



HOLY WEEK OF CARTAGENA STEP BY STEP

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AYUNTAMIENTO  
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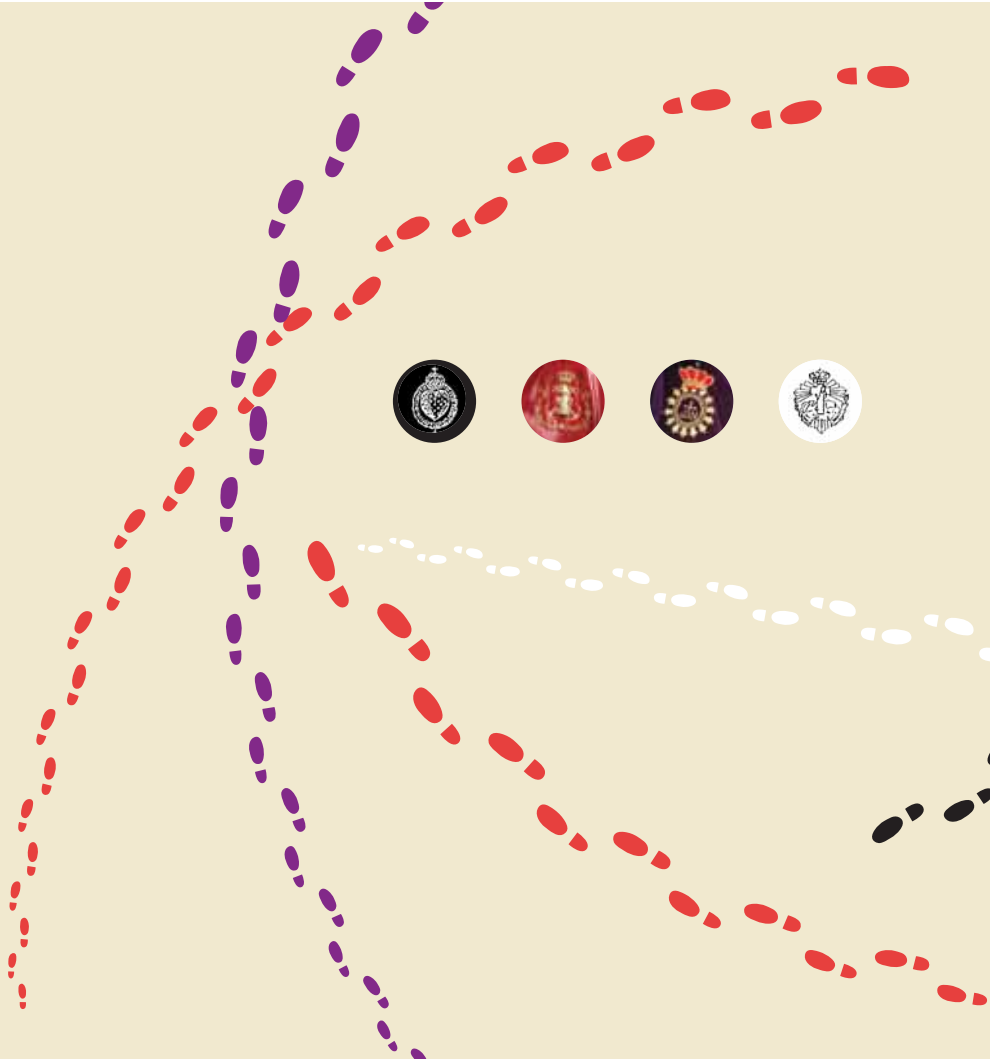
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Of all **Cartagena's** traditions.....





the most deeply rooted is **Holy Week**. The event is marked by a unique series of processions that bear no resemblance to anything in the rest of Spain. The uniqueness lies in the spectacular nature of the processional floats –veritable edifices of light and flowers built in the authentic Cartagena style–, the artistry of the images carried upon them, the rich gold embroidery and the harmony of the procession of penitents who march in perfect order and total silence to the rhythmic beat of drums and traditional processional pieces.

Another feature which has both defined and distinguished Cartagena's Holy Week, as well as making the processions all the more spectacular, is the traditional rivalry between the two main lay brotherhoods. In their eagerness to improve, these brotherhoods, popularly known as *marrajos* and *californios*, are the main reason why the passion processions are as magnificent as they are. Together with the brothers of the Succour and the Resurrection, *marrajos and californios*, who both compete with and complement each other, share the task of bringing the story of Christ's passion alive. Following the chronological order of events, they help transform the streets of Cartagena into a mystical urban landscape whose foundations are the solid columns of hooded penitents and the shifting altars of processional floats.



# The Brotherhoods

The participants in the Cartagena processions belong to four different brotherhoods which (in order of appearance over what is really a ten-day week) are the brotherhoods of **Christ of the Succour**, **Our Lord Jesus at the Hour of His Arrest** (*californios*), **Our Lord Jesus of Nazareth** (*marrajos*) and **Our Lord Jesus Resurrected**. This division into four distinct brotherhoods is somewhat deceptive as, unlike in other towns, none of the brotherhoods is restricted to carrying just one or two processional images or to taking part in just one procession; rather, they are subdivided into various independently organized groups within each of the larger Brotherhoods. These groups are then responsible for the floats which are carried in each of the processions organized by the different brotherhoods, processions which, in the case of *marrajos* and *californios*, are not restricted to a single day.



