

GUIDE TO THE NATURE RESERVE

CABO DE GATA NÍJAR

THE NATURE RESERVE

TOWNS AND VILLAGES

BEACHES AND COVES

VIEWPOINTS AND OTHER PLACES OF INTEREST

ROUTES ON FOOT, BY BICYCLE AND BY CAR

ALMERÍA'S NATURE RESERVES

PRACTICAL GUIDE

**NATURAL RESERVE
DECLARED A BIOSPHERE RESERVE BY UNESCO**



NATURE RESERVE CABO DE GATA - NÍJAR

→ P. 13



VIEWPOINTS AND OTHER PLACES OF INTEREST

→ P. 85



TOWNS AND VILLAGES

→ P. 35



ROUTES

ON FOOT → P. 93

BY BICYCLE → P. 100

BY CAR → P. 104



BEACHES AND COVES

→ P. 55



ALMERIA'S NATURE RESERVES

→ P. 109



PRACTICAL GUIDE → P. 118



Calilla del Playazo

CABO DE GATA-NÍJAR NATURE RESERVE	13	CALA DEL CUERVO	74
GEOLOGY	17	LAS NEGRAS	
FLORA AND FAUNA	19	CALA DE SAN PEDRO	
ARCHAEOLOGY	25	CALA DEL PLOMO	79
RURAL ARCHITECTURE	27	CALA DE ENMEDIO	
TOWNS AND VILLAGES	35	PLAYA DE AGUA AMARGA	82
NÍJAR	36	PLAYA DE LOS MUERTOS	
CABO DE GATA	38	PLAYA DEL ALGARROBICO	
LA ALMADRABA DE MONTELEVA		VIEWPOINTS	
LA FABRIQUILLA		AND OTHER PLACES OF INTEREST	
SAN JOSÉ	40	RESERVOIR OF ISABEL II	85
EL POZO DE LOS FRAILES		LA GRANATILLA	
LOS ESCULLOS	44	ALJIBE BERMEJO	
LAS PRESILLAS BAJAS		MIRADOR DE LAS AMOLADERAS	
LA ISLETA DEL MORO	47	THE SALT MARSHES OF CABO DE GATA	86
RODALQUILAR		MIRADOR DE LAS SIRENAS	
LAS NEGRAS	48	TORRE DE LA VELA BLANCA	
LAS HORTICHUELAS		THE CLIFFS OF LOS ESCULLOS	
LOS ALBARICOQUES		MIRADOR DE LA ISLETA DEL MORO	88
FERNÁN PÉREZ	51	MIRADOR DE LA AMATISTA	
AGUA AMARGA		TORRE DE LOS LOBOS	
CARBONERAS	53	EL ALBARDINAL BOTANICAL GARDEN	
EL ARGAMASÓN, LA CUEVA DEL PÁJARO AND EL SALTADOR		LA CASA DE LOS VOLCANES -ECOMUSEUM	90
BEACHES AND COVES	55	CORTIJO DEL FRAILE	
PLAYA DE TORRE GARCÍA-LAS AMOLADERAS	57	THE LIGHTHOUSE OF MESA DE ROLDÁN	
PLAYAS DE CABO DE GATA, ALMADRABA AND LA FABRIQUILLA		MIRADOR DE LOS MUERTOS	
PLAYA DEL CORRALETE		ROUTES	
CALA ARENA	60	ON FOOT	93
CALA RAJÁ (EL DEDO)		BY BICYCLE	100
CALA CARBÓN		BY CAR	104
PLAYA DE LA MEDIA LUNA		ALMERÍA'S NATURE RESERVES	109
PLAYA DE MÓNSUL	63	PUNTA ENTINAS-SABINAR	110
CALAS DEL BARRONAL		ALBUFERA DE ADRA	111
CALA GRANDE	65	CAÑADA DE LAS NORIAS	112
CALA CHICA		SIERRA ALHAMILLA	113
CALA PRÍNCIPE		KARTS EN YESOS DE SOBRAS	114
CALA DE LOS AMARILLOS		DESIERTO DE TABERNAS	115
PLAYA DE LOS GENOVESES	67	SIERRA NEVADA	116
PLAYA DE SAN JOSÉ		SIERRA DE MARÍA-LOS VÉLEZ	117
CALA HIGUERA	69	PRACTICAL GUIDE	118
PLAYA DEL ARCO		POPULAR FIESTAS, HANDICRAFTS, GASTRONOMY, RESTAURANTS, ACCOMMODATION, ACTIVITIES... + INFORMATION	119
PLAYA DEL PEÑÓN BLANCO			128
CALA DE LOS TOROS			
EL PLAYAZO	71		

