

Spain

Extremadura

Badajoz

Cáceres



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Getting to Know Extremadura

The Land

If only one word could be used to define the Autonomous Community of Extremadura, it would be “diversity”. Mediterranean forests and meadows intersperse with artificial lakes and the peneplain of Cáceres. In the north, Sierra de Gata along with the fertile valleys of the Jerte, Ambroz and La Vera contrast sharply with the extensive plains of La Serena in the south.

The name Extremadura comes from the Spanish word “extremo” meaning “extreme” or “farthest out”; a word that was used to indicate the frontier lands during the eight centuries of fighting between Christians and Muslims while Spain was under Islamic rule.

Its limits extend to the region of Castilla y León in the north and south to Andalusia, to the east lies Castilla-La Mancha and to the west Portugal. Extremadura has an area of 41,602 square kilometers. It is the fifth largest Autonomous Community in Spain and contains eight percent of the national territory. It is divided into two provinces:

Cáceres (19,945 km²) and Badajoz (21,657 km²) with 380 municipalities; 218 pertain to Cáceres and 162 to Badajoz. The capital of the Autonomous Community is Mérida.

The population density is only 27 inhabitants per square kilometer compared with 75 inhabitants in the rest of Spain. The total population is 1,069,419 of which 405,616 are found in the province of Cáceres and 663,803 in the province of Badajoz.



Jerte Valley



Temple of Diana in Mérida

The first thing that surprises most travelers is the fact that Extremadura is often mountainous and has an abundance of water. The main rivers, the Tajo (Tagus) and the Guadiana, cut through the region from east to west, and various mountain ranges run through it. In the north lie the Central mountains, in the south, the foothills of Sierra Morena, and in the east and center of the region, the foothills of the Montes de Toledo. This has given rise to a land of contrasts where elevations range from 130 to 2,400 meters.

Extremadura has a Mediterranean climate modified by continental and oceanic influences. It is more humid and pleasant than the rest of the plateau due to the absence of natural obstacles

between the ocean and the region. Winters are relatively mild and summers are very hot.

The network of roads has two main axes: east-west and north-south. The first, the National V motorway joining Madrid with Lisbon traverses Extremadura; the second is formed by the National N-630 linking the lands of Upper Extremadura with those in the southern part and is being converted into a motorway. The rest of the network of roads is good and provides access to all parts of the region, including the most remote. The railway network consists of an axis crossing both of the provinces: Cáceres-Madrid, Cáceres-Mérida, Mérida-Zafra line. Badajoz has an airport with regular flights to Madrid and Barcelona.

History

The existence of prehistoric settlements in Extremadura is manifest in the caves of Maltravieso (Cáceres), Monfragüe, Villuercas, Alange, and by the numerous dolmen of Valencia de Alcántara and the notable one in Lácara.

Later came the Tartessians, Celts and Romans; these latter having the greatest influence with the founding in 25 B.C. of *Emérita Augusta* (Mérida), capital of the Roman province of Lusitania. With the arrival of the Alans in the 5th century, the splendor of Rome was extinguished. Years later, Mérida fell under the rule of the Visigoth kingdom of Eurico. After occupation by the Moors and when the Reconquest of Christian Spain by Ferdinand II was finally completed, Extremadura emerged with its present name existing as a single entity until 1833 when it was divided in two administratively. The three Extremaduran dioceses: Badajoz, Coria and Plasencia, as well as the religious military orders of the Knights of Alcántara and Santiago, originated in the Middle Ages.

Extremadura cooperated zealously with the Catholic monarchs, Ferdinand II of Aragón and Isabella I of Castile, in the fight against the Moors in

the Andalusian battlefields. It was in these lands as a result of the battle of Albuera that Ferdinand and Isabella secured the throne.

After the Christian Reconquest of Granada and the return of Columbus from America, a significant number of noblemen, friars and adventurers embarked upon the challenge and colonization of America, so that their names and those of their hometowns became a part of world history.

On February 25, 1983 the Statute of Autonomy of Extremadura was approved by an organic act. The Statute sets forth the responsibilities of the Community and the necessary institutions: the Assembly as the legislative body, the Junta and the Presidency of the Community as the executive body.

Palace of the Golfines de Abajo in Cáceres





Plasencia's Cathedral

Artistic Heritage

Extremadura has one of the most important artistic heritages in Spain, a true reflection of all the peoples who have passed through it.

The **first inhabitants** left megalithic structures, such as the ones found in Valencia de Alcántara and the Valley of the Gadiana, near Mérida, as well as cave paintings in Maltravieso cave in Cáceres and verracos (ancient stone carvings of bulls or boars) in Upper Extremadura.

However, the chief constructions were made during the **Roman period**. The largest number of them are concentrated in Mérida: a Roman theater, amphitheater, Temple of Diana and many more to which the artifacts exhibited at the National Museum of Roman Art must also be added. Other structures from the same period are the Roman bridge in Alcántara, the Arch of Cáparra and Regina Theater.

From the **Visigoth period** only the ruins of some basilicas remain in Trujillo, Alcuéscar, Brozas and Burguillos del Cerro. Much more important are the vestiges left by the **Moors**. These were mainly constructions of a military or defensive nature. Splendid examples can be found in a good portion of the walled circuit of Cáceres, the Alcazaba fortress of Badajoz, and the Moorish walls built by the Almohads in Galisteo. The scant number of works of **Romanesque art** are found north of Cáceres. A good example is the Old Cathedral of Plasencia. After the Reconquest,

Cloister in the Monastery of Guadalupe



Gothic art predominated in Extremadura. The Cathedrals of Plasencia, Coria and Badajoz and the Monasteries of Yuste and Guadalupe are noteworthy.

The excellent economic situation that emerged as a result of the discovery of America was the driving force behind the development of **Renaissance art** in the numerous civil, religious and military constructions. The Renaissance was undeniably the period of maximum splendor in the architecture of Extremadura, with around 200 buildings declared of Cultural Interest. Finally, the towns of Jerez de los Caballeros and Guadalupe assemble the greatest number of **baroque** works of art. The artist Churriguera left his distinctive baroque stamp on the tower of the Cathedral of Coria, the Palace of the Marqués de la Conquista de Trujillo and the sacristy of the Monastery of Guadalupe.

Extremadura has likewise been the birthplace of famous artists, including Francisco de Zurbarán, Felipe Checa, Eugenio Hermoso, Luis de Morales, Juan Barjola and Eduardo Naranjo, among others. A considerable number of museums can be found in the two cities, of Cáceres and Guadalupe, as well as the rest of the territory. Guadalupe's monastery and the old quarter of Cáceres have been declared World Heritage Sites.

