Castilla y León

Spain

Avila
Burgos
Leon
Palencia
Salamanca
Segovia
Soria
Valladolid
Zamora
Introduction

TERRITORY

If there is one word that sums up the complex reality of the region of Castilla y Leon, that word is “monumental”. Everything about the geography and the culture of this Region, strategically situated in the north-east Iberian Peninsula, is on a grand scale. The tremendous variety of detail there is the product of sheer physical size – Castilla y Leon covers one-fifth of Spanish territory. With a total area of 94,147 square kilometres, it is the largest region in the European Union.

The basic axis of the territory is the basin of the river Duero, the largest in Spain. The major communication routes between the capital Madrid and the Atlantic regions all run through here. Castilla y Leon, then, is situated in the northern part of the central Spanish plateau. Its borders are demarcated by natural boundaries – the Cordillera Cantabrica to the north, the Sistema Iberico to the east, the Sistema Central to the south and the mountains of Galicia/Leon to the west.
The river Duero, the country’s largest electric power source, descends in torrents from the heart of the Sistema Iberico at an altitude of over 2000 metres. The central axis for the whole area, the river’s natural impetus is attenuated when it reaches the plains. Criss-crossed by a network of tributaries to the main Duero stream, these consist of three broad topographical types - high barren plains, flatlands and fertile river plains.

Because of the differences in physical and orographic conditions, there is a tremendous variety of plant life. The most widespread tree is the holm oak, a hardy species able to withstand both heat and cold. Holm oaks can be found in every province of the region, both on open moorland and in woods. Chestnuts also abound on cool, nutrient-rich lands, particularly in areas of northwest Leon. And finally, the forest cover of the Sierra de Gredos contains extensive stands of the famous and highly-prized Scots pine.

Given the size of the region, Castilla y Leon naturally offers an enormous variety of wildlife. The wildest area is home to endangered species like the wolf or the brown bear, which are now the subject of protective regulations intended to preserve mammal species historically pursued by man. The emblematic mountain goat inhabits the mountains of Gredos, while the Cordillera Cantabrica harbours deer, wild boar and urogallo, a large wildfowl akin to the capercaillie. Avian species include the imperial eagle, the tawny vultures of Río Lobos Canyon and storks that winter in Villafáfila.

What actually makes for such varied and attractive scenery is the majestic heterogeneity of the mountain ranges that form the Region’s natural
boundaries. The permanent snowy caps of the highest peaks provide a background of eternal beauty, while the middle zones are populated by rich woodlands following the life-giving rivers.

The region owes much of its wealth of colour to the typically continental climate of Castilla y Leon: long, hard winters contrasting with moderately warm summers. The deep valleys pass from leafy green to gold with the change of seasons, perpetually shielded by hills on whose crests old castles watch over the passage of man and time.

HISTORY

In the dawn of prehistory, a nucleus of tribes established the first settlements in this ancient region, around the Duero and its tributaries. With the triumph of imperial armed might, the pax romana brought civilisation and progress, with the appearance of roads and bridges, baths and sewers, aqueducts and new townships. The arrival of the Christian Visigoths brought a new element to the scenery as they built the first churches ever to appear on the vast Castilian horizons.

Successive waves of Arab invasion left the banks of the Duero impoverished and depopulated. But the valley survived, and from the ninth century on, new cities like Zamora and Burgos began to appear. In the next century, the imperious will of Count Fernán González inspired a new collective enterprise which would eventually come to be known as Castile. This was the
age of the Reconquest, which acquired renewed vigour with the final union of the kingdoms of Castile and Leon in 1230. In this way, the most powerful of the Peninsula’s kingdoms gradually forged its own culture and peculiar identity.

Leon was the scene of the first popular and democratic Cortes to be assembled in the West. Valladolid witnessed the marriage of the Catholic Monarchs Isabella and Ferdinand, architects of Spain’s accession to nationhood. This was a time of limitless wealth, carried from the New World by the carvels that flew the Spanish flag on every corner of the known seas.

But all the progress and well-being achieved in preceding centuries were gradually lost as the foundations of the empire “on which the sun never set” began to crumble. This marked the onset of a process of emigration in search of new opportunities which was sustained practically until the present day.

With the return of democratic coexistence in this century, the year 1983 saw the promulgation of a Statute of Autonomy whereby Castilla y Leon was recognised as a territorial entity, the largest in Europe as we have said, with a population of 2,484,603 according to the last census.

The Region comprises nine provinces: Avila, Burgos, Leon, Palencia, Salamanca, Segovia, Soria, Valladolid and Zamora – all capitals and towns with their own peculiarities but bound together by a common past replete with history and tradition. Art, culture and tourist attraction are the three facets that define the
fascinating personality of Castilla y Leon – a land of legend which has once again assumed responsibility for its own destiny.

SPIRIT OF THE REGION

If the Region is outsized geographically, it is no less so in terms of its historic and cultural monuments. Littered with Roman remains, which continue to come to light today, Castilla y Leon is and was an outstanding part of that highway of Christian devotion which follows the Milky Way to the sepulchre of the Apostle St. James in Compostela – or, as the ancients had it, to finis terrae, the place where known land came to an end.

Mediaeval Spain, ever attentive to the welfare of pilgrims, undertook tremendous works of engineering, repairing roads and building bridges, hospitals and inns, all of which provided enormous impetus for trade and racial intercourse. And of course
it raised marvellous churches which still stand as living proof of the timelessness of the religious experience.

Along the road to St. James there sprang up veritable miracles of Romanesque art, like the church of San Martin de Frómista, that of San Isidoro in Leon and the curious cloister of Santo Domingo de Silos. Or again there is the string of country churches spanning the north of the province of Palencia, which make this an area of first-class artistic and tourist interest.

The apogee of Gothic belongs to the age of imperial expansion when Castilla y Leon was synonymous with Spain and vice versa. The finest examples of this school can be seen in the cathedrals of Leon and Burgos. In the sober Leonese temple, a structure of unobtrusive angles and cleanly-defined corners, the visitor is regaled with a set of stained-glass windows that produce a magical sensation of standing in the very heart of the light. And then the cathedral of Burgos, a work of filigreed masonry, boasts an ornamental wealth reminiscent of Renaissance aesthetics.

The next stylistic advance produced creations based on an evolved form of Gothic. Examples of the Isabelline style are the San Gregorio school in Valladolid or the Carthusian Monastery of Miraflores in Burgos, whose beauty stretches the limits of human imagination. These places preserve a strong tradition of Castilian architecture with Arabic traces – the monastery of Santa Clara in Tordesillas, the Casa de las Conchas in Salamanca, and countless fortresses the pride of which is the ever-vibrant Alcázar of Segovia.

Turégano. Segovia
The influence of the Italian Renaissance came to us in the form of Plateresque, a tendency that is particularly marked in the Salamanca University building and the convent of San Marcos in Leon. These reflect a time in which the finest literature of the Golden Age was intimately linked to such places, the best example being the picaresque novel El Lazarillo de Tormes.

After the Court moved to Madrid in 1561, the former predominance of Castilla y Leon faded. Nonetheless, there were brilliant flashes of inspiration which left Baroque marvels such as the Plaza Mayor of Salamanca or the empathic sculptural school whose greatest exponent was Gregorio Fernandez. And it is thanks to the will of the Bourbons that we have the palace of La Granja, the last provincial construction of first-rate artistic importance.

For all these reasons it is no exaggeration to describe this Region as a compendium of two thousand years of Christian culture. The regional spirit is embodied by an impressive artistic and cultural legacy to which new names and new works are constantly being added. The aesthetic influence of the landscape is a vital factor in the literature of Miguel Delibes and the group known as the “School of Leon”. Here the researcher and scholar of folklore Joaquín Díaz still carries on his struggle to preserve popular ethnic traditions. And in the plastic arts the most representative painter is surely the muralist Jose Vela Zanetti, one of whose best works hangs in the UN headquarters in New York.

Castilla y Leon is, then, a gigantic museum, a masterpiece forged from natural variety and centuries of glorious history.
Avila

Defined in proverb as “the land of song and saint”, Avila (pop. 47,650), standing 1,131 metres above sea level, is the highest of the provincial capitals. Its carefully-preserved town centre and its numerous attractive monuments are two of the reasons why this small, peaceful city was declared part of the Heritage of Mankind in 1985.

