



## **DISCOVER ALBA DE TORMES** **Following this urban route**

Welcome to Alba de Tormes. We propose that you discover it through a well sign-posted, easy to follow route, which can be started at any point, full of suggestions and little stories that will help you enjoy this attractive tour of its historical heritage.

The best way to carry out this taste of Alba is to let yourself be led by the signs you will find at strategic points, which will show you the main features and monuments, and which have the plaza Mayor square as their central core, a lively place to take a break from the daily chores in town.

Alba de Tormes's character and the relevance of its valuable monumental legacy has been in the making for centuries, clustering around three main aspects: the House of Alba, whose deepest roots are intrinsically linked to those of the town; Saint Teresa of Jesus, who founded one of her convents and also met her death here; and the River Tormes.

To get to know this legacy, the visitor needs to walk around the town, from the river banks to the impressive tower of the ducal castle. And between one and the other, there is an urban area with many convents, churches and hidden corners that deserve a leisurely tour.



## 1a

### THE DUKES OF ALBA AND THEIR COURT The making of a lineage

The history of Alba de Tormes changed forever on the day Juan II of Castile gave the village to Gutierre Álvarez de Toledo Ayala, as a reward for the services rendered to the Crown. Álvarez de Toledo, at the time Bishop of Palencia, was a highly intelligent man with a great capacity for political manoeuvre. It was 1429 and the Álvarez de Toledo family had been meddling with royal affairs for three hundred years, making favours and winning battles for different parties. But in any case, that day the fate of Alba and the Álvarez de Toledo family became so firmly tied together that it became the most important noble lineage in the history of Spain: **the House of Alba.**

Gutierre came to Alba with the purpose of turning the village into the strongest possible centre of power, to counteract that of the kings. And so it was that Alba began **a period of deep renovation**, whose most visible result was the transformation of its castle into an imposing fortress, set at its highest point.

The enormous influence that the House of Alba achieved was to grow even larger with the appointment of his nephew, Fernando Álvarez de Toledo, as first Count of Alba, in 1439 and as compensation for his services to the Crown. But it would be another Fernando Álvarez de Toledo, known as the Great Duke of Alba for the profound impact of his warlike feats and of his actions in favour of the arts, who in the 16<sup>th</sup> century transformed Alba into a key centre for cultural life, which at the time attracted the most relevant thinkers, poets and writers in search of his patronage and protection.



## 1b

### **THE DUKES' CASTLE** **From the clash of arms to** **the splendour of arts**

This unassailable-looking cylindrical tower has been here since Bishop Gutierre Álvarez de Toledo received the village as a reward for the services given by his family. Almost right away he ordered **a powerful fortress** to be built there **that would allow him to rule independently over his new domain**, the most significant remaining part of which is this tower: a true "safe haven", built to last and to endure whatever may come. It is located in the highest part of Alba, and it watches over the Tormes valley. These views are, in fact, one of the main reasons to visit it.

After a few years, the following generations did not miss their chance to enlarge, change or improve the various parts of that castle, which, little by little, became a palace. However, the final touch that turned the old castle into a **true Renaissance palace** was the work of the Third Duke, Fernando Álvarez de Toledo y Pimentel, whose court was deeply involved in the patronage of the arts and the letters. Under his rule the building was embellished with the best marbles, paintings and tapestries, while the leading figures of the Spanish Golden Age visited its halls. An example of these are the **magnificent Renaissance frescoes** that decorate its "Sala de la Armería", one of the few in this style that can be seen in Spain. They are the work of Cristóbal Passin and his brother Juan Bautista, and were carried out between 1567 and 1571.

The palace suffered greatly during the Independence War, when it was blown up to prevent it becoming a refuge for the French troops, and the derelict state it was left in thereafter, of which only the tower has survived.



## 2

### **CHURCH OF SAN PEDRO** **The church that rose from its ashes**

Only the portal of this church, parish temple of Alba de Tormes, survived the **terrible fire that destroyed the rest of the building in 1512**. It would not be rebuilt until 1577, when the Dukes of Alba provided the funds for it, as is commemorated by the two coats of arms that can be seen on the façade. We can be sure of these dates because, on the choir staircase that can be seen when entering the church, there is a grooved column on whose capital a child holds a card that reads "... finished in 1577".

Inside, the building is a hall church with three aisles and a rectangular presbytery; its most remarkable architectural elements are the staircase going up to the choir and the Gothic ribbed vaults under it. In the presbytery there is **an altarpiece that came from the Santiago church**. The altarpiece shows Saint Peter in the centre, Saint Andrew on his right and Saint Sebastian on his left, and Saint James on top. There are also remarkable carved images: the Cristo de la Salud, San Jerónimo and the Virgen de Derrengada.

