

Polop de la Marina



By Karen Marco

Polop de la Marina is an enchanting little town with an impressive history! If you live in the Marina Baja area of the Costa Blanca, you've no doubt seen picturesque Polop poised on a rocky mount, just a few miles inland from Benidorm on the coast... a scenic location encircled by valleys terraced with nispero trees against a backdrop of mountains.

The town originates with the construction of a fortress around the 12th century. The strategic position was first held by the Moors, and subsequently became the scene of battles as the different Crowns that reigned in Spain fought for control of the area. Polop

went on to become a feudal barony in the XIII century.

Polop is a peaceful, traditional place where villagers politely nod and say 'buenos días' when you pass them in the street, in the old-fashioned way. Famed for a water spring plaza where there are 221 water spouts, people for decades have come to fill containers with the pure mountain water (currently these may be turned off due to a drought).

Walk around the typical streets and you can appreciate how modern properties have been built to a design that blends with the traditional architecture of the original character town houses. Dis-

cover the various town squares – plazas lined with restaurants and bars, meeting points for friends and families, and if I'm not mistaken the local expat community; small plazas with play parks for the kiddies, and the main church square where the old folk stop to chat awhile.

The magnificent parish church was built in 1723, the remainder of a past when the catholic religion was the hub of Spanish village life. From here a maze of steep, narrow streets climb the hill and a kind of pilgrimage trail to the 'castle' at the top, which was once used as a cemetery. You can see the remains of the medieval walls, and the ancient tombs in 'the garden of crosses'.

Before you reach the summit, a rustic stone restaurant café with a large shady terrace offers a tempting respite from the sun if you visit in summertime. Nearby there are signs indicating several walking routes.

On your way back down, stop to admire the views in all directions...over the orchards to Sierra Bernia ridge in the distance, or the Mediterranean coast

at Altea, to the neighbouring town of La Nucia, or westwards across the rooftops of Polop to impressive Ponoig mountain (1,181m) which resembles a sleeping lion strad-

for a few days, and discover the marvels of the Marina Baja at your leisure).

Three miles from the town itself, you'll find the hamlet of Xirles, locally known for a typical restaurant hidden by trees beside the riverbank on the site of an old mill. Xirles has been beautifully maintained - an old church, a sprinkling of prettily painted traditional houses and a smart new development that surprisingly doesn't spoil the environment. At the end of the 'main' street a rural lane leads towards Callosa, past nispero plantations (this is a unique area in the world where loquats are cultivated in an ideal climate) and the occasional 'finca' estate. A leisurely walk, where we were only over taken by the occasional horse-back rider and a couple of cyclists!

Getting there: AP-7 motorway or N-332 main road, exit at Benidorm, take the CV-70;

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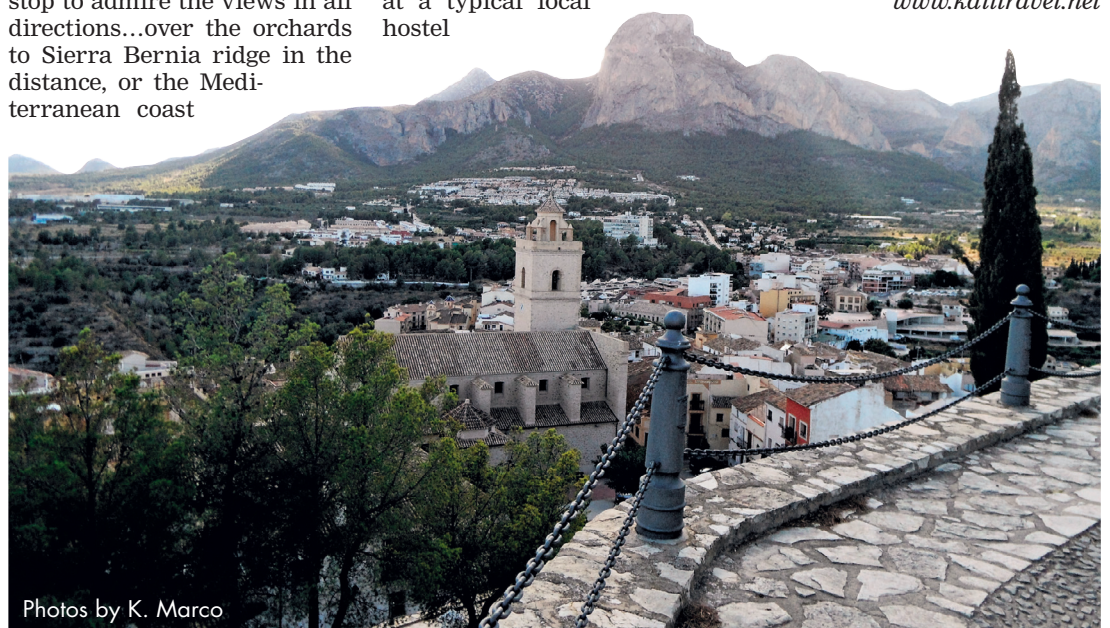
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Lovely Atmosphere



Photos by K. Marco