



Salvador Dalí (1904–1989) is probably one of the most famous Spanish artists in the world – his paintings are instantly recognisable. While studying in Madrid, Dalí was drawn to the cubism and avantgarde movements, but it is surrealism that made him famous. Or rather, he made surrealism famous. Over the course of his lifetime, Dalí made paintings, sculptures, animation, photography, and also wrote – poetry, fiction, essays, criticism, and even an autobiography. His eccentric personality also drew attention. For example, in 1936, he delivered a lecture at the International Surrealist Exhibition in London wearing a deep-sea diving suit and helmet. In Alicante, Dalí's golden statue of St. John is displayed in the city's town hall.



In 2024, *airBaltic* launched an NFT collection featuring AI-generated works of art inspired by artists from its destinations. Each month, a new destination is showcased on the cover of *Baltic Outlook* magazine, blending technology and art to highlight *airBaltic*'s cultural network. Find the collection at *Magic Eden*.

Words by David Palacios Rubio
Photos courtesy of Tourism Costa Blanca.
Illustration: AI-generated, inspired by the style of Salvador Dalí
Not an original work nor endorsed by the artist.

ALICANTE UNCOVERED: THE SPANISH ESCAPE YOU NEED

Embracing Mediterranean charm, Alicante promises an unforgettable spring break with sun, exquisite food, majestic nature, and historical landmarks.

As my plane touches down in a new city, I'm usually already mapping out which landmark to visit first. But Alicante feels different. Here, my first stop isn't a grand monument or a museum – it's a stroll along the Explanada de España, whose iconic wave-patterned walkway is made up of 6.5 million tiles. This seaside boulevard (or *paseo marítimo* in Spanish) was constructed in the 1950s and was designed to mirror the rhythm of the sea, creating a connection between the city and the Mediterranean.

The sun is shining – as it almost always does here – so there's little chance of bad luck. Why not start with a refreshing *horchata*, the local drink made from tiger nuts? One sip, and I'm instantly transported to summer, even though it's still spring. And when the temperature rises, there's no better reason to also indulge in a tasty ice cream at *Helados Antiu Xixona*, which is conveniently located on the Explanada. On warm afternoons, it's a local tradition for families, couples, and visitors to the city to patiently wait their turn for this sweet treat. I go for the *nata con nueces* flavour, which is creamy with just the right amount of crunch, and *mantecado con turrón de yema*, a flavour that pays homage to the region's famous almond nougat.

A classic Alicante experience is to enjoy this treat on a wooden bench along this palm-lined promenade. Just sitting there, feeling the warmth of the sun and watching the world go by, or gazing out at the Mediterranean Sea... It's a simple but cherished tradition.

One thing I absolutely love about Alicante is its rich food culture. Rice is at the heart of the local cuisine, with over 300 different recipes showcasing this beloved staple. And if, like me, you're passionate about food, now's the perfect time to visit, because the city has just been named Spain's Capital of Gastronomy for 2025.



The pavement of the Explanada de España consists of more than six million tri-colour marble tiles.



A view from the Santa Bárbara Castle



Arroz – a traditional rice dish

The gastronomic culture here revolves around one key ingredient: rice

THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET STARTS HERE AND NOW, SO PREPARE YOUR APPETITE FOR A FEAST. Alicante – both the city and the surrounding region with the same name – is considered a pillar of the so-called Mediterranean diet. And it's for this reason that I love the Mercado Central de Alicante, a covered market that has been operating since 1922.

The market opens at 7 a.m., and I make sure to be there, too, to see it in full action. This is the time of day when most *alicantinos* come to pick up the freshest of the fresh, from traditional red prawns (a true delicacy) to seasonal fruit. Every stall at the market has a story to tell, shaped by generations of expertise and tradition. A good example is José Fuster, who has been running a fish stand for decades offering fresh seafood from Alicante Bay. His stall is a must-visit, because he not only serves locals but also provides top-quality fish to some of Spain's best chefs.

Another emblematic tradition in Alicante is fish salting, a practice dating back to Phoenician and Roman times. Juanelo García Martínez is the second generation keeping this craft alive in the market. Some of his bestsellers include roe, dried tuna, bonito, anchovies, sardines, and cod skin – each a taste of history preserved in salt. I could spend

hours here, but my appetite kicks in, so I take a seat at *Barra Central*, a small bar in the market. A *café con leche* and a sandwich of *fuet* (a dry-cured sausage) will give me the energy I need for the morning.

