

TOLEDO

AND ITS PARADOR



FOR GOD AND EMPIRE

"I only feel foolish in Toledo."

Queen Isabel The Catholic

So old are these lands and the origins of their people so ancient that Toledo should be considered the mother of all Spain. Such was the desire of the gods and spirits of history.

The town was born with the earliest myths. The most learned chroniclers claim that Hercules came here to hide the secrets of his great wisdom in a cave in these hills, to be guarded by a fierce serpent. These were Toledo's first inhabitants.

As the earliest Muslim inhabitants of these narrow winding streets would have it, Hercules's cave was where the most precious of treasures, Solomon's Table, was stored. It was said to have been carved from an enormous emerald torn from Lucifer's forehead. Only when the town was conquered would the grace of Allah allow the jewel to be split into nine sacred stones for the nine most beautiful mosques of all Islam.

More recent and skeptical researchers claim that the mythical cave was merely a water tank built by the Romans, another of their hydraulic miracles. Let the visitor instead accept the more pragmatic and sound belief of more recent scholars, who affirm that the greatest tragedy of a people is when their legends are turned into history. For these streets and people are more the result of myths, magic, and marvels than anything else.

The Romans settled here, high above the Tagus River, quite early – some two thousand two hundred years ago – when Toletum, according to Titus Livy, was no more than a small fortified village. They built bridges, dams, and an aqueduct, and the town minted its own coins. They won many victories and built one of the most impressive amphitheaters in Hispania, but Viriato made matters very difficult. The invincible Lusitanian leader used a fable to warn the invaders of the dangers of pact-breaking and deception: *"a man, neither young nor old, took two wives. The younger of the two wives, in an attempt to make him look closer in age to her, began pulling out his gray hairs. The older wife, for the same reason, pulled out his black hairs. In the end, the man was left bald."*

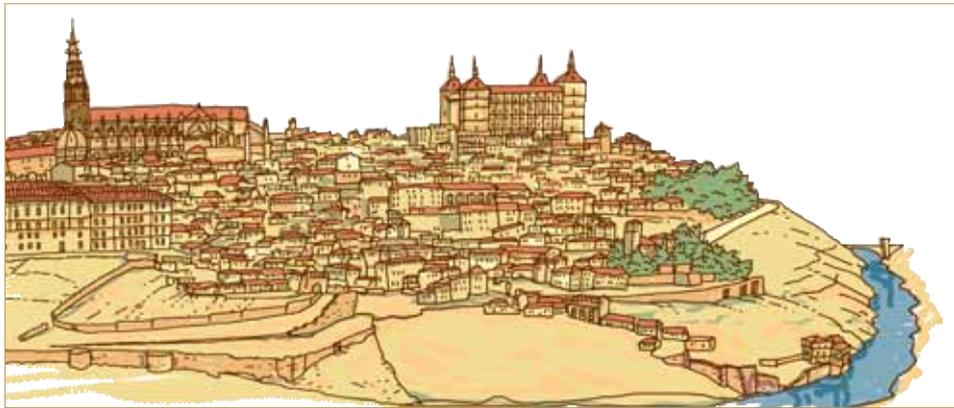
The Visigoths eventually expelled the civilizing Empire to found the kingdom of Toledo and create the State of Spain. It was the first in Europe. As the great warrior predicted, the Visigoths dislodged the civilizing empire to found the Kingdom of Toledo. This was the beginning of Spain, which would soon be foremost in all Europe.

The centuries of Visigothic occupation were unsettled by ambitions, by feudal and treacherous noblemen, and a church desirous of earthly power. The town was both the political capital and Holy See of the relentless Councils of Toledo. The repentant Reccared converted to Christianity, and his kingdom with him, leaving behind the earlier confused beliefs of its people. During the Fourth Council, held in the early 7th century, Saint Isidore subordinated the royal temporal powers to the indisputable designs of the church. The monarchs effectively became missionaries: *"Rex eris si recte facias; si non facias, non eris,"* was Isidore's sentence.

