

SUR IN ENGLISH May 2021

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

GUADALHORCE VALLEY



The fertile orchard of Malaga province

Alhaurín de la Torre, Alhaurín el Grande, Coín, Cártama, Álora, Pizarra...
a district shaped by a river that
has attracted settlers for thousands
of years

A view of Alora across the lemon groves. SUR

Monumental legacy. Several civilisations have left their mark on the towns of the Guadalhorce valley **P4**

Talk of the town. Local residents share their views of the district - their favourite places in town and countryside **P6**

International. Thousands of foreign residents have stepped back from the busy Costa to make the valley their home **P7**



The church of St John the Baptist in the centre of Coín. SUR



The village of Almogía. J. ALMELLONES

Guadalhorce Valley. The garden of Malaga

In touch with nature. This beautiful, natural area offers stunning countryside popular with hikers, as well as being home to busy commuter towns

The Guadalhorce Valley is one of the nine districts of the province of Malaga, situated west of the capital in a natural area formed by the Guadalhorce River, or the 'river of the silent'. The district is also known as the 'garden of Malaga' because it is characterised by its fertility and the cultivation of much of the area's vegetables and fruit. This is a beautiful, almost unspoilt, area offering stunning valleys, rivers, forests of fir, pine and chestnut trees and sprawling country side planted with olive, citrus and almond groves. It is ideal for hikers and adventure travellers and it offers the visitor a chance to explore plenty of undisturbed white villages (pueblo blancos) that are nestled in the mountains.

The district is made up of eight municipalities: Alhaurín de la Torre, Alhaurín el Grande, Coín, Cártama, Pízarra, Álora, Almogía and Valle de Abdalajís. However, there has been some discrepancies regarding these municipalities: according to the BOJA (official bulletin of the Junta de Andalucía) published in 2003, Almogía and Valle de Abdalajís should be excluded from the district, while towns like Casarabonela, Guaro, Monda, Tolox and Yunquera should come under the Guadalhorce Valley.

Spectacular scenery

Scattered among the vast mountainous region that surrounds these towns is some of Malaga's most spectacular scenery, like the reservoirs of El Chorro, the gorge of Los Gaitanes and the mountains which stretch from Ronda to Antequera.

As well as its natural beauty and an exceptional microclimate

perfect for rural tourism, the Guadalhorce Valley has a long and interesting history that dates back to before the Phoenician era. The area is rich with monuments, religious temples and untold tales of triumphs, defeats and legends.

Alhaurín el Grande

Alhaurín el Grande has a rich history, as the traces of Neolithic occupation found south-east of the village will demonstrate. By the time the Romans arrived, the settlement was already well established, although no name was ever recorded. The Romans, who named it Lauro Nova, believed it had been blessed by the gods because of the benefits of the surrounding hills, rich with valuable mineral deposits.

The town began to prosper with the arrival of the Moors in the eighth century. They built a fortress on the hilltop and renamed the town Alhaurín, (garden of Allah). El Grande was added after the reconquest in 1485.

Alhaurín de la Torre

Founded by the Phoenicians around 1000BC, the restful town of Alhaurín de la Torre is situated at the foot of the Mijas mountains. The town was known as Lauro Vetus during the Roman era. Under Muslim rule, it was also named Alhaurín and it grew into a flourishing agrarian town. Some parts of the old town still offer a glimpse of its Moorish past.

The Catholic monarchs added the suffix De la Torre in reference to the town's defensive tower.

The population gradually increased due to the influx of Christian settlers at the end of the 16th century. Today, it is a peaceful residential town within commuting distance of Malaga city.

Coín

Coín is situated in the fertile valley of the Río Grande and there is little doubt that a community of some kind existed on the spot long before the Roman conquest, although it was the Romans who gave the settlement its first recorded name, Lacibis. The town became a transition point for the minerals being quarried to the south in the Sierra Blanca, a practice that continued until the 19th century.

Following the Visigoth era, the town fell into ruin. By the time the Moors arrived, much of the Roman heritage had been lost. The Christian reconquest took place in 1485 and legend claims that Christopher Columbus participated in the campaign.

