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CIUDAD
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A LOOK TOWARDS THE REGION of Ciudad Real shows us a unique landscape and heritage. From the plains of La Mancha to the almost unspoilt Mediterranean forests, its villages and towns possess a special artistic wealth. The traveler will be able to experience the atmosphere of El Quixote, since some of the most famous adventure episodes of this peerless knight take place in this natural area. Two National Parks, Cabañeros and Daimiel, are **proof of the lush nature that Ciudad Real hides.**



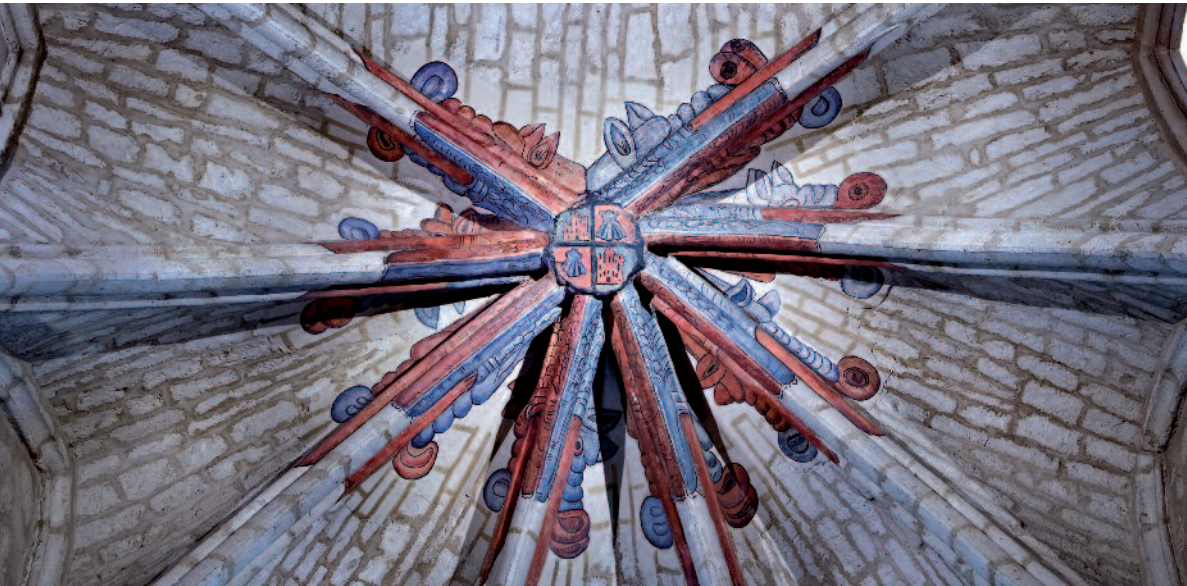
Gate of Toledo.

Seven-headed dragon
at the Church of Santiago.

CIUDAD REAL

The Campo de Calatrava county, a natural area with old volcanic hills, spreads along the south of La Mancha. During the Reconquest of Spain it was a disputed border region. The capital of this interesting area, near Guadiana river, is Ciudad Real. Go through its famous Puerta de Toledo Gate, the only one remaining from the old walled enclosure, and discover this unique capital.

Ciudad Real has three gothic churches to visit. The oldest is the one dedicated to Santiago, with and excellent Mudejar ceiling and a mural painting of an apocalyptic seven-headed dragon. In San Pedro church the tomb of don Fernando de Coca, Isabella's I confessor, can be found, with similarities to the tomb effigy of Martín Vázquez de Arce known as "Doncel de Singüenza". The third church is Santa María del Prado Cathedral, priory church of the military-religious orders of knights, whose single nave dominates a magnificent baroque altarpiece.



Make a stop at Jardines del Prado Gardens. Visit the Museo López-Villaseñor Museum, which occupies a typical Manchegan mansion from the 15th century, where the artwork of this well-known painter from Ciudad Real. The Museo Provincial museum keeps archaeological and paleontological remains found in various sites, highlighting the 3-million-year old mastodon fossils discovered in Las Higueruelas site and the fossils of the oldest rhino in Europe.

During your walk, pay attention to the buildings constructed in historicist and modernist styles such as the Diputación Provincial, the old Casino or the Elisa Cendrero Museum, with collections of furniture in Louis XIV style and old fans. In the main square or *Plaza Mayor* the modern city hall designed by the architect Fernando Higueras will surprise you. The Neo-gothic elements and style of the building have been reproduced in other nearby constructions. Ciudad Real is a city full of parks. The most typical is the centenary Gasset Park, with a surface of eight hectares. Take a walk and admire the different tree species and “La Talaverana”, an artistic fountain decorated with the traditional coloured ceramic pieces from Talavera de la Reina.

In La Mancha the figure of don Alonso Quijano becomes evident. Look for him in the museum Museo del Quijote. You will learn how a printer from Cervantes times was. A multimedia presentation approaches the universal myth from La Mancha. Do not miss either the Parque del Pilar park.

