

“Tourists visit the city because they are drawn to its wide range of cultural attractions”

Turisme de Barcelona information officer, Cristina Monsó, tells us what her job entails, about the profile of the tourists who visit Barcelona and what they are looking for.

Cristina Monsó
Age 33.
Holds a Diploma in Tourism.
She works at the tourist information office in Plaça Catalunya, from Monday to Friday, from 3pm to 9pm (she is currently working as back-up in the morning).
She has been an information officer for 10 years.



Barcelona / 15.05.2013

There are information officers at different information points around the city. How many of you are there?

We make up a team of 100 officers. You'll find us at 16 main sightseeing areas around Barcelona, so tourists can find us when they need us.

You'll find us at the tourist information offices: here in Plaça Catalunya, at the Columbus Monument, in Plaça Sant Jaume, at Sants Station, at the airport... and the information booths.

Which languages can you assist tourists in?

We have 20 languages between us: English, French, Italian, Arabic, Russian, Finnish, Swedish, Chinese... Each information officer usually speaks two or three languages, as well as Catalan and Spanish.

The information offices provide a variety of services and also sell tourism products. Which ones are the most successful?

There's no doubt that the Barcelona Bus Turístic is the most successful product. Tourists choose it because it's the most convenient way of seeing the city and offers panoramic views of all the landmarks.

The Barcelona Card is also very popular. Its appeal lies in the fact that it offers visitors free travel on public transport and free admission to the city's main museums, as well as discounts on other attractions and services (like the zoo, shops and night-time entertainment).

There's also a lot of demand for the Barcelona Walking Tours. The tours are designed for groups of up to 20 people and give visitors an in-depth insight into the world of Picasso and Barcelona's home-grown art nouveau, *modernisme*.

Tickets are another top-selling product: to La Pedrera, the Sagrada Família... as well as entertainments and sporting events. In fact, for a few months now, we have been an official point of sale for tickets to FC Barcelona matches. A lot of tourists (and locals) come here to buy their tickets.

What is the profile of the tourists who visit the information points? What are they looking for in Barcelona?

Their profile is very diverse and varies according to the period of the year.

We get a lot of families who are interested in leisure attractions, such as Tibidabo, the zoo and the aquarium.

Barcelona is also a hub for business tourism. These types of tourists are looking for very specific visits: a tour of the essential landmarks, architectural highlights, night-time entertainments and shopping.

A lot of middle-aged married couples also visit us. They are looking for culture and Barcelona offers them architecture, museums and fine dining.

Can you tell that urban tourists are interested in culture?

Yes. Anyone visiting Barcelona already has an interest in culture. They are drawn to the city's wide range of cultural attractions.

As a rule, what do they know about Barcelona?

All the tourists know about Gaudí's work, Barça, the most important museums, like the Museu Picasso, the Fundació Miró, and the old town.

We try to widen the tourists' knowledge and make sure they find the Barcelona they are looking for.

We offer visitors the convenience of organising part of their stay, with tailor-made planning and products that best suit their needs.

Which countries do the tourists who know the most about Barcelona hail from?

Well, of course, tourists from Europe know the most about Barcelona. The French are particularly well informed. When they get here, they have a great deal of knowledge about Barcelona's culture. They come to the offices to ask for information but they have previous knowledge.

The British are also fairly well-informed about the city when they get here.

Japan is another knowledgeable country. The Japanese visit because they are attracted by *modernisme*.

Your job mainly consists of ...

Making sure tourists are happy with their stay when they leave the city and arrive home with good memories and recommend the city to others.

We want to make sure that the tourists' purpose for visiting is fulfilled, or, if they come with no clear purpose, they will leave the office with information about what will be of most interest to them during their stay.

And do you remember any particularly enriching experiences or anecdotes?

Well, last week a group of young girls came to the office. They were very upset as they had received a text message from their airline telling them that their flight had been cancelled. They felt very lost and had decided to come to the office to see if we could lend a hand. We made a few phone calls and helped them book a new flight leaving on the same day.