Although the economy was traditionally agriculture, Coín is known for its ceramics industry, and it has a distinctive colour style called Coín Verde (Coín Green).

Tourism and the hospitality industry have replaced much of the old industry, although there are still some potters and several quarries where local marble, dolomite rock and sand are produced.

Cártama

Famed for producing what some claim is the best morcilla (blood sausage) in Spain, the sprawling white town of Cártama stands at the head of the Guadalhorce river. A spectacular iron bridge known as the Puente de Hierro (built between 1927 and 1931), spans the river and connects the main town with Estación de Cártama. The whole area is overlooked by the Espartales and Sierra Llana, collectively known as the Sierra de Cártama.

Throughout the ages, Cártama, has been a border town which has seen the settlement of Celts, Ro-

TONY BRYANT



San Pedro church in Cártama. SUR



View of the Guadalhorce district over Alhaurín de la Torre. SUR



The iconic iron bridge in Cártama. SUR

mans and Arabs, all of which have left a lasting impression on the district. The Celts, who named the settlement Carth, favoured the area for its rich mines. The town later became Cartima under the Roman occupation, and, finally, during Muslim rule, took its current name of Cártama.

Pizarra

The town of Pizarra is a popular stop-off on the commuter line between Malaga and Álora. The town dates to 1483, but was largely neglected by the Romans and Moors due to the position of a huge, unstable rock (peñasco) that forever threatened to come crashing down. The 3,000-tonne rock continued to threaten those brave enough to live beneath it until 1988, when, after, showing signs of cracking, the authorities finally blew it up.

Pizarra has a strong association with American painter Gino Hollander, who lived in the town during the 1960s. Hollander amassed an array of archaeological artefacts while living in Pizarra. When he eventually left Spain to return to America, he donated the collection to the local authorities, who converted a disused farm complex into the Hollander Museum.

Álora

Álora is situated just 12 kilometres south of El Chorro, so the surrounding landscape is ideal for hiking and exploring. It is a typical pueblo blanco nestled between three rocky spurs topped by the ruins of a magnificent castle. The castle was first built by the Phoenicians and later expanded by the Romans. The fortress was destroyed by the Visigoths in the 5th century, and then rebuilt by the Moors when they conquered the town one century later.

Álora has plenty of cultural im-

GUADALHORCE VALLEY

○ The six main towns



COÍN

Facts and figures

Total area: 127.37 km²
Height above sea level: 209 m.
Population: 22,673 (2020)
Post code: 29100
Mayor: Francisco Santos Cantos (PP)
Patron: Virgen de la Fuensanta
Feast day: 15 August

ALHAURÍN DE LA TORRE

Facts and figures

Total area: 82.70 km²
Height above sea level: 99m.
Population: 41,170 (2020)
Post code: 29130
Mayor: Joaquín Villanova (PP)
Patrons: San Sebastián / San Juan
Feast day: 20 January / 24 June

ALHAURÍN EL GRANDE

Facts and figures

Total area: 73.01 km²
Height above sea level: 239m.
Population: 25,358 (2020)
Post Code: 29120
Mayor: Toñi Ledesma Sánchez (PP)
Patrons: San Sebastián / Nuestra Señora de Gracia.
Feast day: 20 January / 15 August

portance: as well as its association with verdiales and flamenco, it was home to Miguel de Cervantes between 1587 and 1593, as the plaque on the house at the northern end of the main square reveals.

Almogía

Although Almogía shows evidence of its Roman past, the town was settled by the Moors. The name derives from the Moorish al-megia - the pretty one - a reference to its position in the foothills of the Sierra del Hacho. The town was fortified as an outpost by Christian convert Omar ibn Haf-sún in the 11th century. It fell to the Christians in 1487.

The castle was captured by the French during the War of Independence and deliberately destroyed prior to their ousting. Today, only one of the original seven towers remains, the Torre de la Vela.

