

# Alhama de Murcia Archeological Centre *Los Baños* 2.000 years of history







## Archaeological Museum 'Los Baños'

"Los Baños" Archaeological Museum was inaugurated on the 24<sup>th</sup> May 2005 as an Archaeological Centre and was recognised as a museum on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May 2008, becoming part of the System of Museums in the Region of Murcia. The main objective for the Museum's creation was the preservation and protection of the archaeological remains of Alhama's Baths. Their recovery and valued enhancement has brought together important contributions to the study of hydrotherapy and its architecture in different periods of its history.

The thermal complex has been reconstructed through a series of excavation and restoration projects, that took place in the 1990's and is related to the environment of San Lázaro Church and the Castle. These projects have created a collection of monuments, that integrates a modern building, a garden with water as the main attraction and the remains of the baths as an onsite museum. In the

museum, it is possible to find on display a selection of the archaeological artefacts, which were created in 1992 at the Plaza Vieja Cultural Center, composed of different pieces from Alhama archaeological excavations. These materials bring us closer to different cultures from the Fifth Century BC until the 1930's.

The visitor is immersed in the history through architecture, exhibition panels and other visual resources. Showing the constructive and cultural evolution of the thermal area, the conservation of the cultural heritage in the same complex, with Roman rooms that later were used in Islamic and Christian periods, and the remains of the Spa Hotel that was built in the nineteenth century. The archaeological remains were declared a Historic-Artistic Monument of national character and property of cultural interest (BIC) in 1983.



