



Murcia - Square by Square

Turismo Murcia



Discover our lovely city a stroll round town...

- Introduction
- From the river to the Alameda
- From La Merced to the Plaza de San Juan
- From the Plana de San Francisco to the Plaza de Santa Isabel
- From the Malecón to the Auditorium

Index



Introduction

Of the Murcia of the blue minarets, palaces, gardens, public bath-houses, orchards and narrow twisting lanes, sheltered from the winds and silent, there are still corners to be found, rampart walks and nooks which make us a gift of their cool shade.

Murcia, in the region of the same name, is in the southeast of the Iberian peninsula in the valley of the River Segura, sheltered by the foothills of the Carrascoy, Cresta del Gallo and Pila mountain ranges. The latest population figures give a total of nearly 422.861 habitants, over half of whom live in the surrounding villages. Murcia is situated 388 kms from Madrid, 75kms from Alicante, 140 kms from Albacete and 220 kms from Almería. The city stands on the banks of the river, and enjoys all-the-year round sunshine, meaning that the climate is dry and temperate, with some of the highest temperatures in the Region, with a yearly average of 17.5 degrees. It lies at a crossroads of routes and cultures, surrounded by a tapestry of greenery, a garland of flowers and fruit whose scent hangs over the city, causing it to be known as the capital of the Market Garden of Europe. Founded in 825 A.D. by Abderramán II, work on the new city changed the face of the valley, covered until that time by marsh grasses and stagnant water. Eleven centuries later, the layout of the old quarters bears witness to their Moorish ancestry, while the situation of the city walls and their characteristics is well-known. Both Moorish and Christian writers considered these walls to be among the most imposing in al-Andalus: with a perimeter of 2,700



metres, a height of 14.5 metres, 6.25 metres in width, they had a curtain wall, a barbican, 12 gateways and 95 towers topped with battlements and parapets.

After the Reconquest, the twenty mosques of the city were turned into churches. They must have been very beautiful. King Alfonso X, known as "The Wise", who loved the city so well, spoke of it as "the best city of all Andalusia, excepting Seville". Of that Murcia of blue minarets,

palaces, gardens, public bath-houses, orchards and narrow, twisting lanes, sheltered from the winds and silent, there are still to be found corners, rampart walks and nooks which make us a gift of the coolness of their shade.

We still have its sunlight, the scent of citrus blossom, tuberose and jasmine, the soft warmth of winter,

the sweltering heat of summer and the street names: La Acequia, for the irrigation channels, Aduana, the customs post, Zoco, the covered market, Aladrosos, Albudeiteros, los Álamos, Almudí, Azucaque, Caravija or Almenara with their sensuous Moorish sonority.

The leaflet you are holding will suggest a stroll through the streets and squares of classic Murcia, learning of its rich historical and artistic heritage, the traditions, scents, colours, flavours and sounds of this old city.

From the river to the Alameda

In the beginning, Murcia was an “alcazaba”, that is to say a fortified enclosure from within which its first inhabitants took refuge from the river floods, epidemics and the attacks of the fearsome Moorish tribes.



In this first space, which has an area of about a hundred thousand square metres, was built the main Alcazar, the residence of the emir's governor, the Caramajul tower, which had a huge water wheel inside used to supply the inhabitants, the main Mosque and the Prince's house or Darajanife. It is not surprising to find that even now, eleven centuries later, a large portion of the political, administrative and religious sectors have their headquarters here. This is where the old, well-worn heart of the

city beats, and thus is a good starting point for our voyage of discovery.

In the **Glorieta**, bringing to mind the leafy flower-beds and fountains which gave life to the Prince's palace, the sun gently warms the bronze statue of Cardinal Belluga (1662 /1743) , a bishop and warrior who in peace time forded the river and walked among the orchard trees to show interest in the life of the country folk. Behind the statue, like a balcony over the River Segura hangs the “martillo” or hammer as it is known, an arched wing of the former



Glorieta. (above)

Saint Jerome by Salzillo. Cathedral museum (left)

City Hall. The Cathedral tower. (top right)

Cathedral. Marqués de Los Vélez chapel (right)

Bishop's Palace, and facing the river between palms and jacaranda trees stands the Town Hall, built on the ruins of the Prince's palace.

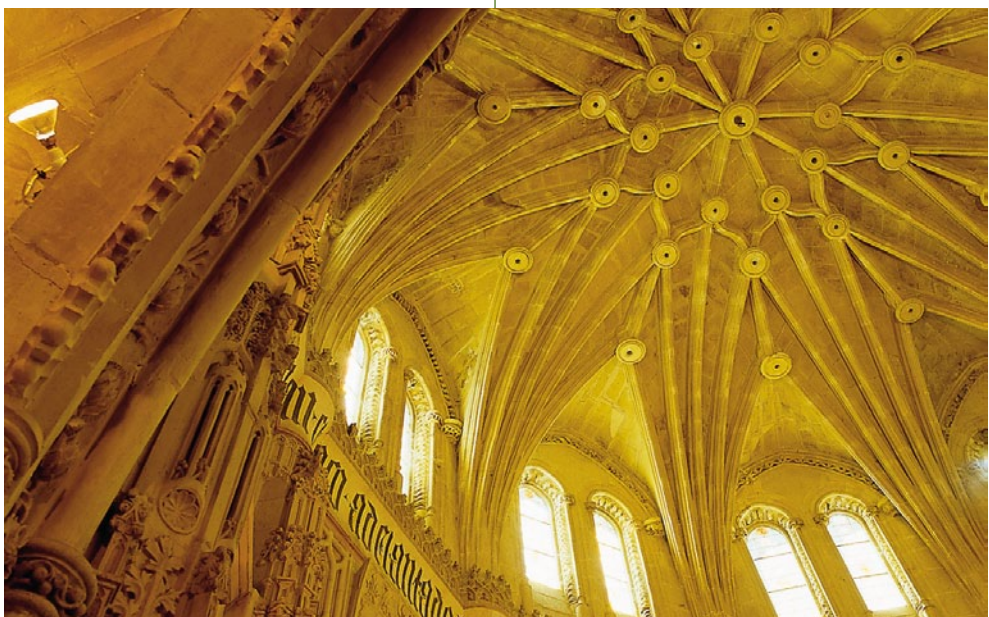
The narrow Calle Arenal, with its shields and pigeons, takes us into the **Plaza de Belluga**, where our most highly-prized historical building stands: **the Cathedral**. Bishop Pedrosa laid the foundation stone in 1388: then no-one could imagine that the work would take four centuries to finish, a long period which explains the widely differing styles of architecture to be found in it: it has 23 chapels each with its own artistic conception, from that of the Marqués de los Vélez, with its lacey stonework typical of the most ornate Gothic style, (1507) to the Junterones chapel (1525), one of the most original of



all Spanish renaissance works. The Sacristy also belongs to this period, inspired by that of San Lorenzo by Brunelleschi. The altarpiece of the capilla del Socorro, the choir stalls, dating from the 15th century, the wood carving of Saint Jerome by Salzillo are among its other treasures.

