



THE FALLAS

COMUNITAT
VALENCIANA



THE FALLAS

the triumph of fire



- The Fallas festivity burns away winter worries in a tribute to spring. As a pagan ritual originating in ancient Mediterranean cultures brought to the shores of Valencia in remote times, this artistic display totally transforms the city during what is called “ Fallas Week” . True to the saying, only those who have actually seen it can believe it. Some 700 fallas, or large and small papier-mâché monuments mounted over wooden frames, are burnt to cinders on 19th March in a tribute to St Joseph, the patron saint of carpenters, and to the coming of the spring solstice. It is a ritual recovered from pre-Christian times which the Catholic church now rightfully claims as its own, paying homage to Our Lady of the Forsaken, the city’s patron saint.



The huge works of art called fallas can be described as authentic monuments of papier-mâché and polyurethane, built over wooden structures and conceived to embody pithy, good-humoured and sometimes sarcastic comments on daily life. **[Architecture and engineering dedicated to creating art of an ephemeral nature – something that takes place nowhere else in the world.]** In city streets and plazas these impressive catafalques are erected around single or multiple figurines that sometimes reach 20 metres in height, highlighting an argument or plot with the support of accessories and backdrops, with the addition of at least a dozen and up to a hundred or so “ninots” (figurines or comic characters) carefully designed for the purpose of heightening the overall effect. Modelled first in clay, then in plaster and finally in cardboard or polystyrene, they are created and decorated to look like authentic theatre characters. The roles are filled with true workmanship.





Fallas artists really live up to their names – they are artists more than technicians or craftsmen. They usually come from the local School of Fine Arts or the School of Arts and Crafts and already have years of experience in the workshop. This know-how, combined with imagination and wit, provides a cocktail denoting a special knack for creating caricatures of daily life. Onlookers can therefore laugh or at least smile at these colourful displays depicting the vagaries of time, the quirks of nature, the ups and downs of love, the unfulfilled promises of politicians, the raunchy side of life, and birth, growth and old age.

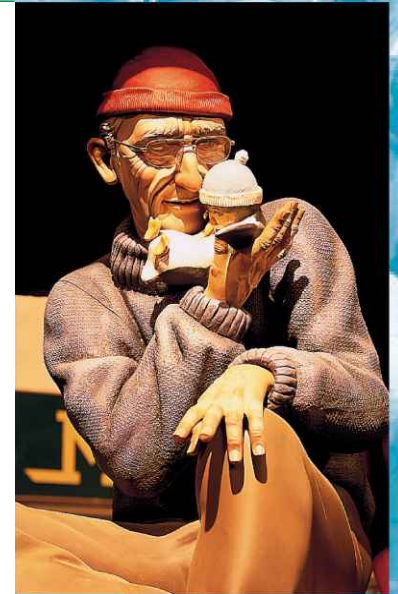
NINOTS

in museums

■ A falla (by which we mean the monument itself as opposed to the Fallas festivity) originated from the wooden candleholders, called “parots” or “pelmodos”, that city carpenters used in their workshops during the winter, bringing them out into the streets in the spring and burning them up in a night-time celebration. It was customary to adorn these “stands” with old clothes and even to place masks over them to imitate some local character. They would then be immolated to celebrate the coming of warm weather.

| *The Fallas festivity was an occasion for indulging in the baroque.*

| Guild members would set up arches in the streets adorned with mythological figurines. Triumphal carriages depicting carved or sculpted angels would be paraded around, floats called “rocas” paying homage to the Holy Trinity and Adam and Eve would be drawn through the streets, and popular representations of the mysteries and the Sacrament would be staged.





