



VALENCIA'S CELEBRATION KNOWN AS THE GREAT CREMA WHEN GIANT FALLAS ARE BURNT.

# GOING UP IN SMOKE

## Valencia's Spring Time Celebrations

### Intro

*The British welcome summer with a mere advancing of the clocks but there are many places in the world where it triggers great celebration. One such place is Valencia in Spain. It is called Las Fallas and culminates with the great crema when giant creations are burnt in spectacular fashion*

### Las Fallas Celebration

For almost a week the city of Valencia prepares for the climax of celebrations known as the great crema. On this night over 300 giant display pieces known as fallas are burnt in spectacular fashion. Every district spends a whole year building them from paper, cardboard and styrofoam on a wooden frame and the end results take your breath away. Those in the centre of town are the biggest and the best. They tower above you and are made up of many elements. I suppose you could liken them to a floats in a parade. We arrived on the day before the burning in order to see as many as we could. A special ticket gave us easy

access to see them up close. With the population of the city swelling from one and a half million to three million it is a great idea. We also had a tourist board guide.

### How it all began

The origin of las Fallas comes from the old carpenter's tradition who, when celebrating the arrival of spring on 19th March, used to burn pieces of wood (parots) that were used to prop up their lights during the winter. To this bonfire they gradually started to add old belongings and rags, which gave the wooden structure a human-looking aspect,



The giant Fallas



DETAIL FROM A FALLAS

THE GREAT CREMA

GIRLS IN NATIONAL DRESS

until they became the ninots (puppets or dolls) that we know today. The Valencian sense of humour soon gave the irony shown in the ninots which is maintained at present. The Fallas celebrations have evolved into temporary works of art which, in some cases, cost millions of euros.

### The final day dawns

All day on the last day of las fallas firecrackers exploded repeatedly and dressed in their national costumes the Valencians intermingled with visitors from around the world. A real party atmosphere prevailed and many vendors set up food stalls to feed the crowds. Although the colourful thought provoking fallas would be burnt later they were deemed never to be forgotten as thousands of cameras clicked and images uploaded to the internet.

In the afternoon the sound of drums intensified and a parade of thousands in their national costumes brought flowers to be added to the giant fallas of the Virgin Mary. Later jostling crowds gave way to busy restaurants which spilled out onto the pavements which filled every available space. Being devout Roman Catholics many visited the local churches.

### The great crema

The first fallas were lit soon after ten thirty and fuelled by propellant they raged fiercely and were destroyed in moments. Each time the fire brigade stood ready to drench the dying embers before they progressed to the next. With 300 burning in various districts and each one preceded with a firework display the sky was filled with leaping flames, brightly coloured fireworks and sometimes dense black

smoke for several hours. It was a little after midnight that the giant Virgin Mary created from thousands of blooms met its fate. By now it had begun to rain heavily which was a bonus for the fire brigade!!!

The final and biggest fallas was lit as 2 am approached. It was lit by an ear bursting string of firecrackers amongst a mixture of sadness and joy. Having been amongst the crowds I could empathise with those who saw their years' work burn but on a more positive note it heralded the end of winter and as each fallas was reduced to dying embers choirs of voices offered up their salutations to Christ.



### The Fallas museum

Every year some Ninots (elements from the giant Fallas creations) are saved from the fire by popular vote. It is a practice which has been in place since 1934 and they are housed in the Fallas Museum. The amount of work involved in their creation is mind boggling and it seems incredible that they are built to burn. They seemed to fall into three categories, rude, satirical, and family orientated. The satirical often depict political figures. Those that represent family have a very 'chocolate box' vibe and the rude tend to show children peeing or people in laughable risky poses.



### Food for thought

Should you be one of those who love the smell of gunpowder and harbour secret pyrotechnic urges then you might wish to experience the vibrant smoky fiesta for yourself. If so it is not too early to start planning. When the drab dull days of winter are getting you down the warm sunshine of Spain is very inviting. The evenings are not cold even without the heat of the flaming bonfires and the city is alive with music, dancing and street food.



THE FALLAS MUSEUM

SOUVENIRS

PAELLA

