

# magazine traveling

ENGLISH EDITION

TRAVEL AND GASTRONOMY MAGAZINE

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**Elche de la Sierra**  
Sawdust Carpets  
Art and Tradition

**JIANGSU**  
The Soul of the  
Chinese Garden

**NAPLES**  
Chaotic, brilliant and  
always Mediterranean

**VALDERREDIBLE**  
Cantabrian Valley where  
the rocks tell stories

**PETRA**  
More than a  
treasure to discover

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# Welcome aboard

Each issue of Traveling is an invitation to travel with curiosity, not only to change place, but also to change perspective. This new edition brings together destinations, stories and flavours that reveal how landscape, culture and cuisine offer a privileged way of understanding a territory.

We begin in China, in the province of Jiangsu, where the classical gardens reflect a refined way of understanding nature as art. From there we travel to Mexico to contemplate Teotihuacán from the air, at dawn when hot-air balloons colour the sky above the ancient pyramids.

The Mediterranean holds a prominent place. Naples is best understood through its culture and its cuisine, a tradition that condenses centuries of history. From there we look towards the Adriatic and pause in Dubrovnik, where sea and stone shape a city unlike any other. The journey continues to Petra in Jordan, and before returning to Spain we make a stop in the Soča Valley in Slovenia.

Spain shines with its own light. We travel through the Valderredible valley in Cantabria, pause in Soria to experience its Semana Santa and head to Elche de la Sierra, where the streets are covered with carpets of coloured sawdust. Palma Cathedral and Alquézar, in the Sierra de Guara, complete an unforgettable journey.

This issue also turns its gaze towards contemporary architecture in Singapore and opens the door to hotels with character such as AlmaLusa Comporta in Portugal or Puntagrande in El Hierro, the smallest hotel in the world.

Gastronomy once again becomes our compass: we discover Naples through its kitchens and explore the secrets of matcha tea in Japan. Back home, we suggest a wine-tourism escape to Bodegas Monte la Reina in the heart of Toro, and travel to Málaga to taste one of Spain's finest extra virgin olive oils at Finca La Torre. To conclude, we invite you to savour part of Madrid's culinary offering.

Thank you for travelling with us. The journey begins now.



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Carpets of Elche de la Sierra  
© Jose A. Muñoz



**COVER**

Flan de coco y piña  
Thai Arturo Soria  
© Jose A. Muñoz



# Jiangsu

## and the soul of the chinese garden

### Suzhou, Yangzhou and Nanjing

Words and photography: Jose A. Muñoz

**T**he province of Jiangsu, in the fertile Jiangnan region, brings together some of the most refined classical gardens in China. Here the garden is not an ornamental park, but an intellectual construction, a space where philosophy, poetry and architecture engage in silent dialogue. Since the Song dynasty, and with particular intensity during the Ming and Qing dynasties, retired officials, prosperous merchants and scholars created private spaces where nature was reinterpreted as a metaphor for the universe and a reflection of moral order. These gardens were often conceived in connection with private residences located within the urban fabric. They were not isolated places, but extensions of the home and the study. The owner – often an official who withdrew from public life after passing the demanding imperial examinations, or a wealthy merchant aspiring to cultural recognition – conceived the garden as a place for retreat, reading, writing and conversation. Literary gatherings were held there, improvised poems were composed and landscape painting was practised, a discipline inseparable from the cultivated gaze. The aim was not to display wealth ostentatiously, but to express aesthetic sensitivity and intellectual cultivation, values central to the Confucian tradition.

The creation of a classical garden required planning and technical knowledge, but also a profound symbolic culture. The location was chosen according to the topography and, above all, the available water, an essential element in the landscape of Jiangnan, a region crossed by canals and rivers. Rocks were incorporated, many of them from Lake Taihu, famous for their perforated forms and surfaces shaped by centuries of water erosion; these stones, admired since antiquity, were considered genuine natural sculptures with aesthetic qualities described as “wrinkled, permeable, slender and transparent”. Ponds, winding paths and pavilions were laid out to capture the changing light of the seasons and the movement of air. The design avoided the rigid symmetry typical of official architecture, favouring instead a controlled irregularity that evoked spontaneous nature, although every viewpoint was carefully calculated to create the illusion of a landscape “small yet grand”.

The Jiangnan region preserves outstanding examples of this art. The city of Suzhou, known as the “Venice of the East” for its canals, is home to nine gardens listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, among them the Humble Administrator’s Garden, built in 1509 by a retired imperial censor who conceived its five hectares of ponds and pavilions as a place for spiritual retreat. The nearby Master of the Nets Garden, covering barely half a hectare, demonstrates how the vastness of natural landscape can be recreated within a reduced space. In Yangzhou, Ge Yuan Garden stands out for its rockeries of Xuan stone representing the four seasons, including a winter composition from the seventeenth century attributed to the celebrated painter Shi Tao. Nanjing, meanwhile, preserves Zhan Garden and its Ming-era city wall, once among the longest in the world and offering spectacular views of the Yangtze River. The harmony of these places transcends time: anyone who walks along their paths follows in the footsteps of poets and thinkers who sought, in still water and weathered rock, an echo of their own spirit.

中国古典园林

## CHINESE GARDENS

### Humble Administrator's Garden (Suzhou)

Founded in 1513 by the retired official Wang Xianchen, this garden in Suzhou is the largest in the city and one of the most representative of the Ming dynasty. Its name refers to the modest life of the scholar who tends his garden far from the court, an ethical statement rather than a decorative one.

The project involved the painter and literatus Wen Zhengming, whose artistic sensibility shaped the composition of the ensemble. Water occupies an essential part of the space, structuring broad ponds in which pavilions, bridges and rocks from Lake Taihu are reflected.

Historically divided and reunified in the twentieth century, the garden has formed part since 1997 of the Classical Gardens of Suzhou inscribed as a World Heritage Site. Its fluid design, without rigid symmetry, turns every walk into a succession of pictorial scenes. It is, above all, a stage for intellectual retreat. The columns of the Orchid Pavilion reflect the aesthetic simplicity of the Ming dynasty.



## Lingering Garden (Suzhou)

Created in 1593 during the Ming dynasty and later expanded in the Qing period, the Lingering Garden stands out for its mastery of architectural space. Unlike the previous one, here the built structure — corridors, halls and framed windows — takes on a particularly prominent role.

The garden is organised into four distinct sections: a central area with a pond, an eastern zone with pavilions, a northern section of bamboo and a western sector with rockeries. Decorative windows act as frames that transform the landscape into a living painting. The rockeries, meticulously composed, interact with ponds and pavilions in a precise balance between density and emptiness.

Its inscription in 1997 as part of the World Heritage recognises this ability to synthesise architecture and nature within a unified composition. The garden also houses twelve Taihu rock peaks, including the famous Guanyun Rock, which rises six and a half metres high.



## Master of the Nets Garden

Smaller in size but considered one of the most refined, this garden dates back to the twelfth century and was rebuilt in the eighteenth. Its name evokes the life of the retired fisherman, a symbol of simplicity and freedom.

Its greatest virtue lies in perspective: despite its modest scale, it creates depth through changes in level, winding corridors and a sequence of linked scenes. The central pond structures the whole composition, surrounded by light pavilions that invite contemplation.

It is a masterful example of how the Chinese garden does not depend on size, but on the balance between proportion, suggestion and visual rhythm.

### Ge Yuan Garden (Yangzhou)

This garden acquired its present form in 1818, when the merchant Huang Zhiyun transformed it into a private residence during the Qing dynasty. Its name refers to bamboo (also known as the Bamboo Garden), a plant associated with integrity and modesty.

Its singularity lies in the representation of the four seasons through groups of rocks and specific vegetation. Each section suggests spring, summer, autumn and winter, turning the walk into a metaphor for the cycle of life.

Circular gates and covered corridors connect the different spaces in a meditative sequence. Here the rock takes on a sculptural prominence and the garden becomes a reflection on the passage of time.



## Slender West Lake (Yangzhou)

More than a closed garden, Slender West Lake is a linear cultural landscape that winds through Yangzhou. Its configuration reached particular splendour in the eighteenth century, during the travels of the Emperor Qianlong. Bridges such as the Five Pavilion Bridge (1757) or the so-called Twenty-Four Arch Bridge are integrated into a landscape of willows and landing stages.

The lake, narrow and sinuous, deliberately evokes West Lake in Hangzhou. Here water organises the space. The visitor moves through the landscape as if unrolling a painted scroll. It is an expanded garden, where city and nature engage in dialogue without strict boundaries.



## CHINESE GARDENS

### Lion Grove garden (Suzhou)

It is one of the most singular classical gardens in Suzhou. It was founded in 1342, during the Yuan dynasty, by the monk Tianru Weize to commemorate his master, in a setting linked to Chan Buddhism. The name refers both to the rocks from Lake Taihu — whose eroded shapes evoke lions — and to the symbolism of the “lion grove” associated with Buddhist teaching.

Its most striking feature is the large labyrinthine rockery, a network of passages, grottoes and changes in level that deliberately disorient the visitor and turn the walk into an exercise in contemplation. Over the centuries it experienced periods of abandonment and reconstruction; during the Qing era it was restored and visited by the Emperor Qianlong, who left calligraphic inscriptions. Today it remains a stony microcosm where rock and water condense the intellectual essence of the Chinese garden.



### Zhan Yuan Garden (Nanjing)

It is considered one of the oldest classical gardens in southern China. Its origins date back to the fifteenth century, at the beginning of the Ming dynasty, when the land was granted by the Emperor Hongwu to a distinguished general and began to take shape as a residence with a private garden.

The ensemble combines domestic architecture and landscape, following the model of the southern scholar's garden: ponds, pavilions and rockeries that evoke mountains in miniature. The stones, carefully selected, take on a special prominence within a sober and balanced composition. Unlike the later and more complex gardens of Suzhou, Zhan Yuan preserves an earlier structure within the classical tradition. Its interest lies in this historical continuity and in its role as one of the precedents of the literati garden that would fully flourish in Jiangnan in the following centuries.



The gardens of Jiangsu do not follow a single model, but rather different interpretations of the same idea: nature as a mirror of the spirit. From the quiet retreat of the Humble Administrator's Garden to the watery expanse of Slender West Lake, passing through the symbolism of Ge Yuan or the architectural staging of the Lingering Garden, they all share a sensibility that runs through the centuries. Here geometry does not prevail, harmony does. Every stone, every bridge and every reflection reminds us that the classical Chinese garden is a form of thought built within the landscape.

This tradition, which reached its full maturity during the Ming and Qing dynasties, flourished thanks to the patronage of scholarly officials who, far from the court, created miniature worlds in which to cultivate poetry and reflection. Many gardens were integrated beside study halls: the walk among rocks and ponds extended the act of meditation.

Today, several gardens in Suzhou and Yangzhou are listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, not only for their beauty, but for embodying a worldview that still inspires. Walking through them remains an invitation to pause and understand that within a single moment lies the immensity of nature.



## How to get there

From Madrid (Adolfo Suárez Madrid–Barajas Airport – MAD) there are non-stop flights to Shanghai Pudong (PVG) with China Eastern several times a week, with an approximate duration of 12 h 45 min to 14 h depending on the schedule. From Barcelona (El Prat – BCN) there is also a new direct route with China Eastern, recently inaugurated with several weekly frequencies between El Prat and Shanghai.

To move around cities such as Shanghai no special permit is required beyond a passport: the metro is the most practical option, with signage in English and inexpensive fares; high-speed trains quickly connect nearby destinations such as Suzhou or Hangzhou; and taxis or ride-hailing services operate normally. The essential thing is to anticipate the payment system, as payments are usually made through mobile applications (Alipay or WeChat Pay), although cash is still accepted. A valid passport is required; for Spanish citizens and for most countries in the eurozone, if the stay does not exceed 30 days, no visa is required.

## Where to stay

### Wyndham Garden Suzhou

Located in the Gusu district, beside the canal and close to the classical gardens. It offers modern comfort with easy access to Tiger Hill and the Humble Administrator's Garden.

### Taizhou Maoyu Hotel

A centrally located hotel on Taizhou's main avenue, ideal for exploring Qinhu Wetland Park. It stands out for its proximity to the Fengcheng River and its night cruises. Yangzhou Jinling Hotel

### Benchmark hotel

in western Yangzhou, a short distance from the slender West Lake. It belongs to the prestigious Jinling group, synonymous with quality in Jiangsu.

### Nanjing Jinling Hotel

An emblematic hotel in the heart of Nanjing, facing Xinjiekou Square. It combines history and luxury just steps from the city wall and the Confucius Temple.

### UrCove by HYATT Shanghai Jing'an

A modern hotel from the Hyatt brand in Shanghai's dynamic Jing'an district. Perfect for the final night thanks to its proximity to the airport.

## Where to eat

In cities such as Shanghai the gastronomic offer is as broad as its urban skyline: major restaurants dedicated to regional cuisines — from the Cantonese tradition to that of Jiangnan — coexist with contemporary spaces in skyscrapers and international hotels, where service is attentive and ingredients carefully handled. Yet the true pulse beats in the street: stalls preparing dumplings to order, steaming soups, spiced skewers and small family-run eateries where food is cooked in plain view and eaten quickly, at affordable prices. This coexistence between refined dining and popular street food defines much of the Chinese culinary experience.

China National  
Tourist Office



# Sunrise in a hot-air balloon over Teotihuacán

Words and photos: Larissa Rolley - LarissaRolley@outlook.com

Hot-air balloons flying over the Pyramid of the Sun



**T**here are experiences one approaches with a certain degree of scepticism before living them. Too well known, too often photographed, repeated endlessly across social media and travel brochures. Yet some withstand that initial suspicion and, when experienced first-hand, fully justify their popularity. A sunrise hot-air balloon flight over Teotihuacán, on the outskirts of Mexico City, belongs to that category.

The day begins while the city is still asleep. The streets of the Mexican capital, usually vibrant and restless, appear silent in the early hours of the morning. The journey towards the archaeological zone unfolds with a calmness that anticipates what is to come. At the launch field, the ritual is perfectly choreographed: hot coffee in hand, a little pastry to wake the body and, in front of us, the almost theatrical spectacle of balloons inflating one after another.

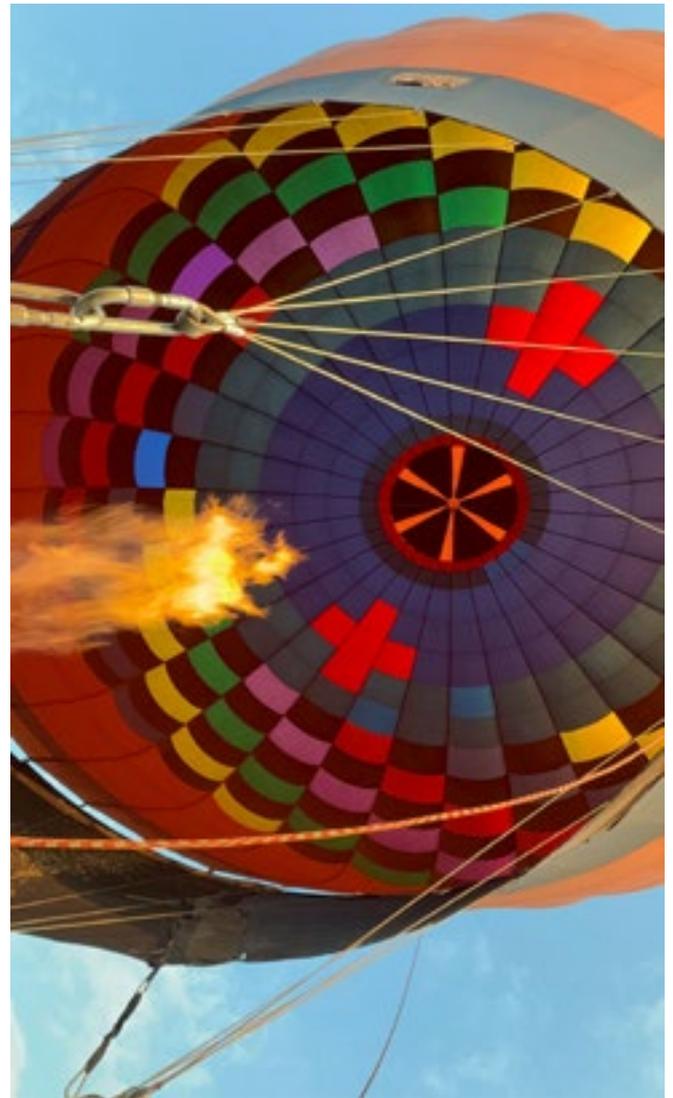
The bursts of flame from the burners illuminate the dim light while the enormous coloured envelopes slowly come to life. The process has something hypnotic about it. It is not a dramatic or abrupt beginning, but a patient, technical and precise preparation. When the moment comes to step into the basket, any nerves quickly fade. The ascent is gentle, almost imperceptible. There is no vertigo or sudden movement, only the sensation of slowly separating from the ground.

Our basket, divided into compartments to balance the weight, carried six passengers in addition to the pilot. The space felt intimate but comfortable. Flights are scheduled early in the morning for a practical reason: the wind is more stable and allows greater control. That stability translates into a serene, almost contemplative experience.

Teotihuacán, whose name is often translated as “the place where the gods were created”, is one of the most important pre-Hispanic sites in Mexico. The city was built roughly between 100 BC and AD 550, many centuries before the arrival of the Mexica, who found it already abandoned and endowed it with a sacred aura. At its height it was one of the largest cities of the ancient world. Although the identity of its founders remains uncertain, the urban planning, astronomical orientation and monumental scale of its buildings speak of a complex, organised and deeply ritual society.

The sun begins to rise while we are still close to the ground, offering a gradation of colours that exists only in that fleeting moment of the day: cool blues shifting towards pale pinks and finally into warm gold. As we ascend, the pyramids emerge beneath us as perfectly drawn geometric forms across the plain.

At the heart of the complex stand its two most emblematic structures: the Pyramid of the Sun and the Pyramid of the Moon. From the air, the former asserts itself as an unmistakable visual axis. It is the largest structure in the complex and



A burst of flame inflates the balloon envelope as the pilot adjusts the altitude at dawn

Support teams and vehicles regroup in open fields after landing



## TEOTIHUACÁN

one of the biggest pyramids in Mesoamerica. At one point during the flight we descend low enough to grasp its scale, suspended at a height that allows its volume to be appreciated without losing the overall perspective. It is a view impossible to obtain from solid ground. The Pyramid of the Moon, located to the north of the main axis, appears framed by Cerro Gordo. The alignment between architecture and landscape does not seem accidental. Specialists believe this relationship was deliberate, emphasising the symbolic connection between the natural environment and the spiritual conception of the city. From the air, this integration becomes clear in a way that a walk on the ground does not always allow.

The Avenue of the Dead organises the urban complex like a backbone. Its name was given centuries later by the Mexica, who believed the lateral platforms were tombs. Today it is known that they served ceremonial and administrative functions. Along this axis unfold pla-

zas, residential compounds and temples, among them the Temple of the Feathered Serpent, associated with the figure of Quetzalcóatl, reinforcing the religious and political dimension of the site.

During the flight, silence takes on a leading role. Only the intermittent roar of the burner breaks the stillness. Beyond that sound and the low voices of the passengers, everything seems suspended. The sensation is that of floating not only above a landscape, but above time itself.

The landing, as gentle as the take-off, gradually restores awareness of the tangible. Ground crews collect the passengers and transport them back to the starting point. Some operators offer professional photographic reports; the use of private drones is not permitted, but the visual experience remains vividly recorded in memory.

The morning continues at La Gruta, one of the best-known restaurants near the archaeological site. Carved underground, in a space reminiscent of a natural cave,

The Pyramid of the Sun frames the view towards the Pyramid of the Moon, with mountains rising in the distance



The Avenue of the Dead leads to the Pyramid of the Moon, with Cerro Gordo marking the horizon beyond Teotihuacán



the place offers a cool and enveloping atmosphere, almost theatrical. The breakfast is traditional: chilaquiles, freshly made tortillas, Mexican-style eggs and café de olla. At certain moments there may be a brief display of folk dancing. It is clearly a setting oriented towards visitors, yet it does not feel contrived; it accompanies the experience without distorting it.

Afterwards comes the moment to explore Teotihuacán on foot. If from the air the complex appears orderly and almost abstract, at ground level its human scale becomes evident. The site is vast, with several dispersed entrances, so it is advisable to orient oneself well from the beginning. Shade is scarce and the air dry. The heat does not overwhelm suddenly; it accumulates slowly.

Along the paths appear souvenir sellers and small instruments that imitate animal sounds. The whistle that evokes the roar of a jaguar resonates among the stone structures and adds an unexpected acoustic note to the walk. Some visitors choose to climb certain platforms; others prefer to remain below and observe the monumentality from a distance.

Experiencing Teotihuacán from the air and from the ground offers a more complete understanding. From above, the city appears intact, suspended in a perfect geometry.

On foot, it recovers its real scale: the physical effort, the sound, the dust beneath one's shoes. That duality enriches the experience.

As midday approaches, the return to Mexico City marks the close of the day. What began with a certain hesitation turns into conviction. It is not only the emotion of flying. It is the perspective gained from seeing an ancient civilisation from the sky and then walking through it step by step. Some experiences earn their reputation on their own merits. This, without doubt, is one of them.

Visitors walk among the pyramids through the open ceremonial spaces of Teotihuacán.



Diners gather beneath colourful papel picado inside the cavernous restaurant La Gruta



A traditional dancer performs inside La Gruta, adding movement and ritual to the experience



# INTERLACE

## Singapur

Words: Editorial Staff - Photography: Archive





In a city like Singapore, where space is limited and vertical growth seemed, for years, the only possible answer, Interlace emerged as a different proposal. It did not seek to compete in height or spectacle, but to rethink a basic question: how to live together in a large city without losing the sense of neighbourhood, of closeness, of community?

The answer was as simple as it was bold: instead of raising isolated towers, the project opted to stack buildings horizontally, as if they were pieces of a great puzzle. Thus one of the most singular residential complexes of the 21st century was born.

### **The origin: a new way of understanding housing**

The project was commissioned in 2007 as part of a private residential expansion program-

me. Singapore was looking for ways to continue growing without giving up quality of life, and Interlace fit perfectly within that challenge. Construction began shortly afterwards and the complex was completed in 2013, after several years of planning and building.

The design was developed by the studio OMA, with the architect Ole Scheeren leading the project. In collaboration with local teams, they were responsible for transforming an unconventional idea into a fully habitable and functional complex.

From the beginning, the objective was clear: to break with the image of the vertical block repeated to infinity and to propose a collective housing model that recovered something of the spirit of old communities, where neighbours crossed paths, knew one another and shared spaces.

### **A different structure: buildings that intersect**

Interlace is made up of 31 elongated blocks, each six storeys high, which are stacked and rotated in relation to one another following a regular geometry. Seen from a distance, they resemble wooden pieces carefully placed, forming a structure that is solid yet open at the same time.

These blocks surround eight large internal courtyards, which function as true centres of life. They are not simple gaps between buildings: they are gardens, resting areas, sports zones and spaces for meeting.

In total, the complex contains more than a thousand homes and occupies a very large area. However, thanks to this layered arrangement, it avoids the feeling of overcrowding. From many points, the view opens towards the sky, the greenery or the nearby parks, rather than towards a wall of concrete.

### **Floating gardens and terraces for outdoor living**

One of the project's great successes is its relationship with nature. Instead of concentrating the gardens only at ground level, Interlace distributes greenery

throughout the entire building. The roofs, terraces and many of the intermediate platforms are landscaped. There are trees, tropical plants, shaded areas and small paths. These are the so-called "floating gardens", elevated spaces where residents can walk, read or simply sit and breathe.

These stepped terraces create a kind of artificial landscape, an inhabited hill where each level offers a different experience. They are not merely decorative, but real spaces designed to be used every day.

