



EYEWITNESS TRAVEL

# TOP 10

# BARCELONA



THE 10 BEST OF EVERYTHING

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## ESSENTIAL TIPS

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A quick read of these tips will help you find everything you are looking for, quickly and efficiently.



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## INTERACTIVE MENUS

1 Museums 

2 Churches 

Navigate by using our interactive table of contents, click each link to be taken to that section. These appear at the beginning of each chapter.

## NAVIGATION

The best way to explore this guide is to begin at **Highlights**. This first chapter shows you, quite simply, the best sights in the destination. This is followed by: **Top 10 of Everything** – themed Top 10 lists that allow you to make the most of your time away; **Around Town** – must-see sights, area by area; **Streetsmart** – essential practical information; and the **Image Gallery** – A selection of great images that accompany many of the sight listings.

# INTRODUCING BARCELONA



With warm, crystal-clear waters lapping its sandy shores and mountains nuzzling up to its northern edge, this glittering jewel in the Mediterranean is blessed with desirable geographical genes. From the buoyant, revamped port area to the atmospheric medieval streets of the Barri Gòtic and the beautiful *Modernista* buildings of the Eixample, Barcelona has it all. A host of treasure-filled museums, architectural wonders, lively beaches and enchanting squares provide the icing on the cake.

BARCELONA



# 10 TOP 10

BARCELONA'S  
HIGHLIGHTS

THE MUST SEE SIGHTS AND EXPERIENCES

# BARCELONA'S HIGHLIGHTS



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# SAGRADA FAMÍLIA



# SAGRADA FAMILIA

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Nothing prepares you for the impact of the Sagrada Família. A *tour de force* of the imagination, Antoni Gaudí's church has provoked endless controversy. The church was only partially complete when Gaudí died in 1926 and, as a work in progress, it offers the unique chance to watch the eighth wonder of the world in the making. During the last 80 years and at incalculable cost, sculptors and architects have added their own touches to Gaudí's dream. Now financed by over a million visitors each year, it is estimated the project will be complete by 2026, the 100th anniversary of Gaudí's death.  **Entrances:** C/Marina (for groups) & C/Sardenya • 93 207 30 31 • Metro: Sagrada Família • Open 9am–6pm daily (Apr–Sep: to 8pm) • Adm: €13.50 (€18 with guided visit/audioguide); €17 for combined ticket with Casa-Museu Gaudí (€21.50 with guided visit/audioguide) • Guided tours: 11am, 1pm, 3pm daily (May–Oct & wknds: also noon • Limited DA

 [Google Map](#)

## 1. NATIVITY FACADE

Gaudí's love of nature is visible in this façade. Up to a hundred plant and animal species are sculpted into the stone, and the two main columns are supported by turtles.

 [View photo](#)

## 2. PASSION FACADE

Started in 1978 and completed in 2002, this façade by Josep Subirachs represents the pain and sacrifice of Jesus. The difference between the Gothic feel of Subirachs' style and the intricacy of Gaudí's original work has not been without polemic.

 [View photo](#)

## 3. SPIRAL STAIRCASES

These helicoidal stone stairways, which wind up the bell towers, look like snail shells. They allow access to the towers.

## 4. SPIRES

For a close-up look at the gargoyles and mosaic tiling on the spires, scale the bell tower stairs – or ride up in a lift. The views are equally spectacular (for further details see [Sagrada Família](#)). Not for sufferers of vertigo.

 [View photo](#)

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## 5. HANGING MODEL

This bizarre contraption in the crypt museum is testimony to Gaudí's ingenuity. Gaudí created this 3D construction – made of chains and small weighted sacks of sand – as a model for the arches and vaulted ceilings of the Colonia Güell crypt. No-one, in the history of architecture, had ever designed a building like this.

## 6. NAVE

The immense central body of the temple, now almost complete, is made up of leaning, tree-like columns with branches spreading out across the ceiling. Inspired by towering redwood trees, the overall effect is that of a beautiful stone forest.

 [View photo](#)

## 7. ROSEDOOR CLOISTER

In the only cloister to be finished by Gaudí, the imagery is thought to be inspired by the anarchist riot that began in 1909 (for further details see [1909-1931: The Revolutionary Years](#)). The devil's temptation of man is represented by the sculpture of a serpent wound around a rebel.

## 8. CRYPT MUSEUM

Gaudí now lies in the crypt, and his tomb is visible from the museum. Renovated to include audio-visual exhibits, the museum offers information about the temple's construction. The highlight is the maquette workshop, producing scale plaster and stone models for the ongoing work.

