



Benavente

YOUR STOP ALONG THE WAY



AYUNTAMIENTO DE
BENAVENTE

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INTRODUCTION

BENAVENTE,
YOUR STOP ALONG THE WAY

Since its foundation, Benavente has steadily acquired rich artistic heritage sites generously contributed by the various cultures which have settled in the area. Throughout its history, an enviable location in the northwest of the peninsula has made it an eternally important crossroads for the Roman *Vía de la Plata*, the *Camino de Oriente* (East Road) to Madrid and Alicante, the Road to Valladolid, the Route through the Tera River Valle and the Road to Asturias. Even today, Benavente continues to be one of the most relevant transportation hubs in Spain and constantly strives to become an internationally renowned destination on the world map of transport and logistics.

In this city surrounded by rivers, you will find luscious cuisine, age-old festivals and traditions which are heartily kept alive, as well as abundant choices in terms of cultural and leisure activities. Let yourself go and enjoy your stay.

Benavente is your stop along the way.



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LOCATION AND ACCESS

LOCATION

For ages on end, Benavente has been a strategic location where many crucial overland routes intersected; perhaps the most significant being the Vía de la Plata which first helped to Romanize the peninsula and later became a Mozarabic road and itinerary for pilgrims on “the Way” to pay their respects at Saint James’s resting place. This veritable peninsular secant stretched northward from Mérida to Astorga.

Due to its location, Benavente became the administrative and commercial centre of an extensive region, as well as the main transportation hub of the northwest peninsula.

The city of Benavente is located in the north of the province of Zamora, almost entirely perched upon a hill presiding over a far-reaching meadow embraced by the Esla and Órbigo rivers.

The area of the municipality includes 45 km² at an average altitude of 744 m. above sea level.

ACCESS: HOW TO GET THERE?

By road:

Several highways intersect in Benavente connecting the centre of Spain with the northwest of the peninsula:

A-6 or Autovía del Noroeste

A-52 or Autovía de las Rías Bajas.

A-66 or Autovía Ruta de la Plata.

Benavente, aside from being a starting point, is a boundary post on other roads like the N-525 (Benavente-Ourense) and the N-630 which runs from Sevilla to Gijón.

Along with these major thoroughfares, smaller roads, like the N-610 from Benavente to Palencia, and other regional roads contribute to making this city the largest transportation junction in the northwest of Spain.

The city offers regular national and international transportation services by road.

By plane:

The nearest airports can be found in León 73 Km away, Villanubla (Valladolid) 93 Km away and Matacán (Salamanca) 150 Km away.

By train:

The nearest railways stations are located in Zamora 66 Km away, León 73 Km away, Puebla de Sanabria 85 Km away and Valladolid 114 Km away.

HISTORY

A noble past

Throughout the ages, its enviable strategic position has attracted diverse peoples who decided to settle in the area.

Long before our times, the region was inhabited by pagan Celtic Asturs known as brigeecienses whose major town, Brigeccio, mentioned in the Roman itinerary of Antonino, united Mérida with Astorga along the Roman way. Much later, in

the 12th century, la Villa (as it is colloquially known) appears as part of the repopulation policy supported by the monarchs of León and was given the appellation Malgrat. In 1164, King Fernando II carried out this policy by granting a proprietary charter which was renewed and expanded upon in 1167. This monarch initiated a period of expansion which continued to de-

Feudal Charter of Benavente, 1167





Juan Alfonso Pimentel. El Greco.

velop though the 12th and 13th centuries. As benefactor of such policies, the township, whose name now finally became Benavente, was where the King's Court met and where he himself finally passed away in 1188. Alfonso IX would also hold court here in 1202, and Sancho IV further promoted the region through the concession of new privileges whose exemptions attracted new settlers.

In 1230, Benavente witnessed a momentous event which proved to be transcendental in the history of Spain: the initiation of the unification of all the kingdoms in the peninsula under one ruling crown. The Concord of Benavente, long after the preliminary agreement reached in Coyanza, ratified the definitive union of the

kingdoms of León and Castille with Ferdinand III as its monarch.

In 1398, during the reign of Henry III of Castille, the county of Benavente was conceded to the Portuguese knight Juan Alfonso Pimentel, who would prove to be the trunk of a noble family tree which prospered well into the 19th century. During this extensive period, the history of the town depended largely upon that of its counts, who consolidated themselves as one of the main dynasties and influential noble families in Spain. The town of Benavente was converted into the political and economic focal point of a far-reaching county where numerous prominent figures would visit its township and castle.

During the Peninsular War, the city and its castle were attacked by Napoleon's troops and the physiognomy of the city was profoundly altered as many significant constructions were affected.

During the Corunna Campaign in the winter of 1808, with the advance of the Napoleonic troops in the so-called "Race to Benavente", a historical event took place which proved to be tragic, particularly for its historical landmarks. Following an im-

portant battle between the French and the English in the immediate vicinity in which General Lefebvre was captured, Napoleon himself took refuge in the city for several days. Numerous buildings, including the castle, were sacked and burned down.

The Spanish confiscation in the 19th century also affected, in particular but not exclusively, the ecclesiastic patrimony of Benavente.

Even so, Benavente managed to acquire a certain importance on a political level in the 19th century when it

became the administrative, judicial and electoral centre of a wide territory. Economically, the last decades of that century witnessed a process of modernization which included several public works (the Esla channel, the Plasencia-As-torga railway, the highway network, etc.), as well as private enterprises, mainly in the form of gristmills.

A blooming commercial landscape which developed around its fairs and traditional markets earned it the right to be called a “city” under King Alfonso XIII.



Seal of the Council of Benavente, 13th century (obverse)



Castle of Benavente. Recreation



HISTORIC MONUMENTS ARCHITECTURE

Religious Architecture

HOSPITAL DE LA PIEDAD
C/ de Santa Cruz, 5

This monument, which was declared a Bien de Interés Cultural (or National Cultural Heritage Site) by the Spanish government in 2003, is merely a sample of the different hospitals and asylums which used to exist in Benavente.

The Hospital de la Piedad Foundation, currently a retirement home, owes its existence to the fifth Count of Benavente, don Alonso Pimentel, and his wife doña Ana de Velasco y Herrera.

Its creation must be considered within the framework of other similar foundations along “the Way” of St. James, whose main purpose was to house and attend to needy pilgrims.

Ground was broken in 1517 upon the site of the old Santa Cruz church and hospital which had once stood in that place. The barely legible inscription over the

door in gothic letters gives testimony to this fact. The inscription says:

“THIS HOSPITAL WAS BUILT AND FUNDED BY THE ILLUSTRIOUS LORDS DON ALONSO PIMENTEL FIFTH COUNT AND DOÑA ANA DE VELASCO E HERRERA, HIS WIFE, AND WAS DEDICATED TO OUR LADY OF SORROWS SO THE GRACE OF OUR LORD MAY BE WITH THEIR SOULS; BEGUN AND FUNDED IN THE YEAR MDXVII; COMPLETED IN THE YEAR XVIII”.

Due to its geographic location, Benavente has always been an obligatory stopping point for pilgrims along the Vía de la Plata on their way to Santiago de Compostela.

From here they gain access to the “French Path” in Astorga. Although the original purpose of the Hospital was to house pilgrims, it was also equipped to attend to ill patients who were just passing by.

The building’s façade is a beautiful example of early

in French or Gothic lowercase lettering. Above, we can see a high-relief representation of the Pietà, capped by a frontispiece containing a shell and candelabra. On either side of the relief we find the coats of arms of the founders. The



Wrought iron door-knocker with the figure of Saint James the pilgrim.

Spanish Renaissance, without straying too far from Gothic influences. The entry is composed of a semicircular arch with an ample number of voussoir framed by a great alfiz. On its upper cornice, we find an inscription

surrounding decor is simulated foliage and the outcropping frame of the entire composition hints at a more Gothic style.

The wrought iron door knockers of the main entrance are admirable. One of

them represents James the Apostle as a pilgrim in great detail.

Inside the building we find a gorgeous square interior patio surrounded by galleries on two floors all of which was constructed in fine ashlars.

Four slightly overextended round arches appear on each side of the patio except for that of the chapel entrance where there is a trio of three-centred arches. The columns resemble the Doric order.

The top floor exhibits another series of arches, lower than the first, with Gothic parapets and windows. The decoration is not uniform, but varies on each side of the patio.

