

# ARCOS DE LA FRONTERA

AND ITS PARADOR

## ARCOS: THE ANCIENT WHITE TOWN

*"Imagine the flat, narrow, long plain that rises and falls, undulating as it descends from the mountain; add white houses and old, blackened mansions, cut off each side of the hill sharply so that it stands out like a wall: put a silent, slow-running river at the base of the wall to lap against the yellow stone...Once you have imagined all this, you will be visualizing the pale image of Arcos."*

Azorin

Travelers see it at once: this town that Fernán Caballero called "ancient and white" is many things. It is as if its dreamlike landscape had created a special race of people from a mix of all its inhabitants over the course of its history. Because Arcos is, above all, a legend.

Legend has it that the town was founded around the time of the Great Flood, built originally by King Brigo, Noah's grandson, some 2,000 years before Christ and 400 years after the Flood. The town's emblem includes the following legend: "**Rex Brigus Arcibrigam Fundavit. Alfons Sapiens a Mauris Restaruavit**" ("King Brigo founded Arcos and Alfonso the Wise recovered it from the Moors")

What is certain is that the finest prehistoric remains -stone axes and vessels- confirm that it was populated in the Bronze Age and that Phoenician tribes inhabited the area 1,100 years before Christ.

The area was long known for its mineral deposits, which have been mined since 700 B.C.. Lead, copper, iron, and perhaps even silver and gold, appear to have been abundant. Examples have been found of bronze coins minted in the area around 300 B.C..

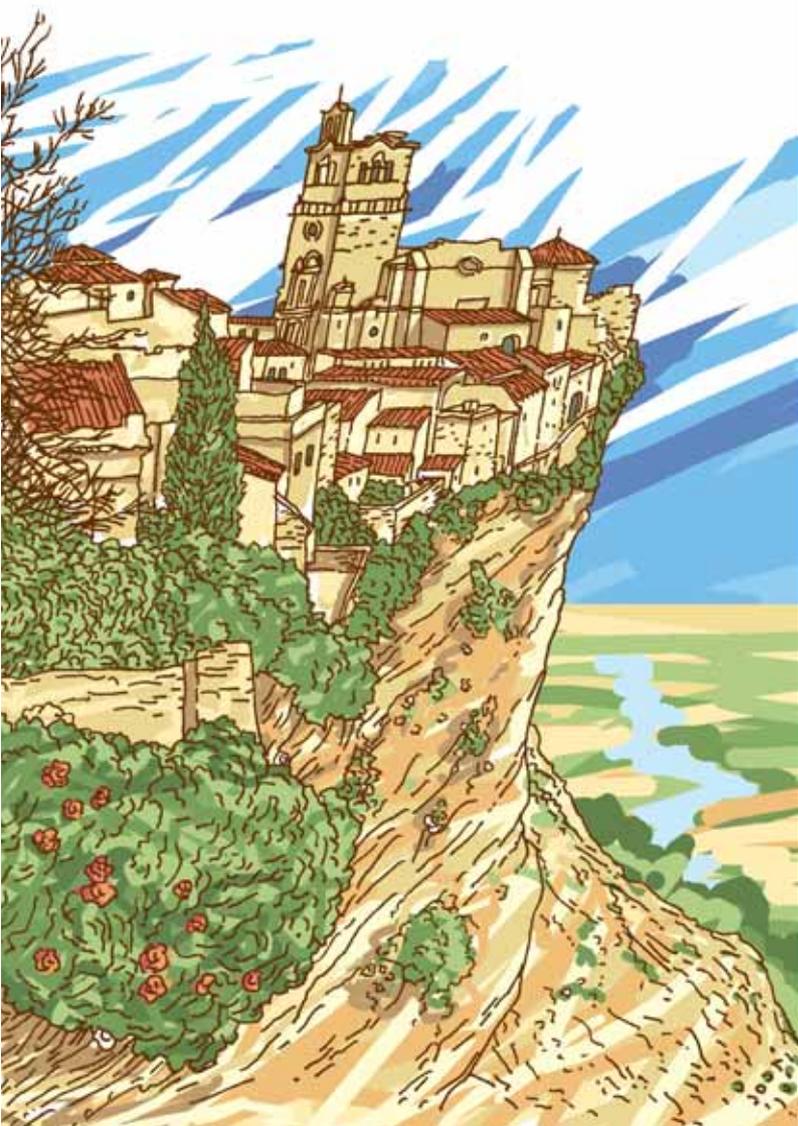
The first town walls were built during the Roman occupation, remains of which can be seen in the Competa district of the town. There are also numerous inscriptions and evidence of a Visigoth presence.

