

## Things you should know about my country

# Consuegra's Rose of Saffron Festival



With a rich history dating back to Roman times, Consuegra has many attractions besides the Rose of Saffron Festival, including an 11<sup>th</sup> century castle, that was once the stronghold of the Knights of San John, and perfectly preserved windmills. Each of the mills is named after Don Quixote's characters.

Since 1963, the lovely town of Consuegra has hosted Spain's most colorful festival dedicated to the world's most expensive spice. Consuegra cultivates the highest quality saffron in the world.

**The Rose of Saffron Festival** is celebrated each year on the last weekend of October (this year it will take place on the 24<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, and the 26<sup>th</sup>). The fields are a sea of purple crocus petals, which is quite a sight ! Traditionally, when the people of Consuegra finished the harvests, the festival began. In modern times that translates to the last weekend of October. It is a quaint, folkloric festival where the connection to Don Quixote is strong. The windmill called "Sancho" is used to grind the wheat, and a local beauty is crowned "Dulcinea", the name of Quixote's lady. Visitors can also get here a taste of traditional music and dancing from La Mancha.



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### Saffron, the “red gold” of La Mancha

Many Mediterranean cuisines use the delicious and colorful seasoning known as saffron in their recipes, as paella, for instance. The threads of saffron are the dried stigmas of the flower of ***Crocus sativus***, the autumn flowering. Each bulb can produce several flowers, while each flower produces just 3 stigmas. It takes more than 250,000 flowers to produce just one kilo of dry saffron, the world’s most expensive spice.

Even though saffron is commercially produced in many places in the world, most chefs prefer the superior quality saffron grown in central Spain, more precisely in La Mancha, where the climate and soil conditions optimally favor the growth of the plant. Spain is actually now the second largest saffron producer in the world, after Iran.

The best time to **harvest saffron** is in mid-morning on a sunny day, when the flowers just open and are still fresh. The whole harvest is completed within 2-3 weeks. Then the stigmas are separated from the flower and dried before packaging. Working against the clock, the stigmas are immediately cut out and dried above a heat source.

The whole chain from harvesting and drying, right up to packaging, is totally done by hand, in order to avoid damaging the delicate stigmas

When the saffron finally reaches your kitchen it needs to be steeped in a bit of warm cooking liquid for 20 minutes or so before being incorporated, liquid and all, into your recipe. The longer it cooks the more flavor is extracted, so it is added early in the cooking process.

One of the highlight of the festival is the **culinary competition**. This is when the townsfolk prepare their best recipes using saffron. The whole community turns out to taste them.

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### The Milling of Peace

The Town of Consuegra is also famous for its windmills. A string of windmills stretches across the hill above the town, and that's quite spectacular.

One of the windmills, the one called Sancho, is set in motion to celebrate the harvest. Sancho still operates using its original 16th-century machinery, in the symbolic event "The milling of peace". Eventually, flour is distributed in a cloth bag for all attendees as a symbol of unity

Consuegra is an agricultural community, with a centuries-long history of growing wheat. That's why there are so many windmills. The windmills are the original "green" machines. The ancient wooden wheels are turned by the wind moving the exterior sails. They, in turn, rotate the millstones that grind the grain into flour. It's a centuries old design that still works today.

### Let's have a look to Consuegra in its famous festival!

#### Special Events

There is a **contest** in the village square where the fastest hands **compete to remove the saffron threads from the flowers**, which have been handpicked early that morning. Everyone participates wearing traditional clothes. You need 250,000 crocus flowers to make a kilo of saffron apparently, but that kilo will literally sell for more than its weight in gold. Only Iran produces more saffron than La Mancha, and the Spanish spice is considered to be the best.

An **agricultural fair** is also held along with handcraft market and exhibits.

**Folk-dancing festival.** Visitors can also get a taste of traditional music and dancing from La Mancha in the Main Square of the town on Sunday morning.



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