A powerful court filled with vanity and intrigue soon flourished, to the

dismay of its progressively more impoverished and forgotten neighbors. These understood nothing of sides or wars, nor were they interested in the nobility or the church. But many different trades and handicrafts developed. There were cobblers and spinners, and artists who worked in metal, wood, and stone. There were craftsmen making arms and armor, and gold and silversmiths producing numerous treasures. There were also a large number of potters, false doctors with magic potions, and many merchants who would come from the most remote areas to sell their wares.

The cathedral was first a mosque and finally a church in the Gothic style. It was the pulpit from which the religious power of this early Catholic Spain was preached. Some of the most luxurious palaces and mansions of the time were built here. There were palatial monasteries inhabited by cultured bishops who enlightened the path of the Councils. Magnificent churches such as San Román and El Salvador



THE MUDEJAR CHARMS OF THE TAGUS

This Parador is part of the age-old enchantment of Toledo. This was where Hercules decided to build a town on the banks of the Tagus and fill it with people and homes to create and experience victories and defeat. It was the home of kings and other cultured and high-ranking inhabitants. It was the showcase for art and literature, daughter of heroic deeds, marvels, magic, and legends, of Christian suns and Moorish moons.

When the Moorish invaders reached these gates, they did not find a hostile population, but rather a hospitable one, as soon as their tolerant talent for government became clear. They almost always respected pre-existing property and customs and tolerated the Christian religion. They built irrigation channels where there had previously only been dry unusable land. They encouraged the cultivation of grape vines and olives, and a textile industry developed out of sheep farming. Glass was re-invented and pottery became an art. Many magical engineering projects could be seen at court, such as the famous water clock that measured the passing of time between two columns of marble, driven exclusively by the changing phases of the moon.

A new town emerged, one filled with mosques and Mudejar-style brick., which was never entirely re-Christianized. There were noisy markets full of merchants and beggars, astrologers and performers. The narrow, winding streets and hidden squares offered ideal spots for impossible love affairs, and for jealous revenge. It became so populous that only Cordoba and Seville were larger. The mixed

still contain some capitals and other elements carved by the Visigothic master masons, and part of the town wall built by King Wamba. It is unfortunate that the visitor cannot see Solomon's famous table or the many golden crowns that have adorned royal heads. Many other treasures have disappeared into the hands of Moorish and Christian thieves, although the Visigothic Museum still has remnants and jewels from that primitive flourishing.

The plague of power continued to spread. The nobility wanted to be more powerful than the king and all were subject to the uncompromising Church. The population became poorer and was increasingly abandoned amid the treacherous plots of nobility, bishops, and monarchs.

It is not certain how, but it seems the Moors felt almost invited to conquer the town, possibly with the help of some ill-intentioned Jews.

Or perhaps it was the revenge of Julián, the Governor of Ceuta, after being offended and humiliated by Roderico's attack on his daughter's virtue. First Tarik, and then Muza, quickly turned Toledo into the center of operations for their final conquest.

population of some forty thousand was not entirely Moorish, or Jewish, or Christian. The territories ruled by this Moorish kingdom spread as far as Madrid, Guadalajara, Cuenca, Ciudad Real, and included parts of Extremadura. The famous geographer, Mohamed-al-Idrisi wrote: *"This town is the center of all Spain. This is where the Table of Solomon, son of David, and many other treasures were found."* Art and



science flourished becoming the envy of the most cultured and refined societies of the Western world.

Even today, Toledo proudly boasts the ornate brickwork of the time in its doorways, the square that is still used as a market, and the mosques filled with intricate mysteries. The Cristo de la Luz Mosque is a jewel with Visigoth, Romanesque, and Mudejar features and announces the triumph of the cross over the moon of Toledo's night

According to legend, when the triumphant Alfonso VI was riding through these newly conquered streets, his horse knelt down in front of a sanctuary. The king ordered the floor stones to be lifted and an image of Christ was found there, no doubt hidden at some time in the past by a devout Christian. The image was accompanied by a lamp that had never gone out. In gratitude for the miracle, the monarch consecrated the sanctuary for the return of Christian activity.