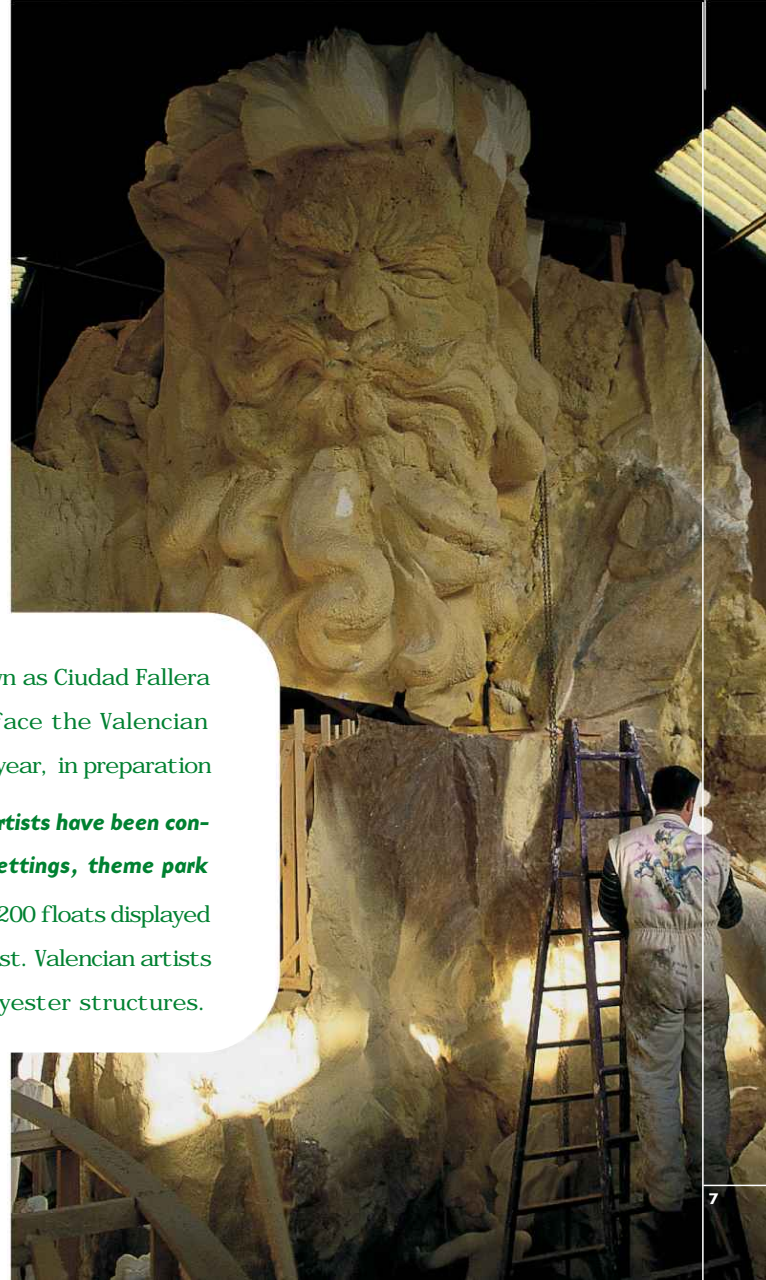
It was by no means difficult to convert the “ parot ” , with its two cross-like intersecting pieces of wood, into a humorous character known as a “ ninot ” , derived from a word meaning something like “ a doll, a grotesque figurine, a chump ” . They were made in an ironic tone to look like local authority figures, clergymen, ladies and squires, buxom lasses and old cuckolded husbands. They represented life itself, commented on with a few lines in verse form written in the Valencian vernacular, and strategically placed at points around the falla.

Because it was born from a popular movement and frequently criticised the authorities, the burghers and ecclesiastics, the Fallas festivity often had to overcome prejudices and municipal regulations. Stemming from the 18th century, they were actually prohibited on more than one occasion, or Fallas Commissions were obliged to pay special taxes in order to erect their displays in the streets.

