

SIGHTSEEING IN BARCELONA

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* Texts written by journalism students on work experience.

1. Barcelona from the monument to Christopher Columbus

The Lookout of the Monument to Christopher Columbus, at the bottom of the Ramblas, can be accessed by a lift. The lift takes you to the level of the shoes of the *discoverer* of America. Three people and the lift driver fill the small circular space of the lift while it travels up and down. A short silence, a smile as you glance at each other, and the door opens. A fresh breeze with a hint of the sea and the light of the day that has finally dawned, accompany the magnificent views from one of the most famous lookouts in the city. Generations of Catalans and multitudes of tourists have visited the lookout at some time or another. It is like tasting the water from the Canaletes drinking fountain. There are things that become more modern and customs that last forever.

Its windows offer an all-round view of a city that spreads from the sea to the mountains. From Maremàgnum to the National Palace, an immensity of rooftops that open the city to the sky. Looking up Rambles, trees and a kaleidoscope of colours each going its own way. From the roof of the Wax Museum, Superman seems ready to fly off to complete yet another mission. From here you see the tourists queuing up in front of the lift to purchase tickets for the **Barcelona Tourist Bus** or waiting to begin today's tour. As the morning advances, people fill the Portal of Peace under a sun that invites you to try the most sophisticated types of hats.

118 years pointing to the sea. This is the fact that most fascinates the people when they go up the monument. And the monument keeps a record of its visitors. The typical graffiti in ball-point or marker pen leaving a memoir of the visit fill the circular wall where visitors gaze fascinated as they see the city from quite a different point of view. The same as the television crew who filmed the view this morning so that it can be shown to people who are not so keen on heights.

The group begin the tour by heading down La Rambla and call in at the first stop on the route: the famous **Granja Viader**, on Carrer Xuclà in the Raval district. This *granja* (a café specialising in cakes and dairy produce) is a Barcelona classic which still serves breakfast and tea, and is a little piece of Barcelona history because, in olden days, it used to supply the nearby hospitals with milk. You'll find yogurts, creams, cheeses and all kinds of dairy produce.

Carles, the guide, recommends one of the house specialities: **thick hot chocolate** accompanied by thin, crunchy fritters known as *churros*, cakes and sponge fingers called **melindros** –“the Catalan variant of the Castilian breakfast of **porras** (thick crunchy fritters) and **churros**”. “This is a very dark chocolate which is so thick and tasty that you eat it rather than drink it”, he explains. One of the most significant aspects of the Granja Viader is that the city’s first milk and dairy produce processing plant, Letona, was housed on the premises. It went on to produce, the iconic Catalan milk drink: **Cacaolat**, hot or cold, as the brand slogan goes.

La Boqueria

The next stop on the Barcelona Gourmet Walking Tour is Sant Josep Market, better known as the Boqueria, which stood on the site of the former Convent of Sant Josep.



Boqueria Market

You can find all kinds of fresh fruit and garden produce here. “Everything you see here is produced in Catalonia but not all of it is native to the region”, our guide explains. This isn’t the case with the **calçot**, an authentic Catalan product that bears more than a passing resemblance to a spring onion. How do you make a nice dish of *calçots*? “The key,” Carles explains “is in the **romesco sauce**, made with almonds, tomatoes... among other ingredients”.



Romescu sauce

You’ll also find food that is Arabic in origin, such as **dates** and **torró** nougat, which remind us of the Muslim presence in Catalonia. **Esqueixada** – a cold salad of shredded salt cod – is another typical regional dish you’ll find at the Boqueria.



Esqueixada

The market is one of the most visited tourist sights and the perfect setting for the first tasting on the tour. The members of the expedition can recharge their batteries while they sample slices of the typical cured sausage **fuet**, which is currently surpassing in popularity the colourful, but less distinctive, **tubs of chopped fruit** which also attract visitors.

Two further products introduce foreign tourists to the idiosyncrasies of Catalan cuisine. The first are **cooked legumes**, which are sold by weight, ready to eat. “Years ago, the working classes hadn’t time to make lunch and cook legumes at home, so this was a great solution”. **Snails** are the second unusual product.

