

Serrania de Ronda and White Villages

Inland from the over-development of the Costa del Sol and between the limestone massifs of the Natural parks of the Sierra de las Nieves and the Sierra de Grazalema lies an area of outstanding natural beauty and rightly famous for its 'pueblos blancos' - or white villages – villages of Moorish origins which occupy spectacular positions perched above the deep valleys of the Genal and Guadiaro rivers.

These villages are connected by a network of ancient pathways which crisscross the river valleys and make the region a walkers paradise. Although the paths are generally in good condition and easier to follow than many in Spain, this is not to be classified as gentle walking – the mountains ridges which separate the river valleys are barely lower than those in the surrounding natural parks, while the river valleys are deep and the white villages are perched high above the valleys. A days walk connecting a few of the villages will often involve ascents/descents in excess of 1000m.

The region is dominated by the valleys of the Genal and Guadiaro rivers. The Genal is notable for its changing moods – the upper regions are circled by bare but rounded mountain tops, which give way to area of chestnut plantations – spectacular when in their autumnal colours – and, further downstream, deeply wooded with cork and holm oaks. The Guadiaro is more open, with arable lands in the river valley floors but bounded on the western sides by the severe and rocky peaks of the Sierra de Libar. Common to both are the white villages, each with their own history and traditions, located in dramatic and strategically important positions and offering lodging and needed refreshment to the walker.

At the head of the whole region lies the town of Ronda. Generally regarded as the "capital" of the Serrania – it is on most tourists lists as a must-visit, for its spectacular setting spanning a deep gorge, for its Roman and Moorish history and for its rich bull-fighting traditions (the bullring is considered the oldest in Spain).

Outline Itinerary

Day 1.

Arrive in Ronda, in time for an afternoon exploring the town, and the gorge.

Day 2

We leave Ronda through the old town to head south and up over the Cerro de Canalizo and over the ridge which separates Ronda from the upper Genal valley, rising up to a level of over 1200m. We drop down to the village of Cartajima, the highest in the Serrania de Ronda, on the way enjoying the splendid views down the Genal valley in front of us and across to the Sierra de las Nieves to our left.. We pass through the village and continue to the south, crossing the arroyo blanco (white stream) before climbing over a small ridge and dropping down to the village of Juzcar. (14 kms, 600m ascent).

Day 3

We have a choice of routes from Juzcar to Jubrique. The first takes us through the village of Farajan, down to cross the Rio Genal and then climbs gently but steadily up to the Puerto del Colmenar and then drops gently down to Jubrique (17 kms, 600m ascent) .The second option is a higher level route, crossing the Rio Genal at Vega Larga and then climbing to go around the base of Monte Jardon, ascending to over 1000m in the process.. We end the day in Jubrique, a very pretty village built on a steep hillside overlooking the river Monardilla (a tributary of the Genal) (21 km, 1000m ascent)

Day 4

We drop down from Jubrique to cross the river Monardilla and then climb and skirt around a ridge to the village of Genalgaucil. This is regarded by many as the prettiest white village of all and has become something of an artists colony – with sculptures on every street corner. It is worth spending a while exploring the village before continuing on to Benarraba, crossing the river Genal again in the process. From Benarraba we drop down to cross the Infiernillo stream before gently ascending up to the village of Algotocin (13 kms, 900m ascent).

Day 5

We follow a small path down from Algotocin to cross the Benajumaz stream and pick up a broad track and then path through the oak trees to Benalauria, another very pretty village with splendid views back across the Genal valley. We climb up from Benalauria across a pass at over 1000m, just below the Peñon de Benadalid, and then descend steadily down to the Guadiaro river valley at Estacion Cortes – a satellite village situated alongside the railway line and river some 2 km below the main township of Cortes de la Frontera. (12 kms, 750m ascent)

Day 6

A longish but easy day following the Guadiaro valley upstream, past the village of Jimera de Libar to reach Estacion Benaolan (another satellite village below the main village of Benaolan.). (19 km, 200m ascent).

Day 7

A choice of circular routes - for those that are pining to ascend a summit, we will climb to the summit of Ventana (1300m) and return via the pretty white village of Montejaque and visit the Cueva del Gato – a spectacular cave exit where the river Guadares exits after being underground for some 6 km. (17 km, 1000m ascent) or we will do a circuit to visit both the Cueva del Gato and Hundidero caves (the start of the same cave system. (15km, 500m ascent).