PRESS

Destination
Region of Murcia
Region of Murcia

The Region of Murcia is located in south-east Spain on what is known as the Mediterranean Arc. Set between two seas –the Mediterranean and the Mar Menor– as a region, it has succeeded in combining its extensive cultural heritage with innovation and avant-garde artistic tendencies.

Its most important cities are Murcia, the capital, with more than 440,000 inhabitants, Cartagena with more than 214,000 and Lorca with more than 90,000.

The Region of Murcia has a population of around one and a half million and covers an area of 11,300km². Although it is not a very large region, it offers 252km of coast and an astonishing variety of different landscapes considering its size. Diverse and accessible, it only takes a few hours to travel the length and breadth of the region. Mountains, beaches and cities dot the landscape and visitors will find history at every turn.

Another of the Region of Murcia’s main attractions is its particularly good weather, with average temperatures in excess of 19ºC and 315 days of sun a year. All these factors offer visitors the opportunity to choose between a wide range of alternatives when organising their stay in the Region of Murcia. It is a destination full of contrasts, where everything is close at hand and easily accessible.

Although the driving force behind the Region of Murcia’s economy has traditionally been agriculture, the Regional Government has made a firm commitment to converting the tourist sector into one of the pillars of the region’s economy.

In this way, the Region of Murcia has succeeded in positioning itself as a benchmark in tourism and culture, with a myriad of features that goes above and beyond stereotypes and clichés of any kind.

In order to create a platform that would act as a unified showcase for the Region’s portfolio of tourism-related products and also as an instrument for the promotion of the Region of Murcia’s tourism strategies, www.murciaturistica.es was created in 2002 and, since then, has earned accolades on a number of occasions for its quality and usefulness.

Amongst many other services on the web site, tourist resources are geographically referenced, enabling clients to download GPS (Sat-Nav) coordinates for points of interest. Other features include the current regional calendar of events, street plans, online reservations, an online offer search facility and panoramic virtual
tours of tourist facilities. All in the **four languages** of the Region of Murcia’s principal feeder markets: Spanish, English, French and German.

Statistics indicate that during the **year 2012** the portal [www.murciaturistica.es](http://www.murciaturistica.es) received **872,227** visits, an average of 2,390 per day, and more than 3.5 million visited sites.

Murciaturistica completes its Internet presence with its professional blog and its participation in social networks and travel channels and communities, such as Facebook and Twitter, Youtube, Minube, Tripadvisor and Pinterest, thereby gathering the main promotion, broadcasting, communication and interaction tools available in the 21st century.
Region of Murcia’s Tourism News in 2013

Region of Murcia’s International Airport
The opening of the new airport is scheduled for 2013. At an early stage, this infrastructure, only 15 minutes away from the capital city, is expected to house 1.5 million passengers and 15,000 operations every year.

Roman Forum Neighbourhood in Cartagena
This year, Cartagena has opened the gates to the Roman Forum Neighbourhood, located in the Molinete Archaeological Park. This big archaeological ensemble from the old Cartago Nova shows the buildings of a thermal complex and an atrium for religious banquets.

The Parador in Lorca
It is a new building, located next to the Fortress of the Sun, offering 13,625 m2 of history in an incomparable setting. The Parador is over a great archaeological site, the remains of which have been integrated to the building.

Lorca Synagogue
In Lorca’s walled area, the old Synagogue, which presided the old Jewish quarter, has been opened to the public. It dates from the 15th century and is the ensemble’s most important site, due to its good state of conservation. Something that stands out is the finding of numerous glass fragments: thanks to them, twenty lamps that used to illuminate this building have been reconstructed.

ARQUA National Underwater Archaeology Museum in Cartagena
This centre of national and international reference in the protection of underwater heritage houses the ‘Odysseus’s treasure’ for a short time now. The collection includes more than 570,000 gold and silver coins from the end of the 18thC and the beginning of the 19thC. In addition to this exhibition, there is another showing a shipment from several wrecked ships from La Manga del Mar Menor; various elephant tusks from the 7thC BC and 6thC BC, some of them showing Phoenician inscriptions, stand out.
Tourist Sector Portfolio and Structure

Quality is one of the fundamental pillars upon which the Region of Murcia’s tourism portfolio is based. In this respect, the Region is both working towards and encouraging the implementation of quality management systems: EFQM, ISO and, in particular, specific tourist sector quality systems such as Q for Tourism Quality [Q de Calidad Turística] and Commitment to Tourism Quality [Compromiso de Calidad Turística].

Spain’s Q for Tourism Quality is a system of standards focused on the ongoing improvement of working practices and services in tourism sector businesses and organisations, whereas the Commitment to Tourism Quality is a project that encompasses an entire destination and which, through the implementation of a guide to best practices, aims to improve the quality of the products and services offered by companies in the particular destination.

At present, the Region of Murcia has 85 establishments and areas certified by the Q de Calidad -Q for Quality- seal and 217 entities which have been awarded the Compromiso de Calidad Turística -Tourist Quality Commitment- certificate.

Great efforts are also being made to provide the best and most comprehensive service for visitors and to offer the highest possible standard of facilities. A further reason behind the Region’s attractiveness as a destination lies in the proximity of its various attractions. This is due fundamentally to the vast improvements that have been made in communications.

