

## Route of the Almoravids and Almohads



This Route evokes the long and profound relationship between two continents, barely separated by a narrow strip of sea. This fascinating journey revolves around the strategic crossroads, where Africa and

Europe face each other, sharing the foundations of the mythical Pillars of Hercules. The old people, with expressive sensitivity, call this region "The Two Banks" due to their proximity and mutual dependence. It is a region linked by the dense network of paths that crossed and converged, multiplying the ties between men. The essence of this fruitful contact has survived: a common cultural and artistic source and a special art of living. What better way to discover and enjoy it but to follow the path taken by the Almoravids and Almohads, the people from the Sahara, who, between the 11th and 12th centuries moulded the Western Maghreb and al-Andalus into a huge empire. Following its African prelude, this cultural route commences in Tarifa, which together with Algeciras, are the starting points of the trip. The journey reveals the irresistible charms of the coast, the cultivated plains and the sierras of Cadiz and Malaga, with villages and towns which preserve the most pure Andalusian charm. Breathtaking landscapes, legendary towns and castles, monuments, traditions, along with the warm hospitality of its people, are the ingredients of this irresistible itinerary, which traverses valleys and mountains and ends in the final magical destination of Granada.

## The legacy of al-Andalus

The Iberian Peninsula went through one of the most privileged periods in its history during the Muslim era, which resulted in a brilliant civilization. During this time, Andalusia became the cultural centre of Europe and the link between East and West.

The Routes of "El legado andalusí" go through those paths which connected the kingdom of Granada with the rest of al-Andalus in the past. Along this itinerary travellers have the possibility of enjoying wonderful landscapes on a quiet journey, tasting exquisite dishes and giving free rein to their imagination by turning past events into a present experience.

Corral del Carbón, Granada, Spain.  
Headquarters of El legado andalusí Andalusian Public Foundation.



## ALMORAVIDS AND ALMOHADS

The name of this route makes reference to the two movements which forged great empires in North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula between the 11th and 15th centuries. From the Western Sahara and Marrakech, the capital founded in 1070, the Almoravids created a vast dominion, which stretched from Senegal to the kingdoms of al-Andalus. Their successors and rivals, the Almohads, or "The Unitarians", came from the Atlas mountains. Following a great conflict in the middle of the 12th century, the Almohads took control of Marrakech and consolidated their power in the lands of the Maghreb and the Peninsula.

## THE WHITE VILLAGES

The group of small towns and whitewashed villages that stand out in the beautiful countryside of the sierras between Arcos and Ronda, the so-called *Pueblos Blancos* (White Villages), constitute an essential section of this route. Their romantic appearance, clustered around castles and churches and dominating the horizon from cliff tops and hilltops, or sheltered under imposing mountains, impress and captivate the traveller. The same feeling occurs when the visitor enters the charming maze of the old town centers, with winding streets that still retain all the essence of medieval times and the atmosphere of an architecture which embodies the ideal of typically Andalusian construction: sober elegant façades, whitewashed walls, empty gaps enclosed by wrought iron grills, roofs of red tiles and, inside, patios with wells, flowerpots and plants that are a haven of intimacy. Arcos, Zahara de la Sierra, Grazalema, Olvera,



Setenil de las Bodegas and a whole bunch of villages, make up one of the most attractive itineraries of popular architecture that can be followed in Andalusia.

## ITINERARIES AND DISTANCES

The route covers a stretch of about 300 to 450 kilometers between Algeciras and Granada, depending on the options of path chosen. From Algeciras and Tarifa a first branch goes directly to Ronda through the *serranía*, and passing through Castellar, Jimena de la Frontera, Gaucín and the villages located in the Genal river valley, along the A-369 road. The western branch of the route, on the other hand, covers longer distances. It passes through Alcalá de los Gazules and Medina Sidonia, connected by the A-381 and goes on to Cadiz, El Puerto de Santa María and Jerez. From here it follows the A-382 towards Arcos and the White Villages of Cadiz: Grazalema, Zahara, Algodonales, Olvera, Setenil, until it reaches Ronda. The route then rises up the A-367 to Teba and Campillos, where it joins the N-331 and the C-340 towards Vélez-Málaga. After the route along the villages in the province of Granada, we shall arrive at our goal: Granada

