

# Falles



Traditional *SARAGÜELLS* costume for the men

The **FALLES** are a Valencian traditional celebration in praise of Saint Joseph in Valencia, and other towns along the Valencian Community as Benicarló. The term **FALLES** refers to both the celebration and the monuments created during the celebration.

Each neighbourhood of the city has an organized group of people, the *CASAL FALLER*, that works all year long holding fundraising parties and dinners, usually featuring the famous speciality paella. Each *CASAL FALLER* produces a construction known as a **FALLA** which is eventually burnt. A *CASAL FALLER* is also known as A COMISSIÓ FALLERA.

## ***FALLES & NINOTS***

Formerly, much time would also be spent at the Casal Faller preparing the ***NINOTS*** (Valencian for *puppets* or *dolls*). During the week leading up to 19 March, each group takes its *ninot* out for a grand parade, and then mounts it, each on its own elaborate firecracker-filled cardboard and papier-mâché artistic monument in a street of the given neighborhood. This whole assembly is a ***FALLA***.

The *ninots* and their *falles* are developed according to an agreed upon theme that was, and continues to be a satirical jab at anything or anyone unlucky enough to draw the attention of the critical eyes of the fallers — the celebrants themselves. In modern times, the whole two week long festival has spawned a huge local industry, to the point that an entire suburban area has been designated the **CITY OF FALLES — CIUTAT FALLERA**. Here, crews of artists and artisans, sculptors, painters, and many others all spend months producing elaborate constructions, richly absurd paper and wax, wood and styrofoam tableaux towering up to five stories, composed of fanciful figures in outrageous poses arranged in gravity-defying architecture, each produced at the direction of the many individual neighbourhood *Casals faller* who vie with each to attract the best artists, and then to create the most outrageous monument to their target. There are more than 500 different ***FALLES*** in Valencia, including those of other towns in the Valencian Community.

During ***FALLES*** , many people from their *casal faller* dress in the regional costumes from different eras of Valencia's history — the DULZAINA AND DRUM are frequently heard, as most of the different casals fallers have their own traditional bands.

The days and nights in Valencia are one running party during the five days of Falles. There are processions galore — historical processions, religious processions, and hysterical processions. The restaurants spill out to the streets. Explosions can be heard all day long and sporadically through the night. Foreigners may be surprised to see everyone from small children to elderly gentlemen throwing fireworks and bangers in the streets, which are littered with pyrotechnical débris.

## LA DESPERTÀ

Each day of Falles begins at with *LA DESPERTÀ* ("the wake-up call"). Brass bands will appear from the casals and begin to march down every road playing lively music. Close behind them are the *fallers* throwing large firecrackers in the street as they go.

The crowd gathers....



For Masclètà!!

## LA MASCLETÀ

THE *MASCLETÀ*, an explosive display of the concussive effects of coordinated firecracker and fireworks barrages, takes place in each neighbourhood at 2 pm every day of the festival; the main event is the municipal Masclètà in the *Plaça de l'Ajuntament* where the pyrotechnicians compete for the honour of providing the final Masclètà of the fiestas (on March 19th). At 2pm the clock chimes and THE FALLERA MAYOR (DRESSED IN HER *FALLERA* FINERY) will call from the balcony of the City Hall, *Senyor pirotècnic, pot començar la "masclètà"!* ("Mr. Pyrotechnic, you may commence the Masclètà!"), and the Masclètà begins.

*Mascletà* is almost unique to Valencia, hugely popular with the Valencian people and found in very few other places in the world. Smaller neighbourhoods often hold their own *mascleta* for saint's days, weddings and other celebrations.

## **LA PLANTÀ**

The day of the 15th all of the *falles* infantils are to be finished being constructed and later that night all of the *falles* mayores are to be completed. If not, they face disqualification.

## **L'OFRENDA FLORAL**

Each *falla* casal takes an offering of flowers to the virgin. This occurs all day on their days of March 17th and March 18th. The virgin's body is then constructed with these flowers.

## **ELS CASTELLS AND LA NIT DEL FOC**

On the nights of the 15, 16, 17, and 18th there are firework displays in the old riverbed in Valencia. Each night is progressively grander and the last is called *La Nit del Foc*, the night of fire.



La cremà, 2002

## LA CREMÀ

On the final night of Falles, around midnight on March 19th, these *falles* are burnt as huge bonfires. This is known as the *cremà*, i.e. "the burning", and this is of course the climax of the whole event, and the reason why the constructions are called *falles* ("torches"). Traditionally, the *falla* in the *Plaça de l'Ajuntament* is burned last.

Many neighbourhoods have a *falla infantil* (a children's *falla*, smaller and without satirical themes), which is a few metres away from the main one. This is burnt first, at 10pm. The main neighbourhood *falles* are burnt closer to midnight. The awesome *falles* in the city centre often take longer. For example, in 2005, the fire brigade delayed the burning of the Egyptian funeral *falla* in Carrer del Convent de Jerusalem until 1.30am, when they were sure they had all safety concerns covered.

Each *falla* is adorned with fireworks which are lit first. The construction itself is lit either after or during these fireworks. *Falles* burn quite quickly, and the heat given off is felt by all around. The heat from the larger ones often drives the crowd back a couple of metres, even though they are already behind barriers that the fire brigade has set several metres away from the construction. In narrower streets, the heat scorches the surrounding buildings, and the firemen douse the façades, window blinds, street signs, etc. with their hoses in order to stop them catching fire or melting, from the beginning of the *cremà* until it cools down after several minutes.

Away from the *falles*, there are people going crazy through the streets, with the city resembling an open-air nightclub, except that instead of music there is the occasionally deafening sound of people throwing fireworks and bangers around randomly. There are stalls selling products such as the typical fried snacks *porres*, *xurros* and *bunyols*, as well as roast chestnuts or various trinkets.

## HISTORY

There are a few different theories regarding the origin of the Falles festival. One theory suggests that the Falles started in the Middle Ages, when artisans put out their broken artifacts and pieces of wood that they sorted during the winter then burnt them to celebrate the spring equinox.

Valencian carpenters used planks of wood to hang their candles on. These planks were known as *parots*. During the winter, these were needed to provide light for the carpenters to work by. With the coming of the Spring, they were no longer necessary, so they were burned. With time, and the intervention of the Church, the date of the burning of these *parots* was made to coincide with the celebration of the festival of Saint Joseph, the patron saint of the carpenters.

This tradition continued to change. The *parot* was given clothing so that it looked like a person. Features identifiable with some well-known person from the neighborhood were added as well. To collect these materials, children went from house to house asking for *Una estoreta velleta* (An old rug) to add to the *parot*. This became a popular song that the children sang to gather all sorts of old flammable furniture and utensils to burn in the bonfire with the *parot*. These *parots* were the first *ninots*. With time, people of the neighborhoods organized the process of the creation of the Falles and monuments including various figures were born.

Until the beginning of the twentieth century, the Falles were tall boxes with three or four wax dolls dressed in cloth clothing. This changed when the creators began to use cardboard. The creation of the Falle continues to evolve in modern day, when largest monuments are made of polyurethane and soft cork easily molded with hot saws. These techniques have allowed Falles to be created in excess of 30 meters.

- Official page for the Falles of Valencia, Spain: <http://www.fallas.com>