

1. The building

Welcome to the Babia and Luna Natural Park Visitors centre. We are placed in Quiñones Palace, a building from the sixteenth century that belonged to the Quiñones, a family from the León Kingdom aristocracy. The palace was consumed by a fire in 1915, and rebuilt by a neighbour in the seventies, after buying it. It keeps its original outer appearance, while the inner one has been renewed to hold the exhibition.



Figure 1. The palace from outside

2. The exhibition

If you go upstairs, you will find a colour palette, which represents some of the most iconic items in these areas: the grey from the mountains and the rocks, the white from the snow; and the orange from the dusk and the fire, around which many stories have been told in this area.



Figure 2. Babia and Luna colours

3. The geology

As you move to the left, you enter a zone dealing with the geological facts of the Natural Park. The first one is its glacial origin, which appears in the wide U-shaped valleys with lakes and lagoons in their upper areas, because of the activity of the glacier before the melting. You can also compare the thickness of the ice with the tallest trees in that period to be able to imagine the real size of this cold layer.



Figure 3. Giants which transformed the landscape

Another remarkable fact about Babia and Luna's geology are fossils. In both areas, you can find rocks that reveal the occurrence of a shallow sea before the mountain-forming process which made these seas become high mountains. It's quite common to find marine animals as corals while hiking in these mountains.



Figure 4. The story told by the rocks

While the access to the Luna reservoir was under construction, engineers found an unusual formation of rocks that contain parts from the Cambrian period, when life on earth flourished. That was more than five hundred million years ago, so it is not usual at all to find such a clear formation. There are only a few places where this phenomenon can be observed, and that made Luna a destination for many universities and researchers.

4. The immersive room

The subject of the first picture in the immersive room is the Luna reservoir, with a photomontage that represents the sixteen villages that were flooded for its construction. The other picture shows the disappearance of the trees in the Nature Park, both because of the fire but also of the cattle, quite abundant in Babia and Luna.

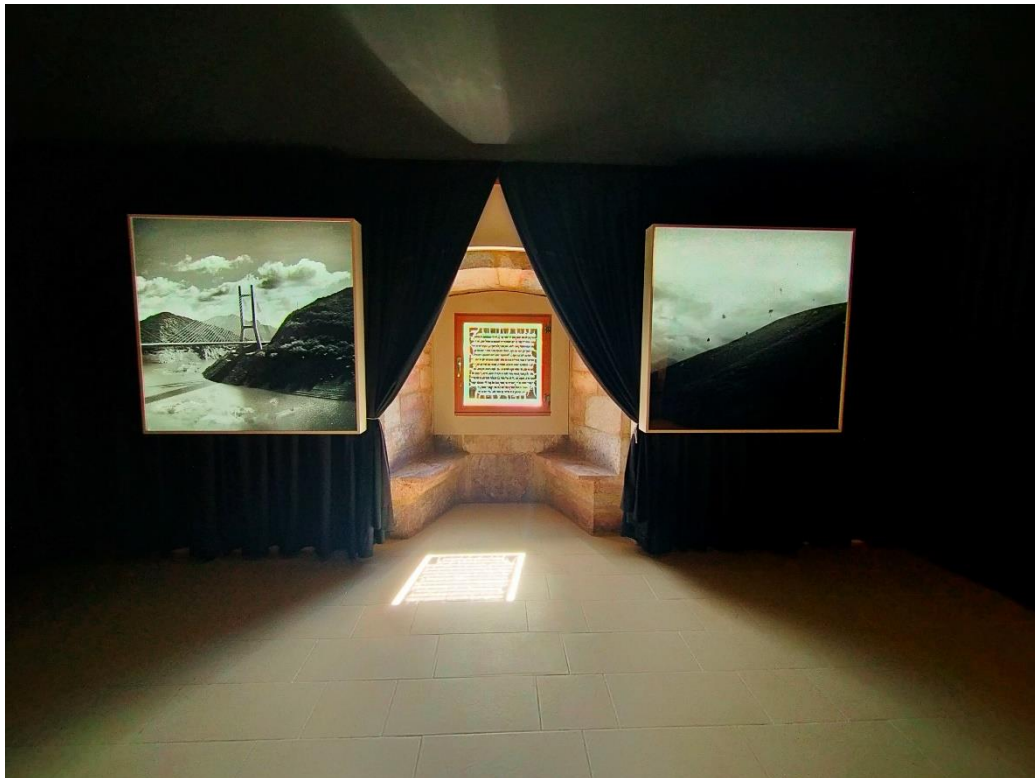


Figure 5. Immersive room

5. The fauna

Returning to the central room of the exhibition, we enter a zone devoted to the fauna. The wild one is represented by the chamois, common in some valleys such as that of La Cueta; and the Egyptian vulture, which migrates and stays in the park between spring and September, when they go back to Africa.



Figure 6. Wild fauna

The human-related fauna focuses on two animals: the dog and the sheep. More precisely, on two important dog breeds: the mastiff, which is the Natural Park's symbol, and whose main function is protecting the cattle from wolves and, more rarely,

from bears; and the “carea”, a smaller but tireless dog that perfectly reads the shepherd signals to guide the herd.



Figure 7. The mastiff is the dog represented in the famous picture "Las meninas"

Regarding to the livestock species, although there are also different breeds of cows and the hispano-bretón horses, sheep play an important and ancient role in Babia and Luna. For centuries, they have been connecting this area with others further away, such as Extremadura in the south of Spain, by

transhumance and its ancestral paths called “Cañadas”, some of which today pass through big cities.



