

# Valencia



In 2005 more than five million overseas visitors chose the Comunidad Valenciana (Valencia region) as their holiday destination. Most descend upon the resorts of the thin coastal strip, where they stay put – except, perhaps, for a day trip to Valencia City. The more enterprising rent a bike or car, leave behind the coastal hedonism and explore the region's rich interior.

Valencia is both of Spain, and distinct from Spain. In Muslim hands for five centuries, its Christian European history has been shaped as much by Catalonia, its neighbour to the north, as by Castilla. The region's flag bears the red and yellow stripes of Catalonia and the mother tongue of many is Valenciano, a dialect of Catalan.

Valencia City, the region's capital, is famed for its nightlife, the wild Las Fallas spring festival and the stunning architecture of its Ciudad de las Artes y las Ciencias. At the time of writing, it's scheduled to be in the spotlight again when it hosts the America's Cup yacht race in 2007.

To the north, along the Costa del Azahar (Orange Blossom Coast), is a string of low-key resorts, plus the historic site of Sagunto. Southwards along the Costa Blanca (White Coast) stretch some of Spain's finest beaches. You can bar-hop and party in international resorts such as Benidorm, Torrevieja and the lively provincial capital of Alicante. Others, such as Denia and Gandia, still retain a much more Spanish flavour. Inland lies another world where mountains buckle and castles crown the hilltops: there's Morella, girt by its intact medieval walls; Xàtiva, with its own splendid castle; and Elche, with Europe's most extensive palm groves.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Fling fireworks and suffer serious sleep deprivation at **Las Fallas** (p586), Europe's wildest spring festival
- Take a sunset boat trip on **La Albufera** (p593) freshwater lake
- Bring your tent and shake your booty at **Festival Internacional de Benicàssim** (p605), Benicàssim's outdoor international music festival
- Gasp at the daring architecture of **Valencia City** (p581) in the Ciudad de las Artes y las Ciencias, and immerse yourself in the Oceanogràfic, Europe's largest aquarium
- Savour your first glimpse of the medieval fortress town of **Morella** (p608) from afar



■ AREA: 23,255 SQ KM

■ AVE SUMMER TEMP: HIGH 32°C,  
LOW 19°C

■ POP: 2.2 MILLION



## VALENCIA CITY

pop 738,400

In the first quarter of 2006, Valencia, Spain's third-largest city, registered a massive 30% increase in visitors compared to the previous year. But these were a mere trickle compared to the million and a half faithful who greeted the Pope in July, when he called by for a long weekend. Early in 2007 the city's set to receive tens of thousands of yachting when it's scheduled to host the America's Cup, while in 2008 it stages the World Indoor Athletics Championships.

This increasingly popular year-round short-break venue is where paella first simmered over a wood fire. It's a vibrant, friendly, mildly chaotic place with two outstanding fine-arts museums, an accessible old quarter, Europe's newest cultural and scientific complex – and one of Spain's most exciting nightlife scenes.

### HISTORY

Pensioned-off Roman legionaries founded 'Valentia' on the banks of Río Turia in 138 BC. The Arabs made Valencia an agricultural and industrial centre, establishing ceramics, paper, silk and leather industries and extending the network of irrigation canals in the rich agricultural hinterland.

Muslim rule was briefly interrupted in 1094 by the triumphant rampage of the legendary Castilian knight El Cid (see p225), but almost a century and a half were to elapse before the Christians definitively retook the city in 1238, when Jaime I incorporated the area into his burgeoning Catalan kingdom.

Valencia's golden age was in the 15th and 16th centuries, when it was one of the Mediterranean's strongest trading centres. Like Catalonia, Valencia backed the wrong horse in the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–13) and in retribution the victorious Bourbon king Felipe V abolished Valencia's *fueros*, the autonomous privileges the city had enjoyed. The Spanish Civil War proved similarly unlucky; Valencia, having sided with the Republicans (and acted as seat of the Republican government from November 1936 until October 1937) was slighted for years by successive nationalist governments.

The *fueros* may not have been restored but, benefiting from the decentralisation that followed Franco's death, Valencia today enjoys a high degree of autonomy.

### CREEPING CATALAN

More and more town halls are replacing street signs in Spanish with the Valenciano/Catalan equivalent (though more broad-minded local authorities still sign in both). While the difference between the two versions is often minimal, this can sometimes be a source of confusion for visitors. Occasionally we use the Valenciano version where it's clearly the dominant one. But since Spanish is the version every local understands and the majority uses, we've elected to stick with it in most cases.

### ORIENTATION

The 'action' part of the city is an oval area bounded by the old course of Río Turia, long ago diverted, and the sickle-shaped inner ring road of Calles de Colón, Xàtiva and de Guillem de Castro. This traces the walls of the old city, demolished in 1865 as a job-creation project.

Within the oval are three major squares: Plazas del Ayuntamiento, de la Reina (also known as Plaza de Zaragoza) and de la Virgen. The oldest quarter of the city, the Barrio del Carmen (or El Carmé), is delimited by Plaza de la Virgen, the Torres de Quart and Seranos, and the Turia riverbed.

Best and easiest to handle of several competing commercial maps of town is the *Gran Plano de Valencia* at 1:9000, produced by Bayarri.

### INFORMATION

#### Bookshops

**Casa del Llibre** (Map p582; ☎ 96 353 00 80; www.casadelllibre.com; Passeig Russafa 11) Offspring of the giant Madrid mother store, with a reasonable stock of books in English.

**Llibreria Patagonia** (Map p582; ☎ 96 393 60 52; Calle Santa Amalia 2) An excellent travel bookshop with some guides in English, including Lonely Planet titles.

#### Emergency

EU standard emergency number (☎ 112)

Medical emergency (☎ 085)

**Policia Nacional** (Map p582; ☎ 091; Gran Via de Ramón y Cajal 40) For serious stuff.

#### Internet Access

**Oro** (Map p582; Calle San Vicente Màrtir 22; per hr €3;

11 10am–1am)

**Work Center** (Map p582; Calle Xàtiva 19; per hr €4;

11 24hrs)

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**VALENCIA CITY**

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## Internet Resources

### Region of Valencia (www.comunitatvalenciana.com)

The Valencia tourism authority's excellent official site. The main site is multilingual and includes some English information, or try the English site.

## Money

**Viajes Duna** (Map p580; % 96 374 15 62; Calle Cirilo Amorós 88) Represents American Express.

## Post

**Main post office** (Map p582; Plaza del Ayuntamiento)

## Tourist Information

Call % 902 12 32 12 throughout the region for tourist information (at premium rates).

**Diputación (Provincial) tourist office** (Map p582;

% 96 351 49 07; www.valenciaterramar.org; Calle Poeta Querol s/n; h 9.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-2pm Sat, 11.30am-2pm Sun) At the Teatro Principal.

**Regional tourist office** (Map p582; % 96 398 64 22; Calle Paz 48; h 9am-2.30pm & 4.30-8pm Mon-Fri) The best informed office.

**Valencia Convention Bureau tourist office** (% 96 315 39 31; www.turisvalencia.es) Plaza de la Reina (Map p582; Plaza de la Reina 19; h 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun); Train Station (Map p582) Also has a branch at the airport arrivals area.

## SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

### Ciudad de las Artes y las Ciencias

The aesthetically stunning Ciudad de las Artes y las Ciencias (City of Arts & Sciences; Map p580; % reservations 902 10 00 31; www.cac.es; Autovía a El Saler; combined ticket for all 3 attractions adult/child €29.90/22.40) occupies a massive 350,000-sq-metre swath of the old Turia riverbed. It's mostly the work of local architect Santiago Calatrava, designer of, among many other exciting creations around the world, the transportation terminal for the new World Trade Center site in New York.

The Hemisféric (Map p580; adult/child €7.50/5.80) is a planetarium, IMAX cinema and laser show in one, all with optional English commentary.

The Museo de las Ciencias Príncipe Felipe (Map p580; adult/child €7.50/5.80; h 10am-6pm or 8pm) is an interactive science museum where each section has a pamphlet in English summarising its contents.

The highlight of the complex, especially if you have young children, will probably be the Oceanográfico (Map p580; adult/child €22/16.60; h 10am-6pm or 8pm Sep-Jul, 10am-midnight Aug). The aquariums of this watery world have sufficient water sloshing around to fill 15 Olympic-size

swimming pools. There are also polar zones, a dolphinarium, a Red Sea aquarium, a Mediterranean seascape – and a couple of underwater tunnels, one 70m long, where the fish have the chance to gawp at visitors.

The Palau de les Arts Reina Sofía (Map p580; % 902 10 00 32; www.lesarts.com; Autovía a El Saler) broods over the riverbed like a giant beetle, its shell shimmering with translucent mosaic tiles. With four auditoriums and seating for 4400, it's exceeded in capacity only by the Sydney Opera House.

Take bus 14, 15 or 35 from Calle Játiva and bus 95 from Torres de Serranos or Plaza de América.

### Museo de Historia de Valencia

The Museo de Historia de Valencia (% 96 370 11 05; Calle Valencia 42; adult/child €2/1; h 10am-2pm & 4.30-8.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun), above the riverbed Parque de Cabecera, plots more than 2000 years of the city's history. Hands-on and with lots of film and video, it's great fun – even if your Spanish isn't too hot. Ask to borrow the museum's informative folder in English. Take bus 3, 81 or 95 or get off at the Nou d'Octubre metro stop.

### Museo de Bellas Artes

The Museo de Bellas Artes (Fine Arts Museum; Map p582; % 96 378 03 00; Calle San Pio V 9; admission free; h 10am-8pm Tue-Sun) ranks among Spain's best, with works by El Greco, Goya, Velázquez, Murillo, Ribalta and artists such as Sorolla and Pinazo of the Valencian impressionist school.

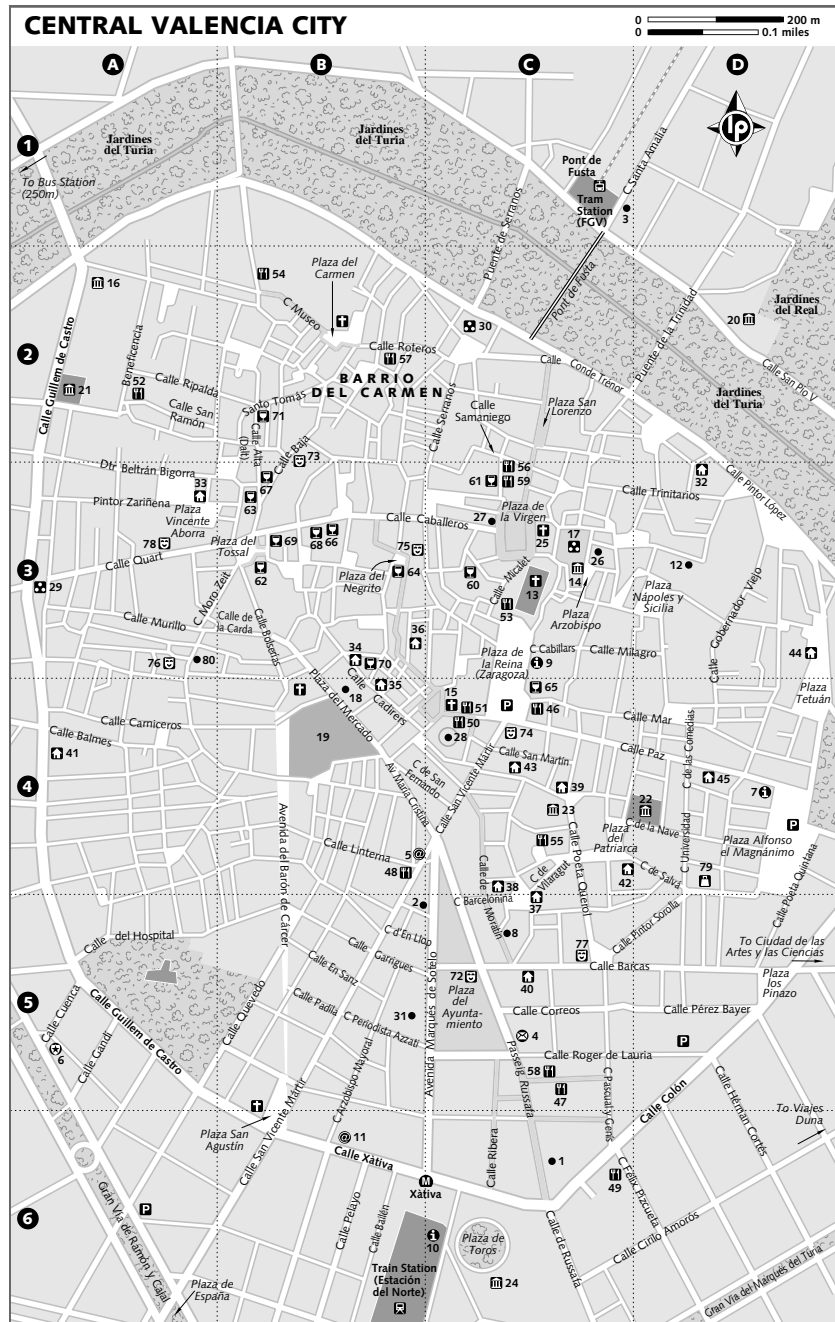
### Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno (IVAM)

IVAM (Map p582; % 96 386 30 00; Calle Guillem de Castro 118; adult/student €2/1, Sun free; h 10am-10pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-8pm Oct-May), pronounced 'ee-bam', is currently in the throes of a major expansion. It houses an impressive permanent collection of 20th-century Spanish art and hosts excellent temporary exhibitions.

### Cathedral

The cathedral (Map p582; adult/child with audioguide €3/2.10; h 8am-8.30pm) is a microcosm of the city's architectural history; the Puerta del Palau on Plaza de la Virgen is Romanesque; the dome, tower and Puerta de los Apóstoles are Gothic; the presbytery and main entrance on Plaza de la Reina are baroque; and there are a couple of Renaissance chapels inside.

In the flamboyant Gothic Capilla del Santo Cáliz, right of the main entrance, is what's



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claimed to be the Holy Grail, the chalice from which Christ sipped during the Last Supper. A door leads to the cathedral museum, with its rich collection of vestments and statuary. The next chapel north, La Capilla de San Francisco de Borja, has a pair of particularly sensitive Goyas.

Left of the main portal is the entrance to the Miguelete bell tower (adult/child €1.20/0.60; 10am-1pm & 4.30-6pm). Climb the 207 steps of its spiral staircase for great city-and-skyline views.

As for over a thousand years, the Tribunal de las Aguas (Water Court) meets every Thursday at noon outside the cathedral's Plaza del Palau. Here, local farmers' irrigation disputes are settled in Valenciano.

## Plaza de la Virgen &amp; Around

The plaza occupies the site that was once the forum of Roman Valencia, on the spot where its main north-south and east-west highways met. Beside the cathedral is the church of Nuestra Señora de los Desamparados (Map p582; 7am-2pm & 4-9pm). Above the altar is a highly venerated statue

of the Virgin, patron of the city. Opposite is the handsome 15th-century Gothic – and much amended – Palau de la Generalitat (Map p582), seat of government for the Valencia region. The reclining figure in the central fountain represents the Río Turia, while the eight maidens with their gushing pots symbolise the main irrigation canals flowing from it.

Through the transparent viewing area of the archaeological site of La Almoína (Map p582), just east of the square and Valencia's newest urban space, you can look down on the remains, Roman, Arab and Christian.

Beside it, the Cripta de la Cárcel de San Vicente Mártir (Map p582; 96 934 14 17; Plaza del Arzobispo; adult/child €2/1, Sat & Sun free; 9.30am-2pm & 5.30-8pm Tue-Sat, 9.30am-2pm Sun) was reputedly used as a prison for the 4th-century martyr San Vicente. Although the crypt of this Visigoth chapel isn't particularly memorable in itself, it's worth taking in the multimedia show that presents Valencia's history and the saint's life and death. Reserve by phone or at the Palacio del Marqués de Campo (Map p582), just opposite, and ask for a showing in English.



## LAS FALLAS

The exuberant, anarchic swirl of **Las Fallas de San José** – fireworks, music, festive bonfires and all-night partying – is a must if you're in Spain between 12 and 19 March.

The *fallas* themselves are huge sculptures of papier-mâché on wood (with, increasingly, environmentally damaging polystyrene), built by teams of local artists. Each neighbourhood sponsors its own *falla*, and when the town wakes after the *plantà* (overnight construction of the *fallas*) on the morning of 16 March, more than 350 have been erected. Reaching up to 15m in height, with the most expensive costing more than €120,000 (oh yes, we've got those eurozeros right!), these grotesque, colourful effigies satirise celebrities, current affairs and local customs.

Around-the-clock festivities include street parties, paella-cooking competitions, parades, open-air concerts, bullfights and nightly free firework displays. Valencia considers itself the pyrotechnic capital of the world and each day at 2pm from 1 to 19 March a *masclètà* (over five minutes of deafening thumps and explosions) shakes the window panes of Plaza del Ayuntamiento.

After midnight on the final day each *falla* goes up in flames – backed by yet more fireworks.

(admiring the fine mansions as you go) or continue down Calle Bolserías. Turn left into Plaza del Mercado and allow yourself time to browse around the Mercado Central (6; p589) and Lonja (7; p584).

Bear right at the junction with Calle San Vicente Mártir to detour briefly and take in Plaza del Ayuntamiento (8), where the neoclassical town hall (9) looks across to the neobaroque splendour of Valencia's main post office (10). Pop inside to savour its freshly renovated interior – more like a theatre foyer than a place to post a letter – and raise your eyes to the magnificent leaded-glass dome. Returning, head north up Calle San Vicente Mártir to Plaza de la Reina (11), wide and a bit soulless – something that can't be said for the bar Finnegan's (12; p590). With the walk's end almost in sight, you might want to reward yourself with a Guinness here. Otherwise, slip up the lane that runs to the left (west) of the cathedral to rejoin your starting point.

## COURSES

### Cooking

**Escuela de Cocina Eneldo** (☎ 96 395 54 57; www.cocinaeneldo.com in Spanish; Calle Joaquín Costa 45) Cooking's a very demonstrable discipline so even if your Spanish isn't up to scratch, pitch in and get your hands floury.

### Dance

**Academia de Baile Maria Cruz Alcalá** (☎ 96 334 42 31; Calle Salamanca 20) Runs three dance schools around Valencia City.

**Centre Professional de Dansa Valencià** (☎ 96 385 80 54; centredansavalencia@hotmail.com; Calle Calixto III 11-13) Offers everything from traditional Spanish to belly dancing.

**Estudio de Danza Maria Carbonell** (☎ 96 380 58 43; www.mariacarbonell.com in Spanish; Calle Cádiz 54) Forming dancers for over 20 years.

## Spanish Language

**Babylon Idiomas** (☎ 96 315 33 32; www.babylon-idiomas.com; Calle San Vicente Mártir 2)

**Intereuropa** (Map p582; ☎ 96 394 49 95; www.intereuropa.es; Plaza del Ayuntamiento 5)

**Route 66 Idiomas** (Map p582; ☎ 96 342 73 68; www.route66idiomas.com; Calle Moratin 15) Hey, it even thrives in free bike hire for the duration of your course.

## VALENCIA FOR CHILDREN

**Beaches** (p584), of course: nearest is the combined beach of Malvarrosa and Las Arenas (the latter meaning 'sand'), a shortish bus or tram ride from the centre. The high-speed tram is fun: feel the G-force as it surges along. The other great playground, year-round, is the diverted Río Turia's former 9km riverbed. Of its formal playgrounds, Gulliver (p584) just asks to be clambered all over.