Before diving deeper into Alicante's rich culinary scene, I also make a stop at *Horchatería Azul*, where an iconic *horchata de chufa* – that sweet, refreshing drink made from tiger nuts – serves as the perfect prelude to my day. Pairing it with a *fartó* (a soft pastry designed for dipping) is another local ritual I can't skip.

The gastronomic culture here revolves around one key ingredient: rice. Most people automatically think of paella, but don't be surprised if you don't see this world-famous Spanish dish on menus around town. Here, the main local dish is called *arroz*, and while it has similarities with paella, the cooking technique sets it apart. One of my favourite versions of it is *arroz a banda* (literally, 'rice on the side'), which is served in a large pan and is perfect for sharing with friends and family.

At *Casa Riquelme*, siblings Moncho, David, and Rocío have been cooking this delicacy for over 50 years. But choosing can be a challenge, as they offer nearly 20 different varieties of *arroz*. The traditional version includes monkfish, prawns, and tuna, but you can also try, for example, the *ibérico* version with ham. Whatever you choose, the magic of this dish lies at the bottom. As the rice cooks, it forms a crispy, toasted layer called *socarrat* – and for many, including me, this is the best and most flavourful part.

In the evenings, the crowds move to the districts of El Centro and El Barrio to find a spot in the city's famous *barras*. These are tapas bars where you can stand or sit at the counter, enjoy a glass of Vinalopó

wine, and share a small plate of seafood. One of my favourite spots for this activity is the pedestrian street Calle Castaños. Most people here don't head to a specific bar but simply settle wherever they find a free seat – especially when it gets crowded.

But a few bars stand out. *Nou Manolín*, for example, has been a gastronomic hotspot since it opened in 1971. Grab a seat at the bar in front of the open kitchen and try the daily-sourced fish, such as prawns from Dénia or *sepionet* (baby cuttlefish). This establishment does not take reservations, and

it's usually packed, so make sure to ask the waiter to put your name on the waiting list. *Cervecería Sento*, which is known for its *montaditos* (small sandwiches), is a great alternative. I order the foie gras and grilled *secreto ibérico*. The bar is also famous for its *patatas bravas*, which are crispy fried potatoes with a spicy sauce.

If you're looking for something more intimate, *Bar Manero* is the place to be. The interior design reminds me of a traditional Spanish grocery store, and the food is at a whole different level. You must try

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The church of Santa Maria Magdalena in Novelda, inspired by the work of Antonio Gaudí.



A street in the Santa Cruz neighbourhood, the heart of Alicante's historical centre.



Residents of Santa Cruz decorate their houses with plants and flowers.

No itinerary is needed here – Alicante is a charming getaway to enjoy at your own pace.

the *vitello tonnato* and the boletus-and-Iberian-ham croquettes. *Bar Manero* is also famous for its *tardeo*. The word is a combination of *tarde* (meaning ‘afternoon’) and *tapeo* (‘going out for tapas’), and it takes place before dinner time. This bar is a great place to *tardeo* – that is, socialise, have some bites to eat, and enjoy a cocktail or a local wine. If you want to learn more about what you’re drinking, a 40-minute drive from the city centre takes you straight to the vineyards, and the Ruta del Vino wine route is a fantastic way to explore the villages and wineries of this region.

With more than two decades of experience, winemaker Pepe Mendoza of *Casa Agrícola* crafts artisanal wines that truly embody the Mediterranean spirit. His Paisaje Mediterráneo range is the perfect introduction to the region’s unique grape varieties, such as Monastrell and Alicante Bouschet. While this winery is located in Llíber, near the sea, other standout producers in the Alicante region are found further inland.

For example, *Bodegas Volver* in Pinoso focuses on recovering and preserving traditional Monastrell vineyards, some of which are over 40 years old. Winemaker Rafael Cañizares engages in low-intervention winemaking and has a deep respect

for the natural cycle of the vines, which are located at 600 metres above sea level. Not very far away is *Casa Balaguer*, which is known for its natural and organic wines made from Monastrell, Garnacha Peluda, and Malvasia grapes. Here, one of the highlights for me is the Benimaquía white wine made with Moscatel grapes and aged for six months in clay amphorae called *tinajas*.