In this respect, the first few years of the 21st century are clear evidence of the rapid progress in the region’s transport infrastructure. For instance, the Madrid-Murcia motorway means that the journey between the centre of the peninsula and the Murcia coast now takes less than four hours. Similarly, the opening of four new regional dual carriageways (Zeneta-San Javier, Totana-Mazarrón, Alhama-Campo de Cartagena and a fourth linking the latter two) has optimised interregional flow and access to the coast. Additional improvements include the conversion of the northern access to Cartagena into a dual carriageway and the motorway between Cartagena and Vera, which links Murcia to the province of Almería via the coast.

Future projects include three new dual carriageways financed by the Murcian government that will complete the region’s high-capacity road network: Caravaca-Jumilla in the North, Caravaca-Lorca in the west, and Santomera-Yecla in the east, linking Fortuna and Abanilla to the dual carriageway network, to allow convenient
dual carriageway access to the main populated areas in the region.

Furthermore, the Madrid-South-East Coast AVE high-speed train line will run through the Region, facilitating the establishment of rail links between the cities of Madrid, Cuenca, Valencia, Albacete, Alicante, Murcia and Cartagena, and on to Vera in Almería.

In a similar vein, the regional government, in collaboration with other institutions and businesses, has spearheaded the construction of the new Region of Murcia International Airport, which will facilitate the arrival of thousands of visitors, converting the Region into a top level tourism destination at international level towards 2013.

At present the Region is served by two airports: El Altet (Alicante), 45 minutes from the city of Murcia via the Autovía del Mediterráneo motorway; and San Javier (Murcia), 35 minutes from the regional capital via the Mar Menor motorway. Currently San Javier airport has scheduled flights from the United Kingdom, Ireland, Norway and Belgium.

Lastly, it is worth noting that all these improvements in communication and accessibility have been accompanied by an increase in tourist accommodation. As a result, the Region currently offers close to 50,000 beds as indicated in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>CAPACITY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hotels</td>
<td>20,482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apartments</td>
<td>10,834</td>
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<tr>
<td>Campsites</td>
<td>14,866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural cottages</td>
<td>3,377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total beds</strong></td>
<td><strong>49,559</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Planned
Over the next few years, a further 25,000 hotel beds are expected to come available, the majority in high-end hotels located both on the coast and in the interior. The total investment in these facilities is in excess of 3,000 million euros and will lead to the creation of some 5,000 direct jobs and more than 7,000 indirect jobs.
Beach Tourism

Murcia has 252 kilometres of coast divided between two seas, the Mar Menor and the Mediterranean, where visitors can enjoy 90km of long sandy beaches and secluded coves with crystal-clear waters.

The region’s coast is known as the Costa Cálida –which means warm coast– due to its mild weather, with an average temperature of 19.4°C and some 315 days of sunshine per year. Here, visitors can enjoy sun and beach all year round.

The Costa Cálida has numerous facilities for all manner of water sports and diving, which helps increase occupancy during medium and low season.

The Region of Murcia’s good weather has encouraged businesses to enhance the attractiveness of their offer throughout the year as a means to reduce seasonality.

As can be seen from the following tables, there is extensive infrastructure in terms of accommodation and water sports facilities:

**ACCOMMODATION ON THE COAST**
*(31 December 2012)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>CAPACITY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hotels</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apartments</td>
<td>2.229</td>
<td>9.791</td>
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<tr>
<td>Camp sites</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12.237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cottages</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>121</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total beds</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.373</strong></td>
<td><strong>34.769</strong></td>
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**OFFER OF NAUTICAL TOURISM**
*(31 December 2012)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
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<th>MOORINGS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marina</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6.332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yacht Club</td>
<td>21</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mar Menor

Located in the south-east of the Region of Murcia, the Mar Menor is a saltwater lagoon covering an area of **170km²**. Its warm shallow waters, gentle wind, sheltered coastline and modern hotel and sports infrastructure make it the ideal setting for **water sports** at any time of year.

Along the shores of the Mar Menor, separating it from the Mediterranean is **La Manga**, a narrow spit of land that is considered to be one of the Region’s most important tourist destinations.

Thanks to its geophysical and sociocultural characteristics, La Manga has become an important venue for major nautical and sports events.

By the same token, in the towns around the Mar Menor, (San Pedro del Pinatar, San Javier, Los Alcázares and Cartagena) and in the Los Urrutias and La Manga areas, there are **more than 30 water sport centres and schools** where it is possible to learn and go scuba diving, canoeing, sailing, windsurfing and water skiing. In order to promote and manage the destination, the **Estación Náutica Mar Menor-Cabo de Palos** [Mar Menor-Cabo de Palos Water Sports Consortium] was created in 1995. The first of its kind in Spain, the Consortium operates along the same lines as ski resorts, providing a combination of water sports, sports and tourist facilities, hotels, accommodation, training and leisure facilities all situated along the coast of the Mar Menor and La Manga.

[www.marmenor.es](http://www.marmenor.es)  
[www.enmarmenor.com](http://www.enmarmenor.com)
Mazarrón

Located right at the heart of the Costa Cálida, the district of Mazarrón is the perfect setting for water sports and active tourism in unique surroundings, with all manner of leisure facilities.

