

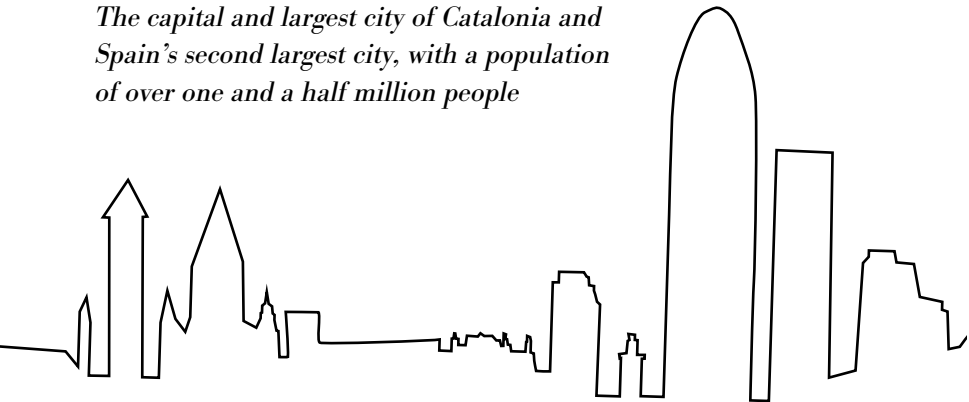
BARCELONA

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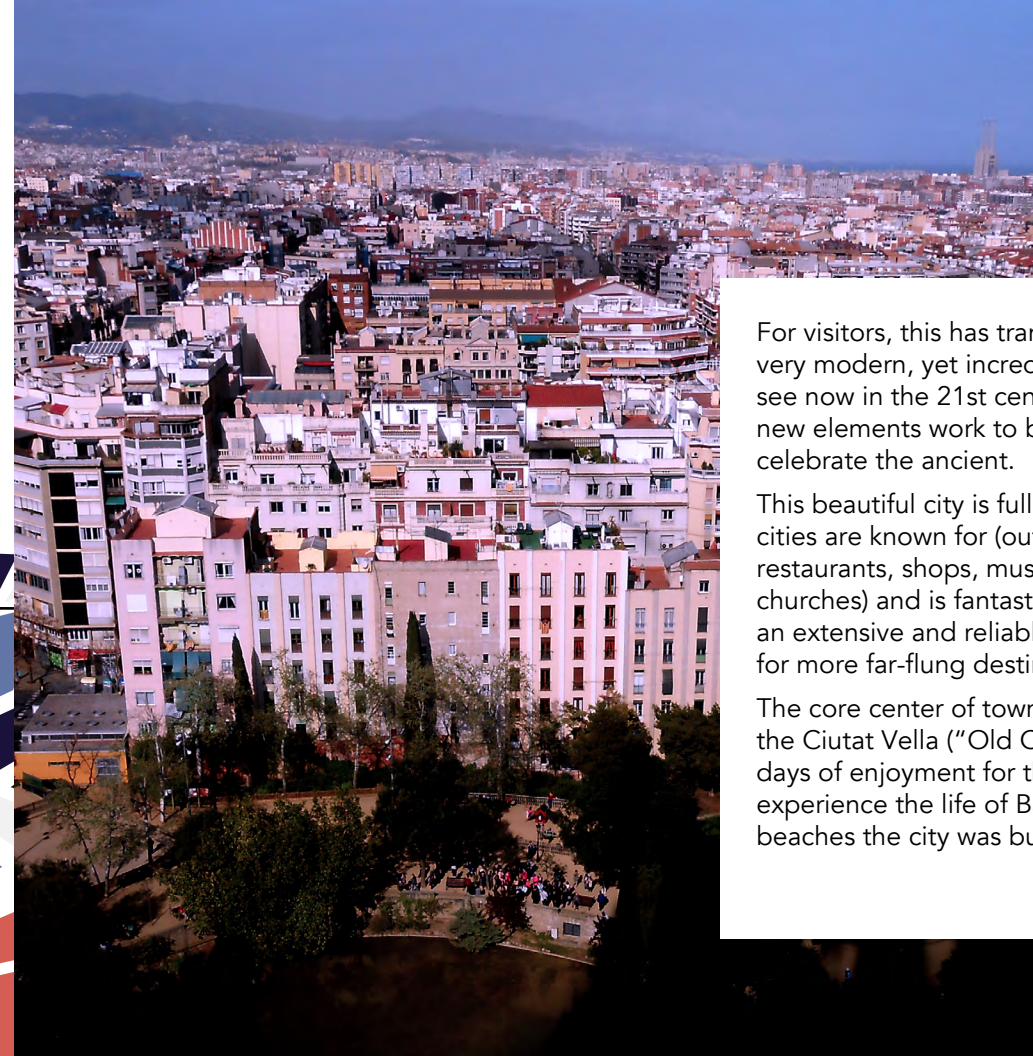
The capital and largest city of Catalonia and Spain's second largest city, with a population of over one and a half million people



This city, located directly on the northeastern Mediterranean coast of Spain, has a rich history, having been under Roman, then Frank law before declaring its independence.

