Even a worldly-wise traveller will find it hard not to fall in love with Barcelona. The sunny Spanish jewel has got everything to impress visitors: a mysterious Gothic Quarter, Antonio Gaudi’s architectural masterpieces, ultra-modern skyscrapers, golden beaches, luxurious boutiques and restaurants offering creative cuisine. But the main attraction is the city’s unique convivial atmosphere, reigning here at all hours and seasons.

By Natalia Maiboroda
Barcelona’s Parallel

My acquaintance with the Catalan capital began in its historic centre – the Gothic Quarter or Barri Gòtic. Its main attraction is the medieval Cathedral, the construction of which began in the late 13th century. In 1493, its walls witnessed one of the most important events in the history of Spain, when King Ferdinand the Catholic and Queen Isabella of Castile welcomed celebrated Spanish seafarer Christopher Columbus home to Europe from his travels to the west, during which he made his most notable discovery – the Americas.

Today, the bustling square is crammed with tourists taking pictures next to the huge metal letters spelling out the word BARCELONA, just before hastening to reserve a table at one of the city’s numerous cafes. Having relished a sweet breakfast popular among the locals, I spent my morning familiarising myself with its historic centre – the Gothic Quarter or modern district of Eixample. I got plenty of both history and fashion as I roamed the narrow chilly streets of the Gothic Quarter with joyful tourists and became a promenade. Today, it’s the most boisterous street of Barcelona, where a festive atmosphere reigns day and night. There is even a saying in Spanish: “to grow like a Ramblas tree,” which means to live carefree.

The Joyful Boulevard

The name of the boulevard comes from the Arabic word for a sandy riverbed. At one time, a small brook flowed through the territory of the present Ramblas, quenching the thirst of a local Roman settlement. The riverbed later dried up and became a promenade. Today, it’s the most boisterous street of Barcelona, where a festive atmosphere reigns day and night. There is even a saying in Spanish: “to grow like a Ramblas tree,” which means to live carefree.

Barcelona’s architectural eras are marvellously intertwined to such an extent that they somehow slip into each other. Glorious medieval cathedrals stand there along with shiny hi-tech skyscrapers, while the surrealistic shapes of Antonio Gaudi’s edifices enliven the sharp geometry of the more modern districts. All this swirling architectural diversity can be found between Parallel and Meridiana, two of the Catalan capital’s most famous streets.

Barcelona’s Parallel

The modern Eixample district is the epitome of urban design. The Eixample is formed by long parallel streets with right angles and forming octagonal squares with chamfered corners. The pioneering design was introduced by the renowned Spanish urban planner Ildefons Cerdà, who found this arrangement of streets to be ideal for traffic and the airiness of a residential area. To me, the district seemed more like a schematic honeycomb, where joyful tourists swarm in search of architectural masterpieces by Antonio Gaudi, Josep Puig i Cadafalch and Lluis Domènech i Montaner.

Modern part of Eixample - Chestnut Place

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Sacular Meridians

That, however, by 1992 Barcellona was the only white ape in the world.

A Modern Meridian

Interestingly enough, Barcelona hadn’t been exposed to mass tourism until 1992, when everything changed with the Summer Olympics, which saw the creation of Vila Olimpica, a new residential district with an Olympic port and shiny skyscrapers. The New Espanya Park is a stone’s throw away from the city’s sandy beaches and it’s no wonder this is the place where local citizens escape from the heat on hot summer days. Shopaholics, in their turn, are magnetically attracted to the numerous display windows of the Maremagnum shopping and leisure centre located in Barcelona’s Old Port. Visitors are treated to three stories of the most popular European brands and many entertainment possibilities, ranging from IMAX cinema to mini-golf. An enormous cathedral which is considered the most scandalous building, designed by French architect Jean Nouvel. Due to its cucumber shape, the tower is jokingly called the erotic symbol of the city. The skyscraper’s name honours its owner, holding company Agbar which, by the way, supplies Barcelona’s water. This analogy must have dominated the lighting choice: at night, as the tower twinkles with blue lights, creating the illusion of a fantastic fountain, as 4500 photodiods devices illuminate the façade!

At the intersection of Diagonal and Meridian streets stands Torre Agbar – Barcelona’s most scandalous building, designed by French architect Jean Nouvel. Due to its cucumber shape, the tower is jokingly called the erotic symbol of the city. The skyscraper’s name honours its owner, holding company Agbar which, by the way, supplies Barcelona’s water. This analogy must have dominated the lighting choice: at night, as the tower twinkles with blue lights, creating the illusion of a fantastic fountain, as 4500 photodiods devices illuminate the façade!

Diagonal of Genius

Most people associate Barcelona with the name of ingenious architect Antoni Gaudi, who turned the city into a lab for his incredible projects. The wavy contours and curly shapes of the best-known Gaudi buildings – Casa Mila (aka La Pedrera) and Casa Batlló, located on Garcia Avenue, make them look rather like skilfully crafted sculptures, which seem to be made by nature herself. However, it is the Sagrada Familia cathedral which is considered to be Gaudi’s masterpiece and the true landmark of Barcelona. The architect spent 43 years of his life building it, but to this day, the Cathedral remains unfinished, construction having been halted upon the master’s tragic death. In an ironic twist of fate, Gaudi was on his way to work on his beloved project when he was struck and killed by Barcelona’s first tram… As the architect built his models in his head, he left no drawings to guide his successors. Today the Cathedral, which had been designed as a religious gathering place for 15 thousand faithful Catholics, greets an equal number of tourists. I join them for a while, just before making my way to a unique albino gorilla named Snowflake, reportedly the only white ape in the world.

