

MARIBEL'S GUIDE TO BARCELONA ©



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GUIDE BOOKS, WEB RESOURCES AND TRAVEL PLANNING

The Best Guidebooks

- **Time Out Barcelona Shortlist '08**- unbeatable!
- **Lonely Planet Barcelona Encounter**, May '07 –more concise but also handy
- **Rough Guide Barcelona Directions**, packed with great info for all budgets!
- **Fodor's Barcelona** written by George Semler, a 25-year resident of the city
- **Insight City Guide Barcelona, 4th edition**, strong on history, architecture, culture, art.
- **Cadogan's Barcelona**, great general guide also strong on history and culture.
- **Let's Go Barcelona**, for the young and those on a very tight budget
- **Barcelona Walks**, for wonderful walking tours, out of print but may be available on the author's personal web site: georgesemler.com
- **National Geographic's Barcelona** and the **Eyewitness Barcelona** are pretty to look at, nice to read before and after, but not as practical, or as easy to use “on the fly”.

Web Resources

- barcelonaturisme.com - official tourist office site - excellent!
- bcn.es - official municipal site
- barcelona-on-line.es - hotel booking
- barcelona-tourist-guide.com
- guiadelociobcn.com - for what's going on during your visit
- softguides.com/barcelona - ditto; also hotel booking
- barcelonahotels.es - online booking service
- rutadelmodernisme.com - dedicated to Modernist (Art Nouveau) architecture

TRAVEL PLANNING

Iberian Traveler (iberiantraveler.com) – American based company offering travel planning and guided and self-guided small group tours in Spain, Portugal and southwest France. Specializing in custom designed wine and gastronomy packages in the Rioja, Navarra and the Basque Country in addition to the Fiesta de San Fermín and the encierro, the running of the bulls, in Pamplona.

ARRIVING IN BARCELONA

Orientation

Pick up a Barcelona cultural activities guide at one of the city tourist offices. It will give you listings of exhibits, theater, music, festivals and dance. Very handy! Also pick up the monthly cultural calendar, **Butxaca**, which will give you a day-by-day listing of cultural events, concerts, lectures, recitals, etc. The main tourist office is located underground on the El Corte Inglés department store side of Plaça de Catalunya, open 9:00 – 9:00. Other branches can be found the Ramblas, 99, next to the Ayuntamiento (city hall) at Plaça Sant Jaume in the Barri Gòtic, Sants train station and El Prat airport. The offices are filled with helpful brochures and a pleasant staff. On the Passeig de Gracia, in the Palau Robert, you'll find the regional tourist office for all of Catalunya.

There are also free tourist guides published quarterly and available at your hotel, such as **What's On**, **Barcelona Style** and **See Barcelona** guides, with lots of ads, but not all of the restaurant selections are tops. If you read some Spanish, the weekly **Guía del Ocio** (similar to Pariscope) costs 1 euro, comes out every Friday and lists what's playing in theaters, cinemas, museums, art galleries, and has terrific restaurant and nightlife sections. In the back you'll find a small English language section.

Train versus Plane

Your quickest way to Barcelona from Madrid is currently by plane. In addition to **Iberia**, the low cost carriers **Spanair**, **Air Europa**, and **Vueling** compete on the MAD-BCN route, keeping the fares low, sometimes amazingly low, particularly on Vueling, but Iberia also often matches these fares. But the trade off to these very low fares on the other carriers is inconvenient departures. Of the four carriers, Spanair offers better in-flight service and has a better on time record in my experience. And these very low fares are only available on the airlines web pages, so you must check them all and check regularly as heavy discounts are often posted only two months in advance.

Iberia's new low cost airline, **Clickair**, began operations out of Barcelona on October 1, '06 but does not yet fly to Madrid. From Barcelona destinations within Spain are currently are Seville, Jerez, La Coruña, Málaga, Santiago de Compostela and Vigo. From BCN this slowly evolving airline flies to a dozen European cities, including Lisbon.

- iberia.com
- spanair.com
- air-europa.com
- vueling.com
- clickair.com

Until the new AVE bullet train route from Madrid to Barcelona is completed to BCN, sometime in late '08, when the trip will take three hours and travel at 350 Kms, it's best to fly, particularly on a short vacation. And PLEASE, DO NOT DRIVE! Not a wee bit scenic; the drive on the A2 is congested with truck traffic at all times and an annoying and tiring experience for the driver.

*Note: As of April 07 the AVE high-speed train has been completed only to Camp de Tarragona. Renfe is now running the **Alvia** and **Altaria** trains from Madrid to Barcelona. The speediest run still takes 4 hours 40 minutes. Tickets can be purchased online, up to 60 days in advance, through Renfe's TIKNET. First class (preferente) tickets on these trains include drinks (beer, wine, cordials) and a (decent) meal served at your seat, cars with a 2-1 seating configuration and access to the first class lounge at Atocha and Sants stations. Check the current schedule at renfe.es.*

TRANSFER FROM THE AIRPORT INTO THE CITY

Aeroport del Prat

The airport is located 12 km southwest of city, with tourist offices, banks, and luggage storage ("consigna"), car rental offices (Atesa/National, Avis, Hertz, Europcar) and ATMs in terminals. Shopaholics will enjoy the great duty free stores, including Loewe and Façonnable.

Taxis

Barcelona has a fleet of more than 11,000 taxis. Black and yellow are the official colors. An airport run to a downtown hotel will cost around 25€ including supplements. There's an extra surcharge of .90€ for each bag carried in the trunk and a 3€ supplement for airport runs. Plenty of taxis available in front of international arrivals terminal, but in summer, when several charter jumbos arrived at the same time, the line can be very long. When traveling alone, I take the Aerobús from the airport, but for an early morning departure from El Prat, I take a taxi from the hotel. Count on a 20-25 minute ride.

My most recent taxi ride to the airport from the Passeig de Gracia, on a Thursday at 6:30 am in late January took exactly 20 minutes and cost €26.60 (hotel called the taxi) including the supplements. When you have the front desk call a taxi for you, the meter starts when the taxi leaves its location, so look for a taxi rank in the vicinity of your hotel to avoid the extra charge.

Aerobús

Simple, easy, inexpensive and leaves every 12 to 15 minutes between 6:00 am to 1:00 am on weekdays and from 6:30 am on weekends and holidays. The trip takes about 30-40 minutes to reach the Plaça de Catalunya, less on Sunday mornings (www.emt-amb.com). From there you can catch a taxi to your hotel or walk, if your hotel is located around the Plaça. The Aerobús (A1) departs from outside Terminals A, B, C every 7 - 15 minutes. Busses have luggage racks. It makes intermediate stops at Plaça Espanya (handy for the B-Hotel), Plaça Universitat (handy for the Gravina, Jazz and Mesón Castilla) and finally, on the Passeig de Gràcia at the corner of Diputació (handy for the Onix Rambla, Continental Palacete and AC Diplomatic).

The Aerobús departs Plaça Catalunya for the airport starting at 5:30 am, Monday to Friday, and at 6:00 am on weekends and holidays. Cost: €3,75.

Train

The ride into the city takes 25 minutes from the airport station to Plaça de Catalunya, but the station is a long walk from the terminal. Train service begins at 6:15 in the morning, and ends at 11:40 pm, departing every ½ hr. Trains stop at the major train station, Estació Sants, then continues to the Plaça de Catalunya. While not the speediest option, the train is most definitely the cheapest, at €2,50 for a single ticket but even less, if you purchase a combined ticket for later use. However, I don't feel that a savings of a few euros is worth the extra time and tedious walk with luggage.

CITY TRANSPORTATION

Taxi Service

Taxis can be hailed at the official taxi stops and sometimes on the street. Taxis must charge a supplement for each piece of luggage carried in the trunk, plus supplements to go to and from the airport and train stations. Please make sure to check these supplements on the information panel, which legally must be displayed on the side window of your taxi to make sure that you're not overcharged. Ask for a receipt, a "recibo" or "rebut" (in catalán) to keep your taxi driver honest (which the vast majority are). Tips are not required or expected, but most just "round up" to the nearest euro.

Autobus

Special day cards are valid for both bus and metro. The card, **T-1** is for unlimited travel in one day. The **T-10** allows 10 rides on the bus or metro and can be shared by your group. A two-day pass is valid for metro/bus/FGC trains. For more information and current pricing see: www.tmb.net.

Metro

Trains run from 5:00 until midnight Monday - Thursday and 5:00 - 2:00 Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Beware of pickpockets.

Tombus

This is a shopping bus that runs from the top of the Passeig de García and along the Diagonal to the west on Monday - Saturday departing from the Plaça de Catalunya. The first departure on weekdays is at 7:00 am and on Saturday mornings at 9:10. Busses come by every seven minutes. Single tickets cost €1.35 each. A one-day ticket for unlimited trips costs €5.40, handy if you're planning to shop at the El Corte Inglés at the Pedralbes shopping center on the tony upper Diagonal, or if you just want to explore the elegant Zona Alta, or if you are staying at the Hilton or Rey Juan Carlos hotels. Most tourists choose to shop at the huge El Corte Inglés complex at the Plaça Catalunya within easy walking distance of most hotels (www.bcn.es/turisme).

TOP SIGHTS

Architect Antonio Gaudí's Modernist works, the Catalán Art Nouveau

As the NY Times article "Antonio Gaudí's Visions in Brick and Stone" states, "there is no other city that honors and, indeed, so identifies with the work of a single architect. Gaudí's buildings are a magnet for the cultivated and the curious; even sightseers who usually never visit buildings make certain to see at least the great, unfinished church of the Sagrada Familia and the Güell Park and Palace".

La Sagrada Familia

Carrer Mallorca 401, (also known as the Expiatory Temple of the Holy Family) is Gaudí's wildly visionary, unfinished temple begun in 1882 (sagradafamilia.org). It was the dream and obsession of his life but remains unfinished after 125 years, a giant, open construction site where you can climb to the top of one of the spires or take the elevator for €2. According to the most optimistic estimates, it should be finished by the year 2022. Because the roofs now are almost all in place, there are plans to begin to hold mass in the temple next year. Open October - March from 9:00 – 6:00; April - September from 9:00 – 8:00. Closed December 25, January 1 and 6. Admission is 8€ plus €3.50 for a guided visit, or 7€ with a Bus Turístic discount plus €3.50, or €5 with Barcelona Card. For €9 you can purchase a combo ticket for the Sagrada Familia and Casa Museu Gaudí in the Parc Güell.

Palau Güell

Don Eusebio Güell i Bacigalupi, a prominent nobleman and Gaudí's most important patron, commissioned this mansion, located in the Raval quarter at Carrer Nou de la Rambla, 3, right off Las Ramblas, as a residence for himself and his family. Inside you'll find more than 40 different types of columns, from brick to marble. Open Monday to Saturday from 10:00 – 1:00 and from 4:00 – 7:00. Guided tours are given in English for €2,50.

Parc Güell *his playful 50-acre park*

When Eusebio Güell bought the land in 1900, he planned for Gaudí to create an urban community for the wealthy, a village modeled on English garden suburbs. The project never came to fruition, abandoned in 1914. Sixty housing sites were provided, but only two houses were ever built. The Güell family donated it to the city to be used as a public park. Gaudí lived in the park in what was to have been the porter's pavilion from 1906 until his death. This makes for a delightful outing particularly with kids in tow. You can visit his house/museum, **Casa Museu Gaudí**, April - September from 10:00 – 7:45 and from November - March, 10:00 – 5:45. Closed on January 1st, but only open on December 25 until 1:45 pm. The park encompasses fanciful gatehouses, fountains, arched and elevated walkways and viewing terraces and is open daily from 10:00 am till dusk.

Casa Batlló

Passeig de Gracia, 43, and **Casa Milá**, nicknamed La Pedrera, “the stone quarry”, is at Passeig de Gracia, 92. Make sure to visit the top floor apartment and the roof, the **Espai Gaudí** at La Pedrera for an up-close view of the surreal chimneys, Monday - Sunday, 10:00 – 8:00, €6. It also has a very nice gift shop on the ground floor.

Mansana de la Discordia

Note the famous block to the left, as you go north on the Passeig de Gracia. It's called the Mansana de la Discordia, or the “*block of (architectural) discord*”, where you'll see three wildly contrasting works in a row from the three great Modernist architects: Gaudí, Domenech I Montaner and Puig I Cadafalch.

THE BEST OF THE ART MUSEUMS

The Museu Picasso

This gem of a museum is housed in a series of medieval stone mansions on the very atmospheric, mansion-filled Carrer Montcada in La Ribera district, to the east of the Barri Gòtic (www.museupicasso.bcn.es). The collection is strong on his very early works, produced as young as 12! Plus his blue period, a bit of his rose period and the series based on Velázquez's Las Meninas. You can expect long lines, so go early, as it's the city's most popular museum. There is a pleasant Café-restaurant on ground floor with outdoor terrace and an expansive shop selling everything imaginable related to Picasso. Tickets cost €6 for general admission, or combo ticket for general admission and temporary exhibits for €8.50. Admission is free the first Sunday of each month. The museum offers **guided tours in English** (included in your entrance ticket) on Thursdays at 6:00 pm, and Saturdays at noon, and is now included in the €20 Art Ticket. (articketbcn.org). Open Tuesday to Sundays from 10:00 – 8:00. On our last visit we chose to visit on Sunday afternoon at 5:30 and found no line. Closed Monday, January 1, May 1, June 24 and December 25 & 26.

Take the metro to Parallel station and hop on the funicular railway to the vast Montjuïc park or simply take the Bus Turístic. Here you'll find the MNAC, the Miró Foundation and the Anella Olímpica, the ring of sports installations built for the 1992 Olympics. Make your last stop on Montjuïc for your visit to the Fundació Miró, where you can take the funicular back downtown or hop back on the bus. The cable car, Telefèric, going to the Montjuïc castle, is currently closed for repairs.

Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya

This enormous, stunning collection housed in the Palau Nacional consisting of 1,315 works on permanent display includes paintings and sculptures from the medieval period, Germanic, Italian Renaissance and Baroque, including Fra Angelico, Cranach, Titian, Tintoretto, Rubens, Canaletto and the **Colección Thyssen-Bornemisza**, moved from the Monastery of Pedralbes to the MNAC (www.mnac.es) in '05. If you're an art lover, this is not to be missed! The Thyssen collection is one of Europe's most valued private collections, given to the autonomous government by the late Baron Heinrich Thyssen, one of the world's great private collectors who sold a portion of his collection to the

Spanish government to create the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum in Madrid and the smaller collection now housed here. I like to tour the Gothic side first, as it takes longer to enjoy because it's so chock filled with European masters, including the 17th century Spanish greats and two Goyas. On the Romanesque side you'll see the apses of several Romanesque churches from the Catalonian Pyrenees-one of Europe's greatest collections of Romanesque art.

There are also 22 rooms dedicated to the 19th and 20th centuries that have been transported from the Museu d'Art Modern. Admission: €8.50. The joint MNAC and Poble Espanyol ticket costs €12, but MNAC is also one of seven museums included in the €20 Art Ticket (articketbcn.org). Open Tuesday – Saturday, 10:00 – 7:00, Sunday and holidays from 10:00 – 12:30 pm. Closed Mondays, January 1, May 1 and December 25.

Caixa Forum

Located in the Montjuïc area on Avenida Marqués de Comillas near the Placa de Espanya (www.fundacio.lacaixa.es). Check the weekly Guia del Ocio, which you can buy at any newspaper kiosk, in Spanish, but easy to figure out to catch one of their great **free** exhibits. Here I have seen, for nary a penny the “Masterpieces from Paris’ Orangerie: , “Turner and Venice”, the works of Fragonard and an exhibit of Henry Moor sculptures. Open Tuesday - Sunday, 10:00 - 8:00. Closed Mondays.

Palau de Pedralbes

This is a stop on the Bus Turístic, is a 1929 Italianate palace set back off the upper Diagonal, built as a royal residence surrounded by beautiful gardens and a fountain by Gaudí, and houses two museums:

- **Museu de Ceràmica** - Palau Reial de Pedralbes, Avinguda, 686, has one of the most impressive collections of medieval ceramics in Europe, plus contemporary pieces by Miró and Picasso.
- **Museu d'Arts Decoratives** - Features Spanish blown glass, period furniture and pocket watches from the 16th century.

Both museums are open Tuesday – Saturday from 10:00 – 6:00, Sunday and holidays from 10:00 – 3:00. Closed Monday, plus January 1, May 1, June 24, December 25 & 26. Both are free on the 1st Sunday of each month.

Joan Miró Foundation

Also located on Montjuïc, it has wonderful views of the city from its perch in the very middle of Montjuïc Park (www.bcn.fjmiro.es). Was built in the seventies, designed by Miró's friend Josep Lluís Sert (author of the Maeght Foundation in St-Paul-de-Vence) to house works from 1917 to 1978 donated by the artist. Displays include paintings, sculptures (Chillida), drawings, tapestries and graphics, also the works of other leading 20th century artists. It's the largest single collection of Miró's works in the world, and as is the Maeght Foundation,



the building is filled with airiness and light. Also works by Calder, Henry Moore, Duchamp, Leger, and Max Ernst. Audio guides available. There is a bar/restaurant with an outdoor terrace. Admission is €7,50, or €5 with Bus Turístic discount. It's also included in the €20 Art Ticket (articketbcn.org). Open Tuesday – Saturday, 10:00 – 7:00, October - June and 10:00 – 8:00, July - September. Open Tuesdays until 9:30, Sundays and holidays 10:00 - 2:30. Closed Mondays (except for public holidays).

GUIDED TOURS

Do-it-yourself, on/off bus tour of city

Bus Turístic

Hop on - Hop off, do it your way at your pace bus tours! The very easiest, least labor/walking intensive, time-consuming way of seeing all the city attractions in a short amount of time is to use the **Bus Turístic**. The visitor who tries to see all of BCN's attractions his own way in two days by foot/bus/metro wins the "dumb tourist of the year award". Just kidding, but I've tried it and learned the hard way.

BCN's attractions are incredibly spread out; much more so than Madrid's, and the blocks of the Eixample are quite wide, with some sights not easily accessible by metro. For example, to reach the National Museum of Romanesque Art, you could take the metro to the Plaça de Espanya stop and walk, but you'll be walking uphill, climbing for the next 15-20 minutes. Even though there are escalators to take you to the top, the last tier of escalators is difficult to find, and at times you may find it under repair or just non-functioning. So please take the Bus Turístic.



I recommend buying the two-day pass for more leisurely sightseeing, doing the northern (red) circuit on the 1st day and the southern (blue) on the 2nd. The third (green) route from the Port Olympic to the new Forum-Barcelona Diagonal area is of very limited interest to tourists and runs from only April to September. The red and green routes run **daily except** for December 25 and January 1.

However, if you're very pressed for time, the whole tour, north and south (red and green), can be done in a single day. Without alighting from the bus, each route, red and green, can be done in two hours. The blue route takes 40 minutes. There are a total of 44 possible stops along the way. The bus will take you through the Olympic Village area as well, plus a stop in front of the Parque de la Ciudadella, for an optional visit to the zoo. Start your tour at the Plaça Catalunya on the red (northern) route, getting off the bus at

the Francesc Macià - Diagonal stop to switch to the southern blue route. Easy. A one-day adult pass costs €21 and a two consecutive day pass €27. For children 4-12 the one-day pass costs €13, two days for €17. It's free to toddlers three years and younger. ('09 prices) The bus comes by every 10-15 minutes. I have never had to wait long for a bus, even in summer. You may buy your ticket on line in the BCN shop section of www.barcelonaturisme.com.

You'll be given a little book of explanations of the sites and a booklet chock full of discounts for tours, museum entrances, cable car, Tower of Collserola (on Tibidabo) and the Mirador de Colón tower (at the harbor) and "Las Golondrinas" boat trip, not a bad way to spend 40 minutes on a steamy summer's day, etc. There's a very limited commentary in several languages by hostesses on board. Take your guidebook along with you for maximum enjoyment.

NOTE: TAKE THE VERY FIRST BUS; LEAVING THE PLAÇA CATALUNYA IN FRONT OF EL CORTE INGLES PROMPTLY AT 9:00 AM. YOU WON'T REGRET THE EARLY START! BY MID-MORNING, THESE BUSES GET QUITE CROWDED EVEN IN WINTER.

Barcelona Card

The tourist office also promotes the Barcelona Card available for 2 to 5 days for free public city transport, free "Golodrinas" boat tour, free entrance to the Poble Espanyol (an ersatz and now a bit cheesy Spanish village built in 1929) and 13 museums, plus 80 discounts. Adult tickets cost €24 for two days; €29 for three days; €33 for four days and €36 for five ('07 prices), but I don't consider it a particularly good value. I find it just too expensive for my needs, and I never quite get my money's worth. For more information see www.barcelonaturisme.com. You'll receive a 10% discount if you purchase the tickets on-line.

Articket BCN

Another discount card, it gives you free entrance to seven museums for €20 and is valid for six months; however, you must have an interest in visiting all seven for it to be worthwhile. The museums included are: Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (MNAC) which has an extraordinary collection Gothic and Romanesque art, the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), Fundació Antoni Tàpies (if you have interest in this abstract expressionist), Fundació Joan Miró (very worthwhile, stunning setting), Fundació Caixa Catalunya, Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona (so, so) and the Museu Picasso (a don't miss). It can be purchased in the BCN tourist offices and branches of the Caixa Catalunya banks or as the rest, online. See www.articketbcn.org.

City Tourist Office

Offers **Barcelona Walks**, which are guided walking tours of the Gothic Quarter, Picasso's Barcelona, the Modernist architectural route, Marina district and a Gourmet tour, all departing from the Plaça de Catalunya Barcelona Tourist Board office. Participants should be there ten minutes in advance of the scheduled departure time. One can purchase tickets online and receive a **10% discount** at: www.barcelonaturisme.com.

- The **Picasso Tour**, in English, departs Tuesday - Thursday - Saturday at 4:00 and lasts 2 hrs. The price includes an entry ticket to the Picasso Museum, all for €12.
- The **Gothic Tour** in English departs **daily** at 10:00 and lasts two hours, costing €12
- The **Modernisme Tour** in English departs Friday - Saturday only at 4:00 from October - May and departs at 6:00 from June - September, lasts two hours and costs €12
- The **Gourmet tour**, which is a tapas tour with two tastings, departs on Friday - Saturday only at 10:30 and lasts two hours, costing €16. ('09 prices)
- The **Marina tour** includes a ride on a "Las Golondrinas" boat, admission to the Mirador de Colón view point and gives a 20% discount on admission to the Maritime Museum. This tour departs from the information office next to the Mirador de Colón monument at Placa Portal de la Pau. Tours in English are given on Friday - Saturday only and depart at 10 am.

See the routes of all tours and further details on tours conducted in Spanish or catalán in the online shop section of: www.barcelonaturisme.com.

My Favorite Things

Conducts themed walking tours (culinary, cooking, Art Nouveau, the secret life of the Old Town) and is run by two Belgian ladies. Walks take around four hours and have a maximum of 10 participants (www.myft.net).

Dominique Blinder

Recommended by George Semler of Fodor's Barcelona, also gives multilingual tours of the Jewish Quarter on her Jewish Heritage Tours. These tours can be given in English, Hebrew, French, Spanish or Catalán. See www.urbancultours.com

Hi This is Barcelona

Jordan Susselman, a Californian living in Barcelona since 2000, offers private, tailor made tours of the city which might include a tour of the Gothic Quarter, of the trendy El Born district, of Moderniste architecture, of the city's hidden corners, a bicycle tour or tapas tour. See them all at: www.hithisisbarcelona.com

Segway Tours

Two hours with a guide between 10:00 and 5:00, cost €60 pp. Meeting point is Plaça Sant Jaume in Gothic Quarter. Not a bad way to see the harbor area, which is quite spread out (www.barcelonasegwayglides.com).

Bcn SkyTour helicopters

Offers daily chopper tours over the city, the first such venture in Spain (cathelicopters.com). The quick **10-minute** ride costs a pricey €80/person, or €8 per minute/person! The heliport is located in the port area, next to the cruise ship terminal, just under the raising bridge. Each helicopter can carry up to four passengers.

Un Cotxe Menys

Offers a 3-hour bike tour around the old city; the fishermen's quarter of Barceloneta, up to the Sagrada Familia and around the Port Olímpic (www.bicicletabarcelona.com). These tours start daily at 11:00 year round with an additional tour at 4:30 Friday - Monday from April to mid-September. Their meeting point is located outside the tourist office on Placa de Sant Jaume, Town Hall Square.