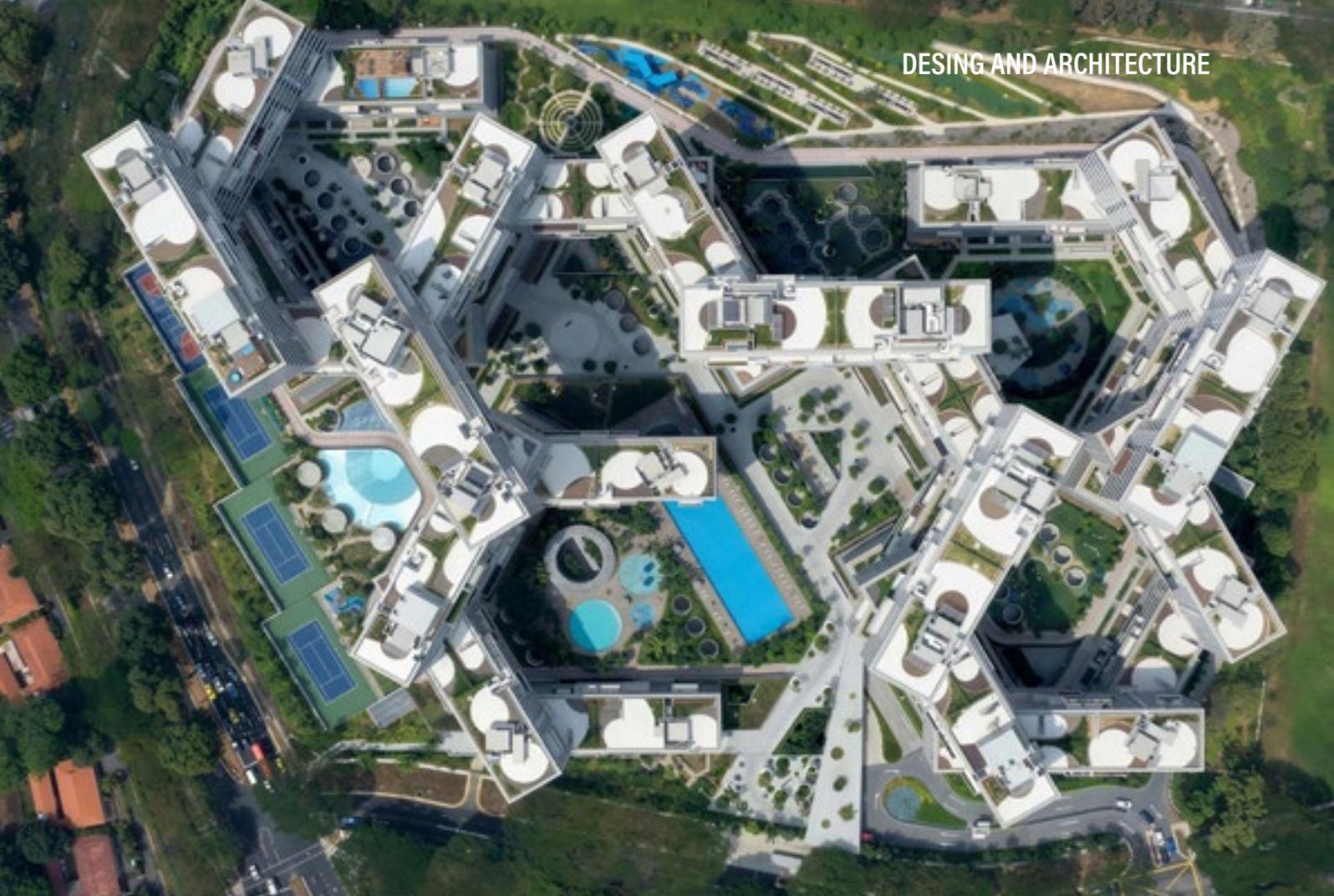
Thanks to this system, the complex has more vegetated surface than many urban parks. In a way, it returns more nature to the city than the space it occupies.

### **Sustainability adapted to the tropical climate**

Talking about sustainability in Singapore implies taking its climate into account: constant heat, high humidity and frequent rainfall. Interlace responds to these conditions with simple but carefully studied solutions.

The orientation of the buildings favours the natural circulation of air. The courtyards act as ventilation chimneys, cooling the communal areas. Sheets of







water help reduce the ambient temperature, and the abundance of shade means that many outdoor spaces remain usable even during the hottest hours.

In addition, the very volume of the complex creates areas protected from direct sunlight. Not everything depends on air conditioning: a large part of the comfort is achieved thanks to the design.

Parking and circulation routes are concentrated on the lower levels, freeing the rest of the space for pedestrians and landscape. This reduces noise, pollution and improves the environmental quality of the complex.

### **International recognition and prestige**

Since its inauguration, Interlace captured the attention of the architectural world. In 2015, it received the Building of the Year award at the World Architecture Festival, one of the most prestigious accolades in the sector.

It was also honoured by the Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat for its contribution to the urban habitat, and in 2023 it received the so-called “10 Year Award”, which recognises buildings that, a decade later, continue to function well and retain their value.



This last award is particularly significant: it confirms that the project was not a passing trend, but a solid and lasting solution.

### **Anecdotes and little curiosities**

One of the lesser-known features of the complex is its perimeter route: a pedestrian circuit of approximately one kilometre that allows one to walk around the entire site without leaving the grounds. Many residents use it for walking or running, as if it were a private park.

Another curiosity is that, despite its formal complexity, the building is designed to be easy to use. The entrances, lifts and pathways were organised to avoid confusion, something essential in a complex of this size.

Over the years, Interlace has proven to be a living place, not just an architectural object. Its communal spaces are used, maintained and adapted to the real needs of those who live there.

### **A silent lesson for the cities of the future**

Interlace does not aim to be a dazzling icon or an urban sculpture. Its value lies elsewhere: in demonstrating that it is possible to build at high density without giving up well-being, greenery, and community life.

In an era dominated by solitary skyscrapers, this complex proposed an alternative: living in networks, in layers, in relation to others and the environment. It swapped verticality for horizontality, towers for fabric, isolation for connection.

Perhaps that is its greatest contribution: reminding us that architecture, when well conceived, does not merely raise buildings, but builds ways of living, of coexisting, and of interacting with the everyday landscape, the climate, and the human scale.





# NAPLES

Chaotic, brilliant and deeply Mediterranean

Text: Rosario Alonso - Photography Archive



Gulf of Naples

**H**ow difficult it is to classify Naples within a specific type of city. It is chaotic and refined, popular and cultured, luminous and dark at the same time. Travelling to Naples requires time, attention and a certain willingness to let yourself be carried along. Every street, every façade, every everyday gesture refers back to centuries of coexistence between splendour and ruin, between absolute beauty and the most human disorder. Travelling to Naples is to accept that pact without conditions. It is undoubtedly a city that will not leave you indifferent; the most categorical will tell you: you either love it or you hate it.

### **The sea as a permanent stage**

The first contact usually takes place by the water. The Lungomare Caracciolo is one of the most beautiful seafront promenades in the Mediterranean. Not because of its monumentality, but because of its direct re-

lationship with the city. Here the sea is not scenery: it is an everyday presence. Facing the gulf, with Vesuvius tracing an unmistakable silhouette, Naples appears serene, almost classical.

In this stretch stands the Castel dell'Ovo, the oldest fortress in the city. Its origins date back to the Norman period, although the islet of Megaride was already known in Roman times. The legend of the magical egg hidden by Virgil belongs to the Neapolitan imagination, but what is truly relevant is its historical function as a defensive bulwark and symbol of urban power.

At its feet lies the Borgo Marinari, a small fishermen's quarter that possesses a human dimension rare in such an intense city. Family restaurants, fishing boats and simple façades form a setting where time seems to have slowed down. It is one of those places where Naples explains itself without the need for words.



Castel Sant'Elmo and the Vomero district

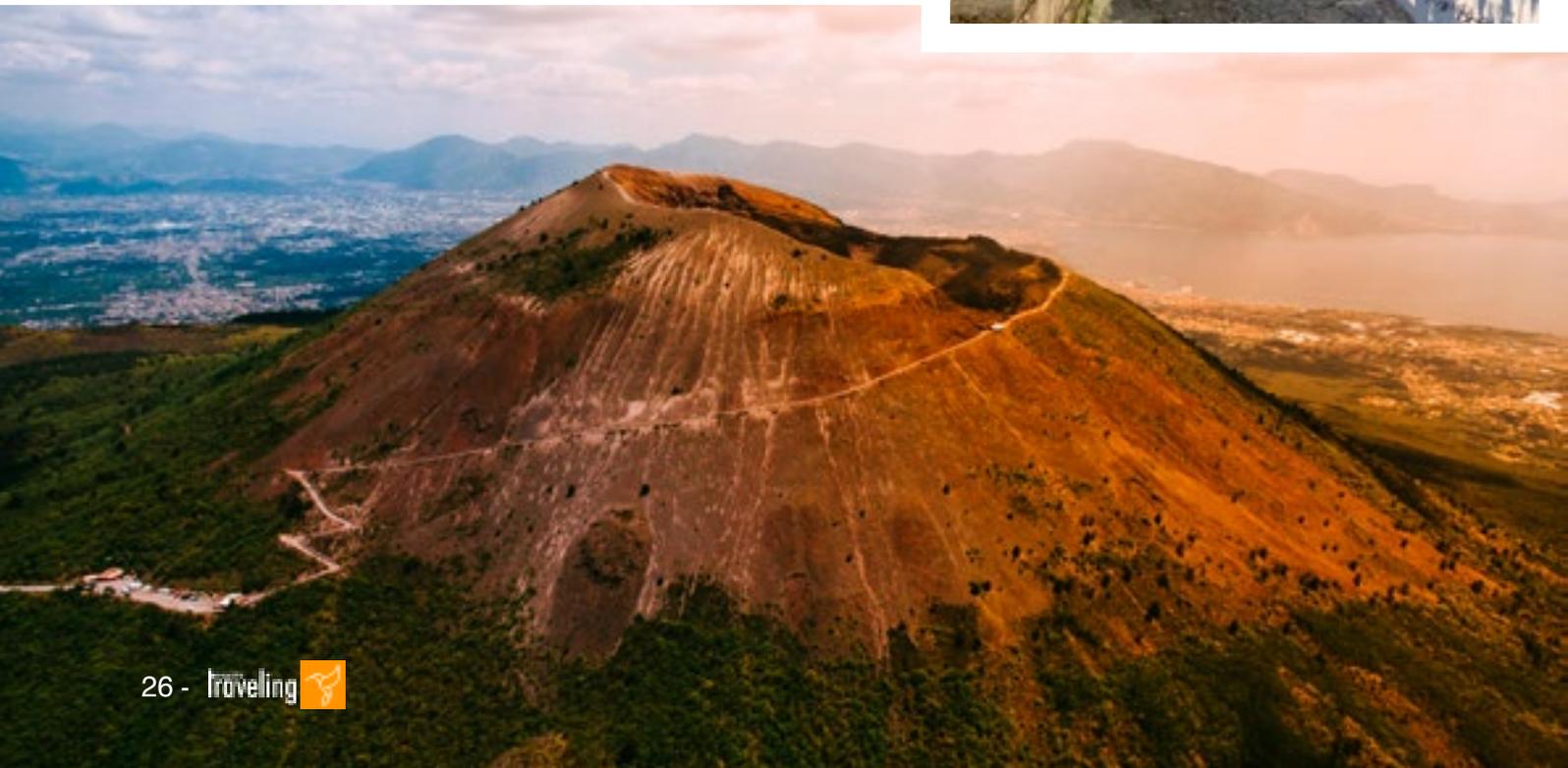
### Vesuvius and the view from above

Vesuvius never entirely disappears. It accompanies the traveller even when it is not being looked at directly. One of the most decisive experiences is watching the sunset from Vomero, the elevated district that dominates the city. From its viewpoints, the sunset over the gulf acquires a solemnity that is difficult to forget: the sky turns shades of ochre and violet while the volcano is outlined with an almost sculptural clarity; on clear days the views extend as far as the islands of Capri and Ischia.

This view summarises Naples's relationship with its natural surroundings: beauty and threat, calm and memory. Vesuvius is not only a landscape; it is a constant reminder of the city's historical fragility.



Vesuvius



## The monumental heart of the city

The historic centre of the city is structured around Spaccanapoli, a narrow and vibrant artery that runs through it, with shops, churches, workshops and balconies with laundry, always hanging, defining an anarchic human landscape. Soon we reach Piazza del Plebiscito, one of the largest squares in Italy. Open, solemn and controversial since its construction in the 19th century, it is a vast space (25,000 m<sup>2</sup>) that commands attention. Facing it stands the Royal Palace of Naples, residence of the Spanish (Aragonese) viceroys and later of the Bourbons. Its sober façade hides rooms that reflect the political and cultural power Naples wielded for centuries.

Very close by is the Teatro di San Carlo, the oldest active opera house in Europe. Inaugurated in 1737, it remains an absolute reference for its acoustics and elegance.

Also noteworthy is the imposing semicircular colonnade of the Basilica of San Francesco di Paola, strongly reminiscent of Agrippa's Pantheon in Rome.

The route continues towards the Galleria Umberto I, an example of 19th-century urban planning that aimed to modernise the city after Italian unification. Its iron-and-glass dome remains a popular meeting point.

From there, Via Toledo leads to the most lively heart of Naples. Opened in the 16th century by Viceroy Pedro de Toledo, it was conceived as a modern urban axis. Today it remains a vibrant artery, where commerce, history and everyday life overlap without any clear order.



Umberto I Gallery



San Carlo Theatre of Naples

Plebiscito Square



## NAPLES

### The Chapel of San Severo: Reason and Mystery

In the ancient heart of Naples, on the narrow Via Francesco de Sanctis, lies one of the most fascinating and enigmatic sanctuaries of European art: the museum of the Sansevero Chapel. What at first glance might seem like a family chapel has, over the centuries, transformed into a Baroque reliquary where sculptural mastery, esoteric symbolism, and emerging science converge—a place that has, for generations, continued to draw those seeking to understand the limits of human creative ambition.

The history of this museum dates back to the late 16th century, when the di Sangro family, one of the most influential in the Neapolitan aristocracy, promoted the construction of a small chapel dedicated to Santa Maria della Pietà. This space evolved over time, until in the 18th century the seventh

Prince of Sansevero, Raimondo di Sangro, conceived a profound renovation that transformed it into the monument we know today: a Baroque mausoleum of intense artistic and symbolic character.

Visitors are welcomed by a single nave that, despite its modest size, houses one of the most sublime sculptural collections of 18th-century Italy. The heart of the museum is undoubtedly the Veiled Christ, a masterpiece created by Giuseppe Sanmartino in 1753. Carved in marble with extraordinary technical skill, this sculpture depicts the dead Christ wrapped in a shroud that seems woven from silk: the transparency and detail of the veil have fascinated critics and travellers alike, placing it among the most admired sculptural works of the Baroque.

Alongside the Veiled Christ, other highly significant sculptures complete the museum's artistic itinerary.

Modesty, by Antonio Corradini, presents a female figure covered by an ethereal veil, uniting the virtues of chastity and serene beauty; while the group known as Disillusion, by Francesco Queirolo, depicts an almost theatrical scene of spiritual liberation.

It is not only the sculptures that captivate visitors. The fresco on the vault, known as The Glory of Paradise, painted in 1749 by Francesco Maria Russo, crowns the space with a celestial display that contrasts the density of the marble with the lightness of the sky. And in the depths of the crypt, the famous "anatomical machines"—two models that astonishingly reproduce the human circulatory system—blend art and science in a haunting formula that continues to provoke debate among historians and scientists.

The Veiled Christ





Façade of Naples Cathedral



Chapel of San Gennaro

### The Cathedral and the Cult of San Gennaro

The Cathedral of Naples (Duomo di Napoli) is another of the city's great spiritual landmarks. Its construction began in the 13th century and incorporates diverse styles that reflect Naples's turbulent history. Inside, one finds the Chapel of the Treasure of San Gennaro, the centre of the most deeply rooted popular devotion.

San Gennaro is not just a saint; he is a civic symbol. The ritual of the liquefaction of his blood, preserved in ampoules, continues to be an event that transcends the purely religious. Associated with the protection of the city against epidemics and volcanic eruptions, his cult reveals the way in which Naples has historically shaped its relationship with the supernatural.

The adjoining museum allows visitors to understand the artistic wealth connected to this devotion, with works donated over the centuries by kings, nobles and anonymous citizens.

### Caravaggio and Mercy

The Pio Monte della Misericordia houses one of the masterpieces of European Baroque: The Seven Works of Mercy by Caravaggio. Painted during the artist's stay in Naples, the canvas condenses his radical vision of religious painting: raw realism, dramatic light, and profound humanity. It is a perfect synthesis of the Neapolitan spirit and a key to understanding the local Baroque.

Caravaggio and Mercy





National Archaeological Museum of Naples

## Two Hours at the Archaeological Museum

The National Archaeological Museum of Naples is not only one of the great museums of Europe: it is a living archive of the classical world. Its prestige rests on an interesting paradox. Much of its collection was originally created for private spaces—villas, baths, gardens—and today it is presented to visitors as a public and orderly narrative of Roman civilisation and its Greek roots.

The museum was founded in the 18th century, during the height of the Enlightenment. The decisive impetus came from Charles III, then King of Naples, convinced that knowledge of the past should be part of the political and cultural project of the state. From 1738, systematic excavations began at Herculaneum and, shortly thereafter, at Pompeii. The discoveries exceeded all expectations and required a permanent space in which to study, preserve, and display them.

To this core was added the arrival in Naples of the Farnese collection, inherited by Charles of Bourbon through his mother. Monumental sculptures, imperial portraits, and reliefs immediately established the future museum as a reference point for scholars, artists, and travellers.

The chosen building was the former Palazzo degli Studi, gradually adapted for museum purposes. This was not a museum conceived from scratch, but an institution that

grew over time, reflecting the evolution of archaeology as a scientific discipline. Beyond architects and renovations, the true architect of the museum project was Charles III himself, followed by the Enlightenment apparatus of the kingdom. The museum was born with a clear vocation: to gather, classify, and explain. Unlike aristocratic collecting, here a didactic and almost modern approach prevails, where each object must engage with its historical context.

The museum's itinerary spans from Archaic Greece to the end of the Roman world, with particular emphasis on the 1st century BCE and 1st century CE. One of the most celebrated ensembles comes from Pompeii. Frescoes, mosaics, and domestic objects offer an intimate insight into Roman life. The great Alexander mosaic stands out, exceptional both for its scale and its narrative power.

The Herculaneum bronze collections occupy a central place. They demonstrate extraordinary technical quality and thematic variety, ranging from official portraiture to decorative figures. These pieces reveal the refined taste of the Roman elite and their continual debt to Greek art. The museum also dedicates space to writing, religion, and everyday life: inscriptions, utensils, amulets, and ritual objects complete a complex and far from idealised vision of the past.

## The Charterhouse and Silence

At the top of the city stands the Charterhouse of San Martino, a former Carthusian monastery turned museum. From here, the view over the gulf is absolute. But beyond the landscape, the Charterhouse offers a lesson in the balance between architecture, art, and spirituality.

Its cloisters, church, and galleries narrate the religious and political history of Naples, while the silence of the site contrasts with the urban bustle that stretches out at its feet.

## Baroque, Nativity Scenes, and the Underground

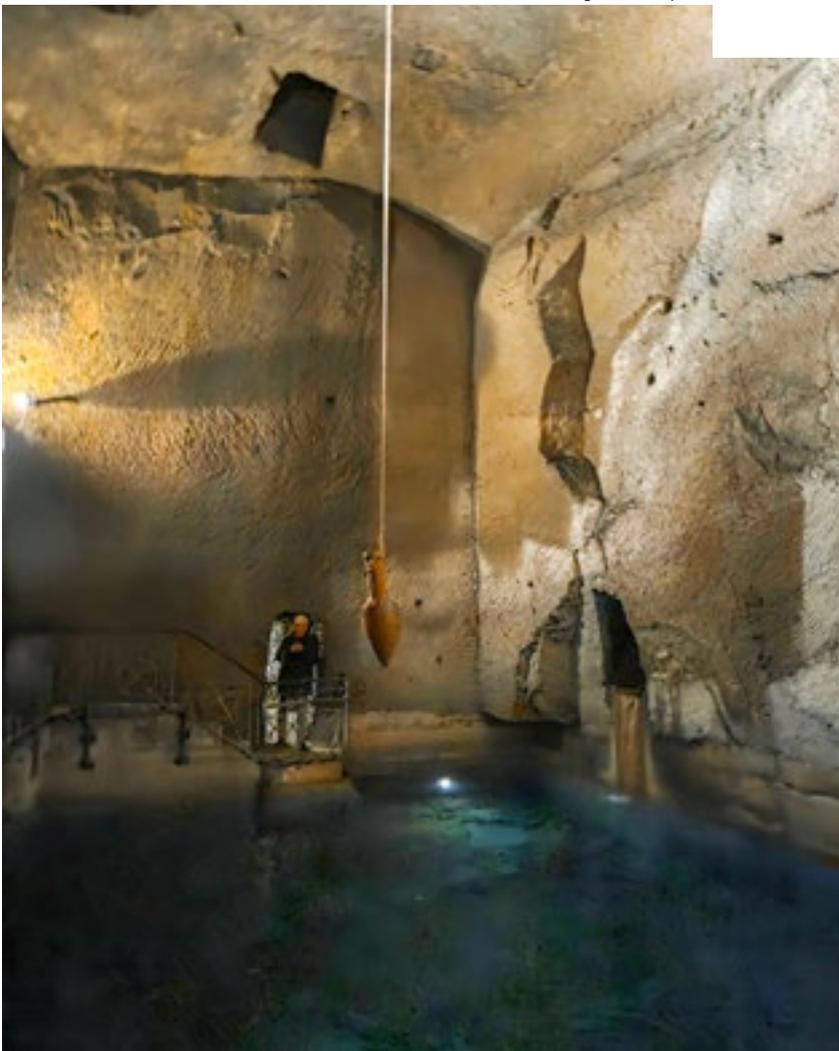
Neapolitan Baroque finds expression in churches such as Santa Maria della Sapienza, Gesù Nuovo, San Domenico Maggiore, and San Gregorio Armeno, where decorative exuberance does not conceal a profound symbolic charge. On the most unexpected street, an imposing Baroque church can surprise the traveller.

On Via San Gregorio Armeno, the tradition of the “Neapolitan nativity scene” remains alive throughout the year. Artisan workshops



Example of a Neapolitan Nativity Scene

Underground Naples



perpetuate a custom that is cultural identity while retaining a certain folkloric aspect.

Finally, Napoli Sotterranea reveals another city beneath the city. Greek aqueducts, Roman galleries, and World War II shelters show the layering of eras that defines Naples better than any narrative.

