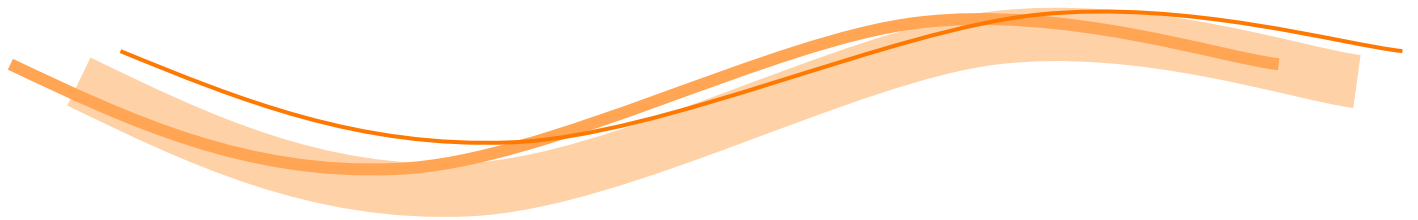




# CATALONIA, SPAIN & TRANSAT HOLIDAYS





<p><b>CATALONIA AND BARCELONA, SPAIN</b></p>	<p>Not since the 14th century, when the Catalan capital was the most powerful city in the Mediterranean, has Barcelona's future looked so promising. The catalysts for change have been many. The first - political - was in 1975, when General Francisco Franco, who had systematically and often brutally tried to eradicate the treasured Catalan language and culture, died. The city in turn started to live and breathe again independently. Today Barcelona is a proud, bilingual metropolis with street signs, newspapers, and television programs in both Catalan and Spanish. In 2006, a progressive statute granted an even greater degree of self-rule to the whole region.</p> <p>The second - more cosmetic - catalyst came just before the 1992 Olympic Games, when feverish renovation work changed the city's image from that of a drab, gray burg to a new gleaming metropolis. The Barri Gòtic, many of whose central medieval buildings had for countless decades been coated with grime, could at last be seen in all its pristine glory, with newly sandblasted facades quietly glowing in the light of the quarter's atmospheric narrow alleys. The waterfront, once lined with large oily containers and sad-looking palm trees, was transformed into an open, sunlit area of promenades, marinas, and modern restaurants stretching several kilometers from beachside Barceloneta via the Vila Olímpica and the 2004 Forum site to Sant Adrià de Besòs. Suddenly Barcelona has become the weekender capital of Europe. Visitors jet in on low-cost flights for the fun lifestyle, superb Mediterranean climate, and an unrivalled location that offers easy access to the delectable coves of the Costa Brava, scenic mountain trails of the Pyrénées, historic cities of Gerona and Tarragona, and wealth of Gothic and Romanesque monuments that fill the countryside.</p>
<p><b>Location</b></p>	<p>Catalonia lies in the northeast of Spain, bordered by France, the Mediterranean and other regions of Spain</p>
<p><b>Geography</b></p>	<p>The province of Catalonia forms a triangle bordered by the French frontier to the north, the Mediterranean Sea to the east, and the province of Aragón to the west. The northern coastline is rugged, whereas the Costa Dorada is flatter, with miles of sandy beaches as well as a mild, sunny climate.</p>
<p><b>Name</b></p>	<p>The name of Catalunya, (Catalonia) began to be used in the 13th century in reference to the group of counties that comprised the Marca Hispanica, which gradually became independent from the French. The origin of the term is subject to diverse interpretations. The most accepted theory suggests that Catalunya derives from the term "Land of Castles", having evolved from the term castlà, the ruler of a castle</p>
<p><b>Population</b></p>	<p>About seven million people live in Catalonia, and twice that many visit every year. Barcelona's population is around 2.5 million.</p>
<p><b>Language</b></p>	<p>Catalonia lies midway between France and Castilian Spain. The region</p>

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	<p>is united by a common language, Catalan. Most people wrongly assume that Catalan is a dialect of Castilian Spanish. Like Spanish and all other Romance languages, it has its roots in Latin, but Spanish and Catalan developed independently of each other.</p> <p>Today Catalan, alongside Spanish, is the official language of the Països Catalans, which include Catalonia, Andorra, the Balearic Islands, and Valencia. "Unofficial" Catalan-speaking pockets include parts of the region of Aragon, parts of the French Pyrénées, and the town of Alghero on the Italian island of Sardinia (as a result of an invasion by Catalan colonists in 1372). All told, Catalan is spoken by nearly 11 million people, making it the seventh most widely spoken language in Europe, more than both Swedish and Greek.</p>
<b>Currency</b>	<p>The <b>euro</b> (€), the new single European currency, became the official currency in Spain and 11 other participating countries on January 1, 1999. After an overlapping period of just over 3 years, the old currency, the Spanish peseta, disappeared into history on March 1, 2002, and the euro became the sole currency in use.</p> <p><b>1 Euro = 1.42 Canadian Dollars</b> (17 November 2007)</p> <p>The easiest and best way to get cash away from home is from an ATM (automated teller machine), sometimes referred to as a "cash machine," or a "cashpoint." In Spain only four-digit numbers are valid so be sure to change any five- or six-digit PINs you may have to a four-digit number before you go.</p>
<b>Tipping</b>	<p>More expensive restaurants add a 7% tax to the bill and cheaper ones incorporate it into their prices. This is not a service charge, and a tip of 5% to 10% is expected in these establishments. For coffees and snacks most people just leave a few coins or round up to the nearest euro. Taxis do not expect tips.</p> <p>Although tipping is not mandatory for hotel staff, you should be aware that wages in the hospitality industry are extremely low so any supplement will be more than welcome. Tip hotel porters and doorman between .80€ (\$1) and 1€ (\$1.25), and maids about the same amount per day.</p>
<b>Government</b>	Historically robbed of its status as an independent nation, autonomy was returned to Catalonia via the 1978 Spanish constitution
<b>Documentation</b>	Canadian passports are required, but no visa is necessary
<b>Time zone</b>	Time in Catalonia and the rest of mainland Spain is 6 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time
<b>Health</b>	Spain does not pose any major health hazards. The rich cuisine - garlic, olive oil, and wine - may give some travelers mild stomach upset. The water is safe to drink throughout Spain
<b>Safety tips</b>	Normal traveler precautions apply. The risk of any terrorist activity affecting tourists is minimal.