For those who want to discover local wines without leaving the city, the *Urban Wine Shop and Bar* is the perfect spot. It offers artisanal wines made with minimal intervention and also gives customers the opportunity to try exceptional wines from Alicante, which are perfectly paired with cheese and charcuterie platters.

Cocktail bars are also becoming popular in town. For something a little more intimate after a day of sightseeing, *The Whisper Cocktail Company* is one of Alicante’s best-kept secrets. One of my favourite creations there is Whispers of Violets (a delicate, floral sour) as well as Yuzu Essence, which is a refreshing cocktail with citrus and matcha. The bar also has a cocktail that pays homage to the land of Alicante; called the Terreta Roasted, it’s a take on the classic Espresso Martini using coffee roasted just a few kilometres away. This establishment takes pride in using locally sourced ingredients, and many of its cocktails are infused with flavours you might not expect, such as rosemary, thyme, and saffron. Saffron, in fact, is commonly used in local food recipes.

But Alicante isn’t just a paradise for food lovers. It has the charm of Barcelona and Valencia but with a more laid-back vibe, making it the perfect place to relax. No rigid itinerary is needed here – this city is simply a charming getaway to enjoy at your own pace.

WHILE OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH BEAUTIFUL BEACHES, ALICANTE ALSO BOASTS A RICH CULTURAL HERITAGE. Its most iconic landmark is the Santa Bárbara Castle, a fortress that played a strategic role in both the War of Spanish Succession and the Napoleonic Wars.

If you’re a morning person, take advantage of the quiet early hours of the day to discover the beauty of this castle. I recommend walking to the top via one of the two access points: La Ereta Park, which offers a unique view of the city from above, and Monte Benacantil, where you’ll enjoy sweeping views of the famous Postiguet Beach and the surrounding mountains. For a step-free option, an elevator is located near the beach.

A visit takes from one to two hours, and one of the highlights is the Felipe II Hall, where artefacts related to the castle’s history are exhibited. The Baluarte de la Reina (Queen’s Bastion) and the old powder magazine stand out with their thick stone walls, which have borne witness to centuries of history on this coast. The castle also preserves remnants of ancient cisterns used to store rainwater, a critical tool during wartime for collecting and conserving water from rooftops and the nearby slopes.

One of my favourite parts of the fortress is La Torreta, or The Keep. As the highest point of the castle, it offers stunning views of the entire Costa Blanca. Dating back to the 14th century, this 360-degree tower once served as the fortress’s final defensive stronghold. Its elevated position made it ideal for surveillance and defence, allowing guards to monitor both the sea and the inland to protect the city.

At the foot of the castle lies the Barrio de Santa Cruz, which was founded after the Muslim occupation of the Iberian Peninsula in the 8th century CE. Whether

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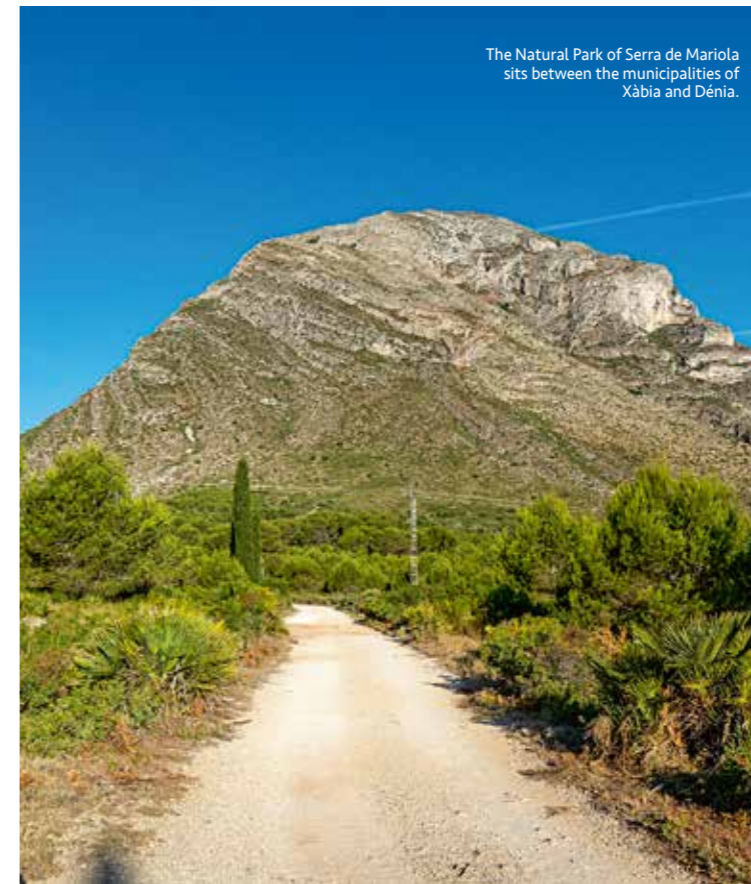
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The MACA museum in Alicante



A view of Tabarca Island



The Natural Park of Serra de Mariola sits between the municipalities of Xàbia and Dénia.