CÁRTAMA

Facts and figures

Total area: 105.10 km²
Height above sea level: 161 m.
Population: 26,738 (2020)
Post code: 29570/29580
Mayor: Jorge Gallardo (PSOE)
Patron: Virgen de los Remedios
Feast day: 23 April

ÁLORA

Facts and figures

Total area: 169.62 km²
Height above sea level: 194m.
Population: 13,112 (2020)
Post code: 29500/29510
Mayor: Francisco Martínez Subires (PSOE)
Patron: La Virgen de Flores
Feast day: 8 September

PIZARRA

Facts and figures

Total area: 63.61 km²
Height above sea level: 80m.
Population: 9,444 (2020)
Post code: 29560
Mayor: Félix F. Lozano (PP)
Patron: Virgen de la Fuensanta
Feast day: 15 August

Valle de Abdalajís

The village of Valle de Abdalajís is perched 340 metres above sea level and is set against an impressive backdrop of the Penibética mountain range that rises above its whitewashed houses and cobblestone streets.

The name is thought to have derived from the name of the Arab who founded it: Abd-el-Aziz.

This area is ideal for rural living, or a quiet holiday spent trekking, cycling, climbing or just relaxing. It is also popular with birders, as the area is populated by a considerable number of protected species such as owls, buzzards, griffon vultures and golden eagles, amongst others.

The more venturesome visitor, especially those looking for breathtaking excitement and adventure, can enjoy hang gliding, a pastime for which the area is renowned.

HELP!



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Valle Natural Río Grande

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The Mayors, councillors and neighbours of the Valley are trying to stop the destruction of their municipalities, but they need your help.

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Lasting legacy. A wealth of cultural heritage

Monuments, temples, churches and castles from the Phoenician, Roman, Visigoth, Arab and Christian eras can be found in every corner of the Guadalhorce Valley

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The emblematic Moorish-looking water tower known as the 'castle in the sky' in Alhaurín el Grande. SUR

The Guadalhorce Valley has seen the settlement of the Phoenicians, Romans Visigoths, Arabs and the Christians, all of whom have left a lasting impression on the district. Monuments, temples, churches, con-

vents and fortifications are found all over the valley, making the area a culture-seeker's paradise. However, these fertile lands were occupied long before the Phoenicians arrived, as the traces of prehistoric settlements in Al-

haurín el Grande and Pizarra will demonstrate.

Unfortunately, little evidence remains of Alhaurín el Grande's Roman and Moorish era, but one will discover the 12th-century Arco de Cobertizo close to the church in the centre of the town. This Moorish arch is thought to be one of the doorways of the fortifications that once protected the town. The balcony located inside the arch offers panoramic views of the surrounding landscape.

The most significant Roman ruins – three columns from around the second century – are found in the main square in front of the town hall. They were discovered, along with coins, pottery and utensils, at a site near Fuente del Sol, thought to be a Roman settlement of significant importance.

Castle in the sky

One of the town's most unusual monuments is the Moorish-looking water tower situated high on a hill on the outskirts of the town. It was constructed to provide water for a project that never got off the ground. Often referred to as the 'castle in the sky', this unusual construction has confused visitors for many years, because it was designed to look like an Arabic construction in order to blend in with the surroundings.

The sister town of Alhaurín de la Torre has little evidence of its past, but it does have a few interesting buildings, like the Casa del

Álora has always been one of the main towns in the Guadalhorce Valley and several important cultures have left their mark

Monuments, temples, churches, convents and fortifications are found all over the district

Conde, one of the oldest houses in the town. Another important landmark is the 19th century Casa Refugio de Torrijos, the house where General José María de Torrijos was held prisoner after an unsuccessful uprising against the absolutist rule in 1831.

The nearby town of Coín offers several interesting religious buildings. One of the most visited is the Santa María Convent. The convent was constructed on the site of the town's mosque, the minaret of which was preserved and used as the bell tower. Built in the Mudéjar style during the 15th century, the name of the convent was decided by Queen Isabella due to her devotion of the Virgin.

Another interesting religious structure is the 16th century shrine to the Virgen de la Fuentisanta, a Mozarab style chapel situ-

ated just outside the town.

The chapel houses the image of the Virgin, the town's patron, and it is the destination for hundreds of pilgrims during the town's annual romería in August.

