



MOJÁCAR

AND ITS PARADOR

MOJÁCAR: WHITE CITY OF MOORS

“...In the West has risen the sun of the Caliphate, which must shine magnificently in the two Easts to banish the infidel shadows with its light...”

ABDERRAMAN III

It is known that Paleolithic man was present in Mazarrón, in a location lost, remote, very distant from the natural corridors of the region. There, in Algarrobo Cave, he left a large number of miniature figures representing the tools used by primitive settlers. They invite archeologists to imagine a society which moved as little as possible, which survived on what it found nearby, which planned its activities and left the settlement only when the season required it.

The southeast coast is so extreme and inhospitable that it was almost overlooked by the Neolithic Age. Mankind was now capable of cultivating grain when, back in the 3rd millennium B.C. a few small communities appeared in the Mojácar area. They established their settlements high atop Loma de Belmonte, taking advantage of the flooding of the Antas River.

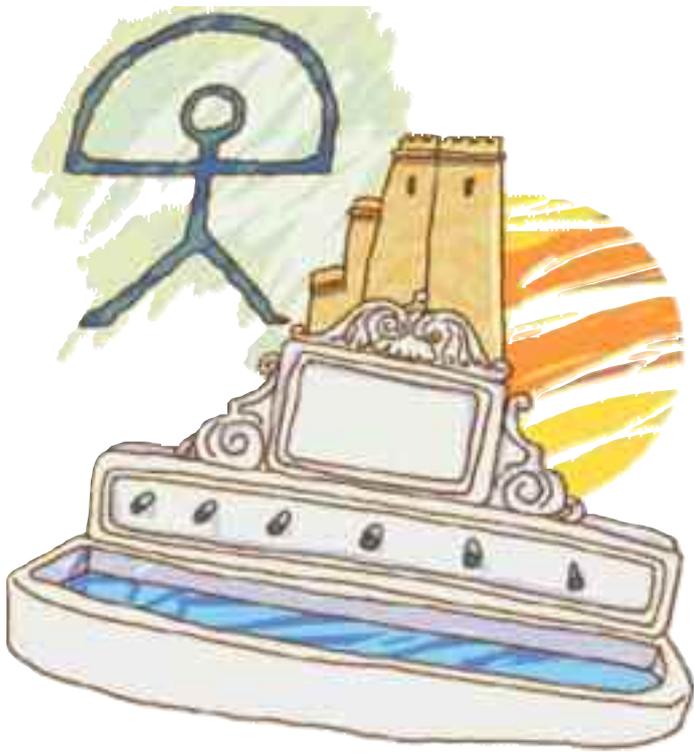
The Mediterranean would come later, but not as a means of survival, this was already provided by stone, ax, hunting and later, the land and wheat, but as a Via Appia along which cultures could mix. This was the pollen that led to Iberian civilization. The oldest inhabitants of Almería were then using sandy metals and stone to kill, quarter, scrape and grind. Copper objects were rudimentary: chisels, flat axes, daggers and knives. There were no rings. The pottery was smooth: rough bowls, red and yellow clay plates.

A millennium and a half later, the link found at the El Argar archeological site, embedded in the Antas River itself, alerts us to the birth of a new civilization. The evolution of Neolithic man now followed a new vein, which was visibly more advanced. His society dwelled in the heights of fortified promontories. The El Argar culture then supplanted the Megalithic. This culture was exclusively confined to southeast Andalusia, and lasted from the mid-Bronze Age to a thousand years before Christ. Specifically, it lasted until the Mediterranean contagion gave birth to a new Iberian society.

Throughout Almería there are large numbers of Algaric sites which explain a great deal. Clothed in violet robes, the Algaric villager preferred working the fields to caring for livestock. He lived in a large community made up of several hundred people, safe behind walls and protected by the alert vigilance of their towers. The houses had two stories and flat clay roofs, clear precursors of the structures of the Alpujarra region.