A Modern Meridian

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особливо коли блукаєш химерними кам'яними лабіринтами чи милуєшся панорамою міста, сидячи на чудернацькій мозаїчній лавочці – за свідченням Книги рекордів Гіннесса, найдовшій у світі.

Тібідабо
Та найкращий оглядовий майданчик із унікальним видом на Барселону знаходиться на найвищій точці міста – горі Тібідабо (512 м). Назва гори – це не каталонська абракадабра, а слова із Євангелії, вимовлені дияволом латиною: "тобі даю". Так диявол спокушав Ісуса Христа, пропонуючи йому весь світ в обмін на віру. На верхівці гори змагаються за увагу туристів католицький храм та парк атракцій, які знаходяться за крок один від одного. Собор Святого Серця Христового зі статуюю Христа, що відкриває обійми світові, нагадує мені паризький Монмартр з його базилікою Сакре-Кер.

Добирається на самісіньку верхівку собору ліфтом, а потім сходами – і ось я вже вище від будь-кого у всій Барселоні! Стою біля ніг Ісуса, що височить наді мною, й милуюся панорамою міста – загадковим Готичним кварталом, життєрадісним бульваром Рамбла, акуратними вуличками Ешямпле, шпилем собору Саграда Фамілія, лазуровим морем та аеропортом, куди сьогодні так не хочеться повертатися... Одна лише ця панорама вартує того, щоб замовити авіапереліт до Барселони!
КОРИСНА ІНФОРМАЦІЯ

Віза:

Barcelona Card (www.barcelona-card.com) дозволяє безкоштовно користуватися громадським транспортом Барселони, надає знижки на вхід до 16 міських музеїв, барів та ресторанів, магазинів та клубів, а також на екскурсійний тур по Готичному кварталу. Вартість картки – від 27,50 євро (на два дні) до 45 євро (на п’ять днів).

Офіційний сайт Барселони: www.bcn.cat
Туристичний сайт Барселони: www.barcelonaturisme.com
Собор Саграда Фамілія: www.sagradafamilia.cat
Барселонський Акваріум: www.aquariumbcn.com
Музей Пікассо: www.museupicasso.bcn.es
Музей Жоана Міро: www.fundaciomiro-bcn.org
Музей футбольного клубу “Барселона”: www.fcbarcelona.cat

ЯКА ДІСТАТИСЯ


УКАЗІВКИ

Візиві збір: 379 гривень.

Barcelona Card (www.barcelona-card.com) блюстіть безкоштовно користуватися громадським транспортом Барселони, надає знижки на вхід до 16 міських музеїв, барів та ресторанів, магазинів та клубів, а також на екскурсійний тур по Готичному кварталу.

OФІЦІЙНИЙ САЙТ БАРСЕЛОНИ: www.bcn.cat
ТУРИСТИЧНИЙ САЙТ БАРСЕЛОНИ: www.barcelonaturisme.com
СОБОР САГРАДА ФАМІЛІЯ: www.sagradafamilia.cat
БАРСЕЛОНАСЬКИЙ АКВАРИУМ: www.aquariumbcn.com
МУЗЕЙ ПІКАССО: www.museupicasso.bcn.es
МУЗЕЙ ЖОАНА МІРО: www.fundaciomiro-bcn.org
МУЗЕЙ ФУТБОЛЬНОГО КЛУБУ “БАРСЕЛОНА”: www.fcbarcelona.cat

USEFUL INFO

Visa: Ukrainians require a Schengen visa to enter Spain. Applications can be made at the Spanish Visa Application Centre in Ukraine (Kiev, 60 Frunze Str., tel.: +38 044 594 9618, www.espvac-ua.com.
Visa fee: UAH 379.

Barcelona Card (www.barcelona-card.com) features free travel on public transport, offers discounts at sixteen museums, chosen bars, restaurants, shops and clubs, as well as a guided tour of the Gothic Quarter. The card costs between €27.50 (for two days) and €45 (for five days).

Official website of Barcelona: www.bcn.cat
Travel guide of Barcelona: www.barcelonaturisme.com
Sagrada Familia: www.sagradafamilia.cat
Aquarium of Barcelona: www.aquariumbcn.com
Picasso Museum: www.museupicasso.bcn.es
Joan Miro Museum: www.fundaciomiro-bcn.org
FC Barcelona Museum: www.fcbarcelona.cat

GETTING THERE

MAU offers five scheduled flights from Kiev to Barcelona a week (except Mondays and Fridays). Buy tickets online at www.flyUIA.com. For more information, call us at +380 44 581 5050. KyivStar, MTS, Life and Beeline cellular service subscribers can dial 566. The call costs UAH 1 per minute for KyivStar and life) subscribers, UAH 0.95 per minute for Beeline subscribers, and is billed as a call to a city phone for MTS subscribers.