



THE AREA KNOWN AS HOYA DE HUESCA IS A WIDE BASIN BOUNDED TO THE NORTH BY THE FOOTHILLS OF THE PYRENEES: THE SIERRAS OF SANTO DOMINGO, LOARRE, CABALLERA, GRATAL AND GUARA, AND TO THE SOUTH BY PLAINS LEADING TO THE STEPPES OF THE MONEGROS AREA. THIS TRANSITIONAL LOCATION MEANS HUGE NATURAL DIVERSITY.



HOYA DE HUESCA IS PART OF TWO OF THE GREAT CULTURAL ROUTES OF EUROPE: THE **CAMINO DE SANTIAGO (ST. JAMES' WAY)** CROSSES IT FROM SOUTHEAST TO NORTHWEST, ON THE CATALAN ROUTE, VISITING THE VILLAGES AND TOWNS OF PERTUSA, ANTILLÓN, FAÑANÁS, OLA, TIERZ, HUESCA, CHIMILLAS, BOLEA, ANIÉS, LOARRE, SARSAMARQUELLO, LA PEÑA, TRISTE AND ENA.

THE **RUTA DEL SANTO GRIAL (ROUTE OF THE HOLY GRAIL)** ALSO CROSSES THE HOYA, AS THE HOLY CHALICE WAS BROUGHT TO HUESCA BY THE LOCAL SAINT LORENZO (LAURENCE) TO PRESERVE IT FROM THE ROMANS, AND AFTER A LONG REFUGE IN THE MONASTERY OF SAN JUAN DE LA PEÑA, IT WAS AGAIN TAKEN ACROSS THIS AREA TO ANOTHER PLACE OF SAFETY, ITS PRESENT HOME IN VALENCIA. THIS ROUTE COINCIDES WITH THE LOCAL STRETCH OF ST. JAMES' WAY AND THE ROMAN ROAD FROM ZARAGOZA TO THE PYRENEES.

→ VIEW OF THE RIVER FLUMEN FROM SALTO DE ROLDÁN. SIERRA DE GUARA. →

## diversity in stone

The geological formations called **mallos** are particularly surprising. Rocky outcrops of conglomerate, evoking enormous towers, with vertiginous vertical faces; they are a paradise for climbers and home to many birds of prey.

The **mallos** of **Riglos**, **Agüero** and **Murillo**, around the Gállego river, and those of **Salto de Roldán** and **Vadiello**, in Guara Natural Park, are especially striking.

The sierras of the Pre-Pyrenees are home to other stunningly beautiful formations, created by river erosion: these are the **ravines, canyions, gullies and gorges**, as well as numerous caves and pot-holes, in an underground world of beauty and mystery.



→ LIME KILN. BESPÉN. →

The **foz** (ravine) of **Salinas**, next to the Gállego River, and the Escalate ravine, by the reservoir of La Peña, are excellent examples of this type of natural feature, and can be enjoyed in easy walks.

The most spectacular canyons and gorges appear in the **Natural Park of The Canyons and Sierra de Guara**, where those of the **Formiga**, **Flumen**, **Guatizalema** and **Calcón** rivers being most popular among fans of canyoning. The gully of **La Pillera**, near Nocito, on the North face of Sierra de Guara, is easy to reach and very pretty, as are the gorgas (gorges) of **San Cristóbal**, at the headwaters of the River Sotón, and the gorges of **San Julián de Lierta**.

In the southern part of the Hoya are the startling **escarpes** (escarpments) of **Piracés** and **Tramaced**, the result of an immense erosive effect on the sandstone terrain, creating an evocative moonscape. The **sasos and llanos** of Violada, Alcalá de Gurra and Almodévar, in contrast, are gently rolling terrain with low hills.



→ CIENFUENS RESERVOIR. SIERRA DE GUARA. →



→ MALLOS OF AGÜERO

## diversity in water

Several **rivers** cross this area from North to South, and provide delightful riverside settings as they descend towards the Ebro: the **Gállego**, in the Reino de los Mallos, is the most vigorous, and a major centre for rafting and other white-water sports; other rivers are the **Sotón**, the **Isuela**, the **Flumen**, the **Guatizalema** and the **Alcanadre**, winding their way through fascinating canyons and gullies, and farther downstream, charming wooded banks.

Water is also present in the various **reservoirs**, offering numerous swimming spots and pleasant walks: the reservoirs of **La Peña**, **Arguis**, **Belsué**, **Cienfuens**, **Vadiello** and **Calcón**. The reservoir of La Sotonera also offers boating. The **albercas**, ponds forming part of irrigation systems of Arabic origin, are also lovely, and are a regular haunt of many types of water fowl; notable examples are the **alberca de Cortés**, by Chimillas, the albercas of **Castilla** and **Alboré**, in Lupiñén, the **alberca de Loreto**, near Banariés and the **alberca de Valdabrá**, on the outskirts of Huesca.



