

## Route of the Nasrids



This Route is devoted to the Nasrids, the protagonists of the important final chapter in the Reconquest of Spain, a splendid epilogue on the rich history of Islam in the Iberian Peninsula.

The Route begins in the mountain passes of Sierra Morena, through which the Christians forced their way into al-Andalus, an event which was to be a determining factor in the birth of the Nasrid Kingdom. The first stage commences at the site of the decisive battle at Las Navas de Tolosa, near the pass of Despeñaperros, the crossroads between the flat plateau of La Mancha and the valley of the River Guadalquivir.

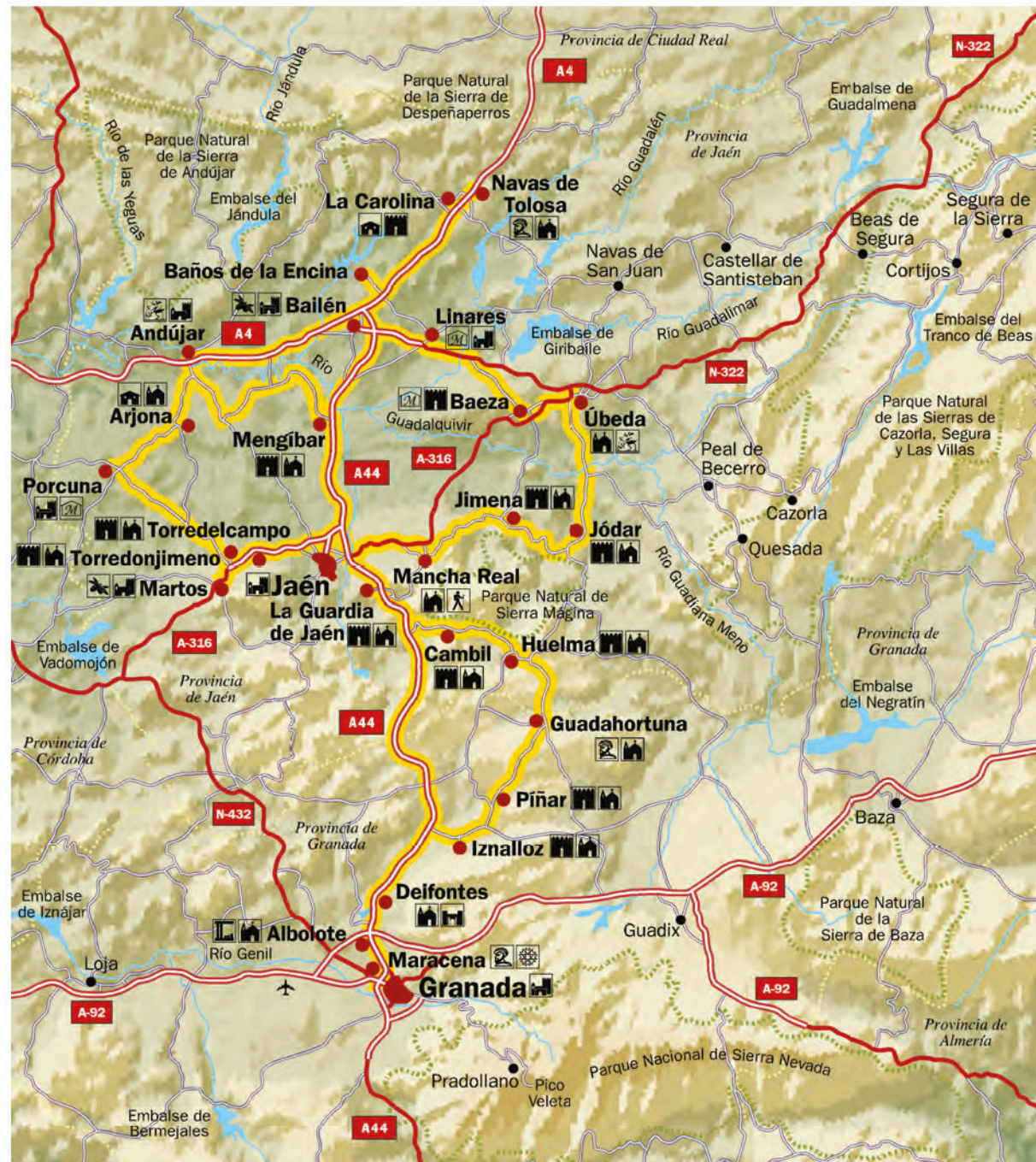
The difficult situation created by this defeat led to the rise of a strong local leader, Alhamar, from the town of Arjona, who would later become the founder of the Nasrid dynasty. After a series of long, skilful manoeuvres he managed to set up his own state with the capital in Granada. These events left a permanent mark on the landscape and the villages of the Holy Kingdom of Jaén and all the area bordering the province of Granada. Visit first the fortified towns and villas on the slopes of Sierra Morena. Then enjoy the peace of the villages in the depths of the countryside of western Jaén. Later follow the trail along the eastern ridges of the High Guadalquivir, through Baeza and Úbeda, before doubling back around the contours of Sierra Mágina to enter the city of Jaén. From here, the last stage of our trip connects the head of the Guadalquivir Valley with the fertile Vega of Granada, journey's end.

