

Title:

Sitges - Resort for Alternative Lifestyles

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Summary:

Located on the Costa Dorada, Sitges is wildly popular among the southern Europe resorts, particularly with gay tourists.

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Article Body:

Located on the Costa Dorada, Sitges is wildly popular among the southern Europe resorts, particularly with gay tourists. It gets very crowded during the summer, and most of the tourists at this time are young swinging Europeans. Yet Sitges never gets tacky, as so many gay-oriented resorts do.

Instead, Sitges is a city rich with culture and Bohemian ideals. The Spanish modernismo movement sprang from the artists and craftsmen here, and Sitges still is at the core of much of Spain's arts. Dali and Federico Garcia Lorca both visited here during the heyday of Sitges, which ended abruptly with the Spanish Civil War. Sitges is still a city of art, but it has never regained its prior prestige.

In addition to its rich heritage, Sitges is convenient to Barcelona (a 30-minute train trip or 45-minute drive).

What to Do

The Carnaval of Sitges, just before Lent, is a kaleidoscope of fancy dress, feathers and sequins, and vibrant floats. The King of the Carnestoltes starts the party on the Thursday prior to Lent, and the carnival ends on Ash Wednesday with the Burial of a Sardine. Sant Bonaventura is when the gay population of Sitges hold their own grand celebrations.

If you're gay, this is a perfect place to party while you vacation. Sitges has beaches and bars close together, but it's not so large that you get lost in the crowd. Summer and Carnival are the times to mingle with the gay crowd; in the off season, Sitges gets quiet.

During summer, though, one beach is primarily gay, while the other is very much a nudist beach, further out of town between Sitges and Vilanova. If you can't find the nude beach, stop at the L'Atlantida disco and ask for directions.

There are other beaches, of course, and water sports from swimming and sunbathing to waterskiing and scuba diving. The beaches to the east tend to be quieter -- Aiguadoic and Els Balomins are examples of these. The Playa San Sebastian, the Beach of the Boats, and Fragata Beach cater to families. The Playa de la Ribera is where the younger crowd go. All beaches here are top-optional for women.

For more intellectual pursuits, there are three excellent museums in Stiges. The Museu Cau Ferrat, in a building that was once two 16th century cottages, was Santiago Rusinol's home, and today holds his works as well as paintings by El Greco and some small Picassos. The Museu Maricel holds Gothic and Romantic paintings and sculptures as well as ceramics from Catalan. And the Museu Romantic, you can see how a Sitges family of wealth lived in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Where To Stay

San Sebastian Playa is probably the best hotel in Sitges. Located right across from San Sebastian beach, it has a wedding-cake facade and an Art Deco interior. Each guest room has a balcony overlooking the sea. Its amenities include a restaurant, bar, and private garden, as well as babysitting for anyone who needs it.

If you prefer to be inland, the Hotel El Xalet is a ten-minute walk from the nearest beach. This contemporary Modernista hotel almost looks like a Gothic church. Antique mosaics in the lobby give the hotel a unique atmosphere. You'll also find a small pool in the private garden and a refreshing roof terrace to have breakfast on. The restaurant is open only during the summer.

Where to Eat

El Velero, on a beachfront promenade, is one of the best restaurants in Sitges. The glass greenhouse terrace holds the best seats. The food is excellent, with a focus on fresh seafood.

With cocina del mercado, or whatever's fresh in the market, cuisine, Els Quatre Gats is named for an old Barcelona cafe that Picasso favored. Enjoy fresh grilled fish, lamb with local herbs, veal kidneys in sherry sauce, and garlic

soup, this restaurant is sure to please your palate. And the restaurant's only a few steps away from Passeig de la Ribera.

Nightlife

The nightlife in Stiges is hectic, colorful, and primarily gay, so if you're straight you may have trouble finding a bar for you. Look for the maps that are distributed to show you where the gay bars are.

The largest gay disco bar is Mediterraneo, in a restored 1690s house. You'll love the covered terrace, the Iberian garden, and the company. Bourbon is another great gay bar for the younger set.

For a mixed crowd, try Ricky's Disco. It's near the beach, and has a really great dance mix.