

The definitive guide to walking in the Sierras and Natural Parks of Western Andalucia

Our area covers what is often loosely-termed the Serrania de Ronda, starting in the west from the Natural Park of Sierra de Grazalema to, in the east, the Natural Park of Sierra de las Nieves. In between lie the karst limestone ridges of the Sierra de Libar and the beautiful valleys of the rivers Guadiaro and Genal, while to the south we find the oak-wooded forests of the Natural Park of Los Alcornocales.

In addition to its mountainous and varied landscape it is an area rich in history and local traditions, well-known for its pueblos blancos, or white villages, of which there are over 30. These villages, of Moorish origins, often occupy spectacular settings perched high above the river valleys. Their seemingly inhospitable locations were born in times of conflict, but most developed their own traditions and industries and are now seeing a new dawn with the onset of rural tourism.

At the centre of the whole region is the historic town of Ronda. Perched on a plateau above spectacular cliffs, this is truly the capital of the Serrania. The dramatic gorge which splits the town in two is spanned by the famous 'new' bridge, built in the 18th century. The town's history, from Roman and Moorish origins, through to its rich bull-fighting traditions – the bullring claims to be the oldest in Spain, have long made Ronda a revered destination for writers and artists.

The walking in the area is as varied as the landscapes. In the rocky crags, mountain ridges, gorges and wooded river valleys are to be found a network of ancient routes, used over the centuries by drovers and smugglers. Many are little used today, and few are marked on maps, but if you know where to look....

All this is just an hour away from the bustle and over-development of the Costa del Sol, but it feels like a different world. The real Spain.