

The Best of Barcelona

Unlike many monumental European cities, the Catalan capital's charm lies in a sum of many small parts. You could fall in love with the city over an encounter with the *mélange* of street performers along the famous boulevard Les Rambles or at your first close encounter with a fanciful work of the master architect Antoni Gaudí. It could be the fact that fine city beaches, splendid Gothic palaces, elegant green parkland, cutting edge cafes, and sophisticated shopping are all within arm's length in this compact metropolis and its inherent easygoing nature means that as much time can be spent on chilling as cultural pursuits. It could be the fact that Barcelona (and Catalonia) are truly distinct from the rest of Spain and therefore many pre-conceptions of what it *will* be like give way to the discovery of a language, landscape, and people you may have known little about.

Over the centuries the Catalan people have clung fiercely to their culture, which General Francisco Franco systematically and often brutally tried to eradicate. Catalonia endured, becoming an autonomous region of Spain in which Catalan culture and language flourishes. Barcelona, the region's lodestar, has truly come into its own. In 2003 nearly four million visitors came to the city, many on charter flights from Northern Europe. The explosion of low-cost, Internet airlines, plus the good value at hotels and restaurants compared to other European cities, has made Barcelona the European weekender capital. Many come to party, some to soak up the unbeatable Mediterranean climate and most find the time to see a few of its outstanding cultural and architectural offerings.

The city's most powerful monuments open a window onto its history: the intricately carved edifices of the Barri Gòtic, the most intact Gothic Quarter in Europe; the florid, curvilinear *modernisme* (Catalan Art Nouveau), the seminal works of Picasso and Miró, plus daring new projects from national and international names of the ilk of Frank Gehry, Jean Nouvel, and Toyo Ito, Barcelona is a crucial incubator for 20th-century art and architecture. Gastronomy is another regional plus; led by Ferran Adrià, a chef whom *Time* listed as one of the 100 most influential people in the world today, "New Catalan Cuisine" has even been hailed by the French as the next great culinary wave. In 2004 six restaurants in the region received the coveted Michelin star.

Barcelona is on the doorstep of some of Europe's great playgrounds and vacation retreats. The Balearic Islands lie to the east, the Costa Brava to the north, the monastery at Montserrat to the west, and to the south, the Roman city of Tarragona, and the playground resort of Sitges.

A revitalized Barcelona welcomed thousands of visitors to the 1992 Summer Olympic Games, but the action didn't end when the last medal was handed out. With a culturally savvy local government, the city has become a model for intelligent development. On any weekend, as locals enjoy a new park or promenade, an outdoor concert or *fiesta*, it is clear that this proud population has an enduring love

affair with their city. Of course the downside of all this progress is that the sound of the jackhammer is never far off. But the Barcelonense believe that while the past must be respected, the future is to be embraced.

