



## Excursion to Setenil - a town nestling into the rock

Setenil grew out of a network of caves in the cliffs above a river north-west of Ronda. Its blinding white houses seem to emerge from the rocks, and some have rock roofs and even olive groves on their roofs.

If you start from the Marbella-Estepona area you will pass Ronda (58 km) on the way to Setenil. It is convenient to stop in Ronda and enjoy what it can give you, i.e. the Bullring and the Bridge with its views. See separate article on our website. Spend at least two three hours in Ronda. There is another 20 kilometres to Setenil in total 1,5 hour's drive.

Setenil is an old settlement. Given the evidence of other nearby cave-dwelling societies, such as those at the Cueva de la Pileta west of Ronda, where habitation has been tracked back more than 25,000 years, it is possible that Setenil was occupied much much earlier. Most evidence of this would have been erased by continuous habitation. Tradition holds that the town's Castilian name came from the Roman Latin phrase *septem nihil* ('seven times nothing')

Setenil is one of the prettiest and at the same time most unusual white villages in Andalucia. It is situated in a deep valley carved out by the river. Centuries ago its habitants decided to ally themselves with the massive rocks which stood alongside the rivers and streams that flow through the village. Setenil has grown up around the Trejo and Guadalporcun rivers, has for centuries hosted a spectacular architecture in and outside the rock of limestone, above and below the huge slabs and stone.



There are numerous cave houses in the lower part of the

village. These were built in the gaps which already existed in the limestone rock and no excavation was needed. From the Mirador in the upper part of the village you can see not only the spectacular architecture but also some of the villages most significant buildings. Drive down to the village and follow the route down through the steep and twisting streets to the bottom of Setenil, but park the car on the top and walk down. First you pass below overhanging rocks, then between rock walls before finally arriving at the area where the rock becomes a roof. A little bit scaring. On the way down there are several tapas bars, i.e. bar la Escueva, where you can sit down and enjoy the views and the daily life in the village. Other bars worth to visit are La Tasca and Bar Fraquito.



The Guadalporcun river flows through the heart of the village and divide it in two different parts. One part is called "Cuevas del Sol" and is the sunny side. The other part is "Cuevas de la Sombra", this part has shade most of the day and the streets are almost like tunnels.



On top of Setenil is the ancient Almohad fortress. The castle took advantage of the huge rock. Some parts of the old fortress still remain i e the Homage Tower which can be seen from almost everywhere in the village. From there the moors had an excellent view over the rugged countryside which surrounds Setenil. Below the tower is still an old water deposit. Beside these remains are some of the old walls. Inside the ancient fortress stands the main religious building, the church La Encarnacion. It is like many others built on the site of a former mosque from the Moorish time, and built shortly after that the village was re-

taken by the Catholic army in 1484. As it took several centuries to build the church and as a result it has several different architectural features including late Gothic, Mudejar and some has pre-renaissance style. Inside the works ended 1614.

The most important civil building is the Townhall from the early 16th century. Here you also can find the Tourist office. The full name of the village is Setenil de las Bodegas. The Christians took over the Moors almond and olive cultivations and introduced the wine in the area. Most of the numerous winehouses that made the village famous, disappeared in the late 19th century when the wine plants where devastated by the Phyllox bug, as it was in the rest of Spain and France. You will find several bodegas closer to Ronda.

Try the local wine from Finca Las Mesetas and a slice of local cheese from the milk of the Payoya breed of goat. Over the intervening centuries, Setenil also gained a reputation for its meat products, particularly chorizo, sausage, and cerdo, pork, from pigs bred in the surrounding hills. As well as meat, it is has a reputation for producing fine pasteles, pastries, and its bars and restaurants are among the best in the region. Its outlying farms also provide Ronda and other local towns with much of their fruit and veg.



On the way back, after Ronda, there are some Miradores to stop at and enjoy the views all the way down to the Med. Take your time on the way back as the road is very curvy.

