

LAS FALLAS

Does the smell of gunpowder excite you? Do fires make you smile?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then **Las Fallas festival** is your kind of event — a loud, smoky, high-spirited fiesta where flickering flames dance in the streets and plazas of Valencia! Find out the most important facts you need to know about the festival, and when you come to Valencia you'll feel right at home among the *falleros* and *falleras*.



WHAT IS LAS FALLAS?

Valencia, a quiet city with a population of about 800,000, more than doubles in size when over a million fire-loving revellers are drawn to Las Fallas celebrations like moths to a flame.

The festival lasts five days, from **March 15 to 19**, but the atmosphere starts to build weeks before: starting on March 1 (and continuing through March 19), a **thunderous firecracker show called a mascletà** is held every day at 2 p.m. in Plaza del Ayuntamiento. The firecrackers shake the ground for next 10 minutes, as the mascletà is an auditory experience rather than a visual one. (Incredible visual fireworks displays are also held every night from March 15-19.)

The festival really gets cracking on March 15, with La Plantà, when more than 700 enormous ninots (puppets or dolls) are set up around the city, and most roads are cut off to traffic, making way for all the people and activities that will fill the streets during the days and nights of the fiesta.

For many, the main focus of Las Fallas is the creation and destruction of ninots, which are huge statues made of papier-mâché, cardboard, wood, or plaster. **The ninots are extremely lifelike and usually depict bawdy, satirical scenes and current events.** Many ninots are several stories tall, and cranes are needed to move them into their final locations in Valencia's parks, plazas, and intersections. Several ninots are organised together to make the multi-faceted story of each falla.

Over the next few days, people walk around the city, admiring the artistry and humour of the creative masterpieces and enjoying the traditional pastries being sold on (seemingly) every street corner. For the most authentic local experience, try the Valencian classic *bunyols de carabassa* (pumpkin fritters) with a cup of *chocolate*.

The ninots remain in place until all the fallas are set aflame on March 19, the day known as La Cremà (the burning).

Each year, one of the effigies is spared from destruction by popular vote. It is called the ninot indultat (the pardoned ninot) and is exhibited in the local Fallas Museum along with the other favourites from previous years.

In addition to the daily firecracker extravaganzas and the climactic burning of the ninots, a myriad of other events also form part of Las Fallas. Festival goers can enjoy an extensive roster of bullfights, music, parades, paella contests, flower offerings, and beauty pageants around the city.

Vocabulary Help

Plaza = a (town) square

Fiesta = a party or festival

A reveller = a partygoer or someone that's celebrating

Auditory = relating to the sense of hearing

Bawdy = rude

Satirical = sarcastic / critical / mocking

Multi-faceted = having many different sides or features.

Effigy = a statue or a figure