunting area, the park is home to deer, wild boar, rabbits and partridges.



# Map



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The Gruta de las Maravillas involves an underground tour in Aracena.

Parish Church of San Marcos in Alájar.

Visits to the white houses in Aroche.





The Gruta de las Maravillas has been a location for a number of films.



Geological formations in the Gruta de las Maravillas.

Square in the centre of Alájar where scenes for the Bollywood film 'Zindagi na milegi dobara' (You only live once) were shot.

## Niche tourism for everyone

### 1.1. Film tourism. An authentic film set

Film tourism is something that travellers are finding more and more interesting. Mountain villages, with lush vegetation and magical light are difficult to resist. That is why more and more directors are choosing the mountains as locations for their films. Film makers have already enjoyed the benefits of this film set in Spanish and international productions. The journey started with the film version of Julio Verne's Journey to the Centre of the Earth in 1959, reproducing the interior of the earth in the Gruta de las Maravillas in Aracena. Another blockbuster, this time the king of the apes in the film Tarzan in King Solomon's Mines (1973) brought the grotto to cinemas around the world.

The mountain villages with lush nature and magical light are really seductive for film directors

Now in the 21st century there have been new films like Días Rojos (Red Days) filmed in Alájar in 2004, The Heart of the Earth, a 2007 film directed by Antonio Cuadri that

was an adaptation of the novel by Juan Cobos Wilkins, and Miel de Naranjas (Orange Honey) in 2012 by director Imanol Uribe, both filmed on location in Linares de la Sierra.

And under the phenomenon of Indian Bollywood, in the film called 'Zindagi Na Milegi Dohara' (translated as "You only live once" in English) the Plaza de España in Alájar was the backdrop for the song "Señorita", one of the highlights of the film.

But it was the 2019 film "La Trinchera" (The Endless Trench) that made filmgoers fall in love with Higuera de la Sierra, showing the town just as it is, with so much soul and tradition.

### 1.2. Gruta de las Maravillas grotto. The beauty of the underground world

Some say that once you have visited one cave, you have visited them all. This topic simply does not apply after visiting this incredible underground cathedral. The morphology of the

formations is so varied that a visit is more like a photographic gymkhana where you will delight in this amazing grotto sculpted by erosion.

In the town centre of Aracena, the phreatic cavity is articulated in three levels of galleries where there is an abundance of stalactites, stalagmites, columns, speleothems, rimstones, flowstones, pisolites and geomorphological curtains.

The Gruta de las Maravillas was the first to be opened to visitors in the Iberian Peninsula in 1914, and today it continues to be a focal tourist attraction not only for Aracena, the mountains and the province of Huelva, but in all Andalusia.

### 1.3. Routes with history - Cultural tourism

Scattered throughout the mountains, sometimes sheltered by rocks or looking for water springs in the few valleys, and usually crowning geographical elevations, the towns and villages that we find in the Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche are linked together as you progress through them. These lands have been inhabited by Celtiberians, Romans, Moors and Christians who repopulated the area after the reconquest and are full of architectural influences, cultural footprints and actions that have transformed the landscape. In the inhabited settlements there is a prominent presence of castles as a result of being a frontier territory, either in the battles between the Caliphate and the Kingdom of Castile, or resisting the interests of the Kingdom of Portugal.

The following are just a few examples of those jewels in the mountains, where it is so difficult to choose that there is always a good reason to return.

#### - Alájar. Mirador de la Sierra

The rock of Arias Montano acts omnipresent protective shade over the town of Alájar (stone in Arabic), located at its feet. From a bird's eye view the streets seem to have been designed to avoid floods. Narrow, labyrinthine streets, that meander amongst old, but robust, wooden doorways with curious locks. In front of each house, a flat area with cobblestones marks the DNA for each dwelling and its inhabitants, with floral and geometric mosaics or representations of animals.

On a stroll you always end up at three places, the Baroque church of San Marcos (18th century), the delightful Plaza España renowned for being the location for the first Bollywood film in Spain, and streets that have different views of the rock.

Peaceful, familiar, so much so that even in one of its neighbourhoods we find the Calabacino eco-village. It was re-populated in the 70s by foreigners who came from different corners of the world, curbing rural depopulation, and developing handicrafts. And those who contributed artistic and cultural initiatives were not only outsiders, since great masters like the painter Ignacio Alcaría, could

The Gruta de las Maravillas was the first in Spain to be prepared for visitors





not resist the quality of life in the sierra so came here to live.

**- Almonaster La Real. Unique example of a rural Andalusian mosque**

Moorish *Al-munastyr* is one of the most beautiful places in the Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche. The hill on which the *Al-Munastyr* Mosque stands is an ode to cultural blending. It is an extraordinary blend of a Visigoth church, a Moorish mosque and a Christian fortress. This beautiful temple is the only example of a rural Andalusian mosque that has been preserved practically intact in Spain. It took advantage of Roman remains and a Visigoth basilica, and reproduced the Cordovan canons of the Caliphate era in the interior. You will find the patio for ablutions (*sahn*), the *mihrab* (from where prayer was directed), and the tower or minaret, where the call to prayer began. Next to the mosque there is a small bullring, inside the castle.

In contrast to the views of the town from the Mosque, when you walk through the centre of Almonaster la Real, amongst the streets you will glimpse the silhouette of a hill crowned by the Mosque. This tour leads to the Gothic-Mudéjar Church of San Martín with an extraordinary Manueline-style façade. Then you come to the Chapel of La Santísima Trinidad in the Plaza del Ayuntamiento, displaying the Baroque forms of the late 18th century with an elegant belfry in two sections adorned by Tuscan pilasters.

On the outskirts of Almonaster la Real, the path that followed the Roman road brings leads to a bridge known as La Tenería, which used to be

Almonaster la Real Mosque.

Bullring integrated into the castle of Almonaster la Real.

Interior of the Almonaster la Real mosque, a blend of Roman, Visigoth, Caliph and Christian architecture.



the access to the old tanneries or leather tanning factories.

**- Aracena. The Grotto of Wonders and so much more**

Nowadays Aracena is the tourist centre of the sierra and attracts those who have heard of the "Gruta de las Maravillas." or Grotto of Wonders. This will not be the only surprise in store for them. The well-kept historical town centre, the castle over the town (from the mid-13th century), and the museum dedicated to ham and Iberian pigs arouse curiosity when you stroll through the city.

As you climb up the hill to the castle where you will discover both the seven towers and the barbican of this Almohad castle there are fantastic views and apart from the physical exercise, you will be able to understand the defensive features it provided for Aracena. The Priory Church of Nuestra Señora del Mayor Dolor was built inside it.

Once in the town you will find the Gothic church of Santa María de la Asunción, a temple built in 1522 in the Renaissance style with three naves. For those who really appreciate religious architecture, Aracena has many fine examples of Andalusian Mudéjar style including the Convent of Santa Catalina Mártir, and the small churches of San Pedro, San Roque,

Santo Domingo, Santa Lucía and San Jerónimo. The temples are surrounded by lovely Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, eclectic, and regionalist houses that form a polychrome mosaic of different styles.

It was in the first third of the 20th century when Aracena was adorned with beautifully built buildings which were the work of the Sevillian architect Aníbal González, these include the Casino Arias Montano, the town hall, the Plaza de Abastos, the Cortijo "San Miguel", the Chalets de Aracena villas and the reception building for the Gruta de las Maravillas. The building that housed the Cabildo Viejo (15th century) is also elegant, with robust, trimmed stone walls and a hip roof covered with Arabic tiles.

As in almost all towns in the Sierra, in Aracena there are fountains everywhere, which were the result of the high rainfall, and enabled the supply of water and the floods to be managed. The Fuente del Concejo is a fountain that takes water from one of the springs in the Gruta de las Maravillas to supply the washroom built by Aníbal González.

**- Aroche. Proud of its past**

Compared to the peace and quiet found in other towns and villages, Aroche is strangely dynamic. The streets are alive and full of local activity.

The Gruta de las Maravillas is ideal for an underground tour of Aracena.

View of the town of Aroche.

A complex consisting of the Chapel of San Mamés and the Roman site of Turóbriga.







Cortegana Castle, one of the best preserved in the Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche.

Views of the town of Cortegana from inside the castle.

Elegant stately homes reflect the sumptuous air of their former owners. The two museums take visitors back in time to Aroche's past. First of all archaeologically, emphasising the importance of the Arucci Turobriga site located on the outskirts of the town and displaying El Tesorillo: a complete collection of silver coins, composed of 376 pieces of "denarii" that were found in the North House of the Roman site, as well as other pieces of an arch that dates from prehistory to modern times. Secondly ethnographically, with the unusual Museo del Rosario, with pieces from all over the world.

As you ascend from the bottom to the top, you can stop next to the Church of the Assumption (1483), a blend of Mudéjar and Renaissance styles, with a Gothic Baptismal font and a Baroque organ. On the exterior, there are stone gargoyles representing zoomorphic and anthropomorphic figures inspired by mediaeval bestiary. If you turn of and follow the walls you come to Torre de San Ginés, a tower also known as the "Almena", an old watchtower that is now a spectacular lookout point.

At the top, there is a stunning Almohad castle of Moorish origin (12th century) that has captivating views. And the surprise is even greater when you find a bullring inside.

On the outskirts of Aroche, in the Llanos de la Belleza plains, you will find the Chapel of San Mamés built by those who repopulated the sierra (originally the Chapel of San Pedro de la Zarza), before going back in time to the Roman era. After enjoying the 14th-17th-century frescoes inside the hermitage, reach the Roman site of Turóbriga-Arucci. Founded in the time of Augustus, at the end of the 1st century BC (15-10 BC), excavations have brought to light a forum, a market, baths, a campus, a city wall or necropolis, as well as

**Cumbres Mayores uses its archaeology to tell us about its Celtiberian and Roman past**

private dwellings like the House of the Column, the North House and the House of the Peristyle

**- Cortegana. The most elegant castle in the sierra**

It will be found here, a fortification built by Sancho IV The Brave between the 13th and 14th centuries, one of the most visited monuments in the province of Huelva. It attracts visitors who are then surprised by a delightful town featuring the captivatingly eclectic Casa Estrada built at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries and in sharp contrast to the mediaeval heritage of Cortegana. Part of this secular heritage are the Parish Church of El Divino Salvador (14th century) that combines Gothic-Mudéjar, Renaissance and Baroque styles whose parish treasure is one of the best in the entire province of Huelva, and the Chapel of San Sebastián, popularly known as "El Santo", a fine example of a Gothic-Mudéjar temple.

**- Cumbres Mayores. Pure seasoned cold meat tradition**

On the border with Extremadura, Cumbres Mayores speaks to us through the archaeology of its Celtiberian and Roman past. Later it was to be part of the "Banda Gallega", a group of fortresses defending the border with Portugal, and promoted by King Sancho IV "The Brave". The fact is that the name of Cumbres Mayores or Altas comes from the inhabitants abandoning the lower areas of the town to nestle next to the castle (built in 1293), located in the upper part. The walls are up to ten metres high and 3 meters thick, to be able to repel any possible threats by the Portuguese.

The tradition of meat products stems from the 18th century, but it was the arrival of the railway at the end of the 19th century when it became really prominent, with as many as 24 slaughterhouses and 37 factories being active.

In addition to the castle, you are also recommended to visit the Chapel of Nuestra Señora de la Esperanza, the remains of the Chapel of Santa María Magdalena, the Chapel of Nuestra Señora del Amparo, the church of San Miguel Arcángel and the Romanesque façade of the Convent of the Franciscanas Clarisas. On the way to Fregenal de la Sierra, we came across the remains of a Roman bridge that connected Nertóbriga (Cumbres Mayores) with Turóbriga, skirting the Sillo river. Along the riverbed there were water mills that still preserve their structure.

**- Linares de la Sierra. Open-air museum**

In this town that was previously dedicated to growing flax and hence its name, it is common practice to look to the ground as you walk. It is that here the art is expressed in the form of "Llanos" or cobblestones, mosaics that adorn the entrance to the house and that function as welcome mats.

There is an abundance of geometrical, floral, animal and religious motifs that also adorn the town's streets and squares. This unusual popular architecture includes about 300 "llanos", some hundreds of years old.

The true monuments are the streets of the town, which form a harmonious ensemble of white houses and cobbled paving, with an urban layout that has hardly changed over the centuries.

Strolling through Linares de la Sierra, looking for cobblestones you will find interesting places to visit, like the Parish Church of San Juan Bautista, a blend of popular and academic Baroque that gave way to Neoclassicism. Another feature is the Fuente Nueva and the circular "Lavadero" or washing site (1908) which clearly define the water supply and social functions as a meeting place for the inhabitants.

The fact is that the absence of patios and corrals in dwellings has determined the street-loving and social way of life in Linares.

The square serves as a public venue spot and is even used as a bullring. The route ends at the "Fuente Vieja" or Old Fountain, surrounded by vegetable gardens and fruit trees.

**- Jabugo. A universal town**

It is the Iberian Ham from Pata Negra pigs that has made a name for Jabugo all over the world. It has been settled since prehistoric times as can be seen in the archaeological site of Cueva de la Mora. Its name comes from the word "SABUGO" in the language of the region of León, the people who, together with those from Galicia and Asturias, repopulated the area after the Christian reconquest. The passage of the Huelva-Zafra railway line promoted the development of the already existing meat industries.

The "Tiro de Pichón", an original work by Aníbal González, is the most iconic building, although another religious building of interest is the church of San Miguel Arcángel, in Mudéjar style, begun in the 16th century, and modified with additions until the 18th century.

**1.4. Hiking. Trails that never end**

There are many ways to enjoy a geographical area rich in flora and fauna, with hills providing a range of interesting options for hikers. More than 800 km of trekking alternatives make up a selection of routes where peace and calm are the common denominator. Some of the most recognised by hikers are the Santa Olalla del Cala - Mina de Teuler trail, the Arroyomolinos de León - Alto del Bujo trail, alongside

In Linares de la Sierra there are many "cobblestones" at the doors of the houses.

The Casa del Tiro Pichón, headquarters of the Jamón de Jabugo Protected Designation of Origin.

**The "cobblestones" are mosaics that adorn the entrances to houses**





Views of Alájar from the Peña de Añias Montano.

the Arroyomolinos de León - Sierra de los Gabrieles trail, the Cañaveral de León - Ribera de Hinojales trail, Hinojales - Camino de la Víbora, Encinasola - Puente de los Cabriles, and the Encinasola - Peña de San Sixto and Arroyo Sillo trail, the ascent to Cerro San Cristóbal, the Alájar - Los Madroñeros route, the Linares de la Sierra - Alájar trail, the Aracena - Linares de la Sierra trail, alongside which is the start of the Aracena - Corteconcepción trail, and those leading to Alto del Chorrillo and the El Talenque - Valdelarco trail. To all these we could add the Ribera de Jabugo and Cerro del Castaño trekking routes.

### 1.5. Sports tourism

Road and mountain biking, Nordic walking, climbing and canyoning complete the activities for enjoying of the region of Jabugo

The Sierra de Aracena is becoming a benchmark sports destination inside and outside Spain. Road and mountain biking, Nordic walking, climbing and canyoning, are some of the activities destined more and more to shortening the winter, while enjoying the wonderful flavours of the land of Jabugo.

#### Nordic Walking

The circular route from Santa Ana la Real is a Nordic walking possibility

that features prominently. It runs through the areas of La Presa (starting point), climbing up to the Sierra de las Cumbres, and then back down to the Los Prietos crossroads. It continues along the riverbank as far as Risco Levante, crossing the bridges on the Santa Ana la Real riverbank. Up again to El Negrillo as far as Nava de Aguafría, then turning back towards Santa Ana la Real before starting the descent o the villa of La Presa.

#### Canyoning

There are a number of locations ideal for canyoning in the Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche. The best known is the Dundún ravine, but once you get started with canyoning, the guides in the area will be able to offer you other fascinating places for this adrenaline sport.

#### Climbing

Limestone cliffs and rock faces pose interesting challenges for climbing enthusiasts. The climbing schools of the sierra: the Risco Levante and the Cerro de San Cristóbal, are ideal for beginners, providing equipment, guides and advice.



Pigs in the pastures.

DOC ham dryers Jabugo.

# 2

## The Jabugo Route. A gastronomical universe.

In the Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche we can talk about the universe of Ham. The Jabugo Protected Designation of Origin helps preserve a region with unique microclimatic conditions. The excellent products come from Iberian pigs raised in the wild in pastures, and fed during the "montanera" (fattening phase) exclusively with acorns and natural pasture.

This is not just any route, since the proposed itinerary transcends the visual to incorporate smell and taste into the Jabugo experience.

The route could start with the iconic El Tiro building in Jabigo, built by the architect Aníbal González, creator of many of the monuments for the Ibero-American Exposition of Seville in 1929, like the Plaza España for example. Today it is the headquarters of the Iberian Innovation and Promotion Centre, and is the perfect place to explain the possibilities offered by the mountains for learning all about the world of Jabugo. As a complement, the Museo del Jamón de Aracena, brings us pedagogically closer to present us with a reality regarding traditional cured meat, which we will become tangible later.

### 2.1. Processing companies and drying rooms

There are 31 towns that make up the Jabugo ham PDO, and you can visit manufacturing companies and in many cases their drying rooms. The good places include Cumbres Mayores, Cortegana, Galaroza, Higuera de la Sierra, Jabugo, Santa Olalla del Cala, Aracena, Aroche and Corteconcepción. It is here that the art, patience, time and care that characterise hams with the Jabugo PDO become palpable.

Seeing how ham is subtly cut to be packaged, observing the curing process, and the astonishing sight of thousands and thousands of hams in the drying rooms, puts you in contact with the delicate and dedicated process of making Jabugo.

Jamones El Lazo in Cortegana has the only wooden drying room built in 50 years. The peculiarity of these dryers is that they still use oak wood and have Arabic tile ceilings.

### 2.2. Pastures

A visit to the pastures completes a 360° tour that is essential to understand the value of this unique landscape and ecosystem. Both adults and children will enjoy this incomparable environment in which the "hogs" are initially shy, but little by little will come to check you out so you will be able to photograph them.

There are a number of renowned, historical municipalities of great beauty where you can visit the pastures and enjoy the magic of the domains of Jabugo, these include Aracena, Aroche, Corteconcepción, Cortegana, Cumbres Mayores, Galaroza, Higuera de la Sierra, Jabugo and Santa Olalla del Cala.

These are where you will find the dries and cellars where they carefully produce these wonderful Jabugo PDO hams that you will learn all about along the route.

The pastures make up a unique ecosystem





An Islamic forum takes place in Almonaster la Real.

Views of the Almonaster la Real mosque from the outskirts of the town.

# 3 Cultural heritage and traditions

Festivities, pilgrimages, cultural and sporting events. The peaceful Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche also have a remarkable calendar of activities.

### 3.1. Festivities - Twelve months of events

Access to the mountain areas from the rest of the province has not always been easy. Centuries of a certain degree of isolation have enabled traditions and festivities to take root in popular folklore. That is why the different towns in the Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche provide twelve months of ethnographic wealth.

Repopulation began with the Christian reconquest, with people migrating from the north of the mainland who brought with them their popular cultural traditions as expressed in gastronomy, dances, pilgrimages and traditional dress.

The pilgrimage of Santa Eulalia in Almonaster la Real, that of the Queen of the Angels in La Peña de Arias Montano in Alájar, or that of El Llano de la Belleza in Aroche, near Turobriga, are just some of these unusual processions.

These religious celebrations are still important, as are pagan festivities, many with links relating to interaction with nature and earth's fertility cycles.

In spring there are many towns where Easter is a profound experience and features processions by the different "hemandades" or brotherhoods such as those in Aracena, Aroche, Cortegana and Encinasola. During the month of March, the International Hunting fair (called Ficar in Spanish) takes place in Rosal de la Frontera, an important event for those who like hunting.

A month later, in April, there is the Puerto Moral Livestock Fair that has been a meeting point for traders and breeders in the region since 1893, and where a handshake is still valid as a commitment to close agreements.

In the month of May, interest moves to Hinojales which features a dance or "launch" by a group of seven men in traditional costumes accompanying the procession of the patron saint, the Virgen de Tórtola, with bagpipe and tambourine music that dates back to its original Celtic routes.

Another of the Christianised pagan festivities is the Cruces de Mayo in Almonaster la Real, was

transformed from the cult of fertility in the height of Spring and involves competitive popular singing by the two brotherhoods of Cruz del Llano and La Fuente. The rivalry is expressed by the tambourines, flutes and drums playing fandangos to liver up the Sunday procession.

Come summer, the flurry of events begins with Mediaeval Days in Cortegana, with the magnificent backdrop of one of the most spectacular castles in the province. The area surrounding the Castle of Sancho IV returns to the Middle Ages with a mediaeval market, horse riding tournaments and other events.

Cortelazor la Real celebrates the beauty of its landscapes with an Open Air Painting Contest, turning the town into an art gallery open to the public.

In July you move on to the Aroche castle and the Turobriga-Arucci archaeological site, where traditional Roman festivals and events like gladiatorial fights are recreated.

The Higuera de la Sierra Jazz Festival arrives at the end of August with good music and performances, now acknowledged as an important musical event.

Before the summer ends, the weather is still warm enough to enjoy the festivities of Los Jarritos, in Galaroza. On 6 September, the whole town enjoys throwing water at each other, with the Fountain of Los Doce Caños being the main supply point for this "water war." The aim is for nobody to stay dry.

Also in September and during the Aroche Livestock Fair (called Fegar in Spanish), there is a lively programme including dressage, exhibitions, a trade fair and recreational activities for people of all ages.

