

Naked Spain

By

Theresa O'Shea

Like thousands of people in the UK, perhaps you've stripped off on beaches abroad, or thought you'd like to, in places like Croatia, Greece, France and Spain, where the climate is kinder and the attitudes towards naturism are more relaxed. Perhaps you've enjoyed – or thought you would – swimming in the nude and working on ALL your white bits. Then how about booking a holiday at one of Spain's 30 naturist camp-sites, resorts, hotels and villages? Tempted, but not sure what's on offer? Don't know which kind of kit-off break is for you? Read on and find about three very different centres: an apartment complex, a camp-site, and a private luxury finca.

Costa Natura – Estepona, Malaga

Opening in 1979, just four years after Franco's death, Costa Natura is the country's first naturist resort. It remains a firm favourite with visitors from the UK (over a third of the 165 apartments are UK-owned) and it's easy to see why. Set in a tropical garden of palm trees, lawns and flowers that bloom all year round, the whitewashed *casitas* look like part of a typical Andalucian village rather than a holiday resort on the Costa del Sol. Apart from the swimming-pool, there are plenty of sports facilities (tennis, min-ten, petanque etc), a Jacuzzi, sauna room, restaurant, cafe and supermarket. For the brave, there are nude yoga and flamenco classes.



Costa Natura



Costa Natura

Naturist newbies David and Sue Sheldon, who now live in Spain, stayed at Costa Natura with their two small children earlier in the year. “This was our first time at a naturist resort,” says David, “and we loved it. Although it's situated on a built-up area of the coast, inside the gates it's another world - a complete oasis.”

“It was brilliant for the kids, too,” adds Sue, “The animator (no yellow uniform ...) kept them busy all day with different games and activities. They keep asking me when we're going back!”

Weather permitting, at Costa Natura you can be naked any time, anywhere. If you've only ever stripped off at the doctor's and on the beach, you may feel slightly hesitant about buying bread in the buff, being served (by clothed waiters) at the bar or hopping into a hot-tub with a group of strangers. “It is weird at first,” says Sue, “but you soon get used to it. You forget that you're naked.”

“We found the Jacuzzi a great place to break the ice,” says David. He has a point. I mean, what do you do? There you are stark naked with a bunch of strangers in a reduced space - you either gaze at your own toes / navel / bubbles or start talking! The last time I was in the tub at Costa Natura, I

chatted to a woman from Norfolk, who was there with her ten-year old daughter and her 62-year old mother. “It’s my mother’s first time here,” she told me, “her first ever naturist holiday and her first ever naturist experience!” She can only agree with Sue and David: “ For family naturism, Costa Natura is hard to beat.”

For information and reservations visit: www.costanatura.com

El Portús – Cartagena, Murcia

Set in 100 acres, the El Portús camp-site sprawls at the bottom of a natural amphitheatre, backed by thickly-wooded hillside. It has its own private beach, and provides a perfect, secluded spot for 24-hour-a-day in the buffness. Facilities include a state-of-the art spa and wellness centre, winter and summer pools, a children's playground, tennis and paddle courts and two excellent restaurants. There are over 400 hook-ups, but if you're not into camping or caravans, you can stay in a mobile home (three different categories) or in one of the new swish apart-hotels, two of which are equipped for disabled people.

Miguel-Ángel and Carmen, two seasoned naturists from Madrid, have been regular visitors to El Portús for the last eleven years. Although they have stayed at many other naturist resorts, this remains one of their favourites. Why? Says Miguel, “Apart from the superb setting, *porque esto es naturismo puro y duro* (because this is out-and-out naturism). You never have to get dressed if you don't want to.” This is not the case at all resorts – at the Vera Playa hotel in Almeria and El Templo del Sol camp-site in Tarragona, for example, only the outdoor areas are clothing-optional.



