

A Valencian Food Adventure

Getting to the centre of Valencia from the airport is a doddle. You unpack and settle into your downtown self-catering apartment and already you are thinking about paella. No one has told you that the easiest mistake to make is ordering paella in the centre of Valencia.

Most probably you also do not know that Valencia is bang in the middle of Spain's market garden. Put on an empty rucksack and head straight for the *Mercado Central* to stock up on fruit and salad. It is an authentic homage to real food. The fruit and vegetables are spectacularly presented and you will see photographers snapping away all over the place. The fish and seafood are like something out of a film and you will see chefs carefully picking out the best.

Now it is time for the best *patatas bravas* in Spain. Go down Barón de Carcer street, which is at the back of the market, until you reach number 31, *El Tostadero*. Most likely, you will have to stand but it is totally worth it.

For a delicious seafood paella take the metro to the *Las Arenas* beach where there is a row of famous and reasonably priced restaurants right by the sand. Be patient as real paellas are prepared individually and take half an hour or so. While away your time munching baby clams or *tellinas*.

Another day, visit the fine art museum by the dry river bed, which is now a magnificent park. It is a must, if only to see Velazquez's self-portrait and shiver as his glaring eyes follow you around the hall. After that, cross the bridge to the city gates and dive into *Bar Serranos*, where the taxi drivers have their brunch. Order a *chivito* French sandwich. Vegetarians can go upriver a few blocks until *Salvador Giner* street and feast in *Las Tastaolletes*, possibly the finest cuisine in the city and for a mere 12 euro.

For downtown shopping go to *Colón* street which is Valencia's main thoroughfare. Stop for a break in *Bar Libano*, Number 42 and order some *esgarraet*, which is a mixture of strips of red pepper and salted cod.

For the gutsier travellers, I recommend my absolute favourite rice dish, *arroz a banda*. Take a taxi to *La Genuina* in *Pinedo* near the port. You will need to book ahead, otherwise you will be turned away and don't forget to order the orange flan for desert. For the even braver, try *El Aquilino*. All you have to do is get on the number 4 bus in Valencia's main square *El Ayuntamiento* in front of the *Moratín* theatre and get off at the last stop. It's a great ride and don't worry about the desolation of the area. The restaurant is the only restaurant in site and you will be the only tourists there for sure. Once again, if you don't book ahead, your journey will have been in vain.

For the truly intrepid travellers, take a yellow country bus out to the village of *El Palmar* by the lagoon. You may be dropped off in the middle of nowhere and end up being stranded so if you decide to rent a car that would involve much less stress. The bus number is 190a and it leaves from *the Plaza Canovas*. However you get there, I recommend ordering the crab and rice stew called *arros amb caranc*, as well as a serving of spicy eels with potatoes called *all i pebre*.

If you did decide to rent a car, book a Valencian paella in *Serra*, which is up in the mountains. This is what Valencians consider to be the authentic paella and it is made with chicken, rabbit, snails, rosemary, butter beans and green beans and cooked over a log fire. Again, make sure you book ahead or you won't get any lunch. My favourite place is *La Balsa de San Antonio*, just out of town, tucked into a bend in the mountain road by a small reservoir.

Valencia can be a very exciting place for food lovers but it won't happen downtown and it won't happen easily. You need to go on adventures. By the way, all the rice restaurants mentioned will happily prepare a splendid vegetable paella if you order ahead.

(For addresses and phone numbers see below.)

Listening and reading

Addresses and Phone numbers

El Aquilino Castell de Pop, Nazaret, Valencia ☎96 367 16 37

La Balsa de San Antonio - Carretera Serra-Torres-Tores. (Valencia) tel. 961.688.434

Fine Art Museum, San Pío V, 9

La Genuina in Pinedo, number 283 Avenida Carrera del Riu ☎963248663

Bar Serranos C/ Blanquerías, 5

Las Tastaolletes C/ Salvador Giner, 6 (best to book at weekends ☎963 921 862)

El Tostadero, Barón de Carcer, 31

713 words