Tabarca Island holds the title of the smallest permanently inhabited islet in Spain

you decide to get lost in its narrow, steep streets or visit its cultural landmarks, you should definitely try to explore this neighbourhood. Although it's usually a crowded area, especially on weekends, it nevertheless feels like a quiet escape from the city.

The Santa Cruz neighbourhood is one of the most picturesque in Alicante, with whitewashed houses adorned with colourful potted plants, creating a charming atmosphere. Here, you can feel the city's deepest roots, as many of these houses have been home to the same families for generations. If you're looking for an *Instagram*-worthy spot, find the Casita de las Macetas Azules, where you can admire the many blue ceramic pots hanging from the balconies.

Nearby, I discover the work of Vicente Pascual, a ceramic artisan who has been working with the material for decades. Specialising in traditional ceramic pieces, his shop offers a stunning variety of pottery, from intricately designed jars and plates to flower pots and vases, all handmade by artisans from Alicante. It's the perfect place to find a unique souvenir – something far more special than a typical fridge magnet.

A short five-minute walk along the San Rafael and Maldonado streets leads to the Alicante Museum of

Contemporary Art (MACA), which showcases works by renowned Spanish and international artists, including Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, and Salvador Dalí, from the 20th and 21st centuries. This cultural centre was made possible by Alicante-born artist and collector Eusebio Sempere, who donated his own artwork as well as pieces he collected from other artists. Today, the museum houses more than 100 drawings, sculptures, and works of graphic art by Sempere.

The Museum of Fine Arts (MUBAG) features works by regional painters and sculptors from the 16th to the 20th century. It's worth a visit not just for the art but also for its unique setting in the iconic 18th-century Gravina Palace. As you step through the grand doors, you're transported to an era when regional painters and sculptors left their mark on the entire Spanish art scene. Among the artists featured are Francisco Soler, a prominent 19th-century painter, and Sempere, who is known for his abstract works.

It often surprises outsiders to learn that fire plays an integral part in Alicante's culture. Every June, Alicante celebrates the Bonfires of Saint John, perhaps the moment of the year when Alicantinos feel most proud of their identity. This UNESCO-listed festival features fireworks, street parades, and the burning of giant satirical sculptures called *ninots*. Each year, one of these sculptures is spared from the flames and transferred to the Museum of Bonfires (Museu de les Fogueres), where it's put on display for the public. If you want to learn more about this celebration, a visit to the museum is a must. A major milestone was reached in 2001, when the festival set the record for the largest fireworks display, with more than 80,000 fireworks over 45 minutes. Will this year break the record again?

THE NATURAL LANDSCAPES IN ALICANTE DO NOT FAIL TO AMAZE. As soon as I enter El Palmeral Park, I'm greeted by rows of palm trees and the soothing sound of water flowing from fountains and ponds. Covering more than 13 hectares, the park also features a BMX-style bike track for adventure lovers. With gentle ramps and curves, it's ideal for beginners or casual riders and is a popular hotspot in the evenings and on weekends. However, one of my favourite areas of this green oasis are the ponds and waterfalls by the lake, where one can rent rowboats.

While the city offers a number of tranquil natural spots, even more stunning places to explore await just outside Alicante. For example, just off the coast of Alicante, Tabarca Island was once a refuge for Barbary pirates, who used it as a base to raid the Spanish coast. Today, it's a protected marine reserve and holds the title of the smallest permanently inhabited islet in Spain, with around 12 residents.

One of the best ways to experience the island's natural beauty is snorkelling. Whether you're an experienced diver or a first-time snorkeller, Tabarca's calm, transparent waters make it an ideal spot to explore the Mediterranean's rich biodiversity. If you're in the mood for a more relaxing day, exploring the island on foot is a good option. The harbour, with its historical fishermen's houses, and the cobbled streets of the Old Town are perfect for a stroll.

