

Hike world's safest, most dangerous trail

Less than an hour away from Malaga, there awaits a dramatic landscape and the promise of a unique adventure at high altitude. Join us as we take a hike along the Caminito del Rey trail.



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The modern hanging platforms make it possible for everyone to experience the Caminito del Rey.



Some sections of the trail consist of almost pitch-black tunnels which were once used to transport water.

Some places, over time, develop a life of their own. The mythology they give birth to grows, and just to be able to say “I’ve been there” can be enough to pique people’s interest.

At over 100 years old, the Caminito del Rey hiking trail in southern Spain is one such place.

With its high-altitude location coupled with narrow platforms in catastrophically poor condition, and neither handrails nor fences for support, it’s long been known as “the most dangerous hiking trail in the world.”

However, following a complete renovation of the 7.7km route, it could now justifiably be called “the safest, most dangerous, hiking trail in the world.”

Just above the half-crumbled old road now hang several kilometers of modern and easily accessible platforms made from steel and wood. Thanks to these platforms, the unique natural environment of the Caminito del Rey can easily be enjoyed by everyone, not just adrenaline junkies looking for adventure. What the renovation and improved level of safety haven’t changed is the incredible feeling of hiking at an altitude of more than 100m above a steep ravine, surrounded by a dramatic mountain landscape.

IN ADDITION, THE fact that the trail is located less than an hour away from the beaches of Malaga makes it a perfect excursion during any trip to the Costa del Sol.

Despite its proximity to the coast, the mountainous interior feels like a completely different world. After passing through row upon row of orange groves, the road starts to climb and the mountains draw ever clearer into view. The landscape becomes barren and the road increasingly winding, before it suddenly opens up in a lush pine forest running along Embalse Conde de Guadalhorce, a large artificial lake that marks the starting point of the Caminito del Rey.

At the El Mirador restaurant, visitors take the opportunity to fuel up on freshly squeezed orange juice from the groves they passed on the way up. The air feels incredibly fresh and pure, a feeling backed up by the fact that the area has been designated as one of the best places in Europe for stargazing. →

‘It was dangerous, but it’s an incredibly beautiful location and geologically very interesting’

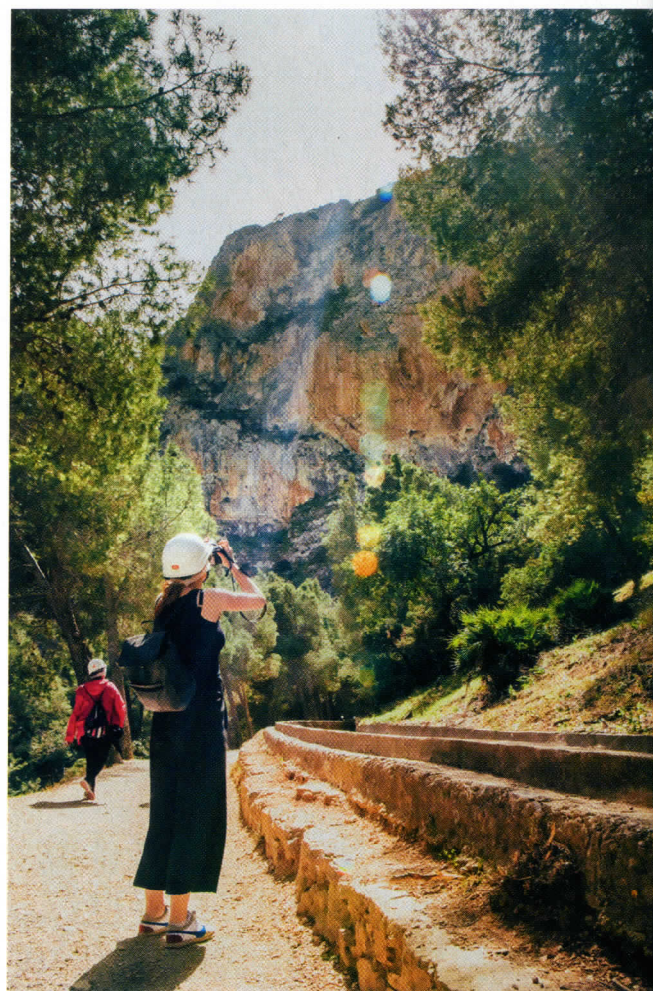


The "Puente Colgate" bridge sways in the wind as you cross the ravine more than 100m above the ground.

Challenge yourself



The middle of the trail opens up to the beautiful Hoyo Valley.



If it's even possible, the sky seems to be more blue here than down by the coast. However, the Caminito del Rey begins in almost total darkness thanks to a 150m tunnel that cuts straight through the mountain. Upon exiting the tunnel, walkers are greeted by huge rock walls with geological formations and caves that were used as homes by farmers well into the 20th century.

This is just the beginning of the natural spectacle that hides behind the control station where helmets are issued. After a short walk, it's not long before the solid ground under your feet leads to platforms that cling high along the walls of the steep ravine.

The enormous proportions of the mountain make the platforms look like they're built of matchsticks, winding up and down like an infinite balcony along the cliff face.