Natural Heritage

A total of 54 nature reserves are scattered throughout the region of Extremadura forming the most interesting and numerous assemblage in Europe.

First, there are the Extremaduran **wetlands** vertebrated by the waters of the Tajo, with the reservoirs of Valedcañas, Torrejón, Alcántara, Borbollón, Gabriel and Galán and Salor; and the Guadiana with the dams of Cíjara, Orellana, La Serena, Zuja and Alange.



Alcántara Reservoir

Next are the Extremaduran **steppe lands**, consisting of pasturelands and farmlands, giving rise to the characteristic Extremaduran plains, a refuge of great importance for the bustard and other steppe species. The Llanos de Cáceres – an extensive plateau of slate and granite – and the areas of La Serena, La Campiña Sur and the Llanos del Guadiana Internacional are good examples.

Thirdly, there are the **green lands** of Extremadura where forests, thickets and meadows form natural vegetation in which the nature parks of Monfragüe and Cornalvo are of special interest. Monfragüe nature park, which extends over an area of 18,000 hectares, shelters the most important examples of flora and fauna of the ancient Mediterranean forests. In Monfragüe, the skies are dotted with tawny vultures, black storks, golden eagles, peregrine falcons and Egyptian vultures. Fox, wildcats, badgers and especially lynx make their home in the forests. The flora consists of cork oak, holm oak, juniper and heather, as well as the typical rich vegetation of the river banks, such as willows and ash trees.

Cornalvo, with an area of 10,750 hectares, is noted for its groves of holm and cork oak, as well as fauna which includes the black stork and imperial eagle, otter, wildcat, rabbit and to a lesser degree, lynx.

Other nature areas that must be named are: the region of La Vera, the Jerte and Ambroz valleys and the Sierra de Gata, Las Villuercas, the Sierra de San Pedro, carpeted with cork oak and dense thickets; and in the province of Badajoz, Hornachos, Jerez de los Caballeros and Tentudía.

Meriting special mention are the unusually large number of storks which form part of the Extremaduran landscape making their nests in some unlikely places – bell towers, rooftops, traffic lights, electrical towers and greeting travelers by clashing their beaks together. The more timid and elusive black stork takes refuge in the high cliffs of the nature reserves at Monfragüe and Cornalvo.

Countryside near Alburquerque





Monfragüe Nature Park

■ A Tour of its Cities

Cáceres

Cáceres experienced its period of greatest splendor under the reign of the Catholic monarchs when the city, as well as other towns in the province, played an important role in the discovery of the New World.

The city is divided into a modern and an old quarter. Our attention is first drawn to Old Cáceres, where we find an assemblage of monuments without equal in Spain. A living artistic relic, Cáceres has been bestowed with the title of World Heritage City, considered the third monumental ensemble in Europe. The finely preserved stone mansions and palaces are encircled by ancient Moorish walls built by the Almohads, although there is also a Roman sector. Of the thirty towers protecting the ramparts, twelve are still standing, including the Púlpitos, Horno, Espaderos and Bujaco. The old town can be accessed through various arches: Arch of the Estrella by



Arch of La Estrella

Churriguera, built over the medieval gate called Puerta Nueva; Arch of Santa Ana, Arch of Cristo, the only Roman gate preserved in the walls; Arch of Socorro and Puerta de Mérida.

Our walk begins at the highest part in the city at the **Church of San Mateo** (1) on the site of the great mosque, across from the **Casa de las Cigüeñas** (2), the House of Storks, with its battlemented tower, the only tower spared by the Catholic monarchs when all others were ordered removed. In the same square is the **Casa de las Veletas** (3), a mansion built over the old Alcázar or fortress, with an interesting baroque facade, now housing the Provincial Museum of

Cáceres





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Archeology. In back is the **Casa de los Caballos (4)**, the Contemporary Art Museum.

Passing by the Church of San Francisco Javier, we arrive at the **Palacio de los Golfines de Abajo (5)**, a mansion in which Gothic, Mudéjar and Plateresque styles coexist harmoniously. In the Plaza de Santa María, we find the **Cathedral of Santa María (6)**, burial place of illustrious citizens, the **Bishop's Palace (7)**, the Plateresque **Casa de Ovando (8)** and the **Palacio de Mayoralgo (9)**, a Gothic mansion.

Following the walls, we reach the **Palacio de los Golfines de Arriba (10)** and a little further, the **Casa del Comendador de**

Alcuéscar (11), currently a Parador hotel. Next is the **Casa del Mono (12)**, presently the Zamora Vicente Library.

Outside the ancient walls, there are other interesting buildings, such as the **Palacio de Godoy (13)** and the **Church of Santiago (14)**, seat of the military order called "Fratres de Cáceres". A fine altarpiece by Berruguete can be seen in this church. Lastly, presiding over the city is the **Sanctuario (Shrine) (15)** of the patron saint, the Virgin of the Mountain.

Cáceres is also a university city and site of important festivals: Otoño Musical, Verano Lúdico, Womad, Teatro Medieval, etc.

Plasencia

Encircled by the deep gorge of the Jerte river, Plasencia was founded in the 12th century by king Alfonso VIII and boasts an important artistic heritage which has merited its declaration as an Ensemble of Historical and Cultural Interest.

Radiating from the main square called **Plaza Mayor** (1) are ten streets with names evoking a past history relating to the custom of guilds, such as the Rúa Zapatería (Shoe Shop Street) and de los Quesos (Cheese Street). The Plaza Mayor is the heart of the city, a meeting place for residents as well as visitors from nearby towns. To one side of the square stands the **Town Hall (Ayuntamiento)** (2) with its two towers, one with a clock displaying a life-size figure of *Abuelo* (Grandfather) *Mayorga*, the symbol of the city that rings the hours.