Due to the semi derelict state of the former **bell tower**, it had to be rebuilt in 1899. Its construction was surrounded by a heated polemic regarding the ownership of the building plans, between Enrique Repullés, architect of the local Basilica who claimed they were his work and Anastasio Corchón, who had directed the works. Nowadays the tendency is to consider that they both had something to do with the tower's plans and therefore it is their joint work. The bell tower is 34.6 m high and it is divided in to three volumes.



3a

## ANUNCIACIÓN CONVENT

### An enthusiastic patronage encourages the eighth founding

Saint Teresa of Jesus arrived in Alba de Tormes with Saint John of the Cross to carry out, in 1571, her eighth founding. This was made possible by the protection of the House of Alba. Francisco Velázquez and his wife, Teresa de Laiz, accountants of the Duke, undertook the project with such devotion that they even donated the land on which their own house was built. The convent's location is **also related to the views over the River Tormes of this place**, which the Saint used to like so much.

The death of Saint Teresa, in October of 1582 in this convent, and the fact that her remains were kept in its church, turned it into a place of pilgrimage, especially after her beatification and canonisation. After many ups and downs and other locations, the **saint's uncorrupted body** is now kept in an 18<sup>th</sup> century casket, made under royal patronage and located in the centre of the main altar, while beside it there are further urns with her heart and her left arm. The relics and the niches behind the altar can be accessed via the Carmelite Museum.



## 3b

### **SAINT TERESA AND THE HOUSE OF ALBA** **An everlasting friendship**

All throughout her lifetime, Saint Teresa maintained a close relationship with the House of Alba. In particular, with Duchess María Enríquez de Toledo, wife of the Great Duke of Alba, Don Fernando. This relationship was key to the fact that Teresa died in Alba de Tormes. This happened because Teresa, who felt that her death was close and was on her way to Ávila, her hometown, did not hesitate to turn back when the Duchess called her to witness the birth of one of her grandchildren. Her health then worsened and she spent her last days in bed, finally died at 9.00 pm on the 4<sup>th</sup> of October, 1582, in a cell of the Carmelite Monastery.

It may seem strange that a saint who made austerity and simplicity the laws of her life, kept such a long, **close friendship with one of the most powerful - and rich - noble dynasties of her time**. But so it was. This tie was very important in the foundational work carried out by Saint Teresa.



## 4

### **THE CARMELITE FATHERS' MONASTERY** **Sober, luminous architecture**

The influence of Saint Teresa of Jesus turned Alba de Tormes in a **centre for spirituality and pilgrimage** in which other religious orders also wanted to be present, among them the Discalced Carmelite friars, the male branch of the order born after the reformation that the Saint carried out. The temple belonging to this order's monastery was built between 1691 and 1695, and it embodies the sober style and the building rules applied to the order's buildings: austere lines, luminosity, whitewashed walls... This was the first-ever church devoted to Saint John of the Cross, friend and companion of Saint Teresa in her reforming work.

The decoration on the façade takes the shape of a cross, with the Carmel Order's coat of arms on top; on the sides, two House of Alba coats of arms and at the bottom, the statue of Saint John of the Cross. Inside, the most remarkable features are the frescoes on the pendentives under the dome, and the Saint's casket.

In a wing beside the monastery is the **museum devoted to Saint Teresa and Saint John of the Cross** (Museo Teresiano y de San Juan de la Cruz).



## 5a

### **SANTA TERESA BASILICA** **A great space for pilgrimages**

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was clear that Alba de Tormes needed a larger church to receive an ever growing number of pilgrims, who came to visit the place where Saint Teresa lived and died. This was the reason that led Father Cámara, at the time Bishop of Salamanca, **to move forward a project for an enormous temple** which, for various reasons, remains unfinished to this day. The project was commissioned to Architect Enrique María Repullés y Vargas, and its first stone was laid in the afternoon of the 1<sup>st</sup> of May of the same year.

The works were carried out with an uneven rhythm until 1933, when they were interrupted at the base of the domes, due to the troubles suffered by the Spanish Second Republic. Most of what can be seen nowadays was built during that first building stage.