## 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.



- Nature
- Hiking
- Palace
- Archaeological site
- Andalusí castle
- Monuments
- Civilian building
- Legendary
- Church
- Olive Oil
- Museum
- Historical



## THE LEGACY OF ANCIENT TIMES

There have been human settlements in this area right from the remotest times of man's history, as is shown by the human remains found in the caves of La Carigüela and Las Ventanas in Piñar, and the cave paintings in the cave of La Graja in Jimena. The Iberian clans established settlements along almost all the route, and an interesting selection of remains of this culture can be seen at the Jaén Provincial Museum. The most important artefacts include the funeral chamber from La Guardia de Jaén, the sculptures of Porcuna and the archaeological site at Cerro Miguelico, in Torredelcampo. Attracted by the wealth of minerals and the fertile soils, the Carthaginians, and later the Romans also came to settle here, at the confluence of the Roman roads that joined the provinces of *Betica* and *Tarraconense*. The firm tread of the Roman legions can still be felt in many towns along the way, such as Baeza, Martos or Mengibar.

## EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL

The olive groves, "a shirt of a thousand stripes" clothing the Route of the Nasrids, are a great source of wealth for rural Andalusia. The harvesting season in autumn and winter fills the fields with labourers, the "haughty olive-pickers" described in the verses of the poet, Miguel Hernández. Olives dressed with oregano and other herbs, crushed or filled with peppers or anchovies, were a delicacy available to even the poorest peasant, and today make a splendid aperitif that adorns every table in Jaén. This province however is internationally renowned for its exquisite extra virgin olive oil, the jewel in the crown of the Mediterranean diet. In the kitchen, in the best preserves or simply as a dressing, its fine flavour is highly prized in all the world's best restaurants.



## TRADITIONS

### FOLKLORE

Flamenco appears to be the product of a melting-pot of Arabic, Jewish, Christian and Gypsy cultures, and it is therefore hardly surprising that it should have set down such deep roots in this part of Andalusia. *Fandangos*, *coplas* and *saetas* fill the air in such legendary places as Sacromonte in Granada, where flamenco guitar, singing and dance shows can be enjoyed in the magical atmosphere of the gypsy caves and taverns. Folk culture also retains vestiges of the two sides of the Reconquest. In Jaén, for example, *boleros* and *fandangos* are just as popular as the *jota*, a musical form more typically associated with Castile and Christian Spain. Local folklore combines both religion and paganism with pilgrimages (*romerías*) and spring festivals in which the streets are decked with floral crosses, both good examples of the way different cultures and periods of history have been blended together.

### HANDICRAFTS

The great diversity of handicrafts and other traditional products manufactured in these towns and villages is a product of both their local environment and their medieval past. Hunting for example is very popular in the sierras of Jaén and Granada, and this means that saddlery, leather-making and taxidermy are typical crafts in this area. In Deifontes, Huelma or Cambil the plants that grow along the banks of the rivers are made into wicker chairs and other goods, and esparto grass has been used since the Middle Ages to make baskets for olive-picking, and the mats on which the olives were pressed. The textile industry in general has a long tradition, and home crafts such as crochet and lace, which in other places have almost died out, are still very important in certain towns such as Baeza. There are a host of ceramic and pottery workshops of which those in Andújar are particularly well-known, with attractive, unusual pieces decorated in blue on a white background. Metalwork is another ancient craft, with important centres in Úbeda, Baeza and Torredonjimeno, one of the few places in Spain where bronze bells are still made in a foundry that is now over two hundred years old.

