

## THE CHÍLLAR RIVER BASIN

The Chíllar River flows through an extremely rugged mountainous terrain, tumbling through vast gorges and spectacular waterfalls and carving narrow karst canyons known locally as cahorros. It is typical of a Sierra Almajara river. According to some experts, the term *almijara*, of undoubted Arabic origin, has two possible meanings: “*almijar*”, which is the place where grapes are dried, and “*escurridero*”, meaning precipitous flow. The river takes the name Chíllar where the ravines Sin Salida and Susto meet, the place names of which reflect the orographic complexity of the surroundings. The final stretch of the river and the estuary do not live up to its exciting beginnings, since the waters are channelled to supply the hydroelectric power plant, to irrigate prosperous tropical crops and to meet the demands of the tourist industry of the Costa del Sol.

The Chíllar forms a small basin of approximately 75 km<sup>2</sup> and carries a constant average flow of 240 l/s. In its short journey, of only 17 km, it pays homage to the villages of Cómpeta, Nerja and Frigiliana. Its main tributary, the river Higuera, has similar characteristics to the Chíllar and flows into the main course very close to the sea, below the Autovía del Mediterráneo motorway. Although the most famous karst canyons or cahorros are the two that form part of the classic Ruta de Chíllar walk, there are others that are less well known because they are off the beaten track. This is the case of the Cahorro del Imán and the Cahorro de las Palomas, the latter ending in a 20 m high waterfall. The Higuera also boasts two beautiful karst canyons. The easiest one to access is downstream from the village of Frigiliana, with access from the Paraje de la Molineta. The other, called Cahorro del Pichirri, is in the upper course of the river and prides itself on the unique beauty of its waterfalls.

As you can imagine, such a rugged landscape is not entirely suitable for human activity, however, in some floodplains subsistence farming was possible, with enough livestock for self-supply. The ruins of a couple of hydroelectric power plants can be found along the Chíllar. The farthest is the Imán, which was also a tobacco factory. The other one lies next to the dam that channels the water through

the impressive Acequia del Canal irrigation stream, a great work of engineering used by some walkers to return from the Ruta de Chíllar to the only working power plant.

The vegetation in these closed valleys of the Almiar has been systematically punished by forest fires. In spite of this, the presence of the maritime pine forest (*Pinus pinaster*) reminds us of the use of this tree during the 20th century to obtain resin that was carried by the muleteers to the Unión Resinera factory in Fornes, where they obtained turpentine and rosin. The hills that contour the Chíllar river basin are of sedimentary origin and are basically made up of dolomites; magnesium-rich rocks that break and crumble very easily and also retain little water. These conditions combine to create a hostile environment for vegetation, although a number of plants, some endemic, have adapted to this environment. Examples include *Anthyllis tejedensis*, *Linaria amoii* or *Buxus balearica*. The butterworts (*Pinguicula vallisneriifolia* and *Pinguicula dertosensis*) are equally striking. Both are carnivorous plants associated with the limestone formations of thermo- and meso-mediterranean soil, although they do much better in the province of Granada.

The king of these wild mountains is the mountain goat (*Capra pyrenaica hispanica*), which is very abundant throughout the Sierras de Tejeda, Almiar y Alhama Natural Park. In order to properly manage hunting in these areas, the current Reserva Andaluza de Caza was created in 1973, which is restricted to the area of the Natural Park belonging to the province of Málaga.

**Freshwater pools in the Chíllar river basin:** *Vado de los Patos.*

**Other bathing areas in the Chíllar river basin:**

**Cahorro del Pichirri. Río Higuero** (Sierras de Tejeda, Almiar y Alhama Natural Park): From Frigiliana, following the GR-249 towards Nerja, you will reach this tributary of the Chíllar. Then walk 7.5 km (one way) along the riverbed and you will reach this stunning karst canyon embellished with four beautiful waterfalls and several giant's cauldrons.

Río Chíllar / Nerja

## VADO DE LOS PATOS



### HOW TO GET THERE

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From the Nerja through road (N-340), Avenida de Pescia, follow the signs to the Cahorros del Río Chíllar on the Burriana roundabout. You can leave your vehicle at the free car park next to Calle Mirto. Walk towards the river along the Camino de los Almachares path, passing by the old quarry next to the wide riverbed. Now you will begin climb up the riverbed, although the really beautiful part begins after the Fábrica de Luz del Salto Grande, an old power station. From here, the river becomes narrower, the current stronger, and you will pass a couple of very beautiful karst canyons. You will arrive at the Vado de los Patos pool after almost 8 km.

## INTERESTING FACTS

The river is shallow and flows over a bed of small polished pebbles. However, as you approach your objective, the river becomes harder to wade and there are a few obstacles that are easily overcome. The pool is small and no deeper than an adult. The surface of the water is stirred by a small but permanent waterfall that makes the place all the more beautiful. Unlike other rivers, the dolomite rocks are not slippery, which is much appreciated when walking this water trail.

**Coordinates:**

**x:** 423318 / **y:** 4073586 / **z:** 284 m

**Location:** Complicada

**Access:** Cómodo

**Protected Area:** Parque Natural  
Sierras de Tejeda, Almijara y Alhama.

## Please Note

*The Cahorros del Río Chíllar are one of the most popular natural destinations of Málaga's geography. The spectacular surroundings together with their proximity to a tourist town like Nerja, means that traffic during the height of the summer is constant, sometimes resulting in a build-up of people. For the above reasons, we recommend visiting this site on weekdays, fairly early and, if possible, at the beginning or the end of the summer, i.e., in the months of June and September. Caution: the round trip is 16 km.*