## HISTORY AND ARCHITECTURE

### TOWNS, VILLAGES AND CASTLES

The traces of the legacy of al-Andalus become patent along every step of the road, in the compact appearance of the villages, in their defensive and monumental construction and in their traditional architecture; a panorama, which later on was enriched in artistic forms and constructions, which ranged from Mudejar to Baroque, following the Christian conquest. The Almoravids, like their successors at the head of the Hispano-Muslim empire, the Almohads, were skillful constructors, who notably promoted the enlargement of the Andalusian towns, endowing them with extensive walls, *alcázaras* (fortresses) and other buildings. The period covering the 12th to the 15th centuries was equally decisive, when these lands constituted the western frontier of the Kingdom of Granada, until its fall in 1492. It was then, either on the initiative of the Muslims or the Christians, that the villages along the route acquired the unmistakable and legendary medieval appearance which characterizes them, with tightly grouped centers, surrounded by walls, sheltered by defiant castles and fortresses and connected by a network of fortified towers and watchtowers.



When considering the altitudes on the route, there is a marked contrast in the course of the journey. The first part runs through villages situated at sea level; Algeciras, Cadiz, El Puerto and in slightly elevated sections of the plains like Alcalá, Medina and Arcos, at altitudes between 100 and 300 m. Further on, the large part of the journey runs through mountainous and highland areas between 500 and 800 m. In altitude. Ronda and Granada are over 700 m. The highest point in the journey is the town of Grazalema, boxed in by mountains at 812 m.



## TRADITION

### GASTRONOMY

This route could be described as a full gastronomic tour through the provinces of Cadiz, Malaga and Granada, given the variety and quality of products and recipes that can be found all along these itineraries. The Atlantic coast of Cadiz offers delicious and fresh fish and shellfish, while the countryside provides a delight for the palate in its wines from Jerez, along with *gazpachos*, thick soups and other specialities. From the sierras come cured pork products of all kinds, as well as game, casseroles and stews cooked with aromatic herbs, while the plains in the interior around Antequera and Granada, offer vegetables, fruit and olive oil of the highest quality, providing the basis for a rich country cuisine. Special mention has to be made of the wide range of sweets, full of references to al-Andalus, such as *pestiños*, *amarquillos*, *alfajores* and an on-going list of sweets that titillate the taste buds.



### HANDICRAFTS

The arts and crafts traditions are still going strong today in the countryside, some inherited directly from the urban guilds, others connected with the agricultural and ranching background so predominant in this area. The diversity of products ranges from high quality book-binding to musical instruments in the workshops of Cadiz and Granada; inlaid woodwork and furniture in Cadiz, Jerez or Ronda; fine wrought iron and metal work in Ronda or Granada. Pottery and ceramics are present everywhere; textiles in Grazalema, where its well-known woolen blankets are still woven on age-old looms; leather goods, with the principal centers of production in the Sierra de Cadiz; carved woodwork and barrel making, objects made from vegetable fibers and other crafts, like saddle-making, which are all witness to deep popular roots.



### FIESTAS AND FESTIVALS

The calendar of festivities along the route is very tight. The Carnival, which has its epicenter in Cadiz, marks the end of winter. In spring, a whole series of events take place: Holy Week with its processions, the first fairs like the Horse Fair in Jerez, the pilgrimages and the Corpus Christi festivities, which precede the endless succession of ferias and fiestas in summer, amongst which there are various festivals of Moors and Christians. Flamenco, which has its most genuine roots here, is present in all these festivals.

## ANDALUSIA IN CLOSE-UP

It is not by chance that many Spanish and foreign travellers think that the different stages covered by this route reflect the essential traits of the image of Andalusia, as if in a mirror: splendid vestiges of a Muslim past, which flourish from Algeciras to Ronda and Granada. Towns and fortifications swathed in chivalrous romances, unusually vibrant and dramatic landscapes, the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Cadiz, in contrast to the rustic authenticity of the villages in the sierras. The ubiquitous presence of flamenco as the deepest example of popular expression, and, finally, the importance and interest incited by the horse and the fighting bull, protagonists in so many festivals and places in these lands.



