

# Understand Barcelona

## **BARCELONA TODAY ..... 222**

An ongoing economic crisis has sparked Catalonia's drive towards independence. Despite financial woes, revitalisation continues in the ever-changing urban landscape.

## **HISTORY ..... 224**

Barcelona's 2000-year history has been shaped by Roman rule, an early parliament, a Mediterranean empire and the Spanish Civil War.

## **CATALAN CULTURE ..... 235**

Folk dancing, traditional festivals, towering human *castells* (castles) and one powerhouse football team are essential elements of the Catalan experience.

## **ARCHITECTURE ..... 237**

Barcelona is home to a soaring collection of Gothic treasures, Modernista masterpieces and more recent works by avant-garde architects.

## **PICASSO, MIRÓ & DALÍ ..... 242**

Follow in the footsteps of three of Spain's great 20th-century artists, who were all influenced by Barcelona.

## **MUSIC & DANCE ..... 244**

Nova Cançó, la rumba and avant-garde rock have shaped the Catalan sound, while flamenco and *sardana* (Catalonia's national folk dance) still flourish.

# Barcelona Today

In 2014 Barcelona commemorated the 300th anniversary of the siege of the city, a watershed event that henceforth placed Catalonia under the dominion of Spain. Whether or not Catalonia will regain its independence, the region will continue to chart its own course ahead – particularly in the realm of architecture, sustainability and cuisine. Meanwhile as in other parts of Spain, the economic crisis continues to have dire consequences, especially for those at the lowest end of the socio-economic spectrum.

## Best on Film

**All about my Mother** (director Pedro Almodóvar, 1999) One of Almodóvar's best-loved films is full of plot twists and dark humour, complete with transsexual prostitutes and doe-eyed nuns.

**Vicky Cristina Barcelona** (director Woody Allen, 2008) Allen gives Barcelona the *Manhattan* treatment, showing a city of startling beauty and neuroticism.

**L'Auberge Espagnol** (director Cédric Klapisch, 2002) Warmly told coming-of-age story about a mishmash of foreign-exchange students thrown together in Barcelona.

**Barcelona** (director Whit Stillman, 1994) A sharp and witty romantic comedy about two Americans living in Barcelona during the end of the Cold War.

## Best in Print

**Barcelona** (Robert Hughes, 1992) Witty and passionate study of 2000 years of history.

**Shadow of the Wind** (Carlos Ruiz Zafón, 2001) Page-turning mystery set in post-civil-war Barcelona.

**Homage to Catalonia** (George Orwell, 1938) Orwell's classic account of the early days of the Spanish Civil War.

## A Nation in Crisis

Spain's ongoing economic woes showed mild signs of improvement at the end of 2013 and the beginning of 2014, with a projected annual growth rate of 1.2% for the year. This was some small relief for a country that had been mostly in recession since the Global Financial Crisis erupted in 2007. Like many other Spaniards, Catalans have yet to break out the cava. Unemployment remains startlingly high, particularly among young workers (above 40% for those under the age of 25). Meanwhile hardship measures prescribed by bureaucrats – slashing budgets, raising taxes and freezing public sector pay – have done nothing to alleviate the hardship for those struggling to pay their bills.

Last year nearly 16,000 Catalans were evicted from their homes according to figures from the General Council of the Judiciary. Homeowners, unable to meet their mortgage payments, have seen their worlds upended as banks seize their properties. Protests against these evictions have grown in recent years, as *barcelonins* and other Spaniards have taken to the streets in outrage against the austerity measures.

Second-hand stores are one of the few businesses that are doing well. In an era of growing joblessness and tightened purse strings, more and more Catalans are taking to buying and selling used goods. Even Passeig de Gràcia, Barcelona's most upscale shopping street, now has a few second-hand stores.

## A Bid for Independence

Spain's ongoing financial turmoil has been a catalyst for independence. Ever since the days of Franco – when Catalan was banned in schools and in the media – Catalonia has felt stymied by the sometimes heavy-handed policies of the central government. These days anger revolves around the topic of taxation. Catalonia's