Since Ciudad Real was incorporated to the AVE railway network, the city stands out for its commercial activity. As a services city and student destination it houses the Chancellor's Office of the University of Castilla-La Mancha. The bustling atmosphere of the city can be appreciated especially during the local celebrations.

The city's carnival is famous, highlighting the parade of music and dance groups on Carnival's Sunday called *Domingo de Piñata*. The Easter week was declared of National Tourist Interest. On Whit Sunday locals celebrate the pilgrimage or *romería* to the Virgen de Alarcos shrine. Towards the end of July, to thank the Virgen del Prado for the harvested crops locals celebrate the “Pandorga” parade, a perfect occasion to enjoy the traditional local customs. With the August Fair, honouring the city's patron saint, the intense festival season. These days are perfect to have a good time and taste the local cuisine and its good wines.



CASTLES, VOLCANOES AND ARISTOCRATIC HOMES

As Ciudad Real is located in the centre of the province, choose a direction, north, south, east or west and travel its regions. Let us start in the Alarcos-Calatrava Archaeological Park, 8 kilometres from the capital.

Remains from the Bronze Age to the Middle Ages have been found in Alarcos, highlighting the remains of an Iberian town. The Christian troops were badly defeated in the surroundings. Due to the fact that it was very difficult to repopulate the place, King Alfonso X “the Wise” founded in 1255 Villa Real, relocating the locals in this new town. Together with the fortress remains, the chapel with a beautiful Gothic rose window is of great importance. The archaeological site is completed with the ancient Islamic *Qal'at Rabah*, one of the most important and best preserved mediaeval sites in the Peninsula. Walk up to its towers, walls, gates and the *coracha* (a wall usually descending to a river for water supply), and imagine the life of the knights who created the first Spanish military-religious order: the Order of Calatrava.

In Campo de Calatrava district there are more than a hundred volcanic hotspots. Some of these are the origin of thermal and hot springs. While you travel, discover remains of old castles such as Caracuel de Calatrava, Calatrava la Vieja, Calatrava la Nueva castles in the town of Aldea del Rey, or the Salvatierra castle in Calzada de Calatrava. Make a stop in Granátula to see Columba volcano.

Calatrava la Vieja / Castle of Alarcos.





Main Square in Almagro.



In the middle of this geological paradise Almagro waits for you, an aristocratic town, whose origins date back to the Paleolithic. The visit to the town must not be short and hasty. It developed greatly under the shelter of noblemen, rich farmers, priests, traders and Centro European bankers who arrived during the reign of Carlos V of Spain. That development is appreciated in the rich urban heritage that has been preserved: the Palacio de los Fúcares and Palacio del Conde del Valparaíso palaces, Iglesia de San Blas parish church, the convent of La Asunción, the Hospital of San Jerónimo... Make a stop at the Plaza Mayor, one of the most beautiful squares in Spain. Enjoy the good local food in one of the interesting and cozy restaurants that the town offers in restored building such as its Parador Nacional de Turismo.



Do not leave Almagro without tasting its famous pickled aubergines, buying a beautiful piece of lacework and watching a theatre play in the Corral de Comedias, an open air theatre. The bohemian and festive atmosphere transforms the streets and terraces of Almagro every summer during its International Classical Theatre Festival.

A WINE AND PALACES REGION

We arrive in Valdepeñas, famous for its wines, its Baroque monuments and its cultural activities. In the Valdepeñas Wine Museum you will find an outstanding collection of testimonies related to grape-growing and wine-making, from the Iberian sites of Cerro de las Cabezas to the creation of the Regulating Board for the “Valdepeñas” Designation of Origin. An important figure in Valdepeñas artistic history was the painter Gregorio Prieto. His foundation, situated in a typical house of La Mancha, holds a stunning collection of more than three thousand pieces of art signed by Picasso, Rafael Alberti, García Lorca, Vázquez Díaz or Prieto. Taste its wines with a good company.

And with the aftertaste still in your mouth continue to the town of San Carlos del Valle, built after the orders of Carlos III. Go for a walk in this beautiful square and head towards the municipality of Villanueva de los Infantes. Another welcome surprise. One of the most interesting and rich in cultural heritage spots in Castile-La Mancha, homeland of Santo Tomás de Villanueva and place where Francisco de Quevedo died. Walk among its palaces, convents, churches, arcaded squares and aristocratic houses, such as the Knight of the Green Coat's House, character mentioned in Don Quixote by Cervantes.

We are in the districts of Campo de Calatrava and Campo de Montiel, crossed by Don Quixote and his faithful companion Sancho. A region where the Jabalón river flows, near the mountain range of Sierra Morena, where towns such as Santa Cruz de Mudela and El Viso del Marqués wait for you. The first is famous for its hot springs spas, hunting offer, craft and the Santuario de las Virtudes shrine, with a square bullring. The great treasure of El Viso is the Renaissance palace of the Santa Cruz Marquis, where the Archivo General de la Marina, the archive of the navy, is kept.





