Baeza

Geography and history

Baeza is in the centre of the province of Jaén, perched on a hill surrounded by the valleys formed by two rivers, the Guadalquivir and its main affluent the Guadalhorce, a natural watercourse 800 metres above sea level. Daylighting over the fertile lands of the valleys which stretch towards the west, its origins date back to the first settlers during the Bronze Age, when it is thought to have been inhabited by the Iberian culture.

A completely established town was built during the Roman period, including a castle and a walled enclosure. The Moors settled here and under their rule the town experienced a substantial development due to its fertile land and strategic location. It was near the capital of one of the Moorish Taifa kingdoms that extended over a great part of the province of Jaén. The period of greatest splendour for Baeza was during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when its economy prospered thanks to its agriculture and the influx of the University of Seville, led by the international University of Andalucía, the Alhambra Palace (152), a beautiful example of Mudejar Gothic; the Palaces of the Christian Kings (16), at the base of the Cathedral, the ancient University conserves the lecture room where Alfonso of Aragon taught; and in a quiet corner of the town, almost unnoticed because of its simplicity, the church of the Santa Cruz (18), one of the few exponents of Andalusian romantic style.

Monuments and museums

On clear days you can see the stone silhouette of Baeza from Jaén, one of the most important Renaissance monumental complexes in Spain. The Plaza del Mercado or market square, the public forum of the town, is flanked by ornate porticos and decorated with passages like the Balcon del Conde and the Arco de las Monjas. Two false gates remain from the walled enclosure that protected the town during the Moorish occupation and lead to the old part of Baeza: the Gate of Jaén (19) and the Villalba Arch (20). From the gate walked under the Arco de las Monjas (19), he walked along the city walls in intimate communication with nature and Antonio Machado's poetry. The Plaza de Santa María, the heart of Baeza, concentrates most of the monuments: the Cathedral (14), the High Town Hall (16), and the Santa María frontera (18). The Seminary San Felipe (12), today houses the International University of Andalucia; the Alhambra Palace (152), a beautiful example of Mudejar Gothic; the Palaces of the Christian Kings (16), at the base of the Cathedral, the ancient University conserves the lecture room where Alfonso of Aragon taught; and in a quiet corner of the town, almost unnoticed because of its simplicity, the church of the Santa Cruz (18), one of the few exponents of Andalusian romantic style.

Festivals and traditions

The Corpus Christi festival is celebrated in May or June. It has been held in Baeza since the Middle Ages. The city is decorated in a special way for the procession of the Monstrance, a magnificent piece of work by the gold and silver smiths from the eighteenth century. The streets are decorated with altars, carpets of flowers and colored sand, plant pots, lanterns, and hanging decorations to receive the procession of the Monstrance. The August fair is in honour of Our Lady of the Abadía, the patroness of the town. The religious Carnival begins in the 9th of August and goes on to the 15th, the feast of the Virgin Mary, when there is the procession. Different activities are organized around this festival, such as sports competitions, bullfights, cultural activities, plays, concerts, and other festivities. The Romería pilgrimage of Baeza takes place the first week in September in honour of Holy Christ of Veña and Our Lady of the Rosary. It is considered to be one of the oldest of its type in Andalucía.

Gastronomy and crafts

Olive oil is the king of the Baeza cuisine and in general of the whole of the province of Jaén, the greatest producer in Europe. Oven-baked cakes, Lent pears, and Easter cakes, marzipan and nut pastries on All圣s' Day are local dishes. Vegetables, cheeses, vegetables, and olive oil are the main ingredients of the dishes in the district, always provided by olive oil, an ingredient used as a seasoning or on toast grilled over an open fire at breakfast, with a pinch of salt and rubbed with a clove of garlic in salad, like the Porronada, the recipe includes, as well as the previous olive oil, tomato, onion, and green peas, melon and salt, and olive oil; marinated pork loin is very typical from this area.

A good idea is to buy olive oil in artistic bottles or tins for gifts and at the same time you will be promoting this basic product of the Andalusian cuisine, the extra virgin olive oil. The local crafts are basically oriented towards cabinet-making and carved wooden objects, The ceramics, wrought iron articles, and textiles are also crafts from Baeza.