In 1992, Barcelona gained international recognition by hosting the Olympic games which brought a massive upturn in its tourism industry.

This had the effect of changing the city in ways that are still felt today with neighborhoods renovated (and in some cases leveled) and the intense focus of modern design permeating all aspects of life in Barcelona from public buildings to something as simple as a park bench or an event poster.



For visitors, this has translated into the very modern, yet incredibly old city you see now in the 21st century, where the new elements work to both preserve and celebrate the ancient.

This beautiful city is full of what European cities are known for (outdoor markets, restaurants, shops, museums and churches) and is fantastic for walking with an extensive and reliable Metro system for more far-flung destinations.

The core center of town, focused around the Ciutat Vella ("Old City") provides days of enjoyment for those looking to experience the life of Barcelona while the beaches the city was built upon provide



WHEN TO VISIT?

Given the high humidity, 19-23°C is considered comfortable weather, which is normally the temperature between April and June and between late September to November. This is the best time to visit the city. Anything warmer than this can feel too hot.

August is probably the busiest time in Barcelona; at the same time about 10% of shops and restaurants can be found closed from mid-August to early September, when the owners go on vacations. In the center of Barcelona you will find most shops and restaurants open. However there will still be plenty of tourists. Barcelona has decent enough beaches but the locals will really appreciate it if visitors do not consider it a beach resort and don't wear beachwear when visiting churches, restaurants, etc.

Barcelona is great off-season and is a lovely city even in winter months of January and February as long as the possibility of rain is low. During these months the city is not too cold averaging between 9-10°C with sunny and blue skies.

TALK

Barcelona's official languages are Catalan and Spanish. However, most signs are indicated only in Catalan because it is established by law as the administrative language.

Yet, Spanish is also widely used in public transport and other facilities. As in most other cities, any attempt by visitors to use the native languages is always appreciated. Most locals are bilingual in Catalan and Spanish, and instinctively address foreigners in Spanish. Catalan is a language, not a dialect, and sounds closer to Italian, Portuguese, and French in many ways. Avoid referring to Catalan as a dialect, which will offend Catalans.

These issues regarding language, national identity, and politics are like politics anywhere, and there's no way to summarize here. The percentage of Catalan speakers is much lower in the city of Barcelona than in the rest of Catalonia. People here thus generally use Catalan with family members, close friends, and others that they are sure speak the language, and use Spanish, which is understood universally, with strangers. Spanish-speaking visitors will have no problems in Barcelona.

GAUDI ARCHITECTURE

The Tourist Offices offer a pack that includes discounted tickets to many attractions such as La Pedrera and La Casa Batlló. All can be seen from the outside for free.



Gaudi architecture includes the Parc Güell in Gràcia, the still unfinished (as of 2011) Sagrada Família in Eixample and the houses La Pedrera/ Casa Milà and La Casa Batlló both in Eixample.

The Ruta del Modernisme [75] run by Modernisme Centre (Pl. de Catalunya, 17, subterràneo; phone +34 933 177 652): guidebook and discount voucher book for €12. Takes you round all the best Modernisme (art nouveau) buildings in Barcelona. The main part of the route can be walked in a couple of hours, providing you don't stray too far from the main routes.

LA SAGRADA FAMILIA

One of the most famous and breathtaking locations to visit in Barcelona is the most famous building in the entire city and its landmark, La Sagrada Familia. Although incomplete, the church is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and in November 2010 was consecrated and proclaimed a minor basilica by Pope Benedict XVI.



Gaudi was born a Catalan (ethnic group in Spain) and produced some of the most moving buildings and works of art that are still standing and praised by the Spanish people. Undoubtedly, his most famous work is La Sagrada Familia. La Sagrada familia is a masterpiece in the center of the city of Barcelona. The height of the church will be, once it's finished, exactly equal to the height of the largest mountain in the nearby hills, the reason being because Gaudi felt that no man-made creation should ever rise above God's natural creations. The height of the church is overwhelming when standing at its base and the inside is even more impressive.

Upon first walking into the church one cannot help to feel their stomach drop as they witness one of the most impressive and beautiful creations known to man. Visitors first gaze up at the height that the ceiling extends to, supported by beautiful hand shaped columns, which were hand-shaped to resemble the trunks of trees. As a lover of nature, Gaudi included many elements of God's natural beauty within his work. As visitors move towards the center of church they cannot help but to twist their head in a full 360 to admire all of the stained glass windows that line the walls of the basilica.

Be careful when visiting, as there are certain restrictions on dress in this and the Barcelona Cathedral. Bare shoulders, knees and feet are not permitted and unless adhered to you will not be granted access.

