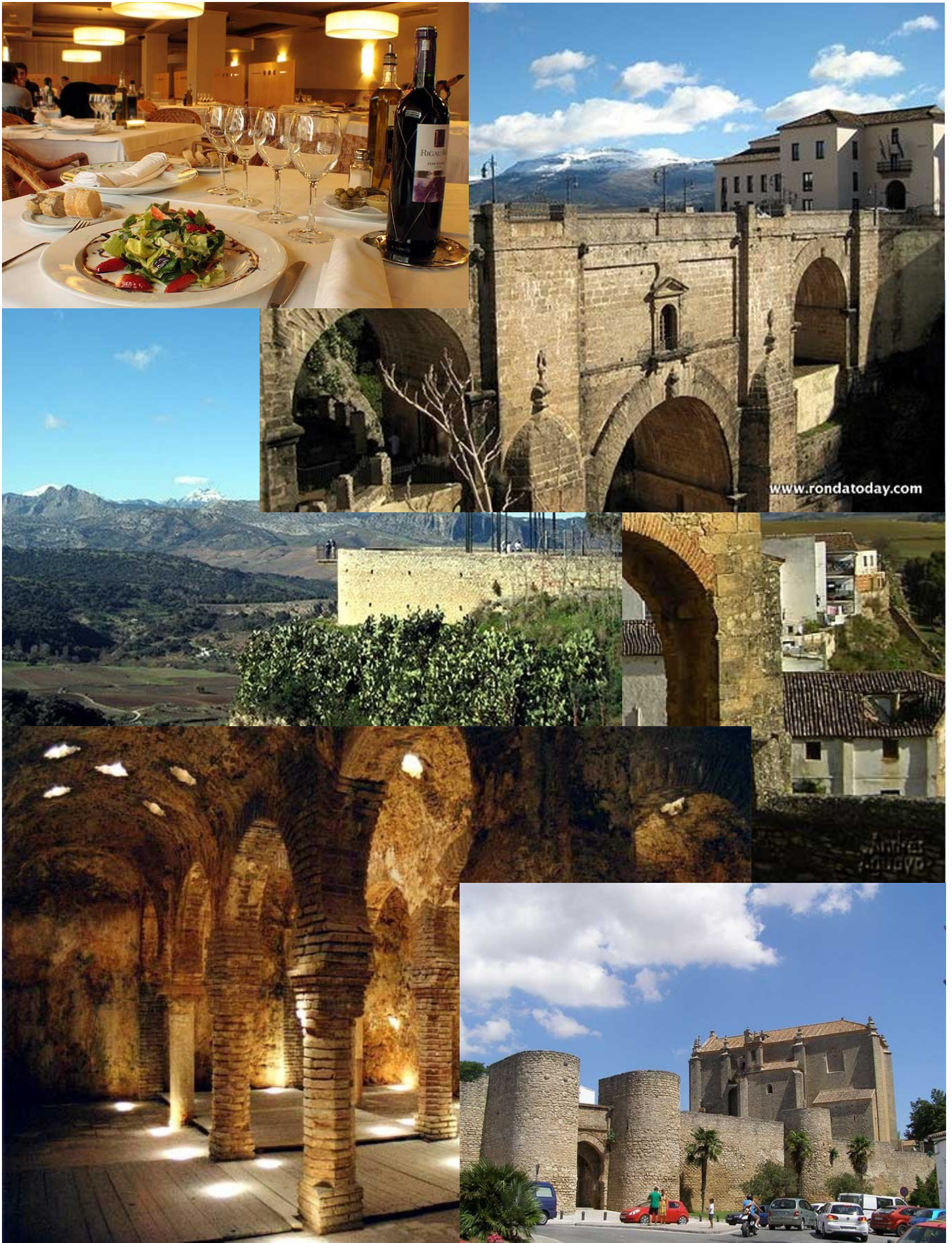


# Ronda "The City of Dreams" in Andalucia

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## Ronda

### “The City of Dreams” in Andalucia

A small city perched on a seemingly precarious platform of rock, Ronda is in fact an impregnable fortress only ever defeated in battle through trickery, and during the reconquest with the modern (for the era) rock blasting cannon.

The mountains and valleys of the Serranía de Ronda are home to a tough breed of people, yet in Ronda these people are refined, some are gentry, some gypsies, others are just common folk, but all proudly call themselves Rondeños.

These days the population of Ronda is a little over 35,000 which is big enough to offer all of the essential services, but not big enough to suffer traffic problems or big city woes.

Rondeños have played a pivotal role in shaping Andalucía and modern Spain, and the city has hosted some of the great names of politics, the arts, education, and played her role in military events.

An hour from the **Costa del Sol**, Ronda is too far away to be heavily influenced by events on the coast, yet still close enough to benefit from the economic strength that tourism brings to Southern Spain. At a height of 723m in the Ronda mountains, the city has a cooler year round temperature than the coast, making life in Ronda altogether more agreeable than many other Andalucían cities.

Ronda is also the perfect base to explore other cities such as Sevilla, Granada, Córdoba, Jerez de la Frontera, Cadiz, Antequera, or Malaga.

### The Serranía de Ronda

Ronda is the biggest city in northern Malaga province, and the closest city to many of the smaller villages in Cadiz province, making Ronda an ideal base for exploring the Serrania.



Within a few kilometres of Ronda are some of the most visited **Pueblos Blancos, the famous white villages of Andalucia**, Setenil de las Bodegas, Grazalema, Gaucín, Juzcar, Benalauria, Montejaque, Teba, Cortes de la Frontera, Igualeja, the list goes on.....



As well, Ronda is close to three natural parques, **the Grazalema park**, Alcornocales park, and the Sierra de las Nieves park. The Serranía is also home to pre-historic cave paintings at Benaolan, Neolithic dolmens at Montecorto, and of course, the Roman city of Acinipo.

The countryside of the Serranía is described as unique, in fact universally important. Many endemic species make their home here, including the pre ice age Spanish fir tree (*Abies pinsapo*), numerous orchids and many other plants only found on our mountains.