Within the Jardines del Real (Los Viveros gardens, p584), there's a miniature road system, complete with traffic signs and bridges. You have to take your own bike, trike or pedal car, but it's great fun – and a learning experience too. The Jardín Botánico (p584) is altogether more peaceful; mind the cactuses and feral cats, play hide-and-peek in amongst the trees and keep an eye out for frogs in the fountain.

Of the Ciudad de las Artes y las Ciencias' diversions (p581), the Oceanogràfic, with more than 45,000 aquatic beasts and plants, has something for all ages. The science museum, reasonably documented in English, is more

for over-twelves (we have seen primary-school kids innocently and casually wrecking the hands-on exhibits), while the IMAX cinema offers thrills for all. The fun is far from free, however, so do research the range of family and combined tickets.

## TOURS

### Bicycle Tours

**Valencia Guías** (Map p580; ☎ 96 385 17 40; www.valenciaguias.com; Paseo de la Pechina 32) conducts 3½-hour guided tours (in Spanish and English) of Valencia by bike (€22 including rental), leaving from their premises at 10am. They'll turn out daily and require a minimum of only two cyclists.

**Orange Bikes** (Map p582; ☎ 96 391 75 51; www.orangebikes.net; Calle Santa Teresa 8) runs similar guided visits for a maximum of eight participants (see p592).

### Bus Tours

**Valencia Bus Turístico** (☎ 96 341 44 00) runs 90-minute city tours (adult/child €12/6) with a recorded commentary in eight languages. Buses leave from Plaza de la Reina, tickets are valid for 24 hours and you can hop off and on at five sites en route.

It also does a similar multilingual tour of La Albufera (p593; adult/child €12/6, two hours), including a half-hour boat trip on the lagoon and trips to Sagunto (p593; €15, 2½ hours).

## Walking Tours

**Valencia Guías** (Map p580; ☎ 96 385 17 40; www.valenciaguias.com; Paseo de la Pechina 32) does two-hour walking tours in Spanish and English (adult/child €12/6), leaving Plaza de la Reina tourist office at 10am each Saturday (Thursdays too, mid-June to mid-September).

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

### March/April

**Las Fallas** See the boxed text, opposite.

**Semana Santa** (Easter) Elaborate Holy Week processions in the seaside district of La Malvarrosa.

**Fiesta de San Vicente Ferrer** (Sunday after Easter) Colourful parades and miracle plays performed around town.

### May

**Fiesta de la Virgen** (second Sunday of May) The effigy of the Virgen de los Desamparados, hemmed in by fervent believers struggling to touch her, makes the short journey across Plaza de la Virgen to the cathedral.

## June

**Corpus Christi** (ninth Sunday after Easter) Celebrated with an elaborate procession and mystery plays.

**Día de San Juan** (Midsummer's Day, 23-24 June) Thousands mark the longest day with bonfires on the beach.

## July

**Feria de Julio** (second half of July) Performing arts, brass band competitions, bullfights, fireworks and a 'battle of the flowers', when decorated horse-drawn floats parade down Paseo de la Alameda while their occupants and spectators pelt each other with tens of thousands of marigolds.

## October

**Valencia Bienial** (October-November, odd years) A festival of modern visual arts with exhibitions all over town.

**Festival of Mediterranean Cinema** A week of films from around the Mediterranean.

**Día de la Comunidad** (9 October) Commemorates the city's 1238 liberation from the Arabs.

## SLEEPING

### Budget

**Hôme Backpackers** (Map p582; ☎ 96 391 37 97; www.likeathome.net; Calle Santa Cristina s/n; dm €14.50, tr/q €51/68; i ) This, the simplest of the Hôme team's three excellent budget options, each with self-catering facilities, has 170 beds and a large roof terrace for chilling out or soaking in the sun.

**Red Nest Hostel** (Map p582; ☎ 96 342 71 68; www.nestyh.com; dm €14-17, d €41-47, q €70-78) This cheerful hostel has brightly decorated rooms ranging from doubles to dorms accommodating 12.

**Purple Nest Hostel** (Map p582; ☎ 96 353 25 61; Plaza Tetuan 5; dm €14-17, d €41-47, q €70-78; a ) Red Nest's big brother, just round the corner, observes the same rates and some rooms have aircon and en suite bathroom.

**Pensión París** (Map p582; ☎ 96 352 67 66; www.pensionparis.com; 1st & 3rd fl, Calle de Salvá 12; basic s/d/tr €20/30/45, d/tr with shower €35/48, d with bathroom €38)

Welcoming, with spotless rooms and corridor bathrooms, this family-run option on a quiet street is the antithesis of the crowded, pack 'em in hostel.

**Hostal Antigua Morellana** (Map p582; ☎ 96 391 57 73; www.hostalam.com; Calle En Bou 2; s €33-58, d €48-58; a ) The friendly, family-run 18-room Hostal Antigua Morellana is tucked away near the central market. Occupying a renovated 18th-century building on a quiet street, the hotel has cosy, good-sized rooms, most with balconies.

Other recommended budget choices:

**Hôte Deluxe Hostel** (Map p582; ☎ 96 391 46 91; www.likeathome.net; Calle Cadirers 11)

**Hôte Youth Hostel** (Map p582; ☎ 96 391 62 29; www.likeathome.net; Calle Lonja 4)

**Indigo Youth Hostel** (Map p582; ☎ 96 315 39 88; www.indigohostel.com; Calle Guillem de Castro 64)

## Midrange

Since Valencia is a business centre, big hotels struggle to fill rooms at weekends and most offer fat weekend and high summer discounts.

**Hotel Excelsior** (Map p582; ☎ 96 351 46 12; www.hoteles-catalonia.com; Calle Barcelonina 5; s/d with breakfast €85/97; a ) The spacious rooms at this recently renovated hotel have gleaming parquet flooring and lavish marble bathrooms. Central and welcoming, it also has a small, pleasant downstairs bar area.

**Petit Palace Bristol** (Map p582; ☎ 96 394 51 00; www.hoteles.com; Calle Abadía San Martín 3; s €80-120, d €90-140; n a i ) Hip, minimalist and friendly, this lovely boutique hotel, a comprehensively made-over, 19th-century mansion, retains the best of its past and does a particularly scrumptious buffet breakfast. It's well worthwhile paying €10 extra for one of the superior doubles on the top, fifth floor.

**Hotel Inglés** (Map p582; ☎ 96 351 64 26; www.meliaingles.solmelia.com; Calle Marqués de Dos Aguas 6; r €82-138; n a i ) In a stylishly renovated, much modified 18th-century palace, the Hotel Inglés has rooms with parquet floors, dark, stained-wood bedheads and a large glass-topped working table. The café and some bedrooms overlook the glorious rococo main entrance to the Palacio del Marqués de Dos Aguas.

**Hotel Reina Victoria** (Map p582; ☎ 96 352 04 87; www.husa.es; Calle Barcas 4; s €82-115, d €93-191; n a ) If you go for faded charm and favour a central position, this grand old place, comprehensively renovated, will please. Bedrooms are large (singles are particularly roomy) and attractively furnished.

**Jardín Botánico** (Map p580; ☎ 96 315 40 12; www.hoteljardinbotanico.com; Calle Doctor Peset Cervera 6; s €94-112, d €94-124; n a ) Welcoming and megacool ('Chill Out' is their slogan), this intimate – only 16 rooms – hotel is furnished with great flair. Understandably, the Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno (IVAM), an easy walk away, regularly selects it as a venue for its guests.

**Ad Hoc** (Map p582; ☎ 96 315 91 40; www.adhoc.hoteles.com; Calle Boix 4; s/d €99/119; a ) Friendly, welcoming Ad Hoc offers comfort and charm deep

within the old quarter and also runs a splendid small restaurant. The late-19th-century building has been restored to its former splendour with great sensitivity, revealing original ceilings, mellow brickwork and solid wooden beams.

## Top End

**Hotel Astoria Palace** (Map p582; ☎ 96 398 10 00; www.hotel-astoria-palace.com; Plaza Rodrigo Botet 5; s/d €110/142, d with breakfast Fri-Sun €94; p n a ) Although facing increasingly keen competition from younger luxury upstarts, Hotel Astoria, almost 50 years in business, can still hold its own for top-end comfort and attentive service.

**Palau del Mar** (Map p580; ☎ 96 316 28 84; www.hospes.es; Calle Navarro Reverter 14; r from €110; n a s ) Created by the merging of two elegant 19th-century mansions (with 18 very similar rooms, newly constructed, surrounding a tranquil internal garden), this boutique hotel, all black, white, soft fuscous and beige, is cool, confident and ultra-modern. There's a sauna and a Jacuzzi – and a pool scarcely bigger than your bathtub.

**Neptuno** (☎ 96 356 77 77; www.hotelneptunovalencia.com; Paseo de Neptuno 2; s €110-180, d €110-225; p n a ) The Neptuno, overlooking the beach, is a very stylish, ultramodern newcomer. It's also an ideal choice if you want to mix cultural tourism with a little beach frolicking. It runs a superb on-site gourmet restaurant, Tridente.

## EATING

Valencia is the capital of *la huerta*, a fertile coastal agricultural plain that supplies the city with delightfully fresh fruit and vegetables.

Rice is the staple of much Valencian cuisine – and the basis of the dish Valencia exported to the world: paella. Other local favourites include *arroz a banda* (rice simmered in a fish stock), *arroz negro* (rice with squid, including its ink) and *arroz al horno* (rice baked in the oven). Then there's *fideuá*, a paella made with noodles instead of rice. Valencians usually eat rice only at lunchtime, when locals in their hundreds head for Las Arenas, just north of the port.

## Around Plaza del Ayuntamiento

**En Bandeja** (Map p582; ☎ 96 394 06 95; Calle San Vicente Mártir 24; h 8.30am-9pm Mon-Sat Sep-May, 8.30am-9pm Mon-Fri Jun-Aug) This relaxed self-service place does excellent-value continental breakfasts (€3.50) and lunches (€8.90 including a drink and coffee).

**Fresc Co** (Map p582; ☎ 96 310 63 88; Calle Felix Pizcueta 6; h dinner daily, lunch Sat & Sun) Fresc Co's all-you-can eat buffet offers a veritable kitchen garden of salad items and a choice of pasta or pizza. With its bare, mellow brickwork, it's an agreeable place to dine in (dinner from €9.70), though you're not encouraged to linger once dessert's over.

**La Utielana** (Map p582; ☎ 96 352 94 14; Plaza Picadero dos Aguas 3; meals €12; h lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, lunch Sat) Tucked away off Calle Prócida and not easy to track down, La Utielana well merits a minute or two's sleuthing. Very Valencian, it packs in the crowds, drawn by the wholesome fare and exceptional value for money. Arrive early as it doesn't take reservations.

There's a cluster of superb upmarket seafood restaurants along pedestrianised Calle Mosén Femades, including **Palacio de la Belota** (Map p582; ☎ 96 351 53 61; Calle Mosén Femades 7; h lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) and **Civera Centro** (Map p582; ☎ 96 352 97 64; Calle Mosén Femades 10; a ). For both, count on at least €50 per head, including wine.

A visit to the magnificent covered market, the **Mercado Central** (Map p582; Plaza del Mercado; h 7.30am-2.30pm Mon-Sat), is a must, even if you only browse.

## Around Plaza de la Virgen

**Las Cuevas** (Map p582; ☎ 96 391 71 96; Calle Samaniego 9; tapas €2.50-7) 'The Caves', a low-ceilinged, semi-basement and aptly named, carries a huge range of tapas.

**Seu-Xerea** (Map p582; ☎ 96 392 40 00; Calle Conde Almodóvar 4; meals €25; h lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) This smart, welcoming restaurant is favourably quoted in almost every English-language press article about Valencia City. Its creative, regularly changing à la carte menu features dishes both international and rooted in Spain. It does a warmly recommended lunchtime *menú del día* (daily set menu; €15).

**La Lola** (Map p582; ☎ 96 391 80 45; Subida del Tolelano 8; meals €25; h lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Up an alley beside the cathedral, here's a very suave number where cool jazz trills. Desserts such as creamed white chocolate, raspberry delight, gooey Greek yoghurt, pistachio and crunchy biscuit (oh yes, that's all one dish) are wickedly tempting.

**Burdeos in Love** (Map p582; ☎ 96 391 43 50; Calle Mar 4; meals €25; h lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, lunch Sat) At this smart restaurant with its modern, clean-lined décor, both the midday *menú* (€16) and the

*menú degustación* (€36) are excellent value and there's an impressive wine list, especially of Spanish reds.

## Elsewhere in El Barrio del Carmen

**La Tastaolletes** (Map p582; ☎ 96 392 18 62; Calle Salvador Giner 6; menú €10; h lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, dinner Mon; v ) This tiny place does a creative range of vegetable tapas. Pleasantly informal, it's worth visiting for the friendly atmosphere and good, wholesome food created from quality prime ingredients. Salads are frondy and the cheese-cake with stewed fruits, a dream.

**La Lluna** (Map p582; ☎ 96 392 21 46; Calle San Ramon 23; meals €15; h lunch & dinner Mon-Sat; v ) La Lluna has been serving quality, reasonably priced vegetarian fare for over 25 years. On two floors, its walls elaborately tiled, it offers lots of choices plus daily specials (go for the seaweed salad if it's on).

**Ana Eva** (Map p580; ☎ 96 391 53 69; Calle Turia 49; meals €20; h lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun; v ) The smartest of Valencia's vegetarian options, just beyond the Barrio, has tasteful décor and a delightful rear patio. Staff prepare some very imaginative dishes and do great juices. With starters including rice, pasta, potatoes and couscous, you won't walk out bloating.

**Mattilda** (Map p582; ☎ 96 382 31 68; Calle Rotereros 21; menus €12, mains €14.60-19; h lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) The décor is stylish and modern at this relative newcomer, run by a cheery young team. There's an imaginative à la carte selection and a particularly good-value lunch *menú*.

## Las Arenas

In Las Arenas, a long line of restaurants overlooking the beach all serve up authentic paella in a three-course meal costing under €15.

**La Lonja del Pescado Frito** (☎ 96 355 35 35; Calle Eugenia Vines 243; meals €15; h dinner Tue-Fri, lunch & dinner Sat & Sun Mar-Oct, Sat & Sun Nov-Feb) One block back from the beach at Malvarrosa and right beside the tram stop, this busy, informal place in what's little more than an adorned tin shack offers unbeatable value for fresh fish. Grab an order form as you enter and fill it in at your table.

**La Pepica** (☎ 96 371 03 66; Paseo Neptuno 6) Larger and more expensive than its competitors and renowned for its rice dishes and seafood, this is where Ernest Hemingway, among many other luminaries, once strutted. Between courses, browse through the photos and tributes that plaster the walls.

## DRINKING

Fuelled by a large student population and an overdeveloped sense of competitiveness with Madrid and Barcelona, Valencia has a justified reputation for having one of Spain's best nightlife scenes.

The Barrio del Carmen has both the grungiest and grooviest collection of bars. The other major area is around the university; Avenidas de Aragón and Blasco Ibáñez and surrounding streets have enough bars and *discotecas* to keep you busy beyond sunrise.

Two other zones worth checking out are around the Mercado de Abastos and Plaza de Cánovas; while in summer, Malvarrosa, north of the port, comes alive.

### Barrio del Carmen

'El Carmé' has everything from designer bars and yuppie pubs to grungy thrash-metal haunts and punk bars. On weekends, Calle Caballeros, the main street, seethes with revelers seeking *la marcha* (the action).

Plaza del Tossal is rimmed by sophisticated bars. The interior of **Café Infanta** (Map p582; Plaza del Tossal) is a clutter of cinema memorabilia. The 1st floor of **San Jaume** (Map p582; Plaza del Tossal), a converted pharmacy that's all quiet crannies and poky passageways, is altogether more intimate. Both have great people-watching terraces.

On Calle Caballeros are a couple of bars for beautiful people: **Johnny Maracas** (Map p582; Calle Caballeros 39) is a suave salsa place with fish tanks on the bar, and **Fox Congo** (Map p582; Calle Caballeros 35) has a cool back-lit alabaster bar and walls clad in leather and sheet-metal.

**Cafe-Bar Negrito** (Map p582; Plaza del Negrito) At this bar, which traditionally attracts a more left-wing, intellectual clientele, the crowd spills out onto the square.

**John Silver** (Map p582; Calle Alta 8) Low, dark and named after the monopod old pirate

### HORCHATA

Horchata is a sweet, opaque local drink made from pressed *chufas* (tiger nuts), into which you dip large finger-shaped buns called *fartons*; both name and taste are to savour. Two traditional places to sample it in the heart of town are **Horchatería de Santa Catalina** (Map p582; Plaza Santa Catalina) and **Horchatería el Siglo** (Map p582; Plaza Santa Catalina).

himself (his wooden leg hangs behind the bar), this place is typical of the cheaper bars north of Plaza del Tossal.

**Xino Xano** (Map p582; Calle Alta 28) The genial owner, a well-known DJ in his own right, picks from his collection of dub, reggae and funk.

### Other Areas

**Café de las Horas** (Map p582; Calle Conde de Almodóvar 1) This place offers high baroque, tapestries, music of all genres, candelabras and a long list of exotic cocktails.

**Finnegan's** (Map p582; Plaza de la Reina) Longest established of Valencia's several Irish bars, it's a popular meeting place for English speakers.

**Lounge** (Map p582; % 96 391 80 94; Calle Estameñaría Vieja 2) A true Irish bar without a false fiddle or unread copy of James Joyce in sight, this friendly place with an Internet terminal is where locals and visitors interact (ask about their weekly conversational interchanges).

Near the Mercado de Abastos, just west of the town centre, Calle Juan Lloréns and surrounding streets are in another hip area. Drop into modish **Akuarela** (Map p580; Calle Juan Lloréns 49); the smaller **Maruja Limón** (Map p580; Calle Juan 54), strong on Spanish pop; or, for a little Pharaonic frenzy, **Anubis** (Map p580; Calle Juan 34) with its ancient Egyptian theme.

Just east of the centre, Plaza de Cánovas, rather tamer, attracts a younger crowd. **Plaza** (Map p580; Plaza de Cánovas) is a stylish corner bar on the square itself. Around the corner, a pair of congenial neighbours, **Abbey Road** (Map p580; Calle Serrano Morales) and **Década Loca** (Map p580; Calle Serrano Morales), wait to pull you in.

### ENTERTAINMENT

*La Turia* and *Que y Donde* are weekly guides in Spanish on sale at kiosks and newsagents. *Hello Valencia* (Spanish and English) and *24-7 Valencia* (in English) are free monthlies. *Cool Carmen* has tip-offs about places within the Barrio del Carmen and *Thisisvalencia Mapazine* (www.thisisvalencia.com) is in the same genre (its website has much greater detail). All four are available in tourist offices and selected bars and clubs.

### Clubs

**Radio City** (Map p582; Santa Teresa 19; 11pm-late) At weekends, Radio City has a free disco that's good for post-bar dancing to salsa, house and sometimes cheesy pop. There's live flamenco at 11pm on Tuesday.

### GAY VALENCIA

There's a small gay rectangle in the Barrio del Carmen where most of the enticing venues beckon.

**Café de la Seu** (Map p582; % 96 391 57 15; Calle Santo Cáliz 7; 11 Mon-Sat) and **Café Sant Miguel** (Map p582; % 96 392 31 29; Plaza Sant Miguel 13; 11 Tue-Sun winter, daily summer) are a couple of relaxing, gay-friendly places, the latter with a large, popular terrace.

**Venial** (Map p582; % 96 391 73 56; www.venialvalencia.com; Calle Quart 26; 11 1-7.30am), with its house and techno music and a quieter chill-out zone, is far and away the city's most popular gay dance venue. It's also big on cabarets and theme nights.

