

BARGAIN BARCELONA

Gaudí masterworks for *nada*, cava that's cheaper than water, and stylish hotels for under £100...



You can do this Spanish city on a budget: just shun its formal restaurants, open-top buses and gimmicky museums. Instead, go Gaudí-spotting for free; choose plates of tapas shrewdly (sardines over octopus); and ramble from bed to beach to bar. There's no need to skimp on hotels either: cheap boutique sleeps are where Barcelona easily outclasses its citybreak rivals...

By Laura Goodman

WHAT TO SEE & DO

● You can't go bargain-hunting on an empty stomach. Make a **breakfast-time beeline for one of three neighbourhood bakeries**. At Forn de Sant Jaume in L'Eixample (La Rambla de Catalunya 50; ① on map), the *coca crema* is a long bun with a chunky streak of custard running through it. In beachy La Barceloneta, Baluard (Carrer del Baluard 38-40; ②) bakes the best loaves; while in El Raval, Forn Mistral (Ronda de Sant Antoni 96; ③) sells scoopfuls of tiny chocolate croissants.

● Time to look around. Runner Bean Tours (www.runnerbeantours.com) has a **free daily walking tour around the winding alleys** of the Gothic Quarter. Or try one of Walkabout Barcelona's (00 34 620 700323, www.walkaboutbarcelona.com) inspiring bike tours – heading to the coast, or the Collserola hills, past forest, rivers, farms and vineyards. They

cost £19pp, which is still less than a day pass for the trafficky, Muzak-playing open-top bus (€20).

● To guarantee cut-price shopping success at Encants Vells, Barcelona's most magnificent flea market, arrive at 9am on a Monday, after stalls have been replenished. You'll find **cheap-cheap chandeliers, gilt frames, battered 'vintage' luggage, vinyl, old boots**, ancient books, maracas and more (Plaça de les Glòries Catalanes; Mon, Wed, Fri, Sat; until 3pm; ④).

● Gaudí made an indelible mark on this city – and you can see much of his output for free. On Passeig de Gràcia, Casa Milà (No. 92; ⑤) features petrified waves of stone and fantastic chimneys, known as *espanta bruixes* (witch-scarers). If you stump up £11 to see the interior of the Sagrada Família (www.sagradafamilia.cat; ⑥), skip the extra £2.20 for the elevator – there are better views from Park Güell ⑦.

Gaudí's **enchanting complex of pathways, sculptures, columns and viaducts**, to the north of the city.

● Gather an extraordinary picnic lunch at the atmospheric Boqueria food market (www.boqueria.info; ⑧) – **take in the dangling hams, seafood on ice, masses of fruit, and the smells!** Mas Gourmets has a few stalls selling Manchego cheese, olives and Ibérico hams for all budgets.

● Not many cities are able to reward diligent sightseeing with a day at the beach, so make the most of Barcelona's choice positioning. Barceloneta ⑨ is its longest sandy stretch, with the **best selection of ice cream, paella and coconuts**. To the north, try Nova Icària Beach ⑩ if you don't mind port views – it tends to be a bit quieter. Bogatell ⑪ is the sporty spot in between, popular among volleyball and table-tennis players, with a good cycle path.

Freewheeling: from left, cycling by the sea; you can view the facade of Gaudí's Casa Milà for nothing; strolling in the Gothic Quarter; Fundació Joan Miró

● The Teleferic de Montjuïc ⑫ is one ticket worth paying for (£5.60, one-way) – **the cable-car glides up to the 17th-century castle ⑬** at the top of Montjuïc hill. The views are splendid, with the spikes of the Sagrada Família poking into the sky. While you're up here, visit the Fundació Joan Miró (www.fundacionmiro-bcn.org; ⑭), where you can see more than 14,000 of the great Surrealist's works for a mere £8.70.

