

The Local Area

The Costa Blanca

The Costa Blanca, or White Coast, is made up of two clearly distinct scenic sectors. To the north, a line of mountains runs parallel to the sea, descending periodically to form cliffs, and, to the south, a vast plain of sand patches, palm trees and salt deposits make up the backdrop for the beaches.

From cosmopolitan towns and resorts where life goes on 24 hours a day to sleepy little villages where the peace and tranquillity is unique, the Costa Blanca is the kind of place, which offers something for everyone.

The Costa Blanca has an excellent year round climate and the humidity is low. It enjoys more than 2,800 hours of sunshine throughout the year and an average annual temperature of 19.3°C.

The beaches are one of the biggest attractions and most of them comprise of clean, white sand. The Costa Blanca has been awarded more blue flags than anywhere else in Europe. Most of the resorts offer a wide range of water sports and there are plenty of golf courses to choose from.

The area is well serviced by two airports. Alicante (El Altet) airport is situated in the middle of the Costa Blanca and Murcia (San Javier) airport is further to the south. A new international airport is currently under construction in the Murcia region and will provide even more flights to and from international destinations in the near future.



Alicante

Alicante is in the bay formed by the Cabo de las Huertas and the Cabo de Santa Pola and at the foot of Mount Bencantil. It is a prosperous city looking out onto the Mediterranean. Unlike Benidorm or Torrevieja, it is still very Spanish, with foreigners making only a small percentage of the population.

The 19th century was an important time for Alicante as in 1821 the medieval walls were pulled down and the city spread to the east and the north. In 1833 Alicante became the capital of the province and in 1851 it was the first coastal city to be linked to Madrid by train, thus becoming the capital's main seaport.

The port, which is very near the town centre, is a popular meeting place for the Alicantinos for a leisurely stroll beside the sea. Recently finished is a new entertainment complex providing a good choice of restaurants, cafés, bars and a cinema. Some of the restaurants boast great views of the port and marina area. The castle of Santa Barbara offers a

marvellous panoramic view of the old town centre and the port.

One of the most well known images of Alicante is the patterned Esplanade, running along the seafront. It was built in 1957 and consists of more than six and a half million small red, black and cream tiles. In the evenings, you will find a range of merchants and artists offering their goods and expertise. The Playa del Postiguet is located at one end of the Esplanade and the Canalejas Park with its fish market - now converted into the best exhibition hall in Alicante - is at the other.

The city offers a wide range of department stores, shops, malls, banks, restaurants and bars. On the outskirts of the city, you will find retail parks offering a range of different stores and entertainment.

The "Casco Antiguo" or "El Barrio" (old quarter) of Alicante provides a lively and interesting venue for dining and eating. Many bars are found on narrow back streets with tables and chairs set outside on the street where most revellers prefer to drink and chat. Between January and September Alicante has at least one fiesta every month except in May.

There is easy access both north and south of Alicante via the A7 motorway with Benidorm around 20 minutes and Torrevieja around 30 minutes away. The airport at El Altet is only 10 minutes. Alicante also offers good rail services to Madrid, with trains leaving regularly and on time.



Benidorm

Benidorm, the tourist capital of the Costa Blanca, has a Moorish past from which it gets its name. This hospitable city is set in a privileged location and is protected by the mountains of the Sierra Helada and Aitana and by the headland of Tossal de la Cala, which help to maintain its special microclimate.

The beautiful landscape contrasted by the urban skyline with its clean and well-maintained beaches and excellent services make Benidorm an ideal holiday place both night and day. While tourists from all over Europe visit Benidorm, the vast majority of holidaymakers are, in fact, Spanish. The Playa de Levante, where most bathers gather, is located two kilometres from the old town centre. The Playa de Poniente is located on the edges of the old town centre, near the Finestrat cove, and is more peaceful than Playa de Levante.