Cultural Route of the Council of Europe

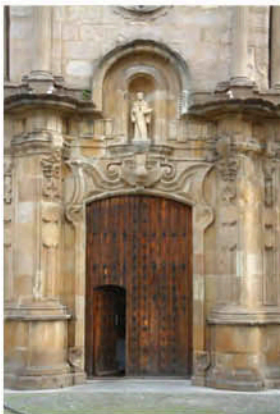
# Route of Almoravids and Almohads

From Algeciras to Granada, passing through Cadiz, Jerez, Ronda and Vélez-Málaga

## Information Points

<b>ALGECIRAS</b> Oficina de Turismo de la Junta de Andalucía Paseo de la Alameda s/n Tel. 956 680 993	<b>MEDINA SIDONIA</b> Oficina Municipal de Turismo Plaza Iglesia Mayor s/n. Tel. 956 412 404	<b>RONDA</b> Oficina de Turismo de la Junta de Andalucía. Oficina Municipal de Turismo. Paseo Blas Infante s/n. Tel. 952 187 119
<b>TARIFA</b> Oficina Municipal de Turismo Paseo de la Constitución, 13 Tel. 952 748 020	<b>CADIZ</b> Oficina de Turismo de la Junta de Andalucía Ramón de Carranza s/n Tel. 956 203 191	<b>TEBA</b> Ayuntamiento Plaza de la Constitución, 13 Tel. 952 748 020
<b>CASTELLAR DE LA FRONTERA</b> Ayuntamiento. Plaza de Andalucía s/n. Tel. 956 693 001	<b>EL PUERTO DE SANTA MARÍA</b> Oficina Municipal de Turismo Plaza Alfonso X el Sabio, 9. Tel. 956 483 715	<b>CAMPILLOS</b> Ayuntamiento Avda. Sta. M <sup>a</sup> del Reposo, 4 Tel. 952 722 168
<b>JIMENA DE LA FRONTERA</b> Ayuntamiento. Calle Sevilla, 61. Tel. 956 640 969	<b>JEREZ DE LA FRONTERA</b> Oficina de Información Turística Plaza del Arenal s/n. Tel. 956 338 874	<b>VELEZ-MÁLAGA</b> Oficina de Información Turística C/ Poniente, 2, Torre del Mar. Tel. 952 541 104
<b>GAUCÍN</b> Ayuntamiento Calle Guzmán el Bueno, 23 Tel. 952 151 000	<b>ARCOS DE LA FRONTERA</b> Oficina de Información Turística Cuesta de Bolán, 5. Tel. 956 702 264	<b>ALCAICÍN</b> Ayuntamiento Plaza de la Constitución, 1. Tel. 952 510 002
<b>CASARES</b> Casa Natal de Blas Infante Carrera, 51. Tel. 952 895 821	<b>GRAZALEMA</b> Oficina de Información Turística. Plaza Acomaderos, 3 Tel. 956 132 052	<b>ZAFARRAYA</b> Ayuntamiento Entrada de Granada, 2 Tel. 958 362 560
<b>ALGATOCÍN</b> Ayuntamiento Fuente, 2 Tel. 952 150 000	<b>ZAHARA DE LA SIERRA</b> Oficina de Información Turística. Plaza del Rey, 3. Tel. 956 123 114	<b>LA MALAHÁ</b> Ayuntamiento Real, 16 Tel. 958 587 101
<b>BENALURÍA</b> Ayuntamiento Plaza Genete Villas, 1 Tel. 952 152 502	<b>ALCODONALES</b> Ayuntamiento Avda. de Andalucía, 2 Tel. 956 137 003	<b>LAS GABIAS</b> Punto de Información. Plaza de España, 1. Tel. 958 580 261
<b>BENADALÍD</b> Ayuntamiento Plaza Ben al-Jelil, 1 Tel. 952 152 753	<b>OLVERA</b> Oficina Municipal de Turismo Edificio la Cilla Plaza de la Iglesia, s/n Tel. 956 120 816	<b>GRANADA</b> Oficina de Turismo de la Junta de Andalucía. Plaza Nueva, Santa Ana, 4. Tel. 958 575 202
<b>ATAJATE</b> Ayuntamiento Plaza de la Constitución, 2. Tel. 952 183 504	<b>SETENIL DE LAS BODEGAS</b> Oficina Municipal de Turismo Villa, 2 Tel. 956 134 261	<b>ALCALÁ DE LOS CAZULES</b> Punto de Información Turística. Ayuntamiento de Granada. Plaza del Carmen s/n. Tel. 958 248 280

