



SIGÜENZA

AND ITS PARADOR

OF THE HUNDRED BISHOPS WHO TOOK UP ARMS

*"The land yields up bread, livestock, birds, fruit, honey,
some wines, famed vegetables, and is rich in merchants
and transactions..."*

History of Méndez Silva. 1645.

The history of Sigüenza is a compact guide to the history of Spain. From the time of its first prehistoric inhabitants to the time of the final battles of the Civil War, the town has experienced, either in suffering or in joy, every chapter in Spain's more than twenty centuries of history.

Of Neolithic origins, in the 5th century B.C.E. Segontia was already among the most notable Celtiberian settlements, inhabited by the Arevaci until the period immediately before the Roman conquest. The settlement was rebuilt by the Visigoths after the Barbarian invasions, and its inhabitants lived a prosperous life, farming and raising livestock.

The town was occupied by the Arabs in an early stage of their invasion of the Peninsula. However, the legacy they left here was neither especially brilliant nor enriching, contrary to that of other territories they occupied. Even so, the Moors raised a great fortress on the site where the Castle-Parador now stands.

During the reign of King Alfonso VII, the town was wrested from Saracen control by Bernardo of Agen, whom the King designated as ruler of the town. From that time on, it would remain under the power and control of a line of bishops whose passions were divided between matters of the diocese and of the sword, until the end of the last century. Bishop Bernardo, moreover, would obtain many well-deserved privileges.

Henceforth, the town of the hundred bishops would know a thousand and one historic events, all with a touch of legend about them.

One such event had Blanca of Borbón as its unfortunate protagonist. The cousin of King Carlos V and granddaughter of King San Luis, she was married to Don Pedro, King of Castile and León and then immediately abandoned in favour of his lover, María de Padilla. After much scandal at court, legend has it that the King imprisoned his legal wife in a cell in this very castle. After numerous incidents, Doña Blanca was finally assassinated by an arrow from a crossbow on the orders of her husband, Pedro *"the Cruel"*. War after war followed, such as the Battle of Olmedo, in which Aragón and Navarra fought Castile; as a result, Sigüenza would need to build new hospitals.

Sigüenza would again know prosperity under Diego Hurtado de Mendoza. His diocese controlled such important towns as Soria, Calatayud, and Ayllón. The powerful influence of Cardinal Mendoza, adviser to the Catholic Kings, would yield such positive results as the construction of Sigüenza's first university. The town's rich Renaissance legacy can still be admired by travellers today.

The periods to follow would bring economic expansion and a dazzling cultural boom: Art and literature would experience their most glorious moments, though these were often tainted by war, such as the War of Succession.



Times were good and peaceful again until the disasters brought by the French invasion, when Napoleon's troops captured and pillaged the city.

At that time, the city had miraculous defenders, such as Juan "the Persistent", and the divine intervention of the Virgin Mary who "miraculously turned day into night, causing the enemy to retreat, and the city was freed." Sigüenza would know other, minor adventures such as that of King Fernando VII "the Desired," who came to the town with one of his wives, María Josefa Amalia, to seek the miracle of fertility in the nearby Solán de Cabras baths. And when the King



saw that the miracle was not as fertile as was necessary, he angrily told his entourage:

"Let us go. If we stay, everyone but the Queen will become pregnant..."

Ever warlike, Sigüenza would yet see more wars, such as the Carlist Wars, during which the town, "decisively and fearlessly" chose to fight against the rebel Cabrera. And the Civil War, in which the citizens bore witness to confrontations between Nationalists and Republicans; once again, Christians against Christians...

THE PARADOR OF SUNS AND MOONS

"This castle is of Roman origin, and was raised as a fortress by the Moors.

It was definitively recovered from the Almoravids for the Kingdom of Castile in 1124, by Bernardo de Agen, Archbishop of Toledo, of the Cluny Order, and his company of armed men. Doña Urraca ruled Castile at this time; she was the daughter of Alfonso VI, who captured Toledo, and mother to Alfonso VII. From that time on, the town was property and fief of the Bishops of Sigüenza.

In 1298, the town suffered a surprise attack by the followers of prince Alfonso de la Cerda, during the battle in Castile against the boy king Don Fernando. The attackers were thrown out of the city by the Bishop's vassals after burning the Castle gates."

Legends such as the alleged kidnapping of Queen Blanca de Borbón, who was held in these walls, by the vengeful decision of her unfaithful husband, King Pedro I. He was known as "The Cruel" in this region, while in others he was called "The Just."

