



Valencia & Murcia

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Carosel (p738)
- ➔ Delicat (p739)
- ➔ Daluan (p752)
- ➔ Cervecería Sento (p759)
- ➔ El Granaino (p765)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Caro Hotel (p738)
- ➔ Cases Noves (p763)
- ➔ Hotel Chamarel (p754)
- ➔ Villa Venecia (p756)
- ➔ Mont Sant (p762)

Why Go?

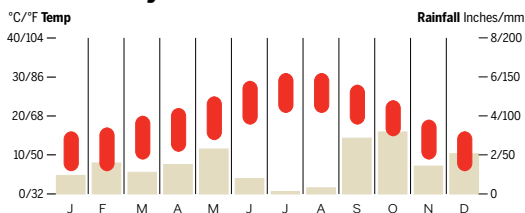
Principal settlement in the region and an utterly addictive city, Valencia exudes confidence. Its sophisticated cultural scene, kicking nightlife, quality museums, great restaurants, understated beach and stunning Modernista and contemporary architecture make it one of the peninsula's real jewels.

Throughout this sun-bathed coastal pleasure-ground, a wealth of festivals awaits you, whether you fancy top-notch rock music at Benicàssim, hooded processions and friendly rivalry at Lorca's Semana Santa, reenactments of Reconquista battles in the numerous Moros y Cristianos festivals or one of the world's biggest food fights at La Tomatina.

While some of the coastal resorts – hello Benidorm! – are notoriously overdeveloped, there are plenty of places to explore that aren't. The ancient port of Cartagena has a magnificent array of Roman and Carthaginian ruins, while Murcia is a buzzy regional capital where there's not a fried breakfast in sight.

When to Go

Valencia City



Mar Las Fallas, Valencia's wild spring festival, brings some two million visitors to town.

Aug Paint the town red at Buñol's tomato fight, then hit the coast's lively nightlife scene.

Oct The sea's still just about swimmable; there's decent weather but far fewer people.

CERCANÍA TRAINS

The *cercanía* short-distance trains run by Renfe are good ways to get around the region. One network radiates out from Valencia, another from Alicante and Murcia. Trains are cheap and leave regularly.

Top Festivals

- Las Fallas (p745), Valencia, mid-March
- Semana Santa (p774), Lorca, Easter
- Moros y Cristianos (p762), Alcoy, late April
- Festival Internacional de Benicàssim (p748), mid-July
- La Tomatina (p748), Buñol, late August

Off the Beaten Track

In summer the coast is packed. Though quieter corners exist, if you want to explore away from crowds, head inland, where valleys and hill towns offer a more relaxed experience.

Online Resources

- www.comunitatvalenciana.com – regional government website
- www.murciaturistica.es – the equivalent for the Murcia region
- www.magrama.gob.es/es/costas/servicios/guia-playas – guide to beaches; in Spanish, but self-explanatory

Street Names

Though many locals don't like to see it as such, for a traveller's purposes, the regional language Valenciano is a form of Catalan. There's a constant to-and-fro here as councils replace Spanish (Castilian) street names with the Valenciano/Catalan equivalents, then their successors change them back. The result is a little chaotic: some streets have a different name at each end. While the difference between the two versions is often minimal, this can sometimes be confusing for visitors. Occasionally we use the Valenciano form where it's clearly the dominant one. But since Spanish is the version the majority uses, we've elected to stick with it in most cases.

WINE REGIONS

The Valencia region has a long winemaking tradition dating back to Phoenicians, Greeks and Romans, and several unusual local grape varieties to taste and quaff. The Alicante and Valencia denominations both cover a wide variety of areas, from coastal plains to mountain valleys, so the range of wines produced is broad, including reds, rosés and whites, as well as sweet wines. Utiel-Requena is an inland region and produces very distinctive reds from the indigenous bobal grape. In Murcia, Jumilla is the zone with the highest average quality; the hot climate produces powerful, full-bodied reds, mostly from the monastrell grape, known in France as mourvèdre. The zone, which also has reasonable whites from Airén, crosses into Castilla-La Mancha. The other Murcian Denominación de Orígenes (DOs), Yecla and Bullas, also focus primarily on monastrell, though a number of other white and red varietals are used.

Top Five Food Experiences

- Denia's gourmet dining options – this lively port (p754) has one of Spain's most renowned restaurants as well as several intriguing tapas and seafood options.
- The region's enormous variety of rice dishes – you could be here for months just trying them all (p739).
- Valencia's embarrassing wealth of restaurants – the city (p738) is surrounded by a rich horticultural zone, locals love eating out, and there's a quality option on nearly every street.
- The most interesting town for wine-tasting is Requena (p747), in the Valencian hills – the local bobal wines are distinctive and delicious.
- Murcia's kicking deli-tapas scene – (p768) the city has loads of delis where you can stock up on charcuterie or fish preserves, and also sample them with a glass of wine in hand.