



Gastronomic Valencia

Food & art in south-east Spain

23–30 March 2026 (MM 947)

8 days

Lecturer: Gijs van Hensbergen

From the sea to the mountains of south-east Spain, a conspectus of Valencian cuisine.

Myriad historical influences (Phoenician, Arab, Jewish) as well as current cutting-edge chefs, such as 3-star Michelin chef Quique Dacosta, make this an incredibly rich gastronomic region to explore.

Based in the handsome, vibrant city of Valencia, excellent for its variety of art and architecture, and in the smaller charming seaside town of Dénia.

From market to plate there is nothing fresher or more vibrant than Valencian cuisine. The legendary *huertas* – market gardens, orange groves, paddy fields and Mediterranean orchards – are the city's larder. Valencian markets are some of the most beautiful in the world; the Gothic silk market is a World Heritage Site.

The tour includes experiences such as a paella cooking demonstration in a family-run restaurant surrounded by rice fields, access to the fish auction at La Lonja in Dénia, and tasting unctuous goat's milk cheeses dribbled with thyme honey in the mountains. There is hospitality at great bodegas like Casa los Frailes, source of wines served to visiting heads of state at Madrid's Palacio Real. There are also low-key everyday experiences – a refreshing *horchata*, a tiger nut milk pick-you-up; an *Aqua de Valencia*, a fresh orange-based cocktail; and rifling the wine cellar, feasting on organic potatoes and nibbling at a perfectly burnt *brandade* at Casa Montaña, arguably the best bar in the world.

Valencian cuisine is both ancient and new. Wind-dried octopus prepared to a 3,000-year-old Phoenician recipe is a revelation, as is the sweet luxury of almond biscuit accompanied by an ice cold Moscatel. The Moors held the Levante for 400 years and the phantom flavours live on. We feel the weight of Borgia rule and the Naples connection, and taste history with *alioli*-steeped *fideuà* – Europe's first pasta dish?

There are Baroque splendours, shimmering Valencian tiles and the hedonistic sun-drenched canvases of Joaquín Sorolla. There are back streets and museums and hideaway cafés to be explored: the Jewish *call*, the Almohad Arab walls, the twelfth-century Christian



Valencia, the market place, in 'Leaves from a Sketchbook', by S. Read 1875.

settlement. Dénia's museum contains artefacts from the Romans and the Iberians, who were pressing wine 5,000 years ago. The final lunch is provided by 3-star Michelin chef Quique Dacosta, a whirlwind of inventive brilliance, theatre and caprice.

Itinerary

Day 1: Valencia. Fly at c. 12.30pm from London Heathrow to Valencia (British Airways). Tapas dinner at Casa Montaña. First of three nights in Valencia.

Day 2: Valencia. First to the fine modernist-style Mercado Central, one of the oldest-running food markets in Europe. Lunch is at a Michelin-starred restaurant in Valencia, to be confirmed. In the evening visit the National Ceramics Museum, housed in its exuberantly Churrigueresque palace.

Day 3: Valencia. In the morning visit the Museo del Patriarca, a 16th-century seminary housing a fine collection of religious art, and the Museum of Fine Arts, one of the best in Spain, with works by Valencian, Spanish and Flemish masters. Paella originates from La Albufera, a freshwater lagoon nearby on the Gulf of Valencia. Taste this authentic rice dish, cooked over a wood fire.

Day 4: Gandia, Dénia. Drive south from Valencia to a remarkable citrus orchard where around 400 different varieties of citrus fruits are grown. Continue to Casa Manolo for lunch. Once in Dénia watch the arrival of the fishing boats with exclusive access to the fish auction. First of four nights in Dénia.

Day 5: Dénia, Parcent. Ascend into the mountains through orange and almond groves to Parcent for a wine tasting at Bodegas Gutiérrez de la Vega, a family-run business famous for their sweet Moscatel wine. Return to Dénia for a grazing lunch at the market.

Day 6: Fontanars dels Alforins, Cocentaina. Travel inland, stopping at Fontanars dels Alforins for a wine tasting at the prestigious Casa los Frailes. Continue to Cocentaina, located between the Sierra de Mariola and Serpis river, for lunch at the family-run restaurant L'escala (2-star Michelin).

Day 7: Dénia. The morning is free. Take a walk before lunch along the impressive coastline of Las Rotas before continuing to Quique Dacosta's restaurant (3-star Michelin). Dacosta combines local, seasonal produce with cutting-edge creativity and technique.

Gastronomic Valencia continued

Day 8. Drive to Valencia airport in time for the return flight to London Heathrow, arriving at c. 1.45pm.

Lecturer

Gijs van Hensbergen. Art historian and author specialising in Spain and the USA. His books include *Gaudí*, *In the Kitchens of Castile*, *Guernica* and most recently, *La Sagrada Familia*, and he has published in the *Burlington Magazine* and *Wall Street Journal*. He read languages at Utrecht University and Art History at the Courtauld, and undertook postgraduate studies in American art of the 1960s. He has worked in England, the USA and Spain as exhibitions organiser, TV researcher and critic and is a Fellow of the Cañada Blanch Centre for Contemporary Spanish Studies at the LSE.

Practicalities

Included: travel by private coach; hotel accommodation; breakfasts; 6 lunches and 2 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all wine and food tastings; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. **SH Hotel Inglés, Valencia** (inglesboutique.com): 4-star hotel installed in an 18th-century palace in a very central location next to the National Ceramics Museum. **La Posada del Mar, Dénia** (laposadadelmar.com): 4-star hotel located near the historic centre and overlooking the harbour. *Single rooms are double for sole use throughout.*

How strenuous? Coach access is restricted in historical centres and there is a fair amount of walking and standing around in museums and vineyards. Dinners tend to be at 8.30 or 9.00pm in Spain, so you might get to bed later than you usually would. Average distance by coach per day: 40 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.