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TRAVEL & GASTRONOMY MAGAZINE

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KYRGYZSTAN
Mountains and traditions

COSTA RICA
The power of volcanoes

SALOU
A town to fall for

5 BREAKS
for lovers of markets, cafés and good food

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Welcome aboard

With November well under way, Christmas is creeping into shop windows and conversations. It's time to think about getting together, and perhaps to set aside a few days for a change of scene. In this issue we follow the festive trail from **Neapolitan nativity scenes**, where devotion meets folk humour, to the Christmas show at **Puy du Fou**. We suggest **five winter breaks** for anyone who enjoys browsing markets, taking a break in a café and discovering Christmas through its sweet treats.

Our writer takes us to **Kyrgyzstan**, a land of mountains and traditions. In **Costa Rica**, volcanoes shape the landscape, while in **Nice** we discover the Riviera in its quieter months. We visit **Évora and Beja** to get to know the Alentejo, stop off in **Salou** and explore Sardinia through its mines and wine culture. In Madrid, the buildings of the **Gran Vía** tell the story of the city.

We also look up at the skies over **Albacete** and follow the trail of the three crosses of **Trasmoz**. Music takes us to Abéné in Senegal, and Manena opens her window onto autumn in Kyoto. For a rest, we pick two palaces in very different settings: Palacio Tondón by the Ebro in Briñas, and M'Ar de Ar Aqueduto in Évora.

In Traveling Gourmets, we trace eight roots of the cooking of **Badajoz** and visit Marqués de Riscal in **Rioja Alavesa**. In Madrid, we revisit afternoon tea at the Ritz and look back on three decades of Cantonese cooking at Tse Yang. In Seville, La Maestría brings us closer to traditional Andalusian cooking in the heart of the old town.

I hope these pages inspire a trip, a meal shared with friends or a good conversation over the holidays. Merry Christmas and safe travels. Thank you for joining us. **The journey starts now.**



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Christmas market in Stockholm
© Archive



COVER
Afternoon tea at the Ritz
© Hotel Ritz Madrid

Kyrgyzstan

Mountains and traditions

Words & photos: Ana Gutiérrez Morales - anagutierrezm13@gmail.com



Kok-Moinok Canyon



Kyrgyzstan, in the heart of Central Asia, is a country of striking mountains, vast lakes and seemingly endless landscapes. Its identity is deeply bound up with its nomadic roots. Even today, you can find families who spend the summer months high in the mountains, living in traditional yurts and looking after the flocks that graze in those high pastures.

Travelling in Kyrgyzstan is a way to discover a culture shaped by hospitality, tradition and a close connection to nature. Old customs sit alongside modern life, and a journey here often means leaving the usual routes behind to get closer to the people who call these places home and the landscapes that have shaped their way of life.

We set out with our local guide, Beksultan, and his travel company, Beks_Adventure. He put together an itinerary for us and adapted it along the way to suit our interests, preferences and needs. His knowledge of the country and his easy manner helped us feel at home and see a more personal side of Kyrgyzstan as we travelled through the country with him.

Our journey began in Bishkek, the capital, where we took the road to Kyzart, the small village where our guide's family lives. Little by little, the road carried us away from the bustle of the city and into increasingly spectacular scenery. Our first stop was Kok-Moinok Canyon, where extraordinary rock formations gave us our first glimpse of the rugged, untamed landscapes that we would come to recognise as a defining feature of Kyrgyzstan.

Kyrgyzstan is known for its hospitality, and our guide's family showed us what that hospitality means in practice, making us feel at home from the moment we arrived. They welcomed us with somewhere to stay, food and everything we needed to rest and get ready for the next adventure: reaching Lake Song-Kul on horseback.

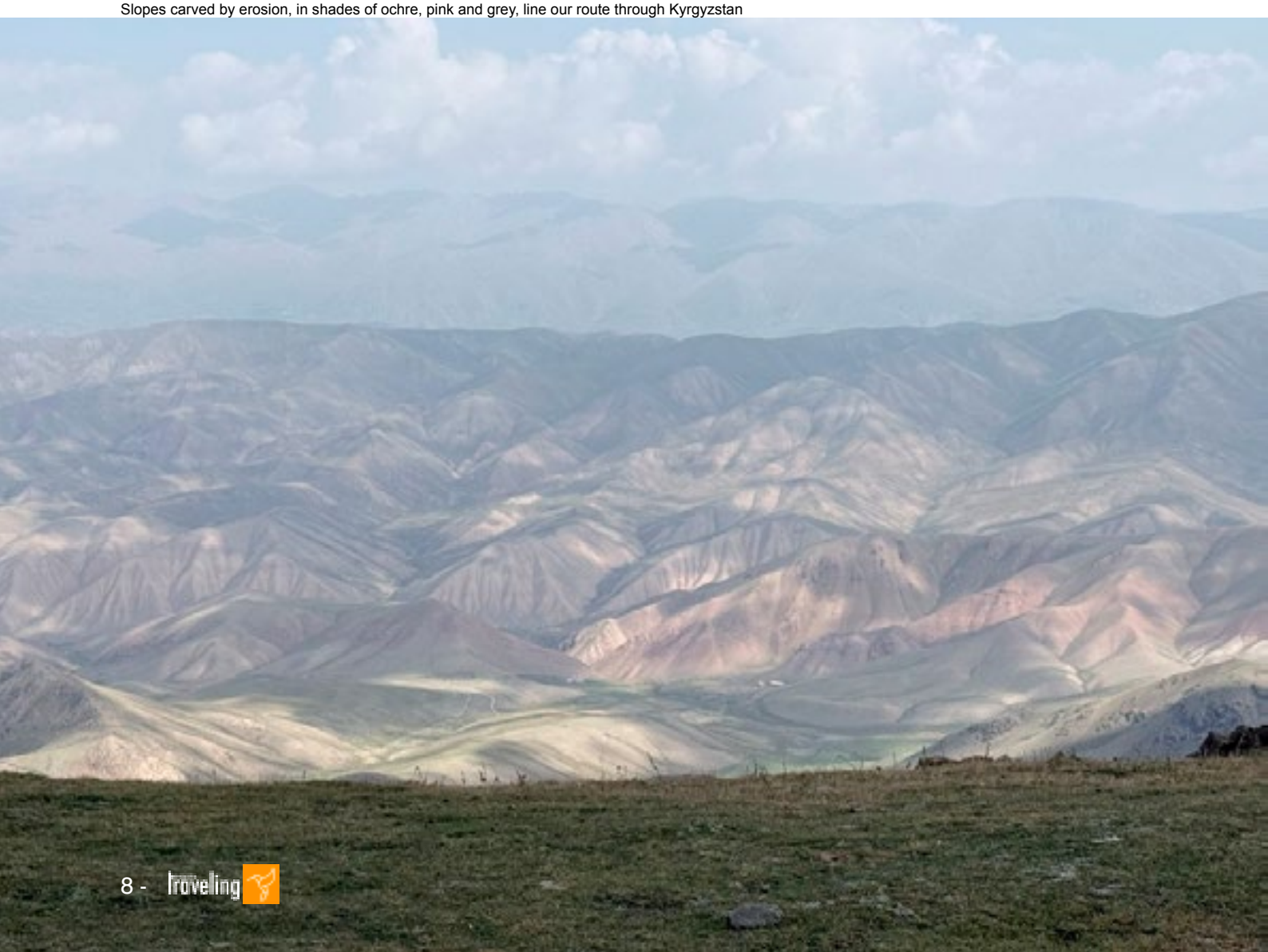
Over three days, our route would take us through some of the country's most spectacular landscapes, stopping for the night at two different yurt camps along the way. As we rode through ever more remote mountains and valleys, we left the bustle of settled life behind and caught a glimpse of a way of life still closely tied to nature and old nomadic traditions.

Along the way, we had a chance to discover the local cooking. We tried traditional soups and home-cooked dishes prepared in the yurts that served as kitchens. The ingredients were simple and the dishes were full of flavour. Mealtimes became a chance to get to know the other travellers and guides as we all sat down at the same table. We talked about the places we had been, swapped accounts of very different journeys and found plenty to laugh about together. For a few hours, borders seemed to disappear and we were all part of a single travelling family, gathered around a table in the middle of the mountains of Kyrgyzstan.



Yurt camp

Slopes carved by erosion, in shades of ochre, pink and grey, line our route through Kyrgyzstan





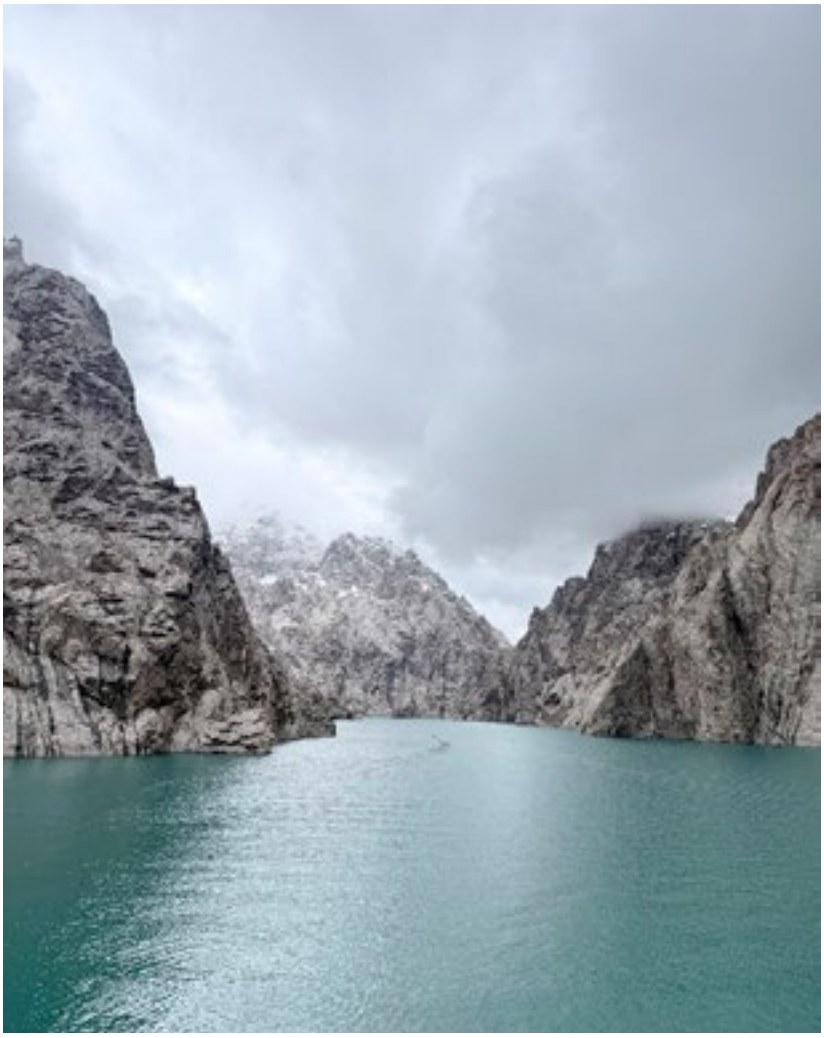


A cow in the mountain pastures

Leaving behind our rides, our gallops and those film-worthy sunsets, we continued to another camp tucked away in the mountains. Once again the outside world felt a long way off. There was no phone signal or internet, and the silence around the camp was broken only by the wind and the sounds of the natural world around us.

Our next destination was Lake Kel-Suu, one of the most spectacular and remote corners of Kyrgyzstan. To reach it, we left the horses behind and pulled on our hiking boots. The trail took us into the high mountains, past towering rock faces and through open valleys as we followed paths that led us steadily uphill towards the lake itself.

The altitude and the climb make it a demanding trek, but every step brings its own reward.
As we gained height, the landscape grew more dramatic and we were continually struck by how completely cut off we felt from the rest of the world, far from any sign of settled life. At last, after the tough climb, Kel-Suu came into view, tucked between towering mountains, its turquoise waters set against the steep rock walls around it.



Lake Kel-Suu

Still thinking about Kel-Suu, we travelled on to Kochkor, a small village where we paused before another day of walking. It gave us time to catch our breath, recover our strength and prepare for the next stage of the journey: Kol-Ukok and Kel-Tor, two lakes hidden among the mountains.

Each turquoise lake has a character of its own, and both belong to a mountain landscape that looks as if it came straight off a postcard. Once again we would leave the roads behind and follow paths that grew ever more remote, making our way up through valleys and meadows and into the mountains to reach two of Kyrgyzstan's most spectacular natural settings.

Every change of scenery rewarded the effort of the climb. When we finally reached the shore, the turquoise of the water was so vivid that, even standing right by the lakes, we could hardly believe the scene before us was real. Kol-Ukok and Kel-Tor gave us another chance to experience the adventure of being in the mountains and to see nature in its wildest state.



Views of Lake Kol-Ukok





Views of Lake Kel-Tor

We continued to Bokonbayevo, a small town on the southern shore of Issyk-Kul, Kyrgyzstan's largest lake. Its sheer size and the constant movement of the water made us forget at times that the water stretching out before us belonged to a lake. At times it felt as though we were standing by the sea. Mountains, canyons and arid terrain surround it, bringing together landscapes you rarely find in one place.

Our first stop was Ak-Say Canyon, but the road there had a surprise in store: a herd of dromedaries moving freely across the landscape in front of us. We could not resist stopping to watch them at close quarters. It was an unexpected and fascinating sight in the middle of the Kyrgyz mountains.

When we reached the canyon, the scale of the rock formations made us feel for a moment as though we had been transported to the vast, open landscapes of the western United States.





A herd of dromedaries
The dry, reddish canyon walls contrast with the endless blue of Issyk-Kul



Ak-Say Canyon

What made this place distinctive was the contrast between the dry, reddish canyon walls and the seemingly endless blue of Issyk-Kul, where the wind whipped up the water, sending waves to break against the shore.

After so many days of adventure in the mountains, we decided to slow down and enjoy the lake. A swim was the perfect way to rest and round off the day, or so we thought. As the day drew to a close, there was still one last surprise in store.

As evening fell, we watched an eagle-hunting demonstration that drew on the old traditions of Kyrgyzstan's nomadic peoples. A local hunter and his two sons showed us how, over generations, nomadic hunters learnt to work as a team with their animals. Their horses, dogs and eagles all had a part to play in finding and catching their prey.



Eagle show



Eagle show

With Issyk-Kul behind them, a hunter and his sons showed us the bond between nomads and their animals. Eagle hunting is still passed down from father to son in Kyrgyzstan





A moment to take in the shapes and silence of Kok-Moinok Canyon

It gave us a glimpse of an ancestral way of life closely bound up with nature. Watching that tradition in a vast canyon, with Issyk-Kul stretching out in the distance, turned the close of our day into one of those experiences you find yourself thinking about long after the journey is over and you are back home.

Our journey was slowly drawing to a close. Before setting off back to the capital, we still had two natural treasures to discover: Fairy Tale Canyon and Jeti-Oguz. The two landscapes look completely different from one another, but what they share is the striking beauty and sheer presence of their rock formations.

Each gave us a different experience and, taken together, the two visits brought our adventure in Kyrgyzstan to a fitting close. We took in the colours and shapes of the rock and the great walls rising around us. Among those last landscapes, we spent our last moments getting to know a little more of the wild side of Kyrgyzstan, a country that kept finding ways to surprise us right up to the final day.

Jeti-Oguz





The avenue around the 1950s. Archive photograph.

GRAN VÍA

The story of a Madrid street

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

Madrid's Gran Vía belongs to that rare class of streets that run through a city and, in their own way, tell its story.

The story begins long before Alfonso XIII raised his pickaxe on 4 April 1910. Behind that ceremony lay almost half a century of proposals, disputes, compulsory purchases and arguments over what a modern Madrid should look like. Once open, the avenue lived through Primo de Rivera's dictatorship, the Second Republic and the Civil War, as well as two world wars. Its architecture changed with the times.

There were, in a sense, three Gran Vías: the first monumental and cosmopolitan, the second commercial, cinematic and reaching skywards, and the third Rationalist and modern. Their stories take us from turn-of-the-century architects to Hemingway, García Lorca, Ortega y Gasset, Rafael Alberti, María Teresa León, Antonio Machado and Miguel Hernández, as well as the foreign correspondents who watched a city at war from their hotels.

Madrid City Council has described Gran Vía as a mirror of Madrid and Spain over half a century. The project was conceived in one society and, after decades of planning, became a reality in quite another. Madrileños had settled on the name Gran Vía long before it found a permanent place on the city's official maps. The avenue was renamed under the Republic, during the Civil War and under Franco, but locals went on calling it Gran Vía.



Gran Vía today

AN AVENUE FOR MODERN MADRID

Gran Vía began before 1910

As early as 1861, the council was looking for an effective route between the north and south of Madrid that would spare traffic from passing through the congested Puerta del Sol. The solution went far beyond widening a street. It meant cutting straight through the historic centre.

One of the first major proposals came from Carlos Velasco in 1886. It never went ahead. Financial and administrative difficulties, compulsory purchases and opposition from property owners and residents kept it on Madrid's urban planning agenda for decades.

The decisive step came with the 1895 Act on sanitation, redevelopment and expansion within the city. It allowed such works to be declared in the public interest.

Municipal architects José López Sallaberry and Andrés Octavio then drew up the plans approved in 1904.

One detail is worth noting here: Gran Vía as we know it was conceived as a redevelopment scheme to be carried out in three large sections, each part of a wider plan to reshape the centre.

The works would affect some 142,647 square metres, with 327 buildings compulsorily acquired, 30 city blocks reshaped and many streets lost in whole or in part.

Building Gran Vía meant tearing down a sizeable part of the old city to make room for the new avenue.

Construction work. Archive photograph.



THE FIRST GRAN VÍA

1910–1917/1919: Alfonso XIII's monumental avenue (eclecticism, historicism and French inspiration)

On 4 April 1910, Alfonso XIII struck his famous blow with a pickaxe at the Casa del Cura, beside the church of San José. The gesture was largely symbolic. Preparatory work and demolition were already part of a complex administrative process, but the ceremony cast the king as the figure ushering Madrid into the modern urban age.

The first stretch ran from **Alcalá to Red de San Luis.**

Nicolás de Peñalver y Zamora, Count of Peñalver and mayor of Madrid at the time, played a central role in creating this first stretch, which would bear his name as Avenida del Conde de Peñalver.

The demolitions swept away convents, homes and much of the existing fabric of the city. The works changed far more than the architecture. They brought social and economic upheaval on an enormous scale.

The Metrópolis Building, an icon of Gran Vía, predates the avenue slightly. It was designed by the French architects Jules and Raymond Février for the insurer La Unión y el Fénix and finished by Luis Esteve. Work ended in 1910 and the building opened in January 1911. Its dome, rotunda, sculptures and famous winged figure made it a monumental gateway to the new avenue.

It also has an intriguing link with advances in construction. From outside it looks like a palace in a historicist style, yet it used modern techniques and materials, including concrete.

La Gran Peña (Gran Vía 2). Founded in 1869 as a club for recreation and conversation, it belonged to the aristocratic and military world of early 20th-century Madrid.

The Casino Militar (Gran Vía 13). Its presence on this stretch shows how the avenue was intended as a showcase for the powers of Restoration Spain: the Crown, the military, banks, insurance companies, the aristocracy and big business.



Capitoline Wolf with Romulus and Remus above Gran Vía.

The first architects of Gran Vía had more in mind than blocks of flats. They wanted an avenue that could hold its own alongside the great thoroughfares of Europe's capitals. The new street was meant to show what Madrid aspired to become, much as those avenues did for their own cities.

Eclecticism set the tone on this first stretch, with monumental façades, French influences, columns, sculptures, domes, turrets and grand shops. The façades gave the street its monumental scale, while the large commercial premises made it a place to spend time as well as to pass through.

Gran Vía was becoming a new kind of street, a place to see and be seen.

The Oratory of Caballero de Gracia was preserved like an island, hemmed in by the new avenue. It was one of just two churches to survive.

It was also on this first stretch that Loewe opened one of Madrid's great luxury shopfronts in 1939, adding a landmark to the avenue.



Caballero de Gracia Oratory



Metrópolis Building

THE SECOND GRAN VÍA

1917–1927: shops, skyscrapers and cinema

Red de San Luis to Callao

The second stretch was officially called Avenida de Pi y Margall, though locals still called the whole avenue Gran Vía. The stretch was about 409 metres long and originally planned with a central boulevard.

The arrival of the motor car was already changing how people moved around Madrid. The avenue's original design soon had to adapt to the demands of road traffic.

In 1921, the boulevard was removed to ease traffic. At the same time, taller buildings were permitted, up to around 35 metres. The changes gave traffic more room at street level and allowed Gran Vía to take on an increasingly vertical profile.

Telefónica: New York comes to Madrid

Between 1926 and 1929, Ignacio de Cárdenas built the headquarters of Spain's national telephone company at number 28.

The building brings two worlds together. Cárdenas studied architectural solutions in New York and brought the form of the American skyscraper to Madrid, rising 90 metres. He combined it with granite, stone and elements of Madrid's own Baroque.

Its concrete-encased steel frame went up at remarkable speed for the time, between March and October 1927. On 13 October 1928, Alfonso XIII and US President Calvin Coolidge made the first transatlantic telephone call between Spain and the United States.

During the Civil War, the Telefónica Building became central to communications and the work of foreign correspondents. It also housed the Press Censorship Office. From up high, much of besieged Madrid lay in view. A landmark built to embody progress had become a vantage point from which correspondents could watch events unfold across the city during the war.

Palacio de la Prensa: a city within a building

Another landmark is the Palacio de la Prensa, designed by Pedro Muguruza. It brought together several sides of life on the avenue. Muguruza's plans called for much more than an office block. The building was to bring flats and studios together with offices, shops, a spacious cinema and a café that doubled as a concert venue.

Work began in 1924 and continued until 1928. The official opening followed in 1930.

