

religious tourism in Salamanca



salamanca
emocion.es



*Come and
take a look!*

In many cases religion is connected with tradition and the customs of the people. It follows therefore that a large number of the monuments, festivals, and other deeply rooted legacies in Salamanca are linked with religious beliefs.

The cultural, historical, artistic, monumental, and documentary heritage of the Catholic Church constitutes an essential part of the Spanish cultural heritage owing to its importance, magnitude, and diversity. This is also the case in Salamanca.

The towns and villages of the province conceal a unique heritage in the form of their churches, cathedrals, monasteries, and convents, and also naturally in its festivals and traditions.

We invite you to explore Salamanca from a different perspective. You can get to know the towns and villages of the province and be dazzled with the magnitude of the buildings created in former times. You will enter into the spirit of the local people by taking part in their festivals and traditions. Let us embrace the silence of the ways that make their mark...

Come and take a look!

The background image shows the interior of a church, likely a choir or altar area. It features highly ornate wooden carvings, Gothic arches, and a prominent red curtain in the center. The lighting is warm, highlighting the intricate details of the woodwork.

Religious architecture

The province of Salamanca conceals within its territory a varied religious heritage which constitutes an added attraction to its tourist routes and walks. In addition to the cathedrals, the churches, and the monasteries and convents of the capital city of Salamanca, the province contains monuments that are well worth a visit, such as the Cathedral of Ciudad Rodrigo which is on a par with those of the rest of the country.

Ancient monasteries still survive today in the province and these contain an artistic richness inherited over centuries. In the fields and the hamlets simple chapels and shrines reflect the deep religiousness of the people.

In the lands of Alba, Peñaranda and La Armuña a rosary of churches preserve magnificent coffered ceilings and altarpieces, while brickwork gives rise to art in the simple Mudéjar churches of the east of the province.



The Cathedral of Ciudad Rodrigo

There is no doubt that this is the most relevant monument of Ciudad Rodrigo, a town in the west of the province that has been declared a Historical Site.

King Ferdinand II of León promoted the construction of the cathedral in the late 12th century, although the work continued for six hundred years to give rise to numerous modifications and influences.

Of the three existing doorways, the 13th-century Pórtico del Perdón is the most important and one of the most spectacular in Spain. This portico is known for its twin arches and mullion and for its iconography with representations of Jesús, the apostles, and the Virgin. The Puerta de las Cadenas, with its Romanesque images, and the Puerta del Enlosado and the Puerta de Amayuelas are the other doorways.

The interior consists of three naves and a transept and is completed by a large apse. The choir is one of its finest works; it is of Hispano-Flemish style and consists of two rows of magnificently carved stalls by Rodrigo Alemán.

Within the architectural complex there is a cloister with fine Romanesque reliefs on the capitals and a rich and varied iconography.

The façade facing the city walls exhibits the marks of the bombs of the Peninsular War that were on the point of destroying this magnificent building.

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📍 1. Puerta de las Cadenas, Ciudad Rodrigo cathedral

📍 2. Choir, Ciudad Rodrigo cathedral



The Cathedrals of La Armuña

The area to the north and east of the city of Salamanca, which is covered with cereal crops, is known as La Armuña. One can see as far as the horizon which is only interrupted by the outlines of its churches. These include in particular three known as the Cathedrals of La Armuña for their magnificence and their artistic treasures.

The first of these is very close to the city of Salamanca in **Villares de la Reina**. It has a magnificent doorway and an interior in the shape of a Latin cross. Masters such as Juan Hernández and Fernando Gallego executed valuable altarpieces, which cover the high altar, the arms of the transept, and the walls of the central nave. The fresco on the vault known as “La Gloria” stands out.

The single-nave 16th-century church in **Villaverde de Guareña** has a superb doorway and is decorated with a magnificent altarpiece organised in six divisions.