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<b>CLIMATE</b>	
<b>General climate</b>	Barcelona is blessed with a benign, Mediterranean climate.
<b>Today's weather</b>	11 degrees Centigrade and sunny (17 November 2007)
<b>Best time to visit</b>	Spring and fall are ideal times to visit, especially May to June and September to October. Even in the winter, days are crisp to cold (due to its proximity to the mountains) but often sunny. Snow is rare and never lasts more than a day or two. Most of the rainfall occurs in April but some quite spectacular storms, as is typical of the Mediterranean, can occur year-round. July and August are hot and humid, even at night, as the temperature often only drops minimally. The surrounding sea is warm enough to swim in from the end of June to early October. Inland the temperatures drop slightly, as does the humidity.

<b>GETTING THERE</b>	
<b>Flying time</b>	Flying time with Air Transat to Barcelona from Toronto is around 10 hours; from Montreal the flight time is around 7 hours
<b>Cities</b>	<b>Barcelona</b> was built around its port on the Mediterranean Sea. The long-standing capital of the autonomous community of Catalonia, this city of 2.5 million inhabitants has always had its sights turned north towards Europe, making for a very unique identity, compared to the nation's other cities. The emblem of Barcelona lies in the northern part of the city, in the Eixample district: the Sagrada Familia basilica. Its construction was undertaken in 1884 and it remains unfinished. This stunning testament to the genius of its architect, Gaudí, is topped with spindle-shaped towers and bears witness to its creator's outlandish taste for symbolism and the exuberant shapes of nature.
<b>Distances</b>	Barcelona to Madrid is 621 km Barcelona to Cadiz is 1284 km
<b>Buses</b>	Buses are plentiful, but less convenient than the Metro because they're at the mercy of the city's infamous traffic. Most bus routes stop at the Plaça de Catalunya, also the stop-off point for the Aerobús and the Bus Turístic . The most convenient way to see all of Barcelona, especially if your time is limited, is to hop on (and off) the Bus Turístic (tel. 93-318-70-74; this double-decker, open-top tourist bus travels to all the major areas and sights; you can either choose to disembark or stay on and continue your journey.
<b>Trains</b>	The most comfortable and the fastest trains in Spain are the AVE, ALTARIA, TER, TALGO, and Electrotren. Both first- and second-class fares are sold on Spanish trains. Tickets can be purchased in either the United States or Canada at the nearest office of French Rail or from any reputable travel agent. The Sants Railway Station in Barcelona is in the midst of a massive renovation and expansion program aimed at preparing for the

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	high-speed trains to Madrid and France, due to be running in 2008. (The journey from Barcelona to Madrid will be shortened from 5 1/2 to 3 1/2 hr.)
<b>Car Rental</b>	All major international car rental companies operate in Catalonia and Barcelona, including the international airport. Driving is on the right in Spain.
<b>Metro</b>	Barcelona has an excellent underground public transport system. The Metro goes pretty much any place in the city you will need to get to. It is run by the TMB (Transports Metropolitans de Barcelona), which also manages the bus network and the FGC (Ferrocarrils de la Generalitat), a pre-Metro, part underground, part over-ground system.
<b>Passes</b>	<p><b>The Barcelona Card</b></p> <p>An ideal way to appreciate Barcelona better and save money at the same time is with the Barcelona Card, which is sold at tourist offices, El Prat airport, Sants railway station, the Estació Nord bus station, and various branches of the Corte Inglés. It's definitely a bargain if you stay in the city for more than an afternoon and do any sightseeing. For adults, it costs 23€ (\$29) for 2 days, 28€ (\$35) for 3 days, 31€ (\$39) for 4 days, and 34€ (\$43) for 5 days. For children 4 to 12 years old, the card costs 4€ (\$5) less for each of the above options.</p> <p>The 24-hour card covers unlimited travel on all public transport, and is valid for a free walking tour.</p> <p>Culture vultures who hold the card can get discounts of 20% to 100% in all museums. Discounts on a host of theaters, shows, and attractions such as the aquarium and the Golondrinas pleasure boats are also on the menu, as are discounts in bars, restaurants, and some shops. The cards specify where they can be used.</p>

