

## **Balneario Las Arenas**

A historical landmark in the city of Valencia, it is the most emblematic building on the seafront. Antonio Zarranz Beltrán promoted the initial project, carried out in 1888, which envisaged simple facilities with the aim of meeting the needs of Valencian bourgeois society, so that they could take the sea baths recommended by doctors. The quality, the good service, the music and the distinguished atmosphere formed by the social elite stood out. There was an entrance fee and it included various services: changing rooms, showers, picnic area, restaurant, swimming pool, children's play area including a small circuit for minicars and a private beach area. All of this was entertained by the band of Pueblo Nuevo del Mar which offered evening concerts.

In 1917, two buildings inspired by classical temples designed by F. Iranzo were built, which housed leisure rooms and spaces for taking hot seawater baths.

In 1922 the floating pavilion designed by the Valencian architect José María Manuel Cortina Pérez was inaugurated, considered one of the most important of Valencian modernism and characterised by an imaginative and imaginative architecture in which he mixed Gothic, Romanesque, Byzantine and Islamic elements. The pavilion consisted of a wooden structure in the shape of a cross, painted white and with blue details, with a central dome from which, by means of several staircases, direct access was gained to the sea. It was set up and dismantled every season, and served as a café in its last days, attended by waiters in bow ties who served iced coffee, meringue milk and “el nacional” (butter and coffee). It was badly damaged by a storm and was never put up again.

The 1934 pools were the first in Europe to have both seawater and freshwater. The imposing diving board was depicted on a poster designed by Josep Renau for the inauguration. They are included in the DOCOMOMO International Register (Documentation and Conservation of buildings, sites and neighbourhoods of the Modern Movement, an international organisation created with the aim of inventorying, disseminating and protecting the architectural heritage of the Modern Movement). Gutiérrez Soto's complete project consisted of a platform with a passageway, solarium, stands, bar and dance floor. In rationalist or functionalist style, of which the architecture is one of the national references, it combines rationalism with naval references. The Spanish Swimming Championships were held here in 1935 and 1957. In the 1960s, the diving board collapsed with bathers on its two platforms, causing fatalities and other serious injuries.

After a period of boom, the development of the railway diverted tourism to other coastal areas in the north, leading to a progressive environmental and urban deterioration of the area. With the decline, the facilities for thermal cures in the Parthenon, which was not bombed, were closed. The spa finally closed its doors in 1993.

Between 2002 and 2005, a new luxury hotel with neoclassical lines was built, which has nothing to do with the iconic image of the old spa. The project, the work of the architects Nebot, Alfaro and Amorrortu, was born out of a desire to restore the area to its former splendour and, taking as a basis the architectural model of the pavilions that housed the old spa, the reconstruction of what was still standing was carried out. Today, only one of the temples, the swimming pools and the perimeter wall remain from the original complex.



Balneario Las Arenas in the memory. Source: skyscrapercity.com, Remember València (I), p. 339



“Barraquetes” and clotheslines. In 1929, “les barraquetes” and its famous clotheslines for bathing clothes, next to the spa. Source: <https://www.lasprovincias.es/Valencia-ciudad/columnas-clasico-20200816095923-nt.html>



The disappeared pavilion over the sea in Las Arenas. Source: Valenpedia (Las Provincias).