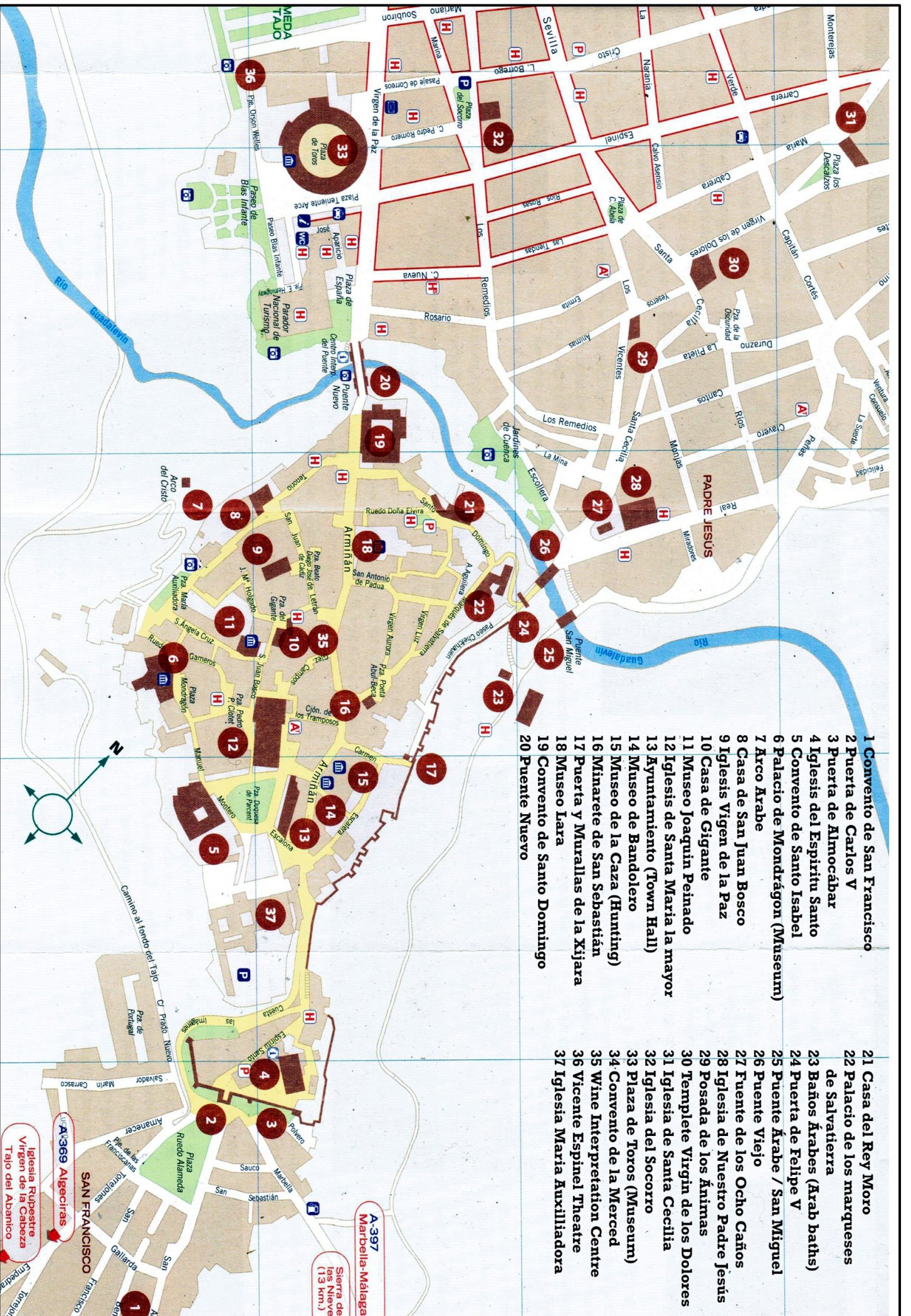
- 1 Convento de San Francisco
- 2 Puerta de Carlos V
- 3 Puerta de Almocábar
- 4 Iglesias del Espíritu Santo
- 5 Convento de Santo Isabel
- 6 Palacio de Mondragón (Museum)
- 7 Arco Árabe
- 8 Casa de San Juan Bosco
- 9 Iglesias Virgen de la Paz
- 10 Casa de Gigante
- 11 Museo Joaquín Peinado
- 12 Iglesias de Santa María la mayor
- 13 Ayuntamiento (Town Hall)
- 14 Museo de Bandobero
- 15 Museo de la Caza (Hunting)
- 16 Minarete de San Sebastián
- 17 Puerta y Murallas de la Xijara
- 18 Museo Lara
- 19 Convento de Santo Domingo
- 20 Puente Nuevo
- 21 Casa del Rey Moro
- 22 Palacio de los marqueses de Salatierra
- 23 Baños Árabes (Arab baths)
- 24 Puerta de Felipe V
- 25 Puente Árabe / San Miguel
- 26 Puente Viejo
- 27 Fuente de los Ocho Caños
- 28 Iglesia de Nuestro Padre Jesús
- 29 Posada de los Ánimas
- 30 TempLETE Virgen de los Dolores
- 31 Iglesia de Santa Cecilia
- 32 Iglesia del Socorro
- 33 Plaza de Toros (Museum)
- 34 Convento de la Merced
- 35 Wine Interpretation Centre
- 36 Vicente Espinel Theatre
- 37 Iglesia María Auxiliadora

A-397  
Marbella-Málaga

Sierra de  
Nueva  
(13 km.)

A-369 Algeciras

Iglesia Rupestre  
Virgen de la Cabeza  
Tajo del Abanico



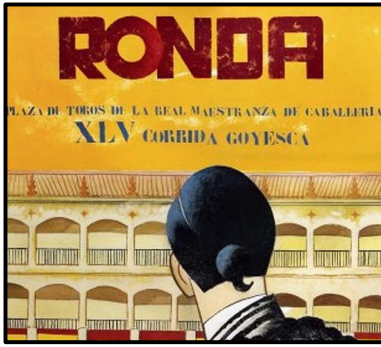


If you're **planning to visit Ronda** here are the top things to do to help you enjoy your holiday. Ronda is a small city, and almost everything is within 500m of the Puente Nuevo bridge.



1. **The Bullring (Plaza de Toros)**, considered to be the most historically important bullring in Spain, and home to the Ronda style with a matador on foot instead of horseback. The building can only seat 5000 people but has the largest central sand surface, known as the rueda, in the world. The structure is entirely built from locally quarried stone, then plastered and whitewashed.
2. The **New Bridge (Puente Nuevo)**, the largest of Ronda's several bridges that cross the impressive Tajo gorge that separates the city in two. The bridge is 98 meters tall with a tall central arch, and a room under the road that has been a hotel, a bar, a prison, and is now a small museum.
3. **The Arab Baths are considered the most complete in Spain** even though they are ruins, and offer a tantalizing glimpse into medieval Islamic times. Visitors are able to see the pump tower on which a donkey turned a crank that fed cold water to the baths. The water was heated and distributed in three rooms, a hot room for sweating out impurities, a warm room for massages and soaking, and a cold room to cool down.
4. The **Mondragon Palace** is a 13th century palace that archeologists believe was the home of Ronda's Islamic King Abomelik when Ronda was the capital city of a large kingdom in Al-Andalus. The palace is home to the city museum with displays from the paleolithic, neolithic, Roman, Moorish, and Christian eras.
5. The **Medieval Walls**, with numerous gates and Islamic arches, high defensive towers and long stretches of impregnable stone wall that surround the old city and would take at least an hour to walk around. The most impressive sections are located at Almocabar in the Barrio San Francisco, Calle Goleta, and near the ruined flour mills in the Tajo gorge.
6. The **Water Mine**, a dark and scary descent to the Islamic era fortress carved into the gorge below the Casa del Rey Moro. Known as the Water Mine because for hundreds of years it operated as the only source of water into the city, with slaves chained to the steps to pass water bags upwards.
7. Visit the **Santa Maria la Mayor church** to see Ronda's largest church, and also home to many of the Easter floats used in processions during Holy Week. The church was built on the foundations of an Islamic mosque, part of which is still visible in a small alcove as you enter.
8. Walk to the **bottom of the gorge**, though not for the faint hearted because this is a steep descent, but completely worth it to get that perfect photo of the bridge. Follow Calle Tenorio to the end and after the plaza take the walking track to the old Arab gate. If you wish, you can go through the gate and walk down and then under the Puente Nuevo.
9. **Enjoy local tapas at one of the many outdoor bars in Ronda**, with popular places being Plaza Socorro, Calle Nuevo, the Plaza in front of the Almocabar Gate, or Plaza Duquesa de Parcent.
10. Stroll through the old town at sunset as the tourists leave and Ronderños reclaim their city. This is the time when the real Ronda comes alive, with children playing in the plazas, families preparing their evening meal, and the sights, sounds and smells of evening life can be enjoyed.





**The Plaza de Toros** (bullring) in Ronda occupies a very special place in modern Spanish culture and history as the home of the Rondeño style of bullfighting and also of the Real Maestranza De Caballería De Ronda. The bullring was built entirely of stone in the 18th century, during the golden years of Pedro Romero's reign as champion bullfighter. Home to the Real Maestranza de Caballería de Ronda, Spain's oldest and most noble order of horsemanship, an order that traces its heritage back to 1485, and the year the Catholic Monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella defeated the Moors in Ronda, thus bringing the city back under Christian rule after 773 years of Islamic rule.

Many tourist guides will tell you the Ronda bullring is the oldest and largest in Spain, in fact the story is confusing. Our little bullring only has seating for 5,000 spectators, hardly the largest in the world, but the rueda, which is the large round circle of sand, is the largest in the world at 66m, making it 6m larger than Spain's biggest bullring, the Plaza Toros Las Ventas in Madrid. The bullring in Sevilla is considered older having commenced construction in 1761, and was completed in 1785, compared to Ronda's commencement in 1779 and completion in 1784, though purists agree Ronda's bullring should be entitled to the crown since it was first to stage a corrida. However, in May of 1784 during the first inaugural corrida to be held in Ronda's Plaza de Toros, part of the stand collapsed forcing its closure until repairs could be made.



The second inaugural corrida occurred on May 19th 1785 and featured Pedro Romero and his greatest rival in the ring Pepe Hillo, by all accounts a day to be remembered in Ronda as one of one of bullfightings greatest moments. All of Ronda's most noble families were in attendance, and the town was bedecked in flags while in the streets a great party was going

on. Ronda's bullring, whilst perhaps not the oldest in Spain is definitely the oldest bullring constructed entirely of stone, most others being constructed with a combination of stone and brick. Our bullring, designed by José Martín de Aldehuela is unique in having all of the seating under cover. The stands were constructed in two levels of seating of 5 raised rows per level and 136 Tuscan sandstone columns forming 68 arches provide support for the top level of seating and the roof of the Plaza de Toros.