The Guadalhorce River, which has slowly but surely carved the ravine from the mountain, flows far below. At the narrowest point of the ravine, the river disappears from sight, the only indication of its existence being the constant roar of water. In other places, where the river is wider, the waters illuminate the bottom of the ravine, alternating between emerald green and brown.

SURROUNDED BY THIS fascinating landscape, it's easy to forget that you're actually on a narrow platform suspended from a mountain, and walking on wooden planks only 5cm thick. But the even surface and solid fence mean that even a novice adventurer can fully enjoy this landscape of vertical drops and strange lime-

stone formations – despite being in surroundings that demand respect.

The Caminito del Rey is actually several hiking trails in one. After the dizzying start in the ravine, the trail transitions to a wide climb in the shadow of fragrant pine trees through the large Valle del Hoyo valley. The path is dusty and the dry stones crunch under your feet. The Andalusian sun is warming and it's difficult to imagine that this arid landscape was once right at the bottom of the sea. The rocks are awash with fossils, including those of whales, which still turn up on a regular basis.

WATER WAS THE main reason why the Caminito del Rey was built between 1901 and 1905. In the late 19th century, engineer Rafael Benjumea had the idea of using the natural altitude differences of the area to fuel a hydropower plant. Through a canal and series of aqueducts, water was channeled from the artificial lakes on either side of the ravine to the power station in El Chorro. Water was released into the turbines at a rate of 10,000 liters per second, allowing people in Malaga to enjoy the warm nights under electric street lamps.

In 1921, King Alfonso XIII paid a visit, and since then the trail has been called Caminito del Rey ("the king's little road").

The decision to build the canal here helped it become part of the most beautiful landscape in southern Spain. But it wasn't to enable people to enjoy the natural beauty of the area that led to the creation of the trail; it was →

Challenge yourself



The dangerous work to construct the hanging platforms was done by sailors from nearby Malaga who were used to climbing the high masts of ships.

constructed for a much more practical purpose – workers needed to be able to access the site to build the canal, maintain it and manage the water flow.

The construction process was difficult and dangerous and there are many different versions of the tale of who built the Caminito del Rey. In fact, it's often claimed that prisoners awaiting execution built the most dangerous sections.

“But the truth is that the Caminito del Rey was built by sailors from the coast around Malaga. They were considered to be best suited to the task, as they were used to climbing high masts and were masters of tying knots – a very practical skill to have when you're suspended from the side of a mountain,” says one of the guides stationed along the route.

Traces of the hazardous work can still be seen in the form of rusty metal structures and hooks that protrude from the rock.

“Safety wasn't thought about then as it is now,” the guide continues, seemingly feigning a smile. “It's difficult having a helmet tightly fastened under your chin, and you may well need it, because the wind can blow at significant speeds in the narrow ravine, which in some places is no more than 10m wide and several hundred meters deep.”

FOR SOME REASON, the path wasn't maintained and, over time, it became more dangerous. That didn't prevent local people from using it as a shortcut, including children on their way to school. But the reputation of the dangerous ravine began to spread among the rock climbing community.

“Just getting there was an adventure,” says Luis Jimenez from Malaga. “The only way was to climb, and then make your way through the train tunnels. We had to press ourselves against the wall when a train was →



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coming on more than one occasion. It was dangerous, but it's an incredibly beautiful location and geologically very interesting."

Several notable accidents took place along the Caminito del Rey and the entrances were officially closed in 2000, with anyone found entering risking fines of €6,000.

HOWEVER, EVERYONE REALIZED that the Caminito del Rey was a unique environment that had to be experienced, so it wasn't long before plans to renovate the trail were put forward.

Nine million euros and 500 tons of building material later, and the new Caminito del Rey was ready to receive visitors in 2015.

The result is impressive and, like all the best experiences, the Caminito del Rey saves the best till last. After a brief stretch inside the old canal, you come to a stop right in front of a solid wall of rock. The entire valley extends out behind you, the only way forward being to cross the suspended platforms that crawl along the rock face and into the next ravine. Those who think that the glass balcony that hoves into view is the high point of the trail are sadly mistaken, for immediately beyond is the Puente Colgante bridge. This 35m-long suspension bridge crosses the ravine at a height of 105m, sways in the wind and affords unbeatable views of both the ravine and the valley.

The experience will stay long in your memory, even when you're back on the beach in Malaga. o

The train tunnels for the Malaga-Cordoba line, originally cut through the mountain by hand, were used by climbers to gain access to the valley during the years it was closed.

'We had to press ourselves against the wall when a train was coming on more than one occasion'

FACTS

OPENING HOURS

→ April–Oct: Tuesday–Sunday
10am–5pm

→ Nov–Mar: Tuesday–Sunday
10am–2pm

PRICE

→ €10 per person, €18 per person with a guide. Since its renovation, the Caminito del Rey has become enormously popular and it pays to book tickets in advance.

→ Minimum age: 8

→ No prior hiking experience is necessary, but sturdy shoes are essential.

caminitodelrey.info

PARKING

→ The best solution is to park at the El Mirador restaurant at the north entrance (Entrada Norte). A bus from El Chorro will take you back to the car park, with the last bus leaving at 5.30pm.