But before immersing themselves in the maze of mediaeval streets, visitors should take the opportunity to enjoy the best views of Avila from a truly splendid vantage point. Known as Los Cuatro Postes (1), this is situated a bare two kilometres from the city, just off the Salamanca road. The most characteristic sight in Avila is its famous mediaeval walls (2), the best preserved in Europe. Begun around the year 1090, this solid “case” of stone measures 2.5 kilometres in length and has 6 gates, 3 posterns, 88 towers and battlements with some 2500 merlons. The best-known tower is the “cimorro”, which houses the gigantic apse of the cathedral of Avila. Tourists can climb to the top of the walls by way of the Alcazar gate (3) situated in Plaza de Santa Teresa.

Nearby soars the superb Cathedral (4), which bears a surprising resemblance to a military fortress. The front consists of a crenellated tower almost 43 metres high with superimposed Gothic and Baroque elements. In the interior, the harmonious dual space of the apse aisle, finished in white and ruddy stone, is particularly striking. There, behind the main altar, it is worth stopping before the carven alabaster tomb of El Tostado, a masterpiece by Vasco de la Zarza. One of the centrepieces of the Cathedral Museum is a silver processional monstrance by Juan de Arfe (open daily).

Outside the walls is the Basilica de San Vicente (5), which is
reached by the gate of the same name. This is the most important Romanesque building in Avila and is easily recognisable by its bell-tower. The church, which was begun in the 12th century, contains the splendid cenotaph of Saint Vincent and his sisters, decorated with scenes from the lives of these martyrs.

Also outside the walls is the Royal Monastery of Santo Tomás (6). An excellent example of Isabelline Gothic, the monastery was built in the 15th century under the auspices of the Catholic Monarchs. In addition to its three richly decorated cloisters there is the tomb of the prince Don Juan, only son of the most important monarchs in the history of Spain, finely executed in Carrara marble. In the grounds of Queen Isabella’s summer palace is the curious Museum of Oriental Art (7) (open daily).

The city of Avila is intimately linked with Santa Teresa de Jesús, one of the great doctors of the Catholic church. The Convent of Santa Teresa (8) was built in 1636 on the site of the house where the saint was born. As well as a church which blends elements of Baroque and Neo-classical, there is a kitchen garden and a museum containing mementos of Santa Teresa (open daily). Teresa de Cepeda has left an indelible mark on an ecclesiastical and cultural itinerary which takes in various churches: Convent of Nuestra Señora de Gracia (9), Convent of San José (10), Convent of La Encarnación (11) and others.
Burgos

The city of Burgos (pop. 161,984), one of the key links in the cultural chain running the length of the Road to Santiago, looks back on a long history. First emerging as an urban enclave in the mid-9th century, it was the capital of Castile during the Middle Ages, only relinquishing this position in favour of Valladolid after the fall of Granada. Enriched by lordly buildings, Burgos is ideal for exploring forgotten corners and basking in the purity of the light.

Entry to the old town is by way of the Arch of Santa María (1), a gateway opened in the walls during the 14th century and adorned with statues of local personalities. Opposite rises the Cathedral (2), which Théophile Gautier described as “delicate as a feminine jewel”. This the city’s most important monument and is the third largest cathedral in Spain. Built in the Gothic style, the first stone was laid by Fernando III in 1221. Its many marvels include the Sarmental door, the magnificent Constable’s chapel with the tomb of this Castilian magnate, the Golden staircase by Diego Siloe, and the renowned Cathedral Museum (open daily).

Behind the cathedral is the Church of San Nicolás (3), with a grand altarpiece in polychrome alabaster. And in the barrio del Castillo, at the foot of the ancient fortress, is the Church of San Esteban (4). Begun in 1280, this now houses a splendid Museum of Altarpieces (June to October: closed Sunday p.m. and Mondays; November to May: open Saturdays and Sunday p.m.).

The way to the river passes by the Casa del Cordón (5), the city’s most outstanding civil edifice. It was here that the Catholic Monarchs received Columbus in 1497 on his return from the second voyage to...
America. Across the **bridge of San Pablo** (6), on the other bank of the river Arlanzon stand the **Casa de Miranda** and the **Casa de Angulo**. Both buildings together constitute the **Museum of Burgos** (7), which has important sections on archaeology and fine art (closed Saturday p.m., Sunday p.m. and holidays).

On the outskirts of Burgos are two religious buildings well worth the visit. To the west stands the **Royal Monastery of Las Huelgas Reales** (8), erected by Alfonso VIII in 1187 on an area of pleasure grounds. Intended as a great funereal pantheon, it boasts a Gothic cloister decorated with Mudejar motifs, and the chapel of Santiago, which preserves a wooden image of St. James the Apostle with an articulated arm that was used to dub knights. Among other unique pieces of the period the **Museum of Fine Fabrics** contains the historic standard wrested from the Arabs at the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa (closed Sunday p.m., holidays p.m. and Mondays).

East of the city lies the **Carthusian Monastery of Miraflores** (9), built between 1454 and 1488. The church preserves the tomb of the Infante Don Alfonso, brother of Isabel la Catolica, and also a spectacular polychrome altarpiece by Gil de Siloe. Legend has it that it was gilt with the first gold to be brought back from the Americas.
The emblematic city of Leon (pop. 139,809), an accumulation of two thousand years of history and stone, began life as a Roman camp built by the 7th Legion between the rivers Torio and Bernesga. Capital of the Kingdom during the Middle Ages, Leon is an ideal place to slowly absorb the scenarios handed down by history.

A town which blends modernity with age-old tradition, its true heart is the Plaza Mayor (1). Historically a stage for all kinds of civic activities, the square is dominated by the Consistorio Viejo or Old Town Hall (2), a palatial building with a long facade which for centuries has been the “eye of the city”. The surrounding area, with its epicentre in the Plaza de San Martín (3), is packed with lordly mansions and churches housing venerated images.

Only a short walk away is the city’s crown jewel, the Cathedral (4), known as the “pulchra leonina” and one of the loveliest examples of Spanish Gothic. Construction of the existing cathedral began around the year 1255 on top of an ancient Romanesque church on a site once occupied by Roman baths. Its great fame derives from almost 1800 square metres of artistic window-work, defined by Miguel de Unamuno as “a miracle of light and stone”. The Cathedral Museum is one of the
most comprehensive of its kind, with exhibits spanning the ages from prehistory to Neo-classicism (September to June: closed Saturday p.m. and Sundays. July and August: closed Sundays and holidays).

A walk down the Calle Ancha leads to the Casa de Botines (5), a Modernist work by the brilliant Antonio Gaudi. Opposite stands the Palace of the Guzmanes (6), headquarters of the Provincial Deputation, which displays a superb main facade and a Plateresque courtyard. Only a little further on is the Basilica de San Isidoro (7), which backs on to part of the mediaeval city walls. The vaults of the royal pantheon, resting-place of 23 Leonese monarchs, are adorned with exceptional 12th-century mural paintings, which have earned it the sobriquet of the Romanesque Sixtine Chepel. The Museum of San Isidoro contains an exquisite collection of codices (closed Sunday p.m., Mondays and the first fortnight in February).

On the far side of the city rises the Hostal de San Marcos (8). A former convent and refuge for pilgrims, it was built between the 16th and 17th centuries in the Plateresque style. Now a luxurious Parador, it was once a bitter prison, where the poet Francisco Quevedo was incarcerated. In the church doister is the Museum of Leon, which exhibits such treasures as the Cristo de Carrizo, a little 11th-century marble crucifix (closed Sunday p.m. and Mondays).
Palencia

The old provincial capital of Palencia (pop. 79,745) sits in the centre of the vast plains known as Tierra de Campos. Embraced by the river Carrion and basking in the protection of the monumental Cristo del Otero (1), whose slender form is a veritable symbol of modernity, Palencia is a town with a significant historical background and considerable specific weight in the mosaic of Castilla y Leon.

