

The best MARCO POLO Insider Tips

Our top 15 Insider Tips



INSIDER TIP Rio-like flair

When the small town of Águilas pulls out all the stops to celebrate its carnival, the atmosphere is just as exuberant as in Rio de Janeiro → p. 104

INSIDER TIP Top concerts

Are you a pop and rock fan, or do you prefer classical music? The Palau de la Música in Valencia has concerts for all tastes on its programme (photo above) → p. 53

INSIDER TIP Dive deep

There is a fascinating underwater world of flora and fauna waiting to be discovered off the coast of Cabo de Palos. You will also be able to explore shipwrecks on your dives → p. 98

INSIDER TIP Castle for night owls

Life has a different rhythm here – in the summer, the castle in Dénia does not close its gates until after midnight → p. 70

INSIDER TIP Country flair

Take a trip from the Costa del Azahar to the mountain and castle village of Vilafamés. It is well worth the effort and can be beautifully rounded off with an overnight stay in one of the country hotels such as El Jardín Vertical, a rustic-style hotel with elements from the 16th century → p. 38

INSIDER TIP Drop anchor

It is impossible to imagine Águilas without the Bar de Felipe: it draws tapas fans and is also a social hub – the locals think of the bar as a kind of second living room → p. 81

INSIDER TIP Charming beach stay

There are plenty of hotel blocks in Benidorm, but the friendly service offered here ensures that you will not feel like you are just a number: the Hotel El Palmeral is located just behind the Playa de Poniente → p. 64

INSIDER TIP Dine in style

The perfect mix of tradition and refinement delights the palates of the diners in the Casa del Mar restaurant in Águilas → p. 81

INSIDER TIP Home away from home

The very well-equipped Villas La Manga apartment hotel in La Manga del Mar Menor is ideal for families with children → p. 87

INSIDER TIP Stirred not shaken

The tiger-nut milk *horchata* served here is freshly prepared each day: in Horchatería El Siglo on the Plaça Santa Catalina, the town's lively inner-city square → p. 50

INSIDER TIP Flighty

Beware of low-flying birds when you visit the Jardín del Papagayo 'Parrot Garden' in Peñíscola. There are around five hundred of these colourfully feathered creatures there → p. 100

INSIDER TIP Trendy 'Bamboo'

The Bamboo de Colón, with its minimalist design, in the lower section of the old Colón Market has developed into a trendy meeting place. The set lunch menu during the week is especially popular (photo below) → p. 51

INSIDER TIP The classic rice dish

No frills: you will be served an excellent, tasty paella in the simple – but authentic – Casa Dorotea Restaurant in Peñíscola → p. 40

INSIDER TIP Come back soon

The marina in Alacant is a great place to spend the evening – enjoy the delicious drinks and great atmosphere! → p. 60

INSIDER TIP The exotic part of town

A modern 21st-century zoo with high standards and realistic environments for the animals: the Biopark Valencia in the Parque de Cabecera → p. 102



BEST OF ...

GREAT PLACES FOR FREE

Discover new places and save money

FOR FREE

● *The joys of the saddle*

How about borrowing a *bicycle free of charge*? This is possible in Benicàssim on the Costa del Azahar if you leave a deposit. The roads in the area have cycle lanes, and it is also the starting point for the short 'Green Route' to Oropesa del Mar → p. 43

● *A concentrated dose of art*

The high-quality exhibits in the *Museum of Fine Arts (Museu Belles Arts)* in Castelló de la Plana can be visited at no cost. The main focus is on Spanish artists, and the paintings of traditional scenes reveal a lot about the culture. Ceramics and archaeological finds complement the museum's collection → p. 43

● *Monumental duo*

There are two interesting sights you can visit in Novelda, and you do not have to pay for them: the small castle and the monastery of *Santa María Magdalena* with its elaborate decoration influenced by the Catalan form of Art Nouveau *Modernisme* (photo) → p. 77

● *View of the coast*

Enjoy the free view of the Costa Cálida from the *lookout point (mirador)* in Mazarrón. The small eyrie is located between the Pava and Reya beaches → p. 83

● *Free museums*

Alacant makes it possible for visitors to go to some of its museums free of charge – these include the *Museo de Belenes* with its Christmas cribs and the *Museo de Arte Contemporáneo* with its collection of modern and contemporary art → p. 76

● *Treasures from the sea*

If you want to see all that has ended up on the ocean floor over the centuries, you should visit the *Museo Nacional de Arqueología* in Cartagena; there is no admission fee → p. 88

● ● ● ● Dots in guidebook refer to 'Best of ...' tips



ONLY ON THE COSTA BLANCA

Unique experiences

● *Famous rice dish*

The entire region is regarded as the home of the *paella* and the restaurants compete to outdo each other and serve the best. You should always be able to recognise and taste the individual ingredients of a good *paella*, such as the vegetables, seafood and meat. The *Restaurante Columbus* in the old city in Cartagena is famous for this delicious dish → p. 93

