

ESSENTIAL TRAVEL GUIDE SERIES

BARCELONA



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ESSENTIAL TRAVEL GUIDE SERIES

BARCELONA, CATALUNYA, SPAIN

Barcelona is one of the most well-known destinations in Europe. There's just something about this coastal city that draws countless people in every year. What I love about Barcelona is that there is something for everyone, no matter their age or interests. When traveling there, I noticed groups of young people, families, seniors, and everyone in between.

The culture of Barcelona is unique to the rest of Spain as it is in the heart of the province of Catalunya. Catalan culture is different than

traditional Spanish culture which makes this particular city a treat to visit. It is a great opportunity to experience the varying history of the people of Spain all in one location! You will notice that three main languages are spoken in Barcelona: Catalan, Spanish and English. Don't worry – almost everyone speaks English and every restaurant you'll visit carries menus in 3+ languages as well.

There is a rich arts culture in Barcelona as many famous artists have spent time in the



city over the years and their work is highly celebrated in museums, parks and buildings throughout Barcelona. It is also a fantastic place to visit if you are a food lover with incredible dishes just waiting to be sampled!

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

There is so much to see and do in Barcelona to suit every taste and interest! If you're just looking to see the major buildings and museums or if you're looking for a more foodie or arts and cultural experience, I've included details on anything you might like to see. I always suggest choosing your favorite spots and checking out how close they are to one another on a map! That way you can cover as much ground as possible in a

shorter period of time.

Logistics: When to Visit, Where to Stay, How to Get Around

WHEN TO VISIT

Barcelona is beautiful anytime of year, but I highly recommend visiting in the late spring or early fall. This will allow you to enjoy the beautiful sunny weather and beaches, but also avoid the extra crowds you might experience in the peak summer months. If Barcelona is one of many cities on your European vacation, I suggest visiting during the week and potentially avoiding Sundays as many shops and restaurants are closed that day.

WHERE TO STAY

There are plenty of great areas to stay in Barcelona. I would recommend either staying in the Gothic Quarter to be close to some of the major sites or Provençals del Poblenou which is close to plenty of shops, restaurants and great beaches. The area of Diagonal Mar (located in Provençals del Poblenou) is only a short walk from some of the city's nicest beaches and is where you'll find well-known hotels with great accommodations and amenities such as rooftop pools with ocean views. The metro is easily accessible from this area and it is much quieter than staying in the heart of the city.

GETTING AROUND

Barcelona is not unlike other European cities in that it has a very efficient and affordable metro system. I highly recommend using the metro and streetcars for getting around. Tip: You can purchase a 10 Ride Metro Pass that will save you a few Euro on each fare. This pass can be shared between multiple people as well! There are also plenty of bike and scooter rental options for tackling small distances as well as über and taxis for airport



transfers. Not sure how long it will take you to get from one place to another? When in doubt, use Google Maps! It will serve as one of your best friends when traveling abroad.

Another great option is the Barcelona Bus Turistic which offers hop-on-hop-off service through most of the city. It is a great way to catch all of the major sites with just one ticket! Tickets can be purchased online or at any Visit Barcelona office.

WHAT TO PACK & WHAT TO WEAR

I highly recommend visiting Barcelona in the summer time. With that in mind, I suggest packing breezy dresses in lightweight cotton and linen, shorts and easy tops. Comfortable

sneakers or even a great walking sandal like a Birkenstock are perfect. Don't forget your swimwear and beach attire, too! Barcelona is home to some beautiful beaches and great hotel pool parties. If you're planning on visiting any monasteries or traditional churches, consider bringing a scarf to throw over your shoulders to be respectful.

I would pack a sweater or a light jacket for the evenings as often the humidity and the breeze coming off the Mediterranean can be a little chilly, especially in the cooler months. If you're visiting in the late fall, winter or early spring, keep the humidity and dampness levels in mind and pack layers of lightweight down. I also suggest packing some light gloves, pants, sweaters and



Parc Guell View

comfortable walking boots. A great moto jacket and a scarf with jeans and booties is the perfect outfit for a trip to Barcelona in the fall.

