



# Jaén

*a place where one can live and feel*

It is not sufficient to learn about the history of Jaén to just know the province. One has to live it and feel it, visit its mountains during a peaceful ride on horseback, let oneself be swept away by the rapids of the Alto Guadalquivir in an active adventure activity, climb its cliffs or explore its deep caves, in a region that contains the largest extension of protected nature reserves in Spain. One can also conquer forts in crusade-like adventures, or walk along a Roman road and even discover waterfalls that are so perfect, they seem to have been created using photoshop; a world of sensations to be experienced by bathing in its spas or waking up to the silence of a Renaissance palace.

The region of Jaén is a place where the boldest travellers can do whatever they feel like doing and experience emotions so intense that they seem to transform you. All things are possible in paradise. There is a before and an after in visiting Jaén, for there is something special in this land that makes everything that a traveller can imagine come true. This province, the past of its territory, almost legendary, is nearer than you think, for Federico

García Lorca Granada-Jaén airport is less than an hour from the capital, which is easy to reach by road from the other provinces of Andalusia and about three hours by car from Madrid.

Your adventure in Jaén can start off anywhere, for example, in the north. The nature reserve of Despeñaperros is more than the gate that separates Andalusia from the Plateau. It is a succession of ravines behind which is a scenario that combines uncultivated land with a sinuous landscape. This reserve contains the Museum of the Battle of Navas de Tolosa (in Santa Elena), not far from the area known as Mesa del Rey, where in 1212, the battle that for the Christians was the prelude to the final assault of Al Andalus was fought. In fact, the museum is one of the central elements of the Castles and Battles Route and the starting point of this route in Jaén. This cultural tourist route runs through most of the province of Jaén and is flanked by castles, forts and watch towers, in addition to being a privileged witness of confrontations such as that of Navas de Tolosa, Baécula or Bailén which marked the course of Spain's history.



## *Baños de la Encina*

History is ever-present in Jaén. Among the watch towers that controlled the advances of the Christians and the Muslims, time travels through other eras. On the way to Baños de la Encina is La Carolina, capital of the New Townships and a fine example of illustrated urban development. Baños is crowned by Burgalimar castle, which still survives, with its fifteen impressive towers that make it one of the best conserved fortresses and the oldest in Europe. Around the castle is a town set on uneven ground, filled with narrow streets. In the month of July, the town is transformed into the backdrop of mediaeval pageants in which, just by changing the attire of the townsfolk and visitors, one suddenly finds oneself transported back to the Spanish Reconquest.

The rolling landscape dominated by Burgalimar allows one to scan a different horizon, one in which the collieries spew gravel at the foot of the derricks. Nearby, in Linares, the Mining Interpretation Centre offers visitors an explanation of how, since the 19th century, these everyday elements are recent proof of the power that lead and silver gave to Cástulo, the Ibero-Roman settlement whose ruins are a few kilometres from the city. This was the birthplace

of Himilce, wife of Hannibal, the Carthaginian general who confronted Rome during the Punic Wars. Linares Archaeological Museum and the ruins of Cástulo tell how Rome gradually took control of the lands watered by the river Betis (or Guadalquivir).

Linares is famous throughout the province for its “tapas” –small, tasty morsels that are offered free of charge as an aperitif in its bars–. An entertaining way to try some of the gastronomic varieties of the province, whereas a route is established in which one can learn more about the national festivity, since in the bullring of Linares (Santa Margarita), the legendary bullfighter (Manolete) met his death. In August, it is the scene of one of the most important bullfights in Spain.

From El Condado one can continue to Sierra de Segura or retrace one’s steps and take the road leading to the East. Along this road, travellers will come to Úbeda and Baeza, both of which have been declared World Heritage Sites by the UNESCO, where there are several Southern Renaissance jewels that extend to nearby townships such as Sabiote or Canena, including the legacy of the architect Andrés de Vandelvira.

# *Úbeda and Baeza*

## *World Heritage Sites*

In winter, Baeza peeps out from beneath a veil of mist, revealing its warm stone to all those visiting it for the first time. The ancient university where the universal poet Antonio Machado once lectured, the palace of Jabalquinto (now the main building of the International University of Andalusia) opposite the church of Santa Cruz, one of the few examples of Andalusian Roman architecture.

Baeza is not to be visited in haste, and visitors have the chance to play detective by searching on the steps of the municipal palace for the notch that marks the geographic centre of the province. One can stroll through it and visit the fountain in Santa María Square, the picturesque Pópulo Square and also taste its gastronomic delights.



Near Baeza, on Bishop's Bridge, is Hacienda La Laguna, where the Olive Museum stands, a place that allows one to learn about the history of the olive oil industry from ancient times to the modern day.

The olive tree, one of the emblems of the province of Jaén –which is the most important olive oil producer in the world–, is a constant in this district of la Loma and surrounds both these Renaissance cities with its peaceful presence. Úbeda has one of the most attractive and singular Spanish Renaissance squares. Its asymmetrical layout, at a corner of Santa María de los Reales Alcázares church, enhances the force and present of the church of Salvador at the other end. This square, whose name is Vázquez de Molina, is flanked by half a dozen national monuments that bear witness to the Renaissance splendour of a city that was created under the protection of Francisco de los Cobos, personal secretary of Carlos I.

