

Route of the Almoravids and Almohads



This Route evokes the long and profound relationship between two continents, barely separated by a narrow strip of sea. This fascinating journey revolves around the strategic crossroads, where Africa and Europe face each other, sharing the foundations of the mythical Pillars of Hercules. The old people, with expressive sensitivity, call this region "The Two Banks" due to their proximity and mutual dependence. It is a region linked by the dense network of paths that crossed and converged, multiplying the ties between men. The essence of this fruitful contact has survived: a common cultural and artistic source and a special art of living. What better way to discover and enjoy it but to follow the path taken by the Almoravids and Almohads, the people from the Sahara, who, between the 11th and 12th centuries moulded the Western Maghreb and al-Andalus into a huge empire. Following its African prelude, this cultural route commences in Tarifa, which together with Algeciras, are the starting points of the trip. The journey reveals the irresistible charms of the coast, the cultivated plains and the sierras of Cadiz and Malaga, with villages and towns which preserve the most pure Andalusian charm. Breathtaking landscapes, legendary towns and castles, monuments, traditions, along with the warm hospitality of its people, are the ingredients of this irresistible itinerary, which traverses valleys and mountains and ends in the final magical destination of Granada.

The legacy of al-Andalus

The Iberian Peninsula went through one of the most privileged periods in its history during the Muslim era, which resulted in a brilliant civilization. During this time, Andalusia became the cultural centre of Europe and the link between East and West.

The Routes of "El legado andalusí" go through those paths which connected the kingdom of Granada with the rest of al-Andalus in the past. Along this itinerary travellers have the possibility of enjoying wonderful landscapes on a quiet journey, tasting exquisite dishes and giving free rein to their imagination by turning past events into a present experience.

Corral del Carbón, Granada, Spain.
Headquarters of El legado andalusí Andalusian Public Foundation.



- Nature
- Historical Fountain
- Panoramic viewpoint
- Horse
- Castle of al-Andalus
- Historical monument
- Medieval Castle
- Wine cellar
- Legendary site
- Church
- Arab bath
- Museum
- Historical place
- Port

ALMORAVIDS AND ALMOHADS

The name of this route makes reference to the two movements which forged great empires in North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula between the 11th and 13th centuries. From the Western Sahara and Marrakech, the capital founded in 1070, the Almoravids created a vast dominion, which stretched from Senegal to the kingdoms of al-Andalus. Their successors and rivals, the Almohads, or "The Unitarians", came from the Atlas mountains. Following a great conflict in the middle of the 12th century, the Almohads took control of Marrakech and consolidated their power in the lands of the Maghreb and the Peninsula.

THE WHITE VILLAGES

The group of small towns and whitewashed villages that stand out in the beautiful countryside of the sierras between Arcos and Ronda, the so-called *Pueblos Blancos* (White Villages), constitute an essential section of this route. Their romantic appearance, clustered around castles and churches and dominating the horizon from cliff tops and hilltops, or sheltered under imposing mountains, impress and captivate the traveller. The same feeling occurs when the visitor enters the charming maze of the old town centers, with winding streets that still retain all the essence of medieval times and the atmosphere of an architecture which embodies the ideal of typically Andalusian construction: sober elegant façades, whitewashed walls, empty gaps enclosed by wrought iron grills, roofs of red tiles and, inside, patios with wells, flowerpots and plants that are a haven of intimacy. Arcos, Zahara de la Sierra, Grazalema, Olvera, Setenil de las Bodegas and a whole bunch of villages, make up one of the most attractive itineraries of popular architecture that can be followed in Andalusia.



ITINERARIES AND DISTANCES

The route covers a stretch of about 300 to 450 kilometers between Algeciras and Granada, depending on the options of path chosen. From Algeciras and Tarifa a first branch goes directly to Ronda through the *sierranía*, and passing through Castellar, Jimena de la Frontera, Gaucín and the villages located in the Genal river valley, along the A-369 road. The western branch of the route, on the other hand, covers longer distances. It passes through Alcalá de los Gazules and Medina Sidonia, connected by the A-381 and goes on to Cadiz, El Puerto de Santa María and Jerez. From here it follows the A-382 towards Arcos and the White Villages of Cadiz: Grazalema, Zahara, Algodonales, Olvera, Setenil, until it reaches Ronda. The route then rises up the A-367 to Teba and Campillos, where it joins the N-351 and the C-340 towards Vélez-Málaga. After the route along the villages in the province of Granada, we shall arrive at our goal: Granada

