



Setenil de las Bodegas: An Andalusia Wonder

Description

A Visitor Guide

**“Setenil de las Bodegas,
where the sky is rock..... “**
Gerardo Diego



Setenil de las Bodegas is a village of about 3,000 people in the Andalucia region of Spain. The municipal area is located in the northeast of the Cadiz province and is part of the Ronda Valley ([check out our post on spectacular Ronda](#)). The landscape is one of the gently rolling fields of olive and almond groves across which the River Guadalporcun flows. One of the most unusual and stunning of the “Pueblos Blancos,” otherwise known as this region’s white towns, is Setenil. It is famous for its dwellings built into the rock walls of the narrow river gorge that runs through the center of town, which is the true architect of this remarkable sight. Many homes and businesses are built into and under the rock. We were drawn here by the surreal images; in person, they are not any less mind-blowing.

The town grew out of caves within the cliffs above the Guadalporcún River. Setenil de las Bodegas stands proudly on a slope crowned with an ancient castle and lovely church. The natural caves served a purpose; building entire buildings was unnecessary. Similar to semi-troglodytic dwellings, they take advantage of the shelter of the rocks in the gorge created by the river. It kept out the heat in the summer and, during the winter, kept homes warmer. This area is believed to have had inhabitants since prehistoric times.

A Brief History of Setenil de las Bodegas



The town’s name, ‘Setenil de las bodegas,’ tells a bit of its fascinating history. Setenil, from the Latin words septem nihil– “seven times no,” refers to the seven times the Catholic rulers tried to take back the territory from the Moors, the medieval Arab inhabitants who ruled much of Spain for several centuries. On the seventh attempt to conquer Setenil, the Catholics regained the territory. It was one of the last Muslim strongholds in Iberia. Setenil later began using the cool areas under the rock to store local produce in large storerooms, which is how the town earned the name “bodegas,” meaning

‘warehouse’ in Spanish.

“Modern” Setenil de las Bodegas dates from the 15th century. The Christian rulers began establishing extensive olive and almond trees and vineyards. The olive and almond trees flourish all around the hills and rooftops of the town to this day. It makes for a beautiful setting within the village and from afar. Sadly, the vineyards were wiped out by the European phylloxera insect infestation of the 1860s.

First stop

This tiny village has a visitors center inside a lovely 16th-century building with a beautiful Mudejar-style coffered ceiling. They are warm and welcoming and will provide the guidance you need to make the most of your visit to Setenil de las Bodegas. It would be an excellent place to get a recommendation on where to eat or grab a drink.

What to see and do in Setenil de las Bodegas

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Setenil de las Bodegas has an intimate atmosphere that is vibrant and welcoming. Take the time to stop at one of the many bars and restaurants where many locals seem to hang out (see suggestions below). Sitting below these massive rocks and having a meal feels precarious, but it is a must-do. The local outdoor market was open when we were there, and it was fun to see all the locals shopping and socializing.

We did drive to the top; it was a bit of a challenge, but the views were entirely worth it!! When you are at the top of the town, visit the beautiful old Church of la Encarnacion; admission is free. The 12th-century Nazari Castle is relatively small and quick to see. Entry was 1 euro, and you can visit all three floors, including an art gallery. It's worth the visit for the views alone and to get a sense of the town planning involved.

There are many options for shopping with local specialties and artisan fare. A fun store to check out is La Cueva Del Ibérico, which produces hams and Iberian sausages. They carry a nice collection of gourmet products from the province of Cadiz, such as Payoya goat cheese. An extensive collection of wines, craft beers, honey, jams, and oils from the Sierra de Cadiz. They have a free sampling of many of their products.

Learning the history



If you want to learn more about the town's history, visit The Torre del Homenaje, an example of an old Almohase fortress that has surrounded the Setenil rock since the 12th century. The Aljibe, located on the ground floor of the Torre del Homenaje, is where rainwater was collected to supply the city's residents. Inside the tower is an exhibition with photographs and information on the history of Setenil de las Bodegas. The Museum of the Damita de Setenil has a collection of archaeological finds from the town. The most important piece is the Little Lady of Setenil, Venus, more than 5,000 years old, that proves life in caves since prehistoric times. It is a nominal fee of 2 euros to visit.

