

A NAUTIC ADVENTURE

Tired of the hustle and bustle of the city? **Kirsty Tuxford** sets sail and discovers paradise without the crowds

If you've been in Madrid all year, the chances are that by now you're craving a bit of sea action. But why sit squeezed in like a sardine amid the hordes on the beaches during August, when you can be sailing through glistening blue water and enjoying all the space the Mediterranean has to offer?

Nautic Spain is a yacht charter company that can tailor-make exciting trips by sailing yacht anywhere in the Mediterranean. Their main base is in the glamorous Marina de Dénia, with its elite but affordable restaurants, bars and nightclubs.

If your geographical knowledge of Spain doesn't reach further than Arganda del Rey Metro, then you need to know that Dénia is on the east coast of Spain, approximately four-and-a-half hour's drive from Madrid. However, you can also get there by plane or train (see the information box).

Who can sail?

Juanfe Jiménez is an emergency doctor by trade, but also an experienced sailor (and he speaks English). He's the man behind Nautic Spain, and he will also be your skipper if you have no sailing experience, or you just don't feel like doing *all* the hard work.

"We rent the boat with or without a skipper," he explains. "When you rent a boat, you have to work together with the skipper. The people who come usually want to learn how to sail and about navigation. Usually you get one or two people who are eager to learn, and then there are others who want to rest. You need one person who helps you. I can sail the boat alone, but with some manoeuvres you ideally need two people."

But there's no need to worry if you're completely inexperienced, as Juanfe is happy to teach. "I do a small lesson before we start: 'This is the bow and the stern, the starboard and port and where all the safety equipment is'. And on the website we have a little book about navigation and safety information," he says.

Sailing can be a pretty physical activity (unless you're the type



of sailor who sits in the cockpit clinging to a G&T), so the best idea is to assemble a group of friends so you can all share the work. It also makes the trip cheaper, as you pay for the boat, not per person.

Casting off

Depending on the time you have available, you can sail up and down the coast of Spain, over to Ibiza or you can cruise around the Greek Islands or even visit Croatia. As long as you give Nautic Spain enough notice, you can pick up your boat in Ibiza or elsewhere; the trip is as flexible as you want it to be.

For beginners, Juanfe advises: "The best thing to do for a



weekend, especially if you don't have a lot of experience, is to stay around Dénia, Jávea, Moriara and Altea [on the mainland]."

These are charming seaside *pueblos*, each with their own marina and plenty of restaurants and shops; great to visit. But then imagine the satisfaction you'll feel, sitting on board your yacht, sipping an ice-cold beer in the sun, while you watch the hundreds of land-lubbing tourists jostle for a space on the restaurant *terrazas*.

Food and drink is an important part of the trip. "When I prepare a journey we have to decide together where we want to have lunch and where we want to rest," says Juanfe. "We can stop in small bays. It's easier to cook once we've stopped," he explains.

One of the bays where Juanfe likes to drop anchor is Portichol. It's a large, sheltered bay popular with divers and snorkelers due to the clear water and shoals of fish living there. You can leave Dénia marina in the morning and arrive at Portichol in time for a swim and lunch, before heading further south to spend the night in Moraira marina. The next day you up-anchor and sail down towards Altea to spend the night there.

Moraira has wall to wall high quality restaurants and excellent seafood, and it's one of the more exclusive towns on the coast. There's a tiny, but heavenly sandy cove called El Portet, where on a calm day, the water resembles that of the Caribbean — make time for a swim there and then sit at the beach bar and try the sardines and sangria.

Altea is a haven for artists, with a bustling seafront promenade and a charming, bohemian, whitewashed old town that clings to the hillside. It is the bourgenvillia-filled, cobbled-roof paradise so often written about in all those "moving to Spain" books — and it's beautiful.