1 Frommer's Favorite Barcelona Experiences

- **A Stroll along the Ramblas:** Barcelona's most famous promenade pulses with life. The array of living statues, street musicians, performers, hustlers, and eccentrics ensure there is never a dull moment by the time you reach the end of your kilometer-long stroll. See p. 56.
- **A Drink at Sunset on the Beach:** The closest thing to an Ibiza experience on the mainland, Barcelona's city beaches are dotted with *chiringuitos* (beach bars) and the Mediterranean provides a perfect backdrop for that end-of-day drink, often accompanied by the music of an in-house DJ. See p. 211.
- **Exploring the El Born Neighborhood:** This port-side pocket of Barcelona was once one of its seediest; now the "in" crowds converge on its narrow, tangle of streets by day to check out the latest in cutting edge fashion and design and by night for the plethora of bars and restaurants churning out the ultimate in New Catalan cuisine. See p. 58.
- **A Concert at the Palau de la Música Catalana:** This masterpiece of *modernista* (Art Nouveau) architecture must be one of the most lavish concert halls in the world. All strains of classical and jazz are played, but even the most finicky music lover will be moved by the Palau's onslaught of decorative detail. See p. 202.
- **Breakfast at the Boqueria:** There are about a dozen bars and restaurants in the city's main food market. Rub shoulders with Barcelona's top chefs and gourmands over a coffee and croissant and watch the day's deliveries coming in. See p. 192.
- **Barhopping in the Barri Gòtic:** Whether it's the iconic, smoke filled tapas bar, an Irish pub frequented by expats, or a cocktail lounge filled with minimalist furniture and minimally clad patrons, Barcelona's Old City is a watering-hole mecca, bar none. One of the best (at time of print, Barcelona's bar scene is famously fickle) is **Ginger**, a comfy, classy tapas and wine bar with the feel of a private club. See p. 207.
- **Sundays on Montjuïc:** The mountain of Montjuïc is the first sight that greets visitors arriving at the port. Behind its rocky seaside face are acres of pine-dotted parkland that cyclists, joggers, and strollers make a beeline for on the weekend; a tranquil contrast to the hustle of the city below and some welcome breathing room. See p. 161.
- **A Trip to Tibidabo on the Tramvia Blau:** The summit of the highest point on the city's hilly backdrop can be reached by a "blue tram," built as a people carrier to the amusement park on the mountain's peak. For most, the fun starts here, as the century-old tram rattles its way up the mountainside and reveals breathtaking views of the city below. See p. 63.
- **Dining at Els Quatre Gats:** The original was the preferred hang out of a young Picasso and his Bohemian contemporaries and acted as a fraternity house for late 18th-century dandies. While most of the art adorning the walls is now reproductions, this classic

Catalan restaurant still screams with history. The resident pianist and general formality only add to the atmosphere. See p. 110.

- **The First Glance of the Sagrada Família:** Nothing quite prepares you for the first glimpse of Gaudí's most famous work. Erupting from the center of a suburban city block like some retro-futurist grotto, the temple's four towers immediately draw your eyes skyward, before they drop down to the facade rich in religious symbolism. And that's before you step over the threshold to the (yet still unfinished) interior. See p. 156.
- **People-Watching at the MACBA:** The forecourt of the Museum of Contemporary Art is a snapshot of the new multicultural Barcelona;

spend some time at one of its outside bars watching Pakistani cricket players, local kids playing soccer and Northern European skateboarders in a fascinating melting pot of recreational activity. See p. 153.

- **Staying Up until Dawn:** A long dinner, a few drinks at a bar, onto a club and then before you know it the sun is rising over the Mediterranean's party capital, throwing a warm glow over the city's palm-filled plazas and streets. Nothing beats a slow walk home at this magical hour (preferably through the Old City). If you manage to catch up on your sleep during the day, chances are you will repeat the experience that night.

2 The Best Hotel Bets

- **Best for a Romantic Getaway:** Lovebirds have good reasons not to leave the confines of **Gran Hotel La Florida**, Carretera de Tibidabo s/n (☎ 93-259-30-00), a fabulous, newly opened historic hotel—and not all of those reasons are to be found in the bedrooms. The stainless-steel lap pool, spa, and gardens offering sweeping views of the city are enticement enough to keep you holed up for days. See p. 100.
- **Best for Art Lovers:** As well as being one of the city's most stylish five-stars, the **Hotel Claris**, Pau Claris 150 (☎ 93-487-62-62), has rooms and foyers dotted with early Egyptian art and artifacts, 19th-century Turkish kilims, and even a couple of Roman mosaics, a fruit of the owner's passion for collecting. See p. 83.
- **Best for Business Travelers:** In the heart of business district, the **AC Diplomatic**, Pau Claris 122 (☎ 93-272-38-10), exudes efficiency. The highly tasteful interior

and amenities have just the right balance of detail and function, allowing those with a job to do to get on with it in comfort. See p. 86.

- **Best for Celebrity Spotting:** Preferred choice of top models and temperamental rock stars (P. Diddy reportedly partied up a storm when he came to Barcelona to host the 2002 MTV Awards) the **Hotel Arts**, Marina 19–21 (☎ 93-221-10-00), has remained a jet-set playground and symbol of “cool Barcelona” for over a decade. See p. 96.
- **Best for Service:** As well as being a well above average four-star, the **Prestige**, Passeig de Gràcia 62 (☎ 93-272-41-80), offers a unique service to its clients. The role of the concierge is replaced with “Ask Me,” specially trained information officers on call to find the answers to the most challenging queries; from how to score soccer tickets to where to find halal restaurants. See p. 85.

