

MARIBEL'S GUIDE TO SEGOVIA PROVINCE ©



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WEB RESOURCES

INFORMATION ON THE WEB

- Info Segovia - infosegovia.com (Spanish only)
- Segovia Turismo - segoviaturismo.es
- Turismo de Segovia - turismodesegovia.com
- Turismo Castilla y Leon - turismocastillayleon.com
- Turismo Real Sitio de San Ildefonso - turismorealsitiodesanildefonso.com



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SIGHTSEEING IN SEGOVIA PROVINCE

There's plenty to see here of merit, from medieval castles to Bourbon dynasty palaces to well preserved medieval villages to exquisite Romanesque churches. In fact the province has so many hidden treasures, that a visitor could easily spend 3-5 days discovering and savoring them. Segovia province is my very favorite in all of Old Castile. Below you'll find my two favorite daylong touring routes in the province, north and west of the capital.

See all your touring options on the English page of the web site of the Tourist Board of Castilla-León at www.turismocastillayleon.com

THE ROYAL ROUTE

SAN ILDEFONSO DE LA GRANJA

The Bourbon dynasty 18th century Baroque-Rococo palace of San Ildefonso de la Granja is located eleven kilometers from Segovia on the N-601. This is truly a **“must-see”** monument. Along with the Bourbon Palace of Aranjuez, it was built as a miniature Spanish Versailles, and it's easily tour-able, as it's on a small scale and feels quite homey. It was conceived as summer palace for the Bourbon kings to relax and escape the intense Castilian heat. It was commissioned in 1721 by Felipe V, grandson of Louis XIV, and Spain's first Bourbon king, and is a blend of Spanish Baroque and French Neoclassical styles. The façade, made from pink stone from Sepúlveda, is the work of the Italian architect Juvara. It was used as a summer palace for Felipe's successors until the reign of Alfonso XIII. Felipe V and wife Isabel Farnese are buried here rather than at the Royal Pantheon in El Escorial.



The interior has been lavishly restored and filled with clocks, porcelain, candelabras, mirrors, Regency and Empire furnishings. The Spanish and Flemish tapestries, in wool, silk, silver and gold, which you can see in an annex, are worth the trip alone. Many date back to the reign of Charles V. Some of these tapestries went “on tour” in ‘02 at a special exhibit at New York's Met.

Visitors can now tour the royal apartments with their stunning crystal chandeliers produced in the local royal glass factory on their own with or without an audio guide (4€) or take a bilingual guided tour (4€) that lasts under an hour.

After your visit you can wander through the majestic formal gardens and exquisite fountains at your leisure. The gardens cover 146 hectares, of which 67 are woodland. Unfortunately, the entire collection of 26 elaborately designed fountain-monuments, based on classic mythology, some 40 meter high, creations of renowned Versailles sculptors Fermín and Thierry, only are allowed to “perform” in full flow three times a year, at 5:30 pm on **May 30th, July 25th and August 25th**. But four of these fountains are turned on for exactly ten minutes at 5:30 pm on Wednesday, Saturday, Sunday and holidays in the spring (starting usually on Maundy Thursday), summer and fall if water supply permits (but in July and August the water supply may be too low to allow for their display). Admission to the fountain “water show” is 4€.

The regular admission fee for a self-tour of the Palace, guided tour (in Spanish only) of the Royal Riofrío Palace and its Hunting Museum and self tour of the gardens and fountains costs 9€. The Palace is free for children under 5. Reduced admission is given to children from 5-16 years of age and for EU citizens over 65. It is also **free** on May 18th, the International Museum Day.

Normal opening hours are 10:00 to 6:00 in winter and from April through September from 10:00 to 8:00. Check the current opening schedule at: www.patrimoniacionacional.es.

The palace is closed Mondays when only the gardens are open. I **strongly** advise being at the door at 10:00 am to catch the first guided tour or to avoid the crowds. The Palace also closes on May 1st, Dec. 24th, 25th and 31st.



See pictures of these extraordinary gardens at patrimoniacionacional.es/granja/granja.htm

To visit **San Ildefonso La Granja** by public transportation from Segovia, you must take a La Sepulvedana bus from the station at Ezequiel González, 12. Currently there is a departure from Segovia at 9:00 am, arriving at 9:25 and another at 9:45 am, arriving at 10:10. There are returns to Segovia in the afternoon at 1:40, 2:25, 3:10, 3:55, 4:40, 5:25 and later. One-way fare: €1,15.

Because these bus schedules often change, please check: www.lasepulvedana.es. From the destination drop down menu choose La Granja (rather than San Ildefonso) to see the current schedule.

GETTING TO THE ROYAL PALACE OF RIOFRÍO

To reach the Palace of Riofrío, which is included in the La Granja admission ticket, one needs a car, as the palace sits isolated in the middle of a forest.

This pink palace was built for Felipe V's widow, Isabel de Farnesio, who feared that the successor to the throne, King Fernando VI, the son from Felipe's first marriage, might keep her away from the Palace of La Granja. But because of Fernando VI's untimely death and because her own son, Carlos III, inherited the throne, since Fernando VI had no descendents, Isabel never occupied the palace. Only the husband of Isabel II and King Alfonso XII, who went into seclusion here, occupied it.

One can visit the palace by guided tour only (in Spanish). A large portion of the palace has been given over to a Hunting Museum, consisting of two sections: A History of Hunting in Spain and Hunted Spanish Fauna (www.patrimoniocional.es).

Royal Palace Opening Hours:

- April-September - Tuesday-Sunday from 10:00 to 8:00
- October-March - Tuesday-Sunday from 10:00 to 6:00

Riofrío Forest:

- Tuesday-Sunday from 8:00 to sunset

MUSEO DEL VIDRIO DE LA REAL FÁBRICA DE CRISTALES DE LA GRANJA

Near the palace is the Royal Glass Factory of La Granja (www.fcnav.es), where you can watch a demonstration of glass blowing, purchase an item in the shop and tour the crystal gallery, containing crystal from La Granja Palace from the 18th and 19th centuries, as well as other European bottles and glass items from the 16th century. General admission: 5€. Guided visits need to be booked in advance. There is a workshop for children, ages 6-12.

Tel: (+34) 921 010 700

Summer Opening Hours - April-September (Closed September 29th):

Museum and Shop (Glass Market):

- Tuesday-Saturday from 10:00 to 6:00
- Sunday and holidays from 10:00 to 3:00

Glass blowers workshop:

- Tuesday-Friday from 10:00 to 5:45
- Saturday from 11:00 to 1:45 and 4:00 to 5:45
- Sunday and holidays from 10:00 to 2:45

Winter Opening Hours - October-March (Closed December 25th, January 1st and 6th):

Museum and Shop (Glass Market):

- Tuesday-Friday from 10:00 to 3:00
- Saturday from 10:00 to 6:00
- Sunday and holidays from 10:00 to 3:00

Glass blowers workshop:

- Tuesday-Friday from 10:00 to 2:45
- Saturday from 11:00 to 1:45 and 4:00 to 5:45
- Sunday and holidays from 10:00 to 2:45

LUNCH AFTER YOUR PALACE VISIT RESTAURANTE PUERTA DE LA REINA

If you'd like to stay in San Ildefonso for lunch, the stylish Parador has a stunning vaulted dining room where very pleasant, gourmet 3-course lunches are offered for 35€/person, and portions are enormous. The chef, Adrián Salas Diosdado, has won a prestigious gastronomic prize, and this restaurant is considered one of the better dining venues in the Parador network.

LA HILARIA

For an informal lunch outside the town, particularly in warm weather, and if you have a car, I suggest that you head south to the village of Valsaín on the CL-601, km 124, to locally popular and family-run restaurant on the right side of the highway with outdoor terrace. The restaurant serves a full lunch *menú del día* for 25€, and runs a little 15-room rural hotel across the street as well. Their specialties include local trout and the famous white bean stew, *judiones de La Granja*. Reservations are essential on weekends, as the restaurant attracts many day-tripper family groups from Madrid (www.eljardindelahilaria.com).

