



## **Barcelona** **December 21 – January 1, 2014**

### ***Barcelona - second time this year.***

We loved Barcelona during our visit in March. The showing of the pictures to Marie incentivized her to want to go so off we went for the Christmas holidays. I'll leave most pictures to Tom's two photo shows on Barcelona as well as his photo show just on the apartment.

### ***Links***

Barcelona apartment photo show: <http://www.photoshow.com/watch/xR9Jt7Sn>

March Barcelona photo show: <http://www.photoshow.com/watch/IB6Nb7pt>

December (this) Barcelona photo show: <http://www.photoshow.com/watch/aF6Av2Sh>

### ***What did we miss?***

Leave it to me to firstly think what I missed. I need another trip. There are more museums, there is a long walk along the waterways, cable cars going across the shoreline and up to the hill to Montjuic with more museums up on the hill. I need to see inside the opera. Though our apartment was to die for, I would probably vote to stay in a new and different area for my next trip. (We return to Spain in October but will take in Madrid before going to the Basque region for my hiking trip.)

### ***The apartment***

Not only do I feature the apartment pictures in this heading, but Tom has a Photo Show just on the apartment from our March visit. He thinks this is the most elegant and special apartment or house that we have ever rented. I would agree but I am not sure that it is the most practical one.

Why would anyone building such a luxurious apartment in order to rent it out? That was always our question and I frankly enjoy best my earlier rendition and not what we finally found us the truth. It seems that the guy is just very wealthy and enjoys designing apartments and it is not that he built this is a little love nest for his sweetheart who then left him. He has paid a price beyond what was expected: some guest actually took off with a pair of huge ivory tusks. And the marble bust is gone too.



Marie had been enchanted by the idea of sleeping in a four poster bed piled high with down comforter and pillows. Apartment photos: [www.amarantelva.com/luxury-apartment-in-barcelona-93119001.html](http://www.amarantelva.com/luxury-apartment-in-barcelona-93119001.html)

### ***Security.***

Security in Barcelona is tight and cautious. We read about Barcelona being one of the most theft prevalent and it makes sense when you realize the economic downturn in Spain and the unemployment at about 30%. We know personal stories of people losing their backpack, their wallets, their passports, so we are super cautious and wore our monies in waist belts. But I must say

that I never felt at risk. This trip was shortly after the Catalanian vote for separation and there were flags everywhere so maybe they are on good behavior.

### **Antoni Gaudi.**

Who doesn't know of this famous early 1900s modernist architect? There are at least a dozen main tourist sites featuring the Gaudi work and we saw many of them and some close-up.

**Stables** - One of Gaudi's early projects was this gate and stables built for Mr. Guell. The dragon was said to be colorful and the big mouth would open and close at the pull of the chain.

**Sagrada Familia** is thought of as a cathedral but in fact it is not as much because there is already a cathedral in Barcelona and apparently only one is allowed per town. But that doesn't keep the Sagrada Familia from been at the number one tourist attraction and one of the most photographed buildings in the world. It was started in the early 1900s and might be done by 2035. We took a guided tour in March and we're delighted to do so again and saw it differently as much because of the different lighting of the day. We tried to find a concert or a service in The Holy Family but apparently it does not exist. I have a wonderful video of the consecration service by the pope when it officially opened in 2010. If you ask Marie what was her favorite thing of the trip, it might be this guided tour.



### **Our tour of Sagrada Familia**

- Visit the astonishing interior of the La Sagrada Familia Basílica.
- Explore the Sagrada Familia Museum with its drawings, plaster models and pictures about the history and development of this basilica.
- Learn about the Antoni Gaudi's life and career

*Description - Gaudi, one of the greatest innovators of his time, has left behind numerous treasures for the discerning tourist to discover in Barcelona. Discover this magnificent modernist building in the guided tour inside the church. Sagrada Familia has a Latin cross plan with five aisles, richly and symbolically decorated, where vaults reach seventy meters. Later on, we will stop by the Sagrada Familia museum, where you will see drawings, plaster models and pictures about the history and development of this basilica from its early beginnings to the present day. The museum will also give valuable information about Antoni Gaudi's life and works.*

*Sagrada Familia is one of the most visited buildings in the world. We will also visit Sagrada Familia museum, where you will see drawings, plaster models and pictures about the history and development of this basilica from its early beginnings to the present day. The museum will also give valuable information about Antoni Gaudi's life and career.*



**Park Guell** Is a trip in itself. It was to be a hilltop community but didn't work so now it's a momentous park. We had skip-the-line tickets. Guell's stables was another stop on our private guided tour. (In a lovely Mercedes at that) as was a gate designed by Gaudi with a statue honoring him.

But **Casa Batllo** needed a separate trip and we did that with skip the line tickets also.

*The outside will surprise you, and you will fall in love with the inside! - Casa Batlló, the masterpiece by Antoni Gaudí, invites you to visit a monument that is much more than a building; it is an artistic legend. Hidden behind the exceptional modernist facade, which mirrors a calm sea, a whole world of surprises and refined architectural details is waiting. Casa Batlló, the definitive must-see benchmark of modernism, invites you to take a look inside.*

*This architectural work by Antoni Gaudí will seduce you with its radical design and with the great array of visual solutions used. In every nook and cranny you will discover something surprising, details which could not fail to enthrall all those who love the fantastical. Visits take in the legendary Noble Floor (the former residence of the Batlló family), the Loft (the former store rooms and laundry rooms), the Roof Terrace with its mythical Chimneys (where you will see the famous backbone of the dragon slain by Sant Jordi, or Saint George), and the fabulous building well (once the communal stairwell). The tour finishes with the splendid entrance hall and the main staircase.*



For La Pedrera, also known as Casa Mila, we had purchased an evening tour called the secret Pedrera. With some doing I'd managed to acquire the pre-dinner of local foods at the Cafe Pedrera. It was one of two most special and memorable meals consisting of a mushroom cannelloni and duck roast beef with orange, a hake Meuniere and then a layered dessert of pear and vanilla and various flavorings. We needed the wine and champagne for later; it was downright freezing up on the rooftop but worth it.