The main entrance to the bullring, completed in 1788, four years after the rueda and seating was constructed, was designed and built by a Rondeño, and master stonemason, Juan Lamas. The design features two tall tuscan columns with the royal shield of Spain at the top centre surrounded by baroque edging. The main door is large enough for horses and carriages to enter the rueda, and above the door is a central balcony featuring wrought iron metalwork with imagery that evokes the culture of bullfighting. In 1923, when the original Espinel theatre was constructed in Plaza Blas Infante, the main entrance of the Plaza de Toros was relocated to Virgen de la Paz, where it still stands today across the street from the Restaurante Pedro Romero. In the 1980s the old Espinel theatre was demolished and a new theatre built in Alameda Park. In July 2009, when the car park next to the Plaza de Toros finally closed, a competition to design new gardens that suit the era was organised. At the same time, historians in Ronda suggested moving the entrance back to it's original location.

During the Feria Goyesca held in the second week of September, an event created by Ronda's bullfighting maestro Antonio Ordoñez, a bullfight in honour of Pedro Romero is held, often including members of the Ordoñez family, Ronda's second bullfighting dynasty. The bullfighters and their assistants all wear costumes reminiscent of those worn by characters appearing in Goya's paintings, whilst the ladies delight in showing themselves off in the most gorgeous dresses.

The museum in Ronda's Plaza de Toros, the Museo Taurino, contains many of the most important outfits and bullfighting regalia from the last two centuries, as well as an extensive collection of weapons used by the Real Maestranza during Spain's many wars.

#### Ronda Bullring Opening Times

January to February 10am till 6pm

March 10am till 7pm

April to September\* 10am till 8pm

October 10am till 7pm

November to December 10am till 6pm

**\*Except during the feria in the first week of September**

Price of Entry

6.50€ individual

8.00€ individual with audio-guide

For group bookings, please phone the ticket office +34 952 874 132 or send an email [taquilla@realmaestranza.org](mailto:taquilla@realmaestranza.org)



**Ronda is one of the few cities** in the world to have a deep gorge running through the heart of the city, and is luckier still to have the Puente Nuevo (new bridge in Spanish) spanning it. The gorge also served as the most formidable defence Ronda's enemies have ever tried to attack. Known as El Tajo, the gorge was created by constant erosion of the rio Guadalevín which is fed by mountain streams and melting snow high in the mountains of the Sierra de las Nieves.



The gorge is quite narrow only 68m at it's widest, but in places very deep, up to 120 metres, adding to the wonder that makes the gorge and it's tallest bridge, the Puente Nuevo, one of Spain's most photographed locations. The rio Guadalevín exits El Tajo into the valley below where it was used by a number of flour mills to drive their grinders but all activity ceased in 1917 after a rock slide destroyed the mills.

Most visitors will start their wandering around Ronda on the north side of the gorge, this is the side with the Parador Hotel, the tourist office, the bullring, and where Ronda's commercial centre is located. The south side is La Ciudad, which forms the heart of Moorish Ronda.

One of the more interesting human built sights along the gorge is the water mine, a tunnel carved into the rock and which descends 60m with 231 steps down to the water. It's an impressive feat of engineering and can be seen by visiting the Moorish King's House (Casa del Rey Moro) for a tour of the garden and the mine.

**The Puente Nuevo spans the El Tajo gorge at the highest point**, and is a must see destination on any tour of Ronda. The north side of the Puente Nuevo is Plaza de España, which is where the Parador hotel, and the Andalucía Tourism Board office is located. The south side is where you'll find the Santo Domingo convent and across the street from it, the Casa de los Arcos.

The road surface is cobbled, and wide enough for traffic to pass in both directions, but watch out for the sharp angle as you exit the bridge into La Ciudad, many a hapless driver has wondered if they hit a tourist when actually they only bounced over the corner of the curb.



Pedestrians are able to walk along both sides of the bridge, and there are several seating positions built into the protective barrier, although they are very rarely used for sitting, most tourists see them as a handy step for taking photographs, and why not, after all, the views on a sunny day are spectacular, just be sure not to lean out too far, it is a long drop to the bottom.

Photographing the Puente Nuevo can be a challenge although there are several

publicly accessible locations that offer good vistas. Closest to Plaza de España, walk around the gorge side of the Parador hotel, or from the south side of the bridge, onto the viewing platform next to Santo Domingo.

For a wider view of the entire bridge, the Cuenca gardens on the eastern side are a perfect location in the mornings, whilst in the afternoons, the viewing platform in the garden of the House of Don Bosco (1.50€) gives a very pleasing photo. It is also possible to descend into the gorge from Plaza Maria Auxiliadora and take a photo of the bridge at the old gate of Albacara.

Hotels with views of the Puente Nuevo include the Parador Hotel, Hotel Montelirio, and the Hotel Don Miguel

**The Arab Baths, known in Spanish as the Baños Arabes** are one of Ronda's most important tourist attractions, and some argue more important than the unquestionably beautiful Puente Nuevo, or Ronda's other claim to fame, the Plaza de Toros, home of Ronda's bullfighting tradition. Ronda's Arab Baths are similar to the design perfected by the Romans, except that steam was used to sweat out pollutants from the body rather than soaking in hot water as the Romans used. The Moors of Spain were also Muslim, so religious traditions were important, a Mosque was located next to the baths, and the baths were more than just a sanitary facility; they were also a place where locals and visitors alike would stop to purify and cleanse their bodies before entering the Mosque to purify their souls.

In Moorish times the main entrance to the Medina of Ronda was located next to the Baños Arabes, the Puente Arabe may have been built around the same time as the Arab Baths, along with a high defensive wall which no longer exists though its foundation stones can still be seen. In those times the baths were outside the walls of the city, and set to the side of the main entrance gate, with a small doorway built into the city walls that connected to a passageway leading to the entrance of the baths.

From the main entrance, visitors will find themselves overlooking the roof of Arab Baths, you'll see short humps embedded in the ground and covered with alien stalks on which rest round glass panels. These are the skylights, and the glass protects the chambers below from rain damage. The baths were built partially underground to better control the temperature of the building. Hot fires in the furnace room closest to the water entering from the aqueduct would heat the water, and channel hot steam under the floor of the rooms in terracotta channels (atanores) of the rooms, and then exit from chimneys located before it reached the cold rooms.



Entering the baths, descend into the first chamber which these days has no roof, and in Moorish times was the reception area for the baths, though in Arabic known as the al-bayt al-maslaj, the changing room. It has a central pool about two and a half metres across, and a series of brick arches surrounding the pool. These arches supported a domed ceiling with star shaped skylights, while the pool itself was a drinking fountain and not a bath as we might think. Around the edges of this room were wooden benches for chatting and socialising, and against the back wall a series of screens that formed changing rooms. Toilets were also located in the first chamber.

Beside the first ruined chamber is a doorway which leads into a small room with pools at each end. This was the cold room, al-bayt al-barid, where people could relax and cool down before entering the warm and hot rooms again. Part of the tradition of these baths was to spend several hours here, and cleansing the body several times over. For many of Ronda's Moorish citizens a trip to the baths would not have been a daily ritual, but even if it was, this was medieval Ronda's equivalent of our evening television where people would go to meet friends.

The next room the largest of the covered chambers, the warm room, al-bayt al-wastami, and which in Moorish times was the warm room where people could relax and enjoy a massage, be pampered with perfumes, or sit in a pool of slightly warm water. This room was warm but not steamy. Mats and cushions were available to use, as well as wooden benches around the walls, and several tables for massage and therapeutic treatments by trained slaves were situated next to some of the columns. The hot room, al-bayt al-sajun, which today is the room with the animated presentation, is the last room entered by the public, and was the case in Moorish times as well. This room has a pool at one end where water from the aqueduct was splashed over the hot floor creating a very humid and steamy atmosphere in the room.

The woodshed, al-furn, the far room in the Arab Baths and which isn't open to today's visitors, is where the water from the aqueduct arrived, and where wood would be unloaded from carts into a storage area. In this room the great fires were stoked in covered ovens with vented openings that kept the fire alive. At the end of this room, and at the back of the hot room, was an opening that allowed staff and slaves to enter and leave the Hammam.

#### Arab Baths Opening Times

##### Autumn and Winter

Monday to Friday 10am till 6pm (10:00-18:00)

Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays 10am till 3pm (10:00-15:00)

##### Spring and Summer

Monday to Friday 10am till 7pm (10:00-19:00)

Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays 10am till 3pm (10:00-15:00)

##### **Price of Entry**

3€ per individual - 1.50€ if part of a group of 10 or more.



**The Mondragón Palace is one of Ronda's most visited buildings**, not only because it houses the excellent Municipal Museum, but also for it's Moorish courtyards and gardens that evoke memories of the kings and governors who called Ronda their home.