Tel: (+34) 921 470 292

LA PORTADA DEL MEDIODÍA

Or if you prefer gourmet fare in a sophisticated, “country chic” setting, head straight north on the SG-V 6124 a few kilometers to the “roast lamb and wedding” town of Torrecaballeros to dine in style at this lovely restaurant housed in the former 18th century rectory, sitting next to the Romanesque church of San Nicolás de Bari. One must reserve on weekends, as it is a very popular wedding destination for madrileños.



This charming and sophisticated *horno de asar* (roasting tavern) offers attentive service in a stylish setting, wonderful cuisine, an intelligent wine list (plenty of distinguished Ribera del Duero labels at fair prices) and a romantic garden terrace. And it gives a warm welcome to families with children. Every item on the menu shines, including their

roast suckling pig and roast baby lamb, but I particularly enjoy the grilled baby lamb chops, the filet mignon, daily fish specials (such as monkfish with clams) and for dessert, their scrumptious *torrija caramelizada*, a type of French toast. Outstanding in every way!

It has been recommended in the Spain Jaguar guide, Gourmetour and many other gourmet guides. Closed Monday (www.laportadamediodia.com).

Tel: (+34) 921 401 011 / 921 401 090

THE CASTLE ROUTE

From Segovia depart on the C-605 to Santa María la Real, taking the SG-341 to Coca. A full daylong loop could be **Segovia – Coca – Cuéllar – Peñafiel - Turégano**.

One could also do the castles of Coca-Cuéllar-Peñafiel-Turégano from **Avila** if staying at its Parador. From Segovia, do the Pedraza-Riaza-Duratón gorge-Sepúlveda tourist route.

ABOUT SEGOVIA'S MUDÉJAR DESIGNED CASTLES

The term *mudéjar* refers to the Muslims who remained in Castile after the re-conquest and worked as architects under Christian rule, their art characterized by Islamic horseshoe arches and geometric designs in brick.

COCA

The granddaddy of these Mudéjar-designed castles is the rose-colored brick castle of **Coca** of typical Hispano-Arab military design, built in the mid fifteenth century for the formidable Fonseca family (Castile's Medicis). Although it never saw a single battle, it was sacked during the War of Independence by Napoleon's troops - just spectacular, 4-stars.

Opening hours:

- Monday-Friday from 10:30 to 1:00 and 4:30 to 6:00.
- Saturday, Sunday and holidays from 11:00 to 1:30 and 4:30 to 6:00

45-minute guided visits only. General admission is 2,70€, 2€ for children 7-14 and 2€ for seniors with proper I.D. (www.castillodecoca.com)

From **Coca**, take the back road through Fuente el Olmo de Iscar up to the C-111 where you'll turn right (east) to Cuéllar.

CUÉLLAR

Here you'll want to pay a visit to the 15th century **Ducal Palace-Castle of the Duque of Albuquerque** high atop the town. Although you can see its 4-star majestic Renaissance exterior year around, during the week from October to June it functions as a public high school. From June 1-September 30 it's open to the public on Monday to Friday from 10:30 to 2:00 and 4:30 to 7:30. On weekends and holidays it closes at 8:00 pm.

It is another castle that was sacked by Napoleon's troops and during the Spanish Civil War it functioned as a tuberculosis hospital. See pictures at: www.castillosdejirm.com. Again, guided visits only on weekends when guides also do a two-hour tour-theatrical spectacle, for those with a prior reservation. If you would like to experience this, have your hotel call ahead to (+34) 921 142 203. Cost is €6,70.

There are also three important churches in the town of Cuéllar built in the brick *mudéjar* style: **San Martín** (which has a *centro de interpretación del mudéjar*, an audiovisual guide to this distinctive architecture), **San Esteban** and **San Andrés**, which are all located around the castle.

Cuéllar's other claim to fame-the hosting of the oldest *encierros* (*the running of the bulls, Pamplona style*) in Spain, celebrated on the last Sunday in August ever since 1499. Notice the statue of a bull runner on the square. These *encierros* are also Spain's longest, lasting a full hour, while Pamplona's last only 3 minutes on average.

If you arrive in Cuéllar at lunchtime, the **Hostal Mesón San Francisco**, on the main drag, route N-601, is THE place to dine (hmsanfrancisco.com). Its specialties include puff pastry filled with leeks, *hojaldre de puerros*, foie, duck confit in orange sauce and a dessert of hazelnut crème with dark chocolate and of course, roast lamb. It offers a set priced lunch menu for a very reasonable price and 29 inexpensive bedrooms in the inn.

Tel: (+34) 921 140 009

After Cuéllar you leave the Segovia province on the SG-223 entering the Valladolid province on the VA-223, which will take you directly to Peñafiel.

PEÑAFIEL

The enormous and powerful 10th century, elongated **Castle of Peñafiel** ("castle of the faithful rock"), another 4-star, looms imposingly above the town of the same name and looks like a giant ship run aground on the Castilian plain (www.museodelvinodevalladolid.es). This fortress once belonged to don Juan Manuel, one of the great literary figures of medieval Spain.

Although much of the inside is now devoted to a very expensively designed Wine Museum to showcase the fine wines of this Ribera del Duero region and to teach visitors about the wine-making process, you can opt for the guided tour only (but in Spanish) of the castle itself and skip the wine museum. You should not miss a visit to the castle, as the views from the castle keep are some of the finest in Old Castile.

Groups form frequently because it's one of the most visited monuments in the Valladolid province, and you don't need to follow your guide, just look around on your own, but the guided tour is your only option to get up to the top for the views of Peñafiel. While the castle is usually closed on Monday, if you visit during Holy Week it may be open. Normal hours are Tuesday-Sunday from 11:30 to 2:30 and from 4:30 to 8:30. The guided tour lasts only thirty minutes, and for those who don't speak Spanish, brochures are provided in English. There are tremendous views of the town below and the Castilian plain from the high ramparts. Terrific!

Once you reach the top, note to your left within the town below a small rectangular square, the **Plaza del Coso** filled with sand and surrounded by two, three and four-story balconied houses. In medieval times the owners of the homes sold viewing rights for the balconies to other villagers so as to view the jousting tournaments and bull festivals in the square. This custom still remains; so all the houses in the square have dual ownership, the actual owners of the dwellings themselves and the owners with the balcony viewing rights. During fiestas of Nuestra Señora y San Roque, August 14-18, the locals still celebrate these medieval jousting tournaments and novice bullfights in the sandy square. And the square again comes to life on Easter Sunday with its ancient ceremony, la Bajada

del Angel (the Descent of the Angel), when a child disguised as an angel descends through the air and removes the mourning veil covering the Virgin Mary's head.



This prosperous and atmospheric town is quite interesting to visit. Park wherever you can find street parking and stroll inside the interesting village. Market day is Thursday.

For picking up some prestigious Ribera del Duero wine labels or artisan local cheese, head to the gourmet shop, **Zaguán**, on the street, Derecha al Coso 45, that leads to the Coso Square. Some labels from the Ribera del Duero Burgalesa to search out here: López Cristóbal, Valsotillo, Viña Pedrosa, Pesquera, Briego, Veganzones and Viña Sastre.

If you need informal sustenance while in Peñafiel, try the **Asador Mauro** on Calle Ataranzanas (closed Tuesdays) on the road leading up to the castle (www.asadosmauro.com), the popular **María Eugenia** inside the village at Plaza España, 17, or the **Molino de Palacios** (molinodepalacios.com), Avenida de la Constitución, 16, in a pretty 16th century stone flour mill overlooking the Duratón river. The latter serves up a low cost *menú del día* (closed Sunday night, Mondays and from Christmas through January 15). The mill and its female chef were featured in a Travel & Leisure article about touring the Ribera del Duero wine-producing region. It offers a menu in English.