With the change of season there are still plenty of options for leisure in the mountain areas, and despite the rain and the lower temperatures autumn is still an ideal time to come.

In October there is an Islamic Culture Forum in Almonaster la Real that aims to reassert this beautiful town's Muslim past. Talks, exhibitions and gastronomic tastings display pride in the mosque.

A month later you have Santa Olalla del Cala with a Sephardic Forum to reminds you that one of the most flourishing times in Andalusia was when there was coexistence between the three historical cultures, Christian, Muslim and Jewish, and which is the focal point for activities and conferences.

It is winter in the mountains and time to hold the popular festival of the "Rehiletos de Aracena". Associated with the end of the sweet chestnut harvesting season, the leaves of the tree are used to make the windmills. The leaves are strung together and compacted on an olive branch. On the night of 7 December they are heated over a bonfire and swung around like a catapult creating an effect of light and colour.

For Christmas and Carnival each town displays its own curious symbols: Onions (Aracena), Chorizo Sausages (Cortegana), Gallipierna Mushrooms (Cala) and Ham Bones (Santa Olalla del Cala). They are all consumed on the bonfire to close festivities and are just a few of the highlights that will give you good reason to celebrate.

Gastronomic events that should be on the agenda include: the Oleozufre olive oil fair in February, the Cumbres Mayores Saborea Fair focussing on Iberian ham and its derivatives in October and the craft cheese market in Aracena in December.

An important event in the sports calendar is the Mountain Bike Marathon in Cala, 75 kilometres across the northern edge of the Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche Nature Reserve.

Excavation in Turóbriga, a Roman archaeological site in Aroche, and the venue for gladiator fights held in July.

Popular culture is expressed in gastronomy, dances, pilgrimages and traditional costumes





Iberian ham P.D.O. Jabugo with "regañá" (toasted unleavened bread).

Visit the drying chambers along the Jabugo Ham Route.



Products from the historic Rufino confectioner's in Aracena.

Baked meringue from the Rufino confectioner's in Aracena.

# 4

## Committed to high-quality, classic, organic products

Seasoned cold-meat delights in Jabugo, extra virgin olive oil, mushrooms, cheeses, honey, sweet chestnuts, and patés are just some of the delights to be found in the Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche.

### 4.1. Jabugo. Guaranteed excellence

The focus is rightly on Jabugo. The seasoned cold-meat tradition extends right across society, the economy and the gastronomy of this mountain area. It begins with the experience of strolling through the pasture, continues with the visual pleasure of visiting the drying chambers, and finally, the crackle of the palate when sitting in a restaurant before a plate of Jabugo ham, or a recipe in which it adds its indescribable flavour.

### 4.2. Cheeses

The woodland pastures of the mountains make the most lavish cheeses made from sheep and goat milk. Fine examples include cured sheep cheese with rosemary, sheep cheese matured in extra virgin olive oil, and traditional cured goat cheese with an intense flavour. Monte Robledo is one of the

most renowned cheese factories in the Sierra with products like Natural cheese, cheese with walnuts, rosemary, herbs, oregano, paprika, cheesecake, "sudao", old oil and wine.

### 4.3. Mushrooms - The Sierra has the greatest mycological diversity in Europe

Huelva is the province where the highest volume of mushrooms is picked, including some of the most valuable and recognised species, like the gurmelo, the tana and the tentullo.

The greatest diversity of species in Europe is concentrated in the Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche. There are more than 600 species of mushrooms and fungi, of which more than 30 species are edible, making this an ideal destination for lovers of mycology. The nature of the mountains, with ideal habitats for mushrooms and fungi make this region an attraction both for those who love mushrooms and for real experts, all of whom can enjoy a gastronomy that adopts these delicacies into their cuisine. In restaurants you will more and more frequently find dishes adapted to mycology who impatiently await the harvesting season.

The gurmelo, the tana and the tentullo are some of the most highly valued mushrooms in the Sierra

This gastronomic treasure is protected through educational forums to explain that fungi are essential for the sustainability of the tree species in the sierra, and especially in the pastures.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Sustainable Development has a Plan for the Preservation and Sustainable Use of Mushrooms and Truffles of Andalusia (Cussta in Spanish) that increases awareness with the aim of preserving this immense mycological wealth. One of the most important actions was to create a Manual for the identification of edible mushrooms in Andalusia.

We can make tourism in the Sierra coincide with the different seasons for harvesting mushrooms and fungi. The season starts in early spring with the Gurmelo mushroom (*Amanita ponderosa*).

"*Amanita caesarea*", the Queen of the Sierra Mushrooms, known by the locals as the "Tana" arrives with the first rains in autumn. It has a characteristic golden-orange colour and is surrounded by a purple-white veil.

The autumn rains also bring the Chanterelle mushroom (*Cantharellus cibarius*), the bronze bolete (*Boletus aereus*) and the parasol mushroom (*Macrolepiota procera*) that sprout from the earth in the mountains.

These are just a few of the edible species, as mushroom gatherers often find saffron milk caps (*Lactarius deliciosus*). Horn of plenty (*Craterellus cornucopioides*) ox tongue (*Fistulina hepática*) and one that is more difficult to find, the yellow trumpet (*Cantharellus tubaeformis*).

### 4.4. Rufino Confectionery - Master pastry makers since 1875

Another great exponent of the excellence of the products of the Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche is the work of the Rufino Confectionery in Aracena. For almost 150 years they have been following the tradition of the first owner, Rafael Rufino Santos. They specialise in cakes and tarts and their reputation has spread throughout Andalusia, as they are synonymous with quality. The recipes are the result of following the tradition, whilst continuing to learn and incorporating new ideas, together with the hard work involved. In 1974 the Rodríguez Romero family, led by José Luis and Gertrudis, took charge and continue with the good work in this pastry shop that was already over a hundred years old. Innovations have been made that have only resulted in increased gastronomic perfection.

The specialities to be tried as you pass through this mountain area feature "Bizcotelas" made with egg yolks, sugar and caramel, and "Tocinillo de Cielo" made with egg yolk and sugar.

### 4.5. Wines. Novel and unique suggestions

The Bodega Cerro San Cristóbal was the result of three partners looking for an ideal location for their vineyards. The Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche do not have a specific designation of origin and the winemaking tradition did not go beyond production for self consumption. Which makes their success in producing excellent wines all the more commendable.

The excellence of the pastries made in the Rufino Confectionery has been acknowledged throughout Andalusia





Bemoles wine from Bodegas Cerro San Cristóbal in Almonaster la Real.

Nestled around Almonaster la Real, the vines grown at a high altitude, in sandy, stony soil and in an environment free of contamination that has enabled them to produce wines with unique organoleptic qualities. This work has given rise to Bemoles and Bienteveo wines that are already finding a place amongst the typical products of the Sierra.

#### 4.6. Olive Oil. The organic approach to olive oil

Olive groves have been a traditional feature of the province of Huelva. In the particular case of the Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche, the orography is not suitable for extensive cultivation that makes harvesting olives easy. So organic cultivation is preferred, dispensing with chemicals, to obtain highly appreciated extra virgin oil.

The municipalities of Hinojales and Zufre are the areas where production of the Manzanilla Serrana variety is concentrated to a greater extent. Zufre, is in fact the capital of olive oil due to the Oleozufre Fair, a benchmark for gastronomic events regarding olive cultivation. Here you will find the Cooperative of Nuestra Señora del Puerto (known as Oleozufre), with an oil mill dedicated exclusively to organic olive groves. This specialisation has opened the doors to "oleotourism" (olive oil tourism), organising visits to olive groves and olive mills, and participation in the Tourist Route by donkey, which highlights the historical heritage of the urban area of Zufre.

Another example of those looking to produce extra virgin olive oil is

the Organic Olive Mill in Encinasola. Promoting the defence of and respect for the habitat in the Nature Reserve and Biosphere Reserve has brought about technological innovations in the sector to enable the organic cultivation of a number of varieties of olives including manzanilla, hojiblanca, picual, galega, arbequina, cobrasosa, cornicabra and carrasqueña, to produce an organic extra virgin olive oil (EVOO) denominated Oleosierra.

#### 4.7. Honey from the Sierra. The happiest bees in the world

The development of beekeeping is another distinctive feature of the Sierra. Traditionally, each family produced a small amount for its own consumption, but companies like Encinasola Sol y Tierra, with hives distributed throughout the Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche Nature Reserve, have channelled a great interest in high-quality honey. This landscape full of holm oaks, cork oaks, sweet chestnut trees, eucalyptus, ash, hawthorn, heather, rockrose, thyme and lavender is ideal for the bees to provide sweet nectar in this natural paradise.

#### 4.8. Ecological Cooperatives in the Sierra. Committed to doing things differently

Apart from the above-mentioned Oleozufre cooperative, there are other joint efforts to promote yet another product of the mountains, sweet chestnuts. The Cooperativa Castañera Serrana de Galaroza is a cooperative that cleans and sterilises fresh sweet chestnuts in a totally natural way and markets them.

There are over 280 members who export fresh sweet chestnuts to countries like the United States, Canada, Brazil and the European Union where they are highly valued in confectionery. The area harvested covers 3,000 hectares with hundred-year-old sweet chestnut trees, distributed in the districts of Fuenteheridos, Galaroza, Los Marines, Castaño del Robledo and Aracena. The average production is about one million kilos of varieties such as Las Pelonas, Anchas de Alájar, Helechal, Dieguina or Vázquez, etc.



The Peña de Arias Montano in Alájar is a telluric destination.

## 5 Unexpected amongst the unexpected. Peña de Arias Montano, a telluric destination.

Beyond the legends that surround the Peña de Arias Montano, the truth is that over the centuries, different peoples have felt a certain attraction to this place. There is no doubt that has been clearly motivated by its strategic position as a surveillance point and control post within the region. And because the wealth of its springs has not gone unnoticed. The network of caves and galleries formed naturally by erosion of the karst rock has been used as a shelter and a necropolis. But both from a scientific and esoteric point of view, explaining the same thing in a different way, it is agreed that the rock generates a certain energy. Scientists call it tellurism or magnetic forces from the earth's subsoil, while others define it as magic, or the influence of Mother Nature.

Archaeologists and speleologists are the "guides to the underworld" who have yet to find an end to the network of caves that run through the interior of the rock. About forty caves, known as the Limpet Caves, have been inventoried so far, and evidence has been found of a cult

worshipping archaic deities of Celtic origin from the Bronze Age. One of them, baptised as "the king's little chair" could have been used for Celtiberian sacrifices (transformed into a legend that says that maidens were slaughtered looking at the rising sun), and later Mozarabic baptismal rites, and Templar settlements. Access is by stairs carved into the stone itself and it is preceded by the so-called "Queen's Bathing", an early Christian baptismal font from the 6th century. This was one of Arias Montano's favourite places for meditation.

Visits are only possible to this feature and one other, the Dark Palace, where compasses are said to lose the north.

The Peña de Arias Montano stands above the mountain town of Alájar as a monument full of symbolism, magic and history. Since the Palaeolithic era it was inhabited by a number of primitive peoples attracted by the wealth of its springs

Both from a scientific and esoteric point of view, it is agreed that the rock generates a certain energy

The Bemoles and Bienteveo wines are among the typical products of the Sierra





"Arco de los Novios" (Sweethearts arch) in La Peña de Arias Montano.

Horse "nosing about".

Exterior of the Chapel of Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles.

and by the elevated strategic position. It was a place of retreat for hermits and anchorites.

"Having travelled all over the world, I could not find anywhere comparable, with a broad wide sky, clean air and how far you can see..." Benito Arias Montano

Few characters like Benito Arias Montano can so unknown and yet so magnetic. He was one of the greatest exponents of humanism in Europe, counsellor to the monarch Felipe II, editor of the Royal Bible and Polyglot of Antwerp, librarian of the Library of El Escorial, participant at the Council of Trent, and a great scholar whose theses on the Bible were the result of his spiritual retreat as a hermit high up on the rock.

In addition to theological studies, Arias Montano thrived with the energy of the place, later creating a "Roman garden", where he cultivated medicinal plants from across the seas. This is how, as a tribute to Esculapio, he promoted the study of plants with healing properties. Physicians and doctors from all over the peninsula knew about the medicinal refuge of La Peña, a reason that, together with the less doctrinal positions of Arias Montano's religious ideas, meant that his position was uncomfortable during the Inquisition.

The Sanctuary of Our Lady of the Angels is at the top of a steep hill, which however is somewhat flat and seems to have been taken from a sketch of Olympus. The chapel has been changed and embellished since the 16th century, and is now the end point of the pilgrimage that takes place every 8 September.

On the esplanade in front of the sanctuary, there are the remains of a bossed Renaissance façade and which is said to have been the access gateway to the garden created by Arias Montano. It is popularly known as the "Arco de los Novios" (Sweethearts Arch), as a result of a legend that says that any couple crossing the arch holding hands will marry.

Not far away, there is a Neoclassical belfry with stunning views from what is a 600-metre-high rock. Two circular sentry boxes flank the structure, with three bells and a lantern adorning the arches.

The magnificent natural watchtower at the top of La Peña is probably the best lookout balcony in Andalusia.

## 6 Practical information about unexpected Huelva.

### 6.1. How to get there

The Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche mountains are easily accessible from both Seville and Huelva. From Seville it takes approximately 1 hr 10 mins to travel the 91.0 km via the N-433 and A-66, whilst from the city of Huelva it takes 1 hr 20 mins to travel the 100km via the N-435. There is a specific area for parking motorhomes at the Aracena Fairground: The Huerta de los Panaderos Urbanisation, 1. The Sierra is an ideal destination for bikers.

Seville airport has connections with the main towns and cities in the province of Seville and there are international flights connecting numerous European cities.

### 6.2. Where to stay

#### ◆ Hotel Essentia.

Calle José Nogales, 17. Aracena. Tel: 959 12 78 22  
<https://hotelessentia.es/>

#### ◆ Hotel Luz Almonaster

Calle Iglesia, 3 - 21350 Almonaster la Real.  
Tel: 638 87 01 29

#### ◆ Hotel Convento Aracena

Calle Jesús y María, 19, 21200 Aracena  
Tel: 959 12 68 99  
<https://www.hotelconventoaracena.es>

### 6.3. Where to eat

#### ◆ Restaurante Russes Gastrobar.

Carefully presented cuisine full of flavour and based on local products.  
Calle Noria, 1 Aracena. Tel. 694 49 73 22  
<https://russes-gastrobar.negocio.site/>

#### ◆ Restaurante El Camino.

Dishes based on products from their own garden and from the Sierra de Aracena.  
Ctra. Cortegana - Aracena, km 6.8. Almonaster la Real.  
Tel: 959 503 240. <http://www.posadaelcamino.es/>

#### ◆ Restaurante Jesús Carrión.

Seasoned cold cuts and local Iberian meats as well as excellent fusion dishes.  
Calle Pozo de la Nieve 35. Aracena.  
Tel. 959 463 188. Mobile 616 990 309  
<https://jesuscarrionrestaurante.com/>

#### ◆ Restaurante 'Arrieros'.

Specialising in Iberian pork and its derivatives, mushrooms and seasonal garden produce.  
Calle Arrieros, 6, 21207 Linares de la Sierra, Huelva  
Tel. 959 46 37 17  
<https://www.restaurantearrieros.es/>

### 6.4. Service Companies. What to do and other activities

#### ◆ "Somos Destino Rural"

An Incoming Services Agency in the Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche Nature Reserve.  
El Tiro de Jabugo building. Tel. +34 655 66 23 34  
[travel@somosdestinorural.com](mailto:travel@somosdestinorural.com)  
<http://www.somosdestinorural.com/>

#### ◆ "Lynxaia" Ecotourism and environmental education

Manages the Peña de Arias Montano Visitor Centre in Alájar.  
Tel. 957 160 154 / 625 512 442  
<https://www.lynxaia.com/>

#### ◆ Lazo hams.

Production company.  
Av. Portugal, 6, Cortegana. 21230 Huelva.  
Tel. 959 13 15 60

#### ◆ Rufino confectioner's in Aracena

Calle Constitución, 3, 21200 Aracena, Huelva.  
Tel. 959 128 121  
<https://confiteriarufino.com/>

#### ◆ Jabugo Route.

A UNIQUE experience involving PDO JABUGO Ham  
<https://rutadeljabugo.travel/>

Restaurante El Camino. A place where it is known you will eat well in Almonaster la Real.

The Restaurante Russes Gastrobar in Aracena serves starters of cheeses and seasoned cold meats.





To speak of Jaén is to speak of a spectacular sea of olive trees that extends throughout its territory. Hills, mounts and plains, where the valuable raw material for extra virgin olive oil grows, the green gold of Jaén. A landscape whose wealth is not restricted to olive groves, but also to a huge extension of protected natural spaces, the largest in Spain. Sierra Mágina, Sierra de Andújar and Despeñaperros, and featuring the largest green lung in the country: the Sierras de Cazorla, Segura y las Villas Nature Reserve. To speak of Jaén is also to speak of an extraordinary monumental heritage, in which a landmark of the Andalusian Renaissance deserves special mention: the spectacular cathedral of the city of Jaén which aspires to be classified as World Heritage. As well as the two UNESCO Heritage cities: Úbeda and Baeza.

“  
Archaeological,  
historical and  
gastronomic  
tourism in a sea  
of olive trees  
”



# Jaen

Jaén in the Time of the Iberians. Detail of the Mosaic of "Los Amores" in Cástulo.

Although here we will show you a lesser known Jaén: the Jaén of the Iberian times, the Jaén of castles and battles, and the gastronomic Jaén. We suggest, first of all, a trip to discover one of the most fascinating civilisations of Antiquity: the Iberian Culture, which developed between the 7th and 1st centuries BC. An archaeological journey with numerous stops at sites throughout the province, whose importance makes Jaén a point of reference for the Iberian Culture. A Journey to the time of the Iberians which will take us to the city of Cástulo, the Iberian Museum in Jaén and the Archaeological Museum in Linares, known as the Monographic Museum of Cástulo. We will also try a little active tourism, discovering the Peñalosa site in a canoe; We will enjoy very special musical performances in the Mosaic of "Los Amores" in Cástulo, a mosaic that has been extraordinarily preserved. And a route on foot through the

landscape of Castellar to reach the Iberian Sanctuary of the "Cueva de la Lobera", where rituals related to the movement of the sun at the equinox were held.

This historical-cultural route includes a visit to a small part of the Castles and Battles Route, with stops at a number of captivating places: the Fortress of La Mota in Alcalá la Real and the Burgalimar Castle, in Baños de la Encina. Jaén is the Spanish province with the highest concentration of castles, towers and watchtowers in Europe and the second in the world. Very important battles took place within its territory. This historical and monumental wealth has given rise to an interesting itinerary that takes you on a journey through a number of chapters of the history of Spain. In addition to archaeology and history, on the journey you will also both the monuments and the gastronomy in Jaén. Our visit to the

Monographic Museum included a visit to monumental Linares and, while we were at it, the heritage city of Úbeda. We visited the Iberian Museum in the city of Jaén, as well as the old town, some of the monuments, the extraordinary cathedral, and we have to say that the splendid gastronomy left us speechless. Modern and passionate projects undertaken by local chefs in high-quality restaurants. We had the opportunity to enjoy original and exquisite cuisine, with local products playing a leading role and which were a delight for the palate. So much so that we would like to propose a short gastronomic trip, declaring the city of Jaén a gastronomic capital and also stopping here and there in the province.

On any trip to unexpected Jaén a visit to an olive-oil mill is essential, because to talk about Jaén and gastronomy without mention EVOO would be impossible! So we will be driving along

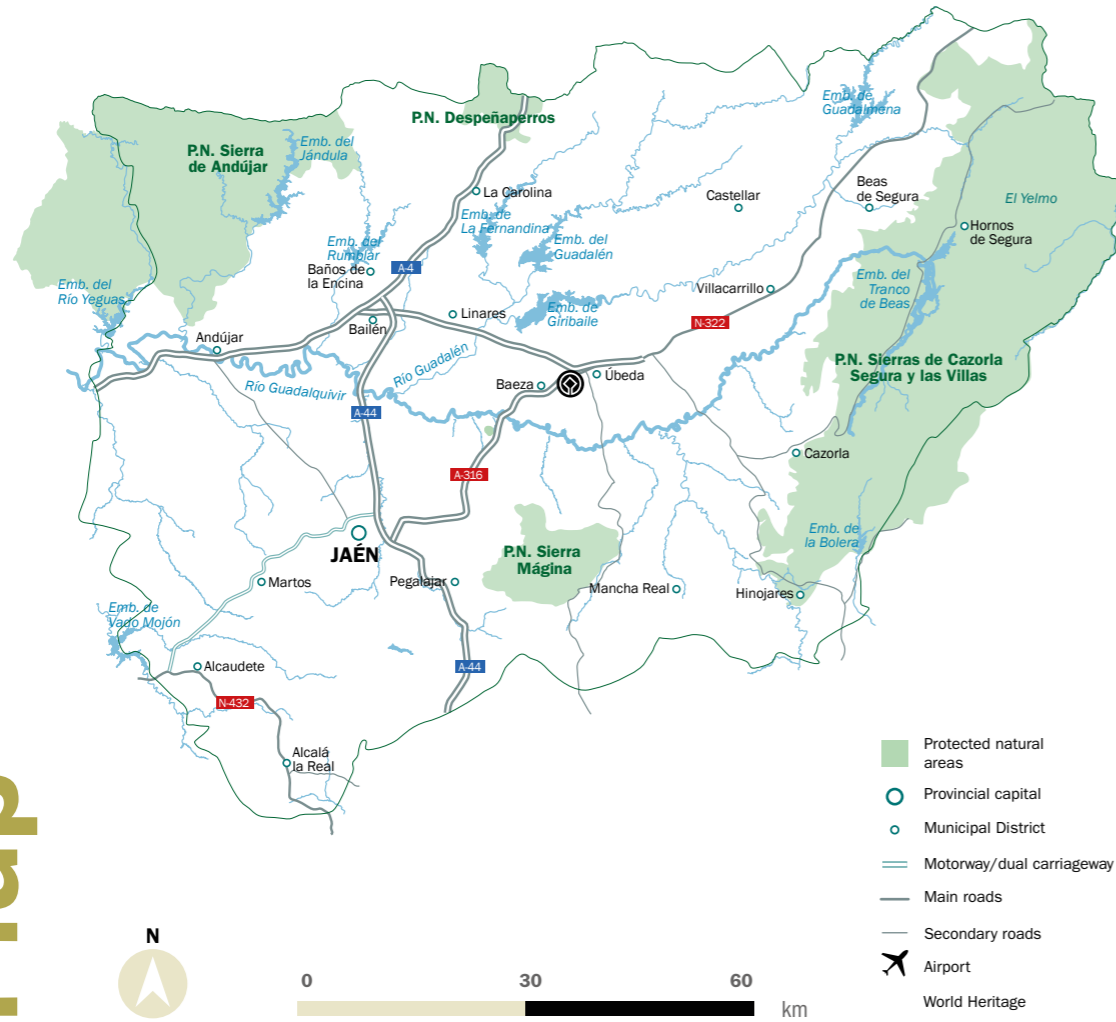
roads surrounded by thousands of olive trees through the hills to visit a very special olive-oil mill. A place that is a blend of the traditional and the modern, where we will taste those essential aromas, those flavours that define Jaén and Andalusia.