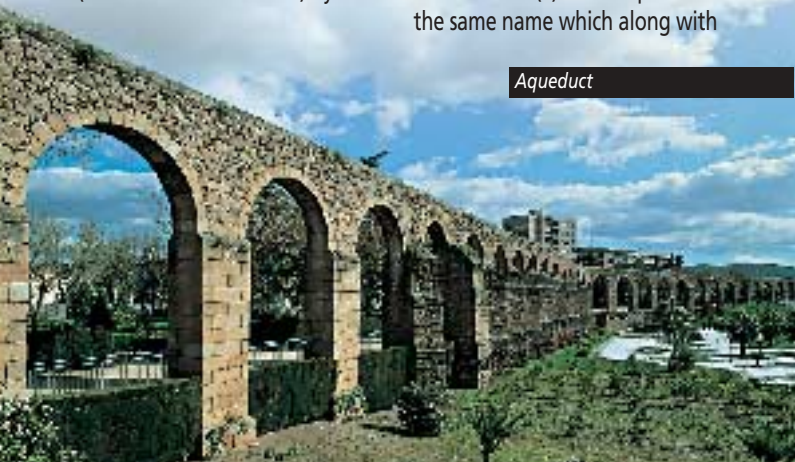
A short stroll takes us to the **Cathedral** (3). The Old Cathedral (13th and 14th centuries) by Juan



Plasencia's Cathedral

Francés stands opposite the **Bishop's Palace** (4). Adjoining the Old Cathedral is the New, with two magnificent Renaissance facades. In the lavish interior, the altarpiece by Gregorio Fernández and the finely carved walnut stalls in the choir by the Master Rodrigo Alemán are the most striking features. In the Cathedral Museum, a 15th century codex of the Bible is on display. In the same square, we also find the **Cultural Complex of Santa María** (5) and the **Casa del Deán** (6), a mansion with a lovely corner balcony. Nearby is the **Provincial Ethnographic and Textile Museum** (7) where typical clothing, furnishings and woolen textiles are on display.

From here, the Postigo de Santa María takes us to the **Church of San Nicolás** (8) in the square of the same name which along with



Aqueduct



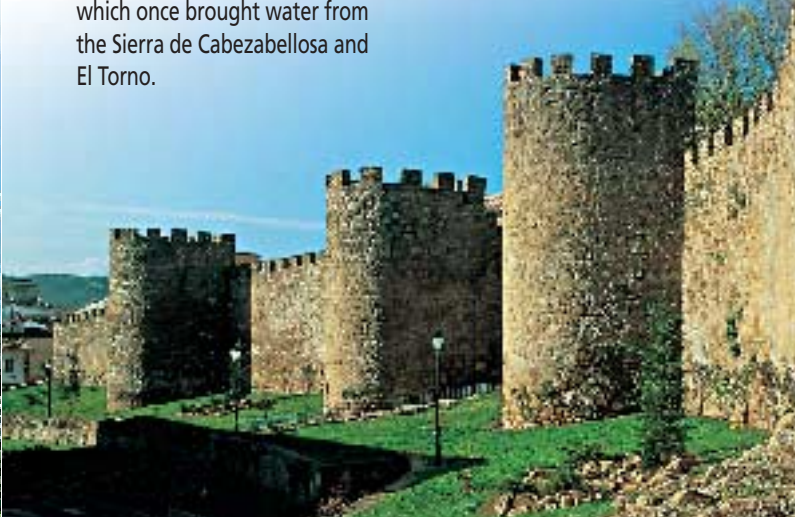
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San Vicente Ferrer (9) (Parador de Turismo hotel) provide a lovely setting around the stone fountain commemorating the discovery of America.

The streets of Resbaladero and Bailén lead to the imposing **Puerta de Berrozanas (10)**, a gate in the old walls. This can be followed intermittently to reach the 55-arched **Aqueduct (11)** which once brought water from the Sierra de Cabezabellosa and El Torno.

Plasencia is devoted to commerce. For centuries the famous rural market held on Tuesdays has attracted people from the valleys who come to fill Plasencia with their products. On the first Tuesday in August, the popular *Martes Mayor* takes place, a festival declared of interest to tourists.

Ancient Walls



Badajoz

The most populous city in Extremadura, Badajoz, lies on the banks of the Guadiana river. Its proximity to the Portuguese border has bestowed upon it a frontier and commercial character, developing as a modern city which nonetheless has a long history as reflected in its buildings and monuments.

Our walk can begin at the **Alcazaba** (1), a fortress located at the highest point of the city and an excellent example of Islamic architecture. Still preserved are the entranceway and the towers of the Traición and Apéndiz, popularly known by the name of *Espantaperros*. Next to this latter tower is the **Archeological Museum** (2), former residence of the Dukes of Roca in the 16th century which has been remodeled to house more than 15,000 artifacts from the numerous sites in the province of Badajoz.



Badajoz's Cathedral

Of unquestionable interest is a visit to the **Extremaduran and Ibero-american Contemporary Art Museum (MEIAC)** (3) located in the bulwark of the walls.

The 13th century **Cathedral** (4) has undergone multiple restorations. Noteworthy in the interior are the choir stalls by Jerónimo de Valencia and the fine 16th century Flemish tapestries in the sacristy. Adorning the walls are paintings by Zurbarán, Ribera and Bocanegra. The **Provincial Fine Arts Museum** (5), located in a 19th century palace, houses on its four floors more than a thousand paintings and sculptures.

View of Badajoz





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The **Puerta de Palmas** (6), the old city Herreran-style gate, provides access to the Bridge of Palmas with more than thirty semicircular arches over the Guadiana river. The gate displays a mixture of Islamic and Christian styles with two battlemented towers and the royal coat of arms of the Hapsburgs.

The squares and parks in Badajoz catch our eye, especially the parks of **Castelar** (7) and **San Francisco** (8). Interesting squares include Plaza Alta, Plaza de San Juan, and Plaza de Soledad, the most commercial.



Royal Bridge

Mérida

Capital of the Autonomous Community of Extremadura, Mérida was also the capital of the Roman province of Lusitania and an important religious center during the spread of Christianity.

Founded in the year 25 B.C. with a dual purpose, Mérida first housed veterans from the 5th and 10th Roman legions, discharged by the emperor after the Cantabrian wars and secondly, it guaranteed the stability of transportation on two of the most important Roman roads: the Silver route connecting Mérida and Astorga, and the route that ran from Toledo to Lisbon.

Our walk through the former *Emérita Augusta* begins at the **Roman theater** (1) (1st century B.C.) with seating for some 6,000 spectators and a stage richly decorated with rows of columns and statues. The ancient theater is still used for theatrical and musical performances. Adjoining

the theater are the remains of the huge **amphitheater** (2) (1st century B.C.), where Roman gladiators once fought with wild beasts. The tiers of seats, tribunes and boxes are still preserved.

Not far from these monuments is the **National Museum of Roman Art** (3) where the spirit and way of life imposed by the Roman culture can still be felt among the antiquities.

In the city center stands the **Temple of Diana** (4) around which a 16th century residence was built, taking advantage of the columns. Nearby is the **Arch of Trajan** (5), a 15 meter high triumphal arch dedicated to the Emperor Trajan, displaying all the grandeur of the Roman period.

