



SOS DEL REY CATÓLICO

AND ITS PARADOR



THUNDER AND SILENT ROMANESQUE LIGHTNING

“For every idle word man will provide a strict accounting

Inscription carved on the Church of San Esteban

This eternal medieval town of Sos may be relaxed, welcoming, and silent, but it is as proud of its magnificent past as of its future, as it grows more sovereign with each passing day.

By the will of gods and men, these lands have long mixed with other sister lands, without frontiers between cults, cultures, and even customs.

The visitor to this small but sage city immediately experiences the strange and pleasant sensation of having stepped into medieval times. There is not much to see, but there is an infinite number of things to look at and reflect upon. It may be said that the entire urban area is almost an exhibition –a museum– of the Middle Ages.

Although it was only a high, cramped hamlet in the Sangüesa region of Navarre, from the earliest centuries of the Middle Ages Sos was forced to serve as a frontier bastion, a jealous guardian against the ambitions of noble feudal neighbors, and not a few bellicose ecclesiastics.

“No warrior bishop absented himself or his vassals from accompanying the kings on the Reconquest, or taking up his own incursions into the lands occupied by the Moors. They had nothing to envy of the famous Bishop of Valencia, Don Jerome, of The Poem of the Cid, who said mass before the battle and absolved the combatants, assuring a place in heaven to those who faced death and fought,” in the words of Tomás Buesa, distinguished professor at the University of Zaragoza.

This entire history has been carved into the foundations of this Parador, alongside stones and medieval legends.

It is reasonably certain that the full and intense events of the medieval period came together here around the beginning of the 11th century. The town would then be consecrated by King Ferdinand II of Aragon, later better known as the Catholic King, who was born here.

From early on these villains would be Christians, or as some interpretations have it, Christianized. According to prudent opinions, embracing the faith may have actually been an obligation rather than a sincere conviction. One never knows.

In any case, Sos would be confirmed as a Christian town around 975, during the reign of Ramiro Garcés. It would soon be annexed by Navarre, but still remain Aragonese, around that magic year 1000. This was the time when all predictions spoke of the end of the world, condemned to inexorable extinction by its sins.

During the 10th and 11th centuries, Sos was one of the greatest and best fortified sites in the region. The visitor will be able to see this with a simple glance at the many ancestral homes.

For its greater defense, the primitive hamlet sought to press itself up against the hill, under the additional protection of the Romanesque Church of El Salvador y San Esteban. The urban area still inhabits a

large spur of the foothills of the Peña Mountains, so that this lovely town still remains a fortress carved into its surprising and rocky surroundings.

It soon becomes apparent why the town can rightly boast of being the first town amongst those of the lovely Las Altas Cinco Villas (The Five High Towns) region, perhaps because of its exceptional observatory with a miraculous kaleidoscope of views over many parts of Navarre and Aragon.

Visitors to these relaxed heights may seek a certain degree of peace and freedom from the many cares of the world, for the town is both magical and generous. However, it is also somewhat avaricious and may be said to weave a spell around travelers, bewitching them and walking them along its streets and lanes, through squares large and small, into churches and shrines and along its miraculously walled borders, always to return.

It is no mere chance that the town should grow up on a majestic spur of the Peña Mountains. Among these crags he who would become the Catholic King was born in the Sada Palace. An ever-present neighbor is Feliciania Rock, on which King Ramiro II erected his own castle, a fitting monument to his greater glory and military strategy. The spot was previously occupied by a then unusable fortress, which had been raised by King Sancho Garcés II towards the end of the 10th century.

However, long, long before these rugged peaks were fearsome bastions of Imperial Rome, these lands had been “colonized” by Paleolithic and Neolithic tribes and peoples. They would lay the rudimentary foundations of civilizations and cultures which would eventually light the fire of our early origins. First there were tribes of savage hunters. These then became shepherds with the passing of time, and much later farmers, jealous defenders, and cultivators of their geographic surroundings. The concept of ownership would be born, together with family ties of a tribal, or clan-like, nature.

They came to share beliefs, gods, and religions; a type of language; and certain technological advances, such as fire and rudimentary methods of construction and defense, no more, but also no less.

