

Gwynneth Jones – Valencia, Summer 2013

Having been out of Mexico for over two months I took a trip to Spain to refresh my Spanish in time for my Part II orals. As I'll be taking a Catalan-based paper I decided to combine my visit with some language lessons and chose the Catalan-speaking city of Valencia for my trip. The college were kind enough to give me a grant to help me with my educational, travel, and accommodation expenses.

I arrived at midday on a Monday and treated myself to a traditional Spanish Gazpacho for lunch before heading to the Royal Botanical Gardens to read and get used to my surroundings. At 6 I met my Catalan teacher, Sheila, and she instructed me on the basic differences between the occidental, oriental and island versions of the language, as well as the history of its progression. Sheila had recently graduated as a teacher and promised to show me to some second-hand bookshops where educational and literary texts could be found at a reduced price to help me with my studies back in the UK.

On my second day I woke up early to take a tour around the Estadio Mestalla, home to Valencia C.F., and aptly known locally as El Templo del Fútbol. My excitement was such that I arrived over an hour early and had time to have breakfast in the club cafe surrounded by the beaming faces of former club heroes such as Juan Mata and David Villa. Following the tour I traced the city walls back towards my hostel, stopping at the Museo del Carmen along the way.

Valencia's tourist information services are excellent, there are numerous offices, each of which provide free maps and mini-guides so I was quickly able to see that there were over 25 different museums and many more places of interest. I tried to cram as many cultural visits into my remaining few days as I could. Entrance prices ranged between free and 1€ so my only difficulty came through managing my timetable around a three-hour lunch break programmed into the opening hours and still getting to my evening lessons on time.

Valencia's cosmopolitan atmosphere makes it an ideal place for visitors of any language ability and I highly recommend it as a destination for anyone travelling individually or as part of a group. As with every holiday I came away with another new experience and with a base knowledge of a new language that will greatly help me with my studies. I'm grateful to Pembroke and my father's complimentary taxi service for making my visit possible.