With the tower the renaissance came to Murcia. It took the place of another, less impressive tower which in its turn replaced the minaret of the mosque.

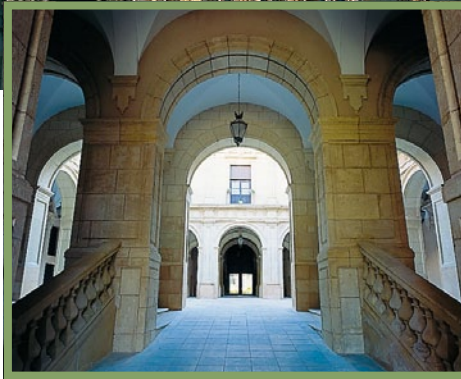
The first stage of the present tower was built by the Florentín brothers between 1521 and 1525. The second stage with its rich Ionic capitals, garlands and statues of the saints in their niches, was finished in 1645, while a further 120 were to pass by before the third stage was commenced: the lantern which crowns





the octagonal roof is 92 metres above the ground. However, the most beautiful and admired jewel of the whole collection is the West Front (1736-1754), a lovely stone façade, work of the sculptor and architect Jaime Bort. Murcian masons, painters, gilders and joiners of Spain's Golden Age worked together on a project which has been catalogued as a work of art of international baroque.

The West Front faces the **Bishop's Palace**, built between 1748 and 1768, on a piece



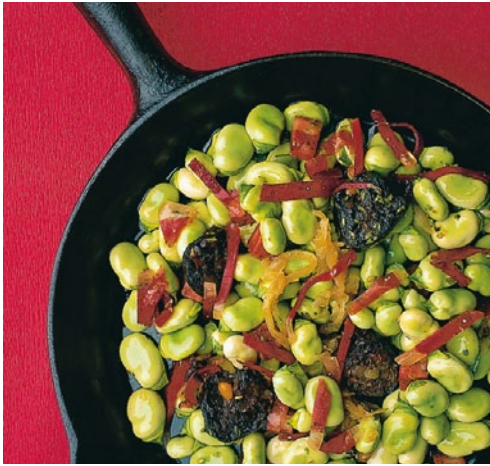
of land donated by the Fajardo family, well-known in Murcia since the 15th century. In the rococo style, the shield of Bishop Roca y Contreras blazes forth from the main balcony of the north façade, picked out in red. The south door onto the Glorieta is more baroque in style, while inside the palace we admire the square courtyard and the bishop's chapel. Alongside we find the former seminary of San Fulgencio, today the School

Cathedral. *Main front (top)*

Bishop's Palace. *Courtyard. (above)*

Sculpture. *Detail. Marqués de los Vélez chapel. (right)*





of Dramatic Art, the Theological College of San Isidoro, taken over by the Licenciado Cascales Secondary School, and the museum-church of San Juan de Dios, where a choice selection of religious carving of the 16th to 19th centuries may be found. Adjoining the Town Hall is a new wing designed by well-known Spanish architect Rafael Moneo. The **Plaza de Belluga**, sunny and relaxing, offers room for culture and leisure, where on leaving the cathedral visitors love to sit for a while at a café table, in the shade of the orange trees, to admire yet again the magnificent West Front of the Cathedral, with its clusters of columns, medallions, capitals, black stone pedestals, niches, cherubim, balusters and stone figures silhouetted against the blue sky.

Around the Cathedral we find two more squares of different shapes and sizes: the Plaza de los Apóstoles, which takes its name from one of the cathedral doors, in the gothic style, and the Plaza de la Cruz, in the lee of the tower. These squares are part and parcel of the city, reminding us of the old courtyards shared by blocks of houses: an ideal place to rest, chat and stare while we enjoy coffee and toast or fresh orange juice, wine with a tasty tapa or even a plate of spaghetti, as all sorts of eating houses are to be found round

the Cathedral and the Glorieta, with colourful parasols shading the tables and chairs which are not stowed away until nightfall.

There is always time to linger in the narrow streets and tiny squares, amid the bustle of the city, to window-gaze and follow our noses as far as the bars and restaurants in whose kitchens steaming pans of stews, greens, meat or fish tempt us. Inside, slates are covered with the names of hot or cold tapas such as zarangollo, (stewed courgettes, potatoes and onions with scrambled eggs), fried baby broad beans with chunks of cured ham, pickled sardines each mated to an anchovy, black pudding, salads of lettuce and tomato, oven-trays of baked potatoes with garlic mayonnaise, salt fish and cooked meats, crushed olives, stewed beans, or chard

Fried tender broad beans with ham. A typical Murcian dish. (left)

Cathedral and Plaza de Belluga. View from the new City Hall building.(below)



stems with pine-nuts. All this adds to the relaxing gaiety of our city centre.

The narrow, bustling **Calle Trapería**, reminding us of the old Moorish market lanes, leads out of the **Plaza de la Cruz**. Once

Murcia had been won back from the Moors, King Jaime I ordered the street to be laid out and named Troncada. Trapería (now named after the Cloth Merchants' Guild) is a river of people coming and going, some slow down or halt before the windows of **the Casino**, where in the nineteenth century the worthy citizens would sit to be admired like fish in a bowl. Inside wonder at its old-world splendours: gilding like cigar labels, divans, horns of plenty, golden cherubim, plaster mouldings round the ceilings, velvets, slim columns like those of Pompeii and the Louis Quinze style ballroom, the work of Ramón Berenguer. Leading out of Calle Trapería are a number of



narrow, winding streets which seem to lead to nowhere in particular but which take us swiftly to where ever we need to go, cosy little squares and peaceful lanes, ever shady in the height of summer. In the midst of this labyrinth stands the

Fontes mansion, fronting onto a square which was a Moorish graveyard; the neoclassical **Cerdá** and **Guillamón houses**, the **Puxmarín mansion** and the **church of San Bartolomé** with its treasured woodcarvings by Salzillo. The headquarters of the guild of silversmiths, from its doorway we can see into Calle **Platería**, home of Jewish jewellers and weavers, a narrow pedestrian thoroughfare which Azorín compared to a corridor in a house. In this area including the Gran Vía, Calle Platería and the

The Casino. The Pompeian Patio (above)

The Casino. Ballroom (below)





Romea square the traditional shops are to be found, with their motto: "Murcia, Open

Centre." The old street of the soap-makers, Calle Jabonería, lined with fir trees and red carpeted in the festive season is typical.

