

I am sitting in a propeller plane, Royal Air Maroc, a ATR72-600 for you plane nerds (and you know who you are). Andy and I, along with our travel companions, Phyllis and Ben Zee, are on our way from Valencia to Casablanca for our 8-day trip through Morocco. We were served little sandwiches and since it is a Moroccan airline, we did not have to worry about being served Jamon.

But first, Valencia. And Cuenca.

We flew from into Valencia from Madrid on Sunday, Sept 30. It was a short 45 minutes flight. We quickly made our way through the airport, grabbed a cab and headed into town. Only as we drove along seeing orange grove after orange grove, did I remember. Ah, Valencia oranges! That and olive trees everywhere.

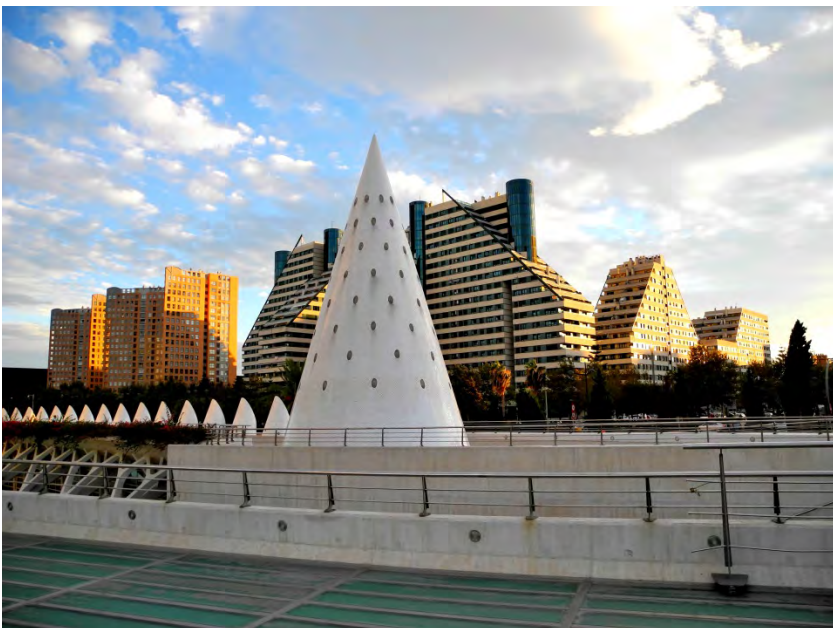
We could tell right away that Valencia was a beautiful city with squares and fountains and statues and roundabouts. Most of Valencia is quite modern with it Old Town section. But more about that later.

We checked into our hotel (Sorhotel Sorello – nothing special) which was right next door to the congress (convention center). We had just enough time to change and dash off to catch the buses for opening ceremonies of the World Association of Sleep Medicine (WASM). This was not to be missed because it took place at the Opera House (Palau de les Arts Reina Sofia), one of the spectacular architectural sights in the City of the Arts and Sciences. This one looks like an enormous helmet or fish.



As we got off the bus, the sun was beginning to set and the light reflected this spectacular white “fish” was breathtaking. As every angle, the building looks different (you must see the pictures – it is too hard to put into words). We were directed to the second floor, but because we were a bit late (due to our late arrival into Valencia), there was no more room in the Opera Hall. So we were asked to what in the lobby area. Turns out the program went very long, with Opera singers interspersed with talks. There were TV monitors, but we opted instead to walk around the building. This gave us the opportunity to see it from different angles, in different lights. And it was really, really spectacular. Eventually we

made our way into the downstairs hall where Spanish wine was served and tapas set out. Since we were one of the first there (the rest were still stuck listening to speeches), we got to leisurely enjoy ourselves. There were cheese sandwiches, little sweet crackers with herring (you know I wash happy), sundried tomatoes with cheese, curried chicken on bread, and things we could not identify. This was followed by fireworks and dessert. But in typical Spanish style, it all ran very late and we did not get back to hotel until after midnight. The best part was seeing the building!





