



Emotional Rescue

Help this Airbnb Experience host improve mistreated donkeys' quality of life in southern Spain and you'll reap feel-good benefits, too.

BY ANJA MUTIĆ
PHOTOGRAPH BY IRIS HUMM

→ It was her grandfather's donkey, Platera—hardworking, humble, with big, soft ears—who sparked Rosa Chaparro's love for these underappreciated labor animals. Her childhood devotion grew into a lifelong calling, and today she is the communication and sustainability manager for El Refugio del Burrito, a sanctuary that cares for nearly 80 rescued donkeys and mules in Fuente de Piedra. After working at NGOs in 12 countries, the 32-year-old returned to her native Spain to help at this branch of the Donkey Sanctuary, an NGO with a presence in 36 countries.

"My heart has always been with these animals who have endured abuse even though they've been carrying people's loads for thousands of years," she says. At many traditional Spanish festivals, mules and donkeys are often exploited to the point of exhaustion or left to wander aimlessly and ultimately die of hunger.

Rosa opens El Refugio to visitors as an Airbnb Experience, with all the proceeds going to the nonprofit organization. Many donkeys come to the sanctuary scared of humans, so the presence of someone—talking to them, grooming them, feeding them—will help the animals regain trust in people. And if a donkey does open up and finally relax around you, sometimes by resting his head on your shoulder, says Rosa, "that's when the real magic happens."

Rosa's Experience:
abnb.co/donkeysanctuary

HELP ANIMALS AROUND THE WORLD

Costa Rica

To recover vulnerable sea turtle populations, join a biologist from the nonprofit Latin American Sea Turtles on a boat trip to weigh and measure the animals before returning them to their natural habitat. abnb.co/seaturtlemonitor

California

Picnic with a baboon or chill with kangaroos at Animal Tracks, a nonprofit in Agua Dulce, where Stacy Gunderson curates interactive encounters with exotic rescue animals. abnb.co/animal-sanctuary

Puerto Rico

Manatees are a threatened species due to loss of habitat and collision with boats. Learn how to care for these gentle mammals at the Puerto Rico Manatee Conservation Center in Bayamón. abnb.co/manatee-caretaker

Portugal

At the nonprofit Algarve Horse Alarm, you can assist Femke Irik in rehabbing mistreated horses by brushing them and walking them around the scenic countryside. abnb.co/horserescue