However, the history of Arcos is, above all, one of comings and goings of Moors and Christians. It was named Medina Arcosch by the Arabs and was a loyal and solid stronghold for the Omeyyas after the start of the Abderraman occupation of the Peninsula (756). From this time onwards, these steep streets would witness numerous and varied adventures, and just as many vicissitudes.

The town was visited and sacked by Norman pirates on several occasions, until Mohammed I managed to drive them out of the area. It has also known plagues and civil wars between different groups of Moors.

Better times began around the year 1000 when Arcos was made an independent Taifa kingdom under the Ben Jazrums. It was subsequently incorporated in the Moorish kingdom of Seville.

Fernando III "the Saint" first won the town back for Christendom, but it was not fully recovered until Alfonso X "the Wise" conquered it. Now empty of Moors, some 50 noblemen came from Seville to repopulate the town in the mid-13th century.



In the 15th century (1429), the town was granted County status by King Juan II, and handed over to Pedro Ponce de León for him to "administer and govern well." Times of war and glory followed: Alfonso XI granted noble status to all those born and living in the town in gratitude for their role in the Battle of Salado. Full town status was granted by Enrique IV of Castile.

In the times of Felipe V, Arcos was granted the titles of "Most faithful" and "Most Noble and Loyal" in recognition of its services during the War of



Succession. During the 18th century, the town and its surrounding region experienced times of artistic and cultural splendor, as well as considerable economic prosperity, deriving mainly from intense trading activity with the Indies, trading that was controlled by the "Casa de la Contratación" (Contracting House) in Cádiz.

These were years of peace, spoiled only by the many bandits that operated in the area, such as "Tragabuches," a fearsome and bloodthirsty, but excellent, bullfighter.

## THE PARADOR OF THE MAGISTRATE, THE PRIEST AND OTHER STORIES

*"A fountain bubbling in the beautiful courtyard: this is the first high-land evidence of a culture centered on water, the burning need of the Arab from the desert to be near water..."*

Caballero Bonald

Visitors should be aware that this Parador does not have the noble beginnings of many others; its past is uncertain and no scholar has yet been willing to give a definite opinion on its origins.

However, this establishment is an excellent lookout point, not only because of its location overlooking the Guadalete River, with views almost to the sea, but also because of the part it has played in the legends that make up the area's history.

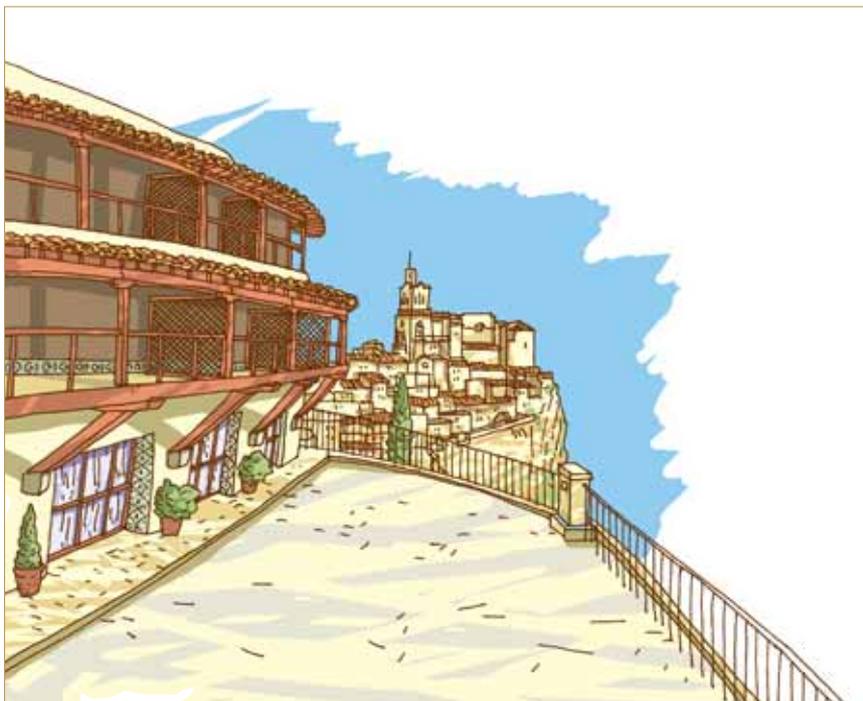
Visitors will find history, legends, and remains of civilizations and cultures all around them. Nothing has