## 9. APSE

Adorned with lizards, serpents and two gigantic snails, the apse was the first section of the temple to be completed by Gaudí.


## 10. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

The church buzzes with activity: sculptors dangle from spires; stone masons carve huge slabs of stone and cranes and scaffolding litter the site. Observing the construction in progress enables visitors to grasp the monumental scale of the project.

 [View photo](#)

### Sight Guide

The entrances to the Sagrada Família are on C/Sardenya and C/Marina (groups only) along with gift shops and lifts. There are two lifts, one in each façade, and they cost €4.50 to use (the stairs are not open to the public). The museum is near the entrance on c/Sardenya. Eight of the 18 planned towers are built, four in each façade.

 **Tip:** Sit in a terrace bar on nearby Avinguda Gaudí and drink in the view of Gaudí's masterpiece illuminated at night.

💡 **Tip:** For the best photos, get to the temple before 8am: the light on the Nativity Façade is excellent and the tour buses haven't yet arrived.

💡 **Tip:** Look out for the cryptogram on the Passion Façade, where the numbers add up to the age of Christ at his death.

# KEY SAGRADA FAMILIA DATES

## 1. 1882

The first stone of the Sagrada Família is officially laid, with architect Francesc del Villar heading the project. Villar soon resigns after disagreements with the church's religious founders.

## 2. 1883

The young, up-and-coming Antoni Gaudí is commissioned as the principal architect. He goes on to devote the next 40 years of his life to the project: by the end he even lives on the premises.

## 3. 1889

The crypt is completed, ringed by a series of chapels, one of which is later to house the tomb of Gaudí.

## 4. 1904

The final touches are made to the Nativity Façade, which depicts Jesus, Mary and Joseph amid a chorus of angels.

## 5. 1925

The first of 18 bell towers, 100 m (328 ft) in height, is finished.

## 6. 1926

On 10 June, Gaudí is killed by a tram while crossing the street near his beloved church. Noone recognizes the city's most famous architect.

## 7. 1936

The advent of the Spanish Civil War brings construction of the Sagrada Família to a halt for some 20 years. During this time, Gaudí's studio and the crypt in the Sagrada Família are burned by revolutionaries, who despise the Catholic church for siding with the nationalists.

## 8. 1987–1990

Artist Josep Maria Subirachs (b. 1927) takes to living in the Sagrada Família just as his famous predecessor did. Subirachs completes the statuary of the Passion Façade. His angular, severe and striking sculptures draw both criticism and praise.

 [View photo](#)

## 9. 2000

On 31 December, the nave is at long last declared complete.

## 10. 2010–2026

The interior of the church is completed, and in November 2010 Pope Benedict XVI consecrated it as basilica. The completion of the entire Sagrada Família is forecast for 2026. The building of the Sagrada Família – as Gaudí intended – relies on donations. With so many paying visitors pouring in daily, construction work is gaining momentum.

### Antoni Gaudí

A flag bearer for the late 19th-century *Modernista* movement, Antoni Gaudí is Barcelona's most famous architect. A devout Catholic and a strong Catalan nationalist, he led an almost monastic existence, consumed by his architectural vision and living in virtual poverty for most of his life. In 2003 the Vatican opened the beatification process for Gaudí, which is the first step towards declaring his sainthood.

Gaudí's extraordinary legacy dominates the architectural map of Barcelona. His name itself comes from the Catalan verb *gaudir*, “to enjoy”, and an enormous sense of exuberance and playfulness pervades his work. As was characteristic of *Modernisme*, nature prevails, not only in the decorative motifs, but also in the very structure of Gaudí's buildings. His highly innovative style is also characterized by intricate wrought-iron gates and balconies and *trencadís* tiling.

