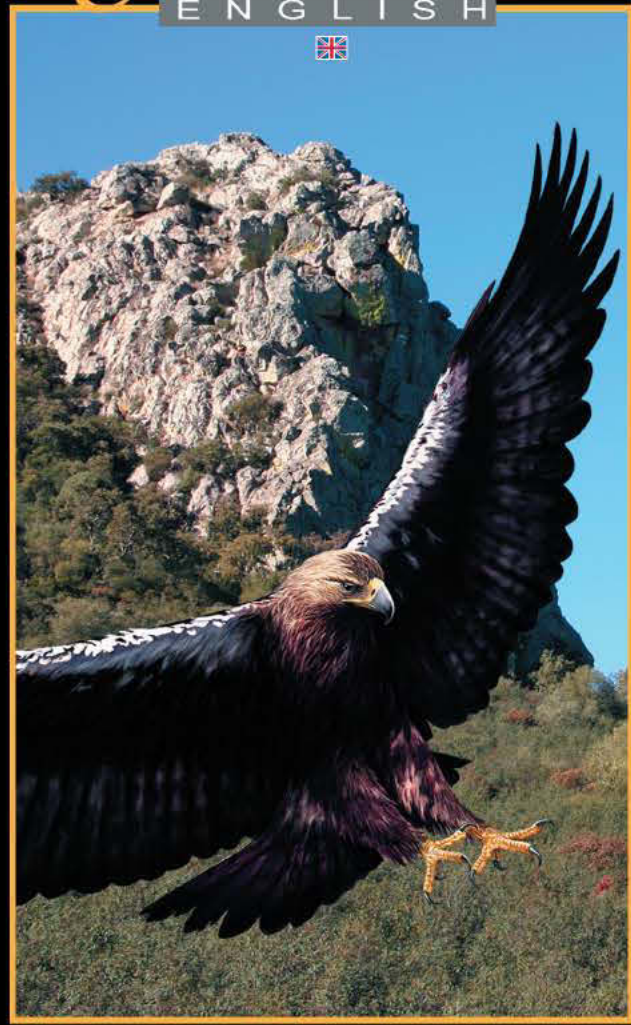


# ILLUSTRATED MAP

## Birds of Extremadura



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Recommended Seasons: SPRING AND WINTER

### The mediterranean forest

The Mediterranean forest is considered to be the habitat most closely resembling that which covered Extremadura thousands of years ago. The activities of mankind throughout history have brought about change to the forest towards other kinds of vegetation which are also of value such as **dehesas**, **heaths** and **pastures**.

The best preserved Mediterranean forests are to be found on the slopes and upper parts of certain mountain ranges as well as in certain river valleys. The dominant species are the **holm oak**, **cork oak** and **pyrenean oak**, which can grow so densely that their branches become entwined. They tend to grow alongside shrub and bush species which sometimes grow so thickly that they become an impenetrable jungle of vegetation.

Some of the Iberian Peninsula's most threatened bird species such as **Black Vulture**, **Spanish Imperial Eagle** and **Black Stork** breed in this habitat, choosing the highest trees and seeking the protection which the dense vegetation of the mountain slopes offers.

Often the forest is made up exclusively of trees, with the shrubs and bushes having been almost completely overwhelmed. Here the bird species are typically forest dwelling such as: **Jay**, **Great Spotted Woodpecker**, **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**, **Wryneck**, **Nuthatch**, **Short-toed Treecreeper**, **Redstart**, **Crested Tit**, **Long-tailed Tit**, **Chaffinch** and **Hawfinch**. In the oak forests **Bonelli's Warbler** are also found.

Where bushes and shrubs are abundant **Robin**, **Nightingale**, **Wren** and **Blackcap** nest.

This is also a perfect habitat for birds of prey such as **Honey Buzzard** -especially in the oak forests- **Sparrowhawk**, **Gosawk**, **Little Owl** and **Tawny Owl**.

The SPAs most typical of this habitat are the 'Sierra de San Pedro' (San Pedro Range), **Monfragüe** and the surrounding **dehesas**, 'Sierra de Villuerca' (Villuerca)



as the



Plover, Lapwing, Hen Harrier, Merlin, Meadow Pipit, Skylark, Goldfinch and White Wagtail.