### FESTIVITIES

The lively, cheerful nature of most Andalusians combined with the particular course of their history has produced countless festivities in which pagan and religious traditions have become inextricably entwined. Livestock fairs and festive pilgrimages (*romerías*) are very popular in the spring, when the countryside is full of colour and the sun is an almost constant companion. Of course if the odd shower should happen to fall, the pilgrims are quite happy to shelter beneath the trees until the rain stops and the fiesta begins again. On the feast days of San Antón and San Isidro many towns up sticks to spend the day in the country. One of the most popular of these *romerías* is held every year in Andújar in honour of the Virgen de la Cabeza. In May the streets and squares of this town and of many others such as Mengibar, Porcuna or even Granada are adorned with crosses and flowers. To commemorate the times of the Reconquest, some towns in Granada bring out their flags, banners and pennants in their Moors and Christians festivals. A good example is Iznalloz, where at the end of August or the beginning of September, during the town's festivity, a mock battle is played out in which the Christians try to recapture an image of the Virgin seized by the Moors. Other historic events such as the foundation of La Carolina or the victory at the Battle of Bailén, are also commemorated with fiestas, bull-fights and parades. Cultural events include the «Ciudad de Úbeda» music and dance festival, the «Pipirrana Flamenca» in Porcuna, and in a different sense, Holy Week, which combines tradition, art and religious expression and fills the streets of the towns and villages along the route with processions and other celebrations.



## ROUTE AND DISTANCES

The Route of the Nasrids snakes its way through the provinces of Jaén and Granada along 240 km (150 miles). Our journey begins in Las Navas de Tolosa and continues alongside the N-IV highway until we reach Bailén. Here the route divides into two branches which later meet up in Jaén, and enable the visitor to discover Mengibar, the area around Andújar and finally, to explore countless rural back roads in search of towns of greater renown: Linares, Baeza and Úbeda. For centuries this path was one of the main routes between the River Guadalquivir and Granada. From here four regional roads gradually descend over almost 100 km (62 miles) until they reach Granada, the Nasrid capital.

## LANDSCAPE

The landscape is one of great diversity. From Sierra Morena to Sierra Nevada, which boasts the highest peaks in the Iberian Peninsula and forms part of the Penibetic mountain range, to the fertile plain along the River Guadalquivir and its innumerable offshoots. Rocky landscapes rich in minerals (such as the lead deposits in Linares and La Carolina, the most important in Spain) alternate with fertile valleys, grasslands, olive groves and fields of cereals. There are also important natural areas such as the Sierra de Andújar, Despeñaperros or Sierra Mágina, habitat of a variety of species of flora and fauna typical of the Mediterranean forest. Wild boars, lynxes and deers are just a few of the creatures that dwell amidst the holm-oaks, Gall oaks and thickets of rosemary, lavender and cistus. Higher up in the mountaintops we can find the Spanish ibex and birds of prey, such as golden eagles or vultures that nest in the crags. As we get closer to Granada there are beautiful caves with spectacular limestone formations that produce amazing shapes and figures that are even more impressive when the sunlight plays upon them.



## ARCHITECTURE

The culmination of Spanish Muslim art under the Nasrids was characterized by an exquisite Baroque-like style. Columns, ogival and lobed arches, inscriptions in elegant calligraphy, *mocarabe* stalactite ceilings, wood-carved ceilings, lattice-work and tiles are all typical features of its elaborate ornamentation. The most emblematic examples are to be found at the Alhambra in Granada. Built on a hill made of reddish earth, it was originally called al-Hamra, «the red castle». Its origins date back to the fortress or *alcazaba* built by Alhamar, also known as Muhammad I, the founder of the Nasrid dynasty.

## CASTLES

The hostilities between Christians and Muslims in the kingdom of al-Andalus had a direct impact on the organization of the towns and cities sheltered by walled fortresses built next to rivers or on hill-tops. They normally had one or more walled enclosures some distance away from the castle, with various towers or watch-towers. The thick stone walls were topped with battlements from which all kinds of projectiles could be hurled or fired and from which boiling oil or pitch were poured on the unfortunate enemies below. The keep, a tower placed on one side of the fortress, was



On the left, the castle of Baños de la Encina, declared a National Historic Artistic Monument in 1931, which has the form of a ship rising over the crest of the hill, its wall faces are interspersed with 14 mortar towers with restored battlements and a grand keep with a double horseshoe arch entrance.

On the right, a painting of the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, by Francisco de Paula van Halen, 19th c.

The Nasrid Palaces were built partly during the reign of Yusuf I (the Throne-room and the *Patio de los Arrayanes*) and were completed during the reign of Muhammad V, who added private rooms for the Court. The Alhambra is considered the best preserved medieval Muslim palace. Particularly noteworthy are its baths, the *Patio de los Leones*, *Sala de los Abencerrajes*, *Sala de las Dos Hermanas* and *Sala de los Reyes*. The courtyards and the gardens of El Partal and the Generalife capture the very essence of the Muslim garden. Their incomparable beauty is framed by the spectacular backdrop of the peaks of Sierra Nevada.

The main building. In addition to serving as look-out posts and defensive positions, these fortresses were also used as food-stores and prisons, as recounted in numerous romantic tales and legends. Many of them still stand today, including those at Úbeda, Jimena, Piñar or Baños de la Encina, to name but a few. Some have curious historical associations, such as the keep of Porcuna Castle, where Boabdil, the last Sultan of Granada, was held prisoner after the battle of Lucena, and Jódar Castle, the oldest castle in the Spanish Peninsula.



