

Abanilla, Full of Surprises

Abanilla has an area of 234 km², 23 districts and has a population of just over 6.150 inhabitants. The most populated areas are Barinas, Macisvenda and Mahoya. It has an arid or semi-arid Mediterranean climate, with occasional torrential rain with high temperatures; and as a consequence of this, a shortage of water. It has **one of the highest temperatures** in the Region of Murcia (19^o) and a large number of sunny days per year.

Many people describe Abanilla as: "The Murcian Palestine" because of the contrast between the arid areas and the lushness of the irrigated lands by Chícamo river.

In the 12th century, the Arabs called it "**Al-Banyala**" and they protected it from a fortress located in the "Lugar Alto" (near the statue of Jesus), of which there are still remains (only a part of the wall). In the 14th century, there was a continuous dispute for the lands of Abanilla between the Kingdoms of *Castile and Aragón*. In 1434, a descendant of Rocafull (Aragón) gave Abanilla to the *Orden de Calatrava (a religious and military Spanish order)*, which lasted until 1879.

A walk through Abanilla (Information about places)

Ayuntamiento de Abanilla. The Town Hall (1751 to 1762) has a wide arcade of stone, large windows, ironworks and frames of the time. During its life, it has been a granary and a jail. It took eleven years to build, and it has the **shield of Fernando VI.** (Number 1-Street map)

Fuente en la calle Mayor o plaza de las Cortes. This fountain dates from 1880. Its water comes from an aquifer system at the base of the Sierra de Abanilla. The water of this source is of **thermal origin**, like that of the Fortuna baths. They come out at a temperature of 20°C. and its composition contains sulfurous salts, which gives them a characteristic taste and smell.

The fountain was reformed in 1995 with five pipes and painted tiles that represent the Pilgrimage of the Holy Cross (every 3rd of May and 14th of September) and the industry of esparto in Abanilla.

Lavadero. One of the scarcest in the region, it was originally built in 1880, it was restored in 1995. It uses underground water from the fountain in Calle Mayor. Afterwards the water is collected in a reservoir beneath the Auditorium and used for irrigation. It is decorated with tiles. (Number 4-Street map)

Moors and Christians Statue. Carried out by the local artist, Cayetano Ramírez. This monument is made with "Amarillo fosil" stone, from Abanilla's mountains. Commemorates the tradition of Moors and Christians in the municipality, celebrated every 1st of May.

Iglesia de San José. It was built for the *Orden de Calatrava*. The construction of the church designed by Toribio Martínez de la Vega (the old bridge in Murcia), began in 1691 and was consecrated in 1712 by Cardinal Belluga. The Order exercised their jurisdiction on the church of Abanilla, independently of the Diocese of Cartagena until the year 1879 in which their subordination ceased, for Pope Pious IX.

The exterior is almost entirely of brick, except for stone windows, main door and *frontons*. The main door is capped by a *hornacina* (a hole) with the image of San José and el Niño, above which is the cross of Calatrava. The side door is a replica of the main, although in this case, the *hornacina* has a sculpture of the Inmaculada (Immaculate), above which is the other *frontón* with the cross of Calatrava. It has a **splendid retable** behind the high altar. To the right of the presbytery is a modern neo-gothic chapel, the Chapel of the Santa Cruz (the patroness) that preserves an artistic precious stone relic called the "Lignum Crucis." (Lignum Crucis is a wooden cross and a relic of Christianity that indicates the tree supposedly used by the Romans to crucify Jesus of Nazareth).

(Number 2-Street map)

La casa Cabrera. The 17th Cabrera family home is of Baroque style, surrounding a patio. Originally it was where the Order de Calatrava commander family lived. This house was 1600 m², and nowadays it has 835 m². The current owners family, Rivera Rocamora, bought the property in 1929 from the Requena de la Roda (Albacete) family, who in turn may have acquired it for lineage stability, from the *Orden de Calatrava*, possibly as a result of the disentanglements of the 18th and 19th centuries.

Its main characteristic that distinguishes it, is its façade, with the great **shield** that presides over it (XVIII century), one of the biggest in the region of Murcia. The shield stems from Ramón Cabrera La Encina, son of Juan Cabrera y Carrascosa (Church main entrance floor). Trumpets drums, cannons, flags and oars demonstrate the military importance of this family. **(Number 8-Street map)**

La casa de la Encomienda. The Casa la Encomienda is called so, because it housed the dignitaries of the *Orden de Calatrava* who **administered the tithes** of Abanilla. The great home of two floors has had many diverse uses, from grain, wheat, fruit and food store, servant's accommodation and visitors to the Order. At the present time it has a wider use for the town - different administrative services from the town hall, and a library beautified by the conserved arcades giving more seclusion to the room.

The building is of austere baroque style of the 17th century, wide for the necessities of storing the tithes, with several dependences and wide spaces for the execution of the administration of the members of the Order.

(Number 9-Street map)

La casa Pintada. It was one of the first buildings to be built outside the medieval city walls in the 16th century, and was extended in the 17th century. It was originally called Enriquez de Navarra's house after its founders, who were direct descendants of the Royal House of Navarra. This was a rich family with more properties in the area. It was sold as a result of the disentanglements of the 18th and 19th centuries. **(Number 10-Street map)**

Escaleras al Sagrado Corazón de Jesús. The access steps, from the square of the city council to the "Lugar Alto" were completed in 1957, 183 steps will take you to the highest point of Abanilla called in Spanish for this reason. There, on a pedestal of masonry of seven meters high, is the **image** of the **Corazón de Jesús** (Sacred Heart of Jesus) that measures another four meters. Murcian Nicolás y Anastasio Martínez (brothers and creators of Monteagudo's Corazón de Jesús) were the sculptors. The inauguration took place on the 15th October, 1946, with a procession. In successive years they have continued to celebrate the anniversary of the Monument to the Sacred Corazón de Jesús. To the rear of the statue, in the 1960's, water from the Taibilla, where possibly the old church of San Benito and Christian cemetery were located.

The castle of Abanilla. The scarce remains of the strength of Abanilla are located on the hill around which the village was formed. The hill top was long and narrow (300m x 100m). Where the castle rose, has a certain interest today because of the cave houses dug into the soft rock.

The population and their castle were granted to the Aragonese nobleman, Guillén de Rocafull, by Alfonso X, after the suffocation of the *mudéjar* rebellion in 1264. It remained in the family until 1462 when control passed to the *Orden de Calatrava*, and it stayed in that form for four centuries.

Even until the 15th century the castle was in a good state, and the small population, formed by a hundred homes, was located within an enclosure walled on the northern hillside. During the 18th century, a century after the expulsion of the Moorish, the population would abandon their old medieval physiognomy, expand outside the castle limits and modernise with new constructions. As the military order left in the 19th century, so the castle was abandoned and dismantled and left in ruins by the middle of the century.

(Number 7-Street map)