

Barcelona Travel & Accommodation Guide

One of Spain's most beautiful cities.



Impressive architecture, delicious cuisine and beautiful artwork.

The most striking feature of Barcelona is its beauty. Seemingly always at the vanguard of artistic expression, be it in architecture, design, art or gastronomy this city, in panoramic or telescopic perspective, is always pleasing to the eye.

Few places in the world combine creativity and wealth generation to such a degree. With busy bees in textile, chemical, pharmaceutical and electronic industries bringing in \$177 billion GDP a year, Barcelona is an economic powerhouse of Europe (rated as the 4th richest city in the European Union).

As the capital of Catalunya, Spain's most independent semi-autonomous region with its own language and a proud history of cultural practice, supporting the arts makes sense. Fine art museums, scattered about the city, are all there to prove it. Be it Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, showcasing Catalanian Romanesque and Gothic art, Museu Picasso with a fine collection of the city's favourite adopted son, or the cutting-edge sculptures, paintings, and installations of internationally renowned local Susana Solano at MACBA Contemporary Art Museum Barcelona, it's hard not to be impressed.



CAMP NOU

GAUDI

LA RAMBLA

TIBIDABO AMUSEMENT PARK

WHERE TO STAY

But the primary reason for visiting this city, for many at-least, is Gaudi. Emulating organic forms with bricks and mortar, the architecture of Antoni Gaudi is a marvel. From Park Guell, overlooking the city, to the renowned Sagrada Familiar and Casa Mila, Gaudi's architecture speaks to people like no other.

Today, Barcelona is famous for its chefs. Pushing the boundaries of taste, the culinary maestros of Barcelona, with a total of 15 Michelin stars, are the envy of Europe. But don't expect great food everywhere. While exorbitantly priced fine dining is its strength, the quality of food does vary. The city has some great tapas bars, but play it safe: eat where the locals eat and avoid the tourist fare.

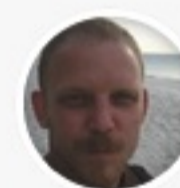
Barcelona is a fabulous city to explore. The many artists, fortune-tellers, dancers and human statues on picturesque, pedestrian Las Ramblas are always entertaining. And La Boqueria market, on its flank, the biggest food market in Europe, with tasty fresh produce arranged with artistic flare, is like a colourful museum of food.

East of Las Ramblas, Barrio Gótic, the old town, is a rabbit warren of lanes through a compact world of medieval architecture. The Gothic cathedral, in particular, is spectacular. And the old-town area, west of Las Ramblas, El Raval was once the domain of seedy bars, prostitutes and drug-dealers. Some remain, but today, with an influx of a young, affluent, bohemian population, the area combines the edge of its past, with funky new bars, galleries and designer boutiques.

Like most Spaniards, Catalunians know how to have fun, and a busy schedule of festivals, exhibitions and concerts keeps everybody satisfied. Experience the city at its celebratory best in September, when the Festes de La Mercè, a dazzling combination of *castellers* (human castles), papier-maché giants, dancing devils with firework tridents, fire-breathing dragons, folk dancing and more.

Barcelona most certainly entertains.

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Ben has travelled extensively through the Americas, Europe, Asia and Australia. His features and reviews have appeared in publications and websites in the UK and Australia, including Rough Guides (Penguin Group, London, UK), The List (Edinburgh, Scotland), Tiger Beer's UK website, Australian Traveller, OUTthere and Cruise Passenger.