Inside the chapel of the Hospital de la Piedad, several other artistic elements of interest can be found, such as the wrought iron gate adorned with a frieze decorated with Gothic style motifs. At the foot of the gate lies the sepulchre of don Juan Pimentel, nephew of the founding counts and lord of the priory left to this hospital in the lands of Vidriales. The coats of arms of the founders shine on two of the pendentives of the central vault. Among the various works of art housed by this temple, the most noteworthy could be the seated image of Our Lady of Good Success (Gothic style) and two paintings of the Italian painter Ja-



The Death of Saint Joseph. *Early 18th century*



Façade of the Hospital de la Piedad. *Detail*

cobus Migliori (18th c.), as well as the set of lovely polychromatic sculptures representing the rarely depic-

ted death of Saint Joseph (early 18th c.).



Interior Patio of the Hospital de la Piedad.

IGLESIA DE SANTA MARÍA DEL AZOGUE

Plaza de Santa María, s/n

This church enjoys the privilege of being the main artistic monument of Benavente and is situated in the very centre of the city. The name “Azogue”, derived from an Arabic word meaning “market”, reflects the activities which took place in its vicinity during the Middle Ages. The same name can be found in numerous churches around Castilla y León.

At a glance, onlookers can unmistakably contemplate the diverse artistic styles that have embellished the original structure.

It is believed to have been constructed in the times of the repopulation of the city supported by Fernando II (around 1180) and is considered a contemporary of the church of San Juan del Mercado.

The Romanesque church contains five beautiful apses and three entrances.

Its construction was carried out in four stages.

ROMANESQUE STAGE:

In the first phase (12th c.) the five apses, part of the perimeter of the church and the two Romanesque entrances of the transept were erected. Construction was suspended

with the death of Fernando II in 1188.

What was built in this late-Romanesque phase is easily recognisable thanks to the slaty sandstone masonry. In the decorative motifs and the distribution of the apses and pillars in this stage of the Romanesque, we can observe clear influences of the Cistercian style; specifically they resemble elements of the nearby monastery of Moreruela in the township of Granja de Moreruela.

There are three exterior and one interior façade, three of which represent the Romanesque style of the time:

Southern Entrance: the theme for the south façade of the church is “Agnus Dei”, or the Lamb of God, surrounded by incensing angels. The door is flanked by three pairs of columns topped with leafy capitals supporting the three intricate concentric archivolts which encircle the tympanum.

The exterior archivolt is composed of tiny round arches; the middle one of flowers with four petals; and the interior one contains various representations of biblical figures which are the



South entry. "Agnus Dei".

following (from left to right): Eve seated upon leaves under the tree of knowledge with the forbidden fruit hanging above, and she hides her nakedness with her hands in recognition of her sin, while the tempting serpent whispers in her ear; a winged lion (symbol of Saint Mark the Evangelist); a standing angel holding an open book (symbol of Saint Matthew the Evangelist). At the centre, the head of the Eternal Father, the figure of Great God, is incensed by pairs of angels on either side with one of each pair standing and the other flying. Next comes an eagle with outstretched wings (symbol of Saint John the Evangelist); a winged bull (symbol of Saint Luke the Evangelist); and the Virgin Mary, standing and praying above

a hideous mask vomiting foliage which represents a passage from Genesis. In the tympanum framed by a clipeus or circle, Christ is represented as a lamb carrying the cross of salvation.

Northern Entrance: while the North Door lacks iconographic elements, it does however contain an excellent sample of foliage and schematic decoration, the style of which is very similar to most Romanesque constructions in Zamora and is replicated in another very similar portal in the church of San Juan del Mercado.

Interior Door: in the interior of the Chapel of Jesus we find the most antique door of the temple which boasts a much more archaic style of the Romanesque. Two moulded archivolts rest on doorjambs that simulate



North entry.

zigzag decor. Above these, we find the impost, decorated with much deteriorated animal heads which support a small tympanum decorated with low-relief bevel sculpted foliage motifs.

GOTHIC STAGE:

At the end of the 13th century, during the reign of Sancho IV, work on the church resumed. During this period, stones of lesser quality were employed (more porous limestone) to cover the transept with groin vaults in the central nave and barrel vaults in the aisles. The naves were raised and pointed (or ogival) arches were used in the windows and most of the vaults. The great tower was also erected in order to house the famous clock of Benavente, whose peals could be heard throughout the valleys of the county

as the following colloquial saying demonstrates:

*“For Bells? That of Toledo
Cathedrals? That of León
Clocktowers? That of Benavente and
Columns? That of Villalón”*

That mechanical invention, which kept time from the 15th century onwards, suffered many fires and as such the bells had to be repaired and replaced on several occasions. A lightning bolt in the great storm of 1877 put an end to the authentic contraption and its substitute was and is considered a mere parody of that remarkable clock for which Benavente had long been famous.

STAGE THREE OR LATE GOTHIC – RENAISSANCE:

In the third phase which took place in the 15th and



Classicist façade and tower.

16th centuries, with the patronage of the Pimentels, the nave vaults were constructed and the sacristy was completed in late-Gothic or early-Renaissance style and probably served as a mausoleum for nobles.

STAGE FOUR OR BARROQUE STAGE:

In the fourth stage (17th and 18th c.) the Chapel to Jesus was built which im-

plied converting what used to be an entrance to the church into an interior façade.

In the 18th century, the West door (called the Apostles' door) was destroyed, most likely due to the collapse of some pre-existing underground wine cellars located near the building. Consequently, a new door had to be built, but in contrast with the polished Baroque style



The five apses.

that characterized this time it had an almost classicist linearity and feeling.

The most recently renovated façade on the west side substituted another possibly Romanesque one, called “the Apostles’ side”, which also fell down in the 18th century. Nowadays, the Madonna in a niche on the frontispiece confirms the classicist influence. Upon the doorway we find an inscription of the year 1735.

SCUPTURES AND PAINTINGS

In the interior of the church, we find diverse altarpieces and sculptures of great value, some of which belonged to defunct churches of Benavente.

A Madonna with Child carved in Romanesque style is particularly noteworthy but the

polychromatic stone representation of the Annunciation, probably from the 13th century, takes the cake: to this day, it remains in perfect condition. The images which comprise the sculpture group are found in the transept on two central pillars. On one pillar we find the archangel Gabriel who is announcing to the Virgin Mary the “Good News”. Mary, incidentally, is represented as being already with child.

In this central apse, we can also see a free-standing sculpture of the Eternal Father. On one of the transverse arches, a magnificent polychromatic Gothic Calvary stands out. In the murals of the dome we find representations of the symbols of the Zodiac: it has received the appropriate appellation of “The heavens of Benavente”.



La Anunciación.

To one side of the transept, a great Baroque emblem of the Counts of Benavente presides over the North Door of the temple, and above this we can read the lemma of the Pimentels: “Better flying”. Finally, one of the chapels houses a sculpture of the *Cristo Marino*.



Interior of Santa María del Azogue.

Coat of Arms of the Pimentel Family.



IGLESIA DE SAN JUAN DEL MERCADO

Plaza de San Juan, 4

In contrast with the church of Santa María del Azogue, in the case of San Juan the beginnings of its construction are well-documented. Doña Eldoncia, daughter of the Counts Osorio and Teresa, initiated the project in 1181 when she happened to be in Benavente building a church with “ashlars of square stones” with the advice and authority of the Order of Knights of the Hospital of Saint John.

This Romanesque construction was built with stones that were undoubtedly very costly in that era. Thus, its promoters soon realized that they would not be able to complete the temple without financial support. They appealed to the Order of the Hospital and its prior in Spain, Pedro de Aréis. Due to this assistance, the church came under the protection of the Knights Hospitaller and was dedicated to San Juan: the name it preserves today.

The corresponding ratifying document was signed in September of 1181 and among the signatories we find some of the figures who participated in the repopula-



San Juan del Mercado

tion of Benavente in the epoch of Fernando II. The following year, 1182, the sanctuary must have been consecrated as this date corresponds with an inscription which can still be seen today on one side of the church next to the high altar.

Many characteristics common to churches dedicated to Saint John were maintained throughout the Middle Ages, such as the emblems and sepulchres in its interior. The church of San Juan de Mercado also shows a more pure Romanesque style than that of its contemporary Santa María. However, the naves were never covered



San Juan del Mercado. West door.

with stone vaults, but instead even today a wooden gable roof gives shelter to believers.

The floor-plan of the church includes three naves with a transept that does not exceed the rectangular shape of the whole. The typically Romanesque chancel contains three semicircular apses, like those of Santa María del Azogue, but with chequered impost blocks similar to those of other buildings along “the Way” of Saint James.

The temple has three doors, all of which are Romanesque.