The abundance of food favours the presence of other birds of interest which nest in different habitats such as **Spanish Imperial Eagle**, **Bonelli's Eagle**, **Golden Eagle** and **Short-toed Eagle**, or **carion feeders** attracted by the herds of animals such as **Griffon Vulture**, **Black Vulture** and **Egyptian Vulture**.

The SPAs with the largest area of pasture and crops are 'La Serena', 'Llanos de Cáceres', 'Llanos de Trujillo', 'Magasca', 'Llanos de Alcántara y Brozas' and 'Campina Sur y Embalse de Arroyo Conejo' (Conejo Brook Reservoir). Certain areas within the 'Dehesas de Jerez (Jerez Dehesas)', 'Llanos and Complejo lagunar de la Albuera (Lakes Complex in Albuera)' and 'Llanos de Zorita and Embalse de Sierra Brava (Sierra Brava Reservoir)' are also significant.

Recommended Seasons: WINTER

### Irrigated Agricultural Crops

In Extremadura more than 200,000 hectares of land are dedicated to irrigated agriculture favoured by the extensive network of dams and channels in the Rio Guadiana basin and, to a lesser extent, in the Tajo basin.

From the birds' point of view the most attractive of the irrigated crops are maize and rice (with 25,000 hectares Extremadura is the second most important rice-growing region in Spain), especially in winter. Once these crops are harvested (between October and November), the birds take advantage of the spilt grain which remains in the stubble after the harvest. Furthermore, the rice fields which continue under water for most of the winter become an attractive but shallow wetland. In spite being areas used for intensive cultivation, they receive large populations from a variety of species. Among the birds associated with irrigated agriculture are the wintering populations of **Common Cranes**, **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Lesser Black-backed Gull**, **Black-headed Gull**, **Glossy Ibis**, **Grey Herons**, **Cattle Egret**, **Squacco Heron**, **Little Egrets**, **Great Egrets**, **White Storks**, **Greylag Goose**, **Pin-tail**, **Shoveler** and **Lapwing**.

Among waders, the numbers of **Curlew**, **Black-winged Stilt**, **Redshank**, **Spotted Redshank**, **Golden Plover**, **Common Snipe** and **Ruff** are significant.



Range) and Valle del Guadarranque (Guadarranque Valley)' and 'International Tajo River and its banks'.

Recommended Seasons: SPRING, AUTUMN AND WINTER

### Dehesas

The dehesas are, without doubt, the most characteristic landscape in Extremadura, occupying 35% of the total area of the region. The dehesas are the result of the progressive clearance of the Mediterranean Forest, the reduction in the number of trees and the increase in the number of bushes and shrubs. At the same time, through periodic pruning of the trees and the clearing of shrubbery, mankind has managed to create a complex eco-system which is an unmistakable symbol of sustainable development in the region. The dehesas are composed mainly of **holm oaks** and of **cork oaks**, whilst in the upper reaches there are dehesas made up of **deciduous oaks**.

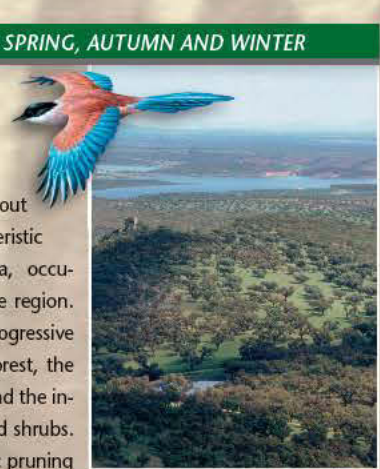
In the denser dehesas with between 20 and 40 trees per hectare, the bird species are typical of forest, including **Hoopoe**, **Woodpigeon**, **Turtle Dove**, **Green Woodpecker**, **Blue Tit**, **Great Tit**, **Chaffinch**, **Blackbird**, **Mistle Thrush**, **Spotted Flycatcher**, **Orphean Warbler**, **Woodchat Shrike**, **Azure-winged Magpi**, **Rock Sparrow**, **Spanish Sparrow** and **Greenfinch** during the breeding season.

Where the dehesa retains shrubs such as the **rock rose**, **retamas** and **brooms**, **lavender** or **osapling oaks** which have not been pruned, it's enriched by the presence of other species such as **Woodlark**, **Sardinian Warbler**, **Orphean Warbler**, **Subalpine Warbler** and **Dartford Warbler**.