The social evolution of Palencia in recent years is clearly reflected in the Calle Mayor. This is the real backbone of the city, running from North to South and a reference point for the most important aspects of civic life. About half-way down, marked out by airy columns and emblazoned buildings, is the Plaza Mayor (2), a porticoed square dominated by a monument to the local sculptor Alonso Berruguete. This central location is also shared by the Ayuntamiento (Town Hall) (3) and on a corner, the Church of San Francisco (4), a venerable 13th-century Franciscan convent.

Close by is the eye-catching Cathedral (5), nicknamed “la bella desconocida” or “the unknown beauty”. Built upon an elder 12th-century Romanesque edifice, the existing Gothic building was modelled on the neighbouring cathedral of Burgos. The exterior is severe, lightened only by the stepped formation at the top, which is adorned with gargoyles and pinnacles. One of the doorways, the Bishop’s Door, is very fine, decorated with sculptures of the Virgin and other saints and prophets. The 16th-century altarpiece, a Plateresque work of great historical value, bears
1. Cristo del Otero
2. Plaza Mayor
3. Town Hall
4. Church of San Francisco
5. Cathedral
6. Diocesan Museum
7. Church of San Miguel

Tourist information
carvings by Juan de Flandes and a Calvary by Juan de Valmaseda. Inside the cloister is the Cathedral Museum, with works by El Greco and Zurbaran (closed Sunday p.m.).

Very near the Cathedral, in the grounds of the Episcopal palace, stands the Diocesan Museum (6), which contains exhibits from the churches of the diocese (closed Sundays and daily p.m.). While still in the area centred on the old Market district one can visit the Church of San Miguel (7), Romanesque in origin and ogival in style. Tradition has it that this is where El Cid married Doña Jimena.

Its crenellated tower is one of the symbols of the city, as is the majestic Cristo del Otero, perched on a hill-top to the north of Palencia. Wrought by Victorio Macho in 1930 and 20 metres high, the sculpture has the air of welcoming the visitor with friendly countenance and open arms. In that sense it well reflects the spirit of this amiable provincial capital.
Salamanca

Salamanca (pop. 158,457) has been very aptly described as “the wise city”. And indeed, this venerable town on the river Tormes has been decisive in the growth of the soul of the Spanish nation. The UNESCO declared it part of the Heritage of Mankind in recognition of its artistic legacy. It has now – most deservedly – been designated “European City of 2002”.

The best place to start a walk round Salamanca is the porticoed Plaza Mayor (1), the most important in Spain in terms of size and construction. Built between 1729 and 1755 to a design by the Churriguera brothers, the east side is occupied by the Royal pavilion, adorned with a bust of Philip V. At sunset, the tones of the golden stone of buildings like the Ayuntamiento (Town Hall) (2) are quite unforgettable.

Following the Rua Mayor one comes to the Casa de las Conchas (3), the monument that best represents Salamancan civil architecture. This odd name (which means the House of Shells) comes from the pilgrims’ symbol, the scallop, adorning the walls. Opposite stands the Clerecía (4), now the headquarters of the Pontifical University. This is considered one of the masterpieces of Baroque and took over one hundred years to build.

Calle Libreros leads to the University (5), the source of Salamanca’s universal fame. Founded as such by Alfonso X the Wise in 1254, its facade, the best existing example of local Plateresque art, bears a well-known medallion with the image of the Catholic Monarchs in relief. The courtyard is dominated by a statue of Fray Luis de Leon, another of the many luminaries who have passed through this institution. In the Minor Colleges is the Museum of Salamanca (6), which contains an important art gallery (closed Sunday p.m. and Mondays).

Among other things, Salamanca can boast two cathedrals. The New Cathedral (7) was begun
by Juan Gil de Hontañón to remedy the shortcomings of the old one, and the work was completed in 1733. The predominant note in the building is late Gothic, although there are also numerous Renaissance elements, particularly in the decoration of the walls. The tower was built in 1705 by the Churriguera brothers but had to be remodelled to make good the damage caused by the Lisbon earthquake of 1755.

The two cathedrals are connected, and therefore one can pass straight through to the Old Cathedral (8). The most striking element on the exterior is the Torre del Gallo (Cock Tower), an exquisite dome evincing Byzantine influence. The Cathedral Museum exhibits major paintings by Francisco Gallego and Juan de Flandes (closed Sunday p.m.).

Opposite the cathedral is the Museum of Art Nouveau and Art Deco, housed in the Casa Lis (9), a pretty Modernist building built in 1905. It contains furnishings, porcelains and a fascinating collection of toys (closed Mondays).

Around the Plaza del Concilio de Trento are two convents well worth a visit. The Church of San Esteban (10) has an unusual facade protected by a triumphal arch wrought in the manner of a gigantic altarpiece (open Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays). The Convent of Las Dueñas (11) boasts a beautiful combination of Gothic, Mudejar and Plateresque elements.
Segovia (pop. 54,012) has been compared in poetic imagery with a ship of stone anchored in the sea of cornfields that is Castile. Declared part of the Heritage of Mankind in 1985, the gateway and the symbol of the city is the Aqueduct (1), one of the best-preserved monuments of Imperial Rome.

The aqueduct was built at the end of the 1st century to carry water to the upper part of the city. This “skein of stone”, measuring 728 metres in length with 163 arches, is built of stone from Guadarrama, without lead or mortar. Visitors walking by the Aqueduct will be struck by its three outstanding qualities – simplicity, elegance and grandeur.

The best place to start a visit is the Plaza del Azoguejo (2). Close by is the Casa de los Picos (3), a mansion whose facade is decorated (and hence the name, which means “House of Diamonds”) with diamond-point motifs. Plaza de Medina del Campo, a corner breathing beauty and harmony, has two notable monuments: the Torreon de los Lozoya (4), a magnificently striking building, and the Church of San Martin (5), highlighted by the Mozarabic elements of its arches and capitals. A few steps farther on is the Plaza Mayor (6), the heart of the old walled town.

To the left towers the superb Cathedral (7). This was built in the 16th century after its predecessor was destroyed by fire. Popularly known as “the mistress of all cathedrals”, this was the last Gothic edifice to be built in Spain. The San Frutos door opens into an arrangement of three naves, a transept and an aisled apse. In addition to various chapels, there is an interesting...
altarpiece of La Piedad by Juan de Juni dated 1571. The Cathedral Museum exhibits fine pieces of gold work and a collection of Brussels tapestries (open daily).

The rocks that mark the western end of the city are topped by the watchful silhouette of the Alcázar (8). Although originally dating back to the time of the repopulation of Segovia, the building was reconstructed in 1862 after a devastating fire. One of its rooms houses the Museum of Arms, with numerous exhibits recalling the military past of the fortress (open daily).
Despite its small size and air of tranquillity, Soria (pop. 33,882) offers a whole series of surprises. Set on the banks of the river Duero, its charm lies in an agreeable blend of culture and nature.

The best place to start a tour of this placid town is the Concathedral of San Pedro (1), which stands near the omnipresent Duero. Built in the late 12th century, only part of the splendid cloister remains of the original structure. The cathedral has iconographic capitals and valuable altarpieces, especially a Flemish triptych of the Crucifixion.

In the oldest part of the town is the Church of Santo Domingo (2), hailed by critics as the most harmonious of all 12th-century churches. In the street of the same name stands the Palace of the Counts of Gómara (3), the finest example of Soria’s civil architecture.

A series of winding mediaeval-looking streets leads into the Calle Caballeros. There, facing the statues that adorn the facade of the Provincial Deputation (4), is the Church of San Juan de Rabanera (5), an edifice that embodies the basic precepts of the best Romanesque architecture – external grandeur and internal austerity.

