



Medium-Sized Cities



ALCALÁ LA REAL ANTEQUERA ÉCIJA ESTEPA LOJA LUCENA

ALCALÁ LA REAL, THE FRONTIER CITY

The majestic sight of the Fortress of La Mota [Fortaleza de la Mota] provides travellers with a visual indication of the historic importance of this frontier city. The word **alcálá** means fortified city in Arabic. Its geographical location confirms the enormous strategic value it has had over the centuries. In this regard, the number of lookout points scattered all over this municipality bear witness to the importance of this location during the transition from the middle ages to the modern age. Alcalá La Real, the birthplace of Juan Ruiz de Cisneros (better known as the **Arzobispo de Hita**), is located in the southwest corner of Jaen Province, 71 kilometres from the city of Jaen and 53 kilometres from the city of Granada. With a population of 22,129 inhabitants, the municipality comprises 16 districts, with around 7,000 inhabitants.

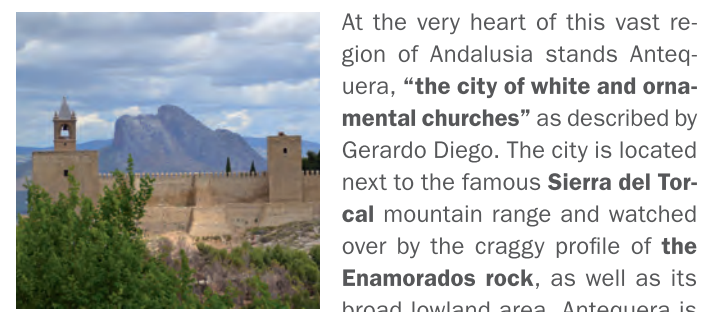


de las Mercedes, where the **Palace-Museum of the Abbot** will acquaint us with the rich legacy and past of this city, with its steep streets full of brightly-coloured houses, many surprises, manor houses, churches and architectural details – signs of the splendour and rich historical past.

Among other places that must be visited are the Plaza Arzobispo de Hita, the Iglesia de la Consolación and the San Juan Tadeo lookout point in the picturesque **Las Cruces district** where visitors can marvel at the magnificent view of Alcalá La Real and its castle.

Alcalá La Real is a land of **wine, olive oil and cherries**. The well-known **Etnosur Festival** takes place in this city, a multi-ethnic cultural fair held in mid-July.

ANTEQUERA, THE CITY OF ART



At the very heart of this vast region of Andalusia stands Antequera, “**the city of white and ornamental churches**” as described by Gerardo Diego. The city is located next to the famous **Sierra del Torcal** mountain range and watched over by the craggy profile of the **Enamorados rock**, as well as its broad lowland area. Antequera is history and monumentality built over many centuries. Antequera is only 47 kilometres from the Costa del Sol and is home to a population of over 44,000 people. Travellers simply must begin their visit at the **City Museum [Museo de la Ciudad]**. This centre can be found in the **Palace of Najera [Palacio de Nájera]** and once inside you will experience an unforgettable journey back in time that includes the impressive **Roman tomb of Acilia** and the enigmatic plasticity of the **sculpture of Ephebe**. From here, one can walk to the higher parts of the city centre where visitors will be amazed by the façade of the **Collegiate Church of Santa María [Colegiata de Santa María]** and the majestic forms of the interior naves. Nearby is the **Alcazaba [Moorish castle]**, an important site during the Reconquest of Spain. But the monumental treasures do not stop here: the **church of el Carmen [Iglesia del Carmen]**, the charming bullring and its **bullfighting museum**, etc. are also essential entries in our travel log.

Another unmissable visit is the Dolmen complex of Antequera, considered the best in Spain and of which the best individual piece is the **dolmen of Menga**, a true milestone in megalithic construction in mainland Spain. **El Torcal** can be found close to the city, a natural spot of extraordinary beauty where we can admire the amazing formations that water erosion has created over time in the limestone rock of the area.

The gastronomy of Antequera offers us the renowned **mollete** de Antequera (bread roll with oil, garlic and paprika lard), the **porra** (gazpacho with ham) and an exquisite sweet known as **bienmesabe** (sugar and egg white dessert).

ÉCIJA, THE CITY OF TOWERS

Nestled in the River Genil valley, we find the beautiful “city of the sun” popularly known as the “**city of towers**”. Its old quarter contains some of the **best legacies of Baroque** construction in all of Andalusia. But before it was Baroque, Écija was Roman – a time of great splendour in the city. The archaeological remains give us an idea of the vitality of Écija in the Roman Empire and the historic importance of its buildings. In the **Plaza de España**, we find important remains of **Roman baths** but the true importance of **Astigi** becomes evident when we visit the **Palace of Benameji [Palacio de Benameji]**, home to the **Archaeological-Historic Museum of the city**.