Situations like this, when you can help out a tourist, are gratifying.

“Barcelona is not only well known, it is well appreciated”

Michel Couturier, President of Marketing Challenges International, stands out the magnificent positioning of Barcelona in the US market as a business tourism destination.

Michel Couturier

President of Marketing Challenges Internacional.

Representative of the Barcelona Convention Bureau from Turisme de Barcelona in the US Market.



Barcelona / June 2013

In 2012 the United States was the first international tourist market in Barcelona. And the number of American tourists is increasing every year... How is Barcelona positioned in the United States?

Barcelona has a very positive image in North America not only for leisure travel but also as a major destination for meetings and conventions. Since the '92 Olympic Games, Barcelona's reputation has grown thanks to its new infrastructure (airport, hotels, convention centers, historic venues), and not to forget its creative and traditional cuisine!

Barcelona Convention Bureau has been promoting the city in the US professional market for years. Is the city well known?

“Barcelona always means something to planners, will it be an efficient meeting facility, a new trendy hotel, a creative Chef...”

Barcelona is not only well known, it is well appreciated. Barcelona always means something to planners, will it be an efficient meeting facility, a new trendy hotel, a creative Chef, or simply a tourist attraction, Barcelona is top of mind.

Is Barcelona on the short list for US companies when planning their meetings?

Yes, Barcelona is very often requested when a meeting is planned in Europe. Of course, competition is tough, and being well-known is not sufficient. The venues have to be efficient, the service has to be top, and the price has to be right. Barcelona has an edge but it has to keep sharpening its product, service and rates to be considered.

Which are the main selling points that Barcelona offers to the meeting industry, under your consideration?

Location, location, location! Barcelona is very well located in Southern Europe, easy air access, great airport, wide selection of hotels, great food, good weather, and a people that is warm and very business oriented. The brand "Barcelona" is strong!

“Barcelona is important for business and in Japan it’s considered one of the most successful cities”

Muji president, Tadamitsu Matsui, reflects with Turisme de Barcelona on the tourism sector and worldwide shopping

Tadamitsu Matsui, the president of the Japanese retail chain Muji, which specialises in homeware and textiles, took time out during his holidays to visit Barcelona in early July. The top executive is an enthusiastic gourmet who has visited a number of Mediterranean countries during his break on a tailor-made route designed so he can enjoy the top restaurants. He spoke to us about the expansion of his business, Barcelona’s international reputation as a tourist destination and shopping city and the prospects for the retail industry worldwide.



Barcelona/ 08.07.2013

Why have you travelled more than 10,000 kilometres and chosen Barcelona as your holiday destination?

I love visiting the world’s finest restaurants and, here in Barcelona, there are so many. This year I’ll be returning to the seafood restaurant Rías de Galicia, which I visited for the first time in 2009 and absolutely loved it. I recommended it in a Japanese magazine that was running a feature on the best restaurants.

“I love visiting the world’s finest restaurants and, here in Barcelona, there are so many”

What else do you like about the city, apart from the food?

The architecture and, above all, Gaudí. It’s a very beautiful city and right by the sea. In Japan, Barcelona is considered one of the most successful cities, much more so than Madrid.

El Corte Inglés on the Portal de l’Àngel will house one of the first “Muji to go” shops, which specialise in travel goods

There are currently two Muji stores in the Catalan capital, one on Rambla de Catalunya and another in the Illa Diagonal shopping centre. Are you planning to open any more?

We're currently developing a new retail concept called *Muji to go*, which sells travel goods and other items that fit into the concept of movement. It's a small shop, with a floor space of 50 square metres, which only stocks this type of product. We plan to open the first one inside the department store El Corte Inglés on the Portal de l'Àngel, although it could be on a street or at an airport. The deal hasn't been signed yet but negotiations are at an advanced stage.

And what are your company's current plans for expansion?

Muji has outlets in 23 countries. Our aim is to open shops in two new countries every year, although this year we've opened in three: Australia, Dubai and Kuwait.