## **The Royal and Illustrious Brotherhood of Our Lord Jesus of Nazareth,**

whose origins go back to the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, is the oldest of Cartagena's brotherhoods. Its nickname, the «*Marrajos*», comes from a popular tradition by which the money to pay for the procession of Jesus of Nazareth was reputedly earned by fishermen from the sale of a mako shark (in Spanish, a «*marrajo*»). Distinguished by their purple tunics, the members of the brotherhood are responsible for organizing the two processions on Good Friday –the Encounter in the morning and the Holy Burial in the evening– as well as the procession of promises of the Piety on Holy Monday and of the True Cross on Holy Saturday. The two Good Friday processions are the oldest in origin of all of Cartagena's Holy Week and have developed out of what, in the Baroque, was known as the Paso de la calle de la Amargura ('Pageant of the Via Crucis') and the Paso del Desenclavamiento ('Pageant of the Unnailing of Christ from the Cross'). The popular roots of the processions were the inspiration for the images used by the brotherhood, images which, in the main, included only head, hands and feet to be dressed in fine clothes and were ideally suited to the theatrical aims of the sacred drama of the Passion. At the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the *marrajos* undertook a major renewal and expansion of their imagery, so that despite the loss of some important items, such as the former St John of Salzillo, the brotherhood can now boast a wide collection of sculptures which have become an inevitable reference-point for twentieth-century Spanish sculpture generally, with work by such artists as José Capuz and Juan González Moreno.



## The Chapel of Our Lord Jesus of Nazareth

This tiny baroque gem, the chapel of the marrajos, is to be found in what is now the military church of Santo Domingo, in calle Mayor. The original chapel of the brotherhood was built in 1642 in what used to be the church of the former Dominican convent of San Isidoro. In 1732 the chapel was extended to include the present altarpiece.

The chapel is square-shaped and topped with a graceful dome which is profusely decorated with emblems of the Passion. All of the theatrical techniques of the Baroque are deployed here, with natural light being used to create the impression that the dome is actually rising into the air and also to highlight the gold of the altarpiece.

The altarpiece is a summary of the essential content of the Good Friday processions: in a lady chapel in the large central hexedra stands the image of Jesus of Nazareth himself, a remarkable sculpture by José Capuz, and in niches on either side the rest of the images which appear in the Via Crucis. The story of the Passion is completed in the upper part of the chapel, with paintings between the rocailles depicting the Crucifixion, Calvary and the Descent from the Cross.



## The Illustrious Brotherhood of the Most Holy and Royal Christ of the Succour

was originally an aristocratic brotherhood founded in 1691 by Don Pedro Colón de Portugal y de la Cueva, Duke of Veragua and Lord Admiral of the Spanish fleet as a way of giving thanks to the Christ of the Succour for the miraculous cure of his son. The brotherhood was refounded in 1961 as an austere penitential group whose task was to stage the Via Crucis on the morning of 'Viernes de Dolores' (the Friday before Holy Week), a procession which wends its way through the oldest streets of Cartagena and is the first Holy Week event in the whole of Spain.

The miraculous cure of his sick son as the pageant of the Crucifixion of Christ of the Succour went by led the Duke of Veragua to raise a chapel in the Old Cathedral for the worship of this wondrous image. The much worshipped former image of the Christ of the Succour (popularly known as the 'Cristo moreno' or 'dark Christ') and the rich baroque altarpiece in which the image was kept were both destroyed during the Civil War. All that is left of the chapel amidst the ruins of the Old Cathedral is the old chamfered dome with its ornate baroque plasterwork which also forms a richly decorated facade.







## The Pontifical, Royal and Illustrious Brotherhood of Our Lord Jesus in the Painful Pageant of the Arrest and Hope for the Salvation of Our Souls

dates back to the 18th century and, or so legend has it, owes its nickname (californios) to the influential role played in the brotherhood by a wealthy group of penitents from California. In the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the city of Cartagena developed spectacularly, thanks to its designation as capital of the Department of the Mediterranean, and saw the building of new fortifica-

tions and an arsenal. The brotherhood, which was founded in 1747, appears to have benefitted from the economic boom and, in the space of a few years, had assembled a collection of processional pieces by Salzillo narrating the Passion of Christ up to the moment of his Arrest, the brotherhood's titular image. Regrettably, most of this magnificent collection was destroyed during

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the Civil War, though the brotherhood would entrust its reconstruction to another of the greats of Spanish sculpture, Mariano Benlliure.

Red is the brotherhood's distinguishing colour, and its task is to stage the grand procession of the Arrest, on the night of Holy Wednesday, together with the procession of the Christ of Mercy on the night of the Friday before Holy Week, the procession of Palm Sunday, the journey of the Apostles on Holy Tuesday and the procession of Silence on the night of Maundy Thursday.

The 18<sup>th</sup>-century chapel of the Arrest, in the church of Santa María de Gracia, is directly connected with the headquarters of the Californio Brotherhood, whose main entrance is in calle Aire, next to the front of the church.



## The Royal and Illustrious Brotherhood of Our Lord Jesus Resurrected

is the most recent of Cartagena's brotherhoods. An offshoot of the Marrajo Brotherhood, it was founded in 1943. Its distinguishing colour is white and its job is to organize the procession of the Resurrection on the morning of Easter Sunday.







## SACRED IMAGES



**The images of the Passion** are the hub around which the processions are organized. In these polychrome wooden sculptures are mixed the desire for realism and a devout sense of the ideal. The realism is necessary for the narration and enactment of the evangelical story of Christ's passion. The symbolic idealization is what prompts the people to clothe its images in finery, sumptuous gold embroidery and crowns of precious stones and metals.

The only sculptural details to be seen on the clothed images are the visible body parts: head, hands and feet. The remainder is a more or less complex frame designed to give shape to the clothes to be draped upon it.

