



'Fira de Tots Sants' in Cocentaina

By Karen Marco

The oldest fête in Spain, and certainly the biggest I have ever been to, is right here on our doorstep in Cocentaina... I can't believe that I'd never been there until last year!

Cocentaina is a remarkable place, a market town located inland Alicante Province, that looks like it has come straight out of the Medieval Ages, especially when the 'Fira de Tots Sants' is taking place. The 'All Saint's Fair' has been celebrated in Cocentaina since 1346...that's almost 700 years ago! No wonder Spain has officially declared it 'a Fiesta of National Tourist Interest'.

The festivities revolve around All Saints' Day November 1. The main fair and activities of this year's 670th edition are taking place from Saturday October 30 till Monday November 1, over the bank holiday.

If you're driving over to Cocentaina, you'll be directed into one of many temporary parking areas on the outskirts of town, and then it's just a short stroll into the centre which is pedestrian-only over these days. Leaflets are handed out at a number of information points, with a map showing the different sectors and the schedule of activities.

The magnitude of Cocentaina's 'Fira de Tots Sants' is quite amazing and the event is in continuous evolution... it is in fact a number of fairs rolled into one. The latest in farm machinery, heating systems, solar panels, eco cars, etc., fill the length and breadth of one main street. A conventional Spanish market lines another with fresh fruit and veg, cheeses and cured meats, clothes, footwear and everything for your home. Then there's a whole zone dedicated to youngsters of all ages, with

attractions and games, and a funfair.

The 'old town' is transformed into a medieval world where a magical ambience reigns in the labyrinth of back streets...discover the medieval market, the Arab souks, Jewish quarters, and Valencian artisan barrios. Stalls filled with handicrafts and treasures, jewellery and trinkets, spices and herbal remedies, incense and essential oils, and much, much more. Around every corner you'll come across themed street entertainment - minstrels, jugglers, jousts - and plazas filled with medieval-style eateries serving feasts fit for a king... meats, sausages and potatoes roasting over coals and boiling cauldrons of octopus! Historic buildings house fascinating exhibitions: arts and crafts, bonsais, stamp collections, for example. But my favourite is the Condal Palace courtyard



where young children can enjoy games and rides that date back to the Middle Ages.

When you've had your fill of olde worlde experiences, it's time to move into the future! A brilliant section of enterprising local firms features the latest in IT: smart phones, tablets, ingenious electronics...

Dozens of tourism stands

from across the Valencia Region offer updated info on a host of interesting places and activities in Castellón, Valencia and Alicante Provinces. Get some great ideas for a day out on the Costa Blanca... Discover what to see and do along the coast from Denia down to Benidorm and south to Torrevieja,

not forgetting those lesser known inland villages topped by magnificent castles.

One of the fair's star attractions, the gourmet and 'tapas' section is open till quite late... so you can either start or finish the day here! Just purchase some vouchers and hand them in at the different stalls to taste a mouth-watering variety of bite-sized gastro treats. Or you may fancy a plate of typical cured cheeses, cold sausages and the best 'jamón serrano' with a bottle of red wine shared between two!

Throughout the day you can also enjoy a great variety of live music, folk dancing and horse exhibitions. Cocentaina's 'Fira de Tots Sants' is fun and excitement for everyone...we'll see you there!

Cocentaina warrants a leisurely visit to appreciate the impressive monuments, scenic countryside and walking routes.

Cocentaina is set in a pretty valley near the River Serpis, surrounded by farming land and imposing mountains - Sierras Aitana, Benicadell and Mariola - in the north of Alicante province. Sierra de Mariola is a national park and wonderful for hiking and cycling.

The strategic position was recognised as far back as the Stone Age! Romans, Moors and Christians have all passed this way over the centuries leaving their historical legacy which includes prehistoric paintings, recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The XIII castle with an

imposing emblematic square tower stands watch from an omnipotent position on the Penyeta Blanca crag, some 300 metres above the town.

Cocentaina old town, known locally as the Villa dates to medieval times; originally walls and 24 watchtowers surrounded the settlement, which could only be entered through the 4 gateways - much has been destroyed although some parts can still be seen today.

The Arrabal or old Muslim quarters is generally very well preserved with a labyrinth of narrow winding streets and alleyways. The district was built around a grand mosque however in the XVI century El Salvador church was built over the original site.

The Condal Palace was built in XIII with later additions mainly of gothic and renaissance style - this impressive building is well worth a visit. The first floor and three towers overlook an interior courtyard. Inside there are several interesting permanent and temporary exhibitions, and the 'golden room' which has an ornately painted domed ceiling.

This is only a brief outline of the fascinating historical sites worth visiting...more on Cocentaina and the surrounding Comtat region in a future article.

Getting there:

A-7 motorway - N-340 - CV-790

Valencia approx 1 hour; Alicante 45 min.

See more features about the Costa Blanca on my personal travel blog: www.kalittravel.net





since 1346

All Saints Fair

29th October to 1st November

Cocentaina




