

CARTAGENA TRIP, September 2012

Led by Anne Cattle

Friday morning found my wife and I, together with other U3A members, dodging the rain drops as we assembled at the coach in Moraira for our weekend trip to Cartagena to enjoy the Fiesta celebrations.



City Centre

After driving through heavy rain en route, interrupted by a welcome coffee break, we arrived safely in Cartagena. The rain had abated and everyone was free to explore the city, armed with information and a map provided by Anne Cattle, our gracious tour guide.

The coach dropped us off by the port, close by the Peral submarine exhibit – the first practical submarine ever built in 1888, constructed by Isaac Peral, a local engineer. One of the other interesting features of the city is the rubber trees on the main streets with their distinctive trunks.



Rubber Trees

Most of the group elected to head for the tourist office, where we were able to buy group discounted tickets (18 Euro) which entitled us to view all the main historical sites in the city, as well as an open-topped bus tour, and a boat tour of the port and Christmas fort.

Our first stop was the Roman amphitheatre and museum which are well worth a visit. Cartagena has obviously spent a lot of money in its efforts to excavate and display its historical sites, and the result is a very interesting tour, made all the more helpful as most exhibits have English descriptions as well as Spanish ones.



Amphitheatre



View from the Fort



Soldiers at the Fort

Following this tour, we found a good local restaurant for tapas and wine, and enjoyed an excellent meal at a very reasonable price. It was then time to board the coach for our short ride to Hotel Costa Narejos, located on the shore of the Mar Menor in Los Alcazares. It was unfortunate that Anne Cattle had the job of telling us that there would be no Fiesta activities that evening, as the heavy rain had convinced the powers that be to cancel them. No one seemed very upset, as the hotel had a good bar with very reasonable prices, and the food served in the hotel restaurant proved to be both varied and good quality.

Saturday morning found everyone in good spirits as the weather had improved, and the coach was ready to take us back to the city. Anne provided us with a flexible shuttle schedule for the coach, so everyone could plan their day according to their individual wishes, and off we went.

As the weather was fine, we decided to take the "on and off" open-topped bus tour around the city, which gives a good overall view of the city, though we were surprised that very few archaeological sites were seen. The reason for this is that many of them are hidden behind or underneath modern buildings.



Panoramic Lift

Towards the end of the tour we got off to visit the Panoramic Lift and see the view from the top. Unfortunately it was temporarily out of order – another victim of the heavy rain – but we were able to go up a short flight of stairs to visit the Refugee Museum.

The museum comprises several tunnels excavated into the rocks which provided shelter for the local residents from the bombing of Cartagena during the civil war (1936-1939,) and contain interesting memorabilia and a short film.

A short walk from the lift brought us back to the port in time for lunch, followed by a quick trip on the Barco Touristic to Fuerto Navidad (Christmas Fort). There we were able to see the cannon emplacements commanding a tactical position overlooking the port of Cartagena. The return trip included a short tour of the harbour, and then it was time for the coach ride back to the hotel for dinner.



Roman Soldiers in the Parade

After dinner we then returned to the city to watch the Fiesta parade through the streets. The parade was over fairly quickly, so with time to kill before the coach picked us up, we enjoyed some quality time with several fellow travellers at one of the local bars before re-joining the coach for our return to the hotel.

Sunday morning found us assembling bright and early for a last chance to tour the city. We spent an interesting time visiting the Casa de la Fortuna (once the home of the wealthy, a domus, dating back to the First Century AD,) the Augusteum and the Decumano. The Roman baths were very interesting and well preserved, even to the location of the furnace used for under floor heating of the hot pool. It reminded me of the Hammam spas in Morocco.



Roman Bath



Bar Barril

It was then time for our return to Moraira, interrupted by a very good lunch at the Porto Bello in Santa Pola. In all, a very pleasant excursion, with special thanks to Anne Cattle for her dedicated efforts to make our trip a success. This was our first U3A outing, and we look forward to our next one, possibly a return trip to Cartagena for Easter if Anne can organize it.

Our final stop in Cartagena was at the Bar Barril, where we were introduced to the specialty of the house – a unique version of a cortado which was very popular and very strong!



Restaurant Porto Bello, Santa Pola



Photo taken by Frank Lee

Report written by Pat & John Barber
Photographs taken by Pat & John Barber
Design & layout of this presentation by Carol Mantle