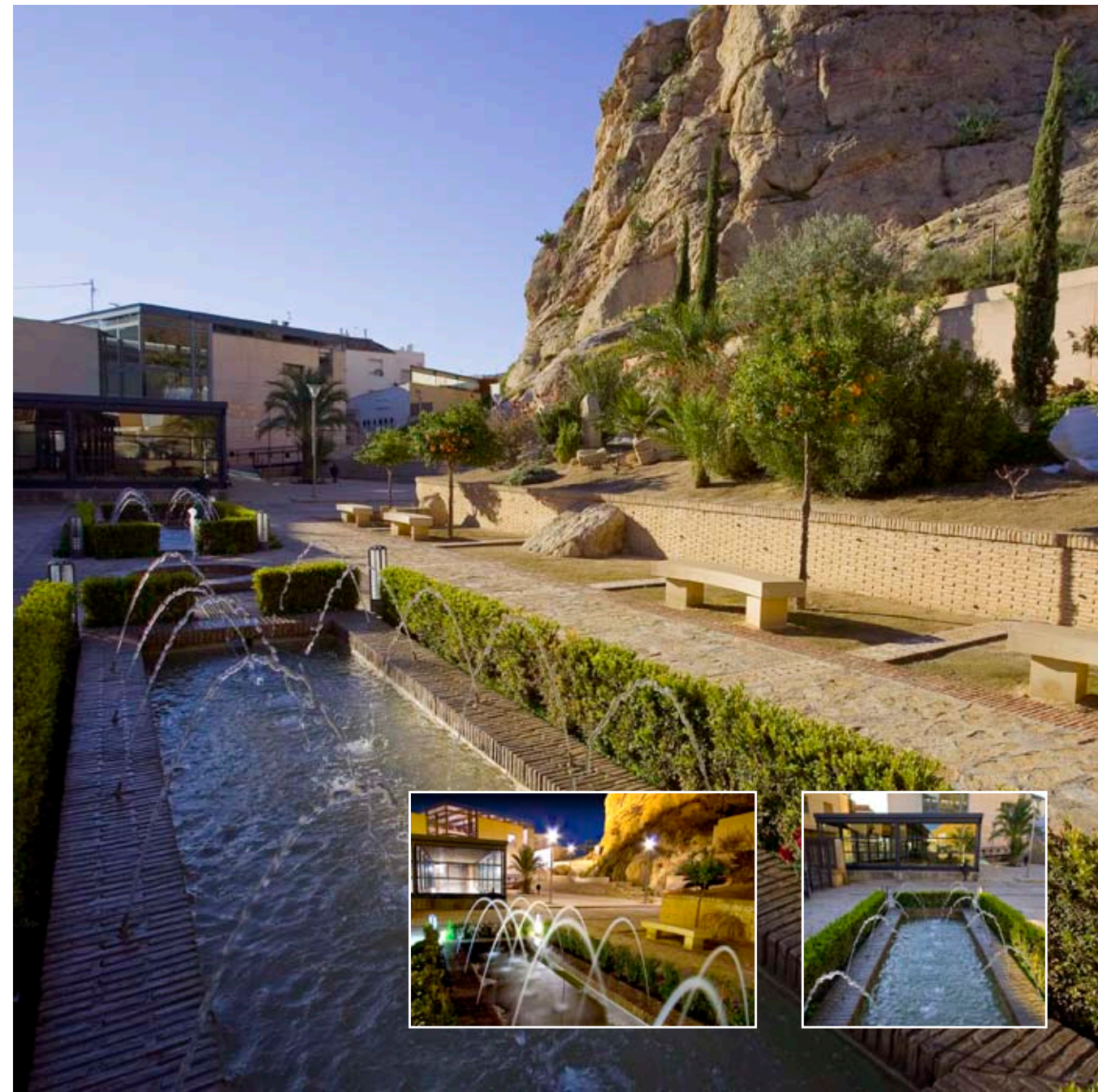


## The Garden

The garden of the museum is designed as a space to offer the visitor a set of perceptions related to the senses through the sound of water, the scent of plants and flowers or the contemplation of the landscape.

From this place, favoured by the history and the nature, the best views of the principal town monument can be enjoyed: the castle, San Lázaro Church and the Bath remains.

The relationship between the water and the floral landscape, combined with the architectural and archaeological elements, like the XVIII century milestone or the XIX century bathtub, creates a congenial and calming atmosphere that evokes the gardens and fountains of the Andalusies gardens.





