

VALENCIA

Off Spain's well-beaten tourist paths, Valencia has much to offer savvy visitors.

Michael Thompson

Valencia is often overlooked by visitors to Spain who flock first to Madrid, Barcelona and the beach resorts. The America's Cup and Formula 1 race events held here have raised its profile recently, but still it remains a forgotten gem unknown to many North Americans. For anyone weary of tourists this is a plus.

Named for Roman emperor Valens, the city was founded in 137 BC. Visigoths, Moors, Christian *reconquistas*, and civil war all left their marks on this city, imparting its distinct culture and language. A thoroughly modern Valencia coexists alongside the cherished antiquities and traditions.

Much of this history is colorfully reenacted in the many annual festivals held in every town and village hereabouts. Popular participation in the brightly costumed rituals and processions that go on for days is almost always accompanied by deafening fireworks events called *masquetas*.

Fallas is the biggest of these, an annual Valencia festival in mid-March that closes most downtown streets to traffic, and requires a full year of preparations. The final week features fantastic giant-figured constructions at every neighborhood center, daily pyrotechnics, contesting processions in period costumes and marching bands, and bonfires the last night so big they threaten surrounding buildings. As Spain's bull-fighting and its bull runs through city streets prove, people here

appreciate risk.

The October 9 celebrations and festivities for Three Kings Day are other good times to see the pageantry of history on display in the city of Valencia. (For other regional celebrations see a recent article and links at Guidemag.com or direct at Tinyurl.com/valencia-guide)

A lively addition to the region's annual festival schedule takes place in Bunyol, a 40-minute train ride away. La Tomatina began a generation ago, and this year attracted 40,000 mostly college-age foreign visitors in August for one of the world's biggest food fights: an hour-long tomato-throwing, t-shirt-ripping melee with tons of ripe fruit preceded and followed by international partying in the bars, the streets and the park (where many were encamped).

A quieter recent celebration took the form of an art exhibition of works by native son Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida, whose paintings vividly depict traditional Valencian life (and were on loan from New York's Hispanic Society of America).

Spain famously runs on different time from elsewhere in Europe. Businesses may close at 2 pm and not reopen for two or three hours, as people head home or go to the cafes. In the heat of summer this is sensible. After reopening the stores stay open until 8 pm or later, so dinner at 9, 10 or beyond is the norm. Families with small children who in other countries would long have been in bed enjoy relaxed evenings together around outdoor tables late into the

night. As afternoon cafes close around midnight some nightclubs aren't yet rolling up their steel shutters.

One of the great pleasures of Spain are these many *terrazas*, the outdoor tables that bars and restaurants spread in neighborhood plazas and along many sidewalks. At the heart of local social life, terrazas also provide places for tourists to gather and mix in the streets from Plaça Colon and North Station through and around Ajuntament to Plaça Reina and the Marketplace, and especially throughout the small squares and narrow streets of the El Carmen district. Virgin Square is one of the grandest and most popular, but while the atmosphere is impressive, the cuisine is mostly middling here, so it's worth venturing deeper into Carmen for better.

El Carmen (or El Carme) is at the heart of the old city, on land where the Romans first established their settlement here, alongside the old Turia riverbed that's now a park. Bounded by Torres de Quart and Torres de Serrans (remnants of the old city walls) to the west and north, El Mercat (the old central marketplace) to the south, and Plaça de la Verge (Virgin Square) and Plaça de la Reina to the east, the district is a warren of narrow twisting streets. Glorious medieval architecture abounds: there are grand palaces and courtyard gardens you'd scarcely know were there until glimpsed through an open door. It's hardly a surprise that this picturesque area and other nearby streets contain so many of Valencia's gay restaurants, cafes and clubs.



At Q-Art



Pride
Valencia
2008



At Cafe de la Seu

Clubbing

At the center of the old city **Cafe Trapezzio** (Plaça Músic López Chavarri, 2) is one of the first to open, at 8:30 am, with terrace seating on the plaza. They remain open throughout the whole afternoon and into the evening, so it's a great first stop to find all the gay magazines and maps to peruse over coffee, drinks and/or tapas.

At the next square **El Principito** (Plaza Vicent Iborra 5) is an amiable hangout with pool table, and windows open to the square from 11:30 am. Busiest in the afternoons, they close before midnight, and don't open on Sundays.