So how many new shops do you open every year?

Last year we opened 49 new shops around the world and we're now planning to open 60 shops a year. Asia is the market where we're expanding the most. We have 390 shops in Japan and this year we'll have 100 in China.

"Asia is the market where we're expanding the most. We have 390 shops in Japan and this year we'll have 100 in China"

Muji was founded in 1980 when it sold just 40 products. It now stocks over 7,000.

What do you think has been the key to its success?

We now sell 7,500 products. Homeware accounts for 55% of our sales; clothes for 35%, and food, 10%. The success also lies in the concept of Muji and the excellent value for money it represents. The Japanese culture of Zen, philosophy and design is also an influence. Muji's products are simple and functional and come in neutral colours. This is something people from all over the world like.

Muji is part of the Barcelona Shopping Line (BSL), Turisme de Barcelona's shopping programme. What do you think about this platform and the support it provides?

Muji has a policy of not running big advertising campaigns and when we open a shop our first customers are the people who live in the city who know about us because they have visited our shops in other countries. Initiatives and associations like the Barcelona Shopping Line help us attract tourists so that when they visit the city they know they'll find Muji shops here too. We're very interested in the programme. It's a great initiative.

Unlike other cities, Barcelona has the advantage that there are shops in the main tourist areas. The Barcelona Shopping Line helps raise awareness of this combination. For instance, you can see La Pedrera and go shopping.

"Through initiatives like the Barcelona Shopping Line we can attract tourists who will discover the Muji shops in the city"

How do you see the evolution and current position of Barcelona on the worldwide shopping city map?

London, Paris, Milan, Rome, Berlin... and Barcelona. There are many new brands in Barcelona. Tourists come here from all over the world; there's a good standard of living and quite a lot of technology. Now there's a crisis, but it'll pass and the city will grow again. There are always waves in the economy. It's bound to grow in the long term.

Muji's profits continue to grow. What were your financial results in 2012?

Over the past year, Muji's sales were up by 6% and the financial results rose by 22.5%. It's important to have managers who know which direction to take. Businesses with premises in China also have an impact and experience even greater growth. Muji's turnover last year totalled 1,500 million euros and the net profit, after tax, was 85 million euros.

"Tourists come here from all over the world; there's a good standard of living and quite a lot of technology. Now there's a crisis, but the city is bound to grow again"

Barcelona attracts a lot of Japanese tourists. What do the people in Japan know about Barcelona and how do they perceive our city?

It has a good climate, it's a beautiful city and a city of art. That's what Japanese people think.

Is there a company or business venture you admire, apart from Muji, and why?

There are so many... Zara, H&M, the Japanese retailer UNIQLO, Gucci, Chanel... They have very good managers and their results are constantly improving. Moreover, these brands are successful around the world, not just in their home countries, and they always remain true to their brand concept.

For instance, Gucci only makes its clothes in Italy and its quality never diminishes. The quality of Zara's clothes is improving a lot and it's very successful in Europe. Although the clothing market is long established, it's a successful brand. In China, it's a new market but it's gaining ground. There aren't a lot of brands like Zara...

"Over the last year, our sales were up by 6% and our financial results rose by 22.5%. It's important to have managers who know which direction to take"

What can we westerners learn from the way people live and work in Asian society?

The Japanese grow as part of a group, as part of the company. It's important for them to become involved in the business. It's the same here in Europe...

Furthermore, over there we think a lot about other people. That's why levels of service and attention are very high in Japan, because we think of the customers. That's one of our strong points. That's why customer service at Muji is so good. Japanese culture means living in a group, and service is one of the most important aspects. It's something that comes from our culture.

Finally, as the president of the company with shops in many countries around the world, which ones do you think are going to be the economic powerhouses of the future?

First and foremost, China, followed by India and thirdly, the United States. Indonesia will also be one of the leading players.

