



NATURE





THE LANDSCAPES OF CASTILE-LA MANCHA

are privileged spots to enjoy nature. Waved plains coloured with ochre and pineapple green tones, blue skies, endless olive groves; hills scattered with windmills; steep mountain ranges and lush forests; valleys; tablelands; rivers; wetlands; national parks... The offer is wide, varied and ready to delight the traveler. Come and roam the landscapes of Castile-La Mancha, a place you must visit, **and feel you own freedom.**

A region as big as Castile-La Mancha, with a surface of 80,000 km², holds an enormous and fantastic natural wealth. You might need some time to fully enjoy its nature. Do not hesitate and spend as much time as you need. You will not regret it. In places such as the world-wide-known plain of La Mancha, the mountain regions of Cuenca, Alcaraz or Montes de Toledo; Natural parks and nature reserves like Cabañeros, Tablas de Daimiel, Tejera Negra beech forest, Alto Tajo natural Park or the gorges of the Cabriel river are privileged locations to enjoy and do ecotourism with you family and friends. Many are the protected natural areas in Castile-La Mancha, so many that you will be able to choose.

MEDITERRANEAN FOREST AND WETLANDS

Cabañeros and Las Tablas de Daimiel are the two National Parks you will find in Castile-La Mancha. These locations are unique. Outstanding refuges where the best species of our flora and fauna can be observed. Both parks also demonstrate the great effort made in this region to preserve and defend its nature reserves, giving preference to environment conservation rather than to other interests.

Some deer in Cabañeros shrublands / Bird spotting in Tablas de Daimiel National Park.







It is said that three hundred million years ago, the collision of two continental tectonic plates raised mountains, sunk valleys and transformed the territories that we know as Mediterranean area. The mountain range known as Montes de Toledo emerged from that raising, creating a unique district. It is an area of great tourist activity. Its villages preserve unique folkloric, gastronomic, craft and cultural traditions. That is the place where Cabañeros National Park is found, an ideal place for horseback riding, hiking and even for some astronomical tourism activities.

Its pasture lands, scattered with Holm oaks, cork oaks and Portuguese oaks, spread at the feet of the Rocigalga and Chorito massifs, whose peaks are over 1,000 metres high. While walking in this park, keep in mind that you are in the best preserved Mediterranean ecosystem in Spain. You will have the opportunity to observe the colonies of Iberian imperial eagle, black storks, black vultures, red deer, roe deer and boars. Its botanical wealth is of



Cabañeros National Park.

great interest. On the first days of autumn, the Park lives one of its most interesting periods: the deer rutting. If you really want to live a staggering experience, do not miss it. It is one of those natural spectacles which is worth witnessing.

Not far from this park, in the province of Ciudad Real, Tablas de Daimiel National Park is the clear example of what is known as the wet La Mancha, a large area which comprises municipalities of Ciudad Real, Toledo, Cuenca and Albacete. It was declared as Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO. The area consists of groups of lakes formed along the courses of the Guadiana, Cigüela, Záncara, Azuer or Riánsares rivers. These attractive reddish territories, golden fallow fields, green vineyards and harmonious French tamarisk forests are dyed with pink colours of the flamingo colonies nesting in some of the lagoons. Alcázar de San Juan, Villafranca de los Caballeros, Miguel Esteban, Mota del Cuervo, Quero or El Toboso are some of the most important locations in the area.

Flamingos in the Lagoon of Manjavacas in Mota del Cuervo.







Tablas de Daimiel National Park.

A looked after network of walkways, surrounded by reed beds and swamp-grass beds will lead you to the heart of this park. You are walking through one of the most valuable ecosystems of the planet. The visit to the park is free of charge. Observe the different species of water birds nesting in the park or those which use it as a transit point during their migrations or breeding seasons; if you want to fully enjoy this, you must visit the park right before dawn or after sunset. Bring a good pair of binoculars and do not miss a single detail of how its water birds live, highlighting flocks of great crested grebe, crane, cattle egret, northern lapwing, red-crested pochard or marsh hawk; moreover do not miss its fish, amphibian, reptile and otter colonies. At the Visitor Centre you can find all the information about the hiking routes or the routes you can do with an all-terrain vehicle, all of them in restricted areas.