 [View photo](#)

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# LA RAMBLA



# LA RAMBLA

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There may be no better place in the country to indulge in the Spanish ritual of the *paseo* (stroll) than on this wide, pedestrian street that is anything but pedestrian. An orgy of activity day and night, La Rambla is voyeuristic heaven. Spray-painted human statues stand motionless among the passing crowds; buskers croon crowd-pleasing classics; caricaturists deftly sketch faces; bustling stalls create an open-air market of bright bouquets and souvenirs; and round-the-clock kiosks sell everything from *The Financial Times* to adult videos. **i** *Metro: Catalunya; Liceu; Drassanes*

 [Google Map](#)

## 1. GRAN TEATRE DEL LICEU

The city's grand opera house, founded in 1847, brought Catalan opera stars such as Montserrat Caballé to the world. Twice gutted by fire, it has been fully restored. **i** *Gran Teatre del Liceu • open for self-guided visits at 11:30am, noon, 12:30pm and 1pm daily • €5.50 • guided tour of main building: 10am (€11.50); guided backstage tour: 9am (€12.50), booking in adv essential, box office: open 1:30–8pm Mon–Fri, one hour before the performance Sat & Sun*

 [View photo](#)

## 2. MONUMENT A COLOM

Pointing resolutely out to sea, this statue of Christopher Columbus (1888) commemorates his return to Spain after discovering the Americas. An elevator takes visitors to the top for sensational views (for further details see [Mirador de Colom](#)).

 [Google Map](#)  [View photo](#)

## 3. MERCAT DE LA BOQUERIA

A cacophonous shrine to food, this cavernous market has it all, from stacks of fruit to suckling pigs and writhing lobsters. **i** *Mercat de La Boqueria • open 8am–8pm Mon–Sat • DA*

 [View photo](#)

## 4. FLOWER STALLS

La Rambla is teeming with life and things to distract the eye. Amid the here- today-gone-tomorrow street performers and tourists, the true Rambla old-timers are the flower stalls that flank the pedestrian walkway. Many of the stalls have been run by the same families for decades.

 [View photo](#)

## 5. FONT DE CANALETES

Ensure your return to the city by drinking from this 19th-century fountain, inscribed with the legend that anyone who drinks from it “will fall in love with Barcelona and always return”.

 [Google Map](#)




## 6. MIRÓ MOSAIC


Splashed on the walkway on La Rambla is a colourful pavement mosaic by Catalan artist Joan Miró. His signature abstract shapes and primary colours unfold at your feet.

 [Google Map](#)  [View photo](#)

## 7. PALAU DE LA VIRREINA

This Neo-Classical palace was built by the viceroy of Peru in 1778. The Palace of the Viceroy's Wife, as it translates, is split into several galleries, showing mainly photography exhibitions.  [Palau de la Virreina](#) • galleries open noon–8pm Tue–Sat; usually free; Cultural Information Centre open 10am–8:30pm daily • DA


## 8. ARTS SANTA MÒNICA


Once the hallowed haunt of rosary beads and murmured prayers, this former 17th-century monastery was reborn in the 1980s. Thanks to a massive government-funded facelift, it is now a cutting-edge contemporary art centre. Temporary exhibitions run the gamut from large-scale video installations to sculpture and photography.  [Arts Santa Mònica](#) • open 11am–9pm Tue–Fri, 11am–2pm & 4–8pm Sat • free


## 9. BRUNO QUADRAS BUILDING

Once an umbrella factory, this playful, late 19th-century building is festooned with umbrellas.

## 10. ESGLESIA DE BETLEM

A relic from a time when the Catholic Church was rolling in pesetas (and power), this hulking 17th-century church is a seminal reminder of when La Rambla was more religious than risqué.  [Església de Betlem](#) • open 8am–1:30pm & 5:30–8pm daily

 **Tip:** Kick back at the [Cafè de l'Òpera](#) at No. 74 and soak up the Rambla ambience with a cool *grantissat* (crushed ice drink) in hand.

 **Tip:** Beware: La Rambla is rife with pick-pockets.

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# BARCELONA CATHEDRAL




# BARCELONA CATHEDRAL

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From its Gothic cloister and Baroque chapels to its splendid, 19th-century façade, the Cathedral, dating from 1298, is an amalgam of architectural styles, each one paying homage to a period in Spain's religious history. Records show that an early Christian baptistry was established here in the 6th century, later replaced by a Romanesque basilica in the 11th century, which gave way to the current Gothic Cathedral. This living monument still functions as the Barri Gòtic's spiritual hub.

**i** *Plaça de la Seu • 93 342 82 62 • Metro: Liceu, Jaume I*

 [Google Map](#)

**i** *Cathedral • 8am–12:45pm (to 1:45pm Sun), 5:15–7:30pm daily (until 8pm Sat & Sun) • church and cloister free access, rooftops (via lift) €2.50, choir €2.50; guided tour (inc choir, rooftops and museum) 1–5pm daily (from 2pm Sun) €6*

## 1. MAIN FACADE

Flanking the entrance of the 19th-century façade are twin towers, *Modernista* stained-glass windows and 100 carved angels. An eight-year restoration was completed in 2011.