Platería and Trapería streets meet and embrace at the Cuatro Esquinas (Four Corners): so do the locals, exchanging news, sharing congratulations or expressions of sympathy. Passers-by of all social conditions come together at this cross-roads with its aroma of roasting coffee, confectionery and meat pies. A mere breathing-space separates

the Cuatro Esquinas from the Plaza de Santo Domingo, and it's well worth-while to make a short detour to the left to see the **Plaza de Romea**, formerly known as the Plaza de Esparta, where we see a statue to the memory of Fernández Caballero, the Murcian composer, the work of Planes, which looks over towards the **Romea theatre**. This was opened by Queen Isabel in 1862 but has been burnt down twice. It is said that a curse augurs a third fire as it is built on the site of a monastery graveyard. There is a magnificent stage curtain painted by Emilio Sala. To the west of the theatre is the **Vinader mansion**, an example of late 18th century architecture, while to the east is the Fontanar home, birthplace of F. Díaz de

The Romea Theatre (*top*)
 In Calle Trapería. (*above*)
 Bream baked in salt (*right*)





Mendoza, the actor, opposite the **Gonzalez Campuzano mansion**. The Romea lends character to the square: flanked by the highest casuarina trees in the region, it is not unusual to see famous actors, actresses and musicians relaxing over a coffee or a snack, and on summer nights outdoor entertainment is laid on to the delight of the citizens, although the square is busy at all times of the day and night because of the many shops, restaurants and bars around.

Through an archway we return to the **Plaza de Santo Domingo**, formerly the Market, site of royal ceremonies, tournaments, executions, bullfights and other celebrations. Laid out in 1547 as the main square of the city, it is reported to be the citizens' favourite. It is an inviting place for a leisurely stroll, buying a bunch of flowers or a newspaper and sitting in the sun which is reflected off the dome of the **Cerdá building**. Ask for the menu and choose some dishes from our traditional cuisine: the best thing is the day's special: fresh vegetables, roast lamb or fish baked in salt, rounded off with such typical Murcia desserts as "paparajotes", lemon leaves deep fried in sweet batter (don't try to eat the leaf!) or squares of cinnamon flavoured custard known as "leche frita", or fried milk, often



Plaza de Santo Domingo (top)
 Cloister of Las Claras. Detail (above)
 Paparajotes. Typical dessert. (left)
 Right page:
 Romea Theatre. Interior (above)
 Plaza Circular. Tram.(right)



served with vanilla icecream. The square is shaded by a magnificent ficus tree, planted in 1893; among its roots, surrounded by pigeons, is a bust of Ricardo Codomú, the botanist, known as the Apostol of Trees. **The Almodóvar mansion**, a mannerist building reconstructed in 1908, is on a line with the convent church of Santo Domingo with its two façades, the west unfinished and the east, which gives onto the square, brick- clad, with its two towers and belfry.

To the north lies a long tree-lined parade on the site of the legendary gardens of the lesser Alcázar, or Moorish palace, pleasure grounds of the Arab kings. On the left of the promenade we find the towers of the **Santa Clara convent**, their windows modestly hidden behind wooden latticework. This was the first convent to be built in Murcia, founded by King Alfonso X himself. In the courtyard are Islamic remains and a beautiful cloister with its three rows of stone archways (15th century), the arched gallery on the first floor and a tiny window, one of the few remains of the Gothic style in Murcia; the finely worked pillars show Mudéjar influence. Over the remains of 12th and 13th century Moorish dwellings which still show signs of their carved wooden ceiling pannels, a cultural centre has been set up. To the right of the avenue, opposite Las Claras,

on the site of the bath-house and dwelling of the Moorish queen, stands the convent church of **Santa Ana**, founded in 1490; some of its wood carvings and altar-pieces are especially lovely. The nuns of the order of Santa Ana are specialists in typical convent confectionery: try some of their delicious pastries.

The **Alameda de Alfonso X** is a delightful shady promenade lined with leafy plane trees. The Book Fair and handicraft exhibitions take place here in an ideal setting, light and airy, warm and peaceful. Tall trees also peep out from the rear of the Jesus y María school. A little further up, the **Archeological Museum** holds pieces from the neolithic age and even more from the Amárican, Iberian, Roman, and Moorish periods, including hand-painted ceramics and plaster-work from the convent of Santa Clara. The avenue takes us far as the **Plaza Circular**, but along the way we pass a trail of specialized shops, fashion franchises, banks, seafood and other restaurants where you can enjoy anything from a hearty plate of German sauerkraut to roast lamb, a whole feast of fresh vegetables or aubergines à la crème, a delicious local speciality. Murcia is sensuous, baroque and generous, as you can see perfectly from the dozens and dozens of bar and restaurant counters, vying to tempt the passer-by.



From La Merced to the Plaza de San Juan

The Calle de la Merced leads into the Plaza de Santo Domingo , bringing a constant toing and froing of students.

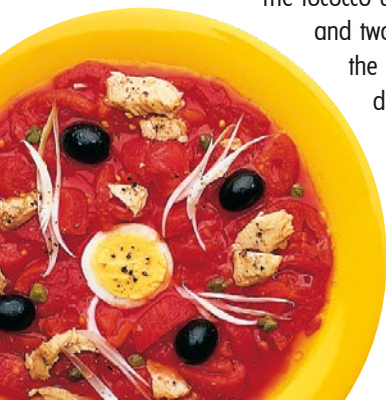


At the end is **the University**, in a convent built by the Brothers of Mercy in 1628 - it's worth while popping into the cloister with its two levels of slender arches. Next door is the church of **La Merced**, enhanced in 1713 with a complex baroque doorway by José Balaguer.