The images can be displayed either separately or in groups of sculptures.

Cartagena's Holy Week brotherhoods are the heirs to the rich artistic legacy of previous centuries. Amongst the images and sculptural ensembles they inherited were several pieces by **Francisco Salzillo** (18<sup>th</sup> century), though most of them were lost during the Civil War.

22| This loss was nonetheless an incentive for the brotherhoods to put together the most important collection of religious sculptures in the whole of twentieth-century Spain. Together with sculptors from the past, such as Salzillo, the images include work by **Mariano Benlliure**, **José Capuz**, **Federico Collaut Valera** and **Juan González Moreno**, all of whom are fundamental to an understanding of how the figurative arts have developed in Spain in the last hundred years.

Work such as the *Descent from the Cross* by Capuz (1930) or *the Holy Burial* by González Moreno (1958) continues to be a reference-point for contemporary sculpture.

Together with these now classic artists, other more recent sculptors have contributed their own work to a substantial heritage which can be viewed all year round in the different chapels and, of course, in the processions, where it can be seen in all its glory.

Detail from the Descent,  
the sculptural ensemble by  
José Capuz in the  
Holy Burial procession  
of the «marrajos».









The Holy Sepulchre is a sober pageant showing Christ lying on the catafalque on the night of Good Friday.





## PROCESSIONS CARTAGENA-STYLE

All of the Holy Week processions in Cartagena follow the same basic pattern which, while giving each a distinct identity, is the basis of a truly Cartagena concept of the processions.

The procession is divided into **«tercios»** (or «regiments») which are grouped around each of the processional floats. The regiment is made up of penitents, all members of the same group, wearing **«capirotes»** («pointed hoods»); three of the penitents lead the procession with the group's standard. Following them are two symmetrical lines of penitents who keep time with a **«hachote»**, a kind of long stick-like lantern which is generally decorated with finely wrought silver. At the rear of the regiment come the drummers and the band, just before the float bearing the image or sculptural ensemble of the Passion. Music is thus a key element in each of the group's processions, both accompanying the step of the regiment of penitents and adding solemnity to the slow passage of the sacred images through the streets. The Cartagena processions have all the trappings of a concert, as music is conceived aesthetically, not as mere accompaniment but as what governs the rhythmic motion of penitents and float. Hence the continued importance of the processional marches and the reason why each of the regiments has maintained its own particular repertoire for the image of its devotion.



The penitent is called a «capirote» because of the «capuz» or pointed hood which covers his head and is held in place by means of an inner frame. Penitents wear tunics, which are tied at the waist with a cord or sash, capes and hoods to cover their heads. The regiments accompany each float in the colours appropriate to their devotion, in rich satins and velvet, with each group's emblem embroidered in gold.

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The standard or «shroud» is a cloth, usually velvet, which is attached to a long pole and embroidered in gold with decorative motifs, including symbolic allusions to the processional image and each of the regimental emblems. It is carried by a shroud-bearer, who is flanked on either side by two other penitents who carry the tassels that hang from the pole.

The uniform nature of the processions extends to the members of the band, who are dressed in a fashion appropriate to the regiment they are accompanying.



The richly decorated pedestals on which each of the images is set are known as «tronos» (or «floats»). They are generally worked in wood or precious metal and the «cartelas», or arms and candelabras which provide the illumination, are profusely decorated with lights and complex floral designs.

The huge floats either move on wheels or are carried by penitents. The float-bearers, who are members of the brotherhood, wear tunics and sashes in the same colour and with the same emblem as the regiment which marches ahead. They form groups of over a hundred, thanks to the long poles needed to rock the float to the beat of the music which is played throughout the procession.





The typical Cartagena float was conceived at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and influenced by the modernist aesthetic which left such a profound mark on the architecture of the city centre. The float is a towering structure built upon a double pedestal crafted in gold wood and adorned with eight large candelabras, festooned with lights and flowers, surrounding the image.

Without doubt, the most striking aspect of the processions for somebody watching them for the first time is their orderliness, an orderliness reflected in the measured stride of the regiments of hooded penitents, who keep step to the rhythm of the drum and to the chords of the processional marches...and then come to a halt, all at the same time. And (or so it seems) no-one can tell when they will start walking again in unison, keeping exactly the same distance, the same harmonious and ceremonial stride. How is this miracle possible? The key is the standard (also known as the shroud) which heads each of the processions and communicates with the torch-bearers by means a series of codified movements which tell them when to stop and when to resume their march. For this to happen the penitent has to be totally focussed on the procession, to remain in silence, imperturbable, absolutely motionless when there it comes to a stop, totally oblivious to anything but the rhythmic motion of the procession on its solemn progress through the crowded streets. Only a few of the penitents in each of the regiments are free to move as they please through the ranks. These are the **«hermanos vara»**, the pole-bearers who carry the regimental emblem and whose job it is to ensure everything proceeds as it should.

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In contrast to the seriousness, the motionlessness and the silence of the hooded penitents is the presence of infant **«nazarenos»**, «Nazarenos» who take part in the procession wearing the colour (red, purple or white) of the brotherhood to which they belong. The children precede each regiment, giving out sweets and cards with pictures of the images. The adult directors of the different groups are also dressed as nazarenos.





The nazarenos wear red or purple velvet tunics, depending on whether they are californios or marrajos, or white ones tied at the waist with a sash and the medallion of the brotherhood round their necks on Resurrection Sunday. On their heads they wear a cap in the same cloth and colour as their tunics. They carry a golden metal shaft with a cross at the top and, in the case of the children, a small bag full of sweets.