LAGOONS AND CANYONS

Upstream of the Guadiana river, leaving behind Tomelloso, Argamasilla de Alba and Peñarroya Castle the Lagoons of Ruidera wait for you in Campo de Montiel district. When you arrive, remember the magical description of this location made by Cervantes in the pages of *Don Quixote* and remember also the magical episode occurred inside the Cave of Montesinos.

This group of lagoons, fifteen, forms a beautiful natural setting of great touristic appeal, both with good swimming and fishing areas. The blueish and greenish tones of their waters are the result of different geological and chemical processes which make each lagoon unlike. During rainy seasons when the lagoons are bursting with water, the lagoons are connected by small waterfalls. In the surrounding hillsides remarkable examples of Holm oaks, Spanish junipers and shrubs grow. The area is also suitable for small game hunting.

Another spectacular nature reserve waits for you nearby: the Gorges of the Cabriel river. You are in the province of Cuenca, in the borders with the autonomous community of Comunidad Valenciana. After leaving behind the reservoir of Contreras, the Cabriel river develops all its erosive force to form a unique limestone canyon, which has the mountain area called Sierra de los Cuchillos as its most stunning location. Visit it by following the hiking path which goes through a certain area of the reserve while Bonelli's and golden eagles or hawks fly over you. Iberian wild goats can also be observed.

In the territories of La Manchuela, a district that expands towards the province of Albacete, you have an opportunity to discover some of the nearby natural areas. The Júcar river canyon has outstanding locations such as the municipalities of Alcalá del Júcar or Jorqueras, which are among the most appreciated rural tourism destinations in Spain. Their varied offer of comfortable accommodations, as well as their sport and adventure activities is attractive. High up on stunning canyon walls, the urban areas invite you to wander among their streets with typical houses.



Lagoons of Ruidera.





Ocejón Peak.



Mundo river.



The source of the Mundo river, near Riópar, is the perfect place to go on hiking routes and practice potholing. In the location of “Los Chorros”, we will see how water gushes out of a big cavern and falls down over two hundred metres forming a beautiful waterfall. You cannot miss the municipalities of Ayna (the “Switzerland of La Mancha”), Liétor, Alcaraz and Nerpio, both because of the beauty of the locations and their distinctive popular architecture, and because of the interesting cave paintings, belonging to the Levantine art, kept in some of their caves and coves. In the mountain range of Sierra de Alcaraz, the Almenara peak is the highest in the province of Albacete.

The highest point in Castile-La Mancha is found in Pico del Lobo, 2,262 metres, which you will encounter crossing the mountains of Sierra de Ayllón. We are in Guadalajara, the coldest and wettest district in the region.

Here you will find the legendary black architecture villages: Campillejo, El Espinar, Campillo de Ranas, Robleluego or Majaelrayo, where we can climb to Ocejón peak. The mountains here are the source for rivers such as the Jarama. The Natural Park of Hayedo de Tejera Negra, found in Cantalojas, also waits for you. It is considered to be a botanical relic, as it is the most meridional beech forest in Europe. Even though you can visit it at any time of the year, autumn with its reddish-coloured leaves gives the forest a special and magical charm.

The Tajo river, which goes through Castile-La Mancha, has on its way through the province of Guadalajara locations of a unique beauty. Some examples are the ones that you will find in the moorlands of Molina and in the Alto Tajo Canyon. This Natural Park possesses a perfect network of well-signposted routes that you will be able to follow by foot, bicycle or car. They will lead you to places like Barranco de la Virgen de la Hoz ravine, Valley of Milagros, La Muela del Conde, Taravila, the Enchanted Town of Orea, Peralejos de las Truchas, Barranco del Horcajo ravine or La Salobreja lagoon. Another natural wonder that the Tajo river offers us, in this case in the province of Toledo, are the *barrancas*, steep gorges found in the municipality of Burujón, next to the reservoir of Castrejón. Walking in its ecological route we will discover a surprising landscape, full of precipices, which seems to be from another planet. The fauna of the area is mainly rabbits, hares and birds. The area is frequented by ornithology lovers.