The south door stands out thanks to its ample iconographic symbolism beneath a pointed arch which imitates the famous Portico of Glory in the cathedral of Santiago

de Compostela. The main theme of the tympanum is the Adoration of the Three Wise Men. At the centre we find the Virgin Mary holding the baby Jesus in her arms; to the left, the Three Wise Men are presenting their gifts; and to the right, slightly detached from the group, we find the dozing figure of Saint Joseph leaning on a staff. The rest of the doorway is dedicated to scenes related to the birth of Christ. On one side of the interior archivolt, we can observe the Wise Men in the presence of King Herod, who appears seated and guarded by a soldier wearing the typical chainmail of medieval times, holding a shield and brandishing a sword. On the other side, the Wise Men sleep, as in their dreams they were



South door.

counselled to not return where Herod was in order not to reveal the location of Jesus. The central section of the archivolt has four musical or praising angels with the Star of Bethlehem in the middle.

The six noteworthy sculptures upon the columns below represent prophets, among which Moses (with the Stone Tablets), David (with his harp) and Saint John the Baptist (the namesake of the church) wearing camel skins are recognizable. On the other side of the door, we find Saint James the Apostle, King Solomon and Jeremiah (also called the “weeping prophet”). Remnants of their original polychromatic state dating back to the 13th century can still be observed on all of the

figures, with predominating tones of red, blue, light green and yellow. The modillions are adorned with a bull’s head (which symbolizes



Prophets, south entry.

Saint John) and a smiling angel (which represents Saint Mathew) pointing at an open book where "Mathew" and the first words of his gospel can be read.

On the wide intrados of the main arch, we can see the remains of antique polychromatic murals which correspond to the four and twenty elders of the Apocalypse seated two-by-two in twelve rows, with their crowns and many-coloured robes.

The other two doors are much simpler, without tympani, although the vousoirs over the west door contain cartouche in which the months of the year are represented. The capitals of this door are decorated with foliage, except for a figurative one that shows a medieval knight next to a dame at the gates of a fortress.

The north door once gave access to a now inexistent cloister, and is very similar to the corresponding door of Santa María del Azogue, although a bit more simplified. It is decorated with lobes, pleats and foliage.

In the interior, the paintings in the central apse alluding to the baptism of Christ are noteworthy and date back to the late 15th or early 16th century.

In the central vault, the doctrine of Free Will is the dominating theme. Along the right aisle we can appreciate several frescos on the wall which represent scenes of the Virgin Mary, for example when she cradles her deceased son in her arms next to the cross.

Once again we find some works of sculpture from churches of Benavente which ceased to exist. There is a Pietà which came from the Monastery of the Geronimo and an Anthony the Great (which belonged to the chapel of San Antón) and Saint Crispin (patron saint of tanners and shoemakers). In the central apse, a striking Gothic Christ can be seen. As far as pictorial art is concerned, the Flemish-Spanish altarpiece on the north wall with its reredos alluding to the life of Saint Ildefonsus, the Birth and the Epiphany; and three pairs of apostles in arches upon a gold base. The group is attributed to some disciple of Juan de Borgoña (16th century).

LA ERMITA DE LA SOLEDAD
Plaza de Santa Cruz, 1

This sanctuary was constructed at the beginning of the 16th century to replace the one which had been situated on the site where the Hospital de la Piedad currently stands. The Brotherhood of the Cross occupied it at that time. In 1528, a chaplaincy was constituted in compliance with the testament of Francisco Suárez, a neighbour of the town, and it came to be known as the Chapel of the True Cross or Veracruz. In the 17th century, the arousal of a great devotion to Our Lady of Solitude helped to significantly renovate the building in 1679.

During the French invasion, the church was occupied by Napoleonic troops and most of the statues inside were destroyed. Half-way through the 19th

century, it was converted into a makeshift hospital to attend to those affected by the many epidemics which devastated the county. It would later serve as storage space for religious art and



Ermita de la Soledad

the pasos (or floats) of Benavente's Passion Week.

The construction consists of one nave with several windows that open on the sides, a simple façade with a round arch made of ashlar. Above one oculus, a coat of arms hints at the link to the Franciscan Order which the church has been blessed with since ancient times.

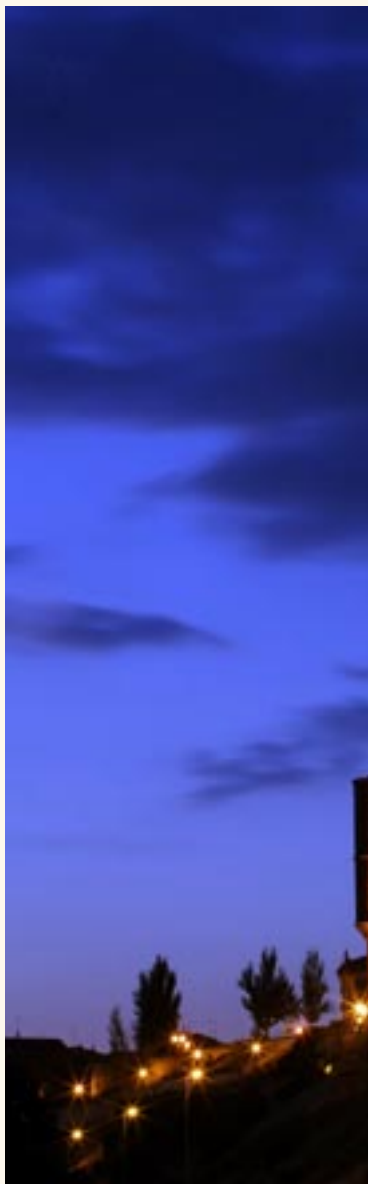
ESPADAÑA DE LA ERMITA DE SAN LÁZARO
C/ Ermita de San Lázaro

Situated near the Transport Hub of Benavente, it is the only conserved remains of an antique chapel called San Lázaro (also known at the Calvary).

This construction was an antique sanatorium which gave shelter and assistance to the ill who suffered certain contagious diseases. Documented proof of this fact dates back to the 15th century, when a religious festival known as “La Magdalena” began to take place.




Espadaña de San Lázaro.



Civil Architecture

THE CASTLE OF LA MOTA
(TORRE DEL CARACOL)
Paseos de la Mota, s/n



I t is safe to assume that construction began during the times of repopulation of Ferdinand II in the 12th century. In the year 1202, King Alfonso IX held court here. In 1230 this fortress witnessed one of the most transcendent historical events in the history of Spain: the Concord of Benavente which definitively united the separate kingdoms of León and Castile under one crown with Ferdinand III of Castile as its first monarch.

Later down the road, when the city was controlled by the Pimentels (14th through late 19th centuries), the castle was reconverted into the residence of the counts and underwent diverse reforms until, at the beginning of the 19th century, French troops burned and destroyed it. Following diverse vicissitudes, it became part of the Parador Nacional de Turismo organization in 1972 and today continues to serve its function as a luxurious hotel. The Torre del Caracol (Spiral



South view of the Castle. Late 19th century.

Tower), a name the building goes by, is merely a small part of the entire fortified structure composed of three walled enclosures which were quite admirable in their glory days.

The “Spiral Tower” itself (which is said to have been the armoury of the castle), was built in 1504 by order of the Fifth Count of Benavente, don Alfonso Pimentel, and was the last structure erected of those which comprise the fortress. It has a square floor-plan with 17

metres to a side, and it artfully combines Gothic and Renaissance elements. Its walls are built with sturdy ashlars. Although some windows conserve the shape of gun ports from the old military castle, its decorative balustrade clearly denotes that this great tower corresponds to a moment in its construction where its military functions were demoted in favour of those more appropriate for a palatial mansion. On the south face, some of the coats of arms of the Pimentel can be



The Castle in 1854 by Clifford.



Panoramic of the Tower.



Moorish honeycomb decor.



Torre del Caracol.

appreciated.

The whole is now covered with a magnificent Moorish coffered ceiling: a work from the 15th century which was salvaged from what used to be the Convent of San Román del Valle where the pantheons of one branch of the Pimentel dynasty can be found.

In the interior of the Caracol Tower, we can contemplate two large contemporary paintings which at first sight appear to be tapestries. They recreate courtly scenes from the epoch of Ferdinand II, the current name of the Parador de Turismo. Both works were carried out by the local artist José Carlos Guerra, in the early 1970's. One of them recreates the moment of the concession of a jurisdiction or proprietary charter which helped repopulate the city at the insistence of Ferdinand II in

TEATRO REINA SOFÍA

C/ La Rúa, 33

T 1164 and 1167. This building dates back to 1928 and is the work of the architect Antonio García Sánchez-Blanco. Don Manuel Guerra Hidalgo ordered its construction to substitute the Elizabethan one next-door which was known as the “Teatro del Jardinillo” (little garden). The new stage was called the “Great Theatre” and was erected upon some parts of the disentailed Convent of Santo Domingo, though some remains and decorative elements of the aboriginal structure survive, like plas-

terwork in the entrance hall, or some original walls with heraldic symbols situated at the back part of the stage.