32| Unique to Cartagena are the regiments of *Grenadiers* and *Jews*.



An integral part of the processions of marrajos and californios, the grenadiers are members of the brotherhood whose presence recalls the infantry regiments which used to escort the processions in the 18th century. Their uniforms are exact replicas of those worn in the period, as are the rifles they carry.

The regiments of Roman soldiers are popularly known as «Jews», and the original 18<sup>th</sup>-century marches both they and the Grenadiers perform throughout the procession and in the parades which precede it are regarded as popular anthems by the people of Cartagena. Indeed, the clock on one of the domes of the Town Hall even chimes the hour to the tune of the march of the grenadiers.

The clearest reflection of Cartagena's status as a fortified town are the military pickets which escort the Virgins at the tail of the processions.





## WHERE AND HOW TO SEE THE PROCESSIONS



A few hours before the processions begin it's well worth going to the church of Santa María de Gracia to see the build-up. All of the processions, save a few which we shall describe below, both set off from and conclude at this church in calle del Aire. It's here that we can get a much better idea of the detail on each one of the floats, of the complex task of the floral artists as they «dress the float of flowers», of the way in which the different images are decked out and the different standards and other insignias which contribute to the uniqueness of the processions are put together.





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The church of Santa María de Gracia, which is the veritable hub of the Cartagena processions, was built in the 18th century, though its facade is still unfinished. Badly damaged during the Civil War, the three large naves and chancel to be seen today are the result of the baroque-style reconstruction carried out by Lorenzo Ros in 1943. However, there still remains a number of fascinating chapels and the main altar still contains the image of Our Lady of the Rosell, the former patroness of the city, flanked on either side by the Four Saints of Cartagena, sculpted by Francisco Salzillo.

Most of the route the processions take is lined with chairs, so there is no trouble working out which way they are heading. In any case, and saving the odd modification to the route made by particular processions, all of them begin at the church of Santa María de Gracia and proceed along calles Aire, Cañón and Mayor, the plaza de San Sebastián, calles Puerta de Murcia, Santa Florentina, Parque, plaza





López Pinto, Serreta, Caridad, plaza Risueño, Duque, plaza de San Ginés, San Francisco, Campos, Jara and back to calle del Aire and the church of Santa María. The evening or morning processions (Palm Sunday, Holy Saturday and Resurrection Sunday) follow more or less the same route, but head in the opposite direction. For the longer processions (Holy Wednesday, the night of Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday) it's better to reserve seats if you want to see them at a particular point along the route. Seats can be booked at the entrance to Santa María de Gracia, the plaza de San Sebastián opposite the Capitanía building, and in the plazuela de Icue opposite Casa Pedreño. Another option, in the true Cartagena fashion, is to watch the processions sitting at a terrace table in one of the cafés on calle Mayor. Whatever you do, bear in mind that you should never cross over in the middle of a procession.

Sitting on a seat is by no means the only way to watch the Cartagena processions. The unique concept people have of the processions here makes viewing from some elevated spot, such as the Cuesta de la Baronesa or any of the typical covered balconies which come into their own at Holy Week, a specially attractive alternative. The measured stride of the legions of hooded penitents is a sight worth watching from afar, as each of the regiments approaches or, with their capes swaying rhythmically, recedes into the distance. There are some spots along the route, such as the steeply rising calle del Cañón or the corner of calles Aire and Mayor, that offer some great views of the whole spectacle. The narrower streets, with their twists and turns, heighten the effect these majestic floats have of some divine apparition, a surging light that grows as they round each corner.

As already explained, there's a particular «technique» to the way the penitents move in the Cartagena processions. Though all of the regiments keep rigorous step and order, every year a few of them stand out because of the special touch they give to the procession, a tiny modification which is often only perceptible to the locals and, even then, only to experts in the field. The visitor shouldn't be surprised, therefore, if all of a sudden the spectators break into applause as they watch



the efforts of float-bearers with their heavy loads or if the whole street goes into raptures over the elegant march of a regiment of penitents. More awkward processionists on either side will often position themselves at especially challenging spots along the route to see how they are negotiated by their marrajo or californio rivals. Amongst these technically tricky spots is the corner of calle Jara, near the end of the route, next to the Holy Week Museum and the headquarters of the Marrajo brotherhood, a spot named after the popular bar to be found on the corner, where the spectator is given a crash course in the theory and practice of processions.

Each of the processions offers an infinite number of unique experiences, but some of these are worth special mention: for instance, the moment when the float of St Peter sets off from the Arsenal on the night of Holy Tuesday, or the image of Jesus of Nazareth leaving the seashore in Pescadería in the early hours of Good Friday on his way to the Encounter with the Dolorosa. These and other events often involve the participation of the audience; they are moments charged with emotion and studded with outbreaks of spontaneous applause, the rumbling of drums, the sound of the processional march or the plaintive cry of the saeta which sends a hush over the assembled crowd. Sensations which leave these unique processions indelibly imprinted on our memory. And what never ceases to impress: the popular salve sung by the multitude as the images of the Virgin reach their final destination.



PROCESSIONS

## Viernes de Dolores

Procession of Christ of the Succour. Brotherhood of the Most Holy and Royal Christ of the Succour.



