

Valencia, Spain: Travel Tips

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Valencia isn't a city I'd known much about before our recent visit to the south-eastern region of Spain.

When Spain is mentioned, the capital Madrid perhaps comes to mind, or the beauty of Barcelona, but beyond that, I knew very little of the country and its principle cities, but with a visit coming up, I started to research the area we'd be going to and decided that we should spend a day in Valencia. I was amazed to discover that it was in fact Spain's third biggest city and has quite a history to it.

After being founded by the Romans almost 2,000 years ago, it really came into prominence in the 14th and 15th centuries, and that's when some of the city's finest buildings that you can see today date from. Our first stop was the Cathedral, which was started in 1262 but was added to over the next couple of hundred years, meaning that the building has a number of different styles, making it unlike any other cathedral you're likely to have seen.

The square in which the cathedral is situated is very reminiscent of Barcelona, with architecture dating back hundreds of years and, as we journeyed throughout the city, there were plenty more examples to be seen. It was very similar in a lot of ways to the architecture you'll find in places like Savannah, Georgia.

A gateway still remains from the medieval city walls, and towards the outskirts of the city is one of the most unusual parks you've ever seen. The Jardines del Rio Turia, literally the gardens of the river Turia, stands where that river used to flow. The park is six miles long and is full of gardens, sports fields and playgrounds, crossed by 19 bridges. It's a unique idea and was obviously no mean engineering feat.

Then there's the Central Market, which again definitely falls into the unusual category. There can't be many markets that are housed in such an attractive Art Nouveau building, although sadly when we visited, the road work outside did detract from its beauty.

Elsewhere is the very grand sounding Palau de la Generalitat, which is home to the Valencian regional government. It's a superb city hall and overlooks a beautiful square, which still retains its splendor from days gone by, despite all the traffic thundering through it. There are plenty

such squares -- and traffic -- to be found in Valencia today. It's evidently become a thriving city and nowhere is that seen more clearly than out at the Ciutat de les Arts i de les Ciències, the city of the arts and sciences.

It's a completely new complex of absolutely visually stunning buildings that has been created over the last decade. It's clear when you see them that the architects were told to be bold and brave with their designs, and that's exactly what they did. We were fortunate to fly over on our way into the airport and it's from the air that you can really see the full splendor of them.

One of them, L'Hemisfèric, is designed to look like a blinking eye, with an auditorium containing an IMAX cinema and planetarium contained in the "eyeball." Elsewhere is a science museum, which is very much aimed at school children. Their motto is "it's forbidden not to touch," which gives you an idea of what to expect there. Then there's the Palau de les Arts or Palace of the Arts, containing four performance spaces, including an open air theater.

But perhaps the real highlight of the whole complex is the other major building, the Oceanogràfic, the city's aquarium. We've visited many aquariums during our travels and usually we've felt that they don't live up to our expectations, but this place was very different. It's probably just as well, as it wasn't cheap to get into, but once we were inside, we could see why it was so pricey. This wasn't your ordinary aquarium, where you see fish swimming around in a tank.

There are different parts of the park, as really this is more like a theme park than an aquarium, showcasing the marine life from different parts of the world, including the Americas, Antarctica and Arctic. As well as the tropical fish you'd expect to see, we were also treated to sharks, jellyfish, sea horses and sea dragons. But better was to come.

Perhaps the best part of the aquarium can be found in the Arctic pavilion, where we were able to watch the playful antics of the two beluga whales, the only ones in Europe. We could have sat there all afternoon watching them, but we still had more to see.

We were disappointed to see that we'd missed the shows at the Dolphinarium, but it wasn't a problem, as we were treated to a show by the dolphins in there. They were jumping out of the water and circling around happily, but we got even more activity when the trainers came out to see them. The relationship they obviously had with their animals was excellent to see.

In truth, there was much more to see and do in Valencia than we could achieve in a day. It was a pleasant surprise to discover how much there was waiting for visitors there and, although it may not feature very highly in the guidebooks, it's got a lot to offer. That's why we'll be heading back again in the future, as we've definitely got unfinished business there, with much more to discover there.

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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