Úbeda, like its sister city Baeza, beckons travellers to stop and walk through its streets that lead to the wall or to the artisan district of San Millán, where one can still see an Arab oven that is still used by famous potters of the province, whose

work brings to mind Al-Andalus. Or try and find the charity hospital, now converted into the Hospital de Santiago cultural centre. Or perhaps visit the House of the Towers, where the legend of the women imprisoned in a wall is often present in the stories of Antonio Muñoz Molina. And all this without missing the opportunity to try the Carmelite stew that owes its name to the presence of this religious order in the city, in the convent where San Juan de la Cruz passed away.

Úbeda and Baeza, separated by just 8 kilometres, do not compete with each other, but rather, they complement each other. That is why they share, in addition to the austerity of Easter Week, the Festival of Ancient Music which, since the middle of November and well into the month of December, fills both cities with feverish activity. Another of the additions to their common heritage is the evening, which can be enjoyed from their balconies. No matter the time of year, the way in which both cities look to the south allows visitors to dream on discovering the prodigies that the light makes when it turns from violet to orange, over the mountains of Mágina.

# *Magic Mágina*

Sometimes, the shapes of these mountains conceal turrets, and on other occasions, the mountains themselves are converted into watch towers, an extension of their castles, over towns such as Albánchez, Bedmar or Cambil, which nestle at the feet of the highest peaks in the province, practically always covered in snow from November to February. The history of this nature reserve is one that can be told by the detachments of warriors, but it was also a centre of activity and a holy place for the Iberians. In Huelma the site of El Pajarillo was found, the traces of a sanctuary in homage to a hero. This site and others discovered at different places in the province are exhibited in the Provincial Museum and are the basis of the future International Iberian Art Museum, where the largest and best conserved

Iberian legacy found in the peninsula will be housed.

This mountainous massif is worth visiting, to try and decipher its mysteries and enter a network of trails that reveal to botany enthusiasts almost 1,300 plant species; or enjoy one of the most beautiful flowering cherry landscapes in Jaén, offered by Torres in the early spring, when the appearance of these trees makes us forget that this place is tinged with ochre and red during the autumn; or which have plotted the outline of ravines such as the Siete Pilillas, where the road leads from this township to Mancha Real, where the gliders or hang gliders of those who enjoy free flying can almost always be seen.

The gastronomy of these mountains, as in the entire province, is basically pork products, spicy sausages that dry with the first frosts of winter. But its orchards also provide gazpacho, onion seasonings and “pipirranas”, the most popular of the salads produced in Jaén which, like all the cuisine in this region, would be impossible to obtain without the discreet and essential presence of its olive oil.

On the other side of Mágina, towards the south, is the outline of Granada. In that area, the struggles between the Moors and the Christians took place, and in the summer, they constitute the theme of the popular festivities organised by that name, such as those held in Campillo de Arenas, Carchelejo or Bélmez de la Moraleda.



## *Alcalá la Real, the Fortress*

To the south of the province, just half an hour from the airport, is Alcalá la Real, the city that changed hands many times between the 13th and 14th centuries, from Muslims to Christians and vice versa. This was the time when the Fortress of la Mota, which during the 12th century, enjoyed full independence and lived its era of greatest splendour during the Arab period, first witnessed the Abacial Church rise up among its towers. This site is now the headquarters of an interpretation centre that has enclosed the history of Alcalá in a museum. The centre gives visitors an idea of the city's progress from its Palaeolithic origins to the Muslim rule during which the figure of the poet and scholar Ibn Said al-Magribí stands out, or the Christian conquest that brought with it the legend of the birth of Juan Ruiz, archpriest of Hita.

These comings and going of local history served as inspiration for celebrating the meeting of all that is diverse. This led to the inauguration of Etnosur, at the end of the 20th century. An event that takes place in July and attracts musicians, craftsmen, merchants, clowns, acrobats and chefs..., who for a few days, allow food, literature, history, music or performances to favour an exchange of experiences that is open to many different peoples and cultures.

Also during July, not far from Alcalá, in the Mountains of the South, Alcaudete is immersed in a unique event, the festivities of Calatrava. The areas surrounding the castle, one of the most characteristic in the province, are the backdrop for an impressive street market and also mediaeval jousting in which knights mounted on horseback compete against with each other, as in a film that relives the Middle Ages. A sight that is worth seeing, and that allows everyone to take part in the event, dressed in costumes from that period.

There are many ways to travel from Alcaudete to the capital. One of these is on foot or by bicycle, running along the Green Oil Route, comprised of a distance of 55 kilometres along an ancient railroad that once connected the capital of Jaén with the border of the province of Córdoba. The route passes through attractive sites such as Laguna Honda and up to nine viaducts, a fine example of 19th century industrial engineering. Structures made of metal or stone or both, that merge into tunnels and mark the outline of a different landscape, still dotted by orderly rows of olive trees.



## Jaén, the capital

One of the first sights of the capital that visitors see is Santa Catalina castle. Its history is told in the interpretation centre that is inside its premises.