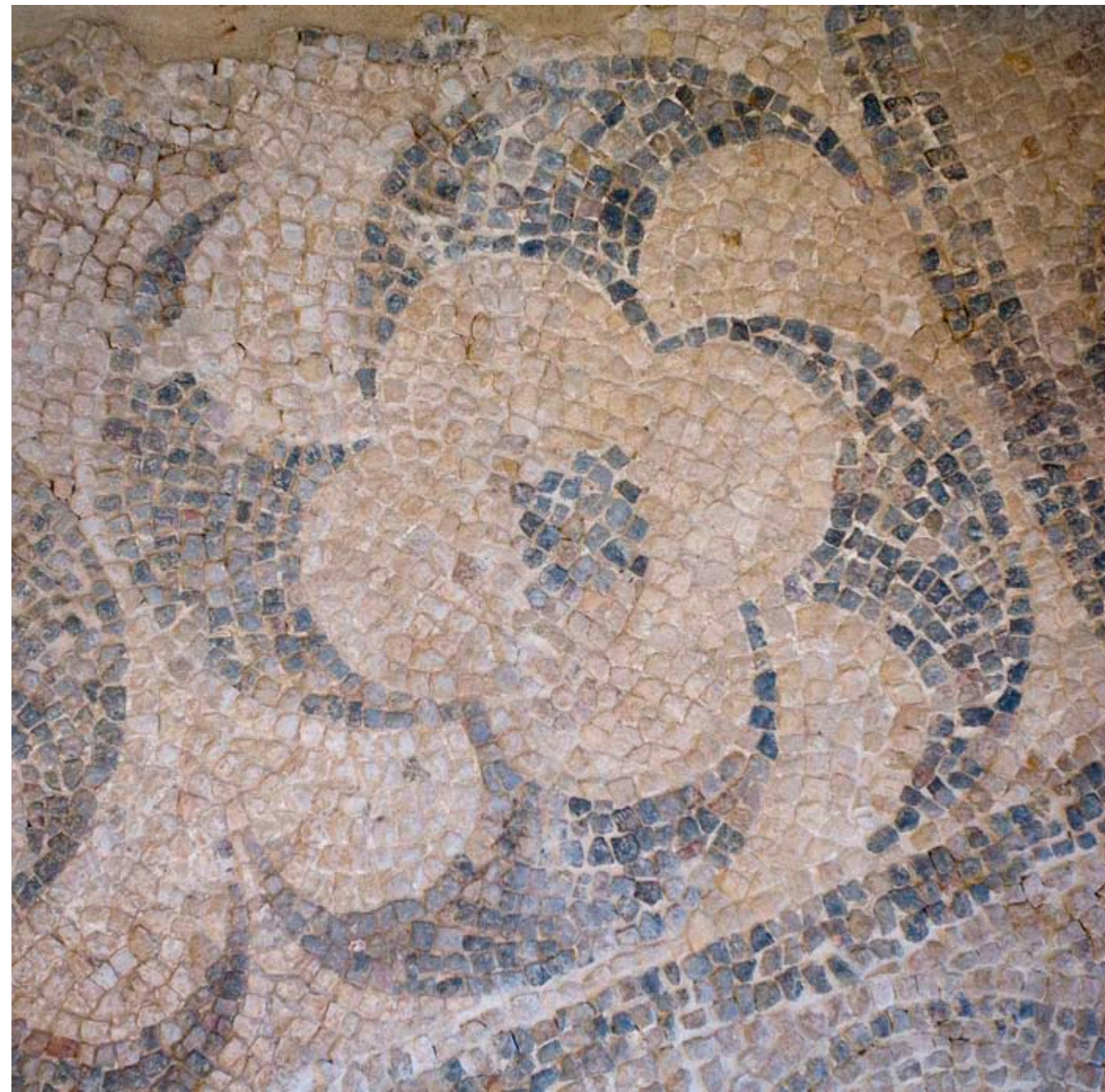
## The Roman World

After the Roman conquest, Iberia turns into Hispania, and from the 2nd century BC the south eastern Iberian societies underwent a lot of social, economic and political changes, known as the process of Romanization of the territory, with special emphasis on those places with hot springs like Alhama. Cities such as Cartago Nova, with a great urban growth, favoured the arrival of new residents and the reoccupation of the territory. The domus in urban areas and villae in rural spaces, are the new housing models that the rich owners decorate with important ornamentations. Examples are the urban excavations of the domus in the atrium of San Lázaro Church or the rural villae of Venta Aledo, in the Cañadas.

At the entrance of the museum, the mosaic of the domus (Roman urban house)

from the end of the 1st century A.D. is exhibited. This mosaic was found in the excavation of the atrium of San Lázaro Church and is dated at the beginning of the 2nd century A.D. In it the ornamental program can be appreciated, with black and white tesseras, showing a repeated motive like a half moon called pelta, the four peltas are placed simulating a small turning mill.

In the same domus, next to the mosaic, mural paintings were recovered, with rich polychromy and geometrical and vegetable motives), which gives an idea of the degree of sophistication and economic power enjoyed by some owners in this area.







## Roman Thermal Baths

The reigning peace in the Roman Empire during the first centuries of our era was well deposited for the Romanisation of the area thanks to the thermal springs that flowed at the foot of the Castle. In the first century AD, the Romans built an important thermal complex that would be used until the fourth century. The material culture of this period, glasses, plates, coins, ornaments, etc. show us the splendour of Iberian and Roman settlements in this area.

The thermal baths were probably one of the Roman's favourite leisure places, to bath, to have massages, to talk, take exercises, etc. to achieve the wellbeing of body and spirit.

The remarkability of Alhama's thermal baths lies in the existence of a complex with two different areas: one of them for recreational use and the other for the medicinal bath, with separated spaces for each sex. In the first of them the common bathrooms of the Roman world with the gradual change of temperature have been conserved (except the apo-

dyterium or changing room which has disappeared). The other rooms were brought together with restored original structures from 2000 years ago: the cool room (*frigidarium*), warm room (*tepidarium*), heated room (*caldarium*) and the swimming pool. The rooms received the heat through an oven (*praefurnium*) from which the warmed air circulated under the floors and through the walls by means of cameras (apertures/ducting) of air.