On the banks of the Guadiana stands the fortress of the **Alcazaba** (6), a legacy of the Moors. A Roman cistern, reconstructed and adorned with Visigothic pilasters, can be seen in the interior. The **Roman**

Roman Theater





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bridge (7) is among the largest of its kind, with 60 arches and a length of more than 800 meters.

On the outskirts of the city is the **Aqueduct of Los Milagros (8)** which served to salvage the slope between the Albarregas river and carry water to the Proserpina reservoir, also built in the same period. The Aqueduct of **San Lázaro (9)** is in ruins and only preserves three pillars.

The monuments of Mérida were designated a World Heritage Site by the UNESCO in 1993.

National Museum of Roman Art



Travel Routes through Extremadura

The Three Valleys

La Vera, the Jerte and the Ambroz valleys boast landscapes of rivers, unbelievably rich in fauna. The abundance of vegetation permits the three valleys to enjoy a more benign climate than the rest of the Community.

The N-630 road out of Palencia ascends through the Ambroz valley along the Silver route. **Aldeanueva del Camino** has an interesting Roman bridge and basket makers are plentiful.



La Vera

Jewish quarter in Hervás



The same can be said of **Baños de Montemayor**, where the main street is filled with baskets and other items set out on the sidewalks, producing a charming decorative effect. Baños received its name (meaning "baths") for its hot springs during the Roman occupation and still attracts health conscious tourists, thanks to its magnificent health spa facilities. Nearby is **Hervás**, where visits are a must to the Jewish Quarter, the Pérez Comendador





Tornavacas

Leroux Museum, the Church of Santa María de las Aguas Vivas (14th and 17th centuries) and the Convent of Los Trinitarios, now a tourist inn.

From Hervás, the winding road affords exceptional views all along the mountain pass of Puerto de Honduras as it descends into the Jerte valley. The N-110 road running through the valley leads to **Tornavacas**, source of the Jerte river, with the baroque Church of La Asunción. At the beginning of spring, the landscape resembles a snowy field due to the effect of thousands of cherry trees in full blossom. The contrast between the white blossoms and the intense blue sky in the luxuriant valley is truly a breathtaking sight.

Down the road, **Jerte** is noted for its alabaster and its gorges, such as the Garganta de los **Infiernos**, declared a Protected Nature Area. Further south on the N-110, we come to **Cabezuela del Valle** with a

well-preserved arcaded plaza. Off to the right of the road is **El Torno**, where homemade liqueurs, especially cherry, can be purchased, and off to the left is **Piornal**, the highest town in the province of Cáceres, well-known for the festival of El Jarramplas and exquisite cured hams.

The road descends from Piornal to the village of **Jaráiz de la Vera**, headquarters of the Paprika Producers Association. Nearby, we come upon the Garganta de Pedro Chate, a gorge with natural pools. Next is **Cuacos de Yuste**, with an arcaded plaza, the Casa de Juan de Austria, and the Plaza de las Fuentes de los Cuatro Chorros. A few kilometers away lies the **Monastery of Yuste**, place of

Cabezuela del Valle



retirement chosen by the Emperor Charles V, with a curious cemetery where Germans who died in Spain during the two World Wars were laid to rest. The road ascends from here to **Garganta la Olla** boasting traditional architecture of the region, a good example of which is the Casa de las Muñecas.

Once again on the C-501, we arrive at **Jarandilla de la Vera**. Here we find the Palacio de los Condes de Oropesa, today a Parador de Turismo hotel, and the Church-fortress of Nuestra Señora (15th century). Two well-preserved Roman bridges can be seen in Jarandilla and **Losar de la Vera**, where sculpted parterres of geometrical shapes and animal figures line the sides of the road. Next is **Valverde**, with a Moorish castle, the Church of Fuentes Claras and the curious Aurelio Gironda Museum. Further east is **Villanueva de la Vera**, where the focal point is the main



Jarandilla de la Vera

square. Both have been declared Historic-Artistic Ensembles and have interesting examples of traditional architecture. Almost bordering Avila province, we find **Madrigal de la Vera** and the Garganta de Alardos.

On our return to Plasencia, a stop in **Pasarón de la Vera** is recommended to sample the typical sweet biscuits (perrunillas), stroll around awhile, admire the impressive Palacio de los Manrique de Lara, a 15th century mansion, and visit the Pecharromán Museum.

Monastery of Yuste



Los Ibores, Guadalupe and Las Villuercas

The mountain massif of Las Villuercas lends its name to the land in eastern Extremadura where we find one of the most important monasteries in Spain: Guadalupe.

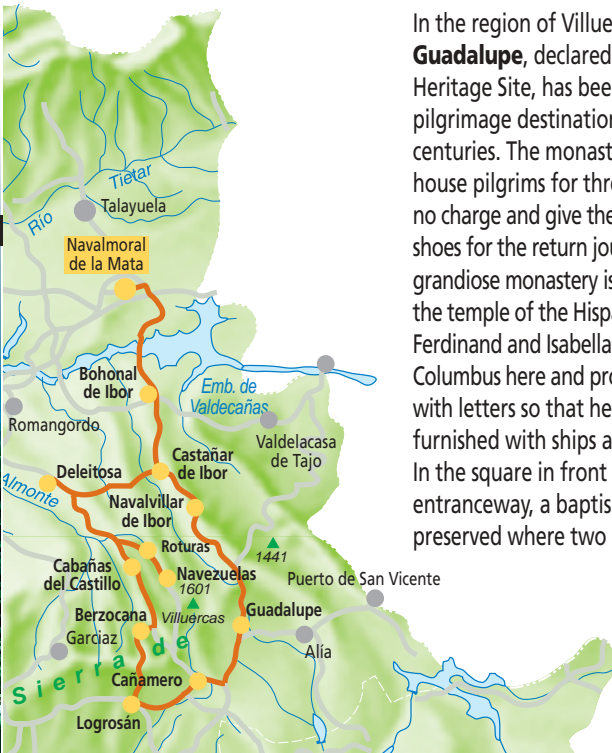
Starting out from **Navalmoral de la Mata**, center of the region known as Campo Arañuelo, we take the road that leads to Guadalupe, crossing Los Ibores, a place with rustic landscapes and excellent hunting and fishing. In **Bohonal de Ibor** we find Valdecañas reservoir. Underneath these waters lies Talavera la Vieja since 1960. Next to the dam, the remains of a Roman temple



Humilladero Hermitage in Guadalupe

are preserved. **Castañar de Ibor** rises amid a grove of chestnut trees, offering visitors its famous Ibor cheese and an interesting visit to the baroque altarpiece in its church. Nearby is **Navalvillar de Ibor**, where you can purchase a sweet treat called “roscas de muédagos” made with honey.

