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The City of Arts and Sciences

Valencia

Spain's third-largest city is riding a wave of popularity like never before thanks to its newfound celebrity status as the host city for the 32nd America's Cup. To get the most out of a visit to this historic coastal community check out these popular attractions. Whatever you do, be sure to take a moment to sip the *Agua de Valencia* (a delicious concoction of orange juice and a sparkling white wine called *cava*). *Salut!*

By Susan Zimmerman

Must-See The City of Arts and Sciences, a futuristic-looking complex that's as much architectural wonder as it is the largest cultural complex in Europe, has put Valencia in the limelight. Designed by Santiago Calatrava, the complex features a state-of-the-art opera house, multifaceted aquarium complex, planetarium, IMAX, Laserium, and science museum. Walking around 87 acres of white concrete and glass-paned buildings can be time-consuming, so if you don't have time to go inside, at least go "window-shopping."

Must-Do Port America's Cup puts visitors in the "spray" of sailing's legendary race without getting their feet wet – the final Challenge Cup match race is June 23-July 7. Check out the *Veles e Vents* building for great views and America's Cup Park, where kids and adults can test their sailing mettle and enjoy hands-on fun. At the other end of the port are the elaborate team exhibits and flashy super yachts. (See America's Cup sidebar.)

Must-Eat *Paella* at La Pepica is a rite of passage. The century-old family-run restaurant, nestled on Malvarrossa Beach and immortalized in Ernest Hemingway's novel, *The Dangerous Summer*, is an institution, as is the country's trademark dish. A word to the hungry: This rice dish takes time, so go early to Avenida Neptuno 6 to order an authentic Valencian *paella*. Remember that late lunches (2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.) are the norm.

Must-Buy Nothing says handcrafted porcelain like Lladró – the collectible works of art first fired in Valencia more than 50 years ago. Though the exquisite sculptures are high-priced, not all Lladró breaks the bank. Two good places to shop are Lladró's Poeta Querol boutique and the porcelain empire's factory outlet on the edge of town, where barely blemished seconds are sold at half price.

My Favorite Shore-X Shore excursions run the gamut, so why would a boat ride on Lake Albufera (even if it is Spain's largest) top the list when the Mediterranean Sea is at the city's shores? My husband and I hopped in a car to see for ourselves. By accidentally going after hours we missed the crowds, but also the boat rides. Instead, we cruised past empty docks for a cursory view of the lake. It was enough to satisfy our curiosity, but rather than return, my let's-see-where-this-other-road-goes spouse did just that and I soon found myself driving past a sea of rice fields bordering the lake.

It was there that we stopped to ask the only soul walking along the road about a bird call we'd been hearing. We not only learned that the mystery bird was a cuckoo, but quickly discovered local rice farmer Jaime Ferrer Marco was a poet extraordinaire – regaling us with words and song amid a light rain and the occasional nearby round of gunfire (scare tactics used on the rice-eating ducks, he assured us).

Call it a serendipitous serenade or a cuckoo encounter, our impromptu poetry session among the rice fields of El Palmer was a refreshing pause.

While roadside "performances" are unscheduled, if you stop in El Palmer and ask around the 800-person village for "Tiu Jaime" (what the local kids call him) or "The Biggest Flamenco of El Palmer" (what he calls himself), there's a good chance you'll get an earful. Of course, if that doesn't float your boat, you can always take a ride on a lake.

What to Do In port for a day and can't decide what to do? Here are a few suggestions to find the shoreside activity that's best for you.

Shopaholics Plaza Redonda has homespun souvenirs from mother-of-pearl fans and Arabic-influenced Manises ceramics to woodcrafts, silver jewelry, leatherwork, and silk fabrics. Mercado Central is a culinary paradise with almost a thousand food stalls to peruse. Port America's Cup is the place for official souvenir race T-shirts. A tip: Have 20 euro bills on hand – vendors prefer the smaller denominations.

History Buffs To witness the thousand-year-old Water Rights Tribunal, in which the distribution of the River Turia's waters for irrigation is decided, be outside the Apostle's Door at the main Cathedral at Plaza de la Virgen on Thursday at noon. It can last all of 30 seconds, so don't be late. Be sure to step inside the church for a look at the Goyas and the bell tower. Local landmarks and museums are many, but do see the Silk Exchange and the Ceramics Museum.

Adventure Seekers Sign up for a ride on one of the America's Cup spectator boats to experience the thrill of being out on the watery course with hundreds of spectator boats bopping about, helicopters flying overhead, and, of course, the sailboats. A word to those weak in the stomach: Ask about the sea conditions before buying a ticket to ride. The water can be choppy and these boats don't float like cruise ships. (Note: There are also rides on non-race days.)

Nature Lovers L'Albufera is a much-touted saltwater lake known for its migratory bird life. This quiet spot is some 7½ miles from the city and a popular escape for boat rides and bird watching. Or duck down to the River Turia's greenway, a former riverbed that was converted into a 6-mile-long garden that now runs through the city. Both are good ways to get back to nature.

Kids in Tow The Oceanographic, Europe's largest marine center, is a kid magnet, with more than 45,000 specimens (including belugas, sharks, and penguins), a maze of aquarium tunnels, and an awesome dolphin show. Make a lunch reservation at El Submarino, which is pricey but mesmerizing. Order the kids a *horchata* – this sweet, frothy milk-like, drink made from the *chufa* (tiger nut) is a healthy Valencian favorite. ■

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE AMERICA'S CUP

When the race talk begins, here's what you need to know about the America's Cup to stay at the helm of the conversation. The 155-year-old competition is older than the modern Olympics, World Cup Soccer, Stanley Cup, and yes, even major league baseball.

"The America's Cup was won before any baseball or basketball game was ever played, and here it is, still going on," says Peter Isler, a two-time cup winner and current navigator for the American BMW ORACLE Racing team.

What you need to know about navigating the course is that between June 23 and July 7, the Swiss team Alinghi (the current cup-holder and defender) will face off against one of the 11 challengers with the most points for the final Challenge Cup match race. It's no small feat to keep all the teams straight (the American team alone has some 140 members with 16 nationalities) but the three to keep on the tip of your tongue are: BMW ORACLE Racing (United States), Emirates Team New Zealand, and Luna Rossa Challenge (Italy).

Even if you know nothing about racing, know this: When these boys play around in their boats it may look like child's play from afar, but it's no joy ride. It takes a 17-man crew working in complete synchronicity to take an 80-foot-long, 24-ton carbon fiber boat out for a spin.

It's amazing to think this all "came about" in 1851, when the yacht *America* beat the best of the British fleet in a race around the Isle of Wight. The United States held the America's Cup the first 132 years of the competition, the longest winning streak in sports. The run ended in 1983.

– S.Z.



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