These lands display their ancient prehistoric lineage. Sections of one of the most important roads built by the Roman empire have also been preserved. This strategic route was designed and built in order to invade, exploit, and govern such difficult distant lands.

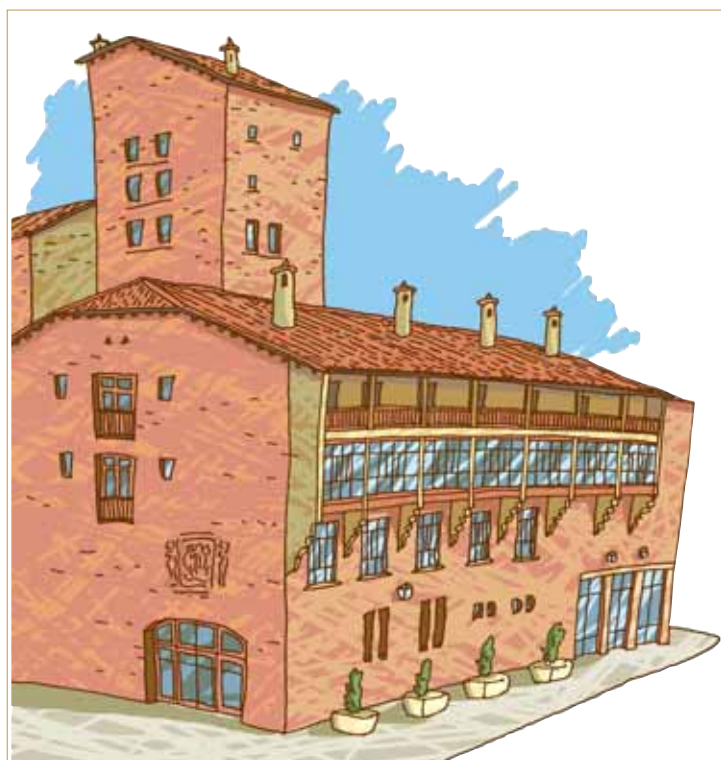
The lengthy task would require incalculable human effort on the part of legionaries and slaves, in addition to techniques and engineering at that time unknown or scarcely mastered by local inhabitants. The remains of the Roman road which would be a vital travel link between Zaragoza (Cesaraugusta) and Pamplona (Pompaelo) can be found nearby.



These regions would eventually be “Romanized,” following lengthy and fierce resistance by the Celtic inhabitants who were already grazing their animals along these hills some six hundred years before the Christian Era.

In contrast, very little is known of what was undoubtedly a short stay by the Muslim invaders in these parts, despite the fact that they also managed to sow these proud hills and valleys with cultures, customs, and handicrafts.

So brief would be the town’s Moorish phase that not long after the turn of the 10th century it would already be Christian.



PAST STEPS IN SEARCH OF THE PRESENT

"The curse of the mother burns, destroys, and uproots children and home."

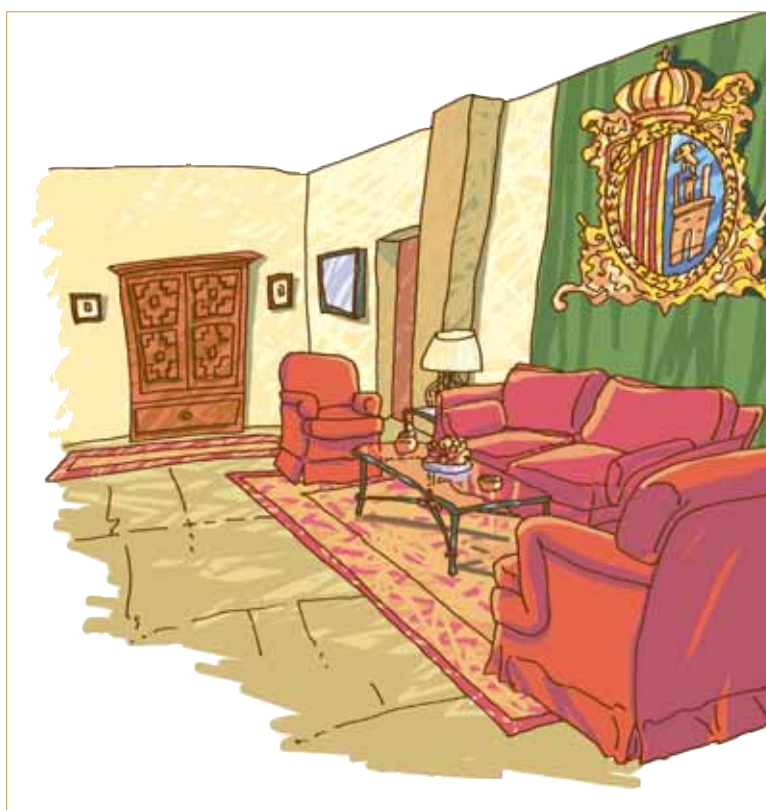
"Says our Lord, God: The house of he who swears will not lack misfortune."