- **Best Grande Dame:** Since it opened its doors in 1919, the city's **Hotel Ritz**, Gran Vía 668 (☎ 93-318-52-00), has survived a civil war, a world war, an anarchist occupation and the fall of a dictatorship, all while retaining an impeccable level of service and tradition. During all this, distinguished guests such as the Duke of Windsor, Ava Gardner, and Salvador Dalí have chosen to stay in its gilt and marble surroundings and take refuge in the elegant tea-room and restaurant. See p. 84.
- **Best In-House Restaurant:** When celebrated chef Fermin Puig took over the food department the highly regarded **The Majestic**, Passeig de Gràcia 70 (☎ 93-488-17-17), he not only revolutionized what clients receive on their breakfast tray but also created **Drolma**, one of the country's most celebrated haute cuisine restaurants. Officially recognized with a Michelin star, Puig's take on traditional Catalan and Southern French cooking has left most gourmands drooling at the mouth. See p. 121.
- **Best Historic Hotel:** The *modernista* masterpiece **Hotel Casa Fuster**, Passeig de Gràcia 132 (☎ 93-225-30-00), was an emblematic building *before* it was recently converted into this luxury five star. The rooms have been restored to turn-of-the-20th-century opulence, but with all the mod-cons expected by today's high society. See p. 81.
- **Best Modern Design:** Combining the best of local talent, **Hotel Omm**, Rosselló 265 (☎ 93-445-40-00), was almost conceived as homage to the city's vibrant design culture. Daring concepts prevail from the metal facade and the sleek open-plan suites and private terraces. On the ground floor, the Omm's restaurant, Moo, is fast becoming the place to see and be-seen among Barcelona's arts elite. See p. 84.
- **Best for Sheer Atmosphere:** If faded glory is your thing then look no further than the **Hotel España**, Sant Pau 11, 08001 Barcelona (☎ 93-318-17-58). Designed by a contemporary of Gaudí's, the street-level dining room, filled with florid motif and brass fixtures, will whisk you back to the early nineteen hundreds, when it was filled with chattering patrons taking supper after a trip to the opera house next door. See p. 80.
- **Best Location:** In terms of location the **Hotel Colón**, Av. de la Catedral 7 (☎ 93-301-14-04), is the envy of every hotel in the city. Placed directly in front of the cathedral's main entrance, across an expansive square that buzzes day and night, a front room with a balcony is the one to ask for when booking this highly recommended four-star. See p. 73.
- **Best for Architecture Buffs:** Hailing from the early '50s, the **Park Hotel**, Av. Marquès de L'Argenteria 11 (☎ 93-319-60-00), was the first example of post-war *modernista* architecture in the city. The renovation carried out four decades later only enhances its singular style, and it sports one of the most striking staircases in existence. See p. 78.
- **Best Boutique Hotel:** The boutique concept took its time coming to Barcelona. Forefront of the movement was **Banys Orientals**, Argenteria 37 (☎ 93-268-84-60), and it remains the best. It's perfectly located in the middle of El Born district, Barcelona's bastion of urban chic. See p. 79.
- **Best Small Hotel:** **Hostal D'Uxelles**, Gran Vía 688 and 667 (☎ 93-265-25-60), looks like it has stepped straight off the pages

of one of those rustic-interiors magazines. Located on the first floor of two adjacent buildings, each of the 14 rooms have a character all of their own, but all include canopied beds, antique furniture, and Andalusian-style ceramic bathrooms. See p. 90.

- **Best for Sea Views:** Imagine stepping off a luxury cruise liner and straight into a five-star hotel. That is pretty-much possible at **Hotel Grand Marina**, World Trade Centre, Moll de Barcelona (☎ 93-603-90-00). Housed in the western-wing of the city's World Trade Centre, which in itself is built on a man-made island in the port, Mediterranean vistas greet you at every turn. See p. 96.
- **Best Inexpensive Hotel:** Serenity and character abound in **Hotel Peninsular**, Sant Pau 34–36 (☎ 93-302-31-38), a nunnery-turned-hotel. Located on a colorful street just off Les Ramblas, the Art Nouveau lift, long hallways in tones of green and white and

inner-courtyard with its abundance of hanging plants is an oasis from the hustle and bustle outside. But book ahead. See p. 80.