All three restaurants serve the ubiquitous roast baby lamb, wild mushrooms and home made desserts, and Mauro belongs to the Association of Asadores de Lechazo (baby lamb roasters) of Castilla-León.

If you would prefer gourmet fare served up in a stylish, relaxed designer setting with a very fine Ribera del Duero wine list, head instead to the 4-star **Hotel Pesquera AF**, a

creation of the celebrated wine maker, Alejandro Fernández and daughters of acclaimed **Bodegas Pesquera**. This avant-garde hotel is a complete remake of a hundred year old flour factory. You'll find it just off the Valladolid-Aranda del Duero highway, across from the Repsol station.

We recently had a very impressive lunch here, one of our best in the Ribera del Duero wine region, in the hotel's cossetting restaurant, Luna Llena. Here you'll find the perfect package of splendid regional dishes prepared with a modern touch, great wines, fantastic salads and gracious, well-trained service. Highly recommended! The sommelier speaks very good English and will choose the perfect wine to accompany your meal. The well-appointed hotel is a favorite among our discerning wine touring clients (www.hotelpesquera.com).

From Peñafiel you'll return to Cuéllar in the Segovia province where you will turn east on the C-112 to Cantalejo, then south on the C-603 for the final visit to Turégano.

TURÉGANO

This is the final town for castle aficionados, where the medieval rose-colored castle was built on the remains of an Arab fortification. It's a box of surprises because inside the castle walls you'll find not the usually Patio de Armas but instead the Romanesque church of San Miguel Arcángel from the 12th century, to which military elements were added in the 15th century. Then the Baroque belfry was added in the 18th century (www.turegano.es).

If you're hungry, the family-run **Hostal El Zaguán** (el-zaguan.com) on the Plaza Mayor is a great place to stop with a varied menu including fish, also a bargain *menú del día*. They also offer pleasant and inexpensive rooms. I've recommended it to those on a budget who can't find lodgings available in Segovia city or just want to stay in the countryside in style but for a low tariff. It's a member of the Estancias de España group, a kind of "poor man's Parador" system, whose properties we've enjoyed in Cantabria, Picos de Europa and Santiago de Compostela. Also recommended in Alistair Sawday's Special Places to Stay/Spain. It gets solid reviews on toprural.com. Guest quarters have telephones TV, a/c, and some rooms have castle views. This is quite a nice little inn for the price.

THE MEDIEVAL VILLAGES

A tour of three charming medieval villages and the Duratón Nature Park/Canyon:
Segovia – Pedraza – Riaza – Sepúlveda - Hoces del Duratón

This full day driving tour can most easily be accomplished with an **overnight** in **Pedraza**, one of Spain's most perfectly preserved and highly photographed medieval villages-the set of movies and the place of dreams. You can reach this charmer from Segovia in under an hour-it's 35 km. northeast of the capital following the N 110. I highly encourage you to include an overnight (or even two) in this most delightful of little towns in your Spain itinerary! In fact, it makes a perfect final stop for rest and relaxation after a long tour before heading home. The drive from the village to Madrid's Barajas airport takes only about an hour and 20 minutes, so if you have an early afternoon flight, you can spend your last night in Spain in this magical spot and take away lasting memories.

About Pedraza...(www.pedrazainfo.com) a slight digression from the driving tour....

PEDRAZA DE LA SIERRA



This picturesque, 16th century fortified fortress town, the supposed birthplace of Emperor Trajan, gets most every Spaniard's vote as the most beautiful, movie-set perfect small village in Spain. Dramatically situated high on the arid plain above the River Cega, it remains frozen in time. There is a single, narrow entrance through a medieval gate leading you to a castle surrounded by a moat, a picture-perfect, irregularly shaped square where novice bullfights, *novilladas*, are still held in early September, and Renaissance homes with their ancient wooden doors, iron balconies and family coats of arms still intact.

Its striking square is filled with *yantares*, or roasting taverns, to which Madrid denizens flock on weekends for the ritual roast lamb feast, to shop at the village boutiques, to buy custom-made Castilian furniture, pewter and antiques and to spend a romantic weekend in one of the atmospheric, designer-decorated inns. I can't describe adequately just how atmospheric and relaxing this little gem of a village is.

In the 16th century Pedraza became the residence of several noblemen of the powerful House of Velasco, and the village began to fill up with noble homes. The village reached its moment of splendor in the 16th and 17th centuries thanks to the wool trade. The woolen workshops of Pedraza became famous in all of Europe and provided the Castilian merino wool to the tapestry looms of Bruges and Florence. But the village fell into decline in the 17th century because of the livestock crisis and only recovered in the mid-20th century, when artists rediscovered the town. In 1926 the artist Ignacio Zuloaga purchased the castle, and other artists/writers (Unamuno, Camilo José Cela) began to discover its beauty. Orson Welles filmed scenes from "Chimes at Midnight" here in 1965.

Pedraza only comes alive on weekends and holidays and does so with a vengeance. The silent little hamlet you experience on Friday night, once the day-trippers move in and tour buses arrive, gets filled to the rafters, simple explodes, on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. On a recent two-night stay, we could hardly believe the difference when we returned from our excursion to the country on Saturday at 5:00 pm, to find the parking lots overflowing, streets jammed with visitors staggering out of the dozen restaurants after having devoured their succulent roast lamb meal.



Speaking of that ritual roast lamb feast, there are a dozen restaurants in this tiny town where one can sample this unique culinary delight. We enjoy this hearty meal most at **El Yantar de Pedraza** right on the square. Although it does have a printed menu, all diners seem to order the same meal: the house salad or a plate of white asparagus, the famed *lechazo*, a forequarter of suckling lamb, served in a terra cotta *cazuela*, a clay carafe of Cariñena red wine (although other wines are available by the bottle), crusty bread, *pan de pueblo*, and a homemade ice cream goblet for dessert.

For weekends, reservations are absolutely of the essence, especially if one hopes to secure one of the 4 or 5 highly coveted tables for two on the upstairs balcony. This delightful, quintessentially Segovian roasting tavern is a member of the Association of Asadores de Lechazo de Castilla y León, always a good sign. It's open for lunch only from 1:45 to 4:30. Closed Monday except for holidays and August; closed 2nd and 3rd weeks of June (www.yantardepedraza.com).

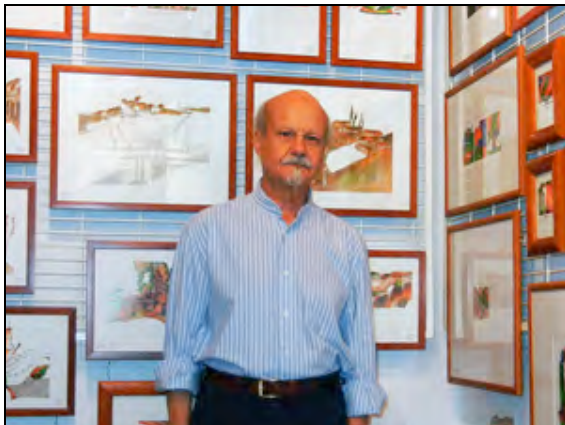
Tel: (+34) 921 509 842.

After a long, leisurely lunch that may last until 6:00 pm, head over to the highly atmospheric 150 year-old **Taberna de don Mariano** (belonging to the family who owns the Posada de Mariano), Pedraza's oldest and most character-filled bar, across the square for a cozy post-dinner coffee or drink by the fireplace. (You'll see a sign that says **vinos** above the open entrance, then as you go through the huge entryway there's a sign above the door to your left that indicates the tavern). In warm weather you can have your *vinito* on the wooden bench out on the square.

SHOPPING IN PEDRAZA

Or do a little gift shopping... On weekends the shops usually don't close until 8:00 pm or later. Pedraza is renowned among the cognoscenti as the best place in the province to do high quality gift shopping.

