

magazine traveling

ENGLISH EDITION

TRAVEL AND GASTRONOMY MAGAZINE

No. 72 Year 2025 Price: America \$ 9,50 - Europe 8,00 €

Albacete

First Starlight tourist destination



Italy
Aeolian Islands
Of fire and silence

Copenhagen
Let yourself be swept away
by Danish hygge

Comillas
El capricho de Gaudí
A house in the key of G

Norway
The Flåm Railway between
fjords and mountains

DIGITAL AND PRINT TRAVEL AND GASTRONOMY MAGAZINE

ROUTES WITH YOUR PARTNER

A REALLY WORTHWHILE TRIP

CASTILLA
Y LEÓN
HAS IT ALL



www.turismocastillayleon.com/en

visitcastillayleon 



Junta de
Castilla y León

Welcome aboard

There are journeys that begin long before packing a suitcase: they are born from a desire, an image, or a story told. This issue of Traveling is an invitation to be carried away by the urge to discover, from a Castilian castle lit up by the Milky Way to a Norwegian train winding its way between fjords.

We begin in the Aeolian Islands in southern Italy, continue to the Niagara Falls, a natural spectacle, before letting ourselves be enveloped in Copenhagen by the Danish concept of hygge; we travel on to Estonia in search of unspoiled landscapes and follow the route of Norway's Flåm Railway through mountains, waterfalls and fjords. Nearby getaways are also present: Albacete, with its nature and starry skies, or Ejea de los Caballeros and the Colonisation Villages, reflecting another side of our recent history. Architecture and design, as always, have their place: in Cantabria we visit Gaudí's Capricho, that fairytale house that captures the genius of the master. We cross into France to discover Albi, the brick city that surprises every traveller.

For those who enjoy the pleasure of reading, Susana Hornos brings us her new novel *Mañana seremos otro día*, while in Cinema we travel to Salzburg following in the footsteps of *The Sound of Music*.

Gastronomy accompanies us throughout the issue. From game on the table, understood as tradition, sustainability and respect for nature, to the flavours of Albacete, told through its products. We sample tables as diverse as the Japanese elegance of Makoto Madrid, the vibrant nightlife of Quintoelemento, or the Andalusian spirit of El Espigón in the very heart of Madrid.

In short, an issue to travel the world unhurriedly, to look calmly and, above all, to enjoy. Because travelling —like reading, like eating— is a way of enjoying our world.

Thank you, once again, for travelling with us and for making Traveling an open window to the world.



Jose A. Muñoz
CEO



Rosario Alonso
Director

Members of:



OMO DOMO SL Publishing

Pol. Ind. Sta. Ana Cl. Electrodo 70-72
nave 49 28522 - Rivas Vaciamadrid
Madrid - (Spain) Tel: (+34) 911 126 744

CEO

Jose Antonio Muñoz
joseantonio@revistatraveling.com

DIRECTOR

Rosario Alonso
rosario@revistatraveling.com

ADVERTISING

Javier Martínez
javier@revistatraveling.com

EDITORIAL STAFF

redaccion@revistatraveling.com

PHOTOGRAPHY

Coromina
josemcoromina@gmail.com

WINE TOURISM

Alejandro y Luis Paadín
alejandro@paadin.es

Correspondants

COSTA RICA:

José David Díaz Picado
jose.diaz@crmia.com

USA:

Larissa Rolley
LarissaRolley@outlook.com

MÉXICO:

Luís Armando Suarez
armando@revistatraveling.com

COLOMBIA:

Carlos Sanchez Uriaga
carlos@revistatraveling.com

ARGENTINA:

Melany Pasquini
melany@revistatraveling.com

Colaborators

Diana Morello
dianamorello@outlook.es

Kiara Hurtado
kiara.hurtado.prensa@gmail.com

Manena Munar
manena.munar@gmail.com

Julián Sacristán
comunicacion@wfm.es

Diego Ruiz-Gil
diegorg45@hotmail.es

Clara Serrano Vega
claraserranovega@gmail.com

Legal Deposit: M-1097-2018

ISSN: 2660-8146



The publisher is not responsible for the content displayed here. Each author or contributor is solely responsible for their own content. Likewise, the total or partial reproduction of the magazine is strictly prohibited. If you have any complaints or claims regarding the texts or photographs displayed here, please send us an email to redaccion@revistatraveling.com with your details and the reason for your dissatisfaction so that we can take appropriate action.



12 **TRAVEL**
NIAGARA FALLS
Views from the USA

20 **TRAVEL**
ESTONIA
Dreaming of Hidden Paradises

24 **TRAVEL**
THE FLÅM RAILWAY
Through Fjords and Mountains

30 **TRAVEL**
COPENHAGEN
Embrace Danish Hygge

36 **TRAVEL**
ALBACETE
First Starlight tourist destination

44 **TURISMO RURAL**
REGION OF SAJA-NANSA
Tradition and Nature

46 **DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE**
EL CAPRICHIO DE GAUDÍ
Comillas (Cantabria)

52 **CHARMING VILLAGES**
SANTILLANA DEL MAR AND ALTAMIRA
Living Traces of History

58 **GETAWAYS**
EJEA DE LOS CABALLEROS
and the Colonisation Villages

66 **WINE TOURISM**
NINGXIA (China)
Tomb of Emperors and Vineyards

72 **24 HOURS IN:**
Albi (France)
The City of Brick

CONTENTS

Traveling Magazine No. 72

Year 2025

ECO DESTINO BRUSSELS Parks and Urban Gardens	76
PLACES TO DREAM HARTFORD HOUSE Exclusivity and Luxury in South Africa	80
PLACES TO DREAM HOTEL KITZHOF Renewed Alpine Spirit	84
CINEMA IN THE SUITCASE SALZBURGO The Sound of Music	88
DEVOURING BOOKS SUSANA HORNOS "Mañana seremos otro día"	94
LA VENTANA DE MANENA WHEN I RETURNED FROM CUBA I Returned, but a Part Stayed There	96
traveling gourmets	101
FLAVOURS OF ALBACETE Products that Tell the Story of La Mancha	102
PRODUCTS GAME ON THE TABLE Tradition, Sustainability and Gastronomy	106
TESTED RESTAURANTS MAKOTO MADRID The Elegance of Contemporary Japan	112
TESTED RESTAURANTS QUINTOELEMENTO Madrid Night under the Stars	114
TESTED RESTAURANTS RESTAURANT EL ESPIGÓN Andalusian Flavour in Madrid	116



COVER

Libisosa Castle, Arch of the Milky Way © Diego Villalobos



COVER

Seafood and fish platter
© MAKOTO MADRID



Stromboli island

Aeolian

The Islands that Breathe Fire and Silence

S I G N A T U R E T R I P S

Text: Jose A. Muñoz - **Photos:** Archive

The ferry moves forward lazily, cutting through a sea that in September is no longer a bright blue but rather a polished steel mirror. The sun casts golden reflections on the waves split by the vessel. In the distance, the islands rise like ink outlines, emerging from the mist with the unhurried pace of those in no rush to be discovered. There is no clamour or noise: the archipelago reveals itself in silence, as if awaiting the traveller with the serenity of a place where time is measured not in hours, but in tides.



These are the Aeolian Islands, a group of seven volcanic isles rising from the Tyrrhenian Sea, northeast of Sicily, Italy. Declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, they take their name from Aeolus, the god of the winds in Greek mythology, and for centuries they served as beacons and havens for sailors, merchants and fishermen who sailed these waters. Here the power of fire lives alongside the gentleness of the Mediterranean, the history of ancient civilisations and the simple life of villages still dependent on the sea.

Arriving in September means finding them at their most intimate: free from the bustle of summer, with mild temperatures, waters still warm and a golden light that caresses mountains, vineyards and harbours. A journey through the Aeolians is not merely a tour of islands, but an immersion in a land where each has its own character, its own rhythm and its own voice.

Stromboli and Vulcano are sheer energy; Salina, green and generous; Filicudi and Alicudi, havens of silence; Lipari, beating heart; and Panarea, charming and minimalist, like a living postcard.

The Volcanic Pulse

Stromboli is the first to rise on the horizon, an almost perfect volcanic cone that juts abruptly from the Tyrrhenian Sea, its black slopes falling straight into the water. It covers barely twelve square kilometres and is home to no more than five hundred inhabitants, spread across two whitewashed villages that seem to cling to the rock. From the deck, its silhouette commands respect: it is one of

the few volcanoes in the world to have been almost continuously active for two millennia, its breath betrayed by a plume of white smoke rising steadily into the clear sky. Disembarking here is to feel beneath your feet a light, porous earth of deep black, which absorbs and holds the day's warmth. The streets are narrow, paved with volcanic stone, flanked by bougainvillea still in bloom at summer's end. The path leading to the Observatory, about 400 metres above sea level, winds through low scrub and solidified lava shaped into whimsical sculptures. The air smells of ash, salt and, at times, sulphur. A warm wind blows, a reminder that here the Mediterranean and magma touch. From the viewpoint, the crater's explosions are heard as sharp, regular thuds, a heartbeat that sets the island's daily rhythm. By night, each eruption sends out a burst of fire that briefly lights the horizon and casts red shadows across the sea.

Vulcano, just 428 yards away, speaks a different language: a pungent smell of sulphur clings to your clothes and memory from the first step on the pier. This island, scarcely 8.1 square miles, was in Antiquity the home of Vulcan, god of fire and the forge. Its black sand beaches and marine fumaroles make clear that geothermal activity is part of the landscape.

The ascent to the crater of La Fossa —about 428 yards above sea level— calls for steady steps and solid footwear. The trail, covered in volcanic gravel, zigzags upward, revealing a shifting scene: fumaroles exhaling golden vapour, mineral crusts stained bright yellow with sulphur, and fissures releasing a dry, unrelenting heat.



Village of Rinella on Salina

At the summit, the spectacle is both circular and overwhelming: the seven Aeolian Islands line up like uneven beads upon an endless sea, with the coast of Sicily faintly outlined in the distance. Up there, the silence is so dense that even the faint whistle of the wind feels sacred.

The Island of Wine and Capers

Salina is the green exception in this volcanic world. Slopes draped in Malvasia vineyards descend towards turquoise coves. It is harvest time, and the air carries the scent of sweet must and damp earth. Golden clusters are gathered by hand and placed in wooden crates that quickly fill under a gentle sun. Family wineries keep barrels where the wine matures slowly, with the patience that everything here demands.

On the higher terraces, caper bushes bloom discreetly, with white petals and violet stamens. In small workshops, women prepare them with sea salt, and when a jar is opened, the vegetal aroma mingles with memories of summer. In the island's taverns, capers are served with warm bread, golden oil and freshly cut tomatoes. Eating here is an unhurried act, accompanied by conversations that revolve around past harvests and the storms yet to come.

Slow Rhythms and Wide Horizons

Filicudi lies at the western edge of the archipelago and is one of the least visited and most authentic of the Aeolian Islands. It has barely more than a handful of small villages, such as **Filicudi Porto** and **Pecorini a Mare**, where white houses with blue shutters and flat roofs cluster on terraces that descend towards a sea shifting from deep blue to emerald with the changing light of day.

Panoramic View of the Crater on Vulcano Island





Vulcano island

The island is covered in Mediterranean scrub, fig trees and almond trees, and preserves archaeological remains of prehistoric settlements such as Capo Graziano, proof that these lands were already inhabited more than 3,000 years ago.

Fishing boats set out at dawn and return by midday with boxes full of swordfish, small tuna and lobsters, filling the quay with a salty aroma. Narrow, sometimes steep stone paths lead to secluded coves like Le Punte or Spiaggia delle Punte, where the sound of the waves mingles with the song of a late cicada and the distant cry of gulls. In September, Filicudi seems to linger in a summer reluctant to depart.

Alicudi, the westernmost and most isolated of the archipelago, is even more austere. With barely a hundred inhabitants, there are no roads, no cars, no mechanical noise: only a network of stone steps climbing the volcanic slope to scattered houses. Each stretch offers open views over a clear horizon where sea and sky merge, and on bright days the distant outline of Sicily can be glimpsed. The island, volcanic in origin, is an almost perfect cone covered with dry grasses, shrubs and small vegetable plots cultivated by locals on terraces. Its tiny harbour receives just a couple of boats a day from Filicudi or Lipari, and the rest of the time life flows

undisturbed. The wind carries scents of wild fennel, thyme and salt, and the bells of San Bartolomeo church mark the hours with a deep sound that spreads through the valley. September in Alicudi is a month of absolute calm, with cloudless skies and nights free of artificial light, when the stars seem to descend upon the sea. It is a place where nothing intrudes or disturbs, and where the traveller understands that here, luxury is simply silence.

Life in the Harbour

Lipari It concentrates the life of the archipelago. In the harbour, fishermen unload their catch while shopkeepers offer fleshy tomatoes, sweet figs and bottles of deep green oil. The seafront comes alive in the late afternoon, as cafés fill with deep voices and gentle laughter. From a bar terrace, one can watch ferries arriving and departing, as if the whole world depended on those sea routes.

Above, the castle guards centuries of history. Inside, the archaeological museum holds Greek amphorae, Roman coins and pieces of black obsidian, witnesses to a past that always regarded the sea as both frontier and pathway. Within those cool walls, one understands that the Aeolian Islands are not merely a place: they are a meeting point of fire, water and humanity.



The Astonishing Lighthouse of Strombolicchio

The Last Swim

The journey ends in Canneto, a coastal village a few kilometres north of Lipari. Its beach, made up of dark, rounded pebbles, produces a dry sound underfoot. The water, still mild in September, allows for comfortable swimming, with visibility stretching several metres below the surface.

Facing the coast, the views open towards the island of Vulcano, its silhouette sharply outlined against the horizon. In the late afternoon, the sun drops quickly, tinting the sky in shades of pink and orange, while

the sea breeze cools the air. At this time of year Canneto keeps a gentle pace, with few bathers and some locals strolling along the seafront promenade, bringing to a close a journey through the Aeolian Islands in a serene atmosphere, already far removed from the high season.

As it departs, the ferry drifts away slowly, as though the islands wished to hold back those who have truly listened to them.



View of the Crater on Vulcano Island

Notes for the Journey

How to Get There

The main access point is Milazzo, on the northern coast of Sicily. From there, ferries and hydrofoils operated by Siremar and Liberty Lines depart. Hydrofoil: fast (1–2 hours to Lipari).

Conventional ferry: slower, but allows cars.

There are also direct connections in summer from Naples, Messina or Palermo.

How to Get Around

Transport between the islands is by sea: ferries, hydrofoils or private boats.

Lipari is the logistical hub and the best base.

Salina and Vulcano are less than 1 hour by boat from Lipari.

Filicudi and Alicudi, further west, require crossings of between 2 and 3 hours.

On land, most travel is on foot, although in Lipari and Salina there are local buses, taxis and convenient scooter rentals. In Alicudi and Filicudi, the streets are stairways and paths: here the journey is truly lived on foot.

Where to Stay

Hotel Mea – Aeolian Charme (Lipari)

Located just a few minutes from the historic centre, it offers spacious rooms with terraces and a pool overlooking the sea. A good starting point for exploring the entire archipelago.

La Settima Luna (Canneto, Lipari)

Small boutique accommodation facing Canneto Bay. With just seven rooms, a sun terrace and a warm family atmosphere. Ideal for peaceful, relaxing stays.

Therasia Resort Sea & Spa (Vulcano)

Set on a cliff in Vulcanello, it is the most exclusive option. It features a spa, private access to the sea and a Michelin-starred gourmet restaurant.

Where to Eat

Ristorante da Filippino (Lipari)

A classic of the island, with a panoramic terrace and seafood cuisine. Highlights include swordfish, sea urchins and seafood pasta.

Da Alfredo (Salina)

A must in the village of Lingua. Famous for pane cunzatu (rustic bread with tomato, capers and cheese) and for its artisanal granitas.

Il Capperò (Vulcano)

Gourmet restaurant at the Therasia Resort, led by chef Giuseppe Biuso. Creative cuisine rooted in Aeolian products.

Pecorini a Mare (Filicudi)

Small restaurant by the pier. Perfect for tasting lobster, swordfish and local wine in a relaxed, seafaring atmosphere.

Practical Tips

Best Time: September and early October, when the weather is mild and the islands regain their calm.

What to Bring: Comfortable footwear for hiking, sun protection and diving goggles for snorkelling.

Local Gastronomy: Do not miss trying Salina's renowned Malvasia, seafaring dishes such as pasta with fresh anchovies, stuffed squid in tomato sauce and pesce spada alla ghiotta, pickled capers and traditional almond-based sweets

NIAGARA FALLS



Niagara Falls From USA

Text and Photos: Larissa Rolley - Larissarolley@outlook.com

*“In the presence
of Niagara, I feel
my spirit rise,
invigorated by
the beauty it
inspires.”
(Isaac Johnson)*



Aerial View of the Walkways beside the American Falls

Niagara Falls are one of the great natural symbols of the planet. From the Canadian side, the view is broad, panoramic, almost theatrical. By contrast, crossing into the United States, the experience becomes closer: paths among trees, small islands in the middle of the river and viewpoints on the very edge of the abyss turn the visit into a direct encounter with nature. Here it is not merely observed —you become part of the water’s continuous spectacle.

The drop is so powerful that it creates a constant drizzle enveloping the visitor, while the unceasing pulse of the river can be felt, flowing down from the Great Lakes as a living current that never stops. From the rapids roaring upstream to the base of the falls, the air is filled with particles that transmit both energy and relief, a natural tonic felt throughout the body. On the American side you are surrounded by it all: the force of the torrent, the thunder of the fall and the freshness of the mist brushing the skin.



Aerial View of the Falls with the Observation Platform and the City in Canada

When water ceases to be a postcard

When one imagines Niagara Falls, it is often the wide, majestic view that comes to mind —the panoramic vista from the Canadian side, splendid, as if witnessing a natural spectacle from a royal box. But across the river, on American soil, the experience is transformed into something else: wilder, more immediate, more intimate. Here the traveller ceases to be a spectator and steps onto nature's own stage.

You can walk along the riverbank, feel the water gathering speed, cross small islands amid the rapids and stand right on the edge where millions of litres of water plunge noisily beneath your feet.

Nature as the protagonist

In 1885, Niagara Falls State Park was created, the first in the United States, with a clear objective: to protect this environment from growing urban pressure and preserve it as a natural sanctuary. The driving force behind this idea was Frederick Law Olmsted, the same landscape architect who had designed Central Park in New York. Olmsted was struck by Niagara's power and fought to prevent commercial greed from turning it into a showcase of hotels and billboards. His vision was simple yet radical: the visitor should experience the falls without distractions, with no adornments other than the sheer power of water and the surrounding forest.

Thanks to that decision, today's traveller walking from Goat Island to the Cave of the Winds follows wooded trails, finds open meadows for resting beside the river and enjoys natural viewpoints where the gaze meets neither billboards nor skyscrapers. What one sees from the Canadian side —a horizon free of concrete and asphalt— is, in large part, the fruit of that early defence. New York, in the face of nineteenth-century progress, chose to preserve nature.

Close to the water

The Niagara River begins to tell its story long before it plunges into the void. Just upstream, several islands interrupt its course: Goat Island, Luna Island and the Three Sisters Islands. They are linked by paths and bridges that allow you to walk above the turbulent waters and hear the rising roar up close. On Luna Island, the traveller stands between two curtains of water: the American Falls on one side and the Bridal Veil Falls on the other. The experience is direct, unmediated, with the mist rising like a curtain enveloping the gaze.

Goat Island, the largest of them all, offers one of the most breathtaking vantage points: Terrapin Point. From there you stand on the edge of the Horseshoe Falls — the great waterfall shaped like a horseshoe— and watch as the immense body of water crashes down vertically with an almost hypnotic roar.



“Niagara is an inexhaustible source of energy. Here the current of the water becomes a force to light up cities and transform the future”
(Nikola Tesla)

Following the Course of the American Falls
The Rainbow Bridge Links the USA and Canada beneath the Shadow of a Helium Balloon



NIAGARA FALLS

For a few moments the boundaries between watching and participating blur: it is not about seeing, but about feeling the earth tremble underfoot and the damp air strike your face.