- **Best for Families Who Don't Want to Break the Bank:** The family-run **Marina Folch**, Carrer del Mar 16, principal (☎ 93-310-37-09), is the only one in the beachside neighborhood of Barceloneta, with plenty of open-air bars and open spaces for the kids to run wild. Ask for a room at the front for a balcony with a view of the port. See p. 98.
- **Best Hostel:** Forget faded curtains and floral wallpaper. **Gat Raval**, Joaquín Costa 44 (☎ 93-481-66-70), is a streamlined hostel fitted out in acid green and black that has been conceived for the modern world traveler on a budget. On-demand Internet access and touches of abstract art add toits contemporary ambience and the foyer is always abuzz with travelers exchanging information. See p. 78.

3 The Best Restaurant Bets

- **Hottest Chef:** Carles Abellán has been hailed as the new wunderkind of nouvelle Catalan cuisine. His restaurant, **Comerç 24**, Comerç 24 (☎ 93-319-21-02), was conceived as a playful take on all that's hot in the tapas world. Delights such as "kinder egg surprise" (a soft-boiled egg with truffle-infused yolk) and tuna sashimi pizza await the adventurous. See p. 109.
- **Best Newcomer:** Even rival chefs are talking about Jordi Villa's **Alkimia**, Indústria 79 (☎ 93-207-61-15), for his vanguard versions of classic Catalan and French dishes. The unstinting minimalism of the interior is a fitting setting for what is an unforgettable gastronomic experience. See p. 123.
- **Best Place for a Business Lunch:** The sleek, urban decor and smoked-glass mirrors, black-clad waitstaff, and imaginative Spanish-Italian dishes have made **Noti**, Roger de Llúria 35 (☎ 93-342-66-73)—in the heart of the power district—a hit with the city's media set and other assorted movers and shakers. See p. 125.
- **Best Spot for a Celebration:** You can make as much noise as you like at **Mesón David**, Carretes 63 (☎ 93-441-59-34), an old-school eatery with an interminable menu of dishes from all regions of Spain. Chances are you will be sitting next to a raucous group celebrating a birthday or engagement with waiters often joining in the revelry themselves. See p. 114.

- **Best Wine List:** You will be spoiled for choice at **La Vinya del Senyor**, Plaça Santa María 5 (☎ 93-310-33-79), a gorgeous wine bar opposite the towering Santa María del Mar church. Mull over the 300 varieties on offer while taking in its facade from the outside terrace, then order some of their delicious tapas to accompany your choice. See p. 138.
- **Best for Paella:** A paella-on-the-beach is one of the quintessential Barcelona experiences and there is no place better to do it than **Can Majó**, Almirall Aixada 23 (☎ 93-221-54-55). Right on the seafont, this restaurant prides itself on its paellas and *fideuàs* (which replace noodles for rice) and is an established favorite among the city's most well heeled families. See p. 136.
- **Best Modern Catalan Cuisine:** With over 10 restaurants, the legendary Tragaluz group has revolutionized Barcelona's gastronomic panorama. its flagship eatery, **Tragaluz**, Passatge de la Concepció 5 (☎ 93-487-06-21), defines not only the city's contemporary design aesthetic, but also its "market" cuisine: The freshest seasonal ingredients are executed to a very high standard. See p. 127.
- **Best Traditional Catalan Cuisine:** **Via Veneto**, Ganduxer 10 (☎ 93-200-72-44), exudes old-fashioned class and serves up some of the finest Catalan cooking in the land. Some of the serving methods, such as the sterling silver duck press, seem to belong to another century (as do some of the clients). See p. 139.
- **Best for Kids:** Children are welcome almost everywhere in Spanish restaurants, but why not give them a real treat by heading for **La Paradeta**, Comercial 7 (☎ 93-268-19-39)? As close as you can get to the Catalan version of a fish and chipper, all kinds of seafood laid out on ice greet you as you walk in. You pick what you want and a few minutes later, *bingo!* Out it comes, hot and steaming, in a cardboard box. See p. 114.
- **Best Fusion Cuisine:** Born in Catalonia but raised in Canada, chef Jordi Artal instinctively knows how to fuse Old and New World cuisines. The five-course tasting menu in his upscale **Cinc Sentits**, Aribau 58 (☎ 93-323-94-90), is a memorable way to sample his expertise; a range of tiny dishes using carefully sourced produce that surprise and delight. See p. 123.
- **Best for Tapas: Taller de Tapas**, Plaça Sant Josep Oriol 9 (☎ 93-301-80-20) and Argenteria 51 (☎ 93-268-85-59), was conceived to take the mystery out of tapas. Multilingual staff and menus ensure you don't get pig's cheeks when you order green leeks and the rest of the delectable dishes are a perfect initiation for the novice. See p. 118.
- **Best for People-Watching:** The food may not win any awards but that doesn't stop soccer stars, models and other assorted semi-celebs from flocking to **CDLC**, Passeig Marítim 32 (☎ 93-244-04-70). Right on the waterfront in the Olympic Village and decked out in fashionable faux-Thai chic, the real fun starts with the post-dinner disco, and you're not sure whether the breeze is rolling in off the Mediterranean or the rush of air kisses. See p. 137.
- **Best Outdoor Dining Area:** As well as being one of the best-value restaurants in the city, the **Café de L'Academia**, Lledó 1 (☎ 93-315-00-26), is blessed with one of the prettiest settings; a charming square in the Old Town flanked by Gothic