The palace was the home of the Moorish King Abomelic I (also known as Abomelic Abd al-Malik, and in some history books as Abbel Mallek), who reigned all too briefly yet initiated a golden age in the city and started large construction projects. It is likely the palace already existed when Abomelic first arrived in Andalusia, with most experts seeming to agree the years 1306 -1314 as likely dates of construction. After Abomelic's defeat at the hands of Alfonso XI, the city came under the direct control of the Nasrid dynasty in Granada, whilst the Mondragón Palace assumed importance as the home of the Grenadian governors of Ronda prior to the reconquest of 1485, including the very last governor Hamet el Zegri.

The palace was even used by Ferdinand II after conquering Ronda in 1485, but is most remembered for supposedly hosting both Ferdinand and his incredibly popular spouse Isabella I when they stayed in Ronda during the Moorish rebellion of 1501. In fact there is no historical evidence that Isabella ever visited Ronda, certainly no letters have ever been uncovered addressed from her in Ronda.

#### **Mondragón Palace Opening Times**

Monday to Friday from 9am till 7pm  
(09:00 till 19:00)

Saturdays, Sundays and Holidays 10am  
till 3pm (10:00 till 15:00)

#### **Price of Entry**

3€ individual

1.50€ if part of a group of ten or more, or  
children



Ferdinand II awarded the palace in 1491 to Don Alonso de Valenzuela, a prominent family from Sevilla, for services rendered to the Spanish crown during the war of reconquest. The de Valenzuela family set about remodelling the palace, and almost all of the above ground construction being replaced. In 1569, Captain Don Melchor de Mondragón who was instrumental in putting down a Muslim rebellion at Istán a small village near Málaga was awarded family arms by Felipe II, and the ownership of the palace in Ronda along with lands in the surrounding area. The arms remain above the main entrance to this day.

The garden, and ground floor patios are largely as they were during Moorish times, though in respect of the central courtyard (inside the main entrance), and the private courtyard leading to the offices of the tourism staff, nothing of Moorish decoration remains. The large rear courtyard still retains impressive Moorish tiling and Arabic script, leading directly to the water garden, a miniature of the one found in Granada's Alhambra. By the late 16th century the palace was once again owned by the de Valenzuela family, though in a heated brawl in the city in the early 1600s Don Francisco de Valenzuela killed another gentleman in Ronda and was forced to flee to Naples where he married and bore a son, Don Fernando de Valenzuela (1630-1692), a man who during his lifetime became one of Spain's most controversial court figures. In the 1670s Don Fernando, became an influential man, supposedly by virtue of being the Queen Regent Mariana's lover after the death of her husband Philip II of Spain.

In 1675 Don Fernando was awarded the grandeanship Marquis de Villasierra, and then in 1677 made Prime Minister of Spain, and it was around this time the Palace assumed it's other lesser known name Palacio Marques de Villasierra. By 1679 Don Fernando had been disgraced and exiled to the Philippines, dying years later in Mexico having never been allowed to return to Spain.



**Part of the reason Ronda is so important in the history of Andalucia** directly relates to how secure the city was from attack, a position that allowed Ronda to develop and be independent, or at least nominally so, and the city walls in combination with the gorge and rio Guadalevin made Ronda impervious from attack until the age of cannon. Whilst wooden palisades existed to protect neolithic communities and their successors before the constructions of the Roman castle, the reality is that most of the stone walls around Ronda directly owe their construction to the Islamic era, a period that spanned close to 800 years from 712 until 1485. Given the absolute impregnability of the gorge and cliffs, the actual length of the city walls didn't need to be terribly great in the first instance, however as the city expanded down towards the Barrio de San Francisco and into the former Jewish Quarter extra walls needed to be built. Consequently, many of the existing walls around Ronda never did join up, in fact they were originally part of separate encircling rings that no longer exist.

The former Jewish Quarter and factory area of Ronda during the Moorish rule of the city no longer exists except for the Arab Baths, a few houses, and the hotel Alavera de los Baños, though it is possible to see where part of the outer wall protecting this district was. Extending from the Puente Arabe, the original wall snaked between the city houses and factories and the Arab Baths which were always on the outside of the city walls, and then along the edge of the stream until it started turning back toward the fortress on which the church of Espiritu Santo now stands. A gate used to stand at the city side of the Puente Arabe, this having been the main road to Granada before the new quarter at Padre Jesus was developed in Christian times. As the main entrance to the city, this was considered one of the most critical to defend, and two walls with towers converged at this point.



We can still appreciate how solid those gates might have been when we continue up the path at the base of the inner walls, the Murallas de Levante, to the Puerta de la Cijara. Certainly without cannon it would be impossible to attack the gate and walls without terrible loss of life. Traders and visitors to Ronda in Moorish times would generally enter the city from the Puente Arabe, and the majority would bathe in the Arab Baths, before visiting a small mosque located next to the gates which probably stood where there is now a small chapel. From there visitors would ascend into the city proper through the Puerta de la Cijara. On the way along the Murallas de Levante, and before you reach the Espiritu Santo church is a short track that leads to the left, and under one of the houses of this street you will see one of the most enigmatic arches, the Puerta de los Esparteros. Believe it or not this used to be one of the gates into the city of Ronda during the Moorish times, though as you can see now it merely part of the foundations of someone's home.

The only traffic that entered through the gates at Almocabar was from the coast, specifically from the Algeciras/Gibraltar direction, or local farmers and traders who needed to go in that direction. Whilst many have speculated these gates must have been the main entrance to the city due to their grandeur, in fact the square in front of the gates was the town cemetery, the "Al-maqabir". Almocabar was also the most heavily defended part of the wall and it was here that the Moorish rulers built their biggest fortress, a large octagonal structure that gave them 360 degree control of both sides of the wall for their longbowmen. The Almocabar gate is now two separate gates, the other being the Charles V gate which bears his coat of arms to this day, next to which you can see a watering trough for horses.

As Spain developed and Christian rule brought about times of peace, Ronda's role as a vitally important defensive city has diminished. Whilst the Almocabar gate is impressive, it is now only a monument, so the wall only extends from the beginning of the houses surrounding the Espiritu Santo church to the hotel Jardin de la Muralla. To the north of Ronda, in the direction of Sevilla, and starting at the Guadalevin below the Puente Nuevo, additional defensive walls and gates were built to give a protected route into the city for the flour mills and their workers. In Moorish times the valley below Ronda was a major wheat growing area, and at least 5 or 6 mills were located along the river to grind the wheat.



**Ronda's museums are a delightful way to spend a few hours** for both holiday makers and residents alike. Children will love the Lara Museum, while adults may prefer the museum of wine, and art aficionados will positively love the collection of Joaquin Peinado.

**Ronda Municipal Museum** - Located in the historic Mondragon Palace (Palacio de Mondragon), the Municipal Museum of Ronda details our city's history from the stone age to the present time with some very well made exhibits such as the Pileta Cave reconstruction, the stone age hut, iron age technology including sword making, the Roman period with an important exhibit on Acinipo, Moorish Ronda including a detailed exhibit of Arab funeral rites, and a very interesting display on life in Ronda's heyday, the 17th and 18th centuries.



**Real Maestranza Bullfighting and Cavalry Museum** - "Everything you wanted to know about bullfighting but were afraid to ask" is how this museum should be described. The Real Maestranza has a long history since 1572 of training cavalry officers for the Spanish Crown, and it was here that the Romero family created the modern Rondeño form of bullfighting, and here too that the Ordoñez family became celebrities. The museum charts bullfighting from its early days to the present with exhibitions of photos and items used in bullfighting. The other half of the museum covers the training of cavalry, which is the actual purpose of the Real Maestranza, and includes exhibits of weaponry and armour used through the ages.

**Lara Museum, Calle Armiñan** - The Lara Museum is an unusual collection of antiques collected by Juan Lara Jurado, the founder of the museum. The collection has been put together into galleries that might not seem immediately related but actually takes the visitor on a journey through science history of the last few hundred years. Displays on weaponry including pistols, knives, and catapults, sit side by side with displays on clocks, scientific instruments, cinema and photography and much more. Exhibits capture the imagination and despite some of the bloodlust such the displays on bullfighting or inquisition torture instruments, the Museum is actually quite child friendly.

**Hunting Museum, Calle Armiñan** - This is an unusual museum, and tends only to attract diehard hunting fans with its displays of guns, pictures of hunters and their catch, and of course taxidermy of animals hunted in the campo surrounding Ronda and further afield by Spanish hunters. The Museum also helps organise hunting expeditions in the Serrania; a shop with hunting supplies is also onsite.

**The Bandit Museum** - The only museum dedicated to bandits and highwaymen in Spain, this is a real experience of Ronda history not to be missed. Back in the 1800s bandits roamed the hills and valleys of the Serrania, and became so powerful in Andalucia the government in Madrid in 1844 ordered the creation of the Guardia Civil to put an end to their thieving ways. As late as the 1930s isolated pockets of bandits were still robbing wealthy travellers on their way to Ronda. The 1950s saw a small resurgence of banditry as communists and socialists opposed to General Franco's regime waged a guerilla war from many of the same caves previously used by the bandits. The museum itself traces the stories of these folk legends from anecdotes and official court testimony, and is an important place of research for academics and writers interested in the psychology of the bandit.

