

BABIA · LACIANA · SOMIEDO · OMAÑA

Four biosphere reserves, one same air.

The Aire de Babia travel guide

PIEDRAFITA DE BABIA · LEÓN

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AIRE DE BABIA · WELCOME

A century-old manor, three houses and plenty of air.

In Piedrafita de Babia, at the foot of mountains that brush the clouds, a century-old stone manor has been restored with respect for its original architecture. Today it holds three independent houses: Casa Oso and Casa Urogallo, for up to eight guests each, and Casa Cigüeña, for four.

They share a wide stone courtyard, a spring-water fountain and views of the Sierra de Gistredo. And they are the starting point of this guide: four biosphere reserves begin right at the door.



The gallery at Casa Oso

SCAN AND BOOK

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Book direct: 5% off

Three independent houses, one shared courtyard.

Each house has its own entrance, its own equipped kitchen and its own character. All include wifi, heating, bed linen and towels.



UP TO 8 GUESTS

Casa Oso

The largest: three double bedrooms, two shower rooms and two extra beds. Made for families and groups of friends.



UP TO 8 GUESTS

Casa Urogallo

Coloured glass windows open to the slate roofs and meadows, and a bathroom with hydromassage and bathtub.



UP TO 4 GUESTS

Casa Cigüeña

The cosiest, with a terracotta-floored living room and its own kitchen. For couples or small families.

Coming as a big group? All three houses can be booked together for up to 20 people.



THE MANOR · 1917

Over a century looking out on the valley.

The Aire de Babia manor was built in stone in 1917, around a large flagstone courtyard and a spring-water fountain. Over a century later it keeps its walls, its glazed galleries and its coloured glass windows.

Family tradition attributes the design to Amós Salvador Carreras, architect and politician, married to Josefina Álvarez Carballo, from a Laciana family. He designed some thirty rural schools in El Bierzo and Laciana, with simple lines and large windows.



Amós Salvador Carreras (Logroño, 1879 – Madrid, 1963)

THE ARCHITECT

Perfumería Gal factory, Madrid

Some 30 rural schools

Minister of the Interior in 1936

ANOTHER STORY OF THE HOUSE · ÁLVAREZ GÓMEZ

This house also gave rise to one of Spain's best-known colognes. In 1899, three first cousins from Babia and Laciana, Herminio Álvarez Gómez, Emilio Vuelta Gómez and Belarmino Gómez, left for Madrid to start a perfumery; in 1905 they opened it on Calle Sevilla, by the Puerta del Sol. Their Agua de Colonia Concentrada is still sold today.

Four landscapes on the doorstep.

From Piedrafita de Babia, four very different landscapes are a short drive away, on both sides of the Cantabrian Mountains. This guide visits them one by one.



Babia

High valleys, mountain lakes and the shadow of Peña Ubiña.



Laciana

Summer pastures, capercaillie forests and the memory of coal.



Somiedo

High lakes, thatched teito huts and brown bear country.



Omaña

Photo: Torpe

Clear rivers, oak woods and unhurried stone villages.



BABIA · BIOSPHERE RESERVE

Land of kings, shepherds and clear skies.

Babia is a high valley, above a thousand metres, closed to the north by the peaks of the Cantabrian Mountains. The highest, Peña Ubiña, reaches 2,417 metres. UNESCO declared it a Biosphere Reserve in 2004.

For centuries its pastures fed the flocks that came up from Extremadura every summer. And legend says the kings of León came here to rest, far from the court: hence the Spanish saying «estar en Babia», to be miles away.



La Cueta, at the head of the river Sil

AT A GLANCE

Biosphere Reserve since 2004

38,107 protected hectares

Peña Ubiña: 2,417 m



BABIA · HIGH MOUNTAINS

Lakes and peaks above two thousand metres.

To the north, the Cantabrian Mountains raise a limestone wall with peaks over 2,000 metres. Peña Ubiña, at 2,417, is the landmark; to the south, the Alto de La Cañada reaches 2,154.

Between them hide glacial lakes, such as Las Verdes, and meadows with plants found nowhere else, such as Saxifraga babiana. In May the snowfields linger; by July, everything is green.



Peña Ubiña

AT A GLANCE

Peña Ubiña: 2,417 m

Alto de La Cañada: 2,154 m

Las Verdes glacial lake



BABIA · VILLAGES

Manor houses, palaces and stone villages.

Babia is shared between two municipalities, Cabrillanes and San Emiliano, with small stone-and-slate villages on the valley floor. Piedrafita, home of Aire de Babia, belongs to the first.

Riolago keeps the 16th-century Palacio de los Quiñones, and there are stately manor houses in Villasecino and Lago de Babia. Higher up, La Cueta guards the source of the river Sil.

And at night, the sky: with very little light pollution, the Milky Way is visible to the naked eye.



Babia's meadows in spring

DON'T MISS

Palacio de los Quiñones, Riolago

Manor houses of Villasecino and Lago de Babia

La Cueta and the source of the Sil



LACIANA · BIOSPHERE RESERVE

The valley of summer pastures and capercaillie.