The second area is the most important and consists of two domed rooms of great monumentality (influence), that are the centre of the complex, with a common swimming pool and skylights in each, to regulate the lighting and temperature of the thermal environment. Other connecting apertures favoured keeping the same temperature in each room and boosting the healing effects of the waters.







## The Islamic Baths

In the Islamic world, the bath (hammam), was a reflection of the splendour of the society, which fulfilled the religious obligatory rules of purification before the prayers. It also became a place of health and relaxation, a place of meeting, of conversation about the personal and familiar life and other social aspects. There were two kinds of baths: the usual classic baths with temperature gradulation per room, of Greco-Roman tradition (al-hammam) and the medicinal mineral thermal baths (al-hamma) with a healing function closely related to religion, which is the case of Alhama.

In Alhama, following the tradition of Roman baths, the same domed spaces were reused, leaving archaeological evidence

as the incorporation of new skylights on both sides of the vault to regulate the beneficial environment. These were next to the arched roof of the feminine bath and over the Roman structures of the bath of leisure, which were recovered thanks to archaeological works undertaken in the first Islamic cemetery (maqbara) of the XII and XIII century.

The name of Alhama means natural hot spring water (Hamma) in contrast to Hammam, the classic bath. The name became Alhama in the Christian period and like that it has remained, protected by its Castle in this frontier land.