The interruption lasted for decades, until the visit of Pope John Paul II, in 1982, reawakened the idea that Alba de Tormes had to have a **large church to receive the pilgrims**. With this spirit, new projects were studied towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>. From the start, it became obvious that, over a hundred years after the initial works, it was impossible to resume the original project as it was. Whatever would be done, would have to take into account the current social and economic circumstances. And precisely these circumstances were what recently led them to make a renewed effort to improve what was already made by providing coverage for the structure so at least part of the space built so far could be used.





## 5b

### **THE BASILICA'S SIDE DOOR** **An unforgettable visit**

Few things are so fondly remembered in Alba de Tormes' recent history as the visit of the Pope John Paul II on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November, 1982. John Paul II knew the stories of Saint Teresa and Saint John of the Cross very well, due both to his close relationship with the Carmelite Order and to the fact that he made Saint John the subject of his doctoral thesis. Also, as it happened, his election as Pope took place on the day after that of Saint Teresa's. In any case, he is the Pope that referred to Saint Teresa the most.

Another circumstantial fact was that he had to delay his trip to Spain due to the attack he suffered in Saint Peter's square on the 3rd of June, 1981. The trip would finally take place by the end of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Saint Teresa, devoting a whole day to the Saint, when he visited, in the same journey, the towns of Ávila and Alba de Tormes. It was the first time that a ruling Pope (John XXIII and Benedict XV did the same before being elected popes) visited Alba de Tormes, with two solemn moments attended by a large number of pilgrims from Spain and Portugal.

The first of the events took place on an esplanade beside the San Leonardo convent. Then, he went to the Anunciación church, where he visited the Saint's relics and the convent building. It was then that something happened, which would become a popular story about this visit: the Pope was momentarily lost in the convent, although what he really did was lose his retinue to have a moment to pray on his own in the cell where the Saint had died.



## 6

### **CARMUS, CARMELITE MUSEUM** **Traces of saintliness**

This is one of the places where the traces of Saint Teresa can be most vividly sensed. And it is not surprising: the museum is set in part of one of her most cherished foundations and the place where she died: the Anunciación convent.

An extremely interesting tour is organised around the *camarines*, niches or spaces specifically designed to shelter the Saint's remains. The tour finishes where her tomb and her relics are, a place that attracts thousands of pilgrims every year.

But the convent's museum is much more than that: it also houses an interesting, valuable, religious art collection, which has been gathered since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, mostly thanks to the donations of the Carmelite nuns protectors and Saint Teresa's faithful devotees. The collection includes Renaissance and Baroque works: sculptures, carved images, worked gold, reliquaries and ivory pieces, as well as paintings. It is remarkable, not just for the number of pieces exhibited, but also for their quality: an experience that can attract the Baroque and Renaissance art lovers as much as religious visitors.

This is certainly an exceptional museum, with highlights such as the Dolorosa, a carving by Pedro de Mencia from around 1675, or collections such as statues of the Infant Jesus with various garments, dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the rich collection of paintings on copper or on semi-precious stones.



## 7

### SAN JUAN CHURCH

#### The best of Romanesque before our eyes

The passing centuries have not managed to hide the Romanesque-Mudejar jewels that, with Alba at the forefront, are scattered around the villages of this land. Their quality places them at the **centre of one of the most important areas in terms of Spanish Mudejar architecture**, along with Toro, Cuéllar and La Moraña. Alba shares with them the fact that it was one of the first places where this particular synthesis of Romanesque shapes with Mudejar techniques took place. In addition to this, San Juan was the inspiration for the other five Romanesque-Mudejar parishes in Alba.

This temple was an ambitious project, with three naves and a triple apse, nowadays partly hidden. From the outside we can only see the central nave, possibly rebuilt, and the southern, entirely original nave. On the latter we can see a beautiful array of blind, semi-circular arches, embellished with brick columns, whose Romanesque bases and capitals are carved in sandstone. Two similar capitals were reused for the atrium, probably taken from one of the (now disappeared) Romanesque doorways.

The main jewel of this church probably belonged to one of those doorways: the **Apostolado**. This is a group of polychrome stone sculptures representing Christ and the Apostles, which now can be found in the main chapel. Their beauty and state of conservation are impressive; their position, at the height of our eyes, makes it impossible to overlook them.

The rest of the church tells us a story of the different works that were carried out along the centuries, like the remains of a Mudejar coffered ceiling from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the dome, or the bell tower. The graves at the entrance remind us that the old medieval churches were also burial places.



8

## **PLAZA MAYOR SQUARE** **A cosmopolitan environment** **to encourage meetings**

The plaza Mayor square in Alba de Tormes is the hub around which local life revolves. It is surrounded by **buildings from various different centuries**, from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup>, from the Romanesque San Juan church to the modernist buildings around the fountain, with the late Gothic style of the Town Hall as one of its highlights.