**The Café** - <https://www.lapedrera.com/en/cafe-la-pedrera> - *The Café is a reflection of its magnificent setting and provides an outstanding venue for meeting others and sharing something to eat or drink with them. In keeping with the cultural amenity in which it stands, the Café combines the splendor of bourgeois Catalan Modernisme architecture with the popular spirit of the inns of old. Located in the city centre, it is open to all for coffee, aperitifs, lunch, afternoon tea, dinner, supper or drinks. For the residents of Barcelona, it represents an opportunity to enjoy a Gaudí heritage site on a daily basis, and for visitors it offers a gourmet experience that provides insights into the city's culture and the local cuisine.*

*A cornucopia of Mediterranean culinary delights. The set meals and à la carte dishes are intended to showcase the culinary tradition of Barcelona, the centre of a region that reaps the fruits of the sea and the mountains, market gardens and dry-farmed land, an entire array of locally-harvested produce in keeping with the Mediterranean concept that the foundation seeks to convey. Some of the dishes are a tribute to the importance of the history of Catalan cuisine, from the mustard sauce and the blancmange of the 14th century to the creativity of recent times. The menu features fresh produce from the city's markets (which are part of the heart and soul of Barcelona), reflecting the changes in the seasons and ensuring that the fruit and vegetables used to make the salads, the char-grilled fish and meat and the fruit served as desserts are at their very best. Indeed, an important part of the Café de La Pedrera's offering is the flavorsome fruit produced by socially-committed companies that operate throughout Catalonia. The Café de La Pedrera intends to showcase the city's culinary heritage for the delight of its visitors and so it will offer dishes that are part of the Catalan calendar of cuisine, in particular desserts and sweetmeats eaten at certain times of year, such as St. John's Day, All Saints' Day, Christmas, etc.*

**The Secret Pedrera at Casa Milà**, popularly known as 'La Pedrera' (the stone quarry), an ironic allusion to the resemblance of its façade to an open quarry, was constructed between 1906 and 1912 by Antoni Gaudí (1852-1926). For its uniqueness, artistic and heritage value have received major recognition and in 1984 was inscribed on UNESCO World Heritage List, for its exceptional universal value. Nowadays it is the headquarters of Fundació Catalunya-La Pedrera and houses a cultural centre that is a reference point in Barcelona for the range of activities it organizes and the different

spaces for exhibitions and other public uses it contains. Casa Milà today is a beacon shining with creation and knowledge, a great container full of content, which has a crucial role to play in the transformation of society and commitment to the people.

The Secret Pedrera is an intimate and highly sensory route to discover the nooks and crannies of this landmark building in a different way: in the peace, tranquility and magic of the night. You can discover the secrets hidden in Casa Milà after dark and become the fortunate witnesses of the lives, customs and little stories of the residents of this singular building 100 years ago. Come and see how Casa Milà, 'La Pedrera', comes to life at night. An intimate, guided and exclusive tour of the main areas of this jewel of the Catalan Modernisme.

- Guided tours at night: The Courtyards, La Pedrera Apartment, Espai Gaudí (the attic) and The Roof-Terrace, with suggestive projections, holograms...
- The visit includes a glass of cava at the end of the tour.

## **Culture.**

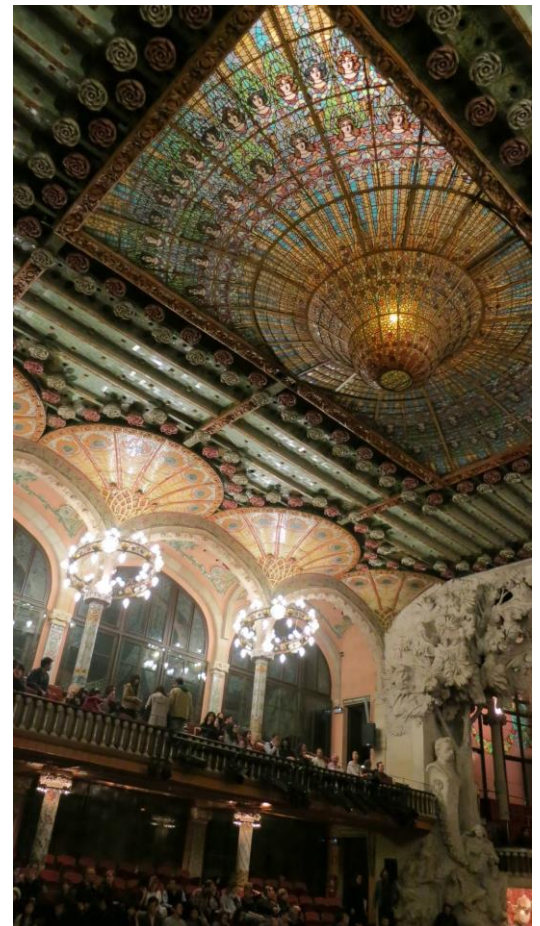
**Palais de Musica** - Marie is very fond of and good at music having taught herself the piccolo and the flute. So it was irresistible not to go to the Palais de Musica for both a guided walking tour and also for a performance. We got in on the grand gala flamenco and I would sure do this again given the opportunity.

See video at [http://www.palaumusica.cat/en/an-icon-of-art-nouveau\\_37981](http://www.palaumusica.cat/en/an-icon-of-art-nouveau_37981)

See pictures at [http://www.palaumusica.cat/en/a-barcelona-mustsee-sight\\_151243](http://www.palaumusica.cat/en/a-barcelona-mustsee-sight_151243)

*"The excitement and passion of the world of gypsy dance" - The Gran Gala Flamenco is held within two halls of the Palau de la Música Catalana complex: the Petit Palau, a recent addition featuring state of the art stage and sound equipment; and the Sala Gran or Main Hall, referred to by many as one of the most beautiful concert halls in the world. The Palau de la Música Catalana (Palace of Catalan Music) is the work of architect Lluís Domènech i Montaner, and considered to be one of the best examples of modernista style of Catalan architecture. The theater hosts the flamenco show Gran Gala Flamenco on a seasonal basis.*

*Flamenco was born in 18th Century Andalusia as a form of expression reserved for the most intense moments of celebrations in life. The Grand Gala Flamenco show allows the spectator to experience a mixture of sensations, rhythms and movements that define this art form that was inscribed by UNESCO in 2010 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Moving through the different palos (different musical forms characterized by a variety of rhythmic patterns, such as Fandango, Seguidilla, Alegría, Bulería, Tarantos, Guajira...), the spectator will discover the intensity of the passion felt by the Gypsy people through time. With the participation of a new Catalanian generation of flamenco artists who are literally stamping their mark on the national artistic scene, the show is a perfect union of heart and soul, music and dance. One that since the beginning of time has characterized the Spanish tradition.*



**The Grand Concerto de Ano Nuevo** is famous through Europe; it is a Strauss festival and ballet ensemble in the traditional and old time mode. We saw it in the area of their new theaters and auditorium. It would have been more fitting in the Palau de Musica but was sold out way ahead of our trip. I believe the Europeans take in culture and the theatre more than we do.