El Portús



El Portús beach

Should you tire of naked chilling / volleyball / petanque / pool aerobics, the once strategically important naval port of Cartagena is a 15-minute drive, while the provincial capital of Murcia is about an hour away. There is also plenty of opportunity for hiking in the area. One walk with fabulous views goes up to La Ermita, a hermitage perched on the hillside behind El Portús. A word of warning. Just in case, like me, you get brave and decide to hike *au naturel*. In the week your blushes will probably be saved, but avoid on a Sunday. Unless you enjoy being cheered at by a bunch of cyclists, or falling flat on your face as you hobble into your jeans with your (sensibly, fully-clothed) partner yelling: “Hikers approaching!”

www.elportus.com

Finca los Etera – Alora, Malaga

For someone new to naturism, there could be no better place to test the water than at Finca los Etera, an exclusive and all-inclusive naturist hideaway set in seventeen acres of olive and almond tree countryside. “Why should naturists always get the worst deal?” say owners Nikki, and Nigel.

“Why shouldn't they enjoy pampering like everyone else?”

We are talking pampering with a very large P. From the moment you step through the flower-filled walkway, ablaze with reds and pinks and purples, you know you've come somewhere special.

“Drop your bags and follow me,” says Nikki, leading you into the cool, farmhouse kitchen, through the hall and out into the stunning swimming-pool area. Think Roman villa. Think huge square-shaped baths, deep-blue, with white columns, white-washed walls and archways, and masses of purple bougainvillea. You want to rip your clothes off there and then, but first you'd better unpack.



Illustration 2: Finca los Etera



Illustration 1: Finca los Etera

All five rooms are fabulous, decked out in a modern-rustic style, with stone-tiled floors and wooden beams, some with four-poster beds, all with air-con and spacious shower rooms (hydro massage, too). On the side there are flowers, a hand-written welcome note and an ice-bucket of champagne. You get the idea. Chill, chill and more chill. Although there are plenty of walks in the area and plenty of day-trips within easy reach, most guests find it hard to drag themselves away from pool-side lotus-eating, and evenings spent in and out of the candle-lit Jacuzzi.

Nikki and Nigel manage to get the mix of hospitality, laid-backness and fun just right. Dutch couple Eric and Ina Klekamp, who recently stayed at los Etera agree: “It's the most relaxing place we have ever visited. Great food, great wine and above all great hosts who give you a warm welcome. It is their approach that makes it what it is.” As another satisfied visitor wrote in the guest book: “If it was any more laid-back it would be horizontal.” What are you waiting for?

www.fincalosetera.com

More Naturist centres

Relaxnat – Costa Brava, Girona. Camp-site with bungalows for rent.

www.campingrelaxnat.com

El Fonoll – Tarragona. Abandoned pueblo turned into a back-to-nature naturist village.

www.kadex.com/fonoll

El Templo del Sol – Tarragona. Superior grade camp-site. Looks like a desert palace with Marrakesh-pink gateways and minarets, and has 1,300m² worth of cascading “mirror” pools. Situated next to the white sand El Torn beach. www.ellentemplodelsol.com

Vera Playa Club Hotel – Almeria. Four-star hotel for naturists in naturist resort, Vera Playa. For more information about the hotel and Vera Playa in general, visit: www.veraplaya.info

Cala de Aceite – Costa de la Luz, Cádiz. Camp-site with textile and naturist sections.

www.caladelaceite.com

Almanat camping – Malaga. Camp-site with mobile homes and excellent facilities. Next to Almayate naturist beach , near Torre del Mar. www.almanat.de

Eagle Peak apartments – Almuñecar, Granada. Situated near the fabulous Cantarrián naturist beach. www.eaglepeakspain.com

Magnolias Natura – Gran Canaria. 28 apartments set in tropical gardens near the famous Maspalomas beach and dunes. www.canariasnatura.com

Some advice for first timers.

1. Always use a towel on public seats and benches, for obvious reasons of hygiene.
2. If you can't handle walking naked into a bar or shop, use a sarong as a skirt or to drape over your shoulder.
3. Men only: if the unmentionable happens, as it may on any kind of beach, turn over, grab a towel, or cool off in the water.
4. If you notice any furtive beating about in the bush / on the rocks / in the dunes, stand up and start clapping. This, at least, is how people deal with voyeurs in Spain.
5. Don't gawk.
6. Don't take photos without asking permission.
7. Try not to worry about your bodily “imperfections”. Ten minutes on a naturist beach is enough to realise that perfect tens are extremely thin on the ground. Thank God.

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