**Interpretation Centre for the New Bridge (Puente Nuevo)** - Have you ever wanted to be inside the New Bridge, looking out the window at the valley below, imagining what it must have been like to be a prisoner shackled beneath the traffic, so near to the life you knew, but so far from it as well. Views of the Parador Hotel and the hanging houses seem so much better when looking from down on the landing below.

**Museum of Wine** - Archeological evidence suggests Ronda was a favoured wine growing district from Roman times, and probably a lot earlier, and whilst the number of commercial vineyards around Ronda is small, the industry is expected to grow. The wine museum in Ronda traces the history of wine making from neolithic times, through Roman, Visigothic, and Arab time to the present.

**Museum of Joaquin Peinado** - Born in Ronda, Joaquin Peinado is one of the most influential painters of the early 20th century, and one of the leading lights of Spanish contemporary art. Sadly Peinado passed away in 1975, long before the museum in his honour was created. Located in the Moctezuma Palace in La Ciudad, the building is a fitting home for one of Ronda's greatest sons.

**Rilke Museum, Hotel Reina Victoria** - Rainer Maria Rilke, described as one of the German world's greatest poets, spent three months in Ronda at the end of 1912 and beginning of 1913, staying at the Hotel Reina Victoria. It was while here that he wrote part of his 6th Elegy and the "Spanische Trilogie". Room 207 at the Hotel Reina Victoria has been converted into a small museum honouring Rilke's connection with Ronda.



Carved in the cliffs of the 'El Tajo' gorge is a surprising mine and fortress that dates back to the Moorish era when constant wars in Al-Andalus required the city governors to protect water supplies for the people and defenders.

**The Water Mine was built during the reign of Ronda's King Abomelic at the beginning of the 14th century**, when Ronda was an independent Islamic kingdom on the frontline between the Christian north, and the newly developing Islamic Nazari Kingdom in Granada. To reach the water mine it is necessary to first enter the gardens of the House of the Moorish King.



In popular culture, the mine is rumoured to be the secret hiding place of Abomelic's gold, and many people in Ronda still believe that underground chambers and palaces may still be discovered. This is unlikely however, and many of the rumours could have been started by slaves freed after the city fell to the Catholic monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella in 1485.

Within the mine there are 231 steps carved into the rock that lead to the river below, a total distance of 60 metres, and the bottom 30 metres contain an impregnable fortress from which the city defence could protect essential water supplies.

The fortress is a marvel of medieval Islamic engineering, and unique in all of Spain. The chambers were built using a complex latticework of stacked vaults that made it possible to defend the lowest chamber and the entrance from chambers higher up the fortress.

At one time it wasn't necessary to leave the fortress to collect water, a water wheel with buckets was used to bring water from a well in the room of the spring ('Sala del Manantial'), and then slaves would form a human chain to pass water in skin bags called zagues from the bottom to the city above.

The fortress at the bottom of the water mine was also thought to be a secret escape from the city because the location of the fortress cannot be seen from the Arab Bridge which was the main entrance to the city. However, to make sure the city was defended, the weapons room included a small window above the door, that could be used to pour boiling water onto attackers.

Another interesting aspect of the fortress is that the stone walls prevent sound traveling, and in the room of secrets it is said that if a person stands in the centre of the room, he cannot hear what is said in the corner.

Directly above the fortress, about 25 metres above the river, there is a terrace known as the Terrace of the Conquest, from which Moorish and then Christian conquerers could watch the river for signs of attack, and this is now known to have been the first line of defence of the water mine. It is below the hermit's grotto, and is so well hidden it cannot be seen from any direction.



Stretching from the Parador Hotel, around to Park Blas Infante, and along Paseo Hemingway, you'll find some of the most impressive views in Ronda in the **Alameda Park before the cliff top walk becomes the Paseo de los ingleses**.

Far down below, actually as much as 200 metres at its deepest point lies the valley that in Moorish times was the wheat growing heart of Ronda, from which farmers and their laborers would collect the wheat grains and transport them to the mills that used to line the edge of the cliffs under Ronda's hanging houses. Over on the far side of the valley you'll see the Virgen de la Cabeza cave church, and a wee bit further you can make out the Cueva del Gato, and beyond that the mountains that stretch from Montejaque to Juzcar. And further away in the distance you have the beautiful mountains of the Sierra de Grazalema that are definitely worth a guided visit. Talk to Wildside Holidays about a nature tour. ([www.wildsideholidays.com](http://www.wildsideholidays.com)) The most impressive views of the valley and tajo gorge are from the platform next to the open air theater and the rotunda close to Ronda's Plaza de Toros, with an amusing name, el Balcon del Coño. Unfortunately the name isn't translatable without causing some offense, but if you imagine a person arriving at the balcony, looking down 150m and exclaiming "Ayy, coño!" and then stepping back rather quickly you might understand its meaning :). ....



This part of Ronda was built during Ronda's golden age, and was originally known as Alameda de San Carlos, and now only as Alameda del Tajo, though the park itself used to be much smaller until a group of dilapidated homes were demolished in the 20th century to make way for the park. Whilst Ronda doesn't have a botanic garden, there are several specimens of Pine, Acacia, and Himalayan Cedar that are listed on the notable trees of Malaga province for being more than 200 years old. The park is exceptionally popular with Rondeños and visitors alike for its formal paths, fountains, duck pond, and bird enclosure, as well as two children's playgrounds.

At the front entrance to the park as you enter from Virgen de la Paz you'll see a statue of the founder of Ronda bullfighting Pedro Romero, and close by a statue honoring the many women of Ronda who have supported the Corrida Goyesca in costume, the Damas Goyesca. The park and the various pathways, as well as the bullring are all closely connected and it is almost impossible to see when one begins and the other ends, so even if you aren't aware that you are in the Alameda park you most likely will be at some point. Next to the Plaza de Toros (bullring), you'll see one of Ronda's most well-known restaurants, del Escudero, made famous by Michelle Obama and her family when they visited Ronda, and you'll also see Tragabuches and several other popular a-la-carte restaurants between Plaza Blas Infante and Plaza de Espana.

Blas Infante is considered the father of Andalusian autonomy, and it was in Ronda that he made his declaration that Andalusia is a nation within the Kingdom of Spain, so be sure to read the plaque at the base of his likeness as you walk to the Balcon del Coño. Enjoy your stroll around the paseos of the Alameda, certainly Rondeños do, in fact every evening as the sun sets you'll find Spanish families enjoying the park and the plazas of Ronda, catching up with friends, looking in shop windows, or just admiring the views and the many flowers of the park.



Originally built in the 14th century as one of the muslim Mosques, **the Church of Santa María la Mayor**, known locally as the Iglesia de Santa María de la Encarnación la Mayor in Ronda's Town Hall square, the Plaza Duquesa de Parcent, and is the biggest and most attractive of the churches. Its distinctive tower and front facade make the church look more like a city hall than a church, but don't be fooled, entering the church soon puts these thoughts aside.

The main doors lead directly into a small vestibule which still contains one of the original columns of the cathedral built in the years immediately after Ferdinand and Isabella's Christian conquest of 1485. Sadly an earthquake in 1580 demolished it and the church which stands in its place today is an incomplete replacement, though still very impressive both inside and out. The bell you see in the vestibule is a duplicate of the bells which ring every hour in the tower above you.

Archeological evidence suggests that the Medina Mosque itself had also been constructed on top of an older Christian church dating from Visigothic times, however we also know that this was built on top an even older Roman altar, possibly a temple to Diana, which built to honour the victory of Julius Caesar over the forces of Pompeii, Cneo, and Sexto in the battle of Munda (the Roman name for Ronda) in 45BC. The balconies at the front of Santa María la Mayor were added later during the reign of Felipe II for nobility and gentry of the city to watch maestranza tournaments, bullfights and other events being held in the square, but these days the square has been converted into a lovely park named in honour of the Duchess of Parcent. Within the church is a fresco of Christopher Columbus painted by one of Ronda's celebrated painters, Jose de Ramos.

Entrance to the Santa María la Mayor is free for devotees and residents of Ronda, and just 4€ for tourists wanting to take photos and see the wonderful artifacts inside including the statues (pasos) which are carried through the town at Semana Santa (Easter).