“Trixi”

Or rent a “Trixi”, an electric rickshaw-like device that looks like a love-bug (trixi.info). You can find them at the Columbus monument at the bottom of the Ramblas or around the Cathedral. Have the driver take you around the Old City or zoom around the Port Vell or out to the beaches. They rent for €6 for 15 minutes, €10 for ½ hour and €18 for a full hour. I've seen these devices in San Sebastián, and they'll be coming soon to Madrid.

Food & Wine and tapas tours

Saboroso

For gourmet wine/tapas tours of the city, contact British expatriates Kirsten Foster and Tara Stevens at Saboroso (www.saboroso.com). A typical short tour will include three wine/tapas bars as well as a wine and cheese shop. They also offer wine tours to the Penedés and an overnight tour to the Priorat wine region, staying at the Catacurian cooking school (www.catacurian.com). The Saboroso duo contributes regularly to the Spain/Portugal forum of eGullet (www.egullet.com), and they have been featured in Food & Wine and the New York Times. They also offer cooking classes.

Cooking Classes

The company, **Cook & Taste**, offers visitors half day cooking classes lasting 3.5 hours with an optional pre-class guided tour of the Boquería market. The twice daily classes begin at 11 am and 5 pm and are given every day. The cost, including ingredients, meal with wine and taxes is €60, and the optional market tour, an additional €12. The School is conveniently located on the Ramblas. These cooking classes are offered for individuals or for groups and special events can be arranged (www.cookandtaste.com).

SELF-GUIDED TOURS

A walk through the Barri Gòtic

For a through and informative tour of the Barri Gòtic, take the guided tour offered by the city tourist office or do a self-guided tour with the **Insight Guide Barcelona** or with a copy of George Semler's **Barcelona Walks** in hand.

La Seu

Barcelona's primarily Gothic Cathedral is open for worship from 8:00 - 12:45 pm and 5:00 - 7:30, Monday through Friday and Saturdays from 8:00 - 12:45 pm and again from 5:00 - 6:00. It is only open on Sundays from 8:00 - 9:00 in the morning and 5:00 - 6:00 in the afternoon (catedralbcn.org). Worshipers and ticket holders of the *visita especial* have different schedules so as not to bother one another. Take the elevator to the roof (€2) for a bird's eye view of the entire Gothic Quarter. The visit to the cloister, where 13 geese are kept (the number symbolizing the age at which the co-patron Saint Eulalia died), is free.

You can watch the locals form circles and dance the "sardana", the Catalán national dance prohibited during the Franco regime, and a display of moving regional pride. Barcelonans come to the cathedral square to dance the sardana, accompanied by musicians, at noon on Sundays, 6:30 pm on Saturdays and 7:00 pm on Wednesdays. It's an experience you won't want to miss.

Generalita

Walk from the cathedral square to the Plaça Saint Jaume, where the Generalitat, the Parliament of Catalunya, seat of the autonomous government, and the **Ajuntament**, the city hall, are located. You can visit the Baroque salons of the city hall on weekends and public holidays.

A (vigilant) "paseo" down Las Ramblas

Take a stroll down the teeming, always lively and often outrageous, pickpocket-filled Las Ramblas, from north to south, from the Plaça de Catalunya to the statue of Columbus at the port. You'll see human statues, vendors selling canaries, flower merchants, the largest newspaper and tacky souvenir kiosks in the world, lottery ticket booths, shoe shine boys, card games (**DON'T PARTICIPATE!**), jugglers, etc.

Boquería Food Market

On the right side of the Ramblas heading south, you'll find the glorious turn-of-the-century Boquería food market, officially called the **Mercat de Sant Josep** (www.boqueria.info). It opens at 6:00 am daily. It is a true feast for the senses. Some 330 purveyors have permanent stalls, and some stalls are legendary, such as **Petràs** for great wild mushrooms in 20 varieties, **Pons** for beautiful fruits and vegetables and **La Masía**, stand #970, that sells sausages from the village of Vic.

As you enter the market, immediately to your right you'll see a little "hole in the wall" lunch counter with a sign above, **Pinotxo**, with a drawing of Pinocchio. You can't miss it given all the cartoons and press articles written about it, prominently displayed all

around. This is a local legend, Juanito Bayan's famous luncheonette, known to "foodies" all over the world, as Juanito is known as the market's most colorful (and most written about) character. This short order chef, now in his seventies, who has been behind the counter for over 50 years, has been acclaimed in virtually all the world's gourmet and travel magazines, most recently in the May '07 Bon Appétit. He's the talkative gentleman with the spiked gray hair, bow tie and vest. George Semler, author of Fodors Barcelona calls him "the ambassador-to-the-world of Spanish gastronomy". Grab a seat, there are only 15 bar stools at the counter (they have added 15 more stools at five high tables to the side to catch the overflow - not as much fun). Observe your seatmates and order what the locals are having. Juan or his nephews, Jordi and Albert, will take your order but may not write anything down. And you won't see a menu.



Best time to show up is between 10:00 and noon. For breakfast they serve the very best "xixos" (a type of sugar-covered doughnut) in town. The food couldn't be fresher, and it'll be 3 deep at the bar at lunchtime, all eagerly waiting these famous little treats. Acclaimed chefs and famous personalities from around the world, including Barcelona's own Ferran Adrià of El Bulli (who calls Pinotxo a "culinary temple"), and fashion designer Jean Paul Gaultier, frequent this little counter. Juanito Bayan's recipe for scrambled eggs with shrimp was published in the 100 best of Saveur magazine in a short piece "The Best Food from the Smallest Kitchen in the Best Market in Europe". And his picture has graced the NY Times. In '04 a cookbook and history of Juan and his lunch counter, with prologue written by Adrià, -"Pinocho, la vida y la cocina en la Boquería de Barcelona", was published. We purchased it at the cookbook stand at the very back of the market. Pinotxo closes at 4:00 pm, and is closed Sundays and holidays.

The “new” guy in the market, who may just be Juan Bayen’s heir apparent, **Quim**, also very much warrants a visit. And to the average tourist, it may impress even more, as the counter is tidier, well kept, doesn’t look so “hole in the wall”, is prettily decorated with fresh flowers, giving it a more polished look. Coffee is served here in cups rather than glasses, the counter sports wooden high chairs with backs rather than metal stools, and it has a blackboard menu for ease of ordering. The paper placemats relate the history of this counter. You can find it in the middle of the market towards the back. Quim Muñoz, the chef, will be the one cooking, wearing the earring.

On a recent visit we had our coffee and *xixos* at Pinotxo then moved to Quim for our *almuerzo*, our late-morning snack taken around noon. We had delicious tortillas served with *pa amb tomaquet* (tomato bread). The gentlemen next to us were devouring *chipirones* (squid). At Quim other specialties are *huevos fritos con chipirones* (fried eggs with squid) for €14.50 and *setas con salteadas con foie* (wild mushrooms sautéed with foie) that looked fabulous. This little counter has been included in this year’s Food & Wine’s annual “The Go List”, its definitive guide to the 335 most outstanding restaurants in 40 cities around the world! It’s open from 6:00 until 5:00. Closed Sundays.

Yet another rather fancy looking lunch counter, **Universal** in the middle of the market gets praise from local gastronomes. Try all three.

Gran Teatre del Liceu

A bit further below on the Ramblas, also on the right side going south, is the Gran Teatre del Liceu opera house built in 1847 (liceubarcelona.com). It was destroyed by fire in 1861 and again in 1994 before being refurbished to perfection, doubled in size and reopened a few years ago. Take a guided tour of this lovely, neoclassical building with Baroque décor. There are guided 1 hour 10 minutes visits daily at 10 a.m. for €8.50. By prior reservation you can also take a more complete, 1 ½ hr. tour that includes the stage, rehearsal, wardrobe and dressing rooms. It departs daily at 9:30 and tickets cost €10.

Or better yet, see a live performance. The box seats have wonderful antechambers. In olden days each family decorated its antechamber in an individual style. The stage takes up 70% of the hall. Up in the “nosebleed” section there were once seats for the “clac”, a group of university students who could watch the performances for just a few pesetas, but in exchange for their ticket they had the obligation to applaud furiously at the end. There’s also a beautiful gilded “Hall of Mirrors” where the elite met to socialize between acts. The theater now houses 2,300 spectators. The opera and concert tickets sell out far in advance, but last-minute return tickets are put on sale the day of the performance at 2:00 pm. There are a few totally blind seats, no view, that go for €8,50. The most expensive can cost up to €175 for the opening night of a popular opera. The sales ladies are very nice to deal with, very patient and helpful, and the Liceu’s web site far outshines that of the Teatro Real opera house in Madrid.

Palau de la Música Catalana

Off the Via Laietana on Santa Francesc de Paula, 2, is a lavishly decorated Art Nouveau music palace built in 1908 to house the Orfeo Catalan choir, the work of a Gaudi contemporary, equally famous Modernista architect, Domenech I Montaner of the

Catalonian “Renaixença”. It’s been declared a World Heritage Site. The delightful guided tours, in several different languages, leave every half hour and last about 50 minutes, including a 20-minute video. Only 55 people are allowed in at a time, and tours sell out fast. The tickets are sold up to a week in advance at the new box office behind the Petit Palau annex.



A screen indicates when tours are given in each language, and how many tickets are left for each tour. On my last visit to the Palau, Monday, January 14th there was an English tour a 1:00 pm, again at 2:00 with the last one at 3:00. If you are a music lover or architecture buff, this will be one of the highlights of your visit to Barcelona.

The Palau is a bit smaller than the Liceu, holding only 2,000 spectators. The guide will explain to you how they magically hide the first 3 - 5 rows of seats. The most recent expansion with subterranean concert hall, the Petit Palau, has now been completed and the organ, which hadn’t been played in 20 years, has been restored and inaugurated. The Palau is also the venue for concerts by international pop and jazz artists such as Carlos Nuñez, Maceo Parker, Gilberto Gil, just a few who have performed recently. Check the performance schedule at: www.palaumusica.org.

El Born

While in the Barri Gòtic, continue your explorations to the young, hip, trendy, happening (and tourist mobbed), constantly gentrifying, Soho or Notting Hill type **El Born** (alternatively spelled Borne) district. Or soak up the atmosphere of this lively neighborhood after your visit to the Picasso Museum.

Santa María del Mar Basilica

Be sure to visit the pretty **Santa María del Mar** basilica on the Placa Santa María. It’s one of the best examples of elegant Catalan Gothic style, from the 14th century, with beautiful stained glass. Open daily from 9:00 - 1:30 and 4:30 – 8:00. Open Sunday from 10:00 - 1:30 and from 4:30 – 8:00. If you hit the basilica during closing hours, just go for tapas at many of the trendy bars with spill over terraces in this area, or have a great seafood lunch at the counter of lively Cal Pep, just down Carrer Vidriera to the tiny Plaça les Olles (but arrive at 1:00 when doors open). You’ll also find many trendy, too-cool-for-school shops here in El Born, such as Custo Barcelona, Bubó and Xocoa chocolates and Origen99.9%. Or in the AM visit the newly opened Mercat de Santa Caterina (see below).

Parc de la Ciudadella

The major attraction here is the zoo, the Parc Zoològic Acuarama (zoobarcelona.com). Sadly, the zoo’s most famous inhabitant, the albino gorilla, “Copito de Nieve” has now

passed on after a very long life as the zoo's star attraction. But there is a house of horrors, the Hotel Krueger. Open daily from 10:00 - 7:30, but only until 5:00 in winter.

OPTIONAL TOURS

Contemporary Catalán artists

Museu d'Art Contemporani

In the slowly gentrifying but still bohemian, multiethnic Raval section, just west of the Ramblas, you'll find the striking, Richard Meier designed, glass structure, the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA). But unless you're familiar with contemporary Catalán artists such as Basquiat, Boltanski, Muntadas or the Basques Oteiza and Chillida, this may be skip-able. Open Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, 11:00 - 7:30, Saturday 10:00 - 8:00, Sundays and holidays, 10:00 - 3:00. Admission is €5,11.

For the soccer fan

Campo Nou Stadium

Visit the stadium, the temple of Barça (fcbarcelona.com), the largest soccer stadium in Europe. You can stop for a visit on the Bus Turistic route. Open Monday - Friday, 9:30 - 1:30 and 4:30 - 7:30. The full guided tour, including a visit to the museum, costs €11 for adults or €8.80 for children 12 and under. Buy your ticket at the ticket booths and enter through gates 7 or 8. Museum is open Monday - Saturday, 10:30 - 6:30, Sundays from 10:00 - 2:00 pm.

Organized Bus Tours

- **Autocares Julia** - Offers packaged excursions to Figuers/Dalí Museum on Tuesdays and Thursdays in the summer, departing at 9:00 and returning at 19:30 (7:30 pm), but the cost is a whopping €92.20 per person (www.juliatravel.com). They also offer full-day tours to the Lloret-Tossa area of the Costa Brava (but not the prettiest section) on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays during the summer, departing at 8:30, returning at 4:30 at a cost of €79. There's also a half-day visit to Montserrat departing daily at 9:30 from their terminal on Ronda Universitat, 5, returning at 2:30. Pick up a brochure at your hotel.
- **Catalunya Bus Turístic** - But much better still, because of the popularity of the city Bus Turístic, two daytrip excursions are now offered by an offshoot of this same company from April 1st - October 31st. The Catalunya Bus Turístic runs a trip to Figueres and Girona, which includes entrance to the Dalí Museum and city discounts, for €60. It departs from the Plaça de Catalunya daily at 8:30, returning at 8:00, **except Mondays**. They also run a Montserrat/Cordorníu/Sitges tour which takes you to the Torres winery in the Penedés, then onto the Monastery of Montserrat by cogwheel railway, and finally to the beaches of Sitges. The cost is €60. The tour departs daily at 9:00, returning at 8:30 in the

evening. Both tours depart from the Plaça de Catalunya. You can reserve your tickets on line at: www.barcelona-on-line.es.

AREAS TO AVOID

Avoid the very seedy *lower* **El Raval quarter** behind the lower Ramblas, particularly at night. The upper Ravel has become a trendy, funky, boho area, slowly gentrifying since the opening of the Casa Camper Hotel-think Manhattan's East Village, but still watch your pockets. **Escudellers** street, just off of and east of the Ramblas, again, especially at night, as well as the nearby **Placa George Orwell** that attracts a druggy crowd. The **Plaça Reial** attracts vagrants and pickpockets.

Watch your belongings *at all times* when strolling down the **Ramblas**, or in the warren of dark and narrow streets of the Old Quarter, **Ciutat Vella**. In fact, leave all your valuables in hotel safe; just carry a copy of your passport and essential credit cards in a neck pouch. Beware of Gypsies, don't accept flowers, become involved in any card or dice games, ignore those who spill something on your clothing, or point to a stain and offer to clean it for you. While doing so, they'll be picking your pocket!

A new city law to combat anti-social behavior has introduced fines for those who make "improper use" of public space, tourists or residents. New fines for "indecent public behavior" (pick up a brochure in Tourist Office) Badly behaving tourists can be fined for using soap in the public showers at the beach, for the misuse of street furniture, sleeping on park benches, roller skating, street gambling, public urination, public consumption of alcohol, etc. Fines for serious to very serious infractions range from €750 - €3,000, with a discount of as much as 75% for paying fine in cash!

SOME OF MY FAVORITES DAY TRIPS

See www.catalunyaturisme.com for detailed info on the myriad possibilities.

Montserrat

The “Serrated Mountain”, is in the spiritual heart of Catalunya. Sitting atop a massif of limestone rising high above deep gorges, the monastery is perched on a dramatic cliff and houses the Black Virgin, venerated by pilgrims in the thousands. The boys’ choir, the Escolania, one of the oldest in Europe, sings daily from Monday - Friday in the basilica of the Benedictine Monastery at 1:00 pm, and at noon and 6:45 on Sundays, from September through June. But be sure to check the current performance calendar at: escolania.cat.

This 50-km, trip, northwest of Barcelona, can be accomplished by public transportation, or by organized tour bus. **Alas** offers a morning tour for €39. **Julia Tour Company** also runs busses from the Estació de Autobuses right in front of Sants train station at 9:00 am (8:00 in July and August) and returns at 5:00. The round trip fare is €8,30. Reserve at your hotel desk or the online shop section of www.barcelonaturisme.com.

If you wish to go on your own you can take the train, the FGC, leaving from Metro Espanya every hour from 8:36 - 5:36. Buy a “Trans Montserrat” ticket, which includes the metro to Plaça Espanya, the train to Montserrat-Aeri, cable car up to the top, Sant Joan Funicular and Santa Cova Funicular. You can pick up this ticket for €18,63 at any FGC station in the city, or better still, at the FGC shop in El Triangle, the huge shopping center to the west at Plaça Catalunya. You’ll get off the FGC cogwheel train at Aeri de Montserrat where you’ll catch the heart-stopping Aeri cable car up to the top of the mountain. The cable car leaves every 15 minutes. Download the pdf files on schedules and fares in English at: www.cremallerademontserrat.com.

Sitges

A colorful, sophisticated, hip, very gay, and often wild (especially during Carnival) beach town south of Barcelona is noted for it’s with wide, expansive beaches and major works of Modernist architects (www.sitgestour.com). It makes an easy day trip for fun in the sun. The narrow old quarter is filled with lively tapas bars, and the beaches are much better here than in the city. For gourmands, there is also the well-regarded Restaurante **Vinitast**, whose chef is Angel Palacios, formerly of La Broche in Miami and a prodigy of Ferran Adrià, was recently featured in Gourmet. This gourmet haven is located at Port d’Aiguadolc, Moll de la Ribera. Sitges is easy to reach by the “Cercanías” (commuter) train from Passeig de Gracia, or Sants stations. Trains leave every 15 to 20 minutes starting at 5:25 in the morning and takes 30 to 40 minutes.

The last train to BCN departs at 10:25 in the evening, but you can check the current schedule at renfe.es for any changes. Click on A-Z Nuestros Productos, then Cercanías, then choose Barcelona. From the drop down menu choose Barcelona Plaça Catalunya as departure and Sitges as destination.

The Penedés Wine Country

Guided visits to the wine regions of the **Penedés** and the **Priorat** are available as day trips or with overnight through **Saboroso** (www.saboroso.com), the gourmet tour company.

- **Freixenet** - The **cava bodegas**, which produce Spain's "bubbly", at **Sant Sadurni d'Anoia**, are easily reached by train and make a nice half-day outing. Catch the RENFE train from Plaça de Catalunya, or Sants station. The trains depart hourly from 6:00 to 10:00 in the morning. The trip takes 45 minutes. As you exit the train station, the Freixenet distilleries will be right across the highway. Free 1-½ hr. tours are currently given on Monday - Thursday at 11:00, noon, 1:00, 4:00 and 5:00, and on Fridays at 10:00 and 11:30, noon and 1:00. Open weekends at 10:00 and 1:00. Before you go be sure to check the calendar of visits and reserve a space online at: www.freixenet.es.
- **Codorniu** - This is the most impressive bodega, housed in a beautiful Modernista building designed by Puig I. Cadafalch, and declared a national monument. It has a cava museum, but you'd need to either drive, or take a taxi. Here again, you will be taken around portions of the 26 km long underground cellars by train-the largest underground cellars in the world. The winery is open for visits Monday – Friday from 9:00 – 5:00 and on Saturday, Sunday and holidays from 9:00 – 1:00 only. Have your hotel call 938 913 342 to reserve space on a tour and verify opening hours. Or before you go, try their online reservations system, or email: reservas@codorniu.es
- **Raventós i Blanc** - This is another cava producer located on the Plaça del Roure. Open Monday - Thursday from 8:00 - noon and 3:00 – 6:00. Must call ahead for visits in English. Tel: 938 183 262. After our tours, we enjoy lunch in the center of the village at **Cal Blay** (www.calblay.com), on Josep Rivera, 7. It opens daily for lunch only from 1:00 - 3:30. On Monday - Friday they serve an attractive menú del día for only €12. The owners have opened a gourmet delicatessen down the street at number 27. An outdoor market comes to town every Thursday and Saturday.

Girona

This is a captivating and hip city with a dark, interesting, medieval Jewish quarter, the Call, considered one of the best preserved in all of Spain, a lively Ramblas, an imposing Gothic cathedral with enormous 23-meter wide nave, a Jewish History Museum, medieval Arab Baths, and all around great atmosphere. The cathedral museum houses a stunning 12th century tapestry, Tapis de la Creació. I highly recommend a day trip to Girona! (www.ajuntament.gi/turisme) Your first stop should be the excellent tourist office on the Rambla de la Libertat 1. The ladies will give you a map and prepare a nice touring route for you. They're very helpful. You can reach Girona by train in 1 to



1-1/2 hours from Sants station, depending on the type of train. See the schedule at www.renfe.es. If you'd like to spend the night, there's the new and modern Hotel Ciutat de Gerona (www.hotel-ciutatdegirona.com), or in the medieval quarter, the Hotel Historic, which is actually a small group of architecturally charming apartments (historic.go.to).

And if you do spend the night, please consider a splurge dinner at one of Catalunya's finest restaurants, the 2-star Michelin **Celler de Can Roca** (cellercanroca.com), 2-km west of the city (take a taxi). With a 9/10 rating from *The Best of Spanish Gastronomy*, 9.5/10 in *Gourmetour* and *3 Campsa suns*, the Roca brothers will present you a superb dining experience that you will long remember. It is closed on Sunday and Monday, July 1 – 15 and Christmas.

Tarragona

Founded by the Romans as Tarraco, the capital of its Western Mediterranean empire and birthplace of Pontius Pilate, has a famed collection of well-preserved Roman ruins, including amphitheater and necropolis and an archeological museum. One hour away by train (www.renfe.es). Most sites can be visited with a combined ticket, but are closed on Mondays.

Figueres

Head to the Alt Empordà and the over-the-top **Teatre-Museu Dalí** if you're an avid Dalí/Surrealism fan (www.salvador-dali.org). Figueres is Dalí's birthplace and the museum he created as a monument to himself and his burial site. Go and be amused. It's Dalí at his most outrageous, most flamboyant. Remember that his best and most important works cannot be found here. For those, you'll have to visit the **Dalí Museum** in St. Petersburg, Florida or the **Museo Centro Reina Sofía** in Madrid, among others. But this is one of the most visited museums in all of Spain.

Dining in Figueres

The town of Figueres itself is a humdrum, rather dull market town but with one terrific restaurant in the **Hotel Empordà**



(www.hotelemporda.com) the cradle of new Catalan cuisine, impeccably run by the owner, Jaime Subirós, who comes out to greet each table. It's a pleasant but fairly non-descript dining room in what appears to be a simple roadside motel (it's on the old highway to France, in the north side of town on the right side, well past the Dalí museum, so take a taxi), but it's considered one of Catalonia's best, serving classic Catalán dishes for fairly reasonable prices. It

will be filled with French, a very good sign. His currant cream ice cream recipe was published in *Saveur* magazine.

The breadbasket is irresistible, and the cheese cart is legendary-half French, half Spanish! The menú del día at €34 (with two desserts!) is a very good value, considering that the restaurant receives a consistent 8.5/10 rating from Gourmetour. But most diners share an appetizer (or forgo it), order a main course (portions are quite generous) and share either the dessert or cheese carts (cheese cart priced at €12). Their delicious homemade sorbets are priced at €7.50. Diners are presented with a water menu of at least 35 choices (we chose a Viladrau for €2.20). The wine list is enormous, with 200 labels from all Spanish D.O.s (including Mallorca) and even some from California, but it lists local wines that are quite affordable, such as the Floresta white for €8 or the Serrasague for €12. Because portions are so copious, dining a leisurely affair and the Empordà cuisine is so hearty, I would only choose to lunch here if you are staying nearby, or have finished your sightseeing for the day. Dress is casual.

If you want to lunch downtown, there is the family owned **Hotel Durán**, whose restaurant serves classic Empordà dishes in a typical regional setting (but no outdoor terrace) and has been doing so since 1855. It's right off the Rambla on Lasauca, 5 (www.hotelduran.com). Figueres by train is a trip of slightly under two hours. See the schedule at www.renfe.es.