Cártama also boasts a good stock of sacred religious monuments. Situated in Plaza de la Constitución, the Iglesia de San Pedro Apostol, which bears the date 1502, is built on the site of a former mosque. Another is the Ermita de Nuestra Señora de los Remedios. This shrine is dedicated to the town's patron saint and it is still a focus of reverent pilgrimage for devout locals. It is perched high above Cártama's twisting streets and can be reached by climbing the winding path from the main square.

A further climb up from the shrine leads to the crumbling 10th century Moorish castle, which offers spectacular views of the unmistakable landscape of La Hoya de Málaga.

Pizarra has numerous interesting temples and monuments that are worth visiting, and these include the Church of San Pedro. The original church was built at the end of the 15th century by order of Diego Romero in order to meet the needs of the settlers. The increase in the population during the 17th century resulted in the construction of the current Mudéjar style church.

Other buildings of interest are the Palace of the Counts of Puerto Hermoso, and the convent of the Sisters of the Cross, all of which

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The Convent of Santa María in Coín. **SUR**



Shrine of Nuestra Señora de los Remedios in Cártama. **SUR**



Convent of Nuestra Señora de Flores in Álora. **J. A.**



Roman columns in Alhaurín el Grande. **SUR**

are located in the centre of the town.

However, much of Pizarra's most impressive sights are located on the town's outskirts. Traces of prehistoric settlements have been found in the municipality, along with an archaeological site containing tombs from the Mozarab period. Other findings include the Roman baths, commonly known as El Bañadero de la Reina (The Queen's Bath).

A pleasant walk that takes about 45 minutes from the town centre along a winding rocky path will lead to the chapel of Nuestra Señora de Fuensanta. Partly excavated into the rock, the temple was built on the foundations of a 10th century Mozarabic church. The present chapel was built in the 16th century, although it was restored in the 20th century.

Álora has been one of the main towns in the Guadalhorce district for centuries and some of the most important cultures of the Mediterranean have left their mark on the town. Its deep-rooted history offers a vast artistic heritage made up of an Arab castle, monumental churches and wind-

ing streets full of tradition.

The castle was built by the Phoenicians and expanded under Roman rule. It was virtually destroyed by the Visigoths during the 5th century, only to be rebuilt by the Moors. Remnants of its Moorish era are still evident, namely the decorative door and the mirador. The view from the castle, situated at the highest point of the town, offers extraordinary views of the Guadalhorce Valley, hence its long importance as the town's main fortification against attack.

One of the town's most interesting churches is the 16th century Iglesia de Vera Cruz. It was built to commemorate the victory over the rebellious Moors, and legend has it that its construction was financed with the sale of twelve Moors.

Situated two kilometres outside of Álora, one will find the Convento de Nuestra Señora de Flores, a 16th century convent built by Franciscan monks. The monks remained in the convent until 1835, when the building was suppressed during the Spanish Confiscation.



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TALK OF THE TOWN

"I like to hike into the forests with a bottle of wine and a picnic"



Chandy Haggett - Alhaurín el Grande

Artist. This local artist enjoys a beer and game of chess on a tree-shaded terrace.

–How long have you lived in Alhaurín el Grande?

–I have only been an Alhaurín for two months, but I have been familiar with the town for more than 20 years.

–What do you like best about the town?

–The beauty and tranquillity of an old village, alongside the buzz and excitement of the newer town.

–What do you like least?

–I like everything.

–Favourite beauty spot?

–Barranco Blanco. It's a beautiful forest trek ending at a spectacular waterfall.

–A place to eat.

–Pizzarte. If you like eccentric, you'll love this place.

–A place to drink.

–La Taberna de la Plaza. You will always get a warm welcome and they do great home-cooked food.

–Favourite annual cultural event?

–La Noche Cultural. An evening where the streets are lined with artists and activity.

–A place to relax.

–I like to hike into the forests with a bottle of wine and a picnic.

–Where do you take visitors?

–The first place that I always take visitors is to see my mural in Calle de la Cruz.

–How could it be improved?

–I had to think really hard about this one. The only thing I can come up with is a better selection of vegan restaurants.

"The people in Pizarra help each other and everyone is so relaxed"



Kirsty Best - Pizarra

Hotelier. Kirsty and her family run the Casa Palmera rural guest house on the outskirts of the town.