In the region of Villuercas, **Guadalupe**, declared a World Heritage Site, has been a pilgrimage destination for centuries. The monastery would house pilgrims for three days at no charge and give them a pair of shoes for the return journey. The grandiose monastery is considered the temple of the Hispanic world. Ferdinand and Isabella received Columbus here and provided him with letters so that he could be furnished with ships and crews. In the square in front of the entranceway, a baptismal font is preserved where two Indians



Columbus brought back on his second voyage were baptized.

The monastery displays a mixture of different styles: Gothic rose windows, a Mudéjar cloister with a lovely miniature temple, and more importantly, Renaissance and baroque additions. It was commissioned by king Alfonso XI to commemorate the apparition of the Virgin in gratitude for the victory at the Battle of Salado in the 14th century. One of the most interesting parts is the sacristy where eleven paintings by the Extremaduran master Zurbarán can be admired. In the camarín (shrine) of the Virgin, behind wooden doors, resides the dark-faced image of the Virgin, patron saint of Extremadura.

The monks once had their own pharmacy and by special dispensation from Rome performed surgical operations. The feudal domination they exercised was the reason relations with **La Puebla**, the village that grew up around the Monastery, were not always good.

The street called Calle Mayor links the upper and lower districts and features houses with typical balconies adorned with flowers, wooden verandas and porches. On the way to Trujillo from Guadalupe, we come across **Cañamero**, famous for its wine cellars. Nearby is Cancho del Fresno reservoir and a little further **Logrosán**, with a grand Gothic church devoted to San Mateo (St. Matthew) and a *rollo* (a large pillar of stone with a cross on top signifying jurisdiction).

Berzocana is located amidst groves of chestnut, oak and cork oak. In the vicinity, caves with prehistoric paintings have been found, as well as a Roman necropolis. Later we come upon **Navezuelas, Roturas, Cabañas del Castillo and Deleitosa**, all of them surrounded by lovely landscapes and hunting reserves. The lands of Deleitosa once belonged to the Duke of Frías. Of special interest in the village is the carved Crucifix in the church and the *rollo*.

Monastery of Guadalupe





Coria

Sierra de Gata and Las Hurdes

Situated in the northwest part of the province of Cáceres, both the Sierra de Gata as well as the region of Las Hurdes are places with a special personality of their own, where the passage of time has respected the traditional forms of architecture, ancient customs and the vernacular language, called "fala" in Valley de Zálama: Valverde del Fresno, Eljas and San Martín de Trevejo.

Coria, a town with an old quarter and perfectly preserved walls, a castle with a keep, and a 15th century Cathedral, is the starting point on this route.

Following the course of the Alagón river, we reach the **Borbollón** reservoir, a recreational spot for fishermen and boating enthusiasts. Not far to the north is **Torre de Don Miguel**, formerly a Roman settlement, with an impressive 15th century church devoted to La Asunción. At the bottom of a lovely valley surrounded by pine trees is **Gata**, which has been designated a historic site of Cultural Interest.

Passing by **Cadalso** and **Descargamaría**, we reach **Robledillo de Gata**. Here we can see good examples of popular architecture recovered for "rural tourism". From the portico of the church, there is a lovely view of the town.



We must retrace our route partially and then head west to reach **Hoyos**, capital of the Sierra de Gata. In the western part of the Sierra, **Trevejo**, with a castle on the heights, commands our attention. The views as well as the examples of popular architecture are splendid.

San Martín de Trevejo is of pre-Roman origin as evidenced by the stelae found here. Its arcaded square is a meeting place for the townspeople. Nearby is **Acebo**, famous for its bobbin lace. On the way to **Valverde del Fresno**, we come across **Eljas**, completely engulfed by nature. Valverde is the last town in the western area of the sierra and has a number of houses made of adobe and wood. Of interest are the Plaza Mayor with lovely wooden arcades and the 16th century Church of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción.

To begin our journey through Las Hurdes, we must return to Coria, but on the way we can stop off in **Cilleros**, famous for the wines processed in the so-called *bóvedas* (vaulted caves). In the House Museum there is a permanent exhibit on traditional housing. Taking the C-512, we arrive at **Pinofranqueado**. The natural pool under the bridge here is a mandatory stopping place. In **Vegas de Coria**, the



road turns to ascend to **Nuñomoral**, a small village in a beautiful natural setting. We must return again to the C-512 to reach **Las Mestas**, famous for its honey and pollen.

El Ladrillar is a town further north, almost on the border between Extremadura and Salamanca. After **Ríomalo**, bordering on the region of Castilla y León, we can see the impressive meanders of the Alagón river.

On our way back to Coria, we go through **Casar de Palomero**, with old Arab and Jewish quarters which merit a visit. **Marchagaz** and **Palomero** are the last towns on our itinerary before leaving Las Hurdes.

The Route of the Conquistadors

In the 16th century, Extremadura left its mark on world history as a result of the important role Extremadurans played in the discovery of the New World.

Trujillo not only was the birthplace of two great conquistadors, Francisco de Pizarro and Francisco de Orellana, it also saw other great native sons take their place in history, including Fray Jerónimo de Loáisía, the first Bishop of Cartagena de Indias, and Nuflo de Chaves, discoverer of Bolivia. One of most attractive places to visit is the huge Plaza Mayor. Along the cobbled streets, there are numerous fine noble mansions, such as the Palacio de Marqués de Conquista, Ballesteros, Piedras Albas, and the churches of Santiago, San Martín and Santa María la Mayor, and the Juliana tower.



From here we can visit **Medellín**, birthplace of Hernán Cortés, conqueror of the Aztec empire. Still preserved are the remains of a theater and bridge from the Roman period.

In **Villanueva de la Serena**, Pedro Valdivia, founder of Nueva Extremadura, presently in Chilean territory, was born. Here we can admire the Monastery of

Church of Santa María in Trujillo



Castle in Villanueva de la Serena





Countryside near Olivenza

San Benito, also known by the name of Palacio Prioral.

In **Badajoz**, capital of the province of the same name, Pedro Alvarado was born, conqueror of Guatemala and El Salvador. Mandatory visits include the Cathedral and the Archeological, Fine Arts, Extremaduran and Ibero-american Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Cathedral Museum.