The architecture captures the new spirit of Gran Vía. You could work, shop, live, eat, read, see a film and catch a performance without going much beyond the same complex. The building brought daily life on the avenue and its public entertainments under one roof.



The Press Palace

The Telefónica Building





Palacio de la Música: when cinema took hold in Madrid

In 1924, the architect Secundino de Zuazo was commissioned to design a large hall suitable for concerts as well as films, with room for both kinds of audience.

Its design offers another clue to the city's cultural transformation.

Zuazo dropped the traditional horseshoe-shaped theatre plan and looked to the great American picture palaces, with seats facing the screen and large balconies.

With halls designed for the screen and for live audiences, the monumental avenue was becoming Madrid's main stage for modern entertainment.

Casa Matesanz by Antonio Palacios

Taking his cue from American department stores and commercial buildings, Palacios designed a magnificent building for shops and offices.

Palacio del Libro

Opened in 1923, it became a meeting place for writers, philosophers and thinkers. Now Casa del Libro, it once housed the publisher Espasa Calpe and Ortega y Gasset's journal Revista de Occidente.





THE THIRD GRAN VÍA

1927–1933: Callao to Plaza de España: Rationalist modernity

The third stretch took the avenue from Callao to Plaza de España.
On this stretch the buildings begin to look quite different from the ones that came before them. The change in architectural language is marked. If the first Gran Vía spoke French and the second looked to New York, the third began speaking the language of modern architecture, Art Deco, Rationalism and Expressionism.
It was here, too, that Gran Vía met some of Spain's most turbulent political history.



The Capitol: 1931–1933

The young and then largely unknown architects Luis Martínez-Feduchi and Vicente Eced Eced designed the Carrión Building, better known as the Capitol after its cinema. Built between 1931 and 1933, it is a landmark of Spanish Rationalism with an Expressionist bent.
The building brought together a cinema, hotel, offices, café, bar, restaurant and other spaces. Its curved corner and tower make the building instantly recognisable. The forms and volumes are composed around that corner, giving it the distinctive silhouette that made it one of Madrid's architectural icons.

This third stretch is the Madrid of cinemas and evenings out. Landmarks include the Art Deco CINE CALLAO (1926–1927), the TEATRO COLISEUM (1931–1933), built for large shows and concerts, and the EDIFICIO LOPE DE VEGA (1945–1949), conceived as a complex of hotel, theatre and shops. The imposing stepped outline of the EDIFICIO ESPAÑA (1948–1953) became a symbol of the way Madrid grew and changed in the years after the war.

Gran Vía during the Civil War

In 1936 Gran Vía was still far from a finished, continuous avenue. Its third stretch contained building sites and vacant plots.
When the defence of Madrid began, its north-westerly orientation became strategically important. The front lines at Casa de Campo and Ciudad Universitaria left certain parts of the avenue particularly exposed.
Madrileños began calling it 'the avenue of shells' and 'the avenue of the fifteen and a half', a reference to the calibre of the shells falling on the city. Shop windows, cinemas, cafés, grand façades and illuminated signs stood alongside sandbags, shattered glass, boarded windows and shelters.
The Civil War made Madrid one of the world's centres for news reporting, and Gran Vía was one of its main settings.
The Hotel Florida on Plaza de Callao was especially important. Designed by Antonio Palacios and built in 1924, it housed many foreign correspondents during the war, among them Ernest Hemingway, Martha Gellhorn, John Dos Passos, Robert Capa, Gerda Taro, Herbert Matthews, Henry Buckley, Mikhail Koltsov and other journalists and photographers. It became a headquarters for the foreign press.
From the Hotel Florida, Hemingway wrote about a night of bombing, recording what it was like to be in the city as shells fell. **John Dos Passos** drew on his own surroundings as well, turning both his hotel room and the building that housed the correspondents into material for his writing.
Gran Vía, once a symbol of modern commerce, had become a window through which the world watched the Spanish Civil War as it unfolded in the streets of the capital.







The Generation of '27 and Madrid's intellectual life

Gran Vía was never quite the headquarters of the Generation of '27. Its cultural world was spread across the Residencia de Estudiantes, the Ateneo, cafés, theatres, publishers, universities, private homes and other places in central Madrid.

Gran Vía was part of the cultural life these writers and artists knew. At the time, Madrid was an extraordinary place for intellectual experimentation.

Its cultural circles included **Federico García Lorca, Rafael Alberti, María Teresa León, Luis Cernuda, Vicente Aleixandre, Pedro Salinas, Jorge Guillén, Dámaso Alonso, Gerardo Diego, Manuel Altolaguirre and Concha Méndez**, among many others.

The women of that generation deserve attention too. Later known as Las Sinsombrero, they included **María Teresa León, Concha Méndez and Rosa Chacel,** whose part in renewing Spanish culture has received particular attention from historians in recent years.

How Gran Vía changed its name

The street everyone in Madrid called Gran Vía bore other official names over the course of the 20th century.

During the Republic and the Civil War, its different stretches took political names, including Avenida de la CNT, Avenida de Rusia and Avenida de México. Under Franco, it officially became Avenida de José Antonio. In everyday conversation, however, Madrileños stuck with 'Gran Vía'. The popular name outlasted political change.

It is a small lesson in urban history. Cities have a memory of their own that can outlast a decree.

Gran Vía and the bright lights of Madrid's Broadway

Foreign writers saw the avenue as something quite different from traditional Madrid, and with good reason. In 1937, Ernest Hemingway compared Gran Vía to New York's Broadway and Fifth Avenue, as recorded in the city council's heritage study. He had good reason: there were grand cinemas, theatres, hotels, cafés, restaurants, international companies, illuminated signs, luxury shops, offices, banks, telephones, cars, trams, foreign journalists, actors, writers and tourists…

1.- Madrid Metro, Gran Vía station
2.- The Lion King musical
3.- Callao cinemas, Plaza de Callao



Perhaps the best way to understand Gran Vía is to look beyond the buildings that line it.

The Metrópolis embodies a monumental Madrid with its eyes on Paris.

Telefónica represents the Madrid that looked to New York.

The Palacio de la Prensa recalls a Madrid of journalists, cinema and city life.

The Palacio de la Música evokes the birth of mass cinema culture.

The Capitol captures the Rationalist modernity of the 1930s.

The Hotel Florida, now gone, offers perhaps the most moving image of all: Madrid in 1937 through the eyes of Hemingway, Dos Passos, Gellhorn, Capa and so many other correspondents who arrived in a city under siege.

GRAN VÍA THROUGH HISTORY

- It began under Alfonso XIII.
- It grew under Primo de Rivera's dictatorship and took shape during the Second Republic.
- It was bombed during the Civil War.
- It continued to change in the post-war years.
- Lights, cinemas and premieres filled the avenue.
- Its pavements witnessed the changes of the transition to democracy.
- It entered the 21st century with musicals, hotels and major shops.

In every era it reflected a different Madrid.

Meanwhile, elsewhere in Madrid, Lorca, Alberti, María Teresa León, Machado, Miguel Hernández, Neruda, Ortega and many other intellectuals lived, wrote, argued and felt the fracture of a culture that the war would eventually scatter across the world.

Gran Vía is far more than a street. It offers a cross-section of 20th-century Spain and became the place where Madrid showed itself off, sought amusement, thought, modernised, came under bombardment, held out and told the world what was happening.

Perhaps that is the most remarkable thing about its history. Gran Vía was conceived as a piece of urban planning and became a historical document on a monumental scale. Spain's ambitions, wounds and transformations can still be read in its façades.



Costa Rica
The power of volcanoes

Words: Editorial team - **Photos:** Costa Rica Tourism

The road up to Poás volcano leaves the last settlements of Alajuela behind and winds between coffee plantations, small farms and stalls selling strawberries, cheeses and home-made sweets. As the road climbs, the air grows cooler and the houses stand farther apart. San José is just over an hour away, yet the landscape feels quite different from that of the capital. This is rural Costa Rica, a landscape of cultivated fields and small family farms where it is worth stopping before continuing to the crater.
The country has more than a hundred volcanic structures and several volcanoes whose eruptions have been documented in recorded history. This volcanic activity has left its mark on the country.

Some are surrounded by vast tracts of tropical forest. Others rise above farmland or still have fumaroles, acidic lakes and geothermal features that bear witness to their activity. Travelling between them takes you through much of the country's interior, far from the beaches that generally take centre stage on a trip to Costa Rica.

The idea is to spend around twelve days visiting four of them: Poás, Arenal, Tenorio and Rincón de la Vieja. The route crosses very different landscapes and leaves time to get to know the towns along the way and discover the customs and cooking of each region.

Central Region, Turrialba volcano





Aerial view of the main crater of Poás volcano, Alajuela

Arenal, Alajuela





Church of San Rafael Arcángel, Zarcero

Poás, coffee and the Central Valley

Poás rises to 2,708 metres and has one of Central America's great accessible volcanic craters. Visitors can use the designated viewpoints whenever volcanic activity and safety conditions allow. On clear days, you can look down into a vast, rocky depression with an acidic lake whose appearance changes with volcanic activity. The designated viewpoints give visitors a sense of the crater's scale and a clear view of the lake when conditions are right.

It pays to get up early. Clouds tend to build through the morning and, at this altitude, they can hide the crater in minutes. The area's appeal goes well beyond the national park, though. The Alajuela mountains are part of one of Costa Rica's main coffee-growing regions. Some historic farms have opened their doors to show visitors how coffee is grown and processed, from picking the cherries to drying and roasting the beans. A visit helps explain the economic and cultural importance of a crop that went hand in hand with the country's development for generations. Seeing the work involved at each stage, from the field to the roasting room, puts that long relationship into perspective.
The villages of Fraijanes and Poasito still have small restaurants serving traditional cooking. Try a casado, the usual Costa Rican lunch of rice, beans, salad, ripe plantain and meat or fish. A night near Poás gives you time to explore these mountains at an easy pace before heading north.

From Zarcero to La Fortuna and Arenal

The route to La Fortuna can take you through Zarcero, a farming town set among hills and cattle pastures. Its striking church of San Rafael Arcángel overlooks a square known for trees and shrubs clipped into geometric shapes and animal figures. The shapes give the square its distinctive character and make it a natural place to pause on the way through town.

Zarcero also has a long dairy tradition. One of its specialities is queso palmito, made in thin layers that are rolled into a ball. The local cheesemakers and bakeries are a good excuse to break the drive, sample something made locally and pick up provisions for the next leg. From here, the road gradually descends into San Carlos. Temperatures rise, the vegetation becomes more abundant and broad stretches of land give way to cattle farms and tropical crops. As you approach La Fortuna, the outline of Arenal comes into view, one of Central America's most recognisable volcanoes.
Its cone rises 1,657 metres above sea level and dominates the whole area. In 1968, a violent eruption reshaped the surrounding landscape and killed many people. The volcano remained highly active for decades afterwards, with explosions and glowing lava flows visible from different parts of the area. That period ended in 2010, when the eruptions that had made Arenal one of Costa Rica's major visitor attractions came to a halt.

Vegetation now covers parts of the slopes, though you can still make out the traces left by old lava flows.

La Fortuna makes a good base for three nights. There is plenty of accommodation, and it is worth looking beyond the centre of town. A place set among tropical gardens gives you time to enjoy the surroundings, especially if there is also a view of the volcano. Some hotels have pools fed by hot springs, especially welcome after a long walk.

Arenal Volcano National Park has trails of varying lengths through forest and old volcanic terrain. The Las Coladas trail brings you close to areas covered in solidified lava and offers views of Lake Arenal and the Tilarán mountains.

Set aside another day for the Místico hanging bridges, which offer a chance to see the forest at different heights, or visit La Fortuna waterfall, a drop of around seventy metres framed by greenery. Cacao farms also show how the crop is grown and processed, an especially good way to learn about local agriculture.

Towards evening, the hot springs are hard to beat. There are options for every taste, from large hotel complexes to quieter places where you can stay for dinner after a soak.



Northern region: Tilarán, Arenal volcano





Río Celeste

Tenorio and Bijagua, the quieter north

From La Fortuna the road skirts Lake Arenal before heading towards Bijagua. It passes through small settlements, cattle farms and stretches of woodland that grow more extensive as you approach the Tenorio massif.

Bijagua lies between the Tenorio and Miravalles volcanoes and retains much of its farming character. Houses line both sides of the road, and accommodation, often in small family-run properties, tends to be tucked among gardens and patches of woodland, in keeping with the small-scale rural character of the town.

The main draw is Tenorio Volcano National Park, home to the Río Celeste. Its extraordinary blue hue comes from an optical effect involving suspended mineral particles, especially striking at a spot known as El Teñidero. The trail, around six kilometres there and back, leads through humid tropical forest to several of the park's most interesting sights. The walk offers time to appreciate the forest as well as the striking colour of the river itself.

The Río Celeste waterfall is the most photographed spot. The Laguna Azul, the bubbling pools of volcanic origin and El Teñidero, where you can see the water change colour, also deserve a visit. Wear suitable shoes, particularly after rain, which is a regular occurrence in this part of the country and can make walking harder. Take your time, both for the conditions underfoot and for the richness of the forest around you. It is worth spending at least two nights in Bijagua. The area offers good opportunities to watch birds, including several species of toucan, and get to know small rural tourism projects. Staying for a couple of nights leaves time for both. Some farms run guided walks around their grounds, while others offer a look at tropical crops or cacao production.

Cooking here stays simple. The sodas, Costa Rica's small local restaurants, serve generous portions of rice, beans, stewed meat, cassava and plantain. Gallo pinto, a mixture of rice and beans usually served with eggs, fresh cheese and tortillas, is still the usual breakfast.
Bijagua offers a different experience from La Fortuna. There are fewer visitor facilities, and many places to stay are set up for visitors who want to slow down, rest and spend more time enjoying the landscape around them.

Rincón de la Vieja, Guanacaste's hot lands

The final leg takes you to Guanacaste, a province of large cattle ranches, sweeping plains and forests that lose much of their foliage in the dry season. It is a striking change from the humid mountains of Tenorio. Near Liberia is Rincón de la Vieja National Park, one of Costa Rica's most interesting volcanic areas. The massif comprises several cones and shows signs of geothermal activity throughout. These are among the features that make the park such a distinctive stop on the route.

In the Las Pailas sector, a circular trail of around three kilometres leads past fumaroles, small lagoons and pools of boiling mud. In places, steam rises directly from cracks in the ground. Elsewhere, the mud is kept in constant motion by heat rising from below. The landscape is quite different from those of Arenal and Tenorio, and it is one of the best places to see volcanic activity without having to approach a crater.

Rincón de la Vieja deserves two or three days, particularly if you stay at one of the ranches near the park that have been converted into rural accommodation. Some are still working cattle farms and offer horse riding, walks and visits to waterfalls. Others have hot springs and outdoor pools, giving you somewhere to relax after spending the day outside.



Guanacaste coast

Guanacaste's culture is closely tied to the sabanero, the traditional Costa Rican cattle herder. The sabanero is part of the history of the large estates that occupied these lands for centuries, alongside cattle rearing and maize growing, two activities that have long helped shape the region's way of life.

The cooking also differs from that of other parts of Costa Rica. Hand-patted maize tortillas, rosquillas, dry cheese from Bagaces and roasted tamales are part of a culinary tradition that survives in homes and small towns. From Rincón de la Vieja, you can visit Liberia, known as the White City for the traditional architecture of some of its streets. Walk through the centre and you can still see the buildings that gave the city that name. The centre retains old houses, historic buildings and a square where much of everyday life takes place. It is a good spot to end the route before heading to Liberia airport or extending your trip with a few days on the Pacific beaches.

On to the Pacific

The Guanacaste coast is fairly close to Liberia. Playa Hermosa, Playa Panamá and the small bays of the Papagayo Peninsula offer two or three nights by the sea without a long drive. It is an easy way to round off the route with a little time on the coast. After the mountain roads, volcanic trails and humid forests, the landscape changes again. Pale sandy beaches, dry coastal woodland and small fishing communities come into view, with fresh fish and seafood taking centre stage. In only a few hundred kilometres, the route crosses some of Costa Rica's main natural regions and offers a look at different ways of life, from the coffee plantations of the Central Valley and farms of San Carlos to the rural holdings of Bijagua and the great ranches of Guanacaste.

The volcanoes give the route its shape, but much of the pleasure lies in what you find between them. The towns, markets, back roads and stops that rarely figure on the usual itineraries are part of a Costa Rica that deserves to be explored at a slower pace, with enough time to stop in the places you come upon along the way.

Travel notes

Recommended duration:
Allow twelve days, with one or two nights in the Central Valley, three in Arenal, two in Bijagua, two or three in Rincón de la Vieja and the remaining nights by the sea on the Guanacaste coast.

Getting around:
Hiring a car is the easiest option, ideally an SUV, since some roads leading to rural lodges and farms include stretches of gravel. Distances are modest, but drives often take longer than you might expect.

When to go:
December to April is generally the dry season in Guanacaste. Rain is frequent for much of the year in the northern mountains and areas near the Caribbean. May, June and November can be good for green landscapes and fewer visitors, though it is worth allowing for rain during your stay.

Bookings:
Book national park tickets through the official SINAC system. Check access before each visit, especially at Poás and in volcanic areas where geological activity can bring restrictions. Check the conditions for the particular sector you plan to visit.

Where to stay:
For a trip of this kind, mix small ranch stays, nature hotels and rural lodges, allowing more than one night at each. In Arenal, a hotel with hot springs is an especially good choice. In Bijagua, look for a lodge surrounded by forest. In Guanacaste, a former ranch suits the character of the trip.



Food:
Make time for the sodas and small roadside restaurants as you travel. They are a good introduction to the Costa Rican cooking people eat every day, from gallo pinto and casado to artisan cheeses and the maize specialities of Guanacaste.

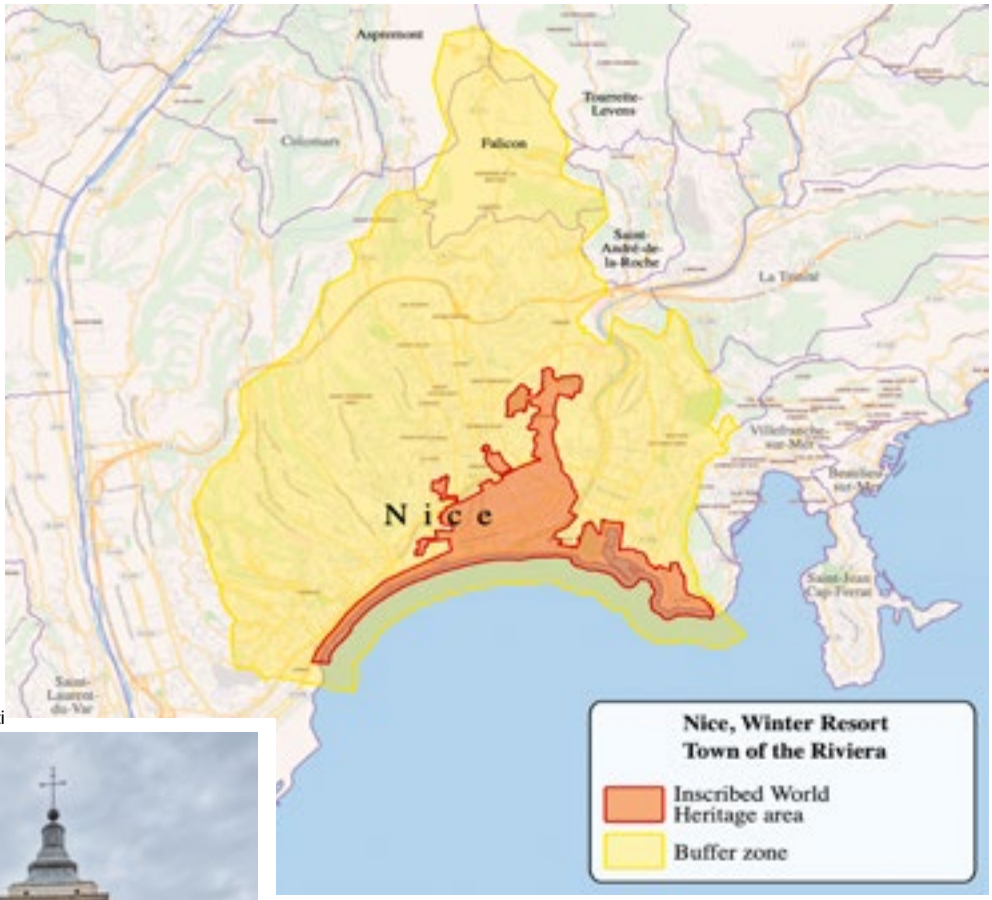


esencial COSTA RICA

Nice

Winters on the Riviera

Words: Rosario Alonso - **Photos:** Rosario Alonso and archive



Sainte-Réparate Cathedral, Place Rossetti



Once part of the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia, Nice became a winter retreat for the international aristocracy. Its mild climate, sweeping bay and promenades shaped a way of life that still lingers in Baroque palaces, grand hotels and Mediterranean squares.

Sheltered by mountains on the shores of the Baie des Anges, Nice developed an international identity in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Aristocrats, writers and artists came to winter by the Mediterranean, bringing with them new ways of spending the winter. The residences and hotels that sprang up to accommodate them changed the face of the city. In 2021, UNESCO recognised that legacy by inscribing '**Nice, Winter Resort Town of the Riviera**', a city reshaped by the birth of modern tourism.

A city built for visitors

In the mid-eighteenth century, Nice belonged to the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia, ruled from Turin by the House of Savoy. The town clustered around what is now the old quarter and Castle Hill, and had close cultural and architectural ties with Liguria and northern Italy. Early British travellers helped spread the word about its mild climate. Among them was the Scottish writer Tobias Smollett, who visited in 1763. Foreign visitors settled in for weeks or months, sometimes bringing their families and household staff. They came to rest and socialise, and to enjoy the benefits that doctors of the day attributed to the sea air.