For a look at the history of the Fallas festivity, how the fallas are created, with a profusion of retrospective photographs and posters paying testimony to social and political developments over the years, visitors are recommended to see the Fallas Museum / **Plaza de Monteolivete, s/n** / This contains “ninots” which by popular vote have been saved from the flames since 1934. Each falla contributes one “ninot” to the annual “Ninot Exhibition” currently held in the basement of the Ruzafa Market for four weeks before Fallas. The exhibition is complemented by explanatory texts on panels and audiovisuals on the festivity. Although some “ninots” are saved from the flames by popular vote, fallas artists also get together to rescue other characters or figurines or even whole sections of a monument. These unburnt representations can be seen at the Fallas Guild Museum / **calle del Ninot, number 24.** / It is an anarchic kind of show that immerses visitors in a world of art and colour.



The Fallas Guild Museum is located in the quarter of the city known as Ciudad Fallera (Fallas City) in Benicalap, where workshops and factory bays face the Valencian “huerta” or market gardens. Work continues here throughout the year, in preparation for the spring festivity. There is always a lot to do. **[Many fallas artists have been contracted in the United States, Canada and Japan to undertake stage settings, theme park assemblies, spectacular shop front decorations and other events.]** The 200 floats displayed during the Mississippi Carnival were created by a Valencian fallas artist. Valencian artists accept challenges from abroad, using fibreglass and steel/polyester structures.





The Fallas Commission is made up of a group of neighbours responsible for producing the falla and arranging its individual festival programme so that everyone can join in the fun. They hold meetings, pay dues, seek out financing for their budgets, and congregate at their headquarters, known as the [**casal**], a place containing all the awards, standards and banners attributed to past fallas, plus exhibits of the explanatory fallas booklet called the “llibret”, and other festivity paraphernalia. All the individual Commissions are part of the Central Fallas Association, a Valencia City Council body that coordinates the Fallas festivity throughout the city.

The Commission hires an artist to make the falla according to a pre-established budget.

Many Fallas Commissions propose the idea or theme of the falla they would like to have made, but it is the artist who finally brings in a sketch of the creation and fills in the details at the next meeting. If the sketch is approved, the artist then makes a model in clay or plasticine (1:20 scale) to give a three-dimensional idea of the scene. After a second approval from the Commission members, and after signing a contract, the artist proceeds to make a full-scale model in the workshop, and then sections it up and prepares it for assembly in the streets, conveniently decorated with “ninots”. It is erected on “setting up” night, called the “plantà”.





Non-stop MUSIC AND GUNPOWDER

- The atmosphere in Valencia during the Fallas symbolises the flowering of gardens and orchards in the spring. Added to the scent of fresh blooms is the sound of music provided by over 300 marching bands, hired to play from morning till night. They start at the crack of dawn when the “wake-up”

fireworks, “la despertà”, are held. These consist of bangers and rockets, which are thrown onto the asphalt around each “falla” or “casal”, and in adjacent streets. The band later plays pasodobles and marches at numerous ceremonies and other events throughout the day. The third element in the holy trinity of this festivity is gunpowder. As of 1st March [***the noisy displays called the “mascletà” are staged every day at 14.00 hours in the Plaza del Ayuntamiento, where people flock to take in the fireworks, catch the pungent smell of gunpowder smoke and feel the earth shaking beneath their feet.***] They have to shield their eyes from the midday sun as the rockets burst overhead, the serpents whine and the thunderbombs crack. The “mascletà” is a prelude to the famous night-time fireworks displays staged along the ancient Turia riverbed. Valencia has some of the most internationally famous pyrotechnical engineers in the world. The manufacture of fireworks is no longer a craft in which secret formulas are passed down verbally from father to son, or bequeathed in old jotters. Today, firework manufacture is based on advanced research into chemical reactions, with computer-aided support followed by a long process of field trials.

Fireworks displays are like a collective ritual, where people enjoy the beauty of the ephemeral, with the emphasis on marvellous sights and sounds. The night-time Valencia sky suddenly lights up with sparkling flowers, giant fireflies, and other colourful contrivances that crackle, pop and bang, standing out on a black backdrop, in full but fleeting colour.

