

ESCAPE

Barcelona BLISS

Spain's most ICONIC metropolis puts a fantastical spin on cosmopolitan PURSUITS

By Mary Murray



Barcelona captivates the imagination. It's a city built on the wildest dreams of architects and artists, businessmen and vagabonds. Its rise as a tourism mecca and beloved port on the cruise ship circuit has often been attributed to the 1992 Olympic games, which renewed worldwide interest in this capital of Catalonia nestled on Spain's northeast coast. But the story of modern Barcelona begins more than a century ago, when creatives from all

disciplines turned it into a playground for design, culture, gastronomy, and commerce.

Take, for instance, the Majestic Hotel & Spa (hotelmajestic.es), a totem of Spanish hospitality grandeur that marks 100 years of service in 2018. In celebration, guests can dine on a special centenary menu culled from the hotel's culinary archive. Available this year during Friday dinner hours at Restaurant SOLC, this multicourse meal features dishes from the

first half of the twentieth century, such as a circa-1935 lobster cocktail dotted with caviar and a "Chocolate Bomb" dessert that can be traced back to 1918.

Beyond its centenary menu, SOLC specializes in classic Catalonian cuisine infused with ingredients plucked from the hotel's farm in nearby Maresme. Join executive chef David Romero on a sojourn to the soil, where you'll walk the fields and perhaps indulge in an irre-



COURTESY OF THE MAJESTIC HOTEL & SPA



THE MAJESTIC HOTEL & SPA TURNED 100 IN 2018 AND IS CELEBRATING WITH A SPECIAL CENTENARY MENU THAT INCLUDES A "CHOCOLATE BOMB" DESSERT (ABOVE). FOR AN ARTISTIC DAY TRIP, VISIT FUNDACIÓ JOAN MIRÓ (BOTTOM LEFT).



PEIRE BRATDESABA/FUNDACIÓ JOAN MIRÓ, BARCELONA



of 150 pieces that chronicle Miró's evolution. One need only sit surrounded by *The Hope of a Condemned Man*, a 1974 triptych prompted by the Franco government's arrest of an anarchist, or gaze upon *Sun, Moon, and One Star*, the veins of Barcelona serving as the backdrop to this quirky sculpture, to appreciate Miró's singular creative spirit.

A Barcelona native, Miró's development and legacy is intrinsically tied to Catalonia. And while Fundació Joan Miró studies his output, Fundació Mas Miró (masmiro.com) offers insight into the man. The Majestic organizes tours to this country estate in Mont-roig del Camp, where Miró spent his summers. It comprises a series of buildings as white as a clean canvas and a working farm where carob, olive, lemon, and almond trees line dirt lanes. Mas Miró opened to the public this spring, and it's perfectly preserved to reflect Miró's daily life. Even his studio—where the artist would transform the landscapes surrounding him into fauvist and, later, surrealist and abstract masterpieces—looks as it did in September 1976, right down to the calendar on the wall.

If Miró is Barcelona's signature artist, then Antoni Gaudí is its ultimate architect. An unflinching perfectionist, Gaudí was at the forefront of the *Modernisme* movement, and his nature-inspired, overly adorned approach is visible across the city. Two works, Casa Batlló and Casa Milà, are equidistant from the Majestic. The former is most famous for its facade that represents a battle between Saint George and a dragon. The latter was envisioned as an apartment complex with a stone exterior reminiscent of a wave. Visitors to Casa Milà, also known as La Pedrera, can explore top to bottom, from the rooftop crowned with ventilation towers disguised as soldiers, to the

sistibly fresh creation made on-site, such as just-shucked peas boiled in cava, a ubiquitous Spanish sparkling wine.