been lost completely. The Guadalete River has witnessed the passing of time, from the first Phoenician settlements to the Reconquest under Don Rodrigo, and what came after... In front of the main entrance to the Parador lies the Cabildo Plaza, which was the castle parade ground centuries ago and through which all the inhabitants of the town have passed during the course of the Peninsula's history: Phoenicians, Romans, Visigoths, and especially, Moors and Christians. Generation upon generation,

a wide range of people with different tastes and styles, have inhabited its walls: Moorish, Gothic and Renaissance, gypsies, bandits and even, more recently, guerrillas, have all settled in the town that spreads out from this same Plaza.

What are today the windows of the Parador have looked out over this square when it was an Arab market place, the site of medieval games, and even a bullring.

The façade and tower of the church of Santa Maria were rebuilt in the mid-18th century after what



was known as the "Lisbon Earthquake" destroyed much of Arcos in 1755.

The castle of the Duke of Arcos is near the Parador. Rebuilt in the mid-15th century during the reign of Juan II, it is today the home of the Marquis of Tamarón.

The Parador gets its name (Casa del Corregidor, or "House of the Magistrate") from one of Arcos's magistrates, although there is no record of his name or when he lived here.

However, it is known for certain that the Vicar González de Gamaza also lived here. He was a very popular clergyman in the area, known as "el Pa Guzmán", and died here in 1917.

Perhaps the true story is hidden in the waters of the Guadalete River, waters that have witnessed so much and hold a thousand secrets. The following story is told by Arcos's well-known scholar and historian, Manuel Pérez Regordán.

In his "Leyenda de Los Pajaritos" ("Legend of the Birds"), he recounts how Alfonso X wished to reconquer the town. The wise, Christian monarch developed a clever strategy against the town's strong and numerous defenses. After besieging the town for some time, he took his army to the gates to observe how the inhabitants behaved. They were a proud people and felt safe that their walls could not be penetrated.

However, the King could not detect any defensive measure on the part the Sarracens except for the strange daily ritual of throwing small stones from the castle into the trees around the base of the rock every evening. The only apparent result was that the numerous birds in the

trees were disturbed and flew out.

In spite of strong objections, the monarch decided to try an unusual experiment. He ordered his warriors to capture as many birds as possible to carry out his plan.

When the Moors threw stones as usual - to find out whether the enemy was close by, it could be supposed - the Christina king's soldiers let loose the birds they had captured to instill a false sense of security among the Moors in the castle. This is how Alfonso X finally conquered Arcos for the Christian cause, using intelligence rather than force.

Without a doubt, travelers are attracted to the Parador because of these legends, its history, its art... And they find in it a special vantage point from which to look into the legendary past of the Moors and the Christians.

Travelers such as General de Gaulle, who chose to write part of his memoirs here. In Arcos, people of the town claim that "he arrived, spent some time writing, ordered a bed his size and then, one fine day, disappeared...."

Antonio, the dancer, also stayed here in 1973 to shoot the film "The Three-Cornered Hat." He ended up in jail for public blasphemy.

Other famous people to visit the Parador include José María Pemán, King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofia, C. Luca de Tena, and, more recently, the well known and prolific bullfighter Jesulín de Ubrique, who has become "a frequent visitor to the Parador, usually accompanied by his parents...."