**Johann Strauss Great New Year's Concert Strauss Festival Orchestra Strauss Festival Dance Ensemble - The most famous tour of Europe** - With the **Strauss Festival Orchestra** comes the most famous production from Europe to Barcelona backed by 25 years of success and 5 million viewers around the world. This production has received standing ovations in major concert halls throughout Europe at the Musikverein in Vienna, Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the Berlin Philharmonic, the Musikhalle Hamburg, the Auditorium Parco della Musica in Rome, the Gran Teatre del Liceu and the Palau Music Barcelona, the Royal Theatre and the National Music Auditorium in Madrid, etc. The program, inspired by traditional musical event held every year in Vienna, including the best-

known titles *Waltz King*, *Napoleon*, *Flower festival*, *The Emperor Waltz* or *Champagne*. You will not miss the most famous of all waltzes, *The Beautiful Blue Danube*, nor *Radetzky march*, rhythmic clapping by the public, usually close the evening. The concert is one of the most anticipated events of the musical season, for the extraordinary festive atmosphere that surrounds it and the huge audience participation, year after year, filled the wards.

**The Museum of History of Barcelona** had been Marie's choice. We went deep into the bowels of Barcelona and saw the old Roman ruins with an overlay to understand how they lived and made wine and survived or in some cases didn't survive.

**The Chocolate Museum** might not have been quite so culturally important but it was full of history and samples and a fun afternoon. Our ticket was a chocolate bar and it didn't last very long.

**Picasso** - More cultural and certainly more educational was the Museum of Picasso housed in an old palace. First because we went and found out that we may have had a wait for as long as an hour or two hours to buy timed tickets and then another wait until our ticket door opening time, (we went back the next day with skip the line tickets) and secondly to learn that the Picasso art is not always so crazy avant-garde. This was a real special treat for me resulting in the purchase of a book for further study. And as much as I would try, I still can't say that I appreciate his last few years' worth of artistic work. Nor that I can even think of them as art. In addition to his art he led a very interesting life full of very young mistresses and finally an even younger wife. There is very little evidence that he was a good person, only a notable and famous artist.

### ***Is this building culture?***

It will soon cease to be an insurance building as it was purchased by the Grand Hyatt but currently referred to as the town's giant penis or the suppositorium. It changes lights and designs continuously and is near to the new theatre and auditorium district where we took in the Strauss Concert.

### ***Religion – well, it IS Christmas!***

We got into the early morning mass at the Cathedral. Remember that the Sagrada Familia (Holy Family) might look like a Cathedral but it is not but rather a Basilica. Oddly there was less than a handful of people at the Mass of the Cathedral.

Then we got into the monastery/nunnery way up in the northwest section of town called Monestir de Pedralbes. The church had a service going on but again there were not many people and the service wasn't all what we might have expected.

Best was our last day when we took a day tour to the Mont Serrat Monastery about 40 kilometers out of town. It's famous worldwide for the holy rocks, the black Madonna, and the numbers of religious folks who have 'graduated' from there. It is now a nature preserve at about 4500 feet elevation with many trails but we weren't going to enjoy much nature in the freezing temperatures and the climb up the stairs into the church was the best because it kept us warm. We'd taken a cog train to get there whereas some of us were searching the hillside for the trails. Well, come to think of it, maybe the liquor tasting(s) was even better and needed enough that we purchased a bottle to consume on the way home. I had intended to do this trip alone but was surprised when both Marie and Tom wanted to come along. They might have rethought that decision while they were shivering up on top.



- *Experience the beauty of Spain as you travel through picturesque villages on your way to Montserrat Mountain.*
- *Ascend 4,051 feet (1,235 meters) above sea level up Montserrat Mountain with Cog-Wheel Train.*

- Visit the Royal Basilica of Montserrat, one of the most important spiritual buildings in Spain – Royal Basilica is home to the famous 12th century Romanesque carving of the Virgin Moreneta.
- Taste 4 typical Montserrat liquors and entrance to Audiovisual “Espai Audiovisual Montserrat”.
- A special treat, on certain days the children’s choir sings in the monastery.

*Description - Start your half day trip from Barcelona in a comfortable Bus to the mountain of Montserrat which rises majestically to 4,051 feet (1,236 meter). You will go up to Montserrat with Cog – Wheel Train which leaves you in the middle of the Monastery. It is a 15-minute trip with a privileged and spectacular view of the mountain. The train has panoramic windows which make the actual journey an interesting attraction. The trains are air-conditioned and they are completely wheelchair-friendly. The rocks of Montserrat formed by natural cement of sand during the centuries affected by the wind and rain which shaped the mountain with strange and varied forms. The popular imagination has seen human or animal shape in some of these peaks, giving them names and inventing legends to explain their fantastic origins. You will visit the Royal Basilica of Montserrat, which holds the famous 12th century Romanesque carving of Virgin Moreneta, the Black Virgin. The Benedict sanctuary of Montserrat has been founded at 1025 and provides a mystical backdrop for the Virgin of Montserrat, the patron saint of Catalonia who is enshrined in the monastery's Royal Basilica. The little monastery soon began to receive pilgrims and visitors who contributed to the spread of stories of miracles and wonders performed by the Virgin. Today, Montserrat has been modernized to continue attending to the needs to pilgrims one thousand years after it was originally founded.*

### **General touring.**

Yes we walked the famous **Rambla**, saw the many mimes on the street, and understood the street lights and some building façades were done by Gaudi also; multiple times we walked the **Passage De Grazia** and especially appreciated the Christmas lights. It was along this last famous street thought of as Barcelona's Champs de Elysee where we had to take our Christmas dinner which was no great shakes to say the least. We made many tries to get into a good restaurant on Christmas, all to no avail. I was not in the least worried that we would wither away.

I mentioned that we had a **private overall tour** with an excellent guide and in a new luxurious Mercedes. I didn't mean to book a private tour but it worked out there were a minimum of four people required to make the tour work so we paid for the fourth person. This was on Christmas Day. Then later we would get onto the **hop on and hop off bus** to see some of the same sites again but a little more afield in some cases. Though I did this in March I always learn something new so I suppose that means I didn't pay attention enough the first time. Or forgot. NOT!



**The flower market** is at the back end of one of the five famous markets and it was within a block of our apartment. Inside the Palau de Musica where we not only saw a Flamenco show, ate a meal, but also took an inside walking tour another day.

### ***How can a couple of old folks keep a young one busy?***

This had worried me but I love the fact that we came home and Marie not only slept on the plane for a lot of the 9 ½ hours but then slept another 14 hours straight once home. I take this to mean that we did wear her out. Smile. However, a running friend suggested that the old folks just bored her to tears or at least to a long sleep.

In the Palais de Musica and then at Park Guell. Always a happy gal.



### ***Food! Substance!***

It has a different meaning for different people and I was happy with the good bread and the peanut butter in the apartment but both Tom and Marie really enjoyed the restaurant scene. There is a famous chef that runs a place called Tapas24 and this was one of our first stops as it was near to our apartment. Can you imagine rabbit ribs? One could never get fat on them. It was an experience and we had just enough to not feel like we were starving thereafter. Lamb kebabs, little taco affairs, and other small plates filled us sufficiently.