Palencia de Negrilla conceals the last of the three cathedrals in the Church of La Santa Cruz. It has a Mudéjar roof and other Romanesque elements and attained its greatest splendour in the 16th century. The spectacular altarpiece dedicated to the Exaltation of the Cross dates from this period. Paintings on panels and sculptures form a harmonious combination in one of the most beautiful examples of the province of Salamanca.



1. Church of Palencia de Negrilla

3. Altarpiece, church of Villares de la Reina

2. Church of Aldearrubia



Romanesque by the Tormes

After abandoning the city of Salamanca the water of the River Tormes bathes a series of towns which contain Romanesque churches of great beauty.

The humble 12th-century church of **Almenara del Tormes** is a Romanesque treasure. It is dedicated to Santa María and consists of a single nave with an apse and contains friezes decorated with animal and plant motifs. The north and south doorways show the virtuosity of its architects. The doorway of the church of **Torresmenudas** is also worth a visit.

If we continue along the river we come to **Ledesma**, a town with a considerable religious heritage that has been declared a Historical Site. Outside the historical complex stands the Church of Santa Elena, a Romanesque treasure. It has a single nave with a semicircular apse and magnificent stone masonry. The small dogs with detailed human faces that decorate its cornice and the north doorway with archivolts are noteworthy.

Near the capital in the small village of **Santibáñez del Río** the walls of another church with interesting ornamental details have been preserved. On the doorway a round arch and a relief of two beautiful herons drinking from the same glass stand out.



1. Church of Santa Elena, Ledesma

3. Apse, church of Almenara de Tormes

2. Ornamentation, Santibáñez del Río



The Mudejar route

On travelling through the districts of **Alba** and **Peñaranda** the visitor can discover fine Mudejar churches. These art forms were developed here in the 12th and 13th centuries as Mudejar techniques were adapted to Romanesque ones and to brickwork as an identifying element. Subsequently in the 16th century it had a second period of splendour with incredible works of carpentry

This Route includes 16 churches representing the fusion of Christian art and Muslim aesthetics. The town of **Alba de Tormes**, which has been declared a Historical Site, retains those of San Juan and Santiago. The former is known for its triple apse and its magnificent Apostolate. These churches and others that no longer exist served as an inspiration for the Romanesque-Mudejar approach of the district, which is one of the most important in Spain.

Other churches that maintain the expressive force of brickwork are those of **Coca**, **Galleguillos**, **Peñarandilla**, and **Turra**. The Route is completed with a visit to the Romanesque-Mudejar apses of **Aldeaseca de la Frontera**, **Gajates**, **Nava de Sotrobal**, **Paradinas de San Juan**, **Rágama**, and **Villar de Gallimazo**.

Hidden treasures of this proposal include the splendid coffered ceilings that we can enjoy in villages such as **Macotera**, **Cantaracillo**, **Rágama**, and **Villoria**, which are true “Mudejar skies”.



1. Church of Peñarandilla

3. Chuch of Aldeaseca de la Frontera

2. Apostle sculptures, S. Juan church, Alba de Tormes



Coffered ceilings and altarpieces

In many towns and villages of the province of Salamanca the parish churches, chapels, and monasteries conceal genuine artistic treasures. Simple and austere without, within them two elements shine forth: the ceilings and the altarpieces.

With the aim of reducing weight, the roofs of Gothic cross ribs give way to others of wood, predominantly Mudejar ones. The so-called “coffered ceilings” are actually complex wooden frameworks in the form of an inverted trough. They were adapted to the naves or vaults with the use of various geometrical shapes.

One of the most beautiful examples can be found in the parish church of **Macotera**, and those of **Cantaracillo**, **Cantalpino**, **Villoria**, **Rágama**, **Zorita de la Frontera**, **Tordillos**, and **Alba de Tormes** should not be forgotten.

As for the altarpieces that crown the transepts and the chapels, we can mention for their spectacular nature those of **Santiago de la Puebla** (by Diego de Siloé) and **Fuenteguinaldo** (by Lucas Mitata). Those of the “cathedrals” of **La Armuña**: **Palencia de Negrilla**, **Villares de la Reina** and **Villaverde de Guareña**, are also impressive.