The Brotherhood of the Christ of the Succour opens Holy Week on the early hours of Viernes de Dolores (the Friday before Holy Week), the festivity of the patroness of Cartagena, with the penitential *via crucis* which begins in the romantic setting of the old Cathedral and the Roman theatre. If we can get close to where the procession starts, we can see the whole of Cartagena's history spread out before us like an open book. Setting out from the proximity of the remains of the Old Cathedral, where it has its chapel, the Brotherhood of the Succour begins the *via crucis* with the «**cristo moreno**» carried on high down the steep streets of the old town, to the foot of the hill that once was sacred to the Carthaginians and where the shrine of Aesculapius was raised, in the shadow of what was first a Muslim citadel and later a Christian fortress, with the theatre of imperial Rome as backdrop. Over two thousand years of history is unfolded before the cross.

One by one all the stations of the cross are taken in, as the procession makes its way to the church of Santa María de Gracia where there is another station to worship Our Lady of the Rosell, the former patroness of Cartagena, and thence to meet Our Lady of Charity, the present patroness, in whose church the first mass on the day of her festivity is held. After mass, the procession completes the final stations of the cross and returns to its point of origin just as day is breaking.

The keynote of this processions is its austerity. The richly clad regiments of hooded penitents are yet to appear: here the torch-bearers wear coarse woolen tunics

The church of Our Lady of Charity, the patroness of Cartagena, becomes a festive place of pilgrimage on «Viernes de Dolores».



The hooded penitents construct a kind of spiritual architecture in the processions of Cartagena.

and the only musical accompaniment is the beat of a drum, the praying of the stations and the odd impromptu saeta to the Christ of the Succour or to Our Lady of the Solitude of Consolation.

«Viernes de Dolores» (the Friday before Holy Week) is the festivity of the Patroness of Cartagena, Our Lady of Charity. But it also marks the beginning of Holy Week, and so the day is packed with all manner of events, both festive, popular and solemn, in honour of the Virgin. In the morning the Town Hall organizes a civic procession to the church of La Caridad where there's a traditional offering of an ounce of gold, by which the population of Cartagena contributes symbolically and materially to the upkeep of the Hospital de Caridad, the old charitable institution which was founded in 1693 by the sailor Francisco García Roldán.

After the solemn religious event, the opening speech of Holy Week is delivered.



Los hachotes de cera van abriendo paso al via crucis del Cristo del Socorro, entre las primeras luces del Viernes de Dolores.

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All day long parades of infant grenadiers mingle with groups clad in regional dress preparing the floral offering to Our Lady of Charity in the afternoon.

At night the procession of the Most Holy Christ of Mercy and Most Holy Mary of the Rosary takes place. The first of the californio processions, it is presided over by the image of the Christ of Mercy embracing the cross of His imminent Passion, and with allusions to the Dolours of the Virgin, represented by an image of Our Lady of the Rosary on a float covered, Andalusian-style, with a canopy. The curious sight of the penitents dragging their long-tailed tunics over the ground is a throw-back to the very first Cartagena processions.

After a Saturday on which images are shifted from one place to another and preparations are made, we come to **Palm Sunday** and the procession of **The Entrance of Our Lord Jesus Christ into Jerusalem** (the *californios*). This is the children's procession, the procession of palms. Here it's the younger ones who come to the





On Palm Sunday the biblical characters of ancient Israel precede Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, escorted by endless lines of Hebrew children carrying palms.

## Palm Sunday



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fore, in regiments clad in the old Hebrew style, with the colours of the group to which they belong. The typical rhythmic step of the Cartagena processions is adopted in this infant parade in which the little Hebrews mark time with palm leaves and olive staffs. The sight of streams of golden palms swaying in unison either down amongst the crowds or from above is not to be missed. A special feature of the procession is the presence at the front of figures representing some of the most important characters of the Old Testament, such as Moses with the tablets, the Pharaoh escorted by his lackeys, King David or Herod, and culminating in the Ark of the Alliance, which gives way to the New Alliance represented by Christ and his triumphant entrance on the back of a humble donkey.

**Holy Monday** sees the first appearance of the *marrajos* in the procession of the **Promises of Our Most Holy Lady of Piety**. Rocked by her float-bearers, every evening of Holy Monday Our Lady of Piety brings thousands of promises that are testimony to the devotion of the people of Cartagena to an image who plays the



same part in the Passion as Our Lady of Charity, the patroness of the city. This is not the best day to see the procession sitting down. The very nature of the procession, with just one main float and two «*carros bocina*» or smaller allegorical floats, the enormous number of children, the vast array of promises and the tributes to the Patroness of Cartagena as the main float arrives at the church of La Caridad, mean there can be various changes of rhythm. It's a procession where the spectator can be carried away by the tide of excitement and devotion the people of Cartagena feel towards a figure who is the Virgin of both Charity and Piety. A good spot is the vicinity of the church of La Caridad where one can see the whole procession go by and the climax when the float of the Piety arrives, the procession comes to a complete halt and the two images of the Virgin with the dead Saviour are brought face to face. This is the moment in which the popular Cartagena *salve*, one of the most deeply felt *salves* in the whole of Holy Week, is sung by thousands of voices stirred by the promises that accompany the Piety of the *marrajos*.



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Holy Monday

From here it's but a short step to the door of Santa María de Gracia where we will be in time to see the long-strutted float, edge its way round the corner of calle San Miguel and up the ramp to the church, its face to the crowd who, once again, will intone the salve as the colossal float of the Virgin sways on the shoulders of its exhausted bearers and the breaths of a thousand voices singing in unison.



The carros bocina are, by Cartagena standards at least, small floats with allegorical pageants of the Passion which generally precede the whole procession or a particular image in the procession.