MY BARCELONA DINING GUIDE

Dishes typical of Catalunya, that one doesn't usually find in the rest of Spain, include the ubiquitous **pa amb tomàquet** (like bruschetta; a long slice of bread rubbed with tomato, garlic and olive oil-delicious!) **butifarra blanc o negre** (white or blood sausage), **mongetes amb butifarra** (white beans and sausage), **escalivada** (a dish of baked red peppers, eggplant and onions, always served cool), **espardeneyes** (sea cucumbers-very expensive), **civet** (a game stew braised in red wine), **pilota** (a giant meatball), **fideuà** (a paella made with noodles), **oca amb naps** (goose with turnips), **esqueixada** (shredded salt cold salad), **xató** (a cold salad with tuna, anchovies and olives on a bed of escarole topped with Romesco sauce) **suquet** (a fish and potato soup), **sarsuela** (like a bouillabaisse), **samfaina** (think of ratatouille) and **canalons** (the Barcelona version of cannelloni). For dessert try the **crema catalana** (carmel custard) and **mel i mató**, (made of fresh cheese with honey).

In many of the city's top, small, chef-owned restaurants, you will be presented with a menu in Catalán, the official language of Catalunya, with no translations. You will need to ask for an English menu, or have your server translate for you. **Time Out Barcelona** has a small but helpful menu glossary.

Before ordering, you'll be asked if you would like an "aperitivo", which means a pre-dinner drink. For Barcelona natives, a glass of "cava" (their bubbly) is customary, or for non residents, perhaps a glass of beer (the Mortiz label from Barcelona is delicious-be sure to give it a try!) A glass of cava can cost from €2.50 (at the market) to €7 at the top rated gourmet shrines.

It's also customary now in Barcelona (and becoming so in Madrid) for restaurants to add to your bill a cover charge (in Spanish a "cubierto") or service charge of from 1.50€ - 4€ for the bread basket and any hors d'oeuvres placed in front of you before your first course. So don't be surprised if you see this charge at the top of your bill-it may say "pa" (bread) or "servei de pa" (bread service) or "pa i diversos", sometimes called "pa i entreteniments" (bread & appetizers). In the top dining spots listed below, my bill has almost always included this charge.

I've designated my recommended restaurants into the following categories with an estimated cost per person, including a glass of wine:

Tipping is not expected, as service is included in the bill but at the more elegant restaurants, diners sometimes leave an extra 5 per cent, but never more.

Cheap: €15 - €20

Inexpensive: €20 - €30

Moderate: €35 - €45

Expensive: €50 - €70

Very expensive-special occasion

splurge: €80 - €100 +

Sunday dining

El Born area eateries are wide open and packed to the rafters. In **Barceloneta**, the fishermen's quarter, seafood restaurants are open and bustling for lunch, closing between

3:30 and 4:00 pm. On the seaside promenade of the Port Olímpic, **Agua**, of the Tragaluz group, serves from 1:30 – 5:00 pm and again from 8:30 - midnight.

In the Eixample, you'll find that the touristy tapas bars on the Passeig de Gràcia never close, but light years better are the reliable **El Trobador**, **La Tramoia** and **Tenorio** brasseries, which are always good bets. For informal tapas dining off the Passeig de Gràcia in the Left Eixample, head for **Cerveseria Catalana**, **Taller de Tapas**, **Ciutat Contal** or **Celler de Tapas** (see the Tapas Hopping in the Eixample section) for better fare more removed from the tourist crowds.

The following attractive and upscale restaurants stay open for dinner on Sundays: **La Camarga** & sister **La Provenza** plus **L'Olivé** and cousin **Paco Meralgo** and **Tragaluz** plus another member of the group, **El Principal**.

My Favorite Dining Spots

TOP GOURMET TEMPLES

I have yet to try all four of these Michelin-starred restaurants, which are getting tons of favorable press in food and wine magazines. They're all **quite expensive**.

Drolma

Friends love this elegant restaurant in the Majestic Hotel (www.hotelmajestic.es), whose chef, Fermi Puig is one of the most gifted in Catalunya and whose clientele includes the Royal Family. Restaurant critic Rafael García Santos rates Puig's cuisine an 8/10. The look is that of an exclusive, classic club with a narrow room of well-spaced tables overlooking the Passeig de Gràcia, wood paneling, beautiful floral arrangements, Baccarat crystal and Versace dinnerware. This is more of a "dress up" place for that special occasion celebration, or just for a wonderful, albeit very pricey, gourmet experience with generous use of truffles and caviar in the luxurious dishes. Count on €120 + per person. Drolma offers a market menu for €90 and a blowout degustation menu for €135. Its cheese cart is considered the best in the city. The maitre'd, named maitre of the year by Gourmetour, gives Drolma a rating of 8.75/10. It has received one Michelin star and 3 suns (soles), from the reliable Campsa '07 guide. Open for lunch at 1:00 and dinner at 8:00. Closed Sunday, December 25 and January 1.

Àbac

Located in the El Born district in the Park Hotel on Carrer Rec 79, is very Asian-minimalist in design, understated, opposed to Drolma's opulence, with huge windows on one side overlooking the street, orange abstract prints on the beige walls, fruitwood floors and very well-spaced tables with high back chairs upholstered in soft orange (www.restaurantabac.com). Plus it has a highly professional wait staff serving the fusion cuisine of Xavier Pellicer (whose parents are Catalán and French) who trained at the 3 Michelin star Racó de Can Fabes. They serve a tasting menu for €84. Pellicer has received a Michelin star, an 8/10 rating from Spain's premier gourmet critic, Rafael García Santos, and 2 "suns" from the Campsa guide. Closed Sunday, Monday for lunch, January 6 - 13 and three weeks in August. Open for lunch at 1:30 and dinner at 8:30.

Note Bene: In the spring of '07 it is scheduled to move from its El Born location to one on the Avenida de Tibidabo 7, with the addition of 16 suites, so expect prices to rise accordingly.

Hofmann

In the El Born district, next to the Santa María del Mar Basilica on Carrer Argenteria, also gets rave reviews (hofmann-bcn.com). The flower filled dining room is upstairs, and there's an outdoor Andalusian style patio for summer dining. This is the most moderately priced of all the Barcelona Michelin starred spots, with a fixed price lunch menu for only €32 and an average price of €60 per person in the evening. It also receives 1 sun in the Campsa guide. You can expect great service and fantastic desserts, such as the warm chocolate cake and tarte tatin with caramel. Chef Mey Hofmann also runs a cooking school where many of the city's top chefs have learned their trade. Opens for lunch at 1:30, dinner at 9:00. Closed Saturday and Sunday, August, Christmas and Holy Week.

Gaig

Owned by long time famed Barcelona chef Carlos Gaig (www.restaurantgaig.com) and in the same family since 1869 has now moved from the suburbs of Horta to new quarters in the Eixample at Aragó, 214, in the Hotel Cram. He was awarded a national gastronomic prize in 2000. Receives an 8/10 in Best of Spanish Gastronomy. This is one of the city's very finest, also having received the 2 "sun" designation from the Campsa guide and 1 Michelin star. It offers a degustación menu for €74. Closed Sunday and Monday lunch, 21 days in August, Holy Week and Xmas.

Lasarte

Owned by 3 Michelin star Basque chef Martín Berasategui, whose eponymous restaurant is located in the San Sebastián suburb of Lasarte, opened in '06, in the Condes de Barcelona Hotel, with separate entrance on Mallorca, 259 (www.restaurantlasarte.com). The chef de cuisine, Àlex Garès, has earned one Michelin star in the '07 guide. He serves a tasting menu for 90€. Count on spending €21 - €47 for starters, €29 - €42 for main courses and all desserts are priced at 14€. One must reserve far in advance, as the restaurant seats only 35 diners. The kitchen also supervises the less pricey and casual spin-off **Loidi** restaurant in the Condes de Barcelona Center Hotel across the street, which serves menus for €33. Lasarte has been included in Food & Wine's '07 "The Go" list of the most outstanding restaurants in 40 cities around the world. Closed Saturday, Sunday, holidays and August 7 - September 11.

Caelis

The former Diana, located in the reading rooms of the Hotel Palace (formerly the Ritz) has a young French chef, Romain Fornell, who has been making headlines and earned one Michelin star in '07 and one Campsa sun (www.caelis.com). Here you can sample his creativity for less at lunch, choosing the daily market driven menu for €45, which includes a "snack", choice of two starters, choice of two main courses, a dessert from the menu or selection of three artisans cheeses and "gourmandise" (homemade chocolates) to accompany your coffee. Or go at night for the €75 degustation menu. Delicious home

made breads. The dining room is beautiful, decorated with chandeliers and a spectacular fireplace, and the service highly professional. Closed Saturday lunch, Sunday and Monday, holidays and August.

CUTTING EDGE - HIGHLY CREATIVE “push the envelope” new wave “molecular” - Think lots of foam cuisine El Bulli style

Alkímia

Carrer Indústria, 79, between Sicília and Sardenya in the Right Eixample, near the Sagrada Família, is considered one of the very best avant-garde places in town among foodies, and rates an 8/10 in the Best of Spanish Gastronomy guide plus has one Michelin star and 2 Campsa suns. Chef Jorge Vilà is getting rave reviews for the best creative cuisine in the city. His wife, Sònia Profitós runs the dining room. It's small and charming, with a white-on-white, minimalist style. Solid reviews on egullet.com. Try the rice with prawns and saffron. It serves a degustación menu of 10 small courses for €60. Closed Saturday lunch and Sunday, plus three weeks in August.

Cinc Sentits

Also located in the Eixample at Aribau, 58, it's the new “buzz” restaurant (www.cincsentits.com/) on www.egullet.org. It was opened in '04 by a Canadian-Catalan chef, Jordi Artal, who relocated from California and is making waves on the BCN culinary scene. Cookbook author and food writer Anya von Bremzen has praised it in Food and Wine. The wait staff speaks very good English, and English-speaking diners feel very comfortable here. Closed Sunday and Monday evenings and holidays.

See the review at: www.cellartours.com/monthly-newsletters/nov-2004/wine-tours-newsletter.html#_7.

Hisop

Passatge Marimon, 9, features two young chefs, Guillem Pla and Oriol Ivern, who serve highly imaginative dishes in a tiny space with red and black glossy interior and offer two tasting menus for €48. Receives a 7/10 rating from The Best of Spanish Gastronomy. It's highly praised on eGullet. They offer a tasting menu for a reasonable €43. It's located on a tiny street in the Zona Alta off the upper Diagonal (right side), past Muntaner, before reaching Plaça Francesc Macia. Open for lunch at 1:30 and for dinner at 9:00. Closed Saturday lunch and Sunday, in addition to August 13 - 25. See the menu, wine list and reserve at: www.hisop.com.

Saüc

Passatge Lluís Pellicer, 12, in the Eixample, just off the upper Diagonal, offers contemporary Catalán cuisine by a husband and wife team. Xavier Franco and Anna Doñate trained at Àbac and the Racó de Can Fabes. It receives a 7 from *The Best of Spanish Gastronomy* and one Campsa sun. It serves two tasting menus for €43 and €56 (appetizer, 5 courses, cheese tray and 2 desserts), but the most economical way to try this one is to go for lunch for their great value €20 menú del día, including bread, starter, main course, coffee, homemade petits fours and VAT with six dishes from which to choose in each course. Food & Wine, in its May '07 issue, chose to include Saüc in its

“The Go” list of the most outstanding restaurants in 40 cities around the world (www.saucrestaurant.com). Closes Sunday and Monday evening holidays, 2nd week of January and three weeks in August.

Colibrí (*the Hummingbird*)

Can be found at Casanova, 212, in the Left Eixample. The owners, another husband/wife team, hail from the venerable Ca l'Isidre. Chef César Pastor produces his market driven cuisine with ingredients fresh each day from La Boquería market. His dessert of chocolate *mil cuít*, with ice cream and bitter almond cream, is one of the best around. Restaurant critic Rafael García Santos gives it a 7.5/10 rating and Gourmetour a 7/10. It's also highly recommended by the director of the Hotel Inglaterra. Open for lunch at 1:30 and dinner at 8:30. Colibrí (www.restaurantcolibri.com) has been included in Food & Wine's '07 “The Go” list of the world's most exciting restaurants and has been featured in Travel & Leisure. Closed Sunday night and Mondays, plus last 3 weeks of August.

Ot

Córsega, 537, in Right Eixample, near the Sagrada Familia between Sardenya and Marina (www.otrestaurant.net). Chef Ferrán Caparròs, serves a market driven, fixed price tasting menu for only €50, consisting of two appetizers, two starters, fish, meat and two desserts. Menu changes monthly. There is also a shorter lunch menu of two appetizers, two starters, a main course and dessert for €35. Closed Sunday and Mondays plus Holy Week, 20 days in August and 10 days at Xmas.

Comerç 24

Carrer de Comerç, 24, a trendy and internationally talked about eatery in El Born, is near the Chocolate Museum. Featured in Gourmet, it was opened by chef/owner Carlos Abellán, who spent 12 years working with Ferrán Adrià of Roses' El Bulli. This one is often praised, as well as Alkímia, on EGullet, but not all recent reviews have been glowing. The design is industrial chic with grey-green walls with red-upholstered corners and plush pillows, very “Catalán disseny”. This is serious gourmet food served tapas style. Try the sashimi of squid in its own in and miso. It has received one sun in the Campsa guide. Count on an average check of around €40. Abellán has recently opened a small and very popular tapas bar in the Eixample district, Tapaç 24 (see below). Open for lunch at 1:30 and for dinner at 8:00. Closed Sundays and August (www.carlosabellan.com).



MODERATELY EXPENSIVE FINE DINING

Windsor

Córsega 286, in the Left Eixample is an exquisite, beautifully decorated restaurant serving creative Catalán cuisine in sumptuous surroundings. This is our very favorite dining spot in the Eixample (www.restaurantwindsor.com). We had lunch here recently, the best meal of our three-week trip, and chose to dine a la carte, although they do serve a popular menu for €36 which consists of three tapas, three small plates and dessert. The gorgeous interior, a reconverted seigniorial palace, has the feel of a private club with high ceilings, beautiful crown moldings, chandeliers, elegant mirrors, soft lighting, an elegant, soothing decor in gray, white, black and orange-classic but with a modern, stylish touch. This is a place to impress your business clients or to have a celebratory lunch or dinner. The wait staff is extremely well trained. Here we received the most attentive service of our week of moderate dining in the city. The maitre greets and welcomes guests at the door and takes coats, the liveried wait staff seats them, and then the maitre returns to take the orders. There is very generous space between tables in the three main dining rooms. For private business meetings, there is also a narrow glassed in terrace room facing the winter garden. The few tables there can also be reserved (book a few days in advance) for a special occasion dinner.

Lunch at the Windsor was filled with area business folk, local movers and shakers in suits, but we saw casually dressed couples as well. If you and your partner would like to try more items, half portions are accepted and welcomed. For my main course I chose *arros a banda*, a pure rice dish, which was wonderful. The wine list of 400 labels is handily indexed and the sommelier will choose something well priced for you. We ordered a Viña Izadi '03 for a reasonable €18. The desserts are outstanding. We chose crema catalana mouse with cinnamon ice cream for dessert (called *crema catalana a nuestra manera*) and the 70% Chocolate, which was a bitter orange marmalade chocolate truffle. With our coffee we were served two lemon creams in chocolate cups. The Windsor well deserves its 7.5 Gourmetour rating and its inclusion in the Jaguar guide. Closed Saturday lunch and Sunday plus January 1 - 7, Holy Week and August.

Lurak

Located in the somewhat bohemian Gràcia neighborhood at La Granada del Penedés, 14, Lurak is considered one of the best Basque restaurants in the city. The young chef-owner, Antxon Arribillaga blends tradition and innovation. He serves a traditional menu for €46 and a degustation menu for €50. It rates a 7/10 in Gourmetour '07. Reserve on line. Closed on Saturday for lunch and Sundays plus December 23 to January 2 and Holy Week.

Manairó

Can be found at Diputació, 424, between Sardenya and Marina in the Right Eixample, not far from the Sagrada Família, is owned by chef Jordi Herrera, who has received lots of recent praise from food critics, particularly for his original and swift new way to prepare meats and seafood (www.manairo.com). He serves a degustation menu for

€48.50. You'll receive nice service from the young wait staff. But you must reserve as there's space for only 25 diners per session. Closed Sunday and Monday.

Coure

Passaig Marimón, 20, between Muntaner and Aribau in the Left Eixample, is a creation of young chef-owner Albert Ventura who is known for cooking with only the finest, freshest ingredients in a straightforward, solid way. He was trained at El Cellar de Can Roca in Girona. This is haute cuisine at affordable prices. It has been featured in the Hot Tables section of Conde Nast Traveler and well reviewed by El País newspaper's gourmet critic. This up and coming chef was recently anointed "best chef of the year" by the Catalan Gastronomic Society. He serves a tasting menu for €30. The bread is homemade and the desserts really fine. Closed Sunday and Monday, January 1st – 6th and August.

El Boix de la Cerdanya

Consell de Cent, 303, in the Eixample is owed by the famed Catalán restaurateur, Josep Maria Boix, whose family owns the luxurious Relais Chateaux Hotel Torre de Remi in Martinet and runs the kitchens of the nearby Chalet de Golf in Bolvir, charming villages in the Cerdanya. This elegant place features such specialties of the Cerdanya Pyrenees region as *trinxat*, a fabulous but extremely filling dish made of cabbage and potatoes and *canelons Martinet gratinats* as well as homemade desserts such as their strawberry *crema catalana*. And they serve half portions, so that couples can share several dishes. For such sophisticated dining, it offers a well priced mid-day menu served Monday - Friday for only €17 and an evening degustación menu with wine pairings for €35. Closed Sundays. See the current menu and reserve at: www.restaurantboix.com.

MODERATELY PRICED DINING

El Principal

Provença,, 286, in the Left Eixample, west of the Passeig de Gracia is an impressive venture of the Tragaluz restaurant group, housed in a sleek and elegant 19th century town house, designer chic (it earned an interior design award) in grays and purple with dark wooden tables and a pretty interior courtyard-quiet and refined (www.elprincipal.es). Loads of style and very well priced for the quality. Try the red wine risotto with tenderloin of pork. Tried to return for a 2nd night, but the whole restaurant was taken over by Goldman Sachs for a private party. Recommended in the Louis Vuitton guide. And the prices are very decent for a high rent district. It offers a weekday set menu at lunch time for only €22. Closed for one week in August.

La Camarga

Aribau, 117, in the Left Eixample, between Provena and Roselló, is another beautifully decorated, elegant but far larger space offering top quality dishes at gentle prices in a highly stylish setting (www.lacamarga.com). It's always filled with a classy, local crowd who seem to know each other, families, friends celebrating a special occasion and couples just out for a fine lunch. You should reserve at least one day in advance.

Our latest lunch here left us very impressed, both with the quality, the very attractive surroundings, the polished service and better still, the reasonable check for this very tony neighborhood. The menu is a Provençal-Catalán mix, and rice dishes (rice being the famous product of the Camargue wetlands area of Provence) are very well executed. We started with a glass of cava and homemade potato chips on the house, then olive tapenade with toast points. I ordered a starter of artichoke salad with foie for €6,50, then the *arros caldosos* (soupy rice) for €14.50 and finished with a dessert of *texturas de chocolate* for €5.50. We chose a simple bottle of Chivite Gran Feudo rosé for €9.50. The wine list is large, about 30 pages, with bottles from all the Spanish D.O.s and strong on cavas. Open daily.

La Provenza

Provença, 242, in the Left Eixample between Enric Granados and Balmes is a production of the same owners, who also have a third restaurant, St. Remy, in the Zona Alta (www.laprovenza.com). Again, here the menu is Mediterranean and Provençal influenced, and the decor is similarly sophisticated yet prices are affordable. It is a Bib Gourmand for value in the Michelin guide. A popular dish is the duck foie over a bed of apples. Try both La Camarga and La Provenza.

Ovic

Aribau, 106, between Provença and Mallorca was a great discovery during our last dining-our-way-through-Barcelona week. I had read a very favorable review in *El País* of this new space and its talented chef Pablo Castellano (*also featured in Food and Wine*), and we were very glad to have given it a try. The space is quite small, no more than a half dozen tables, so one must reserve a few days in advance, especially for its good value €18 lunch menu served during the work week. While the set menu has only three choices in each course and two dessert choices, you can also go off menu without breaking the bank. Don't miss the liquid chocolate cake. This chef, who spent three seasons perfecting his craft at El Bulli, is one to watch. We'll most certainly return!

Canela

Another unpretentious, straightforward and reasonable eatery on my restaurant row street of Aribau, at No.16, is tiny and cute. It serves a great lunch menu for under €10 and on the main menu you'll find fresh pastas, unusual salads and changing main courses, depending on what's best at the market. Closes in August.

Àpat!

Also on Aribau, at No. 137, 2-1/2 blocks below the Diagonal between Còrsega and Roselló, serves a mix of contemporary Catalán cuisine and modern Italian dishes, such as their specialty Rissotos in a cool, grey setting (www.apat.es). It offers a bargain fixed-price lunch under €10. Closes Sunday evening and Monday.

Taktika Berri

Located at València, 169, on the corner of Muntaner, is recommended both as the most authentic Basque pintxos bar in the city (owners are from San Sebastián-Donostia) and as a small restaurant where one can feast on traditional Basque dishes such as *pochas* (a

white bean stew), *marmitako* (a tuna stew with potatoes) and *chuletón* (a giant ox steak). For the eight or so tables in the back, you must reserve! For pintxos just take a spot at the bar and help yourself or wait for the staff to bring plate after plate of hot pintxos fresh from the kitchen. Pintxos specialties include their blood sausage (*morcilla*), cod omelet (*tortilla de bacalao*) and ham croquettes (*croquetas de jamón*). Closed Saturday night and Sunday plus Holy Week and August.

Gresca *

Provenza, 230, between Enric Granados and Balmes, has another up-and-coming chef, Rafael Peña, who has received a recent rave review from El País (www.gresca.net). Again, this is a small, very narrow space with under a dozen tables serving a market driven menu. Like Ovic it presents a daily menú del día for €18. The chef uses concentrated juices rather than heavy sauces, so the cuisine is light. Dining a la carte at night should set you back €45 pp. He was recently a presenter at the prestigious gastronomic conference, Madrid fusion, to present his magic with prix fixe menus.

Alba Granados

Enric Granados, 34, (with sister restaurant on Paris 168) has a talented woman chef, Carlota Claver, a graduate of the Hofmann culinary school (www.albagranados.com). From the open kitchen she executes a market driven menu, the tables are set in a large (500-square meters, loft-like space, and there's friendly service plus a 100-Label wine list. Closed Sunday.

Paco Meralgo Alta Taberna

On the corner of Córsega and Muntaner, in the Eixample, is something between a restaurant and tapas bar, a little of both. Terrific, inventive tapas combined can make an entire meal. Actually they're not tapas size, but entrants, half servings, and plates of the day, plus desserts and a great wine list. Long, high counters all around the room, but there are no tables. This is cramped seating and the high bar stools don't have backs, so it's not the place to linger for hours, but it's a lot of fun (www.pacomeralgo.com). Always packed, so you will need to be seated early and possibly have to wait for a



space, or better still, have your hotel reserve for you. It's a great place to go with a group to share tapas, or as a solo diner, sitting at the bar in front of the kitchen. And at lunch every weekday they serve a different special plate du jour each day for under €15, so you can go in, sit at the bar and order just that. Or the chef will come out and create a tapas dinner just for you. Delicious seafood-try their grilled shrimp, *gambas de Palomós a la plancha*.

There are 35 “*raciones*” (full plates) and “*medias raciones*” (half plates) on the menu. This is the perfect place for a casual meal if you're staying at one of the Eixample hotels. We had a great time here and put ourselves in the hands of our waiter, who delivered us a terrific meal, not too much, just right, a series of half plates and made sure we started off with their terrific tomato bread and finished with the excellent *crema catalana*. Expect many locals and few tourists. It's the elegant Cal Pep of the Eixample. This is a great spot for Sunday night casual dining.

Vinya-Roel

The owner of Paco Meralgo (above) has just opened another tapas bar/restaurant/shop a few blocks further west, near the Hospital Clinic on Villarroel, 190, near corner of Paris (www.vinya-roel.com). The concept here is to choose your bottle of wine among 500 labels offered in the storefront shop, then enjoy it at the bar (there is a €3 corkage fee) or at tables along with a series of small plates. Don't come here for just a glass of wine and a tapa. This is a wine restaurant, serving lunch from 1:00 - 4:00, and dinner from 8:30 - midnight. Like Paco Meralgo, it's open daily.