Terrapin Point and the history of the landscape

This viewpoint also has a singular history. In the early nineteenth century, the Porter brothers built a wooden bridge to access the Terrapin Rocks, a cluster of rocks jutting into the river. Later they erected a kind of tower-lighthouse that piqued the curiosity of visitors but also drew criticism for marring the natural beauty. In 1873, the structure was demolished. In the mid-twentieth century, further filling and reinforcement works expanded the viewing platform.

The result today is an open balcony above the abyss, from which the scale of the Horseshoe Falls can be grasped without intermediaries.

The Cave of the Winds

Among the most intense experiences on the American side is the Cave of the Winds. Access is via a lift descending more than fifty metres to the base of the Bridal Veil Falls. From there, a series of wooden walkways lead the visitor to the so-called Hurricane Deck, a spot where the force of water and wind makes it impossible to stay dry. It is like walking inside the waterfall itself: a constant roar, a cloud of spray and the certainty of being just metres away from an unstoppable torrent.

This attraction is no tourist gimmick but an opportunity to physically understand Niagara's power. The wooden walkways are dismantled each winter and rebuilt each spring, a tradition that strengthens the bond between the river and the community around it. Each season brings a slightly different layout, reminding visitors that the landscape is alive. Standing there, drenched and exhilarated, is to share in a ritual as old as the falls themselves

The Majestic Panorama of the American Falls from Above



Air that lifts the spirit

It is not only the sight or the sound that moves you. The air around the falls is charged with tiny particles of water and negative ions, responsible for the sense of freshness and wellbeing felt up close. The mist works like a balm: it moistens the skin, clears the breath, refreshes the senses and seems to renew the body's energy with each calm inhalation. Visitors often describe the effect as revitalising, almost therapeutic, a natural medicine impossible to bottle.

Studies suggest that exposure to environments rich in negative ions —waterfalls, mountains, damp forests— helps improve mood, reduce stress, encourage better sleep and even balance certain bodily functions. Whatever the scientific explanation, the truth is that Niagara's experience goes far beyond the visual. Travellers return with a different vitality, as if the water had entered their very memory and awakened something deep, a renewed strength that lingers long after leaving the place.

A stage without artifice

The Canadian side of Niagara Falls offers a grand spectacle, a perfect scenography to be admired in panorama, accompanied by hotels, night lights and fireworks. The American side, by contrast, proposes another kind of journey: not distant contemplation, but immersion in nature without embellishment.

Those who cross to Goat Island, who walk along the walkways of Luna Island or are soaked in the Cave of the Winds, become part of the stage itself. The water ceases to be a postcard and becomes presence, a force that envelops, a roar that shakes the body. It is an intimate journey, one that requires no adjectives or additions, because nature speaks with authority on its own. The American side of Niagara Falls preserves the essence of a landscape protected against time and speculation. Olmsted's vision remains alive in every trail, every island, every mist rising from the abyss.



NIAGARA FALLS

Here, the traveller does not look from afar but enters into nature's very current.

In that instant, between the thunder of the water and the freshness of the air, it becomes clear that true greatness needs no adornment. It is enough simply to be there, to let yourself be enveloped and to accept the lesson the falls have repeated for centuries: that when nature is given space, it unleashes a power no human hand can equal.

If the Canadian side is a raised gallery, the American side is the front row: feet dampened by the spray, hands resting on the rail at the brink and the roar of the water resonating through the bones. Here you walk across islands that divide the river, breathe in the rising mist and hear the deep voice of the falls close at hand.

At times, the spray forms rainbows arching above the torrent. Their image inevitably recalls the Rainbow Bridge, the span linking the United States and Canada, a symbol that Niagara is shared heritage, with two distinct ways of approaching the same natural force.

That is why it is worth setting aside time: to prepare a picnic, wander the trails and approach the edge of one of the planet's most imposing waterfalls. And then, to stay a little longer. Because on the American side, Niagara is not observed — it is lived.



Practical Guide

The American side of Niagara Falls offers much more than viewpoints: it is a place to explore, to live unique experiences and to discover stories tied to the river and its surroundings. Here are some key facts to guide your visit.

Did you know...

- **The first state park:** In 1885, Niagara became the first state park in the United States.
- **Three falls in one:** Horseshoe Falls, American Falls and Bridal Veil Falls form the whole.
- **An overwhelming flow:** More than 2.8 million litres of water per second plunge into the void.
- **Pioneering energy:** George Westinghouse brought alternating current from Niagara Falls to Buffalo in 1896, using the electrical transmission system developed by Nikola Tesla. The Niagara Falls Power Company built the first hydroelectric plant.
- **A symbolic bridge:** The Rainbow Bridge links the United States and Canada, reminding us that Niagara is a shared treasure.

Ways to experience the falls

Maid of the Mist

In service since 1846, these boats —now fully electric and emission-free— glide almost silently into the mist. Their name recalls the Seneca legend of Lelawala, the Maid of the Mist, protected by the god of thunder.

Helicopter tours, Rainbow Air

A panoramic flight following the river's course and showing the falls from above. A majestic perspective of the rapids and the waterfalls as a whole.

Tethered balloon, Live On Air

A helium balloon anchored to the ground lifts visitors for 360-degree views over the river and gorge. From below, its white silhouette becomes part of the landscape.

Cave of the Winds

Wooden walkways descend to the foot of Bridal Veil Falls. Visitors are enveloped by wind and mist in a thrilling experience of water and adventure.

Niagara Falls Scenic Trolley

A green tram that runs throughout the park with hop-on, hop-off stops. A comfortable and nostalgic way to get around without missing the scenery.



- 1.- Nikola Tesla
- 2.- Niagara Falls Scenic Trolley
- 3.- Maid of the Mist
- 4.- Park Entrance
- 5.- Tethered Balloon



NIAGARA FALLS
STATE PARK - USA



ESTONIA, HIDDEN PARADISES



Panoramic View of Tallinn

Estonia

Dreaming of hidden paradises

Text: Joaquín del Palacio - joaquineografo@gmail.com

Photos: Estonian Tourist Board



Amid medieval fortresses, frozen seas and thousands of islands, Estonia reveals itself as a destination of unspoilt nature, unique history and festive culture

The Baltic Sea was formed after the last Ice Age, having lain beneath ice for millennia, as did the lands that now shape its coastline. Once freed from the ice's weight, those lands slowly rose, and among their shores the territory of Estonia began to emerge. As the glaciers receded, losing their carrying power, the great rocks they had transported were left stranded. Scattered at random, these erratic boulders, weighing several tonnes, are now a hallmark of Estonia, found in forests, along the coast or even in the streets of its capital.

A catalogue of architecture

began as a fortress and in the thirteenth century prospered under the protection of the Hanseatic League. From that golden era it retains a beautiful old town with an authentic medieval square, dominated by the fifteenth-century town hall, along with many streets and houses of the time, all enclosed by a wall lined with towers. Later, in the mid-sixteenth century, St Olaf's Church would become the tallest building in the world for 76 years, with a tower rising to 522 feet. It was so tall that it served less as a landmark for ships than as a lightning rod, burning in 1625. It now measures 124 m. All this heritage was recognised by UNESCO in 1997.

The turbulent history of the capital is distinctive due to its position between great empires. During the Soviet era, the districts of Telliskivi and Rotermann played an important industrial, railway and naval role. Today, however, they reveal how those old factories have been transformed into stylish homes, shops and restaurants.



Song Festival Grounds



Icebreaker Ship



Muhu Vineyards

To the east of Tallinn, where the forest blends with the city, stands the Song Festival Grounds, an immense stage for 10,000 cho-risters used for the Song Festival held every five years. Estonians are cheerful people, fond of celebrating everything with music, singing together.

When the sun tilts...

Winter arrives. At these latitudes daylight fades dramatically and temperatures fall below zero. Because the Baltic has the lowest salinity of all seas, it freezes solidly enough for roads to be built across the ice, allowing access to certain islands. Icebreakers are also a common sight, keeping maritime transport moving. Its low salinity is due to being almost enclosed, with little evaporation and abundant rainfall, making it a brackish sea rather than a salty one. It hardly tastes of salt at all.

With its cold winters and fir-filled forests, Tallinn is considered the birthplace of the Christmas tree. Records state that in 1441, the Brotherhood of the Blackheads placed a tree in the square to celebrate Christmas with dancing and festivities around it.

Thousands of islands of every kind

The country's insular side is astonishing: more than 2,300 islands and islets shape its silhouette, though only 22 are hab-ited. Saaremaa, whose name means "island-land", is the largest and overflows with surprises. The first is that to reach it by ferry one must first cross the island of Muhu —an island of grapes, trees and horses.

Muhu is of grapes, because one of the world's northernmost wines is harvested here; of dense forests that cloak it; and of rides through them on horseback. The two islands are separated by a narrow, shallow strait yet also united by a bridge. Crossing it leads to Saaremaa.



Kuressaare Castle, Saaremaa Island

Kuressaare, its coastal and charming capital, boasts Estonia's best-preserved fortress and houses within its walls three museums and a library. The star-shaped citadel is reached by crossing a wide, water-filled moat via one of three islets with defensive bastions that complete the fortifications.

Embarked and isolated

Water connections define life at every step. The Lõve River, in its 19.9 miles course, drops only a few metres before flowing into the Laidevahe Nature Reserve, an environment brimming with life, lit by vibrant green. Vegetation crowds both its banks and the water itself, making these waters seem to run through tangled, impenetrable jungles. Its flat profile causes the current to overflow the riverbed, flooding the accompanying gallery forest and creating sensational scenes. Like Alice chasing the rabbit, paddling down the Lõve in a kayak takes you into another world. You enter exuberant nature, where wildlife can be felt, greenery can be smelt and adventure can be breathed. At its end, before reaching the sea, the river widens into Lake Oessaare, encircled by trees and dense with aquatic plants and algae, an unusual corner home to countless waterbirds that swim, fly and sing.

Nature of Saaremaa Island



And there is more, beyond Saaremaa. To the Abruka Nature Reserve, a tiny island south of Kuressaare, one sails by yacht. Around thirty people live on this secluded paradise of timeless images, between forest and sea, without asphalt. It can also be explored in an old Soviet truck that carries you beyond reality



Port of Flåm

Between Fjords and Mountains

The Journey on the Flåm Railway

Text: Rosario Alonso - **Photos:** Jose A. Muñoz

More than a train, the Flåmsbana is a story that links the calm of the fjords with the power of the mountain

The Flåm Railway climbs slowly from the shores of the Aurlandsfjord, where the water mirrors vertical mountains, to the snow-capped peaks of Myrdal. In just an hour, the scenery shifts from fjord to high mountain: hand-dug tunnels, waterfalls thundering only metres away and valleys that seem endless. Every curve opens up a different postcard, a journey where Norwegian nature displays all its grandeur.

The Flåm Railway: a journey between mountains and water

Travelling on the vintage-style Flåm Railway is not simply moving between two points on the Norwegian map; it is accepting an invitation into the heart of a landscape seemingly designed to inspire awe. As a travel journalist, accustomed to observing with a critical eye, I rarely feel the urge to put the notebook down and simply gaze.

A beginning among fjords

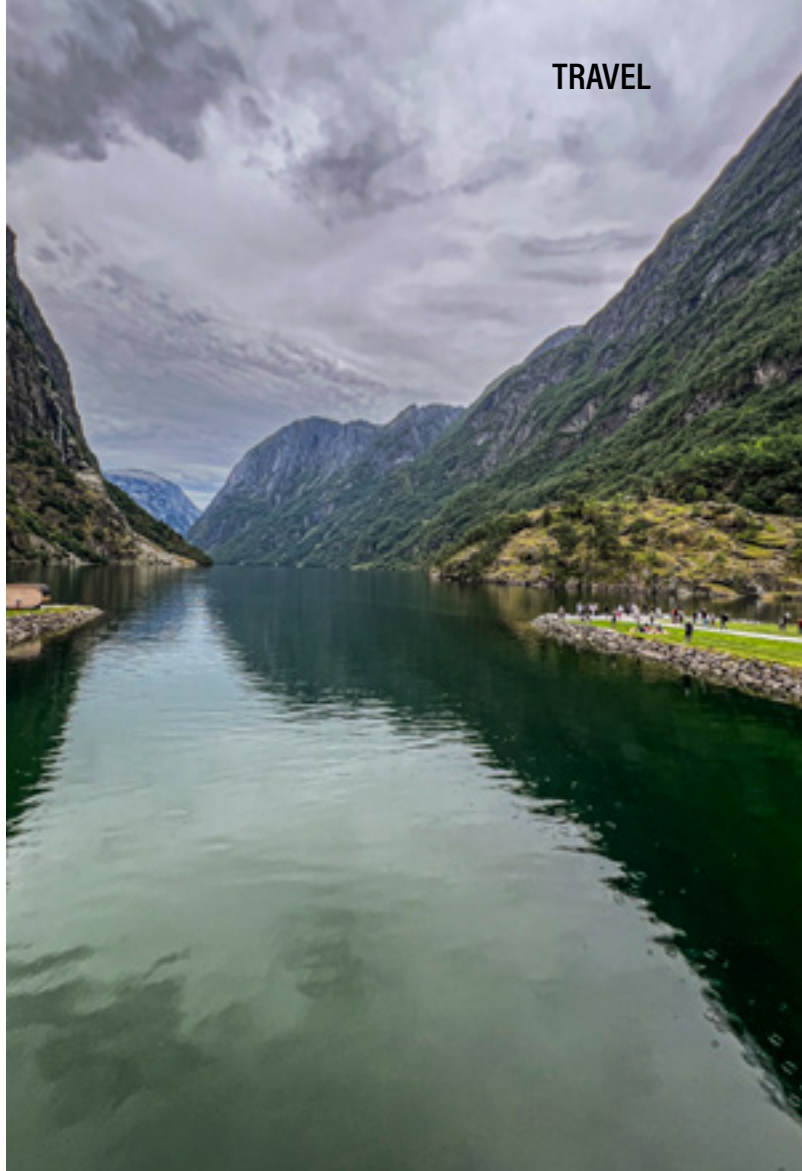
The journey starts in Flåm, a small Norwegian village nestled on the inner shore of the Aurlandsfjord, one of the arms of the famed Sognefjord, the longest and deepest fjord in Norway (second only to Greenland's Scoresby Sund) and one of the most spectacular on the planet. There, between still waters and sheer cliffs that seem to cut the sky, the train begins its ascent inland. The contrast is immediate: the fjord's calm is left behind as the rails climb into an increasingly rugged landscape.

At the station, tourists mingle with hikers laden with backpacks and cyclists eager to descend the valley's serpentine road. From the first movement of the locomotive, it is clear that the spectacle lies not only at the destination, but in every kilometre travelled.

A feat of engineering and patience

The Flåmsbana, as Norwegians call it, climbs 866 metres in just 12.4 miles, making it one of the steepest standard-gauge railways in the world. The line, inaugurated in 1940 after two decades of work, earned its reputation as a technical marvel: 20 tunnels cut through rock, most of them excavated by hand, trace a route where every bend seems to defy gravity.

As the train plunges into these dark passages, one imagines the labourers who spent years carving stone with dynamite and pickaxe.



View of the Fjord from Flåm

Classic Carriages of the Flåmsbana



THE FLÅM RAILWAY



The Huldra of the Waterfall and, below, the Kjosfossen Waterfall

Emerging from each tunnel, the light reveals a different landscape: meadows with red-painted wooden houses, rivers rushing wildly and snow-capped mountains even in summer.

The roar of Kjosfossen

One of the journey's most intense moments comes when the train stops beside the Kjosfossen waterfall. The roar of the water drowns out all conversation. With a drop of more than 295 feet, the site is a natural stage that needs no extra scenery. In summer, the spectacle is enriched by the appearance of the "Huldra", a female figure from Norwegian folklore who, through music and dance, reminds travellers that in these lands nature has always had a legendary face.

Watching the falls from the train's platform is a sensory experience: mist dampens the skin, the air smells of wet rock and the thunderous noise overwhelms, as if the entire fjord had been compressed into that single point.



Cycling routes and active tourism

The train continues towards Myrdal, but not all passengers complete the trip. Many disembark at intermediate stations to embark on one of the most sought-after adventures: cycling through the Flåmsdalen valley along the old railway construction road. The more daring load their bicycles onto the train before embarking on a 12.4 miles descent past waterfalls, forests and hamlets.

The valley also lends itself to hiking, with marked trails leading past torrents and meadows where sheep graze. For those who prefer the water, kayaking on the Aurlandsfjord offers another perspective: paddling at the foot of sheer cliffs more than a thousand metres high is to grasp the magnitude of these landscapes from a place of humility.

Connections and onward journeys

On reaching Myrdal, the small station perched 2,848 feet above sea level, travellers encounter a junction connecting the Flåm line with the main Bergen–Oslo route. The train change also marks a shift in scale: from the intimacy of the valley to the breadth of Norway's rail network, opening the way to two essential destinations.



Landscapes from the Train and, below, the Flåmsbana Museum





Tvindefossen waterfalls



Aerial View of Voss and its Impressive Lake

Westwards lies Bergen, the Hanseatic city cradled between fjords and mountains, gateway to the Atlantic. Eastwards, the line leads to Oslo, the capital, where architectural modernity meets museums and a vibrant cultural life. The Flåm journey, then, does not end in Myrdal but stretches out in either direction, as if the rails were linking intimate Norway with its urban heart.

Voss, land of adventure

Not far from this route lies Voss, another town worth a pause. Known as Norway's capital of active tourism, Voss offers it all: from hang-gliding and paragliding to white-water rafting. Its lake and mountains make it a mecca for adrenaline seekers. For the traveller who has ridden the Flåmsbana, Voss is the natural extension of a journey that began contemplative and may well end with a physical challenge.

A journey to remember

In little more than an hour, the Flåm Railway condenses the essence of Norway: fjords like infinite mirrors, vertical mountains, roaring waterfalls and tunnels testifying to human ingenuity. Yet what lingers in the memory is not only the scenery, but the feeling of having passed through a land where nature still sets the rhythm.

When the train stopped at Myrdal and I changed for Bergen, I carried with me a certainty: the journey on the Flåmsbana is not mere transport, it is a story. One that begins in the calm waters of the Sognefjord, rises through inland valleys and leaves the traveller in touch with a Norway that, between fjords and mountains, seems never-ending.

Norwegian Scenes of Mountains, Rivers and Small Villages





Copenhagen

Déjate llevar por el *hygge* danés

Text: Rosario Alonso - **Photos:** Archive and Jose A. Muñoz

The first thing that surprises visitors is how easy-going the Danish capital feels. There are no intimidating skyscrapers or impossible traffic jams. Here, distances are best covered on two wheels. Copenhagen is designed for cyclists: wide lanes, adapted traffic lights and road etiquette that would make many a European capital envious. Renting a bicycle is also the best way to blend into the urban landscape.

The historic centre, **Indre By**, is best enjoyed at a leisurely pace. In one stroll you can go from the majestic City Hall Square to lively Strøget, the pedestrian street lined with shops and cafés, and end up in Nyhavn, Denmark's most photographed harbour. Its colourful façades, aligned like dominoes along the canal, are the image every traveller wants to take home.

Between Fairy Tales and Design

If Copenhagen had to choose a cultural ambassador, it would be Hans Christian Andersen. The author of *The Little Mermaid* lived here for much of his life, and his presence is felt in commemorative plaques, literary trails, museums dedicated to him and, of course, in the bronze statue of the Little Mermaid, sitting silently by the sea. Small, yes, and always surrounded by curious tourists, but an inseparable part of the city's identity.

The Danish capital is also a showcase for Scandinavian design. Amalienborg Palace, residence of the royal family, offers a perfectly choreographed changing of the guard. A short walk away, the Copenhagen Opera House, with its contemporary architecture and world-class acoustics, shows that this is a city looking to the future without forgetting its past.

Eating Well, Eating Slowly

Hygge also sits at the table. Copenhagen has earned its reputation as a gastronomic capital thanks to restaurants such as Noma, but you don't need to book months in advance to eat well. Danish cuisine combines simplicity with local produce, with dishes such as smørrebrød, rye bread topped with marinated herring, roast beef with remoulade or peeled prawns.