The municipality of Villablino, with its fourteen villages, forms the Laciana Valley, a Biosphere Reserve since 2003. Its forests are home to the brown bear and the Cantabrian capercaillie, two of the most endangered species in the range.

Above the villages lie the brañas: meadows between 1,200 and 1,600 metres where livestock spent the summer, with huts for the herders. And everywhere, the mark of coal, which shaped the valley's 20th century.



A Cantabrian capercaillie, emblem of the valley

AT A GLANCE

Biosphere Reserve since 2003

22,846 protected hectares



LACIANA · HERITAGE

Granaries, hillforts and a language of its own.

Laciana still speaks, ever less, patsuezu, a variety of Astur-Leonese that lives on in the names of its villages, mountains and pastures. That is why the valley is also written Tsaciana.

Its heritage is discreet and ancient: hórreo granaries, pre-Roman hillforts, the church of San Julián in Robles, the anthropomorphic tombs of Sosas and the sanctuary of Carrasconte, on the border with Babia.



The Lumajo waterfall in late winter

DON'T MISS

San Julián, Robles de Laciana

Anthropomorphic tombs of Sosas

Sanctuary of Carrasconte

LACIANA · MINING MEMORY

The valley that lived on coal.

Beneath these mountains lies one of Spain's most important coalfields. Mined from the early 20th century, for decades it gave work to the whole valley; the Ponferrada–Villablino railway carried the coal down to El Bierzo.

Restructuring closed the mines and took hundreds of jobs with it. The traces remain in the landscape: open-cast faces where layers of rock and coal read like the pages of a book.



Viewpoint over a former open-cast mine

AT A GLANCE

Mining since the early 20th century

Ponferrada–Villablino railway



LACIANA · WINTER

Leitariegos: snow twenty minutes away.

On the pass between Laciana and Asturias lies the Leitariegos ski resort, about twenty minutes from Aire de Babia. It has alpine ski runs and room for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing.

Winter transforms the whole valley: rivers run between white banks and the villages smell of woodsmoke. At the house, the heating is on and a ski room awaits.



The river in the February snow

AT A GLANCE

About 20 minutes by car

Alpine, cross-country and snowshoes

Ski storage at the house



SOMIEDO · NATURAL PARK

The Saliencia lakes, just over the pass.

The Alto de la Farrapona, at 1,708 metres, marks the divide between Babia and Somiedo. From there a circular route links four mountain lakes: La Cueva, Almagrera, Cerveriz and Calabazosa.

Calabazosa, also called Lago Negro, is the largest and deepest, up to 60 metres. In spring, snow still traces the slopes and the water changes colour with every cloud.



The Alto de la Farrapona viewpoint

THE ROUTE

Loop, 7.6 km

3 to 5 hours

Moderate difficulty



SOMIEDO · LA FARRAPONA

A balcony between Asturias and León.

The Alto de la Farrapona is the gateway to the Saliencia lakes and one of the great viewpoints of the range. At 1,708 metres, a circular steel walkway looks out over the Asturian valley, facing the limestone peaks.

The first lake, La Cueva, is a short walk away. From Torrestío, on the Babia side, you can also hike up to the pass.



La Cueva lake, the first on the route

AT A GLANCE

Altitude: 1,708 m

Border between Somiedo and Babia

Start of the lakes route



SOMIEDO · PASTURES AND TEITOS

Huts with broom-thatched roofs.

Teitos are stone huts roofed with broom, once shelters for the vaqueiros de alzada, Asturias's transhumant herders, and for mountain farmers. More than five hundred survive in the park, scattered across the pastures.

From the village of Valle de Lago, a wide track climbs the valley to the Lago del Valle, the largest lake in Asturias. Along the way come the first teitos and the Gabitón pasture.



Dusk in the valleys of Somiedo

LAGO DEL VALLE ROUTE

Loop, 14.6 km

Over 5 hours

Moderate difficulty



SOMIEDO · WILDLIFE

Brown bear country.

The brown bear is the most illustrious resident of Somiedo, Asturias's first natural park and a Biosphere Reserve since 2000. Seeing one is neither easy nor guaranteed, but at dawn and dusk, with binoculars and patience, one sometimes appears on a distant slope.

The rule is simple: always watch from afar, stay on the paths and never approach. The park has interpretive trails devoted to the bear, to understand its territory without disturbing it.

WILDLIFE WATCHING

- Binoculars or a spotting scope
- First and last light of day
- Always at a distance, in silence
- Stay on the paths

Somiedo: 283 km² across five valleys



OMAÑA AND LUNA · BIOSPHERE RESERVE

The quiet valley.

South of Babia, the Omaña and Luna Valleys form a biosphere reserve of over 81,000 hectares, declared in 2005, home to just over three thousand people. It is a land of Pyrenean oak woods, birch groves and trout rivers.

Murias de Paredes and Riello are its two main towns. From them, narrow roads lead to stone-and-slate villages where you may not meet a soul.



The Omaña river

AT A GLANCE

Biosphere Reserve since 2005

81,162 hectares, six municipalities



OMAÑA · VALLE GORDO

Fasgar: Roman mines and clear water.