The winter population needed accommodation, gardens and places to meet. The Consiglio d'Ornato was set up in 1832 to regulate the layout of streets and squares and the appearance of façades. The old quarter kept its markets and churches, while across the Paillon new avenues and residences offered places to stroll and be seen. The council had to manage the relationship between the old town and the new districts so that the arrival of foreign visitors did not lead to haphazard growth. The way Nice looked became part of an economy increasingly reliant on those who came for the winter.

The Italian imprint

The difference is still apparent as you make your way into Vieux-Nice from the later districts. Ochre, yellow and reddish façades, shutters and closely spaced balconies retain the character of the old Savoyard town. The Baroque of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries recalls its ties with Italy in stuccowork, frescoes, sweeping staircases and reception rooms designed to proclaim their owners' status. **The Palais Lascaris**, built in the mid-seventeenth century for the Lascaris-Vintimille family, captures that world. Behind a restrained façade on rue Droite are a grand staircase and frescoed rooms. Today it houses a museum with a notable collection of historic musical instruments. The interiors show that Nice had a rich architectural culture of its own long before it became a winter resort. **Place Rossetti**, overlooked by Sainte-Réparate Cathedral, and the market on Cours Saleya are still places where the everyday life of the old quarter plays out.

With its reddish façades, arcades and open spaces, Place Masséna links the old Mediterranean quarter with the cosmopolitan city that grew up in the nineteenth century.

The English promenade

The Promenade des Anglais began on a far more modest scale than its appearance today suggests. In 1822, the Reverend Lewis Way helped raise funds for a seafront path barely two metres wide, so that people could walk along the shore. Locals called it Camin dei inglés, the Englishmen's path. The city began widening it in 1844. Walking by the sea became a social occasion: elegant dresses, carriages and conversation brought some of the bustle of Cours Saleya to the new avenue. Villas, hotels and places of entertainment followed.

Grand staircase at the Palais Lascaris



The Hotel Negresco opened in 1913, and its pink dome remains one of the defining sights of that era. Nearby, Villa Masséna was built between 1898 and 1901 for Victor d'Essling, grandson of Marshal André Masséna. Its neoclassical architecture and gardens by Édouard André capture the refinement of the Belle Époque. The villa was given to the city in 1919 on condition that it become a museum and its gardens open to the public. The Musée Masséna opened in 1921.
Other buildings have disappeared, including the Jetée-Promenade casino, built out over the sea. Its memory completes the picture of a bay that became a stage for international society.

The Riviera goes cosmopolitan

Nice was ceded to France in 1860 amid Italian unification, following agreements between Napoleon III and Victor Emmanuel II. The Treaty of Turin and a plebiscite held in the city and county formalised the transfer. The Italian inheritance endured in a city between Provence and Liguria. The railway arrived in 1864, making it easier for visitors to reach Nice. Between then and 1914, the population rose from some 48,000 to nearly 150,000. Russian, French, German, Scandinavian and American residents joined the British, and these communities built villas, hotels and places of worship for their different faiths.

The Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St Nicholas, consecrated in 1912, remains one of the most visible traces of that diversity, also seen in the Anglican and Protestant churches. Large residences and hotels went up on the hills of Cimiez. Queen Victoria's stays enhanced Nice's standing among the European elite. The Belle Époque left a landscape of gardens, tree-lined avenues and ornate façades. French, Italian, British and Central European influences created the eclectic character that still distinguishes the city.

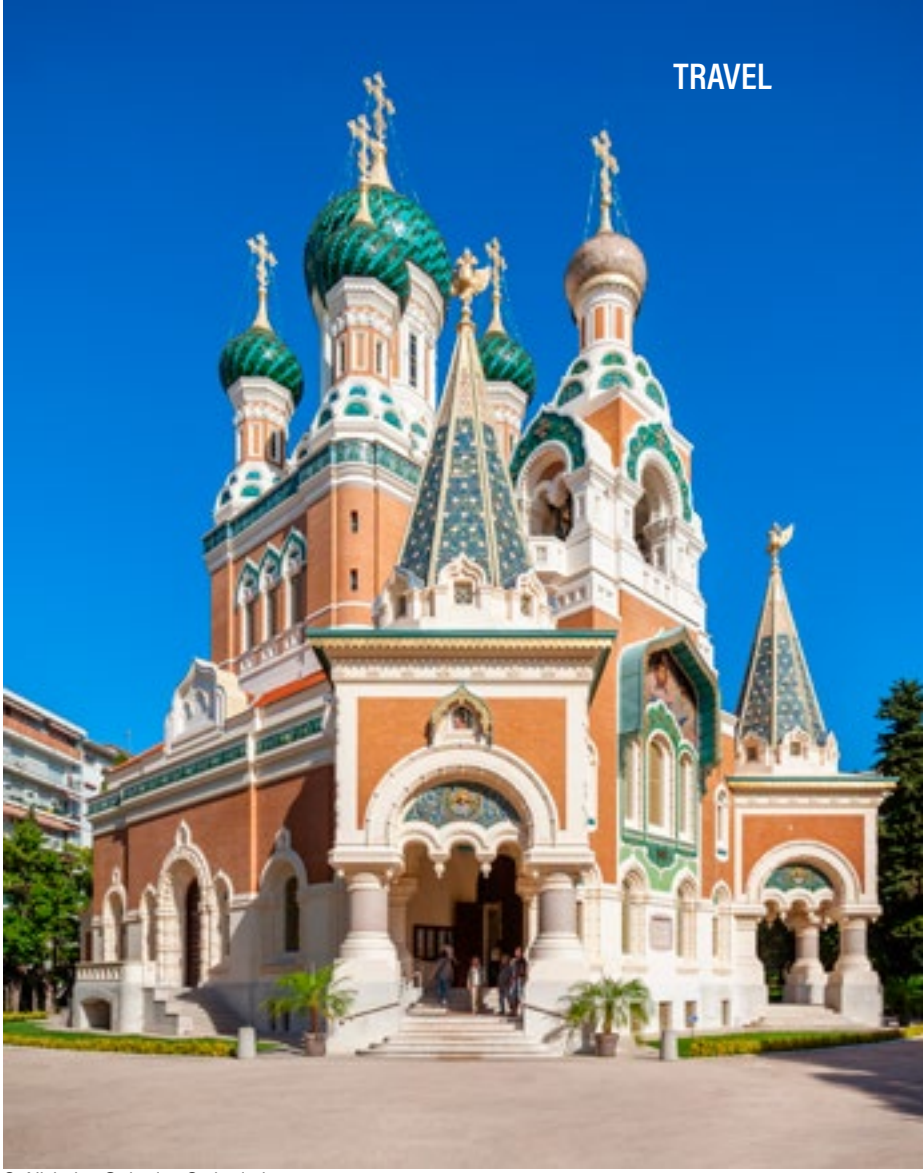
The city from above

Castle Hill brings those stages of the city's growth into view. From here you can see the bay, the harbour, the tightly packed buildings of Vieux-Nice and the promenade running along the seafront. Louis XIV ordered the medieval fortress demolished in 1706. Today, archaeological remains and a park look out over a city that spread well beyond its old boundaries. Below, near the harbour, rue Bonaparte and Place Garibaldi retain the everyday life and trade of another historic district. Shops and restaurants occupy traditional buildings and keep this neighbourhood lively away from the grand hotels. Walking here gives you a sense of how a historic district can accommodate new uses in the course of daily life while keeping the scale of its streets and its traditional buildings.

The Hotel Negresco



The course of the Paillon also helps explain how Nice grew. For centuries it divided the city, until stretches were covered and built over. The Promenade du Paillon, opened in 2013, reclaimed some of that space as a green corridor between the old town and the districts that grew up later. The UNESCO listing covers some 522 hectares of promenades, gardens, villas, hotels, palaces, homes and places of worship. It recognises a story that unfolded from the mid-eighteenth century to the early decades of the twentieth, as winter tourism brought different influences together in Nice. That legacy lives on in the relationship between the buildings and the landscape. From the rooms of the Palais Lascaris to the gardens of Cimiez, each place preserves something of those winters. Facing the Mediterranean with the Riviera hotels behind you, it is still easy to imagine the travellers who came to spend the winter and stayed for several months.



St Nicholas Orthodox Cathedral

Panoramic view of Nice harbour





Nice: exploring the Côte d'Azur

A short break in Nice takes in the elegance of the French Riviera, the streets of the old town and a cuisine shaped by Provençal recipes and Italian traditions. Here are a few places to help you plan your stay.

Getting there

easyJet flies from Madrid to Nice, with a flight time of about two hours on direct services. Direct flights operate on Mondays and Fridays for much of the year, with possible breaks in the low season. The airline also links the Côte d'Azur with Málaga, Palma de Mallorca and, at certain times of year, Ibiza and Tenerife South. Timetables vary with the season, so check which routes are operating on your dates and how often they run before booking. If you are heading straight into town from Nice Côte d'Azur Airport, tram line 2 links the terminals with the city centre and the harbour. The journey takes under 30 minutes.

Where to stay

At 38 rue Barbéris, easyHotel Nice Old Town is a practical and affordable base. The rooms are simple, Wi-Fi is free and reception is staffed around the clock. The République tram stop is nearby, and you can set out on foot from the hotel for both the harbour and the streets of the old town. The location makes this an inexpensive and convenient place to stay while you take the time to explore one of France's most stylish cities.

Eating in Vieux-Nice

At 22 rue Pairolière, L'Escalinada retains the feel of a traditional neighbourhood restaurant. The menu draws on local family recipes: farcis niçois, or stuffed vegetables; daube, a slow-cooked meat stew; stuffed sardines; and courgette flower fritters. For a taste of the cooking that has been handed down through generations in Nice, this is an address worth seeking out. The Cuisine Nissarde label recognises its commitment to those local recipes.

Fresh pasta in the old town

Also in the old town, at 2 rue Saint-François, Nulle Pâte Ailleurs is worth a stop on a leisurely stroll. Fresh handmade pasta is the speciality, and this is a good address for discovering the different dishes the kitchen makes in-house. There is also a branch at 28 avenue Malausséna, in the Libération district. As well as pasta, it offers prepared dishes and a selection of charcuterie and cheeses.

Italian dining by the harbour

At 16 rue Lascaris, Tina Trattoria champions northern Italian cooking. Lorenzo Ragni and Florencia Montes, who also run Onice, serve homemade pasta and dishes from Piedmont and Lombardy. Specialities include ravioli del plin, vitello tonnato, ossobuco and Milanese veal cutlet. The Michelin Guide recognises this lively trattoria for its traditional cooking.

More information

Nice Tourisme

easyJet


You are always welcome here. History loves company.
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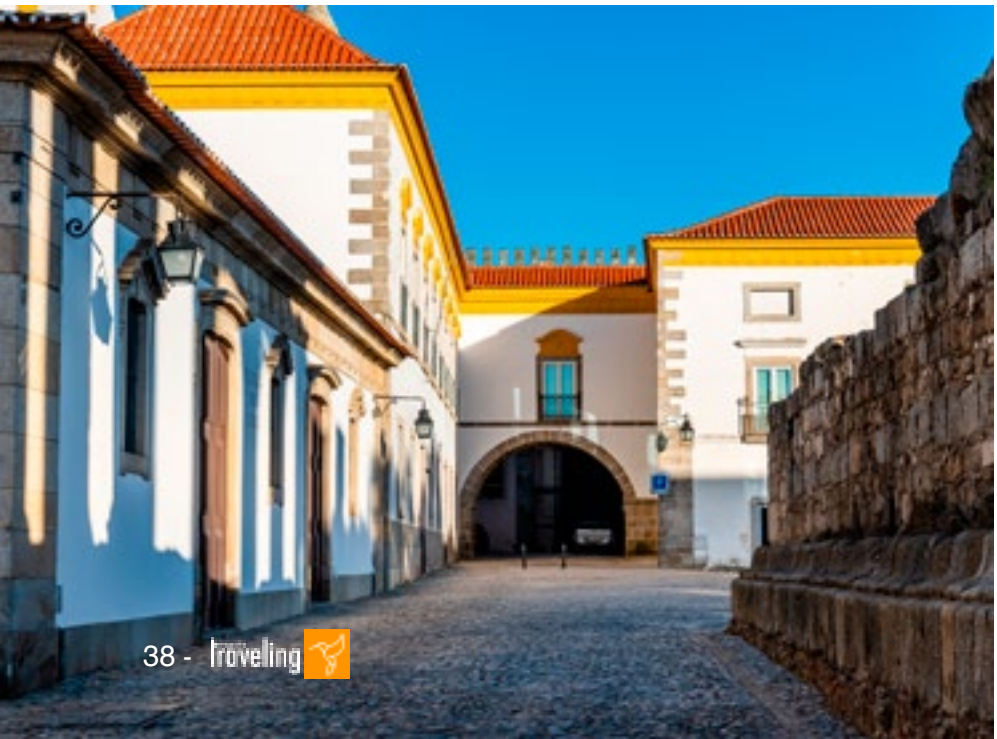
Évora's Roman temple

Évora & Beja

The charm of the Alentejo

Words and photos: Jose A. Muñoz

Entrance to Pousada Convento de Évora



Between Évora and Beja, the road passes olive groves, vineyards and pastures dotted with holm and cork oaks. The countryside stays with you along the way and turns up again in the markets, the shops and on restaurant menus. The two cities share this bond with the land and a long history, though each gives you its own reasons to stop. Exploring both is a way to get to know the Alentejo through its monuments and its cooking, with produce drawn from the land around them.



The fountain and Santo Antão church, Praça do Giraldo

Évora, from Roman temple to the Chapel of Bones

Praça do Giraldo is a good place to start exploring Évora on foot. Shops and cafés line the arcades, while at one end of the square the church of Santo Antão rises above the cafés. From there the streets climb past whitewashed houses, iron balconies and stone doorways. A World Heritage Site since 1986, the historic centre is compact enough to explore on foot and retrace your steps without following a set route. Higher up, the streets lead to the Roman temple, one of the monuments that most immediately identifies Évora.

Built in the first century, it once formed part of the Roman forum. It is popularly known as the Temple of Diana, though research links it to the imperial cult. Columns with Corinthian capitals still stand on the podium. Circle the temple to take in its proportions and see how it fits into a square ringed by buildings from different periods. Next door, the former Lóios convent houses the Pousada Convento de Évora. The old cloister and several vaulted rooms survive within the pousada, and it is easy to picture their place in the life of the convent. Between the temple and cathedral, the pousada is right in the heart of the old city. The conversion complements its surroundings and shows how part of Évora's heritage has found a new use.
Beside the pousada stands the church of São João Evangelista, also known as the Lóios church. Beyond the Gothic doorway, the walls are lined with blue-and-white tiles by António de Oliveira Bernardes.



Inside São João Evangelista church

The Roman temple, the tiles of the Lóios church and the Chapel of Bones tell centuries of history in a few streets of Évora

The panels tell religious stories, with crowds of figures set among carefully drawn details of buildings and interiors. Take time to look closely at each panel. The gestures, clothing and smaller details are easier to pick out when you look at each scene on its own. Santa Maria Cathedral is a short walk away. Its sturdy form reflects its medieval origins, at the transition from Romanesque to Gothic.

From the roof you can see the rooftops and the countryside around Évora. The university, founded in 1559, adds the courtyards and classrooms of the Colégio do Espírito Santo to the route. Another essential stop is the church of São Francisco and its Chapel of Bones. Human bones and skulls line the walls and pillars, arranged to follow the architecture. Built in the seventeenth century, the chapel has three aisles divided by pillars covered in human bones.

The inscription at the entrance speaks of the fate shared by those who rest here and those who visit. The Franciscans designed the chapel as a place to reflect on death. The sight is still startling, both for the closeness of the remains and for the way they were arranged. Near São Francisco, the municipal market offers a chance to discover local produce as you walk. Bread, olive oil and herbs are the basis of dishes such as açorda, made with garlic and coriander, and migas, often served with pork. You'll also find cheeses from Évora, olives and wines from the Alentejo.

Finish with pão de rala, a sweet made with almonds, egg yolks and candied squash. You'll find it in pastry shops, a reminder of how much the convent kitchens passed down and how those recipes still form part of local cooking. After lunch, the Água da Prata aqueduct gives you another reason to keep walking through the city.

Évora Cathedral



Inside the Chapel of Bones



University of Évora courtyard



Beja, history from the castle keep

You can see the castle keep well before you reach Beja's historic centre. It rises above the rooftops and guides your first steps towards the upper town. The medieval fortress recalls how important it was to defend Beja as the Portuguese kingdom took shape. Walk through the entrance and into the parade ground. Here you can take in the line of the walls and see how the keep, with its great height, dominates the entire enclosure.

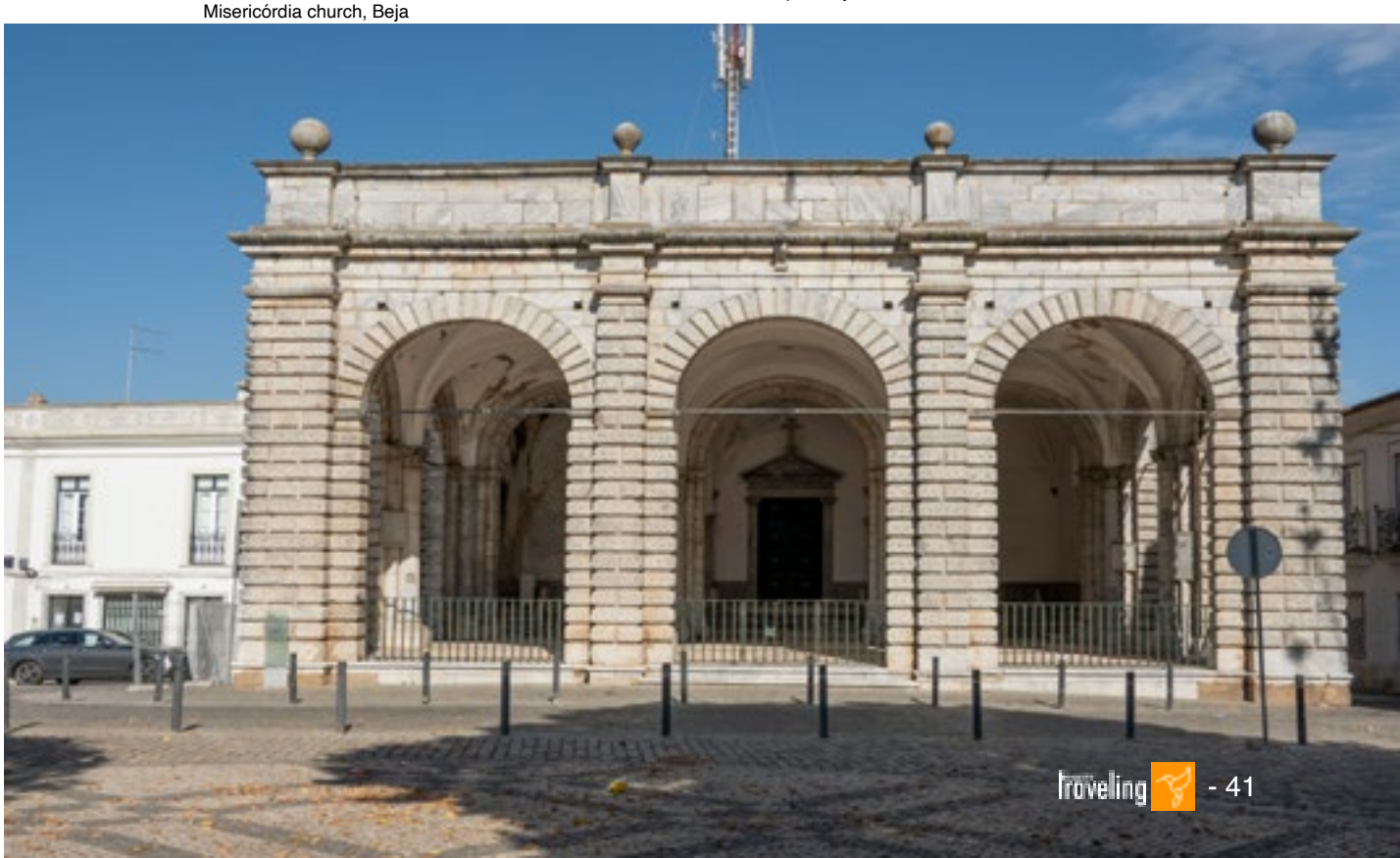
Allow time for the climb. The stairways and rooms are worth looking at as you make your way up. They give a sense of the thickness and solidity of the building well before you reach the top, some 40 metres above the ground. From there, the houses of Beja give way to a broad sweep of fields. The view makes it easy to see the military value of the site and pick out the churches and streets you'll explore next. The view also shows where the streets give way to open country and how closely the town is tied to the plain that surrounds it.

Long before the castle was built, the Roman town of Pax Iulia stood here. The Romans left their mark on the town and on the farms around it. The villa of Pisões, on the outskirts, is worth visiting to see that connection. The mosaics, baths and surviving rooms give an idea of how the estate was laid out and how farm work and domestic life fitted together there. Advance booking is required.



The keep of Beja Castle

Misericórdia church, Beja



Back in Beja, continue on foot past the cathedral, the church of Santa Maria and the streets leading to Praça da República. The centre is compact enough to walk from one sight to the next, and there is time to pause in a café or browse the shops as you go. After Évora, Beja takes the journey into the Lower Alentejo, a landscape in which the wide expanses of farmland are never far from view.

The former convent of Nossa Senhora da Conceição is another of Beja's main sights. Its doorway and windows retain Gothic and Mudéjar features, and it houses the Rainha Dona Leonor Museum. The convent is associated with Mariana Alcoforado, the nun credited with writing the celebrated Portuguese Letters, though their authorship remains disputed. The museum is listed as temporarily closed. It is worth checking whether it has reopened before making plans to see the interior.

Beja's ties with the countryside are just as evident at the table. Serpa cheese, olives and cured meats offer a first taste of the Lower Alentejo. Then might come migas with black pork, a lamb stew or a bowl of dogfish soup, all dishes that show how the local cooking makes use of what is available nearby. Bread goes into many of these dishes, along with olive oil, garlic and herbs. These are dishes in which you can recognise ingredients also used in Évora and in other towns across the Alentejo.