Nearby, the long-locked El Argar man had his mine, from which he extracted silver, gold and other metals: bronze, copper and iron. With these he created, now we find them, bracelets and rings, as well as halberds. The necropolis was in the town itself. Here the most socially distinguished persons were buried in boxes, or in large earthenware jars known as pithoi. Firing and finishing of clay pottery had been refined. There are parabolic bowls, vases with low carinas, long-stemmed glasses, plates and pitchers, all black, smooth and so finely burnished you would say they were metal. Silver is preferred to gold at the end of the second





different faith fleeing inland, shaken off by an earth which split open in an earthquake created by a Christian god. Other explanations point to the population's search for a more sheltered settlement. Of what there is no doubt is that, despite its isolated location, far from the heart of historic events, Mojácar possessed one of the most important wells of the kingdom of Granada.

Beauty, harmony and civilization are all echoes, repetitions, essences of sounds, luminous beams which ripple on the water. Water, which has always meant life and well of peoples, in the Arab consciousness took on the nature of a founding father. Proper management guaranteed health. If the Arabs settled in Mojácar it is because there was a sure way to obtain good water.

The fountain of the twelve spouts, and the figure of the Mojaquera, so extolled by the Romantics, with jug atop her head, are evidence of that deeply rooted tranquil love for water and its trousseau of flowers. Daisy, myrtle and chamomile are a few of the favorites. *"Of all poetic themes, descriptions of gardens are perhaps the most familiar to the Muslim writers of Spain"*, states Henri Pérès in his book *Splendor of al-Andalus*. One of the loveliest describes a violet as *"butterfly wings stained with blackberries from the garden"*.

period of this civilization, which was undoubtedly visited by peoples from the eastern Mediterranean attracted by its mines and forges. We have learned of them through their flat axes with curved blades and the banded bracelets sported by warriors returning from over the sea.

The absorption of the peoples of the Bronze Age into the Hellenic cultures of the infant sovereign Greek civilization can be traced in burial practices. The metals of this permeable civilization came to form the substratum of the nascent Iberian civilization. The abundant traces of Greeks, Carthaginians and Romans scattered throughout Andalusia are scarcely found in this part of Almería. Of the Roman population there is evidence in a tile factory and a couple agricultural villas.

The conditions here: an extreme landscape with a rich subsoil, the surface dried by a sun which is a friend to few (the lizard, prickly pear and man taking shelter in his cave), have remained, unchanging, throughout history. Quite a few centuries would have to pass, nineteen, to be exact, before the mines which attracted the Greeks and Phoenicians, and gave prosperity to the El Algar and Iberian cultures, would recover their lost empire. The third most profitable iron mine in the province is found in the town near Mojácar de Bendar.

The sub-Saharan aridity of the province of Almería's landscape was during the 20th century turned into a film location, and in the 21st, into a museum. The most outstanding characteristics are concentrated in the Taberna Desert. Physically hostile, life is virtually absent, the white and grey desolation channeled along the dry riverbeds of the earth. This is the esthetic horizon from which the beauty of Almería's dawn springs.

It is not surprising that it was the Arabs who were able to get the most out of this familiar landscape, giving it science and poetry. In the westernmost part of the Muslim world, Mojácar the impregnable belonged to the chorus of Tudmir at the dawn of the 8th century. It was loyal to the Caliphate of Damascus, and later, from 917, to the Caliphate of Córdoba. The original town was thus a frontier location defended by fortresses, towers, and castles, and which gazed out to sea, never losing sight of it.

The city's move inland, begun during the 13th century, is the subject of a wide variety of speculations. Some historians see the ashlar of the fortress fall, demolishing the Arab hiding places, men and women of a

ESOTERIC PHILOSOPHERS

There was also an Almerian school of philosophy, headed by Ibn Mararra. Using the doctrines of Empedocles as a basis, he constructed his own Islamic esoteric beliefs, according to which the soul had taken a body as a means by which to purify an offense. Once it has achieved redemption, it will be reunited with the divine matter. Accused of atheism and surrounded by disciples from a very young age, Ibn fled here to preach in the mountains of Almería until the day he died.