For gourmet goodies (oils, vinegars, sweets, tinned vegetables) and local wines go to **Atalantar** on Calle Real; for prints and original paintings of the town, stop in at **Sánchez Muñoz** on the Calle Mayor near the Posada de Mariano.



In the gallery with the artist



La Tahona

For artisan breads, puff pastry, *ponche segoviano* and *soplillos* (extremely light treats made of egg yolk, wheat flour, oil and sugar that melt in your mouth) head to the bakery, **La Tahona** (www.latohona.net), Calle Calzada 4.

For striking hand-crafted dinner plates, coasters, pitchers, candelabras and other decorative items all made of pewter, which make fine wedding gifts, head straight to

***Estaños de Pedraza** (www.estañosdepedraza.com) at Calle Calzada, 9; for toys, stop in at **Crepundia** and for scented candles at **Más Que Velas** on Calle Mayor.

Muebles Artesanos, Calzada, 12, has been providing well-to-do *madrileños* their hand-carved rustic Castilian furniture for years. And next door, at number 8, a shop housed in a three-story barn-like home, **De Natura** is where their decorators shop (now open by appointment only) for embroidery, blankets, country dishware, candles and other home decorating items straight out of House & Garden.

If you happen to land in Pedraza between Wednesday and Sunday, you'll have the chance to view the inside of the **Castle** (via guided tour, but a very short one), said to be one of the most impregnable in its time in all of Spain and one of the oldest in all of Europe. Once inside the caretaker will allow you to view two rooms filled with paintings by Ignacio Zuloaga, the Basque post-impressionist and friend of Toulouse-Lautrec.

MUSEO ZULOAGA

Now housed in the Castle of Pedraza, the museum houses a magnificent collection of the Basque master, post-Impressionist Ignacio Zuloaga, and a collection of art he built up from an early age (museoignaciozuloaga.com). No photographs allowed.

- Summer hours: Wednesday-Sunday from 11:00 to 2:00 and 5:00 to 8:00.
- Winter hours: Wednesday-Sunday from 4:00 to 6:00.
- Private visits can be reserved on Mondays and Tuesdays
- Tours of the museum in the Tower on the first Friday of the month by prior arrangement.



Zuloaga is one of my favorite Spanish impressionist painters-dark and brooding, but a fascinating portrait artist much like John Singer Sargeant. In 1926 Zuloaga acquired the castle, then in ruins and abandoned, he restored one of the towers to use as his atelier

Also, the medieval city jail, **Cárcel de la Villa**, is open most of the year only on Saturday, Sunday and holidays from 11:30 to 2:00 and 3:30 to 7:30. But from July 15-

August 31 it opens daily from 11:30 to 2:00 and 4:00 to 7:30. Another required guided tour that will show you the ancient dungeons, but very fast. Entrance: 2,50€

Pedraza's local fiestas are held September 7-12, in honor of **la Virgen del Carrascal** with the procession carrying the image of the virgin on the 8th, on the 9th the town celebrates its *encierros*, bringing the herd of young bulls to be fought that afternoon up from their grazing land and through the village. On the 9th and 10th bullfights take place in the square, and on the final day of the fiesta, the 12th a gigantic *caldereta*, lamb stew, is prepared on the square for the enjoyment of all.

On the **first two Saturdays in July**, Pedraza celebrates its nationally renowned **Noche de las Velas** when 35,000 candles illuminate the town, and classical music concerts are celebrated both inside the castle and on the Plaza Mayor. The latest edition of this festival brought in 13,000 visitors. This is a truly magical experience!

For evening dining in Pedraza we also like the pretty, very friendly, family owned **La Olma**. It's not on the square, but housed in a lovely 16th century mansion on the Plaza del Alamo near the parking lot. It has a printed menu (posted at the door) that offers diners other gastronomic delights beyond the ubiquitous roast lamb and suckling pig. The restaurant's chef is a member of the Confrérie de la Chaîne de Rôtisseurs and his and his wife's creations are far more gourmet than the usual roasting tavern fare, and the service is most attentive. Upstairs dining, with well spaced tables.

We enjoyed dinner there on a Saturday night off-season and were impressed with our starter of white bean stew (*judiones de la Granja*) and main courses of loin of venison in a chestnut puree and crayfish wine. Delicious desserts include crepes filled with homemade turrón ice cream. We chose a red Valtravieso Crianza from the Ribera de Duero region to accompany the venison. The Hospedería de Santo Domingo sends its guests here. This is a solid bet on a Saturday or Sunday **night** when many of the traditional roasting taverns, such as El Yantar, are closed.

See photos of the dining rooms and peruse the menu (in Spanish only) at: www.laolma.com. Closed Tuesday, except during summer, and the 2nd half of September. Recommended in the Jaguar, Gourmetour and Repsol Guides.

Another highly recommended dining spot offering a more varied menu (friendly to pescatarians) and lovely views is the **Restaurante La Jara**, Calle la Florida, 3 (www.restaurantelajarapedraza.es).

THE PEDRAZA ENVIRONS

In the neighboring village of Navafría, found off the N-110 between the first and second turnoffs to Pedraza, on Saturday and Sunday only from 11:00 to 2:00, right at the river Cega's edge, one can visit an **Ethnographic Museum** containing the last remaining copper water-wheel powered *martinete* (drop hammer) in Europe, dating from 1850. And just two kilometers from the village, one can take a beautiful walk through a pine forest up to the waterfall named **El Chorro**, a perfect spot for a weekend picnic. At the parking area there are picnic tables and barbeque pits, restrooms, a children's playground and a rustic restaurant plus a natural swimming hole.

But back to driving tour #2, Segovia-Pedraza-Riaza-Sepúlveda-Duratón Park

Upon exiting the medieval gate of Pedraza, follow the signs towards Rades de Abajo and Matabuena, which will take you to the N-110 where you will turn left.

PRÁDENA

In Prádena, the artwork of nature can be seen in its entire splendor at the **Cave of the Enebralejos** (www.cuevasturisticas.com). Open April-September, Tuesday-Friday from 11:00 to 2:00 and 4:30 to 8:00. On Saturday, Sunday and holidays it's open from 11:00 to 2:00 and 4:00 to 9:00. From October-March, it's open Tuesday-Friday for guided visits only at 1:00 and 5:00, then on Saturday, Sunday and holidays from 11:00 to 2:00 and 3:30 to 7:30. Closed Monday.

From Prádena continue on the N-110 to the motorway A-1 and go north on it for a few kilometers until you reach the exit for Cerezo de Arriba and Soria. Take this exit and you'll find yourself once again on the N-110 heading northeast. Continue for about 12 kms, past the turn off to the ski slopes of La Pinilla, to the village of **Riaza** and park in the municipal lot.

RIAZA

This village has always been a "must stop" on a driving tour through the province due to its highly photogenic, irregular shaped, porticoed and sand covered Plaza Mayor. Here during the festival days throughout the first two weeks of September, la fiesta de Nuestra Señora del Manto, bullfights are held in the square, as well as *encierros* (Running of the Bulls Pamplona style) and contests of *recortadores*, a game of gymnastics in which the bulls are not fought but instead are vaulted over, and rings placed on their horns. You can see photographs of these festival events in the tourist office on the square.

Riaza has always been noted for the quality of its meats and is a beacon to those on the suckling pig, suckling lamb trail. One of the best spots in town to sample these two specialties is **La Taurina** right on the square at #6. Average check: 28€. Closed Monday, except on holidays. Mondays and Fridays are market days.



Before you leave the town, don't forget to visit the gothic church to see its beautiful polychromed wood *Pietà* from the 16th century.

A charming inn to spend an overnight: **El Molino de la Ferrería** on the Riaza-Villacorta road. The inn is a converted flourmill with 10 antique-filled rooms surrounded by an oak and beech forest, an idyllic place to spend a chilly autumn night in front of the fireplace—a member of Posadas Reales de Segovia (www.molinodelaferreria.es).