From our last trip we renewed acquaintances with a restaurant also near to the apartment called La Flauta. Fortunately we got in just as it was opening and within moments there was a line out the door. I believe this was one of two special main eating experiences of the trip.

In the apartment, Tom cooked, and even Marie cooked. We filled in with pizzas, omelets and sandwich makings.

Returning home to New Jersey almost immediately took Tom and Marie to the riverfront and a place called Oyster House to experience Tom's favorite fish and chips outside of England. For New Year's Eve Tom is cooking a special veal Zürichoise dish.

### ***What's next?***

As Marie gets older we can realize this might be her last trip to New Jersey. This summer she is hoping to get into a pre-med summer internship at Stanford. We would go to install her at her dorm. Time allowing, she may return to look at a couple of east coast schools but it is just as likely that she would go direct, by-passing New Jersey.

For me, I go to Santa Monica for a few days next week and then to Florence later in January. February is a big deal trip to Argentina AGAIN in order to enjoy the southernmost part of Patagonia. The southernmost part of the world. March includes a lovely little town called Salida in Colorado AGAIN and also seeing my hiking friends in Colorado Springs AGAIN. (Can you tell that I am not enthralled with folks who say "I've been there already.?"?) I'm looking for ideas for April and might go to Santiago. I don't think Tom is going anywhere until his big bang birthday bash (BBBB) which will take up much of the month of May. On and on it goes with much of the rest of the calendar filled and with the hope that our legs will keep moving.

Follows is from Majorca/Barcelona March 2014 trip notes:

## Onto Barcelona – a Catalan Country



We'd been looking at Barcelona for at least a year and Tom had honed in on a special apartment that I thought too extravagant. You will see who won out. And going to Majorca was just a good excuse to add on extravagant Barcelona stay though he did negotiate a somewhat better price. This was NOT high season, after all.

Barcelona apartment – a reason for going <http://www.holidaylettings.co.uk/content/rentals/b...>

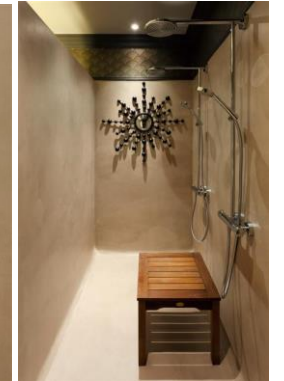
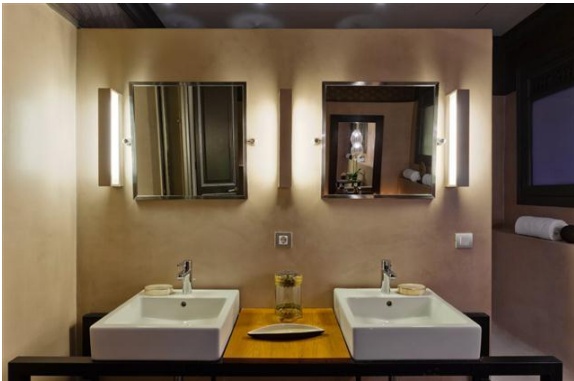
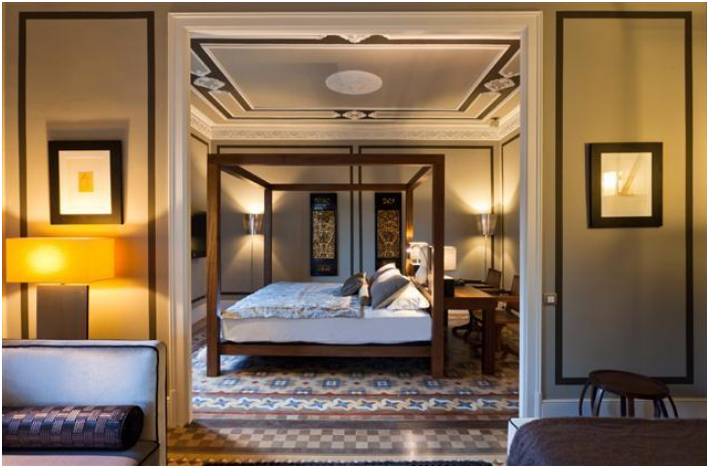
*Luxury Suite II is state-of-the-art 120m2 apartment with one suite with king size bed 2 x 2 m and another suite with twin beds that can be separated. A living area with two chaise longue is the perfect space to chill and relax. The apartment counts with a very spacious bathroom with a double shower and bathtub and another ensuite bathroom.*

*The apartment is fully equipped with top brand appliances, including three 46-inch flat screen TVs with international channels and there is an audio system in every room, which can be customized so you can create a different atmosphere in any room. We have another "sister" apartment, Luxury Suite I with similar features and style but with one bedroom, which can be rented together or separately. The total capacity of these two is 6 people and there is a possibility of placing an extra bed for a child. Both apartments share common access area as shown in the pictures. Our guests will be delighted to experience this unique Luxury Suite experience. Features and Facilities - Internet access, DVD player, Staffed property, Boat available; Central heating, Air conditioning, TV, CD player, Telephone, Safe, Satellite TV, Wi-Fi; Kettle, Toaster, Iron, Hair dryer; Clothes dryer, Dishwasher, Cooker, Microwave, Fridge, Freezer, Washing machine; Linen provided, Towels provided, Outdoors - Balcony or terrace*

*Located within the historic building Jaume Forn, built by architect Domenec Boadain 1904. Modernist style, with special moulded ceilings, floors and hydraulic angle leaded glass windows by the company Rigalt i Granell. All these elements have been recovered and carefully restored to preserve the property style. The remodeling was done with a prestigious interior designer achieving a contemporary and elegant result aiming for maximum customization in order to get a sense of comfort and exclusivity for guests. To achieve this we used the best materials, fabrics and have carefully selected paintings, antiques and a splendid library (Guinovart, Frederic Mares, Millares, Sert). Privileged location: Two blocks from Paseo de Gracia, on the fourth floor this is a corner building facing south with lots of natural light throughout the day. At the same crossing there are four houses with these characteristics; high-quality original architecture. The facade, the concierge, the location gives you the feeling of experiencing the Example at its best. This property is staffed, meaning that the apartment is cleaned every day. We offer concierge services for planning activities like sailing, wine tasting or getting tickets to a football match or concert in advance.*

*The Costa Brava/Catalonia/Barcelona region - Barcelona and Catalonia in general are one of Europe's top destinations due to their history, culture, architecture, mild climate (but with ski resorts within a 2 hour drive in winter), vineyards, beach, and nightlife. Next to Costa del Sol, Costa Brava has amazing golden beaches, rocky gorges, unspoiled nooks, sheltered coves, and some of the most attractive and breath taken scenery in the Mediterranean. Certainly the perfect holiday escape. Barcelona - Local attractions are the Old Quarter, Gaudi buildings (the Tourist bus stops right outside the marina), Spanish cuisine, beach & watersports attractions, Wine country tours, Sailing day trips to Sitges.*







We were certain the leather walls were tufted and had to touch them to realize that it was all trompe de l'oeil. Everything was pricey and quality.