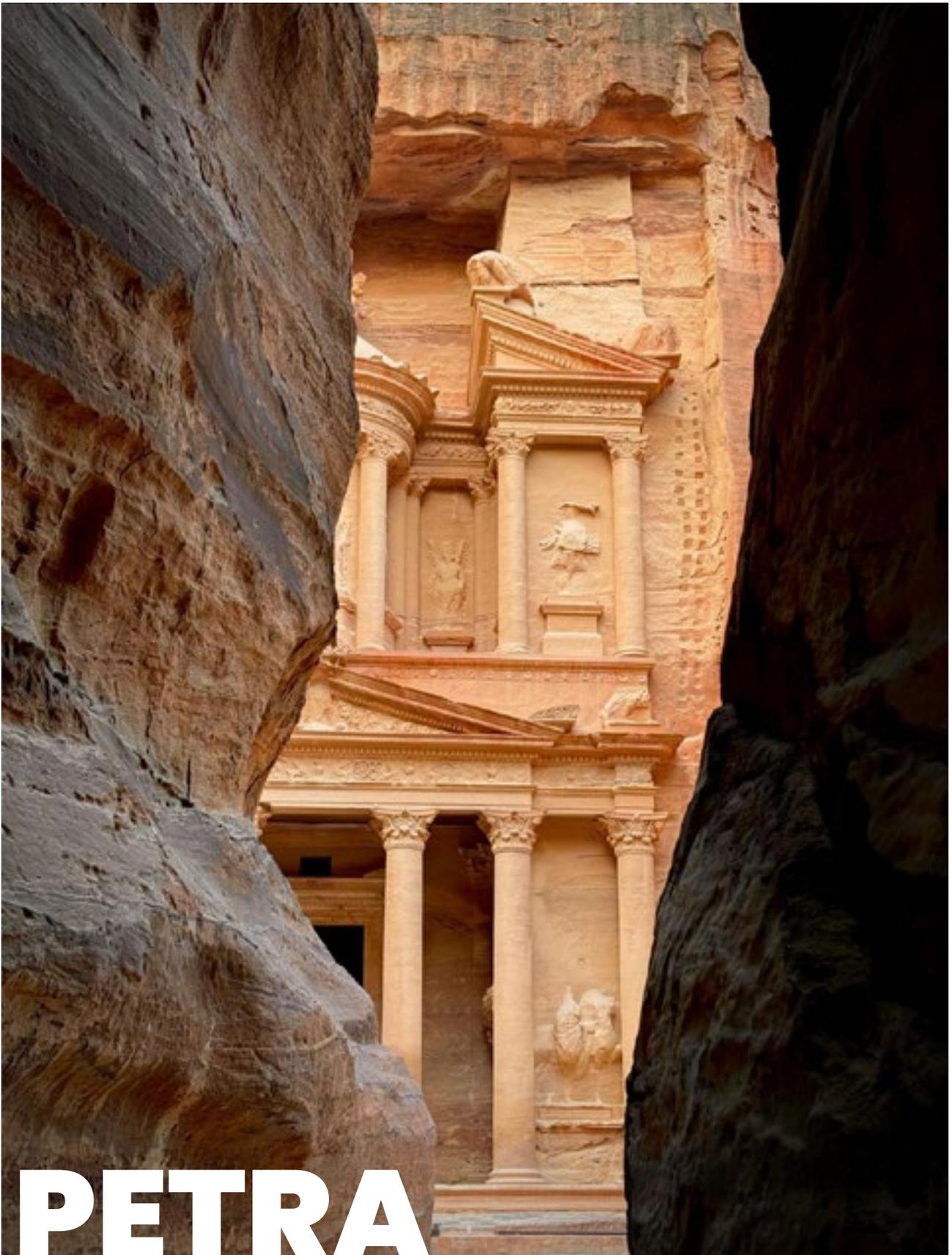
No trip to Naples can conclude without visiting the Quartieri Spagnoli, an opportunity to experience the most authentic Naples, unfiltered and unadorned.

Naples cannot be summarised. It is accepted, explored, and remembered. And it always leaves the sense that something essential has been left unfinished, awaiting the next visit.



**NAPLES**

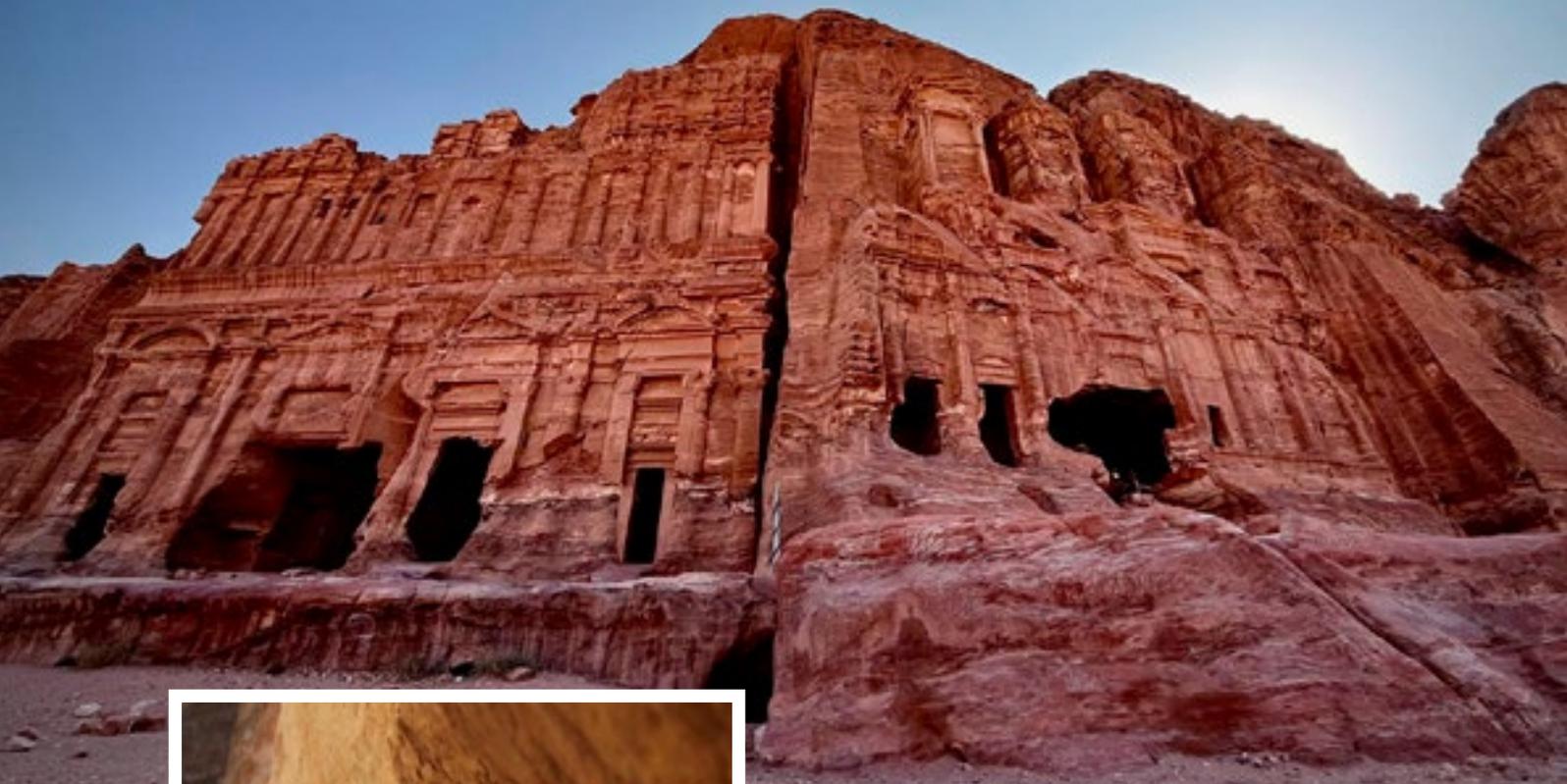




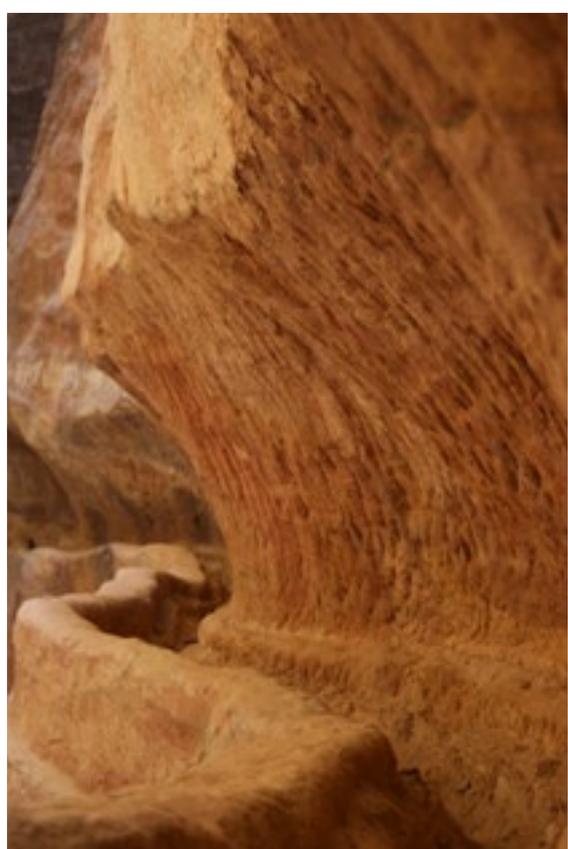
# PETRA

**MORE THAN A TREASURE TO DISCOVER**

Sandra Fernández Fernández - [fdez2.sandra@gmail.com](mailto:fdez2.sandra@gmail.com)



Royal Tombs



Hydraulic System

the Nabataean people. And you can feel it.

The path takes you through mountains of intense colours, channels carved into the rock, and some underground chambers, finally presenting you with its crowning jewel: the Treasury of Petra, located in present-day Jordan.

Carved into the rock, a 40-metre-high façade rises, perfectly sculpted, leaving visitors speechless. How can a monument over two thousand years old remain in such good condition despite plundering, floods, and the earthquakes that the city endured?

### New Evidence on Its Aqueduct System

The city holds more secrets than it reveals at first glance. A recent study published in the scientific journal *Levant* has documented a complex aqueduct system that challenges our previous understanding of the ancient capital. The discovery of advanced channels with lead pipes reveals a surprising technical sophistication for that era.

This study demonstrates that the Nabataean people were perfectly adapted to their environment. Not only was water channelled, but it was also managed with almost mathematical precision. Subterranean cisterns and settling tanks have been identified, allowing millions of litres to be stored during the rainy season. Even the external aqueducts were

**W**hen you begin the one-and-a-half-kilometre walk that separates the start of the Siq—or gorge—from one of the Seven Wonders of the World, a feeling of nerves and excitement wells up inside you. Your steps follow the traces of one of the most mysterious civilizations of the ancient world:

## PETRA

designed with calculated gradients to control the flow speed, preventing erosion of the channels and protecting the infrastructure during sudden floods. This level of planning shows that the city was more than a commercial hub; it was also prepared to thrive in an extreme desert environment.

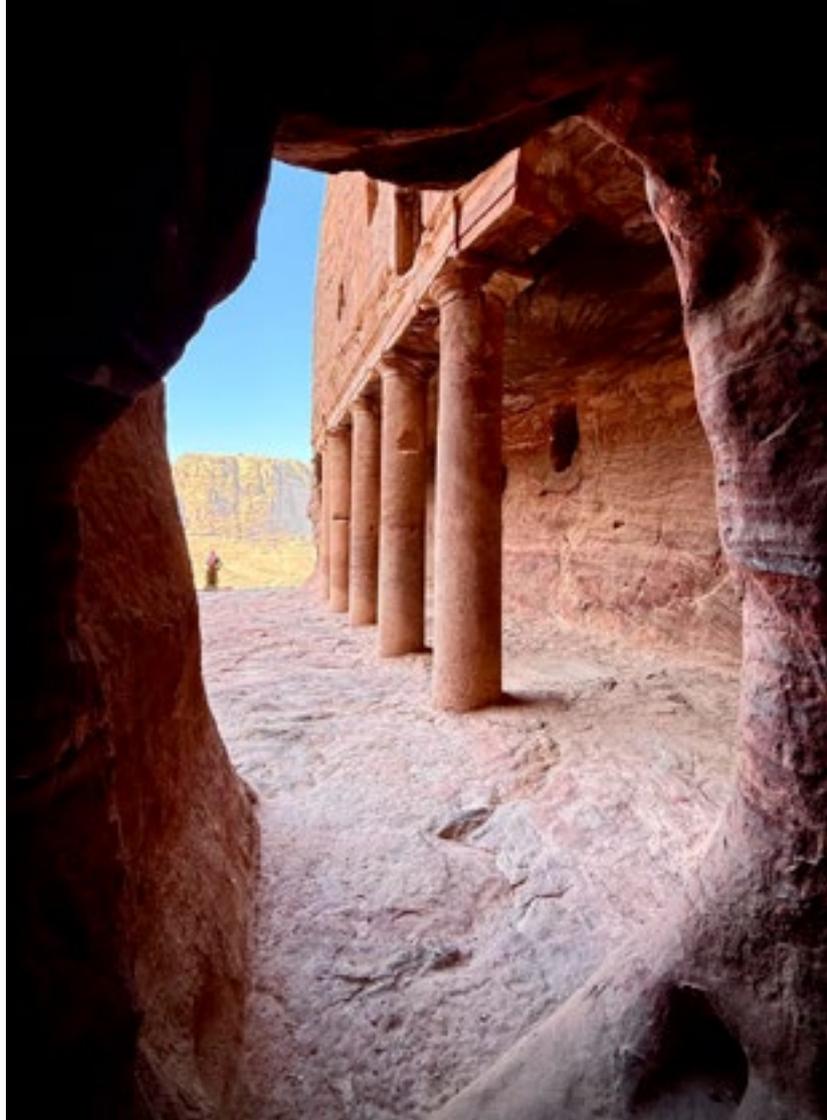
Today, we can see only 20% of Petra. Beyond the Monastery, the Royal Tombs, and the amphitheatre, the entire site contains several semi-buried buildings, witnesses to a past life and proof that this millenary settlement has much more to reveal.

### From Nabataean Capital to Lost City

To understand the history of Petra, one must turn back the wheel of time beyond the Nabataeans. Its first inhabitants were the Edomites, an ancient Semitic civilization from the Near East, who settled in the city in the 8th century BCE.

Later came the Nabataeans, a nomadic people from Arabia, who made the city the capital of their empire in the 6th century BCE. Petra became a perfect hub amid the caravan trade routes between the East and the Mediterranean, offering goods such as incense, myrrh, and bitumen.

In 106 CE, the Nabataean kingdom was annexed into the Roman Empire. The city experienced a transitional period in which it adopted Roman ar-



View from the Tombs

Pink Treasury



chitectural and administrative elements: streets—some of which still survive today—were paved, public buildings were erected, and its integration into the imperial networks was strengthened.

However, over the years, and due to changes in trade routes, Petra was gradually abandoned by its last inhabitants, until it fell into obscurity in the 6th century CE. Since then, the city suffered several natural disasters, such as earthquakes and sandstorms, leaving it buried beneath the earth. All of this has contributed to the survival of the Treasury, along with other monuments in the city, through the centuries.

### Home of the Bedouins

During this period of abandonment, there was a group that remained as silent guardians: the Bedouins. Just as today, they used the city as a refuge, but at that time they allowed no one to enter. In this way, they managed to keep their presence almost secret until the 19th century, when the Swiss explorer Johann Ludwig Burckhardt rediscovered it.

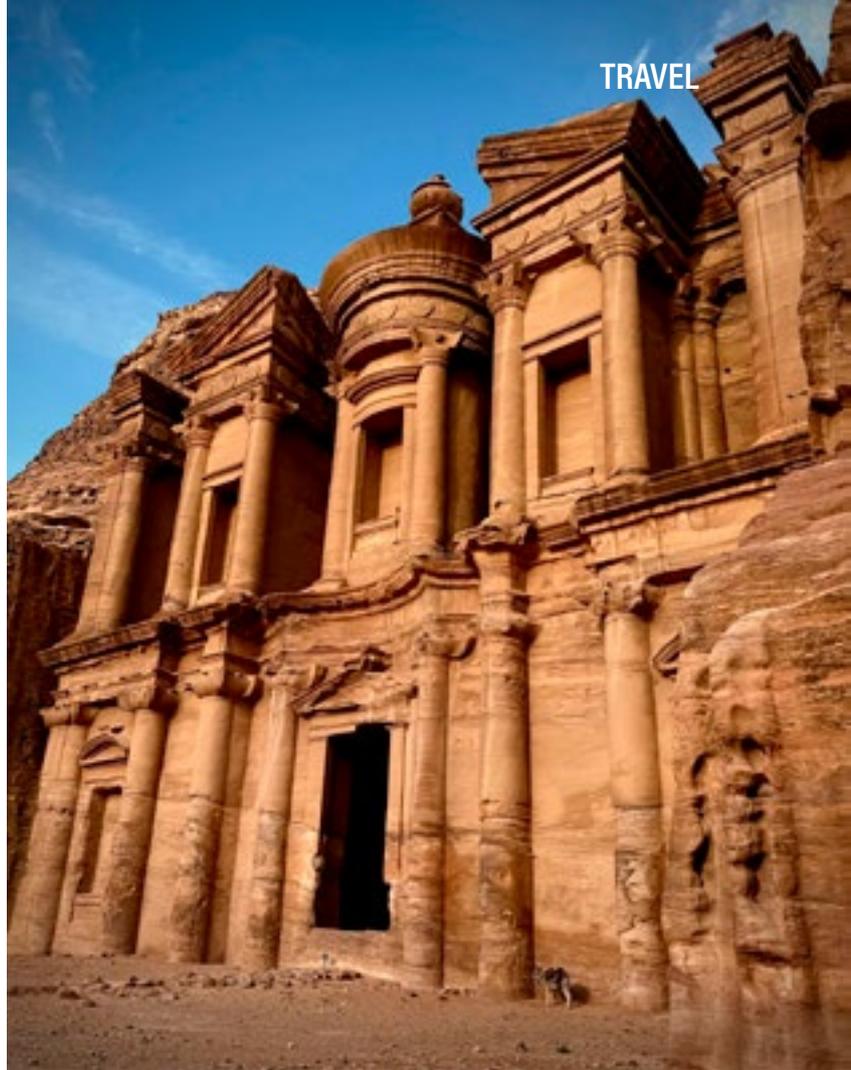
To gain the Bedouins' trust, Burckhardt posed as a Muslim traveller and spent several days exploring the region with them. His respect for their

customs and the patience he showed allowed him to access the hidden gorges and paths of the city, ultimately leading him to the Treasury. Thanks to this strategy, he was able to document Petra and introduce it to the Western world.

With the site's official opening to the outside world, the Bedouins' way of life also changed. Petra's designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985 encouraged their relocation to nearby settlements, but it did not sever their connection to the city. Today, many work as guides, artisans, or animal handlers, sharing with visitors the stories inherited from their ancestors and a knowledge of the desert that does not appear on maps. When Petra's light fades, they are the only ones who remain among its walls, demonstrating that the city belongs not only to its past but to those who have made it their home, generation after generation.

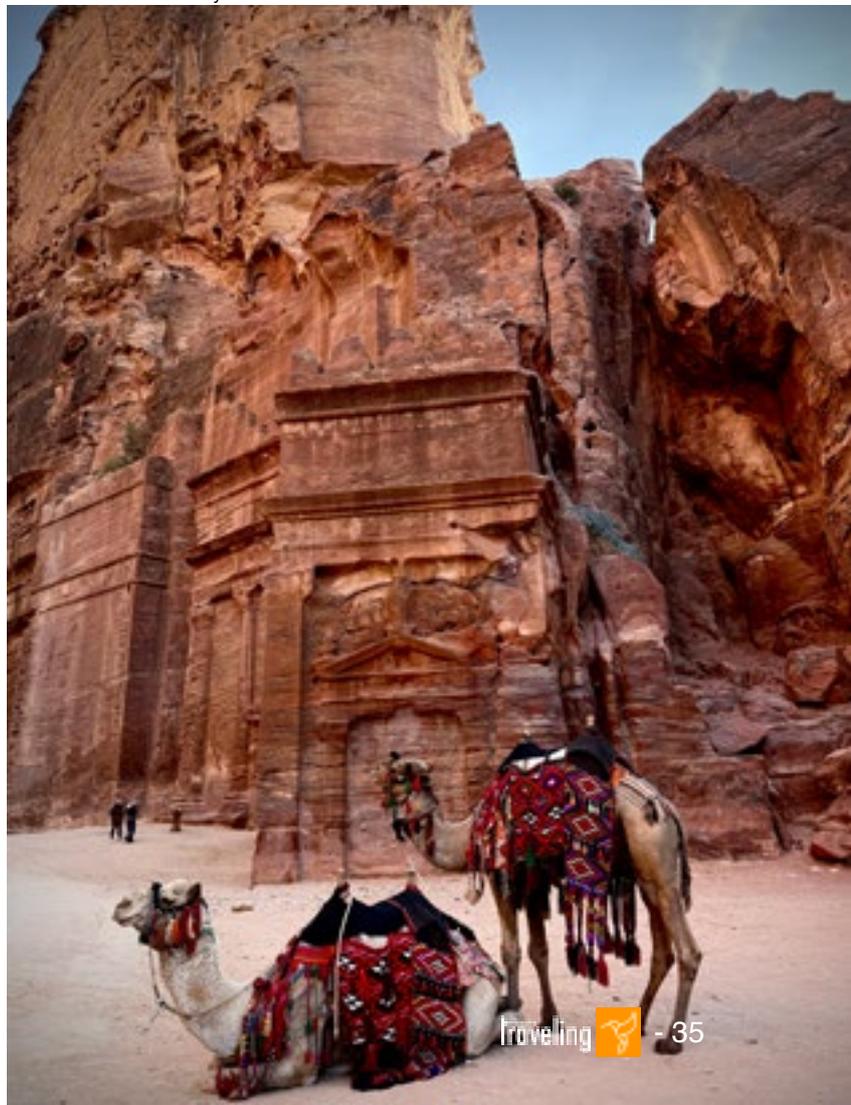
Today, millions of people walk through Petra, marveling at the Treasury and its numerous tombs, with the same awe that its ancient inhabitants would have felt two thousand years ago. The city remains an open enigma, a place where past and present intertwine, and where each visitor leaves their mark while history continues to live. Who knows how many treasures are still waiting to be discovered among the stone and sand?

Bedouins



Monastery

Other Remains of the City



THE SOČA VALLEY

# The Soča Valley

Adventure and Landscape in the  
Green Heart of Slovenia

Text: Rosario Alonso - Photography Archive



**T**he Soča Valley (Isonzo in Italian) is an Alpine corridor in northwestern Slovenia, nestled between mountains and forests, where the water rules and the landscape sets the pace. Here, adventure is not a slogan but a natural way of moving: walking along the river's course, jumping onto a raft in the rapids, entering a limestone gorge, or simply letting yourself be hypnotised by that emerald colour that seems unreal, yet is the hallmark of the place.

### Why Choose the Soča Valley if You Crave (Real) Adventure

Some destinations promise adrenaline but end up offering only “catalogue activities.” The Soča plays in a different league because its geography makes it effortless: the river rises in the heart of Triglav National Park and quickly begins to carve pools, gorges, and rapids; around it, small towns like Bovec, Kobarid, and Tolmin serve as convenient bases for short getaways.

The main magnet is the water. Rafting and kayaking on the Soča have become classics, with Bovec as the hub for companies and access points to the most sought-after stretches. The valley’s official office even organises the rafting season into “pre-season” months (April, May, September, and October) and “high season” (June, July, and August), a useful guide for choosing dates based on water levels and atmosphere.

If you prefer adventure without paddling, the va-

lley offers top-tier trails with perfect logic: walking along the river. The Soča Trail follows the river from its source to Bovec within Triglav National Park, linking the Trenta Valley with more open and accessible areas. It’s a route designed to enjoy the water at a relaxed pace, with the constant feeling of being “inside” the landscape.

### Best Time to Travel: Choosing the Soča by Season

Late spring and summer (May–August) are the safe bet if your idea of adventure includes river sports. There is more activity, more open services, and a sense of a livelier valley, especially in June, July, and August, when demand also peaks.

September and October offer something many travellers seek but few destinations maintain: less noise and more authenticity. Water activities are still available, the forest begins to change colour, and the trails become more vibrant.





Winter, on the other hand, offers a different Soča: quieter, connected to the mountains and nearby ski resorts. It is not the peak season for the river, but it is perfect for those looking for an experience more closely tied to the Alpine landscape.

### Three Landscapes That Justify the Trip

There is a moment in the valley when you understand why this river has fostered a culture of adventure. It is when you peer into the Great Soča Gorge: a cleft polished by the river, with emerald-coloured natural pools and vertical walls that impress with their depth and narrowness.

The Tolmin Gorges, considered the lowest gateway to Triglav National Park, offer an accessible yet spectacular route among limestone walls, walkways, and river confluences. It is a short but intense walk, where geology becomes a show in itself.





Very close to Kobarid, the Kozjak Waterfall completes this natural triangle. Hidden in a dark gorge, its cascade emerges like a final scene carefully sculpted by nature.

### **The Adventurer's Rest: Simple Flavours, Local Ingredients on the Plate**

After the river, the trail, or the gorge, the Soča Valley expresses itself on the table as well. This is not a cuisine of pretense, but of mountains and borderlands, defined by local produce and a subsistence-based cooking refined over time. River trout, lamb, highland cheeses,

potatoes, and wild herbs make up honest dishes, designed to comfort the active traveller.

Particular mention goes to Tolminc cheese, made from cow's milk in the area and protected by a designation of origin, a staple on local tables and perfect after a day of exertion. The Italian influence is evident in recipes and techniques, but always adapted to the Alpine landscape: here, people eat as they live—unhurriedly, respecting what the land provides, with the sense of having arrived somewhere where tradition still makes sense.

