



# **Welcome Pack Cueva Geco**

**CAVEHOLIDAYSANDALUCIA.COM**

## Welcome Pack Geco

### Cuevas Geco

Welcome to Cuevas Geco named after the Gekko that decided to reside in this cave before the renovations began, fortunately he no longer lives here but escaped to the great outdoors in the campo across the way.

### Cave living

Spain has thousands of modern-day “cave-dwellers” who call these literal holes in the wall their home. From Guadix to Galera and all across the Altiplano area, there are some incredibly beautiful houses carved out of the Andalucian mountainous rocks although there are many other areas throughout Spain which also advertise cave living as a viable option.

Most of these regions have long histories in terms of cave settlement, some which can trace their early days to Arab Spain, over 500 years ago. In fact, cave dwelling has been a tradition in North Africa for over 1000 years. People in these regions have become experts in all facets of cave construction with many people having generations of expertise within their family.

So what makes living in a cave so attractive? Well, first of all, it has to be said that cave-dwelling is not for everyone. Cave communities tend to be in small villages where stimulating entertainment might be difficult to find. It is definitely a rural lifestyle.

However, cave houses offer a number of distinct advantages. Damp, dark, cluttered, and claustrophobic areas they are not. Certain cave dwellings can have 8 or more bedrooms and gigantic living space as well.

Cave houses are also easier to heat in the winter and cool in the summer. Being constructed in stone, their temperature does not reflect the sometimes violent temperature changes can occur in Andalucian. In fact, the average ambient

temperature usually stays around 20 degrees Celsius. While the weather outside does its thing, cave homes stay stable.

As you can see in this apartment we have a digital thermometer to monitor the temperature and humidity, to ensure that the property stays cool but comfortable.

Once you stay inside our cave you will see how comfortable it is, it does not feel like you are underground or in a darkened cell, but gives the feeling of comfort and cosiness.

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## **About your Cave Apartment**

### **Cuevas Geco**

#### **Emergency procedures**

- Your cave apartment has two smoke detectors, one outside the shower room and the other in the hall way outside the twin bedroom
- There is a carbon monoxide detector above the hob in the kitchen.
- There is a fire blanket in the kitchen by the fridge.
- In case of an emergency we ask that you evacuate through the front door and congregate at the bottom of the hill by our lamp post.

## Equipment

The hob is powered by gas, the cylinder is located to the side of the hob, please can you turn this off when you are not using it. If the cylinder runs out please let us know and we will replace it for you, we always have spare cylinders. The oven is powered by electricity.

The hot water is powered by electricity from a water tank, this is on a timer switch. There should be plenty of hot water but if you feel there is not enough please let us know and we will adjust the timer.

The cave does not require central heating as it stays at a constant temperature of 18c, which is very comfortable. In the winter we provide a gas fire and extra electric heating if required.

**PLEASE DO NOT USE THE GAS HEATER IN ANY OF THE BEDROOMS, THIS IS ONLY FOR USE IN THE LIVING ROOM.**

We can provide an iron and ironing board, please ask.

There is a washing machine for your personal use outside the twin bedroom  
There is a clothes dryer outside your apartment.

We are on mains water and our tap water is safe to drink. Please ensure no sanitary products are flushed down the toilet please use the bin provided.

Caves should have good airflow so we have provided ventilation fans in each room for you to switch on if you wish, there is also one in the shower room that should be switched on when the shower is in use. Please try and leave internal doors open when you are out.

Your front door has an upper fly screen to avoid the flies coming in, it is beneficial not to leave the front door open but use the fly screen instead. We also provide a fly swot for the pesky insects!

### **Wifi**

Wifi is available and you can also receive it outside.

### **Habland-B8**

**Password - hablandA5B8**

We hope you find that your cave apartment is fully equipped, if you require anything else please let us know and we will do our best to provide it for you.

**Please like our FaceBook page Cuevas under the Andalucian Sun and feel free to rate us.**

If you haven't done so already check out our website  
<https://www.caveholidaysandalucia.com>

We have a comments book, please feel free to fill it in at the end of your visit.

## Interesting Places to Visit

### National Parks of the Altiplano

With five national parks within a 30 minutes drive, the area is characterised as one of the greatest natural heritages of Andalucia.

The region contains two national parks, Baza and Castril, and many others nearby. In a relatively short distance, we have a strong representation of Mediterranean forests, mountains, rivers, etc..

