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0.1.- INTRODUCTION

0.1.1.- Promotion of tourism and widening participation

Since the founding of the Department of Tourism in June 1989, its main goal has been to raise awareness about the city's artistic, monumental, cultural and gastronomic wealth and offer, among other areas of tourism interest. In short, to disclose the multiple aspects that make up the multifaceted experience of a tourist destination in a city like Ávila, was declared a UNESCO World Heritage City in 1985.

After spending the early years establishing our presence in the major tourism markets, increasing our presence at trade fairs, enhancing media advertising and publishing tourist information for those who visited the city's tourist offices and ensuring this information was readily available at local tourism agencies and entities, we decided it was time to offer those visiting us new experiences that recreate Ávila's historical past, and allow the visitor to enjoy a well-rounded trip filled with new and exciting experience.

The other element that inspired the programming of the first edition of the "Medieval Days. The Market of the Three Cultures", was to encourage the active participation of Ávila's residents, and ensure they took a leading role in the events, alongside tourists who wanted to attend these celebrations and soak up Ávila's authentic culture.



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0.1.2.- Ávila revives its history: A focus on leisure and culture.

The first weekend of September 1997 marked the start of Ávila's medieval market events. At that point in time, the events were organised by the Ávila City Council Tourism Department, which brought together political representatives, institutions and business representatives, in addition to participation from the Government of Castilla y León.

This first market was very small and limited to Mercado Chico and the surrounding streets. The number of stalls was also small, but from the very first edition, great effort was put into decoration, the quality of the artisans, as well as to offer a range of different activities to complement the event.

In these early beginnings, groups of residents started decorating their balconies, and hotel owners even got involved and started decorating their hotels and dressing up in medieval costumes.



0.1.3.- Markets in the Middle Ages. The Catholic kings.

Nothing has ever caused the people of Ávila to abandon the tradition of their weekly Friday markets. Not even the stress of everyday life and work.

Except for a few expected dashes of modernity, the Mercado Chico, located in the heart of the walled area, continues to ooze the feel and smells of those markets dating back to the Middle Ages or maybe even further, channelling the authentic experience of farmers' fairs in centre of the Roman city that must have happened in this exact spot. In a bid to make the most of these privileged surroundings, the first weekend of September Ávila will mark a transformation designed to bring back to life the colour of that medieval city that shaped the glorious city we now call home, and which has reached the 21st century with the amazing history held by its ancient stone buildings.

Market traders and business owners from all over the region come together for three days in this experience which, under the guise of the market, is quite a show recreating the daily life of the Middle Ages.

Comedians, storytellers, fire-throwers, musicians and bailiffs will accompany the vendors and artisans at this fair, where there will be no shortage of silversmiths or fortune-tellers, esparto-makers, basket-makers, toymakers and brass and alpaca embossers.

The first market held in Ávila, heir to the old repopulation fairs, was what we know today as Mercado Chico. However, the establishment of the wall as a fiscal border for merchants made them decide over the years to establish another market outside the walls on the esplanade that extended between the Puerta del Alcázar and the Church of San Pedro, in the area called Mercado Grande or El Grande.

Both markets were weekly, and we know from historical records that they were held on Fridays. Historical evidence of these markets is found in a document signed in 1494 by the Catholic Kings, where approval to hold the market is granted for every Friday of the year "from sunrise to sunset".

The existence of other more specific markets is also known, such as cattle, fruit and many others.

The supply problem even forced the City Council to build two buildings: the Alhóndiga and the Carnicerías.

Municipal records show us that there were constant legal battles between merchants and the Council about control of the space taken up by stalls in the traditional shopping streets, which often stopped pedestrians from freely passing through.



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We also know that the deputy mayors of the Alcázar prohibited the setting up of market stalls next to the city walls in the 17th century.



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Testimonies from the 16th century give us an even better understanding of how the Mercado Grande looked: to one side were the portable stalls run by silversmiths, tailors, linen makers, garment makers, armour makers, seamstresses, tinsmiths, tanners, saddlers, boilermakers, game makers, bag makers; while the other side featured stands selling necklaces, rings, pins, knives, and scissors. The third part was home to fruits, kitchenware, bread, wheat, barley and vegetables; and, in the last, the meat tables and farriers.