“Barcelona has got it all! A great climate, the Mediterranean diet, and it’s cosmopolitan and a great place for sports training”

Barcelona / November 2013

Marc Márquez, new Moto GP world champion

Marc Márquez

20 years old. Born in Cervera
Catalan motorcycle speed racer
On 10th November 2013 he became the youngest MotoGP world champion of all time at the Circuit Ricardo Tormo, in Xest.



You came to prominence at the Circuit de Catalunya... Now that Barcelona has become so closely associated with this venue, which part of the city do people ask you about when you’re at a racetrack abroad?

You might not believe it, but Camp Nou is one of the biggest draws for tourists. A lot of people know Barcelona because of Barça!

I’m sure there’s a place in Cervera where you live, where you like to escape from everything; where would you choose in Barcelona...?

I don’t usually go sightseeing in Barcelona, because it’s a bit complicated at the moment. But I love walking by the sea in summer and along the Carretera de les Aigües in winter, the views are spectacular.

How do sportspeople from other countries see Barcelona?

As a cosmopolitan city and a great place to train at professional level. It’s got a great climate, the Mediterranean diet, it’s got everything!

Do you think the city promotes sport well at an international level, particularly motor racing,?

Absolutely. The only thing is I haven’t been able to see a lot of what’s being done, as I’m away for nearly half the year...

Turisme de Barcelona has a programme that promotes the city as a venue for sporting competitions, Barcelona Sports. What do you think about this kind of initiative?

It's great. I think it helps the city as much as it helps promote sport among the community, and that's something important today. Moreover, good foundations mean that Barcelona will have top-level sportsmen and women in different disciplines.

What would you highlight about the city?

That it's a great city to engage in sport at professional level.

Which do you think is the best-loved sport in Barcelona and Catalonia?

There are many, many Catalan sportsmen and women who have become recognised in every discipline. I wouldn't know what the favourite sport is...

The speed and concentration required are certainly different, but have you ever visited Barcelona on the Barcelona Bus Turístic?

To tell the truth, I've never been on it... but it sounds like fun!

Yann Monod

43 years, Lyon (France)

General Manager Elipsos
(Renfe / SNCF)
www.elipsos.com



Barcelona, 2014

“Barcelona, the city that is missing in France”

Do you think Barcelona will become a key destination for the French as a result of the new high-speed rail connections with Paris?

Spain has been a main destination for the French for a long time now. Among the many attractions Spain offers, Barcelona is, of course, one of the key players for the French. The new high-speed train offering “shortens the distance” between France and Spain. It really brings France and Catalonia closer together. These trains will make it simpler for French visitors to travel to Catalonia as well as to other Spanish towns and cities where our trains operate: Madrid and Zaragoza. Fourteen French cities, in addition to Paris, have direct connections with five Spanish cities.

These new trains will make it possible to develop exchanges between regional capitals as well as travel between areas on either side of the border, such as Languedoc-Roussillon and Catalonia, which was mostly done by car until now.

The French account for some of the highest visitor numbers in Barcelona. What do you think is the main reason they visit?

As a Frenchman, I can say that Barcelona is the city that is missing in France! We love it because of its cultural vitality, wealth of architecture, historic heritage and dynamism, as well as the way it encapsulates the art of living, its Mediterranean climate, layout and coastal locations and proximity to the beach and natural sites.

In the space of two months, more than 82,000 passengers have travelled on the route between Barcelona and Paris. What do you think is the reason for its success?

First of all, the launch of the new route was given excellent media coverage in Catalonia, in the Parisian region and in the neighbouring region of Languedoc Roussillon. Furthermore, this direct connection with French and Spanish cities has been eagerly awaited for a long time. These new fast and comfortable trains, which make travel simpler, have naturally won over clients who used to travel by other means of transport. They have also attracted leisure trips that wouldn't have taken place otherwise. These new attractive links stimulate travel between France and Spain and particularly to Catalonia. It think that this opportunity to visit new destinations in a practical, pleasant and affordable way, will favour short breaks between France and Catalonia.

What economic opportunities and benefits for tourism do these new connections bring to the two countries?

