

Roaming Roman Spain

Roaming Roman Spain- 48 hours in Spain; a cultural and historical feast in Castille and Lyon, 1-2 hours North of Madrid.

Keith is a massive history fan, and his passion for Roman history has already taken us to many spectacular sites across the UK and Europe- including walking the Peddars Way close to home in Norfolk, a Long Distance path that was once a Roman Road; visiting many a Roman Villa- our favourite probably being Bignor Roman Cilla in Sussex. We've seen Roman sites in Tunisia - Keith's been to

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Rome and is vowing to take me so I can visit, and we've marvelled at exhibition's showcasing some of the most important and historical Roman artefacts. For Christmas this year, in a long standing tradition of me buying K presents that I can benefit from too (wink), even if I say so myself.... I excelled! A mini break to Spain was dreamt up following an article that I had read in Wanderlust last summer, with cheap flights to Madrid snatched up in the Black Friday Ryanair sale for just £60 for the both of us along with luggage, I couldn't believe my luck....Until the very next day when Omicron was announced and all travel was suddenly impacted by Mandatory PCR tests on our return to UK- something that just wasn't feasible for us mid term as we'd loose much more income between us

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than the flights cost in the first place. So the break was shelved and the flights were officially written off- I even deleted the Ryanair app in absolute heartbreak!

Fast forward two months and 10 days before our intended departure. I broke my big toe and ended up on crutches. I then got a chest infection and Keith got a sinus infection. The Ryanair app remained deleted and the trip was still deemed impossible despite PCR test no longer being necessary. Two days before our intended departure and things were beginning to look up. We were both feeling brighter- I was now crutchless again and although my toe was sore, I was managing. A chance remark about “those flights” being this weekend developed into a “sod it, lets

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just go” the afternoon before our flights were due to depart.

This is how we came to find ourselves hurtling down the A11 late on Thursday night towards Stansted!

Our adventure began with a night at the Premier Inn at Stansted – a convenient place for us to aim for after a full day of work which has reasonably priced parking (non reservable and no height barrier) for the duration of your trip and shuttle to the airport >10 mins for just £4 pp.

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Our Ryanair flight ran to schedule, rare but true!, and by Friday lunchtime 1200 we were collecting our 1x 10g check in bag (additional £10 each way) off the carousel and picking up our weekend wheels, a dinky little toyota, costing us just £30 for 48 hours!

By 3 pm we'd completed a surreal 2 hour

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journey north and across some spectacularly high mountain passes, arriving in Salamanca and immediately finding parking at the Plaza Mayor underground parking. 5 mins walk from here we entered the spectacular Plaza Mayor – considered one of Spain’s most beautiful town plazas.



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The old town of Salamanca is registered as a UNESCO World Heritage site- with its absolutely stunning display of architecture, historical buildings and fabulous facades its really not hard to see why. There are two cathedrals and Europe's oldest university to marvel at. The reason why I had brought Keith here, as well as its UNESCO status, was its 2000 year old exceptionally well preserved Roman Bridge.

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The whole thing was a surprise for Keith- easier to keep secret when you think you're not actually going to go! To say he was blown away by the bridge is an understatement. It really is stunning and so well preserved. What really blew us away was the fact that up until the 1970s this bridge was used for traffic- including lorries! Just incredible. A

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walk across the bridge away from town presented us with great city views looking back towards the old town.



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Naturally after our journey here, and the excitement of actually ***being here***, we felt in need of some refreshments! We found so many local bars, perfect for sitting and enjoying a crisp Spanish lager and watching the world go by. Being in Spain meant that we got tapas with every drink so we decided to embrace this and enjoyed an evening drink-

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ing in the local wine bars and bars, sampling the local wine or beer and enjoying chorizo, jambon, spanish omlette, seafood croquettes. This list went on! Amazingly, and really unsurprisingly, the drinks here were SO cheap. I'm talking 5 Euros for two drink and two bits of tapas. It blew our mind!



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Our hotel,

<https://www.sercotelhotels.co.uk/hotel-las-torres/> couldn't have been any better located. It sat proudly on the Playa Mayor and our room opened out (with small balcony) onto the square itself. It was truly magical!