The last stop is **Jerez de los Caballeros**, birthplace of the first European to see the Pacific Ocean: Vasco Núñez de Balboa. The solemn and spectacular festivities of Holy Week and the many monuments, including the fortress of the Knights Templar, with its Torre Sangrienta (Bloody Tower), are the most important attractions.

Church of La Encarnación in Jerez de los Caballeros



La Raya

Almost 300 kilometers of frontier land between Extremaduran and Portuguese towns burst forth with history and reminders of old conflicts, buying and selling of goods between neighbors, and bridges linking towns.

Valencia de Mombuey, hovering at the southernmost part of the border, once belonged to the lord of Feria at the beginning of the 15th century. Amid holm oak, we find **Villanueva del Fresno**. Although believed to be founded by the Knights Templar in the 13th century, prehistoric and Roman remains have also been found here. In the main square stands the Town Hall (Ayuntamiento) with a lovely arcaded gallery and a small temple in the center.

Alconchel, like so many of the towns in La Raya, changed hands between Portugal and Spain at various times. The Order of the

Knights Templar established itself here and later, the Knights of Alcántara. Noteworthy are the Plaza Mayor and the medieval bridge over the Alconchel stream. To the east is **Táliga**, which like **Olivenza** pertained to Portugal until 1801. A little further north is Olivenza, founded by the Knights Templar in the 13th century. The defensive walls and splendid castle with an impressive keep (Torre de Homenaje), commissioned by the king of Portugal Juan II, command our attention. In general, all the architecture, civil, military and religious, presents a delightful mixture of Spanish and Portuguese styles. Also interesting is the attractive door in the Portuguese, Manueline Gothic style of the Town Hall (Ayuntamiento), the church and the Ethnographic Museum located in the Panadería del Rey (King's Bakery).

After passing through Badajoz on the road to Alburquerque, it would be worthwhile to stop in **Bótoa** where the first Sunday in



May a popular “romería” (pilgrimage to a shrine) is held in honor of the virgin of the same name. **Villar del Rey** has acquired international fame for its production of slate used in construction.

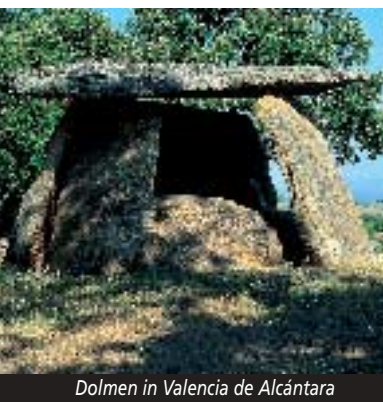
We find **Alburquerque** nestled in the foothills of the Sierra de San Pedro. Luna castle, home of Alvaro de Luna, was built at the beginning of the 14th century and stands guard over the village down below. A leisurely stroll is in order to see the interesting religious and civil buildings. On both sides of the road, the landscape is covered with cork oak trees, the basis of a powerful cork producing industry, earning **San Vicente de Alcántara** the name of the “cork capital”.

Castle in Alburquerque



In addition to Piedrabuena castle, once the seat of the Order of the Knights of Alcántara, the dolmen that can be seen in the vicinity are an added attraction. Also notable are the dolmen in the vicinity of **Valencia de Alcántara**. In the Church of Nuestra Señora de Rocamador, Isabel, daughter of the Catholic monarchs, married the king of Portugal, Manuel “the Fortunate” in 1497. The town’s Gothic quarter is one of the most attractive and best preserved in Spain.

Cedillo is the westernmost town in Extremadura. Not too far away in **Santiago de Alcántara**, prehistoric cave paintings are preserved in the “Cave of the Borrico”. Further to the north is **Alcántara**, on the banks of the Tajo river. Of all the monuments evoking the city’s past greatness, the imposing Roman bridge (2nd century A.D.) 192 meters long dedicated to the Emperor Trajan



Dolmen in Valencia de Alcántara



Church of San Benito in Alcántara

is the most remarkable. Other interesting monuments include the Conventual de San Benito, the Church of Nuestra Señora de Almocóvar and the Church of San Pedro de Alcántara.

In **Zarza la Mayor**, worth visiting is Peñafiel castle, built on the border with Portugal. In its Plaza Mayor stands the former Royal Silk Factory (18th century) and almost at the edge of the town, the Conceja Fountain. After crossing the valley of Alagón, we reach **Cilleros**, noted for its wines. At the gateway to the Sierra de Gata, we encounter **Valverde del Fresno** with lovely examples of popular mountain architecture. If Cilleros is famous for its wines, Valverde has earned a name for itself for the olive oil and cheese, as well as the delicious honey and pollen produced here.



Palace of Monsalud in Almendralejo

Through Lands of Wine and Artisans

A journey through the regions of Tierra de Barros, Tentudía and the Campiña Sur embraces large tracts of land devoted to growing grapes, hunting and earthenware.

Almendralejo, starting point for this route, has a flourishing wine industry which has earned it well-deserved fame. At the edge of the **Alange** reservoir stands the town of the same name. Alange has splendid hot springs which date from the Roman period, a medieval castle, cave paintings and the Church of Nuestra Señora

de los Milagros. Skirting the reservoir, we eventually arrive at **Puebla de la Reina** with a magnificent example of Mudéjar art in the tower and the church.

The route passes by Almendralejo to get on the C-423 heading in the direction of **Aceuchal**. Once we arrive, a visit to the Bullfighting Museum and a stroll around to admire the noble architecture would be a good way to enjoy the afternoon. Aceuchal is famous for its garlic and once belonged to the Knights Templar.

The traveler now finds himself in the heart of Tierra de Barros, and the landscape is filled with grapevines, source of the celebrated wines produced in these lands. **Villalba de los Barros, Santa Marta de los Barros** are some of the towns on

Parador hotel in Zafra





Church of Santísimo Cristo del Humilladero in Azuaga

the way to **Salvatierra de los Barros**, known as the town of the potters, where almost every street has a workshop or store devoted to this activity.

Even before arriving in **Feria**, we can already glimpse from afar the imposing 15th century castle presiding over the town. The next stop is **Zafra**, known as "Little Seville", with its charming Plaza Grande and Plaza Chica, and the Church of La Candelaria with an altarpiece by Zurbarán and another by Churriguera.

In **Jerez de los Caballeros**, ("caballeros" means knights) capital of the Order of the Knights Templar, the last knights of this powerful order refused to surrender and were beheaded. Along the narrow streets of the town, a rich and varied sample of history and art awaits the visitor. Also under the Knights Templar was **Fregenal de la Sierra**, where the 13th century fortress, the Church of Santa María and the plazas of Abasto and Toros form an impressive assemblage.