Public criers were a common feature in markets, and they read out sentences, royal and pragmatic decrees, which were always preceded by the expression: "hear ye, hear ye, hear ye!" They also announced the prices of fish, meat, salt, bull fights and other food prices.

The markets provided colourful and eye-catching sights which some locals still remember and have now come back as a permanent feature of weekend life in Ávila.

It is difficult to pinpoint which of Mercado Chico's activities deserve to be mentioned in more detail: as in almost all cities, the Plaza Mayor has been the hub of the most important events and has been chosen as the setting for the most outstanding moments in the history of our city.

The town started its life as a small Vetton farmstead and and later, the forum of a Roman military camp, is known in Ávila by the name of Mercado Chico. From the beginning of the history of this city, the square had two clear destinies: it was a political and social meeting place for the townsfolk and also a commercial meeting place. These uses continue to this day.

It was the setting for meetings held by the Council, which summoned residents by ringing a bell. Later, when the Council ceased to be an Open Assembly, it continued to hold its sessions in San Juan, until, in the 16th century, it erected its own building in the same spot.

We also know that this was the place where Jimena Blázquez gathered numerous armed women to face Arab invaders, who threatened an attack on a city devoid of men, giving rise to one of Ávila's best-known legends.

Santa Teresa de Jesús, whose family belonged to this parish, was baptised in the church of San Juan.

During the 16th and 18th centuries, the square witnessed the city's reception of various royal figures: in 1531, the Empress Isabella and her son Philip; in 1534, Charles I; and in 1600, Philip III.

In 1592 a scaffold was built to execute Don Diego de Bracamonte, who was beheaded after handing out leaflets that spoke against the king.



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The Inquisition used this square to carry out Acts of Faith. It is said that the Act of Faith depicted in the famous painting by Pedro Berruguete (Museo del Prado), is set in the Mercado Chico.

Some of the most notable social gatherings in Mercado Chico included: jostling, theatrical performances, for which the balconies were rented, and other medieval games.



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0.2.- Origins: First Markets (1996/2006)

Since the first medieval market events, scenic visuals and decoration have always featured, as well as include cultural, artistic and historical re-enactments as a core part of the programme. All of these activities are made possible by the huge passion of everyone involved.

A key part of our strategy was to positively set ourselves apart from some of the medieval markets that were beginning to emerge in some places without offering any distinct attractions. We did this by filling our events with cultural content, including performances of Gregorian music choirs, medieval dances performed by specialised Ballet Groups, remembrance of historical events of the city and other dynamic performances.

Another aspect that we paid special attention to when promoting the events to citizens of Ávila is talking about our history of coexistence between three cultures: Christian, Jewish, and Muslim. Our intention was to make them feel including and like authentic owners of the events by inviting them to participate dressed in costumes inspired by the medieval age and to any of the cultures represented, through parades and in all kinds of events: photographic contests, archery exhibitions, decoration of balconies, shop windows, etc.

This is the type of event the City Council decided to support in order to provide experiences filled with excellence and distinction in the holding of Medieval Days, as well ensuring the participation of Ávila's people, making them the true leaders of the event from the beginning and increasing their involvement year on year. The participation of neighbourhood associations, a diverse range of groups, folk groups, choirs, dance groups, etc., has been an example of popular participation by citizens. Residents now say that these celebrations are the most popular event in the whole of Ávila.



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Similarly, the hotel and business sector have always been fully behind the medieval markets event from the beginning and decorate their establishments, ask their employees to dress up and offer products especially thought up for these celebratory days.



