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Elche is a city of about 200,000 inhabitants located in the province of Alicante, Spain.

Archaeological sites and discoveries show that Elche was already inhabited around 5000 BC, during the Neolithic Age. Carthaginians, Iberians, Romans, Greeks and Moors are said to have lived in Elche throughout its history.

The Mysterious Dama de Elche

Found in 1897 in an archaeological site 2 km from Elche, this famous funerary bust of La Dama de Elche is believed to be an Iberian sculpture of a young rich woman from the fifth century BC. Some believe it is a representation of the goddess Tanit of the Carthaginians, venerated also by the Punic Iberians. Some old vestiges of dye suggest that the Dama de Elche may have been originally polychromed, or painted with many colors.

Not much is known about the Iberians, and some even think they may have been descendants of Atlantis, suggesting the Dama de Elche could have been an Atlantis Queen. Others say she may have been of alien origin and that her strange headdress may be some kind of headphones from outer space. Either way, this enigmatic sculpture can now be seen in the Spanish National Archaeological Museum in Madrid.

The Oasis of El Palmeral in Elche

During the Muslim rule that lasted for 800 years, a very ingenious and effective system of irrigation was developed to favour agriculture.

Elche has a vast palm forest with more than 200,000 trees. It is so beautiful and extended that UNESCO has declared it a World Heritage site. It creates a microclimate to protect Elche from the semi-arid weather of the region and gives the impression that the whole city is enclosed by an oasis of palm trees, courtesy of the ancient Moors and their agricultural techniques. The fruits of the palm trees, dates, are abundant in this region and are part of all regional dishes and desserts.

The Drama Play “El Misterio” in Elche

The play “El Misterio” is a drama from the Middle Ages, the 15th century, and is still played every year during the regional celebrations of The Virgin Mary’s Ascension. It is also considered a Masterpiece Heritage by UNESCO.

Other monuments to see are the Basilica of Saint Mary, the tower of Calahorra, the Palace of Altamira, the watchtower “La Torre”, the Museum of Agriculture of Puzol, and the Rio Safari Theme Park.

Elche has many restaurants where you can try the typical crusty rice paella or the dry cod with pimientos.

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