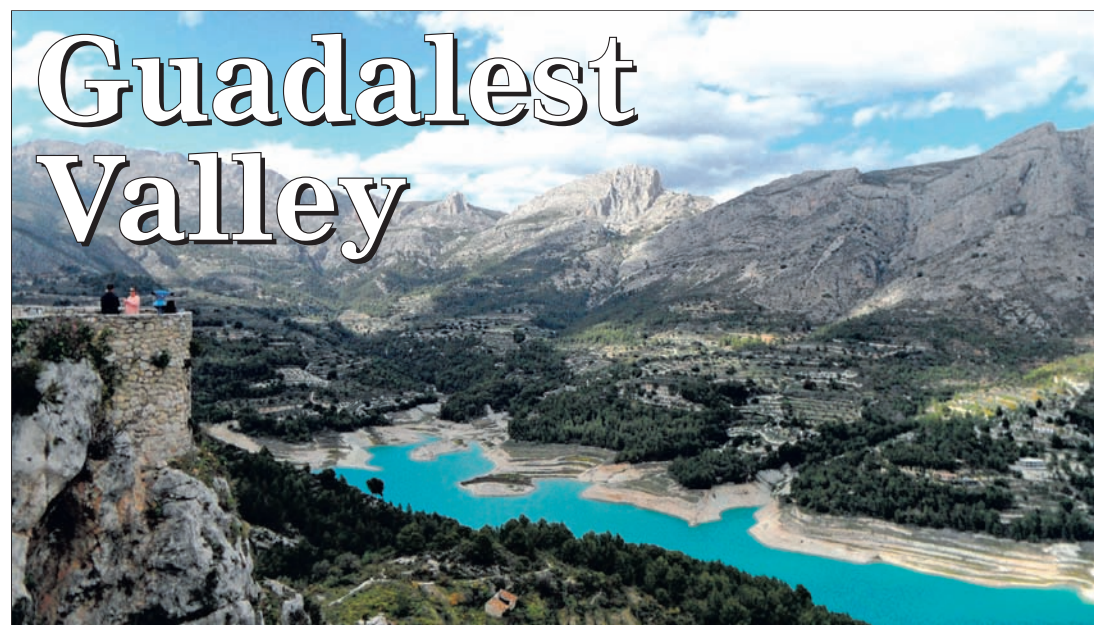
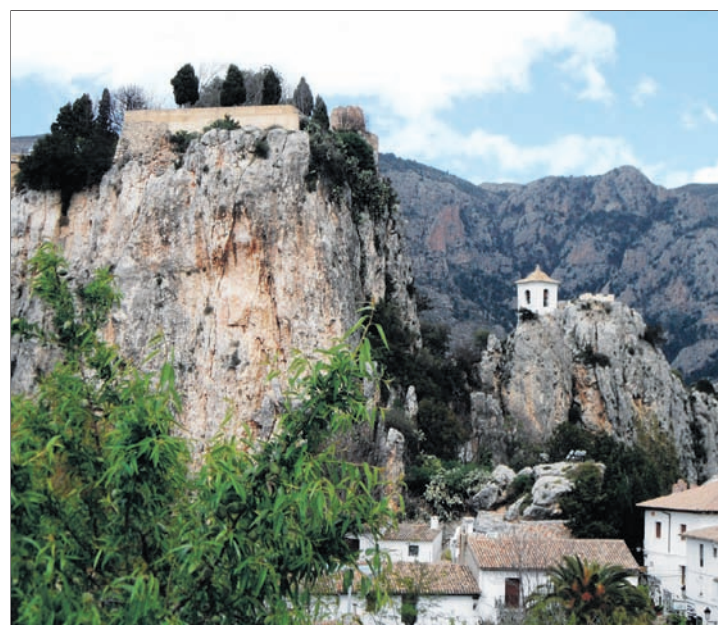


DISCOVERING THE COSTA BLANCA

Focus on Guadalest Valley



Guadalest Valley



Picturesque villages and mountain walks

By Karen Marco

The Guadalest Valley is a beautiful area to explore, especially in springtime when the fruit trees are in blossom and the fields are filled with colourful wild flowers.

The valley is confined by Confrides mountain pass at the top, Sierra Aitana (the highest mountain in Alicante province at 1,558 metres) to the south, with Sierra de Xortá and Sierra Serella on the northern side. The Guadalest river flows through the valley from the source at Confrides into the reservoir:

Guadalest, Benimatell, Beniardá, Benifató, Abdet and Confrides, the villages that lie in the valley date back to Moorish times. Many local families still carry on the agricultural tradition handed down through the centuries, cultivating almonds, olives, loquats, oranges and vines - some continue to elaborate wine in the natural ecological way, treading the grapes and with no additives.

El Castell de Guadalest is one of the prettiest mountain villages in Spain and has been classed as an official 'place of historical cultural interest' since 1974. Built on a crag, the only entrance to the village is tunneled through the rock. San José castle was built as a defensive fortress in the XI century by the Moors and the remains are located on the highest part of

Guadalest. The Alcozaiba castle was built in the same era - only the iconic tower remains at the entrance to Guadalest. Guadalest prison goes back to the XII century - you can visit the dungeons beneath the town hall.

Guadalest has become famous for its interesting museums which include the ethnologic museum, Nativity scenes and dolls houses, instruments of torture, micro-miniatures, salt and pepper sets (20,000), micro-giant (miniature and giant sculptures), historic vehicles, and Casa Orduña (a nobleman's house built in the XVIII century, decorated with typical XIX furniture, and a collection of paintings and pottery).

Gift shops offer a fascinating selection of arts, crafts and souvenirs, while delicatessens sell local produce such as sausages, cheese, honey, vinegars and olive oil.

The village square overlooks the valley and the clear turquoise waters of the reservoir below, reflecting the blue sky and green pine trees on the slopes of the surrounding mountains.

Benimantell is some two kilometres further up the valley. The peaceful medieval village is a maze of steep winding streets on the hillside with views down to the reservoir and surrounding countryside. You can see the distinctive hexagonal church tower

peeping over the rooftops of the small three-storey townhouses, which traditionally had basements for stabling mules, living quarters on the first floor and lofts for drying almonds or grain.

There are several good hikes in the area such as the circular route from the fresh water springs at Font de Moli (Benimantell) to Font de Partagas (Beniardá) - an easy walk in the foothills of the Aitana mountains through breathtaking countryside (approximately 10 kilometres, 2 ½ hours).

Take a quiet walk or enjoy a picnic down by the reservoir - find the turning down to the dam on the CV-70 from Callosa de Ensenya, just before Guadalest. A circular walk starts on the footpath under the Guadalest fortress, leading through pine woods following the reservoir to Beniardá - alternatively, continue driving or cycling along the lane on the opposite bank.

You can find some great restaurants in the vicinity of Guadalest which serve wonderfully presented traditional cuisine, carefully elaborated with fresh local ingredients. Typical dishes include garlic rabbit, rice dishes, 'olleta de blat' (pork, bean and wheat hot-pot), 'pilotes de dacsca' (meatballs with maize) or 'minchos'. Local game, roast lamb and vegetables are also popular.

If you have the opportunity,

stay over at an enchanting rural retreat for a relaxing break or as a base for a walking or cycling holiday.

There are several mountain routes and more sleepy villages to discover in the Guadalest Valley...

we'll be talking about them in a future edition!

You can see more features about the Costa Blanca on my personal travel blog.

www.kalitravel.net

Photos by K. Marco

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