**Deseo 54** (Map p580; www.deseo54.com; Calle Pepita 15; 11 1.30am Sat) is a gay disco for the stay-through-till-dawn crowd where the music's mainly pop remixes.

For more life after 3am, head to the university area along and around Avenida Blasco Ibáñez and Avenida de Aragón. Most *discotecas* have cover charges of up to €10, although discounted passes are often available from local bars.

**Caribbean's** (Map p580; Calle Bélgica 5; 11 Tue-Sat) Drinks are decently priced at this club, which plays a mixture of house, hip-hop and R&B.

**Rumbo 144** (Map p580; Avenida Blasco Ibáñez 146; 11 Thu-Sat Sep-Jul) This is a funky, large-floored place with a light show. Thursday is student night.

**Warhol** (Map p580; Avenida Blasco Ibáñez 111; 11 Wed-Sat) Across the road from Rumbo 144, Warhol is a smallish venue playing eclectic music that attracts a predominantly student crowd.

**Bananas** (% 96 178 17 06; Carretera Valencia-Alicante, El Romani; 11 midnight Fri & Sat) Just about the maxiest maxidisco you'll ever party at, Bananas packs in dancers by the thousand, playing techno with a leavening of house. Forget taxi lines: take the special train that leaves Estación del Norte at 1.15am, go Bananas and return on the early bird at 6.15am.

**Dub Club** (Map p580; www.dubclubvalencia.com; Calle Jesús 91; 11 Thu-Sun) With the slogan 'We play music not noise', this is a bar that has great music: reggae (Thursday), dub, drum 'n' bass, funk and more. Tuesday is live jazz jamming night.

**La Claca** (Map p582; % 669 325079; www.laclaca.com; Calle San Vicente Mártir 3; 11 7pm-3.30am) La Claca has nightly DJs playing funk, hip hop and indie. Earmark 11.30pm Sunday for some of the best live flamenco in town. It also gives flamenco classes if you fancy expanding your dance-floor repertoire.

**La Marxa** (Map p582; % 96 391 70 65; Calle Cocinas 5; 11 11pm-3am) This is a popular late-late choice. Raucous, thumping and pumping, it pulls in all sorts from hardened local partyers to international students fresh in town and out for something a little raw.

### Cinemas

**Filmoteca** (Map p582; % 96 399 55 77; Plaza del Ayuntamiento; admission €1.50) This cinema, on the 4th floor of the Teatro Rialto building, screens undubbed classic, arthouse and experimental films – and hasn't raised its admission price in 20 years!

Valencia has two multiscreen cinemas that show exclusively undubbed films and share a website (www.cinesalbatrosbabel.com): **Albatros** (Map p580; % 96 393 26 77; Plaza Fray Luis Colomer) and **Babel** (Map p580; % 96 362 67 95; Calle Vicente Sancho Tello 10). Admission prices are lower on Monday.

### Theatre & Opera

**Teatro Principal** (Map p582; % 96 353 92 00; Calle Barcas 15) This is Valencia's main venue for opera and the performing arts.

**Palau de la Música** (Map p582; % 96 337 50 20; www.palauvalencia.com in Spanish; Paseo de la Alameda 30) A huge, glass-domed concert hall, this venue hosts mainly classical music recitals.

**Palau de les Arts Reina Sofía** (Map p580; % 902 10 00 31; Autovía a El Saler) The Palau de la Música is overshadowed in size alone by this brand new venue with its four auditoriums.

### Live Music

**Black Note** (Map p580; % 96 393 36 63; Calle de Polo y Peyrolón 15) Valencia City's most active jazz venue has live music Monday to Thursday and good canned jazz, blues and soul on Friday and Saturday.

**Jimmy Glass** (Map p582; Calle Baja 28) Come here to listen to cool jazz from the owner's vast CD collection, and live performers at 9.30pm on alternate Tuesdays.

**El Loco** (Map p580; % 96 326 05 26; Calle Erudito Orellana 12) This place puts on live concerts from Wednesday to Saturday and runs house and techno sessions on other nights.



**Cormorán** (Map p580; ☎ 607 659705; Calle San Vicente Mártir 200) Cormorán has the pulling power to bring in the big names of pop and rock. With a couple of auditoriums on two floors, it's open only when there's a gig.

### Football

The city, as football crazy as any other corner of the Mediterranean, has a highly successful soccer team, Valencia Club de Fútbol, Spanish League Champions 2003 and 2004 and UEFA cup holders in 2004. You can pick up a scarf, woolly hat, shirt or other memento from the club's shop (Calle Pintor Sorolla 24).

Valencia's other professional club, Levante, a minnow by comparison, has lately bounced in and out of the Spanish first division. Should they still be up there by the time you hit town, do take in a game; they'll be needing all the support they can get.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

#### Air

Valencia's **Aeropuerto de Manises** (☎ 96 159 85 00) is 10km west of the city centre along the A3, in the direction of Madrid.

Less than five years ago, not one budget airline buzzed in to Valencia. Today seven low-cost flights daily fly to/from UK airports, in addition to national carriers BA and Iberia. Other economy flights serve major European destinations such as Milan, Rome, Berlin, Amsterdam and Zurich.

#### Boat

**Acciona Trasmediterránea** (☎ 902 45 46 45; www.acciona-trasmediterranea.es in Spanish) operates car and passenger ferries to Mallorca and Ibiza. Buy your ticket online, at the passenger terminal of the **Muelle de Poniente** (☎ 96 316 48 59) or at any travel agency.

#### Bus

Valencia's **bus station** (Map p580; ☎ 96 346 62 66) is located beside the riverbed on Avenida Menéndez Pidal. Bus 8 connects it to Plaza del Ayuntamiento.

**AutoRes** (☎ 902 02 09 99; www.auto-res.net) operates hourly bus services to/from Madrid (€21.10 to €27, four hours). **ALSA** (☎ 902 42 22 42; www.alsa.es) has more than 10 daily buses to/from Barcelona (€22.87 to €27.76, four to 5½ hours) and Alicante (€16.30 to €18.55, 2¾ hours), most passing by Benidorm (€12.70 to €14.35, 1¾ hours).

### Train

From Valencia's Estación del Norte (Map p582), seven to 10 Alaris express trains travel daily to/from Madrid (€40.60, 3½ to 4¼ hours) and at least 11 to Barcelona (€31.80 to €37, 3¼ to four hours). Up to nine trains head daily to Alicante, (€21.40 to €24.50, 1¾ hours).

Trains run every half hour to Castellón (€3.65, up to one hour) via Sagunto (€2.40, 30 minutes).

### GETTING AROUND

Valencia has an integrated bus, tram and metro network. EMT buses ply town routes, while MetroBus serves outlying towns and villages. Tourist offices stock maps for both services.

The three tourist offices of the **Valencia Convention Bureau** (☎ 96 315 39 31; www.turisvalencia.es) Plaza de la Reina (Map p582; Plaza de la Reina 19; 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun); Train Station (Map p582); Airport (arrivals area) sell the **Valencia Card** (€6/10/12 per 1/2/3 days), entitling you to free urban travel and discounts at participating sights, shops and restaurants.

### To/From the Airport

The number 5 metro line is currently being extended and will connect the airport, downtown and port. **Aero-Bus** (€2.50, 20 minutes, every 20 minutes) leaves from a stop outside the departures area on the airport's upper level and terminates beside metro Bailén, just south of the main train station. A taxi into the centre costs around €15 (there's a supplement of €2.50 above the metered fee for journeys originating at the airport).

### Bicycle

**Orange Bikes** (Map p582; ☎ 96 391 75 51; www.orangebikes.net; Calle Santa Teresa 8), opposite Radio City, rents out mountain bikes and town bikes (€9 to €12 per day, €24 per weekend, €45 to €55 per week) and electric bikes (€15 per day). The initiative of a young Anglo-Valenciano couple, this is also a good place to buy a second-hand cycle. **Valencia Guías** (p587) also rents out reliable town bikes.

### Car & Motorcycle

Street parking is a real pain. There are large subterranean car parks beneath Plazas de la Reina and Alfonso el Magnánimo and, biggest of all, near the train station, covering the area between Calle Xàtiva and the Gran Via.

Major car-hire companies include **Europcar** airport (☎ 96 152 18 72); train station/town (☎ 96 351 90 55) and **Avis** airport (☎ 96 152 21 62); train station/town (☎ 96 352 24 78). Reliable local companies operating from Valencia airport include **Javea Cars** (☎ 96 579 3312; www.javeacars.com), **Solmar** (☎ 96 153 90 42; www.solmar.es) and **Victoria Cars** (☎ 96 583 02 54; www.victoriacars.com). They are usually substantially less expensive than the major companies.

### Public Transport

Most EMT (☎ 96 352 83 99) buses run until about 10pm, with night services continuing on seven routes until around 1am. A single journey costs €1.10. Tobacconists and kiosks sell T1 (one-day pass; €3.10) or a 10-trip Bonobus (€5.20) pass.

The smart high-speed tram is a pleasant way to get to the beach, paella restaurants of Las Arenas and the port. Pick it up at Pont de Fusta or where it intersects with the Metro at Benimaclet.

Metro lines serve the outer suburbs. The closest stations to the centre are Ángel Guimerá, Xàtiva (for the train station), Colón and Pont de Fusta.

### Taxi

Call **Radio-Taxi** (☎ 96 370 33 33) or **Valencia Taxi** (☎ 96 357 13 13).

### AROUND VALENCIA CITY

#### La Albufera

About 15km south of Valencia, La Albufera is a huge freshwater lagoon separated from the sea by La Devesa, a narrow strip of sand dunes and pine forests. The lake and its shores are a breeding ground and sanctuary for migrating and indigenous birds. Keen bird-watchers flock to the **Parque Natural de la Albufera**, where around 90 species regularly nest while more than 250 others use it as a staging post on their migrations.

The sunsets can be spectacular. You can take a boat trip on the lagoon, joining the local fisherfolk, who use flat-bottomed boats and nets to harvest fish and eels from the shallow waters.

Surrounded by rice fields, La Albufera was the birthplace of paella. Every second house in the villages of El Palmar and El Perellonet is a restaurant, serving paella and other rice and seafood dishes.

Autocares Herca buses for Playa El Saler (p584) are also good for La Albufera and continue to either El Palmar (five to seven daily) or El Perellonet (hourly), further down the coast.

### Sagunto

pop 61,800

You come to Sagunto (Valenciano: Sagunt), 25km north of Valencia, primarily to enjoy the spectacular panorama of the town, coast and green sea of orange groves from its hilltop castle complex. It's usually visited as a day or half-day excursion from Valencia.

Nowadays a sleepy spot, Sagunto was once a thriving Iberian community (called – infelicitously, with hindsight – Arse) that traded with Greeks and Phoenicians. In 219 BC Hannibal besieged the town for eight months. The inhabitants were eventually wiped out and their town destroyed, sparking the Second Punic War between Carthage and Rome. Rome won, named the town Saguntum and set about rebuilding it.

From the train station it's a 15-minute walk to the **tourist office** (☎ 96 266 22 13; www.sagunto.com; Plaza Cronista Chabret; 11am-3pm & 4.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1.30pm Sat, 9am-2pm Sun). A further 10-minute uphill walk – detour into the small Judería, the former Jewish quarter – brings you to the **Roman theatre**. Its modern 'restoration' is controversial but the acoustics remain outstanding and it's the main venue for Sagunto's three-week, open-air **August arts festival**.

Higher up, the stone walls of the **castle complex** (admission free; 11am-dusk Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) girdle the hilltop for almost a kilometre. Mostly in ruins, the rambling complex's seven sections each speak of a different period in Sagunto's long history.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are frequent trains between Valencia and Sagunto (€2.40/3.90 one way/return) and

#### NAVAJAS

About 2km north of the Segorbe turn-off on the main N234, take a signed right to drive beside orchards, almond and olive groves to the attractive village of Navajas, shaded by cypress, pine and palm trees and spouting with fountains and springs. Savour the charming tiled and pastel-painted **summer villas**, built during the 19th century by rich Valencians, then stretch your legs by following one of the four signed **walking trails**, each about 12km long, that radiate from central Plaza del Olmo, over which towers a venerable *olmo* (elm), planted in 1635.

## LA TOMATINA

Buñol? It'll make you see red.

The last or penultimate Wednesday in August (the date varies) marks one of Spain's messiest and most bizarre festivals. Held in the town of Buñol, an otherwise drab industrial town about 40km west of Valencia City, La Tomatina is a tomato-throwing orgy that attracts around 30,000 visitors to a town of just 9000 inhabitants.

Just before noon on this very red-letter day, truckloads of ripe, squishy tomatoes (125,000kg is one estimate) are tipped out to the waiting crowd, and for the next hour or so everyone joins in a frenzied, cheerful, anarchic tomato battle.

After being pounded with pulp, expect to be sluiced down with hoses by the local fire brigade. The mayhem takes place on the town's main square and Calle del Cid.

At 1pm an explosion signals the end and the drenched participants don their stash of fresh clothes. Most people come for the day, arriving on the morning train from Valencia and heading back in the afternoon.

You can watch the spectacle in dry comfort on Canal 9, Valencia's local TV channel.

**AVSA** (96 267 1416) runs a service (€2, at least hourly) from Valencia's bus station.

## Segorbe

pop 8500 / elevation 395m

Segorbe, 33km northwest of Sagunto, has a substantial baroque cathedral. Within its more delicate Gothic cloister is a fine ecclesiastical museum (adult/child €3/2; h 11am-1.30pm & 5-7pm Tue-Sun) with a sculpture of the Virgin and Child by Donatello and several colourful altarpieces.

At the western corner of the old town is a pair of cylindrical towers. The Torre de la Carcel for a time served as the town's lock-up while the town executioner, for those whose fate was even worse, lived nearby in the Torre del Botxí. The medieval aqueduct, of which a healthy hunk remains, brought water from the fountain of La Esperanza (Hope), from where it still springs eternal.

Segorbe is renowned for its *Entrada de Toros y Caballos* (Entry of Bulls and Horses). Prompt at 2pm for seven days in the first half of September, skilled horsemen guide and prod the bulls down Calle Colón between two human walls of spectators.

The **tourist office** (96 964 71 32 54; www.segorbe.org; Calle Marcelino Blasco 3; h 9am-2pm & 4-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat, 10.30am-1.30pm Sun) is beside the municipal car park.

## Requena

pop 20,100 / elevation 690m

From the heart of Requena, 71km west of Valencia, rears La Villa, its medieval nucleus, jumbled and irregular with twisting streets and

blind alleys. Requena's former wealth came from silk; at one time it had 800 active looms, making this tiny town Spain's 4th-biggest producer. Nowadays it's primarily wine and livestock country, producing robust reds, sparkling *cavas* (Spain's rival to champagne), and rich hunks of sausage and spicy meats.

The second weekend in February marks the *Muestra del Embutido*, the Sausage Show; in 2005, visitors gobbled up around 10,000kg of sausage and 25,000 servings of roast pork. In late August/early September, Requena's *Fiesta de la Vendimia* is another hearty bacchanal, celebrating the end of the grape harvest.

The **tourist office** (96 962 30 38 51; www.requena.es; Calle Garcia Montés s/n; h 9.30am-2pm Tue-Thu & Sun, 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Fri & Sat) is below the main entrance to the old town. Ask for the English version of its *Sensaciones para Descubrir*, a useful guide to La Villa.

## SIGHTS

Enter the old quarter from its northern side, passing by the 10th-century Muslim Torre del Homenaje. Within the town walls are the Gothic Santa Maria and San Salvador churches, each with a magnificent if much weathered main portal, and sturdy noblemen's mansions such as the *Casa del Arte Mayor de la Seda* (Silk Guild House) and *Palacio del Cid*, soon to house the town's new wine museum.

Requena's recently inaugurated *Museo de Arte Contemporáneo* (96 230 30 32; Cuesta del Ángel 2; adult/child €3/2; h 11am-2pm & 5.30-9pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun) has canvases mainly by Spanish artists, including Picasso, Miró, Sempere, Tàpies and Dalí.

The *Museo Municipal* (adult/child €3/2; Plaza Consistorial; h 11am-2pm Tue-Sun) has a rich collection of traditional costumes, re-creations of a bourgeois town house and country dwelling and a few Roman funerary remains. In the old town, *Plaza Albornoz*, also called Plaza de la Villa, hides in its intestines a network of interlinked cellars, once used as storerooms and, during strife, hideouts. **Guided visits** (adult/child €3/2; h 11am, noon & 1pm Tue-Sun plus 4.15pm, 5pm & 6pm Fri-Sun) descend from the entrance on the eastern side of the square.

## SLEEPING & EATING

**Mesón La Villa** (96 restaurant 96 230 12 75, rooms 96 230 03 74; www.hotelmesonlavilla.com; Plaza Albornoz 13; s/d €32/52) If you can't visit the cellars, dine here (mains €8.50 to €15.50, menú €9.50) and ask your hosts to let you see theirs (admission €1), briefly used by the local branch of the Inquisition (see the Papal coat of arms on the façade) to turn the screws on heretics. *Mesón La Villa* also keeps nine decent rooms, some with views of the square.

Also on the square are two other attractive options, each with a good restaurant. Recently inaugurated *Hôtel La Villa* (96 restaurant 96 230 12 75, rooms 96 230 03 74; www.hotelavillarestaurante.com; Plaza Albornoz 8; s/d €36/55; a ), run by the same family, and *Hôtel Doña Anita*; (96 96 230 53 47; www.tubal.net; Plaza Albornoz 15; s/d €45/70), a new building despite its antique air.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

More than 12 buses (€3.90, one hour) and eight trains (€3.65, 1½ hours) run daily to/from Valencia.

## COSTA DEL AZAHAR

Inland from the Costa del Azahar – the orange blossom coast – spread orange groves, from whose headily scented flowers the region takes its name. The busy, developed – not always harmoniously – seaside resorts are enticing if you're after sun and sand. They're expanding rapidly in anticipation of the inauguration of Castellón's airport. Scheduled for 2008, it's vehemently opposed by environmentalists (not least because Valencia's international airport is only 80km south). The high hinterland, especially the wild, sparsely populated lands of the Maestrazgo, offer great walking, solitude and hearty mountain cooking.

## Getting There & Away

The Valencia to Barcelona railway follows the coast and regional trains stop at all main towns. From Valencia, trains run every half hour to Castellón de la Plana. Up to seven trains daily call at Benicàssim, three at Oropesa and six at Benicarló/Peñíscola and Vinaròs.

## CASTELLÓN DE LA PLANA

pop 167,500

The outskirts of Castellón de la Plana (Valenciano: Castelló de la Plana) are grim, industrial and rambling, so the centre comes as a pleasant surprise if you penetrate to the heart of this prosperous commercial town.

## Orientation & Information

Plaza Mayor and, just to its south, Plaza Santa Clara, form the nucleus of what matters to the visitor in Castellón. Bus and train stations – one above the other – are about 1km northwest, beyond leafy Parque Ribalta. El Grau de Castellón, the port area, is 4km east of downtown.

**Main tourist office** (96 964 35 86 88; Plaza María Agustina 5; h 9am-7pm Mon-Fri Jul-Aug, 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri Sep-Jun, 10am-2pm Sat year-round)

## Sights

The *Museo de Bellas Artes* (96 964 72 75 00; Avenida Hermanos Bou 28; admission free; h 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) occupies award-winning premises. Its displays include a large and impressive ceramics section, reflecting the region's major industry, but the real stars are 10 magnificent canvases by Zurbarán.