The walls and rooms of this Castle-Parador have witnessed many heroic events and court intrigues, and have historically been used by the bishops to receive nobles and courtesans, both Moorish and Christian; to receive Kings, including the Catholic Kings, or as protection for armies during the Carlist Wars, or Napoleon's troops. Even later, much closer to our times, for the "Nationalists" fighting the "Reds" of the Civil War, in an unequal struggle that remains somewhat unclear even today.

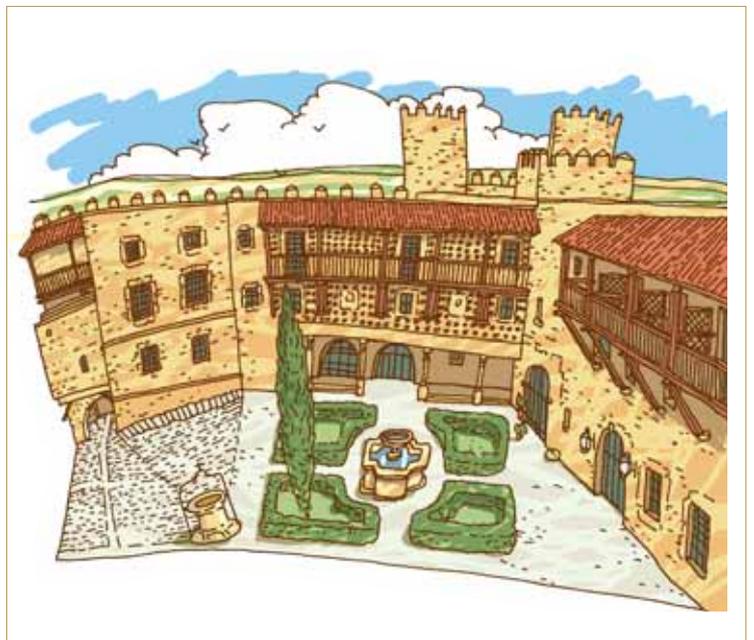
Many periods of splendor and of others of poverty were experienced by generations which, through the centuries, would serve as unique witnesses to such an incredible history.

The above text, printed in ceramic, is a careful summary of the history of this castle, today a Parador, and of Sigüenza itself. Travelers will find this summary in the entrance to the Parador, next to the reception area. The text is written and signed by the author and architect of the Parador's restoration, José Luis Picardo.

But this castle, formerly an Arab fortress, before that ruled by Visigoths and long before that, a Celtic settlement, conserves even more history and legends, the former rigorously documented and the latter pleasantly embellished.

What is certain –and this is unanimously confirmed by experts– is that the history of what is today the Parador begins in the Neolithic period. The site's first inhabitants were the Arevaci, within the region occupied by the Celtiberian tribes.

Since that time, long before our Era, Sigüenza, its castle and the inhabitants living both inside and outside its walls, walls which still stand today, have experienced myriad events and seen characters of all types: some which history has recorded with painstaking precision, while others grew out of tradition, legend, or that history which the people decide to remake.



Therefore, travelers will not be surprised to learn that these walls harbor a legend or two which, always with some degree of certainty, the locals have wanted to confirm for the entertainment of the most skeptical travelers.

It happens that during a convention, a panel used during one presentation fell from the wall on which it had been hung. The presenter/instructor of such a promising group decided to attribute this event to the Castle's ghost.

The next day, the participants were again startled by the falling of the panel. In light of the event's repetition, one of the participants decided that the ghost was, without a doubt, male, as such things only occur in the presence of women.

It was then unanimously decided - with the participation of the Parador staff - that this magical, amazing act was none other than the vengeance of the Ghost of Fray Bernardo himself, first Bishop of this castle, which still roams the castle halls...

Since then, the Ghost of Fray Bernardo has demonstrated his power and presence within this Castle-Parador from time to time.

Travelers should know that the Castle-Parador is today the scene of numerous cultural and artistic activities, such as productions of Don Juan Tenorio, exhibits of all styles of paintings and painters, the Community of Madrid's Autumn Concert Series, poetry recitals, as well as films such as "Christopher Columbus: The Discovery" starring Marlon Brando, and a few television series.

Famous personalities from the world of politics, culture, and science have also stayed here. To name just a few of them: the King and Queen of Spain, Sánchez Albornoz, Jose Luis Sampedro and popular humorists Mingote and Forges.

