



Fact file Tapas and trails

Distance: 434km in total, including shorter day trips.

Route: From Cartagena to Aledo, with a day trip through the Sierra Espuña. From there to Caravaca de la Cruz, over the Vía Verde to Murcia, and a final day cycling to Cartagena and exploring two loops in the Carrasco y El Valle Regional Park around Murcia.

Conditions: Pleasantly warm weather with dry trails, not too dusty.

Bikes used: Markus: Kinesis Tripster AT with Schwalbe G-One Overland tyres and Exposure lights. Louise: Lapierre Traveller e-bike (hired). Both equipped with bags from the Carradice Adventure Range (Overland panniers, Odyssey saddlebag, Cambrian and Bowland bar bags).

Maps/guides: Routes were provided by the Region of Murcia tourist board as GPX files. We used Komoot to alter them where needed.

I'm glad I had: Fresh tyres on the bike, as some of the gravel sections were rough. And I loved my Coros Dura bike computer with solar charging; it still had 50% charge after five days of riding.

Next time I would... Bring a drinking bladder instead of bottles. While it wasn't that hot, drinking water is not as readily available as in Scotland.

Further info: Route on Komoot: bit.ly/tapas-trails-markus-stitz
Region of Murcia website: bit.ly/turismo-murcia-english
The Osados Bike Tours: theosados.com/en/cycling-tours/



dinner after 8pm can sometimes be a real challenge, especially in the off-season. Arriving at our table at 9pm, we were the first guests. As well as seafood and a lovely bottle of Spanish white wine, we had a chat with the owner, our cook for the night.

Day two: pine-clad mountains

Day two took us on a tour of the Sierra Espuña Regional Park. With rain forecast, we packed our waterproofs. Our day's 1,130m of climbing was stretched over 52km, but our initial fears that we would run out of battery again were not realised. Travelling without luggage meant less work for Louise's bike, and we arrived back at our hotel with plenty of juice left.

Out of the five days on the bike, this was my favourite. After an initial climb on tarmac roads, we hit the gravel at around nine kilometres. From there on we had the tracks to ourselves. The visitor centre, halfway through the ride, was perfect to learn

more about the park and enjoy our lunch. After a second short section on tarmac, we were alone on the trails again. Another welcome difference from cycling in Scotland was the attitude of Spanish drivers. Every time a car passed, the driver gave us plenty of space.

We were sad to leave our hotel behind on day three but were equally excited to visit Caravaca de la Cruz. The holy city, with its skyline dominated by the Basilica of Vera Cruz, houses the Cross of Caravaca. It's a relic that, according to Christian tradition, is believed to be a fragment of the True Cross. That's not the only cultural asset which makes the city world famous. The celebration of Horses of Wine, now listed as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO, takes place each year in May. It culminates in a race, where elaborately dressed horses are run uphill by four men who must hold on throughout.

Day three: history and culture

Our route on day three mostly followed the signposts between Totana and Caravaca de la Cruz, which connects the ends of the Campo de Cartagena and Noroeste Greenways. At first we cycled through the same stunning pine woods we much admired on day two. But it was the last section, about 10km from the finish in the holy city, that really blew us away. →

Above: Cerro Espuña
Left: Basilica de la Vera Cruz in the holy city of Caravaca de la Cruz