AEGROTANTIUM SALUTI  
VALENTIUM VOLUPTATI  
ANNO MDCCCXLVIII

For the health of the those who are sick  
and the enjoyment of the healthy

## The Hotel Spa of the 19<sup>th</sup> century

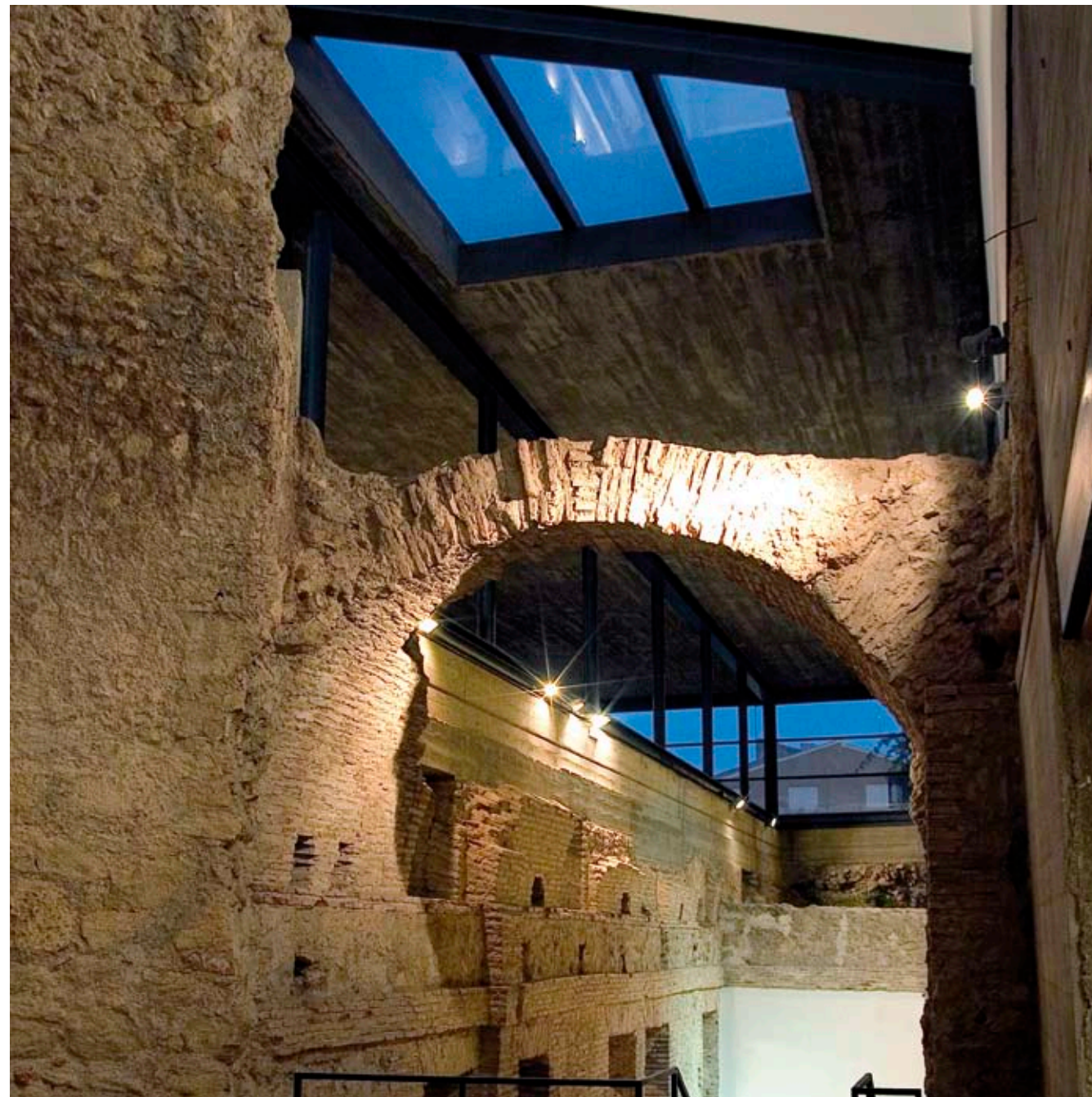


At the end of the middle ages, the baths entered a phase of decline until the construction of the grand Hotel Spa in 1848. In that year, a building of borrowing freely from various sources and classical architecture of three floors was constructed, designed by the architect Jose Ramón Berenguer, adapting the ancient domed bathrooms and re-using again these spaces.

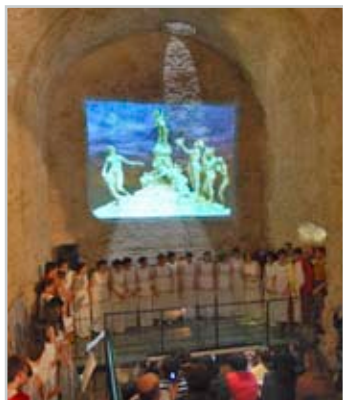
In the basement area, there were located the bathrooms and modern facilities of showers, baths of steam, general swimming pool and a public swimming pool separated from the rest of facilities of the private complex, destined as bathing place for the poorest. In the other three floors there were the rooms, kitchens, dining rooms, social areas and all kinds of luxuries and comforts for the bathers.

In the second half of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century the modernisation of the villa and the Spa enjoyed a deserved reputation which attracted bathers from the whole Spain. Most notably were the visits of important personalities of the high society or illustrious figures such as the Nobel D. Santiago Ramon y Cajal.

In the thirties the splendour of the Spa was to be ended abruptly with the disappearance of the spring and the conversion of the building into a hospital during the Spanish Civil war. In the forties the building began deteriorating and became neglected until its demolition in 1972.







## New “Old” Places

More than one hundred of cultural objects of daily use, elements of the trade, evidences of the daily life, touches of life and death or building decoration samples are exhibited during the tour of the museum as a permanent archaeological collection in an exceptional historical setting. The temporary exhibition hall offers a wide and diverse range of cultural activities: theatre, music, storytelling, exhibitions, recitals, meetings etc., all of them are part of a program which aims at a dynamic and living museum. This museum, occupied and reinvented by different cultures in its 2.000 years of history, shows the constructive evolution of this area throughout the centuries,