buildings and an ancient water fountain. At night the warm glow of the table candles bounces off the stone walls, ensuring you linger long on after the last liquor. See p. 108.

- **Best View:** Dine on top of the world, or at least 75m (246 ft.) up in **Torre d'Alta Mar**, Passeig Joan de Borbón 88 (☎ 93-221-00-07), located in a cable-car tower. The view couldn't be more mesmerizing, allowing you to take an almost-360-degree view of the city's skyline and the surrounding sea in one swoop. See p. 134.
- **Best for Seafood:** Although good seafood is abundant in Barcelona, many swear that the best catches end up in **Cal Pep**, Plaça des les Olles 8 (☎ 93-310-79-61), a tiny bar near the port. Mountains of the stuff are prepared in front of your eyes by lightning-quick staff and your dexterity is put to test as you try not to elbow your neighbor while peeling your prawns. See p. 109.
- **Best Wine Bar:** Bathed in Bordeaux red, with large arched windows looking out onto a tranquil square, **Vinissim**, Sant Doménech del Call 12 (☎ 93-301-45-75), has a mind-boggling array of wines from all corners of the globe, plus a scrumptious array of tapas to soak them up. It offers a pleasing experience for all the senses. See p. 119.
- **Best for Sunday Lunch:** The queues say it all: **7 Portes**, Passeig Isabel II no. 14 (☎ 93-319-30-33), one of the oldest restaurants in Barcelona, is a Sunday institution. Extended families can be seen dining on their excellent meat and fish dishes in turn of the century surrounds and the photographic memorabilia on the walls denotes its perennial popularity. See p. 134.
- **Best Vegetarian Restaurant:** True vegetarian dining is still quite rare in Barcelona. Thank heavens for **Organic**, Junta de Comerç 11 (☎ 93-301-09-02), a barn-like place with communal wooden tables, an all-you-can-eat salad bar, and tempting rice, pasta, and tofu dishes. See p. 115.
- **Best for a Sweet Tooth:** Sweet but never sickly, **Espai Sucre**, Princesa 53 (☎ 93-268-16-30), is perhaps the world's only restaurant that offers a menu made up entirely of desserts. Foodies rave about it and its reputation has spread far and wide as a once-in-a-lifetime gastronomic experience. Some savory dishes are available. See p. 110.
- **Best for Morning or Afternoon Tea:** The tiny street of Petritxol in the Old City is renowned for its *granjas*, cafes specializing in cakes, pastries, and hot chocolate. As well as all this **Xocoo**, Petritxol 11 (☎ 93-301-11-97), makes its own mouth-watering chocolates and presents them up in funky wrappers; worthy of picking up to pop in your hand luggage. See p. 185.
- **Best for Consistency:** **Pla**, Carrer de Bellafila 5 (☎ 93-412-65-52), strikes that right balance between hip and highly creative without scaring you off. The menu focuses on local market produce with a touch of Asian and Arabic and the staff are unusually friendly and helpful. See p. 112.
- **Best Snack on the Go:** Before you embark on a visit to the Museum of Contemporary Art, fuel-up at **Foodball**, Elisabets 9 (☎ 93-270-13-63), a new concept in fast food. Wholegrain rice balls filled with tofu, wild mushrooms, chickpeas, and the like, plus fresh juices and smoothies are served in a quirky setting where you can also eat in. See p. 117.
- **Best Retro Interior:** For an authentic touch of the '70s, head up to **Flash-Flash Tortillería**,