And one last surprise... the wines! Surely no one could imagine that in the land of olive trees there is room for grapes. And yet it was once a land of vines, which are currently being recovered to produce surprising wines. And we invite you to taste them in a number of wine-cellarers throughout the province.

Please remember that this is just a sample, and that in the province of Jaén there are so many more. The aim of this historical-cultural and gastronomic journey is for you to see that a different type of tourism is possible and for you to become as enthusiastic as we are as you discover unexpected Jaén.



# Map



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The magnificent Burgalimar Castle is on the Route of Castles and Battles.

In Baños de la Encina you will find the Burgalimar Castle, a jewel of Almohad architecture and the prehistoric town of Peñalosa.

Remains of dwellings in the Fortress of La Mota.



Eight stops on a journey back to the Time of the Iberians.



- The Iberian Museum in Jaén is a benchmark museum of the Iberian Culture.
- Ceremonial stone box.
- Woman dressed as an Iberian.

## Travel back to the time of the Iberians

Our Journey back to the Time of the Iberians consists of eight milestones through the extraordinary heritage that the Iberian Culture left in Jaén. The "Cueva de la Lobera" sanctuary (Castellar) can be combined with a visit to the local museum, where there is an exhibition of votive offerings. Fortified towns like Cástulo in Linares, Puente Tablas in Jaén (the best preserved in Andalusia) and Giribaile in Vilches. Princely Tombs of Hornos and Toya in Peal de Becerro. The heroic sanctuary of El Pajarillo, in Huelma, where sculptures were found that are exhibited in the Museum of Jaén. The tumular necropolis of Cerrillo Blanco, in Porcuna, which can be combined with visit to the Visitor Centre and the museum. And the Cyclopean Wall of Ibros.

We only visited a few of the sites and museums, which enabled us to better understand the rapid development of these settlements towards more complex societies and cultural models. We had the privilege of travelling back to the time of the Iberians with two great archaeologists who are specialists in this period: Marcelo Castro and Vicente Barba. It was a unique

**The Iberians left a huge footprint in the province of Jaén**

and special privilege to spend time with these experts who have contributed so much to preserving culture in Jaén and to learn so much from them.

### 1.1. Who were the Iberians?

The Iberians were a group of settlements from the south and east of the Iberian Peninsula who shared a similar social model and material culture. This culture developed in what is now the province of Jaén in the Iron Age, that is, between the 7th and 1st centuries B.C., and ended with the conquest and Romanisation of Iberia. Seven centuries of history of a culture that went through different phases and gave rise to an important Mediterranean civilisation, which became more complex, and was eventually a princely aristocratic society of city-states.

They left a huge footprint in the province of Jaén and an extraordinary heritage that consists of *oppida* (fortified towns), sanctuaries, tombs, sculptures and votive offerings. With regard to technology, they were renowned for producing swords like the iron *falcata*, agricultural implements and pottery turned on a wheel. In agriculture they fostered the production of cereals and incorporated rotary mills and arboriculture (vines, olive trees and fruit trees).

The Iberian towns grew as a result of trade in metals, cereals, oil and wine, which they traded with the Greeks and the Carthaginians. With the supremacy of the Romans, some disappeared but others were integrated into the Empire and became Roman. Their legacy was perpetuated in Rome and part of it has survived to the present day.

### 1.2. The Iberian Museum of Jaén. An introduction to Iberian Culture

It is the best possible introduction to their world before visiting the sites, since it is the only monographic museum on the Iberian Culture in existence. It has one of the largest collections on the material history of settlements and cities in Andalusia. Magnificent pieces are exhibited in a spectacular, contemporary 10,000 square-metre building where a prison used to stand. The museum has so much to exhibit that in the future it aims to become the National Museum of Iberian Culture.

Vicente Barba, one of the leading experts on the Iberians, accompanied us on our visit the temporary exhibition entitled "The lady, the prince, the hero and the goddess". These archetypes appear in more than 300 archaeological pieces (sculptures, ceramics, tools) found in the province. Like the four Greek kraters (luxury ceramics from the 4th century) that were part of the grave goods of an Iberian prince found in the Necropolis of Piquía de Arjona. A thematic tour that shows what this

aristocratic society was like. The Prince is shown as a hero; the Iberian Lady as the bearer of the lineage; and the Iberian goddess who plays an important role in religion.

This exhibition enabled us to begin our journey already having some idea of how this aristocratic society was organised and of Iberian State Protocol.

### 1.3. Milestones on the Journey back to Time of the Iberians

We suggest a number of stops in fortified towns in the province, necropolises and princely tombs, just in case you would like to follow a more comprehensive itinerary to discover the Iberian Culture.

#### 1.3.1. Puente Tablas oppidum, Jaén

The fortified town of Puente Tablas, 4 km from Jaén, is essential to understand how the Iberians of the Alto Guadalquivir lived in the 4th century B.C. during which time the town acquired great importance. Of the great fortification, 300 metres of wall and part of the Puerta del Sol gateway are preserved. If you pass by the Visitor Centre you can also discover how the Iberian town operated.

A monumental gateway, facing the rising sun, illuminated the figure of a goddess at the equinoxes, rites

**The Iberian Museum of Jaén enabled us to discover the history of the settlements in Andalusia**





One of the magnificent sculptures in Cerrillo Blanco. Iberian Museum in Jaén.



Iberian warrior with double armour, from the 5th century BC found in Cerrillo Blanco, in Porcuna.



Greek kraters found in Toya and Hornos.



Marcelo Castro standing next to the Iberian-Roman lion. A tireless, persistent and experienced archaeologist, one of those responsible for the recovery of Cástulo.

The mosaic in the Patio de los Amores was one of the most important archaeological discoveries in recent years.

that are recreated today and provide a sacred environment. Next to this is a terraced sanctuary with a number of caves. You can visit a block of dwellings with a patio, the palace of the Iberian prince and the walls, which are the best preserved in the south of the peninsula.

### 1.3.2. Fortified town of Giribaile, Vilches

The fortified town of Giribaile, in Vilches is another of the Iberian *oppida*, the largest in the province with 18 hectares. It dominates the surrounding area from a fortified plateau at the confluence of the Guadalimar and Guadalén rivers. The visit also includes a prehistoric sanctuary; an early Christian chapel; the Espeluca caves, scattered along the slopes of the hill; and most extraordinarily, an Almohad castle. And the Visitor Centre, where you can appreciate the footprint left by different cultures over time.

### 1.3.3. Cerrillo Blanco Dynastic Necropolis in Porcuna

Cerrillo Blanco is an icon of the Iberian Culture. We recommend you take a walk through the site where you will discover a 7th-century B C necropolis with twenty-four individual tombs and a megalithic burial chamber for two individuals. Here is where a surprisingly large collection of Iberian sculptures was found that were of great artistic quality. There were a total of 1,400 fragments that are currently preserved in the Iberian Museum in Jaén. They represent the power of a group of aristocrats who ruled the important city of Obulco in Porcuna.

For a better understanding of this necropolis you have the Visitor Centre located right next

to the site. And right in the centre of Porcuna, in the Torre de Boabdil ( 15th century) there is an Archaeological Museum with an interesting collection of Iberian-Roman sculptures.

### 1.3.4. Princely Tombs of Toya and Hornos

At the beginning of the 20th century, a farmworker discovered the tomb of an Iberian aristocrat 5 kilometres from the town of Peal de Becerro, which is the best example of Iberian funerary architecture found in Spain. It is a quadrangular burial chamber with three longitudinal naves, built with perfectly carved ashlar and covered with large slabs. In the interior there are rectangular niches carved into the walls. The funerary offerings found included some magnificent kraters.

Visitors are able to get an idea of what the princely burial chambers were like and their importance in this aristocratic society. The visit is completed at the Princely Tombs of Toya and Honos Visitor Centre, in Peal de Becerro, where you will better understand the Iberians' vision of death and the funeral rites.

### 1.3.5. Cyclopean Wall of Ibros

In the historical town centre of Ibros there are the remains of a cyclopean wall from the Iberian period. A defensive architectural feature typical of this late period of the Iberian Culture (2nd-1st century B C), when the Romans are already in the area. It was probably part of an enclosure that surrounded the town and of which today only one corner with huge ashlar remains.

## 2 Unexpected amongst the unexpected: The Iberian-Roman city of Cástulo

A visit to the Iberian-Roman city of Cástulo is essential to discover one of the most important oppida of the Iberian Culture, it is right next to Puente Tablas. Excavations in Cástulo began in the 1950s, and a considerable amount has still to be excavated. It was the most important and populated centre of power in this area in Iberian times. It was a huge 70-hectare walled city that stretched along the Guadalimar River. Cástulo grew and developed because it was strategically located in the Alto Guadalquivir and there were important silver, lead and copper mining operations in Sierra Morena. It played an essential role in the Second Punic War, a conflict between the Romans and Carthaginians in the third century B C. and that ended with the Roman conquest.

The importance of Cástulo increased enormously when the famous "Mosaico de los Amores" (Mosaic of Lovers) was discovered. A magnificent gem of Roman art dated between the late 1st and early 2nd centuries A D and which was acknowledged as one of the most important archaeological discoveries of 2012.

### 2.1. Visit to the fortified city of Cástulo

The tour of the city of Cástulo should begin at the Reception Centre, where the Necropolis

of the North Gate is located and where you can learn about beliefs, funeral rites and society. Continue with the walls, where you can make a stop at the highest part (North Wall), corresponding to a fortification from the Lower Empire era. There you can visit the Puerta de los Leones, a fine example of Iberian-Roman architecture that symbolises the change in supremacy that came with Romanisation. In the western acropolis there are cisterns and other water installations, and a temple on the Torre Alba. In the town centre of Cástulo there is a monumental arcade, hot springs and a synagogue, which is the oldest to be found in the entire peninsula.

The tour continues in the Lower City where you will find the marvellous Amores mosaic, and in the Plaza de Armas there is the Castle of Santa Eufemia, from the Moorish period and included in the Cultural Route of Castles and Battles.

### 2.2. Linares Archaeological Museum. Understanding Cástulo

A visit to the Archaeological Museum of Linares is inseparable from a visit to the fortified city since it exhibits the archaeological findings from Cástulo. That is why we recommend visiting the





The Mosaic of the Lovers, a jewel and one of the great finds in Cástulo.

One of the Iberian-Roman lions (1st century BC) which would have been located at the monumental entrance gate to the fortified city of Cástulo.

museum before going to the site. We had the good fortune to have the archaeologist Marcelo Castro, director of the archaeological site, as a personal guide. His passionate approach helped us understand that the work undertaken by an archaeologist is human, social and cultural and it is often not given the recognition it deserves.

The museum is on several floors, a covered patio and a basement. It is extraordinary to be able to see one of the most important findings in Cástulo: An Iberian-Roman Lion (1st century AD), together with the people who found it. The figures would have been located on one side of a monumental gate, most probably the entrance to the fortified city the "Puerta del León" (Lion Gate). Symbol of strength and vigour, a model for the noble, an image of an unchanging society. And a protective symbol of the city of Cástulo. The importance of this sculpture also lies in the fact that it is the best preserved in the Iberian Peninsula.

### 2.3. The jewel of the "Mosaico de los Amores"

The "Mosaico de los Amores" (Mosaic of the Lovers) is one of the most beautiful mosaics we have ever seen, both because of the impeccable state of preservation in which it was found and

the magnificent compositions, both geometric and figurative. It was part of a 1st and 2nd-century AD public building and it is believed to have been dedicated to the cult of the emperor Domitian (81-96 BC). An unfinished work that, when it was demolished, buried

**The Mosaic of the Lovers was part of a 1st- and 2nd-century AD public building.**



the mosaic under the side walls, which is why it was preserved in such excellent condition. It was discovered in 2012 when the face of an elderly woman with 28 coloured tiles that depicted old age in great detail appeared out of the rubble. Little by little all the scenes appeared in what was a spectacular mosaic. It was a discovery that amazed scientists and *National Geographic* included it as one of the ten most important archaeological finds in the world. It was called the "Mosaic of the Lovers" because it speaks of love, but it also depicts death, power and intrigue.

You could spend hours contemplating these masterfully made images for which more than 750 thousand pieces of tile were used, made of marble, stone and glass paste in shades of blue, red and yellow. The different scenes represent human and animal figures: allegorical busts of the seasons associated with the passage of time (childhood, youth, maturity and old age), Erotes (winged gods of love in Greek mythology) with animals and the representation of a number of myths. It is a symbolic tale relating to love and political power, with a tragic ending.

Another mosaic from the same period was recently discovered on the opposite side to the Mosaic of the Lovers. It has also been excellently preserved and is decorated with geometrical motifs decorated with colourful fragments of tiles. Future excavations at Cástulo are expected to reveal new treasures like these.



### 2.4. Electronic music in the Patio de los Amores

We discovered Cástulo and the Mosaic of the Lovers as part of the 20th anniversary of the beginning of the Journey back to the Time of the Iberians, which involved numerous cultural events. Some were quite unexpected, like the "Ciclo de Música Resonancia Ibera" (Iberian Resonance Music Cycle)! The autumn equinox was celebrated with an electronic music concert by DJ MoM around the mosaic. The evening light, with a light show on the tiles to the rhythm of the music created a unique and special atmosphere to contemplate one of the most significant archaeological finds in recent years. We took a stroll along the walkway installed around the mosaic in the heart of a site that was the scene of important historical events, like the Roman-Carthaginian conflict in Hispania. We were mesmerised by beautiful images that took us back to another time.

### 2.5. Discover Cástulo and the Iberian Culture from other points of view

There are a number of pathways that make discovering Cástulo interesting. Of course it goes without saying that first we should focus on history and archaeology in order to have a broad vision of what an Iberian-Roman fortified city was really like. But recently other activities have been developed, like musical shows, dramatised routes involving rites linked to the movement of the sun at the equinox, children's workshops, visits by experts, all in all, numerous opportunities to discover Cástulo in a different way. And not only in Cástulo, but in other sites



The inhabitants of Castellar go to Cueva de la Lobera dressed as Iberians to experience the autumn equinox.

In the Cueva de la Lobera, they celebrate the autumn equinox with the poem "Aceituneros de Jaén" by Miguel Hernández, put to music by Paco Ibáñez and performed by the Andrés Segovia Choir.

and museums that are part of the Journey back to the Time of the Iberians. These are unique experiences that have great value, since they bring visitors who are interested closer to the Iberian-Roman historical legacy by looking at it from an original standpoint.

### 2.6. Experiencing the autumn equinox in the Cueva de la Lobera Sanctuary

Our Journey back to the Time of the Iberians had a very special ending: in the Iberian sanctuary of the Cueva de la Lobera, in Castellar. We accompanied the inhabitants of the town dressed as Iberians as they went from the town to this rock sanctuary to welcome the autumn equinox. People used to go to this sanctuary between the 4th and 2nd centuries BC to worship their gods. In fact, numerous Iberian votive offerings were found at the site that can be seen in the Museum of the Iberian Sanctuary located in the centre of Castellar.

We walked along the barely 1-kilometre path, following the crowd while there were only a few minutes for the sun to set. We imagined this same path being taken about 2,500 years ago by Iberians anxious to see how the sunlight at sunset illuminated a precise and symbolic place in the cave. When we arrived there, there was a deathly silence and we all contemplate the light projected onto the walls of the cave representing silhouettes that reminded us of votive offerings. A magical moment that is received with "Aceituneros de Jaén" sung by the Andrés Segovia Choir.

**The autumn equinox is celebrated in the Cueva de la Lobera**





The Burgalimar Castle, in Baños de la Encina that started as an Argaric town and became an Almohad urban complex.

# 3

## On the Castles and Battles Route

The Journey back to the Time of the Iberians is not the only unexpected route that you can take in the province. Jaén is also a land of castles that are found throughout the territory among the olive groves, with links to three important historical battles. The first was in 208 B C, between Romans and Carthaginians; the second in 1212, the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, which put an end to Andalusian supremacy in the Peninsula. And the third in 1808, the Battle of Bailén, a severe defeat for the Napoleonic troops. This gave rise to the Castles and Battles Route, an interesting tourist and cultural option running through the west of the province from north to south, with stops to visit stunning castles and fortresses with strategic locations. For a complete list, you should go to the

Andalusian Tourism website or that of the route itself.

**Burgalimar Castle is one of the best preserved fortresses in Europe**

On our trip we discovered two of the most stunning and well-preserved fortresses along the route: Burgalimar Castle, in Baños de la Encina and the Fortress of La Mota, in Alcalá la Real. If you would like to

enjoy a little slow tourism, away from the most crowded places, then a great option is to follow the Castles and Battles Route! At the same time you also have an opportunity to discover the landscape, towns and cities, gastronomy, wines and olive oil in Jaén.

### 3.1. Burgalimar Castle, a gem of Almohad architecture in Baños de la Encina

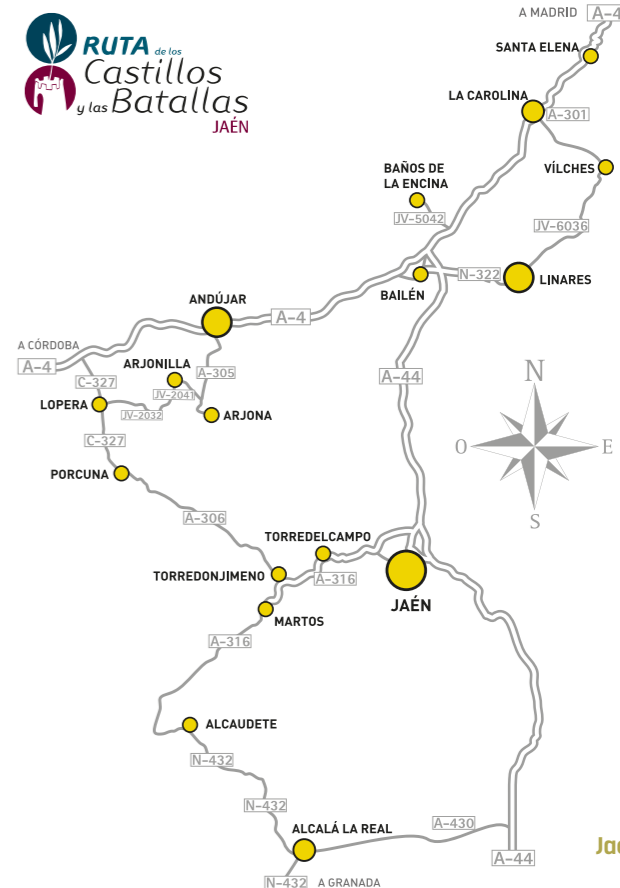
After crossing a sea of olive trees you reach Baños de la Encina, a town located in the north of the province of Jaén in a magnificent setting called Cerro del Cueto. High on the hill stands the Burgalimar Castle, a splendid defensive complex built by the Almohads in the 10th century. Its strategic location right at the beginning of the Guadalquivir valley was the reason for numerous conflicts between Christians and Moors during the Middle Ages. The castle constantly changed hands, until it was finally conquered by the Christians in 1225. It did not undergo major transformations afterwards, in fact, it is one of the best preserved fortresses in Europe.

We climbed up towards the fortress, crossing the town of Baños de la Encina to reach a

stunning crenellated tower. This is the entrance to the castle and it is strikingly robust. We entered the spectacular walled enclosure where we came to a huge oval parade ground measuring some 2,700 square metres. It is surrounded by high walls and 15 incredible quadrangular towers.

Most of the town of Burgalimar and the defensive enclosure is from the Almohad period (13th century): streets and houses for the provision and training of Moorish troops. There are also traces of previous occupations: the stairway of a temple from the Roman era, and the "alcazarejo" (a defensive structure) and the Torre del Homenaje from the Christian era. There are even the remains of a wall, fragments of pottery and organic matter from dwellings in what had been an Argaric settlement that had inhabited the Cerro del Cueto more than 4,000 years ago. The Argar culture was one of the first archaeological manifestations of the Bronze Age.