## Adventures with Memory: Culture in the Surroundings

The Soča Valley is not just nature: it is also a land shaped by contemporary history. During the First World War, this area was the scene of the Isonzo Front, one of the toughest theatres of the conflict.

In Kobarid, the town's museum allows visitors to understand that past from a human perspective, far from epic narratives. Photographs, objects, and testimonies explain how the current landscape was, just a century ago, a battlefield.

This story continues along the Walk of Peace, a route connecting monuments, trenches, and cemeteries from the Alps to the Adriatic, transforming the memory of conflict into a message of reconciliation.

Very close to Bovec, the fortifications of Kluže and Fort Hermann complete this historical itinerary. Situated in a strategic gorge, they demonstrate how geography shaped the defence of the territory for centuries.

## A Well-Planned Short Getaway

The Soča Valley works especially well for short stays of three or four days, if well planned:

The first day can be dedicated to Bovec and an initial encounter with the river. The second invites exploration of the Trenta area and sections of the Soča Trail. The third day combines Kobarid, Kozjak, and the region's historical memory. The fourth, if time allows, can conclude the trip at the Tolmin Gorges.

No great expedition is needed to understand this place. It is enough to walk it, paddle its waters, sit down to eat unhurriedly, and listen to the silence of its mountains.

The Soča has that rare virtue: it allows you to return home with a tired body and a clear mind, with the feeling of having lived a real adventure in one of the most authentic corners of Alpine Europe.



# Elche de la Sierra



Corpus Day procession © Ayto de Elche de la Sierra

## The Corpus carpets: When sawdust becomes art

Text: Jose A. Muñoz – Photography: Jose A. Muñoz and Ayto. de Elche de la Sierra



In the Sierra del Segura, when Corpus Christi approaches, Elche de la Sierra, in the province of Albacete, ceases to be merely a mountain village and becomes a collective workshop. Throughout an entire night, hundreds of residents work on the asphalt with a humble material—dyed sawdust—transforming streets and squares into a multicoloured tapestry. At dawn, the result is a work as monumental as it is fragile, destined to disappear hours later under the solemn passage of the procession.

This is not merely festive decoration. The sawdust carpets are part of the village's vital pulse, of its way of understanding tradition, shared labour, and respect for what has been inherited. Here, art is not confined to museums: it is built in silence, admired for a few hours, and then accepted as part of a cycle that renews itself every year.

*Throughout the article, we will break down, step by step, the meticulous and admirable process behind the creation of these sawdust carpets.*

Top photo: drawing with a stencil on the ground to begin the work  
Bottom photo: cleaning and spreading sawdust to level and remove irregularities from the surface



### A recent story turned into tradition

The origin of this celebration is not lost in distant centuries or vague legends. It has a date and protagonists. In the early hours of 28 May 1964, a group of ten young people created a coloured sawdust carpet for the procession route for the first time. The initiative came from Francisco Carcelén, a local shopkeeper, who had seen floral carpets in Catalonia and thought that the effect could be reproduced in his town using leftover sawdust from woodworking workshops.

That almost improvised gesture found an immediate echo. The following year, the experience was repeated, more participants joined, and more elaborate designs began to appear. Within a few years, the individual initiative transformed into a shared tradition. By the early seventies, the carpets ceased to be a one-off curiosity and became the central feature of Corpus.

Over time, official recognition arrived: Festival of Regional Tourist Interest in 1994, Festival of National Tourist Interest in 2014, and Intangible Cultural Heritage status. But beyond the titles, what was truly significant was the social consolidation of the tradition: the carpets became part of the village's emotional calendar.

### The material: from industrial waste to artistic language

Sawdust was not an aesthetic choice, but a practical solution. In an environment abundant with wood remnants, this material offered lightness, manageability, and availability. Over the years, it became an identifying element.

Preparation begins weeks before Corpus. The sawdust is selected by texture, cleaned, and carefully dyed. The process combines water, pigments, and long sessions of mixing until a uniform colour is achieved. Afterwards, the material is spread out to dry, preventing clumping and preserving a loose texture.

It is not just about achieving vibrant colours. The sawdust must maintain stability, withstand the night's humidity, avoid excessive staining, and retain its tone under the morning light. Each group of participants knows their own formulas, passed down from generation to generation, refined through experience and observation.

The result is a surprisingly rich palette: deep blues, intense reds, luminous greens, soft yellows, and a wide range of intermediate shades that allow for complex compositions.

Transporting the stencils to begin creating a carpet





Top photo: drawing on a stencil to create the first layer of the portrait  
Bottom photo: creating the carpet in a style similar to airbrushing





### The construction of a carpet: from paper to asphalt

Each carpet begins to take shape long before the night of Corpus arrives. Months in advance, the groups gather to choose the motif they will represent, create sketches on paper, and adjust proportions, colour schemes, and compositional rhythms. What at that stage exists as idea and calculation often transforms in the squares into large figurative compositions, featuring religious scenes or figures of notable complexity, while in the streets geometric designs and borders prevail, conceived to interact with the urban layout and accompany the procession route.

Once the sections are assigned by the Association, each group takes responsibility for its space as a collective commitment. When the appointed night arrives, the first gesture is always the same: carefully cleaning the pavement, removing dust and debris, preparing as even a surface as possible, and marking the initial axes with chalk or stencils. Slopes, tile joints, and irregularities in the ground require on-the-spot corrections to what seemed perfect on paper, adapting the design to the reality of the street.

Images of the groups working through the night on the creation of the carpets





Process of creating a sawdust carpet in one of the village squares

Next comes the outlining and the division of colours. Some groups use templates to maintain symmetry and proportion; others work directly on the ground, relying on experience gained over the years. The filling with dyed sawdust is done in layers, from the large backgrounds to the finest details. With stencils covering the areas already worked to prevent colours from mixing, and using sieves, buckets, or simply their hands, the material is gradually applied, always aiming for uniformity, cleanliness, and precision.

Gradients require an exact mix of tones and very controlled application. Human figures and ornamental elements demand extreme concentration. Each mistake means removing part of the material, reconstructing the design, and starting again. For hours, the street transforms into an open-air workshop, where brief instructions are heard, quiet conversations take place, and music

enlivens the night as the sawdust slowly falls onto the ground. A walk along the route reveals the carpets' evolution and the steady progress of the work.

The final phase consists of compacting, cleaning, and refining. Colours are fixed, minor imperfections corrected, and absolute sharpness is sought at the edges and where tones meet. Only then is the carpet considered truly finished. All of this occurs over the course of a single night, and at dawn, the accumulated fatigue dissolves before the sight of entire streets transformed into continuous carpets, the result of a collective effort rewarded by ephemeral beauty.



### Motifs, styles, and aesthetic evolution

Las alfombras nacen para acompañar la Corpus Christi procession: alongside this repertoire of religious motifs, geometric, floral, and ornamental designs also engage in dialogue, evoking ancient textiles. The street thus becomes a tapestry spread over the asphalt, where symmetry, rhythm, and colour take on a prominence of their own. In recent decades, a clear aesthetic transformation has been observed: strictly religious motifs have gradually given way to more open designs, with bolder colour palettes, more complex compositions, and an increasingly conscious attention to the overall visual effect. The carpet is no longer understood solely as a carrier of a symbol, but as an ephemeral work aiming to move through form and balance.

Many groups have successfully incorporated influences from contemporary design and other artistic disciplines, reinterpreting the inherited tradition without breaking its essence. The result is a living tradition, renewed year after year while maintaining its connection to its origins.



## 2025 Competition:

The contest is one of the most eagerly anticipated moments.

The jury awarded:

### Squares Category:

- 1st prize: La Isteria (Plaza de la Iglesia)
- 2nd prize: La Sentencia (Plaza de Simón Bolívar)
- 3rd prize: Los Musikeros (Plaza de Ramón y Cajal)

### Streets Category:

- 1st prize: El Descontrol (Calle Polvoristas 1)
- 2nd prize: El Restregón 2 (Calle Polvoristas 2)
- 3rd prize: El Recalke (Calle Mayor 2)

### Special Awards:

- Greatest Effort: El Descontrol
- Best Design and Best New Group: Tiro porque me toca

Beyond the podium, the contest recognises technical excellence, originality, and collective commitment.



Passage of the procession © Ayto de Elche de la Sierra

### The groups and generational transmission

The work falls to the carpet-making groups, true centres of local sociability. Each has its own history, style, and way of organising. The Association of Friends of the Corpus Carpets, established in 1990, coordinates logistics, preserves documentary memory, and ensures continuity.

Particularly significant is the participation of children. From an early age, they learn to dye, trace, and fill. In 2025, more than two hundred children took part in festival-related activities, creating carpets specifically made by young participants. The transmission is not theoretical: skills are learned by working alongside parents, uncles, and neighbours. In this way, the craft is perpetuated.

The 2025 edition confirmed the tradition's vitality. Twenty-eight groups participated, over 600 carpet makers were involved, and nearly 17,000 square metres were covered with more than 5,000 kilos of dyed sawdust. In the official competition, the jury awards three main prizes, in addition to honours for greatest effort and best new group. These recognitions reinforce technical excellence and encourage the continuous improvement of the carpets.

### The meaning of creating to disappear

The carpets exist to be destroyed. The procession passes, the colours blend, the designs blur. That disappearance is an essential part of the ritual. In a world obsessed with preservation, Elche de la Sierra celebrates the value of the ephemeral. Months of work culminate in a few hours of shared beauty. There is no ownership, only memory.

The longest night and the most beautiful dawn encapsulate this philosophy. For a few hours, the village becomes a collective work of art. Afterwards, everything begins again.





## The Museum of Ephemeral Art

The Sawdust Carpet Museum of Elche de la Sierra is not a tourist appendage or a hall of memories: it is the organised record of a tradition that, by definition, disappears every year. It was created with the aim of preserving what vanishes from the streets after the procession. Its galleries document the aesthetic evolution since 1964, the earliest designs, the dyeing techniques, the tools used, and the transformation of those initial carpets into compositions of great artistic complexity. Photographs, original sketches, explanatory panels, and audiovisual material allow visitors to understand the preparatory work that is barely perceptible when walking through the carpeted streets.

The museum also serves an educational purpose. It explains the technical process of dyeing sawdust, the organisation of the groups, the division of sections, and the collective dimension of Corpus. It does not replace the experience of the big night, but it provides context. After visiting, the visitor better understands what they have seen—or what they will see—in the streets: that behind every metre of colour lie hours of preparation, learning, and shared commitment.

Fragment of one of the winning carpets from previous years



Museum displays simulating the different sawdust dyeing techniques

## Town Hall OF ELCHE DE LA SIERRA





Arroyuelos Rock Shelter

# Valderredible

## The Cantabrian valley where the rocks tell stories

**Text:** Editorial Team – **Photography:** Ayto de Valderredible

More than 300 square kilometres and 53 scattered villages make Valderredible the largest and, at the same time, the most little-known municipality in Cantabria. Following the young course of the Ebro, one discovers hamlets, rock art, and clear skies..

It is the largest municipality in Cantabria, yet also one of the least known. Within its territory lies a landscape dotted with more than fifty villages, a collection of rock art unique in Spain, and skies so clear that an astronomical observatory has been installed. Welcome to Valderredible.

There are places that are visited, and places that are explored. Valderredible belongs to the second category. Here, one does not simply arrive; one ventures in. This southern Cantabrian valley, crossed by the Ebro when it is still a young and promising river, unfolds slowly before the traveller willing to embrace the secondary roads.

Valderredible is a territory to explore without hurry. Po-lientes serves as the capital, but the soul of the valley is spread across each of the villages that dot the map: from Villaescusa de Ebro to San Martín de Elines, passing through Cadalso, Loma Somera, and Riopanero.

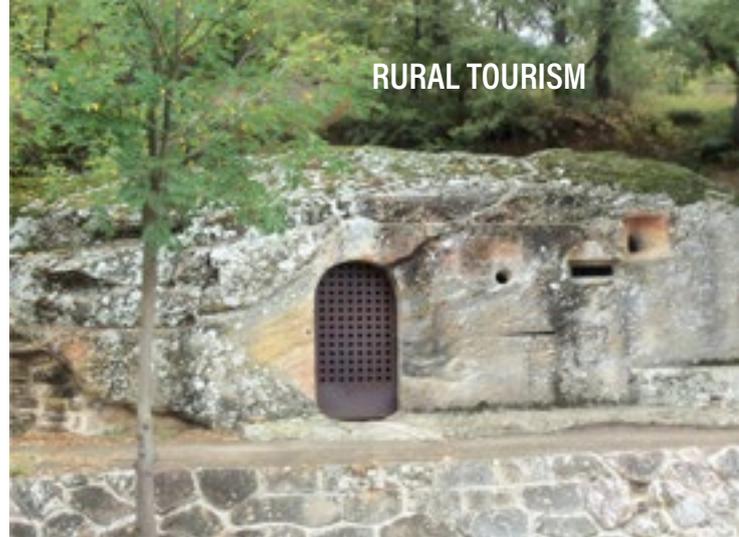
## The legacy of the hermits

The first thing that surprises the traveller is that here, history is not read in books, but in the rock itself. Valderredible hosts the highest concentration of rock-hewn churches in Spain, a phenomenon that experts have dubbed the “Iberian Cappadocia.”

Between the 7th and 10th centuries, a community of hermits chose this corner to carve their temples and dwellings directly into the sandstone. The result is a unique sacred landscape that can be visited today with the same naturalness with which those monks once inhabited it.

**The Cadalso rock-hewn hermitage**, dedicated to the Virgin of Carmen, is one of the finest examples. Declared a Property of Cultural Interest in 1983, it preserves two early medieval excavated tombs outside: one rectangular and the other anthropomorphic, shaped like a bathtub. Situated beside the road from Polientes to Escalada, it goes unnoticed by those who do not know how to look. But those who stop discover a small jewel carved with faith and chisel.

Shortly afterwards, at **Santa María de Valverde**, we find another of these churches. Here, worship has continued uninterrupted for over a thousand years, making this place a marvel of historical continuity. As in Cadalso, the medieval tombs flank the temple, reminding us that death was also part of community life.



The Cadalso Rock-Hewn Hermitage



Santa María de Valverde and the rock-cut tombs  
Santa María de Valverde, interior of the church



### El Tobazo, water that sculpts stone

But not everything carved into the rock was the work of humans. In Villaescusa de Ebro, a simple twenty-minute walk from the parking area leads to the Tobazo Waterfall. It is the only waterfall in Cantabria that flows directly from the earth's crust, emerging from a rocky wall a hundred metres above the river.

The water, rich in limestone, gradually forms the tufa that gives the site its name—a porous, malleable rock that the hermits also used to carve their caves. The trail follows the bed of a usually dry stream, and the murmur of water guides the walker until the waterfall suddenly appears, offering one of those views that make any journey worthwhile.

Winter and spring are the best seasons to see it at full strength. But any time of year is rewarding, even if just to sit and listen to the silence broken by the sound of water.

### The Giant of Loma Somera

If one continues climbing, they reach Loma Somera. This village, situated at over 900 metres above sea level, is one of those places that seem frozen in time. Its cobbled streets, stone fountains, forge, and horse-trampling frame transport visitors to another era.

But there is one resident who deserves a chapter of its own. On the outskirts of the village stands “La Piruta,” a centuries-old oak of colossal proportions. Its trunk exceeds six metres in circumference, and anyone who stops before it understands why our ancestors revered trees.

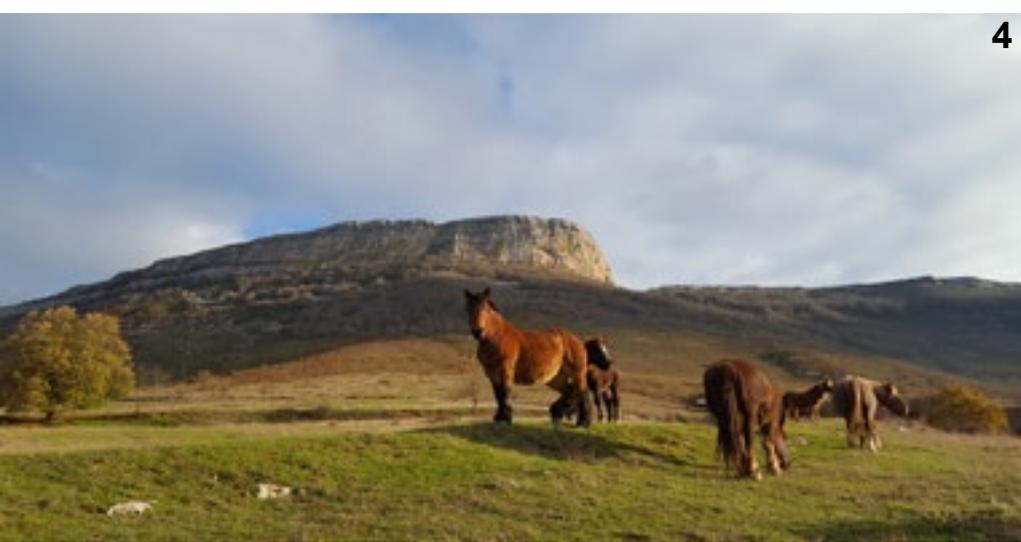
From Loma Somera, the view stretches over the Burgos lands of La Lora, the Palentine mountains, and the rest of the Cantabrian valley. It is a privileged balcony that invites contemplation. The village preserves three hermitages—San Vicente, the Virgen de la Somera, and San Miguel—the latter featuring a curious fountain-trough attached to the apse.



- 1.- Cuevatón
- 2.- Tobazo Waterfall
- 3.- Ruerrero Arcades
- 4.- Free-roaming horses beneath Peña Camesía
- 5.- Blue hour in Loma Somera
- 6.- Arcades in Ruerrero



3



4



5



6



Autumn trails and waterfalls in Monte Hijedo



### The Collegiate Church and the Forest

In **San Martín de Elines**, we find the **Collegiate Church**, one of the four great Romanesque temples of Cantabria, alongside those in Cervatos, Castañeda, and Santillana. Declared a Historical-Artistic Monument in 1931, it originally began as a monastery in the Mozarabic period—the 10th-century cloister walls are still preserved—before later becoming a collegiate church.

Its interior houses richly carved historiated capitals: the Massacre of the Innocents, Samson with the lion, Daniel in the lion's den... And a curiosity: in the cemetery chapel, pieces from other churches in the region are displayed, including the tomb of a pilgrim knight with Gothic reliefs.

Very nearby, in **Riopanero**, is the **Monte Hijedo** visitor centre. Considered one of the three most important oak forests in Spain, this 1,500-hectare woodland is home to sessile oaks, beeches, and thousand-year-old yews. Some specimens exceed 800 years in age.

Walking through Hijedo is like entering a fairytale landscape. Erosion has shaped the sandstone into whimsical forms: rock shelters, stone mushrooms, and hollows. And if you are lucky, you might encounter a roe deer, wild boar, or even a wolf, which still finds refuge in these dense woods.

### A cinematic sky

But Valderredible does not only look down. It also lifts its

The Collegiate Church of San Martín de Elines



gaze. The quality of its skies, free from light pollution, has made the area a prime destination for astronomical observation.

At Alto de la Lora, on the border with Burgos, the Cantabria Astronomical Observatory (Valderredible) has been established, a centre that brings the mysteries of the universe closer to those who dare to look at the stars.

And it is no wonder. Here, the nights remain dark, as they once were. In a world where artificial light has erased the Milky Way from many horizons, that alone is a luxury.

**A valley to be felt**

In the end, Valderredible is just that: a place to feel more than to see. To pause in each village—among the more than fifty settlements scattered across the map—and discover that each holds a treasure: a heralded manor, a Romanesque hermitage, or a centuries-old yew.

The traveller seeking grand monuments may feel disoriented. But the one who journeys to hear the silence, to walk millennial paths, to understand how faith was carved into stone, will find



Cantabria Astronomical Observatory (Valderredible)

Forest bathing in Monte Hijedo

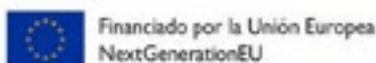


here one of those corners that no longer exist elsewhere.

The best time to visit is autumn, when the oak forests of Hijedo and the slopes of Loma Somera are dressed in ochre and gold. Or spring, when the Tobazo flows full of water, and the fields turn green and burst with vibrant colours. Yet any time is perfect to venture into this corner of southern Cantabria—a valley to explore at a slow pace. With the same calm with which the ancient hermits chose these lands to speak with God. Or with the stars.



**Town Hall of Valderredible**





# Holy Week in Soria

**The Passion told step by step**

Text: Editorial Team – Photography: Brotherhoods Council of the City of Soria



**S**ilent, austere and deeply coherent, the Holy Week of Soria is experienced as a story in motion. Its processions traverse this Castilian city following, day by day, the chronological order of the Passion of Christ. In this way, the streets, Romanesque churches and historic squares become a unique stage where faith, art and history walk hand in hand.

The Holy Week of Soria is one of those celebrations that surprises the traveller precisely because of the sobriety that characterises the processions of Castile. Here there are no excesses or baroque displays: what the traveller finds is a solemn and restrained atmosphere, a singular staging that makes it an original Holy Week. Its distinguishing feature is unique: the brotherhoods process strictly following the chronology of the Passion of Christ, just as it is recounted in the Holy Scriptures. Day by day, step by step, the city visually narrates the final hours of Jesus.



Palm Sunday – Entry of Jesus

Palms of Acclamation

Eight brotherhoods make up this Passion Week in Soria. Each one processes on a specific day, dedicating itself exclusively to a particular episode, and carries out its penitential station from its home church to the Co-Cathedral of Saint Peter the Apostle, crossing the heart of the city. Streets such as El Collado, the true social and commercial artery of Soria, are transformed during these days into a solemn stage where more than a thousand brothers advance in silent harmony, broken only by the tearing sound of trumpets and drums, and by the hammering of the staffs carried by the members of each brotherhood.

The week begins on **Palm Sunday** with the procession of the Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. It is the brightest and most popular, especially due to the presence of children and families who accompany the well-known Borriquilla, a statue from the Olot school. The white of the robes, the palms and the restrained joy mark the beginning of a week that gradually moves into reflection and solemnity.



From there, the city immerses itself in a perfectly ordered sequence. On **Holy Tuesday** one of the most moving moments takes place with the nocturnal meeting of the brotherhoods of the Prayer in the Garden and the Scourging of the Lord, which converge in the very heart of the historic centre before continuing together to what will be their new home during Passion Week, the Co-Cathedral of Saint Peter. The contrast between light and shadow, the stillness of the atmosphere, and the weight of the statues make this event one of the most awe-inspiring.

On **Holy Wednesday**, the image of the Ecce Homo emerges from the church of Santo Domingo. The departure of this image through the wonderful Romanesque portal is one of the most eagerly anticipated moments for both residents and tourists. The portal of Santo Domingo, considered one of the masterpieces of Romanesque art, provides a magnificent setting and is one of the



Majestic Ecce Homo

Prayer in the Garden and the Scourging of the Lord



highlights of Soria's Holy Week. After the procession, the brothers and numerous faithful continue in a silent Way of the Cross to the hermitage of San Saturio, on the banks of the Duero, in one of the most unknown and beautiful scenes of Soria's Holy Week.

**Holy Thursday** is marked by the penitential station of the Brotherhood of the Falls of Jesus, which travels through the city from the Co-Cathedral, following its path of preaching that highlights the falls on the way to Calvary, and by the nocturnal procession of the Virgin of Solitude. Possibly one of the most crowded and most devout events in the city. This parade of quiet reflection sets off from the small and secluded Hermitage of the Humilladero, in the heart of Dehesa Park, a location full of symbolism for the people of Soria. The sepulchral silence, barely broken by the sound of footsteps, envelops the Christ of the Humilladero and the Virgin of Anguish in an atmosphere of profound devotion.

## HOLY WEEK IN SORIA



Christ of the Humilladero

The image of the Virgin emerging, in complete darkness, as if on a black theatre stage, and illuminated only by the lights of the torches on her float, the shine of that jet-black mantle richly adorned with jeweled trim, and those tearful eyes glistening through their tears, is one of the most unforgettable sights for those in attendance.