<b>ACCOMMODATION TYPES</b>	<p>Barcelona's accommodations options continue to increase on all levels, from deluxe comfort to budget simplicity. Three hundred new hotels are due to open between 2006 and 2008, providing an additional 30,000 rooms. The overall trend is for hostelries with state-of-the-art facilities that include free Wi-Fi access, a standard feature now with innovative chains like High Tech and its sister company Petit Palace, whose latest hotel Petit Palace Opera Garden Ramblas opened in 2006 in the heart of the Barri Gòtic. One of the newest hotels to burst on the scene (in Oct 2006) was the chic modern Barcelona Cathedral Hotel, located only a stone's throw from the city's great Gothic cathedral.</p> <p><b>Transat Holidays</b> feature a large range of hotels in their Transat Europe brochure, including city hotels in Barcelona and seaside resorts on the Costa Brava and Costa Daurada.</p>
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TARGET GROUPS	
<b>Kids</b>	<p>Barcelona is a lively and very crowded city that also happens to be a very good destination for families with children. From the peaceful <b>Parc Güell to the Parque Zoológico, as well as fun spots like Happy Park Port Aventura and Cataluña en Miniatura</b>, there's plenty to choose from.</p> <p><b>Happy Park</b> is the perfect solution for kids who need to let off a little steam. It's a huge covered labyrinth-type setup full of bouncy, touchy, feely, jumpy, rubbery contraptions for the little darlings to romp around on. Monitors are on hand and there is a special enclosed area for tiny tots. There are two in Barcelona: one at Comtes de Bell-lloc 74-78 (tel. 93-490-08-35; Metro: Sants) and the other at Pau Claris 97 (tel. 93-317-86-60; Metro: Urquinaona). Both are open Monday to Friday 5 to 9pm and weekends 11am to 9pm. Cost is 4€ (\$5) per hour for children, free for adults.</p>
<b>Teens</b>	<p>Adventure sports are popular in a lot of places in Catalonia like Llavorsí in the Pirineus – great for older teenagers!</p> <p><b>Barcelona Aquarium</b>            One of the most impressive testimonials to sea life anywhere opened in 1996, in Barcelona's Port Vell, a 10-minute walk from the bottom of La Rambla. The largest aquarium in Europe, it contains 21 glass tanks positioned along either side of a wide, curving corridor. Each tank depicts a different marine habitat, with emphasis on everything from multicolored fish and corals to seagoing worms to sharks. The highlight is a huge "oceanarium" representative of the Mediterranean as a self-sustaining ecosystem. You view it from the inside of a glass-roofed, glass-sided tunnel that runs along its entire length, making fish, eels, and sharks appear to swim around you. Kids can let off some steam in the Explora section, a collection of touchy-feely educational exhibits on Catalonia's Costa Brava and Ebro Delta.</p> <p>Children are welcome almost everywhere in Spanish restaurants, but why not give them a real treat by heading for <b>La Paradeta</b> in Barcelona? As close as you can get to the Catalan version of a fish and chipper, it offers all kinds of seafood laid out on ice, which greets as you walk in. You pick what you want and a few minutes later, out it comes, hot and steaming in a cardboard box.</p>
<b>Romance</b>	<p>There is much for the romantics amongst us to enjoy in this part of the world. The long, golden sands of the Costa Daurada in the south are ideal for those sunset walks. The high mountain valleys and alpine meadows of the Pyrenees are ideal for getting away from it all. And the hedonistic delights of one of Europe's great cities are a great match for young party-goers!</p>

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<b>Seniors</b>	Barcelona and Catalonia are an excellent destination for the older traveler, combining high standards of accommodation and cuisine with easy transport and a wealth of cultural and scenic highlights.
<b>UNIQUES</b>	<p><b>Sagrada Família</b>  This is where you'll want to start your evening. Abandoned for decades, the still-unfinished cathedral finally saw restoration and expansion work carried out when its hermit-like architect, Antoni Gaudí (who was killed by a tram in 1926 and whose tomb can be viewed in the crypt), came back into fashion in the 1990s. The four original spires - designed by the master himself - are generally acknowledged to be far superior to the additional quartet. You can now take an elevator up to the top of one of the towers and enjoy the fine view. Loved and reviled in equal measure, the building remains unique. Current construction progresses slowly, however, and even the most optimistic forecaster doesn't believe the whole project will reach completion for at least another decade.</p>
<b>Surprising</b>	<p><b>La Rambla:</b> this 2 km-long avenue is divided into five distinct sections named successively Canaletes, Estudis, Sant Josep, Caputxins, and Santa Monica. It's a stage set of human statues, jugglers, singers, eccentrics, misfits, transvestites, caged animals, kiosks, cafes, and radiant flower stalls. Originally called ramla (riverbed) by the Arabs, it's the favorite strolling place for Barcelonese and visitors alike. For year-round atmosphere there's nowhere else like it in Spain.</p>
<b>History</b>	<p>550 B.C. Greeks settle at Empúries in northern Catalonia.  218 B.C. The Romans, using Empúries as an entry point, subjugate Spain. Barcino, principally a trading port, is founded.  A.D. 415 Barcelona occupied by the Visigoths.  719 The Muslim invasion of the Peninsula reaches Barcelona.  801 Barcelona taken by the Franks.  878 Guifré el Pilós (Wilfred the Hairy) defeats the Moors and becomes Count of Barcelona, the first in the line of a 5-century-long autonomous rule.  1064 The Usatges, the first Catalan Bill of Rights, is drafted.  1137 A royal marriage unites Catalonia and neighboring region of Aragon.  1213-35 Jaume I conquers Majorca, Ibiza, and Valencia.  1265 Barcelona forms the Consell de Cent, its own municipal government.  1282-1325 Catalonia conquers Corsica and Sicily.  1347-59 The Black Plague halves the city's population. The Generalitat (autonomous government) is founded.  1479 Fernando II, monarch of the crown of Catalonia-Aragon, marries Isabel, queen of Castile, uniting all of Spain. Catalonia falls under Castilian rule.</p>