The rococo church has side chapels and two interesting altar pieces the main one and another dedicated to the "Virgen de los Remedios", also known as the "Wry-necked Virgin", a stone carving

from the 16th century. A legend states that it was found floating on the waters of the River Segura. The south side of the church faces the Plaza del Beato Imbernón , lined with bars and taverns: being so near the university means that a whole area of leisure facilities has grown up here where, as soon as twilight falls, thousands of young people collect to stroll, chat and make friends over a glass of local wine and a tapa, while traffic comes to a standstill in this, the old Jewish quarter. Murcia

Cloister of La Merced. *University (above)*
Typical Murcian salad (*left*)



is a hospitable city: witness the development of the Jewish community from Moorish times, with its later protection by the Castillian monarchs. Alfonso X set up a Jewish quarter within the city walls, covering the following streets:

Santa Quiteria, Selgas, Sardoy, Mesegueres, Horno, Paco, Victoria, Mariano Vergara, Luisa Aledo, Trinidad, Amores, Sémola, Torreta, Santa Rosalia, Rosario, Lomas and Cigarral. The lay out of these streets has not changed much at all; here they are narrower and more winding, the alleyways show that nearby, buried underground, lies a section of Moorish wall, and at every step of our stroll we come upon peaceful corners, warm little squares bathed in the golden light of sunset. By the Saavedra Fajardo market the bells of San Lorenzo ring out, one of the seven parish churches built within the city walls; the present church was designed by Ventura Rodríguez in 1810.

In the **Plaza Balsas** we find the Pérez Calvillo mansion (18th century) and further



on in Calle Obispo Frutos, the **Municipal Art Gallery** with its two carved doorways dating from the 17th century and commemorating the silk trade. Within the museum we find paintings by Ribera, Rosales, Orrente,

Romero de Torres and Picasso, and by local artists from the renaissance to the latest trends in painting and sculpture.

The Jewish quarter was bounded to the south by the church of **Santa Eulalia**, or Santa Olalla as it was originally known as, being a popular place of devotion for the Catalans who came to Murcia with Jaime I. A statue to the wood-carver Salzillo looks out over the square where fairs are held to celebrate San Blas's day and Candlemas; like those of the San Antón district, they are the last remains

Plaza Cetina and Calle Alejandro Seiquer
(above)

La Muralla café. *View the Arab walls whilst you enjoy a coffee or a liqueur. (below)*



of the local fairs, present in the memory of the quarter where balconies are decorated and folk hang round their necks a clay replica of that great curer of sore throats, the ever-popular bishop San Blas. On the Saint's day they wear plumes of red, green and yellow feathers and there is a procession with its band, typical sweetmeats, the smell of smoking fritters, the lucky dip, roundabouts, nuts, dried fruit and the parish priest craving protection for the children's throats with the aid of two candles held aloft like windmill sails. The **Plaza de Santa Eulalia** was the site of coaching inns, and the well-earned fame of its bakeries, taverns and inns dates back from those days. Behind the church in the Paseo de Garay both the football stadium and the



Plaza de San Juan (above)

Typical dish: *rice with vegetables.*

bull-ring bear the name of a nearby irrigation channel: the Condomina. The stadium is shortly to be moved outside the city but the bullring has just been refurbished; designed by Justo Millán and opened in 1877, it is considered to be of the largest category, as it is 53 metres in diameter, 18 metres high and has room for 18,000 spectators. Opposite the main gate is Calle San José, leading to the square of the same name, where King Jaime I

made camp with his army before reconquering the city from the Moors. There lived the Count of Floridablanca, Carlos III's prime minister, whose palace and gardens gave onto the square; the work of Ramón Berenguer, the building has been made over for use as a hotel, and is the prototype of the 18th century Murcian neoclassical mansion (in that century, the city's history was closely united to three important figures: Cardinal Belluga,





the woodcarver Salzillo and Floridablanca, the politician). The parish church of San Juan dates back to the times of the Reconquest, but the present building was erected at the end of the 18th century; inside there are carved figures by Roque López, Sánchez Tapia, Porcel and Nicolás de Bussy.

Around the square there are restaurants offering international cuisine and typical bars, so the food available is very varied. One is tempted to sit in the open, tasting some of the traditional tapas and just letting time drift by in this peaceful, sunlit square, which can be reached through the archway leading into Calle Ceballos, formerly called Caramajul because it was there that the great water wheel stood which was used to supply water for the Moorish palace.

Crossing an alleyway we come to **the Convalecencia**, a building inspired by the renaissance opened in 1915 and at present home of the University administrative offices. It stands on the site of the hospital set up by Ribera the Chantry priest in the 18th century to provide help and shelter for sick and convalescent priests. Its windows overlook the river and the tall eucalyptus trees, vestiges of the Ruiz Hidalgo park, no longer in existence, which was a leafy Garden of Eden with carriage drives and avenues. It used to be the ideal setting for the Battle of Flowers and also for livestock shows. Ricardo Codornú, writer of a guide book to the park, catalogued 144 species of plants there. On summer nights roses shimmer under the eucalyptus and the garden is cloaked in the incense-like aroma of the sweet-scented shrubs.

La Condomina bull-ring. (above)

Roses. (right)





From the Plano de San Francisco to the Plaza de Santa Isabel

The squares of Santa Catalina and Las Flores are like a calendar: when November is just around the corner the pavements are alight with crysanthemums and gladioli, ...