October 1, 2013

The next day I had to give a talk at noon so we slept in a bit and then I went to the meeting. I was done at 1:30, so Andy, Ben and I went off sightseeing. We headed back to the City of Arts and Sciences, stopping first at the Museum of Fallaro, Turns out the museum is closed on Monday, so we went straight to explore the buildings of the Palau de les Arts Reina Sofia.

The City of Arts and Sciences has five main buildings all designed by the architect Santiago Calatrava, a native of Valencia, who is now one of the world's hottest architects. He also designed the Olympic sports complex in Athens. The architecture is avant garde and eye-catching, with modern white buildings – and when I say modern I mean really modern. In addition to the Opera House, there is an Imax theater, also white and in the middle of a very wide reflecting pool. The Prince Felipe Science Museum is the science building, a huge white structure surrounded by two reflecting pools of water. There is the Agora, a multifunctional space where major (sports) events are held. Then there is a group of buildings set in a huge garden which consist the aquarium, the L'Oceanografic which is the largest aquarium in Europe. But just saying these buildings exist is not doing them justice. As it is described, "the City of Arts and Sciences bridges the widely admired Mediterranean blue and white tradition of sea and light with the avant-garde architecture. The bold strokes - the futuristic image that symbolizes the new Valencia: a modern city within the age-old city which millions visit every year to enjoy its culture, nature, art, and science." Each building is unique with white and blue, surrounded by water and shapes. Again – see the pictures!



After spending time walking around, we began the walk back to the hotel, through the Antiguo Cauce del Rio Turia. In 1957, the Turia river flooded, killing hundreds of people and causing much damage. To prevent future disasters, the flow of the river was changed, and rerouted/diverted out of the city center. The original bedding was turned into a fabulous park with many playgrounds and sporting facilities. Each section of the park is different, with statues and museums, including the Museum of Music and the Belle Artes Museum. The park runs like a green snake through the whole town. It is a true green oasis, filled with people and families walking, biking and jogging. One area is called Gulliver, has it has a huge sculpture of Gulliver which kids can climb over. The park is covered by the original bridges which went over the river, dating back from between the 14th and the 17th centuries. Some are particularly beautiful such as the Puente del Mar or the Puente de Santiago Calatrava, also known as the Peineta (comb). We found this to be such a creative use of space.



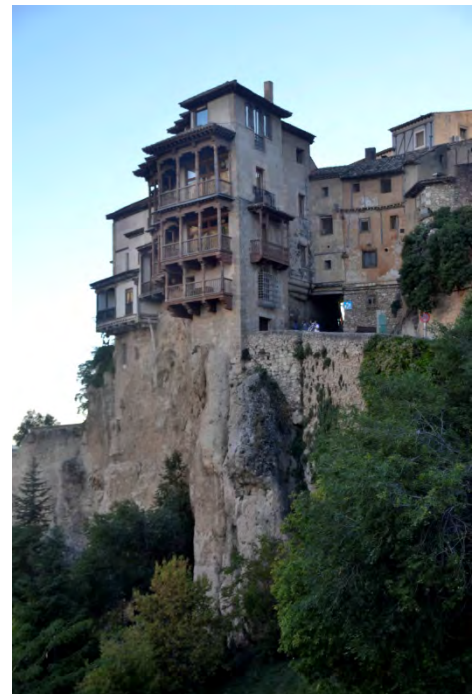
We walked as far as the old town and then took a taxi back to the hotel as the rest of the way was less interesting. And it was hot!

That night we were back on the buses for the WASM presidential dinner which was out by the beach in a fancy hotel filled with fountains and gardens. We had cocktails outside and then moved inside for dinner. This sounds very civilized, except cocktails did not start until about 8:30, dinner until about 10:30, and a guitar concert at about 11:30. The Zees and us left before the concert and just took a cab back as Phyllis had her keynote address at 9:00 the next morning and my talk was right after that. We are just not used to the Spanish lifestyle of siestas and late dinners.

And the Spaniards do take siestas and they do have late dinners. Shops and museums are closed from 2-5 every day, and restaurants do not open for lunch until 2:00 and for dinner until 8:00. Tapas at the bars are always available however.