Philosophy, Architecture, science, Folklore, even to the wastelands, Islam had some kinship (a place name or prickly pear). Its legacy makes a hasty inventory impossible. The stones of the wells and citadels stand rigid when they are pointed out as the remnants of the period prior to the Reconquest. Because here, in the south, the poles of the compass seem to change place, inverting, or at the very least, multiplying the direction of history in a polysemous filigree. What orthodox Christians and ancient historians called Crusade, and today's Muslims, Revolution, has in this area of Andalusia become considered simple rivalry for the Mediterranean market.

From the heights of the defensive tower of Turre there is a view of the Mojácar countryside broken up into different crops (wheat, alfalfa, olives, grapes) which should not be missed. The peasants of the Nazrid period repaired the furrows and caused the water to flow so that there would be no lack of grain. Reaping and harvesting proceeded calmly thanks to the scare-Christian tower which the mojaqueros, as the residents of the town are known, had to place there, in the middle of the sown field, to stop the men of Lorca in their tracks. During this period, the Mozarabs who had been expelled from Córdoba and Granada came to this area to set up their farmsteads. They settled in the Ibero-Roman Cádima, and later built Santa Teresa and Cabrera. Some farmhouses from that period have survived in the Alpujarra region.



In 1488, the Catholic Monarchs invited the Moors to leave for Africa, or, failing that, to move away from the coast of Mojácar to resettle among the peasantry inland. (This is how the Mudejar quarter of Turre came into being.) One man defied the Monarchs and did not attend the surrender in Vera. He was the keeper of Mojácar. Displaying a praiseworthy political prudence, the Monarchs opted for dialogue. They chose the most honest among their faithful followers, Garcilaso de la Vega, captain and poet, who traveled to the town with an embassy. (Other sources refute the fact that the poet had been born by this time.)

The midday heat melted the men, beards and all. The ride had left the delegation in a very bad way. It was the month of June and the temperature was extreme. Dry heat. The air batted not an eye. Garcilaso took refuge under the spouts of the fountain of Alabez, famous even in Granada.

“Thou must surrender.” “Why? ‘I have never borne arms against the Christians.” “Orders of the king and queen. Do not force me to subdue thee,” pressed the poet. *“I am more than strong enough, and duty is my protector.” “Before handing myself over like a coward I would die like a Spaniard.”*

Moved by the Muslim’s explanations, the Renaissance man accepted him as a brother and gave him permission to continue working (as had been done for the preceding seven centuries) the homeland of both. According to Mojácar chroniclers, the co-existence of Moors and Christians overcame even the Morisco revolts of 1568, when they refused to be expelled yet

again. This time it was by the Marquis of Torralba. The town became *“the very noble and very loyal city of Mojácar. Defender and refuge of the kingdom of Granada”*, as stated on its coat of arms, after the War of the Alpujarras.

From this time, and through the 18th century, when piracy ceased to lash the coast, Mojácar made its living defending the coastline and crops which, following the Arab teachings, had encroached on the Cabrera Mountains in terraces set along the slopes. Fig trees, grapes, olives and locust beans transformed the hillsides. The silk industry was no longer a business. Country estates, chapels, churches prospered. Then came the black years which followed the Napoleonic invasion, leaving famine and yellow fever in its wake.

Mojácar reached its maximum population of 6,382 inhabitants in 1887, thanks to a vein of silver in Almagrera Mountains, and the set up of a lead blast furnace which would become the second most productive in Spain.

What remains of modern history will have to be confirmed by you, kind traveler, in the streets, architecture, and biography of her inhabitants.

