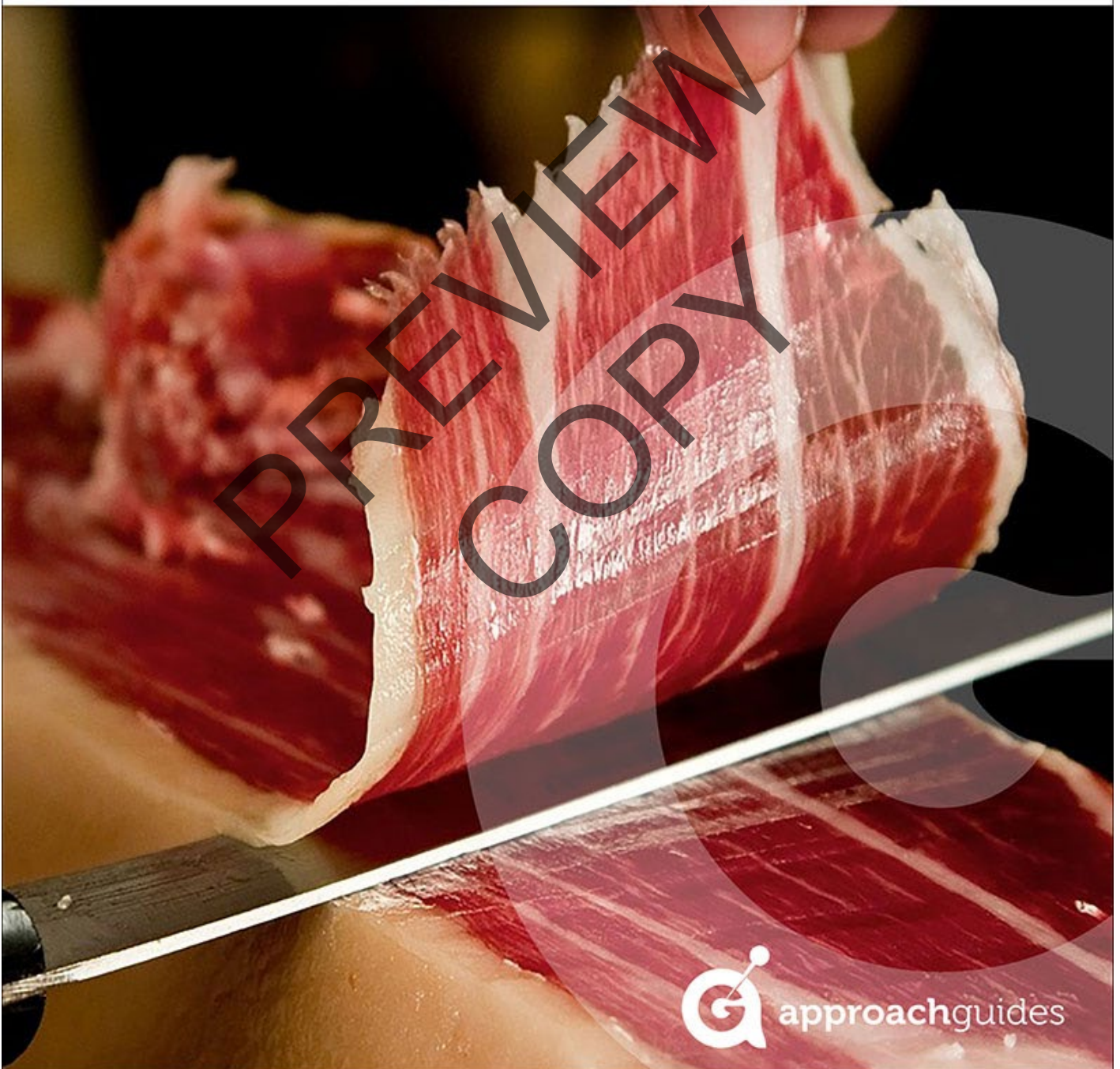


A Connoisseur's Guide **Jamón Ibérico**



Jamón Ibérico: A Connoisseur's Guide

Version 1.0

by [David Raezer](#) and [Jennifer Raezer](#)

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Previewing this book?

Please [check out our enhanced preview](#), which offers a deeper look at this guidebook.

Travel guidebooks for the ultra curious, Approach Guides reveal a destination's essence by exploring a compelling aspect of its cultural heritage: art, architecture, history, food or wine.