Inside this sumptuous Baroque home can be found several splendid **Roman mosaics** [that stand out for their rich colours, the careful formation of the figures and the pictorial effects] and such sculptures as the “**Amazona herida**” [wounded Amazon] and the interesting collections of inscriptions, capitals and various domestic items from Roman times.

The emergence of Baroque culture in Andalusia can be admired at the **Church of Santa María [Iglesia de Santa María]**, the choir stalls of which are the work of **Juan de Mesa**. A visit to the parish museum is highly recommendable. The **Church of Santa Cruz [Iglesia de Santa Cruz]** and the **Church of Santiago [Iglesia de Santiago]** are also unmissable during any visit to Écija. The many convents dotted around the city all uphold the **convent bakery** tradition for which the city is also famous.



In terms of civilian architecture, we recommend the **Palace of the Palma [Palacio de los Palma]** among the many to be found in the city. The rooms on the upper floor of this building contain furniture from the period.

We cannot leave the city without admiring the beauty of its studs, a magnificent and internationally-recognised example of **Andalusian horses**. Added to this is the long-standing **Flamenco tradition** that is kept alive by its many groups.

ESTEPA, THE CITY WITH SCENTS OF CINNAMON AND BAROQUE

The city boasts a significant **monumental heritage** enhanced by the scent of cinnamon that wafts through its streets at Christmas time. Estepa is located in the southeast of Seville Province, a frontier location in times gone by. It is and has been a **crossroads**, linking Upper Andalusia with the River Guadalquivir valley and the latter with the Mediterranean coast and the Plain of Gibraltar. A look at its history would start at the **Hill of San Cristóbal [Cerro de San Cristóbal]**, a strategic and fortified location with privileged views over the surrounding landscape. The **Tower of Tribute [Torre del Homenaje]**, 26 metres high, is the best kept bastion of the **old Moorish fortress**. Here we also come across the **Franciscan convent church of Our Lady of Gracia [Iglesia conventual franciscana de Ntra. Sra de Gracia]**, as well as the **convent of Santa Clara [convento de Santa Clara]**. The **temple of the order of Santa Clara** is a work of unique beauty. To leave this site without trying the sweets sold at this convent would be unforgivable. Here we also find the **church of Santa María la Mayor [Iglesia de Santa María la Mayor]**, which houses an interesting temporary exhibition on the monument restorations in the city. If we stroll down to the city centre, we come across the enigmatic **Victory Tower [torre de la Victoria]**. Also to be found here are numerous **whitewashed ancestral homes** with iron railings on the windows, as well as the **palace of the Cerverales [palacio de los Cerverales]**. The artistic wealth of Estepa is also evident in the two most important churches in the city: **La Asunción** (slightly reminiscent of the Sistine Chapel) and **El Carmen**, both beautiful Baroque works with exuberant ornamentation. When arriving in Estepa after 1 October, it is difficult to abstain from buying a box of **mantecados**. The fame of these pastries lies in their taste and the character of “La colchona” who used to make the pastries to be sold later by her husband, a corsair of Estepa in the 19th Century. Neither must we forget the **extra virgin olive oil** with its own Protected Designation of Origin.



The abundance of water has led to many **springs feeding** a number of fountains that are hundreds of years old, of which the most notable is the **Fuente de la Mora** or **Fuente de los 25 Caños**. Legend says that if you drink from this fountain, you must do so from each of its 25 spigots. The **Centro de Interpretación del Agua [Water Heritage Visitor's Centre]** was created due to the importance of water in this area.

‘YOUR STORY’, THE BRAND CREATED BY THE MEDIUM-SIZED CITIES IN THE CENTRE OF ANDALUSIA

The “**Your Story**” brand encompasses the tourism product on offer from the Medium-Sized Cities in the Centre of Andalusia and was created by the Fundación Ciudades Medias del Centro de Andalucía [the Medium-Sized Cities in the Centre of Andalusia Foundation]. This Foundation was set up by the city councils of Alcalá la Real, Antequera, Écija, Estepa, Loja and Lucena. The main objective for the work undertaken by the foundation is to raise awareness of the region’s historic-artistic legacy through the medium of “**Your Story**”. To that end, the Foundation offers visitors to the region a comprehensive list of activities associated with the local heritage, including guided tours, history-related activities to stimulate the senses, theatre-based tours, themed events, etc. The goal is to create an exceptional and irresistible offer of cultural tourism to be enjoyed in Andalusia.