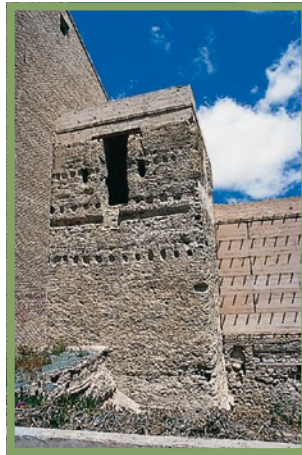


With the opening up of the **Gran Vía** in the middle of the 20th century, Murcia of the golden domes and white rooftop terraces was split in two. The Moorish bath houses and the *Contraste de la Seda*, a handsome 16th century building, were demolished, while the mansion of Count Roche, at one time occupied by the Inquisitor, and **the Almudí**, a building used as a grain store dating from Moorish times and opened in 1275 were saved. The Almudí had

Plaza de las Flores (*above*)

El Almudí (*left*). This building, converted into an Arts Centre, holds the city's Historical Archives.

a further storey added on top in the 16th century and later the façade was decorated with a relief of a Mother which symbolises the generosity of the Murcian people. Within the building, the columns of the entrance hall and the 18th carved wooden ceiling are noteworthy. The Almudí lends dignity to the **Plano de San Francisco**, a name which has lingered on despite the disappearance of the convent it was named after. Formerly known as the Carretería, one of the oldest streets of Murcia, we can find in a sidestreet one of the 95 majestic towers which formerly dotted the city walls, hidden for centuries by the convent church of Las Verónicas, which is now used as an exhibition hall and art restoration centre. The tower is almost as high as the nearby Verónicas market hall, where you can find the best fruit and vegetables from the surrounding market-gardening land, juicy steaks, cooked meats and dried and fresh fish, or the famous prawns from the Mar Menor. To the south, bounded by the Malecón, lies the greenery of the Botanical garden, where



together with many species of plants there is a small lake, fountains, ponds and the stone gateway to the Huerta de las Bombas orchard, carved in the 17th century.

The Malecón is formed by a succession

of flood protection walls built from 1420 onwards to hold back the River Segura after heavy rainfall. It is now a delightful walkway with views over the surrounding market garden area and away to the Cresta del Gallo, Carrascoy and Pila mountain chains which embrace the city on each side. Where

the original valley-dwellers settled we find the Fuensanta Pilgrimage Church, within the El Valle Natural Park. From the summit of its hills

*The Moorish walls at Las Verónicas. (above)
The Las Verónicas market. (right)
Plano de San Francisco. Malecón
footbridge. (below)*





we can see the Mar Menor lagoon and the Mediterranean. The Malecón, a flat pedestrian promenade, is the ideal place for a stroll. It is over one and a half kilometres as far as the statue of José María Muñoz and just about half a kilometre to the Sarten, or Frying-pan, where the walkway widens out and you can step down to the convent of the Clarisas Capuchinas where a carved figure of Jesus of Nazareth by de Bussy and another of Santa Clara by Salzillo are the object of popular devotion. Every Maundy Thursday night a most original procession leaves from the convent to follow the country lanes of La Arboleja: the bearers, dressed in richly-worked typical costume, carry along a study for the Virgen de las Angustias by Salzillo to the clacking of castanets.



Many poets have evoked sunrise and nightfall over the Malecón lined with orange groves, fields of lettuces and scented flowerbeds: “on that Malecón between orchards, divine at sunset...” wrote Jorge Guillén after a stay in Murcia, his habit at the end of his walk being to cross the Plano de San Francisco and slip into the narrow streets of Arco de Verónicas and Aduana, on his way to the cheery **Plaza de las Flores**, named in 1630, when a rich landowner, Macías Coque, sold the Butchers’ Guild building to the City Council. The Plaza de las Flores boasts bay-windows and geranium decked balconies, orange trees in blossom and a palm tree soaring into the blue. This city square is so lively, baroque and sensuous that it has been copied by the neighbouring square of Santa Catalina, which also has its necklace of orange and jacaranda trees; in May, peeping out from behind the garlands of blue flowers we see the pale coloured façade of **Casa Palarea**,

El Malecón and the Botanical Gardens. (above)
Swans, *Botanical Gardens* (left).



which houses the museum bearing the name of **Ramón Gaya**, the famous painter who is one of the city's most notable inhabitants. In the museum, over 150 works by the painter and his local contemporaries are to be seen.

Until the reign of Felipe III, **Santa Catalina** was the most important square in the city, with its ceremonies and official acts, courts to decide on irrigation disputes, the handing out of public offices, auto da fés and royal proclamations. The quaint little church stands on the site of a mosque dedicated to the memory of the Cartagena poet al-Qartayanni, who wrote from exile in Tunis: "With such great love, my friend, did I love that garden which was my homeland, that estranged from it my heart languishes." Founded by Alfonso X himself, it belonged to the Knights Templar and was rebuilt in the 15th century; the statue of Saint Catherine is by Nicolás Salzillo and his son carved a magnificent Lady of Dolours with its expression of intense grief. The tower dates from 1579; it originally had a clock and the sentry did duty from its battlements, serving as a look-out post to warn of attacks by the Barbary corsairs; the carving of the Immaculate Conception is by González Moreno.

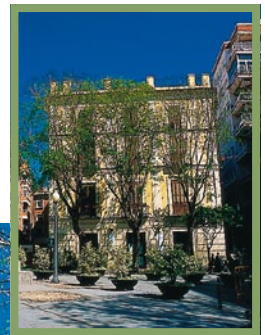
The Santa Catalina and Las Flores squares are like a calendar: when November is just around the corner, the pavements glow with chrysanthemums and gladioli, the air is scented with sweet fritters and in the neighbouring square of San Pedro, opposite the medieval church, today's new generation of craftsfolk sell fruit preserved in syrup, candied pumpkin and other traditional delicacies. At other seasons we find Easter buns with a hard-boiled egg embedded in them and sweets to hand out at the Holy Week processions, and at any time of year there are meat pies, whose recipe was laid down in official terms in 1691 under the orders of Carlos III.

In the side streets leading into the square there are niches for statuary and old signs advertising woollen goods, blankets or knives. On both sides of Calle Ruipérez are taverns

La Plaza de las Flores
(above)

Casa Palarea. Ramon Gaya Museum (right)

Plaza de Santa Catalina (below)





packed with discerning dedicatees of the tapa, one of the best-loved customs of our city. There are so many varieties on offer

that often no one bothers with lunch, having eaten their way through a whole long, narrow menu of tit-bits. The larders of our ancestors contained the same foods: baby broad beans cool to the tongue, sliced tomatoes, boiled potatoes with garlic mayonnaise, black pudding (morcilla), scrambled egg with baby courgettes, potatoes and onions (zarangollo), stewed dried beans (michirones), consomé with meat balls, portions of fried coagulated blood, little buns with cheese and sobrasada (spicy paprika spread) or pickled sardines, or tuna with mayonnaise, or a "marinera", an anchovy perched on top of a pile of Russian salad, and of course dried or smoked tuna or fish roe, exquisite to the palate.