### **Santa María La Mayor Opening Times**

#### April to September

10am till 8pm (10:00-20:00)

#### March and October

10am till 7pm (10:00-19:00)

#### November to February

10am till 6pm (10:00-18:00)

Sundays closed for Mass between 1pm and 2pm (13:00-14:00)





**The origins of Gazpacho are mysterious**, and like most things have never documented, what writing does exist is filled with inaccuracies, however general consensus is that pre-Roman Andalucians were making something akin to Gazpacho in Phoenician (and Carthaginian) times, although to really confuse matters, so were pre-Roman Italian peninsula peoples. In fact, a cold meal of stale bread, vinegar, olive oil, garlic, and water is common in the bread eating cultures surrounding the Mediterranean, the concept is even alluded to in the Old Testament book of Ruth (2.14) "Come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar."

Renowned British chef Jamie Oliver was in Ronda in 2009 filming his TV show 'Jamie Does... Andalucía'. He loved the traditional Ronda recipe, though in Spain gazpacho is a summer dish eaten cold, and most Ronderños would never eat gazpacho in the cooler months or in winter.

Typically, a gazpacho andaluz is treated like a drink, rather than a soup needing spoons. Jamie's recipes can be a drink or a soup depending on the consistency. It is possible that the Jamie recipe owes some allegiance to an ancient recipe developed in pre-Roman times.

Jamie has another recipe for gazpacho which he mentions in one of his books uses a chicken or vegetable stock base instead of tomatoes, and is a modern twist on gazpacho that changes the soup completely. He caramelizes garlic and onion for the flavour, and adds almonds and oranges to his modern recipe, and the taste is delicious.

Ronderños like to argue about food, and we doubt Jamie will ever convince them to call his modern recipe an authentic gazpacho, certainly while Jamie was in Ronda he delighted in trying the traditional gazpacho recipe, but this recipe is always better when it's made at home with your own special touches to add a unique flavour. The base recipe for gazpacho is always the same, but no two chefs will ever create the same soup.

#### **Mixing Directions;**

First, prick the tomatoes and cover them for 30 minutes with boiling water then peel. Blend the tomatoes, cucumber, bell pepper, and garlic. Add the bread, and blend again. Add a third of a cup of olive oil, and a splash of sherry. Mix with a spoon. Season with salt and black pepper. Chill and serve cold with a flourish of cucumber and parsley.

#### **Jamie Oliver's Gazpacho Recipe**

The ingredients for Jamie Oliver's gazpacho are;

Five large ripe tomatoes

200g bread (not fresh) without the crust

Six inches of peeled and chopped cucumber

One chopped green bell pepper (pimiento)

Two garlic cloves

Extra Virgin Olive Oil

Sherry

Salt

Ground Black Pepper





**By the middle of the 13th century the Almohads had lost most of their former possessions in Iberia** to Castile, all that remained in 1238 was the Kingdom of Granada, of which Ronda was now an important capital. The first Nasrid Sultans of Granada managed to halt the first reconquista of Ferdinand I by promising fealty to Castile, and historical evidence confirms that until 1480 an annual payment of gold was made to the treasury of Castile.

It was during this time that one of Ronda's most famous poets lived. Abul Beka (also known as Salih ben Sharif al-Rundi), born 1204 and who died in 1285 was a poet and master of Arab-Andalucian culture and history, who wrote some of the Arab world's most poignant poetry about the futility of war and the great losses to the world of the Muslim cities of Sevilla, Toledo, and Córdoba.

Even today Abul Beka is remembered in Ronda, the square in front of the San Sebastian Minaret is named Plaza de Abul Beka, and a dance school that has won international acclaim for teaching Flamenco and traditional Andalucian dance honours him in its name, the Abul Beka Folk Dance Association.

Despite the official peace, war was an almost constant irritant in the region, indeed soldiers from the Kingdom of Granada regularly fought alongside Almohad and then Marinid troops in the Maghreb, as well as the frontier villages of Al-Andaluz. Christian forces continued their attacks in Southern Andalucia as they desperately tried to reach the straits of Gibraltar and prevent further invasions from Africa in support of Moorish Spain. Whilst part of the Kingdom of



Granada, Ronda in fact exercised considerable autonomy. Located close to the frontier with Christian Spain local decisions often had to be made quickly so a system of defences and signalling towers in the Serrania were built. Many of the local villages to the North and West of Ronda are known to have changed hands several times. Further South in Cadiz a new threat to both Christian Spain and Muslim Granada had appeared, an emergent Morocco under the Marinids.

In **1288**, sensing that his armies wouldn't be able to contain those of the Christian Kingdoms to his North, the emir of Granada approached Abu Yaqub Yusuf an-Nasr, the Marinid King of Morocco and cedes Cadíz to the Maronids in return for additional Berber troops in Al

-Andalus. In **1329**, Abu Al-Hasan 'Ali ibn 'Othman (**1297-1351**), sultan of Morocco invades Granada, capturing Algeciras, and shortly after installs his son Abomelic Abd al-Malik (also known as King Abomelic of Ronda), as king of Ronda, Algeciras and Gibraltar.

Abomelic started an ambitious period of construction and renovation in Ronda, including some of Ronda's most beautiful Moorish buildings such as the Arab Baths, and the Casa del Gigante. Abomelic successfully engaged the forces of Christian Spain from Ronda, at one point nearly capturing Jerez de la Frontera from Alfonso XI, but in 1388, he was finally defeated on the battlefield and killed by Diego Fernandez Herrera of Jerez, at which point Ronda once again came under the control of the Nasrid dynasty in Granada.

By **1340** Portuguese-Castilian forces are on the march again, inflicting a terrible defeat on Marinid forces at the Battle of Rio Salada, and four years later after a two year siege Algeciras is finally lost. Gibraltar fell to Christian forces in 1462, long after the last of the Marinids had returned to Africa and Ronda was back under the control of Granada.

Ronda's new palaces and economic growth in a time of war sadly didn't lead to peace-time prosperity because around **1349** one of the greatest tragedies of the medieval ages, the black death (bubonic plague), appeared as if from nowhere and within months is estimated to have killed a third of the population of Iberia including Alfonso XI and the bulk of his army. Ronda itself was devastated, her citizens decimated. In such a small city with only a single supply of water, it would have been almost impossible to avoid the disease.

One of the survivors of the black death was another of Ronda's most famous sons, Ibn Abbad al-Rundi (**1333-1390**) who was born in Ronda to a wealthy and influential family. He studied law in Ronda before leaving for Fez to follow his heart and study sufism. Ibn Abbad quickly established a reputation as one of the leading sufi scholars and is credited with writing a series of "Letters on the Sufi Path".

Despite endless wars against the Christian north, and frequent small invasions from North Africa, Ronda, the "Rose of the Kingdom of Granada", remained under Muslim control until **1485**, her citizens waking on the morning of the 14th May **1485** to the dreadful site of thousands of Christian soldiers surrounding their fair city.



It is hard to believe that Ronda was once a major centre in the Iberian provinces of the Roman Empire, however a quick look at the history books will find references to the **City of Acinipo** and the terrible battles that occurred at Monda during a civil war between Julius Caesar and the sons of Pompey.

Acinipo the city was most likely founded by native Iberians several thousand years ago, and archeological evidence at the site shows a bronze age settlement existed here between 1100BC and 750BC, and a Carthaginian town may well have been established after this period, before the fall of Carthage in the Punic wars.

However the most obvious history of Acinipo relates to the Roman era, starting from 202BC until the fall of the city nearly 700 years later. At its height, Acinipo was home to 5,000 Romans, with many more believed to inhabit the countryside and the castle of Arunda (modern day Ronda).

The district at one point in the first century AD was so important that Acinipo minted its own coins for a brief few years (56-53BC), and led to the construction of the amphitheatre capable of seating 2,000 people. In fact, after Caesar's civil war many parcels of land were given to veterans in his legions who settled with their wives and children, became tradespeople, or grew grapes for making into wine. The name Acinipo means "amongst the vineyards".

Situated at 999 metres above sea level with commanding views over the area, Acinipo was never threatened by barbarians, in fact the Iberian population of the time was completely Roman in almost every way, and life was more or less safe and prosperous. Acinipo was a complete city, with public buildings, the amphitheatre, Roman baths, temples; everything a Roman citizen could need.

#### Acinipo opening times

**Monday:** Closed

Entry times **Tuesday to Saturday:**  
10.00 to 16.00 (Gates locked at 17.00):

**Sunday:** 09.00 to 13.00 (Gates locked at 14.00).

(These hours although accurate at the time of writing are subject to change at any time.)



During the time of Acinipo's dominance over the area we know that Roman settlements also existed at Grazalema, Setenil de las Bodegas, Olvera, Antequera, Juzcar, and of course Arunda, where a castle and military fortress was built to keep the army out of the major civilian towns.