Three of its sides are porticoed, and under the arcades there are shops, bars, cafés, and there are improvised meetings and promenades taking advantage of the shelter they provide, the excuse for socialising that the Castilian streets and squares have always been. Its Modernist air, with a profusion of iron features and viewpoints, is consequence of the renovation it went through in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the bourgeoisie imposed the materials that were the new trend, like metal and glass. This gave it a cosmopolitan look that still lives on, sustained by the exotic palm trees brought from Elda (Alicante) in 1927.

The square is, undoubtedly, a good reference point for the visitor when exploring the town.



## 9

### **THE TOWN HALL A sheltered place for the council**

Throughout the Middle Ages, the council meetings took place in various places around Alba, at first in the “council houses”, which were by the Santiago church, or in its atrium, later in the arcades of the San Juan church and in the so-called “Court house”, in the plaza Mayor. After that, it was necessary to erect a building that would permanently house the council meetings and could preside over any relevant events taking place in the plaza Mayor square. The resulting building is an interesting Renaissance style work, constructed mostly between 1556 and 1558, which underwent significant renovation in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Among them was the installation of the clock, essential for marking the passing of time in the town’s daily life, but which was located in the tower of the Santiago church, away from the heart of town. A new one was then ordered, made by a local watchmaker, and installed in the Town Hall on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April, 1893. Another relevant feature in the building is the corner balcony, unique in Alba de Tormes.



10a

## PARQUE DEL ESPOLÓN PARK From warlike fort to playground

This park, a popular place for many Alba people, who usually choose it for quiet walks and for their kids to play, offers **splendid views over the town and the Tormes valley**. It is located, more or less, in the place where the *alcázar* or military fort stood in the Middle Ages, which was in charge of defending the town from any of the attacks that, for various reasons, were suffered over the centuries. Among them, those carried out by Almanzor during his conquering or the border wars between the kingdoms of Leon and Castile. It is believed that the defensive walls that surrounded Alba de Tormes began in that fortified *alcázar*; a city wall which, according to ancient testimonies, had five doors into the town.

When the Álvarez de Toledo family arrived in Alba, they built a new castle in the highest part of the town. The wall that surrounds the park is practically the only part of the ancient wall that still remains.



## 10b

### **LOOKING TOWARDS THE NORTHERN LANDS** **Discovering the traces of History**

In the panoramic views enjoyed from this point, the main thing one can see, from left to right, are the ruins of the Carpio Bernardo castle. Its history, where historical fact and legend become mingled, is that of the medieval knight Bernardo del Carpio. That fortress played a significant role in the border wars between Leon and Castile.

On its left is the plateau known as Mesa del Carpio, an archaeological site where have been found traces of human settlements between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.

Beside the San Esteban square is the snow pit, an 18<sup>th</sup> century construction where snow was stored during the winter and then given many uses during the summertime, such as preserving food, making medicines and even ice cream.

On the right bank, not far from the town, is the **monastery of San Leonardo**, founded by Alfonso VII in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, currently in use by the Priests of the Sacred Heart (Dehonian Fathers), houses the "Padre Belda" archaeological museum.



10c

## THE TORMES EMBRACE A tenacious river that accompanies and defends

The history of Alba cannot be understood without the River Tormes. And this is a good place to see how Alba, from its origin, had in the river **a defensive barrier against the attacks** that could come from the other bank.

Over the centuries, several industries have been set on its right bank, which **used the force of water to move elements**. Among them, there were several water mills for making flour. Other industries that needed the River Tormes's waters to function were tanneries and electricity generators. While the right bank was always more densely populated, the left one was devoted mostly to orchards; and joining the two, the beautiful medieval bridge.

The width of the River Tormes at this point is related with the Azul de Villagonzalo reservoir downstream from Alba, which is used for irrigation, for producing electricity and to provide water for Salamanca city and other localities.

An interesting route called "**Ruta de las aceñas**" ("Water mills route"), starting beside the bridge, allows the visitor to walk along the banks, among the riverside vegetation, to discover some of those old factories.





11

## SANTIAGO CHURCH

### Working, praying and giving the time of day

In 1140, Alfonso VII King of Leon granted **Alba de Tormes its charter** and in it, even then, the Santiago church was mentioned. The same document also mentions "Jews" and "Moors" as part of the population in Alba and its surrounding villages. One of them could have been the master that built this temple.