#### Sierra de Baza

Accessed from Caniles, Baza and the A-92 motorway, this area of natural beauty covers a total of 53,649 hectares. Its peaks range from 1200m to 2269m, the highest of which is the peak of Santa Bárbara.

The Park is a mixture of dense forests of pine trees, which are used for commercial forestry purposes, craggy summits, deep gorges and pastureland. There are also many other trees including oaks, chestnuts, maples, poplars and junipers.

The Sierra is home to deer, wild boar, mountain goats, badgers and birds of prey, including Golden and Bonelli's Eagles and the Egyptian Vulture. Many other species of birds can be seen and there is also a wealth of flora. It even boasts its own specie of butterfly, the Baza Butterfly.

The Narváz Visitor and Environmental Education Centre, accessed from the A-92, is a source of tourist information and includes an interesting Museum. There are number of rooms, and also wooden cabins, to stay in, a pleasant bar, which has an open fire in winter, and a well-appointed restaurant.

There are many possibilities for exploring the whole area by car, bicycle or on foot. Anyone seeking solitude can, should they wish, travel for miles, summer or winter, without seeing a soul. There are a number of way-marked walks and places of interest to see, including the sites of old copper and gold mines and abandoned farms and villages.

## **Castril Natural Park**

This lovely, dramatic and rugged limestone area has peaks over 2000m high. The whole Park has been sculpted by water and gives birth to the Río Castril which crosses the area from north to south. There are waterfalls, cave systems and verdant valleys.

The Sierra is home to many species of plants and animals. Trees include pines, holm oaks, junipers and maples. Also to be found here are mountain goats, fallow deer, wild boar and a wealth of bird life including the Golden Eagle, Peregrine Falcon and Griffon Vulture. The rivers, which contain trout and other fish, also attract many other species of birds, including kingfishers, herons and dippers.

On the edge of the village of Castril there is a Visitor Information Centre and Museum. There are a number of recreational areas and a campsite . Many beautiful walks in the Park are way-marked and are of varying grades and durations.

## **The Lakes of the Altiplano**

The area treasures some of the most beautiful reservoirs of Andalusia, different and diverse among themselves, they have become a tourist reference of the Altiplano of Granada.

### **Lake Negratín.**

The Embalse de Negratín, in the Altiplano de Granada, is one of the largest reservoirs in Europe with an approximate length of 22 km. It was created in 1984 from the river Guadiana Menor.

There are many beautiful views of the lake which can be seen from above and along its shores. The tranquil deep blue of the water is in stark contrast to the semi-desert backdrop of rust-red and ochre, deeply-eroded cliff faces. In places, pine-clad slopes descend to meet the shoreline and there are several beaches around the lake, one of which, at Cuevas del Campo, is naturist.

Even in August, the beaches are blissfully peaceful and there is a profound silence that is hard to find in the world of today.

Activities which can be enjoyed on the lake include canoeing, windsurfing, swimming and the use of pedaloes.

### **Lake Portillo**

Near Castril, its small but almost always full, highlighting the scenery. This scenic reservoir is close to the village of Castril and offers recreational areas for picnicking and swimming, as well facilities for canoeing.

### **Lake San Clemente**

The Embalse de San Clemente is another attractive large reservoir not far from the town of Huéscar. Swimming in the lake is not advisable although it is a lovely, tranquil picnic spot.

With magnificent views of the Sierra de la Sagra and Sierra de Castril.

### **Lake La Bolera**

Although not actually in the Altiplano, this beautiful reservoir is well worth a mention. It is a short drive from the village of Castril and set within the stunning Natural Park of Sierra de Cazorla. There are picnic areas as well as a restaurant and there is easy access to the water for swimming.

### **Walks and Drives**

## **Castril gorge walk**

A lovely 1hr 30mins circular walk that must have it all. It includes a dramatic, deep gorge, a tunnel, olive groves, fantastic views from the highest point in the village of Castril and a stroll through its quaint streets. <sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub> (Easy with some steep parts).

The walk begins at the Visitors Centre which is located just off the main road 200 mtrs outside the village of Castril. Here you will find an interesting museum as well as tourist information.

Walk towards the town and turn along the main street. When you reach the bar with trees and tables on its patio, turn right down a steep road. Go past the school and wind down to the bottom. You can if you wish bring your car down to this point where there is ample parking. (15/20 mins walk from Visitors Centre).