Now back to driving tour #2, which continues on to our third impressive medieval town of note - **Sepúlveda**. From Riaza return west on the N-110 for 3 km until you reach the SG-911 that will lead you directly east to Sepúlveda, a distance of about 21 km.

SEPÚLVEDA

The village is another dramatically perched, steeply terraced, stunning-to-view-from-afar Segovia treasure perched high above the meandering Duratón River. The town also comes alive on weekends when droves of day-trippers from Madrid come up to – guess what? - Indulge in the traditional lamb feast. So on a day-trip from Pedraza you should time your arrival carefully, to either avoid the 1:00 to 5:00, crush or join in. Street parking is always problematic, so you should follow the **P** signs and the steady stream of cars to the parking area high above the town square. I don't recommend a visit to Sepúlveda on Monday or Tuesday because the *hornos de asar* will be shut tight and the town quite dead.

An aside... **Sepúlveda**, along with **Riaza**, is quite proud of its bullfighting tradition and its corridas take place the last weekend of August. These events are not associated with any religious holiday. They are called **Las Fiestas de los Santos Toros**. On Thursday a parade of the peñas (local societies that support the fiesta) initiates the festivities. These peñas have their “headquarters” in the caves that you'll see along the city streets. As these festivities are known as the San Fermín de Castilla y León, just like in Pamplona, a

rocket is ignited by the mayor to indicate the start of the 3-day long party. In the mornings the encierros (running of the bulls through the town) take place followed by the afternoon corridas, then evening dances in the town hall square. Monday is the day of the *mozos*, the young men of the town who participate in an amateur bullfight with young cows, the *vaquillas*, in the afternoon. One of Sepúlveda's native sons was the matador Victoriano de la Serna who fought in the '30s along with Juan Belmonte.

In addition to Sepúlveda's dozen roasting houses, Romanesque churches, bullfighting tradition and medieval *fueros*, its other claim to fame is its pastry-making tradition. The town is filled with *pastelerías* and *panaderías* that sell local sweets such as *soplillos*, *florones* and *rosquillas*. Try some at the **Bollería La Peña** on the Plaza Mayor.

Before lunch pick up a map of the town at the tourist office next to the town hall and make sure to pay a visit to the **Iglesia de los Santos Justo y Pastor**. From the town hall square you will walk north on Calle de la Barbacana and through the medieval gate Puerta del Ecce-Homo, to the church, which will be on your right.

This lovely Romanesque church with three naves, a handsome *mudéjar* coffered wooden ceiling and crypt, has been recently restored and converted into a museum, the **Museo de los Fueros**. Signage is in Spanish only, but you can enjoy the displays of ancient keys, tombs, poly-chromed sculptures, beautifully sculpted capitals and paintings, and archaeological finds dating from the 12th to the 18th centuries. (The *fueros* refer to the special privileges and charters given in the 11th century to the town by King Alfonso VI.). The church is open Wednesday to Sunday from 10:30 to 2:30 and 4:30 to 7:30. Entrance: 2€. Admission is free on Wednesday.

If your timing is right, lunchtime should now be approaching... I suggest that you head back to the square and around the corner past the souvenir shops down Calle Sancho García to # 3, **Casa Román** for an *aperitivo* and glass of wine. This rather fancy *asador* and member of the Association of Asadores de Lechazo of Castilla-León serves fine wines by the glass and tapas in an atmospheric setting, making it a nice preamble to your roast lamb feast in one of Spain's most legendary *figones*-the much loved and heralded **Figón Zute el Mayor**. And after your lamb banquet I suggest that you return here for an after lunch coffee.

See my full description of this über-famous but totally unpretentious eatery below, under "*In the province - doing the weekend ritual roast baby lamb ritual feast*".

Upon exiting Sepúlveda, follow the signs to San Frutos. This route will take you through the park towards Villar de Sobrepeña and up to the village of Villaseca. There you'll see an **Ermita de San Frutos** sign on your left immediately before the church and before leaving town. Turn left and follow a gravel 5 km track (wide enough for tour busses) down to the parking lot. The Ermita is a 1-1/2 km pleasant downhill walk from there. You'll see it in the distance on its island floating between the canyon with its 100-meter drop and the hundreds of griffin vultures soaring on the warm air currents above you, an amazing sight! There is sheer and utter total silence except than the sounds of the bells of the sheep grazing on what is said to be the best sheep grazing land in the world!

San Frutos, the patron saint of Segovia, was a Visigoth nobleman, born in 642, who, upon entering middle age, decided to renounce his worldly goods and, along with his brothers, headed up here amidst the rocky terrain high above the river for a life of reclusion. The story goes that he confronted attacking Moors by brandishing a cross, and with it drawing a mark on the ground, and when he rammed the cross into the ground, a huge chasm opened up, creating this island and thus impeding its crossing by the invaders. The saint died in 715. In the 12th century, the Benedictine Monks of Silos built the Hermitage in the saint's honor. Each year on October 25, a pilgrimage is celebrated to this holy site.

We have done this castle route from our perch at the **Posada del Duratón** in tiny **Sebúlcor** in early November (www.posadadelduraton.com).

From here we recommend combining your castle touring with a walk to the **Hermitage of San Frutos** sitting atop the spectacularly scenic gorge (the Castilian "Grand Canyon") in the **Las Hoces del Río Duratón Nature Park**.



See photos at: www.fotosierra.com/segovia/sepulveda/ermita_de_san_frutos.php

The appropriate season for this walking adventure is really from April to November. It might be far too muddy and cold in the dead of winter. We've here both in early April and early November and enjoyed glorious sunny skies for our walk.

Now retrace your steps to the village of Villaseca, turn right and drive down to the town of Sebúlcor, where you'll pass the Posada del Duratón (a lovely place to stay in this "blip on the road" town) and an adventure sports shop that rents kayaks for trips down the Duratón gorge. Then continue on west to Cantalejo where you follow the CL-603 to the SG-231. Turn east and in a few kilometers you'll come to the turn off for the SG-V-2311 which will take you through Rebollo and on down to Pedraza.

OVERNIGHT IN LA GRANJA

Although La Granja and Segovia are next-door neighbors (only 11 km apart), lovers of Spain's Parador system might enjoy the bragging rights of spending a night in La Granja in one of the most "chic" Paradors of the network. Inaugurated in June of '07 by King Juan Carlos, it forms part of the Bourbon palace complex, a 35-million Euro re-conversion of the 1770 **Casa de los Infantes**.



This ultra-modern Parador boasts 127 ultra spacious rooms, including 14 suites, a gorgeous vaulted dining room, a spa, indoor paddle court, putting green, 2 pools (one heated, part of the spa complex, and one outdoors, not heated), a solarium and state-of-the-art convention center in a separate building, the former Royal Guard barracks.

We enjoyed a recent 3-night stay (in very spacious room 314) after a long excursion to the north, using the Parador La Granja as our final, pampering "rest and relaxation" stop before our transatlantic flight (under a 90-minute ride to Barajas airport).

Although some guests have expressed minor complaints here about the poor signage (difficult to read the small green signs that lead to the hotel located inside the walls) and the lack of parking directly in front of the hotel (one must park in the free public town lots, as the small Parador parking lot fills up quickly and spots cannot be reserved, even for Amigos members), we found the overall experience to be quite pleasant. We found

the service first rate, even though the dining room staff can be overwhelmed on busy holiday weekends.

The lavish breakfast buffet, costing an additional 18€, should not be missed, one of the best in the Parador network!



Dormer room in the Parador de La Granja

This 4-star experience does not have to be especially costly as special, discounted “Tarifa Unica” (Fixed Rates) are often available online. A 5-night card is also available, as are promotions for those 35 and under (“Young Getaway”) and for seniors 55 and older (“Golden Days”).

Search for web specials at: www.parador.es.