L'Olivé

Balmes, 47, a bistro near corner of Diputació in the Eixample, is also a great option for stylish dining, bistro style, but at considerably higher prices. It is co-owned by Paco Meralgo and Josep Olivé, and serves a market-driven menu (www.rte-olive.com). Open for lunch at 1:00 and dinner at 8:30. Closed Sunday night.

Cata 1.81

The new restaurant at València, 181, to the west of Taktika, calls itself a “wine restaurant”. While not as “fun” or as quite as popularly priced as Paco Meralgo, it is where chefs and sommeliers go on their night off. The owner is the former sommelier at Vinya del Senyor and Michelin starred Gaig. We stopped in during our last visit, initially just to have a glass of wine at the bar, but there were no spaces available in the tiny bar at the entrance, so we asked to be seated in the small orange, white and black dining area to have a small plates meal. Wine service is by the bottle at the tables. We chose a Castell Peralada '03, for €16, from a very interesting wine list. Our waiter explained that since the plates, *plattillos*, (ranging in price from €3 - €8) are really too small to be shared (which was correct), it's recommended that each diner order 4 to 5 dishes for a complete meal. This is experimental “El Bulli” style miniature cuisine, but our dishes worked very well. I really enjoyed my monkfish, baby hamburger and baby rib. The menu is in Catalán, but our waiter spoke perfect English. Since it's recommended in the **Time Out** guide, they attract English-speaking tourists who stay in the Eixample.

INFORMAL & INEXPENSIVE DINING

At almost any hour - Family Friendly

Brasserie Tenorio

Situated next door to the Loewe store in the Eixample, on Passeig de Gracia, this restaurant is both inexpensive and noteworthy. It is a huge, cavernous, sleek, open space with a designer, industrial look with an interesting combination of grey, black, purple and rose that works. Seating on the mezzanine and downstairs faces the shiny open stainless steel kitchen. Dramatic lighting, along with the large purple columns, gives you a stage effect and is very NYC in style. Tenorio offers an enormous menu of at least 75 items at very reasonable prices, but are nearly impossible to get through, so we ordered the chef's daily specials. Chic presentations are designer done down to the cutlery. Order as little or as much as you'd like. There was a little plate of shaved Manchego cheese on the house. I ordered a cold creamy melon soup with little pieces of silky Jabugo ham along with a dish of irresistible tomato bread, a delicious dish of perfectly fried calamari, tiny asparagus, baby shrimp and little green beans in a very rich and creamy sauce. Called a *salteado*, it was served in a square designer deep glass bowl, a beautiful presentation. Every dish looked well presented. They also offer delicious ice creams.

Fast service by brusque waiters in grey tunics, which is typical of all these new eateries. Casual dress. I dined here at 11:30 and the place was still buzzing. A well priced wine list. It's more family dining than a model, celebrity hang out. There were children dining at midnight. They also serve breakfast. There are hostesses in snappy red and black outfits at the door to greet and seat you. There's an outdoor terrace, but the "buzz" is inside. This place impresses with solid quality and low prices for the avenue. Good for families. Open from noon until 1:30 pm daily.

El Trobador

Can be found in the Eixample at Enric Granados near the Astoria Hotel. It's similar in concept to the Tenorio, as it's part of the same Brazilian Cacheiro group (www.grupcacheiro.com). It's a huge space with a circus theme and an open kitchen. Wildly popular with low prices and great food and even faster service. The American concept of turning tables seems to exist here. Our waiter served with lightning fast speed, but we were not rushed. Nice desserts. Fits the bill perfectly for hungry travelers who want something upscale but casual and fairly priced. They serve *crema de 5 verduras* (cream of five vegetables soup) for €5.98, *arros caldoso* for €8.95, *calcots* (braised onions) for 5.98, *entrecote de vedella* (veal steak) for €13.98 and a *coulis* of chocolate for €4.35. The bar is open for breakfast and coffee. It's become so popular that two more sister restaurants have opened in the Eixample, one at Rambla de Catalunya, 2, and one at Roselló, 255, plus another one on the well trodden tourist path at Ferrán, 36, in the Gothic Quarter, very near the City Hall square.



La Tramoia

Located on Rambla de Catalunya in the Eixample is a cousin to El Trobador and Tenorio. They have the same great hours, from noon until 1:30 pm daily. The sit-down dining here is upstairs. Perfect for those who don't want to bust their budgets on food, yet who enjoy dining well. Try them all and see them all at: www.grupcacheiro.com/.

Taller de Tapas

Rambla Catalunya, 49 , a fourth branch of the highly successful “Workshop” tapas bar/restaurant of the Barri Gotic on Placa del Pi and El Born on Argenteria (see below).

Flamant

Enric Granados, 23, between Aragó and Consell de Cent, belongs to another group of low priced, casual restaurants that have stylish contemporary settings-tablecloth dining for those on a lower budget (www.flamantrestaurant.com). It serves lunch from 1:00 - 3:15 and dinner from 9:00 - midnight (reservations are taken for dinner only). At the bar next door you can pop in for breakfast, for a salad or cocktails and canapés.

OLD STANDBYS - TRADITIONAL CATALÁN CUISINE

Very Expensive

Cal Isidre

Located at Carrer les Flors, 12, this is a small family run, 32-yearold, wood paneled, bistro-type, elegant restaurant, whose walls are covered with original paintings. It is near the Parallel theater district and receives regular visits from King Juan Carlos, celebrities and foodies (www.calisidre.com). César Pastor's regular dishes include artichoke hearts stuffed with wild mushrooms and duck liver, and loin of lamb, broiled English-style, complimented by a great wine list. Desserts are made by the daughter of the owner, master pastissera Núria Gironès, include a great rum marinated apple dessert. Open for lunch at 1:30 with dinner at 8:30. Closed Sunday, Saturdays in summer, holidays, 1st week in January, all of Holy Week and 15 days in August. Count on spending €90 - €120/person. Tel: 934 411 139.

The food critic and author of the “Catalan Cuisine” cookbook, **Coleman Andrews**, considers this Barcelona’s best restaurant, as does author **Patricia Wells**, who rates it among her top 10 for casual dining in Europe. It has also been featured in Gourmet, Saveur, etc. and is included in the Jaguar and Louis Vuitton guides, receives a 7.5/10 in The Best of Spanish Gastronomy and gets 2 suns from the Campsa guide. It’s close to the seedy Barrio Xines, so be sure to go by taxi at night.

Moderate, down by the Port

Set Portes

The “seven doors” can be found at Passeig de Isabel II, 14, near the waterfront, behind a colonnade of seven archways. Founded in 1836, it is the 2nd oldest restaurant in BCN

and a true Barcelona institution, sprawling, with a lovely Parisian brasserie décor. Some call it Barcelona’s La Coupole, with black and white tiled floors, bentwood chairs, mirrors, marble tabletops, beamed ceilings, pretty cloth decorated ceiling lamps. The super efficient waiters (read speedy service) in long white



aprons serve 11 different rich dishes, including vegetarian paella. Their most requested paella is the classic Paella Parellada in which the meat is de-boned and the shellfish presented sans shell. The restaurant fills up with large family groups on Sundays. Great *pa am tomaquet*, a Catalan bruschetta, spinach with raisins, *espinacas a la crema con pasas*. There is piano music after 10:00, a menu in four languages, and a good selection of sorbets and gelatos for dessert. Expect large portions. It, and Cal Pep, were recently

featured in a *Vino y Gastronomía* magazine article, “Where to eat well for €30. This classic restaurant is very popular with tourists but the prices keep the hordes away, and the tourists we see dining here are well dressed and well behaved! Open continuously from 1:00 to 1:00. We passed by on a recent Sunday and saw several tables filled at 7:30, a very early hour for dining in the capital. It never closes. The owners have opened a branch, **Magnum, 7, Portes** in the Olympic Village, open daily as well. See the menu at: www.setportes.com.

Inexpensive to Moderate in hip El Born

Senyor Parellada

Argeneria, 37, in the La Ribera section, has stylish modern décor, Soho style with pale yellow walls, an atrium with skylight, is atmospheric and extremely popular with the publishing crowd and artsy types (www.senyorparellada.com). Always packed at lunch, it offers creative Catalan cuisine including *caldereta de pescado*, a bouillabaisse, and is very romantic at night. The owner speaks English. There's no marker at the tall black door, just a “Sr. P” etched in black and white. Attracts businessmen at lunch. There are potted palms, chandeliers, piano music, and waiters in long white aprons, a bit of a Jazz Age kind of feel. They own the stylish, boutique hotel next door, Banys Orientals and the fifth generation restaurant family also owns the wine bar, **La Vinya del Senyor**, which is directly across from the Santa María del Mar church in El Born. Some compare Senyor Parellada to NYC's Union Square Café. Recommended in the Louis Vuitton guide. Open daily for lunch at 1:00 and for dinner at 9:00. Never closes.

FOR LUNCH OR TAPAS IN EL BORN

Cal Pep

Placa de les Olles, 8. Try to get there **EARLY**, at least by 1:00, because by 1:30 there will be people behind you eagerly waiting for your seat at the counter (www.calpep.com). Grab a stool (one of maybe 16?) and sample the tapas at this lively, miniscule and crowded bar known for its exceptional grilled fish, *peixet fregit*, and seafood prepared by a raspy voiced owner. "Pep", Josep Manubens, and his helpers somehow keep up with the constant stream of orders. Order what others are having or what Pep tells you to have. He took charge of my order and insisted that I start with clams, then *chipirones*, squid in a chickpea sauce, not pretty, but delicious. I finished with his *crema catalana* "foam" served from a foam canister into a shot glass topped with sugar and placed under the broiler for a second, Pep's own creation, which was very light and exquisite. There's also raspberry ice cream. Order the houses white wine. It's a Duart de Sio from the Penedés. They'll keep pouring, and you pay by the glass. Most of the menu items are fresh fish, but the couple next to me ordered simple roasted chicken with potatoes. The little green peppers, *pimientos de Padrón*, looked fabulous as well did the prawns. This is an experience not to be missed!

It makes for a great stop for lunch after touring the Picasso Museum. Been written up in the NY Times, Vogue and all of the gourmet magazines. Pastry chef of El Bulli, Alberto Adrià recommends their potato omelet, *tortilla española*. If you only have time for one informal meal in Barcelona, **this is it!** Open 1:00 – 4:00, and 8:00 – midnight, Tuesday – Saturday and 8:00 – 12:00 noon on Mondays. Closed Sunday and Monday for lunch.

Taller de Tapas

Argenteria, 51, is a gourmet tapas bar, cum "workshop", particularly good for seafood (www.tallerdetapas.com). Featured in Food and Wine October '04 and in the London Telegraph's Guide to Barcelona. The Taller now has 4 outposts in the city. Others are in the Barri Gotic on Plaça del Pi, on Carrer Comtal near the Palau de la Música and in the Eixample on Rambla de Catalunya, 49-51. They are all handily open Monday - Thursday from 9:30 to midnight (a half hour later on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. These spots are very popular with tourists due to the multilingual menus. Takes the mystery out of how to order tapas. They also serve breakfast.

Lonja de Tapas

Can be found just around the corner from Cal Pep, on the Placa de Palau, 7, where everything on the menu is of tapas portions (www.lonjadetapas.com). It's a copy of, **not** a sister restaurant to, or a spin-off of the four hugely successful Taller de Tapas. Here at the Lonja, tapas are prepared fresh, made to order in the kitchen. English menus are available, and there is a bargain priced menú del día. Here you'll also find an outdoor terrace facing the square. If you want to dine in a more gourmet style, they offer a degustation tapas menu for €26, which consists of six small plates and dessert. It's open daily, noon to midnight, 1:00 am on Friday and Saturday.

Bossborn *

Placa de Palau, 13, right across the square from Lonja de Tapas, continues to be one of Barcelona's most fashionable tapas bars, although it has recently changed ownership, formerly called *Estrella de Plata* (www.bossborn.es), and is half bar, half bistro. The current chef prepares sophisticated, gastronomic tapas from an open kitchen, and the dining room, seating 26, is attractively decorated with polished wooden tables, fresh flowers, everything gleaming. We had some of the best and richest ham croquettes here that I've tasted in quite a while. Their *pa amb tomaquet* is also highly recommended, as is their tomato salad with Burrata cheese and pesto sauce. Cava by the glass costs a reasonable €2.95. It serves a very reasonably priced lunch menu for €12.90 and has a moderately priced wine list. Must reserve for the dining room. This is a favorite in the Louis Vuitton Spain guide and in Vogue. Open 1:00 - midnight. While Lonja de Tapas brings in the crowds because of its outdoor dining and low prices, Bossborn appeals to the cognoscenti. You can dine here for €25, including wine. Open from 1:00 – 4:00 and 8:00 - midnight. Closed Sunday, Monday and holidays.



Santa María

Comerç 17, near the closed Mercat El Born and across the street from the Museu de Xocolat, the chocolate museum area. Shabby-chic industrial looking space with ancient walls, mauve pipes and bare light bulbs, is a hangout for inventive, sit-down tapas that make a full meal, like eggplant with tomatoes, wild mushrooms, fish and shrimp croquettes with a plum and hoisin sauce, great frogs legs, *habas a la catalana*, local beans, and unusual salads. The handwritten menus hang from the light fixtures like lampshades. Chef Paco Guzmán, who trained with Ferrán Adrià of El Bulli, (and also in Japan) has received numerous accolades in international gourmet magazines. Very avant-garde. Order the trio of mini desserts. A top rated tapas bar from the Louis Vuitton Spain guide. Closed Sunday.

La Vinya del Senyor “The Lord’s vineyard”

Plaça de Santa Maria, facing the Basilica Santa María del Mar. The tiny bar in a medieval building serves wines by the glass and creative tapas on the outdoor terrace. Owned by Ramón Perallada of Senyor Parellada. The chef, Ismael Prados, had his recipe for crispy chicken and vegetable croquettes featured in February '05 issue of Food & Wine. It serves more elaborate tapas at its uptown branch at Avenida Sarrià, 15, off the Upper Diagonal in the Zona Alta. It's open noon to 1:00 am Tuesday – Thursday and noon – 2:00 am Friday – Sunday. Closed on Monday, except during the summer.

L'Arrel del Born

Fusina, 5, near the old El Borne market building, a contemporary “casa de comidas”, something between a formal restaurant and a bistrot. Well reviewed by the food critic of

El País. At lunch it offers a set menu of two courses, such as a starter of crab bisque and a main dish of oriental chicken permuted with coconut, dessert (apple tart or runny chocolate cake), bread and glass of wine for only €15. The chef's cousin fishes daily and brings his catch straight to the kitchen. Good wine list with reasonable prices. Closed Sunday nights. See the menu at: www.arreldelborn.com.

A Dessert Restaurant in El Born

Espai Sucre

For something totally unique, there's the dessert restaurant called Espai Sucre (meaning Sugar Space) at Princesa, 53, open only at night from 9:00 to midnight during the week, with two seatings on weekends, at 8:00 and 11:00. Look for the lighted orange sign with the black ant, the house logo. Inside you will be greeted by a grey, minimalist décor. The five-course tasting menu includes three sweet dishes, ending with two savory delights. There is also a three-course menu available. It's a mix of sweet, salty, sour and bittersweet flavors (www.espaisucre.com). Upside-down Manchego cheese tar with pineapple sorbet, for example. Espai Sucre functions also as cooking school, also run by chef Jordi Butrón. According to the pastry chef of El Bull, Alberto Adrià, Butrón "makes the best desserts in Spain". He trained at Le Crillon and Pierre Gagnaire in Paris, worked at El Bulli and is the former pastry chef of Jean Luc Figueras.

OLD STANDBYS IN EL BORN

El Xampanyet - *also known as Bar Esteve*

Montcada, 22, down the street from Picasso Museum, is an old-time, classic champagne (cava) bar with pretty wile tiles, marble top tables, stacked casks, hanging hams and a well-worn interior in business since 1929. Has the best *pa amb tomaquet*, tomato bread, in town. Anchovies, *anxoves*, with cider and homemade potato chips are on the house. Always crowded, and another great institution for enjoying tapas and the local Voll Damm beer. Open noon to 4:00 and 7:00 to midnight. Closed Sunday evening, Monday and August.

Euskal Etxea

Basque sit down tapas (pintxos) are served as a complete meal at this “Basque House”, in El Born at Placa de Montcada, 1-3, on the northwestern corner of Placa. Locals eat a fixed price lunch, the “menú del día”, consisting of two courses plus dessert, bread and drink for a reasonable tariff. Prices rise at night. Open 11:30 – 11:30. Closed Sundays (euskaletxtxak.org).

Taberna del Born

For outdoor dining on very inexpensive tapas. not gourmet, just cheap. Grab a table on the terrace of the Taberna del Born on the square in front of the now closed Mercat del Born. We had a very pleasant paella lunch here recently. Modest prices.

Tèxtil Caf 

Across from the Museu Picasso, in the inviting courtyard of the Museu T xtil D'Indumentaria, you'll find a charming outdoor bar/caf  serving late breakfast, tapas, sandwiches, salads and light meals until the late hours. Tables are candlelit at night. This makes for a relaxing place to stop for coffee and pastries before, or after seeing the Picasso Museum. Or have a quiche or lasagna for lunch after your morning visit. They serve a daily €16 set menu as well. You can download the varied and well-priced menu at: www.textilcafe.com.

LOW BUDGET DINING

in the Old City

La Dolce Herminia

Magadalens, 27, two blocks towards the Rambla from the Palau de la Música, right off Via Laietana. Inexpensive, and it has a non-smoking section.

It has the same owners as the low priced **La Fonda** on Plaça Reial, 6, **Les Quinze Nits** also on the Plaça (a hangout for some seedy characters) and **Crema Canela** (which does take reservations) on Madoz, 6, 30 yards north of Plaça Reial. This is an ever-growing chain of casual restaurants with gentle tariffs with outposts in Madrid: the Finca de Susana, Gloria de Montera and Bazaar. Each has the same type of contemporary decor and menu with something for every taste and praised by Rick Steves readers. You can see them all at: www.lesquinzenits.com. Click on “We recommend”.

Personally, I feel the Cacheiro group (El Trobador, La Tramoia, Tenorio) does this better, but most of their brasseries are located in the Eixample with the exception of a new **El Trobador** at Ferrán, 46, near City Hall, well on the beaten tourist path and **El Gran Café** on Avinyó, 9, very popular with politicians from Town Hall or the Generalitat regional government, since it's just a few blocks from Plaça Sant Jaume.

The Upper El Ravel

Anima

Carrer del Angels, 6, just steps from the MACBA museum, serves an amazing value menú del día for lunch.

FOR A SUNDAY SEAFOOD LUNCH

Near the water

Can Solé

Carrer de Sant Carles, 4, open since 1903, housed in a former fisherman's cottage and an excellent choice for a Sunday afternoon paella lunch in the old fishermen's quarter of Barceloneta (www.restaurantcansole.com). Vintage photos line the walls of this old-fashioned seafood house, a true classic. Closed Sunday evening and Monday.

El Suquet de l'Almirall

At Passeig Joan de Borbó, 65, Chef Quim Marqués, who has trained at El Bulli, serves great rice dishes, such as his *arroz caldoso* (a soupy rice) in a stylish, bistro setting. You might want to order the €38 set menu, the *fórmula marinera*, which starts with a *pica pica* or assortment of tapas, then a rice dish of your choice. Open for lunch at 1:00 and dinner at 9:00. Closed Mondays, holiday nights and three weeks in August.

FOR TAPAS IN SANT ANTONI

Way, way off the beaten tourist path

Inopia

Carrer Tamarit, 104, (near Poble Sec metro), is the new tapas bar with shared tables created by Albert Adrià, brother of Ferrán, another famous chef of El Bulli. (www.barinopia.com). Like Tapaç 24, created by El Bulli alumnus Carlos Abellán, it doesn't serve experimental dishes, rather the most ultra traditional of unpretentious tapas, like *patatas bravas* (spicy fried potatoes), *ensaladilla rusa* (potato and tuna salad), *pinchos morunos* (shish kebobs), *croquetas de jamón* (ham croquettes) at moderate prices, from €3 - €5. You'll see no foams, no liquid nitrogen, no razzmatazz, just classic tapas and the very best *cavas*. Open Tuesday - Friday 7:00 - 11:00, Saturday 1:00 - 3:30 and 7:00 - 11:00. Closed Sunday and Monday. Their business card indicates it's located in the Left Eixample, but it's actually in the Sant Antoni neighborhood at the corner of Tamarit and Rocafort, three blocks south of the Gran Vía.

WINE AND INEXPENSIVE TAPAS

In the heart of the Gothic Quarter

Taller de Tapas

Plaça Sant Josep Oriol, 9, in the heart of the quarter, next to the church, is a member of a



group of four wine bars that have become extremely popular with visitors to the city, particularly English speaking ones, due to their low prices, open kitchen where the tapas are prepared fresh, unbeatable value menú del día for lunch for €11 with choice of six starters, six main courses, beverage, bread and dessert, English menus and outdoor terrace dining (their tapas menu

costs 10% more if taken on the terrace). The other branches are located in the Born next to Santa María del Mar church, in the Eixample on Rambla de Catalunya and on Carrer Comtal, near the Palau de la Música (tallerdetapas.com). These tourist friendly spots are well located are quite handy because they are open continuously from 9:30 – midnight, 12:30 on Friday and Saturday, and from noon to midnight on Sunday. You'll find them filled to the brim on Sundays. Try the Palamós prawns or the little green peppers from Padrón. Its branch at Carrer Comtal, 28, near the Palau de la Música Catalana, was recently recommended in Condé Nast Traveler.

Irati Taberna Basca

A member of the Sagardi Basque group (www.sagardi.es), on Caardenal Casañas, 17, right off the Ramblas, not far from the Teatro Liceu, is our favorite Basque pintxos

(tapas) in the Old City. While its sister Sagardi gets more tourists, this bar feels more authentic, with menus in Basque and Catalán, Basque music, fresh flowers adorn the bar, and the groaning board of pintxos at the bar is the most attractively displayed of the lot. In the back there are a few highly coveted tables for full dining. You should call a day in advance to



reserve one, particularly at night. This would be my choice for nearby dining after the opera. It's open for lunch from 1:30 - 4:00 and for dinner from 8:30 - midnight. This bar is also a favorite of George Semler, the Fodor's Bilbao to Barcelona author.

Tapas hopping in the Eixample

Cerveseria Catalana *

One the corner of Rambla de Catalunya and Mallorca is extremely popular with locals, always a buzz. It's a great "beer hall" with two counters at the front and a dining room in the rear. This place is immaculate and a great value. There's no menu del día here, just a menu of *flautas*, tapas of the day, *montaditos*, little salads and hamburgers. The drink of choice here is their beer. The service is good and it's well worth the wait. They should export this to the USA. Nice crema catalana for dessert, flan and Tarta de Santiago. I loved their baked timbal of *escalivada* with goat cheese. Open daily from 10:00 pm - 2:00 am.

Ciutat Contal *

Rambla de Catalunya, 18. It has a bustling bar and large dining area in the back offering breakfast, offers more than 50 tapas, professional service and good prices. You pay the cashier. It's very popular at all hours. Open 07:30 – 01:30 weekdays and Saturdays, Sunday and holidays from 08:00 - 01:30. It's a sister to the Cerveseria Catalana.

Taller de Tapas

Rambla de Catalunya, 49, is the Eixample sister to the group of Talleres and Lonjas in the Barri Gotic and El Born (see above).

Origens 99.9%

Enric Granados, 9, is the Eixample branch of this organic shop in the El Born. Try the toast covered with garlic and tomato, olive paste and melted cheese (*tostada de "al madroc"*).

Tapaç 24 **

Diputació, 269, close to the Passeig de Gracia. Recently opened by chef Carlos Abellán of Comerç 24. This is a tiny basement gastro-tapas bar with room for about 30 patrons (carlosabellan.com) and consists of a bar, a counter surrounding the open kitchen and some high tables with bar stools in a corner. Your menu is printed on the envelope that holds your silverware. On the back of the envelope menu there is a list of tapas to have with your glass of vermouth, and there are eight tapas of the daily on the blackboard plus eight seafood specials. Prices range from €3 to €12. A hearty dish of black rice or lentil stew costs €10, and the popular McFoie burger goes for €8. The *bikinis* (grilled ham and cheese sandwiches with a bit of truffle) are local favorites. The chef whips up these classics, traditional creations (*patatas bravas*, *bombas*, *tortillas*, *huevos estrellados*) from the prime ingredients displayed right in front of your eyes. It has wines by the glass, but specializes in the perfect Moritz draft beer, a *canya* and serves a mean *cava* for €3. If you're staying at a Passeig de Gracia area hotel and want to save on breakfast, come here and feast on one of their scrumptious *tortillas*! This is quite a clever place-looks like a simple lunch counter but is quite gourmet. A winner. Open daily from 8:00 am until midnight. Peruse the menu at: www.comerc24.com.