From Plaza Mayor, bordered by the early 18th-century town hall and the bustling covered market, thrusts the long finger of El Fadri (1604), an octagonal bell tower and symbol of the city. Beside the tower is the reconstructed *Concatedral de Santa María*, shattered in the civil war and now restored to its original state.

Four kilometres east of the centre is El Grau de Castellón, a harbour that handles this industrial region's exports as well as the local fishing fleet. Castellón's beaches start north of here.

## Sleeping & Eating

*Hostal La Esperanza* (96 964 22 20 31; Calle Trinidad 37; basic s/d/tr €18/30/45) This welcoming *hostal* has spotless rooms above a cosy, family-run bar-restaurant (menú €7.50; closed Sunday). The bar carries a great range of tapas.

**Hotel Intur Castellón** (☎ 964 22 50 00; www.intur.com; Calle Herrero 20; r Mon–Thu from €73.50, Fri–Sun & Aug €55; p n a i ) Stark from the outside, it's cheerful from the moment you enter. There's a bright, spacious central atrium, onto which give both restaurant and bar. There's also wi-fi access, parking for €9, and weekend rates, which are a particular bargain.

**Julivert** (☎ 964 22 37 26; Calle Caballeros 41; h 9am–4.30pm Mon–Fri; v ) This tiny place does a good three-course *menú* with vegetarian option for €8.70.

**Mesón Navarro** (mains €8.50–12.60) Calle Amadeo (☎ 964 25 09 66; Calle Amadeo 18); Calle Sanchis Abella (☎ 964 26 11 33; Calle Sanchis Abella 4); Plaza Tetuán (☎ 964 21 31 15; Plaza Tetuán 26) Navarro has three restaurants around town, all busy and all excellent value, especially for meat dishes. The one at Calle Amadeo 18 also specialises in fresh fish.

**Arropes** (☎ 964 23 76 58; Calle Benárbé 5; menú €25, mains €11–17; h lunch & dinner Tue–Sat & lunch Sun) Arropes (from Arroz – rice – and Pes – abbreviated *pescado*, fish) specialises in just that, plus the freshest of seafood. It's popular with discerning locals, and you'd be wise to reserve. A nice touch: the fresh mint sprigs and flowers in the toilets.

## Getting There & Around

Long-distance services use the bus station (☎ 964 24 07 78). Buses for El Grau and the beaches to its north leave from Plaza Borrull, 300m south of Plaza Mayor. Frequent buses for Benicàssim set out from Plaza Fadrell. For both Valencia and resorts to the north, except for Benicàssim, trains tend to be both swifter and more frequent.

Local bus 9 connects bus and train stations with the town centre.

## AROUND CASTELLÓN DE LA PLANA

### Vilafamés

pop 1700

What draws visitors to Vilafamés, a tiny hillside town 26km north of Castellón de la Plana, is its excellent Museo de Arte Contemporáneo (☎ 964 32 91 52; Calle Diputació 20; adult/child €2/free; h 10am–1.30pm & 4–7pm Tue–Sun). Within the 15th-century Palacio de la Bailía, worth a visit in its own right, is a highly eclectic collection of contemporary paintings and sculpture. The tourist office (☎ 964 32 99 70; www.vilafames.com) is at Plaza del Ayuntamiento 2.

The small old town is an agreeable clutter of whitewashed houses and civic buildings in

rust-red stone. From Plaza de la Sangre, steep steps take you up to the ruined castle and a sensational panorama.

The modest **Hotel El Rullo** (☎ 964 32 93 84; www.elrullo.com; Calle de la Fuente 2; s/d €22/42), 200m below the museum, is a friendly family hotel that does a good *menú*.

The small yet spacious **Jardín Vertical** (☎ 964 32 99 38; www.eljardinvertical.com; Carrer Nou 15; r from €110; n a i ) is a gem; there are only seven rooms, so reservations are essential. A mainly 17th-century mansion with five floors, Jardín Vertical has been renovated with great taste by the proprietress herself. There's a lovely terrace, all rooms have a balcony and those overlooking the valley – which cost no more – have sweeping views.

## Montanejos

pop 490 / elevation 460m

It's a spectacular drive along the CV20 from Castellón up the Río Mijares gorges to this resort and spa village at the heart of the Sierra de Espadán. Surrounded by craggy and pine-clad mountains, its cool, fresh mountain air attracts hordes of visitors over the summer months and there's bathing for free in the 25°C waters of Fuente de Los Baños, 1km north. Montanejos is also a popular base for rock climbing.

The tourist office (☎ 964 13 11 53; Carretera Tales; www.montanejos.com in Spanish) is within the *balneario* (spa).

Most hotels open only in summer and at weekends. **Hotel Rosaleda del Mijares** (☎ 964 13 10 79; www.hotelesrosaleda.com; Carretera Tales 28; s/d €57.50/77, Sat, Sun & Aug €62/84; a s ), barely 100m from the *balneario*, lays on a filling *menú* (€12) in its vast dining room. Its 81 rooms are attractive and comfortable and have large beds, and breakfast is included. The hotel has its own pool and gym and also offers a variety of spa packages.

## BENICÀSSIM

pop 16,200

Benicàssim (Castilian: Benicasim) has been a popular resort since the 19th century, when wealthy Valencian families built summer residences here. To this day, around 80% of summer visitors are Spanish and many people from Madrid, Valencia and Castellón own summer apartments.

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## Orientation & Information

Benicàssim's beaches and accompanying development, scarcely a couple of blocks wide, stretch for 6km along the coast.

**Main tourist office** (☎ 964 30 09 62; www.benicassim.org; Calle Santo Tomás 74; h 9am–9pm daily mid-Jun–mid-Sep, 10am–2pm & 5–8pm Mon–Sat, 10am–1.30pm & 5–8pm Sun mid-Sep–mid-Jun) One kilometre inland in the old town.

## Sights & Activities

Those 6km of broad beach are the main attraction. Bordering the promenade at the northeastern end are Las Villas, exuberant, sometimes frivolous holiday homes built by wealthy Valencians at the end of the 19th century and into the 20th.

**Aquarama water park** (☎ 964 30 33 21; www.aquarama.net; h 11am–7pm mid-Jun–Aug) is just south of town, off the N340.

About 6km inland is the Desierto de las Palmas, a mountain range – cooler than the coast, on occasion misty – with a Carmelite monastery (1697) at its heart. Nowadays a nature reserve and far from desert (for the monks it meant a place for mystic withdrawal), it's a green, popular outdoor activities area. From Monte Bartolo (728m), its highest point, there are staggering views. Ask at the tourist office for its handout *The Desert de les Palmes Nature Reserve*, which illustrates three splendid walking trails.

## Festivals & Events

In early August music aficionados by the tens of thousands gather for the annual Festival Internacional de Benicàssim (FIB; www.fiberfib.com), one of Europe's top outdoor music festivals that also embraces short films, dance and alternative theatre. Major performers in 2006 included The Strokes, Franz Ferdinand, Madness, Morrissey and the Scissor Sisters.

## Sleeping & Eating

Benicàssim's six camp sites are all within walking distance of the beaches.

**Hotel Avenida** (☎ 964 30 00 47; www.hotelescoavenida.com; Avenida Castellón 2; d mid-Feb–Jun & Oct €34–41, Jul & Sep with compulsory breakfast €53–62, Aug €68; h mid-Feb–Oct; p a i s ) This appealing family-owned hotel, on the old town's main street, has a pool and shady courtyard. Rooms are large, parking's free and it's excellent value. The entrance is on Calle Quatro Caminos.

**Hotel Tramontana** (☎ 964 30 03 00; www.hoteltramontana.com; Paseo Marítimo Ferrandis Salvador 6; s/d/tr with breakfast from €30/48/67; h Mar–Oct; p ) More in the heart of things and only half a block from the beach, the Tramontana is also family-owned and welcoming. All triples overlook the shore.

**Hotel Voramar** (☎ 964 30 01 50; www.voramar.net; Paseo Marítimo Pilar Coloma 1; s/d from €44/58, high season from €67/79; p n a i ) Venerable (run by the same family for four generations) and blooded in battle (it functioned as a hospital in the Spanish Civil War), the Voramar has more character than most of Benicàssim's modern upstarts and is the only hotel that faces directly onto the sands. The dining room, where the cuisine is first class, has large windows overlooking the sea. There's free wi-fi and parking is €8 to €12.

Plenty of economical restaurants line Calle de Santo Tomás and Calle Castellón, the old town's main street.

## Drinking

In summer and at weekends, Benicàssim rocks. The eastern end of Calle de los Dolores in the old town has a great collection of lively bars including El Único, Pink Noise, Scratch Sessions, Campus and Resaca (the perhaps appropriately named 'Hangover'). The town's *discotecas* are clustered around Aquarama (left).

## Getting There & Away

Buses run every half-hour (every 15 minutes in summer) to Castellón, from where train connections are more plentiful.

## OROPESA DEL MAR

It's a fine scenic drive from Benicàssim to Oropesa (Valenciano: Orpesa) along a narrow road winding around the rocky coastline. The resort is expanding rapidly and none too prettily northwards, embracing the massive spa and resort of Marina d'Oró.

The main tourist office (☎ 964 31 33 20; Plaza París; h 9.30am–2pm & 3–8pm or 4.30–6.30pm) is beside Playa de la Concha.

**Naturhiscope** (☎ 964 31 30 26; Plaza de la Iglesia; adult/child €3/1.50; h 9.30am–2pm & 4.30–7.30pm or 6–9pm) is a collection of photos and everyday objects, interpreting the town and its relationship with the sea in a high-tech context. Inspirational for some, pretentious flummery for others.

More interesting are two museums, also in the old town and each run by passionate, eccentric amateurs. The official opening hours of Museo del Naípe (Playing Card Museum; ☎ 964 31 20 20;

Calle Hospital 1; adult/child €3/1.50; 7-6-10pm Jun-Sep) are short, but at other times, just knock; the owner lives above. This place has over 5000 different packs and other memorabilia from around the world, explained with beguiling enthusiasm.

Luis Elvira, another collecting squirrel, has assembled a unique collection of cogs and grills, shields and other items in metal at the **Museo del Hierro** (Metalwork Museum; % 964 31 61 04; Calle Ramón y Cajal 12; admission €3; 7-10am-2pm & 7-10pm Tue-Sun mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 10am-2pm Tue-Sun mid-Sep-mid-Jun).

## PEÑÍSCOLA

pop 6150

Peñíscola's old town, all cobbled streets and whitewashed houses, huddles within stone walls that protect the rocky promontory jutting into the sea. It's pretty as a postcard – and just as commercial, with lots of souvenir and ceramics shops (one favourite: a pot with an – oh dear – stiff penis for a spout, a pun that doesn't even work in Spanish). In stark contrast, the high-rises sprouting northwards along the coast are mostly leaden and charmless. But the **Paseo Marítimo promenade** makes pleasant walking, and the beach, which extends towards neighbouring Benicarló, is sandy and over 5km long.

The main tourist office (% 964 48 02 08; www.peniscola.org; 7-9am-8pm Mon-Fri mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 9.30am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) is at the south end of Paseo Marítimo. Pick up its descriptive booklet, *The Old City*.

## Sights & Activities

The rambling 14th-century castle (adult/child €2.50/free; 7-9.30am-9.30pm Easter-mid-Oct; 10.30am-5.30pm mid-Oct-Easter) was built by the Knights Templar on Arab foundations and later became home to Pedro de Luna ('Papa Luna', the deposed Pope Benedict XIII).

The **Museo de la Mar** (Maritime Museum; Calle Príncipe s/n; admission free; 7-10am-2pm & 4pm-dusk daily Apr-Sep, Tue-Sun Oct-Mar) illustrates the town's fishing and seafaring heritage from Phoenician times to the present. Highpoint for children will be the three small aquariums.

The Sierra de Irta, running south from Peñíscola, is both nature park and protected marine reserve. It's one of the last unspoilt stretches of coastline in the Comunidad Valenciana, best explored on foot or by mountain bike. You can attack the full 26km of the circular PR V-194 trail or slip in one or more shorter loops. Ask at the tourist office for the English version of its *Senderos de Irta* brochure.

## Sleeping & Eating

There are two great alternatives to the beachside concrete towers. Since they're small, make sure you reserve.

**Chiki Bar** (% 964 48 02 84; Calle Mayor 3; r €37-45) In addition to its engaging name Chiki Bar has seven spotless, modern rooms with views. It's high in the old town, and you might want your earplugs, since the nearby parish church chimes tinnily, on the hour, every hour. It runs a small restaurant (mains from €8.50), which is closed on Tuesday from March to October but open every day July to September. The three-course *menú* (€10), offered for both lunch and dinner, is excellent value.

**Hotel-Restaurante Simó** (% 964 48 06 20; www.hotel-simo.com; Calle Porteta 5; s €40-56, d 50-70; 7-Mar-Dec) At the base of the castle pile and right beside the sea, the Simó has a restaurant (mains €11 to €18) with magnificent views across the bay. Of its nine rooms, all have balconies and seven enjoy equally impressive vistas. Rooms are simple, unfussy and relatively spacious.

**Hosteria del Mar** (% 964 48 06 00; www.hosteria delmar.net; Avenida Papa Luna 18; s €47-94, d €64-125; p n a i s ) This family-owned hotel has more character than most of its undistinguished multistorey neighbours on the north side of town. Nearly all rooms have balconies overlooking the beach. There's wi-fi and free parking.

**Hogar del Pescador** (% 964 48 95 88; Calle Jardín 2; fish from €10) This popular fisherfolk's café by day is also great value for everything fishy. For the maximum taste sensation for two, share a *mariscada* (seafood special; €33) followed by the *combinado degustación*, a magnificent platter of mixed fish and shellfish.

**Casa Jaime** (% 964 48 00 30; Avenida Papa Luna 5; mains €17.50-20.50; 7-lunch & dinner daily mid-Jun-mid-Sep, closed Wed & dinner Sun mid-Sep-mid-Jun) Dine on the ample outside terrace or in the cosy dining room, where you can see mum and dad (once a fisherman who learnt his trade cooking for the crew) at work in the kitchen. They're renowned for their *suquet de peix* (fish stew; €20.50; minimum two people), and other rice and simmered fish dishes.

## Getting There & Around

Year round, local buses run at least every half-hour between Peñíscola, Benicarló and Vinaròs. From July to mid-September, there's a run at least hourly to Peñíscola/Benicarló Renfe station with trains to Barcelona and, southwards, to Castellón and Valencia.

To patrol the long beach front, hire a bike or scooter from **Diver Sport** (% 609 622225; Avenida Estación 17), beside Hotel Herasu.

## VINARÒS

pop 25,250

Unlike its luxury-loving neighbours, Vinaròs is a working town, and a fairly grim one. Redeeming features are its active fishing port, famous for *langostinos* (king prawns), and a pair of small, sandy beaches.

The **Iglesia Arciprestal** (Plaza del Ayuntamiento) is a stocky baroque fortified church with a tall bell tower and elaborate main doorway decorated with candy-twist columns. Opposite is the **Modernista Casa Giner** (1914), garnished with floral motifs and fine *miradores* (enclosed balconies). These days a Benetton shop, its original stained glass proclaims its earlier quaint function as *paquetaría* and *mercería* (haberdasher and draper).

From here, pedestrianised Calle Mayor leads past the covered market to the tourist office (% 964 45 33 34; www.vinaros.org; Paseo Colón s/n; 7-10am-2pm & 5-8pm daily Jun-Sep; 10am-2pm & 5-7.30pm Tue-Fri, 11am-2pm Sat-Mon Oct-May) and the **Playa del Fortí**.

You've plenty of eating choices on the waterfront, most specialising in seafood.

**El Faro de Vinaròs** (% 964 45 63 62; Zona Portuaria s/n, menús €25-65, mains €12-18; 7-lunch & dinner Tue-Sat & lunch Sun), located in the base of a former lighthouse, serves up both traditional Mediterranean dishes and more innovative fare. There is a strong emphasis on what's pulled from the sea.

Just across the road, and also a well-lopped *langostino* from the quayside fish market, **Bar Puerto** (% 964 45 56 72; Calle Costa Borrás 60; mains €7-10), small, friendly and informal, does a great range of tapas and fishy mains, displayed on its chalkboard.

## EL MAESTRAZGO

Straddling northwestern Valencia and south-east Aragón, El Maestrazgo (Valenciano: El Maestrat) is a mountainous land, a world away from the coastal fleshpots, where ancient *pueblos* (villages) huddle on rocky outcrops and ridges.

One such place, Sant Mateu, was chosen in the 14th century by the maestro (hence the name El Maestrazgo) of the Montesa order of knights as his seat of power.

## Activities CYCLING & WALKING

This is fertile territory for cyclists and walkers. The long-distance GR-7 walking trail crosses the Els Ports area. The Morella tourist office has a free brochure (in Spanish) describing a 15km, four-hour signed route between the town and Forcall. It also sells *Guía de Senderos Homologados de Els Ports-Maestrat*, a pack of loose-leaf folders describing (in Spanish but with explicit maps) 16 routes lasting between one and six hours.

## SALTAPINS

**Saltapins** (% 964 17 32 56; www.saltapins.com; adult/child €17/15; 7-daily mid-Jun-mid-Sep, Sat & Sun Apr-mid-Jun & mid-Sep-Oct) is an adventure centre within the **Fábrica Giner** complex (p609). There's a gentle circuit for kids aged five to 10 and, open to all, a more challenging one with creepers to swing from, suspended gangplanks to teeter over and barrels to wriggle through.

## SANT MATEU

pop 2000 / elevation 325m

A drive 5km south from the N232 along the CV132 brings you to Sant Mateu, once capital of the Maestrazgo. Its solid mansions and elaborate façades recall the town's more illustrious past and former wealth, based upon the wool trade. From attractive colonnaded Plaza Mayor, ringed with café terraces, signs point to four small municipal museums: the **Museo Paleontológico**, **Museo Arciprestal** of religious art (in Casa Abadía, beside the parish church tower), **Museo les Presons** in the former jail and **Museo Histórico Municipal**, entered via the tourist office in the **Palacio Borrull**, a stalwart 15th-century building.

The tourist office (% 964 41 66 58; www.santmateu.com in Spanish; Calle Historiador Betí 10; % 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) is just off Plaza Mayor.

**Hotel-Restaurante La Perdi** (% 964 41 60 82; fax 964 41 64 78; Calle Historiador Betí 9; s/d mid-Sep-mid-Jul €18/30, mid-Jul-mid-Sep €24/36) has modern, comfortable rooms and its restaurant does a decent *menú* for only €9.

Follow signs from Plaza Mayor to the **Ermida de la Mare de Déu**, perched on a rocky hillside, a 2.5km drive or considerably shorter walk. A monastery until the Spanish Civil War (take a peep at its over-the-top baroque chapel) and freshly renovated, it was about to open again as a restaurant offering incomparable views of the surrounding plain.

## Getting There & Away

Weekday Autos Mediterráneo (% 964 22 05 36) buses link San Mateu with Vinaròs (€2.20, 35 minutes, four daily), Castellón (€4.45, up to two hours, three daily) and Morella (€2.90, one hour, two daily). On Saturday, one bus runs from Castellón to Morella via Sant Mateu. The bus stop is 100m east of Hotel Restaurante Montesa.

## MORELLA

pop 2800 / elevation 1000m

Bitingly cold in winter and cool in summer, Morella is the principal town of El Maestrazgo. This outstanding example of a medieval fortress, perched on a hilltop and crowned by a castle, is girdled by an intact wall over 2km long.

## Orientation & Information

Morella's walls are broken only by their seven entrance gates. The town is a confusing, compact jumble of narrow streets, alleys and steep steps. The main street, running east-west between Puerta San Miguel and Puerta de los Estudios, compounds the confusion by assuming five different names in less than a kilometre.