**Why would anyone rent out such a place?** A friend posits the following:

- Changed his mind?
- Broke up with his partner, and now this place reminds him of his partner who he hates?
- Tax shelter or some kind of tax investment or safe place to put his money because he lives in country with bad economy?
- So rich it's now beneath him/her?
- He's an idiot?
- All of the above? None of the above?

I would guess that the apartment was a fun project, that he holidays here sometimes, all of which is suggested by the many coffee table art and architectural books, piles of current magazines, and candles.

Comments in return to Tom sending pictures: (1) I like how everyone is pulling out and dusting off their best adjectives and superlatives...exuberant is a good one from previous email. (2) I think exuberant is a pretty close description of the visual effect. (3) It's all a bit beyond belief but beautiful/dreamlike/beyond modern/startling/but certainly amazing.

**The best? Our favorite?**

Maybe but they all have their own reasons for being 'the best' and this was probably the best for quality and richness. Our place in Varenna on Lake Como was the best for the view though it tied with the home in Cap D'Ail on the French Riviera, though it had the added specialness of being a

short shore walk into Monaco. My favorite has been one in Paris's Palais Royal as much for the historical significance of the location but I was fully enchanted with one in the Champs d'Mars as much because the huge skylight showed the Eiffel Tower. Brugge was tiny but elegant and right in the city so the best for there. San Francisco was huge and on Nob Hill and we called it 'the best' then. One can't forget the magnificent setting and ancient history of the modernized whole house hanging over the Dordogne River. Tom chooses well and life is good.

### ***One has to eat – a priority for some, a requirement for the other***

We found a favorite restaurant in Barcelona recommended by concierge in a fancy hotel. We also found a favorite in Majorca as a result of a suggestion. In the Barcelona restaurant they had a menu of the day with five choices as starters, then six main courses to choose from, then six desserts to choose from, coffee, AND A WHOLE BOTTLE OF WINE or water .....and all for the princely sum of 13 euro!!! And all the food was delicious. One lunch Diana had squid as a main course and Tom had roast veal in a great sauce. The picture is a timbale of vegetables.



### ***Tourist***

It was a book called "Shadow of the Wind" by Carlos Ruiz Zafos that got me interested in Barcelona in the first place. One could spend lots more time and our week was surely not enough. Left over for my 'next' trip . . . a boat tour, the cable car up to the Olympic site, opera house, flamenco and guitar concert in the palace of music and more wandering of the food markets. I'd check out [www.runnerbeantours.com](http://www.runnerbeantours.com) and [www.DiscoverWalks.com](http://www.DiscoverWalks.com) . A day trip to Montserrat monastery which happened to coincidentally be the subject of a book I was reading.



We did wander **La Rambla** and were very careful of the famous pick pockets; enjoyed the rows of creative mimes. We went into three different markets with the main one being **La Boqueria** off La Rambla. A skip-the-lines two hour tour of **Sagrada Familia** then our own tour of the mainstay **Cathedral** where they let you walk on the rooftop. It was near to the Roman walls and old city. It felt like we saw ALL of Barcelona on the multiple routes of the hop on/hop off bus tour. We took separate guided tours of Gaudi's **Park Guell**, **Battlo Casa** and **Casa Mila aka La Pedrera**. We took a guided tour and heard the London Philharmonic rehearsing in the **Palace of Catalan Music**. We walked to their park and under their **Arc de Triomf**. But unless you do a quick "fly-over" there's no way to touch even the main sites in a week so a return visit is needed. That might happen in conjunction with a hike next year.

### ***Was Gaudi a genius or a nut case?***

Maybe he was some of both? Casa Batllo was impressive. <http://www.casabatllo.es/en> Live able and like able and so special that some family makes it available to tourists. Sagrada Familia was Disneyesque. See what it might one day become when it is finished. It was only started 100 years ago or so and might be finished in 2035. <http://gizmodo.com/heres-how-sagrada-familia-will-look-when-its-finally-1400455342/all>. The lines to get in were so long that some of the building will be completed before the end of the line gets in (smile). We were so impressed to buy a pricey CD with book. Yet if Gaudi was a genius and this style is so appealing, then why don't we see more of it in later generations? [http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antoni\\_Gaud%25C3%25AD](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antoni_Gaud%25C3%25AD) It might be of interest that no tours were reasonably priced and entry to just one Casa was in the 35 Euro per person range.

Not so long ago  
A man dreamed  
Of a City  
In his dream, the dragons had  
Scales of tiles  
The house smiles  
Of wrought iron and the buildings the  
Waves of the sea  
And  
Mountains  
Barcelona was the open workshop which  
Gave shape to the imagination of this genius

**Tom's description in an email home** (he was so struck at seeing Casa Batllo that he declared that might be worth the trip in itself.) *Almost 9pm and we're just home after walking 150 miles or so. I love Paris architecture but this is not to be believed. And not just the Gaudi things - I just couldn't stop taking pictures today. We stopped in at a fancy hotel to talk to the concierge about tours and got a tip on a place to eat lunch. Tapas - the specialty of Spain it seems. Wonderful. We sat next to a nice young fellow from Panama who is living here after completing his MBA in finance here. He helped us a bit with the menu and we had a nice conversation. This evening we're having pate and goat cheese with a bit of wine that we bought at this huge (I mean HUGE) market that Diana had read about. You'll love the pictures.*

*A tiny aside note about the apartment - the sound system is piped to every room including both bathrooms - each with its own volume control. Also, each bedroom and the living room have big flat screens. The place is full of books and magazines and things, just as if someone lived here full time (which is not the case). There are more lights (and switches) than any place I've EVER seen. Up lights, down lights, accent lights, table lamps, floor lamps. The owner is of course very wealthy and the apartment would probably be in the 2-5 million euro range (at LEAST!!) Exquisite and no expense was spared. (I just knew I had to stay here and sure glad Diana decided on the Mallorca marathon which helped us decide to visit). The only down side is it's on a major street with heavy traffic night and day which means we can't sleep in that big post framed bed as it's on the front side of the apartment. The twin bedded (more like twin 3/4 beds) back bedroom is very quiet though. Large bathrooms and deluxe walk in showers (there is a special tub but we almost never use a tub). It's very likely we'll return another time.*

### **The Asians – were Americans so ugly? Probably!**

Tom and I have a new observation from our last few trips. The Asians are probably looking very much like the Americans appeared in the 60s. Generally they are a little bit obnoxious, they are cocky travelers. They don't mind dropping their garbage, they are spending as fast as they can, and they are buying all the most fashionable and pricey clothes. Just look into a Louis Vuitton or Escada or an Armani and especially a Chanel and you see loads of young little Asians with many purchases and decked out in the newest and wildest. Sort of disgusting to see them and remember that's what the Ugly American must have looked like in Europe when our money was cheap.