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	<p>1492 Columbus discovers America. The "Catholic Kings" expel all remaining Jews and Muslims.</p> <p>1522 Under the rule of Charles V, Catalans are refused permission to trade in the New World.</p> <p>1640-50 Catalan revolt known as the Guerra dels Segadors (Harvesters' War).</p> <p>1702 The War of Succession begins.</p> <p>1759 Barcelona falls to Franco-Spanish army. Catalan language banned.</p> <p>1808-14 French occupy Catalonia.</p> <p>1832 The Industrial Revolution begins in Barcelona with the first steam-driven factory.</p> <p>1873 First Spanish Republic established.</p> <p>1909 Setmana Tràgica; anarchists go on anticlerical rampage in Barcelona.</p> <p>1923 Dictatorship led by General Primo de Rivera starts in Spain.</p> <p>1931 Francesc Macià negotiates autonomy for Catalonia during the Second Republic and declares himself president.</p> <p>1939 Anarchist-occupied Barcelona is taken by Franco's army.</p> <p>1960s The package tourism boom takes off on Catalonia's Costa Brava.</p> <p>1975 Franco dies. Barcelonense drink the city dry in celebration.</p> <p>1978 King Juan Carlos grants Catalonia autonomous rule.</p> <p>1986 Spain joins the European Community (now the European Union).</p> <p>1992 Barcelona hosts the Summer Olympics.</p> <p>1998 The Generalitat introduces controversial "linguistic normalization" laws in an effort to strengthen Catalan as the region's primary language.</p> <p>2006 A new Estatut (Statute) granting Catalonia more autonomous powers is passed by the Spanish government</p>
<p><b>Books</b></p>	<p>Frommer's Spain 2008</p> <p>Spain: a Phaidon Cultural Guide</p> <p>James A. Michener's Iberia</p>
<p><b>1000 Places to see before you die</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Catalan National Art Museum</b>, Barcelona: the world's finest treasure trove of Romanesque and Gothic art housed in the National Palace</li> <li>- <b>La Sagrada Familia</b>: the incomplete masterpiece of Antoni Gaudi in Barcelona</li> <li>- <b>Museo Picasso</b>, Barcelona: many of Picasso's great works are housed in two adjoining Palaces</li> <li>- <b>Cadaques and Figueres</b>: white-washed fishing village on the Costa Brava and the home of Teatre-Museu Dali built in and around the nineteenth century theatre where Dali had his first exhibition</li> </ul>
<p><b>Must Sees</b></p>	<p><b>Montserrat</b></p> <p>56km NW of Barcelona</p> <p>The monastery at Montserrat, which sits atop a 1,200m-high (4,000-ft.) mountain, 11km long and 5.5km wide, is one of the most important</p>

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	<p>pilgrimage spots in Spain. It ranks alongside Zaragoza and Santiago de Compostela. Thousands travel here every year to see and touch the medieval statue of La Moreneta (The Black Virgin), the patron saint of Catalonia. Many newly married couples flock here for her blessing. One of the monastery's noted attractions is the 50-member Escolanía, one of the oldest and most renowned boys' choirs in Europe, dating from the 13th century. At 1pm daily you can hear them singing "Salve Regina" and the "Virolai" (hymn of Montserrat) in the basilica. The 9-minute funicular ride to the 1,236m-high (4,119-ft.) peak, Sant Joan, makes for a panoramic trip. The funicular operates about every 20 minutes daily from 10am to 4:45pm in low season and to 5:45pm in summer. The cost is 6€ (\$7.80) round-trip. From the peak, you'll see not only the whole of Catalonia but also the Pyrenees and the islands of Majorca and Ibiza.</p>
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<b>SPORTS ACTIVITIES</b>	
<b>Golf</b>	One of the Barcelona's best courses, Club de Golf Vallromanes, Afueras s/n, Vallromanes, Barcelona (tel. 93-572-90-64), is 20 minutes north of the center by car. Nonmembers who reserve tee times in advance are welcome to play. The greens fees are 75€ (\$94) on weekdays, 125€ (\$156) on weekends. The club is open Wednesday through Monday from 9am to 9pm. Established in 1972, it is the site of Spain's most important golf tournament
<b>Fishing</b>	Sea fishing in the Mediterranean as well as fresh water fishing in the lakes and rivers of the mountainous north of Catalonia will delight all fishing enthusiasts
<b>Horse riding</b>	Located high above the city on the mountain of Montjuïc, this is a top setting for a riding school. The Escola Municipa d' Hípica, Av. Muntayans 14-16 (tel. 93-426-10-66; Metro: Espanya), provides classes to all ages from 15€ (\$19) per hour.
<b>Hiking</b>	The mountain of Montjuïc is the first sight that greets visitors arriving at the port of Barcelona. Behind its rocky seaside face are acres of pine-dotted parkland beloved by cyclists, joggers, and strollers on the weekend. Topped by a castle museum with stunning city views, it provides a tranquil alternative to the hustle of the city below and offers some welcome breathing space.
<b>Cycling</b>	One growing form of transport in the city is the bicycle - there are a number of bicycle lanes in the center of Barcelona. You can rent bikes at Un Coxte Menys, Esparteria 3 (tel. 93-268-21-05) or at Biciclot, Verneda 16 (tel. 93-307-74-75). You are not required by law to wear a helmet (though you'd still be wise to do so).
<b>Windsurfing</b>	When the wind blows, Barcelona's beaches offer good conditions for wind and kite surfing and regular surfing, and the latter has really taken off. Wind 220°, on the corner of Passeig Marítim and Pontvedra (tel.