The **tourist office** (% 964 17 30 32; www.morella.net; Plaza San Miguel 3; h 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) is just behind the Torres de San Miguel, twin 14th-century towers flanking the main entrance gate.

## Sights

Morella's **castle** (adult/child €1.50/free; h 9am-8pm Easter-Oct, 10am-6.30pm Oct-Easter), though badly knocked about, well merits the strenuous ascent to savour the breathtaking views of the town and surrounding countryside. At its base is the bare church and cloister of the **Convento de San Francisco** (admission free), being converted into a *parador* hotel.

**Museo del Sexenni** (adult/child €1.80/1.20; h 11am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sun Jul, daily Aug, Sat & Sun Sep-Jun), in the ex-Church of Sant Nicolau, displays models, photos and items associated with this major fiesta (see right).

In **Museo Tiempo de Dinosaurios** (adult/child €1.80/1.20; h 11am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sun Jul, daily Aug, Sat & Sun Sep-Jun), opposite the tourist office, are dinosaur bones and fossils – the Maestrazgo's remote hills have been a treasure-trove for palaeontologists – together with an informative video (in Spanish).

A combined ticket to both the Sexenni and Tiempo de Dinosaurios costs €3.

The imposing Gothic **Basilica de Santa Maria la Mayor** (Plaza Arciprestal; h noon-2pm & 4-6pm) has two elaborately sculpted doorways on its south façade. A richly carved polychrome stone staircase leads to the elaborately sculpted overhead choir, while cherubs clamber and peek all over the gilded altarpiece. Its ecclesiastical treasure is kept within the **Museo Arciprestal** (admission €1.20).

Among several imposing civil buildings are the 14th-century **Casa del Consell** (town hall; Calle Segura Barreda 28) and manorial houses such as the **Casa de la Cofradia de Labradores** (House of the Farmers' Guild; Calle de la Confraria).

On the outskirts of town stretch the arches of a 13th-century **aqueduct**.

## Festivals & Events

Morella's major festival is the **Sexenni**, held every six years during August (the next is in 2012) in honour of the Virgen de Vallivana. Visit the Museo del Sexenni to get the flavour of this major celebration with its tonnes of confetti and elaborate compositions in crêpe paper.

Annually in August, there's a **baroque music festival**, starring the Basilica de Santa Maria la Mayor's huge organ.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Hotel El Cid** (% 964 16 01 25; www.hotelescidmorella.com; Puerta San Mateu 3; s/d €25/42) Nestling beside the ramparts, Hotel el Cid has spruce, modern rooms above a busy bar and restaurant. Head high; top-floor rooms have magnificent views of the surrounding countryside.

**Hostal La Muralla** (% 964 16 02 43; www.hostal.muralla.com; Calle la Muralla 12; s/d €28/48) You may find 19-room Hostal La Muralla a little quieter. Just around the corner and also abutting

### AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Mesón del Pastor** (% 964 16 02 49; Cuesta Jovani 5-7; mains €4.65-14; h lunch Thu-Tue, dinner Sat) The stuffed boar and wild goat heads balefully eyeing your plate hint at the glories within the kitchen. It's all about strong mountain cuisine, thick gruels in winter, rabbit, juicy sausages, partridge and, yes, wild boar and goat. In February, you can eat truffle-flavoured dishes from starter to dessert. Ditto for wild mushrooms during peak autumn collecting time.

the walls, it's equally trim, though the rough towels might induce razor burn.

**Hotel Cardenal Ram** (% 964 17 30 85; www.cardenalram.com; Cuesta Suñer 1; s/d €45/70; a ) This venerable hotel has ancient stone floors, high ceilings and antique furniture, all in a wonderfully transformed 16th-century cardinal's palace. Attractively decorated rooms have sensual power showers. Its restaurant (mains €8 to €13) is open daily July to September but closed Monday October to June. It does a first-class *menú degustación* (€30, minimum two people) and a tempting *menú del día* (€14).

**Restaurante Casa Roque** (% 964 16 03 36; Cuesta San Juan 1; h lunch & dinner Tue-Sat & lunch Sun) Occupying an attractive 17th-century mansion, Casa Roque does a good-value weekday *menú* (€12). For a selection of typical Els Ports dishes, go for the *menú gastronómico* (€22).

## Getting There & Around

On weekdays, Autos Mediterráneo (% 964 22 05 36) runs two daily buses to/from both Castellón (€7.30) and Vinaròs (€4.35). There's also one Saturday bus to/from Castellón.

## ELS PORTS

Morella is the ancient capital of Els Ports, the 'mountain passes', a rugged region offering some outstanding scenic drives and strenuous cycling excursions, plus excellent possibilities for walkers.

## Fábrica de Giner

On the Forcall road, 4.5km west of Morella, is the **Fábrica de Giner** complex, a former textile factory with a pair of choices at each end of the sleeping spectrum:

**Hotel Fábrica Giner** (% 964 17 31 42; www.ghihoteles.com; s/d €50/58, Sat & Aug €70/80; p a ) has 24 well appointed rooms within the former factory owners' sumptuous dwelling, while the **HI-affiliated Youth Hostel** (% 902 22 55 52; fax 963 98 59 13; dm under/over 26yr €7.45/10.60; h daily Apr-mid-Sep, Fri-Sun mid-Sep-Mar) has been converted from workers' housing.

**Saltapins** (p607) occupies the woods across the valley while over the road is a large public swimming pool.

## Forcall

Nine kilometres further west, this quiet village is at the confluence of the Ríos Caldés and Cantavieja. On the weekend closest to 17 January, the **Santantonà** (also known as the Fiesta

## SANTUARIO DE LA BALMA

Push northwards beyond Forcall for 15km along the CV14 to experience the extraordinary Santuario de la Balma, set inside a rocky crag. Behind the main altar is a forest of offerings and ex-votos – wax limbs, baby clothes, bridal dresses, military berets and much more – accompanied by notes of thanks to the Virgin for her protection or intercession.

de San Antonio), a winter festival celebrating fire, briefly dispels the prevailing calm as local youths sprint through a blazing tunnel.

One of two fine, renovated, 16th-century Aragonese palaces on opposite sides of Plaza Mayor, the **Hotel-Restaurante Palau dels Osset** (% 964 17 75 24; www.ghihoteles.com; s/d €58/65, Sat & Aug €80/95; a ) has been converted into an elegant 20-room hotel with a more than respectable restaurant (mains €10 to €13.50).

From Forcall, an attractive 20km drive along the CV120, ascending the rugged Rio Cantavieja valley, brings you to the charming medieval town of Mirambel.

## COSTA BLANCA

The long stripe of the Costa Blanca (White Coast) is one of Europe's most heavily visited areas. If you're after a secluded midsummer beach, stay away. But if you're looking for a lively social scene, good beaches and a suntan...

It isn't all concrete and package deals. Although the original fishing villages have long been engulfed by the sprawl of resorts, a few old town kernels, such as those of Xàbia (Jávea) and Altea, still survive.

In July and August it can be tough finding accommodation if you haven't booked. Out of season, those places remaining open usually charge far less than in high summer.

Most buses linking Valencia and Alicante head down the motorway, making a stop in Benidorm. A few, however, call by other intervening towns. Renfe trains connect Valencia with Gandia, while the FGV narrow-gauge trains and trams ply the scenic route between Denia and Alicante, stopping at all *pueblos* en route.

*Inland Trips from the Costa Blanca* by Derek Workman describes in detail and with flair 20

one-day car excursions into the interior. Pack too his *Small Hotels and Inns of Eastern Spain* if you'd like to linger and spend the night away from the crowds.

## GANDIA

pop 71,500

Gandia, 65km south of Valencia, is a tale of two cities. The main town, once home to a branch of the Borja dynasty (more familiar to most as the infamous Borgias), is a prosperous commercial centre.

Four kilometres away on the coast, Playa de Gandia has a long, broad beach of fine sand, groomed daily by a fleet of tractors and backed by medium-rise hotels and apartments.

It's a popular and predominantly Spanish resort with a good summer and weekend nightlife.

## Information

**Playa de Gandia tourist office** (☎ 96 284 24 07; www.gandiaturismo.com; Paseo de Neptuna s/n; h 9.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1.30pm Sat & Sun mid-Jun-mid-Sep; 9.30am-2pm & 4-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1.30pm Sat & Sun mid-Sep-mid-Oct & mid-Mar-mid-Jun; 9.30am-1.30pm daily mid-Oct-mid-Mar)

**Town tourist office** (☎ 96 287 77 88; h 9.30am-1.30pm & 3-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1.30pm Sat) Opposite the bus/train station.

## Sights & Activities

Gandia's magnificent **Palacio Ducal de los Borja** (☎ 96 287 14 65; Calle Duc Alfons el Vell 1; guided tour adult/child €5/3; h 10am-1pm & 4-6.30pm or 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) was the 15th-century home of Duque Francisco de Borja. Highlights include its finely carved *artesonado* ceilings and rich ceramic work – look out for the vivid *mapa universal* floor composition. One-hour guided tours in Spanish, with an accompanying leaflet in English, take place every half hour.

There are two extremely good *Rutas Ecoturísticas* (Ecotourism Routes). The 12km **Racó del Duc** walking and cycling trail follows an old railway line through unspoiled countryside between the villages of Vilallonga (8km south of Gandia) and L'Orxa. **Entre Senill i Borró** is a 13km walking trail through coastal marshland and dunes from Gandia town to the coast. You can pick up brochures in English describing the routes from both tourist offices.

## Sleeping

**Camping L'Alqueria** (☎ 96 284 04 70; www.lalqueria.com; Carretera del Grau de Gandia s/n; sites per person/tent/car €4.30/6.20/4.90; h year-round; s ) About 1km inland, this place has a heated indoor pool.

**Albergue Mari Vent** (☎ 96 283 17 48; albergopiles\_ivaj@gva.es; dm under/over 26 €7.45/10.60; h year-round) This excellent beachfront youth hostel is 5km south of Gandia beside Playa de Piles. Take La Amistad bus from the bus station.

**Hostal El Nido** (☎ 96 284 46 40; fax 96 284 65 71; Calle Alcoy 22; s/d Sep-Jun €35/45, Jul-Aug €45/60) Rooms are as cheerful as the owners at this warmly recommended place, a block back from the beach. Between June and September it also runs a small bar for guests.

**Hostal Riviera** (☎ 96 284 50 42; www.hotelesrh.com; Paseo de Neptuno 28; half-board per person Jun-Sep €57-87, Oct-May €34-45.50; p a i s ) It's well worth going for half-board – compulsory anyway in July and August – at this large beachside hotel, one of Denia's earliest, that's been comprehensively renovated. Invest an extra €5 per person for one of the eight sea-view rooms.

**Hostal Bayren 1** (☎ 96 284 03 00; www.hotelesrh.com; Paseo de Neptuno 62; half-board per person Jun-Sep €58-91.50, Oct-May €38.25-48.25; p a i s ) Rooms are comfortable and there's wi-fi, a gym, spa and a pool at this good, if a little monolithic, hotel, that also faces the beach. Parking is €9 to €12.

## Eating

Eateries abound in Paseo Marítimo Neptuno. You'll also find a few longer-established places at the western end of the port and along Calle Verge.

**Kayuko** (☎ 96 284 01 37; Calle Asturias 23; menú €25-54; rice dishes €13 mains, €9-22; h lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) The Kayuko, at the northern end of the resort, is one of a trio of excellent seafood restaurants in Gandia. Service is attentive, staff speak excellent English and the rice is simmered to perfection.

**Restaurante Emilio** (☎ 96 284 07 61; Bloque F-5, Avenida Vicente Calderón; mains €14-18; h lunch & dinner Thu-Tue, daily Jul-mid-Sep) Despite a cupboardful of gastronomic accolades, Emilio, his wife and three children manage to preserve a family atmosphere in this traditionally furnished restaurant, where you'll eat very well indeed.

## Drinking

There's great summer and weekend nightlife at Playa de Gandia, with bars, including **Paco Paco**, **Mama Ya Lo Sabe** and **Ouka-le-le**,

clustered around Plaza del Castell, barely 300m inland from the beach. After they close, head for one of the discos that bop till dawn, such as **Bacarra** (Calle Legazpi 7), two blocks from the beach, or **Falkata** (Cami Vell de Valencia), further inland.

## Getting There & Around

Trains run between Gandia and Valencia (€3.65, one hour) every half-hour (hourly on weekends). The combined bus and train station is opposite the town tourist office. Stopping beside the office, La Marina Gandiense buses for Playa de Gandia run every 20 minutes.

## DENIA

pop 40,600

Denia town is rather dull but the beaches of La Marina, to the north, are good and sandy, while southwards the fretted coastline of Las Rotas and beyond offers less frequented rocky coves. From the port are the shortest sea crossings to the Balearic Islands.

## Orientation & Information

**The tourist office** (☎ 96 642 23 67; www.denia.net; Glorieta del Oculista Buiques 9; h 9.30am-2pm & 5-8pm daily Jul-mid-Sep, 9.30am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-1.30pm Sun mid-Sep-Jun) is near the waterfront. Both train station and ferry terminal are close by.

## Activities

To catch the sea breezes, sign on with **Mundo Marino** (☎ 96 642 30 66), which does return catamaran trips to/from Xàbia (adult/child €14/7), some of which continue to Calpe (€25/12.50) and Altea (€30/15).

## Sleeping

**Hostal l'Anfora** (☎ 96 643 01 01; www.hostallanfora.com; Esplanada Cervantes 8; s €26-32, d €43-55; n a ) This place facing the fishing port has 20 trim rooms with pinewood furniture and tiled bathrooms. All have balconies.

**Costa Blanca** (☎ 96 578 03 36; www.hotelcostablanca.com; Calle Pintor Llorens 3; s/d from €35/55; p n a ) Beside the train station, this is an excellent-value option except in high summer, when prices soar to €45/87 for singles/doubles. Rooms are comfortable and cosily furnished and the port is but a few steps away. Parking is €10.

**Posada del Mar** (☎ 96 643 29 66; www.laposada delmar.com; Plaza Drassanes 2; r with breakfast €115-165;

p n a i ) This sensitively renovated hotel occupies a 13th-century building that last functioned as Denia's customs house. Each of its 25 rooms is individually decorated with a nautical theme and light streams through the large windows that overlook the harbour. Parking costs €15.

## Eating

There's a clutch of tempting restaurants catering for all pockets along harbour-facing Bel-lavista, Calle Port and their continuation, Plaza del Raset.

**Restaurante Drassanes** (☎ 96 578 11 18; Calle Port 15; mains €7.50-12, menus €15-23; h lunch & dinner Tue-Sun Dec-Oct) Bustling and seething on two levels, the Drassanes is pleasantly informal compared to some of its more expensive and stuffier neighbours.

**Asador del Puerto** (☎ 96 642 34 82; Plaza del Raset 10-11; mains €16.50-22) This is an excellent choice for either meat, roasted in a clay oven, or fish dishes. Try the *cochinillo* (suckling pig), crispy on the outside, juicy within and roasted to a turn.

## Getting There & Away

From the station, seven trains daily follow the scenic route southwards to Alicante (€7.75, 2½ hours; change to the tram in El Campello) via Altea (€3.50) and Benidorm (€4.30).

For the Balearic Islands, **Balearia Lines** (☎ 902 16 01 80; www.balearia.net) runs daily ferries to/from Mallorca and Ibiza. Both **Acciona Trasmediterránea** (☎ 902 45 46 45; www.acciona-trasmediterranea.es) and **Iscomar** (☎ 902 11 91 28; www.iscomar.com) run a high-speed service to/from Ibiza.

## XÀBIA

pop 28,250

With a third of its resident population and over two-thirds of its annual visitors non-Spanish (every second shop seems to be an estate agent/realtor), Xàbia (Castilian: Jávea) isn't the best place to meet the locals. That said, it's gentle, laid-back and well worth a visit early in the season, when the sun shines but the masses haven't yet arrived.

Xàbia comes in three parts: the attractive old town 2km inland; El Puerto (the port), directly east of the old quarter; and the beach zone of El Arenal, a couple of kilometres to the south of the harbour. Further south, the promontory of Cabo de La Nao offers spectacular views.

## Information

**Bookworld** (☎ 96 646 22 53; Avenida Amanecer de España 13) In the old town.

**Lavandería Los Delfines** (Avenida del Pla s/n, El Arenal; 10am-1pm & 4-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat)  
**Link** (Calle San Rafael, El Arenal; per hr €2.50; 10am-2pm & 2.30-9pm Mon-Sat) Internet access.

**Tourist offices** (www.xabia.org); El Arenal (☎ 96 646 06 05; Carretera Cabo de la Nao; 10am-1.30pm & 4.30-7.30pm or 5-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1.30pm Sat); Old Town (☎ 96 579 43 56; Plaza de la Iglesia; 10am-1.30pm & 4.30-7.30pm or 5-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1.30pm Sat); Port (☎ 96 579 07 36; Plaza Almirante Bastarache 11; 4.30-7.30pm Sat & 10am-1.30pm Sun)

## Activities

To explore the old town, pick up the free tourist office brochure, *Historical Centre of Jávea*. Its *Nature Parks & Trekking Routes* describes six waymarked routes in the area, including an ascent of Montgó, the craggy mountain that looms over the town. Year-round, the tourist office leads free guided walks almost daily.

## Sleeping

The harbour area has a couple of options.

**Camping Naranjal** (☎ 96 579 29 89; www.campinge.naranjal.com; Camino dels Morers 15; sites per person/tent €5/11.25; 11 year-round) A 10-minute walk from the beach.

**Pensión la Favorita** (☎ 96 579 04 77; fax 96 579 64 68; Calle Magellanes 4; r €26-35, with shower €32-41, with bathroom €41-46; 11 Mar-Nov) Run by a friendly young couple, this popular place is clean as a new pin, fresh with flowers and warmly recommended.

**Hotel Miramar** (☎ /fax 96 579 01 02; Plaza Almirante Bastarache 12; s/d €29/52, Jul-Sep €40/64; a ) This imposing building, right beside the port, couldn't be nearer the sea. Rooms are cosy (those overlooking the bay carry a €10 to €15 supplement) and there's a bar and restaurant.

**Parador de Jávea** (☎ 96 579 02 00; www.paradores.es; Avenida del Mediterráneo 7; s/d €120/150) Architecturally, Xàbia's boxy, once-modern *parador* ranks among the least exciting of this excellent state-owned chain. But it enjoys a magnificent site, on a headland overlooking the bay of El Arenal.

## Eating & Drinking

The old town has several enticing tapas bars, while bars and restaurants flank Avenida de la Marina Española, the pedestrianised promenade south of the port. In El Arenal, cafés and restaurants hug the rim of the beachside Paseo Marítimo.

**La Bombonería** (☎ 96 579 16 47; Avenida Lepanto 20; mains €14.50-18.50; 11 Mon-Sat) Near the port and set back from the road, this restaurant offers good traditional cuisine with a creative twist. You can dine inside or on its ivy-clad terrace.

**Amarre 152** (☎ 96 579 06 29; Port de la Fontana; meals €30) At the end of a backwater in El Arenal, this is a delightful retreat (just count your way along the moorings to number 152), with a designer interior and small quayside terrace. Great for rice dishes, its fish is the freshest: nothing from the freezer and not even a minnow from a fish farm.

In the old town, **Temptacions** (☎ 96 579 29 20; Plaza de la Iglesia 10) is adapted from two old houses (only their doorway arches, curving over the interior, still survive). Nearby (go down the steps beside the tourist office), **neighbours Bar Imperial** (☎ 96 646 11 81; Plaza de Baix 2) and **Tertulia** (☎ 96 646 07 61; Plaza de Baix 3) have pleasant terraces and offer both tapas and full meals.