### **Barcelona pictures**

The web being so full of pictures, and then Tom's Photo Show(s) being in the making, that I don't feel a need to add more pages of tourist pictures. He was so impressed that he is talking about having three separate photo shows at [www.TomsKoi.com](http://www.TomsKoi.com) of Majorca, Barcelona, and the apartment.

### **Miscellaneous observations on Barcelona**

- Restaurants commonly specialize in tapas. Filipino staff with good English is the norm.

- Street plan is squared with corners cut off so every intersection has a square appearance. Everyone abides by the traffic lights and for good reason: Cycles whiz by at 70 mph. I never saw jay walking.
- Parks were included in the original plan but developers apparently nixed the green places the city needs. There are tree lined streets but a park let alone a green park is rare.
- Sidewalk surfaces are patterned and not just concrete. Many streets have different patterns. One is designed by Gaudi.
- Lots of rain and little sun in March/April. Surely that's better than hoards of tourist.
- La Rambla said to be THE place to get pick pocketed in all of Europe. Per everyone including Rick Steves. It's rare to have muggings fortunately.
- Balconies are required living? Everyone seems to have some sort of ledge or balcony on which to watch traffic.
- Gay rights must have been here long before in the US. There seems a comfort zone for displays of affection.
- Tourism even off season requires pre booking for many of the houses, churches and theaters. For Gaudi's Sagrada Familia the line was at least two blocks long. Just for the tickets. Or pay up for a private tour as we did.
- Meal hours require pre 1:30pm or pre 7:30pm or there are long lines. And this is low season. Business is good. Shops suggest spending is plentiful.

## ***Itinerary***

### **Sun Dec 21 – Marie**

5:43am Depart Kansas City MCI via UA#4397 Conf#PLX3ES  
9:30am Arrive Newark EWR

### **Mon Dec 22 – All**

7:05pm Depart Newark EWR via UA#120

### **Tues Dec 23 – Day 1**

9:00am Arrive Barcelona BCN

Apartment Carrer de Roger de Llúria 82, 08009 Barcelona, Spain – 7 nights  
c/o Sergio Ravenet Huveneers, Cell +34 639727411 Yes washer/dryer; yes WiFi  
[sergio.ravenet\\_1g4182@bm.holidaylettings.co.uk](mailto:sergio.ravenet_1g4182@bm.holidaylettings.co.uk)  
<http://www.holidaylettings.co.uk/content/rentals/barcelona/181966>

*Luxury Suite II is state-of-the-art 120m2 apartment with one suite with king size bed 2 x 2 m and another suite with twin beds that can be separated. A living area with two chaise longue is the perfect space to chill and relax. The apartment counts with a very spacious bathroom with a double shower and bathtub and another ensuite bathroom.*

*The apartment is fully equipped with top brand appliances, including three 46-inch flat screen TVs with international channels and there is an audio system in every room, which can be customized so you can create a different atmosphere in any room. We have another “sister” apartment, Luxury Suite I with similar features and style but with one bedroom, which can be rented together or separately. The total capacity of these two is 6 people and there is a possibility of placing an extra bed for a child. Both apartments share common access area as shown in the pictures. Our guests will be delighted to experience this unique Luxury Suite experience. Features and Facilities - Internet access, DVD player, Staffed property, Boat available; Central heating, Air conditioning, TV, CD player, Telephone, Safe, Satellite TV, Wi-Fi; Kettle, Toaster, Iron, Hair dryer; Clothes dryer, Dishwasher, Cooker, Microwave, Fridge, Freezer, Washing machine; Linen provided, Towels provided, Outdoors - Balcony or terrace*

*Located within the historic building Jaume Forn, built by architect Domenec Boadain 1904. Modernist style, with special moulded ceilings, floors and hydraulic angle leaded glass windows by the company Rigalt i Granell. All these elements have been recovered and carefully restored to preserve the property style. The remodeling was done with a prestigious interior designer achieving a contemporary and elegant result aiming for maximum customization in order to get a sense of comfort and exclusivity for guests. To achieve this we used the best materials, fabrics and have carefully selected paintings, antiques and a splendid library (Guinovart, Frederic Mares, Millares, Sert). Privileged location: Two blocks from Paseo de Gracia, on the fourth floor this is a corner building facing south with lots of natural light throughout the day. At the same crossing there are four houses with these characteristics; high-quality original architecture. The facade, the concierge, the location gives you the feeling of experiencing the Example at its best. This property is staffed, meaning that the apartment is cleaned every day. We offer concierge services for planning activities like sailing, wine tasting or getting tickets to a football match or concert in advance.*

*The Costa Brava/Catalonia/Barcelona region - Barcelona and Catalonia in general are one of Europe's top destinations due to their history, culture, architecture, mild climate (but with ski resorts within a 2 hour drive in winter), vineyards, beach, and nightlife. Next to Costa del Sol, Costa Brava has amazing golden beaches, rocky gorges, unspoiled nooks, sheltered coves, and some of the most attractive and breath taken scenery in the Mediterranean. Certainly the perfect holiday escape. Barcelona - Local attractions are the Old Quarter, Gaudi buildings (the Tourist bus stops right outside the marina), Spanish cuisine, beach & watersports attractions, Wine country tours, Sailing day trips to Sitges.*

Note that most Christmas festivals close down Monday or Tuesday. Largest is near to Cathedral, secondary is near to Sagrada Familia.

PM Walk to city center and take “Hop On/Hop Off” bus for overview of city

PM Shop for kitchen and pantry basics – grocery list in file  
Arrange for food on Christmas evening and day if restaurants closed

### **Wed Dec 24 - Day 2**

2:45pm Pick up tickets for Sagrada Familia at Julia Travel, Placa Sagrada Familia no. 3

3:00pm Meet for tour of exterior and interior of Sagrada Familia – 1 ½ hour

- Visit the astonishing interior of the La Sagrada Familia Basílica.
- Explore the Sagrada Familia Museum with its drawings, plaster models and pictures about the history and development of this basilica.
- Learn about the Antoni Gaudí's life and career

**Description** - Gaudí, one of the greatest innovators of his time, has left behind numerous treasures for the discerning tourist to discover in Barcelona. Discover this magnificent modernist building in the guided tour inside the church. Sagrada Familia has a Latin cross plan with five aisles, richly and symbolically decorated, where vaults reach seventy meters. Later on, we will stop by the Sagrada Familia museum, where you will see drawings, plaster models and pictures about the history and development of this basilica from its early beginnings to the present day. The museum will also give valuable information about Antoni Gaudí's life and works.