CABO DE GATA-NÍJAR NATURE RESERVE



The **UNESCO Global Geoparks** are geographical areas where the landscapes and places of geological relevance are run following a concept of protection, education and sustainable development.

On the Mediterranean coast, positioned with its back to the rest of the Iberian peninsula, lies a landscape whose remote corners, desert landscapes and simple lives are unfamiliar to many. **Cabo de Gata-Níjar** was a land-sea Natural Park as from 1987. Later, in 1997, it was declared by UNESCO a **Biosphere Reserve**, as well as a **Global Geopark**. This space has maintained its serene beauty throughout time. The guidebook you are holding is a homage to that land and its people.

The volcanic origin of the area, its extremely arid climate, unique and varied flora and vegetation, peculiar coastal relief and the human warmth which envelopes it all in its traditions and customs, its craftwork and cuisine... All these elements combine to make Cabo de Gata a truly extraordinary location.

In the past, the coast was coveted by various Mediterranean peoples for the richness of its mineral deposits, and its ports were visited by Eastern trading expeditions. Its arid landscape and location, remote from communications by land, kept it virgin for a long time. Sun-baked and wind-beaten, its constantly changing landscape is evocative of dreams, struggles, hard work and survival. All this has maintained almost 50 km of coastline, practically intact.

In order to take full advantage of the Nature Reserve, we recommend following some of its numerous routes by car, bicycle or on foot. We have tried not to miss anything: the interior of the sierra with its volcanic cones, watercourses, vegetation, towns and architecture; the coastal area, its coves and beaches —many of which are unspoilt— separated from one another by enormous volcanic cliffs and curious reefs; the area of salt marshes and artificial wetlands so important in terms of ecology for its colonies of migratory birds, among which feature the colourful and surprising presence of flamingos, sometimes flying around the salt flats, offering us a magnificent spectacle.

The pages at the end of the book provide concise information on various activities, craftwork, fiestas and folklore, cuisine and restaurants, accommodation, museums and markets and other information of practical interest. Familiarity with the region is paramount to loving it, respecting it, making one's own small contribution to the preservation of the richness of this culture and landscape which are our heritage: and enjoying it all as if bathing in a peaceful pool.



Playa de los Muertos



Common pink flamingo



Playa de Mónsul



Remains of battlements in Castle of San Pedro



Mesa Roldán Tower

ARCHAEOLOGY

Located close to Níjar, the settlements **Inox** and **La Matanza** received the earliest settlers here, and are worth a visit for those who like to get away from the crowds and are equipped with the right kind of vehicle.

The remains of some necropolis are also found in the area. The best preserved is that of the watercourse **Rambla Morales** near Baranquete. There are others in Las Hortichuelas, in Cerro del Cinto and in the town of La Molatilla (Las Negras). Featuring in nearby zones, as more numerous, are the remains of the Argar and Milares cultures (outside the limits of the Park).

The **salting factory Torre García**, of Roman origins, gives us an idea of just the degree to which fish and products derived from it (*garum*, *thonina*, etc.) were important in the diet of these peoples.

Some centuries later, the Arabs established their own culture here, which was made evident through irrigation systems (ditches), the use of water (wells), cubic architecture (country houses), coastal defence and lookout systems (watchtowers, Nazarí remnants), various handicrafts (weaving, ceramics) and mineral mining (gold, silver, etc.). Many of these mines were still in use until well into the 20th century, when the inhabitants of the area emigrated in search of other resources.

In the 18th century, in response to the need to defend themselves against attacks from Berber pirates, the inhabitants erected forts, watchtowers and castles, some of which remain to this day.