## Getting There & Around

Six buses run daily to both Valencia (€8.90) and Alicante (€7.55). They stop on Avenida Óndara, near the unnamed square with a large olive tree at its heart.

You can rent a cycle at **Xàbia's Bike Centre** (☎ 96 646 11 50; xabiabike@hotmail.com; Avenida Lepanto 21; per day/week from €7/42) in the port area.

## CALPE

pop 25,200

The Gibraltaresque Peñon de Ifach, a giant molar protruding from the sea, dominates the seaside resort of Calpe (Valenciano: Calp).

Two large bays sprawl either side of the Peñon: Playa Arenal on the southern side is backed by the old town, while Playa Levante to the north has most of the more recent development.

## Information

**DIP Digital Center** (Calle Benidorm 15; per hr €3; 10am-midnight Mon-Sat, 4-11pm Sun) Internet access.

**Librería Europa** (☎ 96 583 58 24; Calle Oscar Espá 2) Good stock of titles in English and other European languages.

**Main tourist office** (☎ 96 583 85 32; www.calpe.es; Plaza del Mosquit; 10am-1.30pm & 4-7pm or 5-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1.30pm Sat) In the old town.

## Sights

A fairly strenuous trail – allow 2½ hours for the round trip – climbs from the Peñon's **Aula de Naturaleza** (Nature Centre) towards the 332m summit, offering great seascapes from its end point at the end of a dark tunnel. In July and August numbers on the cliff are limited to 150 at a time, so you may have a short wait.

## Sleeping

**Camping Levante** (☎ 96 583 22 72; campinglevante@telefonica.es; Avenida de la Marina s/n; tent & 2 campers €24) A brief walk from Playa Levante.

**Pensión Centrica** (☎ 96 583 55 28; mjpiffet@telefonica.net; Plaza de Ifach 5; per person €12) This welcoming, recommended place just off Avenida Gabriel Miró has 13 neat, well maintained basic rooms and there's a fridge and microwave for guests' use. Look out for the pet tortoise and iguana...

**Hotel Bahía** (☎ 96 583 97 02; www.bahiacalpe-hotel.com; Avenida de Valencia 24; s/d from €59/74, mid-Jul–Aug from €115/148; p a s ) The Bahía, overlooking Playa Arenal, is a very stylish option that's handy for both beach and town. Sea-facing rooms (aim high, towards the top of its seven floors) offer good views of the beach and Peñon. Parking costs €9 and there's wi-fi access.

**Hotel Esmeralda** (☎ 96 583 61 01; www.rocaesmeralda.com; Calle Ponent 1; s €64.75-85.25, d €84.50-127.50; p a s ) At the northern limit of Playa Levante, the huge Esmeralda, as much leisure complex as hotel, is particularly suited to families with children. If the sea fails to call, there are three outside pools and a heated indoor one too, plus a gym, a couple of restaurants and a café. Parking costs €5.35.

## Eating

There are plenty of restaurants and bars around Plaza de la Constitución and along the main Avenida de Gabriel Miró, plus a cluster of good fish places down by the port.

**La Cambra** (☎ 96 583 06 05; Calle Delfin 2; mains €15-21; 11 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat Jul-Aug, lunch Mon-Thu, dinner Fri & Sat Oct-Jun) All agreeably antique wood and tiles, La Cambra specialises in rice dishes (€10 to €12) and also has a rich à la carte selection.

**Los Zapatos** (☎ 96 583 15 07; Calle Santa María 7; mains €13-20; 11 lunch & dinner Thu-Mon Dec-Oct) Highly recommended, this German-run restaurant has a short, specialised à la carte menu. In season it does a tempting *menú caza y pescado* (hunting and fish menu) with boar and fish of the day. Or go for their 'Menu for Fish Freaks'.

## Getting There & Away

Seven FGV trains travel daily northwards to Denia (€2.65, 40 minutes) and south to Alicante (€5.35, 1¼ hours) via Benidorm (€1.75).

Buses connect Calpe with both Alicante and Valencia (€9.85, 3½ hours, six daily). The bus station (Avenida de la Generalitat Valenciana) is on the ring road.

## ALTEA

pop 21,200

Altea, separated from Benidorm only by the thick wedge of the Sierra Helada, could be a couple of moons away. Its beaches are mostly pebbles and rock – and that's what has saved it so far from mass tourism. The whitewashed old town, perched on a hilltop overlooking the sea, is just about the prettiest *pueblo* in all the Comunidad Valenciana.

Altea's **tourist office** (☎ 96 584 41 14; Calle San Pedro 9) is on the beachfront.

Off Plaza de la Iglesia in the old town, and especially down Calle Major, there's a profusion of cute little restaurants, many open for dinner only except in high summer.

## BENIDORM

pop 67,500

It's easy to be snobbish about Benidorm, which long ago sold its birthright to cheap package tourism. But the old girl, though violated most summer nights by louts from northern Europe, still manages to retain a certain dignity. The foreshore is magnificent as the twin sweeps of Playa del Levante and the longer Playa del Ponent – 5km of white sandy beaches – meet beneath Plaza del Castillo, where the land juts into the bay like a ship's prow.

In winter half of all visitors are over 60, mostly from northern Europe. During summer Benidorm is for all ages.

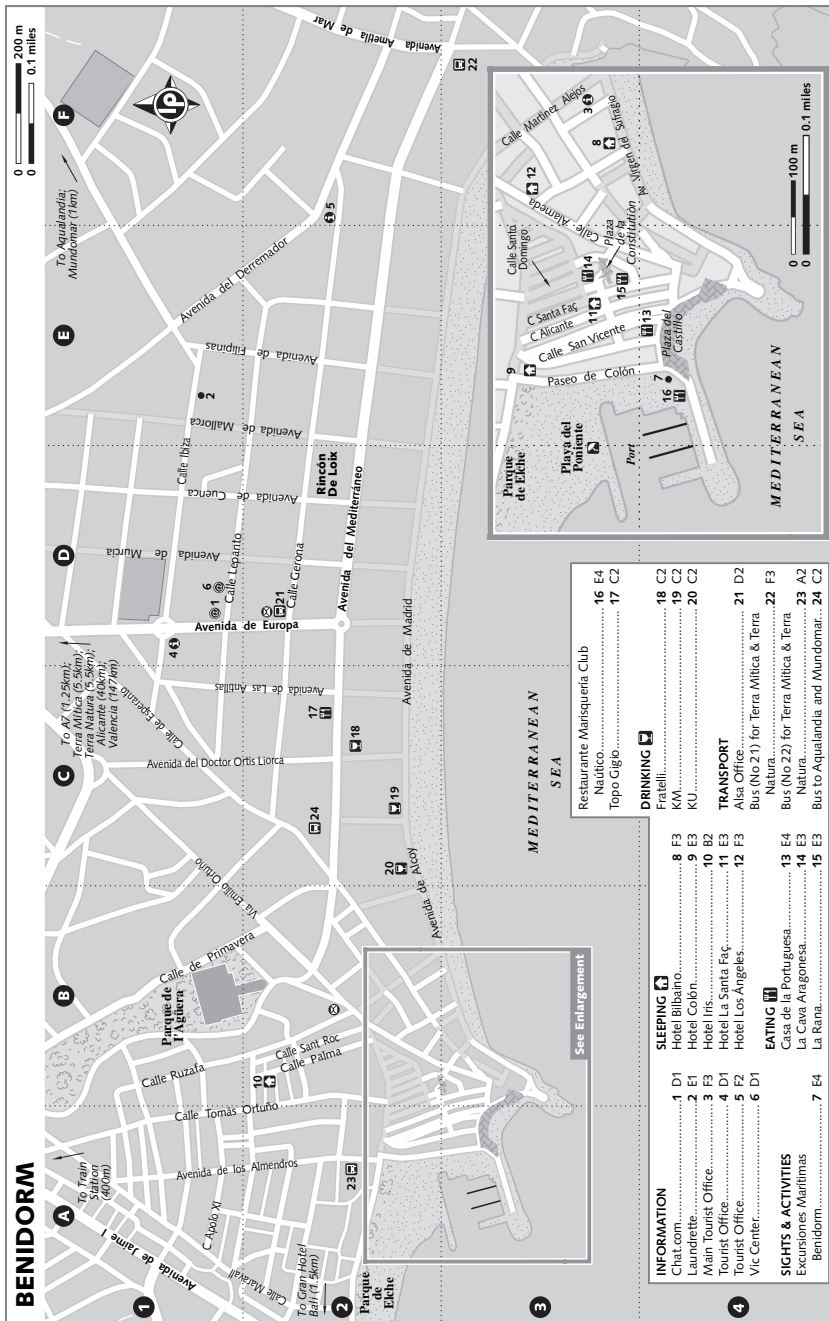
## Information

**Chat.com** (Avenida de Europa s/n; per hr €1.80; 10am-midnight) Internet access.

**Laudrette** (Calle Ibiza 14; 11 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat)

**Main tourist office** (☎ 96 585 13 11; www.benidorm.org; Avenida Martínez Alejos 6; 11 9.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1.30pm & 4.30-7.30pm Sat, 10am-1.30pm Sun) There are also tourist office kiosks on Avenida de Europa and in Rincon de Loix.

**Vic Center** (Calle Lepanto 6; per hr €1.80; 11 9.30am-midnight) Internet access.



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Bus (No 22) for Terra Mítica & Terra Natura	24 C2
Bus to Aquilandia and Mundomar	

## Sights & Activities

**Terra Mítica** (Mythical Land; % 902 02 02 20; adult/child €33/25; h 10am-10pm mid-Jul-Aug, 10am-8pm Apr-mid-Jul & Sep, Sat & Sun only Oct) is the Costa Blanca's answer to Disneyland. A fun day out, especially if you're with children, it's Mediterranean in theme, with plenty of rides and areas devoted to ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, Iberia and the islands. Take bus 21 or 22.

**Terra Natura** (% 902 50 04 14; adult/child €20/15; h 10am-dusk) is a rival theme park, also on the grand scale. Over 1000 animals live in man-made habitats, there's a water park (€5 supplement) and, for the brave, the chance to swim with sharks (fairly small and benign, no visitors yet lost).

**Aqualandia** (% 96 586 01 00; adult/child €23/16; h 10am-7pm mid-May-mid-Oct) is Europe's largest water park. Beside it is **Mundomar** (% 96 586 91 01; adult/child €20/14; h 10am-7pm), a marine and animal park with parrots, dolphins, sea lions, even bats – and no, they're not mermaids but a bevy of girls doing synchronised swimming with dolphins. Each is worth a full day. It's economical to buy a combined ticket (€31/21 adult/child), which can be used on different days. Take bus 11.

Should Benidorm's frenetic pace get you down, pick up a free copy of *Routes Across Sierra Helada* from the tourist office and stride out into the hills north of town for superb bay views.

**Excursiones Marítimas Benidorm** (% 96 85 00 52; Paseo de Colón) runs hourly boats (€10/8 adult/child return) to the Isla de Benidorm, a full-day outing to the island of Tabarca (€25/16) and a cruise up the coast to Calpe (€19/12).

## Sleeping

Almost everyone's on a package deal, so accommodation can be expensive for the independent traveller. Book on line through **Benidorm Spotlight** ([www.benidorm-spotlight.com](http://www.benidorm-spotlight.com)) for significant discounts.

**Hotel Iris** (% /fax 96 586 52 51; Calle Palma 47; s €25-45, d €25-50; i ) Here's a friendly budget choice on a fairly quiet street. All rooms come with fans and bathtubs and most have a small balcony too. There's a cosy ground floor bar for guests only, equipped with three Internet terminals.

**Hotel Los Angeles** (% 96 680 74 33; Calle Los Angeles 3; s/d Nov-Jun from €27/50, Jul-Sep €43/72) This pleasant, informal, family-owned hotel is also in the old town. Fifth- and sixth-floor rooms have

large balconies at no extra cost. The family also runs **Penión** and **Restaurant del Mar**, just down the road, where guests staying at the **Los Angeles** dine.

**Hotel La Santa Faç** (% 96 585 40 63; [www.santafazhotel.com](http://www.santafazhotel.com); Calle Santa Faç 18; s/d/tr €48/75/90; h Apr-Oct; a ) This long-established hotel, up a narrow street in the old quarter, is friendly and full of character. All rooms have a balcony.

Larger hotels can be reasonable value out of season.

**Hotel Colón** (% 96 585 04 12; [www.hotelcolon.net](http://www.hotelcolon.net); Paseo de Colón 3; s/d €30/42, Jul-Aug €56/84; h mid-Mar-Oct; a ) Conveniently positioned where the neck of the promontory and old town meet Playa del Poniente, the Colón is great value outside high season. Half-board is only €3 more than the B&B, though don't expect fine cuisine. East-facing rooms have great views of Playa Poniente.

**Hotel Bilbaino** (% 96 585 08 04; [www.hotelbilbaino.com](http://www.hotelbilbaino.com); Avenida Virgen del Sufragio 1; s/d winter €31.60/51, summer €54/96; h Mar-Nov; a ) This, Benidorm's very first hotel, still belongs to the same family. Now completely remodelled, it overlooks the beach and is a particularly good deal outside high summer.

**GranHotel Bali** (% 96 681 52 00; [www.granhotelbali.com](http://www.granhotelbali.com); Calle Luis Prendes s/n; half-board per person €46-89; p a s ) At 186m high, this mammoth complex, as much space-age village as hotel, is Europe's tallest. Its vastness isn't to everyone's taste but, with 23 lifts/elevators (have fun riding one of the two external ones), 776 rooms and a pair of restaurants that can accommodate up to 1000 diners, it's superlative in many senses.

## Eating

For Benidorm's biggest concentration of local and Spanish regional restaurants and tapas bars, take your pick from those lining Calle Santo Domingo at the Plaza de la Constitución end.

**Topo Gigio** (% 96 585 71 68; Edificio Marianne 9, Avenida del Mediterráneo) On the main east-west drag and hemmed in by high rises, this authentically Italian place prepares superior pizzas and pastas (around €8) and also offers a selection of mains from across the Med.

**Restaurante Marisquería Club Náutico** (% 96 585 54 25; Paseo de Colón s/n; mains €12-18, menus €21) At this elegant restaurant, designed with flair, you can pick at tapas by the bar or enjoy a full meal on the large terrace – where you can also simply enjoy a drink and the view over Benidorm's small port.



## AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**La Cava Aragonesa** (Plaza de la Constitución) We have been dropping into this place for well over a decade now. What keeps drawing us back is its magnificent selection of tapas, fat canapés, 20 different plates of cold cuts and good wine by the glass (a decent measure of Catalan bubbly is still under a euro).

**Casa de la Portuguesa** (% 96 585 89 58; Calle San Vicente 39; mains €9.50-14) With its tables spilling onto the narrow street in summer, this restaurant, a favourite of Benidorm's movers and shakers, is nevertheless very reasonably priced. Family-run, it owes its reputation to its great rice dishes and fresh fish.

**La Rana** (% 96 586 81 20; Costero del Barco 6; meals €20) One of Benidorm's oldest restaurants (that aged cash register must have rung up the very first bills), The Frog serves authentic Spanish cuisine. Tucked away up a cobbled alley, it's well worth tracking down.

## Drinking &amp; Entertainment

**Fratelli** (% 96 585 39 79; Calle Doctor Orts Llorca s/n; 11-6pm) For a sophisticated drink in a town not noted for subtlety, park yourself on a stool at this recently opened, cool designer cocktail place that styles itself 'Bar Fashion'.

**KU** (Avenida de Alcoy s/n; 11-10am-5am), with its reproduction Hindu and Buddhist statues, plays the oriental card. At its near neighbour **KM** (Avenida de Alcoy; 11-11am-5am), the music's eclectic until 6pm, when it's strictly house. Both are laid-back cafés during the day, changing tempo once the sun sets.

Both have mega *discotecas* on Avenida de la Comunidad Valenciana and the outskirts of town. They and other similar giants open daily in July and August, and at weekends year-round.

## Getting There &amp; Away

**ALSA** (% 96 680 39 55; www.alsa.es) buses run north and south along the Costa Blanca to/from Valencia (€12.70 to €14.35, 1½ hours) and Alicante (€3.40, one hour, at least hourly). The ticket office (set back in La Nuria shopping mall) is at the bus stop (Avenida de Europa 8).

Alternatively, you can take the FGV train to Alicante (€3.45, 1¼ hours, hourly), Denia (€4.30, 1¼ hours, seven daily) and all stations in between.

## ALICANTE

pop 319,400

Alicante (Valenciano: Alacant), the Valencia region's second-largest town, lives for much more than tourism alone. Dynamic, it's transformed itself from a somewhat seedy port to an attractive place that improves with every visit. Try to fit in at least one overnight stay to experience its frenetic – and unmistakably Spanish – nightlife.

## Orientation

Palm trees shade the pedestrianised Paseo Explanada de España, lined with cafés and running parallel to the harbour. Around Catedral de San Nicolás are the narrow streets of El Barrio (the old quarter), which has most of the cheaper accommodation options and a vibrant nightlife. El Barrio is bordered by the Rambla de Méndez Núñez, the principal north-south artery.

## Information

Main post office (Calle de Alemania)

Municipal tourist office (www.alicanteturismo.com; Bus Station)

Regional tourist office (% 96 520 00 00; Rambla de Méndez Núñez 23; 11-9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm &amp; 3-8pm Sat)

UP Internet (Calle Ángel Lozano 10; per hr €1.65;

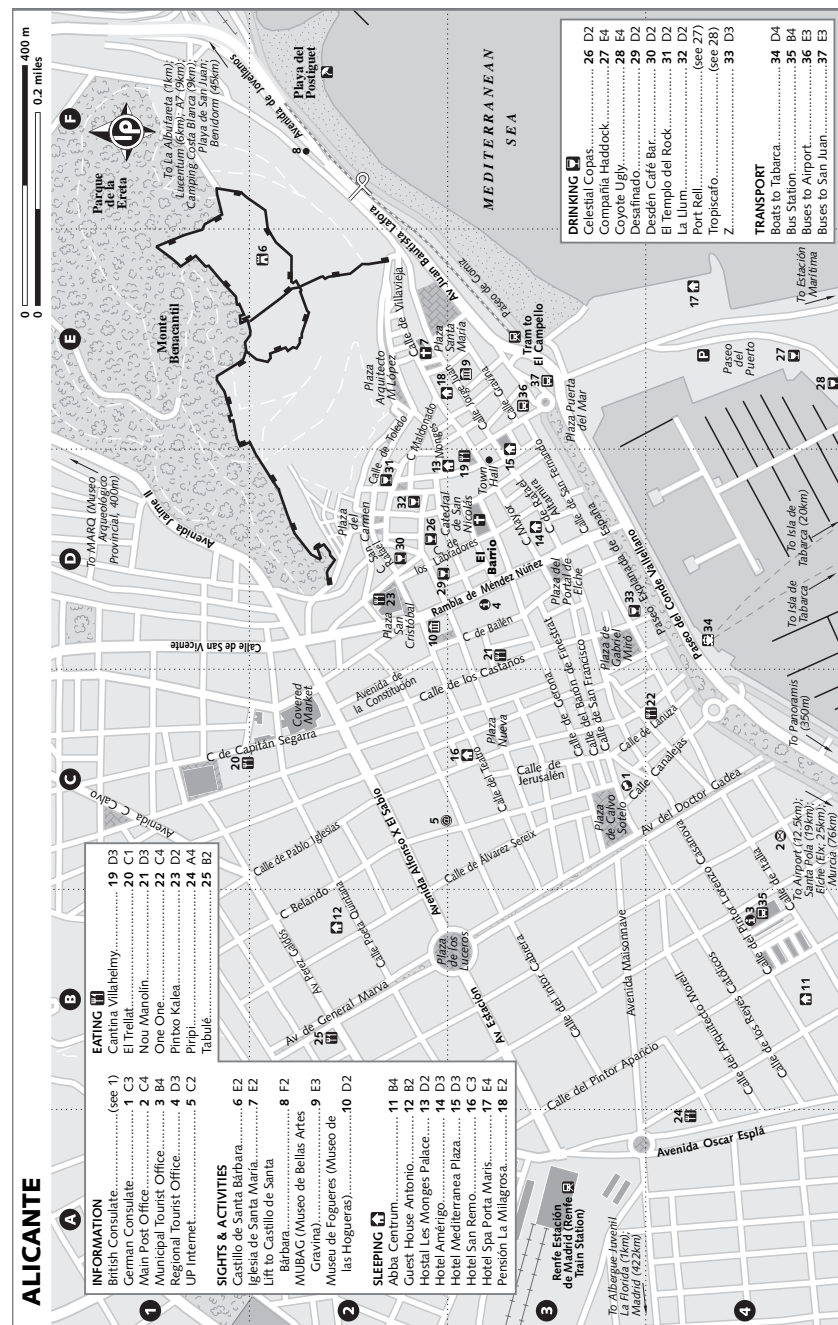
11-8am-1am Mon-Thu, 9am-3am Fri &amp; Sat, 9am-1am Sun)

## Sights &amp; Activities

**MARO** (Museo Arqueológico Provincial; % 96 514 90 06; Plaza Doctor Gómez Ulla s/n; adult/child €3/1.50; 11-10am-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), very visual and high-tech, well merits a visit even though there's little information in English. Buses 2, 6, 9, 20 and 23 pass by.