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Among the activities programmed especially during these first ten years, as a complement to the "main idea" of the Market, a growing number of artisan stalls started to participate. The quality and distinct offer of each of them was carefully analysed and supervised, in addition to a varied entertainment programme that offers new shows every year. These include:

- Choral performances, such as: the Tomás Luis de Victoria Choir (15th and 16th century music) Mass sung by the Gregorian Choir, performances by the Aulencia Chamber Choir, Period Bullfights, Amicus Meus Choir.
- Medieval dances by Eoán Ballet.
- **Folk groups (Nuevo Mester de Juglaría, Mare, Duo Mayalde, etc.)** and traditional music, which managed to reach out to the people of Ávila and visitors alike through the cultural roots found in their music and dance.
- **Fireworks shows,**
- **Theatre displays,**
- Music from Muslim and Jewish cultures: Traditional dance of the Maghreb by the Al-Baraka group, Sephardic Music from the Zohar Group
- Shows by the Ávila Archers Club
- **Conferences on the Medieval History of Ávila**
- **Historical and medieval cinema screenings**



0.3.- Evolution. Growth and international outlook

The first ten years of our Medieval Days, which we have carefully described so far, have provided huge wealth and rich tourist attractions for the city. We have summarised this information in the attached press kit, which outlines the growing importance of these events.

It is important to note that in 2004, the Ávila City Council was invited by the Comunità Montana de Camerino to participate in its Medieval Festivities which are called “Corsa de la Spada e Palio”. Representatives from Ávila took part in the main parades and activities, dressed in clothing to represent each of the “Three Cultures”.

The result of that first meeting was the signing of a twinning agreement with Camerino, who first took part in Ávila’s celebrations in 2005 with the participation of one of their local Sbanderatori groups.

This provided a starting point for the participation of groups, artisans, and shows from a range of different countries, who were attracted to Ávila’s medieval events as a result of their international presence in the tourism media in those locations.

A significant element in the growth of the Medieval Market, as well as of differentiation with other existing markets, was the unique customisation of the events decorations, adapting them to Ávila’s most symbolic monument, its city walls.





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In 2006 we started decorating all the wall's towers and doors, creating a unique spectacle on this UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Since then, the decoration of our city walls for the celebrations have become more standardised and are guided by a style manual to ensure high quality visuals and materials.

The number of artisans and performers attending the celebrations has also seen significantly healthy growth.



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0.4.- Community participation

Since starting these events many years ago, we realised that the concept connective with an unconscious feeling of community in Ávila that brought people together as part of an international event and twinning with other towns. The events allowed for a party atmosphere on the streets and a fun use of different costumes which isn't always as common during the town's Carnival and Patron Saint Festivities due to its socially religious nature and the observant nature of those events.



0.4.1.- Parades: CEAS and Public participation.

Seeking to coordinate this fun and spontaneous involvement by all of the townspeople's participation, all of the yearly editions of our medieval celebrations include a "Parade of the Three Cultures", with full participation of the council in order to inspire citizens to do the same, with members marching in high-quality costumes of their choice in order to successfully represent the culture and time.

Neighbourhood associations, youth associations, sports associations, the Ávila Archers Club and all the citizens who decided to enjoy this festive parade have participated. All the musical, dance and entertainment groups that performed at the Market have been welcomed into this parade on the other days of the event, making the Parade of the Three Cultures, which runs through all the streets and squares of the Market area, a centre point and highlight of the town's Medieval Festival.

To achieve greater participation and better coordination of the event, and fundamentally encourage the participation of children in the hope that they will continue our Medieval Events, we work in partnership with CEAS, who hold children's workshops in the different neighbourhoods where they are based. They use these workshops to encourage children to design their own costumes which they can later use in the Market parade.

All these actions have contributed to the creation of the modern-day Ávila Medieval Market, which has more than 250 craft stalls and boasts the participation of more than 65,000 people. This provides a consistent increase in profit for the hospitality sector and business in general, with a huge boost in employment during the celebrations.



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0.4.2.- AAVV. Clothing workshops.

Another activity that has formed part of these celebrations from the beginning and continues to this day are the medieval costume workshops run by the city's neighbourhood associations, which we proudly promote at the City Council.

These workshops include cutting and sewing classes in different neighbourhoods across the city and at the AAVV headquarters, so that anyone who wants to try their hand at making clothes for the Market parade can do so.

The workshop are hugely popular and almost 100% of the neighbourhood associations participate annually, enhancing interest across the city. This also means that more and more people take part in the Market each year using original medieval costumes.



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0.4.3.- Craftspeople, actors, musicians, and dancers from Avila.

Our Medieval Events would not be what they are today without the huge participation of an estimated figure of more than 60,000 people, including the people of Ávila that are also made up of merchants, hoteliers, musical groups, artisans, and many, many more, who participate in a party that they feel is authentically part of their identity.

