

Spain *is special*

Awesome canyons and majestic mountains, charming cities and abundant wildlife – it's full of delights

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The hilltop setting of Segovia can be fully appreciated from the Pinarillo

Trip summary

OUR MOTORHOME

2015 Devon Tempest on a Renault

Master MWB 2.3-litre Energy

DCI. This is our second

Devon Conversions

'van. At 5.3m

we think it's

enormous

and, with a

washroom,

also luxurious



2015 Devon Tempest

THE JOURNEY

We travelled from Salford, using the Portsmouth to Bilbao ferry and spent 66 nights away, August to November, of which 23 nights were spent in Spain over 2,200km (1,367 miles)

THE COSTS

Fuel average 34mpg (€523) £475.88

Ferry Portsmouth-Bilbao return £768

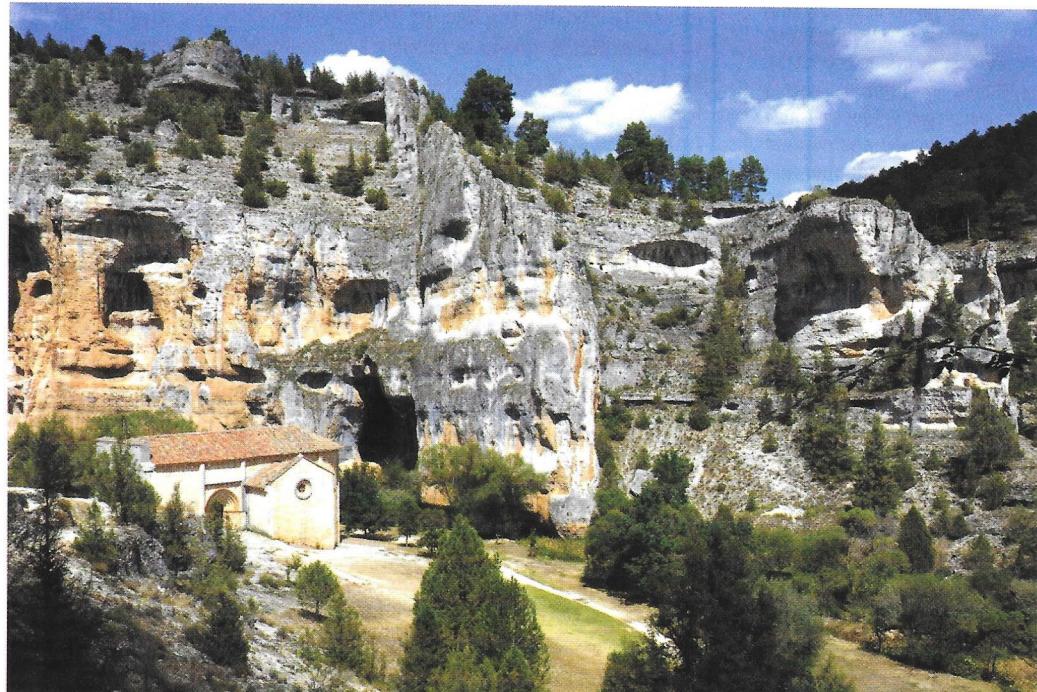
Site fees (€434.40) £395.26

Attractions two adults: Cathedral in Segovia, combined ticket for sites in

Merida and Museo Vostell Malpartida (€49)	£44.58
Public transport Two adults: bus one-way in Segovia and return bus in Cáceres (€6.40)	£5.82
Parking El Parque Natural del Cañón del Río Lobos (€5)	£4.55
Total £1,694.09	

3,520 miles

Total £1,694.09



RIGHT The Ermita de San Bartolomé is dwarfed by the cliffs of the Cañón del Río Lobos



Carol Kubicki...

From the lofty viewpoint I peered over a precipitous drop into the spectacular Río Lobos canyon. Before me were huge limestone crags of different hues and dotted with caves and pinnacles. I could only speculate why the young man at the information office had been so insistent that we shouldn't follow Las Gullurias walk. My Spanish is patchy but, as he waved his hand dismissively over the map, I was sure he said Las Gullurias was just woodland and that instead we should drive into the canyon.