Granada del Penedès 25 (☎ 93-237-09-90). Bathed in dramatic red and white, the photo-murals of a model that adorn the walls

were taken by Leopoldo Pomés, one of the founders and a top fashion photographer during the city's swinging decade. See p. 131.

4 The Best Bars & Pubs

- **Best Champagne Bar:** Sparkling wine in Spain is called *cava*, and often there is very little difference between the local version and what you get north of the border in France. **El Xampanyet**, Montcada 22 (☎ 93-319-70-73), a tiny, ceramic-lined *cava* bar opposite the Picasso Museum, has been serving up its house variety for generations and is one of the more atmospheric places to down a bottle or two. See p. 217.
- **Best View:** The trek up to the peak of Tibidabo is worth it for **Mirablau**, Plaça Doctor Andreu s/n (☎ 93-418-58-79), a chic bar that provides an unparalleled, panoramic view of the city from its floor-to-ceiling glass windows. See p. 216.
- **Best for Predinner Drinks:** Strategically located just off the top end of Les Rambles, **Boadas**, Tallers 1 (☎ 93-318-88-26), is another historic watering hole, this time with its roots in Havana, Cuba. Predictably *mojitos* and daiquiris are a specialty, and it's relaxed enough to wander in casually dressed. See p. 206.
- **Best Irish Pub:** While Barcelona abounds with good Celtic-style pubs, their wood-lined interiors and leather seating are not altogether congenial on a summer night. **The Fastnet**, Passeig Juan de Borbón 22 (☎ 93-295-30-05), has an outdoor terrace that looks out onto the port, and is a favorite hangout of visiting yachties and beach-loving expats. See p. 212.

5 The Best for Kids

- **Sightseeing:** Anything by Antoni Gaudí, the city's most famous architect, immediately appeals to young eyes and imaginations. His whimsical **Parque Güell** (p. 169) with its imagery from the animal kingdom and hidden grottoes is a particular favorite. Speaking of animals, the city's world-class **Aquarium** (p. 167) with its walkthrough tunnels and superb collection of Mediterranean marine-life is also a good bet. The somewhat older and less-funded **Parque Zoológico** (p. 152) has a fantastic primate collection and is located in the **Parque Ciutadella** (p. 151) which also boasts a lake with row boats for hire, swings and other assorted kiddie attractions.

Museum-wise, a trip to the **Maritime Museum** (p. 167) could be combined with a jaunt on **Las Golondrinas** (p. 176); quaint, double-decker pleasure boats that take you from the port to the breakwater. The **Museu de la Cera (Wax Museum)** (p. 146), may not be of the standard of its counterpart in London, but is interesting enough to make it worth a visit. Older children will also find the **Chocolate Museum** (p. 150) enticing and the newly opened **Science Museum** (p. 171) has excellent hands-on exhibits for all ages. Then, of course, there are the beaches—most with showers, toilets, bars, and hammocks for hire.

- **Trips:** An all-time favorite is the **Parc d'Atraccions Tibidabo** (p. 174); an amusement park on top of the city's highest peak, has death-defying attractions and a few gentler ones from bygone days. The **Parc del Laberint d' Horta**

(p. 175) is neoclassical park complete with a maze in an outer suburb of the city. Further afield, **Montserrat** (p. 219); Catalonia's "spiritual heart" offers plenty of walking tracks on its rocky terrain, caves to visit, and a monastery.