The FLOWER offering

■ In a profusion of beauty like few others, the Fallas festivity has always included a flower offering to Our Lady of the Forsaken since 1945. Two full afternoons are dedicated to the parades composed of all the Fallas Commissions, headed by the Fallas Queens and their Courts of Honour

followed by standard bearers and marching bands in a ceremony in which traditional costumes and flower bouquets are the major attractions.

Participants carry baskets full of flowers and sometimes little allegorical temples made from carnations, gladioli, cyclamens and lilies. These are enchanting afternoons, replete with the rhythms and strains of marching bands continuously playing “El Fallero” by the master Serrano and “Valencia” by the composer Padilla – with lots of pageantry and applause, because “falleros” and “falleras” simply love seeing and being seen, and ladies’ costumes are of course very much a part of the picture.





Guarded by the Miguelete tower, the Plaza de la Virgen is transformed into a flower garden during the offering. The façade of the basilica becomes a floral tapestry that covers the entire wall, giving shape to a huge representation of Our Lady. In the centre of the plaza, a 14m-high wooden structure is set up, on which agile climbers insert the flower offerings as they are thrown up



to them, creating a gigantic effigy of Our Lady. [***It's well worth a visit to Valencia during Fallas, if only to see this prodigious offering of flowers which the sun will soon wilt after a mere 24 hours.***] Providing the music are traditional chirimias and drums, and resounding throughout the city are Spanish rumbas and boleros, marches and waltzes, or modern rock music – each Fallas Commission does its own thing.









DRESSES AND JEWELLERY

and traditional costumes

■ It is true that the Fallas festivity has brought about a resurgence of traditional Valencian costumes, bringing back styles from the 18th century rescued from rural treasure chests, second-hand shops and antique dealers. Valencia is the only city in Spain that still does silk weaving on manual looms. [***Delicate damasks, brocades and flowered silk cloth called “espolín” containing multiple colours intertwined with silver and gold thread combine to form a concert in textile fabrics.***] Only 20cm of flowered silk cloth can be woven in one day, usually at a cost of 90,000 to 200,000 pesetas per metre, and a dress normally requires from 10 to 12 metres. Luxury prevails everywhere one looks. A beautiful outfit is complemented by abundant jewels and headdresses: combs, needles and clasps for hair done up in a bun, covered in gold, pearls and semi-precious stones; pendants, earrings, “joies” (brooches to hold the veil or shawl); pearls, emeralds and selenite, not to mention coral, are the preferred decorations.



Shops selling typical Valencian costumes and jewels – today all of them have Fallas adornments – are very attractive for visitors wanting to acquire a memento of the city and its major festivity. These costumes and jewels merited admiration many centuries ago from illustrious travellers such as Richard Ford, the Baron of Davillier, Alexander Dumas and Théophile Gautier.