Nèboa (Plaça Vicent Iborra 4), directly across the street, is a gay restaurant with evening hours serving Gallician and Portuguese style food they call "Atlantian" here.

Pekado (Plaça Vicente Iborra 9) means "sin" and the food here is named for various vices, and is served up by a charming and hunky staff. After dinner on weekends they have cabaret shows and drag performances.

Next door, the **33 Lounge** (Sant Dionís 8) is another gay-favored restaurant and cocktail lounge. With their eight kinds of paellas, it's a good place to sample the local speciality.

Several Carmen afternoon and night spots around Plaça del Tossal comfortably include many gay folk among their other customers, especially after midnight on weekends when these streets begin to teem. Among these are: **Cafe Tertulia 1900** (de Dalt 4); **Cola Caos** (de Dalt 6). **Cafe Sant Jaume** (Caballeros 51, at Sant Jaume) is another such, with pleasant outdoor seating on hot nights beneath expansive trees and a good view of all who pass by. **Marrasquino** (Sant Jaum, at de Dalt) serves at tables directly across the street in the square.

Other nearby mixed and inexpensive cafes with tapas, simple meals, beer and wine include **Cafe de Paris** (Caballeros 30) and **El Dorita** (Plaça Sant Miquel, Sant Dionís 1), also with outdoor tables. **Chill Out** (de Baix 20) opens from 7 pm

with cocktails, tapas and sandwiches for a young pre-dance club crowd. Saturday and Sunday brunches are served from 8 am, plus they have live music Sunday nights.

La Strada (17 Quart) is a reasonably-priced Italian restaurant just off Tossal, with comfortable ambience, and tasty food, albeit with small portions.

Ca Revolta (Santa Teresa 8; Carevolta.org), located between Plaça del Tossal and el Mercat, is a bar and cafe with live music, theater, film screenings, photography and art exhibits, poetry readings, and dance.

Cafe de la Seu (Del Santo Cáliz, 7) opens at 7 pm daily near the cathedral for before dinner drinks. The crowd arrives in force here around 11 pm, and quickly spills out onto their pedestrian street tables. It's a young, informal and friendly group here, both customers and staff, and a pleasant and central place to meet or make friends over cocktails, before heading to the nearby discos.

La Claca (Carrer de San Vicente Mártir, 3), for thirty years a meeting place for Valencia's bohemian vanguard and an international crowd, just off Plaça de la Reina. It continues an even more venerable tradition going back centuries as Cervantes published Don Quixote from this building. Live music, flamenco and cafe theater are among current offerings, with shows from 11 pm Wednesday through Saturday, and Sunday shows at 8:30 pm.

The nearby **Piccadilly** (Embajador Vich) attracts a young, alternative late-night crowd for the music—electro, pop and rock—with DJs, live performances and happenings amidst a gilded décor of mirrors and velvet on a very lively street.

Within the shadow of Torres de Quart from El Carmen, **Secreto** (Guillem de Castro 133) is a cozy cafe that's open mornings, late afternoons and early evenings for breakfast and light fare, juices, coffees and orxata (horchata), the local chufa drink.

Down the street nearby **Q-Art** (Guillem de Castro 80) is a cafe and bar that's open from 9 am to 4 am with a

comfortably casual atmosphere, amusingly kitschy décor, cute and friendly barstaff and shows most nights. Here you can have breakfast at one end of your day, and wrap it up with dancing or checking out their strippers after midnight (among a variety of rotating shows). Q-Art's warm, casual and affable atmosphere makes it a must-visit gay Valencia nightspot.

Also by Quart are two more places of interest. **Epoca** (Ensendra 9) is a tranquil cafe for bocadillos, tapas and other snacks, beer and other cold and hot beverages, plus free wi-fi. **Babylon** (Turia 28, basement) is a new restaurant and drag show, open to all Fridays and Saturdays, with Tuesday-through-Thursday group nights. They offer creative set-menu dinners at 14 euros from 9:30 pm and shows after midnight, with dinner, for 30 euros.

Many Valencia gay bars have mixed crowds, but some cater to men primarily, exclusively or on specific nights.

