

Traveling among castles in the Jaen province



To travel to the Jaen province today goes quickly on the modern highways that go up to Granada. You drive past the Rio Frio which has Trout and Sturgeon plantations. This time of year, in November, the almond trees are beginning to get yellow leaves, like poplars standing at attention in straight lines. In a few months the valleys will be in full bloom with almond trees with white flowers. Andalusia has eight regions, two of which have not border to the sea. It's one of these that we are traveling to, the Jaen province, a province that is the largest producer of olive oil in Spain. We pass the village Vaqueros where the poet Lorca was born. After Granada landscape becomes dramatically with high mountains and deep valleys. On the other side of the mountain range stretches a large valley out. As we approach the town of Jaen , we see the castle towering on the cliff high above the city, where shall we have eat lunch . Olive by Olive I saw as far as I saw. 60 million olive trees spread out before us in the rolling landscape.

We will go to the city Jaen´s Old Town. Here we will visit the famous Cathedral. It is built in the 1600th century after the Christian conquest of Andalusia , on the remains of Moorish mosque . The cathedral is rectangular and the construction style has been a model for many churches around the world as contemporary architects flocked here to learn and see. The town hall is trying to get the cathedral named World Heritage Site. When you walk in, there are two things that you notice. Along the sides are richly decorated galleries. The other is balconies along both sides. The story is that the woman had put a shroud over the face of Jesus, and when she took off the cloth so his face was left on the cloth. Believers flocked to the Cathedral three times a year, and so that all who sat in the church and stood outside should see, the priests went out on the balconies and demonstrated the cloth. There are three copies, except in Jaen, is one in Cordoba and one in Rome.

For lunch, we drive on the winding roads up to the castle on the cliff above the town. The castle was built for military purposes only by the Moorish rulers but its importance declined after the Christian conquest. Next to the renovated castle is a relatively new parador which has a restaurant with beautiful mountain views. On the way up the mountain side, we enjoy the panoramic views of the valley



We move on to Baeze located on the Guadalquivir river valley's north side, three hundred meters above sea level. The old part of town is nice to walk around in and Renaissance environment is protected World Heritage Site by UNESCO. The Moorish elements are easy to see, even if the city got its present appearance a few hundred years after the Christian army captured the city in the mid 1200 's. The castle was built already by the moors but the fighting

continued did not cease not until the sixteenth century.

For those interested in churches, it is a small cathedral to visit. Not as interesting as Jaen and rather simple. The views and the urban environment is adorable.



Next stop is the town of Ubeda just ten kilometers away. Also this city is protected World Heritage for its Renaissance buildings came about when the city flourished in the 1600th century. The Plaza de Vazquez de Molina is surrounded by beautiful buildings built by the Molina-Cobo family and the renowned architect Vandelvira who also was involved in the construction of the Cathedral of Jaen. What especially catches the attention is a private church, Sacra Capilla del Salvador, with a mausoleum. The huge

rich Francisco de los Cobos wife built the building after his death. In this richly decorated church, the two are buried in a crypt . To construct a church at the time, demanded permission not only from the king, but also from the Pope. But he was with the current language Spain's Finance Minister and presided over the revenue from the profitable trade with America after Queen Isabella dead.

Not far from the square, in 2010 a synagogue was found when they renovated a block. When the Spanish Inquisition took over the building in the 1600th century, the house was rebuilt and much hidden behind bricks and mortar. The basement was filled with debris and bricked up. Today the synagogue is restored and open to the public to visit. During the Moors time lived Muslims, Christians and Jews in concert, something that the Catholic rulers quickly changed on by setting an ultimatum to either convert or be kicked out of the country.



The nature park Parque Natural Sierras de Cazorla, Segura y Las Villas is our next destination. This is Spain's largest nature reserve with mountain peaks of over two thousand meters. In summer the area is cool and in the winter there is snow. The road goes steadily uphill on winding roads. A kilometer or two after the village Burrunchel is a restaurant on the edge of the cliff, la Carelia, overlooking the valley, a nice place to stop in for a break for not years.



We reach the ridge and can look out over the natural park's valley at the Mirador de las Palomas . Next to us is a griffon vulture hovering, Griffon Vulture, with its nearly two meters between the wing ends. Impressive! Down in the valley we see a few hotels and small farms. Adjacent to us a shepherd is gathering together his flock of sheep and closes them into the enclosure. We stop and look at the mountains.

We are high up, more than a thousand meters. We have been spoiled with magnificent views during the trip, but once again we stand and enjoy the valleys. One cannot get enough of the views. So begins the journey down. Nature changed, coniferous trees disappear and are replaced by deciduous trees. The ground is covered by grass and plants. There is an abundance of wildlife. Here and there are small, simple houses, people living here got to take what

nature offers. The "street" is not of the best kind. It was built in the thirties when the railway company had a tie factory near the river. To manage transportation they tipped simply sleepers in the river and picked them up further down. Here at Vadillo Castril Franco built homes for holiday and encouraged people to come here and live a simply life. We are going down to the Guadalquivir river. The river has its origin here in the mountains and meanders through Cordoba six hundred kilometers down to Seville, where it is navigable.

We stop here to hike. We follow the path that starts at the left of the bar next to the bridge over the river. We walk along a gravel walkway halfway up the mountain.

The walk takes just under an hour. The mountain above goes vertically down to us. It's probably 50 meters to the top. You feel small where you walk on the path. When we come to the last section, we enter into a narrow ravine and we reach a dam of the Guadalquivir. This is where the trail changes to stairs carved into the rock. Surely at least a hundred steps to climb. A significant effort, but you can rest on the way up and enjoy the scenery and hear the river gurgle.

We travel back the way we came, out of the nature park. On the way down on the other side, we stop in the town of Cazorla. In the middle of the village is a ruined church. The village was under the Bishop of Toledo regime. To show that they belonged to Christendom there was built several churches in the village. One of them was built in the sixteenth century on top of the river that divides the village. It turned out to be a poor idea.

When a big storm flooded the river and took most of the church with it. We take the sixty steps up in one of the towers that is left and get a great view of the castle situated above the town and how the town has expanded in



the narrow valley. Our guide takes us down to the river through the Plaza Santa Maria. Quiet flow the Danube so also this river. We enter through a wrought-iron gate and walk underground in the tunnel that was built to carry water under the church ruin. It's exciting to go in this six-meter high tunnel with floodlighting and with the water flowing under the grid floor.

We head south back towards Granada and stop at the town of Alcala La Real. In the



distance we see the fortress, Fortaleza de la Mota, on top of the mountain and it was once the third largest fortress in Europe. Here was the border between the Moorish and Christian empire for a long time. Originally all lived inside the fortress walls. It is estimated that four hundred people lived in the houses in the courtyard. There was one problem. It did not pass any longer sieges since all food and water must be stored in the houses and sooner or later there are no more provisions. From the castle you can see a number of towers,

Atalayas. It was signal towers. They lit a fire when the enemy appeared, and was able to warn the town or even perhaps Granada for Christian armies. Once peace was established people moved down from the cliff to the valley below. Today you can see the remains of the houses and their large jars for storing food and drink. The Christians built a church and inside the church doors, a surprise awaits. The church is partially restored since in the early nineteenth century it was blown to pieces by the Napoleon army as it was an ammunition warehouse. What surprises are all the carved graves in the ground and you walk over all this on glass floors. Here, they have buried people since Roman time, and some in tombs.

The journey has been wonderfully interesting. We have traveled among the best urban areas in Spain with roots in Roman times, Moors and the Christian conquest. Something everyone who is interested in Spain