After a break for refreshment, **San Nicolás** awaits us, a street lined with the homes of the local aristocracy; a plaque reminds us that here in 1812, General Martín de la Carrera was shot down by the troops of the French Marshal Soult, when trying with the aid of a handful of Spaniards to stop the advance of the invaders. The church of San Nicolás dates from the 18th century, its main door having two medallions by Jaime Bort. Opposite, on the corner of Calle Aistor is a shield and further on the wall of a shady garden leads to Brujera,



a by-way rampart walk which points to the nearness of the city walls, a section of which has been uncovered in the nearby Calle del Pilar, near the Vidrieros gateway where the Emperor Carlos V entered the city in 1541. Over the years the historic gateway gave way to the Arco del Pilar, which was demolished in turn in 1863 as it was too narrow. The façade of the



present hermitage of El Pilar dates from that time, founded two centuries earlier by the side of a little pilgrims' hostel by Pueyo the Viceroy, a man of Aragon who financed work after coming unscathed through an ambush which was laid for him while he went the rounds.

To the west walled Murcia reached as far as Calle Sagasta, and the space between the two

Michirones. (*Stewed dried beans*) (top)

Iglesia de Jesús church (above). Houses the *Salzillo Museum*.

Regional Handicrafts Centre. (*left*).

churches of San Antolín and San Andrés was called the Arrixaca, where the Christians were made to dwell until Aben Hud handed his kingdom over to Castille. When Alfonso X arrived in Murcia in 1243, he proclaimed the Virgin of La Arrixaca as Patron Saint of the city, and a carving of her is to be found in the San Andrés chapel, where it is still venerated, although since the 17th century she is no longer our Patron.



In the old walled quarter of the Arrixaca, the passer-by will be surprised to find squares

The Kiss of Judas. *Work by Salzillo. (above)*
The Salitre Gardens (*below*). In the background is the Museum of Bullfighting.

of varying size and shape: San Antolín, whose church was practically destroyed in 1936; San Ginés, Sandoval, Yesqueros or San Agustín, the largest and pleasantest on account of the garden which decorates it. The parish church of San Andrés belonged to the convent of San Agustín; the present façade, finished in 1762, is held up by two Corinthian columns which come from the old castle at Montegudo. Next door, the **church of Jess** has an elliptic interior. It is one of the most popular places for visitors to the city, as it holds a permanent exhibition of the most precious works of **Francisco Salzillo**, ranging from the well-loved set of Christmas Crib figures to the majestic groups of carvings carried through the streets on Good Friday



morning. Except for that which gives its name to the Holy Week guild, Jesus of Nazareth, the other carvings were made by Salzillo between 1752 and 1777. There is no other morning in Murcia as glorious as that of Good Friday. As dawn tinges the roof-tops with gold, the blossom-scented city awakes, every citizen reverent before the endless-seeming river of purple-clad penitents bowing down under the weight of the invaluable statuary as they bear it through the streets of the baroque quarters of Murcia.

The convent of Las Agustinas, dating from the 18th century, faces onto the **Plaza de San Agustín**. The main altar piece is presided



over by a San Agustín, work of Salzillo, but there are other valuable carvings, such as that of Santa Cecilia by Roque López, or San Miguel by Antonio Dupar. Centuries ago, the coat of arms of Murcia bore a tower and palm tree, emblem of the **City Museum**, opposite Las Agustinas.

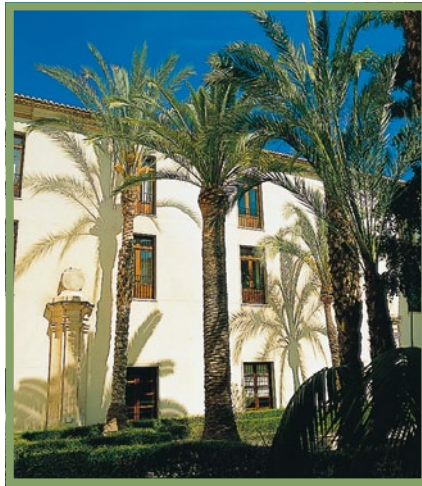
The building, remodelled in 1868, belonged to Gil Rodríguez de Junterón, secretary to Pope Julian II. It is surrounded by a garden dating from Moorish times, set out like a kitchen garden divided into different plots with many scented plants and shady trees, such as the splendid century-old magnolia and palms

Santa Isabel gardens. (below)



of different varieties. To the rear is the **Museum of Bullfighting**, with an interesting display of posters, bullfighters' costumes, a library, paintings and sculptures. To the left is the Handicraft Centre, where you can buy anything from a set of Christmas Crib figures to a bedspread, embroidery, matting, wrought ironwork or papier mâché toys. On leaving, stroll through the spacious **Salitre gardens** which used to be part of the old Gunpowder Works. Under the eucalyptus, palms, orange and lemon trees, jacarandas, acacias, pines and cypresses are children at play, gossiping mothers and the elderly shading their eyes from the sunlight.

On the other side is the medieval church of Santiago, the oldest building of any outside the city walls, and behind it Calle Jerónimo de Roda which takes us to the **San Esteban gardens** and the Plaza de la Fuensanta , where the main thoroughfares of the city meet: avenida de la Libertad, Jaime I, Constitución and Gran Vía, the nerve centre of local business. Here the neon lights of the best-known chain stores and the most up-to- date fashion franchises compete. Their flashing lights up the craft fair which has taken over one side of the garden of the **Palace of San Esteban**, seat of the Regional Government. The church and college of San Esteban, "the finest flower of the Company of Jesus", were set up



in 1555 with a donation from bishop Esteban de Almeyda. The doorway of the church, now used to house exhibitions, is Plateresque, the slender nave has Gothic roof tracery with its bosses and twin windows near the main door and to the rear which let in a flood of sweet light. The most interesting feature of the Palace is the courtyard with its renaissance

arcades and the handsome white marble staircase.

Calle Acisclo Díaz, called after a musician from Alhama, lies between San Esteban and the **church of San Miguel**, built in the second half of the 17th century. It holds an important collection of carvings and altar-pieces, the main one being one of the best examples of baroque carving in Murcia, commissioned in 1731 from Jacinto Perales and Francisco Salzillo, who carved the four angels and the Coronation group; he also carried out the Holy Family group and a Saint Joseph with the Child Jesus, sharing work on the latter with his father Nicolás Salzillo.

Down Calle Acisclo Díaz we can hear the bustle of the Gran Vía. The Tax Offices stand on the corner, and to the right, opposite the Bank of Spain building, is the **square of Santa Isabel**, newly redesigned in an attempt to link past and present with its flower beds and the silhouette of the Vizconde archway.