Industrial archaeological remains are to be found in the **Reservoir of Isabel II** (dating to 1850) in the municipality of Níjar.



Castle of the Batería, dating back to the Nazrid period, on El Playazo

NÍJAR ¹

Whilst most of the area of the Nature Reserve is within this municipality, the town of Níjar is outside the protected space, in a very interesting location on the southern slope of the **Sierra Alhamilla**. There are many springs from which it collects its water, thus remaining fresh and exuberant-looking throughout the year.

Níjar is a traditional, almost archaic-feeling town. Many different civilisations and cultures have passed through it, each leaving its mark, such as the complex system of terraced farmland and irrigation channels, clearly of Moorish influence, built to take full advantage of the available water. Much of the town's traditional architecture remains, both in the **Barrio de las Eras** and in the high part of the town, where the streets narrow to receive you. Visitors should also enjoy its squares, La Glorieta and the **church of Mudéjares**, from whose Watchtower **Atalaya** the sea can be seen. An interesting visit is to the **Butterfly Zoo**. Don't miss a visit to the **Water Museum**.

Níjar retains a firmly-rooted tradition of craftwork. Many families continue working with ceramics and weaving-looms, using techniques which have been handed down from generation to generation. It is well worth taking a walk around the many water-mills between Níjar and **Huebro**, a district worth visiting for its excellent panoramic views.



Craftsman's weaving loom for *jarapas*, in Níjar



Traditional arts and crafts



Overall view of the town of Níjar



Palm grove in front of La Isleta. In the background, its islets "Las Ballenas"



Abandoned mines in the village of Rodalquilar

LA ISLETA DEL MORO ⁹

A natural anchorage, both Arabs and pirates in search of treasure used this port, and it appears to have been the Berber leader Mohamed Arraéz who, venturing here, caused the port to be named after him. Boats, nets and fishing tackle can be seen lain out in the sun in the white streets and characteristic square with its public washhouse, fed by the well situated next to it.

Fishing and farming activities have always been practised by its folk. Today the industries are complemented with tourism, now the sustenance of various families in the town. It is a very pleasant, peaceful place in which to eat fresh fish and spend the night. Its beach is the **Peñón Blanco**.



The Cerro de los Frailes appears as you turn your back on La Isleta

RODALQUILAR ¹⁰

Located in a lovely valley below the **Cerro del Cinto**, the exploitation of its **gold mines** began in Roman times and ended around 1960. Part of the old mining town has been rehabilitated and several facilities have been created such as the **Casa de los Volcanes**, the **El Albardinal Botanic Garden** and the Exhibition and Information Hall of the Natural Park.

The entire mining town is presently being restored to form part of the Nature Reserve's infrastructure. Rodalquilar is a peaceful, pleasant spot, in which few people live on a permanent basis. In contrast, its population grows a lot in summer. It is on the way to the interesting watercourse which leads to **El Playazo**, and it is worth stopping to eat some tapas in its bars, with their straightforward, ever-cheerful atmosphere.



Playa del Corralete, at the foot of Cabo de Gata's lighthouse



Church of Las Salinas, in Playa de la Almadraba

PLAYA DE TORRE GARCÍA-LAS AMOLADERAS ¹

In order to reach these beaches, one must cross an area of embryonic dunes covered in plants which are accustomed to the scarcity of water, among them features the jujube. They are comprised of fine sand and gravel. In Torre García we find a chapel of the same name, set very close to the **Roman salting factory** and the watchtower, overlooking the full extent of this extraordinary landscape. A stroll along the **Rambla de las Amoladeras** is well worth it.

PLAYAS DE CABO DE GATA, ² LA ALMADRABA AND PLAYA DE LA FABRIQUILLA

These are the Park's largest beaches. The quality of their coarse, light-coloured sand is excellent, as is the transparency of the water where snorkelling is recommended and enjoying watching the great variety of fish, especially in the rockier areas. Several kilometres of beaches end in La Fabriquilla under the hills **Cerros de la Testa** and **San Miguel**, which shelter them from the easterly winds.

