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IN  
FALLES

# THE FALLES

The **Falles** is a traditional celebration held in commemoration of Saint Joseph in the city of Valencia, in Spain. The term *Falles* refers to both the celebration and the monuments created during the celebration. A number of towns in the Valencian Community have similar celebrations inspired by the original one in Valencia.

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 specialty 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*.

The name of the festival is thus the plural of the Valencian word *falla*.

# THE FALLES

## History

There are different speculations regarding the origin of the Falles festival. One suggests that the Falles started in the Middle Ages, when artisans disposed of the broken artifacts and pieces of wood they saved during the winter by burning them to celebrate the spring equinox. Valencian carpenters used planks of wood called *parots* to hang their candles on during the winter, as 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. Over time, and with 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 carpenters.



# THE FALLES

## History

This tradition continued to evolve. The *parot* was dressed with clothing so that it looked like a person; features identifiable with some well-known person from the neighbourhood were often 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 as they gathered 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 neighbourhoods organized the building of the falles and the typically intricate constructions, including their various figures, were born.

Until the beginning of the twentieth century, the *falles* were tall boxes with three or four wax dolls dressed in fabric clothing. This changed when the creators began to use cardboard. The fabrication of the *falles* continues to evolve in modern times, when the largest displays are made of polystyrene and soft cork easily molded with hot saws. These techniques have allowed the creation of *falles* over 30 metres high.

# THE FALLES

## History

The origin of the pagan festival is similar to that of the Bonfires of Saint John celebrated in the Alicante region, in the sense that both came from the Latin habit of lighting fires to welcome spring. But in Valencia, this ancient tradition led to the burning of accumulated waste at the end of winter, particular wood, on the day of Saint Joseph, as was fitting. Given the reputed humorous character of Valencians, it was natural that they began to burn figurines depicting people and events of the past year. The burning symbolised liberation from servitude to the memory of these events or else represented humorous and often critical commentary on them. The festival thus evolved a more satirical and ironic character, and the wooden castoffs gradually came to be assembled into progressively more elaborate 'monuments' that were designed and painted in advance.

# THE FALLES

## The Burning *La Cremà*

On the final night of Falles, around midnight on March 19, these *falles* are burnt as huge bonfires. This is known as *la cremà* (the burning), 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.

Each *falla* is laden with fireworks which are lit first. The construction itself is lit either after or during the explosion of 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 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 to stop them catching fire or melting, from the beginning of the *cremà* until it cools down after several minutes.



ART  
&  
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**Thank you**  
for your  
**attention**

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