

# Visit sunny Spain, even if just in your imagination

By Tracy Beard

Washington and Oregon are incredible places to live in and explore, but sometimes it is fun to visit somewhere a bit more exotic. Join me on a journey to one of Spain's most exciting cities, Barcelona, a city filled with stylish hotels and rooftop bars, an array of delicious food, and spectacular works of art and architecture.

## Incredible Accommodations

During my visit to Barcelona, I split my stay between two sister hotels, Hotel Ohla Barcelona and Hotel Ohla Eixample.

Hotel Ohla Barcelona is located just a short walk from the Gothic Quarter, a place where the Old World meets the new. The hotel boasts a unique exterior with a dramatic exhibition of 1,000 ceramic eyeballs affixed to the face of the building. I booked a private walking tour, and traversing the cobblestone streets, I admired how the century-old churches coexisted with the modern shops in the area. It is easy to spend one or more days visiting the museums, the Barcelona Cathedral, colorful gardens and the Jewish Quarter, all located in the Gothic Quarter.

Hotel Ohla Eixample (*center photo*) is a new five-star boutique hotel nestled between the main thoroughfare, Diagonal Avenue, and a prime shopping street, Rambla de Catalunya. Navigation through the modernist Eixample district is simple due to its grid design; it makes sightseeing in this area a stress-free pleasure.

Nearby are several architectural works by Antoni Gaudí. Both Casa Batlló and Casa Milá are just minutes away. La Pedrera is within walking distance, and public transportation is available to reach the Park Güell.

La Pedrera was one of my favorite architectural sights, and it is the perfect example of how nature inspired Gaudí's work. The rough exterior is reminiscent of a stone quarry. The building stretches for two blocks with apartments interconnected by interior courtyards. The rooftop is the most exciting part



## Escape to Barcelona



of the tour as you get a real sense of Gaudí's whimsical use of space and shapes (*see photo, page 36*).

## Stunning City Views

Barcelona, the cosmopolitan capital of Spain's Catalonia region, is located by the sea. Each day I spent some time at one of the hotel's rooftop bars. The Mediterranean can be steamy, and there is no better way to cope than sipping a cold glass of cava (*top photo*), Spain's version of champagne, while dangling your feet in a refreshing pool on a rooftop. I gazed out over the cityscape, soaked in the beauty of the nearby mountains, and stood in awe of the cathedral spires reaching up toward the heavens.

## Delectable Dining

Bring your appetite to Barcelona. It doesn't matter if you have an unlimited expense account or just a few Euros in your pocket, the city has incredible food for every price point. During my trip, I was fortunate to dine at two Michelin-star restaurants, Caelis and Enoteca.

Caelis received a Michelin star in 2005, and Chef Fornell became the only chef to acquire a Michelin star in both France and Spain. Over the years, he has opened several other tempting restaurants. The cuisine at Caelis changed over the years, and it is now less classical and more contemporary. Caelis serves a set menu changing with the seasons. I dined at the chef's table and delighted in observing the staff meticulously prepare identical plates to serve throughout the evening (*photos, above*).

My dinner began with six single-bite tastings, each one delicious, but the pumpkin gnocchi with truffle ice stood out. The tiny gnocchi bathed in a pool of sweetened chardonnay vinaigrette, frozen truffle water and minuscule pieces of white mushroom was light, fruity and refreshing. The evening continued with Mediterranean courses offering items from both land and sea.

Chef Pérez, at Enoteca, serves a rendition of contemporary cuisine with classic and inventive touches, reimagining the use of quality ingredients, creating exquisite and delicious dishes with innovative aromas, tastes and textures.

My tasting menu at Enoteca began with a lovely play on a cappuccino. A delectable mix of deep rich stock made from chicken and mushrooms was topped with black truffle foam and dusted with cocoa powder. As a starter, it was delightful and surprising. Five small bites followed the "coffee." Chef Pérez's intense and hearty fricandó unleashed all the flavor of a typical stew, yet he produced it without any

*cont page 36*



Vancouver, Wash. resident Tracy Beard writes about luxury and adventure travel, traditional and trendy fine dining and libations for regional, national and international magazines and is a regular "Out & About" contributor to Columbia River Reader.



