

Practise Spanish in Wild Spain - La Montana Palentina

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Santander & transfer to Perapertú Valley
Day 2/7	The Palentian Mountains & Las Loras
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!
- Raptors, Middle Spotted Woodpecker & Bluethroat
- Chance of Iberian Wolf, Brown Bear or Wildcat
- Good walking opportunities watching wildlife
- Expert guiding



Bluethroat



Romanesque architecture



Tudanca cow in the Montaña Palentina



Naturetrek

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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 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, a high mountain ridge boasting a handful of 2,000-metre summits, amongst them Pico Curavacas (2,524m) and Pico Tres Mares (2,175m) – The 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 hydrogeographical jigsaw that places this mountain at the source of such mighty watercourses as the Ebro and the Duero.



The ancient Palentian villages of the region are largely deserted, with hardly an occupied house in each. For this reason, so too are the Palentian Mountains: they are being reclaimed by Iberian Wolves, Cantabrian Brown Bears, Wild Boar, and numerous Cantabrian Chamois, Red and Roe Deer, not to mention a host of smaller mammals, such as the endemic Broom Hare, Beech and Pine Martens, and European Wildcat.

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 if needed for further discussion and advice.

Day 1

Fly Santander, transfer Perapertú Valley

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 Campoo. Our base is a nineteenth-century rural building, converted into a comfortable and modern lodge which preserves the essence of times gone by, and the original Romanesque elements that characterise it. During its restoration, it was decided to maintain the warmth of the materials: a mixture of stone, oak, brick and adobe.

Days 2-7

Montaña Palentina

The majority of each day will be spent on foot in quiet locations, accessed by our 4x4 vehicles. We will visit a range of habitats, with a full suite of raptors present, including resident Golden Eagles and Peregrines, and Griffon Vultures. Middle Spotted Woodpecker breeds here, and is easier to see here than throughout much of the rest of its range.

The small town of Aguilar de Campoo lies on the doorstep of a truly wild landscape, comprising high mountain ridges rich in alpine flora and local butterflies, jagged crags and cliffs, and vast oak and beech forests which support a high percentage of the endangered eastern population of the European (Cantabrian) 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, we will use 4x4 vehicles to take us to remote viewpoints for optimal opportunities to scan from the ridges for Brown Bears, Iberian Wolves, Wildcats, Wild Boars 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 Las Loras Geological Reserve and multiple areas within this UNESCO site, the main entrance of the fabulous Iberian *meseta*. A short distance away, in the midst of the Montaña Palentina's meadows and remote rugged ravines, a pack of Iberian Wolves secretly flourish, unbeknown to all but a very few keen Spanish naturalists and conservationists, and a barking dog in the nearby remote villages. 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 Iberian Wolves as they tentatively venture out into the stubble from their daytime home: the only spinney for miles around. The lush meadows nearby are a great place to try for the very elusive European Wildcat.



Flexibility will be the key to this tour and, whatever time we arrive back at our hotel, we can be sure that a hearty meal will be waiting for us when we 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, a repeat visit to a favourite area, or 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 A/B. This tour will suit those prepared to put in long hours in sometimes cool conditions.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All food, wine and accommodation is included in the price of this holiday. You will be assigned a double or 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.



Spanish

There will not be any formal Spanish lessons on this holiday. The tour is usually led by Tino Garcia, who speaks only a few words of English, but very clear Spanish, and Byron Palacios, who is Ecuadorian, lives in the UK, and is fully bilingual. Between them, Tino and Byron will encourage you to communicate in Spanish as much as possible, to teach you some new vocabulary, and to give you some informal tips on communication. Byron will be happy to revert to English at any point, if help/clarity is needed.

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.