Very recently, Imanol Uribe set up headquarters here to prepare his film "Los días contados," which was awarded the Concha de Oro at the San Sebastian Film Festival.

For all of these reasons, Sigüenza is what it is - for what it was and for all that this "very unique, very historic city" aspires to be.

A MORE THAN SINGULAR STROLL THROUGH THE CITY

1. **Cathedral.** Cistercian-Gothic style with Romanesque elements, such as the rose window that looks out onto the Plaza Mayor. Inside, of particular interest is the Doncel de Sigüenza funerary sculpture, one of the best in the world. The cloister is from the 16th century.
2. **Plaza Mayor.** Construction began in 1494.
3. **Convent of Las Madres Ursulinas.** From the 16th century.
4. **Church of San Vicente.**
5. **College of Los Infantes.** In the San Roque district, from the 18th century.
6. **Shrine of El Humilladero.**
7. **Episcopal Palace.** Impressive Baroque facade.
8. **Former University.**
9. **Puerta de Hierro, Portal Mayor and Puerta del Toro Gates.** Once provided access to the now invisible city walls.



IT IS NEVER TOO LATE IF THE FOOD IS GOOD

"Eat honey with your fish, but do not tell the Christians."

From a Collection of Arab Sayings

Travelers will easily note the abundance and richness of the region's gastronomy referred to by the Romans, the result of the area's surprising, almost unreal geography, the many fertile river valleys, the rugged mountains and the Alcarria countryside.

Nature has given itself wholly to an uncommon, colorful cuisine, and not just in Sigüenza, but also in the entire region.

River trout are plentiful here as nowhere else. The saralino (known as the salmon of the Pacific) is also fished here, along with carp, bogue, barbel, pike, and black bass. Unfortunately, those ugly, small, but delicious crabs are no longer available; they fell prey to a new population of a prettier, though tasteless, American variety.

Big and small game such as hare, rabbit, partridge, and quail are also abundant. Wild boar and venison are available though these are scarcer. There are different cheeses and wines to be had as well.

And above else, there is honey, which enjoys well-deserved, worldwide recognition.

The traveler will find delectable samples of these and other foods in the cuisine of Sigüenza and the surrounding area.

Any place is a good one to savor **Sierra-style or Alcarria-style Suckling Goat**, or **Wild Rabbit Fried or Prepared with Pisto** (similar to ratatouille).

Tables are especially festive at the opening of hunting season, set with dishes based on venison, wild boar, or partridge. And the **Migas** (seasoned fried breadcrumbs) are always present, adorned with **Fried Eggs** and **Tallos de la Olla**.



or **Walnuts with Honey**.

Travelers will find many of these dishes on the Parador menu, as well as: **Roast Suckling Goat Alcarria-style**, various **Stews**, **Partridge** and **Quail Stewed or in Marinade**, and a good selection of desserts, including specially-prepared **Flores**.

Other dishes include **Trout**, either stuffed, in **Sauce or Sierra-style**. **King Oyster Mushrooms** are plentiful in season and as well as **Saffron Milk Cap Mushrooms**, prepared in sauce or grilled.

The **Green Beans with Chorizo** seasoned pork sausage and the **Marinated Rabbit and Partridge** should not be missed.

And there are as many **Tapas** (appetizers) as one can imagine: **Sweetbreads**, **Crabs**, **Myriad Mushroom Tapas** or **Perdigacho** (local name for male partridge). And to finish, honey, in all types of desserts: **Uvao**, **Egg Yolk Sweets**, **Sponge Cakes Soaked in Liqueur**,

WANDERER, THERE IS NO PATH, YOUR PATH IS MADE AS YOU GO...

There are a number of paths starting at the Parador to help travelers better explore this extraordinary region. To help travelers organize their trips according to the time available, here we suggest two short routes and a few others that require a full day.

■ **Pelegrina**. Beautiful buildings, including the Bishop's Palace. A trip to the **Hoces del Río Dulce** (a freshwater river) area is also recommended

The **Salt Mines of Imón**. The Salado River is near Imón; though it may seem strange, this is a saltwater river (as its name suggests).