## ALGECIRAS



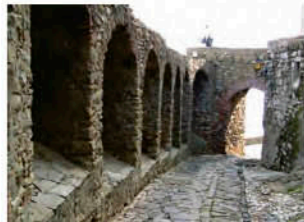
Algeciras and Granada symbolize the North African presence in Andalusia. Algeciras, from the Arabic *al-Yazira al Jadra*, the green island, was founded to fulfill a role as a bridge between the Peninsula and Africa. In the 11th c., it was the first town in Al Andalus to pass into the hands of the Almoravids, when the grand emir Yusuf Ibn Tasufin chose it to be a strategic bastion on the Andalusian coast. Following a period of splendour under the North African dynasties, it suffered a sudden decline in the 14th c., when it was sacked by the Nasrids from Granada. Its recuperation came in the 18th c., experiencing constant growth and turning into one of the largest towns in the province of Cadiz. Stimulated by the bustle of the Straits and the maritime traffic, the old town centre looks out over the bay, with Gibraltar in the background. Interesting places are the Plaza Alta, streets with Baroque, Modernist and English-style houses, a Municipal Museum and garden areas in the Old Town.

## TARIFA

We move on to another key location of the Straits. Tarifa, the most southerly point, reaches so far out to sea that the coast of Morocco can be contemplated in minute detail. Founded over Phoenician and Roman remains, the Muslims created a key city for Hispano-African relationships and named it after the Berber Tarif Ibn Malluk, who in 710 undertook an exploratory visit before the conquest. Its importance was established in the 10th c., with the construction of a formidable castle. Following the Christian reconquest in 1292, it became legendary owing to Guzmán el Bueno's gesture, in choosing to sacrifice his son rather than surrender the village. A lot remains from that time, as can be seen in the Municipal Museum. At the same time, the winds of change blow strongly here and have turned its beaches into a paradise for windsurfing, together with other attractions like the ruins of Bolonia.

## CASTELLAR DE LA FRONTERA

Moving inland, the route branches off towards Ronda through the mountains, and all of a sudden the impressive sight of a walled precinct appears, a construction whose appearance has hardly changed since the Middle Ages. The lovely village of Old Castellar, surrounded by its impressive walls, constitutes a



perfect example of the borderline villages of the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada and perfectly illustrates those times of intensive struggle and interchange. The modern part of the village occupies an area down the hill.

## JIMENA DE LA FRONTERA

The landscape gets rougher on catching sight of the Roman *Oba*, then named *Xemina*, at the foot of a Nasrid castle, which passed into Christian hands in 1456. In Jimena one can appreciate the first hint of the architecture of the sierra villages, reflected in the design of the steep and uneven streets. Here nature displays the vast stretch of the Natural Park of Los Alcornocales, a huge range of Mediterranean virgin forest, which hosts some of the most precious flora and fauna.



## GAUCÍN

The route leads round Serranía de Ronda, already in the province of Málaga. Gaucín, the former *Sair Guazan*, "the strong rock" of the Andalusian Muslims, stands at the foot of the defiant castle of El Aguila, tinged with legendary events, such as the death of Guzman el Bueno in 1309. A rural atmosphere combines with the presence of tourists, who are drawn from the nearby Costa del Sol, in its small squares and winding streets, dotted with fountains, stately mansions and interesting buildings.