Carrying on westwards one comes to the Alameda de Cervantes (6), an ideal area for strollers and site of the Hermitage of La Soledad (7). One of its chapels preserves the Cristo del Humilladero, a splendid carving attributed to Juan de Juni. And nearby is the Museo Numantino (8), which exhibits archaeological finds from Tiermes and Numancia (closed Mondays).
1. Concathedral of San Pedro
2. Church of Santo Domingo
3. Palace of the Counts of Gómara
4. Provincial Deputacion
5. Church of San Juan de Rabanera
6. Alameda de Cervantes
7. Hermitage of La Soledad
8. Numantine Museum
9. Monastery of San Juan de Duero
10. Hermitage of San Saturio

Tourist information
The walk finishes in the other part of Soria after crossing the Duero by a bridge of mediaeval origin. There stand the remains of the Monastery of San Juan de Duero (9), founded by the monks of St. John of Acre. Masterpieces of decorative art, the intertwining arches of the cloister exhibit the best of Moslem influence on Romanesque art. Following the river bank, the path ends at the Hermitage of San Saturio (10), Soria’s patron saint. Excavated in the living rock, this little Baroque church is a marvellous display of romanticism and originality.
Valladolid

The burgeoning city of Valladolid (pop. 319,946) preserves some of the best examples of Renaissance art. The Belad Valed mentioned in documents of the Reconquest, Valladolid boasts a major monumental legacy scattered among the arteries of what is now the capital of the Region.

A good place to start a tour is the exceptional National Museum of Sculpture (1), which is housed in the College of San Gregorio, an outstanding example of Flemish Gothic. On exhibit there are polychrome wood carvings from the hands of such legendary figures of the region as Alonso Berruguete or Gregorio Fernandez (closed Mondays and Sunday p.m.).

Close by stands the Convent of San Pablo (2) with its lovely facade. Next to it is the Palace of the Pimentel (3), now home to the Provincial Deputation. Also in this area, Zorilla’s House/Museum (4) preserves the memory of this romantic writer and scion of Valladolid (closed Mondays and holidays).

On the way to the heart of the city is the Palace of Fabio Nelli (5), a building of Classical lines which houses the Museum of Valladolid and its collections of tools, coins, paintings and ceramics (closed holidays, Mondays, Saturday p.m. and Sunday p.m.). And in the street of the same name is the Monastery of San Benito el Real (6), built on the site where the fortress of King Juan I once stood, Its church has an austere doorway completed by Gil de Hontañon in 1569.

After visiting the rectangular Plaza Mayor (7), the route leads on to the Cathedral (8). Commenced by Juan de Herrera.
1 Collage of San Gregorio. National Museum of Sculpture
2 Convent of San Pablo
3 Palace of the Pimentel
4 Zorrilla’s House/Museum
5 Palace of Fanio Nelli. Museum of Valladolid
6 Monastery of San Benito el Real
7 Plaza Mayor
8 Cathedral
9 University
10 College of Santa Cruz
11 Church of Santa María la Antigua
12 Church of Las Angustias
13 Archbishop’s Palace
14 Oriental Museum
15 Casa Cervantes

Tourist information
in 1582 on the remains of a collegiate church, in the event the work was never completed. The Romanesque tower and a splendid Mannerist altarpiece by Juan de Juni still survive. The Diocesan Museum exhibits various religious objects, one of the finest being a processional monstrance wrought by Juan de Arfe in 1590 (closed Saturday p.m., Sunday p.m. and Mondays).

Past some gardened ruins appears the Baroque facade of the University (9), decorated by the Tome brothers with a variety of academic symbols and allegories. In its vicinity rises the exceptional College of Santa Cruz (10), one of the first Spanish Renaissance buildings. The Baroque shelves of its library hold around 13,000 volumes printed between the 16th and 19th centuries.

Back near the cathedral, the Church of Santa María la Antigua (11) boasts an unexpected Romanesque tower which quite dominates its surroundings. Very near there is the Church of Las Angustias (12), which contains a carving of La Virgen de los Cuchillos by master Juan de Juni. And here ends the tour of the principal monuments of Valladolid, although the city does of course have other places of interest – the Archbishop’s Palace (13), the Oriental Museum (14), the Casa de Cervantes (15) and many more.
The days of splendour of Zamora (pop. 64,421) are long past, but so many churches and other vestiges of that golden age survive that the city today is a veritable museum of Romanesque art. Unwilling to wallow in resignation, like the rest of the Region this agricultural and commercial centre has moved with the times. It is not for nothing that Zamora’s legendary resistance to adversity coined the motto “Zamora was not won in a day”.

Visitors wishing to get a feeling for the past should begin their tour at the Portillo de la Traición or Traitor’s Gate (1), an entrance in the great walls that have been so decisive in the history of this frontier town. Hard by that undulating stone curtain is the Parque del Castillo (2). On one side stand the remains of the Castle, originally of Arab construction, which still preserves its Tower of Homage, its gate and its moat.

Practically opposite is the Byzantine Romanesque Cathedral (3), which dates back to the 12th century. It was erected on top of the original church built by Alfonso III the Great, whose legendary deeds live on in marble. And yet the place as it is now still preserves an aura of magic and the East. The most strikingly original and best-known feature is the unusual dome.

What catches the eye in the interior are the wrought iron grilles and pulpits and the extraordinary choir stalls, whose back-rests are decorated with episodes from daily life during the Renaissance. In the cloister is the Cathedral Museum, which exhibits an important collection of 15th-century Flemish tapestries (closed Sundays).
The way to the city centre passes by a series of churches: San Ildefonso (4), originally built in the 12th century, boasts vaulted roofs of Gothic cross-work. The Palacio del Cordón (5) is home to the Museum of Zamora, which has an important archaeological exhibition. And spanning the eternal river Duero the puente de piedra (6), a stone bridge with 16 fine arches, is practically a symbol of the city.

Also famous are the Holy Week processions in Zamora, thanks to the exquisite quality of the processional images. These can be viewed in comfort in the Holy Week Museum (7) (open daily). Standing next to the Museum, the Church of Santa María la Nueva (8) was the scene of the bloody “mutiny of the trout” in 1158. This square is a perfect example of the symbiosis of tradition and modernity that characterises Zamora, city of limitless horizons.
Enjoying Castilla y Leon

Quite apart from past glories and merits, tourists will find these lands a haven of tranquillity, scenery and good food. A wealthy repository of fine religious artefacts of the past, where the light and the atmosphere are superbly entrapped, the Region also boasts countless natural attractions. Here, the prospects blend the wildest of scenery with bucolic plains to produce a truly haunting tapestry.

There are three traditional itineraries which travellers of all ages have followed through the region. The Road to Santiago, a metaphor of life itself, is no mere spiritual pilgrimage but the base on which the framework of mediaeval Christianity was built. The ancient Road to the Stars undoubtedly deserves the proud distinction of being the precursor of the unity of the peoples of Europe.

“Old father Duero”, the basic axis of regional geography, offers a tremendous variety of scenery on its long course. This route passes from the high mountains at the river source to the sweeping horizons of the Ribera, where its waters resemble a “sea turned land”.

And lastly the Ruta de la Plata or Silver Route, one of the arterial ways of Roman Spain. Running originally from the city of Mérida in Extremadura to Astorga in Leon, this is a monumental work whose wealth of history stems from its crucial situation. We have, then, three routes through places of beauty and legend, whose variegated facets speak of a particular and highly appealing philosophy of life.

In order to bring out the adventure of life in Castilla y Leon we have devised nine new tourist routes, one for each province of this historic land and each commencing in a provincial capital. These take in the places that best highlight the tradition and the artistic heritage of the region. And these cultural itineraries are interspersed with inevitable references to other attractions that nature scatters on the way.
Highway 403 runs north from the city of Avila to the district of La Moraña, a major site of Castilian Romanesque-Mudejar architecture. There are fine churches in the villages of Órbita, Espinosa de los Caballeros and La Lugareja. The latter is incomplete, but even so it is a marvel of its kind.

Arévalo, capital of Moraña, is a town with a warlike tradition which has been classified as a Historic and Artistic site. The tower of homage of its imposing semicircular castle betrays its Moorish origins. Within its walls, Isabel la Católica dwelt for a time. In the Plaza del Arrabal stands the Church of Santo Domingo de Silos, where the Gothic naves contrast with the Mudejar brickwork of the apse. And finally, the “jewel” of Arevalo is the Church of San Martín in the Plaza de la Villa, a magical contrast of superimposed styles.

Highway 605 is the route to Madrigal de las Altas Torres. Once the residence of the Royal Court, this is the birthplace of Queen Isabel la Católica. She was born in 1451 in the palace of Juan II, which has since been converted to the Monastery of Nuestra Señora de Gracia (open daily, except the second fortnight in September and the first fortnight in October). Solidly anchored in its illustrious past, the name of the town derives from the 75-metre tower of the Church of San Nicolás de Bari.