The historical centre is located around the Canfali vantage point, which is the most emblematic image of Benidorm with a white stone balcony and a vantage point. The neoclassical church dedicated to St James the Apostle is also located in this area. Benidorm offers a vast range of shops and well-known stores, which sit adjacent to busy and popular street markets where all manner of souvenirs and articles can be bought. As for restaurants, bars, cafés and nightclubs, you will feel spoilt for choice. Benidorm offers some excellent night time entertainment and is becoming a popular venue for big names in the music world to hold their concerts. Elton John and Bryan Adams being the most recent ones.

In this unique city, the fiestas take on a special meaning. The most important fiesta is that in honour of the patron saints of the Virgen del Sufragio and San Jaime Apóstol, which takes place on the second Saturday of November and continues for five days. The fiesta of the Moors and Christians takes place in October, the bonfires of San Juan in June. There are carnivals in March and, of course, the traditional Easter (Semana Santa) celebrations. Benidorm also offers much in the way of theme parks. There are three nearby, Terra Mitica (adventure park), Mundomar and Aqualandia, Europe's largest water park. The parks offer some of the shortest queues for rides and entrances of any theme park in Europe.

For the more adventurous, there are many walking routes for avid hikers. There are several local companies offering organised trips through the mountains and into small villages off the beaten track.



Dénia

Dénia dates back to Roman times and lies between mountains and 20 kilometres of both fine sandy beaches and shingle beaches. It is situated to the north of the Costa Blanca and is dominated by its ancient fortress. Dénia is a modern and cosmopolitan city offering a wide range of services.

Dénia has earned a reputation as the Mediterranean's yachting capital and holds many regattas. From Dénia it is possible to catch a catamaran to the Balearic Islands. Further inland is the National Park of Montgo Mountain and gothic hermitages where potholing is carried out.

Fiestas in Dénia take place in March with the burning of satirical monuments and in June with songs and fires on the beach. Dénia's saint's days in July are celebrated by releasing

bulls in the port and in August Moors and Christian fiestas are held.

Dénia is also home to two 18-hole golf courses, Club del Golf La Sella designed by Jose Maria Olazabal and Campo de Golf Oliva Nova designed by Seve Ballesteros.



Torrevieja

In Roman times, Torrevieja was well-known for its outstanding sea port, the remains of which can still be seen in La Mata, called the Embarcadero Romano, or Roman docks. More recently Torrevieja developed into a fishing village in the 18th century built around one of the many watchtowers, which flank the Costa Blanca coastline.

They were used in the Middle Ages to warn the local inhabitants of attacks by Barbary pirates and this particular tower was called the Old Tower, (La Torre Vieja) from which the village took its name.

In 1802 the administration of the Mata salt-flats transferred to its current location and brought about the rapid urbanization of Torrevieja. The proximity to the salt-flats and its position as a port exporting salt, fruit and vegetables produced in the Vega Baja of the Segura River resulted in the rapid development of the port and the city. It gained its independence from Orihuela in 1820. Today it is one of the leading European producers of salt, producing approximately one million tonnes each year, mainly for export.

Present day Torrevieja is in the province of Alicante in the south of the Community of Valencia. It has a population of some 100,000 in low season rising to around 500,000 in the months of July and August.

The area boasts over 300 sunny days and only 30 days of rain in the year with an average annual temperature of 18°C.

The Nature Park of the La Mata Lagoon and the Torrevieja Lagoon are protected nature zones and are included in the list of the most humid zones in Europe.

Torrevieja's weekly outdoor market is held near the bus station every Friday. It starts early in the morning and lasts until about 2.00 pm and offers a considerable range of food, clothes and household goods and in the daily indoor fish market you can buy an amazing variety of fresh fish

The craft market, held every evening along the promenade in the centre of town, is expanded in July and August so that, as well as shopping, you will be able to have your fortune told, watch a street theatre or have your portrait painted.

The Casino building, in front of the harbour, dates from the 19th century and is currently used as a café and for many cultural activities.

There are two modern marinas in Torrevieja offering over 1,500 berths for rental or sale with a complete range of services for sailing, yachting and diving. There are a further four marinas along the twelve mile stretch of coast with others planned for the future.

There are fiestas in Torrevieja almost every month throughout the year. The towns own fiesta is based on habaneras, traditional songs originating from Cuba.