## CASARES

Opposite Gaucín, at the foot of Sierra Crestellina, the whitewashed hamlet of Casares stands out as a perfect example of an "Andalusian village", given its precarious setting on a large rock, the blinding whiteness of its buildings and the castle which crowns it, with an old church built upon a mosque set within its walls. From Moorish Casares, the home town of Blas Infante, pioneer in the creation of an Andalusian regional consciousness, the mountains give onto the Mediterranean, which can be made out in the distance, like a fascinating backdrop.



## ALGATOCÍN



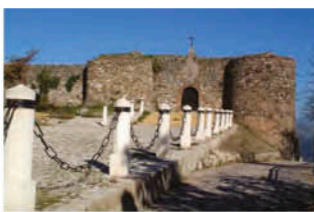
Algatocín, in the lands of the Banu Atus clan, is situated in the lush Genal river valley, carpeted with one of the best preserved forests in Andalusia, with chestnut trees that become spectacular in the autumn. It is a charming white village on the side of a hill, where mills and other attractive elements of traditional architecture are well preserved.

## BENALAURÍA

Benalauría, which has clung to the precipitous slope of the hillside since the 8th c., owes its name to the Banu-l-Havariyya clan, who came from Morocco. Strolling about the winding streets, one reaches the Town Hall, a mid-18th c. edifice, the 19th c. church of Santo Domingo and in the upper part of the village, the handsome building, La Molienda, now an ethnographic museum.



## BENADALID



The rosary of small villages continues through Benadalid, the farmstead of the Banu Khalid family. Below an outstanding Arab castle, which nowadays serves as a cemetery, there is a beautiful old town, which becomes especially lively during the "Moors and Christians" festivities, which are also held in the neighbouring town of Benalauría.

## ATAJATE

The last link along the valley is the village of Atajate, which controls the access to Ronda and a handful of villages bunched together in the vicinity of El Havalal, at the source of the Genal river. These wild places served as a refuge for the brigands and smugglers, who proliferated in the 19th c. This whitewashed township, with its Arab roof tiles, is centered round the main square, in the shadow of the church of San José.



## ALCALÁ DE LOS GAZULES



The second branch of the route roams through the western parts of Cadiz, passing through historical villages located between the mountain range of Sierra de Cadiz and the coastal plains, following the so-called *Ruta del Toro* (route of the Bull). Thus Alcalá de los Gazules, "the fortress of the Gazules", the haughty silhouette of which climbing up a slope containing remains of the castle and the gothic church of San Jorge at the top, stands out against the mountainous backdrop of Los Alcornocales National Park.

## MEDINA SIDONIA

The former *Asiob* with its Phoenician, Roman and Visigoth origins, is located on a strategic crossroads between the sierra, the plains and the coast. It acquired importance in the times of al-Andalus, when it became the capital of the province with an Arab aristocracy and a principally Berber population. According to chronicles of the Almoravid and Almohad periods, *Madinat Saduna* or *Abu Salim*, was noted for its ramparts, the remains of which, such as Arco de Pastora or Puerta de Belén, still evoke its strength. The church of Santa María la Coronada embellishes its enchanting town centre.



## CÁDIZ

From mountains and hills, the route descends towards Cadiz, considered the first urban settlement of the Western World, founded more than 3,000 years ago, when the Phoenicians settled the island enclave of *Gadir*. A privileged stop for trade, its dense history runs from its splendour in Roman times, its important role in the times of al-Andalus, to its definitive peak in the 18th century, as the metropolis of the Overseas Empire. During its difficult existence in the Middle Ages, it was sacked



several times by the Vikings. Cadiz was the base of the Almoravid fleet that controlled the Straits, serving in turn as a bridgehead for the Almohad penetration in the mid-12th century.

After its conquest around 1262, the Christians reinforced its naval function. The oldest part of the city, around the quarters of Santa María and El Pópulo, are adorned with Roman vestiges and medieval walls, the Old Cathedral and the colossal New Cathedral, fruit of the richness that trade with the New World brought, whereas the remainder of the old town delights the visitor with its incomparable atmosphere, both artistic and popular. There is an endless list of worthwhile places to visit, from fortifications like Puerta de Tierra, walks and squares, such as San Antonio and Mina, to the splendid Museum of Cádiz, the oratory of San Felipe Neri, where the first Spanish Constitution was proclaimed in 1812, or Santa Cueva, with its outstanding Goya frescoes and an interminable list of other references.