When tree density reduces to fewer than 15 per hectare with a predominance of pastures with occasional shrubs, other species appear such as **Thekla Lark**, **Stonechat**, **Corn Bunting** and even **Stone Curlew**.

In winter, one of the most typical species is the **Common Crane**, truly symbolic of the dehesas at this time of year. Similarly **Wood Pigeons**, also attracted by the abundance of acorns, arrive in large numbers in the holm oak dehesas. Other frequent visitors in winter are **Lapwing**, **White Wagtail**, **Robin**, **Black Redstar**, **Song Thrush**, **Redwing**, **Chiffchaff** and **Bullfinch**.

The dehesas are also the nesting habitat for various birds of prey such as **Black-shouldered Kite**, **Black Kite**, **Buzzard**, **Booted Eagle**, or the



Amongst the birds of prey, the populations of **Marsh Harrier** and **Hen Harrier**, which tend to roost in the rice fields are worthy of mention and as well as **Black-shouldered Kite**, **Buzzard**, **Black Kite**, **Merlin** and **Short-eared Owl**.

Some SPAs are designated exclusively for the protection of birds which inhabit irrigated agricultural areas such as 'Arrozales de Palazuelo (Palazuelo Ricefields)' and 'Guadalperales', 'Vegas del Ruedas (Ruedas water-meadows)', 'Cubila and Moheda Alta' and 'Llanos de Zorita and Embalse de Sierra Brava (Sierra Brava Reservoirs)'.

Recommended Seasons: SPRING AND WINTER

### Reservoirs and dams

The two main rivers, the Tajo and the Guadiana, are dammed for almost all of their passage through Extremadura, being used for hydro-electricity production and the supply of water to the population and the irrigation of crops. The shortage of water during the summer months, which can be prolonged, has led to the building of numerous reservoirs and dams. In fact, Extremadura is the region with the greatest length of interior coastline in the Iberian Peninsula, measuring almost 2,000 kilometres. These artificial wetlands are used intensively by birds for which they are a real oasis.

On the islands in the reservoirs, breeding colonies of **Collared Pratincole**, **Little Tern**, **Gull-billed Tern**, **Black-winged Stilt**, **Little Ringed Plover** and, occasionally, **Common Tern** can be found. **Great Cormorant** has also begun to nest in recent years on some reservoirs.

In the shallower dams with floating vegetation **Little Grebe**, **Great Crested Grebe**, **Coot** and at times, **Whiskered Tern** and **Lapwing** make their nests. Amongst the nesting duck are **Gadwall** and **Shoveler** and sometimes **Red-crested Pochard** and **Pochard**.

The ornithological value of these wetlands is much greater in winter as Extremadura is one of the most important regions in Iberian peninsula for wintering waterbirds, with over 250,000 birds including populations of **Mallard**, **Pintail**, **Wigeon**, **Gadwall**, **Shoveler**, **Pochard**, **Tufted Duck**, **Teal** and **Red-crested Pochard**. The wintering popula-



Short-toed Eagle whilst others arrive in search of food such as **Spanish Imperial Eagle**, **Bonelli's Eagle** or **carion** such as **Griffon Vulture**, **Black Vulture** or **Egyptian Vulture**.

The SPAs most typical of this habitat are 'Embalse de Cornalvo (Cornalvo Reservoir)' and **Sierra Bermeja (Bermeja Range)**, 'Dehesas de Jerez (Jerez dehesas)', 'Vegas del Ruedas (Ruedas Meadows)', **Cubilar and Moheda Alta (High Moheda)**, 'Monfragüe and the surrounding dehesas', 'Puerto Peña and Sierra de los Golondrinos (Golondrinos Range)', 'Sierra de la Moraleja (Moraleja Range)' and **Piedra Santa** and 'Sierra de Siruela (Siruela Range)' and 'Sierra de Hornachos (Hornachos Range)'.

Recommended Seasons: SPRING

### Rocky areas

Many of Extremadura's mountain ranges are topped by quartzite rocks projecting from the dense vegetation of the Mediterranean Forest or the dehas. The security of the often inaccessible rocks and the dense barrier formed by the vegetation of the mountain slopes lead certain bird species to choose them for nesting purposes as they avoid humans and their natural predators.