Although one of the most beautiful elements of the castle, is the stunningly tall "alcazarejo" (defensive structure) built by the Christians and with incredible panoramic views. The defensive area was reduced to create more residential space and the Moorish tower was replaced by the Tower of El Homenaje. A beautiful Gothic-style tower with two bodies that look into the town, not towards the outside, so it follows that the nobles were looking to control the population in this way. From the top of the tower we had panoramic views of Baños de la Encina with its tightly-knit white houses, a sea of olive trees that disappears over the horizon and the Rumbler Reservoir sandwiched between hills.



Panoramic views of Baños de la Encina from the Christian era "alcazarejo" (defensive structure).

Baños de la Encina was a strategic enclave for both Moors and Christians.

The Castles and Battles Route in Jaén.





However, one of the most interesting views from the Tower of El Homenaje is towards the interior of the Burgalimar Castle itself: a magnificent oval-shaped Parade Ground, crenellated towers and the remains of the Almohad urban layout. All in splendid natural surroundings.

It is really interesting to discover the uses to which Burgalimar Castle has been put throughout history, as well as being eminently defensive. Between the 19th and 20th centuries it was a cemetery, a venue for events and festivities (the "alcazarejo" served as the stage), and a number of scenes from "El Capitán Trueno y el Santo Graial" (Captain Thunder) were even filmed there in 2011. The castle certainly has a long history within its walls that enabled us to travel back in time.

### 3.2. By canoe to the prehistoric site of Peñalosa

Just a short distance from Baños de la Encina is the town of Peñalosa, located on the banks of the Rumblar reservoir, in the Sierra de Andújar Nature Reserve. It is an Argaric archaeological site from the Bronze Age that had great importance 4,000 years ago in the Alto Guadalquivir, as a result of the exploitation of copper ore. It was abandoned in about 1400, after the population emigrated to the Guadalquivir valley when resources ran out.

What is unprecedented, in addition to its historical interest, is that it is reached by rowing through the marshland or hiking along the pathway to the south. The Baños de la Encina Tourist Office organises canoe trips that include a visit to the Peñalosa site. This can be seen from afar because it is located on a natural lookout point jutting out into the water. You disembark at the Tamujoso beach, which is a recreational area for swimming and water activities. There you will find a part of the walls that surrounded the settlement. Then you come to a fortified area with houses and narrow streets that connected three artificial terraces. On the lower terrace there is a cistern that collected rain water; on the second there are remains of metallurgical

Sea of olive trees seen from the Castle of Burgalimar, Baños de la Encina.

Views of the Main Square in Burgalimar Castle.



activity and a monumental tomb; and on the last terrace, an acropolis, where there are sumptuous burial chambers.

It is quite a special experience to cross the waters to reach the town of Peñalosa and travel back in time. From there you will also be able to see the Burgalimar Castle on the horizon.

### 3.3. Fortress of La Mota, Alcalá la Real

At the southern end of the Castles and Battles Route, on the border with the provinces of Córdoba and Granada, nestled in the Eastern Subbética mountains there is another magnificent fortress that we visited: the Fortress of La Mota, in Alcalá la Real. Looking up at it from the bottom of the hill on which it stands, we already realised that this was one of the most complex Al-Andalus defensive systems, a splendid Nasrid monumental complex (13th-14th century). We embarked on another journey back in time as soon as we entered the gates of the Fortress of La Mota, which became a very important cultural and power centre after the Christian conquest. This was especially due to its location on the border between the kingdoms of Castile and Granada for 150 years.

During our visit we were better able to understand its characteristics as a border and defensive post. Alcalá la Real stood right on the passageway from the coast to the interior of the peninsula, hence its strategic and defensive character, which is reflected in the architecture and urban planning. There is a complex system of three lines of walls, of three belts that surrounded it, which follows the scheme of a Moorish city with a medina, a fortress and a suburb. We walked up the winding streets in the old Town to the top of the hill where the Alcázar and the church of Mayor Abacia are located. Hardly anything remains of what was the suburb: a stunning stretch of wall and the ruins of the Church of Santo Domingo de Silos. Some of the main city gates and part of the towers are all that remain of the old medina. In both the lower and upper parts there are



The Torre del Homenaje in the Fortress of La Mota, Alcalá la Real.

The beautiful interior of the abbey church in the Fortress of La Mota, Alcalá la Real.







squares, the first was for commercial purposes and in the second there were the most representative buildings. It should also be pointed out that there is an extensive network of cisterns and wells.

At the top of the hill stand the grandiose Alcázar and the abbey church. The first stands around what was the Moorish parade ground and its towers. These feature the "Torre del Homenaje", of Moorish origin and standing proud in the monumental complex. We then went to the lookout point which has spectacular views of Alcalá la Real and the Sierras Subbéticas. Mountains and ever-present olive groves that stretch all the way to the horizon. We enjoyed magnificent views of the Alcázar, the Torre del Homenaje and the abbey church. There are also remains of houses that were distributed around a patio.

We entered a splendid church that was built between the 16th and 17th centuries in a blend of different styles. The architecture is a unique example of Renaissance in Jaén, combined with late Gothic and Plateresque at the bottom, with a Mannerist and Classic central body and at the top. We climbed up a stairway to the choir to be able to appreciate its beauty.

It was exciting to discover that the Fortress of La Mota hides a network of underground galleries that run all along the hill. From the suburb of Santo Domingo it is more than 120 metres to the upper part. Inside the abbey church there is also a spectacular ice house dug into the rock that was used to preserve food.

A visit to Alcalá la Real is a great opportunity to see the Fortress of La Mota from the spectacular Mirador de los Naranjos lookout point, and of course, to visit the beautiful Barrio de las Cruces neighbourhood and the Fátima Chapel.

And here ends this tour of the castles and battles in Jaén that, together with that of the Iberians, took us on a journey back into history. We now turn to the gastronomic that is a perfect complement to the previous ones, and where we discovered exquisite cuisine.

The abbey church of the Fortaleza de la Mota. Alcalá La Real.

Magnificent interior of the abbey church.



In Jaén there are numerous high-quality olive oils.

Olives are a symbol of the fields of Jaén.

## 4 Discovering the green gold of Jaén. EVOO and a sea of olive trees

We invite you to combine this cultural tourism with other suggestions for visits and experiences in the province of Jaén, like visiting the nature reserves parks, World Heritage cities (Úbeda and Baeza), the city of Jaén, and experiencing oleotourism. We could not tour the province of Jaén and its sea of olive trees without discovering its EVOO, Andalusian gold. Extra virgin olive oil is present on the tables of all Andalusians, it is essential and this does not surprise us at all! So we encourage you to discover it for yourself in the olive-oil mills, restaurants and at your accommodation.

Once you learn about its history, the incredible flavour of this oil obtained from the first pressing at low temperature, what is essentially "olive juice", you will remain faithful forever. We have been converts ever since we discovered the flavours of Andalusia. In each accommodation, in each restaurant, in each olive-oil mill we did

a small tasting and learned something new about green gold that made us fall in love even more with its flavour and aroma. There is a true ritual surrounding EVOO tasting, it is done using very specific containers and the senses play an essential role. Producers are continually striving to improve the quality and to conquer the consumer with passion, so in the end you will fall under the spell of EVOO.

### 4.1. At the foot of an olive tree. The secrets of EVOO

When you arrive in the province of Jaén you find yourself in a huge sea containing 64 million olive trees. To find out about the raw material you just need to go to the countryside and take a close look at an olive tree. He will tell us his story in the first person. There are numerous

There are numerous experiences based on oleotourism





In the city of Jaén you can enjoy authentic gastronomic experiences.

Olive-oil tasting in oil mills in Jaén is an essential part of oleotourism that has become extremely fashionable in recent years.

You cannot speak about Jaén without mentioning EVOO.

Different types of EVOO in an olive-oil tasting.

experiences focussing on oleotourism, with visits to the groves and olive-oil mills, where Jaén manufactures its gold.

This is where we learned the stages necessary to produce it. The best green olives are chosen at the optimum point of maturity. It involves work by the farm labourers and machines who pick the olives without damaging the tree to guarantee a select harvest. If this is done between the end of September and November, the olives contain a high level of polyphenols which are active antioxidants. And preferably when the temperature is lower, when the sun rises. Once at the olive-oil mill they are washed and separated, then pressed,

and the temperature during the process should always be below 21°. The first pressing is what makes EVOO, real olive juice, the best. Finally, the importance of the bottling should not be forgotten, as this maintains the properties of the oil.

#### 4.2. Visit to an olive-oil mill: Aceites Castellar and their product Nobleza del Sur

We were told the secrets of EVOO on numerous occasions during

our travels through Andalusia. In the Aceites Castellar Olive-Oil Mill, for example, where 12 generations have been producing olive oil since 1640. There we visited the family's olive groves and oil mill accompanied by Dolores Sagra, who explained the process for producing olive oils making use of the latest technologies. This passion for olive oil resulted in their organic "Nobleza del Sur" being included in the ranking for the *World's Best Organic Olive Oil Mills* and chosen as one of the best EVOOs in the world.

Then, in the tasting room, the magic happened: on an enormous table full of little red glasses we inhaled the aroma of exquisite EVOOs, slowly savouring each drop. The *Centenario Premium*, deep and Mediterranean; the *Arbequina Premium Monovarietal*, sweet and aromatic; and the *Reserva Familiar*, more personal. Those deep aromas and flavours still remain on the palate.

We encourage you to try a little olive-oil tourism in Jaén, stopping here and there at some of the many oil mills in the province. And of course, to simply enjoy a landscape teeming with olive trees that is currently being considered as a future World Heritage Site. We do not doubt that they will succeed.

**"Nobleza del Sur" was included in the ranking for the World's Best Organic Olive Oil Mills and chosen as one of the best EVOOs in the world**

**Numerous professional chefs serving high-quality cuisine**

## 5 Jaén, the capital of gastronomy

Our tour of monumental Jaén led us to discover an authentic capital of gastronomy. The quality of Andalusian cuisine is well known, something that we were able to verify on these tours through unexpected Andalusia. But we did not expect to find the surprise that awaited us in Jaén. A city that has all the ingredients required to be a capital of gastronomy. The main ingredient: Numerous projects undertaken by passionate professionals who have had the courage to break into the market by offering high-quality, attractive, significantly personal cuisine. So our lunches and dinners in the city of Jaén were authentic gastronomic experiences where each dish was acclaimed, where each ingredient contributed to the flavour, where the skill and imagination of the chefs resulted in magnificent creations.

We encourage you to stroll through the streets of a city that will appeal to your senses with aromas from local products from a not-so-distant sea. You will all this in small pubs and bars serving tapas that will awaken the taste buds; in taverns and restaurants serving

dishes that you will find irresistible. Tapas are a traditional feature of Jaén where each drink is accompanied by its corresponding tapa. And, as a friend of ours said, "If by chance they forget the *tapa*, ask for it because a drink without a *tapa* is no kind of a drink at all".

And how could it be otherwise, these delicacies will be sprinkled with Jaén's best EVOO and another surprise awaits you! The local wines. Because the hills of Jaén that today belong to olive trees were once covered with vineyards. And there are still vintners determined to create high-quality wines. And these you will also find at the tables of this capital of gastronomy.

#### 5.1. Where to eat in Jaén, capital of gastronomy

There is a wide selection of gastronomy in Jaén. As an example, we would like to tell you about two establishments that inaugurated a succession of culinary festivals they extended throughout the province.





Restaurante Mangas Verdes in Jaén.

Restaurante Los Sentidos in Linares.

Delights from the Restaurante Antique in Úbeda.

Cheese and avocado salad at the Restaurante La Tomatina in Alcalá la Real.

In Jaén you can enjoy authentic gastronomic experiences.

**Traditional cuisine with touches of modernity, using both local and exotic raw materials, but always of high quality.**

The first of these is the *Dixtinto* Restaurant, where you can just feel the passion that lies behind this project that has been so successful. The most interesting feature is the freedom enjoyed by the audacious chef Manuel Frutos, whose innovative dishes are so full of imagination. This Gastro-Rice Restaurant is called "*Dixtinto*" for a good reason.

The speciality is rice dishes with endless possibilities. His ideas are so fresh and his creations such a delight that we were completely conquered. This list is just a sample of the creativity of his dishes, made with local products: "red tuna pipirrana" (tomato/onion/pepper based salad), "fried eggs with dehydrated potato", "Andalusian ceviche" (fish dish), "free range chicken violets in pepitoria", "steak tartare with EVOO", etc. Well worth trying!

The second is the *Mangas Verdes* Restaurant, an "atypical gastronomic tavern", named after its creators: Emilio Martín and Francisco Cuadros. Intelligent chefs who have combined tradition and avant-garde, traditional cuisine with touches of modernity, using both local and exotic raw materials, but always of high quality. Here are some of their dishes: "cod confit in EVOO with cream of spinach and chickpeas", "sphere of mascarpone cream cheese, strawberries, mango and pine nut crumble", "sea foie with monkfish liver", "roasted pepper salmorejo" (similar to gazpacho), "artichoke with ajoblanco" (traditional chilled soup), "oxtail ravioli", etc. what could be better!

◆ **Restaurante Dixtinto**  
Calle de la Rioja, 1, Jaén.

◆ **Restaurante Mangas Verdes**  
Bernabé Soriano, 28, Jaén.

## 5.2. Where to eat in the province of Jaén

But this gastronomic route continues throughout the province of Jaén, with stops in Linares, Úbeda, Baños de la Encina, Alcalá la Real etc. where there are also fantastic professional chefs serving very interesting cuisine.

The *Los Sentidos* Restaurant in Linares really deserves its name as the cuisine truly awakens the senses. A cuisine based on a wealth of recipes with influences from different cultures that have passed through the province, and using high quality ingredients like EVOO, Segureño lamb, local garden produce, etc. The chef Juan Pablo Gámez makes splendid use of them to create atypical and creative Andalusian cuisine, with the wine steward Jaime Moya suggesting excellent wines.

In Úbeda we discovered the *Antique* Restaurant, also serving tapas, where they prepare cuisine that is traditional and progressive, serving unique dishes, rich in nuances. EVOO plays a leading role in all dishes, desserts and drinks.

The *Palacio de los Guzmanes* Restaurant in Baños de la Encina, and the *La Tomatina* Restaurant in Alcalá la Real both feature high-quality traditional cuisine. In the latter, local wines from Bodegas *Marcelino Serrano* revealed the excellent quality of Jaén wines.

◆ **Restaurante Palacio de los Guzmanes**  
Calle Trinidad, 4. Baños de la Encina.

◆ **Restaurante Antique**  
Calle Real, 25, Úbeda.

**This gastronomic route continues throughout the province of Jaén**





Marcelino Serrano and his daughter Blanca produce extraordinary wines on land that was once full of vineyards.

Marcelino Serrano's vineyards are located on a hilltop with magnificent views of the Sierra Sur de Jaén.

◆ **Restaurante Los Sentidos.**  
Calle Doctor, 13, Linares.

◆ **Restaurante La Tomatina**  
Calle Iglesia, 2. Santa Ana, Alcalá la Real.

### 5.3. And the surprising wines of Jaén

We did not associate the province of Jaén with wine, and yet what a surprise awaited us with the wines of Jaén! By the end of the 19th century phylloxera had destroyed the vines and left their ancestral space to the olive groves that today populate the territory. However, 3,000 vineyards survived in the province, increasing in the 21st century and maintaining a winemaking tradition that has existed since the 15th century. They can be tasted in a number of interesting wine-cellar throughout the province. In the *Torreperogil* Cooperative, one of the oldest regions producing wines. In *Bodegas Herruzo*, in Lopera, best known for white wines, Córdoba-type Amontillado. In *Casería de Algarjes*, Arbuniel (Sierra Mágina), with excellent red wines. The *Bodega de Tobar* wine-cellar, in Segura de la Sierra, which incorporated "La Molinera", an autochthonous variety of grape from Jaén. *Bodegas Viñas Tintas Capellanas* in Andújar, which produces white wines mainly from vines

found at high altitude. *Bodegas Cefrián*, a new wine-cellar in Jamilena, with handcrafted wines: a red called "Mala Hostia" and a white called "Blasa". And then there is *Bodegas Viña Alcón*, in Pozo de Alcón, and *Viña Cazorla*, in the Sierra de Cazorla. In the southern Sierra, there are the wines of Frailes, the *Bodega Campoameno*, which also uses autochthonous varieties of grapes (Jaén blanca and Jaén negra)

The surprise of wines from Jaén we experienced first hand in *Bodegas Marcelino Serrano*, in Alcalá la Real, located on a hill top view views over the Sierra sur de Jaén. Marcelino and Blanca Serrano have been making extraordinary wines for more than 25 years. In their vineyards they are experimenting with high-quality varieties with the aim of making great signature wines, and they have succeeded! A visit to the vineyards and wine-cellar with Marcelino and a master class in oenology during a tasting with Blanca are just not to be missed. The rest is all down to the wines, you will not be disappointed.

◆ **Bodega Marcelino Serrano.**  
Avenida Iberoamérica, 27, 23680 Alcalá la Real  
<https://marcelinoserrano.com>

In Jaén there are also vineyards and high-quality wines. Vinos Marcelino Serrano, Alcalá la Real.

## 6 Other practical information about unexpected Jaén

### 6.1. How to get there

The province of Jaén is very large, so you have to think carefully about the area you wish to cover in your travels. The best option could be to go to Alcalá la Real, Málaga or Granada. If you go to the city of Jaén or Linares, the best option is perhaps from Madrid by train. The airports in Madrid, Málaga, Seville, Granada and Almería have good connections. Then you can take the train from Madrid to Linares and Jaén. It takes just over four hours.

If you prefer to hire a car, or take your own, it takes about 2 hr 45 min by road from Seville to Jaén. 2 hr 5 min from Málaga, 1 hour from Granada, 2 hr from Córdoba and 35 minutes from Linares. From Jaén it takes 40 minutes to Cástulo; and 1 hour to Alcalá la Real.

### 6.2. Where to stay in unexpected Jaén

◆ **Palacio de los Guzmanes,**  
Calle Trinidad, 4. 23711, Baños de la Encina  
Tel. +34 953 613 075  
[guzmanes@palacioguzmanes.com](mailto:guzmanes@palacioguzmanes.com)  
<https://www.palacioguzmanes.com>

A company dedicated to the documentation, dissemination and management of historical heritage. Guided tours with the archaeologist and researcher Manu Torres Soria. [manutorressoria@gmail.com](mailto:manutorressoria@gmail.com)

◆ **Almazara Aceites Castellar,**  
Avenida Andalucía, 13 / Ctra. Sabiote, s/n. Castellar

### 6.3. Service companies. What to do and other activities

◆ **La Factoría de Historias.**

◆ **Travel back to the time of the Iberians Route**  
<https://www.viajealtiempodelosiberos.com>

◆ **Castles and Battles Route**  
<http://castillosybatallas.com>



**Málaga is a province with many tourist attractions, but unfortunately people only seem to know about the Costa del Sol and the magical, welcoming city of Málaga. But who would believe that Málaga is the fourth most mountainous province in all of Spain! On our travels we discovered the mountains that surround and shelter the beaches and the city. Unbelievable as it may seem, beyond Ronda, the Caminito del Rey, the Costa del Sol and the city of Malaga, the rest of the province is quite unknown.**

“  
Sports in  
the hills and  
mountains  
”



# Malaga

Nestled between Sierra Bermeja, Grazalema and Los Alcornocales, Gaucín is a great spot to explore nature, practise sports and relax.

**A**stunning as it is unknown, this rich and varied nature area is great for sports and active tourism. It boasts charming accommodation and excellent leisure companies. But Malaga is, above all, amazing because of the people who live here and who work to improve the tourist offering.

On this brief but breathtaking tour of the mountains of Malaga, we will travel from west to east. We will start on the Malaga end of Sierra de Grazalema mountains and Los Alcornocales Nature Reserve. Later we will visit Gaucín,

which is perched atop rocky walls facing Sierra Bermeja mountains. Then we will discover Sierra Blanca mountains and, especially, the recently designated Sierra de las Nieves National Park with its Spanish fir forests. After Sierra Blanca and Sierra de las Nieves, which are full of water and peculiar features, we will go to the Axarquía, a drier but rich and tasty region, with agriculture, curious towns and traditions that will never be forgotten. And to finish off the tour, we will go to the easternmost part of Malaga, to the Maro-Cerro cliffs, the last unspoilt natural coastal strip in the province.

