

Viva Valencia:

Two Days on the Spanish Coast

With the 2007 America's Cup looming and architectural masterpiece Ciudad de las Artes y las Ciencias nearing completion, it won't be long before Valencia occupies as many column inches in the travel supplements as big sisters Madrid and Barcelona. Get in there now, before the secret's well and truly out...

BACKSTREET BODEGAS

Start your day with a tiger-nut *horchata* at **Horchatería de Santa Catalina** (Plaza Santa Catalina). Don't forget to order long *fariton* buns – excellent dipping material for the sweet drink.

Lose yourself down the backstreets heading towards the **Mercado Central** (Plaza del Mercado; www.mercadocentralvalencia.es). Valencia's Modernista market was completed in 1928 and is a swirl of smells, movement and colour. There are over 900 food stalls within the mosaic-clad building, selling everything from ham legs to paella pans.

Facing the market is the Gothic splendour of **La Lonja** (Plaza del Mercado). Founded in 1498 as a silk exchange, the building is now UNESCO-listed. The rib-vaulted ceiling of the main colonnaded hall is supported by what the experts call helicoidal columns – wonderful, slim, twisted pillars curling up high like sticks of barley sugar.

If La Lonja turns your thoughts to more modern commerce, explore the boutiques hidden down the mazy streets between Plaza del Mercado and Calle Caballeros. Fashion victims should keep their beautiful eyes peeled for **Cactus** (Calle Derechos 35), **Mil Rinas** (Calle Correjeria 20), **Bacilacoco** (Calle Purisma 5) and **Sine Die** (Calle Correjeria 4). Be sure to stop and join the

locals tucking into tapas at **Bodegó de la Sarieta** (Calle Juristas 4).

Fully sated, amble to Plaza de la Reina and the **cathedral**, erected on the site of Valencia's main mosque shortly after the city was retaken from the Moors. For great 360-degree skyline views, clamber up the 207 steps of the octagonal Miguelete bell tower. Next door, in the **Plaza de la Virgen**, poke your head into the basilica of the **Nuestra Señora de los Desamparados** for a glimpse of an ornate statue of the Virgin, the city's patron.

If you're game for more sightseeing, make a beeline for the **Palacio del Marqués de dos Aguas** (Calle Poeta Querol 2) and the **Museo Nacional de Cerámica** within. The 15th-century palace has been extensively modified, with the rococo excess of the main doorway added in the 18th-century. Inside you'll glide through period-style rooms and get a quick lesson in the history of ceramics, with representations from Roman times to the present day.

The afternoon may be over but the Spanish eat late, so relax with a drink on the terrace of **San Jaume** (Calle Caballeros 51) and the bars surrounding the Plaza del Tossal.

When it's finally acceptable to devote some time to your stomach, get your head around the concept of Spanish nouvelle cuisine in the suave surroundings of **La Lola** (Subida del Toledano 8; www.lalolarestaurante.com; ☎ 96 391 80 45).

Forget about bed – it's time to experience Valencia's legendary nightlife. The **Barrio del Carmen**, with both the grungiest and grooviest bars, has the best vibes.

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To set you on your way, try **Cafe-Bar Negrito** (Plaza del Negrito), **Fox Congo** (Calle Cabelleros 35) and **Backstage Russafa** (Calle Literato Azorín).

THE FUTURE'S BRIGHT, THE FUTURE'S WHITE

You've no time to sleep off your late night so have breakfast at your hotel and then head to Valencia's newest crowning glory – the **Ciudad de las Artes y las Ciencias** (Autopista del Saler; www.cac.es). The City of Arts & Sciences occupies a 350,000-sq-metre swath of the former Turia riverbed. Bursting from what was previously marshland, the spectacular white buildings are mostly the work of internationally renowned local architect Santiago Calatrava.

The highlight is the **Oceanogràfic**. This watery world, the largest of its kind in Europe, has, among much else, polar zones, a dolphinarium, a Red Sea aquarium, a Mediterranean seascape, and a couple of underwater tunnels where sharks, giant eels and rays glide all around you.

The spiky exterior of the **Museo de las Ciencias Príncipe Felipe** recalls the skeleton of a giant whale. The innards aren't as exciting as the structure itself but there are still plenty of machines that will arouse even the most unscientific of visitors. The **Hemisfèric** broods like a huge heavy-lidded eye over the shallow lake around it. It's at once planetarium, IMAX cinema and laser show.

You could easily spent an entire day at the Ciudad but if you fancy a change of scenery catch a bus down to Valencia's port area. If you arrive in time for lunch, don't miss **Bodega Montaña** (Calle José Benlliure 69), a Valencia institution since 1836.

Along the coast, the inner harbour has undergone a massive regeneration project ready for the Americas Cup, with buildings spruced up and temporary art galleries installed in old warehouses. The elegant **Paseo Marítimo** promenade is great for a walk, stretching for

3km beside the broad beaches and inviting waters of Las Arenas and La Malvarrosa.

Back in town, spend your final night scooping up mussels at **Bar Pilar** (Calle Moro Zeit) or wolfing down tapas and Spanish cider at **El Molinón** (Calle Bolsería 40). A good place to finish off your trip is laidback **Jimmy Glass** (Calle Baja 28), a smoky jazz joint in the heart of the Barrio del Carmen.

SLEEPING

Budget:

Hôme Deluxe Hostel (www.likeathome.net; ☎ 963 916 229) Welcoming haven with ten individually designed rooms.

Midrange:

Ad Hoc (www.adhochoteles.com; ☎ 963 919 140) Comfort and charm in a 19th-century building deep within the old quarter.

Top End:

Palau de la Mar (www.hospes.es; ☎ 963 162 884) Ultramodern boutique hotel recently created by the merging of two elegant mansions.

For more reviews of Valencia accommodation, check out the Sleep section on www.lonelyplanet.com/accommodation.

By Amanda Canning

For the complete guide to Valencia, grab a copy of Lonely Planet's *Best of Valencia* guide, available online at shop.lonelyplanet.com.