→ POTHOLES AND GULLIES. SIERRA DE GUARA. →



→ CALCÓN RESERVOIR. SIERRA DE GUARA. →



→ RAFTING ON THE RIVER GÁLLEGO. →

# living diversity

## flora and fauna

This varied landscape is covered by very different plant species, especially holm oaks and pines, fields of cereals, orchards and groves of olive and almond trees. Herbs and Alpine plants, such as saxifrage, houseleeks and calceolaria, also cling to the rocky landscapes of La Hoya. Poplars line the riverbanks, and mountainous areas teem with Atlantic and Pyrenean plants such as fir and beech.

Wildlife is also diverse in this area, with wild boar, roe deer, rabbits, partridge and wild cats. The skies of La Hoya are patrolled by birds of prey and carrion-eaters such as the griffon vulture, red kite and bearded vulture. Water birds also use the albercas of this territory as a stopping place on their migrations across the peninsula.



## watching and learning

All of this diversity deserves a leisurely stroll and contemplation from our outstanding **miradores (lookout points)**. Some which can be enjoyed without requiring a lot of effort to reach are the **Salto de Roldán** (Roland's leap), next to Santa Eulalia de La Peña; the medieval tower of **Santa Eulalia la Mayor**; Mount **San Miguel**, in Ayerbe; **Marcuello castle** and the **Mirador de los Buitres** (Vulture lookout point), in Sarsamarcuello; the chapel of the Virgin of La Peña, in Aniés; the **mirador de la Reina** lookout point, at Loarre Castle; el **Colegiata** lookout point, in Bolea; **La Corona** hill, in Almodévar; the **Piedra del Mediodía** (midday stone), in Piracés.

The Hoya de Huesca also offers several **museums and interpretation centres** relating to nature: the Nature Museum «La Casa de los Buitres» (Vulture House), in **Santa Cilia de Panzano**; the Interpretation Centre «Los Altos de Guara» (Peaks of Guara), in the same village; the «Alberca de Alboré» Migratory Birds Observation Centre, in **Montmesa**; and the «Pascual Garrido» Centre for Visitors to Sierra de Guara, in **Arguis**.



## nature and popular culture

La Hoya de Huesca has many interesting examples of cultural heritage and ancient symbolism directly linked to nature, displaying the intimate relationship of people and their environment.

For example, the many **ice houses**, used to store winter ice and snow which would later be used in summer; good examples in the Hoya can be found in **Vicién**, **Almodévar**, **Salillas**, **Casbas de Huesca** and **Nueno**.

The search for underground springs began in the medieval period and under Arab influence, with the best examples of **wellsprings** being those of **Albero Alto**, **Piracés**, **Antillón**, **Blecua**, **Ola**, **Veillas** and **Angüés**.



→ LA SOTONERA RESERVOIR. →

**Underground cellars**, excavated in the hills of towns and villages, are a third group of elements of our popular culture, of ancient origin. They are especially numerous in the villages of **Almodévar**, **Alcalá de Gurra**, **Puibolea**, **Bespén**, **Blecua** and **Antillón**. Most are still used by local households. The **Vineyard, Wineries and Wine Interpretation Centre of Almodévar** explains this type of popular cultural heritage.

Combining cultural heritage and pagan symbolism, and linked to fertility rites of ancient origin, is the **Fertility Stones** route, rock formations altered by human hands to enhance their appearance of human reproductive organs, and thus becoming sacred temples of fertility where women and men could go to cure problems of this type. This route is in the south-eastern part of La Hoya, in the villages of **Piracés**, **Ayera**, **Fañanás**, **Ibieca**, **Sesa**, **Tramaced** and **Veillas**.

The **ermitas rupestres (rock chapels)** of the Hoya deserve special mention, a string of medieval hermitages in the Pyrenean foothills, in caves or other natural landmarks. This cultural heritage, closely connected to nature, forms our **Hoya Route of Silence**, consisting of the chapels of the **Virgen de La Peña** in Aniés, **San Cristóbal del Barranco** in Bolea, **San Julián de Andría** between Lierta and Arascués, **San Martín de la Val d'Onsera** in San Julián de Banzo, **San Chinés** and **San Cosme y San Damián** in Vadiello. The walks required to reach these chapels require some effort, but most of them are manageable for everybody. The cultural, historic and natural interest of these rock chapels makes them very much worth the visit.

