



A duchy
for a saint

ALBA DE TORMES



HISTORIC SITES
OF SALAMANCA
ROUTE

S. 304-2016



RiVeR, PLaiNS aND MuDeJaR STYLe

The landscape of the north-eastern corner of Salamanca province is characterised by its soft hills and large cereal-covered plains, interrupted here and there by the dense forest areas known as *dehesas*. There also those little wetlands which, much like oasis, break with its greenery and the bustle of their feathered inhabitants an chromatic palette where otherwise the predominant colours are ochres and yellows.



It is in this hilly territory where the towns of Peñaranda de Bracamonte and Alba de Tormes rise. Like poles that complement and attract each other, these towns are set apart, one by its location at the crossing of a thousand roads and the other, by its proximity to the River Tormes.

The river, here in its middle section, seems to slow down before passing by Salamanca city, which can be almost felt not far away. And it is precisely the short distance between Alba de Tormes and Salamanca, just 22 kilometres, what makes it the ideal destination for those who, while visiting the capital, would like to spend a day getting to know the area around it.

Another interesting aspect for those willing to visit these lands, which belong to the natural areas of Tierra de Peñaranda and Tierra de Alba, is the group of small Mudejar churches hidden in many of the villages along the Route of Mudejar. A string of temples that will surprise the visitor with their



unexpected coffered ceilings, not unlike wooden skies, carefully built piece by piece as if they were complex jigsaws to embellish these houses of prayer. This is an art based on simplicity, recognisable by its use of brick, as can be seen in the churches of San Juan and Santiago, in Alba de Tormes.

One of the historical places in this land, Los Arapiles, very close to the province capital city, includes signposted routes for the interpretation of this battlefield. This place was the setting for one of the most important battles in the Independence War, marking the end of the Napoleonic dominion.



A WaLK THROuGH HiSToRY

The medieval tower that rises over the town is proof of the importance that the most influential noble house in the history of Spain: the House of Alba. Located by a strategical ford in the River Tormes, Alba became part of history when it was designated the seat for this lineage, which for centuries increased its power and influence. The tower, once part of the fortress built in the highest part of the town, ended up being a luxurious Renaissance palace, where some noteworthy frescoes can still be seen.

But the heritage of Alba de Tormes can also be enjoyed in many other of its corners, such as the church of San Juan, with its amazing group of Romanesque sculptures representing Jesus and the apostles, the Anunciación monastery, Saint Teresa's burial place, Carmus, the Carmelite Museum, which houses valuable works of art, or the "Padre Belda" Museum.

LiViNG NaTuRe

The River Tormes is born in the Sierra de Gredos mountain range. From there, it runs through 284 kilometres until it reaches the River Duero, in the Salamcan Arribes. When it reaches the ducal town of Alba, in the middle part of its journey, the river is surrounded by a fertile area. There it becomes wide and slow enough to be a mirror for the skyline of a village that ended up being the main city in the most influential duchy of the history of Spain.

Its banks provide the visitor with the possibility of watching a great variety of birds and animals when walking the paths on its right side. One of those paths, known as the "Watermills route", in addition to a singular panoramic view of the town, will let the visitor walk under the various trees lining the riverside - poplars, alder trees, black poplars, ashes - up to the area where the remains of the old industries that used the river power can still be seen.



ReNeWeD TRaDiTiONS

The two highlights of the festival cycle of Alba de Tormes, which includes religious and secular celebrations scattered along the year, are related to honour the links of the Saint with this place. One is the Transverberación of Saint Teresa festival, held between the 25th and 27th of August, and her Patron Saint Festival, which takes place between the 14th and 22nd of October, and has been declared a Tourist Attraction in the Castile and Leon Region.



Among the local traditional handcrafts, the most interesting is pottery, masterfully worked by the artisans who have, throughout the centuries, developed an exclusive style that nowadays can be easily recognised: the ceramic filigree. This technique, applied to plates and the particular Spanish pitchers, creates a small area which brings to mind the Salamanca embroideries or a peacock's tail.

WHeRe To eaT aND SLeep

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A DuCHy FoR a SaiNT

From the day she died in Alba de Tormes, on 4th of October, 1582, the echo of the steps of Saint Teresa of Jesus, *the travelling saint*, mystic and woman of letters, founder of convents and reformer of her religious order, have not stopped for a minute. In fact, there is an ever increasing number of pilgrims tirelessly coming every year to venerate her remains in the Anunciación convent, her eighth foundation.



The convent became her last dwelling when she came, being quite ill already, heeding the call of her friend, María Enriquez, wife of the Third Duke of Alba.

This friendship joined two of the greatest personalities in the history of Alba de Tormes, Saint Teresa and Fernando Álvarez de Toledo, better known as the Great Duke of Alba. This key statesman, who belonged to both Carlos I and Felipe II's court, made of this village a relevant cultural hub which benefitted, thanks to his patronage, of the presence of many a thinker, artist and writer of the Spanish Golden Age.

Of all that, and of what had been here before and was here after, much has been left in Alba, a monumental heritage that spreads from its Ducal castle at the top, down to the bridge over the Tormes in the lower area, and all of which deserves to be visited without hurries.

