



## Ondara

### History & Culture on the Costa Blanca

By Karen Marco

Ondara is located in the Marina Alta, just four kilometres inland from the coast at Denia, on the northern stretch of the Costa Blanca. Few outsiders imagine the interesting historical centre hidden from sight... circumvented by a busy ring road, Ondara's main claim to fame is the renowned shopping centre on the outskirts of town! Next time you're driving this way take the

time to stop awhile to discover the fascinating 'old town'.

The Plaza de Toros is an emblematic landmark which has been part of local life since the turn of the twentieth century... the bullring (1901) was wrecked in the Spanish Civil War and principally rebuilt in 1957. Recent work has uncovered the original features of solid stone walls and brickwork arches. When the huge wrought metal

entrance gates are closed, access is through the restaurant premises onto the terrace, and from here you can enter the bullring and wander round the whole complex.

The Prado is just across from the bullring. This long, low white building was once the main fresh food market and has since been converted into a cultural space where regular exhibitions and concerts are held.

Cross over the Barranco de la Alberca (the bridge has artistic wrought iron railings) to the Plaza del Convento, a picturesque town square with a fountain. Points of interest include the attractive 17th century Franciscan Convent, which now houses the Town Hall, and the adjacent 16th century Santa Ana Church. From here you can discover a maze of traditional old streets and stroll uphill to the Plaza Mayor.

Ondara castle was built at the top of the town many centuries ago by the Moors – all that remains today is one of the four towers, a bell tower with the town clock which was added in the 1900's. The Casa de Cultura is housed in a magnificent building with distinctive features, and is also on the Plaza Mayor. The adjoining streets are fascinating too - there are many traditional townhouses, typically with beautifully tiled facades.

Ondara organises a host of cultural activities and local festivals throughout the year. For example, there's a Contemporary Arts Exhibition and Amateur Theatre held in the Casa de Cultura (February); Street Food, Arts and Book Fair; Local Commerce and Music Festival (April); the town's main Sant Jaume Fiestas (July); Jazz Festival and open air cinema (August); Symphony Orchestra Concert (September); Winter Fair (November); and in December there's a Traditional

Nativity Scene. The various events take place in venues developed across the town.

The countryside around Ondara has been inhabited since the Stone Age... cavemen once lived in these lands and remains of an Iberian settlement have been found on the Sierra de Segària. Roman ruins and inscriptions were discovered in the old town and the relics can now be seen in Denia Museum. The Moorish legacy has left a more visible mark and includes the aforementioned clock tower. The Moors introduced an irrigation system in the 15th century and

developed agricultural land - you can still see a small stone dam of Muslim origin down by the river. The Moors were driven out of the area in the 1600's and Christian churches and convents were erected were built.

#### Getting there

**By road:** N 332, Km 198; A-7 motorway, exit 62.

**Nearest airports:** Alicante 98 km, Valencia 106 km

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