

## Barcelona trip 2004

I arrived on a sunny afternoon and was thrilled that my tiny hotel was a few steps from La Rambla. This long promenade is notorious for petty crimes perpetrated on tourists so it was a good thing I looked a tad shabby. This was unplanned, but the clothes I'd used in Almeria for my geological field trip the week before continued to look dusty look even though I had washed them all before leaving Almeria.

On the first afternoon, I walked to the Picasso museum. I heard an English tour in progress, and since none of the captions on the paintings were in English, I joined it. I sincerely thought the tour was hosted by the museum. I participated, asking and answering questions on Picasso. It turned out the museum stop was part of a day tour but no one in the group, including the tour guide explained that to me. The group merely headed outside to look at the architecture of the area when it ended, leaving me a touch embarrassed but on the bright side, more knowledgeable.

The next day I bought a two-day ticket for the Barcelona bus touristic tour. I got off at Parc Guell and was entranced. This place is a treat for the senses. The mosaics make everything look jeweled. The entrance is flanked by two buildings that are straight out of "Hansel and Gretel". I dutifully went to each of the must-see mosaics, sat in the serpentine bench and wondered around the Gaudi museum on site. This museum also contained Salvador Dalí exhibits including a video of Dalí doing a huge drawing using a broom sized brush and tar for paint at Parc Guell. The woods in the park provided a lovely green scent and coolness to the area and while I was wondering around, I heard beautiful guitar music. I followed it and found a musician playing under the trees with a crowd around him. Soon after that, I saw someone playing an instrument I had never seen before. It looked like a metal bowl turned upside down and he played it with his fingers and thumbs. It sounded like a steel pan, but the notes were rounder.

After Parc Guell, I toured the museums of ceramics and decorative arts that were housed in a stately building with great grounds. I ended the day by going to the magic fountain show. I sat on the steps of the National Palace listening to the classical music and watching the intricate patterns made by the water and light.

The next day I got together with a friend of one of my Venezuelan colleagues. Ysabel was very happy to take me on a walking tour of the nearby Gaudi buildings and it was fun to have someone to talk to while checking out these mosaic encrusted buildings. She spoke as much English as I did Spanish, but we were fine. I even rode the subway with her to the "Familia Sagrada" cathedral which is one of the icons of Barcelona. The building has been worked on for decades. As a result, the postcards of it have cranes in the background. Even the subway station was arty with a large mosaic mural and a contemporary metal sculpture of Don Quixote.

Ysabel also took me to La Boqueria (the market) as she had shopping to do. It was off La Rambla and I had never noticed it before. This was my opportunity to see the Barcelonians going about their business as there were no tourists there.

## Barcelona trip 2004 (continued)

I have a theory that J. K. Rowling must have visited Barcelona because there is "Philosopher's Stone" at Parc Guell and one of the subway stations that Ysabel and I stopped up at was called "Diagonal".

When Ysabel left for work I headed to the Joan Miro museum. I was thoroughly pleased I went and even had an English audio tape for myself so I understood what I had gone to see and I was not crashing any tour groups.

The only negative thing that happened in Barcelona to me occurred here. The museum insisted I put my backpack into a locker and when I returned, the key was in the door and the backpack was gone. I figured I had forgotten the key in the door and the security guard helped me to check all the empty lockers but the back pack was gone. The good news is nothing essential was taken as my ID, money, keys and camera were all on me in my fanny pack. However, the fifteen postcards I had taken so much time to write and stamped that day were gone together with a little gift Ysabel asked me to take to Alejandro, the friend we have in common. I was really angry at myself until later that day I found the locker key in my fanny pack so someone must have had another key that fit the lock and got lucky.

I was planning to forgo the Poble Espanyol (Spanish Village) but decided to celebrate that I was *not* responsible for the theft by still going. This was a collection of buildings representing various types of architecture in Barcelona's history. They housed artisans who were working on their crafts as well as selling them – glass blowing, masques, fans, fused glass jewelry, ceramics and handbags. I had dinner there, paella, and then headed out to catch the last bus back to La Rambla. A Flamenco show was about to start at Poble Espanyol but I figured I should leave some things to do next time I visit Barcelona.

When I got home and I recounted my Barcelonian adventures to Keeb, I mentioned that the Bus Turistic tour guide said that after 9 pm, the former Olympic stadium allows nude swimming. Keeb helpfully pointed out that if you were unlucky enough to have all your clothes stolen, at least you could still go swimming at night. He is a glass half full kind of guy.