Some cities seem designed for living in haste, while others invite you to slow down. Copenhagen undoubtedly belongs to the latter. It is not only about bicycles, canals and colourful façades: it is the way of understanding life that the Danes call hygge. A word difficult to translate —and even harder to pronounce without sounding like a tourist— it sums up the happiness of simple things: a chat with friends, a hot coffee while it rains outside, a blanket and good company. In Copenhagen, hygge is not a luxury, it is part of daily life.

Nyhavn, the 17th-Century Historic Harbour



COPENHAGEN



Amalienborg Palace, Frederiks Church in the Background, and, below, City Hall Square



For a livelier atmosphere, **Torvehallerne** is a covered food market full of cheeses, cured meats, pastries and coffee stalls. An ideal place to practise the art of sitting, watching and letting time slip by.

The Art of Doing Nothing...

The Danes have mastered the ability to enjoy small moments. In summer, that means sitting in parks such as the King's Gardens with an impromptu picnic. In winter, it means retreating to a café with large windows while the city takes on its grey hues. The best way to understand it is to forget the agenda and simply wander. It may be crossing the canal to Christiania, the self-managed neighbourhood famous for its alternative spirit, or exploring Vesterbro, once a working-class district, now full of bars and galleries.

Museums that Invite You to Stay

The National Museum of Denmark takes you through the country's history from pre-history to the present day. The Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, just outside the city, combines modern works with spectacular views of the Øresund Strait.



View of Tivoli, in the City Centre

Copenhagen Opera House





The Little Mermaid Statue

And then there is Tivoli Gardens: an amusement park opened in 1843 that is still a place for all ages. Wooden roller coasters, illuminated gardens and open-air concerts create a collective sense of hygge.

Copenhagen by Night

Night in Copenhagen is calm, but never dull. Bars invite conversation rather than noise, and local beer flows generously. In summer, the quays fill with people; in winter, candlelight does the rest.

Danes need no big excuse to gather, and visitors are welcome to join. It might be in a minimalist cocktail bar or a neighbourhood brewery. What matters is not the place, but the company.

Bringing Back More than Photos

Copenhagen is not understood only by what you see, but by what you feel. Hygge is not a souvenir you can pack in your suitcase, but an attitude you can bring home: the value of simplicity, the pleasure of shared moments, calm in the midst of routine.

The Famous Alternative Neighbourhood of Christiania





The Windmill of Kastellet

Keyword: Hygge

Pronounced “hoo-geh”, it means enjoying the little things with calm and good company.

How to Get Around

Rent a bicycle: it's fast, affordable and part of local culture. The metro is another highly recommended way to move around. The city is flat and walking is very pleasant.

When to Go

Summer: long days, terraces and festivals.

Winter: perfect for experiencing hygge by candlelight.

What to Try

Smørrebrød: rye bread with herring, roast beef or prawns.

Danish coffee: strong, aromatic, served unhurriedly.

Local beer: Carlsberg, Tuborg or craft varieties.

Where to Stay

Villa Copenhagen, located in the former post office, is a central hotel belonging to **Preferred Hotels & Resorts**, right next to the central station and Tivoli Gardens. It combines history and modernity with a sustainable luxury concept, a rooftop pool, organic restaurant and elegant Nordic design, ideal for discovering the city in comfort.

Cultural Curiosity

In Denmark, candles are lit even in offices and bars: warm light is part of their identity.

Must-See Sights

Nyhavn.

The Little Mermaid.

Amalienborg Palace.

Tivoli.

Rosenborg Castle.

Christiansborg Palace or Danish Parliament.

Hotel Villa Copenhagen





Albacete

Natural parks, trails among waterfalls, historic villages and unique festivals make Albacete a destination that surprises travellers in every season

Text: Clara Serrano Vega - claraserranovega@gmail.com

Photos: Albacete Hospitality and Tourism Association (APEHT)



Arch of the Milky Way over Lavender – Ossa de Montiel © Diego Villalobos

Under the clear skies of Albacete, where light pollution is barely present, the province opens up to the universe as the world's first Starlight Tourist Destination. A network of viewpoints, night routes and unique sites invite you to experience the night in its purest state



Libisosa Castle – Milky Way Arch © Diego Villalobos

Albacete, beneath a Sky that Opens to the Universe

Albacete has become the first region in the world to be designated a Starlight Tourist Destination, a recognition that rewards the clarity of its skies and the province's commitment to astrotourism. Districts such as Mancha Júcar-Centro and Monteibérico-Corredor de Almansa have achieved certification, leading to the creation of a network of 17 astronomical viewpoints designed to attract travellers and enthusiasts from across the globe. The proposal goes beyond obser-

vation: night routes, astrophotography workshops and guided sessions turn the experience into both a cultural and scientific journey. Among the viewpoints, spots such as **Casas de Lázaro, Bogarra and Liétor** stand out, where absolute darkness reveals constellations and planets with astonishing clarity. In La Manchuela, the Abengibre viewpoint looks out over the Júcar Valley, while in the **Corredor de Almansa** the medieval castle becomes a privileged watchtower from which to follow the course of the Milky Way.

The jewel of the province's astrotourism is the Sierra del Segura, recognised as one of Europe's regions with the best conditions for contemplating the night sky. In **Nerpio**, the Universe Interpretation Centre and the international complex run by AstroCamp bring visitors closer to astronomical research. From here, astronomers track exoplanets, record novas and supernovas, and have even captured images of the quasar J1148+5251, the most distant object known to humankind.

Other mountain villages, such as **Yeste, Letur and Riópar**, invite visitors to extend the experience with night walks and unspoiled skies, where galaxies and star clusters appear with a moving clarity. In **Ayna**, the "La Mancha Switzerland", the contrast between the gorges of the River Mundo and the celestial dome multiplies the spectacle.

Albacete has turned the night into a first-class tourist resource. A place where science mingles with the emotion of looking up and realising that, in the silence of darkness, the entire universe opens before our eyes

Lagunas de Ruidera with the Milky Way © Diego Villalobos



Albacete, Land of Calm and Green Horizons

Natural parks, crystal-clear rivers and turquoise lagoons make Albacete a haven for both rest and adventure

Albacete surprises. Often associated with the La Mancha plain and the city that bears its name, the province holds a mosaic of landscapes where nature, heritage and popular tradition intertwine. Two natural parks, trails that invite unhurried walking and festivals with deep cultural roots make this corner of Castilla-La Mancha a destination that goes far beyond clichés

Parks that Pulse with Water

The Calares del Mundo and Sima Natural Park It is, without doubt, one of the most impressive landscapes in the south-east of the peninsula. Here the River Mundo is born, in a setting where limestone rock and pine forests combine with the spectacular **reventón**: a natural phenomenon that forcefully expels thousands of litres of water from the cave. The town of **Riópar** serves as the gateway to this environment, where trails lead into gorges and viewpoints offering unforgettable panoramas.



Turquoise Lagoon – below, Kayaking in the Lagunas de Ruidera



Zarzalar Route



The second great natural landmark is the **Lagunas de Ruidera**, shared with Ciudad Real but with much of their splendour lying in Albacete. This is a group of fifteen terraced lagoons linked by waterfalls and streams that seem taken from an alpine landscape. Their turquoise waters, surrounded by reeds and holm oaks, are a paradise for kayaking, diving or simply pausing to contemplate. It is no coincidence that many call it “the Caribbean of La Mancha.”

Nature in Motion

The province unfolds an almost endless catalogue of routes, where every path combines landscape, heritage and tradition.

The Tranco del Lobo Route, in La Manchuela, leads to an impressive natural viewpoint overlooking valleys and mountains blanketed with pine forests. It is a demanding walk, but one with great visual rewards.

In Nerpio, the Zarzalar Route allows visitors to enter a setting of waterfalls, tunnels of vegetation and crystal-clear pools, a perfect oasis for those seeking freshness and nature in its purest form.





Route through the Gorges



Mountain Routes in Yeste, a Paradise for Cycling
Waterfalls at the Source of the River Mundo

The Sculpture and Waterfall Route in Bogarra combines art and nature. Along the trail, dozens of open-air sculptures converse with the murmur of water and the riverside forest.

Cinema also has its place in the Albacete mountains. “**Amanece, Que No Es Poco**” Film Route, in **Ayna** and its surroundings, takes in the natural settings of José Luis Cuerda’s cult film, now places of pilgrimage for film lovers.

In **Riópar**, the route to the **Source of the River Mundo** is one of the most visited. The path leads to the mighty jet of water bursting from the cave which, during the thaw, multiplies its flow in the phenomenon known as the **reventón**.

The Ruidera Viewpoints Route links natural balconies from which to contemplate the lagoons, their waterfalls and riverside vegetation. A peaceful walk that invites you to pause at each observation point.

The “**Between Gorges**” Route connects Alcalá del Júcar, Tolosa, La Gila and Casas del Cerro, following the course of the river. It is a circular route showcasing the canyons and gorges that have made this landscape one of the most photographed in the province.

Finally, the **Vía Verde del Renacimiento Natural** Trail recovers an old railway line to connect Albacete with Jaén. Ideal for cycling or walking, it crosses agricultural and mountain landscapes, making it a perfect axis for cycle tourism.



A Journey through Centuries of History

The cultural heritage of Albacete adds layers of meaning to the journey. The province preserves a collection of **25 must-sees** ranging from medieval castles to highly distinctive contemporary museums. **Chinchilla de Montearagón**, with its imposing fifteenth-century fortress, stands guard over the La Mancha plain, while **Alcalá del Júcar**, with its hanging houses above the river, offers one of the most recognisable images of popular architecture in dialogue with the landscape. **Letur**, recently incorporated into the network of The Most Beautiful Villages of Spain, retains its Arab layout in a network of cobbled streets and viewpoints that reward travellers with unexpected panoramas.

Museums complete this cultural geography and allow visitors to delve into the identity of the province. **The Cutlery Museum of Albacete**, located in the **Casa de Hortelano**, pays tribute to a craft declared an Asset of Cultural Interest and protected by a Geographical Indication. The city, which was World Capital of Cutlery in 2022, still preserves workshops and collections that show how artisanal tradition coexists with innovation. In Hellín, the **MUSS, Museum of Holy Week**, combines religious and ethnographic heritage with a modern museographic approach. In Tobarra, the Drum Museum holds more than 4,000 pieces linked to a tradition declared of International Tourist Interest, while in Elche de la Sierra **the Serrín Carpets Museum** preserves an ephemeral artistic expression that each Corpus Christi dyes the town's streets with colour.



Alcalá del Júcar at Night

Chapel of Our Lady of Bethlehem, Liétor





Tower of the Church of San Francisco in Caudete and, below, View of Riópar Viejo



Festivals with a Popular Soul

The province is also a land of festivals with a singular strength. The most famous is the **Albacete Fair**, held from 7 to 17 September and declared of International Tourist Interest. For ten days, the Fairground —built in the eighteenth century and popularly known as “**La Sartén**” (the frying pan)— becomes a hive of activity with concerts, parades, bullfights, folk performances and a gastronomic offering that confirms the open and hospitable character of the city.

Other events complete the province's festive calendar with their own personality. **The Battle of Almansa, re-enacted** each April with great historical accuracy, brings back to the streets the memory of one of the most decisive military episodes of eighteenth-century Europe. In Tobarra, the uninterrupted drumming during Holy Week fills the region with an ancestral sound that moves thousands of visitors. In Hellín, processions become a collective spectacle where devotion and music intertwine, while in **Elche de la Sierra the sawdust carpets colour Corpus Christi**, transforming the village into a gallery of ephemeral art.

Re-enactment of the Battle of Almansa



Albacete Fair



Sawdust Carpets in Elche de la Sierra

Each of these celebrations, together with the wealth of museums and the value of its historical heritage, confirms that Albacete is much more than a land to pass through: it is a true open-air museum, with free entry and hospitality included, where travellers find culture, memory and celebration in every corner.

A Land to Rediscover

Nature, culture and festivity merge in Albacete in perfect balance. From the murmur of water in Ruidera to the clamour of the Fair, through the silent paths of the Sierra del Segura or the medieval streets of Chinchilla, the province offers travellers a land to rediscover. And in a time when we seek calm and authentic experiences, few places invite us as much as Albacete to pause, breathe and look around.





Hermida Gorge © Jose A. Muñoz

In western Cantabria, the Saja-Nansa region sketches a mosaic of landscapes where rivers set the rhythm of life and villages preserve their popular architecture intact. Here, rural tourism is not a recent invention but a way of understanding the land and keeping its traditions alive

The great natural emblem of the area is the Saja Reserve, an extensive protected space where oak groves, beech forests and mountain meadows coexist. It is also one of the sanctuaries of Iberian fauna: on its trails it is not uncommon to find tracks of roe deer, wild boar or red deer, and with a little luck, to catch sight of the elusive brown bear as it moves between the Cantabrian mountains and the Cordillera. Autumn turns into a sonic spectacle with the bellowing of stags, drawing numerous visitors every year.

But Saja-Nansa is not only nature. Its underground heritage has in El Soplao Cave one of Spain's most unique jewels. Discovered at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was first exploited as a mine and later recognised as a geological wonder for its eccentric formations, whimsical stalactites that seem to defy the laws of gravity. The visit, adapted for tourism, allows you to enter a unique mineral universe, a spectacle that amazes both experts and the curious alike.

Region of SAJA-NANSA Cantabria

Text: Editorial Staff

Photos: Cantabria Tourism Board, Region of Saja-Nansa and archive

Interior of El Soplao Cave © Cantabria Tourism board



On the more maritime side of the region, San Vicente de la Barquera opens its port to the Cantabrian Sea with the silhouette of the Picos de Europa as a backdrop. Its historic centre, with the Church of Santa María de los Ángeles and the medieval walls, recalls its importance on the northern Jacobean route. Today, its beaches and seafaring atmosphere attract travellers in search of good fish, coastal walks and that perfect blend of sea and mountain.

The counterpoint is provided by Bárcena Mayor, considered the oldest village in Cantabria and one of the most beautiful in Spain. Its stone houses with wooden balconies, grouped around a main street, offer visitors an untouched image of mountain architecture. Wandering its corners means immersing yourself in traditional life, with the tranquillity of a natural environment surrounding it.

And just a few kilometres away, like an unexpected gift, stands Gaudí's Capricho in Comillas, the modernist work that adds colour and fantasy to the journey. The Catalan architect's signature, with its unmistakable circular tower and vegetal decoration, provides an artistic flourish in a land where stone, wood and nature take centre stage.

Saja-Nansa is a destination where every stop opens a different door: wild nature, mining heritage, seafaring flavour or rural calm. A region that invites you to travel slowly and let yourself be surprised at every turn of the road.



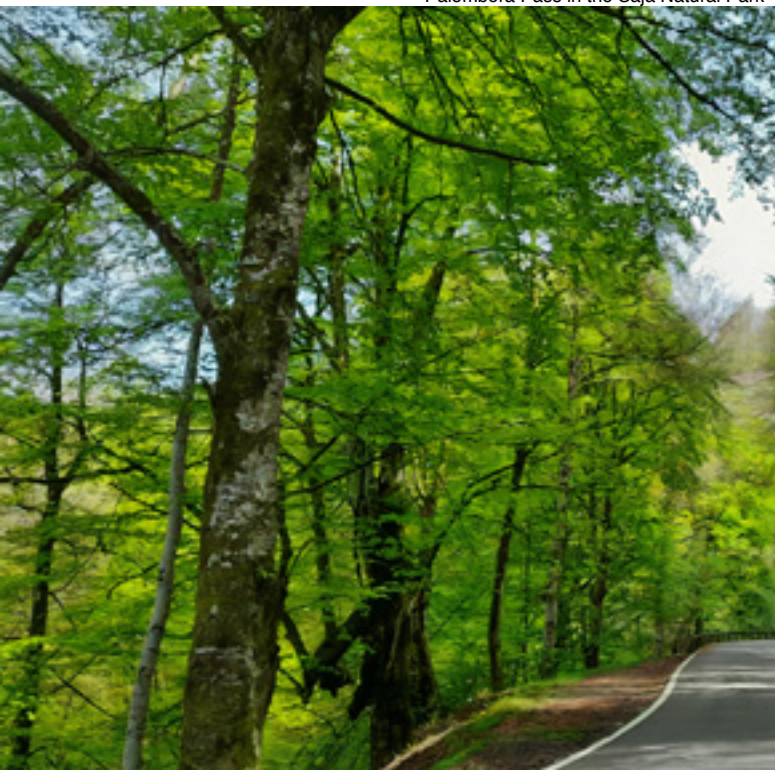
Palombera Pass in the Saja Natural Park



San Vicente de la Barquera



Panoramic View of Bárcena Mayor
Saja Natural Park, from its Viewpoint at Palombera Pass





El Capricho de Gaudí

A House in the Key of G

Comillas (Cantabria)

Text: Rosario Alonso - **Photos:** Jose A. Muñoz - **Foto:** Entrada principal de la casa

Comillas, On the western coast of Cantabria lies a town which, despite its modest size, occupies a prominent place in the history of Spanish architecture. At the end of the nineteenth century, this seafaring enclave was transformed into a hub of modernity thanks to the drive of Antonio López y López, the first Marquis of Comillas. His successful business career, linked to maritime trade and the creation of the Compañía Transatlántica, earned him a fortune which he partly devoted to embellishing his birthplace and turning it into a spa-retreat for the Spanish elites after Comillas debuted as a summer resort of King Alfonso XII around 1881–1882.

That patronage attracted some of the most influential architects of the time, including Domènec i Montaner, Joan Martorell, Cristóbal Cascante and, decisively, a young Antonio Gaudí.

The Marquis of Comillas and his circle gave rise to a unique heritage ensemble in Cantabria: the Sobrellano Palace with its Chapel-Mausoleum, the Pontifical University and, as a singular architectural jewel, El Capricho. It was commissioned by the indianero Máximo Díaz de Quijano, a wealthy lawyer settled in Cuba who was also the Marquis's brother-in-law by marriage, since his sister Benita was married to the Marquis's brother. The commission to Gaudí came in 1883, when the architect was only 31 years old.

An Early Work by Gaudí

El Capricho is one of Gaudí's few works outside Catalonia and belongs to his youthful period, along with the Episcopal Palace in Astorga and the Casa Botines in León. Completed in 1885 by the architect Cristóbal Cascante from Gaudí's plans, the building already shows many of the keys that would later define the architect's mature style: the integration of nature into architecture, the importance of ornamentation as a symbolic language and the imaginative use of traditional forms.

Although conceived as a private residence, El Capricho stands as a laboratory of ideas where Gaudí experimented with elements he would later refine in Casa Vicens or Parc Güell. The combination of the picturesque with the functional, the decorative with the structural, makes this work a fundamental example for understanding the evolution of Catalan modernism.







One of the House's Halls, with its Peculiar Musical Shutters

Architecture and Materials

The building has an elongated floor plan, adapted to the sun's orientation and the needs of the owner, a passionate music lover and a bachelor. Its 720 sq ft are distributed over three floors (basement, main and attic, connected by two extremely narrow spiral staircases) and organised around a circular tower reminiscent of a minaret, crowned by a lookout offering views over the meadows of Comillas. The façade, of exposed brick and glazed ceramic, plays with colour and texture contrasts, while the sunflower-patterned tiles set the decorative rhythm and convey the constant dialogue with nature.

The house is an architectural sunflower designed to be used according to the solar hours with efficiency and sustainability (a design dating back 140 years). The best example of this purpose is the conservatory at the heart of the house, which also provided heating through a system very similar to the "gloria castellana", with a chamber beneath the floor, but here replacing the furnace with the sun filtered through the glass.

The layout of the interiors responds both to comfort and originality, as well as to synchronising their uses with sunlight. The main hall was conceived as a flexible space for musical performances, while the south-facing glass gallery makes the most of natural light.

The combination of wrought iron, glazed ceramics and stone gives the building a material richness beyond mere ornament: it is Gaudí's manifesto of transforming tradition into innovation. Magnificent stained glass windows —unfinished, like the house itself— were designed to decorate the upper parts of all windows with depictions of animals playing musical instruments; sensational coffered ceilings in Oregon pine that change with the function of each room; windows and shutters with guillotine-style counterweights and cord-free blinds rolling up on their own, designed to work automatically with 6.6 lb counterweights that produce melodies when handled; as well as doors that appear and disappear to make the most of spaces and create unexpected ambiances —all examples of the innovation embodied in this impressive artistic creation.