● For respite, the Gothic Quarter is packed with lovely patches of shady serenity. The Cathedral (Plaça de la Seu; ⑮) is free to enter – **it has awe-inspiring interiors and a pretty garden**. Plaça del Rei ⑯ is roomy and frequented by musicians, while Plaça de Santa Maria ⑰ is filled with the grand, Gothic shadow of its church. >

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WHERE TO STAY

Hotel Market (Passetg de Sant Antoni Abad 10; 00 34 933 251205, www.market-hotel.com.es; 18). Two minutes from the innumerable sandwich options of the giant Mercat de Sant Antoni, this place is excellent value; its black, white and red rooms are sleek and large. Spend leftover pennies on garlicky shrimp and courgette salad in its brilliant Catalan restaurant. Doubles from €60, room only.

Hostal Goya (Carrer de Pau Claris 74; 00 34 933 022565, www.hostalgoya.com; 19). This impeccably-run hostel has been in the same family for three generations, and has more elegance than most of the city's swankiest addresses – that's why business travellers keep coming back. Two beautiful apartments have recently been added, sleeping four and six. Doubles from €70, room only.

Hotel Pulitzer (Carrer de Bergara 8; 00 34 934 816767, www.hotel-pulitzer.es; 20). One of Barcelona's original boutique hotels, the Pulitzer is as cosmopolitan as they come, scattered generously with modern art, top-notch furnishings, vintage lamps and zebra-print rugs. Find the swish 1920s facade in a quiet street off Plaça de Catalunya. Doubles from €95, room only.

IntoBarcelona (00 34 620 586655, www.into-barcelona.com). Choose from five sparkling apartments scattered about the El Born district. The kitchens pay dividends – you can

go nuts at the Boqueria food market and unravel it all on your dining table. The owners also run walking tours and cooking classes. Apartments sleeping two to six from €114, room only.

The 5 Rooms (Carrer de Pau Claris 72; 00 34 933 427880, www.thefiverooms.com; 21). This is a proper pad, run by Jessica Delgado, whose background in fashion is obvious; the interiors are glossy and gorgeous, with exposed brick walls, luxe white linen and the odd bit of velvet. Breakfast is at a grand communal table, where staff leave you to it. Doubles from €127, B&B.

Gran Hotel La Florida (Carretera de Vallvidrera al Tibidabo 83-93; 00 34 932 593000, www.hotellafloida.com; 22). Elevate your citybreak to full-blown holiday status at this beauty on top of Tibidabo hill. Some bedrooms have magnificent arched windows, so you can survey the city. The 20-minute drive to the centre keeps prices down, but there's a free shuttle – providing you book your seat in advance. Doubles from €135, B&B.

WHERE TO EAT

La Pallaresa (Carrer de Petritxol 11; 00 34 933 022036, www.lapallaresa.com; 23). Seek out this little *granja* (snack bar) for spot-hitting savoury croissants, *bikinis* (toasted sandwiches) and Catalan sponge fingers. There's little point resisting the *churros*, best dipped in dark puddles of thick hot chocolate – the most decadent bargain in town. Snacks around €3.

Pinotxo (Mercat de la Boqueria; 00 34 933 171731; 8). The Boqueria market is all it's cracked up to be, and eating on the premises is a delicious business. You'll have to get up early to nab one of 14 bar stools here; energetic owner Juanito will sort you out with a brunch of market-fresh tapas – chickpeas, inky baby squid, steamed clams and *tripsas* (tripe). Tapas dishes around €4.

Tapaç 24 (Carrer del la Diputació 269; 00 34 934 880977, www.tapac24.net; 24). You'll be shoved while you wait – the atmosphere in this basement restaurant is brusquely casual – but the goodies are gourmet. Even the humble Russian salad is taken to new heights (tuna, potato, olives, boiled egg, €3). Lovely bottles of wine start at €8.70. Tapas dishes around €5.

Alta Taberna Paco Meralgo (Carrer de Muntaner 171; 00 34 934 309027, www.pacomeralgo.com; 25). If you don't want to splash out on the works (gazpacho, grilled razor clams, croquettes, black-pepper fillet steak) at this simple, creamy-walled spot, pop in for the game-changing *crema Catalana*, a ramekin of custardy sunshine. Tapas around €5.