Another highly recommended route runs southwards to the Sierra de Gredos, the stony backbone of Castile. Highway 502 crosses the centre of the mountain range by way of the Menga pass, at whose top there is a vantage point with innumerable attractions for the tourist. Before Navarredonda de Gredos one comes to the first Parador to be opened in Spain, in what was once King Alfonso XIII’s hunting lodge.

To reach the heart of the massif one turns off on highway 500 to Hoyos del Espino. The road climbs on what is known as the Platform of Hoyos to the Laguna Grande or Great Lagoon, the majestic peak of Almanzor (2,592 m.) or even as far as the Cinco Lagunas or Five Lagoons. The scenery there is quite breathtaking, a panorama
of great rocky mounds, fantastical peaks and rock-strewn granite.

Back at the bottom the road follows the river Tormes to El Barco de Ávila, a town with lovely prospects of Gredos. It preserves remains of the old walls and, most importantly, the Castle of Valdecorneja, a 15th-century fortress that once belonged to the Dukes of Alba.

Another alternative route goes to the southern face of the Gredos massif. Once through the Pico pass, the same highway 502 carries on to the outskirts of Arenas de San Pedro, the most important point in all this area. Travellers are recommended to visit the Sanctuary of San Pedro de Alcántara, where rest the bones of the patron saint of Extremadura. In the Royal Chapel Museum there are notable collections of gold liturgical objects (closed Mondays).
Heading from Burgos to Madrid the N-I highway enters a district where monuments and archaeological remains abound. The importance of the artistic heritage of Lerma, a town with a lordly air, is exemplified by the majestic Ducal Palace, begun by Francisco de Mora in 1605. The most outstanding religious edifice is the Collegiate church of San Pedro, which offers a fine outlook over the river Arlanza. Despite its austere outward appearance, inside there is a valuable statue of Archbishop Cristobal de Rojas in prayer, the work of Juan de Arfe.

After a brief halt in Gumiel de Hizán to see the Church of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción, the next stop is Aranda de Duero. One of the sites of longest tradition in this, the chief town of the Ribera of Burgos, is the Church of Santa María. The southern face is devised as a gigantic altarpiece including scenes in relief from the Adoration of the Magi. Of civil edifices, the Palace of Colmenares stands out among the abundant lordly mansions that adorn the town, which is also celebrated for its delightful wine.

Highway 122 takes one to La Vid, where there is a famous convent of the same name, then heading north on highway 111 one comes to Peñaranda de Duero. This is a small town clustered around the foot of the old castle, which was
built at the time of the Reconquest. The Palace of Avellaneda is a Renaissance building whose main door is decorated with warriors and heraldic shields. As well as the Church of Santa Ana, visitors are recommended to see the interesting Museum of Pharmacy in the Ximeno apothecary’s (open Monday to Friday and some Saturdays and Sundays a.m.).

Not far away, slightly off the main track, is Clunia, once a city of the Celtiberian tribe of the Arevaci. It still preserves a Roman amphitheatre, tombs and myriad other remains.

In the eastern part of the province of Burgos are a number of highly recommended places. From Lerma one carries on to Covarrubias, a town which derives its name from the reddish caves that abound in the neighbourhood. There, the Collegiate church of San Cosme y San Damián holds the tomb of Fernán González, first Count of Castile. The museum has an important collection of sculptures, further enriched by the Triptych of the Three Kings, attributed to Gil de Siloe (closed Tuesdays).

To the south-west lies the Monastery of Santo Domingo de Silos, a universal pearl of Romanesque art which is now a centre of spiritual and artistic pilgrimage. It was razed by the Arabs and rebuilt by Saint Dominic, whose remains are preserved in a tomb excavated in the rock. The sensational 11th-12th-century Romanesque cloister displays magnificent reliefs and sculpted capitals portraying a great variety of subjects. The monastery, run by Benedictine monks who hold Gregorian masses, also has a fine library and an 18th-century apothecarium (open daily; closed some holidays and days of monastic celebration).
Leon, The Road to Santiago

Following the same route trodden for centuries by pilgrims, the traveller leaves the city of Leon by highway 120, with the first stop at Hospital de Órbigo. Two monoliths, one at either end of the Roman bridge there, serve as a reminder that this is the exact site of that “joust” or knightly duel known to posterity as “the honourable passage”.

Further along the road is Astorga, the “Asturica Augusta” of Imperial Rome. Outstanding in a harmonious monumental assemblage which has seen moments of historic splendour, is the Cathedral. Particularly interesting in the interior is the main altarpiece, the work of Gaspar Becerra, and the pulpit and choir stalls. Of the fifty-odd exhibits in the Diocesan Museum, the most striking is a gilt silver casket, known as the casket of San Genadio (open daily). In the Episcopal Palace, a neo-Gothic edifice designed by Antonio Gaudi, is the Museum of the Roads, a rich repository of mementos of the pilgrimage to Santiago (closed Sundays).

San Miguel de las Dueñas, a town which grew up around the celebrated monastery of that name. And a little further on lies Ponferrada, which grew into a city largely thanks to the presence of the Order of the Templars. On the bank of the river Sil stands the castle, recently refurbished and now open to the public. Worth seeing in the old town centre is the Clock Tower, the only part of the old city walls left standing.

Villafranca del Bierzo is the last town of any importance on the Road to Santiago in its passage through the province of Leon. This is a highly colourful town at whose entrance stands the popular 12th-century Romanesque Church of Santiago. Pilgrims who fell sick and could not continue their journey could still attain their jubilee by prostrating themselves before the Cathedral of Astorga.
Gate of Pardon of this church. In the surrounding area travellers can visit the curious mine of Las Médulas, where the Romans extracted thousands of tons of gold.

Those tourists interested in “green itineraries” are best advised to head for the north of the province to experience the eternal struggle between water and stone in the Picos de Europa National Park. Leaving Leon on Highway 621, the road passes through a number of villages as it climbs up to the Alto de Tarna (1,490 metres). From there, a delightful succession of valleys, lakes and mountain rings lead to Posada de Valdeón, the main town in the Eden-like valley of the same name. The ultimate goal of this excursion is to follow the legendary Senda del Cares. This is a breathtaking walk through the “divine gorge” hemmed in by rock walls hundreds of metres high to a spot that offers utterly marvellous panoramic outlooks.
The northern part of the province of Palencia abounds in examples of the best Romanesque art, in most cases linked to the legendary Road to Santiago. Visitors caring to take their time and stop in practically every village will be rewarded by some real architectural marvels.

Heading north on Highway 615, the road leads to Carrión de los Condes, a key town on the old pilgrim paths. Clearly mediaeval in origin, the highlight of the old town is the Convent of Santa Clara, founded in the 13th century, with a church and annexe attached (open daily; closed 15 October to 15 November). Also worth seeing are the Romanesque churches of Santa María del Camino and Santiago, the latter of which is crowned by a striking frieze in which sculpted figures of the twelve apostles surround the Christ Enthroned or Pantocrator.

South-west from Carrion lies Villalcázar de Sirga, a reconstruction of the past that has been rendered habitable, site of the Church of Santa María la Blanca, once an encomienda of the Order of the Templars. A little farther on is Frómista, a place with a noble past where the miracle of faith conjoins with reason. The Church of San Martín, perfect in its harmony and beauty, is a veritable landmark in Jacobean Romanesque.

On the outskirts of the town, near the mediaeval bridge, is the Monastery of San Zoilo, a former refuge for pilgrims containing an elegant cloister wrought by Juan de Badajoz.

Northwards lies Herrera de Pisuerga, which preserves remains of the old walls and a number of emblazoned houses. Also on the same road is Aguilar de Campoo, one of the key
points on this Palencian Romanesque route. A good example of what makes it important is the Monastery of Santa María, one of the oldest Cistercian edifices in Spain. The Collegiate church of San Miguel, a 14th-century Gothic work, contains an interesting parish museum which is open daily. And next to the ruins of the traditional castle stands the Hermitage of Santa Cecilia, embellished by a strikingly graceful tower.