They are undeniable because, in addition to the flow of tourists we mentioned earlier, the new connections also make it possible to develop economic exchanges between highly dynamic regions such as Barcelona, Montpellier, Lyon, Toulouse and Marseille. We know that high-speed rail travel is already in great demand among business travellers in France and Spain with the AVE and TGV, and these new connections add a new dimension to this form of travel. During our first year of operations, we expect to carry almost one million passengers between both countries.

Which routes do you see as having the greatest potential?

Today, the Paris-Barcelona route clearly demonstrates that our trains are performing very well, but we are convinced that most of the cities where our trains operate have great potential too. It will take a little time for them to show their full potential as the offer of trains becomes better established and better known.

What are the main objectives of the cooperation between Renfe-SNCF for 2014?

It is a major and complex challenge to successfully launch a new high-speed train connection between two countries. We have had to combine two very different models such as Renfe and SNCF. The year 2014 has undoubtedly been the year when our offer has stabilised in terms of production levels. The excellence of the services we want to offer our customers has also been confirmed. I see high levels of motivation among the Spanish and French teams that make me think that we are going to be successful during this our first year. The results of the first quarter and bookings lead us to believe that travellers are and will keep travelling with us.

Do you think that the TGV will absorb travellers on the borders between France and Catalonia?

We think that the new high-speed rail service will encourage people to travel by train instead of by car. It offers a real alternative to high petrol prices and motorway tolls as well as convenience when it comes to problems parking in cities and traffic jams. Notably, on shorter journeys, when the car cannot compete with the train in journey time and takes passengers right into the city centre, it is a real asset. You can travel from Montpellier to Barcelona in 2 hours 50 minutes, from Toulouse to Barcelona in just over 3 hours, and from Perpignan to Barcelona in 1 hour 19 minutes. There are millions of journeys made by car between France and Catalonia and, of course, we believe it will remain, in absolute terms, the most widely used means of transport, particularly on trips to destinations that are further away from the towns where our trains operate.

What percentage will high-speed rail travel take away from air travel?

It isn't easy to talk about the rail market vis-à-vis the air travel market because there are no airlines competing on many of the routes where our trains operate. There are major differences regarding the routes where airlines operate such as, for instance, Paris and Barcelona, where more than 20 flights operate daily, and Marseille and Madrid, where there are only four flights per week. Passengers are increasingly taking into account the total journey time (travel to the airport, delays...) as well as the overall costs which make the train very competitive. Moreover, we know that passengers feel increasingly better disposed towards the train, particularly due to the levels of comfort offered, convenience and service on board. The types of train we operate, particularly the TGV Duplex, allow us to put a large number of seats on the market which will give our customers a real choice between our airline competitors and ourselves.

How do these new connections strengthen Barcelona's position as a European rail hub?

Barcelona is the cornerstone of our new offer as it is connected to all our destinations in France. The connectivity offered by Renfe at Barcelona Sants station is a wonderful asset that allows our passengers to travel further in Spain with direct connections with Madrid and further away to Cordoba, Granada and Seville, or to highly attractive cities in the south, including Valencia and Tarragona. We estimate that about 20% of our passengers will be transferring from or transferring to another destination.

Do you believe that the AVE and TGV market trends will force them to become a low-cost means of transport?

It's difficult for me to answer this question about the TGV and the AVE, but I can say that the low-cost airline model, although it has enjoyed recent success, has evolved towards a less Spartan offer by providing more services. The high-speed train has a well-established position; it is convenient, comfortable and affordable. The French and Spanish like high-speed trains and this is borne out by the success of the TGV and the AVE. I believe that trains are now held in the high regard enjoyed by planes some years ago. Nevertheless, SNCF and Renfe are always on the look-out for the ways societies are evolving in order to adapt their products and ensure they live up to our customers' expectations as much as possible. Proof of this is given by a number of experiments which have led to new products, such as OUIGO from SNCF, which targets a specific segment of our customer base and focuses on ticket prices while applying certain restrictions. So, yes, Renfe and SNCF are able to provide travel solutions for all kinds of clients by putting forward models similar to those of low-cost companies but I am not convinced today that this is a fundamental trend.



