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36 Hours in Valencia, Spain



Stefano Buonamici for The New York Times

From left: Café Negrito, a good stop for an after-dinner drink; in décor and menu, Balansiya pays tribute to the city's Moorish past; L'Oceanográfico in the City of Arts and Sciences. [More Photos](#) »

By CHARLY WILDER
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FOR the last decade, Valencia, best known as the birthplace of paella, has been steadily inching onto the radar of savvy travelers. Since 2005 — when work was completed on [Santiago Calatrava's](#) futuristic museum complex, the City of Arts and Sciences — and 2007, when Spain's third-largest city played host to the America's Cup, Valencia's Moorish-accented neighborhoods have been filling up with boutiques, restaurants and night spots. Last month, a new train line on the AVE, Spain's [high-speed rail](#) service, linked the city to Madrid, about 200 miles away, making it even easier for travelers to visit this seaside city, which is cooking up a lot more than rice.

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A Weekend in Valencia



Friday

4 p.m.

1) SHOP THE CARMEN

In hilly Barrio del Carmen, the oldest part of the city and its creative center, bearded students and elegant urbanites trek over graffitied passageways where cafes and galleries spill onto medieval squares. The sprawling Mercado Central ([mercadocentralvalencia.es](#)) has recently become a high-fashion party locale, hosting shindigs for Prada and Aston Martin, among others. Stylish boutiques are tucked behind the 15th-century late Gothic Lonja de la Seda silk exchange. Two of the best, Bugalú (Calle de la Lonja 6; 34-963-918-449) and Madame Bugalú y Su Caniche Asesino (Danzas 3; 34-963-154-476; [madamebugalu.es](#)), carry clothing and accessories by Spanish, French and Swiss designers, as well as international labels like Paul Frank.

6 p.m.

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2)

VALENCIAN ORIGINAL

Valencia is the birthplace of horchata, a drink made from the juice of chufas, or tiger nuts, and said to date from the city's Islamic period, the 8th to 13th centuries. You can sample it at the Horchatería El Siglo (Plaza de Santa Catalina 11; 34-963-918-466) in the Carmen. Pair a glass (2.20 euros, or \$2.80 at \$1.27 to the euro) with a café cortado (1.30 euros) and another Valencian original: the fartón (.50 euros), a fluffy pastry finger dusted in powdered sugar.

9 p.m.

3) TAPAS, DECONSTRUCTED

Valencia's once-middling restaurant scene is seeing the emergence of creative young talent. [Carosel](#) (Taula de Canvis 6; 34-961-132-873; [restaurante-carosel.blogspot.com](#)), a chic but unpretentious restaurant that opened in the Carmen in March, has become a standout. The Valencian chef Jordi Morera serves up delectable twists on traditional cuisine, like a mini cuttlefish stew with artichokes and almonds. The prix fixe menu changes weekly and is always a bargain at 22 euros.

11 p.m.

4) CARMEN CAROUSING

In the Carmen, late-night action converges on the Plaza del Tossal. Locals avoid the splashy tourist traps and pour into the Stone Age-themed Bar los Picapiedra (Caballeros 25; [bar-lospicapiedra.com](#)), where students, bohemians and miscellaneous walk-ins guzzle cider out of large, spouted glass porrones, which look vaguely like watering cans (7 euros), and listen to Spanish alt-rock.

Saturday

10 a.m.

5) FUTURE CITY

Last summer, Valencia adopted Valenbisi ([valenbisi.es](#); 10 euros a week), a public bicycle rental system. Pick up a [bike](#) near the Torres de Serranos, one of the gates to the city, and cycle under a series of bridges through the palm-filled Jardín del Turia to the [City of Arts and Sciences](#) (Avenida Autopista del Saler; 34-902-100-031; [cac.es](#)). The buildings' curved, billowing facades resemble everything from the skeleton of a whale to the upper half of a giant eye completed by its mirror image in a reflecting pool. Farther south, at L'Oceanogràfic marine complex, you can wander through underground tunnels as sharks float overhead. Entrance is 24.50 euros; a three-day pass to the entire City of Arts and Sciences is 32.40 euros.

12 p.m.

6) AN ALTERNATIVE HUB

Built largely in the 1920s, the neighborhood of Rusaffa became a center for the city's Muslim immigrant community in the second half of the 20th century. This influence still dominates, with Middle Eastern and East Asian markets and cafes dotting the streets. But as the Carmen has become increasingly touristy, Rusaffa has also become an alternative hub for artists and students. A combination bookshop, bar, performance space, publishing house and gallery, Slaughterhouse Books (Denia 22; 34-963-287-755; [slaughterhouse.es](#)) used to be a butchery and still has the meat hooks to prove it. Gnomo (Denia 12; 34-963-737-267; [elblogdegnomo.blogspot.com](#)), a design boutique, carries things like ceiling lamps made from recycled cola bottles and oil and vinegar pourers shaped like beakers.