■ **Country Romanesque Route.**

This routes leaves from the Parador towards **Albendiego**. This town, located on the slope of the Alto Rey Mountains, has a magnificent Romanesque sanctuary. Next, we reach **Campisábalos**. This town is a perfect example of country architecture. The 12th century Romanesque Church of San Bartolomé is also of interest. **Villacadima**. Though abandoned, this village invites visitors to wander through and imagine its history and legends. We return to the Parador via



Galbe, a small village whose castle is of particular interest.

■ **Atienza Route.** (Depart towards Palazuelos)

Palazuelos is known as "little Ávila" because it is a beautiful walled city. **Carabias**. Another example of Romanesque art; it has a 12th century church. **Imón**. Next to the Salado River; here, the **Salt Mines of Imón** and **Olmedo** can be visited. **Atienza**. This was an ancient Iberian settlement that knew its greatest splendor during the Late Middle Ages. Its **Plaza Mayor**, and **Plaza del Trigo** are noteworthy, in addition to its noble churches, such as the Renaissance **Church of San Juan** and the 12th century Church of **Santa María del Rey**. The castle, from the 12th and 13th centuries, is described as the "the very strong crag" in the epic poem "Cantar de Mio Cid".

■ **Route to Hita, Cogolludo and Jadraque** (Depart towards Hita).

■ **Hita**. Birthplace of the unforgettable archpriest of Hita, author of the Libro de Buen Amor. **Cogolludo**. Once belonged to the **House of the Duke of Medinaceli**. It has an exceptional Renaissance palace from 1492. The **Castle of Jadraque** was built on the site of another

castle during the period of Moorish rule, and is attributed to Pedro González de Mendoza, Bishop of Sigüenza.

■ Upper Tajo Route.

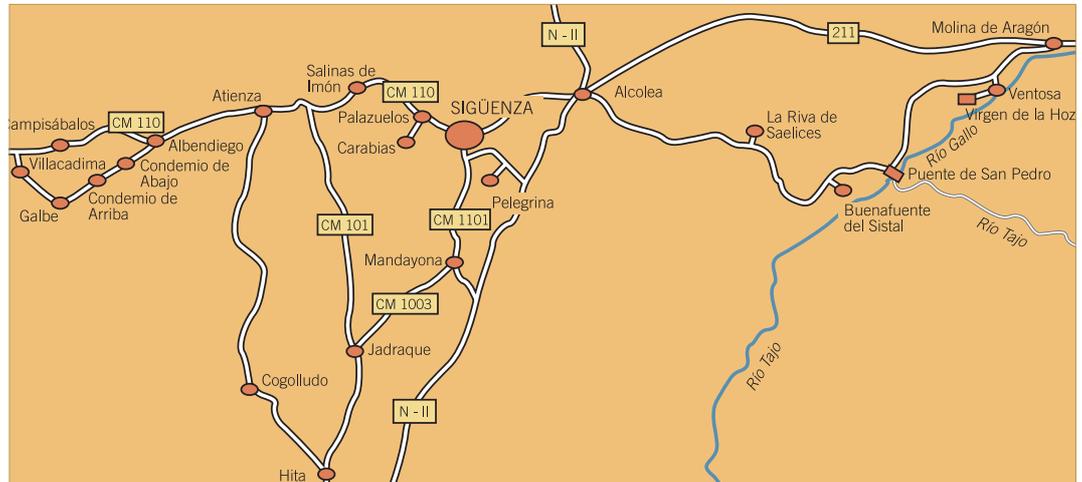
This route takes us from Sigüenza to **Alcolea**, and then on to **La Riva de Saelices**, where we exit to visit **Los Casares Cave**. This cave is very important for its paintings which, apparently, are the first to depict sexual intercourse.

We then return to **La Riva de Saelices** and continue on to **Buenafuente del Sistol**, which has a Cistercian monastery from the 13th and 14th centuries. The church still contains a sculpture of Cristo de la Salud in the chapel, where there is a fountain from which the monastery takes its name.

■ **San Pedro and Puente de San Pedro**. We will pass through areas of spectacular landscapes, where age-old juniper forests mix with wild olive trees and *Lentiscus* to reach the **Puente de San Pedro** (bridge), which marks the confluence of the Gallo and Tajo

Rivers. Following the path toward **Molina de Aragón**, we reach the 15th c. **Shrine of the Virgen de la Hoz del Río Gallo**, which is practically embedded in the rock.

■ **Molina de Aragón**. Despite having been burned and sacked on numerous occasions, the town still conserves areas such as the **Moorish quarter** or **Soledad quarter**, the latter with a strong medieval feel.



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