



Where and when

Wherever you go throughout the Costa Blanca you will find Moors and Christians fiestas. The season kicks off in Bocairent in the first week of February, in the atmospheric, medieval setting of Bocairent old town. Very few tourists attend and this is reckoned to be one of the most authentic celebrations outside Alcoy. Near Alcoy the Cocentaina festival, held in August, is very colourful, and on the coast the fiestas at Jávea (July) and at Moraira (June) are worth seeing. At the latter the Moors arrive from the sea and a music festival (mostly pop and rock) is added to the revelries. Other good places to attend fiestas are Elche, Villajoyosa and Alicante. The Alicante celebrations are aimed squarely at locals and take place in early December.

Have you had
first-hand experience of
a fiesta?
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Above: Huge cigars and fearsome-looking weapons are the order of the day in Alcoy

had evaporated. No other fiesta had even vaguely prepared me for the noise that I was experiencing. Think of the loudest bang you've ever heard; now double it, and then multiply by ten. Imagine a bang so deafening that it vibrates not only the nearest windows but also your jaw, glasses and fillings, and simply defies you to take your hands away from your ears. In Britain it would be banned instantly on health and safety grounds; in Alcoy they can't get enough of it! Volley after volley rends the night air, ricocheting madly around the main square into which the Christian *filás* march to symbolically reclaim the town, or in this case a temporary wooden castle.

Brian was right: the tarmac did set alight on occasions, though no-one seemed at all perturbed, certainly not the septuagenarian Moors and Christians leaders who were happily firing volleys into the air within touching distance of each other, as if it were a normal street greeting. In fact it seemed only the British contingent thought the decibel level a tad high. Among the several hundred marchers, only one wore proper ear protectors and I could see very few marchers or spectators wearing any kind of ear plug. We lingered for around 20 minutes, observing

this curious bedlam, before our discomfort threshold was finally breached and we retreated to the nearest bar, musing on how much louder a real battle could possibly be.

For the inside track on the fiesta, Els Freres Hotel in Quatretondeta, a sleepy little place 12 miles from Alcoy, is offering a three-night package during the fiesta comprising: the opening ceremony and first night of music in Plaza de España with around 1,000 musicians; all day in Alcoy for the spectacular parades, including seats in a prime location, lunch in one of the fiesta clubhouses, and supper in a clubhouse with the members of the club, plus musicians in full costume; and a brief visit to witness the battles.

The package includes accommodation for three nights, all transport and most meals for €321 (£220) per person, based on two sharing. You can even continue the Moorish theme with the hotel's "Taste of Spain in the footsteps of the Moors" walking holiday. ☉

Els Freres Hotel
Tel: 00 34 965 511 234; www.inn-spain.com