We were glad that we had ignored his advice and taken the path through butterfly-rich lavender and thyme into fragrant pine woodland. We had the viewpoint to ourselves and sat watching griffon vultures soaring above, their calls echoing around

the canyon and their huge shadows flitting across the cliffs as they swept onto ledges.

Our adventures around northern Spain started with a trip back in time. After landing in Bilbao we drove through the Rioja vineyards, following the River Ebro to Logroño. Heading south, near the village of Enciso we discovered the Yacimiento de Valdecevillo dinosaur footprints. The best-preserved footprints were left by dinosaurs crossing a shallow lake millions of years ago. I struggled to comprehend just how old the clear three-toed prints in the rock were.

The Parque Natural del Cañón del Río Lobos was next and, after Las Gullurias, we cycled to the canyon and climbed to the natural rock 'window' above the Ermita to enjoy the stunning view through the coral-coloured cliffs to the gorge beyond. ▶

...and her husband, Anthony, use their Devon Tempest to pursue their hobbies of walking and cycling while exploring historical and natural environments

TOP TIPS

The best dinosaur footprints (Yacimiento de Valdecevillo) are 2km (1 1/4 miles) from Enciso on LR286. Large car park

The fiesta in Salamanca is held around the second week of September (7-15 in 2018)

whatsalamanca.com/feria-salamanca.html

In the **Parque Natural del Cañón del Río Lobos** there is free parking at Casa del Parque outside Ucero; here the Las Gullurias walk begins.

The road continues to the canyon with three parking areas: Fuente Engómez (immediately inside the park), Cueva Fría (after 1.3km/ 3/4 mile) and Valdecea (after 2.5km/ 1 1/2 miles and nearest to the Ermita). In summer and on weekends traffic cannot go beyond Cueva Fría. Parking for motorhomes is €5 (£4.55) a day

From here the canyon has less craggy drama and is traffic-free, intimate and peaceful. We stopped by pools carpeted in water lilies and bulrushes and watched azure-winged magpies among the trees and drag martins flocking around the cliffs.

Another memorable excursion is the delightful two-hour circular walk from the campsite to the Ucero Castle, with gorgeous views back to the canyon.

We had a loose plan for this trip, wanting to achieve the right proportion of outdoor and cultural activities, so our next stop was Segovia. Combining culture and exercise, we walked the two miles into town, following the exceptional Roman aqueduct from its lowly beginnings to the city centre where it grows to a stunning 28.5m (93.5ft) high.

Compact Segovia is mostly traffic-free and we wandered through lovely squares and narrow streets. Outside the walls we found the steep paths to the Pinarillo, a shady green space with exceptional views back to Segovia.