You are now at the River Castril. Walk left into and through the tree-lined park - Parque de la Arboleda Perdida - and then along the riverside until you come to a gateway. Pass through the gateway and onto the wooden walkway which runs along the wall of a narrow gorge, known as the Cerrada de Castril. The views along this walkway are stunning

Cross over the small metal suspension bridge and enter the tunnel. Walk carefully along the tunnel as, whilst it is perfectly safe, there is only just enough natural light to see your way. Two-thirds of the way along there is a viewpoint over the river - spectacular when the river is in full spate. On exiting the tunnel, walk to the steps and down to the iron bridge to cross the river.

Turn right alongside the river and left past the Alojamiento Rural "El Molino", where there is a picnic area and a garden in which there are a number of old pieces of milling machinery. Follow the narrow country road up through the olive groves, where everywhere there is the sound of running water from the old Moorish irrigation channels (acequias). Above you, through the trees on the left, you can see the white houses of the village.

Continue along this road. We were there on the first day of spring when fruit trees were coming into full blossom and the abundance of wild spring flowers were giving off their scent in the glorious warm sunshine. Idyllic!

**Huéscar - La Sagra**

## A Circular Drive

A wonderful scenic drive from Huéscar, around the peak of La Sagra and returning to Huéscar, taking in sights of great natural beauty and of historical interest. This trip takes around 3 hours, longer if you stop for lunch.

Approach Huéscar from the Cullar/Galera road. When you arrive at the town, follow the road around it in the direction of Puebla de Don Fadrique. At the "Carpintería Martínez" building on the left, turn into the town. This road is called Cuesta Mena. At the T-junction (narrow roads), turn right (one-way) and continue to the end of the road (Calle Santiago) . You are now on the edge of town where you will see a display of millstones and signs to "Las Santas" and "Piedra del Letrero".

Drive along in the direction of Las Santas (La Carretera de Las Santas). This beautiful long, straight, cypress-lined road (ideal for cyclists) passes through rolling agricultural land between hills. After a while, the road starts to wind into the pine-clad mountains of the Sierra de La Sagra and alongside the Rio Bravatas.

Soon you will arrive at a sign for the Piedra del Letrero and see a large iron cage surrounding a rocky outcrop. This is a rock shelter (abrigo) containing late Neolithic rock paintings (pinturas rupestres) . Unfortunately, damage done by visitors (some allegedly used Coca Cola to make the images more visible!) has meant that access has had to be barred to the public.

Continue along the road and, at the signs, carry on in the direction of Ermita de Las Santas. A little down the road is the area recreativa of Las Tablas. This is a beautiful wooded (pines, poplars, evergreen oaks) picnic area complete with stone tables and benches and a river meandering through. It is normally deliciously peaceful with only the sounds of the river and birds to be heard.

Further along the road you will come to where the road turns right to cross a bridge. At this point we recommend a short detour. Instead of crossing the bridge continue on to the area recreativa of Las Santas. From here the spectacular peak of La Sagra (2,381m) can be seen and can be reached from a signed unmetalled road (3 hours). Here also is to be found the hermitage of Santos Martires del Monte (Holy Martyrs of the Return to the bridge, cross it and continue to wind along for about 5 km. until you reach a T-junction. Turn left in the direction of Collados de La Sagra. You will now be driving around the magnificent mountain with its pine-covered slopes and its often snow-covered peak (winter and spring only).

At Collados de La Sagra there is an attractive hotel, bar and restaurant complex which is set in well-kept gardens and enjoys prime views of the mountain peak. The restaurant enjoys a very good reputation but may be a little expensive for those on a budget.

Almost next door is the entrance to the Observatorio La Sagra. In 2007 a new asteroid was discovered from this observatory. A little further along is the hamlet of Cortijos Nuevos, seen as a small collection of white buildings. From this whole area there are several starting points for those wishing to climb the mountain. Continue along the road and at the junction (4.5 km from the hotel), turn left towards La Losa and Huéscar. 1km down the road is Cortijo de La Losa. This area is famous for its stands of huge sequoia trees, which can be seen on both sides of the road. These giant redwoods, which were originally imported into Europe from America by the Duke of Wellington, are also known as "Mariantonias".

Continue this scenic drive along the lovely quiet road past arable land, almond trees and pine forests. At the sign for Canal de San Clemente, it is worth making another 15 minute detour. Turn right here and wind down the road to the Puente de Las Ánimas (Bridge of the Souls). This interesting and ancient double bridge over the Rio Raigadas is said to be of Roman origin. It can only be appreciated by walking down the embankment on either side of the road. Turn round here or continue on to the nearby tiny village, where there are a number of cave houses, many of which are being restored. The road peters out at the end of the village. Return to the turn-off.

