

Thematic Tours

“Atapuerca Surroundings: “Natural and historic crossroads”

Atapuerca is the Rift Valley of Europe and Emiliano Aguirre is the David Leaky of Europe. 1,300,000 years ago a new species *Homo Antecessor* evolved here, the only place in the world where it was found. Why here? Simply because **Atapuerca is on the natural routes from Africa to mainland Europe**. Early man was the first of many to follow this route. Celtic tribes like the Autrigones passed through and settled. The roman road *Via de Italia* passes through. In Medieval times the Pilgrims route “El Camino de Santiago” came through the village. The modern main road passes by and when Spain entered the European Union the first Freeway was built from Madrid to France.

In 1978 Aguirre, a local archeologist started digging; he was looking for prehistoric bears and stumbled on one of the most important archeological discoveries of recent times. The site, known locally as los **Yacimientos de Atapuerca**, is extensive and over two hundred people work on the dig. There are two information centers in the village and in Burgos, the provincial capital, is the new Museum of Evolution dedicated to all the discoveries made in the last 36 years.

Near the village of Atapuerca was located one of the most important **Celtic settlements** in Spain called **Tritium**. Later the **Romans** occupied the site and built the **Via de Italia**, the roman road connecting Spain to Rome passes close by. In medieval times, at the peak of its popularity many thousands of Pilgrims flocked to Santiago each year along this roman road passing through Atapuerca. In the last two decades there has been an explosion in the numbers of modern pilgrims treading in the footsteps of those medieval pilgrims.

As important as its Cultural and Historic heritage is its unique environment and ecosystems of Atapuerca.

Atapuerca Lagoons are situated directly below the village church; four natural and one man made lagoons. Just like ancient man and his descendents, all the migratory species of birds moving between Africa and Europe follow this natural route. The lagoons offer a natural stopover for species as diverse as cranes, geese, herons, storks, ducks and various different raptors. Golden eagles, vultures, black and red kites, lake harriers and other raptors can be seen here. Some are migratory and some are nesting in the nearby mountain range of Sierra de la Demanda, part of the Iberian Mountain Range.

Another of the natural resource that we will visit is the Quintanapalla,s Oakwood. All over Spain you can find oak woods with a mixture of pasture and shade trees, called a Dehesa, the trees provide acorns which are the most important part of the cattle and pigs diet. La Dehesa de Quintanapalla is one of the few remaining examples in the north of Spain; there are a number of ancient oaks which are over five hundred years old and this unique ecosystem supports many song birds.

Other environmental features: Above the village on the slopes of Sierra de Atapuerca where the pilgrims pass by there is a well preserved forest of rare junipers.

Duration

To appreciate everything fully, we recommend a **whole weekend**.



Activities

- The complete tour of the cultural heritage and environment.
- The environmental visit.
- Bird watching visit.