Along Mazarrón’s 35km of coast there are a number of scuba diving and sailing centres.

A few years ago, Mazarrón Town Council set up a series of themed beaches in order to enhance its seaside product. At present, there are several beaches of this type, including a senior citizens’ beach, a children’s beach, a sports, a winter and a cultural beach.

In addition, interesting historical buildings such as the Town Hall and the modernist-style former Cultural Athenæum are a fruit of its rich past and provide an indication of the town’s mining wealth and splendour in the early 20th century. Meanwhile, the Roman Salting Factory shows visitors the importance of fishing and the salting industry in the area in the 4th and 5th centuries AD. As such, Mazarrón is both an important water sports and beach tourism destination and also a district of cultural, historical and gastronomic interest.

Another attraction is the Mazarrón Phoenician Ship Interpretation Centre, where visitors can immerse themselves in the district’s history through the important archaeological finds and the impressive reproduction of the Mazarrón Phoenician ship, a gem dating back to the 7th century BC.

www.mazarron.es
Águilas, the southernmost district in the Region, lies along **28km of coast**, guarded by **San Juan de las Águilas castle**. Along its coast, coves and rocky outcrops are interspersed with sandy beaches such as Calarreona, Calabardina, Calacerrada, Playa del Arroz and Playa del Hornillo, all distinguished by their beautiful natural surroundings. The district has two protected **areas of outstanding natural beauty**: The Cabo Cope Regional Park and the Cuatro Calas Protected Landscape. All of which means that Águilas is an exceptional setting for water sports and **diving** in particular, which can be arranged through any of the district's specialist scuba diving, canoeing, sailing or windsurfing centres.

www.aguilas.es
Cultural tourism in the Region of Murcia has evolved towards a new model based more on the search for experiences than on the concept of destination. On this basis, culture has succeeded in positioning itself as one of the driving forces of the tourism industry, integrating a rich historic and artistic heritage with a wide sense of innovation and the avant garde.

This has given rise to a highly diverse offer, capable of meeting the needs of visitors, providing access to a wealth of tradition, where different cultures are superimposed.

Numerous archaeological sites and relics transport visitors back to the Stone Age, the Iberian period, the splendour of the Roman Empire and speak eloquently of precise town planning; of Visigothic cities and Arab medinas; of castles and watch-towers; of Christian temples and churches and of civil and military buildings...

The Region’s most important cities - Murcia, Cartagena, Lorca and Caravaca de la Cruz - are home to the majority of its historic monuments, cultural heritage and museums.

The more modern side of the Murcian cultural scene is reflected in an extensive calendar of festivals, exhibitions and events, designed to foster artistic activity, new means of expression and ways of thinking.

Particularly worthy of note is the SOS 4.8 Festival, which takes the regional capital by storm at the beginning of May with 48 hours dedicated to live artistic creation, exhibitions and music.

During the same month, the capital is home to the Murcia Tres Culturas [Murcia Three Cultures] Festival. Streets and squares are filled with people and become open-air stages for arts from around the world, fostering respect between different cultures.
In July, the San Javier International Jazz Festival and Cartagena’s Mar de Músicas world music festival take centre stage in the Region’s festival programme, as they have done year after year.

In August, it is the turn of one of the world’s most important Cante Jondo and Flamenco events, the Cante de Las Minas International Flamenco Festival, which takes place in the town of La Unión. Similarly, Torre Pacheco is home to the Lo Ferro International Flamenco Song Festival, an excellent way to explore and learn about the world of flamenco at its most authentic.

www.murcia.es/murciatresculturas/web.htm
www.sos48.com
www.lamardemusicas.com
www.jazz.sanjavier.es
www.festivalteatrosanjavier.com
www.fundacioncantedelasminas.org
www.loferroflamenco.com
www.laconservera.org
Murcia, Cultural Crossroads

The city of Murcia is a place where styles and cultures meet, where life is lived in the streets, where visitors can enjoy walking around its modernist districts, through the maze of Mediaeval streets in its former Moorish and Jewish quarters, as well as admiring Renaissance and Baroque buildings or visiting the many historic monuments in the old town.

The city dates back to 831, when Abderramán II ordered the construction of a town that would be the capital of the entire Caliphate. Thus Mursiya, a walled and strategically located settlement on the banks of the River Segura and today’s city of Murcia, came into being. In the 12th century, Ben Hud, the ‘Wolf King’, made it the capital of Al-Andalus and, a century later, it was annexed for Castile by Alfonso X ‘The Wise’.

The city has numerous vestiges of its past and its cultural heritage, including the Santa María Cathedral, the most emblematic of all its monuments with a history going back more than 600 years. Crowned by a beautiful, slender tower, which is one of the tallest church towers in Spain, it has an imposing Baroque façade in soft limestone and marble that was designed by architect Jaime Bort. The Plateresque style is present both on the La Cruz façade and the Los Junterones Chapel, whilst the Flamboyant Gothic style is at its most ornate in the Los Vélez Chapel.

The city of Murcia has many more surprises in store. For example, it was home to Spain’s first Jesuit college. Visitors will also come across numerous Baroque buildings, such as the La Merced, San Miguel or San Juan de Dios Churches, as well as important 19th century buildings including the Town Hall and two more of the city’s most emblematic architectural symbols: the Casino and the Romea Theatre.