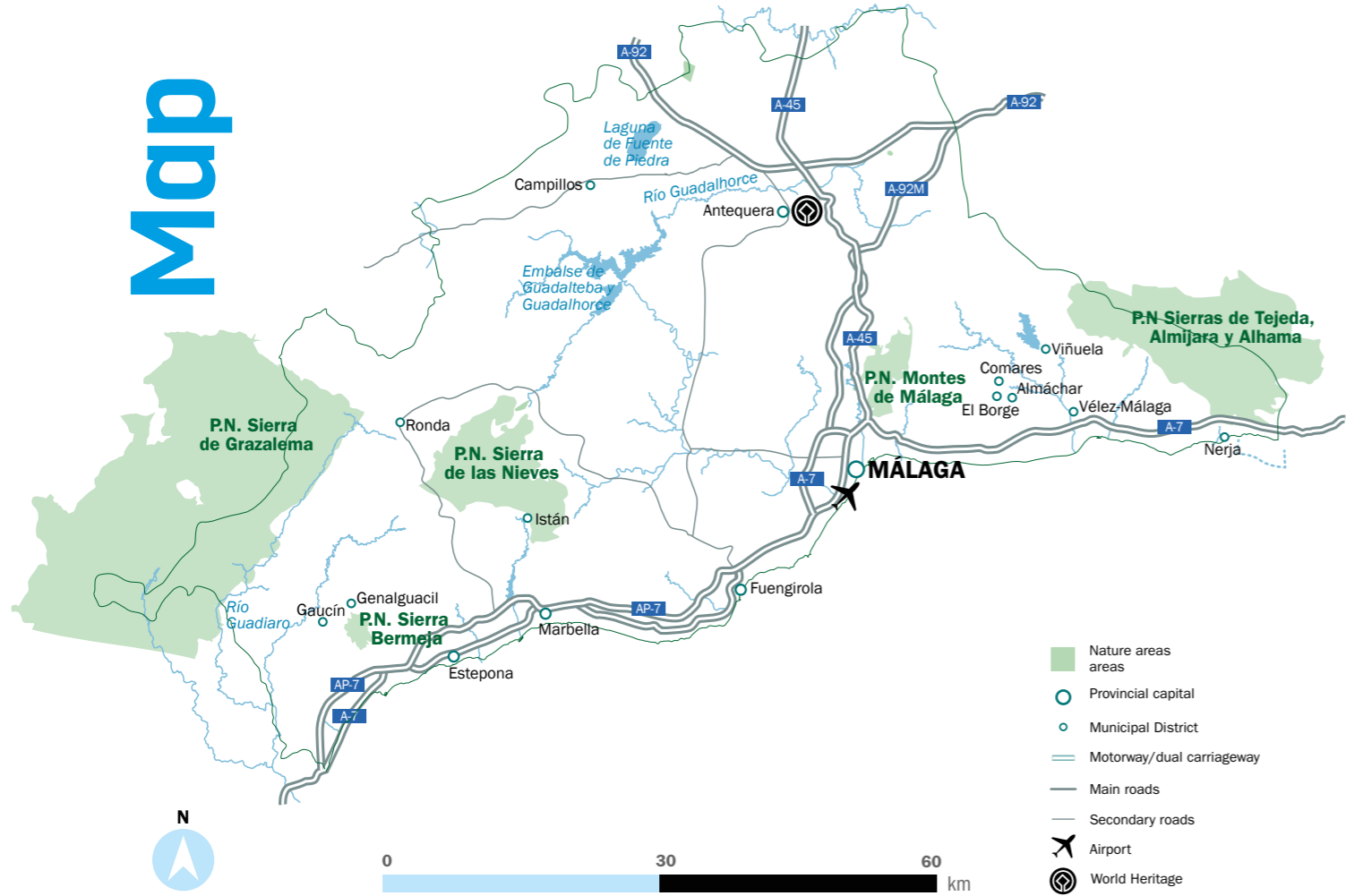
A long journey that takes us through hills and mountain ranges, offering an alternative to mass tourism based on sun and sand. The mountains of Malaga are an opportunity for a different type of economic and social development, which protects areas of incredible beauty, and of great cultural, social and financial value, from rural exodus.

Tourism in the future must promote quality, personalisation and diversification, and this is

already being carried out successfully in the mountains of Malaga. Small projects offering services adapted to the new trends in active tourism, sports, nature and well-being. Malaga can, and should, continue to be a benchmark for tourism thanks to the diversified activities that its geography and its people have to offer.



# Map



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Torre de la Caleta on the cliffs of Maro-Cerro Gordo, guarding the beach with the same name

A statue that reminds us of the festival and tradition of the Verdiales, a peasant musical and social event that is still held in some of the towns of the province. Los Verdiales de Comares are the most popular ones.

Triana seen from the village of La Zorrilla. Towns with rich tropical agriculture.





The moon says goodbye to us as it floats over Sierra Bermeja, as we cross the last bridge of the via ferrata.



An amazing zip line almost at the end of the Gaucín via ferrata. This exhilarating activity can also be done on moonlit nights.

## 1 Sierra Bermeja. Gaucín, Sports in the Hills and Mountains

Gaucín is a beautiful town perched atop one of the edges of the Genil River basin. This area is stunning as several hills and mountain ranges converge here: Serranía de Ronda, Grazalema, Sierra Bermeja and the hills of Los Alcornocales Nature Reserve. Leaning on the foothills of Sierra de Grazalema and Serranía de Ronda, it is facing the reddish hue of Sierra Bermeja.

Gaucín is one of the relatively unknown towns tucked away in the western mountains of Malaga, near Cadiz and Seville. A corner of Andalusian that is quite unexpected, as it is one of the regions with the highest rainfall in Spain! Who would have thought, so down south, so close to Africa! Due to the altitude and the winds, this region of Andalusia has a humid microclimate, with plenty of rain but without losing its markedly Mediterranean character. In some of the valleys we can find traces of

the humid subtropical vegetation that populated the entire Iberian Peninsula millennia ago (see Unexpected Cadiz in this same guide). As well as the area's natural wealth and rich wildlife, we find humid climatic niches, almost unimaginable in these regions. The Spanish fir, an endemic conifer in Europe, is a unique feature in Sierra de las Nieves National Park, and it also withstands the climate in some other areas in this part of Malaga.

Sierra Bermeja, a reddish rocky massif, is the unusual paradigm of the Malaga mountains. An unspoilt and unique mountain range in the world. It is geologically unique, since these mountains are the largest outcrop of peridotite rocks, rich in iron and platinum. In Arabic it was named after the reddish hue of the rock – Yebel Al Jamra. A massif that is over 1500 m high, and an incomparable spot for geology lovers. Its geological features explain how people settled in the area – on the border between the peridotite

rocks and the limestone layer, right where the rivers emerge, as water was essential for humans, livestock and crops.

As in other areas of Cadiz, the predominant vegetation includes cork oaks, gall oaks and wild olive trees in the lower areas, and pine trees in the middle areas. In the higher areas there are remains of old Spanish firs, which are now being recovered. Various biotopes are home to an amazing range of species: birds, bats, mammals, invertebrates, amphibians, fish, reptiles and butterflies. It is an ideal setting for those who love nature tourism, birdwatching and butterflies. Sierra Bermeja is an excellent spot for birdwatching. More than 220 species live or spend long periods of time in the area, during the endless migrations that between Europe and Africa through Andalusia.

### 1.1. Thrilling adventure in Gaucín, via ferrata in the moonlight

Gaucín is an example of a job well done by institutions, private companies and citizens who have worked hard to change the face of inland

tourism in Malaga and Andalusia. It has rich and diverse heritage, with the castle, whitewashed streets and charming accommodation. Gaucín is also an example of how small but highly important tourist niches can revitalise and diversify the economy.

In Gaucín we find one of the 14 via ferratas that have been installed very close to various towns around Malaga, with the aim of bringing this intense and exciting sport closer to the towns of the province. They have certainly achieved their goal! The Cortado de Ronda via ferrata is very popular. The one in Gaucín, which goes around the cliffs overlooking the still largely unknown Sierra Bermeja, is a great example of this project. A modern activity to enjoy nature and quality tourism next to a town that offers accommodation and restaurants.

We were able to discover it in the late afternoon when the rusty red of the Sierra Bermeja became even more intense. We descended on zip lines and Tibetan bridges, hanging on the rock wall. With the void and

The landscape of Sierra Bermeja is a treat for geology lovers

Gaucín has one of the 14 via ferratas installed near various towns in Malaga





A small town of 400 inhabitants has become famous thanks to contemporary art. Since 1994, Genalguacil has been a leading artistic town.

The Spanish fir, an endemic conifer that only exists in Spain and Morocco.

fresh air of the night behind us. Enjoying the silence of the spectacular countryside. And the moon rose little by little, brushing the peaks of Sierra Bermeja. A unique experience that can also be done by night! Under the full moon or starry skies, the via ferrata changes, and we can start to hear the noise of nocturnal animals. It is an experience that we will never forget!

### 1.2. Genalguacil and the Biennial of Contemporary Art

Genalguacil is another beautiful town that is well worth visiting. Less than 10 km from Gaucín as the crow flies, but 22 km along a road that is as beautiful as it is winding, Genalguacil is known as the "museum town". A museum but also modern, as the town council has been organising an international art biennial for over 20 years now. An event that gathers contemporary artists from all around the globe in this small town with a population of just 400. They meet up, share experiences, exhibit their work and leave their imprint on

the town's heritage in the form of contemporary art, which attracts art and nature lovers all year round. Because Genalguacil is set in a preserved and secluded natural environment. Nestled on the hillside and looking out over a valley, the town is made up of Moorish narrow

streets and whitewashed houses, interesting corners and viewpoints, always with the imprint of artists at every step.

### 1.3. Reales de Sierra Bermeja

Reales de Sierra Bermeja Natural Area was another of our amazing discoveries on a trip full of intense experiences. It is a place that sums up everything that the area has to offer. First, Sendero del Pinsapo (Fir Trail) where you can discover these very special trees, with their characteristically thick needles, forming a blue-green carpet that resists the inclemency of the weather. A hardy fir that comes from the ice ages. Second, because you can see the peridotite rocks that make these mountains unique. Broken red rocks at Los Reales peak and at the Salvador Guerrero viewpoint. From these places, right in the middle of Sierra Bermeja, we look out over the Mediterranean Sea and gain a stunning view of the entire Malaga and Cadiz coastline, and we can even spot the Rock of Gibraltar. Sports and learning about the flora and fauna of this area that is so peculiar and so rich, but so unknown outside of Andalusia. Our first steps through the most unexpected Malaga end here.

The landscape of Sierra Bermeja is a treat for geology lovers

Nestled between valleys with dense vegetation, Istán is known as the Spring of the Costa del Sol because of its waterways

The urban area of Istán, white and variegated, in the middle of a rich and luxuriant mountain range.

## 2 Istán and Sierra Blanca

On our journey across the unknown mountains of Malaga, we went from Gaucín and Sierra Bermeja, bordering Estepona, to Sierra Blanca, just north of Marbella. Sierra Blanca is made up mainly of limestone, which is why it is called "White Mountains", and contrasts with the Sierra Alpujata and Bermeja, which we previously visited. Its peaks stand over 1,200 metres in a natural, rich and varied area, oblivious to the densely developed coast.

The old iron mines affected the original vegetation made up of cork oaks and holm oaks, like in other areas of Malaga and Almería. They were replaced with pine forests, chestnut trees and areas of reforestation with endemic Spanish firs, a very interesting feature in the area. Many cork oaks are still exploited, though, and "peeled" every ten years, showing off their deep red trunk. Water is very present in these mountains in the form of streams and pools, for example, in the Istán area. There we travelled along the Verde River and the Charco del Canalón route, always with water to cool off, even at the height

of summer. A route available to everyone, where you can bathe and enjoy nature, but it is also the end of an amazingly fun canyoning route, for those looking for adventure!

Istán is a mountain town, an example of what the other side of Malaga is like. Towns with a way of life that is more connected to nature; economic activity linked to agriculture and many possibilities for a different kind of tourism that is much more sustainable. Exactly what we were looking for when we created this guide! During the hiking route to Verde River, we were able to spot birds such as eagles, goshawks and vultures. Our guides told us about the mountain goats, marten, roe deer, wild boar and rabbits that live round here. Natural wealth and great potential for organic farming and those sectors, both agricultural and tourism, that prioritise quality and added value. There are tourist niches that appreciate personalised, exclusive services and are willing





Istán is an interesting town, with irrigation channels and cork oaks, and the starting point for several routes through Sierra Blanca

to pay to stay overnight and enjoy different activities in all these towns. Possibilities for economic development, but also a remedy for the rural exodus to the coast, something which Malaga and the rest of Andalusia have suffered from greatly.

Istán is known as the Spring of the Costa del Sol, because it is nestled between dense valleys of vegetation and benefits from abundant rivers and streams. A town that has preserved its old structure and can be an excellent base camp to spend a few days in Sierra Blanca and Sierra de las Nieves mountains, without having to travel too far from the coast.

### Recipes made with oranges stand out in its cuisine

Istán also stands out for its culinary specialities, including countless recipes made with oranges, especially on the so-called "Day of the Orange", a day dedicated to this fruit. Sweet corn is a very typical product in the area, and is used in dishes such as sweet corn soup. Fennel stew, "gazpachuelo" (a kind of fish

broth) and "migas" (fried breadcrumbs) are also highly recommended, as well as the typical local sweets.

Agriculture would not be possible without the irrigation channels built by the Moors, which are the most modest and important monument in the town. A feat of engineering that has brought about wealth and development. The fountain and the washhouse of El Chorro are a refreshing surprise when we arrive at the town, thirsty after our walk.

Some of the monuments include the 16th century Church of San Miguel and the Escalante Tower, which reminds us of the fights and confrontations that took place in the early modern period, as the area provided the backdrop for the civil war between Moors and Christians. Today, however, peace reigns in Istán and Sierra Blanca. And this peace, which has managed to integrate the past and look towards the future, is what we take away from this area as a souvenir. Until we come again, of course.

## 3 Sierra de las Nieves, a New National Park

We fell in love with the sixteenth Spanish National Park when we came on one of our first trips. We discovered it when we took the road that crosses it, through El Burgo and Yunquera, from Malaga to Ronda. We were surprised by the beauty of its limestone landscape, its peaks, viewpoints, dense forests, charming villages, and calm atmosphere. It surprised us that it was so unknown, despite being so close to the Costa del Sol, Malaga city and Ronda. Then we discovered the Spanish fir, the conifer that makes the area unique and allows it to be a National Park in its own right. The protection of natural areas is essential if we want to preserve the landscape, nature and wildlife, but, above all, if we want it to be appreciated and loved.

The Sierra de las Nieves Park covers more than 20,000 hectares, spread out over several municipalities. It has peaks that reach almost 2,000 metres, such as Torrecilla and, more importantly, it has one of the few Spanish fir forests (*Abies pinsapo*) in all the world. The Spanish fir forests of Sierra de las Nieves spread out over more than 2,000 hectares and, together with those of Sierra Bermeja and Grazalema, they make up the last refuge of a unique species the world, closely related to the varieties of the Moroccan Rif: *Abies maroccana* and *Abies tazaotana*.

If the Spanish fir is a very unique species, the mountain gall oak is not far behind, as it is proof of a humid and varied south. Maple trees, yew trees, holm oaks, rowan trees decorate the landscape, between areas of rock that emerge

Charco de El Canalón on our route through Sierra Blanca and Istán. A great place to take a dip!







This is how the cork is harvested in Sierra Blanca

dry, rugged and magnificent. Two of the most special tree specimens we have to mention are the Pinsapo de Las Escaleretas and the Castaño Santo, which are 800-1,000 years old.

As for wildlife, this area is full of birds. Because they either live here or come back season after season. Golden eagles and griffon vultures are the largest, but dozens of other species also live here.

The survival of the Spanish fir in these mountains is proof of its isolation and character. The trees used to be a hiding place for those wanting to escape social control over the

centuries: Mozarabs, Moriscos, and, later on, bandits. Snow was extracted from the highest mountains and stored in dug-out wells, like natural refrigerators. That is where the name of Sierra de las Nieves ("Snow Mountains") came from. This mountain range is a spectacular, rugged territory, full of

Recipes made with oranges stand out in Istán's cuisine.

great panoramic views to photograph and enjoy calmly, at your own pace.

Sierra de las Nieves has chosen to be green and promote sustainable development that does not alter its natural wealth. There are no large hotels, nor are they necessary, but there is a good network of quality tourist accommodation – small establishments where it is easier to meet the locals. Hiking and action sports are some of the activities to choose from, according to our interests, complemented by delicious cuisine. The area is full of options for wellness, slow and adventure tourism, as well as sports, where fun and adventure is guaranteed.

We hope that the fact that the area has been designated a National Park will further boost this type of economic and tourist development. The challenges are great since the Spanish fir is endangered due to climate change and the pressures of urban development.

### 3.1. Routes and Trails in the National Park

One of the main routes we would like to highlight is Quejigales-Torrecilla, which goes through gall-oak groves and ends in Pico de Torrecilla, which stands at over 1,900 metres.

Another especially beautiful route is Mirador Ceballos and Tajo de la Caña, which penetrates into the largest Spanish fir forest on the planet. The view from Tajo (precipice) of La Caña are breathtaking.

The villages of Sierra de las Nieves are also special because of their curious celebrations: Los Polvos and La Cohetá in Tolox; Rondeles in Casarabonela; The Soup of the Seven Branches; the Burning of Judas in El Burgo; and Corpus Christi in Yunquera.



## 4 La Axarquía, the Most Diverse and Surprising Malaga

Even the name of La Axarquía is attractive. An unexpected name for travellers, a strong and curious name that can transport us to an unknown area that every traveller wishes to discover. A name that rolls off your tongue and a region in Malaga that will exceed all your expectations when you come to visit it. Because the Axarquía is not just an exotic-sounding name – it is a lively region that has something for everyone. Diverse landscapes with bare and dry mountains, humid and fruitful valleys, historical towns and popular stories. A region that has sea, mountains and valleys, fresh air, dry heat and the scent of the sea. The name comes from the Arabic šarqíyya and the old Castilian xarquía / jarquía. It means "eastern" and the pronunciation sounds like "Aharquía", as the "x" is pronounced like in old Castilian, like the Spanish pronunciation of México or Don Quixote.

The beautiful Nerja, Balcón de Europa and Frigiliana are the areas that are usually visited by tourists in the Axarquía. But beyond its beautiful coastline and the eponymous caves, there is

so much more to be discovered. The Axarquía is a triangle of land in the east of Malaga, bordering the province of Granada, a confluence of valleys and mountains that descend from the high peaks to the sea. La Maroma, at 2,100 m, which borders the province of Granada and, in the heart of the valley, La Viñuela reservoir, make up a region around which many charming towns are located, such as El Borge, Almáchar, Alfarnate, Alfarnatejo, Cómpeeta, Periana and Comares. The Axarquía is a region that surprises visitors as it has so many things to offer. Hiking, sports and excitement, culture, stunning heritage and monuments, and delicious gastronomy.

### 4.1. Comares, hanging town, and the longest zip line in Spain

Comares is another surprising town in the Axarquía. It is situated at 750 metres above sea level, which is why it is called "The Balcony of the Costa del Sol". A town with a

La Aldea de La Zorrilla is a special place, surrounded by mango and avocado trees. In the background we can spot Triana and the valley of the Benargamosa stream with the majestic peak of La Maroma, which exceeds 2,000 m in the province of Granada.

Hiking, sport and adventure, culture, heritage and gastronomic enjoyment





long history and ancient prestige. It was one of the centres of power in the area during Moorish times, but it may have been founded by the Greeks as early as the 7th century BC. Converted into a marquisate after the Castilian conquest, a strategic location for centuries, it turned into an agrarian town based on olive groves and almond trees. Now, in the 21st century, it is becoming a tourist attraction in the Axarquía.

The views across the entire region are undoubtedly its best feature. We recommend exploring the town to enjoy the different viewpoints. The remains of the old castle/citadel are one of our favourites. The Town Hall square, with its cafés and views over the valley, is also spectacular. From there you can go up to the Church of Nuestra Señora de la Encarnación and continue to the old castle, from where you can see the entire town. This curious church is in the Mudejar style (16th century), and inside we find the Sagrario chapel, with its rococo plasterwork dome.

We were also able to savour those tasty dishes that travellers can look forward to at each stop, such as "gazpachuelo", "migas" and local stew. The vineyard has been recovered and continues to produce excellent sweet wines and table grapes that can even be bought from the houses in the town.

However, there is so much more to be discovered. The rugged terrain, as well as magnificent views, offers many opportunities to carry out fun activities. Comares has decided to foster the kind of innovative and niche tourism that this guide is all about, that we have worked hard to discover and promote. And one of its best attractions is... the longest zip line with natural anchors in Spain!

Castle and bastion of Comares, the balcony of the Axarquía

The Verdiales are a peasant musical and social expression, very popular in places like Comares.

Perched on a crag, Comares is a beautiful and spectacular town

It is 400 metres long and goes from the town of Comares to a hill opposite. A crazy, but completely safe, ride that will make your head spin, across a huge ravine. We felt like we were flying over the void! This thrilling experience is over in less than half a minute and has become a popular attraction in Comares, although only a few of the locals have dared to try it! Comares is gradually becoming known for adventure sports, active tourism experiences, wonderful gastronomy, and the culture, peace and calm of the Axarquía. Another multi-destination that we loved.

#### 4.2. The Raisin Route

The Raisin Route is another of those great unexpected surprises that we discovered on our travels through Andalusia. It was all thanks to Cipriano Ramos from Oletrips, a small company that develops new tourist niches. Agricultural customs and traditions become guided tours for small groups, in unusual places, guaranteeing unique experiences. Because travellers are almost always interested in what the locals find normal, boring or banal, and it turns out that these things are quite the opposite.

The drying of the Muscat raisin for consumption, especially at Christmas, is an economic activity that is disappearing. In order to preserve it, this new tourism values the work of the farmers who still carry it out. It is a tough job, but it produces the delicacy called Malaga raisin. We actually visited this area during the raisin season and we were lucky enough to discover the raisin dryers of the Moclinejo area.

For many decades, the Muscat raisin from Malaga was one of the province's best products. Nowadays, changes in gastronomic customs and the huge offer and competition from other countries have made people value price over quality. However, the tradition lives on thanks to about two thousand families who produce this exquisite morsel. The Muscat raisin is grown on farms that are off the beaten track, harvested by hand and left to dry on "paseros" (drying floors). These are slopes where the Mediterranean sun adequately gets rid of the excess water, achieving an ideal ripening point, preserving the bloom, which is the yeast found on the grape skin. Then the bunches are cut with a small pair of scissors. Each one of the raisins is cut off. Hence the high price of a quality raisin: it is large, dark purple, almost black, hand-picked. A unique product that also reminds us of a farming culture, long neglected but increasingly appreciated.

