





JANUARY

The year starts with the Three Kings on 6th, who come to all the medieval village squares to give Christmas presents to the children. Then, on the 17th the ancient fiesta of Sant Antonio, patron saint of animals kicks off with a vast bonfire, hot drinks, traditional cakes and a smattering of diableras (devil figures). Everyone parties until breakfast, cooked on the embers of the fire until daylight brings a parade to mass in traditional dress, before animals are blessed by the priest.



FEBRUARY

Santa Agueda, patron saint of women, makes her appearance with the almond blossom that transforms the countryside. Local women in traditional dress, with exquisite embroidered shawls, step out in procession to a special mass in their honour. Bread is blessed and shared, and the women eat together. In some towns, they even take over the running of the council for the day.



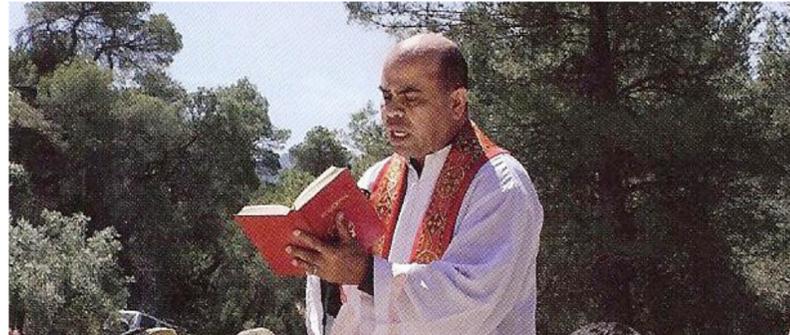
MARCH

Easter is marked by huge celebrations in the region, including candlelit processions to trumpets and primal drum beats. A week later, Cretas Wine Fair & Medieval Market showcases crafts and the best wineries of the Matarranya and neighbouring regions, Terra Alta and Bajo de Aragon. For a few euros, visitors can taste their way through the vino culture landscape.



APRIL

Calaceite Olive Oil Feria gives visitors the opportunity to taste and compare the region's many Denominación de Origen oils, made primarily from the local richly peppery empeltre, and smoother, fruity arbequina varieties. Rafales' Museum of Olive Oil houses a perfectly preserved 18th century press, and machinery used through the ages to the present day.



MAY

The Saturday after 29th April, the Pilgrimage to Saint Peter Martyr of Verona from Fuentespalda brings townspeople together to bless the land. Gathering for a mass in the hermitage, the crowd is served cakes and sweet wine, before the blessing. Bursting with poppies and wildflowers, the surrounding landscape acts as backdrop to a communal feast with music and games.



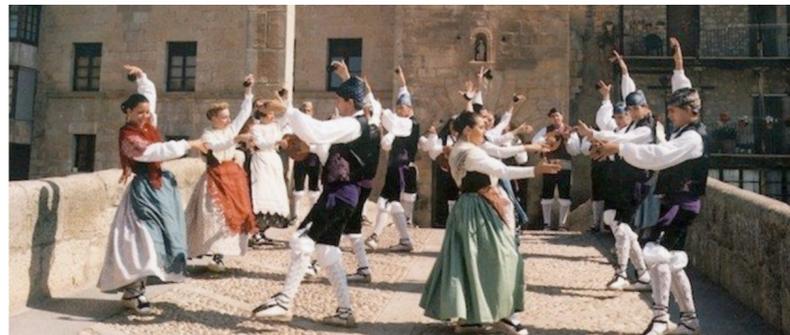
JUNE

Midsummer gets the Valderrobres treatment with the Fiesta of San Juan. Huge bonfires said to drive away evil spirits welcome all to feast on the traditional Coca de St Joan cake. Those wishing to prosper in the year ahead traditionally eat local snails, while anyone desiring to preserve both youth and beauty bathe their faces in the river before midnight.



JULY

July is holiday month and even fiestas take a break to allow everyone to cool off with wild swimming in crystal clear waters, ranging from the warm and shallow to the chilly invigorating depths. Inextricably woven into rural summer life, along the course of every river there are beautiful natural pools, small waterfalls and rugged banks yielding beautiful spots to picnic.



AUGUST

Summer fiestas throughout August are too numerous to mention, but rare is the village that doesn't mark the coming together of friends and family, and the endless sun-soaked days (and long nights) that mark the height of summer. Fireworks, exhibitions, parades, feasts, traditional music and dancing draw villagers and townsfolk of every age together to welcome one and all to the fiesta.



SEPTEMBER

Harvest is a festival all over the world, and here we gather blackberries, figs, quinces and acres of almonds. Regional cash cow, almonds, are still often picked by generations of the same family onto nets spread on the ground beneath the trees. The quality almonds from our region are ground to make the utterly delicious “turrón” (Spanish marzipan), pressed for milk and fried then salted for delicious snacks at home and in the local bars.



OCTOBER

With the autumn rains comes a foraging madness, taking everybody outdoors to pick and cook some of the world's finest wild mushrooms, born from the unique geography of the Matarranya. Many hotels and restaurants offer tasting menus and cookery workshops, while the Wild Mushroom Fair of Beceite unites all-comers in their love of ‘setas’. It's also the time of the first olive harvest – the source of our liquid gold.



NOVEMBER

Local artisans and their timeless traditional handmade crafts are celebrated at Ráfales Fair of Natural Resources & the Environment, along with a photographic exhibition featuring the local wildlife and, of course, a feast of local food and drink. On quieter days, the breathtaking colours of the beech trees that stud the spectacular walks through the nearby Els Ports Nature Reserve, beckon.



DECEMBER

With the end of the year comes the main olive harvest – the Matarranya region's most important Empeltre crop makes fine denomination of origin Aceite de Oliva del Bajo Aragón. Christmas brings magical illuminations to the medieval villages of Valderrobres and Cretas while Santa and his elves parade into the main squares on 24th, showering children with sweets from the back of a tractor.