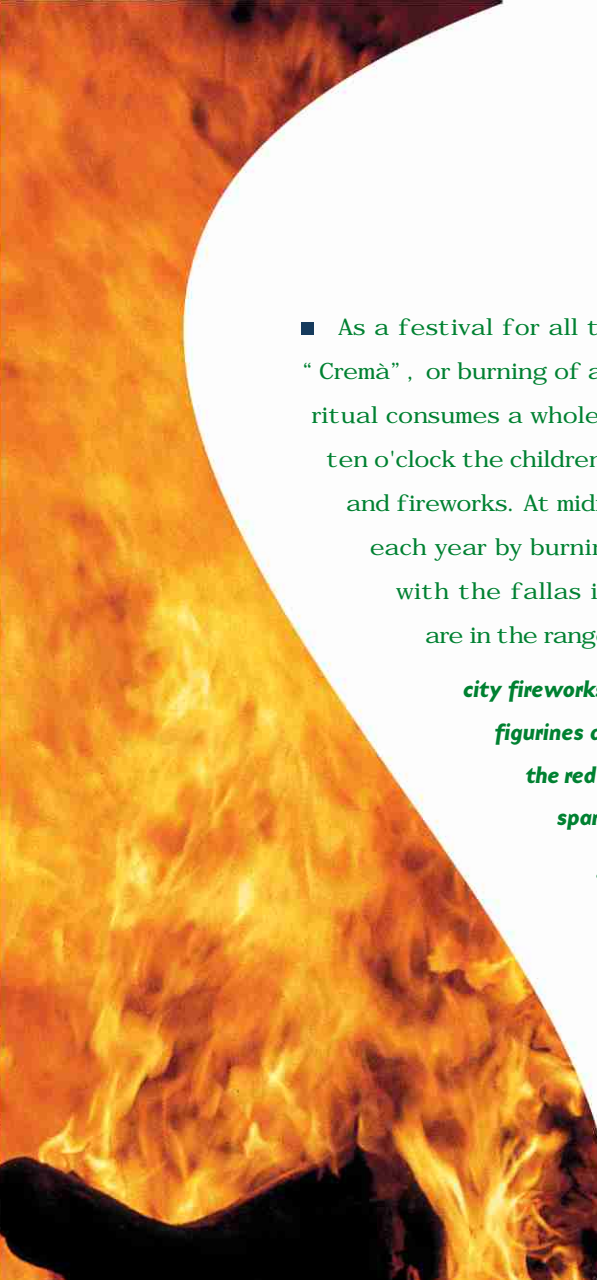
On another note, romantic chroniclers also mention the smell of sweetmeats and fritters that prevails throughout the festive commemorations. [***The Fallas are fed on pumpkin fritters, it might be said.***]

These sweet “buñuelos”, or fritters, can be accompanied by a drink of the famous “horchata”, or tiger-nut milk, in “horchaterías”, or hot chocolate in “chocolaterías”, because it is precisely these two drinks that traditionally accompany this feast. From the wee hours of the morning, the music never stops, nor are the lights turned off, and the fritters keep piling up for all hungry feasters in ancient-looking shops with their typical mirror walls, and marble or ceramic chequerboard floors. These still survive in the heart of the old guild quarters of Valencia, around the Plaza de la Virgen, Plaza Doctor Collado and the Santa Catalina church.



THE "CREMÀ"

the fire ritual



■ As a festival for all the senses, the Fallas culminate with the “Cremà”, or burning of all the monuments, on 19th March. This fire ritual consumes a whole year of work, a whole year of dreams. At ten o'clock the children’s fallas are set to the torch, amidst music and fireworks. At midnight, Valencia astonishes the entire world each year by burning its street monuments to ashes, ending with the fallas in the “special section”, whose budgets are in the range of 20 million pesetas each. **[Throughout the city fireworks are set off and the flames consume the gigantic figurines as onlookers stand in silence, with eyes reflecting the red flames, amid crackling red-hot wood and showering sparks and thick smoke.]** Valencia is enveloped in a weird reddish-grey gloom, yet the music still plays, and more than a few eyes shed tears as the last farewells are said to the monumental spring offering.