A Beja street with the castle keep beyond

For something to drink with lunch, look to the wines of nearby Vidigueira, north of Beja. In the pastry shops, trouxas de ovos and Santa Clara pastries carry on the convent baking tradition. It is worth setting aside as much time to see what is served at the table as you spend walking around the town. When you head back towards the castle after exploring town, the fields you saw from the keep seem more familiar. Those fields are where much of the food you've just been served comes from.

Old windmills in the Alentejo countryside



Holy Trinity church in Trindade, Beja



Travel notes

Getting there

Fly to Lisbon and hire a car from there. Iberia, TAP and other airlines connect the Portuguese capital with several Spanish cities. Évora is about 130 kilometres from Lisbon, roughly an hour and a half via the A2 and A6. Beja is a further 80 kilometres along the IP2, or around an hour's drive. If driving from Spain, one route is via Badajoz. Cross the border at Elvas and take the A6 towards Évora.

Where to stay

M'AR De AR Aqueduto

A five-star hotel by the aqueduct in the former Sepúlveda palace. It retains Manueline windows and vaulted rooms, alongside contemporary bedrooms, a pool and a spa. Rua Cândido dos Reis, 72. **www.mardearhotels.com**

Casa Amarela Health & Spa

A small place to stay in central Beja, with nine individually decorated rooms, designer furniture and touches of colour. There is a spa and there are terraces for unwinding after a walk. Rua Tenente Valadim, 7. **casamarela.pt**



Garden and pool at Casa Amarela, Beja



M'AR De AR Aqueduto, Évora

Pousada Convento de Évora

In the old Lóios convent beside the Roman temple. Stay in the upper town, amid its historic monuments, courtyards and cloisters, in a former convent that still has its vaults and thick walls. **pousadas.pt**

Where to eat

Adega Típica 25 de Abril

Alentejo cooking in the old town, including açorda, migas with pork and chickpea stew. Open for lunch and dinner. Closed on Sunday evenings and Mondays. Rua da Moeda, 23. **adega25deabril.pt**

Fialho

A family-run institution in Évora for Alentejo cooking. Try partridge in the style of the Cartuxa convent, cheeks braised in red wine or one of the game dishes. Booking is advisable. Travessa do Mascarenhas, 16 **www.restaurantefialho.pt**

Wine tourism

Herdade do Rocim

Between Vidigueira and Cuba, this winery follows the Alentejo tradition of fermenting wine in large clay vessels known as talhas. Tours and tastings can be followed by a meal of regional dishes paired with its wines. Book ahead for either**. rocim.pt**

Herdade do Vau

Near the Guadiana, between Beja, Serpa and Mértola, this estate offers rural accommodation and makes RISO wines. Vineyard tours and tastings are available by advance booking. A good option for a night in the countryside.
herdadedovau.com

Things to do

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Salou

A town to fall for, a place to experience

Words: Editorial team - **Photos:** Salou Town Council

Salou offers a way to live the Mediterranean. Welcoming and lively, the Costa Daurada's leading resort combines a good quality of life for residents with plenty of reasons for visitors to explore and come back. Its challenge is to stay competitive while developing tourism sustainably and keeping a balance that draws visitors throughout the year.

Its 25 beaches and coves, with their fine golden sand, are part of a wider offer that takes in culture, natural spaces, food, sport and major events. Together they give families more to discover and more ways to spend time together in Salou, well beyond the summer months.

Local heritage

Among the free cultural activities is a trail devoted to Modernisme and Noucentisme. It takes in 14 buildings that tell the story of the town's beginnings as a resort. Xalet Bonet, Villa Enriqueta, Xalet Mallorquí, Hotel Niza and the restored Xalet Fort give a glimpse of what Salou looked like as it began to welcome early holidaymakers.

The bunkers at Punta del Porroig offer another view of the past. Cut into the rock during the Spanish Civil War in case of a landing, they bring the history of the conflict into the Mediterranean landscape. Guided tours of their circular chambers run on the third weekend of each month.

Salou's heritage also includes the settlement of Kallípolis at La Cella, dating from the fourth to the second century BC, and the Roman villa at Barenys, where the remains of a pottery workshop survive.

Nature, coast and vineyards

A trail through Pla de Maset Park and the Duna Gran woodland brings back into use a place that generations of Salou residents have known. Old paths, dry-stone structures and native species form part of a project that protects the dune while opening up paths for people to enjoy a walk and spend time among the native plants and trees.

Backed by Tarragona Provincial Council and part-funded by the EU's NextGenerationEU programme, the project is reviving local winemaking traditions by planting a thousand vines of native varieties, including *pàmpol girat* and *escanyagós*. The planting is also part of a research project involving INCAVI and Rovira i Virgili University.

Along the coast, the Viewpoints Trail links 43 lookouts on the Camí de Costa. Over nine kilometres, the route takes in beaches and eight parks. The lookouts offer different views of the shoreline to anyone out hiking, *running* or taking a leisurely stroll beside the sea.

The flavours of Salou

Salou's food reflects its ties to the sea and its family traditions. Sabor Salou and the Squid Festival celebrate local produce and the town's seafaring heritage, and are two ways to discover these traditions in a town with a wide choice of places to eat.

For the 2026 European Heritage Days, research and accounts from local families helped recover a traditional recipe: salt cod and bread soup with potatoes and aioli, a dish that used to find its way to the table when families gathered for Sunday lunch.

Sport and major events

Sport keeps Salou active year-round. Challenge Salou, La Mussara, the Mare Nostrum Cup and RallyRACC give the town an international profile. Away from the big events, Salou's climate and sports facilities make it easy to stay active outdoors. The coastal scenery of Cap Salou is part of that appeal.

Festa al Cel is another highlight. The air show has drawn around 400,000 people to the Salou coast, with displays by day and after dark. For the duration of the festival, the seafront becomes a stage for aviation, drawing crowds at a time of year beyond the summer peak.

With culture, heritage, nature, food and sport, Salou continues to change so there is something to do in every month of the year. The aim is to attract new visitors and improve daily life for people who live here, while giving visitors reasons to discover a different side of the town at any time of year.

Salou Ajuntament



View of Llevant Beach



Modernista and Noucentista villas



Iberian tartare

Sardinia:

Mines, landscapes and wine culture

Words & photos: Alejandro & Luis Paadín - alejandro@paadin.es

Along the Cammino Minerario di Santa Barbara and through Carignano del Sulcis wine country

Sardinia conjures up beaches washed by clear seas, secluded coves and a Mediterranean cuisine shaped by the island's relationship with the sea. Travel into the south-west, however, and a different side of the island comes into view. Here, mountains and former mines are part of the landscape of rural communities, and much of the traditional cooking looks inland for its ingredients and inspiration.

The Cammino Minerario di Santa Barbara is a walking route of about 500 kilometres, divided into some thirty stages. It crosses the Sulcis-Iglesiente and other mining areas in south-west Sardinia, following paths once used by the men who worked in the mines and connecting disused industrial sites along the way. Following those paths on foot makes it easier to read the landscape, from the routes between the workings to the workings themselves. Much of what we see today is bound up with what was taken from beneath it.

A history written underground

For centuries, the mines shaped the economy of this part of Sardinia and the way its communities were organised. Mining has a long history here. It was in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when minerals such as lead, zinc and silver were extracted on an industrial scale, that the effects on the territory became most pronounced.

The San Giovanni mine holds the extraordinary Grotta di Santa Barbara, a cavern discovered during mining work in 1952. Inside the cavern, plate-like barite crystals stand out among the other crystalline formations. The materials around them tell a much older story. Their origins go back to the Cambrian period, around 500 million years ago.

Other landmarks include Monteponi and the landscapes of Nebida, Masua and Buggerru. At Porto Flavia, engineers cut into the cliff to load ore directly onto ships. The workings are among Sardinia's most recognisable industrial sites.

San Giovanni mine



The workings tell a story that goes beyond the engineering of the mines and the geology of the ground. Local families have passed down memories of the people who worked in them, including accounts of some especially painful episodes. In September 1904, soldiers shot and killed three workers during a miners' protest in Buggerru. The events helped trigger Italy's first nationwide general strike. That gave this small Sardinian town a place in the history of the European labour movement.

As the mines closed one by one, the loss of the industry had far-reaching consequences for the local economy and for the people who lived there. The Cammino Minerario di Santa Barbara is one of the initiatives now working to preserve what survives of that heritage. Walking, culture and sustainable tourism offer ways for the communities along the route to find new opportunities in the places shaped by the old industry.

A remarkably varied landscape

The trail also reveals the complex geology of south-west Sardinia. The changes are apparent over the course of its stages. The path passes cliffs, ancient sedimentary deposits, carbonate formations and metamorphic outcrops. It takes you from one kind of rock to another through landscapes shaped over millions of years by tectonic activity and erosion.

Mediterranean plants line much of the way. Mastic, everlasting flowers and sarsaparilla grow among the wind-exposed rocks. Local people traditionally used these plants in folk remedies and as food in times of scarcity. The north-westerly maestrale shapes much of the coastal landscape, while the warmer sirocco plays a part in some farming practices and local traditions.

Among the most striking sights are the Piscinas dunes, where sand has built up on a vast scale, with banks reaching inland from the island's west coast.



Entrance to Porto Flavia

The dunes owe their origins to the movement of sediment by sea and wind during the Quaternary. Nearby, the old mining districts of Ingurtosu and Montevecchio show how closely the landscape and human activity have evolved together. That contrast is one of the pleasures of the trail: a coastline of great ecological value lying close to former industrial sites that, for decades, brought profound changes to the lives of the people who lived and worked here.

The Piscinas dunes



The flavours of inland Sardinia

On an island surrounded by the Mediterranean, much of the traditional cooking has its roots in activities that take place inland. Sheep farming and crops grown without irrigation have shaped what people eat, giving cheese, meat and grain a central place in the Sardinian kitchen.

One of the most distinctive products is casu marzu, a sheep's milk cheese in which larvae of the cheese fly, Piophila casei, change the texture as it matures and help create its pungent aroma. Its sale is illegal, though some small producers still make it for their own use. The native black Sardinian sheep, or pecora nera, is also part of this food culture. The various pecorino cheeses are aged for different lengths of time, which gives them a wide range of textures, aromas and flavours.

Grain makes its way into some of the island's most characteristic foods. Pane carasau, a thin, crisp bread, is traditionally associated with shepherds. There are also small pizzette and mustazzeddu, baked dough folded over its tomato filling. Among the pastries are pardulas, made with ricotta or fresh cheese and often scented with saffron and citrus.

Pasta is another staple, with each shape suited to a different preparation. Malloreddus are small, ridged pieces of semolina pasta, traditionally served with a tomato and sausage sauce. Culurgiones are filled with potato, cheese and mint, then closed with their distinctive braided seam. Fregula takes yet another form, made from tiny balls of semolina that are toasted.

One feature of eating out in rural Sardinia is the agriturismo. By law, these businesses are attached to working farms and must meet requirements on where the food they serve comes from. The arrangement encourages them to put produce from their own farms and the surrounding region on the table, keeping local cooking closely tied to the agricultural economy.

The Carignano trail

Winegrowing is just as closely tied to the landscape and history of south-west Sardinia. It is the home of Carignano del Sulcis, an appellation built around a grape known in Spain as Cariñena or Mazuelo and grown widely around the Mediterranean.
Traditional bush vines, known locally as alberello sardo, survive here. Some grow in sandy ground, where they have been able to survive on their own roots without grafting. This is of particular interest in certain areas near Sant'Antioco and Calasetta. There, the properties of the soil have historically made it difficult for phylloxera to establish itself.



A plate of fregula

The Carignano trail



Yet sandy soils tell only part of the story of winegrowing in south-west Sardinia.

The area's geology is remarkably varied, with sedimentary and metamorphic formations as well as granite outcrops. Around Arbus in particular, this variety helps explain why growing conditions can differ substantially between vineyards that are quite close together.

The relationship between geology and wine involves many factors. The mineral make-up of the ground alone cannot explain what a wine tastes or smells like. Water availability, the depth and texture of the soil, and how it holds and releases heat all help explain differences from plot to plot.

Alongside Carignano are varieties less familiar abroad, including Monica, Bovale Sardo, Barbera Sarda and Nasco. Vermentino is the leading white grape.

Mining memories and the future of the land

The history of south-west Sardinia brings mining and winegrowing together. Following that relationship over the course of generations is one of the most interesting ways to understand how this part of the island and the people who lived there developed together. For generations the two activities shared the land, drew on the same resources and involved the same communities. Mining shaped the distribution of settlements and the jobs people could find. Farming and livestock fed the local communities. The relationship is taking a different form today. The Cammino Minerario di Santa Barbara is working with wineries and other local businesses to make wine culture part of what visitors experience along the route.

Bringing visitors to the area is one part of the aim. The other is to preserve the memories of the communities who lived by the mines and and whose identity grew out of their work underground.

There are parallels with other European regions, such as Valdeorras, El Bierzo and Asturias, where extracting what lay beneath the surface also left a lasting mark on the economy, society and landscape.

We often pay most attention to what the land can produce and overlook how much of our history was made underground. Sardinia reminds us of the human cost of extracting mineral wealth. It also shows how the communities that grew up around the mines learnt to live and work together, to support one another and to resist, habits that remain part of their identity.

Perhaps that is the great value of the Cammino Minerario di Santa Barbara. It lets you walk through a landscape that holds both the riches and the hardships of its past, while the people who live here look for new ways to keep the heritage of the mines alive where they still live.

Pan di Zucchero seen from the trail



Where the Paadíns eat

Cantina Gibadda

SS 126, km 83.3, 09031 Arbus (Sardinia)
www.gibadda.it
In the hills of Arbus, between Monte Linas and the Costa Verde, this small family winery was founded in 2014 when an old vineyard was brought back into use. Its four hectares, at around 400 metres on weathered granite soils, are planted with traditional Sardinian varieties. The winery combines traditional methods with wines made in terracotta amphorae and also makes extra virgin olive oil. Vineyard tours and tastings include Sorbino, a distinctive sweet wine made from dried Nasco grapes.





Birrificio 4 Mori

Località Scirìa – Montevecchio Levante, S.P. 66, km 5.6, 09036 Guspini (Sardinia)
www.birrificio4mori.it

This craft brewery opened in 2013 in the former power station of the Montevecchio mines, as part of a project to revive Sardinia's industrial heritage. Its Central European styles include Pozzo 16 (Helles), Pozzo 9 (Vienna lager) and Pozzo 5 (Dunkel Bock), named after the old mine shafts. There is a tasting room, and guided tours include samples of the beers and local food.

Trattoria del Sole e della Luna

Località Santa Giusta, 6, 09010 Buggerru (Sardinia)
Tel. +39 347 884 6310

In the countryside near Portixeddu, in the Sulcis-Iglesiente mining district, this trattoria specialises in Sardinian cooking, especially recipes from inland. The set menu includes local cured meats and cheeses, seasonal vegetables, culurgiones and ricotta ravioli, as well as porceddu, roast suckling pig served with potatoes. Regional sweets and traditional liqueurs such as mirto round off the meal.





Hotel Le Dune Piscinas*****

Via Bau 1, Località Piscinas, 09031 Arbus (Sardinia)
www.ledunepiscinas.com

Facing the sea amid the Piscinas dunes, this five-star hotel occupies a converted ore warehouse and retains some of its industrial architecture. The restaurant gives Sardinian produce a contemporary treatment. An extensive wine list champions Sardinian appellations and native grapes alongside bottles from the main Italian wine regions. The international selection features France in particular, with wines from other producing countries too.

La Baia da Tore

Via Roma, 68, 09010 Buggerru (Sardinia)
www.labaiadatore.com

In the centre of Buggerru, minutes from the harbour and the historic Galleria Henry, this family-run restaurant has been serving seafood and traditional Sardinian recipes for more than twenty years. Fish and shellfish from the Sulcis-Iglesiente coast feature in dishes such as fregula with clams, seafood spaghetti and freshly fried fish.





Albergo Al Cinghiale

Via Matteotti, 10, Montevecchio, 09036 Guspini (Sardinia)
Tel. +39 070 705 7938
www.albergoalcinghiale.it

In the heart of the old mining village of Montevecchio, Al Cinghiale occupies a late nineteenth-century building connected with the local mines. Carefully restored and protected for its heritage value, it retains much of its original architecture and now houses a ten-room hotel. There is a bar and space to enjoy local food and wines.

The Neapolitan Nativity:
Folk theatre, devotion and satire in miniature

Words & photos: Rosario Alonso





Few Christmas traditions capture the character of a city quite like the Neapolitan Nativity scene. In Naples, the Gospel account of the birth of Christ is set in an intricate world where faith sits alongside everyday life, humour and social criticism. Every figure, every market stall and every tavern re-created on this tiny scale tells you something about the streets and people of the real city. Look closely and what emerges is a small, concentrated portrait of the city.

The origins of a distinctive tradition

The portrayal of Christ's birth has deep roots in Europe. The tradition is often traced to 1223, when St Francis of Assisi staged the first re-creation of the Nativity at Greccio. With figures and live animals, he brought the Gospel story within reach of the people who came to see it.
The custom then spread across Italy and to other parts of Europe.

In Naples, the tradition took on a character of its own from the seventeenth century, and especially in the eighteenth under Bourbon rule. The Neapolitan court, particularly during the reign of Charles of Bourbon, the future Charles III of Spain, took an enthusiastic interest in these displays. Nobles, members of the clergy and wealthy families began commissioning ever more elaborate settings, large enough to hold dozens or even hundreds of figures.

That was when the Neapolitan Nativity became an art in its own right. Specialist workshops made figures with hand-modelled terracotta heads, jointed wire bodies and costumes cut from real cloth. The artisans tended to every detail, from embroidery and household utensils to tiny fruit and loaves of bread, recreating the texture of everyday life in the city with enough precision to recognise the ordinary things people wore, used and ate.





Between the sacred and the everyday

Where other European Nativity scenes concentrate on the biblical stable, the Neapolitan scene opens up well beyond it. There is an entire cityscape to look at, filled with figures that bring the daily life of Naples into the display.

At its centre is the birth of Christ: Mary, Joseph and the infant Jesus, with the ox and the mule. There are shepherds and the Three Wise Men, whose arrival is often shown as a journey. You can follow their route as it winds through the different parts of the display towards the Nativity.

A much wider world unfolds around the sacred scene. There are markets and taverns, street vendors, washerwomen, fishermen, musicians and farmers. Each represents a small part of everyday life, the work going on in the streets and at the stalls beyond the central scene.

One of the most distinctive features is the tavern, which often has a prominent place in the composition. The familiar bustle of a place where people stop to eat and drink gives the composition an earthly, human dimension alongside the sacred mystery of Christ's birth.

A fallen classical column is another familiar sight, often Corinthian in style. Its presence is deliberate. In the traditional symbolism of the Neapolitan Nativity, that fallen column represents the pagan world crumbling with the arrival of Christianity. Classical architecture survives as a trace of an ancient civilisation giving way to the new spiritual age ushered in by Christ's birth.

Common in eighteenth-century scenes, the motif reflects the Baroque taste for symbolic ruins and for reading a moral lesson into architecture.

Familiar figures

Some of the most recognisable characters in a Neapolitan Nativity come from local tradition and have no part in the biblical story.

One of the best known is Benino, the sleeping shepherd. In popular tradition the entire scene springs from his dream. As he sleeps in the landscape that the artisans have built around him, he imagines the birth of Christ and the whole world around it.

The street vendors represent the months of the year through the different wares they have laid out for sale: fruit, fish, poultry or vegetables.



There is also Donna Carmela, the baker who symbolises prosperity, and the Shepherd of Wonder. The figures mark the passing of time within the scene.

For centuries, artisans have depicted familiar trades: bakers, butchers, fishmongers, wine sellers and other craftspeople. The familiar tools of their trades help turn these little figures into a record of the people who made a living in the city.

Satire as tradition

Satire is one of the most distinctive features of the Neapolitan Nativity. From the eighteenth century, artisans introduced figures modelled on real people, including nobles, merchants, officials and members of the clergy. These likenesses offered an ironic view of society. The Nativity became a miniature chronicle of popular life. People looking at the display might recognise a character from public life among the figures.

The tradition continues in Naples today. Every year, the workshops make figures inspired by the faces of contemporary Naples and beyond, from politicians and footballers to artists and media personalities. Those additions keep the tradition's popular and critical spirit alive.

Via San Gregorio Armeno, the Nativity street

If one place sums up this tradition, it is Via San Gregorio Armeno, in the heart of Naples' historic centre. The little street between Spaccanapoli and Via dei Tribunali is known as the street of Nativity scenes.

For centuries it has been home to workshops that specialise in making the figures and their settings. At any time of year you can look in the windows and see shepherds, animals, household utensils and complete market scenes, all on a miniature scale. Come December, the little street becomes one of the liveliest places in the city.

Many shops belong to families who have practised the craft for generations, passing techniques down from parent to child. Marco Ferrigno's family has been in the trade since 1836. Figures about 30 centimetres tall cost around €400 and can take up to fifteen days to make. These miniature sculptures have clay heads, glass eyes, bodies of iron and esparto, wooden limbs and clothes sewn by hand. Every stage of the work, from shaping the face to sewing the costume, takes patience and close attention to detail.

Echoes of underground Naples

Grottoes, caves and spaces carved into the rock are part of the setting of some Neapolitan Nativity scenes. Their origins lie chiefly in the traditional imagery of the stable. Some scholars also suggest that they recall underground Naples, the network of chambers cut into volcanic tuff that has extended beneath the streets of the city since antiquity.

Naples has long existed on two levels, one visible and one hidden. Greek quarries, Roman cisterns, shelters and passages form part of that underground geography. The grottoes in many Nativity scenes can be read as a symbolic echo of that familiar feature of the city, where there is another Naples beneath the one you see from the street.