In 1984, the Town Hall of Benavente decided to acquire the building in an attempt to revive singular architectural structures in the city and to return to its citizens part of the historical memory conserved by its walls. Thus, in 1991, the building was renovated under the watchful eye of the architect Francisco Somoza.

The Theatre now can seat up to 576 people between the stalls and the gallery after being re-inaugurated by Her Majesty Queen Sofia on April 5th, 1991.

The elegant façade which gives access to the interior is faithful to the composition and constructive elements which were commonly applied to this type of buildings in those times, as it is decorated with alcoves and garlands. It follows the parameters of Romantic theatres



Façade.

with a large foyer and spatial excess in the remaining facilities. Around the stalls, there are three floors of balcony seating as well as the boxes. The fronts of the galleries are decorated with golden ribbons and plaster reproductions of Greek masques. The mural paintings of the main entrance hall and the theatre itself are based on sketches of Jacobo Pérez-Enciso.



Interior of the theatre .

TOWN HALL BUILDING *Plaza Mayor, 1*



Town Hall .

Built to house the City Council in the middle of the 19th century (1845), this building can be described as late-Neoclassical. The seve-

riety of the architectural lines and the horizontal spatial composition harmonizes quite well with the rest of the Plaza Mayor. For the most part, it was constructed with

ashlars taken from the disentailed local convent of San Francisco. It is composed of two floors made of stone, the first being of Tuscan order and the second, Doric.

The Consistorial Building opens up to the main square with its ground floor portico composed of a series of round arches (thirteen of them, to be exact), with the exception of two which appear to be Tudor. The centre

of the building contains a balcony with openings defined by protruding doorjambs and lintels separated by pilasters. A simple Doric frieze runs along the part of the cornice where we can find, just above the central balcony, a small stone relief of the emblem or coat of arms of the city.

BUILDINGS IN THE PLAZA MAYOR

In the urban area of the Main Square, in addition to the Town Hall, we can enjoy a series of constructions of historical and architectural interest. They recall different styles of and epochs in building, and yet they maintain a certain harmony amongst themselves both in the materials used to build them and in their overall contour, contributing to compose a peculiar typology in Castilian plazas, despite the stylistic mixture of the different buildings.

- Casa de las Pescaderías

This building brings together constructive elements

and materials from several eras which denote their antiquity. Thus, the beams and columns which support their flaunting arcades invoke designs from 16th century civil architecture. The more noble materials of the same would be reused in its renovation in the middle of the 19th century, as can be read on the sign found in the wall section of one arch on the façade of Calle de las Carnicerías (1847).

The top floor of this building presents solid brickwork in the Castilian style, with no decoration whatsoever and practically the only decorative motif found in its row of balconies. All in all,



Casa de las Pescaderías.

its most remarkable feature without a doubt is the wrap-around portico which opens up to both the Plaza Mayor and the aforementioned Calle de las Carnicerías.

- Casa Allén

The house on the corner of pasaje de las Guindas was built around 1940 as a substitute for another that was almost surely like the one next-door called de las Pescaderías. The new construction attempts to conserve the air of a Castilian square with a façade

that emulates the nearby buildings. At the same time, newer elements, such as the slightly offset tower on its corner and the use of brick as a decorative material, denote its modernity.



Casa Allén.



Casa Lesmes.

- Casa Lesmes

Constructed in 1918 on the corner of C/ Cortés Leonesas, this sombre building exhibits a portico on the Main Square side and is noteworthy because of some attractive decorative elements such as the use of brick as a constructive artistic element and the placement of masks or terracotta faces on the keystones above its balcony windows as adornment.

- Casa Morán

This house was constructed in the 1920's and has recently been renovated, although the side facing the Plaza Mayor was conserved. Its sombre yet elegant façade contains notable ornamental elements including the eaves of its roof and the keystones of its arches as well as the supporting structures of its balconies.



Casa Morán.

CASA DE SOLITA
Paseo de Soledad González, 3



Casa de Solita.

This little palace perfectly represents the turn-of-the-century bourgeois. Situated upon a magnificent location next to the Mota overlook, its owners enjoyed spectacular views of the meadows of Benavente.

The landowner and senator don Felipe González Gómez ordered the construction of this building in 1904 and hired the architect Segundo Vilorio Escarda to create this representative example of high-quality architecture of the early 19th century. Using the architectural models of Madrid's upper class as his inspiration, Vilorio artistically combined them with

several architectural patterns of his own which can be seen throughout Benavente.

He used the vast decorative possibilities of brick construction on the façades to break up the excessive starkness and monotony of its walls. The three floors of the building embrace the same unifying scheme, although the ground floor substitutes windows for balconies.

The building is composed of three floors plus a basement and a rooftop, with the first floor being the noblest. In the interior, the elegant bourgeois halls are decorated with paintings of landscapes or Oriental scenes, floral and geometric motifs



Modernist entry.



Sala de las palomas.

on the ceilings and excellent glasswork as well as the ironwork and tiling. The square floor-plan wraps itself around an interior patio and the staircase of its main entrance. It also contains an underground cellar and a lovely rooftop terrace with a view of the gardens of la Mota.

The striking balustrade rises elegantly up all three floors beginning at the main entrance with its collapsing glass doors decorated with tulips in a Modernist fashion. Other noteworthy parts of the building include:

- The Landing, or Reception Hall, of the first floor accommodates curvilinear radiators and a trap door which allows one to secretly observe the main entrance of

the mansion.

- Music Hall: decorated with lovely plasterwork and including a gorgeous overlook which serves as a privileged observatory with a view of the main façade.

- Hall of the Doves: pretty plasterwork, adorning the ceilings and window sills, includes floral motifs and, of course, doves.

- The Master Bedroom or Columns Chamber: Solomonic columns support the partition wall of the room and include floral motifs and a birds' nest (love nest). The antechamber harbours a beautiful and aristocratic marble fireplace.

- Oriental or Japanese Lounge: this living room located on the south side of the building was used for the entertainment of the women of the house and as a playroom for the children. It is a reflection of the Oriental tastes that spread throughout Europe at the end of the 19th century and is decorated with paintings of landscapes. Special note must be made of the silk paintings (19th century originals from Japan) which can be found in the window frames of the wardrobe doors: five of the six originals are still conserved today.

- Landscape Hall: here we



Oriental painting on silk.



Mural of the river port of Seville.

find murals mainly representing the landscapes of the south of Spain, among which the riverfront of Seville next to the Guadalquivir merits special attention. However, there are also Romantic style paintings with idyllic scenes and even one of a locomotive, due to the fact that the owner of the house promoted the installation of the railway in Bena-

vente in 1896.

After a significant renovation, the building is currently used for cultural events. It is called the Centro Cultural Soledad González, paying homage to the last owner who, upon her death, bequeathed the building to the city for this particular use.

The building also houses the Public Library on the ground floor.

CASA DEL CERVATO
Plaza del Grano, 3

The “Fawn” House, also known as the House of the Rodríguez, has been renovated and converted into a trade school. The local landowner and politician who ordered its construction as his family residence, Don José Rodríguez y Rodríguez, was a member of the so-called “fawn clan” in reference to his birthplace: Villardecierros, which is literally “Deer-ville”. Its façade and balconies are characteristic of

walls. However, more noble stones are used to form the arches, trusses and lintels of doorways and windows. On the first floor, a row of balconies runs along the façade before the central openings and is flanked by two enclosed balconies with strikingly elegant ironwork. This last decorative element, composed of original artisan wrought iron, ennobles the building with a combination of simple geometric elements including discs, spirals, rhomboids, etc. The



Casa del Cervato.

19th century civil architecture and, for this reason, it must be included on the route of nineteenth century historical buildings in the town.

On the upper floors, the balconies are perfectly centred upon smooth brick

guardsails of the balconies on the first floor, like all the ironwork in the building, are made of simple rods of metal which roll up and intertwine with others to form tasteful

floral and symmetrical combinations. We must not forget to mention the original weather vane crowning the building which alludes to a popular festival of the town: the toro enmaromado or “roped bull”.