Saturday soon arrived after a deep and

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peaceful sleep – we had set our alarms as we had lots of exploring to do – indulged in a hearty continental breakfast buffet to set us up, and hit the road by 9am. Our first stop of the day was in the opposite direction of where we were actually heading, but we had seen it and it quite frankly looked like a hidden gem, so we decided to go for it and head East to La Aberca which is situated in the beautiful mountain area of the ‘Sierras de Bejar y Francia’ (Sierra de Francia) which is a UNESCO listed Biosphere reserve. The small village was the first in Spain to receive National Historic Monument Status. Many of the buildings are half timbered, and the streets are tiny and disorganised. Some of the houses are actually built into the stone boulders and the small square is just delightful. There

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is practically NO english spoken here we couldn't have felt further away from England and we absolutely LOVED it! We wandered the streets, nodded and said Ola to the locals and with the help of Google translate had a great chat with a local beekeeper. The whole place just was wonderful - well worth our 2 hour detour to get here for a noisy around.

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We stocked up on local cheese, bread and ham for a car picnic as we made our way back East towards Segovia for our next stop. Somehow I'd managed to keep this a secret to Keefy and smuggle him into the city of Segovia without a sight of the tremendous Roman Aqueduct. So his first view was when he got here....

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I on the other hand had seen LOADS of pictures, none of which did the place ANY justice at all. Just Wow. Is all I can say!

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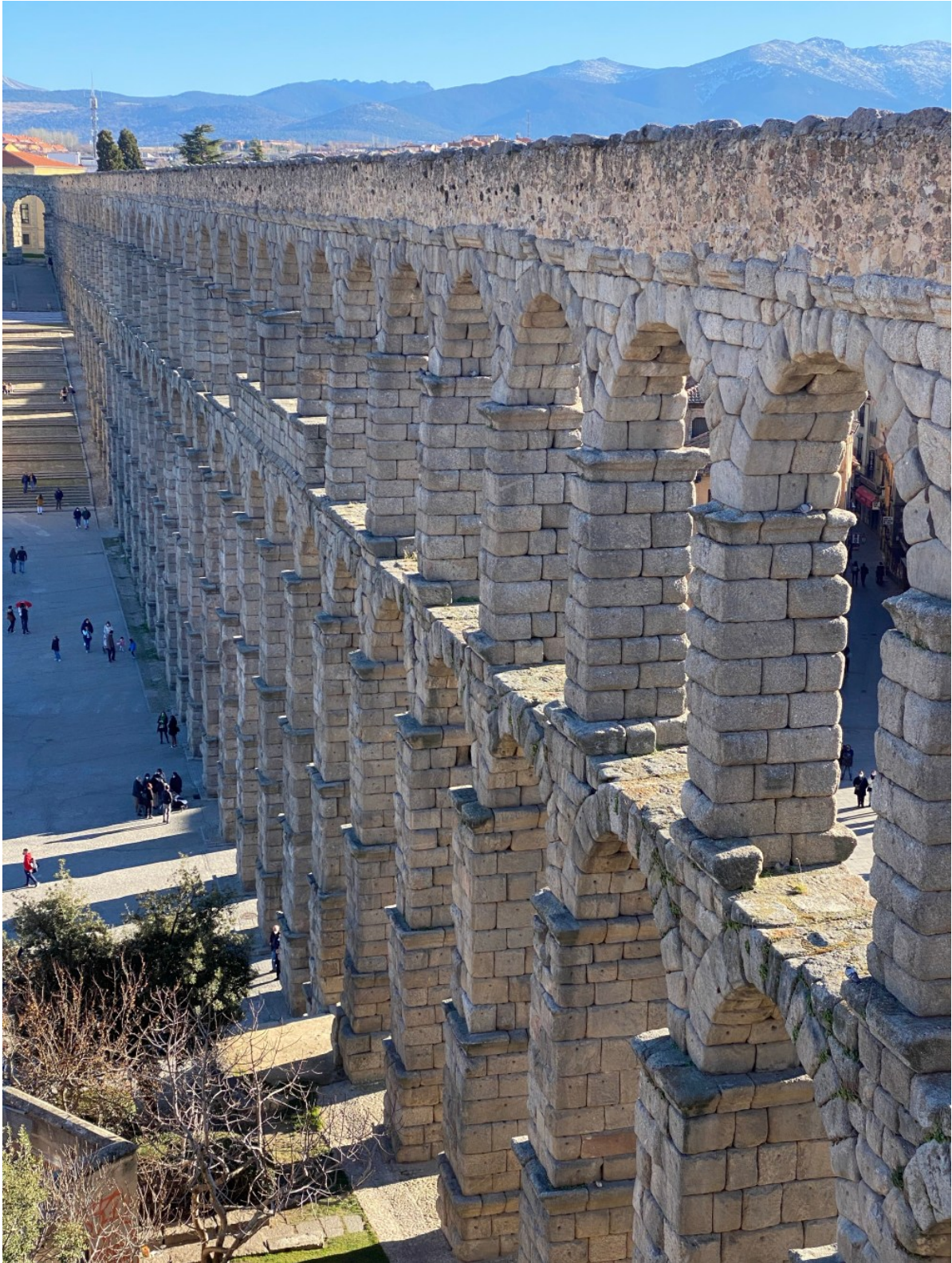
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This MIGHTY and marvellous piece of engineering has stood here for 2000 years. It isn't free standing and has NO mortar holding it together. How is that even possible.