RAMON SEOANE. Owner of the restaurant La Gavina

Like his parents and grandparents before him, Ramon Seoane has spent all his life devoted to the restaurant trade and La Barceloneta. His children will be the fourth generation working in the sector. He began in 1972 at the Costa Azul, one of the seafront bars known as *xiringuitos*, which are now gone. Today, his bar has relocated to the Palau de Mar and been renamed La Gavina. Seoane believes that you have to take care of the quality of the produce, above and beyond any distinctions between tourists and locals.

“Barcelona is already a gastronomic tourist destination”

XAVI CASINOS

The first question is almost obligatory. We are told that we are coming out of the crisis. Is this really being felt in the restaurant sector?

Not at the moment. Things are looking up but it is still a bit premature to let ourselves get carried away on a wave of euphoria.

Things are looking up... but thanks to tourism...

Yes, of course. At the present time, tourists are the ones who are not only driving the restaurant trade and its associated sectors, but the country as a whole.

At La Gavina, what is the percentage of tourists and local customers?

Well about 90% of our customers are tourists...

So they're winning hands-down...

Yes, yes. It clearly shows that the tourist sector is one of the cornerstones of the economy and that local customers still haven't recovered from the crisis.

How do the 90% of tourists come to La Gavina? Do they know about the restaurant before they come to Barcelona...?

Yes, yes, many of them know about it already. Many of them come back, particularly visitors on weekend breaks.

Do you think that Barcelona is now a gastronomic tourist destination?

Yes, it's already on the gastronomic route map. The fact is, in recent years, the offer has tended to be geared towards quality.

Your career as a restaurateur has always been linked to La Barceloneta...

Yes, always. In fact, my children are the fourth generation working in the sector. We have worked and grown up in La Barcelona since the time of the seafront snack bars known as *xiringuitos*.

La Gavina was one of them, but it was known as the Costa Azul. Why did you change the name?

Well, after the *xiringuitos* were demolished, we found this new site at the Palau de Mar, and, at the time, this part of the promenade was full of seagulls (gavina is Catalan for seagull). And we decided to give it this Catalan, Mediterranean name which has such a lot to do with the sea. There was no sophisticated marketing operation. It was as simple as that (laughs).

During all the years you've spent in La Barceloneta, how would you describe the changes the neighbourhood has experienced?

Before 1972, the year I started working, there were *xiringuitos* in La Barceloneta and not much else. The occasional foreigner would visit but they were few and far between. The French started coming in the 1960s. They would come by car and this was the first real boom. The ferries from Genoa, the airport and improvements to the road and rail networks brought growth until the great Olympic boom in the late 1980s.

Seen from a historic perspective, was the removal of the *xiringuitos* a positive intervention?

At the time it was a traumatic experience, but it had to happen sooner or later. The *xiringuitos* were in a poor state of repair, and they were also a visual barrier to the sea. The demolition even allowed some of us to evolve. Our business has grown from the Costa Azul and we now have three restaurants: La Gavina, L'Arroç and the Tapas Club.

Is rice still the most popular dish?

Yes, but we've modernised by adding new dishes.

Do you think there is an oversupply of restaurants in Barcelona as a whole, and, more specifically, in the area of La Barceloneta and its surroundings?

Well there isn't an oversupply, although there is a type of restaurant designed to attract only tourists. These sometimes don't help the rest of the sector.

And doesn't the fact that they cater solely to tourists mean they often neglect local customers?

No, because, at the end of the day, restaurants like La Gavina don't distinguish between customers who are tourists or locals. We look after the produce and when we put together our menu we make sure everyone will like the food.

Who are the most demanding customers?

The English. The Italians and French are the easiest. All they want to do is eat well.

How do you value the work of organisations like Barcelona Turisme in promoting the city to the outside world?

They do a wonderful job. If Barcelona Turisme didn't exist, we'd have to invent