

Short walking break in the Sierra de Arcena

- Stunning scenery and charming villages
- All transport included
- Carefully planned itinerary
- Two full days independent walking
- Full route notes, diagrams and topographic map provided.
- Back-up and vehicle support, as well as advice and recommendations
- Three nights in Posada del Castaño
- Option of additional night(s) in Seville

This three night break is offered by Posada del Castaño - a recently converted village guesthouse in a beautiful mountain region of south-west Spain. For more details about the Posada del Castaño see: www.posadadelcastano.com

The trip is ideal for couples or small groups of friends who enjoy exploring traditional, out of the way areas. The itinerary starts and ends in Seville, though pick ups can be made by special arrangement from other airports in the region such as Jerez, Faro, Beja or Malaga. Details of the itinerary are as follows...

Day 1 – Arrival and transfer to Posada del Castaño

You'll be met on arrival in Seville and taken directly to the mountains and to your base in the tiny village of Castaño del Robledo. The Sierra de Arcena lies just 1½ hrs to the north-west of Seville but might easily be in a different country. After you've had time to settle in to the charming surroundings of the Posada you can get to know a little of Castaño del Robledo – perhaps with the help of Craig or Sasha – and once back in the Posada you'll sit down to a 3-course dinner - a delicious first foray into the region's culinary delights. *Overnight Posada del Castaño*

Day 2 - Walk to Linares via Alájar and the Peña de Arias Montano. Visit Arcena. (4 hrs walking + stops)

After breakfast you'll be provided with picnic lunches then climb steadily out of the village on an ancient cobbled mule trail. Crossing the hills you'll be treated to spectacular views southwards with the historic Rio Tinto mines in the distance. Later the trail descends sharply to the Peña de Arias Montano - an important place of pilgrimage offering fantastic views over the village of Alájar and the tree-clad hills beyond. After admiring the views and perhaps visiting the cliff-top church you'll descend further to wander the cobbled street of the Alájar. There'll be time for a drink in one of the bars before taking the track to Linares - another gem of a 'Serrano' village whose plaza doubles as a bull ring. After exploring the quaint corners of this sleepy Andalucian outpost you'll board the local bus for the last 7km to Arcena. Here you can visit the famous caves and explore the ruined hilltop castle. There are several restaurants where you can dine this evening (not included) and later you'll be brought back to the Posada by taxi. *Overnight Posada del Castaño*

Accommodation On The Trip

Your accommodation will be in a recently renovated guesthouse in the charming village of Castaño del Robledo, in the Natural Park of the Sierra de Arcena. The guesthouse retains all the original rustic character and rural charm that typifies this delightful region. From the rustic terracotta floor tiles to the age old, chestnut roof beams, the house blends both charm and practicality. In addition to en-suite double rooms the house boasts lounges, a dining room and a terrace overlooking a traditional cobbled patio.

How Tough Is The Walking?

Ascents/descents: Whilst the walks in the Sierra are almost never on the flat, the rolling nature of the Arcena range is such that steep climbs and descents are few. Castaño del Robledo is the highest village in the range while Almonaster, and particularly Linares, are significantly lower so your walks are predominantly downhill except for the one major obstacle that is the peak of the 'Cerro San Cristobal' en route to Almonaster. Here there is a steep ascent of around 500m along a dirt track. However, even this is optional as your route notes also offer an alternative route around the hill.

Terrain: Mostly you'll be walking on broad dirt tracks, old cobbled mule trails or narrower footpaths. Dirt tracks make for easy walking and involve little effort in placing your feet. The cobbled trails vary in their state of repair from level stone flags with well defined steps, to uneven jumbles of large boulders. Footpaths can be rocky and have loose stones underfoot but are generally easy to follow and have firm footing. Very occasionally footpaths may be ill defined for short distances or, depending on the time of year, may have some vegetation (like brambles) over-hanging the trail in a few places. Your route notes however, will keep you on the right path on such occasions.

Obstacles: The routes used on this itinerary avoid the need to climb any walls or fences or cross any significant water courses. The paths used are designated walking routes within the Natural Park and are often way-marked. In general this itinerary is well within the capability of anyone who takes occasional long walks in the countryside.

Day 3 - Castaño del Robledo to Almonaster (5 hrs walking + stops)

Today's walk is a delightful route crossing hills to the historic village of Almonaster La Real. At first you'll climb out of the bowl of hills which surround Castaño del Robledo, then traverse a long ridge with distant views

Almonaster's Mezquita

This imposing castle and mosque has rightfully set Almonaster apart as one of the most visually dramatic villages in the sierra. The superbly well preserved mosque is truly ancient with many of the materials used in the Moorish construction coming from earlier Roman and Visigoth buildings on the same site. Uniquely, this mosque has survived whilst other similar ones were built over or destroyed by the reconquering Christians. The mihrab - the ornate alcove indicating the direction of Mecca - is easily the oldest in the entire Iberian peninsula having been built around the end of the 9th century.

westwards to the villages of Jabugo and Cortegana with its 13th century castle outlined against the horizon. Slightly to the south of this is the high peak of the Sierra's 2nd highest mountain – Cerro San Cristobal. Your route leads over this peak affording you spectacular views back to Castaño and several other villages around the Sierra. Along the way you'll see stone walled enclosures full of the prized Iberian black pigs whose delicious cured hams are famous throughout all Spain. Once on the top you'll descend (partly on ancient Roman cobbles) to the picturesque village of Almonaster, all the while enjoying marvellous views over the village with its dramatic 9th century hilltop mosque set against a backdrop of yet more

peaks and valleys stretching to the distance. Once in Almonaster, a visit to the mezquita is simply a 'must'. Although tiny, this architectural gem exudes a peaceful aura of contemplative calm with its delicate double horse-shoe arches and bubbling fountain. From Almonaster you'll return to Castaño by car so you'll have the option to dine (not included) in Almonaster or at the village restaurant in Castaño. *Overnight Posada del Castaño.*

Day 4 - Seville

After breakfast a short drive brings you to the neighbouring village of Fuenteheridos where you'll board a comfortable air-conditioned coach to Seville. As there are two buses per day you can choose to arrive in Seville at 09.05 or 18.20 (Sun; 12.00 or 18.35). The tour ends at the bus station in Seville where luggage lockers available. You're then free to enjoy the city's marvellous atmosphere and many historic attractions before continuing your onward travel.

NB: If you wish to add a night in Seville at the beginning or the end of your itinerary we will be happy to make a hotel reservation on your behalf.

Included in the trip

- All transport from/to Seville
- Local transport in the sierra
- Accommodation throughout the trip
- All breakfasts throughout the trip
- Two picnic lunches
- One evening meal
- Route notes and topographic map

Not Included in the trip

- Flights to/from Seville
- Lunch on day of arrival & departure
- Two evening meals
- Entrance fees to monuments and museums
- Airport taxes
- Accommodation in Seville
- Transfer out from Seville city to airport

Rates:

The price for the trip in 2012 is **199 euros per person** based on minimum two people who share a room. There is a single supplement of 50 Euros for those requiring a single room throughout the trip.

Bookings can be made for any dates (subject to availability) and couples or groups of up to 16 people can be accommodated. Group discounts apply for 6 or more people - the bigger the group the bigger the discount. Please contact Posada del Castaño for details.

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