Kaiku (Plaça del Mar 1; 00 34 932 219082, www.restaurantkaiku.cat; 26). Right by the sea, Kaiku is brilliant for one of those lazy lunches that rolls into dinnertime. Book a table on the pavement and order a big, satisfying *arroz de chef* to share – it's smoked paella, studded with luscious seafood. Three-course lunch menu €9.50.

The price is right: from left, The 5 Rooms; pool deck of Gran Hotel La Florida; Tickets tapas bar, part-owned by culinary legend Ferran Adrià

Tickets (Avinguda del Paral·lel 164; www.tickets-bar.es; 27). Not a bargain in the traditional sense, but a snip for foodies, Ferran Adrià's tapas bar serves some of the gastronomic jiggery-pokery made famous at El Bulli – and you can feast for well under €50. Begin with the 'olive' – a smooth olive purée that bursts in your mouth. End with the candyfloss tree – real-life Willy Wonka. Dishes €5-11.

WHERE TO DRINK

Ubeda Gin Tapas (www.ubedagintapas.com; 28, 29, 30). You can nurse one of Ubeda's bucket-sized G&Ts for hours – the chain of three bars in L'Eixample and Gràcia is owned by an artist, so they're lovely places to linger. G&T €7.

Can Paixano (Carrer de la Reina Cristina 7; www.canpaixano.com; 31). By night, excitable young Catalans squish into this diminutive purveyor of house Cava for 80p per glass – the atmosphere is warm and expressive. Before 5pm, you can even get a bottle for €2.60, providing you order some sandwiches.

Cala del Vermut (Carrer de les Magdalenes 6; 32). This easy-to-miss place looks like a newsagent but serves Vermouth with a splash of soda, and sardines for snacking. Its sister restaurant shares the same name (and is 50m away on Carrer de Copons) but has more complicated offerings. Vermouth from €1.75. ■

Ask the local



Juan Carlos Iglesias runs Tickets (see Where to Eat) with the famous Adrià brothers

'I take guests to see the (free) Magic Fountain of Montjuïc

(33) – it's a Disney-like display of water, light, colour and music, designed by Carles Buigas in the '20s. Get there before the jets start shooting and grab a seat on the stairs of the National Museum of Catalan Art (Plaça de

Carles Buigas 1; every half hour at night; see www.bcn.es). I also get a lot of pleasure from La Rambla (34) – it's an uplifting, hilarious place. Inside the Boqueria (8), I buy a *cortado* (espresso with a little warm milk) at El Quim (www.elquimdelaboqueria.com) – it sets me up for a good shop. Barcelona is Europe's best city for eating out; of around 3,000 eateries, 500 are wonderful. **Dos Palillos is not the trendiest restaurant, but it's a classic** (00 34 933 040513, www.dospalillos.com; 35). For a treat, I love Torre de Altamar, which has great set menus for €42 and **dazzling blue views of city, sky and sea** (00 34 932 214460, www.torredealtamar.com; 36).'



Get me there

GO INDEPENDENT

EasyJet (0843 104 5000, www.easyjet.com) flies from Luton, Gatwick, Stansted, Belfast, Newcastle, Bristol and Liverpool to Barcelona from €44 return. **Monarch** (08719 405040, www.monarch.co.uk) flies from Manchester from €87 return. **Bmibaby** (09058 282828, www.bmibaby.com) flies from Birmingham and East

Midlands from €84. **Jet2** (0871 226 1737, www.jet2.com) flies from Manchester, Leeds and Glasgow from €111.

GO PACKAGED

Lastminute.com (0800 072 1795, www.lastminute.com) has two nights in four-star accommodation from €99pp, room only, including flights from Luton; or three nights at a three-star hotel from

£138pp, room only, including flights from Gatwick. Or try **Co-operative Travel** (0845 600 3063, www.co-operativetravel.co.uk) or **Cities Direct** (01242 536900, www.citiesdirect.co.uk).

FURTHER INFORMATION

Barcelona Tourism (Rambla de Catalunya 123; 00 34 932 853834, www.barcelo-naturisme.com).