The mixture of meat and fish (in rice dishes, for instance) is another characteristic of the region’s cuisine which isn’t as common elsewhere. The fish stalls are another distinctive feature of the old Sant Josep Market.

Catalan Patisserie

The **Escribà patisserie** is our last stop before we move on from the Raval to the Gothic Quarter. This century-old shop with its entrance right on La Rambla has an eye-catching art-nouveau frontage. “They changed the way the **Easter cake** was made”, our expert guide explains in order to highlight just one of the things that makes this cake shop unique.



Escribà Patisserie

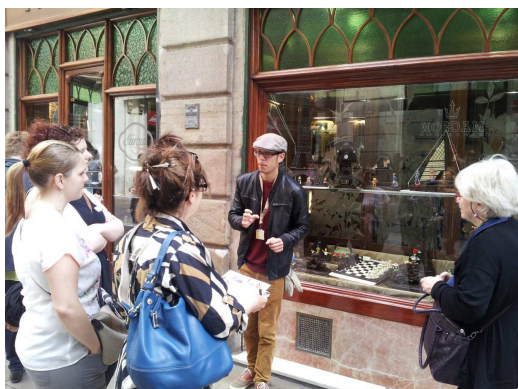
Escribà opens from 9am until 9pm and a plaque outside bearing the name *Establiment BARCELONA* tells us that it is unique. The lardon flatbread known as **coca de llardons** (“high in calories”, Carles warns us) and the **bunyols de Quaresma** (Lenten fritters) are two more typical Catalan cakes which are displayed in the windows. But the irresistible, life-size **chocolate shoe** is the delicacy that captures everyone’s attention and triggers the camera flashes.

The Miró mosaic set into the pavement on La Rambla marks the boundary with the Gothic Quarter and also brings visitors nearer to the **tapas bars** scattered around the district. In the square in front of the church of **Santa Maria del Pi** is one of the century-old emporiums which specialise in eating implements rather than food: the **Ganiveteria Josep Roca**, a knife shop founded in 1911.

Streets that are a treat for the senses

On **Carrer Petritxol** a whole host of *granges*, where you can have breakfast or tea, as well as countless art galleries, including the **Sala Parés**, invite passers-by to stop along the way. As we walk along Petritxol we’ll find one of these *granges*, the **Granja Pallaressa**. Founded in 1947, it specialises in traditional desserts and sweets. Here, and in the other cafés along the street, lovers of confectionery and cakes will be able to eat a **xuixo**, an elongated doughnut filled with crème pâtissière, or indulge in a **suís**, a cup of mouthwatering thick hot chocolate topped with whipped cream.

From here, the Barcelona Gourmet Walking Tour continues further along **Porta Ferrissa** past the laboratory of the chef Ferran Adrià, from the famous restaurant El Bulli in Roses. On the same street, the city’s oldest chocolatier, the **Xocolateria Fargas**, welcomes its clients as it has done for the past 100 years. The shop has stood on this corner for many years but its viability is now under threat due to the high rents in this busy shopping area.



Xocolateria Fargas

As we walk along the **Carrer del Pi**, which is still in the Gothic Quarter, we can take a look inside the **Colmado La Pineda**, which opened in 1930, and epitomises the classic grocer's shop where we can view products such as the typical pork sausages **botifarró** and **xistorra**.

The itinerary continues past establishments selling the Mediterranean product par excellence, **olive oil**, which is also one of our key regional products. It has now been elevated to the status of luxury product at the shop **oroliquido**.



Oroliquido shop

This part of the tour allows the visitors to enjoy another staple of our tables: **torró** nougat. Right in the heart of the Jewish Quarter, on **Carrer del Call**, the tour makes another scheduled stop at another unique emporium, the **Casa Vicenç**, which has been selling the genuinely Catalan **torrons d'Agramunt**. A date on the door, 1775, reveals how long this traditional, well-known speciality from Lerida has been around. The members of the group can take advantage of a 5% discount off the purchase of the products.