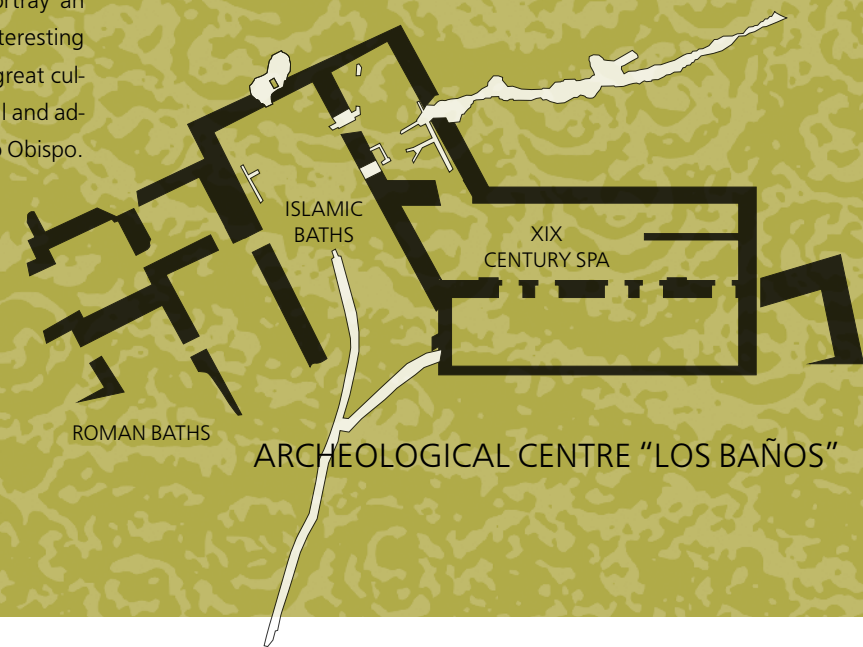
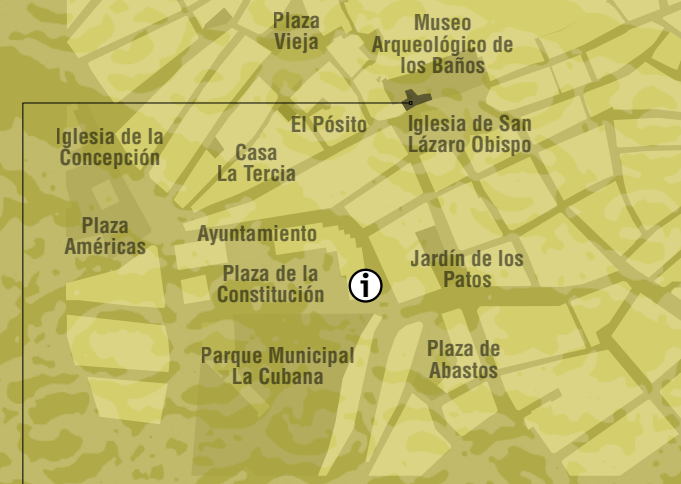
now presenting and allowing visitors of all ages to learn and observe the history from multiple points of view, of culture and leisure, through its archaeological materials, virtual reconstruction, etc. The Garden, the temporary exhibition hall and domed rooms of the bath complex, are the new ancient places that receive concerts, storytelling, workshops, exhibitions, etc. with past and present in common.

## 2000 years of history

The Roman Baths have been created to form a pleasing rectangular shape around the spring. There are two accompanying long rooms with an interesting domed roof which are attached to the bath area and were for recreational use (S. I AD) in the Islamic Period. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century with some remodeling, these areas were incorporated within the new construction of the Hotel Spa.

The new building to house the archaeological remains was designed by Architect Alberto Ibero and was created to protect and integrate this unique site within its modern linear structures of concrete, glass and metal pillars.

The creatively designed areas portray an extremely worthwhile and very interesting visual and pleasing aspect in this great cultural space at the foot of Castle Hill and adjacent to the Church of San Lázaro Obispo.







### Museo Arqueológico "Los Baños"

Calle Sánchez Vidal nº 5. 30840. Alhama de Murcia

#### INFORMACIÓN Y RESERVAS

Tél. 968 630 776

[museoarqueologico@alhamademurcia.es](mailto:museoarqueologico@alhamademurcia.es)

Web museo: [www.museolosbañosalhamademurcia.es](http://www.museolosbañosalhamademurcia.es)

Concejalía de Cultura y Patrimonio

### Opening hours

#### INVIERNO Y VERANO

Tuesdays to Fridays.

Mornings: 10'00 a 14'00 horas

Evenings: 17 a 20 horas

**Domingos y festivos:**

De 10'00 a 14'00 h.

**Lunes cerrado**

ARRANGED VISITS

FREE ENTRANCE