A VISIT TO ÁVILA

The Auto-Res bus (Avanzabus) runs daily bus service from Segovia to the walled city of Ávila (which also boasts a lovely but somewhat dated Parador). The distance from Segovia to Ávila is 84 kilometers. The morning buses depart at 7:00 and 10:00. The first afternoon bus leaves for Avila at 2:00 pm. The ride takes 55 minutes and a round-trip ticket is 12,90€. You can check current schedules and purchase your ticket online at www.avanzabus.com.

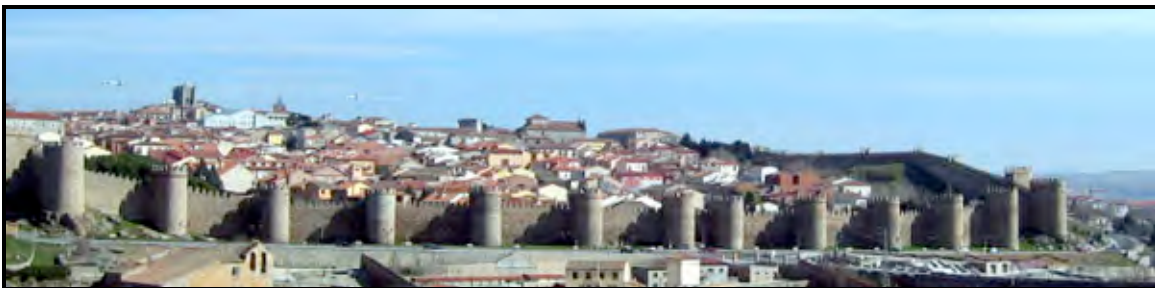
Once in the walled city, you should first visit the **cathedral**, a late Romanesque-Early Gothic construction with its sanctuary built into a section of the medieval city walls, making it a defensive fortress. Inside you'll find a magnificent altarpiece, a museum of religious art, and in the ambulatory a delicate and beautiful alabaster tomb of "El Tostado", Alonso de Madrigal, the 15th century writer and Bishop of Avila. General admission: 3€.

Opening hours:

- November-March: Monday-Friday 10:00 to 5:00, Saturday 10:00 to 6:00 and Sunday and holidays from 12:00 to 5:00.
- April, May, October: Monday-Friday 10:00 to 6:00, Saturday 10:00 to 7:00 and Sunday and holidays from 12:00 to 6:00
- June-September: Monday-Friday 10:00 to 8:00, Saturday 10:00 to 8:00 and Sunday and holidays from 12:00 to 7:00

Make sure to walk a portion of Avila's 11th century defensive walls. These walls, 2-1/2 kilometers in length, with 88 defensive towers and 9 gates constitute the best-preserved example of military architecture of Spain's Romanesque period. To walk a portion of these walls is an experience not to be missed!

They're open Tuesday-Sunday; March 28th-October 29th from 10:00 to 8:00, and the rest of the year from 10:00 to 6:00. Closed Mondays.



For more information about the city and its patrimony or to download an English brochure with walking routes and additional information, see www.avilaturismo.com

LUNCH IN ÁVILA

Food critics generally agree that the best dining in the city can be found at **El Almacén**, in a 19th century converted warehouse, sitting off the Salamanca highway, to the right, just beyond the bridge and next to the Adaja River. It offers diners a fine wine list, well

prepared fish dishes, pleasant décor and impressive views of the walled city. It has been bestowed with two Repsol soles (suns), the Spain equivalent to the Michelin star (www.restauranteelalmacen.es),

Tel: (+34) 920 211 026 / 920 254 455. Closed Sunday night and Monday.

For a sit-down meal inside the city walls, we have had good luck at the Parador dining room when sticking to their classics: veal steak and white bean stew from El Barco de Avila. A complete 3-course meal here will run about 32€.

I have taken small groups to the typical Castilian inn, **Mesón El Rastro**, on the Plaza del Rastro for the regional specialties of roast lamb (*lechazo*), roast suckling pig (*tostón*), white bean stew, trout, veal cutlets, dining well and less expensively on this very traditional fare (www.elrastroavila.com).

Tel: (+34) 920 352 225

DINING IN THE PROVINCE

GASTRONOMIC SPECIALTIES OF THE SEGOVIA PROVINCE

- *Cochinillo asado*: roast suckling pig (also referred to as *tostón*)
- *Judiones de la Granja*: tender white haricot beans
- *Cordero lechal*: roast baby lamb, served in quarters in a clay casserole
- *Cabritillo*: roast baby goat
- *Truchas de Valsain*: local trout
- *Niscalos a la Segoviana*: Wild mushrooms sautéed with garlic and parsley
- *Sopa castellana*: a garlic soup with ham, topped with poached egg
- *Chorizo de Cantimpalos*: the local spicy cured sausage
- *Ponche segoviano*: a moist-sugar glazed sponge cake
- *Leche frita*: a rich dessert made of milk, sugar, flour, egg, butter and cinnamon

DOING THE WEEKEND RITUAL ROAST BABY LAMB FEAST

Regardless of how one feels about suckling roast lamb, which here is baby lamb of the ancient *churra* breed, long-legged with black noses and ears, famed for the superb quality of its meat and slaughtered when between 18-25 days old, it's a Segovia (actually a Castilian) ritual. Spaniards from all parts of the country come to Segovia city, or to the province, on weekends and holidays to do the medieval banquet roast baby lamb feast at the many *hornos de asar* (roasting taverns) where the lamb is prepared in clay pots, roasted for 2+ hours in adobe ovens fired with Holm oak with the addition of just a dash of salt and water. We've done this ritual both in the city and in the province.

The traditional feast is simple: a lettuce/tomato salad, rustic bread, a clay casserole dish of tender baby lamb called *lechazo*, looks simply like a plate of bones, but so tender that it can be cut with a plate rather than a knife, and for dessert, a lemon sorbet (*sorbete de limón*) which is refreshing and serves to cut the grease. The famous Segovian dessert specialty, *ponche segoviano* is an orange liqueur soaked, custard filled cake topped with marzipan, cloyingly sweet (for me). A red wine, a *tinto*, either a *crianza* or *reserva* from the Ribera de Duero region, should accompany a proper roast lamb meal. This lamb feast is the quintessential Segovia experience, the non-plus ultra.

As to Ribera del Duero D.O. wines, I recommend the following labels: Alión, Carmelo Rodero, Valsotillo, Hermanos Sastre, Pesquera, Emilio Moro, Viña Pedrosa, López Cristóbal, Condado de Haza, Valduero and Hacienda Monasterio.

For diners endowed with deep, deep pockets, add a Vega Sicilia, a Pingus or Flor de Pingus.

In Pedraza we've dined at **El Yantar** on the square, which is housed in a 17th century noble home directly on the atmospheric square. You **must reserve** and reserve well in advance for the few highly coveted outdoor tables on the 2nd floor balcony.

In Turégano, we've enjoyed **El Zaguán** on the square, which also served impeccable fish with a Basque touch, seafood crepes, steak, and home made desserts. Female chef. It's

also a simple but pleasant 15 room hostel. It has been recommended in the Gourmetour and Repsol guides as well as the red Michelin, where it has received a Bibi Gourmand designation for good value. See: www.el-zaguan.com.

BUT THE NON-PLUS-ULTRA IS FOUND HERE:

1. FIGÓN ZUTE EL MAYOR

In Sepúlveda you'll find an extraordinarily famous, "greasy spoon" (the rough translation of a *figón*) dating from 1850 that is a legend throughout the country, commonly referred to as **Tinín**, located on the town square at #6. Martín Antorán and his family serve a simple menu of truly remarkable, melt-in-your-mouth roast lamb (€28 for a quarter), a lettuce and tomato salad (€5.50) and cheese with quince paste, *cuajada* (milk curd) or *ponche segoviano* for dessert (4€). No wine list, just the young Ribera de Duero house red served cool (€10). We had a memorable feast for four here on a Saturday in April for the very reasonable tariff of €28 per person. On weekends, due to its fame, it's wildly popular, so one must reserve in advance. When you call, you will be told when to arrive rather than your choosing your dining time, as Tinín staggers its reservations so that each party's lamb will be perfectly cooked and ready upon arrival.