**Good Friday** is the main day. First, at midday, the Brotherhood of the Seven Words traverses the historic centre, stopping at seven emblematic points of Soria's old town where the final words of Christ before the crucifixion are proclaimed. In the afternoon takes place the grand procession of the Holy Burial, the true climax of Soria's Holy Week. All the brotherhoods parade together, in strict chronological order, accompanying a recumbent Christ and the venerated Lignum Crucis, a relic documented since the sixteenth century. A piece of what is said to have been the Cross of the Messiah, once belonging to the powerful Borgia family, and now kept in the Co-Cathedral of the city of Soria.





Brotherhood of the Seven Words of Jesus on the Cross

Beyond the religious aspect, Soria's Holy Week is also a journey through its Romanesque heritage. Santo Domingo, San Juan de Rabanera, Santa María la Mayor, and the Co-Cathedral of Saint Peter become living settings that accompany the visitor on a tour through one of the purest Romanesque ensembles in Castile and León. Added to this is the traditional cuisine of the season, with torrijas, Holy Week fritters soaked in wine, leche frita, vigilia stews, or the popular lemonade, which complete the experience.

Discreet and authentic, Soria's Holy Week is an invitation to discover the city through silence, history, and restrained emotion. A measured story to be walked, contemplated, and remembered.

## Holy Week In Soria



Holy Sepulchre in the Co-Cathedral



# Palma Cathedral

Between Faith, Light, and Time.  
From Gaudí to Barceló.

Text: Rosario Alonso – Photography: Rosario Alonso and Archive

**T**he silhouette of Palma de Mallorca Cathedral (La Seu) has dominated the city's maritime skyline for centuries. Few cathedrals in Europe engage in such a direct dialogue with the sea. La Seu rises not merely on stone: it stands upon history, faith, power, art, and memory. Over time, it has known how to open its walls to creators capable of reinterpreting it without betraying its essence. Among them, two names encapsulate a century of artistic sensitivity: Antoni Gaudí and Miquel Barceló.

This dialogue between tradition and modernity makes Palma Cathedral more than a monument: it is a living space, where each generation has left its mark.



## A Cathedral Born of the Sea and History

The construction of La Seu began in 1229, following the Christian conquest of Mallorca by James I. On the site of the former main mosque, a Gothic temple of ambitious dimensions was planned, in keeping with the new political and religious power.

The works continued for nearly four centuries. Stonemasons, master builders, and artisans gradually gave shape to one of the most singular Gothic cathedrals of the Mediterranean. Its location, facing the sea, was no coincidence: it symbolised the arrival of Christianity by sea and the strategic role of the island. One of its great prides is the main rose window, known as the “eye of Gothic,” one of the largest in the world. Twice a year, in February and November, the sun casts its light forming a spectacular luminous figure eight within the temple. This effect is no random accident: it is the result of a profound medieval understanding of light and space.

## The Time of Gaudí: Faith, Crisis, and Renewal

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Cathedral required a profound intervention. The temple had suffered damage, unfortunate renovations, and gradual deterioration. It was then that Bishop Pere Joan Campins decided to undertake a comprehensive renewal.



Eye of Gothic

Suspended Baldachin over the Main Altar



In 1904, he called upon Antoni Gaudí, who was already a recognised figure, although he had not yet reached the mythical stature he would later achieve. The commission came at a delicate moment in his life. Gaudí was going through a period of spiritual introspection, marked by an ever-deepening religiosity and a gradual withdrawal from social life.

For him, working on a cathedral was not merely a professional task: it was a mission. Between 1904 and 1914, Gaudí transformed the interior of La Seu with a highly personal vision. He did not alter the Gothic structure, but he profoundly changed the way it was experienced.

He removed the central choir, which obstructed the view of the altar, relocating it to the royal chapel. He sought to allow the faithful to participate more directly in the liturgy. He reorganised the presbytery, designed new liturgical furnishings, and created a suspended baldachin over the main altar, one of his most recognisable works in the cathedral. This baldachin, shaped like a crown of thorns, appears to float in the air. It is supported by almost invisible cables and decorated with Eucharistic symbols, representing simultaneously protection, sacrifice, and transcendence.

Gaudí also introduced a new conception of light. He opened windows, modified colours, and conceived the interior as a space that changes with the hours of the day. For him, light was a spiritual language.

## PALMA DE MALLORCA CATHEDRAL

During his time in Palma, Gaudí led a discreet life. He stayed in modest homes, walked alone along the port, and devoted long hours to prayer. Some witnesses recall that he worked with an almost obsessive intensity, reviewing the details over and over again.

Interestingly, he left the project without fully completing it. Disagreements with part of the chapter and new priorities—especially the Sagrada Família—led to his departure in 1914. He left quietly, without any grand farewells.

Today, his intervention continues to generate debate. Some regard it as a brilliant reinterpretation of Gothic architecture; others see it as an excessive rupture. But no one disputes that he forever changed the way La Seu is perceived.

### Twenty-First Century: The Arrival of Barceló

Almost a century later, the cathedral once again opened itself to contemporary creation. In 2001, Miquel Barceló was commissioned to decorate the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament.

The Mallorcan artist, internationally renowned, accepted the challenge with both respect and audacity. For five years he worked on the creation of a monumental ceramic mural covering the walls and vault.



Projection of the Main Rose Window



Work Representing the Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes



The work represents the miracle of the loaves and fishes. It does not do so in a traditional narrative manner, but through an explosion of forms, reliefs, and colours. Fish, fruit, bread, faces, and waves seem to emerge from the material itself.

Barceló employed techniques inspired by traditional ceramics and Mediterranean mural painting. He even worked with industrial kilns to achieve the desired effects. The most remarkable aspect of Barceló's work is its integration. Despite its contemporary language, the chapel does not feel out of place. It dialogues with the stone, with the light, and with the silence of the temple.

Like Gaudí in his time, Barceló took the risk of intervening in a sacred space without renouncing his artistic identity. Both understood that a cathedral is not a static museum, but a living organism. This creative continuity makes La Seu a rare example of coexistence across centuries.

### Curiosities That Speak of the Soul of the Temple

Among the many details that enrich the visit, some little-known ones stand out:

- For centuries, the cathedral served as a reference point for navigators, thanks to its location and the height of its central nave.
- The earthquake of 1851 severely damaged its structure, necessitating significant restorations.
- Gaudí personally designed benches, lamps, and confessionals, many of which are still preserved.
- In Barceló's chapel, the texture of the walls deliberately recalls skin eroded by the sea.

Small traces that humanise a monumental building.

### A Cathedral That Moves the Soul

Visiting Palma Cathedral is not merely contemplating an architectural marvel. It is a journey through eight centuries of spirituality, collective effort, and artistic creation.

Palma de Mallorca Cathedral

Within its walls coexist medieval stonemasons, enlightened bishops, visionary architects, and contemporary artists. Each left a piece of themselves. Gaudí too, in one of the most intense and silent periods of his life, sought here a form of transcendence.

Perhaps that is why, when the evening light streams through the stained glass and the sea reflects on the stone, La Seu ceases to be a monument and becomes an intimate place. A space where the visitor realises that art, when born of respect and emotion, does not age.

And where Mallorca, through its cathedral, continues to dialogue with time.

### Palma de Mallorca Cathedral





# Ecodestinatons

# Dubrovnik

**Green Jewel of the Adriatic**

Text: Editorial Team – Photography: Archive

Millennial walls, crystal-clear waters, and a silent revolution: the Croatian pearl has been crowned European Green Pioneer 2026, proving that heritage and sustainability can—and must—go hand in hand.

Some cities seem condemned to their own success. Dubrovnik, the dazzling “Pearl of the Adriatic,” has long carried the weight of its beauty: crowds, massive cruise ships, and selfies on every corner threatened to blur its millennial soul. But 2026 marks a turning point. The European Commission has just named it European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism, an accolade that does not celebrate its past, but its courageous commitment to a different future.

When the European jury met in Brussels in November 2025 to select the winners, Dubrovnik stood out among 58 candidacies from 22 countries. It was not only for the beauty of its Old Town—declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979—but for something deeper: the ability of a historic city to reinvent itself without losing its essence. The European Commissioner for Tourism, Apostolos Tzitzikostas, put it clearly: “This year’s awardees set a high standard for smarter, more sustainable, and inclusive tourism across our Union.”

Today, walking along its famous Stradun street is no longer an ordeal. Crowds are now managed, cruise arrivals are regulated, and the city breathes at a new rhythm. Dubrovnik has understood that protecting its millennial stones also means protecting the experience of those who visit them.



Stradun Street



## DUBROVNIK

### The Old City That Found Its Voice Again

The first thing that surprises the traveller arriving in 2026 is the calm. The sixteenth-century walls—almost two kilometres of fortifications that surround the Old Town like a stone embrace—remain imposing, but are no longer overcrowded. The city has implemented a timed reservation system for access, allowing each visitor to walk along the ramparts at leisure, admiring the Adriatic without rush.

The Old Town unfolds its treasures with renewed dignity. The Church of St Blaise, the Sponza Palace, and the Rector's Palace—now a museum narrating centuries of splendour of the former Republic of Ragusa—can be visited in peace. Stradun Street, paved with white limestone that glistens under the Dalmatian sun, has regained the murmur of conversations, drowning out the noise of the crowds.

Dubrovnik's defensive system deserves a leisurely visit. St Lawrence Fortress (Lovrijenac), atop a 37-metre cliff, rises with walls up to 12 metres thick. Minceta Tower, a symbol of the city, and Bokar Fortress, considered one of Europe's oldest casemate fortresses, complete a unique defensive ensemble.



Dubrovnik Walls



Rector's Palace

Minceta Tower



## Beyond the Walls: The Green Dubrovnik

But the Green Pioneer title is not earned merely by managing crowds. Dubrovnik has extended its gaze beyond the Old Town, rediscovering the surrounding territory. The Elaphiti Islands, just off the coast, have become a refuge for those seeking nature and tranquility. Koločep, Lopud, and Šipan—car-free and surrounded by turquoise waters—offer trails through olive groves, hidden coves, and small taverns serving fresh fish. The regular ferry line allows visitors to escape the bustle and experience the most authentic Dalmatia.

Mount Srđ, which watches over the city from above, is no longer accessed only by cable car. New marked hiking trails allow visitors to reach the summit on foot, enjoying panoramic views that, on clear days, stretch up to 60 kilometres. At the top, the Imperial Fortress houses the Homeland War Museum, a reminder of the resilience of a city that also knew how to rise from the ashes.



Dubrovnik from Mount Srđ



Elaphiti Islands

Cathedral of the Assumption



## DUBROVNIK

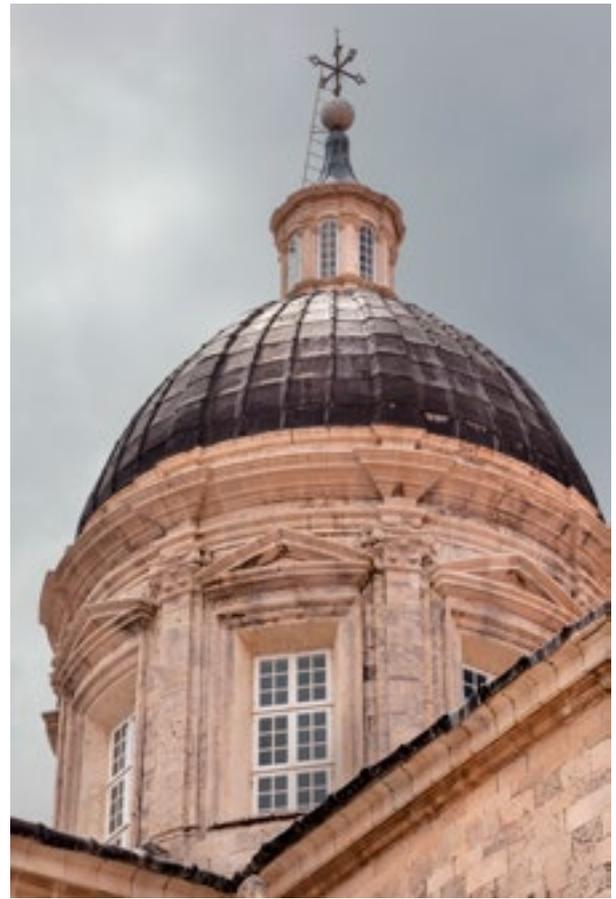
### A Walk Through Living History

Dubrovnik's Old Town is an open-air museum where every corner holds a story. The Large Onofrio Fountain, built in the fifteenth century, still flows with drinking water through its sixteen spouts, offering a refreshing oasis. The Franciscan Monastery, founded in 1317, houses one of Europe's oldest pharmacies still in operation, along with a museum preserving medieval vessels and manuscripts.

The Cathedral of the Assumption, rebuilt in Baroque style after the 1667 earthquake, holds 132 saintly relics in its treasury. The nearby Church of St Blaise, a masterpiece of Venetian Baroque, completes the tour of essential temples. For culture enthusiasts, the Rector's Palace houses the Museum of Cultural History, with rooms including the audience hall and the former dungeons.

### Tourism Intelligence: Technology at the Service of the Traveller

The "smart tourism" that the European Commission has recognised in Dubrovnik is not merely a label. The city has deployed a network of sensors and mobile applications that provide real-time information on crowd levels at major points of interest, allowing travellers to decide when and where to move. Screens at the entrances to the Old



Dome of the Cathedral of the Assumption

Panoramic View of Cavtat



Town display waiting times, updating information and easing congestion.

Dubrovnik's data-driven strategy engages both the local community and visitors in a collaborative effort to ensure the long-term sustainability of the destination, protecting its cultural and natural heritage. Digitalisation has also reached waste management, efficient lighting, and the monitoring of water quality on urban beaches.

**A Model That Inspires Europe**

Dubrovnik's success serves as an example for other destinations in Europe—Venice, Barcelona, Amsterdam—demonstrating that there are alternatives to tourist overcrowding. Thanks to careful management, Dubrovnik has become a symbol of how cities can adapt to the demands of modern tourism while remaining liveable, sustainable, and culturally rich.

**The Most Authentic Adriatic**

Those who travel to Dubrovnik will also discover its surroundings. The Konavle region offers landscapes of vineyards and traditional villages such as Čilipi, famous for its folk costumes. Nearby Cavtat, the ancient Roman Epidaurum, is a dreamy small port with the Račić family Mausoleum, a work by the sculptor Ivan Meštrović. Lokrum Island, just ten minutes by boat, is a protected forest reserve with a saltwater lake perfect for swimming and the ruins of a Benedictine abbey.

And, of course, the sea. The Croatian Adriatic remains one of the cleanest in Europe. Its cuisine, based on fresh fish, olive oil, and local wines such as Dingač, completes an experience that in 2026 feels more authentic than ever.



**Dubrovnik**

Cavtat Beach





# Charming villages

## ALQUÉZAR

Balcony of the Sierra de Guara

Text: Emma Lázaro – Photography: Archive

Collegiate Church of Santa María la Mayor



**T**here are places to be seen and places to be heard. Alquézar, in the heart of the Somontano region of Huesca, is one of those sites where the stones speak. Locals say that if you listen closely, amidst the murmur of the Vero River and the whistle that passes through the Smile of the Wind, you can hear the echoes of a past shaped by Visigoths, Muslims, and Christians.

### A Name with Magic (Al-Qasr)

Looking out over Alquézar is to look out over the living history of Aragón. Its name comes from the Arabic al-qasr (قَصْرًا), meaning “the fortress,” and it is not hard

to see why. Perched atop a rocky mass that seems to defy gravity, the village was founded as a defensive stronghold in the ninth century. Today, however, its castle is no longer a refuge for soldiers, but for restless souls seeking beauty in every nook and cranny.

The Collegiate Church of Santa María la Mayor crowns the town like a well-kept secret. It is a strange, wonderful, trapezoidal building, where a Romanesque-Gothic cloister preserves capitals that narrate Genesis with the innocence and mystery of medieval art. It is one of the most singular cloisters in Spain, and from its arches, the gaze drifts into the green abyss of the canyon. It is not just a monument; it is a privileged lookout over time.

### Streets That Taste of Legend

Getting lost is the only plan possible in Alquézar. Its cobbled, steep, and winding streets smell of boxwood and ancient stone. The houses cling to the hillside, their wooden balconies bursting with flowers, creating passages and corners that seem lifted from an illustrated storybook, frozen in time and memory, where silence sets the pace of the walk.

Collegiate Church of Santa María la Mayor



In Rafael Ayerbe Square, the former Main Square, the stone arcades invite pause. Here, time passes slowly, as if the clock had stopped in 1528 when Charles V granted the town the privilege of holding a market. Today, the trade is different: the trade of sensations. A breath of fresh air, a coffee with a view, the gentle bustle of travellers who have discovered Huesca's best-kept secret.

### The Beat of the Abyss

But if Alquézar is famous worldwide, it is not just for its stone heritage. It is for what lies beneath. The village is the gateway to the Sierra and Canyons of Guara Natural Park, and its main natural attraction is, without a doubt, the River Vero Walkway Route.





Streets of Alquézar

This short route of barely three kilometres is an almost initiatory experience. Paths carved into the rock, hanging bridges, and wooden stairways cling to the canyon walls while the River Vero roars 25 metres below. It is not suitable for those afraid of heights, but it is perfect for those seeking the adrenaline rush that only well-preserved nature can offer. The UNWTO (UN Tourism since 2024) recognised precisely this: the sustainable management of this site, which welcomes over 120,000 visitors a year without losing its wild essence.

### The Smile That Sees Everything

There is a place on the outskirts where the wind becomes art. It is the Lookout of the Smile of the Wind, a monumental sculpture by a local artist named Gabriel, carved into a block of stone in the shape of a smile. When you stand behind it, the light and air frame the village as if it were a moving photograph.

From there, the panoramic view is complete: Alquézar, nestled on its rocky perch, watchful over the canyon, guardian of vineyards and olive groves. For this is also Somontano, land of wines with designated origin, oils that taste of fruit, and cuisine that comforts the soul after a long walk.

Rafael Ayerbe Square

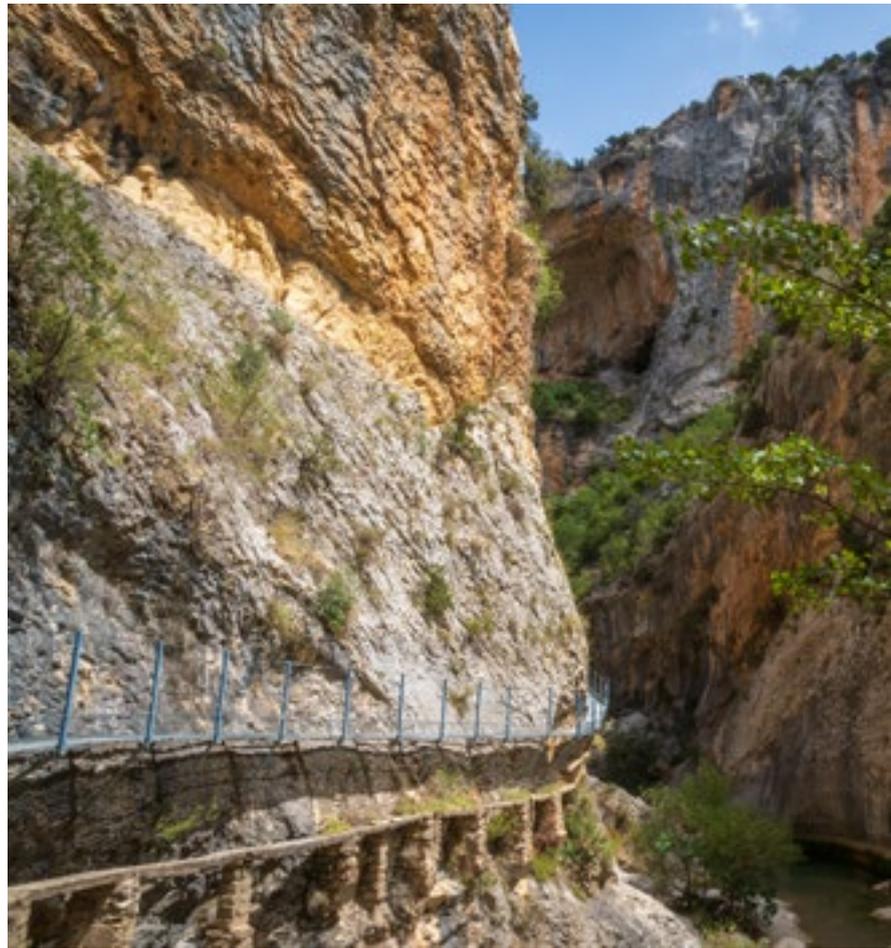


### A Future That Looks Back

Today, Alquézar is not only one of the most beautiful villages in Spain, but it has also been included by UN Tourism on the list of Best Tourism Villages. This is no empty recognition. It is the reward for an approach to travel that is sustainable, community-focused, and authentic. Here there are no large impersonal hotels; instead, there are charming rural houses, farm-to-table products, and a community that has learned to say “yes” to visitors without saying “no” to itself.

Traveling to Alquézar is just that: a journey to the origin, to the stone, the water, and the wind. A place where one does not ask what to do, but when to return.

# ALQUÉZAR



River Vero Walkway Route





# Hotel Almalusa Comporta-Portugal

The Serene Soul of the Portuguese Coast

Text and Photos: Manena Munar – [manena.munar@gmail.com](mailto:manena.munar@gmail.com)

A place to experience authenticity, in the renowned Comporta, amid one of Europe's longest beaches, vineyards, historical heritage, artisanal crafts, and a calm that envelops everything.

**A**s its name suggests, AlmaLusa Hotel carries the essence of Comporta, reflected in the traditional craftsmanship that decorates each room, in the photographic collection “Ethereal Roots of Comporta” by the German photographer Delia Rogge, and in the works of the Portuguese designer-photographer João Trindade, who spent time in the village capturing the “Lusitanian soul” of Comporta: the fishing, the rice fields. Also part of the hotel’s photographic narrative are the anonymous works of a local artist, “Beach Art Man,” inspired by the sea and the dune-strewn beach that proudly claims to be one of the longest in Europe. The hotel and the village prepare for spring, when the first visitors will begin to arrive. In the meantime, enjoying the warmth of the hotel in intimate company, strolling through its empty streets, and having the beach to oneself is a true privilege.

The hotel staff, charming and local, welcome guests with affection and pride, eager to show off their beautiful village and outstanding natural surroundings. Speaking with those who make AlmaLusa Comporta possible, they recount how Comporta—always a very special destination for those seeking the extraordinary—gained attention through the customary visits and horseback tours in the area by the famous artist Madonna. However, the true boom of Comporta came after the pandemic, when people were searching for serenity and beauty above all.

At AlmaLusa, the traveller stays in the heart of Comporta, among museums that tell the story of rice, the fresh air of a fishing village, and wineries where Alentejo is served by the glass. Here, rest converses with culture, the sea, and the land.





Pile-dwelling village of Carrasqueira

The gastronomic chapter of AlmaLusa Comporta is one to keep in mind. Its local products – fish, rice, and wine – arrive at the table of the cosy bar and restaurant La Biblioteca, transformed into a flavoursome soupy rice with grouper, prawns, and coriander, accompanied by a wine from the neighbouring winery Adega de Herdade de Comporta. One more of the typical and exquisite dishes with which the hotel's restaurant pampers its guests, usually ending with the sweet touch of a chocolate ball with salt and olive oil.

The quaint and seaside village of Comporta



### Right in the very centre of Comporta

Another of the advantages of AlmaLusa Comporta is its location as the only accommodation situated in the centre of the village. Just stepping out onto the street, one sees the charming white houses framed in blue, the local craft shops, and that Rice Museum, which tells the story of when the English company The Atlantic Company acquired the agricultural estate Herdade da Comporta in 1925, recognising the enormous rice-growing potential of the area. The land later passed into the hands of the Portuguese Espírito Santo family until, today, both the wine and the Comporta rice belong to a Portuguese investment group.

In exploring the area, walking from Hotel AlmaLusa along the edge of the rice fields, rises the omnipresent Adega Herdade de Comporta, a former rice factory, now converted into a museum and winery producing that wine which, thanks to the fertility of its fields, comes from the many types of grapes grown in its vineyards. One passes through the pine forests, another of Comporta's cherished products, and reaches the seemingly endless beach. On the return to the village, one passes what is presumed to be the origin of its name: those sluice gates that opened and closed to prevent sea water from mixing with the fresh water of the rice fields, painted with the cross linked to the Espírito Santo family, due to their historical and commercial connection with the region.