CASA DE LOS RAMOS (CASA DONCI)

C/ Santa Cruz, 17

This Neo-Mudéjar building was constructed in 1900 by the local architect Santiago Madrigal Rodríguez for the lawyer don Agustín Ramos. Later on, this building would be known as Casa Donci. Its construction was carried out in the framework of the historicist architectural currents that were popularized at the beginning of the 20th century. Both doors and windows reveal Arabic pointed horseshoe arches. The typically Arabic alfiz above the arches is decorated with tiles containing geometric motifs. The string courses, made of the brick corners forming typically Arabic Mocárabe or honeycomb work, run along the façade separating one floor from another.

The corner of the building is crowned with a round-tipped cylinder and a weather-vane with a crescent moon on its top. The great wooden eaves above the façade merit special attention as between each beam a surprising Star of David painted in red, blue, yellow and white contrasts starkly with the dark background.

Further details of the build-



Casa de los Ramos. (Casa Donci).



Cylindrical cap crowning the building.

ding, besides the merely architectural ones, contribute to the enhancement of the structure, such as the 14 balconies with artisan ironwork. The lower part of the railings contains narrow overlapping Arabic ogives, yet the same parabolas at the top, now juxtaposed, form horseshoe arches.

EDIFICIO DE LA ENCOMIENDA
(CASA DE CULTURA)
C/ Encomienda, 2

Located next to the church of San Juan del Mercado, the original project dates back to 1894 although it was later renova-



Edificio La Encomienda (Casa de Cultura)

ted. This work of the architect Segundo Vilorio Escarda constitutes one example of the typical civil architectural constructions in Benavente of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was rehabilitated to accommodate the Casa Municipal de Cultura and re-inaugurated in 1987.

The large number of windows perforating the exterior walls is an indication of its original purpose: its use as a public school required abundant sources of light and ventilation for the classrooms.

The entire building is harmoniously designed in terms of all the elements which comprise the building, including the correspondence of

symmetries, eaves, cornices and the lines of the skirting boards and imposts.

The width of the external façade which gives access to the main part of the building

does contrast with the broader main pavilion. Its prolongation is made up of an elevated wrought iron wrought iron fence above a quartz-stone skirting board which encloses the exterior patio. The overlapping cornice on the wall of the entrance is decorated with brick compositions. A stone on the front of the building indicates its original purpose as a schoolhouse and above this we find a Royal coat of arms which had its crown removed during the years of the Second Republic.

PALACIO DE LOS CONDES DE PATILLA

C/ Santa Cruz, 18



Palacio de los Condes de Patilla

This palace was constructed in the middle of the 19th century upon one of the great man-

sions that the infamous Pimentel family possessed in the town.

The current palace served as the residence of the Tordesillas Fernández-Casariago family who were counts of Patilla. Stone was used as the noblest construction material par excellence. The building is composed of three floors and a cellar and turns out to be excessively sombre in decorative appearance, although it does preserve a certain stately air.

CASA BARRIOS

C/ Encomienda, 1

This building located on the corner of Calle de Santa Cruz and Calle de la Encomienda has a view of the Plaza del Grano: one of the most beautiful urban areas of Benavente. It was constructed in 1932 as a residence for the tradesman Santiago Barrios, whose initials can be devised at the top of the façade.

As a whole, the building

seems to emanate a certain palpable prosperity, as the exterior includes handsome balconies and pleasingly ornamental tiling.



Casa Barrios.

CASA DE MANUEL GRANDE
Corrillo de San Nicolás, 2



Casa de Manuel Grande.

At the beginning of the 20th century, some buildings were built with a clearly Modernist bent.

The Manuel Grande house is a construction that is in line with the style developed by the architect Francisco Ferriol who graced the capital city of Zamora with many magnificent samples of his work. The building is perfectly integrated into the urban landscape of Benavente.

Located on the intersection of Calle Santa Cruz and Corrillo de San Nicolás, the corners of each floor of the

building are graced with a body of elegant oriels. Recurring formulas of garlands and other floral elements decorate the upper portions of the building.



Casa de Manuel Grande. Overlooks.

GROUP OF BUILDINGS

(from *la Rúa* to *Ronda del Progreso*)

The buildings on this block represent a pre-conceived urban and aesthetic idea. The uniformity of their exteriors is proof of this fact.

Due to the fire in 1903, many buildings had to be reconstructed on a large scale. The alignment and uniformity comes from the partici-

pricious ornamentation that ennobled the façades and created an original interplay of light and shadow.

The exterior of the Hotel Mercantil merits special attention. Its preserved nineteenth-century façade is integrated into a modern construction.

Although this hotel, where



Façades on la Rúa.



Hotel Mercantil.

pation of the architect Segundo Vilorio Escarda. By using bricks to rebuild the walls, he was also able to decorate the cornices as well as the exterior walls in order to distinguish one building from the next.

The adornments are based on bands of projecting bricks in the form of arches, rhomboids and all types of geometric compositions.

In this way he obtained ca-

the most illustrious figures of the society who visited Benavente in the 19th century were accommodated no longer exists, its balconies continue to preserve part of the affluent taste and demeanour of the times.

Their guest list is said to have included the eminent writer from Galicia, Emilia Pardo Bazán.

MEDIEVAL BRIDGE OVER THE ESLA



Medieval bridge over the Esla River

Despite being renovated on numerous occasions, it still conserves its medieval design and some of the oculi. Some 17th and 18th century engineers considered it the most beautiful bridge in the kingdom of León and one of the most essential crossings in all of Spain because it helped unite Galicia and Asturias with the Castilian plateau. Truthfully, it is composed of four consecutive bridges connecting the banks of the Esla through three intermediate fields. The frequent floods which inundated the meadows were cause for constant repairs until finally, in the Middle Ages, the Santa Marina bridge was constructed. Afterwards, in the 16th and 17th century, the Mayor or Grande bridge was built and consisted of 21 arches. In the 18th and 19th centuries, some of the sections had to be reinforced and repaired.



THE ARCH OF THE “PUENTE DEL JARDÍN”
Parque de Entrecaños

Located in the park called Entrecaños, near the Canal de Sorribas, only one arch has been conserved of the antique medieval bridge that once stood here. It appears on the stamp of the 13th century town

council of Benavente with five spans.

From this vantage point, visitors can observe one of the most gorgeous perspectives of the castle and the gardens of la Mota.



Arch of the Puente del Jardín.



Sculpture

GRAN LAZO *(Paseo de Soledad González)*

Located on the Paseos de Soledad González, this is a work of the local sculptor José Luis Alonso Coomonte.

It represents a large bow placed on a stone base and is very representative of the geometric-constructive shapes and mechanical sculptures develo-

ped by this author. The material used in this case is iron, the execution is very clean, it is inventive in its development and it gives the possibility of altering the positions of the piece with respect to its base. This sculpture was installed in the year 2002.



MONUMENT TO
DOCTOR CASTRO
Paseos de la Mota



This bust represents the doctor don Francisco de Castro Pascual (1871-1949), an honorary citizen of the town. He was a student of medicine, professor of microbiology and an eminent researcher. It was revealed on April 2nd, 1951 in the centre of the Main Square where it stood for many years, until decades later it was moved to its current location at the entrance to the Gardens of la Mota.

MONUMENT TO
THE COUNT OF
BENAVENTE
Paseos de la Mota

Ricardo Flecha, a sculptor from Zamora, created this piece in commemoration of the VI Centenary of the County of Benavente. The monument

is an allegory which alludes to the history of the county, founded in 1398, through the figure of the Portuguese knight João Alfonso Pimentel and the lemma of his lineage: Better Flying. This piece was commissioned in celebration of the VI Centenary of the County (1398-1998) and was installed in its current location in the year 2002.



It represents the head of a medieval warrior with large wings which appear to wish to take flight. The wings symbolize the vulture on one of the coats of arms of the Pimentels. On its pedestal, shells and fringes allude to the heraldic emblem of this same noble family.

Its meaning proposes that

when faced with the mediocre security of earthly simplicity, it is always preferable to take flight in search of new exploits... to struggle to overcome one's earthly insignificance... to fight for a noble cause.

LOWRELIEF OF FRAY
TORIBIO OF BENA-
VENTE "MOTOLINÍA"
C/ Encomienda



This relief pays homage to the Friar Toribio of Benavente, also called "Motolinía" (the poor). He was a Franciscan missionary born in Benavente around 1491 who evangelized extensive parts of Mexico and Central America. He was also the first ethnographic

historian of Latin America because he described in great detail the life and customs of the indigenous tribes of the New Spain.

The commemorative relief is the work of a Mexican artist named Carlos H. Terrés and was donated to the city of Benavente by the residential college Colegio Mayor Hispanoamericano de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe of Madrid in 1988.

It is 3.55 metres high and 2.55 metres wide.

The use of a mix of granite and resin gives the piece a greater resistance to adverse weather conditions.