Jamonísimo

Provença, 85. Although it's far from inexpensive, it's the best place in the city to sample the delectable, indescribable Iberian ham, *jamón ibérico*, and Spanish sausages. It's a deli and tasting room with space for only 12 diners, and serves its hams from all the D.O.s in Spain on slate tablets. Open 8:00 to 8:00. Closed Sunday nights.

La Taverne del Clinic

Rosselló, 155, at the western end of the Left, Eixample, in the same neighborhood as Jamonísimo only it opens earlier to serve breakfast and closes at midnight. Like the tapas spots mentioned above, the Taverne serves tapas and raciones (larger plates) of high quality at very reasonable prices and has a well-chosen wine list. The two young chefs here have trained with 3 Michelin starred Santi Santamaría of El Racó de Can Fabes. Try the grilled baby vegetables, "*verduritas a la plancha*", or the fried eggs with shaved black truffles "*Huevos fritos con trufa negra rallada*".

VERY CHEAP AND KID-FRIENDLY SPOTS

El Mussol *the Owl*

Has several branches and is very popular for quick, any-time dining, easy on the wallet. You'll find cooks at the open grill, not a great chef. Open kitchen, barn-like space, like an American theme restaurant. Their specialty is grilled meals, and grilled vegetables served with a delicious aioli sauce, but don't order the grilled artichokes. Yummy gazpacho. Lots of sangria is served here, something that Spaniards usually don't order. Can order just one dish or several. Locations: Casp, 19, Diagonal, 488, Aragón, 261. Open daily.

El Glop

You'll find more of the same at the El Glop chain. There's one next to El Mussol on Casp, 21, in the Right Eixample and at Rambla de Catalunya, 6, in the Left. Open daily. You can check the menu and reserve online at: elglop.com.

Txapela

Although I'm quite reluctant to recommend any strictly-made-for-tourists-eating spots on the Passeig de Gracia, Txapela may be the "best" of the pseudo Basque tapas bars along this avenue, better IMO than Ba Ba Reeba, Qu Qu and Tapelia. There are two floors and an outdoor terrace. Paper place mats are your menu with pictures of the tapas. There are 51 varieties, hot and cold, which cost a couple of euros each, and are ordered by their number. Try the slightly fizzy fresh and tart Basque wine called *txakolí*. Kids and teens will be happy here, and it's very easy on the wallet.

ICE CREAM

Planelles-Donat

Port d'Angel, 7, near the El Corte Inglés record/book store, for ice cream, *orxata* (horchata), which is the very refreshing Valencian tiger nut drink, *granissat* (like a slurpie) and *turrón*, almond nougat. Has been open for more than 200 years.

Giangrossi

Is the high concept, glam and oh so trendy Argentinean artisan ice cream bar/café/lounge with branches in Madrid-Marbella-Barcelona. It has two venues here, in the L'Illa shopping complex on the Diagonal and in the Olympic Village. Their six-flavor sampler is quite remarkable. You can see their flavors at: www.giangrossi.com.

Casa Colomina

Located on Portaferrisa. Best flavors: Coco (coconut), Llet (leche merengada) Turro (turrón), Avellana (hazelnut) and Llimona (lemon).

Cremeria Toscana

In the Eixample on Muntaner, 161.

FOR AN AUTHENTIC “SUIS”

Granja Pallaresa

A *suis*, or in Spanish a *suizo*, is an addictive drink of thick hot chocolate topped with a mountain of whipped cream, usually accompanied by a pastry such as an *ensaimada* (from Mallorca, filled with almond paste), and loved by Barcelona denizens. The ritual is to have it at mid-morning or at teatime. Granja Pallaresa, in the Gothic Quarter on pedestrian Petrixol, 11, makes one of the city's best. Veteran waiters, wearing white jackets and bow ties, will serve you - it's a Barcelona institution. The *suis* is to Barcelona what beloved *horchata* is to Valencia, although far more caloric. Open daily from 9:00 - 1:00 and 4:00 - 9:00 and Sunday from 9:00 – 1:00 and 5:00 - 9:30.

MY FAVORITE SHOPPING

On Passeig de Gracia, the rest of the Eixample and the Diagonal

Fashion

The high-end international boutiques can be found on the Passeig de Gracia or at the Diagonal. Here's the designer line up on the Passeig de Gracia:

- *Cartier*
- *Salvatore Ferragamo*
- *Louis Vuitton*
- *Gucci*
- *Bulgari*
- *Carolina Herrera*
- *Dolce & Gabbana*
- *Adolfo Domínguez (Spanish fashion designer-think Armani)*
- *Roberto Verino (Armani Jr.)*
- *Antonio Miró (designer from Catalunya)*
- *Chanel*
- *Armani*
- *Armando Basi (contemporary Catalán designer)*
- *Hermes*
- *Max Mara*
- *Purificación García (Spanish designer, kind of "out there")*
- *Bally*
- *Loewe (for luxurious leather, like Gucci or Louis Vuitton)*

Two more young emerging Spanish designers: **Antonio Pernas** from La Coruña, Galicia, whose boutique is on the corner of the Passeig de Gràcia and Carrer Consell de Cent and Catalán **Josep Font** on Carrer Provença 304.

Shoes/bags

- **Acosta** - on the right side of Diagonal, up from P de G. Elegant designs in soft, luxurious leather.
- **Yanko** - on the Passeig de Gracia, 95. Very elegant shoes and bags.
- **Lureña** - on the Diagonal, 580. Traditional, very classic styles.
- **Camper** – Valencia, 249, to the west of the P de G, also Rambla de Catalunya 121, El Triangle and the Passeig de Gracia. Funky, casual shoes from Mallorca.
- **Farrutz** - Diputació, 255, also Roselló 218, corner of Rambla de Catalunya.
- **Ferragamo** - boutique can also be found in the El Corte Inglés on the Diagonal
- **Jaime Mascaró** – Córsega, 537. Designer from Menorca. Wonderful ballet slippers (www.jaimemascaro.com).
- **Mandarina Duck** - Passeig de Gracia 44 and Roselló, 218. Less expensive bags in the latest colors and styles.
- **Cristina Castañer** - on Mestre Nicolau, near Plaza Francesc Macía, off the upper Diagonal, (www.castaner.com) for handmade espadrilles. *Also in Madrid on Calle Claudio Coello, 51, in the Salamanca quarter.*

Handbags

- **Acosta** and **Longchamps** bags are available at the Diagonal branch of El Corte Inglés. You find the same prices as in Paris for Longchamps.

Jewelry

- **Bagués-Masriera** - located at Passeig de Gràcia, 41. This famed jeweler, founded in 1910, sells fine, 19th century modernism (Art Deco) jewelry.

Evening gowns and bridal dresses

- **Rosa Clara** - Carrer Paris, corner of Balmaes; another on Rambla de Catalunya at Diagonal 409 (www.rosaclara.es)

Beautiful children's clothing

- **Nanos** - Provença, 268, at corner of Rambla de Catalunya (www.nanos.es)

Books

- **Casa del Llibre** - on right side of Passeig de Gracia going up, next to the Hotel Prestige Passeig de Gràcia. Open until 9:00 pm
- **Altair** - Gran Vía, 616, has a huge selection of travel books and maps with helpful staff.
- **Laie Librería & Café** - Pau Claris, 85, has a first floor café with glass-fronted gallery overlooking the street, with newspapers and magazines to peruse while dining. It serves a set menu lunch for €12.50 in the back.

Beauty Salon

- **Le Salon** - Consell de Cent, 261, in the Left Eixample is arguably the city's most exclusive salon (www.lesalon.es). Ask for Tomás to do your haircut and Sergio your color. Open 10:00 – 9:00.
- **Llongueras** - The Catalán chain (www.llongueras.es) runs the salon in the huge El Corte Inglés department store on Plaça de Catalunya and has many other branches.

Urban spa

- **Spacioom** - The stunning, Asian inspired, full service spa at the Hotel Omm and its beauty salon are open to non-hotel guests. Take a water treatment while you contemplate the beautiful bamboo garden from your bay window.

Fabrics

- **Gastón y Daniela** - on the corner of Provença and Pau Claris in the EAST Eixample across the street from la Carta de Vinos wine shop.

Spanish CDs

- **FNAC** - can be found in the El Triangle shopping center on the west side of Placa Catalunya.

Ceramics

- **Lladró** - Passeig de Gracia, 11. (www.lladro.com)
- **Sargadelos** - the contemporary Galician ceramic works can be found on Provença 274 (www.sargadelos.com)

Chocolates

- **Cacao Sampaka** - Carrer Consell de Cent, 292, right off the Rambla de Catalunya, is a bakery-café for chocoholics, designed like a market with tasting bar, the creation of Alberto Adriá, the pastry chef and brother of Ferrán Adriá of El Bulli (www.cacaosampaka.com). The interior is full of dark, chocolate-colored wood with a café in the back where you can sample chocolate drinks and pastries. Some chocolate treats are sweet and savory combos, with ingredients such as black olives, Modena vinegar, truffles and Parmesan cheese. Featured in the Jan. '05 issue of Bon Appétit. Makes the best brioche in town. On March 21 they bring out a chocolate egg weighing 400 kilos and invite people to help hack it into bite sized bits. They also have an identical shop in Madrid on Calle Orellana.
- **Chocolates Valor** - the hundred-year old Alicante chocolate makers, on Rambla de Catalunya near the corner of Consell de Cent, has a tea salon upstairs (www.valor.es).

Pastries

- **Mauri** - Rambla de Catalunya, 100, on the corner of Provença. It's gorgeous and chic and a haven for ladies who lunch (www.pasteleriasmauri.com). Stop in here for sandwiches, pastries, canapés or a set menu lunch. The system works this way: First, choose your pastry or sandwich at the counter, and they will ask if you want it "para llevar o para tomar" Say "para tomar" and they'll put it on a plate and give you a ticket. Take your treat upstairs and order coffee/tea from the waitress in the tea salon. So, you order and pay for coffee at table after choosing your treats at the counter, then pay for all upon departure at cash register with the plastic card the waitress provides you. There's also a tea salon and restaurant downstairs. We never take breakfast in our hotel when we're within walking distance of the classic and beautiful Mauri.
- **Farga** - on the corner of Córsega and the Passeig de Gracia is another classic delicatessen with bar and tea salon (www.fargabarcelona.com). It has the same pay at the counter system. We stop in here for the weekday €17 set menu lunch. Both Maura and Farga are open on Sunday.

Flowers

- **Au Nom de la Rose** - on the corner of Granados and València, is a branch of the Parisian flower emporium.

Iberian ham

- **Jamonísimo** - in the far Left Eixample, at Provença, 85, (a long walk) offers a selection of the best hams and sausages produced in Spain plus an excellent assortment of wines. You can sample them "tapas style" on slate plates. Open 8:00 – 8:00.

Cava

- **Xampany** - Valencia, 200, near Balmes, specializes in cava, Spain's bubbly.

Wines

- **Padro Esteve** - Pau Claris, 169, at the corner of Provença and next to La Pedrera (handy for the Omm, Majestic, Prestige, AC and Claris hotels) has a fine selection of wines from around the globe priced reasonably (www.padroesteve.com).

Gourmet foods

- **La Mantequeria de Can Ravell** - Aragó, 313, opened in 1929, arguably this is best gastronomic boutique in the city and featured in Saveur magazine's best 100 of the year (www.ravell.com). Come here for the finest wines, hams, cheeses, oils, vinegars, whiskies, cigars, caviars. It has a "hidden" restaurant upstairs that serves a superb gourmet lunch from 1:00 – 4:00 for €35, in elegant surroundings and tables set with Christofle silverware and Riedel crystal. Open 10:00 – 9:00. Closed Sunday and Monday.
- **Colmado Quílez** - Rambla de Catalunya, 63, is an old time delicatessen selling superb canned goods. Look for Los Peperetes brand of mussels and clams.

SHOPPING IN THE ZONA ALTA - *around and above Plaça F. Macià*

Chocolates

- **Oriol Balaguer** - the pastry chef for seven years at "best restaurant in the world", El Bulli, has opened his own chocolate studio at Placa de Sant Gregori Taumaturg, off the Upper Diagonal, north on Carrer Ganduxer beyond the Plaça de Francesc Macià (www.oriolbalaguer.com). He's the equivalent (or better) of Paris's Pierre Hermes.
- **Enric Rovira** - like Balaguer, has an international reputation for his genius in creating chocolates and has opened a shop at Josep Tarradellas, 113. You can find it off the Upper Diagonal, at Plaça Francesc Macià (www.enricrovira.com). His packaging is as interesting as his creations. His *rajoles* is a bar of chocolate made to look like a Barcelona sidewalk tile. For Easter he produces chocolate eggs cut out to reveal smaller eggs, golf balls or even Japanese characters. Hours are 10:00 – 2:30 and 5:00 – 8:00, except on Saturday when it is only open from 10:00 – 2:30.

Artisanal cheese

- **Tutusius** - Carrer Francesc Pérez Cabrera, 5, (street running along the left side of gardens due north of the Plaça de Francesc Macià on the upper Diagonal in the Zona Alta), featured in the Feb. '05 issue of Food & Wine and anointed as **the best cheese shop** in Barcelona. It has a cava bar serving caviar, blinis and Iberian ham. It's open Monday - Saturday 10:00 – 8:00. This is handy if you find yourself shopping at the large Diagonal El Corte Inglés.

Wines

- **Lavinia** – Diagonal, 609, in the Zona Alta at the Pedralbes Shopping Center along with another branch of El Corte Inglés. Owned by the same duo that opened the huge new Lavinia on the Place de la Madeleine on Paris' Right Bank.

It is run by France's top female sommelier, Marie Louise Banyols, formerly of the wine spa, Les Sources de Caudalie, in Bordeaux (www.lavinia.es).

Gourmet products

- **Semon** - Ganduxer, 31, set on the Plaça Sant Gregori Taumaturg, off and to the north of the Diagonal, past P. Francesc Macia, in the very high rent neighborhood of Sant Gervasi is the city's most fashionable gourmet emporium. Coleman Andrews, author of *Catalan Cuisine*, calls it Barcelona's Fauchon. It was chosen by the Royal Family to cater Infanta Cristina's wedding banquet, and it's frequented by the Infanta, who lives in the neighborhood (www.semon.es).
- **Semon 9** - Owners have opened Taste de Semon at Santa Fe de Nou Mèxic 1, which serves gourmet fast food at reasonable prices-hot sandwiches, tapas, soups, and salads along with a well-chosen wine list. Open Monday - Saturday from noon until 11:00. Closed all of August. The gourmet shop's attached restaurant, **L'Indret de Semon**, allows one to taste the culinary delights sold in the store, and it's open for lunch from 1:00 - 3:30 and now for dinner from 8:00 -11:00. Count on €50/person.
- **Bar Turó** - If prices at L'Indret at Semon deter you, and for lunch you need something gentler on the pocketbook, walk south east to the bottom of the tranquil gardens, Jardines del Poeta Eduard Marquina to the outdoor terrace of the Bar Turó at Tenor Viñas, 1. This well regarded neighborhood bar serves impeccable traditional Spanish tapas, such as *ensaladilla rusa* (Russian salad) and *tortilla de calabacín*. Open 9:00 - 1:00 am. Closed August.

SHOPPING ON THE RAMBLAS

Pastries

- **Escribà** - Can be found at No. 83, on the west side of the Ramblas. Look for the glittering Modernist façade with its violet and green mosaics, Art Nouveau stained glass and swirling decorative motifs. They have a tearoom where you can enjoy a cup of coffee, chocolate and a pastry. They sell their own brand of cava, *champagne*, and chocolate (www.escriba.es).

SHOPPING IN THE BARRI GÒTIC

Chocolates (Barcelona has become a chocoholic's paradise)

Catalans consume double the amount of chocolate per year than anywhere else in Spain

- **Xocoa** - Like Cacao Sampaka, Xocoa (www.xocoa-bcn.com), at No. 11 Petritxol, near the Cathedral, is a chocolate shop cum café with multiple branches in Spain that serves croissants, "ensaimadas" (the Mallorcan filled pastry) and other pastries with your morning coffee. Sells 40 gourmet chocolate bars in flavors such as green tea, Jamaican pepper, ginseng, and guaraná. The gold bars are made with 73 percent cacao and 22 karat gold! They have opened a newer and larger boutique at Carrer d'En Bot, 4, and at Vidriera, 7.

Handmade espadrilles (*alpargatas*)

- **La Manuel Alpargatería** - Catherine Zeta Jones, Michael Douglas, Jack Nicholson and Penélope Cruz have been customers here in the store at Avinyó, 7. The Tasier family has run this workshop since 1910. They're purveyors to Spain's Royal Ballet and official suppliers to the Vatican.

Candles

- **Cerería Subirà** - Is the city's oldest store, founded in 1761; candles in every shape/size, at Bajada Llibreteria, 7.
- **Antigua Cerería Lluís Codina** - Carrer del Bisbe, , right around the corner from the Cathedral. Walking away from the Cathedral, headed toward the port, it's on the right side. Baptismal candles. Hours are Monday - Friday, 9:30 – 1:30 and 4:30 - 7:45.

Cuban cigars

- **L'Estanc** - Via Laitana, 4.

Coffees and teas

- **E & A Gispert** - Sombrerers, 23 (www.casagispert.com), behind the Santa Maria del Mar Basilica, has been in business for 150 years and sells teas, spices, honey, chocolate and freshly roasted coffees and nuts. This aromatic shop is a Fodor's favorite.
- **Cafés El Magnífico** – Argenteria, 64, founded in 1919

Gourmet items

- **Caelum** - Carrer de la Palla, 8, on the corner of Banys Nous, sells artisan jams, liqueurs, biscuits, cakes, teas, olives and cheese coming from monasteries and convents throughout Spain. They also have a café and a teashop located in the 14th century former Jewish baths, open at 4:00.

Ceramics

- **Art Escudellers** - Escudellers, 23, across from Los Caracoles restaurant, is a huge shop with ceramics and contemporary glass, recommended by George Semler, resident and author of Fodor's Barcelona. I much prefer to buy my ceramics at the source, or in the lovely Antigua Casa de Talavera shop in Madrid, but if you're in the market for kitchen tiles or street address tiles for a Southwestern type home, this is your place. They have opened a branch on the Ramblas, but where I've found zero of interest. See their wares at: www.escudellers-art.com.

SHOPPING IN THE HIP AND TRENDY EL BORN-LA RIBERA

Fashion

- **Custo Barcelona** - Placa de les Olles, the same square as Cal Pep. Where Antonio Banderas, Julia Roberts, Penélope Cruz and Cristina Aguilera buy their wild, and expensive, €100, psychedelic T-shirts and club wear from designer brothers Custo and David Dalmau (www.custo-barcelona.com). They've opened

a second store at Carrer Ferrán, 36, in the Barri Gotic, and on the Diagonal at No. 557, plus boutiques in other Spanish cities and in other European cities as well/

Wines

- **Vila Viniteca** - Carrer dels Agullers, 7, near the Santa María del Mar church, is a wine lover's paradise with 3,000 wines and liqueurs to choose from. Great selection of Priorat labels such as Les Terrasses. Free tasting sessions are often held on Saturday mornings (www.vilaviniteca.es/).

Food

- **Mercat de Santa Caterina** - Was renovated at a cost of 17 million dollars and opened in the fall of '05. This is the city's oldest covered market, dating from 1845 (www.mercatsantacaterina.net), and since the reopening has become a major tourist site in its own right. Designer Enric Miralles gave it a colorful, undulating roof covered with 325,000 ceramic tiles, which is a tribute to native son architect Antonio Gaudí. The market has 60 vendor stalls for fruits, vegetables, meats, cheese and olive oil, plus a **Cuises de Santa Caterina** bar & restaurant, which is a product of the hyper successful Tragaluz restaurant group. We come here for breakfast or for a casual lunch or tapas at the bar on Sunday. Prices are reasonable with tapas ranging from €3 - €8 and desserts at €4.50. And better still, it's open daily, and the kitchen stays open until midnight, Thursday - Sunday. It's located at Francesc Cambó, 16, off the Via Laietana, due east from the cathedral square.
- **Origen 99.9%** - At Vidriera, 6, the street that leads from the Passeig del Born to the Plaça Olles, where you'll find Cal Pep. This is a "espai gastronòmic" housed in a medieval glass blowing shop selling olive oils, wines and cheeses all organic and all from Catalonia (www.origen99.com/web). It also has an attached café serving casual and inexpensive fare. Their specialties include *trinxat* (a caloric but yummy mash of boiled potatoes and cabbage with bacon) and *albóndigas con sepia* (meatballs with cuttlefish). It's very popular with tourists as it provides multilingual menus.

Cheese

- **Formatgeria La Seu** - Dagueria, 16 (www.formatgerialaseu.com), is open from 10:00 – 2:00 and 5:00 – 8:00, selling twenty-five artisanal cheeses by small-scale producers. Owner is Scotswoman Katherine McLaughlin. Closed Sunday and Monday and August.

More chocolates

- **Bubó** - Caputxes, 10, near the Basílica de Santa María del Mar, is a new wave chocolate and jewel-like cakes shop with the Bubó bar next door serving tapas, small plates and of course, desserts (www.bubo.ws). Written about in the NY Times, tourists often mistake it for a jewelry store. The multilingual pastry chef, Carlos Mampel, won an award for best chocolate tart at the '05 Lyon Pastry World Cup. See his creations at [creations at: bubo.ws](http://www.bubo.ws).

BARCELONA NIGHTLIFE

Cocktail Bars

Party By the sea

Bestial

A product of the fashionable El Tragaluz group (bestialtragaluz.com) is a new restaurant and discreet and elegant cocktail bar near the sea promenade on Ramón Trias Fargas, 2. It's decorated with gold and red velvet sofas, earth tone rugs, *dissey* bar chairs, has warm lighting and the feel of a Soho loft. For "beautiful people" in their 30s. Open Thursday - Sunday until 2:00. Mixed drinks cost €7 and beer is €2.50.

Sugar Club

Located in the World Trade Center, is a lounge, cocktail bar and night-club combo with great views of the city (www.sugarclub-barcelona.com). A product of the Salsitas nightclub group, it opens at 8:00 for pre-dinner drinks and at 11:00, when a DJ arrives to turn it into a hip dance club. Dance until 3:00, Wednesday - Saturday.

Carpe Diem Lounge

Below Hotel Arts, directly on the beach at Plaça Maritin, 32 (www.cdlebarcelona.com), with lounge beds on the terrace and a restaurant serving sushi, fish and sandwiches.

In L'Eixample

Noti

Roger de Lluria, 35, near the corner of the Gran Vía de les Corts Catalanes in the Right Eixample is a glamorous cocktail bar and restaurant opened in '02 in the former *El Noticiero Universal* newspaper headquarters (www.noti-universal.com). It has a 1970s look and attracts creative types in journalism, fashion and interior design plus the area's bourgeoisie. This is a place to see and be seen, good for celebrity spotting. The **Goodbar** is open from 8:00 - 2:30. The restaurant serves a fixed price lunch menu (€18) from 1:30 -4:00, and a la carte dinners from 8:30 - midnight. Fusion cuisine. It closes Saturday for lunch and all day Sunday.

Buda

Pau Claris, 92, in the Right Eixample near the Gran Vía (www.budarestaurante.com). One of the newest night spots in the neighborhood, it's supposedly the "home of the beautiful people" with models' night on Tuesday. It has an Asian cuisine restaurant serving until 3:00 with five set menus starting at €45.

Gaudí's La Pedrera

The rooftop of Gaudí's La Pedrera (Casa Milá) becomes a giant "terrazza" (open air bar) on Fridays and Saturdays from July to September. Go for drinks and live music, jazz, blues and flamenco. Open from 9:00 to midnight. Your ticket includes the visit, music and a glass of cava.

Bucaro

Aribau, 195, in the Left Eixample close to the Diagonal. Attracts a fashionable crowd, including Kevin Costner when he's in town. This is both a club and a restaurant. Open from 11:00 pm to 3:30, except on Thursdays when it's open until 5:00. The restaurant opens for dinner only from 10:00 - midnight.