Among the typical nesting birds in the rocky areas are many threatened birds of prey such as **Bonelli's Eagle**, **Golden Eagle**, **Peregrine Falcon** and **Eagle Owl**. More than 40% of the **Black Stork** population choose to nest in the quartzite rocks rather than in the tall trees.

This habitat is also very important to other species in the breeding season such as **Crag Martin**, **Alpine Swift**, **White-rumped Swift**, **Black Wheatear**, **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Rock Thrush**, **Jackdaw**, **Raven** and **Chough**. In winter, in the medium to high mountains **Alpine Accentor** may be observed and, very occasionally, **Wallcreeper**.

The best rocky areas for bird-watching are in the following SPAs: 'Dehesas de Monfragüe (Monfragüe dehesas)' and its surrounding areas' (Salto del Gitano, Portilla del Tietar), 'Embalse de Orellana (Orellana Reservoir)' and **Sierra de Pela (Pela Range)**, 'Puerto Peña', 'Sierra de las Villuerca' (Villuerca Range) and **Valle del Guadarranque (Guadarranque Valley)** (Pico Villuerca), 'Canchos de Ramiro and Ladroneira', **Sierra de la Garrapata (Garrapata Range)**, 'La Serena and the peripheral mountains' (Sierra de

tions of **Great Crested Grebe**, **Little Grebe** and **Black-necked Grebe** can be considerable in some places. In winter several reservoirs are used as communal roosts by **Common Cranes**, **Gulls** and **Great Cormorants**.

**Osprey** can be seen regularly on the reservoirs during their migrations and **Black Stork** gathers in large numbers (over 100 birds) on reservoirs and dams in the course of their migration after breeding.

On the walls of dams **Crag Martin** and **Rock Dove** can be seen and on occasions also **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Black Wheatear** or **Rock Bunting**.

A large number of reservoirs are included in a network of SPAs in Extremadura amongst the most important being the 'Embalse de Orellana (Orellana Reservoir)' and **Sierra de Pela (Pela Range)**, 'Llanos de Zorita and Embalse de Sierra Brava (Sierra Brava Reservoir)', 'Embalse de los Canchales (Canchales Reservoir)', 'Embalse de Montijo (Montijo Reservoir)', 'Embalse de la Serena (Serena Reservoir)', 'Embalse de Arrocampo (Arrocampo Reservoir)', 'Embalse de Brozas (Brozas Reservoir)', 'Embalse de Borbollón (Borbollón Reservoir)', 'Embalse de Alcántara (Alcántara Reservoir)', 'Embalse de Talaván (Talaván Reservoir)', 'Embalse de Valdecañas (Valdecañas Reservoir)', 'Embalse de Valungo (Valungo Reservoir)', 'Embalse de Gabriel y Galán (Gabriel y Galán Reservoir)', and 'Embalse de Vegas Altas (Vegas Altas Reservoir)'. The most important dams and lakes are 'Llanos and complejo lagunar de Albuera (Albuera Lakes Complex)', 'Complejo Lagunar Egido Nuevo (Egido Nuevo Lakes Complex)' and 'Charca de la dehesa boyal de Naval-moral (Cattle dehesa Pond at Naval-moral)'.

Recommended Seasons: SPRING AND WINTER

### Rivers and streams

The river courses can be very different dependent on the associated vegetation, the width and depth of the flow and the altitude.

The most frequently found tree species on permanent water courses are the **alder**, **ash**, **poplar** and the **willow**. On the seasonal water courses, almost always dry in the Summer months, the tree species best adapted to the **lack of water** predominate such as **oleander** and **buckthorn**.



Tiros, Tiros Range), 'Sierras de Peñalsordo (Peñalsordo Ranges)' y **Capilla'** (Torozo), 'Sierra de la Moraleja (Moraleja Range)', 'Sierra de Hornachos (Hornachos Range)' and 'Sierras centrales (Central Ranges)' and **Embalses de Alange (Alange Reservoirs)**.