The area encompassing the outskirts of Aguilar de Campoo and Herrera de Pisuerga preserves the largest collection of examples of Romanesque in the whole province. More than fifty churches, monasteries and hermitages are clustered in the Ojeda valley and the northern districts. Example of this are the towns of Olleros de Pisuerga, which has a curious church in a cave, or Santa María de Mave.

From here there is a westward route which traverses the Fuentes Carrionas y Fuente Cobre nature zone, an area liberally endowed with tarns and wetlands. The route carries on to the mining town of Guardo then turns south on Highway 615 as far as Saldaña, a town with a fine Roman bridge and an old square of incalculable historic and artistic value. And the last stop on the route is Pedrosa de la Vega, site of an ancient Roman mansion containing some lovely mosaics - the ideal conclusion to this journey into the past.
Travellers through the various mountain ranges of the province of Salamanca will find wonderful scenery and examples of well-preserved popular and monumental architecture. This route leaves the city of Salamanca by highway N-620 in the direction of Ciudad Rodrigo, turning left on to highway 525 after about fifty kilometres.

Past El Cabaco, the road starts to wind upwards through dense forests of chestnut. This attractive zone is the westward bulwark of the Sierra de Gredos, whose highest point is the Peña de Francia (1,732 metres). The summit is crowned by a collection of buildings dating back to 1434. This is the Sanctuary of Santa María de la Peña, shrine of the image of a dark-skinned Virgin and the Child.

A scant ten kilometres farther downhill is La Alberca, whose alleyways constitute a veritable museum of popular elements. The Church of La Asunción, built in the 18th century, contains a figure of the Cristo del Sudor, attributed to Juan de Juni. Farther south is the Sanctuary of San Jose, a nunnery inhabited by discalced Carmelites.

The next stop is Miranda de Castañar, a fortified town whose emblazoned houses recall the magnificence of its noble past. As well as the parish church, it is worth stopping at the 16th-century bull-ring with its traditional stone safety barriers. The next objective is the Sierra de Bejar in the south-eastern part of the province.

The capital Bejar offers a comprehensive sample of traditional mountain architecture. The town’s many attractions include the Ducal palace, a major civil edifice built in the mid-16th century. The best known church is that of Santa María la Mayor, which dates back to the time of
Repopulation (13th century). On the edge of the town it is worth stopping at the estate known as **El Bosque**, a beautiful Italianate garden with a little palace and a variety of fountains.

The end of this itinerary is **Candelario**, a town of rural mountain dwellings. Behind the 19th-century Town Hall is the Church of La Asunción, whose chief attractions are the main altarpiece and the Mudejar caisoned ceiling of the main chapel.

Another place recommended to travellers is **Ciudad Rodrigo**, which is also reached by the N-620. On a promontory in the upper part of the town stands the castle, built by Enrique II to watch over and defend the town. Today, this legendary fortress is a modern Parador looking out over the river Águeda.

The most outstanding building is the Cathedral, which was begun in 1165 and was not finished until the mid-16th century. Important details are the Gate of Chains, adorned by a frieze which is a Gothic gallery of sculpted reliefs, and inside, the choir stalls decorated by Rodrigo Aleman with a series of burlesque and even profane scenes. The Diocesan Museum contains an interesting section of religious gold work and ornaments (open daily).
The Royal Houses

Leaving the city of Segovia in the direction of Soria, Highway 110 leads to Torrecaballeros, where the parish church is a fine example of Romanesque art. The same is true of Sotosalbos, the next village on the route. The Church of San Miguel is outstanding for its impressive porticoed gallery and a small museum. No more than 2 kilometres away, in the leafy environs of Collado Hermoso, stand the ruins of the Monastery of Nuestra Señora de la Sierra.

The Town Arch opens the way into Pedraza and its delightfully extravagant Plaza Mayor. The castle tower was the subject of a study by the painter Ignacio Zuloaga and now contains a museum devoted to Zuloaga’s work (closed Mondays and Tuesdays). The next point of interest is Sepulveda and the Church of El Salvador, which boasts one of the oldest porticoes in Spain (1093). No more than seven kilometres farther on, one of the best “green” itineraries in the whole Region commences. This is the Hoces del Duratón Nature Park, domain of the tawny vulture. On the far side of a little 18th-century bridge stands the Hermitage of San Frutos del Duraton, patron saint of Segovia.

Carrying on westwards the road comes to Turégano, a town crowned by a superb castle. From Turégano it carries on to Cuéllar, the province’s second city and a site of Mudejar Romanesque. The castle is a mediaeval structure of great historic and artistic interest, the jewel of a town which boasts several important churches: San Martín, San Andrés, San Esteban and others.

Heading back towards Segovia on Highway 601, there is still time for a detour to take in Coca, famous as the birthplace of the emperor Theodosius, and above all for its castle. This is an exceptional...
example of Mudejar-Gothic military architecture, surrounded by a deep moat and heavily fortified. Back on the main road, Carbonero el Mayor boasts what is possibly the finest altarpiece in the province. And from Carbonero the road leads back to the city of the Aqueduct.

There is another equally interesting itinerary in the southern part of the province. A scant 11 km from Segovia on the N-601 is the Royal Palace of La Granja de Ildefonso, in a fine natural setting. Built in 1721 on the site of a former hospice, it was intended by King Philip V to be a royal residence in the style of the Court of Versailles. In the collegiate church are the tombs of Philip himself and his wife Isabel de Farnesio. The interior of the palace is a succession of dazzling salons decorated with artistic objects of all kinds. There is also a fine collection of tapestries and a museum devoted specifically to them (June to September: open daily. October to March: closed Mondays).

Nearby is the Royal Glass Works of La Granja, an industrial building with a permanent exhibition of glass works of art (closed Mondays and Tuesdays except for groups by arrangement). And the final touch is provided by French-style gardens with a collection of fountains and statues providing a setting of vivid light and colour.
The excursion leaves the city of Soria on highway 122 and goes to El Burgo de Osma, a town indelibly marked by its status as Episcopal capital. The old heart of the town spreads around the Cathedral, built in 1232. With later Renaissance additions and a slim tower dated 1739, the cathedral is a perfect example of the most refined religious art. Inside is a fine altarpiece by Juan de Juni and the tomb of the founder, Pedro de Osma. And in the sacristy a priceless object is preserved: the codex of the Commentary on the Apocalypse by Beato de Liebana (open daily).

Having soaked up the atmosphere of this town of countless columns, the excursion continues to San Esteban de Gormaz, where a rapid visit is recommended to two excellent churches: San Miguel and Nuestra Señora del Ribero, both porticoed Romanesque edifices. Turning back, a local road leads off to Gormaz, site of the most impressive fortress in the province of Soria. This is a magnificent Arab castle with 28 towers, considered the largest in Europe. During the
Reconquest it was gifted by King Alfonso VI to the legendary Cid Campeador.

Carrying on down highway 116 there is a turn-off to the right which leads to Berlanga de Duero. Surrounded by trees, its most outstanding building is the Collegiate church of Santa María del Mercado, a monument richly endowed with carvings, tombs and altarpieces. In the environs, set on a hill near the village of Casillas, stands the Mozarabic Hermitage of San Baudelio, a unique structure in Spanish pre-Romanesque architecture. A scant 4 kilometres away, Caltojar preserves the Church of San Miguel, another major religious monument whose most striking feature is a number of capitals adorned with enigmatic faces.

The traveller should now return to highway 116 to reach Almazán, whose Romanesque church is set off by an unusual cupola with a Moslem aura. In the Plaza Mayor stands the Palace of the Counts of Altamira, which has a splendid Renaissance facade. Carrying on south on highway 111, the next stop is Medinaceli, a town whose origins lie in the remote past. A triumphal archway built long before the birth of Christ is a reminder of the ancient Roman Ocilis. From here, the last stop on the route is the Cistercian monastery of Santa María de Huerta, one of the purest examples of Castilian-Leonese Gothic architecture.
The province of Valladolid offers a choice of excellent local tourist routes. Heading east from the city of Valladolid on highway 122 one comes to Peñafiel, a town that spreads out at the foot of a majestic castle whose outlines resemble a ship. The most outstanding artistic edifice in Peñafiel is the Church of San Pablo, founded in 1324 by the Infante Don Juan Manuel. The various different elements that go to make up the whole, among them the funeral chapel of the Manuels, make this a major achievement of provincial Mudejar-Gothic.