Nick Havana

In the Eixample at Roselló, 208 (www.nickhavanna.com). You'll find a slick design with wall-to-wall video screens. Open until 5:30 am.

Luz de Gas

In the Eixample on Muntaner, 246, recommended by Time Out and Louis Vuitton is a reconverted music hall decorated with chandeliers and classical friezes, which hosts classic musical acts. In between, there's blues on Mondays, on Tuesdays Dixieland Jazz, soul on Thursday, and on Fridays rock. Frequentated by a preppy crowd. It's open from 11:30 until 5:00. In summer they open a branch on a boat anchored in the Port Vell.

Belevedere

Pasatje Mercader, 3, off Provença in the Left Eixample (down a cul de sac, 2-½ blocks from the Passeig de Gracia) has a tiny back garden for cava sipping. Open Monday - Saturday until 1:30.

In the Zona Alta

Mirabé

Carrer Manuel Arnús, 2, high, high above the city, is for the young and hip. Has attracted the likes of Cristina Aguilera, Joaquín Cortés, the Nuevo flamenco international dance star, Stefano Gabbana, of Dole & Gabbana designer fame, and Alicia Keys.

Off the Ramblas

Boadas

Tallers, corner of Ramblas, is a famous Art Deco cocktail bar with lots of atmosphere. Go for their mojitos, an institution just like Havana's "La Floridita". The owner, María Dolores Boadas, served her first cocktails at age of 14.

In trendy El Born

Palau Dalmase

Montcada, 20, is found in a 15th century mansion- supposedly makes the best gin and tonics in town, says the brother of "best chef in the world" Ferrán Adriá.

Gimlet

Carrer Rec, 24, is like Boadas, but in El Born, so it draws a hipper, trendier crowd, Soho types including actors, musicians and politicians. Bar owners often drop by on their nights off. Hard to find, but has a small neon sign outside. Long wooden bar crowded with "the hippest elements of Barcelona society".

Passeig del Borne

Near the old market there are several new spots; the **Bar Rosal Café**, **Berimbau** (music and Brazilian cocktails), **Miramelindo** (Italian), **Cocktel**, a tiny bar with music where the bartender Andy, makes adventurous cocktails.

DANCE CLUBS

Consult *BCN Nightlife* (www.bcn-nightlife.com) for the latest in-vogue spots.

In the Eixample

Ommession

The downstairs disco of the trendy and ultra fashionable Hotel Omm off the Passeig de Gracia on Roselló, 265. It fills with models and other fashionistas. Open Wednesday - Saturday 11:30 pm - 3:30 am.

CDLC Barcelona

An exquisitely decorated venue on Barcelona's beachside mixes Mediterranean with oriental influences, where the fashionable crowd mingles with celebrity soccer players who come to hang out with Barça star Patrick Kluivert, who is also one of the owners. Resident DJ Annemiek spins from 10:00 pm daily and at special parties such as Twilight and Privee alternate weekly on Sundays with top DJs (www.cdclcbarcelona.com).

City Hall

On Rambla de Catalunya, 2, near the Plaça de Catalunya. Belongs to the Otto Zutz empire, and has three floors and terrace in which to dance to house music. Very fashionable Open 1:00 am – 6:00. Closed Mondays in winter.

Nick Havana (*see above*)

Agua de Luna

Viladomat, 211, far west in the Left Eixample, is THE place to go for dancing to the Latin beat-salsa, merengue, chachacha and bachata (www.aguadeluna.com).

In the ultra exclusive Zona Alta

Elephant

Passeig dels Til·lers,1 (www.elephantbcn.com), is in the ritzy Pedralbes (take a taxi). This area is the Beverly Hills of Barcelona. A big tent-like dance space filled with fashionista types. Open 11:00 pm – 3:00 am on Wednesday and Thursday - Sunday from 11:00 – 5:00.

Otto Zutz

Lincoln, 15, has been around since 1985. Opened in a post-industrialist warehouse space in the Zona Alta and is more popular with the younger set (www.grupo-ottozutz.com).

On Tibidabo

Danzatoria

Avenida Tibidabo, 61, high atop Mount Tibidabo, is a sprawling hacienda with three floors, the “restaurant-club of the moment” (www.danzatoria-barcelona.com). Open Thursday - Saturday 11:00 pm – 3:00 and Sundays from 6:00 pm – 2:30.

Off the Ramblas

Salsitas / Club 22

At Nou de la Rambla, 22, is a stylish, tunnel-like white space with a restaurant in the back. You'll be greeted by a doorman and pass through velvet curtains. After midnight from Wednesday to Saturday it turns into Club 22 with tropical décor, pineapples and palm trees. Quite fashionable.

In El Born

Borneo

Rec, 49, is a new nightclub in El Born opposite the bar Gimlet (see above) featuring jazz. A laid-back place that occasionally has live concerts.

In the Gothic Quarter

Café Royale

Nou de Zurbano, 3, is a soul, funk and bossa nova chill-out place with comfy sofas. Open until 3:00 on weekends. This is a hip, sleek bar and club on a tiny street just off Placa Real. Arrive by midnight to snag one of only 15 places on the velvet sofas, or wait up to an hour outside if you happen to arrive too late. Gets really busy at 2:00. A mixed crowd in the 20-30 year-old range.

FLAMENCO - Barcelona is **NOT** at all the best place to see authentic flamenco, as it's not remotely an art form in Catalunya, but if you won't be traveling to Madrid or Seville, there is a brand new venue created by the Cacheiro restaurant group that is destined to change the city's poor flamenco scene.

Palacio del Flamenco

In a renovated theater on tony Balmes, 139, in the Eixample, handy to hotels and recommended by the top desk staffs. It has a regular cast of 15 artists who perform true flamenco and flamenco fusion on the original theater stage while the orchestra seats have been turned into an upscale restaurant.

Opened January '07 (www.palaciodelflamenco.com).

Soniquete

There's also a lively new flamenco bar that attracts the young and hip on Carrer Milans, 5, near the Placa Reial in the Gothic quarter and only open from Thursday - Sunday.

Try to avoid the touristy and unauthentic **Los Tarantos** on Placa Reial.

MY RECOMMENDED BARCELONA HOTELS

Note: For the sultry, very humid Barcelona summer, I would always book a hotel with pool, as tiny as these rooftop pools tend to be (plunge pools really), will come in very handy after a strenuous day of sightseeing.

- Casa Fuster
- Majestic
- Omm (*spa also has indoor pool*)
- 1898 (*gorgeous roof terrace with heated pool open all year. Three suites have private pools*)
- Claris
- Granados 83 (*plus duplex room 24 shares a little pool with standard room 209*)
- Cram
- Atrium Palace (*very inviting*)
- AC Diplomatic
- Onix Rambla
- Balmes
- Astoria
- América
- Jazz
- B-Hotel
- Soho
- Inglaterra (*guests have pool privileges at sister ship, Majestic*)
- Pulitzer (*no rooftop pool but guests have privileges at health club with indoor pool*)

My top picks

- **5-star Gran Lux Casa Fuster**
- **5-star Gran Lux Majestic**
- **4-star 1898 (expensive)**
- **4-star Atrium Palace (moderate)**
- **3-star Inglaterra (gives 4-star service)**
- **2-star Constanza**

LUXURY IN L'EIXAMPLE

5-star Hotel Majestic GL

On the fashionable designer boutique-filled Passeig de Gràcia, at València, is where you'll find our very favorite luxury hotel in Barcelona, the superbly run Majestic (www.hotelmajestic.es). The hotel, housed in a stunning neoclassical 1918 building, is surrounded by world-class shopping including the Chanel and Armani boutiques, which are part of the hotel. The lobby, with its enormous flower arrangements, tapestry, crystal chandelier, marble columns and antique desks, gives an immediate impression of classic elegance. Inside you'll discover one of the hottest restaurants in town, the intimate, expensive and exquisite **Drolma**, in a secluded space on the second floor done in a

luxurious Art Nouveau décor. Chef Fermi Puig is one of the best young chefs working in Spain today and has been awarded one Michelin star, 3 Campsa suns plus an 8/10 rating in The Best of Spanish Gastronomy. On the ground floor, beyond the lobby, you'll find the more casual **Condal** restaurant which serves a wonderfully copious Sunday brunch buffet from 1:00 – 4:00 for €45, including cava and live guitar music. There is a daily luncheon buffet and a tapas menu at night from 7:30 - 11:00 for €28 (includes a tapas assortment, a rice dish or paella and dessert). There is also a cozy and clubby bar with piano music in the evening, and a business center.

There is a pool on the top floor, the 10th floor **Penthouse**. It's slightly larger than the one at the Casa Fuster, measuring 1.15 meters deep by almost 6 meters in width. There is



a private sunning area to the side, a decent sized fitness center, steam bath and sauna, plus spa services and a cafe/ bar with remarkable views of the city. The bar is open from 7:00 until 10:00, while the pool closes at 7:30 in the evening. We often go up for late morning coffee or a pre-dinner cava and feast on the extraordinary vistas, with the Sagrada Familia to the east. Guests can also have a continental breakfast served on the terrace.

We had a wonderful and memorable stay here in January in room 809, an interior (and adjoining) room, on the floor below the roof terrace. This Classic Room is generous in size, with very comfortable queen bed with cherry sleigh headboard, high quality linens, modern art adorning the walls, a large desk for writing, a flat

screen TV with too many channels in too many languages to count, a movie menu and coffee table with two small side chairs. In the closet we found heavy wood hangers, a safe large enough for our laptop, bathrobes and slippers, a box for nightly shoeshine service (for a fee of €3) and an umbrella. The marble bath had only one sink but featured a powerful hair dryer; magnifying mirror, large, plush towels and Majestic brand toiletries replenished generously. Maintenance was impeccable. On our classy desk was a menu of gourmet products that can be ordered and delivered from the prestigious Can Ravell gourmet emporium. And turn down service left a small box of chocolates. Suite

amenities include two plasma TVs, a music system, Jacuzzi tub, a dressing room, extra half bath, Molton Brown toiletries, free internet connection and one day's use of a Smart Car. The hotel has 8 suites and 22 junior suites.

The Majestic is well known for its seamless impeccable service which guests experience from the minute they arrive and alight from their taxi upon until the moment they depart. The smartly outfitted, multi-lingual desk staff is highly efficient, proficient in English and well trained-there's never a wait to ask a question. Our restaurant reservations were taken care of quickly and reconfirmed via voice mail. The check in procedure here rivals that of the Ritz in Madrid - smooth as silk. In fact, the Majestic is all about **great service**. After staying here, you may find the service at other Eixample-area hotels pails in comparison. It has received a Q for quality by the government. During our winter stay, the hotel offered an advantageous rate of three nights-for-two.

The Majestic is featured in the '07 Louis Vuitton Spain guide, is a JP Moser selection and a member of Leading Small Hotels of the World. The vast (3,232 square feet) presidential suite, or apartment, has hosted Nora Jones, John Galiano, King Constantine of Greece and his sister Queen Sofia of Spain. Other rooms have hosted such celebrities as Jean Paul Belmondo, Calista Flockhart, and Catherine Deneuve. This hotel exudes class and Old World elegance, but yet the energetic marketing director and the meticulous management keep it right up-to-date. Immediately after completing my guest survey, I received an email thank you from the hotel's General Manager. The Soldevila-Casals family has just purchased the exclusive designer **Hotel Montalembert** on Paris' Left Bank. Highly recommended!!

Read reviews at:

travelintelligence.net/wsd/hotels/htls_1285_Hotel_Majestic_Barcelona_review.html.

5-star Grand Lux Casa Fuster

This fabulous hotel, opened in June '04, is owned by Hotels Center, based in Granada, who invested almost 80 million euros into the outstanding re-fit of a gorgeous 1908 **Domenech I Muntaner** designed opulent mansion, really a petit palace. Built for Mallorcan aristocrats, this was his last work (www.hotelcasafuster.com). It sits in front of a lovely and quiet square with fountain, set away from the noise and fray, just above where the Diagonal intersects with the Passeig de Gracia.. At the time of its construction in 1905 it was considered the most expensive in the city. The facade was done in white marble. This is the most expensive Eixample hotel by far, with the category of a **5-star Gran Lujo Monumento**, a luxury hotel-monument. Given its monument status, it has retained its original sculptures, its plaster moldings, wrought iron balconies and marble throughout. It has been decorated in Art Deco style with an exquisite eye for detail-everything finished to absolute perfection.

It has an enormous and dramatic black marble lobby turned into a Viennese style bar-coffee house where serve-yourself tea and pastries or evening tapas and drinks are presented, 96 luxurious, ultra plush rooms with flat screen TV, free high speed internet connection and gorgeous whirlpool baths with towel warmers, robes and slippers, double sinks plus Loewe-brand toiletries and silk bed linens. Because the rooms could not be

enlarged due to its historic landmark status and walk-in closets could not be added, storage space is at a premium. Extra storage trunks can be brought in upon request, or extra luggage can be stored away.

This discreet and refined hotel also offers 24-hour room service, high speed internet access, a 7th floor business center with free use of high-speed computers, complimentary water and apples, free daily newspapers (including IHT and Wall St. Journal), a tiny gym with sauna and shower, a small roof top pool and terrace (for guests' use only) with stunning, take-your-breath-away, Champs Elysees-type views down the Passeig de Gracia, a fitness center, garage and a first floor gourmet restaurant, Galaxó which is equally plush. Chef Dídac Alcoriza offers a market driven menu (and fantastic cheese cart) that runs around €70 per person. The restaurant never closes. The sumptuous breakfast served in the basement costs a whopping €25 extra, as is typically of such luxury hotels. The breakfast room turns into a bar with DJ chill out music at night, starting at 11:30. Woody Allen recently played in the café while in BCN filming of his new movie.

Casa Fuster has a far more snazzy, enviable and **practical** location than the Hotel Arts at the port, or the Gran Hotel Florida at the top of Mount Tibidabo (a 20-minute taxi ride



away), and has more luxurious rooms than the Claris, its Grand Lux competitors. We took a full tour in January, given to us by friendly Abel (who left the Arts for the calm of the Fuster), and we left quite impressed after seeing a standard room (520), which was gorgeous and had a view of the Sagrada Familia. We also saw rooms 501-510, which face the Passeig de Gracia with truly unforgettable views,

superior twins 507 and 508, which was our favorite, not the most expensive, but a “senior suite” with large flat screen TV in living room, which faces the Passeig de Gracia. The bedroom with a second large flat screen TV, had a dressing room, with that trunk provided for extra storage space and its own sauna. The hotel has been receiving generally fine reviews on Trip Advisor (tripadvisor.com). It's a member of Leading Small Hotels of the World, and Karen Brown has included it in her Spain guide. Like the Majestic, it also exudes class, albeit at much higher tariffs. Book at:

www.hotelescenter.es.

4-star Hotel Omm

Opened in '03, this was the first hotel venture of the Tragaluz restaurant group. It was designed by the architect Juli Capella, who likens the strange limestone façade on Calle Roselló to an advent calendar. He wanted to let in the light without compromising guests' privacy. One reviewer calls it "Gehry meets Gaudí". It has a terrific location at the corner of Passeig de Gracia and Roselló 265 (www.hotelomm.es). It remains BCN's hippest "design" hotel ("Nordic Zen") and is very popular among the fashion conscious and was expanded last year, with the addition on the Passeig de Gracia, adding 30 more rooms for a total of 91. It has a rooftop pool and terrace bar that is open to guests only. Downstairs there's a beautiful full service spa, indoor pool, fitness center and hairdresser called the **Spaciomm**. For dining/drinking the hotel features the **Moo** restaurant with one Michelin star supervised by the Roca brothers of the Celler de Can Roca outside of Girona (2 Michelin stars). Next to the Moo is the **Moovida** bar and lounge, a cozy open place with sofas, comfy fifties-style armchairs and fireplace where the buffet breakfast is served (for an additional €20) then tapas or small plates with chill out music at night. There's also the **Ommsession** dance club in the basement also open to the general public from Wednesday - Saturday from 11:00 pm until 3:00 am. The giant open public spaces sport metal-mesh curtains, rough stonewalls, grey furniture and Oriental style lighting fixtures.

We took a tour in January during the "Bread & Butter" fashion week when the hotel was abuzz with models and designers. Although the designer clad staff is trained to be cool, and you do have to coax a smile out of them, we did like what we saw in the guest quarters. The very dark corridors are lined in black rubber and are lit by fiber optic strips on the floor, quite a theatrical touch. Most of the standard rooms are a bit too tight on space to be recommended for the price. There is no door between sink area of bath and the sleeping area, so if you have privacy issues, think twice. All rooms are done in blond woods and decorated in a very pared-down, minimalist style, in the ubiquitous grey-black-cream color scheme that we saw in all the design hotels in the city. They have designer sinks, flat screen TVs, music systems, beds are centered on deep-pile moss green or burnt-orange area rugs, have duvets, blond oak parquet floors, molded-plywood armchairs and offer WiFi. All rooms ending in 17 are superior rooms, which have a good deal more space. Rooms 501 and 601 have views of La Pedrera.

The superior rooms overlooking the back, ('02, '04, '06, '08) which we found the most attractive, have canopy beds, a large writing desk, a bistro table for two in an alcove and a private teak deck with ivy-covered trellis and enough room for a small table and two chairs. These are the ones I would choose. Room 319 is a suite with separate living room and a little alcove overlooking the street. If you are a lover of Wallpaper magazine, you'll be very happy here. It's a member of the Metròpoli selection of Rusticae, is a JP Moser selection and belongs to the Design Hotels group. You can book at the hotel's own website (hotelomm.es), the Grupo Tragaluz web page, or at JP Moser.

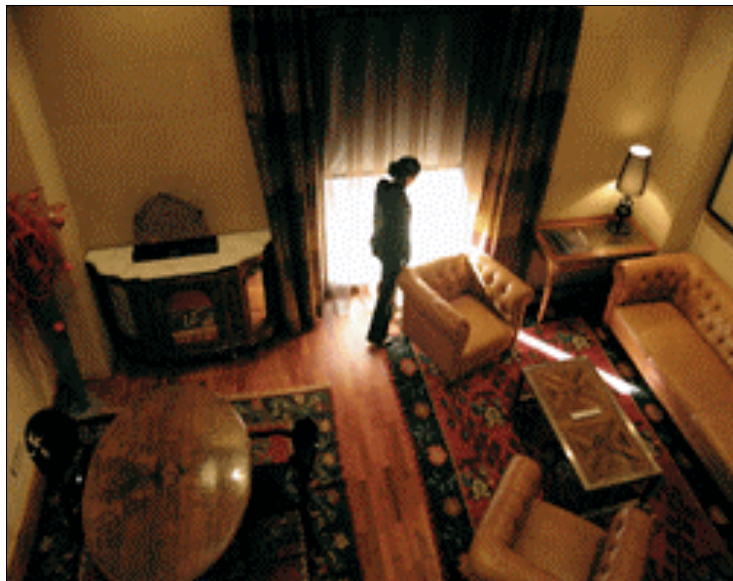
5-star Grand Lux Hotel Claris

Behind the façade of a former mansion, the Verdruna Palace, in the Dreta (Right) Eixample, one block east of the Passeig de Gracia, is the 124-room Barcelona flagship of

the Derby Hotel group (www.derbyhotels.es). The moment you walk in the lobby you're assaulted by the heavy aromatherapy putting you in a Zen-like mood. The concierge desk is always staffed, and one's first impression is that of tranquility. And, as with the hip Hotel Urban in Madrid, one is greeted by a doorman in a striking long white coat. The desk staff is dressed in black. There is a tiny glass enclosed gym (not much equipment) on the top floor and a tiny free business center open 24/7 on the ground floor. WiFi is available in the guest rooms for a fee of €10 for 24 hours. For dining, the **East 47** restaurant has fairly reasonable prices and offers half portions and tapas at the bar. On the street next to the restaurant there's a casual place, **Sal y Pimienta** with a menu in English, and low prices.

Jordi Clos, the owner of the Derby Group, is an Egyptologist, who has put his collection on display in his hotels. The Claris has a Roman and Egyptian art museum on 2nd floor mezzanine. Its top floor Terraza, complete with pool (which opens in May), is the place to have lunch, or drinks on a warm summer's evening, accompanied by "chill out" music from their DJ, from 8:30 pm to midnight. Room service will also deliver breakfast to guests who would like to take it on the terrace.

The Claris duplex suites do impress. On our January tour we saw the duplex room 210, an exterior with living room with leather sofa, Persian rug and flat screen TV and bedroom with two twin beds (purple bedspread) and second plasma TV. It had a large walk-in closet with slippers, robe and safe. The very pretty woods are cherry. The Italian marble bath has a double sink. Junior suites are connecting, good for families, and are the only rooms that connect. We also saw the exterior double duplex suite 211, which has two baths and is double the size of a normal duplex. In the entrance there is a beautiful antique dining table, the living room is furnished with a leather sofa with two leather chairs, antique table and bureau, very large plasma TV, and original modern art adorns the walls. It also boasts a large walk-in closet. The large downstairs bath has its own Swedish sauna and Jacuzzi and double sinks. Upstairs there is a double bed with small bath. The Claris has eight double deluxe duplexes. In each of the suites you'll find a piece or two of the owner's Egyptian and Roman art collection.



The desk clerk confessed to me that their rates change constantly, so **always** look for online deals. And look for promo rates on Expedia. Good deals can be found through close monitoring. Celebrities such as Plácido Domingo, John Malkovich, Meg Ryan,

Claudia Schiffer and Naomi Campbell are former guests. It's a luxury selection of JP Moser and Secret Places (www.secretplaces.com.) Karen Brown raves about the Claris in her Spain guide. Book it at the Derby Hotel web site (derbyhotels.es) or at the Small Luxury Hotels of the World (www.slh.com).

Read reviews:

travelintelligence.net/wsd/hotels/htls_148_Claris_Hotel_Barcelona_review.html.

5-star Hotel Husa Palace Gran Lux

The former Ritz, built in 1919 by Catalán architect Ferran Puig (co-designer of Madrid's Hotel Palace). Think Old World Grand European style in the public rooms, which have



been recently re-decorated. Downstairs in the lobby the Persian carpets, marble, chandeliers and antique mirrors glisten. The concierge desk is staffed by ultra polite and accommodating liveried footmen is at the entrance, while the wood paneled check in desk is housed in an oval side room off the entrance, like the Ritz in Madrid. The formal parlor serves afternoon tea and evening drinks, and the beautiful winter

garden breakfast room is located below the parlors. There is also a very British style Scotch Bar off the entrance. Although the public rooms do look grand, the picture changes when one moves upstairs via the old time elevators. The wide hallways just aren't as impressive as those at Madrid's Ritz, and the guest rooms, while quite ample in size, do need to be redecorated to bring them up to date and make them look less "dowager-like". They seem very much "period pieces". But they have housed illustrious guests in the past such as the Queen of Norway, the Dukes of Windsor Arthur Rubinstein, Tyrone Power, Dalí, Elton John and Paul McCartney. But they have a museum quality look about them (www.hotelpalacebarcelona.com). The Palace's current claim to fame is its **Caelis** restaurant (caelis.com), whose young French chef has received a Michelin star and one Campsa sun. It serves a €60 lunch menu, Tuesday – Friday only, consisting of a snack, poached egg with white truffles in chicken broth, a choice of two starters, two main courses and a dessert or selection of 3 artisan cheeses plus a tray of chocolate "Gourmandises" to accompany coffee (extra). It offers other tasting menus for €72 and €90.

We were given a tour of the bedrooms and saw room 602, which was very spacious for a standard room, with king bed, 2 arm chairs, coffee table, fireplace and large closets. The bath was equipped with Etro toiletries, double basins, gold plated fixtures (that needed a good polishing), magnifying mirror (but no fresh flowers) and an entryway with full-length mirror. We also saw a junior suite with living room, furnished with old-fashioned furniture and a curtain which separated the living area from the bedroom. All rooms ending in '08 are suites and are enormous. Rooms 607 and 609 have Roman style baths.

N.B. I would consider the Palace only by using Talonotel or Bancotel coupons, bringing the daily rate down to €180 per night. These voucher programs list availability at the Palace throughout the year, not only during low season. This hotel is also featured in the Karen Brown guide.