Continue down the road towards Huéscar. Turn right at the Presa San Clemente turn-off. Drive the 7 km to the San Clemente dam, cross it and continue along the road. At the T-junction, turn left for Huéscar (now 15 km away). A little way down the road a spectacular river gorge can be seen to your right. Further along, also on the right and on a hill, can be seen a Moorish watchtower, the Atalaya de Campo Valentín.

Continue along this partially tree-lined road, passing the Sierra Seca on the left with La Sagra a little beyond, until you once more reach Huéscar.

**Orce - Minas de Silex Circuit**

This is a circular drive of under 30km on good, unmetalled, country roads. It starts and ends at the village of Orce and, passing through wonderful mountain scenery, it winds up to the site of ancient silex mines from which there are spectacular panoramic views.

Make your way to Orce and take the road out of the village signposted to Maria and then, on the right, to the Area Recreativa del Bosque. Note that the Minas de Silex are also signposted but, as some people have seen fit to turn some of them around, not all the signs can be trusted. Stay on the main country lane, heading into the Sierra de Orce-Maria. At about 9km from Orce you will pass through the Area Recreativa. This is a very pleasant public picnic area. Continue along the track, passing through pine woods with their abundant undergrowth of rosemary, thyme and gorse. At about 14km from Orce, turn left off the main track at the Minas de Silex sign and park your car. Here, from pine decking vantage points, you can admire wonderful views to the Sierra Nevada to the south and to the Sierra de Sagra to the north. It would appear that there were information plaques at these viewpoints but these have, unfortunately, been removed.

It is here, in the Sierra del Periate, on a hill which is around 1400m above sea level, that the prehistoric site of the Minas de Silex de la Venta is situated. Silex is a type of quartz which was mined for fashioning into tools in pre-Bronze Age times. The flint mines found here are probably 5,000 years old and are said to be the first discovered in Spain. To continue along our route, return to the main track and continue winding up through mountainous terrain to its highest point. Follow the track through lovely pine forests with the mountain peak of La Sagra visible ahead of you. In the spring months, you will eventually drive alongside fields of colourful wild spring flowers.

At about 12km from the viewpoint stop you will reach a Y-junction. Bear right and go over the crossroad. From here you continue winding down until you once more reach the village of Orce.

**Santa Barbara Summit**

## Sierra de Baza

This is an easy to moderate 1 - 1½ hr walk up to the summit of Santa Barbara (2,269m) and back in the heart of the beautiful Sierra de Baza Natural Park.

From the A92 motorway, take the turn-off for Sierra de Baza (Junction 28) and drive the 5km to the Narvaez Visitor Centre and continue on along the good unmetalled road up the mountain. Wind up the mountain, past the Area Recreativa and Refugio "La Canaleja" to the top of the pass. Shortly after a viewpoint with an information board, to the right, you will arrive at the Prados del Rey. Here you will see a turn-off to the right (near some litter bins), signposted to a Refugio. Ignore this turn-off and continue straight ahead for a few metres and look for a rough dirt track on the left. You may wish to park here and start the walk as the road is narrow and rough, although most cars would have no difficulty in continuing for the next ½km. You will then come to a small cairn marking an old miners' road on the left which leads up the mountain. Park here. This road leads to close to the summit, which is clearly marked by a white concrete post. Along this track you will see plenty of evidence of former mining activity (iron ore?). Continue on up to the summit over rough, rocky ground which you will note is covered in a variety of mountain plants.

At the summit there are fantastic views to be enjoyed over the Altiplano de Granada, including those of Cerro Jabalcon and the peak of La Sagra.

Return to the car by the same route.

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Return to the car by the same route.

## La Sagra Summit

## Mountain Walk

A fairly strenuous walk to the summit (2381m) of the spectacular peak of La Sagra.

This is an approximately 5 hour return trip and is best attempted by experienced and properly equipped hill walkers. Much of this walk is on loose rock and shale tracks.

To start this trip make your way to the Huéscar Area Recreativa of Las Santas - see Huéscar-La Sagra trip. Look for the wooden signpost on your left to "La Sagra". (It says 3hrs - ???) Drive along this track to a fork in the road. Bear right. After a while you will see a turning to the left which you ignore. Continue until the road is joined by another track coming in at a sharp angle to the left, by a fire warning sign. Take this road to the left. Ignore the next turning on the left and continue winding up, past a small construction with a wooden gate, until you reach a car parking area at the end of the road. Here you start your walk along the trail through the trees. This will eventually lead up to the summit. Take careful note of marker stones (cairns) and sticks.