In the culinary world, no ham rivals Spain's jamón ibérico in flavor or texture. Made from Iberian pigs raised on a diet of acorns in the woodlands (*dehesa*) of the country's southwest, it must be tasted to be believed.

This guide explores everything that makes jamón ibérico special: the native purebred pigs, the man-made dehesa ecosystem, the rearing method and the ham-making process. We save the most interesting part for last, demystifying the many classes of products so you know exactly what to look for when on location in Spain. For a food-loving traveler aiming to eat local, this guide is a must-have reference.

What's in this guide

- **Context.** We begin by describing the Iberian pig and the dehesa woodland ecosystem that supports it.
- **The ham itself.** Having set the stage, we review how the pigs are reared and their unique diet. We then walk step by step through the ham-making process and the range of products available.
- **Advice for getting the best culinary experience.** This guide supplies a map of Spain's four Iberian ham-producing denominations and links to online resources where you can explore specific topics in more detail. Finally, we give our personal tips — including what to look for when purchasing and even wine pairing — for getting the most from your experience on location.
- **Information the way you like it.** As with all of our products, this guide is optimized for intuitive, quick navigation; information is organized into bullet points to make absorption easy; and high-quality images are used to illustrate key points.

Contact us anytime

Our readers are our greatest inspiration. Email us at founders@approachguides.com to let us know about your experience with Approach Guides — many of our recent updates have been inspired by customers like you. We personally respond to every email.

We hope you enjoy this unique guide to one of Spain's greatest culinary treasures.

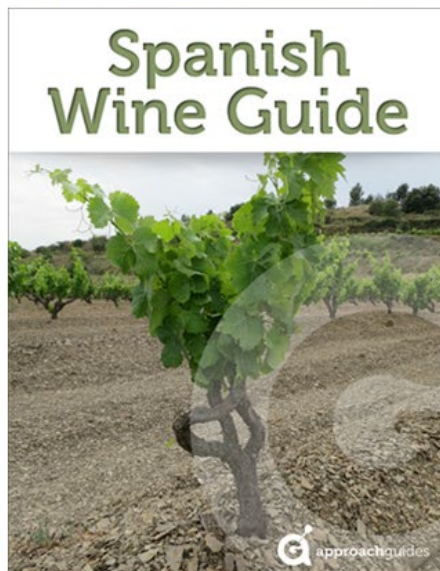
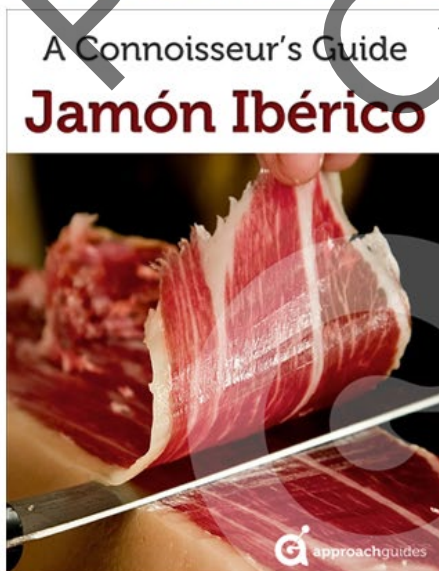
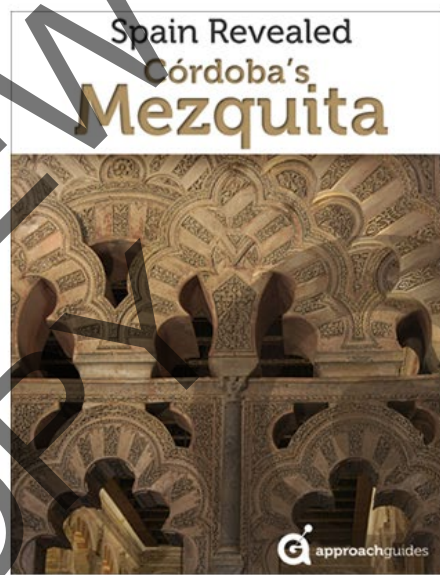
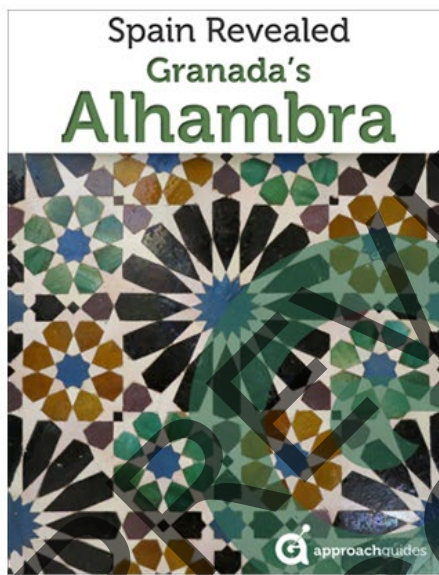
¡Buen provecho!