The highlight of our visit was wandering this fascinating village and cave streets. Though beware of the cars, these streets have little room for vehicles and pedestrians. Check out our photo gallery to see

how cars and pedestrians intermingled.

Local events



Carnival (Feb/Mar) includes street parades, dancing, and music. Easter Week (Mar/Apr) sees two local brotherhoods put on competing processions through the town's narrow streets. The Feria de Setenil de las Bodegas (Aug) is a multi-day event with concerts and flamenco dancing. The Fiesta del Aceite (dates vary) celebrates local olive oil production with an outdoor market and tastings.

How to get to Setenil de las Bodegas

- [Setenil de las Bodegas](#)

Setenil de las Bodegas can be reached by car, train, and bus. We drove during our visit, which we strongly recommend as the area has many sights. The town is 90 minutes from Malaga and Seville and 24 minutes from Ronda by car. It takes about 3 hours from Seville and Malaga by train or bus.

Parking can be a challenge within the town itself. Streets are very narrow and parking very limited. We parked just outside the outskirts of town with no issues finding a space.

Bring some good shoes to hike the town as it is a relatively steep climb to the top.

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Where to stay when visiting Setenil de las Bodegas



During our visit, we came from Granada and ended our day in Seville; it was a long day. We seriously regretted not staying one night in this area. If you can stay overnight, there are few hotel choices in the town except for the two-star hotel **Hotel Villa de Setenil**. There are though many houses, apartments, and rooms for rent. They can be found at the links below.

Ronda will have the most options for accommodations and is about 25 minutes away. It is where we will stay the next time we visit.

We believe it is important to price out properties on various sites. [Expedia](#) is a US-based company, whereas [Booking.com](#) is Europe-based. Not all properties appear on both. If the establishment has a website, check the price there as well.

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Where to eat in Setenil de las Bodegas



Calle Cueva Del Sol owes its name to having the sun streaming on it practically all day. It is the best-known and busiest street in the town. There are several terraces of bars and restaurants, most with outdoor seating. Some of the most well-rated restaurants in this area include Bar Frasquito, Cafeteria Bar Sol y Sombra, and Restaurante Casa Palmero.

The best time to visit Setenil de las Bodegas



Setenil de las Bodegas has a Mediterranean climate, with hot, dry summers (Jun–Aug) and mild winters (Dec–Feb).

Temperatures in the summer are often in the 80s. During the winter months, the average temperature is in the 50s.

Rainfall is highest in the winter months. With rock covering many streets, it is the ideal protection from rain. Most restaurants and bars are under the rock overhang. You can eat or enjoy a drink outdoors, even in the rain.

White Towns we suggest visiting nearby



Ronda

The White Towns of Andalusia, or Pueblos Blancos, is a series of whitewashed towns in the northern part of the provinces of Cádiz and Málaga in southern Spain, mainly within the Sierra de Grazalema Natural Park. The area is quite broad, so we will focus on two towns near Setenil de las Bodegas to visit.

Ronda and Zahara de la Sierra are entirely different from Setenil de las Bodegas but astounding in their ways. They are all relatively close to each other, and the drive is scenic. It would take an hour to drive a loop to all three towns.

Ronda

Ronda ([click here to see our post on Ronda](#)) is known as the “City of Dreams.” It is a small yet bustling city with a fascinating history dating back to the Neolithic Age. Established in the 9th century BC, storytellers say those who arrived here never wanted to leave. The first Ronda inhabitants were primitive people, then the Romans, followed by the Moors. After conquering the town, the Crusaders drove out the Moors in the 15th century. Ronda bears markings from all these various inhabitants over the years. It is truly a step back in time. Its beguiling white houses and buildings, Roman and Moorish Antiquities, and impressive architectural wonders like the Puente Nuevo bridge. The immense

sandstone cliffs in the deep river gorge that divides the city in half were the most memorable. It is a beguiling sight and a joy to photograph. Ronda will capture your heart.

Zahara de la Sierra



Zahara de la Sierra

It is a small, incredible hilltop white town with a heartwarming sense of community. The valley around Zahara de la Sierra is breathtaking, and the views alone are worth the trip up to narrow roads to reach the town. A Castle is perched above the village as if watching over its residents. You can choose from many restaurants and bars in town. Walking the city is challenging due to the steep streets, but take your time and take it all in. Our visit there came on Halloween, the day before All Saints Day. The town residents were in the process of decorating the graves of their loved ones in the most elegant and elaborate floral displays. Observing this annual ritual that honored those who passed before them felt personal and meaningful. The cemetery was lovely and had the best views the town offered.