The year 1681. Inscription on the façade of the City Hall

These are only symbols, but also suggestive premonitions of the attitudes, idiosyncrasies, and vocations of these reasonable yet fiercely decisive peoples determined to decide their future. It is this period which brings the genesis of this tall and proud Parador. The building is a model of building techniques and esthetics, of special attention and service, of outstanding gastronomy, and of anything the visitor may need, as you will soon see.

These same streets, lanes, palaces, and walls were initially a fortress under the reign of Navarre, although they would become Aragonese with King Ramiro I, in the mid-11th century. Sos entered history in the spring of 1452, with the birth of he would come to be Ferdinand the Catholic, son of Juan II of Aragon, in Sada Palace.

"Queen Juana came to the town of Sos, in the Kingdom of Aragon, within the confines of Navarre, and on the tenth day of the month of March gave birth to a son who was called Hernando, like his grandfather." (The words of the



famous chronicler Zurita)

There are many more testimonies and documents which demonstrate the most faithful symbiosis between these lands and their royal protectors. Just one more example:

"Seeking to reward the great sacrifices made by the people of the town for the Crown of Aragon, and the great damage and expense which they had incurred due to their utmost innate fidelity, and give them fitting retribution for the illustrious Infante Fernando having been born there ... it is his will that the residents of the town of Sos shall be free of all toll and usage taxes ... and of all taxes and customs old and new ... and that all residents of the town shall in perpetuity be part of the lesser noblemen."

So as not to bore or overwhelm the reader, we shall simply recall that it would be another monarch, Felipe V, who would come to grant this town the privileged title of "Very Loyal and Victorious Town," in due gratitude for its struggles against Charles of Habsburg.

These demonstrations of mutual fidelity between monarchs and vassals should be seen as reasonable and just exchanges.

All of these great privileges did not impede a relative progressive decline in population, so that the town now numbers some one

third fewer residents than a century ago.

LEGENDARY MIRACULOUS REMEDIES

Around the 19th century, many cases of the "obsessed" and "possessed" came to light. The devil, out of vengeance or spite, invaded the body of any Christian or sinner. Ways and formulas of "proven" efficacy were sought out to banish the evil and thus recover the soul of the tormented "possessed" person.

Long ago, in the nearby town of Calatorao, there was a special veneration for a Holy Christ who was generous in bringing forth miracles. One day a very ill and destitute pilgrim appeared in the town. The charitable people gave him food and treated his ailments. The grateful pilgrim went to the temple to give thanks to the Lord.

Upon noticing that there was no image of the crucified Christ, he offered to carve a crucifix in a period of three days. When this period had passed, some of the locals entered his chamber: the thankful pilgrim had disappeared. In his place they found a perfectly carved image of the Holy Christ. The wonder was attributed to the Christ of Calatorao by a certain Father Faci.

Faci tells that as Father Antonio Pascual was cleaning the holy image in the presence of Doctor Falcón, one of the crown's thorns broke off. The two decided to share the two halves of the relic.

Some time later, Father Antonio was passing through Sos and was

called to visit a sick woman in her final death throes. He pressed the pocket in which he kept the piece of holy thorn to the dying woman, who suddenly arose. At this, the priest of Sos called up the devil so that he could explain to him what the magnificent pocket contained. The devil replied, *"It contains a thorn of the 'brown one of Calatorao.'"* It was great blasphemy to call the Holy Christ 'brown' simply because he had been carved from dark wood.