However, it is probably more likely that the 'miracle' was a result of the King's astuteness, as strategy was then known. While fleeing from Christian enemies, also abundant at the time, he found refuge in the Court of King al-Mayon. One fine day, the Moorish statesmen were discussing how the town could be conquered and decided that it would only be possible after seven years of siege, with the town completely isolated. The clever Christian king pretended to be asleep to eavesdrop on these valuable secrets. But the no less astute taifa al-Mayon decided to test whether his guest was really asleep by pouring molten lead onto his illustrious guest's hand. Alfonso kept as quiet as a mouse, listening to the preparations. Since that time he has been known as the "King with the Perforated Hand," and the spot where all this took place is known as the King's Garden.

Toledo was baptized and shone with these and similar tricks. But the different religious cults and cultures were so intertwined that it became necessary to submit followers to a trial by fire. Some say it was divine intervention, others attribute it to the all-powerful Cardinal Cisneros's skill, but the fire that would have consumed a Christian went out and that of the Mozarab failed to catch. This diplomatic draw has meant that the cathedral still maintains some of the least Orthodox rituals.

The Jewish community still provided important knowledge and financing. Some twelve thousand Jewish money lenders confessed more sorrows than glory in some ten synagogues. However, they were eventually converted through a combination of the Inquisition and the holy word of Ferrer, "the stake" of the sinful Inquisition.

Toledo very soon reached even greater heights when the infallible Pope Urbano raised the city's category to metropolis, and his prelate's seat became "the most important bishopric in all of Spain." The cathedral was decorated in the finest Gothic style. The Catholic Monarchs bestowed favor and privileges, held court here, and ordered the Church of San Juan de los Reyes to be built. Carlos V saw fit to bring his court here, thereby making the town the imperial capital.

The Toledo School of Translators, under the learned hand of King Alfonso the Wise, brought light to medieval Europe with the knowledge of the Moors and Jews, and what was lost or forgotten of the Greeks and Romans.

The 15th and 16th centuries were times of great splendor in Toledo, and even after Felipe II decided to move his court to Madrid, the town never lost its imperial flavor, although some of its former brilliance has become somewhat decayed and rusted.

Even so, these streets would experience other moments of glory and pride that would also honor the city's coat of arms. There was the rebellious Padilla, leader of the utopian Comuneros. Here the eternal Celestina was born and Garcilaso de la Vega filled the Golden Age with poetry. Another foreign emperor would also come to live and paint his own unique infinity here, an emperor called El Greco for short. All this makes Toledo no less than eternal.

STREETS OF FLAMING MOONS

1. **Bisagra Gate**
2. **Alfonso IV Gate, or Old Bisagra Gate**
3. **Cambrón Gate**
4. **San Juan de los Reyes Monastery**
5. **Santa María la Blanca Synagogue**
6. **El Tránsito Synagogue and the Sephardi Museum**
7. **El Greco's House and Museum**
8. **Church of Santo Tomás**
9. **Cathedral**
10. **Santa Cruz Museum**
11. **Alcázar (Fortress)**
12. **Sol Gate and Bib Mardúm Mosque**
13. **Alcántara Bridge**
14. **Fuensalida Palace**



COURTLY AND PLEBIAN CUISINE

Toledo's tables are privileged to have inherited age-old recipes from Romans, Arabs, Jews, religious orders and shepherds. The visitor will soon discover the carefully and patiently prepared creations of this Parador.

The region's gardens are prodigious, producing peppers, onions, zucchini, eggplant, chickpeas, and lentils. These are the source of dishes and stews fit for a king. This are also wild areas which are a paradise for the best hunters: quail and partridge, hare and rabbit, deer and wild boar.

Poultry is raised in traditional ways and cod and other salted fish are still brought from the sea. Pork, the king of the table, is to be found in a wide variety of delicious sausages and meats which change with every bend of the road.

The area's olives proudly compete with the best in the kingdom, especially those from around Mora. Local wines have borrowed their heritage and robustness from abroad, and grow in an area which can boast of being one of the world's best wine-producing regions.