From Naples to Spain

The Neapolitan Nativity reached Spain in the eighteenth century through Charles III. Before taking the Spanish throne, he had been king of Naples and Sicily, where he had come to know first-hand how the local Nativity scenes were made and displayed.





Via San Gregorio Armeno





In Madrid he encouraged the making of large Nativity scenes at court and promoted the practice. Over time, the custom spread across the country. Spain developed a rich tradition of its own, particularly in Murcia, Andalusia and Catalonia, while the storytelling of the Neapolitan scenes continued to serve as a model.

A city in miniature

The Neapolitan Nativity is still one of the most recognisable expressions of the city's popular culture. Alongside the religious scene is a portrait of Naples, its trades, its humour and its history.

Amid ruined columns, boisterous markets, taverns and figures from our own times, each Nativity becomes a small theatre where faith, irony and everyday life meet. A reflection of Naples in miniature.

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5 winter breaks for lovers of markets, cafés and good food

Words: Clara Serrano Vega - claraserranovega@gmail.com - **Photos:** Archive



When the cold arrives, Europe changes pace. Squares light up, markets smell of spices, shop windows fill with sweets and cafés become places to linger over the last cup of coffee. Here are five cities for a winter trip with a simple purpose: eat well, walk and see where the day takes you.

Some trips you remember for the sights, others for a table. For the smell of coffee as you step into a tiny café, for the pastry shop you find around a corner, for a market where someone is roasting chestnuts at dusk, or for the drink you decide to take your time over because it is cold outside.

Winter has a way of slowing you down and making the ordinary things part of the trip, the little encounters you might otherwise hurry past. A street lit up at night, a bowl of hot soup, a coffee beside a steamed-up window. And as Christmas approaches, Europe's cities bring out their markets, dress their shop windows and revive their seasonal food traditions.

You can find that atmosphere well beyond the familiar capitals of Central Europe. There are cities where winter is celebrated around a table, among the stalls of a market or simply with a steaming cup of coffee in your hands.



Copenhagen

A winter that tastes of cinnamon

In Copenhagen, the cold feels like part of the scenery. People keep riding their bikes, lights reflect in the canals and the cafés glow with candlelight behind misted windows. Inside, the wood and the warmth turn each café into a small refuge from the street.
The Danish word **hygge** has become something of a travel cliché, but a seat in a café at dusk is enough to understand why it has gone around the world. Winter gives you a reason to stay a little longer at the table. Order a coffee, have it with a cinnamon bun and spend a while watching the ordinary life of the street from your seat.
Food is another reason to go. Copenhagen pairs contemporary Nordic cooking with a tradition of bread, cheeses, smoked fish and baking that comes into its own in the colder months. The markets give you a less formal view of the city and a chance to see what people eat from day to day. Stalls serve food from different corners of the world alongside local produce.
At Christmas, the **Tivoli Gardens** become one of the city's most familiar winter sights. Lights, stalls, sweets and hot drinks turn a walk through the gardens into an outing to savour in its own right.



The plan: Walk along Nyhavn, duck into a café, roam the markets and set aside an evening for new Nordic cooking.



Lisbon

An Atlantic Christmas

Lisbon shows that a Christmas break can be just as inviting with temperatures above freezing.

In winter, the Portuguese capital holds on to the clear light that makes it such a pleasure to explore on foot. The hills still demand something of your legs, but there is usually a reward by the time you reach the next corner. It might be a café, a pastry shop, a little tavern or a viewpoint looking back over the streets you have just climbed.

The ritual starts early. A short espresso and a pastel de nata still warm from the oven are a good way to begin the morning. Then there are neighbourhoods, markets and squares to explore, taking in a little of the city's culture and making time to stop for something to eat whenever the opportunity presents itself.

Christmas in Portugal has a character of its own. Shop windows light up, squares are dressed for the season and bakeries bring back traditional sweets, each a contender for the most delicious memory you take away from the trip.

And then there are the markets. Lisbon rewards anyone who likes to see what people buy, what they cook and what comes in from other parts of the country. At places such as the **Mercado da Ribeira**, food is a way to travel around Portugal without leaving the city.

Winter feels different here: a light jacket, a table by the window and the chance to end the afternoon looking out over the Tagus as the lights come on.



The plan: Have breakfast in a pastry shop, explore Alfama and Chiado, visit a market and finish with fish, Portuguese wine and a walk by the river.

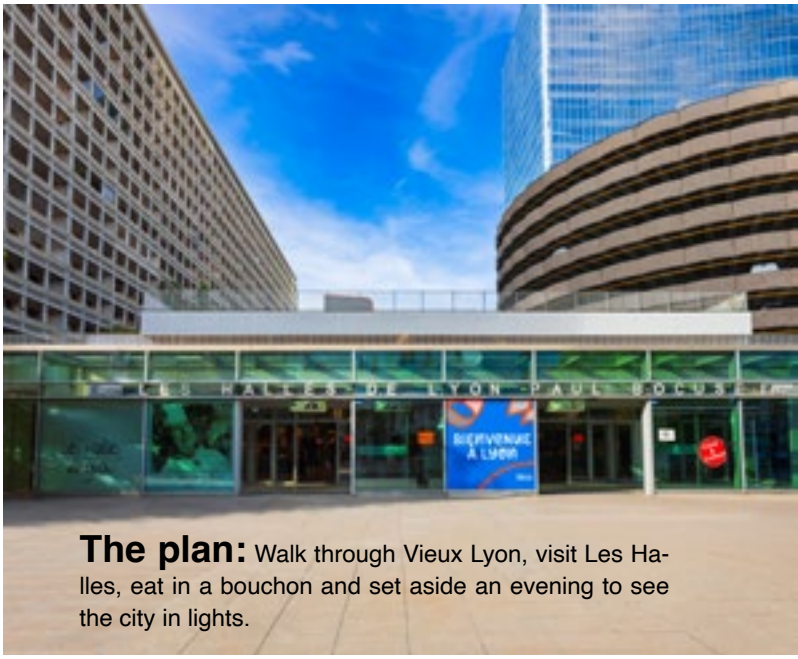
Lyon

Lights and good food

Few cities have made food as much a part of their identity as Lyon. In winter it is especially inviting. The light changes in the streets of Vieux Lyon, its squares invite you to walk without much hurry. When it is time to go indoors, the restaurants are refuges from the cold, and what is on the table soon becomes the centre of the conversation. The traditional bouchons of Lyon serve a hearty cuisine with deep roots in the city. There are soups and stews, cured meats, cheeses, meat dishes and desserts, the sort of food that gives you a reason to linger over lunch on a cold afternoon.

Lyon has a sweeter side, too. With so many chocolate shops, bakeries and pâtisseries, you could make an outing of exploring the city from breakfast to the next pastry counter and on to an afternoon treat. At **Les Halles de Lyon Paul Bocuse**, a remarkable cross-section of the French larder comes together under one roof, with enough to see and taste to make the market a stop in its own right. December also brings one of Lyon's biggest events, the **Fête des Lumières**. For several days, buildings and public spaces become the settings for light installations. The festival transforms the city and makes a spectacular complement to a trip centred on food.





The plan: Walk through Vieux Lyon, visit Les Halles, eat in a bouchon and set aside an evening to see the city in lights.



Palermo

A Mediterranean winter Markets and cafés

For anyone who likes a little more light with their winter, Palermo offers a fascinating alternative.

The Sicilian capital's relationship with food needs little explanation once you have walked through its historic markets. **Ballarò, Capo and Vucciria** put food at the centre of daily life, with stalls selling fish, fruit, vegetables, spices, cheeses and ready-to-eat dishes. These markets are part of the life of the neighbourhoods around them. Walking between the stalls is a way to get to know the city as well as a reason to visit.

Palermo also invites you to make a ritual of coffee. Sit, watch the movement of the street and let the trip unfold at its own pace for a little while before getting back on your feet. Then take to the streets again, past churches, palaces, narrow lanes and peeling façades.

Sicilian sweets alone can justify several stops: cannoli, cassata, granitas and other specialities that turn any stroll into a deliberate search for something sweet.

At Christmas, Sicily brings out its own traditions. Sweets, markets and Nativity scenes are a reminder that the Mediterranean knows how to celebrate winter too.





The plan: Have Sicilian pastries for breakfast, lose yourself in Ballarò, try the street food and finish with an espresso and a passeggiata.

Stockholm

An island Christmas

We head north to finish the trip. Stockholm is a city of water and islands, where winter afternoons seem to stretch out as the light fades. It is also a city of welcoming cafés and a food culture that comes into its own at this time of year. Gamla Stan, the old town, takes on a character of its own in the weeks before Christmas. The stalls selling crafts, sweets and traditional produce bring a festive air to its narrow streets, colourful buildings and historic squares.

It is a good time to try a **julbord**, the traditional Swedish Christmas buffet, or to step into a café for another national ritual, **fika.** Coffee and something sweet are part of it, but above all it is a pause. A reminder that sometimes the best thing to do on a trip is sit down.

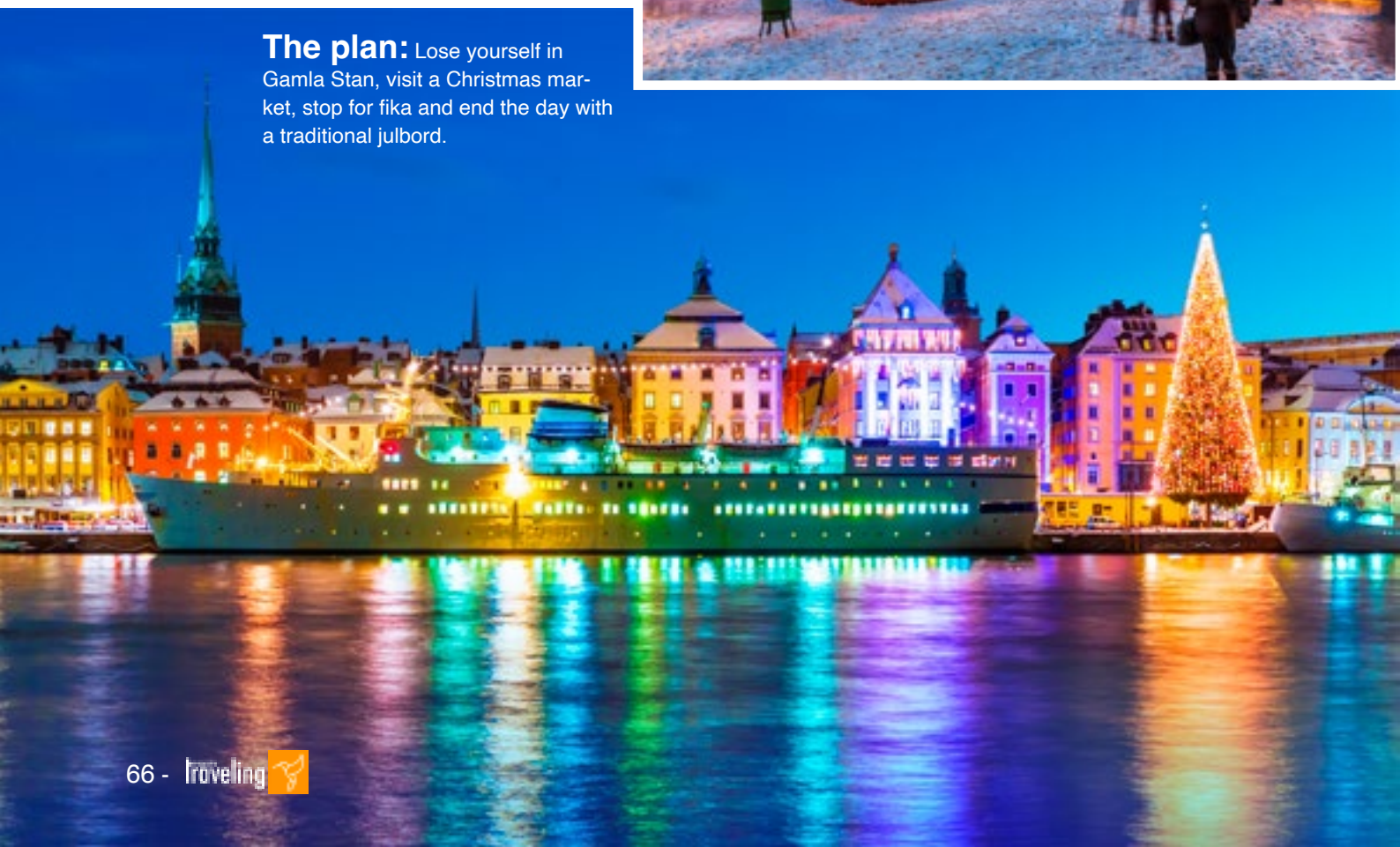
Cinnamon and saffron buns are perfect company on afternoons when darkness comes early. In between one coffee and the next there is always time to explore the islands, take in a museum or head out on the water for a different view of the city in winter.

One of the pleasures of this trip is seeing how Stockholm lives with winter. As the days shorten, the city adapts to the season and makes it a time to get together, share a meal, talk and turn on the lights as the darkness comes down.





The plan: Lose yourself in Gamla Stan, visit a Christmas market, stop for fika and end the day with a traditional julbord.



Five cities, one reason to go

Copenhagen, Lisbon, Lyon, Palermo and Stockholm are far apart and differ in climate, landscape, culture and cooking. They are destinations you might choose for quite different reasons, yet each is just as inviting when summer gives way to the cold.

Perhaps that is the best way to travel in winter. Make room for the things you discover precisely because the temperature has dropped: markets full of aromas, cafés to take shelter in, food you crave on a cold day and streets that take on a different beauty under Christmas lights.

There is an easy way to recognise a good winter break: you arrive with the city still to discover, and by the time you leave, you are already thinking about going back to that table.


Copenhagen


Lisbon


Lyon


Palermo


Stockholm



Christmas at Puy du Fou

Words: Editorial team
Photography: Puy du Fou

The El Sueño de Toledo stage hosts a large-scale production of La Alegría de la Navidad. The villages have craft workshops, food stalls, carols and a chance to meet the Three Kings.

At Puy du Fou you can start the day with El Cid and end it in Bethlehem. Along the way there is time to deliver a letter to the Three Kings, watch a craftsperson at work or sit down for a meal at an inn. The park outside Toledo celebrates its fifth Christmas season on selected days from 28 November to 5 January. The biggest change is on the El Sueño de Toledo stage, which hosts La Alegría de la Navidad for these weeks. The park first added this biblical story to its programme last year and now brings it to a five-hectare stage. The Christmas market is moving too. Its stalls will be spread across several villages, so the market will become part of the usual route through the park as you walk from one show to the next.

From Moses to Bethlehem

La Alegría de la Navidad begins long before the scene at the manger. It starts with the liberation of Moses' people, passes through the Roman era and ends with the birth of Jesus. In 45 minutes, the show brings together episodes separated by centuries that lead, in the Christian tradition, to Bethlehem. More than 120 performers will take the stage, and the stands can hold up to 7,000 spectators per show. Lighting, imagery and sound help you place each episode. The scale of the site gives the production room for scenes to unfold at considerable distances from one another. For anyone who has already seen El Sueño de Toledo there, the change adds a point of interest. From the same seats that usually look out on the story of Spain, audiences will now see that stage given over to a very different story, one that ends with a birth.



Much of the regular programme continues during the day. El Último Cantar draws on the figure of El Cid and A Pluma y Espada stages the adventures of Lope de Vega. In Allende la Mar Océana, the audience walks through a voyage inspired by Columbus. El Misterio de Sorbaces is set in Visigothic times, while El Tambor de la Libertad tells how Toledo resisted Napoleon's troops. El Sueño de Toledo and Cetrería de Reyes are off the programme during the Christmas season. With several eras packed into one day, it is worth leaving time between shows. Once you step out of a performance, you can spend some time on foot in the villages, looking more closely at settings of the kind you only catch a glimpse of on stage.

A letter for the Kings

For many children, the highlight will be stepping into the Royal Tent with a letter in hand. They can go up to the king they have chosen, hand it over and tell him what they have asked for. It is an encounter on a very different scale from the procession, a quiet moment before the Kings and their followers wind through the park as night falls. Melchior, Caspar and Balthazar take to the paths then, with pages, shepherds and an entourage of 150 characters. More than a hundred animals take part too, including sheep, goats and oxen. It is the same tradition experienced in two ways. In the tent, it is about the few moments of conversation each child has prepared in their own way. By the time the procession comes through, families are watching from the edges of the path, sharing in the moment when the Kings arrive.

This year the market spreads into the villages, so you come across craft stalls as you walk around. La Puebla Real recreates a medieval town of workshops and merchants. Villanueva del Corral, with its balconies and neighbourly air, evokes Spain's Golden Age. El Askar Andalusí recreates a caliphal camp with tents and fountains. The buildings change from one village to the next, and each setting suggests a different way to make your way through it. Music has a place too, with the fifth edition of the choir competition bringing together 22 children's groups from across Spain. The children sing the carols themselves, giving families another reason to linger between shows.





Over 120 actors tell the story from Moses to Bethlehem on the El Sueño de Toledo stage.



Some of the Christmas market stalls





A shepherd girl and her flock among the stalls





Making marzipan at a market stall

From market stalls to inns

At the stalls, a plate of migas is a good reason to take a break. Churros with hot chocolate or a slice of roscón suit the middle of the afternoon. For a sit-down meal, El Mesón del Buen Yantar and La Hospedería de Santiago serve traditional Spanish cooking. At El Bodegón del Capitán, the meal is part of the performance. The owner, a veteran of the Tercios, runs the inn at Villanueva del Corral and is intent on courting a local woman. Diners watch the comedy as they eat. At El Salón Califal, the food draws on Arab cooking and the plot follows a vizier who wants the throne. The two meals offer different ways of carrying the visit on at the table. Each is set in the period of the village where you sit down to eat.

The park has also prepared a Christmas menu. For groups, it starts with a seafood cannelloni with fish cream sauce, followed by herb-roasted pork and a bar of Toledo marzipan. The children's menu includes chicken stuffed with ham and cheese, potatoes and croquettes, and chocolate cake. Marzipan brings to the table a sweet associated with Toledo, where pastry cooks work almonds and sugar into figurines, eels and other shapes that come out of the city's traditional workshops. At the park it comes as dessert, while at the stalls roscón and hot chocolate mark the afternoon break. Between lunch and the Bethlehem show there are still carols and workshops, and for the youngest visitors, time to wait for the Kings to come out along the paths.



Special Christmas menu





Practical guide
Christmas at Puy du Fou

PUY DU FOU ESPAÑA

Dates and tickets

The Christmas season runs on selected days from 28 November 2026 to 5 January 2027. Buy tickets on the Puy du Fou España website, where you can check which days the park opens and what time each performance begins. La Alegría de la Navidad is staged outdoors on the usual El Sueño de Toledo stage.

By car

The park is outside Toledo, off exit 13 of the CM-40. There is free parking at the park. The drive from the historic centre of Toledo takes about ten minutes. From Madrid, allow around an hour, depending on traffic.

By public transport

A direct service runs from Toledo. Civitatis offers a pre-booked return transfer from San Martín Bridge. For the December and January dates it operates, the advertised return leaves the park car park at 10.15 pm. Choose the date of your visit to see what time the outward transfer leaves. Puy du Fou also has its own shuttle, stopping at Ronda del Granadal and San Martín Bridge. Check with the park whether it runs on your chosen day.

From Madrid, Avant trains leave from Atocha and Alsa buses from Plaza Elíptica. From Toledo, take a taxi or book a transfer. If returning that evening, check the departure time of the last train or bus back to Madrid.

Where to eat

Try migas at the market stalls between shows or stop for hot chocolate and churros in the afternoon. El Mesón del Buen Yantar and La Hospedería de Santiago serve traditional food. El Bodegón del Capitán and El Salón Califal combine a meal with a performance. Check which restaurants will be open on the day of your visit. It is worth booking a table in advance if you want to eat at a particular sitting.

Albacete
Under the stars

The world's first Starlight province

Words: Jose A. Muñoz · **Photos:** Albacete Prov. Council

Starlight certification brings 86 municipalities across Albacete's six districts into one project. The night sky becomes part of a journey through castles, squares and mountains, and gives you a reason to stay longer.

In the mountains around Nerpio, some telescopes work for people thousands of kilometres away. Their owners operate them over the internet while the equipment remains at AstroCamp, under the skies of the Sierra del Segura. It is the conditions here that make this a place to set up a telescope and keep it trained on the sky. Among the ravines and walnut trees, anyone who needs to look a long way knows how much the darkness is worth. That same quality has opened up another way to travel through Albacete: stay in its villages after sunset.

In 2024, the province completed Starlight certification across its six districts, covering 86 municipalities, all except the provincial capital. The Starlight Foundation presented it as the first province in the world to be designated a **Starlight Tourist Destination.**
The distinction came after years of taking measurements, training people and preparing sites where visitors could look up at the night sky. It recognised the quality of the night sky, the commitment to protecting it and the activities and services that help visitors discover it.

The project first took shape in the mountains and spread to the rest of the province as other districts did the work required for certification. The Sierra del Segura and the Sierra de Alcaraz y Campo de Montiel earned certification in early 2021. They were followed by La Manchuela, Campos de Hellín, Monte Ibérico-Corredor de Almansa and Mancha Júcar-Centro. That spread offers a choice of landscapes, and it is worth resisting the urge to see them in a single trip. A night of observing takes time and lends itself to a longer stay, with room to get to know a village's history, its paths and its cooking.

The provincial capital makes a good starting point. The Pasaje de Lodares, built between 1925 and 1929, still houses shops and homes beneath its iron-and-glass roof, inspired by Italian arcades. At the Cutlery Museum, you can spend some time getting to know a trade so closely associated with Albacete that its history offers a way into the story of the city itself. Between the two visits, there is time for gazpachos manchegos or atascaburras before heading to Chinchilla de Montearagón. Its castle signals the change in scale from a distance. The plain falls away below, while the streets climb the hill past houses with coats of arms and dwellings cut into the rock.