From that time until early in the 19th century, there would persist a firm conviction that the miraculous Christ could draw the demon out of the bodies of women. As the demon was cast out, the women's shoes, garters, tights, and corset were torn off.

Year after year, masses of people attended the festival of the Holy Christ to see and confirm the wonder of the exorcism of the possessed in the presence of the miraculous image.

So many pious peoples would come that the railroad companies added more journeys from Zaragoza, and substantially reduced ticket prices.

A journalist from the Heraldo de Aragón witnessed the event in 1919 and related the story of one of these magical recoveries:

"Upon leaving the church a woman was overcome by strange violent convulsions; perhaps she was suffering an epileptic fit. As she was taken away, the woman had lost a scarf. A circle formed around the strange cloth, which no one dared to touch. In that scarf the enemies had been captured ..."



PANORAMIC VISIONS

Regardless of the direction from which you come, you will have noticed the unusual and unexpected location of this singular hotel. It is surprisingly hidden amongst green and shady valleys, surrounded by the dry land of Cinco Villas, set like a magical oasis atop the highest viewpoints which can be enjoyed in these parts. The vistas and visions from almost any spot in the town are lovely to contemplate, perhaps even more so from any of the rooms in this ancient, yet excellently restored, hotel.

The town has been restored with such great care that it appears almost to be a movie set. However, it is real, this is how it actually is. Any of these streets will transport the walker to medieval times as they once were. The walled medieval quarter still boasts seven gates which in olden times were left open during the day and closed at night, to protect the town from strangers.

For those new to these steep medieval lanes, a good place to start a tour of the city is on Sainz de Vicuña Street heading towards Nador Gate. To the left, take Desengaño Street towards Mercado Square. Just opposite is Jaca Gate and Bonafonte House, a large noble house with a pointed masonry arch and the obligatory heraldic coat of arms indicating the supposed noble origins of the residents. It boasts one of the most admirable and attractive patios in the historic town.

In any case, all routes are rewarding. One option would be to visit Sada Palace, birthplace and baptismal font of the most Christian King Ferdinand the Catholic, in 1452. It would be just atop Feliciano Rock that King Ramiro would erect a splendid castle:

"... where those eyes that gaze, expecting to see less, will see the mountains of Pyrenean peaks and lands of Sanguesa, although they may have so wished..."

The castle made its debut in the 12th century. It is not much, but extremely attractive. Next to the lovely castle keep, it is a privilege to view the exquisite Romanesque temple of San Esteban. However, there is even more along these streets and lanes. No matter which route you choose, you will eventually come across the pleasant surprise of the Church of San Martín. The lovely Romanesque-Gothic chapel has given private service to the noble and courtly tastes and needs of the Sada family.

The shrine of Santa Lucía, built in the Romanesque style, if a little late (13th century), merits attention.

The Convent of Nuestra Señora de Valentuñana is a Carmelite convent which respects and maintains a notable 18th-century temple with a curious collection of South American objects and relics. These date from the period when the Spanish adventurers went in search of feverish ambitions, to then return to Europe converted into generously presumptuous and powerful Indians. In any case, the convent accepts both believers and unbelieving guests.

Above all, what Sos offers, desires, and asks of the visitor is no more than a simple yet attentive look. This is not a town only for snapshots.

TABLES AND TAVERNS OF MEDIEVAL MIXTURES

This apparently rudimentary cuisine is a hybrid blend with the neighboring cuisine of Navarre. The foods share flavors and a focus on garden produce such as borage and thistle. **Cod** goes especially well with **Garlic, Egg, and Paprika** or **Tomato and Pepper Sauce**, both magical and mysterious blends.

There are excellent and unique varieties of **Roast Lamb**, and many other surprising dishes which change according to custom and taste, sometimes within a very small region.

These strong and diverse culinary offerings are no product of chance: *“Since time immemorial, the main, although not the most luxurious, room in Aragon was justly and necessarily the kitchen. It was the place where the most time was spent and was a multipurpose workplace. In the kitchen woman spun, wove, or darned. Bread was baked in an oven that was always lit, and sausages and other pork products were cured over the smoke of the house fire. Meals were eaten here, and then the daily evening rosary was recited.”*

In this town, eating is a pleasure devoid of mystery. No matter where you go, you will find quality, the sole difference being price and comfort.