Malaga raisins are unique because of their quality and the way they are dried and selected

Learning how to cut raisins

This is what a traditional drying floor looks like







The Raisin Route goes through several towns in the Axarquía that still produce real Malaga raisins

The Raisin Route is an activity that must be done in September and October, the months of the harvest and the drying of the Muscat grapes. At the end of the summer, when it gets cooler and the vines turn golden – this is when the bunches of plump Muscat grapes are picked, dried and cut. Only then can you fully enjoy the flavours, aromas and traditions – the kinds that are worth preserving. Sunny weather that is warm, but not scorching, when mangoes and other tropical fruits are also ready to be eaten, close to the vineyards and drying floors.

The towns where this activity is still carried out are mainly El Borge and Almachar, but also in Iznate, Cómpea, Sayalonga, Moclinejo, Benagalbón, Cútar and Comares. This is heroic viticulture – vines clinging onto steep slopes, where machinery cannot operate. The farmhouses where the raisins are dried have open slopes, the drying floors, where the grapes remain until they reach the optimal degree of drying. Dirt roads, trails along the ridges of the hills, with mountains to one side, valleys below and the salty sea air floating over. We were able to cross those ridges of hills cultivated against the wind and against the sun.

Suddenly, a lonely house emerged among vineyards and crops, hidden and quiet. A place where Manuel, Mari and their children continue to spend the last of the summer earning some money and enjoying the privilege of watching the sun rise; a place with much more charm than a five-star hotel. With the Malaga raisin, with the wisdom and work of these farmers, new possibilities

**The Raisin Route must be done in September and October, the months when Muscat grapes are harvested and dried**

arise for a different kind of tourism, for different places to stay, for old sensations that we have forgotten but that we should recover and appreciate.

We chatted with Mari and Manuel, of course; we learned more about their difficult trade, but also about how much this place gives them and how they do this work with passion. In the end, we were able to cut some raisins, with less skill and speed than them, but with the same care and great interest. Then we tasted them under the sun, on a day that still had many surprises in store for us. We left them to finish cutting the raisins, which will rest on the drying floors in the sun and turn into delicious raisins after two weeks. We reminisced about Christmas as children in the humid and misty north, and we remembered why we loved plump Muscat raisins so much, tasty raisins full of this Andalusian sun that was still unknown to us.

#### 4.3. Almachar and El Borge, towns in the Axarquía

There are many towns in the heart of the Axarquía, but we were able to spend quite a lot of time in two of them. They are close to each other and are both connected to the Raisin Route. Almachar, a whitewashed town like most of the towns in Andalusia, with hills and narrow streets, remains of the Moorish urban development from the Al-Andalus era. It nestles in a beautiful spot, creeping up the hill of the Vallejo peak, between 300 and 600 metres high.

In Almachar we discovered tasty and surprising vermouths that make the most of the good Moscatel wine grapes of the area, as well as the local herbs that give this drink a unique character. They did not reveal the secret recipe, of course, and since it is not yet sold outside the province, you will have to go to Almachar to taste them. A good excuse to visit the Raisin Museum – a small ethnographic museum that celebrates life in the Malaga countryside so that this recent past is not forgotten. The Mudejar Tower attached to the 16th century church is another of its attractions.



El Borge, the neighbouring town, looks very similar, but has some special features. One of these are the fountains, which shows the importance of water in this region and its relative abundance due to the aquifers in the mountains. Another feature of El Borge is the significant presence of banditry. Although the phenomenon was common to many mountainous areas of Andalusia, El Borge develops tourism linked to this socioeconomic phenomenon of the 18th and 19th centuries. After the Museum of Banditry in Ronda closed down, El Borge bought the collection made up of 1,300 objects, to be exhibited in the town. The town already had another museum, Posada del Bandolero El Bizco. Legend has it that this bandit ("El Bizco") used to visit this inn. This place is almost a must, even if it is just to enjoy the local recipes: "ajoblanco", stews, "gaspachuelo", kid with garlic, etc.

Finally, another interesting tradition is El Borge's Trabucozo Festival. A curious and archaic way of declaring your love and proposing to your girlfriend: by shooting a blunderbuss ("trabuco"). The festival lives on, but don't worry – the blunderbusses are only loaded with gunpowder. It was always about declaring love, not war!

#### 4.4. La Viñuela and the reservoir

La Viñuela reservoir was built in 1989 and nowadays it supplies water to a large part of the population and crops in the Axarquía. It has also become a tourist attraction and it has a special place to stay and a restaurant that is worth visiting. The reservoir offers an ideal base camp if we are looking for strategically located, quality accommodation. The reservoir covers an area of 565 hectares and,

The Church of Almachar, roofs and whitewashed walls in the Axarquía

Raisin Museum in Almachar, where the history of this trade that is typical of the province of Malaga is appreciated and recognised

The town of El Borge and the Church of El Rosario

Plaza de la Constitución and Church of El Rosario in El Borge

**El Borge and Almachar are the main towns on the Raisin Route**





La Viñuela reservoir, another unexpected surprise in the Axarquía



Nudist beach of Catarrián and the border of the province of Granada

when the water level is high, you can practise water sports, like kayaking.

La Viñuela Hotel overlooks the reservoir. It is a haven of peace, with all the services and quality you need for a perfect holiday. La Viñuela is calm, but there are lots of activities you can do! We recommend doing the route that goes round the reservoir. This path is on an old railway line that fell into disuse in 1960. On the way you can enjoy the Mediterranean countryside, scrubland and holm oaks, and you might spot rabbits or partridges running free. Halfway round there is a reservoir supply channel from some of the tributaries, called "Pocapaja Tunnel". However, one of the most interesting places is the

ruins of Cerro de la Capellanía, between Periana and La Viñuela. An area that has been inhabited since the third millennium BC, with remains from the Neolithic to the Romanisation. There are many active tourism options available as the route can be covered on foot, by bike or on horseback.

Lastly, after all these sports and activities, you can enjoy local specialities, which include olive oil and local wine, game meat and kid. The Pantano Restaurant is very close by and it offers high quality local cuisine, so we can take home the memory of Andalusian food: fried kid, vegetable and legume stews, the pot with "pringá", tomato soup and "gaspachuelo" (cold garlic soup, oil, egg white and mayonnaise and the local "migás" that are made with orange and pomegranate!).

**At the ruins of Cerro de la Capellanía, between Periana and La Viñuela, we can find remains that date back to the Neolithic period, right up to the Romanisation**

#### 4.5. Cliffs of Maro-Cerro Gordo

The cliffs, coves and mountains of Maro-Cerro Gordo are not an immense nature area, but they are still surprising, spectacular and unexpected. It is an area of great natural value as it is the last undeveloped stretch of coastline in the province of Malaga, at least on its eastern side. Bordering the province of Granada, Maro-Cerro Gordo is a 12-kilometre-long nature area that goes one mile into the sea, limited by the N-340 highway.

This strip of the Andalusian coast is very important because of its ecological and geological value and its diversity.

As well as holm oaks, there are junipers, mastic trees, carob trees and fan palms (the

only European palm species). The Maro area contains two endemic Spanish plants: white rosemary and "siempreviva", the everlasting flower of Malaga, as well as species that only exist in the Mediterranean basin, such as Balearic boxwood and spike thorn.

The cliffs are 75 metres high and have the sea at their feet, creating cracks and coves where vultures and other birds nest. This makes Maro-Cerro Gordo a great spot for birdwatching.

These are the last mountains of Sierra de Almijara – the end of our journey through all these mountains, which are the foundations of the province of Malaga.

**Maro-Cerro Gordo has great ecological and geological value and diversity**





Maro, a nature area, a delight for walkers and hikers who can combine fairly accessible walks with dips in the coves and beaches here. For example, the nudist beach of Cantarriján, in the cove of La Caleta, Cañuelo or Torre del Pino. The coastal and underwater flora is also very rich, making diving a very attractive activity due to the abundance of corals, sponges, fish, crustaceans and molluscs.

We also find watchtowers such as La Caleta and Cerro Gordo, the remains of the surveillance system used by Moors and Castilians to watch for pirates. The nature area is well preserved and unspoilt, with wonderful views of the Axarquía mountains, Málaga coast and Granada's Costa Tropical. And on clear days you can even spot the African coast. From the nearby town of Maro, in the district of Nerja, there are many viewpoints along the road where you can stop. Then you have to take the road to Cerro Gordo and, from there, there are several trails that connect the coves and follow the coast. A discovery to be preserved.

Discovering this coastline that goes right up to Nerja has been one of the highlights of our trip.

The Maro-Cerro Gordo cliffs mark the boundary of the province.



The mango has adapted to the Axarquía incredibly well. It is very tasty and healthy.

Mango trees in the Axarquía, near Triana

## 5 Unexpected amongst the Unexpected: Tropical Flavours. Axarquía, Tropical Land

We did not expect to find in the Axarquía these flavours that reminded us of other places. Tropical fruits that are much more common in Brazil, Mexico, the Gulf of Guinea and Thailand. But it is astonishing to see that a few kilometres from the city of Málaga there are vast fields of mango trees, avocados, custard apples, lychees, star fruit, medlars, pomegranates, papayas, kumquats, prickly pears, etc. Pomegranate trees and prickly pears have been common in Andalusia since the arrival of the Moors and the discovery of America, but avocados, mangoes and lychees are much more recent. Coming from Asia, America or Africa, these products are here to stay, for economic reasons, due to the suitable climate, and to revitalise Málaga's countryside and agriculture. The high value of these fruits benefits, for now, retail production and offers new possibilities to local farmers.

The Axarquía and the neighbouring Costa Tropical in Granada are areas where these exotic fruits are now being grown successfully. We spotted many of these fields next to the roads and paths. We ventured into some of them during our visit to the Raisin Route and when we passed through the Vélez-Málaga area. They also abound around La Zorrilla, a curious district of

Triana where many foreigners settled in search of a quiet and peaceful place.

Vélez-Málaga is undoubtedly the main production centre, but the entire region grows these tasty and profitable fruits. Demand in Europe for tropical products is very high and the climatic conditions of the Axarquía allow excellent ripening. In addition, many of the producers are organic, so their avocados or mangoes are even more profitable. Other tropical crops that are making their way into the region are guavas, passion fruit, pitangas and lucumas, but to a lesser extent. If you visit Vélez-Málaga, Algarrobo, Torrox, Nerja and the central area of Axarquía through Triana or La Viñuela, for example, you will be able to discover the fields of tropical fruits. Savour them and make sure you take lots of photos, especially at the end of summer and in autumn, when a lot of the fruit is already ripe and about to be harvested.

An attraction in the area that has already been integrated into tourist and gastronomic routes, and that offers many possibilities to discover the Axarquía in another way.

The climate in the Axarquía is suitable for tropical fruit





View of the reservoir from Hotel La Viñuela



Avocados, figs, mangoes... tropical flavours change the gastronomy of Malaga. Comares



Tropical salad with avocado and mango from the Axarquía. Simply delicious. (La Viñuela)

Fried aubergines with honey are very popular throughout Andalusia. We tried some and they were simply delicious. (Istán)



# 6 Practical information about Unexpected Malaga

## 6.1. How to get there

There were good transport links on our trip through the province of Malaga. All the areas we have described are not too far from Malaga city. Malaga has excellent air connections with all of Europe; by train with Madrid, Seville, Granada and Cordoba; and by road with the rest of Andalusia and Spain.

The roads in Andalusia are generally in very good condition. The traffic is not too dense or complicated, with the exception of Malaga city and the Costa del Sol, where there can be traffic jams at weekends and during the holidays. The mountain roads are very beautiful and make for a very interesting trip. The only condition is that you should have your own vehicle or rent one if you want to enjoy all the areas we have visited.

Here are the distances and how long you need to get to each point from the city by road. Malaga - Gaucín / Sierra Bermeja: 125 km 1 h 40 min; Malaga - Sierra Blanca / Istán: 80 km 1 h 15 min; Malaga - Sierra de las Nieves / Yunquera: 60 km 1 h; Malaga-Axarquía: 35 km and 1 h to Comares; 48 km and 50 min to La Viñuela; 66 km 1 h to the Cliffs of Maro.

## 6.2. Where to stay

- ◆ **Hotel la Fructuosa, Gaucín**  
A small, top quality rural hotel. Rooms with charm and friendly service.  
Calle de Luis de Armiñán, Calle Convento, 67  
29480 Gaucín  
Tel. 617 69 27 84  
daniel.beauvois@me.com

reservoir. With spa, swimming pools, gardens and rooms adapted for business meetings and congresses.  
Carretera Vélez-Málaga a Alhama  
29712 La Viñuela  
Tel. 952 519 193  
www.hotelvinuela.com

- ◆ **B bou Hotel La Viñuela & Spa**  
A very special hotel that you would not expect to find in the heart of the Axarquía - a high quality stay that combines rest, enjoyment and activity next to the

## 6.3. Where to eat

- ◆ **Restaurante El Ático, Gaucín**  
Calle Barrio Alto, s/n.  
T. 637 077 017

### ◆ Bar Troyano, Istán

La Plaza, 3, 29611 Istán, Malaga  
Mobile: +34 617 338 669  
www.troyanoistan.com

### ◆ La Atalaya Hotel Restaurant, Comares

Calle las Encinillas, 7, 29195 Comares, Malaga  
Tel.: +34 952 50 92 08  
http://hotelrestaurantatalaya.blogspot.com

### ◆ El Borge, Posada Del Bandolero Hotel Restaurant

Calle la Peseta, 1  
29718 El Borge, Malaga

### ◆ El Pantano en La Viñuela Restaurant

A-356 Road next to Embalse la Viñuela Campsite  
Tel. 952 554 561  
http://elpantanorestaurant.blogspot.com/

### ◆ B bou La Viñuela & Spa Hotel Restaurant

Carretera Vélez-Málaga a Alhama  
29712 La Viñuela  
Tel: 952 519 193  
www.hotelvinuela.com

## 6.4. Service Companies. What to do and other activities. Transport and Guide

### ◆ Oletrips - small groups, great experiences

Cipriano Ramos and María Tomé, two exemplary young entrepreneurs who unlock the secrets of the Axarquía and all of Andalusia. Small groups, personalised and friendly service.  
Tel. +34 616 59 85 15  
info@oletrips.es  
www.oletrips.es

### ◆ I'M Experience.

Trinidad Blanco runs a small company of quality and personalised tourist services in Benalmádena. They cover all of Andalusia.

info@imexperience.xyz

https://www.imexperience.xyz

### ◆ Nature Tours Andalucía.

Transport and guided tours throughout Andalusia. Personalised services to travel round the province. Alfredo Carrasco, Tel. 606 61 81 39.

### ◆ Rafa Natura, hiking in Andalusia.

Rafael Flores, guide specialising in nature. A small company full of passion and knowledge.  
Tel. 637 849 665  
info@rfnatura.es  
https://www.rfnatura.es

### ◆ Pangea Turismo Activo,

Activities in nature, extreme sports and much more. Youth and professionalism to discover the less common Malaga.  
C/ Posada de las Ánimas, 5  
Ronda 29400  
Tel. 630 562 705  
info@pangeacentral.com

### ◆ Local experiences and adventures.

As its name suggests, adventure and sport in local natural surroundings.  
Tel. +34 675 647 355  
info@localexperiences.es  
http://localexperiences.es

### ◆ Vive Aventura.

Zip lines, canyoning, experiences in the great outdoors.  
Tel.: 697 218 289  
viveaventuraleo@gmail.com  
https://viveaventura.es



**The north of Seville is arguably the most unknown area of the province. The natural heritage of Seville's part of Sierra Morena offers visitors a haven of peace, away from mass tourism and the hustle and bustle of big cities. Exploring the winding paths that cross these hills is a great way to get away from it all, to de-stress and enjoy the great outdoors. There are white towns scattered all over the region of Sierra Norte de Sevilla.**

“  
**Sierra  
Morena in  
Seville**  
”



Panoramic view of the charming town of Guadalcanal

The following towns are part of this beautiful landscape: Alanís de la Sierra, Almadén de la Plata, Cazalla de la Sierra, Constantina, El Pedroso, El Real de la Jara, El Ronquillo, Guadalcanal, La Puebla de los Infantes, Las Navas de la Concepción and San Nicolás del Puerto.

The lush landscape offers gorgeous views and is full of cork oak and holm oak groves. For those who love hiking, there are endless trails to be explored on foot, and there are also many routes suitable for cycling. The most popular one is the Greenway that goes from the area surrounding Cazalla de la Sierra and Constantina to Cerro del Hierro, and crosses the refreshing landscape of Huéznar Waterfalls near San Nicolás del Puerto.

In addition, the pleasant Mediterranean climate of the interior accompanies travellers all year round. Summers can be hot, but nights are cool and invite you to observe one of the greatest treasures of this land – the canopy of stars of the Sevillian Sierra Morena. Thanks to the low light pollution of the small towns, we are able to enjoy a dark sky full of twinkling stars, if the weather is fine. Definitely a treat for those who love astrophotography.

Sierra Norte de Sevilla Nature Reserve is a real gem. Its natural beauty, as well as its charming towns, will make visitors fall in love with it as they explore its gentle hills. Its highest point, the viewpoint of La Capitana in the Sierra del Viento, near the town of Guadalcanal, does not exceed 1,000 m in height, but it still offers

a wonderful view of this area, the natural border between Extremadura and Andalusia.

Designated a UNESCO Global Geopark in 2015 and added to the European Geoparks Network in 2011, Sierra Norte de Sevilla Nature Reserve is a great place to develop geological tourism. And if we add the appeal of its mining past, which enables to contextualise the visit to mines such as Cerro del Hierro and Villanueva del Río and Minas on the fringes of the Sierra, travellers will find more than enough reasons to believe that there is always more to be discovered.

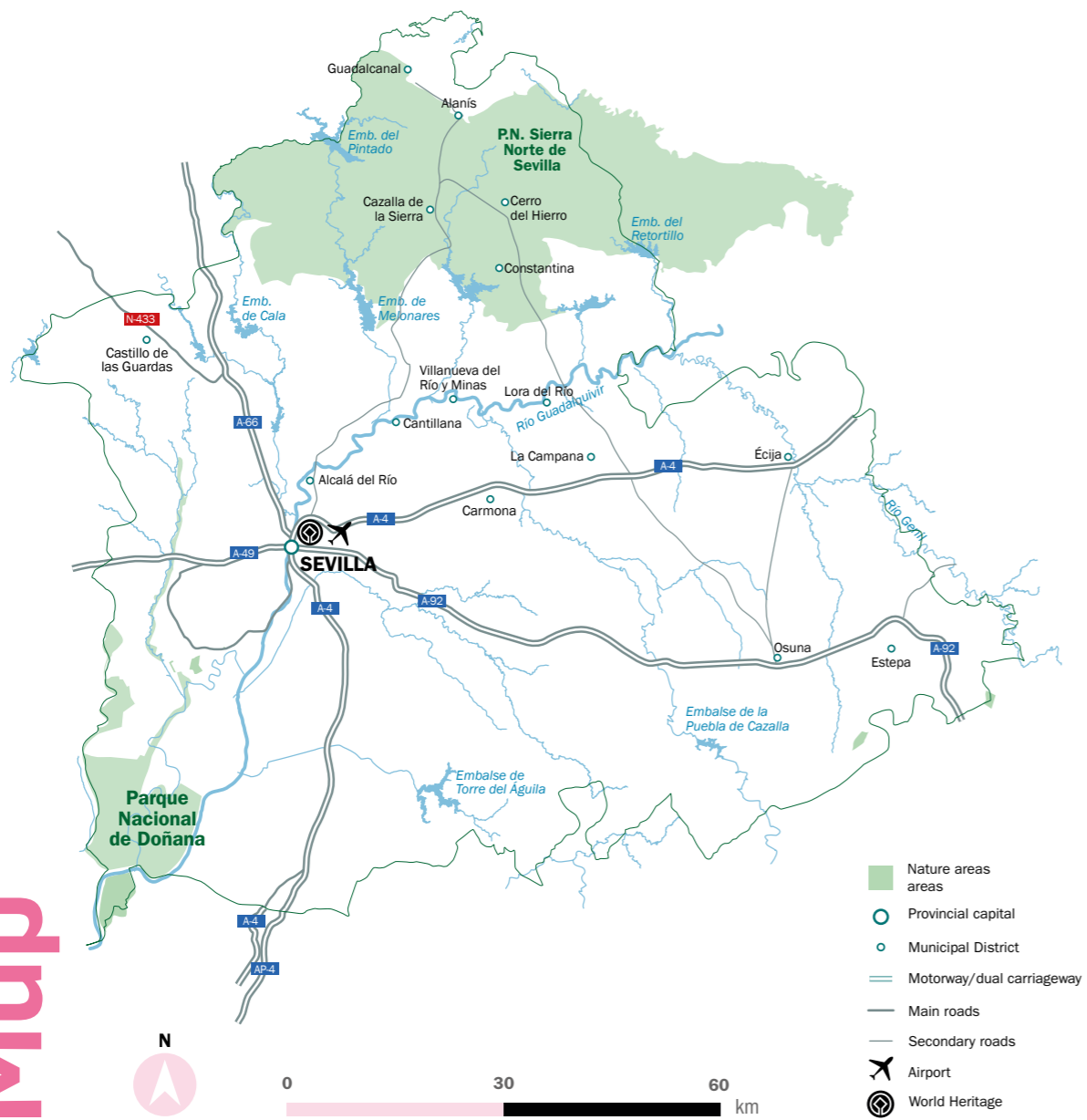
Sierra Norte also offers a vast range of options to enjoy active tourism. In addition to hiking and mountain biking, recreational fishing can be carried out at El Pintado and José Torán reservoirs, as well as kayaking and other nature tourism activities.