–How long have you lived in Pizarra?

–We bought our small hotel in October 2019, but we have lived in Spain for 17 years.

–What do you like best about the town?

–I love the local people in Pizarra. People help each other and everyone is so relaxed.

–What do you like least?

–That I can't see the sea, but the Mediterranean is only 30 minutes away, so an easy fix.

–Favourite beauty spot?

–El Santo. Simply stunning.

–A place to eat.

–We love the railway station café. It is run by a local family and offers the best menu of the day I have ever had. The staff are so friendly and welcome all nationalities.

–A place to drink.

–We love the disco pub in Cerralba. It's a local hub.

–Favourite annual cultural event?

–We haven't had the luxury of being able to be part of the many ferias and fiestas as all have been cancelled due to the pandemic.

–A place to relax.

–If you love walking, there is a great trek into the town via the Río Grande.

–Where do you take visitors?

–To the local produce market on a Thursday.

–How could it be improved?

–Every individual town in inland Spain is unique. I wouldn't want to change it.

"The campo is a great area to relax as there are various trails to walk"



Ruud Faber - Coín

Retired. A former Dutch policeman, Ruud enjoys life in the campo and learning to play the flamenco guitar.

–How long have you lived in Coín?

–I came to live in Coín four years ago.

–What do you like best about the town?

–Coín is perfectly situated for me as it is only half an hour drive from Marbella and the beaches.

–What do you like least?

–The rush hour at 2pm, when everyone dashes back home for the siesta.

–Favourite beauty spot?

–My favourite beauty spot is Barranco Blanco. It's a bit of a walk, but worth it.

–A place to eat.

–Parilla de Pepe in the La Trocha shopping mall.

–A place to drink.

–My favourite place to enjoy a drink is at one of the terraces in the town centre, especially around the church.

–Favourite annual cultural event?

–I love the romería, because everyone dresses in traditional costume.

–A place to relax.

–The campo is a great area to relax as there are various trails to walk. The Río Grande is a good place to relax with a picnic.

–Where do you take visitors?

–I take my visitors to the monastery, where one can enjoy art and live music.

–How could it be improved?

–By making the town centre only accessible to pedestrians.

"Barranco Blanco is a great place to unwind at the weekend"



Lee Creech - Alhaurín el Grande

Retired. The former radio presenter enjoys classic cars and motorcycles.

–How long have you lived in Alhaurín el Grande?

–We have lived in the town for 15 years.

–What do you like best about the town?

–The people are friendly and I like the great atmosphere in the bars at the weekend. It's also safe to walk the streets at night.

–What do you like least?

–The biggest problem is the parking. This has always been a pain.

–Favourite beauty spot?

–I particularly like the pretty square in front of the blue church.

–A place to eat.

–Restaurante Carolina: this offers good honest Spanish food at a reasonable price.

–A place to drink.

–La Biblioteca Gerald Brenan in the town centre.

–Favourite annual cultural event?

–The Feria in May is something I look forward to because it is always so traditional.

–A place to relax.

–Barranco Blanco is a great place to unwind at the weekend.

–Where do you take visitors?

–We always take visiting friends or family to El Mori for their excellent ice cream and cakes.

–How could it be improved?

–We need more supermarkets, better parking and more hotels.

"Coín is a very friendly town with lots of facilities"



Shelly Exley - Coín

Business owner. Shelly moved to Spain with her parents as a young girl.

–How long have you lived in Coín?

–38 years.

–What do you like best about the town?

–Coín is a very friendly town with lots of facilities, which means you don't really have to go to the coast for supplies.

–What do you like least?

–I have thought about this question for more than 15 minutes and don't have an answer.

–Favourite beauty spot?

–Río Grande. In the spring there is plenty of running water with local wildlife.

–A place to eat.

–Restaurante Bohemia, because it has a lovely inner courtyard.

–A place to drink.

–Cafetería La Alameda in the main square, although there are many other great places.

–Favourite annual cultural event?

–Easter week. We are not tremendously religious, but to see the devotion of the people of Coín is so moving.

–A place to relax.

–Definitely down by one of the rivers with a picnic.

–Where do you take visitors?