There are excellent **Salads** made with **Escarole, Chicory, Thistle, Celery**, and even **Lettuce**. The most usual first courses are light vegetable dishes: **Asparagus, Pocha Beans with Eels; Artichokes** in a variety of styles: with **Clams, Boiled, Grilled**; and above all the **Mixed Vegetable Sauté**, consecrated by what the locals deem the best vegetables in the world, an assertion which the most discerning palates do not dare question.

A well-rounded menu demands the presence of **Lamb from the Bardenas Reales region** prepared in a variety of ways, although with a preference for Tudela ovens, as they are called. There is **Lamb Shank in Vegetable Sauce, Lamb Chilindrón in a Tomato and Pepper Sauce, Baked Local Lamb with Bread Soup**, and **Fried or Charcoal-Grilled Lamb Chops**.

Amongst the game, the highest recommendations go to **Hare Stew** and **Stewed Partridge**. **Bull’s Tail** is a much-appreciated dish in these parts. Diners should not forget the **Stuffed Piquillo Peppers** or the simple **Fried Eels**.

From among the exclusive desserts, one can sample **Hollow Fritters with Chocolate, Curd Pudding with Syrup and Walnuts, Almond**

and Puff Pastry, Custard with Cakes, and Cherries from Milagro –all sure to please.

The **Wine** selection comes out of esteemed vineyards. The pocketbook will not be excessively injured by the **Crianza and Grand Reserve Reds, Whites, Rosés**, and even **Muscatel**.

A much-repeated local phrase goes, *“In these parts one eats well all over. All you need to know is how to choose what you like.”*



The diagnosis is apt. Most importantly, if the traveler seeks gastronomic guarantees, give the Parador’s offerings a try. You have every chance of success, and another helping.

Diners can almost always choose from dishes as remarkable as:

–**Muel Thistle Stewed with Local Almonds and cured Ham.**

–**Shepherd’s Bread Crumbs with Eggs and Chistorra Sausage.**

–**Borage with New Potatoes and Authentic**

Carril Clams.

–**Local Peppers Sautéed with Green Garlic and Shrimp.**

Nor should we forget cod in all its varieties, shoulder of suckling lamb, and the ever-reliable vegetables.

THE SECRET RECIPES

This hotel also has the temerity to reveal its most secret dishes to any curious guest. Some are from the region and others are exclusive to this Parador. Please do not hesitate to ask for more precise cooking information if necessary.

■ BODELA DE TENA SOUP

A type of soup or broth with pieces of lamb.

■ Pocha Beans with Chorizo Sausage from UNCASTILLO

Using pocha beans – the local ones are slightly round – picked green and then dried.

■ FRIGOLLA BATURRA

With eggs and thick julienne onion, tomatoes, peppers, and zucchini, all baked at medium heat.

■ ENGRUDOS DE JACA

A mystic scramble of eggs, potatoes and cod.

■ MARINATED RABBIT SOS STYLE

Cut up the rabbit and then fry. Refry with onions and julienne carrots. Simmer with equal parts water, white vinegar, and white wine. Cook and marinate for two days and nights.

WALKS SHARED WITH OTHER SOULS

These people are alone, or almost alone, by the will and desire of the capricious local geography, and a history filled with ambitions and frontiers decided by force of arms. These lands would generally be mute witnesses to the invasions of powers and powerful ones and other less visible governments and authorities.

Perhaps it was with more ability than strength that these environs managed to achieve a certain degree of independence almost unheard of in those times.

Finally, this singular region universally known as **Las Cinco Villas** would come into being. With Sos as its godmother, it governs the northeast of Zaragoza. These are lands which boast art, handicrafts, gastronomy, and very peculiar customs. We suggest two routes to discover something of the area.

■ Sos-Uncastillo-Luesia-Biel-Sos

Uncastillo: Valuable archeological displays. A faithful reproduction of the significant traces left by the passage of the Roman Empire through these lands. Boasts proudly of its 13th/14th-century castle and keep rising from Ayllón Rock. It is this castle that gives the town its name.

Pleasant town which transports the visitor to the Middle Ages: the **colonnades, noble houses, market,** and City Hall all help to create this atmosphere. The 12th-century Romanesque **Collegiate Church of Santa María** and the **Churches of San Martín, San Juan, San Andrés** and **San Felices** have preserved altarpieces and other pieces of great artistic value.