1. Coffered ceiling, church of Macotera

3. Coffered ceiling, church of Cantaracillo

2. Altarpiece, church of Palencia de Negrilla



Monasteries and convents

The landscape of Salamanca includes places of secret beauty that are ideal locations for convents and monasteries. It is even possible to stay in some of them in search of lost tranquillity.

On occasions they achieve seclusion in isolated spots as is the case with the Carmelite monastery of San José in the valley of **Las Batuecas**, which is within the nature reserve of Las Batuecas-Sierra de Francia that has been declared a Biosphere Reserve.

On others they find refuge on high as is the case of the sanctuary of the **Peña de Francia** (also in the Sierra de Francia) or among evergreen oak groves like the Monastery of Porta Coeli of **El Zarzoso**.

Many others no longer exist and their remains recall an existence of work and contemplation. We are surprised by the magnitude of the so-called Casa Baja in **El Maíllo**, the winter accommodation of the aforementioned Peña de Francia; the remains of the monastery of Nuestra Señora de Gracia near the town of **San Martín del Castañar**, which has been declared a Historical Site; and the former monastery of Basilio del Santo Niño de Belén in **Herguijuela de la Sierra**.

This route is completed by others that were of courtly importance that can be found in three of the sixteen towns that have been declared historical sites in Salamanca: La Caridad in **Ciudad Rodrigo**, San Leonardo in **Alba de Tormes**, and that of San Francisco in **Béjar**.

Living passions

Easter in the province

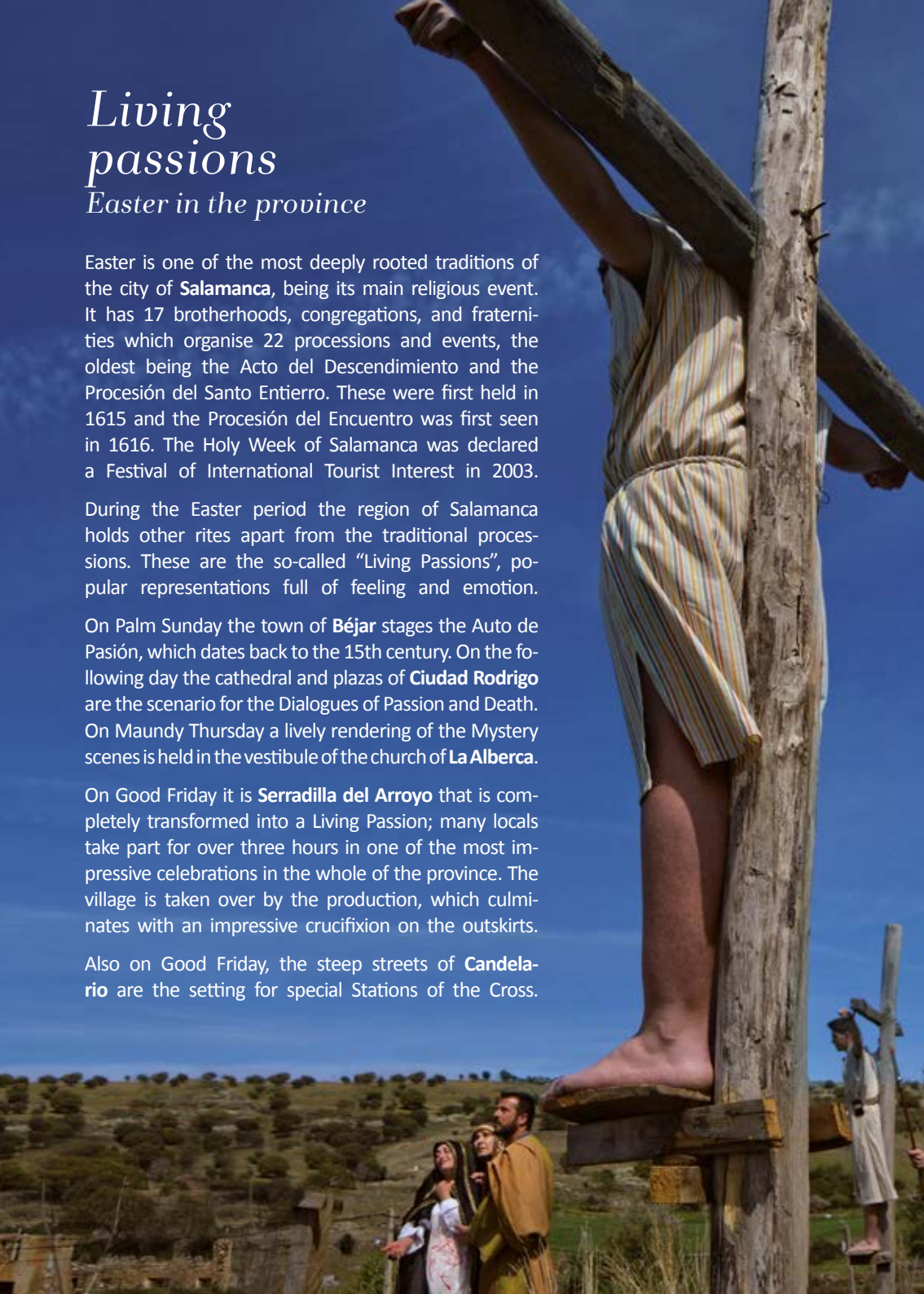
Easter is one of the most deeply rooted traditions of the city of **Salamanca**, being its main religious event. It has 17 brotherhoods, congregations, and fraternities which organise 22 processions and events, the oldest being the Acto del Descendimiento and the Procesión del Santo Entierro. These were first held in 1615 and the Procesi3n del Encuentro was first seen in 1616. The Holy Week of Salamanca was declared a Festival of International Tourist Interest in 2003.