David Raezer

David and Jennifer Raezer
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“Iberian pork meat is extraordinary.
There’s nothing like it elsewhere in the world.
There’s a great difference between a superior ham and all the rest.”

—

Barcelona-born Ferran Adrià,
head chef at the famed (now-closed) El Bulli,
five-time winner of the best restaurant in the world,
as quoted in the New York Times article
[“In Spain, a Delicacy Rooted in Earth and Tradition”](#)

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The Iberian Pig



Iberian pigs grazing during the montanera.

Let's start off by getting to know the unique breed of pig that is the basis of one of the world's greatest foods. A longtime resident of Spain's southern territories, with a history stretching back to the 11th century BCE, the Iberian pig likely owes its presence in this part of the world to the Phoenicians. The ancient trading empire might have carried the pig's ancestors from the shores of the eastern Mediterranean in conjunction with the founding of a western outpost in [Cadiz](#), where they promptly interbred with local wild boars.

Characteristics

- **Free range.** Since its arrival, the Iberian pig has roamed in herds in free-range conditions, mainly in southwestern Spain along the Portuguese border. It is particularly well suited to such a lifestyle — it is far better at scavenging for food, finding adequate shelter and avoiding danger than other domesticated breeds.

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The Dehesa



The distinctive appearance of the oak-tree-studded *dehesa*.

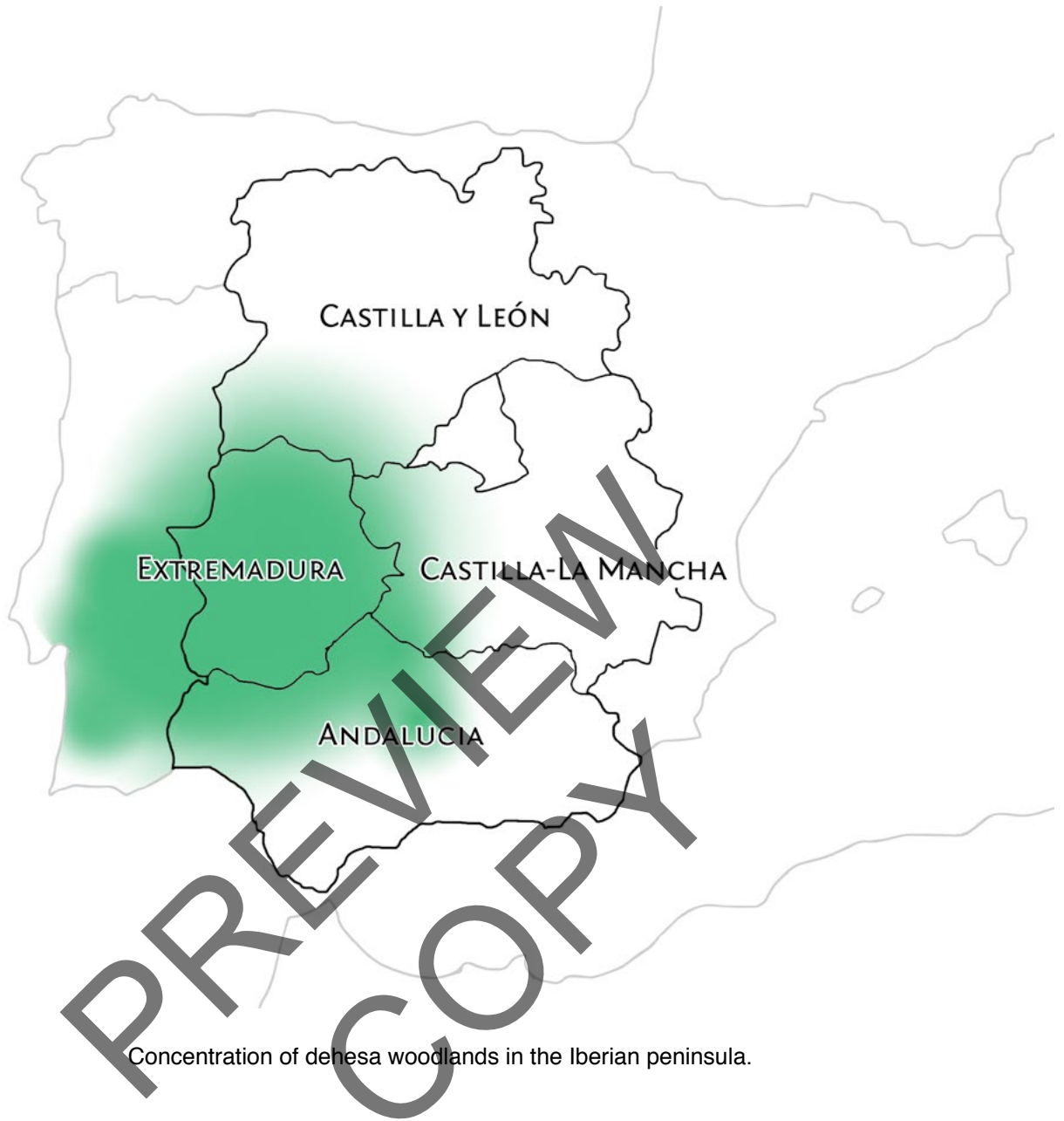
The home of the free-range Iberian pig, the *dehesa* is colloquially referred to as a forest, woodland or savannah.