Sagrada Familia is one of the most visited buildings in the world. We will also visit Sagrada Familia museum, where you will see drawings, plaster models and pictures about the history and development of this basilica from its early beginnings to the present day. The museum will also give valuable information about Antoni Gaudí's life and career.

6:00pm Pick up tickets at box office – paid and voucher in file

7:00pm Palau de la Musica Catalana for Gran Gala Flamenco show  
Three seats in first floor central stalls

See video at [http://www.palaumusica.cat/en/an-icon-of-art-noveau\\_37981](http://www.palaumusica.cat/en/an-icon-of-art-noveau_37981)

See pictures at [http://www.palaumusica.cat/en/a-barcelona-mustsee-sight\\_151243](http://www.palaumusica.cat/en/a-barcelona-mustsee-sight_151243) - with guided tours available.

"The excitement and passion of the world of gypsy dance" - The *Gran Gala Flamenco* is held within two halls of the Palau de la Música Catalana complex: the Petit Palau, a recent addition featuring state of the art stage and sound equipment; and the Sala Gran or Main Hall, referred to by many as one of the most beautiful concert halls in the world. The Palau de la Música Catalana (Palace of Catalan Music) is the work of architect Lluís Domènech i Montaner, and considered to be one of the best examples of modernista style of Catalan architecture. The theater hosts the flamenco show *Gran Gala Flamenco* on a seasonal basis.

Flamenco was born in 18th Century Andalusia as a form of expression reserved for the most intense moments of celebrations in life. The Grand Gala Flamenco show allows the spectator to experience a mixture of sensations, rhythms and movements that define this art form that was inscribed by UNESCO in 2010 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Moving through the different *palos* (different musical forms characterized by a variety of rhythmic patterns, such as *Fandango*, *Seguidilla*, *Alegría*, *Bulería*, *Tarantos*, *Guajira*...), the spectator will discover the intensity of the passion felt by the Gypsy people through time. With the participation of a new Catalonian generation of flamenco artists who are literally stamping their mark on the national artistic scene, the show is a perfect union of heart and soul, music and dance. One that since the beginning of time has characterized the Spanish tradition.

### **Thu Dec 25 - Day 3 - Christmas**

Pre-Arrange for food if restaurants closed

8:55am Meet downstairs on street for pick up by tour guide for overview mini-bus tour – ½ prepaid and time is to be confirmed by email

### **Fri Dec 26 - Day 4**

Ideas: Walk Rambla, seaside, take the cable up to the castle top, and see if food markets open

Idea: Try for Casa Battlo with prepaid tickets (including fast pass and video guide) – tickets in file

The outside will surprise you, and you will fall in love with the inside! - Casa Batlló, the masterpiece by Antoni Gaudí, invites you to visit a monument that is much more than a building; it is an artistic legend. Hidden behind the exceptional modernist facade, which mirrors a calm sea, a whole world of surprises and refined architectural details is waiting. Casa Batlló, the definitive must-see benchmark of modernism, invites you to take a look inside.

This architectural work by Antoni Gaudí will seduce you with its radical design and with the great array of visual solutions used. In every nook and cranny you will discover something surprising, details which could not fail to enthrall all those who love the fantastical. Visits take in the legendary Noble Floor (the former residence of the Batlló family), the Loft (the former store rooms and laundry rooms), the Roof Terrace with its mythical Chimneys (where you will see the famous backbone of the dragon slain by Sant Jordi, or Saint George), and the fabulous building well (once the communal stairwell). The tour finishes with the splendid entrance hall and the main staircase.

7:30 Dinner at The Cafè de La Pedrera – reserved dinner and tour; paid and receipt in file

<https://www.lapedrera.com/en/cafe-la-pedrera>

The Cafè is a reflection of its magnificent setting and provides an outstanding venue for meeting others and sharing something to eat or drink with them. In keeping with the cultural amenity in which it stands, the Cafè combines the splendour of bourgeois Catalan Modernisme architecture with the popular spirit of the inns of old. Located in the city centre, it is open to all for coffee, aperitifs, lunch, afternoon tea, dinner, supper or drinks. For the residents of Barcelona, it represents an opportunity to enjoy a Gaudí heritage site on a daily basis, and for visitors it offers a gourmet experience that provides insights into the city's culture and the local cuisine.

El Cafè de La Pedrera offers a special pack The Secret Pedrera + dinner, for 49€. – could not book online. For further information and bookings, phone 93 488 01 76. A cornucopia of Mediterranean culinary delights. The set meals and à la carte dishes are intended to showcase the culinary tradition of Barcelona, the centre of a region that reaps the fruits of the sea and the mountains, market gardens and dry-farmed land, an entire array of locally-harvested produce in keeping with the Mediterranean concept that the foundation seeks to convey. Some of the dishes are a tribute to the importance of the history of Catalan cuisine, from the mustard sauce and the blancmange of the 14th century to the creativity of recent times. The menu features fresh produce from the city's markets (which are part of the heart and soul of Barcelona), reflecting the changes in the seasons and ensuring that the fruit and vegetables used to make the salads, the char-grilled fish and meat and the fruit served as desserts are at their very best. Indeed, an important part of the Cafè de La Pedrera's offering is the flavoursome fruit produced by socially-committed companies that operate throughout Catalonia. The Cafè de La Pedrera intends to showcase the city's culinary heritage for the delight of its visitors and so it will offer dishes that are part of the Catalan calendar of cuisine, in particular desserts and sweetmeats eaten at certain times of year, such as St. John's Day, All Saints' Day, Christmas, etc.

9:00pm The Secret Pedrera at Casa Milà, popularly known as 'La Pedrera' (the stone quarry), an ironic allusion to the resemblance of its façade to an open quarry, was constructed between 1906 and 1912 by Antoni Gaudí (1852-1926). For its uniqueness, artistic and heritage value have received major recognition and in 1984 was inscribed on UNESCO World Heritage List, for its exceptional universal value. Nowadays it is the headquarters of Fundació Catalunya-La Pedrera and houses a cultural centre that is a reference point in Barcelona for the range of activities it organises and the different spaces for exhibitions and other public uses it contains. Casa Milà today is a beacon shining with creation and knowledge, a great container full of content, which has a crucial role to play in the transformation of society and commitment to the people.

The Secret Pedrera is an intimate and highly sensory route to discover the nooks and crannies of this landmark building in a different way: in the peace, tranquility and magic of the night. You can discover the secrets hidden in Casa Milà after dark and become the fortunate witnesses of the lives, customs and little stories of the residents of this singular building 100 years ago. Come and see how Casa Milà, 'La Pedrera', comes to life at night. An intimate, guided and exclusive tour of the main areas of this jewel of the Catalan Modernisme.

