

VALENCIA

Valencia is Spain's third city, with a population of almost 800,000. This has been written following a weekend visit to the city in 2015, and can be no more than a brief introduction to the city.

Valencia has been a settlement since at least Roman times, and grew up at the centre of a rich agricultural area. From processing and exporting the local produce it developed into a major commercial and industrial centre and one of the largest ports on the Mediterranean. The city prospered in the early twentieth century, and once more in the post-Franco years. More recently the city has reinvented itself as a tourist and convention centre and cruise liner port, with the development of new infrastructure and cultural facilities and the renovation of the port and beach area. Though the city has been affected by the economic crisis it is lively and prosperous.

Layout

The city centre sits in what was a loop of the Rio Turia, on its south bank a few kilometres from the sea and is bordered by a ring road along the line of the old city walls. The oldest areas are those closest to the river. Following serious floods in the 1950s the river was diverted away from the city, and the drained river bed has since been converted into a linear park.



The main railway station (**Estació del Nord**) sits on the old wall ring road. Directly across from the station the **Avenida del Marqués de Sotelo**, leads to the attractive **Plaça de l'Ajuntament** (city hall square – pictured)). Round the square is the city hall and the main post office, and in the surrounding streets are many of the impressive renovated commercial buildings from the early 20th century. The road then continues from the square then fork right to reach the

Plaza de la Reina, the centre of the city. The oldest part of the city lie between here and the river, including the cathedral, the central market and the narrow streets of the **Barrio de Carmé**.

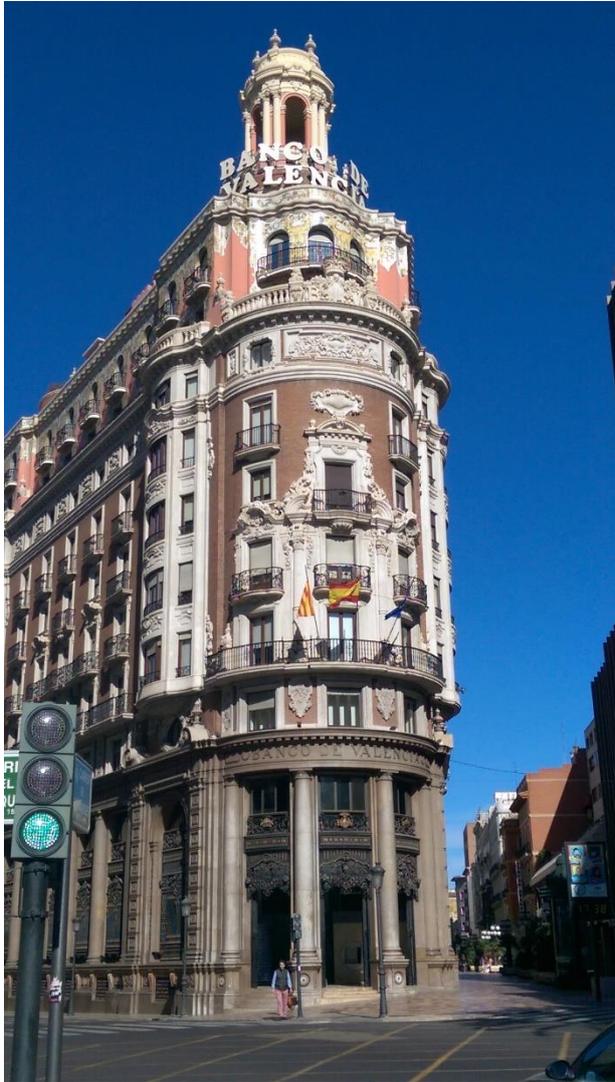
Beyond the centre, apartment block development spread beyond the old city walls in a grid pattern, on both sides of the river and extending towards the port and the Mediterranean, while more recent suburbs stretching out into the surrounding countryside.