## EL PUERTO DE SANTA MARÍA



This popular seaside and wine-producing town, on the other side of the bay, near the mouth of the Guadalete river, is referred to in the chronicles as the Moorish *al-Qanatar*, meaning "port of the salt mines". A very old mosque remains from that time, perhaps dating from the 10th century, covered by the castle of San Marcos, which was built by Alfonso X in 1265, shortly after the Christian conquest. Among other things, The Prior church, the Municipal Museum, the *Ribera del Marisco*—an extraordinary gastronomic inducement—, the abundant palaces and wine houses and La Victoria monastery, add up to make El Puerto de Santa María a recommendable destination.

## JEREZ DE LA FRONTERA

Jerez is situated amidst fields and vineyards, which have made it famous. Its fame stems from Hispano-Muslim period, when *Saris* appears as one of the principal towns of the province of *Saduna*. In Almoravid times, a chronicler described it as, *a fortified town of a medium size, ringed by walls; its surroundings are pleasant, because it is located in the midst of vineyards, olive groves and fig trees*. The town's



importance increased upon being incorporated into the Kingdom of Castile in 1264, as a frontier town with the Kingdom of Granada. Along with the reconstruction of its historical past, that can be seen in the Archaeological Museum, the legacy of al-

Andalus becomes tangible in its Alcázar, built by the Almohads and dating from the late 12th c. It includes a mosque, that was later consecrated as a church, and Moorish Baths. It is difficult to do justice to the wealth of this well-endowed town with a great cathedral, a prolific number of religious buildings, covering all styles, and civil buildings like the Cabildo Viejo, or its Carthusian monastery, where the purest breed of Andalusian horses was preserved, apart from its aromatic wine cellars, temples to the delicate sherry wines, and its traditional quarters, where the most genuine in flamenco art thrives.

## ARCOS DE LA FRONTERA

The route now continues through cultivated fields and hills until it reaches Arcos, which is considered one of the most beautiful villages in Spain. The town occupies a fantastic site right on top of rock, with a sheer drop of 150 meters. Its origins date back so far, that it is said that one of Noahs grandsons founded it, although the most tangible remains date from the Muslim



period, when *Arcus* appears as one of the main Berber settlements, which eventually headed an ephemeral Taifa kingdom in the 11th century. Enveloped in old stories and romances, a town with a truly impressive architectural wealth came into being. At the top, the

castle and the magnificent church of Santa María de la Asunción, with its hefty tower that competes in appearance with the imposing church of San Pedro. All this bordered by lots of beautiful palaces, mansions and magnificent houses with patios, remains of the ramparts, convents and other religious buildings that make up an enchanting maze.

## GRAZALEMA

The journey reaches its highest point at Grazalema, the capital town of the Sierra, which is surrounded by rugged peaks over 1,500 m. high. The town took shape under the Moors, following its settlement by Berbers from the mountains, who adapted to its environment of forests and livestock and gave it its name, derived from the tribal *Banu Salim* or *Ben Zulema*. From the 13th c. the Nasrids used it as a bulwark until it fell into the hands of the Christians in 1485, together with the remainder of the mountainous areas of Cadiz and Ronda. Along with its town centre, calmed by the relaxing sound of the fountains, this haven in the sierra is the key to the treasure of the Sierra de Grazalema



Natural Park, an extraordinary landscape, which apart from constituting the enclave of most rainfall rate in the Peninsula, is also home to woods of rare Spanish firs, dating from the Tertiary and other marvels of Nature.

## ZAHARA DE LA SIERRA

The vibrant stamp of this "white village" looks as if it emerged from the imagination of a romantic painter; a cluster of houses perched on a cliff top, with a castle at the summit. Its name comes from the Arab word *vajara*, "the rock", which is already a clue to its past, because Zahara stood out among the villages that marked the limits of the Kingdom of Granada. Taken by the Christians in 1407, the sudden attack by Moors in 1481, served as an excuse for the Catholic monarchs to undertake the final stage of the war against the Nasrids. Its history is as impressive as the beauty of the village and its surroundings, which includes some of the most imposing enclaves of Sierra de Grazalema Natural Park.