During the Easter period the region of Salamanca holds other rites apart from the traditional processions. These are the so-called "Living Passions", popular representations full of feeling and emotion.

On Palm Sunday the town of **B3jar** stages the Auto de Pasión, which dates back to the 15th century. On the following day the cathedral and plazas of **Ciudad Rodrigo** are the scenario for the Dialogues of Passion and Death. On Maundy Thursday a lively rendering of the Mystery scenes is held in the vestibule of the church of **La Alberca**.

On Good Friday it is **Serradilla del Arroyo** that is completely transformed into a Living Passion; many locals take part for over three hours in one of the most impressive celebrations in the whole of the province. The village is taken over by the production, which culminates with an impressive crucifixion on the outskirts.

Also on Good Friday, the steep streets of **Candelario** are the setting for special Stations of the Cross.



Offertories and pilgrimages

In the wide range of traditional festivals of Salamanca the offertories and pilgrimages stand out, they are a unique occasion for getting to know and sharing the religious feeling of a people. The former abound in the mountain villages in summer when the narrow streets are adorned with embroidery.



Mountain costume and bullfights characterise the offertory of **Mogarraz** and that of **San Martín del Castañar**. At **La Alberca**, Nuestra Señora de la Asunción is the patron of the main festival; for over five centuries the Diagosto has been celebrated on 15th August in honour of her. In the fine Plaza Mayor stewards and locals make offerings and dance before the image of the Virgin, wearing their most precious outfits and jewels.

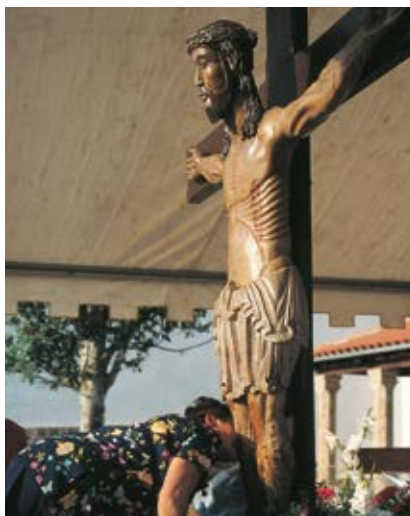


The following day La Loa is held next to the vestibule of the church. This is a mystery play of medieval origin in which the inhabitants of the town take part in the performance. Angels and devils share the stage in a fight in which good triumphs over evil.



