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Insider's Guide to Barcelona

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Travel Advisor

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Image courtesy of Hotel Pulitzer Barcelona

Barcelona is a city of layers. It still bears evidence of its various historical periods, from Roman occupation to medieval splendor, 20th-century artistic renaissance to Olympic resurgence in

the 90s. As a result, the city is uniquely worldly and dynamic. As much as there is to see, however, also leave ample time for wandering.

Below, my curated guide outlines a few ideas for what to see and do, plus where to eat and stay in Barcelona. Read on for a little inspiration, then reach out to start planning your dream getaway.

Need to know

Barcelona is brimming with historic streets and stunning architecture reflecting various periods and artistic movements. Expect to walk a lot — it's the best way to explore the city and experience its vibrancy. Starting 2025, non-EU travelers will be required to apply for the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) before entering the country.



Image courtesy of the Wittmore Hotel

- **Currency:** The official currency is the Euro (€). Credit cards are widely accepted, but consider bringing cash (or using an ATM) for smaller purchases, or to have on hand for cash-only businesses.
- **Languages:** Barcelona has two official languages, Catalan and Spanish.

- **Airports:** Josep Tarradellas Barcelona-El Prat Airport (BCN) is the city's main point of entry.
- **Transportation:** Walk when you can. For longer distances, opt for taxis and rideshares; the metro is prime pickpocket territory.
- **Best time to visit:** Barcelona is a year-round destination. Visit during early spring and fall for the best weather. The high season runs from May to September, but summer especially can bring hot temperatures and lots of crowds.
- **Ideal length of stay:** Three to five nights is the sweet spot for covering the city's highlights. You can also stay longer and add on a few day trips, using Barcelona as your homebase.
- **Signature dishes:** There are many regional specialties to try, but a few highlights include paella (saffron rice with vegetables, meat or seafood), patatas bravas (fried potatoes with tomato sauce), escalivada (roasted peppers, eggplant and onion) and pà amb tomàquet (bread rubbed with tomato and drizzled in olive oil)
- **Key phrases:** “Bon dia” (Good morning), “Gràcies” (Thank you), “Si us plau” (Please), “Salut i força al canut!” (To your health and wealth!)
- **What to wear:** Keep it breezy and cool in the summer, and pack light layers for fall and winter. Do as the Barcelonians do and complement a stylishly casual ensemble with equally stylish (and comfortable) sneakers.

Where to stay

Barcelona is very cosmopolitan, with dynamic neighborhoods — all with distinct personalities — to match. Below are a few prominent Barcelonian neighborhoods, followed by a list of my hotel recommendations.