## ALGODONALES

Situated at the foot of the Sierra de Lfjar, it was settled in the 16th century on the site of a former Muslim settlement that was dependent on Zahara. The colourful Baroque of the church of Santa Ana, considered to be one of the most notable in the province of Cadiz, stands out in the midst of endless whitewashed walls. Thanks to the conditions in its sierra, Algodonales is an important centre for hang-gilding and parachuting.



## OLVERA

At a distance and from all angles, Olvera appears on the crest of a hill, crowned by its castle tower and the magnificent church of La Encarnación, which make Olvera the perfect example of a medieval town. The Muslim *Wubira*, then named Olvera or Olvera by the Castilians after its conquest in 1327, was one of the most important fortified towns on the western frontier of the Kingdom of Granada. Along with its quiet urban corners and artistic buildings, it is



worth a visiting the Cultural Center of La Cilla, located inside the walls of the castle, which contains an attractive and detailed exhibition on the hectic period at the end of the Middle Ages, full of legends and romantic tales.

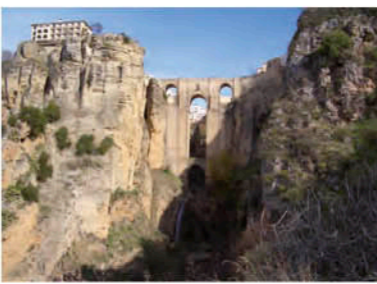
## SETENIL DE LAS BODEGAS



This unusual village can both confuse and impress the traveller. Instead of announcing itself at a distance, it takes one by surprise, half-hidden in a narrow gorge cut by the Trejo river. Above, at the level of the plateau and fields, stands the citadel, which was taken by the Catholic Monarchs in 1484 and the remains of the alcázar and the church. The unusual buildings of Setenil line the depths of the gorge, some of them being semi-excavated into the terrain and often under massive protruding rocks.

## RONDA

Whether approaching along the Genal or the Setenil rivers, the route reaches one of its fundamental landmarks, Ronda, "the dream city" of the poets, the throbbing heart of Romantic Andalusia and also one of the most remarkable bulwarks of Muslim Spain. Its position on the edge of the gorge, in the midst of a grandiose landscape of mountains and valleys, is completely breathtaking. Its character didn't take shape until the arrival of



the Muslims, when *Rundab* appeared as the capital of *Takurunnna*, an ample mountainous district with a largely Berber population. The nature of its inhabitants and the favourable conditions of the terrain gave it an independent character, to the extent

that it established itself as an independent kingdom in the 11th century, led by the Banu Ifran clan, of African lineage. Following the consolidation of the Nasrid Kingdom, between the 13th and 14th centuries, the sultans ceded Ronda to their Marinid allies from Morocco, which acted as the main axis of the western frontier, until its capitulation to the Catholic Monarchs in 1485. The *Tajo* (steep cliff), spanned by the Puente Nuevo of 1793, divides the town centre into two parts. On one side "La Ciudad", the Andalusian *medina*, with walls and gates, like the Puerta de Almocábar, the main church of La Encarnación, which was a mosque, the Mondragon Palace, formerly the emirs' court and now Museum of the Town, the mysterious stairway of the Mina de la Casa del Rey Moro, some perfect 13th c. Moorish Baths and an endless collection of charming spots. Opposite, on the other side of the ravine, the Mercadillo, more modern in outlay but also full of monuments, like Maestranza bullring, inaugurated in 1785, and the leafy Alameda (promenade), which runs along the ravine's edge and gives free rein to the imagination.

## TEBA



From Ronda, the route sets off inland, crossing plains and wheat fields. Teba is located on a hilltop on the way to Antequera. It has the unmistakable layout of a frontier town, with its Castle of La Estrella standing on a rock; an immense fortress built in the 10th century and enlarged by the Almohads and the Nasrids from the 12th century. Its conquest by Alfonso X in 1330 is shrouded in legend. The stepped streets wind up the skirt of the hill and its rich past is displayed in the local museum, which is well worth a visit.