MALLOS OF RIGLOS →





# hoya de huesca

hoya de huesca  
Diversity in the Aragonese Pre-Pyrenees



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THE LOCATION OF LA HOYA DE HUESCA, WHERE THE FOOTHILLS OF THE PYRENEES MEET THE PLAINS RUNNING DOWN TO THE EBRO VALLEY, HAS MADE THIS AREA A MELTING POT OF CULTURES AND WAYS OF LIFE THROUGHOUT ITS HISTORY. AFTER THE RECONQUEST OF THE 11TH CENTURY, FORMERLY DIVIDED CULTURES BECAME UNIFIED, WHILE CONSERVING THE CULTURAL DIFFERENCES WHICH MARK THE NATURAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING OF THE TOWNS.



→ MONTEARAGÓN CASTLE. IN THE BACKGROUND, THE SALTO DE ROLDÁN.



→ HUESCA CATHEDRAL. DOORWAY.

## medieval period

In the **medieval period**, the northern Sierras formed an important frontier between Christians and Arabs, the former confined to the mountains and the latter dominating the fertile southern plain. The natural defences of these Sierras were used in the construction of castles and watchtowers in the period when the Kingdom of Aragon was extending its boundaries southwards and eastwards from the area of Jaca and San Juan de la Peña.

This **military romanesque** heritage has left fine examples in La Hoya, such as [Marcuello castle](#) in Linás de Marcuello, [Loarre castle](#), [Ordás castle](#) in Nueno, the castle of [Salto de Roldán](#) (Roland's leap) next to Santa Eulalia de la Peña, and the [tower of Santa Eulalia la Mayor](#). Past the defensive line of the mountains, Montearagón castle, in Quicena, was decisive in the reconquest of Islamic Huesca. The city's Arab defensive walls were breached in 1096 by the Aragonese King Pedro I; other fortresses of this period are the castles of [Almudévar](#) and of [Novales](#), in the southern part of the Hoya, and the defensive [walls of Antillón](#).

After the castles had fulfilled their military purposes, they were occupied by religious orders who would oversee the resettlement of the reconquered areas and their indoctrination in Christian dogma, while new monasteries were also built.



→ MEDIEVAL TOWER. SANTA EULALIA LA MAYOR.



→ MONTEARAGÓN CASTLE. IN THE BACKGROUND, THE SALTO DE ROLDÁN.

La Hoya de Huesca is rich in examples of **religious Romanesque**, such as those in [Loarre castle](#), offering a contrast between the Lombard Romanesque of the first epoch and the later Romanesque in the style of Jaca. The [castle-abbey of Montearagón](#) was also home to a community of monks, and for a long period, stretching beyond the Middle Ages, it was a very rich abbey, controlling territories, assets and populations over a large area.

Other essential sites in this Romanesque heritage include the [church of Santiago](#), in Agüero, an unfinished project which was to have been a branch of the Monastery of San Juan de la Peña; and the church of [San Pedro el Viejo](#), in Huesca, which belonged to a Benedictine monastery built over an earlier Mozarab church. This has a lovely cloister leading onto the second and final [Pantheon of Kings](#) of all Aragon; here lie the remains of Alfonso I El Batallador and Ramiro II El Monje, the perpetrator of the bloody massacre known as the Bell of Huesca and the founder of the Crown of Aragon, as he married his daughter to the Count of Barcelona, Ramón Berenguer IV.

Romanesque is by far the dominant artistic style in the Hoya de Huesca, which holds many more interesting examples in the parish churches of many villages, although these were largely altered in later periods.

The city of Huesca is also home to the most notable example of **civil Romanesque** in La Hoya: the [Palace of the Kings of Aragon](#), now part of the Museum of Huesca –the Provincial Museum of Archaeology and Art– where we also find the lugubrious [Sala de la Campana](#) (Bell room), the scene of the legendary Medieval massacre.



→ MONASTERY OF CASBAS DE HUESCA.



→ URRIÉS PALACE. AYERBE.



→ SANTIAGO CHURCH. AGÜERO



→ CLOISTER OF SAN PEDRO EL VIEJO. HUESCA.