HISTORY AND ARCHITECTURE

TOWNS, VILLAGES AND CASTLES

The traces of the legacy of al-Andalus become patent along every step of the road, in the compact appearance of the villages, in their defensive and monumental construction and in their traditional architecture; a panorama, which later on was enriched in artistic forms and constructions, which ranged from Mudejar to Baroque, following the Christian conquest. The Almoravids, like their successors at the head of the Hispano-Muslim empire, the Almohads, were skillful constructors, who notably promoted the enlargement of the Andalusian towns, endowing them with extensive walls, *alcazabas* (fortresses) and other buildings. The period covering the 12th to the 15th centuries was equally decisive, when these lands constituted the western frontier of the Kingdom of Granada, until its fall in 1492. It was then, either on the initiative of the Muslims or the Christians, that the villages along the route acquired the unmistakable and legendary medieval appearance which characterizes them, with tightly grouped centers, surrounded by walls, sheltered by defiant castles and fortresses and connected by a network of fortified towers and watchtowers.



The Route of the Almoravids and Almohads connects the coast and the villages of the Straits with Granada via Cadiz, Jerez and Ronda, following the main means of communication of the network that linked the north of Africa and the south of al-Andalus. The stretch that runs through the provinces of Cadiz, Malaga and Granada, splits into two branches in Algeciras, which converges in Ronda, from where a single final section goes on to Granada. Today the journey follows a modern network of roads (A-369, A-381, A-382, A-92, A-367, N-331 and A-359).

When considering the altitudes on the route, there is a marked contrast in the course of the journey. The first part runs through villages situated at sea level: Algeciras, Cadiz, El Puerto and in slightly elevated sections of the plains like Alcalá, Medina and Arcos, at altitudes between 100 and 300 m. Further on, the large part of the journey runs through mountainous and highland areas between 500 and 800 m. In altitude, Ronda and Granada are over 700 m. The highest point in the journey is the town of Grazalema, boxed in by mountains at 812 m.



TRADITION

GASTRONOMY

This route could be described as a full gastronomic tour through the provinces of Cadiz, Malaga and Granada, given the variety and quality of products and recipes that can be found all along these itineraries. The Atlantic coast of Cadiz offers delicious and fresh fish and shellfish, while the countryside provides a delight for the palate in its wines from Jerez, along with *gaspachos*, thick soups and other specialities. From the sierras come cured pork products of all kinds, as well as game, casseroles and stews cooked with aromatic herbs, while the plains in the interior round Antequera and Granada, offer vegetables, fruit and olive oil of the highest quality, providing the basis for a rich country cuisine. Special mention has to be made of the wide range of sweets, full of references to al-Andalus, such as *pestiños*, *amarguillos*, *alfajores* and an on-going list of sweets that titillate the taste buds.



HANDICRAFTS

The arts and crafts traditions are still going strong today in the countryside, some inherited directly from the urban guilds, others connected with the agricultural and ranching background so predominant in this area. The diversity of products ranges from high quality book-binding to musical instruments in the workshops of Cadiz and Granada; inlaid woodwork and furniture in Cadiz, Jerez or Ronda; fine wrought iron and metal work in Ronda or Granada. Pottery and ceramics are present everywhere; textiles in Grazalema, where its well-known woolen blankets are still woven on age-old looms; leather goods, with the principal centers of production in the Sierra de Cádiz; carved woodwork and barrel making, objects made from vegetable fibers and other crafts, like saddle-making, which are all witness to deep popular roots.



FIESTAS AND FESTIVALS

The calendar of festivities along the route is very tight. The Carnival, which has its epicenter in Cadiz, marks the end of winter. In spring, a whole series of events take place: Holy Week with its processions, the first fairs like the Horse Fair in Jerez, the pilgrimages and the Corpus Christi festivities, which precede the endless succession of ferias and fiestas in summer, amongst which there are various festivals of Moors and Christians. Flamenco, which has its most genuine roots here, is present in all these festivals.

ANDALUSIA IN CLOSE-UP

It is not by chance that many Spanish and foreign travellers think that the different stages covered by this route reflect the essential traits of the image of Andalusia, as if in a mirror: splendid vestiges of a Muslim past, which flourish from Algeciras to Ronda and Granada. Towns and fortifications swathed in chivalrous romances, unusually vibrant and dramatic landscapes, the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Cadiz, in contrast to the rustic authenticity of the villages in the sierras. The ubiquitous presence of flamenco as the deepest example of popular expression, and, finally, the importance and interest incited by the horse and the fighting bull, protagonists in so many festivals and places in these lands.



Route of Almoravids and Almohads

From Algeciras to Granada, passing through Cadiz, Jerez, Ronda and Vélez-Málaga

Cultural Route of the Council of Europe



Information Points

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