- Guided tours at night: The Courtyards, La Pedrera Apartment, Espai Gaudí (the attic) and The Roof-Terrace, with suggestive projections, holograms...
- The visit includes a glass of cava at the end of the tour.

**Sat Dec 27**

Gaudi house(s) not already done?



9:00pm (21:00) Gran Concierto de Ano Nuevo – Johann Strauss  
L'Auditori – Sala 1 – Pau Casais

**Johann Strauss Great New Year's Concert Strauss Festival Orchestra Strauss Festival Dance Ensemble**

**The most famous tour of Europe** - With the **Strauss Festival Orchestra** comes the most famous production from Europe to Barcelona backed by 25 years of success and 5 million viewers around the world. This production has received standing ovations in major concert halls throughout Europe at the Musikverein in Vienna, Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the Berlin Philharmonie, the Musikhalle Hamburg, the Auditorium Parco della Musica in Rome, the Gran Teatre del Liceu and the Palau Music Barcelona, the Royal Theatre and the National Music Auditorium in Madrid, etc. The program, inspired by traditional musical event held every year in Vienna, including the best-known titles Waltz King, Napoleon, Flower festival, The Emperor Waltz or Champagne. You will not miss the most famous of all waltzes, The Beautiful Blue Danube, nor Radetzky march, rhythmic clapping by the public, usually close the evening. The concert is one of the most anticipated events of the musical season, for the extraordinary festive atmosphere that surrounds it and the huge audience participation, year after year, filled the wards.

**Sun Dec 28 - Day 6**

Picasso museum?  
Up the hill via cable car?

**Mon Dec 29 - Day 7**

AM Open

2:45pm Montserrat Tour with Cog-Wheel Train starts at 3:00pm from Julià Travel Gray Line Spain office at Balmes str nº 5, Barcelona. Check in with voucher (in file) 15-minutes prior.  
Tele: 0034 93 317 64 54 / [spain@grayline.com](mailto:spain@grayline.com) Map of meeting location on Grayline website.

- Experience the beauty of Spain as you travel through picturesque villages on your way to Montserrat Mountain.
- Ascend 4,051 feet (1,235 meters) above sea level up Montserrat Mountain with Cog-Wheel Train.
- Visit the Royal Basilica of Montserrat, one of the most important spiritual buildings in Spain – Royal Basilica is home to the famous 12th century Romanesque carving of the Virgen Moreneta.
- Taste 4 typical Montserrat liquors and entrance to Audiovisual “Espai Audiovisual Montserrat”.
- A special treat, on certain days the children’s choir sings in the monastery.

Description - Start your half day trip from Barcelona in a comfortable Bus to the mountain of Montserrat which rises majestically to 4,051 feet (1,236 meter). You will go up to Montserrat with Cog – Wheel Train which leaves you in the middle of the Monastery. It is a 15-minute trip with a privileged and spectacular view of the mountain. The train has panoramic windows which make the actual journey an interesting attraction. The trains are air-conditioned and they are completely wheelchair-friendly.

The rocks of Montserrat formed by natural cement of sand during the centuries affected by the wind and rain which shaped the mountain with strange and varied forms. The popular imagination has seen human or animal shape in some of these peaks, giving them names and inventing legends to explain their fantastic origins. You will visit the Royal Basilica of Montserrat, which holds the famous 12th century Romanesque carving of Virgen Moreneta, the Black Virgin. The Benedict sanctuary of Montserrat has been founded at 1025 and provides a mystical backdrop for the Virgin of Montserrat, the patron saint of Catalonia who is enshrined in the monastery's Royal Basilica. The little monastery soon began to receive pilgrims and visitors who contributed to the spread of stories of miracles and wonders performed by the Virgin.

Today, Montserrat has been modernized to continue attending to the needs to pilgrims one thousand years after it was originally founded.

**Tue Dec 30**

7:30am? Car to be arranged with Sergio

10:30am Depart Barcelona BCN via UA#121

1:50pm Arrive Newark EWR

Car Service ordered

### **Wed Dec 31**

Open – what to do? Shopping!  
Gives Loudean and Joe New Year's Eve alone!

### **Thu Jan 1- Marie**

12:45pm Depart Newark EWR via UA #4567  
2:44pm Arrive Kansas City MCI

### **Packing reminders**

Passports

Euros

Plug adapters

United -10% card

Spi Belt

Bee's Book

Please come with sufficient clothes and shoes as we don't have time to 'fill in' the wardrobe.

An extra Baggalini backpack is available.

Hat, scarf and gloves? – also available here

Extra umbrella?

### **Links**

Sagrada Familia – wonderful video: <http://m.youtube.com/watch?v=5IYdrhYYWpg>

From Ellen: What a magnificent film in honor of the Inauguration of the church. While this is a very special Mass, it gives you an idea what a Mass is like, and may help make some sense of my suggestion that you and Diana start attending Mass in the biggest and most glorious church in the cities you visit. No matter how thorough your tours of such churches are, you don't get the essence until you attend a service there, experience the church in use. and hear the music vibrate off the arches. It can be Mass or evening song at around 6:00 PM. These services are pageants hundreds of years old. and while I despise the catholic church hierarchy for its outrageous wrong-headedness for centuries,, going to mass or evensong, puts you in touch with an element of life in that city you can't get any other way. Give it a thought.

The film starts with my favorite opera aria, Nessun dorma, Pavarotti's signature piece, and the aria that brought Paul Potts to the attention of the world (although I have no idea what it has to do with any church) It's just beautiful. The piano piece is one I played when I was taking lessons, but I can't remember either the composer or the name. I'll probably remember in the middle of the night.

What a magnificent film. For me, the pageantry of the Mass or evensong is like a time machine, taking me back through the centuries. Forget the religion. Just go for the pageantry. People going to mass or evensong are very lenient. You can come and go as your choose. Just remember to genuflect (grab hold of the outside end of the pew for support and bend one knee while facing the alter) before entering the pew and upon leaving. You can sit through the whole thing, or you can stand when they do, kneel when they do, whatever you wish. Many of these cathedrals have great choirs and organists and the music is magnificent. Give it a thought. Get the time for high mass and go to it because that's when the music is best. And when you've had enough, just leave. No problem.

In Barcelona, Making the Markets Fresh Again - Since 1992, more than 20 neighborhood food halls have been remodeled in the Catalan capital.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/19/travel/in-barcelona-making-the-markets-fresh-again.html>

Weather: <http://www.barcelona-tourist-guide.com/en/weather/weather-december.html>

Free walking tours: <http://www.runnerbeantours.com/barcelona-tours/free-walking-tour-gaudi/12>

What to do on Christmas and Dec 26? Not much!

<http://www.barcelonayellow.com/bcn-events-articles/165-christmas-in-barcelona>