And just three kilometres from Comporta lies the pile-dwelling port of Carrasqueira, in the Sado River Estuary Natural Reserve, a protected area of great ecological value.

### Dining in the former stables

Dinner takes place in the centre of Comporta, at the restaurant Cavalariça, the restored former stables of the village that still retain their original aesthetic. Upon entering, the space leaves one open-mouthed due to the curious and cosy dining room, painted in shades of blue and white, in harmony with the neighbouring houses. Every item of tableware is carefully considered to accommodate the type of menu served; some dishes highlighted by gastronomic guides, such as the cured meat croquettes with clam mayonnaise, or the grilled brioche with chicken liver parfait and orange chutney.

On returning to AlmaLusa Comporta, before the day concludes, nothing compares to a massage, one of those experiences never to be forgotten.

### Tailor-made experiences

An ideal complement to Hotel AlmaLusa are its exclusive activity offerings, which include horseback rides along the beach, taking in the rice fields and vineyards. The hotel also organises golf experiences alongside the Terras da Comporta project. On these courses, given Comporta's climate and natural surroundings, it is a true privilege to play—whether at Dunas Golf, designed by David McKay Kidd, 84 hectares among pine forests and dunes, or at Torre Golf, designed by Sergio García, featuring a par-72 course beside the Sado estuary—both just ten minutes from the hotel.



One of the delicious dishes from the restaurant Cavalariça

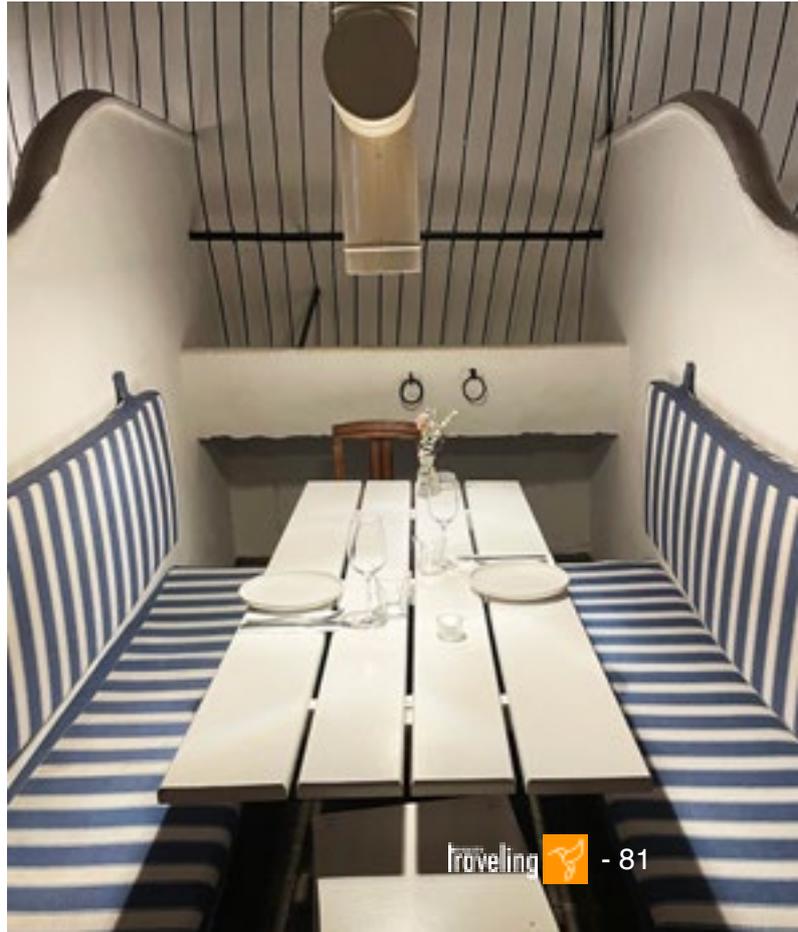


**Hotel AlmaLusa  
Comporta-Portugal**

One of the delicious desserts from the restaurant La Biblioteca at Hotel AlmaLusa Comporta



Restaurant Cavalariça, in the former stables of Comporta





# Hotel Puntagrande

Welcome to the smallest hotel in the world

Text: Editorial – Photography: Hotel Puntagrande

There are hotels that you visit and hotels that you remember. Puntagrande belongs to the latter category. Perched on the volcanic rock, facing the open Atlantic, it seems more like an inhabited lighthouse than a conventional accommodation. Here, the sea is not a landscape: it is a constant presence, sound, horizon, and raison d'être. In El Hierro, the journey begins where the land ends.



**A**t the westernmost tip of Frontera, where the solidified lava juts into the Atlantic like a prow frozen in time, stands Hotel Puntagrande. This is no metaphor: the building is literally perched on a tongue of volcanic rock, surrounded by the ocean. From every angle, the sea is a constant presence. From within, it is, too.

It is considered the smallest hotel in the world, and that distinction is no empty claim. It has just four rooms, a number that defines its identity. There is no room for anonymity or unnecessary noise. Among these four accommodations, one suite stands out—the largest—equipped with two private terraces overlooking the sea and the mountains, a privilege that perfectly encapsulates El Hierro’s duality: ocean and volcanic relief in continuous dialogue. The remaining rooms are doubles, all with private bathrooms and showers, some with balconies opening directly onto the Atlantic.

Sleeping here is almost like sleeping over the water. The sound of the waves accompanies the night, and the sunrise enters unfiltered through the windows. From the hotel’s panoramic terrace, the view is clean and open, without any constructions breaking the horizon. It is one of those places where the traveller realises that the landscape is not merely to be admired—it is to be inhabited.

Recognition with a Michelin Key reinforces this idea of a singular experience. It does not respond to conventional luxury or large-scale infrastructure, but to the coherence between location, size, and concept. Puntagrande does not try to appear larger than it is. Its strength lies precisely in its minimal scale.

This small scale also dictates how it operates. It does not function like a city hotel with a 24-hour reception. Service is personalised, direct, and adapted to guests’ arrivals and departures. It is advisable to communicate your arrival time, as the attention here is close and the pace is set by the establishment itself. This direct relationship is part of the charm: there are no long waits or unnecessary formalities.

The building retains a maritime memory. Within its own premises, it houses a small naval museum, integrated into the common areas. It is not an independent or large space, but rather an intimate corner displaying models, artefacts, and objects connected to the island’s seafaring tradition. This museum reinforces the hotel’s character as a historic maritime enclave and highlights El Hierro’s long-standing relationship with navigation.

## HOTEL PUNTAGRANDE



Rooftop terrace of the hotel, ideal for unwinding  
Panoramic view of the hotel and its unique location

Beyond the building itself, the surroundings complete the experience. Frontera opens onto the El Golfo valley, one of the most recognisable landscapes on the island. Towering cliffs, crops thriving on volcanic soil, and an ocean that shifts colour with the light of the day. A few kilometres away lie spots such as Charco Azul, a natural pool formed by lava and the sea, where bathing depends on the state of the tides.

El Hierro, declared a Biosphere Reserve and Geopark, invites exploration at a leisurely pace. Trails wind through wind-sculpted juniper groves in La Dehesa, viewpoints such as La Peña—designed by César Manrique—or small coves where the Atlantic reveals an unexpected transparency. Diving is another of the island's highlights, with seabeds valued for their biodiversity and the clarity of their waters for much of the year.

Returning after a day in nature feels a little like finding a refuge. The hotel's cuisine relies on local produce and a kitchen that looks to the sea without losing its Herreño roots. Fresh fish of the day, island cheeses, wrinkled potatoes, and wines from the valley find their place in a menu that complements the surroundings without artifices. The gourmet restaurant pays careful attention to presentation and the rhythm of service, supported by a wine cellar with selected Canary and mainland references.





View of one of the rooms

Some tables incorporate videomapping experiences that add a subtle sensory dimension, reinforcing the sense of something beyond a simple meal. Dining in front of the ocean, with the sound of water striking the rock, is an essential part of the experience.

Free WiFi and complimentary private parking are practical details that ease the stay but do not distract from what truly matters. Here, the landscape takes centre stage. The black stone building with white accents, compact and solid, resembles more an inhabited lighthouse than a conventional hotel, suspended almost over the Atlantic.

In times when many destinations compete in height and capacity, Hotel Puntagrande shows that human scale still makes sense. Four rooms, a naval museum integrated into the building itself, personalised attention, and the ocean as an immediate neighbour. That is its formula—simple and coherent with the island that hosts it.

Sleeping in what is considered the smallest hotel in the world is not merely a curiosity. It is a different way of approaching El Hierro, an island that for centuries marked the edge of the known world. On this tongue of volcanic rock, the traveller discovers that true luxury can be as simple as opening the window and seeing that the sea is there, just a few metres away, setting the rhythm for everything.



A drink and cigars to end the evening



# Short films are cinema—brief stories in which their creators invite us to enjoy and reflect

By: Julián Sacristán – comunicacion@wfm.es



Director Iñigo Echávarri is one of Spain's pioneers in the professional integration of AI in audiovisual production. Echávarri makes history with the short film *Superescolares2, Una Mente Sana*, an animated short created using AI tools, which has become the most selected film on both national and international festival circuits. As of the closing date, it has already been selected by more than 53 festivals, marking a milestone in the audiovisual world and offering the director the opportunity to travel globally.

*Superescolares2, Una Mente Sana* tells the story of Amaya accompanying her friend Telmo through a day of play, where the boy learns that the mind is like an engine that needs energy to keep going. With tenderness and great complicity, Amaya shows him that talking, playing, and asking for help are essential keys to taking care of mental health.

Beyond its undeniable technical and narrative achievement, the work addresses, from a kind and accessible perspective for children, the importance of mental health care at an early age, encouraging dialogue within family and educational environments about emotions and well-being—what some have called “a necessary short film.” *Superescolares2, Una Mente Sana* demonstrates the potential of artificial intelligence as a creative accelerator, under human artistic direction.

It should be noted that Echávarri is a highly recognised professional thanks to his extensive experience in film, series, and advertising.

The *Superescolares2, Una Mente Sana* project was initiated by scientific researcher Raquel Mateos, with the support of the Institute of Food Science and Technology (ICTAN\_CSIC).

Cecilia Gessa, the acclaimed director, premieres *Una conversación pendiente* in the Official Section of the Málaga Festival, another story that highlights a different taboo topic. In this latest work, she once again demonstrates that cinema can be a tool for social transformation, without compromising artistic excellence or economic independence.

Cecilia has been recognised with the Rayo Verde Award from the Spanish Academy of Cinema and Greenpeace, the Linda Chacón Award for her work as a female filmmaker, the MUM Award from the Ateneo de Madrid, among others.

*Una conversación pendiente* explores territories rarely addressed in the Spanish film landscape. It tells the story of two friends, played by Carlos Bardem and Salva Reina. After Raúl's bachelor party, he goes to his friend Santi's hotel room to have one last conversation. What begins as a casual chat turns into something unexpected—decades of silence, unrequited love, and the paradox of feeling profoundly lonely even when surrounded by friends.

Cecilia explains: "I wanted to talk about what we keep silent, what we endure quietly, and what we do not dare to confront." Her filmography is filled with taboo topics such as abortion, gender-based violence, and more. Her career spans 58 titles as an actress, 12 productions as a director, and 26 audiovisual projects produced without subsidies or institutional support.

For Cecilia, the Málaga premiere brings profound joy: "It's a key festival, and for me, it validates the path I have followed." This year, she also plans to shoot her first feature film and return to theatre.

These two remarkable shorts demonstrate that short films are indeed cinema, while also introducing new themes that enrich the Spanish audiovisual universe and, thanks to their recognition, the international scene as well.



Carlos Bardem, Cecilia Gessa, and Salva Reina





# Manena's Window

## Travel Anecdotes

Words and Photos: Manena Munar [manena.munar@gmail.com](mailto: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”

*Oh, Borinquén of the soul!*

*A wealth of history, architecture, spectacular nature, and one anecdote after another are the memories of my trip to Puerto Rico (Borinquén in Taíno), where, as I tell you this, I am dying to return.*



**P**uerto Rico brings me very fond memories, although it is true that no two trips are alike, and from each one you return with amusing anecdotes and unforgettable moments. There, I met someone who has been a lifelong friend ever since, and who had the curious idea—if the redundancy may be pardoned—of photographing me again and again, looking for door colours, windows, and even lighthouses that would match my outfit at the time. And they certainly succeeded, creating an original and beautiful collage of my time on the island.

### **In my Old San Juan...**

Let's start with Old San Juan, where, as soon as I arrive, the heartfelt song by Javier Solís *En mi viejo San Juan* comes to mind, where “Mis cuitas de amor son recuerdos del alma.” Colourful houses, many matching my shirts—haha—colonial architecture, and the omnipresence of the sea make Old San Juan a truly charming place. This impression is confirmed when meeting Eddie Ramírez and Margarita Pastor, owners of Casa Sol at 316 Calle del Sol. An 18th-century colonial mansion, restored, with a perfect courtyard for the magnificent breakfasts they prepare, and where each room is cosy and unique.

A house that we immediately made our own, thanks to the hospitality of its owners, wandering through it as if we were “Pedro in his own house” in the literal sense: now I have a delicious pineapple juice, or a Don Q rum cocktail—named after Don Quixote, a Puerto Rican pride—now I sit reading in the courtyard, or lie on the bed to relive everything seen, carefully filed in that memory folder dedicated to Puerto Rico. Needless to say, photo after photo, so that, as dictated by these times we live in, everything—absolutely everything—is captured on the ever-hungry social networks.

### The Black Perla of Old San Juan?

As diligent travel journalists, it's rare that anything escapes our notice, and on the way to Casa Sol, we had already taken a good look at the neighbourhood nestled in a hollow outside the city walls, next to the ocean and the María Magdalena de Pazzis Cemetery. When we asked the owners of our inn about the place, they slightly frowned and respectfully advised us against venturing into the so-called La Perla neighbourhood, known for its questionable reputation. Needless to say, as soon as we left the hotel, the whole group, as if wound up like a clock, headed straight for the neighbourhood of dubious renown.

The first thing that left us speechless was the panoramic view of La Perla, the cemetery, and the Atlantic, through which ships once brought the enslaved people who lived in that outskirts area. La Perla, they say, later became a dangerous area. However, today it is home to a determined group of people working to change its reputation, organising art and literature workshops, as well as salsa and hip-hop concerts.

We quickly became friends with the residents, who, with charm and warmth, shared jokes and gossip, explaining the meaning behind the street art adorning the neighbourhood. Many murals portray famous Nuyoricans of Puerto Rican descent, such as Benicio del Toro, Ricky Martín, Jennifer López, Rosie Pérez, or the actress, singer, and dancer—the spectacular Rita Moreno—who played a pivotal role in *West Side Story*, the legendary musical about the lives of Puerto Ricans in New York. I listened to the 45 rpm LP over and over again on my parents' record player, until I finally saw the film in the cinema. And oh, how many times I danced “I Like to Be in America” like Rita Moreno, and how many tears I shed empathising with the heartbroken María (Natalie Wood) when Chino (José de Vega) kills Tony (Richard Beymer).

La Perla neighbourhood on the shores of the Atlantic





Scenes from the controversial and creative outlying San Juan neighbourhood of La Perla

The impressive walls of Old San Juan

Night was falling over La Perla and the Cemetery, and it was no ordinary sunset, but a grand and ghostly spectacle in which the darkness of the sea clashed with the tombs—where it would not have been surprising to see José Ferrer emerge with his ironic smile, hear a bolero by Pedro Flores, or watch Pedro Albizu Campos raise his independence flag once more. Meanwhile, a full orange moon illuminated the boy, alone, tossing balls into the hoop of a basketball court that could have been one of the sets from the famous musical.

### What the stones hide

The next day, after enjoying the bohemian—and, it seems, “inadvisable”—neighbourhood of La Perla, we got serious and, following our itinerary, ventured inside the walls, captivated by the stately architecture of the castles of San Cristóbal and San Felipe del Morro, the Plaza de Armas, and the Metropolitan Cathedral of San Juan, from the 16th and 17th centuries, the centuries of the Spanish colony. Months would be needed, I thought, to unravel the amount of history and experiences that these stones hold.



The colourful colonial houses of Old San Juan





Satisfied after teaching his grandson to play chess

**Santurce in San Juan—not Bilbao, as the ballad sings.**

On the following day, we left Old San Juan to head to the Santurce neighbourhood, the most populous in Puerto Rico, founded by freed Black slaves. Apart from being lively and full of charming locals, it is also the birthplace of the basketball team Cangrejeros de Santurce, truly top-tier... The Plaza del Mercado in Santurce is packed with little bars pulsing to salsa vellonera, places like La Bodeguita del Medio, which even had a DJ making us move like salsa marionettes. I have to say I was moved when I entered Discos Viera, right in the heart of Santurce, where I bought Siembra by Willie Colón and Rubén Blades, in that cathedral of Latin music—which, unfortunately, like so many tangible, smellable, and touchable things, belongs to eras past, as the shop has now closed.

**They are the troubles of love, as Javier Solís would sing.**

It was time for lunch at Punto Vista, the rooftop of Hotel Milano, 307 Calle Fortaleza. Everything was delicious, especially the “mofongo,” a staple in any Borinquén meal, made with the ever-present plantain. While the others were having coffee after the meal—I don’t take it, as I can’t sleep if I drink it at night—I was looking for photographic scenes when I came across a young, beautiful woman crying, hidden in a corner.

When I asked her, she confided in me that the universal reason for her tears was none other than heart-break. I told her—though at that moment she paid me no mind—that in a matter of days, perhaps even



Viera Discos, a reminder of bygone eras

Scenes from the controversial and creative outlying San Juan neighbourhood of La Perla

What a special photo presented itself to me when, turning down one of those colourful little streets of Old San Juan, lined with Beetle cars and two vividly coloured horses, a man wearing a visor appears, teaching someone—probably his grandson—to play chess while enjoying a Magueyes beer, framed by the turquoise blue of the calm sea. The sun hides again, and night begins in the SOFO area, between Fortaleza, San Francisco, O’Donell, and Tetuán streets, full of restaurants, cafés, and bars where one can spend a memorable evening.





Just in case the extraterrestrials...



Dreamlike arch of giant bamboo on the way to El Yunque National Forest



Ocean Beach in the residential area of Ocean Park, San Juan



hours, she would see that the world kept moving despite her sorrow, a sorrow that would gradually fade to the background, then further back, until it disappeared. Through her tears appeared a sincere, radiant smile..

### Man overboard!

I must mention three standout moments from the trip. The first occurred on an ordinary road when, as if by chance, the sign for the municipality of Lajas appeared, announcing that we were travelling along the PR 303 Extraterrestrial Route. Equally astonishing, though less surreal, was passing beautifully beneath an arch of giant bamboo on the way to El Yunque National Forest, the only tropical rainforest within the United States National Forests. The third was reflecting on the luck of the residents of the tranquil Ocean Park neighbourhood in San Juan, who have an urban beach of the calibre of Ocean Beach right on their doorstep.

And I've saved for last the great epic of the trip, when we boarded the boat bound for Isla Culebra. The day was perfect—sunny and calm. But, as everyone knows, whether at sea or in the mountains, you can trust nothing. In a matter of seconds, the weather turned, and with it our hearts, as we saw that the little nutshell carrying us to the island was on the verge of capsizing. I always carry pills for air turbulence, hot-air balloon ups and downs, and in this case, the rocking of the waves. I told my companions that my grandmother—who they still remind me of when they see me—always said, “Darling, the important thing is to get through it as best you can.” I offered my pills to the crew, took a couple myself, and by the time we reached Isla Culebra, the sun was shining again. The friendly green and hawksbill sea turtles were delighted that we were diving with them—without the need to actually shipwreck.

# traveling

gourmets



## FLAVOURS OF NAPLES

A Journey Through  
Its Cuisine

## SHIZUOCA (JAPÓN)

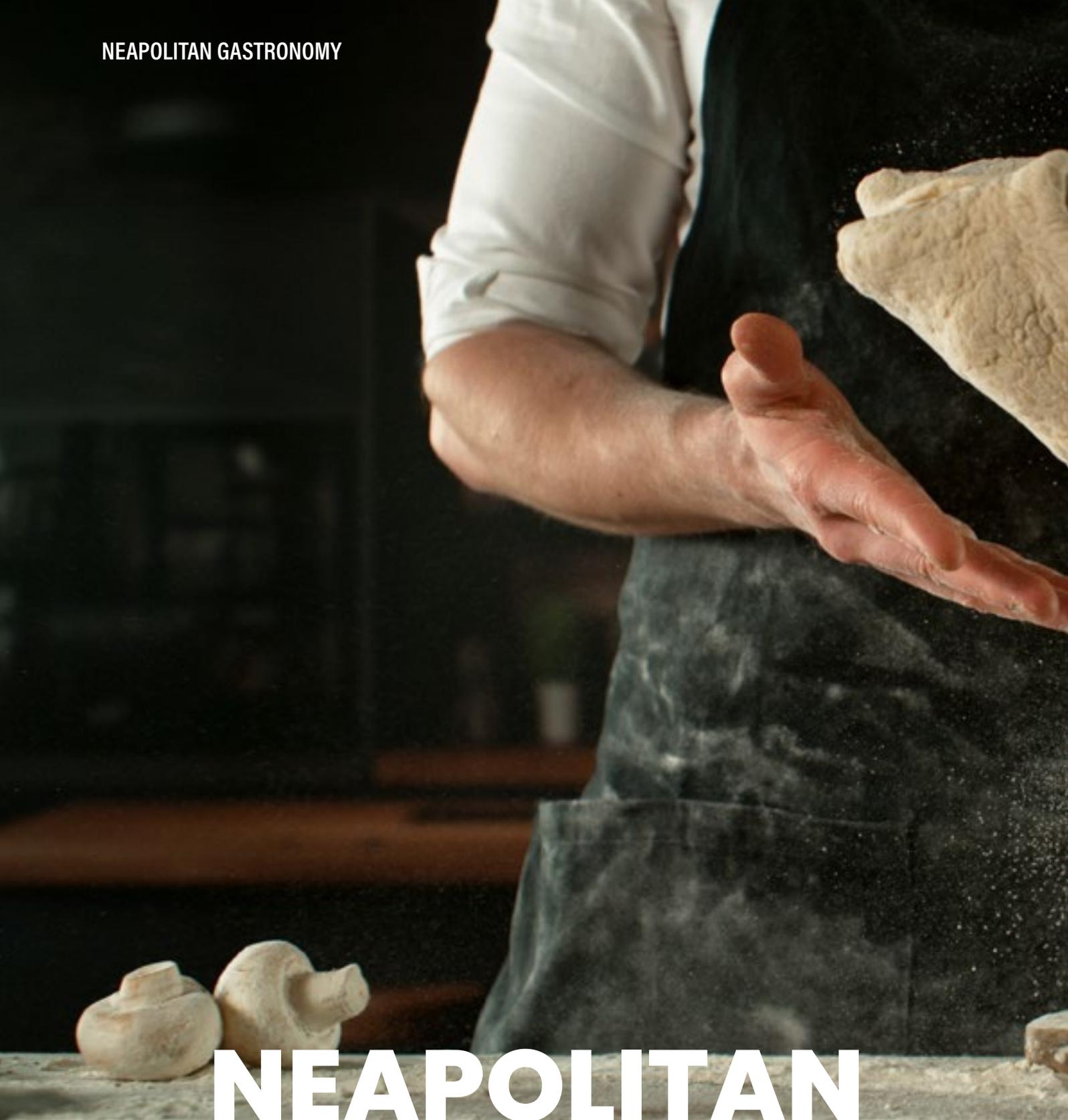
La niebla que esculpe el  
té matcha

## WINERIES WITH SOUL

Monte la Reina Wineries  
Wine Tourism in Toro

## THAI ARTURO SORIA

Thai Cuisine in the  
Heart of Madrid



# NEAPOLITAN GASTRONOMY

Text: Rosario Alonso – Photography: Archive



In Naples, cuisine is not a marketing tool—it is daily life. It smells of slowly cooking tomatoes, fresh basil, and dough fermenting since dawn. Pizza and pasta are not exported symbols, but home-cooked dishes, Sunday family meals, neighbourhood fare, and street-side conversation. Here, people eat with what is available—sea, garden, and patience—and with an ancient certainty: around the table, the world is better understood.