Cultural Route of the Council of Europe

From Navas de Tolosa  
Jaén and Granada

# Route of the Nasrids



## Information Points

<b>NAVAS DE TOLOSA</b> Museo de La Carolina. Plaza de la Iglesia, 6. Tel. 953 662 081	<b>LINARES</b> Oficina de Información Turística. Paseo de Linaresjos s/n (Antigua Estación de Madrid). Tel. 953 607 812	<b>GUADAHORTUNA</b> Ayuntamiento. Calle Real, 1. Tel. 958 383 002
<b>LA CAROLINA</b> Museo de La Carolina. Plaza de la Iglesia, 6. Tel. 953 662 081	<b>BAEZA</b> Oficina de Turismo Junta de Andalucía. Plaza del Pópulo s/n. Tel. 953 779 982	<b>PIÑAR</b> Centro de Recepción de la Cueva de las Ventanas. Plaza del Ayuntamiento, 7. Tel. 958 394 725
<b>BAÑOS DE LA ENCINA</b> Oficina Municipal de Turismo (Centro de Interpretación). Avenida José Luis Messia, 2. Tel. 953 813 255 Tel. 626 818 446	<b>ÚBEDA</b> Oficina de Turismo Junta de Andalucía. Plaza de Andalucía, 5. Tel. 953 779 204	<b>IZNALLOZ</b> Ayuntamiento. Plaza de la Constitución, 7. Tel. 958 384 051
<b>BAILÉN</b> Ayuntamiento. Plaza de la Constitución, 1. Tel. 953 878 540	<b>JÓDAR</b> Museo de Jódar. Casa Municipal de la Cultura. Tel. 636 602 704 Tel. 670 493 465	<b>DEIFONTES</b> Ayuntamiento. Avda. de Andalucía, 12. Tel. 958 407 005
<b>MENGIBAR</b> Ayuntamiento. Plaza de la Constitución, 1. Tel. 953 370 025	<b>JIMENA</b> Ayuntamiento. Plaza de la Constitución, 1. Tel. 953 957 001	<b>ALBOLOTE</b> Casa de la Cultura. Calle Pintor Manuel Rodríguez s/n. Tel. 958 465 428
<b>ANDÚJAR</b> Oficina Municipal de Turismo Torre del Reloj. Plaza de Sta. María s/n. Tel. 953 504 959	<b>MANCHA REAL</b> Ayuntamiento. Plaza de la Constitución, 1. Tel. 953 350 157	<b>MARACENA</b> Casa de la Cultura. Calle Horno, 17. Tel. 958 421 395
<b>ARJONA</b> Ayuntamiento. Calle Cervantes 9. Tel. 953 823 325	<b>JAÉN</b> Oficina de Turismo. Calle Maestro, 8. Tel. 953 313 281 Tel. 953 190 455	<b>GRANADA</b> Oficina de Turismo de la Junta de Andalucía. Plaza Nueva, Santa Ana, 4. Tel. 958 575 202
<b>PORCUNA</b> Oficina de Turismo. Plaza de Andalucía, 2. Tel. 953 545 130	<b>LA GUARDIA DE JAÉN</b> Ayuntamiento. Plaza de San Pedro s/n. Tel. 953 327 100	<b>CAMBIL</b> (Centro de Interpretación del Turismo, la Cultura y el Medio Ambiente). Ayuntamiento de Granada. Plaza del Carmen s/n. Tel. 958 248 280
<b>TORREDONJIMENO</b> Ayuntamiento. Plaza de la Victoria, 2. Tel. 953 572 202	<b>MARTOS</b> Casa de la Cultura. Avda. de Europa, 31. Tel. 953 210 010	<b>HUELMA</b> Ayuntamiento. Plaza de España, 1. Tel. 953 390 210
<b>TORREDELCAMPO</b> Centro Cultural de la Villa. Calle V. Castellano s/n. Tel. 953 568 649		



## NAVAS DE TOLOSA

The rocky landscape of Sierra Morena embraces the plains of Las Navas. Nearby, the remains of the forts of Tolosa and Ferral, left behind by Umayyads and Berbers, are a witness to the strategic importance of this town, wrested from the Almohad armies by Christian crusaders in the 13th century. Its name derives from the mountain pass known as La Losa. Once a staging-post for highwaymen, the Despeñaperros Natural Park is today a sensational natural reserve of flora and fauna. Also nearby is the Iberian sanctuary of El Collado de los Jardines.