Winter sailing

If you hail from colder climes, you might be interested to know that Nautic Spain charter out their boats year-round. Juanfe says, "People in Spain usually rent the boat just in the summer. It's interesting to rent the boat in October, because you get a different view of the sea. And we organise races; it's a bit cold, but it's great because we get [more] wind . . . the winner gets a free dinner paid for by the others. It's a lot of fun!"

And when he says "cold", he means around 15-20 degrees. The winter climate on the coast is much milder than in Madrid. "Our autumn here is like summer in northern Europe! So it might be interesting for northern Europeans!" he grins. And not to mention it's cheaper in the autumn and winter too.

The sailing doctor

With a doctor on board there's no need to fret about accidents (not that there's likely to be any), and with Juanfe's experience you're in safe hands.

"I've been sailing for 15 years," he says. "I started with light sailing: Lasers and 49ers. Then I started as a client in bigger boats and then I began to organise trips for friends, and every year more and more friends wanted me to plan trips for them. So then I bought a boat, then I bought a bigger one and then this one."

There are, however, many people sailing around who have little or no experience, according to Juanfe: "Madrid has the most officially registered skippers in Spain. Anyone can do the [theoretical] exam. And in one weekend you can do the practical. I know a lot of captains with no experience. And I also know people with no certificates who are magnificent sailors," he says.

Juanfe has the experience and the qualifications: "At the moment I'm *Patron de Yate*," he explains. This means he is officially qualified to sail a boat "up to 60 miles from the coast." (The distance between the mainland and Ibiza.)

The thrill aspect

Sailing is an addictive pastime. With a good wind of force four-six, you'll suddenly feel the power of the boat as it heels (tips – don't

panic, it's designed to lean right over) to one side and slices through the water. Even a novice can take control of the helm, leaving the experts to trim the sails, while you concentrate on pointing in a straight line.

For a trip along the coast of Spain in summer, you won't get high winds. "From Dénia to Moraira you can go without problems up to 25 knots [force six]," explains Juanfe. "In summer the highest wind speed you'll get is 25 knots on a bad [as in 'very windy']



day. Usually it's about 12 knots [force four]. If the weather is bad we don't go out. You're there to enjoy it, not to be sick!" he laughs.

In addition to the sheer thrill of sailing a boat, the opportunities to visit several different towns and villages, and the chance to swim in places where only boats can reach, you will probably also see some unique sea life.

"You always see dolphins all year round. Sometimes there are turtles too, and near the coast there are lots of fish and you can fish from the boat. Plus, sometimes you see tuna," Juanfe says.

Don't you think it's time to get your sea legs out for a sail? See www.nauticspain.com for more information about Nautic Spain, or tel: 91 447 79 56/609 253 069.

Getting to Dénia

By car – take the A3 out of Madrid to Valencia, then turn onto the A7 (the 'por la costa' AP7 toll motorway, not the 'interior' A7). Exit at Dénia and pay 7.05 tolls.

By plane – Fly with Iberia (www.iberia.com) to Valencia or Alicante and then hire a car at the airport or take a taxi (taxi approximately 90).

By train – Take the train from Madrid to Valencia (book in advance with www.renfe.es) and then take a taxi.

Boat and sailing info

Juanfe's yacht is called Farabutto. She is a 10.75m Delphia 37, constructed in 2007. Farabutto can hold eight people on single day trips. She has three cabins and one toilet, which is ideal for six people if you are staying overnight. For larger groups, bigger boats, extra boats or catamarans can be arranged.

Nautic Spain use an office in Dénia marina. The office staff are responsible for the cleanliness and maintenance of the boat. They will fill the boat with diesel and water before you arrive. Clients usually bring their own food, but you can also request that food be on board upon your arrival.

Anyone interested in taking the Spanish theoretical sailing exams should contact the Dirección General de Marina Mercante. http://www.fomento.es/MFOM/LANG_CASTELANO/DIRECCIONES_GENERALES/MARINA_MERCANTE/

For UK sailing qualifications (also available to study and practice in Spain) from the Royal Yachting Association: www.rya.org.uk

In August Nautic Spain are offering 10-15 percent discounts!