MODERNITY AND TREACHERY

This rich and picturesque town we know today is highly sought after by travelers, thanks to two rescues by the Romantics: that of the Mojaquera and the totemic Indalo. In the first half of the 19th century, these bourgeois renegades, early thrill-seeking travelers, came down to find the Moor and rediscovered Spain. The laundries of Mojácar stunned the Romantics, not because in them they found the Muslim Spanish iconography of the eternal cult of fertility, it was not that. What got the Romantic attention, entrancing all exotic expectations, was the attire. Those women went to the fountain with their jug covered in veils from head to toe, a custom which endured until not much less than twenty years ago.

The scene, in the Romantic imagination packed with guitars, bandits, lobed arches and latticework, confirmed the genuine nature of the country, as opposed to the uniformity of bourgeois habits. This became a living expression of freedom and difference.

Those travelers also fell headlong into the exaggerated sentimentality of the *Indalo*, which the locals painted in ochre on the whitewashed façades of their house. The strange figure was known among the residents as the *“Man of the Arch”*, and the original is found in Letreros Cave. In him, archeologists are able to make out the figure of a god who holds a rainbow in his open arms, protecting humans from floods.



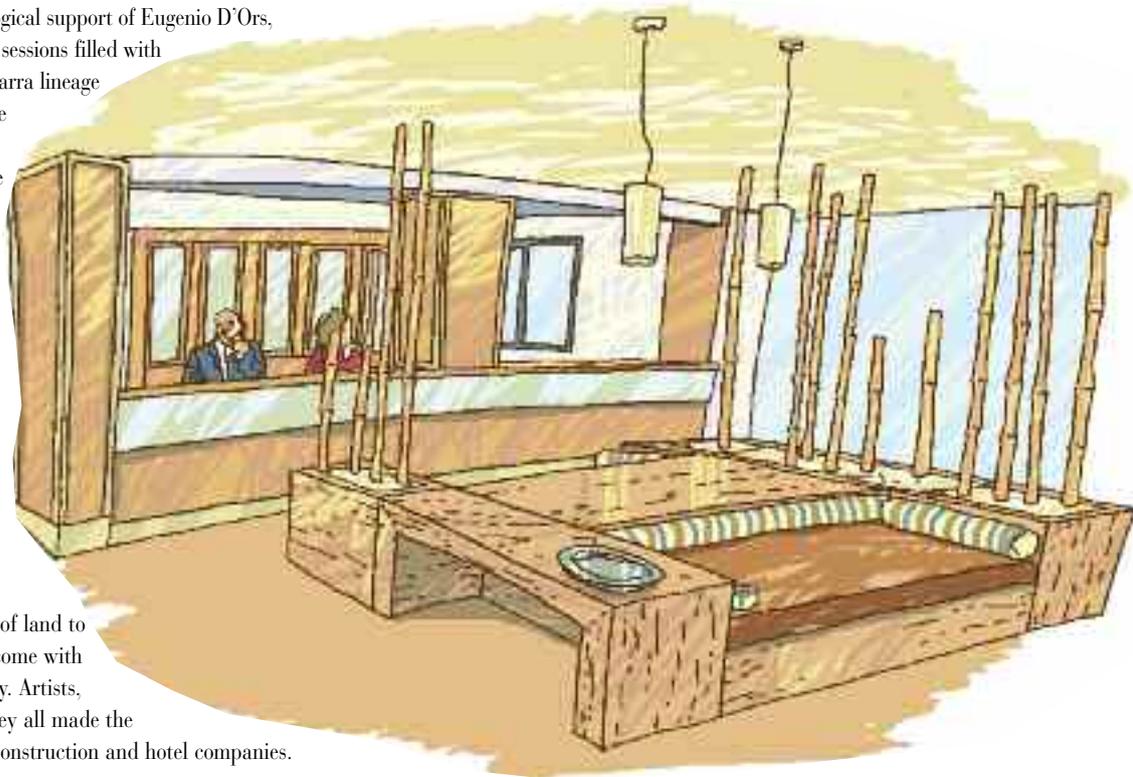
That he came to universally represent the entire province as the prehistoric Prometheus came later, at the hands of a group of Almería painters, who used the symbol as an intellectual battering ram.