Murcia is also home to several museums, one of the highlights being the Salzillo Museum, dedicated to Murcian sculptor and master of the Baroque style, Francisco Salzillo. On display are examples of his masterful, richly coloured and almost lifelike carvings, which are paraded through the city streets every Good Friday morning in one of the most evocative of all the Holy Week processions.

Complementing the city’s cultural offer are the Ramón Gaya Museum, dedicated to this talented artist; the Fine Art Museum, the Archaeological Museum, the Molinos Del Río Hydraulic Museum, the Santa Clara Museum, the City Museum, the San Juan de Dios Museum and the Science and Water Museum, designed especially with
younger visitors in mind. The Almudí, Verónicas, San Esteban and Cabellerizas exhibition galleries are also worth a visit.

The outskirts of the city are also very interesting. In the El Valle Natural Park, in the La Luz Visitors’ Centre, next to the hermitage of the same name, visitors can find out about the history of the area through an exhibition about its primitive Iberian settlements. The visitor centre has a café-restaurant and a Nature Activities Department that organises trekking and climbing excursions throughout the year. Only a few minutes away along the El Valle Cultural Trail is the Murcian Baroque style San Antonio el Pobre Chapel, now converted into a visitor centre. Here, in a privileged location close to the Santa Catalina del Monte Franciscan Convent, visitors can discover the life, habits and customs of the hermits that used to live here. In nearby Algezares, right in the heart of the Natural Park, is the 17th century Sanctuary of the Virgen de la Fuensanta, the city’s patron.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
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<th>CAPACITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hotels</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>4,521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apartments</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campsites</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural cottages</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total beds</strong></td>
<td><strong>127</strong></td>
<td><strong>5,349</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Visitors will find that, thanks to its perpetual spring-like weather, the city of Murcia is a great place to wander around and enjoy the relaxed atmosphere, not to mention its wealth of shops and restaurants.

In order to enhance and promote Murcia as a destination, the Consorcio Turístico Murcia Cruce de Caminos [Murcia Cultural Crossroads Tourism Consortium] was set up and is behind the creation of new infrastructures designed to proactively develop and foster tourism.

www.murciaciudad.com

Cartagena Puerto de Culturas

Cartagena boasts a vast wealth of heritage founded on the presence of Punic, Roman and Byzantine remains, military batteries and forts and on its extensive architectural legacy, which ranges from its archaeological sites dating back to the Augustan period, through the Carlos III Wall to the modernist architecture of the 19th century.

In order to optimise the potential of this extensive historical legacy, a few years ago, the city launched Cartagena Port of Cultures, an initiative that has turned the streets of Cartagena and its heritage into a vast cultural and thematic arena, guiding visitors in their journey of discovery, allowing them to find out about the past and history in a fun and interactive way.
As such, it is now much easier to get to know Cartagena. A good place to start is the **Historical Interpretation Centre** in Concepción Castle, which can be reached via a spectacular ride in the 45-metre high panoramic lift that is connected to the Castle by a footbridge. The Centre’s modern facilities provide the key to understanding the most important aspects of Cartagena’s history and development.

Once the route has been decided, visitors can choose from various **themed itineraries**. The **Roman Cartagena** route allows visitors to admire the quality and quantity of historic heritage that form part of the city’s urban landscape and their excellent state of conservation. The splendour of the Roman Empire is part of everyday life in Cartagena. The **Roman Theatre Museum**, the **Decumanus**, the **Casa de la Fortuna**, the **Augusteum** and the El Molinete Archaeological Park are but a few examples of all that the city has to offer.

For those choosing the **Millennial Cartagena** route, another must is the **Punic Wall Interpretation Centre**, where visitors can delve into the most ancient chapters of Cartagena’s history.

Another of the itineraries is **Modern Cartagena**, where visitors will come across the vestiges of more recent times, which include **Baroque churches**, modernist style buildings, the Port and **Marine Promenade**, the Isaac Peral **Submarine**, the Sea Wall, the **Military Arsenal**, the Artillery Park and the exceptional collection of **castles and coastal batteries** that sit atop the hills that surround the port and protect the entrance to the Bay of Cartagena.

The **Spanish Civil War Air-raid Shelters and Museum** take visitors back to wartime, enabling them to re-envisage day-to-day life at the time; education, homes, pastimes, the bombing raids...

Another option is a sightseeing tour aboard the tourist boat, which enables visitors to discover the network of castles and coastal batteries that used to protect the city and to enjoy a different perspective and views of the city of Cartagena. It is also possible to take the boat to the **Centre for the Interpretation of Defensive Architecture in Cartagena and the Mediterranean** in the Navidad Fort. Similarly, the **tourist bus**, which has stops at all the key places of interest, makes it all the easier for visitors to get to know Cartagena’s exceptional heritage. **Signage** in the city is exemplary, which means that itineraries are simple to follow and points of interest easily found.
In addition to its themed itineraries, visitors to Cartagena can also enjoy the city’s gastronomy, its **traditional fiestas and celebrations** (including Easter, which has been declared of International Tourist Interest and the Carthaginians & Romans Festival, declared of National Tourist Interest) and its renowned cultural events (the ‘Mar de Músicas’ world music festival; the International Jazz Festival; the ‘Músicas del Mediterráneo’ international classical music festival…).