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The californios are back in business on Holy Tuesday with the procession of **the journey of the Apostles**. What once was little more than a preparation for the main californio procession on Holy Wednesday has now become one of the most typical events in the whole of Cartagena's Holy Week. Holy Tuesday is the day on which centuries of military tradition which, from its origins, made Cartagena the impregnable fortified town it has always been, are fused with the events of Holy Week. That fusion is what in 1755 led the rigging workers of the Royal Navy, civilian staff working in the dockyards of the Arsenal, to propose to meet the costs





## Holy Tuesday

The quays of the Arsenal are the starting-point for the pageant of St Peter each Holy Tuesday on its way to the church of Santa María de Gracia.

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of transporting St Peter in the procession of the Arrest. And St Peter, like any other docker, continues to be on the navy pay-roll and picks up his wage as Pedro Marina Cartagena (Cartagena Navy Peter). Every Holy Tuesday he asks the Admiral of the Arsenal for leave to attend the Grand Californio Procession, leave which is solemnly granted when, after a prayer for all those who given their lives for Spain, he sets off from the very edge of the Arsenal quays, swaying from side to side like the old wooden galleons that cast off from this same dock, on his way to the Plaza de Armas. There the Admiral invariably grants his leave, on condition he is back by Thursday, a condition which, invariably, is not fulfilled because the procession ends too late, and so Peter is kept under arrest till the following year.

## Holy Tuesday

The old clock in the parade ground of the Parque de Artillería marks the departure of the regiment of St John the Californian.



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Permission having been granted, the regiment and float of St Peter cross the threshold of the colossal gates of the Arsenal and, under the vigilant gaze of the watchtower with its four-faced clock, are met by the townsfolk who are waiting in calle Real. It's well worth trying to enter the Arsenal to catch the sunset by the sea and the warships, as the float of the saint picks its way amongst radars, gunboats and Mediterranean palms. No less appealing is the spectacle of the float leaving the great neoclassical gateway and its passage between the palm trees of calle Real, en route to the church of Santa María.

For his part, the californio St John will have set off from the former Parque de Artillería, the present-day Military Historical Museum. Not to be missed is the depar-

ture of the regiment of penitents through the long vaulted passage which leads to the parade ground.

Shortly before, the patron of Spain himself and legendary defender of its armies, the Apostle St James, will have left the palace of the Military Government, which is set on the Muralla del Mar overlooking the port. The sight of the Apostle setting off from the top of the rampart at dusk, beneath the giant dome-like rubber plants with their hanging stalactyte roots, while behind him stretches the historic port which, according to tradition, was where he first set foot in Spain, has much to recommend it. From here, the down-sloping calle Príncipe de Vergara offers a magnificent view of the solemn procession of the penitents of St James, their capes swaying in unison to the breeze wafting in over the port.

These movements of saints make a curious procession where there are no images of Christ or the Virgin. Maybe it's because the people of Cartagena feel that the saints are just like them that the entrance of the three apostles into Santa María is a noisy and competitive affair, even amongst the californios themselves.

Holy Wednesday is quite different. The preparations in the church of Santa María go on all night and the hectic activity beneath the archpriestly domes will last until Resurrection Sunday. If not unique to the city, the atmosphere on Holy Wednesday in Cartagena is indeed a festive one. It's well worth going to see the floats lined up in perfect order inside Santa María. As if oblivious to the onlookers, the californios will spend the whole morning and part of the afternoon putting the finishing touches to the floats that will take part in the evening procession. This is the opportunity to see them laying the table and preparing the menu for the Last Supper or to savour the elaborate detail of the golden baroque carving on the floats. The work of the florists is a spectacle in itself as, flower by flower, they construct truly architectural monuments which will acquire all their splendour when they are lit up and carried through the streets. Flowers, gold embroidery, silverwork, the images of Benlliure, the chaotic comings and goings of penitents and the curi-



## Holy Wednesday

ous, soon to be transformed into the orderly baroque splendour of the Grand Procession of the Arrest of Christ.

This is one of the truly great processions: thirteen floats, with their respective regiments of penitents, narrate the story of the Passion from the Last Supper to Pilate washing his hands. It's important, therefore, to book the place we want to see it from by purchasing the seats beforehand. In the afternoon before the procession, in the plaza del Ayuntamiento, there is a dramatization of the trial of Christ before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. At the end of the trial Pilate throws the water he has been using to wash his hands of the crime over the spectators.



The red hoods of the Arrest in the californio procession of Holy Wednesday.



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The standard or shroud guides and directs the solemn, uniform stride of the regiments of penitents.

Amidst parades of Grenadiers and Jews we can take our seats to watch the procession, which will set off from Santa María at 9 pm. A front row seat in the calle Mayor, encircled by modernist buildings and covered wooden balconies, is a good spot to feel the gentle brush of slowly swaying satin and velvet capes. The clash of bright colours and gold embroidery, the passion of the baroque. The narrow street is flooded with golden hoods as the enormous float of the Last Supper emerges. The colossal horn bellows plaintively, calling the faithful to prayer in the garden of olives, but fails to awaken the apostles of Salzillo who recline on golden rocailles and cherubs while Christ is comforted by the angel. Rudely awoken, St Peter strikes off the ear of the servant Malchus and is frowned upon by Jesus,





St Pedro looks up in repentance from amongst the covered balconies of calle Mayor.