On **Baixada de la Llibreteria**, after we have crossed the **Plaça de Sant Jaume** and before we make our way to the Ribera district, we have to stop in front of the **Confiteria La Colmena**. The guide points out that this was the first confectioner's in the city to make cakes and biscuits to go with tea.

El Born, La Ribera

Two hours into the tour and it's time to discover the last district on the itinerary: the Ribera. **Cafés el Magnífico**, on Carrer d'Argenteria, are expert coffee roasters. The shop introduces us to this flavourful product which is another Catalan culinary tradition inherited from the Spanish presence in America.

We rush past the door of the **Hoffmann Cookery School**, on the same street which is very close to the basilica of **Santa Maria del Mar**. As we turn the corner of Carrer d'Argenteria we come to the **Casa Gispert** which tempts us inside. Founded in 1851, a sign by the door reads "We have been roasting nuts here for 160 years". There are all kinds of walnuts and almonds which are sold by weight and exported to 80 countries around the world. The antique 19th century roasting machine is still on display.

After walking around Santa Maria del Mar along the **Passeig del Born**, leaving behind us the **Born Market**, which has now been reconverted into a library and archaeological space, the Barcelona Gourmet Walking Tour ends at **Cal Rovira**, in the **Plaça Palau**.

Here you can experiment with another home-grown tradition: drinking beer or wine from a **porró** (a drinking vessel with an elongated spout). The guide has a go but none of the guests joins in although they follow the ritual closely. The servings of bread spread with tomato, **pa amb tomàquet**, drizzled with olive oil and topped with ham grab their attention straight away. This is the last tasting on the tour. The members of the group are hungry and they really tuck in. It's not long before they peruse the menu and choose a dish.

Joan Oliva

3. A morning at the tourist information office in Plaça Catalunya

It's Monday, and around the Plaça Catalunya the city centre once again becomes a hive of activity. At nine on the dot, the two doors to Turisme de Barcelona's information offices open and let in a long line of people who have been queuing for some time, just like the first day of the sales. Inside, some 20 tourists begin to form a queue and browse the shelves containing tourist information brochures and leaflets. Five minutes later, a paper boy delivering free newspapers arrives and leaves a pile at one of the display counters. As he leaves, he passes two men who had called at the information office before it opened. They don't bother to queue. They flick through the leaflets, pick up a few, and leave. It looks like they'll decide what they want to do as the day progresses. The hotel bookings desk isn't as busy, but, from time to time, it fills up with people carrying suitcases.

The lobby is beginning to get crowded and the queue waiting for tourist information and tourism products is formed by a motley selection of people spanning the entire colour spectrum: from sunburnt red to the pale tones of the socks poking out from sandals of a darker hue. A red-faced man, the camera round his neck resting on his belly, takes his place in the queue. In front of the information counters, another man wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with the words Venezuela, and his wife ask about the opening times of the Museum of Erotica, and exchange a sly smile. At the entrance, another paper delivery boy passes a man who is coming to pick up some tickets for a concert. The security guard tells him to come back later because the Caixa Catalunya counter doesn't open until ten. There is a constant stream of people, and it's not even half past nine. At the counters, the information officers are attending to three groups of people who want to buy the **Barcelona Card**: "*One ticket, two days, yes!*"

Looking for the right destination

Two ladies in their fifties with elaborate hair-styles are commenting on the leaflets about **Picasso** and pop a couple of things that have caught their eye into their handbags: leaflets about a flamenco and opera show. The tourist clichés prevail and the two Japanese who have just come in are proof of this. One of them wears a camera with a long telephoto lens round his neck and his friend has a backpack of the type used to carry laptops. The man waiting to collect his concert tickets finishes his cigarette before coming back in. Meanwhile, a boy comes out loaded down with all the leaflets he could find about art-related events and exhibitions. The security guard watches them until a girl, who is also carrying a stack of leaflets, goes up to him and asks him a question. He tries to make himself understood in English and seems to have succeeded.

