



Barcelona

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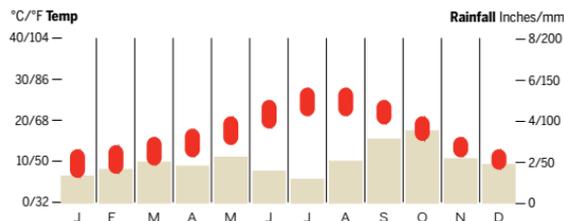
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Why Go?

Barcelona is a mix of sunny Mediterranean charm and European urban style, where dedicated hedonists and culture vultures feel equally at home. From Gothic to Gaudí, the city bursts with art and architecture; Catalan cooking is among the country's best; summer sun seekers fill the beaches in and beyond the city; and the bars and clubs heave year-round. From its origins as a middle-ranking Roman town, of which vestiges can be seen today, Barcelona became a medieval trade juggernaut. Its old centre holds one of the greatest concentrations of Gothic architecture in Europe. Beyond this are some of the world's more bizarre buildings: surreal spectacles capped by Antoni Gaudí's Sagrada Família. Barcelona has been breaking ground in art, architecture and style since the late 19th century. From Picasso and Miró to today's modern wonders, Barcelona's racing pulse has barely skipped a beat. Equally busy are the city's avant-garde chefs, who compete with old-time classics for gourmets' attention.

When to Go

Barcelona



May Plaça del Fòrum rocks during Primavera Sound, a long weekend of outdoor concerts.

Jun Sónar, Europe's biggest celebration of electronic music, is held across the city.

Sep Festes de la Mercè is Barcelona's end-of-summer finale and biggest party.

History

It is thought that Barcelona may have been founded by the Carthaginians in about 230 BC, taking the surname of Hamilcar Barca, Hannibal's father. Roman Barcelona (known as *Barcino*) covered an area within today's *Barri Gòtic* and was overshadowed by *Tarraco* (Tarragona), 90km to the southwest. In the wake of Muslim occupation and then Frankish domination, *Guifré el Pilós* (Wilfrid the Hairy) founded the house of the *Comtes de Barcelona* (Counts of Barcelona) in AD 878. In 1137 Count Ramon Berenguer IV married *Petronilla*, heiress of Aragon, creating a joint state and setting the scene for Catalonia's golden age. *Jaume I* (1213–76) wrenched the Balearic Islands and Valencia from the Muslims in the 1230s to '40s. *Jaume I*'s son *Pere II* followed with Sicily in 1282. The accession of the Aragonese noble *Fernando* to the throne in 1479 augured ill for Barcelona, and his marriage to Queen *Isabel* of Castilla more still. Catalonia effectively became a subordinate part of the Castilian state. After the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–13), Barcelona fell to the Bourbon king, *Felipe V*, in September 1714.

Modernisme, Anarchy & the Civil War

The 19th century brought economic resurgence. Wine, cotton, cork and iron industries developed, as did urban working-class poverty and unrest. To ease the crush, Barcelona's medieval walls were demolished in 1854, and in 1869 work began on *L'Eixample*, an extension of the city beyond *Plaça de Catalunya*. The flourishing bourgeoisie paid for lavish buildings, many of them in the eclectic *Modernisme* style, whose leading exponent was *Antoni Gaudí*. In 1937, a year into the Spanish Civil War, the Catalan communist party (PSUC; *Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya*) took control of the city after fratricidal street battles against anarchists and Trotskyists. *George Orwell* recorded the events in his classic *Homage to Catalonia*. Barcelona fell to Franco in 1939 and there followed a long period of repression.

From Franco to the Present

Under Franco, Barcelona received a flood of immigrants, chiefly from *Andalucía*. Some 750,000 people came to Barcelona in the '50s and '60s, and almost as many to the rest of Catalonia. Many lived in appalling conditions. Three years after Franco's death in 1975, a new Spanish constitution created the autonomous community of Catalonia

(Catalunya in Catalan; *Cataluña* in Castilian), with Barcelona as its capital. The 1992 Olympic Games put Barcelona on the map. Under the visionary leadership of popular Catalan Socialist mayor *Pasqual Maragall*, a burst of public works brought new life to *Montjuïc* and the once shabby waterfront.

Flush with success after the Olympics makeover, Barcelona continued the revitalisation of formerly run-down neighbourhoods. *El Raval*, still dodgy in parts, has seen a host of building projects, from the opening of *Richard Meier's* cutting-edge *Macba* in 1995 to the *Filmoteca de Catalunya* in 2012. Further west, the once derelict industrial district of *Poble Nou* has been reinvented as *22@* (pronounced 'vint-i-dosarroba'), a 200-hectare zone that's a centre for technology and design. Innovative companies and futuristic architecture (such as the brand-new *Museu del Disseny*) continue to reshape the urban landscape of this ever evolving city.

On other fronts, Catalonia continues to be a trendsetter for the rest of Spain. Barcelona's shared biking program *Bicing*, launched in 2007, has become a model for sustainable transport initiatives, and the city continues to invest in green energy (particularly in its use of solar power and electric and hybrid vehicles).

Once a great kingdom unto its own, Catalonia has a long independent streak. In 2013, on the Catalan National Day (11 September), hundreds of thousands of separatist supporters formed a 400km human chain across Catalonia. In 2014, a referendum on independence took place, though Spanish judges have said such a vote was illegal and violates the constitution. Whether or not Catalonia will gain its independence, Barcelona will continue to chart its own course ahead.

Sights

Barcelona could be divided into thematic chunks. In the *Ciutat Vella* (especially the *Barri Gòtic* and *La Ribera*) are the bulk of the city's ancient and medieval splendours. Along with *El Raval*, on the other side of *La Rambla*, and *Port Vell*, where old Barcelona meets the sea, this is the core of the city's life, both by day and by night. Top attractions here include the *Museu d'Història de Barcelona*, *La Catedral* and the *Museu Picasso*.

L'Eixample is where the Modernistas went to town. Attractions here are more