Defining Features of the Dehesa

- **Man-made ecosystem supporting livestock and cork.** Although it might appear at first glance as an entirely natural setting, it is a man-made and necessarily intensely maintained ecosystem. Unsuitable for agriculture due to its acidic, low-fertility soils, the *dehesa* is crafted to support two major industries: livestock raising (of which Iberian pigs are the most important), providing a source of cereals, grasses and legumes for grazing; and cork production (of which wine bottle stoppers are the most important), hosting cork oak trees that are harvested for their precious bark.
- **Origins.** The *dehesa* likely originated approximately 6000 years ago in the Neolithic period, when the extensive Mediterranean forest was cleared to establish grasslands. It began to take its modern form subsequent to the Christian reconquest of the Iberian peninsula from the forces of Islam in the late 15th century, when land was redistributed and functioned as warmer

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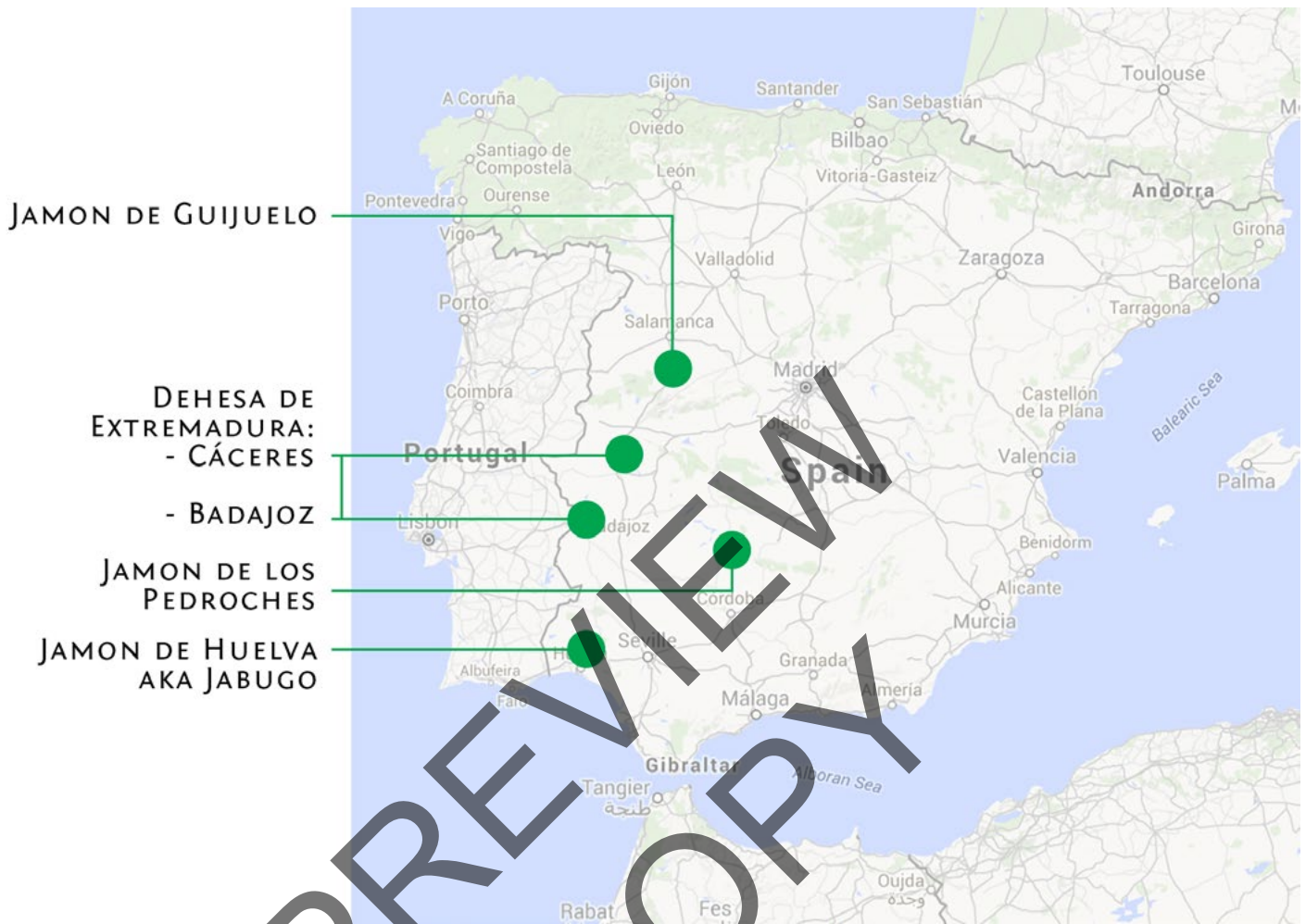


Concentration of dehesa woodlands in the Iberian peninsula.

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Where It's From



The four Iberian ham denominations. [See our detailed Google Map.](#)

All Spanish Iberian hams are produced in one of four specific geographic areas. To assure the highest quality final product for the consumer, each of these areas has a denomination of origin (*denominación de origen*), a regulatory system that determines and enforces strict rules for production: the lineage of the pigs, the rearing of the animals and the steps that must be followed to produce the final product. Although rules — discussed more in subsequent sections — vary slightly among the denominations, they generally adhere to the same standard.

Author tip: All Iberian hams carry the seal of the denomination in which they were produced. Look for it when buying to know exactly where your ham comes from.

The Four Denominations