I'm a fan of lighthouses, so I also make sure to visit the one on Tabarca Island. Built in 1854, it has served as both a guide for passing ships and a strategic viewpoint, surrounded by a fortress designed to protect the island from pirate attacks. Parts of the fortress ruins still remain, making this one of the most picturesque spots in the region. After taking in the views, there's nothing



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With a career spanning more than three decades, **Quique Dacosta** has established himself as one of the most influential chefs on the Spanish haute cuisine scene. At his restaurant in Dénia, which has been awarded three *Michelin* stars, he presents Octavo, a menu in which gastronomy is explored as an artistic discipline – an homage to the concept of the ‘eighth art’.

What’s your favourite place in town?

I’d recommend visiting Alicante’s Central Market and then heading to *La Taberna del Gourmet*, where they serve excellent tapas. It’s one of those places where fresh fish and vegetables are always present.

What local products would you recommend to someone visiting Alicante for the first time?

Salted fish is a truly unique thing to try if you’re into the full flavour of fish. I’d also recommend the red shrimp from Dénia – it’s one of the Mediterranean’s finest seafood products and can now be found on the menus of top restaurants. May is also the season for loquats, a fruit that resembles a small yellow plum and is particularly common in the interior of the province, especially in Callosa d’en Sarrià. While not the most widely known fruit, loquats from this region are exceptionally tasty.

In 2013, you introduced the concept of ‘terroir cuisine’. How does it influence your work?

We act as a bridge between the place we live in, the landscape, and what it provides for us to cook. This is intertwined with another crucial value: the heritage of traditional recipes. The idea of ‘landscape cuisine’ is a dreamlike representation of memories,

moments, and circumstances connected to a specific environment. The first landscape I created was The Animated Forest, inspired by childhood walks through the woods near my home – the scent of wet earth, the rustle of leaves, and the aroma of herbs. The products from that environment, such as mushrooms and truffles, became part of that creation.

Here, one eats rice, not paella...

In the province of Alicante, it’s rare to find a true Valencian paella. Visitors should know that ‘paella’ refers to the pan used for cooking, not every rice dish prepared in it. For example, here we have popular rice dishes such as spinach and anchovies or rabbit and snails, which are cooked in a paella pan but are not considered Valencian paella. In Dénia, you can also find *arroz a banda* and *arroz del senyoret*, two traditional rice dishes deeply rooted in the region’s culinary heritage. Both are emblematic of Alicante’s coastal cuisine and are a must-try for anyone looking to experience authentic flavours with a strong local identity.

Where’s the best place to enjoy a sunset?

Without a doubt, in Dénia, at a spot we call Playa de la Olvidada. It’s located on the quay where boats depart for Ibiza, and from there, you can witness one of the most beautiful sunsets in the entire province of Alicante.

better than a great meal by the sea. At *Mar Azul*, try the delicious *caldero*, a traditional dish made with rockfish, potatoes, and rice. If you’re feeling indulgent, order the version made with lobster.

Beyond the beaches, the province of Alicante has other natural wonders worth discovering. The Natural Park of Montgó, located between Dénia and Xàbia, offers an unforgettable experience and is a true haven for nature lovers. At 750 metres above sea level, the summit of Montgó is a great place to discover. The hike starts at the Ermita del Pare Pere, a whitewashed church named after a Franciscan monk from the 17th century. The views of the Mediterranean Sea and the rugged limestone cliffs make this hike quite unique. And if you’re lucky, as I was, you may even spot Ibiza on the horizon on a clear day.

The Natural Park of Serra de Mariola feels like entering a different world. Located further inland, it’s the perfect place to slow down and truly connect with nature. The park is home to around 1200 plant species, many of which are aromatic and medicinal.

If you have time, visit the Castle of Banyeres de Mariola. Perched nearly 1000 metres above sea level, it’s one of the highest castles in the province and offers spectacular panoramic views of the reserve. The strategic location was chosen for its commanding view of the surrounding valley. Some stones and construction elements in the walls are believed to have been repurposed from older Roman settlements in the area. Inside, you’ll find the Museu Fester, a small museum dedicated to the town’s rich history and the Moros y Cristianos festivities, which is a popular annual event reenacting the historical battles between Moors and Christians during the Reconquista.