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	93-221-47-02; Metro: Barceloneta), right on the beach at Barceloneta, has all the equipment you need for rent, plus storage facilities, a cafe, information, and courses.
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<b>CULTURE</b>	
<b>Arts</b>	From the cave paintings discovered at Llerida to several true giants of the 20th century - Picasso, Dalí, and Miró - Catalonia has had a long and significant artistic tradition. Today it is the Spanish center of the plastic arts and design culture
<b>Music</b>	Three major composers stand out, two of whom were Catalans: Camprodon-born Isaac Albeñiz -- a child prodigy who played in piano concerts at the age of 4 -- with his Iberia suite and Enrique Granados from Lérida (now Lleida) with his lively Goyescas. Manuel de Falla, an ascetic from Andaluz (an unusual combination) was renowned for his Three Cornered Hat ballet. The most talented Catalan musician of modern times was cellist Pablo (Pau) Casals; while one of today's leading opera singers (alongside Placido Domingo) is Josep Carreras. Barcelona's very own Montserrat Caballé is Spain's most loved soprano.
<b>Museums</b>	<p><b>Museu Picasso</b> By far the most popular art museum in town, the Picasso is tastefully spread throughout a quintet of fine old mansions in the heart of La Ribera. Be prepared for long lines but if you do manage to squeeze it into your time-challenged schedule, don't miss the Malagueño artist's version of Velázquez's La Meninas. The museum concentrates mainly on more conventional works and etchings by the adolescent Picasso, who arrived in town with his family in 1895 and wasted no time in opening his very first (and very modest) studio in Carrer de la Plata.</p> <p><b>Museu Maritim</b> The Gothic arches inside the Royal Shipyards building loom impressively over what's probably the best nautical museum in the Mediterranean: a superb testament to Barcelona's great naval past. Check out the marvellous "Great Adventure of the Sea" collection with its full-scale replica of Don Juan of Austria's Royal Galley from the decisive 16th-century Battle of Lepanto when Spain defeated the Ottomans. There are smaller models of Magellan's world-navigating Santa María, and one of the earliest submarines, the Ictíneo; and just outside you can go on board the old Santa Eulalia sailing ship moored in Moll de la Fusta.</p> <p><b>Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (MNAC)</b> This museum, which recently underwent massive renovations and expansion, is the major depository of Catalan art. Although its</p>

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	<p>mammoth collection also covers the Gothic period and 19th and 20th centuries, MNAC is perhaps the most important center for Romanesque art in the world. The majority of the sculptures, icons, and frescoes were taken from dilapidated churches in the Pyrénées, restored, and mounted as they would have appeared in the churches in expertly reproduced domes and apses.</p>
<p><b>Festivals</b></p>	<p><b>Semana Santa (Holy Week).</b> 1 week before Easter. Catalonia has some Easter traditions not found in the rest of the country. The Mona is a whimsical chocolate and pastry creation given in the same way others give Easter eggs. On Palm Sunday, palm leaves are blessed in Gaudí's Sagrada Família and the city's main cathedral has the curious L'ou com balla -- a hollowed-out egg shell that is placed on top of a fountain in the city's cathedral's cloister to bob around and "dance." Out of town, the ominously named Dansa de la Mort (Dance of Death) sees men dressed as skeletons performing a "death" dance in the village of Verges, near Girona, and various Passion Plays are also performed, the most famous in the village of Esparraguera, 40km outside of Barcelona.</p> <p><b>Fira de Santa Llucia</b> 2 - 23 Dec 2007 (annual) Dating from 1786, this Christmas fair outside Barcelona Cathedral has 300 stalls selling all manner of seasonal goodies. A nativity scene contest, musical parades and exhibitions and the popular life-size nativity scene in Plaça Sant Jaume add to the fun. Kids line up for a go on the giant caga tió, a huge, smiley-faced "log" that drops out presents when beaten with a stick (smaller versions are on sale in the market).</p>
<p><b>ATTRACTIONS</b></p>	<p>There are five UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Catalonia:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Archaeological Ensemble of Tarraco, Tarragona</li> <li>- Catalan Romanesque Churches at Vall de Boí</li> <li>- Poblet Monastery, Poblet, Tarragona province</li> <li>- Palau de la Música Catalana and Hospital de Sant Pau, Barcelona</li> <li>- Works of Antoni Gaudí: Sagrada Família, Barcelona; Parc Güell, Barcelona; Palau Güell, Barcelona; Casa Milà, Barcelona</li> </ul>
<p><b>Beaches</b></p>	<p><b>The Costa Brava</b> (Wild/Rugged Coast), in the northeast of the country, has rocky cliffs and a mix of pebble beaches and sandy beaches.</p> <p><b>The Costa Daurada</b> (Golden Coast), in the southeast of the country, has sandy beaches which are beloved by families.</p> <p>The Catalan capital's 6.4km (4-mile) stretch of new city beaches, whose promenade, jetties, and marinas are lapped by inviting Mediterranean waters, have been transformed from a once-neglected area into a round-the-clock international playground. Their atmospheric chiringuitos</p>

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	(waterside bars and eating spots specializing in seafood dishes) are perfect spots either for lunch or a relaxing end-of-day drink, often accompanied by the music of an in-house DJ.
<b>Wildlife</b>	<p>Because of its geographical location and terrific range of habitats, including dryland steppes, rocky coastlines, mountains and some of the most important wetland sites in Europe, Catalonia has a greater variety of <b>bird life</b> than anywhere else on the peninsular, with 95% of Iberia's and 50% of the whole Palearctic's recorded bird species.</p> <p>Some of the most sought-after are Lammergeier, Black Woodpecker, Wallcreeper, Bonelli's Eagle, Lesser Grey Shrike, Dupont's Lark, Little Bustard, Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, Audouin's Gull and Lesser Crested tern. The most important sites are Cap de Creus, Aiguamolls de L'Empordà, Barcelona's Llobregat Delta, the Parc de Garraf, Ebro Delta, Steppes of Lleida and, of course, The Pyrenees.</p>
<b>Parks</b>	<p><b>Parc Güell</b>          You can imagine gremlins living in this unique fairy-tale park located high up in the city and loved by children and adults alike. Look out for its mosaic serpent and Hansel and Gretel houses at the entrance (one of which is a tiny museum, the Centre d'Interpretació i Acollida, devoted to depicting creator Gaudí's building methods). At its center, up some steps, the Banc de Trencadís -- a multicolored ceramic bench -- curves around a spacious esplanade, while behind it footpaths climb into the pine woods of Vallcarca and Monte Carmel, offering scenic views through the trees of the city below.</p> <p>Opened in May 2006, Barcelona's newest park is the 11-hectare (27-acre), <b>Parc de la Pau</b> (Park of Peace), which lies on the city's eastern coastal outskirts. It adjoins a new beach (covered with imported sand), a marina, and a tree-lined promenade</p>
<b>Gardens</b>	<p><b>Botanical Gardens</b>          Just behind the Castell de Montjuïc, the city's Botanical Garden opened in 1999 and has steadily gathered international praise for its cutting-edge landscaping. The foliage focuses on species of plants, flowers, and trees that flourish in a Mediterranean-type climate (all are clearly labeled in Latin, Catalan, Spanish, and English). The park is divided into sections representing each of these regions.</p> <p><b>Parc de la Ciutadella</b>          Once the site of a fort (Ciutadella is Catalan for citadel), this verdant park is the most attractive and popular spot in lower Barcelona, complete with two lush but small botanical gardens, a Gaudí-designed fountain (La Cascada) with a huge statue of a primeval elephant, and a quiet lake where you can go rowing. Other attractions include the Castell dels Tres Dragons (Castle of the Three Dragons) and Parlement</p>