Another considerably longer excursion is to take highway 601 as far as Portillo. From there, there is a turn-off to the industrial town of Íscar, once the scene of many deeds of knightly valour. From there, highway 112 leads to Olmedo, capital of the Mudejar route of the province of Valladolid. Highly recommended here are the Church of Santa Maria del Castillo and the Church of San Miguel, with one Baroque and one Plateresque altarpiece.

The next destination in this land of vine and fortress is Medina del Campo, best symbolised by the Castle of La Mota, a mass of brick and mortar raised in the 15th century. The Collegiate church of San Antolín preserves a splendid haut relief by Juan de Juni, entitled La Piedad. In one corner of the Plaza Mayor stands the modest house where Queen Isabel la Católica died in 1504, whose statue dominates the square.

Heading north on highway N-VI, it is worth making a stop in Rueda, a town renowned for its wines, which are sold under the “Rueda” appellation of origin. The same road carries on to Tordesillas, a city with a long and noble history. Here it was that Portuguese and Castilians divided their dominion over the largest empire in the world, two years after Columbus first touched land in America. Tordesillas boasts a pearl of Arab art in the Royal Monastery of Santa Clara, a palace built by King Alfonso XI. The architecture and decoration of all the rooms is truly striking, including a curious portable reredos and the clavichord that belonged to Queen Joan the Mad (closed Mondays).

Still further north lies Medina de Rioseco, the erstwhile “city of the admirals”. This monumental
site in the Tierra de Campos contains a number of churches of great sumptuary wealth. In one of the chapels of the Church of Santa María, an Isabelline Gothic work, there is a marvellous altarpiece by Juan de Juni, dedicated to the Inmaculada. The Church of Santiago exhibits a wonderfully finished triple altarpiece in Churrigueresque style. The church also contains an exhibition with the images that are carried in procession during the local Holy Week celebrations.
A scant 33 km east of the city of Zamora on highway 122 is Toro, a quiet little town but one with an intense history. The unusual layout of the town centre naturally brings the visitor to its most outstanding monument, the Collegiate church of Santa María la Mayor. The building has the presence of a cathedral, with a magnificent west portico and a cupola with a Byzantine air. In the sacristy its most important treasure is preserved – a Flemish panel dated 1520, entitled La Virgen de la Mosca or The Virgin and the Fly.

However, the tourist route really leads to the north of the province, which means leaving the city of Zamora by highway 630. Level with Granja de Moreruela there is a turn-off to the Salines of Villafáfila, an oasis of life in the middle of Tierra de Campos. Back on highway 630 and still heading north is Benavente, “the town of the counts”. The monumental interest here is to be found in a series of churches, finishing off with a visit to the Torre del Caracol or Tower of the Snail, all that remains of the Castle of the Counts of Benavente. For many years now there has been a Parador backing on to this historic relic.

Westward from Benavente on highway 620 is Valle del Tera, one of whose points of interest is the Hermitage of Santa Marta de Tera, an example of 12th-century Romanesque. A few kilometres farther on lies Mombuey, whose church although modest boasts a curious artistic feature. This is an unusual tower of curved structures built in green sandstone. Half-way up an ox’s head protrudes, clearly alluding to the name of the village (“buey” means “ox” in Spanish). The next stop is Puebla de Sanabria and its imposing fortress, an archetypal mediaeval defensive structure. The town has
a number of noble houses and mansions adorned with old crests, such as the 15th-century Town Hall, which stands in the Plaza Mayor.

This route ends at the **Lago de Sanabria Nature Park**, an incomparably beautiful setting rich in customs and traditions. Mountain landscapes like **Peña Trevinca**, **Peña Negra** and the Sierra de La Cabrera encircle an area of wetlands whose history goes back ten thousand years. This is the largest lake in Spain, 3.5 kilometres long and 2 kilometres wide.

Right in the heart of these splendid natural surroundings lies the village of **San Martín de Castañeda**, which grew up around the monastery of the same name. Among the surviving original buildings is the Romanesque church, a true haven of life and culture. The restored monastery buildings now house the Nature Park Environmental Education Centre, where there is a permanent exhibition illustrating the ecosystems of the Sanabria valley.
Leisure and entertainment

Fairs and Festivals

The Region has seen a major flourishing of cultural activities in recent years. Outstanding thematic exhibitions periodically travel to the provincial capitals, supplementing the range of entertainment offered by the endless list of celebrations held annually in our towns. These popular festivals bring the visitor into contact with local customs that have been handed down from generation to generation.

Starting with Avila, besides the musical performances put on in the Summer Fiestas, the last quarter of the year normally includes theatre and classical music concerts in the Cathedral. In a more traditional vein, in mid-September there is a romería or popular devotional excursion in the town of Candeleda, dedicated to Nuestra Señora de Chilla and famous for the dancing in traditional local costume.

At the end of June the Fiestas of San Pedro and San Pablo in Burgos offer a series of bull fights (the bull is a prominent feature of many celebrations) and contests of traditional musical instruments. Another popular attraction is the ascent to the Hermitage of San Juan de Monte, which takes place on the Monday of Pentecost in Miranda de Ebro.

During the month of October, Leon offers a ceremony with a long local tradition to mark the feast of San Froilan. This is known as Las Cantaderas, an event including traditional singing and dancing opposite the Cathedral.

Yet another of these curious old traditions is the Romería de Santo Toribio, which takes place in Palencia in mid-April. From the saint’s hermitage the local councillors “bombard” the public with bags of “pan y quesillo” (lit. “bread and cheese”, a blossom said to resemble these) to commemorate a mediaeval miracle. In August is the International Descent of the Pisuerga, which attracts canoeists from all over the world.

The bustle of the university is tangible in Salamanca’s local Carnival where boisterous festivity mingles with events of a more serious tone, not dissimilar to the atmosphere of La Alberca during the Feast of the Assumption. The Loa, for instance, is a curious religious play in which characters like the Devil and the Gallants appear.
In Segovia, normally in June, there is a well-known Festival of Puppets or Titirimundi. Before this, on 5 February, is the Romería of Las Águedas in the little village of Zamarramala. One of the main events is “women’s day” when the ladies take charge of the town.

The village of San Pedro Manrique in Soria celebrates the magical night of San Juan in its own very peculiar way. This event commemorates the Celtiberian rite of the Passage of Fire, in which participants walk through the bonfires carrying someone on their shoulders. Also memorable are the Jornadas de la Matanza, literally “days of slaughter”, in Burgo de Osma, a series of culinary and cultural events which are held in February and March.

As the regional capital, Valladolid offers an outstanding cultural programme all the year round. Top of the list comes the International Film Week, a festival which has attained considerable prestige thanks to the quality of the movies shown. The profound religious faith of Castile comes to the fore in Holy Week, when 29 artistic images are carried through the streets in procession.

Holy Week is also a major event in Zamora, where the processions contain some absolutely priceless examples of Castilian religious imagery. On a more relaxed note is the Fuente del vino or “Fountain of wine” which takes place in Toro on 28 August. This is a romería held in the main square, where the famous local red wine flows in rivers.

**Sports**

There are a good many options for the practice of sports in this region, almost always having some connection with nature. For winter sports enthusiasts there are ski-slopes at La Lunada, La Pinilla, Leitariegos and San Isidro. All of these provide a range of services that ensure a comfortable and enjoyable stay.

In summer Castilla y León offers a great many natural zones and parks for enjoyment, in which
water normally plays a prominent part – lagoons and reservoirs ideal for outdoor recreation. Here there are all sorts of river and water sports in settings which visitors will find paradisical. There are normally camping sites and other comfortable and economical types of accommodation in the vicinity of these wetlands.

The mountains of Castilla y Leon provide the ideal setting for such sports as trekking, bicycle and horseback touring, rafting or, for those seeking a bit of risk, climbing. All these leisure and recreational activities are available in unspoilt surroundings of great natural beauty.

As an area of both mountain and plain, the region also offers many opportunities for shooting and fishing. There are exclusive game reserves and countless fishing reserves, so that the amateur does not go home empty-handed at the end of the day. There are also good golf courses and grounds for autochthonous sports such as skittles, as well as first-rate football and basketball teams. It is well said that sport is one of the most reliable gauges of the vitality and progress of peoples.