Their undisputed messiah was Jesús de Perceval, who succeeded in making esthetic ideas and paintings, his own and those of his circle, recognized in Madrid at the end of the 1940s.

This was possible thanks to the ideological support of Eugenio D'Ors, who, although absent from the defamed sessions filled with Arab incense and wines of ancient Alpujarra lineage held in the Mojácar nights, sponsored the regional movement from his Brief Academy of Art. It is to him that we owe the definition of the *Indalo* as: *"fundamental survival of a sub-history made translucent by the ink of history and the bright colors of culture"*.

Mojácar, however, was still deserted. The mines had closed. The population stood at barely three hundred souls. It was then that the proverbial figure of Don Jacinto emerged, pioneer of the tourist boom.

As mayor, he embarked on a plan to repopulate the town, giving away plots of land to anyone who would restore houses and come with the purpose of settling here permanently. Artists, journalists, bull fighters, bohemians, they all made the pilgrimage, followed not long after by construction and hotel companies.



In the **City Hall square (Plaza del Ayuntamiento)** the memory of Spaniards returned from America gleams in the branches of its hundred-year-old tree. Nearby was one of the city's entrances. It is that round arch adorned with the Mojácar coat of arms. Flores Square is not much further along, and is one of those corners of the city brimming with characteristic features.

PARADOR DE MOJÁCAR THE CITY OF THE SUN

Parador guests will immediately notice the modern style of the building in which you are staying. It was built during the early days of the tourist boom, when the town attracted the dissolute, the free-thinking, audacious seekers of an earthy paradise and freedom.

The large windows on the porches and function rooms look out onto the Mediterranean. The beach, despite the massive summer influx of visitors, enjoys a cozy anonymity. The garden, recently renewed and replanted, offers fresh air, morning and afternoon, and solid shade during the harsh midday hours. Opposite is the island and sea of Alborán. But we will talk of them later, now let us turn to Mojácar.

A visit to the town should start from the **Plaza Nueva Viewpoint**. The view of the valley gives us an historic perspective of Mojácar's earliest location, La Vieja. Up the hill lies **Castillo Viewpoint**, named for a once strong walled castle. However, during the city's low point it was scattered into a white labyrinth.

The street bears the name of the driving force behind the modern metropolis, Mayor Jacinto, and ends at **Santa María Church**, an ancient fortress. Facing it, as you will already know, there is but one more, and it is stone, the **Mojaquera**. Romantic idol. The aforementioned wall, or what remains of it, and the Arab cemetery are down the stairs which start at the church.

The **Jewish Quarter** is one of the choices at the crossroads which here appears before you, kind traveler. Another way to lose yourself among the streets is to descend to the sea, which is within view. However, a visit to the fountain is obligatory, up the hill that bears its name. It was remodeled during the 20th century, but its water remains the same, pure, divine. You may have the good luck to see a woman approach to carry on the tradition of doing the washing here. Should this not occur, you may console yourself by listening to the chorus of its spouts singing in their twelve voices.



SEA OF SEAS

Set amidst the hills, Mojácar's population has multiplied, together with services and number of tourists, without adversely affecting its surroundings. The coastline is free of buildings for 12 kilometers. Until **Cabo de Gata**, kind traveler, who are now surely eager for a bathe, you have your pick.

There are busy beaches like **El Cantil** or the fine sands at the mouth of the Aguas River, known as La Rumania. Others are more intimate, such as the secluded Las Grantillas, whose red sand has a rugged charm, and the vast and rocky grey sandy area of Castillo de Macenas, hardly crowded at all.