The Easter street procession of Semana Santa is a riot of colour where the fraternities parade in their robes and matching hoods. At the beginning of May, a mini-town of casetas is laid out near the harbour and there are competitions, traditional Sevillana dancing and dressage events. Music, wine tasting and general celebrations are the order of the day (and night).

The Community of Valencia currently boasts 15 golf courses of which 3, all 18 holes and par 72, are located in the Torrevieja area. Villamartin is probably the best known and was the venue for the 1994 Mediterranean Open.

The Costa Cálida

The Costa Cálida or “the warm coast” lies in the south-east of the Iberian Peninsula between the Costa Blanca to the north and the Costa de Almería to the south and has a total of 250 kilometres of coastline.

The Costa Cálida boasts 315 days or approximately 3,000 hours of sun each year with temperature ranging from 12-22° in the winter and between 18-35°C in the summer. The average annual temperature is 18°C.



Murcia

Murcia stands on the banks of the River Segura and is sheltered by the Carrascoy, Cresta del Gallo and Pila mountain ranges. Murcia was founded in 825AD by Abderraman II and was named Mursiya. Its Moorish ancestry can still be seen in the city walls, which were at one time considered to be the most imposing with a perimeter of 2,700 metres, a height of 14.5 metres and a width of 6.25 metres.

Murcia's most highly prized historical building is the cathedral dating back to the 12th century. It took four centuries to complete and contains 23 chapels. Its 92 metre high tower was built between the 16th and 18th centuries.

On the other side of the river can be found a variety of museums including the Science and Water Museum and the former artillery barracks.

Like any other Spanish town or city Murcia has its own fiestas, which are special to them, including processions during Holy Week. At the start of Lent they also celebrate Entierro de la Sardina or “the burial of the sardine” where papier-mache statues are burnt.



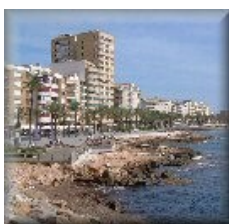
Cartagena

Cartagena was founded in 228 BC by the Carthaginians and later fell into the hands of the Romans and was occupied by Julius Caesar. After the fall of the Roman Empire Cartagena was then invaded by the Moors. In the 18th century it became an important military base and was walled and defended by numerous castles.

There are many sights to see including a Roman theatre and necropolis and a 13th century cathedral. There is also a Municipal Archaeological

Museum and a National Maritime Archaeological Museum.

Cartagena's most important fiesta is that of the Cartagineses and Romanos celebrated in mid-September.



Mar Menor

The Costa Cálida boasts the attraction of Europe's largest saltwater lagoon, the Mar Menor or “little sea”, which is 170 square kilometres. It stretches from San Pedro del Pinatar in the north and Cabo de Palos in the south. The Mar Menor's warm and peaceful waters make it an ideal location for a variety of water sports including sailing, water skiing, windsurfing and diving. The Mar Menor is lined by quiet Spanish

coastal towns.

Los Alcázares was where the Moors chose to build their second residences. They were forced to build watchtowers due to continual fighting with pirates from Algiers, some of which can still be seen. Santiago de la Ribera is home to the headquarters of the Spanish Air Force Academy.

At Lo Pagan it is not unusual to see people with mud smeared all over their bodies as the mud is rich in salt and iodine and is believed to have curing powers for rheumatic and skin disorders.

San Pedro is famous for its salt pans that cover over 700 hectares and has been a

regional park since 1985. The salt pans were originally worked by the Romans and are still in use today. This area is a natural habitat for a wide variety of birds including flamingos.



La Manga

La Manga or "the sleeve" is approximately 24 kilometres in length and divides the Mar Menor and the Mediterranean. It was formed by sediment and sand being dragged by the currents around the volcanic rocks. La Manga is a narrow stretch of land ranging between 200 metres and 1.5 kilometres in width and is intercepted by many channels that allow the passage of water between the Mar Menor and the

Mediterranean. It benefits from having beaches on both sides.