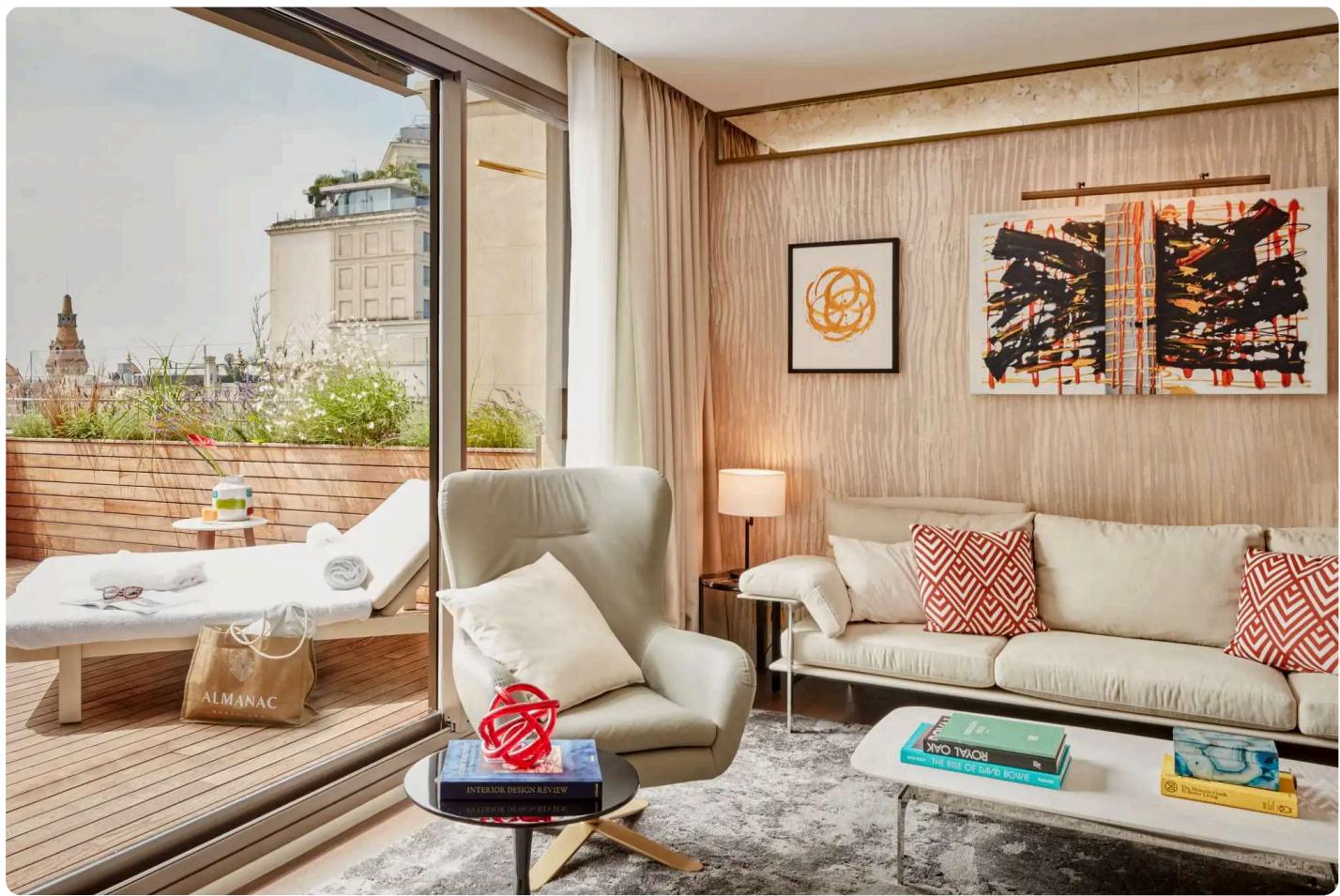


Image courtesy of Almanac Barcelona

- **El Born:** Come here for designer stores, fine dining, art galleries, medieval streets and a trendy vibe.
- **L'Eixample:** This neighborhood is marked by wide streets and an abundance of Modernista architecture; Gaudí's work (including the must-visit Sagrada Família) abounds. L'Eixample also has a lively nightlife and LGBTQ+ scene.
- **Gràcia:** Wellness enthusiasts and those with boho dispositions should head to this local, cool, neighborhood, which is also home to Gaudí's Park Güell.
- **Barceloneta:** Tourists flock to this beachfront stretch.
- **Gothic Quarter:** The historic city center, with centuries-old buildings, winding alleys and a legendary party scene.
- **El Raval:** A multicultural hub known for its street art, nightlife and boho vibe.

Almanac Barcelona: The brand brings its signature boutique luxury, hip vibes and hyperlocality to the Catalonian capital. Fora Reserve perks include \$100 food / beverage credit, a welcome amenity, breakfast daily and an upgrade whenever possible.

Alma Barcelona: A 71-room design-forward stay with a leafy garden restaurant and warm hospitality. Fora Reserve partner perks include a minibar & coffee kit by Nespresso, a welcome amenity, an upgrade and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Wittmore Hotel: You'll find this effortlessly cool, 22-room, adults-only hideaway among the alleys of Barcelona's Gothic Quarter. Fora Reserve partner perks include \$100 food / beverage credit, welcome amenities, breakfast daily, an upgrade and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Hotel Pulitzer Barcelona: Chic boutique luxury with cozy rooms and ingredient-driven cuisine. The hotel is especially ideal for couples and anyone with an eye for design. Fora Perks include a complimentary glass of wine, an upgrade whenever possible and guaranteed extended check-in/out.

Mandarin Oriental, Barcelona: The epitome of luxury, right on the stylish Passeig de Gràcia. Don't miss the hotel's Michelin-Starred restaurant. Expect flawless service and spacious rooms. Fora's Mandarin Oriental Fan Club partner perks include \$100 food / beverage or spa credit, a welcome amenity, breakfast daily and an upgrade whenever possible.



Image courtesy of Casa Bonay

Casa Bonay: A beautifully restored historic building turned trendy, chic boutique hotel, with a happening on-site tapas bar. Fora Perks include welcome amenities, an upgrade whenever possible and guaranteed late check-out.

Hotel Neri: A charming escape comprising two centuries-old buildings on a historic square. Don't miss the locally sourced cuisine at "a" restaurant, nor the leafy rooftop oasis, Roba Estesa. Fora's Relais & Châteaux partner perks include a VIP welcome and breakfast daily.

Grand Hotel Central: Come for the rooftop pool and terrace, with 360-degree city views. Stay for the architectural grandeur — the hotel used to be a grand private villa. Fora's SLH withIN partner perks include \$100 food / beverage or spa credit, breakfast daily and extended echo-in/out whenever possible.

Kimpton Vividora Barcelona: Modern, tranquil and sophisticated, with Kimpton's signature playfulness. The hotel is perfect for friends who want two beds and plenty of space. Fora's IHG Luxury partner perks include \$100 hotel credit, welcome amenities, breakfast daily, an upgrade and late check-out whenever possible.

