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# MARVELLOUS MURCIA



By Cathy Lee

NESTLED between the tourist meccas of Valencia's Costa Blanca to the north and Andalusia's Almeria to the south, the region of Murcia is one of the least visited coastal areas of Spain - and one of its undiscovered gems.

With 250km of coast and over 3,000 hours of sunshine each year, sun, sea and sun-tan is (almost!) guaranteed and with only 300mm of annual rainfall it is an ideal escape for those needing a break from Ireland's climate.

You could easily lounge around the sandy beaches of Murcia for the duration of your trip but let's not forget, there are some cultural must stops for the traveller and explorer within you.



Magic Murcia: Cartagena's Museo del Teatro Romano, a trawler off La Azohia and the natural sand sculptures on Bolneuvo beach



The unspoiled Parque Natural de Sierra Espuña draws climbers and walkers while those who prefer a stroll can enjoy the laid-back provincial capital (Murcia City) that comes alive during the weekend paseo (stroll).

A university town with a splendid cathedral, this stunning city is bypassed by most tourists and treated as a country cousin by many Spaniards, surrounded

as it is by vast swathes of fruit and vegetable farms.

Cartagena, Murcia's second city and Spain's premier naval port, is home to some of the finest Roman sites you will find anywhere outside of Rome itself.

There are plenty of museums and galleries to choose from including Museo del Teatro Romano where the tour trans-

ports visitors from the museum on Plaza del Ayuntamiento, via escalators and an underground passage beneath the ruined cathedral, to the magnificently restored Roman theatre dating from the first BC.

Lorca, located inland was once a frontier town between Christian and Muslim Spain and is now a market town crowned by a 13th-century

castle and is known for hosting one of Spain's most flamboyant Semana Santa (Holy Week) celebrations.

But if that is all too much culture, there's plenty fun in the sun to be had - from the tourist hotspots of the Mar Menor (expect to bump into the odd Premiership footballer in the north) to the quieter, much more Spanish resorts southwards,

such as Mazaarron or Bolneuvo. Throw in plenty of golf courses, sailing trips, water parks, white water rafting, horse riding and all manner of outdoor activities, there's plenty for all the family to enjoy!

And to top it all off, Paramount Studios are due to build a massive theme park in the south of the region near Condado De Alhama to go with the new Corvera International which is due to open in 2016.

*Ryanair flies daily during peak season into both San Javier and Alicante airports, while Aer Lingus fly into Alicante four times a week.*



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