Passing by **Bodonal de la Sierra**, **Segura de León** and **Cabeza la Vaca**, the road winds up to the Monastery of Tentudía, with splendid views and an interesting Mudéjar cloister from the 16th century. Descending again, the next town is **Calera de León**, where the Conventual Santiaguista can be visited.

Monesterio is a good place to stock up on cold cuts before heading to **Fuente de Cantos**, birthplace of the celebrated painter Zurbarán.

Taking the N-432 west, we reach Llerena and enter into the Campiña Sur. **Llerena**, the Arab town of *Ellerina*, was the seat of the Holy Office and has fine examples of Mudéjar and baroque art. On the way to **Fuente del Arco**, almost at the border with Andalusia, is **Casas de Reina**. In the outskirts we find the Roman Theater of Regina. **Azuaga** was a very important place due to its privileged location as a passageway between Andalusia and Extremadura in Roman times. Crossing La Campiña, we head east to **Hornachos**, at the foot of the sierra of the same name, habitat for birds of prey. Cave paintings and a 5th century fortress are testimony of an interesting past. In Villafranca de los Barros, famous for its sweets and needlework, we take the N-630 to return to Almendralejo.



Our tour through the region of La Serena

begins at **Don Benito**, a populous town. The FEVAL fairgrounds here host important agricultural, livestock and industrial fairs. Next is **Villanueva de la Serena**, where we find the Herreran-style Church of La Asunción in the Plaza de España. Also of interest is the 16th century Town Hall (Ayuntamiento) and the Palace of the Piores de Magacela.



Dolmen in Magacela

La Serena, La Siberia and their Reservoirs

The regions of La Serena and La Siberia are located in the northeast part of the province of Badajoz. In La Serena, the abundance of water is evident in the numerous reservoirs, while the quality of the pastureland in La Siberia gives rise to the "tortas" from La Serena made with the sheep's milk from La Siberia.

On our way to Castuera, we pass **Magacela**. Its Moorish castle affords impressive views of the surrounding plains. In the vicinity there are interesting megalithic dolmen which have given the town its name. The Order of Alcántara established its priory here until it was transferred to Villanueva. In the Hermitage of Nuestra Señora de Piedra Escrita, on the outskirts of **Campanario**, a traditional *romería* (pilgrimage to a shrine) is held. A stop in **Castuera** is

recommended to purchase the famous “torta de La Serena”, cheese made with sheep’s milk.

The mayor of **Zalamea de la Serena**, Pedro Crespo, was immortalized in the plays written by Lope de Vega and Calderón de la Barca. In the town center we can see the medieval castle and the *dystilo*, a Roman funerary monument built in the year 103 honoring the Emperor Trajan. Almost bordering the province of Córdoba is **Monterrubio de la Serena**. Various noble homes can be admired throughout the town.

The road heads now to **Cabeza del Buey**, a town with great historical importance. In the vicinity, the Hermitage of Nuestra Señora de Belén, built in the 13th century, was originally the quarters of the Knights Templar. Almost at the border with La Siberia is **Peñalsordo**, where one of the oldest festivals in Extremadura is held, Corpus Christi, declared of Tourist Interest.

Crossing over the reservoir of La Serena we enter into the region of La Siberia. The first town is **Puebla de Alcocer** with an imposing stone fortress which

Zalamea de la Serena



presides over the medieval hamlet. In **Talarrubias**, interesting cave paintings have been discovered. In addition, the 16th century Church of Santa Catalina de Alejandría merits a visit, one of the best examples of Gothic-Mudéjar-Renaissance religious art in the area.

On the banks of the Orellana reservoir lies **Orellana la Vieja**. A fortress-palace evokes the village’s past splendor. We have to go through the towns of Navalvillar de Pela, and Casas de Don Pedro to get to **Herrera del Duque**, once the estate of the Dukes of Osuna. Its unusual Moorish castle has no towers.

Pelоче rises near the García Sola reservoir, as well as **Valdecaballeros**, where numerous nautical activities are organized at the artificial lake. From **Castilblanco**, the road leads to the National Reserve of Cíjara, 26,000 hectares of nature in the heart of Extremadura.

The Silver Route

The Silver route was the most important transportation route in western "Hispania" of the Romans. It connected the city of Emérita Augusta (Mérida) with Astorga. From Astorga it entered into Galicia to Santiago or via León, making its way to the Cantabrian Sea. From Mérida it penetrated Andalusia to Seville. Later, it was called the "Mozarab Road" and was used by Christians living in Muslim territory to journey to the pilgrimage site of Santiago de Compostela.

Starting out in the province of Salamanca, we enter Cáceres province through the Béjar pass and arrive at **Baños de Montemayor**, a town known for its health spas and also as a center for handcrafted wicker and leather shoes. In **Hervás**, the old Jewish Quarter and the Pérez-Comendador Leroux Museum are particularly noteworthy.



Roman road in Baños de Montemayor

A short distance before we arrive in Plasencia, we find the Roman ruins of Capera, the most important monument being the Roman arch of Cáparra with the remains of a small temple with four doors, underneath which ran the Silver route.

Plasencia merits a lengthy stop in order to visit the old and new Cathedrals, the Plaza Mayor, and the ancient walls and gates.

In the municipality of **Garrovillas**, we find the Alconétar bridge, transferred here when the Roman bridge of

Palace of Justice in Plasencia





Plaza Mayor in Garovillas



Mosaic in Mérida's National Museum of Roman Art

Alcántara was built. **Cáceres**, a lovely medieval city, renovated as a result of the conquest of South America, is the next stage of this journey. Narrow streets, stately old mansions, churches and a Jewish quarter make up this attractive city, declared a World Heritage City by the UNESCO in 1986.

Mérida, has an outstanding complex of monuments and archeological remains which evoke its glorious past as the capital of the Roman region Hispania Ulterior - Lusitania.

Alange boasts a Roman spa still in use. It also has a medieval Moorish castle. Next we come to **Zafra**, where its charming squares catch our attention: the completely arcaded Plaza Grande on a grand scale, and the smaller Múdejar-style Plaza Chica, as well as the 15th century castle. As our journey draws to a close, we stop awhile in **Calera de León** to see the 15th century Conventual Santiaguista and the 13th century Monastery of Santa María de Tentudía.

In **Monesterio** one of the great gastronomic delights in Spain awaits the traveler on this route: cured ham from the much prized "pata negra" pig.