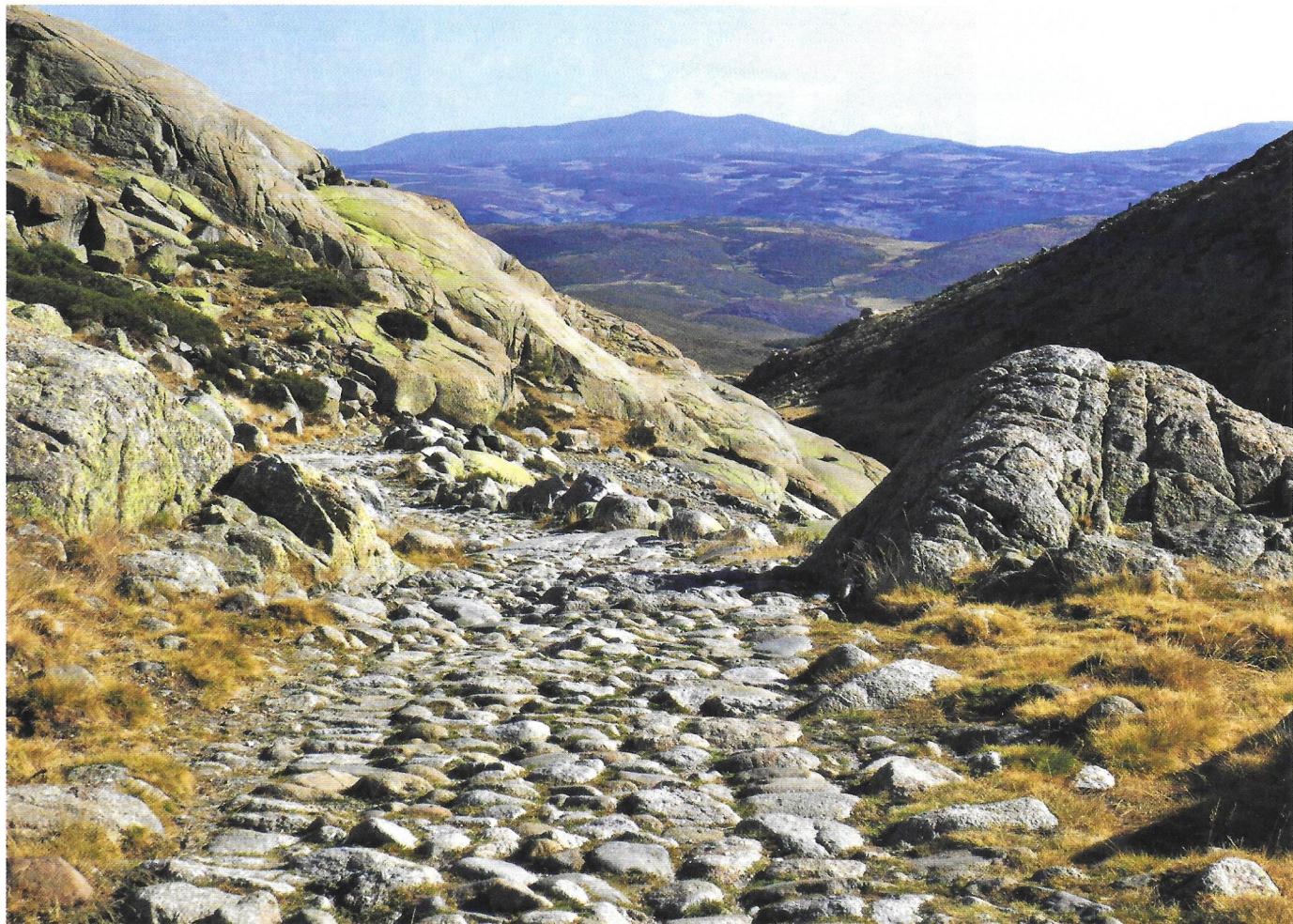
We climbed the cathedral's tower on a guided tour for the 360-degree view over the town. On the horizon was the mountain

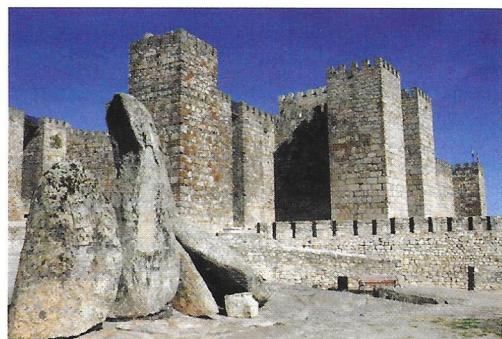
whose silhouette resembles a reclining woman – La Mujer Muerta.

The September mornings had a chill that the sun soon overcame and it was hot as we cycled from the site along the *vía pecuaria*, a medieval drover's road for the transhumance (moving animals from one grazing ground to another as the seasons change). The cycling was easy along the Tormes valley, but became more challenging as we climbed the hillside. Here, we rested on boulders, enjoying the gentle breeze. Returning to the valley, we cooled down in pools in the Tormes surrounded by waterfalls and the aroma of fresh mint.