## 2. CHOIR STALLS

The lavish choir stalls (1340), crowned with wooden spires, are decorated with colourful coats of arms by artist Joan de Borgonya.

 [View photo](#)

## 3. CLOISTER

Graced with a fountain, palm trees and roaming geese, the cloister dates back to the 14th century. The mossy fountain is presided over by a small, iron statue of Sant Jordi (St George).

 [View photo](#)

## 4. CRYPT OF SANTA EULALIA

In the crypt's centre lies the graceful alabaster sarcophagus (1327) of Santa Eulàlia, Barcelona's first patron saint. Reliefs depict her martyrdom.

## 5. CAPELLA DEL SANTISSIM SACRAMENT I CRIST DE LEPANT

This 15th-century *capella* (chapel) features the Crist de Lepant, which, legend has it, guided the Christian fleet in its 16th-century battle against the Ottoman Turks.

## 6. CAPELLA DE SANT BENET

Honouring Sant Benet, the patron saint of Europe, this chapel showcases the 15th-century altarpiece *Transfiguration of the Lord* by illustrious Catalan artist Bernat Martorell.

## 7. CAPELLA DE SANTA LLÚCIA


This lovely Romanesque chapel is dedicated to Santa Llúcia, the patron saint of sight and vision. On her saint's day (13 December), the blind (*els cecs*) arrive in large numbers to pray at her chapel.

## 8. NAVE & ORGAN


The immense nave is supported by soaring Gothic buttresses, which arch over 16 chapels. The 16th-century organ looming over the interior fills the Cathedral with music during services.

 [View photo](#)

## 9. PIA ALMOINA & MUSEU DIOCESA

The 11th-century Pia Almoina, once a rest house for pilgrims and the poor, houses the Museu Diocesà with Romanesque and Gothic works of art from around Catalonia.  *Museu Diocesà • open 10am–2pm & 5–8pm Tue–Sat, 11am–2pm Sun • €6 • DA*


## 10. CASA DE L'ARDIACA

Originally built in the 12th century, the Archdeacon's House sits near what was once the Bishop's Gate in the city's Roman walls. Expanded over the centuries, it now includes a leafy patio with a fountain.  *Casa de L'Ardiaca • open 9am–8:45pm Mon–Fri, 9am–1pm Sat (Jul & Aug: 9am–7:30pm Mon–Fri) • free*