The Aqueduct was build to carry water from the mountains to the town, and when you think it was built without the help of computers and has to be at such a precise angle that the water flows uninterrupted for miles upon miles, its just incredible to imagine the feat of this engineering story.

We stayed in the area, admiring the aqueduct and also walking from the smallest section to the highest section (video on time-lapse below) for quite some time.

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After a refreshment stop at the cheapest place so far – yet the best view!- we continued on an explore of the historical old town, making it as far as the Roman City walls and the Walt Disney-esque castle.

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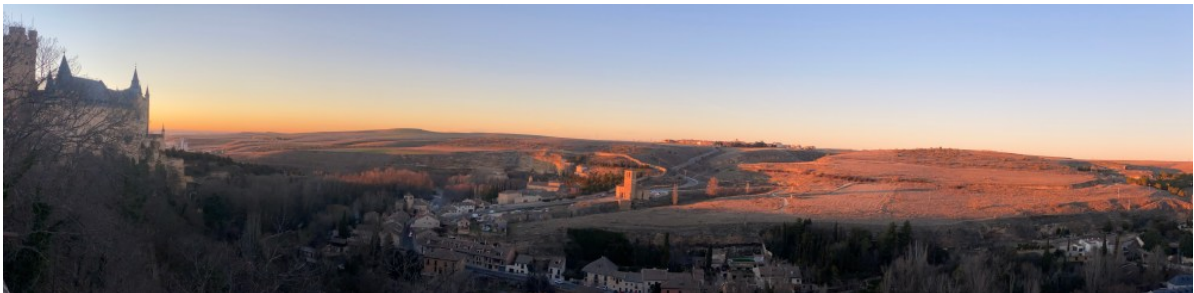
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Time was ticking on and the sun was getting lower and lower. My toe was also beginning to hurt, so we went back to the hotel for a lit-

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tle siesta. In reality we had to sort our return to UK Paperwork out – a bit of a drag, but currently a necessity and if it allows us the freedom to travel then in my option, so be it.



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Toe dutifully rested, we donned our glad rags (haha!) and set out to see what Segovia had to offer on a Saturday night. It turns out we probably **should** have booked somewhere, places were full with reservations and, probably a result of packing lots onto a very short amount time, meant we began to wander around aimlessly. A couple of unsuccessful

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dining opportunities arose, and in the end we decided to just keep bar and tapas hopping before finally crashing out.

Before we hit the sack though we did nip to our rooftop terrace for a beer from the vending machine- a very cool part of the hotel. Our hotel in Segovia. The Real Hotel, had connections to many a film star who had stayed here in the past. Its converted terrace hang out area was really fun and offered great views across the city. Keith particularly enjoyed seeing all of the famous autographs along the wall too- as an avid collector himself he really loved the hotel's collection, presumably gathered as these movie stars stayed here. We didn't realise quite how many films had been filmed here in Segovia.

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After a restful evening, and generous breakfast, we collected the car first thing on Sunday morning, stopping to take some more pictures of the castle as we exited the city and making our way an hour south back to Madrid for our flight home.

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We had had a BLAST. This area of Spain is so far from the usual UK Tourist trail, we couldn't believe how unspoilt and traditional it was here, not to mention breathtakingly gorgeous. Hiring a car was a great way to explore - and with our very ,limited time here worked a treat. If you have longer to explore this tour (except La Alberca) can be done by

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travelling on the trains though and I imagine would be a fun and stress free way to travel.

If you have any interest whatsoever in Roman history – or even if you have none at all – I honestly can't think of any reason(s) why you wouldn't be in awe of all of the places we crammed into our short stay. It really felt like a complete hidden gem. I implore you to give it a visit!

Until Next Time

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