Arrival

High speed AVE trains from Madrid and elsewhere arrive at the **Estación Joaquín Sorolla**, which is a few hundred metres from the main station **Estació del Nord**(left), on the edge of the city centre. A free shuttle bus links the two stations.

As an important business centre the **airport** has frequent flights from major UK and European cities. The airport is linked by frequent metro services to **Xàtiva metro station**, in the square outside the Estació del Nord.



Sights

Walking around the city centre allows you to take in the pleasant squares, the twentieth century commercial buildings, the **central market** and the network of narrow old streets in the **Barrio de Carmé**. The **cathedral** is close to the Plaza de la Reina, in its own square. The **Torres Serranos**, by the river, are remnants of the old city wall.

The major recent tourist attraction is the **Ciutat de les Arts i les Ciències** (between the city centre and the sea), a major cultural centre with visitor attractions such as the Hemisfèric, the Museo de las Ciencias and the Parque Oceanográfico. Built mainly by Valencian architect Santiago Calatrava, the buildings are tremendous (though there was scaffolding up on one of them when we passed).

Valencia remains a major commercial **port**, with the more recent addition of a cruise liner terminal which brings many visitors to the city. Part of the port area was redeveloped for the America's Cup yacht race in 2007 and now forms the Marina Real Juan Carlos I. This area was also used as a Formula 1 Grand Prix track. Nearby are the city's **beaches** with a line of seafood restaurants along the shore.

Getting Around

The city centre sights are within walking distance of one another, but reaching the Ciutat de les Arts i les Ciències involves a bus trip, and the port and beach are most easily reached by metro.

As an introduction to the city, the hop-on hop-off open-top **bus turistic** is useful, linking all the main sights. There are two routes, historical and maritime, departing from and intersecting at the Plaza de la Reina, forming a figure of eight. One route focusses on the historic city centre and the newer suburbs, the other on the Ciutat and the beach area. The cost is €17 for 24 hours or €19 for a 48 hour ticket, which covers both routes

Eating and drinking

In the **Barrio de Carmé** there are plenty of places, for example in the area round **Plaça del Tossal** and **Carrer des Cavallers**. We sat in CafeBar Infanta in the Plaça square people watched (including local hen and stag parties – a phenomenon which has now reached Spain).

The bars and restaurants around the **Plaza de la Reina** and the cathedral are more upmarket and expensive but again suitable for people watching on the terraces.

There are plenty of small places around, even on the main streets, for a coffee, drink, snack or a cheap breakfast.

Only a couple minutes walk from Plaza de la Reina is a pedestrianised square, **Plaça de Lope de Vega** which was good for watching the world go by. We used a bar on the square, Pinxtos Traigas, and another, Taska Hogan, just off it.

Near the station and our hotel there were plenty of bars in the pedestrianised lanes. Some of them are Spanish chains, but the food, from tapas and pinxtos to main meals was good.

There are a couple of specialist beer café-bars but limited time meant we didn't reach them.

Where to stay.

There are plenty of hotels to choose from throughout the comfort and price range, though prices may be high if there are major conventions in the city.

We stayed in the three star **Hotel Sorolla Centro** on Carrer del Convent de Santa Clara. It's modern but the rooms are fine (some of the rooms facing the street may be noisy) and comfortable. There are plenty of places to eat and drink nearby and it is less than five minutes walk from the Estacio del Nord and Xativa metro station. It's the second time I've stayed there, and I would stay there again.

Out from the city - Xativa



For some time out from the city we caught a local cercanias train to the historic town of **Xativa** - about an hour away through the countryside. Above the modern town centre there is a hill topped by a castle. On the lowest slopes is the old town (left) grouped around the basilica and the old market square (Plaça Mercat). It was a pleasant a wander around followed by a stop for a drink of lunch.

Note

Many of the locals speak Valencianco which is closer to Catalan than Castellano (Spanish) and most street signs are in Valenciano. Everyone can speak Spanish, and when they do, we found their Spanish very clear and easy to understand.