

Catalonian Delights in Barcelona and in Costa Brava

Where art abounds and nature thrives

9 JULY 2019, NOELLE NEWELL



Collioure, France

My family and I traveled to Barcelona for a short spell before focusing our attention onto Costa Brava— the rugged coast of Spain. No trip to Barcelona would be complete without seeing some of the iconic architecture of Antoni Gaudí and the art of Pablo Picasso.

Park Güell

Originally, designed as a residential community based on the ideas of the garden city movement that begun earlier in England, garden cities attempted to incorporate the greenery of the countryside into an urban environment. The park is partly named after Count Eusebi Güell, a friend and patron of Antoni Gaudí. The English term “Park” was included to add to the English feel. Gaudí and Güell shared similar

views in their devotion to their faith and to Catalonia. The project was never fully realized and thus later it became a park for all to enjoy, though parts now requires a ticket for entry.

The beautiful mosaics that abound are created from broken tile shards in a technique is called *trencadis*. The color-infused *trencadis* makes everything come alive from the meandering benches to animals such as the whimsical dragon— El Drac. One can also see Guadí's use of *trencadis* at *Sagrada Família*. Park Güell offers a delightful way to experience the outdoors in an artful setting that will wow even the most jet-lagged visitor.

The purpose of art is washing the dust of daily life off our souls.

(Pablo Picasso)

A taxi ride away whisks you to El Born neighborhood where you can refuel at the bar El Xampanyet before embarking into the Picasso Museum. Picasso's interpretation of Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas* is spellbinding. Picasso masterfully extracted the essence of Velázquez's *Las Meninas* into his very own. It also hints at what the Art world was to become - in the sense of contemporary artists appropriating others' art and making it their own, such as the artist Richard Prince who has pushed such appropriation to its limit.

Picasso's rooftop paintings of Barcelona are very appealing, as the roof tops haven't changed much except for the addition of electrical wirings and satellite dishes. Picasso's brushwork is varied from heavy to light, his brush strokes are long and short. Not far from the Picasso Museum is Sans & Sans a tea purveyor which is where I selected a tisane of rooibos which makes a chic and delicious souvenir. Fortunately, dining late in Barcelona is de rigueur, and thus after full day of art there's still time to nap, and refresh before dinner. One of my favorite dining experiences was at Vinitus in the chic neighborhood of l'Eixample.

Costa Brava

There are charming towns throughout the Costa Brava region stretching north along the Mediterranean. Peratallada is a beautifully well preserved and cared for medieval village that imparts an elegant air with potted plants bedecking patios and entry ways, and bougainvillea offering pops of color contrasting with the neutral colors of the stone roads and homes. Ties with Cuba is evident in architecture of many colorful mansions dotted throughout the town of Begur.

The Dalí Theatre Museum in Figueres is a must, from the Mae West apartment face, to its vast collection of paintings, prints, and his dazzling jewelry. Stunningly clear turquoise water can be seen all along the coast; where there are small coves and summer cottages in white and with terra cotta roofs. One of my favorite restaurants is in such a setting is, Toc Almar, serving in my opinion the best *Pa amb tomàquet*. Translating it into English; *bread with tomato*, just doesn't do the bread any justice.

The drive over the border to Collioure, France took us over winding roads with hairpin turns and at dizzying heights through the picturesque villages of Cadaqués, Port Lligat, Cap de Creus, and Llançà. The views are beautiful. The arid terrain dotted with cacti becomes surprisingly green as one approaches France. Once one is in Languedoc the terrain becomes quickly dominated by vineyards. Cadaqués is a postcard-perfect coastal village of white painted buildings that give one a feeling of being in Greece with its narrow streets, pots of geraniums, and bougainvillea that offer a splash color against the dominating white walls.

My quest on this day was to see Collioure a seaside town painted by fauvist artists Henri Matisse and André Derain. We enjoyed a glass of Banyuls wine at one of the numerous cafes with a view of the Eglise Notre-Dame des Anges before heading the back to Costa Brava.

If you come to the Mediterranean for its beaches then perhaps it's best to book a hotel in a coastal village. I eyed a very cool one close to the Greco - Roman ruins of Empúries in L'Escalà. You may otherwise wish to stay a tad inland in one of many villages. We made Begur our temporary home and every day we went out to explore the region. In Begur there are terrific restaurants such as Aigua Clara, and a couple of alluring boutiques one with dazzling array of espadrilles.

The office of the interior architect Susanna Cots also piqued my interest in Begur. Impressively, she also has offices in Barcelona and Hong Kong. Susanna's work is very clean, modern, yet one can see that she pays a lot of attention to detail to make it work. Simple is harder to do it right. One of her projects that comes to my mind is a home in Peratallada with its white fitted Bulthaup kitchen up against an exposed ancient stone wall. Susanna's palate is monochromatic which allows the nature outside to come through the floor-to-glass windows. It is also soothing and relaxing en par for summer residences. Her interiors make me dream of having a house here too.

The contrast of the Mediterranean terra cotta roofs to the clapboard homes of New England was what I was longing for on this trip. Travel changes one, it opens ones eyes wider, and provides an opportunity to see a glimpse of the world through another culture's eyes.

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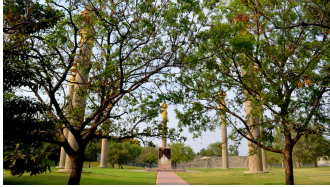
Noelle Newell is an interior designer. She believes that Interior design is about cultivating beauty and refinement. She is a Graduate of Curry College and Fashion Institute of Technology. She has also studied at The British Institute of Florence and The Sotheby's Institute of Art, London. Writing allows her to share her passion of the Fine Art of Living with the world at large..

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1. Begur, Costa Brava
2. Trencadis Park Güell Barcelona
3. Aiguablava, Costa Brava
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5. Medieval village of Peratallada
6. Trencadis Park Güell Barcelona

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