

Murcia me!

Ringed by vegetable gardens, Murcia is one of Spain's tapas capitals – and the inventive creations of its chefs stray far from the beach-bar routine

WORDS NICK RIDER PHOTOS TIM E WHITE

KEKI TAPERIA

The local produce, says owner Sergio Martínez, is what makes cooking in his home town so appealing. "We have sea, mountains, and fruit and vegetables from *la huerta* (the region's famed farmlands)," he says. "Plus locals love their tapas, and always want to try new things." At Keki Tapería, a laid-back, all-white haven from the heat in a tiny square near the cathedral, Sergio typifies the young Murcian cooks who are now combining their traditions and travel inspirations with this regional bounty, as in his trademark local tuna prepared Japanese-style with wasabi. Other more rustic tapas still come with a fresh twist, such as scrambled eggs with wild mushrooms and truffles, and vibrant artichoke and calamari salad served in a cured Ibérico ham broth.

4 Calle Fuensanta, +34 968 220 798, kekitaperia.es



LA TORRE DE LAS FLORES

Heart and hub of Murcia's tapas circuit is the Plaza de las Flores – actually two squares, Las Flores itself and Santa Catalina, not that anyone minds. La Torre's terrace sprawls around the corner between the two. Cuttlefish, sardines and other seafood catch the eye, but just as delicious are the platters of roasted Mediterranean vegetables or *ensaladilla* – the mayonnaise salad that's a Murcian obsession. There's a refined local wine list too. ▶

Plaza de las Flores, +34 968 967 290

RESTAURANTS

LA TAPA

A stylish option among the many bars on Las Flores, La Tapa has a hard-to-beat adventurous range. Croquettes come with all sorts of unusual fillings, *aioli* (garlic mayonnaise) is mixed with almonds, wonderful use is made of spicy peppers and wild mushrooms, and the fish and seafood are exquisitely presented almost sushi-style. Just don't let the restaurant's minimalist décor put you off.

13 Plaza de las Flores, +34 968 211 317, latapadelasflores.com

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Bright colours and slick lighting tell you right away this is one of Murcia's hipper spots. Menus are playful, with specialities such as aubergine doughnuts and multicoloured mini-hamburgers, but original salads, meat and veg pastries are made with skill and prices are an absolute steal. The only problem can be finding space inside.

6 Calle San Lorenzo, +34 968 969 328

EL PULPITO

"The Little Octopus" is a temple of seafood, with a bar - facing, Murcian-style, both inside and outside on to the square - piled high with plates of succulent fresh langoustines, clams, anchovies, octopus, several different kinds of *gambas* (prawns) and more. They're sold by weight (so watch the price), and slip down beautifully with Murcia's own Estrella Levante beer. As the locals say, *paradisíaco!*

Calle Pascual, corner Plaza Santa Catalina, +34 968 213 965



LOS ZAGALES

The opposite of trendy, this much-loved bar near the cathedral has been the home of Murcia's most traditional tapas since the 1920s. There's still a huge range - scrumptious prawns in batter, seafood salads, a fine *arroz con marisco* (the local form of paella), and the powerful country wines are served straight from the barrel.

4 Calle Polo de Medina, +34 968 215 579, barloszagalesmurcia.com

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