

The Emir Abd ar-Rahman II, wishing to put an end to the conflicts between his Yemeni Arab allies and the muladis (local converts) settled in what was known as the Cora (territory) of Theodemir, founded Murcia in 825 AD. It soon became the capital of successive Taifa kingdoms after the fall of the Caliphate of Córdoba. Among the most notable figures of this important period is Ibn Mardanis, known as the Wolf King. It was during his reign that the palace and castle at Monteagudo were built, as well as the defensive walls of Murcia, which survived until the nineteenth century. But the most outstanding international figure of Arab Murcia was Ibn Arabí, one of the leading lights of Islamic mysticism.



Cathedral

Alfonso X, the Wise, who reconquered and entered Murcia on the first of May 1243, made the city a vassal of Castile, and named it as capital of the kingdom. The city so seduced the king that he left instructions in his will to be buried there, and his heart and internal organs are preserved in an urn in the Cathedral. The city was powerful enough throughout the fourteenth century to build the oldest part of the Cathedral complex. Thanks to the role played by Murcia in putting down the 'morisco' rebellion in Granada, Philip II conferred on the city the motto 'Very noble and very loyal'.



The gardens of Seda and Salitre, the conversion of the watermills into a museum of hydraulic engineering, the construction of footbridges over the Segura by Santiago Calatrava and Javier Manterola; the building annexed to the Ayuntamiento, by Rafael Moneo; the Auditorio and the Conference Centre by José María García de Paredes..., these significant developments at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries, represent a living testimony to Murcia's self-confidence, and its image as a welcoming city, a city of great tradition, a modern city.

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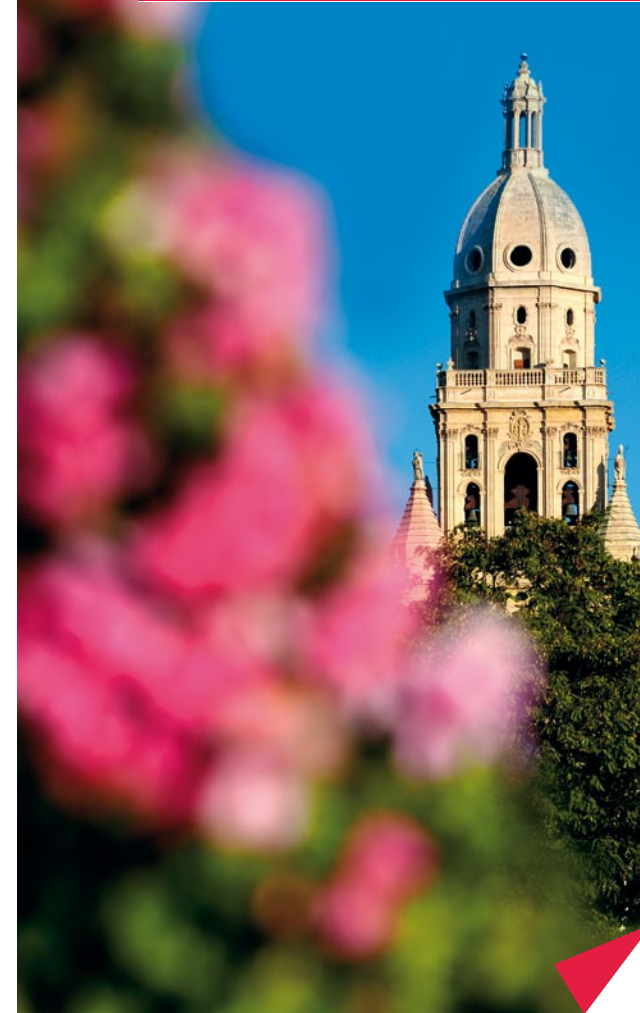
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MURCIA AND ITS HISTORY



In the Bronze Age, the area around what is now Murcia was inhabited, as shown by the archaeological finds at Verdolay, Beniaján or Monteagudo. El Cabecico del Tesoro also provides evidence of the large number of people in the area. Under the Romans, the fertile 'huerta' farmland became established as an area of settlement and agriculture. The Martyrium in La Alberca, dating from the fourth century, and the remains of the Basilica of Algezares, from the sixth, are two monuments which indicate the presence of Christianity.



Castillete. Monteagudo





Salzillo sculpture



Episcopal Palace

Throughout the eighteenth century, Murcia experienced its period of greatest splendour, known by scholars as the Spanish Golden Age. There was great economic growth, and the population of the city grew to 70,000 inhabitants. Among those born at that time were the great sculptor Francisco Salzillo, and José Moñino, Count of Floridablanca, a minister under Charles III; they were complemented by the arrival of bishop Luis Belluga, a key figure in Murcia's continuing importance.

This was the century of important public works like the Puente Viejo and the flood-relief channel, the Canal del Reguerón; there were new religious buildings, such as Saint Eulalia, Saint Nicholas, Saint John the Baptist, Saint John of God, and La Merced, as well as the monasteries and convents of the Hieronymites, the Anas (Dominican nuns) and the Augustinians, and the Episcopal Palace. And, above all, the completion after a 200-year pause, of the work on the tower of the Cathedral - 90 metres high - and

Murcia



the facade, a Baroque masterpiece created by Jaime Bort. Imposing buildings also appeared, like the Fontes and Vinader palaces among others, and public squares such as Plaza de Belluga, Plaza de Camachos, and la Glorieta....the heart of the city centre of Murcia reached new levels of sophistication.

In spite of the political changes and conflicts of the nineteenth century, the city's transformation continued, especially in terms of culture. The Universidad Literaria came into being, and the Jardín de Floricablanca was created; building also continued with the Teatro Romea, inaugurated in 1862 by Isabel II, and the Casino, a noble building incorporating a variety of architectural styles



Romea theatre



Old Bridge-Bridge of Dangers

and splendid spaces. The railway came into operation and the construction of the Puente Nuevo was begun. But another flood struck - the Santa Teresa flood of the fifteenth of October, 1879 - causing more than eight hundred deaths and sowing panic in the city and surrounding farmland.

The establishment of the University in 1914, the Conservatoire, the Business School, the monument to Fernández Caballero, the construction of the new prison... these are the important and enjoyable landmarks of the city in the years prior to the Civil War. The opening of the Gran Vía and the Paseo de Alfonso X, and the expansion of Vistabella and Santa María de Gracia districts show, at the mid-point of the century, a more modern outlook, increasingly irresistible with the arrival of democracy.

Casino



In the early part of the seventeenth century, Murcia maintained its splendour despite the crisis ravaging Spain. Thus, important building work was carried out including the monumental Contraste, now gone, one of the symbols of the importance of silk production. But on the fourteenth of October, 1651, the city suffered one of its greatest catastrophes: the San Calixto flood, which caused more than a thousand deaths and brought untold destruction to the fertile farmland and the city. Despite all this, important figures of international standing are also remembered from this period, such as the diplomat Diego de Saavedra Fajardo (1584-1648), and the humanist and writer Francisco Cascales (1563-1642).