Sadly the fortunes of Acinipo were strongly tied to the fate of the Roman Empire, and as barbarians threatened Rome from the north many of her citizens moved to military settlements for protection. As a consequence Arunda slowly became the bigger town, and Acinipo declined. By the time Rome fell in 495AD, Acinipo was all but abandoned, and soon fell into disrepair.

Acinipo offers a fascinating look into how Roman towns were planned out on the frontiers of the Empire around the time of the Punic wars, and is worth a visit along with Setenil de las Bodegas, the village built into the caves.

**Directions:** Take the road to Sevilla (A-376), and after 7km turn right into MA-7402 Acinipo and Ronda la Vieja.



Ronda can sometimes be a difficult little city to drive around for the uninitiated, especially if you're driving a large SUV or motor home, and if you're towing a caravan don't even think about entering the city centre, instead park in one of the outlying streets and then walk into the centre.

Most hotels have their own parking and if not at the very least a temporary parking bay so that you can unload any luggage and the staff will then direct you to the nearest parking.

Streets in Ronda are narrow, most are one way, and in the older part of town corners and bends can be quite tortuous, of course this is one of the "City of Dreams" main attractions but can be a nightmare when driving a car. The city is however blessed with being small and almost everything is within walking distance of the outskirts of town. La Ciudad, the old Moorish town of Ronda, is becoming a car free zone in many places and what parking there is will often be taken by residents.

Unless you're in a rush our advice is to park outside the centre, the walk is only a few minutes, and regardless of which direction you've come from the best parking is always free, and is almost all in the commercial area between the centre and the poligano industrial.

### **Parking Restrictions**

In some places you may see a free space with a yellow line around it, this is most likely a commercial dropping point or private park and your vehicle will be towed away. Similarly, never park in front of a garage entrance that has a yellow line painted on the road surface and a no parking sign attached to the door. Vehicles that are illegally parked in Ronda are being towed with more frequency than they ever used to be. The fee for retrieving your car ranges from 70€ to 150€.



### **Here is a list of car parks in Ronda**

**Parking Martínez Astein** - Avda Martinez Astein. Entradas por Avenida de Málaga y Calle Córdoba: 400 places: Open 24 hours

**Parking Martinez Astein** - Avda Martinez Astein. Entradas por Avenida de Málaga y Calle Córdoba: 400 places: Open 24 hours

**Parking Antiguo Asilo** - Calle Paseo Poeta Rilke: 180 plazas: Open 24 hours

**Parking Multicines** - Calle Lauría, 57: 106 places Open: Monday to Saturday: 9:00 to 22:00. Sundays and Fiesta days: 10:00 to 22:00 horas

**Parking El Castillo** - Plaza Duquesa de Parcent: 194 places: Open 24 hours

**Parking Plaza del Socorro** - Plaza del Socorro: 280 places: Open 8:00 to 22:00

**Parking Renfe (Train Station)** - Avda Andalucía Capacidad: 100 Places: 7:00 a 23:00

**Parking La Merced** - Calle Carlos Cobo: 100 places: Open 7:30 to 23:30

**Parking El Fuerte** - Calle Guadalquivir: 230 places Open: 24 horas

**Parking Victoria** - Avda Victoria: 105 places Open: 8:00 to 22:00



Andalusian landscapes and wildlife have been bringing pleasure to visitors for decades. The south of Spain and especially the interior of Andalucía holds many wonders and surprises. The “real Spain” has little to do with beach resorts or whirlwind tours of Andalusian cities.



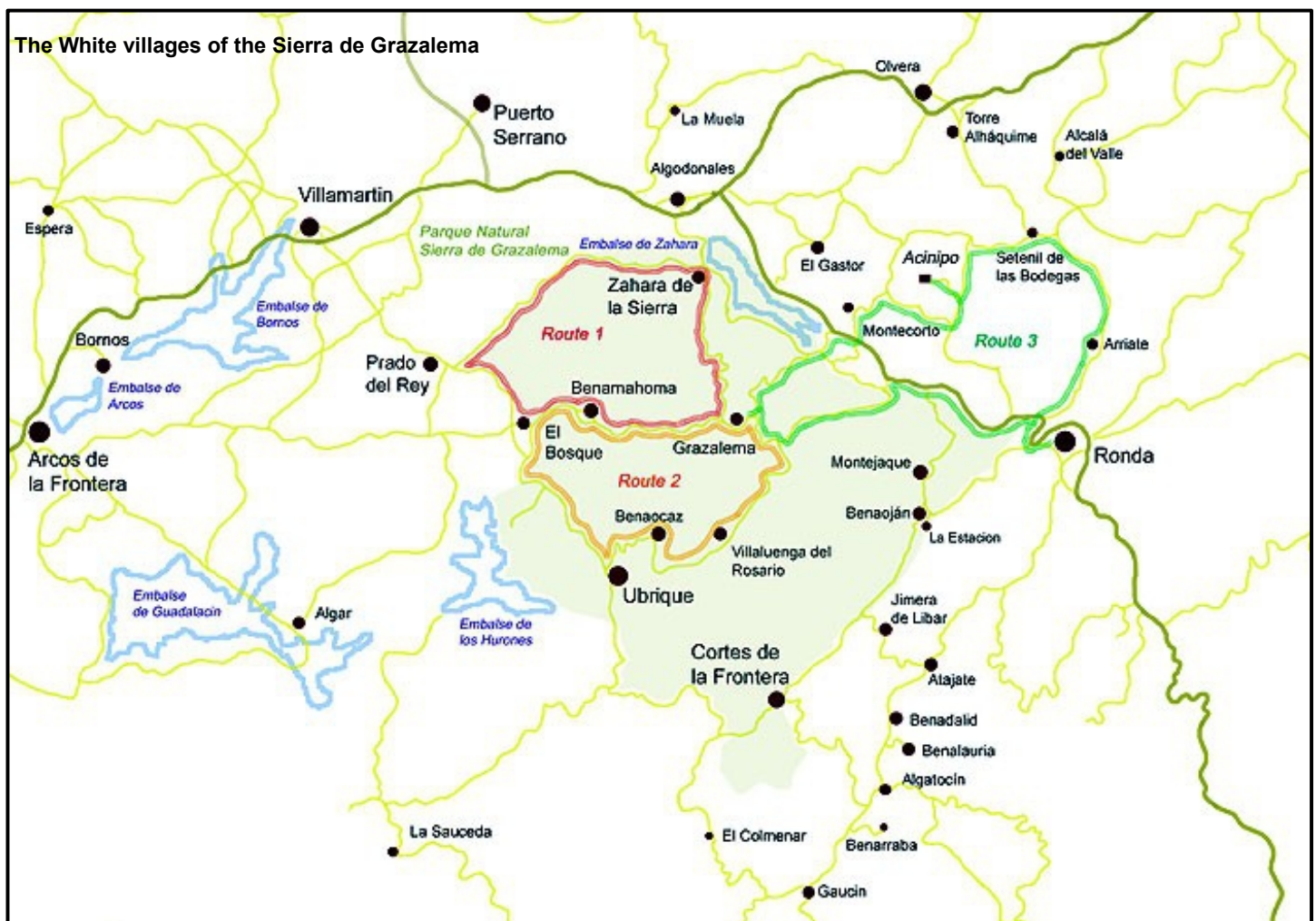
You are discovering the white town and “City of Dreams” that is Ronda and will be amazed by the beautiful Puente Nuevo, the architecture and history, the Plaza de Toros. But, take a moment to enjoy the stunning views from the balcony behind the Parador and the Paseo de los Ingleses. The mountains in the near distance are known as the Sierra de Grazalema. One of Spain’s most famous natural parks. A fabulous location to spend time be it resting, walking, bird watching or photography.

The park status envelopes several beautiful towns and villages; Grazalema, El Bosque, Ubrique, Zahara de la Sierra, Benaocaz, Benamahoma, Prado del Rey, and Villaluenga del Rosario are within the Cadiz side of the park. Ronda, Benaolan, Cortes de la Frontera and Montequae, are in Malaga province

Wildside Holidays – Grazalema only work with local people who know every inch of the area and can offer you an authentic ‘Grazalema’ experience. The guides who lead the nature walks have their favourite spots and know where (and when) to expect a certain bird, plant or mammal. This makes seeing something special much more likely. Not having to worry about navigation eliminates the slight unease anyone feels when being in unknown territory. No chance of getting lost will help you plan your day and you won’t be late for dinner! No need to carry lots of equipment, guidebooks, map or GPS – your hands and your mind will be free to take photographs or to just “be”.

