

We are grateful to Joan Flint for this report of the day out in Valencia.

On 18 March twenty-seven members of the U3A Marina Baixa spent an eventful day in Valencia. The plan for the day was to visit the Lladro factory, museum and shop, followed by a menu del día at a local restaurant and then the afternoon at leisure to visit the Fallas in old Valencia. Unfortunately even the best made plans don't always come to fruition.

I started to think that the day was possibly jinxed when I realised I had left my 'phone and handbag at home and had to return to pick them up. Then, when Bill and I arrived at the Casa de Cultura in Alfaz the car park was closed so we had to use the car park down by the market. Oh well, no problem, just a bit inconvenient. Members were gathering in good time and when the coach arrived I walked over to discuss with the driver the arrangements for the day. "What arrangements?" he said. No Lladro visit (and he didn't know the directions to the factory or shop), no restaurant booked and a return time of 3.00 pm instead of 6.00 pm as previously arranged! I was now even more convinced that the day was jinxed. Should I just go home now?

However, we set off with everyone in good spirits, probably because they didn't yet know of the change of plan. Despite several phone calls to try to salvage some of the day's itinerary, nothing could be done so the driver agreed to take us as close as possible to the Fallas, which he did despite road closures etc, and we agreed to meet up at the same point at 4.00 pm. We had over 5 hours ahead of us to explore and the carnival atmosphere in Valencia was contagious. The crowds were slowly moving forward towards the Cathedral and the Plaza de la Virgen where the square was overflowing with magnificent displays of fresh flowers and a towering figure of the Virgen covered with carnations and chrysanthemums. It really was beautiful. Many of us stopped off in the square for coffee and churros before starting our tour of the Fallas. The Fallas monuments made up of "ninots" were huge masterpieces of creativity and design taking months to complete, only to be set alight the following day. I don't think any of us saw all of the Fallas monuments, despite them being located within a relatively short distance of the Cathedral, due to the volume of people making it almost impossible to get through to some of them. Fire crackers constantly exploded as children took great delight in setting them off one after another and at lunchtime the mascletas display was enough to burst your eardrums. Not very good for the nerves either!

There were plenty of restaurants to choose from for lunch and by 3.45 pm a weary band of members were gathering at the designated point. Some had found time to visit the shops, Peter and Marilyn had acquired hats to keep off the sun and others commemorative neckerchiefs but I think most of them had wished they'd brought their slippers by the way they were walking! The coach was due to pick us up at 4.00 so we were all ready to jump straight on without any delay. Four o'clock came and went and so did 4.15 and 4.30 and still no coach. My mobile phone was hot! The driver had been prevented from driving into the town because of a parade taking place at 5.00 and I had that horrible feeling that the Jinx was sitting on my shoulder again! The driver asked us to cross over the bridge and wait on the other side of the dry river bed where he would pick us up as soon as the road block was lifted. By this

time some folk were almost on their knees and Bill finished up sharing his wheelchair with another member (not both at the same time, I hasten to add!)

On arrival at the new pick-up point (which must have been the windiest corner in Valencia) we were able to watch parade after parade of men, women and children in the most beautiful costumes. Something we would have missed if we had been able to depart on time. Fortunately there were a couple of cafes nearby so many of our weary members were able to rest until the coach arrived just before six. The driver was most apologetic but it was a situation that was out of his control and he soon had us on the road to join the motorway back to Benidorm.

We had a raffle on the coach with 3 members winning chocolates and wine. Everyone was tired but happy and despite the change of itinerary we had all had a good day with plenty to talk about. But the Jinx had got on the coach with us at Valencia. I sat behind the driver and I could see a red warning light saying STOP on his dashboard. He said that he would have to pull in at the services to check it out. So I told everyone we were having a toilet stop whilst the driver dived under the coach to investigate the problem. When he reappeared, looking more like a mechanic than a coach driver, his face said it all. The bad news was that he had discovered a split water hose and water was pouring out faster than he could pour it in. I did think that we may need to ask the winners of the chocolates and wine to keep them for emergency rations if we had to spend the night in the coach! The good news was that there was an empty coach on its way back from France that would be with us shortly to enable us to continue our journey.

They say that the British are at their best in time of crisis and that proved to be the case with everyone on the coach. There was no shortage of laughter, albeit verging on hysteria at times. We waved farewell to Russ after Liz Guest had left him with a supply of Wet Wipes and set off on the last leg of our journey.

I started off by saying it was an eventful day and it was certainly that! However, from the emails I have received the Jinx didn't succeed in spoiling the day but I don't think I ever want to organise another coach trip! Thank you all for your patience and understanding and for those of you going to Cartagena may the Jinx not be with you!