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**Eating and drinking**

The culinary tradition of Castilla y Leon has something for everyone. The range of cuisine is varied and attractive, thanks to the skill with which local produce is prepared. The story that in this part of the country there is nothing but roast meats is no more than a cliché, but the fact is that here the age-old art of the brick oven has been honed to perfection, producing either tender lamb or rosy suckling pig, known as “toston” in this part of the world.

Obviously the cuisine of Castilla y Leon is by no means confined to these succulent dishes. There is the juicy veal of Avila, the marvellous hams of Guijuelo (Salamanca), and of course all kinds of sausage, which is a chapter to itself in the regional gastronomy. The names are legion: chorizo from Cantimpalo (Segovia), the simple and delicious morcilla (blood sausage) of Burgos, and the botillo (a round pork sausage) from El Bierzo (Leon), which has been around since Roman times. Art and craft are both required to produce this culinary delight, which is very difficult to make.

And rounding off the meats, these lands abound in game, all of which naturally finishes up on
the table. Stewed quail Valladolid-style, partridge from Segovia and pigeons from Zamora are but a few of the most sought-after dishes.

One of the foundation stones of regional cookery is pulses. Pottages like the ones to be found in our towns - maragato, for instance - would not be possible without chick-peas from Fuentesauco (Zamora). Then there are lentils from La Armuña (Leon), potatoes from Burgos and broad beans from Segovia. And fish dishes again are another story apart. One of the most characteristic elements in this area is trout. Simply fried in olive oil, it is one of the best examples of what Alvaro Cunqueiro defined as “the Christian cuisine of the West”.

The preparation of foods with such individual personalities requires a lot of love, time and talent, a special something that clearly stands out in the endless variety of our confectionery. Among the sweetest and tastiest of these products are the popular mantecados of Astorga, the rosquillas ciegas of Palencia, the nicanores of Boñar (Leon), the sugared almonds of Salamanca and the yemas de Santa Teresa of Avila.

Any menu worth its salt is naturally accompanied by one of our noble regional wines - a food and a token of health which in recent years has had well-deserved success on the international markets. There is the superb Ribera del Duero, rose from Cigales, the fresh whites of Rueda, the full-bodied reds of Toro and the celebrated wines of El Bierzo, to name but a few of the best examples of a series of products which, drunk fresh and pure, more than match their European counterparts for quality.
Folklore and crafts

The autochthonous folklore, bursting with popular feeling, is woven from the same stuff as the inhabitants of the Meseta, the tremendous wealth and variety born of the multifarious strands of ethnic and cultural influence that have prevailed this territory. Its greatest achievement is to reflect with wonderful aesthetic sensitivity the love of things one’s own – the music, the customs, and of course the shared history.

This folklore is associated with events and traditions, with common acts and ceremonies of towns and villages – for example the *coplas* traditionally sung at Christmas in a merry, festive medley that includes the time-honoured carols. There is another type of melody linked to religious liturgy, like the *dances* executed by the youngsters before the carven figure of the local patron saint, to the strains of flageolet and tabor. This is a singularly colourful rite, brimming with intimate emotion for those who have been practising it since time immemorial.

One folk custom embodying great wit and ingenuity is that surrounding the lovers’ *serenades*. The youths do the rounds of the streets offering up songs to their beloved ones to the strains of guitar and bandurria (a small lute-like instrument), in couplets which admirably express the sentiments and traditions of our peoples.

Similarly, regional crafts betray a tradition characterised by subtle variety and charm. Despite the inevitable decline of hand-crafted articles, artisanal techniques have evolved to combine traditional standards with new industrial approaches. In this way, a number of family lines have been enabled to keep up activities that were carried on by their ancestors hundreds of years ago.

In the Gredos massif in the province of Avila, there are still workshops turning out striking creations in wood, leather, wickerwork and ceramics. The city of Burgos holds shows of elegant classical Castilian furniture, while in the town of Arenas de San Pedro (Avila), pottery is booming.

The traditional looms of Val de San Lorenzo, near Astorga, produce typical blankets and carpets. These are also among the most popular products of Palencia, which is renowned for its stout blankets made of pure wool.

Salamanca is far and away the province with the greatest variety of crafts. In the capital one can
find articles connected with the cattle-breeding in the west of the province – for example saddles or the famous leather boots known as botas camperos. Typical products are articles of gold and silver work, mainly rings and earrings, in the charro style of western Salamanca. The best embroidery can be found in La Alberca, where garments adorned with jewellery and gold and silver work, known as trajes de vistas, are worn on festive occasions.

Segovia is outstanding for the tapestries and leather work that prosper in some parts of the province. Soria produces wooden furniture and wrought iron goods. Valladolid, on the other hand, specialises in ceramics and basketwork, while Zamora is best known for the wooden barrels made in Nava del Rey to supply the needs of the wine-growing area.
USEFUL INFORMATION

COMMUNICATIONS

Situated centrally in the northern half of Spain, Castilla y Leon is a key sector in the network of peninsular communications. Thanks to the modernisation and remodelling of highways in recent years, the preferred mode of transport is road, either by car or by regular or charter bus lines. It is fair to say that the automobile has brought people closer together and shortened distances.

The most important highway for the region is perhaps the N-VI which links Madrid with A Coruña by way of Segovia, Valladolid, Zamora and Leon. The N-I runs from Madrid to Burgos. Going from south to north, the N-630 traverses the provinces of Salamanca, Zamora and Leon then carries on north to the Bay of Biscay. Besides these, there is a comprehensive network of local and district roads which are being constantly improved.

The best option for travellers is therefore the bus.

BUS STATIONS

Valladolid: ☎ 983 23 63 08. Zamora: ☎ 980 52 12 81.
Traffic-Highway Information: ☎ 900 123 505.

Years ago, the basic means of transport from town to town was the train. This is no longer the case, but nevertheless Castilla y Leon has good direct rail links with the principal cities of Spain.

RENFE (TRAINS)

Segovia: ☎ 921 42 07 74. Soria: ☎ 975 23 02 02. Valladolid: ☎ 983 20 02 02.
Zamora: ☎ 980 52 11 10.
TOURIST INFORMATION

Country code: 34

TURESPAÑA Tourist Information: 901 300 600. www.tourspain.es
Tourist Information, Castilla y Leon ☏ 902 203 030. www.jcyl.es/turismo

Federation of Tourist Initiative Centres of Castilla y Leon / FECITCAL.
Pasón 5-7, 4ª A. 47001 Valladolid. ☏ 983 35 78 99, fax 983 35 79 99.

TOURIST INFORMATION OFFICES

Avila: Plaza de la Catedral, 4. 05001.
Avila. ☏ 920 21 13 87, fax 920 25 37 17.

Burgos: Plaza Alonso Martínez, 7. 09003 Burgos.
Burgos. ☏ 947 20 31 25, fax 947 27 65 29.

Leon: Plaza de Regla, 4. 24003 Leon.
Leon. ☏ 987 23 70 82, fax 987 27 33 91.

Palencia: Calle Mayor, 105. 34001 Palencia.
Palencia. ☏ 979 70 08 68, fax 979 70 08 22.

Salamanca: Casa de las Conchas. Rúa Mayor. 37008 Salamanca.
Salamanca. ☏ 923 26 85 71, fax 923 26 24 92.

Segovia: Plaza Mayor, 10. 40001 Segovia.
Segovia. ☏ 921 46 03 34, fax 921 46 03 30.

Soria: Plaza Ramón y Cajal. 42003 Soria.
Soria. ☏ 975 21 20 52, fax 975 21 20 52.

Valladolid: Santiago, 19. 47001 Valladolid.
Valladolid. ☏ 983 34 40 13, fax 983 35 47 31.

Zamora. ☏ 980 54 82 00.

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Local Police: 092
Civil Guard: 062
Citizens’ Information: 010

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Palencia: 979 16 70 00
Salamanca: 923 29 12 08
Segovia: 921 41 91 00
Soria: 975 22 15 29
Valladolid: 983 42 04 00
Zamora: 980 54 82 00

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