## WHITE AND ANGULAR HOUSES AND STREETS

- 1. Town Hall.**
- 2. Ducal Castle.** Formerly the home of the Dukes of Arcos.
- 3. Church of Santa María de la Asunción.** Gothic, Mudejar. 15th century.
- 4. Church of San Pedro.** Romanesque-Gothic Transition style.
- 5. Convent of the Encarnación.** Founded in the 16th century as a hospital.
- 6. Convent of the Mercedarias.** 12th century with a Baroque altarpiece.
- 7. Convent of San Agustín.** From the 16th century.
- 8. San Antonio Abad.**
- 9. Palace of the Cont of Aguila.**
- 10. Palace of the Mayorazgo.**
- 11. Palace of the Marquis of Torresoto.**
- 12. House of Pedro de Gamaza.**
- 13.** 12th century Sevillian tile on **Maldonado street.**
- 14. Puerta (Gate) de Matrera.**



## CUISINE FROM THE SEA AND FROM THE MOUNTAINS

*"The pig is a sordid, low and clumsy animal, that lives in filth; its recreation is mud and its life is dirt"...*

Comment by a Jewish Rabbi living in Arcos

And yet, pork and fish (from the nearby sea and from the mountains) are the main ingredients for most of Arcos's cuisine, not forgetting many other dishes made with ingredients found in the surrounding areas.

If travelers expect they will have to be content with a little fried fish and gazpacho, they will be pleasantly surprised. Such a wide, varied, and imaginative range of food is available that it was even praised by the wise King Alfonso X when he conquered the region.

The cuisine reflects the area's natural boundaries: the sea and the mountains, the rivers and the valleys, all of which offer exquisite ingredients used in dishes that often follow traditional recipes handed down by Moors, Jews, and Christians. Some roasts are prepared using secret methods (it is said that in some mountain areas, meat is still cooked on the stones used by shepherds to give salt to their flocks).

Along with the usual cold soups (**Gazpacho** -tomato and vegetable, and **ajoblanco**- almond and garlic) Arcos has many surprises in store for the most demanding palates: **Tagarninas**, a plant which grows wild and is similar to asparagus; cabbage, an essential ingredient in the stews that are typical of the mountain areas; chard, spinach and **Alboronía**, a dish of beans with eggplant, and many others.

Game stews are also popular in the mountain areas, as are oxtail stew and roast lamb everywhere. **Salmorejo** (cold tomato soup thickened with breadcrumbs), **Flamenquines** (Serrano ham wrapped in beef, breaded and fried) and **Cortijeras** stews should also not be missed.



Travelers should leave room to sample the fish the Parador offers. Not just the "pescaito" (small fried fish), but dishes such as **Urta en Salsa a la Roteña** (a local fish in sauce) **Marinated Roe**, **Tope Shark**, **Clams with Spinach** and **Shrimp Omelets**.

Or shrimp, king prawns, and Sanlúcar oysters.

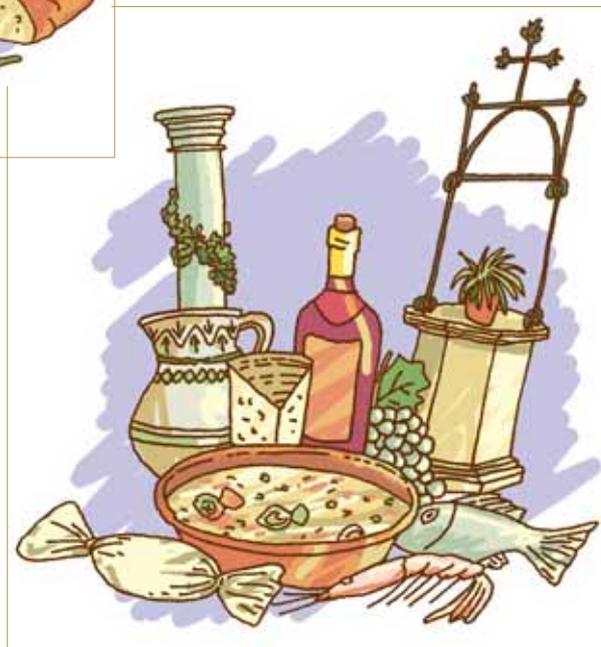
Also to be tried are Arcos **Swordfish a la Molinera** and **Sea Bream** "a la Puerca". Cheeses and wines are limited in number, but not in quality. The best-known cheese is Grazalema goat's milk cheese and the best wines come from Arcos itself: **Viña Lucía** red and **Tierra Blanca** white.