For a wonderful nature walking experience in the Sierra de Grazalema contact Wildside Holidays through their website

[www.wildsideholidays.com](http://www.wildsideholidays.com)



# The white villages (Pueblos Blancos) of the Sierra de Grazalema

Absorb the tranquillity as you meander through the narrow, charismatic streets and open squares, noting the blend of Arabic layout and design with eighteenth century grandeur and ornamentation. This guide offers you a choice of short tours passing through stunning surroundings of lush Mediterranean woodlands and high mountain passes, with each white-washed population cluster separated by impressive scenery.

**This article was written by Sue Eatock and Clive Muir of Wildside Holidays**

Encompassing the north east of Cádiz and north west of Málaga provinces, this area is saturated in history with palaeolithic cave paintings, neolithic dolmens, bronze and copper age remains, Roman roads, Visigoth fountains and Moorish towers. For the most part, this tour takes us through towns created during almost 800 years of Muslim settlement. Berber tribes arrived here in around 714, coming from similar mountainous terrain in Morocco. They chose easily defended sites and built watch towers as an early warning system against attack. All of which was needed as this area was a lasting frontier between the Muslim and Christian kingdoms. The Moors were killed, expelled or converted to Christianity in this area in around 1483-5 under the command of Don Rodrigo Ponce de León, Marquis of Cádiz.



This part of Andalucía has seen many fluctuations, with a steep population decline during a Black Death epidemic 'Epidemia de peste' in the 12th C, the French invasion 'Guerra de la Independencia' 1808-1814 and an economical boom and growth in the 18th and early 19th centuries. A time when Bandits 'Baneleros' lived in hiding and stole from the wealthy, often attacking travellers in the mountains and forests. The 'Pueblos Blancos' or White Villages of Andalusia preserve a cultural heritage. And whilst each village displays its individual history and continues to pass on artisan crafts through the generations, they also embrace modern living and offer the visitor many conveniences.

**Local Produce and basis of the cuisine** - Olive Oil, Iberian cured ham and cold meat cuts, cured - spicy sausages, trout, wild boar, rabbit, venison. Cured and fresh cheeses from sheep, goat and cow's milk.

Soups, stews, wild asparagus, spanish oyster thistle, quince jelly, sweet pastries, liquors, wines

**Crafts** - Woollen textiles, ceramics, leather goods, woven esparto grass, carved wood, basketry, cork furniture, cosmetics,

## **Route 1: Grazalema-Benamahoma-El Bosque-Zahara**

This route begins and ends with spectacular mountain scenery, the mirador at Puerto de Boyar gives a panoramic view of the plains and later, crosses at the highest road pass 'Puerto de las Palomas' to get a bird's eye view of the sierras and beyond.

## **Route 2: Grazalema-Villaluenga-Ubrique-El Bosque**

Villaluenga is the smallest and highest of the villages, Ubrique the largest, with many historic monuments, El Bosque boasts a botanic garden of plants from the sierras.

## **Route 3: Grazalema-Acinipo-Setenil-Ronda**

Visit the Roman theatre of Acinipo, and from this vantage point look back across the sierras, Setenil has a unique river setting and the gorge which divides Ronda in two is world renowned.



**Benaocaz: population 751 (2011), 793 m above sea level**

This village lies in a fold of the Sierra del Caíllo, it was created by the Muslims, and traces back to 715. You can step back in time with a walk along the Roman road which crosses from Villaluenga to Ubrique

**Benamahoma: population 429, 500m above sea level.**

Built in the foothills of the Sierra del Pinar, it lies within the municipality of Grazalema and comes under its jurisdiction. It contains the 'Fuente de Nacimiento' a natural spring that gives rise to the river Majaceite that flows towards El Bosque. On its banks is the Water Museum 'Eco-museum del Agua' which demonstrates how important water power has been in the growth of this area. Creating olive oil and flour are the most obvious, but water powered mills were also used in making dough for bread, in carpentry and processing (fulling) wool for the textile industry.

**El Bosque: population 2,117 (2011), 298 m above sea level**

A more modern town, as the area was a gift from the Catholic Monarchs to Don Rodrigo Ponce de León, Marquis of Cádiz. After taking control of the Sierras de Cádiz from the Muslims he went on to be commander in chief of the war at Granada. With the Marquis came a large entourage which required extra accommodation, and so the hamlet grew. In 1815 King Ferdinand VII granted them the title of a town, due to the heroic behaviour of the population during the French occupation.

The Rio Majaciete runs beside the village, making use of this fresh torrent of water is the most southern trout farm in Europe and the Molino de Abajo; a water powered flour mill and bakery museum.

**Grazalema: population 2,206 (2011), 812m above sea level.**

Situated in a mountain cleft below the impressive peak named Peñon Grande. The original part of the village was built during the Muslim era, with the upper parts extending during the economical growth of the 18th and 19th centuries. This village gives its name to the surrounding natural park, Parque Natural de la Sierra de Grazalema, the heart of which was declared a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 1977 to protect the wealth of fauna and flora, especially the endemic Spanish Fir tree (*Abies pinsapo*) and a larger area was designated as Natural Park in 1984 by the Junta de Andalucía.

**Prado del Rey: population 5,941 (2011), 440 m above sea level**

Located on the outer edge of the mountain range this village was created in the 18th c as a way to increase the population of this area in Andalucía. Land was given to families in the locality and later to those from the north to consolidate the re-population. There were Neolithic and bronze age artefacts showing signs of earlier settlements, although the most famous is the nearby Roman town of Iptuci, which is not open to visitors.



The design of the town layout reflects its more recent creation with a grid of streets laid around a central square. It grew economically through wine production in the 19th c and more recently by making leather wear and furniture.

**Setenil de las Bodegas: population 2,951 (2011), 640 m above sea level**

The original castle was built in the 12th c by the Muslims. It is situated on a bluff above this unusual village. Whereas most villages here are built on the mountainside, much of Setenil is built literally into the curves of a river gorge. Many of the houses take advantage of an overhanging rock ledge, simply building a front wall which encloses the natural caverns behind.

This site was considered strategic in the war to over-throw the Muslim power. The first attempt in 1407 failed and it is said that the origin of the town's name reflects seven failed attacks 'septem nihil'. Finally being taken by the Catholic Monarchs in 1484, practically destroying the castle to gain control. 'Bodegas' refers to wineries but the infamous phylloxera virus devastated

vines in the Cádiz and Málaga area around the 1870's.

**Ubrique: population 16,873 (2011), 330 m above sea level**

Settlement in the Ubrique area has been traced back to the Palaeolithic times and there is also evidence of Ibero or pre-Roman settlement. The Roman road still visible today would have connected Ubrique with Acinipo. Along with many other mountain villages, Ubrique was conquered by the soldiers of the Catholic Monarchs in 1485.

In the early 19th century, the villagers fought valiantly against the French occupation lead by Napoleon and many of their names are still remembered by local historians. During this time much of the area's finest architecture was burned along with archives dating back to the 15th century. It was in the 17th century that the first leather factories were set up, a craft for which the village has gained world fame.



**Villaluenga del Rosario: population 485 (2011), 858 m above sea level**, making it the highest in the province of Cádiz.

Founded by the Muslims in 716 and taken by the Christian Monarchs in 1485. It is built on the rugged slopes of an enclosed valley and dominated by the vertical cliffs of the Sierra del Caillo.

The bullring was built in the 18th C and is the oldest in the province. It is an unusual design, being polygonal rather than circular in shape and the seating is made from the local stone. The 'Sima de Villaluenga' is a sink hole just below the village. There is a sign-posted walk to this rocky, vertical cavern. The initial drop is 60m, and water travelling through the cave system surfaces at Ubrique. This valley is very popular with cavers.

**Zahara de la Sierra: population 1,522 (2011), 500 m above sea level**

The castle was built in the 13th Century by the Muslims and rebuilt in the 14th Century. It played a vital role in the conquests and reconquests which took place between 1407 and 1483. It is perched on a hill in a strategic position between Seville and Ronda, on what was the western border of the last Muslim Kingdom in the Peninsula. The views out



from the tower are a worthwhile reward after a steep ascent. On the rock above the village, inside the interpretation centre, are the remains from an Iberian cistern, a Roman cistern, a Christian church from the first conquest in 1407, which was replaced by a Mosque and on top of all of those a Christian church which fell into disrepair.

**We hope that this brief printable guide has helped you to get the most out of your visit to Ronda and the Sierra de Grazalema. All this information is available on our websites [www.wildsideholidays.com](http://www.wildsideholidays.com) and [www.rondatoday.com](http://www.rondatoday.com). Please feel free to contact us at anytime ([Clive@rondatoday.com](mailto:Clive@rondatoday.com)) if you need any further help...**

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Best regards

Clive Muir

Grazalema, Andalucia, Spain