

Welcome to Barcelona

This enchanting seaside city boasts boundless culture, fabled architecture and a world-class drinking and dining scene.

Architecture of the Ages

Barcelona's architectural treasures span 2000-plus years. Towering temple columns, ancient city walls and subterranean stone corridors provide a window into Roman-era Barcino. Fast forward a thousand years to the Middle Ages by taking a stroll through the shadowy lanes of the Gothic quarter, past tranquil plazas and soaring 14th-century cathedrals. In other parts of town bloom the sculptural masterpieces of Modernisme, a mix of ingenious and whimsical creations by Gaudí and his Catalan architectural contemporaries, for which this city is so well known. Barcelona has also long inspired artists, including the likes of Salvador Dalí, Pablo Picasso and Joan Miró, whose works are in bold display in the city's myriad museums.

A Moveable Feast

Barcelona's great artistic traditions don't end at the canvas. Its masters of molecular gastronomy (Ferran Adrià, Carles Abellán et al) are part of the long and celebrated tradition of Catalan cooking. Simple, flavourful ingredients – olive oil, *jamón*, seafood – are transformed into remarkable delicacies and served in captivating settings. Feast at an outdoor seaside table or step back to the 1920s in an art-nouveau-filled dining room.

Under the Iberian Sun

The deep blue Mediterranean beckons. Sun-drenched beaches make a fine backdrop to a jog, bike ride or leisurely stroll along the seaside – followed by a refreshing dip of course. You can also enjoy the view from out on the water while kayaking, windsurfing or taking it easy on a sunset cruise. Looming behind the city, the rolling forest-covered Collserola Hills provide a scenic setting for hiking, mountain biking or just admiring the view. Closer to the centre, hilltop Montjuïc offers endless exploring amid botanic and sculpture gardens, an old castle and first-rate museums with panoramic views at every turn.

Twenty-four Hour Party People

Barcelona's nights hold limitless possibilities. Start with sunset drinks on a hillside terrace or at a rustic beachside *chiringuito*. As darkness falls, music transforms the city: the rapid-fire rhythms of flamenco, brassy jazz spilling from basements, and hands-in-the-air indie-rock at vintage concert halls. Towards midnight the bars fill. Take your pick from old-school taverns adorned with 19th-century murals, plush lounges in lamp-lit medieval chambers or festive *cava* bars. If you're still standing at 3am, hit the clubs and explore Barcelona's unabashed wild side.



Why I Love Barcelona

By Regis St Louis, Coordinating Author

I love the sea, and taking an early-morning jog along the Mediterranean is my favourite way to start the day. I'm also a bit of a history nerd, and relish strolling the cobblestone lanes of the Gothic quarter, thinking about all the people in past centuries who walked these same streets. And then there's the food and drink – the first-rate tapas bars, the abundant and inexpensive wine, the superb and reasonably priced multicourse lunches. Add to all this Catalan creativity (Modernisme, Miró, Dalí), bohemian bars and stunning nearby getaways and you have, quite simply, one of the world's most captivating cities.

For more about our authors, see p320.