Poveda waterfall / Upper Tajo / Ravines of Castrejón.





The reservoirs of Entrepeñas, Bolarque and Buendía take us to La Alcarria, underbrush, pasture land and moorland area. Beekeepers produce there their delicious honey, appreciated because it combines the flavour of the numerous aromatic plants found in the district which was immortalized by the writer Camilo José Cela. In the Henares Valley, apart from visiting the historical and monumental town of Sigüenza, you cannot miss the Hoz de Pelegrina canyon and the ravine in the Dulce river. There you will find a viewpoint remembering Félix Rodríguez de la Fuente, the missed naturalist, who filmed plenty of scenes for his documentaries in these locations.

ROCKROSES AND MOUNTAIN RANGES

To the northwest of the province of Toledo and in the limit with the mountains of Sierra de Gredos, the massifs of Sierra de San Vicente are territories with pines, oaks and chestnut trees. You can go across these massifs by following the “Route of Viriato”, whose 140-kilometre long path runs along cattle routes and rural roads that connected towns and villages. Almoróx has a great pine forest and there are interesting rocky formations in the surroundings of Nombela and Pelahustán.

Between these mountains and Montes de Toledo mountains you must visit La Jara, a district which is plentiful of rockrose shrubs. Among all the locations in this district, make sure you do not miss places like “Garganta de las Lanchas” gorge in Robledo del Mazo. In Sevilleja de la Jara there is a wildlife rehabilitation centre for birds of prey (*Centro de Recuperación de Aves Rapaces*). A good alternative to travel this district of the province of Toledo is to take the “Vía Verde de la Jara”, *La Jara Green Route*, an old railway route which was never used. Due to its levelling it has been reused as a hiking and cycling route.

And now we travel from the territories of Toledo to the territories of Cuenca. In the eastern half of this province you will be able to admire the random shapes that the limestone rocks have been taking during its erosion process. The most important example of this process is the Haunted City. However, you will also be able to admire numerous sinkholes caused by collapses of the surface layer or water. We are in an area rich in dinosaur fossils and cave paintings.



Spectacular spots such as “Ventano del Diablo”, a viewpoint over the gorge of the Júcar river in Villalba de la Sierra, wait for you in this mountains. Make a stop at the source of the Cuervo river, in the municipality of Vega del Codorno, one of the most beautiful locations in Castile-La Mancha. It has been declared as Natural Monument. Watching how water gushes out is a visual delight for the senses, as it is going across “El Hosquillo” Hunting Park, where red deer, fallow deer, mouflons, roe deer, Iberian wild goats, wolves and even brown bears live. Before leaving this mountains, go to discover the gorges of Beteta and its famous hot springs with mineral and medicinal properties.

VOLCANOES AND HOLM OAK FORESTS

Our trip in the territories of La Mancha stopped in the National Park of Tablas de Daimiel and the Lagoons of Ruidera, near the district of Campo de Calatrava. Do you know that one of the most important volcanic areas in Spain is waiting for you here? If you are surprised by what you are reading, do not waste time and come to discover it. More than a hundred hotspots have been found, some of which are lagoons now. Also, this area is rich in thermal and hot springs.

Heading south, towards the crossings in Sierra Morena mountain range, we find the Valley of Alcudia, a traditional hibernating area for transhumant flocks of sheep. The valley is protected by the nearby mountain ranges and the pasture lands enjoy soft temperatures and abundant rainfall. Holm oaks scatter a landscape of great beauty which presents important remains from the past such as the ancient Roman town of *Sisapo*, near the municipality of Bienvenida.

If you have arrived in this spot of Castile-La Mancha following all the locations suggested in these pages, you can feel satisfied and proud of yourself. You have travelled across a unique and exceptional region, whose natural heritage appeals to everybody. Enjoying it is entertaining, pleasant, enriching and relaxing. Repeat your visits and stays. We will be delighted to welcome you back. 🐾





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Castilla-La Mancha