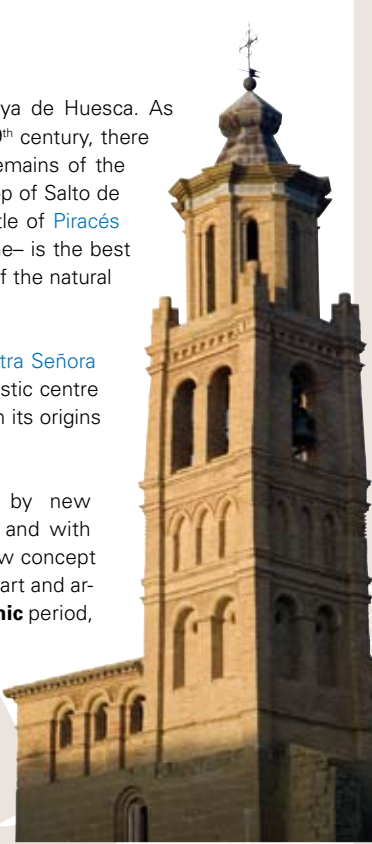


→ HUESCA CASINO.



→ COLLEGIATE CHURCH OF BOLEA.

As well as Gothic buildings, which are closely linked to cities and cathedrals, the painting of this period is well represented in the works shown in the Museum of Huesca and the Diocese Museum. The Hoya de Huesca also has many examples of paintings in their original context in the countryside and villages, forming one of the most important groups of Gothic paintings in Spain. The **Linear Gothic route**, concentrating on 13<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> century fresco or tempera wall paintings of the martyrdom of saints, runs through the Eastern side of the Hoya, in the chapel of [Santa María del Monte](#), in Liesa, [San Miguel](#), Barluenga, [San Miguel de Foces](#), Ibieca, and [Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles](#) in Arbaniés.



→ SAN JORGE CHURCH. ALCALÁ DE GURREA.

As time went by new towns and cities appeared, and with them new ways of life, a new concept of society and new styles of art and architecture. This was the **gothic** period, with the best example being [Huesca Cathedral](#). The present building was begun in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and for various reasons was not finished until the 16<sup>th</sup>. The bright interior is dominated by the outstanding *Main Altarpiece*, a Renaissance masterpiece carved in alabaster in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by Damián Forment. Many more works of art are scattered around the cathedral. To one side the former Chapterhouse and Cloister have been converted into the [Diocese Museum](#), conserving many works of art of the diocese, with the *Altarpiece of the Abbey of Montearagón* being of particular interest.

## the modern period

The **Renaissance** saw an abundance of sculpture and painting in the form of **altarpieces**, and many of these can be enjoyed in the Museum of the Diocese of Huesca. The 16<sup>th</sup> century [Collegiate Church of Bolea](#) is the outstanding and most representative building of this period. Its bright interior is home to interesting works, especially the *Main altarpiece*, a spectacular combination of stonework and sculpture housing twenty tempera-painted panels, clearly influenced by Flemish and Italian Quattrocento art, created in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century by the Master of Bolea.

Renaissance building is dominated by **civil buildings**, *casas de la ciudad* –now Town Halls– and mansions. Some good examples of this Aragonese Renaissance style are the [Ayuntamiento de Huesca](#) (Town Hall), the former Town Hall of [Loarre](#); the Palace of the Urriés, in Ayerbe; Villahermosa Palace, Casa Oña and Casa Claver, in Huesca; and many examples scattered around the Hoya de Huesca, all with brickwork façades, arched galleries on the top floor and pronounced eaves, combined in harmonious symmetry.

Other characteristic buildings of the late 16<sup>th</sup> century are the towers, freestanding or attached to churches, which are a focal point of many of our villages. Good examples are to be seen in [Aguas](#), [Loporzano](#), [Angüés](#) and [Pertusa](#), this last in the Herrerian style, with a Romanesque crypt inside. Some of these towers were built in the **Mudejar style**, such as those of [Alcalá de Gurrea](#), [Montmesa](#) and [Nueno](#), the most Northerly example of this style.

In the **Baroque** period, the Basilica of [San Lorenzo](#) and the church of [Santo Domingo](#) y [San Martín](#) are the outstanding examples in the city of Huesca. The building of the [Provincial Museum](#), in the same city, was originally the University of Huesca, and is a landmark in the civil building of the era.

In the **19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries** various architectural styles were developed; Historicism, the imitation of earlier periods in new

buildings, is especially visible in Huesca: Santa Ana School, the Hacienda Tax Offices, the Post Office building and Olimpia theatre. Huesca also has its Casino (1901), the best example of Art Nouveau of this territory, as well as good examples of civil architecture in Rationalist and Contemporary styles. Contemporary art in the form of sculpture is nurtured by the programme [Arte y Naturaleza](#) (Art and Nature), managed in the province by CDAN, the Huesca Centre for Art and Nature. Two interesting examples can be seen in natural settings in the Hoya: the hill of Piracés and the poplar woods of Belsué. Eternal nature, as a backdrop for contemporary art. Once again, the Hoya de Huesca is fusion and diversity.



→ PIRACÉS. ART AND NATURE. TREES AS ARCHAEOLOGY.