13th-century **Santa María** is acknowledged to be one of the best Romanesque churches in Aragon.

The 12th-century **Church of San Martín** contains early Romanesque elements. The **Church of San Juan** displays painted Gothic murals.

Luesia: One of the oldest castles in Aragon, with an important history. Today only one tower and a semicircular arched gate remain. The **Church of Salvador** contains important artifacts.

Biel: In the foothills of the Santo Domingo Mountains, near the Arba River. The urban area of Biel is presided over by a 10th-century castle tower and the **Church of San Martín**. It also offers a nature walk amongst the enormous wealth of flora and fauna in its environs.

■ Sos-Castiliscar-Sádaba-Ejea De Los Caballeros-Sos



Castiliscar: This castle was erected atop a rocky mesa in 1088, and dwellings grouped around it. Today only one tower has been preserved, a shrine with a Romanesque Christ, considered one of the best carvings in Aragon. Lovely parish church from the 12th century.

Sádaba: Along the Roman road that joined Zaragoza and Pamplona.

Nearby is the so-called **Mausoleum of the Atilios**, a Roman funerary structure from the 2nd century; and the imperial archeological site of Los Bañales, with baths, hydraulic works, and an aqueduct.

The town center is very interesting, with a castle-palace from the 13th century. Experts agree that the **Church of Santa María** is one of the most important examples of Aragonese Gothic.

Ejea De Los Caballeros: "Romanized," as were all of the sites in the Cinco Villas region, for its excellent grain harvest. Later it was an Arab town until the beginning of the 12th century, when Alfonso I the Warrior re-conquered it.

The 12th-century **Church of Santa María de la Corona**, the 13th century Church of Salvador and the 12th-century **Church of Santa María**.

Tauste: The southernmost of the five towns of the Cinco Villas region. The church is 12th century. **Santa María** is a magnificent Mudejar work, as is the tower which accompanies it.

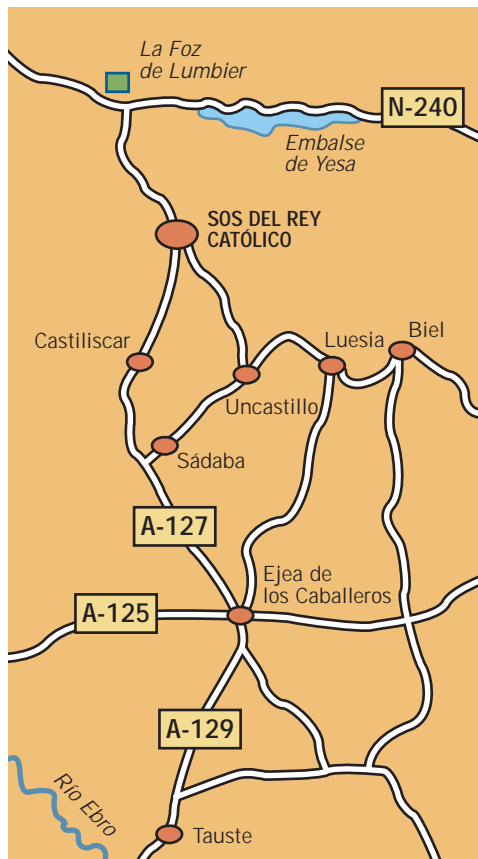
The Curious Gorge Of Lumbier

From the entrance of Lumbier, a small road leads to a gorge carved out by the force of the waters of the Irati River, just before it reaches the Salazar River. There is a surprising artificial waterfall which you can walk through and which can be reached via old hidden railroad tunnels drilled out for the timber trade.

Following the first tunnel, the awestruck visitor will reach the gorge. This lovely and vertiginous vision is frequently accompanied by majestic vultures and turtledoves with their nervous flapping of wings.

If you stop and listen, you will hear your footsteps blend in with the murmur of the river and the flight of birds. The experience can be sublime, or at the very least, unusual.

In any case, guests should not forget that the Parador can provide complete information about sporting activities available in and around the town of Sos, as well as information about hikes or local festivals. Please do not hesitate to ask in reception.



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