THINGS TO SEE & DO

Much of what you will want to see is located in the Gothic Quarter of the city or the 'old city' as some call it. Other notable areas are The Eixample or 'the expansion' as well as The Diagonal which runs through the city and along the sea. If you plan on visiting a number of tourist sites while in Barcelona, I highly recommend purchasing tickets through VisitBarcelona as they provide discounts on a number of tours and attractions.

THE GOTHIC QUARTER & THE EIXAMPLE

The Gothic Quarter of Barcelona is over 2,000 years old and features some of the city's most incredible historic architecture. Some of the main sites to visit in this area include: Plaza de San Filipe Neri, Santa Anna de Barcelona (church), and the Palau Reial Major in Plaça del Rei (set of historic buildings).

You will also want to take a walk down the Ruta del Modernisme which features buildings designed by Gaudì and other famous architects of the era. The blend of such varied architectural styles is very interesting to see.

A great spot to check out in the evening is Plaça Reial, a square in the Gothic Quarter



La Rambla

close to La Rambla. This plaza is where you'll find a number of great restaurants and famous nightclubs.

KEY LANDMARKS TO VISIT

La Sagrada Familia

La Sagrada Familia, also known as the Basilica of the Holy Family, is famed for being a

continuous work in progress. Nicknamed the Temple d'Antoni Gaudì because this exceptional cathedral is the result of his architectural work. It has been in progress for over 135 years and is still under construction today. This unique building is an absolute must-see in Barcelona which does cause it to get quite busy, so try not to visit midday. I also suggest purchasing tickets ahead of time to be able to tour the Basilica.



Sagrada Família Outside

Plaça de Catalunya

Plaça de Catalunya or Catalonia Square is a large city square surrounded by large buildings and incredible architecture. The square is a great spot for feeding the pigeons, watching street performers and taking in the city's culture. Plaça de Catalunya is where you'll find a hub of streets that feature plenty of places to shop; both major European retailers and local boutiques. This is also a great place to grab a bite to eat as it is home to a number of both well-known chain restaurants and local eateries. Note that this is also where you will find the main VisitBarcelona office as well as a number of ticket and tourist information booths.

Park Güell

Park Güell is located on the northern face of Carmel Hill in Barcelona and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The park was meant to be a housing development, conceived by Eusebi Güell and designed by Antoni Gaudí. This housing development was meant to be a 'garden city' full of terraces and artwork for residents to enjoy. Today it sits as a historic park with hiking trails, mosaics and beautiful views of the city and the sea. This is a great spot to take a morning or afternoon stroll, enjoying the outdoor artwork and unique architectural features and symbols.



Plaça de Catalunya

MUSEUM RECOMMENDATIONS

Barcelona is home to countless museums. If you prefer museums that feature local and national history, artwork or the works of a specific artist, you will find somewhere to explore. When it comes to art museums, the top two that I would recommend are the Museu Picasso (Picasso Museum) and the Gaudì Exhibition Centre.

Museu Picasso

Museu Picasso celebrates the entire life's work of Pablo Picasso and most recently has featured an exhibition of family photos that feature the artist himself throughout his life. The stone building and courtyard that this museum can be found in are absolutely idyllic and provide the perfect escape from the city on a hot afternoon. If you'd like to learn



Picasso museum inside

more about the pieces found in the museum, be sure to pick up an audio guide for your tour.

The Gaudì Exhibition Centre

The Gaudì Exhibition Centre and Museu D'ocèsà de Barcelona are an international museum devoted to the work of Antoni Gaudì. Gaudì spent much of his life in Spain and his influence can be seen all throughout Barcelona. I suggest visiting this particular museum to get a real sense of his work and impact.

Eating in Barcelona: A Foodie's Dream

Rather than include a “where to eat” section in this guide, I am going to incorporate it into this section of “things to see and do” because food is a big part of Barcelona's tourism.