Nature and Music: Two Essential Inspirations

Nature is, without doubt, the great guiding thread of the work. The sunflowers, reproduced in ceramic, not only decorate but also reinforce the idea of movement and the search for light.



View of the Conservatory, One of the Brightest Rooms in the House

Detail of One of the Balconies of the Main Hall



The circular tower with its belvedere evokes a stem growing skywards, while balconies and cornices suggest vegetal or symbol-laden forms. Gaudí, who conceived architecture as a living organism, anticipates here the fusion of environment and building that he would fully develop in the Sagrada Família.

Music, meanwhile, is intimately linked to Díaz de Quijano, an inveterate music lover who wished for a house in which he could live surrounded by his passion. Gaudí designed windows and rooms that evoked musical notes and rhythms, conceiving the structure of the home as an architectural score in which each element had its tempo. Even the stained-glass windows and arches contribute to creating a sense of cadence, as if the building itself breathed in rhythm. Staves, musical notes and even treble clefs on the tower's railings adorn the façade. The main hall, designed for concerts, with a vaulted ceiling to improve acoustics, together with the outdoor benches arranged like theatre boxes to hear performances as if inside, reinforce the feeling that the house is a score in its entirety.



Smoking Room
Detail of the Stained Glass Windows



Curiosities and Transformations

Among the curiosities of El Capricho is its experimental nature. Its very name could allude to the creative freedom with which Gaudí approached the project —a “caprice” departing from academic conventions. The premature death of Díaz de Quijano in 1885, just a week after his return to Comillas gravely ill and at only 47 years old, added a note of melancholy to the work, strengthening the idea of whim or reverie of its owner, who never lived to enjoy it, nor allowed its completion, though only decorative work remained pending.

Gaudí's youthful work passed through various hands and uses during the twentieth century, including a period of abandonment. In the 1980s, the building was restored and converted into a restaurant, and later into a museum dedicated to Gaudí himself. Today it is one of Comillas's main cultural attractions and part of Spain's most visited network of modernist buildings.

Heritage and Architectural Value

Beyond its unique beauty, El Capricho represents the seed of an architectural language that broke with established moulds. In its façade and floor plan can be seen the creative freedom that would characterise Gaudí's later works, as well as his ability to transform the everyday into the extraordinary. Attention to detail, integration with nature and symbolic dimension make this building an essential testimony to the relationship between art, architecture and life.

Thanks to the Marquis's patronage and Gaudí's talent, Comillas became a meeting point between Cantabrian tradition and architectural modernity. El Capricho is, in this sense, much more than a summer residence: it is a declaration of intent, a hymn to creativity that anticipated modernism and still dazzles architects, designers and visitors more than a century after its construction.

**El Capricho
de Gaudí**





Santillana del Mar and Altamira

Living Footprints of History

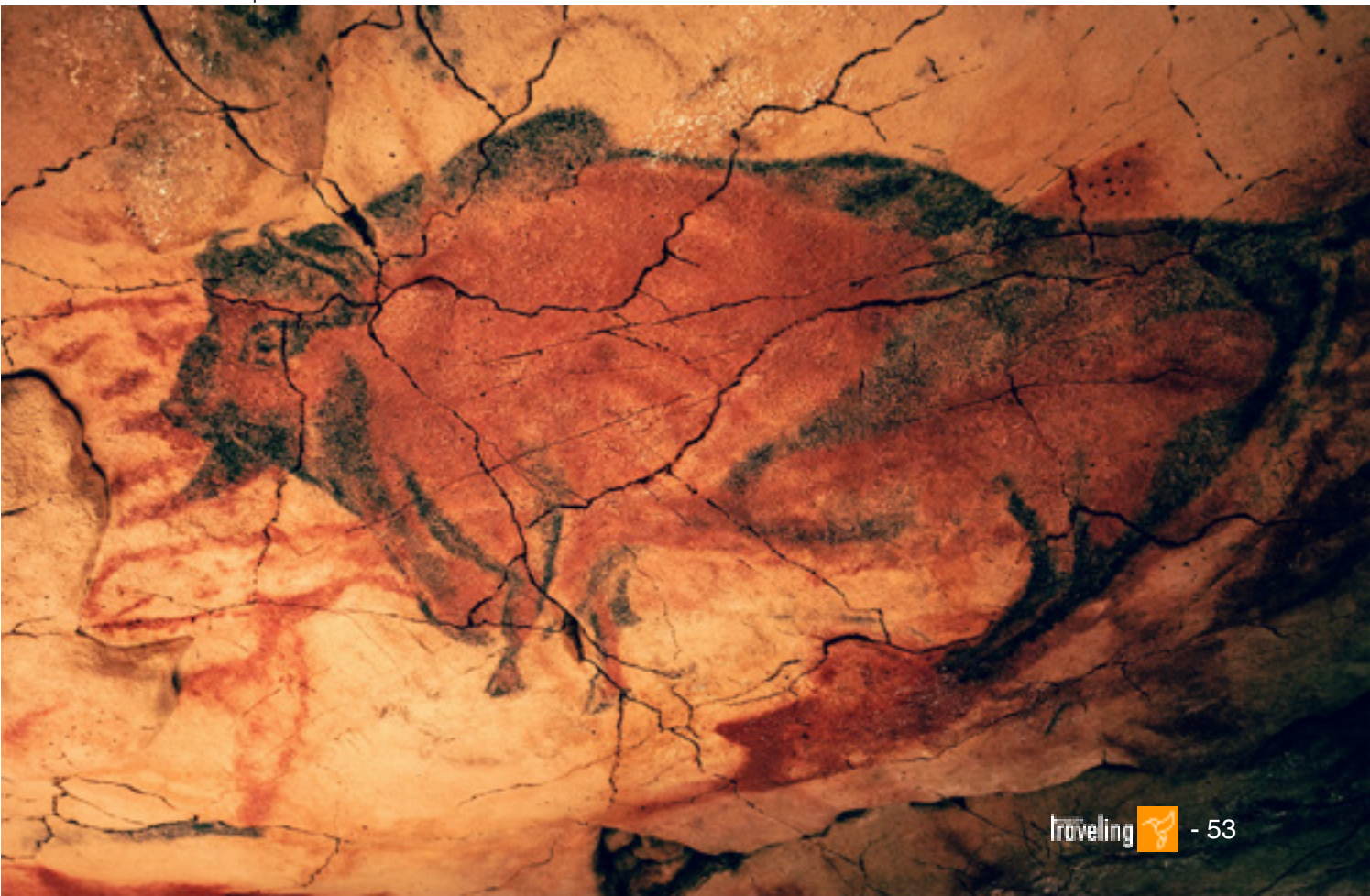
Text: Rosario Alonso- **Photos:** José A. Muñoz **Photo:** Portico of the Collegiate Church of Santa Juliana

Cantabria It holds stories and History, but few with as much meaning as Santillana del Mar and its neighbour, the Cave of Altamira. In this village that does not face the sea —despite what its name suggests— history has paused, as if it wished to be a textbook from which to learn the *modus vivendi* of our ancestors, without pretension and with serene dignity. Its medieval layout, its stately homes, its cobbled streets where the footsteps of centuries still echo, have made it one of the best-preserved historic ensembles in Spain. But it is not only its architecture that makes it unique: it is also the gateway to one of the most extraordinary chapters of human art, the Cave of Altamira.

Located barely two kilometres from the historic centre, Altamira is not just a cave, it is a symbol. Discovered in 1868, fortuitously by a hunter and his dog, and recognised for its artistic value by Marcelino Sanz de Sautuola in 1879, its vaults decorated with polychrome bison revealed to the world that art was not born with Greece or Rome, but much earlier, in the Palaeolithic. The paintings, executed with ochres, charcoal and iron oxides, and making use of the natural reliefs of the rock, proved that those men and women more than 15,000 years ago were not savages, but artists with a surprising sensitivity.

Altamira was, and still is, a revelation. But it was also a source of controversy. At the time, the scientific community doubted the authenticity of the paintings. It took years —even decades— to acknowledge that those red and black bison were the work of the ancient inhabitants of the Cantabrian coast, and not a modern fraud. Today, however, Altamira is considered the “Sistine Chapel of cave art”, and has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1985.

Reproduction of a Bison in the Altamira Neocave





Altamira Museum, Entrance and One of Its Rooms

The original cave was closed to the public in 2002, after scientific studies warned that excessive visits were altering its microclimate and endangering the paintings. The closure was a painful but necessary decision. Yet the story did not end there. In 2001 the Neocave of Altamira was inaugurated, an exact reproduction of the original cavity, created with astonishing meticulousness. This replica, built next to the National Museum and Research Centre of Altamira, allows visitors to immerse themselves in the sensory and emotional experience of Palaeolithic art without endangering the original treasure.

The Neocave is not a backdrop or a mere simulation: it is the result of years of work by archaeologists, architects and artisans who replicated not only the paintings, but also the texture of the walls, the relief of the ceiling, the dim lighting that would have accompanied those early artists. In that twilight space, where colour seems to emerge directly from the stone, one understands that art was not born as ornament, but as something more transcendent, almost a mystery.

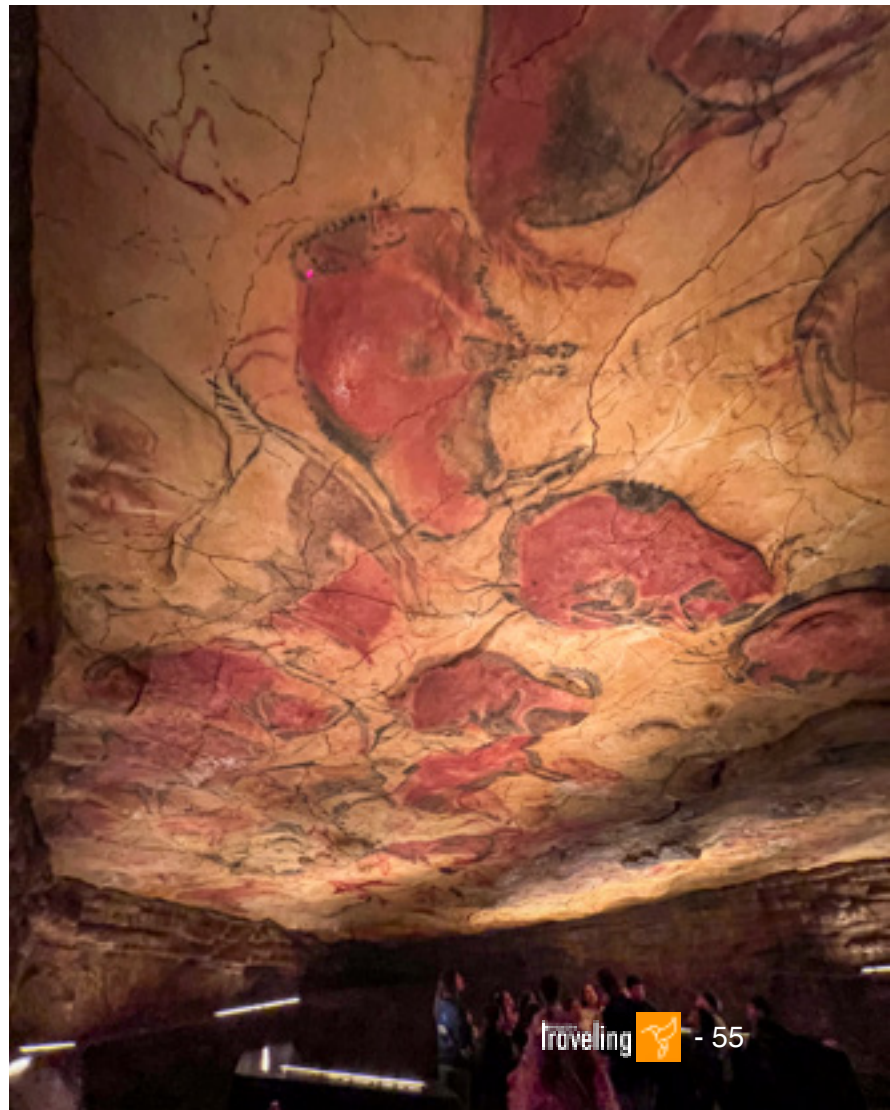




Reproduction of the Paintings in the Altamira Neocave

The Altamira Museum complex is conceived as an extension of the landscape. Its architecture, sober and partially buried, respects the environment and offers a visit that goes far beyond the visual spectacle. Educational panels, projections and original pieces contextualise the life of the hunter-gatherers who inhabited the area. It is not just about seeing bison: it is about understanding how they dressed, what they ate, how they hunted, how they related to their environment.

The visit to Altamira finds its perfect prologue in the walk through Santillana del Mar. Few towns have preserved their character so intact. The village revolves around the Collegiate Church of Santa Juliana, a twelfth-century Romanesque jewel whose cloister invites silence. Around it, cobbled streets lined with manor houses bearing coats of arms on their façades, wooden balconies and arcades where time seems to have turned to stone.





Walking through Santillana does not call for haste. Every corner is a picture: the Merino Tower, the Velarde Palace, the Barreda Palace, the old coach houses converted into craft shops, the open gates revealing silent courtyards. Here there is no engine noise: the historic centre is closed to traffic, allowing visitors' footsteps to echo like those of a pilgrim. For in a sense, Santillana is that too: a pilgrimage to the authentic. There are no frills or grand spectacles. Everything is sober, ancient, cared for. Even tourism, so present, seems to respect the spirit of the place. Unlike other villages that have lost their soul to the haste of visitors, Santillana keeps its own with discretion.

In the surroundings of the village, the green, undulating landscape of Cantabria accompanies without imposing itself. Small meadows, stone walls, grazing cows, a mist descending the slopes.





3

- 1.- Juan Infante St, Entrance to the Village
- 2.- Houses of the Eagle and the Vine
- 3.- The Collegiate Church of Santa Juliana
- 4.- Columns of the Cloister of the Collegiate Church
- 5.- Old Washhouses

It is a land where history has not been erased by modernity, but lives alongside it. And Altamira, with its cave closed but still present, with its Neocave open to didactic experience, remains a reminder of what we once were and what we are still capable of feeling.

Santillana del Mar and Altamira are not visited, they are listened to. It is a journey backwards, but also inwards. A search for origins which, like all that is essential, does not need grand words. Only silence, stone and art. And the unspoilt wonder of knowing ourselves heirs to something very ancient that still moves us.

4



5



Altamira
Museum and
Neocave



Santillana
del Mar



Church of El Salvador, 13th-Century Romanesque, Ejea de los Caballeros

Ejea de los Caballeros

and the Colonisation Villages Born of Water

Text: Rosario Alonso - **Photos:** Jose A. Muñoz

In the heart of the Cinco Villas of Zaragoza, the history of the twentieth century was written with water, clay and effort. From the 1950s onwards, when the Franco regime finally carried out the rural modernisation programme first designed during the dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera, through the National Institute of Colonisation, the surroundings of Ejea de los Caballeros underwent a profound transformation. On drylands that had barely provided enough to survive, canals, irrigation ditches and new villages were planned, with one clear objective: to turn water into life.

The Yesa Reservoir and the Bardenas Canal made the unthinkable possible. Tens of thousands of hectares turned from dust to greenery. And around Ejea —the natural and administrative centre— seven colonisation villages were born: Bardenas, El Bayo, El Sabinar, Santa Anastasia, Pinsoro, Valareña and Rivas. They were not mere settlements, but complete communities, designed with functional and social criteria, welcoming hundreds of families who had arrived from different parts of Aragón and the rest of Spain.

The allocation of Plots (including house and household goods, farmland, farming tools, draught and domestic animals, ...) was subject to strict requirements: being between 23 and 30 years of age; at least two years' experience in agricultural tasks; married with children —the more numerous the better; being able to read and write; and proving morality and acceptable conduct.

Today, more than six decades later, these villages remain alive. They preserve their original urban layout, maintain their agricultural vocation and embody one of the great rural feats of twentieth-century Spain.

Bardenas

Where It All Began

Bardenas was the first colonisation village inaugurated in the municipality of Ejea, in 1959. Around 220 houses were built, along with a school, church, cinema, swimming pool and sports facilities. Its layout follows the rationalist model: wide streets, houses with courtyards and a central space for collective life. Today it has just over 400 inhabitants, and its economy remains focused on irrigation farming, with crops such as maize, alfalfa, barley and wheat. The agricultural cooperative and local associations keep its cultural and economic activity alive.



El Bayo

Life between the Canal and the Village

Very close to Ejea, El Bayo was founded in 1961 with 171 houses built. Its name refers to the light brown colour of the surrounding soils. Today around 350 people live there, many still dedicated to the cultivation of cereals, fodder and some livestock. Its urban design is sober and efficient, with single-family homes, a church, a school and well-defined public spaces. On the outskirts of the village stands the Casa del Colono, a museum space paying tribute to those who gave life to the villages of water.



El Sabinar

Among Junipers and Cereal

Founded in 1964 with 126 houses, El Sabinar takes its name from the juniper forests surrounding the area. It is one of the smallest villages, with around 160 inhabitants, but also one of the most picturesque due to its location in a transition zone between the agricultural plain and the pine forests. Farming activity revolves around irrigation, with cereal and fodder crops, and the community retains a strong sense of belonging. As a curious detail, the church and the central square were built with the collaboration of the settlers themselves, becoming the social heart of the village.

Santa Anastasia

White and Fertile Horizon

Also inaugurated in 1959, Santa Anastasia owes its name to religious devotion, common in those years. Today a community of 390 people lives there, organised around the church, the square and a social fabric that has retained its strength. From the beginning, the village embraced intensive cultivation of vegetables and fodder, making the most of the canal water. Its houses, with backyards, evoke the days when each family sustained itself with hens, a vegetable patch and shared hard work. At the dawn of colonisation in Santa Anastasia, 213 houses were built.



Pinsoro

Rice and Progress

Pinsoro, founded in 1961 with 356 houses, is the most populated and dynamic of the colonisation villages, with around 650 inhabitants. On the shores of the San Bartolomé Reservoir, it became an agricultural reference point thanks to rice cultivation, the presence of an alfalfa dehydration plant and a very active cooperative. The village has managed to modernise without losing its essence: it has social housing, sports facilities, a library, a play centre and even rural internet access. In addition, its natural surroundings have opened the door to emerging nature tourism.



Valareña

Discreet yet Steadfast

Valareña was founded in 1963 with 247 houses and, although its exact population is not updated, it is estimated at around 400 inhabitants. Its name comes from valerian, a wild plant native to the area. The village retains its rationalist layout, with perpendicular streets, a square, a church and single-family homes. The economy remains tied to irrigation farming and livestock, especially sheep. Its quiet rhythm and deep attachment to the land make Valareña an example of serene and resilient rural life.





Church of San Miguel Arcángel in Rivas

Rivas Revitalised Tradition

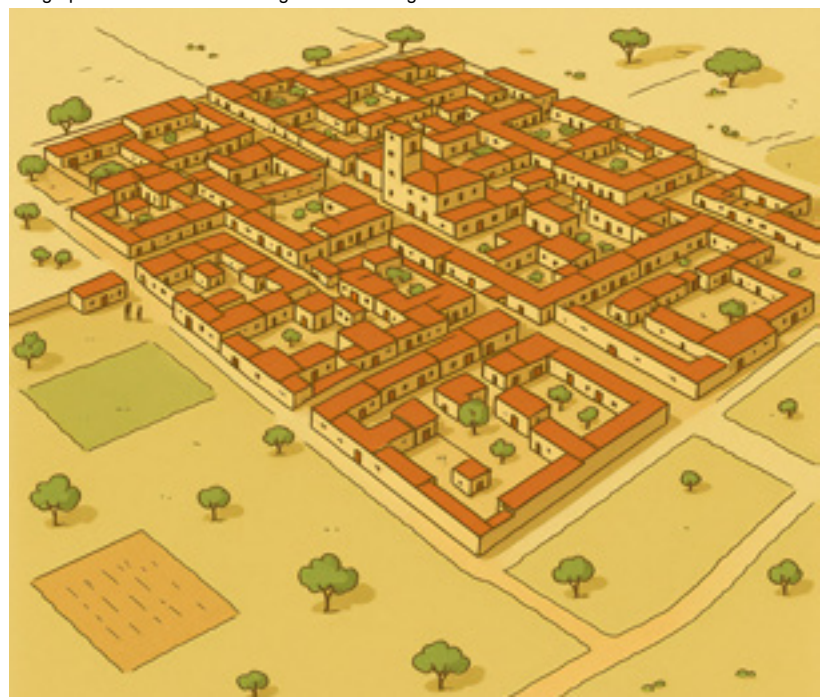
Rivas, with around 500 inhabitants, was not a newly built village like the others, but it was integrated into the strategy of agricultural transformation. Located in a fertile area near the San Bartolomé Reservoir, its economy combines irrigation farming with small livestock holdings. Its medieval-origin church coexists with modern structures, bearing witness to a village that has managed to combine past and present.