This builder was commissioned to build a Romanesque, single nave church, very narrow and high, with a semicircular apse. He carried out a simple decoration with a series of blind arches, although the top part includes a **tri-lobe arch design**, which can be seen on the north part, and which brings to mind some Cordovan models.

This master builder very obviously did not work on his own and there was a sculptor in charge of decorating the **Romanesque capitals** with animal and fantastic figures. The latter could have been Christian, or maybe he was also Muslim, since the Mudejars also knew how to work with stone.

Towards the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, other masters were involved in the construction, especially in the nave, which was covered with a simple Mudejar wooden structure. They also worked on the southern access, building an atrium and decorating the doorway with a **ball pattern**, typical of the Catholic Monarchs' age, who were cousins of the first Dukes of Alba.

However, the Medieval bell tower was kept and reinforced. Since then it was known as the "clock tower", which became an important feature in the social life of the inhabitants of Alba. For centuries, the parish managed a hospital next to it, under the protection of Sts. Santiago and Marcos.

The church was also a burial place of noteworthy persons, such as Don Gutierre, first lord of the village; the knight Antón de Ledesma and his wife; or the wife and one of the daughters of poet Lope de Vega.



12

## **LAS DUEÑAS CONVENT** **The “out of walls” community**

The convent of Nuestra Señora de las Dueñas was located out of the city walls until it was moved here in 1769. It was, in fact, known until then as “the convent out of walls”. The church portal comes from that previous convent. It is not known exactly when it was founded, but the oldest reference in documents is a Papal bull from Innocent IV and a letter from Prince Sancho, both from the 13<sup>th</sup> century. We also know that, from the beginning, it was in the **favour of noblemen and kings**, such as Fernando IV, Alfonso XI, Enrique II or Juan I.

The convent had moments of great splendour between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, when it accumulated many possessions. Some relevant ladies became nuns in this convent, like Doña Mayor and Doña María Ovalle, sisters of Saint Teresa’s brother in law, or her niece, Beatriz de Ovalle y Ahumada, who was schooled here. The events that took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century - the Independence War, the act on the sale of Church property - very nearly wiped away the convent community. Nowadays, the nuns make many things, notably their baked goods and sweets. And above all, the caramel-coated almonds.



13

## SANTA ISABEL CONVENT

### What a distinguished, pious lady founded when she widowed

This convent was founded in 1481 by Aldonza Ruiz de Barrientos, widow of the II Duke of Alba's treasurer and, at the time, one of the most distinguished ladies in town. For many centuries, it was usual for noble or rich women **to found their own convent when they were widowed and to become nuns**, often becoming its abbess as well. Aldonza, who was piously devoted to Saint Francis, ascribed her convent to the Tertiary Franciscan order and dedicated it to Saint Isabel, although during the 16<sup>th</sup> century it was known as Our Lady's or Mother of God's convent. It was built where her own house had been, and she reserved for herself the privilege of being buried in the convent's church. Only the church's portal and the convent's portal remain of the original building. Above the latter we can see the House of Alba coat of arms held by two savages.

The temple has a simple structure, typical of the mendicant orders, with a single nave and three areas: the choir, the main nave and the presbytery. This particular church also has a **beautiful Renaissance funeral chapel**, founded by Don Juan Gaytán. Other remarkable features are a 13<sup>th</sup> century Crucifixion, the stellar vault in the main chapel and the coffered, trussed rafter ceilings on the nave and the choir. There is also a magnificent 16<sup>th</sup> century cloister, boasting its share of House of Alba coats of arms, due to the House's protection given to this and other Alba convents.



14

## THE BRIDGE

### Arches that will take you to the other side

The River Tormes has always been an agent of change, a decisive element in the location of the oldest Salamanca villages, which are on its banks. Such was the case with Alba de Tormes. The first time its bridge is mentioned was in the village's founding charter, in 1140, a key moment in which the repopulation south of the River Duero was being encouraged.

The uneven look of its 23 arches is the consequence of the countless rebuilding it has suffered over the centuries, many of which were due to the warlike events that took place on it during the Independence War, when the **town changed hands about ten times** in the six years that this war lasted.

But not only the battles have affected its aspect. The many floods that took place throughout its history have also had a crucial effect on it. Thankfully, this stopped once the Santa Teresa reservoir was built in 1963 and regulated its flow.

Not far from the bridge there is a **watchtower** known as "El torreón" or "turrión". This, along with the walls kept around the Parque del Espolón, is one of the few remains of the old city walls in Alba.