

Valdegovia – My Impressions

I came to Valdegovia for a sabbatical of 9 weeks and was given the job of taking photographs of the local Casas Rurales, restaurants, bars and other business' for this website. My wife and I have visited many parts of Spain and thought we knew it well and yet Valdegovia was a complete surprise to us.

Immediately after leaving the motorway we could see how unspoilt, beautiful and peaceful the area looked. One of the first surprises was the salt pans of Salinas de Ananas right there at the side of the road. The sight of this large and rather strange looking place was a thrilling shock, somehow promising much to come. As we drove deeper into the valley it became even more beautiful, with the towering mass of the mountain of Carrias a focal point in the distance. The presence of "our mountain" and its ever changing moods was a daily focal point.

The first thing that struck us was just how friendly everyone was. Everyone we asked for directions or where we could get a coffee and something to eat could not have been more helpful or kind. This included our neighbours, Roberto and Irduna, who along with their two dogs, Harro and Biscotcha, gave us a very warm welcome to Valdegovia. With such fantastic surroundings and friendly people we instantly felt comfortable and knew we would be happy here.

Everyone was keen to tell us that on Sunday there was going to be a Potato Festival in a neighbouring village. Knowing just how much the Spanish love to celebrate anything that moves, however slowly, this was a must. We were not disappointed as it turned out to be a rowdy fusion of farmers market, selling local meats, cheeses, honey, bread and pastries and agricultural show. This included log chopping and other feats of strength such as carrying a ridiculously large concrete ball round the show tent, brass band and a delicious free meal from a large steaming cauldron of potato and mushroom stew and glass of "vino". Along with the bright sunny weather, this was the perfect introduction to Valdegovia.

What we also loved was the walking and wildlife that abounds. All the walks that we took were fantastic, often with stunning views, but our favourite walks were in the Natural Park of Valderejo. The walk along the River Puron is so varied, taking you through forests, heath, open pasture and canyons. We loved it, especially the ruined village of Ribero, with its church with original frescos (one of the few you can actually get into!) and the climb to the top of Santana, which our 25 year old son was so excited about discovering, he came all the way back down so that we could go back up and share it with him.

The symbol of the Natural Park is the Griffon Vulture and we saw them every day, along with Roe Deer, that the large and flashing road signs warn you about. We had heard that wild boar, or using the wonderfully Arabic name, Jabali, are also common, but as we slept so well everyday in our perfectly quiet house, we could never rouse ourselves early enough in the morning to see them. The spring flowers and butterflies were also very beautiful.

We were also struck just how quiet the roads were (two tractors an hour was something akin to rush hour) and how suitable they would be for cycling, something we have done a lot of in Spain. Smooth and relatively flat, they did offer some fantastic cycling.

We were puzzled though! Why was this area so unvisited? Why were there not more tourists about when it was clearly so beautiful? Was it because there did not appear to be anywhere to stay or places to eat and drink? However, as my work unfolded, that impression was to change. Many of the villages have their own Casas Rurales or Agroturismo, often with a bar or restaurant attached. Each of them has their own style, some contemporary, others more traditional and others that can be rented as a whole for families or groups of friends. There are also lots of good restaurants and friendly bars as well as plenty of places of interest to visit. So much so, it would be easy to spend a long weekend or even up to two weeks holiday to get to know Valedegovia.

Our overriding impression of Valdegovia will always be its outstanding natural beauty, its lovely soft sandstone villages but most of all, the welcoming and friendly people.

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