### Cathedral Guide

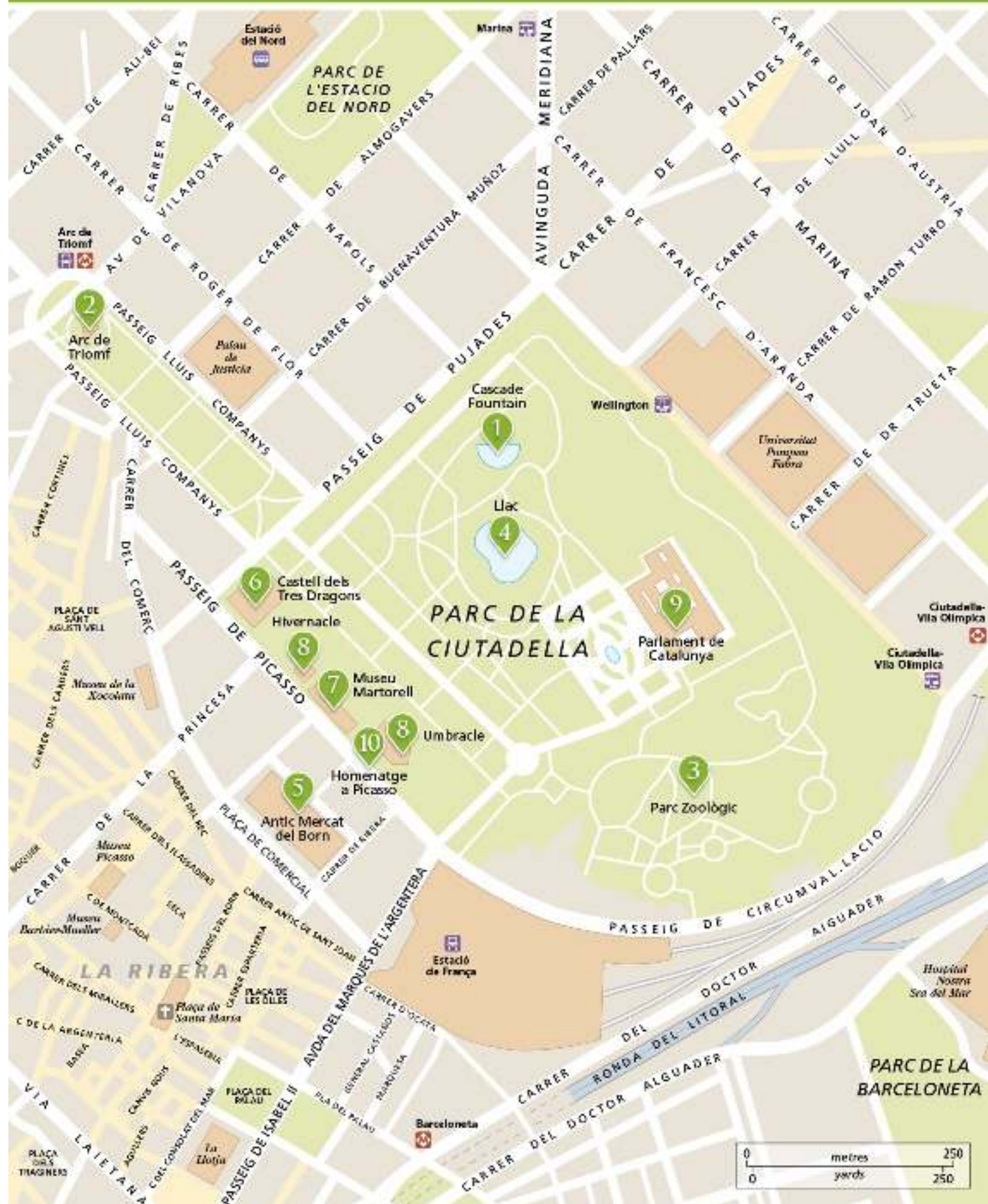
The most impressive entrance to the Cathedral is its main portal on Plaça de la Seu. As you enter, to the left lie a series of chapels, the organ and elevators that take you to the terrace for phenomenal views of the Barri Gòtic (for further details see [Barcelona Cathedral](#)). The Casa de L'Ardiaca lies to the right of the Cathedral's main entrance (at Carrer Santa Llúcia 1); the Museu Diocesà is to the left (at Avinguda de la Catedral 4).

 **Tip:** Bask in the Cathedral's Gothic glory at the Estruch café on Plaça de la Seu.

 **Tip:** Organ and choral concerts are usually held monthly; enquire at the Pia Almoina. Watch *sardanes* – Catalonia's regional dance – in Plaça de la Seu (6pm Sat, noon Sun).

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# PARC DE LA CIUTADELLA



# PARC DE LA CIUTADELLA

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Unfolding languidly just to the east of the old town, this green, tranquil oasis provides a welcome respite from the city centre. Built in the late 1860s on the site of a former military fortress (*ciutadella*), the park was artfully designed to offer Barcelona's citizens an experience of nature (shady corners, paths and greenhouses), recreation (rowing boats on the lake) and culture (two museums). The 1888 Universal Exhibition was held here and in preparation the city's great Modernista architects were brought in to work their magic. Lluís Domènech i Montaner created the *Castell dels Tres Dragons* (today part of the Natural Science Museum) and a young Antoni Gaudí helped design the flamboyant Cascade Fountain. **i** Main entrance: Pg Pujades • Park: open 8am– sunset daily • free • DA

 [Google Map](#)

## 1. CASCADE FOUNTAIN

One glimpse of this Baroque-style fountain and you'll guess Gaudí had a hand in its creation. Winged horses with serpent tails rear over a waterfall and cherubs play amid jets of water.

 [View photo](#)

## 2. ARC DE TRIOMF

The grandest entrance to the park is the Arc de Triomf, designed for the 1888 Exhibition by Josep Vilaseca i Casanoves. Topping the arch are angels tooting horns and offering wreaths.

 [View photo](#)

## 3. PARC ZOOLÒGIC

These colourful flamingos are just some of the stars at this child-friendly zoo, which also has pony rides, electric cars and regular dolphin shows (for further details see [Parc Zoològic](#)). **i** Zoo • open Nov–Mar: 10am–5:30pm daily; mid-May–mid-Sep: 10am–8pm daily; Apr– mid-May & mid-Sep–Oct: 10am– 7pm daily • €19.60, children aged 3–12 €11.80 • DA

## 4. LLAC

Located in the centre of the park is a placid, man-made lake, where it's possible to rent a boat for half an hour or more.

