

# A Night in Valencia

Emily Janzen

A cool wind swept across my face as I walked across the long stone bridge. About 20 meters in front of me stood two large, daunting castle gates, which concealed any further view. As I walked, my friends and I began to hear loud crackling sounds, as people rushed to the streets to begin the nightly festivities of the Festival of Fire. We were good four days into our band trip to Spain, and each of us held our breath with excitement, as we knew what was about to happen once we entered the ancient city of Valencia, would be incredible. As we walked through those stone castle gates, we were greeted with sights, sounds, and smells of all kind. People paraded the streets with musical instruments and festive costumes. Giant, paper statues dotted each block corner, and incredible cuisine and treats were displayed in the windowsills. At this point, everybody in my group was anxious to run off and explore, but our chaperones called us into a meeting. They explained that we had to stay in groups of at least four, and that we must be wary of the location of the castle gates, so not to get lost. The meeting lasted for about five minutes, but I barely heard a word from the chaperones as my attention was fully captivated by the city sights ahead. Then, once they let us go, a group of three friends and I dashed off to join the festive party. We had a wonderful time, visiting shops and watching parades, and wandered deep into the heart of the city. Then, around 8:00, we decided it would be time to start heading back, and set off down the road which we assumed we had come from before hand. Not much seemed out of the ordinary at first, so we walked slowly, still laughing and enjoying the sights. However, after fifteen about minutes of following our presumed path, we started to realize that we may have been going in the wrong direction.

Looking around for landmarks was our first course of action. We wandered the nearby streets once again searching for the large castle gates that was our meeting spot, but to no avail. Now at this point, our group was getting tired of walking, and started to argue with each other about which way we should travel. We pulled at the only map that we had, trying to argue why our suggested path was the correct one, but this only made matters worse. We ended up tearing the map into pieces, and came to the conclusion that we were now hopelessly lost. So, logically, we decided to ask for directions. We wandered into the nearest shops and asked if anyone spoke English, and eventually, we found a small ice cream bar with employees who did. We showed them the left over fragments of the map, and they seemed to understand what we wanted, so we followed their directions and walked off once again. Unfortunately, they actually pointed us in the opposite direction, and soon we were around 30 minutes away from where we were trying to get to. Now at this point, we were getting some frantic calls from our teachers, and some of the locals were getting pretty rowdy, so we decided something needed to get done ASAP. Luckily, we were right next to a small police station, and decided to go inside. We wandered the halls for a few minutes, trying to find the front desk, and wondered why no one was there. Then it hit us; the door we had entered through was a back door, and the station was actually closed. Not wanting to go to Spanish prison, we booked it as fast as we could out the door and ran back into the streets.

It was about an hour after our designated meeting time, when our chaperone finally found us. We were tired, cold, but very thankful to have found our way back. Although this experience was scary, confusing, and quite strange, it was exhilarating, and I will never forget it.