From the hill of Santa Catalina, the Cathedral is the most outstanding building in Jaén. The church, which is in the process of being declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, rises up over the old Moorish mosque. From there, the road leads to the stream of la Magdalena, the lair of the lizard/dragon that terrorised the city for years, until a knight finally killed it and put an end to its rule, converting the dragon into the emblem of the city for ever after.

Halfway along the route, one comes to the Arab Baths: the largest and best conserved in Europe. It is located beneath Villardompardo Palace, alongside the Museum of Popular Arts and Customs and the first International Naif Art Museum in Spain, known as the “Manuel Moral” Museum.

The road carries on to La Magdalena Church and the Ancient Hospital of San Juan de Dios, passing in front of Santo Domingo convent, which is now the Provincial Archive, from where small roads emerge, leading to districts that take their names from their churches: San Juan, San Bartolomé, San Andrés, San Lorenzo... It runs near tiny streets adorned with geraniums or leads visitors into what was once the Jewish quarter, or the most traditional taverns in the city.

From the capital, the olive trees of La Campiña stretch for many kilometres. In this district, the remains of the walls of Arjona or Arjonilla castle serve to maintain the era when history and legend come together with universal love. Not

far away is Porcuna, where the last king of Granada, Boabdil, was supposedly held prisoner, in the tower that bears his name. In this township is another of the important Iberian settlements that exist in the province: Cerrillo Blanco.

From here, the route leads to the Mountains of Andújar. There is the site of the oldest pilgrim’s sanctuary in Spain, that of Virgen de la Cabeza, where half a million people gather every spring.

Every autumn, this nature reserve, with gentler landscapes than the others in the province, is the scene of numerous combats between stags to take control of their herd and attract the attention of the females. Here are some of the few examples of lynx that remain in Spain. It is also the ideal place for those who are fond of hunting, which is translated, in gastronomic terms, into marines made with game, hare casseroles, partridge or thrush, cooked with scented thyme or rosemary that evokes the aroma of these mountains.

And again, the route takes you to a place you already know: Bailén, where Napoleon lost a battle in an open field for the first time. Very little is left to mark this event, which took place on 19 July 1808, just the waterwheel of San Lázaro, a well whose waters were used to supply the Spanish troops and forge the legend of a local heroine, María Bellido. Three of the main roads in the province converge in this township. One of them goes in search of the east coast and leads directly to one of the most popular areas in the province: the nature reserve of the Mountains of Cazorla, Segura and Las Villas.

# *The largest Nature Reserve*

Arriving at this immense nature reserve (the largest in Spain) through Las Villas is equivalent to following the route of the conquest, which can be seen in the traces of the Renaissance of Vandelvira in Villacarrillo or in Iznatoraf, converted into a privileged balcony from which one can see most of the townships in the province on a clear evening. Or from here, head towards Segura, whose mountains are as beautiful as they are welcoming. An area where, at the beginning of July, hundreds of gliders, hang gliders and paragliders can be seen participating in the International Air Festival, in which thousands of free flight enthusiasts from all over Europe take part. On flying over El Yelmo, they succeed in obtaining that unique perspective of Segura castle, where legend has it that the poet Jorge Manrique was born, or Hornos castle, the future astronomic observatory, with its fortified citadel.

Like Segura de la Sierra, Hornos has been declared a historic-artistic site. In winter, the snow often marks the boundary between this township and the towns of Santiago-Pontones, a succession of tiny hamlets that invite one to stop and admire the singular countryside. Visitors should not leave these mountains without trying the typical Segura lamb, of extraordinary quality, or other gastronomic specialties that are based on oil, potatoes, garlic, hare or codfish.

Hornos controls the end of El Tranco de Beas, a reservoir that stores the waters of the river Guadalquivir which never stops widening from this point on.

Heading towards Cazorla, from the reservoir, one comes to Torre del Vinagre interpretation centre, which ends our visit to the reserve. On the way, Iruela

castle rises up, emerging like an echo of the fortress that keeps Cazorla safe.

Every July, Cazorla opens its gates to one of the most important blues festivals in Spain. It also has an impressive drama festival that is held between October and December, in which some of the most noteworthy drama productions of each season are staged.

In this reserve is the route that leads to the source of the Guadalquivir, in Quesada, a township that, like practically all the townships in this region, tells many tales of its settlers since they first adorned the nearby caves with paintings that are now included in the Unesco World Heritage Catalogue. Also the presence of the Romans, expressed in the exquisite mosaics of Bruñel, and local history in the paintings of Rafael Zabaleta, one of the great Andalusian painters of the 20th century. Zabaleta Museum houses most of his work and that of other contemporary artists of his time, such as Miró, Juan Gris or Picasso. All in all, this reserve is the focal point of the most important and most extensive tourist activity in the province.

From time immemorial, Jaén has traced its history with the energetic strokes of those who have lived it and loved it. All those who have had the fortune to discover that Jaén is not merely a string of small towns and olive trees, but a litany of open history, tiny universes that remain to be discovered, waiting for the next part of a script that each traveller can write at will; a script written in an interior paradise in which anything is possible.