Gross (Juan de Mena 7) is an exuberant sex bar a few streets from Torres de Quart. Here Carlos extends a big welcome to visitors and locals alike for their weekly Wednesday and Sunday men-only "*fiestas sin ropa*" — gay naked sex parties, from 10 pm to 4 am. On other nights (except Mondays) the parties here are open to all genders and orientations if you're in the mood to venture into a more expansive terrain.

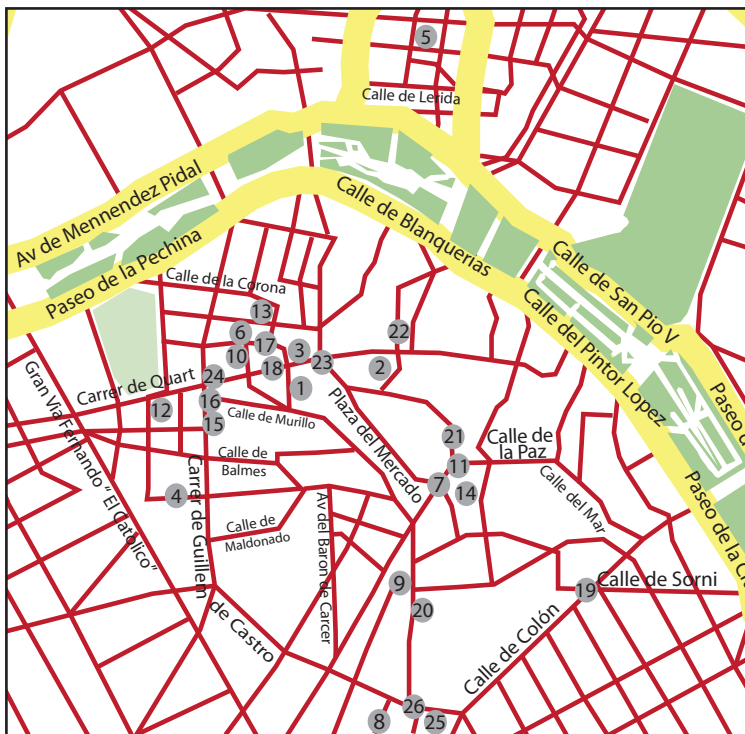
North Dakota (Plaça Margarita Vall Daura 1, near Plaça de La Reina) is a country-western-themed men's pub of 25 years with a bear and leather crowd that arrives around 11 pm. The guys here are exceptionally welcoming, especially before midnight on Thursdays when their two-for-one happy hour brings 'em earlier — around the 9:30 opening time. In February check out their annual Mr Bear Dakota contest.

B&B Botanic Bear (Botanic 7) is another local ursine favorite.

An early (from 7 pm) cruise bar option is the busy **Nuncadigono** (del Turia 22), with leather and fetish guys who gather here near Torres de Quart. They picked up more business recently

VALENCIA

- 1) **Ca Revolta**
Santa Teresa 8
- 2) **Café de la Seu**
Santo Cáliz 7
- 3) **Café Trapezzio**
Pça. Músic López
Chavarri 2
- 4) **Cross**
Juan de Mena 7
- 5) **Deseo 54**
De La Pepita 2
- 6) **El Principito**
Pça Vicente Iborra 5
- 7) **La Claca**
San Vicente Mártir 3
- 8) **Magic Spartacus**
Flassanders 8
- 9) **Mogambo**
De la Sangre 9
- 10) **Nèboa**
Pça. Vicent Iborra 4
- 11) **North Dakota**
Pça. Margarita Vall
Daura 1
- 12) **Nuncadigono**
Del Turia 22
- 13) **Pekado**
Plç. Vicente Iborra 9
- 14) **Piccadilly**
Embajador Vich
- 15) **Q-Art**
Guillem de Castro 80
- 16) **Secreto**
Guillem de Castro 133
- 17) **Space Venial**
Pça. Vicent Iborra 4
- 18) **Venial**
De Quart, 26
- 19) **Colón Metro**
- 20) **Pça. de Ajuntament**
- 21) **Pça. de la Reina**
- 22) **Pça. de la Verge**
- 23) **Pça. del Tossal**
- 24) **Torres de Quart**
- 25) **Valencia Bullring**
- 26) **Xàtiva Metro**
(North Station)



with the closing of the nearby **Oh La La** in August. Nuncadigano (“no one says no”) is 100-percent *chico* territory, with cabins, darkroom sex and steamy videos to set the mood.