The **Museo de Fogueras** (Museo de las Hogueras; % 96 514 68 28; Rambla de Méndez Núñez 29; admission free; 11-10am-2pm & 5-8pm or 6-9pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) has a great audiovisual presentation of what the Fiesta de Sant Joan (p618), all fire and partying, means to *alicantinos*.

From the 16th-century **Castillo de Santa Bárbara** (admission free; 11-10am-7.30pm Apr-Oct, 9am-6.30pm Nov-Mar) there are sweeping views over the city. Inside is a permanent display of contemporary Spanish sculpture. A lift/elevator (€2.40 return), reached by a footbridge opposite Playa del Postiguet, rises through the bowels of the mountain. It's a pleasant walk down through Parque de la Ereta via Calle San Rafael to Plaza del Carmen.



**MUBAG** (Museo de Bellas Artes Gravina; % 96 514 67 80; Calle Gravina 13-15; admission free; h 10am-2pm & 4-8pm or 5-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), Alicante's stimulating fine arts museum, is within an 18th-century mansion.

Nearby, the **Iglesia de Santa María** (admission €1; h 10am-12.30pm & 6-8.30pm) has a flamboyant, 18th-century façade and ornate, gilded altarpiece, both contrasting with the nave's Gothic simplicity.

From the harbour, boats (€16 return) make the 45-minute run to the popular island of Tabarca (p620), 20km south.

A pleasant harbourside promenade and tiled walkway (separated only by a hideously busy road) follow the curve of the port. On the western mole is **Panoramis**, a vast shopping and leisure complex.

Immediately north of the port is the sandy beach of **Playa del Postiguet**. Larger and less crowded beaches are at **Playa de San Juan**, easily reached by buses 21 and 22.

## Festivals & Events

Alicante's major festival is the **Fiesta de Sant Joan**, spread either side of 24 June, when the city stages its own version of Las Fallas (see the boxed text, p586), with fireworks and satirical effigies (Valenciano: *fogueres*, Spanish: *hogueras*) going up in smoke all over town.

## Sleeping

### BUDGET

**Camping Costa Blanca** (% 965 63 06 70; www.campingcostablanca.com; Calle Convento, Campello; sites per person/tent/car €4.75/7.05/4.75; s ) This large camp site is about 10km north of Alicante. The train passes right by.

**Albergue Juvenil La Florida** (% 96 511 30 44; Avenida Orihuela 59; under/over 26yr €7.45/10.60) **Around 2km** west of the centre and normally a student residence, La Florida functions as a youth hostel between July and mid-September. Facilities are excellent, with most beds in single rooms. Take bus 2 or 3, both of which pass by the bus and Renfe train stations.

**Pensión La Milagrosa** (% 96 521 69 18; www.hostalamilagrosa.com; Calle de Villavieja 8; s/d €20/35, with bath-room €30/45; a ) From its freshly painted façade to the refurbished roof terrace, The Miracle has been given a thorough going over recently. It also has three apartments (€50) that can sleep up to six (per extra person €20). There's also a small guest kitchen and washing machine.

## AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Hostal Les Monges Palace** (% 96 521 50 46; www.lesmonges.net; Calle San Agustín 4; s/d with shower €27/41, with bathroom €39/54; p a i ) This agreeably quirky place, with its winding corridors, tiles, mosaics and antique furniture, is a treasure. Each room is individually and tastefully decorated, there's parking for €10 and the reception couldn't be more welcoming. To really pamper yourself, choose one of the two rooms with sauna and Jacuzzi (€92). Look out for the small Dalí original beside the reception desk...

**Guest House Antonio** (% 650 718353; www.guesthousealicante.com; Calle Segura 20; s €25-32, d €33-45; a ) Here's a magnificent budget choice. Each of the eight large, tastefully decorated rooms has a safe, full-size fridge and free beverage-making facilities. The five apartments (€60 to €70), two with their own patio, have a mini-kitchen and washing machine and are exceptional value. There's also free wi-fi and Antonio has two other apartments, one nearby, the other handy for the bus station.

## MIDRANGE & TOP END

**Hotel San Remo** (% 96 520 95 00; www.hotelsanremo.net; Calle Navas 30; s €31-37, d €45-57, tr €61-75; p n a ) This friendly, family-run hotel has 27 spruce, well-maintained, if smallish, rooms. Although it doesn't offer breakfast, there's a coffee machine near reception that dispenses the real brew. There's also wi-fi access.

**Hotel Mediterranea Plaza** (% 96 521 01 88; www.hotelmediterraneaplaza.com; Plaza del Ayuntamiento 6; s €75-127, d €99-140; n a ) Occupying a converted 18th-century mansion in a pedestrian square, the Mediterranea Plaza couldn't be more central. It has spacious, stylishly furnished rooms with wood floors, plus a sauna, gym and sun terrace.

**Hotel Spa Porta Maris** (% 96 514 70 21; www.hotelspportamaris.com; Plaza Puerta del Mar 3; s €77.50-108, d from €87.50-123; a s ) Each of the 138 rooms has a balcony overlooking either beach or marina. Among the many facilities at this hyperhealthy choice are pools, gym and a Wellness Center. Then again, no one will care if you simply slob around...

**Abba Centrum** (% 96 513 04 40; www.abbahoteles.com; Calle Pintor Lorenzo Casanova 33; r €85-125; p n a i )

With a new name and a radical overhaul in 2005, the **Abba Centrum** is a hugely attractive option in the heart of town. Weekend rates drop to a bargain €60 per room. Parking costs €11.

**Hotel Aragón** (% 96 514 65 70; www.hospes.es; Calle Rafael Altamira 7; r from €140; p n a i s ) Within an old Dominican convent, this glorious five-star hotel harmoniously blends the traditional and ultra-modern. Enjoy the views from the rooftop pool, itself a work of art, build up a sweat in the fitness area or just flop in the solarium – if you can tear yourself away from the comfort of your stunningly designed room. Parking costs €15 and there's wi-fi access.

## Eating

**El Trelat** (% 965 20 62 75; Calle Capitán Segarra 19; menús lunch €8.50, dinner €11.50; h lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Fri & Sat) Beside the covered market, this small, friendly place does creative three-course *menús*: first course a serve-yourself buffet, then an ample choice of inventive mains. For dessert it has to be *brazo de gitano con crema de turrón* (gypsy's arm; a swiss roll wrapped around soft creamy nougat). Trust the chef; he previously worked in Alicante's premier cake shop.

**Cantina Villahelmy** (% 965 21 25 29; Calle Mayor 37; mains €4-8; h lunch & dinner Tue-Sat & lunch Sun) Intimate, funky and popular, the Villahelmy has lots of snacks, excellent salads and a menu that features dishes from couscous to octopus.

**Pintxo Kalea** (% 96 514 58 41; Plaza San Cristóbal 11; menús €12) Basque music wails and jigs in the background at this modern, stylish bar and restaurant, which does a wonderful selection of juicy *pinchos* (small open sandwiches), salads, steaks and cod prepared in four different ways.

**Tabulé** (% 965 13 34 45; Avenida Pérez Galdós 52; menús €18; h lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Wed-Sat; v ) At this friendly vegetarian restaurant, run by an all-girl team, you take what's on offer on the day's *menú*. You won't repeat yourself; it's original, inventive and changes weekly.

**One One** (% 965 20 63 99; Calle Valdés 9; meals €25; h Tue-Sat) It's easier if you speak a little Spanish at this wonderfully eccentric place (pronounced 'on-eh, on-eh') with its faithful following of regulars, but a touch of bravado will get you by (just ask your ebullient host about his travels to Peru). It's a true bistro, the walls scarcely visible for photos and posters, and there's no menu. Just listen carefully as Bartólome intones...

**Nou Manolín** (% 96 520 03 68; Calle Villegas 3; menús €15, mains €10-19) This mellow bare-brick place does magnificent bar tapas and delightful rice dishes. Book in advance, since it's another favourite among discerning *alicantinos*.

**Piripi** (% 96 522 79 40; Avenida Oscar Esplá 30; mains €13-23) This highly regarded restaurant is strong on stylish tapas (head for the shoulder-to-shoulder downstairs bar) and fine rice or seafood dishes.

Self-caterers can browse around Alicante's huge, Art Nouveau twin-storey covered market (Avenida Alfonso X El Sabio).

## Drinking

The old quarter around Catedral de San Nicolás is walk-to-wall bars. Down by the harbour, the Paseo del Puerto, tranquil by day, is a double-decker line of bars, cafés and night-time discos.

Early opener **Desdén Café Bar** (Calle de los Labradores 22) is a friendly place to kick off the evening, while **La Llum** (cnr Calles Montegon & Padre Maltés) is a tiny sweatbox dance-bar that goes wild late into the night. No prizes for guessing what music prevails at nearby **El Templo del Rock** (Plazo Quijano 1).

**Celestial Copas** (Calle San Pascual 1) is heavenly and decidedly weird, with a kitsch collection of religious art/junk and great music. Nearby, **Desafinado** (Santo Tomas 6) is another heaving dance bar with DJs that also offers good jazz.

An easy walk away, **Z** (Calle Coloma; h Tue-Sun) is a slick *discoteca* with a dress code. Don't turn up before 3am unless you want to dance alone.

In the port area, if you don't recognise **Compañía Haddock** by the din, you will from the image of Tintin's pipe-smoking companion. Sitting above it – and risking bringing the roof down on a good night – is **Port Rel**.

A couple of doors along, **Tropiscafo** beams out good recorded jazz, while beside it **Coyote Ugly** sometimes has live music.

If you're still on your feet, take the night ferry over to the Panoramis complex, where the opportunities for nocturnal action are almost as rich.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

Alicante's El Altet airport (% 96 691 91 00), gateway to the Costa Blanca, is served by budget airlines, charters and scheduled flights from all over Europe.

Two cut-price operators, both with offices at Alicante airport, are **Servitour** (☎ 96 568 26 42; www.servitour.es) and **V. Travel 2000** (☎ 96 691 94 60), which also calls itself Goflightline.

#### BOAT

**Acciona Trasmediterránea** (www.acciona-trasmediterranea.es) and **Romeu** (☎ 96 520 04 01), an Algerian company, run regular ferries to/from Oran in Algeria.

#### BUS

From the bus station (☎ 96 513 07 00) over 10 motorway buses run daily to Valencia (€16.30 to €18.55, 2½ hours). Others, much slower, pass through Costa Blanca coastal towns such as Benidorm (€3.40, one hour, at least hourly). At least four serve Madrid (€33, 4¼ hours).

#### TRAIN

Destinations from the main Renfe Estación de Madrid (Avenida de Salamanca) include Murcia (€5.10, 1½ hours, hourly) via Orihuela and Elche, Valencia (€24.50, two hours, up to 10 daily) via Villena and Xàtiva, Madrid (€38.60, 3¾ hours, five daily) and Barcelona (€47.25, five hours, eight daily).

**Ferrocarril de la Generalitat Valenciana** (FGV; ☎ 900 72 04 72) has a tram and narrow-gauge train service, the *trenet* (little train), which follows a coastal route that's scenically stunning at times. A tram (every half hour) runs northwards as far as El Campello, where the *trenet* takes over. It runs to Denia (€7.75) via Playa de San Juan (€0.95), Benidorm (€3.45) and Calpe (€5.35). Trains run hourly as far as Altea and every two hours to Denia (€8.20).

#### Getting Around

El Altet airport is around 12km southwest of the centre. Bus C-6 runs every 40 minutes between Plaza Puerta del Mar and the airport, passing by the north side of the bus station.

Reliable and very economical local car-hire companies operating from the airport include **Javea Cars** (☎ 96 579 33 12; www.javeacars.com), **Solmar** (☎ 96 646 10 00; www.solmar.es) and **Victoria Cars** (☎ 96 583 02 54; www.victoriacars.com).

There are also taxis (☎ 96 510 16 11).

### AROUND ALICANTE

#### Isla de Tabarca

A trip to Tabarca, around 15km to 20km south of Alicante as the seagull flies, makes for a pleasant day trip – as much for the boat ride

itself as for the island, which can heave with tourists in summer. Pack your towel and face-mask. Much of the waters that lap this small island, 1800m long and 400m wide at its widest point, are protected and no-go areas. But fish don't understand such boundaries and you'll enjoy some great underwater viewing in permitted areas.

In summer, daily boats visit the island from both Alicante and Torrevieja and there are less regular sailings year-round.

#### Lucentum

On and around the Tossal de Manises spread the remains of the Roman town of **Lucentum** (☎ 96 526 24 34; adult/child €2/1.20; 9am-noon & 7-10pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-May), forerunner of Alicante. You can make out its clearly defined streets and town plan, and more waits to be revealed as excavation continues. Take bus 9 or 21.

#### TORREVEIEJA

pop 83,350

With a high proportion of northern European visitors, Torrevieja has good beaches. Sea salt production remains an important element of its economy.

**Ciber Paredes** (Calle Pedro Lorca 13; per hr €2; 10.30am-2pm & 4.30-10pm Tue-Sun) has Internet access.

The **tourist office** (☎ 96 570 34 33; www.webtorrevieja.com; Plaza de Capdepon; 8.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) is near the waterfront.

#### Sights & Activities

To appreciate why salt still means so much to *torrevejenses*, visit the **Museo del Mar y de la Sal** (Sea & Salt Museum; ☎ 96 670 68 38; Calle Patricio Pérez 10; admission free; 10am-2pm & 5-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1.30pm Sun), an appealing clutter of mementoes and bric-a-brac, and the more recent **Centro de Interpretación de la Industria Salinera** (☎ 96 570 58 88; Avenida de la Estación; admission free; 10am-1pm & 4-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat), more didactic yet with a lightness of touch.

**Aquópolis** (☎ 96 571 58 90; Finca la Hoya Grande s/n; adult/child €18.50/12.80; 11am-7pm mid-Jun–Aug) – say it aloud and the pun will make you wince – is a fun water park on the outskirts of town. It offers free transport from the bus station.

**El Delfin** (☎ 96 670 68 38; admission free; 10-5pm Wed-Sun) is a decommissioned navy submarine that you can prowl around.

The **Via Verde** is a 6km long walking and cycling track that follows an old railway line,

down which the last train steamed over 50 years ago. Running beside the lagoon and through the salt pans, it makes for a great half-day outing. Rent a bike from **Da Bike Profi** (☎ 96 692 83 67; Calle Pedro Lorca 49; per day €7) or **Family Bike Hire** (☎ 655 338066; www.costablancabikehire.com; per day/three days/week €12/24/39), who will deliver to your hotel.

Just to the south of the tourist office is a large parking area and the jetty from which boats leave in summer for day trips (€20/14 adult/child return) to the island of **Tabarca** (opposite).

#### Sleeping

**Camping La Campana** (☎ /fax 96 571 21 52; sites per person/tent €4.25/11; 11 Apr-Sep) The nearest camp site, La Campana is 4.5km south of town on the Cartagena road.

**Hotel Cano** (☎ 96 670 09 58; www.hotelcano.com; Calle Zoa 53; s/d mid-Sep–Jun €30/40, Jul–mid-Sep €40/60; p a ) Five blocks west of the bus station, the Cano has 57 trim, modern rooms, many with balcony. Those in the new wing have fresh furniture and plenty of pleasing woodwork. Parking is €8.

**Hotel Madrid** (☎ 96 571 00 38; www.ansahotel.com; Calle Villa Madrid 15; s/d with breakfast €45/63, Jul–mid-Sep €60/85; p a i ) With 40 rooms and one star up, the Madrid is a friendly option with comfortable, fairly spacious rooms, one equipped for travellers with disabilities. There's also a top-floor Jacuzzi. Parking costs €7.

**Hotel Masa Internacional** (☎ 96 692 15 37; hotel-masa@arrakis.com; Avenida Alfredo Nobel 150; s €55-90, d €77-120; p a s ) This smart cliff-top hotel, extensively renovated in 2003, is a lovely top-end choice, east of town and remote from all the downtown frenzy. Rooms overlooking the sea come at no extra cost.

#### Eating

Plenty of restaurants around the waterfront offer cheap meals and international menus. On Plaza Isabel II, park yourself on a patio and enjoy great grilled fresh fish.

**Restaurante Vegetariano** (☎ 96 670 66 83; Calle Pedro Lorca 13; mains €9, salads €5.25-8; 11am-10pm Tue-Sun; v ) One block back from the beachfront, this little vegetarian haven is run by a Spanish-Australian couple. It offers salads, sandwiches, pizzas and tasty mains.

**El Muelle** (☎ 96 670 41 72; Paseo Marítimo Juan Aparicio; mains €10-14, pizzas €8-12; a ) East of and set apart from the run-of-the-mill promenade restaurants, the highly regarded 'Jetty' does great

house pastas and mains, all served on crisp linen tablecloths. Eat on the terrace overlooking the sea or inside in the chill of the air-con.

**Mercado de Abastos** (Plaza Isabel II) Torrevieja's covered market is a great basket-filler for self-caterers.

#### Getting There & Away

From the bus station (☎ 96 571 01 46; Calle Antonio Machado), there are up to six buses daily to Madrid (€33.50, 5½ hours). Autocares Costa Azul runs eight buses daily to Cartagena (€3.77, 1¼ hours) and Alicante (€3.28, one hour).

## INLAND FROM THE COSTA BLANCA

The borderline between the holiday *costa* and the interior is, perhaps appropriately, a motorway. Venture away from the Med, west of the A7, to find yourself in a different, truly Spanish world. By far the easiest way to explore this hinterland is with your own transport.

#### XÀTIVA

pop 28,200

Xàtiva (Castilian: Játiva) makes an easy and rewarding 50km day trip from Valencia. It has a small historic quarter, town museum and a mighty castle strung along the crest of the Serra Vernissa, at whose base the town snuggles.

