

Back To Barcelona: A Travelogue

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

The beautiful Spanish city of Barcelona is one that regularly makes it into lists of the top ten of cities to visit around the world, and with good reason. Barcelona was the home port for the Disney Cruise Line in the summer of 2007, as it set sail around the Mediterranean; this was our first encounter with the city. We flew in on a Friday morning, with a sailing time of the following afternoon and, perhaps naively, I thought this would give us enough time to see the city. I was sadly mistaken, even with our fast paced touring abilities. We came away feeling that we hadn't been able to do it justice and that we had missed great chunks of what Barcelona had to offer. When you're in that position, what else can you do but plan a return trip?

That opportunity came just over a year later, when we headed to Spain to the Costa Blanca. I built in time -- and car rental -- so we could head back to Barcelona, which is a five hour drive along the coast from the Costa Blanca region. In the end, we only had one full day to explore the city, but still it gave us enough time to hit the parts that we didn't get to see on our first visit.

On that occasion, we had been to most of the major tourist draws, which include La Rambla, arguably the most famous street in Spain, packed with a bewildering variety of shops, cafes, market traders, and some stunning architecture alongside the wide pedestrian areas. The impact of Barcelona's famous son, the architect Antoni Gaudi, can be seen everywhere and already we had visited [Caso Battlo](#), an amazing apartment block, with conversions making it appear like a reptile in places, and the [Sagrada Familia](#). This church is Gaudi's most stunning piece of work and remains incomplete to this day, but what has been finished is absolutely breathtaking.

There was still more of Gaudi's work to be seen. It's fair to say that we weren't expecting to be overawed by Gaudi's creations, but we were blown away by the sheer brilliance and imagination that went into these buildings. It left us wanting more and that was to be found at [Park Guell](#) to the north of Barcelona. It's a subway ride and a 20 minute walk up a fairly steep hill, which left us gasping for breath in the heat and humidity, but it was worth every step when we got there.

Gaudi was commissioned by Eusebio Guell to plan out a mini city, complete with leisure areas and amenities for everyone to enjoy. Designed to be a private estate, it was an ambitious plan, but sadly, as sometimes happens with ambitious plans, the money ran out before it

could be completed. In fact, only two of the planned houses were ever built, but it's the leisure areas that are the main draw today. As you approach, you're almost overwhelmed by what you see. There are just so many colors and vibrant designs to try and take in at the same time.

The entrance is guarded by two fairytale pavilions that wouldn't seem out of place in Cinderella or Sleeping Beauty. Although a wonderful site from outside, when you go in, you find some wonderful narrow staircases and very unusually shaped windows.

From there, you head up the grand staircase, complete with a multi-colored dragon in the center, the creature that Gaudi has become best known for. Go to any souvenir shop in Barcelona and you'll be able to buy your own Gaudi dragon. In fact, one found its way home with us from that trip. At the top of the staircase is the Square, which has a bench unlike any you've ever seen before. It meanders in and out and curves its way around the edge of the square, covered in tiny tiles making up a stunning collage. It's certainly a place to sit and take in the beauty of the place and also the wonderful views over Barcelona below.

It's certainly somewhere that has to be seen to be believed and it's just a great shame that it's so far outside of the city center, as I'm sure that puts a lot of people off coming here. While we were there, coaches were regularly disgorging people, who quickly packed the place out. At least a coach tour cuts out the steep hill, although it probably doesn't allow you the time to explore and enjoy this unique place.

One other part of Barcelona that I wanted to explore was Montjuic. Again, it's not the most central part and lies to the west of the city, although it is a little more accessible than Park Guell, with a funicular railway running from the main subway station and providing a lovely way to get into the area. Montjuic is built on a hill and it's fair to say that, over the years, development has come and gone here, with the latest being for the 1992 Olympics.

Our first stop was via cable car, which offered some superb views of Montjuic Park below us and the city spread out underneath us, up to Montjuic Castle. From here, you can admire the thriving port, packed with both cruise liners and cargo vessels. I couldn't help but feel a tinge of sadness that the Disney Magic wasn't one of the ships sitting in the port below.

Having enjoyed the view, it was back down to the main part of Montjuic and a lot of this can easily be explored on foot. There's a lot to see and our first stop was the Olympic Stadium, home to so many great sporting memories from 17 years ago. This stadium was originally built for the

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1936 Olympics, but those were canceled when the Spanish Civil War started, instead moving to Berlin, Germany. I was delighted that we were able to walk into the stadium free of charge and admire it, with a small section, including a cafe, toilets and shop, open to the public.

Although I don't mind admitting that we're no great art fans, I do love beautiful buildings and the building that houses the National Museum of Catalan Art is certainly beautiful, but really it should be, as it's the National Palace, built for the 1929 International Exhibition. Here, escalators help you to make your way around, which were a wonderful relief for our tired feet.

Our final stop of the day was also built for the same exhibition and was designed to show off the different types of Spanish architectural styles and crafts. Called Poble Espanyol or Spanish village, it showcases building styles throughout the country, using more than 100 houses arranged on streets radiating from a main square. Many of the buildings are now home to craft shops, restaurants, or workshops. On the day we visited, we were fascinated by the glassblower we saw and we were also able to find some truly unique gifts in some of the shops we visited. It wasn't cheap to get in, but it was very good value for money and there was certainly plenty to see and do, with no-one worrying about how long you lingered to enjoy the scenery.

I won't say we've seen and done everything in Barcelona now, as that would do the city an injustice, but following our latest trip, we're certainly closer to that than we were before and it was certainly worthy of a return visit. Like any good city, don't imagine you can do it all in a day or even two days, as you simply won't be able to.

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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