 [View photo](#)


## 5. ANTIC MERCAT DEL BORN

The outline of Barcelona's medieval streets, houses, shops and palaces is revealed below this old market, the foundations of which date from 1714. The market now houses a cultural centre.

## 6. CASTELL DELS TRES DRAGONS

Domènech i Montaner's striking building is now part of the Natural Science Museum, and houses the library, laboratories and part of the zoological and geological collection. It is open to researchers only.

## 7. MUSEU MARTORELL

Originally a geology museum, this building is now part of the Natural Science Museum. When it reopens, in 2014, it will house an exhibition on the scientific culture of the city.  *Museu de Ciències Naturals (Museu Martorell)* • closed for renovation until the end of 2014 • €6 • DA

## 8. HIVERNACLE & UMBRACLE

The late 19th-century Hivernacle and Umbracle greenhouses are currently empty pending renovation work. The latter was designed by architect Josep Fontseré, the former by Josep Amargós.

 [View photo](#)

## 9. PARLAMENT DE CATALUNYA

Housed in the lovely Palau de la Ciutadella, 1891, is the Catalanian Parliament, where Artur Mas (the President of Catalonia) and other political groups meet. In front is the Plaça d'Armes and a graceful waterlily pond with a sculpture (1907) by Josep Llimona.


 [View photo](#)

## 10. HOMENATGE A PICASSO

Antoni Tàpies toasts Picasso's cubist legacy with an abstract creation of his own. Tàpies' *Homage to Picasso* – a large glass cube filled with furnishings and abstract objects – requires some mental gymnastics to decipher its meaning.

### Park Guide

Two metro stops provide access to the park: to approach through the grand Arc de Triomf, disembark at the metro station of the same name. If you're heading to the zoo, get off at Barceloneta metro stop, which is within easy walking distance.

 **Tip:** Pick up a picnic at the bustling Santa Caterina food market (northwest of the park), or have a drink and a snack in the pretty outdoor café, El Drac, next to the Castell dels Tres Dragons building.

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# MUSEU NACIONAL D'ART DE CATALUNYA

Incorporating one of the most important medieval art collections in the world, the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (MNAC) is housed in the majestic Palau Nacional, built in 1929. The high point of the museum is the Romanesque art section, consisting of the painted interiors of churches from the Pyrenees dating from the 11th and 12th centuries. There is also the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, with works from the Gothic period to the Rococo; the Cambó Bequest, with works by the likes of Goya and Zurbarán; and a collection of works by Catalan artists from the early 19th century to the present day. **i**

*Palau Nacional, Parc de Montjuïc • Metro: Espanya; or buses 55 or 150 • 93 622 03 70 • [www.mnac.cat](http://www.mnac.cat) • Open 10am–6pm (8pm Jun–Sep) Tue–Sat, 10am–3pm Sun • Adm: €12; con €8.40 (valid for two days within one month; free Sat from 3pm and first Sun of the month; free under 16 and over 65 years old; Audioguide €3.20) • Guided tours by appt and 1st Sun of month (noon in Catalan and 12:15pm in Spanish) • DA*



## 1. MURALS: SANTA MARIA DE TAÜLL

The well-preserved interior of Santa Maria de Taüll (c.1123) gives an idea of how incredibly colourful the Romanesque churches must have been. The symbolism concentrates on Jesus's early life, with scenes of the Wise Men and John the Baptist.

## 2. FRESCOES: SANT CLIMENT DE TAÜLL

The Taüll interior is a melange of Byzantine, French and Italian influences. The apse is dominated by *Christ in Majesty* and the symbols of the four Evangelists and the Virgin, with the apostles beneath.

## 3. CRUCIFIX OF BATLLÓ MAJESTY

This splendid, mid-12th-century wooden carving depicts Christ on the cross with open eyes and no signs of suffering, as he has defeated death.

## 4. THE MADONNA OF THE COUNCILLORS

Commissioned by the city council in 1443, this work by Lluís Dalmau is rich in political symbolism. It reveals the head councillors, supported by saints and martyrs, kneeling before an enthroned Virgin.

## 5. CAMBÓ BEQUEST

Catalan politician Francesc Cambó (1876–1974) bequeathed his enormous art collection to Catalunya; two large galleries contain artworks from the 16th to early 19th centuries, including Titian's *Girl Before A Mirror* (c. 1515).



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