Cartagena is one of the three cities in which the cultural tourism model has been adopted, in this case through the creation of Cartagena Port of Cultures. The others are **Lorca** and **Caravaca de la Cruz**.

[www.cartagena.es](http://www.cartagena.es)  
[www.puertoculturas.com](http://www.puertoculturas.com)

**La Unión Mining Park**

The La Unión Mining Park is a pioneering initiative in the field of reclaiming historical heritage and its revaluation as a cultural and tourist attraction. A total of twelve mining elements allow visitors to see “in situ” how miners in the Sierra de Cartagena – La Unión used to live and work.

The complex, which looks set to become one of the Region’s most important tourist attractions, covers an area of 50,000 square metres on the lower slopes of the Sierra Minera and has its own touring train taking visitors to the different sites. Of particular interest are the refurbishment and conversion of the Agrupa Vicenta Mine
into a museum, with 4,000m² open to the public at a depth of over 80 metres, and the Camino del 33, the old access route to the mines, which crosses the Sierra and links La Unión with Portmán and the Mediterranean Sea. www.parqueminerodelaunion.es

Lorca Workshop of Time

Lorca, the City of One-Hundred Coats of Arms, used to be a border post and military enclave and, in the aftermath of the Reconquest, a town of considerable importance. Today, it is one of the most beautiful and majestic cities in the Region.

Highlights amongst its architectural treasures include the Plaza Mayor, where the former Collegiate Church of San Patricio with its grand Baroque façade and exuberant retchoir, the Courthouse and the Granary are located. Elsewhere in the city there are further examples of Murcian Baroque architecture, including the Guevara Palace, the Casa de los Mula and the Casa de los Moreno. Standing proud above the city is the majestic Castle. Better known as the Fortress of the Sun, it could once accommodate 3000 men and has two famous towers: the Espolón and Alfonsina towers.

The value of this heritage has been reaffirmed through the Lorca Workshop of Time project, a tourism and cultural initiative whose ultimate objective is the development of the city and the local area through the recuperation of its heritage and the creation of new cultural and visitor facilities that convert the old town district of Lorca into a themed heritage site.

In order to achieve these objectives and taking full advantage of the city’s cultural potential, various initiatives have been undertaken such as the restoration and adaptation of the Castle to create a themed attraction known as the Fortress of the Sun, the construction of a Visitor Centre in the former La Merced Convent, the creation of various themed itineraries that take in all of Lorca’s architectural heritage, the launch of a visitor train that facilitates sightseeing and visits, and a signage scheme to guide and inform visitors, as well as the implementation of a quality and training programme designed to enhance the city’s tourist-related services.

Added to this, a new route has been developed, which will introduce visitors to ‘Jewish Lorca’, taking in the old Jewish quarter, the synagogue and various household/living quarters from the period.

Lorca also has several museums where visitors can gain an understanding of the city, its history and its Holy Week celebrations, which have been declared of International Tourist Interest. Lorca Workshop of Time’s star attraction is the Castle, the Fortress of the Sun. It is, first and foremost, a tourist attraction provided by Lorca to enable visitors to effectively combine leisure with culture, learning with fun, historical accuracy with enthusiasm and entertainment. Lorca Castle is the perfect setting for something of this nature, offering visitors an unforgettable experience travelling through time, justified by and anchored in its past.

A defensive fortress, watch-tower and symbol of the people of Lorca since time immemorial, the Castle has been occupied and reinvented by successive civilisations from the Argar period to the present day. Today it features displays and exhibitions in its restored towers and cisterns, scenes from history re-enacted by actors that transport visitors back to the 13th century, workshops, children’s areas, live archaeology and more.
For the past few years, the castle has played host to mediaeval games, board game competitions, falconry demonstrations and archery amongst other activities that help make the fortress even more lively. And, at times such as Easter and summer, guided tours, evening visits and concerts offer visitors a truly magical experience. In addition, the city will soon have another major attraction: a Parador hotel located within the Castle walls.

www.lorca.es
www.lorcatallerdeltiempo.es

Caravaca de la Cruz, Ciudad Santa

The capital of the north-west of the Region of Murcia is Caravaca de la Cruz, one of the five cities in the world entitled to celebrate a Permanent Holy Jubilee Year, a privilege shared only by Jerusalem, Rome, Santiago de Compostela and Santo Toribio de Liébana.

Since ancient times, pilgrims in their multitudes have come to Caravaca to venerate the holy relic that gives it its name. The Most Holy and True Cross of Caravaca is a double armed reliquary in which a Lignum Crucis – a fragment of the cross upon which Christ was crucified – is kept.

The city has played host to many pilgrims over recent years and now has a comprehensive network of infrastructure to meet the needs of the visitors who come here each year.

The most emblematic site in Caravaca is the Vera Cruz Basilica; an exceptional historical monument surrounded by walls of Islamic origin that were fortified by the Knights Templar in the 13th century. Within the Basilica there are numerous symbolical and historical references to the apparition and the traditional Chaplain’s House is now the Museum of the True Cross.
One of the city’s main nerve centres is the **Plaza del Arco**, a square where the Baroque **Town Hall** and sculptures dedicated to Moors and Christians are found. A visit to the city might finish at the unusual **Bullring** with its marvellous neo-Mudéjar façade.