An Architecture for Life

All these villages share a common urban concept: they were designed with functional criteria, adapted to the environment and focused on the well-being of their inhabitants. The National Institute of Colonisation planned compact settlements, with straight streets, houses with courtyards for gardens or pens, a church as a symbolic centre, a public square, a school and, in many cases, a medical office. The scale was human, conceived to encourage community life. Although many services have since been centralised, the original structure remains intact and is part of the character of each of these villages.

At the outset, around 1,333 houses were built with an interesting peculiarity: they are known as the “7 km villages”; about 7 km separate one village from another, the distance —known as the cart module— that draught animals used in farm work could cover in a day.

Infographic of the Urban Planning of These Villages



The Casa del Colono and the Aquagraria Museum

Living Memory

A las afueras de El Bayo, en una casa tradicional de 2,755 sq ft, se encuentra la Casa del Colono, un espacio museístico que rinde homenaje a los primeros habitantes de estos pueblos. La vivienda se conserva como era: cocina de leña, objetos cotidianos, fotografías, y en el exterior, un corral con aperos y animales. Gestionado por la Fundación Aquagraria, es un lugar donde la historia se toca, se escucha y se revive con emoción.



The Aquagraria Museum

Located in Ejea de los Caballeros, it offers a panoramic view of the relationship between water, agriculture and social transformation. Divided into three areas—the importance of water, the transformation of the landscape and mechanisation—it houses one of the most complete collections of agricultural machinery in Spain. From hand ploughs to twentieth-century tractors, the museum shows how the Aragonese countryside became an agricultural power. In 2023, it welcomed over 12,000 visitors, a record that reflects its value as an educational, tourist and cultural centre.



EJEA DE LOS CABALLEROS AND THE COLONISATION VILLAGES





The Aquagraria Museum in Ejea de los Caballeros is a place where water tells the story of the countryside through the machinery that has shaped rural progress

How to Get There

Ejea de los Caballeros is well connected by road. From Zaragoza it can be reached in about 50 minutes, and from Tudela in just 35 minutes. The town has no train station, but it does have regular bus services linking it with Zaragoza and other nearby municipalities.

Where to Stay

Salvevir Hotel

It is located in Ejea de los Caballeros, in a strategic setting, and offers 20 rooms with the Spanish Tourism Quality "Q" certification.
Tel: + 34 976 67 74 17



El Bolaso Campsite

The Bolaso Complex, surrounded by forest and a lagoon, blends nature with leisure. It offers a restaurant, café, terraces, sports facilities, campsite, bungalows and extensive wooded areas.

Tel: +34 976 66 80 43



Where to Eat

Gratal Restaurant

It combines rural tradition with local produce, a carefully crafted signature cuisine closely linked to the land
P.º de la Constitución, 111,
Ejea de los Caballeros
Tel: +34 976 66 37 29

Casa Fau

A modern and welcoming space in the centre of Ejea, it combines tapas, creative cuisine and cocktails in an urban yet friendly atmosphere.

P.º de la Constitución, 102,
Ejea de los Caballeros
Tel: +34 976 66 14 82

El Bolaso campsite Restaurant

Its creative traditional cuisine includes Aragonese meats and stews, accompanied by a select wine cellar and a unique natural setting.

Ctra. Gallur Sangüesa Km. 46, Ejea de los Caballeros, Zaragoza
Tel: 976 66 80 43

Erian Restaurant

It offers homemade cuisine with an Andalusian touch, generous tapas and traditional dishes that stand out for flavour and authenticity.

C. Molino Bajo, 37
Ejea de los Caballeros
Tel: +34 676 86 43 05

Aragón Restaurant

It offers a refined experience based on local produce and recipes prepared with precision, in an elegant and welcoming setting

C. de la Mediavilla, 14,
Ejea de los Caballeros
Tel: +34 976 66 76 65

What to Visit

Art and Exhibition Centre

C. Santiago Ramón y Cajal, 21,
Ejea de los Caballeros
Tel: +34 976 66 11 67

Aquagraria Museum

Ciudad del Agua, C. Manuel Lorenzo Pardo, s/n, Ejea de los Caballeros,
Tel: +34 646 39 90 33



The Colono House

C. de la Venta de Guiral
El Bayo, Zaragoza
Tel: +34 876 63 76 03



Further Information



**Turismo de
Ejea de los
Caballeros**



Ancient Imperial Tombs

Ningxia

Tomb of Emperors and Vines in China

Text: Alejandro y Luis Paadín
alejandro@paadin.es

Photos: Concours Mondial de Bruxelles

On the far reaches of north-western China, where the sands of the Gobi Desert meet the Yellow River (Huáng Hé), lies a land that seems more like a mirage than a wine region. A land bordered by stretches of the Great Wall which for centuries defended empires and which today guard an extraordinary vineyard. In this landscape of sand and stone, the vine survives lethal winters thanks to a unique ritual: each vine is buried in its autumn slumber to be reborn in spring.

This is a land of extreme contrasts, with dunes encroaching on the vineyards, freezing winters that plunge to -25°C , and scorching summers that rise above 35°C . A hostile place for the vine... except for human ingenuity. The survival of the vineyards depends on a ritual as arduous as it is fascinating: in the prelude to winter (October–November), millions of vines are buried beneath the soil to protect them from the cold. Like emperors, they rest under a tomb of sand and clay until, with the arrival of spring, they are reborn to give life once again to one of the most unique vineyards on the planet.

Between Desert and Dynasties

Ningxia is not only a land of contemporary wines, but also one of ancient history. It was a passageway for Silk Road caravans and the stage for the splendour and decline of Chinese dynasties. The region was the burial ground of emperors of the Western Xia dynasty (11th–13th centuries), whose mausoleum still overlooks the plain with pyramid-shaped mounds reminiscent of the tumuli of Central Asia. That same funerary image is repeated today each autumn, when the vineyard landscape turns into a vegetal necropolis: tractors and teams of workers toil to cover the vines with soil, building sand ridges that conceal millions of plants until spring.

The freezing winter temperatures of Ningxia are capable of destroying the vascular system of the vines and rupturing their internal tissues, which would mean the death of the plant. Traditional frost-protection methods prove useless in a land where thermometers frequently drop to -20°C or even -25°C , figures unthinkable in most wine regions of the world.

In regions such as the Niagara Peninsula (Canada) or parts of northern United States like the Finger Lakes in New York, the vine also faces deadly cold, but there the accumulated snow layer acts as an insulating blanket that protects the vineyards from structural damage. In Ontario, for example, vineyards can withstand extreme lows because the snow...



Cellar Tastings (Concours Mondial de Bruxelles)



NINGXIA (CHINA)

In the Finger Lakes, the moderating effect of deep lakes such as Seneca, combined with snow cover, softens the rigours of winter.

In Ningxia, however, this natural blanket does not exist: the cold is dry, cutting and bare. The only solution is to bury the vines in soil every autumn and unearth them in spring, in an endless cycle repeated year after year. It is estimated that up to a third of grape production costs are devoted to this manual process, a practice extremely rare in the wine world beyond a few remote areas of Central Asia (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan) and Russia. A colossal labour which, paradoxically, is the key to Ningxia's rise as a wine power in the heart of the desert.

In few regions of the world does the vineyard demand so much human effort. Burying and unburying the vines is an enormously labour-intensive process: thousands of labourers bend their backs in a choreography repeated year after year. First the vines are pruned, then the arms are bent down to the ground (with trellising already more inclined, at 35–45°, and lower than usual), and finally covered with a thick layer of soil and sand to shield them from frost. When the thaw arrives in April, the process is reversed: the vines once again see the light, scarred yet renewed with fresh energy.

Although some partially mechanised systems exist, it remains arduous work, applied only in those regions

where the cost–benefit balance favours it over alternatives (geotextiles, heating, sprinkling): manual labour is still cheaper than energy in many of these zones.

Moreover, soils must be loose enough to allow the earth to be lifted and returned without waterlogging. All this effort only makes sense if the outcome is high-quality wines, which is why it is applied to *vitis vinifera* destined for winemaking.

This system, reminiscent more of subsistence farming than modern viticulture, entirely defines Ningxia's character. Here wine cannot be understood without sacrifice. The State itself knows this: thousands of hectares have been built on subsidies, central planning and an army of hands willing to work where machines cannot yet. They understand and recognise the value that wine confers upon the land, even under truly adverse conditions.

The impossible terroir

Paradoxically, amid this landscape of almost epic toil, conditions converge that seduce both national and international winemakers. The altitude (3,609–3,937 ft), wide diurnal temperature range, alluvial soils of the Yellow River and constant sunshine allow for slow ripening, firm tannins and an unexpected balance in such an arid land. Cabernet Sauvignon, introduced in the 1980s, reigns supreme over more than 98,842 acres of vineyards (over 70% of plantings). Alongside it, Merlot, Cabernet Gernischt (a local variety that proved to be Chilean Carménère), Marselan (a cross between Cabernet Sauvignon and Grenache created in France but embraced in China), and

Detail of the Ningxia Winery with a View of its Vineyards (Concours Mondial de Bruxelles)





Winery Vats in Ningxia (Concours Mondial de Bruxelles)

Syrah produce wines that have earned recognition in international competitions such as the prestigious Concours Mondial de Bruxelles. Ningxia's reds surprise with a sober, elegant profile, closer to classic Bordeaux than the overripe warmth one might imagine at these latitudes.

While classic reds display their Bordelais elegance, Ningxia is also shaping a future project with the so-called PIWI varieties, hybrids resistant to fungi and adapted to extreme climates. Regional agricultural institutes and pioneering wineries have begun experimenting with hybrid varieties (mostly with amurensis), assessing their natural resistance to powdery and downy mildew, as well as their ability to yield wines of character and finesse in a context where sensory identity is decisive. Though they account for barely 0.5% of total plantings, this figure is expected to reach 10% in the coming years, with research focused on the "Bei series" (Beihong, Beimei, Beixi, Beixin, Beibinghong) and the Prince/Princess pair. These hybrids could cut grape production costs by up to 40% and develop a new range of more accessible wines, fostering wine consumption among the wider population.

Beyond scientific interest, the strategy responds to a practical necessity: reducing production costs in a region where up to a third of the annual budget is spent on burying and unburying the vines.

Spritz of Chandon (Concours Mondial de Bruxelles)





Viñedo de Ningxia (Concours Mondial de Bruxelles)

The introduction of PIWIs could ease part of that expense, reducing both vulnerability to the cold and dependence on plant-health treatments. It is an innovation which, without relinquishing the international prestige Ningxia has already earned, aims to relieve the economic pressure borne by vine-growers and winemakers in such a hostile environment, opening the door to more accessible wines and encouraging new consumers to take an interest.

Backed by local authorities, the project foresees these varieties moving from experimental plots to occupy a growing share of vineyards in the coming years. The strategy is particularly significant at a time when the premiumisation of Chinese wine —that push towards hi-

gh-end labels— has slowed, and consumers show greater price sensitivity. PIWIs are thus emerging not only as an agronomic and environmental lifeline but also as a strategic tool to keep Ningxia competitive in the global market.

The future amid the sands

Yet Ningxia's future is overshadowed by a dilemma: is it sustainable to maintain a vineyard that relies on the annual burial of millions of plants? The human and economic cost is enormous, and although some trials with cold-resistant rootstocks have begun, tradition still prevails as the only guarantee of survival. The paradox of Ningxia is that its wines, born of

Viñedo con la Montaña Helan de fondo (Concours Mondial de Bruxelles)



titanic effort, aspire to present themselves to the world as symbols of modernity and prestige. And perhaps it is that tension between the ancestral and the futuristic that makes them unique: wines born from a hostile desert, laid to rest each winter in their tomb of sand and, like the Xia emperors, seeking eternity in the memory of those who discover them



Training and Burial of the Vineyards (Concours Mondial de Bruxelles)

Where the Paadíns Eat

Huang He Lou Muslim Restaurant

55 Xinhua Dongjie, Yinchuan

Founded in the 1940s, this historic Muslim restaurant is now an institution in Yinchuan. Its Hui-style architecture recalls the city's cultural heritage, and its cuisine elevates local recipes to an almost ceremonial level. Among its specialties, the sweet and sour Yellow River carp (tang cu li yu) and the chicken with egg and milk (fu rong ji pu) stand out, offering a delicate and surprising contrast.

Domaine Chandon Ningxia

No.1, CHANDON road, Huang Yang Tan farm, Yong Ning. Ningxia

Just a few kilometres from Yinchuan, in the heart of the desert, Moët Hennessy built in 2013 a winery that looks like a contemporary mirage: Chandon Ningxia. There, in this extreme landscape, sparkling wines of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir are born, crafted by the traditional method with a finesse that surprises in this little-known corner of China.

Altitude, wide temperature variation and constant sunshine give rise to elegant bubbles with crystalline freshness. The visit combines avant-garde architecture, local hospitality and glasses that reveal how French luxury has taken root in the sands of the Gobi.

Guoqiang Hand-Grasped Lamb

(Guobin Building Branch) No. 4, Jinhai Mingyue Garden. Yinchuan

In this modest yet revered house, the most emblematic dish of Ningxia is served: hand-grasped lamb. An item of intangible culinary heritage, it consists of tender lamb slowly cooked and eaten with the hands, in the most authentic style of the Hui communities. Its soft texture and clean flavour are the result of flocks raised on the arid steppe, where their natural diet imparts character to the meat.

Helan Qingxue – Jia Bei Lan

Condado de Helan, Ningxia

At the foot of the Helan Mountains, Helan Qingxue has become a benchmark winery in Ningxia. Its Jia Bei Lan wines have won distinctions at the Concours Mondial de Bruxelles, consolidating the region's reputation on the demanding international stage.

The winery combines precise viticulture with the challenge of working in an extreme desert, where Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot achieve a sober and elegant profile. Behind this projection stands the young winemaker Zhang Jing, whose sensitivity has guided the estate towards fresher, more balanced styles, making each visit an experience that blends landscape, history and modernity.

Château Dulaan

Condado de Helan, Ningxia

Tf.: 18895071919

www.duzuichina.com

On the eastern slopes of the Helan Mountains, Château Dulaan offers a complete wine tourism experience. The winery, surrounded by vineyards in the middle of the desert, includes an elegant and comfortable hotel, ideal for sleeping among the vines and waking up to a unique landscape. Its restaurant reinterprets local products — lamb, vegetables and Yellow River fish — in harmony with the estate's wines, from a fresh Chardonnay to Marselan reds that reflect the character of Helan and Ningxia's winemaking ambition.

Helanhong Winery

(Helan, Yongning Count)

Helanhong is one of Ningxia's most emblematic wineries and a symbol of the region's winemaking drive. Located in Yongning County, it combines tradition and scale in a project that brings wine closer to the wider public without sacrificing quality. Its facilities allow visitors to follow the journey from vineyard to barrel hall, conveying the idea of wine as collective heritage rather than exclusive luxury. The visit shows how Ningxia blends local identity with international ambition through wine.



View of the city, the Old Bridge, and the Cathedral

24 HOURS Albi

Text: Diana Morello - dianamorello@outlook.es

Photos: Archive



In the southwest of France, barely seventy kilometres from Toulouse, lies Albi, capital of the Tarn department and the heart of Occitania. On the banks of the river that bears its name, the city unveils a medieval ensemble of red brick whose unity both surprises and captivates.

Albi is a city that does not appear in quick guides or on the lists of must-see places, and yet, when one stops in its historic centre, there is the sense of contemplating an urban landscape unlike any other in the country. Everything is built in brick, that warm red that changes with the light and gives the city an unmistakable personality. It preserves the splendour of its episcopal past and the legacy of Toulouse-Lautrec, born here in 1864. It is at once fortress and mercantile city, religious centre and bohemian refuge. Twenty-four hours are enough to grasp its discreet grandeur, one that has no need of crowds to justify itself.

Morning in the Red City

The day begins on the esplanade of the Cathedral of Sainte-Cécile, a colossal work built between the 13th and 16th centuries. Its exterior resembles a fortress more than a temple, with massive walls and cylindrical towers. This cathedral, considered the largest brick building in the world, was erected as a symbol of power after the wars against the Cathars.

The contrast with the interior is striking. Once inside, the austerity gives way to a polychrome universe: frescoes covering walls and vaults, a minutely carved Gothic choir and a 15th-century Last Judgement that overwhelms with its expressiveness. In few places in Europe is medieval painting preserved with such intensity and scale.

Just a step away stands the Palais de la Berbie, residence of the bishops and now home to the Toulouse-Lautrec Museum. From its gardens, designed with classical symmetry, comes the finest panorama of Albi: stone and brick bridges, houses perched over the river and the Tarn flowing calmly below. The museum's collection is the most complete in the world dedicated to the painter. Posters, drawings and canvases trace the path of that fragile yet lucid artist who portrayed the night-life of Montmartre without concession.

Among markets and medieval streets

The morning continues through the Vieil Alby, the old town of narrow streets and wooden balconies. Here one feels the imprint of the merchant bourgeoisie who prospered with the trade of pastel, the blue dye that enriched the region between the 15th and 17th centuries. Brick façades with timber framing,



Gardens of the Palais de la Berbie, built in the 13th century. Today it houses the Toulouse-Lautrec Museum.

The largest brick cathedral in the world and the memory of Toulouse-Lautrec make Albi a unique place in France

arcades and small squares compose an atmosphere frozen in time. In Place Savène, under the arcades, coffee becomes a ritual: watching neighbours come to the market, hearing the Occitan accent still alive in conversation, sensing the life of a city that thrives not on tourism but on itself.

Noon inevitably leads to the covered market of Les Halles. Here the gastronomic character of the Tarn unfolds: goat's cheeses, smoked sausages, artisan breads and seasonal fruits. It is the place to try cassoulet, a stew of beans with confit duck and sausages, or aligot, that mixture of mashed potato, cauliflower and cheese that stretches in endless strands. All accompanied by the wines of Gaillac, a historic appellation that surprises with native varieties and mineral freshness.

An afternoon by the river

The afternoon invites a crossing of the Pont Vieux, one of the oldest bridges in France still in use, built in the 11th century. From there one captures the most recognisable image of Albi: the cathedral dominating the horizon

and the reddish houses descending towards the water. On the opposite bank lies the Madeleine district, more popular and tranquil, with wide streets and privileged views. Here stands the Lapérouse Museum, recalling the figure of the Albigensian navigator who disappeared in the Pacific in 1788. Letters, maps and models recount the maritime adventure of the age of exploration.

As the sun descends, the best is to embark on a gabarre, the traditional river boat. The Tarn's slow pace offers another view: medieval façades reflected in the water, vegetable gardens on the banks, silence broken only by the splash of oars. It is a brief journey, but enough to understand the intimate union between the river and the city.

Night and its flavours

Back in the centre, life gathers around the Place du Vigan, broad and lively. Here the evening atmosphere unfolds, with cafés, brasseries and wine bars. It is the moment to taste foie gras, artisan charcuterie



Panoramic view of the city from the River Tarn with its two entrance bridges

or the apple pastries known as croustades, prepared with fine puff pastry and armagnac. Some bars organise evening tastings with Gaillac winemakers. These are simple gatherings, where conversation is unhurried, little-known varieties are discovered —such as prunelart or duras— and the bond between land and glass is kept alive.