The monument which represents Fray Toribio is replete with symbolism alluding to his defence of the natives and to his missionary work. Among other symbols, there are twelve candles which represent the group of 12 Franciscans who disembarked in Mexico in 1524 as well as diverse elements of the Aztec culture like the turtle which stands for the new light that must illuminate the darkness in which the natives live or the serpent of the natives' calendar which stands for the fertility of the Aztec lands.

The left hand of the friar from Benavente holds a cross: a symbol of the evan-

gelization and salvation. From his fingers, little crosses sprout as embodiments of the numerous foundations and convents created by Fray Toribio in Mexico and Central America.

The palm of his outstretched right hand points down as a demonstration of his conciliatory and humble disposition as well as his determination in defending the natives.

A third hand appears holding a pruned tree, expressing the figure of the new spiritual life which the buds of the new teachings should offer.

MONUMENT TO
DON QUIJOTE
DE LA MANCHA
Avda. Federico Silva



It was erected in December 2005 as a contribution from the city for the IV Centenary of the publication of this work of Cervantes. It was donated by the students of an educational course and is located on one of the roundabouts at the en-

trance of the town on Avda. Federico Silva.

The work includes distinctive symbols and elements of this idiosyncratic character in universal literature, like the lance held high, the winnowing rake or the chamber pot, etc. Don Alonso Quijano himself holds in his hands perhaps one of those novels about chivalry that his personage was such a fan of, or perhaps a copy of the very same work of Cervantes which he is the hero of. The entire sculpture uses and augments the possibilities of that particular texture offered by the use of metallic materials.

ALEGORÍA DE
BENAVENTE Y LOS
VALLES O “CUCAÑAS”
Plaza del Grano

Located in the gardens of the Plaza del Grano, in front of the casa del Cervato, these sculptures become, as its author José Luis Coomonte had hoped, elements of theatre or visual guides for the citizens.

High up on one of the supports rise two metallic spheres, upon each of which an allegorical representation of



these lands is perched: one is a fish which stands for its fluvial character and the other is a stork referring to the aerial. Large glass pineapples in diverse colours hang like fruit from the metallic structure.

Its integration into the surrounding verdant garden in the heart of the city, almost as if it were just another arboreal element, does not prevent it from being a landmark or reference point for passers-by who wander through the plaza, which confers a social function on it, as well. The artwork thus loses part of its traditional “vocation as object” and is adopted by the everyday citizens and an element which participates in the urban

landscape. As such, the public has quickly appropriated them and has come to call them “Coomonte’s greasy pole” (2003).

MONUMENT TO THE TORO ENMAROMADO

*Rotonda de la
Plaza de la Soledad*

This sculpture group consists of three elements: Man, Bull and the Rope which unites them. This monument represents the age-old tradition of the Toro Enmaromado Festival and is a work of the artist Pedro Requejo Novoa.

The figures are life-size and made of cast bronze. They stand upon a pedestal which is covered with the same stones as the streets of the centre of town where the race with the bull takes place.

The lads are represented as dynamic, full of life, with expressions of tension and exchanging conspiratorial glances while they race and firmly grasp at the rope with one of them crouched lower than the others and shouting at the animal “Hey, toro!” The one at the front guides the race facing forward. The Rope is the uniting nexus of



the entire piece. The Bull, the most carefully sculpted and prominent member of the group, appears defiant, emanating vitality and dynamism.

MOSAIC OF
LA VEGUILLA
(*Plaza Mayor*)

This mosaic located in the centre of the Main Square as a type of tessellated pave-

ment allegorically reproduces the 5 rivers of the county of Benavente: Esla, Eria, Tera, Órbigo and Cea.

The heraldic emblem of the city presides over the collage: the Virgen de la Vega on a bridge, accompanied by two scallop shells which represent





one of the characteristic symbols on the coat of arms of the Pimentels, counts of Benavente. The local sculptor José Luis Alonso Coomonte authored this piece.

MONUMENT TO LA
VEGUILLA PATRON
SAINT OF BENEVENTE
(*Avda. Federico Silva*)

This work of the sculptor and religious artist Ricardo Flecha can be

found on one of the roundabouts at the entrance of the city.

This rather small monument rests upon a pedestal to better appreciate its splendour. The sculpture reproduces a small image of the Virgen de la Vega, with the Child in her lap, on a bridge flanked by two towers which represent the two fortresses which existed in Benavente (the Lord's Palace and the Council). The ensemble allegorically recreates the antique village and the intervention of the Virgin Mary in the legendary battle of Polvoraria which took place nearby during the Reconquista. It is made of bronze and is patinated in Pompeii green. The base of the image is a svelte 80 cm x 30 cm and, pedestal and all, it reaches the petite height of 140 cm. It was inaugurated in 2015.





PARKS AND GARDENS

JARDINES DE LA MOTA

The Gardens of la Mota are the most important green spaces of Benavente: they are considered the lungs of the town. The name derives from the dry moat above which the palace-castle rises. Its gardens and paths offer magnificent views of the meadows of Benavente and the Órbigo and Esla rivers.

This park, as we know it today, is the result of consecutive phases of expansion and adaptation throughout the years.

As such, different spaces receive particular appellations like the Old Moat (Pa-

seos de Soledad González), the High Moat, the Rose garden, etc.

Thus, in addition to some wide central footpaths, we also find denser green spaces where the trees form a continuous canopy overhead, thus providing much needed shade on summer afternoons.

Near the bandstand, tiny islands of vegetation are surrounded by little paths which weave in and out like a labyrinth.

The “Jardines de La Rosaleda”, or rosegarden, next to the Parador de Turismo, is a delight to the senses where gorgeous flowers and panoramic surroundings can be appreciated.



PARQUE DE LA PRADERA- PARQUE DE LA ESTACIÓN



Next to the channel called las Molineras or de Sorribas, we find the so-called Park of the Prairie.

This expansive setting cleft by canals and sprinkled with ponds is a soothing place to escape from daily life and enjoy the bucolic tranquillity of nature. At one end of the park, we find the “Merendero” or picnic area of the fountain: a picturesque parcel replete with chestnut trees.

The public swimming pools are located near this park and are open year round. There are other leisure-time activities available nearby such as the bike path, the Entrecaños Park, the botanical garden of la Isla de las Pavas and the Merendero de la Estación (a picnic area near the railway).

ARBORETO DE LA ENCOMIENDA



The Arboretum is located at the Casa de la Cultura de la Encomienda and was created by the students of the Escuela Taller de Jardinería del Ayuntamiento de Benavente in 2007. On its 570 m2 plot of land we can appreciate 44 types of the most common vegetation to be found in the Iberian Peninsula.

They are divided in three groups: conifers, deciduous trees and aromatic shrubs which comprise a peculiar garden in incomparable surroundings.

JARDÍN DEL PRADO DE LAS PAVAS

The botanical garden called Prado de las Pavas forms part of the infamous Gardens of the Counts of Benavente.

The canal of the Molineros (millers), also known as King Philip’s water hole, comple-



tely surrounds these gardens.

Recently, this unique space has undergone significant reforms to reconvert it into a four hectare educational and pedagogical paradise in which we can find the most common types of botanical species in the province of Zamora, grouped by geographical location. The paths along the island of the Pavas allow us to contemplate chestnut, walnut and oak trees from Sanabria, the holm oaks typical of the Aliste area, almond trees commonly found in Tierra del Vino, junipers and olive trees which dot the countryside of Sayago, and we must not forget the pines of Tierra del Pan or the typical vegetation found in the area of Benavente and los Valles replete with elms, black poplars and alder trees.

All of this arboreal vegetation is accompanied by a multitude of species of bushes and aromatic plants that also contribute to the rich

botanical heritage of our province.

The island accommodates an artificial lagoon as well to teach about the conservation of the traditional arts of fishing in addition to a small greenhouse to cultivate a wide variety of plants to further nourish this extensive recreational area.

MIRADOR DE LA SINAGOGA Y MIRADOR DEL RÍO

These urban vantage points, situated in the old Jewish quarter of Benavente whose hamlet overlooks the fertile meadows of the Órbigo River, provide an assortment of diverse views of the pretty, suggestively coloured countryside: the canal of the Sorribas mill, for example, and the more distant Órbigo River snaking its way through thickly planted black poplars hanging over its banks.



FESTIVALS

FIESTAS DE LA VEGUILLA (Declared of Regional Touristic Interest)

The Town Festival in honour of patron saint, the Virgen de la Vega, is celebrated around the so-called Lunes de Pascuilla: eight days after Easter Sunday. During the festivities, the traditional “Petición del Toro Enmaromado” takes place to ensure a roped bull

will take to the streets fifty-one days later. The national government has awarded these festivities with the official title “*de Interés Turístico Regional*”.