It is also a good spot for ornithological tourism, as we can see a wide variety of species in the area, both endemic and those that migrate year after year and find shelter in these hills.

Lastly, the gastronomy of Sierra Norte de Sevilla offers a wide variety of local products. Some of these products include mushrooms, organic fruit and vegetables, the acorn-fed Iberian ham and excellent game meats which can be tasted in top-quality restaurants. And we must not forget to mention the wonderful historic wines we can find in this area.



# Map



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Shrine of Nuestra Señora de las Angustias. Alanís

Alanís Castle

The Cartuja Monastery is a mystical setting for reflection and beauty.





View from La Capitana viewpoint

## Tourism of the past, present and future. Recovery and innovation

The recovery of the past is used both to promote tourism in the present and to invest in the future. Centuries and centuries of history have cemented traditions and customs in Sierra Norte de Sevilla, and they have also favoured the emergence of tourist spots that had not been exploited until now. All this tangible and intangible heritage is going to promote Sierra Norte de Sevilla, and we press on towards the future without forgetting the path that we have already travelled.

### 1.1. Nature, owner of the mountains

This mountain range in Seville is flanked by two other beautiful mountainous areas: Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche in Huelva to the west, and Sierra de Hornachuelos Nature Reserve in the province of Córdoba to the east. In this part of the Sierra Morena there are timid peaks that slightly exceed 1,000 m. It seems that these undulations want to go unnoticed, shrinking their "necks",

afraid to show the beauty of their viewpoints, like the beautiful balcony of La Capitana in Guadalcanal.

Even the rivers have a modest flow, making their way south towards the River Guadalquivir. However, its hydrographic network is not less important just because it is moderate, as it is essential to the landscape of this nature reserve. Three main rivers refresh the area: Rivera del Huéznar, Viar River to the west and Retortillo.

Here the silence of the mountains is not interrupted by the murmur of traffic or human voices. All you can hear is birds of prey shrieking across the sky, or the guttural cry of the bellowing of the deer, which restores the connection with nature.

In the extensive meadows of holm oaks and cork oaks – which cover a third of the nature reserve – you hear pigs, cows, sheep and goats trotting around the pastures, or wild boars and deer who roam freely. The sky is dominated by

Iberian imperial, golden and Bonelli's eagles; black and griffon vultures; black storks; eagle owls, scops owls, little owls and tawny owls.

Humans arrived much later on to leave their imprint, as we can see from the prehistoric remains of Almadén de la Plata. Iberians, Romans, Arabs and Visigoths each left their historical, artistic and religious legacy with cities, castles, churches and shrines.

### 1.2. Astrophotography. Photographing the stars in an unpolluted sky

The sky in the northern region of Andalusia is the perfect setting to observe the stars, and it delights astronomers, astrophotographers and the general public, as they are captivated by the twinkling beauty of the luminous stars that dazzle Sierra Morena. Several years ago, towns such as Cazalla de la Sierra and Alanís were awarded the "Starlight Tourist Destination" certification by the Starlight Foundation, which is supported by UNESCO. This certification guarantees the conditions of good visibility and quality of the sky for stargazing.

Thus, in the wonderful and privileged environment of northern Andalusia, surrounded by the noise of nature and far from the light pollution of the big cities, the stars shine in all their splendour for curious eyes that are searching for a welcoming display. A starlit sky embraces us and the constellations are clearly marked across one of the most extensive starlight reserves in the Andalusian mountain range.

When the dark of night falls upon Sierra Norte de Sevilla and the stars light up brilliantly, just look up at the sky, be amazed and enjoy the little things in life.

As part of the tourist potential of this area, we have to add astrotourism and astrophotography. There are many tourist companies and hotels that offer these experiences. If you want to fully enjoy a starry night in Sierra Morena, we recommend a guided tour. Qualified guides monitor the weather conditions and know the best stargazing spots.

The possibilities are endless and you can do an astronomy workshop, which teaches basic notions of astronomy in situ, as well as how to recognise different constellations and stars with the naked eye and with a telescope. We can also complement our stargazing adventures with other activities such as a romantic dinner and a glass of cava under the stars. It is definitely a great plan for couples, but also for families.

Large uninhabited areas in total darkness allow for clear and fantastic viewing, ideal for taking spectacular pictures. This is why the Andalusian Sierra Morena is the ideal setting for astrophotography.

If you want to go without a guide, we recommend the viewpoint of La Capitana, the highest point in Seville, and Cerro del Hierro, a spectacular place by day or by night.

### 1.3. Monastery and Guesthouse of La Cartuja de Cazalla. Poetry in a enchanting setting

Just 5 kilometres from Cazalla de la Sierra, the Monastery and Guesthouse of La Cartuja de Cazalla is an enchanting place that invites you to reflect and reconnect with yourself. A building steeped in history in an environment that transmits peace and tranquillity.

The complex is surrounded by lush, ancient trees that could tell a thousand stories. Going inside is like a trip back in time. We can see traces of its Moorish past (8th century), with the mixture of remains of an old mosque and flour and oil mills. Little by little we discover the metamorphosis of the monastery over several centuries, first as a monastic complex, later on as a military and industrial site.



Antonio Parrón reads poetry at the Cartuja Monastery in Cazalla de la Sierra

The Monastery and Guesthouse of La Cartuja are steeped in history, set in an environment that transmits peace and tranquillity





Courtyard of Cartuja Monastery  
in Cazalla de la Sierra

Former cloister of the Cartuja  
Monastery, now converted into  
rooms of the rural accommodation

Main hall of the accommodation  
Los Pozos de la Nieve

Los Pozos de la Nieve –  
charming accommodation

Situated on the Silver Route, and part of the Way of St James, many pilgrims travelled on the path and here they were welcomed by the Carthusian monks to regain strength. In this place of incomparable beauty, peace and tranquillity, the monks led a life of contemplation back in the 15th century, spending their time farming. They also cemented the tradition of making liquors, which served as a prelude to the now very famous liquors of Cazalla.

During the Napoleonic invasion in 1810 the monks were expelled and fled to Portugal, and returning to the monastery in 1813. However, with the ecclesiastical confiscations of Mendizábal, the religious order was finally expelled in 1836.

Now it has been converted into a rural hotel and you can stay overnight in the old cells used by laymen in 1416, refurbished as suites and rooms with vaulted brick ceilings and magnificent views of the valley and the cloister.

Strolling through the gardens that once housed the monks' orchards is a real treat for the senses. The wind gently rocks the leaves, and the branches begin a waltz to the beat of the poetry that comes from the innermost feelings

of poet Antonio Parrón. A man who spent his childhood was in the monastery, whose old walls became the inspiration for his most heartfelt and moving works. The guided tour by this poet helps us to discover a place that exudes calm, soul and heart.

Many pilgrims travelling on the Silver Route were welcomed by the Carthusian monks to regain strength

We are not surprised that it is a very popular venue for weddings and other events. The beauty and mysticism that surrounds it make it an idyllic place.

#### 1.4. Los Pozos de la Nieve in Constantina. Seville's ice factory

Set in the beautiful area of the nature reserve, Los Pozos de la Nieve is a wonderful rural accommodation just 2 km from Constantina and an hour from Seville. Here you can get away from it all and enjoy the building's interesting history.

In the 17th century, Los Pozos de la Nieve was an industrial building that supplied Seville with ice. In this area the temperature is frequently up to 5 degrees lower than in Constantina, which favoured the natural production of the popular product.

The manufacturing process involved extracting the ice that remained frozen in rectangular structures located outside. It was then stored indoors, inside massive wells that can still be seen today thanks to the respectful conservation that has been carried out, keeping its industrial past intact.

Los Pozos de la Nieve currently has five spacious and magnificent apartments, decorated respecting the original architecture of the building, which makes it extremely charming and unique. Each space is designed to make the most of your stay, with the added bucolic calm of Sierra Norte de Sevilla.

The site is also ideal for social events, and its strategic location is perfect if you to spend a few wonderful days.

#### 1.5. Mudejar Gothic in the mountains. Recovering the Islamic past

An area of transit, communication, and also of coexistence and tolerance, Sierra Norte is a cultural melting pot with the imprint of the Iberian, Roman, Visigothic and Moors past. There are many reasons to discover these towns, and one of them is the Mudejar Gothic heritage that reflects the Muslim influence on the architecture.

The beautiful Guadalcanal has an amazing artistic and monumental heritage. In addition to the churches of Santa María de la Asunción – whose walls made use of the Almohad wall –, Santa Ana, and San Vicente, the Shrine of San Benito, and the Church of San Sebastián (current a food market), we find traces of the Moorish past in the "Almona". It is the oldest civil building in the province of Seville (dating from 1307), a distinguished construction from the important city of Al-Andalus, Guadal-Kanal, and an architectural gem that today we can discover from the inside. The subsoil of Guadalcanal is full of surprises, as many treasures keep popping up, such as the wells of tanneries, used by tanners to treat leather. Covered again after their discovery to protect them, they are another reason to promote the historic recovery of Sierra Norte.

Not many notice that the Parish Church of Nuestra Señora de la Consolación de Cazalla (known as the "Cathedral of Sierra Morena") was attached to one of the gates of the old Almohad wall. Mudejar in style, it is one of the most outstanding examples of Sevillian architecture.

The Morería de Constantina neighbourhood seems to have been shaped by the erosion of the torrents of water flowing down from the top of the castle. If you walk up the winding streets (they are more pleasant if you walk down, though!) reflect the varied character of Moorish town planning. The Church of Santa María de la Encarnación and the Shrine of La Señora del Robledo showcase the Gothic transition that draws from the Mozarabic past.

When we get to San Nicolás del Puerto, we see that the Church of San Sebastián with the apparent simplicity of its façade, and the Shrine of San Diego were built following the relative homogeneity of the Mudejar Gothic of these mountains.

Under the castle of Alanís, the powerful tower-façade of the Parish Church of Nuestra Señora de las Nieves grabs our attention. Visiting the interior is a must, as we will be able to see its 16th century main altarpiece, which was declared Historic-Artistic Property.

In the 17th century, Los Pozos de la Nieve was an industrial building that supplied Seville with ice





In the south of the mountains, the last stop on this route is El Pedroso. Here we find the Chapel of San José and the shrines of Nuestra Señora del Espino and Cristo de la Misericordia, with clear Gothic-Mudejar influence.

### 1.6. "Cazallera" voice

A hoarse, rasping voice, caused by too much shouting. This is what having a "cazallera" voice means. Cazalla de la Sierra had 15 distilleries for the surplus of its wine production. First the production took place in convents, then it moved to private stills and distilleries, and the mountains eventually became famous for their drink.

The production was so large and its quality was so high that the anise liqueur came to be known as "a cazalla". Those glorious times are in past, but the factories that survived have adapted well to current consumption, promoting old anise-flavoured liqueurs and releasing new ones, as well as pomace brandy, and even gin and vodka.

In Cazalla we can visit the historic El Clavel anise liqueur factory (1896), and the Miura Distilleries with their cherry cream. The neighbouring Constantina is also a production centre and where the Anís la Violetera factory still survives (founded in 1961 and named after a film character played by Sara Montiel).



La Almona de Guadalcanal, the oldest building in the province of Seville

Church of Nuestra Señora de la Consolación in Cazalla de la Sierra

Anís del Clavel anise liqueur factory



Bollinckx steam engine to raise the winch that went down to the mine galleries in Villanueva del Río and Minas.

Corta de San Fernando in Villanueva de Ríos y Minas.

## 2 Geotourism

The interior of Andalusia is becoming increasingly appreciated and the amount of geotourism opportunities is growing. And Sierra Norte de Sevilla offers ideal possibilities to boost the local economy.

millions of years. Equally important is the palaeontological legacy of fossilised marine flora and fauna, which allows us to interpret the planet's geological evolution.

### 2.1. Sierra Norte de Sevilla Geopark

In 2011, Sierra Norte de Sevilla Nature Reserve was included in the European Geoparks Network. The special geological features of the Sevillian mountains, in addition to the ancient mining tradition and archaeological wealth, have positioned the park as one of the most important geological points of interest in Andalusia. As a result of the seal of the European geoparks network, geotourism routes have been consolidated in destinations such as Capas de Campoalla, Cerro del Hierro Natural Monument, Sinclinal del Valle, the travertine deposits of the Hueznar River, the large site with jellyfish fossils from the lower Cambrian period, Los Berrocales in Almadén de la Plata, and El Pedroso.

### 2.2. The Metal Route

Some place names in the north of the province of Seville speak of their centuries-old mining activity: Almadén de la Plata, Villanueva de Río y Minas, and Cerro del Hierro (which we will talk about shortly). Following the trail of mines, old quarries and semi-abandoned buildings, we can go on a peculiar tour of the mountains.

In Pago de Gibla mine in Constantina, archaeologists have found that it was used several millennia ago, and the argentiferous lead sites Alanís and in Cazalla de la Sierra seem to indicate that they had already been exploited in Roman times.

Back in Moorish times, Almadén was known as Al Madin (The Mine), which recognised the richness of its minerals. Los Covachos Cave and San Miguel Mine (next to Esterquizo farmhouse, about two kilometres north of Almadén de la Plata), from

In Sierra Norte de Sevilla we will find geological wonders carved whimsically by nature over

The Metals Route follows the trail of mines, old quarries and semi-abandoned buildings





Panoramic view of the archaeological site of Mulva-Munigua. Villanueva del Río y Minas.



Cabría del Pozo N°5 in Villanueva del Río and Minas

Chimneys and other mining buildings in Villanueva de Río y Minas

Remains of the Roman settlement of Mulva-Munigua

where copper was extracted, are two examples of ongoing extraction. In the latter, the buildings used for the exploitation, the walls of the mineral extraction winch and the miners' houses are preserved in a dilapidated state.

On the road between El Real de la Jara and Cazalla de la Sierra (SE-179), at the height of Los Pájaros hill (kilometre 19.2), we find San Luis mine. It was a lead, zinc and silver mine until the 1980s. Under the ground, three superimposed galleries were excavated on the hillside, 190, 285 and 246 metres long respectively, and a 50-metre deep internal shaft made in the lower gallery. Part of the old facilities scattered throughout the countryside.

Some place names in the north of the province of Seville speak of their centuries-old mining activity: Almadén de la Plata, Villanueva de Río y Minas, and Cerro del Hierro, for example.

The marble quarries of El Real de la Jara, just south of the town, are a peculiar mining feature we can find in the area. The rocks, extracted especially during the Middle Ages, were used to build the Castle of El Real de la Jara.

In Guadalcanal, the Metal Route is perhaps less visible, since there is hardly any trace of the extraction of the mines dating from Roman times, and later, in the 16th century, brothers Martín and Diego Delgado discovered silver in 1555.

There were also iron mines in El Pedroso, and the remains of a 19th century foundry, built to process the minerals extracted from the environment, can also be spotted. We can visit them on the A-432 road from El Pedroso to Cazalla de la Sierra (Km. 10) as it passes over the San Pedro stream. Its recovery for tourism would serve to boost the industrial archaeology of the mountains. Something that has already been established is the "New Schools" Culture Centre, which houses the Museum of Mining and Writing. The beautiful building was erected by Aurelio Gómez Millán, architect Aníbal González's brother-in-law, and today it is the backbone of "El Pedroso, Villa del Libro", which promotes the municipality as a cultural reference in the mountains.

### 2.3. Historic Site of Pozo 5 in Villanueva de Río and Minas

Although Villanueva de Río y Minas is not actually geographically part of Sierra Norte (it belongs to the district of Guadalquivir Doñana), it deserves to be included in the mining route. The area has been exploited since Roman times, as proven by the archaeological site of Mulva-Munigua. Back then, copper and iron ore were extracted, although it is true that it was not until the introduction of technological and industrial developments that the area became a benchmark for coal mining in the province.

The first exploitations were promoted by the archbishopric of Seville in the 17th century, and in the 19th century the Guadalquivir y Canal Fernandino company introduced steam engines for drainage pumping in the "Minas de la Reunion" (1830), leading to the first industrial revolution in the area.

The architectural, cultural and social footprint left by mining in Villanueva de Río y Minas can be seen even in the place name, which was coined by the people living there. The historical mining complex of Minas de la Reunión has been declared a Property of Cultural Interest and includes various preserved areas and structures.

The mining complex of Pozo nº 5 stands out, opened between 1893 and 1898 and which had a power station, called the "Castillete" (little castle) because of its elegant crenellated finish, chimneys, sieves, coal washes, the Mengemor building, the Babcock Wilcox boiler rooms, the Kaselowsky drainage pump building and railway station, and the winch which took the miners down to the underground galleries.

There are other smaller mines, such as San Fernando next to the river, which today is a deep blue lake. If we walk through Villanueva de Río and Minas, we will notice clear mining signs,

such as the International Style in some public buildings and workers' houses, or the subtle refinement of buildings such as the old school, currently the Town Hall.

### 2.4. Lower Cambrian jellyfish in Constantina

On the outskirts of Constantina – in the private estate of "El Revuelo", just 2 km from Cerro de la Víbora – we find one of the most curious fossilised sites in the world, similar only to others in China and the United States. The deposit was formed 550 million years ago, during the Lower Cambrian period. This used to be a coastal area, and jellyfish of up to 88 cm were fossilised here. It is thought that they were covered and compacted after a big storm. This created a large jellyfish graveyard, fossilised and hidden until they were recently discovered. The effect of the fossilisation is so visible that there are even oscillation ripples (wave marks) alongside 90 preserved jellyfish.

The historic mining complex of Minas de la Reunión has been designated a Property of Cultural Interest





Sierra del Viento Path

# 3

## Outdoor sports. Beautiful Views of the Sierra

Hiking, cycling, climbing and kayaking are some of the activities that we can do in Sierra Norte.

### 3.1. Hiking at La Capitana viewpoint

In Sierra Norte de Sevilla you can reach the stars, or at least that is what it feels like at Mirador de la Capitana viewpoint, an excellent observation point for astronomical tourism, at 960 metres.

This beautiful balcony located in Sierra del Viento not only offers us a clear sky, but also equally spectacular earthly views that remain imprinted in our memories.

To the south you can see undulating mountains stretching out before you: Sierra del Agua with Mount Hamapega, Sierra de La Grana and Sierra de San Miguel. This rough mountainous terrain makes the wind blow about at its mercy, creating currents that have earned it the name of Sierra del Viento (Windy Mountains). If we look north,

we will be able to spot the bordering penplain of Extremadura stretching out for miles in front of us, with its vast fields and meadows.

To get to Mirador de la Capitana viewpoint we have to walk up a path for about 5 km. Only half of

the way is accessible by car and the rest must be covered on foot or by bicycle if we dare. The hill is not extremely strenuous, but it is a continuous slope.

As we walk up along the crest of Sierra del Viento, we can see the depressions of the two great rivers of the south of Spain, the Guadiana to the north and the Guadalquivir to the south. On the way we leave behind a hill where there is an astronomy observatory and after a couple of kilometres we reach the viewpoint.

It is also a very good spot for birdwatching as you can see migratory birds. Just before sunset, many birds flock over Mirador de la Capitana, taking advantage of the last light of the day to fly over the highest point of Sierra Norte de Sevilla.

The sky is painted ochre, red and purple, the prelude to the appearance of thousands of stars, which want to catch our attention with their brightness.

### 3.2. Cycle touring along the Sierra Greenway. Pedalling behind the mine carts

Part of the route of the old railway lines that connected the mines to the capital of Sevilla has been converted into the Sierra Greenway. The route is almost 20 kilometres long, through

the surroundings of the charming towns of Cazalla de la Sierra, Constantina and San Nicolás del Puerto.

The route is easy and can be covered on foot or by bicycle. The itinerary begins at the train station halfway between the towns of Cazalla de la Sierra and Constantina.

Rivera del Huéznar runs parallel to the path throughout much of the journey, and we can enjoy a wooded landscape of elms, ash trees, honeysuckle and other plants.

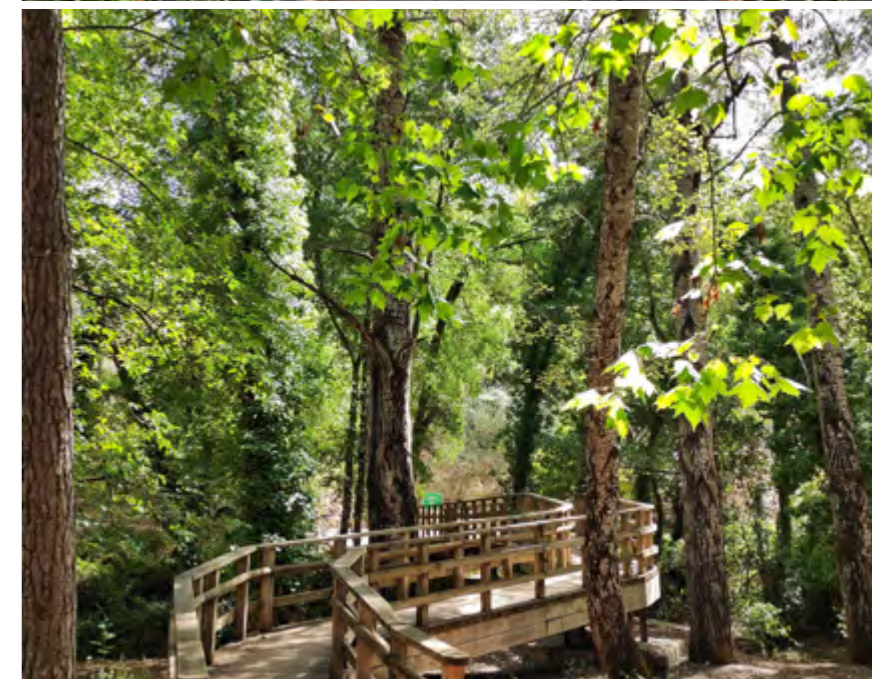
The path begins slope slightly upwards until it reaches its highest point, Cerro del Hierro. On the way it is well worth taking a break at the Huéznar Waterfalls – declared a natural monument – to enjoy the beautiful surroundings.

