

Wild Spain - La Montana Palentina

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 Fly London & transfer to Cordovilla

Day 2/7 The Palentian Mountains

Day 8 Return Santander; fly London

Departs

June

Focus

Birds, plants, butterflies

Grading

A/B. Some longer optional walks sometimes involving substantial altitude gain, but not generally over difficult terrain

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code ESP18) or brochure

Highlights

- Enjoy a truly undeveloped corner of rural Spain, & its natural history
- A host of raptors including Golden Eagle and Egyptian Vulture
- Tino and Rosa's charming rural cottages are our base
- Enjoy Rosa's hearty local cuisine & wines
- Endemic wild flowers & a great array of butterflies
- Excellent walking opportunities



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NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Introduction

There still remain corners of rural Spain, far from the reality of this fast developing and increasingly urban-dwelling country, that have been forgotten by time, largely abandoned by all but the older generation, and which are being reclaimed by a wildlife no longer so persecuted by man. The Montaña Palentina – the Palentian Mountains – is one such place: a wild, unpopulated region of high and chilly ridges, rounded summits, sweeping valleys and magnificent panoramic vistas extending southwards to the great plains of Castile and Leon. Nestling in the shadow of northern Spain's Cordillera Cantábrica, not far from the jagged limestone peaks of the Picos de Europa, the Palentian Mountains are dominated by the majestic Sierra de Peña Labra, essentially a high mountain ridge boasting a handful of 2,000-metre summits, amongst them Valdecebollas (2,136m) and Pico Tres Mares (2,175m) – Peak of the Three Seas. A raindrop falling on the latter could, in theory, end up in any one of the Bay of Biscay, the Atlantic or the Mediterranean, such is the peculiar hydro-geographical jigsaw that places this mountain at the source of such mighty watercourses as the Ebro and the Duero.

The ancient Palencian villages of the region are largely deserted, with hardly an occupied house in each. For this reason, so too are the Palentian Mountains... left for reclamation by Iberian Wolves, Brown Bears, Wild Boar, and numerous Chamois, Red Deer and Roe Deer, not to mention a host of smaller mammals such as Iberian and Broom Hare, Beech Marten, Pine Marten, Wildcat and the elusive Genet.

Day 1

Fly Santander, transfer to Cordovilla de Aguilar

We usually depart London Stansted on a Ryanair flight direct to Santander on Spain's north coast. On arrival, our local guide Tino will be waiting to collect us before driving south for an hour and a half or so to the small town of Aguilar de Campo. Here we turn off and head up into the hills. Our base for this weeklong exploration of this little-known mountain wildlife haven is in a picturesque village. Here Tino and his wife Rosa have sympathetically restored three terraced farm cottages in a remote and tumbledown hamlet. This evening, we will settle in to our accommodation where Rosa will prepare the first of many tasty meals for us.

Days 2-7

Cordovilla de Aguilar

The cottages are very much central to our daily outings, with the majority of each day spent on foot, either walking from our base, or in quiet locations accessed by 4x4. A range of habitats can be found in close proximity, with a full suite of raptors present, including resident Golden Eagles and Peregrines and both Griffon and Egyptian Vultures. Middle-spotted Woodpecker breeds here, possibly being



Griffon Vultures

easier to see here than throughout much of the rest of its range.

The cottages lie on the doorstep of a truly wild landscape, comprising high mountain ridges rich in alpine flora, jagged crags and cliffs, and vast oak and beech forests which support a high percentage of the endangered eastern population of the European Brown Bear. Much-maligned, these magnificent creatures are notoriously difficult to see, roaming elusively over vast tracts of difficult terrain. Nevertheless, we do stand a small chance of a sighting if we put in the effort at dawn and dusk, when the Bears are most active. At these times, our local Spanish naturalist guides, Tino and friend Toño, a botanist and bear expert, will use their 4-wheel drive vehicles to take us to remote view-points for optional opportunities to scan from the ridges for Bears, Wolves, Wild Boar and other mammals.

Although La Montana Palentina is an ideal habitat for large carnivores such as Iberian Wolf and Brown Bear, they are difficult animals to see during the summer when daylight hours are very long. We rely here on the expert local knowledge of our guides and their detailed knowledge of territories and habits. Weather permitting, we will try to see mammals twice during the week; one very early morning (0400 wake-up) and also one evening till dusk, likely taking a picnic dinner out on to the hillsides with us.

The guides will make us feel very much at home, sharing a rich passion for, and knowledge of, these mountains... and regaling us with tales and photographs of their close encounters with both Bears and Wolves.



Parnassius Apollo

Flexibility will be the key to this tour and, whatever time we arrive back at our cottages, we can be sure that a hearty meal, prepared by Rosa, will be waiting for us on our return each day from the wilds of this forgotten corner of Europe. It will be hard to leave!

Day 8

Fly London

Today we enjoy our last breakfast in these charming cottages before beginning our drive back to Santander in time for our direct flight back to London Stansted.

Tour Grading

Grade B. This tour will suit keener walkers as we will be visiting remote spots in the mountains for different wildlife.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All food and accommodation is included in the price of this holiday.

Our accommodation comprises up to 3 old farm cottages. Please note that facilities are not en suite.

Casa Montes, the largest, has a double room, bathroom, kitchen and living space (where group meals will be had) upstairs, with 2 twin rooms and 2 full bathrooms downstairs (one for each bedroom, but not en suite). Rooms in this house will be allocated on a first come, first served basis.

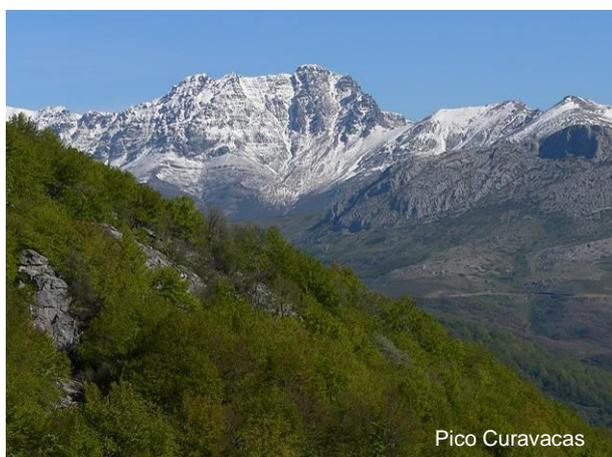
Casa del Arco has 2 bedrooms upstairs (1 twin, 1 double) with 1 bathroom, together with toilet, kitchen and living space downstairs.

Casa Gutierrez has a twin and a double upstairs with a bathroom, kitchen and living room downstairs.

You will be assigned a twin share room, unless you would prefer a single room, in which case please let us know and make your payment before departure or, preferably, on booking.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.



Pico Curavacas



The cottages