Final thoughts

Spain is a country with incredible diversity and wonder. The White Towns of Andalusia are one of the gems of this beautiful and fascinating region of Spain. It is a perfect fit with a visit that includes Cordoba, Granada, Malaga, and Seville. It was part of our two-week road trip to Portugal and Spain. We were so intrigued we plan to visit again, giving the region at least three days.



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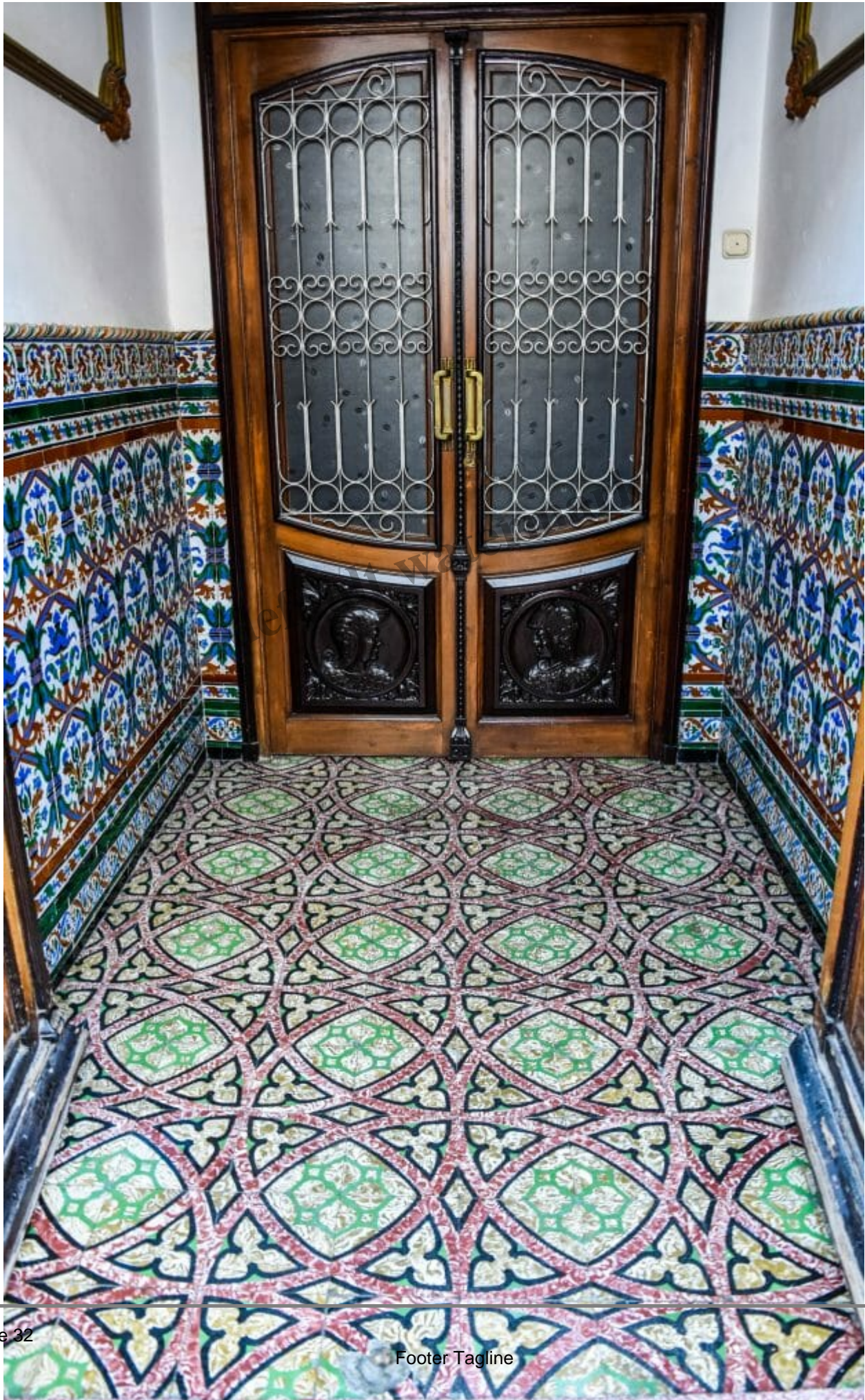