To sleep in Albi is to stay in former merchants' houses or small family-run hotels that preserve the brick-and-timber architecture. The city offers lodgings that feel like an extension of its history: discreet, welcoming, unpretentious.

Albi reveals itself in 24 hours as a place that does not need to compete with other French cities. Its appeal lies in coherence: all in brick, all linked to its river, all marked by a past that does not hide. The monumentality of the cathedral, the memory of Toulouse-Lautrec, the flavours of the Tarn and the calm of the river suffice to understand why UNESCO recognised it as a World Heritage Site.

There are cities one visits like a catalogue of monuments. Albi, by contrast, is contemplated like a fresco, where every colour and every line carry meaning. And that, perhaps, is its greatest secret: that it still preserves intact the power to surprise.



Les Halles Market and, below, one of the streets in the city centre





eco destinations

Brussels

Belgium

Text: Redacción - **Photos:** archive and Jose A. Muñoz

Brussels surprises visitors with a green and sustainable side: a city that invites you to explore by bike, get lost among historic parks and gardens, discover urban vegetable gardens in the very centre, and feel that nature is part of everyday life



In the collective imagination, Brussels is often associated with its institutional role, the presence of the European Union, its historic squares, and the lively cultural life unfolding in cafés and museums. Yet, over the past few decades, the Belgian capital has built another, lesser-known but increasingly visible identity: that of a European eco-destination, pioneering in its integration of nature, sustainable mobility, and urban agriculture at the very heart of the city.

Parks as green lungs

More than half of Brussels' surface area is made up of green zones — a surprising figure for a European capital. From the **Bois de la Cambre**, an urban forest that stretches into the legendary **Soignes Forest**, to the **Parc de Laeken**, with its royal greenhouses and historic gardens, the city offers spaces where asphalt gives way to nature and the air fills with vegetal aromas.

These parks are not merely promenades: they have become true refuges of biodiversity. **Woluwe Park**, for example, combines wooded paths with lakes and meadows that host migratory birds. **Parc Duden**, in the southern area, preserves a hilly terrain offering panoramic views unusual in an otherwise flat city. Even in the very centre, **Brussels Park** — facing the Royal Palace — balances 18th-century formal design with contemporary use as a place of rest for locals and visitors alike.

Urban gardens and local agriculture

Brussels has embraced urban agriculture as a tool to reinforce its environmental and social commitment. Initiatives like **Parckfarm**, in Tour & Taxis, combine community gardens, composting workshops, and gastronomic events highlighting local production. On rooftops, former warehouses have been transformed into hydroponic farms and beehives, such as the **Ferme Abattoir** project in Anderlecht, which supplies fresh vegetables and fish raised in aquaponic systems.



Rainbow Fountain in Brussels Park, also known as Warandepark

This drive for local production is not merely symbolic. It is part of a strategy to reduce the carbon footprint of food consumption while strengthening social cohesion in diverse neighbourhoods. Community gardens serve as intergenerational and multicultural meeting points where techniques, seeds, and recipes are shared.

The bicycle as common thread

Cycling in Brussels two decades ago was an adventure for the daring. Today, the city has transformed into a network of bike lanes, cycle priority zones, and signposted routes connecting parks, neighbourhoods, and cultural spaces. The **Réseau Vélo** — a system of urban and interurban cycling routes — allows one to traverse the capital and link up with the green belt surrounding the region.

BRUSSELS

Routes like the **Promenade Verte** offer a 60-kilometre circular itinerary that skirts the city, crossing nature reserves, farmland, and riverside areas. Meanwhile, the Villo! bike-sharing system has democratised cycling, facilitating short journeys and connecting tourist spots with residential zones.

Cycling is no longer just a means of transport: it has become a symbol of Brussels' sustainable mobility, reinforced by events like *Sunday Without Cars*, when the entire region closes to motor traffic and streets fill with cyclists, skaters, and pedestrians.

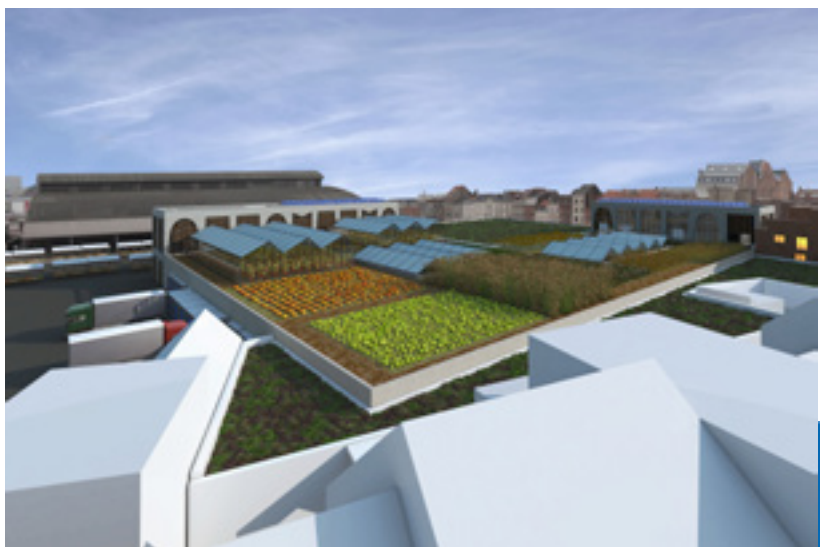
Spaces to reconnect with nature

Beyond parks and gardens, Brussels also offers unconventional ways to reconnect with nature. **The National Botanic Garden** of Meise, just a few kilometres away, houses one of Europe's most extensive plant collections. Meanwhile, **Josaphat Park** in Schaerbeek combines play areas, open-air sculptures, and wooded corners.

Along the canal, former industrial areas have been rehabilitated into pedestrian walkways



Urban Gardens in the Centre of Brussels



Ferme Abattoir Project, in Anderlecht, a municipality of the Brussels-Capital Region

Mont des Arts, Located in the centre of Brussels





Greenhouse of the Brussels Botanical Garden, and below, the Atomium and its gardens



and leisure spaces. Once marginal, these sites are now green corridors inviting visitors to explore the city on foot or by bike, with water as the central element.

A model in evolution

Brussels has not achieved this eco-destination profile by chance. It is the result of urban planning aimed at integrating greenery into every new development, promoting zero-emission mobility, and revaluing its cultural and natural landscape. This approach is reflected in the city's cultural agenda: garden festivals, local food fairs, farmers' markets, and environmental volunteering days are part of the yearly calendar.

The Belgian capital demonstrates that a major city can also serve as a sustainability laboratory. Its parks, gardens, and cycling routes are not only amenities for residents: they are an invitation for travellers to discover a different Brussels, where tourism blends seamlessly with a genuine commitment to the environment.



Hartford House

Discreet Exclusivity in the Heart
of KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa)

Text and Photos: Jose A. Muñoz



In the South African province of KwaZulu-Natal, on the grasslands of Mooi River, stands Hartford House, a boutique hotel that has turned its past into part of its identity. Once the residence of the Oppenheimer family, linked to mining and horse breeding, it is now a benchmark property in the Midlands, where hospitality blends with gastronomy and a rural landscape of great beauty. Hartford House is not just another hotel on the South African map. Surrounded by gardens, stables and meadows, it forms part of the grounds of Summerhill Stud, one of the country's most renowned stud farms. That connection gives it character, although what truly defines the traveller's experience is not the horses themselves, but the hotel's proposal: an intimate place, steeped in history, with a very personal concept of hospitality.

The hotel and its rooms

Hartford House presents itself as a boutique hotel with a small number of rooms, ensuring a tranquil atmosphere and highly personalised service. What sets it apart is the variety of rooms and the way historic spaces have been carefully repurposed. In the main house are the most classical rooms, which retain features of the former residence: high ceilings, fireplaces and period furniture. By the lake, the newer suites embrace a contemporary design, with private terraces and large windows that integrate the room into the landscape.

And perhaps most striking: some of the rooms have been created from the estate's former stables. Where Summerhill's thoroughbreds once rested, there are now suites that preserve the original structure while offering modern comfort and discreet elegance. The traveller sleeps, quite literally, at the very heart of the estate's equestrian history — a detail that makes every stay truly unique, intimate and deeply memorable.

Gastronomy with identity

The restaurant at Hartford House is one of the region's culinary landmarks. Its proposal is based on locally sourced ingredients: vegetables from nearby gardens, artisanal cheeses, farm meats and South African wines. The menus, which change with the seasons, reflect the gastronomic character of KwaZulu-Natal without artifice, with dishes that let the produce take centre stage. Dinner, served in the main dining room or on terraces overlooking the lake, becomes a highlight of the experience, uniting fine cuisine with a serene setting.

The Midlands setting

Mooi River lies at the heart of KwaZulu-Natal's Midlands, an agricultural region of hills and grasslands. The area is known for the Midlands Meander, a tourist route linking craft workshops, breweries, art galleries and producers. Guests at the hotel can combine their stay with cycling or walking excursions, fly fishing in nearby rivers, and visits to private reserves home to rhinos, zebras and antelope. It is also possible to delve into local history: the surroundings were the scene of episodes of the Anglo-Boer War, with memorials and cemeteries recalling the conflict.

One of the Suites housed in the estate's former stables





One of the hotel's main halls
Hotel restaurant

The equestrian tradition

Although the hotel is at the core of the experience, Hartford House remains closely linked to equestrian activity. More than 700 thoroughbred horses are bred on the estate, making it one of Africa's leading stud farms. Visitors can walk through the stables and meadows, observe foals and learn about the work of grooms and veterinarians. The estate also hosts a high-performance equestrian school for training riders and competition horses, and a highly specialised breeding centre focused on improving thoroughbred genetics. These facilities place Hartford House within a professional and prestigious context, though for the traveller they are presented as added value: a chance to step into a world usually seen from afar.

A place with memory

Hartford House is not a hotel built from scratch, but an estate that has successfully transformed its legacy into a contemporary proposal. The old residence, the stables converted into suites, the nearby stud farm and the meadows of the Midlands are all part of the same identity.





Horses roaming free at Summerhill Stud © Summerhill Stud

Travellers find here rest, gastronomy and nature, but also the imprint of a living equestrian tradition. That blend of hospitality and memory is what makes Hartford House unique, unlike other rural hotels in the country.

Hartford House is, above all, a boutique hotel with personality. Its rooms —whether in the main house, by the lake or in the converted stables—, its restaurant based on local produce, and its setting in the Midlands make it a singular destination in South Africa. The presence of more than 700 horses, the high-performance equestrian school and the thoroughbred breeding centre are part of its context and add to its distinctiveness, but what truly defines the experience is the balance between hospitality, environment and authenticity.

At Hartford House, the traveller does not simply stay in a hotel: they become part of an estate with history, where every detail reflects the union of rural tradition and exclusive hospitality, with luxury understood in South Africa as authenticity and excellence.

Stables adapted for selective breeding at Summerhill Stud



**Hartford
House**





Typical Tyrolean Façade of Hotel Kitzhof

Hotel Kitzhof

Kitzbühel, Austrian Tyrol

Preferred
HOTELS & RESORTS

Text and Photos: Manena Munar manena.munar@gmail.com

Kitzbühel Over time, it has earned a privileged place among the most exclusive Alpine destinations in Europe. Surrounded by majestic peaks and meadows that change colour with the seasons, this corner of Tyrol offers two equally appealing faces: in summer, trails winding through forests and lakes such as the Schwarze see invite calm walks or bike rides; in winter, snow transforms the region into one of the largest ski areas in the Alps, with 145 miles of slopes.

In this setting rises the Hotel Kitzhof, a retreat that interprets Alpine tradition with a contemporary language. Its Tyrolean façade, painted a vibrant red and adorned with flower-filled balconies, opens to interiors where wood, light and tasteful design define every corner. With the serenity of a hidden garden, the warmth of a fireplace and the wide views from windows open to the landscape, the Kitzhof offers more than comfort: it delivers the feeling of living Tyrol from within, with the authenticity of its mountains and the hallmark of the most refined hospitality.



The Village of Kitzbühel, Five Minutes from the Hotel
Detail of One of the Rooms

Entering Tyrol means stepping into the magnificence of the Alps, dressed in mountain architecture as welcoming as it is exquisite, where even the stables have checked curtains to preserve the cows' privacy. Kitzbühel is one of the most famous Alpine villages —the “Monte Carlo of the Alps,” as it is called— whose setting in western Austria offers enchanting trails, green meadows, cycling circuits, golf, or water sports on Lake Schwarzsee in summer, and endless white slopes in winter, when the Kitzbühel Alps are covered with snow, ideal for cross-country skiing, alpine skiing, or mountaineering, in one of the largest ski regions in the Alps, with 145 miles of pistes.

A comfortable and welcoming hotel

The mountain atmosphere blends with the comfortable luxury of Hotel Kitzhof, proudly belonging to the prestigious Preferred Hotels & Resorts collection. Its typical Tyrolean façade, painted red and adorned with flower-filled balconies, is the prelude to the warmth and quality sensed as soon as one crosses the threshold. Wood dominates the interiors, as do hidden corners and small gardens that invite guests to enjoy peace



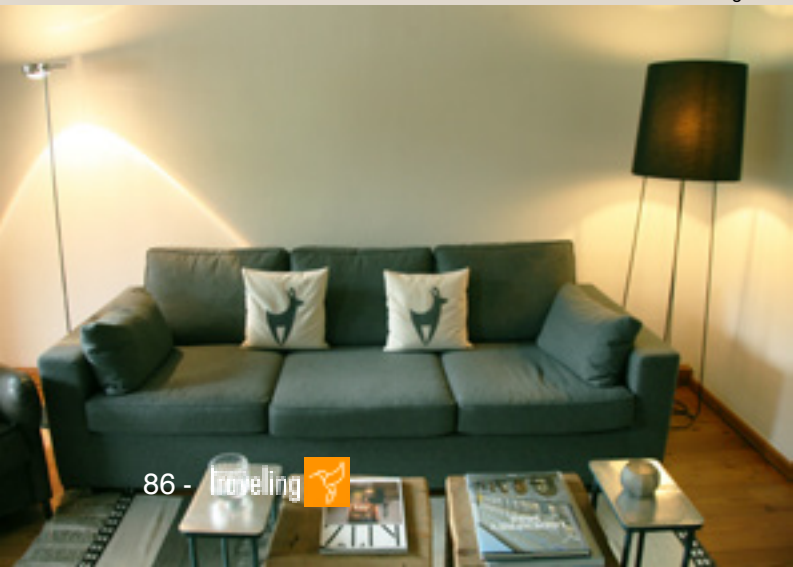


Fireplace Lounge

One of the Hotel's Cosy Rooms



The Suite's Living Room



and serenity. Good taste reigns in every detail of the Kitzhof: from its emblem, a simple deer, to the double fireplace separating different spaces, or the bar that precedes the huge glass wall overlooking the Tyrolean landscape.

Opening the door to one of the hotel's 160 rooms is like stepping back into childhood, into the stories read during the siesta; a return to an almost forgotten world that reappears in rooms with carved wooden headboards, cosy checkered blankets, and a balcony overflowing with flowers that looks out onto farms, forests, and the grandeur of the high peaks. Its design is not only charming but also fully up to date in terms of technology and materials.

The spa could be no less, and its 9,688 sq ft. include Turkish and Finnish saunas, pampering the guest, especially in winter when the cold bites. Meanwhile, its glass-walled pool with garden views and a variety of treatments using the exclusive products of Susanne Kaufmann are enjoyed vividly in every season.

Zero-kilometre cuisine

As for the culinary chapter, the Kitzhof takes pride in its natural products; hardly difficult when practically everything is right at its doorstep: milk, eggs, charcuterie, meat... Traditional dishes such as the platter of cold cuts, cheeses and pickles known as Brettljause, and delicacies masterfully prepared by chef Jürgen Bartl and his team, can be enjoyed at the Kitz Alm restaurant, in Kitz Lounge, designed to satisfy any craving — be it a warm croissant with cappuccino, five o'clock tea, or a glass of wine by the fireplace — or in the Vinothek, the chosen spot for gourmet menus or a lively fondue.

The perfect location

Hotel Kitzhof's location is perfect. It is right beside the village once known for its silver mines, its church and the many luxury shops that fill the streets, yet far enough to give the feeling of living in a Tyrolean mountain home. Night falls and the sound of bells can be heard. It is time to return to the room, sit on the terrace with a glass of wine, watch the farms light up, and imagine, behind closed doors, the life of Tyrol.

Hotel Spa Pool



Views from the Suite's Balcony
The hotel staff is charming



**Hotel
Kitzhof**

Preferred Hotels & Resorts





Benedictine Convent of Nonnberg

Salzburg &

The Sound of Music

Text: Redacción - **Photos:** Turismo de Austria y archivo

The Trapp Family: From Reality to Screen

The film *The Sound of Music* is based on the life of the Trapp family, originally from Salzburg. Georg von Trapp, a captain in the Austro-Hungarian Navy, was widowed at a young age and hired Maria Kutschera, a novice in a convent, as governess for his seven children. In 1927 the two married and went on to have three more children.

During the 1930s, the family became renowned for their musical talent. They performed in choirs and gave concerts across Europe, until the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany led them to refuse collaboration with the regime. In 1938 they left the country, emigrating first to Italy and later to the United States.

In Vermont they founded the Trapp Family Lodge, a hotel still run today by their descendants. There they continued their music while building a new life. The 1959 Broadway musical, and later the 1965 film, adapted their story freely, accentuating the romantic and musical elements.

Beyond fiction, the Trapp family's journey symbolises values of resilience, family and culture that continue to inspire visitors to Salzburg.

Salzburg has many faces. It is Mozart's birthplace, the host of an international festival that fills the city every summer with classical music and Baroque heritage, and, of course, a gateway to the Alps. But for millions of people around the world, Salzburg is linked to a film: *The Sound of Music*, known in Spain as *Sonrisas y Lágrimas* (and in Latin America as *La Novicia Rebelde*). Released in 1965, it became one of the greatest successes in musical cinema and fixed in the collective memory an image of the city that still endures today.

Filming in Salzburg lasted several months and turned the city into a vast film set. Locations such as the gardens of Mirabell Palace, the Benedictine convent of Nonnberg or the lake at Leopoldskron became part of cinema's iconography. For the people of Salzburg, it was an event that left a lasting mark. Over the decades, the city has known how to preserve that bond, transforming it into experiences that go far beyond nostalgia. Film sets converted into museums, theatre productions, cycling routes, cookery classes and even open-air dinners with live soundtracks allow visitors to immerse themselves in the film from multiple angles.



Mirabell Palace Gardens

Panoramic View of Salzburg



The Marionette Theatre

Tradition in Miniature

The Salzburg Marionette Theatre first opened its doors in 1913 and has since become a cultural institution of great renown. In 2016, UNESCO included it on the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage, recognising an art that remains alive and cherished in Salzburg. Here, a small army of wooden puppets — some more than a century old — performs operas, children's tales, and also *The Sound of Music*, to the delight of audiences.

The production condenses the film into just under two magical hours. The original music plays while the marionettes sing, dance, and move through beautifully crafted miniature sets. Visitors discover an artistic tradition that forms part of the city's cultural identity and creative spirit. Many travellers consider it one of the finest ways to connect with the film because it adds the magic of a unique stage art deeply tied to Salzburg.

In addition, the theatre offers fascinating guided tours of its workshops, where the processes behind each puppet can be observed in detail. The meticulous handcrafting, the painting of the faces, the tailoring of costumes and the intricate string system reveal an artisanal dedication that is as impressive, surprising and memorable as the performance itself

Salzburg by Bike

In the Footsteps of Fräulein Maria

Another way of approaching *The Sound of Music* is by bicycle. The "Fräulein Maria" tour covers 8 miles, passing through the film's most emblematic locations. From the gardens of Mirabell Palace to Lake Leopoldskron, the itinerary allows visitors to discover the city calmly and at an unhurried pace, fully enjoying the scenery.

It is not a sporting route, but an accessible ride for everyone. The guide accompanies the group, stopping at points of interest and recounting anecdotes from the filming. Cycling allows a more intimate connection with Salzburg: riders cross parks, quiet streets and breathe in the everyday atmosphere of the historic and monumental city.