The Valle Gordo holds the traces of Roman mining, which can be explored today on waymarked routes. At the head of the valley, Fasgar keeps a Roman bridge and a river that tumbles down in pools and small falls.

There is another Roman bridge in Murias de Paredes. And across the reserve lie eight sites of geological interest, among them the Murias glacial complex and the glacial valley of the Boeza.

DON'T MISS

- Roman bridge of Fasgar
- Roman mining routes
- Roman bridge of Murias de Paredes
- Glacial valley of the Boeza

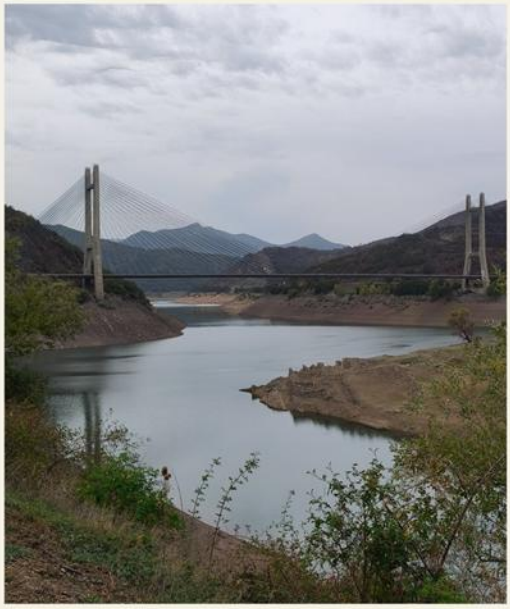


OMAÑA AND LUNA · THE RESERVOIR

Luna: water, junipers and fossils.

The Luna valley opens into a large reservoir, one of the few in the province open to boats. On its slopes grows the Mirantes de Luna juniper wood, a relic of the Tertiary, and Los Barrios de Luna has a trilobite fossil site.

It is also the natural route to Babia from León: the road skirts the water, in sight of the motorway's great cable-stayed bridge, and climbs the valley to Piedrafita.



Puente de las Palomas

DON'T MISS

Mirantes de Luna juniper wood

Trilobites of Los Barrios de Luna

Caldas de Luna

WILDLIFE AND LIVESTOCK

Bears, capercaillies and mastiffs.

The four reserves share their neighbours: brown bear, wolf, Cantabrian capercaillie, golden eagle, grey partridge and the broom hare, found only in the Cantabrian Mountains. In the rivers, otters and trout.

And alongside the wild animals, the domestic ones: cows and mares on the high pastures, flocks of sheep and, guarding them, the Leonese mastiff, huge and calm, almost a symbol here.



Horses in the meadows, autumn on the hillside



A cow on the autumn pastures. Above, a Leonese mastiff rests in Villablino



FOOD

Mountain cooking, unhurried.

Here you eat what the land gives and the cold demands: botillo with cabbage and potatoes, cecina, cured sausages, lamb stew and river trout. For dessert, frisuelos, the local crêpes.

Over the pass, Asturian cooking rules, with fabada and pote. And the houses have equipped kitchens and a shared barbecue for those who prefer to cook what they buy in the village.

TO TRY

- Botillo
- Cecina de León
- Lamb caldereta
- Frisuelos

Ask us: we'll tell you where to buy local produce and where to book a table.



RAINY-DAY PLANS

When it rains, explore the valley indoors.

Rain is part of the mountains too. For those days, three indoor visits close to the house that help you understand what you will later see outside.



RIOLAGO DE BABIA

Palacio de los Quiñones

A fortified 16th-century palace with a 15th-century curtain wall, a gateway bearing coats of arms, a tower and a chapel. Today it houses the Babia and Luna Park House: a model of the park, a film and guided visits.

PARK HOUSE

+34 987 687 554



CABOALLES DE ARRIBA

Capercaillie Centre

The park house of the Laciana Valley. A film follows the valley through the seasons and, with a guide, you can visit the aviary of the Cantabrian capercaillie, the most threatened bird in these forests.

BOOKING ESSENTIAL

+34 987 490 107



ROBLES DE LACIANA

Geology Classroom

In the village's old school: minerals from around the world, rocks and Carboniferous plant fossils from the Villablino basin, remains of the forests that turned into coal.

ASK ABOUT VISITS

+34 690 288 620

Opening hours change with the seasons: call before you go.

WHEN TO COME

Babia changes with every season.

No season is better than another: there are four different ways to see the same landscape.



Spring

Green meadows, wildflowers and the last snowfields on the peaks.



Summer

Long days and mild temperatures for walking without the heat.



Autumn

Ochres and golds, mushrooms in the woods and the deer rut in September.



Winter

Snow in the valley and skiing at Leitariegos, twenty minutes away.



PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Getting here and booking.

Aire de Babia is at Calle El Carmen 9, Piedrafita de Babia (Cabrillanes, León). From León it is about 80 kilometres along the CL-626, towards Villablino.

Minimum stay is two nights. Check-in from 5 pm, check-out by noon. The price includes bed linen and towels, wifi, heating and all utilities. Pets are welcome.

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