## CAMPILLOS

The cultivated fields that surround this town define the landscape of the Guadalquivir and Genil rivers and the very origin of this place. Campillos came into being around 1536, following the upheavals of medieval times, when this area, formerly so subject to frontier skirmishes, was repopulated. Its outlay is geometrical and well ordered and centered on the parish church of El Reposo. In the surrounding area, there is no lack of interesting places, like the lagoons which constitute a natural reserve, the gorges and historical settlements like Bobastro, on the nearby Guadalhorce reservoirs.



## VÉLEZ-MÁLAGA

The final section of the Route leads to Granada along a road which runs directly from the Malaga coast to the former Nasrid capital, via Vélez-Málaga. The old Islamic *Véláz*, "the valley", crops up in the middle of a fertile valley of fruit trees and tropical plants. Populous and historic, it is the capital of the



lovely mountainous region of Málaga, the Axarquía. In tone with its importance, it is crowned by the large fortified tower of its Alcazaba, in the shadow of which the medieval quarter of La Villa spreads out with its magnificent buildings: Santa María la Mayor, which is Mudejar, with a tower that was a minaret; San Juan Bautista, which also has a slim belfry and a multitude of beautifully built convents and palaces, which are full of historical references, such as the presence of Cervantes.

## ALCAUCÍN



From Vélez, the road winds up the Axarquía to Alcaucín, on the edge of the rugged national park of the Sierras of Alhama, Tejeda and Almijara, an area of many antiquities and grandiose landscapes. The legendary castle of Zafra rises up on a hill above

the town, of Phoenician foundations and Moorish walls but the most outstanding spot is the Alcázar.

## ZAFARRAYA



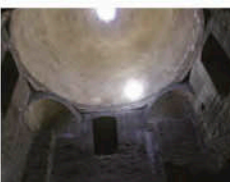
Beyond the spectacular mountain pass, known as Boquete de Zafarraya, which introduces the traveller to the province of Granada, comes the town of Zafarraya, surrounded by orchards in a plain, which is encircled by rocky crests. Its most important sites are the ruins of the Old Church, the Hermitage and the Parish Church.

## LA MALAHÁ

Granada and its Vega (valley) can already be observed upon reaching La Malahá, a place with Roman baths and salt flats, which the Moors exploited by means of an elaborate system of canals and pools. These were so considerable and productive that the salt flats gave their name to the village, for this is the meaning of the Arab word *al-malaba*.



## LAS GABIAS



Water is responsible for rich and fertile irrigation farming and olive groves in this town. Its monuments, like the Torreón fortress take us back to the 14th c. and this 15-meter high structure, indicates the importance of the town to us. The Roman Baptistery, the only one preserved in Spain, together with the parish church of La Encarnación, the church of El Rosario, the Hermitage of Las Nieves, Depósito and its stately mansions, in Mudejar style, make this town the anteroom to Granada.

## GRANADA

The last part of the route reveals a universally renowned city to the traveller, steeped in history, artistic treasures and a unique atmosphere, born of fruitful interchange between different peoples and cultures. Its long history, from the old *Iberis* to the 11th c. *Garnata*, inhabited by Berbers and Jews, which came to be the capital of the last Muslim kingdom in the Peninsula, until its eclipse in 1492, constitutes an especially significant chapter of this trip. Granada was the main stronghold of Almoravid domination in al-Andalus, ruled by members of the Royal Family of the Moroccan dynasty, as well as being one of the last bastions of its power, which survived, even after the loss of its imperial seat in Marrakech. Lauded as the *Damascus of the West*, a feast for the eyes, rapture for the soul, Granada captivates the visitor with the enchantment that irradiates from the splendid palatine fortress of the Alhambra, town quarters with an indelible stamp of al-Andalus such as the Albayzin, a fabulous maze of walls, *carmenes* (prosperous town houses), palaces and old mosques, and a truly overwhelming repertoire of historic sites of all kinds, such as the Cathedral, the Royal Chapel, the Madrasa, Corral del Carbón or the Carthusian Monastery.

