

Barcelona's Hidden Gems

Barcelona is one of the most cosmopolitan cities in Europe. It's a city that virtually has everything due to its privileged location on Spain's north east coast.

When I say privileged I am speaking about the fact that it has sun, mountainous regions, sea and it's just up the road from Andorra and France. Someone once told me that if they had all the money in the world they'd choose Barcelona to live in because of all these points I have just mentioned above and I must say he certainly has a point.

Getting to the city of Barcelona these days has never been easier and the choice of transport is quite varied. There are two main low-cost airlines that fly here from most European cities and land at either El Prat, which is just outside Barcelona, or Girona airport, which is roughly an hour and a half away from Barcelona's city centre.

So what are Barcelona's hidden gems apart from its location? For a start, a stroll around The Barrio Gótico or Gothic Quarter, which is in the centre of the city, is amazing. Many of the buildings here date back from medieval times with some as far back as the Roman settlement here. The Barrio Gótico retains its labyrinth-like maze of streets, which are usually closed off to normal traffic just letting taxis and public service vehicles through. One of the most famous landmarks here is The Cathedral of Santa Eulalia, which was constructed throughout the 13th and 15th centuries on top of a Visigothic church. It is dedicated to Eulalia of Barcelona a co-patron saint of the city. According to Catholic tradition Eulalia, who was a young virgin, suffered martyrdom during the Roman settlement in Barcelona.

The next hidden gem is another neighbourhood called El Raval, which belongs to the district of Ciutat Vella and next to the Gothic Quarter. This area of the city has undergone a major scrub-up campaign as it used to be quite infamous due to the crime and prostitution here. Now it's an area where artists like to live along with its high immigrant population. You'll also find numerous hip bars and nightclubs along with some fine restaurants. El Raval has two noteworthy landmarks – one of which is a favourite of mine – El Gat which is a large cat statue by Colombian sculptor Fernando Botero and can be found on La Rambla de Raval. The other attraction is La Boqueria Market – one of the best markets in Europe not just Spain. It has the freshest of fish and seafood on offer along with fine fruit and vegetables. It's an experience in itself just to go into the market and have a look around. A word of warning though: keep your valuables close, as it's usually full of pickpockets looking out for unwary awestruck tourists!

The last hidden gem I'll mention is another neighbourhood in the Ciutat Vella district called Barceloneta. This area is known for its sandy beach and many pubs, bars and restaurants dotted along the boardwalk. This area was originally constructed for the residents of another neighbourhood called La Ribera who had been displaced by the construction of the Ciudadela of Barcelona by king Felipe V in 1714. One of the best places to go is without a doubt is a place called Can Paixano on Reina Cristina 7. It's one of the most amazing places to sample the cheapest Cava in Barcelona along with an array of sandwiches you never knew existed! It's basically a rowdy cava bar where the most expensive Can Paixano bottle is a little over 5€. Don't expect a seat, as there aren't any! If you go at lunchtime, you'll be able to find some space to enjoy your drink - but if you go at night, expect the place to be jam-packed! A firm favourite with the many English teachers who either reside in Barcelona on a permanent basis or who are just passing through. Amazing.

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