## Mount Jabalcon

Standing proud at a height of 1492 metres above sea level Mount Jabalcon can be seen for miles around, not surprisingly the views from its peak present breathtaking, all encompassing vistas including the badland landscapes of the plateau, the contrasting mountainscapes, which reach as far as the Sierra Nevada, and, in the immediate vicinity, the stunning vision of Lake Negratin.

To best appreciate Mount Jabalcon it is possible to take a mountain trail, by vehicle or mountain bike, around the mountainside and up to its summit, both the circular and summit routes are signposted from the village of Zujar, the summit route leads to the Ermita de la Virgen de la Cabeza chapel, named after the patrona of the village. The Romeria de la Virgen de la Cabeza, a local fiesta celebrated at the end of April, involves the villagers taking a parade, along with the statue of the virgin, from the village to the chapel, visitors are welcome to join the elaborate procession. Zujar is reached along the A-315 to the north west of Baza town.

A popular location for outdoor pursuits, besides walking, mountain biking, and rock climbing the mountain has established and signposted launch points for

paragliding or hang gliding, strong ascending currents create ideal conditions for the sport, attracting enthusiasts all year round.

### **13thC Arab Baths -Baza**

Now open to the public, the Baños Árabes, or Arab Baths, are well worth a visit. With its hot, tepid and cold rooms it is one of the best examples of this type of building in the whole of Spain.

The Baths are situated just off the Plaza de Santiago in the old Moorish quarter of Marzuela in the town of Baza. Built in the 13thC and 14C these Baths were discovered at the end of the 19thC by the historian Gómez Moreno. In recent years the building has undergone a program of painstaking restoration and the whole edifice is protected by a concrete shell.

The Baños Árabes were finally opened to the public in July 2009.

### **Redwoods**

Stunning redwoods colonies, known as the world's tallest trees are conifers belonging to the branch of taxo days. They reach a height of 100m tall and they live for 1000 years. The colony located in the Shire of Huéscar, estate of the slab, is a prime tourist attraction. Have copies in excess of 80m tall and almost 200 years old.

### **Natural Baths**

They are in the villages of Orce and Huéscar and are considered among the best options for natural baths in Spain.

In natural waters, dont have any treatment or pollution are an excellent bathroom option, with water temperatures throughout the year between 16 ° and 19 °. Free entry.

They have a bar-restaurant and beverage stands.

### **Badlands**

Known as badlands, to understand how this landscape evolved we must go back over 100,000 years, when it began to dry up the lake that occupied the middle of this area, which were exposed to a series of fragile materials that were eroded by floodwaters. The result is this interesting steppe landscape, crisscrossed by gullies and ravines of lunar, undoubtedly one of the most striking in Europe.

### **Hot Springs**

A favoured year round attraction at the lake is the Los Baños de Zujar, an outdoor thermal mineral water pool. Situated in a slightly elevated position on the edge of the lake at the base of Mount Jabalcon. Located approximately nine kilometres from the village of Zujar by taking the Avenida de Los Baños in the direction of the lake and following the signs for baños termal. The constant temperature of the bathing water, maintained from the mountains natural hot spring, is said to have therapeutic qualities. Certainly a relaxing experience, and enhanced by the splendid setting, a visit can be completed by enjoying a meal or refreshments at the Los Baños restaurant which has both a covered and open air terrace overlooking the lake and pool. Access to the pool and the changing area is via the restaurant, where a small charge is made to help cover the cost of maintenance. Car parking is available in a designated area beside the restaurant.

### **Archeological sites**

The area around Fuente Nueva and Venta Micena has a number of interesting archaeological sites. The latter village has a dig where the alleged piece of human skull was found, known as the 'Hombre de Orce'. This fragment can now be seen in the Orce museum, which is housed in the beautiful Palacio de los Segura in the centre of the town. The find is believed to date back to man's earliest arrival in Europe. The region contained a vast prehistoric lake, and it is believed that early man made his home on its shores. The site of the dig is within walking distance of the accommodation. There is a further dig at the Barranco Leon, between the village and the town of Orce. The museum also contains the remains of a sabre tooth tiger and a mammoth, among other exhibits.

