

VALENCIA

DAKOTA



Inside This Guide...

- 3 - Introduction
- 3 - Understanding Valencia First
- 4 - Where to Stay
- 5 - Eating and Drinking
- 8 - The Bodegas
- 9 - Jamón Ibérico
- 11 - The Markets
- 13 - Shopping
- 14 - A Couple of Walks
- 15 - City of Arts & Sciences / The Beach
- 16 - Fallas
- 20 - Day Trips: Wine Country Around Valencia
- 28 - Recipe: Tortilla Española
- 30 - Quick Reference

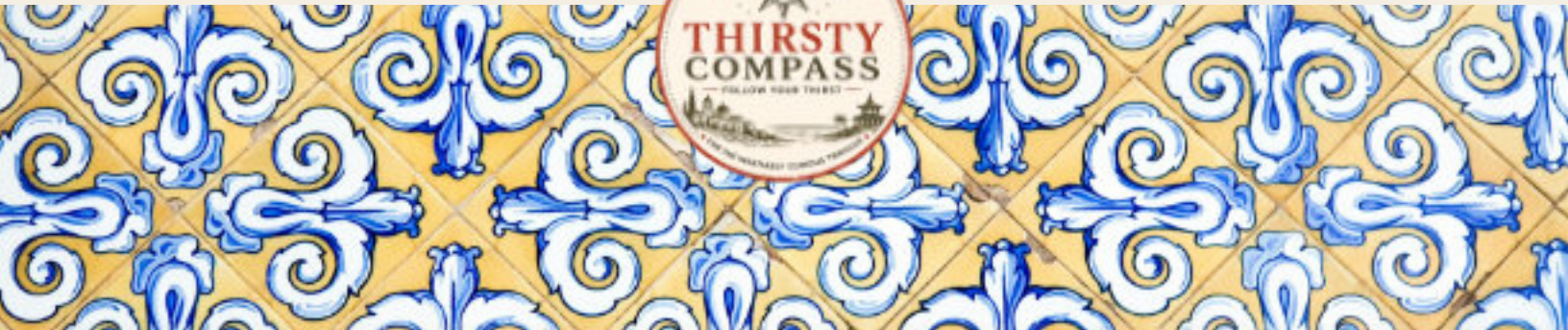
Interactive Guide

Scan the QR code to open the companion map for this guide. Every location mentioned in these pages is pinned and color-coded by category: paella, food and drink, markets, landmarks, and neighborhoods. Tap any pin for details. Use the filter buttons to narrow by category. No app required, opens in any browser.



This whole guide contains my "Top Picks" but where many options are listed, a top-top pick is indicated with this icon; all suggestions are solid otherwise they wouldn't be here.

If you find otherwise, please let me know: hello@thirstycompass.co



The City That Invented Paella and Gets Almost Everything Else Right Too

An Insider's Guide From Someone Who Actually Lived Here

Introduction: The City That Tourists Keep Getting Wrong

Valencia is the third-largest city in Spain, the birthplace of paella, and one of the most livable cities in Europe. It is also almost entirely misunderstood by the people who visit it.

Most visitors come for two days on the way between Barcelona and Madrid, see the City of Arts and Sciences, eat paella somewhere near the beach, and leave thinking they've seen Valencia. They haven't seen Valencia. They've seen the postcard.

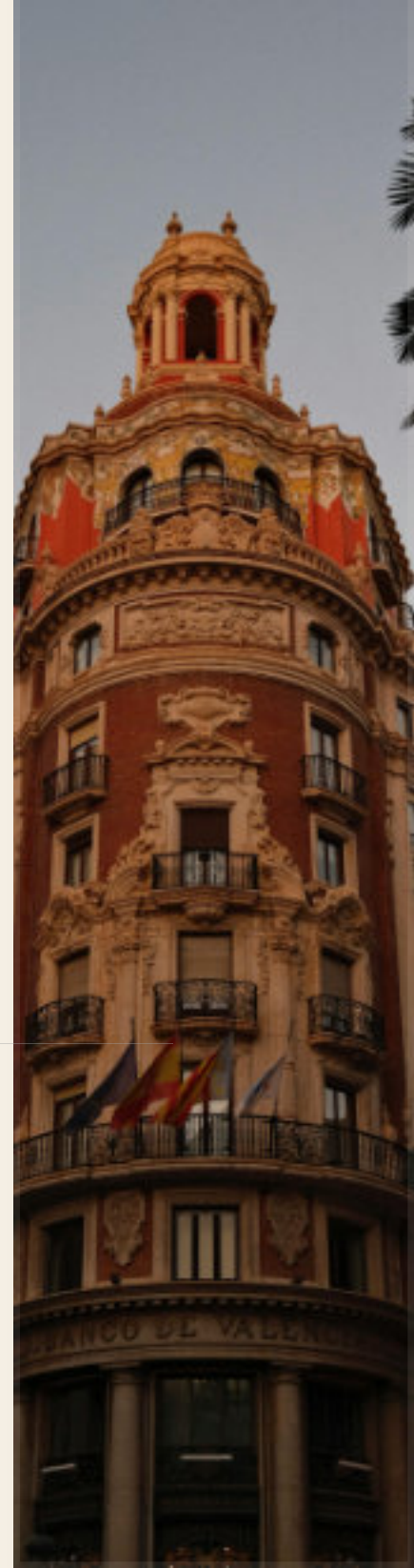
I lived here. On Calle de Felix Pizcueta, wedged between Plaza del Ayuntamiento, L'Eixample, and Russafa neighborhoods — a perfect central location adjacent to the old city, the medieval warren of streets that tourists walk through quickly on the way to something else. I knew my neighbors. I had a local bar. I knew which paella was worth eating and which was made for people who wouldn't know the difference. And I've been coming back ever since with enough return visits that you could easily add another six months to the time I've spent here.