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	de Catalunya (Catalan Parliament), which you can visit free if you have time to make an appointment.
<b>Castles/Forts</b>	<p><b>Tarragona</b> 97km S of Barcelona, 554km E of Madrid</p> <p>The ancient Roman port city of Tarragona, on a rocky bluff above the Mediterranean, is one of the grandest but most neglected sightseeing centers in Spain. Despite its Roman and medieval remains, it's merely the second oldest city of Catalonia.</p> <p>The Romans captured Tarragona in 218 B.C., and during their rule the city sheltered one million people behind 64km-long (40-mile) city walls. One of the four capitals of Catalonia when it was an ancient principality and once the home of Julius Caesar, Tarragona today consists of an old quarter filled with interesting buildings, particularly the houses with connecting balconies. The upper walled town is mainly medieval, the town below newer.</p> <p>In the new town, walk along the main artery, Ramble Nova, a fashionable wide boulevard. Running parallel with Ramble Nova to the east is the Ramble Vella, which marks the beginning of the Old Town. The city has a bullring, good hotels, and even beaches. The Romans were the first to designate Tarragona a resort town.</p> <p>After seeing some of the many attractions, cap off your day with a stroll along the Balcó del Mediterràni (Balcony of the Mediterranean), where the vistas are especially beautiful at sunset.</p>

<b>OTHER ACTIVITIES</b>	
<b>Shopping</b>	<p><b>What To Buy</b></p> <p>Stylish clothing and shoes and leatherwear are the items to go for in Barcelona. Leather shoes, belts, jackets, and coats are particularly good buys; whether you want a high-end brand such as Loewe or succumb to the leather hawkers on La Rambla, the quality and value of leather goods is superb. Barcelona has always been renowned for its expertise in design and has a vibrant design culture supported by the local government. Decorative objects and housewares here are original and well made and can be found in the shops around the MACBA and Picasso Museums. Artisan pieces, such as ceramic tiles and earthenware bowls and plates are cheap and plentiful. Cookware, crockery, wineglasses, and utensils in general are a great buy; a poke around a humble hardware store can unearth some great finds, too.</p> <p>The new face of market shopping in Barcelona is the <b>Mercat de Santa Caterina</b> in La Ribera, renovated in 2005 to a plan by local architect Enric Miralles, who also designed the Scottish parliament. In a cool functional setting topped by a colorful roof, you can browse through a wealth of well-stocked stalls whose offerings range from traditional</p>

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	<p>produce to trendy balsamic vinegars and expensive crianza olive oils. Meanwhile, on the chic interior-design front, the big event in 2006 was the opening of B &amp; B Italia's 167-sq.-m (1,800-sq.-ft.) showroom on Passeig de Gràcia. Its dazzling display of elegant furnishings shows just why this stylish company's shops have been a hit in no less than 54 countries.</p>
<p><b>Markets</b></p>	<p><b>The Boquería market</b>, La Rambla 91-101 (tel. 93-318-25-84; Mon-Sat 8am-8pm; Metro: Liceu), is the largest market in Europe (and probably the greatest in the world) and a must-see in the Catalan capital. It's located right in the middle of any visitor's top destination: the famous boulevard La Rambla. While many markets have little to offer a visitor in terms of practical shopping, the Boquería boasts some of the best bars and cafes in the city, and a chance to rub shoulders with the people who are helping put the city at the forefront of Mediterranean cuisine.</p> <p>There are various outdoor markets on the streets of Barcelona. Practice your bartering skills before heading for El Encants flea market, held every Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday in Plaça de les Glòries Catalanes (Metro: Glòries). Go anytime during the day to survey the selection of new and used clothing, period furniture, and out-and-out junk (although the traders will try to convince you otherwise). Coins and postage stamps are traded and sold in Plaça Reial on Sunday from 10am to 8pm. It's off the southern flank of La Rambla (Metro: Drassanes). A book (mainly Spanish-language) and coin market is held at the Ronda Sant Antoni every Sunday from 10am to 2pm (Metro: Universitat). All types of fine quality antiquarian items can be found at the Mercat Gòtic every Thursday 9am to 8pm, on the Plaça Nova outside the city's main cathedral</p>
<p><b>Nightlife</b></p>	<p>Barcelona is a great nighttime city, and the array of after-dark diversions is staggering. There is something to interest almost everyone and to fit most pocketbooks. Fashionable bars and clubs operate in nearly every major district of the city, and where one closes, another will open within weeks.</p> <p>Locals sometimes opt for an evening in the tascas (taverns), or they settle in for a bottle of wine at a cafe, an easy and inexpensive way to spend an evening people-watching.</p> <p>Nightlife will begin for many Barcelonense with a promenade (paseo) from about 8 to 9pm. Then things quiet down a bit until a second surge of energy brings out the post-dinner crowds from 11pm to midnight. Serious drinking in the city's pubs and bars usually begins by midnight. For the most fashionable places, Barcelonense will delay their entrances until at least 1am - meeting friends for the first drink of the evening after midnight certainly takes some getting used to. If you want to go on to a club, you should be prepared to delay things even longer - most clubs</p>