After the Reconquista, Xàtiva became Valencia's second-largest city. Birthplace of the Borgia Popes Calixtus III and Alexander VI and of the painter José Ribera (1591–1652), who sought fortune in Italy, its glory days ended in 1707 when Felipe V's troops torched most of the town.

#### Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 96 227 33 46; Alameda Jaime I 50; 10am-2.30pm Tue-Sun mid-Jun–mid-Sep, 10am-1.30pm & 4-6pm Tue-Fri, 10am-1.30pm Sat & Sun mid-Sep–mid-Jun) is on the Alameda, Xàtiva's shady main avenue.

#### Sights & Activities

Attractions of interest lie south and uphill from the Alameda. Ask at the tourist office for its English brochure, *Xàtiva: Monumental Town*.

In the **Museo del Almudín** (☎ 96 227 65 97; Calle Corretgeria 46; adult/child €2.10/1.10; 11am-2.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2.30pm Sat & Sun mid-Jun–mid-Sep, 10am-2pm & 4-6pm

Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun mid-Sep–mid-Jun) items of most interest, including a couple of fine portraits by Ribera, are up on the penultimate floor. You can't miss the portrait of Felipe V, hung upside down in retribution for his sacking the town.

The 16th-century *Colegiata Basílica* (Colegiata Church) impresses by its sheer size but little else. The paintings and statues, carefully illuminated, tend towards the kitsch. A contemporary curiosity: in a couple of side chapels are 20th-century portraits of clerics assassinated by the Republican side during the Spanish civil war.

It's a long climb to the castle (adult/child €2.10/1.10; 10am-6pm or 7pm), from where the views are sensational. On the way up, on your left is the 18th-century *Ermita de San José* and, to the right, the lovely Romanesque *Iglesia de Sant Feliu* (1269), Xàtiva's oldest church. Alternatively, hop aboard the little tourist train (€3.80 return) that heads up from the tourist office at 12.30pm and 4.30pm (5.30pm June to September) or call a taxi (€96 227 16 81).

### Sleeping & Eating

**Hotel Huerto Virgen de las Nieves** (€96 228 70 58; Avenida Ribera 6; r €82; a i s) This intimate hotel (it has only eight rooms) has been restored with very considerable flair. It's a wonderfully spacious place, all mellow brick and woodwork, with a secluded garden and wi-fi. Its restaurant (*menús* €15-40), open to all comers, is equally rich in character.

**Hostería Mont Sant** (€96 227 50 81; www.mont-sant.com; s €93.50-131, d €103-149.50; p a s) On the road to the castle, this place is charmingly set amid palm trees and orange groves. Stay in the main building, once a farm, or in one of the spacious wooden cabins. There's a splendid restaurant, agreeably divided into intimate crannies. Sip your sundowner beside the *mirador* (viewing platform) with its plunging view of the plains.

**Casa la Abuela** (€96 228 10 85; Calle de la Reina 17; mains €11-16.50, menus €13; 11am-8pm) Renowned for its à la carte cuisine and rice dishes, 'Grandmother's House' does a good *menú* for €12 and is strong on regional dishes.

**Canela y Clavo** (€96 228 24 26; Alameda Jaume I 64; mains €12-19) This place is spacious, well lit and staffed by black-clad waiters. It does inventive mains and an excellent value four-course lunch *menú* for €15. We savoured their *bacalao con fusión de erizos de mar y crema de almendras* (salt cod with sea urchins and cream of almonds).

### Getting There & Away

The train is by far your best bet. Frequent services connect Xàtiva with Valencia (€2.85, 45 minutes, half-hourly) and most Valencia-Madrid trains stop here too. You can also reach Alicante (€8.15-19.50, 1½ hours, six daily).

### VILLENA

pop 34,200

Villena, on the N330 between Alicante and Albacete, is the most attractive of the towns that dot the corridor of the Val de Vinalopó.

Plaza de Santiago is at the heart of the old quarter. The **tourist office** (€96 580 38 04; 11am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun) is at No 5. Within the fine 16th-century **Palacio Municipal** (Plaza de Santiago 2) is the **Museo Arqueológico** (admission free; 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Fri, 11am-2pm Sat & Sun). The pride of its collection are 60 gold artefacts weighing over 10kg, dating from around 1000 BC and found by chance in an old riverbed. Perched high above the town, the 12th-century **Castillo de la Atalaya** (admission free) is splendidly lit at night. Guided visits are offered every morning except Monday until 1pm.

Villena celebrates its **Moros y Cristianos** fiesta from 5 to 9 September (see the boxed text, p624).

### ELDA

pop 55,600

Elda vies with Elche for the title of shoemaking capital of Spain. Foot fetishists shouldn't miss the **Museo del Calzado** (Shoe Museum; €96 538 30 21; Avenida Chapí 32; adult/child €2.50/1.25; 10am-1pm & 4-8pm Tue-Sun). Above the mezzanine floor with its rows of Heath Robinson drills, stamps and sewing machines, it's wall-to-wall footwear: boots through the ages; shoes from around the world; fanciful designs that must have been agony to wear; and donated cast-offs from matadors, flamenco dancers, King Juan Carlos, Queen Sofia and other well-shod greats.

### NOVELDA

pop 26,250

If you're a fan of Art Nouveau (more often known as *Modernismo* in Spanish), make the 25km pilgrimage from Alicante to Novelda's wonderful **Casa-Museo Modernista** (€96 560 02 37; Calle Mayor 22; admission free; 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm Sat). A bourgeois mansion completed in 1903, its stained glass, soft shapes in wood, period furniture and magnificent spiralling wrought-iron staircase take the breath away.

**Novelda's tourist office** (€96 560 92 28; Calle Mayor 6; 11am-2pm & 4.30-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) is within the town's Centro Cultural, itself a lovely *Modernista* building. Admire too the exterior of the headquarters of the local Cruz Roja (Spanish Red Cross; Plaza del Ayuntamiento).

### JIJONA

If you love all things sweet, you really ought to make a pilgrimage to Jijona (Valenciano: Xixona), on the N340 more or less midway between Alicante and Alcoy. This small town has two claims to fame. Nowadays, it's Spain's principal producer of *turrón*, a kind of nougat with both soft and crunchy variants. In the past, the place was also a stopover for porters bearing ice from the high hinterland to assuage the heat of a coastal summer. And so it lent its name to Jijona, a popular brand of ice cream that sells by the hectolitre throughout the land.

### ALCOY

pop 60,950 / elevation 565m

For 51¾ weeks a year, there's really not a lot to entice you to the lugubrious industrial town of Alcoy (Valenciano: Alcoi), 54km north of Alicante. But there's everything to draw you here between 22 and 24 April, when Alcoy holds its resplendent **Moros y Cristianos** festival (see the boxed text, p624).

To get some idea of the splendour of the costumes and a feel for the fiesta, visit the **Casal de Sant Jordi** (€96 554 05 80; Calle San Miguel 62; admission €1.50; 11am-1pm & 5.30-7.30pm Tue-Fri, 10.30am-1.30pm Sat & Sun). Occupying an 18th-century mansion, it houses the festival's museum.

Alcoy's **tourist office** (€96 553 71 55; alcoi@touristinfo.net; Calle San Lorenzo 2) is just off the main Plaza de España.

**Hostal Savoy** (€96 554 72 72; www.hostalsavoy.com; Calle Casablanca 9; s/d/tr with bathroom €35/50/65; p) is a friendly place, one block south of Plaza de España and one of only three accommodation options in town. Rooms are trim and well kept and most have a bathtub. There's locked parking (€6) a short walk away.

Immediately west of Plaza de España, **Plaxa de Dins**, arcaded and more intimate, is packed with drinkers and diners on warm summer evenings.

There are four trains daily to/from Valencia (€6.75, two hours) via Xàtiva. From the nearby bus station, three to six daily services run to Valencia (€11.25), at least 10 to Alicante (€5.75) and a couple to Gandia (€3.75).

### GUADALEST

You'll be far from the first to discover the village of Guadalest; nowadays coaches, heading up from the Costa Blanca resorts, disgorge more than two million visitors annually. But get there early, or stay put after the last bus has pulled out and the place will be almost your own.

Crowds come because Guadalest, reached by a natural tunnel and overlooked by the **Castillo de San José** (adult/child €3.50/1.50; 10.30am-6pm or 7pm), is indeed very pretty, and it's a joy to stroll through a traffic-free village.

One little jewel amid so much day-tripper-orientated tackiness is the diminutive **Museo Etnológico** (€96 588 52 38; admission free, donations welcome; 10am-6pm daily Jun-Oct, Sun-Fri Nov-May), a sensitive presentation of what life in Guadalest was like before the coach parties came along.

### ELCHE

pop 215,150

A mere 23km southwest of Alicante, Elche (Valenciano: Elx) is a Unesco World Heritage site twice over: for the *Misteri d'Elx*, its annual mystery play (see the boxed text, p625) and for its extensive palm groves, Europe's largest and most northerly, originally planted by the Arabs. Muslim irrigation systems converted the region into a rich agricultural district that still produces citrus fruit, figs, almonds, dates – and 85% of Spain's pomegranates.

Its sights are comprehensively and accurately signed in English.

### Orientation

The town is split north-south by Río Vinalopó. The older quarter and most of the parks and monuments lie on its eastern side.

Train and bus stations are beside each other on Avenida de la Libertad (also called Avenida del Ferrocarril), north of the centre. From either, go left along Avenida de la Libertad, then left again down Paseo de la Estación to reach the tourist office and town centre.

### Information

**Entre Acto Cybercafé** (Calle Santa Barbara 15; per hr €3; 11am-midnight Mon-Fri, 3pm-2am Sat & Sun) Internet access.

**Tourist office** (€96 545 27 47; www.turismedelx.com; 10am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) At the southeast corner of Parque Municipal (Town Park).

## Sights & Activities

Around 200,000 palm trees, some shaggy and in need of a haircut, most trim and clipped, each with a lifespan of some 250 years, make the heart of this busy industrial town a veritable oasis. A signed 3km walking trail (ask at the tourist office for its leaflet, *Historic Palm Groves Route*) leads you through the groves.

Opposite the hotel of the same name, the **Huerto del Cura** (Porta de la Morera 49; adult/child with audioguide €5/3; 9am-sunset Mar-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Feb) is a lovely private garden with tended lawns and colourful flowerbeds. More instructive is the **Museo del Palmeral** (96 542 22 40; Porta de la Morera 12; adult/child €3/1; 10am-8pm daily mid-May-Oct, 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1.30pm Sun Nov-mid-May). In a former farmhouse, it's all about the date palm and the intricate blanching, woven fronds used throughout Spain in Palm Sunday rites. Wander through the delightful adjacent palm grove and orchard with its gurgling irrigation channels and typical fruit trees of the *huerta*.

The **Museo Arqueológico y de Historia de Elche** (MAHE; 96 661 53 82; Diagonal del Palau s/n; admission free; 10am-10pm daily Apr-Oct, shorter hours and closed Mon Nov-Mar) is a great new museum, well signed in Spanish and English, that recounts the Elche's history through selected artefacts, touchscreens and giant computer animations.

For an alternative overview of the town, make your way to the **Centro de Visitantes**

(admission free; 10am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun). This Arab-style building, located in the park behind the tourist office, runs a 10-minute audiovisual presentation with multilingual commentary.

The 12th-century **Baños Árabes** (Arab Baths; 96 545 28 87; Plaza Santa Lucia 14; adult/child €1/0.50; 10am-1.30pm & 4.30-8pm Tue-Sat, 10.30am-1.30pm Sun) runs an enjoyable audiovisual presentation with optional English soundtrack.

The vast baroque **Basilica de Santa Maria** (7am-1.30pm & 5.30-9pm) is used for performances of the *Misteri d'Elx*. Climb up its tower (adult/child €2/1; 11am-6pm or 7pm) for a pigeon's-eye view over the palms.

The well-signed **Alcúdia archaeological site** is 3.5km south of the town centre. Here was unearthed the *Dama de Elche*, a master-piece of Iberian art that now forms part of Madrid's **Museo Arqueológico Nacional** collection (see p135). Visit the site's excellent **Museo Arqueológico** (96 661 15 06; adult/child €2.50/1.80; 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar, 10am-2pm Sun year-round). The museum displays the rich findings from a settlement that was occupied continuously from Neolithic to late Visigoth times.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Hotel Faro** (96 546 62 63; Camí dels Magros 24; basic s/d €15/30) This friendly nine-room family place is a little gem. It's rooms are simple and spotless rooms.

## FIESTAS DE MOROS Y CRISTIANOS

More than 80 towns and villages in the south of Valencia hold their own *Fiesta de Moros y Cristianos* (Moors and Christians festival) to celebrate the Reconquista, the region's liberation from Muslim rule.

Biggest and best known is Alcoy's (22 to 24 April), when hundreds of locals dress up in elaborate traditional costumes representing different 'factions' – Muslim and Christian soldiers, slaves, guild groups, town criers, heralds, bands – and march through the streets in spectacular and colourful processions with mock battles.

The various processions converge upon Alcoy's main plaza and its huge, temporary wooden fortress. It's an exhilarating spectacle of sights and sounds: soldiers in shining armour, white-cloaked Muslim warriors bearing scimitars and shields, turban-topped Arabs, scantily clad wenches, brass bands, exploding blunderbusses, firework displays and confetti showering down on the crowds.

Each town has its own variation on the format, steeped in traditions that allude to the events of the Reconquista. For example, Villena's festival (5 to 9 September) features midnight parades, while La Vila Joiosa (24 to 31 July), near Benidorm, re-enacts the landing of Muslim ships on the beaches. Other major festivals include those of Bocairent (1 to 5 February) and Ontinyent (end August), both inland in Valencia province; Biar (10 to 13 May), inland in Alicante province; and Guardamar (late July), on the coast near the border with Murcia.

## MISTERI D'ELX

The *Misteri d'Elx*, a two-act lyric drama dating from the Middle Ages, is performed annually in Elche's **Basilica de Santa Maria**.

One distant day, according to legend, a casket was washed up on Elche's Mediterranean shore. Inside were a statue of the Virgin and the *Consueta*, the music and libretto of a mystery play describing Our Lady's death, assumption into heaven and coronation.

The story tells how the Virgin, realising that death is near, asks God to allow her to see the apostles one last time. They arrive one by one from distant lands and, in their company, she dies at peace. Once received into paradise, she is crowned Queen of Heaven and Earth to swelling music, the ringing of bells, cheers all round and – hey, we're in the Valencia region – spectacular fireworks.

The mystery's two acts, *La Vespra* (the eve of her death) and *La Festa* (the celebration of her assumption and coronation), are performed in Valenciano by the people of Elche themselves on 14 and 15 August respectively (with public rehearsals on the three previous days).

You can see a multimedia presentation – complete with virtual apostle – in the **Museo de la Festa** (96 545 34 64; Carrer Major de la Vila 25; adult/child €3/1.80; 10am-1pm & 4.30-8.30pm or 5-9pm Tue-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun), about a block west of the basilica. The show lasts 35 minutes and is repeated several times daily, with optional English commentary.

**Hotel Huerto del Cura** (96 661 00 11; www.huerto delcura.com; Porta de la Morera 14; r Mon-Thu €90-110, Fri-Sun €88; p n a i s ) Accommodation here is in trim bungalows within lush, palm-shaded gardens. Parking is free and there's wi-fi access. Complete the cossetting at Elche's longest standing luxury hotel by dining in **Els Capellans**, its renowned restaurant.

**Restaurante Dátil de Oro** (96 65 45 34 15; mains €8-12, menus €14-20) Within the municipal park, this vast emporium to eating can accommodate almost 2000 diners (last time we passed they had three simultaneous wedding receptions). Even so, the cuisine is far from institutional and it's one of the best places in town to sample local cuisine at reasonable prices.

**Carrer Mare de Déu del Carmé** (Calle Nuestra Señora del Carmen) has a cluster of good, cheap and cheerful eateries including **Bar Los Extremeños** (Calle Nuestra Señora del Carmen 14), which serves great tapas. On summer evenings almost the whole length of this short street is set with tables.

## Getting There & Around

**SuBús** operates buses every half-hour to/from Alicante (€1.70). **ALSA** (www.alsa.es) runs six buses daily to Valencia (€10.30) via Elda and Villena and six to/from Murcia (€3.50).

Elche is located on the Alicante to Murcia railway. Around 20 trains daily rattle through, bound for Alicante (€1.75) or Murcia (€2.45) via Orihuela.

## ORIHUELA

pop 75,000

Beside Río Segura and flush with the base of a barren mountain of rock, the historical heart of Orihuela with its Gothic, Renaissance and (especially) baroque buildings well merits a detour.

The **tourist office** (96 530 27 47; Calle Francisco Die 25; 8am-2.30pm & 5-7.30pm Mon-Fri mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 8am-3pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri mid-Sep-mid-Jun) is opposite the **Iglesia de Santiago Apóstol**.

## Sights

The 16th-century **Convento de Santo Domingo** (Calle Adolfo Claravana s/n; 10am-1.30pm & 4-7pm or 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) has two fine Renaissance cloisters and a refectory rich in 18th-century tilework.

Other splendid ecclesiastical buildings include the 14th-century **Catalan-Gothic Cathedral of San Salvador** (Calle Doctor Sarget; admission €1.20; 10am-1.30pm & 4-6.30pm or 5-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1.30pm Sat) with three finely carved portals, a lovely little cloister and the **Museo Diocesano**, whose collection includes Velázquez' *Temptation of St Thomas*.

The **Iglesia de las Santas Justa y Rufina** (Plaza Salesas 1; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm or 5-8pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) has a Renaissance façade and a Gothic tower graced with gargoyles. Also noteworthy are the sober baroque façade of the **Palacio Episcopal** (Calle Ramón y Cajal), the 14th-century **Iglesia de Santiago Apóstol** (Plaza de Santiago 2) and, crowning the mountain, the ruins of a castle originally constructed by the Muslims.

Access to Orihuela's **Museo de la Muralla** (☎ 96 530 46 98; Calle del Río s/n; admission free; h 10am-2pm & 4-7pm or 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) is through the main door to the Universidad Miguel Hernández. A 20-minute guided tour in Spanish (ask for the English leaflet) leads you through the vast underground remains of the city walls, Arab baths, domestic buildings and a Gothic palace.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Hostal-Residencia Rey Teodomiro** (☎ /fax 96 674 33 48; 1st fl, Avenida de Teodomiro 10; s/d €30/50; n a ) This hotel is a tidy option in the more modern part of town. All of its 23 rooms have bathtub and tiled floors and those facing the square have small balconies.

**Hotel Melia Palacio de Tudemir** (☎ 96 673 80 10; www.solmelia.com; Calle Alfonso XIII 1; r €88-99; n a i ) Palace is indeed the word for this tastefully renovated 18th-century building, recently gobbled up by the Melia chain. There's wi-

fi access, a pleasant café and its restaurant (*menús* €15 and €35) is the best of Orihuela's limited dining options.

**Café Bar Casablanca** (☎ 96 530 10 29; Calle Meca 1; tapas from €3.50, mains €6-12) This unpretentious place dishes up a good choice of tapas and a wide selection of meat and fish mains.

**Ateneo** (☎ 96 530 40 18; Calle Cardenal Loaces 1; mains €12-17, *menús* €12) The restaurant of Orihuela's lavish 19th-century Casino (stride through to the far end), Ateneo serves good food in its eccentrically tiled restaurant and gloomy bar, which is a little cheaper.

### Getting There & Away

Bus and train stations are combined at the Intermodal, an airy structure at the end of Avenida de Teodomiro. Orihuela is on the Alicante–Murcia train line and has frequent services to both places. Tickets cost €2.90 to Alicante and €1.75 to Murcia.