Chinchilla belongs to Monte Ibérico-Corredor de Almansa, one of the districts that completed the province-wide designation. The ditch cut around its fortress shows how much effort went into defending the site. Farther east, Almansa Castle recalls the importance of the route to Spain's east coast and the battle of 1707. Both are worth exploring by daylight. When planning a night's observing, attention shifts to suitable sites nearby, away from the glow of the town. Allow enough time to do both and you can get to know this part of the province in two ways, through the monuments you visit by day and the sky you come out to see at night.

The Milky Way over lavender fields, Ossa de Montiel





Lisosa Castle and the Milky Way

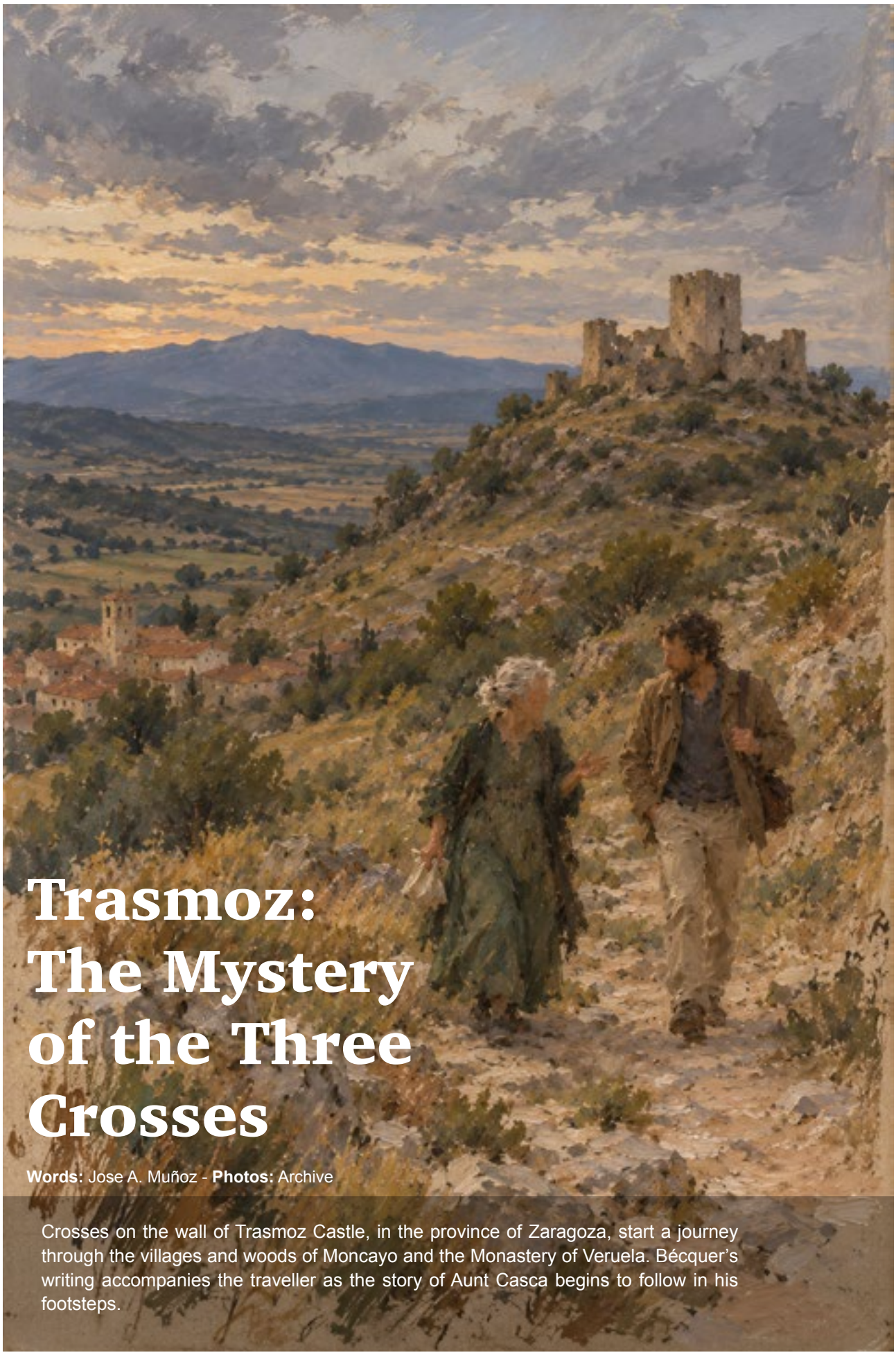


The Milky Way over Alcaraz Castle

The mountain districts already have a network of stargazing viewpoints. In the Sierra del Segura there are sites in Ayna, Bogarra, Elche de la Sierra, Férez, Nerpio, Riópar and Yeste. Signs help you find places to observe among the mountains. The shape of the land matters here, because it determines how much of the sky comes into view from the spot where you stop. Riópar is a good place to see how a viewpoint can add a few hours, or a whole evening, to a visit. If you have come for the Chorros del Río Mundo waterfalls, spend a few hours in the town and set aside the evening for stargazing.

Between the two lies a little-known story. Today's Riópar grew up around the metalworks promoted in the eighteenth century by the Viennese engineer Juan Jorge Graubner. It was the combination of calamine and the power of the water that made brass production possible. As the workshops in the valley took shape, their work drew people down from the old hilltop settlement. The museum of the Reales Fábricas de San Juan de Alcaraz preserves that history. A walk around Riópar Viejo completes the picture of a landscape transformed by industry long before anyone spoke of stargazing tourism.
Nearby Alcaraz makes another stop in these mountains. Its market halls and the towers of La Trinidad and El Tardón recall the trade and architecture of the birthplace of Andrés de Vandelvira. Farther south, Nerpio has a different heritage: centuries-old walnut trees along the riverbanks and the paintings of Solana de las Covachas and Torcal de las Bojadillas. These rock shelters, which you can visit with a guide, are part of the Mediterranean rock art recognised as World Heritage. Start the day with those figures and end it with a booked observing session under the sky that has made Nerpio known to astronomers. Beyond the mountains, the way you plan the trip changes again. In Alcalá del Júcar, caves run through the rock beneath the white houses and the castle. The daytime visit follows the slopes and bends of the gorge. To see the stars, leave the canyon behind and find an open horizon. The landmarks guide the walk by day, then the conditions overhead determine where to stop. Knowing how to choose that spot is part of what the guides bring to the visit.

The weather and the phase of the Moon help you plan the outing. Nights close to the new moon are best for seeing fainter objects. Then give your eyes time to adjust to the dark and listen to the guide beside the telescope.



Trasmoz: The Mystery of the Three Crosses

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

Crosses on the wall of Trasmoz Castle, in the province of Zaragoza, start a journey through the villages and woods of Moncayo and the Monastery of Veruela. Bécquer's writing accompanies the traveller as the story of Aunt Casca begins to follow in his footsteps.



Trasmoz Castle

Andrés spotted the crosses as he approached the wall of Trasmoz Castle to photograph the village. There were three, carved into separate stones at chest height. The grooves of two were still deep. The third was barely visible. Below the castle, the rooftops of Trasmoz ran down the slope and, beyond the fields, Moncayo was half hidden by cloud. In his rucksack he had a copy of Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer's **Cartas desde mi celda** (Letters from My Cell). He had bought it while preparing for the trip and decided to bring it along, to see those places while Bécquer's stories were still fresh in his mind.

An elderly woman with grey hair came up the path and stopped beside him. She wore a slightly worn green dress. Andrés asked about the marks and she came closer to look. People used to make crosses by the hearth to keep witches from coming in, she explained, though these might have a different origin. When she saw the book in his hands, she told him to read the story of *Aunt Casca*. Then she asked what day it was. When he said Friday, she suggested they talk about something else. Andrés smiled, thinking she was joking, but the woman hurried away.

From the keep you can see why Trasmoz stands here. The houses sit on a rise overlooking roads and farmland, with **Moncayo** always in view. The fortress tells the story of its lords and of the conflicts that shaped this borderland. The museum displays finds from excavations and devotes part of its collection to the beliefs that made the village famous. Witches are part of the visit, but there are other reasons to make the climb. Stop to look out from the castle and you can take in the fields below, the roads through them and the mountain beyond.

Take your time on the way down. The streets follow the slope, with small changes in perspective: a stretch of wall above the roofs, an old doorway, balconies with potted plants and façades where stone meets render. Andrés stopped at the **Church of the Virgen de la Huerta**, which retains a Romanesque Chi-Rho above its entrance. It was a detail that made him look more closely. Beneath the alterations and repairs were traces of other times. Trasmoz had more to tell than its reputation as a village of witches. Over lunch, he opened the sixth letter.



Bécquer describes meeting a shepherd after losing his way between Litago and Trasmoz. From the shepherd he learns how neighbours came to blame Aunt Casca for their misfortunes, how they pursued her and how she died at their hands. For the writer, it was murder. The shepherd still speaks of it as though the neighbours had seen justice done. At the end, a girl explains why she will not speak of witches on a Friday: on that day they can hear everything said about them. Andrés remembered the woman at the castle and marked the page before going on.

Litago was the next stop. The name he had just found in the book now had a place on the map and streets he could walk. The villages on this side of Moncayo are close enough to visit in one trip, though it is worth leaving time to go on foot. A walking route links Trasmoz and Litago, and the paths continue towards **Lituénigo** *and* **San Martín de la Virgen del Moncayo.** Andrés decided to drive and save the next morning for the woods. On his way he pulled over by some fields for another look at the mountain. From there he could make out the villages on the slopes. Seeing them together gave him a clearer sense of how far Bécquer had walked on those paths. In Litago he took his time looking at gates, eaves and façades, some in exposed stone and others whitewashed. The mountain came into view again as he left. From below it can look close and easy to reach, but the summit of San Miguel rises to 2,315 metres, the highest point in the Iberian System.

The natural park covers around 11,000 hectares and takes in a wide range of habitats. That contrast is one of the pleasures of exploring this part of Moncayo. In just a few kilometres the open fields give way to wooded slopes and, as you climb higher, the landscape changes again into high mountain terrain.

Veruela was for that afternoon. Beyond **Vera de Moncayo**, the monastery walls came into sight by the road. **Gustavo Adolfo and Valeriano Bécquer** stayed there between 1863 and 1864. The Espacio Bécquer recalls their stay. Andrés had read a few pages at lunch and could now picture the writer here, setting off for the villages and hearing stories that would eventually reach his readers. At Veruela, you can walk through the rooms where he stayed and see where he set out from to explore Moncayo.

A visit to the **Royal Monastery of Santa María de Veruela** takes time. In the cloister, pause at the tracery of the arches and turn the corner for a view along the galleries. The church is striking for its size, the chapter house for the arrangement of its supports and vaulting. The refectory and the other rooms help you make sense of monastic life. Andrés joined a guided tour and put the book back in his rucksack. For a good while he gave all his attention to what was in front of him: how high the aisles rose above him, how the doors connected one room to the next and how much he would have walked past if no one had drawn his eye to it. Before leaving, he went back to the cloister to photograph the arches from the opposite gallery.

◀ Trasmoz and Moncayo · Entrance to the Royal Monastery of Santa María de Veruela





Cloister of the Royal Monastery of Santa María de Veruela

The next morning he set out for **San Martín de la Virgen del Moncayo** and **Agramonte**. The landscape changed as he climbed. The fields fell behind and the road entered the woods. On this side of the mountain, you can follow the changes as you climb, from stands of holm oak and oak to beech woods and then pine. Above the last trees lie scrub and the summits. The land still bears traces of the glacier that once shaped it. Before choosing a route, the **Agramonte Interpretation Centre** is a good place to learn about these habitats and ask which path best suits your plans.

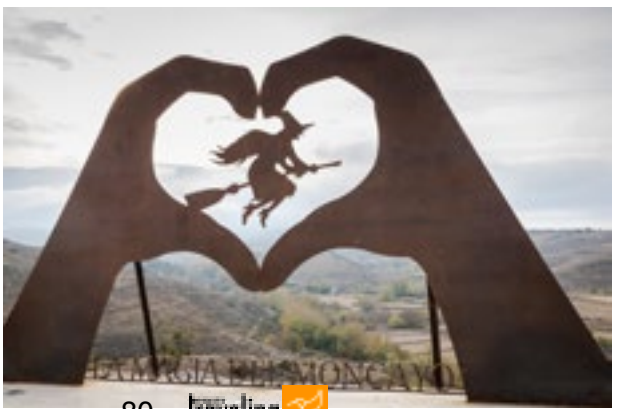
Andrés walked towards the Fuente de la Teja. This is a way into the woods without attempting the summit. The route starts near Agramonte and leads to a recreation area beneath the beeches. As he walked he watched the greens, ochres and reds of the trees, with the sound of water alongside him. In autumn the changing colours of the beeches give the whole walk a different appearance. At other times of year the shade and the cool air beneath the trees are just as good a reason to make the stop. Here the Moncayo he had photographed from Trasmoz was no longer a distant backdrop.

His next stop was the **Santuario de la Virgen del Moncayo**, a chance to get closer to the high ground and look out over the plain from another angle.

1. Trasmoz beneath Moncayo · 2. Path through Peñarroya beech woods · 3. Monument to the witches of Trasmoz · 4. View of Litago











Sanctuary of the Virgen del Moncayo

On other slopes, the ravines of **Purujosa and Talamantes** have landscapes worth a day of their own. Andrés wrote down the names before heading back. He was planning another trip later in winter to see the villages and follow the trails he had missed.

He decided to return to Trasmoz to collect his things from the rural guesthouse before heading home. He found the woman by the wall again. She asked about the trip, and he told her about Veruela and the beech woods. When he mentioned the story of Aunt Casca, she asked what he thought of the woman. He said she had been murdered and that Bécquer had written it plainly. The stranger nodded. They walked down together to the first houses, where she turned into a narrow street. Andrés followed to ask her name and say goodbye, but the lane ended at a closed gate. A neighbour heard him call and looked out. The house had stood empty for many years, she told him. He described the woman and her green dress. Then he said they had talked about Bécquer and about crosses carved in the castle wall. The neighbour asked if he was sure he had seen her go in. Andrés stared at the gate. 'Yes, I saw her go in and I even heard the door shut.' The neighbour slammed her window. Only then did Andrés think about the last thing the woman had said to him: *'Bécquer told the story well, though I never did get to meet him…'*

This feature combines travel and fiction. Andrés, his encounters and the crosses on the wall are fictional. The places and their descriptions are real.

The Virgin and the 'Witch of the Year' share a façade in Trasmoz





HOTEL PALACIO TONDÓN (Briñas)

Hotel Palacio Tondón

Autograph Collection (Briñas, La Rioja)

Words: Rosario Alonso - **Photos:** Hotel Palacio Tondón and Jose A. Muñoz

In Briñas, an old manor house has become a 33-room hotel looking out towards the vineyards of Rioja Alta. Palacio Tondón, Autograph Collection, retains a nine-arch gallery and a cellar holding part of the wine collection of Gran Reserva, Jesús Terradillos's restaurant.



In Briñas, the Ebro runs at the foot of the village houses. From the terrace at Palacio Tondón you can see the far bank and, beyond it, the rows of vines on the river bend that gives the hotel its name. The entrance is on Calle Campo, among the village's stone houses. On that side, thick walls and small openings retain the secluded character of the old residence. The river façade opens towards the garden and the vineyards.

The hotel links three buildings. The oldest date from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and over time the complex has served as a manor house, a farmhouse and a school. Nine dressed-stone arches survive in the Loggia lounge. The gallery runs along the most open side of the palace. From inside you can look out on the river landscape that is hidden from view as you approach through the village streets.



Restoring the palace

Architect Giovanni Muzio led the restoration and extension with Carpe Construcciones y Proyectos. Carlos Porqueras helped design the interiors. The hotel opened in 2018 and is now part of Marriott's Autograph Collection. The project restored around 1,300 square metres of the old house and added just over 1,100 square metres of new construction. The finishes, counters and slatted screens in the lobby, bar and dining room were made to measure.

The difference between the two buildings is clear in the bedrooms. In some rooms of the old house, the rock on which it stands is left exposed. In the seven rooms of the new wing, timber is part of the structure. Cross-laminated panels form the floors, walls and ceilings on a fir frame. Pale furnishings with curved lines soften the geometry of the boards. In some bathrooms, an octagonal shower breaks with the straight lines of the bedroom.







A selection of the hotel's rooms



Rooms and a walk through Briñas

Palacio Tondón has 33 rooms, five of them junior suites. The doubles are divided between the stone building and the timber wing. Some look onto the Ebro or the vineyards, others onto the street and the houses of Briñas. In some of the river-facing rooms, a chaise longue by the window lets you follow the curve of the meander. Rooms have individual climate control, a desk, a minibar and Wi-Fi. The hotel offers room service and has a wine bar and a room for meetings and celebrations.

From Calle Campo, walk up to the church of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción and back down to the riverside path. Follow the Ebro to Briñas Bridge, the historic crossing towards Haro. Its seven spans combine pointed and rounded arches. This stretch follows the inland Camino de Santiago. As you come out onto the bridge, the perspective begins to change. The walk brings you to the other bank, where you can see the bend of the Ebro around the planted land before the river continues towards Haro.

Dining at Gran Reserva

Back at the hotel, Gran Reserva's dining room and terrace overlook the Ebro. Jesús Terradillos, from Logroño, heads the kitchen and oversees breakfast and the rest of the hotel's food. The menu changes with the seasons, giving a place to vegetables from the garden, pulses and the region's traditional Rioja stews.

Inside Gran Reserva restaurant



The restaurant's signature dishes include an artichoke flower with potato cream, saffron milk caps in an orange escabeche with a slow-cooked egg, and confit shoulder of suckling lamb with roasted peppers.
Anguiano caparrones, a variety of red bean Terradillos has served with ham broth, piparra peppers and a thin slice of Iberian pork belly, have appeared on his autumn menus, along with confit cod on a Rioja-style fritada and venison shank stewed with red berries and aligot, a potato purée worked with cheese. This autumn's desserts include a PDO Camerano cheesecake with pear, crisp crumbs and black trumpet mushrooms. The mushroom brings to dessert an ingredient usually found in seasonal stews.

The wine list explores the Rioja appellation through whites and reds from historic estates and younger producers. Bottles selected by the house include white Viña Tondonia Reserva and reds such as La Rioja Alta's Gran Reserva 890 and Castillo de Ygay. The selection by the glass gives you the freedom to try one wine with the vegetables and another with a stew, or to taste something at the bar before going through to the dining room.

Part of the collection is kept in the old calado, the cellar restored during the building work. The hotel holds tastings here, among the old stone walls where some of the most distinctive bottles in the collection are kept. At the back you can hear the water from a small cascade fed by the Ebro. The river you see from the table makes itself known here by its sound.



Artichoke flowers with shellfish





Tartlet with toasted meringue, ice cream and crumble · Cheeseboard

Gran Reserva restaurant



At Gran Reserva, Jesús Terradillos serves Rioja recipes and seasonal produce. Out on the Palacio Tondón terrace in Briñas, there is every reason to linger over the Ebro and vineyard views after lunch.

Hotel Palacio Tondón



M´AR de AR
AQUEDUTO

Words: Jose A. Muñoz - **Photography:** M´AR de AR

A stay in an Évora palace

The former Sepúlveda palace, once a college and textile factory, is now a five-star hotel by Évora's aqueduct. The restoration kept the Manueline windows and chapel, opened new bedrooms onto the garden and set aside the vaulted rooms for Alentejo cooking.

From the garden at M'AR De AR Aqueduto you can see the aqueduct that supplied Évora with water for centuries. Its arches are so close to the pool that they seem to enclose one side of the property. Directed by the royal architect Francisco de Arruda and inaugurated in 1537, the aqueduct gives the hotel its name. The entrance on Rua Cândido dos Reis belongs to another building from the same century, the former Sepúlveda palace, within the city walls and a short walk from Praça do Giraldo.

The Castilian nobleman Diogo de Sepúlveda commissioned the house in the early sixteenth century. Several vaulted ground-floor rooms survive, along with three Manueline windows on the façade, protected since 1922. One retains a frame with a trefoil arch and foliage carved in stone. In another of the windows you can still make out the shapes of two small horseshoe arches. On the third, what remains of the moulding looks like interlaced branches.

In 1625 the palace became home to the Colégio de São Manços, also known as the Colégio das Donzelas, which took in girls from noble families without means. The single-nave church survives from that period. In the nineteenth century, the building passed into private hands and became a factory. A steam engine was installed, grain and olives were milled and cork was worked. Textile production followed in the 1950s, and the building became known as the Melka factory.

Restoring the palace

Architects Pedro Guilherme and Sofia Salema placed the reception, bar, restaurant and lounges in the palace, where the project focused on preserving the existing structure. The college church was restored so its single nave could be used for meetings and celebrations. In parts most altered by the factory, rooms were restored and new sections built to house bedrooms. The hotel opened in 2008.

You feel the change of period as you leave the vaulted rooms of the lobby behind. In the new wing, the tall windows open up the view of the garden and pool. The Portuguese studio Branco sobre Branco, run by Paula Laranjo and Vera Moreira, designed the interiors and created furniture and accessories for the hotel. Among the lobby pieces are Ball Chairs, designed in 1963 by Finland's Eero Aarnio. Their spherical fibreglass shells enclose the seats like little cabins beneath the palace vaults.

The rooms

The hotel has 62 rooms and suites. In the palace wing, classic rooms are spread over two floors and face the street or the garden. Rooms with terraces on the ground floor have a small outdoor platform, where you can step outside and look straight towards the aqueduct. On the floor above, some rooms have larger private balconies, with furniture for sitting out and looking over the houses and rooftops of Évora.

The palace suites and the balcony suites range from 40 to 45 square metres. They have a sitting room with a desk and a bathroom with a separate shower and bath. Balcony suites sleep up to four guests. Classic rooms have climate control, Wi-Fi, a minibar, a coffee machine and a desk with its own light. The garden has separate outdoor pools for adults and children. The arches of the aqueduct are still in view when you go down to swim.