There are also several interesting options for visitors in the outskirts of the city. Just 2km from the city centre, a natural spring brings the countryside to life at **Fuentes del Marqués**. Very close by, an old Templars’ Tower houses a **Nature Interpretation Centre**. In the same area, the craggy massifs of the north-west offer ideal territory for horse-riding on the slopes of the **Sierra del Gavilán** or the opportunity to visit the **Estrecho de La Encarnación**, where the remains of one of Spain’s oldest Roman temples have been found.

www.caravaca.org  
www.caravacajubilar.com
MICE Tourism

The Region of Murcia plays host to a large variety of social and cultural events. This is the principal reason it has developed a comprehensive range of facilities and services for the staging of congresses, meetings, conventions, conferences and symposiums, both at national and international level.

The regional capital is an ideal destination for professional and business events. One of the key facilities is the Auditorium and Conference Centre, which has had Q for Tourism Quality certification since 2006. It has two main conference halls accommodating 1,838 and 469 people respectively, as well as 15 smaller meeting rooms accommodating between 20 and 230 people and four multifunctional spaces ranging from 300 to 1,200m² in size. All the function rooms feature the latest multimedia systems, simultaneous interpretation booths and everything necessary for conferences, meetings and conventions.

www.murciacongresos.com
www.auditoriumurcia.org

Cartagena has, at its turn, the El Batel Congress Hall, which is a modern building next to the port, with 10 rooms and a capacity of 3,000 persons.
www.auditorioelbatel.es

And in Águilas, the opening of Infanta Doña Elena Auditorium and Congress Hall has taken place recently. It is located in front of the Playa de Las Delicias beach and has a capacity of more than 1,200 persons. The town offers now a new tourist product that completes sun and beach tourism.
www.auditorio-aguilas.org

The towns of Torre Pacheco, Yecla and Lorca also have exhibition centres that are suitable for events of all kinds.
Rural Tourism

The interior of the Region of Murcia is ideal for relaxing, enjoying nature, sports and good food. This, combined with the quantity and quality of facilities available, makes the rural interior of the Region a highly attractive destination.

The good weather means that it is possible to enjoy outdoor activities all year round and, as a result, the region’s rural accommodations have high annual occupancy rates and are virtually full during school and public holidays.

El Valle de Ricote y Cieza

If there is a place where the subtle essence of Arabic culture endures, it is in the Ricote Valley, which had a sizeable Moorish population right up until their expulsion in the 17th century. The districts of Abarán, Archena, Blanca, Ojós, Ricote, Ulea and Villanueva del Segura are all located along the valley, a lush, verdant garden that snakes its way along the banks of the River Segura. This fertile valley is firmly rooted in its Arabic past, evidence of which is provided by its irrigation and cultivation systems, such as the numerous water-wheels that were used to raise water from the river to irrigate the outlying fields.

Over recent years, river beaches have emerged as a new option complementing the range of activities in the Region’s interior. Far from the coast, visitors can spend an enjoyable day at the “beach” on the banks of the River Segura at the river beaches in the districts of Abarán and Blanca.

In addition to the beauty of the surroundings and its ethnographic heritage, the Ricote Valley area is a particularly attractive setting for activities such as trekking, climbing, rafting on the River Segura or horse-back excursions.

Bordering the Ricote Valley, the district of Cieza has numerous outstanding UNESCO World Heritage listed rock art sites. The district has the only examples of Palaeolithic rock art in the Region. Highlights from the Neolithic period include the Cueva de la Serreta and the Barranco de los Grajos group of shelters. The Iberians and Muslims also left their legacy. Dating back to Islamic times, the Medina Siyâsa archaeological site is one of the most important from Western Islamic culture. A large part of the remains found and a full-size reconstruction of two houses can be seen in the museum of the same name.
Another highlight in rural Cieza is when the trees are in bloom and at their maximum splendour, burgeoning with blossom in a wide variety of colours. A series of what are called ‘Blossom Routes’ have recently been set up here, allowing visitors to enjoy landscapes of unparalleled beauty, which can be combined with cultural visits, sports and other activities.

www.valledericote.com  www.cieza.es

Sierra Espuña Natural Park

The Sierra Espuña Natural Park is home to the Region of Murcia’s largest expanse of woodland and is one of its most emblematic landscapes. These days it is green and leafy thanks to the reforestation work carried out at the end of the 19th century. In 2005, the park became the first in the Region to obtain Q for Tourism Quality certification. The districts of Mula and Pliego nestle between the Sierra Espuña and the Sierra de Ricote and have a rich legacy of customs and traditions. Their stunning countryside makes them ideal stopping points on a visit to the interior of the Region.

Also of interest are Alhama de Murcia, Totana and Aledo, towns renowned for their potteries located under the watchful presence of the watch-tower that commands the entire area, which was once the setting of bitter skirmishes between Moors and Christians.

Located in Totana, the La Bastida Archaeological Site was an Argar civilisation settlement founded in around 2200 BC and the first in Western Europe. Here visitors can see how La Bastida was inhabited over almost seven centuries. The Barranco de Gebas protected landscape in Alhama is another must, where visitors will feel as if they are on the moon because of the absence of vegetation and the unusual rock formations.