Local Foods to Experience

Barcelona is unique because it features both Spanish and Catalan cuisines. Being a major port city on the Mediterranean, you can also expect fresh seafood and Italian-inspired cuisine as well. Spanish cuisine features a lot of eggs, pork, seafood, vegetables, fruits and dairy products.

While in Barcelona, be sure to try a few of the local specialties: Paella (a dish of seafood, meat, fish and vegetables over rice), Tapas (small plates) as well as Omelettes and Fritatas. The region also boasts some of the best cured hams, potatoes and cheeses in the country. Don't forget about gazpacho (a chilled soup), patatas bravas (a bean dish), peppers, tortillas, empanadas and so much more. Also be sure to try the café con leche,



Tapas Barcelona



Catalunyan custard and churros.

Unsure of where to start? VisitBarcelona offers a number of food tours that include various tastings, local wine pairings and even cooking classes so you can learn to make your new favourite dishes at home!

Mercat de Sant Josep de la Boqueria

This market, known in short as La Boqueria is my absolute-hands-down-favourite place in all of Barcelona. If you're looking to try as many local dishes as possible, I highly recommend a visit to La Boqueria market. This market features only the highest quality foods and is visited by countless locals and tourists daily (it is busiest around the lunch hour). There are a couple of options for a self-guided

food tour of the market: you can stop at one of the sit-down restaurants on the perimeter and enjoy the local cuisine while taking in the passers-by, or stroll through the aisles of food vendor stalls, sampling as you go.

I highly recommend starting at one end of the market and weaving your way through, stopping to sample each thing that catches your eye. My top choices are: a paper cone of Serrano ham and Manchego cheese, freshly squeezed fruit juices, watermelon on a stick, empanadas, roasted nuts and churros.

Aside from the number of sit-down restaurants and bars around the market's perimeter, there are also a number of food stalls that feature bar seating around their customer counters. Many of these places offer tapas



and other small plates of their version of local dishes.

La Boqueria is located in the heart of La Rambla making it the perfect spot to stop for a bite while strolling the street market. Most vendors accept major credit cards, but cash is always easier in these situations. Note that the market is closed on Sundays, so plan your trip accordingly.

SPORTS TOURISM

Football: FC Barcelona

Football (soccer) is a big part of Spanish culture and Barcelona's home team, FC Barcelona (part of Spain's La Liga), is celebrated across the city! You will find plenty

of places to purchase FC Barcelona merchandise and places to catch a game on television. The La Liga season runs from August to May each year so be sure to try and catch a game if you are in Barcelona! A football game in a stadium like Camp Nou is a once in a lifetime experience.

If you would love to experience the football stadium but are not in Barcelona when a game is being played, you can also take a tour of the Camp Nou stadium, where FC Barcelona plays. The experience of visiting a European football stadium is like no other! Go behind the scenes and even step onto the turf, just like the players do! The stadium is easily accessible via metro and tour tickets are available through www.barcelonaturisme.com.



Olympic Park

Barcelona was the location of the 1992 Summer Olympic Games and many of the facilities are still available for viewing today. Visit Estadi Olímpic, the original sports arena that was built in 1927, and take a walk around the Anella Olímpica (Olympic Park). The complex is where you will find the Olympic and Sports Museum, Palau Saint Jordi facility and famed Telecommunications Tower. Admission to many of these venues is free.

OTHER THINGS TO SEE & DO

Tibidabo Amusement Park

Tibidabo Amusement Park is the oldest amusement park in Spain and one of the first ever to be built in the world. This park features traditional amusement park rides

all while providing exceptional views of the city and Mediterranean. The park also features a unique SkyWalk that provides incredible panoramic views and photo opportunities. Not sure how to plan your visit? Tibidabo has a Plan Your Visit tool on their website that shows lets you plan your entire day, including rides, shows, food and more!