2 p.m.

7) TAPAS, FAMILY STYLE

[Maipi](#) (Maestro José Serrano 1; 34-963-735-709), a small tapas restaurant in Rusaffa, fills up in the early afternoon with businessmen who spend their siestas trading barbs at the bar and sampling dishes like fresh artichoke and morcilla sausage wrapped in a thin dough or grilled cod fish in lemon and olive oil, beneath a backdrop of country-kitsch décor and soccer paraphernalia. Lunch for two costs around 40 euros.

5 p.m.

8) RUINS UNDER GLASS

10. The Getaway: How to See Fall's Leaves for Less

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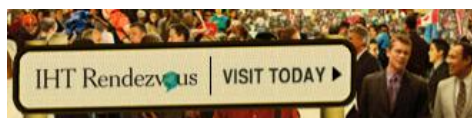
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One of the best spots for exploring Valencia's history is at the museum [L'Almoína](#) (Plaza de Décimo Junio Bruto; 34-962-084-173; [valencia.es/almoína](#)), which opened three years ago in the Carmen on the site where Valencia was founded by the Romans in 138 B.C. Visitors walk over glass floors, looking down at a stunning assemblage of ruins excavated in the area. The exhibition includes Roman baths, Visigoth tombs and a medieval Moorish ward for plague victims. Free on weekends and 2 euros during the week.

9 p.m.

9) MOORISH COURSES

The city's Islamic past is the focus of [Balansiya](#) (Paseo de las Facultades 3; 34-963-890-824; [balansiya.com](#)), an out-of-the-way restaurant that authentically recreates the culinary experience of medieval Moorish Valencia. The décor is exquisite Arab-Andalusian, and the prix fixe dinner menus include tabbouleh, tagine and couscous plus lesser-known Moorish specialties like assaffa (Andalusian pasta with chicken, cinnamon and nuts), waraka inab (grape leaves stuffed with cereal in an almond-mint vinaigrette) and xarab Andalusi (a drink made of fruits, flowers, spices and herbs). Dinner is 20 to 30 euros.

Midnight

10) PARTY UNDER THE MUSEUM

Club life doesn't kick off until after 1 a.m., so hit Café Negrito (Plaza Negrito 1; 34-963-91-4233) for an after-dinner drink. Later, witness Valencian late-night decadence at [MYA](#) (Avenida del Saler 5, City of Arts and Sciences; 34-963-319-745; [umbracleterraza.com](#)), a domed club underneath a landscaped walkway leading to the Principe Filipe Science Museum. It's Studio 54 meets imperial Spain meets Jersey Shore. Entry and your first cocktail, 15 euros.

Sunday

11 a.m.

11) SHOP THE LOT

Every Sunday, Valencia's antiques and junk shop owners convene at the Plaza de Luis Casanova, a giant lot tucked behind the 55,000-seat Camp de Mestalla stadium, the home field of Valencia Club de Fútbol, to sell their goods at huge markdowns to a fantastically eclectic cross-section of locals.

1 p.m.

12) PAELLA EN LA PLAYA

The shore is lined with large restaurants that have made paella their specialty. [La Pepica](#) (Paseo de Neptuno 6; 34-963-710-366; [lapepica.com](#)) is the best known (for good reason), but a few doors down is an even better choice, L'Estimat (Paseo de Neptuno 16; 34-963-711-018; [restauranteestim.com](#)). On Sunday afternoons, the place fills up with the after-church crowd chowing down on paella Valenciana (made with chicken and rabbit). Lunch for two costs around 70 euros.

2 p.m.

13) WALK THE CABANYAL

There is a controversial initiative to bulldoze many of the gorgeous but decrepit turn-of-the-century buildings in the seaside neighborhood of Cabanyal, the former fishermen's quarter, to link the city with the coastline and "regenerate" a district known for crime, vagrancy and prostitution. Before it's too late, stroll past the colorfully tiled maritime murals and weathered but elegant Art Nouveau town houses. One can't help but hope to some day come back and find it utterly unchanged.

IF YOU GO

The new AVE high-speed line travels between Madrid and Valencia in about 90 minutes, a marked improvement from the previous travel time of just under four hours. Round-trip tickets start at 96 euros, about \$125 ([renfe.com](#)).

The Hospes [Palau de la Mar](#) (Navarro Reverter 14; 34-963-162-884; [hospes.es](#)), a design hotel built in adjoining 19th-century mansions, melds grand arches, detailed woodwork and marble staircases with 66 minimalist-chic rooms in hues of white and

chestnut, replete with Egyptian cotton sheets and plasma televisions. Doubles start at 115 euro when booked 15 days in advance.

Petit Palace Germanias (Sueca 14; 34-963-513-638; petitpalacehotelgermanias.com), also in a 19th-century residence, is a comfortable 41-room boutique hotel in up-and-coming Russafa; from 65 euros.

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