● *Blazing fiesta fun*

Fireworks and bangers are always part of the *Fallas*, a top event in March during Spain's annual fiestas. Artists give free rein to their sarcasm when they build their papier-mâché figures and display them on the streets and squares – especially in Valencia – until the 'Night of Fire' → p. 53, 104

● *Decorative and tasty*

The orange tree is a common sight in the region (photo). The delicious fruit ripens on countless plantations, and the northern part of the coast, the Costa del Azahar, is even named after the fragrant flowers: 'The Orange Blossom Coast'. You can stock up on fresh oranges at *Frutas Piñana* in Peñíscola → p. 40

● *Total work of art*

The *Old Town in Peñíscola* is a total work of art typical of the cities in the region: a jumble of white houses, cosy restaurants and, at the top of the hill, a castle dating from the days of the Knights Templar → p. 38

● *Commanding castles*

Numerous watchtowers and castles, many dating back to the Moors, can be seen along the coast. In the Middle Ages, the fortresses fell into the hands of the Christians who adapted them for their purposes. One of the most impressive dominates the skyline over Alacant; the *Castillo de Santa Bárbara* → p. 58

● *Beach giants*

The magnificent sandy beaches are among the most valuable assets of the Spanish Mediterranean coast. Benidorm boasts two gigantic stretches of sand: the *Platja de Llevant* and *Platja de Ponent* → p. 63



ONLY IN

THE PERFECT ROUTE

LEAD-UP TO THE COAST

The route is conceived as a round trip from and to Valencia and invites motorists to discover all the coast and hinterland has to offer. The main focus is on the Costa Blanca. The starting point is the airport at **1 Valencia** → p. 44 where you collect the hired car that you booked in advance. You can put off visiting the city itself until after you return. After you leave the airport, take the ring road to the south and drive on the motorway until you reach the exit to **2 Dénia** → p. 69. You should plan to spend two nights here in what is one of the most delightful little towns on the Costa Blanca. The castle, the beaches and the marina in Dénia offer a fascinating cultural mix.

ON THE PROMONTORY AND IN THE MOUNTAINS

Dénia is the ideal starting point for a full-day excursion to **3 Cap de la Nao** → p. 72 and **4 Calp** → p. 67 with its beaches and the famous rocky landmark *Penyal d'Ijac* (photo right). The picturesque mountain village of **5 Guadalest** → p. 66, poetry in stone, despite the many visitors, lies waiting for you near Calp.

Back in Dénia, you will still have time to freshen up with a dip in the hotel pool or the sea before you go to dinner. *Chimichurri* is a popular restaurant at the marina specialising in tasty grilled food.

OFF TO ALACANT!

The next day, you can cover the stretch from Dénia to the port city of Alacant, which is better known under its Spanish name of Alicante, in one go unless you want to make a stopover in the lively holiday resort **6 Benidorm** → p. 62. Instead of looking for rooms directly in the city of **7 Alacant** → p. 56, it is better to spend the night away from the main centre near the beach area at *Platja de Sant Joan*. You must visit the castle, the *Castillo de Santa Bárbara*, in Alacant. Then you can set off to explore the old city and harbour area of Alacant – or just relax on the *Platja de Sant Joan*; tomorrow you have a long drive ahead of you to get know the southern section of



Experience the diversity of the Costa Blanca from north to south and take a few brief detours to the left and right of the main route

your destination: **8 La Manga del Mar Menor** → p. 83 on the inland sea the Mar Menor 'Little Sea'. It is worth spending two nights there so that you have enough time to explore the **9 Cabo de Palos** → p. 84 and make a short trip to **10 Cartagena** → p. 87, the harbour town in the south-west.

PALM GROVES, MOORS AND CHRISTIANS

The motorway makes it easy to get around quickly and you drive back over the AP7 to the north after you leave La Manga del Mar Menor and head for **11 Elx (Elche)** → p. 73, the city of palms. The highlight is a foray into the palm groves of the *Huerto del Cura*. Maybe you would like to spend the night here before driving north-east into the hinterland and making a stopover in **12 Alcoi (Alcoy)** → p. 64. You should visit the town's historical centre and admire the Art Nouveau architecture. Alcoi becomes really packed in April and May when it is invaded by hordes of Moors and Christians for the *Moros y Cristianos* festival. The barren, mountainous surroundings of Alcoi give way to more fertile land farther to the north. The small mountain town of **13 Xàtiva (Játiva)** → p. 55 is a pleasant place to spend the last night of your road tour.

THE METROPOLIS

The A7 takes you from Xàtiva through a fertile, hill-lined valley full of orange groves back to the starting point in **14 Valencia** (photo, far left). This marks the end of the 'Perfect Route'. It is not worth keeping the car in town. After returning it to the rental company, you should plan on spending at least two or three days in Valencia to experience all the charm and vitality of the city.



Approx. 750km (466mi)
Driving time: approx. 15 hours;
recommended travel time: 8 days
Detailed map of the route on the back cover, in the road atlas and the pull-out map