Although there are a number of other amusement parks in Barcelona, Tibidabo is my top recommendation for fun for the whole family. Park information and admission packages available through VisitBarcelona. The park is accessible via private transportation and shuttlebus.

The Beach

Barcelona is home to some stunning beaches and unlike other European destinations, some



of their beaches are sand beaches, rather than rock. Chairs and umbrellas can be rented for the day from local vendors. In the peak summer months I suggest getting to the beach early to ensure you have a spot as they do fill up quickly! The main beaches also feature promenades that are perfect for a walk or a bike ride to explore the seaside. Bike and scooter rentals are available all across the city.

Clubbing + Pool Parties

Barcelona is home to many famous night-clubs that often feature performances by well-known DJs from around the world. Many young people come to Barcelona just for the incredible nightlife. Some of these parties take place in the afternoons and evenings at hotel pools or even on the beach, so be sure to check out a list of events before booking your trip!

More Museums, Cathedrals, Squares & Historic Sites

Because it is such an old city and has been built up over centuries, Barcelona features a number of additional museums, cathedrals, famous squares and other historic sites that have not been mentioned in this guide. Be sure to do a quick online search before you go, or even pop into the local tourism office for advice on visiting these places.

Flamenco Show

Flamenco dancing is traditional to Spanish culture and is a colourful site to behold. These shows take place in the afternoons and evenings and can be fun for the whole family. I recommend taking an evening stroll through the Gothic Quarter, grabbing a bite to eat and



then taking in a Flamenco Show while enjoying some Sangria! Tickets and performance information available through VisitBarcelona.

SHOPPING: WHERE TO SHOP

There are so many wonderful places to shop in Barcelona! On many of the main shopping streets that surround plazas and squares like Plaça de Catalunya, you'll find large, well-known retailers such as H&M, Zara, Mango, Sephora, Uniqlo and more. For more local flare, be sure to wander the streets of the Gothic Quarter, in particular near the Museu Picasso, where you will find local boutiques featuring artwork, blown glass and other one of a kind souvenirs.

A visit to La Rambla in the Gothic Quarter is also a must! This long street market is bustling with vendors selling everything from

soccer jerseys to flowers to pet birds! This is a great place to watch street performers and take in the sights and sounds of Barcelona. La Rambla is also where you'll find La Boqueria Market – a local favorite.

Note that most shops are closed on Sundays. La Rambla is only partially open on Sunday – it is a very pared down version of the street market.

DAY TRIPS FROM BARCELONA

If you're looking to get out of the hustle of the city for a day or two, there are a number of ways you can experience the areas surrounding Barcelona. There are day excursions on the ocean such as sailing trips and deep-sea fishing expeditions. Another option would be to take a few days and visit one of the nearby Spanish islands where options range from



tranquil retreat to high energy party scene. Cycling the area is also a popular excursion, both around the Barcelona area and its nearby islands, particularly the island of Menorca.

Montserrat

Montserrat is a Benedictine Monk retreat in the mountains of Catalunya. It is famed for having reported visits by the Virgin Mary. Enjoy the mountain walks with breathtaking views from both the monastery and the cable car that you'll take to visit this heavenly place. Often you can hear the voices of the Montserrat Choir while you're walking through the main building. Be sure to pick up an audio guide for your tour so that you don't miss any of the significance of the artifacts and shrines inside.

Montserrat is located approximately one

hour north west of Barcelona by train. The visit takes anywhere from a half to full day, depending on your preference.

Spanish Wine Country

Spain is home to some of the world's best wines and visiting Spanish Wine Country is sure to be a treat. In Spain you will find varieties such as Rioja, Tempranillo, and Garnacha. Closest to Barcelona is the Alella wine region, accessible from Barcelona by train. This region is home to over 27 different wine varieties so you'll be sure to find something that you will enjoy. To access the area, take the Rodalies Regional Train Service out of Barcelona to El Masnou (approximately 30 minutes). If venturing out of the city on your own is not something that appeals to you, check out the wine tours available through www.barcelonaturisme.com



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