

Elche

The city of Elche or Elx (in Valencian) is located near Alicante in the province of Valencia, steeped in history and palm trees. It is the third most populated city in the province and about 20th largest Spanish city. The economy of the city is largely based on its prosperous shoe manufacturing businesses with a reported excess of 1000 factories.



The river Vinalopo, now more a creek, runs through Elche and there are several impressive bridges crossing what was once a wide expansive river splitting the town in two. The old part of town has many impressive buildings with intricate stonework and also statues and monuments.

Elche had its original roots at La Alcudia, some 10km from its current site, where the bust of the Lady of Elche was found. The original location was a settled by the Iberians and then occupied by Carthaginians and Romans. This was followed by a short Byzantine rule before the Goths took over. During the Moorish occupation, Elche lost importance and was moved slightly north to its current location. Eventually in the 13th Century James II of Aragon took the city from the Moors. The city grew over time and became important once again in the 19th Century with the arrival of the railway and a booming industrial development.



Today there are over 200,000 protected palm trees, lining streets and planted in well-tended parks, known as the Palmeral de Elche that has been recognised by UNESCO World Heritage since 2000. These parks cover three and a half square kilometres, and are planted with palms, some that date back 300 years. The star attraction is the seven-armed Imperial palm tree, which is around 170 years old and weighs in at more than 8 tons.

La Calahorra is a 7th Century fortress, built within the walled part of the city. An annex was built in the 15th Century, used for Masonic acts and Egyptian rituals of which there are many objects on display today.

Altamira Palace, also known as *Alcázar de la Señoría*, is located next to the Municipal Park which is a part of the Elche Palm Grove. It was originally built in Almohad times (12th-13th centuries), and was later renovated with brick exterior in the 15th century. A former fortress, it has also been used as the town hall and as a prison during the Spanish Civil War, while today it is home to the Archaeological Museum Alejandro Ramos.

There is a well preserved unearthened Moorish Baths. It is only a small affair but well worth a visit. A pre-recorded narration, in the visitors requested language, explains how these Roman baths were re-used by the Arabs.

Misteri d'Elx

The Mystery of Elche is a sacral-lyrical medieval drama dating back to the 15th Century and is celebrated in two acts over two days on the 14th & 15th August. It takes place in the Basilica of Saint Mary and is a reenactment of the life of the Virgin Mary. In 2002 UNESCO declared it a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. Also as part of the celebration, on the 13th of the month, Elche holds a city-wide night-long show of fireworks, known as Nit de l'Alba.

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La Dama de Elche

The stone bust of the Lady of Elche was discovered in 1897. It is believed to date back to the Iberian period, around 4th Century BC. Although there are examples of her in Elche the original can be viewed in the National Archaeological Museum in Madrid.

If you haven't been to the city I highly recommend a visit. If you would like us to arrange a trip for you give us a call on 950 449 602 or email info@themessengerinspain.com