The locations in Sierra Madrona mountains and Alcudia Valley have a great natural wealth and they will surprise you.

Puertollano, an industrial and mining town, is the most important municipality of this area. Under the shelter of the waterfalls known as “El Chorrero” several cave paintings are conserved. It is also of great interest its bitter spring fountain, situated in Paseo de San Gregorio promenade, inside a small temple from the 19th century. Do not miss its Ethnological Museum, Mining Museum and Municipal Museum, or the Santo Voto festivity celebrating the end of a big cholera epidemic that spread across the town in the 14th century. The festivity takes place 48 days after Easter Sunday.

Almodóvar del Campo, an ancient Roman settlement, preserves a mediaeval old town with emblazoned houses. In the Middle Ages it was an leading trade centre in wool and cloth products. Its surroundings are rich in cave paintings locations, such as the ones found in La Venta de la Inés cave, a suitable place for hiking routes that appears in Cervantes novel.

You are in Valle de Alcudia and Sierra Madrona Natural Park where wolves live with lynxes and eagles, as well a more than 160 species of birds. Since mediaeval times livestock has fed from its pasture lands. The steep hillsides are a privileged place for hunting activities. Near Bienvenida the Iberian and Roman town of *Sisapo* is found. Some important municipalities are Fuentecaliente, Brazatortas, Minas del Horcajo or Minas de Diógenes, whose Embalse de Montoro reservoir is a great place to fish and practise water sports.

Palace of the Marquis of Santa Cruz in Viso del Marqués.
Cave Paintings in Fuentecaliente.





Sunrise at Cabañeros National Park.

The district expanding south from Montes de Toledo has in Cabañeros National Park its great natural and leisure area. Before entering the park, make a stop at the reservoirs of Gasset and Vicario and also in the town of Malagón, where Saint Teresa of Avila made the third of her foundations.



Since Roman times up to few years ago, the Almadén mines have produced most of the mercury consumed in the world. Its mining park is has been declared as World Heritage by UNESCO. A visit to this place is a must. Moreover, in this town you will find a hexagonal bullring with houses outside.

LUSH NATURE

The Embalse de la Boca de la Torre de Abraham reservoir is an appreciated place for fishing lovers. The waters of the Bullaque river create in Piedrabuena another natural space for a good swim: the Tabla de la Yedra.

The Tablas de Daimiel National Park is another jewel in Castile-La Mancha. In the course of the rivers Cigüela and Guadiana, its lakes are home of an extraordinary and rich variety of migratory birds. Spend the first hours of the day to observe the magnificence of the nature here as you walk on the walkways that lead you deep into these unique wetlands. The near site of Motilla del Azuer, an unrivalled archaeological site in Spain, can teach you a lesson about how important water was, and still is today, for the locals.

Church of The Convent of San José / Tablas de Daimiel.







Fields full of vineyards will accompany you on your way to Manzanares. Its wines, as well as the ones from La Membrilla, were praised by Lope de Vega. The town of La Solana is famous for sickle production and Argamasilla de Alba, a place mentioned in El Quixote, brings us to the gates of the Lagunas de Ruidera Natural Park.

Situated between the provinces of Ciudad Real and Albacete, this group of connected lakes is spectacular. Its blueish and greenish waters, difficult to forget, are surrounded of holm oak trees, poplars, elm trees and Spanish junipers. Ruidera is a place to swim, fish, relax, hike, tour by bike its tourist routes and practise water sports. Stay there and discover the Montesinos cave, where the delusional Don Quixote had an adventure.



The nobleman had another absurd episode fighting against the windmills, when he believed they were giants. In Campo de Criptana, the most beautiful windmills in the province wait for you. From the Cerro de la Paz hill and surrounded by whitewashed and indigo houses you will look down on the vineyard see between Tomelloso and Alcázar de San Juan. The underground of the first is full of wine cellars and caves which are samples of the popular architecture together with the bombos, traditional stone dome houses built for shelter. You must visit the museum dedicated to the painter Antonio López, the Posada de los Peines Inn and the Cart and Ethnographic museums. Its wine cellars and agricultural cooperatives buildings are also worth mentioning. One of the cooperatives, the one called Virgen de las Viñas, is the largest in Europe.

Alcázar de San Juan will surprise you by its commercial development and its cultural heritage monuments, such as the churches of Santa María la Mayor, Santa Quiteria, San Francisco and Santísima Trinidad. Do not forget to visit the Roman mosaics of the Municipal Museum, the Tower of Don Juan of Austria, the Hidalgo House Museum and FORMMA museum (Pottery Museum of La Mancha). Alcázar's windmills and small lakes, a unique spot within the regional wetlands where flamingo colonies live, are also of interest to the visitor.

Ciudad Real, as you will see, is a province with a large surface, the third largest in Spain. However, it is also large concerning its attractive cultural, artistic, tourist and natural offer. The trip through its towns and counties waits for you. Come now. 🍷

Campo de Criptana / Hidalgo House in Alcázar de San Juan.







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