There is no let up in the flow of people and the tourist office staff are in need of a coffee. Today, a large group of people has signed up for the **Walking Tour** of the Gothic Quarter and, before it departs, even more people arrive asking if they can go on the tour. Today, quite a few guides will be needed, and you can see the look of satisfaction on the faces of the girls who have to let them know how many people will be on the tour. Near the other information office entrance, two girls have found a map of the city on one of the walls and trace several routes with their fingers. After a while they leave. They must have photographic memories or they'll have to come back to ask for a city map. The queue gets longer and shorter, but doesn't stop. A redheaded girl is flicking through a black folder for some documents. When she finds what she's looking for, she knocks on a door with a sign reading 'no admittance'. She can't have passed her theory exam because she goes in anyway, but emerges swiftly. She'd just dropped by to leave her CV. Later, a boy leaves another CV at the hotel information desk.

A vast array of people

At 10am it is revealed that John Lennon is alive. This morning he has decided to pay a visit to Barcelona. He is accompanied by a friend who, as his T-shirt reveals, is more of a Bob Dylan fan. Turisme de Barcelona's information office has become the city's new Rambla. What's more, the security guard hasn't much time to keep watch, particularly because, instead of queuing, many tourists choose to ask him about things to do in the city. Surrounded by a group of ladies, he tells them about the trip to Montserrat they can go on with the

Catalunya Bus Turístic.

There is only one last free paper to be delivered. The piles of newspapers get smaller and smaller as people help themselves and leaf through them. I don't know how much they understand because, as the explanations given by the information office staff indicate, you hear more English and French than any other language. The lady who has just entered has come here with a specific purpose. She picks up three newspapers from each pile and goes to another counter. Then she opens her bag and has a struggle to fit them all in. Her bag now packed, she goes out through the other door. Maybe she does this every day, and gets her information without having to pay for it. However, the main information provided at the tourist offices in Plaça Catalunya is quite different. A short while ago, two girls at the **Modernisme Trail** counter began giving information to those interested in discovering **Gaudí** and **Domènech i Montaner**. A young man comes in who seems decided, but he stops suddenly, shakes his head and carries on walking. They laugh, maybe he's shy. Making the most of the fact that, at the moment, they have no customers, one of them copies up her notes in a folder featuring the logo of her university.

Another look-alike arrives. Salvador Dalí comes in arm in arm with his wife. He hasn't lost a single hair from his long moustache, but he's just a look-alike, because he hasn't noticed the glass shelves displaying the range of jewellery designed by Dalí, on sale in the **BCN Original Shop**. They form a

queue without saying a word to each other. When their turn comes, they speak in French to one of the information officers. They are delighted to be taking the **Catalunya Bus Turístic**. Obviously they choose the tour of Girona and Figueres, home of the Salvador Dalí Theatre-Museum.

Cartographic ‘souvenirs’

The **BCN Original Shop** sells cards for the **Bus Turístic** amidst the compulsive shoppers buying maps and guides, eager not to miss out on anything Barcelona has to offer. The girl in the shop says that, compared to other Mondays, today is a quiet day. She says, however, that the weekends are impossible. According to her, sales of **Barcelona football club** merchandise never vary and it always sells in large quantities. In front of the shop, next to a cashpoint machine, a group of four boys have piled up their backpacks and take it in turns to keep an eye on them while they visit the toilets. When they return, with the accommodation guide for young people under their arm, they try their luck at booking from a telephone box. It takes them over an hour but they're clearly successful because they pick up their belongings and leave. In the lobby, the queue is getting longer again. One of the information officers says that there are a lot of people around today but that, even though they've been rushed off their feet, there are days when the queue extends into the street. Today, for the time being, it's not that long but there's certainly no shortage of people.

The hours go by and the people keep on coming. Barcelona has to be lived to the full and everybody wants to make the most of their stay. One of the information officers is assisting a group of four women, who seem to be Russian. One of them is wearing a white embroidered headscarf with a long fringe, tied around her head several times, and huge sunglasses. The information officer asks her if it's typical for people in Russia to wear this type of item on their heads. She laughs and tells her about her adornment: "*It's Spanish!*" The girl makes no further comment. People come flocking into the shop. Now behind the counter, the information officer is attending to another

group of women who are trying to speak in Spanish. They want tickets to the opera and the theatre. The girl in the red jacket tells them they have to go to the box office because they don't sell tickets here. They remain cheerful and thank everybody as they leave.

