

Nights full of history and fire

Las Cruces de Mayo Festival held in Ubrique marks the beginning of

“La crujía de los gamones”

“It is a little famous village where people work with leader without betraying morality...” sing the young women while swinging among the balconies along the streets of Ubrique. “La Crujía de los Gamones”, held every May in the Sierra de Cádiz, has been proclaimed as interest for international tourism in 2008.

The festival starts on Friday, 2nd May, and will last until 4th May. Take your time to listen to the flamenco singers accompanied by the best guitarists while enjoying the floral ornaments and candles which decorate the white streets of this village.

This festival is considered a popular tradition as it is deeply rooted in the Andalusian culture. Each neighborhood collects what they call “gamones” (huge asparagus plants) and rustle them against the floor.

“Gamones” are plants with long slender stems and thick roots which were used long time ago to chase the wolves away. In order to do that, the villagers heated the “gamones” and rustled them against the rocks to simulate the sound of a firecracker. During the French occupation in Spain, Napoleon’s troops wanted to invade Ubrique. Nevertheless, the cunning villagers rustled the “gamones” against the floor to make the soldiers believe that they had sophisticated weapons. According to some legends this fact is considered the origin of this tradition.

Every 3rd May ever since, people from Ubrique decorate the streets of the village and prepare plenty of bonfires using furniture and old wood items on which

the “gamones” are put. Young and elder people pick up firewood and old wood items for hours. After that, at dusk, bonfires are lit.

The main features of this tradition have not changed over time although some activities have been added afterwards. Orchestras, folk singings and flamenco dancing enliven the night and many associations prepare typical dishes including one of the most famous called “gañotes” (fried rolls with honey).

The swings are placed between the balconies and young boys swing the girls while singing traditional folk songs.

In recent years new activities have joined this festival, so that nowadays people can choose whether to join chess and checkers tournaments, sack races or speed races. Young people can have a great time playing the apple game or trying to reach the top of the greasy pole. The children will also enjoy beating the piñata to pick up all the sweets. Another typical game is what Spanish people call “carrera de huevos” (it consists on carrying eggs with a spoon). For those who prefer to be more relaxed they have a wide variety of activities such as writing, poetry and drawing contests, storytellings and handicraft among others.

The festival begins in “Plaza de las Palmeras” at 20:30 with a march-past of the French army. People dressed up like soldiers walk along the streets until reaching “Plaza del Ayuntamiento”. But the festival does not end here, there will be an old time market and a marvelous performance of “El Romancero”, which is a set of epic poems from the 15th century considered a jewel of Spanish literature. Moreover, you better do not go far away as the presentation of the Municipal Music Band will take place at “Plaza del Ayuntamiento” as well.

On Saturday, 3rd May the most anxiously awaited moment finally arrives. From 20:00 the bonfires are lit in the neighborhoods of Ubrique to light up almost all the old quarter of the village. Subsequently, some neighborhoods take part on the streets decoration contest and the best one are visited and later awarded by the panel members.

On Sunday, 4th May from 13:00 the panel members award the prizes to the winners of the streets decoration contest and the festival finally ends up with a show performed by the Municipal Music Band.

Joining this singular festival offers you the chance to explore closely the historical center, declared of Cultural Interest in 2003.

Take a break to go for a wander around the village and get lost inside this charming place. Do not forget to get into the shops to buy designer products with the highest quality.

Moreover, in the surroundings of Ubrique takes place the Natural Park of Grazalema, where you can go for a trip to enjoy the landscapes and the most typical dishes of Cádiz province.