## LA CAROLINA

We leave Las Navas through hills dressed with oaks, bushes, olive trees and vines, and La Carolina soon arises before us with its orange-treed streets lending it an aristocratic air. The town which was born out of the resettlement of Sierra Morena, was established in the 18th century around La Peña, an old Carmelite convent, which gave its name to the village. It is laid out in clean, straight streets with whitewashed houses, a sign of its neoclassical architectural design. Along with the Church of la Concepción, there are a number of interesting institutional buildings such as: the Palace of the Intendente Olavide, the Customs House, the Jail and the Town Hall. Hunting and shooting are activities with a long tradition in this area, which means that menus often include typical dishes such as partridge, venison or wild boar, and local craftsmen make leather chaps and pouches.

## BAÑOS DE LA ENCINA

Clinging hard to granite rocks, amongst cistus thickets and lavender, the towns of the region have even more relics of their past, as their rich soils proved attractive to both Carthaginians and Romans. During the Caliphate, the castle of Burgalimar guarded the mountain passes of El Muradal, Despeñaperros and El Rumberal. Cradled in its lap lies the village. Its streets lead to the Church of San Mateo, a building that combines Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque styles. Other religious architecture includes country chapels or hermitages, such as those of El Cristo del Llano or Nuestra Señora de la Encina, which are visited by pilgrims in May. In September the images of Christ and the Virgin are taken out of their *ermitas* and processed around the town together with that of the patron saint San Mateo. This is known as the fiesta of the Slaves, one of the oldest fiestas in Andalusia.



## BAILÉN

Bailén overlooks a landscape of olive-groves and vegetable fields irrigated by waters from Guadief and Rumberal rivers. A legacy of its Andalusí past, handicrafts make an important contribution to the local economy, as do sheep and goat-farming and mining. The ruins of the castle that was taken by King Fernando III el Santo on his way through Jaén are just some of its remnants of the past. Its main attractions include the Palace of the Condes de Benavente and the Gothic church of La Encarnación, where there is a carving by Alonso Cano. Famous for the battle in which the troops of General Castaños defeated Napoleon's army, numerous commemorative monuments adorn its squares and promenades. Every year between 17th and 22nd July this victory is remembered with festivities, parades and processions.

## MENGÍBAR

On route now to Andújar, the Iberian settlement of *Osvigi* flourished along the rural banks of the Guadalquivir, and was the scene of bitter battles between Romans and Carthaginians. The current position of this town however, around the castle that crowns the hilltop, dates from Arabic times. After being conquered by Fernando III, it was baptized with the name of



*Mexibar*. Today, the *Torre del Homenaje* (keep), in the centre of the town conserves the majesty of times gone by. Nearby are the Palace of the Señores de la Chica, which hosts an exhibition of numerous Iberian and Roman remains, and the Town Hall.

## ANDÚJAR

A latticework of cultures, Andújar the powerful, retains the essence of al-Andalus in every corner of its old quarter. The remains of the wall, the mosque that was converted into the Church of Santa Marina and the Mudejar-style Clock Tower are all beautiful examples of the architecture of this period. In the same square as the Tower, the Church of Santa María la Mayor, with gothic and renaissance lines, is proud home to the *Prayer in the Garden* by El Greco. There are other interesting buildings scattered around the town such as the Church of San Miguel and the Town Hall, a baroque-style building which curiously enough was a Comedy Theatre until the end of the 18th century. There are also many noble houses and palaces, such as the Palace of los Cárdenas or that of los Niños de Don Gome, which is now the Archaeological Museum. The main festivity, in honour of the Virgen de la Cabeza, patron saint of hunters, is held in April and is one of the most popular festive pilgrimages (*romerías*) in Spain.

## ARJONA

The hill on which unrivalled Arjona is perched rises up amongst the olive-groves in the very heart of the Jaén countryside, alongside Bronze Age, Iberian and Roman archaeological sites. The birthplace of the Nasrid dynasty, the founders of the Kingdom of Granada, its streets follow the same lines as they did in times of Alhama. Its main buildings are the Gothic church of Santa María, probably built on the site of the mosque that occupied the centre of the fortress, the church of San Juan and the sanctuary of Los Santos. Near the village, the Moorish tower of Arjonilla evokes the beautiful legend of *Macías el Enamorado* (Macías the man-in-love).