**N**eapolitan gastronomy is not understood as a collection of famous dishes or a list of recipes exported around the world. It is a way of life and a means of self-recognition. In Naples, cuisine has always been both sustenance and celebration, refuge and pride. From the founding of Neápolis by the Greeks to UNESCO's recognition of the art of the pizzaiolo, the city has protected its culinary identity without remaining static.

Tradition here is not an abstract concept. It is breathed in the markets, in family kitchens, in neighbourhood trattorias where the menu changes little and gestures are repeated with precision. The story begins in the 8th century BC, when Greek settlers introduced wheat, olive oil, and a culture of bread that would shape the character of the Neapolitan table. That Mediterranean heritage, based on balance and simplicity, remains present today.

The Romans consolidated this legacy with agricultural improvements and more effective preservation systems. Bread, wine, and oil became daily staples. In the Middle Ages, the city—one of the great capitals of southern Europe—absorbed Arab, Norman, and Spanish influences. Sugar, almonds, citrus fruits, and spices arrived; pastry was refined; and the city integrated innovations without diluting its personality.

In the eighteenth century, under the Bourbons, Neapolitan cuisine experienced a period of splendour. Recipes were organised, trades were defined and popular gastronomy gained prestige. Cooks, bakers and pastry chefs ceased to be merely anonymous artisans and became recognised figures. The great turning point came with the tomato, introduced from the Americas in the sixteenth century and gradually adopted until it became the central element of local cooking. With it, the flavour of the city was redefined.



## The Territory on the Plate

The strength of this cuisine comes from the landscape. Campania combines volcanic soils, fertile gardens, and proximity to the Tyrrhenian Sea. This geography explains the intensity and clarity of its products. The **San Marzano tomato**, grown in the Agro Sarnese-Nocerino on lands enriched by Vesuvius, is elongated, meaty, and balanced in acidity. Its firm pulp makes it ideal for sauces and preserves.

**Mozzarella di bufala campana**, made from buffalo milk, fresh and slightly tangy, is one of southern Italy's great emblems. Its elastic texture and juicy centre demand almost immediate consumption. In a caprese salad or on a white pizza, it reveals its full identity.

**Wheat** has historically been essential in the region. Fine, well-worked flours form the basis of pizzas and pasta. Slow fermentation and mastery of the dough make the difference between an ordinary result and a memorable one.

**The sea** provides cuttlefish, clams, mussels, octopus, prawns, and anchovies, delivered daily to the markets. Neapolitan cuisine treats them with respect: garlic, parsley, lemon, and olive oil are enough. The gardens complete the picture with eggplants, peppers, zucchini, artichokes, escarole, and aromatic herbs cultivated on small family farms.

## Pizza as identity

Speaking of Naples is speaking of pizza—not as a tourist icon, but as a popular food. In the 18th century, bakers began selling discs of dough seasoned with fat, garlic, or tomato to workers and sailors. It was cheap, straightforward food. In 1889, the Margherita—tomato, mozzarella, and basil—became popular, associated with Queen Margherita of Savoy. Older still is the Marinara, with tomato, garlic, oregano, and oil, without cheese. Over time, a precise style became established: slowly fermented dough, a thin centre, high and airy edges, and quick baking in a wood-fired oven. Margherita, Marinara, Cosacca, Diavola, Provola e Pepe, or Filetto form the essential repertoire. Each pizzaiolo adds personal nuances, but respect for the canon is universal.



San Marzano Tomato  
Mozzarella di bufala



Pizza Margherita





Spaghetti alle vongole

Alongside these coexist pasta e patate with melting provola, ziti al ragù slow-cooked for hours, the onion-and-meat genovese, or the vibrant scarpariello. These are recipes born in modest homes, designed to feed and gather people, where time itself is an essential ingredient. On the streets, the cuzzetiello filled with sauce or portions of pasta served in simple containers remind us that eating standing up is also part of the Neapolitan urban rhythm.

### Sweets and coffee

Pastry has convent and courtly roots. Sfogliatella—riccia or frolla—babà al rum, pastiera napoletana, zeppole di San Giuseppe, or Christmas struffoli mark the festive calendar. These treats are tied to family and religious celebrations.

Coffee completes the ritual. Espresso in Naples is short, intense, and social. It is taken at the bar, with the day discussed and shared. It is the natural conclusion to any meal.

### Present and continuity

In the 21st century, Neapolitan cuisine evolves with restraint. New generations of pizzaioli study fermentations and flours; contemporary chefs revisit classic recipes without breaking their logic. It is not about modernising for the sake of trend, but about deepening what has been learned.

Naples continues to cook with honest ingredients, family memory, and trust in flavour. Every plate of pasta, every pizza fresh from the oven, every hand-sliced tomato confirms that here, gastronomy is everyday heritage. Its strength does not lie in fashion, but in continuity.

### Everyday pasta

Pasta sustains the daily table in Naples with a naturalness that requires no showiness. Less visible than pizza in the collective imagination, it is the true domestic cornerstone—the dish that sets the rhythm of the week. The Neapolitan pantry has mastered both dried pasta—made from firm, resilient durum wheat—and fresh pasta, crafted at home or in small workshops. The shape matters: ziti are broken by hand before hitting the pot; spaghetti demand precise cooking, always al dente; short pasta holds thick, hearty sauces best.

To the inland tradition is added the voice of the sea. The frutti di mare—clams, mussels, squid, prawns—find in pasta a direct and honest vehicle. Spaghetti alle vongole, linguine ai frutti di mare, or a simple pasta with mussels and tomato capture the character of the Gulf in seemingly simple dishes, where the perfect timing for seafood and the balance of garlic and oil are crucial.

Sfogliatella y Pastiera



**Wine**

Wine in Campania is an extension of the landscape. Viticulture dates back to Magna Graecia and finds a decisive ally in the volcanic soils. On the slopes of Vesuvius, wines such as Lacryma Christi—both white and red—are produced, with a dry profile and marked mineral character, perfect for gulf fish or a classic pizza.

Inland, altitude adds complexity. Falanghina offers fresh, aromatic whites; Greco, especially from Tufo, displays structure and minerality. Among reds, Aglianico reaches remarkable expression in Taurasi, a denomination recognised for its ageing potential.

Wine is drunk naturally. It accompanies everyday cuisine and reinforces the connection between territory and table. In Naples, tradition and character continue to walk together, also in the glass.



Some of the wines of Campania



One of Naples' markets



Before sitting at the table, it's worth remembering something simple: in Naples, you don't come just to eat—you come to understand. Behind every dish is a story of an open port, bustling markets, and home kitchens where nothing goes to waste. The flavour here doesn't aim to surprise; it aims to convince. And it does so without artifices, with quality ingredients, with time, and with that distinctly Neapolitan way of turning the everyday into something memorable.

## A gastronomic journey through Naples

To understand this tradition in its current context, there is nothing better than visiting a few tables that represent different layers of Neapolitan gastronomy, from contemporary pizza to reinterpreted home cooking.

### Pizzeria Errico Porzio

Errico Porzio is one of the most recognizable names in contemporary Neapolitan pizza. His pizzeria maintains orthodoxy—hydrated dough, careful fermentation, wood-fired oven—but introduces contemporary combinations without losing respect for the canon. It is a good starting point to understand how pizza continues to evolve without breaking from its popular origins.



### Otto Matri sopra il livello del Mare

Located by the sea at the Hotel Royal Continental, OTTO Matri offers a refined interpretation of Neapolitan cuisine, with a strong focus on fish and seafood. Its approach combines tradition, contemporary technique, and a clear attention to the surrounding environment. Here, gastronomy engages in dialogue with the landscape, recalling Naples' historic connection with the Tyrrhenian Sea.



### La Taverna del Bongustaio

This establishment represents the most recognizable and home-style Neapolitan cuisine. Classic recipes, stews, pasta, and hearty dishes evoke the family table. It is the kind of place that shows how true Neapolitan haute cuisine is passed down from generation to generation—without speeches.



### Casa Vittoria

Casa Vittoria focuses on elegant, serene, and well-executed cuisine, based on traditional recipes thoughtfully reinterpreted. It is a stop that demonstrates how Neapolitan gastronomy can adapt to a more contemporary format without losing its identity or roots.



### Trattoria AL 53

This historic and traditional Neapolitan trattoria, located in the heart of Naples, is known for its authentic land-and-sea cuisine. AL 53 is a reference point for pizza lovers seeking absolute fidelity to the Neapolitan style. Here, simplicity done well prevails: few varieties, impeccable ingredients, and precise technique. A reminder that pizza needs no embellishments to be memorable.



### Ristorante JOCA

It represents a Naples open to new gastronomic sensibilities. Without abandoning local ingredients or its Italian foundation, it introduces contemporary nuances and a more creative perspective. It is the perfect conclusion to the journey: a city that respects its past but does not fear to engage with the present.





# Shizuoka

The fog that sculpts the matcha

Text and photos: Alejandro and Luis Paadín - [alejandro@paadin.es](mailto:alejandro@paadin.es)

Although the drink that has experienced the greatest growth over the past five years has its roots in imperial China, it would not be until its arrival in Japan that it would reach its true zenith, transforming into the product of technical refinement and ritual aesthetics that characterises it today.

**T**racing the origin of tea involves venturing into a territory where legend and reality overlap until they become indistinguishable. Tradition places its birth in mythical China, when Emperor Shen Nong, around 2737 BC, accidentally saw camellia leaves fall into his boiling water. That fortuitous gesture is said to have given rise to one of the most influential beverages in human history: tea. For centuries, tea was consumed in the form of infused leaves, with varying degrees of fermentation and fragmentation depending on the region, but it was during the Tang dynasty that it began to be pressed into bricks to facilitate transport, a format that encouraged crushing and the consumption of particles in the infusion.

It would not be until the Song dynasty (960–1279) that the true revolution occurred. Buddhist monks noticed that fragmented tea offered a more concentrated drink than infused leaves, and so they decided to grind it into a fine powder, which they then whisked with hot water. Tea thus ceased to be a simple infusion and became a discipline. The repeated gesture of whisking and the green foam it produced transformed its consumption into an exercise of concentration, facilitating access to *sanmei*, a state of full absorption and focused mind. It was not just a drink: it was a method. And in that transformation, the ritual path that would soon reach its fullest expression in Japan began to take shape.

In 1191, the monk Eisai brought this practice to Japan along with tea seeds and a conviction: that beverage not only stimulated the body but also refined the spirit. His treatise *Kissa Yōjōki* consolidated that vision. In the archipelago, what had been a courtly trend in China transformed into an aesthetic discipline. During the Muromachi period, powdered tea was adopted by the warrior aristocracy and, with Sen no Rikyū, crystallised into *Sadō*, the Way of Tea.

A decisive milestone was the gradual refinement of shading techniques between the 16th and 17th centuries. This technique, intended to modulate light and alter the



plant's metabolism, increases the concentration of L-theanine and chlorophyll, softens astringency, and accentuates umami. The result was no longer the ground tea inherited from China, but a new, refined, and deeply Japanese product. Thus, although matcha has its roots in ancient China, it was in Japan that it reached its fullest technical, ritual, and sensory expression.

### **Shizuoka, the historical terroir of matcha**

Talking about Shizuoka is talking about structure. If Uji symbolises ceremonial tradition and Kagoshima represents the climatic modernity of the south, Shizuoka embodies the backbone of Japanese tea. For more than a century, it has been the country's great productive engine, the territory where tea ceased to be the preserve of religious elites and became a regional economic driver and a strategic national product. Situated between the Pacific Ocean and Mount Fuji, the prefecture has historically accounted for around a third of Japan's total tea production. Its volcanic soils, rich in minerals and well-drained, alternate with humid valleys and open pla-

## SHIZUOKA

teaux, allowing both mountain cultivation and extensive mechanised plantations. This duality explains its ability to produce volume without relinquishing a genuine identity.

The true turning point came during the Meiji era. After the Restoration of 1868, Japan needed to modernise its agriculture and generate foreign currency through exports. Shizuoka knew how to read that historic moment. The Makinohara plateau was progressively transformed into a vast cultivable area, developing irrigation infrastructure, roads, and cooperative systems that professionalised production. Tea, especially sencha (the main type of Japanese green tea), became an exportable, standardised, and competitive product. Sencha was — and remains — the economic heart of the region. Shizuoka perfected steaming, drying, and rolling techniques that defined the profile of modern Japanese green tea. In areas such as Kakegawa, Fukamushi, or deep steaming, was developed, which reduces astringency and enhances colour and texture in the cup. This technical mastery allowed the prefecture to supply both domestic and international markets with a coherent and recognisable product.

But Shizuoka is not just about volume. In inland areas such as Kawane or Honyama, morning mists soften radiation and moderate thermal peaks, promoting slower growth and potentially finer leaves. They do not replace pre-harvest shading, but they predispose the plant to a more balanced expression. This internal diversity allows



small family farms to coexist with large mechanised cooperatives, in a hybrid model that combines tradition and scale — something uncommon in the Japanese agricultural landscape. Within this structural context, contemporary matcha emerges. Historically, Shizuoka was a land of sencha rather than tencha (the specific leaf intended for grinding into matcha). However, the exponential growth in global demand over the last decade has required redirecting part of the *Camellia sinensis* plantations (the tea plant) towards shaded cultivation, often in versatile plantations that can be restructured according to annual demand.

The transition from sencha to tencha is not a simple varietal adjustment: it involves altering calendars, installing shading structures, and reprogramming plant metabolism. Under shade, photosynthesis slows, the concentration of amino acids such as L-theanine increases, and the synthesis of catechins responsible for astringency decreases. The result is a leaf richer in umami and more intensely coloured, an essential base for high-quality matcha.

If matcha today is a global symbol of Japanese sophistication, its agricultural foundation finds in Shizuoka a territory of balance. Between the Pacific Ocean and Mount Fuji, the prefecture combines well-drained volcanic soils with a diverse topography that alternates productive plateaux and humid valleys. The temperate, humid climate, with mild winters and regular rainfall, completes a stable vegetative cycle, naturally reducing light before artificial



shading. In Shizuoka, geology, mist, and light control are not isolated elements, but gears of a single agricultural system that has learned to turn landscape into productive structure.

### From ritual to superfood

For centuries, matcha in Japan was not an everyday drink, but a symbol. Linked to Zen Buddhism and Sadō, its consumption was associated with concentration and introspection rather than simple gustatory pleasure. Whisking the green powder was not a domestic gesture, but an exercise in inner discipline.

This spiritual dimension also shaped its social role. Until just a few decades ago, matcha occupied a discreet place outside formal ceremonies. It was common in ritual contexts, including funerals and commemorative events, where its colour and symbolism evoked calm, transition, and continuity. More than a gastronomic gift, it was a present imbued with spiritual significance.

While sencha became established as the everyday tea, matcha remained a ceremonial and occasional product. Its laborious preparation and price reinforced this almost testimonial status.

The change came with the 21st century. Scientific studies began to analyse its composition in depth: high concentrations of catechins, a notable presence of L-theanine, and a powerful antioxidant profile. Unlike traditional infusion, matcha involves ingesting the whole



leaf, which amplifies its nutritional impact. The combination of caffeine and theanine came to be understood as a form of sustained alertness and stable concentration.

In a global context of functional foods, matcha transitioned from ritual object to wellness icon. What was once a spiritual discipline became a contemporary superfood, without entirely losing the calm that defines it.

### Beyond the chawan: Gastronomic matcha

For centuries, matcha found in the chawan its natural vessel and on the silence of the tatami its symbolic context. However, in the last decade it has expanded its culinary territory to become a transversal ingredient in contemporary gastronomy.

In Japan, its bitter and vegetal profile has transcended the ceremonial sphere to be incorporated into modern confectionery — cookies, mochis, cakes, creams, and ice creams — where it acts as a structural counterpoint to sweetness. But its expansion is not limited to the sweet universe. In haute cuisine, it appears sprinkled over fatty fish, incorporated into light sauces, or used as an aromatic element in stocks and emulsions. Its ability to contribute umami and a slight astringency makes it a tool for balance.

Outside Japan, matcha has been embraced by artisanal bakeries, French patisserie, and contemporary mixology. From a ritual object, it has become a global gastronomic language, without losing the tension between concentration and refinement that defines it.



# Where the Paadíns eat and drink

## Ren – Sake, cuisine, and gatherings

11-29 Mabuchi, Suruga Ward, Shizuoka

Tel.: +81 542 939 309

An izakaya (traditional tapas-style eatery) where shoes are left at the entrance. A genuine informal Japanese space where food and drink share the spotlight, and social interaction sets the rhythm. The menu revolves around an outstanding selection of sakes, carefully curated. In the kitchen, smoked eel shines — intense yet delicate — seasonal sashimi is prepared with precision, and the gyozas are perfectly balanced, crisp on the outside and juicy inside.



## Fujinokuni Cha no Miyako Museum

3053-2 Kanayafujimicho, Shimada, Shizuoka

Tel.: +81 547 465 588

This is Japan's premier tea interpretation centre and the best gateway to the world of matcha in Shizuoka. It explains the historical evolution of tea, from its arrival from China to industrialisation in the Meiji era, when the prefecture became a major production power. It provides technical details on the processing of sencha, tencha, and matcha, showcasing both historical and modern machinery. Additionally, it explores shading scientifically — key to matcha's umami — and offers practical workshops and tastings, all with views over the Makinohara tea fields.

## Sunaku Kokoro

3-14 Minamicho, Suruga Ward, Shizuoka

This cocktail bar is the project of young entrepreneur Takahiko Yoshimura, who has created a genuine drinking spot where various Japanese teas take centre stage, especially matcha, making it a pilgrimage site for those looking to discover new ways to enjoy it. Nearby is a specialty café, Organic Matcha Cafe Nagomi, which works with premium organic matcha from the region and offers customisable lattes and infused sweets.



**Otokichi**

883 Asukubo Okugumi, Aoi-ku, Shizuoka  
Tel.: +81 543 955 777

Restaurant of the former Otokichi public house, housed in a centenary kominka in Okusizu, where diners sit on traditional tatami in an intimate, rural setting. Its cuisine highlights local products in a seasonal and unhurried format. Among its specialties is tororo, a traditional Japanese tuber (mountain yamaimo) grated to a creamy texture and served over hot white rice. Simple in appearance but deeply comforting, it captures the essence of the region in a single bowl.



**Genbu Matcha, Japanese Ceremonial Tea**

Shuchi-Gun, Shizuoka  
genbumatcha.com

One of the most recognisable brands in Europe, it bases its identity on the selection of high-quality tencha from Shizuoka, working primarily with the Saemidori cultivar in spring harvests, considered the finest and most elegant of the year. Although its flagship range is the Barista Selection (with a slightly higher roasted degree that imparts biscuit-like notes), it also offers ceremonial selections in very limited editions. It features an intense green colour, creamy texture, and a balanced profile between vegetal sweetness and umami, suited both for ceremony and contemporary premium consumption.

**Kuruma Sushi**

2-6 Nakada, Suruga Ward, Shizuoka  
Tel.: +81 542 860 777

The itamae (sushi master) has over forty years of experience behind the counter. Trained in the orthodox Edomae style, his cuisine is defined by precise knife work, millimetric balance of the rice, and absolute respect for the produce of Suruga Bay. Without artifices or contemporary concessions, his omakase is an exercise in refined technique and unhurried rhythm.





# La Torre

Text: Jose A. Muñoz – Photography: Finca La Torre

In Bobadilla, just fifteen minutes from Antequera, the landscape opens into gentle hills where the olive tree defines the horizon. There stands Finca La Torre, an olive mill that has turned extra virgin olive oil into an exercise in agricultural precision and sensory sensitivity. It is not just another brand on the vast Andalusian olive oil map: it is a project that has successfully combined heritage, technical knowledge, and a very clear idea of what a great EVOO should be.



**R**oman remains found in the gardens testify that olives were already being cultivated and pressed on these lands. Later, around 1260, the watchtower that gives the estate its name was built, still dominating the landscape from one of its hills today. Over the centuries, the property went through various stages until falling into disuse. In the 20th century, a German community revived its activity under biodynamic agricultural principles, with limited production. In the early years of the new millennium, the estate passed into the hands of Swiss entrepreneur Daniel S. Aegerter, who, upon discovering its potential, decided to launch an ambitious project supported by specialised professionals.

The contemporary era began in 2011 with the appointment of agronomist Víctor Pérez to management. Since then, Finca La Torre has defined a production philosophy based on autonomy, sustainability, and absolute respect for the raw material. The estate operates under ecological and biodynamic principles: no pesticides or chemical products, minimal intervention, and a system aimed at self-sufficiency of resources. The idea is simple yet demanding: care for the soil and the tree so that the fruit expresses its character without interference.

The olive grove covers 240 hectares within a total property of 380 hectares, including pastures, pine forests, and cultivated land. There are around 48,000 trees, combining centenary olives — mainly Hojiblanca — with younger plantations of Arbequina, Picudo, and Cornicabra. In recent years, part of the traditional grove has been renewed, so that currently about one third are centenary trees and two thirds are young trees. This varietal and generational diversity allows for highly defined profiles without losing identity.





The declared objective is to produce oils in the purest and freshest way possible. To achieve this, harvesting is early, generally from the first half of October. Olives are picked while still green, before full colour change, sacrificing yield in favour of aromatic intensity and complexity. The result is greener, fruitier oils with greater vibrancy on the palate. Extraction is carried out cold, just a few hours after harvesting. Only the quantity the mill can press in a single day is harvested, avoiding prolonged storage that could compromise the fruit. Here, control of time is a key quality tool.

The result is expressed in four single-variety oils that the estate defines as “signature EVOOs”: Hojiblanca, Arbequina, Picudo, and Cornicabra. Each reflects the character of its olive and a precise technical interpretation.

**Hojiblanca**, sourced from trees between 100 and 130 years old, is the estate’s benchmark. It presents an intense fruitiness with notes of freshly cut grass, olive leaf, and tomato plant. On the palate, it shows a light bitterness at the start and a progressive, balanced pungency, with hints of green almond and apple. It is a structured, harmonious, and persistent oil.

**Arbequina** offers a gentler profile, medium-fruity, with aromas evoking fresh grass, banana, and apple. Its entry is sweet, with a light pepperiness and a balanced, fluid body, making it especially versatile in the kitchen.

**Picudo** stands out for its aromatic intensity, with a marked presence of green notes. On the palate, it combines initial sweetness, moderate bitterness, and persistent pungency, with an aftertaste recalling green almond and fresh fruit.

**Cornicabra**, true to its variety, begins sweet on the palate but evolves towards more pronounced bitterness and pungency, offering character and depth.

This range is complemented by the One collection, made from a meticulous selection of olives picked on the first day of harvest, when the fruit is still completely green. From this come One Organic Hojiblanca and One Organic Arbequina, conceived as the ultimate expression of freshness and aromatic concentration. These are carefully curated, limited editions that underscore the estate’s commitment to excellence.



Beyond the sheer number of national and international awards received, what defines Finca La Torre is consistency. Year after year, the estate strives to maintain a constant organoleptic profile for each variety, despite climatic and agricultural variations. This regularity is not the result of chance, but of meticulous agronomic planning and rigorous control in the mill.

In a country that produces nearly 40% of the world's extra virgin olive oil, standing out is no easy feat. Finca La Torre has achieved it by relying on its territory, technical knowledge, and a clear sense of identity. Here, olive oil is not just a gastronomic product: it is the result of a landscape cultivated with patience, a harvest carefully measured day by day, and a production process that treats time as an ally. An exercise in precision that makes each harvest a new starting point.



**finca  
la torre**





Wineries

# MONTE LA REINA

Text: Clara Serrano Vega – Photography: Bodegas Monte La Reina



In the open landscape of Toro, where the Duero sketches wide horizons and the vineyards cling to austere soils, stands Bodegas Monte la Reina, one of the estates that has best captured the character of this land. Here, Tinta de Toro —the local adaptation of Tempranillo— finds depth, concentration, and a recognisable identity. The winery has built its portfolio around a clear idea: to offer wines with personality, capable of reflecting the terroir while also engaging with different consumer profiles.