## Towns

### Caniles

Sitting on the edge of the Sierra de Baza Natural Park, Caniles is set in stunning natural countryside, surrounded by lush vegetation and offering the nature lover and photographer the chance to follow beautiful countryside walks and excursions. A walk around the little town itself is a delight, with the pretty whitewashed Andalusian houses, including some original cave houses, also typical of the region. Agriculture is the main local activity and the people live by traditional Andalusian customs and values and are known to be very welcoming to visitors. There are several excellent bars and restaurants where you can test the gastronomic delights of local produce in with time tested recipes.

Caniles was once an important and well fortified frontier town and during the Christian reconquest was known by beseiging Castillian troops to be very difficult to take. A restored Moorish watch-tower, situated on the road between Caniles and Baza, can still be seen.

In the village itself the church of Santa María y San Pedro is of cultural interest. It was built in the 16thC and 17thC on the site of the old mosque. Inside can be seen some beautiful Moorish craftsmanship produced by Mudejar artisans.

A walk around the village reveals some fine 17thC, 18thC and 19thC buildings, including the Pósito theatre and the Hermitage of San Sebastián. There are also a number of cave houses (casas cueva) in the village which add to its charm.<sup>[1]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>

### Baza

Baza town sits at an altitude of 844 metres about sea level and has a population of around 21,600; accounting for almost 50% of the overall 45,000 population of the entire region of Baza. One of the most appreciated aspects of this magical main town of Baza is the towering mountain at just 12 kilometres away, which dominates the landscape like a protective watchtower. This natural backdrop of the surrounding mountains of the Sierra de Baza and the Sierra de Castril is simply breathtaking. When taking it all in, it is hard to believe that you are a mere 107 kilometres from Granada City.

The original city of Baza was founded in the 4thC BC by the Iberians and was known as Basti. Later it was incorporated into the Roman province of Tarraco.

The archaeological site of Basti is to be found at 3km from the town centre and is of great historic importance.

A walk around Baza is well worth the effort. The areas around the remains of the Moorish Alcazaba (old fortress) and the magnificently preserved 13thC Arab Baths, with their narrow streets and quaint architecture, are of particular interest.

### **Benamaurel**

The surrounding area is alive with nature, being within very close proximity of three Natural Parks: the Sierra de Baza and the Sierra de Cazorla. Also close by is the Negratin lake and the Jabalcon hills, making this one of the most beautiful natural spots in Andalucia and indeed in Europe. There are many lovely excursions on foot, bicycle or by car in the surrounding area.

The Mayor of Benamaurel, Antonio Arredondo García, warns visitors that they may "become spellbound by the by the ancient Arabic influence" saying that "you could fall for the enchantment". The strongly contrasting sensations cannot be denied and it is well worth the risk of experiencing, not only the amazing and often surprisingly palatial cave living, but also the wonderful local gastronomy. A visit to Benamaurel is one of the few chances you will have in modern life to step back in time and enjoy the experience totally.

Although you are inland and away from the sea, there is an open air municipal swimming pool in Parque San León, which is open from June until September. Benamaurel is a traditional village where fiestas are colourful and give a real sense of rural Andalusia.

The 14thC church in the Plaza Mayor (main square) was originally built on the site an Arab mosque. The Christian reconquest of Benamaurel in 1434 has been spectacularly celebrated in the village for centuries and the annual "Moors and Christians" fiesta is today of special touristic interest.

The village and the surrounding areas are of particular interest as the majority of dwellings are cave houses (casas cueva). In the intriguing part of the old town is the old Arab quarter, known as la Alhanda, where a number of cave houses dating back to the 12thC can be seen from a spectacular cliff walk. There are also casas colgadas (hanging houses) to be seen in the village. These amazing dwellings appear to be clinging perilously from rock faces.

There are many fascinating places to see in the neighbourhood of Benamaurel including several outlying cave hamlets and the impressive Moorish cave dwellings, "Las Hafas de Arriba", located high up in the cliff faces a little distance from the village.

### **Castillejar**

At 766 metres above sea level, the stunning little village of Castillejar is one of the six Andalusian hamlets that make up the region of Huescar in the north east corner of the Province of Granada. With a population of around 2,000, this idyllic haven is tucked away and yet easily accessible at just 15 minutes off the A-92 Mediterranean autovía (motorway). It is some 120 kilometres from Granada City and just 15 kilometres from the main town of Huescar.

There are many cave houses (casas cueva) in the village and the surrounding countryside, some of which date back to Moorish times. A spectacular collection of these historic Moorish cave dwellings, dating from the 12thC, can be seen high up on the cliff banks of the river, in an area known as La Morería.