Out to sea, 40 nautical miles away, is the volcanic island of **Alborán**. It is no big thing, barely measuring 300 by 600 meters, with a height of 19 meters at its highest points, but it has been the

site of innumerable raids. It takes its name from the Tunisian pirate Al-Borany, who anchored his ship here in order to better assail the coast from this position. An entire fleet of the allies of Barbarossa, led by Alí Famet, made up of no less than 16 ships, used the island as a strategic site in the battle waged against the squadron of Spanish galleys under the command of Bernardino de Mendoza.

Even in the 20th century, in the mid-1960s, Russian fishing vessels sought to take the island. For this reason, every so often a detachment of marines is sent to guard the location.

On the esplanade or in the shops along Mojácar's streets you will undoubtedly have noticed the coral necklaces and earrings, a typical local craft. The rough depths of the sea around Alborán are their place of origin. They have been a marine reserve for a little over a decade. If you are keen, scuba diving or certain types of fishing are possible. You can rest assured, gentle visitor, that the red coral you may decide to adorn yourself with has been collected legally. The ruddy fascination of its brightness is almost as old as man himself.

Coral ornaments have been found in 25,000-year-old tombs. Turks, Greeks, Romans and Mandarin Chinese have differentiated themselves by rank with red coral.

TO WHERE İNDALO HOLDS UP THE RAINBOW

The sun rises from its bath in the east. This is known as the **Costa Cálida**, Warm Coast. From Mojácar, the other cardinal points offer excellent excursions for tourists. The most popular are to the west, the spaghetti west of the **Tabernas Desert** (along the A7 E15 towards Nijar), and to the south, **Cabo de Gata**.

The Tabernas is the only desert in Europe, and has an average summer temperature of 48 degrees Celsius. In addition to **Mini Hollywood** and a recently opened **Desert Museum**, it rewards the daring adventurer who defies the heat with a scenic beauty they little expected. It is strange and dazzling. Contrary to what you might suppose, the area is rich in vertebrates, and voluptuous flowering in the midst of the severity of dry grey watercourses, or in pools of water, the few areas of salt water.



In **Cabo de Gata**, renowned and extolled by all those who visit, it is just the opposite. This great lake which quenches the thirst of the province is probably the most incredibly outlandish wetland in Andalusia. In addition to its water, flora and fauna, it boasts a coastline which combines cliffs, coves, sandy areas and reefs for the enjoyment of tourists.

Las Cuevas de Almanzora is the sunniest village in all Spain. Drought is an overwhelming fact. Its reservoir, which together with Beninar's, contain all of the peninsula's water, has no upper sluice gates because the water level has never risen above 5% of capacity. The river gives the village its last name, and the caves its first.

It is said that in the early 20th century, 865 people still inhabited the caves, and that the neighboring caverns of Calguerin were populated by another 260. A visit is essential

Just head towards Vera on the Alp 118, and then continue along the A-352. Once in the town, any local can tell you how best to reach the caves. One of them can be visited, and also serves as rural accommodation, thanks to the enthusiastic initiative of its owner.

The first inhabitants left their traces 3000 years ago. This is practically yesterday, if we compare it with the cave-dwellers of **Zájara**, located on the **Cuevas de Herrerías** road (near the crossroads for Las Águilas), which provided shelter no less than seventy thousand years ago.

The town is remarkable for its simplicity. You already know the route. It is well worth having a look at the neoclassical town hall, and making a full tour of the castle. It was rebuilt by the first Marquis of Vélez, Don Pedro Fajardo, using the previous Arab structure as a base. It could not be better preserved, and houses a library, archeological museum and unexpected contemporary art museum, that of the essayist and art critic Antonio Manuel Campoy. The amazing collection holds more than 400 paintings by Tapies, Solana, Picasso, Benjamín Palencia, Clavé, and Miró, as well as an important selection of etchings and engravings by Goya and other artists.

Further north, travelers can spend the day at the **Sierra de María Los Vélez Nature Reserve**, an eden more than 22,000 hectares in size, and home of the Indalo.