If you want to stop somewhere for lunch, we recommend Batán de las Monjas Restaurant, where you can rest and regain your strength with delicious typical dishes. It is located just before you arrive at Huéznar Waterfalls, next to the greenway.

Once we are back on the road, we will go past the town of San Nicolás del Puerto, where the landscape changes and orchards and olive groves are the main trees we can see.

On the final part of the greenway route, we will find an old mining town, built by the Scottish company William Baird Mining and Co. Ltd., from Glasgow, in the late 19th century. From here there are only a few hundred metres to Cerro del Hierro, one of the most impressive natural monuments in Andalusia.

It is highly interesting from a geological point of view, as time, mining and climatic conditions have sculpted its high and colourful walls, and



Zip lines at Parque Aventura in the recreational area of Isla Margarita

Greenway in Sierra Norte de Sevilla

Beautiful green landscape in the recreational area of Isla Margarita





Panoramic view of Cerro del Hierro and the path that crosses it

The wonderful karst landscape of Cerro del Hierro



Aubergine fritters with Cazalla honey. La Posada del Moro

the veins are due to the mineral composition of the rock.

### 3.3. Kayaking (José Torán Reservoir in La Puebla de los Infantes)

In the southeastern foothills, near Puebla de los Infantes, the landscape changes when you reach the José Torán reservoir. The reservoir supplies the region with fresh water and is also a great spot for water sports. It is named after a famous civil engineer who invented a concrete tetrapod that we often find on the breakwaters of ports. This reservoir is a popular destination with fishermen and families who come to cool off and enjoy a picnic in the picnic areas. Kayaking is one of the most interesting activities since it allows us to row the length and breadth of the reservoir, and explore the gorges.

### 3.4. Climbing at Cerro del Hierro

Only nature would have enough imagination to sculpt the landscape of Cerro del Hierro. Climbers fall in love with the old mine because of its fanciful stone shapes,

which also have an ideal grip for practising this risky sport.

There is a wide range of climbing options, from vertical walls with small holds to places which are less steep but with almost no holds, including areas where the wall has collapsed (45-degree walls), though less common.

Only nature would have enough imagination to sculpt the landscape of Cerro del Hierro

Each mountain town has its own typical dishes

## 4 Slow Food in the Sierra

There is no need to rush when cooking in the Sierra. Here everything is cooked over a low heat, always using fresh (and seasonal, where possible) products. Some artisan products such as wines and anise liqueur from Cazalla de la Sierra and Constantina are extremely well known, even outside Andalusia. And others such as sweets from Puebla de los Infantes, oil from Guadalcanal, sausages from Alanís, El Real de la Jara and Almadén de la Plata are an open secret that we discovered as soon as we arrived. The cuisine focused on game meats is sensational, and each town in the mountains has its own typical dishes.

### 4.1. Iberian ham. Romeros de Alanís

Romeros de Alanís produce top-quality acorn-fed Iberian ham following traditional methods. Their drying sheds have become a benchmark for the industry, not only in the province, but also throughout Andalusia, Spain and even exporting to the rest of Europe, South America and Asia. The Iberian pigs are reared in the pastures of

Sierra Norte de Sevilla Nature Reserve, where they roam freely. In the Alanís facilities, the quartering, salting and drying of the ham takes place, and there is a cold meats factory. And among other delicacies, we can taste their top product, Jamón Ibérico de Bellota (Iberian acorn-fed ham), cured for at least 36 months, and Paleta Ibérica de Bellota (Iberian acorn-fed shoulder), cured for at least 24 months, accompanied by Lomo Ibérico de Bellota (Iberian acorn-fed pork loin) and Lomito Ibérico de Bellota (Iberian acorn-fed underloin).

### 4.2. Cheese

The mountains are also a land of interesting cheese, such as Flor de Cazalla artisan cheese factory, made with milk from their own farm. They offer guided tours with tasting sessions.

Or the different varieties of CorSevilla Cheese, ranging from





Quality certificate for acorn-fed hams from Romeros de Alanís

Maturing Iberian ham from Romeros de Alanís

Iberian ham from Romeros de Alanís

Romeros de Alanís production line

goat cheese cured with rosemary to cheese with extra virgin olive oil or paprika.

#### 4.3. Gourmet tradition

Local sweets balance out the savoury cheese and cold meat. In Alanís we discovered artisan pastry products at the Forum cake shop. Depending on the time of year, you can learn how various cakes are made: perrunillas, cortadillos, tortas de polvorón, mantecados, or whatever is in the oven when you visit.

If we walk through Cazalla, our destination will be the Mantecados Trigo Factory. Several generations of pastry chefs make the delicious "mantecados cazalleros".

#### 4.4. Sierra wine

It is often said that the province of Seville does not make good wine, because people look at numbers. However, although it is true that the

current volume of wine production is not very high if we compare it to the rest of Andalusia, Sierra Norte de Sevilla has been producing wine for centuries.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, the wine that arrived in Seville came from Cazalla de la Sierra and was mentioned by contemporary writers. This wine was even shipped to the American Indies, and only the phylloxera epidemic in the 1870s put an end to the winemaking tradition. Before that, in the mid-19th century, the "Geographical-Statistical-Historical Dictionary of Spain and its Overseas Territories", an important work published by Pascual Madoz, mentioned up to 700 wineries in Sierra Norte de Sevilla.

Little by little, the vineyards repopulated the municipalities of Cazalla de la Sierra, Constantina, Guadalcanal and Alanís. Mainly with white varieties such as Chardonnay, Pedro Ximénez, Colombar, Sauvignon Blanc, Palomino and Moscatel de Alejandría; and red:

Tempranillo, Grenache, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Petit Verdot and Syrah. Good examples are Colonias de Galeón and Fuente Reina.

We visited the Hacienda La Purísima Concepción, and the Fuente Reina vineyards, where we found an interesting history of wine production. The origins of the vineyard date back to 1647, and 28 huge earthenware jars are still preserved on the estate, witnesses since 1647 of the estate's longstanding winemaking tradition. Founded in 1930, "Bodegas de Fuente Reina" recovered the winemaking tradition of the Sierra, and in 1998 winemaker Óscar Zapke undertook a very personal project to promote the Sierra's wine. The main goal of Fuente Reina wines is to create controlled productions, made with care, resulting in full-bodied wines with character. They have recreated traditional winemaking, launching a vintage made in their winery that has earned them great recognition in the wine world.

The wineries are located in Constantina, but it is well worth visiting their vineyards in the Hacienda de la Purísima Concepción (on the road to Cazalla) to better understand and appreciate the process of these Andalusian wines that show nuances typical of the beautiful land where they come from.

#### 4.5. Olive Oil. Organic Olive Oil Production

Unlike virgin olive oil from the Sevillian plain, in the mountains we find oil with the "Parques Naturales de Andalucía" brand certification and organic certification, such as the products of the CazallaOliva cooperative (Cazalla de la Sierra) and Sierra de Guadalcanal Oil. They use the following olive varieties: Pico Limon, Chamomile, Lechin and Zorzaleña (native to the area).

#### 4.6. Honey from the Sierra

The bees of Sierra Norte produce artisan honeys that are bursting with flavour. The delectable La Golimbra honey is made from the flowers in the Sierra's meadows such as French lavender, thyme, chestnut and bramble bushes.

#### 4.7. Gastronomy

The cuisine of the Sierra Norte de Sevilla is influenced by the land and is the result of the legacy of different cultures: Romans, Phoenicians and Arabs. The flavours are complex, robust and intense, and from the outset you can see that quality and quantity are very important. Local products are used such as mushrooms, wild asparagus, truffles, Spanish oyster thistles, watercress, quince, chestnuts and olives.

The dishes proudly express their original mountain cuisine. That is why hearty and comforting dishes abound, with chickpea stews and restorative soups that feel like a warm hug on a winter's day.

The extensive pastures in the area are ideal for rearing Iberian pigs, which are well fed and graze freely, producing excellent quality ham and cold

Sweet treats from the Obrador Forum bakery in Alanís.

2014 Torre Beraun wine, Bodegas Fuente Reina, Constantina





meats. These are smooth with strong flavours, matured to perfection to delight visitors. The by-products obtained from pork are also highly appreciated in the Sierra. We can highlight "manteca colorá" (red lard) and "zurrapa" (pork loin), which are often used instead of butter to spread on freshly baked country bread. Both delicacies are an essential part of a hearty breakfast, typical of the Sevillian mountains. One of the most typical and historical places in the area to enjoy good food and start off the day well before sunrise is the El Litrón Bar in Cazalla de la Sierra.

We should also mention fillet steak, "secreto" and the famous Iberian pork cheek – the latter cooked to perfection anywhere we go in Sierra Norte.

There is also excellent game meat, as hunting is popular in the mountains. Deer, thrushes, wild boar, partridges, rabbits and other wild animals become the main ingredients of balanced and hearty dishes such as roasts and stews, which are absolutely delicious.

Following the gastronomic tradition of Cazalla de la Sierra, at La Posada del Moro we can find a good example of this typical and homemade cuisine. It is a flavour that reminds you of home, with fresh products and well-balanced dishes: baked quail with a good garnish of pickled artichokes with thin slices of Iberian ham, venison done to a turn, but also lighter dishes such as aubergine fritters with the sweet touch of the famous Cazalla honey.

You cannot afford to miss the most traditional Andalusian dishes that go down so well on a summer's day: "salmorejo" and "gazpacho" (both tomato-based cold dishes), the latter served in Constantina with a refreshing touch of mint.

Two-veg cake with tartar sauce. Agustina Restaurant

Slightly spicy marinated tuna with wakame and sesame salad. Agustina Restaurant

Vegetable lasagne. La Posada del Moro



Another traditional dish of northern Sevillian cuisine that should not be missed are "migas molineras" (fried breadcrumbs) with chorizo or sardines, the latter very typical of San Nicolás del Puerto. In Batán de las Monjas, halfway between San Nicolás and Huéznar Waterfalls, we can taste succulent cuisine with copious dishes: Iberian cheek, scrambled with mushroom and wild asparagus, roast meat and delicious desserts.

Olive oil is an essential ingredient in the dishes of Sierra Norte de Sevilla. A generous amount of this precious elixir is always appreciated in traditional Spanish cuisine in general and, of course, in Sierra Norte de Sevilla.

For those with a sweet tooth, the list of options is also endless: "pestiños", doughnuts and some other desserts, the result of Muslim influence such as "alfajores" and almond cakes, the famous Cazalla mantecados and the artisan pastry shop of the Forum workshop in the town of Alanís delight adults and children alike.

As for new options, visitors will be pleasantly surprised by the menu of the Agustina Restaurant in Cazalla de la Sierra. Thanks to its refreshing and innovative cuisine, it offers us a parade of flavours with avant-garde techniques that guests will love. The value for money that we find in this restaurant has earned it the Bib Gourmand seal of the Michelin Guide, as one of the best places to eat in Sierra Norte de Sevilla. Raúl and Seneida, its owners, have opted for haute cuisine culinary techniques in perfect synergy with the most traditional cuisine of this region. The result is an inventive tapas menu that is highly recommended.

Dessert at the Batán de Isa Monjas Restaurant

Another delicacy in the Sierra de Sevilla

Goat's cheese ice cream with a Pedro Ximénez reduction La Posada del Moro







Panoramic view of Cerro del Hierro and its paths

# 5

## Unexpected amongst the Unexpected: Cerro del Hierro

"Melted" by time, Cerro del Hierro's limestone pavement is one of the most characteristic landscapes of Sierra Norte de Sevilla. Cerro del Hierro natural monument is located in the heart of these mountains, very close to San Nicolás del Puerto.

It is a fantastic example of the geological wealth found deep in the karst landscape the mountains of Seville. The karst carbonation processes have produced many iron and calcium ores such as chalcopryite, pyrolusite, hematite, goethite, limonite, barite, quartz, calcite, malachite and siderite. These minerals have been sculpted out over time, since the Cambrian and Silurian periods. Back then the landscape was completely different to the rocky moor that we see today. It is very hard to imagine that there was a sea here millions of years ago, and that its ancient reefs, now petrified, are part of this wonderful scenery, as an unequivocal example of the greatest artistic exponent – Mother Nature.

Just 5 kilometres from San Nicolás del Puerto, we are able to visit the majestic Cerro del Hierro,

declared a natural monument. This place is an extraordinary visual and sensory experience, as we contemplate the beauty of its shapes that are traced with an iridescent and complex outline. It is a magical experience to feel welcomed by that ancient spectacle of ferrous veins that look like small earthly rainbows, as we discover their formations on various paths.

The huge pointy, vertical rocks are a delight and a challenge for climbers trying to overcome the intricate walls, where birds such as eagle owls and black storks find shelter.

The route that runs through the labyrinthine network is of low-medium difficulty and is 3 kilometres long. Part of the route is accessible for people with reduced mobility and prams. If we want to do a longer walk, we can choose "El Rebollar" trail, a circular route round the Cerro del Hierro Natural Monument. At the beginning it covers the section of the Sierra Greenway, and then continues along the "Public Road from Cazalla de la Sierra to Las Navas de la Concepción", continuing along the "Vereda de Mojón Blanco to San Nicolás del Puerto" cattle track, and finally gets back to the Greenway.

**Cerro del Hierro is a fantastic example of the geological richness of the Sevillian mountains**



Abandoned mining town near Cerro del Hierro

The impressive karst massif of Cerro del Hierro

The remains of the mining communities settled by the British in the 19th century are silent witnesses, but with much to tell if they could talk. Some houses were abandoned, while others still remain inhabited, not far from old structures such as the Anglican church, or the former residence of the engineers and the mine manager.

The interpretation centre is a good starting point to soak up the geological and historical context of Cerro del Hierro. Here we will be able to understand how it was formed and how important it was for humans, from the first mining operations until it was abandoned in the 1980s.

As we move forward, the sunset enhances the colours of the minerals that stand out in the limestone rock: copper red, maroon, ochre and ferrous green glow as the sun goes down. If we glance towards the horizon we can make out the majestic outline of the limestone pavements or "needles" of rock that pierce the sunset sky. The trails lead us through canyons, gorges, natural and also artificial hollows drilled for mining. If we look into the earth, we will notice the entrance to underground galleries or to open-pit mines excavated to find and follow the iron veins.

The iron extracted from this mine was used to build the structure of the Isabel II bridge (Triana bridge) over the Guadalquivir, as well as other iron structures in the city of Seville.

But the peaceful karst landscape is not the only attraction here. The flora and fauna of Cerro del Hierro fill the environment with colour, life and noise. The habitat is so peculiar that native

species such as rockrose, curled-leaved rock rose, basil-leaved rock rose and gorse have spread all over, along with forests of cork oaks, gall oaks and Pyrenean oaks.

We find many other plants taking advantage of the microclimate that is created between the humid rocky cavities: strawberry trees, mastic, laurustinus, oleander and fig trees; aromatic plants such as garden thyme, lavender, Roman chamomile, and various species of ferns such as maidenhair fern, silver lace fern, maidenhair spleenwort, rustyback, hart's-tongue fern and golden male fern.

And in the sky we can spot thrushes, eagle owls, redstarts, rock sparrows, bee-eaters and even black storks who watch over their lands.

The signs guide us along the way and, although it should not be necessary, they remind us of the importance of respecting the environment, and not picking up rocks or wandering from the path.

Visitors might feel at times that they are desecrating a sacred place for miners, as they come upon remains of their exhausting work. We can imagine the mine carts going down the road that today is the Greenway, or we might think we hear the tinkling of metal picks or the deafening explosion of dynamite. Other times our daydream comes true when we come upon the walls of buildings, such as the one that was used to protect the items used for blasting.

**The flora and fauna of Cerro del Hierro fill the environment with colour, life and noise**





## 6 Practical information about unexpected Seville

### 6.1. How to get there

Seville airport is the best destination if you are coming by plane, and from there it takes 1-2 hours by car to get to the Sierra.

First we take the A-8005 and later on the A-432 towards the mountains. The first place we get to is El Pedroso, and then we can choose the road to Constantina or to Cazalla and Guadalcanal.

As for public transport, there are buses to the towns in the mountains from Plaza de Armas station, managed by the Monbus company (for El Real de la Jara and Almadén de la Plata, you have to use Damas). Alternatively, there are trains from Seville (Santa Justa) to El Pedroso, Cazalla/Constantina station and Guadalcanal.

### 6.2. Where to stay

- ◆ **La Posada del Moro**  
The elegance and friendliness of the mountains.  
Paseo del Moro, 46, 41370 Cazalla de la Sierra, Seville  
Tel. 954 88 43 26 - <http://www.laposadadelmoro.com/>
- ◆ **Hostería Casa Adriano**  
Old shearing house and stable converted into a superior category country house lodge  
Calle Barrionuevo, 8, 41380 Alanís, Seville Tel. 954 88 59 15
- ◆ **Los Pozos de la Nieve**  
Style and history in a unique boutique hotel set in an ice factory  
Carretera A-455, Km 17.5, 41450 Constantina, Seville Tel. 680 41 14 28  
<https://www.lospozosdelanieve.com/es/>
- ◆ **Hotel La Posada del Infante**  
19th century stately house, ideal place from which to explore Hornachuelos Nature reserve  
Calle Raimundo Martinez, 6, 41479 La Puebla de los Infantes, Seville  
Tel. 954 80 80 43.  
<https://laposadadelinfante.com/>

Posada del Moro Gardens.

Room at the Posada del Moro in Cazalla de la Sierra.

Ham curing process in Romeros de Alanís.



Fuente Reina winery in Constantina

Los Pozos de la Nieve, rural accommodation steeped in history and full of charm

Old earthenware jars where wine was stored in Hacienda de la Purísima

### ◆ El Batán de las Monjas

Campsite and rural apartments on the Cazalla-Constantina Greenway  
Vereda de las Moreras, Km 3,5, 41388. San Nicolás del Puerto Seville Tel. 661 84 56 47  
<https://www.batandelasmonjas.es/>

### ◆ Santa Bárbara Los Gatos Bar

Homemade food and friendly service  
Address: Plaza de Santa Bárbara s/n.  
Villanueva del Río y Minas.  
Tel. 655 57 28 53 / 954 74 72 63

### 6.3. Where to eat

#### ◆ Bar Casa Pacheco

Typical mountain tapas  
Calle Llana, 9, 41370 Cazalla de la Sierra, Seville  
Tel. 619 50 22 88

#### ◆ Casa Agustina

(Bib Gourmand Guía Michelin 2020) Fusion in the mountains  
Plaza del Concejo, 5, Cazalla de la Sierra  
Tel. 954 88 32 55

#### ◆ Bar La Puntilla

Perfect for tapas with family and friends  
Calle Sta. Clara, 2, 41390 Guadalcanal, Seville  
Tel. 954 886 003 / 637 81 69 60

#### ◆ El Batán de las Monjas Restaurant

Ideal for stopping on your cycling route  
Vereda de las Moreras, Km 3,5 San Nicolás del Puerto  
Tel. 955 95 41 63 / 661 84 56 47

#### ◆ La Posada del Moro

Mountain cuisine backed by experience  
Paseo del Moro, 46  
41370 Cazalla de la Sierra, Seville  
Tel. 954 88 43 26  
<http://www.laposadadelmoro.com/>

#### ◆ Bar El Litron

Recommended if you want to enjoy authentic Andalusian breakfasts from 6 am  
C/Manuel Cabrera N°5 - 41370 - Cazalla de la Sierra  
Tel. 955 07 34 17 - 680 577 636  
<http://www.barlitron.es/>

### 6.4. Service companies. What to do and other activities

#### ◆ Turnature.

Tour operator for the Sierra Norte in Seville  
Espacio FC3 y Centro del Aguardiente de Cazalla.  
Calle San Francisco, s/n - 41370 Cazalla de la Sierra.  
Tel. 955 217 405  
<http://turnature.es/>

#### ◆ Rumbo Cultura.

Tour Operator in Villanueva del Río y Minas  
Tel: 621069569  
<https://www.facebook.com/rumbocultura/>

#### ◆ Bicicletas Verde Vía.

Vía Verde bicycle hire  
Ctra A-455 Km 8 (km 0 on the Sierra Norte Vía Verde rail trail)  
41370 Cazalla de la Sierra.  
Tel. 955490104 / 609058860  
<http://www.bicicletasverdevia.com>

#### ◆ Bodegas Fuente Reina

Bodegas: Calle Yedra, 2, 41450 Constantina

#### ◆ Viñedos de Fuente Reina: Hacienda La Purísima Concepción.

Ctra de Cazalla km 11 (Apdo. 26)  
41450 Constantina  
<http://bodegasfuenteraina.com/>

#### ◆ Secaderos de Romeros de Alanís

Carretera Fuenteovejuna, 0  
41380 Alanís de la Sierra, Seville.  
Tel: 954885912  
<http://www.losromerosdealanis.com/>





Junta de Andalucía

<p><b>5</b> GENDER EQUALITY</p>	<p><b>8</b> DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH</p>	<p><b>9</b> INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE</p>	<p><b>10</b> REDUCED INEQUALITIES</p>	<p><b>11</b> SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES</p>	<p><b>12</b> RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION</p>	<p><b>15</b> LIFE ON LAND</p>	<p><b>16</b> PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS</p>
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