

Tomato Fight in Spain!



The world's largest tomato throwing festival takes place in the small Spanish town of Buñol, 45 minutes outside of Valencia, every year. It's called La Tomatina. And ever since I was a little girl I wanted to be in a food fight like the ones I saw in the movies. With only four hours of sleep since our last night in Madrid, the four of us travelers woke up at 5:45 a.m. to catch a metro and a train to Buñol. We had to make do with wine for breakfast and to no surprise, there were hundreds of people from around the world who also shared my dream of launching ripened red fruits.

Arriving in the town we followed the music and masses siphoning into the city center. Walls were covered in tall blue tarps to prevent staining from the tomatoes. Locals looked onto to us locos from their balconies, sometimes dumping pails of water over the excited crowd. Being packed in a crowd so that my body is brushing several strangers at once isn't an unfamiliar or uncomfortable situation for me, but the pushing in this crowd was too much. For fear of losing each other or falling down and being trampled we clamped our hands in a line and pushed through to a side street. Before the festival had even started, Chloe and I had lost our flip flops in the crowd from someone stepping on the backs. **RULE #1: DO NOT WEAR FLIP FLOPS. CRAPPY CLOSED TOED SHOES ONLY.** But we weren't the only ones to lose our shoes. Jelissa spotted a right-footed shoe, then a left-footed shoe, and perhaps several pairs of shoes

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for Chloe and me by the time we left the festival. Actually, it was pretty fun picking out new pairs of random shoes.

Once we were in more open space we noticed Chloe's toe, which was bleeding like hell most likely from broken glass.



Jelissa and I brought her to a nearby ambulance where she was mended free of charge – how about that? We kept a block away from the chaos waiting for someone to climb a greasy pole and knock down the ham from the top, as this is how La Tomatina traditionally starts. A shirtless young man dances on his balcony, beckoning and riling the masses as though he were the king of La Tomatina himself. Before long we heard the cannons announcing the start of the tomato fight. Trucks loaded with a total of 40 tons of soft tomatoes slowly made their way down the street unloading the peoples' ammunition. Once we broke through onto the main street, we wasted no time picking up fallen bits of tomatoes and throwing them in every direction. The streets were literally flooded with tomato juice up past our ankles. We wore goggles to protect our eyes while every other part of our bodies became drenched in tomato – our hair, our mouths, even inside our shorts. **RULE #2: BRING GOGGLES SO THAT THE ACID FROM THE TOMATOES DOESN'T BURN YOUR EYES. WEAR SOMETHING YOU CAN THROW AWAY AFTERWARDS BECAUSE YOUR CLOTHES WILL FOREVER BE RUINED.** One guy and I got into it, firing tomatoes, but when I



slipped and fell backwards into the bath of juice he scooped me up and gave me a chivalrous

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kiss in the middle of the madness. The atmosphere was ecstatic. We were all little kids again in grown-up bodies.

After one hour the tomato throwing ceased and people mercifully gathered below the balconies of the locals to be hosed down by little boys and girls. I can only imagine growing up and looking forward to the one day of the year I could hose down a tourist without getting into trouble. Manu, my friend from Valencia, had told me about a river at the bottom of the city, which is where we went to rinse off the putrid and acidic tomato residue. The riverside smelt strongly of mint and was overgrown with vibrant violet flowers and thorns. The returning train and metro tickets that had been in my back pocket had disintegrated from the tomato juice. **RULE #3: DON'T BUY YOUR RETURN TICKET. DON'T BRING A PURSE, JUST MONEY FOR BEER.**

At that point, we hadn't a care in the world. We danced to music in the street by the beer stand vendors, losing track of time. Eventually we met two Canadians and the six of us illegally crammed into their small European car and headed straight to the beach of Valencia, Playa Marvillosa, where we washed away in the Mediterranean and fell asleep side by side under the sun like life-long friends.

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