From Vélez Rubio on the N.342, we reach a new type of geography, the feel the impact of a newly green landscape. This is a complex mountain area. There are many and conflicting ways of tackling it, some more active than others: along the paths or along the ravines.

Gentle traveler, breath in the air scented with pine and rosemary. By day the edges of the shadows are perfumed with **lavender**, at dusk, with **marjoram**. The animal species must be counted by thousands. The relief changes the colors, sharpening them, heightening instinct as we ascend.

This was the setting which the Almerían poet Julio Alfredo Egea gave to the traditional pastoral legend which features the son of a knight in the marquis's retinue and a Moorish girl who lived close by the castle.

To return to the Parador the best route is: **Vélez Rubio, Puerto Lumbresas, Huércal Overa** via the A7/E15 until **Los Gallardos**, and from there along the E150 to Mojácar.

MAKING WAY AS YOU GO

Almería's cuisine is a Mediterranean one which makes use of the sea, arid areas and fertile regions. In her dishes, like the land, an Arab breeze lifts spiced aromas into the air, carrying along intense sweets and the oriental flavor of its culture. The province's geographical isolation is also reflected in its dishes, which, in terms of traditional cuisine, only rarely contain products from other areas.

Most famous throughout the entire country is **El Pimentón**, which is, as you may already know, in reality a dish of potatoes, paprika, and tomato (and given its characteristic flavor by cumin). **Gachas**, which are similar to polenta, and **Migas**, a fried bread crumb dish, are also common. Generally favored are the **Soups, Stews, Salads** and **Paellas**, very different from those of Valencia.

Here in Mojácar they enjoy **Fresh Fish, Seafood** and **Broad Beans**. **Red Mullet** can be accompanied by **Ajo Blanco**, cold almond and garlic soup, a truly superior food. Batter-Fried Fish are washed down with the soup and adorned with grated egg. There are **Shrimp, Prawns, Clams**, but here what really gets people excited are **Squid** and **Jack**

Cooked in the Moorish Style, once again enrapturing diners with the aromas of cumin and a pinch of turmeric. **Octopus, Monkfish** and **Mackerel** abound in these waters and give rise to not a few delicious recipes.

An absence of all artifice is a common trait of most local specialties. Examples of this are **Fish Soup, Pelotas** (dumpling and sausage stew), and **Ajocolorao**, blended skate and potato soup whose reddish color comes from tomato and pepper. Visitors should not leave without trying **Crema Mojaquera** (a cream dessert) or **Gurulllos**, even smaller than croquettes. **Tarbinas**, a variety of polenta-type dish, sometimes thickened with milk, livened up with anise seeds, and generally served with croutons.

If you would like a **Wine** from Almería, the one to ask for is **Laujar de Andarax**, a powerful rosé. For those less inclined towards the grape, there is a light **Ezurraqueí**, prepared with the **Alpujarreña**, a white grape. For dessert, we recommend **Fig Cake, Soplillo** sponge cake, **Chestnut Flan** and **Pork Scratchings Pie**. **Prickly Pear Ice Cream with Fruit Salad** has no peer.

It would be impossible to end a report on the gastronomy of Almería without making reference to **Michirones**, the king of *tapas*. A whole host of cold meats and sausages (**Butifarra** sausage, **Morcón** blood sausage, **Cured Ham** and **Chorizo** sausage) are tipped into a broad bean and onion stew.

THE SECRET RECIPE

■ BONITO TUNA SALAD

The melva is an essential variety of tuna the color of steel, and striped. It lives in the Atlantic. Some residents of the Mojácar coast prepare a salad which eases the end of those long summer days, when pure tiredness makes only cold dishes appealing. The ingredients are: 300 grams of melva in olive oil, five firm red tomatoes, another few sweet red peppers, the same number of salad tomatoes, two diced cloves of garlic and two small onions.

The trick with this salad is to sauté the garlic a little before adding the clean and peeled tomatoes and peppers. These are served with julienne onions and topped with the melva. Some embellish it with olives, and others with capers.



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