Aqueduto Spa

The indoor pool was added in 2020 in an extension by Nuno Narciso Arquitetos. The panoramic roof admits natural light, and you can look out at the garden of orange trees from the water. The heated pool has jets, a cascade and submerged hydromassage seats. The spa circuit is included in the stay, with time to go from the pool to the hot tub, sauna or steam room and then sit in the relaxation area.





The spa has a gym and four rooms for facial and body treatments. The choice includes a hot-stone massage and a Vichy shower. In the latter, gentle jets of warm water run over you as the massage is given. The Aqueduto's signature treatment begins with a hydromassage bath with essential oils and ends with a head massage.

Alentejo cooking

Degust'AR occupies several ground-floor rooms in the palace. The vaulted rooms, their horseshoe arches and the traces of wall paintings all remain part of the dining room, where the palace's older fabric is still in view. António Nobre has shaped the group's approach to food. The restaurant kitchen is headed by Tiago Moreno, from São Marcos do Campo, a village beside the Alqueva reservoir.

Bread, olive oil and herbs matter to the menu as much as meat and fish. Migas accompany a cut of Iberian pork shoulder and reappear with cod, coriander, egg yolk and cacholeira, a Portuguese sausage. Pike-perch comes with a sauce based on caldeirada, the Portuguese fish stew, and cauliflower migas. There are two tasting menus and, with either, you can choose a pairing of Alentejo wines. Both menus end with sweets from the convent tradition and lemon sorbet.





The second restaurant, Degust'AR Bistro, serves dishes to share. There are boards of Alentejo cheeses and cured meats with homemade preserves, mushrooms roasted with garlic and coriander, and Iberian pork cheek turnovers. Among the dishes most closely associated with the city is Évora cheese, served hot from the oven with olive oil, oregano and toast.

After dinner, go back to the garden to see the aqueduct arches before setting out for a walk through Évora. Praça do Giraldo is a few minutes away on foot. Its arcades and marble fountain mark the transition from the narrow streets of the old centre to the city's liveliest square.

From the square, Rua 5 de Outubro climbs towards the cathedral, past shops selling cork and ceramics. A little farther on, the columns of the Roman temple rise opposite the Palace of the Dukes of Cadaval. To return to the hotel, take Rua do Cano downhill, where some houses fit into the arches of the same aqueduct you saw from the garden.



M'AR de AR
AQUEDUTO

We saw it on screen. Now we can live it.

By Julián Sacristán - comunicacion@wfm.es

Inspired by the world of Neverland, the €7 million production gives Espacio Delicias another transformation. The set spreads across 7,000 square metres, giving the audience room to explore a world where theatre, contemporary circus and an immersive experience come together.

The Island of Neverland brings together a Spanish and international cast. Captain Hook is played by Edu Ferrés, one of Spain's leading improvisers and an actor whose work ranges from straight acting to clowning and physical comedy. Cristina Cigüela, who specialises in aerial hoop and hair suspension, plays Tinker Bell. Inés Castrillo plays Tiger Lily and works on high and low wire as well as balancing acts. Anna Saskia Stickler plays Tempesta, Hook's daughter, and specialises in trapeze, slackwire and several forms of acrobatics. Gabriele Lemiere plays Peter Pan, bringing his skills in Chinese pole and aerial straps.

Pirates, Lost Boys and dancers join them. It is a new entertainment format and an international benchmark for the kind of large-scale production that can be mounted under a big top. The show has reshaped Espacio Delicias to make room for that format.

The Island of Neverland tells an original story set in the world of Neverland. Tempesta, Captain Hook's daughter, was born in a storm and raised among pirates in her father's shadow. Taught to obey, lead and never fail, she seemed to have her future mapped out. Once she reaches the island, the rules that have governed her life begin to change. Discovering a world of freedom, play and danger, Tempesta must decide whether to carry on wandering with the pirates or change the course of her own story and stay in Neverland with the Lost Boys.





Tempesta is one of many people who have a choice to make. As soon as you book, before picking up your ticket, you have to decide whose side you are on: the pirates or the Lost Boys.

LETSGO and Balich Wonder Studio have transformed Espacio Delicias into a full-scale world, with the experience unfolding in two parts. In the first part, you enter the island itself and walk through areas inhabited by pirates, Lost Boys and creatures of fantasy. There are games along the way and encounters that invite the audience to take part.

The adventure begins when you climb through the bedroom window. On the other side, the audience steps into the room of dreams. Each visitor can choose which part of the island to explore, from the pirates' bay and the fairy woods to the Lost Boys' tree and the mermaids' rock.

Once you have had time to explore the island, you can make your way into the heart of Neverland. There the characters you have encountered come together and the second part of the experience begins. The audience now enters a live contemporary show in which acrobatics and theatre are woven into the performance, bringing you into the same world you have just crossed on foot.



For a return to Peter Pan on screen, there are several generations of films to choose from. The first film adaptation dates to 1924, in the silent era, while one of the best known is Disney's animated Peter Pan of 1953. It was decades before Steven Spielberg returned to these characters in Hook, released in 1991. In 2002 Disney revisited its own 1953 film with the animated sequel Return to Never Land. A year later came Peter Pan, a film that stays particularly close to the story in the book. Finding Neverland, released in 2004, turned to the life of J. M. Barrie, the writer who created Peter Pan.
The prequel Pan took the story back to its beginnings in 2015. Peter Pan & Wendy followed in 2023.

Neverland is vast,
full of magic
and in Madrid.



Abéné

Coming together through music

Words and photos: Larissa Rolley

Casamance, Senegal

Before the first drum sounds, Abéné already has a music of its own. Birdsong drifts down from the trees, the Atlantic keeps time with its waves and mopeds rattle along streets of reddish earth. Snatches of conversation in Jola, Mandinka, Wolof and French cross their paths. By the time the first musicians arrive, there is already a rhythm to the place, and the music of the festival slips into it. Abéné is said to mean 'a gathering'. The name seems to anticipate what happens from 26 December to 2 January, when this fishing village in **Casamance, in southern Senegal,** hosts the annual Abéné Festivalo. For eight days, artists from Senegal, elsewhere in West Africa and the diaspora share the stage with a community that takes part in every aspect of the celebration.

By late afternoon, the pirogues rest above the tide line. The smell of fish on the grill drifts from the restaurants on the main street, while vendors set out their wares, laying clothes and the things they have made along the road people take to the festival grounds. Musicians arrive with drums, koras and guitars. Families look for seats and the performances begin as the light fades. More than three decades on, Festivalo still has the spirit of its beginnings. Its story is bound up with Baba, from Senegal, and Anna, from the Netherlands, who imagined a gathering of musicians and visitors. Around the same time, local cultural organiser El Hadj Dabu invited



artists from other countries to give workshops and performances. Those efforts gradually took the shape of the festival that fills the village nights with music today.

The festival is still closely tied to Abéné. Neighbours get the celebration ready, artists teach and perform, and those who live far away come home to see family and friends. Festival president Alpha Sané calls the work ‘a source of pride, but also a great responsibility’, passed down by those who worked to nurture the village’s culture. Each edition has a theme and supports community initiatives related to it. Ticket sales and sponsors cover artists’ fees and production costs and help fund local projects. You can see the connection between the festival and the community during the day too, when you meet the same people again on the village streets. After a few days, the musician you saw on stage last night walks past in the morning, someone you met on the beach turns up in a café and a craftsperson becomes someone you greet by name.
The programme moves from traditional percussion ensembles and kora players to reggae, rap and other contemporary music. Different sounds find a place on the same stage over the course of the festival. It reflects the range of cultures in Casamance, where Jola, Mandinka, Balanta and other communities keep their own music and dance traditions alive.









During the day, the artists lead workshops in djembe, bougarabou, séourouba and dance. At night, the distance between stage and audience narrows. As the music plays, someone goes round sprinkling water over the reddish earth to keep down the dust. Little by little, people leave their seats and join the dancing. Family stories run through the festival, too. For nearly thirty years, the kora master Solo Cissokho closed the final night. After he died, his younger brother Sadio Cissokho carried on the tradition with the Golden Kora Band, keeping alive the bond between generations, musicians and audiences.

Offstage, there are other figures to look out for. The Kumpo, covered in palm leaves and topped by a long pointed pole, is a particular draw for children. First they edge a little closer, then they pluck up the courage to run towards it. When it spins without warning, they scatter in a mixture of excitement and play. Before long they creep back towards it to have another go. A few minutes away on foot stands the Fromager Sacré, known as Bantam Wora. The imposing kapok is six trees that have grown around one another over time. Associated for centuries with animist practices, it also stands for the way different communities and religious traditions live together, with different roots in the same ground.

Senegal is a predominantly Muslim country. In Abéné, the festival begins the day after Christmas, a time of hospitality and shared celebration.

On New Year's Eve, the beach becomes the gathering place. An enormous bonfire brings together families, friends, musicians and travellers as midnight approaches. Afterwards, DJs and small performances keep the party going into the early hours. Along the shore, the glow of the fire reaches the pirogues and lights them up as the party carries on. When Festivalo ends, Abéné returns to the usual pulse of the Atlantic. For those eight days, though, music has travelled through restaurants and guesthouses, streets and beaches, connecting village life with the lives of the people who come to discover it. Conversations carry on long after the concerts have finished, and people who met by chance cross paths again from one day to the next. Amid the drumming, the walks and the dancing, the village's name makes sense. Abéné is, above all, a gathering.

For eight days, this small village on Senegal's Casamance coast brings musicians, dancers and travellers together for a festival rooted in everyday life, where culture is something everyone can celebrate.





Manena's Window

Travel tales

Words & photos: Manena Munar · manena.munar@gmail.com

'It's those little things...', as Joan Manuel Serrat would sing. They're what stays with you after a trip. When they come back to you, you find yourself smiling, crying or laughing out loud all over again. I'd like to take a few of mine out of the memory box and share them with you.

Autumn in Kyoto

Spring in Paris, summer in New York, April in Portugal and, without a doubt, autumn in Kyoto. The old Japanese capital welcomes the season in a dreamlike dance of reds, ochres and golds.

I have a weakness for autumn. I love the way the leaves fan out their colours before disappearing, and the faint nostalgia that steals over you as the season turns. I can think of few lovelier ways of marking the passage from one season to the next. And nowhere puts on a more exuberant show than Kyoto during momiji, when people come from all over Japan to see the city as the leaves change colour. What fascinates me is the idea behind it. The leaves put on their finest clothes and before long they are on the ground, year after year, a reminder that everything passes. It is a thought that runs through Zen Buddhism and invites you to pay attention to the beauty of things that do not last.

Temples, torii, geiko and maiko

Kyoto was Japan's capital from 794 until the imperial court moved to Tokyo in the Meiji era. It has the quiet, almost provincial air of places that seem to live outside their own time. I have travelled a fair bit in my time, but I have never lost that first thrill of arriving somewhere new. I still get ridiculously excited about it. Kyoto in autumn sent my inner voice into overdrive, repeating the same refrain: 'I'm in Kyoto, I'm in Kyoto, and I'm about to climb up to Kiyomizu-dera.' The temples and torii brought to mind Memoirs of a Geisha. And there was certainly no shortage of geisha to complete the scene I had imagined, or at least women dressed the part. I saw them on the steps towards the temple and between the thousands of red posts in the torii tunnels at Fushimi Inari Taisha.



A treat of green tea ice cream

I must admit my film fantasy was better off without the phones. The supposed maiko and geisha were forever taking selfies. It put paid to my romantic picture of women steeped in the traditional Japanese arts, playing the shamisen as they sang their high, lilting ballads. The loud, distinctly unladylike laughter of these new 'geisha' brought me back to earth, one selfie at a time.

In Kyoto, autumn turns the gardens and centuries-old temples red and gold. Momiji invites you to pause and look at the leaves before they fall. It is a celebration of fleeting beauty that changes how you feel about the journey and the passing of time.

Visitors flock to Kyoto for the autumn colours of momiji





Kiyomizu-dera's temples and torii are a dreamlike sight in autumn

Tradition meets technology



Food, real and make-believe

On Chawan-zaka, or Teapot Lane, are the pottery shops that gave the slope its name, full of teacups, teapots and other implements for the traditional tea ceremony. I gave in to the temptation and went into several of them. You can imagine what happened next. I bought more than I meant to, as usual. Then I polished off a steaming nikuman, a bun stuffed with meat that tasted like heaven. For dessert, and to keep up with the youngsters around me, I had a green tea ice cream.

I could happily move into the little streets of Gion in the old town. They are lovely, immaculate and dotted with tiny restaurants displaying very appetising set meals. At first glance I thought they were real. Just as well I did not take a bite. They were samples of sampuru, the famous resin food models that reproduce each restaurant's dishes down to the last detail. It is a peculiarly Japanese tradition, and a very effective way for a restaurant to show you exactly what it serves and make you hungry before you even step through the door.
Owners greet you from their doors and invite you in. I could hardly resist the kindness of a woman who ushered me into her tiny place and treated me to a cheerful conversation of which I understood precisely nothing. The gyoza needed no translation. They were delicious and gave me just the strength I needed to step back out into the street and see a little more of beautiful Kyoto.



The ramen curtain

A brief digression. I did try to write down the address and the owner's name. I simply could not do it. What was the street called? Your guess is as good as mine. I certainly could not make it out from the characters on the sign. Those gyoza had whetted my appetite, and I noticed a perfectly orderly line filing into a ramen shop. I joined it. Inside, I found a shop unlike any I had been in before. The customers sat alone, at individual places, each facing what looked for all the world like a curtain they had been sent to sit in front of. They waited for the curtain to rise, and then, as if by magic, there appeared a deep, inviting bowl of noodles and boiled eggs floating in chicken broth.

The ryokan and its ever-changing rooms

The high point was staying at Nenrinbo ryokan, with its hot springs, or onsen. But first, that tatami room and its curious metamorphosis over the course of the day. When I walked in there was nothing there except me and my unruly thoughts. Before long it was a dining room at floor level. A young woman in a kimono came in on her knees to serve kaiseki, the traditional Japanese multi-course meal, and made her way forward, still on her knees, with a tray laden with little dishes. Without losing her smile or breaking a plate, she

Delicious gyoza and a delightful chat I couldn't understand



set down one delicacy after another. As she went, she explained how miso soup takes pride of place, as tradition requires. There was seasoned duck, roast duck and pickled duck, and a starter that is usually made with tofu. As the different dishes appeared, they were accompanied by soups served in owan bowls. Osechi, which means a gift, is usually eaten in the first days of the year, its flavours carrying wishes for good fortune. Then came beef shabu-shabu, cooked in a hotpot with vegetable broth, and sukiyaki with meat and tofu, and a host of other little dishes, each carrying its own symbolism and made all the more colourful by the bowls they came in. My fairy of the feast never turned her back and withdrew on her knees. I very nearly asked her to stand up. Somehow I managed to keep my mouth firmly shut.

The cedar bath was too inviting to resist. While I soaked, the dining room turned into a bedroom, and when I got out of the bath, there was a lovely, inviting futon all ready for the night. I should add that from the moment you arrive at the ryokan to the moment you leave, the thing to wear is a comfortable kimono. It goes with wooden or leather sandals, which you leave at the door so you can enter the room barefoot. And do take care to get the outfit right. I got a rather wary look when I emerged from my room in an ordinary dressing gown instead of the special kimono.

What I nearly left out

Five minutes' walk from Nenrinbo is Genkō-an, one of Kyoto's most delicate temples. Geisha and gentlemen dressed in the old style walked through its garden. I would gladly have stayed to talk with them, they seemed so wise, but for the small inconvenience of having no language in common. It was hard to imagine that outside the gates it was the twenty-first century. Maples, bamboo and bonsai enfolded this beautiful sanctuary. The whole place was steeped in silence and peace.

Delicacy as a way of life



The ryokan's cedar bath





traveling gourmets

FOOD DESTINATIONS
Badajoz, eight roots of its local cuisine

WINERIES WITH CHARACTER
Marqués de Riscal
A château in the heart of Rioja Alavesa

RESTAURANT REVIEWS: HOTEL RITZ ■ TSE YANG ■ LA MAESTRÍA

Badajoz

Eight roots of its local cuisine

Words Rosario Alonso · **Photos:** R. Alonso and Badajoz Prov. Council

From the olive groves of La Serena to the vineyards of Matanegra, by way of the dehesas where some of Spain's finest livestock breeds are raised, Badajoz has a food heritage with a character of its own. Four Protected Designations of Origin and four Protected Geographical Indications are at the heart of #OrigenBadajoz Gastroruta, an initiative that takes visitors to the places where these products are made, so they can see the land for themselves and meet the people who keep its food traditions alive.

The story of Badajoz's food starts long before it reaches the table. It is in the olive groves around Monterrubio de la Serena, the flocks of merino sheep out on the pastures, the holm oaks that feed Iberian pigs and the vineyards that spread across Tierra de Barros. Farming and livestock rearing have shaped much of the area's economy, landscape and cooking for centuries.

To introduce visitors to that heritage, Badajoz Provincial Council organised #OrigenBadajoz Gastroruta, a food tour held from 27 to 29 October 2026 and centred on eight protected names. It offers a closer look at the work of co-operatives, livestock farmers, cheesemakers and wineries, and helps explain what makes these foods distinctive. On the tour, you can see for yourself how the landscape and the people who work it shape what eventually comes to the table.



Monterrubio olive oil: the character of La Serena

In the east of the province, between La Serena, La Siberia and part of Campiña Sur, olive groves are part of a landscape shaped by dry summers and a long farming tradition. This is where the Aceite Monterrubio PDO extra virgin olive oil is made, mainly from cornezuelo and picual olives. The latter is also known locally as jabata.

The oil ranges through shades of yellow and green and has a fruity flavour. There are hints of almond and green, vegetal notes, with a pleasant balance between bitterness and a peppery finish. Those qualities make it particularly good with vegetables, fish or white meats. A piece of good bread is enough to taste it on its own.

Monterrubio de la Serena is home to Cooperativa La Unidad, founded in 1946 and closely linked to the area's olive-growing history. It brings together many local growers and markets several oils, including Oppida, covered by the designation of origin. Its work shows how much of a part co-operatives have played in keeping traditional olive oil production alive. Working together has also given local growers a way to bring the methods of production up to date.



Cabrito de Extremadura, a herding tradition

Goat rearing has long been associated with the rougher country of Extremadura, where goats graze on pastures and vegetation that other livestock make little use of.

The Cabrito de Extremadura PGI, recognised by the European Union in 2024, covers meat from breeds such as Verata, Retinta, Florida and Serrana, among others, raised in extensive or semi-extensive systems.

The specification distinguishes two categories. Milk-fed kids are fed exclusively on their mothers' milk and yield pink, very tender meat with a delicate flavour. The other category allows supplementary feed and produces meat with different characteristics, which are also regulated.

In Extremadura, kid comes into its own roasted, in caldereta stews or cooked with garlic, bay and wine. The recipes let the qualities of the meat come through and have been handed down from one generation of rural cooks to the next.

Traditional roast kid



Extremaduran beef: two ages, two characters

Cattle rearing has long been one of the characteristic activities of the Extremaduran dehesa. Retinta, Avileña Negra Ibérica and Morucha are some of the breeds that form part of this farming system. Raising cattle here means making use of the natural resources that the land itself provides.

There are two distinct geographical indications for beef: Ternera de Extremadura PGI and Vaca de Extremadura PGI. The first covers meat from young cattle, prized for its tenderness, juiciness and balanced flavour. That combination suits cuts that can be cooked quickly on a griddle, as well as joints for roasting and the longer cooking of traditional stews.

Vaca de Extremadura comes from adult cattle and has a more pronounced flavour. Restaurant kitchens value it for the way it responds to the heat of the grill and for the possibilities it offers when the ageing is carefully controlled.
Both specifications set requirements for origin, rearing and traceability. The differences between the two types of meat are part of the same cattle-rearing tradition, one that still shapes much of the region's farming.



Ternera de Extremadura PGI fillet



Cordero de Extremadura: the merino inheritance

For centuries, Extremadura has been one of Spain's great grazing regions. The merino sheep, closely associated with the history of seasonal herding and the old livestock routes, is still central to its meat and cheese production. Both traditions continue in a region where herds have moved across these pastures for centuries.

Cordero de Extremadura PGI, known as CORDEREX, covers lambs from breeds of merino stock. They start life with their mothers and are raised under controlled feeding and husbandry conditions. They are slaughtered before they reach 100 days. The meat is pink, tender and moderately fatty, with enough juiciness for a range of preparations. Roast leg, grilled chops and the traditional Extremaduran caldereta show what it can do in the kitchen. The importance of sheep farming is felt far beyond the table. The flocks make use of the grazing land and help keep an activity that is essential to the economy of many rural communities in operation.

Dehesa de Extremadura: ham and the land behind it

Few sights capture Extremadura as well as a dehesa of holm and cork oaks, with Iberian pigs foraging among the trees. The farming system has taken shape over generations, through the use of the woodland for grazing. It is this relationship between the animals and the land that underpins the Dehesa de Extremadura PDO.

The designation covers hind-leg and shoulder hams from Iberian pigs that meet strict requirements for breed, feed, husbandry and production. Among the most prized are the acorn-fed hams, from animals that feed on the dehesa's acorns and pasture during the montanera.

Curing slowly transforms the meat and fat, developing complex aromas, lingering flavours and a characteristic texture. The result depends on the raw material and on the salting, drying and ageing. At Montaraz you can see the successive stages of the process for yourself. The visit takes you from the first preparations to the drying rooms and cellars, where the hams mature slowly and time and ambient conditions play a decisive part.

At Finca La Asesera in Olivenza, near the Portuguese border, #OrigenBadajoz Gastroruta brings visitors into this farming landscape and shows its connection with Iberian ham and certified beef. This is a landscape where keeping the dehesa in good condition goes hand in hand with the day-to-day work that keeps the farms in operation.