As you'd expect, the geographic locations of the denominations largely coincide with the position of the dehesa, the natural homeland of Iberian pigs.

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Rearing & Diet



The acorns (*bellotas*) of the holm oak, the pigs' primary food source during the montanera.

During the first 10 months of an Iberian pig's life, in the spring and summer months, it forages in the dehesa consuming plants, cereals, grasses and legumes. This is preparation for the final, most critical stage of the rearing process known as *montanera*. During this period, pigs feed on acorns (*bellotas*) lying on the ground below holm and cork oak trees.

The Montanera

- **A three-month feeding frenzy.** From early October to February, acorns fall from the oak trees. The most important feeding window is typically the three-month period from November-January, when acorns are most abundant.
- **Starting and ending weights.** In general, pigs enter the montanera at roughly 80-115 kg

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Some Wine with That?



A perfect match: Jamón and Cava.

Iberian ham is so delicious, it goes with pretty much anything, but here are our picks for the best wine combinations.

Pairings

- **Sparkling wine.** For the ultimate experience, opt for sparkling Cava from Catalonia. Dry versions marked as Brut Nature (0-3 grams/liter residual sugar) or Extra Brut (3-6 grams/liter residual sugar) work best. The higher levels of acidity in the wine cut the fat perfectly.
- **White wine.** Again, trying to keep up the acidity, we suggest going with an albariño from Rias Baixas (more fruity for fans of chardonnay) or a verdejo from Rueda (more citrus for fans of sauvignon blanc).
- **Red wine.** All tempranillo-based Riojas go quite nicely, as well as cabernet franc-like mencía-based offerings from Bierzo in Castilla y León.
- **Fortified wine.** A superb, less conventional pairing is with fino sherry from Andalucía's Jerez or, even better, dry 10-year sercial from Madeira. If these are wines you have never tried, we encourage you to give them a shot!