Hotel Arts Barcelona: An ideal property for families, with a great location near Barcelona's beaches, beachfront and marina views and a pool area. Fora's Marriott STARS partner perks include \$100 hotel credit, a welcome amenity, breakfast daily, an upgrade and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

W Barcelona: A beachy, modern stay on the Barceloneta Boardwalk. Fora's Marriott LUMINOUS partner perks include a welcome amenity, breakfast daily, an upgrade and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

History and culture



Gaudí's Casa Milà

The Romans initially founded Barcino in the 1st century. The walled city would eventually grow into what we now know as Barcelona, Catalonia's capital. (Its coastal location made it especially strategic to the thriving empire.) The city changed hands over the centuries, falling under Christian and then Muslim rule. The 13th through 15th centuries were marked by medieval flourishing, the remnants of which are still visible in the city's Gothic Quarter.

In the late 19th and early 20th century, Barcelona experienced an industrial revolution of sorts, which corresponded with the birth of the artistic (but largely architectural) movement known as Modernisme, where curved lines, asymmetry, colorful exuberance and natural forms reigned. Famed architects Lluís Domènech i Montaner, Josep Puig i Cadafalch and Antoni Gaudí left an especially significant artistic mark on the city. Modernisme was also tied to the Renaixença movement and its accompanying Catalonian nationalism.

In the mid-1930s, the Spanish Civil War broke out. Several other countries got involved, the Spanish nationalists prevailed and Catalan culture was subsequently suppressed. Catalonia was finally granted full autonomy in the late 1970s, but the ensuing decades were rather rocky: illegal referendums, constitutional crises, ample disagreement.

Today, Catalonia is an autonomous region, but fewer residents want full independence. It's still a touchy subject. Barcelonians are proud of their city and Catalan heritage, and when you travel there, it's best not to bring the subject up unless a local initiates the conversation.

Activities



Parc Güell

- Spend at least two half days visiting Gaudí's architectural masterpieces. **Sagrada Família** (get tickets in advance!), **Parc Güell**, **Casa Batllo** and **La Pedrera** are musts. Casa Batllo hosts seasonal rooftop concerts. Visit Parc Güell early in the day or during sunset, to beat the crowds.
- Anyone into art must visit Picasso Museum Barcelona, which houses over 5,000 works in its permanent collection.
- Take a **tapas tour** on your first day to get the lay of the culinary land, and to glean local recommendations from your guide to enjoy throughout the rest of your trip.
- Learn more about Catalonia's culinary scene during a **cooking class**.
- Attend an evening **flamenco show**. The dance form originated in southern Spain, but the cultural experience lives on in Barcelona.

- Take a **sidecar night tour**; it's a romantic, unique way to see the Catalan capital.
- For something a bit more off the beaten path, head to El Born Center for Culture and Memory, an archaeological site and exhibition collection that explores Catalonia's history.
- Take advantage of Barcelona's robust **vintage shopping** and bustling **food markets**.

Restaurants & bars



Image courtesy of Hotel Neri

Definitely make reservations in advance, and note that many restaurants on the Michelin Guide do not allow children (also, dinner usually starts at 8 pm or later). But there's a lot more to Barcelona's gastronomic scene than Michelin-Starred haunts.

Below is most certainly not an exhaustive list of Barcelona's best places to eat. Consider it a curated starting point.

- **Brugarol Barcelona** is moody and modern, with a tight seasonal menu.

- The Barcelona mainstay **Bar Cañete** is always on point. Expect a palpable energy, lots of character and the best staff.
- **ANGLE** and **Capet** are Michelin-Starred gems worth the hype.
- Go to **Bodega La Palma** (get the patatas bravas) for a local tapas moment, and to **Ziryab Fusion Tapas Bar** for tapas with a Moroccan twist.
- The whimsical **Dr. Stravinksy** is one of the world's top 50 bars. Once you try one of their masterful cocktails, you'll see why.
- Let the waiters guide you at the intimate, unfussy **Berbena**, and try traditional Galician dishes at the upscale **Louro**.
- For something more casual (but no less delicious), try the conservas and open-faced sandwiches at the standing-room-only **Quimet y Quimet**.

Add-on destinations

You can cover a lot of ground in a few days. If you want to extend your trip, consider venturing to one of the below destinations. They make great day trips — you can easily keep Barcelona as your homebase — but you can also spend a few days here and there before or after Barcelona.



Montserrat

- Take a day trip to **Montserrat**. Explore the area's vineyards and visit the Santa Maria de Montserrat Abbey, which overlooks the Llobregat Valley.
- Head to the LGBTQ-friendly **Sitges**, a coastal town that knows how to party.
- Explore the various charming beach towns along **Costa Brava**.
- *Game of Thrones* fans shouldn't miss **Girona**, where much of the series was filmed. The university town sits on the River Onyar, and will draw you in with its medieval architecture.
- Visit **Figueres**, the birthplace of Salvador Dalí, and stop by the museum dedicated to the artist.
- Many people start or end their **cruise** in Barcelona. Consider it your gateway to the Mediterranean.

Get in touch with Gregory

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