The walk from the car park at La Plataforma to Laguna Grande, a lovely mountain lake, deserves a full day and the well-maintained path is justifiably popular. As we climbed through the high pasture dotted with boulders and grazed by cattle, we met a train of horses descending to resupply the refuge.

Before descending to the lake we took in the impressive panorama of the circle of craggy peaks, with the glacial lake below, and watched a short-toed eagle circle above.





“We sat taking in the awe-inspiring view, looking for eagles and admiring the soaring skills of the vultures”

INFORMATION

- lariojaturismo.com/en
- turismodesegovia.com
- castrojeriz.com
- haroturismo.org/en
- salamanca.es/en

Salamanca was so pleased we had stopped by that it put on a firework display! It would have been rude not to attend.

Dusk had arrived as we cycled beside the River Tormes into Salamanca and a murmuration of starlings swirled across the sky and noisily roosted in the surrounding trees. Their song was joined by a drumming band practicing in the park and the combined sight and sound was remarkable. I immediately took Salamanca to my heart.

If you only do one thing in Spain, make sure you see Salamanca's Plaza Mayor after dark. I was awestruck by the impressive sandstone buildings, their harmonious elegance emphasised by the lighting.

Around the cathedral we found crowds in elaborate traditional dress honouring the city's patron saint. At 10pm we joined the throng overlooking the Roman Bridge and watched a colourful and noisy firework display. What a welcome!

Salamanca suited us perfectly; we enjoyed an hour cycling back and forth and the lively city, with a healthy mix of residents and tourists and streets of graceful sandstone buildings, proved ideal for two drifters. I was constantly looking up as we

ABOVE CLOCKWISE

Traditional dress in Salamanca is colourful and elaborate; the Roman aqueduct in Segovia is one of the best preserved; the imposing castle in Trujillo

LEFT The cobbled path to the Circo de Gredos is delightful

wandered the streets to ensure that I missed no details on the magnificent buildings.

Salamanca plays games with its visitors; we joined the throng searching for the sixteenth century carving of a frog in an intricate university doorway as spotting the frog is supposed to bring you luck. We're expecting a lottery win soon! On a cathedral entrance are two more unusual carvings, an astronaut and an ice cream, both added during renovations.

When we wanted to rest, the cafés in the colonnade of the Plaza Mayor proved ideal and are also prime people-watching spots.

We chanced upon cool, formal gardens with views over the river and enjoyed the serenity of the Convento de las Dueñas. This has an unusual two-tiered and five-sided cloister and we came away with a box of the delicious almond cakes baked by the nuns.

I didn't really want to leave Salamanca but I did want to reach Portugal, so we headed north and found the remote and graceful seventh century Visigoth church of San Pedro de la Nave in El Campillo, northwest of Zamora.

It's a charming stone church with a squat central tower. Light filters gently onto the inside walls of bare stone blocks, a flagstone floor and columns with outstanding carvings. The custodian showed us the horological recordings on the wall where the sun was tracked and months and days recorded.

We returned to Spain via Extremadura, ▶



ABOVE An astronaut was added to the cathedral in Salamanca in the 1990s

BELOW Trujillo is a town of many towers

FOR WALKS

-  canondelriolobos.com
-  turismoextremadura.com/en
-  walkingextremadura.com/los-barruecos.html

staying in Cáceres. Keen for some walking in the undulating and arid steppe landscape of Extremadura, we drove about 20km (12½ miles) west to Los Barruecos Natural Monument. Here, granite boulders in the sandy valley have been eroded into bizarre shapes that encourage the imagination and, in the arid autumn conditions and under a blue sky, were theatrical.

Our five-mile marked walk took us to the Museo Vostell Malpartida, an eighteenth century wool-washing station that's now a gallery for the works of Wolf Vostell, an artist with local connections. His installations use vehicles, TVs and concrete to make a statement about late twentieth century society.

We walked around the two small reservoirs and this proved to be a great area for bird watching. We saw azure-winged magpies around the café, a kingfisher flying over the reservoir and lapwings, geese, little egrets and heron on the shoreline. In the trees we were accompanied by crested larks and hoopoe, with griffon vultures overhead.

