

Spain's most beautiful secret villages

A selection of the prettiest pueblos in Spain that aren't on the tourist trail — yet

Chris Haslam

January 20 2019, 12:01am,
The Sunday Times



Cliffhanger: Setenil de las Bodegas

The Spanish government decided in 2011 that some of the country's prettiest villages weren't getting enough love. So they created Los Pueblos Mas Bonitos de España (The Most Beautiful Villages in Spain), a body given the job of ensuring that tourists knew where these out-of-the-way communities were, and how to get to them.

Qualification isn't easy: hopefuls must pass an audit covering 45 criteria, ranging from parking to flowerbeds. And they need to be oh-so-pretty. Eleven new villages have joined the club for 2019. Here is our pick.

Nijar, Almeria

Nearly 60 years ago, the Catalan writer Juan Goytisolo chose this settlement as an exemplar of the Franco-era deprivations suffered by the rural poor. Now Nijar has joined the list of Spain's prettiest villages in a comeback that's almost entirely due to the power of tourism. It's not just the gorgeous desert setting — citrus orchards and vegetable gardens are watered by irrigation channels dug by the Moors — that attracts visitors. They also come for the high-end ceramics, made to original Arabic designs, and for jarapas rugs assembled from scraps on clattering antique looms.

Stay At the Cortijo La Alberca, a Moorish-style farmhouse in citrus groves just north of the village. It has eight rooms, a pool, and views that will make you seriously discuss the prospect of buying a house here (doubles from £62, B&B; cortijolaalberca.com).