

Absolute Almonds

13/09/2024

Spanish Tit-Bits



The Spanish love a reason to throw a party – you only have to look at the colourful chaos that is annual tomato fuelled Armageddon in August that is ‘La tomatina’ – when residents of the pueblo of Bunol, just outside Valencia, pelt each other with tonnes of over-ripe tomatoes. That tradition of celebrating foodstuffs with fiestas, although with a little more restraint (a rare thing in Andalucía) also takes place in the village of Almogía

Located in the mountains inland from Malaga, the Día de la Almendra is celebrated every year on the last weekend of September. Almogía is renowned for its almonds, and the day is an opportunity to publicise the many traditions that surround the cultivation and processing of almonds.

It’s not only about the almonds, however. The programme of events includes an exhibition of products made by local companies with tastings of cheese, almonds, desserts and local wines. Over 150 kilos of almonds are distributed through the day, as well as a welcome glass of sweet wine to get the celebrations going!

More than fifty stands from companies in the region participate in the event, with the aim of promoting local products and raising awareness of the traditions surrounding the cultivation and processing of almonds. There are also demonstrations of traditional crafts, such as saddle making, as well as the shelling, splitting and peeling of almonds. To keep the little ones entertained there is also a programme of activities, including face painting.

If you were wondering how exactly almonds arrived in Spain, here is a little bit of a shock for you. While most things in Andalucía seem to have been imported by the Moors (who ruled over 'Al –Andalus' for more than 700 years), almonds were introduced by the Romans. As well as using them in the kitchen, sugared almonds were given as wedding gifts and almonds were scattered like confetti at weddings.

The almond tree itself originated from China. Brought to the eastern Mediterranean by merchants travelling along the ancient Silk Road, they have been part of Mediterranean culture since then. They keep good for years, are easy to carry and very nutritious, which made them excellent, practical food for merchants on the move or nomadic tribes.

Approximately 1.7 million tons of almonds are produced annually worldwide and Spain is the second-largest global almond producer. Almonds have great health benefits, being a great source of vitamins and minerals, rich in calcium and vitamin E, high in protein, cholesterol free fat and mineral rich. Almonds reduce heart attack risk, protect the artery walls, lower blood sugar, aid weight loss, build strong teeth, aid brain function, moderate the nervous system and support the immune system. They really are one of the original superfoods!

Back to the day itself – which this year celebrates its 18th edition. Music plays an important part, with the performance of a local choir and a live DJ taking the party well into the night. (This is Andalucía, after all). Perhaps the most unique performance, however, are the colourful 'verdiales'. A musical tradition that pre-dates Flamenco, it has its roots in Bronze Age Spain. Verdiales feature group singing and dancing, with the participants wearing colourful costumes, especially hats adorned with flowers, mirrors and ribbons. Musicians playing violins, lutes, guitars, cymbals and tambourines, accompany the dancing and singing.

A fascinating, flamboyant and fun fiesta, don't miss the Día de la Almendra!

This year's Día de la Almendra takes place on September 28th

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