Figure 8. Merinas, the most appreciated sheep breed

Nowadays, the number of sheep grazing in summer declining, but it reached thousands of animals each year, looking for the best pasture in different seasons.

The most controversial threat for shepherd's is, undoubtedly, the wolf. They are responsible for the death of cows, horses, and sheep every year, but they also play an important role in keeping food chain balanced by hunting other wild animals.

The coexistence is not easy but taking preventive measures such as having mastiffs protecting the cattle, and paying fair insurances, are the key to this species survival.



Figure 9. The wolf, on the top of the trophic chain, has an important role in ecosystems

Another predator from which cattle must be protected is the brown bear. Although Babia and Luna are still being considered connecting the two Cantabrian populations, the population living next to this area is recovering more and more. That means that watching a bear in the southern part of

the main valley is not as unusual as it used to be. Mastiff also offers protection from this animal which is quite popular compared to the wolf.



Figure 10. Bears are more and more common in Babia and Luna

6. The flora

We jump to the flora part, in which Spanish junipers are the star. These are evergreen plants that have their trunk covered by leaves from the ground up. There is a junipers forest next to the reservoir. And why is this so special? Because this forest isn't supposed to be there. Spanish junipers require a drier place than the one where they grow. And how is this possible? Because they stand on a limestone south-oriented slope, which receives a lot of sunlight but also that drains most of the rain. At one time, when the Earth was hotter, this species was more widely spread, but as the Earth got colder, its distribution shrank. Currently, this forest is a clue as to what the ancient landscape was like. It's called a relic forest.



Figure 11. The Spanish junipers forest around the reservoir is probably the most special one in this area.

Now, we are talking about the connection between animals and plants. We all know that plants are important because animals feed on them, but we tend to forget that animals are equally important for plants, because they play an important role as pollinators, and they help seeds to travel far from their “parents”. In the round panel, you can match some animals with one of their favourite foods, and you might discover that carnivores don’t eat only meat.



Figure 12. Match animals with their diet

8. cows and horses

On the left wall of the room, we can see two more boards. The first one is about the cow breeds we can find in Babia and Luna. These cows were greatly appreciated in the past because of their fatty milk which was perfect for making butter. The butter was sold in the most exclusive shops in the centre of Madrid. Unfortunately, the most important breed is now extinct.



Figure 14. While we have mainly one horse breed and one sheep breed, there are more varieties of cow breeds

9. The river

The next board is related to another unusual geological fact to be seen in Babia. The Sil river, the most important tributary of the Miño, takes its source in Babia (more precisely, in a place called “La Cueta”). But millions of years ago, its source was found somewhere downstream. Its strong current made it work its way upstream, until it “stole” the first tributaries of the Luna River. This phenomenon is explained on some informative boards next to the Palomas bridge, an eighty-two-meter-deep canyon under the road that leads to Laciana.



Figure 15. Have you ever seen a river stealing?

We continue talking about the river, and about some animals that work as bioindicators. This means that their occurrence shows the quality of a certain habitat. One of these animals is

the best-known fish in this area, the trout, that needs cold clear water with natural riverbeds.



Figure 16. Life underwater

The second animal is not as famous as the trout. In fact, it doesn't look like an animal. It's a kind of a small pipe made of little rocks from the riverbed, that protects the larva of an insect: marabayos. It doesn't sting and it is not dangerous, so if you ever see one, take it as a good signal and put it back in the place you've found it.

Lastly, there is the Iberian desman, which is even less known. It has been compared to many other animals, and we let you decide if it is like any of those by watching it on the black box in the exhibition. This animal feeds on marabayos, among

others, so it has the same requirements they have: excellent water quality.

We are lucky in the Nature Park because we have these three species living in our rivers.

We go on discovering the river and, if we focus on the left board, we learn about some traditional uses and man-made structures we find in it. For instance, there are many dams whose function it is to change the course of a river to get the fields watered. The biggest dam logically, is the one of the Luna reservoir, that flooded the villages shown below the bridge in this panel.



Figure 17. Backwater in the river

10. human settlements

At the front, we find an explanation for some of the features to be found in old buildings in this area. The first one is the thatched roof, which is called “teito”, and which is maintained by the “teitadores”. Is not easy to interweave these materials to avoid water entering through it.

We can also find round walls in some houses, that once were ovens, at a time when people harvested cereals, milled them, and baked their own bread.



Figure 18. Searching for shelter

On the left, we have a corner devoted to both animals and plants that are easy to find in human settlements. Many birds use buildings to nest, and several wild plants are edible or have a medicinal use.



Figure 19. Hosts and herbarium

II. The night

The last part of the exhibition is a small room where it gets dark to watch the night sky. Babia and Luna are regions with small villages, that produce little pollution, with wide valleys. Together, they are perfect ingredients for astronomy and night photography lovers. In these conditions you can count thousands of stars in a clear night.



Figure 20. A walk under the stars

12. The story

The video which is shown in the room downstairs is a story about Babia and Luna. It recreates a *Filandón*, a word used to describe the moment of gathering between neighbours at the end of the day, near a fire, when stories were told while women kept spinning wool. You will see a man remembering his journey with the flock of sheep to the southern and warmer part of Spain.

Pay attention as you are going to have an important role to keep the couple warm!

P.D. Thanks for visiting us. This is a collaborative guide, so, if you see any translation mistake, please let us know to improve the information given.

Thanks to the anonymous German visitor who unselfishly spent almost three hours checking and improving this text.