**INSTANT ESCAPES**

**WHAT TO SEE & DO**

You can’t go bargain-hunting on an empty stomach. Make a breakfast-time beeline for one of three neighbourhood bakeries. At Forn de Sant Jaume in L’Eixample (La Rambla de Catalunya 50; on map), the coca crema is a long bun with a chunky streak of custard running through it. In beachy La Barceloneta, Baluard (Carrer del Baluard 38-40; takes the best leaves, while B Raval, Forma Nuts al Ronda de Sant Antoni 96; sells scoopfuls of tiny chocolate croissants.

Time to look around. Runner Bean Tours (www.runnerbeantours.com) has a free daily walking tour around the winding alleys of the Gothic Quarter. Or try one of Walkabout Barcelona’s (00 34 620 700323, www.walkaboutbarcelona.com) inspiring bike tours – heading to the coast, or the Collserola hills, past forest, rivers, farms and vineyards. They cost £10pp, which is still less than a day pass for the trafficky, Muzak-playing open-top bus (£20).

To guarantee cut-price shopping success at Encants Vells, Barcelona’s most magnificent flea market, arrive at 9am on a Monday, after stalls have been replenished. You’ll find cheap-chep chandeliers, gilt frames, battered ‘vintage’ luggage, vinyl, old boots, ancient books, maracas and more (Plaça de les Glòries Catalanes; Mon, Wed, Fri, Sat; until 3pm;).

Gaudí made an indelible mark on this city – and you can see much of his output for free. On Passeig de Gràcia, Casa Milà (No. 92; features petrified waves of stone and fantastic chimneys, known as espanta bruixes (witch-scarers). If you stump up £11 to see the interior of the Sagrada Família (www.sagradafamilia.cat;), skip the extra £2.20 for the elevator – there are better views from Park Güell.

Gaudí’s enchanting complex of pathways, sculptures, columns and viaducts; to the north of the city.

Gather an extraordinary picnic lunch at the atmospheric Boqueria foodmarket (www.boqueria.info; take in the dangling hams, seafood on ice, masses of fruit, and the smells! Mas Gourmets has a few stalls selling Manchego cheese, olives and Ibérico hams for all budgets.

Not many cities are able to reward diligent sightseeing with a day at the beach, so make the most of Barcelona’s choice positioning. Barceloneta is its longest sandy stretch, with the best selection of ice cream, paella and coconuts. To the north, try Nova Icària Beach if you don’t mind port views – it tends to be a bit quieter. Bogatell is the sporty spot in between, popular among volleyball and table-tennis players, with a good cycle path.

Freewheeling: from left, cycling by the sea; you can view the facade of Gaudí’s Casa Milà for nothing; strolling in the Gothic Quarter; Fundació Joan Miró

The Teleferico de Montjuïc (is one ticket worth paying for (£5.60, one-way) – the cable-car glides up to the 17th-century castle at the top of Montjuïc hill. The views are splendid, with the spikes of the Sagrada Familia poking into the sky. While you’re up here, visit the Fundació Joan Miró (www.fundaciomiro-bcn.org;), where you can see more than 14,000 of the great Surrealist’s works for a mere £8.70.

For respite, the Gothic Quarter is packed with lovely patches of shady serenity. The Cathedral (Plaça de la Seu; is free to enter – it has awe-inspiring interiors and a pretty garden. Plaça del Rei is roomy and frequented by musicians, while Plaça de Santa María is filled with the grand, Gothic shadow of its church.

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*BARGAIN BARCELONA*

Gaudi masterworks for nada, cava that’s cheaper than water, and stylish hotels for under £100...
WHERE TO STAY

**Hotel Pulitzer**
(Carrer de Pau Claris 72; 00 34 933 427880, www.thefourwinds.com; This is a proper pad, run by Jessica Delgado, whose background in fashion is obvious: the interiors are glossy and gorgeous, with exposed-brick walls, lace white linen and the odd bolt of velvet. Breakfast is at a grand communal table, where staff flatter you to it. Doubles from £127, B&B.

**Grand Hotel La Florida**
(Carretera de Vallvidrera 193-95; 00 34 932 593000, www.lagrandehotelafortuna.com; Elevate your citybreak to full-blown holiday status at this beauty on top of Tibidabo hill. Some bedrooms have magnificentarched windows, so you can survey the city. The 20-minute drive to the centre keeps prices down, but there’s a free shuttle – providing you book your seat in advance. Doubles from £135, B&B.

**WHERE TO EAT**

**La Pallaresa**
(Carrer de Petritxol 11; 00 34 932 219082, www.lapallaresa.com; There’s little point resisting the newsagent but serves Vermouth with a splash of soda, and sardines for snacking. Its black, white and red rooms are sleek and modern art, top-notch furnishings, vintage jiggery-pokery made famous at El Bulli – and you can feast for well under £50. Begin with the ‘elvè’ – a smooth olive purée that bursts in your mouth. End with the candied floss tree – real-life Willy Wonka. Dishes £5-11.

**Go in Independent**

**GO PACKAGED**
(Lastminute.com (0800 072 1795, www.lastminute.com) has two nights in four-star accommodation from £99pp, room only, including flights from Luton or three nights at a three-star hotel from £138pp, room only, including flights from Gatwick. Or try Co-operative Travel (0845 660 3063, www.co-operative-travel.co.uk) or Cities Direct (01242 536900, www.citiesdirect.co.uk). Further information Barcelona Tourism (Rambla de Catalunya 123; 00 34 932 833 814, www.barcelona.naturisme.com).