The route also has an added value: it links historical heritage with cinematic memory. Cyclists discover baroque palaces, centuries-old convents and panoramic views of the Alps, all connected to scenes the viewer immediately recognises. The experience blends exercise, history, popular culture and an unforgettable memory in a single shared, evocative and profoundly memorable journey

Puppet theater, scene with Maria and the Trapp children



Behind the Stoves

Music and Strudel

In Salzburg, the film can also be savoured. The Edelweiss School offers cooking classes where apple strudel and pretzels, two classics of Central European gastronomy, are prepared with care.

The process goes far beyond simply following a recipe. The history of the dessert is explained, along with the technique of stretching the dough until it becomes transparent and the proper way of serving it. Students roll up their sleeves, knead, and finally enjoy their creations accompanied by a goulash or a local wine. All of this unfolds to the familiar soundtrack of the musical, sung and hummed throughout the class.

What makes this experience truly special is that it is not just culinary. It also connects visitors with Austria's tradition of hospitality and with the table as a place of encounter and community. While singing and cooking together, participants share not only food but also a piece of the country's cultural identity, bringing the story of *The Sound of Music* even closer



Above and below Mirabell Palace Gardens



Facade of Mirabell Palace



Picnic at Leopoldskron Palace Dinner outdoors

Few settings are as recognisable as Leopoldskron Palace, set on the shores of a lake. In its park, a picnic-dinner is organised where visitors enjoy an evening outdoors while fragments of the soundtrack play.

Blankets are spread out on the grass, simple dishes of local tradition are served, and the surroundings do the rest. The film seems to come alive again as the sun sets over the water. The palace, built in the 18th century by Prince-Archbishop Firmian, was used for exterior scenes in the film and remains an architectural icon of the city. Its use for these evenings blends history, nature and cinema into a single setting.



The Greenhouse and Lake of Schloss Leopoldskron Palace



The classic tour

Bus full of songs

Panorama Tours runs the best-known route: the “Original Sound of Music Tour.” On board a bus, visitors are taken through the film’s locations, from Mirabell to the nearby hills. Along the way, the original songs play while guides encourage travellers to sing along.

It is a more tourist-oriented proposal, but one with undeniable appeal. Families, travellers who grew up with the film, and young people discovering it for the first time share an experience that continues to celebrate an enduring cultural phenomenon.

The tour also provides insight into the real story of the Trapp family, whose life inspired the Broadway musical and later the film. Fiction and reality intertwine here in a narrative that leaves no one indifferent.

Austria



Domplatz, estos arcos conectan la Catedral con otros edificios oficiales

Villa Trapp was the residence of the real Trapp family



A city that never forgets

The Sound of Music was not just a box office success. It was also the creation of a myth that turned Salzburg into a dream setting for millions of viewers. Half a century later, the city has managed to transform that legacy into cultural and tourist experiences suited to every audience.

Marionettes, bicycles, cookery, picnics or buses: each format offers a different gateway into the same story. What is remarkable is that Salzburg has not been trapped in nostalgia. It has woven the film into its daily life, adding it to its vast musical and architectural heritage.

Visitors may come for Mozart or the Summer Festival, for the medieval fortress or the nearby Alps. But those who choose to follow in the footsteps of the Trapps discover a parallel tale which, like the songs from the film, remains alive in the collective memory.

In the end, what lingers is a simple certainty: in Salzburg, the music never stops playing.



Susana Hornos

By: Julián Sacristán - comunicacion@wfm.es

As a Riojan, we can imagine that your first novel is deeply inspired by those landscapes. If you had to design a short route through your homeland for us, which places would you recommend and why?

First let me clarify something not everyone knows: although La Rioja is one of Spain's smallest regions (just over 1,930 sq mi, around 68 miles from end to end), we are fortunate to have the River Ebro gifting us seven tributaries: the Oja, Tirón, Najerilla, Iregua, Leza, Cidacos and Alhama, each carving its own valley. Imagine the sea of vineyards, beech forests, poplars, villages and broom shrubs that we breathe along these routes.

Could you suggest a route for us?

I'll propose one that works perfectly for a couple of days. Starting from the capital, Logroño, I would head towards Briones. On the way, it's worth visiting the Vivanco Museum of Wine Culture. Before reaching the hillside town itself, with its manor houses, palaces and medieval layout, you can climb Briones' tower to enjoy the spectacular views over the Sierra de Toloño and the River Ebro. From there I would continue to Casalarreina, another beautiful village. For those who love Renaissance art, it has several gems, from the Monastery of Nuestra Señora de la Piedad to the Palace of Pobes. My next stop would be San Millán de la Cogolla. On the way, I would pause in Santo Domingo de la Calzada, where the cathedral is an essential stop on the Camino de Santiago. By late afternoon you can reach San Millán (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) and delight not only in the imposing nature of the Sierra de la Demanda, but also in learning more about the cradle of the Spanish language among glosses, valleys, beech forests and cloisters (I recommend checking the visiting times). Spending the night there at its enchanting hostelry is the perfect way to complete the experience.

For the second day, exploring the Cameros on the way to the Seven Villages and stopping for breakfast at Venta Goyo in Viniegra de Abajo is, I must say, a plan to embrace wholeheartedly —full of energy, intensity, nature and, once again, culture. For instance, visiting the Corral de Comedias in Canales de la Sierra (the oldest in La Rioja), or the hamlet of Mansilla, where Ana María Matute spent part of her childhood and which her readers can recognise in some of her books. Along the way you also come across Las Viniegras and Montenegro (mind the bends) before reaching Villoslada de Cameros, on the northern slope of another of the region's landmark ranges, the Sierra de la Cebollera Natural Park.

On the way back to Logroño, you can stop in villages seemingly frozen in time and yet still alive with markets, restaurants... You could even go a few extra miles to the González Lacasa Reservoir in El Rasillo, or to Ortigosa (its caves are very famous, but that would require more time on another visit). Almost back in Logroño, one last stop at the Cameros viewpoint in Islallana is well worth it (if you remember the stunning shots of the Peñas in Isabel Coixet's film *Un Amor*, they were filmed there).

And if you still feel peckish before bed, once in Logroño, of course a couple of pinchos in Calle Laurel —though we locals prefer Calle San Agustín. I adore the pinchos at La Anjana; and if instead of pinchos you'd rather go for a proper dinner to finish in style, La Cocina de Ramón or En Ascuas are two of my favourites.

Where would you say is the ideal place in La Rioja to read your novel, *Tomorrow We Will Be Another Day*?

I'll give you three, depending on the type of reader. For bookshop lovers, the café at Santos Ochoa in Logroño; for library goers, I adore the Casa de Cultura in Fuenmayor, a beautiful building in a quiet setting, very well run —I spent a lot of time there during university studying and reading. And if it's outdoors, then the Boca del Río, also in my hometown of Fuenmayor.

You reach it along a path through orchards and vineyards and, unexpectedly, the calm —yet sometimes treacherous— River Ebro appears, far from everything.

How has your Riojan identity influenced your writing style and creative process in this first novel?

Mainly that when I began to create the two protagonists, I couldn't imagine them in a big city like the ones I have lived in (Buenos Aires and Madrid). I needed to bring them closer to myself, to make them from a small place—or, in his case, to have him work in the countryside. I felt that if I started from those "common places" tied to my childhood and adolescence, I would be able to understand them better and walk more closely alongside them.

To what extent have the landscapes, culture, or history of La Rioja influenced the setting or the plot of your novel?

In addition to what I said in the previous answer, the novel also con-

veys a strong sense of community. Alongside its two protagonists, other characters live around them —full of flaws, blunders, and selfishness— and yet they help them to feel like family, to truly become one.

Is there a specific place in La Rioja that directly inspired scenes or characters in your book?

I haven't had one in particular, but there were times when, if I doubted a farming term or was looking for a word connected to the land, I would call my father at the hours I knew he was playing cards in Fuenmayor. That way, along with his game of mus, I had four dictionaries in total to consult.

If your novel were a Rioja wine, which one would it be and why?

I'd say a young one. Precisely because those of us from here drink them more often: they don't go through barrels, they're fresher, but also more primary. Despite everything the protagonists have lived through, I like to imagine them that way.





Manena's Window

Travel Anecdotes

Text and Photos: Manena Munar manena.munar@gmail.com

Those little things..." as Joan Manuel Serrat would sing, are what remain in the memory after a journey —the ones that, when recalled, bring back a smile, a tear, or even bursts of laughter. I would like to take a few of them from the chest of my memories and share them with you"

When I Returned from Cuba

In Cuba, life is lived through dancing. I begin this Havana tale by emphasising how, in Havana, they welcome you dancing, they cry dancing, they chat dancing, and, when it's time to part, they bid you farewell dancing.

In Cuba, life is lived dancing



I'm not exaggerating. Blackouts, shortages, blockades—and still, they keep dancing. Before moving on with the anecdotes from what was truly a one-of-a-kind trip and closing this rumba-filled chapter, I'll tell you about one day among many on the buses. The driver simply vanished, leaving us inside, right at the hotel door, eager to explore Havana. When one of us finally asked where he'd gone, the answer came naturally: "He's around here somewhere, dancing with the receptionist."

And on the Malecón, an unrepentant rumbero explained to us, with tears in his eyes, how, despite carrying it in his heart, he'd had to return from Spain because, "there, my brother, people don't dance."



American classic cars, rolling legends

Through the Bus Window

Our first glimpse of Havana comes through the bus window, until we realise that the only way to really see it is to “escape” from the bus. We’re a large group, and the day begins with a procession of buses, one after another, collecting passengers—slowly, very slowly—from different hotels in the city. And it’s not always because the driver is dancing with the receptionist; sometimes it’s a sleepy traveller, another still at breakfast, or someone waiting at the wrong door.

By the time we finally get moving, the sun is already threatening to sink behind the Malecón. I distract myself watching the yellow coco-taxis buzzing past, the colourful almendrones, and the endless parade of people, each with their own story. A woman with Taíno features crosses the street, overtaken by a boy who could just as easily be Andalusian. A dark-skinned man with turquoise eyes walks quickly past a mulatto dressed in white, flaunting his Santería. On the corner, a Chinese man from Havana’s Chinatown buys peanuts from the immense “Negra Tomasa,” whose booming manisera cry fills the streets while she winks at a blond yuma passing by, teasing him with a laugh. In Cuba, they laugh even in their sleep.

A Woman in a Hat

There’s dancing, but there’s also singing; just ask the incomparable Celia Cruz, Compay Segundo, or the voices of the Nueva Trova Cubana. I remember with nostalgia how, years ago, I would play Silvio Rodríguez on vinyl—dropping the needle again and again on “Una mujer con sombrero, como un cuadro del viejo Chagall...”

And cinema, of course, cannot be forgotten. Not long ago, I watched *Return to Ithaca* with a brilliant, mature Jorge Perugorría; in the unforgettable *Strawberry and Chocolate*, he was still a young man. Those rooftop conversations with his friends, facing the Malecón, capture Cuba as it is today—its decline and magnificence combined, painting a city that is unique, mysterious, and beautiful. A city impossible to live without, and yet almost impossible to live in.

It’s easy to understand this when you walk through the Miraflores neighbourhood, full of old mansions, most of them in dubious condition but ingeniously transformed by Cuban creativity into paladares, makeshift gyms, or workshops where the famous

WHEN I RETURNED FROM CUBA

almendrón is rebuilt Frankenstein-style: a Mercedes engine, Ford seats, the body of a vintage Cadillac, all painted in the loudest colours possible so that no one can miss it.

An unforgettable chance encounter

It's worth adding that during any walk through Havana you inevitably get to know its people. Moving quietly, keeping to yourself, isn't the way here. In Havana, everyone talks, asks questions, tells stories, and laughs. By the end of the day, they've already made your "file," and you've made theirs. This reflection leads me to one of the most beautiful experiences of the trip. We had wandered through the Old Town, lovingly restored thanks to the dedication and wisdom of historian Eusebio Leal, who gave Havana back its splendour.

During that stroll, my eye was caught by a couple of bookshops I promised myself I'd return to. I stepped into one lined with wooden shelves, books upon books everywhere—I wanted to take them all—when a middle-aged mulatto woman approached me. In her hand she carried the typical plastic bag Cubans use when they go out, just in case they find something useful that day. Her smile lit up the room.

The Decline of Havana



Marta Rojas, as she introduced herself, turned out to be one of Cuba's most prestigious writers, also a journalist, and a witness to the assault on the Moncada Barracks, about which she wrote several reports.

Streets of Havana,
The City of Columns



She asks me, with that irresistible Cuban lilt, if she can help me with anything. We start talking, and I quickly realise how captivating her conversation is, radiating culture, command of words, and a healthy touch of irony.

When we meet, she is ninety years old and still contributes to Granma newspaper, as she had since its founding. Marta pulls from one of the shelves her marvellous novel *Las Campanas de Juana la Loca*, about the queen's role in Cuba—beyond her supposed madness—when she ordered the return of bronze that had been taken from the island to Spain, so it could be used in the bells of Havana's churches. I can hardly believe the chance encounter but, as so often happens on group trips, I have to dash off to rejoin the others. I say goodbye with a kiss and the promise that if I ever return to Havana, she will gift me a couple of hours.

I do return the following year and visit her in her modest flat in the Nico López building, in the El Vedado district, where surrealism once

again makes an appearance: a neighbour explains that when you call the lifts, it is always the opposite one that arrives, and when you press the entry phone, there is only one button for all ten floors—but it rings in each and every one.

The afternoon is unforgettable: photo albums showing her family from Santiago—her Spanish grandfather, a pastry chef, married to a woman of African descent, born free of slavery; her father, a tailor; her mother, a seamstress; and herself as a girl, with bright, curious eyes already full of promise. Marta as a correspondent in the Vietnam War, with Fidel Castro, receiving the Alejo Carpentier Literary Prize for her novel *Inglesa por un año*, the José Martí National Journalism Award in recognition of her life's work, or as a juror for the Cervantes Prize. Her flat is simple and devoid of luxuries: a fan, a rocking chair, and a small study where she writes, walls adorned with works by renowned Cuban painters, whose sketches she often used for her book covers, such as that of *Santa Lujuria*.

We said goodbye as friends, with a heartfelt embrace, and I never saw her again, for soon after I learned of her passing.

Piranhas Sending WhatsApp Messages

I'll continue with an anecdote that, though it could have ended badly, was resolved with a toast and thanks to the ethereal "virtual cloud." We were sailing from Varadero towards Cayo Blanco, rocked by a catamaran and enjoying the tropical exuberance. I was sitting in the front row, between the hulls and that net where the more daring stretch out to sunbathe, when a fellow traveller politely asked me to take her picture with her phone. While she looked for the right spot and pose, one of those pesky motorboats passed by, leaving waves in its wake. The fatal swell made me slip, and I watched, in slow motion, as my friend's phone slipped from my hands and fell into the tiny gap between the hull and the net. Silence and horror followed, as I pictured the phone drowning, taking with it all the memories of her trip.

¡Maniiiiii!



MANENA'S WINDOW



Marta Rojas



Mysterious Havana

A slip, a rogue wave and a phone on the verge of sinking in the Caribbean. The anecdote, which could have ended in disaster, ended instead with laughter and a toast, thanks to the virtual cloud



Sailing to Cayo Blanco

The legendary Hotel Nacional de Cuba welcomes us with history and glamour: we arrive with mud-stained boots, but a welcome rum and the sensual rhythm of dance remind us that in Havana, elegance is always intertwined with warmth

She reacts with elegance; I fight the urge to jump into the water to rescue the phone. “Let’s have a whisky!” she says, while someone nearby remarks: ***“the piranhas are sending WhatsApps.”***

Hotel Nacional de Cuba: A True Legend

The last Havana evening unfolds at the grand, historic, and anecdotal Hotel Nacional de Cuba, perched between the exclusive El Vedado district and Old Havana, facing the Malecón and the Gulf Stream, commanding a sweeping view of the city from the Taganana hill —a Guanche name given by Canary Island emigrants.

I won’t spare details in telling our arrival at the hotel, where we had been invited to a lavish black-tie party. We turned up in a sorry state, quite literally, in

hiking clothes, boots caked with mud, and hair plastered by the heat. We entered in single file, heads down and eyes on the floor, embarrassed by such an appearance, excusing ourselves with the truth: the day trip to Viñales had run over time, and we hadn’t been able to shower or dress properly for the occasion.

Needless to say, the welcome was both warm and glamorous. We were immediately offered a small glass of Havana Club Añejo Especial rum to start enjoying the spectacle of dance —colourful, sensual, and uniquely Cuban. The music rose, the lights dimmed, and for a moment we felt part of the island’s timeless elegance

At last, I raise my eyes —and my glass— and, looking out to the Malecón, the Atlantic, and El Morro, I toast to the Cuban capital.

The National Hotel of Cuba



traveling

gourmets



FLAVOURS OF ALBACETE

A journey through
their products

GAME ON THE TABLE

Tradition, sustainability
and gastronomy

EL ESPIGÓN

Andalusian flavors in the
heart of Madrid

MAKOTO MADRID

Contemporary
Japan



Albacete

Flavours that Tell the Story of La Mancha

Text: Redacción - **Photos:** APEHT

Flavours of La Mancha, where shepherds' dishes coexist with cheeses, wines, oils and saffron that have carried Albacete's name far beyond its borders

The gastronomy of Albacete is a journey to the Manchegan essence, a cuisine forged in rural life and in making the most of the resources of each season. On the table appear recipes passed down from generation to generation: migas ruleras, born of shepherding; the hearty atascaburras, which mixes cod, potato and walnut to comfort the winter months; or gazpacho manchego, prepared with small game meat over the traditional shepherd's flatbread. Humble dishes that, over time, have become part of the culinary heritage.

To these flavours are added products that have given the province international prestige: Manchego cheese with Denomination of Origin, made from the milk of local sheep; saffron from La Mancha, known as "red gold" for its aromatic intensity; or the wines of the Almansa and La Mancha designations, surprising for the strength of their reds and the freshness of their whites. No less important is the extra virgin olive oil, the fruit of the mills that transform olives into a gastronomic elixir. All of this shapes a culinary identity that, more than simply nourishing, is savoured as part of Albacete's cultural landscape

La Mancha's gastronomy is a living tale, woven with simplicity and rural memory, which has become a pillar of identity for an entire region. In Albacete, tables are filled with dishes born of necessity and now shared with pride. **Gazpacho manchego**, which bears no relation to Andalusian gazpacho, is a shepherd's stew in which unleavened bread cakes are crumbled into a broth with small game, herbs and spices. Its strength lies in its simplicity and that deep flavour that has accompanied generations.

Another classic is **migas ruleras**, made from stale bread, garlic, oil, bacon and chorizo, a humble delicacy cooked slowly and, as its very name suggests, "rolling around" in the pan until they reach the perfect texture. In this recipe, passed down from parents to children, the essence of rural life endures.

Atascaburras, also known as ajoatao or ajoarriero, is another example of popular ingenuity. With potato, cod, garlic, oil and sometimes walnuts, it is prepared as a thick purée that, according to tradition, "fills you up even more than the donkeys". Simple and hearty, it reflects the rugged character of the land.

The recipe book would not be complete without sweets, with icons such as **Miguelitos from La Roda**, puff pastries filled with cream that have become ambassadors of the province, or rollicos de anís, whose fragrance evokes childhood and family celebrations.



Migas manchegas



Atascaburras

Gazpacho manchego

Miguelitos from la Roda



“

Each
Glass of
Wine is a
Journey to
the Heart
of the Land

”

The province boasts not only its repertoire of recipes but also products recognised worldwide. **Manchego cheese**, with its Protected Designation of Origin, has for centuries been one of the most recognisable emblems of Castilla-La Mancha. Made exclusively from Manchega sheep's milk, its intense flavour and firm texture are the result of an artisanal process handed down from generation to generation. It is more than a gastronomic product: it is a symbol of identity, linked to shepherds, transhumance and the culture of the plateau. Its presence on regional tables accompanies everything from the humblest meals to the most solemn celebrations.