Nearby is the famous La Manga Golf Club. Spread over 1400 acres it offers three 18-hole golf courses, tennis courts and numerous sporting facilities including a 5 star hotel.

Region of Murcia

Murcia is one of the regions with the greatest yearly number of sunny days, an average temperature of 21° C, and 250 km of shoreline over two seas: the Minor and the Mediterranean. Its environment is noted for being a land of contrasts, with high mountain natural parks, southern basins with steppe landscapes, and wonderful beaches such as those of La Manga, Mazarrón and Calblanque.

Murcia's coastline is rich and diverse, with strips of rough waters and coves with placid and serene beaches. Dunes, salt flats, wetlands... The Murcia Region coastline contains a considerable number of areas of unquestionable environmental interest, with many of them being Natural Protected Areas. Places where you can still find native flora and fauna species such as the Phoenician juniper (*Sabina mora*), a native tree variety, and the "fartet" (*Aphanius iberus*), a minute and highly unusual fish, the only one of its kind. The diversity of landscapes, a privileged climate and its cultural and historical richness make Murcia the perfect region to live in and enjoy the outdoors, practice water sports in the Minor Sea, explore its mountains, go hiking, rural tourism... and, of course, play golf.

Festivals

Six National Tourism Interest festivals, and 31 Regional Tourism Interest festivals provide an idea of the Murcia Region's lengthy festive calendar, of great interest to residents and visitors alike.

It all begins on the last Sunday in January, with the Cuadrillas de Barranda Festival.

February is Carnival month, with famous dance troupe parades, and costume contests in communities such as Águilas, Cartagena, and Cabezo de Torres.

Holy Week is noted for the Cartagena, Lorca, Jumilla and Murcia processions. It is also the season of the Tamborradas (processions with drummers) that accompany the Mula and Moratalla celebrations, and the Murcia Spring Festivals. A highlight of the latter festivals is Bando de la Huerta Day, on which thousands of Murcians, sporting their traditional attire, accompany the cavalcade through the city. Another Holy Week festival is the Entierro de la Sardina, which is Murcia's other major festival together with Bando. A pagan festival of mythology and fire, a must-see magical night in the city, where a striking parade of dance troupes, brass bands, entertainment groups, dragons, giants, huge-headed figures, and floats accompany an enormous sardine, which is ultimately burned in a purifying fire under a spring sky lit up by the dazzling fireworks performance.

The month of May features Moor and Christian parades in many of the region's towns, such as Abanilla and Alhama, and the massively attended performances of the Santísima y Vera Cruz Festival in Caravaca.

The summer sees an abundance of Virgen del Carmen seafarer's processions in many of the coastal communities. It is also the season of cultural festivals such as those of San

Javier, La Unión, Los Alcázares, Lorca, and the Wine Harvest Festival in Jumilla. In autumn Murcia prepares for the September Fair, with the Moors and Christians parades, and the Mediterranean Folklore Festival. Concurrently, legions of Romans and Carthaginians face each other on the streets of Cartagena, recalling ancient historical times. Over 10 days, key moments in the history of Spain are staged in outdoor performances: a motion picture production of the city's refounding; the wedding of Hannibal and Princess Himilce amid mystical dances and divine invocations; the power of Rome represented by the seaborne arrival of its Legions and Circus, a live performance with four-in-hand races; Hannibal's departure to Italy with his grand army; and the final battle staged outdoors at twilight. September is also the month of the religious pilgrimages called Romerías, featuring Virgen de la Fuensanta, the patron of Murcia, and Virgen de la Esperanza in Calasparra. At the end of fall, the prominence of the festivals moves to the north of the region, with the Fiestas de la Purísima in Yecla, amid the thunder of the harquebuses. The Cuadrillas de Ánimas (troupes) and the Campanas de Auroras ("Dawn Bells" music group) announce the beginning of Christmas by singing their carols along orchard roads. Also famous in the Region during these dates are the nativity scene contests, and the big parades on Epiphany Day.

Schooling in Spain



In all towns and most Spanish villages, you will find a primary school. In smaller villages where a primary school does not exist, there will usually be some form of transport available. Most larger villages and towns will have a secondary school.