This commitment to experiential luxury travel is palpable throughout the Majestic, a member of the Leading Hotels of the World. It's smelled in the bespoke Atelier Cologne fragrance that delicately scents the halls and communal spaces. It's felt at the spa, which offers treatments both conventional and unexpected. It's heard in the historic grand piano and the swish of cocktail shakers at the lobby bar. It's tasted at La Dolce Vitae rooftop restaurant, which brings humor to stereotypical hotel food. It's seen in the intoxicating city views framed by wrought-iron balconies and a collection of world-class art by the likes of Antoni Tàpies and Jaume Plensa.

Throughout its lifetime, the Majestic has been a haven for area artists. Joan Miró is said to have frequented the lobby, in part to commune with works by his mentor, Modest Urgell. Now, the Majestic has partnered with Fundació Joan Miró (fmirobcn.org) to restore a massive tapestry housed at the foundation's museum. The aptly titled *Tapestry of the Fundació* is part of a permanent exhibition



ROBERTO MORALES/GETTY IMAGES

BARCELONA ABOUNDS WITH AMAZING ARCHITECTURE, FROM THE SANT PAU ART NOUVEAU SITE (ABOVE) TO THE MEDIEVAL STREETS OF THE GOTHIC QUARTER (BOTTOM RIGHT). SOME GAUDÍ HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE (RIGHT, TOP TO BOTTOM) CASA VICENS, CASA MILÀ, AND THE BASILICA OF THE SAGRADA FAMILIA.

fourth-floor apartment frozen in time to depict early 1900s bourgeois life.

Out of Barcelona's 14 Gaudí structures, the Basilica of the Sagrada Família is the most recognizable. Gaudí devoted the last 40-plus years of his life to its design and construction, but only saw a small portion of it completed before he was unceremoniously run over by a trolley. Work still continues on this symbol of the city, which incorporates traditions from both Gothic and Byzantine cathedrals. The goal is to have it all finished—18 towers total—by 2026, to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of Gaudí's death. In the meantime, the entire basilica remains open. And if you think the artistry is limited to the outside, just wait until you witness the prismatic glory that lies within.

On the other end of the Gaudí spectrum is Casa Vicens, the architect's first home in Barcelona and his most recent site to welcome sightseers. A stark contrast to Sagrada Família, Vicens is about as subdued as Gaudí gets. That is to say, it structurally resembles a traditional home but sports countless decorative elements that keep eyes dancing. Geometric woodwork protects the porch from the sun. Floral tiles and checkerboards of green and white create a dynamic discordance. Trompe l'oeil nature scenes dance across ceilings and walls. Papier-mâché pieces in indigo cap an Islamic-style smoking room. It's a lot of look, and a lot of fun.

When you've had your fill, shift your attention to the Barcelona beyond Gaudí. Peruse

the shops of the Gothic Quarter and Las Ramblas. Indulge in a traditional Spanish meal at Casa Leopoldo (*casaleopoldo.es*), a legendary eatery decked in bull-fighting motifs and memorabilia. Roam the pavilions of Sant Pau Art Nouveau Site, a former working hospital with captivating gardens and architecture. Immerse yourself in the world of Pablo Picasso at the Picasso Museum, home to more than 50 iterations of his interpretation of the Diego Velázquez masterpiece *Las Meninas*. Head outside the city limits to sample Spanish vino at Alta Alella, the closest winery to Barcelona. Whatever your wanderlust desires, consult Barcelona Turisme (barcelonaturisme.com) and take advantage of its Barcelona Premium program (barcelonapremium.com), which can help organize custom, high-end experiences that capture the city's unique personality.

And what a personality it is. While Barcelona pulsates with sophistication, its soul speaks humbly. Ask a local about their favorite pastime, and they'll most likely muse about the simple pleasure of afternoon tapas enjoyed on a shaded terrace. They'll wax poetic about *pan con tomate*, a modest meal of bread dressed with ripe tomato juice and top-quality olive oil. It's a dish everyone's mom makes, one that personifies pure bliss. Because in Barcelona, it's the promise of a life well-savored that makes you yearn for more. ◀



POL VILADONS



FUNDACIÓ CATALUNYA LA PEDRERA