Recommended Seasons: SPRING

### Heaths

The loss of trees from the dehesas together with the reduction in the cultivation of crops and animal rearing combined with other factors such as forest fires have favoured the consolidation of a type of vegetation where Mediterranean heathlands and bushes predominate. The most common vegetation is **rock rose**, **retama**, **broom** and **wild olives**, whereas in the higher areas there are **heaths** and **broom**.

The bird species associated with this type of vegetation are more numerous than might be expected, dependent to a large part on the variety of species which make up the heaths, their complexity (height, cover) and the presence of other elements such as pastures or isolated trees.

Among the breeding species are to be found **Dartford Warbler**, **Sardinian Warbler**, **Spectacled Warbler**, **Subalpine Warbler**, **Tawny Pipit**, **Stonechat**, **Rufous Bush Robin** and **Linnet**.

When clearings are made on the heaths to make way for pasture, **Northern Wheatear**, **Black-eared Wheatear**, **Thekla Lark** and even the **Montagu's Harrier** can often be found.

In higher areas where snow often falls in winter and where only **Broom** and **Heather** grow mixed with mountain pastures **Duncock**, **Ortolan Bunting** and **Bluethroat** can be found nesting.

Amongst the SPAs with large areas of heathland are the 'Sierra de Gata (Gata Range)' and **Valle de las Pilas (Pilas Valley)**, 'Hurdas', and 'Nacimiento del Rio Gévora (source of River Gévora)'.

There are many bird species associated with riverbank vegetation such as **Nightingale**, **Melodious Warbler**, **Robin**, **Blackcap**, **Penduline Tit**, **Golden Oriole** and **Cirl Bunting** as well as nocturnal birds such as the **Red-necked Nightjar**.

On the rivers in the north of the region **Dipper**, **Grey Wagtail** and **White Wagtail** can often be found, the latter particularly in all types of wetland all over the region.

On the rivers with **emergent vegetation** breeding species include **Reed Warbler**, **Great Reed Warbler**, **Cetti's Warbler** and even exotic species such as **Red Avadavat** and **Common Waxbill**. Where the emergent vegetation occupies large areas it is also possible to find populations of **Purple Heron**, **Little Bittern**, **Water Rail**, and even much rarer species such as **Purple Swanphen** or **Savi's Warbler**.

There are sizeable colonies of heron in the trees along the river banks, some with thousands of birds where the **Cattle Egret**, **Little Egret**, **Grey Heron**, **Black-crowned Night Heron** and **White Stork** nest together joined at times by **Squacco Heron** and **Spoonbill**.

On the sandy river banks **Sand Martin** and **Bee-eater** build their colonies joined by **Kingfisher**. At times the nests of these birds are used by **Rollers** or **Rock sparrows**.

Among the SPAs which include river courses are the 'Azud de Badajoz', 'Embalse de Montijo (Montijo Reservoir)', 'River and Pinewoods at Tietar', 'Rivers del Almonte' and 'Vegas del Ruedas (Ruedas water-meadows)', **Cubilar and Moheda Alta**.

Recommended Seasons: SPRING

### Towns and villages

Many towns and villages in Extremadura are excellent places for bird watching as they offer perfect places for nesting which are close to sources of food. At times historic buildings (churches, palaces and castles) are the sites chosen by birds to build nests because of the openings and supports for them.

The huge nests of **White Storks** in the bell-towers of churches in Extremadura have become a typical image of the



## ILLUSTRATED MAP

### Birds of Extremadura



Extremadura is the home of one of the most extensive and best-conserved formations of Mediterranean vegetation in Europe, with extraordinarily beautiful landscapes that reveal a great diversity of habitats formed by the transformation of Mediterranean woodland, providing shelter to more than 300 bird species. A real treasure for bird-watchers where one can still find some of the most valuable and spectacular endangered species of wildlife in Europe. A region that also offers tourists a fascinating historic and cultural heritage with infinite possibilities.

#### USEFULL PHONENUMBER AND ADDRESS

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region and are evidence of the coexistence of man and birds.

Old buildings are home to large colonies of **Lesser Kestrels** which at times exceed 50 pairs. In the same area coexist **Jackdaw**, **Pallid Swift**, **Common Swift** and **Barn-owls**.

On the great bridges, some dating back to Roman times, **Alpine Swift** breed, in places such as Mérida the population reaches 70 birds.