## PORCUNA

When asked about the different names of their town, whose stone-age origins are lost in the mists of time, the people of Porcuna proudly cite the Tartessian name of *Nelva*, the Iberian *Ipolea*, the Roman *Obulco* and the Muslim *Burquna*. It has always been an important military stronghold because of its privileged position in the heart of rural Jaén (*La Campiña*). It was finally captured by Fernando III during his campaigns in Jaén, and he granted it to the Order of Calatrava. There is very little left of the walls that defended the fortress. One of the town's bastions, the *Torre del Homenaje* (keep), does however survive, and is of particular note as the place where Boabdil, the last Sultan of Granada, was held prisoner for five months after the battle of Lucena. Other places that must be visited include the churches of La Asunción, Nuestro Padre Jesús and San Benito, built in a varied selection of styles, and the Casa de Piedra, an original construction that is an excellent example of local stonemasonry. Just outside the town is *El Cerrillo Blanco*, once an important megalithic and pre-Roman archaeological site.

## TORREDONJIMENO

The landscape of Torredonjimeno is dotted with watchtowers that stand like pieces from a chess-game between Calatrava knights and Nasrid horsemen. The few remaining pieces of the town walls remind us of the Almohad origins of this town, which according to local tradition, takes its name from the knight who conquered it, Don Jimeno de Raya. There is still one stone circular tower remaining of the castle built next to the Salado stream. The church of San Pedro, which displays a mixture of Mudejar and Mannerist features, presides over a small square behind the Town Hall, which has a splendid façade and is considered one of the finest examples of civil or secular architecture in Andalusia. The town's other treasures include the stylized lines of the late Gothic on the convent of La Piedad and the church of Santa María with its Baroque chapel. The remains of Iberian and Roman civilizations discovered in nearby fields, and a set of Visigoth silverwork are a testament to the area's wealth of history.

## MARTOS

An important settlement in ancient times, the rocky hills of Martos were consolidated as a look-out point over the south of the Campiña by the Arabs, as can be seen by the ruins of their castles. The castle of La Peña still retains its original courtyard and its keep, which rewards the visitor with wonderful views. Hidden amongst the town's streets, the stones of the Castillo de la Villa, the town's second fortress, guide us towards other towers built by the Order of Calatrava. Worthy of note are the churches of Santa María and Santa Marta, with a door in the Flamboyant Gothic style, and the convent of Trinitarias, whose delicious cakes and pastries sweeten the Martos air.



## TORREDELCAMPO

Torredelcampo stands a few kilometres west of Jaén, at the foot of the sierras of La Grana and Jabalcuz, amongst cereal fields and olive groves. Its people make delicious home-made *postijos* (honey-coated fritters), *dulces de bojalbre* (puff-pastry cakes) and *rocros de anís* (anise-flavoured doughnuts). Nearby country beauty spots such as Cerro Miguelico or La Floresta are nourished by relics of their Iberian, Roman, Visigoth and Muslim past. The Iberians left behind a fortified settlement, the Visigoths a necropolis. Towers and watchtowers are scattered around an area with beautiful natural and man-made monuments, such as the Cascada (waterfall) or the Hermitage de Santa Ana, the destination of one of the province's most popular pilgrimages held every year in the first week of May.

## LINARES

Linares finds its origins in ancient *Cástulo*, occupied by successive civilizations throughout the centuries, all of them attracted by the wealthy lead and silver mines. In the foothills, crucial battles were fought, like the one that implied the victory of Carthaginians over Scipio. The town that witnessed the death of the bullfighter Manolete after being gored by the bull *Islero* possesses significant monuments, like the churches of Santa María and San Francisco and the sanctuary of the *Virgen of Linaresitas*. Other buildings representative of the boom of mining and industry from 19th century onwards can also be visited.

## BAEZA

Baeza, which is mentioned in the works of the Roman historian, Pliny the Elder, stands out above a sea of olive-trees in the fertile plains around Alto Guadalquivir. A small university town and ancient bishopric, Baeza is today one of Andalusia's most flourishing towns. Its interesting monuments include Casa del Populo in the Plateresque style, and the fountains of Los Leones and Santa María. It has a number of churches of which the 13th-century Cathedral is particularly outstanding for its beauty. Built on the site of a mosque and restored during the Renaissance, it has a magnificent relic box which is displayed at Easter and during the Feast of Corpus Christi. The Palace of Jabalquinto, the Chancellery and the old university, where the poet Antonio Machado taught are just some of the main examples of civil or secular architecture.

## ÚBEDA

Úbeda, described by Machado as "queen and gypsy", lies on loamy hills of vines and olives. Known in Muslim times as *Ubbadat*, it became one of the greatest centres of wealth in al-Andalus, before finally being conquered by Fernando III. The Moorish legacy is still present today in its well-known home-made esparto rugs, its ceramic tiles and pottery. Its best-known buildings date from the 16th century. The splendour of the reign of King Charles I can be seen in the chapel of El

Salvador, with a magnificent altarpiece by Berruguete, the Church of Santa María de los Reales Alcázares, built on the site of an old mosque, the Palace of las Cadenas, the University and countless other palaces and noble residences. The old town's renaissance style architecture is at its most charming in May and June thanks to the «Ciudad de Úbeda» Music and Dance Festival.