The cast of characters is becoming more and more varied. A wide range of hairstyles, piercings, sandals, sunglasses and complexions. Taking advantage of the good weather, people pick up guide books and stop on the steps deciding which route to take while they enjoy the sunshine. Lunchtime approaches and the hustle and bustle seems to have subsided, but it only seems that way. There are a few moments of calm but they are short-lived. At 3 o'clock, the information officers change shifts. In the afternoons, people continue to ask for information about Barcelona but their preferences change. The tourists are interested in restaurants, want information about concerts, and ask about leisure attractions. All the people visiting the Catalan capital are eager to discover the charm of a city which attracts so many people throughout the year. Turisme de Barcelona helps them to do so. Visitors come here determined not to miss a single thing in a city which is just as captivating under the rays of the sun or in the moonlight.

4. Barcelona Bus Turístic, the city in motion

It's 9am and the first Barcelona Bus Turístic leaves on time from its departure point in Plaça Catalunya. It's a pleasant day and since there aren't very many tourists around who are early risers, there's plenty of room to enjoy the city from the best seats on the open top deck.

Discover the city of Gaudí on the Red Route

We set off on the Northbound, or Red Route, where Antoni Gaudí is the key figure. As we head up the Passeig de Gràcia, the courier welcomes us on board and points out the main architectural jewels on our itinerary. On the left, the Casa Batlló, and, on the right, the Casa Milà, popularly known as *La Pedrera* (stone quarry in Catalan). She reminds us about the opening times of both buildings and that the passengers can obtain a discount on admission prices. Meanwhile, the tourists take the first tentative photos of the day.

We continue on our way and pass the Casa de les Punxes, the house of spikes designed by Puig i Cadafalch. This is another *modernista* landmark which is of interest to visitors because, as the courier tells us, it has "365 windows, one for every day of the year". We gradually approach one of the city's iconic landmarks: the Sagrada Família. The bus circles the church and those on board marvel at its sheer scale, its details and myriad vantage points. Ten passengers don't want to miss out on this landmark and alight here. Meanwhile, the remaining passengers use the opportunity to take a few photos of the church or pose with the building as a backdrop.

The bus sets off again and heads up the Passeig de Sant Joan where highlights include the Palau Macaya, another major *modernista* landmark. Next we enter the district of Gràcia, bound for the Park Güell, one of the key visitor attractions on the route. A group of Japanese visitors open out their large map and ask the guide on the top deck questions. It's quite clear that none of them

want to miss this masterpiece by Gaudí. It comes as no surprise that the utopian garden-city is the most popular site on the bus itinerary; and the fact that eight people get off the bus, determined to see it, bears this out.

The sun is getting hotter as we continue to discover some of the city's most interesting nooks and crannies. We're now on Carrer de Balmes and the courier tells us about the attractions at the next stop. Mount Tibidabo, with its breathtaking panoramic views, Norman Foster's communications tower, the amusement park, the blue tram and the funicular railway, although the latter three only operate at weekends. She also reminds us that we can obtain a discount on admission to the science museum – CosmoCaixa –and recommends we take a stroll through the Tamarita Gardens.

We head along the Passeig de la Bonanova towards the district of Sarrià, where highlights include one of the city's finest patisseries, delightful shops and a *modernista*-style market. The inviting streets of this former village on the city's outskirts are the perfect place for a stroll. As we move along, the courier points out a view of the Collserola Ridge on our right and a tourist stands up to take advantage of the best photo opportunity. The second courier quickly and politely attracts his attention, because passengers are not allowed to move from their seats for their own safety.