Alange



Leisure and Events

Chief Festivals

January

La Encamisá (16th) in Navalvillar de Pela (Badajoz), riders on horseback ride through the town amid bonfires. El Jarramplas (19th-20th) in Píornal (Cáceres) where a masked man wearing a protective padded suit endures a shower of turnips. Las Carantoñas (20th) in Acechucho (Cáceres), men wearing animal masks accompany the procession of San Sebastián.

Carnival (Carnaval)

The most important Mardi Gras-style parades are held in the capital city of Badajoz and Navalmoral de la Mata (Cáceres). Pero Palo carnival in Villanueva de la Vera (Cáceres) recalls the old inquisition-style trials.

Holy Week (Semana Santa)

Los Empalos in Valverde de la Vera (Cáceres) and the dances of El Chíviri on Easter Sunday in Trujillo (Cáceres). Big processions are held in Cáceres, Jerez de los Caballeros, Badajoz and Mérida.

May

The festival of Santa Cruz (1st-3rd) in Feria (Badajoz); San Isidro (15th) in Valencia de Alcántara (Cáceres) and Fuente de Cantos (Badajoz).

June

Corpus Christi (week of the 24th) in Peñalsordo (Badajoz) and El Toro de San Juan in Coria (Cáceres).



"Los Empalos" in Valverde de la Vera

December

The night of the 7th, the eve of the Immaculate Conception, is celebrated in various towns in Extremadura. Los Escobazos in Jarandilla de la Vera (Cáceres) and La Encamisá in Torrejuncillo (Cáceres) are of special interest.

Theater Festivals

Cáceres: Medieval Theater Festival in June.

Mérida: Classical Theater Festival in July and August.

Alcántara: Medieval and Renaissance Theater Festival in August.

Handicrafts

Noted for their pottery is Ceclavín and Arroyo de la Luz (Cáceres). Also well-known is the red earthenware from Salvatierra de los Barros (Badajoz), a town filled with potters' workshops. Textiles are produced in Torrejuncillo and Trujillo in the province of Cáceres. Alabaster is handcrafted in the Jerte Valley (Cáceres). Guadalupe (Cáceres) is noted for handcrafted copper. In the town of Acebo (Cáceres), almost all the women in town do some kind of



Potter's workshop in Salvatierra de los Barros

embroidery. Leather, including embossed leather, is typical of Jerez de los Caballeros (Badajoz). In Guijo de Santa Bárbara, Hervás and Guadalupe (Cáceres) wooden furniture is made. Last of all, the town of Montehermoso (Cáceres) has become famous for its hats, the most original part of the regional costume with a mirror indicating if one is single, married or a widow. There is an Association of Artisans (Asociación de Artesanos) in Cáceres ☎ **927 47 26 50** and another in Badajoz ☎ **924 69 81 46**.

Cuisine

The cuisine of Extremadura is characterized by its excellent use of nature's bounty. Centuries old recipes make up the major part of today's cuisine, such as the variety of lamb dishes adapted from the Moors and the introduction of potatoes and peppers (used for paprika) brought back by returning explorers.

A simple dish like soup is a notable example of the myriad variations in this region's cooking. You can delight the palate with tomato, garlic, potatoes from La Vera, green asparagus or Bishop's soup. Chilled

soups (gazpachos) are welcome in the summer heat, including ajoblanco, poleo, trincaya and cachorreña.

Cured meats from Extremadura enjoy well-deserved fame, especially those from the controlled areas using the name of "Dehesa Extremeña". The controlled wine-producing area is called "Ribera del Guadiana". There are also other top quality cured meats and wines, such as red wine from Salvatierra, white wine from Miajadas and those from Cañamero. The sparkling wines, known as cavas, from Almendralejo and liqueurs from Guijo de Santa Bárbara and a liqueur made from acorns from Almendralejo in La Vera, as well as cherry liqueur from the Jerte Valley, must also be mentioned.

Delicious freshwater fish include tench and trout from La Vera and Jerte. Olive oil comes from Sierra de Gata, Monterrubio de la Serena and Jerez de los Caballeros.

Cheese deserves special mention; tortas made with ewe's milk from La Serena, Casar de Cáceres, Los Ibores and Las Villuercas, and those made from goat's milk. Both Islamic and monastic influences are discernible in the desserts and other sweet treats.



Museums

Badajoz

Badajoz

Provincial Archeological Museum
Plaza José Alvarez y Sáenz de Buruaga
☎ 924 22 23 14, fax 924 22 29 05

Provincial Museum of Fine Arts
Calle Duque de San Germán, 3
☎ 924 22 28 45, fax 924 25 40 63

Cathedral Museum. Plaza de España
☎ 924 22 39 99, fax 924 26 05 93

Extremaduran and Ibero-american
Contemporary Art Museum (MEIAC)
Calle Museo, 2
☎ 924 25 98 16, fax 924 26 06 40

Mérida

National Museum of Roman Art
José Ramón Mérida, 2
☎ 924 31 16 90, fax 924 30 20 06

Museum of Art and Visigoth Culture
Calle Santa Julia, 3 ☎ 924 30 01 06
Geology Museum ☎ 924 33 06 00

Olivenza

Ethnographic Museum González Santana
☎ 924 49 02 22

Cáceres

Cáceres

Provincial Museum. Plaza de las Veletas, 1
☎ 927 24 72 34, fax 927 24 72 77

Museum of Art and Culture (Casa
Pedrilla). Ronda de San Francisco
☎ 927 24 16 33, fax 927 21 42 88



MEIAC in Badajoz



Ethnographic Museum in Olivenza



National Museum of Roman Art
in Mérida

Provincial Museum in Cáceres



Ethnographic Museum in Cáceres



Cilleros

Casa Museo (House-Museum)
☎ 927 51 20 37

Guadalupe

Royal Monastery of Our Lady of
Guadalupe. Plaza Mayor
☎ 927 36 70 00

Hervás

Pérez Comendador Leroux Museum
Calle Asensio Neila, 5 ☎ 927 48 16 55

Malpartida de Cáceres

Vostell Museum of Modern Art,
Los Barruecos (3 km from Malpartida)
☎ 927 27 64 92, fax 927 27 64 91

Plasencia

Cathedral Museum. Plaza de la Catedral
☎ 927 41 48 52

Ethnographic and Textile Museum
Marqués de la Puebla, s/n
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Marqués de la Romana, 10
☎ 927 36 70 75, fax 927 36 70 76

Parador de Jarandilla de la Vera
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☎ 927 56 01 17, fax 927 56 00 88

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☎ 927 42 58 70, fax 927 42 58 72

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