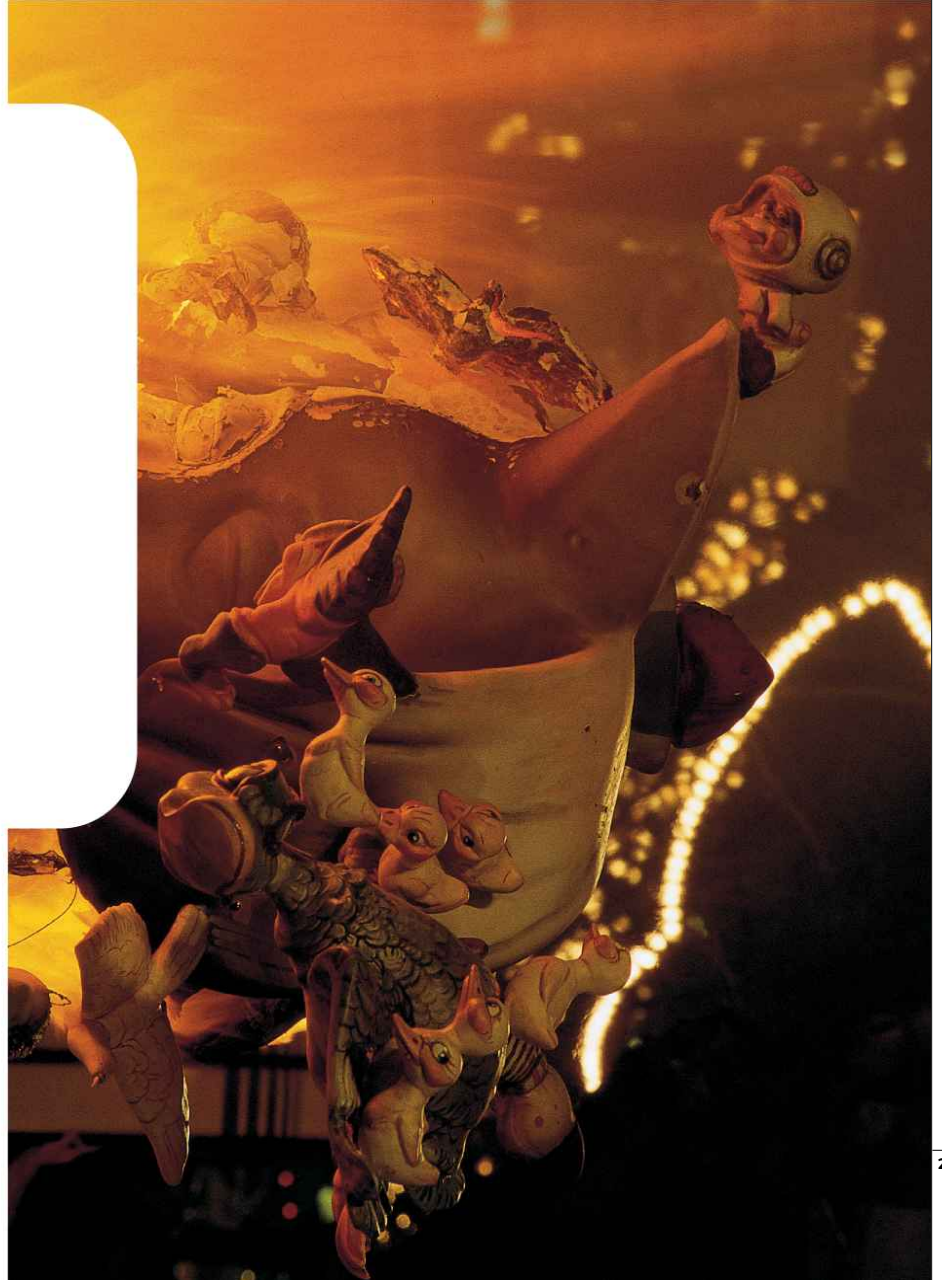


This wholesale incineration culminates in the burning of the main falla in the Plaza del Ayuntamiento, much to the surprise of both national and European television channels, whose announcers always seem to ask

“ how is this possible – so much time and energy all gone up in smoke?” . This is simply yet another traditional quirk of the Valencians, channelling their craftsmanship into an event of international status; people who are in love with aesthetics, beauty, fireworks and music; people who outdo the ancient Greeks and Romans in pageantry; people who see the ironic side of life through their “ ninots” yet allow the flames to consume them in a homage to spring.



Following the night of 19th March, after having sown the sky with silvery palm trees, with fountains of gold and fuchsia, with blue hearts and rich red flowers, and after the signs of fire have been washed away from the asphalt, and the silence of normality reigns once again, | *Valencia wakes up to a new morning and already starts thinking about the fallas it will build the coming spring.* | It's spring renewal with a style of its own.



THE FALLAS QUEEN

The revered figure of the Fallas Queen acquires more importance than the President of the Fallas Commission himself. She is chosen from among the young ladies belonging to the Commission and is probably the daughter of a “fallero”. She will have her own Court of Honour comprising a selection of graceful young ladies. All this is arranged long before the actual festivity in what is known as the “exaltation”, or the election of the Adult and Child Queens and their Courts.