The Sierra Espuña, with its varied and contrasting landscapes and environments and its array of services, offers visitors an extensive repertoire of options for relaxing and making the most of their free time. The area is an invitation to go back to basics, where visitors can immerse themselves in time-honoured traditions, culture and gastronomy and enjoy unrivalled and varied surroundings. There is plentiful accommodation in the area, ranging from camp sites to country manor houses with all manner of facilities and services.

www.sierraespuna.com
The North-East

Characterised by the extensive vineyards that unfurl before the eyes of visitors, the North-East encompasses the Jumilla and Yecla designated origin wine-growing areas, where some of the Region of Murcia’s best wines are produced.

In addition to sampling fine wines, this area offers much else for the visitor. One interesting option is to discover its numerous Bronze Age, Roman and Mediaeval archaeological sites, as well as some unusual relics from the Iberian era. The Balneario Leana thermal mineral spa in Fortuna is a prime attraction for those seeking rest, relaxation and the benefits of its thermal baths. The Sierra del Carche mountain range provides the perfect setting for a variety of sports and outdoor pursuits.

In the north of the area is the Murcian Altiplano, a high plateau partly in the district of Jumilla and partly in Yecla. The former, a town which currently has a population of over 25,000, has taken advantage of its wine-making tradition and has created its own ‘Wine Route’, an initiative that introduces visitors to the processes of wine-making. The neighbouring district of Yecla, which sits beneath the emblematic Mount Arabí, also has its own Designation of Origin. Further south, beneath the Altiplano, Abanilla’s Moors and Christians Festival and the Roman baths in Fortuna are further attractions for visitors in this beautiful inland area of the Region of Murcia.

Alto Guadalentín

This area in the south-west of the Region of Murcia has everything a visitor could possibly ask for when it comes to enjoying outdoor pursuits, with hills and countryside that are ideal for walking, horse riding or cycling.

The city of Lorca is the starting point for any visit to the Alto Guadalentín area. Declared of Historical and Artistic Interest in 1964, the city has a fascinating old town where traces of its Moorish legacy are still apparent in its maze of narrow, winding streets. Visitors will quickly recognise that Lorca is a Baroque city, as they discover its 17th and 18th century religious and secular buildings, such as the Guevara Palace, the former Collegiate Church of San Patricio, the Plaza de España, the Granary, the façade of the Town Hall or the Corregidor’s House. Another of the city’s most important attractions is the Fortress of the Sun, a mediaeval castle that
has been converted into a theme attraction where exhibitions and outdoor activities are held.

**Puerto Lumbreras** is another of the towns in the Alto Guadalentín district. Home to a Parador hotel, it is best known for its interesting archaeological sites, its 12th century Arabic castle and the cave dwellings found around the Cerro del Castelar hill.

[www.lorca.es](http://www.lorca.es)
[www.puerto-lumbreras.com](http://www.puerto-lumbreras.com)

**The North-West**

The North-West is a land of contrasts. Wide, barren plains coexist alongside vineyards, fields of cereals and rice and mountainous areas such as the **Revolcadores massif, the highest in the Region of Murcia** at over 2,000m.

It is home to **Cehegín**, a town with a remarkable wealth of heritage, including the ancient Roman-Visigothic settlement of **Begastri**, the most important site of its kind in Spain. Further south, **Bullas** is the birthplace of some excellent designated origin wines, whilst **Calasparra** is famous for its rice, which also boasts its own designation of origin.

It is in this area that the River Segura is at its liveliest, which has led to the formation of such remarkable features as the Cañón del Almadenes gorge, a unique setting for sports such as river rafting, canoeing and kayaking. **Moratalla**, with its intricate old quarter full of mystery, is another of the area’s towns. Here visitors can also discover the Region of Murcia’s legacy of World Heritage listed cave paintings at the ‘Casa de Cristo’ Rock Art Interpretation Centre.

The **Holy City of Caravaca de la Cruz** is the religious heart of the Region of Murcia and the most important town in the North-West. In 1998, Caravaca was granted a Permanent Holy Jubilee Year, which is held every seven years and guarantees Plenary Indulgence to all those who visit.

Otherwise, the geography of the North-West, with its location in a mountainous inland area far from the traditional transport hubs, means that the area is well forested and that visitors can enjoy the countryside with options such as the **Vía Verde** or Green Route, a 48-km trail that runs along the route of the old railway line linking Mula with Caravaca de la Cruz.

[www.turismodelnoroestedemurcia.com](http://www.turismodelnoroestedemurcia.com)
### INLAND ACCOMMODATION

(31 December 2012)

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Wine Tourism

Recently, there has been a significant increase in demand for rural tourism products amongst travel agencies and tour operators throughout Spain, mainly due to the implementation of sustainable tourism policies and complementary activities, one of the most popular of which is wine tours.

Wine tours have established a place for themselves as an increasingly important option, both because of their value-based nature and their expected growth potential. The Region of Murcia is the only single-province region in Spain to have three Designated Origin Wine Areas: Jumilla, Bullas and Yecla, and is working on a series of different initiatives to develop wine tourism as a product and link it with segments such as leisure, culture and wellness.

www.murciaturistica.es
Wellness Tourism

Another growth segment is wellness tourism, an area in which the Region of Murcia is highly regarded throughout Spain for its renowned thermal mineral spas, thalassotherapy centres and hotel or resort spas.