Every year we reserve a significant number of spaces for artisans from Avila, including both for adults and children. We always receive more applications than places we have available, which demonstrates the huge popularity of the events.



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0.4.4.- Benefits for the hospitality sector

At the Department of Tourism of the City Council of Ávila, we have always understood tourism development as a fundamental component in the city's economy, currently constituting around 20% of GDP, which is why it contributes decisively to the economic development of the city and as a result, to the creation of employment and the well-being of Ávila's people.

The service sector, fundamentally the hotel industry, reminds us of this every year, and tells us that the Medieval Events are the most important yearly celebrations and the ones that make them the most money. The event fills hotels, restaurants and doubles spending on services, staff increases and extends business opening hours. This has been the impact of the Medieval Market celebrations Cultures in Ávila since they started, on every first weekend of September every year, since 1977.



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0.4.5.- Clothing, photography and decoration contests.

Another way of seeking wider participation and achieving higher quality and more visible features at the Market celebrations, are the different contests that we hold each year that centre on different themes.

Contestants use these contests to celebrate various different aspects of Market celebrations, encouraging public participation and enhancing the quality of decoration, craft stalls and costumes.

One of the main contests gives a prize to the best medieval clothing and costumes for different categories, including adults, groups, and children.

Another high-quality contest that proves to be exceedingly popular is one we hold in partnership with the Ávila Photographers Association. We carry out an exhibition every year using the best photos from the contest and feature them in the promotional materials for that edition. The winner gets their photograph featured on the poster and cover of the brochure of the following year's edition of the Medieval Days.

Meanwhile, balcony and shop window contests aim to decorate the entire city and complement the decoration put on by the event organisers.

We also try to enhance both the quality and participation of Ávila's artisans in the events by holding a contest for the best market stall.



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0.5.- The Market of the Three Cultures today.

Growing from its modest beginnings, in which the main event space was limited to the Plaza del Mercado Chico and surrounding streets, in last year's edition we celebrated throughout the entire historic city centre, filling its streets and squares, including the decoration of 2.5 km of the city's walls.

In the early years of the celebrations, we set out to divide the events into each cultural representation. We did this by using the Plaza de la Catedral and Mercado Chico as a hub for the Christian artisans, while the historically Jewish Calle Reyes Católicos which was home to the Jewish Quarter and has an old Synagogue was filled with Jewish artisans, and the Plaza Pedro Dávila was used as a space that turned into an Arab souk filled with Muslim artisans.



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Other important locations include the Jardín de San Vicente, which is home to a dedicated children's space and the unique shows put on by Avila's Archers' Associations.

We also chose Plaza Adolfo Suarez, Calle San Segundo and Plaza Tte. Arevalo as spaces to showcase Avila's local artisans.



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The Plaza de Santa Teresa has long been home to special military demonstrations which feature weapons and other army-centred demonstrations. It also features falconry demonstrations, which are very popular with the public.

More than 25 streets and squares are decorated for the celebrations, and they host a constant stream of entertainment troupes (more than 10), including dancers, minstrels, jugglers, and a diverse range of other shows.

Last year's event saw 250 stalls, which fill 12 of the historic centre's most important squares and streets.

In recent years, a new activity has also emerged at the Atrio de San Isidro, next to the city's walls. The space is used for medieval tournaments and jostles. Public interest in these events exceeded all expectations and last year we held performances in the morning, afternoon and evening, with full capacity at all of the shows.

Finally, a closing show that takes place after the large parade rounds of the three days of celebrations (Friday to Sunday).





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All these activities require city-wide organisation which has expanded with the event itself. Different groups and organisations come together to ensure the smooth running of the event as a whole. The Department of Tourism, organises, supervises and coordinates the event and distinct activities, while the Municipal council services are responsible for Cleaning, Water, Lighting, Construction Works, Gardens, Local Police and Firefighters.

Other organisations that take part in ensuring the security and organisation of the Market event are: the Red Cross, National Police Force, Food Safety Authorities, Sanitary Services, Civil Protection, Volunteers, etc.

In total, a group of more than 150 people are involved during the event to ensure the success and safety of the Market of the Three Cultures.



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