The stew artfully called **Madrileño** has its roots in **Adafina**, a Jewish dish from Toledo, which has been converted to Christianity by His Excellency the Pig. **Castilian Bread, Egg and Chorizo Sausage Soup; Garlic Soup; Gazpacho** (cold tomato soup), and **Fried Bread Crumbs** are dishes whose names are shared by neighboring areas, although the recipes change depending on the location. There are many substantial stews. Lamb was not discovered in Toledo, but has been used for many years in traditional recipes. **Caldereta** stew clearly gives its Muslim influence away with its spicy flavor and cooking method, over an open fire. **Chicken Fricassee** awoke the gastronomic imagination of the excellent Sancho Panza. The mixed vegetable and tomato **Pisto** is

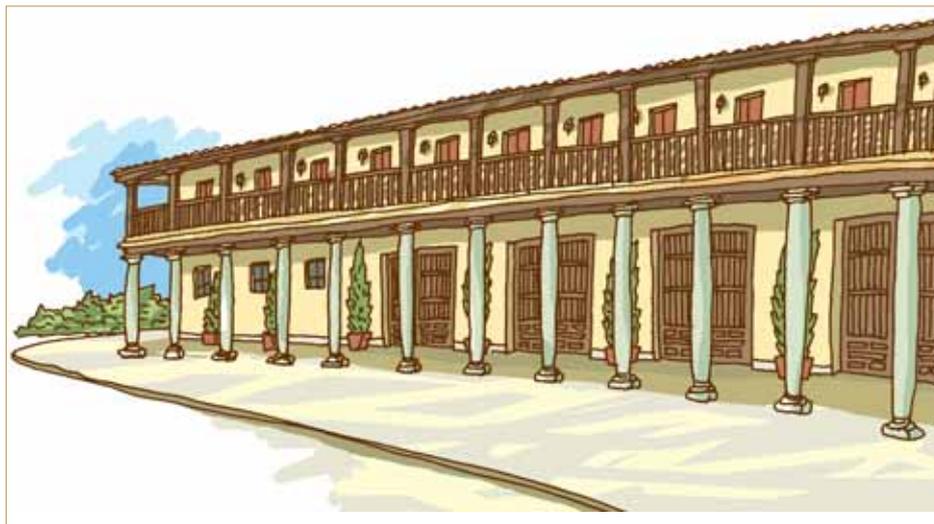


the child of the Moorish alboronía. **Slowly Stewed Partridge and Quail; Hare and Rabbit with Garlic or Tomatoes; and Wild Boar and Venison with Mushrooms**, and sometimes with tomatoes, round out our list.

Cod is the main fish to be found in Toledo, although there is no shortage of trout, tench, and other fish from rivers that have earned their own saying: "From Toledo, fish or fowl." However, the modern and civilized diner has given up sacrificing the tiny song birds that used to be found so frequently in local restaurants.

Marzipan is the universal sweet for both Christmas and every day.

Strong-flavored **Manchego Cheeses**, fine **Wines** from **La Mancha**, and hardy and heady wines from **Méntrida** should also not be missed.



COUNTRY HOUSES AND PATHS OUT OF CERVANTES

There is so much to see in Toledo that the visitor often runs out of time along these surprising streets filled with memories. But the surrounding province should not be missed, as it has much to offer which will satisfy the most varied appetites of the avid traveler. There is abundant fishing and hunting in an unusually wide variety. There are also relaxing and time-consuming pottery and wooden handicrafts, threads woven in the air, and fine gold and silver decorations hammered into more humble metals. The festivals are a study in folk traditions and there are temples which are art, paths to

war, and miracles all in one. The professionals at this Parador can suggest the best route for your tastes and the time available. We offer the following suggestions as a general guide.

■ La Mancha of Cervantes

Almonacid. The fortress of medieval counts, used for both attack and defense. **Mascaraque.** Castle of the brave Comunero rebel Padilla. **Mora** is olive-growing land with a castle to defend the town from Almoravid attack and a Gothic church where many unfortunate infidels