Many other offertories are also held in **Cepeda**, **Sotoserrano**, **Casas del Conde**, and **El Cabaco**.

If however you prefer a more austere event, the pilgrimages that are held on the Salamanca fields and pasturelands incarnate the purity of what is genuine, of profound feeling.



With the arrival of spring the village of **Horcajo Medianero** stages the pilgrimage of Nuestra Señora de Valdejimena. The major festival of the land and the people of fighting bulls at the chapel of Nuestra Señora del Cueto, in **Matilla de los Caños**, takes place on the same day.

A few days later on 18th June, the **Christ of Cabrera** attracts many people to the pilgrimage of Las Veguillas from all over the province.

1. Virgin festivities, La Alberca

3. Cabrera Christ pilgrimage, Las Veguillas

2. Cueto pilgrimage, Matilla de los Caños

Pilgrim routes



In the footsteps of Santiago the Apostle, St Teresa of Jesus, St Francis of Assisi, or the Black Virgin... several pilgrim routes explore the geography of Salamanca on inland roads, roads that make a mark.



The Teresa Route:

*from Avila to Alba de Tormes
with Teresa of Jesus*

The route “From the cradle to the grave” joins the two Teresa towns par excellence, Avila and Alba de Tormes, and offers the pilgrim a historical and spiritual route in the footsteps of the Traveller Saint.

On reaching the province of Salamanca at Mancera de Abajo the pilgrim has two options, the North Road or the South Road, both of which are duly signposted. The former runs through Mancera de Abajo, Bóveda del Río Almar, Peñaranda de Bracamonte, Nava de Sotrobal, Coca de Alba, Peñarandilla, Garcihernández, and Alba de Tormes, a total of approximately 40 kilometres.

The South Road passes through Mancera de Abajo, Macotera (with its splendid coffered ceiling known as the “Sky of Macotera”), Tordillos, La Lurda, Garcihernández, and Alba de Tormes, which amounts to some 30 kilometres.

Finally the pilgrim is rewarded by Alba de Tormes, the origin of the Casa de Alba and the historical site where the Doctor of the Church died on 4th October 1582. Her tomb is kept in the Convento de la Anunciación together with the relics of her heart and her left arm.



1. Panoramic view, Alba de Tormes

3. Sculpture of Santa Teresa de Jesús, Alba de Tormes

2. Sepulchre of Santa Teresa de Jesús, Alba de Tormes



The Vía de la Plata:

the Southern Way of St James

For centuries the Vía de la Plata, from Seville to Astorga, facilitated the movement of people, merchandise, and ideas. After the discovery of the tomb of Santiago the Apostle, the so-called Southern Way of St James became a pilgrim itinerary. Parallel to it runs the Ruta de la Plata, which is larger and more tourist-orientated.

Over a hundred kilometres of the pilgrims' route run through the province of Salamanca. From the snowy peaks of the Sierra de Béjar and Candelario (which together with the Sierra de Francia has been declared a Biosphere Reserve by the UNESCO) towards the south, the Vía crosses chestnut and oak woodland, pastureland, and stock farms to reach the cereal plains of the north.

The pilgrim will also be fascinated by the valuable historical heritage encountered: the Roman roadway itself with its milestones, the Bridge of La Malena, the fort of La Calzada de Béjar, and the Roman bridge of Salamanca, a city which is a World Heritage Site.

Proper signposting and a series of hostels along the way make the Salamanca stages an unforgettable interior journey.



1. La Malena bridge, Puerto de Béjar

3. Roman bridge, Salamanca

2. Roman milestone, Chinatos yard, Puerto de Béjar



The Way of St Francis of Assisi:

the Vía Dalmacia

The Way of St Francisco de Asís recalls the journey made by the saint according to tradition from Santiago de Compostela to Lisbon. The Salamanca section includes 131 marked kilometres that show the pilgrim the essence of the countryside of the Campo Charro.