The evenings here are particularly warm. Moments to take some great photos. There are some interesting places to enjoy *tapas* and eat well.

PLAYA DEL CORRALETE ³

Small and cosy, this beach is located below the rocky outcrop upon which stands the **Cabo de Gata lighthouse**. The white sand of the beach here contrasts with the ochre tones of the surrounding rocks. Ideal for diving, since there are large meadows of *posidonia*, very close to the shore and which hosts many species of fish.



Cabo de Gata's lighthouse



To reach the beach of **Mónsul** and the **Calas del Barronal** (as well as **Media Luna** and **Los Genoveses**), in summer it is advisable to take the bus that goes to them and which you can catch in **San José** (see p. 67). There are many visitors and the parking space is limited.

Playa de Mónsul with Punta de la Peineta in the foreground

Calas del Barronal



PLAYA DE MÓNSUL ⁸

This is the most emblematic beach in the Nature Reserve. The sand is extremely fine and the water very shallow. A curious volcanic dike on its left, known as **La Peineta** (an ornamental comb), is caressed by the water. Here the lava outflows, with their pentagonal forms should not be missed. Its great rampant dune, fed by the westerly winds, is also exceptional. To protect it, we recommend you don't walk on it as it is a fragile ecosystem. This beach, like many other locations on the Nature Reserve, has been the scene of many cinema productions. Steven Spielberg shot several films here. It is also the setting of many advertisements, video-clips, etc.

CALAS DEL BARRONAL ⁹

This paradise is comprised of various beaches on which one can enjoy nude bathing. It is located between **Playa de los Genoveses** and **Playa de Mónsul** and access is gained on foot only. There are no established paths, only the tracks left by the visitors.

The beauty of each of these beaches, set between mountains upon which basaltic columns stand out as if they had just been formed, is unique. The dunes, retained by enormous sisal pitas and other bushes, such as the terebinth (*Pistacia terebinthus*), are home to varied animal life.



Playa de Mónsul



Playa del Arco



Playa del Peñón Blanco



This area hosts the **Integral Reserve of Loma Pelada**. On the seabed, where sandy areas alternate with rocky ones with meadows of *Posidonia oceanica*, the variety of fish is spectacular.

CALA HIGUERA ¹⁶

Accessed by track from San José. There is a very small sandy beach with some beautiful little corners and a cave on land called “el Tabaco”, where smugglers are said to have spent nights. A watchtower stands over the beach, which shares its name. There is also a rather unconventional establishment where one can eat and sleep. An ideal place for rest and meditation.

PLAYA DEL ARCO ¹⁷

Situated next to Los Escullos, playa del Arco is a fairly broad gravelly beach. You should bathe with caution. It has some excellent spots for photography lovers, particularly at dawn. The walk along the coast from this beach to **La Isleta del Moro** along a coastal path is very pleasant.

PLAYA DEL PEÑÓN BLANCO ¹⁸

The largest beach on La Isleta, it takes its name from the curious rocky outcrop rising out of it. It has a small car park from where you can easily reach the beach. The fine sand mixes with the gravel. There is a small oasis where you can rest near the beach, with a beautiful series of palm trees, dwarf fan palms and other leafy plants.

CALA DE LOS TOROS ¹⁹

A beautiful small cove with unusually dark, large-grained sand. It has, very close to the beach, an authentic oasis that is always fresh and green, even on the hottest days of the year. It can be accessed on foot after parking in a small car park on the road from La Isleta to Rodalquilar. Bathing is not easy on this beach.



Cala de los Toros



1 PUNTA ENTINAS-SABINAR NATURAL AREA

This area of marshes and scrubland, set between **El Ejido** and **Roquetas de Mar**, is very rich in terms of flora and fauna. Spotted with large pools, it is home to a large community of water birds, such as the flamingos in the picture.



2 ALBUFERA DE ADRA NATURE RESERVE

Located in the municipality of **Adra**, this area abounds with small and large pools. Its interest lies in the abundance and variety of water birds seeking refuge there. Unfortunately, the increasing number of greenhouses has seriously deteriorated the environment.