In the 1940s, the Fallas Queen of Valencia was a young lady from the aristocracy or the upper middle class, but when the first democratic city council was formed, this opportunity was given to any young lady who was willing to compete for the position. Each Fallas Commission nominates a young lady for Queen, plus a child of their choice as the Children’s Fallas Queen. They undergo a careful election process in which physical beauty, grace, poise, culture and traditional costumes come under close consideration.



DISCOVER THE CITY



Although the hubbub reigns supreme and the city is completely transformed, whoever comes to Valencia at this time of the year will find many monuments well worth seeing. [***A visit to the marketplace, and the Lonja or the 15th-C World Heritage gothic silk exchange building, is a must.***]

The silk exchange contains an impressive columnated hall, an orange orchard patio, and religious gargoyles. Facing the building is the church called the Iglesia de los Santos Juanes, a baroque building with interesting murals, and the early 20th-century Central Market, an impressive example of Spanish modernism with stone, ceramics, stained-glass windows and splendid domes. It has a brilliant display of fruits and vegetables from local gardens.

From here, stroll along Calle Caballeros to view the manorial homes, and then Plaza de Manises, Plaza de la Virgen and the cathedral and Miguelete tower. Santa Catalina church is also worth a visit, with a tall baroque belltower.





FALLAS WEEK

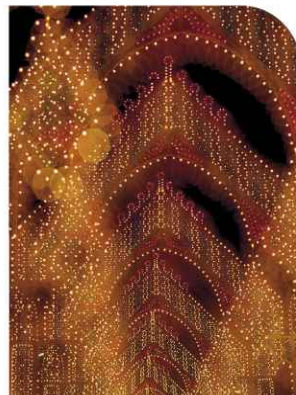
Although at the beginning of March one can see pieces of monumental figurines wrapped in transparent plastic being transported around the city, many streets are adorned with lights and garlands, and fireworks displays are staged at midday in various parts of the city, Fallas Week per se officially runs from 12th to 19th March. The week's programme includes the "Parade of the Ninot", with its carnival-like atmosphere; the folklorish "Parade of the Kingdom", with groups of serenaders and dancing troupes from various districts of Castellón, Alicante and

Valencia performing in the streets; presentations and exultations of fallas in theatres and dance halls around the town; until on 15th March the fallas monuments are actually erected in the streets. As of that day, Valencia no longer sleeps at night - not until late in the night of the 19th, after everything finishes.



During Fallas Week, mornings are loud and colourful. Fallas Commissions parade the streets with marching bands all headed for the City Hall grandstand to collect their awards. In the afternoons there are flower offerings and the city is turned into a river of rich costumes and fragrant flowers as entire Commissions decked out in all their finery take to the streets.

Although the impressively larger fallas in the Plaza del Ayuntamiento and those in the Special Section are compulsory visits, there is also much traditional competition between the fallas assembled in the streets known as Na Jordana, Plaza del Pilar, Convento de Jerusalén and Plaza de la Merced, followed by those from Sueca/Literato Azorín, L'Antiga de Campanar and Avenida Burjasot-Padre Carbonell, among others.





As opposed to the sheer size of the fallas in the Special and First Sections, you are recommended to stroll around the streets and discover those in the more popular quarters where the assemblies may not be as monumental, but are fully compensated by their humour and charm.

Fallas are also held in a number of towns around the Land of Valencia, such as Burriana, Xàtiva, Utiel, Dénia, Manises, Paterna, etc. Townsfolk often put up a falla during their patron saint festivities, in any month of the year. The important thing is to enjoy the satire, the music, the flower offerings and, of course, plenty of loud fireworks.