Learn more about Spanish wine and pairing with the [Approach Guides mobile application](#), recently rated #1 for wine education by Food & Wine magazine!

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A Special Thank You

We offer a special thank you to the following organizations that provided above-and-beyond assistance in the creation of this guide.



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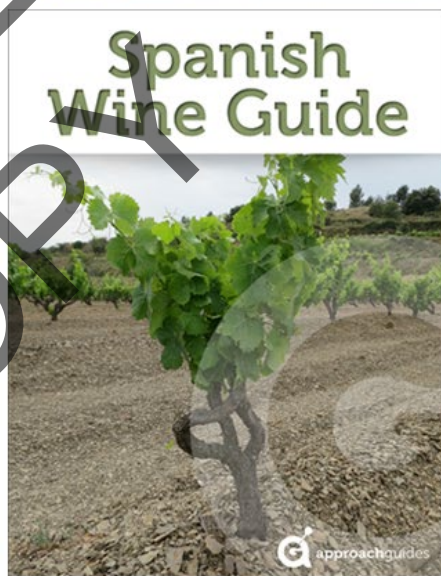
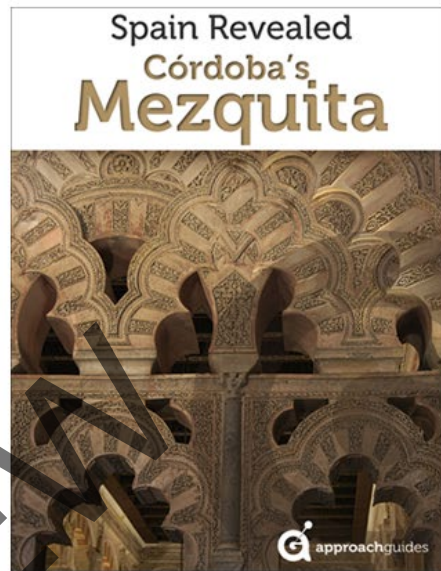
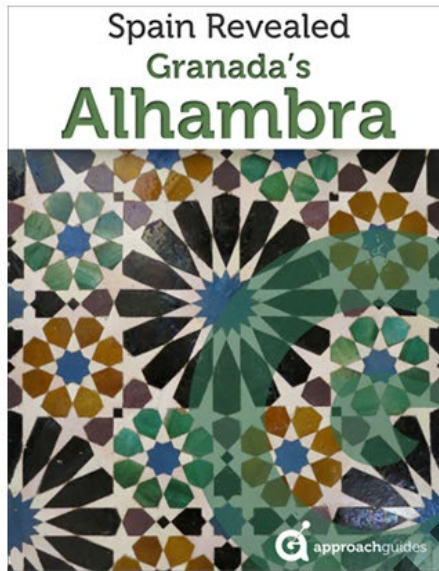
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Spain Reading List

We've reimagined the travel reading list for those seeking more rewarding and fulfilling experiences around the world. [Explore our collection](#) of "Trip Reads" – expertly-curated print books, ebooks, magazine articles, papers from leading academics, online resources, music, podcasts, videos and more.

Here are just a couple of our Spain recommendations ([see the complete list](#)):

- **“Bullfighting is Not a Sport – It is a Tragedy.”** Ernest Hemingway’s thoughts on this Spanish tradition, written for The Toronto Star Weekly in 1923.
- **Video: El Greco’s style.** An art restorer from Madrid’s Prado museum explains the artist’s technique.

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PACKING LIST *for global voyagers*

We're constantly on the road and as you can imagine, have a pretty defined list of things that we never leave home without. Here's a peak at [what's in our luggage](#), from our favorite camera to portable wine glasses. It's the ultimate list for a seasoned traveler!

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Travel Guides for the Ultra Curious

Since 2009, Approach Guides has been the ultimate resource for curious travelers. With a portfolio of digital guides and mobile applications that offer expert insights, context and on-location intelligence, we've reimaged the way travelers explore their destination, connect with the local culture and experience the world.