The urban stretches of the River Guadiana passing through Mérida and Badajoz have been chosen by **herons** to make their noisy breeding colonies completely oblivious to the human activity around them. These colonies can reach up to 2,500 pairs making a great spectacle for ornithologists as well as other inhabitants.

Equally showy are **House Martin** settled on many buildings and bridges sharing their urban space with **Barn Swallow** and, in more northern villages, with **Crag Martins**.

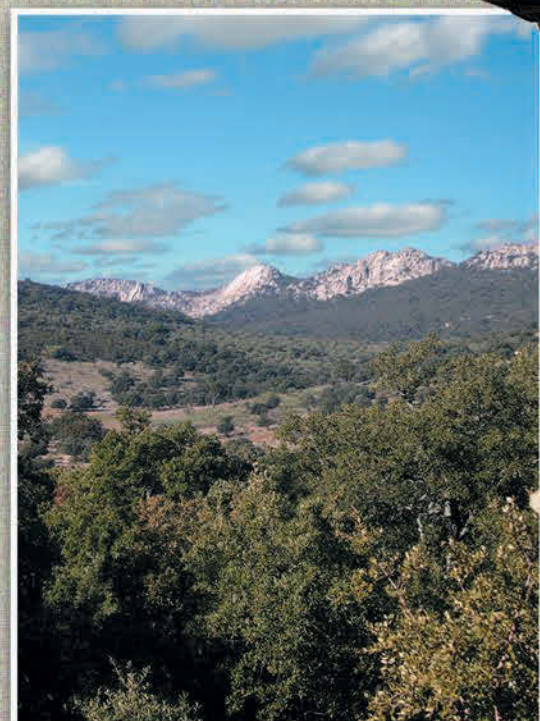
Extremadura is one of few regions to designate SPAs in urban areas of 17 towns and villages, protected because of their importance to the birds especially **Lesser Kestrel**. Visits are recommended to Cáceres, Trujillo, Llerena and Zafra which have much to offer to tourists. There are also important **Lesser Kestrel** colonies in the historic buildings of **Almendrales** (Iglesia de la Purificación, Purificación Church), **Acedera**, **Brozas**, **Belvis de Monroy**, **Fuente de Cantos**, **Garrovillas**, **Guaña**, **Ribera del Fresno**, **San Vicente de Alcántara**, **Saucedilla** and **Jaraiz de la Vera**.

#### SUGGESTIONS

- Before visiting the countryside it is recommended that you visit the Centro de Interpretación (Interpretation Centre) to obtain detailed information on the place and the birds.
- You should avoid approaching the birds during the breeding season especially where there are nests or bird colonies.
- You should also try not to disturb the birds during their courtship rituals remaining on the roadside or the designated spots.
- Many birds nest in rocky places to which is preferable not to climb so as not to disturb them.
- It is best not to approach large concentrations of birds so as not to scare them away.







# ILUSTRATED MAP

## Birds of Extremadura

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Extremadura is considered to be one of the most important European regions for birds, an ornithological paradise due to the excellent state of preservation of its natural habitats and the great diversity of landscapes. The snowy peaks of the Sierra de Gredos, the vast pastures of the high-plateaus, the forests - still intact - the interminable dehesas, the steep mountains which break-up and yet form the backbone of the landscape, the lakes, rivers and streams and the immense and varied cultivated fields together form an environment which is highly favourable to bird-life where they find perfect habitats for nesting.

So far, some 344 species of bird have been seen in Extremadura - a record from any point of view - revealing the impressive ornithological treasures of the region. Of these 344 species, at least 228 nest here regularly whilst the remainder winter here either on their migratory route or appearing occasionally.

In response to the European Directive on Preservation of Wild Birds (79/409/CEE), the Junta de Extremadura has designated 69 Special Bird Protection Areas (known as SPAs), the purpose of which is to protect the most threatened species and their habitats. This network of SPAs is one of the most extensive on the Iberian Peninsula and covers 26.15% of the area with 1,089,936 hectares.

To get to know the birds of Extremadura, a visit to the most representative habitats is recommended to enjoy watching the species most associated with them. In addition to its ornithological riches, Extremadura also has a wealth of culture associated with the landscape, the mark of history and tradition on its people and its cities without forgetting the hospitality offered to visitors.