The opportunity to enjoy a relaxing break, to escape from the hustle-bustle of day-to-day life or to immerse yourself in well-being, are all reason aplenty to get away from the city and spend a few days at one of the Region of Murcia’s thermal mineral spas, thalassotherapy centres, hotel or resort spas which, together, comprise a comprehensive portfolio of wellness experiences.

The Region of Murcia’s thermal mineral spas offer modern facilities, well-appointed hotels, open-air and indoor thermal baths, sports facilities and private medical services. The Region offers three such facilities located in Archena, Fortuna and Mazarrón. The first, in the Ricote Valley has Q for Tourism Quality certification both for its hotels and for its spa facilities, awarded on the basis of the reliability and quality of its services and facilities. The second is located three kilometres from the town of Fortuna and is considered to be one of Spain’s most ancient thermal water spas. The third is located ten kilometres from the town of Mazarrón and is fed by mineral-medicinal thermal waters from the Pozo Manoli, which at a temperature of 49ºC, provide for highly beneficial treatments.

The Region of Murcia’s thalassotherapy centres are located along the coast of the Mar Menor, whose waters are highly saline and rich in magnesium, calcium, sodium, bromine, iodine and fluorine, which makes them ideal for treating arthritis, rheumatism, tendonitis, osteoporosis, physical and mental exhaustion and many other conditions. It is also worth noting that the Mar Menor is particularly suitable for the elderly and children thanks to the lack of waves, shallow water and greater buoyancy. Worthy of special mention is the Thalasia thalassotherapy centre in San Pedro del Pinatar, which is unique in the Mediterranean and offers the very latest facilities and treatments.

Completing the Region’s wellness tourism facilities are its spas, which use treated water as the basis for their treatments.

The Region of Murcia has a Health Tourism Consortium –the only one of its kind in Spain– which promotes the majority of the region’s thermal mineral spas, thalassotherapy centres, hotel and resort spas.

www.turismurciasalud.com
Golf Tourism

Golf is another of the areas that the Region of Murcia is targeting and developing. Considered one of the most attractive segments for tourism, golf is an engaging pastime whose enthusiasts tend to seek golf-related destinations for their holidays and consequently create demand for indirectly related services such as accommodation and parallel or complementary activities.

In the Region of Murcia golfers can put their game to the test on 21 top quality courses in a radius of 50km, with a total of 348 holes, each with its own challenge.

Some of the courses have been designed by stars such as Jack Nicklaus, Dave Thomas or Severiano Ballesteros, who have used their experience and passion to create thrilling courses where skill and driving power play a key role.

All of which explains why the Region of Murcia is, today, Europe’s new golf destination, with first class resorts offering all manner of services such as accommodation, restaurants, sports facilities, spas, shops and academies.

www.murciaturistica.es
Language Tourism

The welcoming, friendly nature of the Murcian people makes the Region an ideal place to come and learn Spanish. Those who visit the Region of Murcia for that purpose will find everything they need to make it a worthwhile experience.

This is an original and funny way of promoting the blending of cultures and discovering the people’s main characteristics by studying their most intimate feature: their way of expressing themselves. Those who visit our region with this aim will find here all they need for a profitable, pleasant and complete experience.

The Region of Murcia’s Language Product Club (TURLINGUA) has a network of centres which every year bring thousands of students from around the world to learn Spanish in our region.

www.murciaturistica.es
Region of Murcia Autonomous Community Facts & Figures

Population: 1,472,837 inhabitants.
Area: 11,317 km².
Kilometres of coast: 252km.
Kilometres of beaches: 90km.
Average annual temperature: 19.4° C.
* Source: Frontur, IET.

The Region of Murcia received 5,196,623 tourists in 2011. The main sources of international tourists were the United Kingdom, with a share of 56% of the total of foreign tourists, France, with an 8% share, and Germany, with a 6%. During the first eleven months of 2012, national tourism increased by 1.4% over the year 2011; international tourism increased by 1% during the second semester of the year, and, at the end of 2012, there will be about 600,000 foreign tourists, with an increase of their economic impact of more than 2%. Source: Frontur, Familitur IET.

OTHER TOURIST INFRASTRUCTURE
- 20 marinas with 6,332 moorings.
- 21 yacht clubs.
- 24 sailing schools.
- 22 golf courses.
- 7 regional parks.
- 1 nature reserve.

AIRPORTS

Murcia-San Javier Airport
Located 47km from Murcia on the shores of the Mar Menor, this airport offers scheduled flights to Spain’s principal cities as well as charter and scheduled services to the following destinations:

- United Kingdom (Belfast, Birmingham, Blackpool, Bournemouth, Bristol, Edimburgo, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, London -Gatwick/Luton/Stansted-, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham).
- Ireland (Dublin).
- Norway (Bergen, Stavanger, Oslo, Trondheim).
- Belgium (Brussels).

Alicante - El Altet Airport
There is direct motorway access between Alicante International Airport and the Mar Menor (60km) and the city of Murcia (68km).

Region of Murcia International Airport
The new Region of Murcia International Airport, which is being built next to the Murcia-Cartagena motorway, was given the go-ahead at the beginning of 2004 and is expected to be operating in 2013.