Next stop: Pedralbes Monastery. Built in 1326, it is a beautiful example of Catalan Gothic architecture; a couple decide to pay it a visit. This is the furthest point on the Red Route and we now begin our descent along the majestic Avinguda de Pedralbes. The courier points out the gatehouses of the Güell estate, also by Gaudí, and once on the Diagonal, the royal palace, the Palau Reial, which is the site of a less well-known work by the *modernista* genius: the fountain of Hercules. We are now approaching the university campus, but we backtrack along the broad avenue and head towards the Camp Nou, another major tourist attraction. The passengers take a good look at the vast stadium while the courier tells them it is the biggest in Europe. The reminder that FC

Barcelona is the current European champion brings a smile to the lips of many of those on board, who can obtain a discount on admission. Four people don't give it a second thought and decide on a visit. Two of them, from South America, say this is the second day they have used the bus and that they are delighted with the service. They also say that it is the best way of seeing the city's most interesting sights at close quarters.

Heading towards Plaça Francesc Macià, the courier points out the transfer point for the Southbound Route. She also informs the passengers that the area is part of the Barcelona Shopping Line, the city's main retail thoroughfare: a showcase for leading international brands. However, it seems too early for shopping because there are few remaining passengers inside the bus. Most of the passengers have already disembarked at earlier stops along the route and, as we near the end of our journey, the bus is practically empty.

The most traditional aspects of Barcelona await us on the Blue Route

Two hours later, the atmosphere in Plaça Catalunya has changed completely. The area is now teeming with people and long queues snake around the Bus Turístic stops. Luckily, the stop for the Southbound, or Blue Route isn't as busy, and while we wait, some people are still buying their tickets from the courier who walks along the queue to make sure everybody has one. The other couriers tell the passengers where to get off or what to visit first. There are a whole range of options, all of them with their own particular appeal, so, for the time being, they will board the bus and decide what to do during the journey. The buses that arrive don't empty completely and a lot of people choose to wait for the next one and find a seat on the top deck. Finally, we board one of them and set off on the new route which will take us to some of Barcelona's most historic landmark sites.

This time, there's a real sightseeing buzz on the top deck: baseball caps, sunglasses, maps... The visitors have come prepared to discover the city from another angle. As we head back up the Passeig de Gràcia, the guide is keen to

point out the “Mansana de la Discòrdia”, or Block of Discord, in four languages. All heads automatically turn to the left and, like good pupils in class, a lot of the tourists point to the three buildings which form part of the block. The Casa Batlló and *La Pedrera* are the key attractions on the boulevard, and the focus of the passengers’ lenses. Passengers hop on and off at the corresponding stops, but the bus never empties out completely. The courier reminds the passengers that the service is a means of transport, rather than a guided tour, and that everyone can get on and off as many times, and for as long as they like. But most people are happy reading their guides and don’t want to leave the bus for the time being.

Once we have crossed the Diagonal, “the avenue stretching for over 14 kilometres which crosses the entire city”, we head to another, less touristy area: the Sants district. The bus goes around the railway station and shows us two large green spaces: the Parc de l’Espanya Industrial and the Parc de Joan Miró, with its colourful sculpture *Woman and Bird*. Next we enter the district itself, which is also renowned for its shops and the Hostafrancs market, where those who are interested take time out to stop and do some shopping. From this stop, on Carrer Creu Coberta, we can see Plaça Espanya where the guide points out the monumental fountain by Jujol, an associate of Gaudí’s. The tourists are impressed by the view: the Venetian Towers framing the Palau Nacional in the background. Most people reach for their cameras again, get up from their seats and snap a few photos as a permanent memento of the site.

We begin our climb up Montjuïc Hill, and the couriers tell us about the attractions that await at the next stop: CaixaForum and the Mies Van der Rohe Pavilion, but not many passengers show signs of moving. However, the Poble Espanyol, or Spanish Village, arouses greater interest. Here the bus sets down a large group of passengers and picks up another, so it remains just as full. Next, the bus passes by the National Art Museum of Catalonia – the MNAC –, the Olympic Ring and the Fundació Joan Miró. When the passengers travelling on the top deck get off at the required stop, the ones on the lower deck

scramble to find a seat on top, although a lot of couples still have to sit separately. This means there is never any free space on the top deck and new passengers have to make do with a seat inside. Once they have reached the Montjuïc Funicular stop, another fantastic view on the left catches their eye: a superb panoramic vista of the city from the Montjuïc swimming pools. As we only stop for a few minutes, everybody on board takes the opportunity to stand up again and snap a few photos.