To help with the increasing population of English speaking children, many schools will provide a specialist teacher to help with integration and learning of the Spanish language. Most people moving here from England will tell you that the younger your children are, the easier they will pick up and learn the language.

To help working families, some schools may open early in the morning to enable parents to drop off their children before going on to work. This

can often be as early as 07:00 and the children will be provided with a breakfast and encouraged to undertake some form of sports or leisure activities.

In Spain, it is not unusual for pupils of secondary school age to start in a year below their actual age. This is to help them learn the language and prepare them to cope with normal school work. In a few cases, pupils may be required to repeat a year if they have achieved poor end of year exam results. Normally however, this will only be recommended by the teachers if the child has made insufficient effort.

Opening Hours

Schools in Spain work on a three term year very similar to the UK. The main difference is that Christmas and Easter breaks are shorter in favour of a longer summer holiday period. You will also find that in Spain, there is no such thing as a half term break but instead, lots of odd days and long weekends, mostly as a result of national and religious holidays.

For primary schools, the hours can vary depending on local school preferences. Typically however, the hours will be either 9.00 to 12:30 and 3.30 to 5:00 or alternatively, straight through from 9.00 to 14.00. Most primary schools however work only mornings from 09:00 until 13:00 in the summer between June and September. Secondary schools tend to be different, working from 8:15 to 2:30 all the school year.

Costs

State education in Spain is free for all pupils although parents are required to provide all of their children's books, materials and other necessary equipment. A list will be given to you at the beginning of each school year and you can expect to pay somewhere in the region of €150 (100 pounds) for each child. The good news however is that school uniform is not normally required to be worn in state schools, only in private schools.

Private schools

As schooling in state schools is rather unsurprisingly conducted in Spanish, many people relocating to Spain with older children in the middle of a GCSE or A level course choose to enrol them at an International or private School.

The charges for these schools do tend to be cheaper than an equivalent school in the UK and will offer your child qualifications that are well known by the UK universities. Many will also offer a system of English and Spanish curricula enabling students to be qualified for either Spain or the UK.

If private schooling is the choice for your children, you will find a good selection to choose from on both the Costa Blanca and Costa Cálida.

Healthcare in Spain



European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)

If you are travelling to Spain, you should ensure that you have a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). The EHIC is normally valid for three to five years and covers any medical treatment that becomes necessary during your trip, because of either illness or an accident.

The card gives access to state-provided medical treatment only, and you'll be treated on the same basis as an 'insured'

person living in the country you're visiting. In some cases this might not cover all the things you'd expect to get free of charge from the NHS in the UK and you may have to make a contribution towards the cost of your care.

Travel Insurance

For short term trips, it is advisable to acquire travel insurance as this can be obtained for a very reasonable cost. It will supplement the EHIC card by covering additional costs such as translation services as most doctors will not speak English.

The NHS operate a website providing comprehensive information about healthcare abroad at www.dh.gov.uk/travellers.

For more related information from the official government website:

Healthcare if Relocating to Spain

The Spanish state health care scheme (INSALUD) is very similar to the UK's National Health Service in that the quality of care available is incredibly high for emergency, basic health care and treatment.

As a rule of thumb the state health care system in Spain will cover all your doctor appointments, ambulance and hospital costs as well as medical tests, it subsidises the cost of medication, covers basic dental treatment and covers complete ante and post-natal care.

People relocating to Spain will often supplement the free services offered by the state with the purchase of private health insurance. This is because the state system will sometimes only cover up to 75% of the cost of treatment, leaving patients to find the remaining amount.



Private Health Insurance

A private health insurance policy can prove to be good value as it will cover the additional costs, speed up waiting times and bed shortages, and of course, provide for translation of consultations with medical staff. Most will also cover the cost of dental treatment and most importantly, annual health checks.

Working in Spain

If you are intending to work in Spain, you will need to sign up for the Spanish state healthcare scheme and contributions will be deducted automatically from your wages. An application should result in you receiving your social security card and number in a few weeks later and you can use this whenever you need medical attention.