## JÓDAR

In the valley carved out by the high reaches of the Guadalquivir, at the foot of Sierra Mágina, is the town of Jódar. The first settlements in the area date back to the third millennium B.C. These early settlers were later followed by the Iberians, the Romans and the Muslims. It was the Muslims who built its castle around the 9th century, although it acquired its definitive structure under the Christians. Two towers, the New Tower and the Old Tower survive today. The churches of El Santo Cristo and La Asunción are also of interest. The latter, which has a Latin cross layout and a neoclassical door, was probably built on the site of the old mosque. There are a number of exceptional beauty spots nearby such as Fuente García or el Pilar de la Dehesa that are popular with day-trippers. Not far off is the historic town of Bedmar, the home town of Isabel de Solís, known to the Arabs as Soraya, who became the wife of the Nasrid Sultan, Muley Hacén.

## JIMENA

The intriguing prehistoric paintings in the cave of La Graja show that Jimena was populated even in the remotest times. The town which is situated to the North of Sierra Mágina, was also home to Iberians, Romans and Moors. Its castle of Arabic origin, although rebuilt by the Christians, was one of the main defences of the Order of Calatrava in the wars they waged with the Kingdom of Granada. The main tower of the church of Santiago, in the old town and the sanctuary of the Virgen de los Remedios, in the area known as Cánava, are excellent examples of the charm of a town that is embedded in a landscape of natural springs, rocks, grasslands, poplars and almonds. Fig jams and typical desserts made with raisins and pine-nuts are delicacies popular throughout this area.

## MANCHA REAL

Originally baptized as La Manchuela in the time of King Charles I, the town was created during the drive to colonize the country and the sierras of Jaén that had largely been abandoned after the wars of Granada. Its grid-like street system was part of a carefully planned design. Walking down these streets we see the façades of aristocratic houses emblazoned with coats of arms, and in the centre of the town, the renaissance church of San Juan, which has a beautiful doorway opening onto the square. Throughout the year locals anxiously await the «Pipirana Flamenca» festival, attended by the best *cante jondo* flamenco singers, and the festivity of San José, Patron Saint of Carpenters, a trade that has a long tradition in the town.

## JAÉN

Once colonized by Iberians and Romans, old Jaén, with a long history of tanneries and cloth workshops, is today above all an important olive oil and cereal centre. The town began to take off from the 9th century onwards when it replaced La Guardia as the capital of this district of al-Andalus. As the main city in the area, commerce became an important activity, and its strategic position meant that it became a fortress-city, a status it maintained even after being conquered by Fernando III. The castle and the Arabic Baths are two excellent emblems of



al-Andalus. The mount of Santa Catalina, on which the castle was built, offers a wonderful view of the city, and the Cathedral is perhaps the most impressive building in monument terms. Built on the site of an old mosque, its rebuilding process began in the 16th century and was not fully completed until the 18th century. Its magnificent façade, its dome and the Holy Face of Jesus that presides over the main chapel are all examples of the artistic wealth of this noteworthy building.

## LA GUARDIA DE JAÉN

Through fields and pastures we come to the small town of La Guardia de Jaén, which in its glorious past was once more important than its neighbour Jaén. With the capture of Jaén by Fernando III its strategic position on the front line meant that it had to be heavily defended. The fortress, originally built by the Arabs, was redeveloped by the Christians in the 13th and 14th centuries. A walk around the old quarter would not be complete without a visit to the Keep [*Torre del Homenaje*], the Church of la Asunción and the old Convent of Santo Domingo.

## CAMBIL

Immersed in the folds of Sierra Mágina, Cambil was once a stronghold of al-Andalus. Nearby there are vestiges of a Bronze Age necropolis and of Roman settlements, perhaps of the legendary but lost Vergilia, residence of San Tesifón, one of the Seven Men that came to preach the Gospel. The town has two castles both of Nasrid origin, although during the last period of the Reconquest the sign of Islam alternated with that of the Holy Cross and it was only finally taken by King Fernando the Catholic to clear his path towards Granada. Another place that deserves a special mention is the poplar wood at Mata Bejid, a genuine natural monument.

## HUELMA

The village of Huelma is perched on a hilltop presided over by its fortress. This was built by the Christians at the end of the 16th and beginning of the 16th centuries and the remains of previous fortifications can be seen nearby. Looking down from the castle onto the roofs of the houses, it is easy to spot the tower of the church of La Inmaculada, considered one of the most beautiful examples of religious architecture in the province. Huelma has other remnants of its past, in the old Jewish quarter, today Barrio del Santo, in its beautiful fountains and on the coats of arms on its grand aristocratic houses. The Lord and Conqueror of the village, Íñigo López de Mendoza, Marquis of Santillana, captured to perfection the renaissance ideal of a man of arms and of letters.