Russafa is another smaller gay district beyond North Station and the Bull Ring, with some gay restaurants and bars. **Som Com Som** (Cadis 75) is mixed but women predominate; **Cadiz 70** (Cadis 70) is a nearby wine bar; and **Cafe Dublin** (Sueca 51) is a third local option.

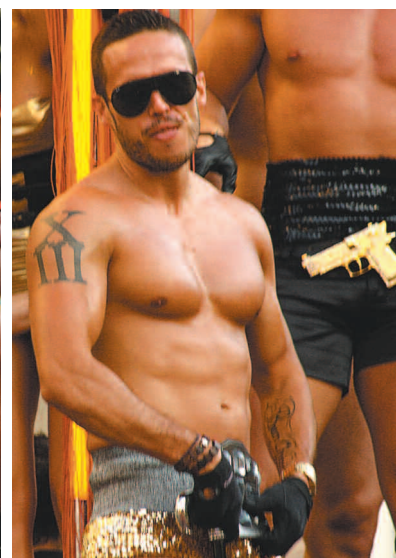
Dancing

Discos hereabouts open late and don't really get going until around 3 am, but **Space Venial** (Plaça Vicent Iborra 4) is an early warm-up club from 10 pm, Thursdays through Sundays. It's at the back of the larger, later-opening nightclub, **Venial** (de Quart 26), a long-popular gay dance club at the heart of the Barrio del Carmen gay district. Open Thursdays and weekends, Venial has shows, stripper go-go dancers, a brand-new sound system, lights and videos throbbing late into the night — but it's the scene rather than the music that's most appealing here.

ADN (Angel Custodi 10) is a medium-size club in Carmen, with a mixed, sociable and energetic all-ages and genders and orientations crowd that dances wherever they want to and dresses as they please.

Deseo 54 (de la Pepita 2) is a biggest gay dance club, just beyond the Turia, with two floors open Thursdays through Saturdays from 1 am, and a constantly changing line-up of concept parties and DJs to keep the crowds coming in. It's mainly guys here, sometimes with men-only events and dark-room ambience. Dress to impress here on weekends, but for Thursdays it's a younger more casual crowd, and on Sundays the tea-dance starts early (for Spain), from midnight.

Mogambo (de la Sangre 9, just off Plaça de Ajuntament) is a basement gay dance club with a big variety of guest DJs (many from Germany and the UK) playing a wide range of techno, retro and drum and bass every weekend and half the time on weeknights, too.





Photos of Valencia Pride



47 Social Club (Quart 47), formerly La Guerra, is a small dance club, now with a more mixed crowd dancing to pop, indie and electro music and a comfortable chill-out zone. Open from 10 pm, Thursdays through Saturdays,

Alma de Noche (Alberique 27) recently began attracting gay folk to this dance club southwest of downtown.

On hot summer nights many people head for the long wide beach that extends northward from the harbor, easily accessible by metro during the day, but requiring a taxi by 2 am when the throng arrives. It's a young and seemingly "straight" crowd that spills out of seasonal dance clubs here, onto the sand. But defining

lines blur easily here as the weekend partying extends into dawn-time hours.

Getting steamy

For some guys saunas are the main attraction and Valencia has three. **Magnus Termas** (Avingda del Port 27), and **Olimpic** (Vivons 15) are two local tubs from the Pases Group with all of the facilities you'd expect. See Guidemag.com for links to their websites for details. **Thermas Romeo** (Pintor Gisbert 5) is a third, independent bathhouse in town.

Under the heading "relax" (which generally means "sex" in its least complicated forms) there are a number of

shops for gay men in Valencia. The most popular of these erotic bookstores are: **Spartacus** (Flassanders 8 — near the central market), with cabins and black-light areas; and **Magic Spartacus** (Bailén 38 — by north station), with video peeps, DVD porn and darkrooms.

For more hands-on action, **Adan Boys** (Adanboys.com) provides escort services from 50 euros at their rooms near Ajuntament, and from 100 euros per hour for services performed back at your place (within the city.)

Lambdavalencia.org and **Gayvalencia.org** are two local websites with gay updates and **24-7valencia.com** has useful general information. ▼