We searched the magical landscape for human and animal-shaped rocks, spotting a frog, a baby and even a caricature of Margaret Thatcher.

We drove to the Parque Nacional de Monfragüe via Trujillo, a pretty town that was perfect for a few hours of exploration, not least for the views from the castle over the steppe with blue-tinted mountains in the distance. This route gave us the best approach to Monfragüe (meaning fragmented mountain) as, from the south, the craggy ridge at the heart of the park looks breathtaking.

We drove through the *dehesa*, extensive areas of sparse holm oak trees grazed by cattle and pigs that provide food for the many birds of prey in Monfragüe. The road reaches the Salto del Gitano, a spectacular cliff-sided gorge cut by the River Tagus. We stopped to gaze at the circling vultures; both griffon and Eurasian black vultures can be spotted and Monfragüe is an important site for the latter.

Monfragüe is managed for wildlife and some areas have no access, but there is a good network of paths and roads to take you to the best viewing points. My favourite walk was the 'green' circular route to Cerro Gimio, a small peak above the Tagus with views over the Salto del Gitano.

The route contours along the hillside through aromatic lavender, with oak trees ➤





ABOVE This friendly Thekla's lark posed obligingly; the Plaza Mayor in Salamanca puts on its best show at night

BELOW LEFT One of Wolf Vostell's bizarre sculptures in the Los Barruecos National Monument, near Cáceres

BELOW RIGHT The cliffs at Salto del Gitano are a popular viewpoint for griffon and Eurasian black vultures

giving welcome shade and accompanied by jays and hoopoes. Dropping down to the Malvecino river there was water for a paddle before the final push to the craggy summit. We sat taking in the awe-inspiring view, looking out for eagles and admiring the soaring skills of the vultures.

The 'yellow' route (amarillo in Spanish) started the inevitable rendering of *Is this the way to Amarillo?* and took us through low scrub with little shade. The path reaches the river and follows it to La Tajadilla viewpoint, taking in a stunning section of the valley.

We reluctantly left Extremadura and headed north for Castrojeriz. This is a small town on the *meseta* (plateau) near to Burgos that developed from the popularity of the Camino de Santiago, creating a long and narrow town strung out around the base of the hill, as every church and hostel wanted to be along the Camino. Above the town is a castle with panoramic views over the landscape.

We followed the Camino to the River Odra and an ancient arched walkway where we were passed by two *peregrinos* (pilgrims).

At a viewpoint on the next hill we had our picnic with kites and buzzards above us and a Thekla's lark posed on a pile of stones, giving me plenty of time to take its photo.

As we sipped a rich Rioja in Haro's pretty square, we toasted the beauty of Spain with its amazing countryside, abundant wildlife and stunning cities and we agreed there was still plenty to explore. We clinked glasses chorusing, *hasta la vista, España!* **mmm**

WE STAYED AT

As this is a very long list, we've abbreviated the information below. To get full details of address, open dates and prices, head for motorhome.ma/MMMSpanishTour

Casalarreina Aire, Calle del Frontón, Casalarreina 26230, La Rioja

Camping Fuente de la Teja, 42005 Soria
fuentedelateja.com

Camping Cañón del Río Lobos, 42317 Ucero
campingriolobos.es

Camping El Acueducto, 40006 Segovia
campingacueducto.com

Camping Gredos, 05634 Hoyos del Espino
elcampingdegredos.com

Camping Monfragüe, 10680 Malpartida de Plasencia
campingmonfrague.es

Camping Don Quijote, 37193 Cabrerizos
campingdonquijote.com

Campsites Sierra de la Culebra, 49520 Figueruela de Arriba
campingsierradelaculebra.com

Cáceres Camping, 10005 Cáceres
campingcaceres.com

Camping Camino de Santiago, 09110 Burgos
campingcamino.com

Camping Red de Haro, 26200 Haro, La Rioja
campingdeharo.com/en