## GUADAHORTUNA

Until the end of the Reconquest, Guadahortuna was just a group of houses next to the country inn of La Cañada del Espino. Later, at the behest of Queen Isabel the Catholic, the town was repopulated with Christians, as a way of guarding the paths and as «Pipirana Flamenca» festival. The pillars of the Church of Santa María la Mayor must have been erected around that time, but the Church was not completed until the middle of the 16th century. It is an elegant combination of the classical and Mudejar styles, and the renaissance lines of its portico and its altarpiece inside are particularly worthy of note. Visitors will be struck by the contrast between the immense wheat-fields and the rugged surrounding hills. The landscape is interrupted nearby by the metal bridge of Hacho, built by French engineers in the 19th century.

## PIÑAR

The village of Piñar appears quite near Guadahortuna, on the road to Iznalloz. The oldest bones ever found on the Iberian Peninsula were discovered here in Sierra Arana in the palaeolithic site in the Cave of la Carigüela. This settlement seems to have continued until the Neolithic period, judging by the tools and ceramic fragments found in the nearby Cueva de las Ventanas, through which the sunlight plays impressive tricks of light and shade on the limestone formations of the cave. A castle stands on the same hill as these caves to remind us of the battles between Nasrids and Christians fought around this town at the gates of Granada.

## IZNALLOZ

Iznalloz «the castle of the almond-tree» was strategically positioned at the crossroads of the Roman roads that joined *Betica* and *Tarraconense*. It reached its peak as a defensive stronghold of the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada, guarded by the watchtowers and castles of its neighbouring towns. Its situation on the front line and the wear and tear of countless battles led to its definitive decline a few years before the fall of Granada in 1492. Very little is left of the castle, although the Renaissance-style parish church and the old Hospital with its amazing Mudejar ceiling are definitely worthy of mention. The history of this town is manifest today in its popular traditions with episodes from the battles between Moors and Christians being played out as part of the town's festivities in honour of the Virgen de los Remedios held every year at the end of August or the beginning of September. The Mediterranean forest and the subterranean lakes and springs in the caves of Sierra Arana are a sight for all visitors to enjoy.

## DEIFONTES

An outpost keeping watch over the entrance to the Vega of Granada, the stone walls of the watchtower of Deifontes stand on the top of a hill that overlooks a vast tract of land. The landscape bathed by the River Cubillas and its various streams has seen many civilizations flourish. The Romans for example built a temple to the Gods of Water at the Venta del Nacimiento, of which only small traces survive. In the village, the traveller will enjoy a pleasant walk through the white-washed streets to the Church of El Cristo de la Vera Cruz, a delight for all the senses.

## ALBOLOTE

The vega (fertile plains) of Granada stretches out before our eyes when we reach Albolote, an ancient farmstead located in what was once a forest of oaks and a battlefield for numerous forays made by the Christians before the ultimate move on the city of Granada. In Albolote the church of la Encarnación is worthy of note, as are the inns and restaurants in the country nearby, in which the visitor can try a variety of local dishes, such as rabbit with rice prepared "Albolote style".

## MARACENA

The fertile fields around Maracena, a town of Roman origin, were part of the Vega of Granada, a rich tract of farmland criss-crossed by irrigation channels and dotted with farms. Its fields provided food for the inhabitants of the city, both before and after the Conquest, as after the Moriscos were expelled, the area was resettled with Christians. The Mudejar church of la Encarnación dates from this period, although it was extended centuries later. Its 18th-century tower was designed in the style of a minaret.

## GRANADA

As al-Andalus began to fall apart, the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada, the last Muslim stronghold in Spain until the city was finally captured by the Catholic Kings, enjoyed a golden age in Art and Science. The amazing palace city of the Alhambra, with Sierra Nevada in the background is the symbol par excellence of the Muslim presence in Andalusia. The Courts of the Myrtles and of the Lions, the Generalife, with its fabulous gardens and the renaissance palace of King Charles I provide a harmonious combination of art and nature. An inspiration for artists and poets, the whole city is decked with oges, *mocarabes*, lattice decoration, baths, fountains and beautiful towers such as *Torre de la Vela*. Notable buildings include the University built in the times of Charles I, and the Cathedral which is next to the Royal Chapel, with the tombs of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabel. Other places of particular interest include the Carmenes (typical houses with gardens) in the Albayzín quarter and the caves of Sacromonte. If we stop to admire these treasures it is easy to understand why Boabdil, the last Sultan of Granada shed tears as he looked back at the city for the last time on his way to exile.

