



**Left and below**  
One of Alcoy's Christian  
confraternities; and the town's  
ladies show off their costumes

**A**lcoy's annual Moors and Christians Festival is one of Spain's oldest. The festivities hail from the 17th Century and the fiesta – in its present form – is around 200 years old. The event it commemorates, however, dates from as far back as 1276 when the great Moslem leader Al-Azrak was killed in a pivotal battle very close to present-day Alcoy. His forces were subsequently expelled from the region forever.

As we sat feasting on tapas in a tent as a guest of the Filá de Judíos (the Jews Confraternity) I asked my guide and party organizer, Brian Fagg, about Moros y Cristianos fiestas I had seen advertised around the Costa Blanca. "Yes, there are other fiestas," he confirmed, "but they are staged purely for holidaymakers, and by comparison with this one they're small-scale imitations. This is the original, the big one; the people here are doing it for themselves and their families. As you can see, they make us very welcome but really the spectators are almost incidental."

It seemed incongruous that such a spectacle could attract so few outside visitors. As Brian explains: "It is such a popular local event that it's just not promoted to outsiders; they don't need to spend time and effort getting us here."

"A lot of British visitors are simply overwhelmed by 200,000 people in such a small space. With all the alcohol frothing about they think there will be trouble – which there never is. They have a phrase for the fiesta which translates as 'the art of organised chaos'. In fact it's very well organized. And finally, unless you have a personal invite – which we do – there is nowhere to eat."

The Alcoy fiesta is staged over four days. The first night involves the fiesta opening ceremony and music in the handsome Plaza de España with around 1,000 marching musicians. But it's the following day when the real spectator action begins. There are always 28 troupes (or filás) made up by the town's confraternities who spend the whole year planning the next fiesta. They are divided equally into 14 Christian filás and 14 Moorish filás. All troupes are led by their captain, who's often on horseback and always keen to demonstrate