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	don't open until around 2am, and then they're mostly empty for the first half-hour or so, until the bars close at 3am. Many clubs stay open to as late as 6am.
<b>Casinos</b>	A casino by the sea...The Casino Barcelona is set in one of the finest spots in the city, the Port Olímpic in Barcelona, beneath the luxury of the Hotel Arts and the golden lights of the Fish, designed by architect Frank Owen Gehry.

<b>CUISINE</b>	<p>Join Cook&amp;Taste's unique <b>cooking classes</b> in Barcelona and discover the secrets of our traditional cuisine. You will learn how to cook the authentic typical dishes of Spain (paella, gazpacho, tapas,...)</p> <p>You can start with a walking tour around the famous Boqueria market, getting plenty of tips on picking local, seasonal products, continue with the cooking experience and finish the adventure enjoying the menu prepared in a friendly and casual atmosphere</p> <p>The cooking school is located on the Ramblas, the heart of the city, and offers cooking classes for individuals and groups.</p> <p>Half-day cooking class: if you don't have much time, join their half-day cooking class (3.5 hours). You will learn all you need to prepare a complete real Spanish meal. Cost is 50 Euros.</p>
<b>Food</b>	<p>Catalan cuisine relies heavily on ingredients found along the Mediterranean coast, including fresh vegetables (especially tomato, garlic, aubergine, red pepper, and artichoke), wheat products (bread, pasta), olive oils from Arbequina, wines, legumes (beans, chick peas), mushrooms, all sorts of pork preparations (sausages from Vic, ham), all sorts of cheese, poultry, lamb, and many types of fish like sardine, anchovy, tuna, and cod.</p> <p>Traditional Catalan cuisine uses a lot of pasta (second only to the Italian cuisine) and cod (salted, dried, fresh, etc.). The cuisine includes many preparations that mix sweet and salty and stews with sauces based on botifarra (raw pork sausage) and the characteristic picada (ground almonds, hazelnuts, pine nuts, etc. sometimes with garlic, herbs, biscuits).</p> <p>Torró is a nougat-like traditional Christmas confectionery. Nowadays many variants and flavours exist, but the traditional ones are these kinds based on almonds and honey.</p>
<b>Wine</b>	<p>There are 11 Catalan wine-growing regions qualified by the INCAVI (The Catalan Institute of Wine): Priorat, Penedès, Catalunya, Costers del Segre, Conca de Barberà, Montsant, Alella, Tarragona, Empordà-Costa Brava, Pla del Bages and Terra Alta. The sparkling wine cava, the Catalan equivalent to champagne, is widely exported.</p> <p>Catalonia Vineyard Tour</p> <p>The beauty of its wine cellar and the surroundings make the Abadal Vineyards a place you can't miss. It will captivate you with its history,</p>

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	<p>the identity of its wines and the beauty of its dense forests and lush vineyards, spotted with peculiar vineyard huts built in the dry stone technique. The modern technology of its winery combines harmoniously with the 12th century country house and the museum, which exhibits a collection of tools formerly used in the winemaking process, as well as vehicles and medieval carriages.</p> <p>Tasting of Abadal wines, with the Picapoll grape variety predominating as the autochthonous variety from the Bages region. Wine tasting courses and specialised workshops. Price: tour and wine tasting: €1 per person.</p> <p>Try bar-hopping in the Barri Gòtic, with its iconic, smoke-filled tapas bars, Irish pubs frequented by expats, and cocktail lounges filled with minimalist furniture and minimally clad patrons, Barcelona's Old City is a watering-hole mecca. One of the best locales is Ginger, a comfy, classy tapas and wine bar with the feel of a private club.</p>
<b>Restaurants</b>	<p>For an atmospheric lunch you can't do better than Barcelona's oldest restaurant (est. 1786), <b>Can Culleretes</b>, Quintana 5 (tel. 93-317-64-85). It's tucked away in a secretive lane in the heart of the Barri Gòtic. You won't be the only non-Catalan visitor - the place is in too many guidebooks - but the restaurant is a monument, the service and decor from another age, and the traditional food and wine pretty good.</p> <p>You can't pass through Barceloneta without sampling one of its finest - and definitely oldest - seafood eating spots, <b>Can Costa</b>, Passeig de Joan de Borbón (tel. 93-221-59-03). It's located a block back from the waterfront, as all the genuine locales are. This is the real McCoy, with excellent fideuà de paella (made with noodles not rice) and baby calamars that are worth leaving home for. Can gets busy for lunch, so arrive early - and that's any time before 2pm in Spain.</p> <p>Halfway down La Rambla, <b>Café de l'Opera</b>, La Rambla 74 (tel. 93-317-75-85), is a 19th-century Parisian-style cafe. Its murals, iron columns, and wall mirrors with etchings evoke a more elegant age, when waiters with bow ties served you with delightful indifference. It's the ideal spot to sit back, enjoy a quality coffee, and watch the nonstop activity outside.</p> <p>Perhaps the hottest chef at the moment is Carles Abellán, who has been hailed as the new wunderkind of nouvelle Catalan cuisine. His restaurant, <b>Comerç 24</b>, was conceived as a playful take on all that's hot in the tapas world. Delights such as "kinder egg surprise" (a soft-boiled egg with truffle-infused yolk) and tuna sashimi pizza await the adventurous.</p>

