

Learn Spanish in Wild Spain - La Montana Palentina

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 Fly Santander & transfer to Cordovilla

Day 2/7 The Palentian Mountains

Day 8 Return Santander; fly London

Departs

September

Focus

Birds, mammals and Spanish!

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 ESP22) or brochure

Highlights

- Practise your Spanish with our Spanish-speaking guides
- This is a Naturetrek 'house party' in Spain – a fun & unique week!
- Tino & Rosa's charming rural cottages are our base
- Enjoy Rosa's hearty local cuisine & wines
- Raptors, Middle-spotted Woodpecker & Great Bustards
- Chance of Iberian Wolf, Brown Bear or Wildcat
- Good walking opportunities watching wildlife
- Expert guidance from Tino, & Naturetrek's Byron Palacios



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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 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 Brown Hare, Beech Marten, Pine Marten, Wildcat and the elusive Genet.

Language

Who are we aiming this tour at in terms of language ability? Anyone from good holiday Spanish to fluent(ish) speakers we hope, but enthusiasm and willingness to learn (only dropping into English when necessary) is more important than your ability. Please call us for further discussion and advice.

Day 1

Fly Santander, transfer Cordovilla de Aguilar

We depart today (times TBC) from London Stansted on a Ryanair flight direct to Santander on Spain's north coast. On arrival we will pick up a minibus and drive 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, our local guide Tino and his wife Rosa have sympathetically restored three terraced farm cottages in a remote and tumbledown hamlet. On arrival, in the late evening, we will settle in to our accommodation where Rosa will have prepared 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 our 4x4 vehicles. 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 breed here, being 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 guide, Tino, will use his 4-wheel drive vehicles to take us to remote view-points for optional opportunities to scan from the ridges for Brown Bears, Iberian Wolves, Wildcat, Wild Boar and other mammals. 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.

On one day we will drive further afield to explore the steppes and plains of the *meseta*, home to Great Bustard, Stone Curlew and other grassland birds, and a large (depending on rainfall) reed-fringed lake, which supports large numbers of ducks, geese, waders and such interesting passerines as Penduline Tit, White-spotted Bluethroat and the very local Moustached Warbler. A short distance away, in the midst of Castile and Leon's vast cereal belt, a pack of Wolves secretly flourish, unbeknown to all but a very few keen Spanish naturalists and conservationists and a barking dog in the nearby village. Although we cannot guarantee the presence of the pack (they sometimes move to a different area and are difficult to track), an atmospheric vigil at dusk may reveal the Wolves as they tentatively venture out into the stubble from their daytime home – the only spinney for miles around.

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 should have time for another excursion into the mountains for further wildlife encounters, or a repeat visit to our favourite area, or simply to visit the Paleolithic caves at the beautiful village of Puente Viesgo located on the way to the airport, before we have to leave for the drive back to Santander in time for our direct flight back to London Stansted.

Grading

Grade B. This tour will suit keener walkers and those prepared to put in long hours in sometimes cool conditions.

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.



Griffon Vultures



The cottages



Bluethroat



Parnassius Apollo