

A feast of fireworks

Paella aside, Valencia does not have a high tourist profile. The city has struggled in the past in the face of stiff competition from the resorts on the coasts and from Barcelona. Yet Valencia has a rich history, an attractive old quarter and a revitalized beach area. Plenty, in fact, to make it an appealing city-break destination.

In medieval times, Valencia was an independent kingdom, and the buildings in the old town reflect its wealthy mercantile past. The regional government offices, for example, have rooms with golden ceilings, while at the former silk exchange the columns in the main hall resemble palm trees.

The event most steeped in tradition and history is Valencia's Fallas festival, held every March. During Fallas week, each city neighbourhood unveils a vast wood and plaster sculpture filled with fireworks. Every day there are firework displays, and on the 19th of the month the sculptures are set alight.

What started in medieval times as the annual burning of unwanted wood by Valencia's carpenters has flourished into an unrivalled spectacle. These days, the sculptures are often satirical images of topical events or personalities. Evidently, the Valencians, like the rest of us, enjoy seeing their politicians go up in smoke.

1. Answer the following questions using your own words. (2 points: 1 point each)

- a) Why is Valencia not a very popular tourist destination?
- b) What does Valencia offer tourists?

2. Are the following statements true (T) or false (F)? (1 point: 0.5 each)

- a) Valencia has never been worth visiting.
- b) The traditional burning of wooden sculptures started in medieval times.

3. Find a word or a phrase in the text which, in context, is similar in meaning to: (1 point: 0.5 each)

- a) renewed, given new life
- b) shows something which has been kept secret

4. Choose a, b, or c, in each question below. Only one choice is correct. (2 points: 0.5 each)

1. Valencia ...

- a) *is a good place to visit.*
- b) *has always been more popular than Barcelona.*
- c) *would receive more tourists if the paella were better.*

2. In medieval times, Valencia ...

- a) *had regional government offices in the silk exchange.*
- b) *had its own king and was a prosperous area.*
- c) *was bigger than Barcelona.*