The waterfalls and natural pools of Algar in Callosa de Sarrià become a popular spot when temperatures rise, as they provide a refreshing escape from the summer heat. There are several parking lots near the site, including a free one about 500 metres from the main entrance. Bathing in a natural pool is truly a unique experience, but what I enjoy most in this natural paradise located just an hour from Alicante’s city centre is the scenic walk that follows the course of the Algar River. The trail is less than two kilometres long and is an easy hike with wooden walkways and small bridges.

Alicante sits in the region known as the Costa Blanca, or White Coast. This name was first used in 1957 as part of a marketing campaign by a British airline to distinguish the region from other Spanish coastlines. It’s believed that the name was inspired by the whitewashed villages and the bright sunlight that shines here almost every day of the year. Unlike other major cities on the Iberian Peninsula, Alicante and the Costa Blanca offer a more relaxed environment, where life moves to the rhythm of the sea and the sun. What’s more, the region’s rich gastronomic traditions give locals even more reason to be proud – and visitors every reason to plan their next holiday right here. **bo**

USEFUL ADDRESSES

WHERE TO STAY

Casa Alberola
Set in a historic Neoclassical building with its original majestic entrance still intact, *Casa Alberola* offers a stylish and cosmopolitan stay just a short walk away from the city’s main cultural attractions. We recommend choosing one of the rooms featuring French-style balconies and views of the sea. [Calle Canalejas, 1 casaalberolahotel.com](http://casaalberolahotel.com)

The Level at Meliá Alicante

Add some luxury to your stay in this adults-only accommodation near Postiguet Beach and the Alicante Marina. Guests staying in this part of the hotel have access to unique perks, such as a private pool and lounge. Plaza del Puerto, 3 melia.com

Hospes Américo

This 15th-century convent is now a contemporary accommodation in the heart of the city that features a blend of Gothic architecture and modern design. The hotel’s rooftop terrace is the perfect place for a sunset drink overlooking the city’s skyline. Calle Rafael Altamira, 7 hospes.com/amerigo

WHERE TO EAT

Open

Chefs Javier Prados and Alberto Calleiros bring a modern interpretation to Mediterranean cuisine with a menu inspired by fresh and local ingredients found at the nearby Central Market. The cockles with garlic butter and sherry is one of their signature dishes. Calle Manuel Antón, 12 openalicante.com

La Terraza del Gourmet

La Terraza del Gourmet has been a celebrated culinary destination in Alicante since 1979. Chef María José San Román is known for his sophisticated yet casual approach to Mediterranean and Spanish cuisine. Explanada de España, 2 latabernadelgourmet.com

Quique Dacosta Restaurante

This restaurant with three *Michelin* stars – and ranked 14th in the world by The World’s 50 Best

Restaurants – offers an artistic journey through Mediterranean flavours. Chef Quique Dacosta crafts a menu rooted in the landscapes and culinary traditions of the province. Calle Rascassa, 1 Dénia quiquedacosta.es

WHERE TO SHOP

Alpargatería Pilar

Established in 1948, this family-owned shop has become a reference for traditional espadrilles, a type of footwear primarily made from jute fibre and woven into a rope-like pattern. It also offers a wide selection of sandals and leather shoes. Calle San Francisco, 54

Turrone Candela Espí

Still using the recipes of their grandparents, the third generation of this family continues to make traditional nougat like in the olden days. The classic crunchy nougat and the Jijona version, which is made with almonds and rosemary, are the bestsellers here. Avenida de la Constitución, 3 turronecandelaespi.com

El Corte Inglés – Gourmet Experience

The famous Spanish department store has a whole floor featuring food counters, restaurants, and bars to delight your palate in a sophisticated yet informal environment. It’s also a great spot to pick up a gourmet souvenir to take home from your trip. Avenida de Federico Soto, 1 elcorteingles.es

WHY NOT

The Ocean Race Museum

This venue on the city’s waterfront offers an immersive experience for those interested in the world of sailing and maritime adventure. It features multimedia displays to explore the story behind these races and learn more about life on the open sea. Muelle de Levante, 10 theoceanrace.com



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09	O	LES CONTES D'HOFFMANN
10	B	AT THE BLUE DANUBE
11	C	BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA AND ANDRIS NELSONS
12	C	BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA AND ANDRIS NELSONS
21	O	FLAVIO, RE DE' LONGOBARDI <small>Premiere!</small>
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