The next day Phyllis and I gave our talks and then the four of us rented a car and drove to Cuenca (pronounced Kwenka), a medieval town, about 200 km from Valencia. It took us almost 30 minutes to get out of town, even with a GPS but we eventually found the highway (A3) and headed northwest.

We arrived in Cuenca at about 5:30 in the evening, a time when most tourists were leaving. Cuenca is known for its hanging houses. It is located across a steep spur, whose slopes descend into deep gorges of the Júcar and Huécar rivers. It is a quaint little hill town, with its beautiful cathedral (Cathedral of Our Lady of Grace and Saint Julian), but mostly it is the hanging houses that everyone comes to see. Built over a rock above the Huecar River gorge in the 15th century, *Las Casas Colgadas* are the only remaining samples of this type of building which was common in this city a long time ago.





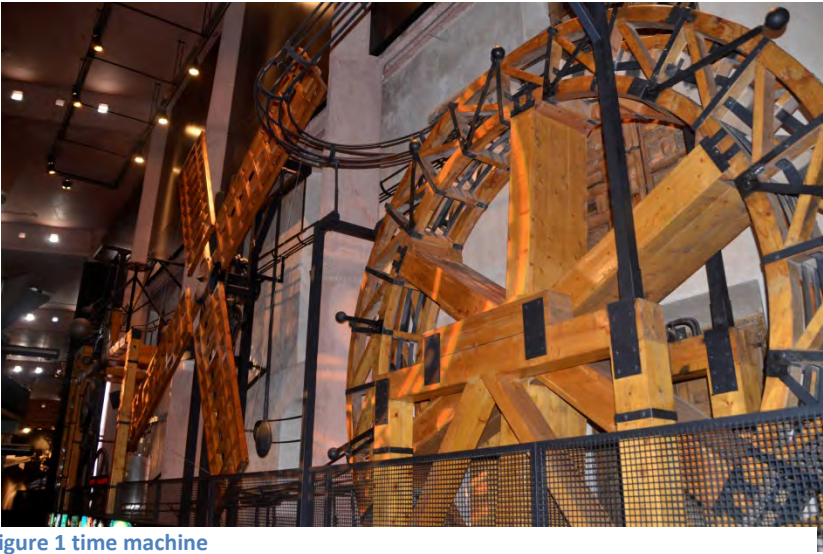


Figure 1 time machine

It actually took us a long time to find the right path to view these houses. We started out in the Science Museum because we had read that they had a time machine. And they did. It was every possible type of time keeper from a water wheel to a pendulum. Very cool! We asked the woman working there if we could go onto to the terrace to see the view (we saw that in the guide book). She unlocked doors, took us where only people working were allowed and showed us the beautiful view of the city. And then in half Spanish and half English she explained how to get there – and we still had a hard time finding it. But find it we did.

We then drove into the new part of town to find a restaurant for dinner. The woman at the museum said there would be all sorts of restaurants on Calle San Francisco. So we parked the car and walked the town (thank you for maps!) and found this tiny one block street covered in cafés and restaurant. We had a typical Spanish meal and then started the drive home, arriving back in Valencia at 1230 in the morning.



Figure 2 Mailbox

October 2, 2013



On Wednesday, our friend colleague, Javier Neito, who grew up in Valencia, took us on a walking tour of the Old City. The Old Town (Barri del Carme) was once surrounded by a wall, but only fragments of the wall and two of the gates still exist. We met at the City Hall in the Plaza del Ayuntamiento.



From there we walked past the bullfight ring (which is still used today) and the train station to the market.

The Central Market (Mercado Central), like all wonderful markets, is in an old, beautiful building with colorful tile (Moorish influence) and domed ceilings. It is generally considered one of the oldest European [markets](#) still running. The building was constructed in the beginning of the XX century, in genuine Valencian style, with lots of colors, ceramics and mosaics.