Roast baby lamb at Figón Zute el Mayor (the first serving)

We were told to arrive promptly at 2:00 pm, which we did, we were immediately seated and our succulent lamb was ready and waiting for us. And it was thoughtfully served in two portions, first the front quarter then the hindquarter, so that it didn't get cold. This *figón* is proud of its mention in all the prestigious gourmet guides, including its top rating of 7.5/10 in The Best of Spanish Gastronomy. Closed Tuesdays and is only open for lunch until 4:00.

Tel: (+34) 921 540 165 E-mail: zutemayor@portalsegovia.com

N.B.: If you do happen to arrive without reservations on a weekend, Martín will call down to his new “annex”, the **Figón de Tinín** (run by the sixth generation) to try to accommodate you at a table there. See www.portalsegovia.com/zutemayor.

2. MANNIX

You'll need to drive north, past Cuéllar, on the SG-223 and cross into the Valladolid province, to the small, quiet town of Campaspero 15 km south of Peñafiel to find this second roast lamb temple. More a formal restaurant (the house with the white facade rather Baroqueish décor) than a “greasy spoon”, this legendary spot, decidedly “off the beaten path”, produces a roast lamb every bit as tender and succulent as Figón Zute el Mayor, but is happily less frequented by day trippers from Madrid.

A recent lunch here proved to be every bit as enjoyable as the Segovia province lamb experience, as the lamb was cooked to absolute perfection, putting Mannix at the very top of our best *hornos de asar* list. It also hits the top of the Best of Spanish Gastronomy list with an 8.5 ranking. The young and enthusiastic chef, Marco Antonio García, takes great pride in his master roaster skills, and a visit to his establishment is very well worth the detour. He will advise you to order simply...just a quarter of baby lamb for two, a lettuce and tomato salad to share, and perhaps a starter of sweetbreads (*mollejas*) for the adventurous.



Another succulent offering at Mannix

His recipe is simple: roast the forequarter of baby lamb in a clay pot with its skin side down, with a bit of salt and water added; roast in the adobe oven, fired with oak at 200°C until it is golden, then at a lower temp, slow roast for another 2 hours; then turn and roast for another 15 minutes skin side up. One must reserve in advance. Closed Monday (www.restaurantemannix.com/).

Tel: (+34) 983 698 018

FOR THE VERY ADVENTUROUS MESÓN GONZÁLEZ

In November we journeyed to the tiny village of Sacramenia from the Duratón Nature Park after an invigorating walk to the Ermita de San Frutos above the Duratón gorge to dine in a butcher shop, yes, a butcher shop! The reason for this gastronomic pilgrimage - Several *cordero lechal* experts assured us that actually Sacramenia, not Segovia, not Sepúlveda, not Pedraza, not Riaza nor Lerma, nor Aranda de Duero, was where the suckling lamb was truly king. (This, of course, is a very arguable point, as each true connoisseur has his/her own *lechazo* shrine). Sacramenia is a nondescript small village with seven flocks of some 400 sheep each, far more sheep than inhabitants.

What gives the village its competitive edge is that nowhere else are so many fine *churra* breed sheep to be found. The renowned butchers of Sacramenia, Javier and José Carlos González also run the town's hostel, the Mesón González. All these gentlemen do with the meat is to rub it with pork fat, salt and a bit of water. They say the flavor comes from the ewe's milk because she has grazed in the hills on thyme, rosemary and lavender.

As always, we called ahead as you must reserve. The butcher only prepares exactly the number of *lechazos* that are ordered ahead of time, and we were told to be there at 3:00 pm. We saw no menu but were brought a delicious lettuce and tomato salad, a loaf of country bread, and our *lechazo* and custard for dessert, plus two rounds (on the house) of the wife's very potent homemade liqueur as a digestif- a totally unique experience.

Tel: (+34) 921 527 300.

While the Mesón González (right on the Sepulveda road, #7) in Sacramenia does have a "formal" restaurant, part of the Hostal, in low season mid-week the restaurant usually doesn't open, so one dines in an annex of the butcher shop downstairs, the **Carnicería Hermanos González**, in a tiny, no frills dining room.

Most *hornos de asar*, roasting taverns, in the Segovia, Valladolid and Burgos provinces are closed Sunday evenings and all day Monday. Again, it's essential to reserve for Saturday and Sunday lunch. Traditionally, the roast lamb ritual is served from 1:00 pm on. Better still from 2:30 to 4:00. No orders are ever taken after 4:30 pm.

ROAST LAMB AND THE “WEDDING” TOWNS

Closer to the city of Segovia are the “roast lamb and wedding” towns of Torrecaballeros and Sotosalbos, where Madrid brides come to get married at the lovely 12th century galleried Romanesque churches of San Miguel in Sotosalbos and San Nicolás de Bari in Torrecaballeros, and have their wedding reception at one of the roasting taverns here.

I recommend the following, both in Torrecaballeros:

LA PORTADA DE MEDIODÍA

This lovely restaurant, housed in the former 18th century rectory, sits next to the Romanesque church of San Nicolás. This charming *horno de asar* (roasting tavern) offers attentive service in a stylish setting, wonderful cuisine, an intelligent wine list (plenty of distinguished Ribera del Duero labels at fair prices) and a romantic garden terrace. And it gives a warm welcome to families with children.

Every item on the menu shines, including their roast suckling pig and roast baby lamb, but I particularly enjoy the grilled baby lamb chops, the filet mignon and for dessert, their scrumptious *torrijoa caramelizada*, a type of French toast. Outstanding in every way!

It receives an equally high ranking in the prestigious Best of Spanish Gastronomy guide (www.laportadademedia.com)

Tel: (+34) 921 401 011 or 921 40 109

LA POSADA DE JAVIER

La Posada de Javier is located in a pretty rural home just off the highway. Like its competitor across the street, it offers more elaborate dishes than the traditional roasting tavern menu of baby lamb and suckling pig and includes fish selections and delectable home made desserts.

Tel: (+34) 921 401 136.

Both restaurants close tight on Sunday night and Monday.

LODGING IN THE PROVINCE

PEDRAZA

HOSPEDERÍA DE SANTO DOMINGO

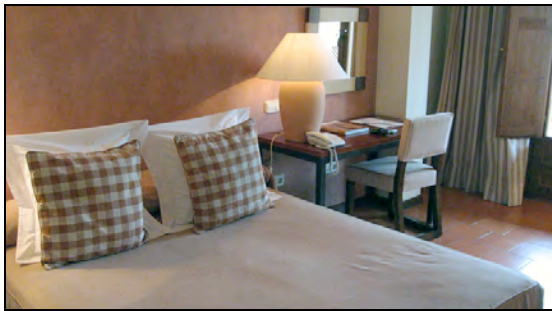
We have loved everything about our several two-night stays at the 3-star Hospedería de Santo Domingo, an ancient convent, some 300 years old, that has been completely gutted, meticulously redecorated and turned in to an oasis of charm and tranquility. In the spacious and supremely comfy lobby, where check-in is done at a stylish writing desk rather than counter, there are designer touches everywhere. The ground floor consists of the check-in area (with courtesy umbrellas at the door), an inviting and warm sitting/reading area with fireplace to the right, and beyond, another large sitting/reading or wine or tea/coffee sipping room with views of the garden and countryside, along with a small serviced bar to the left. We found it extremely relaxing and inviting. And the décor is a harmonious mix of antique elements (the original beams, clay tile floors) and contemporary furniture and artwork (Chillida lithographs).



Downstairs is the impressive designer decorated breakfast room done in warm earth tones, with handsome beamed ceiling, hand-crafted Castilian wood furniture, with heavy curtains, well-spaced tables for two or four covered with the finest of linens and very comfortable contemporary cowhide-wrapped chairs and striking decorator touches everywhere-right out of a design magazine. And all the tables face the garden.