We leave the mountain behind us and head along the Carretera de Miramar with the commercial port and luxury cruise liners in the background, as far as the World Trade Center. The cable car passes high above our heads and a couple decide to get off and take a ride on it. While we are dropping them off, some other passengers take advantage of another photo opportunity.

Now the guide, who never tires of telling us about all the things we can do, announces the stop on La Rambla and the relevant discounts available at the Museu Marítim, the Columbus Monument and on the traditional harbour pleasure boats, the Golondrinas. More photos of the man who discovered America, who seems to be posing just for the passengers. We move forward along the Passeig Colom towards the Port Vell, or old harbour, and those on board smile when they see Mariscal's *Prawn* sculpture and Lichtenstein's *Barcelona Head*, icons of the Olympic city. When we arrive at the Maremagnum, a major leisure and entertainment complex, some people get off. Maybe they want to do some shopping, but, considering what time it is and with the mouthwatering aroma of fried fish wafting in the air, they are more likely to be going for a hearty lunch instead. The bus takes more passengers on board and continues to the Barceloneta, the fisherman's district with its wide array of fish and seafood restaurants. The passengers begin to feel the effects of the sea breeze and relax to take in their surroundings. We drop off eight people at the Olympic Marina, who can either choose to explore the area around the Mapfre Tower and the Hotel Arts, or take the Forum Route. As we head back, we can see in the distance the new landmark of the 21st-century city: the Agbar

Tower. The prevailing peace and quiet on the bus is broken once again by the urge to take more and more photos.

We cross the Olympic Village towards the Parc de la Ciutadella and the Zoo, which are pointed out by the courier. We are now heading back to Barcelona's historic centre and the end of the route. First, the stop in the Pla de Palau which conceals the Ribera district behind it. "One of the city's most beautiful areas", and home to the church of Santa Maria del Mar and the Museu Picasso. A number of tourists climb aboard with contented faces, making it clear that their visit to this part of the city was worthwhile. Then, the stop in the Gothic Quarter. What more can be said about the city's most popular sightseeing area when a large number of passengers gets off to visit it!

Last stop, Plaça Catalunya. A pleasant English-speaking couple tell me that the bus provides a very good service but, as has been shown throughout the day, there's nowhere like the top deck.

** This text (num. 4) was written by a placement student taking a Masters in Historic Culture and Communication at Barcelona University.*

5. Catalunya Bus Turístic: The mountains and the beach on a tour packed with surprises

Stunning landscapes, art, culture, wine and religion are just some of the points of interest on the Catalunya Bus Turístic routes that take tourists to Montserrat, the Torres Winery and Sitges, just a few hours away from Barcelona.

The buses depart at 8.30am from the Plaça de Catalunya in Barcelona. The first stop is at 9.45am at the **Torres Winery** Visitor Centre, in the town of Vilafranca del Penedès. Torres are one of Spain's leading wine-makers and own a number of vineyards and wineries in Catalonia as well as Chile and the United States. The quality and uniqueness of their wines have earned the company worldwide acclaim.

At the start of the guided tour, the visitors climb aboard a miniature train and listen to an audioguide recounting the story of the winery. During the short journey they see the vineyards, wine-making facilities, gardens and the area where the grapes are unloaded. The train stops at the building where the grapes are destemmed, pressed and fermented, and the guide describes the wine-making process.

Afterwards, the group visits the Josefa cellars, which have 2 kilometres of galleries set out on two levels, where the wines are left to mature in more than 6,000 oak casks, at a controlled temperature of 15 or 16 degrees. The oak selected is among the best in the world and sourced from forests in America and Europe (mainly France).

The train ride continues, and takes the visitors through the warehouse, where the wine is bottle-aged, to the tasting room, where they sample *Sangre de Toro*, a red wine made from the Garnacha and Cariñena grape varieties. After

savouring the qualities of the wine, they can buy a bottle to take home with them at the shop. There are reds, whites and rosés to suit every pocket.

At 11am the bus departs for **Montserrat**. It takes an hour to reach the station from where the rack railway will take the group of visitors up to the monastery of Santa Maria de Montserrat, named after the patron saint of Catalonia, which nestles among the mountain crags.