- Events and components of the festival

On Pascuilla Monday, the Procession of the Veguilla takes place in which Benavente’s patron saint is carried through the main streets of the old town by representatives of the town’s peñas, or fraternities. Early in the afternoon, the Petition for the Roped Bull takes place: an act in which a thronging crowd of citizens gather together in the main square and surrounding streets where, in unison, they all begin to chant “*toro... toro... toro...*” imploring that the authorities of the town concede to them the bull that should run through the streets in the festival week of the Corpus (51 days after the Veguilla) one more year as



has been the tradition for ages. Another custom of this festival is the presentation and distribution of the so-called “Bread of the Veguilla”.

The festivals are rounded out with diverse musical and folkloric performances as well as an attractive gathering of Giants and Cabezudos and another of informal brass bands all of which come from other cities and help enliven the festivities.

FIESTAS DEL TORO ENMAROMADO *(Declared of Regional Touristic Interest)*

In 1991, the “Toro Enmaromado” festival also received the title of “de Interés Turístico Regional”.

The festivities usually last a whole week, but the “big day” is the Wednesday before the holiday of Corpus Christi. On that day, lads and lasses run through the streets, tugging on a large rope wrapped around a brave bull’s horns. The “peñas”, the brass bands and the jambo-ree all contribute to a fabulously colourful and musical spectacle.

The race with the “roped bull” follows a set itinerary through various streets of the Benavente. On Wednesday afternoon, the horned animal initiates its spectacular race at the bullpen, preceded by the thunder of three loud bangers announcing the beginning of the event and advising the public to take to the streets and fill the balco-



nies on the racecourse. Beforehand, in the “jail cell” where the bull anxiously awaits, a long rope is tightly tied to its horns. The release of the bull from captivity is truly spectacular and one of the most exciting and engaging moments of the race. Hundreds of lads and lasses struggling with the rope then guide the bull to the slaughterhouse where the bull is sacrificed after completing the race. The “toro enmaromado” of Benavente is also prestigiously recognized as Festejo Taurino Tradicional (a national bull-fighting distinction).

There are many more activities which take place during the festival: running with the bulls quasi-Pamplona style, concerts, fireworks, parades, etc. A caravan of people goes to the ranch and accompanies the bull into town with great fanfare the day before the race and a picnic party takes place along the way.

The so-called “Toritos de Alba” (calves) are another component of the festivities that are extraordinarily popular and ensure the future continuation of this festival. Fireworks and pyrotechnics like the Toros de Fuego (Fire Bulls) spice up the nightlife.

SEMANA SANTA

Benavente’s Passion Week, like many other places in Castilla y León is characterized by its sobriety and is deeply rooted in the historical memory of its people. The three most antique *cofradías* (brotherhoods) that process through the streets are the Vera Cruz, Jesús Nazareno and the Santo Entierro. In 1943, the brotherhood of Silencio was created and in 1999, other sections were incorporated into the existing processions including the Damas de Luz y Soledad and later a group of children to accompany the Christ imagery on Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday. Currently, Benavente adores their traditionally processional parades, which are a demonstration and reincarnation of diverse moments in the histories of the locality and its Passion Week, but are also the personification of its virtues and peculiarities like the humane community which defines its personality. The celebrations of Passion Week could be defined as a nexus of the rural and the urban, the traditional and the modern, but in any case quite dignified and in constant evolution, as

is appropriate for a city on a celebrated crossroads as Benavente has always been.

- Imagery and Statuary

The sculptures and imagery represent the different historical eras and aesthetic tastes that have shaped the town through the ages. Some remnants of the medieval times can be observed (Ecce Homo), or more rural tastes (Cristo de los Afligidos), along with others boasting Baroque effects (Paso de la Desnudez o Rodopelo, popularly known as “The Jew of the nail”). The turn of the century is also present in these processional statues in the form of richly adorned figures with Andalusian canopies, which was a very popular trend at the end of the 19th century among the bourgeoisie who were the

promoters and sponsors of the religious millennialism of that time (Nuestra Señora de las Angustias, La Soledad, etc.). Even so, the greatest contributions to Benavente’s Passion Week statuary were completed in the 1920’s, when the processional phenomenon was authentically renewed and numerous images and sculptures came to further enrich the iconographic repertoire. In this sense, several works of the acclaimed artist from Valencia, Pío Mollar, like El Yacente, La Oración del Huerto and Nuestra Señora de los Dolores, turned out to be decisive contributions to the Easter imagery of the town. The most striking characteristic of these works is their brightness and vivid colouring typical of the east coast of Spain.

Finally, the 1950’s, several





contributions were made by the school of El Arte Cristiano in Olot. Despite coming from a workshop instead of a celebrated artist, they proved to be very meaningful and augmented Benavente's Easter-related patrimony: The Crucifixión (also called the Fourth Word), La Verónica, Jesus on the donkey, etc.

One peculiar contribution

with a lot of personality is El Flagelado, or the Scourging at the Pillar, made by the local sculptor José Alonso Coomonte. Other more recent works include the sculpture group by Ricardo Flecha called San Juan y la Virgen Camino del Sepulcro.

FAIRS

THURSDAY'S MARKET

People come from all over the county to gawk at the lively mercantile activity. Two types of open-air markets take place: vegetables and legumes near the Main Square and Plaza del Grano and another of clothing and shoes in Cañada de la Vizana.

MEDIEVAL MARKET

Harkening back to the 12th century, the enviable strategic position of “the Ville” converted it into a territorial reference point and the commercial nucleus of the county.

During this medieval time period, several markets took place on a regular basis to sell and exchange all kinds of products, animals and livestock which converted it into the

most important meeting place for townspeople and villagers.

The Medieval Market, currently held the last week of July, attempts to recover this commercial tradition and to become a popular festival of social gatherings and harmonious coexistence for locals and visitors alike. It consists of a multitude of stands spread out over the Plaza Mayor and the calle de la Encomienda, with the church of San Juan serving as an incomparable nostalgic backdrop fitting for the occasion.

For the most part, the participants sell produce and other foods or artisan products of diverse trades. Additionally, all around the market, many different kinds of street performances and shows take place.

The Plaza Mayor and nearby streets are spruced up for the occasion. Several stores with their usual medieval style offer

a varied selection of products typical of the dark ages: healing herbs, various forms of jewellery, antique arms and even clothing, et alia. The shopkeepers themselves dress up and appear to have stepped right out of the times of chivalrous knights and pretty damsels.

Numerous musicians interpret medieval pieces, accompanied by jugglers, comics, story-tellers, marionettes, acrobats... as well as falconry exhibitions and dance and fire performances.

BOOK FAIR

The book fair takes place the first weekend in August. Local and non-native bookshops exhibit a sample of their usual stock as well as the latest best-sellers. Other events are also organized for the occasion, such as exhibits regarding the world of literature and reading, informal chats and lite-



rary cafes, book signing by renowned authors, poetry recitals, story-telling for children, collective readings, raffles for sets of books, presentations of the up and coming, conferences, concerts of literary music, etc.

SEPTEMBERFEST



This fair, which takes place the first weekend in September, is culturally and commercially oriented as well as a festive occasion.

A livestock, agricultural machinery and produce of the land fair takes place and is called FEMAG.

The FEMAG is a showroom where we exhibit the present and the future of our

region and, consequently, our city. The fair puts on display our livestock and agriculture, the regional food products (wines, cheeses, cured meats and delicious sweets), our work-tools and, of course, all this work is combined with a bit of pleasure.

The ceramics fair in the Main Square has nothing to envy of the former. All this business is complemented with diverse cultural and athletic events, artisan workshops and exhibitions as well as theatrical and musical performances.

PEPPER FAIR

The Pepper and Local Food Products Fair, which is usually celebrated in Benavente the last week of September, is a veritable shop window which publicizes local products renowned for their excellent quality. The peppers from the Valleys of Benavente, the central figure of this competition, day by day are more highly regarded due to their exceptional qualities.