HOW TO GET HERE

Besides the many excellent road links, this region also offers several airports at a distance of less than 1 hour (Málaga, Granada and Seville). The AVE high-speed train service will also bring you to the very heart of Andalusia and its medium-sized cities, with stations in Estepa and Antequera.

ACCOMMODATION AND RESTAURANTS

Travellers have the option to choose from hotels built within palace walls or in rural surroundings of spectacular beauty. However, these majestic hotels are joined by smaller establishments with quaint traditional authenticity where the service will meet your every expectation. The gastronomy offer can be enjoyed at a wide variety of restaurants and tapas bars where smiling faces, good food and local stews are never lacking.



LOJA, THE CITY OF WATER

Its **strategic location**, a natural thoroughfare between Eastern and Western Andalusia, led the Catholic Monarchs of Spain to call this city the “**gateway and key to the Kingdom of Granada**”. The reconquest of Loja (called the “rose among thorns” by Queen Isabella) signalled the end of the Nazari reign in Andalusia.

Loja surprises us with special, romantic and melancholy spots, as well as others that allow us to enjoy a different sunset from the so-called **Balcony of the City [Balcón de la ciudad]**. This lookout point was immortalised by the **Marx Brothers** in their film “Duck Soup”.

The city has been designed for wandering and contemplating the horizon from its **Alcazaba [Moorish castle]**; a military and administrative centre in **mediaeval times**. There we find the history museum and can enjoy amazing views from the tower of the **church of la Encarnación [Iglesia de la Encarnación]**.

One of the illustrious characters of the city, **General Narváez**, who was chairman of the Council of Ministers under Isabella II, has left behind such monuments in the city as his palace (now the City Hall) and his **mausoleum**. We recommend a visit to the historical heritage visitor’s centre at the mausoleum.

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The **roscos** of Loja, made according to an ancient Arabic recipe, are well known. Also in terms of gastronomy, Riofrío (located not far from Loja), is famous for its trout and sturgeon farms. Its **caviar** is considered to be among the best in the world.

THE MEDIUM-SIZED CITIES IN THE CENTRE OF ANDALUSIA FOUNDATION AND ‘YOUR STORY’

The Medium-Sized Cities in the Centre of Andalusia have played an important role in the history of this region. Their strategic location (at the very heart) and their territorial importance have led to a rich legacy being left behind by the many cultures to have existed here over thousands of years. The cities became focal points for rich, flourishing population centres that contributed to the socio-economic development of Andalusia.

This part of inland Andalusia is home to numerous monuments of great artistic value in the six medium-sized cities (Alcalá la Real, Antequera, Écija, Estepa, Loja and Lucena) in nearly as many provinces (Córdoba, Granada, Jaen, Málaga and Seville).

These lands are dotted with old Moorish castles where the magic of the past is almost palpable, exuberant Baroque churches just waiting to be discovered, beautiful city districts full of popular architecture, convents offering the delight of sweets with heavenly flavours, the remains of more primitive civilisations and extremely rich, deep-rooted traditions. Lands united by the beautiful and rich culture and history of Andalusia. A living history that travellers will create and make their own through experiences they will always carry with them in their heart. Are you ready for the experience?

Discover the Medium-Sized Cities in the Centre of Andalusia, discover ‘Your Story’.

