Guadix

Geography and history

In the north-east of the province of Granada, the town of Guadix emerges in the middle of a labyrinth of clay formations with marked erosion where primitive man, and centuries later the Moorish and Christian settlers, cut cave dwellings out of the red walls lit by the light reflected off the north face of Sierra Nevada. The Moorish Guadix-Haiz (River of Life) is situated in a depression with fertile lands, oak and maple woods, extensive fields of wheat and almond trees. The town spreads among river beds and cultivated land with sheep and horses grazing around the ancient Moorish city walls. The Catholic Monarchs, after taking the town, handed it to the Marquises of Villena and it continued under this jurisdiction until the 10th century, when the lordship was abolished. It was a refuge for the Spanish Moors during their revolt and it suffered repression.

This important town in the province of Granada, with over 20,000 inhabitants is situated in the “hollow” or Hoya de Guadix, 949 metres above sea level on the north slope of the Sierra Nevada. It has good communications and is 60 kilometres from Granada, 200 kilometres from Murcia and 110 kilometres from Almería. It has a Continental climate because the encircling mountains form a barrier that prevents the influence of the sea. The summers are very hot and the winters are quite cold. The average temperature is 15°C.

The old part of the town is more like a town from the north of Spain than Granada, you enter through the Gate of San Torcuato (19), part of the Medieval city walls, into streets with monumental Renaissance façades, like the Plaza de las Palmas, narrow alleys in the ancient Jewish quarter and winding streets of the Santa Ana suburb. The Cathedral (1), a mixture of Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque styles, was built over the ancient mosque in 1492, work went on over three centuries. Its undulating façade is one of the most daring architectural compositions of Spanish Baroque. The Hospital Real de la Concepción, cluttered with mansion houses dating from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the area occupied by the ancient Moorish zoco. The earth-coloured façade of the church of Santiago (12) is in contrast and its wall tower with its crenellated balconies is a symbolic figure called “Cascamorras”, dressed like a “chupi” and carrying a string hanging from the end with a bladder tied to it. The retinue that accompanies or dodges “Cascamorras” sets off from the narrow streets. To follow him he carries a truncheon, a wooden stick with a string hanging from the end with a bladder tied to it. The retinue that accompanies or dodges “Cascamorras” sets off from the narrow streets.

Monuments and museums

The “Cascamorras” festival has been declared to be of National Tourist Interest. It is celebrated every year in the towns of Guadix and Baza in the month of August. According to the tradition, in 1490 work started on the church of the Mercado in one of the suburbs of Baza. Juan Pedernal, one of the workers, heard a sweet voice coming out of the opening in the primitive masonry hermitage saying: “Have pity”. He had found the image of the Virgin Mary that was named Our Lady of Pity. The worker confronted his workmates in dispute of the ownership of the image. The authorities intervened with a Solomonic solution: the image of the Virgin Mary would stay in Baza but with the concession of the right of the inhabitants of Guadix to celebrate the festival of Our Lady of Pity. They came to an agreement: if someone from Guadix managed to enter Baza and get to the church of the Mercado without being deceived with oil, the image of the Virgin Mary would be taken to Guadix. Consequently every year, a symbolic figure called “Cascamorras”, dressed like a harquequin or a jester, sets off on this quest. To defend himself he carries a truncheon, a wooden stick with a string hanging from the end with a bladder tied to it. The retinue that accompanies or dodges “Cascamorras” sets off through the narrow streets. To relieve the effects of the heat the retinue receives water and paint of all colours from the public or they stop to drink at one of the many fountains and springs on route between the two towns.

Festivals and traditions

Holy Week is especially important in Guadix because of the serious and holy character of the processions.

Gastronomy and crafts

The traditional cuisine from Guadix is rich in both variety and quality. It is the fruit of the different cultures that settled in the area throughout its history. The traditional sweets and cakes are outstanding, dating back to the times of Al Andalus and taken over by the nuns in the convents. The Guadix cuisine is based on pork products, like its “olla” or “potaje” stews. Not forgetting the homemade pork preserves, the hams and local wine. To mention some of the local dishes there are the fried breadcrumbs or “migas”, “andajías” stew, porridge, honey-coated cakes or “pestiños” and many other delicacies. A few other dishes from the district are the “gachas” made with oats and red pepper soup, accompanied with land and chorizo “talbinas” made with wheat flour and water served with croquetas, molasses or sugar as to taste; also “sustentos” made with cornflour with slices of potato, chorizo, land and black pudding and the “miga” made with bread crumbs. Typical dishes from this area also include paprika with sardines – a soup made of paprika made from dried red peppers, roast green peppers, onion, olive oil and fish stock served with potatoes and sardines – and the “olla de San Antón” stew, made with pork cooked with red peppers and served with almond sauce and ham. Ceramics make up the main craft industry with a millennial tradition in the Guadix and El Marquesado districts. Due to its clay earth they make ceramics in Guadix with their own local design like the local pitchers or jugs. Other craft products in this area are esparto grass, plaited reeds as well as pita grass, appropriate for making baskets and chairs, wickerwork and wrought iron objects.

Andalucía