The monastery complex comprises two buildings which perform different functions: the basilica with the rooms used by the monastic community, and the building where the visitor areas with restaurants, shops and accommodation are located.

The basilica is an absolute must for visitors. It is the home of the statue of the Black Madonna, known locally as the *La Moreneta* (the little brown one). The shrine presides over the altar and visitors can climb up to take a closer look. The basilica consists of a single nave, underpinned by central columns, and has several chapels around the sides. There are also 41 sumptuously decorated ceiling lamps, one for every Catalan county. On some days it's possible to hear Europe's oldest children's choir, the *Escolania*, sing.

Next to the basilica entrance is the Way of Mary where visitors can light a candle as a votive offering to the Virgin. The Catalunya Bus Turístic ticket includes admission to the audiovisual exhibit which fills visitors in on the monastery's historical background. Another attraction is the Museu de Montserrat, which is divided into several sections, ranging from a collection of archaeological treasures from Mesopotamia, Egypt and Palestine to 19th- and 20th-century paintings by Monet, Sisley, Degas, Picasso, Dalí, Casas and Rusiñol.

After the tour it's time to eat. There are a variety of restaurants on the mountain, most of them offering discounts for Catalunya Bus Turístic passengers. It's a

Catalan tradition to buy the top-quality *mató* (curd cheese) and *coca* (a type of flat sponge cake) at Montserrat, which is made by local farmers. The bus leaves Montserrat at 4.20pm and heads straight for Sitges, where it arrives one hour later.

In the coastal town of **Sitges**, the visitors find out about the Catalans who made their fortune in the former Spanish colonies in South America between the late 18th and early 19th centuries, who became known as “americanos” (or “indianos”). Their legacy in Sitges can be seen in the art-nouveau, or *modernista*, houses which they built on their return from the new continent. They are imposing structures, with decorative elements on the façades, including ceramic details, sgraffito work, stained-glass and wrought-ironwork, and they also share other features: large gardens and a turret and balcony on the first floor, where the owner of the house lived.

The guided tour commences on Carrer Illa de Cuba, where there is a house known as the Casa Bonaventura Blay, which was designed in 1900 by the renowned architect Gaietà Buigues. It has a Gothic façade with gargoyles, pointed arches and a magnificent turret. The tour continues along the same street with the richly decorated three-sided Casa de Manuel Planes (1881). At the end of Carrer Illa de Cuba, turning into Carrer Jesús the group of sightseers comes to the Plaça Cap de la Vila, which features one of the town’s most representative *modernista* buildings, the Casa Bartolomeu Carbonell. Its most outstanding element is the clock tower and the wrought-iron balconies.

From here, the guide takes the tourists along the Carrer Major to one of the oldest gates to the town, dating from the time when it was still encompassed by a wall in the 13th and 14th centuries. This is the site of the town hall which was built on top of the foundations and supporting walls of the medieval castle the town sprung up around. A little further ahead we come to the 17th-century parish church of Sant Bartomeu and Santa Tecla, which stands on a promontory with sea views.

The tour continues behind the church, to the “Racó de la Calma” (Corner of Calm), which is the site of the Museu Maricel, a museum created by the American millionaire Charles Deering and housed in a former medieval hospital. Next door he built the Palau Maricel, a palazzo that was his home until he returned to the United States in 1921. The museum features Romanesque and Gothic exhibits and works by artists such as Ramon Casas and Santiago Rusiñol. The latter was a famous Barcelona-born painter who lived in Sitges on this very street (Carrer Fornolla). His home, Cau Ferrat, was converted into a museum and has remained virtually unchanged since Rusiñol lived there.

After taking in all these sights, there’s still time for a stroll along the beach, to have an ice cream or do some shopping in this lovely coastal town. At 7.20pm it’s time to head back to Barcelona, where the bus will arrive at 8pm. A busy day, full of delights and pleasures which is sure to remain etched in everyone’s memory.

** This text (num. 6) was written by a placement student taking a Masters in Historic Culture and Communication at Barcelona University.*