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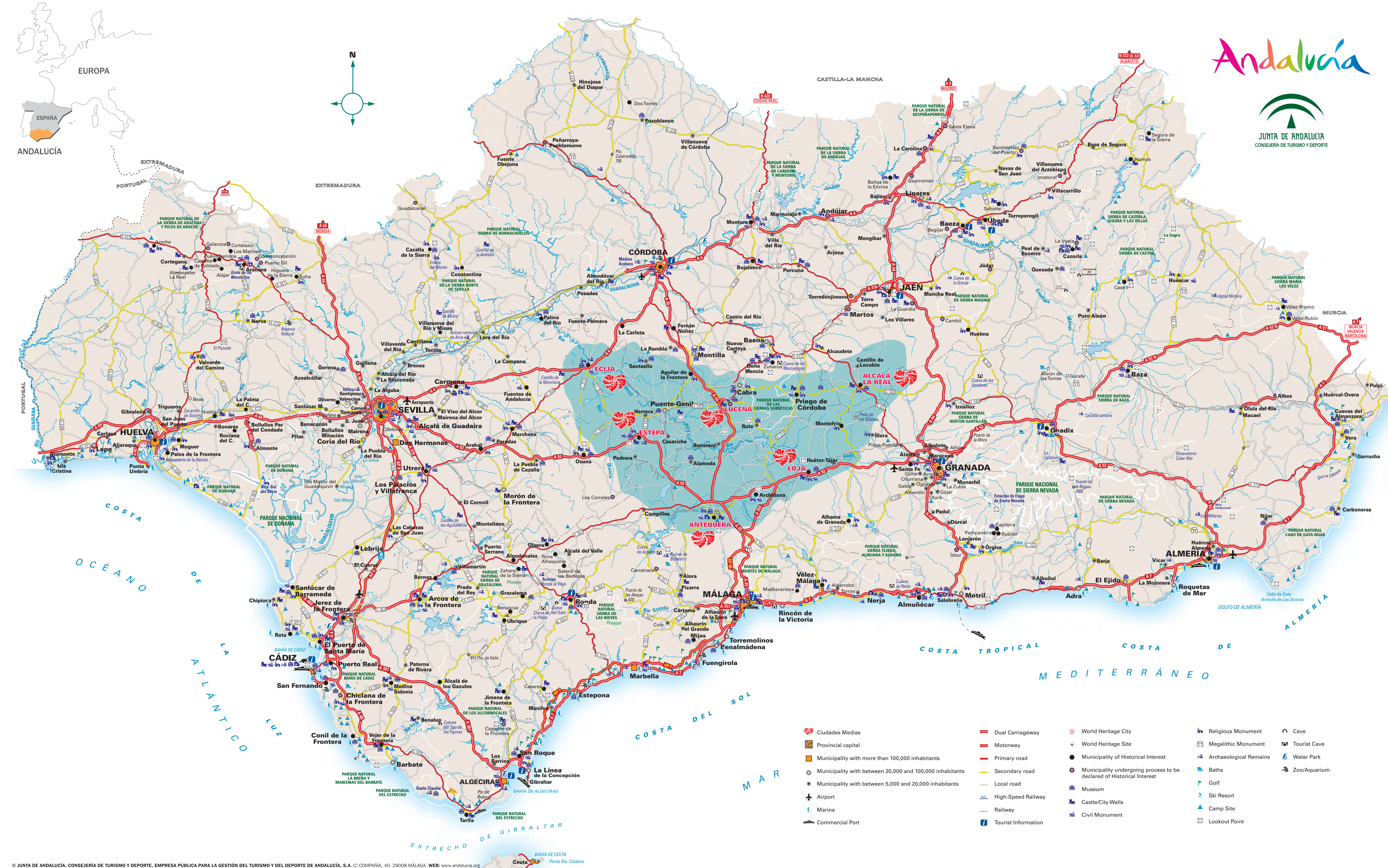


LUCENA, THE CITY OF THREE CULTURES

The city of Lucena experienced a time of splendour during the **Moorish occupation** of Spain, when it became the main Jewish town of Al Andalus. There was an important Jewish university here and many of its intellectuals subsequently travelled to Toledo to found the School of Translators [Escuela de Traductores]. The co-existence of Christians, Jews and Arabs earned the city its name of “**the city of the three cultures**”. It is currently the second most important city in Córdoba Province after the capital. The **battle of Martín González** took place nearby, where the last king of Granada, **Boabdil**, was apprehended and imprisoned for a while in the **Tower at Castillo del Moral**. This monument houses the **museum of history-archaeology** of the city. A visit to this museum must be made in conjunction with a visit to the City of Lucena Visitor’s Centre, located in the former **Baroque palace of the Counts of Santa Ana [Palacio de los Condes de Santa Ana]**. The footprints of the past are evident in such sites as the **Cave of the Angel [Cueva del Ángel]**, in the foothills of the Sierra de Aras mountains and considered to be one of the most important **Palaeolithic** sites in Europe. Also worth mentioning are the **Visigoth basilica** and the **Roman site of Los Tejares**, a group of kilns from an important pottery that has been partly restored. The economic boom in the 18th Century transformed Lucena into one of the **great Baroque cities of Andalusia**. Examples of this can be found in the splendid **Sacramarium of San Mateo [Sagrario de San Mateo]**, in the church of the same name and in the **Chapel of the Virgen de Araceli [Santuario de la Virgen de Araceli]**, the patron saint of Lucena and whose festivities are celebrated on the first Sunday in May.

The **arts and crafts** heritage of Lucena is dominated by two pieces in particular: the **velón [candle]** and the **perula**. It is said that Miguel de Cervantes wrote Don Quixote under the light of a candle from Lucena. The perula is a green glazed earthenware pot that dates back to Moorish times.

Medium-Sized Cities



Alcalá la Real



Antequera



Écija



Estepa



Loja



Lucena



Andalucía