Moorish vase. City Museum. (above)
San Esteban Palace. (above)

From the Malecón to the Auditorium

The Malecón footbridge, the work of Manterola, represents a lighthouse on a quay. It crosses the river from the Plano de San Francisco to the Plaza de la Ciencia...



The **Malecón footbridge**, work of Manterola, represents a lighthouse on a quay. It crosses the river from the Plano de San Francisco to the Plaza de la Ciencia, which takes its name from the **Science and Water Museum**, situated in one of the huge cisterns which were used to hold the city's water supplies; the museum specializes in displays to do with water, the solar system and interactive exhibits aimed at the young. There is a children's planetarium and there are temporary themed

exhibitions. Near the museum are the walls of the old **Artillery Barracks**, which can be reached down the Calle Cartagena. Behind the guardroom and the main gateway is a magnificent parade ground, surrounded by four three-storey buildings and shady gardens; the whole area is due to be made over to the city, with cultural, entertainment and sports facilities to be set up.

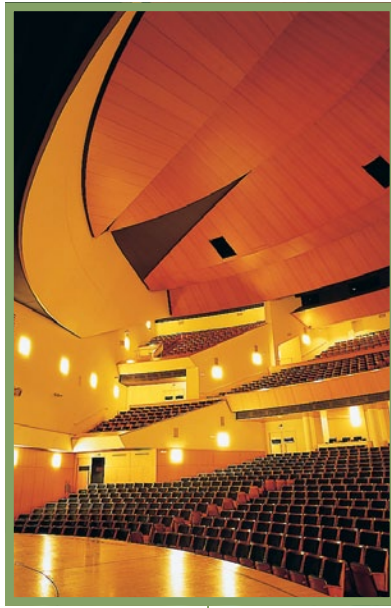
Calle Caballero runs as far as the Avenida de Floridablanca, and from there to the González Conde square, formerly known as the Half Moon, it is only a few steps. Although there is no evidence to support it, local historians



The Malecón footbridge (*above*).
Science and Water Museum (*left*).

believe that the Alhajariella mosque and then the Hermitage of San Benito originally stood on the site of the **church of El Carmen**. It is true that the Carmelite friars established themselves in the vicinity in 1586. Rebuilt on several occasions, work on the church was begun in 1721 under the orders of the Carmelite architect José Chover. Two towers flank the main door, and inside is the venerated carving of the Immaculate

Conception by Salzillo and the Christ of the Sacred Blood, work of Nicolás de Bussy, which stands in the **Museum of the Sacred Blood** where we can admire the wood carvings belonging to the Confraternity of the Precious Blood, carried out by Roque López, Nicolás de Bussy, González Moreno, Dorado, Hernández Navarro and Sánchez Lozano.



hamlet of San Benito, lying on the right bank of the River Segura, near the Carmelite and Capuchin convents. The economic growth which took place towards the middle of the 18th century, which brought the paving and lighting of the streets, the building of the highroad to El Palmar, the Reguerón flood prevention channel and the Puente Viejo (Old Bridge) (1740) encouraged citizens to move over from the other bank. This was the time when the leafy

avenues were laid out, with fairs and markets held in their shade. Díaz Cassou recalled that in the winter of 1787 one of them was set up between the Convents of El Carmen and

Inside the Auditorium concert hall. (*above*)
Floridablanca gardens. (*below*)





Floridablanca gardens, the most beautiful in the city and the first public gardens to be opened in Spain. Recently refurbished, it now displays once more the Moorish philosophy of garden design with flowerbeds in line, the murmur of running water and an avenue of poplars which recalls the original tree-lined walks. A rose garden containing 1,400 bushes lends colour and scent, along with many "galán de noche" (night-scented shrub), rosemary, broom, jasmines, lavender and myrtle bushes, the "arrayán" of the Moors who gave Murcia its name. There are groves of bamboo, with patches of light and shade, ferns, yellow broom, sparta grass, rockroses and "ruscos", a local plant to be found wild in the Espu-a mountains. Opened in 1848, the garden was named after the Count of Floridablanca, whose statue, the work of Santiago Baglieto, rises from a simple base. The enormous rubber trees were planted

in 1914 and the jacaranda on the west side is the oldest in any garden in Murcia.

The Matadero gateway which used to stand in the Plaza de la Paja lends importance to the garden. Through it we come to the **Marqués de Camachos square**, work of the ubiquitous Jaime Bort, who planned it for bullfighting, giving the houses private balconies for the ecclesiastical and municipal authorities. It was opened in 1759 with a bullfight, when the San Benito quarter was composed almost entirely of farmland and garden plots. Now, edged with mulberry trees, it keeps its original shape and the Camachos archway which leads through



Plaza de Camachos (top)
 Molinos del Río Hydraulic Museum. (above)
 Bridges over the river Segura. (right)

to the **Molinos del Río Hydraulic Museum**, set up in the famous mill with its 24 stones, which in 1808 replaced the former mills known as El Batán and Las Coronas; memories of the water mills which used to dot the





surrounding market gardening area are to be found in the millstones and machinery and tools for grinding corn. The neighbouring **Sala de las Caballerizas** (cart sheds) surprise us with its handsome dome and stone arches: exhibitions are held here from time to time.

Until 1901, when the Puente Nuevo (New Bridge) was opened, the El Carmen quarter was only joined to the rest of city by the Puente Viejo, also known as the Puente de Piedra (Stone Bridge). Toribio Martínez de la Vega, the Town Council's Master Mason, began work on it in 1718 and within three months the foundations were already laid,

but lack of funding meant that work did not conclude until Jaime Bort arrived on the scene in 1740, when the bridge was finally opened. A good view of the city can be had from the **Puente Viejo**, where an effigy of the Virgen de los Peligros (Virgen of Dangers) watches over her devotees as they cross the bridge from a neoclassical altar piece by Cayetano Ballester. On the evening of Holy Wednesday, as night falls, the famous procession known on account of the bright colour of the robes of the penitents as "The Reds" leaves the church of El Carmen. The guild was founded in 1411 and is the oldest in Murcia; between 1701 and 1744, because the old wooden bridge



Concert hall and Congress centre complex. (*above*)
Puente Viejo or Los Peligros bridge. (*left*)

was considered unsafe, it left temporarily from the church of Santa Eulalia. Locals love to watch the procession as it crosses the Puente Viejo once darkness has fallen: the lifesize carved figures are reflected in the waters with their lamps like bunches of grapes.