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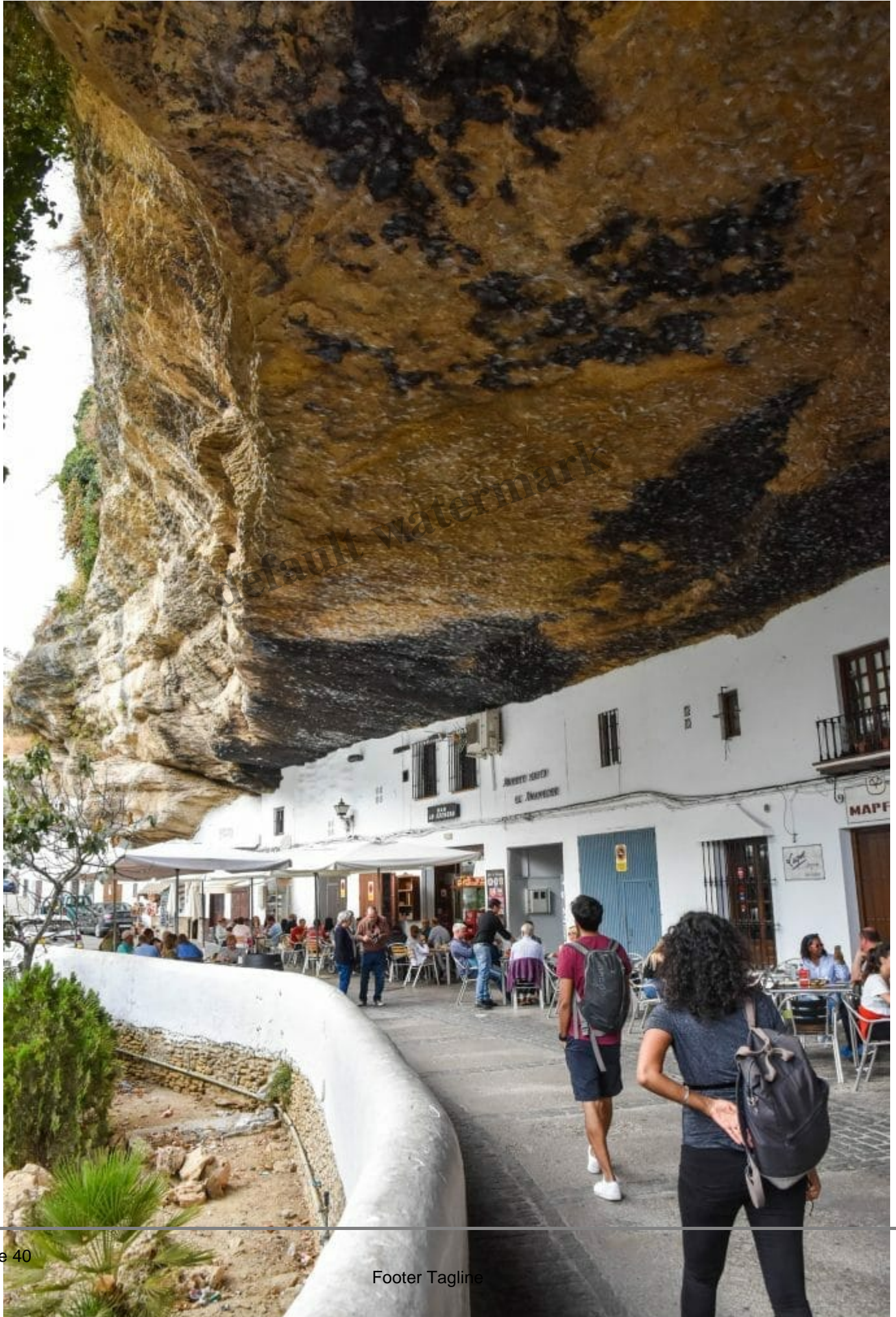
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[VRBO](#) is now under the Expedia group's ownership, which many were worried about, but it hasn't panned out to be a concern. It is a massive network with access to all lodging forms should issues arise. Joelle has used VRBO for many years with her family and has had no problems with it.

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