### Holy Wednesday

who has been betrayed by a kiss beneath the shadow of the olive trees. A succession of golden trees borne by little angels mixes landscape naturalism with the artifice of the baroque. Jesus Arrested marches between two Romans, escorted by the impressive ranks of red-hooded penitents of the Arrest. The regiments march past with their rhythmically flowing capes in slow-stepped procession and when Pilate washes his hands the Apostles who had been following Jesus –St James, St Peter and St John– emerge once more. Only St John remains, accompanying Our Lady of the First Dolour in search of his Master. It's impressive to sit and watch these massive Cartagena-style floats being hoisted aloft and images wrapped in light and thousands of flowers being carried rhythmically along. The Virgin pass-

es by and we are left in the monumental wake of her long, red, gold-studded cloak. There's still time to get to the door of the church to see the procession draw to an end. And as we make our way through the streets we will be constantly bombarded with the sounds of the procession, discover new perspectives every step of the way. And, finally, the eagerly awaited moment of the multitudinous salve.



Gold embroidery is a very important part of the Cartagena processions. The special techniques of free and surface embroidery employed create impressive designs such as the enormous cloak of Our Lady of the First Dolour.



Only the moon and the wax candles light the procession of Silence, where hooded penitents march in silence to the tinkle of glass teardrops.

More contrasts. After this baroque display of light, of flowers by the thousand, comes **Maundy Thursday** and the Procession of Silence. But on Maundy Thursday the marrajos are already busy preparing their processions for the early hours of Good Friday. Face to face, across the central nave of Santa María, stand californios and marrajos, the former preparing what will be their final procession, the latter covering the structures of the early morning floats with flowers. The marrajos seem to have occupied important positions in the old city which once were held by californios and so they are no longer confined to the church of Santa María. In the former Hospital Real de Marina, an 18<sup>th</sup>-century edifice which is now the home of the University, the marrajo group known as Los Estudiantes prepares the image of Our Lord Jesus of Medinaceli for the early morning procession, looking out to sea from the rampart of Charles III. At the foot of the rampart, as if floating on the water of the fishing port of Santa Lucía, the marrajos' titular image of Our Lord Jesus of Nazareth is lifted onto its float, where one by one red roses begin



**Maundy  
Thursday**



to bud amidst hundreds of candles. The preparations almost over, the marrajos will assemble for the last time in the traditional cabildo de las yemas or «council of egg-yolks» to await their moment: midnight and the start of Good Friday.

Prior to this a single muffled drum marks the start of the Procession of Silence. A stunning event. More astonishing still to see how, in almost complete darkness and with no drums to mark the beat, the typical orderly step of the Cartagena processions remains intact. There can be no doubt: in Cartagena processions are an art. Penitents and public in complete silence, the streets in total darkness, the only thing to be seen or heard is the glimmer of the rhythmically marching rows of hooded penitents and the tinkle of the silent floats they bear upon their shoulders. The procession flows smoothly, which means that we can move from streets shrouded in darkness to clearings of light and sound to see the shadows looming on the walls again. The Ecce Homo is accompanied by a choral chant and the laboured footsteps of the float-bearers. The cross of the Christ of the Miners casts gigantic shadows against the darkened architecture. The hooded rows of penitents, the plaintive saetas, the staffs of the torch-bearers striking the ground, the tinkling of crystal tears and the colossal cloak of Our Lady of Hope sweeping away the shadows to usher in the Early Morning Procession.

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Because by now a purple-clad multitude has assembled in the silent darkness before the seat of the Marrajo Brotherhood in calle Jara. The last of the californio processions comes to an end and the marrajos anxiously await the count-down to Good Friday. At midnight the marshal of the marrajo grenadiers requests and is given permission to troop the colours of the Brotherhood, an event which announces that Jesus of Nazareth is to set out on the path of bitterness and the Encounter with the Dolorosa. Marrajo regiments of grenadiers and Jews struggle through the throng to commence the longest morning. The procession is joined in many distant points of the old town of Cartagena. From the fish-market of Santa

Good  
Friday





Lucía, while we await the multitudinous appearance of Our Lord Jesus of Nazareth at the water's edge, we can see the brightly-lit escort of the penitents of the Christ of the Students troop along the top of the rampart. From Santa María the Veronica follows Christ, now condemned and fallen. Finally, in the early hours of the morning, the Dolorosa is guided by St John from the same church to the encounter with the Nazarene.

There are very few places where so many different sensations are felt as in Cartagena on the night of Maundy Thursday and the early hours of Good Friday morning. The Roman soldiers accompany Christ to the burlesque strains of «*Perico Pelao*», while the Nazarene is the only person who has the honour of opening the gates of the fish market, where an enormous crowd has gathered in expectation. The plumed helmets of the Jews float above the throng, which seems furrowed by the sharp purple hoods of the penitents, like the dorsal fins of the mako sharks to which the marrajos owe their name.

## Good Friday

The Nazarene of the marrajos leaves the fishing port of Santa Lucía on its way to the encounter with the Dolorosa.





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From the popular streets of the fishing quarter there is time to reach the plaza de la Merced and to find a good spot from which to witness the Encounter, the moment in which the Dolorosa exchanges glances with the Nazarene as she turns the corner of the palacio Aguirre. This is one of the climaxes of Holy Week. After singing the salve, the crowd merges with the procession which amazingly regains its usual order and rhythm as the Nazarene heads off into the distance followed by St John and the Virgin in the footsteps of the Jews. From the narrow, twisting streets which lie adjacent to the plaza de la Merced the implacably rhythmic striding regiments of marrajos emerge and form a single procession bound for the church of Santa María.

The calle Mayor is again a good spot to see the four processions merging in the first light of day to form a single retinue. Dawn is waved in on Good Friday by the palm of St John, while as we are sipping coffee to recover from the long night, the morning is greeted with another salve as the Dolorosa enters the church.



The streaming procession of marrajos mixes with the people of Cartagena in the chaos of the Encounter, the highpoint of the Good Friday morning celebrations.