This beautiful region of contrasts is one of the prettiest and least spoilt areas in Andalusia and is well worth a visit. Castillejar was a fortress against invasion from Murcia in Moorish times gone by and still shows distinct links with its historic past. Sitting between the two rivers Guardal and Barbatas, this enclave has, over the centuries, been witness to the passing of important historic settlers of many different cultures of the Iberian Peninsula. Nowadays it is the perfect stopping off point for visitors to the nearby Natural Parks of Castril Sierra and Cazorla.

From the village there are a number of beautiful and tranquil walks to be enjoyed, along the riverside and amongst the leafy poplar plantation

### **Castril**

Castile is one of the six villages which make up the Huescar region in the Province of Granada and is about 150 kilometres from Granada City. The village is set at an altitude of 890 metres and has a population of 2,656. This idyllic countryside hamlet is situated on the edge of the Province of Jaen, bordering on the stunning natural park of Cazorla. Since 2001, Castril has been officially recognised as a place of historic interest. The steep, narrow cobbled streets, with the typical whitewashed houses are all part of the authentic Andalusian village life. Of particular interest in the general structure and decoration of the houses, is the use of Arabic tiles and wood. There are a few cafes, bars and

restaurants, where you can sample the local wine and cooking at very reasonable prices.

Although the occupation of Castril goes back to Carthaginian times, it was the Romans who first used the Peña as a base for a military camp. The village was given its name by the Romans, whose name for a military camp was "castro". During the Moorish occupation the village was fortified and given the name of "Qastalla" (Castle). In 1319 it was besieged by the Christians and changed hands on several occasions until, in 1489, it was finally conquered by the "Reyes Catolicos" (Ferdinando and Isabella). Remains of the Moorish fortifications can still be seen.

The most outstanding feature of the village is the Peña del Sagrado Corazón (Rock of the Sacred Heart), the top of which can be reached by a footpath. From here there are wonderful views of the village and its surrounding countryside.

The parish church of Nuestra Señora de Los Angeles (Our Lady of the Angels) dates back to the 16thC.

### **Galera**

The village of Galera is a natural beauty spot, which is steeped in the history of many cultures going back some 4,000 years. With a population of less than 1,500, this unspoiled village in the Granada 'Altiplano' area and is one of the six villages which makes up the Huescar region within that area. Galera has a spectacular surrounding landscape including remarkable sparkling crystal deposits, where an interior lake has dried out over the years, leaving fascinating rock formations. It is about 150 kilometres from Granada City and at an altitude of around 830 metres above sea level its geographical situation is dominated by the surrounding mountains of Sagra, Castril, Cazorla.

### **Huescar**

The small town of Huescar is known as "Cuidad de la Paz" (City of Peace). It sits at an altitude of 953 metres and has a population of less than 8,500. Its ancient traditions and folklore are kept alive and the rural lifestyle is that of the authentic Andalusian village. The natural surroundings are picturesque, with the stunning backdrop of mountain peaks and greenery.

Odd as it may sound, this municipality was officially at war with Denmark from 11th November 1809 to 11th November 1981, when a peace treaty was finally signed. It is now known as the "Ciudad de la Paz" (City of Peace).

There are many interesting buildings to be seen in the town including the impressive 16thC Colegiata de Santa María la Mayor, built in renaissance/gothic style, the 16thC Iglesia de Santiágo, a church built in gothic style on the remains of an old mosque, and the 16thC Convento de Santo Domingo, currently under restoration, which houses a beautiful Mudejar ceiling. The Gaudí-style Casa de los Penalva is also of architectural interest.

Also worth seeing in the town is the Torre de Homenaje (Tower of Homage) which was built by the Moors. Three clearly inscribed memorial stones, taken from a Roman necropolis, were used in its construction.

There is a beautiful circular drive to be enjoyed starting at the Carretera de Las Santas and skirting the mountain peak of La Sagra.

Just outside the town there is an outdoor fresh water pool where all the family can enjoy a swim and every Thursday there is a village market. Outdoor activities abound, whether it's walking in the Vidriera pine forest or taking to the Sagra Mountain tracks, the natural beauty is in abundance. For those who prefer a gentler walk, there is also the Rodriguez Penalva Municipal Park in the Avenida de Granada.

## Orce

The Andalusian village of Orce may be small, but is nevertheless of remarkable importance in the search of the first traces of mankind in Iberia, with archaeological digs uncovering proof of settlers there from millions of years ago. In the far north of the Granada Province and bordering onto the Province of Almeria, the village of Orce is a also true discovery for anyone in search of real Andalusia. It is 926 meters above sea level and has a population of just over 1,400. At just 150 kilometres from the City of Granada, it is easily accessible by road. Orce is one of the six main villages of the region of Huescar (pronounced 'Wescar'). This whole area, together with the neighbouring region of Baza is known as the Altiplano de Granada.

