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SPECIAL BUDGET TRAVEL SECTION

Week at Spanish resort earned by chatting in English

Spaniards pay for immersion program letting them hone language skills

By **AMANDA J. MILLER**
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RUSS ALLEN/Special (ENLARGE)

Oscar Robles, an executive with Sun Microsystems in Spain, pauses beside the riverwalk in Cazorla, Spain, a favorite route for Pueblo Ingles one-on-ones between Spaniards and Anglos.

Cazorla, Spain — Gathered around a blazing pot on a patio at [Hotel](#) Villa Turística de Cazorla, we're cooking up your basic moonshine. Blue flames lick at the ladle and at the dish towel-covered fingers of one of our hosts.

This is a Queimada (meaning "to burn"), a centuries-old Celtic ritual of brewing a concoction of aguardiente de orujo (alcohol), sugar, coffee beans and lemon rind to sip in a ceremony to free your spirit and confer confidence in your own strength.

Most tourists to Spain do not participate in or even hear about this custom, but we're not most tourists. And we don't need strength, but our new Spanish friends do.

Language immersion

It's the midway point of an eight-day session of Pueblo Inglés, an immersion program launched in 2001 as a supplement to English grammar lessons. Pueblo Inglés brings together about 20 Spanish speakers and 20 English speakers at resorts in Spain to help Spaniards improve their comprehension and speaking.

We've been yammering at them nonstop for days. It's our job, for which we're being well-rewarded: Our stay at this three-star resort, along with a breakfast buffet and three-course gourmet meals at lunch and dinner, including wine, is absolutely free.

Our only expenses are round-trip airfare to [Madrid](#) and a night in a hotel before and after our week with the Pueblo Inglés program (though we decided to stay a few days longer), plus a few euros if we want sodas, coffee, other alcohol or between-meal snacks at the resort. (We spend less than 10 euros, about \$12 for the week, and leave a 10-euro tip for the staff.)

It's a budget trip with a rich experience.

The cost of the program is paid for by corporations that send their Spanish executives to hone English skills, by individuals looking to improve their speech and comprehension and by the company's Masters Students, who pay to attend four Pueblo Inglés sessions as part of their nine-month intensive English study program.

Another glimpse of Spain

But the fact is, most of us English speakers would pay for this chance to meet and talk with interesting, fun-loving Spaniards and get a glimpse of Spanish culture you don't see while roaming Madrid as a tourist.

"We had a wonderful time at Cazorla, and I have recommended it to all my sisters. I have five, so this could be quite a spike in activity for Pueblo Inglés if they all decide to go at once." Tom Brown of Vancouver Island, British Columbia, says of his week with our group at the resort.

"Personally, I would love to go again and am scheming to find a way to manage it for the fall."

David Miller, a Texan who's retired from the military and living in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, has attended Pueblo Inglés sessions at other locales in Valdelavilla and La Alberca, and says each is unique. "The makeup of the group [at Cazorla] was just remarkable and ... the synergy that evolved was just fantastic," he notes in an e-mail. "The diversity of backgrounds, both Spanish and Anglo, helped to move it along."

Diversity is an understatement. At this session, the first in Cazorla, our group of English speakers ranges in age from early 20s to 70s and includes Anglos temporarily living or traveling in Spain; a singer/actress from Canada; an entertainer/traveler from the Netherlands, whose most recent job was teaching in Thailand; and two people from Ireland, one a native and the other a Chicagoan studying at the University of Limerick.



RUSS ALLEN/Special (ENLARGE)

The village of Cazorla, Spain, sits on a mountainside beneath the Castillo de la Yedra, a castle dating to the 11th century. The castle houses the Museum of Popular Arts and Customs of the Upper Guadalquivir, a state museum. During their free time, participants in the Pueblo Inglés language program walked a mile up a steep, narrow road to tour the castle and museum.



RUSS ALLEN/Special (ENLARGE)

The museum at the Castillo de la Yedra is divided into a historical section and an arts and popular customs section. The historical section includes a room with a life-size Romano-Byzantine Christ on a cypress cross, flanked by depictions of the Apostles dating from the 17th century. In another room are remains of Arabic pottery found within the castle.



RUSS ALLEN/Special (ENLARGE)

Some Pueblo Inglés participants visit the museum in the Castillo de la Yedra above Cazorla: Bob Prochnow (from left) of Albuquerque, N.M., who's temporarily living in Spain,

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