POPULAR FIESTAS

Huebro

The procession of the *Virgen del Rosario* is celebrated on the first Sunday of October. It is traditional to walk there from Nijar. A lovely, spirited fiesta day.

La Isleta del Moro

From the 14th to the 16th of July the *Virgen del Carmen* is the protagonist. There is a seaside mass and a boat procession. Its festive atmosphere continues into the early hours.

Las Negras

The *Fiesta de San Antón*, held on the 16th of January, with night-time bonfires (also at other points in the area) and the *Asunción de la Virgen*, from the 14th to the 15th of August. Its is very popular, and many young people go there.

Los Albaricoques

Held in honour of the *Virgen del Mar*, its fiestas are celebrated on the 15th of August.

Nijar

The town's most popular fiesta, *Los Chisperos*, is held on the 16th of January. It is nevertheless advisable to watch from a balcony. The fiesta of the patron, *San Sebastián*, is held on the 20th of January. The *Autumn fair* is celebrated from the 20th to the 25th of September, and includes regional dancing and popular folklore.

Pujaire

From the 12th to the 14th of June, the fiestas of *San Antonio de Padua* take place. Other celebrations on the 15th of July.

Rodalquilar

Fiesta del Turista. On the 29th of July a fiesta which was forgotten for a long time, has now been revived.

Ruescas

A fiesta in honour of *San Guillermo*, from the 1st to the 3rd of July.

San Isidro de Nijar

On the 15th of May. Fiesta in honour of *San Isidro*.

San José

The *Fiesta del Turista* is also celebrated here during the first week of August, and is very popular.

Torre García

An important procession, going from Almería to this beach, takes place on the first Sunday of January. According to legend, the patron saint born by this procession, the *Virgen del Mar*, appeared at this spot. A mass is held in the chapel and regional dancing takes place.



Popular Christmas celebration in Pozo de los Frailes

HANDICRAFTS



Jarapas of Nijar

HANDMADE PRODUCTS

The largest handicrafts centre is **Nijar**. Ceramics, *jarapas* and esparto grass products —the latter increasingly rarely— are prepared using techniques very similar to those used by the Arabs.

Nijar pottery is made almost exclusively out of materials from the region itself. The use of potter's wheels is traditional and some ovens of Arab origin are still used. The local pottery is very lively and unmistakable in style. Some craftsmen make items of more modern designs and colours.

Nowadays, the material used — rags— to make harap *jarapas* as on weaving looms are brought in from outside, but are prepared locally. Both traditional and more modern designs are produced.

This activity is handed down from parents to children. Blankets and *jarapa* hanging in the streets of **Nijar** create a very colourful image. What is more, they are very reasonably priced. Handicrafts which make use of esparto are gradually being lost here.

The need for espadrilles, baskets, harnesses for animals, rugs, etc. has dwindled and today such objects are more decorative than functional. Moreover, young people have not been keen to inherit this hard trade and only a few old people can be seen weaving these sun-dried bundles.

ARTS AND CRAFTS OF NIJAR

Alfarería Góngora
Tel. +34 950 36 03 81

Artesanía Atalaya
Tel. +34 950 36 00 59

Artesanía Esther Pérez
Tel. +34 950 36 11 04

Cerámica Alfarería Angel y Lolí
Tel. +34 633 77 81 40

Cerámica Baldo García
Tel. +34 639 21 48 80

Cerámica Carmen Mari
Tel. +34 629 33 23 28

Cerámica Jarapas Esther
Tel. +34 678 33 57 88

Cerámica Góngora Blanes
Tel. +34 950 36 03 48

Cerámica María Francisca
Tel. +34 950 36 00 44

El Oficio de Baldomero
Tel. +34 687 768 634

Entre Barro y Pitás
Tel. +34 606 40 68 94

Jarapas Isabel Montoya
Tel. +34 647 50 07 64

La tienda de los Milagros
Tel. +34 645 50 41 62

NijarArte
Tel. +34 950 36 01 23

MARKETS WEEKLY

Nijar
Wednesdays

Carboneras
Thursdays

Cabo de Gata
Saturdays

San José
Sundays