Although the estate also produces more relaxed lines under the Carolina label, it is the wines under the D.O. Toro that define its essence. Six reds and two whites condense the power, structure, and colour intensity typical of the denomination, but with a measured, thoughtful production tailored to each reference.

### Tinta de Toro in Six Interpretations

The red wine collection is built around six single-variety Tinta de Toro wines: Joven, Roble, Crianza, Cuvée Privée, Vendimia Seleccionada, and Inaraja. Each reflects a distinct winemaking intention, from the most direct expression of fruit to the complexity imparted by extended barrel ageing.

Joven avoids wood and focuses on freshness. Red fruit notes —strawberry, raspberry— dominate, accompanied by a subtle milky hint from well-integrated malolactic fermentation. It is a straightforward wine, easy to sip, maintaining Toro's characteristic colour intensity without losing lightness.

Roble spends six months ageing in French oak barrels. This wood influence brings balance and roundness without masking the fruit. On the palate, it shows volume and a glyceric texture that supports a clean, persistent taste intensity.

With 12 months of ageing, Crianza takes a more classic line. Dry, broad, and balanced, it offers notes of fine wood, black fruits, and candied plums. The structure is firm, but the entry is smooth, in keeping with the style that has made the denomination famous.

Cuvée Privée, one of the estate's most recognised labels, is made from overripe grapes and spends 14 months in new French and Caucasian oak barrels. Despite this intensive ageing, it retains the primary expression of the grape. On the nose and palate, ripe fruit, toasted notes, and a mineral undertone coexist, adding depth.

Vendimia Seleccionada and Inaraja come from centenary vines, a vegetal heritage that marks a difference in Toro. Vendimia Seleccionada, aged 14 months in new French oak, stands out for its elegance and mature, sweet tannins, the result of a balance between optimally ripe fruit and well-integrated wood.



Carolina Inaraja

**Monte la Reina welcomes visitors with a relaxed and personal wine tourism experience: tours of the winery, guided tastings, and the opportunity to stay at its vineyard hotel, allowing guests to understand the wine from the very landscape that produces it.**

Inaraja, the winery's flagship, extends ageing to 16 months in French oak. It is a powerful, balsamic wine, with smoky and toasted notes and a mineral undertone that reflects the soil. Its solid structure and persistence position it as the most ambitious reference in the portfolio.

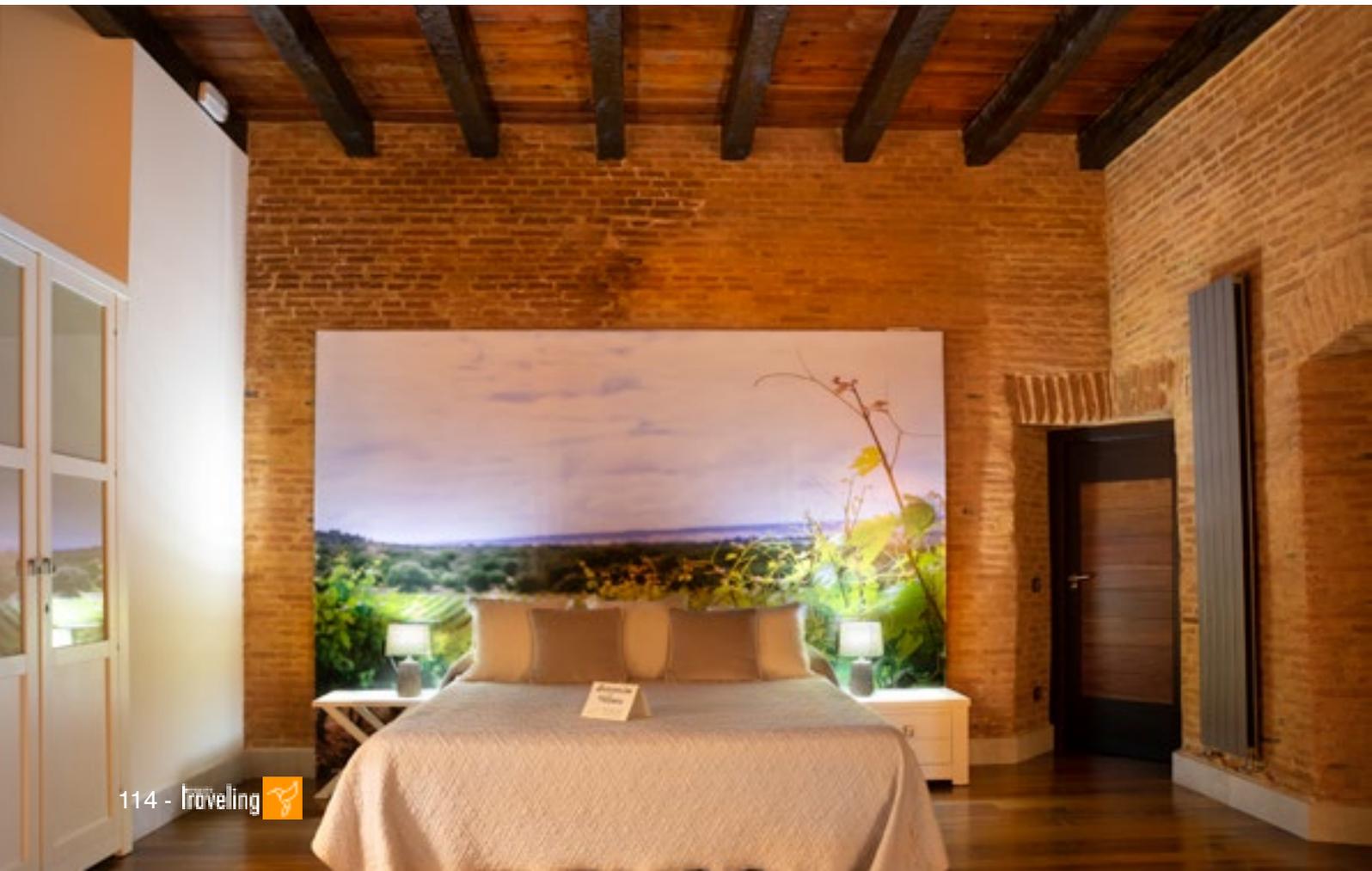
In all cases, the production process follows a precise technical scheme: cold maceration in stainless steel or concrete tanks, fermentation under controlled temperature, and, for most wines, malolactic fermentation in the same tank. The goal is not to standardise, but to adjust each wine to its profile, preserving the identity of Tinta de Toro.

### **Verdelho as a Differentiating Element**

What sets Monte la Reina apart within the denomination is its commitment to Verdejo. The winery was a pioneer in the D.O. Toro in producing this white variety, traditionally associated with other areas of Castilla y León. Here, it finds soils and climate suitable for balanced ripening and alcohol levels around 12.5%.

Harvest takes place in early to mid-September, when the grapes reach optimal ripeness. After pneumatic pressing, the must ferments in stainless steel tanks and is aged on its lees, seeking volume and complexity. The Verdejo presents as intense and creamy, with good acidity and a slightly bitter finish, a characteristic of the variety. On the

One of the rooms in the hotel located in the castle



nose, notes of pineapple and apple appear in its riper expression, adding structure and persistence.

The barrel-fermented version is the most distinctive offering. It spends five to seven months in French oak and then rests up to eight years in the bottle, an uncommon approach for white wines. The result is an expressive wine, with nuances of ripe fruit and white flowers, designed not for immediate consumption but for evolution and complexity.

Overall, Monte la Reina has built a coherent and well-defined range. The reds explore different interpretations of Tinta de Toro, from youthful freshness to the concentration of centenary vines. The whites introduce a differentiating note within the denomination. There are no superfluous gestures: only vineyard, technique, and a clear desire to interpret Toro with its own personality.

Beyond the vineyard and winery, Monte la Reina has developed a strong focus on wine tourism, conceived as a natural extension of its winemaking project. Visits allow guests to tour the facilities, understand the production process —from grape reception to barrel ageing— and conclude with guided tastings that contextualise the estate's different references. The experience is complemented by the hotel, integrated into the estate's surroundings, offering accommodation in the heart of nature, surrounded by vineyards and the silence of Castilla. A proposal designed for those seeking to understand wine from its origin and experience Toro calmly, without intermediaries.



MONTE  
LA REINA





# Em Sherif Madrid

Lebanese Cuisine Inspired by Family Tradition

Text: Rosario Alonso – Photography: Em Sherif Madrid

Bokjat jebneh



**M**adrid has been experiencing years of extraordinary gastronomic vitality. On this ever-evolving map, certain venues aim to go beyond the mere act of eating to offer a complete experience. Among them stands Em Sherif Madrid, which seeks to revive lunch as a moment of slow, generous enjoyment, rich in nuance and inspired by the culinary traditions of the Mediterranean Levant.

Located on Calle de Alcalá, just a few steps from El Retiro Park, the restaurant presents itself as an urban refuge in the heart of the city. A place to step into almost on impulse after a walk in the park, between meetings, or simply to pause the day for a while. The concept revolves around a clear idea: to restore to midday the role it has played for centuries in Mediterranean cultures, where meals were a necessary pause to share and enjoy.

Em Sherif's cuisine draws directly from Lebanese tradition, but through a contemporary lens that respects the origin of the recipes. The group's philosophy, known for championing family-based culinary traditions and Levantine hospitality, is reflected in a menu designed for lunch that balances authenticity and lightness.

The starting point is often the mezzes, one of the great expressions of Near Eastern cuisine. These small dishes, served hot or cold, invite tasting, sharing, and conversation. On the table appear preparations that deliver intense yet balanced flavours, where olive oil, fresh herbs, lemon, and spices create a culinary language full of personality.

Alongside them, the menu features fresh salads and lighter dishes for those seeking a quicker lunch without sacrificing the depth of Lebanese cuisine. There is also room for heartier preparations that showcase the richness of this gastronomy, shaped by centuries of cultural exchange in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The result is a gastronomic proposal that maintains the generous spirit so characteristic of the Levantine table, adapted to Madrid's contemporary pace. Here, diners can choose a brief, straightforward lunch or extend the meal leisurely, as the best Mediterranean traditions dictate.

The experience is designed with this flexibility in mind. Em Sherif Madrid works both for a quick break between professional commitments and for a relaxed gathering with friends or family. Even those wishing to simply enjoy a coffee with dessert and watch the city's rhythm from a quiet table will find a place here.

Beyond the cuisine, the restaurant pays special attention to the ambiance. The space conveys elegance without feeling distant. Contemporary décor, combined with attentive and friendly service, creates a welcoming atmosphere that encourages lingering. This hospitality, deeply rooted in Lebanese culture, is one of the defining traits of the project.

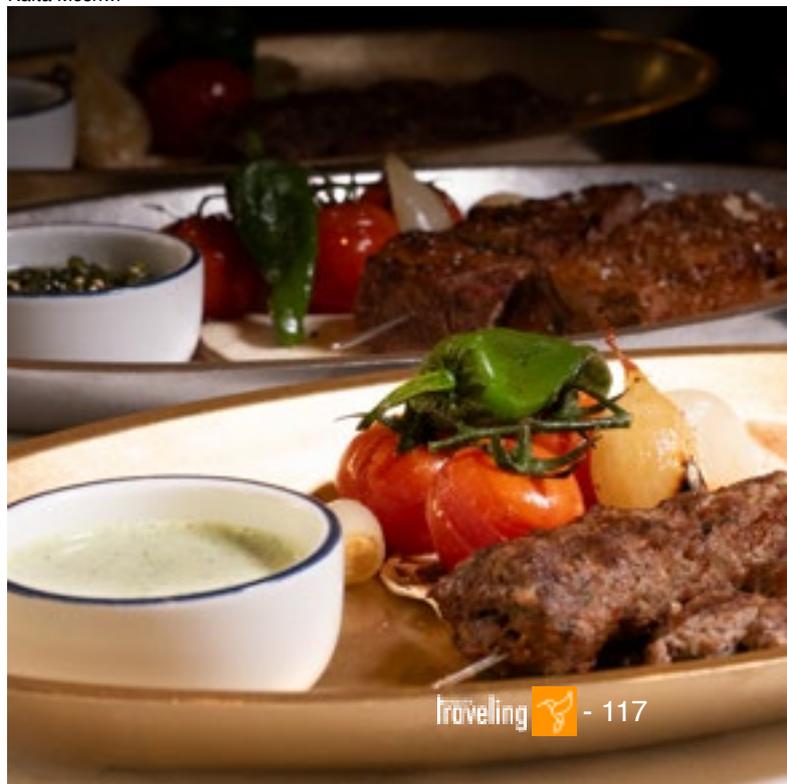
In a city where daily life can be hectic, Em Sherif offers something as simple as it is necessary: a moment to stop and eat well. To rediscover the pleasure of a lunch that is not just a task between errands, but a moment to savour, converse, and enjoy the table.

Its strategic location, just minutes from one of Madrid's most emblematic parks, El Retiro, reinforces this idea of a gastronomic refuge in the city's heart. A place where the Eastern Mediterranean meets Madrid life, and where Lebanese culinary tradition naturally adapts to urban living.

With this concept, Em Sherif Madrid establishes itself as a destination for those seeking cuisine full of character and a distinctive gastronomic experience. A pause that, for a moment, reminds us that eating can also be a way to travel.



Yasmina Hayek

Artichoke  
Kafta Meshwi



# USKAR

Text and photography: Jose A. Muñoz

**E** At number 11 Alonso del Barco Street, in the heart of the Embajadores neighbourhood, is one of those restaurants that grows naturally with its surroundings. Uskar began as a neighbourhood bar and today is a gastronomic restaurant that has evolved without losing its essence. Behind it is the Granadian chef José Miguel Valdivieso, a cook who sees cuisine as an exercise in honesty, where the product dictates the path.

Recognised with a Solete from the Repsol Guide, Uskar has earned its own place on Madrid's gastronomic scene thanks to a proposal that appears simple but is highly refined in execution. The foundation is clear: absolute respect for the raw material, unpretentious cooking, and a menu built around three well-defined pillars — land, sea, and garden. Each dish speaks of origin, seasonality, and specific producers.

The connection to the chef's native land is evident. Segureño lamb with Protected Geographical Indication, from the Huéscar region in Granada, holds a central place on the menu, making Uskar the only restaurant in Madrid to offer this product. The shoulder is slow-roasted for twelve hours, aromatised with thyme, rosemary, and garlic, perfectly capturing the spirit of the house: patient cooking, deep flavour, and technique in service of the product. Other preparations include lamb neck brioche or slow-cooked shank.

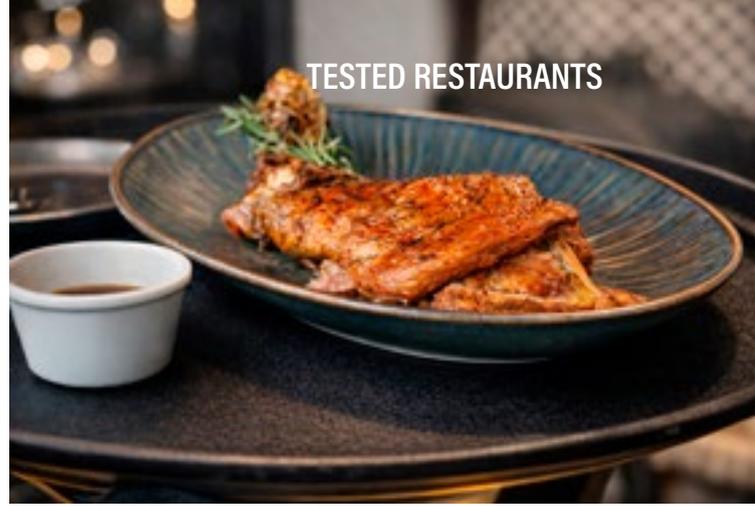
The sea arrives from Tarifa with wild bluefin tuna, caught sustainably and delivered to the restaurant within 24 hours. Valdivieso treats it with respect and restraint, as shown by his grilled tuna chop, made from the lower loin aged for at least a week and finished in a kamado, a Japanese ceramic oven that imparts a delicate smoky touch.

The third pillar of Uskar's cuisine is organic vegetables from the Madrid countryside, sourced from the Parque Agroecológico Soto del Grillo. These ingredients are used in dishes such as roasted chinocordobesa eggplant with salmorejo and goat cheese, cauliflower with fried egg and truffle, or confit Tudela artichokes with Black Angus cecina and green pepper.

The menu is brief and dynamic, designed for sharing or leisurely enjoyment. More gastronomic dishes coexist with nods to traditional tapas: baby squid or ham croquettes, Russian salad with piparras foam, shrimp fritters, or crispy pork belly with kimchi mayonnaise. There are also two tasting menus that allow diners to explore the chef's cuisine across several courses.

The experience is completed by a wine cellar overseen by sommelier Raúl García. It gathers around 150 references, showcasing over 200 grape varieties, with special attention to small producers, options by the glass, and non-alcoholic alternatives.

Bar, dining room, and terrace coexist in a space that preserves the neighbourhood spirit, with a loyal clientele and a welcoming atmosphere. Uskar demonstrates that good cooking does not need grand artifices when it is built on quality product, territory, and a clear idea of what the plate should convey.



Segureño Lamb Roasted in Its Own Juices



Chino-Cordobesa Eggplant with Salmorejo, Goat Cheese, and Chinese Sauce



Calçots with Black Garlic in a Wok



Restaurant  
**USKAR**  
MADRID



# Thai Arturo Soria



**O**n Arturo Soria Street, away from the fast pace of the city centre, there is a restaurant that invites you to travel without leaving Madrid. Over the years, Thai Arturo Soria has become one of the most recognisable destinations for those seeking authentic Thai cuisine and a setting where the dining experience can be enjoyed in a calm, unhurried way.

The restaurant occupies a spacious location on this well-known avenue in northeast Madrid. Upon entering, the impression is of momentarily leaving the city to step into a small oasis. This feeling is partly due to its garden and terrace surrounded by greenery, one of the defining features of the place. Among plants and well-spaced tables, the atmosphere acquires a rare tranquility in the capital.

The interior continues this same sense of serenity. The décor draws on traditional Thai aesthetics, with wood, ornamental carvings, and details that evoke ancient Siam. Soft lighting and balanced spaces

create a harmonious environment, reflecting a core aspect of Thai culture that extends to their approach to dining. This is not a restaurant designed for rushed meals, but for enjoying both time and surroundings.

The cuisine follows the same line of respect for tradition. The menu brings together some of the most representative Thai dishes, prepared with the herbs, spices, and sauces that define this cuisine. The result is a selection where the contrasts typical of Southeast Asia appear: sweet, salty, sour, and spicy flavours combine to create balanced, aromatic dishes.

Starters allow diners to begin their journey through this gastronomy with classic preparations. Highlights include crispy spring rolls, one



## TESTED RESTAURANTS

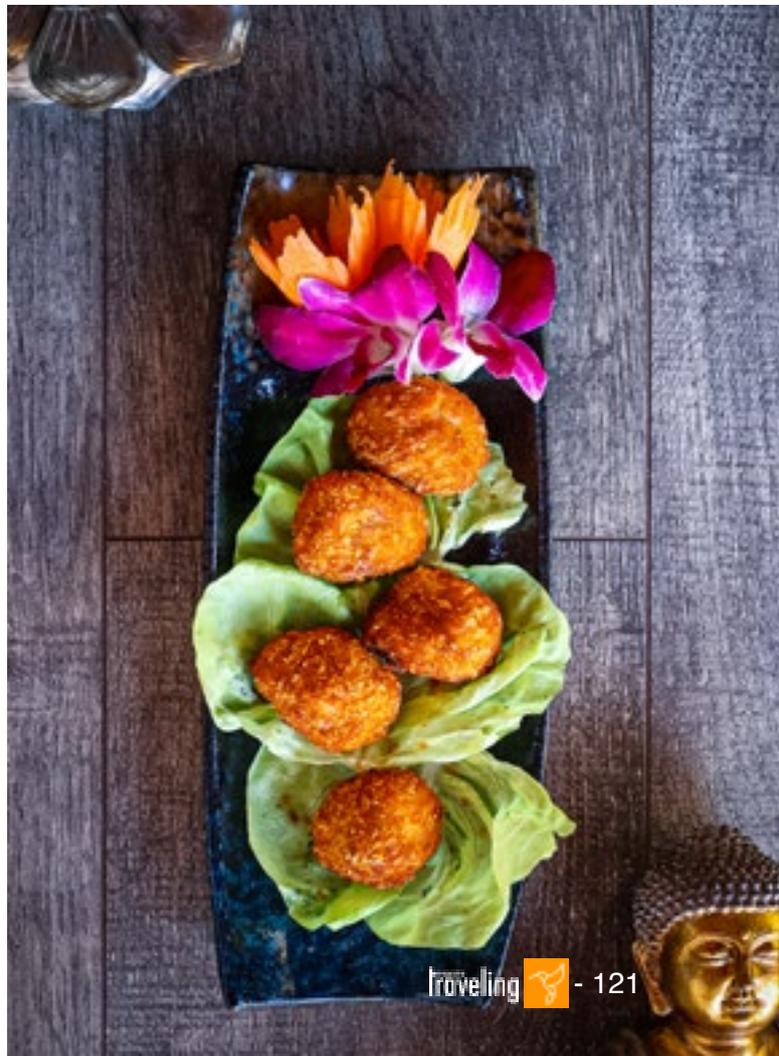
of the most popular Thai dishes, marinated curry skewers, and small recipes inspired by street food, which is so central to the country's culinary culture.

A cornerstone of the menu is the Thai curries, made with coconut milk and spice pastes that provide depth of flavour. Red curry and green curry are two of the best-known examples, reflecting the aromatic character of this cuisine. Typically served with jasmine rice, they are among the restaurant's most iconic dishes.

Pad Thai is also a staple, the famous stir-fried rice noodles with egg, vegetables, tamarind sauce, and peanuts. Originating in Thailand's popular kitchens, this dish has become an international symbol of its cuisine and remains one of the most requested by diners.

The menu is rounded out with dishes featuring chicken, beef, seafood, and vegetables, allowing diners to explore a variety of flavours from Thailand. In all of them, the use of characteristic ingredients such as lemongrass, lime, cilantro, and galangal

Fried Shrimp Balls



## THAI ARTURO SORIA



Rice Noodles with Shrimp and Red Chili



Red Curry with Chicken and Thai Jasmine Rice

is evident, providing freshness and a distinctive personality to the Thai cuisine.

Thai Arturo Soria also offers a variety of spaces — indoor dining rooms, a covered terrace, and a garden— capable of hosting both relaxed meals and group celebrations or meetings. With capacity for over a hundred diners, the restaurant has established itself as a regular gathering point for those seeking authentic Asian cuisine in Madrid.

Over time, the restaurant has maintained a clear mission: to bring Thai gastronomy to the capital while respecting its flavours and character. It is a place where diners can explore this complex, aromatic cuisine in a calm setting, almost unexpected in the city, surrounded by greenery and with the feeling of having discovered a small Asian garden in Madrid.

## Thai Arturo Soria



Assorted Thai Appetisers

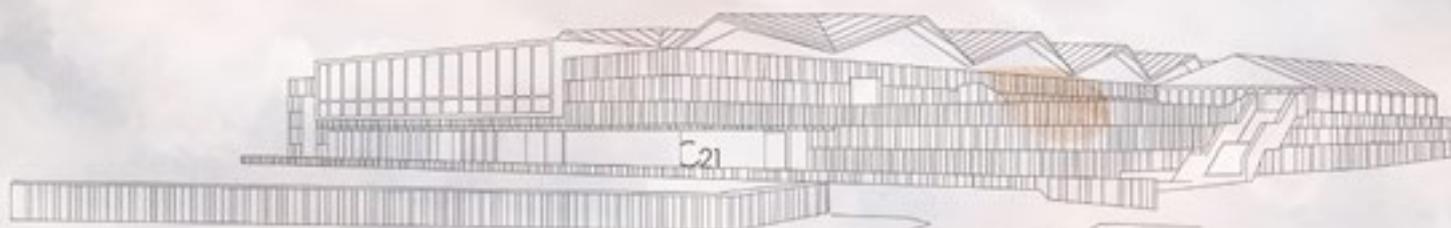


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