It enters the province by the medieval Puente Mocho near the town of **Ledesma** and takes a south-westerly direction among evergreen oaks and fighting bulls to **Ciudad Rodrigo**. The Way constitutes the union of several historical roads that link two historical sites and between them the Roman Vía Dalmacia route.

The route is studded with treasures such as the small palace of Aldeávila de Revilla, the large churches of Santa María de Sando, Gallegos de Argañán, and La Fuente de San Esteban together with other smaller ones such as those of Encina de San Silvestre, Sando, Martín de Yeltes, and Garcirrey.

The Saint lived in Ciudad Rodrigo in about 1214 at the chapel of San Gil, where the Monastery of San Francisco would subsequently be built. The cathedral of this Historical Site contains the only portrait of the saint allegedly painted from life.

The Fort of La Concepción, which is one of the best examples of military architecture, bids farewell to the pilgrim in the vicinity of Aldea del Obispo and nearby Portugal.



Route of the Peña de Francia:

From the Vía de la Plata to the sanctuary of the Black Virgin

Attracted by their devotion and the miracles of the Virgin of the Peña de Francia, some pilgrims would abandon the busy Vía de la Plata to make for the monastery of the Black Virgin at the Peña de Francia.

Now recovered and duly signposted, the route begins in the town of **Puerto de Béjar**, on the border with Extremadura, and after 72 kilometres reaches the magic mountain. The landscape takes on great importance with its chestnut woods, oak groves, vines, and cherry trees of the Sierra de Béjar and Sierra de Francia, which have been declared a Biosphere Reserve by the UNESCO.

The historical heritage also enhances the walk, with the romantic garden of El Coto de Nuestra Señora del Carmen in **Peñacaballera** and the Historical Sites of **Montemayor del Río**, with its Castillo de San Vicente, and **La Alberca**, a haven for popular architecture and traditions.

All this is without forgetting mountain villages such as **Lagunilla**, **Valdelageve**, **Sotoserrano**, **Cepeda**, **Madroñal**, and **Monforte**.



1. Panoramic view, Peña de Francia

3. Montemayor del Río castle

2. Sanctuary, Peña de Francia

Religious museums

"CARMUS" TERESA OF JESUS CARMELO MUSEUM (ALBA DE TORMES)

The convent founded by Teresa of Jesus now includes a museum with 900 square metres of exhibits and includes some of the original rooms of the convent that have today been restored.

The collection is based on the chapel rooms designed to house the Saint's relics and ends with a visit to her tomb.

The various rooms hold important Renaissance and baroque religious works of art.

ALBA DE TORMES

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Plaza de Santa Teresa. Access from C/ Sor Mariana de S. José, 3. 37800 Alba de Tormes (Salamanca)

TERESA AND SAN JUAN DE LA CRUZ CENTRE (ALBA DE TORMES)

This small but interesting museum holds a large number of baroque religious works of art related to St Teresa of Jesus. Reliquaries, gold articles, carvings of saints, and facsimiles of the works of the Saint transport the visitor to a time of passion and spirituality.

ALBA DE TORMES

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CATHEDRAL AND DIOCESAN MUSEUM (CIUDAD RODRIGO)

The richest and most complete museum of Ciudad Rodrigo is located in a setting of exceptional beauty: the cathedral. This museum houses an important archaeological collection, some vestiges of a Roman past, and architectural remains of the various building stages of the Cathedral. Other rooms are devoted to liturgy and other exhibits of religious art.

CIUDAD RODRIGO

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MUSEUM OF THE CONVENT OF THE DISCALCED CARMELITES (PEÑARANDA)

This 17th-century convent, which thrived under the protection of the Casa Condal de Peñaranda, holds a magnificent collection of religious art. Paintings of the Italian school by names as important as those of Lucas Jordán, Andrea Vaccaro, and Guido Reni stand out.

PEÑARANDA DE BRACAMONTE

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