LUXURY FOR LESS IN L'EIXAMPLE

Sometimes for under €200

4-star Hotel Cram

Opened in February of '05, it also has a superb location on Aribau, 54, in the Esquerra (Left) Eixample, just three blocks west of the Passeig de Gracia (www.hotelcram.com). Hidden behind an elegant 19th century facade is an extremely avant-garde, 7 floor striking, design hotel. Unlike the Omm, the hallways are filled with light shining in from the dramatic open atrium. It has 67 ultra modern, very contemporary, hip and boldly decorated rooms (in red, black, orange, violet or grey with white walls) equipped with king platform beds, blond hardwood floors, interactive 32-inch plasma TV, and guests can choose their lighting from "fiesta" to "romantic" to "night light". Baths of the standard rooms have showers only but are sleekly appointed. The "Privilege" suite is the largest, with private terrace with views of Tibidabo and the Sagrada Familia and a separate living room. We have seen suite 602 which is done in very attractive reds, black and dark woods. It has a small living room and Jacuzzi next to the bed. Guests can watch the large flat screen TV while soaking in the tub. Room 605 is a "privilege" room whose bath has a shower only, but it's charming. The Cram has just two suites and two executive rooms and **no** triples or quads, as the hotel doesn't cater to families (although we did see children in the lobby). All rooms are equipped with bathrobes, slippers, plasma web TVs and a high tech alarm, Do Not Disturb system at each door, which has a doorbell.

The Cram also offers Mercedes limo service to the airport, laptop service with wireless Internet access, pressing, health club privileges at Holmes Place (as does the Pulitzer) and a roof top terrace with tiny plunge pool. It's a selection of Tablet Hotels, JP Moser, Secret Places, and Inns of Spain and belongs to the Rusticae group. I have seen rates as low as 134 euros three months in advance at: laterooms.com. If chic design hotels fit your fancy, I encourage you to book this member of Rusticae, or the Granados 83, rather than the Prestige Passeig de Gracia.

The hotel's one Michelin star restaurant, **Gaig**, is considered one of the top ten in the city and has a dramatic Thai inspired design, done in shades of red, black and metallic. Guests must reserve far in advance for a table, as the restaurant is completely independent from the hotel, and dining here is an expensive affair, although it offers a degustation menu for €74.

Read reviews at:

travelintelligence.net/wsd/hotels/htls_4945_Hotel_Cram_Barcelona_review.html

4-star AC Diplomatic

This is an excellent business-class hotel, which also happens to be in a great location, in the Right Eixample, one block from the Claris, between Aragó and Consell de Cent, but usually with lower rates (www.ac-hoteles.com). Run by the very hip AC chain, Spain's version of the "W", it is decorated in the minimalist, contemporary style typical of all AC hotels. The AC Grand Class hotels give value, with lots of extras such as early morning coffee downstairs in the lounge with computers (for a fee), printers and free newspapers, free soft drinks, juices, water and beer in the mini-bars, robes and slippers, plentiful toiletry goodies, including a toilet kit specially designed for women. There is also an in-room safe, umbrella, leather bound book of hotel services, super fast laundry service, a small roof top pool, gym and a well-trained staff. They try harder, as it is the brainchild of Antonio Catalán, the young wonder boy hotelier who was the CEO of the rival and highly profitable NH chain, who bolted several years ago to start his own hotel chain and beat out his original company. Book a superior room, as the standard rooms at AC Hotels tend to run small. Their restaurant, **Nicte** has reasonable prices and English menus. Another solid four-star hotel featured in the Louis Vuitton Spain guide.

4-star Prestige Passeig de Gràcia

Opened in '02, it's ultra hip and trendy, with a spectacular location right on the Passeig de Gràcia between Roselló and Aragó, tucked between the two sections of my favorite bookstore, Casa del Libro, and billed as an ultra high tech hotel with supposedly super service from the **Ask Me** concierge staff and has only 45 rooms and 2 jr. suites (www.prestigepasseigdegracia.com). Five superior rooms have Japanese roof patios with teak decks, white lounge chair and table for two overlooking the Passeig de Gracia. This is perfect for those who love and must stay in Ian Schrager, Philippe Starck type hotels. The hotel furniture and accessories are for sale, if you fall in love with some piece.

We toured the public rooms only, as it was fully booked during the Bread & Butter fashion week. It has a very dramatic, high ceiling lobby with original marble and wrought iron staircase leading to the lounge, and a smartly dressed, very professional staff. The upstairs library lounge, called the Zero Room, with large picture windows overlooking the Passeig de Gracia, is stocked with design books, is a quiet and soothing place to have coffee, drink (decent prices) a snack, to check email or just to rest, and the two black t-shirt clad Ask Me concierge attendants were busy at the computers, ready to solve problems or make reservations for guests. It has no restaurant but offers 24-hour room service. Breakfast is complimentary for those who book online, and the hotel offers free airport transfers. The tariffs do run on the high side compared to other 4-stars, but it does have a perfect location. There is no restaurant.

It's a selection of Secret Places, Rusticae, JP Moser, and I-Escape (www.i-escape.com). I would never choose it over the **Majestic** if the prices were equal. I've read some reports indicating small rooms and design features (lights and blinds that are difficult to work) that are impractical - form trumping function. I have seen rates from €187 - €214 at: www.travel-in-spain.com.

4-star Granados 83

This is another member of the Derby group. (www.derbyhotels.es), which opened its 77 rooms in March, '06 on the pretty, tree-lined and quiet Carrer Enric Granados in the Left Eixample. I think of this new Derby property as a 4-star "mini" Hotel Urban (their 5-star ultra hip Madrid flagship). Although the facades of the two are not alike-the Granados lies behind a beautiful neoclassic facade rather than cold stone-the decor is quite similar, with the same high back black leather chairs in the lobby, dramatic lighting, sleek front desk, the smattering of ancient artifacts throughout the hotel, the same design (black bedspreads, tall burnished leather headboards and sofas, zebrawood floors, tamarind wood furniture, exposed brick) in the bedrooms. But unlike the Urban, the hotel exudes quiet rather than constant hustle and bustle. The suites are located on the ground floor. The small roof top pool with hip bar opens at the beginning of May. **Restaurant 3**, downstairs, serves a market driven menu plus breakfast buffet served from 7:00 – 11:00 and a late breakfast from 11:30 – 1:00 in the Bar 8. The downstairs nightclub club and bar are open from 9:00 to 2:00. Next to the bar you'll find a computer and printer.

We saw duplex suite 24 (one of six) with a private terrace and shared plunge pool, two mini bars, a cozy salon downstairs with half bath and small table for two, two plasma TVs and bedroom upstairs. Standard room 209 has access to this terrace and plunge pool for the normal standard double rate. Room 010 is handicapped accessible (bath has walk in shower with a seat) and very spacious, a standard double with leather sofa. Room 406 and 412 are small, interior single rooms. All rooms come with bathrobes, mini bars, music systems, LCD television and free high-speed Internet access by cable.

This Granados 83 belongs to the Rusticae Metròpoli group, along with the hotels Omm, Cram, Prestige and Pulitzer.

LUXURY APARTMENT RENTALS NEAR THE SAGRADA FAMILIA *On the far east side of the Eixample*

Hispanos Siete Suiza

This 5-star apartment-hotel is located at Sicilia, 255. It has 19 Junior suites, one and two bedroom apartments with living room, a kitchen with coffee maker, mini bar, DVD, satellite TV, non-smoking apartments and a garage. In the stylish Art Deco lobby seven Hispano Suiza vehicles from the '40s are displayed from the collection of the Colet Foundation. Guests can take one out for an hour's spin. It has a restaurant, La Cúpola, supervised by famed chef Carlos Gaig of Gaig (Hotel Cram) and also has an informal cafeteria. They have recently received a nice review from El País's hotel critic, who gave the rooms a 9 for comfort and the staff an 8 for service. And it's a member of **Inns of Spain** (www.innsofspan.com), which is a very good sign. Book it at Inns of Spain or on their own web site: (www.hispanos7suiza.com).

UPPER MODERATE HOTELS IN L'EIXAMPLE

3-star Inglaterra

This little sister of the 5-star Hotel Majestic provides 4-star service and amenities with the same touch of class as the Majestic itself. Housed in a classic 1910 Art Nouveau

apartment building, it's located on busy Calle Pelai, around the corner from the Hotel Pulitzer. Although there's plenty of hustle and bustle outside the doors, once inside, you'll find it blissfully quiet. The totally unprepossessing, tiny lobby with just a simple sofa and chair doesn't do the hotel justice at all and is scheduled for a refit soon (the last section of the hotel to be completely refurbished), but the polished and professional front desk staff, headed by Lucia, sets a warm and friendly tone for guests. And the resident director, Gemma, is absolutely charming, full of enthusiasm (and advice regarding restaurants and nightlife) and runs her "baby hotel" with lots of love, as if it were her own home.

We looked at a standard room, 114, which is very comfy and much nicer, more stylish, than other 3-stars that we've seen (such as the Astoria). Rooms are decorated in soft,



soothing beige and cream tones, have parquet floors, a desk with white leather chair and leather hotel directory, mini bars, flat screen TVs and updated baths with designer sinks and the same bath kits as those at the Majestic, plus new hair dryers and make up mirrors. We also inspected connecting rooms 111-112, which make a little apartment, great for a family or two couples traveling together. Room 108 is a lovely room with handicapped access, one of two in the hotel.

Room 107 is a great triple for parents and one child or a group of 3 good friends who want to share a room. The hotel has 11 triples. We particularly liked cozy little room 105 with its private patio and bath with window. Room 104 also has a private patio, equally cozy. The two suites are called the Gaudí and the Dalí and are appointed with large flat screen TV, private terrace and a trouser press and are a steal during low season rates! The hotel does have a lovely roof terrace with classic teak furniture open only to guests. Because the building can't be fitted with a roof top pool and is too small to have a fitness center, guests have pool and fitness/sauna privileges at the 5-star Hotel Majestic.

In the basement you'll find a reading lounge with large plasma TV and computer terminal and an extremely inviting "Red Café", a prettily decorated, very inviting, living room type of space with comfortable arm chairs to relax in while enjoying a leisurely buffet breakfast. While the bar makes your cappuccino to order, you can serve yourself American coffee from a machine at the buffet. The chef Jordi Canesa from the Majestic prepares the breakfast spreads, which cost a reasonable 12€ (or less, depending upon the season), and is served from 7:30 – 11:00 am. If you have an early departure, a limited menu is available at 7:00 am.

If you have a special birthday or anniversary, let the desk staff know, and they will prepare a special package. Guests receive lots of brochures and maps at check in and the

personal attention (such as arranging a private guide) that is an important detail for the Majestic Hotel group. And like the Majestic, its little sister exudes class and timeless classic style. It's featured in the Karen Brown guide. See www.hotel-inglaterra.com for easy online booking.

4-star Pulitzer

Calle Bergara 8, around the corner from the Plaça de Catalunya (technically not in the Eixample, but close enough) opened in '04 as a Clarion but dropped its affiliation with Clairton hotels in Sept., '06 and is now a member of the Rusticae boutique group. It's very sleek and sexy, design-trendy with 91 smallish double rooms and 5 suites done in grey, black and white with bare wood floors, wall mounted plasma TVs, with CNN, robes (but no turn down service), free paper, "chill out" CD, mini bar, high speed internet, marble baths, in room safe and 24-hour room service. There are 3 handicapped accessible rooms, and 4 floors are non-smoking. The hip downstairs (also non smoking) open library-bar with comfy white leather sofas in front of the fireplace and resident mixologist stays open until 2:00 am on weekends and plays chill out music - a happening spot (www.hotelpulitzer.es).

The very friendly public relations manager gave us a January tour along with a CD of the hotel's chill out music. We saw a standard double, which didn't appear too terribly small because of the excellent, efficient use of space. There was room for a secretary type desk and plenty of storage space was hidden behind floor to ceiling sliding doors. The stylish baths (robes provided) have marble sinks that are hard to keep looking beautiful-form over function-but the designer, who also did the Bany's Orientals, chose them for their design appeal rather than practicality. The superior rooms, such as 306 and 506 have a leather sofa. Like the Cram, this is not a particularly family-oriented hotel, as there are no triples. Breakfast is complimentary for the suites and brought to the room. Plus evening turn down service with flowers is provided. The suite, room 516, is just a knockout! It's quite stylish with a huge amount of closet space, four-poster bed, complimentary honor bar, very large plasma TV and a deck to die for with huge table for four.



The pretty rooftop terrace, Sky Bar, is open to the public in the summer and serves drinks along with a DJ for chill out music at night. Although there's no dipping pool (can't build a pool because the metro runs under the building), the hotel provides **free** access to the Homus Place fitness center a block away, with sauna, heated indoor pool and Pilates

classes. Breakfast (€16) is served in the downstairs Visit Restaurant that also offers lunch and dinner and outdoor dining on a small terrace.

The Hotel Pulitzer gets solid reviews on Trip Advisor (www.tripadvisor.com), and would suggest the Pulitzer over the Atrium Palace for those who are particularly design conscious, who frequent “cool” spots, who aren’t traveling with children, want to be steps away from the Ramblas, need personalized service and are able to snag a reduced rate. It’s also a member of **Epoque** hotels.

4-star Apsis Atrium Place

Also in a pretty neoclassical building, located on the bustling Gran Vía in the Dreta Eixample, next door to the Palace, but set back on a side street and extremely well soundproofed, which makes for a pleasant stay. The impressive lobby retains its classic look, with marble floors and a stunning marble staircase. This moderately priced, highly functional hotel has a lot going for it, including the central location, the helpful desk staff, the nicely maintained rooms (if not particularly stylish), free WiFi, 24-hour room service, a free, 24-hour business center, the inviting indoor pool in the basement and the convenient café-restaurant. We liked our visit.

The spic-and-span marble baths have double sinks, make up mirrors, bathrobes are provided and rooms with their red, white and black color palette, are equipped with irons and ironing boards, internet TV (for a fee) and free mini bar (water). The charming lady desk manager, who speaks excellent English, showed us around, and we saw exterior room 308 with a bath/shower combo and an additional sink in the bedroom. We also looked at a 7th floor suite, 702, facing the Gran Vía. It has a living room with sofa bed. Its terrace has two lounge chairs, the bath boasts a Jacuzzi tub and separate shower. Room 611 is a triple connecting to 610 for families. Kids under 12 stay free. The fifth and sixth floors are the smoking floors. Buffet breakfast costs an additional 16€ and is served from 7:15 -11:30 am. The restaurant also serves a buffet lunch for €20. A small fitness room, a mixed sauna and a Jacuzzi are found in the basement along with the heated pool. Although the Pulitzer (below) has a sexier, jazzier, less corporate bland look, the Atrium Palace (www.hotel-atrumpalace.com) gives an overall better value and is more utilitarian, a better bet for families.

THE REST OF THE 4-STARS - *In a pinch*

4-star Hotel Olivia Plaza

New as of '06, yet another edition to the city’s design hotel scene, has received favorable press by El País hotel critic (www.oliviahotels.es). It’s a ten-story tiny, narrow but deep property located directly on the Plaça de Catalunya, at the southern end, No. 19, near the upper Ramblas. It has 109 doubles, 8 triples and 9 “suites”. Its selling point seems to be the interior loft above the reception desk, with a lounge-cafeteria, a dining room and an oriental garden. Five bedrooms have terraces facing the square, while the best rooms are the three annex rooms on the 10th floor. Rates as low as €140 can be found through Utell. We chose not to tour this property, as this location is so very busy and noisy at all hours.

4-star Rafaelhotel Casanova

Gran Vía de Les Cortes Catalanes, 559, at Carrer Casanova in the Esquerra (Left) Eixample, seven blocks from the Plaça de Catalunya, as of September 6, '06 was the latest entry in the 4-star Eixample hotel scene (www.rafaelhotels.com). Owner Rafael Santamaria, head of Rafael Hotels, has refurbished a Belle Epoque building on the Gran Vía, converting it into a minimalist design hotel that displays his and his wife's private art collection. It offers 126 rooms with the usual 4-star amenities, including double glazed windows (needed on the Gran Vía), WiFi, room service from El Tribeca Restaurant, a lime green lobby bar (yuck) and a garage. Rates start at €136. The major disadvantage here is that its location too far to the west. The Eixample blocks are very long, and it is at least a 15-minute brisk walk from the hotel to the Plaça de Catalunya. I would book the Rafael only if other more central hotels aren't available.

4-star SOHO

The same applies to this new 47-room hotel with very narrow lobby, decorated in dark red and black (www.hotelsohobarcelona.com). Even though it has 4 superior rooms with sitting area and private terrace, free high speed WiFi and a rooftop pool, it's located on the bustling Gran Vía between Casanova and Comte d'Urgell, which for me, is too far west to be handy.

Villa Emilia

While the new (in '06) boutique style, 53 room hotel (www.villaemilia.com) receives very solid reviews on Trip Advisor, with doubles, buffet breakfast included, coming in at €130, its location on Carrer Calabria, beyond the Rafaelhotel Casanova, for me, would be a distinct disadvantage, as I prefer to be closer to the Passeig de Gracia. That said, this newcomer has a metro station very close at hand and seems to please most guests. The roof terrace does not have a pool, but the downstairs **Zinc Bar** offers evening piano music, guest rooms feature flat screen TVs, large walk in showers, and it offers free WiFi. Plus the decorating palette appears far prettier than that of the Rafaelhotel and the Soho.

OTHER 3-STARS TO CONSIDER

3-star B-Hotel

I have yet to inspect this hotel, which again, for me is just too far west at Gran Vía. 389, near the Plaça Espanya (www.sercotelhotels.com).

3-star Hotel Jazz

At Pelai, 3, (<http://www.hoteljazz.com/>) is near the Hotel Pulitzer, and is a member of the Núñez Navrro Hotel Group. It's a short walk to the Plaça de Catalunya and the southern end of the Passeig de Gràcia.

HIGH BUDGET TO MODERATE HOTELS IN L' EIXAMPLE

3-star Hotel Actual

This is a budget-boutique property with an enviable location, right off the Passeig de Gracia, and 1/2 block from the Diagonal on Roselló, 238, facing the Hotel Omm (www.hotelactual.com). It's not a chain hotel, but owned by the Gimeno sisters, who own a household goods and design store on the Passeig de Gracia. It has only 29 absolutely identical, "cookie cutter" rooms with twin beds that can be put together to make a double. Very simple, minimalist décor ("smart and functional" says one review), with bare wood floors, hospital mounted TVs but high thread count sheets and power showers in the grey slate bathrooms, in room safe, mini bar, satellite TV, free high speed internet access, hairdryer, key cards and room service. Eight rooms in back have views of the chimneys of Gaudí's La Pedrera building. It's up-to-date, but simple, with low rates for the tony location. The lobby, in grey and chocolate brown, has Internet access. There's a first floor lounge and bar where the €10 buffet breakfast is served. Room and laundry services are available. For those who want a bit of style in a fantastic location, but are budget conscious, then stay here, save your pennies, and "hang out" at night across the street in the Omm Lounge. Weekend double rates are only €123 and don't vary from season to season, so this makes for a very practical choice during a convention period, such as the first week of February, or for the January Bread & Butter fashion week, when hotel rates can soar. Book on the hotel's own website. Read the review at: www.i-escape.com/hotelactual.php.

3-star H10 Catalunya Plaza

I have yet to inspect this hotel located right at the top of the Plaça de Catalunya, and #7. It originally opened for the '92' Olympics, but was taken over and completely redone by the H10 group (www.h10.es). It has 46 rooms, a young and friendly staff and reports are that it offers a very good value in an ultra convenient location with the usual ample H10 breakfast buffet in a 2nd floor breakfast room overlooking the plaza. There is a computer for guests to check their email on the same floor as the breakfast room. You are offered a complimentary glass of cava upon arrival. Note that some rooms are extremely small. Sandra Gustafson, in her "*Cheap Sleeps in Spain*" recommends room 313 with its desk, large closet space, balcony and double windows facing the plaza. When booking *request the largest double available*, one with a sitting area with a sofa.

2-star Hotel Constanza

Can be found at the southern tip of the Right Eixample at Bruc, 3, just three blocks east of the Passeig de Gracia, very near the Hotel Palace (www.hotelconstanza.com). It's a cute, classy, stylish 20-room B&B type family run hotel, housed in an 1829 building refurbished in 21st century Catalan style. Here is where you will find comfort at a very reasonable price for this neighborhood. The rooms on the first two floors are decorated in reds and creams, with white leather headboards and red banquets at the foot of each bed, marble floors, spotless baths, a/c, Internet access, safe and mini bars. The hotel offers continental breakfast for a reasonable €6 served in ground floor breakfast room and offers laundry service but not much more. A small cafeteria is in the works. Some suites facing the back have private terraces and studio apartments have a kitchenette with stove,

fridge, microwave plus roof top terrace. Gets very solid reviews on Trip Advisor (tripadvisor.com). This is a new selection of I Escape (i-escape.com), which also features the Prestige Passeig de Gracia and hotels Actual, Omm and Neri as their Eixample choices. Double rates can be had for as low as €130.

3-star Continental Palacete

Located on the corner of Rambla de Catalunya and Mallorca, this newly renovated hotel is housed in a 19th century palace and is a sister hotel to the older, and more backpackers' budgeted, Hotel Continental on the Ramblas (www.hotelpalacete.com/). It offers low tariffs in a far nicer, prettier setting than its Ramblas sister, and budget conscious families seems to love the self serve 24-hour buffet with fresh fruit, breads, pastries, drinks (including beer/wine/bottled water), cereals and the plate of the day, available in the 2nd floor common room overlooking the street. The housekeeping is immaculate. It also offers two computers for checking email and Wi-Fi for your laptop. The smallish rooms have rather old-fashioned furnishings and froufrou wallpaper (we saw room 122, decorated in pink, including a pink plastic bureau) and all have a/c. Laundry service is available. The Cerveseria Catalana brasserie is nearby for reasonable dining in the neighborhood,. Rates run €130 for a standard double. This is a classic Rick Steves kind of place.

3-star Derby Hotel Balmes

Sitting in the elegant Eixample district at Carrer Mallorca, 216, the Balmes, with 100 rooms, is the less expensive little sister of the 5-star **Claris** (www.derbyhotels.es). Classy and reasonably priced, it was built in the '90s and is an example of modern good taste and is featured in the Louis Vuitton Spain guide. There is a sky-lighted dining room overlooking an atrium. Three duplex suites have their own terraces, and all backside rooms on the 2nd to the 6th floors overlook the small pool. The décor is in shades of beige. Rooms have desks and marble baths with nice toiletries, a/c, bar, hair dryers, mini-bar, room service, in-room safe and satellite TV. There have been some negative reviews on Trip Advisor (tripadvisor.com), but thus far I am taking them with a grain of salt. The Derby group does things right. Summer rates are lower after 15 July. Check www.hotelbook.com for promo rates.

3-star Hotel América

This is a hip, W-style hotel (hotel-america-barcelona.com), but something like an Ian Schrager-on-the-cheap design, with contemporary with cutting edge furnishings, similar to the Shoreham in New York. Pop artist, designer furniture, and red roses at the counter in the lobby. It has 60 rooms and a great location in the Eixample, at the corner of Provença and Enric Granados, three blocks from Passeig de Gracia. Standard rooms have cable TV, voice mail, Internet connection, mini-bar, safe, bathrobe and slippers. With superior rooms, one gets Internet TV, cordless phone, CD player, digital bath scales, coffee maker and an exercise bike on request. The hotel has a rooftop pool and Jacuzzi with free email access in lobby. Look for Internet specials on this one. It seems to be popular with British "hen parties". Caveat: Please **read all the reader reviews** at: www.tripadvisor.com.

AROUND 100 EUROS IN L'EIXAMPLE

3-star Onix Rambla

This hotel has a very upscale location on the elegant, but busy, Rambla de Catalunya at No.24, which runs parallel to the Passeig de Gracia, and opened in July, '03 (www.hotelsonix.com/). The 40 sparsely decorated rooms have bare wood floors, simple wood headboards, safes, a/c, mini bars, **free** Internet access, satellite TVs, hair dryers, and there is a garage plus laundry service. It also offers a reading room, rooftop pool, solarium, small fitness room and coffee shop. The breakfast buffet costs an extra 12€. Rates, which can be found as low as €96 for a double on softguides.com/barcelona, are a good value for such a highly coveted address. It's located only one block below the Continental Palacete and surrounded by inexpensive dining spots, such as Cervecería Catalana, Ciutat Contal and La Tramoia.