## TRACY'S TRANSPORTIVE TAPAS

*(these will take  
you to Barcelona!)*

### Patatas Bravas

4 medium Yukon gold potatoes  
1 Tbl extra virgin olive oil  
(Spanish if you have it)  
Salt and pepper

Peel the potatoes and rinse under cold water. Pat dry and cut into wedges or quarters. Toss with olive oil, salt and pepper. Place on a baking sheet covered with foil and place in a preheated 400-degree oven for 20-25 minutes until golden brown.

### Garlic Aioli

2 cloves of garlic  
1 egg yolk  
½ teaspoon fresh-squeezed lemon juice  
½ cup extra virgin olive oil  
Salt

While the potatoes cook, make the aioli and brava sauce. Place garlic, egg yolk, and lemon juice in a small food processor. Slowly drizzle in the oil while the machine is running until you have a mayonnaise-like consistency. Season with salt.

### Brava Sauce

2 Tbl extra virgin olive oil  
1 small yellow onion, chopped (1/2 cup)  
2 cloves garlic  
1 bay leaf  
½ cup tomato puree  
1 Tbl smoked Spanish paprika  
1 Tbl hot smoked Spanish paprika  
1 Tbl all-purpose flour  
Salt and pepper

Saute the onions and garlic in olive oil over medium heat until translucent. Add bay leaf, paprika and flour. Stir constantly for two minutes. Stir in 1- ½ cups water and tomato puree. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat to simmer and whisk for 10 minutes. Remove the bay leaf and add salt and pepper. Puree all ingredients in a blender.



## Barcelona *from page 16*

beef. This creative and incredibly tasty dish made my Top 10 list of inspired foods.

I switched gears on my last night in Barcelona and joined a tapas tour in the Gothic Quarter. Our Viator tour guide brought our group of eight to several ancient (100 years old or more) establishments where we dined on a series of delicious tapas, sips of vermouth and tasty desserts. The dishes ranged from flaming sausages to tender octopus. These dishes arrived on everyday serving platters and the tapas were tasty and equally satisfying (*Patatas Bravas*, above left).

### Spectacular Things to See, Do

I love to ride the Hop-on Hop-off buses in big cities as it is a fantastic way to get your bearings and make stops at the sights you find most interesting. Stops not to miss are the Basilica Temple (Sagrada Família, *photo, top of page 16*), the botanical gardens (Jardins de Miramar), and Barceloneta, a neighborhood with one of Barcelona's oldest and longest beaches, Sant Sebastià Beach.

La Rambla, a famous tree-lined pedestrian street, explodes with vibrant colors and delicious smells emanating

from the cafes and shops lining the street. It separates the Gothic Quarter and El Raval. El Raval, a broad pedestrian walkway in a neighborhood with an eclectic mix of different nationalities, is lined with flower stalls and newsstands. This path connects the Mediterranean Sea with modern Eixample.

I enjoyed meandering these streets during the day and felt perfectly safe walking them alone late at night.

Evening activities don't begin until 10pm in most of Spain. After my tapas tour it was already late but I decided to attend a flamenco show. The show was expressive, consisting of guitar playing, songs and dancing with lots of stomping, clapping and intricate hand, arm and body movements. Watching the woman was exhausting as she continuously twirled her brightly colored dress. Flamenco is a form of storytelling, and I noticed that the experience created a lot of emotion in the crowd. The show I visited was not a tourist exhibition but an event that the locals attend, and I saw tears in the eyes of many in the audience.

Barcelona is a fabulous place to visit whether you are a foodie, historian, artist, or traveler. Try one of my favorite tapa recipes and imagine yourself there.

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