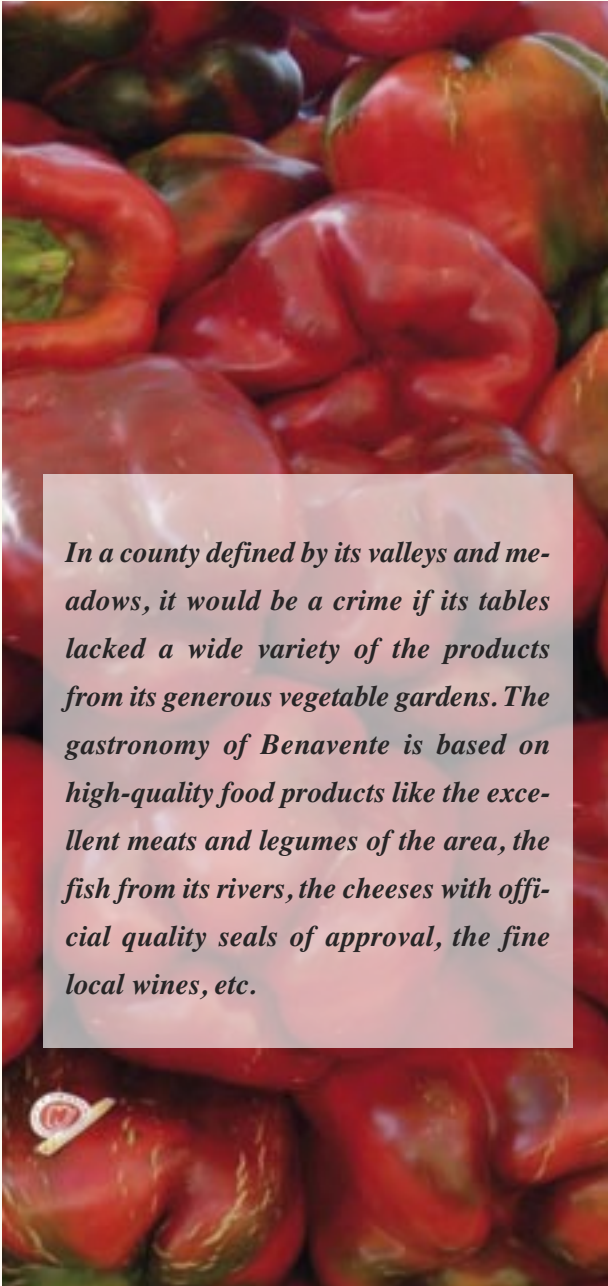
While the peppers take centre stage, the other products which accompany them are also characterized by their

fine qualities. Together, these different types of produce are the flagships of indispensable raw materials that give a distinctive flavour to our regional cuisine. Other interesting activities take place concomitantly with the Pepper Fair, such as the culinary workshops celebrated in the Parador de Turismo de Benavente or the cooking classes with the local pepper as the star ingredient.

TAPA FAIR

The Tapa Fair which takes place in October lasts approximately 10 days. The bars and restaurants in town compete to create new and different tasty morsels and the customers vote for the ones that they like the most. There are several categories of prizes not only for the creative and successful establishments but also for the people who participate in the contest.





In a county defined by its valleys and meadows, it would be a crime if its tables lacked a wide variety of the products from its generous vegetable gardens. The gastronomy of Benavente is based on high-quality food products like the excellent meats and legumes of the area, the fish from its rivers, the cheeses with official quality seals of approval, the fine local wines, etc.

CUISINE

PRODUCE

In a county with an abundance of water and fertile lands more than apt for the cultivation of produce, the great variety and quality of fruits and vegetables produced in the surrounding valleys are without a doubt worthy of high mention. The flagship product of Benavente's cuisine is the pepper which can be roasted, fried, fresh or canned.

CHEESES, HONEY AND LIQUEURS

The agricultural products which enjoy fame and fortune include the cheeses, the honey and the liqueurs.

The quality control organism which evaluates the cheeses from this area is the Denominación de Origen of the province: "Queso Zamorano". Many different types of cheeses are produced, each one with distinctive features which



make every cheese unique with its own characteristic flavour and texture.

As far as honey is concerned, there are several major producers in the area, just as other companies are dedicated to the fabrication, production and bottling of mainly homemade liqueurs with a wide range of flavours and aromas.

FRESH AND CURED MEATS

The remarkably high-quality local meats, both beef and goat meat, need no additives in their preparation.

Typical dishes which we must not fail to mention include meats cooked in wood-burning stones like roast suckling or roast lamb.



The tables in Benavente never fail to include some derivate of pork in any way, shape or form; be it sausages, tenderloins, chitterlings or cured versions.

In the county you can find several companies dedicated to the production of cured meats and charcuterie in general.

FISH

The fluid distribution chain connecting Benavente to the seaports in the northwest of Spain provides the town with excellent fresh fish.

Through the influence of and proximity to the Sanabria and Carballeda regions, a celebrated dish dressed with paprika, garlic and olive oil that is popular in their numerous religious festivals also became common in The Valleys: “pulpo (octopus) a la Sanabresa”.

Bacalao (sea bass) is another popular imported food product cooked a la tranca (with roasted peppers) or al ajo arriero (with garlic and paprika). There is a local variety known as “Bacalao a la Marcela” (which was popularized long ago in a restaurant of the same name).

In a fluvial county like Benavente which has five rivers and countless streams and canals, fresh river seafood is always available to put on a plate: from trout of the Tera to crayfish to frogs’ legs and more.

LEGUMES

The fineness which characterizes the legumes of the area makes cooking them much faster. A wide variety of legumes are sold at the traditional market on Thursdays.

SWEETS

In Benavente and some localities near Tierra de Campos, the typical sweet is called “feos” (uglies) which are made of almonds, sugar and egg. “Bollos de Coscarón” and “Rosquillas de ramo” are traditional sweets made all over the county in ovens and bakeries of the Valleys.



The convents in Benavente are well-known for their delicious baked goods (San Bernardo and Santa Clara, in particular). Among their specialties, the “rosquillas de angel” and the “tarta del Cister” merit special note. Some of the traditional homemade desserts which used to be very popular and commonplace are still made occasionally, such as the “empanadillas de crema”, coconut “coquitos” or “besitos”, “las flores y orejas de carnaval”, “las cañas de crema”, etc.

As for pastries, each Baker makes their own, however, the “bombas” of Benavente have acquired certain fame. More recently, some innovative specialty products like the “Tarta de la Veguilla” which is made to commemorate the local festival of the same name, have become very popular.

WINES

The tradition of wine-making in the area can clearly be seen by the

multitude of private wine cellars in every municipality of the county, some of which are open to the public as is the case of one in Pobladura del Valle. The winemakers themselves painstakingly dug them out of the earth and, every year, each one dedicates part of their harvest to making their own wines for friends, family and, of course, themselves.



A quality control organism has been constituted to ensure a more uniform quality and taste called D.O.P. Vino de Calidad de los Valles de Benavente.

MUSEUMS AND INTERPRETATION CENTRES

THE INTERPRETATION CENTRE OF THE RIVERS

*(Parque de Entrecaños-
Parque de las Pavas)*

*(To visit the building, you must
first consult the Tourists Office)*



The Interpretation Centre of the Rivers was inaugurated in February, 2010. It serves the purpose of revealing the significance of the rivers in all aspects.

The newly constructed building consists of five spaces dedicated to museum or interpretive exhibits and two more for promoting the site. The first five rooms mentioned are dedicated to water, earth, flora, fauna, and man and the river. Each one of them ex-

pounds on its themes with panels and models, some of which are strikingly suggestive like one on fluvial modelling, another on different units of vegetation, yet another on the traditional uses of the river... In the room dedicated to the most common fauna of the area, we find everything from nearly extinct species, like the Náyade or river mussel, to the otter, crayfish, kingfisher or even the ribbed newt.

The Centre also has an audiovisual room in which one can contemplate a presentation video on the facilities and an investigation centre which strives to become a point of reference for the research of rivers and their banks.

**PASSION WEEK
MUSEUM**
(Plaza de la Ermita)

(To visit the building, you must first consult the Tourists Office)

In the Ermita de la Soledad we can find the Passion Week Museum of Benavente. This 16th century building was the headquarters of the brotherhoods Santo Entierro and Santa Vera Cruz until it was turned into a museum.



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1. Church of Santa María del Azogue
2. Church of San Juan del Mercado
3. Hospital of the Piedad
4. Torre del Caracol (Spiral Tower)
5. Arch of the "Puente del Jardín"
6. Soledad González Cultural Centre
7. Reina Sofía Theatre
8. Cervato House
9. Donci House (Casa de los Ramos)
10. Plaza Mayor Architectural Ensemble
11. Palace of the Condes de la Patilla
12. Barrios House
13. Interpretation Centre of the Rivers
14. Ermita de la Soledad. Holy Week Museum
15. Town Hall
16. Local Police
17. Civil Guard
18. Bus Station
19. Health Care Centres
20. Regional Hospital
21. Public Swimming Pools
22. Youth Information Centre
23. Post Office
24. Pilgrims' Hostel





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