The stalls were full of all the most beautiful fruits in sizes you would not believe, fresh meat, fresh fish, herbs, nuts and any other food you can imagine. The smells were stupendous. There were some tourists like us taking pictures, but most of the people there were locals doing their daily shopping.



Across the street was the old Silk Market. Once a market, it is now a building used for events. But on the outside are many gargoyles – in pornographic poses!

We continued walking about the narrow streets with Javier pointing out where he went to school, where his sister still lives. We went into his high school which from the outside was just a square, uninteresting building. But inside was a beautiful courtyard, with trees, and statues and tile everywhere. What a place to go to school!

We went into an old convent now turned into an art museum. We went down into a building which was built over the old Arab wall. They find this extraordinary – but any having been to Jerusalem would have seen this everywhere – the old city walls, and not just a fragment of it.

And Javier took us the place he believed had the best Horchata in town, called Horchateria of Santa Catalina. And he was right! It was wonderful,



refreshing on a hot day, not too sweet, but sweet enough to satisfy. Some of you may have had this whitish drink in the states as it is often served in Mexican restaurants. But this drink is native to Valencia. In Spain it is made from water, sugar and tigernut (*chufas*).



Then it was off to the Cathedral. The Cathedral of Valencia is built on the site of previous temples. During the Roman times, there was a temple here dedicated to the Goddess Diana. The Moors replaced it with a Mosque. When James I of Aragon took the city from the Moors in 1238, he covered the minaret with six sides and converted the mosque into the cathedral.

This cathedral is famous for the Chapel of the Holy Grail, the goblet believed to have used by Jesus at the last supper. It is in its own chapel with a gold altar.

We walked around a bit more, passing the Café de las Horas, a famous, gorgeous bar with chandeliers and a beautiful interior.

Before heading back to the meeting, we stopped for a bite to eat in a bar, Tasca Angel, where we had beer with tapas. It was a tiny place, seats only on stools around the bar, no tourists, just locals having a drink and some tapas before heading home for lunch and their siesta. This time we had sardines on bread, mushrooms, razor clams (which are local and famous in Valencia – I of course didn't eat them, but everyone else agreed they were delicious).

This was the last day of the meeting, so Phyllis and I again made an appearance, went to the closing ceremony which was more speeches and more Spanish wine and tapas. Then it was off to dinner with our Korean colleagues (who will be hosting the 2015 WASM), where we got to have paella, finally.

October 3, 2013

Today was our last morning in Valencia so Andy and I packed, and then went back to the Museum Fallero to once again try to get in. This time it was open. The building of the Museum of Fallas (Fallero) started out as a convent, a military headquarters and a prison. But today it houses Museum. The museum is based on the Festival of Fallero, which takes place in March every year. This festival, internationally known, is unique to Valencia and so said to be spectacular and strange.



The origins of the Fallas festivities goes back to an old tradition of the city's carpenters, who before the Festivity of their patron Saint Joseph, burned their useless things and other wooden utensils in front of their workshops, on the streets and public squares. Over 700 fallas are made, with each neighborhood having one, based on that year's theme. The fallas are made of paper mache and are mostly of a satirical nature. They can be as tall as a few stories. Fallas are constructed of smaller figures called ninots, Valencian for "dolls". The fallas take a whole year of planning and construction to complete. The floats are on display and the festivities continue for the entire month, with locals dressing in old traditional costumes. On March 19, the city is filled with firecrackers, fireworks and culminating in a huge bonfire when

the falla is burned. It is believed that the burning of the float rejuvenates life.

Every year one ninot (a figurine of a falla) is saved from fire and placed in the museum. The fallas are made to be amusing and often make fun of the government or events of the year.



It is also an interesting insight into the Valencian psyche, as the figures are saved by the popular vote. The museum has ninots from 1933 until the present. This was one of the highlights of the trip to Valencia as it was interesting, unique and gave a pinhole view into the traditions of Valencia.

We then met up with Phyllis and Ben, had another tapas lunch in the old city, toured the train station (with the most beautiful tile, this time not Moorish, but rather Spanish) and then went off to the airport to begin the trip to Morocco.