This guide is the collection of what I tell people when they say they're going to Valencia. Every recommendation comes from personal experience, and I'll tell you clearly when that experience has limits.

One more thing before we start: Valencia is a rich, layered, criminally overlooked city, and no guide can cover it completely. What follows is built entirely from personal experience: places I've been, people I know, things I've eaten and drunk. There is more to discover than any single guide can hold. Think of this as a well-informed starting point, not a definitive map.

Understanding Valencia First

Valencia is not Barcelona. In most of the ways that matter, Valencia is better, though not to disparage Barcelona; it is a top destination for countless, valid reasons. But Valencia is cheaper, cleaner, and safer, despite being the third largest city in Spain. The beaches are comparable, the architecture is extraordinary in its own right, and the nightlife holds its own. The one thing Barcelona has that Valencia doesn't is Gaudí, and if that's your priority, Barcelona is your city. If it isn't, Valencia will make you wonder why you spent so much time and money somewhere else.





Eating and Drinking

The Essential: Paella and Fideua

Let's establish something immediately: authentic Valencian paella is a lunch dish. Ordering paella at dinner is a tourist tell and means you're almost certainly getting something that's been sitting around if ordering only a single portion. The Valencians are serious about this. Having said that, as I visit now, sometimes the only time in my schedule I can accommodate a paella is at dinner; it's your vacation, so do what works for you, just make sure they are making it fresh.

Paella Valenciana, which is truly the original, is made with chicken, rabbit, snails, and broad beans or butter beans. You can ask them to make it without the rabbit if that's your preference, though I would suggest to avoid that request; in fact, the rabbit comes out like the chicken but with a lot more flavor. Keep it. Ditch the snails if you want — that I do. All other paellas are something different, like de Marisco (seafood), Negra (squid ink), Mixto (mixed), Verduras (vegetable), etc.

Other options you may see in the "Arroz" section of a menu might be Arroz al Horno, which is baked rice of regional variant baked in an earthenware bowl, often containing some other ingredients like sausage and chickpeas. You might also see creamy rice dishes known as Arroz Meloso or Arroz Caldoso that typically use short-grain, starchy rice varieties like Senia, Bahia, or Bomba which are best for creating a creamy yet firm texture (sometimes almost soupy) rather than a sticky one. Finally, you might see fideua under the rice section even though it is actually pasta.


A word on fideua: While you're here, seek out fideua. It's like paella but made with fideos: short pieces of spaghetti-like pasta. Traditionally fideua is made with seafood, but the first time I experienced it was with meat (at the time not knowing it was actually a seafood dish) and fell in love with it. I never personally got over excited about it when made with seafood, but when I can find it made well and with meat, OMG. The place I discovered fideua first was at a place in Xativa (see Day



The Markets

Mercado Central

The oldest and largest fresh market in Europe. The building alone, an extraordinary Art Nouveau structure with stained glass and iron, justifies the visit. It's become touristy but tolerably so.

When I visit, for a snack I always stop at  **Central Bar**, a stall run by Ricard Camerena, the owner of Canalla Bistro in Russafa. It continuously has every stool occupied, so the move is to look at what people are eating, find someone who looks like they might be finishing, and stand behind them. Unlike most places in Valencia, this is not a place people linger.

Stalls worth seeking out:

- **My friend Cesar** for jamón, salami, and unique cheese options: **Charcutería Cesar Lorente**
- **The best olives you have ever had in your life.** Some pretty excellent other stuff (like pickles) too. Samples encouraged. Without question, go here: **Moixamer**
- **I buy my spices here** (like Spanish saffron or paprika): **Espicias Romero**
- **Fried almonds** (Almendra Frito): **Vicente Gimeno**
- **Turkish pistachios**, which are different from Italian or Californian and hard to find outside Turkey: **Frutos Secos Pepe y Pepita**
- **Wide variety of cheeses**, including many from outside Spain: **Boutique del Queso**
- **Other quality jamón and cured meats:** **Jamones Martínez Gargallo**, **Supergourmet Charcutería Selecta**, **Antonio Mata - Casa Mata**, **Redondo Iglesias**
- **Fresh red meat** (mostly beef, plus lamb and others): **Palanca Carnissers**, **Rosa Lloris**
- **Poultry** (my two whole Thanksgiving turkeys came from here): **Tia Teresa La Casona**
- **Bakery** with lots of options, both sweet and savory: **Horno San Antonio**
- **Turrone**s, a sweet Spanish treat with many varieties and samples offered: **Supergourmet Turronería**