Gunpowder may be popular, but street lighting is another favourite pursuit. So much so, in fact, that companies come from other parts of Spain to stage light shows. There are whole quarters of the city that stand out due to their lighting decorations, such as Ruzafa, where the falla on the corner of Sueca/Literato Azorín wins major awards in this speciality with illumination requiring some 1.2 million watts of electrical power. Other fallas in the Special Section are also of note: Na Jordana, Convento de Jerusalén/ Matemático Marzal, and in the Ensanche area (Gran Vía Marqués del Turia).

Valencians and visitors alike love the “Nit de Foc”, or night of fire, held on 18th March, where gunpowder and fireworks are the true protagonists. When the night-time sky is decorated in bright colours and punctuated by huge explosions, it is a confirmation that this festivity is of Oriental origin, adapted to Mediterranean lands. The ancient Turia riverbed serves as the site for the latest advances in fireworks exhibitions, in surprising combinations of colours and shapes. This is surely a way



to enjoy life, a feast for the eyes, the ears and the heart.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

You can consult the tourist web of the Land of Valencia on the Internet at **www.landofvalencia.com** or tourist Contact Center [902 12 32 12] if you want additional information on fallas or on travel arrangements.

In Valencia you can obtain further information from offices in the Tourist Info network:

- Paz, 48 - 46003 Valencia - Tel. 963 986 422 - Fax 963 986 421
- Xàtiva, 24 (Estación del Norte / Railway Station) - 46007 Valencia - Tel. 963 528 573 - Fax 963 528 573
- Pl. Ayuntamiento, 1 (City Hall) - 46002 Valencia - Tel. 963 510 417 - Fax 963 525 812
- Poeta Querol, s/n. Edificio Teatro Principal (Theatre) - 46002 Valencia - Tel. 963 514 907 - Fax 963 519 927

And the Central Fallas Association (Junta Central Fallera):

- Av. de la Plata, 117 - 46006 Valencia - Tel. 963 521 730 / 963 521 789 - Fax 963 524 494

TOWNS HOLDING FALLAS IN THE LAND OF VALENCIA

FROM 12TH TO 19TH MARCH

ALQUÀS

ALBAL

ALBALAT DE LA RIBERA

ALBALAT DELS SORELLS

ALBERIC

ALBORAYA

ALBUIXECH

ALCÁCER

ALDAIA

ALFAFAR

ALFARA DEL PATRIARCA

ALGEMESÍ

ALGINET

ALMÀSSERA

ALMUSSAFES

ALZIRA

BENAGUASIL

BENAGÉBER

BENEIXIDA

BENETÚSSER

BENICARLÓ

BENIDORM

BENIFAÍÓ

BÉTERA

BONREPÒS I MIRAMBELL

BUÑOL

BURRIANA

CALPE

CARCAIXENT

CARLET

CATARROJA

CHESTE

CULLERA

DÉNIA

ELDA

EL PUIG

FAVARA

FORTALENY

FOIOS

GANDIA

GODELLA

LA POBLA LLARGA

LA POBLA DE VALLBONA

L'ELIANA

LLAURÍ

LLÍRIA

LLOMBAI

MANISES

MASALAVÉS

MASSALFASSAR

MASSANASSA

MELIANA

MONCADA

MONSERRAT

MONTROY

MUSEROS

NÁQUERA

NOVELÈ

OLIVA

PAIPORTA

PATERNA

PEÑÍSCOLA

PICANYA

PICASSENT

PEGO

POLINYÀ DEL XÚQUER

PUÇOL

QUART DE POBLET

RAFELBUNYOL

REAL DE MONTROY

RIBA-ROJA DEL TÚRIA

ROCAFORT

SAGUNT

SAN ANTONIO DE BENAGÉBER

SEDAVÍ

SIETE AGUAS

SILLA

SOLLANA

SUECA

TAVERNES BLANQUES

TAVERNES DE LA VALLDIGNA

TORRENT

TURÍS

UTIEL

VALENCIA

VALL D'UIXÓ

VILLAMARXANT

VILLANUEVA DE CASTELLÓN

VIVER

XÀTIVA

XERACO