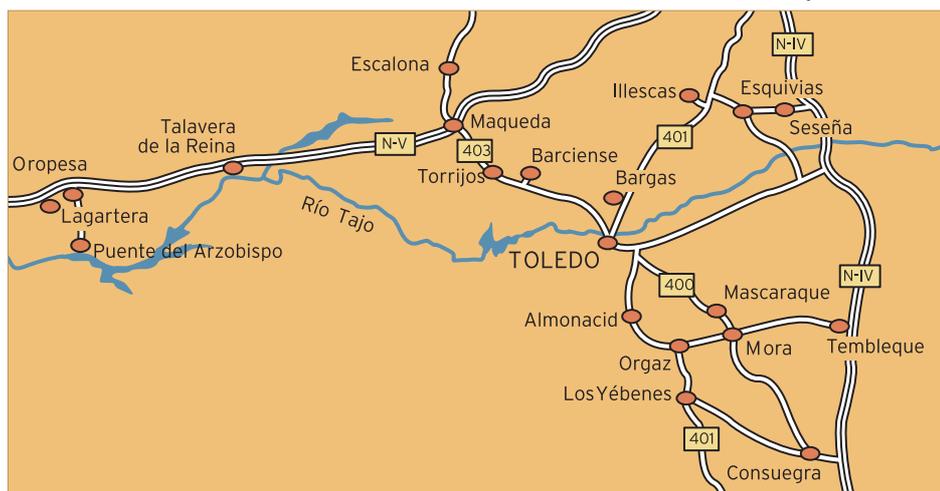
were burned to death. **Orgaz.** Home of the counts immortalized by El Greco. Its Churrigueresque church houses the famous painting El Expolio and has boasted an illustrious mayor, no less than El Cid. **Los Yébenes** continues to be the setting-off point for many a hunting party. The church is 16th-century and has a Mudejar tower. There are also the remains of a Roman aqueduct. **Consuegra** was the distinguished home of Romans and later the stronghold of the powerful Order of Saint John of Jerusalem. Some of the tireless windmills of Cervantes can be visited and show how flour used to be ground. The visitor is advised to take away a sample of some of the most famous saffron ever. **Tembleque** has an extremely lovely and unusual main square from the Golden Age, a proud Gothic/Renaissance church, a baroque shrine and a rollo, a cruel stone used for justice in the 16th century.

■ La Sagra

Bargas. Lands of wines and handicrafts. Famous since the 16th century for its carved wood sideboards. **Illescas.** Gothic/Mudejar church from the 16th-18th centuries with a unique brick tower known as the Giralda of Sagra, after the famous tower in Seville. The Charity Hospital, founded in the 16th century by the powerful Cardinal Cisneros, has five excellent El Greco paintings on display. **Esquivias.** A short stop and the site of Cervantes's marriage. The Virgen de la Leche (Virgin of the Milk) is a valuable 18th-century wooden sculpture. **Seseña.** A distinguished castle with a fine keep.

■ The timeless Tagus

Barciense. 13th-century castle, home of the Dukes of Infantado. Tower keep adorned with a distinctive coat of arms. **Torrijos.** Collegiate church of the Santísimo Sacramento, Gothic/Renaissance with a beautiful Plateresque façade. The altar piece and the choir stalls are 16th-century. **Maqueda.** 15th-century castle built by order of Pedro I the Cruel. Mudejar Vela Tower. **Escalona.** Home of the Infante Juan Manuel, who wrote El Conde Lucanor, and fiefdom of the constable Alvaro de Luna. The impressive castle is being rebuilt and has some interesting Mudejar elements. The main square was the scene of some of the adventures of the famous Lázaro de Tormes. Convent of the Concepcionistas with a Plateresque façade and cloister. Renaissance and Talavera tile frieze in the San Andrés Hospital. **Talavera de la Reina.** A blend of the Roman, Goth, and Muslim. Remains of the walled settlement. Gothic/Mudejar Collegiate Church of Santa María. Renaissance Convent of San Prudencio. Baroque churches of San Bernardo and San Agustín. The Virgen del Prado Shrine contains tiles from the 16th and 17th centuries. **Oropesa.** The castle of the Álvarez de Toledo family houses the magnificent Parador de Turismo. The Church of La Asunción is Gothic and Renaissance. Church of San Bernardo and the Madre de Dios and Las Clarisas Convents. In nearby **Lagartera**, women still perform the miracle and prestidigitation of creating bobbin lace. **Puente del Arzobispo.** Excellent, elegant, and unusual pottery work dating back to the 16th century. **Vascos** is nearby and offers some interesting ruins of a Spanish-Moorish town



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