Arcos also boasts fine desserts: **Higs in Wine**, **Alfajores**, **Amarguillos de Grazalema**, **Pestiños** and **Cadiz-Style Turrón**.

Arcos can also offer travelers something less formal, but no less tasty, if they prefer to lose themselves among the streets and alleys, bars and taverns of the town, in order to try the wide variety of tapas (appetizers) on offer.

Good tapas can be found everywhere, and locally are sometimes referred to as **Engañifas**, such as cured Iberian pork loin and seasoned pork sausage, blood sausage and cured ham. Or small dishes of tope shark, squid roe, and more.

The Parador can advise on where to go and what to choose.



## MOORISH WHITE VILLAGES

The White Villages Route goes through areas with some of the most typical Andalusian architecture. The villages are located in the area between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, and the Cadiz and Ronda mountain ranges. The hills, slopes and gorges make the villages seem like a blaze of white color embraced by the

green pines, holm oaks, Spanish firs, and cork oaks. Bright white villages with steep, narrow streets and beautiful, carefully tended courtyards. The Arab-style roof tiles and the arches that cross the narrow streets from building to building give them their own special identity.

*Route One: Arcos, Grazalema, El Bosque, Zahara de la Sierra, Olvera, Setenil, Ronda.*

**Grazalema.** It is thought that Grazalema is the site of the Roman settlement of Lacidula. Others claim that its name came from Ben Zalama, the Vizier of Cordoba who ordered it to be rebuilt. It was conquered by Rodrigo Ponce de León, Duke of Arcos and Marquis of Cadiz. Grazalema is one of the most beautiful villages in the area. Its magnificent climate in the summer makes it an ideal place for holidays. The church of **Nuestra Señora de la Aurora** is of particular interest.

**El Bosque.** Nestled in the foothills of the Grazalema mountain range, this town was founded by the servants of the Duke of Arcos, who spent long periods living in the **Marchenilla Palace**. The local people were able to show their courage when defending the town against the French invasion. Fernando VII granted it town status in 1815. The **Church of Santa María de Guadalupe** and the **bullring** are of particular interest.

**Zahara de la Sierra.** Historians claim that this was formerly Regia, as cited by Pliny; others claim that it was an ancient Celtiberian settlement called Lastigi by the Romans. Whatever its origins, this was one of the best fortifications in Andalusia. The **Parish Church**, the **Shrine of San Juan de Letrán**, and the municipal archives must not be missed.

**Olvera.** The **Arab castle** on the rock overlooking the town is, without a doubt, the hero of all the battles that have taken place here. Dating back to the 12th century, it has an irregular base, built in the shape of an isosceles triangle.

**Setenil.** The Catholic King Fernando took Setenil in 1484, after a 15-day siege. Its **Parish and Municipal Archives** are the true bibliographical treasures of Andalusia.

**Ronda.** The famous, proud, and dreamlike town of Ronda is found in the center of the mountain range that bears its name. Located at an altitude of 750 m and built on both sides of a 100 m deep gorge, it has excellent views. Romanticism, banditry, and bullfighting have turned its history into legend.

Route two: Jerez de la Frontera.

Jerez de la Frontera is universally recognized for its wine, its horses, and its bulls, and as the birthplace of Flamenco singing.

Some of its major monuments include the **Walled Almohade**

**Enclosure** (12th century with asymmetrical towers), and an 11th century **Alcázar** (fortress) that contains **Arab Baths**. The cathedral is Gothic and has five naves with groined vaulting. The Mudejar **Church of San Dionisio** was built on the site of a former mosque. The 16th century **Church of San Miguel** is one of the most important buildings in Jerez, built in the Isabelline Gothic style.

La **Cartuja**, the Carthusian monastery, is one of Jerez's most significant buildings, located four kilometers from the town center. Building began in 1478, but work continued through the 16th and 17th centuries, which explains the mixture of styles. The main entrance is Lombardesque, while the interior is Gothic with Renaissance features and the façade is Baroque. This is one of the few Carthusian monasteries in Spain that still operates as such today.

For museum lovers, the town offers an **Archaeological Museum** and a **Clock Museum** with over 300 exhibits. For lovers of other things, Jerez's wine cellars offer guests a warm welcome.



## PARADOR DE ARCOS DE LA FRONTERA Casa del Corregidor

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