"We founded the company on the belief that knowing more about a destination enables richer travel experiences. And the desire to create a trusted travel resource — one that breaks from the pervasive "top 10" and "best of" lists to communicate the essence of a place — shapes all of our products."

David & Jennifer Raezer
Founders, Approach Guides

Reveal the Essence of Your Next Destination

You've never used a guidebook like this before. Each guide allows you to appreciate a destination's cultural highlights in a whole new light by providing context and insights found nowhere else. You'll discover a destination's unique story through our engaging, thorough explanations enhanced by high-resolution photos and detailed floorplans. We invite you to [explore our collection](#) of guidebooks.

- **Exclusive focus on cultural sites.** Approach Guides are focused exclusively on providing deep insight into your destination's best cultural sites and experiences.
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- **Free updates.** All guidebooks are marked with version numbers; when we update a guidebook, existing customers can easily download the update for free.

Praise

Compulsive (and compulsively informed) travelers, the Raezers are the masterminds behind the downloadable Approach Guides, which are filled with a university course-worth of history and insights for 62 destinations worldwide. Why we love it. The Raezers share our desire for deep, well-researched information on the wonders of the world.

Travel + Leisure

What started as one couple's travel notes aimed at filling in the gaps in guidebooks has become Approach Guides — a menu of downloadable travel guides that cover cultural and historical topics of interest to thoughtful travelers. What's hot: Bite-sized travel guides that specialize in topics ranging from the foods of Italy to one that helps you explore the historical and architectural significance of Angkor's famous temple structures in Cambodia.

Los Angeles Times

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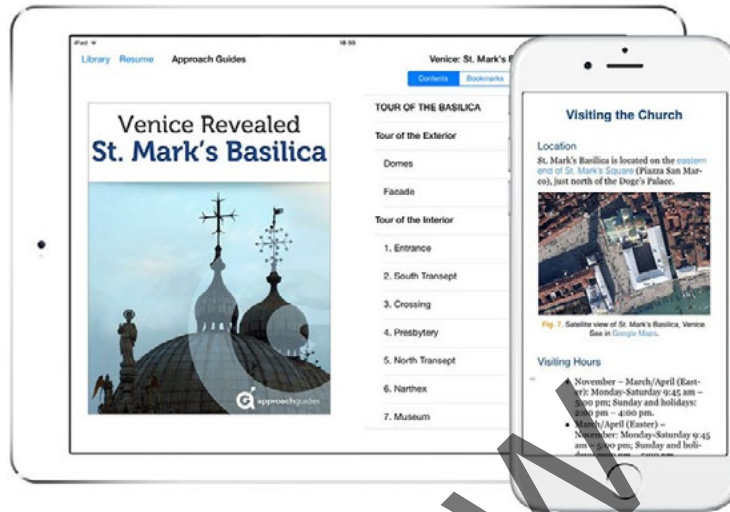
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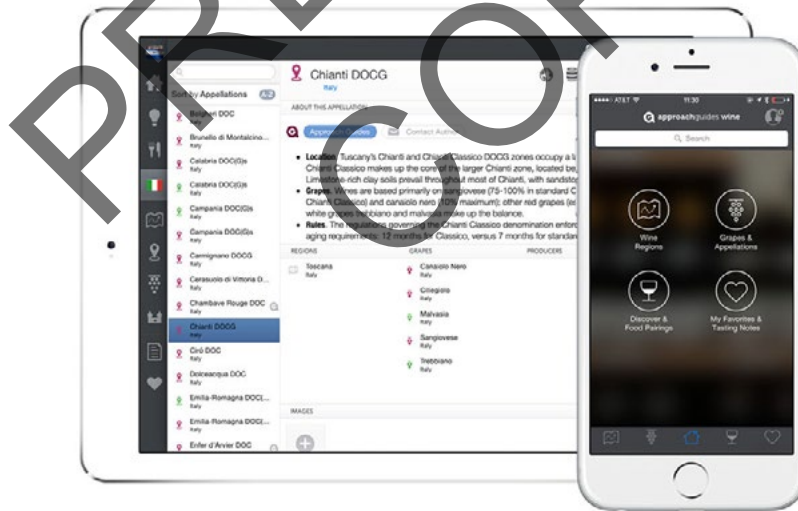
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