–I would definitely take them to the antique Convent of Santa María in the town centre.

–How could it be improved?

–It is being improved at the moment. There is a project which has already started to make a large garden area with natural pools, an auditorium and ample parking.

Rural expat life. The Guadalhorce valley has attracted a large foreign community

The district boasts a close-knit community spirit where the foreigners help each other integrate and enjoy the comforts and services available to them



Members of the Lauro Lawn Bowls Club enjoy an event in 2019. SUR

TONY BRYANT

The Guadalhorce valley is a popular district for expats looking for a more rural lifestyle, especially for those who want to avoid the hubbub and summer mayhem of the coastal towns. According to figures released by the National Institute of Statistics (INE) in 2020, more than 16,000 foreigners live in the six main towns in the district. Of these, the biggest community lives in Alhaurín el Grande (5,645), followed by Coín (3,947) and Alhaurín de la Torre (3,383). The rest are scattered among Cártama (1,763), Álora (1,441) and Pízarra (295). The town of Almorogía has 330 expat residents, while Valle de Abdalajís has just 37.

These towns may not offer the amount of volunteer run associations and clubs that are found on the coast, but they do offer a close-knit community spirit where foreigners help each other integrate and enjoy the comforts and services available to them.

For those foreigners that choose to live in rural Andalucía, the necessity to speak the language is far more essential, although most town halls have a foreign residents department that will offer services in several lan-

guages. However, to help those who struggle with hospital appointments, administrative paperwork and general information, the Guadalhorce Seniors Social Club offers help and advice during its weekly meetings. The British-run group meets every Thursday at 11am in Miky's Bar in Coín. The meetings are in English and are run by professional people who give advice on medical issues, translation of documents, financial and legal advice and help with exchanging a green resident permit to the new TIE card, among other topics. Information about the group can be found on its Facebook page.

There are also several social media platforms and community WhatsApp groups set up by expats that help the foreign community stay in touch, offering advice about entertainment and charitable events.

English pastimes

For those who like typical English pastimes, there are a few sports clubs aimed at foreigners. Founded in 2009, the Lauro Lawn Bowls Club in Alhaurín de la Torre welcomes new members, both seasoned players and novices. Situated in the Lauro Golf Resort, the club performs in the Malaga

league, which is governed by the Federación Andaluz de Bolos (FAB). The club also offers free coaching to potential bowlers. There are currently 66 members, 95 per cent of whom are British.

Chairman Ron Jones says that the club has become extremely popular with expats looking for a few home comforts.

"We are very lucky because there is a large British community in this area. Although things have been difficult this year due to the pandemic, we usually have a regular influx of members," he explained.

Aside from the bowls club facilities, the Lauro Golf Resort has a 27-hole golf course, putting green, golf academy and driving range, along with padel and tennis facilities.

The Costa del Sol Cricket Club is based at the Cártama Oval, a privately owned facility situated in town of the same name. The club offers some of the best training facilities in Europe, with both grass and all-weather pitches.

The cricket ground is a former turf nursery that supplied grass to many of the area's golf resorts; today it offers cricket fans the chance to participate in, or simply watch, a traditional old English sport.

HELP!



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The spectacular countryside of the "Valle de Guadalhorce" is under threat from speculators who want to destroy your heritage by covering the Valley with photovoltaic plates, electric sub stations, pylons and high tension cables.

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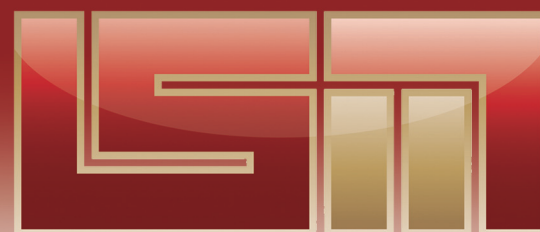
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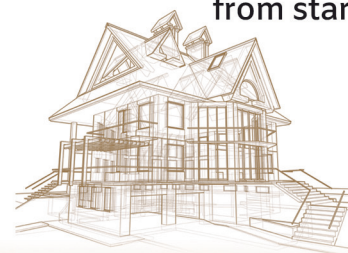
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