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Friday







## Good Friday

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On the architectural monument of gold, flower and light which is his Cartagena-style pagan, St John points to the Nazarene on the night of Good Friday, while with the rhythmic beat of his palm he sets the tempo of hope in the resurrection.



With hardly a respite, the church of Santa María is once again a hive of activity in the afternoon as a mass of people put the finishing touches to the twelve great floats to be carried in the Procession of the Holy Burial. Seeing the floats already prepared in the church gives us a chance to admire the wonderful collection of sculptures which the marrajos will parade later on that evening. This is the procession of José Capuz, who sculpted half of the floats that appear in the procession, the most significant of which is the innovative Descent from the Cross (1930) and the



**Good  
Friday**

spectacular Holy Sepulchre, where the beauty of the sculpture is set off by the richness and elegance of the magnificent coffin-like float. It's well worth pausing to look at the detail on this elaborate float, which is embossed in silver and bronze, before witnessing its solemn passage in this silent procession, followed by the Bishop of Cartagena and members of the municipal council.

This is another of the big processions and the centre of Cartagena is packed with onlookers. It's a very good idea to book a seat, despite the fact that this is actually the longest procession. If we want to see it twice from the same place, we might look for a spot near the Icue, where calles Puerta de Murcia, Sagasta and Carmen meet. Here the regiments heading up calle Sagasta and those coming down calle del Carmen and taking Santa Florentina cross over. And yet again the rigorous order and sober rhythm of the regiments of penitents as they march to the sound of the processional marches. A rigour which is mitigated by the children

of Nazareth who might well give us a 'sepulcro', an (at times) extremely large, lozenge-shaped sweet which is typical of Cartagena's Holy Week.

The greater distance taken by the procession gives us more freedom to roam the streets and find different spots from which to watch it, and to hear the drums which are never very far away. An unforgettable experience is to see the impressive float of the Descent head-on, the dazzling passage of the silver-floated Piety or the mastery of the sculptures by González Moreno for the Holy Burial. The procession ends with three floats in the purest Cartagena style, three splendid structures carved in golden wood and festooned with light and complex floral patterns. The long tall floats of Mary Magdalene, St John and the Solitude are mobile altarpieces, raising the images up to the height of the balconies and stunning the onlookers as they turn the corner, divine apparitions in the midst of the multitudes who cram the streets.

Not to be missed is the procession's end in calle del Aire, where a salve is sung to the Virgin and the squad of Marines who have been following in the black wake of her gold-embroidered cloak salute her and so bring to an end the Good Friday of the Marrajos.



### Holy Saturday

Our Lady of the Solitude of the Poor closes the marrajo procession of the True Cross on the evening of Holy Saturday.

The marrajo processions continue on Holy Saturday, as they await the Resurrection in the Procession of the True Cross. The procession begins late in the afternoon to make the most of the changing complexion of the light at dusk, as it gradually fades to a darkness lit only by the candles of torch and





float. The whole cortege sets off from the church of Santa María in the middle of the afternoon, all but the regiment and float of the Holy Women –borne exclusively by women– who belong to the group of students, which set off from the Senate House of the University to join the rest of the procession at the corner of calles Duque and Caridad. After so many different processions we are still struck by such sculptural gems as the group of the holy Love of St John, by Capuz, or the serene and, by its very nature, processional sculpture of the Solitude of the poor, one of the best pieces by the sculptor Juan González Moreno, which is rocked on its candle-lit golden float.

The intensity of the previous days might make us late for the Resurrection Sunday procession, but if we are able to make it, it can be a pleasure to breakfast on hot chocolate and churros in calle Campos as we watch the Procession of Our Lord Jesus Resurrected draw to a climax. The procession is not restricted to images of Christ Resurrected or Our Lady of Fair Love, but tells the whole story of Easter in ten floats which are carried through the streets of Cartagena from Santa María de Gracia, where they are hailed by a peel of bells, all through the morning and into the early afternoon. Ideally (and it's nearly always the case), there will be a bright Mediterranean sun shining which, combined with the festive mood of the parade, will guide our steps to the end of the route on calles Mayor, Cañón or Aire, where it's always best to book a seat in the shade and where people often celebrate the event with an aperitif. In the Procession of the Resurrection the hooded penitents do not forsake the characteristic Cartagena uniformity. Then again, the torches have now evolved to include elaborate silverwork or staffs with embroidered pennants. The children are also part of this procession and dress as little white Nazarenes or even heavenly little hooded penitents in the regiment of the Holy Angel of the Triumphant Cross.

But even at the very end of Cartagena's Holy Week there are some intensely

## Resurrection Sunday





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The good-humoured exertions of the pageant-bearers, egged on by an enthusiastic crowd, as they inch their way up calle del Cañón.

Resurrection Sunday



The placid beauty of Our Lady of Fair Love, the work of sculptor González Moreno, sees yet another Holy Week come to an end from beneath her canopy.

moving moments in store. One of the most eagerly anticipated is, at the end of the route, the ascent of the steeply rising calle del Cañón by floatbearers bearing Our Lady of Fair Love under a canopy to shade her from the hot Mediterranean sun.

And as the Virgin reaches the church, the Christ of the Resurrection comes out to meet her.

But once again it's the ordinary people who have the last word in the procession of the Resurrection and in Holy Week as a whole, as they sing the popular and always multitudinous Cartagena salve.

Once the hooded penitents have gone, the people of Cartagena are left with bright sunlit days and longer afternoons on which to enjoy the traditional mona de Pascua (a typical Easter cake), while they discuss the processions they have seen and make ready for another year of the Passion.

## Resurrection Sunday



