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Barcelona, Spain

Amy Marquis
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Since the 1992 Olympics, Barcelona has flourished into one of Europe's most popular vacation spots.

When you step foot inside its borders, be prepared for a barrage of color. Antoni Gaudí's surreal architecture beckons at every turn, while Gothic creations compete for attention. This mecca of imagination offers extensive collections by Pablo Picasso and Joan Miró. Art and artistry completely surround you.

Traveling to Barcelona demands color film to capture the essence of its vibrant atmosphere.

LOCATION

The city is located on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, which lies southeast of town. Large hills partially surround it on one side. The Pyrenees Mountains, straddling the border between France and Spain, are less than 50 miles to the north.

Located near 41 degrees north latitude, Barcelona is at roughly the same position as New York City. However, with the Atlantic Ocean looming large only several hundred miles to the west, and because weather systems most often travel from west to east, Barcelona's climate is very different from that of the Big Apple.



Like its Parisian counterpart, the Arc del Triomf watches over the city. Photo by Amy Lewis.

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La Sagrada Familia's surreal shape mirrors the slopes of Mont Serrat. Photo by Amy Lewis.

CLIMATE

Summers in Barcelona tend to be warm and humid. Average highs are generally in the low 80s, with lows in the mid-60s. Temperature extremes are uncommon.

June, July and August are the brightest months of the year with sun shining about two-thirds of the time -- comparable to most spots across the central and eastern United States.

Winters tend to be cool and a bit more humid than most spots across the United States, with average highs and lows in the mid-50s and low 40s, respectively. Clouds are more prevalent in winter, but compared to most of Europe, Barcelona enjoys a bright winter.

Barcelona is fairly dry compared to most of the United States, averaging 23 inches annually. The rainfall is spread fairly evenly throughout the year, with autumn receiving somewhat greater amounts. Each month typically sees between six and 10 days of rain. Given Barcelona's temperatures, snow is a rarity.

Strong storm systems occasionally develop, most often in the cooler months. These systems can draw dusty air northward from the Sahara, leaving behind a yellow, brown or red coating on the city.



Palau de la Mòesica Catalana was designed to be illuminated by natural light. Photo by Amy Lewis.

ATTRACTIONS

To walk along **La Rambla** is to enjoy the Spanish version of the Champs *Élysées*. At one end of the lively street, a mighty statue of **Columbus** surveys the adjacent sea. Down the way, an intricate mosaic created by Joan Miró graces the pavement beneath the feet of passersby. Just to the north, the **Mercat de la Boqueria** tempts with the sights and smells only a bustling market can offer.

Off the main drag sits the **Barri Gòtic** neighborhood, shrouded in medieval Gothic beauty. A model of its time, the **Cathedral** is the quintessential example. The quarter is centered around **Plaça de Sant Jaume**, home to governmental landmarks, the **Ajuntament** and the **Palau de la Generalitat**.

Dating back to 1882, **La Sagrada Família** is an architectural feat not to be missed. Arguably Gaudí's greatest creation, this masterpiece is a jaw-dropping work still in progress. From above, the spiral staircases resemble a delicate conch shell, and from the outside, the swelling shape of this unfinished cathedral was inspired by the nearby mountain, **Mont Serrat**, a highlight in its own right.

Montjuïc played host to the center of activity during the 1992 Olympics. The prominent hill overlooks the city from the southwest and is home to the **Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya**, an art museum whose exterior is as striking as the works within its walls.

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There's no better place to enjoy the day than **Parc Güell**, yet another of Gaudí's dazzling contributions to Barcelona. This public park features a multicolored reptilian fountain that greets visitors as they enter, and a brilliant serpentine tiled bench called **Banc de Trenadis**, which winds its way around a large open area. The spectacular views of the city below are unparalleled.

Other sights worth seeing

- Lit entirely by natural means, the **Palau de la Mòesica Catalana** graces the eyes with its vivid stained glass and rich history.
- Much like its Parisian counterpart, the **Arc del Triomf** is a sturdy watchdog.
- Stroll through the charming fishing village, **Barceloneta**, known for its quaint restaurants and cafés.
- Take a tour of Gaudí's home, the **Casa Milà**. Don't miss the whimsical rooftop, crowded with chimneys and vents disguised as abstract sculptures.
- For a quick getaway, spend the day atop **Mont Serrat**. The holy mountain is home to a medieval monastery that features the joyous harmonies of a boys choir each day.
- Sample Barcelona taste by taste along **Carrer de la Mercè**. Around 8 p.m. each night, the favorite local custom of bar hopping begins. In addition to cocktails, each establishment offers light nibbles, or **tapas**, to wet the appetite. Take time to admire **Casa Batlló**, yet another of Gaudí's contributions. Its mask-like balconies are quite a sight.

TRAVELERS' TIPS

CUSTOMS:

Every day from 1:30 until 4:00 p.m., the city virtually shuts down for *siesta*. Don't expect to get anything done during this time. Either enjoy a spell at a public park or, like the locals, just kick back and relax.

Plan to eat dinner around 10 p.m. If you're hungry beforehand, nothing beats *tapas*!

TRANSPORTATION:

The city's subway system, known as *The Metro*, is your best bet. Its extensive arms reach every point of interest imaginable and the price is right.

Taxis and buses are available.

Remember: *Siesta* causes four rush hours each day - morning, early afternoon, late afternoon, and early evening.

TIME ZONE:

GMT/UTC +1 hour through winter
GMT/UTC +2 hours during daylight-saving time (from the last Sunday in March to the last Sunday in October)



This colorful reptile greets visitors at Parc Güell. Photo by Amy Lewis.

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