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	<p>You can make as much noise as you like at <b>Mesón David</b>, an old-school eatery with an interminable menu of dishes from all regions of Spain. Chances are you will be sitting next to a raucous group celebrating a birthday or engagement with waiters often joining in the revelry themselves.</p> <p>For the best traditional Catalan Cuisine try <b>Via Veneto</b> which exudes old-fashioned class and serves up some of the finest Catalan cooking in the land. Some of the serving methods, such as the sterling silver duck press, seem to belong to another century.</p>
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<b>MORE INFO</b>	
<b>Brochures</b>	<p>Contact the Tourist Office of Spain, 102 Bloor St. W., Suite 3402, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1M9, Canada (tel. 416-961-3131) for brochures on Spain</p> <p>See your local travel agent for Transat Holiday's Europe 2008 brochure which will be launched in January 2008</p>
<b>Websites</b>	<p><a href="http://www.transatholidays.com">www.transatholidays.com</a></p> <p>Barcelona Tourism Board: <a href="http://www.barcelonaturisme.com">www.barcelonaturisme.com</a></p> <p>Catalonia Tourism Board: <a href="http://www.turismecatalunya.com">www.turismecatalunya.com</a></p> <p>Spanish Tourism Board: <a href="http://www.spain.info">www.spain.info</a></p>

<b>AIRLINE PRIZE PARTNER</b>	Air Transat
<b>Flight details</b>	<p>Twice weekly from April to October 2008 from Montreal direct to Barcelona from \$683 + taxes</p> <p>Once a week direct April to October 2008 from Toronto to Barcelona from \$699 + taxes</p>

<b>CURRENT DEALS</b>	Flights with Air Transat are available currently from under \$700 return
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<p><b>TRANSAT HOLIDAYS</b></p>	<p>Transat is now the largest tour operator in Canada, and is at the core of the vertical integration process developing and marketing vacation products as well as flights to destinations in the South and Europe. The company acts as a master craftsman in assembling different components of leisure travel: air transportation, passenger transfers from airport to hotel, accommodation, recreational and cultural activities, meals, cruises, and much more.</p> <p>As an industry leader, Transat Holidays offers departures from many Canadian cities including: St. John's, Halifax, Moncton, Fredericton, Montreal, Quebec City, Ottawa, Hamilton, Toronto, Brandon, Regina, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver, Victoria, Comox, Abbotsford, Prince George and Kelowna.</p> <p>Since 1987, 35 million passengers have flown Air Transat's blue and white aircraft. In 2007, some 2,000 employees will oversee about 12,000 flights departing from every region of the country. Its fleet of 16 Airbus A330s and A310s carry 2.6 million passengers to nearly 60 destinations in 25 countries. It is looking to upgrade its fleet of aircraft in 2011 or 2012 with more modern planes that enable the addition of new destinations, possibly in Asia or South America.</p>
<p><b>Mission</b></p>	<p>Transat Holidays offers quality vacation packages to a wide variety of destinations. Each season, the company presents a wide selection of quality products, in order to meet the diversified needs of Canadian travellers.</p> <p>In keeping with their mission, their employees aim to exceed vacationers' expectations in order to maintain their position as a market leader.</p> <p>They see their role, ultimately, to turn holiday dreams into reality: making the vacation experience one of the most memorable ever.</p>
<p><b>Products</b></p>	<p>Packages, Cruises, Hotels, Flights, Tours, Car Rentals &amp; Train Travel. With a choice of over 300 hotels located in more than 50 destinations and a complete line of itineraries offered in partnership with the most prestigious cruise lines, all products offered by Transat Holidays are subject to a rigorous standard review.</p> <p><b>Transat Holidays is flying direct to Barcelona next summer with the most comprehensive range of Spanish vacations available – Barcelona City Breaks, Package Plus, Beach Vacations, Tour and Stay, Escorted Tours, and self drive, coach and train Tours.</b></p>
<p><b>Awards</b></p>	<p><b>2006 Agent's Choice Awards:</b> Transat Holidays ranked number one for a fourth year in a row by Canada's travel agents according to the</p>

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	<p>results of the Agents' Choice Awards 2006, a survey carried out in February 2006 by Canadian Travel Press and Travel Courier. Transat Holidays is without a doubt the country's leader in the tour operator category, maintaining a sizeable lead over its closest competitor. In fact, since the survey began, it is the only tour operator to consistently finish first in its category for three consecutive years.</p>
<p><b>Fuel Costs</b></p>	<p>Effective 16 November 2007, Transat Holidays will increase its existing fuel surcharge to all Britain and European destinations. The current fuel surcharge of \$75 per sector will increase to \$79 on flights to Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland, \$83 per sector on service to Ireland and the United Kingdom, \$91 to Greece and \$104 to Italy.</p>
<p><b>Air Transat Kids Club</b></p>	<p>To ensure that your family vacations are fun and unforgettable from beginning to end, Air Transat has created Kids Club so that young passengers can really enjoy themselves while onboard an Air Transat flight. It is designed to make air travel a fun experience for young travellers (and for their parents!). Even before the doors of the plane are closed following boarding, every child receives a small bag containing all sorts of surprises and games. The more fun they have, the easier the flight. Furthermore, children who are members of Air Transat Kids Club enjoy certain exclusive privileges.</p> <p>Members of the Air Transat Kids Club will enjoy several benefits that the whole family can share. You can check in at a special "Air Transat Kids Club Members" counter. Thanks to these special counters located in major Canadian airports where Air Transat flies, checking-in is quicker than before. At check-in, special tags will be placed on your baggage; as a result, your baggage gets priority treatment.</p>

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