In the morning guests help themselves from the breakfast buffet (no eggs and bacon but cheeses, chorizo, cured ham, fresh fruits, a fruit compote, and a half dozen different pastries, including chocolate muffins, croissants, *torrijas*, a type of Spanish French toast, also tomato bread plus freshly squeezed juice and bottled water), served from 9:00 am. If guests need an early breakfast at 8:00 to make a flight from Barajas airport, the manager will prepare, with advanced notice, a scaled-down version of the buffet. (Buffet breakfast costs an additional 12€/person)

We've occupied two rooms on the ground floor in a small wing of four rooms. These two (#21 and #22) have beguiling garden views with private sit-out balconies. Room 22, the more spacious of the two, is done in shades of soft cream and light blue, with warm terra cotta tiled floor. The two twin beds (put together) are dressed in fine Bassols linens. It has a writing desk, two upholstered chairs, mini bar, with champagne glasses provided, satellite TV, a/c and Wi-Fi. (On the hotel web page this room is pictured in the 3rd photo at the bottom). The bath of room 22 has a Jacuzzi shower, large towels and Rusticae bath products. Room 21 sports a double bed with canopy and is decorated in tones of cream and salmon-equally inviting.



Both rooms with balcony are very private, and we enjoyed killer views of the dramatic countryside plus a front row seat to watch the goings on of the storks nesting on a pillar right in front of our room. In the evenings at sunset on our balcony, seated at a table with high quality teak chairs, we enjoy our pre dinner wine. Four of the top floor rooms also have balconies, including another guest favorite, room 31. Room 38 is one of the largest, facing the street and has a seating area and large flat screen TV. The hotel critic of El Mundo newspaper enjoyed room 41, done in tones of ochre, sky blue and beige, a dormer perch on the 3rd floor, overlooking the valley. The hotel has 17 rooms, 3 of which are the “special rooms” with separate sitting area, two of which have Jacuzzi tubs.

To reach the Hospedería, beyond the medieval gate you must enter the one-way street, and on your way up, you'll see a small side street to your right, which the hotel faces, and there's a small area in front to park temporarily to unload luggage. Then continue again on the only way around the town and park in the further most spot in the large municipal parking lot, and then walk back (short walk) to the hotel. Or simply print out the map from the web site below.

Another element that makes this hotel so special is the attention given to the guests by the young hostesses. Belén, the afternoon and evening hostess, could not be more

accommodating, delivering our pre dinner wine and cheese to our room along with complimentary snacks. She, Bea and the others are always in residence to provide 24 hr room service and couldn't be more gracious hosts.

The Hospedería is a member of Rusticae, a prestigious collection of lovely country house hotels and B&Bs, all maintained to a high standard. We've enjoyed many wonderful Rusticae properties all over Spain and try to seek them out in our travels. It's also a member of Lugares Divinos, another group of special and unique hotels, inns and restaurants throughout Spain (hospederiadesantodomingo.com).

POSADA DE DON MARIANO

If the Hospedería isn't available, the two other designer decorated small hotels in Pedraza are acceptable if not equally impressive alternate choices. The older of the two, Pedraza's first small hotel to open and the first Pedraza interior decorating project for Francisco Muñoz of Spain's "Casa y Jardín" magazine is the **Posada de Don Mariano**, (formerly the House of the Inquisition!) which is a one minute walk from the municipal parking lot where everyone must park and sits between the castle and the square. It is owned by the family of Don Mariano, the late mayor of the village, who died on All Saints' Day at the age of 100, and was a friend of the Royal Family and of the Colombian artist, **Fernando Botero**. *Note the Botero works adorning the walls of the bar.*



The Posada has only 18 individually decorated rooms (7 are dormer rooms) along with one of the most attractive dining rooms, **El Enebro**, in the village, which serves a large menu beyond the usual roast lamb and trimmings, offering foie in Calvados, steaks and lovely desserts. The restaurant is closed Sunday nights and Mondays. One of the prettiest rooms at the Posada is **la Muñeca**, done in white with a canopy bed (www.hoteldonmariano.com).

Tel: (+34) 921 509 886

HOTEL DE LA VILLA

There is also the Paco Muñoz decorated Hotel de la Villa. Rooms we have seen there are spacious and appealing. I recommend room 110, with its huge canopy over the bed, and room 108, with a sitting room. But it does not seem as intimate as the Hospedería since it does wedding parties, small conventions and takes groups. It is a member of the Ruralka group, a collection of small rural inns of character and charm (elhoteldelavilla.com).

Tel: (+34) 921 508 651

LODGING IN THE VICINITY OF PEDRAZA

If you travel to Pedraza on a last minute whim or your dates are the first or second Saturday of July (the Festival of the Candles), and there's no room at the inn, check availability at other rural B&B properties within a short driving distance. Other rural hotels in the vicinity include a member of Posadas Reales de Castilla y León and Ruralka, both within a 10 km drive of Pedraza. Rates here run slightly below the Pedraza inns and include both breakfast and VAT.

IN NAVAFRÍA, 9 KM FROM PEDRAZA ON THE N-110

POSADA MINGASEDA

Located in Navafría, at Calle de Campillo, 12, in the heart of the Sierra de Guadarrama, this recently restored 13-room, 19th century inn is comprised to two three-story stone buildings, one with an elevator. It offers a sauna, Jacuzzi and free Wi-Fi. Its restaurant, *El Rincon de la Posada*, offers an outstanding regional seasonal menu (www.posadamingaseda.com).

Tel: (+34) 921 506 902 / 645 459 120

IN GALLEGOS, 5 KM FROM PEDRAZA ON THE N-110

POSADA DE GALLEGOS

Another stylishly decorated, expertly renovated stone farmhouse, tastefully furnished and run by a very friendly couple with fine attention to detail. It offers 8 individually decorated rooms, good handicapped access, an elevator, a downstairs lounge with fireplace and relaxing library and a small swimming pool. The owners offer a lunch menú del día for a very reasonable 18€ and a menú del día at dinner for only 16€.

It is located in a back corner of a small, quiet village and has panoramic views of the Sierra. The village is only a 10-minute detour from the A-1 to Madrid, and Barajas airport lies only slightly over an hour's drive away, making the inn a nice, tranquil final stop for those catching an afternoon flight the next day. Breakfast is served from 9:00 to 10:30 and is included in the room rate.

This inn is recommended in the red Michelin guide. Free Wi-Fi, but no A/C. Is an excellent price to quality ratio (www.laposadadegallegos.com).

Tel: (+34) 921 509 070

LODGING NEAR THE DURATÓN NATURE PARK & THE GORGE

El Parque Natural de las Hoces del Río Duratón

LA POSADA DEL DURATÓN

We have also enjoyed stays at a member of the Rusticae group of charming inns in **Sebúlcór**, a tiny village that sits in the heart of the Duratón Nature Park, the *Hoces del Duratón*. Housed in what appears to be an ancient church, the inn has 20 highly unique rooms, five of which are junior suites and two of which are suites. Each of the rooms is original, individually designer-decorated in an eclectic style, furnished with carefully chosen antiques mixed with abstract art, with beds decked out with fine linens. The newest 10 rooms sport Jacuzzi baths.

With its thick walls of stone, ancient wood beams, marble, tiled floors, columns and wrought iron, this inn oozes personality. We choose room #3, Santa Engracia, which is charming, but each room has its own special charm (www.posadadelduraton.com). The inn also offers a menú del día for only 12€.

Tel: (+34) 921 521 424

Note: This Posada would make a nice overnight if driving directly from Madrid's Barajas airport to points north, as it lies only 1-½ hours from Madrid, just 20 kilometers to the west off the A1 to Burgos.

In the spring, summer and fall, the adjacent adventure sports shop, **Naturaltur** (www.posadadelduraton.com/index.php/naturaleza), runs popular kayaking trips down the Duratón gorge, with all equipment and transpiration included.