3-star Hotel Derby Astoria

This is the less expensive sister to the Hotel Balmes and Claris of the Derby group. It has a great, very tony location right off the Diagonal, just a few blocks from the top of the Passeig de Gracia (www.derbyhotels.com). Fashionable dining is available at the nearby Paco Meralgo Alta Taberna, La Camarga and El Principal, while the brasserie El Trobador is practically next-door. The hotel is also close to the fast dry cleaners Kayser and the great shopping of the Diagonal. The hotel has spare, clean, classic Old European lines, lots of Art Deco touches. Murals and original marble have been retained. There is also a nice buffet breakfast served early daily. We snagged an unbeatable rate of €114 on the derbyhotels.es site, including the buffet breakfast, which we had to insist that was included in our rate at the desk when checking out. After showing my printout the breakfast charge was removed from my bill. I only wish the front desk staff were a less formal, and a bit friendlier bunch.

Be sure to request a recently renovated room. One can find web rates for as low as €90 for a standard room. Mine, a superior, had new design furniture and a flat screen TV, but my friends' room did not. Nonetheless, it can be a great value for such an up-market location. The new rooftop pool is a real plus. The same rate was also available at utell.com and travelhero.com. The Astoria is also convenient for picking up an Avis rental car, as their office is only two blocks away on Córsega. There is a bus stop in front of the hotel as well as a taxi stand nearby. This hotel is also featured in the Louis Vuitton Spain guide.

3-star Apsis Aranea

Is found 9 blocks east of the Passeig de Gracia, an easy walk from the Sagrada Família Temple on Consell de Cent, 444, but **a very long walk** from all other sights (www.hotelaranea.com). Opened in '03, it is part of the six-member Barcelona Apsis group, along with the Apsis Atrium Palace (see above). The 84 rooms are done in modern, clean and simple lines, in tones of brown with plain laminated floors, and windows are double-glazed for solid soundproofing. Amenities include a mini bar, safes, bathrobes, room service during the day, a 24-hour business center, with newspapers and computers, and a rooftop sundeck. The buffet breakfast, served from 7:00 - 10:30, costs an additional €10, but can be booked at a discount on the Apsis web page.

I have seen rates as low as €75 - €80 for this property on Utell (www.utell.com) and Places to Stay (www.placestostay.com).

3-star AB Viladomat

Located in the far, far Left (Esquerra) Eixample at Viladomat, 197, the hotel opened in '03 and offers 81 rooms, six of which can be made into **family rooms** for 3 to 4 people (www.hotelabviladomat.com). Rooms are large with bare parquet floors, cedar furniture and high ceilings. It has the same contemporary design look, done in yellow and blue, as the H10 chain, but at a gentler price. Room amenities include free WiFi, mini bar, safe, marble bath. It offers laundry service, a garage, bar and restaurant where the buffet breakfast is served for an additional €12.50. The walk to the main Sants rail station takes about 10-minute, while the Plaça de Catalunya is **at least** a 20-minute walk away, so be prepared and plan your day accordingly. Rooms are sometimes available through bancotel.com or edreams.com for €70. Bancotel coupons may be purchased individually in Spain at any of the many Viajes Iberia travel agencies.

LOW BUDGET IN L'EIXAMPLE

Hostal Girona

Located at Calle Girona, 24, just a few blocks from the Plaça de Catalunya. This is an historic "pensión" with twenty rooms that occupy three floors of an Eixample apartment building, run by the López Berlanga family (hostalgirona.com). It has lots of modernist touches with marble fireplaces, coffered ceilings, antiques and colored floor tiles. Rooms do have a/c. The rooms with balconies facing the street cost €10 extra. This property has been recommended in the *British Condé Nast Traveller* magazine, but I have yet to inspect it (www.hostalgirona.com).

MY ONE AND ONLY HOTEL SUGGESTION OFF LAS RAMBLAS

Note: I haven't listed other hotel recommendations directly on the congested, crazy Ramblas because it's a haven for pickpockets; thus, I personally do not enjoy staying there, although I certainly did in my teens. The Ramblas area is teeming with a mass of humanity at all hours, infested with pickpockets, way too much street life and just plain tawdry for me, but that has to do with age. At 19, when backpacking through Spain, I wouldn't have stayed anywhere else, but you certainly do need to watch your valuables at all times when strolling the Ramblas. Since it's a favorite place to hang out for tourists, there are very sticky fingers working the crowd at all times.

4-star Hotel 1898

This new flagship of the NN Hotels (www.nnhoteles.com) is housed in the former headquarters of the Philippines Tobacco Company, an emblematic 1881 building with an historic monument protected status that has been just beautifully restored and now gleaming, due to the constant polishing by the staff. While it does have a discreet entrance on the upper Ramblas, the main entrance is found on Pintor Fortuny, directly across from the Hotel Le Meridien (now undergoing a much needed renovation). Although it was full, a young member of the nice bell staff took the time to give us a

complete, top to bottom tour. The décor is colonial and highly atmospheric, with



handsome rattan furniture, lots of dark leather sofas, ceiling fans and highly polished oak floors given a mahogany stain. The most impressive common area, besides the large and beautifully outfitted lobby, is its roof terrace with wraparound views of the entire city - THE largest private terrace of any of the BCN hotels with a multitude of private sunning and lounging areas. And it is used all year long, because

the pool is heated. Guests were swimming in January. The terrace is also open for non-guests to have a drink, and a DJ plays “chill out” music on summer nights.

While we couldn't visit the completely occupied standard or superior rooms, we were able to view one of the three enormous suites. Suite 503 is the most expensive (€1,500/night), but according to the bellhop, not necessarily the best (he prefers No. 501). It does have a gorgeous living room with two love seats and two arm chairs, a large desk, even a humidor with cigar menu and an espresso machine. The living room can be closed off from the bedroom via sliding door. The bath has a separate dressing room, enormous walk-in closet and a huge Jacuzzi bath with separate walk-in shower and Etro toiletries. The piece de resistance is the super-sized private terrace with lounge chairs galore and a private pool with Jacuzzi tub. If you want to swim in winter, the staff will heat the water for you. The pool was being prepared for just that purpose when we peeked in. The other two suites have private pools as well. All rooms, divided into Classic, Superior, Privilege and Deluxe, come equipped with music system, plasma TV, free high speed, wireless internet connection, and mini bar, safe and individual climate controls.



On the second floor you'll find the pretty library with two computer terminals for guest use. Also there is an equally relaxing and attractive breakfast room serving two types of

breakfast-the express buffet served at the bar for those in a hurry or the complete, lavish buffet (including cava), which is one of the most ample we saw, served from 7-11. If there is something you want and don't see on the buffet, the kitchen will whip it up for you and include it in the €19 price. Lunch and dinner are also served here. On the lower floor there is a spa with nice, large, indoor heated pool (free to guests) and a sauna.

This is a truly beautiful 4-star hotel. While I wish it had an Eixample location rather than its setting off the teeming Ramblas, that it were family rather than corporate owned and that it had a more experienced, better trained service staff, it's just too darn pretty, too architecturally interesting and too immaculate not to be recommended enthusiastically.

*Note: The ultra hip Tragaluz restaurant group has recently opened a handy bar and light meals venue, the **Bar Lobo** (www.grupotragaluz.com/barlobo), on this same street at No.3. It has high ceilings, large glass windows looking out onto the street and an outdoor terrace, well-spaced tables and a very modern design done in black and white. It serves a market driven menu with some oriental touches. You can come in to have one dish or several. Closed Sunday night and Mondays.*

4-star Hotel Onix Liceo

I've yet to visit the new Hotel Onix Liceo (www.hotelsonix.com), opened in March, directly behind the Teatro Liceo on Nou de la Rambla in the lower Raval quarter. While I don't recommend this noisy location, the hotel does offer 45 brand new, designer done rooms (four with a small private terrace) and is housed in a 19th century building. The architects have kept the original marble staircase and black and white tiled floors and the marble fireplace in the downstairs lounge. Rooms are done in the requisite black, gray, brown color scheme and offer flat screen TVs, free WiFi, safes and baths with double sinks. Buffet breakfast costs extra, but guests can help themselves to coffee, tea, water, juices and fruit 24/7. Rates start at under €120.

For the young, who want to be in the center of the Ramblas action.

LUXURY IN PORT OLYMPIC

5-star Hotel Arts

This 482 room property, managed by the Ritz Carlton (ritzcarlton.com) in the Port Olympic, is probably the very "best" in the city in terms of luxury and service, but is too far removed from the main part of the city for good, walk able sightseeing. But if you can afford the Arts, you can easily afford the cost of a taxi to ferry you back and forth on daily basis. The 44-story glass and steel skyscraper looks onto the waterfront below and beach of Barcelona. Each room has a spectacular view, and each jr. suite sits at the corner, affording wraparound views. Rooms are done in shades of beige, and the pink marble baths have twin sinks, sit-down showers and wide tubes. Robes are courtesy of Frette. There are three club floors with the usual Ritz Carlton club amenities.

The Arts is almost resort-like, with the typical Ritz Carlton extras, including 27 huge penthouse apartments and a lovely pool area. It has recently opened a full service Asian Six Senses Spa on the 42nd and 43rd floors, with panoramic sea views. Its 80-minute Jet Lag Relief is a massage plus acupuncture combo. See prices and treatments at:

sixsenses.com/spa/hotel-arts/spa.php. Superb service is the norm, and it's consistently rated as one of Europe's finest city hotels, and a top choice in the Louis Vuitton Spain guide. There is a formal restaurant, a more casual dining venue run by the brother of Sergi Arola of La Broche in Madrid, and a wine bar, Enoteca Bombau. The marina area reminds me of Venice (CA) beach. You can take the No. 7 bus from the hotel to the Plaça Catalunya for only €1,40, but why bother with the bus, when you can opt for a chauffeured limo!

Read reviews:

travelintelligence.net/wsd/hotels/htls_343_Hotel_Arts_Barcelona_review.html.

5-star Hotel AB Skipper

Opened in January '07, it is a lower cost alternative to the adjacent Hotel Arts, offering 235 rooms with all the possible amenities, including CD, DVD, MP3 players, huge lighted closets with space to store a suitcase, iron and ironing board, coffee/tea makers, pillow menu, 32-in. flat screen TV, free WiFi, or cable internet access, twice daily turn down service with weather forecast and a chocolate on your pillow at night (hotellabskipper.com). The baths have double sinks, scales, professional hair dryers, anti-fog make-up mirrors, extra phone, large tubs (Jacuzzi in suites) and separate "rain" showers plus separate toilet room, a menu of bath salts, rose petals, robes and slippers, Loewe toiletries. Executive (standard) rooms measure 30 square meters, the deluxe rooms have terraces with either port or pool views. The six corner deluxe suites measure 75 square meters with two bedrooms, a living room with 40-inch plasma TV, a power room and foyer. Suite guests can call on a 24-hour personal valet. Hotel services include airport transfers via Mercedes minivan, 4 computers available 24/7 in the Cyber Corner, 24-hour concierge service. This new competitor to the Arts (in price rather than in personalized service) gets generally fine reviews on Trip Advisor.

The hotel has a formal restaurant **Syrah** (restaurantsyrah.com), serving contemporary Catalán cuisine for about €60 pp, closed Sunday and Monday. The more informal Restaurante **Malbec** offers a daily dishing of more traditional fare, where buffet breakfast and Sunday brunch are served. It also offers three bars, one poolside, around the downstairs garden pool area. Another outdoor pool and lounge area is located on the top floor, along with the wellness spa, fitness center and bar serving drinks and light fare, low in calories. The downstairs Blend Bar serves an express continental breakfast, tapas, sandwiches, afternoon tea, pre dinner cocktails and after dinner drinks accompanied by chill out music.

5-star Eurostars Grand Marina Hotel

Another top business-class property opened in '03 and designed by I.M. Pei, is found at the World Trade Center complex at the pier, Moll de Barcelona, next to the car ferry terminal at the southern end of Las Ramblas (grandmarinahotel.com). It was designed as a direct, but smaller, competitor to the Hotel Arts. There are 235 double rooms and 42 suites on eight floors. Rooms vary from 30-44 square meters in size and 99% have balconies with water views. All have Jacuzzi tubs. Albert of Monaco, Berlusconi, Eminem, former Spanish Prime Minister Felipe González, Julio Iglesias and Jerry Lewis have been guests in the 900 square meter Presidential suite at €2,500/night. Amenities

include a “Hollywood starlet” pillow menu, an 8th floor gym with sauna and Jacuzzi, an outdoor pool, hair dresser, the top floor **Aire de Mar** restaurant-bar and meeting facilities. This hotel, along with the Casa Fuster, is used for the pre and post packages of most luxury cruise lines.

MODERATE BY THE BEACH

3-star Hotel 54

Is a newcomer located at Passeig de Joan de Borbó, 54, in the former fishing quarter of Barceloneta. It is yet another minimalist hotel with only 28 sleekly designed rooms (read bare tile floors, flat screen, wall mounted TV), some having stunning views of the harbor (hotel54barceloneta.com). It is housed in the former fishermen's guild building. Its two outstanding features are its rooftop terrace, with spectacular sight lines and its downstairs bar-café, **Snack 54**, which is the first branch ever to be opened of the famed Boqueria market snack bar, **Pintxo**, promising great tapas and casual dining. The hotel provides free WiFi access. Be sure to request a room on an upper floor, as the first floor rooms are subject to noise drifting up from the basement nightclub.

LUXURY IN THE BARRI GÒTIC

4-star Hotel Neri

A small, 22-room luxury boutique hotel (hotelnери.com) in a converted 18th century palace with a stylish and moodily romantic interior, each floor having a different color scheme, with dim lighting, original art decorating the walls, abundant use of velvet and taffeta in the furnishings and silver or gold leaf above each bed. Room 103 has a balcony overlooking the square, the third floor rooms have terraces and rooms ending in '01 and '02 face the square. There is also a fashionable restaurant attached, whose chef, Jordi Ruiz trained at El Bulli and Akelarre in San Sebastián. There is a Japanese style rooftop terrace with views of the cathedral, 24-hour room service, butler service and a young and friendly staff, but is located on a medieval square (complete with fountain) where gypsy guitarists hang out at night. Rates run consistently high. Buffet breakfast is an additional €12.

It's a member of Design Hotels and a selection of Secret Places, I-Escape, and Rusticae, a group of charming, unusual and very distinctive properties located throughout Spain and is easily book-able at Inns of Spain (innsofspan.com). We've stayed in many of the Rusticae properties, including Caserío de Lobones in Segovia, Hotel Churrut in Navarra, Hospedería de Santo Domingo in Pedraza and Casa del Maestro in Seville, and enjoyed their very personalized service, both before and during one's stay, romantic atmosphere and pretty, elegant designer looks. I have yet to personally inspect this hotel, but have read glowing reports about it in several travel magazines. However, not all reviews on Trip Advisor (tripadvisor.com) are as equally enthusiastic, particularly given its location on a dark square with narrow streets, not for women traveling alone.

Here is a rave review from the Fodors Forum:

“I just got back from my honeymoon and stayed at the Neri in Barcelona for one night. I absolutely loved it. I was also concerned as there is so little info out there on this hotel.

It is a "Rusticae" and "Inns of Spain" property so you can find info on those sites. It is in an old palace, so it retains loads of old world charm, yet really sleek and modern decor and amenities. My room had a great sound system with customized mood music, there were even speakers on the balcony and in the bathroom, great mood lighting in the rooms, even a flat screen TV. Rooms were spacious, bathroom was ultra modern and clean and my terrace was wonderful. This boutique property has great service. We were greeted with a glass of Cava and were given a "tour" of our room highlighting all of the amenities. The only downside is that it is on a pedestrian street so we had a bit of a hard time finding it, which was a pain if you have lots of luggage, which we did. Tell the taxi driver to drop you off at la plaza de la cathedral. That is the most accessible place. Keep in mind it is in el Barrio Gotico, narrow, dark and winding streets. Can be a little dangerous if you get there at night, but you shouldn't have any problems. I stayed at the Hotel Colón across from the cathedral for 2 nights, and thought it was awful compared to my experience at Neri...I mean, really bad. "

MODERATE TO UPPER MODERATE HOTELS IN BARRI GOTIC

3-star Hotel H10 Raco del Pi

This is a 45-room hotel converted from an old family home built around a patio, and is a member of the hip Catalan H10 chain (h10.es). Similar to the AC & NH chain of hotels, it sits on a pedestrian street in the heart of the Gothic Quarter. This chain delivers a great product, with lots of amenities, at a reasonable price with young, friendly "can do" staff.

4-star Hotel H10 Montcada

Another member of the hip H10 chain, it has 87 rooms and is located on the corner of busy Via Laitana, a safe location. There are some non-smoking rooms available and all have a/c, safe, satellite TV, Internet access, daily paper, and mini-bar. Baths have regular H10 goodies, plus makeup mirror and scale. There is a Jacuzzi and small gym in the attic. With all H10 hotels, always book the largest double or twin available, as some are tiny.

4-star Hotel Barcelona Catedral

A newer, more chic and comfortable 4-star alternative to the Montcada, this late '06 hotel (barcelonacatedral.com) is situated right off cathedral square, to the north. It offers 80 soundproofed rooms, all with free WiFi, 26-in. LCD television, a welcome coffee/tea service, king size beds with goose down comforters and 4 pillows, iPod docks, laptop size safes, minibars, make up mirrors and bath/shower combos, professional hair dryers. With the superior rooms como CD players, robes and slippers and the top floor suite, next to the small outdoor (non-heated) pool adds daily newspapers, a 32-in. flat screen TV and welcome bottle of champagne, with chocolate covered strawberries. On the roof there's also a gym, and the lobby offers a little business corner for free internet access with 4 computer terminals. The hotels **4 Capellans** restaurant serves contemporary Mediterranean cuisine. The hotel is a JP Moser selection.

About the Hotel Colón

I personally feel that the dowager, clubby Hotel Colón, facing the cathedral is highly overpriced at €200, but rooms are often available on web booking sites for far less. On my last walk through in January, I found the furnishings in the lobby and lounges crying out for a good upholsterer. I think that the entire charm of the Colón consists of having a suite with a balcony facing the square to watch the dancing of the sardana on Sunday at noon. Personally, I would save my money and stay elsewhere. It's just very Old (Franco era) Spain and the décor I find is too faded to justify the prices.

Read the reviews:

www.travelintelligence.net/wsd/hotels/htls_1283_Colon_Barcelona_review.html

BUDGET TO LOWER MODERATE HOTEL IN UPPER RAVAL

Near Plaça de Catalunya

3-star Market Hotel

This hotel has a somewhat inconvenient location in the Upper Raval, three blocks below the Gran Vía, near the Sant Antoni market (beware of the early morning noise of purveyors setting up their market stalls), but offers unbeatable rates (markethotel.com.es). The first hotel production of the Quinze Nits budget restaurant chain, it offers smallish rooms with Oriental style lacquered furniture, including 4-poster beds, polished wood floors and stylish baths done in the ubiquitous Barcelona designer white-red-black color scheme-this for €88, including breakfast. Amenities include WiFi access, 20-in. flat screen TVs, plus the ground floor **Market** restaurant with gentle prices like its cousins in the Quinze Nits group (www.markethotel.com.es). The hotel offers its jr. suites for €105 and one apartment for a very reasonable €120. Although it is advertised as an Eixample hotel, it is actually located in the edgy Raval. The early reviews at Trip Advisor have been quite positive.

3-star Hotel Gravina

Formerly an H10, now part of Grupotel, is a nice little 3-star hotel with 78 rooms close to the Plaça Catalunya and Ramblas and below L' Eixample. The young desk staff speaks excellent English, is friendly and helpful and very professional. The downstairs sitting areas are designer chic and inviting. Guests are given a complimentary glass of cava upon arrival. The pretty breakfast room serves an ample buffet breakfast with hot and cold dishes regularly replenished. There are international newspapers available in the breakfast room, IHT and El País in English, and free computer access in the lobby. Room numbers 5 through 8 are exterior rooms with balconies. Room No. 11 is a double with a little sitting alcove, but less floor space. All of the rooms have large, sparkling, up to date baths with power showers and hair dryers that really work, plus plentiful goodies. If you're light of luggage, you can even get off the Aerobús at the Placa Universitat stop and walk to the Gravina (www.barcelonagravinahotel.com).

Caveat: I have not stayed here since it lowered its rates and became a member of the Grupotel chain.

2-star Mesón Castilla

With 57 rooms, is located in the upper Raval quarter, two blocks behind the upper stretch of the Ramblas, very near the Contemporary Art Museum and Plaça Catalunya, and close to two metro stops. I've had to travel alone to Barcelona on several occasions and have felt very safe there (but no longer stay here). It's family owned (since 1956) with a staff that maintains it very well. Here you are within easy walking distance of both of the Gothic Quarter and the elegant Eixample district with its chic shops and famed Modernist architecture. The decor here is not your typical "ultra-hip/cutting edge/post-modern" Barcelona design, instead it has an old-fashioned, Old World feel, with ornate hand carved and painted Castilian furniture, wood beams, medieval looking lamps-fairly large bedrooms with some family rooms, quiet sitting areas on each floor, breakfast room with terrace (buffet breakfast included). It's as comfortable as an old shoe (and thus, not for fans of hip hotels) and belongs to the Husa marketing group, but doesn't have a chain hotel feel (www.mesoncastilla.com).

It's a Karen Brown Recommendation and also appears in the now rather old Sandra Gustafson's "Cheap Sleeps in Spain". Her favorite rooms are No. 126 and No. 464, with sitting rooms, and says "for my money one of best 2-star hotels in Barcelona, not only loaded with charm and character, reflecting the gracious good taste of the delightful owner, but the well-being of guests is always uppermost in the minds of her pleasant staff." It has been dropped from the Karen Brown guide (although she keeps the dowager Colón). Yes, there are many new design hotels in the vicinity that far surpass the M.C., but if the style appeals and it fits your pocketbook, give it a try.

BUDGET TO LOWER MODERATE HOTELS IN THE OLD CITY

Ciutat Vella

3-star Hotel Banys Orientals

Located at Carrer Argenteria, 37, this is only one of two budget hotels I can recommend in the Old Quarter (hotelbanysorientals.com). It's located in the trendy, youthful, up and coming El Born district. I don't feel comfortable sleeping in this area when traveling alone, because some areas can be problematic at night, but this is a designer, boutique hotel run by the owners of my favorite restaurant, **Senyor Parellada**, and on a very well-traversed street near the Picasso Museum. It was opened in the spring of '02, and has been featured in Vogue Entertainment and Travel, the UK Conde Nast Traveller, Travel and Leisure, Passport Newsletter, the Louis Vuitton guide and Wallpaper guides and the travel section of the Guardian, which calls it "style on a budget". It's 44 rooms are done in soft grey and mauve shades, with a sleek, very pared down, minimalist style designed by Lazaro Rosa, with contemporary four-poster beds and Phillipe Starck Lucite chairs (typical Catalán disseny), white gauzy curtains, white bed linens and black tiled baths. 11 rooms have small balconies. Rooms 211 and 311 are favorites that overlook Argenteria street. An annex of suites with lofts has opened in an adjacent building and have flat screen TVs. Plans are to build a small indoor pool or spa downstairs.

Recent Fodor's report says lack of soundproofing between rooms and noise from restaurant below made for difficult sleeping. Again, this hotel is for the young,

adventurous budgeters looking for trendy, designer chic on a beer budget. For only €129, the suites with loft make for a real value in this trendy neighborhood. It's also a selection of Secret Places.

3-star Regencia Colón

This is another budget choice just around the corner from the Hotel Colón on the cathedral square, which often can be found on web booking sites for under €60. For a bit more money you'll have trendier, "hipper" digs at the Banys Orientals, but the R. C. is featured both in the "Cheap Sleeps" and Alistair Sawday's "Special Places to Stay/Spain" guides, and a friend, traveling alone, was comfortable with her stay there. Room 261 is a large, very comfortable double with terrace, complete with chairs and table. Rooms have a mini bar, satellite TV, wine goblets, a corkscrew and hair dryer in the bathroom. It's perfectly comfortable for the price if you simply must stay in the Barri Gotic. Five doubles have cathedral views. Just watch your belongings carefully in the area around the Cathedral (www.hotelregenciacolon.com).

APARTMENT RENTALS

www.friendlyrentals.com

www.boriabcn.com - *rents lofts and suites, 485 square feet each, some with 2 bedrooms, fully equipped kitchens*

www.destinationbcn.com - *designer lofts around Plaça Universitat with fully equipped kitchens*

www.elsolvillas.com

www.oh-barcelona.com

www.rentaflatinbarcelona.com

www.apartmentsbcn.net

www.visit-bcn.com

www.barcelonastuff.com

www.flatsbyday.com

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