But any day is a good day to lean over the balustrades of the Puente Viejo and admire the lovely view: the Malecón, the Manterola footbridge, the Plano de San Francisco, the Glorieta with the City Hall, the former Bishop's Palace, the Cathedral tower, the former Theological College, the Convalecencia building and the spectacular road and footbridges designed by Santiago Calatrava. All along the river side, downstream, a sort of traffic free "green corridor" has been planned, ideal for strolling under shady eucalyptus, palm trees and jacarandas which



line the river banks. On your way you will come upon the modern, welcoming quarters of the city, with their wide avenues and gardens, inviting you to sit and rest a while. Beyond the ultra-modern **Hospital road bridge** and **Jorge Manrique footbridge** lies the remarkable silhouette of the **Concert Hall** and **Congress complex**,

rising like the prow of a ship from the riverside, work of the architects García de Paredes and García Pedrosa, and clad in stone from Abarán. Its two main halls hold 1,800 and 500 spectators respectively. It stands on the very edge of the city: beyond nothing is to be seen but the deep green of citrus trees.

Former Artillery Barracks (*above*)

Stable block. Los Molinos del Río Hydraulic Museum (*below*)

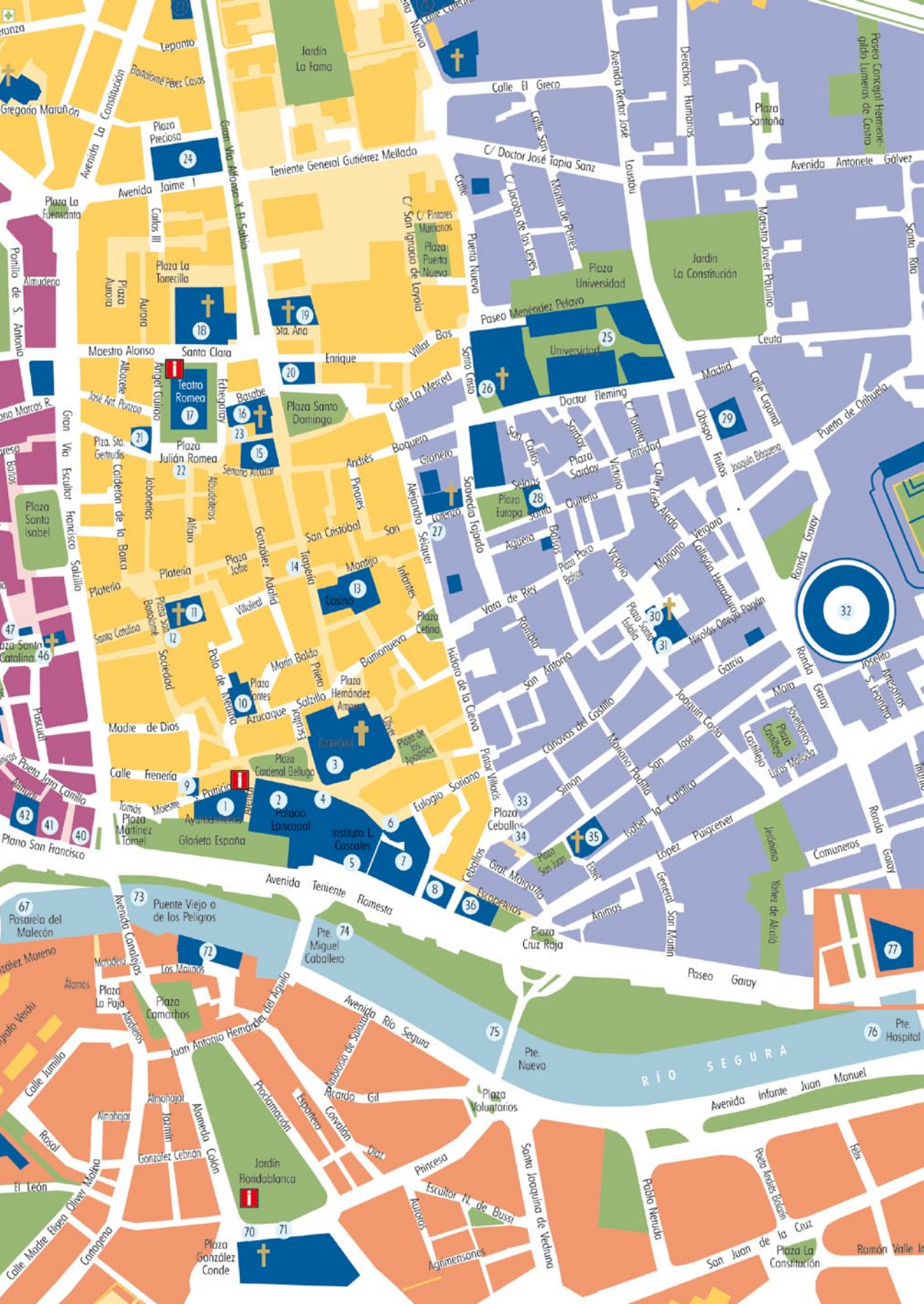


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Map labels include streets such as Avenida Jaime I, Avenida La Constitución, Calle El Griego, and Avenida Antonele Gálvez. Squares and parks are labeled, including Plaza Preciosa, Plaza La Tonerilla, Plaza Santo Domingo, Plaza Julián Romea, Plaza Santa Isabel, Plaza Santa Catalina, Plaza de los Agustinos, Plaza Catedral del Duque, Plaza Episcopado, Plaza Cruz Roja, Plaza Camareros, Plaza Camareros, Plaza González Lebrón, Plaza González Conde, Plaza Santa Clara, Plaza Santo Domingo, Plaza Julián Romea, Plaza Santa Isabel, Plaza Santa Catalina, Plaza de los Agustinos, Plaza Catedral del Duque, Plaza Episcopado, Plaza Cruz Roja, Plaza Camareros, Plaza Camareros, Plaza González Lebrón, Plaza González Conde. Parks include Jardín La Fama, Jardín La Constitución, Jardín La Florida, Jardín Rondablanca. The Río Segura is shown at the bottom. Numbered points of interest (1-32) are marked with blue squares containing a cross symbol.