## Markets

Most villages hold a market once a week, and while you are here it is well worth a visit to one of these markets, they are very traditional, interesting and the fresh produce you get is of great quality.

Monday	Cullar, Pozo Alcon
Tuesday	Orce, Cuevas del campo, Freila, Caniles
Wednesday	Baza. Galera, Gorafe
Thursday	Huescar, Campocamara
Friday	Puebla Don Fadrique, Castril.
Saturday	Castillejar, Velez Rubio, Guadix. Cortes de Baza, Zujar
Sunday	Benamaurel, Maria, Baza car boot

## Fiestas

Many ancient traditions and fiestas are celebrated each year in the villages scattered over the El Altiplano area. The organizing of religious and local events usually involves everyone in the village and visitors are made welcome. One of the most popular festivals is the 'Fiesta del Cascamorras' which takes place around the 6 - 8th September in the streets of the village of Baza. (it is also celebrated in the nearby town of Guadix). The celebrations are apparently based around the discovery of the 'Virgen de la Piedad' when excavations were going on back in 1490 to restore the church of La Merced. Villagers taking part in this fiesta have painted faces and chase one villager who is dressed in a brightly coloured of Harlequin outfit. The throwing of water seems to have become incorporated in the fun, which - while it helps to cool everyone down in the heat of early September, it also adds to the hilarity when all the painted faces start to run.

Easter celebrations in all the villages are taken seriously and are well worth seeing. In the heat of August, many of the villages celebrate a summer fair, when visitors can sample local wines and typical dishes, while watching or joining in the local dancing.

Let us know if you are interested in visiting a fiesta and we will see what is available during your stay.

## Directions

### Lake Negratin

#### Hot Springs at Zujar

At the end of our road turn right, head towards Baza passing Puente Arriba and Benamaurel.

When you reach the signs for Baza take the turning on to the motorway towards Granada.

On the motorway take the turning signposted Zujar. Go straight over 2 roundabouts, drive through Zujar village, keep driving passing lots of olives trees and not much else. When you reach the lake follow the road round to the right passing a hotel set back on the right. You will then reach on the left hand side overlooking the lake Baños de Zujar (hot springs,) its a round white building with a restaurant and the hot springs are below. You pay 2€ (last time we went) in the bar to enter the hot springs.

#### Freila Beach and Restaurant

At the end of our road turn right, head towards Baza passing Puente Arriba and Benamaurel.

When you reach the signs for Baza take the turning on to the motorway towards Granada.

On the motorway take the turning signposted Zujar.

Go left at the roundabout signposted Freila, follow the road to Freila, at Freila there is a signpost on the right - area recreational, take that turning. This road leads you all the way to Freila beach passing half built houses and a campsite. Nice beach and good restaurant.

## Castril and Gorge walk

At the end of our road turn left, 5 minutes down the road take the turning on left toward Los Olivos. Pass through Los Olivos, keep driving until you get to a crossroads (cemetery in front) turn left, keep driving until you reach a T Junction - turn right towards Almontaras, drive through Almontaras, keep driving until you reach not the T junction turn left towards Castril. Follow the windy road down to Castril. you can park at the top of the village explore the village and walk down to the gorge, or keep driving and park at the bottom where the gorge is - lovely walk along the gorge with a tunnel and swing bridge and a restaurant at the end. Nice lake nearby with a big dam called Lake Portillo.

## Cueva del Agua - Tiscar

Caves and waterfalls in a beautiful location, about 1 hour and 15 minutes away.

## Other lakes to visit

Lake Bolera - beautiful lake with a restaurant.

Lake San Clemente - on the way to La Sagra mountain (second highest peak in Andalucia). Good restaurant at the base of La Sagra called Los Collados. Lake Portillo - just after Castril

## Other interesting villages.

Galera - white washed pretty cave village with neolithic tombs outside and a good museum.

Orce - has a castle with seven towers, archeological sites nearby at Fuente Nueva and on the way up to Orce - archeological museum in Orce. Velez Blanco - one hour drive passing though Orce and Maria and beautiful mountains. lovely village with a stunning castle at the top.

many other villages to explore too

Huescar - nice town with beautiful buildings and a great market on a Thursday Baza - larger town with interesting squares and shops in the centre.