Hams buried in salt



Dehesa de Extremadura PDO ham

Iberian pigs during the montanera



#OrigenBadajoz Gastroruta is a food tour and promotional initiative led by Badajoz Provincial Council. It gives visitors an introduction to the province's eight quality labels, including Protected Designations of Origin and Protected Geographical Indications.

Queso de la Serena:
the character of merino milk

La Serena lies in the south-east of Badajoz. Its wide expanse of pasture has long offered favourable conditions for raising merino sheep, the flocks that give this part of the province its distinctive cheese.

Their milk makes Queso de la Serena PDO, one of Extremadura's most distinctive cheeses. Production is limited to 21 municipalities in the district, including Castuera, Cabeza del Buey, Campanario and Monterrubio de la Serena. Cooperativa Ganadera Castuera (COVICA), which brings together more than 250 farming families, is one of the three co-operatives working today and a good place to see how traditional knowledge still shapes the way Queso de la Serena is made.

It is made with merino sheep's milk and vegetable rennet from cardoon flowers (Cynara cardunculus), which sets the milk in a particular way. Depending on production and ageing, the cheese can be soft and creamy or rather firmer.
Cheeses with a soft, rich centre can be eaten with a spoon, while firmer ones can be cut into slices. The flavour combines milky and vegetal notes with a slightly bitter finish. Good bread is all you need alongside it. Serve it at a temperature that lets the aromas open up and you can appreciate the different notes in the cheese itself.



Ribera del Guadiana:
wines from a land of contrasts

Wine completes this journey through the products of Badajoz. Ribera del Guadiana PDO covers six winegrowing subregions across Badajoz and Cáceres, with different soils, elevations and climates. In Badajoz they include Tierra de Barros, Ribera Alta, Ribera Baja and Matanegra. Tierra de Barros, with Almendralejo as a major wine centre, accounts for a large share of winemaking across Extremadura.

White grapes include Cayetana, Macabeo and Pardina, and reds include Tempranillo, Garnacha, Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah. The range runs from fresh, aromatic whites to structured reds, some to drink young and others made for ageing.

In Puebla de Sancho Pérez, in Matanegra, the family-run Bodegas Toribio sells its wines under the Viña Puebla label. It grows different grape varieties and combines traditional winemaking with modern techniques, using concrete tanks and French and American oak barrels.

Its wines show how winemaking can evolve while staying tied to the land. They make a fitting end to this food journey through the province.

Food as heritage

The eight protected names on #OrigenBadajoz Gastroruta make something visible that often goes unnoticed once food reaches the market. Behind each cheese, bottle of oil, cut of meat, ham or wine is the work of farmers and livestock producers. Their work supports the businesses and communities that sustain much of rural life in the province.

Designations of origin and geographical indications set verifiable requirements for origin and production, while leaving room for the judgement of the customer and the skill of the producer. In Badajoz, they also help preserve a food heritage bound up with local landscapes and customs. Going out to see how the food is produced, talking with the people who make it and discovering the different ways it can be used in the kitchen gives visitors a particularly rewarding way into the life of the province. To appreciate good food, it helps to know where it comes from.



The route's eight quality labels

- Dehesa de Extremadura PDO
Iberian hind-leg and shoulder hams

- Queso de la Serena PDO
Raw merino sheep's milk cheeses

- Aceite Monterrubio PDO
Cornezuelo and picual extra virgin olive oil

- Ribera del Guadiana PDO
Red, white and rosé wines

- Cordero de Extremadura PGI
Lamb from the merino tradition

- Cabrito de Extremadura PGI
Kid from breeds such as Verata and Retinta

- Ternera de Extremadura PGI
Meat from young cattle reared on Extremadura's dehesas

- Vaca de Extremadura PGI
Meat from adult cows of breeds such as Berrenda



Marqués de Riscal

A château in the heart of Rioja Alavesa

Words: Rosario Alonso **- Photos:** Jose Antonio Muñoz



The titanium roofs of Frank Gehry's hotel come into view before you reach Marqués de Riscal. Around them are Elciego, the vineyards of Rioja Alavesa and the stone buildings where wine was first made in the nineteenth century. Visitors can explore the historic buildings and spend the night beside a winery that is still in operation.

Marqués de Riscal was founded in 1858. Its early years were shaped by the introduction of Bordeaux winemaking methods, with the help of Jean Pineau from Château Lanessan. Construction of the original winery began in 1860 under the direction of the engineer Ricardo Bellsolá. Local stone was used for the building, with separate spaces to make, mature and store wines intended for lengthy ageing.

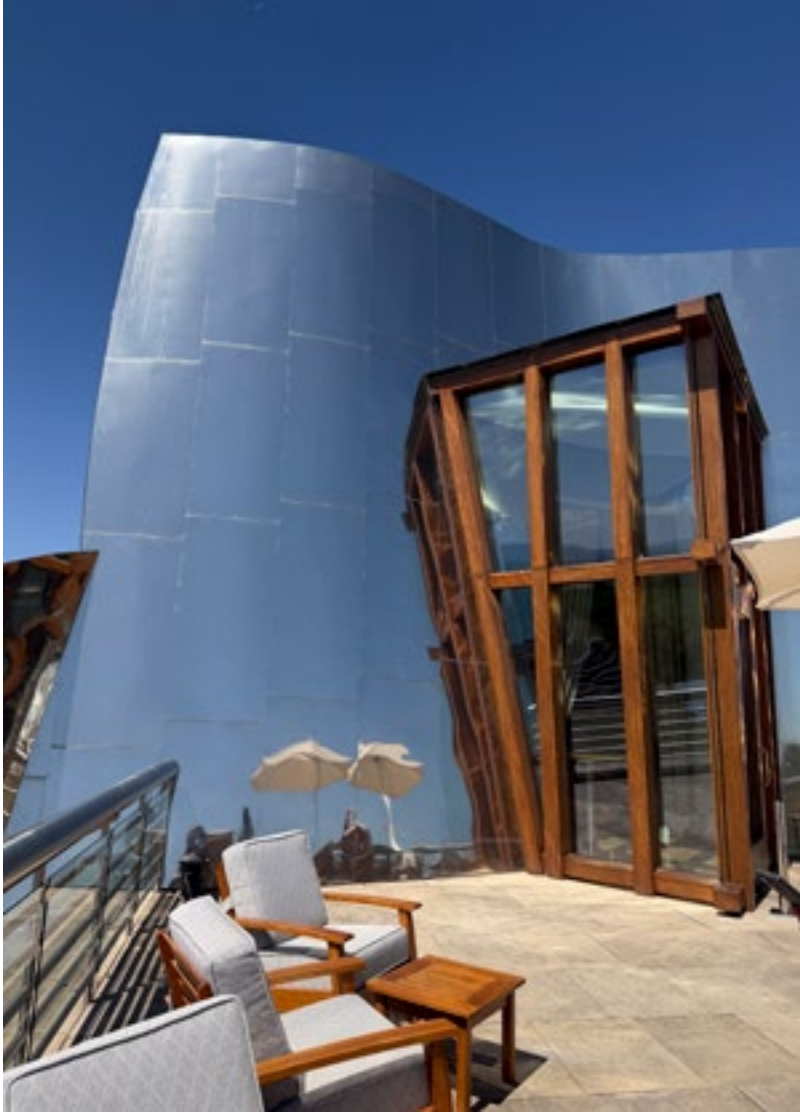
The successive extensions trace the company's growth. El Palomar was built in 1883 and remodelled in 2011 to house facilities for some of the estate's finest wines. The San Vicente winery, built in 2000, was part of the modernisation of production. The historic buildings have remained part of the estate through these changes and are open to visitors as part of the winery's tours.

The barrel cellars

Row upon row of barrels fills much of the floor space in these cellars. The temperature is lower than it is outside and the lighting is subdued. The wines are aged here in oak before they are bottled and left to rest again.

American oak has long been used for the most classic Marqués de Riscal wines. The winery also uses French oak, depending on the wine and the style it is aiming for. The choice of barrel and the time spent in it affect the aroma, texture and development of the wine.

The grapes come from Elciego and nearby villages such as Leza, Laguardia and Villabuena. Clay-limestone soils predominate, as does Tempranillo, alongside varieties such as Graciano. Marqués de Riscal Reserva is the best-known label. The range also includes Gran Reserva, Finca Torrea and Barón de Chirel, first made in the 1986 vintage.



One of the terraces at Hotel Marqués de Riscal

Glazed hotel-to-spa walkway



History in bottles

The bottles in the cellar trace the history of Marqués de Riscal back to its first vintage, in 1862. This space, known as La Catedral, is in the original winery built in 1860. It holds more than 130,000 bottles at controlled temperature and humidity. Some of the winery's old practices are recalled on the labels it uses today. The letters XR, which cellar masters used to mark certain barrels between 1869 and 1964, now give one of the wines its name.

The hotel project

The Marqués de Riscal hotel grew out of Proyecto 2000, which modernised the estate in Elciego and opened it to visitors. The original idea was to create a landmark building for the company. It took shape as a hotel and eventually gained restaurants and a wine-therapy spa. The winery tells how Gehry's hosts opened a bottle from 1929, the year he was born, during a visit. The gesture helped persuade him to take on the commission. Construction took place from 2003 to 2006, with the historic underground cellars setting limits on what the builders could do.

Above, La Catedral. Below, the house and original winery



Barrel cellar



Terrace of the Marqués de Riscal fine-dining restaurant



1860 Tradición restaurant

To avoid damage, the builders set up scaffolding around the building and worked without heavy cranes. Gehry brought the colours of the estate's bottles into the roof: pink for red wine, gold for the wire mesh and silver for the capsule.

The hotel opened on 10 October 2006 with 43 rooms. In 2020, architect César Caicoya, who had worked on the original project, led an extension that added 18 rooms, bringing the total to 61, including ten suites. That year a solar power system was installed to supply the hotel and winery. The site has also hosted events connected with the history of wine. In June 2025, to mark the centenary of the Rioja designation of origin, fifteen bottles from the 1925 vintage were opened after a century in La Catedral. The gathering took place in the same buildings where tours and tastings are held today.

The hotel has two dining rooms, both advised by Francis Paniego. The **Marqués de Riscal fine-dining restaurant**, which earned its first Michelin star in 2011, bases its menu on seasonal produce from Álava and La Rioja. **1860 Tradición** serves regional dishes such as truffled meatballs. The dining room looks onto Elciego and the vineyards, and Gehry's architectural drawings hang on its walls. Next to the lobby, the Vinoteca & Bistró serves the estate's wines by the glass. The Ciudad del Vino is also home to Asador Torrea. It serves three seasonal Rioja menus and specialises in meat grilled over coals.

HEREDEROS DEL
MARQUÉS DE RISCAL



Barón de Chirel 2021 · 40th Anniversary

Tempranillo leads this Rioja red, made with grapes from Elciego and Laguardia. Each plot is vinified separately. Once blended, the wine spends 16 months in French Allier oak and at least two years in bottle. Black plum, liquorice and graphite stand out on the nose. Firm, silky tannins and good acidity carry through to a long finish with dark fruit.



Barón de Chirel Viñas Centenarias 2024

White Rioja made from Viura, Garnacha Blanca, Malvasía and Maturana Blanca. The grapes are picked by hand and pressed in whole bunches. The must ferments in large French oak vats, where the wine spends around eight months on its lees. Floral and stone-fruit aromas stand out. The palate is broad, with good acidity, a touch of oak and a long finish.



Finca Montico Gran Vino de Rueda 2024

Verdejo from vines over 50 years old on one of La Seca's highest terraces. The grapes are picked by hand and fermented with native yeasts. The wine spends eight months on its lees, mostly in stainless steel, with a portion in large French oak vessels and concrete eggs. Fennel, pear and peach lead on the nose. Fresh and rounded, with a long finish.



Marqués de Riscal Verdejo sobre Lías Finas 2025

White Rueda from vines over fifteen years old, grown on stony terraces of the Duero. The grapes are picked at night and the wine spends four months on fine lees in stainless steel. Fennel, freshly cut grass and white flowers stand out on the nose. Creamy and fresh, with Verdejo's characteristic touch of bitterness.



Marqués de Riscal Reserva 2021

A Rioja Alavesa red from Tempranillo vines planted before the 1970s, with a little Graciano. It spends 20 months in American oak and at least a year in bottle before release. Ripe fruit, liquorice, cinnamon and black pepper stand out on the nose. Fresh on the palate, with polished tannins and a long, balsamic finish.



XR de Marqués de Riscal Reserva 2022

A Rioja red made from Tempranillo and Graciano, aged 22 months in oak. The name recalls the letters cellar masters chalked on barrels that stood out. Blackberry and black plum come through on the nose, with liquorice, pepper and coffee. Broad and juicy on the palate, with polished tannins and a long, fresh finish.



Tea returns to the Ritz

Words: Rosario Alonso - **Photos** Ritz Hotel



Beneath the Palm Court's glass roof, Madrid's Ritz serves British afternoon tea with a nod to its neighbours at the Prado. After sandwiches and freshly baked scones, there is a puff pastry menina and a flan inspired by Bosch.





In Victorian drawing rooms, this light meal became a reason to invite people round between lunch and dinner. Sandwiches and cakes could be eaten in a few bites.

The tea tradition

Black, green, white and oolong teas all come from the same plant, Camellia sinensis. Much of the difference lies in how the leaf is handled. For black tea, it is allowed to oxidise before drying, usually giving a darker, fuller-bodied brew. For green tea, heat is applied soon after picking to stop oxidation and preserve its vegetal notes. In oolongs, a Chinese and Taiwanese tradition, the leaf is partially oxidised. Some are light and floral. Others have toasted notes or aromas of ripe fruit. For certain white teas, the buds are picked while still covered in fine down and then left to wither and dry.

English Breakfast and Earl Grey are British classics. The former is a blend of black teas often drunk with a splash of milk. The latter is scented with bergamot, the citrus fruit that gives it its distinctive fragrance. Darjeeling takes its name from where it is grown, on the Himalayan slopes in north-eastern India.

For eight decades, the Palm Court's glass roof was hidden. The restoration of the Ritz drew on the original plans to uncover it, bringing daylight back into the room where afternoon tea is served today. The hotel opened in 1910 on Plaza de la Lealtad, during the reign of Alfonso XIII. The hotel credits César Ritz with bringing this British tradition to Madrid. Tea is still served daily, with sittings at four and six.

Tea reached Britain from China in the seventeenth century and was, for a time, so expensive that it was kept in locked caddies. In the nineteenth century, black teas from Assam, Darjeeling and Ceylon helped broaden its appeal. By then people drank tea at different times of day, but afternoon tea had an hour of its own. It is often associated with the Duchess of Bedford, who around 1840 asked for a little food with her tea to tide her over until dinner.

Savoury sandwich selection



Among the blends the Palm Court has served is Weekend in Shangai, a house green tea. Its lighter profile suits the cucumber and dill sandwich, whose filling is milder than the smoked salmon or the fillet of beef with mustard.

The menu introduced in September under the culinary direction of Quique Dacosta starts with savoury bites. There is Scottish salmon on brioche, a lobster bun with crème fraîche and mimosa egg with caviar. Next are scones baked in the hotel. Split them open and spread them with thick clotted cream and a homemade jam that changes with the fruit in season. The Ritz serves a third bowl alongside them, filled with lemon curd.

From canvas to plate

The easiest figure to recognise on the sweet tray is *the menina*. In Velázquez's painting, the young women who give Las Meninas its name attend the Infanta Margarita in a room at the Alcázar. A mirror at the back reflects the king and queen. At the Palm Court, the pastry takes its shape from the silhouette of one of the attendants. It is a Saint-Honoré, a French confection made with puff pastry, choux and caramel.

In *The Garden of Earthly Delights* by Bosch, figures in the central panel move among animals, pools and enormous fruits. On the tray, the painting is evoked by a lemon verbena and lemon flan.

Lemon verbena and lemon flan (The Garden of Earthly Delights)



El Greco's figure is more solemn, dressed in black with his hand on his chest and his white cuff in view. The portrait inspires a bite of chocolate, peanut and Tahitian vanilla. There is also a tropical candyfloss inspired by *Murillo's The Good Shepherd*.

The final figure takes us to the Liria Palace, home to Goya's portrait of the *Duchess of Alba in white*, with a red sash at her waist and a dog at her feet. At the Ritz she becomes a rhubarb, strawberry and champagne charlotte. If you have come from the Prado, there is a game to play over your last cup: which paintings can you identify straight away, and which do you need the menu to recognise?

Saint-Honoré (the menina)



MANDARIN ORIENTAL
RITZ
MADRID



Tse Yang Villamagna

30 years of Cantonese cooking

Words: Editorial team - **Photos:** Tse Yang Villamagna

Just off Paseo de la Castellana, Tse Yang Villamagna has a garden and dining rooms decorated with tapestries and porcelain. The menu brings together a selection of dim sum, delicately steamed fish and duck prepared in the traditional Beijing style.



On Calle del Marqués de Villamagna, Tse Yang celebrates thirty years of serving diners in Madrid in 2026. Cantonese cooking has shaped the menu since the restaurant opened in 1996, though diners will also find dishes that take their cues from other parts of China. A quick glance at the list of house specialities traces that journey, from Cantonese-style turbot and Sichuan crispy beef to the duck that the restaurant prepares in the traditional Beijing style.

Natural fabrics, handmade tapestries and porcelain give the dining rooms much of their classic character. There are private rooms for groups who want to gather around their own table, and a garden where greenery frames the outdoor dining area. Chinese-inspired details tie the indoor and outdoor spaces together. Just steps from the traffic on the Castellana, the garden is a quieter, more relaxed spot to linger after lunch or dinner.

Start with a selection of dim sum to share. The spider crab and porcini fillings show two sides of the menu, one drawn from the sea and the other from the woodland. Duck with foie gras makes for a richer bite, while shiitake and chicken carry the scent of white truffle. There is also a vegetable version with pine nuts.

The main courses show how the kitchen varies its approach to each ingredient. Scallops come with fresh ginger, while the turbot follows Cantonese tradition. Sichuan crispy beef and five-spice ribs give diners two more ways to explore the meat dishes on the menu. Wok-fried market vegetables, Chinese mushrooms sautéed in oyster sauce and fine, crispy seafood noodles bring contrasting textures.

Tse Yang offers tasting menus and an à la carte selection that goes beyond dim sum and Peking duck, with several other regional specialities to explore. Free-range chicken is stewed with mushrooms, while duck breast is served with curried aubergine, its spices bringing a different character to the dish. The seafood includes Sichuan-style lobster as well as crispy Jade Phoenix king prawns.

The Peking duck is worth lingering over. Tse Yang sources its duck from Silver Hill in Ireland and spends several days preparing it. Marinating, glazing and roasting give the duck a thin, crisp skin while keeping the meat underneath juicy. You can order half a duck, a whole one or have it served in three courses. It is carved at the table, then served with wheat pancakes, julienned cucumber, spring onion and hoisin sauce. Fill each pancake with as much of each accompaniment as you like. The cucumber brings freshness and the spring onion adds a gentle bite. Start with a selection of dim sum and order wok-fried market vegetables with the duck to sample three of the kitchen's techniques in one meal: steaming, stir-frying and roasting.







1.- Peking duck
2.- Sautéed king prawns in hot sauce
3.- Spider crab dim sum
4.- Starters

Tse Yang
Hotel Villamagna
Madrid





LA MAESTRÍA (Seville)

The restaurant at Hotel Querencia de Sevilla serves food rooted in Andalusia, with seasonal produce and interiors inspired by local craft. Its second-floor terrace looks out towards the cathedral and the Giralda.

La Maestría

Andalusian cooking in the heart of Seville

Words: Rosario Alonso
Photos: La Maestría



In Seville, food is as much a part of exploring the city as its squares and monuments. La Maestría, the restaurant at Hotel Querencia de Sevilla, Autograph Collection, offers a place to stop for Andalusian cooking with contemporary accompaniments. In the heart of the old town, a walk can lead naturally to a leisurely lunch or dinner beside some of the city's most recognisable buildings.

The restaurant occupies the hotel's second floor and takes its design cues from the region. Querencia draws on Sevillian culture for its handmade ceramics, handwoven wicker, citrus plants and a palette of albero yellow and potter's green. The craft adds texture and character, with familiar materials and details giving the room warmth. That sense of place runs through the food as well. On the terrace, you can eat in the open air near the cathedral and the Giralda. At dusk in particular, it makes a welcome pause in a walk through the centre. Inside, the warm setting encourages you to linger after the meal. Outside, the city itself is part of the experience.



Confit artichokes, parsnip cream, cured egg yolk and Iberian pork belly

Lamb shank, cumin-spiced carrot purée and demi-glace



Charcoal-grilled acorn-fed Iberian presa





Confit cod

Cheeseboard



The menu stays rooted in Andalusia and changes with the seasons. One dish that stands out is confit artichoke carpaccio with Payoyo cheese ice cream and a pine nut and sun-dried tomato vinaigrette. The artichoke and cheese come together in a contrast of temperatures.

Starters include acorn-fed Iberian ham, artisan cheeses and ham croquettes with roast garlic aioli. The broken eggs bring together roast octopus, crisp pork belly and oil from La Vera, pairing flavours from the sea with those of the traditional pig slaughter. A marshland-style rice with duck and mushrooms, finished with meat juices, brings depth to a meal you can build around several dishes to share.
Fish has a prominent place among the mains. Meagre loin comes with a Cádiz-style sofrito and confit potatoes, while the cod suprême is served Basque-style with spinach and garlic crisps. Iberian presa remains a centrepiece among the meats, charcoal-grilled and served with parsnip cream and cassava crisps. The selection also includes beef cannelloni with a porcini gratin and roasting juices.

To finish, there is still the semi-aged Payoyo cheesecake with blueberries and passion fruit sorbet. A pestiño roll filled with lemon cream and served with cinnamon and lemon milk ice cream nods to Andalusian baking. The kitchen, design and setting give La Maestría an identity of its own, for visitors and anyone looking to rediscover Seville through its food.

La Maestría
Seville

La Maestría cheesecake



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