Another of the province's treasures is La Mancha **saffron, known as “red gold”**. Cultivated patiently on small family plots, it is harvested by hand during the cold dawns of October and November. Each flower opens at sunrise and must be stripped the very same day to preserve its aroma. The result is a condiment at once

delicate and powerful, essential in traditional recipes such as soupy rice, pisto or Castilian soups. Its production, strictly limited, is protected by a Designation of Origin that guarantees its quality and traceability, while striving to keep alive an ancestral agricultural practice.

Viticulture, meanwhile, has undergone a notable transformation in recent decades. Wines from the **La Mancha** and **Almansa** denominations have moved from being known only in local markets to winning awards and international recognition. Today wines of great character are produced, born of an extreme land and native varieties such as **Garnacha Tintorera, Monastrell and Tempranillo. The wineries of the D.O. Almansa**, in particular, have chosen to welcome visitors. They offer guided tours of century-old vineyards that tell the story of cultivation, tastings in historic ageing cellars and pairings with local produce that reveal the essence of each wine. Wine tourism is no longer an add-on but an essential experience for understanding the province from within, through its landscape and its people.

A similar story is unfolding with olive oil tourism. The province is home to some 38 active oil mills which, in addition to producing **extra virgin olive oils** of the highest quality, have realised that visitors want to know the origin of what they consume. These oil mills offer tours that showcase the entire process: from the olive grove, through cold pressing, to the final

Barrel Room of a Winery in Albacete Recognised as D.O. Vino de Pago



Bunch of Tempranillo Grapes and Mechanical Harvesting



tasting in the glass. Visitors learn about the importance of the harvest moment, the differences between varieties such as Arbequina, Cornicabra or Picual, and how to identify the fruity, bitter or spicy nuances that characterise a good oil. In many cases, these experiences are complemented by traditional breakfasts, cooking workshops or walks among centuries-old olive trees.

All this network of knowledge and flavours is part of a broader project, promoted by the Provincial Council and numerous cooperatives, small businesses and independent producers. The goal is clear: to consolidate Albacete as a leading wine and olive oil tourism destination in Spain, capable of attracting travellers seeking authenticity, quality and direct contact with the land. It is not just about tasting, but about understanding. About meeting those behind every cheese, every glass of wine or every drop of oil. And about recognising in these products the living memory of a land that has preserved its essence without renouncing the future.

Travellers can also join urban routes that highlight the vitality of local hospitality. **The Tapas Days** or the **Croquette Day, organised by the Albacete Association of Hospitality and Tourism (APEHT)**, have boosted the city's gastronomic scene, attracting thousands of visitors. The second edition of "**Croqueteando por Albacete**" in 2024 was a resounding success, with 74 establishments taking part.

Markets, festivals and culinary gatherings complete a calendar that unites tradition and modernity. Albacete, a land both rugged and welcoming, proves that its cuisine is not just nourishment but a cultural story served at every table, one that today projects itself far beyond its borders



Saffron (D.O.P.) from La Mancha



Cheeses in Maturation



Oils with a Seal of Quality Produced in Albacete





Game on the table

Tradition, Sustainability and Gastronomy

Text: Diana Morello - dianamorello@outlook.es **Photos:** Archive

Autumn in Spain brings more than fine rain and forests changing colour. It also marks the start of the hunting season, a time when tradition, landscape and gastronomy intertwine. Far from clichés, game on the table is the result of a regulated and responsible activity that contributes to ecological balance, woodland conservation and the survival of recipes with centuries of history. Eating game meat reminds us that the countryside is a living ecosystem, requiring care and management. Hunters and restaurateurs share the same belief: only with respect for the environment can nature's larder be replenished each autumn.

Hunting as territorial balance

In many rural areas, hunting is understood as part of natural management. Controlling populations of wild boar or deer prevents damage to crops and reduces traffic accidents. Regulating the density of partridges, hares or wood pigeons protects the balance between species. Behind the image of driven hunts and shoots lies year-round work: clearing paths, maintaining waterholes, conserving dehesas and reforestation. In many regions, local hunting societies themselves fund these tasks. Hunting thus becomes a tool of stewardship, extending well beyond a single day in the field.

A unique and natural product

Game meats do not come from intensive farms or industrial chains. These are animals that have lived in freedom, feeding on what woodland or pasture provides. The result is lean meat, rich in protein, with intense flavours unlike any domestic meat.

Small game provides delicate pieces: red-legged partridge, pheasant, wood pigeon, hare. Big game, by contrast, offers stronger cuts from venison, wild boar or roe deer. All require cooking techniques that enhance their character: pickling, slow stews, long marinades. Game cookery is, above all, cookery of patience.

From convents to haute cuisine

Spanish culinary tradition preserves a rich heritage linked to game. Convents of the Golden Age perfected escabeches and civets still made today. In Castilla-La Mancha, pickled partridge is part of regional identity; in Andalusia, wild boar stewed with red wine is served in roadside *ventas* and restaurants; in Aragón, hare with chocolate recalls the blending of savoury cookery with confectionery.

A group of hunters clearing the woodland © FAC



GAME ON THE TABLE



Hare stewed with vegetables



Venison and boletus carpaccio

Today, game has also found a place in haute cuisine. **Chefs such as Pepe Rodríguez** in Illescas, **Jesús Sánchez** in Cantabria or **Adolfo Muñoz** in Toledo reinterpret these meats with contemporary techniques. The essence remains, but the presentation is more refined: venison carpaccio, partridge ravioli, wild boar tacos. Tradition meets innovation, and autumn is when both shine brightest.

Territories defined by their cuisine

The Montes de Toledo, Sierra Morena, Sierra de Cazorla or the forests of Soria are landscapes where hunting forms part of identity. Travellers there discover not just a dish, but a way of understanding the land. Many rural restaurants build their seasonal menus around game, while mushroom fairs and food festivals complete the experience.

Responsible hunting, living forests

One of today's great debates is the role of hunting in sustainability. Against those who view it with suspicion, more and

Pickled partridge





Roasted venison loin

more voices recall that without game management, woodlands would suffer severe imbalance. Overpopulations of wild boar, absence of natural predators, spread of disease... Regulated hunting helps keep ecosystems alive.

Meanwhile, hunting associations and restaurateurs uphold traceability: knowing the origin of each piece, ensuring proper cold handling, respecting established quotas. The message is clear: game on the table only makes sense when practised responsibly.

In many villages, hunters are also the first to keep the countryside clean, to remove rubbish, open paths, monitor rivers. This invisible yet constant work is part of a cultural heritage passed on along with recipes.

Between tradition and future

The challenge lies in bringing game closer to younger generations. For many urban youth, it is a distant reality. Yet cuisine provides a bridge. Tasting a venison stew with mushrooms, pickled partridge

or roe deer carpaccio is also discovering a landscape and a culture.

Each dish tells a story: of the forest kept alive by game management, of hunters who tend the land and safeguard balance, of cooks who reinterpret tradition.

For visitors, trying game is not only a culinary adventure but also an educational one, offering insight into rural traditions, biodiversity, and the values of responsible stewardship.

Game on the table is not a relic of the past, but a living practice that speaks of sustainability, identity and flavour. Ultimately, when a traveller sits before a plate of game in autumn, they are not merely eating. They are taking part in a cycle that sustains forests, preserves species, breathes life into villages and pays homage to one of Spain's oldest and most authentic cuisines.

Where to eat good game in Spain

Six restaurants that pay tribute to the hunting tradition

Restaurant Adolfo

In the heart of Toledo's historic centre, Restaurante Adolfo blends Manchegan tradition with signature cuisine in a 12th-century building. Founded by Adolfo Muñoz, it offers seasonal menus crafted with local, zero-kilometre produce. Its centuries-old wine cellar adds a unique dimension to the gastronomic experience. Recognised by both the Michelin Guide and the Repsol Guide, it stands as an essential reference in the city. Warm service and meticulous presentation complete a visit that unites history, flavour and hospitality

C/ Hombre de Palo, 7
Toledo
Tel: +34 639 33 09 91



El Bohío

In Illescas, halfway between Madrid and Toledo, El Bohío keeps alive the essence of a family tavern founded in 1934 and transformed into a gastronomic temple. At the helm of the kitchen, Pepe Rodríguez reinterprets Manchegan tradition with a contemporary outlook and absolute respect for the product. Lentils with butifarra, cocido pringá or a reinvented gazpacho manchego are examples of his creations. Holding a Michelin star since 1999, the restaurant unites history, flavour and hospitality in a space that truly moves diners.

Av. Castilla-La Mancha, 81
Illescas (Toledo)
Tel: +34 925 51 11 26



El Cenador de Amós

In Villaverde de Pontones, Cantabria, Cenador de Amós, under the direction of Jesús Sánchez, occupies an 18th-century mansion where local cuisine reaches its highest refinement. Since 1993, the chef has built a legacy that today shines with three Michelin stars, a Green Star for sustainability and three Repsol suns, thanks to his respect for the environment, his own kitchen garden and an award-winning bakery. His intimate, elegant approach celebrates the regional with contemporary sensitivity, where each dish revives memory and landscape with serene emotion.

Plaza del Sol, s/n, Villaverde de
Pontones, Cantabria, España
Tel: +34 942 50 82 43



El Rincón del Vespok

In the exclusive Puerta de Hierro district of Madrid, El Rincón de Vespok emerges as a garden oasis where traditional Spanish cuisine is meant to be shared in a peaceful setting. Outdoor tables accompany simple yet flavoursome dishes: cocido croquettes, oxtail ravioli, semolina puntalette with wild boar and seasonal mushrooms, or creamy rice with wild duck, all paired with a selection of wines and cocktails. An intimate, discreet space, ideal for long afternoons and lingering conversations, with warm, familiar service.

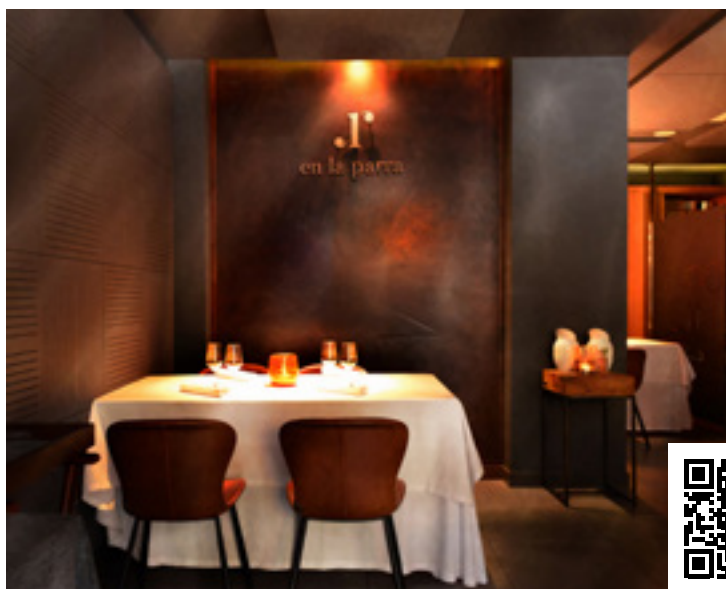
Calle Isla de Oza, 16
Madrid
Tel: +34 910 88 01 93



En la Parra

Facing the Plateresque altarpiece of the Convent of San Esteban, in Salamanca's historic quarter, En La Parra unfolds a modern cuisine rooted in Castilian tradition. Rocío Parra leads the Granito and Pizarra tasting menus, a tribute to Salamanca's soil, with appetisers and Iberian produce as the guiding thread. It also offers the weekday "Concepto Charro", a more affordable option that evokes flavours of memory and proximity. An elegant, warm and creative space, where tradition and contemporaneity engage in dialogue with respect and flavour

C/ San Pablo, 80
Salamanca
Tel: +34 923 064 783



El Molino de Alcuneza

En Sigüenza, en la provincia de Guadalajara, El Relais & Châteaux El Molino de Alcuneza se alza en una antigua casona restaurada junto al río Henares, bajo la guía del chef Diego Guerrero. Con una estrella Michelin, conjuga técnica y paisaje: sobaos modernos, platos inspirados en huerta y monte, y postres que evocan la infancia. El entorno rural, cuidado y sereno, amplifica el disfrute. Una cocina íntima y reflexiva que respira historia y emoción en cada bocado.

Crta GU-128, Alcuneza – Alboreca
km 0,5, Sigüenza
Tel: +34 949 39 15 01





Makoto Madrid

The Elegance of
Contemporary Japan in
the Heart of the Capital

Text: Editorial Staff - **Photos:** Makoto Madrid



MAKOTO

Madrid welcomes a new gastronomic temple with the opening of Makoto Madrid, the first European restaurant by Japanese chef Makoto Okuwa.

Located next to the Rosewood Villa Magna hotel, the venue confirms the international expansion of a chef who has conquered Miami, Mexico City, Panama and São Paulo with his renewed vision of sushi.

Tradition and innovation

Trained from the age of 15 in Edomae sushi and a disciple of Masaharu Morimoto, Okuwa has developed a style that combines Japanese precision with global audacity. His philosophy is clear: 60% tradition, 40% innovation — a balance that allows him to respect technique without renouncing creativity.

In Madrid, he presents a menu that fuses the best of Japan with Spanish products. Thus, ingredients such as A5 wagyu, Hokkaido sea urchin or Oma toro tuna coexist with Galician octopus, Iberian pork, scarlet prawns or almadraba tuna. A proposal that turns each dish into a cultural dialogue.

A menu to share

The offering includes sushi and sashimi of the highest precision alongside hot dishes cooked on the robata, a Japanese grill that imparts a smoky cha-

TRIED AND TESTED RESTAURANTS

An Expanding Group

Since the opening of its flagship restaurant in Miami in 2011, the Makoto group has established itself as a benchmark for contemporary Japanese cuisine, attracting more than 300,000 visitors annually. Its arrival in Madrid marks the beginning of a new chapter, with plans to open three more venues in Spain and to continue expanding in the United States.

With this opening, Madrid reaffirms its status as an international gastronomic capital, and Makoto Okuwa adds a new chapter to his successful career.



racter to meats, seafood and vegetables. Among the most celebrated creations are tiger prawn skewers, miso sea bass with crispy kale, branzino with wasabi chimichurri, or wagyu slices on a hot stone. Creative touches also feature, such as Frosty Kobe fried rice with foie and organic egg, or soft-shell crab with chilli aioli.

Drinks with a Japanese stamp

The drinks programme completes the journey. Makoto Madrid offers a cellar of 150 wine references, around twenty artisanal sakes and cult Japanese whiskies such as Hibiki and Yamazaki. The signature cocktail list reinterprets classics with a Japanese twist, such as a yuzu and lychee mojito.

Design and atmosphere

The architectural project is the work of Manuel Clavel Rojo, who has created a 450 m² space that conveys serenity and sophistication. Noble materials, nods to wabi-sabi, bonsais and water features generate an environment balanced between Japan and Madrid. The restaurant accommodates 60 diners and includes a 40-seat garden terrace set to become a new Madrid landmark.





Quintoelemento

Madrid Night Under a Starry

Text: Editorial Staff - **Photos:** Quintoelemento

Night in Madrid takes on another dimension when you step through the doors of Quintoelemento. The street's bustle fades away as a lift whisks you upwards, where the city unfolds in lights. Beneath a digital dome that projects moving stars, this rooftop has succeeded in redefining the way of dining out in the capital.

More than a restaurant, Quintoelemento is a stage set in the very heart of Madrid's art triangle, a space where gastronomy, music, immersive images and cocktails merge into a single language.

A Table That Surprises

Chef Juan Suárez de Lezo leads the proposal with orchestral precision. Light dishes coexist with intense bites, always with a traveller's touch that reflects a cosmopolitan cuisine. Tatakis with Asian notes, local produce treated with care, and desserts that astonish both visually and on the palate form part of a menu where food is never eclipsed by spectacle.

The Japanese Beat

One of the most distinctive corners is its sushi bar, inspired by the Kaiseki tradition. Here, the experience is unhurried, almost ceremonial: a succession of dishes that evoke the passing of the seasons. Watching the chef shape each piece with precision mentally transports you to Kyoto or Tokyo —a moment of calm in contrast with the vibrancy of the rest of the venue.

Mixology as a Journey

At the bar, cocktails become the protagonists. The liquid proposal travels across continents: tropical fruits, oriental spices and reinterpretations of classics such as the Negroni or the Dry Martini. They are not an accompaniment but part of the evening's script, able to open, complement or close the experience while the terrace reveals a Madrid that never sleeps.

Gastronomy and Spectacle

Quintoelemento's great success is balancing the culinary with the theatrical. The digital dome projects



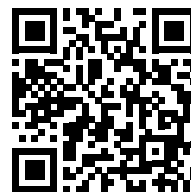
constellations, landscapes or futuristic scenes synchronised with music and light. Everything forms part of the same immersive pulse that envelops the diner without distracting from the table.

A Space in Constant Motion

Nothing here stands still: the menu evolves, the cocktail list is renewed, and the projections change, ensuring that every visit feels different. This adaptability has established the restaurant in record time as a Madrid landmark, a meeting point for couples, groups of friends and international travellers.

Under Madrid's Stars

When the ceiling projects a night sky and dinner comes to an end, the name makes sense: *quinto elemento*. It is not earth, water, air or fire. It is experience —that intangible element that turns a dinner into memory.





El Espigón

Andalusian flavor in the heart of Madrid

Text: Editorial Staff - Photos: El Espigón and archive



Close to Paseo de la Castellana, in Madrid's financial and social hub, El Espigón has stood for nearly three decades as a restaurant that has won the loyalty of generations of diners. Behind this project is the Cascajo Moro family, with Ana and Carlos at the helm, joined by the fresh drive of their son, also named Carlos, who has carried forward a successful model built on honest cooking and excellence in produce.

Family Tradition and Produce of Origin

El Espigón's philosophy is rooted in Andalusian cuisine, based on fish and seafood freshly brought from southern fish markets. The menu reflects this loyalty to origin and a constant pursuit of quality. There are no artifices here: the star is always the product itself, handled with care, respect and meticulous attention.

Spaces for Every Occasion

The restaurant offers different settings tailored to all kinds of gatherings. The lively bar, ideal for an impromptu aperitif; the cosy dining rooms, perfect for family meals or business lunches; and the private rooms, which provide greater intimacy.

A versatility that makes El Espigón a regular destination both for those seeking an informal experience and for more special celebrations.

Fried Specialities and Seafood with a Southern Flavour

A journey through its menu almost always begins with the celebrated fried dishes, the restaurant's hallmark. Highlights include red mullet from Motril, baby squid from Isla Cristina and anchovies from Rincón de la Victoria (Málaga), little flavour-packed gems that capture the seafaring essence of Andalusia. From there, the selection unfolds into a repertoire of the freshest seafood: white prawns from Huelva, cañaíllas from Isla Cristina and langoustines caught with trammel nets, among others. Products that transport diners directly to the coast, with the freshness and aroma of the Atlantic and Mediterranean in every bite.

Fried Victorian anchovies



Fresh seafood brought in daily from Spain's main fish markets

Partial view of one of the rooms with a nautical theme





Ana Moro and Carlos Cascajo



Grilled monkfish with vegetables

Fish, Rice and Meat

The fish selection varies according to the season, always sourced directly and prepared with simplicity to highlight its flavour. Alongside them are rice dishes, another of the restaurant's hallmarks, crafted with mastery and generosity. And for those who prefer meat, the menu includes prime cuts that complete a broad and well-balanced offering.

Sweet Treats and Sevillian Hospitality

The finale comes with homemade desserts that appeal to every sweet tooth. Cakes, flans and traditional favourites provide the perfect close to an experience defined by flavour and hospitality. For if El Espigón is known for anything beyond its cuisine, it is the warm, friendly welcome of the Cascajo family. That Andalusian warmth makes every visit more than a meal: it becomes a reunion.

El Espigón is, ultimately, a little piece of Seville in the capital, a place that brings together tradition, quality produce and hospitality. Those who discover it rarely take long to return

El Espigón





Show Cookings ■ Exclusive Tastings ■ Tapas Contest
Live Music



www.gastrolata.com

BACK TO SCHOOL CAN WAIT A LITTLE LONGER

CANARY ISLANDS FROM

35€



iberiaexpress.com

IBERIA
EXPRESS 